



— THE THINGS YOU KILL



A Film by Alireza Khatami

PRESSKIT



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SCREENINGS IN SUNDANCE

FRI. JAN 24th, 9:00 PM @ EGYPTIAN THEATRE
(WORLD PREMIERE)

SAT. JAN 25th, 9:40 AM @ REDSTONE
CINEMAS – 2

SAT. JAN 25th, 3:30 PM @ HOLIDAY 2 (P&I)

SUN. JAN 26th, 6:45 PM @ BROADWAY
CENTRE CINEMAS - 6

THU. JAN 30th, 12:45 PM @ HOLIDAY VILLAGE
CINEMAS – 1

SUN. FEB 2nd, 4:40 PM @ REDSTONE
CINEMAS – 2

— THE THINGS YOU KILL

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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— SYNOPSIS

Haunted by the suspicious death of his ailing mother, Ali, a university professor coerces his enigmatic gardener to execute a cold-blooded act of vengeance. As long-buried family secrets resurface, the police tighten their noose, and doubts begin eroding his conscience. Ali has no choice but to look into the abyss of his own soul.



A CONVERSATION WITH ALIREZA KHATAMI

What was the biggest inspiration behind this film?

My biggest inspiration for this film was a personal need to reconcile with my own history—the legacy of violence within my family. It's an attempt to clear my account with myself, to confront the shadows that linger and to understand how they've shaped me.

As an Iranian filmmaker setting your story in Turkey, how does this geographic and cultural translation influence the story's resonance?

The story started in Farsi and was meant for Iran, but censorship authorities demanded I remove the patricide - which completely undermines the story's challenge to Abrahamic traditions of filial sacrifice, which I wasn't going to do. Being from a Turkish-speaking indigenous tribe in Iran gave me a natural bridge to relocate

the story to Turkey, where I could preserve its psycho-political examination of patriarchy. While the context shifted, the human truth at its core remained intact. Sometimes limitations force us to find new ways to tell our most personal stories.

How does the relationship between Ali and his father Hamit reflect broader themes about generational trauma and the cyclical nature of violence?

I wrote Ali and Hamit's relationship thinking about how trauma gets passed down in families, but with a crucial twist - while Hamit's violence was about domination, Ali's response to violence comes from a place of protection. That's what motivated the surprising ending - we can't fully escape our fathers' influence, but we can choose how to carry their legacy. It's not about breaking free completely - it's about understanding and choosing a new path.

The image of Atatürk—the founding father of Turkey—appears in several scenes. How does this visual motif deepen the film's theme of generational trauma and identity?

Atatürk is a Turkish title that literally translates to "Father of the Turks." His image intertwines the personal and the political, embodying legacy and authority while reflecting systems of power and tradition that shape both individual and collective identities. For Ali, these images parallel his struggles with inheritance—whether from his father or the societal structures that perpetuate cycles of control and trauma. Rather than serving as a political statement, Atatürk's recurring presence highlights how symbols of authority influence personal narratives, connecting deeply rooted histories to the search for self.

Throughout the script, the protagonist struggles with two key relationships - with

his father and with his wife. How do these relationships mirror each other?

Ali's relationships with wife, Hazar, and his father both center on unspoken truths. In both cases, he's protecting himself from pain by avoiding reality. But what's really powerful is how differently these situations resolve - while the truth about his father leads to violence, his eventual honesty with Hazar opens up the possibility of healing.

The film employs several recurring motifs - water (wells, drowning, thirst), ghosts/hauntings, and burial/excavation. How do these elements weave together?

The way I see it, these motifs all connect to what lies beneath the surface - both literally and emotionally. How deep we have to go to find the truth, and how hungry are we for it? And you know what's interesting? When characters try



to bury things - whether it's secrets or bodies - they always seem to resurface, like water finding its way up through the earth. The ghosts in the story aren't just supernatural - they're the buried truths that keep haunting us until we face them. It's all about what we hide and what we can't help but uncover.

You worked with a star-studded ensemble. How did you go about casting them, and what was your approach to working with the actors?

I feel incredibly fortunate about our cast. Every actor who joined us brought such depth to their roles - we're talking about some of the finest performers you can find around the world. There's this one scene with Ekin Koc - a confession scene that honestly scared everyone. I wrote it after a personal psychedelic experience, and my producers were so shocked they gently asked me to cut it. When Ekin told me how terrified he was to perform it, I knew right then he was perfect for Ali. We were still figuring out how to shoot it right up until the day. Then I was reading Primo Levi, and something clicked about how he strips emotion from his darkest passages. When I suggested this to Ekin, he talked about needing privacy for the scene. So we used camera focus in this really delicate way - just me, Ekin, and the lens creating this private space. Everyone

fought it at first. But sometimes the scariest choice ends up being the most beautiful one. This is the best shot I have ever filmed.

Why does this story need to be told now?

In my view, we're living in a historical moment where established discourses are unraveling, and there's a troubling tendency to regress to the past. The darkest chapters of history are repeating themselves right before our eyes, driven by a deeply entrenched macho, patriarchal system. Now, more than ever, we need to look inward and ask ourselves: What have we done, and who have we become? What fuels this perpetual urge for violence, and who will break free from this cycle? We've examined these issues through an external political lens, but it's time to turn that lens inward and confront the difficult questions within ourselves.

Is it fair to say that the film begins with a dream, and ends in a nightmare?

I started writing this story thinking I knew where the darkness lived - in the father's violence, in the family trauma. But as I followed Ali's journey, I realized the story was really about how we mirror the very things we're trying to escape. The blurring between reality and nightmare - it wasn't planned, but it emerged

organically because that's how trauma works, isn't it? It bleeds across boundaries, makes us question who we really are. Having the narrative structure itself become like a mirror felt... honest somehow. Sometimes the deepest truths reveal themselves in the telling.

You return to questions about killing and the title is *The Things You Kill*? What are we talking about when we talk about killing?

When Ali teaches his students about translation - how the Arabic root 'Rajam' might mean 'to kill' - he's really talking about transformation. And what it takes to transform. We kill parts of ourselves to survive trauma. But what's crucial is understanding that violence has a history - it doesn't come from nowhere. Hamit was beaten by his father, who was likely beaten by his father... So when we talk about killing, we're really talking about inheritance, about how violence gets passed down until someone finds a way to transform it.

In the film, the female characters appear stronger and determined than the men, while the latter compensate for their weaknesses and hesitations with violence. Is this your vision of man?

I wanted to examine how patriarchy keeps itself going through this deep fear of vulnerability. The system teaches everyone that vulnerability is something to be crushed rather than understood. In my film, while the women might seem emotionally stronger, they're just as caught up in this system - they've just found different ways to survive within it. I'm not really interested in sorting people into "strong" or "weak." What intrigues me is how we all develop different strategies to exist under patriarchy. Some of us learn to sit with our pain, others learn to pass it on. The big question is: how do we break free from these patterns and imagine new ways of being?

The film engages with questions of forgiveness. Is Meryam right when she suggests it's "easier to be angry and pretend you care" than to deal with what's in front of you?

That line from Meryam really gets at something critical. She is probably the only one who knows the root of her brother's deep anger. Anger is always a way of avoiding the messier work of understanding. It is a shield against having to really look at the complexity of who we are. Meryam's words direct her brother to a painful truth he has been avoiding for decades.



BIOGRAPHY ALIREZA KHATAMI

Alireza Khatami is an award-winning writer, director, and producer based in Canada. Born into the indigenous Khamse tribe in southeast Iran, Alireza draws from the rich oral storytelling traditions of his heritage, crafting a unique style that blends magic realism with sharp social commentary. Known for his bold cinematic choices that defy convention, his films unravel the invisible architecture of power, tracing societal systems and psychological forces that shape human behavior and identity.

Alireza began as an assistant director alongside esteemed filmmakers, including two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi. His de-

but feature, *Oblivion Verses*, premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2017, garnering critical acclaim and winning multiple awards, including the Orizzonti Award for Best Screenplay and the FIPRESCI prize. His second feature, *Terrestrial Verses* (co-directed with Ali Asgari), premiered in the Un Certain Regard competition at Cannes Film Festival to rave reviews and has been theatrically released in more than 15 countries.

Alireza continues his boundary-pushing cinema with his latest film, *The Things You Kill*, set to make its world premiere in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition at Sundance 2025.



FILMOGRAPHY

ALIREZA KHATAMI

2023 *Terrestrial Verses* — Cannes Un Certain Regard

2017 *Oblivion Verses* — Best Screenplay award in Venice Orizzonti



BIOGRAPHY

CAST

EKIN KOC

Ekin Koc is an actor based in Berlin and Istanbul, known for his compelling and natural performances. He received critical acclaim for his role in *Brother's Keeper*, which premiered at the Berlinale, where it won the FIPRESCI Award, and earned him the Best Supporting Actor award at the Ankara Film Festival. His work in *Burning Days*, selected for the Cannes Film Festival, further solidified his presence in international cinema. Born in Antalya in 1992, he studied acting at the Stella Adler Conservatory in New York, where he honed his craft and developed a deep appreciation for character-driven storytelling. He has built a reputation for his thoughtful and sincere approach to acting, with a focus on portraying complex, human stories.



ERKAN KOLÇAK KÖSTENDİL

Erkan Kolçak Köstendil, born on January 16th, 1983, in Bursa, is an acclaimed Turkish actor, director, writer and musician. He gained early recognition with his role as Karlos in the TV series called *Ulan İstanbul* and rose to prominence with his portrayal of Vartolu Saadettin in *The Pit*. The show has reached huge success across the world. Beyond television, he has been active in theater, performing in notable plays such as *Aut* and *12 Numaralı Adam*, which has been running since 2018, achieving remarkable success internationally and toured all over Europe, performing to a wide audience. His most notable performances include his portrayal of Piroz in Soner Caner's Netflix Original Movie called *Heartsong*, his performance as 'İhsan' in the 2023 Netflix Original Series '*Yaratılan*' (Creature) and his guest appearance in the 2024 Dutch film '*Zwijgrecht*'. Köstendil remains active in many creative mediums, continuing his work as an actor, screenwriter, and director.



HAZAR ERGÜÇLÜ

Hazar Ergüçlü, born in 1992 in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, graduated from the Theatre Department of Haliç University Conservatory. She was discovered at the age of 17 by the renowned director Derviş Zaim, which led to her film debut in *Shadows and Faces*. Ergüçlü has since built a successful career in both cinema and television. She won the Best Actress award at the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival for her performance in the film *Snow*, which she also co-produced. She also participated in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *The Wild Pear Tree*, which was featured at the Cannes Film Festival. On television, she gained widespread recognition with successful projects such as *Kuzey Güney*, *Medcezir*, *Yüksek Sosyete*, and *Alev Alev*. She starred in Netflix's first original series *Hakan Muhafız* and in BluTV's adaptation of the acclaimed series *The Affair*, titled *Saklı*. Ergüçlü has also worked internationally, starring in the BBC One series *Mallorca Files*. She won the *Best Female Actress in Cinema Comedy or Dark Comedy* award at the 25th Sadri Alışık Awards for her role in the Netflix film *Gönül*.



CAST & CREW

Ali	Ekin KOÇ
Reza	Erkan KOLÇAK KÖSTENDİL
Hazar	Hazar ERGÜÇLÜ
Father / Hamit	Ercan KESAL

Director	Alireza Khatami
Screenplay	Alireza Khatami
Director of Photography	Bartosz Świniarski
Production Design	Meral Aktan
1st Assistant Director	Serap Aydoğan
Production Manager	Murat Polat
Casting	İpek Efe
Costume Design	Serap Aydoğan
Makeup Design	Mehdi Sayad
Editing	Selda Taşkın & Alireza Khatami
VFX Supervisor	Darren Wall
Sound	Benjamin Laurent
Sound Edit	Ange Hubert
Sound Recorder & Mixer	Benjamin Laurent

CAST & CREW

Color Grading	Hanna Rudkiewicz
Film was Financed by	Arte Cofinova / PFI / Eurimages / Telefilm Canada
Supported by	Ile de France / Ontario Tax Rebate / WCF / Torino feature lab Award
Production	Fulgurance, Remora Films, Lava Films, Tell Tall Tale, Band With Pictures, Sineaktif
Producers	Elisa Sepulveda-Ruddoff, Cyriac Auriol, Mariusz Włodarski, Alireza Khatami, Michael Solomon
Coproducers	Marta Gmosińska, Ekin Koç & Cenk Ünalerzen
Executive producers	Naomi Despres, Michèle Marshall (Desmar) & Ercan Kesal
Country	France, Poland, Canada, Turkey
French Distributor	Le Pacte
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

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