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Existential Cookie Cutter

Most movies follow a template on their way to the end of the story. The story starts with a bang, heads into the exposition (introducing all of the characters), hits a bump with the complication (at which point the conflict grows in complexity), climaxes, and finally lets the viewers calm down with the denouement. The actual definition for denouement is as follows: a brief period of calm following the climax in which a state of relative calm and equilibrium returns. *The Siege* follows the typical movie template, but as the movie ends the audience is not left with the fuzzy, happy feeling promised most often. The denouement occurs, sure, but after Hub shoots Sharon thus killing Samir and Major General Devereaux is arrested, after the lights turn on, and the audience shuffles toward the exit stumbling as their legs haven't quite remembered how to work yet, the period of relative calm never returns to them because they are exiting the theatre into the movie.

The Siege was made in 1998, three years before the attacks of September 11, 2001. The subject matter is so very close, however, that the denouement did not age well. This movie even takes the aftermath of the attack one step further: having the President declare martial law. Because the movie takes that next step, and because the other fictional responses were so close to reality with the media swarm and the general distrust of other nationalities, the denouement is that much less effective because the

audience wonders if perhaps the state of martial law might be declared now. It didn't work so well in the movie, how would it translate to reality? How could people rally against such a force when, in the movie, they were targeted as the last cell? The movie has Hub to save the day, what does the audience have? A goon running the country with some of his soulless friends (for less than 96 more days!)?

As all of these questions unfold, should one look at the movie for what it was made to be? It has political tones in it, and it wades in the shallow end of important issues such as the disgusting use of torture, the dark sides of humanity, and exactly what fear will do to a crowd of people without any hope for change. But it is still a cookie-cutter Hollywood ending, and even Sharon's death is somewhat predictable. The audience knows Hub is going to win in the end, and he is going to take down the bullies who stole his lunch money as well. But because of the attacks of September 11, the movie was made into something more. The main question switched from, "What would we do if this horrible terrorist attack happened?" to "How far will this go?" The denouement exists in the artificial form, but not five minutes later when a person is driving home in his car, shifty-eyed as he passes big white vans. The audience no longer needs to go see *The Siege* - they can just turn on the news.

Perhaps this shift of questions and priorities enhances the film. The unsettling feeling that perhaps wouldn't have been as strong ten years ago now lingers, making the viewer think about the movie and think about the movie, and, therefore, think about the world. Watching this movie never makes for a period of calm, and this reminds people that there is a war being fought. And no matter how against the war a person may be, it is affecting him. The people killed in this movie weren't fighting. They weren't making

decisions to torture or maim. They were just driving home after work. Or marching for peace.

This isn't to say a person should be paranoid every time he leaves his house. Quite the contrary. What the fizzled denouement tells the viewer is that it is important to realize what is happening in the world. Be informed. Don't let the government take away any individual's rights just because they fit a social profile. Don't let torture go unnoticed. And be sure to chose a leader who doesn't respond to fear but rises above it and makes wise decisions.

Pretty good for an aged denouement meant to fill seats and sell popcorn.