



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We were delighted that so many people loved our last film, *The Teacher Who Promised the Sea*. Thank you for your positive comments.

As you are aware, we are contemplating changing the screening time for our Tuesday nights for every film. This decision will be made at our next committee meeting and everyone will be emailed. We have done straw polls at both screenings for the last two films. We know that we cannot please everyone, so please don't complain if our decision doesn't suit you. We are doing our best!

We invite reviews of our films...our dear favourite people do go on holidays and occasionally have ill health.

You should have received your new membership cards by now. Please check your letterbox!

Best wishes to all from us,

Roz Garwen.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

President: Roz Garwen 4886 4142 & 0414 820 890

Guest Enquiries: Deborah Blay : 0400 411 004

TEXT ONLY minimum 24hours notice

Website: www.fish.org.au

Email: fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com

Membership: Fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com

Membership is closed

Enquiries: fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com

We are grateful to our sponsors : EMPIRE CINEMA ACE
INTERNET SERVICES HIGHLAND CREATIVE

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 19th July 2026

8.15 pm Tuesday 21st July 2026

It Was Just an Accident

[Iran 2025]

DIRECTOR: Jafar Panahi

RUNNING TIME: 105 mins

RATING: M

Synopsis:

This politically charged revenge thriller asks nuanced questions about the nature of trauma and oppression with a blackly comic story informed by the director's own experiences of imprisonment

Review: Peter Bradshaw

An unfortunate encounter with a dog sets off a chain of surreal, grotesque events that expose the corruption and tyranny at the heart of Iran

Jafar Panahi is the veteran Iranian auteur and democracy campaigner who continues to get arrested and imprisoned, to endure film-making bans and defy the law, finding loopholes through which his movies can be made and shown abroad. And the Iranian authorities, tensely and hypocritically aware of world scrutiny and indeed the soft-power prestige still to be accrued from Panahi's eminence, appear (almost) to tolerate it.

Now Panahi has created what might be his most emotionally explicit film yet: a film about state violence and revenge, about the pain of tyranny that co-exists with ostensible everyday normality. There are macabre stabs of satire, black comedy and horror-farce, and the movie almost looks like an Iranian dissident tribute to *Weekend at Bernie's* or even Hitchcock's *The Trouble With Harry*.

A man (Ebrahim Azizi) is driving at night with his heavily pregnant wife and young daughter in the car and suffers the time-honoured suspense thriller shock-premise of hitting something in the darkness: a dog. This simple accident causes his car to break down after just five minutes back on the road, and he finds himself pulling over at random at a garage belonging to Vahid (Vahid Mobasseri), nicknamed "Jughead" because of his habit of holding his painful kidneys with one hand, his arm like a jug handle.

The driver has a disability too, a limp, and Vahid is stunned, scared and angry to realise that he knows this man; and it sets in train a bizarre series of events that reunites a disparate cohort of Vahid's acquaintances who have all suffered at the hands of the state. These include bookseller Salar, wedding photographer Shiva (Mariam Afshari), the couple whose wedding photos she is taking, bride Goli (Hadis Pakbaten) and groom Ali (Majid Panahi), and local hothead Hamid (Mohamad Ali Elyasmehr).

A grotesque, almost dreamlike sequence of scenes takes us to various locations, including a remote desert with a tree that Hamid says looks a stage-set for *Waiting for Godot*. The plot twists and turns are startling, almost unreal; can it be true that normal people like this can countenance violence? But if that seems implausible, perhaps that is because we don't grasp the violence through which they have already lived.

The narrative jolts and shunts us around like Vahid and his contemporaries in the back of his van; so do the shifts in tone from tragedy to comedy and back. But these storytelling chicanes never quite get us to the shark-jumping point of facetiousness or absurdity that they might in another, Anglo-Hollywood type of movie.

There is some acid satire on Iranian officialdom's addiction to bribes. A hospital nurse asks Vahid if he knows how to give a "present" or just make a scandal – and she wants a box of pastries to go with the money. A couple of shifty, dodgy security guards ask for a "present" in exchange for not making a fuss about the suspicious behaviour in the van, and not having cash doesn't let Vahid off; these uniformed guys grinningly produce a debit card reader. They take bribes in the form of contactless payments.

Perhaps Joe Orton might have enjoyed this tough, cynical movie, especially the group scenes in which Goli has to participate in the mayhem wearing her wedding dress. It's another very impressive serio-comic film from one of the most distinctive and courageous figures in world cinema.

Source: www.theguardian.com ~ Peter Bradshaw 3/12/2025 Edited extracts Accessed 18/5/26

~~

COMING UP:

August	<i>Calle Malaga</i> [Morocco/Spain]	Sunday 16 th & Tuesday 18 th
September	<i>A Thousand Lines</i> [Germany]	Sunday 20 th & Tuesday 22 nd
October	<i>The President's Cake</i> [Iraq/Qatar/US]	Sunday 18 th & Tuesday 20 th
November	<i>The Thread</i> [France]	Sunday 15 th & Tuesday 17 th
December	<i>The Golden Spurtle</i> [Australia]	Sunday 13 th & Tuesday 15 th
February '27	<i>Number 24</i> [Norway]	Sunday 14 th & Tuesday 16 th

~~

Some thoughts on: *The Teacher Who Promised the Sea*

This beautiful film was both full of complexities and yet understated in its restraint. It evokes horror, delight, pathos, and for me, a recognition of the ongoing trauma for so many Spaniards who had to spend such a large part of their lives “keeping silent”... Franco did not die until 1975 after which there was a slow trend towards democratisation. I had a sense that it was filmed in black and white, but of course Antonio’s red shirt was a constant, so I must be wrong. Certainly, the colours are muted and restrained. The red shirt is symbolic not only of Antonio’s socialist viewpoint but of the delight and passion in his approach to his teaching and to the world.

Precisely who was Ari’s great grandfather did not become clear until we realise that the child Carlos in the 1930s, mourning his imprisoned father, is her grandfather. Taught to read and write by the wonderful but unorthodox young teacher Antonio, Carlos writes a letter to his father which it seems he did receive. His father later comes to Antonio in prison, who is beaten and tortured and unable to move, and gives him water. It is he for whom Ari is searching, but his remains were not among the 100 or so recovered in 2010 from the mass grave site in Burgos.

The printing press and the books produced on it are central to the story. That wonderful scene where the teacher Antonio first shows it to the children and they watch as the printed page emerges is like a revelation. Their faces are full of astonishment and delight and the camera pans over each one as they watch, enthralled. The Freinet school movement which Antonio espouses seems to have branches in many other countries – Mexico, France and Scotland are mentioned among others. I wondered whether this movement had any formal relationship with the Steiner and the Montessori schools which emerged in Germany and Italy respectively about the same time. They certainly all seemed to emphasise experiential education and the importance of outside activities.

The housekeeper Charo tries to warn Antonio about the possibility of encroaching Fascist power, and when that day eventually comes, it is the burning of the childrens’ books which seems to sum up the crushing of all creativity and joy. Antonio’s beaten and tortured body is displayed in the cart and the children are forced to watch his denunciation, and even to take part in it. It is more than just the agony of seeing their beloved teacher humiliated and tortured. It is the realisation that the truth and meaning he has given to their own lives, the joy of looking at things in a different way, is being crushed and denied. It is also the realisation that not only can they themselves do nothing about it, but neither can their parents nor any of the adults there.

The smirk on the face of the parish priest is a not so subtle indication of the willing collaboration of the Catholic Church with the fascist regime, and its support of even the most brutal acts. After that, it seems to have been a lifetime of silence, as the aged Josefina in 2010 displays with her closed, shut down face when Ari first meets her. And yet, she is eventually able to release her humanity and the documents of her father, the erstwhile Mayor of Burgos, to Ari. Antonio’s influence is still there, despite a lifetime of self-repression.

Spain of course is not the only country where the horrors of a particular regime, its murders and its cruelty, its suppression and its rigidity are still having ongoing effects on its citizens. There are dozens of examples in our world today, not least amongst our own First Nations people where the trauma of enforced silence about past horrors is an ongoing collective trauma. But according to a 2015 report by one group which investigates mass graves worldwide, Spain is second only to Cambodia in terms of numbers of victims whose remains have never been found: out of 114,000 missing, only 7000 have been recovered. Hopefully more remains have been recovered since then.

And yet I find that despite all this, the images of the joyful Antonio and his joyful students are as strong in my mind as any of horrors. Antonio has an effect not only on his pupils but even on some of their most recalcitrant parents – the Mayor does indeed give permission for Josefina to visit the sea; Emilio's illiterate father does likewise, and when the fascists come demanding the children's books, he hides the class photo and Emilio's letter to him. These come many years later into the possession of Ari who is thus able to show the photo to her grandfather Carlos, with himself and Emilio and all the children plus Antonio.

What a gem this film was. Thank you, FISH for showing it – and to the Empire for its original screening several years ago. This second viewing for me was even more valuable than the first.

Trish Topp

Many thanks to our guest reviewer Trish for her most insightful comments. [Ed.]