

'Profile' takes viewers on a tense international ride via social media

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 21 May 2021 04:16



Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 105 minutes

This movie from Focus Features will be playing at open cinemas and drive-ins on May 14.

Over the past few years, several films have attempted to tell a story exclusively using social media. Such efforts have included the *Unfriended* horror series, as well as the 2018 John Cho thriller *Searching*. Writer/director Timur Bekmambetov (*Wanted*, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*) was an executive producer of the first franchise and has now decided to try to create his own film set entirely on a computer screen. The result is *Profile*, based on a true story from French journalist Anna Erelle.

It doesn't all work, but at least it sets its aspirations high and is an improvement over other flicks

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set entirely on a computer.

Amy (Valene Kane) is a cash-strapped, London-based writer researching a piece on young women who have been recruited to ISIS. Specifically, one teen who met a figure online and left for Syria with tragic results. After setting up a fake Facebook profile, she is contacted by a man named Abu Bilel Al-Britani (Shazad Latif). She calls him Bilel and tells him that she is a recent convert to Islam.

The two begin to form an online relationship as he shares his own experiences. Despite being assisted by producer Vick (Christine Adams) and technical specialist Lou (Amir Rahimazadeh), Amy struggles to keep her real motivations and identity secret from her subject. Amy's obsession with the story causes concern and friction with boyfriend Matt (Morgan Watkins) and sister Kathy (Emma Carter). Slowly, the protagonist begins developing true feelings for Bilel, adding further complications.

As mentioned, this story is told entirely on Amy's laptop computer screen. We see a mouse arrow clicking through files of conversations and events recorded over the previous three weeks. Using this as a storytelling method does pose problems. The cast members are fine in their roles, but the technique makes it tougher for viewers to really get inside the protagonist's head and understand her, especially when she is never in direct physical contact with any other character in the story.

Overdue bill notices pop up onscreen that establish why Amy feels that she must complete the story and her frustrations with the Western World. But it sometimes feels a bit on-the-nose when the information simply pops up onscreen.

Bekmambetov does create genuine moments of suspense by keeping viewers in the dark about the finale and forcing the protagonist to keep the dangerous ruse going with unexpected and untimely calls from her potential recruiter. Some of the lead's immediate problems include keeping her personal details consistent and remembering to cover up a tattoo she shouldn't have. The movie also benefits from inopportune calls and messages arriving while she is chatting online with her target. This director has plenty of experience with shooting action, so while it all takes place on a computer monitor, the added boxes and online calls that appear at unexpected moments do surprise and generate some tension.

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It does seem like Amy loses focus easily in her assignment as she begins to fall for the charms of Bilel, sharing personal details and becoming a fast supporter of the man she is seeking to expose. While this ultimately has to happen for the sake of the narrative, the turn still feels too sudden to be fully convincing. Still, one could argue that since this is what happened with the actual person whose story is being told, it is a possible outcome. And one could take the tale itself as an effectively told warning to not believe everything said during online chats.

Both parties are being deceitful and hiding their true intentions, which ultimately results in a potentially deadly reckoning.

Honestly, this reviewer isn't a big fan of social media flicks and *Profile* can't escape all the limitations imposed on it by this narrative approach. However, thanks to the seriousness of the situation, as well as the various pop-ups and difficult relationships taking place within the story, it isn't dull and does generate more strain and stress than other features made in the same manner. So, if you're okay with spending time staring at a computer screen for another couple of hours, the movie will deliver a few effectively delivered chills.

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