



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a delight we had in the film *A Thousand Lines*. We have had some lovely letters from members to that effect.

A message for our Sunday people: the Bowral Classic (bike race all over the highlands) is on 18th October, our screening date. Please consult the map on their website to see if you are affected as some streets are closed off, and the bike riders travel less rapidly than eager film goers might like. Parking may be worse than usual.

Please remember that our dates are set months ahead by the cinema. Not by us.

Best wishes to all,

Roz Garwen.



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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ACE INTERNET SERVICES HIGHLAND CREATIVE

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 18th October 2026

8.15 pm Tuesday 20th October 2026

The President's Cake
[Iraq/Qatar/US]

DIRECTOR: Hasan Hadi

RUNNING TIME: 102mins

RATING: M

Synopsis:

Nine-year -old Lamia is obliged by her school to make a birthday cake for the Iraqi president, and meets a series of vivid characters as she shops for the sanctioned ingredients.

Review: Peter Bradshaw

There's a terrific charm and sweetness in this debut from Iraqi film-maker Hasan Hadi, a Bake Off-style adventure about a little girl in early-90s Iraq required by her school to make a birthday cake in Saddam Hussein's honour, despite sanctions and the consequent shortage of every single cake-making ingredient. Hadi is a former Sundance Lab fellow and his film lists Hollywood heavy-hitters Chris Columbus and Eric Roth among its executive producers – who may just have induced Hadi to sprinkle some old-fashioned Tinseltown sugar into the mix. The moment when the little girl gazes at her reflection in the river is surely inspired by *The Lion King*.

Among the largely nonprofessional cast is the unselfconsciously excellent Baneen Ahmad Nayyef as nine-year-old Lamia, whose greedy teacher gobbles the apple she has brought to school for her lunch. This blowhard announces that the class must draw lots for which of them will bake the Saddam cake; it falls to Lamia. In addition, her pal Saeed (Sajad Mohama Qasem) – who has a crush on Lamia – has to supply the fruit for this party, on which only the teacher will be gorging himself. Lamia sets off into town with her grandmother Bibi (Waheed Thabet Khreibat) on a desperate shopping expedition, carrying her pet cockerel, Hindi, who gives a great animal performance and whose unpredictable crowings clearly forced the actors to improvise lines around him.

They encounter Saeed, who has been groomed as a pickpocket by his beggar father and who intends to steal either fruit or something else to sell for fruit; these cake-ingredient searchers on their travels, like the bicycle thieves of old, encounter a succession of vivid characters, including a grocer who gives rare treats to a pregnant customer in exchange for sexual favours, and, in one grim sequence, a paedophile who offers to take Lamia to his apartment for some

baking powder. The postman who gives Lamia and Bibi a lift in his car gets very excited about their mission: "I adore cake! It's the greatest invention in human history!"

But throughout the film, as if to spoil every happy moment and intensify every sad one, there are placards and posters of Saddam; there is hardly a street scene that isn't complicated by a demonstration wielding Saddam posters and barging past the camera shouting their loyalty. This is, after all, life during wartime. The postman's other passenger is a man blinded by an American bomb who is engaged to be married to someone he hasn't seen, so it doesn't matter if she isn't beautiful.

The film saunters and meanders along, accelerating occasionally to a mad dash for the many scenes in which the children are being chased by grownups. The cake-tasting itself turns out to be an explosively important climax.

Source: www.theguardian.com ~ Peter Bradshaw 11/2/26 Edited extracts accessed 19/5/26

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COMING UP:

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

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Some thoughts on: *A Thousand Lines*

What an unusual and wonderful film this was. As Virginia commented in her introduction, one would not normally go to a German film for humour but this film abounded in it, at the same time as steering a deadly serious course towards the unveiling of the lies and corruption at its heart. In fact, could it be that the humour makes our judgment even more searing? Didactic preaching tends not to elicit the same engagement as humour, even if both are directed towards the same end. The film makers are at pains to assure us that though this is based on a true story, it is fiction. But when I checked this online, the parallels are astounding.

Borgenius is seemingly humble. But the intercut shots of someone lining up a golf shot and then hitting a hole in one, are interspersed with his interview with the current head of Feature Articles where he cleverly manoeuvres his boss into promising complete control of the Latin American migrants' story. His persona projects self-discipline, perfect grooming, and a seeming commitment to his craft. But his image is as curated as his stories. Humble, diffident while manipulating everyone - think of the story of his sister with cancer; praising the weakest member of the team; swapping bow tie and shiny shoes for a rugged, reporter-in-the-field look of open neck and hiking boots for German Press Awards.

Juan, by contrast, is messy, emotional, located both in his work and in the heart of his family, and our response to him is as a human as flawed and lovable as we like to think of ourselves. But his commitment to his craft consists first and foremost in getting the facts correct – who was where, and when. Only when these building blocks are in place will he make a story from it. This commitment is genuine even to the extent of being prepared to ruin himself, his job and his family by trying to find proof of Borgenius' lies.

Borgenius works in the opposite direction. He calculates the emotion he wants to create (is instructed to create?) in his readers and then works backwards to provide facts which will create this response.

In a sense, each man represents a journalistic technique: the irony is that each writes in an opposite way to his persona. Borgenius is the carefully curated image with his careful haircut, neat but rugged clothes, his unemotional and humble demeanour. He never visits the scenarios he conjures but with the skill of AI, sits with coffee in cafes and parks and ogles the women nearby. There is nothing appealing to us, the viewers in this version of him, and in fact, when I checked online, the actor looks very like the real-life Classe Relotius. By contrast, Juan's personal life is messy, but his writing is disciplined and professional.

In the showdown between Borgenius and his bosses, he accuses them of wanting his sort of journalism with drama, excitement and passion. This is not the stuff of everyday life, he says, and therefore necessitates invention and story-telling. He is saying that his bosses are complicit. And of course, their refusal to consider any of Juan's initial and later queries, and eventually evidence about the lies and fake news, means that indeed they are complicit. They have too much to lose by admitting that their star journo is a fraud. And their readership stats

“buck the trend” so of course, they want to support whatever is maintaining and increasing their sales.

It would have been interesting to learn of Juan’s research into other of Borgenius’ fake stories but perhaps that is only because I want to revel in his downfall. In fact, did he fall down? The film suggests a couple of possible scenarios for where he might be now, and what he is doing. When I researched his real-life counterpart, I found the same ambiguity. No article seemed sure, but the strongest evidence seemed to suggest that he now works in an advertising agency as a “true creative”!!

It’s interesting also that the fictional newspaper *Die Chronic* (in real life, it was *Der Spiegel*, the mirror) has a name which implies a deep-seated illness. The lies inherent in Borgenius’ stories were indeed a chronic problem with the paper.

Its pertinence to our present times could hardly be more timely. What can we trust? And whom? Manipulation of facts and stories can be carried out even in our own homes; it does not require the trappings of a major news organisation to organise this. “Truth” can be such a contested word, as Pilate knew, but Juan’s pursuit of journalistic truth and evidence is nevertheless both laudable and essential for us to be able to continue to live in a world where, whether we like it or not, we are more interconnected than ever before.

Thank you as always to FISH for broadening our perspective and to the Empire for providing the means to do so.

Trish Topp

****** We are extremely grateful to Trish for continuing to provide excellent and most insightful reviews in the absence of our resident reviewer, who is unwell.