

Review: Guy Ritchie's 'The Covenant' explores loyalty in war-torn Afghanistan



CHENNAI: Guy Ritchie has made some great cinema, including films “Wrath of Man” and “The Gentleman.” But his latest, “The Covenant,” now streaming on Amazon Prime, is probably his career’s high point. A hard look at geopolitics, it is thrilling to the core with top-notch production values.



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Though not a biographical movie, “The Covenant” is inspired by several real incidents in Afghanistan, where most of the action unfolds.

The film tells the harrowing tale of dozens of Afghan interpreters who helped the US military for years in their country, but were abandoned later when American forces withdrew in 2021, leaving them to fend for themselves and their families.

Promised US visas in exchange for doing work that could put them in direct conflict with the Taliban, they were ignored when the sudden exit of US troops took place, which in turn led to the interpreters being hunted down by the Taliban. "The Covenant" is the story of one such man and the apathy of the US towards its supposed allies when the situation no longer suits them.

Ritchie and co-writers Ivan Atkinson and Marn Davies present two sides. US Army Sgt. John Kinley (Jake Gyllenhaal) is a tough weapons explosives specialist who is posted in Afghanistan. On the other side, we have the interpreter, Ahmed (Dar Salim), with an uncanny intuition about people and situations. Unafraid and persuasive, Ahmed is instrumental to several operations for the US.

In a very exciting sequence, we see how Kinley's team uncovers a huge improvised explosive device factory in a remote location, but is cornered by hundreds of Taliban men on vans brandishing weapons. Kinley is seriously wounded but is saved by Ahmed and taken to safety. It is a story of survival and loyalty, and months later Kinley is back in Afghanistan trying to help Ahmed and his family who are being pursued by the Taliban.

A fascinating piece of adventure in which kinship finds itself in the most unlikely of places plays out, with Kinley trying to repay the life-saving favor Ahmed did for him.

Ritchie works with two very talented actors, and they frequently communicate as much with their eyes and expressions as with their rugged physicality, let alone their dialogue. It is wonderful cinema.
