

“ Bridge of Spies”

“Bridge of Spies” recounts the trial and conviction of Soviet spy Colonel Rudolph Abel and his later exchange for downed U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers. Among the many virtues of this film are:

Casting - Tom Hanks plays Brooklyn insurance defense attorney James Donovan. The government prevails upon him to undertake the thankless task of defending Colonel Abel. Despite Donovan’s best efforts Abel is found guilty. But Donovan’s job is not over. A few years later the C.I.A. enlists him to embark on a secret mission to East Berlin to negotiate an exchange of Abel for Powers. As should come as no surprise, Hanks turns in a rock solid performance. He is the incarnation of decency and integrity, with an iron core of resolve – an Atticus Finch for our time. As the taciturn Colonel Abel, veteran British stage actor Mark Rylance turned in a performance that earned him a richly deserved Oscar.

The Script –The screenplay by the Coen Brothers and Matt Charman is exceptionally smart. Nowhere is this more on display than in the lines they have crafted for Donovan when he finds himself caught in a three way negotiation with his CIA handlers, the Russian KGB and the East Germans, all of whom have separate agendas. His career in negotiating insurance settlements turns out to have served him very well. And, as could be expected whenever the Cohen Brothers are involved, there is a good deal of deadpan humor.

Steven Spielberg - Among his many gifts as a director, Spielberg knows how to create on screen reality. (Witness the D-Day invasion sequence in “Saving Private Ryan” and virtually every frame of “Schindler’s List”). The recreation of 1950’s Brooklyn never feels less than real and the scenes of war-torn East Berlin in the dead of winter are filmed in such a way that you can literally feel the cold and desolation seep into your bones. Add in a brilliant job of editing and an evocative musical score and it is clear why Spielberg is one of Hollywood’s leading lights when it comes to producing thoughtful big screen entertainment.

Bottom Line – It takes real talent to create a “thriller” when the audience already knows the ending. Yet the fact you know the outcome never detracts from the dramatic tension leading to the moment when Abel and Powers stand at opposite

ends of a snow covered bridge waiting for the moment they will finally be going home. It is a memorable moment in a memorable film.

(Amazon Prime)