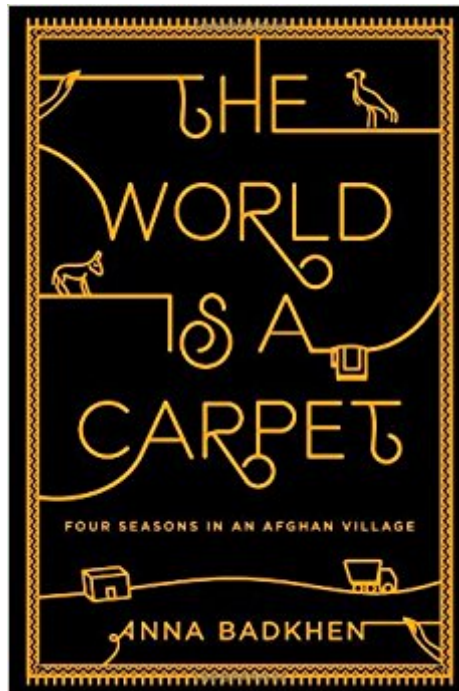




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# The World Is A Carpet: Four Seasons In An Afghan Village



## Synopsis

An unforgettable portrait of a place and a people shaped by centuries of art, trade, and war. In the middle of the salt-frosted Afghan desert, in a village so remote that Google can't find it, a woman squats on top of a loom, making flowers bloom in the thousand threads she knots by hand. Here, where heroin is cheaper than rice, every day is a fast day. B-52s pass overhead—a sign of America's omnipotence or its vulnerability, the villagers are unsure. They know, though, that the earth is flat—like a carpet. Anna Badkhen first traveled to this country in 2001, as a war correspondent. She has returned many times since, drawn by a land that geography has made a perpetual battleground, and by a people who sustain an exquisite tradition there. Through the four seasons in which a new carpet is woven by the women and children of Oqa, she immortalizes their way of life much as the carpet does—from the petal half-finished where a hungry infant needs care to the interruptions when the women trade sex jokes or go fill in for wedding musicians scared away by the Taliban. As Badkhen follows the carpet out into the world beyond, she leaves the reader with an indelible portrait of fates woven by centuries of art, war, and an ancient trade that ultimately binds the invaded to the invader.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The trials and tribulations desperately poor Oqa, a hamlet in northern Afghanistan so remote that regional officials don't even know it exists, comes to life through the story of Thawra, a carpet weaver, and her family. Badkhen, a Russian-born war correspondent, charts the woman's work over a year of weddings, childbirth, Ramadan, and winter snowstorms. Amid the tedium and

grinding poverty—made bearable by opium for the young and old alike—the local Turkoman women have over the centuries earned the distinction of producing some of the finest carpets in the world. It's an existence that Westerners can scarcely comprehend, Thawra's family surviving on less than a dollar a day, earned for an exquisite piece of craftsmanship that will command thousands in the US. Badkhen gains astonishing access to male-only gatherings, earning their lasting respect, and ably documents the infinitesimal though significant influence that Thawra has as breadwinner in this patriarchal society. More travelogue than reportage, her prose is rich and unhurried, evoking the harshness of the desolate landscape. Oqa's isolation means Osama bin Laden may be unknown, but the Taliban is not; their presence an inescapable fact of life, one that propels Badkhen's story to a simple yet chilling dénouement. (June)

**\*Starred Review\*** Journalist Badkhen traveled to the northern Afghan village of Oqa (so remote that Google can't find it) and immersed herself in the villagers' lives over four seasons as she watched Turkoman women weave one of their legendary rugs. In the sparest of language, she tells a heartbreakingly familiar story: the village is suffering its second year of drought; hunger is common; addiction to opium, used to mask hunger pangs, begins at birth; and war is simply another day of life. The carpet is a work of art, the family's financial salvation, and the hallmark of a woman's value. Badkhen tracks the carpet's travels around the world to a place the people of Oqa can scarcely imagine, noting the history of the lands it crosses and the conflicts that have always raged. Badkhen makes friends and shares their stories, drawing readers into this small village where the dream of wealth is hope for a life without suffering. The irony is that, as their carpets garner great sums, money never reaches the place where they are created or those who need the money so desperately. A beautifully written book of eternal heartbreak. --Colleen Mondor

So many Westerners lack either the curiosity or the skill -- perhaps both -- to capture the true lives of Afghans, which at heart, deep down, are not all that different from ours. Badkhen captures this. She captures the timeless yearning for something better, something different, the yearning each of us feels between the mundane work and the indescribable joy that make up life. Badkhen highlights the differences in landscape and circumstances between Afghans and Americans, which are great, but not so great as to obscure the humanity that bridges the gap. I only wish Americans would extend the empathy they felt for the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting and the Boston Marathon bombing to the victims of America's longest war.

I read the reviews of *The World is a Carpet* .. And yes , some of the sentences are over written and hard to follow , but I decided to treat it like a fable . I didn't bother to go back and work out each meaning , I just let the words flow and came to love the story . After following our war in Afghanistan for so many years it was fascinating to see what the inside of the country is like , to get a glimpse of the people and their customs, to get a view of their extreme poverty and hardships . This was a beautiful book , one of my favorites in a long list of other reads . I liked the way Anna joined in the everyday life of the villagers of Oqa and didn't try to make things better for them . She lived and reported their everyday experiences as they unfolded . Her pencil drawings throughout the book are charming .This may not be the book for everyone , but I am going to recommend it to my most discerning friends ..

If you really want a realistic take on the true poverty and history of the area written about, then this book is for you. Ann Badkhen writes in a fearless and clear way while preserving the humanity of the people of the village who do their best under extremely severe circumstances. Sometimes poetic, sometimes just straight realistic writing, through the book I developed fondness for these people struggling daily to survive and feed their families. I haven't finished it yet; I am reading in small doses to more deeply appreciate the detail and attention Ann has given to her writing. I am a bit putting off reading the last 20 pages to savor it the more.

I have had mixed feeling about the book. I really love hearing about the lives of the people in the villages & the importance of understanding but respecting their hardships as well as their way of life. My complaint is that her words did not flow for me. I found myself returning to read a very long sentence again & again which caused my train of thought to be interrupted. Maybe, it's because I just read "*The Great Gatsby*" :-). F Scott's ability to pull you in with few words. I felt like I was reading Proust which certainly can be considered a compliment, but I was able to relate to many of nuances described because of my own travels in Northern Pakistan and the North Western Frontier. In comparison to the village life in remote Afghanistan to Pakistan's North, these villagers of Afghanistan really have really a difficult & hard life. I, too, am fascinated with those cultures so different from our own as we come to learn much more about ourselves & appreciate, respect & love these people. I have found my most joyous times have been in the company of villagers, usually with a local guide who is from the village to translate, where there are no showers (buckets with water boiled for the guest; you learn to use it sparingly), eating with my hands, sharing food &

watching the families interact together. Usually there is story telling, many jokes & dancing by one male at a time. No tv or ipads to draw anyone from the fold. Expectations are different in these societies, joy is from simpler things, and I find candle light or a wood stoke fire to be more gentle than electricity. The homes were swept daily and clean which I found amazing. As in Ladakh, the smell of butter lingered on the heavy quilts. Monks always smelled like butter to me. The butter in these villages is different from ours thus giving a strong scent, but, oh, the taste is heavenly on naan or chapatis with a cup of strong milk tea. Romanticized, you say. Not really, there are goals to achieve during the day and night is for the family togetherness eating, telling stories. Women are reliant on each other as the men are many times gone for months with the need to make a living outside the village. Sisterhood stood out as a noncompetitive sort of life & their instinct of knowing what was needed for the other to be productive. The entire collective system requires give and take flexibility. If the people of the villages could have clean water, land they can cultivate & fuel for heating & cooking they would not want to give up their lives to move to the West. They enjoy their culture & feel proud of it. Support is experienced much more than loneliness. True, one can be unlucky with a mean mother in law or an abusive husband, but how prevalent is this problem in our own country? If you ask me where I'd like to be when there is a crisis or a loss in my own life, it's a village. This is a good book and I recommend reading it. I would have enjoyed more if she had not been so flowery with her sentences. You can learn much about the Afghan culture. One poster said she pulled them into the lives of the villagers & wondered if she had a translator. I would imagine she did to have the understanding of the people which she has, but there is the importance of keen observation she has about the village people. It is quite a nice gift.

This book provides an excellent picture of life in a small, isolated village in Afghanistan. Sometimes I felt there was too much description of scenery, but I know this is important to create a full picture of how some humans and nature live together.

wonderfull!!!

Great book!

This account of life in a little known Afghan village is woven around the cultural practice of women weaving traditional carpets. The carpets provide essential additional income for poverty stricken villagers and in this book, are a metaphor for life in rural Afghanistan. Badkhen, an

experienced journalist is embedded in the tiny village of Oqa, near Mazar Al Sharif, and creates a fascinating tapestry of daily life in Afghanistan, dispelling assumptions and stereotypes about this poorly known and understood country. I learned a great deal about how life truly is there and found it very intriguing and fascinating. Her writing is often lyrical and elegant and the book makes for a good read.

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