



Nick Prescott's Reviews

The Constant Gardener (DVD)

Talent: Rachel Weisz, Ralph Fiennes, Pete Postlethwaite, Danny Huston, Bill Nighy.
Writer/director/editor: Fernando Mireilles

Classification: M (Mature)
Duration: 123 minutes
We rate it: Four stars.

John Le Carre, perhaps the most celebrated author of espionage fiction of the late Twentieth Century, has, in his more recent work, explored some of the genuinely troubling world events that have begun to drive our planet since the end of the cold war. *The Constant Gardener*, set in Kenya and London, caused something of a stir on its release as a book; here was a tragic love story played out against a backdrop of big-business corruption, Governmental apathy and the exploitation of the third world. Large-scale and complex issues these most certainly are, and Le Carre brilliantly examines them by focussing on the effects wrought upon a pair of lovers caught up in the midst of cataclysmic events.

A film adaptation of this incendiary novel was inevitable, and the result is indeed impressive. Rachel Weisz and Ralph Fiennes play the story's central couple: Justin Quayle (Fiennes), a British diplomat working mostly in Kenya, meets and falls in love with fiery journalist Tessa (Weisz) while in London delivering a lecture. This complex pair soon marries and begins a family. They return to Kenya, and while Tessa becomes obsessed with one of the central issues plaguing the under-privileged local community, Justin's diplomatic masters become more and more uncomfortable with the investigations his wife is carrying out. A tragic series of events is set in motion, and it's eventually up to Justin to understand what his wife has been attempting to uncover.

Rachel Weisz deservedly won an Oscar for her performance here, and she invests Tessa with palpable passion and emotion. Her struggle to bring social justice to one of the world's most tragically exploited areas is truly moving, and one can hear Le Carre's impassioned cries for reason behind her every utterance. Fiennes too is particularly good here, and his portrait of a lover's desperate search for answers is incredibly moving. Director Fernando Mireilles has made an urgent (and often harrowing) film of Le Carre's novel, and the filmmaker's careful use of handheld camerawork invests the action with a finely-judged sense of realism. This technique, so often overused, here finds real purpose and dramatic effect.

The exquisite DVD of *The Constant Gardener* comes complete with documentaries on the making of the film, interviews with cast and crew, and telling documentary material on Le Carre himself. Timely and beautifully made, this is a troubling film deserving of attention. For those, like me, who missed *The Constant Gardener* at the cinema, the release of this DVD is a welcome event indeed.

Nick Prescott