

The Telegraph

Locke, Venice Film Festival

Tom Hardy gives the best performance yet from an actor at this year's Venice Film Festival, says Robbie Collin.

★★★★★



Tom Hardy in Steven Knight's thriller, Locke Photo: Handout



By **Robbie Collin**

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Dir: Steven Knight; Starring: Tom Hardy, Olivia Colman, Ruth Wilson, Andrew Scott, Tom Holland, Bill Milner

85 min.

In Locke, the new Steven Knight [film](#), Tom Hardy drives from Birmingham to Croydon in a BMW. He has a thick beard and wears a sensible jumper, and spends the journey calling various people on his in-car telephone. It is late evening, perhaps around 8.30pm, and the traffic is light. There are no

car chases and no car crashes, and no-one else appears on screen. Around half of the dialogue is about concrete. It's one of the most nail-biting thrillers of the year.

Locke screened at [Venice](#) this morning but not in competition, which is a pity: Hardy's performance is the best yet from an actor we have seen at this year's Festival. He adopts, pointlessly but brilliantly, a rich Welsh accent that is equal parts Richard Burton, Hannibal Lecter and Oliver Postgate's Ivor the Engine narration. If you are asking an audience to listen to one man talking for an hour and a half, you had better make sure he is worth listening to, and minute-by-minute, Hardy has you spellbound.

He plays Ivan Locke, the manager of a building site in Birmingham, and his personal and professional lives have reached critical mass on the same night. As he leaves work, he receives a phone call from a woman called Bethan (Olivia Colman), who tells him she has gone into labour.

Ivan's reaction is puzzling at first, until it becomes clear that Bethan is not his wife, but a colleague with whom he had a brief and unfortunate fling. Nevertheless, he vows to drive to the hospital and be with her when the baby arrives. "A baby is something that cannot be stopped," he muses: Knight, who also wrote the screenplay, has Ivan talk in methodical, almost disengaged language that makes him sound like he might almost be reading his thoughts aloud from an instruction manual.

That first decision to do the right thing has a hell of an aftermath: he then has to confess to his wife (Ruth Wilson), again by phone, about the affair and the baby, and then comfort his sons (Tom Holland and Bill Milner) when their mother tells them their parents' marriage is over.

The build is also thrown into chaos: he has to inform his boss (Ben Daniels) that he will be missing a crucial concrete pour at the site tomorrow, and talk his junior colleague (Andrew Scott) through the last-minute preparations. As one mighty edifice goes up – "we are stealing back the sky!" Ivan purrs about his skyscraper-to-be – another comes tumbling down. Our man is determined to micro-manage both construction and demolition from a distance, while the West Midlands slip past in the darkness.

Locke follows the path hewn by more straightforward one-man thrillers such as *Buried*, in which Ryan Reynolds screamed in a coffin for 95 minutes, but the drama here is deeply felt, and the supporting cast craft complex and fascinating characters despite only being voices on the other end of a telephone call.

Knight's first film as director was the odd Jason Statham thriller *Hummingbird*, which was released earlier this year, but he is perhaps best known for his writing for other directors: *Dirty Pretty Things* for Stephen Frears and *Eastern Promises* for David Cronenberg. On this smaller, more script-oriented film he has flourished.