

## ‘The Kingdom’ a Prescient Portrayal of Relentless Ghost in the Terrorist Machine

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CHICAGO – In 1967, author Arthur Koestler wrote the non-fiction book “The Ghost in the Machine”.

The title has come full circle with Friday’s release of “The Kingdom” whereby the ghost – an Osama bin Laden-like extremist – must be extricated from his clandestine machine of terrorists.



From left to right, Jason Bateman, Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, Ashraf Barhom and Chris Cooper in “The Kingdom”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Even if you could smoke out the ghost in the machine, the most disquieting concept of such a search-and-destroy mission is much like what happens with the mythical Hydra creature. When Heracles decapitated one of the monster’s heads, another grew right back in its place.

Such can be said about today’s terrorist leaders. Even when offing a big fish, the mere action itself fanatically rouses another to rise in his place.

In “The Kingdom,” which can be thought of as the anti-“Syriana,” wild-man director Peter Berg (“Friday Night Lights,” “The Rundown”) touches with grave timeliness on modern-day fears through excellently evocative histrionics and relatively accurate portrayals of the abomination that is life and war in Saudi Arabia.



Jennifer Garner in “The Kingdom”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Following blood-splattering carnage in broad daylight, FBI agents Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman are surreptitiously dispatched from the U.S. to the scene in Riyadh to recreate the chaos and punish the executioners.

Life there – with several American families dangerously trying to live in local harmony – is a perplexing and ferocious wake-up call for many of us who lead relatively normal American lives.

The film was actually shot in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates along with at Arizona State University; in Phoenix; in Mesa, Ariz.; and in Washington, D.C.

As you could imagine, diplomats are hamstrung with slow debates of territorialism. The FBI agents quickly learn that Saudi authorities are leery and unwelcoming of American interlopers into what they consider a local matter.



Jamie Foxx in “The Kingdom”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

They nonetheless permit them local access, impart as much safe passage as possible and work as a team to bridge two innately dissimilar cultures.

Foxx gets the decoration for this film’s best acting, Cooper loves to get down and dirty and makes you appreciate him for it, Garner feels fragile for her surroundings until Berg grants her one hardcore whoop-ass scene and Bateman is unfortunately cast as an attempted funny man who the film seriously could have done without.

Richard Jenkins, who plays the FBI’s director, felt exactly where he should be and likely equaled the performance that would have been handed over by Robert De Niro before he decided not to accept the role. Chicago’s Jeremy Piven was purely obnoxious and should have sported the dunce hat along with Bateman.



Jennifer Garner in “The Kingdom”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Don’t be fooled by Danny Elfman’s beautiful score. For Berg’s cast and crew – much like in “[A Mighty Heart](#) [17]” about the death of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in Karachi, Pakistan – filming with intense sequences of brutal violence often wasn’t safe overseas and even in the U.S.

During filming on Aug. 12, 2006, assistant property master Nick Papac was killed in Mesa, Ariz. after the all-terrain vehicle he was driving crashed into Berg’s SUV. On set in Phoenix, Garner collapsed twice due to the sweltering, 115-degree heat.

While some films launch us into fictitious fantasy worlds, we also escape reality into film to glimpse an even truer reality that’s deep within chasms we could never reach.

The geopolitical thriller that is “The Kingdom” makes an important statement about our political relations with that country while vitally illuminating how and why terrorists become who they are.

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