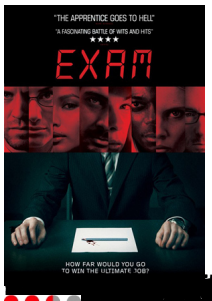
EXAM, out on DVD from IFC/MPI, is a slick and astute thriller that’s never dull, but never quite grips us like it should. The premise—eight strangers vying in cutthroat fashion for a high-profile corporate job offering—is intriguing. The setup—an enigmatic man known only as the “Invigilator” stepping in to brief the group on their objective in coded yet concise directions—is intriguing. The possibilities—what might happen between these candidates in what’s seemingly the most definitive 80 minutes of their lives—is damn intriguing. EXAM’s succeeding events, we learn, will revolve around the freshly introduced group’s efforts to answer one question—the catch being that *they don’t know what that question is*—and my head is nearly about to explode.

The film’s opening moments ooze with mystery and anticipation, so where did it lose me? Let me begin by asking my own question—and you won’t have to read this entire review to unravel what it is, I promise. What exactly are the perks of this job? After all, the description remains nothing but a vague offer of prestige. Why scheme for it? Lie for it? *Kill* for it? EXAM’s only answer seems to be that competition has, by nature, eroded into some perverse twist on THE APPRENTICE, though I’m not so sure I’m as convinced of that as the candidates are. Call me what you will, but unless the light at the end of the tunnel was guaranteed co-ownership of that once-rumored spanking new NFL expansion team with Mark Zuckerberg and Snoop Dogg, I think I’d pack up my things and take my résumé elsewhere.



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