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Joe Morgenstern, *WALL STREET JOURNAL*

**“AN EXQUISITELY FILMED,
LYRICAL TALE!”**

THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Leah Rozen, *PEOPLE MAGAZINE*

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Ann Hornaday, *WASHINGTON POST*

“MAGICAL!”

Kenneth Turan, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

THE STORY OF THE

**WEEPING
CAMEL**

A captivating and magical “narrative documentary” about a Mongolian family's efforts to get a mother camel to accept her newborn calf. The filmmakers have meticulously woven fact and fiction to capture the life of nomadic shepherds of the Gobi desert and the rituals that these nomads use to save their herd. A unique cinematic experience and a fascinating look at a culture living in close harmony with nature whose way of life is threatened by encroaching progress.

MONGOLIA/GERMANY • 2003 • 90 mins • Color • In Mongolian with English subtitles

A Magical Mongolian Fairy Tale's Mother-and-child Reunion

LESLIE CAMHI



"So now, my children, I'll tell you the legend of the camel," a Mongolian grandfather intones as *The Story of the Weeping Camel* opens. This magical film, a "narrative documentary" (or so its makers call it) with the aura of a fairy tale, unfolds amid the scrubby brushland of the Gobi Desert, where nomads live in yurts, ride camels, and tend to herds of sheep and goats as they have for centuries. The granddaughter of nomads, Byambasuren Davaa (who co-wrote and co-directed the film with Luigi Falorni) was inspired by a movie she remembered from her Mongolian childhood about a mother camel who rejects her newborn calf, before the two are reconciled by means of an ancient musical ceremony.

Influenced by classic documentaries such as Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, Davaa and Falorni cast a nomadic family of four generations living in three yurts, who play themselves in sometimes carefully planned scenarios. Shooting this family in the southern Gobi during the brief camel-birthing season, the filmmakers stumbled across the story they were seeking. As *Camel* begins, the lovely Odgoo (Odgerel Ayusch) and her husband, Ikchee (Ikhbayar Amgaabazar), along with their parents, grandparents, and two young sons, are assisting the animals in their labors. All goes well until the difficult birth of a beautiful white calf (called Botok) stretches over two days, straining the mother camel (played by a dromedary named Ingen Temme) to her limits.

Beyond its rare visions of remote vistas, *Camel's* great charm lies in its seeming simplicity. The camera records the events of the day—from a little girl's tears to an afternoon sandstorm—with a childlike clarity and curiosity. When Odgoo's sons set out on camelback to the nearest settlement (some 50 kilometers away),

to find the violinist needed to heal the rift between mother and baby, the camera notes the outside world's encroachments on a traditional lifestyle—satellite dishes, video games, the ubiquitous motorcycles that serve as alternatives to animal transportation. But these are offered without heavy-handed judgments; the filmmakers merely note the coexistence of modernity and ritual.

With its stately pacing (and consistent with its broader theme about the need for belonging), *Camel* conveys a sense of an indigenous culture whose relationship to the earth and to nature is shaped not by conquest but by collaboration. Perhaps that's why the film's camel stars are also credited as performers. Living alongside these otherworldly creatures, whose stubborn independence shines through their wild, bovine eyes, must inspire a profound respect. Infinitely serviceable tanks of the desert, built to withstand the harshest climatic conditions, they may be coaxed, but never forced. And when they weep, their tears seem real.

THE STORY OF THE WEEPING CAMEL

Written (in Mongolian, with English subtitles) and directed by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni; director of photography, Mr. Falorni; edited by Anja Pohl; produced by Tobias N. Siebert. Running time: 90 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Ingen Temme (Mother Camel), Botok (Baby Camel), Uuganbaatar Ikhbayar (Ugna), Odgerel Ayusch (Odgoo), Janchiv Ayurzana (Janchiv), Enkhbulgan Ikhbayar (Dude), Guntbaatar Ikhbayar (Gunttee), Amgaabazar Gonson (Amgaa), Zeveljamz Nyam (Zewel), Ikhbayar Amgaabazar (Ikchee), Chimed Ohin (Chimed), Munkhbayar Lhagvaa (Violin Teacher), Ariunjargal Adiya (Teacher's Assistant) and Dogo Roljav and Chuluunzezeg Gur (Relatives in Aimak).

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