



FILM: **HIT THE ROAD**

FDG RATING: 3.2 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Panah Panahi: *director*
Rayan Sariak: *actor, young boy*
Pantea Panahiha: *actress, mother*

DATE: September 17, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: HIT THE ROAD

In the 2022 Iranian film, *Hit The Road*, a middle-aged couple and their two sons embark on a road trip across the Iranian countryside. The father's leg is in a cast so the elder son, quiet, and pensive, is driving while the younger son who is about seven years old, is an exuberant non-stop chatterbox. One discussion participant thought he was a little brat and said she would have left him on the side of the road if he had been in her car. It is implied that they are driving to meet the son's fiancée and parents. The mother is clearly covering her worried emotions by lip singing to Iranian pop tunes, as they all fondly chide each other. Their old ailing dog is also with them. They make several stops along the way and each time we learn a bit more truth about where they are headed and why they are making this journey. The film is purposely slow to reveal why they are on the road. This is how life is in Iran, fear of what can be said.

The landscape is mostly dusty and barren except for a couple stops at more lush towns. At one stop we see the mother and father paying for a sheepskin that they are to use at the next stop as an unspoken code for their son's passage to Turkey; all part of a carefully plotted process to smuggle Iranians out of the country at an exorbitant price, the family's home and car. We learn that the family sold their house to provide bail so the son would not go to prison. It was definitely emotional, at the end, when the son is turned over to the traffickers, with the understanding that they would see him again before he actually leaves, however that does not happen. The anguish of losing a child is clearly displayed, aware of the dangers he will face, the risk they are taking in the hope he will have a better future. The family transfers their repressed grief of losing a son to grieving for their dog who dies and they hold a little ceremony to mourn his death.

Some discussion participants didn't understand what was going on. Another participant commented that although appreciating and respecting the important message, the story was too drawn out. But the inescapable devotion of the family members is heart-warming. Living under repressive, restrictive, conditions understandably draws a family closer.

A favorite comic scene is when the young boy swings open the car door as the car prepares to stop, knocking over a racing bicyclist. The family apologetically offers to drive him and his bike to where he needs to be which inadvertently helps the bicyclist cheat in the race, probably a snide at corruption in the country.

Another favorite scene is at the end when the boy and Dad, sitting next to their campfire, are transposed against the vast night sky, reminiscent of *2001: A Space Odyssey* which is the older son's favorite movie.

The film provides insight into the daring, secretive procedure for political activists to leave Iran to avoid being imprisoned. We applaud the great acting by the Dad and Mother and especially the young boy. He should be nominated for best supporting actor, or maybe he is actually the lead actor, or others would definitely give him an award for the most irritating child actor.

Iranian films are usually restrained in their criticism of their authoritarian rule, as was *Hit The Road*. The script actually was written with the son deciding not to leave Iran and changed after receiving approval.

Except for a couple high scores from participants who enjoyed the cultural experience and appreciated the portrayal of a very human tragedy, more ratings were somewhat restrained leaving *Hit The Road* with a middle of the road score of 3.2 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote: Within Iranian cinema, the car as a symbol often represents freedom of expression and also public and private space rolled into one. Containing the narrative inside the family's car (private space) where the mother is partially unveiled revealing gray hair, and where she sings (women are not allowed to sing in the presence of men), allows Panahi to break the rules. He refers to this space as a place "without having to submit to the silly regulations".



See you at the movies!

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