

The main character in this feature film is an eight-year-old boy called **Mir Hussain**. He is fun, cheeky, inquisitive, energetic and bright. He also lives in a cave and owns virtually nothing - though to him this is normal; it is all he's known.

The film is about Mir's life through three seasons: Summer, Winter, Spring. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, though much has changed and is changing, there is no guarantee that Mir will survive life in a cave - the sickness, dirt, dust, lack of water and lack of food. Yet his engaging story is not one of gloom and doom but that of a normal child who takes life as it comes and finds entertainment wherever he can. His playground is the rubble and tunnels of the destroyed Buddhas of Bamiyan, the shelled and burnt-out town bazaar, the orchard of the local militia. Through his eyes we see the destruction of the town, the ever-present militarization and the welcomed but watched presence of the Americans. Mir has no clue what it is all about but he knows how to have fun.

Mir's father, **Abdul**, is an amiable, jocular man in his late 60s. A life of pain (two deceased wives, a deceased child, a back broken and misshapen by falling mountain rubble) has left its scars but there's a glint in his eye and humour in his conversation. He adores his only son but also sees him as the one chance of escaping a life of poverty.

Mir's mother, **Mirwari**, is the most resilient of women. She looks 20 years older than her mid-40s, toothless and ailing. We first see her wrapped in blankets, suffering from the green meat that Abdul brings from the market. But she is opinionated and a fighter. Her life is utterly focussed on Mir and his sister. She remembers her youth but, for 25 years, she has known nothing but bombing, death and fleeing through precipitous mountain ranges. She is, understandably, fed up. Not that Mir seems to notice.

**Gul Afrooz** is Mir's half-sister (she is daughter of Abdul's second wife. Mir is the son of Mirwari, Abdul's third wife). In her early teens, she is kept in the shadows by Abdul and Mirwari and rarely speaks.

**Khoshdel** is Mir's sister's husband. He is in his mid-30s. He is a good man, who looks out for his little brother-in-law and shows him the ropes as Mir gradually explores further into the town (where they came as refugees fleeing both Taliban and drought). Articulate, and with an eye on the future, he is also depressed having failed to secure any work. Abdul, Mir's father, becomes increasingly frustrated with this. Though, when they do both find work, all is forgotten. Perhaps strangest of all is the fact that Khoshdel's mother is the same as Mir's! Khoshdel and Mir are both brothers and brothers-in-law! Abdul had a son and a daughter yet no wife. Khoshdel had no wife but a mother so the two men did a deal - my daughter for your mother. Deal agreed, they married on the same day and have all lived together ever since.

**Deljam** is a neighbour - and a comic and singer. Ex-Mujahideen and also ex-Taliban, he always has a smile on his face - though he and his family are lucky to eat every second day. Through his humour we see the past in a new light - he enjoyed being Taliban because they wore bigger turbans that kept your ears warm!

**Muhammad Ali** is the old man of the cliff face. He is bitter, charming, angry and resigned. From the first time he talks to us, we know that he - and all the cave-

dwellers - have suffered. Yet his conversation - as with all the main characters - is not predictable but, in fact, full of detail and nuance. Perched on the edge of the cliff, he looks down on a Bamiyan that is now secure but largely destroyed. His dreams were shattered long ago when the first Russian bombs fell on the town and everyone fled to the caves for safety.

**Sayed Askar** is another neighbour. A deeply religious man, he clearly bears the scars of two decades of war. Sayed Askar has participated in one way or another in all Afghanistan's recent trials and tribulations and his accounts provide a key part of the jigsaw that makes up the narration.