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MCN Columnists

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David & Kamal

David is a 9-year-old American, in Jerusalem visiting the Israeli father he hasn't seen in five years. Also 9, Kamal is required by his tyrannical Palestinian grandfather to help support his family by selling postcards to tourists in Old City of Jerusalem. Anywhere else but the Middle East the boys probably could have put their economic and religious differences aside and found enough common ground to develop a budding friendship. In Israel, though, it's damn-near impossible. Their meeting hardly could be described as cute, at least by Hollywood standards. Kamal spots David as he's standing outside a dealer in rare coins in the Old City with his dad's girlfriend. As naïve as most other Americans his age, David makes the mistake of flashing a wad of money. Desperately poor, the street-smart Kamal snatches the pouch carrying David's precious antique coins, instigating a chase through the narrow streets and alleys of the Old City. Along the way, a gang of Palestinian thugs spots Kamal, who owes them money, and gives chase to both of the boys. Inspired, perhaps, by the story of the Good Thief, Kamal invites David to share his hiding place, which he does. When David demands that Kamal return the pouch, they engage in negotiations that resemble all transactions between merchants and tourists in such places.

When the smoke clears, the boys agree to meet the next day and finalize their deal. His father, who's been too busy at work to spend more than five minutes with his son, forbids David from leaving the house, but he cons the girlfriend into leaving the apartment long enough for him to escape. What transpires next need not be revealed. Suffice it to say, it involves the thugs; Israeli police, soldiers and political figures; a Bedouin black-marketeer; and a few bruised tourists. The bittersweet ending reflects the complexity of life in both sectors of Jerusalem. Written and directed by Kikuo Kawasaki, the 78-minute "**David & Kamal**" is set in parts of the holy city rarely seen in movies with much larger budgets. Adult viewers will find holes in the story through which you could drive a Humvee, but kids probably will be able to identify with the boys, if only because they're bullied, estranged from a parent and aren't afraid to act on their dreams. – *Gary Dretzka*