

GOA FILM FESTIVAL

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Goa has become indissoluble with the International Film Festival of India. The 39th IFFI(Nov/Dec,08) was enriched by films of vision from the world; country focus on Iran, Switzerland and Russia; and tributes to Aki Kaurismaki (Finland), John Landis (USA) and Wong Kar Wai (Hongkong). The Film Heritage section was dedicated to worldwide film classics.

WARLORD

Peter Ho-Sun Chan's "Warlords" (Hongkong,2007, colour, 127 mins) is an epic action film on China, in the mid-19th century. Battles, swords, spears and cauldron fires signal the spirit of 1850. An overhead shot captures a wounded soldier with raised arm, rising with his sword, after crawling from a pile of corpses. It was an age when death came easily, but living was hard. People walk in single file, as a young girl offers broth to passing soldiers. A soldier drops his bowl, crying; "All my men are dead, and I alone survived." After fighting for three days and nights, more than 15,000 men have died. In disguise General Pang (XU LAN) spends a night at a deserted house, and is brought to life by Lian (Aulrey Lam), Zhao's wife. Pang is recognized by his stockings, and a group of soldiers attack him with swords. The invading soldiers are overpowered, and robberies by the rebel army noticed. Another army is entrapped by nets. When guns are aimed, Pang impales with spears. Struck on the head, bodies fall.

Pang organizes the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, with brothers Zhao and Jiang, 430 million Chinese are suffering from the corrupt rule of the Qing dynasty. At a village, Pang meets pretty girls, who are trained as courtesans and sold to rich men. Opposing troops outnumber Pang's soldiers, and many are killed. All guns are pointed at Pang's rebel army and thieves. Pang joins the Kui army, and deserters from the Qing army are tied up and killed. Soldiers march and blow up pagoda arches. Hui city is captured. Soldiers agree to no wages, but share loot. There are captives and beheadings. Swords, bows, arrows, guns and charges lead to hand to hand combats. The camera pans over blinds on horses, tossed cannons and wheels of gun carriages. 800 men upset Lord Chen's army of 2000 soldiers. Pang is pierced by a sword. The local king is decapitated. Bandits kill for their own interests, while Pang's rebel army sacrifices for others. Lian meets Pang outside a village. A voice over describes the battle progress. City gates and bridges herald silver coins and brocade clothes. Two young men are executed when they try to rape two girls. Pang preaches that men and women should be free from oppression. The rebel army kills to survive, and also to be good. Pang, Zhao and Lian try to end the war in three months.

Sepia images record the devastation in Soojhou, after one year of war. Torn flags, the dead and wounded are visible in the smoke of cannon fire. Pang pleads for more weapons and food. In a forest, Lian gives a necklace to Pang, and Pang promises marriage if he survives. After a duel, an opium dealer from the Taipei rebellion is killed. 4000 captive soldiers demand bread. Unarmed captives are killed. Nanking is attacked, and there is an opera on brotherhood. Pang is appointed governor of Ghangzu. Local militias wield powers. There are reflections on ice, as soldiers jump over frozen land. Pang is in the imperial courts, but jealousies result in Lian being stabbed to death. Pang cries with a cloth over his face. Ordinary people with umbrellas in the rain, greet Pang's victory procession. Honour pledges, rains, stabbings and battles continue. Peter Chan's battle scenes reach a spectacular dimension. Arthur Wong's agile camera adds a rhythm to the chaos of swords and guns. Emotion accompanies the action, and the scenario is without melodrama.

TULPAN

"Tulpan - Tulip" (Kazakhstan - Russia,2008, colour, 100 .mins) by Sergei Dvortsevov has as decor the Kazakh steppes and yurt circular tents of felts and skins, used by

nomads. A truck, a small hut and herds of camel dot the village. After a mandatory military stint, Asa (Askat Kuchin Chire Kov) has returned to the home of his nomad brother-in-law, Ondas (Ondasyn Besikbasov), married to sister, Samal (Samal Eslyamova). Ondas and Samal, with their three children, are nomadic shepherds. But Asa must first marry, to start a new life as shepherd. Asa and Ondas meet an old couple, with a proposal from Asa to marry their young daughter, Tulpan, who is kept behind a white curtain. Young Asa is full of stories of fish and octopus, during his stint as a sailor in the Pacific fleet. Tales of sea voyages are accompanied by wedding offerings of ten sheep and a crystal lamp.

Asa and his young friends drive in a truck, in merriment to a Bono song. Camels stroll in the fields. Tulpan's face is never seen. Soon she conveys to her mother that she did not like the proposed groom for 'big ears'. At sunrise a little girl takes out a camel and cattle. Asa looks at his ears in the mirror. A flock of sheep runs, with sunrises on the back. Ondas's son Nuka, with a stick, chases a braying donkey. Sheep, with white ribbons tied on their necks, fleet in the blinding dust storms. Thunder and rains fall on a still born sheep. Asa reads out newspaper news, imitating Kazakh radio and Moscow news. Samal, pleads on Asa not to leave the village in 'Hunger Steppe'. Asa, his sister and brother-in-law attend to the sheep, afflicted with an unspecified disease. There is a tradition of every sailor to draw a dream on a shirt collar. Asa knocks at Tulpan's door, with a drawing on his collar. Tulpan does not respond, and carries a goat, with back to the viewer. Asa promises to buy the flock, and start own business. Tulpan bangs the door on Asa's face. Ondas's children Maha, Beke and Uka sing out aloud. Asa plays with a small tortoise, and compares Prince Charles ears on a photo, with his own ears. Ondas picks up an injured sheep on his shoulders. Samal sings lullaby at night. The community sleep together.

The village vet examines the sheep, and moves on a motorcycle, while camels follow the bike. Asa protests against orders from herdsman and brother-in-law Ondas. He refuses to live with Ondas. A hand held camera pans in close-ups, while Asa helps a goat deliver. The baby sheep is pulled out of the womb, and resuscitated by mouth to mouth breathing. Trucks carry food and ill animals. Asa recites words of love and admiration at Tulpan's door. When Tulpan's mother chases Asa with a spade, Asa smashes up the wooden door to the sheep ken. Soon the family tent covering is pulled down, and the hut is dismantled. Meat and cheese are collected. Asa gives his sailor's collar to nephew Beke.

With plans of moving from Almaty to Sakhalin, and travels on a boat to sail the world, Asa leaves on his friend, Boni's truck. There is Boney M music. Asa voyages with a suitcase. Ondas and his family also leave on a big truck. Sheep and animals are enveloped in the dust storm. Tulpan remains a desert mirage, never to be seen. The sand storms provide a scenic variety to the Kazakh desert, steppes. Dvortsevov captures sociology and anthropology intensely in the landscape and way of life.. There is always a tinge of light comedy in the brutal environment of the inhabitants. The observant camera of Jolanta Dylewska balances lyricism with the tribulations. □□□