

# Series review: 'Bard of Blood' is another Indian jaunt from Netflix



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CHENNAI: One of the high points of streaming platforms like Netflix in India is their freedom from restrictive censorship. Ribhu Dasgupta's latest, "Bard of Blood," a Netflix original, enjoys a free run with its bold content and easy style. Adapted from Bilal Siddiqi's 2015 novel, "Bard of Blood" converts words into visuals, and narrates a spy thriller largely set in Balochistan.

In a tightly scripted seven-episode series, the director uses Shakespearean themes of tragedy and turbulence from the plays “Hamlet” and “Henry VI” to tell the story of protagonist Kabir Anand (Emraan Hashmi).

Anand teaches Shakespeare in a school, and believes that the playwright is relevant today. In fact, Anand’s own life has an uncanny resemblance to that of the tragic heroes found in the plays penned by “the Bard”. Anand — also known as “Adonis” — is also a former Indian intelligence officer who is called back to help rescue four Indian agents taken hostage by the Taliban in Balochistan. Facing Taliban supremo Mullah Khalid (Danish Hussain) and his fire-spewing son, Aftab, Anand knows that this will be no Shakespearean sonnet.

Drawn into the mission to free the four, he gets into battle-gear with Isha Khanna (Sobhita Dhulipala), an analyst in India’s intelligence set-up, and Veer Singh (Viineet Kumar), a forgotten undercover agent in Balochistan. Helping Anand in the province is his old flame, Jannat (Kirti Kulhari), whose teenage brother is part of a resistance movement against the Taliban.

“Bard of Blood” is espionage in every frame with bullets and blood, guns and gore — tempered with love and lust. But beneath all these is a wily political game that moves like the pieces on a chessboard. It becomes apparent that the agents on the ground are mere puppets whose fate appears to be in the hands of men like Rajit Kapoor’s Sajid Sheikh, the number two man in India’s intelligence agency, and the diabolical Pakistani secret agent and Taliban handler, Tanveer Shehzad (Jaideep Ahlawat).

There have been accusations levied by reviewers that the series is not as unbiased as it should have been, with NDTV (<https://gadgets.ndtv.com/entertainment/reviews/bard-of-blood-review-shah-rukh-khan-netflix-india-2108001>)saying “For a show set in the troubled Pakistani province of Balochistan, that deals with cross-border terrorism, and involves rogue Indian agents contending with Pakistani intelligence services, it’s laughable that its makers think the Netflix series isn't political.”

Enriching Dasgupta’s taut narration is a superb performance by Hashmi. He is variedly subtle and stylish without melodrama — conveying energy and enthusiasm as he does pain and pathos. A teacher who emerges from the Shakespearean stage and sinks into slimy statecraft.

