

One of the many striking images in *Sepideh* is of the teen carrying an enormous, unwieldy white telescope, mirroring her struggle to fulfill her dreams in a highly restrictive society.

EAT SLEEP DIE

Director:
Gabriela Pichler
{ANAGRAM PRODUKTION}

Eat Sleep Die (*Äta sova dö*) centers on the life of Rasa (Nermina Lukac), a working-class immigrant living in a small Swedish town. Born in the southeastern European country of Montenegro, Rasa and her father (Milan Dragisic) have been in Sweden since she was a baby, wavering between assimilation into Swedish culture and a lingering sense of exclusion born out of xenophobia and anti-Muslim attitudes. At the start of the film, we see Rasa celebrating her 20th birthday, wrestling playfully, and downing shots of vodka. The next morning, she's at work at a salad greens processing plant, a job in which she takes obvious pride. Rasa supports herself and her ailing father with the money from her job at the plant. Their relationship is close and often playful, if also sometimes uncomfortable to watch in its codependency.

As the plot unfolds, Rasa's coworkers are laid off from the plant and she and her father are forced to reconsider their future in Sweden. The rest of the film follows Rasa as she transitions into independent adulthood

while negotiating the Swedish social-welfare system. She struggles to get disability benefits granted for her father and to secure stable employment for herself in a climate of false compassion, paternalism, and very limited concrete opportunities.

The sense of constraint and stagnation highlighted in the film is enhanced by close-up camera angles. At times, this creates intimate portraits of the characters, but often it is just distracting. And though I was sympathetic to Rasa, I never really felt as though I understood her internal motivations or desires, making it hard for me to fully emotionally invest in her as a protagonist. All in all, this debut feature film from director Gabriela Pichler is notable and worth viewing, but be prepared for the slowness of the action and the experience of dysphoria. — L. K.

SEE IT WITH: Anyone who idealizes the Scandinavian social-welfare system.

SEPIDEH

Director: Berit Madsen
{WORLD DOCUMENTARY}

In a small village in rural Iran, 14-year-old Sepideh gazes at the night sky and dreams of becoming an astronomer. Instead of a poster of a movie heartthrob, a photo of Albert Einstein graces her bedroom wall, and she pens heartfelt letters to him as though he were her patron saint. As she reads her earnest words aloud, we hear the impassioned voice of a young girl with ambitious goals and unwavering determination, as she envisions following in the footsteps of her hero Anousheh Ansari, the first Iranian in space.

One of the many striking images of Sepideh in this documentary is of the teen carrying an enormous, unwieldy white

telescope, mirroring Sepideh's struggle to fulfill her dreams in a highly restrictive society. In a culture where women are not allowed to drive, Sepideh stays out all night observing the stars with a coed astronomy club. With her father recently deceased, her uncle, the new patriarch of the family, threatens to disown Sepideh if she defies him and his cultural expectations. Her mother is more supportive but is dependent on her uncle, and she is unable to pay for Sepideh's education. Sepideh, despite her articulate arguments, is up against seemingly insurmountable odds.

Director Berit Madsen followed Sepideh for five years, documenting her daily life, her obstacles, her triumphs, and her setbacks. The result is an engrossing *cinéma vérité*-style documentary that intimately portrays Sepideh's world. In between the surprisingly frank conversations with her mother and her uncle, in which she tries to convince him that there is nothing wrong with a woman wanting to learn about the stars, gorgeous time-lapse cinematography captures their celestial glory and conveys something of the incredible awe and wonder that Sepideh feels when she looks at the night sky. As we watch this bright and passionate young woman push back against the conventions and expectations of her family and Iranian society, these quiet moments give us pause to reflect on our own place in the universe. Our world may be very small, but Sepideh inspires us to dream big. — A. C.

SEE IT WITH: Your daughter or niece, stargazers, and dreamers of every stripe.

