# Movie Review: 'The Kingdom'

*by David_Elliott*

A thriller set in Saudi Arabia, "The Kingdom" seems less ripped from the headlines than drawn from past thrillers based on previous headlines - but in a highly ballistic way, it often works remarkably well.

'THE KINGDOM' - FBI analyst Jason Bateman fights kidnappers in the political thriller 'The Kingdom.' CNS Photo courtesy of Frank Connor. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) The Saudi realm, triangulated by Islam, oil and royal autocracy, is called "the moon" by one character. There is an aura of the lunar, and the lunatic, when the elite FBI team led by Fleury (Jamie Foxx) lands in Riyadh, by very special (princely) permission allowed to investigate, for five days, a horrific terror bombing at a U.S. compound.

Director Peter Berg stages that nightmare in broad daylight with innocents observing and jams the story along without a pause. Opening with a sort of graphic newsreel of Saudi-American relations, the film is all

quick cutting and convulsive pressure, with some dialogue simply tossed out like excess baggage.

Based on Berg's fascination with the 1996 terror attack in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, then tooled as an action movie with a political edge by Matthew M. Carnahan, the story sets up a simple parallel. Revenge-minded but never stupid, Fleury is hemmed-in by a resentful Saudi police colonel (lean Ashraf Barhom of "Paradise Now"), but they inevitably bond as they track the fanatics.

The Americans feel stranded, their forensic medical specialist (Jennifer Garner) not even allowed to touch the bodies of dead Muslims. The language barrier is almost absolute, though partly overcome by the fact that both Foxx and Barhom are excellent eye actors, and their bitten dialogue seems much less than half of their alliance.

Foxx can be ruthless but never brutal at heart, while rude machismo comes easily to Chris Cooper as the team guy who can't wait to dive into a murky bomb crater and gator around. He's a virtual character of Sam Peckinpah's, but so is the tactic of surrounding hard guys with vulnerable children; both Fleury and the colonel have adored sons, dwelled upon.

Despite Barhom's very human presence, the movie won't win any friends for Saudi Arabia, depicted as radically inhospitable. Once more the Yanks, who again seem partly made of Teflon that can bleed a little, who take charge for the furious, mounting climax of violence.

Pretty plainly staffed with stereotypes, "The Kingdom" is still humanly alert and not just an ammo party. While it sneers at a squishy diplomat (Jeremy Piven), and lets Danny Huston huff and sneer as a D.C. power player, it also is aware that the cost of obvious payback is more of the same, endlessly, Biblically.

It is this note of tragedy breeding sequels, each generation damned by a cycle of retribution, that gives "The Kingdom" resonance beyond its absorbing mayhem.

A Universal Pictures release. Director: Peter Berg. Writer: Matthew Michael Carnahan. Cast: Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner, Jason Batemn, Danny Huston, Ashraf Barhom. Running time: 1 hour, 44 minutes. Rated R. 3 stars.

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