

Review: 'The Forgiven' sees Ralph Fiennes and Jessica Chastain confront their privilege



CHENNAI: A weekend of debauchery into something more in director Michael McDonagh's "[The Forgiven \(https://youtu.be/Y1OlyBcH8QA\)](https://youtu.be/Y1OlyBcH8QA)," which takes a frank look at race and privilege. The film is set to be released in cinemas this summer after it premiered at last year's Toronto International Film Festival.



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Set in Morocco, the camera expertly captures the sneering disdain with which a group of white holiday-makers regard the locals. McDonagh, who adapted the script from Lawrence Osborne's novel, satirizes rich Westerners by portraying them as bigoted and alcohol-fueled. This is apparent in the first minutes of the movie when a squabbling couple — Jessica Chastain's Jo and Ralph Fiennes' David — are seen driving through the desert. They've flown in from London to celebrate the new estate built by their old friend Richard (Matt Smith).



Ralph Fiennes stars in "The Forgiveness." (YouTube)

Having been drinking the entire day, David is ill at ease driving through the dark desert when he loses control and hits a teenager, instantly killing him. Undecided about what to do with the body, they load it in the boot of the car and carry it to a plush estate, where guests are engaging in boisterous revelry. If this was not bad enough, the boy's old father arrives at the resort — his only child is dead and he is inconsolable. David is confused, Jo is nervous, but their friends treat the whole episode as some kind of inevitability.

David, in what is the only touch of humanism in the entire movie, agrees to accompany the father to his village for the burial. After a few days of spending time with the grieving family, David is wracked by guilt, but Jo — who is having her own fun at the resort — is not.

Devoid of any trace of sorrow, Chastain is effective, mixing her highs and lows with panache. But it is Fiennes whose performance is unforgettable. Conveying an arc that travels from drunken callousness to fright and guilt, he is fantastic. And Moroccan actor Ismael Kanater as the boy's father, Abdullah, is probably the most telling character, who hides his rage and anguish in a way that unnerves a confused David.

“The Forgiven” is subtle and plays out a scenario where disrespect and ostentatiousness is rampant. A fairly expansive and well-crafted narrative, the film offers a penetrating look at racist snobbery.
