

A marvellous, masterful story of murder

ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA

(Club, IFI, 157 minutes)

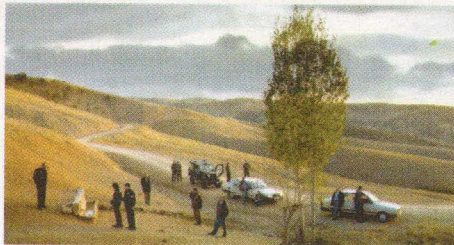
Director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan **Stars:** Muhammet Uzuner, Yilmaz Erdogan, Taner Birsel

★★★★★

One of those films that tends to polarise both audiences and critics, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's drama was a co-winner of the Grand Prix at Cannes last year, but has also led to angry audience walkouts.

Its pace could diplomatically be described as daringly slow, and it's a murder mystery without a mystery, because before the hunt for the body even gets under way we're well aware who killed it.

On the ancient, rolling plains of central Turkey, a motley crew of gendarmes, local police and big city prosecutors are involved in a nocturnal search for a missing villager.



Beautiful: The scene-setting is breathtaking

A suspect called Kenan (Firat Tanis) and his retarded brother have admitted killing him and agreed to lead investigators to the spot where they buried him, but once on the road Kenan begins to obfuscate. His evasiveness infuriates the local police chief, Commissar Naci (the excellent Yilmaz Erdogan), who's prone to beating him.

More measured and jaded responses

come from Cemal (Muhammet Uzuner), the misanthropic local doctor, and Prosecutor Nusret (Taner Birsel), a world-weary official from Ankara. In the course of a long, bleary night they search fruitlessly a series of locations and discuss everything from yoghurt to the horrors of a prostate exam.

For some, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia's* pacing will prove problematic in the extreme, but I think it's a marvellous, masterful film, as much a sombre treatise on the human condition as a murder story. Sombre, but very funny at times, for instance when the police chief berates the killer for his inefficiency by asking him "is this how we're going to get into the EU?".

The scene-setting and photography are breathtaking, and Uzuner and the charismatic Birsel are wonderful as the tired intellectuals trying to make sense of primordial peasant hatreds.