

# Review: RSIFF competition title 'To Kill A Mongolian Horse' is a moving, gripping tale



JEDDAH: Progress and modernism sometimes spell the end of an era and the traditional way of life. This is essayed brilliantly in director Xiaoxuan Jiang's "To Kill A Mongolian Horse," which had its MENA region premiere at the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah and is up for consideration for an award at the closing ceremony on Thursday.



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Running in the “Red Sea: Competition” section against titles from across the world, the Mandarin and Mongolian language work unfolds against the barren landscape of Mongolia.

The moving 98-minute film tells the story of real-life Saina, a herdsman whose deep bond with his horse is captivating. Scouting for locations for her short movie, “Graveyard of Horses,” the director met Saina in Mongolia and he inspired her to create a fictionalised version of his life.

Apart from tending cattle, Saina also appears in a show about Mongolia's past. A daredevil life-threatening display of horsemanship and athletics endear him to the crowds, and he says in a poignant scene they are necessary for financially supporting his gambling father, son and ex-wife.

Pressing concerns like climate change and drought compensate for average performances. But the storytelling is gripping and underlines the aching heart of Saina, who sees tradition and culture slipping away and a new world emerging. He is nervous but his horse offers solace and the kind of permanence that he craves.

The scenes between the two are movingly etched out through impressive framing captured by Tao Kio Qiu's lens. Although the landscape is desolate, the bright colours and unique hues of the costumes worn by the actors are a joy to watch against the drab palette of their surroundings.

There is a good chance this title will catch the eye of jury head Spike Lee as the final deliberations are made.

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