

War of the Words

Assholes are everywhere

IN THE LOOP: Directed by Armando Iannucci. Written by Jesse Armstrong, Simon Blackwell, Iannucci and Tony Roche. Starring Peter Capaldi, Gina McKee, Tom Hollander, Chris Addison, Mimi Kennedy, Anna Chlumsky, David Rasche and James Gandolfini. IFC Films, 2009. 106 minutes. Not rated. ★★★★★

Never before have I seen the word mellifluous used—quite accurately, no less—to describe the dialogue of a film rich with such remarkable profanity. *In the Loop* is a sharp-tongued political satire, a film filled with middlemen endlessly showing and covering their sorry asses in a muddle of fury and insecurity that may lead to a declaration of war in the Middle East (yes, several characters will look familiar). But so much of the time, it's the words that count. It's American Lt. Gen. George Miller (James Gandolfini) staring down the ferociously foulmouthed British bureaucrat Malcolm Tucker (the marvelous Peter Capaldi) and growling, "You know what you look like? A squeezed dick," only to find that this, and the threat that follows it, is far from the most offensive thing he's said.

In *In the Loop*, language matters. The political mess the film nimbly displays happens in large part because Simon Foster

(Tom Hollander), a notably petite diplomat, makes a simple on-air gaffe: he describes war as "unforeseeable," which goes against the party line. Malcolm, the prime minister's director of communications, is colorfully furious. Simon's new aide, Toby (Chris Addison), proves himself immediately useful, but not before being told to fuck off by Malcolm, whose invective-peppered dialogue is also shot through with pop culture references ("Ron Weasley! You do it!" he barks at lanky, tall Toby). Meanwhile, the Americans are in town to discuss this whole war thing, but none of them seems to know jack about what the others are doing; secret war committees and excess facts, those troublesome things, keep cropping up. One American aide, Liza Weld (Anna Chlumsky!), has written an anti-war paper that may be career kryptonite, though it may also bump her up the political ladder. Or it might get rewritten entirely. Or leaked to the press. Or all of these things, eventually.

But the plot is not necessarily the point. The point is the endless bustle, the back and forth, the meetings, the dismissals and conjectures and the fact that often the only people speaking with any sort of honesty are those viciously tearing their colleagues



Peter Capaldi and Chris Addison in *In the Loop*

a new one, whether such vitriol is called for or not. *In the Loop* is a political cousin of *The Office*, shot documentary-style and all, but it's hopped up on steroids and a massive dose of caffeine, and it's still got one hell of a hangover. (The film is a sort of spin-off from the British TV show *The Thick of It*, but director Armando Iannucci says it exists in "outside the world" of the series. Still, I'll be making time to watch the show on YouTube.) It posits a political playing field full of desperate men and women, most of whom are far more concerned with their own career advancement than they

are with the fates of nations.

This isn't exactly new, and the satire, though acid-tongued, doesn't run particularly deep. But Iannucci and his cowriters turn the dreadful act of nations going to war into some of the funniest, most colorful, most rapidly delivered dialogue you could ask for. If you're tired of films that linger in something like the Current Political Climate, fear not: *In the Loop* is political, sure, but transpose the job titles to another industry, another business, and you've found its secondary truth: These assholes are everywhere. **EW**

In the Loop opens Friday, Aug. 28, at the Bijou.

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