



# Alcarras

**Director:** Carla Simón

**Country:** Spain

**Date:** 2022

*A review by Peter Bradshaw for **The Guardian**:*

Capitalism never looked more brutal than in this new Catalan-language movie with nonprofessionals from Carla Simón; it is about an extended family of peach farmers in the town of Alcarràs, people whose unhappiness and dysfunction are created by market forces. It was the winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlin film festival and is this year's Spanish entry for the best international film Academy Award.



Simón's debut was the wonderfully tender childhood study *Summer 1993* and *Alcarràs* is her very accomplished follow-up. I felt it didn't quite have the same immediately accessible richness and sweetness, but this is a really shrewd, empathic and subtle movie which engulfs you in its dust and sweat and heat.

Quimet, played by Jordi Pujol Dolcet, is a middleaged farmer who lives with his clan in a rambling rented house with its own swimming pool,

surrounded by peach trees, whose delicious fruit he is getting ready to harvest: backbreakingly hard work which he does by hand with family members, together with some African immigrant labour. His wife Dolors (Anna Otín) helps, as does his son Roger (Albert Bosch) – though Dolors has onerous housework and childcare, as well as having to massage Quimet's aching back, with little thanks from her grumpy and depressed husband. Their teen daughter Marionna (Xènia Roset) is busy rehearsing a dance number for the town's summer talent show, and their youngest, Iris (Ainet Jounou), likes playing in an abandoned car in the farmland with her cousins Pau (Isaac Rovira) and Pere (Joel Rovira).

To Iris's awestruck astonishment, strange grownups arrive one day and take away her beloved car: this is an awful omen of the problems to come. The supermarkets are offering Quimet insultingly low prices for his produce, and like other farmers he is getting ready for a mass protest. But his landlord, Pinyol (Jacob Diarte) has in any case curtly informed him that all the peach trees are to be ripped out and replaced with solar panels, and if he wants, he can retrain as a solar panel engineer, which is far more lucrative. Quimet's elderly father Rogelio (Josep Abad) failed to get their land-tenancy in writing: it was merely a gentleman's agreement with Pinyol's late father which the son has ignored.



This agony tears their family apart: Quimet is enraged that his way of life has been cancelled, but his sister and brother-in-law want to take the solar panel deal and his son Roger is in any case hurt at his father's contemptuous indifference to all his new ideas on irrigation. And so Quimet, exploited by the landlord class, is also cruel to his own staff, the labourers that he must mostly lay off.

Movies about rural ways of life are often supposed to be all about the sacred, seasonal rhythm of reaping and sowing. But here there is no rhythm. There is just one continuous throb of anxiety: whether the crop will fail, whether it will be eaten by rabbits, whether it will be underpriced by the supermarket buyers. And now the whole system has been thrown out. There is a new harvest to be gathered: solar power.

Simón's film asks us: is Quimet right to be outraged or not? Is there something sacred about the planting, growing and selling of peaches? Aren't solar panels, with their superiority to fossil fuels, just as important? Might Quimet be, in some inexpressibly painful sense, simply loyal to unhappiness, loyal to a business that has not brought him satisfaction? There is something agonising, almost self-harming in Quimet's protest stunt: he dumps a mountain of his precious peaches outside the supermarket offices: a vast, squelchy pile symbolising his wretchedness and rage. It is a deeply intelligent, humane drama.

*From: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/jan/03/alcarras-review-heartbreak-and-ruin-in-the-catalan-beat>*