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The Kite Runner

2007

Tagline: *There is a way to be good again*

Directed by: Marc Forster

Stars: Khalid Abdalla, Atossa Leoni, Shaun Toub, Sahid Jafar Masihullah

Gharibzada, Zekeria Ebrahimi, Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada, Homayoun Ershadi

Length: 122 minutes



In a nutshell

Amir is a novelist living in California with his wife Soraya. His father has just died. Amir gets a call from his dad's best friend in Afghanistan saying he is also sick, and asking if he will visit. Cue a detailed back story where we see Amir growing up a rich boy in his dad's expensive house in Kabul with his best friend, Hassan, champion kite runner but lowly son of the housekeeper. Violent secrets, betrayal and great tragedy ensue, and when the grown up Amir returns to his home country for the first time since his exile he finds it a very different place, with its own dark secrets in store.

Opinion

The Kite Runner is a joy to watch. Don't be put off by its subtitles, its three decade span or its lack of Hollywood actors. These are all good things. Much of the script is spoken in the beautiful sounding language of Dari Persian by relative unknowns including Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada and Zekeria Ebrahimi, the marvellous young boys who play Hassan and Amir as children. Mahmidzada gives the standout performance of the film, measured and sure of himself like an old wise man trapped in a little boy's body.

Ebrahimi is also excellent, perfect as the sulky little rich kid beset by feelings of inadequacy, jealousy and guilt. Shaun Toub is gentle and stately as Rahim Khan, Baba's friend and the one person who encouraged the young Amir to write his stories, and Homayoun Ershadi deserves a special mention too for his powerful and principled portrayal of Baba himself, especially touching as he descends into old age and sickness.

Yes, the film contains upsetting scenes - Hassan is bullied and eventually raped by some bigger boys who take exception at his lowly roots and later scenes showing Taliban violence (including a graphic stoning) pull no punches. Even those used to casual violence of the Hollywood variety should get a reality check, and that's something we all need. An interesting example of this is the use of a few market scenes showing decapitated animal heads on the ground. I heard a few audience members gasp each time these popped up, yet when the Soviet tanks were crashing in or the Taliban were hanging someone in the street there were no such gasps. These things we've all seen before.

Visually, the film is stunning, showing not only great cinematography but the use of computer generated imagery (CGI) at its subtle best. Extensive backgrounds were painted on to the shots filmed in the Chinese city of Kashgar to show Kabul before the Soviet invasion and subsequent Taliban takeover that brought it to its knees, and CG scenes of kites soaring through the air and lunging at each other with the city in the background are breathtaking - the tricks of the trade take nothing away from the lyrical beauty.

The Kite Runner is a beautifully made, terribly sad piece of cinema. All the elements are there in the screenplay for a touching story of friendship and loss, set against the very real, very actual backdrop of war torn Kabul. Yes, the story is sad, but the knowledge that many of the worst scenes have happened, are happening or will happen in Afghanistan is utterly tragic.

Facts

- This film is an adaptation of the book of the same name by Khaled Hosseini, who has also written a novel called A Thousand Splendid Suns.
- Director Marc Forster is already well-known for his work making Monster's Ball (2001) and Finding Neverland (2004). He's also in the chair for the 22nd James Bond film.

Laura Kidd