

Review: The Two Faces of January

This thriller is forgettable in a way its influences never will be. [Kate Barlow](#) reviews

Tuesday 27 May 2014



Director: Hossein Amini

Starring: Kirsten Dunst, Viggo Mortensen, Oscar Isaac

Running time: 96 minutes

Rating: ★★★☆☆

Chester MacFarland (Viggo Mortensen) and his alluring wife Colette (Kirsten Dunst) are a couple holidaying in Athens in suit-wearing, chain smoking version of 1962. While touring the local sites they meet Rydal (Oscar Isaac), a young Greek-American accomplished tourist scammer. As in any inevitable thriller, when one of them gets caught up in the murder of a private detective they are left trying to flee the country.

The Two Faces of January is an instant throwback to those classic never-forgotten thrillers, reminding one of the likes of Hitchcock. From a slow and sleepy beginning the action gradually mounts as paranoia builds, the dialogue is crisp and the atmosphere coolly dark. However, the problem with following classic noir so closely is that it sometimes feels as if we've seen this all before. Hitchcock already mastered this art over fifty years ago. The characters are a bit bland; Chester's endless rage and overwhelming jealousy especially become a little exhausting.

However, this is not to say that the acting isn't anything short of fantastic, and if anything the leads are overqualified for their roles. Mortensen switches with ease between charisma, fatigue, paranoia and sheer

pettiness, while Isaac delivers a consistent air of quite distance. Dunst too gives a strong performance as Colette, even if her motivations can seem bizarre and unfounded. Colette is the type of female role rarely seen out of the age of black and white: confused and hysterical she is only granted knowledge of what is actually going on over half way through the film, after which she proceeds to cry and moan her way through her screen time, finding comfort only in the arms of Rydal to the frustration of her husband. Thankfully, most modern thrillers at least attempt to steer clear of this female stereotype, although it seems Hossein Amini has yet to get the message.

The locations alone are reason enough to buy a ticket, taking us from Athenian ruins, to a tranquil Crete, to the rickety stalls of the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. However, despite the impressive cinematography it feels like they've opted for style over substance here. The audience is in full awareness of the plot throughout, removing the air of mystery and the satisfaction of a big reveal.

Ultimately, *The Two Faces of January* is held back by its loyalty to the classic thriller. Despite its stylish leanings it is easily forgettable in a way its influences never will be.



3 comments

AJ 27 May '14 at 10:31 pm

Superb review.
Very accurate.
Could not have summed it up better.
Well done.

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jim beresford 28 May '14 at 12:11 am

as a big Highsmith fan this was a treat. The best cinema adaptation of her dark world by a massive margin. 11 out of ten.

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Klarissa Klassy 28 May '14 at 9:59 pm

Good review? All the classical references were missed on this shallo piece of writing, more concerned with political correctness than the allusions to the Minotaurus in te abyrrinth at Knossos; the father/ daughter / son get ups and the obsession with money as the root of all evil, ending with redemption.

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