

Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 132 minutes

Writer/director Adam McKay may has made a name for himself in the comedy genre with titles like *Anchorman* and *Step Brothers*, but over the past couple of years he’s begun to switch gears and tackle more pressing and political issues.

The Big Short (2015) took a biting look at the real estate crisis 10 years ago. His latest, *Vice*, details the life of Vice President Dick Cheney and effectively critiques his various actions in the White House, displaying how they have a direct correlation to what is going on today.

Narrated by a mysterious suburbanite (Jesse Plemons), the story follows Cheney (Christian Bale) from his time in Lincoln, Neb. and marriage to high-school sweetheart Lynne Vincent (Amy Adams), as well as an internship at the White House during the Nixon administration.

The trajectory is detailed in his political and private sector careers as chairman of Halliburton oil company.

As events progress and Cheney moves up the political ladder, we see him take quiet control from behind-the-scenes and enact measures to make the President, and himself, more powerful than at any point in history.

In fact, the film purports the politician was pulling many of the strings behind the presidency of George W. Bush (Sam Rockwell).

There’s a lot of material squeezed in here and, as such, the presentation of the material is a little unwieldy and discomfited in spots.

Many theories, laws and ideas have to be communicated in a minimum amount of time. So, much like in *The Big Short*, the film attempts a few humorous tangents to explain concepts like Unitary Executive Theory. At one point, a waiter (Alfred Molina), steps in to describe some of the actions as if they are choices being ordered off of a menu.

However, the general tone is much more serious and ominous this time out. The strange emphasis on humor and gags themselves come across in a rather hit and miss manner. For every aside (like the aforementioned waiter scene) that does hit the mark, there’s another that isn’t as effective (at one point, the characters deliver imagined Shakespearian soliloquies about their actions).

Thankfully, the cast is very strong and manages to keep the audience’s attention through the bumpy patches, quick jumps to other relationships and important political actions.

Bale is once again a standout, really resembling Cheney and mastering his monotone delivery. Adams also makes an impression as his stern wife and Rockwell do a remarkable impression of George W. Bush. They all manage to sell some of the film’s odd eccentricities and attempts at dark humor.

Again, at times, the gags seem at odds with the intent and powerful message of the film, but it still makes an impression.

Over the course of his political career, the writers make compelling (and very believable) arguments that the subject was largely responsible for removing corporate regulations, cutting

taxes for the wealthy, repealing laws requiring news outlets to present balanced reporting (for his friend and Fox News head, Roger Ailes), in addition to trying to enact an invasion of Iraq for financial profit that would unwittingly create ISIS.

There’s a long laundry list of horrible actions, and the movie makes sure we get an overview of all of them.

In the final moments, a recreation of a more recent interview features Cheney saying that he doesn’t care what anyone thinks about his questionable actions. As such, one assumes the figure should have no issue with the sometimes damning material presented against him.

While *Vice* has some tonal issues and troubles distilling its story into a narrative format, the performances are exceptional and those with an interest in politics should find enough here to keep them intrigued.

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By Glenn Kay
For the Sun