



PREVIEWS & EVENTS

# There Is No Evil

*We are screening this film and 3 Faces (Se rokh) in solidarity with Jafar Panahi, Mohammad Rasoulof and Mostafa Aleahmad. The BFI strongly condemns their prison sentence and the oppression of artists in Iran.*

The director Mohammad Rasoulof has been repeatedly jailed by the government his films criticise, and *There Is No Evil* is the latest product of his unwavering persistence in using his art to explore the emotional fallout of how this institution – and others like it – hold both prisoner and soldier hostage. The rough edges of its visuals can be attributed to the guerrilla nature of his filmmaking; *There Is No Evil* was filmed in secret in Iran during Rasoulof's dual ban (on grounds of 'propaganda against the country') from filmmaking and from leaving Iran, but lack of polish doesn't mean lack of finesse.

It's a slow, probing and observant film from the outset. The very first vignette involves long anticipatory silences that underscore mundanity as we watch a man called Heshmat's day unfold with relative normality: arguments with his wife about bills, picking his daughter up from school, running errands. The sequence uses a slow, 30-minute-long build-up to astonishing effect, as Heshmat effectively flips the switch on the lives of several prisoners at once with the same nonchalance with which he flips the switch on his kettle. No words are needed to illustrate the Iranian government's normalisation of killing. It's at this point that *There Is No Evil* reveals its intentions, exploring the various mindsets circling this one monumental decision, to take the life of another, beginning with a character who makes it as easily as making a cup of coffee.

The second story, 'She Said: You Can Do It', takes an immediately different tack. Here, a group of conscripted soldiers responsible for these routine executions philosophises about the nature of their job. Though the dialogue can feel more instructive than in the first story, Rasoulof makes the context and his view of it clear in the austere and claustrophobic, concrete-covered *mise en scène*, the soldier's bunk room easily mistaken for a prison cell. These executions are their route to citizenship and freedom from their mandatory service. One soldier desperately seeks to avoid having to carry out an execution, to escape being ethically compromised. His compatriots chastise him for being high and mighty, for thinking himself their moral superior.

Compared to the imagery, the language is blunt. One soldier lays out the terms of their service plainly: 'It's all forced labour. You can't do anything until you've finished your service.' When the time finally comes, Rasoulof frames the walk towards the gallows as though the would-be executioner is also walking to his death, and then cleverly upends audience expectations. *There Is No Evil* takes on grim subject matter but does not confine itself to naturalism or kitchen-sink misery. Rasoulof also illustrates the option to resist and shows the moment of resistance as something liberating and joyous, not so cynical as to dismiss it as futile. He's not so idealistic that he's blind to the consequences of saying no, however, as the spectre of conscription looms

permanently over the characters who have found the courage (or foolhardiness, or a combination) to run away.

Rasoulof effectively builds warning signs into each chapter without always overtly flagging them – especially in the first and last stories. The first soldier sees and hears a cat struggling under a boiler but walks past it, doing nothing until prompted by his neighbours to help – he is clearly used to simply following instructions.

The culmination of each of the second, third and fourth chapters illustrates a romanticism hidden at the core of *There Is No Evil*, presenting amorous relationships in opposition to the suppression of feeling required by conscripted service. ‘Kiss Me’ sees a man dealing with lingering regrets over a long-lost love. Each story of *There Is No Evil* seemingly presents alternative paths and futures; there are multiple forking roads not taken. Rasoulof is smart about the variance between settings, hopping from cosy suburban homes to grim military complexes to secluded forests and isolated desert plains. This only amplifies the significance of the decision to participate in executions; the effect of civil disobedience (or obedience) carries across the entire country and, as seen in the chapter ‘Birthday’, could directly affect the ones you love. There’s no exemption from the consequences of conforming. Despite the various ethical questions – pondering whether it is arrogance to think yourself above this system, where it’s irresponsible to resist it when your family is at stake – in the end, to Rasoulof, the decision is simple: ‘I just didn’t want to kill anyone.’

**Kambole Campbell, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2021-22**

## **Director’s Statement**

Last year, I spotted one of my interrogators coming out of the bank as I was crossing a street in Tehran. Suddenly, I experienced an indescribable feeling. Without his knowledge, I followed him for a while. After ten years, he had aged a bit. I wanted to take a picture of him on my cellphone, I wanted to run towards him, reveal myself to him, and angrily scream all my questions at him. But when I looked at him closely, and observed his mannerisms with my own eyes, I could not see an evil monster.

How do autocratic rulers metamorphose people into becoming mere components of their autocratic machines? In authoritarian states, the sole purpose of the law is the preservation of the state, and not the facilitation and regulation of people’s relations. I come from such a state.

And driven by such personal experiences, I wanted to tell stories that asked: as responsible citizens, do we have a choice when enforcing the inhumane orders of despots? As human beings, to what extent are we to be held responsible for our fulfilment of those orders? Confronted by this machine of autocracy, when it comes to human emotions, where does the duality of love and moral responsibility leave us?

**Production notes**

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**THERE IS NO EVIL (SHEYTAN VOJUD NADARAD)**

*Director:* Mohammad Rasoulof

*Produced by:* Filminiran, Medianest, Cosmopol Film

*Supported by:* Filmförderung Hamburg-Schleswig Holstein GmbH, ZDF / ARTE

*International Sales:* Films Boutique

*Executive Producer:* Farzad Pak

*Producers:* Mohammad Rasoulof, Kaveh Farnam, Farzad Pak

*Production Managers:* Ali Hemmati, Maryam Yavari

*Assistant Directors:* Samrand Maroofi, Meysam Muini

*Written by:* Mohammad Rasoulof

*Cinematography:* Ashkan Ashkani

*Editors:* Mohammadreza Muini, Meysam Muini

*Production Designer:* Saeed Asadi

*Costumes:* Afsaneh Sarfejo

*Make-up:* Mahmoud Dehghani

*Music:* Amir Molookpour

*Sound Designers:* Philipp Kemptner, Hasan Mahdavi

*Sound:* Hassan Shabankareh

**Cast**

Ehsan Mirhosseini (*Heshmat*)

Shaghayegh Shourian (*Razieh*)

Kaveh Ahangar (*Pouya*)

Alireza Zar Parast (*Hasan*)

Salar Khamse (*Salar*)

Kaveh Ebrahim (*Amir*)

Reza Bahrami (*Shahram*)

Darya Moghbeli (*Tahmineh*)

Mohammad Valizadegan (*Javad*)

Mahtab Servati (*Nana*)

Mohammad Sedighi Mehr (*Bahram*)

Jila Shahi (*Zaman*)

Baran Rasoulof (*Darya*)

Iran-Czech Republic-Germany 2020

150 mins

Courtesy of New Wave Films

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**NEW RELEASES****Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki)**

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

**Conscientious Protectors**

From Mon 1 Aug

**The Feast**

From Fri 19 Aug

**Where Is Anne Frank**

From Fri 19 Aug

**Queen of Glory**

From Fri 28 Aug

**RE-RELEASES****The Big City (Mahanagar)**

Continues from Fri 22 Jul

**Paris, Texas**

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

**The Harder They Come**

From Fri 5 Aug (+ intro by season curator and author Lloyd Bradley on Fri 5 Aug 18:15)

**Burning an Illusion**

From Fri 19 Aug

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**EVENTS & REGULAR PROGRAMME****Projecting the Archive: The Frog + intro by Vic Pratt, Producer, BFI Video Publishing**

Tue 16 Aug 18:30

**Art in the Making: 12 Views of Kensal House + intro by Steven Foxon, BFI Curator (Non-Fiction)**

Thu 18 Aug 18:30

**Relaxed Screening: Kes + intro + discussion**

Mon 22 Aug 18:15

**Woman With a Movie Camera Preview: Queen of Glory**

Mon 22 Aug 18:30

**Terror Vision: Burnt Offerings**

Thu 25 Aug 18:10

**TV Preview: Am I Being Unreasonable? + Q&A with writer/actors****Daisy May Cooper, Selin Hizli and exec producer Jack Thorne**

Wed 31 Aug 18:15

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