

## Review: Slumdog Millionaire

Submitted by [KingoftheMods](#) on Fri, 12/12/2008 - 18:02.



Charles Dickens is alive and well in 21st century Mumbai. **Kimberly Gadette** reviews *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Oliver Twist has nothing on orphan-boy Jamal (Dev Patel), surviving on a fortuitous mix of his wits, luck and the actions of his brother Salim (Madhur Mittal).

Yet another, far more complex mix comes rushing at us from the film itself. Like Mumbai, AKA 'Maximum City', *Slumdog Millionaire* is a kaleidoscope of multiplicity, with elements of romance, memoir, tourism, social conscience, coming-of-age, sibling rivalry, gangsterism and interrogation – accompanied by trains, always trains, taking us in, around and through this Danny Boyle-directed masterpiece.

But first, Simon Beaufoy's screenplay, brilliant in its parceling out of the pieces of Jamal's life via the device of questions posed on a game show, the Hindi replica of 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire'. It's akin to *The Arabian Nights*, but in this version, Scheherazade is represented by the awkward young everyman, spinning a story from facts rather than fiction. Yet the goal is the same – survival at all costs.



We first meet Jamal as he's being pummeled by interrogators intent on breaking down this assumed cheater, someone whose worldly knowledge simply doesn't fit with the profile of a 'slumdog', a penniless orphan from the streets. Screenwriter Beaufoy (*Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, *The Full Monty*) gives us a clue to Jamal's character early on. Seven-year-old Jamal, trapped in an outdoor public latrine, realizes from the shouting just outside the flimsy wooden doors that someone famous has just made an unexpected appearance. He wants that celebrity's autograph no matter what, and if it means he has to jump into the latrine's hole and swim out from underneath, so be it. In that one grossly extremely instant, we understand that Jamal will do whatever it takes to achieve his goals. (Boyle's at it again: as in *Trainspotting*, the hero can't get to his pot of gold without first journeying through another, far more inglorious pot.)

British-born actor Patel beautifully captures the intense young man who survives not only by telling the truth, but by recognizing the truth in others. With his shy, soft-spoken demeanor, he could be the office mailboy, or the post office clerk, barely noticed. Yet it is his quiet, steely will, accompanied by an oversized heart, that wins us over.



Jamal's conflicted brother Salim is played by Mittal, a child actor from Agra. (In an ironic echo of the plot, Mittal gained fame upon winning a reality-based dance contest on Indian television in 1997.) He plays a self-serving thug, his hands opened wide, grabbing at whatever he can, yet driven by guilt and protective love for his sibling. Of the three lead characters, his role is the most challenging, and Mittal steps up admirably.

Indian model Frieda Pinto completes the trio, the third of the self-named 'Three Musketeers'. To her credit, as well as Boyle's, her acting debut comes off as poised and natural.

Other winners include Bollywood superstar Anil Kapoor, playing the Hindi Regis Philbin with just the right mix of faux charm and menace, and Irrfan Khan (*The Namesake*, *A Mighty Heart*), playing the Police inspector with depth and charisma.

For those of us who know little about Mumbai, we are treated to the fantastical and the horrible, the towering high rises multiplying overnight against the abject poverty of the slums. As Boyle states, "India's one of the world's leading nuclear powers on the one hand, but on the other hand, there are no public toilets."

Boyle and cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle create a visually spectacular film. When the boys fall off a speeding train, rolling down an incline, we get their POV, the screen awhirl with dirt as we all tumble together. Much of the film was shot with small, hand-held digital cameras, allowing Boyle to capture the verisimilitude of the teeming alleyways and marketplaces, the tin corrugated rooftops of the slums, the crowds of people unaware that a movie was happening literally under their noses.

With a crisp, involving script, strong performances and superb direction, it's no wonder that *Slumdog Millionaire's* awards are growing as quickly as the population of Mumbai itself.

**Rating on a scale of 5 hard-won Rupees: 4.5**

– **Kimberly Gadette** on *Slumdog Millionaire*

**Release dates:** US: December 12, 2008; UK: January 9, 2009

**Directed by:** Danny Boyle

**Co-directed (India) by:** Loveleen Tandan

**Screenplay by:** Simon Beaufoy

**Based on the novel Q&A by:** Vikas Swarup

**Cast:** Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, Madhur Mittal, Anil Kapoor, Irrfan Khan

**Running time:** 120 minutes



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