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THE 100% INDEPENDENT, **SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT** UK FILM MAGAZINE

FILM STORIES



THE SCORE

WILL POULTER, NAOMI ACKIE, JOHNNY FLYNN & MALACHI SMYTH
on the new British indie heist... musical?



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

FILM STORIES

Welcome!

I can't think of too many films that mix a heist, a romance, a musical and very poorly made coffee. I can't recall too many independent films that were able to film for the best part of a month, and build in rehearsal time too. Yet I can't remember too many British independent films like *The Score*, our cover movie this issue.

I've long been an admirer of just what first-time filmmakers can do with limited resources and a tight budget. Writer/director Malachi Smyth, making his feature directorial debut some 15 years after his first attempt to do so fell apart, is the epitome of what the sector can do. A story to tell, the ambition to tell it, the grit and determination to get it over the line.

If you can't tell, I'm really proud to showcase *The Score* this issue, and we tell its story with the help of Smyth, Naomi Ackie (who's ending the year playing Whitney Houston in a huge Hollywood biopic), Will Poulter and Johnny Flynn. A tremendous line-up, and a really interesting collection of interviewees too.

We've got another British film headlining our next issue too. And for those of you in the London area, our live show is heading to the London Podcast Festival on Thursday, September 15th. You can find more information on that at the Film Stories website: www.filmstories.co.uk

Thanks, as always, for supporting our independent film magazine. If you like it, please spread the word!

Take care all,

Simon

Simon Brew (not pictured)
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How can I be next? Send us ideas to

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WHAT'S THE SCORE?

NAOMI ACKIE, WILL POULTER, JOHNNY FLYNN, AND WRITER/DIRECTOR MALACHI SMYTH TELL SIMON BREW THE STORY OF A BOLD INDEPENDENT MOVIE:

A BRITISH CRIME THRILLER MUSICAL...



It takes a long time to make a simple cup of coffee in the location that sits at the heart of the new film *The Score*. Johnny Flynn's Mike and Will Poulter's Troy – a pair of small-time crooks – find themselves at an all-but-deserted café, where Naomi Ackie's Gloria seems to take an age to make a cup.

"The service isn't great, is it?" laughs Will Poulter, as we muse about that moment. He is not wrong. This is not an establishment that would rank well on TripAdvisor.

The film it's a part of though is an interesting one. A British independent feature that marries together a crime heist story, a romance, and a musical, it manages its resources with some skill. Primarily contained to a single location, it's got the boundaries of an independent film, but an ambition that stretches much further. And a cast that instantly raises eyebrows too.

ORIGIN STORY

Said ambition came from first-time director Malachi Smyth. A long-time writer, he'd come close to making his directorial debut some time ago, only to see it slip through his fingers.

"I nearly had a big break 15 years ago," he tells me. "But it collapsed just as it was about to shoot." Since then, he's stuck to screenwriting, but also been slowly building to directing. Which brings us to his new project, that's about to head into UK cinemas.

"It started as a film that had no songs in it," he tells me of his feature. "I've been doing this for more years than I care to remember and trying to get films made as a writer. And I



reached the point where I thought the only way to really make headway here is to make them myself.”

He thus put together *The Score*, well aware that its contained setting made it a good first-time director’s film. “I’d written the first draft, and had a notion of the basic drama of it,” he says. He thus showed it to a few people, including a friend of his, producer Ben Pullen. “He ummed and aahed,” Smyth recalls. “His concern was how to make the film stand out.”

It’s the perennial problem of the independent film: that making the movie is oftentimes not the trickiest bit. Getting the end result noticed is, at the best of times, a stiff challenge. Changes needed to be made, not least to give it a fighting chance. Which all led to the eureka moment.

PRESS PLAY

Smyth went back and took another look, and started to rewrite the script. He put on a CD – remember those? – of Johnny Flynn’s then-latest album *Sillion*.

“This was the first album of his I really listened to a lot,” he admits.

Smyth is, like many screenwriters, someone who works to music. But in this case? “It just started chiming. A lot of elements were connecting to what I was writing.” Smyth got hold of more of Flynn’s songs, and then took *The Score* in an unexpected direction.

“I used to have a running gag with Ben [Pullen] where I showed him a script, and if he wasn’t quite sold on it, he’d say ‘why not make it a musical?’” Thing is, that’s just what Smyth was doing this time. He weaved Flynn’s songs into the first few pages of a draft, sent it to Pullen, and his response was simple: “This is great, do the rest.”

From an intention of making a contained first-time director’s film that could be realised on a budget, Smyth now had a project that weaved in pre-existing music, and needed people who could pull it all off.

HERE’S JOHNNY

Notably, it also now needed Johnny Flynn – a man constantly busy with his own music, and a growing acting profile in a mix of major and independent films. His cinema profile has seen him take on memorable work in movies as varied as *Beast*, *Operation Mincemeat*, *Stardust*, and *Emma*.

“It was such a weird set of coincidences, events, and friendships,” Johnny Flynn explains on why he signed up to *The Score*. A critical part of the glue was Pullen, who Flynn knew. Flynn had also previously

read some scripts that Malachi Smyth had been writing. He got sent the screenplay for *The Score* – a draft that had his music written into it – as Smyth crossed his fingers. But Flynn was soon nodding his head.

“My reaction at first was ‘oh, I’ve wanted to do something like that for a while.’” Flynn had made little secret that he was interested in writing a musical, and one had just presented itself to him, with his work in it. “I’ve seen it done before well and not so well. I love musicals, but I also feel they need a bit of reinvention. This was a chance to do that.”

Reading the script was quite the experience for him. “It was immediately interesting to me that somebody, without talking to me, had written in these songs as kind of abstract, epochal moments for the characters,” he recalls.

Flynn was told by Smyth that he’d been listening to his music while writing the script, “and he did an experiment. He just put them in, at different emotional moments for each character, and it kind of worked.”

BUILDING THE CREW

Flynn was in. Not just that, he started getting more heavily involved, working with Smyth on shaping and developing the film. Pullen had suggested Flynn taking on one of the lead roles, but instead, Johnny opted for a more supporting role, and took on a musical director position as well, which led to him penning the score as well at the end of the process.

“I fed back a bit on the script. I’m not a screenwriter, but I read a lot of them,” Flynn recalls of the development work. “They came to me asking if I should do the songs the same way I’d originally



**I LOVE MUSICALS, BUT I ALSO FEEL
THEY NEED A BIT OF REINVENTION.
THIS WAS A CHANCE TO DO THAT**



ON THE RECORD

"It was one of the funnest bits," grins Johnny Flynn, as he recalls overseeing the re-recording of his songs ahead of the film's shoot. It was his job to get Naomi Ackie and Will Poulter in a booth, to get the music down before cameras could roll.

"Oh my gosh, the most intimidating," counters Naomi Ackie of recording with Flynn overseeing them ("I was a little bit starstruck. I watched him on the telly!").

She explains, "I feel really bad because Johnny isn't intimidating at all, he's so lovely. But he's a musical genius. And you're singing, and you're not a musical genius, but in front of a musical genius. Me and Will had a chat where we were not sure what we were doing, but we were all in it together!"

Still, "it was very joyful. It all happened during Covid, and being able to create something in a time that was quite dark."

Poulter too felt the pressure at first. "It was terrifying," he laughs. "I was a huge fan of Johnny. It was a first time for me; we sung the songs [as he's] looking at us through the glass. The scenes where we're singing, Malachi and Johnny sort of co-directed it, and it was wonderful to see."

done them on the album. That's not interesting to me. The thing that made it interesting to me: to revisit my old songs and try and deconstruct them now, and put the story in. Rebuild them. To completely rethink and reimagine this new story. Re-recording them using a completely different instrumental palette. I worked with some of the same musicians who recorded them originally, but in a completely different way."

With Johnny Flynn agreeing to take on one of the three key roles as part of his involvement in the film, there were just two more lead roles to fill. As it turned out *The Score* struck gold, with both Naomi Ackie and Will Poulter persuaded to sign up.

"I signed on six months before we got started," Naomi Ackie tells me down the line from Mexico, where she's already deep into her next project. It was casting director





WHEN I FOUND OUT WHO WAS ATTACHED, AND WHERE THE MUSIC WAS COMING FROM, I SIGNED ON REALLY QUICKLY

Kelly Valentine Hendry who put her onto the film, and Ackie enthuses when I ask about her.

"She has really backed me, and the work that I do. And she has amazing taste. When I got the email asking if I wanted to look at the script, I was super-excited about it. When I found out who was attached, and especially where the music was coming from, I signed on really quickly."

Last on board was Will Poulter, stepping out of his comfort zone to try something a little different (Ackie recalls speaking to him on the phone when he was deciding whether to take the plunge: "We had had quite a funny conversation where he was chatting to me on the phone about it, and I was like, 'oh come on mate, just do it!' Although coming from me, there was a lot more swearing!").

Poulter tells me that he gets sent a lot of scripts, and that

"this was unlike anything else I've ever read."

It's a clichéd answer perhaps, so I tried to get some perspective. Is this a one in ten script? A one in 100?

"A one in 100? It probably is, yeah. I couldn't quantify it for you exactly, but it's super, super special."

It helped that other elements of the film were already in place as well.

"Johnny Flynn's music, Naomi Ackie is someone I've admired for a while... for me, [*The Score*] didn't feel so much of a long shot."

For Malachi Smyth, the dream of his directorial debut was about to be realised. What could go wrong this time? Well, Covid of course. In a tale that's been told by lots of productions, it was ready to go, and the world went into lockdown. In the case of independent films,

many never got another chance. But *The Score* remained active. It was still pressing ahead.

ON SET

When it came to filming, *The Score* didn't have all the hallmarks you might expect of an independent. Rehearsal time was built in, for instance ("I insisted on having some time to rehearse, even if it was just three or four days. We needed to talk about how we approach it, the songs, how they fit in," Smyth says).

A first block of rehearsals were organised when the film was first due to go in March of 2020, and a second round when things properly got up and running post-lockdown later that year. Furthermore, a larger, more flexible location had opened up too when the project came back together, and they were able to get a longer shooting schedule: "26, 27 days," remembers Malachi Smyth.

"I think we benefited," admits Flynn of the forced shutdown of the movie. "Work was done on the script, and also, we got a much better location actually. I had more time to play with the music. It'd been a bit of a scramble to get ready for [the original start date]. And we were very lucky that everyone was still free!"

They were, and they were just as committed. And still up for those rehearsals.

"We had some decent rehearsal time," Ackie says. "I think I remember us working in and around it for a week on the location. We had conversations. Sometimes the nature of film is you sometimes have to pull things out of the bag very quickly. The lucky thing for us is we'd had previous rehearsals



from the first time we were going to shoot it before it was delayed, and then we had an extra prep. There wasn't much else going on in life, so I allowed myself to obsess over this role a bit!"

For Poulter, it wasn't just the singing rehearsals either. "We had a limited budget, but we had plenty of table time. We did have rehearsals. We were able to talk through the dynamics between characters. You see yourself as a company. A proper amount of time delving into the material and workshoping it. The project is nearly always better for it."

A PROPER CHAT

There's something almost theatre-like in the way he talks about the process of making *The Score*. "I'm a big fan of discussing. Of sitting down and talking things through. Communication always gives rise to a better result, whatever you're talking about," Poulter says. "When it came to my relationship to Naomi's character, we needed to talk about life journeys. It meant we had a better understanding of what each other was going through when we did meet in this strange and tempestuous situation. Had we not had that, I think the relationship on screen... there'd be less chemistry and authenticity."

Did the stage grounding help, then, moving to a film that's centred on three locations? "It became our little hub and home," Ackie explains of the main location used. "It feels like déjà vu every day! There's also that thing about coming to a same space and making it almost like making the space – forgive me going holier than thou – creatively sacred. It gave us permission. We weren't just acting, we were singing and dancing in front of each other. We felt comfortable to be able to do that."

But also, they were clearly having fun. "We had an absolute blast shooting it," Ackie enthuses. "Because of it being a smaller project, it required everyone to really band together, to lean on one another, a sense of team spirit to get it over the line. It was fun; I feel like I learned a lot not just as an actor, but about the filmmaking process."

The on-screen work with Poulter was a highlight for her too. "One particular scene sees me and Will sat opposite each other on a table. I think it was the first day of a two-week night shoot. It was a very simple scene, two people connecting. It was really late at night, and it being really magical. Feeling very honest and true. It was a really lovely moment, but it'll always stick with me. I'll also have huge respect for Will, but I did think bloody hell, he's a bit talented isn't he?!"

He's not bad, granted.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Things were still tight, though.

"Some days we were shooting nine or ten pages a day," Smyth recalls, "and ironically, they were some of my favourite moments in the film." And even though this was an independent movie with a little more scale than most – wallets were prised open a little more when the relatively high profile cast slipped into place – it was still a challenge.

Swings and roundabouts though, reasons Smyth. "To have had an extra week, say, would have made an enormous difference. But also not having that time puts you under a pressure that leads to creative resolutions."

And so it turned out that just under a month after calling action for the first time, Smyth had wrapped his first feature as director. And a bold independent film was in the can. "I owe my career to independent film, and I'll always feel a strong affinity to it," Poulter reflects to me, clearly proud of his work on it. "There's a sense of unique magic working on smaller, independent productions. I'll always want to be a part of them as long as independent film will have me!"

RESPONSE

There was still the small matter of editing *The Score*, and wrapping Flynn's work into it fully. And then watching it all together on screen.

"It's fascinating," admits Flynn of seeing the finished film, with his music – that'd been in his head and life so long – now set against something else. "It really was kind of bizarre and kind of wonderful," he continues, pride in his voice. "It's like a real gift to me to experience that."

"I'm really, really proud of it," he adds. "I'm really proud of every aspect."

As for the man who started it all, where are Malachi Smyth's feelings on the film that he's written, and made his feature directorial debut? "It achieved what I wanted it to achieve," he smiles. "And it feels totally different!"

The final verdict, of course, goes to the audience. Smyth is aware he's not taken the easy road with his film. But amidst release schedules filling with blockbusters and major studio films, it feels quite something that a film as bold, risky, and – yep – entertaining can not only make it through the UK independent film system, but stand proud on a cinema screen at the end of it all.

It's been quite the team effort. Just not the kind of team you want to order a cup of coffee off... **IS**

FINDING AN AUDIENCE

Of course, with the film in the can, and on the eve of getting a UK cinema release, job one has nearly been completed. The next one? Getting people to see it, and that's something Malachi Smyth and his collaborators have been laser-focused on from the start.

"You don't do this just for yourself," he reasons. "You're trying to reach other people. The starting point has to be how many people can you reach? I didn't set out wanting to make a commercial film. But I don't want people to lose money backing me. I want to make more films, and they've put their trust in me, and I want to make good on that trust. I straddle the line. I don't want to make something that five people and a dog are going to watch."

I want to make a film that's an artistic endeavour, but also entertainment."

He's arguably done just that...

The Score is in UK cinemas on 9th September.

Your Letters

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

Hello 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.

Return to sender

I am writing in response to Tom Beasley's rather poor, inadequate, and unfair review of Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis*, as it got me 'all shook up'.

I was at a press screening a few weeks before it opened and to paraphrase the Good Doctor Kermode, "it's flipping brilliant". A masterpiece of cinematic entertainment – I was enthralled, educated, and captivated from the start.

Tom says, "This is the story of an extraordinary man told by an extraordinary director, which makes it all the more disappointing..."

What?!!? It's a film about Elvis and it's an extraordinary film. I honestly don't know what more he was expecting or wanted. The film,

which deals with the story from start to finish, is a remarkable achievement.

Tom even fails to mention the scenes showing a young Elvis being accused of provocative behaviour on stage which also got him arrested, and he glosses over the fact that the film deals with the way Elvis has to cope with the racists on the extreme right. A vital part of the story not often covered by other movies.

Tom complains that "Tom Hanks is... buried under absurd prosthetics and an even more absurd accent." Has he ever seen any interviews with Colonel Parker? He's meant to look and sound like that!!

Personally, I found the film a dizzying, enlightening, thrilling, joyful, and touching experience and can't see what could have been done differently or better.

Andy Godfrey



Austin Butler in *Elvis*

Simon replies: Human beings were not built to agree with each other on films! I'm going to split this reply into two... Firstly, I disagree with you that Tom's review is unfair, poor and inadequate. In a tight word count, he's raised his issues, explained them, and said why the film didn't work for him. I fully get and respect that you disagree with his view, but that's half the fun, isn't it? I'm surrounded by lots of people who feel the same way as Tom, and don't think his is an isolated view.

The second part of my answer: I agree with you about the film! Absolutely loved it, and I too disagree with Tom's conclusions. But I do fully respect his review. The 4K disc is already on order!

I look forward to further disagreements in the future, and thank you for writing in!



Spider-Man resolved

I'd like to belatedly thank Jon Dracup of Norwich for solving the 'Spider-Man mystery' (Your Letters issue 32). I've only just read his letter – via a back issue – as my FS subscription had lapsed and I was too busy to renew it (I will do ASAP). The 'mystery' has nagged away at me for years, and I sometimes thought that some of these childhood trips to the cinema – with my aunt and sister – in late 1970s/early 1980s Brummagem were imagined. I now know otherwise. Thanks again, Jon!

Will Goble

Simon writes: Hurray! Love a happy ending. For those who missed this, Will was enquiring as to whether some of the old *Spider-Man* TV series was ever shown in UK cinemas. As Jon confirmed, it was, with several films being compiled from the 1977 series *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Keep the questions coming!

Family time?

A year or two ago, understandably, lots of family films were sent to streaming first, or some kind of video on demand variant. I thought when all the lockdowns were gone and cinemas went back to normal, things would be better. They sort of are, but once again, look where the good family stuff is. We get shovelware like *Lightyear* and *Minions: The Rise Of Gru* in cinemas, and interesting animated stuff like *The Sea Beast* and *Luck* on streaming. I love to take all of my family to see a good film at the cinema. We've had some decent live action stuff, but it's all 12A. Can we get the really good animated films back on the big screen now please?

Ally B

Simon writes: I feel your pain, but do think things have improved. *Luck* and *The Sea Beast* were backed by streaming platforms, but the Pixar point has come home starkly with its most ordinary film in memory getting a cinema release while three much bolder, original stories debut on Disney+. Hopefully things will improve going forward...

Challenge Matt

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

This month: *Gozu*

Suggested by @pjstapes via Twitter

“I don't understand,” says a Yakuza boss in Takashi Miike's 2003 film *Gozu*. He's onto something, and not alone...

Gozu is about Minami (Yuta Sone) having to perform a hit on his gangster boss mentor, the increasingly erratic and unhinged Ozaki (Sho Aikawa). Helpfully, Ozaki dies in an accident, but unhelpfully, his body inexplicably goes missing shortly after. Really, even that much plot does little to offer insight into this surreal movie.

It does have a traditional gangster flick set-up – there's a power struggle, a hit gone wrong – but it never, not for even a second, feels like one. *Gozu* is odd enough that, for the first few minutes of the film, I contemplated whether the subtitler might have been improvising rather than actually translating the movie. It would be an impressive prank.

Miike commits to the disrupted reality of *Gozu* with enthusiasm. He certainly invests in its edgy, woozy atmosphere more heavily than narrative. It's like someone fed a description of life into an AI and it spat this out, misunderstanding the details. A film that often garners comparison to the work of David Lynch, it's a wonderfully odd and enjoyable black comedy.

Juvenile in its humour but adult in its content, *Gozu* features interesting relationships with skewed power balances, confusing plot points that are impossible to anticipate, and inspired bursts of lunacy.

For example, there's a Yakuza boss who can't become aroused unless he inserts a ladle, handle end, into himself who has sex in this movie more than once (that's an insufficient warning as to what you're going to see; he really gets it in there). *Gozu* returns to breast milk as a story point more often than you might anticipate, too. Or perhaps not. I don't know what you're thinking.

The ending finds Miike cannonballing gleefully into the abyss of the bizarre. I won't explain what happens to avoid spoilers and because the human ability to communicate has yet to devise a way of accurately expressing what on Earth occurs.

I think *Gozu* should be more prominent in the world of bizarro cinema. If you were having a conversation about Miike's *Audition* and Brian Yuzna's *Society*, you should be able to mention the end of *Gozu*, too. It's a difficult film to get a handle on, but I'd recommend it.

Gozu can't be streamed in the UK at the moment, but can be found as a 2003 Tartan Asia Extreme DVD release.

Room for a Knight

Acting and writing duo Reece J Morant and Adrian Darko tell Freda Cooper about making *Two Knights*

Find daily film news, features and our podcast archive at www.filmstories.co.uk

Barely two years ago, Reece J Morant and Adrian Darko were acting graduates, knowing next to nothing about the process of filmmaking.

“We knew you needed a script and a camera and that was about it,” they tell me. Yet, despite that, a couple of months ago their short *Two Knights* had its first screening. The intervening time has been like a high-octane internship for the pair.

The two met on their acting course at the Royal College of Music, but took startlingly different roads to get there. As a teenager, British-Caribbean Morant was interested in gymnastics, aiming for a career as a physiotherapist, but that all changed when he was on a work experience placement.

“I broke my leg really badly and ended up in hospital,” he recalls. “On the ward, I met an actor who was very dramatic and started telling me about the world of acting. It opened my eyes, so I read up on the subject and soon realised that life as a physiotherapist wasn’t for me. I wanted to act and be many roles in one.”

The next stop was drama school.

“There’s something about what we do that really moves people”

Physical training

For Polish-born Darko, his fascination with performance started with dancing when he was just seven.

“My grandmother realised I had a thing for it and sent me to classes,” he recalls. “I’ve danced just about every style there is and I took part in many national and international competitions.”

He also took part in amateur theatre, but moving to the UK just before his A-levels meant a major rethink, starting with learning English.

“When I started my education in Poland, we were only allowed to learn Russian and German. I didn’t have money to study English, so I had to learn from what I was hearing in the streets, in the shops. I worked in many different places until I got into marketing. I felt I was rather good at it and that my life was sorted. But it wasn’t.”

His love of dance and acting had never gone away and one day he went into the office, packed up, and said goodbye.

“I was going to be an actor.”

Their physical training and what they both describe as their “truthful approach” to performance made the two natural collaborators and their first experience of how they could affect an audience came at a rehearsed reading of Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis*. It was an experience they’ve never forgotten.

“We had about 60–70 people in the audience for about two hours and they were all crying,” says Darko. “This wasn’t performed by professional actors, just people who were just about to enter the industry, but they made a massive impact on the audience. That was the first time I realised there’s something about what we do that really moves people.”

Reece J Morant and Adrian Darko do battle in *Two Knights*

Influences

They acknowledge powerful influences, including their own backgrounds, on their intense style – Darko particularly admires Anthony Hopkins and Heath Ledger, while Morant cites *The Pursuit Of Happyness* as a film that's never left him. His gymnastics training means that he develops characters from the outside in.

"It starts with a walk. I imagine how that person would walk, I analyse it, I start walking like that, and everything else just follows. You start feeling the character over time and that's how I get it."

The idea for *Two Knights*, which imagines an intense confrontation between Lucifer (Darko) and the Archangel Michael (Morant), came to Darko one lockdown night when he couldn't sleep.

"I just got my laptop and put down my thoughts," he explains. "But I didn't know what to do with it, so I showed it to Reece, we worked on it some more and eventually had a first draft. I can't say specifically where it came from. I come from a very religious background and I've seen a lot of films. I'm the sort of person who, if something affects me, it will stay there. I can put it aside, but at some point it comes out again and hits me as something completely fresh. This time I reacted by writing a screenplay."

Still learning

At which point that high-speed internship started – and from scratch. The duo started researching who they'd like to work with, and they still can't believe their luck that BAFTA-nominated director Piotr Szkopiak came on board. He was their guide

throughout, making sure they were clear about how much they were taking on.

"He said our project was ambitious and asked if we were sure we were cut out for it," says Darko. "But he loved our drive and passion and the dynamic between us both. That was the real selling point for him and the fact that he wanted to work with two people who knew next to nothing about the film industry was amazing. He's still there for us to this very day, no matter when we call him."

Now the film is in the public domain – it's currently on YouTube – their initial learning curve of acting, writing, and producing has shifted to marketing and a strategy for film festivals. And that public screening a few months back – the first time the two had watched their short both on the big screen and with an audience – proved to be a real eye-opener. Darko recalls that many of the people he spoke to that night said the same thing.

"They told us that where we went next in terms of festivals would determine whether the film would be a success or not. You only have one world premiere, one international premiere. Until then, we'd thought that if a film is good then it will sell itself."

He laughs at the thought.

"So we had to completely change our marketing campaign and approach to film festivals. Right now we're waiting for the one event where we'd like the film to have its world premiere."

Two Knights, like its two creators, has come a long way. And there's more to come. [📺](#)

***Two Knights* is on YouTube.**

Not waiting Around

Indie filmmaker Sheikh Shahnawaz tells Freda Cooper about setting up on his own

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The phrase ‘guerrilla filmmaker’ seems tailor made for director/writer/producer Sheikh Shahnawaz but, as he describes his approach to filmmaking, it never passes his lips. He used to see himself as a one-man band, but that’s a way of working he now sees as being in the past. With his first feature, *Bluff*, now on Prime Video, his sights are set very much on the future, one which he hopes will take him to the other side of the Pond. A long way from inner-city Birmingham.

At secondary school, his creative streak was encouraged. However, his first forays saw him take up the guitar at the age of 13, in the hopes of becoming a rock star.

“I was a bit of an emo. I had eyeliner, black nail polish, and I thought I was going to be like Slash, be in the next Guns and Roses and tour the world.”

He also joined a drama club, but it was choosing Media as his BTEC subject that took him into making films.

“That was when I first got my hands on a camera and I realised I really enjoyed making something

“I thought shorts were hard, but *Bluff* was like making a short film every day”

and telling a story,” he recalls. “It came naturally to me and from there I made lots of short films for my school projects and with each one I hopefully got better.”

A short every month

He looks back with affection – and a twinge of embarrassment – at his first short, one of those school projects.

“It was a rip-off of *Saw*,” he laughs. “I’m tied to a chair, I wake up, and there’s a very deep, harsh voice – also me – saying ‘Wake up! Let’s play a game!’ I was so proud of it, I put it on Facebook and YouTube and it was there for a very long time.”

The decision to become a “serious filmmaker” came in his second year at university when, with help from fellow students, he made his first official short, *Friend Request*, and by the time he made the one-man *Stalker*, the decision had taken root.

“I knew that I wanted to make a micro-budget film one day and I wanted to make this my career.”

Another short, *Sleepless*, was made post-university. However, it only had a one-man crew and no budget.

“I got in touch with the only two actors I knew, told them I was going to write a script with them as the leads, and that it would be filmed in one day to be released that same week.”

This concept shaped the first of what became a year’s worth of monthly short films from Shahnawaz – a huge workload, but a major leap forward.

“I got better at my craft and writing, I was connecting with more filmmakers and actors and generally putting myself out there. It was all essentially to train myself up for my first feature, which I started producing in 2019.”

A father's influence

That was *Bluff*, which he wrote in eight months.

"I didn't want to make a feature film for the sake of it," he remembers. "It needed to be impressive and it needed to impress me first. I wanted it to be something unique because making a film is hard, so hard that you want it to be one of the best films ever. I'm always quality over quantity."

But he started making it sooner than he'd planned.

"Five days after I finished writing, my father passed away. I was going to put off making the film, but something came to me in the week of his passing. Maybe delaying it wasn't the right thing to do. So I decided to start the next month and complete it in honour of his memory."

Bluff is dedicated to him, and his influence spread further when Shahnawaz found a photograph of the two of them and "immortalised it in my movie" as part of its strong fathers and sons theme.

Made for just £1,500, with just a one-man crew, *Bluff* is "all favours from friends and families and all shot in Birmingham with a Midlands cast."

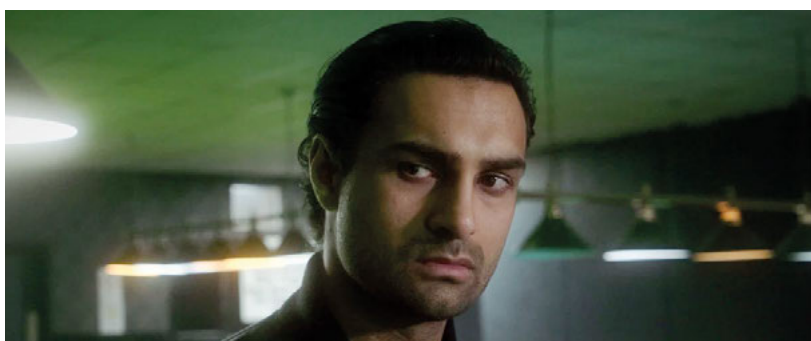
His short films had only partly prepared him for the experience.

"I thought they were hard, but *Bluff* was like making a short film every day. I can wear multiple hats so I can think like a producer and, when I'm on set, put on my writer's/director's hat and get creative."

That extended to him making a cameo appearance, something which he thinks might turn into his very own Hitchcockian Easter egg.

"Nobody was going to help me"

Aside from the demands of actually making *Bluff*, his efforts to get industry backing for it proved something of a disappointment. "I needed support in terms of marketing the film, getting distribution and I had all those short films to my name. I wanted to get their attention, show them what I could do with nothing, but nobody wanted to take a chance on me. It was disheartening, but



I just carried on. I wasn't going to wait around for people. I could have waited five years for somebody to support the film."

As much as he's proud of his film and the way he made it, the experience is behind him.

"I definitely don't want to do this micro budget/one-man stuff again. I did it out of necessity – nobody was going to help me," he says, seeing his future very much in LA.

"I don't see myself doing anything else in the UK. I've tried my best, but the indie movies made here aren't as strong as their American counterparts. *Everything, Everywhere, All At Once* wouldn't get made in the UK."

When he was trying to find distributors and publicists for *Bluff*, he recalls the first people to respond were Americans.

"I'm an indie filmmaker from the UK, from the inner city of Birmingham. I'm British/Bangladeshi. There's going to be challenges and I'm up for them."

***Bluff* is available on Prime Video.**

An accidental Documentary

Director Jay Bedwani speaks to Freda Cooper about the making of *Donna*

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“I love independent documentaries: it’s at a different level, more intimate and smaller, and you help each other”

Director Jay Bedwani has found his niche. It’s taken a while but, as his full length documentary *Donna* arrives in cinemas this month, it not only marks a high spot in his decade-long friendship with trans activist, artist and performer Donna Persona, but spotlights a theme running through all his films.

“I’ve always been drawn to older people,” he explains. They have fascinating stories to tell, but for him it’s about capturing things before they’re gone, Bedwani feels is “really important.”

He got into documentaries by accident and the formidable Donna played an important part. Based in Wales, he studied his first love, documentary photography.

“I had loads of friends who were brilliant photographers and, if I’m honest, I never felt like I was quite ‘there’. It always felt like it was really hard work, not organic,” he recalls. Around ten years ago during a stay in San Francisco, he met Donna at a pool party.

“We started chatting – she was asking me about my family and my mother, and talking about poetry and Marilyn Monroe. She

confounded my expectations – you don't expect deep conversations like that at a pool party in San Fran!"

Photographs to film

They became friends and his first taste of working with film came when he was photographing her.

"I switched my camera over to film for the first time ever, recorded her, and got the bug!" he recalls. It became a ten-minute portrait – his first short film, *My Mother* – even though he had no experience.

"I hadn't studied film and now I'm glad I didn't. There was something so intuitive about it, it was fun and I could say a lot more. It just felt right."

Even more encouraging was that it played at festivals, won some prizes, and Bedwani "loved putting her out there into the world."

That interest in film had always been waiting in the wings.

"I was interested in films – narrative, fiction, independents, French films, and my family were too. But I wasn't particularly into documentaries."

That said, he cites *Grey Gardens* as a real influence.

"It's so complex. It's observed but there's such an interaction with the subject, sometimes obviously and sometimes not. It can be performative or not and it felt like there was so much that you could do with it. Learning about this subject through filming is a great way to spend your time. That was definitely the key for me."

Cathartic experiences

After *My Mother* came a cluster of shorts, which he sees as linked by "authenticity" and "having the freedom to be who you want to be" – but with his tales having "the small twist", it's something their subjects come to find in their later years.

"We can sometimes see these stories about younger people, but there's something about doing it when you're older that takes a lot of courage. That's something I find really interesting."

All of the films were focused on specific people, something that he describes as 'cathartic'.

"I love the process of filming one person, usually on my own or sometimes with a sound person, and just having that privilege of spending time with them and learning from them."

Initially, economic necessity meant multitasking filmmaking – director, editor, producer, cinematographer. But there was the added bonus of "the freedom to do things that you don't necessarily do to make any money."

On *Donna*, in particular, he learned to collaborate more and finds it especially satisfying.

"It's so much fun to talk about the story and where it's going, so I do like working with other people."

A feature-length documentary had always been in the back of his mind, specifically about Donna herself. The resulting film, *Donna*, is deeply personal, following both her efforts to reconnect with her family and reflecting on her activism in the '60s.

"She embraced it," but, as the shoot progressed, he was conscious she found it difficult at times. "I did explain to her that I would be with her a lot, but having somebody follow you all the time, sometimes asking you questions and also crucially following some of your family, makes it really personal."

Support and works in progress

Bedwani has found considerable support for his work in his native South Wales. *My Mother* was made on a zero budget – "you could tell!" – but it did well, so he applied to Ffilm Cymru for mentorship and short film schemes and it was the start of a fruitful relationship. He's also part of the wider documentary-making community in the region, something that's been equally invaluable.

"You want to show each other your latest work and get feedback – often over a pint or two! – so it's essentially geeks talking about how they've made their latest film and who doesn't love that? That's why I love independent documentaries: it's at a different level, more intimate and smaller, and you help each other."

His next projects are works in progress. For the past seven years, he's been filming Barry, an 85-year-old Shakespeare professor in Berkeley, California. The result will be *Fridays With Barry*, and Bedwani is currently getting ready for another shoot as we speak. At the same time, there's a project for the BFI and University of London in the works; a technological diversion into creating an augmented reality documentary based on a location trail around Swansea.

"It's a really new concept, telling a story around a location where you have seven stops and you hear the story unfold. You actually go to the location and use your phone to hear and see things that tell you the story."

But more immediately, he's thinking about the premiere of *Donna*. He's not seen it with an audience or with Donna herself. She's inviting all her friends and family and Bedwani knows it'll be a grand occasion, but also that he will "get a bit nervous if I think about it too much." 

Donna is in cinemas now.

A Leicester Fiesta

A look at the sixth annual Midlands Movies Awards, a ceremony recognising an under-appreciated area in the British film industry

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With cameras at the ready and the red carpet rolled out, the stage was set for the sixth annual Midlands Movies Awards live from the prestigious Y Theatre in Leicester. A regular golden night for the region's film community saw 16 talented winners announced at the glamorous ceremony which was once again co-hosted by BBC's Ed Stagg and Midlands Movies founder Michael Sales.

With a packed auditorium, it was director Ravi Ghelani who picked up the award for Best Short for *Slave To The Page*, which was chosen by special guest jury panel member Steve Oram. Oram is a TV and film actor, writer and filmmaker who had his breakthrough in *Sightseers* directed by Ben Wheatley – an award-winning comedy following the exploits of a serial killer couple, which he also co-wrote.

"It has been a real pleasure to be part of the awards and be on the jury," Oram said. "I grew up in the West Midlands and the area has constantly been a muse to me throughout my writing and performing career. I don't think the [film] industry has caught up



yet; I think we're a bit overlooked as Midlanders in the stories that are told that we see on our screens. Which is a great shame for such a big area. But things appear to be changing and it's really good to see Midlands Movies provide a brilliant showcase to new talent."

Joining him on the panel were a range of industry experts including Denyce Blackman (of Film Birmingham), Mark Woodyatt (host of the *Mark & Me* podcast), Natasha Wilson (of Film Hub Midlands), Kelly Jeffs (CEO of Lighthouse Cinema), Tim Coleman (film writer), and *Midlands Movies* editor Mike Sales.

After a welcome drinks reception and red-carpet photo-shoot on the night itself, the venue lights dimmed and a video of past winners talking about their filmmaking and awards experiences started the show,

reminding audiences of the supportive nature of the local filmmaking community.

It's clear Midlands Movies are immensely proud of their past successes, but there is a definite focus on ways forward.

"We want to keep it exciting and fresh," said editor Mike Sales. "I always want to look to the future – be that the future of the event, the future of filmmaking or even those future filmmakers yet to start a project, but are inspired by these talented winners from the night. We don't want to sideline that."

Sales explained that there's been a return to 'business as usual' after the past few years of Covid being in the back of everyone's mind. Yet he was determined to move away from this and wasn't surprised that some positives came from resilient filmmakers.

“We’ve not missed an event yet, but [we’re] still dealing with the fallout of the pandemic. The thought of having to rearrange or compromise the event filled me with dread. Lucky for us, it seems one strange side-effect, pardon the pun, was the volume of feature films submitted for consideration.

“With a bit more time on people’s hands and perhaps cooped up with editing software, it seems filmmakers used the situation to their advantage to finish off long-gestating projects.”

The 2022 event also represents the next logical step for the awards.

“I want to try innovative approaches and expand our coverage,” Sales added. “So even more people can see what a great location the Midlands is for films and filmmaking.

“The awards are a place which assembles a large audience together for face-to-face networking and celebrating. We want to generate a shared real-world experience at a time when so much relies upon virtual interaction and social media clout.

“A show like ours is exciting because it can be a bit unpredictable in all the right ways. From the surprise on faces when a winner is announced to our attendee interaction and red-carpet interviews. We want to be as creative as the filmmakers themselves.”

Like every year, the production was a big undertaking and although audiences may be used to the sight of Mike Sales on stage with Ed Stagg, new partners Chromosphere Media wanted to capture the night with winners’ speeches and interviews.

“The focus is always on the filmmakers and although we’re up on stage, the ultimate goal is to showcase the talented cast and crew. They’re the true stars. And we really want to make the rest of the UK sit up and take notice of the talent in our area and no longer think of it as second-place to London or Manchester.”

Lucky for them though, with Stagg providing another evening of wry quips and movie references, Sales explained how his spirits were lifted by how many great productions were viewed.

“Film speaks a universal language but also reflects the times and places in which they were made. The pieces chosen celebrate the originality of the region, but also showcase the unique aspects of what makes the Midlands so great.”

“Those that were honoured are doing hugely exciting work and the determination of all of the filmmakers is hopefully an inspiration for others,” Mike added. 

Midlands Movies can be found on Facebook, on Twitter @MidlandsMovies, and on Instagram (@midlandsmovies)

Here’s the full list of this year’s winners...

> Best Feature

Lapwing by Philip Stevens

> Best Documentary

Layers by Lee Page and Micquel Wright

> Best Animated Film

Treasure by Samantha Moore

> Best Short Film

Slave To The Page by Ravi Ghelani

> Best Director

Shona Auerbach for *Rudy*

> Best Actress in a Leading Role

Carmella Corbett for *Her Majesty*

> Best Actor in a Leading Role

Nicholas Clarke for *Fixed*

> Best Actor in a Supporting Role

Francis Terry for *Loneliness*

> Best Actress in a Supporting Role

Alice Knights for *Rudy*

> Best Writing (Original/adapted)

Lizzie Clarke for *Ned & Me*

> Best Cinematography

Haridas Stewart for *Her Majesty*

> Best Editing

James Millar for *Swine*

> Best Sound (Editing or Mixing)

Stephen Theofanous for *Repeat*

> Best Music (Score or song)

Matthew Hickinbottom
for *Emily The Little Match Girl*

> Best Visual Effects

Gary Pollard for *Tales Of The Creeping Death*

> Best Costume & Makeup & Hairstyling

Pauline Loven, Taryn Gladding, Sarah Tribe,
Samantha Chapman and Jane Hyman for *Lapwing*

If you go down to the woods

Jason Ruddy tells Hamish Calvert about his new short film, *Hunting Bears*

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“I think Anthony Hopkins was absolutely amazing in that,” comments short film director Jason Ruddy as he references *The Father*. Discussing depictions of dementia on screen that have particularly impressed him, he continues.

“Everyone’s amazing in it, Olivia [Colman] as well.” Similarly

to Florian Zeller’s award-winning drama, Ruddy’s new short film *Hunting Bears* also tells a story about the cruel illness. Following brothers Andy (Joel Beckett) and Kenny (Nathaniel Parker), *Hunting Bears* explores how their relationship has been affected by Kenny’s Alzheimer’s, which has seen Andy become his carer.

The film sees Ruddy draw on personal experience of previously

looking after a terminally ill family member of his own.

“I was a carer for my mum; she was in my house and I’d just had my first child. It was a situation where my mum needed 24 hours a day care.”

The memory of this experience, triggered by the isolating effects of the pandemic, created a melting pot of ideas that served as inspiration and focus for his film.

“It started to write itself. When I was caring for my mum, I would get these days where I felt trapped. I felt depressed. It was really hard and I thought, ‘wait a minute, I’ve never really thought about what other people, other carers go through.’”

Into the woods

As well as the personal challenges that came with making a film with themes so close to home, Ruddy had to shoot *Hunting Bears* under the first set of rules for filming during the pandemic.

“Obviously we had to have a Covid officer on site, everyone that morning did a Covid test, everyone got the all clear, everyone apart from the actors had to wear a mask as well.”



It started to write itself. When I was caring for my mum, I would get these days where I felt trapped



However, it wasn't only Covid rules Ruddy had to contest with.

"One of the problems we had, because we were shooting in the woods, was that there were a lot of dog walkers."

And if that wasn't enough for the crew to deal with, Ruddy quickly realised a further issue that came with an external shoot.

"We had aircraft going over every ten minutes and that was an absolute nightmare. I never knew that we were on a flight path. We had to do retakes; we'd watch something back and I'd go 'no, no, I can hear a plane'."

Thankfully, Peter Gummerson, the film's sound designer was a saving grace, managing to clean up any sounds of intrusive aircraft. So somehow after a one-day shoot, under strict Covid regulations and despite often being interrupted by dogs and airplanes, *Hunting Bears* was captured and the edit could begin. Next stop: the festival circuit.

Festival frustration

Hunting Bears has been on the festival circuit for a number of months now, playing at Cambridge and Kingston Film Festivals, amongst others.

"I've found, and a lot of filmmakers will say this, it's so competitive and it's expensive. I've spent nearly a thousand pounds... and you know I've

got into maybe a handful," Ruddy discloses as he discusses the pros and cons of festivals. "In terms of sustainability for festivals, I'm not sure what the future is there, because I think people are really starting to notice that online is probably the way to go, because it's a free platform."

With many options for filmmakers, he's not wrong.

"If you look at things like TikTok, it's been making people stars out of something that's 15 seconds long, and I think with Vimeo, YouTube, or any kind of social platform where you can show your work, I think if you do manage to find that right audience for it, then that's just as good as a film festival."

With *Hunting Bears* being subject to Covid restrictions during its shoot and its festival run, Ruddy also sympathises with the film festivals and the struggles they've encountered.

"I think they have definitely adapted over the last two years because of Covid, offering online viewing. I mean I think they're really good for building a community for filmmakers and I think that's really important, especially when it is such a hard industry to get into in the first place."

Looking forward

These difficulties he speaks on have been evident in Ruddy's search for a producer for his upcoming projects: three more short films.

"Unfortunately, I'm producing these ones myself, so it's a lot more work and it's a few things I haven't done before, which I'm having to learn. So it's a bit of a slower process," he reveals when talking about his next short film.

Set in a graveyard, this short follows a recently widowed woman who makes friends with a man she meets there. Despite its gloomy setting, Ruddy promises he's keen to explore more uplifting stories next.

"I'm trying to go for happier endings; this one's got a happy ending."

One element that will certainly keep the resourceful filmmaker happy is the relatively affordable cost of the location.

"It's cheap enough to make it and that's what I strive for. Now I try not to be as ambitious [regarding setting], I'm always thinking of location," he admits. So whether it's the local woods or the graveyard round the corner, you might just bump into Ruddy shooting his latest project. Although if you think you might be stumbling onto one of his shoots, please try and leave your dog (or plane) at home! 🐕

Hunting Bears will be released online in October.

With two new contenders limbering up, the quest for a movie studio management computer game continues.

Simon Brew looks at the slate...

Every year, come the start of the football season, the acclaimed strategy videogame *Football Manager* rolls around – and every year, it gets more comprehensive, adding a bunch of new features. Still, the core of it remains the same: it's a game that recreates in detail the job of managing a football team, for better or worse (usually worse, in my case). It's also one of the most successful gaming series of its type.

Another annual cycle involves me being asked: is there anything like *Football Manager*, but for managing a film studio? A game where you can take control of a company, make a slate of movies, and hopefully generate a few hits, and a bunch of awards?

The answer to said question is... Sort of. In, fact, as it turns out, there are a few more contenders on the way...

/ The Big Blockbuster >> The Movies

The most mainstream attempt to bring movie management to gaming landed with a loud bang in 2005. It was brought to life by legendary game developer Peter Molyneux, and his argument was that lots of people had talked about doing such a title but nobody had really gone for it. He and his team – Lionhead Studios – duly did go for it. Oddly, it didn't quite go to plan but, nearly two decades on, *The Movies* remains the most expensive and glossy effort available.

What Molyneux and his team had to wrestle with – as everyone before and since has done – was the sheer nature of the game: was it a deep strategy game, where you plot things in heavy detail, or something light and accessible, with hidden depths, à la the hugely successful *Theme Park*? He and his team chose the latter for a hugely ambitious game that effectively spanned the history of cinema.

Starting off in cinema's formative years, your job was to build a studio – right down to designing it – and manage the talent. Build the facilities, fill the facilities, get rich was very much the plan. Furthermore, a visual engine allowed you to make short films, and to this day examples can be found on YouTube of people who have done just that. This segment remains groundbreaking.

The broader game turned out though to be – in proper movie style – a bit of a box office disappointment. It did enough business to generate a *Stunts & Effects* add-on pack, but eventually, Molyneux and his team focused their efforts elsewhere when sales didn't measure up. Reviews were generally good, but still there was a sense of a swing and a bit of a miss. Think the John Travolta-headlined hit *Phenomenon*. A pretty good film, with a stinker of a final act.

Even looking back now, *The Movies* is a game that's not shy of ambition, but doesn't quite land as a coherent whole. It took three or four years to make – at a time where that wasn't so commonplace – and perhaps that deterred others from following in its path. In fact, no mainstream publisher has gone near this area since, and been willing to dedicate the required resources for a full-on movie strategy game.

The Movies is still out there though, and still pretty good. But it blazed a trail others should have followed. Precious few tried.

One piece of free pub trivia for you, though: Oscar-nominated composer Daniel Pemberton did the score for the game...

GAME NIGHT



/ The Word-Of-Mouth Indie >> Hollywood Mogul

Perhaps the title that's got closest to the *Football Manager* idea is an independent game that dates all the way back to 1993. Entitled *Hollywood Mogul*, it's the work of a single programmer, a man called Carey DeVuono, and to date three games have been released, with sequels landing in 1997 and 2006. An old-fashioned trilogy, rather than a cinematic universe.

It's a game where you have to look past the lack of gloss and visuals (a polite way of saying the graphics are a bit... let's move on) and delve deep into the strategic side of things. There's much to enjoy too. Perhaps *Hollywood Mogul 3* gets overcomplicated, yet *Hollywood Mogul 2* very much works, even if there's a fair amount of clicking around to get films off the ground. Still, you get to release 100 movies, and it's good fun. It's not tricky to learn the tricks of the game, but even then, what happens when your lead star dies? What happens when that sure-fire sequel sinks? There are plenty of variables at work.

DeVuono has tried to get a fourth game going in the last year or two, and tried on one or two occasions to crowdfund it into existence as well. However, so far, no dice. A Patreon appeal supporting the game has closed, and a more direct crowdfunder stumbled too. It doesn't mean that the new game is completely dead, but it's clearly not close.

On the plus side, and if you don't mind fighting through the older look and feel of the game, the latest version of it – now rebranded as *Hollywood Movie Studio* – is currently available for free download on the Windows PC platform. It takes a bit of technical poking around to get it working, but it remains the closest we've got to a sports management game for the movie industry.

myindiegamecompany.com

► Steven Spielberg

At the point where the CD-ROM disc format was first on the rise in the 1990s, Steven Spielberg got involved in a project that was designed to simulate the making of films themselves. Cunningly entitled *Steven Spielberg's Director's Chair*, it's the only instance we can find of Spielberg working directly with Quentin Tarantino on a project. That said, he hired Tarantino the actor, in what amounted to a sort of interactive movie where you make decisions, and Spielberg appears with a beard. If you head to molleindustria.org/directorschoices, someone's done a full modern-day remake...



> Moviehouse is the hot new talent on the block, from an independent that's punching as hard as it can <

/ The Blumhouse-Style Reboot

>> Moviehouse

Open about taking direct influence from *The Movies* game, *Moviehouse* is the hot new talent on the block, from an independent that's punching as hard as it can.

It's arriving from developer Odyssey Studios, and this time, the game starts in the 1980s. You'll be kicking off as a small indie production company with just the basic equipment and a tiny film crew at your disposal. Your goal is then to grow your company – let's, for argument's sake, call it Film Stories Global International Amazing

Productions Inc – and turn it into a major player. Top tip: try and get a horror franchise. Not sure if it'll work in the game, but that's what we're fully intending to try.

You go about your work by hiring talent, overseeing scripts, shooting films, winning over critics and fans, making hits, dealing with toxic backlash on Twitter (made that last one up), and keeping up with technological change too. *The Movies* parallel doesn't seem to go as far as making the films themselves though.

Still, it's a game that appears to be biting off a lot, all the more ambitious given that it's Odyssey's debut title. But it's also clearly trying to find that sweet spot – that *The Movies* narrowly missed – between an ultra-deep strategy game and something more accessible to casual gamers.

It's currently scheduled for release on PC and Mac platforms this autumn, and the official website is awash with information here: moviehousegame.com



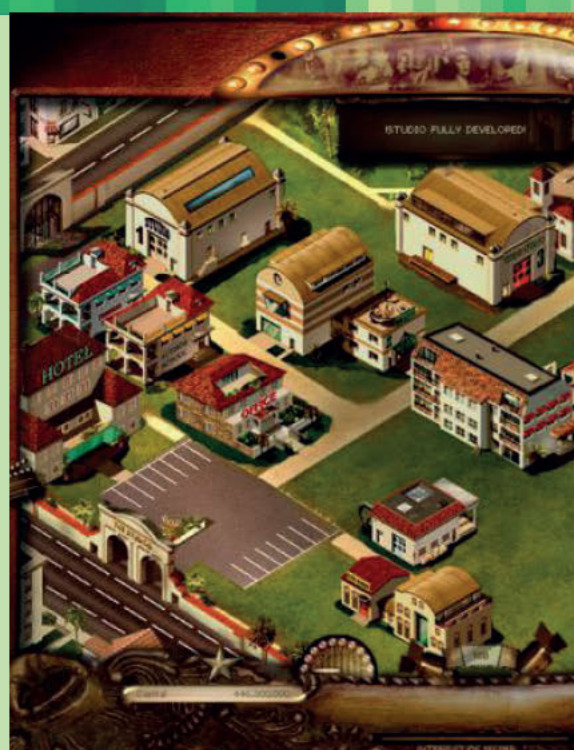
/ The European Import

>> Hollywood Pictures 2

There's not a lot of love out there for 2007's strategy title *Hollywood Pictures 2*, but you can't fault it for having a go. Unlike *The Movies*, this is less interested in getting you to design your studio and production facilities; instead it's up to you to oversee the production of films. The game covers pre-production, shooting and editing, and you can jazz up your films by throwing extra cash at special effects late in the day. Worked a treat for *Green Lantern*, that.

Still, you can get quite surgical when it comes to the making of the movies themselves, and if *Hollywood Pictures 2* has a stand-out to it, it's probably that. But there's not the feeling of correlation between what you make and how the film then performs. That it's not all knitted together particularly well.

Think of it as a picture where neither the first, second, or third act is particularly well tuned, but there are ideas in each part. Still, the coherent whole hasn't led to a fervent Twitter campaign for a third chapter.



/ Straight-To-DVD

>> Movie Studio Boss

Both *Movie Studio Boss* and *Movie Studio Boss: The Sequel* are games from an independent programmer who wanted to capture the feel of football management-style computer games from the 1990s. Not quite as deep as a *Football Manager*, but still with a fair smattering of strategy to wade through. They got made, they got published, but then they've fallen away.

The most recent of the games arrived in 2014, and it's a turn-based title, where you make your decisions, move on a week, and see where things are going. Again, there's a lot of clicking around the screen, and the actual film side of it feels a bit remote. Still, if you like the idea of sitting behind a desk and trying to get films moving, there's something to it.

It's obviously restricted by a very small development team, so it's not long before you're banging at the edges of what's possible. Furthermore, even the latest version is nearly a decade old now, and inevitably feels it. Yet it's priced at under £7 on the Steam platform for PC gamers, and isn't without its merits.



/ How Did This Get Made?

>> Starring Charlie Chaplin

In the 1980s and early 1990s, it was cheap for games publishers to snap up movie licences. As such, everything from Edward D Wood Jr's *Plan 9 From Outer Space* to Oliver Stone's *Platoon* got turned into a videogame. And then someone at publisher US Gold – based in Birmingham – got the idea to do a Charlie Chaplin videogame. Aimed at kids. There's no shade in that comment, either: introducing Chaplin to kids through a game sounded admirable. It also, sadly, sounded like commercial suicide.

Still, in 1987 the game duly appeared. You were Chaplin, you pratted around for a bit on a film set, they called cut, the film got released. The problem was computer technology was such at the time that the only way the game could assess what you'd done was to count how many other actors you'd biffed. The curtain thus came down: this was actually a fighting game, in movie clothes. And the moment in the game where it offered to replay your efforts, to watch as a film? You're basically left with the sight of someone playing a not very good fighting game, not very well.

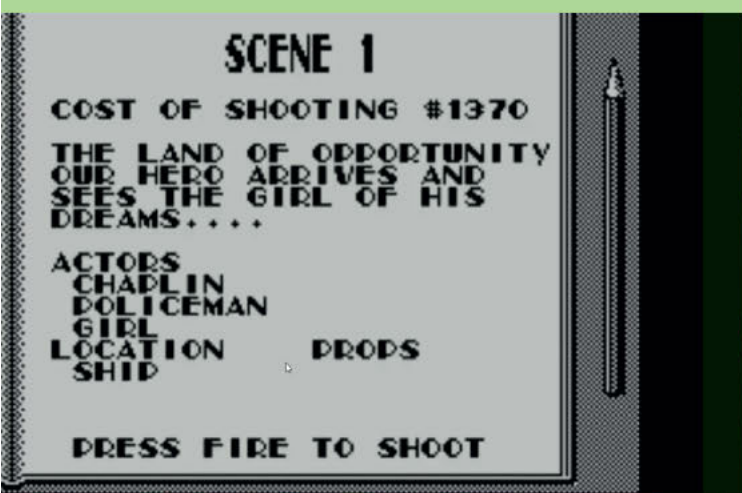
A sequel did not follow.



What the critics say

There's a feeling that there's something in this. The idea of a full Hollywood studio management game. Across sports in particular, similar titles have found a path. Even when it comes to managing theme parks, zoos, prisons, transport systems of various flavours, and factories, there have been successes. But like a precious artefact constantly slipping out of

the hands of Indiana Jones, the movie management game crown remains unclaimed. Yet if we had to be pushed on a best bet? It'd be *Hollywood Mogul 2*, a dated, scrappy-looking game, with a list of problems now that'd fill another page. But still, there's just something about it that's got a lot closer to the prize than many of its better resourced rivals. **18**



/ The Upstart Contender

>> Movie Studio Tycoon2

Another upcoming title, with a familiar task in front of you. You're given the chance to set up a movie studio, and you can pick where you begin: anywhere from the 1930s to the 1990s. Then, alongside the history of the film industry, you get to work.

The drill is familiar if you've got this far through this feature. You need to start your studio, hire in talent, train them up, build things, make things, do things, and presumably book yourself a nice lunch.

This one allows you to make films across 30 genres and 25 different sets, and you can get pretty hands-on with the kind of films you want to make. Plus, you need to accommodate changing technology as the game rolls on.

On the surface, this feels like a nice blend of stuff, but it's still in development at the moment, and we've written about lots of nice trailers that have gone on to be crappy movies. If all goes to plan, we might just be able to go on and make one too.

No release date for this, but it's been in development for a while, and thus might sneak out before the end of the year.



► One more...

Never mind making films: how about showing them? *Cinema Empire* is a 2007 game that charged you with overseeing a multiplex cinema, and trying to make it profitable. Good luck with that in current times. You programme ads, rent movies, expand your cinema, and do everything short of cleaning up popcorn off the floor and being shouted at for not letting kids in to see *Joker*. It's long out of print, and was available on PC.

“YOU WOULDN'T STEAL A CAR”

FILM PIRACY HAS BEEN EVER-
PRESENT IN THE INDUSTRY FOR
DECADES NOW – BUT HOW BIG IS
THE PROBLEM REALLY?

NICK FULLER TAKES A LOOK...

Back in the 1980s, when the advent of the video cassette exploded our choices for viewing films at home, it didn't take long for people to demand not just older titles but also the blockbusters of the day. A bloke down the pub could get you the latest and greatest even when titles were barely yet in the cinema – as long as you didn't mind disappearing sound, a wobbly picture, and the fact that the police might be interested in where you got it from.

Its *Only Fools & Horses*-esque origins – camcorders secreted under coats at cinemas – made piracy a bit of a laugh for many. It shouldn't have been then, and it certainly isn't now, however.

According to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the UK film and TV industries contributed almost £21bn to the economy in 2018; the BPI says that the UK's creative industries (from film and TV to music and software) supports over 2.8 million jobs and around £18bn in exports. According to both, piracy is a threat to all of that investment.



NETWORKED

One of the big reasons that this threat has increased over recent years is the growth of digital technology. The idea of having to buy something physical (like a video cassette or DVD) is quaint now – streaming via sites, apps, sticks, mobiles, or set-top boxes means far less visibility of sources and lower costs in distribution. This goes both for pirates' own dodgy copies and hijacking other people's legitimate work. Nowadays, the leap from the legal (e.g., Amazon Fire or Chromecast) to illegal (e.g., versions with pre-installed add-ons to enable unauthorised premium material access) is small. Tech also helps pirates cover their tracks; virtual private networks (VPNs) provide the sort

of security protection that can help them – and consumers – evade detection.

Some things, though, haven't changed. Most pirate copies still originate from clandestine cinema recording, although these days concealment is a lot easier given the dimensions of a mobile device or compact digital camera. That is one reason that the Film Content Protection Agency (FCCA) was formed in 2016 and has since been focusing on preventing pirated material from being originated in cinemas.

Indeed, nowadays cinema staff may feel more like detectives than ice cream sellers, focused as they are on checking for suspicious behaviour such as seat hopping (possibly to look for the best recording positions),

early arrival (to set up recording equipment), and seat location (potentially to find empty seats to which recording devices can be clamped). Even if this successfully identifies someone making a recording, UK law requires 'proof of commercial activity' (i.e., that the person intends to make money from it) to prosecute – and that's tough.

Profiting from the material isn't always the point anyway – sometimes internet release groups make available pirated content online merely for the status of being first. More often than not though, money is at the heart.

CLICKBAIT

Sometimes this is indirect – where we're offered free access to a film. The criminals may




be making money from advertisers on their site (the online ad process is so opaque that perfectly legitimate brands will find themselves advertising on some very illegitimate sites) or using it to attack us. According to Crimestoppers and the ONS, last year over 4.8m illegal streamers experienced a virus, fraud, or personal data theft as a result of these indirect freebies (or the malware-based ads that appear there). The deal probably looked too good to be true and turned out to be just that.

Sometimes it's direct, where we pay much lower prices than the official sources or pay a fee to see something before it's officially available. Beyond the fact that this is illegal (however much we may try to kid ourselves otherwise), the risks to us here may seem less clear than those to the industry. The glitz and excess of Hollywood hardly tugs at the heart strings, so we may take the view that the glitterati will live with a few less millions in their bank accounts. However in a business where – beyond the blockbusters – profit is tough, it takes very little to dissuade companies from making films at all. If they walk away, that means less choice for us and a far more precarious living for the legion of less glamorous and lucrative workers (from set builders to sound engineers) behind the camera.

This is the primary argument of the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT), the name with which many of us will be most familiar in

KEEPING IT LEGAL & SAFE

Most of us satisfy our film hunger from among the vast range of big streaming providers out there now. But, should you be looking for a title that's not obviously available from the usual suspects, there are ways of tracking down legitimate sources we may not be aware of.

Describing itself as 'your nerdy friend,' **findanyfilm.com** points out the cinema, download, streaming, TV, and physical options for any title you care to search for. More general support for those hoping to locate and identify genuine platforms – and the relevant law – can be found at **getitrightfromagenuinesite.org**.



THE EXCESS OF HOLLYWOOD HARDLY TUGS AT THE HEART STRINGS, SO WE MAY TAKE THE VIEW THAT THE GLITTERATI WILL LIVE WITH A FEW LESS MILLIONS...



countering piracy. Since 1983, it's been in the front line of protecting the film and TV industries and their output: nowadays its six-point mission includes protection, prevention, and disruption, making clear that it's about much more than just catching the pirates after the fact.

Importantly too, it is an international organisation and it works alongside partners including Trading Standards, selected police forces, Sky, Crimestoppers, and the Intellectual Property Office. Whilst focused on the pirates themselves, FACT recently successfully prosecuted an illegal streamer who the judge sentenced not only for selling the illegal content but also watching it. This underlines the fact that consumers are not immune from risk.

LINKS

One of the reasons for increasing numbers of initiatives by law enforcement and the industry is that piracy is no cottage industry. Much is underwritten by serious organised crime. In 2019 a European study concluded that these organised crime groups are often also linked to drug dealing and loan sharking. For this reason, the threats to ourselves as viewers or to the industry are far from the only – or the most serious – consequences.

Criminals are in the game though because it's lucrative of course. Like music, the move to digital delivery has led some of us to believe that noughts and ones have no value, that the creativity behind the art and entertainment that we love somehow comes for free. Or maybe we see the truth but think that we can't afford to care – the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) reports that piracy thrives most in areas with low income and high levels of inequality.

Whatever the reason, plenty of us are doing it. According to last year's Intellectual Property Office research, 27% of UK citizens used an illegal source to watch films in 2019. Even if lack of cash points some of us towards the pirates, we know the risks. Research by FACT last year revealed that 47% of consumers would share their email address to access illicit streams even though almost a third who had done so had been hacked or exposed to fraud as a result.

DOWNFALL

The industry and law enforcement (sometimes alone but increasingly together) are busy countering this with some impact. Film pirated content in the UK was down over 50% year on year in 2020 according to the EUIPO and several of the key bodies involved report successful prosecutions – the FCPA seized counterfeit discs worth over £20m; FACT and Trading Standards have successfully prosecuted people for illegal streaming and for building software to grant illegal access to Netflix and other streaming services.

The battle however is far from won. It's tough because the pirates' business model has become more sophisticated. In fact, it sometimes looks like a legitimate software business. Anyone can set themselves up as a streamer by buying packages to host, sell (via one-off payments and subscriptions), deliver, and communicate with customers. All this comes with none of those pesky overheads involved in actually buying or making the films. Users of these 'services' may have no idea who the ultimate sellers are and the servers used to deliver them are often beyond UK authority. Law enforcement increasingly follows the money because the pirates often use legitimate payment processors (such as PayPal and the banks), sometimes mixing money derived from straight businesses with cash from criminal ones to muddy the waters on the legality of income going through them.

CHOICE

In the end, whatever the police and industry bodies do to counter piracy, it's we film fans who impact it most. It's our money and attention the pirates are after. The purpose of valuing 'Intellectual Property' is to protect the people who make films so that they can make a living from their creativity – and we can enjoy it. If we turn our back on them, we put them at risk – but we do the same to ourselves too potentially. It might be tempting to quickly stream the new *Fast & Furious* film for free. It might just come with a sting in its tale... **FS**



D I G N I F E D
D R A G

Hamish Calvert speaks to Miss Dave Lynn and Miss Jason, long-time friends and colleagues of David Raven, the UK's oldest performing drag artist and the subject of new documentary, *Maisie*



How does it feel to be part of such a special film?

Dave: Well, we didn't feel anything, because it's taken a hundred years to make it! But, now that it has happened, I think we feel fabulous.

Jason: It's been a really interesting process because it's taken so long. They started filming at least three years ago [and] David really wasn't well, so we had to revisit lots of things. They left it to Dave and myself because David was more relaxed speaking about his past with us.

I've known Maisie 30 years and you're a lot longer than that aren't you?

Dave: Oi! Not that much!

Jason: But it's lovely to be involved and it's grown into such a lovely project.

Dave: It's a project of love. I seriously think we all did it out of respect and love for David, he's just a fab human being.

Jason: We're very proud of him as well. Originally, it was a story about being the [UK's] oldest working drag artiste, but it's really a story about someone coming to the end of their career, which they can't quite step back from. It's a story about a man who's lost his partner, society has moved on, and he can't quite keep up.

David prefers to be known as a drag artiste, rather than a drag queen. Why is that such an important distinction for him?

Dave: Well he's got his rules, you see. We can't call him Maisie when he's out of drag,; he actually will blank you.

I remember I was on *This Morning* doing a segment, and I said I was a drag queen. I got a very irate phone call not long after.

Jason: David would never really talk about being – now he does – but he would never talk about being gay. I remember being in a car with David and we were trying to find a pub. I was going to open the window and say to the guy 'where is the gay bar called so-and-so?' But David wouldn't let me. David said 'no, no, you've got to say the street name.'

He comes from an era where being gay was illegal.

Dave: I started around that era, so I know what being underground was like. David was a very glamorous man and had a wonderful partner, who he sadly lost. He was very private; David had the gay life and the gay relationship, but from what we saw he really wanted to be treated as a man when he wasn't doing drag.

I think the film is at its best when all three of you are together on screen, like the scene in the dressing room...

Dave: The dressing room... the painkiller!

Jason: Yes, Maisie was feeling rough and I said 'oh I've got a painkiller,' and all of a sudden she [Dave] pipes up 'I want one!' She can't be left out of anything. I only had one so I think you had to suck it first and then David swallowed it.

Dave: These things are always happening, let me tell you. I

think he sees us a bit like daughters, because he took well to me and he took to Jason very well. But when we went round to his house to do the start of that interview he was in a terrible mood... foul.

Jason: When she's got a temper on her, she's terrible.

Dave: So I said 'Jason, we're just popping out to get some cleaning stuff,' but we bought a bottle of wine!

In the film David meets the world's oldest drag queen, Darcelle XV. How was it hosting their historic meeting?

Jason: It was really interesting, because as men Darcelle was taking the lead and I thought 'oh, I don't know how this is gonna go.' But the minute David was Maisie, Maisie was in charge. You get undertones of Maisie when they meet as men. Maisie starts to get a little bit pissed off with Darcelle and starts to get a little bit sarky. Then once she was in drag, poor Darcelle... I must say Darcelle is 80-odd.

I was a bit shocked to see his bum – and someone gave him 20 quid.

Dave: What, to cover it up?

Jason: I might flash mine!

Dave: She was unstoppable – Maisie, as an act. I mean, it wasn't just in the first stage of his career. When he moved down here [to Brighton], they went mental for him. He had a resurrection that was unreal. He was literally at the top of the tree, next to Lily Savage. He kept the scene going; he said 'if we don't bring new people it'll die.'

Jason: Everything has to evolve; evolve or die. So when people get up the wall about RuPaul, all it is is the next step and it's opening drag up too.

Dave: I think we've got more work since that started.

Jason: And there's been more interest in drag, simply because of RuPaul.

Dave: It's become mainstream.

With drag's new popularity, does David ever feel pressure because of the generational difference?

Jason: I think he takes it in his stride, because we have to realise that David has now, although he's still working, stepped back a lot and he's earned his position. There's a crown on his head and it will be there until he passes on.

Dave: And forever, or otherwise I'll get it. I'm the next in line!

Jason: David has earned his crown, so he wouldn't feel threatened or intimidated at all.

Dave: He kind of likes this new thing and he's excited by it. I think he understands that he's had a wonderful time and just to enjoy it. Revel in it, revel in the adulation.

Maisie attracts a crowd of all ages. Why do you think she has such broad appeal?

Jason: I think it's because you look at David and his appearance isn't ultra glam, so he's not threatening. He's older, so you buy into the nan or the naughty auntie character and then all of a sudden it's the shockability that someone that looks that established and that old, says something filthy. What he delivers he delivers with love and experience, so he can relate to most people.

He's been young, so he can relate to young people. He's now old, so he can also relate to older people. But what he's doing – which I think is really important – is building a bridge between the two. When you watch David, ages meet in the middle, and there's something reassuring about that.

Dave: I agree totally. I also think there's a huge amount of love and respect. If you go and see David as a young person and you've never seen drag, it's going to make you think 'why is a man of his age doing drag?'

Jason: It will make you concentrate more at school!

Do you aspire to be performing at the age that Maisie still is?

[both shake their heads in disagreement]

Dave: I think it's a resounding 'no.' I couldn't go until I dropped, or was forced on stage whilst uncomfortable or ill... no. It's a wonderful time for all of us, but I wouldn't want to outstay my welcome.

Jason: You know what, though? The challenge there is that when I realise that's the situation, I hope I'm brave enough to give it up.

Dave: Or rich enough!

Jason: I'll never be rich enough.

What would you say to anyone who watches the film and is inspired to try drag for the first time or even take it up even as a career, what is your best drag secret?

Dave: DON'T DO IT! No... I always say 'work hard and produce something that you want to do.'

Nowadays, you've got the chance to take it seriously. You can get costumes easily and you can get make-up; you can get lessons in make-up. I would say work hard because it's only going to get stronger, the scene.

Jason: Yeah that's true and I'd just say to anyone with whatever job, only ever do what you love and if you don't like doing it, don't do it. ¹⁸

Maisie is released in UK cinemas on 5th August.

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WHO ARE THE UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND SOME OF CINEMA'S MAGICAL MOMENTS?

WORDS: DAN COOPER

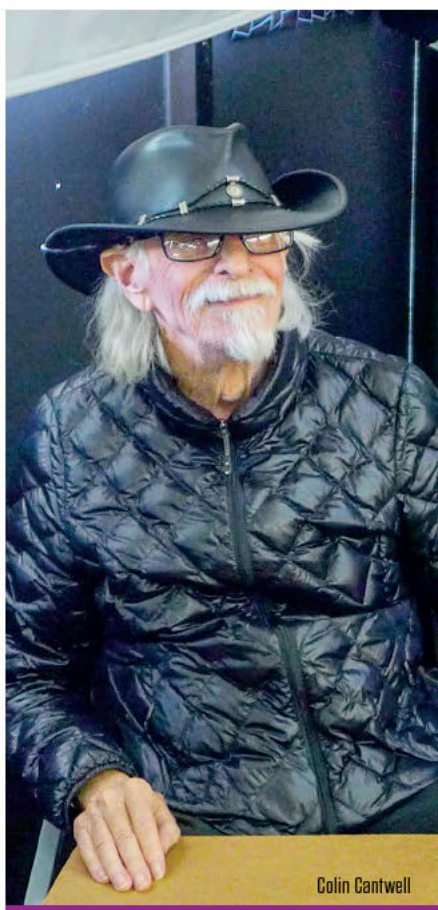
Film directors deserve all the plaudits they get; it can't be easy managing casts, crews, and – in some cases – Godzilla-sized egos. There are perks, though: a chair with their name on the back, first dibs on the catering wagon, and when things go well, everybody assumes it's down to them.

Film is collaborative, though. Behind most directors is an army of less-recognised creatives working to produce the cinematic moments that are seared onto our imaginations. The following pages, then, are dedicated to shining a light on some of these unsung heroes. Although some of their names may be unfamiliar to you, be assured that their work will be anything but...

CREATING THE THING

When Rob Bottin completed the extensive special effects makeup work on 1981's *The Howling*, he'd already taken on more than was originally planned. As a protégé of Rick Baker, the design responsibilities for *The Howling*'s terrifying werewolves were supposed to be shared by both men. However, when Baker realised his designs were veering far too close to his plans for the upcoming *An American Werewolf In London*, he recused himself, adding an extra layer of responsibility onto Bottin's first major project.

Bottin's impressive efforts on *The Howling* next landed him the responsibility of designing the unforgettable monster in John Carpenter's *The Thing*. As a hungry 22-year-old with little regard for the countless hours of toil he was creating for himself, Bottin would repeatedly stoke director John Carpenter's ambitions, insisting they shoot the



Colin Cantwell

DESIGNING THE DEATH STAR

For good and for ill, George Lucas is always held up as the myth-maker behind the *Star Wars* films, a filmmaker whose unique and unifying vision birthed the saga into life. Whilst there is undoubtedly truth in this idea, it is sometimes overlooked just how influential the work of his collaborators was, whether it be Ralph McQuarrie's design work, Marcia Lucas's editing, or Colin Cantwell's models. Cantwell, employed as an ILM model builder for the production of 1977's *Star Wars*, is credited for creating the art of 'kit-bashing', using disparate elements from different model kits to create three-dimensional designs layered with detail, creating starfighters and space bases that felt functionally real.

Whilst Ralph McQuarrie's concept art is rightly lauded for designing the look of *Star Wars*, it was Cantwell's kit-bashing style that transformed McQuarrie's sleek concepts into fully realised models like the X-wing fighter and Death Star battle station, bestowing them with a

texture and tactility that was unmatched. It was a process that embellished *Star Wars*'s grungy, lived-in feel, making 'A Galaxy Far, Far Away' feel as real as the world outside the cinema auditorium.

Cantwell's contributions continued beyond the aesthetic too. When he mentioned to Lucas that the iconic Death Star should feature a trench within its equator, he even had an idea as to how it could be used, suggesting, "this way the good guys could dive into the trench while being shot at by the bad guys in some very dramatic scenes."

As it turned out, that would become the genesis for the trench run, one of science-fiction cinema's most iconic sequences. His understanding of the importance of technological functionality led to the separating wings on the X-wing fighter which the designer described as a gunfighter drawing his weapons. Cantwell passed away in May of this year, aged 90, leaving a design legacy that continues to permeate science-fiction cinema.

creature in the light and suggesting its appearance could alter as it consumed each victim. He worked on the project for 57 weeks, constructing the ever-changing creature and when production ended he was hospitalised with exhaustion, pneumonia, and a bleeding ulcer. However, his small crew had created a creature to rival anything moviemaking had yet seen.

Bottin would go on to design the RoboCop suit and work with David Fincher on *Se7en* and *Fight Club* before abruptly leaving the industry. The designs he left behind, though, are legendary.



RoboCop/Alex Murphy and Rob Bottin

ZERO GRAVITY CORRIDOR FISTICUFFS

Christopher Nolan's films are renowned for the audacious nature of their practical effects sequences. Standing in stark relief to a glut of CGI-heavy action sequences seen in big-budget movies like *Cloverfield* and *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, 2008's *The Dark Knight* would emphasise the potency of practical effects sequences in blockbuster cinema.

Nolan's next project would push this approach into overdrive with 2010's *Inception*, which featured an eye-popping zero-gravity fight sequence between Joseph Gordon-Levitt's Arthur and several sentinels of the mind into which he has intruded. The sequence still stands as one of the most impressive physical action sequences of this century – no surprise given the work that went into creating it. Production designer Guy Hendrix Dyas and visual effects supervisor Chris Corbould conceived and constructed a hundred-foot hallway within a huge rotating structure in the same hangar that housed the mammoth sets for Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy.

The walls of the corridor were coated in three inches of neoprene to protect the performers in such a physically taxing environment. As the corridor rotated, Gordon-Levitt and the other actors were harnessed and flung around the structure, with an upwards-pointing camera creating the sense of weightlessness. Choreography formed a key aspect of the fight sequence too, with stunt coordinator Tom Struthers crafting a fight sequence that felt chaotic and imperfect as the combatants struggled to adapt to the dream's shifting physical laws.

In the decade since *Inception*, we've seen huge fight sequences become increasingly reliant on CGI, with performances often losing a degree of physicality as they blend with environments replete with artifice. The commitment of *Inception* to creating a sequence to rival the scale of a CGI action extravaganza, whilst grounding itself entirely in reality, remains as both a hugely demanding physical endeavour and a landmark achievement in filmmaking.



SOMETIMES, SIMPLE WORKS

We have nothing but respect for the landmark (and complex) technical achievements listed above. Sometimes though, simple works just as well. Derek Cianfrance's *The Place Beyond The Pines* begins with a beautiful and technically glorious long take, but hidden within this hypnotic single shot is a deft example that sometimes, simple can work just as well. As we track Ryan Gosling's stunt rider making his way to the arena, plenty of technical excellence is on display to capture the shot in a true, non-digitally stitched single take.

However, the moment when Gosling is cleverly switched out for an actual stunt rider – who then proceeds to roar into a cage and perform a death-defying stunt – is what Cianfrance calls a 'simple Texas Switch.'

In a sequence full of technical accomplishments, the real 'how did they do that?' moment is actually the oldest (and simplest) trick in the book. Look it up and see what we mean.

John Gaeta on the set of *Matrix Resurrections*





Joseph Gordon-Levitt in a rotating corridor



Elliot Page and Leonardo DiCaprio shoot the dream design exposition for *Inception*

REALISING BULLET TIME

If you want to get picky, the technical principle behind the jaw-dropping ‘bullet-time’ sequence in 1999’s *The Matrix* originates with the birth of filmmaking. The iconic scene, where Keanu Reeves’s Neo appears to slow down time as he hangs in a gravity-defying stance, dodging bullets that slowly zip past him, employs the same basic approach as Eadweard Muybridge’s 1878 moving image, *The Horse In Motion*. A series of single-shot cameras are rigged to fire sequentially and when viewed quickly, combine to create the illusion of movement.

However, whilst Muybridge’s 1878 project was a rather dry pseudo-scientific endeavour, designed to discover more about a horse’s gait, the team

behind *The Matrix* were aiming to create an effect so visually arresting that the film’s entire premise – that of the world being a simulacrum in which the laws of physics could be bent or broken – would convincingly hang together. Directorial duo the Wachowskis are rightly lauded for achieving this, their cine-literate style suffusing each frame of the film, with clear nods to Hong Kong action movies undoubtedly forming part of the bullet time sequence’s enduring appeal.

However, the less celebrated heroes of this moment merit more than a passing mention too. Visual effects supervisor John Gaeta, along with Manex Entertainment, were the experts responsible for constructing the sequence. Whilst the

film wasn’t the first occasion where a number of single-shot cameras had circled a subject, when combined with the slow-motion bullet effects, the keying work that allowed Reeves’s impossible anatomical posing, a technologically demanding 122 camera setup, and the Wachowskis’ dash of style, the moment would wow audiences and enter the realms of cinematic legend. To give him his due, in the last two decades Gaeta has also been open about the sequence being an innovation of the work of others rather than a ‘big bang’ moment, crediting Michel Gondry’s music videos and the Campanile Project among others as examples of technological innovation that his team were able to build upon.

MAKING A MAN FLY

When it comes to magical moments, there's few moments in cinema history that can surpass seeing the Man of Steel soaring through the skies as he memorably did in 1978's *Superman*. So impactful was the effects work on Superman's iconic flight sequences that upon release, the film's promotional campaign would focus on these moments, sporting the tagline: *You'll believe a man can fly*.

Wire work had been common since the 1950s when George Reeves played Superman on TV, although several mishaps saw it phased out on that show in favour of a brace-like device known as 'the flying pan'. By the time Christopher Reeve donned the blue tights some two decades later, wire work was safer, although no more comfortable for the actor than it had been a quarter of a century prior. However, it would be the technical execution of the wire work in 1978's *Superman* that would leave audiences agog and add a vital flourish to Reeve's impressive performance.

The film's visual effects were in the hands of a few talented individuals including Colin Chilvers, who were grappling with a problem that had stymied many an effects team: at this point in time, wire work rarely looked real. With that in mind, Chilvers first experimented with a few avant-garde methods of making Superman fly. Dummies were fired out of cannons and a remote-control flying Superman doll was road-tested and rejected before the team began experimenting with state-of-the-art techniques to evolve the use of wires.

Optical visual effects whizz Roy Field managed to navigate the first hurdle, using a colour grading technique to ensure they could shoot against a blue screen to matte backgrounds in, despite Superman's suit also being blue. Zoran Perisic also played a vital



Superman's Hoover Dam sequence



Margot Kidder and Christopher Reeve get ready to fly

role, developing his own 'Zoptic' optical process, which locked the camera and front projection lenses in sync, meaning the camera could move whilst capturing Reeve's performance, creating the illusion that Superman was capable of movement whilst flying.

Les Bowie, a supervisor of mattes and compositing, would be responsible for a remote-controlled rig with rods inserted into Reeve's costume which would simulate the flutter of wind through the cape. Bowie would also come up with the clever idea of vibrating the wires suspending Reeve so quickly that they became invisible to the camera whilst it shot at an industry standard of 24 frames per second.

All of these technical innovations delighted audiences, advanced the cinematic possibilities of wire work, and won the team a Special Achievement Academy Award for Visual Effects. Later incarnations of the character would utilise the limitless possibilities of CGI, allowing Krypton's Last Son to perform all kinds of incredible flying manoeuvres, but none has ever made Superman feel so human and yet entirely superhuman as those magical moments from 1978.

A GOLDEN EYE

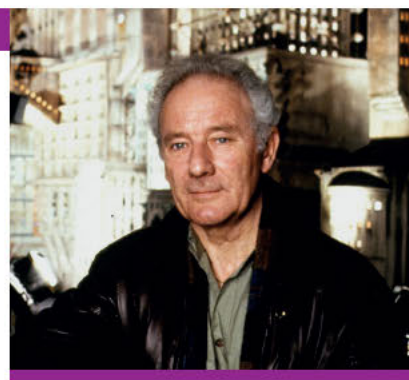
Also part of the team that won that Oscar for *Superman's* visual effects was Derek Meddings, a master of miniatures who cut his teeth alongside Gerry Anderson on TV shows such as *Captain Scarlet* and *Thunderbirds*, before moving into movies in the 1970s and creating some of the most memorable sequences of the ensuing decades.

Alongside the planet Krypton, Meddings's work on *Superman* included the Golden Gate Bridge and Hoover Dam from the film's earthquake sequence. He was, however, less than happy with elements of that finale which were produced once he departed the project.

Perhaps best known for his work on the James Bond films, Meddings would contribute to special effects in the franchise from 1973's *Live And Let Die* through to 1995's *GoldenEye*,

which also marked the year he sadly passed. These included a 70ft-long 'miniature' supertanker for 1977's *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

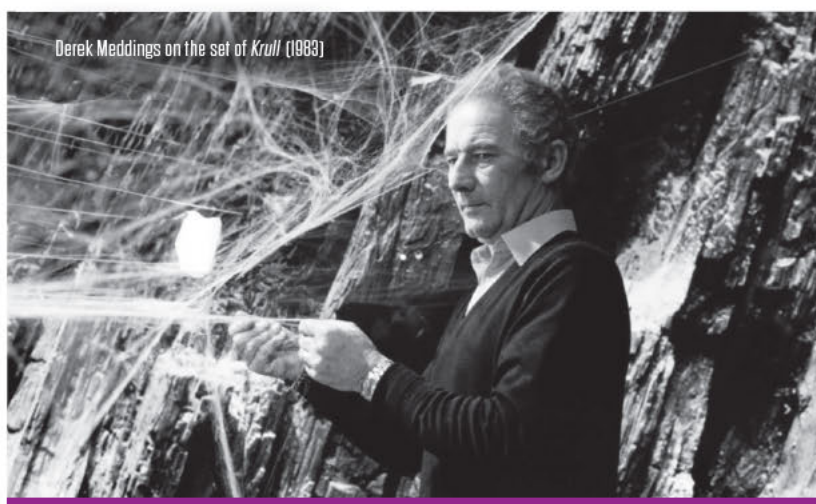
Meddings's creations may have sometimes been physically small but his talents and imagination were anything but. Undoubtedly an artist, Meddings was also brilliantly pragmatic, once getting around the punishing production schedule on 1979's *Moonraker* by shooting all of the visual effects 'in-camera', a primitive technique – winding back the camera after each shot requiring great finesse – but removing the need for additional and time-consuming visual effects work. He also achieved the on-screen destruction of the space station in the same film by blasting it with a shotgun, a perfect image to capture the slightly unconventional but altogether brilliantly ingenious creator.



READ ON...

There are of course many other unsung heroes whose accomplishments would grace these pages if we only had the room. The effects work from the team supporting Douglas Trumbull in designing the opening shot of 1982's *Blade Runner* could form an entire feature article of their own. Roy Walker's haunting production design in 1980's *The Shining* still forms the décor of our nightmares whilst Bill George and the ILM whizzes that made an alien, a boy, and a bicycle fly in *E.T.* should not be overlooked either.

The cover star of the last issue of *Film Stories*, Doug Jones, is the very definition of an unsung hero – having contributed so much to the films of Guillermo del Toro and many others, all whilst encased in mounds of latex. There also wasn't room here to tout the achievements of location scouts like Rick Schuler: would *Se7en* or *Fight Club* still be the films they are shorn of those unforgettable settings? In short, this piece forms the tip of the iceberg and we only wish there was room for more.



In closing, it's worth mentioning that the largely unheralded heroes featured in this piece also had droves of unsung heroes working with them, names too numerous to print in the few pages we have here. But the next time you do find yourself watching one of the films above, or indeed any movie that delivers on the magical potential that cinema holds, consider sticking around to watch as somewhere halfway down the credits, their moment of recognition rolls across the screen. Whilst their names may only be emblazoned in light for a brief moment in time, the magic that they've tirelessly worked to create for us has lasted much, much longer and for that, we thank them all! 



A WAGE TO ITALY 7

Harry Leonard
looks at why the Bond films of the
21st century keep returning to the same country

James Bond is no stranger to travel. Over 60 years, 007 has ventured across five continents. The series' 1960s heyday coincided with the golden age of flying, when air-travel was the exclusive domain of a glamorous jet-set, and there's little doubt that Sean Connery's jaunts to Jamaica, Istanbul, The Bahamas, and Japan played a role in the character's hold on the zeitgeist.

The mundanity of plane travel in the 21st century, however, means that the Bond franchise can no longer rely on this allure. Thus, the series decided to visit the last place one would expect: Bond's own psyche. Since 2006, Daniel Craig's incarnation of Bond has shed new light on the man and his place in the modern world, with the locations signalling a desire to find not only spectacular backdrops, but new thematic and emotional resonances.

This may go some way to explaining why, under Craig, Bond has returned to one country more than any other in the series' history: Italy. If the intention was to carve out a place for this venerable series in the 21st century, what could the history, architecture, and culture of the *bel paese* say about the world of 007?

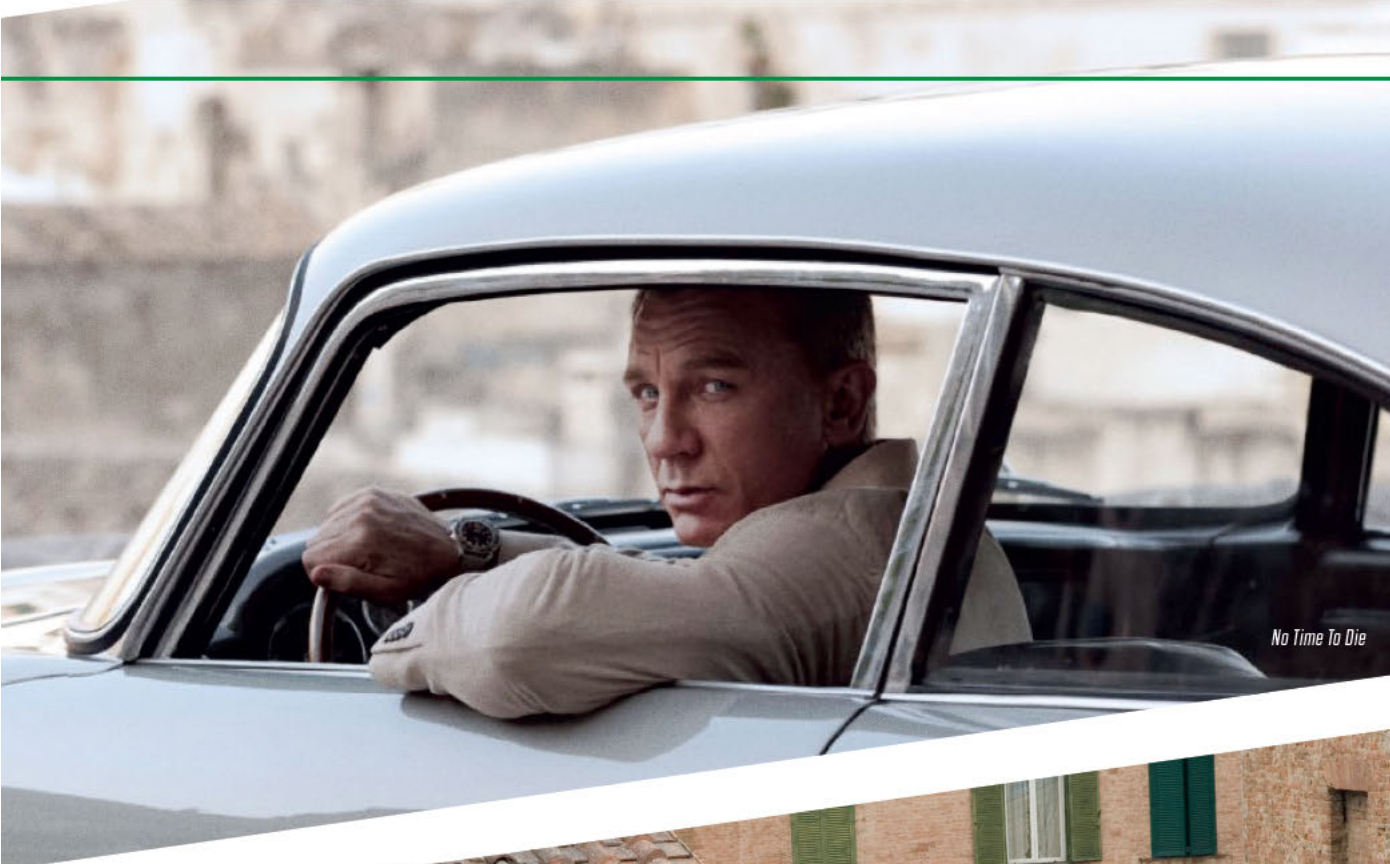
Venice

Its waterways have long been used on page and screen to create a sense of foreboding, as there's no avoiding the reality that one day Venice will fall back into the depths from which it sprung. This incontrovertible sense of fate that makes it the perfect setting for *Casino Royale*'s final act, where Bond and Vesper Lynd (Eva Green) abscond to following a nerve-shredding poker game and a harrowing encounter with a rope. It is a sequence that would have lasting ramifications.

Movie magic

When filming on location, the Bond crew have never let geography get in the way of a spectacular moment. To achieve the effect of a palazzo sinking into the Grand Canal in *Casino Royale*, the production team built a full-scale rig of the building in Pinewood Studios. Subsequently, *Quantum Of Solace* uses editing trickery to allow Bond to make the 400-mile journey from Garda, via Carrara, to Siena in three minutes. In reality, that's a drive of over eight hours.

One almost feels sorry for Mr White being locked in the boot all that time.





The juxtaposition of beauty and death is apparent from the moment the pair enter the lagoon. Framed between the island of San Giorgio and the unmistakable bell-tower of St Mark's Square, the allure of the city, and the sweeping romance between the lovers on their grand tour is tangible. It's also the last time their affair is unblemished. Moments later, while sailing through the Grand Canal, Vesper glimpses an ominous figure among the crowd, an ill-omen that casts a shadow over the floating city, imbuing everything to come with a sense of doom.



Casino Royale is far from the first film to capitalise on Venice's inevitable end. In Nic Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), John Baxter is haunted by visions of a terrible future while pursuing a figure in red who seems to portend death. In *Casino Royale*, Bond and Vesper – the latter clad all in red – retrace this pursuit, a clear invitation from director Martin Campbell to recall Roeg's film. The image bridges deaths past and future, and, despite her betrayal of Bond, we cannot but be moved as we watch Vesper walk to her demise, itself updated to an act of drowning in line with the inciting incident of *Don't Look Now*.

Yet while Vesper surely knows that she is doomed, a point made later by Judi Dench's M, Bond embodies the insouciance of Venice and *Don't Look Now*'s protagonist, sleepwalking into his own future. For Bond's fate is as set as Vesper's. The novel *Moonraker* ends with Bond's reflection that he must 'play the role...expected of him. The tough man of the world. The Secret Agent. The man who was only a silhouette.'

This is the role we as an audience demand of him, that history dictates he plays.

The weight of history hangs over the city and the man. The audience knows that the story of James Bond can't end before it begins, knows that for our continued entertainment Bond must play The Secret Agent, and it is Venice, the doomed city, that underscores the inescapable fate not only of Vesper, but of Bond's soul.

Inset: *No Time To Die* filming in Matera, a historically significant city in southern Italy

Left: Chasing across the rooftops of Siena in *Quantum Of Solace*



A change of scenery

The SPECTRE meeting was not shot in Rome, but rather at England's Blenheim Palace – also seen that year in Kenneth Branagh's *Cinderella* as well as *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation* in 2015. After the eery grandeur of EUR, it feels rather prosaic to resort to such a setting, but fortunately *No Time To Die* would fully embrace its Italian locations, albeit with a bit more trickery.

That film's graveyard was built specifically for the film, and is located not in Matera but nearby Gravina in Puglia – along with the bridge which Bond leaps from.

Siena

Quantum Of Solace (2008), which picks up immediately after *Casino Royale*, returns to Italy. Following Vesper's death, Bond kidnaps mastermind Mr White and makes his way to a safe-house in Siena, where he chases a treacherous MI6 agent across the city. For a film committed to exploring the consequences of Bond's actions, it proves a fitting location.

Largely untapped by filmmakers, the architecture and culture of Siena is embraced by the film. In scenes shot on location, Bond follows his quarry through the city's Bottini – the underground aqueducts – and over its terracotta rooftops, but perhaps most memorable are those scenes set in the Piazza del Campo during the city's most famous event: the Palio.

This annual horse race dates back to the 1600s, the culmination of months of

jostling and scheming among the city *contrade*, or districts, in a display of skulduggery that would impress even the most hardened agent of SPECTRE. Officials engage in underhanded practices to ensure pole position, while residents of each *contrada* take to the streets to invoke doom and destruction on their rivals.

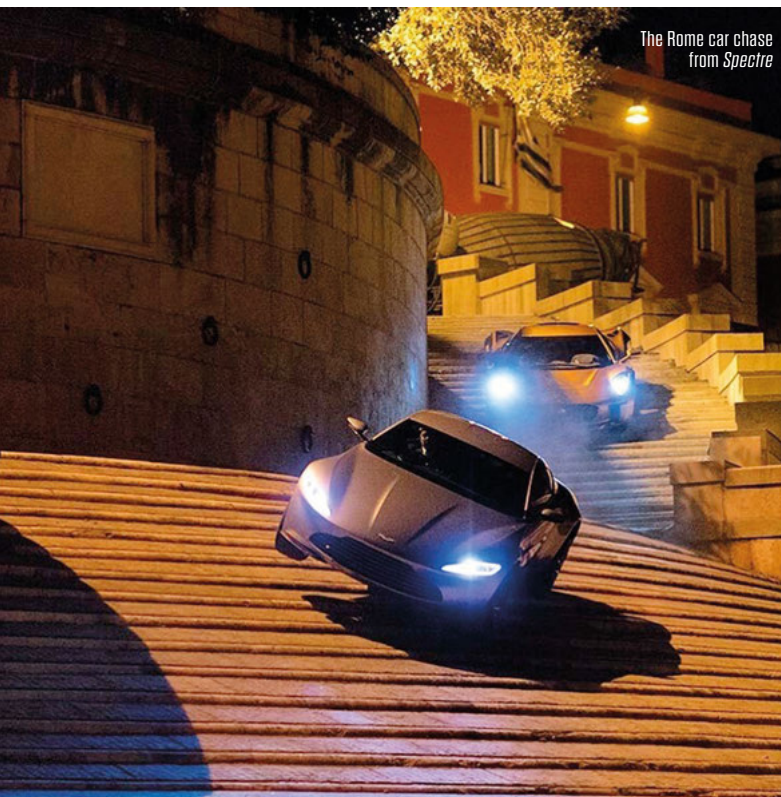
Footage from the Palio, shot long before the start of principal photography, is intercut with Bond's own foot-chase, drawing on the very real violence, ferocity and drama of the race to underscore the narrative stakes. If *Casino Royale* established Craig's Bond as a tragic figure, *Quantum Of Solace* begins to probe whether he is needed, and the Siena sequence is where we first see this theme play out. During Bond's pursuit, a young woman is caught in the crossfire. It's a moment that any other Bond film would likely gloss over, but

director Marc Forster cuts back to this woman bleeding out later in the chase. It is a jarring moment, the efficacy of which is debatable, but it is a sign that the actions of our 'hero' will have consequences in the film, and that in rebooting Bond for the 21st century, the series has taken bold new steps to ground him.

Rome

Bond returns to Italy in 2015's *Spectre*, marking the series' first visit to Rome. In pursuit of a widow with valuable information, it is here that Bond encounters the titular organisation for the first time since 1970, and the Eternal City would seem to offer all the necessary drama for such a confrontation.

There are glimpses of all the requisite landmarks, including Porta San Pancrazio, the Colosseum and Arch of Constantine, and St



Peter's Basilica, but whereas the series has traditionally taken great pleasure in having Bond interact with his environment, there is little such engagement here. As Bond and Dave Bautista's Mr Hinx race through the ancient streets, there's nary a bystander to be seen, with only a lone Fiat intervening to add some thrill to proceedings.

Thus it is not the classical grandeur, but the decidedly more modern surroundings of Rome's EUR district that lends most to the film. The production originally sought to film in the city's iconic Verano cemetery, but, due to protests from an ancient Christian brotherhood, eventually shot in EUR's Museum of Civilisation. The final site proves a blessing in disguise.

Built in the 1930s under Mussolini as a tribute to fascism, EUR boasts no shortage of that movement's typical architecture. Stark, sharp, and imposing, these vast constructions were designed to draw parallels between ancient Rome and modern fascism as they loomed over the people. On screen, Jean-Louis Trintignant was dwarfed by these oppressive structures in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970), as is Bond in *Spectre*, the individual rendered insignificant by the colossal constructions.

With their authoritarian leanings, it is only natural that SPECTRE should be found in EUR, a monument to faceless evil. By so clearly evoking

fascism when updating SPECTRE for the modern world, director Sam Mendes establishes that this is an organisation well versed in fear and oppression, and Italy's history teaches us that such a movement is one to be fought at all costs.

Matera

One of the oldest settlements in the world, Matera was known as the shame of Italy due to its overwhelming poverty and the appalling living conditions in its Sassi – the characteristic cave dwellings. In the 1950s it was condemned, abandoned and left to ruin, making it a fitting location for the demise of a romance ruptured by two dark histories.

The past hangs heavily as Bond and Madeline approach Matera and the score nods to Louis Armstrong's *We Have All The Time In The World*. Given the song's role in 1969's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* – where Bond marries Tracy (Diana Rigg) and is widowed – its inclusion cannot help but foreshadow another tragedy.

And so it proves, but perhaps not in the way we expect. In Matera, Bond embarks on a pilgrimage to Vesper's tomb, the city looming as Bond visits his first love, a monument to the apparent immutability of the past. When the tomb explodes, Bond's violence and paranoia is unleashed, his memory of Venice and Vesper's betrayal blinding him to Madeline's pleas of innocence. We're primed by the series' history, by the parallels to Vesper and Tracy, to brace for her demise too.

But history can be deceiving, and *No Time To Die*, like Matera, confounds expectations. Despite its condemnation, today Matera is a thriving city of staggering beauty. While Venice slides ever further into the lagoon, doomed by its very conception, Matera has embraced its past without being shackled to it, ensuring an ambitious future.

The film too rejects the arc of history, as it's ultimately not Madeline who perishes, but Bond, an unprecedentedly bold decision for a franchise that, like Matera, has frequently been written off. The city, then, signals not only death, but rebirth. While Bond's death is tragic, in making such a bold decision the filmmakers have made clear that there's no end to the series' ambition, and ensuring that its future is wide open.

It remains to be seen which direction things will go, but over 16 years Bond's Italian journey has revealed more than ever before, delving deeply into his past, cementing his place in the modern world, and ensuring that James Bond will return. **ES**

“Laughably Glueless”

Dan Jolin, Dicebreaker



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New Blood

Bibi Lucille talks to Laura Jean Marsh about adapting her one woman show, *Meat Cute*, for the big screen

Bibi Lucille is an award-winning actress, having won the Starnow award for Rising Star and the Women of the Future award. Lucille's career highlights include lead roles in *This Was A Man* at the Leicester Square Theatre, *Trust* on Amazon Prime, *Purgatory* on PopstarTV, and *I Am Sophie*, the winner of BAFTA and Oscar qualifying Flickers' RIIFF.

She was nominated for Pastel Film Festival's Best Actress in 2019 with the film *All Inclusive* and performed her own Offie-nominated, one-woman show *Meat Cute* at Chiswick Playhouse, Hen and Chicken's Theatre, and Bread and Roses Theatre



Bibi Lucille. Photographed by Michael Shelford

throughout 2021. Lucille spends most of her time with her two cats, fighting the urge to post cringey TikToks, and joins me today to discuss her next mission: bringing the brilliant *Meat Cute* to the big screen in film form.

I'm one of the lucky people who gets to call Lucille a good friend and have also persuaded her to play roles in a few of my own productions. She's hilarious, charismatic and talented in equal measure. I'm also lucky enough to have seen *Meat Cute* as a theatre production. It's a one-woman show featuring Lucille in the eye of a dating storm, on a quest to veganise her Tinder dates. It was no surprise to me that the play was such a hit. I laughed my head off and cried my eyes out in equal measure. I'm beyond excited to see it as a film and have huge admiration for her as a writer, performer and animal activist.

How did the idea for Meat Cute first come about and what was your inspiration for writing the original play?

Meat Cute is a tale of a young woman living in London, who goes on lots of Tinder dates and you're not entirely sure why. Then you find out that she's doing it as a form of activism to turn all these Tinder dates vegan. Things go wrong, things continue to go wrong, and we tried to make it funny.

So the way it came about was myself and my cousin Annie, who's a brilliant director, we were in the midst of lockdown and we were sitting in her garden having a socially distanced wine night. And she was talking about this scratch night she wanted to put on. Because nothing was open, the theatres weren't open etc. So she was going to put on



I just love comedy. It's such a good way of getting messages across, and a good way of getting people to feel comfortable

this environmentally themed scratch night in Richmond, and she said 'do you want to write a ten minute piece for it?' And I had never really written anything before. I had never had the confidence to write anything before. It would just be little files on my laptop that no one would ever look at.

So I was like 'yeah I could, but I dunno, I don't have any ideas.' And she said 'why don't you write about how every time you date someone you try and turn them vegan, and then you leave them when they're vegan?' So I thought that was genius. That night I woke up at 5am, and was still pretty drunk from the wine night. So I just started typing

about being drunk, and having these experiences on these dates. And that was it really, it just kind of came in one wave of ideas. And after that, with writing the full piece, it was just kind of disciplining myself to sit down with my window of time during that day to just smash it out. Also, Annie really helped with the writing. She helped me come up with ideas, we went on walks. And she told me what the really bad parts were, and to take them out.

How did you bring the play from page to the stage? Who did you get on board to be part of your team, other than Annie?

So Annie graduated from [drama



Photo by Ryan Johnson

school] Mountview and she knew other producers from the production course. Some people who saw it at the scratch night wanted to get involved, so we managed to get a team together. Luckily it was a team of vegan women, which was just [she performs an enthusiastic chef's kiss]. And we then crowdfunded and raised £1,000, which was all we really needed as it was quite a cheap show really: there's just me, who comes for free, the props which are just a box and a stuffed toy dog.

And then we had to apply to the theatres. It was a strange one having to apply to the theatres because with Camden fringe you have to pay to get in, and then there was the Chiswick playhouse where we had the debut show and they paid us, so it was a weird one trying to work out which ones we would pay for and which would pay us. We broke even in the end, though. Which was all we could really ask for.

Was it daunting performing the whole piece on your own? Without any other cast members? What fuels you every night?

It was probably the most terrifying thing I've ever done career-wise. I just remember the first show. It was all my friends and family. I don't think there were any strangers there, which made it way more terrifying as I really cared about people's opinions. And the thing that spurred me on was thinking about all my idols, like Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Olivia Colman and how they've managed to do really, really scary stuff and just pull it off and go for it.

So whenever I get really nervous about stuff, I kind of just pretend I'm them and not little old me. And with Annie as well, without her I don't think I could have done it at all because she was so supportive and I know how honest she is. I knew whatever I was going to perform wasn't going to be completely shit. So I feel like I had enough honest people in my life to tell me whether what I was doing was going to crash and burn or if it was going to be OK at worst.

Annie is part of your family as well, so is it a different kind of support, knowing that she's a blood relative?

Yeah, it did make such a difference. I have friends that I'm really close to, but there's something about a family member, where you can kind of argue a bit and it not really be that big of a deal. Because you're kind of like siblings and you're family. But with a friend it can be a little more detrimental.

What can people expect from the film? How will it compare to the theatre piece?

Hopefully it will really emulate and capture the whole essence that the play brought, but also be more accessible. I kind of want to completely replicate the play in many ways, but I'm playing with ideas at the moment. Deciding whether it will be *Peep Show*-esque, whether I will be looking at the camera or not. It's harder to work out with film as there are so many more elements to it. The movements of the camera, the other actors, being responsible for them. It's a scary thing, but I think getting over the first hump with your first film will hopefully teach me a lot.

Are there any particular messages that you want to put out there that are related to veganism, as that seems to be the main backbone of the show?

Yeah, I definitely think a huge part of it is getting people to understand where the activists are coming from. It doesn't come from a selfish place, or a place of arrogance. I think quite a few people seem to think that vegans are on this high horse, and are doing it



Photo by Jonno Stone

to feel like they're a really good person. Where it's really just genuinely a very selfless act. And it's really difficult and tough to be defending these animals that people don't really care about.

I think with the main character, Lena, people can understand that it's a really tough thing to care that much about something you have almost no control over apart from what you contribute to the industries. And to show that it's not all fun and games, it's not about arrogance, it's not about being on a high horse and making people feel bad about themselves. It's a story about someone who is trying to do good, and finding out there's so little shift in all the efforts she's putting out. That it just completely takes over her life and weighs on her. I hope that's a big message to get across. And that people see that veganism is actually a brilliant and amazing

thing, and that one person like Lena can make such a difference, even though she ends up not being able to see it.

It's a serious subject matter, but Meat Cute is really funny. Was it an accident that it ended up being so fun and funny, or was that always intentional?

It was definitely intentional. I just love comedy. It's such a good way of getting messages across, and a good way of getting people to feel comfortable. It makes people feel good to not take life too seriously and take things on the chin, and it was a great way to firstly entertain people, secondly make it relatable, and also that means people will have their guard down, because they trust Lena and they feel like they are friends with her. So when the message finally comes out, there's way more of a bond because the

audience have been sharing jokes with her the whole time. That's a lovely way of getting a message out, through comedy.

What stage are you at with the film? What are your next steps and when can we expect to see it?

So we have the final draft of the script. We have a team together, and we have fixed that it will be filmed in September. Next step is funding really. Filmmaking is so expensive compared to theatre. We're opening up the crowdfunder, and I'm going to do some stand-up shows and try and gather the pennies. Maybe sell some feet pics? [she laughs]. And I'm going to do a variety night as well with music, poetry and drinking, and hopefully selling some tickets to raise some money.

Do you have any advice to other creatives like yourself who have an idea and want to bring it to life?

Yes! Don't be scared to ask for help, don't be afraid to talk to people about it. Find people who are into the same genres and interests as you. And try to build a team, that's so valuable. It can be so lonely doing these things by yourself, if you don't have support. You can start feeling this overwhelming doubt. And I think a lot of creatives feel like that. If you have a team, go out to events and screenings and you can meet someone wonderful. I tried to do so many things by myself for so long, but as soon as I had Annie to hold my hand I was like 'Oh thank God!' 

Laura Jean Marsh can be found on Twitter @laurajeanmarsh. Her debut feature as director, Giddy Stratospheres, is available in the UK on Amazon Prime, Sky, iTunes and other popular streaming platforms.

Bibi Lucille is on Instagram @bibi_lucille, and you can find out more about Meat Cute @meatcute2021 or at www.meatcute.org



Faith on Film

Siobhan Fallon Hogan on writing, producing, and starring in her latest film

Words: Leoni Horton

For Siobhan Fallon Hogan, her newest film, *A Mother's Fury*, marks a new and exciting career chapter. Most will recognise Siobhan's wide smile and fiery red hair from her appearances in big blockbusters such as *Men In Black*, *Holes*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Clifford The Big Red Dog*. However, Siobhan's newest project is a much more scaled-down, independent adventure, with Siobhan taking credits as writer, producer, and lead actress. Leoni Horton sits down with Siobhan to discuss her new hands-on approach to movie-making and her role as a grieving mother looking for justice for the sudden death of her son following a college hazing initiation.

Can you tell me what drew you to this story? And why did you decide to tell it?

As you know, hazing is an epidemic in the US. When I wrote the film, I had a daughter in high school and two kids in college. I was doing what we call being a helicopter mom, which is like paying too much attention and worrying too much about what's happening in your kids' lives. I would hear all these horror stories about kids drinking, so the story came from my mind running wild, wondering

what I would do if something horrible happened to my kid. I think the thriller element came in because, obviously, I'm not normal, and if something happened to my kid, I would go hog wild.

Many people will recognise you from these big blockbuster-type films. How does it feel to have the opportunity to get to do more work behind the camera and take part in bringing an indie film together?

Well, it was so nice because the majority of the cast was made up of many people I've worked with before, like Robert Patrick, who I worked with 35 years ago on *Striptease*.

I've acted in several Lars von Trier movies, and while making those films, I saw how the Europeans run a movie set. There was no top-of-the-line. Making them was almost like making a play, where everyone is united in a common goal, so that's how I treated this, and I absolutely loved it. I sent the script to Lars von Trier's producers, and they liked it and said they would co-produce, so then I had to raise the money. It became very hands-on. The frat house in the movie is actually my own house. During filming, I even put a message on Facebook asking people if they had any housing for the crew, and people really



responded. So, eventually, my entire town in New Jersey became involved in the movie.

This story is a grave issue for many people and families. We sort of get a window into their lives through the interviews Barbara conducts within the film.

What preparation and research did you do before writing?

I had only written one-person shows and comedy sketches for myself before now. I just thought 'I've been in the business long enough, let me see if I can figure out how to write a movie'.

I suppose I wanted to write a faith-based movie, but I didn't want it to be icky; I wanted it to be normal and realistic and based around a funny family, which is the environment I grew up in. So initially, that's where everything came from.

What's interesting about the character you play is how tenacious she is in everything she does, from raising her kids to the mission she goes on to get justice. She's more than one thing. What made you want to write a character like her?

I have three sisters, and I know a bunch of strong women who are not in the public eye and those are the women Barbara is inspired by. Barbara is a woman who runs her family like a ship, and I guess she is a little odd but doesn't know she is; she's just living her life as she would. Then Barbara is thrust into doing something way outside her comfort zone and has to fight for what's right for her kids, but she's no bullshit, you know? She goes to a party, sees all the dignitaries and upper-crust people, and knows she doesn't fit in with them, but she has no problem telling them what's what.

You said that faith plays a big part in this film. What do you think that brings to the movie?

It kind of ties into everything. Barbara is a woman who has a set of rules that she abides by, but she's also the kind of woman who says her prayers while she's making her kids' lunches. It's all kind of funny to her until she really, really needs it. It's not until she hits rock bottom that she realises how important her faith is and that she can use it to pull herself up. What gets her through is her faith. You see her with her rosary beads and you see her praying, and that's the thing that gives her courage.

This will be an interesting film for British audiences because we don't do the whole fraternity thing over here at college and universities. Could you explain where you think the toxic nature of them we see in this film comes from?

I actually talked to my mother about this before she died. She was 97, and she said that hazing had gone on since before she went to college. I think it's a rite of passage that has spun out of control. It wasn't meant to be mean or cruel or hurtful. The truth is that fraternities and sororities both do great work.

I'm not anti-people being in these things. It's just that in the United States, I believe there is a huge problem with alcohol and hard liquor in colleges, which is why these horrible things keep happening. For British audiences, I don't think this story has to be about fraternities in any way. It boils down to what do you do when someone crosses your child? What length will you go to? That's a universal thing. **18**

A Mother's Fury is out now on digital platforms.



TALES OF A WESTERN LEGEND

**Michael McGreevey
regales Matthew Davey
with anecdotes from his
memorable acting career**

There are few actors who remain that were riding high in the saddle when the Western film was the must-see event in cinema, but Michael McGreevey is one of them.

The son of Emmy Award-winning screenwriter John McGreevey, Michael was just 11 years old when he got his first big break – appearing in 17 episodes of television series *Riverboat*, alongside Burt Reynolds – before appearing in various Disney projects. By the time McGreevey had finished high school his future was uncertain. He hadn't been seen on screen for three years – taking a break from it all – as he apprises “being a movie star is hard.”

It was the mid-1960s, the height of the Vietnam War, and the now 18-year-old faced the possibility he might get drafted. Until one day he got a phone call from an old agent who had read the script for an upcoming Western, called *The Way West*, starring Kirk Douglas, Robert Mitchum, and Richard Widmark. McGreevey landed the part of Widmark's son in the film, Brownie Evans. *The Way West* follows a former US Senator (played by Douglas) leading a wagon train of settlers to Oregon planning to build and live in their own settlement, capturing the zeitgeist of frontier life.

“On my first day,” McGreevey remembers, “I went out in front of the hotel to get onto the transportation to the location and the whole cast was there. I mean including Kirk Douglas, Robert Mitchum, and Dick Widmark. We went out to the location which was the Independence, Missouri set that they had built and it was incredible. We had a crew of 200 and 1,000 extras; it was just a huge production from day one.

"Looking back on it, I was never involved with anything before or after as big as that production. The director – Andrew V McLaglen – said 'you know I'm sorry but I need you to be at work every day,' because even if we weren't doing a specific scene, often we were needed to be in the background of this great wagon train. So, we spent a lot of time together and we all became very close friends. For an 18-year-old kid to play cowboy and chase Sally Field (in her first film role) around the Oregon forest and have scenes with Mitchum and Widmark, it was a dream come true for me."

Action stations

The process of making any movie is far from easy, but throw into the equation that *The Way West* had three Academy Award-nominated popular lead actors, who were all star names in their own right, competing for scene-stealing performances, McGreevey had a fly-on-the-wall experience of movie stardom like no other.

"We had the typical... let's say creative differences among our superstars," McGreevey says, chuckling as he contemplates unlocking a Pandora's box full of amusing anecdotes.

"Richard Widmark was totally professional. Nice guy, very shy though, standoffish to most people. I think some people misread him, but I didn't. Mitchum was the greatest enigma that I ever met. I mean, the guy was incredibly talented and brilliant, and just pretended like he didn't want to be there and smoked a lot of marijuana. I still to this day try to figure out what was going on inside his head. Then you had Kirk Douglas, who was a very nice man, but was a big ego, gigantic ego. When we had scenes together as a group, Douglas would step in and

try and direct them. Eventually Widmark said 'Kirk, why don't you let Mr McLaglen do his job and direct us? You're not directing this movie.' Years later I ran into Kirk, after he'd had his stroke. He said to me 'I was a real jerk on that movie, I was so full of myself.' You know it's hard being a movie star and keeping your crap together.

"I just came back from Oklahoma City where I saw one of my best friends, Kurt Russell; he was honoured by the Cowboy Hall of Fame. I marvel at how he's handled stardom. He's handled it much better than anyone I've met. I think it was a combination of his family, who were very grounded and meeting Goldie Hawn, who was dealing with the

same problem of the stardom thing. Anyhow, other than those few moments with Mr Douglas and Mr Widmark, everyone got along. Mitchum would just walk away, but he made it quite clear to me that he didn't care much for Douglas. Other than that, everybody got along wonderfully.

"The other great line that came out of *The Way West*, that I didn't hear until it was told to me later by the unit manager, was that he had done a lot of pictures with Mitchum and they had been watching dailies for a couple of weeks. Mitchum was underplaying everything and when asked why, he said: 'Brother, Kirk is doing enough acting for all of us.'

For an 18-year-old kid to play cowboy, and have scenes with Mitchum and Widmark... It was a dream come true



Michael (Right) with Disney-era Kurt Russell and Joyce Menges in 1972's *Now You See Him, Now You Don't*

"I have a funny story about Widmark. My first day of shooting was with him and we were mostly riding mules across big fields – no dialogue, just scenery. We were side-by-side and alone mostly, so I tried to strike up a conversation with him as I admired a lot of his work; he totally ignored me, didn't even respond. I remember that first night, I called home and said to my mum, I think Richard Widmark hates me! She said 'just be professional and try not to bother him.'

"So, the next morning I went to set and we were back on the mules and he's not saying anything, and I'm not saying anything. Suddenly, he just turned to me and said 'how are you doing this morning?' All very warm and nice. He said 'It's good that we're together, I think we're going to make a good father and son team.' He was charming suddenly and I guess I had a look on my face and he said 'is something wrong?' – and I said 'to tell you the truth sir, I thought that you were mad at me.' He said 'were you trying to talk to me yesterday? I'm so sorry, I'm deaf in my right ear' and I was talking to him on his right side!

"I loved that guy and we became lifelong friends."

Lawgiver

McGreevey would team up again with Widmark at the request of the veteran actor just two years later in yet another Western, *Death Of A Gunfighter*. Widmark plays a battle-hardened local marshal who refuses to resign when fired by the town's council, leading to gunfighting violence from both sides.

Bloodshed aside, *Death Of A Gunfighter* is notable for its quieter moments, taking time to show the friendship between McGreevey and Widmark's characters. A relationship not far removed from that of their off-screen bond. McGreevey fondly recalls:

"What I remember most was the personal connection with Dick, and how much he taught me about acting, just in a very quiet way."

Though Widmark's teaching may have been quiet, the making of the film itself was far from it.

"My other memory," McGreevey is quick to note, recollecting the film's production, "is that Dick didn't get along with Robert Totten, who was the original director, which was sort of understandable because Bob Totten was sort of a difficult personality.

"He was sort of self-destructive. It was his first feature as a director and he's dealing with, you know, a superstar, and he was treating Dick Widmark like he was a rookie, over-directing him, and so that was very upsetting for me to watch that disintegration happen because I was so close to Dick and he kept saying to me – and I should have known something was up: 'what do you think a' Totten?'"



Michael (far left) with Lena Horne and Richard Widmark in *Death Of A Gunfighter*

"Eventually Widmark went to the Universal executives and said 'It's either him or me.' So, they brought in Don Siegel (long-time collaborator of Clint Eastwood who had worked with Widmark the previous year, directing *Madigan*) to finish the picture, which was a marvellous choice. Totally different. If he gave you a direction you went, 'wow'. He just let you do your thing, so I understand why Widmark liked that, and by then we were so into the role, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. So, I didn't need any direction."

Given the off-camera shenanigans that had taken place on *Death Of A Gunfighter*, both Totten and Siegel refused to be credited as director of the film as they both felt it wasn't their picture – Totten helming 25 days of the shoot and Siegel stewarding just nine. A compromise was reached whereby the film was credited to a fictitious legend, Alan Smithee.

Famously, in his *Chicago Sun-Times* review of the film, Roger Ebert wrote: "*Death Of A Gunfighter* is quite an extraordinary Western. Director Alan Smithee, a name I'm not familiar with, allows his story to unfold naturally."

As McGreevey says: "You know, *Death Of A Gunfighter* is the best film directed by Alan Smithee!" 

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We talk to the young stars of *The Railway Children Return*



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When Somerset Maugham visited the set of MGM's production of *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* in 1941, the author posed a question to a fellow observer – director George Cukor – as they watched Spencer Tracy, the film's star, shoot a pivotal scene...

It was a query that almost instantly passed into Hollywood lore:

**“Which one is he
playing now?”**

Words: Lawrence Bennis

Born at the turn of the century, by 1941 Spencer Tracy was one of MGM's stars – and the winner of two consecutive Best Actor Oscars for *Captains Courageous* (1937) and *Boys Town* (1938). An established favourite with audiences and critics alike, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* was the actor's first (and ultimately only) foray into horror. Ten years earlier, Fredric March had pursued a similar volte-face in Rouben Mamoulian's version of the Robert Louis Stevenson classic for Paramount.

However, rather than a new take on the oft-filmed tale (the story had been adapted 17 times for the screen since 1908), MGM had opted to directly remake the earlier picture. Mamoulian's film was met with acclaim and Oscar success. March won for Best Actor (famously tying with Wallace Berry for *The Champ*) whilst the film received nominations for Best Cinematography

and Best Writing Adaptation. Furthermore, Mamoulian's innovative cinematic techniques, including the film's ground-breaking transformation sequences, left audiences, and critics, dazzled.

Remake

A decade on, MGM was hoping to trump March, Mamoulian, and Paramount. Its new Dr Jekyll had already won two back-to-back Oscars. Co-starring were Lana Turner and Ingrid Bergman, two of Hollywood's most glamorous and popular starlets. Behind the camera was Victor Fleming, riding high from his remarkable double success in 1939 with *Gone With The Wind* and *The Wizard Of Oz*. The source material was a proven crowd-pleaser. And, to add icing on the cake, MGM had no need for concern over comparisons to Mamoulian. The studio acquired full rights to the 1931 film and buried it to prevent competition with its



Much like Jekyll's doomed dalliance with nature, things soon took a devilish turn



Spencer Tracy and Ingrid Bergman
in *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*

new, polished remake. The stage was set for the ultimate *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* and the words of Stevenson himself would have been fitting for the occasion: "My devil had been long caged; he came out roaring."

Yet that unfortunate remark from Somerset Maugham would haunt the production. Much like Jekyll's doomed dalliance with nature, things soon took a devilish turn for the leading man. Tracy faced comparison to both John Barrymore (1920's silent *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*) and Fredric March, whilst Bergman received top plaudits at the preview. Worse came after the film's release.

"While Spencer Tracy does a grand job in his dual role, his Mr Hyde is inclined to be more humorous than terrifying," quipped *Hollywood*, while the *The New York Times* went even further by calling the star's performance "not so much evil incarnate as it is the ham rampant."

Elsewhere, Harry Hirshfield quipped that Abbot and Costello had suddenly been

substituted for Spencer Tracy, a joke that proved prophetic as *Abbot And Costello Meet Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* would be released 12 years later. For all the promise, MGM's glossy, prestigious, star-studded update of *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* had, seemingly, become a disaster.

"It was seen as an embarrassment for Tracy and MGM," explains film historian Greg Mank. "In fact, it was a fastidiously put-together movie and MGM were very experimental."

In his latest book, *Angels And Ministers Of Grace Defend Us! More Dark Alleys Of Classic Horror Cinema*, Mank delves beyond the film's beleaguered reputation to reveal a fascinating behind-the-scenes story of a production which, on paper, had everything going for it, but ultimately failed to strike a chord critically and commercially.

"The evolution of the movie was enormous," he says. "They started at A and ended up at Z."

Tracy's own dismissal of the film, and his performance, certainly complicated the film's

Memorable moments

Ironically, two of the most notable removals from the film were perhaps Tracy's best scenes and, arguably, the most thematically significant in the film. Following the first transformation, Hyde delivers a monologue into a mirror in his darkened laboratory, before coming to the chilling realisation of "Can this be evil then?" In the official print of the film, only this last sentence from Tracy is retained, and the impact is evidently stilted.

Similarly, another mirror-based scene occurs in the film's climax. This time, having transformed back to Jekyll, his alter-ego suddenly appears in place of Jekyll's reflection, taunting him before the authorities break in to pursue Hyde. Incredibly, this whole exchange was cut, eliminating an additional appearance of Hyde from the film and obscuring more of Tracy's performance.

Ingrid Bergman and Lana Turner in *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*

legacy from the outset. “There were so many things that bothered him about the film,” Mank elaborates. “The addiction angle bothered him. It was also an incredible flip of a coin, after his previous work, and he probably questioned why he was doing the film.”

Lost in the edit

Following its preview, the film was also heavily cut from its original 127-minute running time. More footage was excised until the final version ended up at 108 minutes. It’s this version which has since been in wide circulation. Even when the film was released on a double-feature DVD (alongside a restored 1931 version) in 2004, 20 minutes were still left out, despite the existence of a complete ‘German version’ that has been broadcast in various regions.

In this age of restorations and extended cuts of films, both adored and previously overlooked, one would have expected this film to be given the same treatment, given the prominence of the source material and the picture’s cast and director. Yet the complete version that was first unleashed in 1941 has largely remained hidden from public view.

“So much of it was being altered as it was shot,” Mank adds. “The film is way ahead of its time and greatly under-appreciated. I think a restoration would really knock people out.”

For Mank, the regrettable editing decisions are only part of the complicated legacy of the film. Critical and audience response has often beleaguered the 1941 *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* for lacking the Pre-Code edge of Mamoulian’s film. Yet there were some who felt differently, even back in 1941.

“Sadism in this degree seldom finds expression on the screen,” wrote Donald Kirkley, referring to a scene where Tracy’s Hyde forces a hysterical Bergman to sing before flinging her in the face with grapes.

Elsewhere, Nelson B Bell’s appraisal of the film couldn’t be further from its lukewarm reputation. He calls it “a stark and disturbingly realistic study in human cruelty and depravity... executed in the present instance with such frank, such unrestrained and such relentless actuality as to become questionable entertainment.”

In Greg Mank’s eyes, the film is “the saga of a sexual sadist and his victim” lost within a conventional framing of the story. Furthermore, he makes a persuasive argument that the film, contrary to common opinion, was daring for its time; or at least that was the intention – and Mank’s book reveals a ton of omissions from the script. There is also the blockbuster-style dimension of the film’s marketing, where audiences were asked to keep the appearance of Hyde a strict secret, preceding Hitchcock’s famous tactic with *Psycho* by almost 20 years.

History is, often, very kind to film. FW Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) is one of the great examples of restoration in film history. An unofficial German adaptation of *Dracula*, it incurred the wrath of Bram Stoker’s widow, who ordered all prints to be destroyed. Nevertheless, some copies did survive, and the film today is a revered masterpiece. Mamoulian’s *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* also underwent a similar process of persecution, survival, and redemption.

MGM had every print of the 1931 film that could be located destroyed and, for decades, the film was believed lost. After resurfacing from obscurity in 1967, it would be 37 years until a fully restored version debuted on DVD in 2004. All the lost and censored scenes were back in, and the film was also given a commentary by Mank himself. Today, it is the most acclaimed version of the story. Derek Malcolm has called it “still the best version there is, far more frightening than the glossy MGM version Victor Fleming made a decade or so later.”

Yet, for Gregory Mank, there is a clear case that the Tracy film (“one of the most controversial horror films of all time”) also came close to greatness. What we have been left with for 80 years is “a dual nature film – perceived as either a sexy, pioneering, all-stops pulled super-version of a classic story, or an overstuffed Faustian bomb.” Perhaps the time has come to return to the lab and let the long-caged, complete *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* of 1941 to finally come out roaring. 



Anna Gale tells the fascinating story of Ida Lupino

Film star, producer, director, pioneer – Ida Lupino enjoyed a long career in Hollywood, and forged an unprecedented path for women in the industry. Yet for many she remains undiscovered, despite her achievements and influence still being felt today.

When Lupino walked out of her lucrative seven-year contract with Warner Bros in 1947 at the age of 29, many thought it would be the end of her career, but it was just another twist in the fascinating tale of a woman who would go on to change Hollywood. A doyenne of film noir, and a favourite of movie fans and the gossip columns alike, her personal story is as dramatic as the roles she became famous for. She

walked away from studio contracts, overcame serious illness and personal struggles, and then defied the odds to become one of Hollywood's most influential filmmakers. Yet few people have heard of her beyond film academics and ardent cinema enthusiasts.

A CHILDHOOD LESS ORDINARY

Born in London's Herne Hill in 1918 to actress Connie O'Shea and music hall star Stanley Lupino, Ida was part of a famous performing dynasty. She appeared on stage at a young age, and soon showed a precocious talent, even writing her first play at the age of seven.

Although she preferred writing to acting, Lupino enrolled at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. At



With Basil Rathbone in *The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes* (1939)

the age of 14, she took her first screen role in *The Love Race* (1931). Her career took off, and in 1933 she took lead roles in five different films. But often she was typecast as the bad girl, which made her uncomfortable. Dubbed by some as ‘The English Jean Harlow’, she was discovered by Paramount, and set off for Hollywood on a five-year studio contract aged just 15.

RESPECT

Lupino was determined to make it as a respected actor. However, after her initial screen roles showed promise, in 1934 she developed polio. The disease affected her ability to work for some time, jeopardising her chances of fulfilling her contract with Paramount.

She returned to acting, but despite her protestations, she was usually cast in light-touch supporting roles, which she felt did not fully demonstrate her talent. She was often loaned out to different studios, leaving her frustrated, and her career floundered. In 1937 she took the decision to leave Paramount, determined to gain the recognition she desired elsewhere.

Lupino reinvented herself, casting aside the heavy make-up and blonde hair the studio had styled her with. She worked on her acting craft, and won acclaim for her roles in *The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes* (1939) and *The Light That Failed* (1939).

A ROARING 40s

It was her performance in *They Drive By Night* (1940) which proved to be a turning point. Directed by Raoul Walsh, Lupino plays the femme-fatale in a tense noir set in the gritty world of American road haulage. She starred opposite George Raft, Ann Sheridan, and an up-and-coming Humphrey Bogart. Her spellbinding final courtroom scene in which her character mentally unravels won critical acclaim and landed her a lucrative long-term contract with Warner Bros.

She worked with Walsh and Bogart again on *High Sierra* (1941). This was followed in quick succession by starring roles in *The Sea Wolf* (1941), *Out Of The Fog* (1941), *Ladies In Retirement* (1941), and *Moontide* (1942) in a prolific run of notable hits. Her performance in *The Hard Way* (1943) won her the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actress.

But despite her success, she often found herself on suspension by the studio for turning down parts she did not fancy, or for falling ill and being unable to work. She gained a reputation for being difficult.

What Lupino craved was control of her career. She had been studying the technical aspects of filmmaking on the job for years, observing directors and producers. When the tensions with Warner Bros finally came to a head in 1947, she walked out of her contract and set about forming an independent production company. Working with her then fiancé, producer and writer Collier Young, and screenwriter Malvin Wald, she set up The Filmakers Inc (sic) in 1948.

Their ethos was to bring realism to the screen by telling intimate, human stories about ordinary people that audiences could relate to. Stories with a social significance, but entertainingly told. Their first notable success was *Not Wanted* (1949), which explored the controversial topic of a young woman’s unwanted pregnancy.

They followed this success with *Never Fear* (1949) the story of a dancer with polio, a subject close to



Ida as débutante Hope Harcourt in *Anything Goes* (1936)

Lupino's heart due to her own personal struggle with it as a young woman. Lupino was officially credited as director this time.

PIONEER YEARS

Outrage (1950) tackled the subject of rape, although working within the constraints of the Hays Code meant the word was never used. In total the production company made 12 films, including *The Bigamist* (1953) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953).

With her naturalistic technique and eye for realism, Lupino became a filmmaking pioneer. There was often a focus on women's issues in her work, strong female characters trying to find their place in society amidst the pressure of social constraints of the period. She herself was forging a directing career as a woman in Hollywood, a largely male-dominated world, working under the radar to make films nobody else dared.

In 1955, she moved into television. Again, largely as the only woman in a male-dominated field, in the 1950s and '60s she directed more than 100 episodes of popular TV shows including *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Fugitive*, and *The Twilight Zone*. She occasionally directed features and continued to work as an actor throughout the 1960s and '70s.



However, as was the case with her career success, Lupino's personal life ebbed and flowed. She was married and divorced three times, including a lengthy and difficult separation from third husband, actor Howard Duff, with whom she had a child. She experienced significant health problems throughout her life, culminating in alcohol abuse, and her eccentric and unpredictable behaviour perhaps exhibited a lifelong struggle with her mental health. After becoming largely reclusive, she died from a stroke in 1995 aged 77.

A WOMAN IN CONTROL

Despite a prolific career, Lupino's work is often hard to find, and she has largely fallen off the radar. But the tide seems to be turning. Modern filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese cite her as an inspiration. Already well-respected in her adopted home of the USA, Lupino's influence is starting to be recognised in the UK too.

Ida Lupino left a significant legacy. From her impressive acting filmography which spanned almost 50 years, to her work as a director and producer pioneering representation and social justice, she brought change to the industry. As a woman who wanted to be fully in control of her career, she defied the conventions of the time, forging a fascinating and varied career both in front of and behind the camera. **fs**



As Marie, alongside Humphrey Bogart, in *High Sierra* (1942)



Ida as Elvira Bonner in Sam Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972), the mother of the film's titular rodeo rider, played by Steve McQueen

IDA LUPINO WATCHLIST

THEY DRIVE BY NIGHT (1940)

Lupino stars in this hard-boiled film noir set in the gritty world of road haulage, also featuring George Raft, Ann Sheridan, and an early role for Humphrey Bogart. Lupino appears as frustrated wife Lana Carlsen, whose obsession for Raft's trucker Joe Fabrini leads her to murderous consequences. Her sublime performance caused a sensation, and led to her lucrative contract with Warner Studios.

HIGH SIERRA (1941)

Another performance in her fabulous run of 1940s film noir classics, Lupino again stars with Bogart, who plays a career criminal mixed up in a jewel heist in the Sierra Nevada, with Lupino's former dancer Marie coming along for the ride. It is more than just a gangster movie, giving the audience a perfect balance of excitement, suspense and character complexity, with Lupino and Bogart giving career-defining performances.

MOONTIDE (1942)

Lupino stars in this unusual but captivating film. Part atmospheric noir, part poetic love story, she plays mysterious and troubled young woman Anna, who is saved from a suicide attempt by nomadic fisherman Bobo (French star Jean Gabin), himself battling with an inner turmoil at the hands of a blackmailer. It is hard to find a copy, but well worth seeking out.

THE BIGAMIST (1953)

Lupino directs this realist melodrama starring Joan Fontaine, Edmond O'Brien, and herself. The film tells the story of a successful couple, Harry and Eve, who want to adopt a child. But when their suitability is investigated by the adoption agency, it emerges that Harry is hiding a big secret – another wife (played by Lupino).

THE HITCH-HIKER (1953)

Two friends are taken hostage by a psychopathic hitchhiker during a road trip to Mexico in this tense thriller co-written and directed by Lupino. Loosely based on a true crime case from 1950, it was the only American film noir of the classic period to be directed by a woman. Lupino expertly winds up the tension and claustrophobia throughout, producing a bold and compelling film.

The

Shorts

Renaissance

Director Rita Osei shares one of her short stories, and ponders the resurgence of short films

The BFI's Short Film fund and festivals such as S.O.U.L Fest, Aspen Shortsfest – the best short film festival in the world 2022, as crowned by *MovieMaker* – Clermont-Ferrand, Palm Springs, HollyShorts, Kyiv, Aesthetica, Underwire, and Martha's Vineyard are all entities that put short films front and centre. An aide-mémoire that shorts are a glowing part of the filmmaking landscape, with some projects enjoying direct financial and even cryptocurrency returns through screening fees paid by film and television platforms.

Often seen as a stepping stone to features or a seed of delight that can spring into more action, shorts are in fact a unique proposition in their own right. They enable their creators to yield force in a way that can resonate for years to come. Shorts are often bolder than features, more experimental, and available to watch quickly. An entire life-changing viewing experience can be had in 15 minutes or less.

On the second anniversary marking the death of George Floyd, Sky Documentaries launched a £500,000 UK Short Initiative. Screen Ireland's Focus Shorts fund awards up to £50,000 each to four aspiring talents per year, and in 2019 the Women X Film Festival was launched by Caris Rianne in Darlington, to celebrate shorts made by female identifying and non-binary filmmakers who "challenge the narrative set by mainstream media."

Last year, when I began my voluntary role as Chair of BAFTA's British Short Film Award, it fuelled a return to writing in short form for me and, while my long-form projects progressed to the next stage of gestation, I wrote two short films: a short play and some short stories.

Short is sweet. Short happens now, and in many cases short does lead to longevity.

We'll be returning to the topic of short films in future issues of the magazine. For now, you can read one of my short stories on the next page...

Short Stories about The Revolution: Barbara & Beaumont

The small and reasonable gathering on East London's Cable Street soon hotfooted into a mass of 3,000 people. As the summer solstice sun burned down on them, a few cries of apprehension shook the jubilations. They were uneasy words on revolution, spoken through helium inhalations, and coming from the crowd by the pile of red balloons underneath 'The Battle of Cable Street' mural. Raven-haired Barbara walked toward the mural, arms raised, waving the air with a well-produced mock-up of her book *F*ck Oppression* like a placard.

Barbara finished writing the book on her 45th birthday, and it was her pride and joy. She gave everything to it, her inner and outer worlds, her wisdom, all of her. Beaumont, the editor of the book, had seen that from a long way down. The passion in Barbara's prose, the chink in her luminous-white smile, and her need to win. But Barbara had grown tired of listening to Beaumont's constant complaining. His winning streak turned almost overnight into a whining lie and directly after the rejection letter from Barbara's number one choice of publisher arrived.

Before that letter had arrived, Beaumont had seen it in the stars: the ink drying on the page of Barbara's multiple deal contract. The awards, the fans, the whole shebang. He went as far as putting up the money he gained from his divorce as a guarantee, just in case, and as it certainly wasn't going to go that way, but nonetheless, just in case the book did not sell, signing away his money to a middle-man whether that middle-man secured a book deal or not. That middle-man had seen Beaumont coming from a long way down. The squint of anxiety in Beaumont's left eye, the desperateness of his elongated smile, and the looseness of his over-easy personality.

No one asked Beaumont for a guarantee, in fact no one asked Beaumont to do anything outside of editing the book. The book was a winner and Barbara knew it, and Beaumont asserted that it was a credit to

her, the knowing, and she really held onto that. So when he deflated in almost a day and after months and months of endless work, sureness, and praise, it wasn't even anger that got hold of her. It wasn't the thought of the even longer wait until the thrill of knowing where she belonged returned. What caught her outer ego in a twist was she knew that the book was great, and that Beaumont was not.

Beaumont's meltdown came on late in their business relationship, and once Barbara had already concurred to theirs being a meeting of minds, or an intricate understanding. But it was the type of understanding that sees a once well-orientated mind relegate all logic and reason to the back of that mind. The type of understanding that helps in turning a small problem into a near disaster. That type of understanding viewed in the rear-view mirror right before the car crash. And Barbara knew what was coming next, a major re-evaluation of her own ability to think. Why did she not see this coming? When did she stop thinking for herself, thoroughly? And why?...

The small and reasonable gathering on Cable Street soon hotfooted into a mass of 3,000 people. As the summer solstice sun burned down on them with all the power they'd summoned in being together, a few cries of apprehension shook the jubilations. They were uneasy words on revolution, spoken through helium inhalations, and coming from the crowd beside the pile of red balloons underneath 'The Battle of Cable Street' mural. As Barbara feathered through the rejoicing crowd, she smiled and waved her book at everyone she passed. Running through them she sighted a black Labrador dog, and they locked eyes for an eternity. Eventually Barbara took hold of her book, threw it up into the air, bent down to stroke the double-coated dog, and enjoyed the most persuasive rush of relevance she'd experienced in years.

This all led to Barbara's decision to join the revolution. ⑮

A Crew of Two

J Arcane and Paul Erskine tell us the story of their latest film, *The Razing*, and their approach to independent filmmaking...

Some people save for a vacation, a new car, or the next iPhone, but not us. Since 2018, we've put all our spare cash into self-funding (and self-crewing) our own feature films, of which we've made three in the last four years. Our latest project just got picked up by Gravititas Ventures, the largest independent film distributor in North America. Our biggest achievement for our most personal project yet. This is our film story.

In December 2020, we had just completed post-production for our second film – which we shot during Covid and the New York City Black Lives Matter protests. J had just gone through family estrangement a couple of months prior and was dealing with a lot of emotional pain. Paul suggested she write it into a script in an attempt to process it, and hopefully find some peace.

The idea

With our first two films being more plot and action driven, we next wanted to make a more character-driven film. Inspired by a number of talented actors we worked with in our previous film, J essentially let her subconscious take over during the writing process. She was able to so clearly see and hear the

characters, that they essentially wrote themselves. Much of the film works as a metaphor for J's familial experiences and innermost thoughts she was unable to express anywhere else. Three weeks later, the script for *The Razing* was complete and we were ready to begin casting.

Casting

The Razing is an ensemble film about a group of estranged friends haunted by a traumatic event from their teenhood, so not only was it vital to get a strong main cast with the right chemistry, but also to find their matching teenage counterparts. Early on in the casting process, we were lucky to come across a monologue video of Carson Marquette (who plays Teen Corey, the teenage version of the main character of the film). His performance in the monologue was so outstanding, sophisticated and layered, you would never have guessed he was still in high school. His talent and confidence went far beyond his years. After an equally impressive audition, there was no doubt that Carson was the perfect actor for the role.

Finding the perfect actor to play the main adult character Corey was more challenging. After having to let go of the original actor we had cast, we had

to expand our search to outside of our shooting city to find an actor that looked and sounded like an adult version of Carson. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because we ended up finding Jack Wooton who was the embodiment of Corey. During the audition, J was amazed at how much Jack spoke and acted exactly like the character she imagined while writing the script. He was the definition of a character being brought to life.

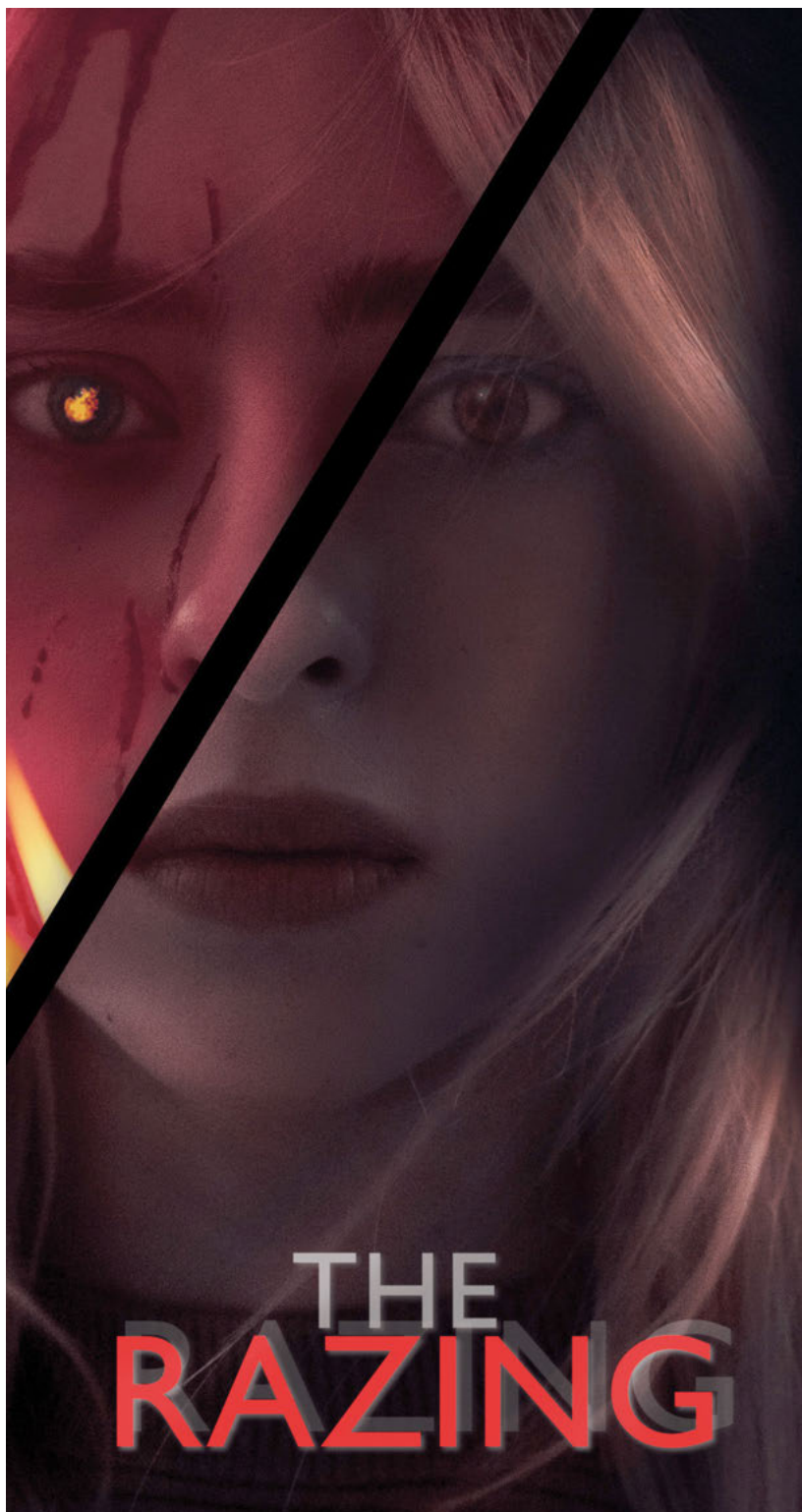
Choosing gear

Filming a feature film with a crew of two is incredibly difficult, but it is possible. We had already done it on two previous features by taking on multiple roles each. We knew we needed to be able to capture footage quickly and effectively.

Lighting: We relied on practical lighting and augmented it by strategically positioning nine full-colour compact LED lights around the location. They were so compact that they blended into the set beautifully. That enabled us to shoot 360° without having to move any lighting gear.

Camera: J wanted to be able to shoot freely around the set. She loves to move with her actors, to flow through a scene with them.

J essentially let her subconscious take over during the writing process



Static tripod shots were not what we wanted for this film so we went with a lightweight camera rig (Sony a7S III) on a gimbal. We actually set up two camera/gimbal rigs – one with a 14mm lens, the other with an 85mm lens – so J could quickly switch from one to the other without the need to swap lenses or rebalance the gimbals.

Audio: Capturing audio was going to be difficult because of the wide lens we were shooting with. What worked for us was a mixture of booming, lavaliers, and as a backup we hid field mics around the set inside customised props.

The shoot

For budgetary reasons, we needed to wrap principal photography in six days, but we also wanted to keep to an eight and a half hour day to not overwork our talent.

We stuck to a very strict shot list which enabled us to capture only the shots we needed. Ultimately, we had to shoot at a pace of 15 minutes maximum per script page on the first five days, which reduced to ten minutes per page on the last day of filming. We filmed 18 pages per day.

Was it hard? Yes, but with the help of most of our actors being so well prepared and always in character, we did it. It made for incredibly long hours for J and Paul as we would spend hours before and after the shoot transferring and backing up files, resetting and recharging gear, and reviewing footage that we survived on around four hours of sleep per night, forgoing sleep altogether on the last night. But would we do it all over again? Absolutely. We're planning our next film already... 

The Razing will be available on DVD and digital on 27th September.

Channelling a Passion

Sean Wilson reflects on composing his first book, which looks at the history of film music

What does it mean to compose music for the movies? How has the medium of soundtrack music evolved? And are people paying enough attention to this singularly complex art form?

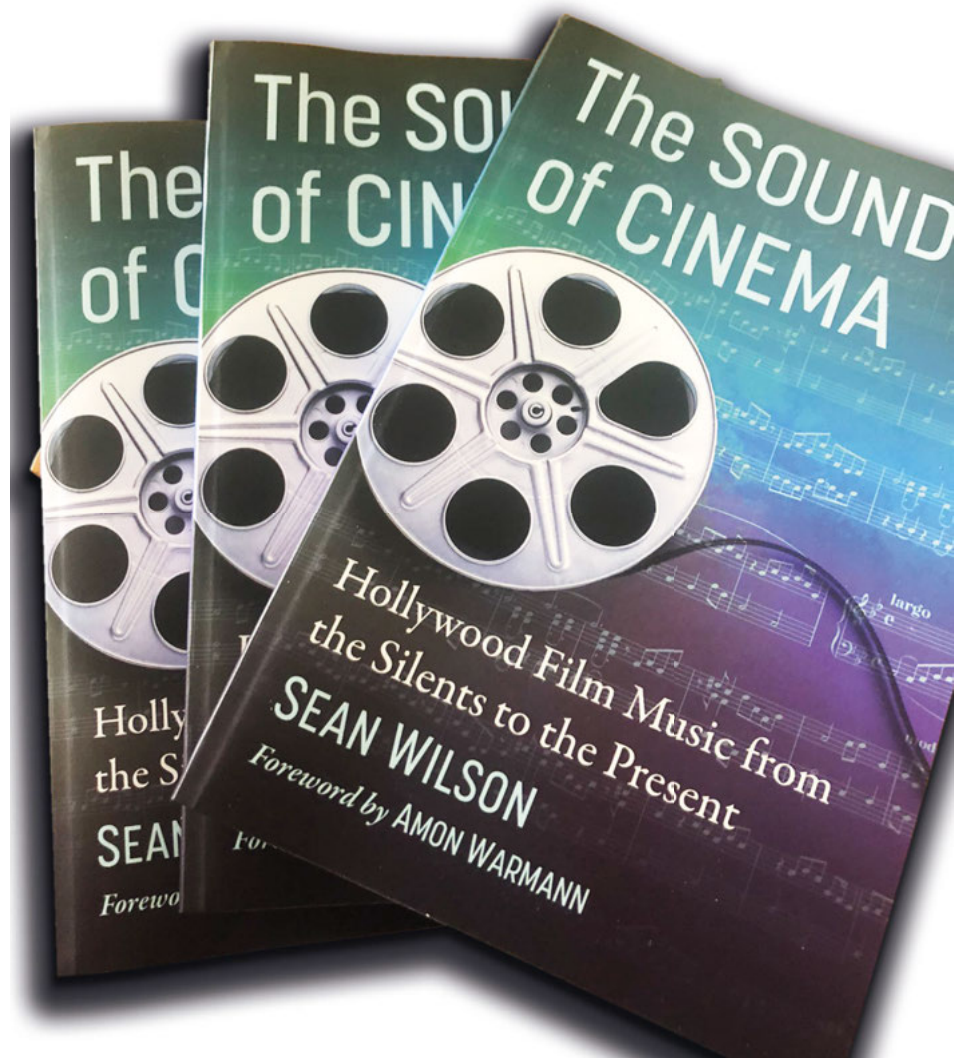
These were just three of the questions rattling through my head as I sat down in January 2021 to pen my first book. What subsequently became known as *The Sound Of Cinema: Hollywood Film Music From The Silents To The Present* began in the midst of Covid lockdown as a reaction to many different things.

Articulating emotions

Primarily, it aimed to bottle my enthusiasm for the singularly mercurial medium of film music. Whether it was John Williams's multifaceted *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, Danny Elfman's *Batman*, or something else entirely, I must have acknowledged the visceral register of film scores on some deep-seated level.

Of course, merely feeling these notions and being able to articulate them at length are two wildly different things. Having been encouraged, by many different people, to translate my passion into a book (goodness knows, I've

Being able to channel a deep-seated passion into one's first book is a cathartic and enriching experience



bored enough people with the subject matter over the years), I decided to put pen to paper and exorcise these feelings.

What struck me about the academic marketplace for film music (which isn't especially populous in the first place) is that relatively few texts have attempted a broad narrative sweep. More often than not, authors have tended to alight on singular, epochal periods in film soundtrack history, treating each generational shift as the equivalent of a David Lean epic.

The favoured eras

The era of silent cinema, and its transition into talking pictures, has a strong academic foundation. The sheer level of attention that is given to cinema's nascent period, its torturous and fascinating birth, means that there is also a wealth of matter about the music of the time. After all, music and the moving image are forever tethered together, Jordan Peele-style, a relationship that was initially forged in the fires of pipe organs and live pianists.

Likewise, the dazzling eclecticism of Hollywood's 'Golden Age', encompassing the likes of Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and Bernard Herrmann, is well traversed. However, relatively few (and I stress the word relatively) have attempted to impose an overall narrative on film music. This is something I sought to address: where did film music start, how did it proceed, and where is it headed in future?

In particular, the modern era of film music, traversing giants like Hans Zimmer and blockbuster trends such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, isn't especially well covered in

academic literature. Of course, there may be a logical reason for this – we're living through this period now, and one is perhaps reluctant to apply the power of critical hindsight when events are continuing to unfold in front of our eyes.

The soundtrack bug

Being able to channel a deep-seated passion into one's first book is a cathartic and enriching experience. But I'm at a loss to say when the power of film music first imposed itself on me. It certainly wasn't through any formal musical training – none of my family are musicians, although I dabbled in the violin at school. We did perform the likes of *Star Wars* and *The Phantom Of The Opera* for end-of-term concerts, but I think I caught the soundtrack bug long before then.

I could cite any number of movies with bold soundtracks that made an impression on me at a very young age. John Barry's James Bond scores with their sweeping strings, contrapuntal horns, and tinkling xylophone communicated a sense of escapist flair laced with knowing absurdism. Then, as mentioned earlier, there's John Williams's *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* – anchored in the unforgettably brassy 'Raiders March', the score runs the gamut of emotions from the romantic to the militaristically thrilling and the utterly terrifying.

Of course, I wasn't to know that any of these soundtracks were seeping into my consciousness via osmosis. Nor would I have been able to articulate their impact. It's taken many years to build the editorial discipline and confidence to translate this enthusiasm and interest into

something more rigorous and academically disciplined. Passion is one thing, but it needs to be bolted to experience and structure, particularly when dealing with such a wide-ranging subject as film music.

The writing of the book was peculiarly serendipitous with the second UK lockdown. Having signed the book contract at the end of 2020, my writing process commenced at the start of January 2021 with the whole of the UK then plunged into a wintry incarceration. The subsequent monastic existence enforced by the lockdown, at least until April of that year, instilled greater discipline and focus when I was writing the book, a surprising example of how dire circumstances can sometimes work to one's favour.

With the fantastic support of my publisher McFarland, I have gained greater respect for the power of collaboration and steady routine. Individual words become sentences, sentences become chapters and, before long, the foundations take on a remarkable structural life of their own.

I'm now also instilled with a greater level of respect for authors who are capable of crafting entire fictional worlds out of thin air – I, at the very least, had a historical record to draw on. It was just a question of wrestling said facts into shape, the book starting as a diminuendo and building to a crescendo of celebration, saluting the finest musical artists in Hollywood. ❸

The Sound Of Cinema: Hollywood Film Music From The Silents To The Present is published by McFarland and Co and now available to buy from Amazon, Waterstones, and Blackwells.

WRITING WORKSHOP

TV and film writer James Moran is back, with more tips for those of you looking to write your own screenplays...



Previously in our Writing Clinic, we found an idea, brainstormed it, then put it all together to make a surprise, rough outline. Not too bad, right? Well, now it's time to tidy that outline up, make it simpler and easier to follow, and figure out exactly who your characters are. Don't worry, it's much easier than it sounds!

Yes, I tricked you last time. It was for your own good. You'd never have believed me if I said building an outline was painless. But it was! You did it! Told you it was the easy part!

Okay, sure, it's very rough. That's fine, it's just for you, but it has the entire story from start to finish. You CAN write the script based on this (and I have a few times), but you'll usually want to make it easier for yourself, so

let's take the time to tidy it up and make it more readable. Don't worry, this is the easy part!

If the tidy outline is just going to be for you, then you can do a simple, bullet-point version. Keep it lean, functional, no need for flowery description. Taking our sea cadet action drama, here's what a section might look like:

- Show the threat attacking another boat, but nobody else realises
- Old cadet leader goes to work, prepares for the new recruits
- New leader tries to stop him doing his job, wants to replace him, they argue

It's simple but clear, just the bare story moments, so you can refer to it easily.

If you want anyone else to read the outline, then you'll need more of a 'trailer' version. Keep it between three and six pages, otherwise it gets unwieldy. That version of the bullet points above would be like this:

Out on the sea, a small fishing boat is in trouble. They can't pull up the anchor, it's stuck. They check the radar, to see if they're caught on a wreck or something. But the radar shows a large, dark shape approaching from underneath, fast. Panicking, they try to cut the anchor line and fire up the engines. But it's too late. Something SLAMS into the boat, knocking it sideways and tipping everyone out into the sea. It slams into the boat again, breaking it in half and killing several of them. They scream for help, but there's nobody within earshot.

Joe, the elderly cadet leader, gets into work, opening up the shutters on the seafront office. A new batch of recruits are due in today. Before that, Martin, the 30-year-old deputy leader comes in.

He's condescending, saying maybe it's time for Joe to retire. He's not saying Joe is past it, but... perhaps it's time to let go. For the safety of the recruits, of course. Joe is angry, and tells him he's not going anywhere.

It's longer, but helps the reader understand it, and get a feel for the tone and atmosphere. Even when I do this type of outline, I still do the bullet-point version for myself, so I can see the flow more clearly while writing.

Whether you're doing the bullet-point version or the pretty version, it's time to work out the characters. You may already have them from your brainstorm, which is great. Even so, use a separate file or piece of paper to list them.

The outline will guide you. Look at your story, think about who it might be happening to. Custom-design characters

specifically for it, so that the events of the story are the *worst* possible thing that could happen to them. The clumsy, lazy person ends up having to defuse a bomb, or the person who hates heights is trapped at the top of a skyscraper, or the one who fears change has to upend their entire life. Ideally, they are changed by the end of the story, otherwise they've learned nothing. Life changes us in lots of ways, so you want to put them through the wringer.

Also, when people are in a crisis, you find out who they really are. The brave character might secretly be the most cowardly. The meek character could have an inner strength that nobody would have realised, even them, if this story hadn't happened. We've all seen news stories about people who became heroes, ordinary folk who just saw that something needed doing and stepped in to help. They probably had no idea they could do it.

Keep it lean, with short paragraphs for each character – two or three sentences, to give an idea who they are. Rough age, minimal physical description, a few adjectives to sum them up. They'll probably change when you're writing, so just give yourself a starting point. You don't need to know their eye colour or what their favourite cereal is.

If you're stuck, you can even start with a stereotype – the funny one, the angry one, etc. – but then when you get into the script later, you can add layers and give them more depth. Or base them on someone you know. Or both. Then build on it. Why are they angry? What are they using humour to hide?

Another trick I use is to pick actors for each character, and write that into the description. When you start writing, this will help keep them separate in your head, and avoid their dialogue sounding the same. Liam Neeson sounds very different to Jennifer Lopez; they have different speech rhythms, accents, and localised expressions. Especially on the first draft, this helps keep their dialogue distinct and consistent.

When writing *Tower Block*, I had trouble finding Kurtis's voice, so I imagined Michael Smiley in the role – he's got a strong Northern Irish accent, and it instantly helped me keep his dialogue consistent and unique. When Jack O'Connell took the role, quite a lot of this dialogue stayed the same, but still sounded right.

Now you have an outline and your characters, you're ready to start the script, right? Not quite! There's one more step before that... **B**

If you want anyone else to read the outline, then you'll need more of a 'trailer' version



You can find James on Twitter at @jamesmoran, and at his website: www.jamesmoran.com

Eiffel

Certificate: 15

Director: Martin Bourboulon

Cast: Romain Duris, Emma Mackey, Pierre Deladonchamps, Armande Boulanger

Release date: 12th August

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



Martin Bourboulon's historical romance builds a fantasy around the real-life figure of Gustave Eiffel, the civil engineer behind the famed Tower.

Eiffel is presented as both a steamy romance and a straight-faced biopic – chronicling the landmark's construction and Gustave's success in the face of adversity when asked to build a landmark to represent France, despite the distraction of an old flame coming back into his life.

These two storylines are often at odds with each other – visually and

thematically. The scenes dealing with Gustave's forbidden romance with the married Adrienne (Mackey, who does a good job of being sultry and coy) show the Paris of the late 1800s at its most chic. For the wealthy, it's full of stately homes, impossibly green gardens and an endless supply of fancy parties. As we switch to Eiffel's office and the process of having his landmark made, we see a city in the grip of an industrial revolution – all murky, dusty, and bustling streets.

It's unfortunate we don't get to see more of the latter. Romain Duris imbues his performance with resolve and determination to complete his project, and some of the film's most compelling moments are when he has to fight for himself and his vision against bureaucrats who don't believe in

it. Initially, he doesn't even believe in it himself, and wants to build something much more functional.

The character is a determined but pragmatic figure, which suits the film's depiction of his real-life endeavours, but fails to light the spark of romance. Duris is often lacking in the charisma needed to make his and Adrienne's affair as steamy as the movie wants it to be. It's hard to believe that Adrienne, played with a youthful exuberance by Emma Mackey, would be attracted to the serious Gustave.

The romantic side of the plot may not be as interesting as Gustave's career, and it drags on for longer than it maybe should, but it does allow for some truly gorgeous production design. It's clear that the film's budget was used to make sure everything within the frame looks

Girls Can't Surf

Certificate: TBC



Director: Christopher Nelius

Cast: Jodie Cooper, Frieda Zamba, Pauline Menczer, Wendy Botha, Pam Burridge

Release date: 19th August

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



Shining a spotlight on the struggles and careers of some of the best women in the world of pro surfing, *Girls Can't Surf* is a spirited, emotional, and intelligent look into the

long journey to get women to be taken seriously in a previously male-dominated sport. From the frenetically edited opening sequence, it's clear these pros – including former world champions Frieda Zamba, Wendy Botha, and Jodie Cooper – are telling their stories to empower other women (and as a satisfying 'fuck you' to the people who underestimated them).

The documentary takes on the standard format, with a mixture of archive footage, talking heads, and snapshots of news articles. As the film progresses, it loses some of the exciting energy it brings in its opening scenes, but does a good job of allowing the personalities of those involved



perfect at all times. It takes on the glossy sheen of a big blockbuster, while still maintaining the necessary element of realism.

The tale of Gustave Eiffel's work is an interesting one,

and the film enlivens the narrative further by placing various political obstacles in the engineer's way. This alone would make for a worthy biopic and a beautifully designed

period drama. It's a shame that the screenplay's writers felt the need to inject a prominent romantic subplot that's meant to be passionate, but turns out to be a bit tepid. **CS**

to shine through. It's easy to empathise with them and feel the outrage they no doubt felt at being sidelined and treated as a second class of sports person.

Girls Can't Surf exposes so many of the difficulties female pros experienced, it's sometimes hard to believe they were fighting on so many fronts. The film covers a period from the early eighties, when the women's competition was run alongside the more popular bikini contest, to today (acknowledging that it took until 2019 to close professional surfing's gender pay gap).

It's a wild ride, with women in the sport going from being completely sidelined, to objectified, being held to unreasonable expectations, and

not taken seriously. The women of this documentary tell of their experiences with a mixture of bemusement (especially when it comes to the high-cut swimsuits they were expected to compete in) and indignation. Most have similar experiences, but individual stories stand out, particularly Pam Burridge recalling her battle with anorexia, and Jodie Cooper and Pauline Menczer's experience of homophobia (coming from both the men and women).

Christopher Nelius's film uses newspaper clippings and old photographs to show as well as tell of the sexist double standards at play. Women would only be featured in surfing magazines if they were conventionally

attractive and wearing bikinis (it also goes into Wendy Botha's nude photo shoot, with opinions coming from both sides of the fence) and pictures of championship winners reveal that the women's cheque was a fraction of the men's.

Girls Can't Surf is just really good at stirring up feelings of outrage at what these women had to go through to be perceived as equal. On top of that, it's an intelligent, well-researched documentary that chronicles an important time in women's pro surfing. The women involved are spirited, funny, and absolutely willing to call out the sexist behaviours they were subjected to and sometimes still observe in the industry. An enlightening, essential film. **CS**

Stag

Certificate: TBC

Director: Alexandra Spieth

Cast: Mary Glen Fredrick, Elizabeth Ramos, Stephanie Hogan, Lillian Herrick, Safiya Harris, Katie Wieland

Release date: TBC

Reviewer: Eli Allison



Stag is a horror-comedy and Alexandra Spieth's directorial debut. It follows six 'friends' in a remote cabin, surrounded by an assault course of inflatable penises, endless small talk, and everyone on the edge of a white wine cajoled meltdown. It's hell on Earth, commonly known as... The hen do.

Jenny, an estranged childhood friend of the bride-to-be, is a last-minute guest at (bar a hen do from my past, which involved a startled stripper, a pound-a-pint happy hour, and projectile vomiting) the worst hen do in the known universe. Never mind the horrific murders, this hen do has a maid of honour with a personality that's like an angle grinder to the face, cringe-inducing social interactions that make shitting your pants during a work meeting seem elegant, and the most sinister lasagne outside of a Wetherspoons. It's my kind of film.

The tension builds from the get-go, when Jenny learns that

her oldest friend is getting married, and it doesn't stop – as old friends and new are forced to spend the weekend together. Trapped both physically in the remote retreat and socially by the group's power dynamics, the weekend doesn't go well at all.

The tears cried over the contradictory nature of female friendships could fill a mid-sized saloon car, and *Stag* really comes into its own in its observation of how women strong-arm each other into group conformity. Spieth uses the highly charged hen weekend atmosphere to highlight these tensions, and she doesn't let go.

The Railway Children Return

Certificate: PG

Director: Morgan Matthews

Cast: Jenny Agutter, Sheridan Smith, Tom Courtenay, Beau Gadsdon, KJ Aikens

Release date: Out now

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



Set during the Second World War, *The Railway Children Return* tells the tale of three children – Lily (Beau Gadsdon), Pattie (Eden Hamilton), and Ted (Zac Cudby) – sent away from Manchester to live in the Yorkshire countryside. There they go to live with Annie (Sheridan Smith), her mother Bobbie (Jenny Agutter, reprising her role from the original), and her son Thomas (Austin Haynes). They make new friends, and discover a wounded American soldier (KJ Aikens) who they attempt to nurse back to health.

As it's been over 50 years since the original *The Railway Children* was released, you might be pleased to know that this one stands completely on its own. The only thing tying the two together is Agutter, but there aren't many references to the events of her character's childhood. Instead we get three new children, and they are a joy to spend time with. They're written exactly like real kids – they get mucky, mess around, get into mischief, but also are extremely loving and supportive towards each other.

In line with this, most of the film's problems are resolved through childish antics and shenanigans, which alleviates some of the seriousness of the subject matter. Despite being focused on a set of fun-loving children, *The Railway*

Children Return doesn't shy away from serious topics, be it war, racism, or death. Most of the performances are largely jovial, but each character has their moment of melancholy to keep them grounded.

Most impressive of all though are the child actors. Gadsdon and Haynes are excellent as Lily and Thomas, who are both given more depth and serious, emotional dialogue than the younger ones (understandably). They're the eldest of the children, and beneath the childlike exterior and fun-loving playfulness lies the worry and the emotional harm that living through the war has inflicted on them. It's rare that the film calls for them to be angry – it's light-hearted family entertainment after all – but on the odd occasion they need to

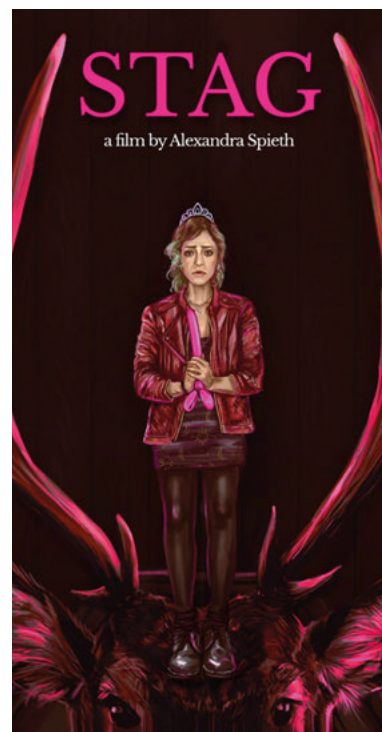
Dark humour and tone permeate the film, but the horror element feels almost hesitant. Now don't get me wrong, people die in this film – in horrible and brutal ways – yet the murders lack the tension you get in buckets from the emotional interactions.

I know that every horror film (and in fact all films) require a suspension of disbelief, but the logic in *Stag* is far less than realistic. One hen was wilfully unbothered by a gun-toting weirdo, and drunk girls were allowed to wander off alone. In a less emotionally tense film, those niggles might have been

glaring, but the director, cast, and camerawork draws you in and keeps your attention. No mean feat – with a single location, limited cast, and a small budget.

Of course, some of the acting is slightly uneven and the indoor scenes reflect the budget, but filming a whole chunk of everything outside in the oppressive and majestic woodlands of upstate New York adds much-needed gravitas.

If you fancy a clever movie that's heavy on dark humour, dark tone, and some ritual-based stabbing... then this is the film for you. **fs**



give a moving monologue, it's done flawlessly.

However, on one occasion these monologues are used simply to force tension and conflict into the film. It's almost as if, as it comes towards a resolution, the writer realised everyone's a bit too chummy and

there needs to be an argument to heat things up. There's no good reason for it and it's resolved shortly afterwards, making it feel all the more pointless.

Thankfully, this is an isolated incident, and the film overall is fun, light-hearted, and moving. There's a real sense of

a caring community – which the entire cast, adults and children, pull together to create. *The Railway Children Return* perfectly illustrates what can be achieved through friendship and co-operation, and carries a message that hits even harder in these present times. **fs**

Maisie

Certificate: TBC

Director: Lee Cooper

Cast: David Raven, Miss Jason, Dave Lynn, Allan Cardew, Walter Cole

Release date: 5th August

Reviewer: Hamish Calvert



Despite a surge in popularity, drag is by no means a new form of entertainment, as evidenced by Maisie Trollette, the UK's oldest drag artist. Known as David Raven out of drag, this legendary performer, and the subject of Lee Cooper's new documentary, was in heels and lippy long before a certain Miss RuPaul ever

was. Cooper's film follows David as he approaches his 85th birthday, capturing his celebrations and looking back on his fabulous career in showbusiness – one that's still going strong.

If you're here for death drops and splits, you may leave feeling short-changed, as Maisie is as old-school as they come. Predating the outrageous beauty standards that have become expected in the industry today, older drag performers were less concerned about immaculate make-up and more so with entertaining a crowd. David himself admits that his drag isn't particularly glam – think less RuPaul and more Lily

Savage, with no snark intended. The generational difference is immediately apparent and whilst David's drag might not be the flavour of the month, he's living proof of its enduring quality.

Cooper's film takes a largely fly-on-the-wall approach in telling David's story. This technique conveys the often charmingly camp content of David's life in drag. A boozy rehearsal with long-time friends and colleagues, Miss Dave Lynn and Miss Jason, is a particular highlight. Just wait until you see what antics they get up to in their dressing room! Not content with highlighting the local scene alone, this drag

The Feast

Certificate: 18

Director: Lee Haven Jones

Cast: Annes Elwy, Nia Roberts, Julian Lewis Jones, Sion Allun Davies, Steffan Gennydd

Release date: 19th August

Reviewer: Lauren Miles



After witnessing the final moments of *The Feast*, the impression you're left with is one of undeniable weirdness. Unfortunately, it's not the good kind. Lee Haven Jones's

Welsh horror film spends long stretches doing nothing, then dives head-first into shocking and visceral imagery. Perhaps that's to cover for the lack of clarity in the story, as it never gives satisfying answers to the



documentary even has international appeal. Observing the meeting of David and Darcelle XV, the world's oldest drag performer all the way from the USA, *Maisie* offers a drag collision course like no other.

Whilst Cooper does well to capture these riotous moments, he simultaneously leaves notable gaps while profiling David's life. An interesting array of achievements and accolades are eventually mentioned in text alongside the end credits; however, these would have been of more benefit if explored in the main body of the film. Nonetheless, one profoundly moving segment that sees David reminisce about his late partner – sadly lost to AIDS – reminds audiences why it's deeply important to care for the generations that came before their own.

So, much like David's drag, *Maisie* might seem dated to some, but it's almost impossible not to become enamoured with it. 



questions it poses. There are many of them, but the one that comes to the fore is 'what on Earth did I just watch?'

On the outskirts of a Welsh town, we're given a peek inside the luxurious lives of a wealthy family. Gwyn (Lewis Jones) and Glenda (Roberts) are setting up to host a fancy dinner for a businessman and a neighbouring farmer, hoping to broker a deal. Their two sons – Guto (Cennydd), a rebellious type, and Gweirydd (Davies), a shameless pervert – are entirely self-centred. Their dynamic is disrupted when quiet waitress Cadi (Elwy) arrives to help with the preparations.

To describe her as quiet is an understatement. In the film's entire runtime, Cadi speaks only a handful of words, choosing instead to observe. Elwy's performance is incredibly unsettling, her lack of

dialogue meaning that she instead utilises her penetrating stare. It's obvious from the very start that there's something not quite right, and the movie takes its time allowing events to unfold. Slowly we come to realise she may not have the best of intentions when it comes to the family.

Problem being that it's far too slow. Much of the film is spent establishing characters and their bonds with each other, which would be interesting if not for the majority of the family still being woefully underdeveloped. Even Cadi remains a mystery, with only her job and one event from her past being revealed. Even her motivations, arguably the thing we want to know the most, are left questionable. It's barely hinted at, and after watching you're left still trying to piece things together. Not knowing her motivation also

means that Cadi's less easy to root for. It's a film where all characters can be equally distasteful in their own ways.

It's apparent that Jones prioritises *The Feast's* imagery over its writing. There is undeniably some gross stuff here that will affect squeamish viewers. With food being such a prominent theme, you can imagine what some of this might entail. However, as the climax hurtles into full-blown horror, things take a turn into the unexpected. Most of the horror imagery at this point seems to be just weird for the sake of it. For the shock factor rather than the storytelling.

The Feast and its protagonist may be far from generic, but between its threadbare script, flat characters, and shocking-for-the-sake-of-it imagery, the film simply disappoints. 

That Was A Serious Party

Certificate: TBC

Director: Dylan Harvey

Cast: Freddie Fellowes,

Edmond Scott, Maff Scott

Release date: Out now (digital)

Reviewer: James Harvey

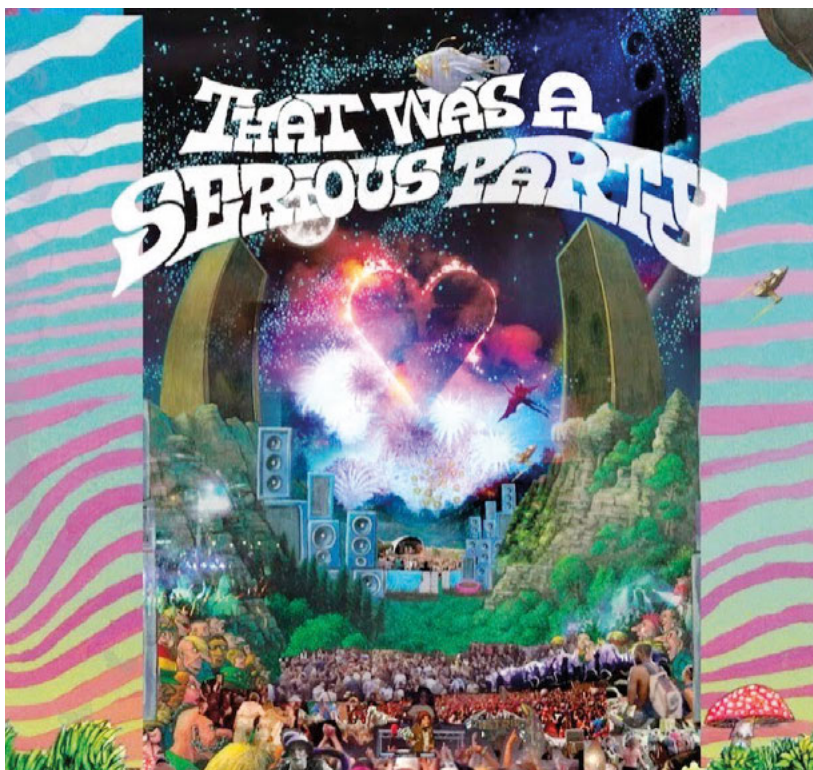


Mud, mushrooms, and men's genitalia abound in a documentary tracking 14 years of the Secret Garden Party.

That Was A Serious Party opens with a classic documentary trick. As the festival's co-founder, Freddie Fellowes, attaches a comically large lapel mic to his shirt, the camera's 'record' light flickers on.

This isn't a slick, exactly produced festival documentary like last year's *Summer Of Soul*. Sound guys wander into shots holding boom mics. Interviewees knock drinks off tables. A subject finds a bag of what he insists isn't MDMA. These moments capture some of the spontaneity of the Secret Garden Party's early years. They lend the documentary a cheerfully homemade feel, and though it contains few insights into the realities of the independent festival scene, its tale is compelling enough to ensure its brisk 72-minute runtime passes by in a flash.

Inspired in equal parts by late-rave culture and Lewis Carroll, the Secret Garden Party originally ran from 2004–2017, bringing the long-standing British traditions of camping, nonsense poems, and nitrous oxide to a wet field in Cambridgeshire. While the party was always a music festival, that was never really the point. Each year stood as a monument to creativity, packed with secret



attractions and mad activities which earned it a cult status.

The story of the Secret Garden Party takes us from its humble beginnings in a boggy field to its strobe-lit final form in 2017. These largely chronological sections are divided up by delightful Gilliam-esque animations courtesy of the festival's resident illustrator, Pete Loveday.

Early footage of 'The Suicide Olympics' (think tobogganing, but without the snow and in a wheelchair) is topped immediately by its successor (the same, but in a tractor tyre and ending in a river). The health and safety nightmare of earlier years does seem to lessen as the documentary progresses, but there's a simple pleasure to be had in watching inebriated partygoers do *Jackass* stunts in a mud puddle.

Though the party was founded, we're told, with the intention

that attendees should be willing to get their hands dirty, the doc's after-the-fact presentation seems to actively work against its own ethos. It's frustrating to repeatedly hear variations of "you had to be there, man," when the people behind the camera quite evidently weren't. A purely retrospective lens struggles to capture the sense of wonder so many attendees wax lyrical about.

But despite its rather surface-level investigations, and a couple of extended musical performances which give the distinct impression the filmmakers ran out of footage, *That Was A Serious Party* is still a fascinating look behind the scenes of one of the UK's most unique festival experiences. It even has a happy ending: on 21st July, the Secret Garden Party made its comeback after five years in the wilderness. I'm gutted I didn't get tickets. [FS](#)

Prizefighter: The Life Of Jem Belcher

Certificate: 15

Director: Daniel Graham

Cast: Matt Hookings, Russell Crowe,

Ray Winstone, Jodhi May

Release date: Out now

Reviewer: John Moore



While neither play the eponymous subject of the film, Russell Crowe and Ray Winstone are the undoubted stars of Daniel Graham's third feature. Though they sadly never share a scene, both offer up rugged turns as father figures to a largely forgotten name from the bloody annals of boxing history.

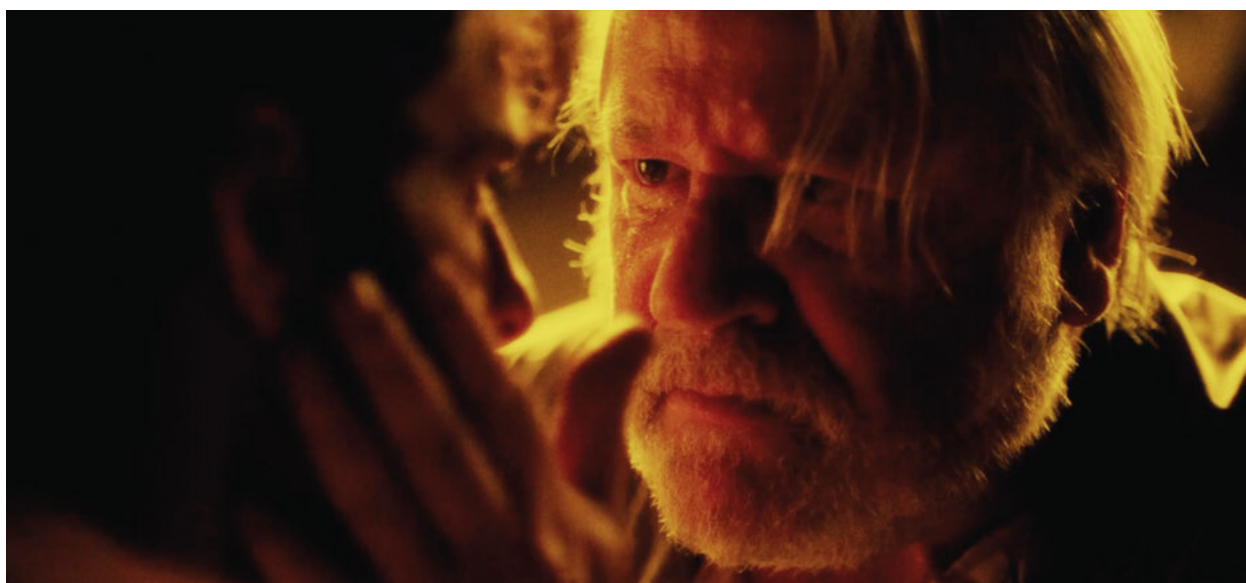
Prizefighter: The Life Of Jem Belcher expands on a 2017 short film written by the aptly named Matt Hookings – who played the titular character both then and now in this expanded take on his boxing legacy. Its tale runs from Belcher's fatherless formative experiences in Bristol of the late-1780s, through to his fight with Henry Pierce in the first decade of the 1800s, charting his run as the youngest ever English boxing champion, subsequent downfall,

and search for redemption. It serves to place him as a key figure in the formative years of the sport when it was still an illegal activity patronised by wealthy aristocrats in search of more blood sport, and styles him as an early archetype for the modern boxer.

Crowe's grumbling turn as Belcher's drunken grandfather and Winstone's salt-of-the-fuckin'-earth trainer notwithstanding, *Prizefighter* is at its most engaging – certainly visually – when depicting the violence of the dimly lit rings its central character made his workplace during and beyond his prime, prior to his early death at just 30. Blood and spit flies for the gratification of baying men; with the brutality of the entertainment viscerally depicted in both sight and sound. However, the film is somewhat guilty of putting a distinctly modern sheen on the sometimes protracted, invariably brutal matches that took place at the cusp of transition between the bare-knuckle matches of Belcher's youth and the fights of the sport we know today.

Nevertheless, the fights are oft-repulsive, but invariably engrossing fare – like all contact sports are – and the updated pacing asks viewers to meditate on how little has really changed regarding the nature of pugilism from the primitive affairs of England's past, to the bright spectacles of the modern sport. It is far from lost on the film's script that, to this day, largely working-class men like Belcher – a young man living with a familial legacy, raised with the sport in their blood like so many still are today – put their lives on the line for a shot at fortune, fame, and immortality. Indeed, one interesting thread within the film explicitly outlines an ongoing debate about boxing's status as an art and science versus its role as money-making entertainment.

Prizefighter, then, stylishly resurrects a ghost and celebrates his life-less-ordinary. Sadly, though, it falls into an historically tinged take on modern boxing movie tropes; serving to wallow in romanticism. Whether that makes you happy or not is largely down to how you feel about boxing and its ongoing appeal. 



Gaslight

FOR THE WATCHLIST

The 'have I gone mad?' genre: women

Becky Clough continues to add to our watchlists with another selection of movies... or does she?

Thanks to George Cukor's 1944 film *Gaslight* (previously a play-turned-British-movie) we have a new verb for making someone think they're insane. Ingrid Bergman's husband literally 'gaslights' her, telling her she's imagining the lamps flickering.

It's become a whole genre: is the protagonist in real danger, or deluded? In 1968's *Rosemary's Baby*, Mia Farrow has suspicions about her neighbours' intentions for her baby, but the more she discovers, the crazier it sounds. Writer Ira Levin's other classic *The Stepford Wives* (1974) touches on similar themes: when Joanna (Katharine Ross) moves to the suburbs with her family, the local community seems strange. An insular men's group, women with more interest in housework than feminism... She suspects something is making the wives submissive, but what's the truth?

People disappearing is always good for potential paranoia: in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), Iris (Margaret Lockwood) wakes from her nap on the train to find the old lady she'd befriended has gone – and everyone on-board claims she never existed. Either Iris is mad, or everybody is lying.

The storyline has proved timeless: in *Flightplan* (2005) Jodie Foster's young daughter disappears from a plane... but there's no proof she was ever there. Jean Simmons visits Paris with her brother in *So Long At The Fair* (1950), but after a night out, she finds a blank wall has replaced his hotel room. The staff claim she arrived alone – can she prove them wrong?

Seemingly unstable, hysterical women often feature in gothic thrillers: in *Midnight Lace* (1960) Doris Day is terrorised by an eerie, disembodied voice threatening her from the depths of the London fog, but police dismiss her fears. *The Innocents* (1961) stars Deborah Kerr as a governess

caring for two unruly kids; she becomes haunted by thoughts of her now-dead predecessor, with her fears for the children reaching fever pitch.

The 'maybe I'm crazy' theme may have its roots in yesteryear, but it remains popular, with Elisabeth Moss looking bonkers in *The Invisible Man* (2020) when a ghostly ex appears to visit. *Fear Of Rain* (2021) is an outlier of the genre, as the main character is well aware she has schizophrenia. But does that mean she's mistaken in believing her neighbour kidnaps little girls and keeps them in the attic?

TV movies have always loved the 'unreliable narrator'; in *Committed* (2011), doctor Andrea Roth starts work at an isolated psychiatric hospital, only to discover she's a patient, having killed her fiancé and blocked out the memory... or did she? *Dangerous Company* (2015) goes back to *Gaslight*-esque roots, with successful businesswoman Alicia Leigh Willis assuming she has premature dementia – supported by her helpful husband.

The trend's current renaissance really began with *The Girl On The Train* (2016): Emily Blunt may not be at her most convincing when playing an alcoholic who's let herself go, but she gives it her best shot. Lamenting the loss of her marriage, Rachel (Blunt) is still linked with her past, with a daily commute that overlooks her ex's new house. Drinking problems plus a daily glimpse into the lives of others is a bad combination and when a woman goes missing, Rachel finds herself entangled in a police investigation.

The Woman In The Window (2021) neatly hits all the tropes: Anna (Amy Adams) is stuck at home because of agoraphobia and other mental ailments. Past trauma haunts her, she mixes alcohol and pills, yada yada. Life is enlivened by the arrival of new neighbours the Russells (Julianne Moore and Gary Oldman), but after Anna witnesses a shocking incident, she's surprised to find Jennifer Jason Leigh has replaced her new friend – what happened to the Mrs Russell nobody else remembers?

Mini-series *The Woman In The House Across The Street From The Girl In The Window* (2022) is a fantastic parody of all of the above. Kristen Bell stars as the obligatory woman recovering from a painful past and drinking too much (with wine glasses approximately the size of her head). She's curious about her hunky new neighbour and his adorable daughter... to say any more would spoil the surprises. You could enjoy this as a 90% straight-up thriller, but the remaining 10% has an almost *Airplane*-esque silliness which makes it – to my mind at least – an instant classic. 📺

Five To Watch

Bunny Lake Is Missing (1965)

Laurence Olivier shows why he's a star in this weird little film; he's the police officer investigating when Carol Lynley claims her improbably named daughter has vanished. When it transpires that her belongings have also disappeared, the immediate (rather drastic) conclusion is that she never existed at all. Noel Coward is the creep next door, and Keir Dullea the apparently supportive brother/uncle.

Irresistible (2006)

Sophie (Susan Sarandon) is already noticing odd events before she even meets Mara (Emily Blunt). Mara's a young colleague of Sophie's husband (Sam Neill), and she quickly insinuates herself into their lives. Hell hath no crazy like a woman who suspects her husband of having an affair... but how far will Sophie go to investigate her suspicions, and will it tear her family apart?

Changeling (2008)

A sobering true-life illustration of the harmful 'hysterical female' stereotype, this stars Angelina Jolie as Christine Collins, whose nine-year-old son goes missing. It's 1928 Los Angeles, and police are eager to solve their PR issues, so they 'find' him. But Collins knows it's not her son, and despite all the evidence on her side, she's sent to a hospital's psychiatric ward until the truth emerges.

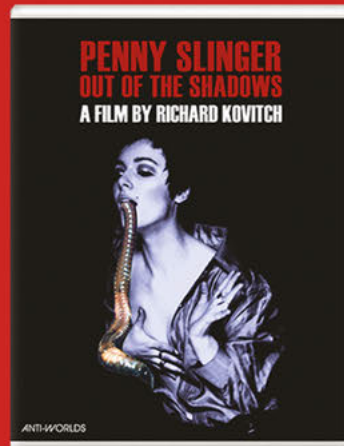
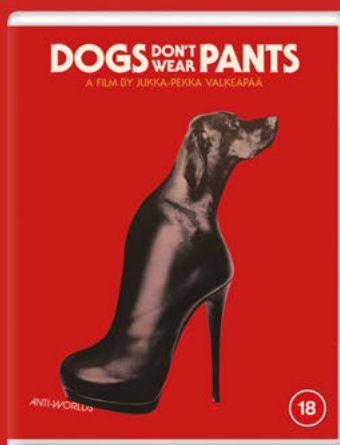
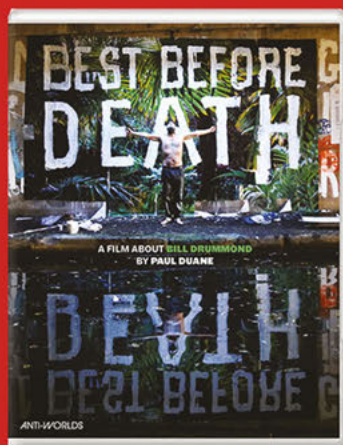
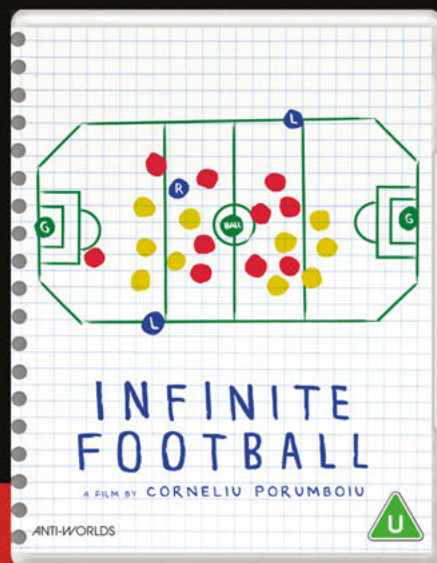
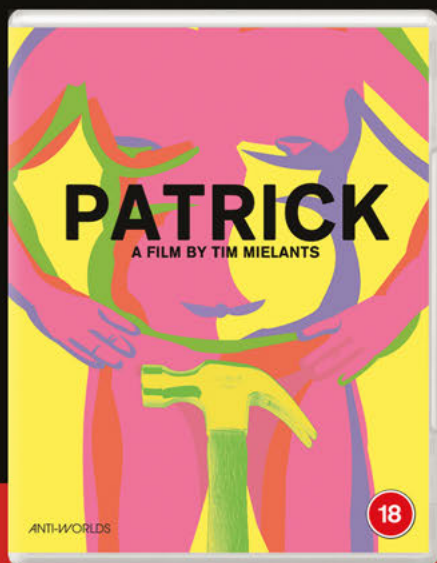
Before I Go To Sleep (2014)

Every day, Christine (Nicole Kidman) wakes up next to a stranger and depends on notes stuck all over the house to explain her predicament: after an unknown traumatic event, her memory only lasts for one day. While she tries to piece together her past, it seems danger is closing in – can she recover from her amnesia in time to work out who her real enemy is?

Gone (2012)

This breathless thriller was panned by critics, but heck, I liked it. We learn that security-conscious Jill (Amanda Seyfried) once claimed to have been kidnapped, but 'escaped': obviously, the police decide she's made it all up. Her time in psychiatric hospital now colours her communication with the cops, which isn't improving as she takes more and more desperate measures to find her missing sister...

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Big Trouble in Little China (Disney+)

“It’s all in the reflexes,” claims Kurt Russell’s Jack Burton – the enthusiastic but not-so-capable protagonist of *Big Trouble In Little China*.

In John Carpenter’s classic action/fantasy film, truck driver Burton finds himself accidentally caught up in ancient sorcery when his friend’s green-eyed girlfriend is kidnapped by cursed sorcerer David Lo Pan (James Hong) in Chinatown, San Francisco. Kim Cattrall, Dennis Dun, and Victor Wong co-star in this wacky and infinitely quotable adventure that has action, magic and martial arts in equal measure. James Hong is at



his absolute best, and you won’t forget Russell’s performance in a hurry, either. *Big Trouble In Little China* is a fun film about a

reasonable guy who witnesses some very unreasonable things, and it’s absolutely earned its cult classic status.

Tales From Earthsea (Netflix)

One of various Studio Ghibli films available on Netflix, *Tales From Earthsea* is directed by Goro Miyazaki, son of director and studio co-founder Hayao Miyazaki. It deals with a fantasy world where kingdoms are deteriorating, and dragons are being sighted in human lands. The strange occurrences lead wizard Ged to investigate. The villainous Lord Cob is also one of the creepiest of Studio Ghibli’s villains. This is arguably one of the studio’s less popular movies, but is nonetheless worth seeking out.

Funny Games (Mubi UK/Arrow)

Helmed by Austrian director Michael Haneke, *Funny Games* was a controversial film on its release in 1997, causing a fair few walkouts at its Cannes Film Festival premiere. A home invasion thriller, the entire aim of the movie is to subvert audience expectations and get under people’s skin. It gets your hopes up only to dash them again. It’s perhaps not a cosy night in film, but definitely worth watching if you like movies that challenge you.

Pacific Rim (Netflix/Prime Video)

If you missed Guillermo del Toro’s *Pacific Rim* when it was released in 2013, and you like your monster movies, this is definitely one to watch. As humans in humongous robot suits do battle with equally gigantic sea monsters called Kaiju, you can expect nothing less than fun action scenes on an epic scale. It’s also got an excellent cast, with *The Suicide Squad*’s Idris Elba and *The Gentlemen*’s Charlie Hunnam putting in memorable performances.

Bringing Up Baby (iPlayer)

Widely considered one of the definitive screwball comedies of the Classical Hollywood era, film premises don’t get much more random than that of *Bringing Up Baby*. It focuses on a palaeontologist and a free-spirited heiress who meet and soon get caught up in various improbable and amusing predicaments – some of which involve a tame leopard called Baby. The great Howard Hawks directs, and Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn star as the unlikely central couple.

4K Ultra-HD Blu-rays

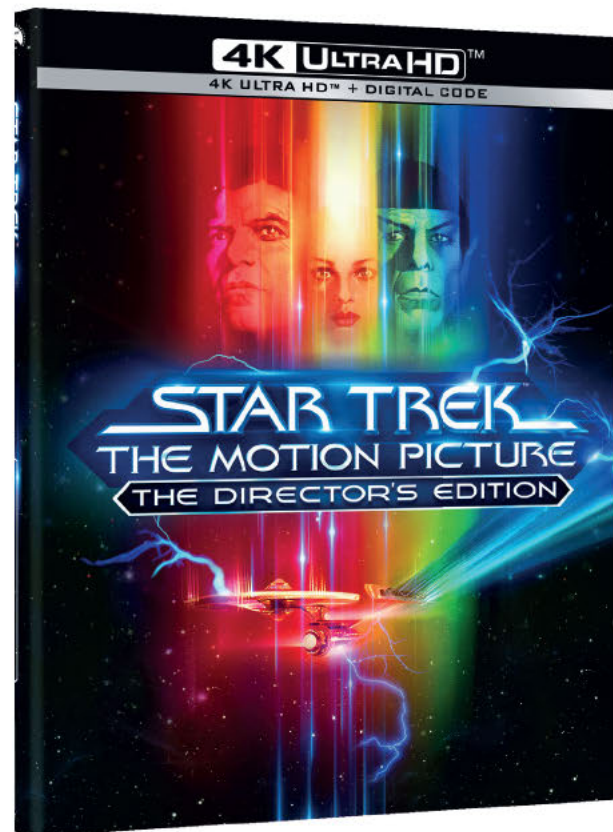
Words: Simon Brew Twitter: @simonbrew

Beam 'em up

The major 4K releases on the immediate horizon – at least where September is concerned – have a feel of exploring new worlds about them. Paramount is having another run at its vintage *Star Trek* movies on the 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray format. It released the first four last year in a boxset, but on 5th September there's some jiggery-pokery going on.

The studio is releasing the first six films as individual titles. So: the straight reissues, now in standalone packaging, are films *II*, *III*, and *IV*. We're getting *V* and *VI* for the first time on 4K disc. And then the original movie is back, but different. This time, Paramount is releasing in standalone form *Star Trek: The Motion Picture – The Director's Edition*. This is the recut version of the film from director Robert Wise, and both a standard and very posh deluxe boxset are being made available.

The plan is for a boxset of films one to six as well, but that wasn't up for order at press time. Expect the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* films to follow on the 4K disc format in 2023...



New films

In terms of recent cinema releases, *Lightyear* arrives on 4K at the end of August, following its debut on Disney+. *Elvis* is set for 26th September, and *Jurassic World Dominion* pops up on 24th October. Look for *Thor: Love & Thunder* this side of Christmas, along with the box office juggernaut of 2022: *Top Gun Maverick*. Smart money has that appearing in October, but Paramount is keeping mum for now...

Christmas specials

Warner Bros has a bunch of catalogue titles that it's going to try and tempt the Christmas market with this year. We already know that *Poltergeist*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, and *The Lost Boys* are coming to the format from the studio in the months ahead. We also hear that *Casablanca* is set for a release in November, and Warner Bros is likely to ship a more affordable version of *Edge Of Tomorrow* too.

Old films

September sees a mix of catalogue releases, with 1980s Schwarzenegger flick *Raw Deal* arriving on 4K disc – courtesy of Studiocanal – on the 19th. That's the same day a SteelBook of *Indiana Jones & The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* goes on sale, with the following week seeing the release of *I Spit On Your Grave* and the *Police Story* trilogy we mentioned a while back. 10th October has been earmarked for *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Rumours

Finally, a few unconfirmed titles at the time of going to press. Columbia is said to be readying its third six-pack of classics. Included this time are the likes of *The Last Picture Show* and *As Good As It Gets*. Universal is said to be readying *8 Mile*, meanwhile Paramount has a *Scream 2* release up its sleeve, and Sony is looking to bring out the original *Fright Night* as well. Hopefully, all of those will arrive in the UK at some point...

Em, the host of the *Verbal Diorama* podcast, balances the books...

There's a lot of difficult things to manage when you have a podcast, and I've spoken about them at length in previous columns, but I've often mentioned in this column that I manage mine – *Verbal Diorama* – almost like a mini-business.

Most podcasts probably have a very flexible approach to all of the work that goes into podcasting, so certainly don't tarnish all movie podcasts with the same control-freak brush, but there comes a time in every podcast's life, where costs become such that they consider monetisation. Once a podcast feels like they're ready for monetisation, there are several different avenues they can go down; ads, sponsorship, one-off payments, or subscription-based models. None of these are mutually exclusive and it's up to individual podcasts what they choose. I personally chose the latter, but it happens to be one of the toughest things to manage, and here's why...

It's really hard to ask for help, but it's even harder to ask for financial help from listeners.

I don't do *Verbal Diorama* to make money. It was never something I set up as a way to subsidise my income – it was always just a fun hobby that ultimately became a bit more serious. The Patreon site itself actually came about by accident; I set it up, changed my mind, decided to come back to it later, and lo-and-behold someone found it and signed up. He became my first patron. He's still a subscriber too, and despite patrons being free to leave as and when they please, he and several others have stuck around for the long term, as new people join. Gratitude seems like too small a



word to describe my feelings for these wonderful people, who often believed in me despite me not believing in myself.

The thing is, I don't want to be the sort of person always asking for money, and to be honest – apart from a cursory mention in episodes and a heartfelt public thank you if people do sign up – I try not to. Asking for money at any time, but especially right now, doesn't sit well with me.

So why am I writing about money in this column? Well, the ugly truth is that most podcasts still have hosting, software, and equipment upgrades to pay for. As much as I want to be completely financially capable, it's hard to find the money for everything alone. Without some incredibly generous people, this would all be so much more expensive. It's worth adding, I still don't make any money from this. Every penny I do earn from the Patreon gets ploughed back into the podcast. A non-profit mini-business, you might call it.

Ultimately, the free support you can give a podcast – a rating and review, a subscribe, a share on social media or even a quick message to say “I really enjoyed your episode” – means a lot to independent podcasts, and really is the easiest (and cheapest!) way to support anyone. There's never any obligation, but if you can spare a few quid a month, your favourite indie podcast will appreciate it more than you will ever know.

Recommendation Of The Month: On Second Watch

Six friends get together to watch and discuss some of the best and worst movies of the last century, but do they get better on second watch? Ever wondered how Sean Bean would have died in a movie? You'll have to listen to *On Second Watch* (www.oswpodcast.com) and find out!

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

Welcome to Movie Clinic, the column that focuses on the movies that have changed or influenced us in some way, in some cases, even saved our life. This month, I've chosen to write to you and revisit a couple of themes that have featured previously in the column: that of memory and perception, this time through the monochrome gaze of Mike Mills's *C'mon C'mon* (2021) and how, as a parent, there may be times we misrepresent the experiences of our children through our own perception, something that I've often wrestled with.

Dear Readers,

Last year, I heard the buzz around *C'mon C'mon*, with praise of its performances, in particular that of the young Woody Norman (Jesse).

C'mon C'mon is written and directed by Mike Mills (Beginners, 20th Century Women), it stars Joaquin Phoenix, Gaby Hoffmann, Scoot McNairy, and the aforementioned Norman. The story follows Phoenix's Johnny, a radio journalist, as he moves around America to capture interviews with children about their hopes and dreams for the future. This is at a time when he and his sister (Viv) – played by the brilliantly naturalistic Hoffman (Field of Dreams) – are very much estranged, after the loss of their mother. In addition Viv is largely a single parent to Jesse, a young boy (9 years old) who – whilst never referenced directly – appears to have ADHD, with perhaps some autistic traits. Viv gives her all to Jesse, with impulsive, therapeutic play, and music (opera), allowing him to explore himself through a narrative that often dissociates himself from reality. But when Jesse's dad Paul (McNairy) experiences a repeat period of depression, Viv asks Johnny to look after Jesse whilst she travels to support her estranged partner.

As the story develops, Johnny offers to look after Jesse for longer and take him on the road as he continues to record interviews for his documentary. What begins

to unfold is that Johnny is as much a child as Jesse and perhaps his questions to children about the future are in fact his way of working out his own. Alongside, Johnny becomes frustrated by some of Jesse's behaviours, routines and play, with a push/pull relationship that may even replicate that which he had with Viv as a child himself. Multiple times Johnny attempts to interview Jesse, though is always met with resistance. Interestingly, Jesse often attempts to turn the tables on Johnny, asking a string of questions, something Johnny is far from comfortable with. He's avoidant and dismissive of personal questions about relationships, and in many ways emotionally immature.

The film – beautifully shot in monochrome by Robbie Ryan – meanders about the streets and schools of America, as Johnny and Jesse's relationship develops to a point of understanding and acceptance, allowing Jesse to grow and Johnny to grow up.

Though what struck me most about *C'mon C'mon* were the themes of perception and memory. Jesse's anxieties are no better displayed than in his deep rooted fear that he'll forget past experiences. It's a theme we've covered in the column before, in how perhaps we do not consciously recall our childhood memories and that we're so reliant upon those around us at the time to recount those and reprint them upon our conscious mind as we grow. As an adult and now parent, this has always been a concept I've wrestled with, undoubtedly they will differ, but by how much?

C'mon C'mon draws to a gentle, melodic and poetic conclusion; Jesse takes to the mic – unbeknownst to Johnny – and records his own thoughts and in response, Johnny then does the same, attempting to answer the many questions he avoided, now with some remorse. Though it's in its final words, the film perfectly answers a question that has caused so much anxiety for Jesse – in saying to Johnny "I want to remember" – as a viewer and parent, as Johnny responds to Jesse through a recording, I felt an undeniable weight lift from both my shoulders and heart, in just these few words:



"I hope you do. And you got so upset...and I said. I'll remind you of everything."

In this moment, that fear of one's own lens creating a skewed perspective of a memory for another, in my case my daughter, was alleviated. I realised that my experiences, with her, my love for her, are part of her experience also. Her truth is supported by those around her and if it's genuine, honest and congruent it will be truthful, real and something none of us will ever forget, be it conscious or not.

Duncan

C'mon C'mon is a beautiful and affecting film that integrates so many layers in a subtle, nuanced way. The film has stayed with me and is a cinematic experience I won't forget, largely due to the emotional connection I had, one that will remain significant in recalling. This idea itself creates an even closer connection to the film and its themes, as I, like Jesse, don't have to be fearful of forgetting and can rely upon others to draw out or trigger my memory if required.

"Much of what they remember cannot be immediately recalled, but given the right cue they can access it."
(Baddeley, 2013)

British Psychologist Alan Baddeley, alongside Graham Hitch, through their research, developed the Model of Working Memory which focused on three elements: the Phonological Loop (auditory/verbal information), the Visual-spatial Sketchpad (visual/spatial movement, texture) and the Episodic Buffer (short-term store of information).

In many ways the idea that a cue, whether that be auditory, visual, or verbal etc., may trigger the access of a memory highlights the importance of others around you. If our recollection serves as a cue and comes from a place of truth, then we can to a degree relinquish the concern of tainting or influencing another's experience or memory, as perhaps they will, ultimately, find their own way to the truth.

Be kind, be safe and take care...

Duncan

If you want to contact this column, you can email me via clinic@filmstories.co.uk

NOTES:

MIND: www.mind.org.uk

National Autistic Society: www.autism.org.uk

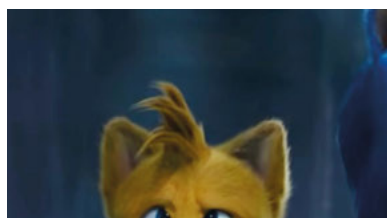


Got 5 minutes spare? Well we're got a couple of puzzles for you.
That's right... It's Coffee Time!

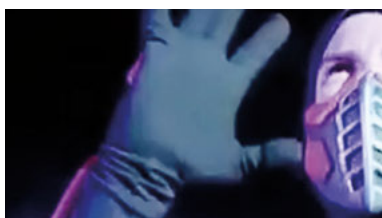


PICTURE QUIZ

Can you name these computer game movies?



1



2



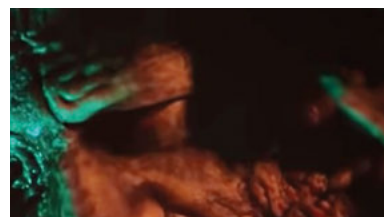
3



4



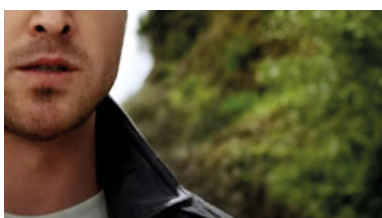
5



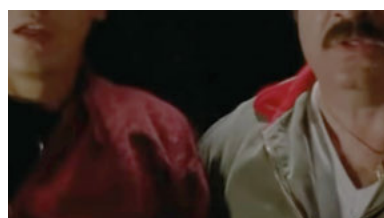
6



7



8



9

FS MOONFAUX

Which is the odd moon out? Wake up Sheeple!



FS MOONFALSE

One frame of *Moonfall*, seven changes! Good luck...



Games Movies Quiz: 1. *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*; 2. *Mortal Combat Annihilation*; 3. *Doom*; 4. *Double Dragon*; 5. *Rampage*; 6. *Resident Evil: Welcome to Raccoon City*; 7. *House of the Dead 2*; 8. *Need for Speed*; 9. *Super Mario Bros*. Moonfaux: Top row, far right is the odd moon out. Moonfalse: (From left) 1. There are two extra lights on the ceiling; 2. FS badge; 3. Extra zips; 4. ABBA appreciation; 5. Extra bloke; 6. North not South; 7. Missing badge on jacket.

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6. Spring 2021



7. Summer 2021



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1. December 2018



2. February 2019



3. March 2019



4. April 2019



5. May 2019



6. June 2019



7. July 2019



8. August 2019



10. October 2019



11. December 2019



12. January 2020



13. February 2020



14. March 2020



15. April 2020



16. June 2020



17. July 2020



18. August 2020



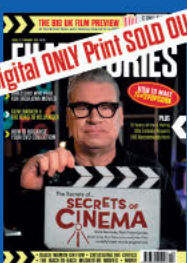
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20. November 2020



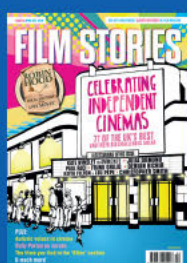
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22. February 2021



23. March 2021



24. April 2021



25. June 2021



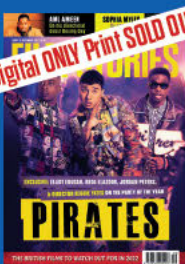
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27. August 2021



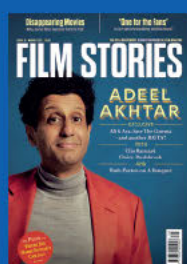
28. October 2021



29. December 2021



30. January 2022



31. March 2022



32. April 2022



33. May 2022

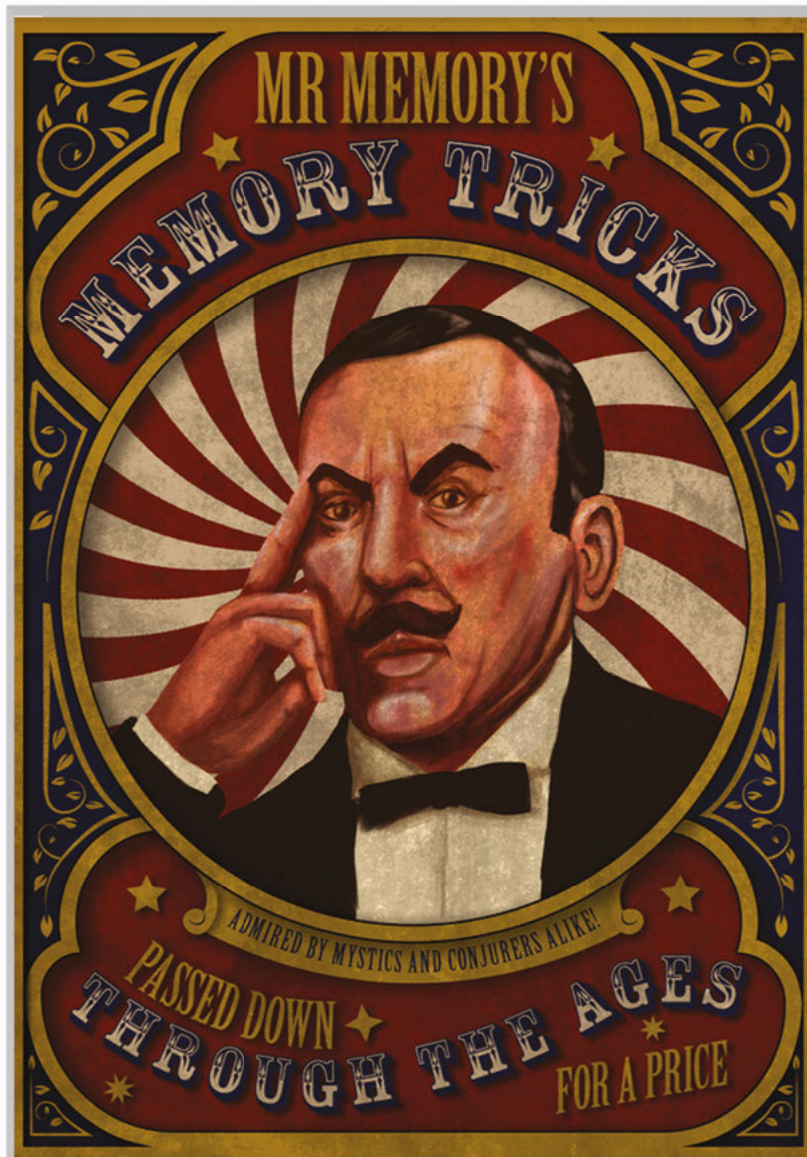


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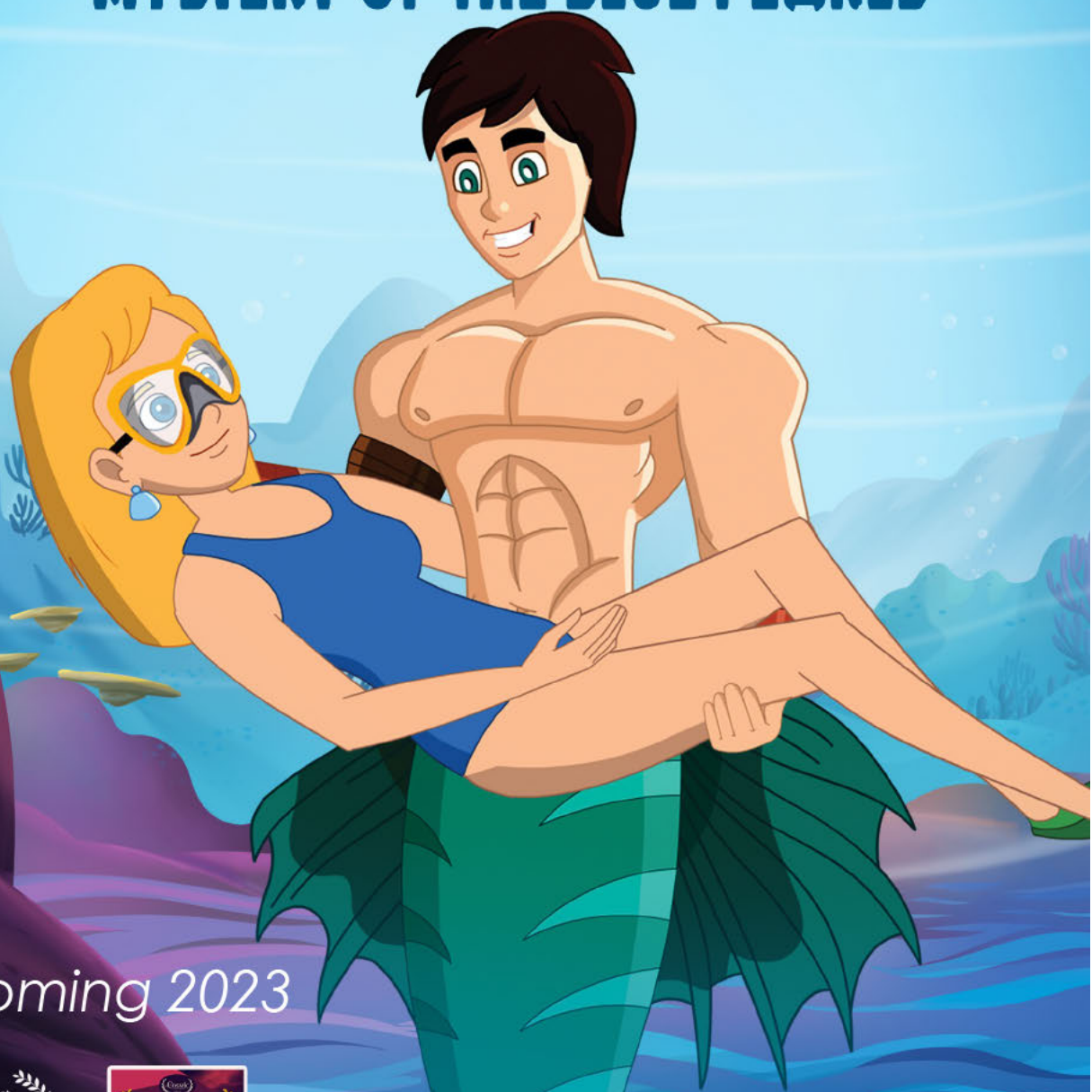


6. The 39 Steps

Vanilla Ice Carl Van Dyke Margaret Huerta Kim Cameron

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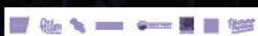
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