

Churchill [PG] 2017|UK|105 min

UK release date **16th June 2017**

Director **Jonathan Teplitzky**

Screenplay **Alex von Tunzelman**

Cinematographer **David Higgs**

Cast **Brian Cox** (Winston Churchill); **Miranda Richardson** (Clemmie Churchill); **John Slattery** (Dwight Eisenhower); **Ella Purnell** (Helen Garrett); **Julian Wadham** (General Montgomery); **Richard Durden** (Jan Smuts); **James Purefoy** (George VI)

What breed of political animal was Winston Churchill? If this new biopic of the wartime Prime Minister is anything to go by, "a big one" is a reasonable start. As played by Brian Cox, he's like a distant cousin of a brown bear or a Hereford bull, snuffling and stalking through his subterranean Whitehall war rooms, champing at underlings and barking at his reflection, while cigar smoke uncurls from his nostrils in great, steaming snorts.

In a low moment, he even describes himself as "a clapped-out, moth-eaten old lion whose teeth have been pulled so as not to frighten the ladies" – and Churchill's commitment to making sense of its title character, and the historical figure into which he evolved, makes it less a period drama than a work of scalpel-sharp political taxonomy.

Jonathan Teplitzky's film plays out over the 96 hours before the D-Day landings – beginning on the "1,736th day of World War 2", as an opening caption soberly frames it. By this time, the Blitz was three long years ago, and the Churchill who galvanised a nation in those terrorised times has become a marginalised figure in the war operation, while Field Marshal Montgomery (Julian Wadham) and General Eisenhower (John Slattery) plot Operation Overlord, the coming Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France.

For Churchill, the plan smacks of costly old mistakes: specifically, the ruinous Gallipoli Campaign he personally championed almost three decades before. The result then was eight months of fighting that ended in Allied retreat and

with more than 100,000 men dead, and the culpability still weighs as heavily on him as if he were carrying one of their bodies on his back.

The one terrain he still can't be outmanoeuvred on, however, is rhetoric – and we see his talents deployed to subtle but dazzling effect early on, in a "speech" he rehearses like a stadium-rousing set-piece but eventually delivers to a small but vitally important audience of one. This is George VI (James Purefoy), at a meeting of the Allied high command at Southwick House, during which Churchill hopes to persuade the King to back his alternative strategy.

The meat of Teplitzky's film comes in these verbal confrontations, and its best scenes are all head-to-heads, whether Churchill is butting heads with Monty over a map of the Normandy coast, or grumbling at his wife Clementine (Miranda Richardson) – whose own role in the creation and maintenance of her husband's political persona is given unexpected, welcome room to breathe.

Without wanting to overplay Churchill's timeliness, let's just say the film's notion that true authority stems from complexity and compromise is a lesson Westminster's Class of '17 would do well to heed. Still, if any of them have unexpected spare time on their hands in the immediate future, there's always a cinema trip.

After Robbie Collin, The Telegraph, June 2017

Coming Soon....

Tonight at 7.30pm: Clash (15)

Sunday 26th Nov at 6.30pm: Hamlet

www.buxtonfilm.org.uk

Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040



admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk



@buxtonfilm



BuxtonFilm