

'The Circle' Review: Torn-From-Headlines Tech Thriller Is Cinematic Dead Link

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What we have here is one of those up-to-the-minute attacks on Internet atrocities that stopped being up-to-the-minute the second co-writer Dave Eggers, on whose 2013 novel *The Circle* is based, finished the script and hit "send." Fact trumps (I use the verb advisedly) fiction everywhere these days, especially with Congress giving Web providers a free hand to sell every little thing they know about us. What this movie needed was the satiric depth-charge of a Stanley Kubrick in his *Dr. Strangelove* period, a sort of *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb that Exploded My Privacy*. Instead, the director leading the attack here is James Ponsoldt, a sure hand at character-driven pieces (*Smashed*, *The Spectacular Now*, *The End of the Tour*), but a novice at doing more than tsk-tsk-ing in the face of digital Armageddon. It's a paranoid thriller without suspense, urgency or a single new thing to say.



The story? It's basically Beauty ([Emma Watson](#)) versus the Beast ([Tom Hanks](#)), with zero chance of the former reforming the latter. Watson, her brow perpetually furrowed, plays Mae Holland, a wage slave who finds nirvana when she punches in at the Circle, a corporate entity run by sweet-talking tech guru Eamon Bailey, played Hanks at his most charmingly benign. Hanks and Eggers collaborated with similar lackluster results in last year's *A Hologram for the King*; no one could doubt their good intentions, but the roads they keep taking us on still leads to movie hell.

[Watch Tom Hanks Unleash Tech Dystopia in 'The Circle' Trailer](#)

Watson struggles to keep us in Mae's corner. She has her suspicions that everything isn't all rainbows and stock options. What's all the fuss when Bailey and his partner ([Patton Oswalt](#) in full sleaze mode) fret, nicely, that Mae isn't working on weekends? Or that their new employee isn't taking advantage of the company's program for children of MS sufferers (Mae's father, played by [the late, great Bill Paxton in his final film role](#) has the disease.)



Other actors hover around – *Boyhood*'s Ellar Coltrane as Mae's best friend and *Star Wars* hunk John Boyega as a mystery informant – but don't amount to much. The supposed "gasp" moment is when Mae drinks the Kool Aid and agrees to wear a tiny dot of a camera that feeds her every action (bathroom breaks excepted) to a computer screen. Total transparency. That's the golden calf for millennials.

There's a theme being toyed with here, about how we the people are contributing to our own exploitation. But the reveal is as retro as the first smartphone. *The Circle* feels dull, dated and ripped from yesterday's headlines. It flatlines while you're watching it.