

# Hidalgo (2004)

Rated PG-13 Our content rating V-5; L-2; S/N-4.

Fans of Viggo Mortensen will be happy to see him in a starring role after his excellent performances in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. This adventure that begins in the American West of the 1890's (the Wounded Knee Massacre and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show figure into our hero's story) and culminates in the sands of Arabia is enjoyable, but marred by mixing too many elements interjected into the plot. I had hoped it would be a Seabiscuit type tale, but it actually is a Seabiscuit Meets Lawrence of Arabia Meets the French Foreign Legion film, even though supposedly based on the life of the real Frank Hopkins and his legendary horse Hidalgo, said to be the greatest of the long distance riders of the old American West.

Hopkins (Viggo Mortensen) reluctantly agrees to enter the North African race when an Arab spectator in the audience of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show challenges the claim that Hopkins and Hidalgo are the world's fastest horse and rider. The "Ocean of Fire" is a 3000 mile race, so grueling that very few of the entrants finish the course indeed many of them lose their lives amidst the harshness of the savage desert. No one thinks that Hopkins and his mustang have any chance of

winning indeed, as an infidel his presence is deeply resented by man of the riders. Complicating matters is Lady Anne Davenport (Louise Lombard), a British noblewoman of less than noble virtue out to see that the horse and rider she is backing wins at any cost. Hopkins has to deal with the wrath of the head Sheikh Riyadh (Omar Sharif) when he and the leader's daughter Jazira (Zuleikha Robinson) are caught late in the night conversing without a chaperone. And there is the matter of the nasty prince, who kidnaps Jazira and holds her hostage in an attempt to influence the outcome of the race. With its races, sword fights amidst exotic sets, desert pits with stakes to impale the unwary, a desperate rescue against great odds and a deadline and more this film is about as true to the actual life of Frank Hopkins as those dime Buffalo Bill novels beloved by Sheikh Riyadh but few will probably care, especially if the child inside that delighted at the old adventure films set in Arabia and North Africa is still living inside oneself. And it is so good to see Omar Sharif back in fine form that he alone makes the film worth seeing.