MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Phew! The Bowral Classic affected very few for our last Sunday screening and parking wasn't bad after 9am, I believe. My street was blocked at 8.15am; I saw not one bicycle and had an early morning coffee with barely clad, freezing tourists.

We are learning such a lot from our foreign films and *The President's Cake* was no exception. Our reviewers do us proud, don't they? This film was a member's suggestion. We do try to find distributors for your preferred films.

best wishes from us all,

Roz Garwen

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC
10.00 am Sunday 15th November 2026
8.15 pm Tuesday 17th November 2026

The Thread
[France]

DIRECTOR: Daniel Auteuil
RUNNING TIME: 115mins
RATING: M

Synopsis:

Daniel Auteuil plays a well-past his prime defence lawyer, who agrees to defend a shell-shocked father of five who is arrested for the murder of his troubled wife. Daniel Auteuil also directs this film which is based on a true story.

Review: Peter Bradshaw

Here is a fictionalised true crime drama, but one that is more stately and sedate than the garish procedural brutality of regular true crime. There is one gruesome crime-scene photo, but otherwise this could really have been based on something by Ruth Rendell. It is co-written and directed by its star Daniel Auteuil and the original French title is *Le Fil (The Thread),* after an incriminating thread of material found on the corpse – or perhaps it means the thread of logic behind a legal argument, the loose thread which, if pulled sufficiently, might cause the whole thing to collapse.

The action is based on a case recounted by Jean-Yves Moyart, a criminal defence lawyer, who blogged under the name "Maître Mô" and who died in 2021. Grégory Gadebois plays Nicolas Milik ("Ahmed" in Moyart's blog), a devoted, careworn husband to his alcoholic wife Cécile and caring dad to five children. When Milik is accused of murdering his wife, with a local bar owner apparently an accomplice, principled lawyer Maître Monier (Auteuil) takes the case; passionately convinced of his client's innocence but finding himself in an increasingly tense situation.

The Thread is, mostly, a rather low-key movie whose incidental details of obsession and crime are oddly underplayed; the same goes for Auteuil's rather detached performance, gliding through scenes in court and at home with his partner and fellow lawyer Maître Annie Debret (Sidse Babett Knudsen). Yet the film snaps into shape after the verdict in the final act and a tense conversation between Monier and Milik has a force that lends a retrospective charge to what has gone before; their final conversation raises the stakes yet further.

This is not exactly a drama of ambiguity, like Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall:* it is more old-fashioned than that. Perhaps Auteuil needed to give it more energy on both sides of the camera, yet there is a charge in its deferred revelation.

Source: wwwguardian.com ~ Peter Bradshaw 30/6/2025 Edited extracts accessed 20/3/2026

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Some thoughts on*: The President's Cake*

It would have helped enormously to have had some context with this film. Lamia apparently belonged to the so-called Marsh Arabs who occupy the south west of Iraq. They tend to be Shia, rather than the majority Sunni and the area had become in the 1970s and 80s a refuge for dissidents and rebels against the regime. It had been bombed during the first Iraqi war, but in 1991 the Saddam regime itself began systematically converting the wetlands into a desert, forcing the residents out of their settlements in the region. Villages in the marshes were attacked and burnt down and there were reports of the water being deliberately poisoned. By 1993 the Americans were again bombing Iraq in retaliation and as a warning provoked by the attempted assassination by Iraqi agents on former U.S. President George H.W. Bush while on a visit to Kuwait in April 14-16, 1993.

None of this matters, of course, in our viewing of the film but it underlines the emphasis on the fragility of the lives of the people there, both from within and outside their own country. There is so much bombing in this film that after a while it simply becomes background noise. It almost doesn't matter who it is who's doing the bombing since the effect on the people is the same. This is what makes the end so shocking. The equally prominent propaganda involved pictures everywhere of ruler Saddam Hussein and the compulsory, innocent chanting of the children about his being their saviour and benefactor. They know nothing of the context so perhaps it's fitting that neither do we. It's just daily life in a war zone.

This child's-eye-view allows much social and political criticism without any overt statement. We see the greed and ignorance of the teacher (who calls himself a soldier) through to the various characters in the city, all of whom are striving to survive with either foul means or fair. The contrast between the final school scene and Saddam's actual birthday party with its massive cake and Happy Birthday on a continuous creepy loop is pointed and dreadful.

The low production values of this film made it fairly rough at times, and the non-professional status of the actors seemed to produce a lot of shouting. The scene with Bibi in the police station was a noisy chaos with no one listening to anyone else, but that's how you'd behave if you're infuriated with a regime whose representatives refuse to listen. Bibi simply did not allow herself to be fobbed off.

Despite being "unknowns", the acting and the beautiful faces of the children showed an instinctive authenticity which more than made up for their non-professionalism. Their enjoyment of their staring game throughout the film meant that that trust was all that was left to them at the end. [Cont.]

My other lasting image is of the beauty of the marshes, the elegant shape of the boats and the river life, both human and other. There was a meditative calm in the shots of the light on the river and a sense of timelessness and the eternal – all too easily shattered by a powered boat ploughing its wash across the water. The draining of the marshes which followed in subsequent years was more of the same on a huge scale.

Thank you to the FISH member who recommended this film. And as always, thank you to FISH and the Empire.

Trish Topp

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COMING UP:

December	*The Golden Spurtle* [Australia]	Sunday 13th & Tuesday 15th
February '27	*Number 24* [Norway]	Sunday 14th & Tuesday 16th