



# Iranian film shows reality of Afghan children's lives

■ Mohsen Makhmalbaf's 'Kandahar' portrays a side of Afghanistan overlooked on many news broadcasts

## MOVIE REVIEW

'Kandahar'  
Mohsen Makhmalbaf  
★★★★☆

By Ryan Bornheimer  
for the Emerald

Despite winning multiple awards at film festivals throughout the world last summer, Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf's "Kandahar" struggled to find distribution in the United States. Then came Sept. 11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. Suddenly, this movie named after a Taliban-held Afghan city was very marketable.

"Kandahar" opens with a bird's-eye view of the forbidding mountains of Afghanistan. By now, these landscapes have become common images in American homes. And there can be no doubt that watching Makhmalbaf's movie, in light of what's happened in this former Taliban stronghold, gives "Kandahar" added weight. But what the movie offers that no CNN broadcast can is the presentation of these beautiful vistas as stark contradiction to the brutality and oppression that's become the daily existence of the people who live there.

The plot is simple. Nafas, an Afghan woman who fled to Canada as a teenager, is returning to her homeland. Her sister, maimed by a land mine and overwhelmed by the mistreatment of women, has sent her a letter in which she vows to commit suicide at the time of the next solar eclipse, only three days away. Disguised in the head-toe covering of the burka, Nafas enlists the help of various locals to reach Kandahar in time to save her disturbed sibling.

Though "Kandahar" has a straightforward plot and beautiful



Courtesy Photo

photography, it has a documentary-style vitality, thanks to a run-and-gun structure. Nafas is on a timetable, and since we're tagging along, the pace is non-stop.

The actors in the film are not actors at all, but Afghan refugees from camps near the Iranian border. Their natural behavior imbues the movie with a tactile — and at times, heartbreaking — realism.

Likewise, Nelofer Pazira, who portrays Nafas, is in fact a Canadian journalist and becomes the movie's makeshift travel guide. At times, "Kandahar" feels like a perverse episode of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." Only we're not being taken on a tour of the Crayola Crayon Factory, but a depressing wasteland ravaged by decades of war. This style has a purpose. The way the Afghans in the movie have come to take war and death for granted offers a sobering glimpse into a world so foreign to Western sensibilities, some may not have believed it prior to Sept. 11.

One especially surreal sequence focuses on a Red Cross camp that offers prosthetic limbs to an endless parade of men who've suffered the same fate as Nafas' sister. The way the scene unfolds, one would think journeying to this "market" for limbs is as natural as a visit to

the pharmacy to fill a prescription. At one point, planes buzz the area, dropping more prosthetics by parachutes. Men on crutches race to pick up the goods in a slow-motion sequence that illustrates the sad absurdity of such an act.

"Kandahar" gives special attention to the children raised in this environment — young women in particular. When Nafas arrives in a border town, Afghan girls are being told they will no longer be allowed to go to school. Later in the day, they are taught lessons in the dangers of picking up dolls that may be rigged with explosives.

Later, we see students at a school for boys, who chant the Koran and are given pop quizzes on the usefulness of swords and machine guns in the war against "infidels."

These are the moments that define "Kandahar," and they are not easily forgotten. The movie is at times disturbing, but never ugly. It's eye-opening but remains lyrical and possesses an exotic beauty that may surprise you. You can't look away, and despite the subject matter, you won't want to. The movie itself provides hope that cinema can still be a vital tool to reflect the world we all live in.

Ryan Bornheimer is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

Blondie, the Ramones and California hardcore, she formed an all-girl band, the Bombshells. The Bombshells opened for the '90s legends Nirvana, Sublime and the Goo Goo Dolls.

Now touring under her own name, DuVall is sponsored by Mission Snowboards and has appeared at the Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival. DuVall has just released her first full-length album, "Star." The album, pro-

duced by Vince Jones and powered by Pat Steward and Doug Elliott (formerly of the Odds), features what DuVall calls "pumped up punk rock power pop."

Music from her new album will be used in a Whistler-produced extreme sports video. Now DuVall is coming to Eugene to play her own special brand of girlie rock. Call John Henry's for more information at 342-3358.

—Alix Kerr

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## A&E brief

**Siobhan to perform 'pumped up punk rock power pop'**  
"The Price is Right" host Bob Barker encourages viewers to spay and neuter their pets. So does Siobhan. Former Blondie-infatuated riot grrrl Siobhan DuVall is playing Sunday at John Henry's.  
DuVall's rock life began in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1989 when, after being influenced by