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ABOUT BAGHDAD

(DOCU — IRAQ-U.S.)

An InCounter production. (International sales: InCounter Prods., Washington, D.C.) Produced by InCounter Prods.

Directed by InCounter Prods. (Sinan Antoon, Bassam Haddad, Dirar Hakeem, Rania Masri, Maya Mikdashi, Suzy Salamy, Nadya Sbaiti, Sherene Seikaly, Adam Shapiro). Camera (color, BetaSP), Salamy, Haddad, Mikdashi, Shapiro; editor, Carol Mansour. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (Documentaries of the World), Sept. 5, 2004. (Also in Rio de Janeiro festival.) Running time: 100 MIN.

With: Sinan Antoon.

An exiled Iraqi writer spends three weeks in July 2003 talking to the citizens of a troubled city in graceful, dignified docu "About Baghdad." The product of InCounter Prods., a D.C.-based collective of activists, academics and artists, pic's bracingly unvarnished views stand in stark contrast to official reports. Fest and tube deals are a natural, with a DVD available for purchase on the InCounter Web site.

"They're stubborn and will never accept colonialism," says a chemist-turned-cabbie of his fellow Iraqis, summing up the mood of anger and humiliation that permeates co-director Sinan Antoon's explorations around the shattered, trash-strewn city. In casual and apparently impromptu conversation with teachers, workers and American soldiers, the writer discovers a people physically and psychologically worn down by decades of dictatorship, sanctions, war and occupation.

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A DIFFERENT REALITY: *Filmmakers offer a view of Iraq that conflicts with official reports in stylish docu "About Baghdad."*

Though respectful, Antoon bears a passing resemblance to, of all people, Michael Moore. Tech credits are quietly stylish, with split-screen views in various sizes and bursts of onscreen transcripts of interviews and poetry livening up what could have been a procession of talking heads and urban landscapes. Per collective, finished pic was culled from more than 70 hours of footage.

— *Eddie Cockrell*