

# Gorgeous Geisha stunning to watch



Anne Brodie

On Movies

**MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA**

Starring Ziyi Zhang, Li Gong, Michelle Yeoh, Ken Watanabe  
Directed by Rob Marshall,  
based on the book by Arthur Golden

Nitta Sayuri's transformation from fishing village waif to Japan's leading geisha is the stuff of book club fever of late. Fans around the globe are eating up the exotic, yet painful story of a woman's struggle to find wholeness.

The year is 1929 and nine-year-old Chiyo is sold into a Tokyo geisha house; her family can no longer care for her.

She serves the geishas, preparing their clothes and makeup and running errands, enduring beatings and humiliations from the house mother.

The geishas are high and mighty; they can make men fall to their knees with one look. Eventually Chiyo is renamed Sayuri and begins her training. She believes it will transform her, freeing her from want and making her famous.

It requires mastering the arts of con-

versation, song, dance and flirtation, while withholding sexual favours and love. Her eyes are bright blue — giving her an advantage over other geishas.

It's not long before Sayuri is the most celebrated geisha in Japan. It makes the news when her virginity is sold for the highest price ever.

The "glamorous" geisha is shown to have a sad existence, bereft of love, in which no one can be trusted, colleagues are bitter enemies and virginity is sold to the highest bidder, no questions asked.

Her clients are married and unavailable, but shower her with presents, attention and even adoration. There are no misunderstandings. Besides, she's in love with a man she met on a bridge once, he bought her "sweet eyes" and gave her his hankie.

She was a child then. When they meet again, she is stunning in a silk kimono, elaborate geisha hair and makeup with all the confidence in the world. He doesn't know it is an act.

The geisha world is like a beehive filled with stinging and gorgeous insects, all focused on the prize — wealth — and all doomed to a single life and a dubious one when they become old.

Many are soulless; they have had their joy and trust taken away from them in servitude to their men and their owners. They're not called slaves but, in the end, that's what their lives amount to — beautifully dressed and behaved slavery.

Mr. Marshall, who got the gig to direct the film after the runaway success of *Chicago*, seems at home with the intricacies of the book and, indeed, of Japanese culture. His film is beautifully

shot, a dreamscape hiding the ugliness inside the geisha world.

The film is a little long, but it's consistently fascinating, total eye candy. Major chunks of the book have been omitted including the details and importance of the kimono and secondary plotlines. Fans of the book may not like it, but the

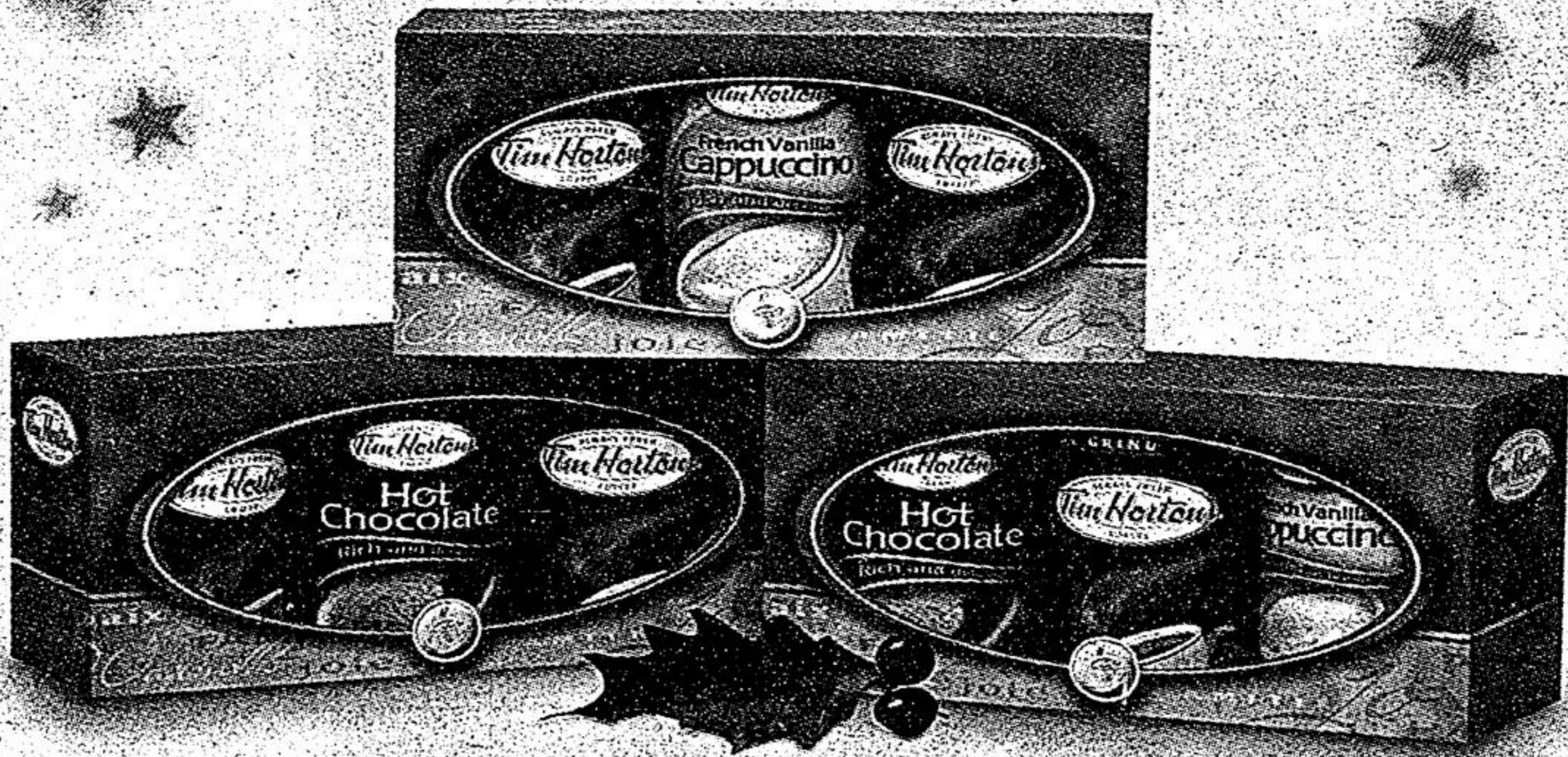
film seems surprisingly lacking in plot.

Still, it is worth seeing, to marvel at Mr. Marshall's depiction of illusion and reality.

Second World War planes fly overhead, signaling the end of an era, the end of the geisha and the beginning of a new age.

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