

Members *Our City Our Sky* feedback

It was beautifully shot and a really interesting insightful view of everyday life in a war zone. The stories interwove beautifully. It demonstrated the pull between heart and head. The desire to stay in your homeland and the desire for safety. The way the lives of everyday people are changed and ruined by governments and their power games. My only criticism being that it didn't always show the background, the disputes between the different branches of the religion and the stories of those that escaped.

Excellent feel of what life was like in Baghdad at that time and how the services of a people smuggler might be taken up by someone in desperate circumstances. Also made me think of how awful life is for people of Gaza at the moment with many having no roof and little food and water. At least the Baghdadis had basic requirements.

When we read about another explosion in Iran or anywhere in the Middle East our reaction tends to be dismissive. This film really showed the effect on ordinary peoples' daily lives and the losses they feel every day. Such bravery to stay in their country, their home.

Very shocking and disturbing seeing how death, gunfire and explosions became a hum-drum way of life. Residents just living with it all as routine. The brutality conveyed for the most part by sounds and plumes of smoke leaving one to imagine what was going on, so distressing.

I would rate this a Poor. Whilst it had some interesting insights into life in Baghdad it never came together as a film. There seemed little to no plot and little to no character development. I felt bored for most of the film, waiting to see if the man on the boat would actually do something.

A thought provoking and insightful film providing a deeper understanding of what it's like for a population in times of great change, loss of opportunity and yet the human idea of hope remains. The last few films have been pretty heavy going for the soul and the world stage is also challenging and hard..... perhaps it's time to mix up the film offering to include some humour even if the topic overall is difficult. For next year, can the panel think about this before finalising the selection?

Stunning film. Really made me think about the ordinary people in these sectarian conflicts who do not want them but who are frightened and coerced by those who do. Thanks for all the hard work you and your committee do in bringing us these wonderful films.

I'm enjoying seeing all these Arabic language films this season but I found this one was rather too slow and disjointed to hold my interest, hence a OK. Many thanks.

I found this film hard to follow and quite confusing. As soon as the action became a little clearer it switched to different characters and storylines. Some parts were really engaging but as a whole it did not work for me.

A fascinating insight into living under the threat of random acts of terror. The film did well to underline the humanity and humour that comes with despair. However, I found it hard to work out who was who, how they were all connected and where it was all going. It felt like a montage of sub-plots and situations with no interlocking narrative to give the film momentum (the sound mixing was great - the gunshots could really make you jump). Glad it was picked - a good choice.

A compelling film showing the terrible difficulties and dangers for everyday people and living in Iraq after the invasion. A range of characters in different situations, well-acted and well shot, the portrayal seemed very real.

No discernible plot dynamic; individual characters given too little history; such fictional portraits of an historical episode need more structure and tension.

It is an interesting film although I found the plot a bit disjointed in parts. I do like the way it portrayed ordinary life going on in very strained circumstances.

Interesting set of vignettes giving an insight into everyday lives in Iraq.

I thought this was a disappointing film. A very interesting and important context of the Iraq war and what it must have felt like to live through it but I couldn't get engaged in the film as it felt so disjointed. Difficult to know who was who, storylines not followed up or reaching any conclusions. Perhaps it was supposed to be a series of snapshots which were not supposed to be connected?

A very moving film. Made me realise how lucky we are and our problems are minor compared to living in such a war zone which I don't think has improved that much since. But yet another very sad film. Anything more light-hearted coming soon?

The trauma and chaos of a disintegrating city was well conveyed but there were far too many characters to follow. For me, this diluted the impact of the film.

It was moving but a film about ordinary people living in Baghdad in 2006 could hardly be anything else. It did well to keep away from depicting wider political events; the glimpses of peoples' lives were more engaging and made me more conscious of the horror of armed, or military, violence. But (I accept perhaps because of becoming older or tired or both) I rather lost track of the different characters and their relationships. To the extent that was due to the way the film was written and shot, it detracted from it.

A very good film, excellently shot. You felt as if you were there living it with them! Plenty of people to blame and yet no griping. The children, especially, were good. (Future career?). And the river. And thank God someone made a film about it. Again, too long. Is it not possible any longer to select films of the usual length (90 minutes)?

This wasn't really a story but an observation about the lives of a small community in Baghdad and it had me completely hooked all the way through. At times I felt I was there as it was so true to life. Really interesting characters all coping in their own way with the terrors around them.

A subtle film about how internal political strife touches the lives of so many and in very different ways. Sara, the protagonist, was so sensitively acted -one really felt her dilemmas in being a single, intelligent woman and mother in an unbearable situation, where ultimately loyalty to one's country won out. The different characters conveyed the range of terrible experiences faced every day and always in the background the low but persistent rattle of gunfire- a film for our time.

Although the main actress who played Sara was wonderful, I felt it was a boring film with no real story and thus lacked all the necessary components of a good film.

I found the film very moving. Seeing the daily life of the families and how they coped with their situation was interesting. I liked the way their lives were depicted in short vignettes that didn't show the surrounding violence but depicted it in sound.

Certainly, very interesting with difficult to watch and heartbreaking moments. But it was confusing for me to put together the different family stories and to work out who was related to whom. Actually, I might have more enjoyed following the stories via a traditional documentary with voiceover - the director's original career I see. Still, it was a powerful comment on the effects of this (and other) wars on ordinary people and communities.

While it was a slow burn and at times for me a bit disjointed, I very much appreciated the insight into life in Baghdad through its troubled times. How people tried to cope and carry on with their day-to-day tasks despite the horrific traumas, violence and destruction surrounding them. Compelling and unsettling, an important story well told.

Dreadful, Yes Dreadful.

It was a hard watch but worthwhile. I thought it was too much like a documentary than a feature film. It was difficult to engage with the characters or to work out the relationships between them. A series of vignettes rather than fully developed scenarios. This was a pity because some of the characters were intriguing and it would have been interesting to explore their stories fully. So many of the films on offer this year have followed a similar pattern i.e. - people in poverty stricken or war-torn countries struggling against the odds and often failing. I would like more European films next season with developed characters and complex plots. We need some comedies or at least light and shade in the films.

Very powerful film that made me feel almost as if I was there. And, once again, I came out of The Exchange thanking my lucky stars that I live where I do!

Hi RFS, another interesting film I wouldn't have come across had I not been a member... thank you loads. For me more of a documentary than a film. Almost expecting a journalist to appear in a bullet proof vest with microphone between the blasts. Shocking but morbidly fascinating none the less. Not sure I would recommend this to a friend as either a "film" or "entertainment". Many thanks again.

A dreadful, pointless film. No story.

I found the film interesting and thought provoking and I suspect it conveyed well the confusion and damage to Baghdad society. However, it was a bit of a struggle at times to work out the relationships between all the characters and the film was slightly episodic in nature.

A collage of people struggling to cope amidst the devastation of sectarian war. We are shown something of living in a war situation, the practical and emotional issues and how people try to carry on some semblance of normal life, like trying to keep up a child's learning but meanwhile in another building we see an older boy is psychologically damaged from missing his absent mother and living with a broken father. Every character and situation was totally believable. An idea was put to us - at what point and at what cost is there a possibility of escape? It is, sadly, timely to watch this as Gaza and Ukraine continue to be destroyed.

Rather disjointed narrative. Interesting but more like a documentary.

I didn't enjoy this film; it is not made to be enjoyed. It was profoundly sad, moving and challenging. I was grateful that we were spared the graphic consequences of the horrors everyday Iraqis have to endure, a feature of the film that added to its impact. The whole viewing experience was, for me, coloured with an underlying and nagging feeling of responsibility for the original attack and invasion perpetrated by the American government, the UK and others, without any real plan for rebuilding Iraq after the war. I have to echo other recent comments about the diet of films chosen. I am afraid that Tuesday evenings have often become a rather depressing experience. Perhaps a slightly different balance of films for next season - from the challenging to the uplifting and even to those films that bring a smile to the face. Oh, occasionally for something more enjoyable!

It was a compelling account of the human aftermath of all that 'shock and awe.' However, I struggled to be engaged. Too many disparate storylines which didn't have coherent narratives and there was no overarching narrative storyline. The main character, if there was a main character, was movingly portrayed as were some of the other characters but the glimpses into their lives didn't really enable me to form a connection with many of them. Additionally, it was difficult to keep track of the large cast.

I thought that very important themes were touched upon but in general everything was very disjointed and quite hard to follow. I thought also that the film would stay with me more and become more significant as time went on but so far this has not been the case. An opportunity missed here I think.

This is a powerful film which particularly resonates today with wars being waged around the world. It almost felt like a documentary as we followed the lives of a number of Iraqis in Baghdad. What I found so moving was the mixture of their despair and their practicality as they tried to maintain a semblance of normality. And the optimism of the children was particularly poignant. The ending was very powerful too with the sound of the cry of a newborn baby at the dawn of Saddam Hussein's execution.

Excellent film, if somewhat harrowing. A seemingly very realistic depiction of life in Baghdad at the time. The attempts by the main characters to live normal lives in the terrifying circumstances was very well portrayed, as was the anguish over whether to stay or try and leave the country.

The main aim of this film was clearly to convey the sense of violent chaos, combined with frustrated patriotism, which prevailed in Baghdad at the time. This aim was successful but resulted in a somewhat fractured, disjointed presentation. I was not the only audience member who found disentangling the human relationships difficult. One theme was the difficulties experienced by westernised Islamic women. For the first time, I felt some sympathy with those reviewers who long for happier films. Roll on, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*!

A compelling film that has the feel of a documentary about daily life of a family and their neighbours in a war torn Bagdad. A long introduction to the characters before the final plot- to leave or not to leave Iraq- emerges. Confronted now to a mosaic of daily images of wars, this was a reminder of one from the recent past. I appreciated the economical use of blood and mutilation to inspire revulsion to war.

Wonderful film.

It was a thought-provoking but harrowing film and it was difficult to understand how anyone was able to try and live a normal life in these grim circumstances. It was interesting to see a film set in Iraq.

Once again, we should consider ourselves privileged not to be living in one of these Third World hell holes and it is no surprise so many people wish to get out. This film came across as a kind of Arabic Short Cuts but though shorter seemed longer as the stories came across as somewhat disjointed and did not fully mesh together, maybe because we only fleetingly met some of the characters. The acting was excellent, in particular Darina Al Joundi, who played the lead Sara, the rock upon whose shoulder everyone else seemed to lean on. One moment that almost took the breath away was when the girl meeting her potential date at the cafe backs out when she sees him in a wheelchair, only for him to get blown up, such an understandable reaction simultaneously saving her life. Still, a good film and another good selection for the season.