Review of DVD

**Equilibrium**  (2002)

**Starring:** Christian Bale, Emily Watson, Taye Diggs  
**Director:** Kurt Wimmer

**Rating:** R

**Studio:** Dimension Films

**Review Posted:** 5.13.03

**Spoilers:** Minor

Reviewed by [Dennis Landmann](http://www.moviefreak.com/contact_a.htm)

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| **Synopsis** |

In a futuristic world, a strict regime has eliminated war by suppressing emotions: books, art and music are strictly forbidden and feeling is a crime punishable by death. Cleric John Preston (Bale) is a top ranking government agent responsible for destroying those who resist the rules. When he misses a dose of Prozium, a mind-altering drug that hinders emotion, Preston, who has been trained to enforce the regime's strict laws, becomes the only person capable of overthrowing it.

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| **Critique** |

The inspirations for Kurt Wimmer’s *Equilibrium* are evident. While some of it could be considered a rip-off, the film stands well on its own. Similarities to “Brave New World” and “1984” occur in the futuristic world of the film, a post-war era where life is no longer like we know it. Wimmer offers an interesting future, but for the viewer it is hard to accept and consider its impact. The premise of *Equilibrium* feels original, but similar ones have already been explored. Nevertheless, the premise serves the film well as it sets up politics and incredible choreographed fight scenes.

*Equilibrium*’s opening sequence is fun to watch as it involves clever gunplay and cinematography. The clerics have the license to initiate gun battles and deadly fights (more or less) and they always win thanks to the gun-kata, a set of specialized and probability moves to limit self-injury but kill the enemy effectively. I find the film’s concept interesting and the execution is performed very well. The script sets the stage and is generally well structured. The film’s limited budget, around $30 million, doesn’t lend itself to grand sets and amazing special effects. However, with shooting around the special effects when possible and creating sets from inventive lighting and grand buildings in Berlin, Germany, you can make the film look more cool and expensive than the budget allows.

The negative aspect of *Equilibrium* is the way the story begins and draws to a close. Despite an exciting last twenty minutes, including the demise of someone’s face, the plot is a bit too grandiose for its own terms. The plot is established adequately, but something is missing. Its proportions are almost epic-like and there is a sense of longing. Believability is stretched to a certain limit and the handling of the “no emotions” motto is not readily accepted or respected; it just isn’t possible.

With slick cinematography by Dion Beebe and excellent choreography, the action scenes in Equilibrium stand out, even though some of them have been compared to *The Matrix*, etc. Nevertheless, this film brings its own goodies to the table. Locations look fantastic, set design is grand, and special effects are pretty decent when they occur. Kurt Wimmer also includes some philosophical aspect in the film, much like *The Matrix*. But in *Equilibrium* the philosophy affects us more directly, specifically what makes us human, our feelings and emotions.

This film’s cast doesn’t consist of "names" per se, but the familiar faces of Christian Bale, Sean Bean, Emily Watson and Taye Diggs make good for it. Bale is especially believable as Cleric John Preston and carries the character real well. He is the one character we really are allowed to identify with as he begins to question the society in the film. He takes the viewer on a journey from oppression to freedom, even if many bodies (or anonymous henchman) have to be sacrificed.

Emily Watson’s presence is likeable, but Taye Diggs isn’t. Diggs is supposed to be the bad guy, more or less, but his constant smile doesn’t convince of his position. Sean Bean’s talent is limited to the film’s first twenty minutes, but makes an impact nevertheless. Lastly is Angus McFadyen who also does a fairly good job. In terms of direction, Kurt Wimmer makes a very decent impression with *Equilibrium*, despite the few flaws of the film.

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| **The Video** |

*Equilibrium* is presented in 2.35:1 anamorphic widescreen transfer; another term for saying the picture is enhanced for 16x9 televisions. The film plays on a dark tone and colors are heavily subdued. The only visible and penetrable colors are white and black with some blue, which goes with the mentality of the film (no emotions are allowed). Color detail lacks identity, but color depth is evident. Dark scenes and black levels are handled with care, but some dirt and specs penetrate the print at those points. On most occasions, however, the transfer looks clean and cool. *Equilibrium* feeds on its great visuals and the presentation is very supportive of them.

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| **The Audio** |

Never have so many bullets kicked ass all around the base. *Equilibrium*’s base consists of a very nice Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround transfer. The film is obviously reliant on sound effects and the transfer accentuates such effects above the bar. Klaus Badelt’s taut and emotional score is spread across the track very nicely. *Equilibrium*’s many action scenes, which include a lot of gunplay, help the rear speakers come to life and create cool and heavy noise. Nothing else can be said about the transfer other than it creates a very good and pleasant audio presentation/experience.

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| **The Extras** |

Commentary by Director Kurt Wimmer – This man is as enthusiastic as one can get. He explores the film’s conventional and unconventional matters. Wimmer speaks about the production; the actors, sets, locations (mainly in and around Berlin, Germany), and the countless times he refers to the limited budget. Early on in the track he acknowledges his inspiration for *Equilibrium* from films/concepts explored in *The Matrix*, *Judge Dredd*, *1984*, *Brave New World*, etc. While he tends to repeat “at the end of the day” a lot, referring to decisions made, listening to this track is worth your time if you enjoyed the film.

Commentary by Kurt Wimmer and Producer Sam Foster – Wimmer joins Foster for this second commentary track that is more conversational and contains information not necessarily revealed in the first one. While both acknowledge the limited budget more than several times, they keep the track fresh and interesting. Again, if you enjoyed *Equilibrium*, give this commentary a listen.

Finding *Equilibrium* – This is your standard EPK (electronic press kit, FYI) at work, clocking in at a mere five minutes. Kurt Wimmer, Christian Bale, Taye Diggs, Angus McFadyen are available for interviews, but none one of them have interesting things to say other than acknowledging the film and its respective appeal. Wimmer speaks well of the film and his snippets, intercut with footage of the film, provide some kind of path to finding *Equilibrium*…get it?

The DVD is devoid of the film’s Theatrical Trailer, which is a pity because it is a good one. One feature worth mentioning is, if you have trouble understanding anything in the film, to choose the display of English subtitles. What is the big deal here? Nothing, but subtitles can sometimes make the difference between understanding dialogue and missing crucial elements. The DVD’s menus are not animated. The 107-minute feature is organized into fourteen chapters.

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| **Overall** |

*Equilibrium* offers good entertainment value and draws some inspiration from other material. However, it is also smart and creative. Director Kurt Wimmer delivers great action, but minor flaws can’t be ignored. The DVD offers really good video and audio presentations, two well-spoken commentaries, and a worthless, thin featurette. *Equilibrium* is a good way to spend two hours and I recommend a first-rate rental. Hardcore fans of the genre might want to look into buying it.