



NEW RELEASES

No Bears

For the last decade, Jafar Panahi has made a series of boldly inventive statements defying the Iranian government's ban on his being an active filmmaker. As he faces six years imprisonment, his latest film is testimony to how artistry and protest can find inspiration in the very restrictions that he and other creative voices face. Panahi plays himself, a filmmaker trying to direct a cast and crew in Turkey, who is forced to remain in an Iranian village close to the border. As his actors perform their own story of attempted escape to Europe, Panahi finds himself coming up against suspicion and local traditions. Arguably the filmmaker's richest and most complex work to date, *No Bears* is a witty, serio-comic self-portrait, and a resounding act of artistic and political expression.

Jonathan Romney, BFI London Film Festival

There is a moment in Jafar Panahi's new film when the filmmaker, playing a version of himself, stands on a hill at night, staring at the lights of a town across the border. He's not sure where exactly the border is, and asks his companion, who points at the ground right in front of him; Panahi takes an involuntary step back as if what was pointed out wasn't a line on a map, but a land mine, a viper. In *No Bears*, borders aren't simply legal, geographical and political constructs, but psychologically internalised fears and limits. These limits are imposed on the individual (Panahi would know, having endured 12 years of travel bans and house arrests) and on a society as a whole.

No Bears sees Panahi's filmmaker directing his new film remotely as he lives in self-imposed exile in a small Iranian village near the border with Turkey. The film-within-a-film traces the story of two lovers, Bakhtiar (Bakhtiar Panjeji) and Zara (Mina Kavani), who want to escape to Europe together. The problem is that they only have one passport, and Zara refuses to leave Bakhtiar on his own. The filming progresses by fits and starts as Panahi communicates with his assistant Reza (Reza Heydari) by phone, watching the live shots coming through his laptop. As in Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), the fluctuating strength of the internet signal becomes vitally important, underlining Panahi's isolation as well as the isolation of the village he finds himself in.

Another problem emerges when Panahi finds himself embroiled in a dispute about another pair of lovers who are apparently defying tradition. It appears that Panahi – who has been casually filming the villagers, and even recruiting his simple-minded landlord Ghanbar (Vahid Mobaseri) to film some local marriage ceremony – might also have taken a photograph of the couple whose forbidden relationship is upsetting the woman's betrothed and the rest of the village. This exacerbates Panahi's ambiguous position: a stranger from Tehran who has the support of the local sheriff but who is also in trouble with the regime. Is he a spy or a filmmaker? In the end, is there actually a difference?

On one level this is a fish-out-of-water story. The amiable Tehran urbanite, Panahi enjoys some of the aspects of village life. He is prepared food and

herbal teas by the matriarch and in turn offers her magnesium supplements for her aches and pains. There's a mutual interaction and respect and initially Panahi is a casually curious anthropologist, amused by the goings-on of the village but not interested enough to pay them much attention – unlike Ghanbar, who puts on a servile front but accidentally films himself badmouthing his guest.

But as the story weaves a web of misunderstanding and distrust, the tone becomes darker and the consequences more serious. Panahi's position in the village is compromised as he is requested to formally swear, in a special 'swearing room', that he did not take the picture. One villager advises him to simply lie if that will keep the peace, and Panahi is aware that others are promising violent consequences: 'There will be blood'. Meanwhile, his film is coming unstuck: it appears now to be a documentary, and the falsehoods of fiction are simply becoming lies.

Over all of this Panahi is presented with a possible solution: the temptation of escape, of crossing the border, extricating himself from danger and giving up on his own country in the process. But emigration means different things for different people. In the case of Zara and Bakhtiar, it means separation; for the young couple in the village, it means being together. For Panahi, it affords the possibility of freedom, but also the renouncement of the culture that lies at the root of his art.

The film is not a simple cry for artistic freedom. As in his other films, Panahi portrays himself as a stumbling avuncular figure who inadvertently causes harm. His artistic mission has consequences that ripple outwards, disrupting the lives of others as well as his own. Given Panahi's own real-life suffering and repression, it is a testament to his integrity as an artist that he looks so critically at himself and so empathetically at those who are indifferent to, or might even support, his imprisonment. The final shot is a heroic acceptance of responsibility and a refusal to flee, made all the more poignant by the director's subsequent real-life incarceration with a sentence of six years.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, December 2022

Jafar Panahi is an Iranian film director, screenwriter, and film editor, commonly identified with the Iranian New Wave film movement.

After several years of making short films and working as an assistant director for fellow Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, Panahi achieved international recognition with his feature film debut, *The White Balloon* (1995). The film won the *Caméra d'Or* at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, the first major award won by an Iranian film at Cannes. Panahi was quickly recognised as one of the most influential filmmakers in Iran. Although his films were often banned in his own country, he continued to receive international acclaim from film theorists and critics and won numerous awards, including the Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival for *The Mirror* (1997), the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for *The Circle* (2000), and the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for *Offside* (2006).

His films are known for their humanistic perspective on life in Iran, often focusing on the hardships of children, the impoverished, and women. After several years of conflict with the Iranian government over the content of his films (including several short-term arrests), Panahi was arrested in March 2010 along with his wife, daughter, and 15 friends and later charged with propaganda against the Iranian government.

Despite support from filmmakers, film organisations, and human rights organisations from around the world, in December 2010 Panahi was sentenced to a six-year jail sentence and a 20-year ban on directing any movies, writing screenplays, giving any form of interview with Iranian or foreign media. While awaiting the result of an appeal he made *This Is Not a Film* (2011), a documentary feature in the form of a video diary in spite of the legal ramifications of his arrest. It was smuggled out of Iran in a flash drive hidden inside a cake and shown at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

In February 2013 the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival showed *Closed Curtain* by Panahi and Kambuzia Partovi in competition; Panahi won the Silver Bear for Best Script. Panahi's new film *Taxi* (2015) premiered in competition at the 65th Berlin International Film Festival in February 2015 and won the Golden Bear, the prize awarded for the best film in the festival. His last film *3 Faces* (2018) was awarded Best Screenplay at Cannes 2018.

NO BEARS

Director: Jafar Panahi
Screenplay: Jafar Panahi
Cinematography: Amin Jafari
Editor: Amir Etminan
Production Design: Babak Jajaie Tabrizi

Cast

Jafar Panahi (*Jafar Panahi*)
Naser Hashemi (*village chief*)
Vahid Mobaseri (*Ghanbar*)
Bakhtiar Panjei (*Bakhtiar*)
Mina Kavani (*Zara*)
Narjes Delaram (*Ghanbar's mother*)
Reza Heydari (*Reza*)
Javad Siyahi (*Jacob*)
Yousef Soleymani (*Jacob's uncle*)
Amir Davari (*Solduz*)
Darya Alei (*Goza*)
Rahim Abbasi (*villager*)
Sinan Yusufoglu (*Sinan*)
Ehsan Ahmad Khanpour (*kid*)
Iman Bazayr (*soldier*)

Iran 2022
107 mins

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

NEW RELEASES

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim)

From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(*Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?*)

From Fri 25 Nov

RE-RELEASES

The Others

From Mon 17 Oct

Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

The Draughtsman's Contract

From Fri 11 Nov (+ intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov 17:50)

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