

Member and guest feedback for *The President's Cake*

Interesting but some scenes felt OTT and not necessary.

I'm afraid I found it overlong and underwhelming. It felt like a fairy story tacked onto a docudrama. However, the lead actress was great and for a first feature film all credit due.

A film about the vulnerability of children set against the plight of the Marsh Arabs getting it in the neck from western economic sanctions and Baathist suppression. The children's adventures in the marshes and city were both informative and engaging, however, I think there was a problem with the film's end. The death of the children by bomb attack was melodramatic and improbable. It seemed a random act by whoever and one designed simply to shock rather than draw together the arc of the story beforehand.

Sensitively made and directed while being brutally honest about the situation people had to live through. Stunning performances from the young girl and her grandmother. There was no sentimentality nor manipulation, it told the story as it was.

Definitely "Excellent", a fantastic film.

Excellent acting from the young girl. A simple inconsequential story but used as a platform to reflect the absurdities and cruelty of the Hussein regime. Powerful political story but not much artistry, although the waterway scenes, especially at night, were captivating.

A bold and courageous film. Quite harrowing but important that films on such subject matter are made. Amazing young actress!

A profound illustration of the way wars affect the vulnerable and dispossessed. A remarkable central performance.

Such an interesting and touching film, giving a real insight into the daily realities of people living under dictatorship and in a war zone. The film showed how Saddam Hussein and his regime were totally uncaring of the hardships they imposed on the population of Iraq, particularly those who were poor. Such a selfish, egotistical custom of requiring schoolchildren to bring fruit and bake cakes on Hussein's birthday. The children playing Lamia and Saeed were brilliant and showed such resilience and ingenuity. Such a sad film but with some lovely lighter, funny moments. Hindi the rooster almost stole the show.

The Disneyesque part of the film - when the two children were having adventures in the city - is at odds with the tone of the rest of the film which overall is excellent. It's an "Excellent" from me.

Loved it! Immediately involved with the drama and peril of Husseins regime.

Excellent acting all round; dialogue was so realistic I thought it must have been ad-libbed. Excellent turn by the rooster. I'd highly recommend it.

Much more enjoyable than many of the other films. Children were very good. Poor cockerel was dragged around everywhere.

A very interesting and thought-provoking film. I was disturbed with how the children were treated and had to cope with their life and their inability to trust the adults who surrounded them. I have since looked up The Mesopotamian Marshes, so I have learnt about what has happened to the population during and since Saddam's reign.

I was so relieved that the cockerel survived even if everyone else perished. A fascinating insight into a cruel regime. Not an easy watch but a magnificent film.

This film was inevitably disturbing in its subject and setting but displayed a mastery of narrative and atmosphere. Humorous elements, superb performances by the children and the deeply human pull of family and home.

Interesting to learn about how the "Marsh Arabs"(?) lived but otherwise rather slow and a bit plodding. The "worship" of Saddam Hussein was deeply terrifying.

Beautifully acted, well written and well directed. I loved it.

Absolutely stunning film - have not been able to get it out of my head, particularly the ending.

Overall, it was desperately sad but managed to squeeze in a few laughs along the way and the acting was really excellent - particularly from the two children. The pace was good and I enjoyed the cinematography. The actual footage of Sadam's birthday at the end really pushed the point home.

Had low expectations prior to watching the movie and was mesmerised by the intensity and raw emotions on display. Fantastic performances. Great choice RFS.

Very moving film. The acting was excellent considering most of the actors weren't professionals.

Enjoyed the storyline and in particular Lamia's resilience. I thought the film showed an honest portrayal of life in 1990's Iraq.

This film "has stayed with me," illustrating the horrors and injustices which are inflicted on ordinary people living in war zones in our times as well as past times. Unbearable!

A slow burn start to a wonderful film full of heart and wonderful performances and the dreadful Saddam Hussein!

From the silver water of the Mesopotamian marshes to the heartbreaking cruelty of adults, this film felt real. Afterwards, as we spoke about the beauty and ugliness of the film, a fellow filmer told us that Saddam Hussain drained the marshes and killed the marsh folk.

The film provided an extraordinarily vivid insight into poor people's lives under the Saddam Hussein regime. It was sad and funny at the same time. The cinematography was beautiful. Prior to watching the film, I knew nothing about the Marsh Arabs but it has prompted me to learn more. My mark of a good film is one that teaches me something (or prompts me to watch other films by the same director or on the same theme) so it really achieved that. Great choice.

What I found most remarkable about the film are the performances of the actors which I read were non-professionals, especially the performances of the two children. The film gave us an insight about how difficult life was in Iraq under the dictator Saddam Hussein and how western sanctions severely affected ordinary people. It is beautifully filmed. You feel for Lamia, get upset with her when her rooster disappears, feel anxious when she nearly fell into the hands of a paedophile and sad when her grandmother dies. I very much enjoyed it and would love to see it again.

I found the film slow. Sometimes you didn't know which direction the film was heading. However, the pace was setting the scene, establishing the characters involved and the political background. You become aware of the indoctrination by the regime and the fragility of human life. This 9-year-old girl was trying to bake a cake for the president despite having no access to the ingredients and despite the president being an evil dictator. A very powerful ending that gets you thinking long after the film has ended.

I love Arabic films in general and thought this particular film gave an insider perspective on the Iraq War and how the country survived throughout the bombings. I assumed it would be an intense film and I was proved right. It brought home how easy and safe our kids' lives are and how war pulls apart the fabric of society, leaving children and the elderly so vulnerable.

What a nice taxi driver. The next time I have coq-au-vin I will pause for thought. The headmaster was such a nasty piece of work. A courageous depiction of a desperate society when the supreme leader is corrupt and divorced from reality, present day parallels can easily be drawn.

A bit too long for me, 90-100 minutes would have been enough.

I thought the film was both powerful and very moving. Lamia, the young girl and main character, was wonderfully portrayed and the hardship she and her grandmother had to endure was heartbreaking to watch. Unfortunately, there was not much hope for a better future anytime soon. Full marks for showing this remarkable film!

Very good directing and acting specially by the main character Lamia. I think she gave an excellent performance. The dialogues in local dialect were amazing but of course

lost lot of flavour in translation. Attention to details was remarkable and photography was very good. Glorifying the President, tyranny and ruthlessness of the regime are all historically true but they were other true aspects of the situation in Iraq at the time of the first war which were not shown in this film, so the balance was not kept. In the late 80's and early 90's, Iraq was experiencing prosperity and progress (several new universities, good education standards, high standard of living, very strong Iraqi currency, etc..). The scenes of poverty, deprivation and poor and corrupt health care, police and low moral standard across the society came later on and after years of sanctions and isolation after the Second Gulf war. (which followed allegations of WMD). Still, this is a good film, although lacking accuracy and balance.

Not an original tale - rural child on big city - but different. Not sure about the cockerel - would he have survived all the adventures? Lots of running away - good. Also good were the street/market scenes. I liked the idea of including a paedophile but would he have been able to cope with the cockerel? HOWEVER, I had misgivings about the end. From where did the man who rescued her from the police cell come? Who paid for the grandmother's coffin? It all seemed to fall apart.

A gripping film full of quirkiness with a terrible end for which they neglected to credit Bush and Blair.

Difficult to watch at times but was a very touching portrait of life there. The characters felt very authentic and the two children were wonderful.

An excellent film: a simple story, beautifully told. It was sensitive and compassionate but not at all sentimental. The child actors were superb.

Modern version of a Greek tragedy.

A fine film. The acting by Baneen Ahmad Nayyef as Lamia and Rahim Alhag as Jasim respectively was excellent but somehow, I could not help feeling we've been here before - people quite undeservedly suffering in despotic third world misery made palatable for art house audiences in the West.

The two children's performances were astonishing. We watched them battle with all the injustices and harsh realities of Saddam's Iraq during the Gulf War. The filming of their surroundings, as Marsh Arabs, was stunning but the harsh circumstances of peoples' lives, shocking; their compulsory task to find fruit and cake ingredients for the president's cake, almost impossible. Rebuffed and exploited at every turn, they did not give up and we follow their perilous journey, with the cockerel Hindi in Lamia's pouch, with hearts in our mouths. The only kindness shown was by the postman/driver, ultimately helping her magnificent but implacable grandmother to look for her charge. The tragic ending is spellbindingly achieved.

The children were well cast and very good, particularly Baneen Ahmad Nayyef, who played Lamia. Fortunately, both Lamia and her friend Saeed, were sufficiently streetwise to avoid some of the predatory people they encountered on their shopping

trip for the cake ingredients. The pet rooster Hindi also gave a good performance! I wondered how Lamia was going to manage after her grandmother died, as she seemed to have no other family. Seeing the conditions that the Iraqis had to endure certainly makes me appreciate living here!

Filmed in a beautiful setting in the southern Iraq marshes, we saw a refreshing boat journey to school for the pupils but sad and even tragic actions followed. This was excellent story telling with dramatic twists. The acting- I imagine mainly by non-professionals- was superb especially by the two child stars. This film shows what life was like in the marshes before they were tragically and brutally drained. Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 there have been attempts to restore the drained marshes to wetlands and rebuild with the giant reeds.

So sad to see how innocent people were affected by the Saddam Hussein regime, ridiculous a child had to bake a cake for his birthday whilst in the middle of sanctions and war. Found the film interesting to see life in Iraq down to basics like food shopping and seen through the children's eyes who were fantastic actors.