

Brazil

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I remember the first time I became aware of the movie *Brazil*. I was reading through *Variety* magazine in an effort to keep up with the films of the day when I suddenly came across a strange full-page advertisement. It didn't say much. It was a full page sheet bordered in black with the question, "Dear Sid Sheinberg, when are you going to release my film *Brazil*? Terry Gilliam." At the time, I had not heard of the film *Brazil* and did not know the controversy surrounding its release in the United States. *Brazil* is a dark comedy set in a dystopian society where paperwork and proper procedure is everything. Terrorists are at work in the system, however; sometimes violently, but also peacefully working against the bureaucracy of the system. The basic set-up of the story is that a bug in a computer system results in a man by the name of Buttle being arrested instead of renegade heating and air-conditioning repairman Harry Tuttle [Robert De Niro] who was to be arrested. Several things happen at this point; a low-level bureaucrat by the name of Sam Lowry [Johnathan Price] is assigned to find out why the incident occurred and Jill Layton (Kim Greist) who was a neighbor of the Buttles also attempts to find out what happened to him. In the meantime, Sam's air conditioning malfunctions and is repaired by Harry Tuttle. The unauthorized repair to the system is found, and Sam is declared an enemy of the state. Things go downhill with his life from there.

Terry Gilliam was fresh from his run as writer and animator with Monty Python and made *Brazil* a film that is both funny and an effective commentary on the world of bureaucracy. The sets are dark and busy and there are little things going on all of the time. I catch something new in the background almost every time I watch the film. It will make you laugh, and think at the same time. Personally, I can't think of any film before or since that describes the frustration people have with paperwork and bureaucracy in a manner that makes you laugh and almost cry at the same time. The film has won a number of awards including the Los Angeles Film Critics Award for best picture as well as their nominations for Best Screen Play, Best Director and Best Picture. *Brazil* also received Best Art Direction and Best Screenplay nominations from the Motion Picture Academy.

WARNING POSSIBLE SPOILERS AHEAD

As I mentioned I first became aware of the film because of a controversy regarding its American release. It seems the company in charge of distribution of the film in the United States was concerned about its dark ending and wanted to replace it with a "feel-good" ending before releasing it. Sid Sheinberg, the man in charge of the film's American release, requested a re-edit without Terry Gilliam's involvement or approval that is often called the "Love Conquers All" edit. Gilliam combated Mr. Sheinberg's efforts by providing preview copies to reviewers and the advertising campaign in *Variety* magazine mentioned at the start of this post. Because of this campaign, Mr. Sheinberg was finally forced to release Terry Gilliam's version of the film to the theaters rather than his edit.

Posted by Keith C. on March 3, 2016

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