

A second look at 'Kitchen Stories'

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At first "Kitchen Stories" seems to be a quiet, understated, wacky little comedy. In reality it is an Easter/Passover gift, a parable for these troubled times of racial and ethnic hatred.

It is the story of a friendship that in its small way grows out of a background of resentment, distrust, chauvinism and revenge that is as big as any of the conflicts we witness on the nightly news.

Folke is a member of Ingle men. Both men are wary of each other and locked in the routines of their lonely lives.

Gradually, however, they lower their guards, and the way their friendship grows shows that despite our differences we, as a species, can get along. But added to the mix is an unexpected complication provided by Isak's friend Grant, so that the story is actually about three men and how they cope with their differences and their ingrained attitudes toward those differences.

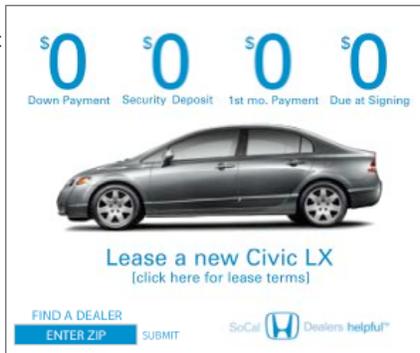
At first Grant's disdain of Folke appears to be nothing more than jealousy. Soon, however, it becomes clear that Grant has a deeper reason: Folke is Swedish.

Several times in the film, Isak refers to Sweden's role in World War II. As with every detail in "Kitchen Stories," these references are not just haphazard bits of dialogue.

During the war, Sweden was neutral and virtually collaborated with the Nazis, whereas Norway resisted the Nazis and suffered for it.

Although the opening titles offhandedly inform the viewer that the Swedish kitchen studies began in 1944 and the events of the film take place in 1950, the dates are significant, since 1944 was the year before the war ended, and in 1950, it was still a bitter memory in Norway.

For these reasons, the film is as much about the triangle between Folke, Isak and Grant as it is about Folke and Isak's growing friendship. In reality Grant is not so much jealous of Folke as he is unable to forgive or trust any Swedes, since, we find out halfway through the film, he was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II.



That explains why he tries to kill the researcher (an ominous, almost jarring moment in the film, as well as a breach of the film's comic mode).

In light of Grant's attitude, the film's double surprise ending, which I won't reveal, is not only justifiably poignant but also uplifting. And it's no accident that the penultimate scenes occur during the Christmas season. By then this quiet, quirky comedy has transformed into a bittersweet affirmation of human possibility that should give hope to us all.

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If You Go

WHAT: 'Kitchen Stories (Salmer fra Kjøkkenet).'

RATING: Not rated: No objectionable material. In Swedish with English subtitles.

WHERE: The Nickelodeon, 426-7500.

TIME: 1 hour, 31 minutes.

VERDICT: A.

Unfortunately, the rest of society is merely putting pressure on athletes of all levels to improve their performance. The health risk is serious. Use of certain steroids can lead to heart disease and other complications; the side effects of other supplements probably aren't even known yet.

At some point, parents will start discouraging their children from competing in sports. It's the ultimate irony: becoming an athlete — thanks to performance-enhancements — could become less healthy than not competing.

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