

Four Lions (2010)

Contributed by Daniel Cann
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A film about four inept Jihadist terrorists in Britain is not your typical subject matter for a comedy. Unsurprisingly 'Brass Eye's' King of controversy Chris Morris is involved on co-writing and directing duties and it shows. Love him or loathe him Morris is master of dealing with tough subjects most comedians shy away from. I went to a screening of this one with some trepidation and much anticipation. My main worry was: would it be too dark? Or even worse: unfunny?

Well, Morris and co-writers Jesse Armstrong, Sam Bain and Simon Blackwell have crafted a sharp, witty and sometimes hilarious script in the same vein as recent political comedy 'In The Loop' which Armstrong and Blackwell were also involved with. In both tone and style this latest effort has the writer's flourishes and trademarks stamped all over it. It also benefits from having likeable characters with a lot of heart, even though their logic and ideals are totally flawed!

'Four Lions' holds the microscope up to 21st Century life in Britain with its depiction of suburbia and the blandness of contemporary life for most of Britain's bored and jaded citizens. Enter Omar (Riz Ahmed), Waj (Kayvan Novak), Faisal (Adeel Akhtar) and Islamic convert Barry (played with convincing misguided energy and to great effect by Nigel Lindsay).

These four friends live on the fringes of society in dead-end jobs dreaming of greater glory, particularly for their fellow Muslim's; unfortunately their solution to train as 'ideological soldiers' forming their own cell to hit back at the oppressive and uncaring authorities will result in farce with both tragic and comic consequences.

The story of losers on the edge of society desperate to be somebody is a familiar theme, but I bet it has never been tackled in this way before! This is a truly unique endeavour that will no doubt upset 'Daily Mail' readers but will entertain and amuse most despite its dark subject matter of terrorism and suicide bombing.

The characters are well drawn, particularly cynical family man Omar and the 'wannabe' who tries too hard, Barry. Faisal and Waj manage to create mirth and elicit sympathy and empathy from the audience at the same time. The film walks a tightrope and in lesser creative hands could easily have fallen flat on its face; but thanks to the heartfelt performances of everyone including impressive cameos from Julia Davis and soon to be Sherlock Holmes (in a new BBC series), Hugo Cumberbatch, this works well as both comedy and tragedy. Fans of comedy series 'The Inbetweeners' will also spot Neil's Dad as Malcolm Storge MP (Alex Maqueen).

Putting a human face to suicide bombers is a bold thing to do, especially in the comedy genre but it works here. Very dark humour and at times deeply poignant, the tough subject matter may be unpalatable to some but this is a well intentioned and well executed (pardon the unintentional pun) project. This is undoubtedly the most unusual film hitting Britain's cinemas this summer, but is well worth a look, much more original and challenging to the usual fare on offer.