

[Home](#) / [Entertainment](#) / [Others](#) / [At Cannes 2022, Iran's Holy Spider raises u...](#)

## OTHERS

### At Cannes 2022, Iran's Holy Spider raises unholy smoke in theatre and outside

A bunch of women put up a protest at the premiere of Iran's Holy Spider at Cannes Film Festival.



A still from Holy Spider.

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By [Gautaman Bhaskaran](#)

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It could not have been a coincidence for a group of feminists to have

chosen the screening of Holy Spider on Sunday at [Cannes Film Festival](#) for their protest against feminicides. They gathered on the famed red carpet releasing smoke from handheld devices. There were a dozen of them dressed in formal attire keeping in mind the Festival's dress regulations – without which they might not have been able to breach the strict security barrier around the Grand Theatre Lumiere, where Holy Spider was all set to play. The demonstrators held a long scroll with the names of 129 women who had been murdered in France since Cannes 2021. **(Also read: [Nicole Kidman curiously missing from ex-husband Tom Cruise's career highlight reel at Cannes Film Festival](#))**

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This is the second feminist protest the Festival has seen this year. On Friday, an activist attending the world premiere of George Miller's 3000 Years of Longing demonstrated against purported sexual violence from Russian forces against the women of Ukraine.

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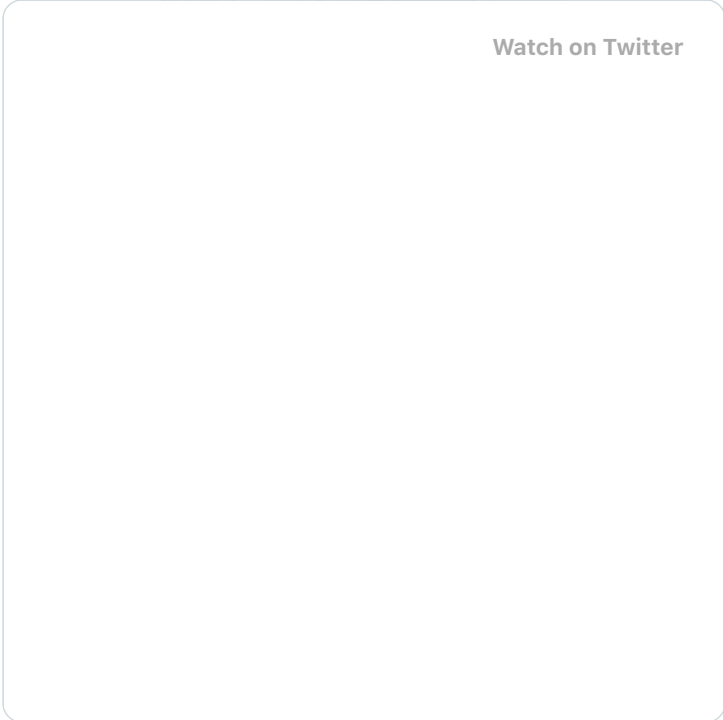
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Feminist protest at Holy Spider premier #Cannes



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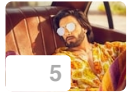
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As much as the demonstrating women shocked the Festival organisers, viewers of Holy Spider were jolted as well. The Festival, rather sleepy and dull till now, felt a strong electric current sweeping through the aisles. And the film by Iranian-Danish auteur, Ali Abbasi (who had earlier given us Border), is already being tipped for the Palm d'Or, and we have still six more days of the Festival to go.

The movie explores a killing spree on the streets of the religious city of Mashhad, where 16 sex-workers were found dead in 2000 and 2001. Looks like Iran's Jack the Ripper, who murdered sex-workers at Whitechapel in London's East End in 1888.

In Holy Spider (not so holy after all), journalist Rahimi (played by Zar Amir-Ebrahimi) is trying to probe the murders, and early on we are let into who the criminal is. He is a war veteran, Saeed (Mehdi Bajestani). He is a typical Jekyll and Hyde; a normal man with a loving family by the day, he turns into a monster at night, picking up women on his motorcycle and brutally strangling them as a "religious cleansing ritual".

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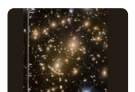
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In a press handout, Abbasi said: "Holy Spider is about the rise and fall of one of Iran's most infamous serial killers: Saeed Hanaei. In a larger context, the film is a critique of Iranian society, as the killer is a very religious man and a well-respected citizen. I was still living in Iran in the beginning of 2000s when Saeed Hanaei was killing street prostitutes in the holy city of Mashhad. He managed to kill 16 women before he was caught and put on trial. It was during his trial that the story really caught my attention. In a normal world there is no doubt that a man who had killed 16

people would be seen as guilty. But here it was different: a part of the public and the conservative media began to celebrate Hanaei as a hero. They upheld the idea that Hanaei simply had to fulfil his religious duty to clean the streets of the city by killing these ‘dirty’ women. This was when the idea of making this movie came to me”.

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Antichrist by Danish director Lars Von Trier had also provoked such extreme reaction at Cannes.

Holy Spider was shot in Jordan – it could not have been in Iran – and is bound to anger Tehran for the depiction of topless women and several sex scenes.

“In Iran, movies are not allowed to feature such images”, which Abbasi alluded to in his brief remarks at the premiere. “This means a lot for us,” the director said. “This means a lot to my fantastic team, my crew, my actors. But it’s also a great day for Iranian cinema. There’s finally at least one film where women actually have bodies, where they don’t sleep with their headscarves on.”

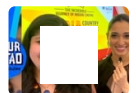
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As the audience clapped, he continued: “And in the past 20 years, I have always thought of a huge injustice that has been committed against the real victims of this story. And even now, when people condemn this, they

seldom mention those dead women. I feel a little piece of justice is being played out tonight.”

Holy Spider is one of two Iranian movies in competition at Cannes. The other is Saeed Roustaei’s Leila’s Brothers. Neither has been cleared by authorities to screen in Iran.

Cannes 2022 appears like the year of Iranian cinema: Oscar-winning helmer Asghar Farhadi is on the main jury, and he has come with a smoke of plagiarism around his A Hero.

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Deepika Padukone took over the Cannes red carpet in a bunch of impressive outfits. Check them out here.

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**Deepika Padukone with Rebecca Hall at the opening ceremony.(REUTERS)**

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**Jury member Deepika Padukone poses for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the film 'Armageddon Time' at the 75th international film festival, Cannes, southern France.(AP)**

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**Deepika Padukone chose a Sabyasachi saree for the opening night.(AP)**

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**Deepika Padukone poses for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the film Decision To Leave.(Joel C Ryan/Invision/AP)**

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**Deepika Padukone in another Sabyasachi design.(AFP)**