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EIFF 2012 Day 4: Flying Blind and Unconditional



Appearing to start off as a big budget version of *Spooks*, *FLYING BLIND* introduces us to lecturer and aeronaut, Frankie, played sincerely by Helen McCrory.

A woman who throws herself wholeheartedly into her work, the constant pursuit from student Kahil (Najib Oudghiri) catches her completely off guard and serves as a welcome distraction from her daily routine. And, though she is initially very guarded with her student, it is not long after their awkward and amusing first date that we are subjected to the duo's blistering chemistry.

If you think you have an inkling as to where this relationship is heading, there is room for guesswork before Frankie's father warns her of the implications an Algerian-Muslim boyfriend could have on her career. Add to this the fact that Frankie is nowhere near mastering his language, and unwanted doubt about Kahil's true intentions start to trickle into her mind.

Though it takes until the halfway mark for her doubts to set alarm bells ringing, Kahil has an answer for everything, leading to some very tense moments that Oudghiri delivers with silent ease. And, although the second half becomes rather predictable, the reasons for Frankie's personal drama are all very understandable, with Kahil's heritage a massive stumbling block for her.

Challenging our racist and religious perceptions, the finale definitely lacks the emotional punch you'd expect, but leaves us questioning our preconceived post-9/11 ideas.

From the opening few minutes of Bryn Higgins' *UNCONDITIONAL*, you'd be forgiven for assuming it's just another film about underprivileged teenagers and their day-to-day struggles. But everything you think in those first five minutes could not be further from the truth, and we are soon presented with an incredibly brave and demanding film that deserves a huge amount of acclaim.

The possible clichés may be present as twins Owen (Harry McEntire) and Kristen (Madeleine Clark) care for their very ill mother with whom they share a very touching, if not completely dependent, relationship, but when loan shark Liam (Christian Cooke) enters their life as a bolt of excitement offering both financial and social refuge, both children are fascinated by his extravagance.

To say much more would ruin this film and it's hard to imagine how any trailer will ever be able to protect the secrets and gut wrenching truths UNCONDITIONAL holds. However, the further into the film you go, the more unstable you discover Liam is and it is an intoxicating spiral that actually makes you want to delve deeper into this man's dark, personal demons.

The trio work effortlessly together, but it is Cooke and McEntire who are truly special as a very unlikely pairing that are exceptionally strong, constantly leaving you in fear for their safety. Under very assured direction, the pair are able to completely submerge themselves into their tormented characters who constantly reach out in acts of heartbreaking desperation.

Though family truths are quite obviously the crux of all three leads' issues, Liam's are never delved into too far, the mere hint of any explanation allowing us to make a lot of our own decisions throughout the film.

Believing this absurd and often tragic tale at every twist and turn, it would not have worked without the three leads who commit unfailingly to ensure that the slightest flinch of uncertainty does not bring this bizarre world crashing down around them.

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