



fish

## *Riders of Justice*

(Denmark 2021)

**Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening**

DIRECTOR : Anders Thomas Jensen

RUNNING TIME : 116mins

RATING : MA15+

### **Synopsis:**

When a little girl in Tallinn [Estonia] asks her Dad for a blue bicycle for Christmas, the consequences are felt in a provincial Danish town.

### **Review: Jay Weissberg**

Deliriously wry and so perfectly balanced it should become a case study in script classes, *Riders of Justice* may be the film that finally gives Anders Thomas Jensen international recognition beyond his usual spotlight as a sought-after screenwriter.

Comparisons with the Coen brothers will be inevitable given oddball characters whose fixations and genuine heart contrast with moments of extreme violence, yet the roots of this black revenge comedy go back even further, bringing an asocial spin to classic screw-ballers where a group of quirky misfits are balanced out by a lone woman who's the most put-together and in touch of the bunch.

Jensen (*Adam's Apple, Men and Chicken*) works with his customary stable of actors, many of whom have appeared in his previous four features including Mads Mikkelsen, the most globally recognized of the group and currently enjoying quite a year between this and *Another Round*.

There's something unexpected at the end of practically each sequence, which is only fitting given how *'Riders'* is premised on an analysis of probability and predictability. Every action in our lives, whether deliberate or by accident, has a chain of consequences; when the concept is picked up by men with obsessive-compulsive disorders, the conclusions become a driving force that lead down progressively dangerous paths.

It all starts with a stolen bike, whose setup is filmed like a Christmastime fairy tale, complete with *The Little Drummer Boy* on the soundtrack. The far-reaching knock-on effects of that banal theft take the viewer down a path of skewed logic that's deliciously, blackly entertaining. (Cont.)

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## **FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC**

10.00 am Sunday 16th October 2022

8.15 pm Tuesday 18th October 2022

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## **Review:** Cont.

That bike belongs to teenager Mathilde (Andrea Heck Gadeberg), whose mother Emma (Anne Birgitte Lind) is about to drive her to school when she gets an overseas call from her soldier husband Markus (Mikkelsen) saying his desert deployment will last another three months. To combat their disappointment, Emma suggests Mathilde skip school for some mother-daughter time. On the metro, Otto (Nikolaj Lie Kaas) gives up his seat to Emma. Shortly after, the train crashes and 11 people, including Emma, are killed. Markus, already emotionally shut down and suffering from war-related PTSD, returns home but is little comfort to Mathilde, rejecting offers of counselling for them both from mental health professionals.

We saw Otto shortly before the tragedy, making a disastrous presentation with Lennart (Lars Brygmann) to a company board about an algorithm he designed to predict the future. Otto's OCD behaviour manifests itself through a fixation on probabilities, so when he becomes convinced that the crash was no accident, he ropes in fellow misfits Lennart and Emmenthaler (Nicolas Bro) to "prove" that the crash was masterminded by a criminal gang called the Riders of Justice in order to rub out a turncoat and his lawyer.

They take their "findings" to Markus, whose frozen military mindset starts him strategizing ways to bump off the gang members. Like any good caper film, the plot becomes increasingly byzantine, drawing in Mathilde's super-sensitive boyfriend Sirius (Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt) and a trafficked gay Ukrainian sex slave named Bodashka (Gustav Lindh). At the centre of them all is Mathilde, unaware of the plot and thinking that Otto and company are therapists come to help her and her father deal with their grief. The resulting pile-up of misread signals as everyone aims to protect Mathilde while taking on a gang of murderous criminals is beautifully calculated for laughs, much in the way a Robert Riskin comedy generated humour out of Runyonesque characters bandying together as a bulwark against chaos.

Jensen goes one step further by tying all the improbabilities to theories of random cause and determined effect which he then marvellously, elegantly explodes. The film's significant humour comes from amusingly implausible situations coupled with rapid-paced droll dialogue; its equally sizable heart derives from the script's respect for society's outcasts and Jensen's way of nimbly endowing every character with their own emotional backstory, all in need of healing.

Part of the magic also comes from the performers' familiarity with each other, and the pleasure they take in the ensemble — on numerous occasions viewers half-expect to see the actors lose character and burst into laughter. Mikkelsen's Markus is the most inexpressive of the lot, his deep-seated trauma disconnecting him from emotions apart from anger, yet the pain on his distinctive, grizzled face makes the character far more than an automaton. Within all this, Heck Gadeberg is an ideal foil, making Mathilde the most real figure without ever becoming a mere straight-woman to the craziness around her.

The film's playfulness extends to its visual design, bookended by Christmas scenes marked by saturated colours and precious quaintness that quickly flip to a cooler, darker realism. Unsurprisingly given Jensen's formation as a writer, the editing privileges the script's liveliness, allowing all the actors the scope they deserve.

Source: [www.variety.com](http://www.variety.com) Jay Weissberg 3/2/2021 Edited extracts ~ accessed 3/10/2021

## **Some Thoughts on: *Limbo***

I think the best way to describe this film is a phrase used in the synopsis of the film's review in our last newsletter....."weirdly gripping."

The treatment of this hugely difficult and emotional issue (refugees and asylum seekers), was dealt with sensitively, creatively and with a huge dollop of absurdity. The location was perfect as the isolation reflected the characters' emotional and physical reality. The bleak, relentless, cold and barren landscape (beautiful in its own wild and rugged way), portrayed the hopelessness, loneliness, absurdity and harshness that is often the lot of refugees around the world.

I found Omar's performance was absolutely engaging from the outset as he struggled with family guilt and frustration at the system. The entire cast was very effective as a whole, evoking real concern and empathy from us, as we got know of all their journeys to this particular purgatory.

I loved the bizarre 'English' lessons conducted for the benefit of a very confused and amused group of reluctant pupils. Was this absurdity any less ridiculous than the 'test' Australian immigration officials used to expect of newcomers??? With questions about Don Bradman and Ned Kelly, and others about Australiana that most home-grown Aussies would struggle with? Second verse of the National Anthem, anyone???

The quite surreal nature of the film was creatively employed with great success, as surely the situation would be completely unrealistic to those poor souls having to suffer and survive it.

Despite death and disappointment there was still a glimmer of hope at the conclusion of the film when Omar finally played his oud. His playing counteracting his father's often repeated saying, "A musician who doesn't play his instrument, is dead."

I think this film may have divided opinion amongst us FISHers, but I for one, thoroughly enjoyed its passion and imaginative treatment.

**Ross Armfield.**

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## **Late Thoughts on: *Pain and Glory***

Despite some wonderful performances, relevant/universal themes and very polished production/art direction throughout, I left the screening with a feeling of being somewhat underwhelmed. It may have been due to my own inflated expectations based on reviews I'd read and the reputation of Pedro Almodovar, or the necessary use of sub-titles creating a stumbling block for me, on this particular occasion, preventing full emotional engagement, thus inhibiting me from empathising with the very personal memories and reminiscences of the ageing film director.....or maybe I was just tired and in the wrong mood.

Whatever the case may be, I found the film to be a little flat, slow and somewhat repetitive in many of the scenes, picking up pace to a degree though, as we progressed. Having said all that, I still felt there were many positive aspects to this work.

I loved the many flashbacks to childhood, evoking endearment for another time and place effectively, with strong skills demonstrated by the young boy and Penelope Cruz. I grew to enjoy Antonio Banderas's performance as the film advanced, especially when he reunited with his onetime male lover. It was genuinely moving.

The art direction was beautifully framed and shot, with special attention to colour. Attractive as it was to the eye, I felt a sense of the artificial about the style of the scenes in the 'present'. There was much to take from this film, which I know many people really appreciated. I've tried really hard to pinpoint why it didn't affect me the same way. I just felt a real sense of it lacking authenticity.

I thought the conclusion of the film was very clever (and filmic?), as the camera pulled back revealing the hand-held microphone and the recording of his life story. His last film??

Thank you anyway, FISH. Don't worry, it's just me!

**Ross Armfield.**

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### COMING UP:

November	<i>Skies of Lebanon</i> [Lebanon]	Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 22 <sup>nd</sup>
December	<i>Antoinette in the Cevennes</i> [France]	Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 13 <sup>th</sup>

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### Message from the President

Thank you to those who attended our recent AGM. Many thanks also, to the long-serving members of the FISH committee who have agreed to continue in their roles.

You may be interested in *Behrouz* – a documentary about Kurdish-Iranian writer Behrouz Boochani which will be screened at the Empire on **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022**. The director Simon V Kurian and Behrouz will be in conversation afterwards. Behrouz's book *No Friend but the Mountains*, an autobiographical account of his perilous journey to Christmas Island and his subsequent detention on Manus Island, won the Victorian Premier's prize for Non-Fiction in 2019.

**Sandra Gillespie.**



#### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

**President:** Sandra Gillespie 4868 2396 & 0424303620  
**Guest Enquiries:** **Deborah Blay : 0400411004**  
**TEXT ONLY minimum 24hours notice**  
**Website:** [www.fish.org.au](http://www.fish.org.au)  
**Email:** [fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)  
**Mail:** P.O. Box 1330 Bowral NSW 2576  
**Membership:** [Fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:Fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)  
Membership closed  
**Enquiries:** [fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)

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