



Persepolis

A film by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud

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It's fair to say that *Persopolis* is unlike any other film you're likely to find this year, and that's not just because the film's fluid narrative gives a rare and illuminating glimpse into the history of Iran over the past 30 years. More distinctively, the film's larger narrative thread is woven into a logistically crazy quilt of a mega-story, involving the twists and turns of a young woman's coming-of-age and cultural exploration in and out of Tehran.

Oh, and did we mention that it's entirely animated, with free diversions and detours into stylistic fancy? If a summary description sounds tedious or stiflingly serious, the end result is anything

but: It's a fizzy, deep, irreverent, and highly personal saga told in moving pictures and smart, ripe dialogue. The historical and societal factors are just a backdrop — albeit an ominous and repressive one — to a life unfolding and unveiling.

Based on Iranian artist-writer Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel and with the writer's direct involvement in the film, *Persopolis* is a rare example of how to artfully adapt a graphic novel to film. A world (and a budgetary stratum) away from *Ratatouille*, Satrapi's visual style is deceptively simple and fluid, moving from realism to the fantastical and back.

In recounting her saga, from life under the Shah through the Islamic Revolution, and up to her self-exile in the early '90s, Satrapi tells a gripping story from the inside out with both the naiveté of youth and the hardened wisdom of experience. While her country was going through its machinations, Satrapi's own youthful obsessions follow paths not unlike her Western counterparts, moving from Bruce Lee to the Bee Gees and, in her teen years, Iron Maiden. She goes to school in Vienna, but is far from liberated by Western contact, instead torn between affinities.

In some way, this compact epic tale conveys both the protagonist's passage beyond youth and the legacy of her grandmother, who imparts non-sentimentalized wisdom and a kind of philosophical ballast throughout. As with the best graphic novels, *Persopolis* — the film — tells its stories not only through words and pictures, but in the very language created through the blending of the two.