



Below is Kino Ken's dvd review of THE BREADWINNER. This movie is a probable future LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

10 of a possible 20 points

****1/2 of a possible *******

Ireland / Luxembourg / Canada 2017 color 93 minutes feature animation drama Aircraft Pictures / Cartoon Saloon / Melusine Productions / Jolie Pas Productions / GKids / Film Fund Luxembourg / Telefilm Canada / Talent Fund / Bord Scannan na Héireann (The Irish Film Board) / Gaia Entertainment / Shaw Rocket Fund / Artemis Rising Foundation / The Broadcasting Association of Ireland / Ontario Media Development Corporation / RTE (Ireland) / The Movie Network / Canadian Broadcasting Corporation / WestEnd Films Producers: Anthony Leo, Andrew Rosen, Paul Young, Tomm Moore, Stephan Roelants

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

1 Direction: Nora Twomey

0 Editing: Darragh Byrne
 1 Animation Camera
 1 Lighting
 Storyworld Direction: Jeremy Purcell Technical Direction: Mark Mullery
 0 Screenplay: Anita Doron, based on the novel by Deborah Ellis
 Screen Story: Deborah Ellis
 Music Editing: Erich Stratmann
 Music Recording: Jan Holzner
 2 Music: Mychael* and Jeff Danna*; Qais Essar
 Orchestrations: Adam Klemens*
 Additional Musical Arrangements: Nicholas Skalba
 1 Art Direction: Reza Riahi and Ciaran Duffy
 1 Animation Direction: Fabian Erlinghäuser
 Backgrounds: Lily Bernard (Key), Solene Chevaleyre (Key), Rory Conway
 (Key), Daby Zainab Faidhi (Key), Isabelle Franck,
 Laurence Gavroy, Enora le Luherne, Aine McGuinness,
 Miki Montillo (Key), Andre Odwa, Geneviève Penloup,
 Amandine Philippe, Jean Baptiste Vendamme,
 Nicholas Verbeke
 Layouts: Julien Dottor, Stéphane Nedez, Rikke Skovgaard, Etienne Willem
 Character Design: Sandra Norup Andersen, Louise Bagnall, Reza Riahi
 Concept Artist: Rosa Ballester Cabo
 Makeup: Natalie Dale
 1 Sound Design: J. R. Fountain
 Sound Editing Supervision: Nelson Ferreira, J. R. Fountain
 Sound Effects: John Elliot, Dashen Naidoo, Kevin Schultz, Tyler Whitham,
 David Yonson
 Dialect Coach: Kawa Ada
 Dialogue Recording: Brian Gallant
 Rerecording Mixing: J. R. Fountain, Frank Morrone
 2 Voice Acting
 10 total points

Voices Cast: Saara Chaudry (j) (Parvana), Laara Sadio (Parvana's mother,
 Fattema / Old Woman), Shaista Latif (Soraya, Parvana's older sister), Kawa Ada

(Razaq), Ali Badshah (Nurullah, Parvana's father / Talib Security Man), Noorin Gulamgaus (Idries / Sulayman), Soma Chhaya (Shauzia, Parvana's classmate), Kanza Feris (Sorceress / Woman in Courtyard), Kane Mahon (Optician / Kiln Owner / Crowd Voices), Ali Kazmi (Darya / Fruit Juice Vendor / Jail Warden), Mran Volkhard (Megaphone Voice / Market Seller), Reza Sholeh (Stall Seller / Guard Man on Bike / Teenage Boy 2), Lily Erlinghauser (j) and Patrick McGrath (Zaki, Parvana's little brother), Wamiq Furoghudin (Prison Gatekeeper), others

This animated adaptation of Deborah Ellis's searingly dramatic novel *The Breadwinner* suffers from a decisively split personality. On the one hand, it attempts realistic portrayal of life in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Not content with that, however, it contrives a parallel fantasy thread which completely upsets both the atmosphere and the rhythm achieved by its almost documentary counterpart. Director Tomm Moore, here restricted to storyboard and producer duties, was able to pull off such a combination credibly in *THE SECRET OF KILLS*. Nora Twomey fails to match his clever interweaving of history and myth.

Story One pivots on the relationships between Parvana and various living members of her family: father Nurullah, mother Fattema, big sister Soraya, and little brother Zaki. Nurullah, wounded veteran of previous conflict between Afghans and Russians, is limited in job options, since his former profession of teaching is looked upon with suspicion by undereducated Talib security forces. With an amputated leg, he depends upon younger daughter Parvana to travel daily to market, where his new work consists of reading and writing letters. He has a sideline selling household furnishings to raise money for food purchases. In intervals between customers, the eternal pedagogue instructs his assistant in Afghan history, a convenient excuse for acquainting filmgoers with it via lightning traversal of several thousand years of combat, conquest, and displacement. No one has satisfactorily tamed various contending factions seeking sovereignty over the region, the Taliban being most recent to come into power. It is also one of the least secure governments ever, its record of human rights violations adding yet another dismal chapter to Afghan's bloody chronicles.

Though inclined to oppress perceived weaklings of either sex, Taliban edicts impact more on the female population they seek to minutely control. Girls are not permitted to formally attend school. Women cannot visit marketplaces nor walk about the streets without adult male companions. They must wear a constrictive burqa whenever outside the home, no matter how clumsy it makes their movements. Females must cover their faces whenever an unrelated male approaches them. None are allowed to employ makeup or participate in sports. All are merely homemakers serving whims of fathers, husbands, or boyfriends as cooks, tailors, and vessels for production of heirs. Property is controlled, too, by men, through both inheritance laws and rigorously defended tradition.

Having moved repeatedly from bombed residences to putatively safer locations, Parvana's family currently lives in Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul. It has grown progressively poorer after each departure, selling off furniture and clothing to survive. What happiness does come to its individual elements derives from keeping the family unit intact. This is made extremely difficult by the outspoken liberalism of Nurullah, who soon after the film's opening is betrayed and denounced by a former student, Idries, who has recently been ideologically radicalized by Taliban associates. He sees Nurullah's downfall as a way to elevate his own status, showing no concern whatever about imprisonment of his old teacher. The wretched man's family can fend for itself. And must.

With no male presence left in their house except toddler Zaki, Parvana, Soraya, and Fattima are faced with a dilemma. Who can buy and sell for them in shops outside? Neither Fattima nor Soraya ought to dare the roads alone. Another jailing would devastate surviving residents. Exterior duties thus fall completely on the shoulders of Parvana, an eleven-year-old accustomed to direction from Father, not other females. She resents being thrust into a position of family dynamo, preferring Father's pampering indulgences to Soraya's caustic scoldings and Mother's ironic explanations.

In Parvana's mind, the world should spin around her. Not the other way around. She still has a child's selfish perspective, dodging work and responsibility whenever possible. Her escape is interactions with strangers on the streets and a sympathetic former classmate, who, like Parvana, has resorted to a boy's identity to earn money for her family and move about freely.

Unlike Ellis's book, which always keeping foremost Parvana's point of view about what's happening, the movie treatment tries to give equal weight to Soraya and Fattima's characters and motivations, causing audiences to wonder whose story is being told. Whereas the novel sticks firmly to Parvana's growing independence and transition from childhood to premature initiation into the world of adults, the animation instead settles on a female emancipation storyline. It highlights a battle between three marginalized homebodies, all of the same sex, and an outside community determined to shame and abuse them. Injection of a kindly-disposed illiterate male figure, whose help is critically important in facilitating Parvana's quest to see her father again, doesn't counterbalance otherwise relentlessly grim, violently antagonistic men and boys bent on crushing any spark of rebellion in sisters, wives, daughters, and schoolmates of the opposite gender.

Each of two preadolescent girls whose friendship forms the strong secondary thread of Ellis's original tale escapes bleak surroundings and clutches of despair by retreats into imagination. For street-smart Shauzia, a prospective trip to France inspires, its postcard greenery as far distant from Kabul's autumnal-toned, battle-scarred monotony as the pictured landscape is geographically. Parvana's desires are more mundane. She hopes to once again be inside a formal school setting, eat filling meals, see her dad liberated and reunited with family.

In this movie production, Parvana's aspiration is kept as stated by her original creator. But Shauzia's objective is altered to visiting the ocean, as if middle schoolers around the globe couldn't identify France and its contrasting way of life. Her first step will be to leave Afghanistan and cross the border into Pakistan. According to the book text, she will travel with a wandering band of shepherds.

Adhering only to Parvana's goal, animators quietly discard Shauzia in the final quarter of the film and alternate between an utterly artificial hero quest story with Arabian Nights trappings and the heroine's stubborn perseverance in search of a way to visit her father's prison. Through friendly connivance of a Talib veteran whose late wife's letter from Germany Parvana read for him, the single-minded gender-swapper partly realizes her aspiration. Only, though, through intervention of a *deus ex machina* not present in Ellis's narrative.

Meanwhile, the rest of her home guard is sundered and then rejoined en route to Mazar-e-Sharaf for an ill-conceived negotiated wedding between Soroya and a young man who had been years earlier playmate and neighbor there. Mother Fattima literally sheds blood to free her children from a feverish relative intransigently fixed upon driving them immediately out of a city rapidly degenerating into siege defensiveness.

At the same time, cartoon hero Sulayman, invented inauspiciously by filmmakers, befriends a plundering enemy Elephant King, who magically settles into peaceful listener, if not yet agreeable to becoming active ally. This is starkly different from the novel's conclusion, where Parvana and Shauzia separate, neither sure a better future awaits her.

Even in Ellis's uncompromising account, Parvana and Nurullah come together just before it ends. But their roles are completely reversed, daughter dutifully now caretaker for a dying parent, an adult whether she likes it or not.

Voice casting is appropriate with regard to regional accents and differentiation. Not so character design, a marked tendency to minimize distinctions within genders making all characters of the same sex facially similar. Only size and, occasionally, eye or hair color individualize them. Backgrounds could well pass for genuine Afghan scenery. Original music by brothers Mychael and Jeff Dynna fuse Afghan harmonics with Western orchestrations to darkly exotic effect. Lighting is spare and dark, fitting given locales depicted. Sound ambience never violates expectations, though falling short of microtonal calibrations common to Middle Eastern voicings.

Two shortcomings cause maximum damage. One is a screenplay which perverts a coming-of-age story, making it into a female empowerment one. The other is editing which doesn't even begin to harmonize documentary and fabulous components. Two trains traveling at different speeds on different tracks will never completely meet, even under ideal circumstances, which this production isn't integrated enough to establish.

In short, read the book by Deborah Ellis and its three sequels. Detour around this film. What you miss is only a diluted and unnecessary version of an extremely important world drama deserving more forceful and coherent presentation.

DVD bonus material consists of an utterly superficial half-minute summarizing introduction by Nora Twomey and Angelina Jolie, its saving grace

being the physical appearance of THE BREADWINNER's director, an impressive and therefore misleading minute-long trailer, an apologetic audio commentary by filmmakers attempting to justify creative missteps, and a forty-five minute documentary about this film's creation, which has more entertainment and instructional value than the feature.

Rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America, THE BREADWINNER is an underachieving substitute for the book on which it's based, moderately suitable for middle-school audiences just starting to comprehend world politics, too evasive and tame for satisfactory mature teen and adult fare.