

# Love Thy Enemy

Davor Marjanovic brings home the madness of war

**W**ars and film go together like theatre floors and gum. From *Birth of a Nation* to *Saving Private Ryan*, man's inhumanity to man has always stuck at the box office. But when it comes to the tales told, the civilian impact often takes a backseat to a soldier's story—for every *Salvador*, there's a hundred *Platoons*. More unusual still is the film that examines war's legacy on those who have managed to escape, and how the horror can continue long after the shooting has stopped.

Thus we have *My Father's Angel*, Davor Marjanovic's deeply personal tale of two Bosnian families taking refuge in Vancouver. Thrice nominated in the upcoming Genie Awards, *My Father's Angel* gets a local screening Saturday night as part of the Reel Madness Film Festival.

In the film, Djordje is a former Serbian soccer star who emigrated prior to the "ethnic cleansing" of Sarajevo in the mid-'90s. While he has managed to establish a moderately middle-class existence for himself as a courier, Ahmed, his Muslim counterpart (who, according to his son's narration, "used to be wealthy"), now lives on welfare and prays daily for an angel to arrive and save his family's fragile sanity. With a wife both physically and mentally muted by her



Two tribes: a scene from *My Father's Angel*

time in a Serbian rape camp and a son who struggles daily with his own emotional legacy, rarely has a survivor's trauma been as intimately explored.

Over the phone from his Vancouver home, director Marjanovic tells me of the film's evolutionary process, from a man's dream of an angel to the final bitterly ironic tale of victim and victor penned by UVic grad (and former "White Guy") Frank Borg. "It was quite a process," says Marjanovic. "We started finding all these destinies, all these stories of what happened in Bosnia. We had trouble expressing what it was exactly we wanted to express." Vividly drawn from newspaper accounts, refugee tales and aspects of his own life, *My Father's Angel*

is easily mistaken as autobiographical.

Marjanovic, a Sarajevo native who fled to Canada in 1993 and now teaches filmmaking at Vancouver's Capilano College, is quite frank about his own experiences.

"When I was in Sarajevo, I saw all these raped women expelled by the Serbs—they were like Sayma [Ahmed's wife], like vegetables."

Far from being exaggerated, however, Marjanovic admits he and Borg chose to soften Sayma's rape ordeal. "We had so many harrowing stories," he says of their narrative dilemma. "Should we put it in? Shouldn't we? In the end we really played it down." But for a glimpse of a gender crime still downplayed by a primarily patriarchal media, it's horrific enough.

If nothing else, *My Father's Angel* makes it clear that simply leaving a war zone does not guarantee escape. "Ahmed is in some seventh ring of hell," says Marjanovic. "Canada, the best country in the world, is his hell and he'll resort to anything just to get out. What if someone is praying for an angel and God sends him someone who's his mortal enemy? If you're Muslim, isn't that the irony, to have a Serb understand you?"

—John Threlfall

**My Father's Angel (& Davor Marjanovic)**  
 Saturday, January 20. 6:30 pm.  
 By donation  
 Directors' seminar. January 21. 1:00 pm.  
 \$15. Eric Martin Pavilion. 595-FLIC

G

## REEL MADNESS January 18th to 22th 2001

### Film Festival

FILMS & DISCUSSIONS  
 AN EXPLORATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

A Special Project of Movie Monday • [www.islandnet.com/mm](http://www.islandnet.com/mm)

THURS JAN 18	FRI JAN 19	SAT JAN 20	SUN JAN 21	MON JAN 22
• <b>The Moody Brood</b>	• <b>Gordon's Head</b>	• <b>My Father's Angel</b>	• <b>The Goodbye</b>	• <b>Rollercoaster</b> (one world-smaller)
with Film Maker Lulu Keating	with Film Maker Clive Holden	with Film Maker Davor Marjanovic	with Film Maker Katherine Surridge	with Film Maker Scott Smith
• Lulu's Back	• Dad			

001 - JANUARY 24, 2001