

Just saw "VICE". This aggressive and irreverent political biopic is directed by Adam McKay("The Big Short", "The Other Guys"). The film stars Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Steve Carell, Sam Rockwell, Tyler Perry, Eddie Marsan, Alison Pill, Justin Kirk, LisaGay Hamilton, Jesse Plemons, Bill Camp, Don McManus, Lily Rabe, Shea Whigham, Cailee Spaeny and Naomi Watts.

I first heard of Adam McKay when I saw "The Other Guys" years ago. That movie was very funny and a great showcase for Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg in comedic roles. Then many years went by and his films that followed didn't really interest me all that much. Little did I know that he'd make a film called "The Big Short" in 2015 that I thought was EXCELLENT. It really did come out of nowhere in retrospect. So you can imagine when I heard McKay was directing another film in the same style and telling the story of Dick Cheney, I was already sold on it. Does it reach the "The Big Short" levels of greatness though?

The answer to that. NOT QUITE. However it's still a very good film with excellent performances. It's in your face, blunt and pulls no punches. Heck, at the start of the movie some text reads that the filmmakers tried their absolute best to tell an accurate fact based story. From that creative decision alone, I knew what kind of film this was going to be. So let's talk about it in depth.

The performances. They're all extremely good. Bale's physical and mental transformation into "Dick Cheney" is truly a sight to behold. I didn't see Christian Bale. I saw Dick Cheney. He commanded every scene with quiet intensity and great confidence. I hope he gets nominated for "Best Actor" because he more than deserves it. Adam's portrayal as "Lynne Cheney" was entrancing and undeniably convincing from her physical appearance to her demeanor. Another standout was Carell's mentor/friend to Cheney, "Donald Rumsfeld". It's great getting to see him play another unlikable character and he does it so well here. Rockwell's "George W. Bush" was as delightfully oblivious as you'd expect. Lastly I thought Plemons' narrator "Kurt" was a great mouthpiece for the story and the reveal of his character was as shocking as it was saddening. At the end of the day this is a film worth seeing JUST for the performances alone.

Next. The storyline and structure of the film. Similar to "The Big Short", this film tells it's story through imagery, outrageous situations and blunt yet fact based honesty. It did take me a while to acclimate myself to this type of narrative/editing again however. While "The Big Short" had a very cohesive and straightforward narrative, this film is a bit more sporadic and unfocused. It has a lot of things to say but doesn't always communicate it in the best way. At one point the film even jokingly pretends to end with credits and music. This movie constantly throws you for a loop like that. Shifting back and forth from flashbacks to present day was a bit confusing at times. Despite all that I still understood it pretty well. Just know that it's very fast paced and throws a lot at you.

Moving on. The cinematography. When not cutting to relative images or past footage of political figures, the film looks very polished and professional. Having previously worked on "Foxcatcher" and "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story", Greig Fraser clearly made sure that the film looked as great as it possibly could.

Lastly. My issues. As I stated before, this film can be unfocused and scattered with it's points and messages. This is a film that's meant to get under your skin. A film meant to wake you up. A film meant to SCARE you. Having said that the last two scenes are way too "on the nose" for their own good. The first one having Bale's Cheney address the audience directly followed by a focus group scene that lacks any real point and predictably goes wrong quickly.

In conclusion. While not being as cohesive as "The Big Short", this film still hits its targets more often than it misses. The acting is superb. The aggressive messages and sharp dialogue deliver and the themes could not be more timely. This film's REAL end credits embody the saying "Hook, line and sinker. That's a pretty clear message if you ask me. I do think it's a film worth seeing. In fact, EVERYONE should see it. It's films like this and "The Big Short" that we need to pay attention to. I firmly believe that. Almost four years ago, I gave "The Big Short" 5/5 stars. With that in mind I'm going to give "VICE" 4/5 stars. This is a film that's going to be stuck in my head for a while.