

The Man Who Would Be King

Two consummate thieves and ex-soldiers run guns from colonized India into the fictional Kafiristan in order to become kings. Daniel Dravot and Peachy T. Carnahan arrive in Kafiristan just as bandits ransack a kingdom. Armed with an advantage (guns) they save the kingdom. The kingdom treats them as gods.

As they instruct the Kafiris in modern warfare, their empire grows. Held to the standard of a deity the two are revered in the kingdom. Tempted as anyone would be by the treasures that pass before them, the two have trouble keeping their hands clean, and take liberally from the people who so adore them.

Eventually exposed as what they are Danny and Peachy face the wrath of a betrayed people. As they and the soldiers loyal to them run a fighting retreat the villagers stone them with the very gold that Danny and Peachy took as their own. Danny is marched onto a bridge over a deep crevice and the ropes of the bridge are hacked to pieces. Danny falls as he sings “The Minstrel Boy” and Irish folk tune at the top of his lungs.

Peachy is tortured but eventually manages to return to India to tell the story to a young reporter, Rudyard Kipling, the author of the book on which the film is based. A glory, honor among thieves and an eventual mythological downfall all combine to make one of the greatest semi-historical films of all time.

By Dan Smith