

# THE KITE RUNNER

**A 2007 DreamWorks Pictures / Paramount Pictures / Sidney Kimmel Entertainment & Participant Productions Presentation**

**A Sidney Kimmel Entertainment & Parkes / MacDonald Production**

**Film Directed by Marc Forster**

**Screenplay written by David Benioff**

**Based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini**

**A film review by Franco P. Visser**

It has been a while since I have reviewed a film that takes the viewer on such an intense emotional journey as did this one. The film 'The Kite Runner' is based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan-born American author who also wrote 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' – both books reaching best-seller status in several countries.

The film is set in 70's Afghanistan and tells the exhilarating and heartbreaking story of two friends – Hassan (played by Ahmad Khan Mahmoodzada) and Amir (young Amir played by Zekeria Ebrahimi / adult Amir played by Khalid Abdalla) - going through a peaceful pre-war childhood. But as the story develops Hassan and Amir's lives get more complicated in addition to the country of their birth's political atmosphere rapidly deteriorating. Hassan and his father work as servants to Amir and his family.

Both Hassan and Amir are avid kite flyers, Hassan acting as Amir's assistant when the actual flying of the kite happens, controlling the length of string, the tension thereof and so forth. Twelve year old Amir dreams of the day where he would win the annual Kite flying competition in Kabul and by doing so inadvertently also winning the recognition and acceptance of his harsh father, Baba (played by Homayoun Ershadi). Hassan always acts as Amir's 'kite runner', running all over Kabul in which ever direction to fetch Amir's kite for him when Amir's kite is downed by a rival flyer. This task Hassan does with such loyalty and devotion to Amir that one is left with feeling a mixture of admiration and awe for the little boy who is deemed of a lower social status, a 'Hazara', and considered fair game for bullying and abuse by the town's other boys.

Eventually to every ones' delight Amir succeeds in winning one annual kite flying competition in Kabul. After Amir's win, Hassan 'ran the kite' for Amir and on this day a particularly disturbing event takes place involving Hassan. Amir witnesses this incident in which Hassan was the victim of sexual assault by a group of boys and does nothing to assist his friend in crisis. The lack of action or intervention on Amir's part to rescue his friend from the cruelty of the other boys leaves Amir conflict-filled and emotionally confused. Amir 'turns' on his best



friend and a series of events lead to Hassan and his father leaving the employment and care of Amir's father. It is clear that Amir's inability or unwillingness to act caused him great discomfort and the only way he could lessen this discomfort was to project and externalise his conflictual feelings unto his best friend Hassan. Hassan in turn showed no emotionality or any other reaction to his friends' seeming 'betrayal' of him except for being more loyal still and more subservient towards Amir.

What is of interest especially during this part of the film is Baba's continued affection and tolerance towards Hassan and his father, an oddity that's explanation will come later in the film in a surprising and heartbreaking twist.

Then the Russians enter during their invasion of Afghanistan in the 70's and Amir and his father with their financial security as a backup are forced to flee to America. This they succeed in doing so by bribery and they are eventually smuggled over the border in a tanker truck. Hassan and his poorer servant family stay behind in Kabul and after Hassan and his father left the care and employment of Baba and Amir, the boys lose contact with each other altogether. Hassan and his father are soon captured and usurped into the Taliban rebel group that forms in response to the Russian invasion. Hassan's experiences range from sheer terror to emotional numbness during a time where the Taliban instituted very strict religious laws which saw many women and men being stoned to death or being beheaded, hanged or just shot on the side of the road for no apparent reason by the Taliban soldiers and authorities.

Many years pass, and the adult Amir is settled in San Francisco with his father. In addition to being a published author Amir runs a weekly flea-market stall with his father. Here he one day meets a girl, Soraya Taheri (played by Atossa Leoni) that he falls in love with, but whose father, General Taheri (played by Abdul Qadir Farookh) is very traditional and set in the ways of old Afghanistan and Kabul rules of socialisation and courtship. One day Amir receives a telephone call from his friend Rahim Khan (played by Shaun Toub). This telephone call will change his life forever and will hopefully

bring him the peace and redemption for his cowardly behaviour and betrayal of Hassan during his childhood.

Further details as to how the story unfolds I do not want to divulge, as I want to leave it up to the viewer to discover and experience.

This film is an exceptional one in terms of several aspects. The film's directors achieve great success in drawing in the viewer from the first moment to the last. The film was shot in the middle-east on actual locations, a first for a film that achieved such high acclaim and recognition, making the story so much more intense and real – the scenery adding great value to the film's overall appearance and appeal. The film came under extreme criticism from several extremists, religious clerics and persons of authority, especially in

Afghanistan, as they felt the film portrayed an unfair and demeaning picture of their culture, religion, religious laws, ways of life and their political justifications. Finally, apart from all this, there is the actual story, so beautiful and emotion-filled that it leaves the viewer with a sense of hope and, strangely enough, one's own internal peace – albeit only at the end of the film. One realises that there is such a thing as correcting one's past mistakes. Friendships can weather many storms and survive. Some of my friends who already viewed the film noted their extreme emotional reaction to the film and its content, and there was general consensus of the film leaving the viewer to feel emotionally 'drained' afterwards – but everything taken into consideration, viewing *The Kite Runner* is a must and more than worth it. Exceptional.

---