

No Gray Matter Here

Torture deserves a smarter movie

RENDITION: Directed by Gavin Hood. Written by Kelley Sane. Cinematography, Dion Bebe. Music, Paul Hepker and Mark Kilian. Starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Reese Witherspoon, Peter Sarsgaard, Alan Arkin, Meryl Streep, Omar Metwally and Zineb Oukach. New Line Cinema, 2007. R. 120 min. ★★☆☆

While there is nothing horrifically wrong with *Rendition*, a solid, well-put-together film which doesn't so much rip its story from the headlines as pluck it gently from the news, twist it a touch and set it on its feet, there is nothing spectacularly *right* about it either. With its abundance of under-developed characters, unsatisfying plot threads and reliance on a black/white view of the world, *Rendition* is, for the most part, exactly what a cynic would expect: Too slick, too pretty, too bland to dare say anything or pose more than the most obvious questions.

And it's a disappointment, too, this blandness, at least when you consider the potential inherent in a film that stars Reese Witherspoon, Jake Gyllenhaal and Meryl Streep. But not one of them gives more than a standard performance: As Isabella Fields-El-Ibrahimi, Witherspoon has little to do but look concerned about her missing husband as she strokes her massively pregnant belly. Gyllenhaal, playing recently promoted CIA analyst Douglas Freeman, seems even more out of his

depth than his character is meant to. And Streep, well, we know she can do icy like nobody's business. Here, as steely-hearted government official Corinne Whitman,

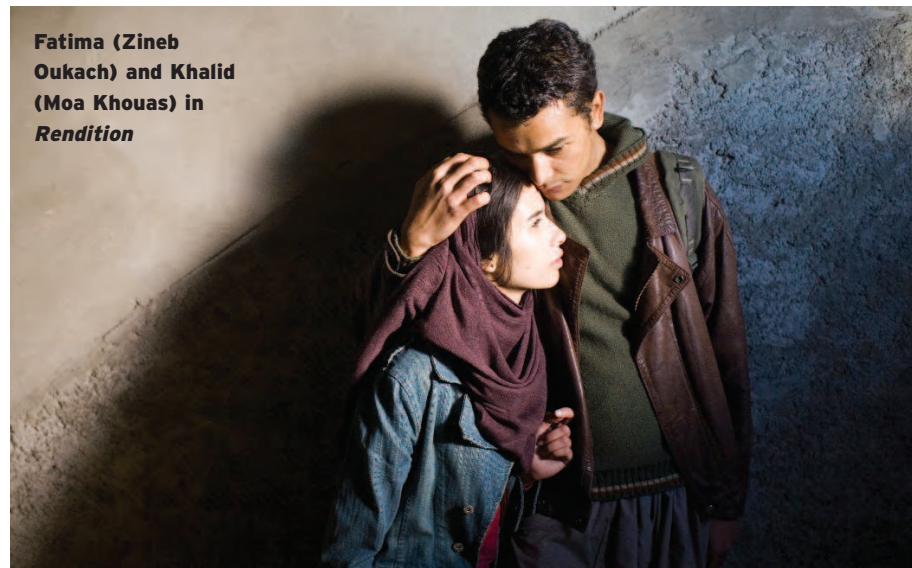
tells him to drop Isabella's search; and Fatima's (Zineb Oukach) defiance of her father, Abasi (Yigal Naor), whom she disobeys out of love for Khalid (Moa Khouas), though Khalid's occasional disappearances trouble her (and the film; his subplot feels like an afterthought).

It's not an unreasonable number of sto-

ing to their consciences and their compassion, and the bad guys give the briefest shimmer of feeling before marching off to do the duties they believe they must do. It's hard to fault a film for being anti-torture, yet it seems oversimplified and a little cheap to package an anti-torture piece in such glossy, depthless wrapping, as if there wasn't a lot of thought put into the position in the first place. At one point, driven to action, Douglas asks a colleague if there is any proof that torturing people leads to useful information, rather than simply creating more enemies. There is no answer from the man he questions, which, of course, gives Douglas his answer. But to sympathize with, to feel boundless horror for a man who we *know* is innocent — that's easy. What if you *don't* know?

By ignoring the ambiguities, the complexities, the endless questions that surround the use of force and power, *Rendition* turns the fate of those spirited away by the government into something of a fairy tale. Still, though it mostly misses the mark, it's a game try at bringing an important conversation into the theater, and you can almost see the filmmakers (chiefly *Tsotsi* director Gavin Hood and screenwriter Kelley Sane) hoping for in-depth post-film debate. Though for some their film will engender nothing but further cynicism, let's hope — in the spirit of optimism — that it spurs a few meaningful discussions. **EW**

Rendition ends Thursday, Nov. 1, at VRC Stadium 15 and Cinemark.



Fatima (Zineb Oukach) and Khalid (Moa Khouas) in *Rendition*

she does it with a drawl.

Rendition tries to hold together three or four strands of plot, including Isabella's search for her husband, Anwar (Omar Metwally), who never got off his plane from South Africa; Charlie's (Peter Sarsgaard) brief wrestling match with his conscience when his boss (Alan Arkin)

rylines for a movie to hold together, as recent films have shown, but *Rendition* fails to create emotional tension between the pieces; instead, one thing leads logically and simply to another up until a small twist near the end that lends nothing to the story. Everything goes as you expect; the good guys are good, respond-

OPTIMISTIC?

a 16mm snowboard film

headlines

THE 2nd ANNUAL SPHERE of INFLUENCE

film tour

Presented by

&

riding image: Jules Reymond by Daniel Blom

come see it on the big screen

McDonald Theatre Eugene 1010 Willamette St

Saturday November 10th

www.mcdonaldtheatre.com

Rider autographs 8pm show 8:30

Tickets \$5

Tickets available at theater box office and online

Free Shit

product toss and prizes at every show

1-800- 727-6689

stopglobalwarming.org

Show appearance by featured riders:

Marc Frank

Montoya

Matt Beardmore

Wolfgang Nyvelt

www.sphereofinfluencetour.com