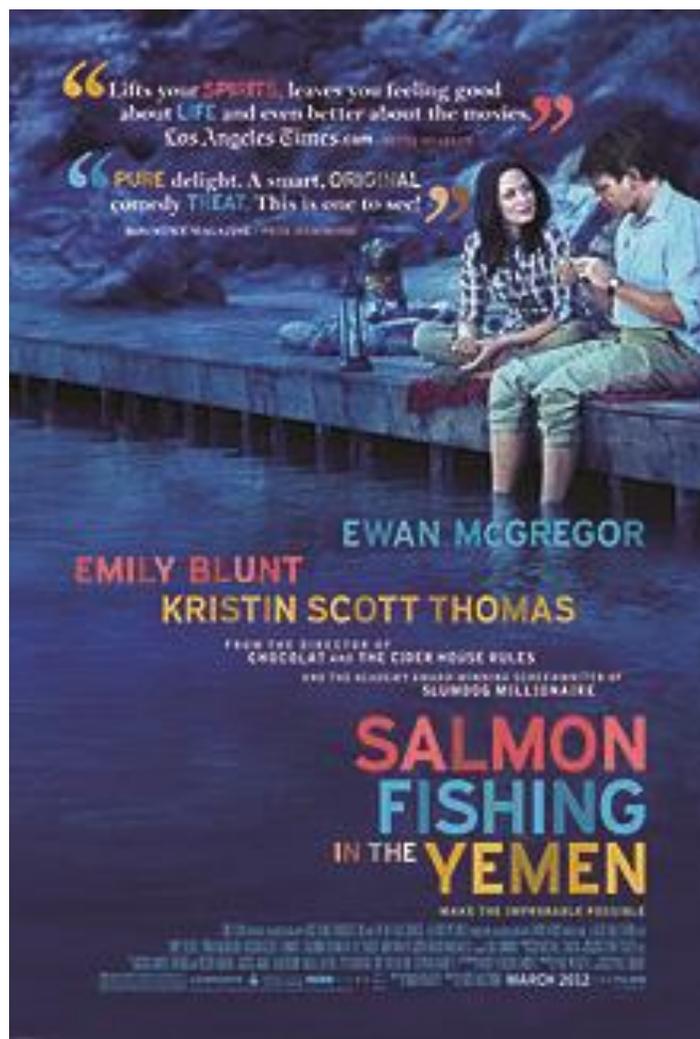


Salmon Fishing in the Yemen



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Produced by Paul Webster (major producer). Directed by Lasse Hallström. Screenplay by Simon Beaufoy. Based on the novel by Paul Torday. Production Design by Michael Carlin. Cinematography by Terry Stacey. Art Direction by Steve Carter. Original Music by Dario Marianelli. Edited by Lisa Gunning. Key Costumer: Julian Day

Length: 103 minutes. Companies: Lionsgate/ BBC Films/UK Film Council. Cinematic release 2011: DVD release 2013. Rated M. Rating 90%.

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Cast

Ewan McGregor as Doctor Fred Jones

Emily Blunt as Harriet Chetwode-Talbot

Kristin Scott Thomas as Press Secretary Patricia Maxwell

Amr Waked as Sheikh Muhammed bin Zaidi

Rachael Stirling as Mary Jones

Conleth Hill as Bernard Sugden

Tom Mison as Captain Robert Mayers

Catherine Steadman as Ashley

Hugh Simon as the Foreign Secretary

Tom Beard as Peter Maxwell

Steven Blake as the Cabinet Minister



Kirsten Scott Thomas in real life and in a film still that aptly captures the character of Mrs Maxwell.





Emily Blunt and Amr Waked in role. Below Ewan MacGregor in real life



Review

Let us start with the negatives that are so good about this film. It does NOT have any of the following clichés from 21st century films:

A high speed car chase with fast paced music

Lots of explosions

Endless swearing

A psycho killer who self-consciously explains his motivations after cornering the hero or heroine.

A love scene in an expensive hotel with accompanying soft sensual music

Syrupy concocted happy endings

The exact opposite; cynical doom laden dog eat dog gloom where the hero and heroine survive by almost supernatural or obviously contrived luck.

Instead this film, while ultimately optimistic, is realistic and focuses on a vision and the people, who when given an idea, become visionaries.



Three of the principal actors on location.

The English Prime minister's pushy, extremely self-assured press Secretary Patricia Maxwell (Kristin Scott Thomas in a marvelous performance) has a problem: in the war with Arab terrorists England looks bad and the Prime Minister wants a constructive image of Anglo –Arabic cooperation to be able to present a more positive media image. Not knowing a thing about salmon except their taste, she selects a request by a Yemeni Sheik Muhammed bin Zaidi (Amr Waked perfectly cast in a wisely understated role) to work together to introduce salmon into Yemen.

The fisheries department are strong armed by Maxwell into working with the sheikh, initially by sending their expert, Doctor Fred Jones (Ewan McGregor) to confer with Sheikh Zaidi's leading English coordinator, Harriet Chetwode-Talbot (Emily Blunt). Doctor Fred initially thinks that salmon fishing in Yemen can only be a hoax, then he changes his mind when he finds out that it is not. The sheikh, he now believes, must be an eccentric, deluded into the idea by a combination of his love of salmon fishing in Scotland and his wealth. As Fred says, salmon need a special kind of gravel for spawning grounds and cold water and cold temperatures; the Yemen is a hot, sandy desert.

Fred's attitude (and that of the audience) starts changing when Harriet starts explaining about the Yemen and adaptation. Salmon are in Californian waters because they can adapt to warmer water. In the Yemen night temperatures are very cold and they already have a dammed river with gravel. Meeting the sheikh on his Scottish estate, Fred sees a reasonable man with vision, so rich that tremendous costs, such as flying in thousands of salmon to Yemen from Scotland, will not worry him.

There are other worries: finding ten thousand salmon for starters. Outraged British anglers do not want their stock of wild salmon depleted. Moslem fundamentalists do not want their desert desecrated by those who challenge the ways of God. Harriet, a key player, is unable to work, being shattered when given an unresolved missing in action report concerning her boyfriend, who serves in the Afghanistan conflict. Patricia Maxwell keeps turning up with the clout to push her unwanted ideas and unwanted politicians. It seems that the scheme always stays on the brink of failure. Fortunately one of Maxwell's ideas works and becomes a crucial factor.

The film has several advantages: strong performances by the entire cast, an interesting idea, a welcomingly cynical but not didactic attitude to politicians and bureaucracies, an astute use of locales in rural Scotland, London and the Atlas

Mountains of Morocco filling in for Yemen. More than these advantages, some intangible quality that makes for the magic of cinema is at work here. The sub-text works in a refreshingly optimistic way that avoids being corny, syrupy or contrived. The world can be improved. Faith can be justified, impossible things can become true, like a fishery prospering in the desert.



Yemen does not seem to inspire confidence for salmon fishery experts



