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WANTS TO FORGET!

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REALLY CHANGE THE WORLD?

ISSUE 32. APRIL 2022. £5.99

THE 100% INDEPENDENT, SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT UK FILM MAGAZINE

# FILM STORIES

"A year after  
winning the  
Oscar, I was  
directing a dog  
food commercial"



**PETER**  
**CAPALDI**

**EXCLUSIVE: Benediction, Terence Davies, directing & more**



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A very warm welcome to Britain's **slightly different** film magazine...

# FILM STORIES

Welcome!

**A**ppreciating that over the past few weeks it's been this year's Academy Awards that have seized the headlines, if you go back to the ceremony that took place on 27th March 1995, it was the year that *Forrest Gump* walked away with a whole bunch of gongs. Against a field that included *Pulp Fiction*, *Quiz Show* (underseen movie, that), and *The Shawshank Redemption*. *Gump* also took Best Picture home. But a little way further down the list of winners was a future Time Lord: Mr Peter Capaldi.

Just as Riz Ahmed has this year, he took home the prize for Best Live Action Short, and at that stage he was building himself a career as a screenwriter and director. All on top of his acting work. Things didn't quite go as he planned or expected, and it's just part of what he chats about in this issue of the magazine. All building up to his latest screen role, and a dream chance for him to work with one of Britain's most revered directors – Terence Davies – for the incoming film *Benediction*.

Peter Capaldi has many film stories in our interview feature this issue, and the rest of the magazine isn't short of them either. Whether you're picking us up for the first time, or a returning reader, you're very welcome, and I hope you enjoy our independent film publication. Our aim? To celebrate films, to shine light on cinema big and small, and to dig up the many tales around the big screen. Thanks so much for supporting us. Oh, and one more thing: if there's a young film fan in your life, might I point you in the direction of our other movie magazine, *Film Junior*? You can find the latest issue of that at [store.filmstories.co.uk](http://store.filmstories.co.uk).

Take care all,

*Simon*

**Simon Brew** (not pictured)  
Editor and founder, *Film Stories*  
[simon@filmstories.co.uk](mailto:simon@filmstories.co.uk)



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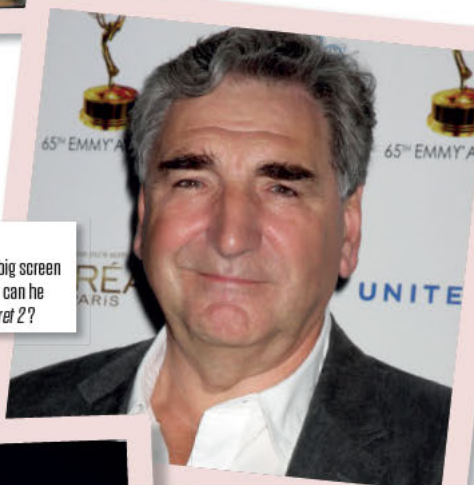
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# Vocal Hero

As he returns to the big screen in Terence Davies's latest film *Benediction*, Peter Capaldi tells us about the past and future of his film career...

Words: Simon Brew

**I**t's not unusual for an actor to have met the director they're going to work with some way ahead of a new project getting underway. In the case of Peter Capaldi though, his introduction to one of Britain's most revered filmmakers – Terence Davies – wasn't via an agent, or anything formal.. Nope, it was Capaldi standing in a queue to get his autograph after a screening of Davies's film *The Long Day Closes* at the BFI. At heart, the man is a fan. You can imagine how happy he was to get asked to be part of a Terence Davies movie many years later. That film would be *Benediction*, and it's a project all concerned have needed to have a bit of patience with.

## Getting the call

It was back in 2016 that Davies first got interested in the idea of bringing poet Siegfried Sassoon's story to the screen. The filmmaker had been in the

midst of a purple patch, finally getting the funding together for a run of movies – after a near-decade period where he couldn't get a film off the ground – including two in two years (2015's *Sunset Song* and 2016's *A Quiet Passion*). He delved into three different biographies of Sassoon, got his script together, and pieced together funding.

"I think we were going to do it I think in 2019," Capaldi remembers of when he was asked to get on board. "He'd asked me earlier to do it, and I was obviously thrilled, but the funding didn't quite come together, and that was what I'd expected. That we'd commit to a project and hope that the funding would come together and follow its ups and downs."

Capaldi takes on the role of the older Sassoon in the movie, with Jack Lowden playing the younger version. The film was set up and ready to go once, and then the money didn't come through, so it was cancelled. Then it was ready again, and lockdown happened. But because it was such a tight, independent film that was



*Peter Capaldi*





days away from filming when Covid first reared its head, it was able to come back together very quickly when the world was let out of its homes again.

Capaldi had first got his love for Davies's work with his classic debut feature, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), an unflinching look at working-class life in Liverpool in 1940 and 1950, "I was deeply moved by it," Capaldi recalls. "And the process, the technique he used to tell that story was so cinematic, but also so poetic."

More than that, he says of the characters in the film, "I felt like I recognised a lot of them. You know, I'm not from Liverpool, and I don't have an upbringing like that. But I come from Glasgow, and my family were quite humble. We lived in a tenement and stuff like that. A lot of the fabric of the story of that film... I recognised the people. And the way he was able to be brutally honest and poetic.

"And that opening! With the ruined street, the rain, and the camera eventually beginning to move through it is so powerful. It's like a sensory trigger. It's taking me somewhere that I'm familiar with. It was just a very powerful and evocative record of a kind of British life and a kind of British people. Good, hard-working, decent people, to whom life is sometimes kind and sometimes not. I find that very moving."



## Delivered

We talk about Terence Davies for a while, and Capaldi reflects with some affection on several of his films. And getting to work with him?

"He doesn't disappoint," he grins. "He tells you what to do, he knows exactly what he wants you to do. You can fight that, suggest other things but, at the end of the day, it's Vermeer or Rembrandt. A master filmmaker. If you want me to stand there, I'll stand there. If you want me to look left, two beats after you've said action, I'll do it. I don't need you to explain why."

Capaldi adds that Davies is hugely serious about his work, and also very light-hearted company. His direction too could get incredibly surgical, down to the number of beats to leave, and Capaldi admits that "normally I'd appear if I was doing a job and say 'I have some ideas about how this should be'. And we might rehearse that and my ideas generally express themselves in a physicality. It might change the way a director may have imagined a scene. I didn't do that with this, because I knew that Terence would have a very definite idea of the picture he was making. However, it doesn't let you off the hook. The energy it takes to suppress your instinct to act is quite fulsome. Also, you can't just sit there! You have to be there."

Given there are actually two actors playing Sassoon in the film, was there much crossover between him and Jack Lowden? "We overlapped on a couple of days," recalls Capaldi, "and we'd have a good talk about Terence, about his way of working, and how we were dealing with that," he laughs. Davies was happy, it seems, to keep them primarily apart. "It's one of those strange situations where you give yourself over to the filmmaker totally – and it's very rare, because there are very few of them left [like that]... he'd be very embarrassed and he'd been laughing at all this!"

## Big screen

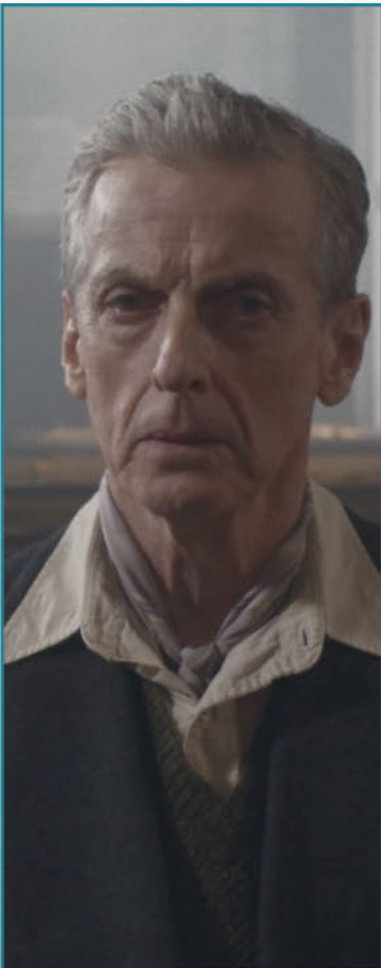
Since he left his arguably highest profile role as the 12th Doctor in *Doctor Who* back in 2017, he's gradually worked his way back to films, appearing in the likes of *The Personal History Of David Copperfield* for his old friend Armando Iannucci, through to last year's *The Suicide Squad* for director James Gunn. Yet dig into his past, and he's written films, he's directed one, he's got an Oscar on his mantelpiece. His interest has always been both in front of and behind the camera.

As a child, Capaldi was always interested in TV shows like *Ready Steady Go* and *Top Of The Pops*, acknowledging "I must have been seven or something!" With *Ready Steady Go*, it was one of the first shows to actually show you the cameras in the





He knows exactly what he wants you to do.  
You can fight that, suggest other things but,  
at the end of the day, it's Vermeer or Rembrandt...







studio, and Capaldi got to work with his version. He made a cardboard studio, with cardboard cameras and cardboard replicas of The Beatles.

"I think I always wanted to be part of that world, and making something."

He would ultimately be turned down by drama school and plumped for an art course instead.

"When I went to art school, there was an ethos there of being creative on a larger scale. People would make little films, and I'd get involved with that. And this was 1976, so music became more interesting too. You could be in a band, because you could [more easily] do that."

The screen beckoned, but breaking in wasn't easy.

"I always wanted to be involved with film, but I couldn't really see how it could be done. I would scan newspapers, and hang around places actors were... I was 17, 18, and I'd try and find my way in citizen's theatre. But nothing ever happened."

## Graphics

The break came via art school. "The BBC used to do short-term contracts and, because I could draw, I applied for a summer contract with the graphics department at BBC Scotland. Wow! They had a rostrum camera, where they used to film opening title sequences. I would secretly at night try and come up with things I could do. They eventually employed me on this contract to provide drawings for various title sequences, and I'd be around the shooting of them.

"I was doing that, but I wasn't 'in'. There was a lot of dreary Letrasetting, and lots of things I couldn't do. They used to give me terrible graphic jobs. But all I could do was draw."



## Strictly Sinatra

A companion piece of sorts to *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*, *Strictly Sinatra* is Capaldi's – to date – sole feature directorial outing. He wrote and directed the film, which starred Ian Hart, Kelly Macdonald, and Brian Cox. It notably holds a place in history as the only film to date to open with a shot of British comedian and TV personality Jimmy Tarbuck. Yet the film didn't click, and when I bring it up, Capaldi is hardly effusive about it either. I think I liked it more than him.

"*Strictly Sinatra* was quite a brutal experience," he laments, offering a clue to just how much of his way he got on the film when he adds that it's "not the title I'd have given that."

It's still worth digging out, however, and remains available to rent on video-on-demand platforms.



Yet being around creative people sparked a few chain reactions.

"Embarrassingly, how I got into films was down to the extraordinary luck of living in a flat with somebody who happened to be a costume designer who worked with Bill Forsyth."

Forsyth, the director who at the time was coming off the back of 1981's *Gregory's Girl*, was casting for his new film *Local Hero*.

"Bill happened to be in the flat one night when I came back from one of my gigs. I'd had too much to drink and dyed red hair, and was all dressed in black. I must have given them 20 minutes on something – and that's how I ended up in that film!"

As for his subsequent jump into screenwriting?

I certainly wasn't 'hot' - winning an Oscar for short film is great... but it's an Oscar for short film

"I really wanted to be an actor, and I'd been stymied in that ambition for a long time. I realised I wasn't really equipped with anything. I wasn't going to be in a Merchant Ivory [*Howard's End*, *The Remains Of The Day*] film, you know? And there wasn't much else I could be in. If it was now, I'd just go to Los Angeles and try and hang around there, but we didn't know anything about that. But I managed to develop an acting career, and was still really interested in filmmaking." He pauses,

thinking about this, adding "my wife laughs, as I still get excited when I see location signs!"

## Scribbles

Still, the next catalyst was a man called John Preston. He's penned, amongst other things, *The Dig* and *A Very English Scandal*. Yet earlier John Preston would share a flat with earlier Peter Capaldi, an experience that the latter likens to not unlike Hugh Grant and Rhys Ifans in the film *Notting Hill* ("he was Hugh Grant, I was Rhys Ifans!").



"John, at the time, was the TV editor – I think – of *Time Out*, and he said to me 'do you want to write a script?' He must have thought I had some capacity for that, so I said 'okay, let's do it.'"

They did. "He was a proper writer," recalls Capaldi. "He was very disciplined. He insisted we had to work a certain amount of hours a day."

The script was duly produced, and while nothing came of their screenplay, Capaldi wanted to do more. Thus, the spark that led to the 1993 film *Soft Top, Hard Shoulder* had been lit. This was the movie that would be Capaldi's screenwriting debut, a British road film in which he also co-starred with Frances Barber.

"I actually wrote it to direct," he admits. "I wanted to do a road movie, because I love road movies. At that time we had *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, and *Midnight Run*. It seemed a ready-made structure, and because I was driving up and down to Scotland all the time, I thought 'I'll try and do that.'"

Capaldi got writing, but inevitably struggled to get financing together. Nobody wanted to back the film with him as director, and eventually, the path to getting it made involved Stefan Schwartz coming in to direct the film.

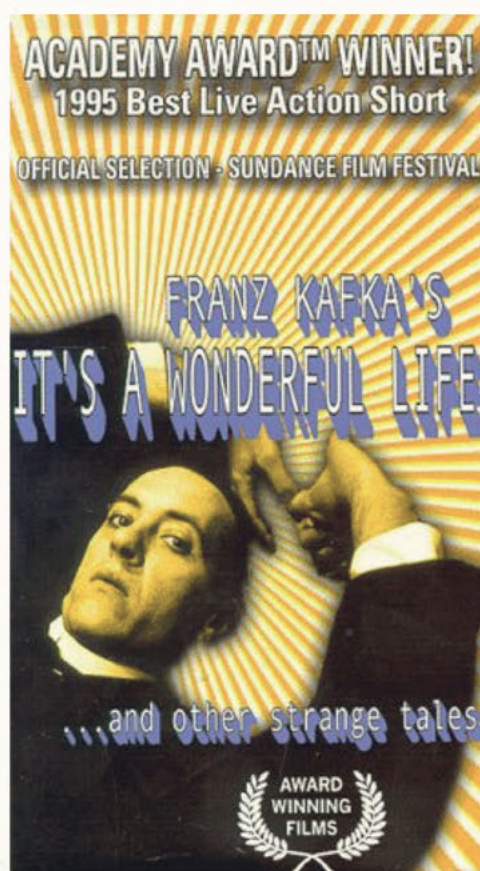
"It was made for absolutely no money, and I remember having arguments at the time because I thought we should really tell people it was made for no money, because that's a story in itself. But I think at that time, the British film industry was kind of changing. Everything pre-*Four Weddings And A Funeral* was the Ken Loach, Terence Davies, BFI kind of route that you had to go.

"Suddenly after [the success of] *Four Weddings And A Funeral* it was Klondike. And I love Ken Loach. I love Terence and all of those guys. And I love Ridley Scott. There's so many movies I just love. It saddens me that Terence finds it so difficult to find the money to make his films. But at the same time, I also like really commercial films, funny films. At the time there were a lot of knockabout American comedies, John Hughes kind of movies."

But, if he hadn't picked up his pen, he didn't feel like he was going to get cast in one of them, let alone get to make one.

"By the time projects got written, they already had directors attached. I was really only writing in order to direct," he admits. "I wanted to explore the idea of directing, I really fancied it. Because I'd been to art school and all that, I thought I had a visual sensibility and wanted to play around with all that stuff."

Of course, by 1993, there was the small matter of a short film on his résumé, one that would take him to the stage of the Academy Awards.



## Franz

"I wanted to get behind the camera, and the only way I could do that is if I generate material myself. And I was very lucky that my wife had a slip of the tongue and said Franz Kafka instead of Frank Capra, and I thought that's a great gag/title all in one! I was also very lucky that Richard E Grant, who was a friend of mine, agreed to play it."

The 'it' in this case being the short film *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life*, that Capaldi made in the first half of the 1990s. He wrote and directed it, and famously, it would win him an Oscar for Best Live Action Short.

"It was like 20 or 30 grand to make it, and I just got the most fabulous people," he remembers. He particularly cites costume designer Hazel

Pethig, and *Brazil*'s production designer John Beard.

"They were so kind and so great... Nowadays people are much more primed for success and for what direction to take, and managing their careers and all that. It was less so then. *Empire* magazine hadn't been around very long. There was the old American movie magazine *Premiere*. So this was really where we learned about movies. *Sight & Sound* magazine, you know, grainy videos and stuff. There wasn't a network of people: you do a short, then you develop a feature, blah blah blah.

"When the short became successful, I didn't really know what to do with it. Inevitably I was approached,



I am going to direct and I have been keen on the idea of directing, but wanted to bring it into a place I can control, and nobody can get upset



and I'd been writing this fantastical thing called *Moon Man*, which was a horror slash fantasy thing, which was more akin to *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life*. Because I'd won the Oscar, suddenly I had an agent in LA, and Miramax wanted to buy it, and New Line wanted to buy it. This fantasy was exploding around me.

"But what you've got to remember, which is common knowledge now, was not common knowledge. It belonged to insiders, so I didn't really know how to operate in that world. I eventually sold it to Miramax and thought 'this is great, I'll just go home and work on this movie. Rewrite it, take their notes', and that's what we did for a year. And I was very, very happy, because I thought we were going to make it."

The script was already on its third draft when he sold it, and Capaldi worked with Bob Weinstein on developing it further.

"Then, they flew me over and pulled the plug on it about a year later. I can remember that everything was done and everything was gone. They pulled

the plug, nobody else would buy the script, because they'd have to pay Miramax too..."

The comedown from Los Angeles was dramatic.

"A year after the Oscars, I was standing in a muddy field in Rickmansworth directing a dog food commercial. I thought 'that's funny... that's how this business works'. I was doing well, then I wasn't, and everything vanished. I neglected my acting career, so I didn't have anything to go back to."

Things didn't improve much when he eventually got what would be his directorial debut off the ground, *Strictly Sinatra*, which was released in 2001.

"I was knocked around quite a lot," he tells me. But did it put him off directing another feature? He pauses to consider this.

"It demands so much of you. You have to love what you're doing. I found it was becoming harder to bend with the wind and balance all the other people. I stepped away from it because I thought I don't want to spend my life doing what other people wanted me to do.

"It was all just getting too hard, and I never had the kind of success to lever that. If it was really hard and you were embraced? That didn't really happen. It was really hard and I was out."

## Future

The following decade and a bit rocket-fuelled his career, though. Firstly, there was the potty-mouthed Malcolm Tucker from *The Thick Of It*, a character he also took to the big screen in *In The Loop*. Then, getting cast as a certain Time Lord earned him fresh fans around the world.

Set free of television schedules, Capaldi is now exploring, and his work in *Benediction* is an example of that. He's also released music, done some work in theatre, and turned up in a huge Hollywood blockbuster. What next, then?

"I'm going to direct something later in the year," he smiles. "I'm working a lot with one of the streamers. You know who they are but they're all very secretive, and we're not allowed to say anything about anything we're doing – which drives me crazy because I had enough of that with *Doctor Who*. I'm going to act in a series for one of them. I'm directing a pilot in December. That'll be fun!"

Any fears of directing this time around, though? Apparently not.

"I think with me, I am happy. What I learned was, the less money involved the better. There are less obligations. I am going to direct and I have been keen on the idea of directing, but wanted to bring it into an era I can control, and nobody can get upset with me if I don't do what they want!"

If they even thought about it, he could always unleash Malcolm on them... 

**Benediction is in UK cinemas on 20th May.**



# Your Letters

Twitter: @filmstoriespod email: letters@filmstories.co.uk

**H**ello and welcome to *Film Stories'* letters page. Here's your chance to ask us questions, to sound off, and to chat movies. We're happy to print longer letters to try to get some old-style conversations going, but we will edit letters for length if needs be.

If you want to be included, send your missives to [letters@filmstories.co.uk](mailto:letters@filmstories.co.uk).

## The Spider-Man mystery!

I have just finished reading Issue 31 of *Film Stories*, which I feel has been the best one yet. I especially enjoyed the four articles *Why Films Disappear*, *Opening Up Cinema*, *One For The Fans* and *The Oldest Video Store In Paris Is Still Standing*. Absolutely excellent work, and I hope to see more articles of this calibre.

I am writing to you in regards to the letter from Will Goble, in which he enquired about some of the *Spider-Man* TV series being shown in cinemas. Whilst I am not old enough to have seen these myself in a cinema, several films were made from the 1977 USA TV series *The Amazing Spider-Man*, starring Nicholas Hammond as the titular hero.

From the 14 episodes filmed, three films were released to US and UK cinemas, under a multitude of titles. They were as follows:

**Movie 1:** *The Amazing Spider-Man* (which was basically the 90-minute Pilot Movie episode of the TV series, in Widescreen for cinemas)

**Movie 2:** *Spider-Man Strikes Back* (the Season 1 episodes *The Deadly Dust Part 1* and *2* edited together)

**Movie 3:** *Spider-Man: The Dragon's Challenge* (the Season 2 finale *The Chinese Web Part 1* and *2* edited together)

The movies have all been shown on BBC One and BBC Two many times in the 1980s and 1990s, often at teatimes (6pm-ish), which is how many UK fans first discovered the show. Other episodes were put together



on video tape, for US and UK release, but these were not 'movies' as such, just paired episodes.

Lastly, you asked about a 3D animated film you saw at the Futurist cinema (RIP) in Birmingham. Well, it's almost certainly going to be *Starchaser: The Legend Of Orin 3D* from 1985, directed by Steven Hahn. You can get it on either Region 1 (USA) DVD or Region Free (USA) Blu-ray in America, for a reasonable sum of about £20 approx., new. Sadly, both are in flat, 2D prints, and not 3D, but at least you can get to relive your youth once more, should you wish to do so. Hope that helps.

*Jon Dracup*, Norwich

**Simon writes:** We had a few people write in about Will Goble's *Spider-Man* letter, and this seems like the perfect summary of just what was showing! Thanks to everyone who got in touch. And on your second point: you're absolutely right! My mystery film was indeed *Starchaser*, a movie I barely remember save for the fact that it was in 3D. That's some much appreciated sleuthing work!

## That Oscars moment

I'm hoping this letter makes it in time for your





next issue. I've just finished watching the Academy Awards, and wanted to express my disappointment. Not just at Will Smith's actions – which presumably everybody is very familiar with by now – but the punch-down joke from Chris Rock as well. Why is it that these shows have to have a streak of meanness to them?

The standout moments for me were the moment when Lady Gaga whispered into Liza Minelli's ear that she had her, and the signing clapping as Troy Kotsur took to the stage to collect his richly deserved Best Supporting Actor award. In the aftermath of Mr Rock's joke and Mr Smith's punch, how many of those moments are really being talked about? A real pity. Up with *CODA*, anyway.

**Rob B**, Cardiff

**Simon writes:** Wherever you stand on 'that Oscar moment', it was still a bit bizarre to see one minute Smith striding onto the stage to give Rock a slap, and then fast-forward to him getting a standing ovation and being afforded the time for the longest speech of the night, when so many winners got their gongs away from the live transmission. The Academy has a lot to sort for next year.

But let's salute and celebrate the winners, not least two films that made our front covers! Let that be a lesson to movie PR folk: a Film Stories front cover clearly, er... has huge, er... power. It's okay, I'll get my own coat.

### Tinke-tonk

Noting that Simon Mayo and Mark Kermode are bringing their BBC radio show to an end, might the future for their witterings be a print magazine? Any ideas where they might be welcome?

**J Isaacs**

**Simon writes:** Hmmmm. Not entirely convinced that you're really a Mr Isaacs, but better say hello just in case...

## Challenge Matt

You tell Matt Edwards what to watch. He goes and watches it. Send your suggestions to: [letters@filmstories.co.uk](mailto:letters@filmstories.co.uk)

### This month: *Joe's Apartment*

Suggested by @AndyWilliams250

SPOILER WARNING!

**T**here are different kinds of weird. Personally, I gravitate towards films that suggest one of the key creative forces has become unhinged from reality in one way or another. *Joe's Apartment* is something else entirely.

*Joe's Apartment* came out in 1996 to unenthusiastic reviews and apathetic audiences. John Payson wrote and directed it, expanding on his own short (which aired on MTV between shows). It's about Joe, played by Jerry O'Connell, who moves to New York only to find people unfriendly and accommodation unaffordable. Chancing on an apartment, he finds himself rooming with an infestation of singing and dancing cockroaches, who soon insert themselves into his life. Zany antics ensue.

It's an odd pitch; you can still feel it straining to be weirder, but it ends up falling back on grating, laboured wackiness. I can't imagine how you capture a story like this, even without the technical demands that come from incorporating dancing cockroaches into the movie. To really get this film to happen in a way that works would have required some combustion that isn't there.

There are issues with the script, which just doesn't have enough of anything that works, from characters to story to jokes. It never seems to know what to do and, despite its wackadoo concept and oddbod characters, it's far from rich with jokes, and banks on its concept and noisy atmosphere to entertain. It all feels like a botched melding of *Wayne's World* and Troma movies.

*Joe's Apartment* is notable for being MTV's first movie and little else. If you don't feel grabbed by the concept of singing smart-arse cockroaches then there's not much else in the film to win you over. However, if this seems your kind of film, grab a hold of it tightly. I can't think of what other movie might scratch the same itch, nor when someone might invest in something like this again. If there's a reason to celebrate *Joe's Apartment*, it's the fact it exists – because it proves that there was a moment in time when this movie was able to fight its way through the studio system and into existence.

It's not my thing because *Joe's Apartment* feels someone trying to make something weird rather than someone weird trying to make something.

***Joe's Apartment is available to rent from digital outlets (that's a weird sentence).***



# Made In Bury

John Domokos and Patrick Tierney talk to Sarah Philip about documentary *Made In Bury: Elephant In The Room*

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**A** documentary offering a unique perspective into the social problems of a Greater Manchester borough, *Made In Bury: Elephant In The Room* is centred on ‘The Elephants Trail’ – a group of people with experiences of addiction, poverty, and homelessness who work with professionals to help their community. But they aren’t just subjects in the film: what makes this documentary so distinctive is that it’s a collaboration between video journalists from *The Guardian* and The Elephants Trail itself. It lets them bring their insight into reporting, editing and filming the issues facing the people of Bury. The film is the second of a wider eight-part series called *Made In Britain* from filmmaker John Domokos and *The Guardian*, in collaboration with disadvantaged and underrepresented communities across the UK.

Initially, The Elephants Trail planned to make a film on its own. Patrick Tierney is an engagement worker for the group and a big part of its decision to go

into filmmaking. He’s overcome his own problems with addiction and mental health.

“Film seemed to be a good way to raise our profile,” Tierney tells me. “We work with people facing adversity and wanted to show some of the issues we thought needed highlighting. We also felt that through film we could harness our experiences to have more impact. But we struggled with a lack of experience in filmmaking and reporting.”

At the same time, Domokos was looking to work with local people who wanted to participate in filmmaking for his *Made In Britain* series.

“John [Domokos] was involved in a project trying to restore people’s trust in the mainstream media,” Tierney says. “He felt that one of the best ways to do that was to give communities the power to create their own news and create a connection between the media and communities. Our purposes aligned and that’s how we set off on this journey together.”

## Zooming

They met in person just before the second Covid lockdown in 2020, but were soon forced to go online. Domokos set up zoom

meetings every week, created video tasks, and came up with different ways to challenge the group. They then moved to working physically together. There were many highs and lows, but through it all they developed a lot of trust between each other and the people they were filming.

*Made In Bury* shows how they help those struggling in their community, their work as community reporters, and the power of the connections they make with people who have similar experiences. In one of the film’s most moving moments, Juliet Eastham from The Elephants Trail shares her mental health struggles with Dave Billington, a man who tried to kill himself. She talks about how being part of The Elephants Trail empowered her and let her use her experiences to help other people.

Throughout the film, they try to step in for a system that’s been overstretched by budget cuts. They raise awareness of the elephant in the room: issues from mental health to homelessness that everyone else ignores. The film ends on a hopeful note as the team reports on the power of local people who come together to stop a rise in rent on their estate.





## Challenges

But filming during the pandemic was difficult. There were the practical problems of filming, the challenges of working face to face, and the issue of people being in masks or reluctant to be filmed. They also had to face mental health challenges that affected their team and many of the people they were filming with.

“It was a rollercoaster,” Domokos says. “We all struggled with the process at times. But it was one of the most rewarding things I’ve done in journalism.”

Domokos shared his skills and knowledge with The Elephants Trail, connected them with industry people, and bought their kit. But he also learnt a lot from working with them. “They all have their lived experience of things like prison, addiction, and homelessness. They know how to talk to people with those experiences and just understand their approach to life and these problems.”

## It’s not just about the size of the audience, it’s how engaged they are and what they do after seeing the film

### The future

*Made In Bury* has already gained an audience on YouTube and *The Guardian’s* website. This spring, it will be screened locally alongside Domokos’s other short films from the *Made In Britain* project.

“We want *Made In Bury* to reach large audiences, obviously,” Domokos says, “but it’s not just about the size of the audience, it’s how engaged they are and what they do after seeing the film. We want to inspire people in communities around Britain to do the kind of work The Elephants Trail are doing.”

Patrick Tierney hopes the film can help others. “We have a real hunger to change things so that

people don’t have to go through some of the stuff we went through. We might not have the resources, but we’re hoping that we can use film in the right way to inspire others.”

The team also wants to start a conversation about how documentaries like this are usually produced. Too often the filmmaker or journalist asks the questions and shapes the narrative, while the genuine voice of the local community is lost. For his part, Domokos hopes that they can inspire others to collaborate.

“We want other people to try this collaborative approach. It is challenging, but it’s how we bring about a change in the system.” 



# Doing it for The Clout

Tom Beasley chats to the cast of British influencer horror *Followers*

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I'd imagine that, to a lot of you reading this, the only thing worse than being crammed into a pokey shared house with three other people is the prospect of those three other people being online influencers determined to document every second of their lives. That's the idea at the centre of the fun British horror movie *Followers*, which depicts a house full of social media-savvy uni students at the centre of something that is either a legitimate haunting or an elaborate prank to supercharge their online platforms. The film is the debut feature of writer-director Marcus Harben, who sadly passed away last year before the movie was released.

Harry Jarvis plays protagonist Jonty – an uber-posh former reality TV star hoping to rehabilitate his image after an on-air disaster got him sacked. He moves into a student house and can't believe his luck when things start to go bump in the night. It's so serendipitous, in fact, that it raises the question of whether known prank artist Jonty might be pulling the strings himself.



I didn't know at the time that my character would be holding the camera so much. That came as a surprise

Jarvis says the character is based on a mixture of reference points, including YouTube controversy magnet Logan Paul and the cast of *Made In Chelsea*.

"I think we do have a tendency to view influencers as either fame-hungry or vapid," Jarvis adds. "I think it just very much depends on the people doing what they do. Because there are some people

out there who you can sort of see through and what they're doing is purely for fame. But there are other people who really promote what they love. And when you do that, it takes a lot of work."

Jonty's new housemates include socially conscious documentary filmmaker Zauna – played by *Black Mirror* star Loreece Harrison – Instagram-loving Amber (Erin



Austen), and Scottish mature student Pete (Daniel Cahill). They also receive periodic visits from a mental health counsellor played by *EastEnders* legend and recent *Strictly Come Dancing* contestant Nina Wadia.

For Jarvis, the process of getting into character also meant having to sympathise with Jonty, despite the irredeemable way he is depicted early in the film.

“I think it’s actually clear during the film, you start to feel sorry for him a little more than think he’s an arsehole. He’s just desperate for some sort of human contact, because everyone who’s his friend, or even his dad, they don’t really like him. He’s just trying to find a connection and whatever, and he thinks the best way to do that is through humour. And then if you don’t get humour, you’ll get fans through the fame and then all his fans will be his friends.”

Loreece Harrison says she sent in a self-tape to Harben for her audition, but didn’t realise just how well that process would prepare her for the movie’s found footage style, for which cinematographer Alan C McLaughlin trusted the cast members to wield the cameras themselves.

“I didn’t know at the time that my character would be holding the camera so much. That came as a surprise afterwards in a meeting with Marcus,” says Harrison. “I did [shoot] quite a lot. And when it wasn’t in my hand, it was in either Dan or Harry’s. It was intense. It was really easy to get lost in it as you were filming. Because, coincidentally, Zauna’s entire motivation was to make sure she got the shot. And I was just terrified of messing the shot up, so it worked really well.”

## Filming

The cast members lived together in the house for the duration of the 12-day shoot and Jarvis estimates that they shot around 100 hours of footage, most of which will never see the light of day. The stars played pranks on each other throughout the shoot and also had a handful of genuinely spooky experiences – including a heavy door which appeared to open by itself and a cast member waking up with scratches on their back – though Jarvis isn’t prepared to chalk them up to an actual ghostly force just yet.

“One of my good friends has a theory that the supernatural is like a radio frequency. When you’re not thinking about it and you’re not tuned into it, you can miss a lot of the signals. But when you are tuned into it and you’re looking for it, it’s like you enter that frequency and other things recognise that. The other explanation is you’re looking for things so you find them.”

The movie mixes horror and comedy as its characters spiral further into the darkness within their new home. Naturally, they never put the cameras down. In fact, they add even more of them – handheld or affixed to various parts of the house. It all makes for an unusual tone which Harben is able to juggle nimbly, balancing grotesque gore and ethereal effects to conjure his 21st century ghost train ride.

“At risk of sounding slightly unprofessional, I found it difficult to look scared because we were having so much fun between takes,” says Harrison. “There’s something about seeing someone who you’re really close with and used to playing pranks on covered in fake blood, and trying to be terrified. I was quite easily gotten by horror before, but now I see things in horror movies and I’m like ‘I know how they did that’.”

## Release

*Followers* landed a UK cinema release in March and is due to arrive on home entertainment platforms later this year. It screened to die-hard horror fan audiences at FrightFest in 2021, which Harrison said was “nerve-wracking” given how knowledgeable and genre-aware that crowd is. Jarvis adds that he “had people coming up to me all night” wanting to share their views on the movie. “I don’t think I bought a drink all night. I’ve never experienced that at a festival before – the absolute love of the genre.”

Jarvis adds that he believed the film would “really split opinion” and so he has particularly enjoyed the warm reception it has earned from genre fans and general audiences alike. “It’s very unconventional. You’d think that horror fans would want less comedy and comedy fans would want less horror. That film could’ve been cut ten different ways, and it was.”

As for the cast, there are big things on the horizon – and they must be big because they can’t tell us anything about them. Harrison has filmed several episodes of an HBO series to air this year, while Jarvis is working on writing a TV series of his own. But first, they’re ushering *Followers* out into the world as a tribute to a filmmaker with enormous potential who sadly never got to make more than one feature.

“I really hope that lots of people come out to see it because I think it’s something really interesting and a beautiful homage to a director who thought about nothing else for a large portion of time towards the end of his life,” says Jarvis. “I think he would’ve really liked that.” 

***Followers will come to streaming later in 2022.***



# All About Muscles

**Ali & Ava's Ellora Torchia on her approach to acting**

Words: Freda Cooper

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**I**t's lunchtime, but Ellora Torchia was up at 5.30 am. Juggling her acting commitments with the family food business means she's always short on time and sleep, but she never seems short on energy. And her work ethos turned 2021 (she was on BAFTA's Breakthrough list and one of *Screen International's* Stars Of Tomorrow) into something of a whirlwind.

That approach has been with her from day one. Until her early teens, she travelled around the world. "My mother was an English teacher with the British Council and numerous charities. Every six months or so, we'd be in a different place, with a different language, a different culture, and fitting into different types of schools – large classrooms, tiny classrooms, home schooling, the works!"

Change was the norm, making her adaptable and resourceful, but money was never abundant. "My parents don't come from moneyed backgrounds. They have always had to work for a living, like being a delivery rider and cleaning toilets. That's what my background is," she explains. "It's something that's kept me

humble. When somebody asks me on set if I'd like a coffee, it still blows my mind that they're actually going to do that for me."

## Director in the making?

By the time the family settled in the UK, she was already interested in creative and performing arts. "When I was about seven or eight and we were living in Sri Lanka, *The Wizard Of Oz* was the school play. I was the youngest and asked to audition, but was told I was too young. Yet somehow I got the part of Dorothy! I just jumped in and I remember loving it, spending weeks learning not just my lines but everybody else's. There's a VCR of me telling somebody on stage they were in the wrong place and telling somebody else they'd dropped their monkey's tail which was fastened on with a safety pin." A director in the making? She doesn't dismiss the idea.

"That element of coming out of my own world and being in somebody else's was something I always had," she recalls. "But the knowledge of it becoming a job came much later. I fell in love with a lot of other artistic things. I wanted to be a dancer for a long time but had no training, so then I found boxing, trained for two years, and thought I'd do that. But I auditioned for RADA when I was 18 and suddenly it felt right. Acting allows me to dip in and out of other people's stories, as well as it being in my own story, and how exciting is that!"

After three years at RADA, she was thrust into acting on TV, appearing in *The Suspicions Of Mr Whicher* alongside Paddy Considine, and *Indian Summers* with Julie Walters. The latter happened because "an old casting agent recognised me. She'd seen me in a community theatre project when I was at school – I love to do things, I have fingers

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When somebody asks me on set if I'd like a coffee, it still blows my mind that they're actually going to do that for me

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in lots of pies! – and, realising that I was now acting professionally, she got me an audition.” The show was an experience she’s never forgotten. “I landed in Malaysia the night before, got onto set, met the director, and then it was ‘action!’ So I jumped in and gave it a go.”

## Acting on instinct

She alternated between TV and film until *Midsommar*, which started a run of working with three distinctive directors. Having loved Aster’s *Hereditary*, she “went to a very hot Budapest and spent a long time there. His approach was very meticulous, very scrutinising of every shot, every moment. He was such a visionary,” she remembers.

“I just absorbed everything. There was a wonderful mix of cultures – the British and American actors and a large community of Swedish actors, so it was lovely to work with people from a different school of acting and learn from them.”

Shooting *In The Earth* with Ben Wheatley took her to a wet, cold location during lockdown, when everybody was staying at home.

“He’s meticulous in his own way,” she says. “He always knew what he wanted, so you just trusted him and I learnt so much about not overthinking. His speed forces you to work in a different way and be more in the moment and not complicate anything with an intellectual approach. You act from instinct.”

Perfect preparation, then, for *Ali & Ava*’s director Clio Barnard, who builds her films on improvisation.

“My first experience of meeting Clio face to face was after the auditions, when I went up to Bradford for what I thought was a costume fitting and turned out to be a rehearsal day,” she smiles. “It was a passion project for everybody – they all put their heart and soul into it. That speed of working with Ben and then working with Clio, who watches you work and is very in the story with you, were two very different things.

## Opening your heart and mind.

“This job is all about muscles. Your whole body and life is an acting muscle. Those experiences you absorb and put into your work build who you are and the more I do this, the more I find that so much of where you’re at in your world somehow interlinks with the kind of work you end up doing. It’s a very fluid, organic process and you don’t know what’s going to happen. You try to open your heart and mind and go with it.”

She’s open to the idea of her muscles taking her to greater heights. “I would love that experience” is her reaction to the thought of following Lashana Lynch and Letitia Wright into superhero territory. But she also loves working in British indie movies – “they’re brilliant and so amazingly creative.” And there’s the food business as well. [ts](#)

***Ali & Ava is out now.***



# Young Lion

Freda Cooper chats to Stephen Odubola about his burgeoning film career

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**O**n Twitter and Instagram, he's @Steviegambles. It comes from a time when young Stephen Odubola and his friends used to play a game called Penny Up.

"You throw a pound coin against the wall and whoever's pound is closest to the wall takes all the pounds behind it," he explains. "Surprisingly, I was very good at it and everybody started calling me Stevie Gambles. It stuck. And it also stuck in the sense that I took a chance on acting, something that's unheard of where I'm from."

He comes from a background where most of his friends were into football and sport.

"But I never glued with sport. My dad loved football, so did my brother, but I loved drama at school. That's where the passion came from and, although I didn't think of it as a career to start with, drama was what I wanted to do." His parents were less than sure.

"They suggested I become a doctor or a nurse. Coming from a Nigerian background, they thought that going to school made it all straightforward, but I wanted to be an actor. Now they really believe in it, but they found it hard to start with."

## Special

His dad also kick-started his love of film.

“He used to buy a lot of DVDs and we’d watch them. It’s part of the reason I loved drama so much. The earliest film I remember watching – I was about seven – was *Titanic*. I cried and wondered how all those people on a screen made me feel all these emotions. This craft is really special!”

Leonardo di Caprio remains one of his acting idols, while more recently he’s drawn inspiration from Idris Elba and Denzel Washington. A hankering to do sci-fi means that Christopher Nolan is on top of his mental list of directors. Not that he wants to restrict himself.

“I’m an actor first and foremost, but I want to dive into different roles – there’s directing, producing, there’s so many other things and I want to acquire as much knowledge as I can. I’m very open-

minded,” he

says. “The main thing I want is roles that challenge me, so that people can’t tell they’re watching me

on screen. Give me a caveman, a lawyer, a person with split identity – I will do anything, because that’s what acting is all about. It’s putting yourself in somebody else’s life.”

## A sense of identity

With his parents’ support, Stephen went to Identity Drama School, following in the footsteps of John Boyega and Letitia Wright.

“It was one of the first established black drama schools and helped everybody have a sense of identity – that’s where its name came from,” he recalls. “Everybody around me was black and in the same position as me, trying to start this new craft. Not everybody goes to drama school but, for me, it opened my eyes to so many different things – the learning process, the work. There’s so many screws and bolts to it and it helped me find them for myself.”

With no doubt in his mind – and no back-up plan – Stephen launched himself into acting and vividly remembers that first audition.

“For me, at the time, getting an audition meant you’d got the part. Boy, was I wrong!” he laughs. “My agent explained to me that there’d be lots of rejections and that it makes or breaks people. I’ve been rejected over 100 times and it’s not just down to talent. It’s about little things and a lot of it is very

subjective and out of the actor’s control. And, yes, there were times when I started to wonder if acting was really for me, but I couldn’t see myself doing anything else. I wasn’t a rubbish actor! So I took rejections on the chin and that’s the attitude you’ve got to have. It’s not for the faint-hearted.”

## No limits

Stephen made his big-screen debut in 2019, sharing the lead with Micheal Ward in Rapman’s *Blue Story*, a film that both hit the headlines and received positive reviews. Already a Rapman fan, an audition was like a dream come true. And the super-prepared young actor, who already had a hunch about the role, landed it. With a lead role came pressure, but “there was no way I was going to make myself look like an idiot, especially in my first feature film. I was definitely

willing to put in the work, to showcase my talent and my ability to act. There were things I didn’t know – like switching

camera lenses, it’s just a whole different experience – but knowing that this was also a starting point for a lot of the other actors made me feel more comfortable.”

This year, we’ve seen him keeping company with Craig Fairbrass and Jason Flemyng in gritty prison drama, *A Violent Man*, which was made during lockdown.

“It’s shot in one cell so you have to really focus on what’s going on with the characters, and that was what I loved about it,” says Stephen. Working with two experienced actors – Fairbrass described him as “a young lion” on Twitter – was a pleasure and a reassurance.

“There were times when Craig and Jason would talk about their experiences. They’ve been in this industry for years and they’re still figuring stuff out. Things that I’d been going through, they told me it was normal and it’s what happens. They really put me at ease and reassured me.”

Stephen’s next project is something different again. A radio drama. He can’t reveal anything about the project, but he sees it as a stepping stone for animation voice acting. Does he have the luck that his social media handle implies? He says so. “But it’s mixed with hard work.” 

***A Violent Man is out now***

**I will do anything, because that’s what acting is all about. It’s putting yourself in somebody else’s life**



# Making Magic

Freda Cooper chats to Stacey Gregg about collaborative filmmaking and *Here Before*

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**S**tacey Gregg hasn't yet found the right word to describe what she does. Until recently, the Belfast born director/writer/actor, whose first feature *Here Before* was released in February, opted for 'storyteller', but it didn't feel right.

"If a door opens, I'll go through it. I call myself an artist, but it's easier to call yourself that when you're working in live theatre," she explains. "I'm drawn to projects. I might still make a documentary and I like experimental film, but I don't really know what's round the corner."

That wide range of interests started when she was young, but she had no idea where they would take her.

"I was very interested in visual arts from a young age, but I didn't really know what that meant or how you could make a job out of it," she recalls. "So I did art at school and tried to make some films with my friends, and then did a degree in English Literature and a master's in documentary film. A sense of wanting to go into that field was starting to emerge, but I don't come from an arts background, so I didn't know how to get started."

## Eclectic taste

Writing became her starting point and, established in the theatre, she took her skills to TV. But after ten years, Stacey "had this itch to scratch". A self-confessed film nerd, she watched a lot of movies when she was young – probably too young. But when she's asked about the first film that really impressed her, the reply is instant. "*Dead Poets Society*. It really spoke to me, really moved me. It felt really soulful and I remember it opening doors in my brain and my heart. I think

she was watching *Candyman* and *Predator* – she went on to discover the works of directors including Todd Haynes and, more recently, Céline Sciamma, whose film *Petite Maman* she hasn't seen yet. "I'm saving it up!" But the time came when she wanted to make her first film, a short. "I had a small idea that was never going to be a feature. It wasn't chronological and I wanted to have a crack at it. I wanted to play with the form and it drew on the part of me that had always been interested in observational documentary."

## I'm less interested in plot and more in how a film makes you feel, how it can transport you

that experience is something I've always chased. I'm a bit less interested in plot per se and more in how a film makes you feel, how it can transport you, and that's a thread that's gone through my theatre work and into my filmmaking."

With an eclectic taste in film – as an eight-year-old

I was very confident in the script because, by that stage, I'd been writing for years and I very much knew who I was." The result was *Mercy*, which she both wrote and directed, and it was an experience that taught her a huge amount about filmmaking, and the approach she wanted to take.



## Still learning

“What’s the thing that film can give us?” she reflects. “It’s that incredible intimacy and stillness and a different mode of engagement. Those are the things that I was experimenting with, and I discovered something about myself as well. It went really, really well.”

“I was eight months pregnant when we shot it and we were in a tiny, two-up two-down house. I was bumping crew and kit out of the way. But, like everything in life, it was a good way to do it and I really enjoyed the process. The edit felt really magical. The alchemy that can happen makes great sense and I’m not precious about sticking to a script. I really got a taste for it and felt this was what I wanted to do. And everybody – my agent, my producers – was incredibly supportive about making a feature.”

Writing and directing go hand in hand for Stacey and, so far, they’ve been two separate roles but she admits she’s “still learning”. For *Here Before*, she wrote and directed the story of a grieving mother fascinated by a little girl who lives next door. Some describe the film as a thriller, others a horror, but given her early taste in films it’s the latter that she favours.

“I can understand why some people describe it as a thriller, but I can see those horror elements quite clearly. There’s something about unresolved grief that’s deeply horrifying on a philosophical level. I absolutely knew I wanted to evoke an experience in the audience and I wanted to make a familiar, domestic world feel incredibly unfamiliar and strange and uncanny.”

## Collaboration

After playing at last year’s SXSW, the film closed the Belfast Film Festival. It’s was Gregg’s first opportunity to see her film on a big screen – and watching it with a home audience made it even better.

“What was really interesting was that a lot of people wanted to stay and talk about the film and personal experiences. I always want to make work which doesn’t stop when the credits roll, which stays with people and for which people have different interpretations. So to be there and see people really respond to it – there’s nothing better.”

For her next feature, *Ballywalter*, she’s taken a cameo role, as well as giving her script to Prasanna Puwanarajah to direct.

“Handing over a script isn’t always easy or smooth, but I’ve been treading a path for a long time that involves collaboration and we grow by that. We even grow by the things that don’t work out or go our way. Rather than be threatened by it or afraid of it, I’m curious because sometimes magic comes out of it.”

It’s a fearless approach that works for her. **18**

**Here Before was released on 18 February.**





# SCANNED & PANNED?

The majority of movies now are filmed digitally — quite a shift in the industry since a major turning point in the summer of 2002 — but has this been to the benefit of the end product?

Words: Thomas H Sheriff



FOR THE  
BETTER,  
RIGHT..?

FOR THE  
BETTER,  
*RIGHT?!?*

**I**n the summer of 2002, a full 20 years ago, *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack Of The Clones* was released. While undeniably financially successful, it has a somewhat spotty reputation to say the least. For many, it came to represent everything wrong with the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy – an overabundance of cold, computer-generated effects, combined with questionable dialogue and wooden performances.

Today, lines in the film have transcended to full meme status: “I don’t like sand,” laments Anakin Skywalker to his lover, Padmé. “It’s coarse and rough and irritating and it gets everywhere. Not like here. Here everything is soft and smooth.”

It’s hardly Keats, in fairness, but while writer/director George Lucas was never a great wordsmith, he was nothing if not an innovator. After experimenting with digital

recording methods for 1999’s *The Phantom Menace*, he fully embraced the technology for *Attack Of The Clones*, making it the first major blockbuster release to be shot entirely using digital cameras. Lucas and his director of photography, David Tattersall, used brand new, state-of-the-art Sony HDW 900F cameras, which recorded high-definition footage to digital tape. The decision would have a profound impact on the whole film industry.



Lucas, Tattersall, and Sony proved that digital video technology wasn't just the domain of home movies and scrappy indies. It was now possible to shoot a big, Hollywood production – *Star Wars*, no less – without touching a roll of celluloid. Say what you will about its love story, but it's hard to deny that *Attack Of The Clones* looks the part.

## Dominance

Digital technology has swept across Hollywood in the subsequent two decades. In 2009, Anthony Dod Mantle became the first person to win a cinematography Oscar after shooting on digital, for *Slumdog Millionaire*. 2013 was the first year where, of the top 200 grossing live-action films, more were shot digitally than on film – a mere 11 years after *Clones*. This year, all but one of the Oscars' cinematography nominations have gone to films shot entirely digitally.

At times, the rise of digital has been seen as a battle, with deep encampments on both sides. In 2011, Christopher Nolan invited a group of big-name directors to watch the first six minutes of *The Dark Knight Rises*. Really, the point of the gathering was for him to argue for the continued use of analogue formats. The lines in the sand, apparently, were drawn. "There is a war raging in Hollywood," declared *LA Weekly*. "A war between formats."

But sometimes it can be hard to understand what all the fuss is about. Most moviegoers have no idea about the difference in formats, and simply don't care. Audiences usually don't want to think about the technicalities of the camera when at the cinema. For a layperson, digital filmmaking has not had an obvious aesthetic impact – in that respect, it's nothing like the transition from silent to sound, or black and white to colour. So why is it such a fiercely debated topic?

## Vision

One reason often given is that film stock has a certain 'look', that digital struggles to replicate (even if most moviegoers have no idea what this is). This year's *The Batman* was shot digitally, then printed on film, then re-scanned to digital, to achieve an apparently authentic 1970s neo-noir feel. JJ Abrams, whose *Star Wars* sequels were shot on 35mm, said that "you just know when you're looking at something shot on film, there's a reality to it – you just can't deny it." Nolan put it more bluntly: "film has tremendous balls... film is oak, digital is plywood."

Increasingly, evidence is mounting which disputes claims like these. In 2019, Steve Yedlin, a cinematographer most famous for his work with Rian Johnson (*Knives Out*, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*), created a

little video he called the 'Display Prep Demo': a series of pairs of shots, one captured using a 35mm film camera, and one using a high-end digital machine. Yedlin showed this to an audience of industry professionals, with clear results: it was impossible to determine which was which. Film's mysterious, inimitable visual quality could be a myth.

Yedlin's point is not to strike back at the Nolan camp: it's to change the way we think about the camera. He believes that the camera does not create the look of the film – that's the result of a series of artistic choices made at all stages of the image-making pipeline. One of these is the choice of film stock, with the stocks themselves being designed by creative people. But the camera is simply a device for recording data, and whether that data goes onto a roll of film or a hard drive is moot. The 'look' of the final image is decided by the people making the film, not the camera. The proof is in the pudding: *Knives Out* has a far more 'classic' look, with its grainy, warm aesthetic, than *Tenet's* smooth, modern spectacle. But *Knives Out* was shot on digital, and *Tenet* was all film.

## Comparison

Director of photography David Raedeker shot *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir: Part II* using a mixture of analogue and digital formats. He's keen to emphasise that, in many ways, film and digital have converged.

"Film stocks nowadays are quite similar to digital. It's not like the old days", he told me. "The colour depth on digital is as good as film now – objectively, they are as good as each other." Most film processing now also begins with simply scanning the film in digitally. "Apart from the recording, everything is digital," notes Raedeker.

So why bother shooting on different formats at all? There's another side to the discussion: not what it looks like to the audience, but how it feels for the crew. Raedeker knows that the technical visual difference between formats can be slim, but that's not the point. "For me, the 'look' is a really small difference. It's much more about what's going on behind the camera."

In short: a film crew working with a tactile, physical medium seems to behave differently to one working with ones and zeroes. "There's this kind of concreteness with film. Everybody knows something is running through the gate, it's something very physical. The loader chucks the last bits in the bin and everybody sees that... it's quite basic."

The nostalgia about celluloid, then, perhaps comes less from the way it looks and more from the way it feels to work with. The presence of a physical



## The nostalgia about celluloid, then, perhaps comes less from the way it looks and more from the way it feels to work with



medium can ground the crew in something concrete, engendering a more collaborative, focused atmosphere. This isn't surprising: surveys suggest that jobs involving physical labour are roughly twice as rewarding as non-physical roles. It could be that the physical aspect of shooting film makes it simply more enjoyable for the crew, which would explain why so many industry professionals are fighting to keep it alive.

This might all seem overly romantic – especially to producers, who would have to spend vast sums on film stock just to keep their crews a little happier. But that's not really the point. "There's a relationship when I film the actors – I influence them as well; I'm the audience in that moment," says Raedeker. "Maybe it's my imagination, but it just feels very

different to shoot on film. The actors have a different awareness."

Perhaps the format is important to the film, but in a more nuanced way than just through grain or sharpness. "The 'look' is also the performance, the feel and the atmosphere of the piece. There's always a connection between the content of what you're filming and how it's done. Form follows the content, or whatever you want to say. And then it's feeding back, going the other way."

### Sprockets

Director of photography Andrew Dunn, whose credits across over 40 years range from *The Bodyguard* and *Gosford Park* to *Hot Rod* and *Downton Abbey: A New Era*, has worked on both sides of the digital revolution. He agrees that shooting film brings a certain intangible delight to the filmmaking process.

### Future

In much the same way as vinyl has resurged as a format for music, so new research suggests that film stock is set to remain in vogue. Both in still and film photography, there's growing enthusiasm for shooting on film stock. However, there's a danger it's become a format for those with the resources to use it.

The cost of developing film is making it prohibitive, for instance, for many still photographers. Likewise, there's an incumbent cost that comes with physical film that digital doesn't come lumbered with. For indie filmmakers in particular, there's no shortage who'd love to shoot on 35mm, but as it becomes the exception rather than the norm, so the price of doing so continues to exclude them.

"There's a moment in the theatre when the curtains open and the performance starts, and I think on film there's a certain excitement about the curtain opening."

But he's also aware that digital brings its own benefits. In 2003, Dunn shot *The Company* with Robert Altman digitally. This meant that they could shoot longer takes than was possible with film.

"Altman would create a situation and then give the actors freedom to move and do what they like within that, without the discipline of a length of a roll of film," Dunn recalls. "It was a benefit to him."

Another benefit is the low cost of digital video, which allowed The Lonely Island comedy troupe to build an online following, which eventually led to *Hot Rod*.

"They wouldn't have got going if it hadn't been for the digital revolution. And you can call it



a revolution,” Dunn stresses. “Digital opens up the world to people who otherwise may not have got a chance.”

There are other practical conveniences of digital. Everyone in the crew can have a monitor that shows, in high definition, exactly what’s being recorded.

“From a craft point of view, it’s a huge difference,” says Raedeker. “Every department can see exactly what they’re getting.”

Digital doesn’t get scratched, and it doesn’t burn, and it lessens the environmental impact that film stock can have. But for a creative, or indeed for a film fan, these are pretty quotidian arguments: there are no awards for convenience and cost-effectiveness, and it’s rare to hear anyone argue for the visual qualities specific to digital, in the way that film is fetishised.

Why is this still the case when, as Yedlin illustrated, the visual differences between film and digital can be pretty much eliminated? Well, it’s hardly surprising that Kodak, which has been in the business for well over a century, makes film stocks that look good. A digital sensor is a much more passive observer. “Film naturally has a third dimension, whereas digital wants to be two-dimensional and flat,” says Dunn. “So through lighting, choice of lenses, what we can do in post, we’re constantly trying to get another dimension to it.”

This isn’t a bad thing. With the new possibilities offered by digital technology, Dunn suggests there may be creative freedom.

“You can look at it on the set and say, I think we can actually push this further. We can go hotter in the background, more flare, less focus... Because you’re seeing the image there and then.”



There are also more options in post-production: “There are more tools at your disposal to play with the image in post. On film you can alter the colour a little bit, you can alter the density a little bit, but you can’t really alter the contrast and other things.”

## Freedom

These sorts of freedoms open up a wealth of creative opportunities for filmmakers using both formats. Take *The Souvenir* as an example. Raedeker says, “It was supposed to be a montage of different textures and formats to reflect the different stages our main character was in. Her relationship with her lover didn’t go anywhere – it was kind of stuck. And so that rigidity seemed to be more fitting for digital.”

These are nuanced artistic choices that transcend a simple question of convenience or superiority. “You just have to see what the format does to you; and not just visually, on a much broader scale. It might be very personal.”

## End of the story

In the two decades since *Attack Of The Clones*, the fundamentals of filmmaking haven’t changed.

“What we do is tell stories,” says Dunn. “And I just use this thing – a camera – and it’s a means for us to tell a story. From The Lonely Island guys on *Hot Rod*, to Julian Fellowes and Robert Altman on *Gosford Park*, it’s all about storytelling.”

This hasn’t changed for all of human history, whether we’re scratching woolly mammoths on a cave wall or projecting an army of clones onto a cinema screen.

“What really counts is something else,” says Raedeker. “At the end of the day, people want to be entertained.” 



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## Jim Carter talks to us about returning for *Downton Abbey: A New Era* – with a generous dose of *Top Secret!* and *Brassed Off* too...

**R**eleased in 2019, the *Downton Abbey* movie might not have done comic-book movie numbers, but with nearly \$200m banked, it ensured pretty instantly that a follow-up would be along soon. And so it has proven: in fact, when it was announced, *Downton Abbey: A New Era* seemed to come together quickly. Confirmed in early 2021 with at that point an eye on a Christmas release, it seemed to rocket along.

One of the key components of the *Downton* cast is Jim Carter, an experienced, instantly recognisable actor of stage and screen for several decades. As *Downton*'s Carson, the butler with a heart of gold, he's earned a fresh legion of fans, and he's back again for *A New Era*. But for him, it wasn't quite as fast at coming together.

"It didn't feel that quick!" he tells me from the shoot of the upcoming *Wonka* movie. "I think the first film came out God knows when because

I can't remember anything, but from our point of view there seemed to be quite a delay." Carter notes that the decision to make both *Downton Abbey* films was "economic", but also the problem is finding time in the calendar of series creator and writer Julian Fellowes.

"That took a while. It seemed quite slow to us I think. We filmed it last April, May, June, during the pandemic, which brought its own difficulties in a way.

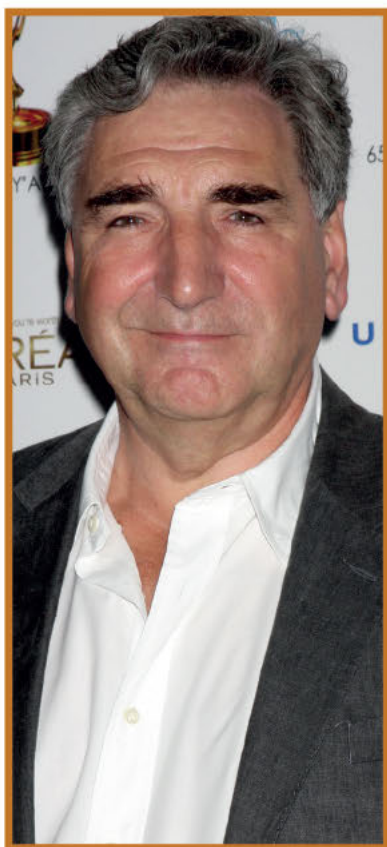
Get ready for your violins: the story gets heart-wrenching from here.

"For some of us, the difficulties worked in our favour. Some of the cast went to the south of France and had to be put up in a hotel with a swimming pool near the Mediterranean coast for a week, in a bubble. It was rough, but we managed."

I commiserate on his hardship.

"People just don't understand, Simon," he tells me. "They don't know what we go through!"





## Travels

The new film has been made under a veil of Marvel-esque secrecy. Carter had only seen the film himself the day before we spoke.

"I think the fans will love it. I think there's everything that the fans will want in this film. I mean, all the regular characters are there, and some spicy new characters who bring a bit of joy to the world. We open out because it's no secret we go to the south of France, so that broadens the appeal."

He'd already joked to me that it never seems to rain in the world of *Downton Abbey*, and of the new film he adds that "it's what people want from *Downton Abbey*: they want lush pictures, big skies, people falling in love, a little bit of intrigue – and it's all there."

If it hits big (again), I put to him that the modern path of cinema is spin-offs and his own merchandising line.

"What a dreadful thought," Carter laughs. "Although illegitimately there are a few

## You're given a weird kind of public profile for being a butler in a TV show. And it seems a little bit unjustified

Carson artefacts knocking about. Several cut-out butler's trays that you put next to your armchair and put your cup of tea on, and they look suspiciously like me. I don't want a spin-off or any particular merchandise, but maybe I could copyright the eyebrows!"

## Origins

Jumping aboard *Downton* in the first place seemed like a good idea at the time. It was positioned against a BBC remake of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and it was unclear which posh-house TV drama would emerge victorious.

"I'd never done a series before," Carter recalls of being offered the role of Carson. "I'd been in things like *The Singing Detective* or *Cranford*, but nothing that would

recur like this. And I wouldn't have taken this job in my 30s or 40s, because it would have nailed me down too much. But I was 60ish at the time, and I thought I'll give this a go. If Maggie Smith is in it, that's a stamp of approval, as she doesn't do much TV. And it was a gamble I was prepared to take".

The huge success took pretty much everyone by surprise.

"We've all have to come to our own accommodation with it," he considers. "I'm less frenetic about doing other work, but then you've also got to think you're given a weird kind of public profile for being a butler in a TV show. And it seems a little bit unjustified somehow the amount of attention you get from that. So you've got to square that with



your own conscience. I've got more involved in my charity work and stuff like that, to use the profile to parlay into doing something good as a payback."

Carter thus works with the likes of Marie Curie as an ambassador, the Special Olympics, and a cause that uses magic to help children with brain damage.

"I don't wish to sound pious or pompous here, but that's the equation. Because, you know, I don't think being a butler deserves some monster attention."

## Fringes

Carter grew up in Yorkshire, moving south to study at the University of Sussex. It was there that he found his way into acting.

"Five pounds a week, fringe theatre, thank you very much, the gateway to paradise opened there for me," he chuckles. He did fringe theatre and theatre a lot in the 1970s, the first decade or so of his career.

"Then I started doing films, and I think I got onto a list where American companies like HBO and Hallmark thought I was trustworthy, and that I could play characters in their film."

## Path

Carter donned all sorts of medieval costumes as roles took him around the world, but he'd battled to get that far. Today, he notes, it's a lot more straightforward to at least see the opportunities coming out of drama school, but against that, the likes of repertory theatre has declined in the UK. Has the erosion of that cost us a little, I wonder?

"I think so," he says. "I mean I might sound like an old-fashioned view, but you build your acting muscles in theatres. And also in theatre, you get cast against type. Film and telly, I'll always be cast as someone with a big booming presence and a big voice. In theatre, you can play against type. You can make mistakes, be rubbish, and not too many see it. And you can make an impact and do different things."

## Déjà Vu

For a certain generation, Jim Carter will always take pride of place in their film collection as Déjà Vu in the 1980s comedy favourite *Top Secret!* Carter clearly loves chatting about the film too. "That was great wasn't it? That was my first film!"

It was Val Kilmer's too, directed by the *Airplane!* trio of Jerry Zucker, David Zucker, and Jim Abrahams. Carter plays Déjà Vu, a crucial member of the Resistance force in a gleefully silly comedy. And when Carter appears on screen? Well, you might just have seen him somewhere before...

In terms of playing against type, his enthusiasm for his villainous role in the film *The Good Liar* is hard to get across in words, but it was a very different role – when director Jon Amiel on *The Singing Detective* cast him against type as a "meek and mild dad" – that changed his career.

"He cast me in that, [and] it altered people's perceptions of me, and allowed me to play a broader range of things. I worry for young actors, not just the fun of doing theatre, but you bond together as a gang."

## Heart

Several terrific films are found on Carter's CV, but few feel more special than Mark Herman's late-'90s comedy drama *Brassed Off*, a film about a mining community in Yorkshire and its brass band. To this day, it plays to sold-out screenings around the UK.

"*Brassed Off* is one of the things that I'm most proud to have been involved in. I thought that had genuine heart. Real humour and political edge, sort of everything I wanted in a film.

"It was a very strange thing, because we made it in Grimethorpe, and I used to travel from Harrogate. I grew up in posh Yorkshire, but my mother's family were from South Yorkshire. And we used to travel through the mining villages like Grimethorpe to get to my mother's side of the family. And they were always black as pitch those villages, because of the mines. Then the mines shut down, and those communities





## Flash!

Jim Carter's first credited film role was *Top Secret!*, but it could very easily have been 1980's *Flash Gordon*. He was certainly on set, but you just couldn't see him through the crowd.

"I had a mate in the theatre," he remembers of getting into the film, "and he said 'how tall are you?'" Carter told him he was six foot two, to which his friend replied "ring this number and tell them you're six foot five."

The ruse worked.

"We stood around in the background, and all the meetings of the tribes were there. We had blue masks on, blue costumes. And because there were so many scantily clad women around, and octopus people, and Brian Blessed, you never really saw us. But I earned 250 quid, which was unbelievable at the time, for four weeks! It was heaven," he cackles.

were largely decimated, because they were given, you know, 23 grand to pay off.

"I couldn't believe filming there. Was this really England in the 1990s? It felt like deprivation you might expect from some remote parts of Eastern Europe."

Carter also remembered driving down at weekends to visit his wife, Imelda Staunton, who was filming *Twelfth Night* in Padstow on the Cornish coast, at the time.

"It was like crossing continents and time zones," he laments, but adds that *Brassed Off* had impact.

"I'm not saying it changed everything, but we've been in touch with community groups in Grimethorpe since, and they told us they felt the film stood up for the place, and they were proud of it, which I'm pleased about."

## Laughs

Carter's dry delivery leads to some of the film's big laughs too, and I wonder if comedy has an appeal to him? Well, yes and no.

"I like it when Mr Carson's odd line... I latch on to the moments where he's allowed to be funny. The telephone, or the invention of the iron! I love those moments."

But, I wonder, hasn't he found a home in films with a sense of humour, that also have community at their core?

"I like those sort of things," he admits. "My favourite kind of

**I've done a magic act. I've done circus things. I've done fringe theatre. I've had a show stop because Salvador Dali walked through the audience...**

film in the whole world is one of those let's put a gang together kind of film," he says, as we start chatting about another he made of that ilk, *Swimming With Men*.

"It sort of said something quietly about men's society, men's friendships, that men can't just sit around and talk, they have to have a sort of an activity."

He notes a problem or two in the film, but adds in *A Private Function* too, as another of his films with a community feel. It's not always been plain sailing, but Carter is happy with his lot.

"I've been lucky to work. I've done a magic act. I've done circus things. I've done fringe theatre, I've had a show stopped because Salvador Dali walked through the audience, and the whole audience walked out and left us – we packed up and went home!"

## Chocolate

We spoke the day before Carter wrapped filming on *Wonka*, the Paul King-directed prequel story of Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka. He's clearly had a ball making it. I can't,

however, persuade him to get *Top Secret! 2* going, although he did admit that he was in Los Angeles a few years back and he met with two of the original's directors, Jerry and David Zucker.

"We all met for lunch, and had a good reminisce about when Val Kilmer kissed me on the cheek."

For now, though, the focus is on getting *Downton 2* into the world, at a time when it seems people are finally going back to cinemas in numbers.

"I think the delay probably helped us. The release date was initially December, and that got put back, then March, that got put back. I sense there is now a desire to get out and go to the cinema, go to the theatre, go to restaurants. Hopefully, that'll work in our favour, and people will enjoy the escapism of the film, after the dreary and frightening times we've been going through."

If it works, don't rule out *Downton 3*. But count me as someone who'd happily queue up for a *Top Secret! 2* ticket as well if all concerned could be persuaded. **TS**



# From HUMANS to HOMEBOUND

Tom Goodman-Hill talks to  
Lauren Miles about playing  
a character with an  
edge in a new  
psychological  
horror



**T**hough he'd never done a horror film before, *Humans* actor Tom Goodman-Hill found a lot to love in the script of *Homebound*, a psychological horror he stars in with Aisling Loftus. It's helmed by first-time feature director Sebastian Godwin and produced by his brother Hugo. Goodman-Hill took on the role swiftly after being asked – "I'm pretty sure the number one choice dropped out," he modestly says. In the film he plays Richard, a character with a big personality who brings his new wife Holly (Aisling Loftus) to meet his three children. Upon arrival, they find the children's mother Nina is missing and the kids are acting strangely. What happened in the house before they arrived?

"I loved its sparsity; I loved its creeping sense of dread, and I love the sense that the house is a character in the film as well," Goodman-Hill says of the script. *Homebound* was filmed entirely at Wiveton Hall in Norfolk, and the house was a big draw for the actor, among other things.

## It can be such a tricky industry for children. Not even children, for young actors... It can be crippling, it can be demoralising

"I knew it was going to be an amazing house, and that it was going to be pretty special that we were shooting in there and the grounds around it. And I really wanted to work with Aisling again, because although we did *Mr Selfridge* together we didn't really have many scenes together. It was a lot of things

coming together that made it worth doing."

It's also the first time he's made a horror film.

"I'm always game for picking up on a genre I've never gone near before. I thoroughly enjoyed it. A lot of the time I tend to play everyman characters who are quite straightforward, so to play someone who has a real edge to him was very attractive as well."

Richard is certainly an interesting character, and the film likes to keep you guessing about what kind of person he is. As Goodman-Hill puts it: "he has an unexpected dark side that you don't see coming. And you're never quite sure what it is that's provoked it, you just feel it coming from a long way off. Like it's something that's just surging up inside him and then just spills over."

### Turning

Richard is extremely different to the actor's previous roles, so would he take on something similar again? Turns out, he's pretty open-minded. "The same rule applies to every job I do – if the script is good, I'm there!"

An interesting aspect of *Homebound* is how none of the characters have a past, they simply exist in the moment and within the narrative of the film. Goodman-Hill leaned into this ambiguity during filming. "We were careful not to be too specific about backstory, because I think part of the quality of the

film is it's almost dreamlike. You never quite know where anybody is from, and it's more about the atmosphere and the relationships between the five characters".

While it leaves questions about what happens before the film starts, the ending is equally ambiguous. "A lot is left unresolved, and I think that's a good thing. I'm a big fan of what I suppose you could call a European sensibility, to leave questions unanswered at the beginning and leave even more questions unanswered at the end. I think that's good; I think it leaves you open to discussion. It leaves a very lively relationship between the film and its audience."

### Supporting the industry

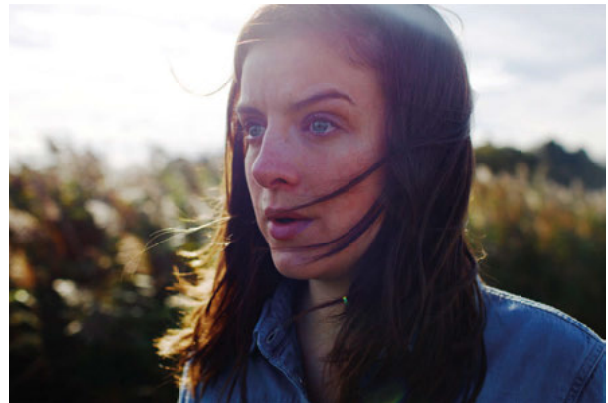
*Homebound* was made with help from BBC Film and the BFI as part of Film London's Microwave Scheme, which enables new filmmakers to produce their first feature film.

"Doing a film like this is so important, because there's not enough funding for the industry, and there needs to be more funding for the industry, and what the industry brings back to the national economy is huge. They're not paid their dues, really," Goodman-Hill explains. "I'd do another one in a heartbeat."

He's an actor who knows the importance of low-budget films, having recently completed *The War Below*, which also had a small budget, but which he describes as "one of the most enjoyable experiences."

"Low-budget movies are there to be enjoyed and treasured, and they should be funded," he says. "You find so many amazing, undiscovered talents doing work like this."





The three young actors who play the children in this film are certainly among that talent. Goodman-Hill points out that *Homebound* was filmed in 2017, and that Hattie Gotobed, Lukas Rolfe, and Rafiella Chapman have grown a lot (professionally and physically) since: “I think they’re all adults now!” Chapman, who plays Richard’s youngest child Anna, has since had roles in *His Dark Materials* and last year’s John Lewis Christmas campaign.

Sebastian Godwin may have been a first-time feature director, but the actor has nothing but praise for him and the whole experience of making *Homebound*.

“The best thing about Seb is he will do the thing that’s best, not the thing that’s quickest. Which is true even now. It’s taken a long time for the film to come out. He only wanted it to come out when it was ready.”

During the shoot, the whole cast and crew stayed in Wiveton or nearby Blakeney, and Goodman-Hill expresses that smaller-scale productions often work best: “It was the joy of not having any travel to do. There were no massive logistics involved outside of actually getting into the space and shooting the film, and that’s a fantastic thing because you get so much time to think about what you want to do”.

Beside film, Goodman-Hill’s other passion is radio.

“I absolutely love radio, because radio is the closest medium to film. It’s like a film for your head, you fill all the images in in your head. Everything just comes alive, and I think the cinema of the mind is the best cinema you’ll ever go to.”

## Teaching and learning

Goodman-Hill has been a familiar face on our screens for a while now, but before turning to full-time acting he was a teacher.

“Teaching is the greatest profession in the world,” he enthuses. “I really enjoyed planning lessons and teaching, but I couldn’t keep on top of the paperwork. I was an absolutely terrible administrator.”

Asked by a friend to move to London and form a theatre company, he took a chance on acting full-

time, and went on to train at Bristol Old Vic. Despite the career change, the actor still has lots of thoughts about working with children in the film industry.

“It can be such a tricky industry for children. Not even children, for young actors in their late teens and early twenties going into it. It can be crippling, it can be demoralising. It can take away all your confidence, or give you so much confidence that you think you’re unstoppable, and then when everything goes wrong you don’t know how to handle it.”

When it comes to protecting young peoples’ mental health in these situations, he has some simple advice.

“If you’re working with young people on a set, the best thing you can do is support them and let them know that this isn’t real, this isn’t reality. What you’re doing is extraordinary, and people are going to love that you do it, but don’t tether yourself to it in such a way that you don’t have anything else going on in your life.”

Of course, this advice comes from his own personal experiences.

“From one minute to the next, you get your ego boosted and then just as quickly it comes crashing down. You have to manage your mental health so carefully in this profession, because no one else is going to do it for you.”

At the moment, he’s producing a documentary about the history of lying in politics, called *The Power Of Lies*. Filmed throughout March, it gathers a mixture of interviews with MPs, campaigners, and historians to document the fight to make lying in politics illegal.

“We’re very excited about it, and it feels very of the moment,” he tells me. Although he does add that “world politics has kind of overtaken domestic politics a bit.”

Who knows what state it’ll all be in by the time the documentary is released? [FS](#)

**For now, *Homebound* is in cinemas on 1st April and on digital on 4th April.**



This article will  
**BLOW YOUR**  
**MIND!**

The internet is awash with clickbait entertainment news — but for young writers, it can be the only way in. Here, one person tells us their story. Names have been changed.

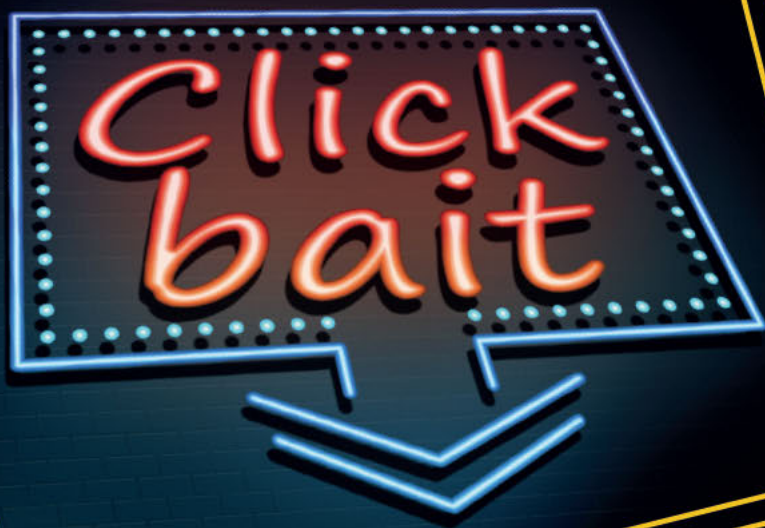
*Words: Joe Gardner*

**T**here was a time, difficult though it may be to believe, when if you were in search of ten reasons why Spider-Man could defeat Batman in a fight, you'd have to imagine them for yourself, or argue about them with your mates. Then the internet happened, and before long we were blessed with definitive answers, not in the tens but in the thousands.

As a young nerd and budding writer fresh out of film school, I desperately wanted to be a part of that. So when the opportunity came my way, I naturally leapt at it (incidentally, the natural ability to leap counts among one of the reasons Spidey could defeat Bats).

I was supremely naive to the intricate and labyrinthine world of film journalism back then: any form of writing my opinions in exchange for a degree of exposure (oh how the connotations of that word were different in those days) was enough for me. In 2012 a film and pop culture website I frequented posted a call-out for submissions with a view to regular writing work, promising readers in the thousands and personal autonomy over the content. Thus, with a wealth of geeky trivia at my disposal, as well as knowledge of the portmanteau 'listicle', I submitted a recent blog I'd written. The editors quickly responded, smitten with my ability to break my opinions down into ten bite-sized chunks, and I was given a job. It was even a paid job: a tidy sum of





ten pence  
per thousand clicks. I

was on cloud nine.

My task was made immediately clear to me: I was expected to submit no fewer than three articles per week, all within the format of numbered reasons that could be spread over as many separate pages (as each click meant revenue to the company, so an article that required ten or more clicks to read in full would increase revenue tenfold). Beyond that criteria, I had freedom to do my own thing with the role. Except when I didn't.

### You won't believe what happens in this paragraph!

Once I'd submitted my first two or three articles, I started receiving more and more regular correspondence from the deputy editor (the editor himself seldom made contact) informing me that I needed to pay closer attention to the 'commission list' — this was a hub of article titles suggested by the core team that the freelance writers like myself were expected to turn into articles. As such, between writing my own stuff, I had to take on the broad and undetailed opinions of someone else and think up ten detailed reasons why I agreed with them (whether or not I did). In one instance I was expected to write an article on why a recently released movie was essentially a big-screen version of *Game Of Thrones*. I scraped the ten reasons together and the final product was well-received by the editors and widely read, but

in  
truth  
to this  
day, beyond  
sharing a director  
and some hairstyles,  
I really don't consider the  
properties concerned very  
similar, even though posterity is  
fated to suggest that I do.

It wasn't too long before  
cloud nine began to disperse  
for me. More and more I was  
being harangued via email  
to re-edit my articles to fit  
an overall tonal standard,  
which was generally  
snarky, speculative and  
sensational. On that latter  
point, I did once receive an

email from the editor himself — which  
was a big deal to me — informing me that one of my  
most recent submissions wasn't nearly "sensational"  
enough. I duly set about adding what I felt was  
an adequate dollop of sensation to my work and  
resubmitted, only to be contacted subsequently by the  
deputy editor, who told me, in these exact words and  
caps: "When the EDITOR tells you to do something,  
you do it properly or you face the consequences.  
Sort it."

I tried, but ultimately the piece was taken off  
my hands, rewritten, and published to the outlet's  
sensational liking. As such, there is an article out  
there that has my name on it but is probably less than  
two-thirds my work all-told.

### What happened next will AMAZE you!

I'd never experienced this level of micromanagement  
in my adult life before. I haven't since. Not long after I  
joined, the company found itself in something of a PR  
predicament when it emerged that two of its longest-  
serving and most prolific writers had been caught  
'being inspired by' content from the writers' forum of  
a considerably more renowned pop-culture website.  
When this news broke, a public message apologising  
for the controversy was posted, reassuring the readers  
and other writers that swift action would be taken,  
and that the two guilty persons would no longer work  
for them. Others joined shortly thereafter with similar  
writing styles.

Following on from this, another of its writers came  
to prominence after a video of himself angrily ranting  
and raving about an unreleased superhero film went





viral. The editors quickly recognised the possibilities of capitalising on this: there were comments in the hundreds grilling this chap, lambasting his opinion and intelligence, and (I'm keeping it civil here) telling him what they'd do to him if ever they met, and what he should do to himself otherwise. Before long, this writer/vlogger became the face of the website and was tasked with doubling down on this take, and regularly. The hits, and the comments, kept coming.

In my personal opinion, the company was now directly cashing in on the abuse and threats towards one of its staff members. When said staff member requested to move away from this as he felt it was harming his professional reputation as well as his mental health, he was swiftly let go. 'Measured and thoughtful critical analysis will never match the revenue of snark and outrage-generation' was the wisdom behind his dismissal. I was gradually developing a greater understanding of the web (greater understanding of the web; another reason Spider-Man would win).

### Readers are all saying the same thing about this bit

After a couple of years, my time came too, and personal tragedy was the reason for my dismissal. With the sudden passing of a close relative and the subsequent funeral, I found I did not have the time to finish the three commissioned articles I was currently working on. Duly, I contacted the deputy editor asking if my deadlines could be extended by a couple of days so I could attend this funeral. A day passed without response. The following day, I received a curt, concise and formal email (which wasn't personally addressed to me, leading me to suspect a template), informing

me that the company would not be taking any of my submissions. No reasons at all were given, let alone ten.

My brief time as a put-upon clickbait generator had come to an end, save for a brief dalliance with the same company a couple of years later. When I discovered that it was looking for – specifically – a *Doctor Who* editor, I went against my better judgment and decided to throw my hat into the ring, feeling I had some expertise in this area. The TV content editor got back to me to tell me he liked my submissions and we ended up having a fairly pleasant back and forth which seemed promising, until I mentioned that I had written for the website before. Upon this, communications abruptly ceased. Over time, so did my visits to that website. Suitably jaded by my experience and very much over its philosophies on how to write about pop-culture, I no longer wished to give them the time of day, not least because each of my clicks meant pennies in the pockets of the editor.

I have, however, kept one eye on its Glassdoor page over the years, and found it awash with tales of experiences similar to my own. As I lived very far away from their HQ, I never once set foot in its offices, but testimony tells me that working life on site was no less unpleasant. Amongst the allegations were stories of staff being treated appallingly, and a member of management who seemed to be cut off from the majority of staff. It is little wonder that this person's own persona filtered down into the – in my view – mean-spirited and combative nature of his publications. As mentioned, I have not visited that website in several years, so I can only idly hope that things are different there now.

But I can think of at least ten reasons why they're probably not. 



# NEW BLOOD



Cathy Wippell

## Screenwriter and filmmaker Cathy Wippell talks to Laura Jean Marsh about her new project

**C**athy Wippell reached out to me on social media a few months ago to ask for advice on bringing her voice further forward in the film world. To say she didn't need help is an understatement, however. Full of beautiful creative fire and the skills to back it up, she's soon to release the film *Bloom*.

It's a stunning short focusing on the after effects of sexual attacks on women, and the importance of a support network for women who have experienced this. Sadly, this is an area I and many other women can relate to.

**What inspired you to write *Bloom*, and how did you get the film off the ground?**

I was in Manchester at the time that the whole Sarah Everard thing was kicking off, and we attended a memorial protest outside the Emmeline Pankhurst statue. I was stood there thinking 'I've got to make a film about this'. We see a lot of sexual assault in film in terms of progressing a male character arc, or it's more often way too violent. You don't need to show that kind of thing, and without trigger warnings as well. These films are often made by male directors, which I find questionable ...

**TRIGGER WARNING**  
Sexual assault



and it's like 'why are you telling this story when it's not yours to tell?'

We do see so much violence towards women in film, but we were really strict about having an all-female cast and crew from the beginning. It was interesting because there's not really a story to *Bloom*. It's quite experimental. There's no conflict really. It's this warpy fantastical element exploring how you navigate this thing that's really unspeakable.

**There was a really gentle closeness between the three friends in the story. It was quite subtle, and we just have this aftermath of them supporting each other. What inspired you to choose that setting, with the three friends by the lake?**

A big thing from the offset was the closeness of the three friends. And a character in itself is actually Mother Nature. Because as women our bodies are so connected to nature. We wanted to set it in this natural environment from the onset, with lots of flowers and leaves and water. The protagonist has two epiphanies: one where she's by herself and one where she's got the shock of this cold water, with her friends.

Experiencing the world, by herself and then with her friends, brings her to be able to talk about these things. The closeness with her friends was important, but the closeness with nature was really relevant with what we wanted to say. Trauma is linked to location, and I think a lot of incidents happen in these grey, urban settings, and the nature was a kind of escape from that.

**You were shocked when you went into post-production by the lack of female crew?**

It was the most difficult part in terms of finding the crew. Finding a female editor was very difficult and female sound designers proved to also be very difficult to find. It was my male editor friends who were putting me in touch with these people, which was great but it was a bit like 'argh! I've done it through men again!'

I'm amazed that we managed to have this completed entirely by women. Every single aspect of it – the poster, the stills, all of it.

**You don't have to answer this: is there a personal reason that you wanted to write about this subject?**

Yes. I was sexually assaulted twice at my first year at uni. There are always stories, especially at student halls. They're a dangerous place for a lot of women. You're all in one place, and a lot of people feel like they can't escape what they've been through because they're still in that same space. A closed little box.

Having to fill in a lot of paperwork about these things is completely the wrong way to go about it. It's

not really going to solve anything, because often when this happens to someone they are so lost that they can't even bring themselves to look at a piece of paper that says it's happened. Because you're in denial.

I've written in another script of mine, for a feature film, a horrible line which is that it's practically a 'rite of passage', which sometimes you feel like that as a woman. You look at how many people experience these things and you think 'how are we all okay now?' But with *Bloom* we really wanted to look at the positivity of those female communities.

Sadly we live in a world where misogyny is still not considered a hate crime, and we have to do a lot of the heavy lifting ourselves. And as women we can do that, and that is what we really wanted to say with the film. When you can't get the support you deserve, turn to the people around you because you'll be surprised at what other people have experienced.

**I've been sexually assaulted, and the group of friends I had at the time were mostly male. I didn't feel like I could talk to anyone about it and be understood. I didn't really have a female network, and if I had seen something like *Bloom* I probably would have felt more inclined to reach out to other girls. What's next for *Bloom*?**

I'm starting the festival submission process, focusing a lot on female-focused festivals, especially in the UK. Everyone involved in the film was Manchester-based, except one girl from Leeds, so it was a really northern film. It was all shot in the north, and even with the costumes, they were all sourced from ethically sourced female brands. Our costume designer Jammy was phenomenal, even down to the earrings and scarves. They were all female made, female focused, and sustainable. We're going to have a screening at a female-owned art collectors venue, who actually approached me about that, which is nice.

We'll have a little celebration of what we've achieved, because it has been a long time coming, but we've got it done and I'm so proud of everyone. 

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**Find out more**

You can find more on *Bloom* at [kickstarter.com/projects/bloomshortfilm/bloom-10](https://kickstarter.com/projects/bloomshortfilm/bloom-10).

And on Instagram at [@bloomtheshortfilm](https://www.instagram.com/bloomtheshortfilm). Cathy's Instagram is [@cathywippell](https://www.instagram.com/cathywippell).

See more on Laura Jean Marsh at [@laurajeanmarsh](https://www.instagram.com/laurajeanmarsh). Her debut feature as director, *Giddy Stratospheres*, is available in the UK on Amazon Prime, Sky, iTunes, and other popular streaming platforms.





# TOY STORIES

Licensed movie toy tie-ins have proved to be lucrative throughout the years... but what about the times when film studios and toy manufacturers got it wrong? Horribly, horribly wrong? Words: Dan Cooper

**T**oy firm team-ups go back a long way. The first action figure to tie into a movie's release was a Sean Connery-inspired James Bond doll that launched alongside 1964's *Goldfinger*. A year later, a scuba-suited Bond toy would appear alongside *Thunderball*, allowing children to emulate the superspy's daring exploits, witty quips, and casual misogyny from the comfort of their living rooms.

The symbiotic relationship between movies and toys runs the other way too, with films based on toy lines. Hasbro, a toy industry Goliath (and Paramount partner on the *Transformers* films) perhaps understood this best. Not content with creating its own production company, Allspark

Productions back in 2009, it also spent \$4bn in 2019 to acquire Entertainment One. That move tripled its planned output of films and media material, giving Hasbro a much bigger pop culture platform from which to sell its toys.

However, before you pick up the phone to your stockbroker and demand they plunge everything into movie-based toys, let us offer a wee word of caution. Despite movie toys seeming like a licence to print money, toy-makers and film studios don't always get things right. In fact, sometimes they make the kind of mystifying decisions that presumably lose somebody, somewhere Scrooge McDuck-sized mountains of cash.

Here, presented in no particular order, are the movie toy tie-ins that went very, very wrong...



## Good Vibrations! Mattel's exciting Nimbus 2000

One of the reasons toys are so revered among children (and some adults) is that they act as totems of a sort, tangible manifestations of fictional worlds that allow us to engage on a physical level with a world of pure imagination. Mattel's Nimbus 2000 toy broomstick, which released to coincide with the 2001 release of *Harry Potter And*

*The Philosopher's Stone*, was perhaps a little too 'physical' though, with its grooved handle featuring a vibrating function that was presumably supposed to simulate flying as children sat astride it.

As you might imagine, the tie-in toy certainly simulated something, with Amazon's now-deleted review section spawning some classic

responses, such as this one: "I'm 32 and enjoy riding the broom as much as my 12-year-old and 7-year-old."

When sex shops in New York reportedly started re-selling the toy for twice the retail price, Mattel quickly pulled it from the shelves and the 'multi-purpose' Nimbus 2000 was replaced by a non-vibrating version.



## The Star Wars Earlybird Certificate or 'How to Gaslight Children'

Like George Lucas, who somehow managed to keep the merchandising rights to his 1977 movie, toy company Kenner also struck gold when it secured the toy licence for *Star Wars*. It became one of the biggest movie hits of all time – but therein lay the problem: toys couldn't be supplied to shops in time for the festival of commercialism that is Christmas.

Not to be perturbed by the fact that it had no toys to sell, the company sold parents an IOU in the form

of the Star Wars Earlybird Mail-Away Certificate. Children across the US woke up on Christmas Morning of 1977 to find an empty box containing a certificate promising them Star Wars toys at some point in the future. Happy days!

Having been raised in an era of YouTube toy channels and unboxing videos, children of 2022 are likely far too sceptical to fall for such a ploy. However, in the late 1970s, the gambit proved to be

a huge success for Kenner and still stands as one of the most audacious toy tie-in strategies of all time, with the firm able to turn a huge potential problem into a success. In fairness to the company, it would continue to use the mail-away strategy to offer exclusive figures (such as bounty hunter Boba Fett) to Star Wars fans, and the act of collecting and cutting out proofs of purchases, mailing them away, then awaiting the toy became a beloved ritual for many children.





## No More Heroes

### *The Death of Optimus Prime*

Here's another infamous toy tie-in gaffe. In the 1980s, Hasbro had enjoyed two years of strong sales for its popular Transformers toy line, bolstered as it was by a wildly popular Saturday morning cartoon. Thanks to US President Ronald Reagan administration's fondness for deregulation, cartoons such as *Transformers*, which essentially served as 20-minute toy commercials, were now entirely within the bounds of the law.

However, despite gifting an entire generation of children with the Autobots, a group of robot heroes that were as noble as they were cool, Hasbro's audaciously callous response to dipping sales had the smack of a moustache-swirling supervillain about it. The toymaker decided to up the ante, planning a Transformers movie to reach even more eyes – but, rather than tell a 'passing of the torch' tale where the current crop of Autobots would ride into the sunset after handing over the reins to the new set of characters (and the new toy line that would invariably follow), Hasbro elected to tread a darker path that would traumatise a generation of young Transformers fans.

1986's *Transformers: The Movie* would kill off a string of the beloved toy heroes in a grisly fashion not out of step with a modern *Saw* sequel. Most distressingly, even the Autobots' inspirational leader, Optimus Prime, would succumb to wounds sustained in battle, dying on a medical table as horrified youngsters watched on, aghast.

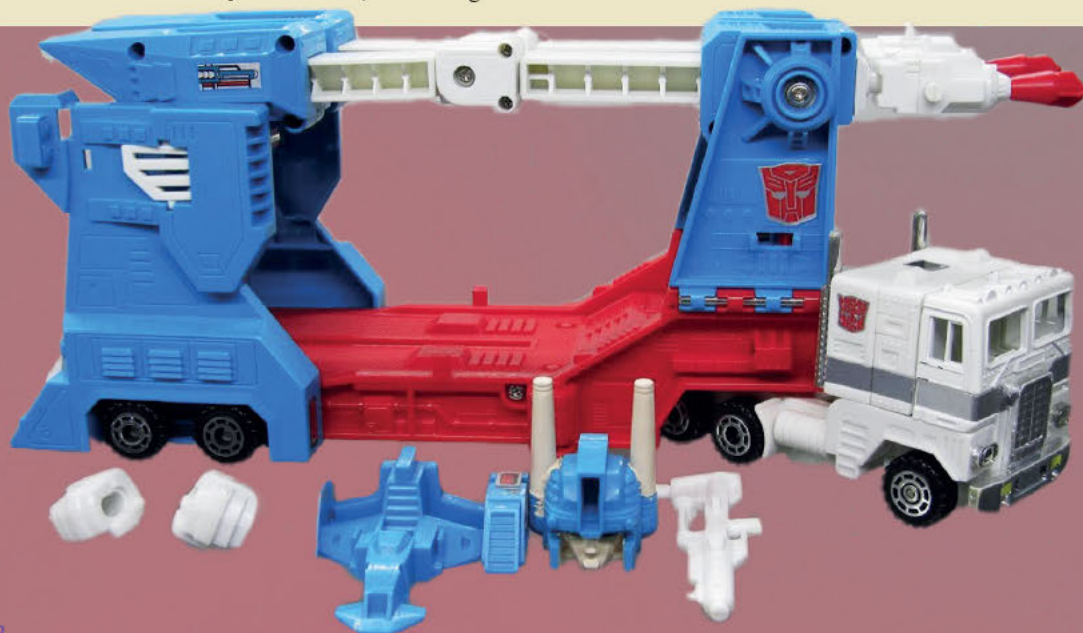
"We didn't know that he was an icon," explained Peter Dille, a Hasbro story consultant on the film. "It was a toy show. We just thought



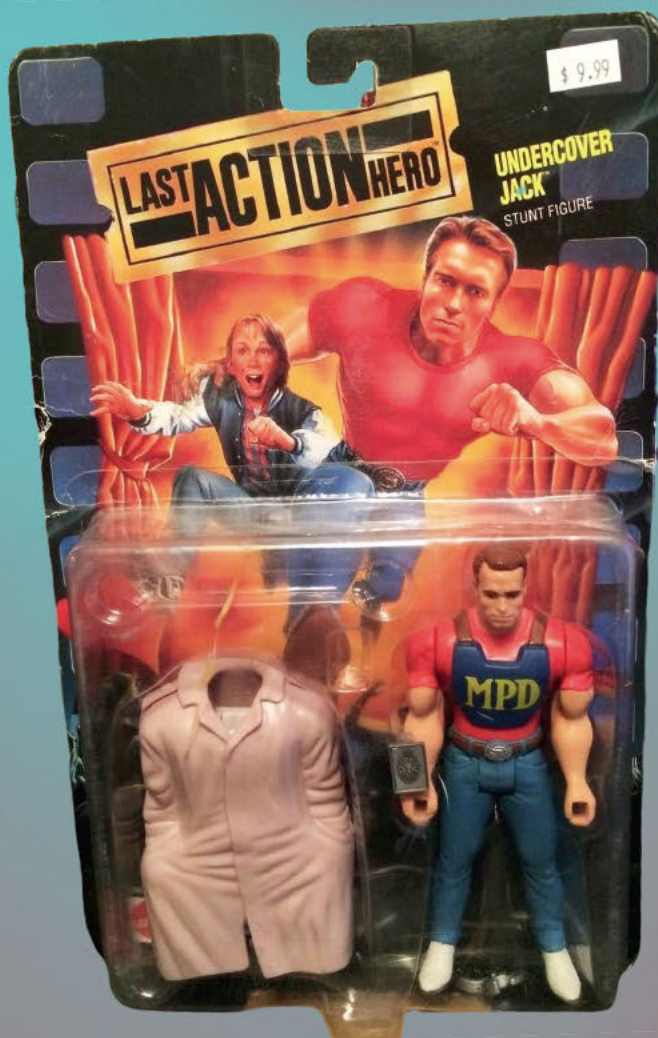
we were killing off the old product line to replace it with new products."

Imaginatively, the replacement toy for Optimus Prime, the brave robot that could transform into an articulated truck would be Ultra Magnus, a brave robot that could... well, transform into a truck.

As well as introducing five-year-olds across the world to the terrifying notion of their own mortality, the new line of replacement toys unsurprisingly failed to meet expectations. The character of Optimus Prime would be quickly resurrected and would go on to take centre spot in every iteration of the toy line since. This rather cynical ploy would not leave Hasbro unshaken either. It swiftly shelved plans to kill off Duke, a character of similar stature in its G.I. Joe line of toys, and elected to send the accompanying movie for that toy line straight to home video instead.







## TOY TITANS!

As we saw with Kenner's crazy 'Mail Away' gambit, sometimes terrible decisions turned out pretty well for somebody, somewhere down the line. Here's a couple more highly questionable toy-tie ins that amazingly ended up making somebody, somewhere a fair few quid.

Meat the real hero of the *Rocky* films

Okay, NECA's *Rocky* toy line was aimed squarely at adult collectors but even so, putting out a figure that was just the giant hunk of meat that Rocky punches? In the good old days, we called that an 'accessory' and it came along with an action figure. This one came all by its lonesome.

NECA's strange decision was rewarded though as the hunk of meat toy's limited release and zaniness factor saw it rise in collectibility. 'The Meat' toy will now cost you upwards of \$60.

## The Last Action Figure? *Schwarzenegger's Veto*

1993 found Arnold Schwarzenegger branching out somewhat. Whilst the Austrian Oak had still wowed audiences as an action icon in 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, that film was bookended by an increasing number of comedic roles – including 1988's *Twins*, 1990's *Kindergarten Cop*, and 1994's *Junior* – and varying degrees of success. The actor's turn as Jack Slater in the upcoming 1993 action blockbuster, *Last Action Hero*, was also aimed at a more family-based audience, which would lead to Schwarzenegger banning Mattel's line of Jack Slater action figures from including gun accessories. This is despite the fact that Slater spends much of the film sporting what can only be described as, er... 'a freaking hand cannon' as he seemingly revels in playing a parody of a all-action cop.

Following Schwarzenegger's decree, Mattel had to get creative in order to give bloodthirsty young children everywhere a means of living out their violent Jack Slater power fantasies, especially given that the Slater range of figures made up over half of Mattel's product line. A quick-as-a-flash scene where Schwarzenegger plays Hamlet was repurposed as a toy, simply so swords could be included. An undercover Jack Slater figure came with an oversized raincoat, every child's dream action accessory for acting out balls-to-the-wall actions sequences.

In a '90s action figure staple, all of the figures were somewhat hamstrung by the inclusion of a ridiculous 'action feature' that hampered articulation and quickly became tiresome.

Ultimately, the toy line would fail, in a similar way to how the movie found itself firmly in the shadow of *Jurassic Park* at the box office. Schwarzenegger's commitment to making *Last Action Hero* a more family-friendly film would only extend so far, though. The star reportedly convinced *Total Recall* co-star Sharon Stone into reluctantly reprising her role as *Basic Instinct*'s Catherine Tramell for a quick cameo appearance, despite the character being renowned for the most X-rated moment in 1990s American cinema. Thankfully, the easily missed cameo didn't merit its own action figure, though NECA probably would have made one given half a chance.



## Batman Returns

### ... but Tim Burton doesn't

Perhaps the most ill-fated of any movie tie-in, the Happy Meal toys released in conjunction with 1992's *Batman Returns* still live in infamy today, often being cited as a contributing factor in Tim Burton's exit as director from the Batman franchise. *Returns* plays as more of a German Expressionist psycho-sexual drama than a light-hearted superhero caper, but McDonald's, having seen a rough cut of the film, was desperate to ally itself with what it believed would be Bat-mania 2.0. The company believed *Returns* was bound to be another all-encompassing commercial juggernaut, resurrecting the Bat-fever of '89 that had gripped the planet during the first film's release.

In a cynical move, McDonald's extended its range of tie-in products to toys that accompanied its Happy Meal range, food aimed at children aged three upwards, despite the film pointedly aiming itself at a more mature audience. When parents saw the film, many were outraged, a tide of complaints ensued, and the company found itself in quite the PR pickle. McDonald's' subsequent argument, that its *Batman Returns* campaign was geared towards adults, proved to be nothing more than a corporate smokescreen when its Happy Meals came packaged with Catwoman, Penguin, and Batman toys.

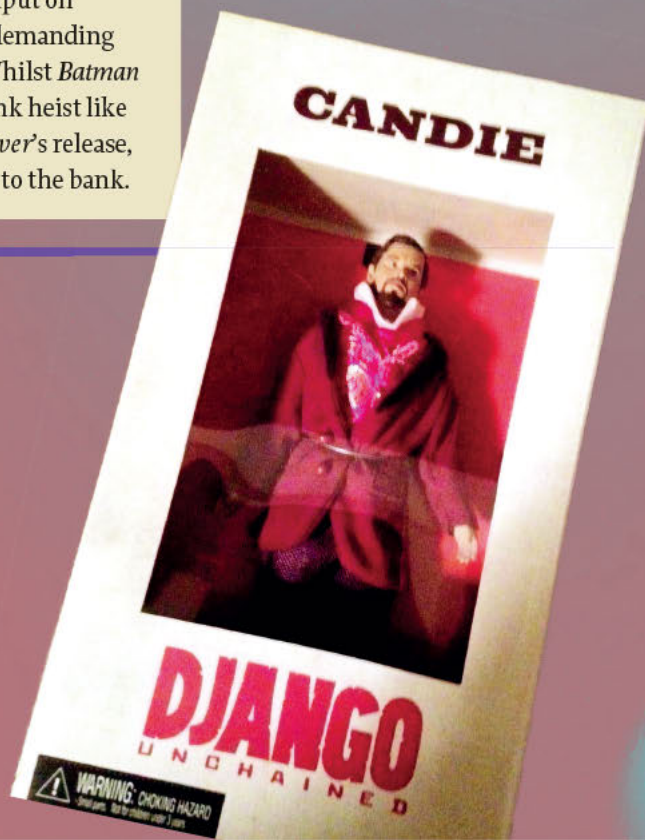
Equally limp protestations of innocence were issued by Warner Bros, which claimed it was 'careful not to provide actual toys from the movie'. Of course, these claims were just as bafflingly nonsensical, when it was plain to see that Happy Meals contained replica toys of the film's Batmobile. Burton would exit the series' third film when it became clear that he wouldn't be afforded the same levels of creative control as the sequel, whilst conspiracy theories have long lingered about the extent of McDonald's involvement in 1995's *Batman Forever*.

The company, having learned from the stinging experience of *Batman Returns*, made film-altering demands before agreeing to promote 1993's *Jurassic Park*, whilst it reportedly had input on costume choices on *Forever*, not to mention reportedly demanding the line where Batman mentions getting "drive thru". Whilst *Batman Forever* may not have featured an unforgettable Joker bank heist like we saw in 2008's *The Dark Knight*, when it came to *Forever*'s release, there was definitely another clown laughing all the way to the bank.



## MORE TOY TITANS!

Again, toys aimed at adults here, but Quentin's Tarantino's *Django Unchained* is a film that contains some highly distressing depictions of slavery. No to be deterred, NECA (again) put out toys including an action figure of slave owner Calvin Candie. eBay promptly banned their sale, as did a host of other outlets. Of course, this just meant that their value skyrocketed, much to the glee of private collectors who already possessed them.





## Chestbursters for kids *Alien vs Outraged parents*

Never again would Hollywood be duped into selling off merchandising rights. Following 20th Century Fox's loss of untold *Star Wars* riches, every film studio worth their salt was actively developing whatever tie-ins it could in the hope of stumbling across another action figure gold rush.

As such, quite a few toy lines released during this period were questionable in their appropriateness, but none more than Kenner's 1979 *Alien* line of action figures. The company was hoping to emulate the wild success of its *Star Wars* toys, and set about creating a similarly-sized series of 3.75" action figures, with the line's *pièce de résistance* being an 18" fully posable Xenomorph. With Fox demanding that it keep the toys under wraps until the launch of the film, Kenner was left to simply talk up its range, revealing to the press that the following year's *Alien* line was already planned and ready to go.

Of course, all of this failed to take into account that Ridley Scott's *Alien* would be a violent and disturbing science-fiction horror, full of the kind of traumatising subconsciously erotic horror that would give children life-long nightmares. The PG-rated movie that Kenner reportedly thought it was getting almost ended up receiving an X-rating in the US (for adults only) and the toy company's request that Fox recut the film were ignored. Whichever foolhardy executive at the toy company agreed on the deal without first reading the script probably experienced the same yawning horror as the *Nostromo*'s crew when he or she finally got to see a cut of the finished movie.

Unsurprisingly, the toy line would fail spectacularly and the planned second series of action figures, along with a scale toy of the *Nostromo*, the film's spaceship, would never emerge. And the children that did open up one of those 18" mechanically jawed glow-in-the-dark Xenomorphs on Christmas morning? Even now, some 40 years later, you can spot them a mile away, in coffee shops, shopping centres or parks. Usually, their haunted eyes are unfocused, lost in a dark reverie of phallic, penetrating mouths and womb-like face huggers. Most of us have long left the action figures of our youth behind, but for those unfortunate souls, playtime will never truly be over...



## EVEN MORE TOY TITANS!

Barbie. The bland inoffensive doll has sparked outrage in the past, usually for reasons to do with cultural representation and body image. However, the toy's tie-in with the popular *Hunger Games* movies saw a crossover release.

Whilst a toy that promotes sending children to battle each other to the death in gladiatorial combat seems like the kind of thing parents might baulk at, they didn't. Instead, youngsters got to comb Katniss's hair, presumably before acting out how she punctured another child's throat with an arrow. The toy now costs several hundred pounds, and good luck finding one.



# Finding a Happy Place



Kate Dolan's feature debut, *You Are Not My Mother*, is an ambition realised – and it's taken some time to get this far, she explains...

Words: Lauren Miles

**W**riter-director Kate Dolan grew up surrounded by Irish folklore. Talking about the inspiration behind her first feature film *You Are Not My Mother*, she recalls tales of “banshees, and having main roads diverted around fairy mounds”. These sound enough like innocent children's tales, but they're deeply ingrained in Irish culture.

“As a child, it's told to you as if it's true,” she says of the folklore at the heart of her new film, which mixes it with psychological horror. *You Are Not My Mother* focuses on teenager Char, who's growing up on an Irish estate with her mother, Angela, and grandmother, Rita. Angela, who already struggles with her mental health, disappears one afternoon after taking Char to school. When she returns the next day she's... different. As her behaviour becomes more concerning, Rita suspects supernatural causes.

## A Record-Breaking Year

In 2021, Screen Ireland reported a record-breaking year for spending on the Irish film industry. €500 million was spent across film, television drama, documentary, and animation production last year – a 40% increase in funding compared to 2019. The company attributes this to a combination of things: their own schemes and funding opportunities, attracting international productions, and government support.

Dolan has dabbled in horror before, with her short film *Catcalls* winning Best Short Film at the Young Director Awards Ireland in 2018.

“I like all sorts of horror, it's my happy place,” she says, brimming with enthusiasm. “One of the reference points for this film is *Rosemary's Baby*.”

It's certainly similar in the sense that, while the supernatural is part of the narrative, it's also all about what's happening within the home.

“It's all about the domestic,” Dolan explains. “It's about feeling like this could actually happen.”

Angela's mental health is a concern for the characters throughout the film, but Dolan didn't want to focus too much on this particular topic. The focus is kept on Char, and the whole tale is told from her perspective.

“I didn't really want to say anything in particular about Angela or mental health – I obviously didn't want to depict mentally ill people as bad or monstrous. It's more about how it affects Char. It's like a coming of age story about what it's like to grow up in a troubled family and how that affects you.”

A central part of Char's coming of age is learning about her family's past and secrets they haven't yet told her. Dolan believes that this is something everyone can relate to.

“It's about when you find things out about your family for the first time. As a child, you put them on a pedestal, but then you find things out about their past. Or maybe you see a parent drunk for the first time. And that can be scary.”



**It's about when you find things out about your family for the first time. As a child, you put them on a pedestal, but then you find things out...**

## Staying up

This may be her first feature, but filmmaking has always been Dolan's goal. She says directing "was just something I always knew I wanted to do," and remembers watching old VHS tapes of the latest films with her mother ("because I would never go to bed"), and vividly recounts her first 'grown-up' film being Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption*, which she watched at the age of seven.

"I absolutely loved it. I was glued to the screen," she says. Her mother at first discouraged the pursuit of a career in film, but that didn't change her mind. "She's fully supportive now!"

Dolan gives a lot of credit for getting *You Are Not My Mother* made to Screen Ireland, a national agency supporting the Irish film industry and new talent. In the case of Dolan's film it helped to provide funding, which the director found invaluable. "Some films take years and years to get made," she says, "so it's crazy to be able to get the script done and just do it."

Screen Ireland hasn't just helped Dolan to get her career off the ground, but also hugely aided in the growth of the Irish film industry.

"The film industry in Ireland has made so much progress in the last ten years, even since I was at college."

However, small independent films need publicity as well as funding. "There's just so much out there," Dolan says of the

choice audiences have at cinemas and on streaming. "In Ireland the film was released [in cinemas] on 4th March, but that was at the same time as *The Batman*!"

She thinks independent films like hers need to be given more attention in the media: "Just give some space to smaller films."

*You Are Not My Mother* was shot over 22 days, and surprisingly Dolan found shooting a feature to be easier than a short film.

"With a feature, all the planning is done beforehand. You get more time with the cast and crew, and that's good because it was the first feature for a lot of them as well."

## Future

She may have a love for horror, but would she ever venture into another genre? "I love horror and I'm comfortable with horror, but I also love thrillers, and erotic thrillers."

The latter would be especially interesting to see, considering they don't tend to get made any more. "I don't think people would know how to make them now," Dolan says. "And you look back on some of them and realise they were bad!"

An erotic thriller sounds unlikely, then, but Dolan does have more feature films in the works. "I'm working on a couple of horror features at the moment," she says. If they turn out as eerie as *You Are Not My Mother*, they're sure to be successes.

***You Are Not My Mother* is in UK cinemas and digital on 8th April**





# Hole In Th

Actor, writer, and director Craig Roberts tells us about *The Phantom Of The Open*, his filmmaking career, and how he's trying to offer help to those breaking through...

*Words: Simon Brew*





“Five films planned,” laughs director Craig Roberts when I asked what he’s up to now that his latest movie, *The Phantom Of The Open*, is in cinemas. A whole cinematic universe of golf movies surely beckons, although more seriously – after playing a bit of PlayStation – he shoots his fourth film as director, *Honey*, this summer.

But we’re here to chat primarily about his third, a light comedy about a man called Maurice Flitcroft. In the 1970s, Flitcroft decided pretty much on a whim to try his hand at the British Open golf championship, and with the aid of a script by Simon Farnaby – who co-stars alongside Sally Hawkins and Mark Rylance – Roberts’s film landed well when it arrived in cinemas in March. “When I read Simon’s script, I loved how accessible and commercial it was, and it felt

really big to me.” Thus Roberts, whose career has segued from acting to moving behind the camera, broke his vow to only direct his own screenplays. His first two films as director – *Just Jim* and *Eternal Beauty* – he argues are more character studies, and this was something different. “There was so much story in there,” he recalls of reading the script for the first time. “I was kind of overwhelmed with it, and overwhelmed with the excitement of what could be done with it.”

He talked a lot about Maurice Flitcroft himself during the pre-release promotion of the film, and tells me “he reminds me of Kanye West... not in his views, but moreso that in the beginning of his career, he believed he was going to be as good as he was, and as popular as he is now in terms of his music. I think that’s a wonderful thing to have,” he argues. “I’m certainly a card-carrying member of the imposter syndrome society, and I love seeing people who really believe in themselves.” Maurice Flitcroft very much included.

### Turning points

When Roberts made the handbrake turn in his career, veering from acting in films as diverse as *Submarine* and *Bad Neighbours*, he embarked on a small character drama, *Just Jim*. Made for £300,000, he wrote and directed the film, and “foolishly put myself in it,” he smiles.

The response though to the final movie wasn’t strong, and Roberts was keenly aware of that. “One review I got

*Phantom Of The Open*



from it, the person said that I'd been given a lot of rope, and come very close to hanging myself making the movie. When I saw that I thought oh my god, I've made the wrong decision completely. I'd better handbrake-turn back the other way. It was tough."

But he decided to pick himself back up, and paved the way to the more successful *Eternal Beauty*. Yet, going back to that review, the point in there somewhere was

that he didn't, in

career terms, hang himself?

"It's actually played quite a big part in me getting to where

I am. If I

hadn't had

that kick up

the backside, I'd

maybe be stuck

in a certain way. But

look, with my first film, I

know my references were a little

out there. I know what filmmakers

I loved, and maybe showed that a

little too much."

Is it such a bad thing showing your references and influences?

Roberts grins. "There's a really good quote, and I forget who says it, but it's when it comes to writing, you can steal from the corner shop, just don't steal from the same corner shop every night!"

Influences underpinning *Phantom Of The Open* are less overt, but Roberts cites films such as Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* and *Punch-Drunk Love*. Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time In... Hollywood* was revisited too. He didn't watch films really once they'd started shooting and when they went into the edit (lockdown meant that *Phantom Of The Open* was a movie Roberts had to remote-edit in his house, with editor John Amos on the other end of the line). He just checked out the ones he wanted, and then went deep into his own film. "I just think it's dangerous watching great movies when you're making something, because I suppose it gets into your head a little."

## Influences

Craig Roberts is open about the filmmakers that he loves, and in particular on his first film he admits he was influenced heavily by David Lynch. "It's dangerous trying to emulate David Lynch," he reflects, "because you can't get there really. David Lynch is David Lynch. There's a certain thing in the DNA of his films that is more than the sum of its parts. There's just something else going on, and as soon as you try and go for that, it sometimes comes across as a little bit too experimental."

## Shaheen Baig

Going back over the covers of previous issues of Film Stories, we've led on movies such as *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*, *Pirates*, and *In The Earth*. Along with *Phantom Of The Open*, they have a person in common, a real force in casting in the UK film industry: Shaheen Baig. "She's just incredible," says Roberts. "She's also a wonderful person, and a lovely person to work with. And that's half the battle sometimes. I made my first film with her and was so happy to reconnect with her on this one. We had a bigger budget on this one to try and discover who was right... I love Shaheen, and film after film she's just able to cast incredible people, and discover people."

Not that too many of them could have helped when it came to shooting live-action golf shots, and trying to make them feel cinematic.

In particular, when Maurice Flitcroft takes his first

shot at the open, it's a

terrific visual piece

of comedy, but one

that caused a lot

of debate behind

the scenes. "I

love that shot

so much, but

there was a

discussion

about whether

it'd be funny just

to cut to the reveal,

or do what I do in

the movie," Roberts

explains. This time too,

given that the film was edited when the world was still in some

degree of lockdown, they didn't have the luxury of a full test screening to help shape the call – "we tested it, but not with many people in there" – and it was thus a lot of gut instinct.

Still, "the golf was a challenge, because a person standing in a green field can become very boring very quickly." The answer? "Move the camera as much as possible. Just keep moving the camera! And go with the rhythm of it, make it feel as kinetic as possible."







## Geography

The film, interestingly, is very specific about where it's set, in the Barrow-in-Furness area of north England. The film is deliberately specific about that. "Sometimes people believe that if you make something nondescript or that could be set anywhere, it's going to be more universal,"

Roberts says. "But actually it's the opposite: when something is very specific, and a certain person from a certain place, it can be much clearer how it transcends."

"For me, the movie is a movie about birth lottery. The hand that you're dealt and the cards you're given. It's a class thing, and it's a movie about class. We didn't want to go on about it too much, but it's very much there."

The colour too is very deliberate, with a tip of the hat to Richard Donner's original *Superman* film. "When I read the script, there was a moment that just clicked with me: when he opened his overalls like Superman! I was like, amazing, okay: then his dog is the same that Superman had; at the beginning of the movie you can see a comet shoot to Earth, and that's him. The number plate is his Kryptonian name. Little strange Easter eggs that nobody will care about!"

## Personnel

Craig Roberts, when he boarded the film, chased Mark Rylance for the lead role of Maurice, writing him a letter to try to – successfully – persuade him to sign up. Rylance, one of the UK's finest theatre actors and an Oscar winner for Steven Spielberg's *Bridge Of Spies*, admitted he'd barely been offered any comedies, and jumped at the chance.

But the constant in Roberts's work also came along with him: the wonderful Sally Hawkins. "She's a great friend, and I hope we get to do more films," he says. "When we made *Eternal Beauty*, every day I was blown

away by just how committed she was to the project. All the ideas she had."

Roberts throughout our chat is very keen to give praise to others, and this leads me to the extensive thank-yous that come at the end of the credit reels for his films. Marshall Mathers, aka Eminem, for instance is one of them. Roberts seems to have forgotten this and laughs – "Marshall Mathers wrote the script," he grins, before confirming he's influenced by his music, hence the thank-you. But there are names like Dave Franco ("a great friend, he's directing now as well"), *Halloween* director David Gordon Green, *Paddington*'s Paul King, and Antonia Bird. There's a reason behind all of them – Green gave Roberts a TV show job and stayed in touch, Antonia Bird gave him his first ever job – and he's keen to cite them.

## Collaborate

But he's also keen to give something back. Having battled to make his own films, he's launched a new platform called Filmd. Found online at [www.filmd.co.uk](http://www.filmd.co.uk), he tells me that "it's an online collaboration platform where people that want to get into the industry or who want to make their films can connect with other people."

"For instance, we have a map of sorts where you can find people around the country who are close to you, that maybe have the right camera you want to use, or the equipment, or maybe you can collaborate together. Essentially we're just trying to democratise the entrance into the industry and make it more accessible for people to get in and make more films."

Roberts very much wants to help. "It's a very lonely world sometimes, being a filmmaker and trying to get things going. The platform's about trying to bring like-minded people together to create. I set it up with my

business partner Craig Heyworth – he's a whiz with everything and has built it out! I think it's incredibly important to showcase all kinds of voices that we have, certainly within this country. If we can do anything to help that, that's what we're trying to do."

For now, with *Phantom* out in the world, the immediate priority is that aforementioned PlayStation for a bit. Then, presumably, watching a few more movies. And then shutting them out of his head as he goes off to make another film, with many more hopefully to come...

The *Phantom Of The Open* is out now. 





# THE PROBLEM WITH LOOKING BACK

Bethany Black explores the world of flashbacks in movie storytelling, and the trouble with getting them right...



**W**e open on a busy Dolby theatre. It's Oscar night

in the year 2030. The previous year's best actor, Johnny Knoxville, is announcing this year's best director; "and the Academy Award goes to, Bethany Black for *Flashback: The Story of Flashback*".

Your dear heroine gets up from her seat and makes her way to the stage to collect her prize, she looks amazing. However good you're imagining her, she looks way better.

"Thank you, Johnny, and thank you to the academy! Wow! This thing's heavy! Obviously I know that, I got one last year for my movie *Flashback*. Seems strange now when I think back to how this all started..."

### Previously...

We cut back to Beth's bedsit, a damp patch on the wall that's cultivating black mould, she sits at her computer perusing the feedback from her hero Russell T Davies. It reads: "The flashbacks. I hate them. They are dull. They tell me nothing. Usually, at this stage, a writer will say 'But *Orange Is The New Black* uses flashbacks! *Breaking Bad* uses flashbacks!' Yes, they do. And they're written by geniuses at the top of their game. You're only on page 11.

"This sounds rude, but every single new writer hands in a script full of flashbacks and reversals and sudden shocks and flash-forwards, and every single new writer is handling dangerous devices without a clue about their power. It needs to be learnt. And to learn it, in my opinion, then first, you have to write a script that goes A, B, C. From beginning to end. When you've seen shows with flashbacks, they have been

written with immense skill. Your flashbacks don't have any skill, I'm afraid. Don't waste your energy on them. Tell me a story instead."

The above is an actual script note I got from the actual Russell T Davies for my first TV script. At the time I was so starstruck at getting writing feedback from the absolute best of the best that I didn't burst into tears. Despite the above, it was mostly positive feedback I must add, and he was right. The more I see bad or misused flashbacks in TV shows and movies, the more I agree with him.

### Connections

Flashbacks are used in a number of ways in cinema. To create a deeper emotional connection and understanding of a character, to show a parallel with a current event and why someone is reacting like they are, and most often today to start a movie in the middle of an action scene before the metaphorical record scratch, freeze frame, and 'I bet you're wondering how I got here?' moment.

The first *Deadpool* movie does this quite spectacularly, and then, in the most recent run of the comic, makes fun of that convention as being dull and hacky. Like a lot of tropes in genre stories, a flashback like that starts off as a really good way of showing an emotional shortcut, but quickly becomes clichéd, followed by it becoming enough of a cliché for it to be spoofed, to it being spoofed by the original creator.

Take the 'three-point superhero landing', which looked cool in the comic *The Invincible Iron Man* #76 back in 1998. As such, director Jon Favreau used it in the first *Iron Man* film as an equivalent to a wrestler showing their strength by not selling the impact of a hit. It's a moment, one that over the next eight years became overused to the

### SPOILERS

*Captain Marvel*

*The Dark Knight Rises*

*Star Wars Episode IX:*

*The Rise Of Skywalker*

*The Godfather Part II*





The Godfather Part II

## For every movie that couldn't work without flashbacks, there's a film that's used flashback that really should have just told the story

point that *Deadpool* made fun of it: "Oh look, she's going to do the superhero landing!" he notes – and then it goes full circle when Florence Pugh's Yelena Belova in last year's *Black Widow* makes fun of Scarlett Johansson's Natasha Romanov for making that same landing.

### Joins

A good flashback can be invisible. In fact, there are whole movies told in flashback that you just kind of forget that that's how it was done, *Titanic* and *Saving Private Ryan* for example. When a movie gets it right, it adds so much. In *Ratatouille* they used flashbacks to create flavour: a visual manifestation of that sensory experience when a smell or a taste takes you back to a specific moment in time, and it works beautifully.

*The Godfather Part II* is the daddy of them all. It uses flashbacks to create a rhyme of history, build an emotional connection between the

characters of Michael and Vito's journeys, and an almost Greek-tragedy-style story. They're used to show that fates have conspired to force Michael to become what he promised himself he wouldn't.

Of course, if you're me, you only recently discovered that most of *The Godfather Part II* was a flashback because you got the VHS box set for your 21st birthday in 1999, which had been edited together as a single chronological story for some reason best known to director Francis Ford Coppola (such a boxset did indeed happen). If you can get hold of a copy of it... just don't bother. The Blu-ray boxset of *The Godfather* is cheap; it works better this way.

For every movie that couldn't work without the flashbacks (*Reservoir Dogs*, about 80% of whodunnits) there is a film that's used flashback that really should have just told the story chronologically.

### When things go missing

When a flashback doesn't work, it can have the opposite effect to what is intended. Rather than bringing us closer to the character, it distances us by giving us the right information at the wrong time. In the case of *The Book Of Boba Fett* over on Disney+, we wait four episodes to find out why the protagonist wants to rule Tatooine; because like Danny Glover in *Lethal Weapon*, he's too old for this shit, and wants to retire as ruler of a desert land. I think. I watched that show twice and I'm still not sure. Looked cool, though.

The story would benefit from being told chronologically: Boba starts at rock bottom in the belly of the Sarlacc Pit, escapes, is stripped of his identity, after which he learns and fights to get it back before sitting on the throne.

Y'know, like they tried to do in *The Dark Knight Rises* where Tom Hardy's Bane breaks Bruce Wayne's spine and he wakes up in that underground prison. Stripped of his money and his gadgets, in a place where his name and connections mean nothing, he must overcome his injuries and escape and learn how to get back into Gotham City to face Bane again... Only they skip over the re-entering Gotham bit, after spending an hour explaining it's an impenetrable city fortress.

Much like Oscar Isaac's explanation of how Emperor Palpatine is back in *Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise Of Skywalker*: "somehow Palpatine returned," he says vaguely, almost certainly speaking a line that was on the writers' room whiteboard and put in the script as a placeholder. Quickly backed up by Merry from *Lord Of The Rings* adding, "Dark science, cloning, secrets only the Sith knew!" and problem solved.





Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise Of Skywalker



Captain Marvel

*Captain Marvel*, a movie that I absolutely adore, relies heavily on flashbacks. But, again, the flashbacks destroy the tension. Our hero Carol Danvers has amnesia, but over the course of the movie we find out who she is, and that she's been fighting the wrong side of a war. It's a great story, but one that's difficult to connect with emotionally because we don't know who she is for much of it.

Many have pointed out how it would have been much better had the story been told

chronologically, and it's hard to disagree. If we'd seen the character with her life and loved ones, fighting to become the first female fighter pilot, who's then in an accident where she gains superpowers but loses her memory, only to have her enemy gaslight her into believing that she's on his side? Well I'm all-in on rooting for her to learn who she is and kick his backside in an incredibly well-choreographed CGI set-piece finale. Take my money, this is the feminist action movie I've been waiting for since *Blue Steel*.

Sometimes, though, it feels like a movie needed a flashback, or in the case of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, the whole movie could have been condensed down to a two-minute flashback in the next chapter, *Attack Of The Clones*. After all, what do we need to know? When the young Jedi Anakin Skywalker meets the Senator Padme Amidala who he's been charged to look after, they have a spark and as their relationship starts to build, he tells of how he was a slave on Tatooine and was rescued by Obi Wan Kenobi. That, and though he misses his mother, his vows prohibit emotional connections so he can't go back to rescue her. As their relationship develops further and he starts to question his vows, we see both stories play out in parallel, how that traumatic experience as a child has affected the man he's become, adding emotional depth to both stories, and without anyone yelling "yippee!" or recourse to broad racial stereotypes.

## Awards

Going back to the start, Russell T Davies was absolutely correct. In the right hands for the right reason, a flashback can be one of the most powerful weapons in a filmmaker's arsenal. However, when it's used badly – as it often is – it feels like a way of making up for a lack of confidence in the narrative arc of a picture, and distances us from the emotional truth of the character. As with all artistic choices, it's a lot easier to look at them in hindsight and say what we would have done, and as a writer and a performer I know all too well that old adage: nothing's ever perfected, only abandoned.

Anyway, the shot dissolves back to the Dolby Theatre and the music is playing as someone's trying to usher Beth away from the microphone...

"It was shortly after that, I started writing my movie *Flashback* which this documentary was based on." "Thank you!" she says as she goes back to her seat. Up next, it's a hologram of Orson Welles to read the nominees for best foreign language documentary... 





## Bill Conti tells Matt Davey about his one and only time he got to do a James Bond score

**A**ll the way back in 1981, American film composer Bill Conti composed the soundtrack to the 12th official James Bond movie, *For Your Eyes Only*. Conti had gained popularity in the previous decade, having a hand in producing the music for *Rocky* and its sequel, *Rocky II*. The first *Rocky* film saw Conti receive his first of three Oscar nominations, culminating in him picking up a golden statue in 1984 for *The Right Stuff*, a high point in a career spanning six decades.

*For Your Eyes Only* is Conti's only contribution to the James Bond franchise, but it's a memorable contribution with a lasting legacy.

"Well, a Bond film is particular," says Conti as he reminisces sat by his piano in his Los Angeles home. "It was particular, even when I did it that long ago, because it had established itself a brand.

"For some reason, [long time Bond composer] John Barry couldn't do *For Your Eyes Only* – and he recommended me. Let's begin with that, that's a rare thing."

Barry composed 11 James Bond films, beginning with *From Russia With Love* in 1963, before departing the world of 007 with *The Living Daylights* in 1987. Conti's participation in *For Your Eyes Only* came about

as a result of Barry being unable to work in the UK at the time due to tax reasons, having become a tax exile in the 1970s. As a result, he recommended Conti for composing duties to James Bond producer (Cubby) Albert R Broccoli.

"It's not that we all want each other's jobs, which we do," says Conti as he grins with a glint in his eye. "I mean, you want a good movie, right? You're all looking for movies to do and that was his account. I mean, John Barry created the James Bond musical language. So, he recommended me and that was wonderful because I was a James Bond fan.

"Then that puts you in touch with Cubby Broccoli and his family – and of course they're wonderful. Cubby says to me 'Bill, I'd like you to do it in England' and I say, well I have a family – a wife and two daughters – I'd rather not leave my family for three months. So, he says 'oh no... I'd like you to bring your family with you'. So I said okay, I can do that, I have no objections."

### Standing apart

Conti's score is somewhat unique in the Bond canon as it's distinguishable by its disco-infused sound, whilst evoking memories of previous Bond films *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and



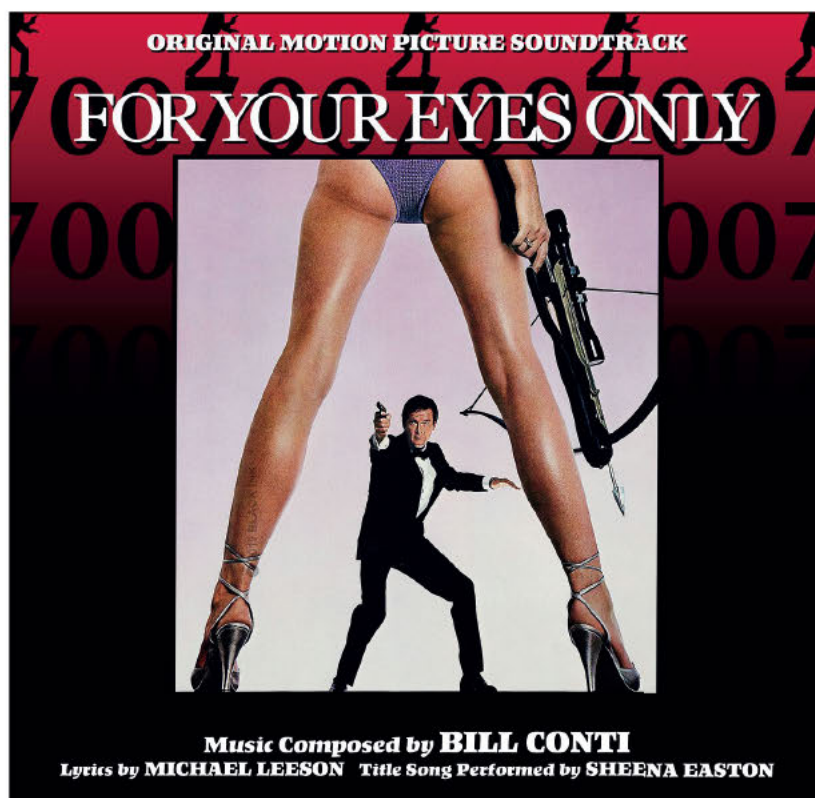
*The Spy Who Loved Me*, with a particularly memorable skiing action sequence.

“There was perhaps some nervousness on my part, let’s say...” recalls Conti. “It’s a bit like going into a country club and they say we require a shirt with a collar, you don’t talk about it, this is what we do, this is the set menu. The Bond people say ‘this is what we do’ and you find everything acceptable.”

Conti’s nervousness at being given such a vital role in the production of a Bond film came at a time when the movie interpretation of the character was entering a period of change, in its third decade on the big screen. John Glen was a first-time director on the picture having been both editor and second unit director for *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, and *Moonraker*.

Roger Moore had reportedly been uncertain on whether or not he would return as 007 after *Moonraker* in 1979, before coming back into the fold for a fifth time in a more serious and scaled-back (compared with the previous film, at least) entry. Had Moore have not returned to play Britain’s most famous spy, Bond producers had touted Timothy Dalton – who would eventually replace Moore as 007 in 1986, after *A View To A Kill* – as his replacement in the 1981 film.

In *For Your Eyes Only* then, James Bond is tasked with retrieving a missing weapons encryption device that was aboard a sunken British ship, to stop it falling into enemy hands. Alongside Moore in the cast, the movie features Carole Bouquet, Topol, Lynn-Holly Johnson, Julian Glover, Michael Gothard, and Cassandra Harris. The latter is the first wife of four-time 007



## We sat at the piano together and she started singing: she had these great lows and these great highs

Pierce Brosnan, who was first introduced to Cubby Broccoli on the set of *For Your Eyes Only* – 14 years before his debut outing in 1995’s *GoldenEye*.

*For Your Eyes Only* fell under the banner of film studio United Artists. The film is attributed with saving the company from bankruptcy with its worldwide gross of \$195 million. At the time of its release, United Artists was in great financial difficulty following the \$40 million flop that was Michael Cimino’s *Heaven’s Gate*. A sprawling western depicting the events of the Johnson County War, the incredible story of that film is told in the excellent book *Final Cut* by Steven Bach.

## Sing the right song

Though *For Your Eyes Only*’s performance at the box office allowed for Bond movies to be made every other year for the rest of the decade before legal struggles halted Dalton’s tenure following 1989’s *Licence To Kill*, the main concern for Conti was producing a hit title song. After all, that’s something synonymous with James Bond that follows on from the pre-title sequence in every film with the exception of the very first movie in the series, *Dr No*.

“I wanted a hit song,” recounts Conti, thrusting his hands towards the air. “You’d be really stupid not to see this as a huge opportunity for a film composer to have a hit song that you’re connected with.





Roger Moore in  
*For Your Eyes Only*

I was adamant about having a Shirley Bassey type. I spoke to Barbra Streisand in the hope she would write the lyrics and sing the theme. She said that she wanted to do it, but that she was making *Yentl* [released in 1983] so she wasn't available, because she was really busy. I wanted to cover my back because I wanted the biggest singer with the best chance of getting the biggest hit."

Conti recalls that "there was some talk of Donna Summer, then we were put in touch with Sheena Easton. Now she did have a hit song at the time, but I thought it was a little middle of the road. It might have been a great song, but I didn't think that it displayed her abilities in a Shirley Bassey kind of way, because that was what I wanted.

"But then we sat at the piano together and she started singing: she had these great lows and these great highs. So, then I knew that I could write a song specifically for her using these great big lows and these great high notes; she was brilliant – it was great for me really – and of course she's the only singer to feature physically in the main titles at the start of a Bond film."

Conti pauses for thought as he searches his mind for the name of the legendary title designer, known for his work on 16 Bond films... "Maurice Binder!" he exclaims as he nearly jumps out of his seat.

"Maurice Binder – Maurice was a little guy, just brilliant, and Sheena was a little lady – and when he saw her, he just fell in love. He saw something in her, her face, her look, and came to me and he said 'Bill, do you think that she would want to be in the main titles?'

"I said are you kidding? She'd kill to be in the titles – and we spoke to her and agreed with her and her people that she would appear in the main titles."

When it came to shooting Easton in the title sequence of *For Your Eyes Only*, it proved problematic. Binder was using a soft light focus and a high-resolution film stock. Filming the close-ups of Easton's face, the smallest of head movements would blur her image on the film. In the end, Binder resorted to putting Easton's head in a steel clamp that was hidden behind her hair and behind her back, therefore being able to keep her head perfectly still without the faintest of movement. Easton would later say "it was the most painful thing that I've ever worn, but it got my face in 70 millimetre!"

## History

Conti received the second Oscar nomination of his career for his work on *For Your Eyes Only* – being nominated in the Best Music, Original Song category in 1982. In turn, he cemented his place in the pantheon of Bond composers.

"Only once or twice, apologetically, Cubby said 'you know, when James goes into action, we'd like to use his theme, I hope you don't mind?' Now as a fan of Bond, I said – Cubby – I wouldn't think of doing it any other way. It was wonderful," Conti remembers.

"It was a great experience. I got to do whatever I wanted in addition to whatever Cubby wanted!" <sup>FS</sup>



# Getting INTO FILM



**I**nto Film is the UK's leading charity for film in education. Partnered with the BFI, National Lottery and more, it supports teachers and educators to achieve a wide range of effective learning outcomes through the use of film. Its programme includes access to the Into Film+ streaming platform, a network of extra-curricular Into Film Clubs, and resources for use in clubs and classrooms. It also holds an annual cinema-based film festival alongside its prestigious Into Film Awards.

From 2013 to until December 2021, it also ran a Young Reporters Programme, which I was fortunate enough to take part in. Each year, the programme provided 20 to 30 young people with training on reporting techniques from experienced journalists. It also provided the opportunity to attend press screenings and junkets to interview the talent in front of and behind the camera.

I was 10 years old when I joined the programme in 2015. During my time, I was invited to the Houses of Parliament to interview MPs about the impact of film on politics, I interviewed The Vamps about their *Kung Fu Panda 3* theme tune, and explored London's Toy Fair reporting on up-and-coming toys. The programme helped 300 young people develop interview skills and opened their eyes to all aspects of the film industry.

I spoke to the very passionate Paul Reeve MBE, Into Film's Chief Executive, about the decision to end the Young Reporters Programme and his plans for the future.

**Your Young Reporter Programme ran for eight years. During that time, what have been some of your biggest success stories?**

In terms of big successes, some of the interviews our young reporters did with talent, like Taron Egerton, got very high numbers because they had a big following. The Get Into Film YouTube channel has had over 30 million views since the programme launched.

**Poppy Oxberry talks to Paul Reeve about Into Film and reminisces on her time in the Into Film Young Reporters Programme**



Poppy with The Vamps



The Into Film Festival 2021 — premiere of  
*Clifford The Big Red Dog*



But I've always been keen on those interviews that might get lower viewings, but have been with a really interesting filmmaker, where they give us a really interesting insight into their creative process.

One of our young reporters is now working as a reporter. She's doing interviews for organisations, working freelance, making little packages, interviewing people in the film world.

**What would you say was your proudest moment of the programme?**

My proudest moment has been the graduation ceremonies. Hearing the young reporters talk about what they've learnt through their experience, some of the skills that they've acquired that we hope they'll hold on to as they go on to future lives and careers.

Also, very occasionally I've got to go on a red carpet for a premiere, or the opening of the London Film Festival, and when I've seen one of our young reporters there on the red carpet alongside all the other TV interviewers and you see the Into Film logo on the microphone, that's always given me a little burst of pride and excitement.

**It's so valuable these days that young people are able to tell their own stories in the moving image**

**Given the successes the programme has had, why did you decide to end it?**

It was a tough decision to close the programme. At the heart [of Into Film], our key purpose and objective is a commitment to engaging with as many children and young people as possible, from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible.

What we found with Get Into Film, our YouTube channel, was when you look at the stats, there is a very high number of people [watching] from outside the UK, and weighted quite a lot towards the upper end of our age range.

**You mention on your website that your new strategy aims to reach young people via schools rather than social media. What**

**was the reasoning behind this decision?**

We're trying to engage children, young people across a broad age range – like 5 to 19. And we couldn't really encourage or facilitate social media engagement with young people under the age of 13. We have to try and focus our work and our resources where we hope we can make the most difference and attract the broadest possible audience.

In our new strategy, we're focusing even more on schools. And the reason for that is quite simple, because school is where children and young people have

to be. If we're looking to try to get film into the lives of as many children as possible, focusing our activity principally on schools makes a lot of sense.

**What lessons have you learned from running the YR programme for eight years that you will take forward in your new strategy?**

So, what I've learned, because our work embraces work in the classroom, work in extracurricular settings, et cetera, is the positive impact film can have on the way young people learn and engage with different subjects. And perhaps most importantly,

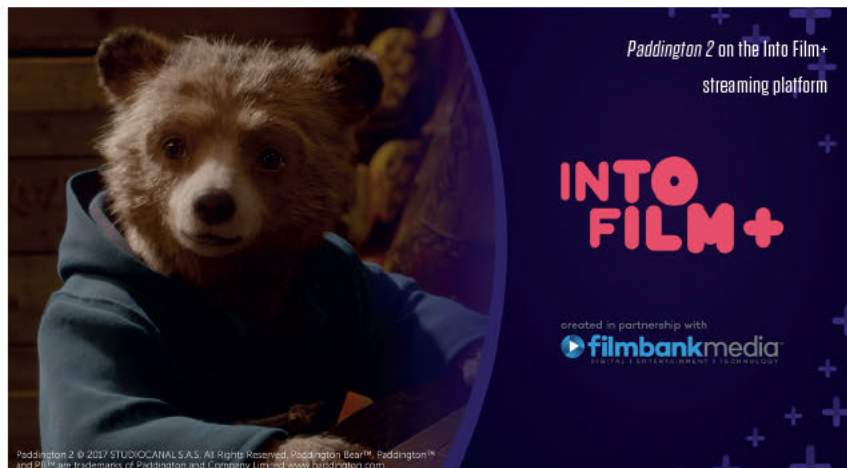


the impact it can have on the way they understand the world around them. I believe that's more important now than ever: being able to see the world through other people's eyes, through the stories that are told on film.

This is such a powerful medium. What I want us to do is utilise the potential of that medium to enrich young people's lives and their learning to really contribute to their educational experience.

It's so valuable and important that young people, in the same way they learn how to read and write, should learn the same things with the moving image. By doing so, they learn how to use those tools to tell their own stories. I just think that it's so valuable these days that young people are able to tell their own stories in the moving image.

The potential of film to enrich young people's lives and learning is massive. And that's why I believe so passionately that learning about film and getting to discover the range of films that are out there should be an entitlement for every child and young person.



to find out about careers, potential careers used in the screen industries. Even if they don't choose to pursue roles in the industry, everyone should be aware of what's out there.

We want to continue to nurture and encourage passionate filmgoers. You get the big commercial films, which are fantastic. But I hope that we can encourage young people to go beyond the ones that have the biggest marketing budgets and explore all these other fantastic films, whether that's classic films, whether that's British independent films, etc.

I'm looking to raise teachers' awareness of the potential and power of film in education, and to make sure that they've got confidence in the skills and the tools they need to teach with and about film. Because that way, their young people, their students are more likely to get those opportunities.

### What are your future plans for Into Film?

We hope to reach as many children and young people as possible and from as broad a range of backgrounds as possible.

We want to place more emphasis on enabling young people

### And finally, for old time's sake, this was my go-to question as a young reporter. If there was a movie based on your life, which actor would you want to play you?

I think there's a big difference between who I'd like to play me and who I think would play me. I would like David Tennant. I think he's a brilliant actor. I think it would be rather flattering to me and probably not to him. But who do I think would play me? Probably someone like Stephen Merchant.



While the Young Reporter Programme may have come to an end, it's great to see that Into Film is moving forward and that it is placing focus on film education through schools. This will mean it can benefit young people of all ages and backgrounds, and help them explore the world of film.

If you'd like to know more about Into Film and the services it offers, check out its website at [www.IntoFilm.org](http://www.IntoFilm.org) 

# INTO FILM



# LISTEN UP!

Inspired by *Dune*, award-winning London based composer, sound designer, producer and mixer Sefi Carmel looks at some of cinema's best-sounding movies...

**W**atching the outstanding *Dune* at an IMAX screening with Dolby Atmos sound (and a Q&A with the director Denis Villeneuve), was a real reminder of why we go to the cinema. It's also a reminder to how much of the experience is about sound.

*Dune* sounds amazing. Hans Zimmer composed an electronic score (no orchestra!) that is comprised of an equal measure of synths, percussion, and voices, including the wonderful voice of long-term collaborator Lisa Gerrard.

The blurred line between sound design and score in this aural masterpiece inspired me to discuss some of the most significant (and also my favourite) sounding movies.

## Saving Private Ryan (1998)

The first 15 minutes of this movie place the viewer on the beaches of Normandy in the most immersive, realistic depiction of a battle scene ever created on the silver screen. The chaotic and impactful sound design, masterfully executed by Richard Hymns and his team, perfectly portrays and captures the first person feeling of 'being there'. The absence of music further accentuates the realism of this scene, particularly when we take the POV of Captain Miller (Tom Hanks). When a mortar shell explodes close by, Miller's hearing is muffled and overtaken by loud tinnitus-like ear ringing. This has been referred to as a 'Saving Private Ryan moment' and used in many films since.

## Blade Runner (1982)

This groundbreaking film by Ridley Scott features an amazing electronic score by Vangelis. The score is a dark, dystopian, futuristic soundtrack that complements Scott's vision perfectly. Described as 'influential and mythical', this superb musical backdrop is often referred to as the pinnacle of synthesizer soundtracks.

## Star Wars (1977)

John Williams's score and Ben Burt's genius sound design are an integral part of what makes this franchise a canon that is almost a new religion. Burt's techniques were incredibly creative, often taking inspiration from organic sounds. For example, the original TIE fighter sound was created from a drastically altered elephant bellow! R2-D2's dialogue is a combination of an ARP 2600 synthesizer and Burt's own voice. Burt had free rein from George Lucas to experiment and create, and the result is a new language of cinematic sounds.

## Apocalypse Now (1979)

This is the first time the term 'sound design' was used. Walter Murch's groundbreaking work blending ceiling ventilators with helicopter rotor blades creates a unique sonic experience. Murch also often combined synthesizers with natural sounds, or deconstructed sounds achieved through the use of synthesizers.



## A Clockwork Orange (1971)

The use of music by Wendy Carlos in this masterpiece by Stanley Kubrick is truly incredible. By merging classical music and analogue synthesis, Carlos creates an anxiety-inducing cinematic experience that deeply immerses the viewer into this bizarre universe. The weaponising of Ludwig Van Beethoven's *9th Symphony* in the 'Aversion Therapy' given to Alex is a piece of iconic cinematography which has since played out in real life through the horrifying stories of torture by governments today.

## Pulp Fiction (1994)

An ode to music supervision, or 'needle drops', as they are referred to in Hollywood. With no traditional film score in place, this masterful selection of songs by Karyn Rachtman (the film's music supervisor) sets the tone and pace of this non-linear narrative by Quentin Tarantino. Most notably, to kick the movie off, we hear Dick Dale's now-iconic *Misirlou*.

## Inception (2010)

An awesome score by Hans Zimmer dominates this masterpiece by Christopher Nolan, featuring huge brass sound and a powerful dreamscape. Zimmer's aim for this film was to 'unleash his imagination in the best possible way' and bring a truly epic experience to the listener. This iconic soundtrack was also a notable catalyst for the popularisation of the modern-day 'BRAAM!' heard in so many film scores and trailers since. Matt Dunkley recalled his ears ringing for days after conducting this historic score at Air Studios, with one of the biggest brass ensembles ever used in recording for a film.



## Forbidden Planet (1956)

In *Forbidden Planet*, the concept of blurring the lines between music and the sound design of Bebe and Louis Barron is a forward-thinking approach that is way ahead of its time. Credited as the first entirely electronic film score, the Barrons even created their own electrical circuits to generate some of the original sounds.

## Wild At Heart (1990)

A fantastic score by Angelo Badalamenti, and inspired sound design by Randy Thom, create a beautiful dynamic light and shade for David Lynch's 1990 masterpiece.

## Sound Of Metal (2019)

This film has superb sound design that accentuates every minute detail of everyday life, and contrasts it with ominous silence as the protagonist loses his hearing. Supervising sound editor Nicolas Becker was briefed to 'tap into the body sound' that is experienced more as hearing is lost, and did so by utilising sounds recorded from his own body in an anechoic chamber. A very well-deserved Oscar for the sound design mix team.

## Trainspotting (1996)

Yet another ode to excellence in music supervision, with a selection of songs that perfectly encapsulated the feeling of the era. Hitting the ground running, literally, with Iggy Pop's *Lust For Life*, the soundtrack to this pop-culture phenomenon was divided into three distinct groups of music, consisting of: '70s pop music associated with drug misuse, '90s Britpop, and '90s techno-dance music.



# TOP OF THE BILL

**The curious case of poster credit alignment remains a bit of a thing. Stuart King has been looking into it...**

**A spoiler  
for the film  
*Se7en* lies  
ahead.**



**P**icture the scene. You arrive at your local cinema to watch a movie. While you walk along the corridor to your screen, you pass a selection of posters promoting the latest and upcoming releases. One in particular grabs your attention. It features a cast of A-list Hollywood stars standing in a line. Your eyes drift up towards the top of the poster, only to realise in horror that it is guilty of one of the most frustrating acts in movie marketing – the names don't correspond with the positioning of the actors.

Surely it can't be that difficult for the marketing team to correctly match up the actor's face underneath their name? Especially in the case of something like 2017's *Life* which only featured three actors on the poster?

Well, it turns out that it's not as simple as listing the names in alphabetical order and the faces being positioned according to their symmetry. It all comes down to the (not so) subtle art of billing. Billing refers to the order in which artists are credited for their





work on a film or show. In the days of Vaudeville, the headline act would appear in the largest font at the top of the poster. Hence the term ‘top of the bill’.

In the modern landscape of cinema-going, when it comes to movie marketing and billing, without fail the category that causes the most headaches in this regard is actors. But this was not always the case.

### Contracts...

During the Golden Age of Hollywood and the ‘studio system’, all the talent (directors, actors, writers) were under contract with the studio. Therefore they had the final say on how their movies were marketed. Take *The Jazz Singer* for example. The poster for the first ‘talkie’ is marketed with Al Jolson’s name above the title of the film. He was, at the time, considered to be America’s most famous and highly paid star of the 1920’s and so was a guaranteed box office draw and worth shouting about. However, just to make sure that the audiences were aware of who brought this film into cinemas, Warner Bros is featured twice – at the top and bottom of the poster.







Following the collapse of the studio system, stars and also their agents fought for top billing on a film-by-film basis – often a rather fraught and fractious process.

### ...And compromises

A compromise was required for Rob Marshall's *Chicago* (2002), where the leads were given equal billing through putting one name first left to right, and the other first top to bottom. It also mirrored the plot about competing stars. Catherine Zeta-Jones's name was first looking left to right and Renee Zellweger appeared highest up on the poster. Interestingly, this positioning was reversed for the film's home release.

It's not the first example of a movie sharing top billing across different platforms. The poster for *All The President's Men* featured Robert Redford's name first, yet when it came to the actual film, Dustin Hoffman was credited first. A similar trick was pulled with Oscar nominee and Best Picture hopeful *Don't Look Up*. Leonardo DiCaprio is credited first on the poster, but Jennifer Lawrence is top-billed in the film.

In terms of top (or above the title) billing, traditionally the names will read from left to right or top to bottom depending on the layout. When it comes to the actors' images, modern posters will default to a number of formats: usually the line-up or the floating head collage. The lead character or actor will appear in the centre of the image, with the other actors' positions determined by their billing or importance to the film.

Spare a thought for the team at Marvel Studios that worked on *Avengers: Infinity War*. A campaign

that featured 19 credits above the title and 22 – yep, 22 – actors appearing on the poster in varying shapes and sizes.

Nowadays, given the popularity of the genre, you might think that playing the titular superhero in a movie would guarantee you top billing. However, that's not always been the case. In 1978's *Superman*, despite becoming the Man Of Steel, Christopher Reeve was a relative unknown at the time, so was actually credited after the title – with Brando and Hackman receiving top billing. In 1989's *Batman*, Jack Nicholson used his gross percentage deal, at the time the most expensive in movie history, to be billed before Michael Keaton.

### Misdirection

There are always exceptions to the rule. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is a film that broke many of them when it came to its marketing strategy. Not only did its trailer not feature any footage from the film and created screening times as we know them in a bid to preserve its secrets, the poster also plays with convention. The film's





'star' Janet Leigh is front and centre image-wise, as you might expect. Yet looking at the billing of names, her name appears on the bottom, credited as 'and Janet Leigh as Marion Crane'. Given the prevalence of 'and' credits in modern movies such as 'and Samuel L Jackson' in *Deep Blue Sea*, perhaps audiences should have cottoned on to her fate before she reached the Bates Motel.

Sometimes the absence of a name, rather than its positioning, can be equally interesting. Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman are named 'above the line' for *Se7en*, yet one actor remains conspicuous by their absence. Kevin Spacey played the twisted serial killer John Doe, but is not featured in any of the marketing materials, only credited during the end credits. The reasoning at the time was that he was coming off the success of *The Usual Suspects* and knew that if he was listed third after the two detectives, the audience would just be waiting for him to turn up and soon realise who the killer was.

There could be contractual reasons for an actor not being credited on a film, but more often than not it'll revolve around saving the moment they appear on the big screen for the audience to enjoy, unspoiled. A feeling fans of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* might have felt. Following months of speculation but no glimpses of them in the posters or trailers, it created huge excitement to see [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in the film. If you don't want the surprise ruined, don't look at the film's IMDb page, as they're listed in the film's end credits.

With the industry finding its feet again following the lockdowns and closures enforced by the pandemic, film studios are having to work extra hard to get audiences back into the cinema again. It's no surprise that the biggest success stories so far have come from franchises such as Marvel and James Bond, that have huge awareness and brand recognition. Although the market is arguably character-led at the moment, there is no denying that star power will be very important in the fight to get bums back on seats. As a result, the fight will be just as fierce for actors to remain top of the bill... even at the expense of any sense of order.

Yet in all the darkness, a glimmer of hope came from an unexpected source. *The 355*.



### *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and its unique compromise...

Irwin Allen's disaster movie featured a veritable who's who of Hollywood at the time, including two bona fide A-listers in Steve McQueen and Paul Newman. Now, you could make an argument in support of each actor being the bigger star. Newman had five Oscar nominations to McQueen's one at that point; however, McQueen arguably had a better box office return with the likes of *The Great Escape* and *Bullitt*. Legend has it that McQueen was fiercely protective of his position (no surprise coming from a star who was a keen racer) and deemed himself to be top of the bill.

The (at the time) rather unique compromise to appease both sides was that McQueen would appear first reading left to right but Newman would appear first going top to bottom. A closer look at the poster reveals that Newman's name, and also image, is just ever so slightly higher than McQueen's.

Forget the plot of five women from different government agencies coming together to foil a potential terrorist plot. The real victory here is five actors seemingly working without ego to ensure that fans could enjoy a film poster where the correct names appeared above the correct actress. Perhaps Jessica Chastain should keep her producer hat on and oversee all film poster design... [18](#)



# Making A Curious Tale

**An evil spirit keeps watch over East Sussex:  
Leigh Tarrant tells the tale of his short film..**

**L**et's go back to the start of the pandemic, March 2020. My usual round of corporate and entertainment films had been put on hold, or worse, cancelled altogether.

Still, this in turn gave me an outlet to stop and consider. I always wanted to make my own movie, albeit a short, something that I knew I could achieve, with the help of some of my local contacts and colleagues. Enter the Christmas ghost story phenomenon. I was always fascinated by those old-fashioned ghosts stories that we used to see, like the *Hammer House of Horror* TV series, or even those 'ghost stories' for Christmas that the BBC had transmitted for years before.

I love the simplicity yet the scale and feel of these old vintage dramas. I took a novella from English author MR James, something that's been adapted for screens and plays many times over, only this time I added something extra: a few new scenes, played with a slight tongue-in-cheek delivery, along with making it up to date yet retaining a bygone era of old, this time the 1960s.

## Planning

One thing I had decided was to make this feel more like a 'movie' not a TV drama. I wanted a little more depth. I also wanted to give the film pace, to start unhurried with slower cuts only to pick up speed as we went along. Once I'd built up suspense and pulled the viewer in, I'd build to a crescendo of fast-paced cuts and a feeling of urgency. I also enhanced the story to make it a more 'whodunnit' thriller, leaving room to explore the supernatural and evilness within. A story of retribution.

So here we were, an independent film company, a small commission to use for the production, an aspiring film team, all now ready to at last get down and make something entertaining, watchable, and hopefully good enough for a transmission or two.

Back then, we were at the height of the pandemic (May 2020). I would use this to my advantage. The locations across East Sussex would be easier to use, after all most of this film plays out across the countryside and beaches, oh, and the odd graveyard here and there. Less people, less cars, less life happening in general would make filming a lot easier.

All the scenes (about 24 in all) would only ever feature two people at any one time. This would make the shoot easier, especially deciding on plotting and movements within a scene for each character. I concentrated on using local talent along with using Pete Tindal as the main protagonist, as I'd worked with him before on TV shows and an earlier musical film. It was nice to keep everything and everything from East Sussex. This would very much help in the marketing of the film.

Other things I needed to do were to arrange the aerial filming sequences, which was achieved by using a second unit filming team. I wanted to capture the south-east coastline with the crashing waves, along with a lighthouse, the chalk cliffs at Beachy Head, and some dense forestry. This was to be used much akin to Stanley Kubrick's opening of *The Shining*. I had contacted my good friend Jeff Crampton, who runs a studio in Crowborough, to write the theme music, something orchestral and melodic yet in that typical horror film style.

Something else he added: numerous underlying scores for the complete film, eerie string arrangements, disturbing chants, and numerous other short passages of music that I could lay into the final cut. Jeff did a sterling job and I'm ever thankful to him as this really made the mood even more engaging and frightening.





## Filming

The main shoot moved into the next year, 2021, again with various lockdowns imposed across our region. Early June allowed for lighter evenings, and longer days to shoot. Locations would include Burwash forestry, the Rye estuary, Heathfield high street, Arlington Church, Seven Sisters, the steam railway station in Bodiam, Beachy Head, Birling Gap, and not forgetting the Powdermills Hotel based in Battle. This was where we decided to shoot all the interior sequences as the hotel had the 18th century feel required for the film's setting.

In all, we shot for 28 days, sometimes short days, sometimes a few shots to go back and capture things I'd missed, such as the prevailing wind within the trees, shots of sunrises, the night time forest, higher crest of waves, things that weren't always achievable first time round. Also, as we hadn't insurance, I couldn't waste other people's time, so I carefully had to monitor what the good ol' UK weather had in store.

A few times we did have to contend with the general public in the background, particularly at Rye estuary. Also, as we were shooting 'live sound' and because of budget restrictions (I couldn't afford cast overdubs in post-production of dialogue cues), we did need peace and quiet! On the day, we had the local beach patrol on practice manoeuvres in the water, a group of Japanese tourists, the usual onslaught of barking dogs, roaming sheep, and of course the seagull squawks to deal with, but all told, after a long day we did succeed in capturing what we required!

The filming of the interior sequences was enjoyable and easier to achieve by contrast, as we were in control of the various interiors. The time of day didn't really matter, even the late evening sunlight would filter through the main entrance and onto the Georgian staircase, which would help with the subtle light required to shoot a female spectre gliding up the main staircase onto the upstairs landing, laying in wait to destroy our protagonist whilst he lay asleep.

## Finale

The post-production was achieved using my own Avid MC editing suite. I gathered each scene, logged each piece, and also got together my library of sound effects. Jeff's music was imported shortly afterwards, so I had all things ready go – in-between a few other pieces that began to creep in, known as my 'day job'.

After four long months the film was ready, some promotional cuts and trailers were made, the poster art along with lobby cards for the opening premiere, it was time to launch the movie across the UK as best I could with little marketing monies put aside. In unison with Raystede animal shelter charity and along with numerous local radio skits, the premiere was set for November at a local cinema. I'm pleased to report it gained good reviews and many people really enjoyed what they saw. It was the final 52-minute cut of a good old-fashioned English ghost story, all filmed locally in Sussex. It's worth pointing out that many movies don't actually get the privilege to showcase a final cut on the big screen any more. Most will go straight to TV streaming services or downloads (some even straight to DVD), as this is the best way of recouping the money and the way everyone wants to see films nowadays. Generally only the large-budget features get the privilege of cinema runs because they have the big bucks and sponsorship.

I'm pleased to report that our film is now available online and has been entered into quite a few festivals internationally, along with gaining good reviews along the way. Even a regional TV showing once or twice. Well received generally. Only time will tell how well the film fares, but it was an enjoyable experience. Now then, back to the day job and filming that all-new production for a client launching something about edible seaweed! 🌿

**Find more about A Curious Tale at**  
**[www.skoochmedia.co.uk](http://www.skoochmedia.co.uk)**



# Film Festival

**From drunken idea to fully fledged film festival. Ti Singh didn't just have an idea for a film. He got involved with a whole festival – in a cinema that'd closed down...**

**B**ristol truly is a city of film. It's the birthplace of Cary Grant and William Friese-Greene. It's the home of Aardman and Stephen Merchant. It has also been the backdrop of numerous productions, including Richard Burton's supernatural thriller *The Medusa Touch*, *Starter For Ten*, *Stan & Ollie*, and recent BBC drama *The Outlaws*.

As a UNESCO City of Film, it's also home to numerous film festivals, among them Cinema Rediscovered, Slapstick Festival, Afrika Eye, and Bristol Palestine Film Festival. However, if you are a fan of the action, science-fiction, and horror cinema genres, you've been hard-pressed to find a festival to cater to this love.

For Dave Taylor, co-owner of 20th Century Flicks, one of the last video rental stores in the UK, and Timon Singh – that's me! – programmer of the Bristol Bad Film Club ("bad films, good times!"), it had been a topic often discussed over pints of beer. How do you bring a genre film festival to Bristol?

Luckily, we have the perfect excuse. This year marks 40 years since 20th Century Flicks' founding in 1982. It also marks 40 years since the release of a host of classic genre films, including *Mad Max 2*, *Blade Runner*, and *Poltergeist*.

## Genre

"When I first met Ti, he was coming into the video shop and asking for trashy action movies that had no chance of having a DVD release," reminisces Dave. "As a fan of indie cinema, I was bemused by his passion for genre films. But, over the years, it has turned to respect. His devotion to these kinds of movies is beyond doubt, and it is also somewhat infectious. Despite working in a video shop since my late teens, I had never seen *Basket Case*, or a

Shaw Brothers movie, or a Roger Corman movie – the shame. Anyway, we were talking about how to celebrate Flicks' 40th, and Ti's petulance about having to go to London for anything genre-cinema related – and, bingo, everything fell into place!"

Petulance, bordering on general sulking, can be a great motivator. For almost a decade, I've run the Bristol Bad Film Club in Bristol with sell-out screenings each month and all profits going to local charities. Set up simply because I was annoyed I'd have to go all the way to London to see a theatrical screening of Tommy Wiseau's legendary *The Room*, I've found that being told something can't be done is the reason to do it.

The location for the festival, if anything, just jet-fuelled this trait. Bristol is home to a host of cinemas but, for a first-time festival, few of the larger chains were willing to take a chance on us. Then Dave hit upon an idea.

Since 2000, Bristol has been home to an IMAX screen. When it opened, it was used as part of the At-Bristol Science Centre, where it did 70mm film presentations of everything from nature documentaries to Pet Shop Boys music videos, often in 3D. It had done the occasional film screening, but, for more than a decade, has generally laid dormant, used as an occasional events space by its new owners, Bristol Aquarium. The auditorium still retains its impressive 19m x 15m screen, however.

The space has barely changed since it originally opened. The seats are a vibrant bright blue with only some minor wear and tear to the fabric. The only sign that gives away its age is the odd well worn-in cola stain on the carpet. However, the auditorium itself is remarkably well-preserved, given that it has had little use in the past decade or so.

The seats are a bit weathered and old-fashioned, and the IMAX projector long since broken,



with any maintenance costs well outside the Aquarium's budget. For a weekend-long genre film festival, however, it's perfect. The Aquarium's team is eager for someone to prove that the venue can be a viable space and, essentially, has given us free rein to make it work.

While I have almost a decade of experience hosting film events, this is going to be a whole other level. Luckily, there is a wealth of love and support for Dave and 20th Century Flicks throughout the city, and that opened a lot of doors because he knows everyone. Thus, we were quickly able to track down the building's old projection crew and pick their brains to see if this would all be possible or just a fever dream.

Digital projection equipment was going to have to be bought in and, on top of that, there was also the question of how to hook it all up to the IMAX's sound setup. Then there's the small matter of programming and licensing the films to be shown, and marketing the festival to the city's cinephiles and genre fans further abroad.

All within a few months. We were going to need a team.

## Assemble

First up, Tom Vincent, archivist at animation legends Aardman. Tom has an incredible passion for film exhibition and can happily talk about aspect ratios, projection systems, and film formats

– perfect for figuring out what kind of projector and setup we'd need. Next up, Tessa Williams – aka the Bristol branch of Film Twitter. She not only has a love of all things action, sci-fi, and horror, but, as an avid film festival-goer, she knows what people expect, how best to present it, and has the contacts to spread the word.

And, finally, Anthony Nield, head of production at Powerhouse Films and its Blu-ray label, Indicator, and a former producer at Arrow Video. Having worked in distribution for a number of years, with an emphasis on retrospective releases of cult classics and forgotten curios, Anthony provides an experienced insight into mounting a rich and diverse series of screenings. Between them, we had our core team.

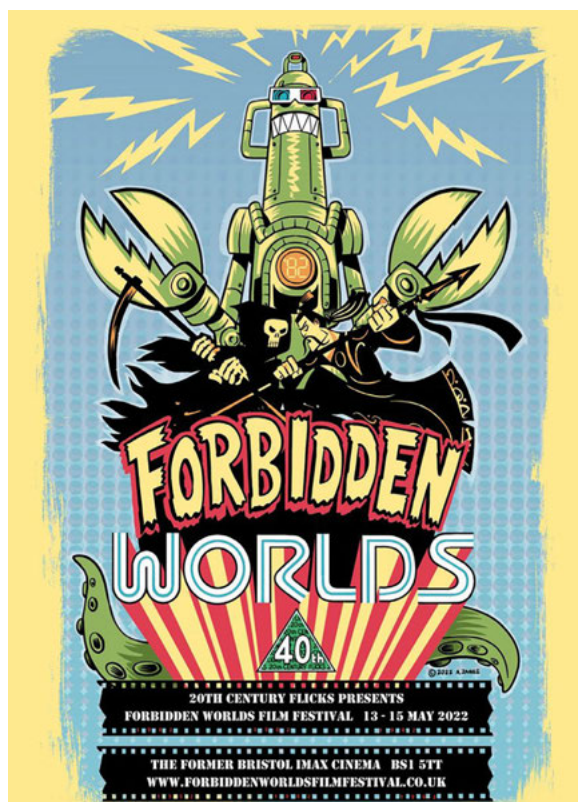
We were divided as to how many of the more 'mainstream' 1982 titles should be programmed over the more leftfield choices that might appeal to a niche, hardcore audience, but aren't shown more regularly at genre film festivals. Obviously if you're doing a genre festival around 1982 and you don't show *Blade Runner*, you're just going to get blowback, and it's the same for a number of classics from that year. But we needed to programme a festival that would also cater to the films that were often ignored by audiences at the time, and those that found appreciation via video rental shops like Flicks.

For Dave, programming the festival has also given him a new-found appreciation for less-well-loved, bottom-shelf VHS titles. "Over the last few months, I have come not only to empathise with fans of the genre, but have also experienced a small epiphany in their appeal and excellent qualities. Like the director in Preston Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels* when he watches a comedy with a group of prisoners and finally understands a crucial part of the appeal of cinema, I think I finally get why these films are so important, especially when watched communally."

With tickets now on sale and selling faster than the team expected (the 'early bird' weekend passes sold out in four hours!), the festival team feel they've struck the right balance – now they've just got to pull the festival off because, if they do, the long-abandoned IMAX screen could, once again, become a new and exciting cinema venue for the city. <sup>13</sup>

*For more information about Forbidden Worlds Film Festival, visit [www.forbiddenworldsfilmfestival.co.uk](http://www.forbiddenworldsfilmfestival.co.uk).*

*You can also follow them on Twitter and Instagram at @FWFilmFestival.*





# WRITING WORKSHOP

The mighty James Moran returns, as he picks up his guide to writing your own script. And we're onto building your ideas...



**P**reviously, on *Dallas...* we did an anti-pep talk, talked about how ideas can come from anywhere, and found a fun idea. And now, the continuation!

Right. You've had a month to let your idea percolate in your brain. You didn't have to do anything. But you *have* been doing something, without even realising. The more the idea sits there, the more your brain gets excited thinking about it, in the background. The longer you can put off doing actual work, the better. Not because we're lazy (although we are), but because if your brain is having fun, it'll be more creative.

Now, though, it's time to take that idea, and brainstorm. Don't worry. This is the easy part. In fact, it's also the most fun part. This process is designed to maximise the fun, and minimise the difficult areas. Anything that keeps it exciting. You have your idea, now all you have to do is think up fun stuff.

Open a text file or grab a notepad and pen. Now, start brainstorming. Focus on your idea, and start thinking up random ideas related to it. Anything fun, scary, cool, or weird. Could be scenes, random

moments, lines of dialogue, characters, jokes, fragments, anything at all.

Don't worry about making them fit together – that's not the point yet. Doesn't matter if the ideas contradict each other, or make no sense. Just defocus. Anything goes! No pressure on any of it, just fun.

## Getting it down

Brainstorm everything and anything that could possibly be related to that initial idea. Anything that pops into your head, type it all into the text file or write it into the notepad, in a stream of consciousness. Ask yourself questions, answer them, and type all that into the document, so you can see your thought process.

For example, let's take one of those local newspaper headline ideas we looked at last time: "Volunteer awarded for 30 years' service" – a volunteer who trained sea cadets for 30 years received a citizen award. The idea that gave me was: when an elderly veteran takes a group of young sea cadets out to sea on one last, simple training mission, they get into danger and have to work together as a real crew to fight the threat.

It's a pretty simple idea, probably the most obvious one, as I thought of it two seconds after seeing the headline. Also, it's pretty much the same story as *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan*. But let's go with it as an example. Don't worry about story, or making sense, or logic, or any of that. Just brainstorm.

Here's how a typical section of brainstorming would look, based on that idea:

*Old veteran has been training the kids for years, is he forced to retire? Is this his last training session before they give him the medal and kick him off to retirement?*

*--Maybe a new cadet leader is making him retire, so he can take over the training? Maybe*



*he thinks the old guy can't cut it any more, and wants him out?*

*--Does the new cadet leader go with them, and we see how useless he is in a crisis? The old guy has to take over?*

*Small coastal fishing village, fishing and boating economy big in the area.*

*Cadets aged 10 to 18, a mix of different types of kids*

*--Do they all have to work as a boat crew when the crisis starts? How do real boat crews work? Would some of the boat controls (?) be too hard to use if you're a kid? What sort of boat is it? Research what boats they use and what they do.*

*--Some kids from difficult backgrounds, all have to put aside differences and work together.*

*What is the actual threat they face? What is the worst thing that could happen?*

*--bad weather*

*--sharks*

*--sea monster*

*--pirates*

*Maybe the big threat, whatever it is, has been causing problems for the village for a while, without anyone realising?*

*Do they have to blow up the boat at some point, to defeat the threat? How would they do that?*

*"Get off my boat!"*

Yes, my brainstorms always look like this, a gigantic mess, or the ravings of a serial killer. Doesn't matter, as long as you can understand it – use whatever visual method works for you. I write pages and pages

of it, just thinking it through. It lets me be completely creative without limiting myself, letting my mind explore it fully. I write down *anything* that could be in the script, without second-guessing it or trying to make it work. This way, I come up with things that would never occur to me if I just went straight to an outline first.

To help spark ideas, research real-life stories and people related to the subject, find links, photos, songs, anything that might come in handy. Throw them all into the document. Now, most of what you brainstorm couldn't possibly be in the same story; it'd be a total mess. But it gives you options for later.

*(Let's ignore for now that real sea cadets don't actually go on big sea voyages as part of their training. If I was writing this, I'd research something more realistic, or make up a separate organisation so I could make my own rules.)*

That is *all* you need to do for this stage. You don't have to make anything fit, or make it logical, or make any decisions. Just think up stuff. You can do this for as long as you like. A few days, or several months. This should be fun, so allow yourself to enjoy it, without worrying about logic, or story, or structure. Just let the ideas flow.

When you finish, or run out of ideas, stop. Put it aside, for at least a week or two. Next issue, we'll start putting it together, and finding the surprises you didn't even know were there... 

*You can find James on Twitter at @jamesmoran, and at his website: [www.jamesmoran.com](http://www.jamesmoran.com)*

My brainstorm always looks like this, a gigantic mess, or the ravings of a serial killer





## Escape From Mogadishu

Certificate: 15

Director: Seung-wan Ryu

Cast: Kim Yoon-seok, In-Sung Jo, Joon-ho Huh, Kyo-hwan Koo, So-jin Kim, Man-sik Jeong

Release date: 25th March

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



**A** tense political thriller, *Escape From Mogadishu* is based on a true story. It tells the tale of the 1990 Somali civil war from the perspective of South and North Korean diplomats trying to escape the country's capital city as it becomes a war zone. When the Somali government provides no aid, the two opposing sides realise they need to work together if they want to get out alive.

The film was South Korea's entry for the 2022 Oscars, and is full of suspense – though it takes its time to meticulously lay out the political backdrop before diving into any action. The two groups must often hide from both rebel and government forces alike, and the lack of distinction between friend and foe heightens the sense of danger running through the film. The action isn't always high-octane or explosive, but when it is, it really pulls it off. The outstanding example of this is a nail-bitingly tense car chase that ramps up the audience's stress levels and is the film's highlight.

The only disappointment in this regard is the underuse of In-Sung Jo's character, Councillor Kang. Early on, we see him practising some martial arts moves, with a taxi driver jokingly comparing him to Bruce Lee. While this appears to be a massive piece of foreshadowing, the moment leads to very little payoff beyond one (admittedly very well-choreographed) fight.

However, the cast performances are collectively great. Kim Yoon-seok and



## All The Old Knives

Certificate: TBC

Joon-ho Huh are the standout performers, playing Ambassadors Han and Rim from South and North Korea, respectively. The two triumph at exuding constant wariness towards one another, but also a tentative sense of hope. On the opposite end of the spectrum are In-Sung Jo's Kang and North Korean Councillor Tae (played by Kyo-hwan Koo). The pair are immediately at each other's throats, with both actors showing an aptitude for displaying a quick and explosive temper that's scene-stealing when provoked.

While *Escape From Mogadishu* is set in the middle of the Somali conflict, the focus is always on the Korean protagonists, and characters aren't portrayed as binary good or evil. This is both a blessing and a curse. When applied to the Korean protagonists, it makes for some very moving moments. The magnitude of the conflict strips away the political differences between the groups, leaving only vulnerable people in need of each other's help. But for the Somali characters, it results in a lack of humanisation. Atrocious violence is committed on both sides, with little explanation of the rebels' cause. It's in the representation of the Somali characters that the film lets itself down.

*Escape From Mogadishu* is a suspenseful thriller that, at least where the Korean characters are concerned, chooses people over politics. The protagonists are easy to root for, and the action will have you on the edge of your seat. **FS**

**Director:** Janus Metz Pedersen

**Cast:** Chris Pine, Thandiwe Newton,

Laurence Fishburne, Jonathan Pryce, Orli Shuka

**Release date:** 8th April

**Reviewer:** Lauren Miles



**B**ased on the novel of the same name by Olen Steinhauer, *All The Old Knives* is an espionage thriller set eight years on from a devastating plane hijacking that killed over 100 people. When it comes to light that the terrorists had inside information, CIA agents and former lovers Henry Pelham (Chris Pine) and Celia Harrison (Thandiwe Newton) meet for a dinner, that doubles as an interrogation aimed at finding the mole.

Flitting between the present day and the day of the hijacking, we get to see how Henry and Celia's relationship has changed from then to now. However, the hijacking part of the plot is extremely familiar and holds very little in the way of depth or surprise – the film is really about our lead characters. And that's very lucky, because the supporting ones are uniformly wafer thin. Laurence Fishburne and Jonathan Pryce mostly get by on being themselves, with Fishburne especially utilising his natural coolness to distract from his generic character (he's Henry's boss at the CIA). To be fair, it works.

Henry and Celia, on the other hand, have buckets of emotional depth. At times, Henry may seem to be serious and all-business, but he's also haunted by the events of the hijacking,

his inability to help, and his persistent feelings for Celia.

Pine and Newton perfectly juggle their characters' complex mix of emotions as the film heightens the present-day feelings of paranoia. Given that their relationship is so central to the plot and the events at its core, it was always going to be important for these two to have chemistry, and they really do. When they first meet for their interrogation-dinner, there's a palpable tension that makes their history as ex-lovers who never got closure believable.

The hijacking plot may be simple and, at times, predictable, but fans of espionage movies will still get plenty of enjoyment out of this. It's more about intrigue than action, but it's absolutely never boring.

Some might critique the use of Islamic extremists as the terrorists, and this could be seen as being in bad taste. However, it's offset a bit by the events of the hijacking being set in 2012 – a time when al-Qaeda was fresher in people's minds, and Osama bin Laden had only died a year prior. It also doesn't paint the leader of the terrorist group as completely unsympathetic, which is worthy of note.

*All The Old Knives* may be a by-the-numbers thriller with some completely expected turns, but Henry and Celia are very nuanced characters, and Chris Pine and Thandiwe Newton are a great pairing who put in a couple of admirable performances. If you enjoy the genre and like the look of the cast, you'll have plenty of fun with this. **FS**



## One Of These Days

Certificate: 15

Director: Bastian Günther

Cast: Joe Cole, Carrie Preston, Callie Hernandez, Cullen Moss

Release date: April 1st

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



**O**n the surface, Bastian Günther's *One Of These Days* has a simple but promising premise. As a group of desperate Texans take part in a 'Hands On' competition to win a pickup truck, there's ample opportunity to use its two-hour runtime to explore how the needs of the poor are exploited for entertainment, and exactly what drives their desperation. It succeeds in some ways, but often it falls short of the mark for a variety of reasons.

The film's protagonist, Kyle, is a family man played by *Peaky Blinders*' Joe Cole. He, alongside Carrie Preston's Joan Dempsey (who runs the competition), are really the only developed characters in the film, and even they are simple and thin. Preston carries the film with her charisma, which Cole is sadly lacking. It may be a stylistic choice considering Kyle is part of a gruelling contest of endurance, but he seems to sleepwalk through the movie – even its sudden, dramatic climax.

In terms of the other characters, *One Of These Days* clearly wants us to sympathise with them, and the fact that they feel forced to torture themselves in this way for a truck, but none of their motivations are revealed. They're

a sea of faces surrounding the vehicle, making conversation but not really telling anything about themselves. The film clearly wants to make a point about class divisions, but the lack of character development really affects how impactful that message is.

Problems also arise from the film's structure and pacing. The two work hand-in-hand to slow the film down – occasionally it feels like you're watching the contest in real time. Because the movie skips over the important parts of a prologue (namely character development), most of it is dedicated to the competition. All we really do is watch people get more and more sweaty and delirious. It's almost as gruelling to watch as it would be to take part,

## You Are Not My Mother

Certificate: 15

Director: Kate Dolan

Cast: Hazel Doupe, Carolyn Bracken, Ingrid Craigie, Paul Reid, Jordanne Jones, Jade Jordan

Release date: April 8th

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



**T**he feature film debut from director and writer Kate Dolan mixes psychological horror with Irish folklore to create an eerie, suspenseful, slow burn of a horror film. Everyday life takes a sinister turn for the teenage Char (Hazel Doupe) when her mother Angela (Carolyn Bracken) disappears after taking her to school. Already struggling with her mental health, Angela returns the next day, but seems different. As her behaviour becomes increasingly worrying, Char's grandmother Rita (Ingrid Craigie) suspects supernatural causes.

The supernatural and the psychological are fertile





and that's likely exactly why the film is structured this way.

The climax is extremely sudden and surprising, which is a highlight of the whole thing, but it's over too quickly and is followed by a baffling epilogue. Lasting 20 minutes, it undermines the climax by taking us

back in time to lay the groundwork it should've done at the beginning. Granted, it makes us feel for Kyle a little bit more, but it's a confusing choice. Not as confusing as a strange conversation that happens right at the end, though, which derails the logic of the film.

*One Of These Days* holds a lot of promise in its premise and cast, but fails to put the work in when it comes to the character development needed to realise that promise. It also makes some questionable structure choices. A wasted opportunity. **TS**

territory and extremely compatible when it comes to horror – just look at how popular *The Babadook* has become. *You Are Not My Mother* sets itself apart from its peers by establishing a very Irish identity, using local legend and folklore as a metaphor for Angela's struggles with mental health. But before it delves into the fictional, it plays the long game of keeping us guessing as to what's really going on.

Two-thirds of the film is devoted to building that tension, focusing on the perspective of a very frightened Char. Seeing the narrative through the eyes of a child (one who has no idea what's going on) helps to sustain the unsettling atmosphere that permeates the film. What does

it even better is a nightmare sequence near the start that utilises bold red lighting and some really unsettling makeup and practical effects. There's only one scene like it in the whole movie, and that's a shame as it really stands out visually in a film that otherwise favours realism in its cinematography and production design.

*You Are Not My Mother* wouldn't achieve anything near the dizzying heights of suspense it does without Carolyn Bracken. Her performance as the changed, volatile Angela is really a quite horrifying thing. What begins as simple mood swings slowly morphs into a visceral, animalistic performance. The danger in conflating the supernatural with poor mental

health is that it could be seen as painting sufferers as 'dangerous' or inherently 'evil' (as films in the past have done). Thankfully, by its conclusion, *You Are Not My Mother* chooses and clearly presents the cause of Angela's illness, so it fortunately lands on the right side of mental health representation.

As a down-the-line horror film, it is perhaps a bit understated – it's clearly going for atmosphere rather than genuine no-holds-barred frights. Unlike *Char*, we won't be having any nightmares about it, but the lack of reliance on cheap jump scares is commendable and there's tons of suspense and eeriness. Besides, it's set at Halloween, and who doesn't like a good Halloween film? **TS**





## Murina

Certificate: 15

**Director:** Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic

**Cast:** Gracija Filipovic, Danica Curcic, Leon Lucev, Cliff Curtis, Jonas Smulders

**Release date:** April 8th

**Reviewer:** Lauren Miles



**H**elmed by Croatian director Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic, coming-of-age drama *Murina* was the recipient of Cannes Film Festival's Camera d'Or award in 2021. Julija (played by Gracija Filipovic) lives on an idyllic island with her controlling, oppressive father Ante (Leon Lucev) and acquiescent mother Nela (Danica Curcic). Tensions rise when Ante's wealthy old friend Javier (Cliff Curtis) comes to visit and gives Julija new ideas of what her life could be like.

*Murina* is a tale of opposites, most obviously between Ante's narrow view of what Julija will accomplish and his friend Javier's 'the sky's the limit' approach. The world the film presents is a beautiful and seemingly boundless coastal landscape. It's always sunny; the sea always glitters. The freedom Julija finds in the sea contrasts starkly with the enclosed, prison-like world her father crafts for her, where her life is laid out and she must always do as she's told.

The whole cast does an excellent job, but Leon Lucev overshadows everybody around him. It's immediately clear what kind of man Ante is – foul-tempered, controlling, with archaic views. He's a loose cannon, and Lucev portrays every emotional fluctuation with precision, whether that's an outburst of anger or a subtle shift

in his facial expression. The mark of an excellent bad guy is when the actor can make you hate them in the first 20 minutes of a film, and Lucev excels at this.

Coming from a female director, it's no wonder *Murina* uses its teenage protagonist and overbearing father to explore womanhood from the perspective of someone who's just coming into it. Julija and her mother are used as props during visits with wealthy guests, there to look happy and not speak unless spoken to. But at the same time as treating Julija like an object, Ante also seems afraid of her sexuality.

As a girl growing into a woman, she wants to experiment with more revealing clothing, but is constantly told to cover up as though her body is causing offence. It's a familiar paradox for any woman – being too old to be considered a child but still too young to be thought of or accepted as an adult – and *Murina* portrays this experience of being a young woman well.

The only part of *Murina* that doesn't sit right is the characterisation of Nela. Yes, she is clearly Ante's victim, but she is not given as much sympathy as she could receive. In fact, at times she is painted as an accomplice. Julija blames her for choosing a life of entrapment, and the film doesn't exactly disagree with her. The topic of emotional abuse could be handled more sensitively.

That said, Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic's film is a beautifully shot depiction of becoming a woman, toxic masculinity, challenging the patriarchy, and hope for a better future. **15**



## True Things

Certificate: 15

Director: Harry Wootliff

Cast: Ruth Wilson, Tom Burke, Hayley Squires

Release date: April 1st

Reviewer: Linda Marric



**I**n 2018, writer-director Harry Wootliff impressed greatly with the simplicity and relatability of her tender debut feature *Only You*, a film about a young couple attempting to navigate their differences and love for one another. Her latest film goes further into cementing her as a filmmaker who truly understands the power of creating complex characters you can't help but root for.

Adapted from Deborah Kay Davies's best-selling novel *True Things About Me*, the film stars Ruth Wilson (*Jane Eyre*, *The Little Stranger*, *Dark River*) as Kate, a naive loner whose life is turned upside down by Tom Burke's louche ex-con, Blond. Wilson and Jude Law produced the film, alongside The Bureau, BBC Films, and the British Film Institute.

Kate, a troubled single woman in her thirties, is struggling to find happiness and feels trapped in a dead end job she hates. While her disapproving parents have all but given up on her ever making something of herself, Kate's best friend Allison (Hayley Squires, sublime) believes things could be different if only she agreed to settle for a nice guy with a normal job.

Salvation for Kate comes in the shape of Blond, a handsome drifter she meets at her benefit office job who offers her a way out of her humdrum life. Charmed by his cocksure and nonchalant demeanour, Kate falls head over heels for Blond. He, on the other hand, takes no time in showing her his dangerous and unpredictable side. As their torrid love affair takes a dangerous turn, Kate finally finds the strength to take her life into her own hands.

Wootliff delivers a gorgeously layered, bold, and unabashedly feminist story about a young woman's journey of discovery

and her eventual realisation that she is enough. Elevated by Ashley Connor's dizzying, intimate, and beautifully composed cinematography, *True Things* does a great job of depicting Kate's shambolic journey from browbeaten and subservient, to self-assured and dignified.

Anchored by Wilson and Burke's electrifying performances and by Wootliff's and first-time screenwriter Molly Davies's commendably sparse dialogue, there is something truly magnificent and unapologetically sensual about this adaptation of Davies's novel. And while there's no denying the fact that the film loses its way slightly towards the final chapter, there is still a lot here to admire and appreciate.

Wootliff's tenacity and refusal to simplify or spoon-feed the film's ambiguous denouement is further proof that she is undoubtedly one of the most fearless young filmmakers around, and I for one can't wait to see what she does next. [B](#)





## Prototype

Certificate: TBC

Director: Jack Peter Mundy

Cast: Shelley Marshall, Stephanie Lodge, Andrew Rolfe, Jamie Robertson, Tom Taplin

Release date: April 8th

Reviewer: Eli Allison



**O**kay, let's break it down; a family of four is at the heel of generic 'Bad Dad' (and scientist) who brings home his prototype android – One – to clean their pants and, as far as I could tell, close doors. Shiz hits the fan when Dad isn't happy with the One and makes himself another, called Two. And... Action.

The androids duly go on to then Hoover up all the character development this film has to offer, which is saying something for characters with the internal logic of black holes, wandering around in knock-off Michael Myers and Jason masks, respectively. The frustrating thing is this movie is bursting with ideas. It's a feminist critique of the power men have over women's bodies! No... it's an allegory of how we palm out unpleasant work to low-income workers. Wait... No... it's about man's hubris when it comes to creating the tools of our destruction. Hold on... now I get it! It's about how trauma affects young men and turns them into monsters themselves... Oh lord, we're back to the feminist thing again... Watching this film felt like having a tennis ball launcher filled with bricks aimed at your face. It doesn't help that the tone is all over the spot. Is it campy horror? Sci-fi thriller? Gore horror? Existential sci-fi?

The film wanted me to believe that a multi-billion pound company (you need god money

to build gods) would land on that design for their androids. A design that, if you'd bought it, would cause you to send the thing back because the delivery person had obviously thrown it at your front door, and it had got left out in the rain. Androids in films look best when either wild CGI creations or horrifyingly like us. These ones are the androids you'd get from the bargain basement.

I can see what the filmmakers were trying to do. It's a sci-fi horror, so make it scary; but it wasn't, it was ridiculous. Sometimes, that's not a bad thing, but with one character suffering mental and domestic abuse, it kept pulling the mood back into a grim place. It's hard to have fun at stupid people meeting absurd ends when every other scene, you have a cowering wife covered in bruises struggling with the trauma of abuse. Violence in films should either be laughably gratuitous or an honest exploration of how it affects people. Having both is like smashing Tommy K and brown sauce onto your chips.

This film had such promising ingredients: a family trapped, a dangerous new element into the mix, a cute kid. But, it wasted them. We now all know the unending tension of being trapped inside with no way out – add in a 'helpful' android to a Covid lockdown and I'd have killed it and worn its circuits as bracelets, or it would have killed me and made me into a hat. On day one.

*Prototype* is a jumble sale of ideas and tone, and most horrifying of all, I wasn't scared once. I'm off to write the screenplay about a fabulously crafty android that makes human hats for her Etsy shop. 

## The Novice

Certificate: TBC

Director: Lauren Hadaway

Cast: Isabelle Fuhrman, Amy Forsyth, Dilone, Jonathan Cherry

Release date: Out now

Reviewer: Freda Cooper



**W**inning. That moment of triumph and elation, the expression of joy and relief, something the ultra-competitive Alex (Isabelle Fuhrman) never gets close to in *The Novice*. It's all about winning, being the best. Satisfaction and achievement don't come into it.

A straight-A student with no interest in rowing, she hustles her way onto the university team, aiming for a seat in the varsity





boat. For most students, that would mean a much-prized scholarship but, with her academic record, she doesn't need it. All she wants is to win at something else and, settling in to a regime of rowing machine workouts, she works obsessively towards that place, determined to knock down every obstacle in her way, whatever the cost. It's mechanical, military, and borderline masochistic.

In her debut feature, director/writer Lauren Hadaway finds herself on familiar territory: her first film was the short *Row* and she was also sound editor on Damien Chazelle's *Whiplash*. *The Novice* plays out like a first cousin to Chazelle's adrenalin trip: admittedly, there's no sadistic teacher, but Alex makes up for

that single-handedly, with her all-consuming obsession to be the first past the post. The film drips sweat – you can almost smell it – and the blood flows from her hands, especially a stigmata-like injury on her palm which stubbornly refuses to go away. She weeps with frustration and self-hatred at the slightest glimmer of coming second. And throughout, Fuhrman's face burns with intensity and an unwavering focus that turns the story into an emotional thriller. Other than knowing the compulsion to excel has always been in her DNA, we never wholly understand what drives her, but nobody on the screen understands either and she can't explain it herself.

For all the drama packed into its 90 minutes, this is a film that's sparse on dialogue, relying instead on its physicality and powerful, superbly photographed images to tell the story. What words there are come mainly from the rowing coaches, plus the occasional, more intimate conversation. The rest are in the background, often muffled, so that our focus is on what's happening inside Alex's head. Hadaway's directorial debut is hugely confident, stripped back, lean, and fraught with tension. With its tenacious, near-painful grip, this is a compelling watch, full of moments when you can hardly bear to watch what Alex does next. Which is when you find yourself sucked into her world of compulsion. **BS**





Dolly Dearest

FOR THE WATCHLIST

# Creepy Doll Movies

**Becky Clough looks at the greatest creepy dolls in horror cinema, and recommends a few good films...**

**W**hat's scarier than a doll? They're a staple of horror, from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2009) – where a girl is lured to another world after receiving a button-eyed replica of herself – to the allegedly “inspired by real life” events of *Robert* (2015), based on the innocuous-looking doll now safely displayed in a Florida museum.

Another notorious ‘true life’ haunted doll is Annabelle of *The Conjuring* (2013) universe. In 1970, Ed and Lorraine Warren’s ‘demonology’ business was called to deal with a doll menacing a nursing student. Having exhausted the tale, fictitious storylines followed in the prequel *Annabelle* (2014) – where a suicidal cult member apparently haunts the doll – and *Annabelle: Creation* (2017), an origin story in which bereaved parents make a doll to represent their dead daughter – accidentally opening up a channel for evil.

The movies cleverly link together the chain of stories which lead to the Warrens taking charge of the doll, and in *Annabelle Comes Home* (2019) she’s under lock and key. All kids have that annoying friend who wants to nose around the basement, though, don’t they?

The stylish, retro movies are deliciously creepy, and Annabelle makes a satisfyingly eerie anti-heroine.

There’s only one devilish doll who rivals her in the icon stakes, and that’s Chucky, of course. In *Child’s Play* (1988) little Andy wants a ‘Good Guy’ doll, but as luck would have it, he gets the one possessed by serial killer Charles Lee Ray. When Andy blames subsequent frightening events on Chucky, he’s taken to a psychiatric hospital. Meanwhile, his mother discovers that the talking doll has no batteries...

The resulting franchise is genuinely hilarious, with Jennifer Tilly appearing as Chucky’s girlfriend (soon dispatched to a doll body of her



own) and Brad Dourif's vocal skills (and infamous laugh) making Chucky a charismatic villain. The sequels became ever more silly (and self-aware) and in 2019 *Child's Play* was rebooted, with Mark Hamill voicing the now high-tech doll. This time there's no serial killer possession, so apparently if you remove safety settings, dolls just default to 'evil'. Good to know.

They also generally seem to make handy portals for the returning dead: in Spike-Lee-produced anthology *Tales From The Hood* (1995), a racist senator encounters dolls containing spirits of slaves killed by his plantation-owning ancestor. Meanwhile a sweet-faced doll undergoes an *Exorcist*-style transformation in *Dolly Dearest* (1991) after a malevolent spirit escapes from a Mayan tomb, and heads – where else? – to the nearest toy factory.

In 1974's *Frighten Barbara To Death* (a Filipino horror classic that's been remade several times), a manipulative woman uses black magic to inhabit a doll after her death so she can get back at people she dislikes.

There are more pests for *Gremlins* director Joe Dante in *Small Soldiers* (1998); toys designed with military technology work too well and declare full-scale war on each other – and the humans they encounter. Tommy Lee Jones lends his voice to action scenes which would be pretty gory if the protagonists weren't made of plastic. Stephen King's short story about sentient toy soldiers became a 2006 episode of *Nightmares And Dreamscapes*, starring William Hurt as the man defending himself against tiny terrorists.

Cuddly toys aren't technically dolls, but *Benny Loves You* (2019) must squeeze into this list. It may be low-budget, but the tale of an adorable toy going on a murderous rampage is absurd, well-written, and funny.

With an equally gleeful vibe, the special effects designers for *Demonic Toys* (1992) were clearly having the time of their lives, with a gruesome collection of little monsters. Critics hated it, but horror fans regard it with affection, and the murderous band of toys spawned sequels and spin-offs galore.

In Korean hit *Suddenly At Midnight* (1981), taking on a new housemaid doesn't seem like such a good idea when you see the little doll she takes everywhere. Part erotic thriller, part 'Am I going mad?' paranoia, this is genuinely chilling, and atmospheric.

Finally, for viewers of a certain age, *Tottie: The Story Of A Doll's House* (1984) involves a naughty doll starting a fire and burning another doll to death. Which sounds nightmarish, but it's actually a cosy stop-motion animation narrated by Oliver Postgate. 

## Five To Watch

### Dolls (1986)

Lost on a stormy night? Seeking shelter in a house where it turns out horrible things happen? Ah, classic tropes. This time the unlucky guests are rather horrible, so when they're rude to the hospitable doll-makers whose house they've invaded, you're quite pleased to see them get their comeuppance. Gory yet comical, this is a fun horror that ends on a note that's actually quite heart-warming.

### Finder's Keepers (2014)

This TV movie fits firmly into the category of 'dolls who look so unbelievably scary that any sane child would run away screaming'. After her parents divorce, young Claire becomes attached to the *muñeca quitapena* (worry doll) she's found under the floorboards in her spooky new house. Obviously multiple deaths ensue, but on the bright side, it brings her parents together again, so that's nice.

### Ghosthouse (1988)

If you love a chuckle over a 'so bad it's good' horror film, this one's for you. The acting, script, and special effects here are all a sight to behold. A creepy clown doll kicks off the action by making a small girl feel murderous, and the story continues with ghostly tape recordings which come true, a thieving funeral director, and a mysterious house.

### Trilogy Of Terror (1975)

Karen Black stars in this anthology of three enjoyably weird Richard Matheson stories. The last segment is the most memorable, with Karen's shopping trip resulting in a regrettable purchase – a Zuni fetish doll. Sure enough, the doll comes to life, and terrorises her while making noises uncannily reminiscent of a cartoon Tasmanian Devil. The story was so well received, it was rebooted for the 1996 sequel.

### The Twilight Zone (1963)

*Living Doll* is one of the series' best-known episodes. Little Christie is delighted to receive a 'Talky Tina' doll. Unfortunately Tina can do more than just talk, and is soon causing trouble for Christie's stepfather (don't worry, he deserves it). June Foray voiced both the sinister doll and her real-life counterpart, Mattel's 'Chatty Cathy' (I can't imagine this would have done their sales much good).



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## After Love (BFI Player)

**C**annes is back in its traditional slot in the film calendar this May, after two years of being postponed or cancelled. In 2020, five films were awarded the Cannes Critics' Week label, despite the festival not actually taking place. One of those selected was Aleem Khan's moving drama *After Love*.

It stars national treasure Joanna Scanlan as a widow who discovers that her late husband had a secret wife and a son across the English Channel in Calais. Jumping confidently between Urdu, English and French, what unfolds is a surprising and sensitive exploration of grief and identity, in terms of family, culture and religion.



Scanlan is superb as a woman whose sense of self is adrift at sea, to the point where she (deservedly so) took home a BAFTA this year for her performance – perfect timing, as the world catches up with the mature feature debut of an exciting British filmmaker.

## Little Joe (BFI Player)

If Ben Whishaw isn't a national treasure yet, he soon will be, and Jessica Hausner's delightfully unsettling sci-fi horror gives you a rare chance to see another side of him. He stars alongside Emily Beecham as two scientists who create a flower that spreads happiness, only for things to take a shady turn. Beecham is wonderful as a woman being gaslit by the men around her – she took home Cannes' Best Actress prize as a reward.

## A Hero (Amazon Prime)

The 2021 Grand Prix went to Asghar Farhadi, the master of slippery tales of morality, humanity and society. Farhadi won for *A Hero*, which sees a man in prison for debts try to convince his creditor to absolve him. When his plan to use some coins found by his girlfriend goes awry, he returns them and unwittingly becomes a public hero. As donations pour in for the disingenuous do-gooder, Farhadi enjoys twisting our sympathies every which way.

## Atlantique (Netflix)

Also in 2019, Mati Diop became the first Black female director in competition at Cannes with her striking debut *Atlantique*. It follows Ada, whose lover takes to the ocean, leaving behind their Senegalese town to find fortune in Spain. As strange happenings begin to occur, Diop weaves a tapestry of poignant romance and ghost story, laced with loss, reunion and reconciliation. She deservedly sailed away with that year's Grand Prix.

## The Happiest Day In The Life of Olli Mäki (MUBI)

MUBI has fast become home to some of Cannes' most memorable titles, from *The Worst Person In The World* to *Lamb* and *Annette*. One of its first acquisitions from the festival was 2016's *Un Certain Regard* winner, a beautifully bitter-sweet and unconventional movie about a real-life boxer gearing up for an impossible fight. It's romantic about defeat, but even more romantic about romance – the disarming result is a knockout, but not in the way you expect.



# 4K Ultra-HD Blu-rays

Words: Simon Brew Twitter: @simonbrew

## Here come the big guns

**B**y the time this magazine lands in your hands, we'll already be in April and only a few days away from the release of pandemic-beating box office juggernaut *Spider-Man: No Way Home* on the 4K disc format. Several other box office hits aren't too far behind.

April for a start sees *Scream* – the 2022 version – arrive on the 11th, the same day as Kenneth Branagh's *Death On The Nile* (which was sent to Disney+ a week or two beforehand). Tom Holland is back in 4K on 9th May when *Uncharted* swings onto disc, and the other big superhero film of the last few months – *The Batman* – has been scheduled by Warner Bros for release on 13th June.



For Bat-fans too, Warner Bros is reissuing in collector's packaging Christopher Nolan's trilogy of Dark Knight movies, and Tim Burton's two ventures

to Gotham City as well. All are reissues of the existing transfers, just in posher packaging to our eyes. Should look nice on the shelf, though.

### Drive on

Director Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive*, starring Carey Mulligan and Ryan Gosling, is – as promised – making its way to 4K disc. It's set for release in the UK on 30th May, in two different versions, from Second Sight. The standard edition comes with the disc and a whole bunch of extra features. The deluxe set will sell for £54.99 and come with a book, postcards, and other bits and bobs too.

### Arrow in May

Keeping up its prolific release schedule, Arrow has inked in two more catalogue releases for 23rd May. There's Bernard Rose's take on *Candyman* from back in 1992 for a start, and then the erotic thriller *Wild Things*, starring Denise Richards, Neve Campbell, and Matt Dillon. John McNaughton directs, and has been involved in the release too. Neither release is shy of extras.

### An offer not to refuse

In stores now, we've already got our hands on one of the 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray *The Godfather* trilogy sets, and can confirm that Paramount has really gone to town on it. It boasts all three films in glistening form – including both cuts of the final instalment – along with a generous bunch of extra features. Director Francis Ford Coppola's participation in putting together the release is very keenly felt too. Terrific.

### Rounding up

Look out for Joe Carnahan's *Smokin' Aces*, which lands in the UK 2nd May, whilst Universal has confirmed a boxset of Alfred Hitchcock films – five of them – for 9th May. Second Sight's release of *The Witch* arrives on 18th April, while the BFI is lining up *Get Carter* – Caine's, not Stallone's – for July. The BFI's release of *The Proposition*, incidentally, was delayed but should be available from 11th April.



## Em, the host of the Verbal Diorama podcast, on attracting listeners

**H**ow to get a complete stranger to listen to your podcast is the age-old question that many podcasters ask themselves. The question I keep coming back to, is how do I get people engaging with a podcast that doesn't, by its very definition, invite engagement?

I expect movie podcasts with multiple hosts find this experience different. It's easier for listeners to interact with a group of people reviewing a movie, because it's clear they're mostly having a good time doing so. When you're just talking to yourself, about film history – a topic that involves fact rather than opinion as its base – how do people engage with that?

*Verbal Diorama* is not without its regular listeners (and for that I remain very grateful), but because that element of discussion isn't there, there's nothing for listeners to actually discuss with me, and therefore engagement remains quite low. Facts are facts, and you can't discuss that as easily as you can opinions, which I'm assured are like, well, a certain part of a human's anatomy that everyone has.

Opinions invite discussion, but without an invitation to discuss, how can you ensure engagement with old and new listeners? If you can't ensure engagement, how can you measure growth, or indeed (and I cringe even writing it) success?

To try to open *Verbal Diorama* up to a new audience, I decided to try some advertising recently with a fairly major podcasting publication. Has it worked? Well, honestly, I have no idea. There was no spike in downloads or engagement. The



trackable link I created specifically for the ad has had zero hits. However, recent episode downloads have been a little higher than usual. Traditionally at the start of every year I do an Animation Season, which I recently finished with Disney and Pixar movies, and due to their popularity this slight increase could also be attributed to that. Animation Season, as a whole, has performed better than expected, although to be honest I did release 12 episodes in a little over eight weeks, so the output was also higher than usual.

Does the benefit of a slight increase in downloads match the cost of this advertising? Well, considering how much it cost (and no, I won't be divulging figures here), probably not, but you have to throw spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks.

But back to engagement, I always ask people to let me know their thoughts on the episodes I cover, so consider this an impassioned plea. Get in touch with me on Twitter – my handle's at the top of this page – and say hi, let me know what you think, let's chat about a recent episode. Let's get the conversation started!

## Recommendation Of The Month: Animation Addicts

Following on from *Verbal Diorama*'s animation season, get more of your animation fix with *Animation Addicts* ([www.rotoscopers.com](http://www.rotoscopers.com)). Hosted by Morgan and Chelsea, it's one of the best animation podcasts around. It focuses on major studios like Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks, as well as the smaller studios, and discusses old and new animated treasures alike.



# Movie Clinic

**Duncan Paveling (@ClinicMovie) with his regular look at the films that get us through tricky times...**

Twitter: @clinicmovie email: clinic@filmstories.co.uk

**W**elcome to Movie Clinic, the column that focuses on the movies that have changed or influenced us in some way, often with correspondence from our readers. Though, on occasion, I write to you with a film and theme in mind. This is one of those occasions. Having recently seen the simply beautiful and understated *Petite Maman* (2021), I felt compelled to explore its themes with you. In this case, loss, but more specifically how a child may process through play.

Dear Readers,

Some of you may already be familiar with Céline Sciamma's work, with *Tomboy*, *Girlhood*, *My Life As A Courgette*, or *Portrait Of A Lady Of Fire*. Some of these she wrote, the rest she worked on as both writer/director. For me, Sciamma is up there with some of the best of her generation, whose work continues to shift between studies of both youth and adulthood with an undeniable amount of empathy. Though it's her latest offering, *Petite Maman*, that I wish to share.

*Petite Maman* follows Nelly, a young French girl, directly after the loss of her beloved grandmother. The loss causes an exploration of grief, through a discovery in the surrounding woodland of her grandmother's house, that her mother grew up in and now has the job of clearing.

It sounds like a simple story of grief, and ultimately its simplicity is the beauty of it. On watching, it drew some parallels with *Coraline*, such as the discovery of a parallel home. Though on this occasion, the house was occupied by her mother as a child.

What struck me most about the film came in a single, simple moment, and in a goodbye (or rather 'au revoir'). The film's opening shows a conversation between Nelly and her mother after their loss. Nelly is seen saying goodbye to each and every one of the

residents at her grandmother's home. This is soon followed by Nelly's admission that she didn't feel she said a proper goodbye to her grandmother, and when asked how or what she would have said, she replies "au revoir" in the most natural, almost flippant of ways. This is a moment I largely forgot about until the film's conclusion, something I'll come to in a moment.

From this point on, the film focuses on Nelly's discovery and relationship with her mother (who's shown as a child) in this in-between woodland and the 'other' house on the 'other' side of the wood. Alongside this, we see both the relationship of Nelly with her father and absent mother, and her young mother's relationship with her own mother, Nelly's grandmother.

*Petite Maman* is far from a time-travel movie, but much more about our inner child, and how our early life experiences guide and shape our adult life physically, emotionally, and even biologically in the case of Nelly's mother and grandmother – with a genetic condition shared by both. It's about how we understand or interpret our youth and how, as we grow, we understand our elders and the youth that influenced them in a similar way. So often we forget, or find it difficult, to see our parents as the innocent or vulnerable child they might have once been, and perhaps underneath still are.

Ultimately, Nelly is presented with an opportunity to say goodbye to her grandmother, a moment that's so understated, yet so perfect, I found myself in pieces. This moment and the film has stayed with me and caused me to think of how a child understands and negotiates loss – how at certain ages, there is a distinct difference in how we understand and process loss.

In my experience as a therapist working with young people after a loss, I see a significant value in the use of play. This is something that *Petite Maman* does so beautifully and something Sciamma clearly understands. Whether it be building dens, making pancakes, or re-enacting crime stories, Nelly and her





*Petite Maman*

*young mother negotiate this period of limbo through play. It's a joy to watch and is a reminder of the cathartic nature of being in the moment, especially at a time when both the past and future may be confusing, or even heartbreaking, places to be.*

**Duncan**

It's consistent in many therapeutic approaches to acknowledge the significance of one's early-years development, with the first four to five years of our lives forming the foundation of how we see the world, and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours we take into our adult lives.

If we take a moment to think about how we learn in those times, of course we learn from our environment, the people and places we're exposed to, and how we see others behave, react and interact with each other. But how do we process this as a child? Generally through play.

In my experience, the value of play is undervalued. If we think about how significant it is in those early years, at a time in which we learn so much, why is it that as we move into adulthood we play less and less?

Virginia Axline was a pioneer in Play Therapy, developing her own Child-Centred Play Therapy

(CCPT), with eight core principles, which can be found in her works such *Play Therapy* (July 1972) or *Dibs In Search of Self* (June 1986). Of these eight principles, the fifth is of great significance here:

"The child must be able to find solutions to his or her problems whenever possible. This way the child understands that they are solely responsible for the changes in behaviour that he or she does not make."

*Petite Maman* is a perfect example of how, as children, we can find our way through problems via the medium of play, and how no matter how complicated life around us can be, the honesty and simplicity of a child's approach can be far more beneficial to us, no matter how old we might actually be.

Be kind, be safe, and take care. 📺

***If you want to contact this column, you can email me through [clinic@filmstories.co.uk](mailto:clinic@filmstories.co.uk)***

## NOTES:

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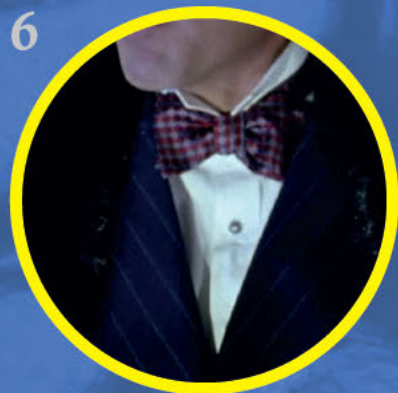




Having a tough day? Relax, grab a nice brew, and take a shot at these brain-teasers until it all blows over...

## Bat-fan?

Well, let's see you name these Batman movies!





# Moonfalse

One of these is a real still from *Moonfall*, one not...  
So can you spot the six differences?



Batman Quiz: 1. The Dark Knight; 2. The LEGO Batman Movie; 3. The Dark Knight Rises; 4. Batman; 5. Batman The Movie; 6. Batman Returns; 7. Batman Begins 8. Batman & Robin 9. Batman Forever  
Moonfalse (clockwise from top left): 1. Sunglasses replace glasses; 2. Floating mobile phone with cat pic; 3. Halle not Patrick 4. Film Stories Moz Eye; 5. Patrick not Halle; 6. Missing Straps!



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16. June 2020



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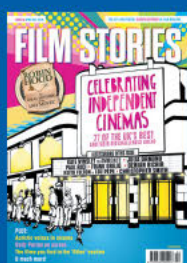
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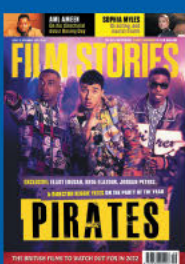
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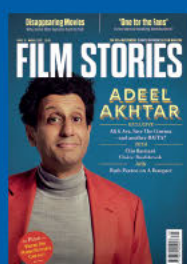
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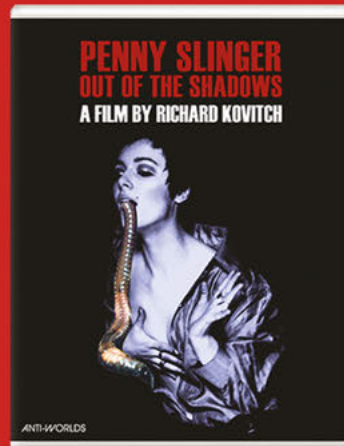
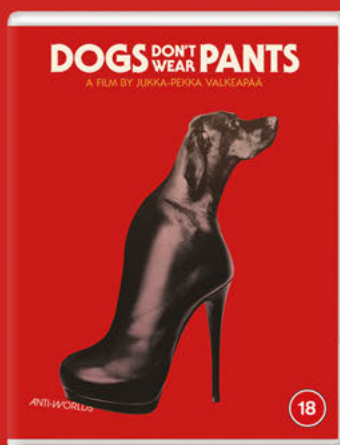
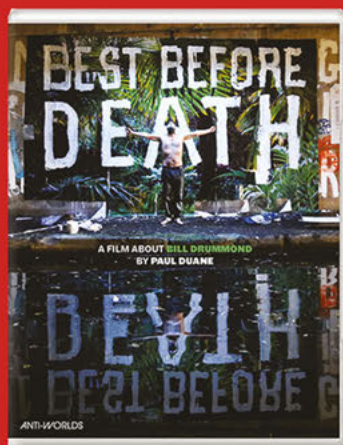
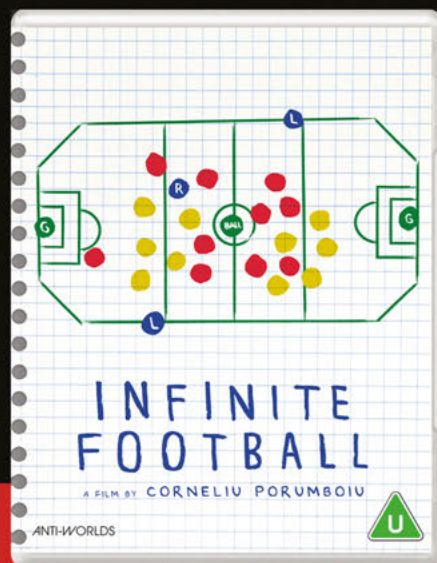
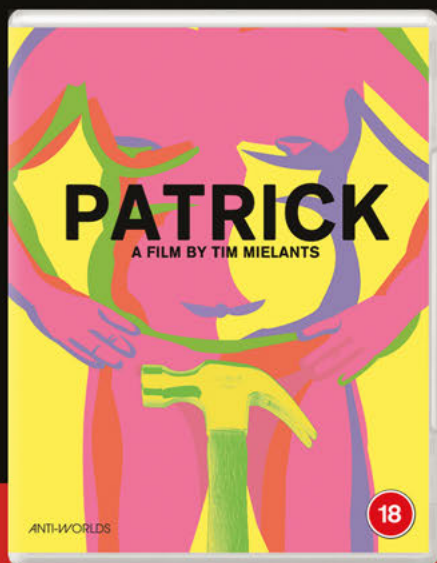
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