Pride of Baghdad – themes and development

*Pride of Baghdad* is about four lions living in a zoo (in Baghdad). The country of Iraq is in war, and in an attack on Bagdad bombs. Also the zoo gets bombarded. This causes the lions to flee. Three out of four lions are very happy to finally be freed from the zoo, but experiences teaches that life in the wild isn’t as easy as it had always seemed to be. The lions have a very hard time finding food and make a lot of (new) enemies. Then, just when peace finally seems to be returned, all four lions are brutally shot and killed by U.S. soldiers.

Several themes are discussed throughout the book. The first we come across is the fight for freedom. Noor, the female, adult lion, is constantly busy with her freedom. As a child she had been taken out of the wild, and despite the fact that she doesn’t remember a lot of it, she claims that things were a lot better back then. Anyway, ever since she’d been old enough to figure things out herself, breaking about of the zoo has been her number one priority. She is constantly making pacts with other animals living in the zoo.

This brings us to the second theme discussed in the book: trust/keeping promises and friendship. The relationship between Safa, the old female lion, and Noor is not good. There are tensions all the time, in the end they decide living in ‘war’ is no longer necessary and a new friendship is born. Noor tries to make an escape plan with an antelope. She is so much willing to get out of the zoo that she is even promising the antelope to not use them as a prey as soon as they are freed from the zoo (an antelope is the lion’s prey in the wild). Later in the book, all of the animals in the zoo get freed by a bomb attack. The lions are searching for an eventual prey, they spot an antelope. However they’re all very hungry Noor tells the other to let go the antelope, because of her promise to the antelope. This is the ultimate keeping promises part in the book.

Trust and keeping promises’s opposite betrayal is another theme mentioned in pride of Baghdad: the young Ali is taken away from his parents by the apes after he ‘lost’ them due to another bomb dropped on the zoo. The apes take him to monkey island. As soon as the other lions find out Noor says ‘But we...we had a deal. If we ever got free, they promised they would help me.’ To which Zill answers: ‘And you believed those scavengers.’ The apes try to make a scratch in Ali’s belly with a rock to hurt him. The apes betray the lions. In the end of the book, the lions are also betrayed by the U.S. soldiers. Even though the lions hadn’t hurt anyone they were shot and killed.

The last theme I’d like to discuss is survival. After the lions have left the zoo they start a new life in the wild. As I mentioned earlier, this life isn’t always that easy. They need to survive in the wild: in their search for food in the forest an army of tanks is heading towards them. The four of them find out a way to get away from those things alive and they decide to go the opposite direction of where the tanks are heading, hoping to end up in a more peaceful place and to avoid meeting them ever again. After a long walk they arrive in a city. They find a way to survive there and they spot a herd of horses. They decide to follow them. They end up at a huge house. In the house they meet a bear who wants to kill them. Zill and Ali kill the bear instead. Many more ways in which the lions survive can be mentioned, but after all the lions fail to survive from the human and their weapons. The lions die from their bullets.