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(From left) Luke Newton, Claudia Jessie, Ruth Gemmell and Hannah Dodd in a still from *Bridgerton*. LIAM DANIEL/NETFLIX

Full steam ahead

Shonda Rhimes, the award-winning creator of successful shows including *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Inventing Anna*, talks of the couple in focus in Season 3 of *Bridgerton*

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After *Bridgerton*’s chaste-ish Season 2, which told the love story of Viscount Bridgerton, Anthony (played by Jonathan Bailey) and fiery Kate Sharma (Simone Ashley), will Season 3 be as steamy as Season 1? This was the question plaguing fans of the Regency-era romance ahead of the four-episode drop of Season 3 on May 16. “I don’t compare the seasons in that way and don’t think of Season 2 as chaste,” says Shonda Rhimes, executive producer of the historical romance. “It was the story that was told. We’re doing

these stories based on Julia Quinn’s eight *Bridgerton* novels and the romances are quite different.” Speaking over a call from the New York area, Shonda says, “Everyone’s life is not the same. The story of the Duke of Hastings (Regé-Jean Page) in the first season was about virginity and sexuality and discovering all of those things. Season 2 was different and Season 3 has its own flavour as well. There’s some steam obviously, but it is based on the story.”

In focus
The couple in focus in Season 3 is Penelope (played by Nicola Coughlan, one of the three daughters of Baroness Portia Featherington) and Colin (the third *Bridgerton* son, played by Luke Newton). “In prior seasons, we were always introducing someone new. This time we already know the two people who are going to become a romantic couple. It is interesting to watch people who grew up on the show find each other.”

The clothes in *Bridgerton* contribute to its gorgeousness quotient. “I don’t necessarily oversee the costumes,” says the 54-year-old writer-producer of hit shows including *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Inventing Anna*. “That’s my producing partner, Betsy Beers’ love and joy.”

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vogue

eyewear

#letsvogue with

Taapsee Pannu



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Instapick

Light's up for Buddha: Despite the rain, Seoul's streets bloomed with pink lotus lanterns! Thousands celebrated Buddha's upcoming birthday at the Yeon Deung Hoe festival, a 1,000-year-old tradition now recognised by UNESCO. The vibrant parade showcased Buddhist themes alongside playful cartoon characters.



Talkingpoint

Sin City's bye: Vegas landmark Mirage says goodbye! The iconic hotel-casino, credited with launching the city's luxury era, shuts its doors in July for a dramatic transformation. Emerging in 2027 as Hard Rock Las Vegas, it will feature a towering, guitar-shaped hotel, a far cry from its Polynesian theme.

THE COLUMN THAT WASN'T

Matter of days

Caught between the twin towers of Kunal Vijayakar and voting, Cyrus is stressed beyond belief

Cyrus Broacha

There is a lot of pressure, this weekend, and it's not just from my middle-aged bladder. Oh God, why did I bring that up? Now, I want to relieve myself, which would not be fair to you, dear reader. Keeping you waiting mid-sentence, whilst I attend to something ridiculously basic, and yet, clearly one of life's truly underrated pleasures. Okay, let's get this article out of the toilet that it has plunged into and start all over again. On your marks, get set... go!

I'm feeling a lot of pressure, and its all due to two cataclysmic events. (Keep in mind the writer, namely me, has no idea what the word cataclysmic even means in the first place. He's just, and by he, I mean me, sticking to a vow he made to



SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

his IV-standard teacher that he would use at least two four-syllable words in every composition that he would ever write, or plagiarise). Specifically, there are two dates – the 19th and 20th of this month – that are causing this turbulence, (if you pronounce 'turbulence' slowly it sounds like a four-syllable word, by the way). Your question to me is: "What issue do I have with these dates? My answer to you is, "Please, don't be so impatient, obviously I'll come to that point otherwise why would I ever have mentioned these dates?"

On May 19 is the birthday celebration of a person, who, seen from his own eyes, is a very close friend. However, seen from my eyes, is more like that distant relative who is always, and unnecessarily, in your house. I don't think its right to name Kunal Vijayakar by name so let's call him Andy. At another time in our lives, I would have celebrated his (Andy's not Kunal Vijayakar's), birthday, happily. Truth be told, in the past I often did. And by often, I mean just once a year, throughout the 90s. This year though Andy, (not Kunal Vijayakar), turns 60 years old. That's two years beyond the official retirement age acceptable in Hindustan. What kind of depraved vulgarity

allows someone to celebrate such a late birthday, and that too with great pomp and splendour in a fancy five-star hotel. I mean, is he, Andy, (not Kunal Vijayakar), turning six or 60? On principal, I was going to boycott the birthday celebrations, but then I heard they will serve aam ras, and no civilised palate can deny itself aam ras.

This brings us to May 20. Here, my problem is to do with my experiences on polling day from the past. Yes, its our day to vote in Mumbai. Now, for us in South Mumbai, after we get over the pain that it's a dry day, six or seven of us actually turn up to cast our vote. I am one of the six or seven. Others include those standing in our constituency and their parents. Sadly, I'm scarred from my experiences in 2014 and 2019.

On both those occasions, I reached the polling booth at 6am sharp, but I found that no one was ready for me. Malabar Hill has its own constitution, and doesn't perform at that hour. It's embarrassing when the voter is ready before the polling booth. If this happens again to me this time, I'm shifting to Calcutta, where technically dawn breaks ever earlier. Caught between the twin towers of Kunal Vijayakar, (oops Andy), and voting, I'm stressed beyond belief. The worst part, I can't even get a drink, cause in preparation of voting on the 20th, they've made 19th a dry day too!

The writer has dedicated his life to communism. Though only on weekends.

pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours, and everything else you need to plan your social calendar. For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Gear up

Looking for an accessory for your cycling adventures? Check out **Tudor's Pelagos FXD Chrono** Cycling Edition! The lightweight carbon watch boasts a cycling-specific tachymeter scale. Shop on tudorwatch.com at ₹4,62,100. For another summer accessory, check out **Vogue Eyewear's** latest collection featuring Taapsee Pannu. Shop online at multiple stores starting ₹3,000.



Art and theatre

Arts Illustrated is launching **AI 50-Edition 1, Sculpture** — a book showcasing 50 sculptors from across India. The group show of the featured artists will be held at Art Houz, 123 Sterling Road, Nungambakkam until May 30. For World Theatre Day Crea-Play is putting up an interactive children's play **Pandi the Indie** at IDAM today at 4pm. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹200



Big screen

Tired of watching movies in theatres? Try open air cinema! Catch **Mayakkam Enna** at Lake View open air theatre in **Chetpet Eco Park** tomorrow at 7.15pm. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com at ₹199. For another timeless movie experience, catch the Tamil classic **Vinnaithaandi Varuvaaya** at One Paramount with **Sunset Cinema Club**. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹550.



Home oasis

Dressing your home? Embrace the poolside look with bright cushions, butterfly-inspired trays and more! **vVyom By Shuchita** curates a stylish and functional collection. Shop on vyom.com starting ₹1,800. For furnishing, check out the collection by **Sans Souci and Christopher Guy** where luxury lighting meets high-end furniture! Take virtual tours and shop in store starting approximately ₹1,50,000.



Mango madness

Missing mangoes? Head to **Sheraton Grand's** Mango Festival throughout May with dishes like mango rasam, double tadka mango daal and more. Call 9384832956 for reservations at ₹2,349. For another unique experience, head to the **Hanu Reddy residences** on May 25 for Chef Goku's tasting menu, featuring mango dishes from around the world. Call 7200233230 for reservations at ₹2,500.



Paint it red!

Explore **art therapy and journalling!** Artist Bhanu Vivekanandan hosts a beginner-friendly workshop with supplies, snacks, and a journal kit at the Backyard Adyar tomorrow from 4pm to 6pm. Call 7397296868 to book your slot at ₹1,499. Want to try your hand at **fluid art**? Blend colours to create fun patterns at Antispot today at 3pm. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹750.



Summer fashion

Experience a vibrant clash of aesthetics! **RajiRamniq's** playful prints meet Archana Jaju's upcycled kalamkari at Collage on May 18 and 19. Shop for shirts, co-cords, dresses, sarees, and more starting ₹15,000. Looking for something breathable and stylish? Check out **The Kaftan Company's** first men's kaftan collection! Shop online on Myntra, TataCliq and more starting ₹1,499.

What makes the 140-year-old watch brand resonate with generations of watch enthusiasts? Hear it from Georges Kern, CEO of Breitling who recently introduced the company's latest collection in Delhi

Magandeep Singh

Recently, Georges Kern, the CEO of Breitling, was in India. Founded in 1884, the 140-year-old watchmaking company continues to be a youthful brand.

Every watch brand has a USP and if I had to pin one to them, I would say it is retro-modern. It has a harken-back aesthetic, which is quite timeless, and yet it consistently manages to match the 21st Century style denominator speed. "Retro doesn't have to mean vintage or dusty," clarified Georges during his recent presentation at The Oberoi, New Delhi, where we were invited to see the brand's latest launches for the year.

But how is it modern, as many smart-watch wearers counter – what's the point of a chronograph, or a slide rule on a watch? A watch on our wrist can tell time – but in context of the times today, it is a piece of art worn at the end of our arm. In that sense, a slide rule is a lovely way to make an otherwise



In tandem with time

plain dial look busy and intricate. A chronograph, similarly, adds texture.

Breitling is unique in that way. From the Navitimer to SuperOcean, it is not known for just one type of watch. "Before 2017, Breitling was focussed on the aviation segment. With the new product segmentation across air, land, sea, and professional we've been able to tap into new and existing

communities within these categories," says Georges.

He adds, "Further, we have seen a large increase in our female customer base, thanks to collections such as the Navitimer 32 and 36, the Chronomat 32 and



(Clockwise from left) Breitling Navitimer Automatic 41; Georges Kern, CEO of Breitling. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



36, and the Superocean 36 – a reference to the case diameter, brought down from the regular 40+ mm sizes. The smaller case diameters make these models feel more accessible to women."

Not only in styles and shapes, Breitling is also democratic about the movement within. "Our approach to addressing both automatic and quartz movements involves maintaining the brand's commitment to quality, precision, and purpose. Being a generalist brand, while a majority of our watches are mechanical, we've broadened our offering with a wide range of new products, from the sporty Endurance Pro, equipped with a SuperQuartz movement that

provides exceptional accuracy, to the Premier Chronograph line powered by the self-winding Breitling Caliber 01, a manufacture movement designed for maximum precision, reliability, and functionality," says Georges.

Breitling is also an anti-metaverse brand. They like people to walk in to their space and interact with the watches – feel them, touch them, try them on – and that builds a more lasting resonance with the brand. So they keep adding to their existing network of three boutiques (Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune) and 22 retail points across India.

My parting question, was an obvious one – If you had to sum up the legacy of Breitling in a few words, what would it be?

Says Georges, "We invented the modern chronograph, equipped the first pilot's watch with a circular slide rule and sent the first Swiss wristwatch into space. We co-developed the first automatic chronograph movement, miniaturised the first international Emergency beacon in a watch, were the first to make our movements 100% COSC certified (Contrôle officiel suisse des Chronomètres, the official Swiss Testing Institute, responsible for certifying the precision of Swiss watches)."

He adds, "Today we're still breaking ground with innovations like the first traceable watch, and an array of manufacture movements designed and assembled at the Breitling Chronometrie. The stories behind these pioneering endeavors will be playing out all through our anniversary year – a milestone we're celebrating with the fitting slogan, "140 Years of Firsts".



Gouda times ahead

Embark on a nine-course adventure through India's finest artisanal cheeses, curated by Chef Goku and Namrata Sundaresan of Kase Cheese, Chennai. Savour unique flavours with dishes like stracciatella salad with fettunta from Italy, grilled kalari kebab from India, ema dashi from Bhutan and more. Reserve your table for this exclusive cheese tasting journey on May 18, 7pm to 11pm at Focaccia, Hyatt Regency, Chennai. For reservations at ₹3,500 plus taxes per person, call +91 9884369333.



Bon voyage!

Resorts World Cruises has announced new voyages for Indian travellers from Dubai on the Resorts World One to explore Arabian Gulf gems like Dubai, Sir Bani Yas Island,

Doha and more. It offers a cultural immersion with onboard entertainment like movies and themed nights. This new route will serve certified vegetarian and Jain cuisine options for Indian travellers. Set sail from October 18, 2024 to April 13, 2025. Book your journeys on rwcruises.com



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At the India International Centre at Lodhi Road, Engendered – a Transnational Arts and Human Rights organisation – featured the Delhi premiere of Academy Award-nominee Deepa Mehta’s documentary film *I Am Sirat*, co-directed by its titular trans star, Sirat Taneja. The evening, which gradually turned into a lively gabfest among Delhi’s queer circles, movie buffs and media mavens, was backed by the Dutch and Belgian embassies.

I Am Sirat looks at what it means to be trans in India through the journey of Sirat Taneja. The film makes its way through Sirat’s life as a trans woman in Delhi, juxtaposing her dual existence as Aman at home and Sirat in the wider world. Having already premiered the film at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), followed by screenings in London, Chandigarh and Dharamshala, the Delhi-born Sirat finally

After premiering the film at the Toronto International Film Festival, the Delhi-born titular trans star Sirat Taneja finally finds her way home

found her way home.

At TIFF, the film had Sirat positively floored by the outpouring of support, leaving her at a loss for words as the collective sentiments reassured her, “You’re not alone, we’re right here with you.” But it was the screening in her beloved Delhi that truly tugged at her heartstrings, her hometown being where her family and roots lie. For at its core, the film was Sirat’s quest for acceptance among those nearest and dearest to her.

Her own voice
Best known for the infamously divisive Elements trilogy, the film marked Mehta’s return to documentary style after 20-odd years. Speaking to *The Hindu*, the filmmaker recounted her initial conversation with Sirat, who sought to share her story

authentically. “The film has always been a collaborative effort,” Mehta emphasised, recalling Sirat’s desire to have her story heard, having been friends for four years.

Initially hesitant, Mehta recognised the importance of Sirat’s perspective and the necessity for a collaborative approach rather than assuming full creative control. “I first declined the idea of the film,” Mehta admitted, “until Sirat agreed to do it herself.” This realisation led to the decision to adopt an unscripted documentary style, allowing Sirat’s voice to shape the narrative organically. The result is a unique visual narrative shot entirely on a smartphone, one that blends Sirat’s personal perspective vertically with Mehta’s broader landscape shots for context.



The trans community is brimming with talent — we have actors, chefs, lawyers... we should all get the same opportunities to get ahead

SIRAT TANEJA

Filming felt like second nature to Sirat, who, thanks to her natural knack for Instagram Reels, practically had a camera glued to her hand throughout. “From dawn till dusk, the camera was my constant companion. Except for when I bathed of course,” she quipped.

Despite her own story shaping the narrative, Sirat advocates a fresh non-trans perspective on trans tales, believing in the power of

(Left) The Delhi screening of *I Am Sirat* at the India International Centre; and Sirat Taneja.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

outsider curiosity to spark essential questions. Yet, she is steadfast in her belief that trans roles in cinema should be owned by trans actors. “The trans community is brimming with talent – we have actors, chefs, lawyers, doctors, models and more – and we should all get the same opportunities to get ahead,” she said.

When discussing the challenges encountered by Indian filmmakers tackling sensitive topics within their own culture through western productions, Mehta dismissed any notion of an easier path. “It’s definitely not,” she asserted. “The effigies burned in protest of my earlier films stand testament to that,” she added, recalling the incendiary reception to her work, with protesters burning down the cinema that first screened her 1996 film, *Fire*.

Sirat’s journey towards acceptance has been intricately tied to her relationship with her conservative mother, who refuses to see her for who she is. On that note, Mehta highlights the centrality of a woman’s right to self-determinism to the film, noting society’s tendency to label such acts as selfish, only when it concerns women.

While boasting its captivating lead, *I Am Sirat* still grapples with its pacing, leaving much desired between mother and daughter. Though she still wages a war for acceptance at home, Sirat’s undying optimism is what seems to hold her story in place.

In the midst of the adoring applause from the crowd, Sirat is buoyed with confidence about the adventures that lie ahead. Her journey carries her to Mumbai’s Kashish Pride Film Festival, with a promising new project twinkling on the horizon.



All eyes on BAFTA

In partnership with Netflix, BAFTA Breakthrough India is in its fourth year and is known as a platform that ‘identifies and celebrates the next generation of talented professionals in the films, games, and television industries across the country’. 2024 also marks the second time the BAFTA Breakthrough programme opens applications simultaneously in India, the US and the UK. Recipients of the year-long initiative will be part of meetings with industry stalwarts, and also receive professional coaching. Access to all of BAFTA’s events for the duration of the programme will also be provided.



Upcoming on Netflix

After almost seven years since the release of her last feature film, Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow is returning with a thriller film for Netflix. The announcement was made during the streamer’s upfront presentation on Wednesday.

According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the new film follows a group of White House officials “scrambling to deal with an incoming missile attack on the US”. The report adds that the film’s tone will be in the same vein as *Zero Dark Thirty*, Bigelow’s 2012 hit film on the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

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Full steam

ahead

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Season 3 of *Bridgerton* sees the team push the envelope, says Shonda. “We have tried new things and some of it turned out extraordinary. I love that every costume that you see on every background player everywhere, is bespoke, it has been made for them. The detail and colour are incredible.”

Representation matters

The racially integrated Regency period of *Bridgerton* featuring people of colour holding positions of power was a conscious decision, says Shonda.

“We created this world. We made a rule that I don’t write or am part of shows that I am not represented in. We made a world based on the idea that Queen Charlotte (Golda Rosheuvel) was a woman of colour.”

Setting pop anthems to classical music in *Bridgerton* was a genius move. “It’s been great to do that. We wanted to stay true to a classical feeling and also find ways to give the show a modern edge. That’s been going on since the very first season.”

It has been powerful, Shonda says, because it is music we can relate to. “It also sounds different with an entirely new musical story behind it, which is wonderful.”

Classic pop

Since it had an Indian flavour, Season 2 had the title song from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham...* “That is also a story that Betsy is



going to have to tell you. I work on the story and editing and Betsy works on the music and costumes. I don’t know how we settled on that particular song, but I do know that once we got it in the show, it was perfect.”

Even though Quinn’s novels are romances, Shonda says they felt literary. “The novels had compelling characters. I could see myself in the characters and that helps in universal storytelling. I wanted to be in that world. We

don’t make shows that we don’t want to watch. We make everything because we’re obsessed with it. I was obsessed with the world of *Bridgerton* and that’s how it began.”

Century not out

Shonda is the first woman to create three shows (*Grey’s*

(Clockwise from left) Scenes from *Bridgerton*; (bottom) Shonda Rhimes. LIAM DANIEL/NETFLIX



Anatomy, *Private Practice* and *Scandal*) that crossed the 100-episode mark.

“Honestly, you don’t know that a show is going to be a 100-episode one until you’re at 100 episodes or 300 or 400 episodes. For me, it’s just about being passionate about the writing. If I’m excited about a

story then that’s what I want to do. I learned very early with *Grey’s* that a show you think will maybe go a season or two, could go on for a very long time. So you better be ready to commit.”

While we have had to wait for two long years for Season 3 of *Bridgerton*, we got a little fix of a bodice ripper with *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* in 2023.

Shonda, the creator and writer of the show, says, “In *Bridgerton*, Charlotte is this powerful woman who is running this world that she’s in the midst of, with a sad, personal story. I wanted to tell the story of how she came to be Queen Charlotte, how she fell in love with King George and what that marriage has been like, what that spark had been. I enjoyed watching her evolve.”

Powerful and tragic

Shonda says she also wanted to understand Lady Danbury, played by Adjoa Andoh. “You get a clear picture of who Lady Danbury is when you watch *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*. Now you are coming to Season 3 with this very different knowledge of these two women and it shapes how you look at the



season and those characters now.”

Mental illness is dealt with poignantly in *Queen Charlotte*. “We are telling the story of Queen Charlotte and King George and you can’t tell that story without speaking of King George’s illness and finding a way to discuss it. I know he’s been called Mad King George and people make fun of him. I believe in stepping into the shoes of the characters and talking about them in three-dimensional ways and that was the goal with *Queen Charlotte*.”

Penelope’s journey

Shonda has a favorite moment in Season 3. “It is a spoiler that I’m not supposed to say (*laughs*). Watching Penelope going through this journey is fascinating. Nicola’s work as that character is incredible. Watching that character come into her own and develop into who she is, is beautiful. Her storyline is one of my favorites.”

“We were fortunate with casting,” says Shonda. “We didn’t have a problem putting these characters together. We had an embarrassment of riches, so many actors to choose from. Each one of these actors was picked because they were exactly right for the part.”

Having worked in network television and streaming, Shonda says she does not have a preference between binge or single-episode drops.

“I’ve done both. When I was writing for network television, I was writing for single-episode drops. When I am writing for streaming I’m not. It’s just a different way of looking at how you tell a story.”

When you are writing single episode television, Shonda says, the goal is to get the audience to return the next week.

“In the binge model you’re trying to tell a full story divided into episodes, but you don’t have to worry about the audience returning for the next episode. The goal is to get people involved and tell a full story that maybe only culminates in that last episode.”

Apart from being the person behind ginormously successful shows, Shonda is also the author of the bestselling memoir, *Year of Yes: How to Dance It Out, Stand In the Sun and Be Your Own Person*, which came out in 2015.

On whether a follow-up is on the cards, Shonda laughs, saying, “I’m considering that, now that we’re coming up on the 10th anniversary.”

Part One of Season 3 of Bridgerton is on Netflix, with Part Two dropping on June 13.

Shilajit Mitra

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Sudhish Kamath cuts a curious figure in Indian independent cinema. His chatty, self-referential films are rarely arthouse events. Rather, he makes quick, quirky, low-budget movies in the tradition of the early mumblecores. Sudhish, a former film critic, writes, directs and self-finances his films. But after over two decades of toughing it out all by himself, on the fringes of an indifferent industry, he’s ready to hang up his boots.

Last year, Sudhish announced his newest film – *Culture Culture*, a stoner comedy that satirises a supine media and entertainment world – as the last he will independently direct. His rationale is straightforward and hard to rebut; years of self-producing his movies have left him drained and exhausted, both financially and spiritually.

“I’m done, man,” Sudhish says with candid finality. “I kept pouring my own money into movies thinking I was pursuing art. I was living out of a suitcase to fund my last film. But then my friends told me, it’s become almost like a gambling habit. I had to understand and draw the line.”

Play it again, Sam

Culture Culture, Sudhish’s marijuana-addled last hurrah, initially took shape as a direct sequel to his 2010 film *Good Night Good Morning*, a black-and-white romance about two strangers who connect on New Year’s Eve. Along with *Side A Side B* (2017), it rounds out his self-described ‘retro romance’ trilogy.

“We shot the earlier version of the film for three days and had already spent 15 lakhs on it. We decided to shelve it because nothing was going right on that project.” This was in December 2019; once the pandemic struck, he lost his skeletal crew including his director of photography from South Africa. With filming restrictions in place and no real budget to go on, Sudhish decided to ‘DIY’ the whole thing, investing in modest shooting gear and handling costumes, edit, and visual effects all by himself.

He also vastly reworked the screenplay, expanding its satirical ambit. The impetus was the frenzied smear campaigns and accusations of drug use against Bollywood celebrities following the suicide of Sushant Singh Rajput (all while, as the film points out, the GDP plummeted and a conglomerate acquired stakes in a major airport).

Anav (Shaurya Tyagi), the protagonist of *Culture Culture*, is a stereotypically clueless Hindi film hero, a spaced-out doofus with “no opinions” who walks into a media witchhunt when he assents to taking a drug test during an interview. To complicate matters, the headstrong journalist, Ila (Rashi Mal), turns out to be his ex.

Sudhish describes the plot as a ‘stoner Casablanca’, with nods to *Ijaazat* (1987) and *Nayak* (2001). “One of my influences was the Woody Allen comedy *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), in which he examines the figure of the Bogart tough guy through a man in the 1970s. Here, I wanted to do the same with the modern Indian hero.”

Culture Culture recalls the loose, free-associating style of X:



The great Bollywood trip

The filmmaker’s latest, ‘Culture Culture’, is a stoner comedy on our distended times; it’s also the last independent film he will ever make

Past Is Present (2015), an experimental film Sudhish co-directed with 10 other filmmakers. There is a 25-minute stretch in this one that unfolds like a bad trip, the colours on the screen smudging over à la *A Scanner Darkly* (2006). The cinematic references fly thick and fast: *Pineapple Express*, *Say Anything*, *Metropolis*, *Rang De Basanti*, you name it.

There are whimsical details that leap out: for instance, a Shah Rukh Khan-shaped Ganesha idol that Anav lugs around, a goofy yet



(Left) A still from *Culture Culture*; (below) Sudhish Kamath. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

touching symbol, as Sudhish says, of the bondedness of Indian culture.

“The film is set on Visarjan day in Mumbai. It’s a day of letting go. I got in touch with a *murtikar* (sculptor) who does Ganesha idols. We got the prop made for 10,000 bucks.”

Cameron Crowe, one of Sudhish’s personal heroes, makes a cameo via Zoom in *Culture Culture* (there are other cameos by Nagesh Kukunoor and Suchitra Pillai). Curiously, in place of a pre-written scene, Crowe was provided questions; the veteran American director wrote the bit himself, funnily riffing on the modern-day relevance of his famous *Jerry Maguire* line: You complete me (“I got it from a Joni Mitchell song”).

“Crowe sweetly recorded the video and sent it to me. I was so thrilled that I didn’t have the heart to make him re-record it in 4k. Resolution, anyway, is overrated.”

Culture Culture takes a comic view of the apathy and disorientation of the pandemic years. Sudhish says he did not wish to make light of the cost of media sensationalism during those difficult, tragic times.

Professionally, Sudhish is in a better place than before. He has written two episodes of The Family Man Season 3

Its frankly anti-establishment tone – there is a bit about the Prime Minister’s ‘cloud cover’ remark on the Balakot airstrikes – likely ensured the film would never make it to streaming platforms (a theatrical release was even more inconceivable). Instead, Sudhish is releasing it directly on YouTube for a limited period.

“I want it to be an appointment-viewing experience. If it gets enough views through the week, I will consider bringing it back.”

Farewell, My Lovely

Professionally, Sudhish is in a better place than before. He has written two episodes of *The Family Man* Season 3 (Krishna DK, one half of the Raj & DK duo, had come to a preview screening of *Culture Culture* and offered him the gig). He will continue to seek out mainstream projects, a chance to expand his horizons while attaining a measure of financial security.

“Unlike in the US, we never had a proper distribution channel in India for independent films. Streamers, too, are mostly going for big-star titles and thrillers.”

He tried getting *Culture Culture* into festivals, to little avail. It was perhaps too light-hearted for them, he figures. “The thing with making middle-of-the-road films is that you get left in the middle of the road,” Sudhish laughs.

Still, he looks back at his independent career with a mix of pride and relief. “It’s time for me to let go,” he says, much like Anav with his SRK Ganesha on Visarjan day.

Culture Culture is now playing on YouTube.



Designers David Abraham, Rakesh Thakore and Kevin Nigli have a new address for their handcrafted apparel and home brand Abraham & Thakore in New Delhi's affluent neighbourhood, Defence Colony

to have many curly lines when we can express our design language with a single straight line?"

This philosophy of aesthetics reverberates in the brand's latest Spring-Summer home and apparel edit, Body Language. Housed in the new atelier, the range features numbers, alphabets and symbols, to form a playful typography. It explores ikat, ajrakh, brocades, badla, sequin, and laser cut work. "In every collection, there's a composite of everything – there will be silks from Varanasi, industrial tencel linen blends from mills in Surat, Maheshwar silk cotton woven on a handloom. I have many ikat fabrics being woven right now in Telangana. So, we work with many techniques in several clusters at the same time," informs David.

Last year, the brand exhibited its textiles and ceramics collection at the AD Design Show. At this store too, there are napkins and table runners dotted with the brand's signature kantha stitches. It also showcases porcelain bowls, marble cheese plates, scented candles, ikat bed linen and artwork centred on the motif of the dot. "We get all our manufacturing done in and around Delhi. All the design work, prototypes and sample collection is done in our studio," says David as he explains that it takes about six months for a collection to reach the store's shelves. "It's a slow process. By the time the collection hits the store, we are already onto our next collection," he adds.

David shares that the brand has several workshops, "approximately 30 to 40 vendors and suppliers, across the country that vary according to the textiles, techniques".

He states that the brand's association with its ikat weavers dates back to its first collection. "For ikat, it's Andhra Pradesh, for brocade, it's Varanasi, for glass there are factories in Faridabad or Moradabad, ceramics are done somewhere outside Delhi where we also have our shoemakers – so its scattered and we work with a lot of small scale industries across India."

At the new store, clothing starts at ₹3,990 and home collections start at ₹14,990.

Maximising on minimalism

The interiors of Abraham & Thakore's latest store, co-designed by Studio Organon, compliment the label's visual grammar

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Designers David Abraham, Rakesh Thakore and Kevin Nigli have a new address for their handcrafted apparel and home brand Abraham & Thakore in New Delhi's affluent neighbourhood, Defence Colony. Co-designed by architecture firm Studio Organon, the shop's interiors compliment the label's minimalist visual grammar with polished, white-marbled walls (diagonally and spaciouly stained with faint streaks of black) and square-mesh patterned terrazzo flooring. An open closet lines the store's walls which are mounted with garment rods. Black shelves are dedicated to dainty ceramics, while linens and



carpets accentuate the furniture that fills the store's remaining space.

This is the brand's third store in the capital, an upgrade of sorts from its nearly 12-year-old outlet in the city's South-East vicinity. "When this

property came up, it had a large space (about 2,000 sq. ft.). We shut the previous store to accommodate a vast collection of fashion and lifestyle here," says David. He lists the brand's other two

establishments – one in The Dhan Mill and another in DLF Promenade, Vasant Kunj. "But these are smaller stores that focus more on fashion," he adds.

The label's aesthetics pivot on Indian textiles and crafts. Its Autumn-Winter 2011-12 double ikat silk houndstooth sari and shirt is part of the permanent archives of Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Since 1992, the brand has opened stores in London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Singapore, Rome and Kuwait, but it started to expand its footprint in India from 2022 after Reliance Brands (RBL) acquired its majority stake. "Currently we have six stores in India, with two more coming up in Hyderabad next month and Mumbai by September," says David.

He credits the label's success to its tact of finding the simplest way of communicating complex designs. "We are interested in complex structures, when it comes to weaving, like our double ikat is a

very complex weave. We always try to focus on the essence of a particular technique. So, we think: do we really want to have 10 forms or patterns in a design when we can have just one? Is it important



(Right) A flowery ensemble from the Été edit; (below) Anavila Misra. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Été, brimming with rose motifs and lace, is Anavila Misra's love letter to this season

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In 1999, designer Anavila Misra visited Puducherry for the first time. Twenty-five years later, she now has a collection dedicated to the Franco-Tamil culture of the coastal town. The smells, sights, and sounds from that trip that remained ingrained in her memory now find representation in her latest collection, titled Été, which means summer in French. The town's laidback pace appealed to Anavila, whose clothes embody sustainability and slow fashion. "Right from the unique architecture to the way the people live, and even little things like windows with lace curtains, old recipes in boulangeries, the scent of roses mixed with coffee... all reflect a blend of cultures," says Anavila, who was in Chennai over the weekend to showcase Été at GoodEarth.

During the initial stages of the edit's creation, as Anavila delved into Indo-French customs and traditions, more elements surfaced. It was a challenge to pick one idea that would front the collection. Finally, she settled for the rose.

"Flowers and Nature have always been part of my garments," she says. And thus, the rose plays a stellar role here, with its presence in every garment, hand-painted, block-printed, embroidered and in hand-block prints mixed with applique. There is a lot of



detailing, she adds. For example, the blooming pattern features all the stages of floration while forming a lattice network of rose creepers. The garments also have words fleur d'amour, French for flower of love, embroidered across them, and lace detailing reminiscent of French aristocracy.

For the most part, white is the designer's choice for this collection, along with shades inspired by the French Riviera of the East, this includes pastel green, smoke blue, blush, and soft yellow, a colour synonymous with Puducherry's sunny countenance. The team at the studio has been working on Été since last March. The collection has 92 pieces, including saris, pin-tucked blouses and tops, kurtis, co-ord sets, shirt dresses, trousers, and jackets in linen, khadi silk, and khadi. The piece de résistance is the khadi silk sari in ivory that took a team of applique artisans and hand embroiderers 190 days to complete.

After showcasing the range in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai, Anavila says she has made up her mind to go back to Puducherry later this year, pause for a bit, and revel in the laidback, simple joys of life that it offers.

Été is available at GoodEarth and on anavila.com. Prices start at ₹14,500.

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Nightmares of Xenomorphs lingered long after Nirupesh Joshi first saw Ridley Scott's sci-fi horror classic *Alien*.

Yet, the terror was not enough to extinguish the spark in his heart – a fascination with the vast unknown of space. Years later, that passion culminated in a real feat: Bangalore Watch Company, a watch brand he co-founded with his wife, Mercy Amalraj, sent a wristwatch to space. A customised two kilogram carbon-fibre unmanned spacecraft launched from Sheffield, UK earlier this year. It carried the prototype watch [called the Apogee Karman Line] on a stratospheric balloon flight. The balloon reached 1,14,000 feet (35 kilometres), experiencing -60°C without oxygen. Exposed, the Apogee endured this harsh environment before the balloon's controlled descent.

"The watch worked flawlessly throughout the flight with no visible timekeeping issues, condensation, or other issues despite extreme pressure and temperature changes," the company's statement read.

Though no institution has recognised this feat, Nirupesh claims his watch company is the first in India to achieve it. "Unlike Omega's NASA-certified moonwatches, chosen through a rigorous selection process, no official programme exists in India. But we have proof to show our watch is spaceworthy."

The Bangalore Watch Company built its reputation on its themed collections – cricket-inspired Cover Drive, aviation-themed MACH1, and the space-inspired Apogee launched in 2021. But Nirupesh and his team wanted to go beyond. "Why just be inspired by space? Why not create a watch that could actually go there?" This question became the driving force behind the Karman Line project, a two-year journey to create "the first space-qualified wristwatch" by an Indian brand. Unsurprisingly, the



(Left) Apogee Karman Line wristwatch; (below) Nirupesh Joshi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SPACE AND TIME

Bangalore Watch Company's Apogee Karman Line wristwatch recently completed a stratospheric flight by travelling 1,14,000 feet (35 kilometres) into the Earth's atmosphere

space-tested watch comes at an astronomical price. The 50 limited edition Apogee Karman Line watches, which can be ordered via the brand's website, cost ₹2,40,000 a piece. But don't expect sci-fi features like remote missile launchers in the timepiece. It just shows the time. According to Nirupesh, however, recording time is merely a vestigial function of a wristwatch. "The key is the emotional connection," he explains. "You wear a watch because of what it means to you. Maybe it was a gift from your grandfather, a celebratory purchase with your first paycheck, or an anniversary present from your spouse. Unlike most things we own, a watch can hold decades of emotions and memories."

He adds that the space flight is not merely a selling gimmick. "Omega, a luxury brand, has a history of watches that have gone to the moon. Their watches are astronaut-qualified by NASA, meaning they're deemed fit for lunar missions. That's the



All watches of Apogee series incorporate Cerasteel and undergo rigorous testing.

NIRUPESH JOSHI, Co-founder, Bangalore Watch Company

ultimate goal for our brand, too. We want our Karman Line watch to be a serious contender in space exploration, worn by astronauts – not just Indian astronauts but international ones

as well. That's our next big goal."

Jilesh Joseph, the company's watchmaker, sheds light on the technical aspects of the series. "All luxury watches are tested for some water-tightness (usually 50 to 100 metres). However, the Karman Line was tested for negative pressure. Space has no atmosphere, so there will be a complete vacuum. The watch had to be tested thoroughly to ensure it would work in a complete vacuum in the same way that it would function in high-pressure environments. There is no predefined process for this, and very few companies have done this before, so we had to develop an entire process for this procedure."

They also developed a proprietary material called Cerasteel, a unique blend of stainless steel and ceramic chosen for its exceptional scratch resistance to withstand the harsh conditions of space. "All watches of the Apogee series now incorporate Cerasteel and undergo the same rigorous testing procedures, making them capable of withstanding the harsh environment of space," adds Nirupesh.

Launching a watch into space presented a unique set of challenges. Finding a launch partner, choosing a launch method (a high-altitude hydrogen balloon), and ensuring the watch's safe recovery were just a few hurdles the team had to overcome. The launch itself was a nail-biter, with three false starts due to unpredictable British weather. Recovery was another story – the touchdown zone lacked cell service, leaving the team in suspense until confirmation of the watch's retrieval and functionality.

Was the experience as thrilling as watching *Alien*? "No, it was a different kind of scary," laughs Nirupesh. "With months of work culminating in this moment, we weren't even there to witness it. It was all a big waiting game, hoping our little watch will survive the journey."

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On a warm and muggy April evening, there does not seem to be a better sight than that of four new bottles of wine arranged on the counter at the small, cosy lounge at Fratelli Vineyards. We are tucked away in a corner of Solapur, Maharashtra, where the last crop of the season is being prepped for harvest, to sample the brand's M/S (Master Selection) range which is up for a re-launch.

Originally a range which comprised an M/S rosé, M/S red and M/S white, the re-launch has also added a late harvest to the M/S Vintage 2023 roster. Giovanni Masi, enologist and agronomist at Fratelli, in Akulj, Solapur regales us with the history of the creation of the M/S range, as he pours a glass.

Legendary winemaker Steven Spurrier collaborated with Giovanni's father, their then in-house wine taster and expert Piero Masi at Fratelli to conceive the Master Selection range, and the first vintage was released in 2015. With the focus on creating approachable blends with a refined taste, they would sit together in the winery to select the blends which would later hit the shelves.

The sprawling vineyards in Solapur, spread over 240 acres, is where Giovanni can be found for a large chunk of the year. "This was virgin soil when Fratelli came here in 2006, and our grapes were the first crop to grow in this area. The soils here are filled with clay, lime, sand and gravel, and located 600 metres above sea level," he says, stating that they add minerality, freshness and flavour to their wines.

This is very different from vineyards around the world given the soil composition, he says, comparing the young

A bold red re-entry

We head to Fratelli wines' vineyard in Solapur as they re-launch their M/S range with a 2023 vintage rosé, red, white, and late harvest



slopes of Italy to the ancient soils of the Deccan plateau, where we are at.

As we swirl and take the first sip of the 2023 vintage M/S white, Giovanni says that Solapur's conditions are optimal for dry wines. The white, made of 90% Chardonnay and 10% Sauvignon Blanc has a sharp, fruity flavour. "If January and February are for harvesting for the white, we begin harvest for the reds at the end of February and this goes on till March or the start of April," Giovanni

says. The composition of the M/S red has been tweaked for the re-launch – from a Sangiovese Shiraz blend to a Shiraz Cabernet. Given India's dominant Shiraz market, its popularity and preferred pairing with Indian food, this does not come as a surprise. Not too far away, the rolling vineyards of Garwad have soil that is ideal for the Cabernet, adding finesse and elegance to their new blend.

For Solapur's warm climes that dominate our trip, the refreshing 100% Sangiovese

(Clockwise from left) Fratelli's M/S (Master Selection) range; and the Fratelli Vineyards. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



This was virgin soil when Fratelli came here in 2006, and our grapes were the first crop to grow in this area. The soils here are filled with clay, lime, sand and gravel

GIOVANNI MASI
Enologist-agronomist, Fratelli

rosé made entirely of Sangiovese grapes however, seems to be the perfect choice. Mildly sweet and fruity, the blend is refreshing and light. Fratelli considers the Sangiovese its flagship – something that has lent itself well to the Indian market, says Jayanth Bharathi, DGM Marketing, at Fratelli.

The newest entrant to the M/S 2023 vintage, the late harvest, is a much deserved inclusion. Before being barrel-aged and fermented, the grapes are allowed to sit on the plant for a few more weeks than usual. "Typically, a lot of sugar is added for similar blends but the sweetness you taste is all from the grape," Giovanni says, of the Chenin Blanc made in the Vin Santo

(traditional Tuscan dessert wine) style.

Earlier in the day, we visit the Machan, a quaint view point nestled on top of a hill, surrounded by the rolling vineyards of Garwad. We hear that the hariyal birds are often sighted on the tree tops here, and the bird with the vivid yellow plumes has found a place on the labels of the new M/S range. "The hariyal is significant to us not just as the state bird of Maharashtra, but is also a source of inspiration to our team. The bird is believed to always be up in the skies, never setting foot on the ground," Jayanth says.

The M/S vintage 2023 range has already hit shelves in Maharashtra and Bengaluru, and is expected to make inroads into other states over the next few months.

The formula that Piero and Steven perfected, is what seems to have resonated over the years and is evident in the new range as well – as wine that will appeal to an evolved palette while also being one that is not too complex for a novice.

The writer was at Fratelli Vineyards, Solapur, on the invitation of the brand.



(Left) Stephanie MacLeod; (below) Scotland's Aberfeldy whisky. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND THE DRAM CLUB

Blazing a whisky trail

Master blender Stephanie MacLeod has created six blended scotch whiskies, and 21 single malt progressions

Anisha Menezes

The world of whisky has been a man's domain for most of its history. But a band of few spirited women is breaking that mould. Stephanie MacLeod, director of Blending, Scotch Whisky, Bacardi, is one such. On the occasion of World Whisky Day (May 18) – the Master Blender of the Year (awarded by the International Whisky Competition (IWC) every year since 2019 – discusses her blending journey that began at John Dewar's and Son's in 1998.

Becoming blender designate in 2003, Stephanie initiated her official three-year training with the then master blender, Tom Aitken, before becoming the first female master blender for Dewar's in 2006. Ever since, she has created six blended scotch whiskies, 21 single malt progressions, and numerous cask expressions.

Meeting the market

Stephanie – who now heads blending scotch whisky for Bacardi – is buoyant about whisky prospects in India. "I am excited by the growing interest in our whiskies from significant global markets, notably India. Modern consumers are not just curious but deeply invested in understanding the origins and craftsmanship of their whisky."

As one of the few women leading the fray in the whisky world, is it lonely at the top? "Currently, my team comprises more women than men," she says, adding, "My personal blenders and whisky stocks team boasts of exceptional blenders from Scotland, India, and Estonia. We believe that this diversity in experiences and backgrounds strengthens our team and helps us better understand the varied preferences of our global audience of whisky enthusiasts."



DENIMS
FOR
NOW

NEW
WIDE LEG DENIMS
FROM TRENDS

TRENDS

DIVE INTO OUR
INSTA-TRENDINESS!

PHANTOM

Tamil

The star only
glitters
occasionally



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There is a lot of heart in everything filmmaker Elan wishes to tell through *Star*. It is a coming-of-age story that gives ample space for its actors to shine. But sometimes, what we do in the name of love might not be how something truly needs to be loved, and this is the case with the way Elan decides to flesh out his ideas.

The soundtrack has composer Yuvan Shankar Raja playing to his strengths. But *Star* is that rare film where most of the punchlines, follow-throughs, as well as the organically-written moments are overshadowed by heavy background scores that prevent us from fully being immersed in the protagonist's world.

The usage of the music reflects a larger issue at play here; from start to finish, you feel a certain dissonance between what the film wants you to feel and how it goes about it with its writing.

Star was marketed as a heartfelt ode to the grueling journey most aspiring actors take to reach the limelight, and we see Kalai go from a doe-eyed kid enacting a moustache-less Bharati to a man who is torn between choosing his passion and the harsh demands of middle-class life.

But the realities that upend Kalai's dreams have nothing to do with the real-world issues that plague most aspiring actors in tinsel town, and more to do with the uncertainties that life throws at you. Unfortunately, even on that end, *Star* is hardly a novel attempt. You also suspect a lack of confidence in the writing when the film resorts to gimmicks to feed emotions.

This journey that Kalai undergoes is the backbone meant to support the romantic subplots we get with the subsequent entries of Meera Malarkodi (Preity Mukhundhan) and 'Jimikki' Surabhi (Aaditi Pohankar). But an unsettling feature in both narratives is how one breaks into the other's room, locks one in an auditorium, or just shows up at someone's home, all in the name of 'love'. As is the case with most films in the genre, these romantic partners are present only to aid in Kalai's love-hate affair with acting, but interestingly we also see the women bring that up as a concern as well.

Now, amidst all this, what truly touches you is the tenderly-written arc between father and son. The advice the father gives before the Bharati play, the pictures he takes of his son with cut-outs of Tamil film stars, the difficult decision he makes when put on the harsh end of a phone call... the magic that happens when such writing meets great actors is where *Star* pays tribute to all those who dream, those who stand by them and the art of acting.

It is only the memory of these few moments that makes *Star* shine even when it falls.

Star is currently running in theatres



A lesson to the ableist world

Director Tushar Hiranandani maps the inspirational story of Srikanth Bolla with a magnifying lens

Hindi

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Most films on physically challenged people end up narrating our perception of an incomplete existence, not realising that all of us are sailing in a broken boat and that communication is a two-way process. Director Tushar Hiranandani's biopic of the visually-impaired industrialist Srikanth Bolla shuns cloying melodrama to tell an inspirational story that is not only witty and winsome in parts but also probes the mental architecture of a visually impaired person in some measure. And, along the way, the film slips in an important message to not treat a person with a disability as special or garbage – but simply engage with him or her as an equal. However, after a point, the biopic becomes a lesson that the makers want to teach to the people of an ableist world, with a smirk.

Based on the dictum that every idea is blind as long as it is not put into practice, writers Jagdip Siddhu and Sumit Purohit delineate the difference between sight and vision with a blunt knife as they take us into the heartwarming struggle of Srikanth (Rajkummar Rao) with social stereotypes to become a role model for every Indian.

Pushed by his mentor Divya (Jyothika), inspired by APJ Abdul Kalam (Jameel Khan), trusted by entrepreneur Ravi (Sharad Kelkar), and embraced by Swathi (Alaya F), Srikanth's success story from a

Srikanth

Director: Tushar Hiranandani

Cast: Rajkummar Rao, Jyothika, Alaya F, Sharad Kelkar, Jameel Khan

Storyline: The inspirational story of visually-impaired industrialist Srikanth Bolla

modest upbringing to the owner of Bollant Industries is shaped by not just his fortitude but also by people with empathy for him and faith in his talent. However, after a point, he starts taking his support system for granted and suffers.

The screenplays of biopics always run the danger of getting reduced to a collection of bullet points of the sterling resume of the subject. Here, too, the writers have marked Srikanth's struggle with the education system, his degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and his skill with the baseball bat with a highlighter but it doesn't brag and drag. Moreover, the film attempts to provide a glimpse into Srikanth's state of mind when success blurs the line between right and wrong. When prejudices against those who pushed him down threaten to turn the hero's feet into clay. It also documents the period when

he starts using his handicap to get over the obstacles – the time when taking the straight path starts looking tiresome to him. That none is bereft of bias adds a little nuance to the inspirational tale.

It helps that Rajkummar is the driving force of the film. He keeps you invested in the story even when the screenplay gets predictable. The tonality of the film demands a little exaggeration without going to the zone of caricaturisation, and Raj walks that fine line. He has imbibed the spirit of a visually challenged person. The assurance with which he snaps his fingers to find his path, and the seamlessness with which he makes his eyebrows dance during conversations and moments of silence reflects that Raj has registered the character in his muscle memory. With eyes half-shut, he opens the door to the soul of Srikanth for us. In the list of actors playing a physically challenged person, his performance is in league with Naseeruddin Shah in *Sparsh (1980)* and Kalki Koechlin in *Margarita With A Straw (2014)*, though *Srikanth* is less nuanced than the mentioned works.

As an idea, the film doesn't help Srikanth cross the road but walks along to understand him and his dreams. However, there are passages, particularly related to the romance and the physical needs of Srikanth, where the moments feel a little too sanitised. Moreover, as the story is structured like a moral science lesson, filled with light-hearted anecdotes and wisecracks, the film demands favour from the audience to ignore the flatness and focus on the feats of the subject. A little more craft and a few more drafts would have turned it into an absolute winner.

Srikanth is currently running in theatres

A cut below the rest

Hindi

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Jerry Pinto's richly observed crime novel, *Murder in Mahim*, was published in 2017, a year before the Supreme Court finally read down Section 377 and decriminalised homosexuality. The book – a noir murder mystery – took a gritty yet empathetic look at gay life in the Mumbai underbelly. Seven years on, it has been turned into a web series. The series, directed by Raj Acharya and adapted by Mustafa Neemuchwala and Uдай Singh Pawar, has the benefit of hindsight, and it shows. Released in marginally freer times, it can afford to look virtuous, even didactic.

Murder in Mahim has the most literal start – indicative of the bland and business-like filmmaking Acharya will mostly rely upon. In the male public urinals of Mahim station, a mutilated body is found. The victim is discovered to be a



young gay sex worker; soon enough, another sex worker turns up dead. A grisly detail ties both murders: the victims' kidneys were forcefully removed. The killer – a hooded, unrevealed figure – has been leaving flagrant clues for their next target. It calls for the expertise of Shiva Jende (Vijay Raaz), who, along with Assistant Sub-Inspector Firdaus (Shivani Raghuvanshi), wearily applies himself to the case.

The official investigation is closely tailed by a private one: that of retired journalist Peter Fernandes (Ashutosh Rana). Shiva and Peter were pals in their heyday. When Peter is informed that his son, activist-y college-goer Sunil (Rohan Verma), is on the police's radar – his phone number had turned up on the victims' call records – Peter sets about seeking some answers.

As Peter warily investigates, he

gets an up-close view of the city's underground gay scene, a world of masseurs and "personal trainers", young boys pulled to prostitution through a mix of poverty, prejudice and police corruption. The series maps the fragility of gay rights in India – and the problems of class and social exclusion that attend queer existence in a city like Mumbai. The show is set in 2013 when the Supreme Court upheld Section 377 and continued to do so for five more years. The legal stigma is reflected in common everyday attitudes: Peter and his wife, Mille (Divya Jagdale), though educated, empathetic parents, react with typical heteronormative discomfort at the possibility that their son might be gay.

The writers adhere closely to Pinto's novel, faithfully reproducing its convolutions and its vast array of characters. There are lines quoted almost verbatim, though I missed the colloquialisms and street-speak. Some of the secondary characters do not come alive as vividly as they do in the book. For instance, colourful socialite Leslie Sequeira (Rajesh

Khattar) is largely reduced to a sideshow. Also, Firdaus represents a feeble attempt at introducing an author-backed queer protagonist.

In a clever twist that deviates from the book, Peter and Shiva are introduced to us as estranged friends: 20 years ago, the journalist reported on a story that resulted in Shiva's father losing his job. This not only lends a dramatic snap to their reunion, but also allows us a glimpse

into Shiva's personal life. The haggard police officer with anger issues is shown struggling in his many roles – as son, parent, husband. It underlines a central theme: the burden of perceived 'manhood' in Indian homes.

Murder in Mahim lacks the subtlety and craft of a *Dahaad* or *Pataal Lok* – sturdy crime dramas that persistently probe a deeper malaise. The opening of minds and changing of hearts in the final episodes feel rushed; even if Peter's evolution over the course of his encounters is credible, is Shiva's too? Characters wind up in neat boxes of black and white, as foes or allies. It skirts the fascinating greyness and humanity of Pinto's book, which evokes Raskolnikov: "What if man is not really a scoundrel, man in general, I mean, the whole race of mankind – then all the rest is prejudice, simply artificial terrors and there are no barriers and it's all as it should be."

Murder in Mahim is currently streaming on JioCinema

Miyazaki's Wonderland comes calling



The Boy and the Heron

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Voice cast: Soma Santoki, Masaki Suda, Aimyon, Yoshino Kimura, Shôhei Hino, Ko Shibasaki, Takuya Kimura

Storyline: A young boy struggling with the grief of his mother's death, gets lured into a new parallel world by a talking heron

Snippets



Tom Hiddleston, Willem Dafoe board Tenzing Norgay biopic

A biopic on the extraordinary life of Tenzing Norgay, who conquered Mount Everest alongside Edmund Hillary in 1953, is in the works. Titled *Tenzing*, the film is being produced by British-Australian banner See-Saw Films.

British actor Tom Hiddleston will feature as Sir Edmund Hillary in the film. Willem Dafoe will portray Colonel John Hunt who lead the famous expedition on which Hillary and Tenzing triumphed.

A search is currently underway for an actor in the lead role of Tenzing. Tenzing, an Indian-Nepalese sherpa, and Hillary, a bee-keeper and explorer from New Zealand, were the first confirmed humans to climb the world's highest peak.



Rashmika Mandanna joins Salman Khan in Sikandar

Rashmika Mandanna will star alongside Salman Khan in *Sikandar*. Directed by AR Murugadoss, the film is scheduled to arrive in theatres on Eid, 2025.

Production banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment shared the news on social media.

Rashmika, a Telugu star, made her Bollywood debut in *Goodbye* (2022), followed by turns in *Mission Majnu* (2023) and *Animal* (2023).

Sikandar is directed by AR Murugadoss, who is best known for directing Tamil and Hindi films such as *Ghajini*, *Thuppakki*, *Holiday: A Soldier Is Never Off Duty* and *Sarkar*. Pritam will score the music for *Sikandar*.



Thalavan, starring Biju Menon and Asif Ali, gets a release date

Thalavan, starring Biju Menon and Asif Ali, has locked its release date. The film, directed by Jis Joy, is set to release on May 24.

The film is touted to be an investigative thriller, with actor-filmmaker Dileesh Pothan, Anusree and Miya in important roles. *Thalavan* also has actors Kottayam Nazeer, Shankar Ramakrishnan, Joji K John, Dinesh, Anuroop, Nandan Unni and Bilas in it.

It is written by Sharath Perumbavoor and Anand Thevarakattu. Sharan Velayudhan is the cinematographer while Sooraj ES is the editor. Deepak Dev has composed the music for the movie.

Japanese

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In 2013, Hayao Miyazaki fans thought they had seen the last of the Japanese filmmaking legend with *The Wind Rises*, in what was a gentle, personal and emotional goodbye. It was perfect.

But a decade on, it is almost as if the 83-year-old Miyazaki has been coaxed out of retirement to show everyone that the magic of his distinct visual style and prose remains unmatched.

With *The Boy and the Heron*, Miyazaki taps once again into one of his favourite recurring themes: that of a child dealing with grief in the backdrop of war who gets sucked into a mysterious fantasy world. Diving headlong into the drama, the director pulls out all the stops to truly immerse us into his vision.

We begin by meeting young Mahito Maki (voiced by Soma Santoki) in early 1940s Japan during wartime. His mother is

killed in a hospital fire after a bombing raid on Tokyo, and his father ends up marrying his late wife's younger sister Natsuko (Yoshino Kimura). Mahito, who is still haunted by the loss of his mother in recurrent nightmares, has to relocate from Tokyo to a country estate run by Natsuko, where he is left to fend off his inner demons alone.

As Mahito's inner turmoil continues to confound his subconscious, he comes across a giant talking heron (voiced by Masaki Suda) who keeps trying to lure him into a forbidden derelict tower. The heron first tells him that his mother is not dead after all; then, his stepmother/aunt Natsuko disappears, and following this anthropomorphic bird into a parallel universe seems to be the key to finding her.

From thereon, the protagonist is drawn into a magical timeline populated by everything from fire maidens and man-eating parakeets to unborn human souls called the Warawara and ancient wizards. Mahito combats one surreal circumstance after another, still unable to differentiate between his dreams and real life; neither are we.

Aided by a superb voice cast and gorgeous orchestral score by Joe Hisaishi, Miyazaki eventually unleashes the full force of his imagination in this limitless world, but the narrative excites and exasperates in equal measure. Lavish though this may be, the striking clarity behind his previous outings like *My Neighbour Totoro* or *Spirited Away* is amiss.

But is this exactly what Miyazaki wanted us to experience? The film's original title *How Do You Live?* is taken from a 1937 Japanese novel by Genzaburô Yoshino, and at several points, it almost seems like he is posing that very question to the audience.

So, how *do* you live? How do you make your peace with the past and confront a grief that nobody else can quite understand? *The Boy and the Heron* provides no easy or clear-cut answers to this, and Miyazaki leaves us pondering well after the film has finished, as Mahito finds new meaning to love, family and loss in more ways than one.

Maybe we will too.

The Boy and The Heron is currently running in theatres



A corker of an adventure

With awe-inspiring visuals, breath taking action sequences, uncanny CGI and underlying smarts, this prequel/sequel is a worthy addition to the canon

English

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The title is a wee bit weird – a kingdom would logically be in a planet and not the other way around innit? Never mind, as, when one is dealing with a story of talking, civilised apes and mute, feral humans, one should not be bothering about semantics. Moving on, Wes Ball has delivered an absolute corker with this 10th film in the Planet of the Apes universe. I suppose the title makes some sort of franchise sense.

Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes is set 300 years after the epic battle that killed Caesar, the chimpanzee that led the revolt against humans. Apes are on the top of the food chain, while humans eke out a living in the shadows as mute scavengers. Apes face the usual problems of civilisation, with some wanting power, and others wishing to live quiet lives.

In the Eagle clan of chimpanzees, Noa (Owen Teague) and his friends, Soona (Lydia Peckham), who he has a crush on, and Anaya (Travis Jeffery), go hunting for eagle eggs for a rite of passage. After a thrilling climb, they get the eggs but also

Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes

Director: Wes Ball

Starring: Owen Teague, Freya Allan, Kevin Durand, Peter Macon, William H. Macy

Storyline: A young ape goes on a quest to find his family and also truths about apes and humans

see a human lurking about. When Noa's egg is broken, he decides to go back for another and returns to find his village in flames.

The village has been attacked by apes who follow Proximus Caesar (Kevin Durand), a bonobo who wants to speed up evolution, find human technology and rule the world. Noa's father Koro (Neil Sandilands), the chief of the clan, is killed, while his mother Dar (Sara Wiseman), Soona and Anaya have been taken prisoner. Noa makes a promise over Koro's corpse that he will find his family.

Noa sets off on a quest, learning and questioning things about his history, that he had taken for granted. Along the way, he acquires two companions – a wise orangutan Raka (Peter Macon) and a human girl Mae (Freya Allan) who has plans of her own. While most humans do not speak, there are some that do, including Trevathan (William H. Macy), who has gone over to the other side, teaching Proximus Roman history.

The gob-smacker visuals of *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* alone are worth the price of the ticket. Then there are breath-stopping action sequences, with gravity-defying leaps and incredible CGI, which makes the apes uncannily real. There is something awe-inspiring about the way Nature reclaims her own, draping the once-proud glass and steel edifices with plants and creepers. The terminal at LAX, where Raka lives, and the deserted

naval base with the skeletons of so many massive battleships looks like a post-apocalyptic Angkor Wat. The moss-festooned telescope at the observatory simultaneously obscures and shines a light.

Ball, who made the super-popular *Maze Runner* movies, which is getting a reboot (why?), was reluctant to make a direct sequel to *War for the Planet of the Apes*. The 2017 movie was the concluding film of the reboot trilogy telling Caesar's (Andy Serkis), story which started with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* in 2011, followed by *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014).

With *Kingdom...* Ball has been wise to start a new trilogy, which acts as a bridge between Caesar's story arc and the original *Planet of the Apes* starring Charlton Heston from 1968. While French novelist, Pierre Boulle used the concerns of the Cold War for his sci-fi satire *La Planète des Singes* in 1963, that *Planet of the Apes* is based on, 10 movies and innumerable iterations in different media later, the concerns are still the same.

When a movie wows one with action and adventure and also makes one think, it is a winner all the way. Now all we have to do is wait for further adventures of Mae, Noa and friends backed by mind-blowing CGI and stunts.

Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes is currently running in theatres