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As Fliff Ends, Extra Jiyan A Fine Touch Film Festival

November 10, 2002 | By John Dolen Arts & Features Editor

Certain movies are the stuff good film festivals are made of. In Fort Lauderdale's festival, ending today, I'd count the flawless Take Care of My Cat (Korea), the provocative documentary War and Peace (India), and Jiyan, which has been added to today's lineup (at 1:10 p.m.).

Heard of no-fly zones? Of villages where a tyrant used chemical weapons on his own people? The media buzz phrases are hard to escape even if you're not a news junkie.

So how about a movie filmed entirely in such villages, a movie that Hollywood wouldn't touch with a 10-foot pole?

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Jiyan, which was awarded a special jury prize at Seattle's film fest this year, was filmed in 28 days in Kurdistan, the part of Iraq under U.S. protection and previously under immense suffering. Kurdish expatriate Jano Rosebiani had to smuggle his film out of the region for post-production in Belgium.

The film takes us to the center of the volcano, so to speak, with a film whose heart and soul are as big and beautiful as the eyes of its brightest star, Pirshang Berzinji, as the orphan Jiyan, 10.

The story is simple: a Kurdish-American arrives in the impoverished village of Halabja, which suffered chemical and biological attacks, to help the townspeople build a new and much-needed orphanage.

If at times artfulness and mild polemics get in the way of the story, these are far outweighed by the documentary feel, the courage and hope of the Kurds and the big story that is being told here.

And that's not to mention the whole assortment of delightful characters who populate this drama, some who'll make you smile, some who'll make you cry, and all who will make you care.

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