



**A DATE WITH CHENNAI**

Did you see Ed Sheeran in a chef's cap in 'Sapphire'? Now we have the details **P2**

Ruskin Bond continues to be the boy who never grew up. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, VICTOR BANERJEE AND PTI



Preeti Zachariah  
preeti.zachariah@thehindu.co.in

“I am a very lazy writer,” declares Ruskin Bond, with a Duchenne smile that extends to his eyes, twinkling behind thick, black-framed spectacles. A couple of pages a day is all that he is committed to writing because “I think if I worked too hard, I wouldn't write well. I've got to enjoy it”.

Bond's daily routine certainly sounds rather idyllic. “I like to write for an hour or two, usually before breakfast, because there is not much disturbance,” says Bond, whose reputation as a highly accessible writer often leads to random strangers ringing his doorbell at frequent intervals. “Young people sleep very late now and are not getting up till noon, so I am safe till then,” he laughs. “I give up some time every day to writing and a lot of time to reading, apart from sleeping and eating.”

Writing leisurely also seems to have been the secret to his long career – the prolific author has written over 500 short stories and more than 70 books for children, besides several essays, and novellas since he began his writing journey in 1956, with *The Room on the Roof*, penned when he was all of 17. “Writing has got to be a pleasant job. That is how I have managed to keep going for so long,” he insists.

Even when he had his doubts, it was “sheer stubbornness” that kept him going, choosing the writerly life over and over again, remarks Bond. “You know, in those early years, paying the bills could be a problem. I would send an article or a story, but it took time, sometimes, to get paid.” But he took it in his stride, approaching it like an adventure, he says. “When you are young and single and healthy, you can do these things. You can take this risk and put up with certain hardships or difficulties or shortage of funds.”

Ultimately, of course, his persistence, coupled with his confidence in the ability to write, paid off. “It is a matter of establishing one's name,” he says, referring to it as an ongoing process. “I've never stopped writing... sitting back and saying that I've done enough and that I've got nothing more to say,” says Bond, whose latest book, *Life's Magic Moments* (published by Penguin India), was launched on May 19, coinciding with his 91st birthday. It also helps that he



# Bond with the best

Now 91 years old, Ruskin Bond has launched his latest book, *Life's Magic Moments*. The author talks about how sheer stubbornness and a love for writing has kept him going, through 500 short stories and more than 70 books for children

keeps a journal, “not very regularly, but I've had many periods where I've put down my feelings, thoughts and observations,” he says, adding, “There is always something to say if you are observant. A writer shouldn't run out of materials or ideas.”

Real life clearly inspires Bond, the creator of some of literature's most memorable characters, including Rusty, a young Anglo-Indian boy, clearly based on Bond himself, eccentric relatives like Uncle Ken and Aunt Mabel and a vast menagerie of animals, like Toto the monkey, Harold the hornbill and Timothy the tiger. “I'm not very good at making up characters who are purely fictional,” confesses Bond, who relies on his excellent memory, instead, basing his stories on people he has encountered. “They start off as real people. While putting them in a story, they might

acquire different characteristics and change into different people,” he says. “By and large, I change characters a bit so they don't always recognise themselves.”

**Exploring magic moments**  
*Life's Magic Moments*, too, is culled from his own life, an amalgamation of observations, reflections, musings, and memories about it. “I send you these little confidences – quiet thoughts of a quiet fellow – telling you something about my

**I send you these little confidences – quiet thoughts of a quiet fellow – telling you something about my life, my writing, the world around me and the passage of time**

life, my writing, the world around me and the passage of time,” he writes in the book's foreword. “Allow me to share some of my golden days with you.”

From the sudden blooming of a tiny yellow flower in an abandoned flowerpot to the joy of knowing that he can still read, despite his fading eyesight, and the delight of discovering a mountain spring on a hot day, the book is chock-full of what the world of trauma therapy would likely describe as “glimmers”, those tiny moments of positivity, gratitude and beauty that help us feel calm and connected to the world we live in. “There is joy in small things, too,” he further states in the foreword. “Look for the ladybird, the firefly in the night.”

There is more to the book, including the secret pleasures offered by tin roofs and windows, Bond's deep, if somewhat perilous, affinity towards pickles, the close relationship between cheerfulness and compulsion and, my personal favourite – the appearance of a

rather ornery three-legged, semi-Persian cat named Mimi, who constantly tussles with Bond “for the occupancy of the easy chair”, he writes, pointing out that if she loses, she takes her revenge by sitting down on the leafiest geranium. “She is very arrogant and aristocratic, not the type of cat who'll sit on your lap,” he says, with a guffaw. “She is the boss here... rules the roost... is the managing director of the household.”

Long before Indian ecofiction became mainstream, Bond has been writing about animals and trees and revelling in Nature, gently hinting at larger themes like climate crisis, human-animal conflict, and shrinking wild spaces, without ever sounding pedantic, preachy or grimly prophetic. This deep, abiding love for the natural world finds its way into every page of the book, which is packed with ruminations about flowers, trees, earthworms, butterflies, birds and more.

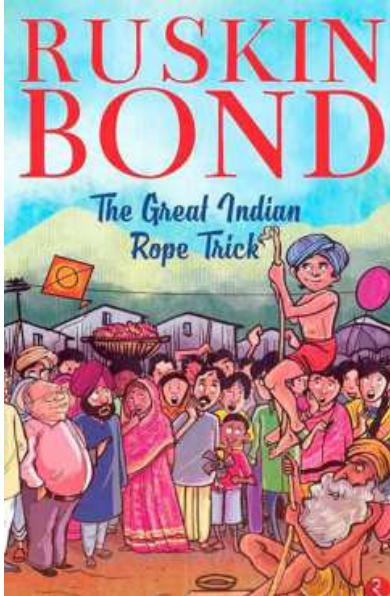
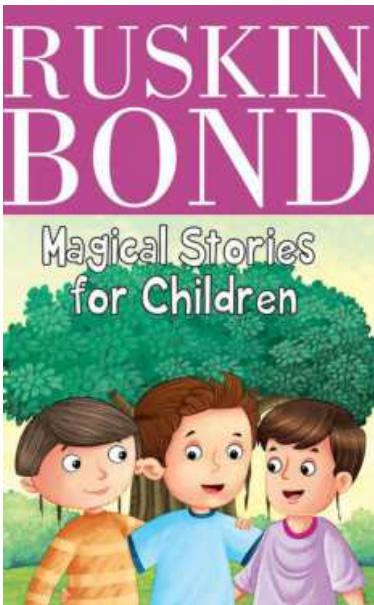
“My relationship with Nature is deep, but it has grown over the years,” he agrees, adding that it was not so deep or so passionate when he was younger. “When we are young, we take everything for granted: the trees, the forests, the animals,” he explains. Only later does worry set in as one begins to wonder what is going wrong with the planet since these wonderful creations are not there anymore, he says. “I am in my dressing gown and sweater, and having to use a heater in the middle of summer. It is pretty obvious that it is climate change, and I don't know how some world leaders can deny it.”

**His first love**  
Despite his vast body of work and the many accolades he has received for it over the years, including a John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992, the Padma Shri in 1999, and the Padma Bhushan in 2014, Bond insists that reading has always been his first love. “Even though I have got a couple of hundred titles in print, I am a reader first and a writer second,” he says. So much so that if he is halfway through writing a story and a book he has been wanting to read arrives in the mail, “I'll immediately put my work aside and start reading, which means that I am really a reader,” he says. “I often feel that people who don't read are missing out on something in life.”

So, does it bother Bond that, in an age with so many distractions, the world has fewer readers? “No, not really,” he responds. “There never were many readers. It has always been a minority pastime.” According to him, in the 1940s and 50s, before television, laptops, mobiles and apps, there were only two boys in his class of 35 at school who read books for pleasure. “We had a good library, and everyone had to take a book out of the library every week, but most people did not read them. They put them back unread,” he says. “Actual book lovers have always been few, the exception rather than the rule.”

He believes that, in fact, thanks to better access to education and with more people simply being able to read, there are actually more readers today. “Today, I make a living out of my books, which I could not have done in the 1950s and 60s,” feels Bond, who says that he has already written two successors to *Life's Magic Moments* as well as some children's stories, “enough to keep my publishers busy for the next year or so,” he says. He is also 5,000-odd words into his next project, a short book on the small towns of India, and is also working on a few stories for children.

“I've quite a busy work schedule. But, who knows, it is not in my hands,” he says, with a laugh. “The great librarian above decides these things.”





pick of the week



Conscious drop

The Honest Hustle Collective is back with its second edition featuring brands such as Smith Design Studio, Thoorigai, Tula, Porgai, Tulika Books, Aavaran, etc. The line-up also includes an organic millet-based lunch, a performance by African Drumming Circle, and more.

On June 28 and 29 at Alliance Française of Madras. 10am to 7pm.



A date with dad

Ring in Father's Day with a brunch at Taj Coromandel's Anise (on June 15) coupled with live counters serving colourful ice popsicles, candy floss, and chaat. At Novotel's The Square, dads get a complimentary beer with the buffet lunch (on June 16). If you are in the mood for a staycation, the hotel offers members a 25% discount.

For details, call 8939842272.



Sonic life

Later this month, students of KM Music Conservatory will come together to commemorate World Music Day 2025 with a special performance. Titled The Chennai Singalong, the 90-minute concert will see a seven-member band perform English, Hindi, and Tamil classics.

On June 20 at Goethe-Institut Auditorium. From 7pm to 8.30pm



Tiffin tales

At the soon-to-open Tamarind Tales, savour dosas from across South India. These include benne dosas, pesarattu, crisp podi dosas, and more. Soon, a quick-grab-and-go snacks counter outside the restaurant will serve butter and jam buns, bajjis, samosas and puffs.

At 11, Cenotaph Road, Teynampet. Opens on June 16, Monday.



POP IT LIKE IT'S HOT

Matcha wars

Tamma Moksha  
tamma.moksha@thehindu.co.in

You unfortunately cannot make do with your kitchen appliances for this Internet fad, so hop on, as I try to see what the buzz about the latest moss-green Japanese drink is all about. For this, you'll need a mini broom-like bamboo whisk, a bowl, and a wooden spoon. You will then have to sift the powder, add water (measure it!) that is just under a boil, whisk the concoction, and serve. In an age when our attention spans are measured in seconds, matcha, despite its elaborate process, has found many takers.

You see, the West went all out and embraced matcha in 2024, so

If you express your dislike for the tea, an influencer will spawn on your shoulder, talking about how you just have not had 'good' matcha

Indians on social media dived into it six-eight months later. And we went overboard with this newly 'acquired' taste, and all the hipster drama plus Instagram clout that goes with it. Now we can order matcha-flavoured cakes, ice-cream, and even noodles! (Try them with matcha dressing or miso broth – the kitchen is your playground



really.) Given that green powder costs about ₹500 for 100 grams, maybe it is best for your wallet if you do not develop an insatiable taste for it though!

If you find it grassy – and let's be honest, some of us do – try matcha-powered sheet masks, which you can spread on your face while you listen to a Spotify playlist curated for you with an extremely specific title like 'melancholic matcha Monday mornings' that will have songs that have nothing to do with matcha or Japan. I mean I found one playlist full of Harry Styles songs.

Brands are naturally capitalising on this craze. Huda Beauty debuted a matcha

(Clockwise from below) Tea farmer Yoshio Shoji checking a net over a matcha tea field in Fujieda, Shizuoka prefecture; a bamboo whisk and a bowl; and matcha tea products at a tea shop in Fujieda. AFP AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



flavoured jelly lip balm while Laneige introduced a limited edition matcha lip mask. Amazon hopped on this trend and unveiled a matcha green Kindle. This trend is so all encompassing that the other day I stumbled upon a YouTube short showing a woman make matcha in an airplane at 35,000 feet.

Clearly, matcha fans are on overdrive now, and yes, I have more receipts. There's a town in Japan called Uji, which is about a half-hour train ride from Kyoto. This is called Japan's matcha capital. So when some of your favourite influencers eventually land here in search of 'authentic' matcha, they will find

out that most shops selling the powder have imposed limits on the number of tins a visitor can buy. The passion for this green drink is so intense that entire towns are reportedly drying up and running out of matcha supply.

Despite all of this absurdity I am willing to reason with the matcha aficionados because they do seem to have a point. This green drink, made of crushed tea leaves, is packed with antioxidants, amino acids, and vitamins. It also supposedly releases caffeine slowly, ensuring you have a steady energy boost instead of a spike followed by a crash that our usual coffee gives us. With everyone trying to nail the clean girl aesthetic and shift their diet charts to eat healthy, I can see why one might want to grab a tin of matcha powder.

But are you really willing to trade your comfort beverage in for some apparent health benefits? If matcha is not really your cup of tea, hold on and wait for the next Japanese trend – warm, nutty Hojicha, a roasted green tea with a nutty, caramel-like taste. Now, let's just wait for the influencers, and Spotify, to catch up.

Level up

**Gucci:** No, it is not the brand. Gucci means chill and cool. You use it to signal you are fine with someone or something. For instance you could say, "my influencer friend hopped on the matcha trend I think that's gucci".

(Clockwise from below) British singer Ed Sheeran with the team at Avartana, ITC Grand Chola; (right) Ed performs live in a concert during his The Mathematics Tour to India. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Parottas on tour

Here's what Ed Sheeran was up to in Chennai, besides getting a head massage and taking selfies. 'Sapphire' shows him beaming in a chef's cap at ITC Grand Chola. We get details from the kitchen

Sangita Rajan  
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

You could not have missed Ed Sheeran's tall chef's hat in his latest music video, 'Sapphire', set in India. While Ed beams cheerfully from under the hat in the ITC Grand Chola's Avartana kitchen for only for a few seconds, Chef Mayank Kulshrestha, area executive chef, Southern Region, ITC Hotels, who was in the kitchen when Ed shot the video, said the performer spent an hour with the team, curious to learn how their menu came together. "He flipped some coin parottas and tried his hand at sautéing and steaming," says Mayank, adding "He tried the lobster, fish, and Uthukuli butter chicken."

Mere months after his six-city India tour, Ed Sheeran released 'Sapphire' (part of his new upcoming album *Play*) in

collaboration with Indian singer Arijit Singh. The song was just picking up momentum and finding its spot on trending charts when Ed dropped a music video that surprised the country. It featured actor Shah Rukh Khan, Arijit, and snippets from Ed's tour across India.

The video, which is light, vibrant and fun, has over 2 million views and counting.

Ed stayed at the ITC Grand Chola during his two-day visit to the city and dined at Avartana on both days. Avartana, the hotel's Southern Indian restaurant, has garnered numerous awards, including rankings of number 30 and 44 on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants in 2023 and 2024.

During the tour, Ed played tourist whenever he could, riding in autos, getting massages, sightseeing, and sampling local food. "This is kind of a selfish trip for me because I came here to be a tourist and spent the last two



days just going around the city," he had said during his Chennai show which saw a footfall of approximately 50,000.

"He was a very curious person, and anything creative requires curiosity and enthusiasm. He was very lively and said he didn't want to disturb us. Ed told me this was for a music video and asked us to just keep operating as usual. So we were preparing for the evening shift, and all the stations were busy," says Mayank.

"He loved our triple-distilled rasam and joked about how he could write a song just for this," says Shaariq Akhtar, general manager, ITC Grand Chola. To welcome him to the Karikalana Chola presidential suite at ITC

Grand Chola, the team built a miniature replica of Portman Road Stadium in chocolate. This is the home of the Ipswich Town Football Club. "Ed Sheeran is a huge football fan, and he supports Ipswich Town. He was thrilled because other hotels he stays at usually focus on him and his music, but this is an interest I share with him, so he loved that," adds Shaariq.

Another moment from Ed's stay at ITC Grand Chola, which also features in the music video, was one of him getting a true street-style head massage from A Sandeep, a long-time member of the 85-year-old Kerala Hair Dressers in Pondy Bazaar. "He got the massage on the roof of the presidential suite," beamed Shaariq.

As for that tall chef's hat? Ed autographed it, and gave it to Chef Mayank. So now the chefs can blare Sapphire and dance to 'Don't you end the party, I could do this all week' the next time they make parottas and Uthukuli butter chicken.

Ed Sheeran's eighth studio album *Play* will release on September 12, 2025.

Ed told me this was for a music video and asked us to just keep operating as usual. So we were preparing for the evening shift, and all the stations were busy

CHEF MAYANK KULSHRESTHA

Spotlight stories

Out with its third mini album *Defend Myself*, K-pop girl group X:IN delves into its music

S Poorvaja  
poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in

For multi-national K-pop group X:IN, working on its latest mini album *Defend Myself* has been a deeply reflective and personal journey.

The five member group – comprising Korean members E:sha, Nizz, and Hannah, Russian member Nova and Indian member Aria – is currently basking in the aftermath of the album's release in May. When the group debuted in 2023, they garnered significant attention in India for having a member from Kerala, Aria. Aria is among the few artistes of Indian origin in K-pop, which includes Sriya Lenka from Odisha who is a part of the K-pop group Blackswan.

Presenting an autobiographical narrative of their inner conflict and emotional turmoil in *Defend Myself*, the group also consciously emphasises on protecting themselves amidst all the chaos, in the songs of this third mini-album. "We focussed on the vulnerabilities and challenges of being in the spotlight. All of us were keenly involved in the creation of this album," says E:Sha, the group's leader.

While they have actively been a part of the creative process and their songs in the past, Aria calls their increased involvement in *Defend Myself* a 'huge stepping stone'. "This was a significant learning experience for us," she says.

Of the four tracks in *Defend Myself*, the title track 'Attention Seeker' explores the members' image, vulnerability and longing to be seen as

well as what it takes to be their authentic selves. A slick music video pictured on the group was shot in a desert as well.

The autobiographical track 'Almost Done' however seems to be the group's favourite, which chronicles their growth and the work they have put in through hard times. "Writing the lyrics for this song felt special because I felt like it showcases my story, and my journey in the industry. It was a difficult track, but I like how the song sounds and our voices blend well," Nova says.

Since their debut, the members acknowledge different areas where they have been able to see their evolution as artistes. "Singing and dancing at the same time used to be daunting. Over the years, I have got used to it and instead of worrying about it, I now recognise that it's a part of the job and go with the flow," E:sha says.

X:IN has performed in India twice in the K-Wave festival in Bengaluru in 2023 and in the Falcon Festival in Umrangso, Assam in 2024. For Aria, performing in her home country has always felt special. "I initially did not know what to expect during our first performance in Bengaluru, but the energy was amazing. Knowing I am special to them, I feel a greater sense of responsibility and happiness that I am representing the country," she says.

Three mini albums in, and Nova now hopes for them to work on a full length music album soon. Post the release of *Defend Myself*, the group has a packed wishlist for 2025. "I want to take the first place on the music charts," Hannah says, while Nizz wishes for them to perform in the large year end music festivals in South Korea. "We also hope to visit more countries and more onstage performances is something we really look forward to," Aria says.



X:IN has performed in India twice. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT





Amarjot Kaur  
amarjot.kaur@thehindu.co.in

There is a method to all the madness about metal music, and folk-metal band Bloodywood has cracked it. With two albums under its belt, the recent one being *Nu Delhi*, this is the first Indian band to have collaborated with Japanese kawaii metal band Babymetal. Credited for creating the kawaii metal, a musical genre that was pioneered in Japan in the early 2010s, Babymetal blends elements of heavy metal and J-pop. “The song that we worked on with Babymetal features on our new album. Babymetal’s producer attended our concert in Tokyo in 2023 and gave us the brand’s merchandise, but we got talking to them while writing ‘Bekhauf’ in 2024. I think, we manifested it,” says Jayant Bhadula, who is assigned to vocals and growls of the

three-piece band. Its other two key members are Karan Katiyar on guitars, flute, production and composition and Raoul Kerr on rap vocals. On tours, they are joined by Sarthak Pahwa on the dhol, Roshan Roy on the bass and Vishesh Singh on the drums. “Karan, when listening to ‘Bekhauf’, suggested that the song would sound better with Babymetal on vocals. Within two-three days, we received a serendipitous message from the band’s producer and instantly sent them the project. The composition was followed up on e-mails, and their vocals in Japanese were later mounted on the song,” shares Jayant. Bloodywood’s first album, *Rakshak*, was released in 2022. The

(Above) Bloodywood poses with its new album’s vinyl; (right) members of Bloodywood. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

For its second album, folk-metal band Bloodywood collaborates with Japanese kawaii metal band Babymetal taking on everything from politics to influencers

10-track album explores subjects that swing between addressing mental-health issues (‘Jee Veerey’), bullying (‘Endurant’), and a commentary on the politics of hate (‘Gaddaar’). Its new album too stands testimony to the band’s creative arch of creating conscious content. The eight-track album features songs like ‘Halla Bol’. Raoul explains: “We wrote this from the Indian perspective, having survived Colonialism, for people all over the world who have survived oppression of any kind. It’s a testament to their resilience. It’s about drawing on that knowledge and experience of how power can be abused and using it to break the cycle of oppression forever.” Another track, ‘Daggebaaz’, takes a jibe at ‘Plastic Influencers’. “Plastic Influencers who rely on the superficial sides of life are annoying. It takes skill to get people to follow you; we see a lot of these people using their skills for the wrong reasons and abusing the trust they manage to manufacture. It’s also about

calling people out for this gullibility because that’s what gives these influencers power,” says Raoul. “Interestingly, most metal music is characterised by profound lyrics; take, for instance, ‘Rage Against The Machine’. But then, the genre also has ‘Pizza Thrash!’” laughs Jayant. The band started working on *Nu Delhi* in 2023 during its performance in Chicago and recorded the tracks in Noida at Karan’s home, where the band’s studio is. The album art has been created by Anirudh Shekhawat, says Jayant. “The album has been released by Fearless Records, an American independent record label, which is looking after the distribution and production of vinyls and CDs. Besides the general instruments you find in metal bands, the ethnic Indian instruments used were dhol, sarangi, tumbi, esraj, harmonium, and many regional percussive instruments,” says Jayant. He leaves us with the news of



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“CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE”

the band’s next collaboration with Babymetal. “The song is called ‘Kon! kon!’ and it will be featured on Babymetal’s upcoming album called *Metal Forth*, which is set to release on June 27. It has collaborations with artistes like Tom Morello, Poppy, Electric Callboy, Slaughter to Prevail, Spiritbox and more,”

informs Jayant. Till then, mosh on, metalheads! The album is now streaming on all music platforms and its CDs (₹1,400) and vinyl records (₹2,700) are available on [bloodywood-official.mysshopify.com](https://bloodywood-official.mysshopify.com).

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# Ocean of possibilities

Directors of the documentary *Ocean With David Attenborough*, Keith Scholey and Colin Butfield, speak of all the things David Attenborough brings to the table

**Mini Anthikad Chhibber**  
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

There is no stopping David Attenborough. As the legendary broadcaster and natural historian turned 99 in May, he shares an important message on how the health of our oceans has a direct impact on our lives in a feature-length documentary, *Ocean With David Attenborough*. “After living for nearly a hundred years on this planet, I now understand that the most important place on Earth is not on land, but at sea,” he says.

Directed by seasoned conservationists, Toby Nowlan, Keith Scholey and Colin Butfield, *Ocean With David Attenborough* was shot over two years around the world, including the Azores (Portugal), California, Indonesia, the UK, Liberia, Antarctica, the Mediterranean and Hawaii. It premiered on National Geographic on World Oceans Day on June 8.

Working with Attenborough was an absolute privilege, Colin says over a video call from London. “He’s a master storyteller. He’s had a life that spans the narrative of the film, witnessing all the great ocean discoveries as well as the destruction.” Attenborough was embedded through the film, Colin says. “We worked with him to develop and refine the script. He wrote these incredible pieces to camera. You can sense his passion for the ocean, as well as his great authority. People understand and trust him,” he adds.

While shoots on this scale come with innumerable heart-stopping moments, one particular shoot in the Azores Islands is burned into Keith’s brain. “We were trying to film these big bait balls where whale, sharks, and dolphins come to feed,” Keith says over a video call from Bristol. “There’s one amazing moment when our underwater cameraman, Doug Anderson, jumped into the mayhem.”

As Anderson was filming, Keith says, a huge sei whale came at him. “That’s the third-biggest whale in the world. Doug just picks this perfect shot, and you see the whale going past him, you can see the whale’s tail



coming at him, but he just held the shot. It’s a remarkable scene.” The challenge, Colin says, was trying to show the destruction like it has never been shown before. “A big objective of ours was to be able to film bottom trawling. We had thought and presumed, the footage would exist already, but found that it didn’t. To capture that in a way that would bring home the destruction to viewers, and then to find the best examples of recovery around the world and be able to present those in a way that felt fresh and inspiring, was the real test.”

**Always hope**  
It is always hope not doomsday scenarios that are the need of the hour, Keith comments. “Whenever you show a problem, you have to show a solution. In this film, we focus on the fact that there’s a really easy solution. The wonderful thing about the ocean is, if you just leave it alone, it bounces back. You can have a protected area, and in five years you’ll see a big change, and in 10 years, there is a huge change.”

“What we’ve tried to do here is show realistic hope,” Colin chimes in. “The images we’ve shown of ocean destruction are the most powerful that have ever been shown. So that’s certainly showing where this is going wrong, or where this could go wrong. As Keith rightly says, if you don’t balance that with hope,

(and in the ocean, the hope is genuine), then you leave the audience powerless.”

When you watch *Ocean With David Attenborough*, Colin says, “You think, ‘I don’t like what’s happening right now. That’s horrific, but not only can I see a way out but one that can be enacted quickly.’ That’s far more motivating than just leaving people with the problem and hoping they find a way through it.”

Technological advancements have been a huge help in shooting Nature, Keith says.

“We use drones a lot. Earlier, if you wanted to film aerial, you had to have a helicopter, for which you need a big ship, which costs a huge amount of money. Now we could be out in the middle of the ocean, and pick up a little, cheap drone and get amazing images.”

Earlier, for underwater filming, Keith says scuba tanks were used. “They gave you an hour underwater. Now we use rebreathers, which circulates the air and you can have four, five or six hours underwater. So cinematographers can go down and film underwater like you do on land. There are loads of these changes that absolutely revolutionise what we can do.”

*Ocean With David Attenborough is streaming on JioHotstar.*



## Need for speed

Formula 1 is releasing exclusive merchandise to celebrate the upcoming film, *F1 The Movie*, ahead of its summer premiere on June 25. It stars Brad Pitt and is directed by Joseph Kosinski. The film is produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, Kosinski, seven-time F1 world champion Lewis Hamilton, Pitt, Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner and Chad Oman.

The merchandise collection is available at the official F1 Store, between \$55 and \$125, and includes unisex hoodies, T-shirts, and hats featuring the fictional APXGP team’s sleek black and gold branding.

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**K Jeshi**  
jeshi.jeshi@thehindu.co.in

The iconic Nilgiris Mountain Railway (NMR) – one of the world’s last-remaining steam-powered railways that chugs up the hills from Mettupalayam to Udhagamandalam – is the muse of Coromandel Watch Co., based in The Nilgiris. In May, the brand launched Blue Mountain Edition, limited to 300 timepieces, as an ode to the 125-year journey of the train that covers 16 tunnels, over 200 steep curves and 257 bridges, using the rack-and-pinion system. “Personally, it’s a tribute to the NMR, which I hopped on to during my stint in the hospitality industry with the Taj group,” says Shibin VS, co-founder of Coromandel Watch Co., which forayed into the microbrand watch industry in 2022. Originally known as Watch Projects, a vintage and pre-owned online watch store, the company sold vintage watches sourced from across the world. Then, as Madras Watch Works, the brand’s journey in watchmaking started in September 2023 with the launch of the Marina Edition, before rebranding the company as Coromandel Watch Co.

Shibin adds that he often took the train for his journey home while working on shifts between Coonoor and Udhagamandalam. “A ride on NMR is a throwback to a time when life was slower. The scenery brings an instant calm and I reached home feeling refreshed,” he recalls.

The Blue Mountain Edition, a collector’s item, takes inspiration from Heuer’s camero variant, a 1960s model that is no longer in production. Tag acquired Heuer in the 1980s. “This model of the iconic brand paid tribute to a racing car. We took the design inspiration from there but crafted it as a tribute to the train steeped in history,” he explains, adding that the watch has mechanical

# Tracking time

Coromandel Watch Co. launches the Blue Mountain Edition, an ode to the 125-year journey of the Nilgiri Mountain Railway

movement adapted from pocket watches created in the 17th Century.

Shibin shares that there is something special about mechanical watches, powered by a mainspring, a coiled metal spring that stores energy. “As the mainspring unwinds, it transfers energy through a series of gears and springs, powering the watch and its functions. This intricate system of moving parts sets mechanical watches apart from their quartz watch counterparts, which are powered by batteries,” he describes.

The Blue Mountain Edition uses Miyota OS21 Chronograph Quartz movement, made by Citizen in Japan, and has a chronograph function too. “Apart from keeping time, it measures the elapsed time while indicating the current time. Though chronograph watches have nothing to do with the railways, every second counts when the chronograph function is activated on your watch, much like the synchronised working of the train’s rack-and-pinion mechanism. As NMR that enjoys UNESCO’s World Heritage Site status, climbs the Blue Mountains with power and precision, the watch mirrors its spirit. We chose a quartz chronograph because it reflects the same reliability, accuracy and functionality that the NMR stands for,” says Shibin adding that his motive is to create awareness about the charm of mechanical watches. In the last year, the company has sold watches across India, the US, the UK and Gulf countries. “The watches use the same mechanism of the 17th Century, the good old way of keeping time,” he says, adding, “It’s like wearing history on your wrist.”

The Blue Mountain Edition starts at ₹8,000 on coromandelwatchco.com

## Passenger arrives in India

Indie folk singer-songwriter Passenger, aka Michael Rosenberg, is all set to make his debut in India with a three-city tour in November this year. “I can’t tell you how excited I am to finally come to India to play some shows! For many years people have been requesting a Passenger tour of India! I’ve been to India as a tourist a few times and absolutely loved it so I can’t wait to come back in a few months — this time with my guitar,” Rosenberg said.

Passenger shot to fame with ‘Let Her Go’, the breakout single from his 2012 album *All The Little Lights*. The track climbed to the number one spot in 19 countries. With a discography of 15 independently released studio albums, Rosenberg has, over the past year alone, performed at some of the world’s most iconic venues, including Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado, the Royal Albert Hall in London and Sydney Opera House. In India, he will perform at DLF CyberHub in Delhi-NCR on November 19, followed by Phoenix MarketCity in Mumbai on November 21 and Phoenix MarketCity in Bengaluru on November 22. The tickets will go live on June 17 at 10am on BookMyShow.



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Malayalam

One-sided critique against Section 498A



SR Praveen  
praveen.sr@thehindu.co.in

The way a filmmaker conceives a single sequence can sometimes reveal the entire thought process behind the film. This is especially true of single-agenda films like *Aabhyanthara Kuttavaali*, the debut directorial of Sethunath Padmakumar. Sahadevan (Asif Ali), the protagonist who is facing a case under Section 498A over dowry harassment and domestic abuse, is shown returning to his wife’s family the 100 sovereigns of gold that he got as a “gift”. A sentimental background score accompanies this sequence which is framed fully from the man’s perspective, although he was earlier shown to have denied his wife’s demand for a part of the gold to fund her higher education.

This sequence fits well with the rest of the film which is an emotional narrative of men “victimised” by Section 498A. By now, we have a handful of such films, a number significant enough to call them as part of a universe of films proudly carrying the flag of men’s rights associations.

While it is true that there have been cases of women misusing the law to frame their husbands and claim alimony, the number of such cases are miniscule

Aabhyanthara Kuttavaali

Director: Sethunath Padmakumar

Cast: Asif Ali, Thulasi Haridas, Shreya Rukmini, Sidharth Bharathan, Jagadeesh

Storyline: A man faced with a fake dowry harassment case goes to great extents to prove his innocence

real-life examples. Family court lawyers occasionally make such claims to bolster their side’s case. The problem arises when the film generalises this case and gives the protagonist an opportunity to deliver two long preachy speeches inside a courtroom, emphasising how this law has made life hell for men. The accused man has to make this speech because the female advocate (Shreya Rukmini) who is supposed to represent him is too scared to make her point in court.

By some sheer coincidence, this lack of voice is a common affliction of all of the female characters in the film, due to which we rarely get to know what any of them thinks. Even Nayana (Thulasi Haridas), Sahadevan’s wife, gets only a short monologue towards the end of the film. Even Asif Ali’s natural flair in emotional scenes cannot lift this film, partly because it comes in the service of a regressive idea.

The only safeguard, perhaps, is that the film intended to spread such ideas is not particularly well-made, with the treatment mirroring that of television soaps.

Aabhyanthara Kuttavaali is currently running in theatres



Tamil

Bhuvanesh Chandar  
bhuvanesh.chandar@thehindu.co.in

When an auteur like Mani Ratnam returns to a genre he is known for, with a maverick multihyphenate like Kamal Haasan, the expectations are naturally high; the worst result one could anticipate is a film that works but doesn’t necessarily redefine the genre. Seldom would you expect a *Thug Life*, which bafflingly feels like a Mani Ratnam-ish film that gave in to the mainstream compulsion of being a modern-day Tamil potboiler. A 163-minute chronicle of an elderly gangster’s tryst with love, destiny, guilt and death, *Thug Life* is a gangster crime drama with stretches so generic and cold that you might wonder if it was really the filmmaker at the helm.

Given his oft-discussed distinct filmmaking style, you can’t help but look out for a certain Mani Ratnam-esque quality in the mise-en-scène, like the shots of a young boy running into a framed entrance of a chawl, and later, standing there helplessly, drowned in grief, in the initial portions of the film. The sheer promise that shone through the first twenty minutes or so is hard even to reminisce. We begin in 1994, in a scene of gorgeous monochrome. A police shootout ensues at a chawl in Old Delhi, where wanted gangster Rangaraya Sakthivel (a de-aged Kamal) and his chieftains – Manickam (Nasser), Pathrose (Joju George), Anburaj (Bagavathi Perumal) and co – have gathered. In a tragic turn of events, one of Sakthivel’s men inadvertently kills a newspaper vendor (Elango Kumaravel), leaving his two children orphaned.

Gutted by his death, Sakthivel adopts his son, Amar, and promises to find his sister, Chandra, who went missing in the commotion that followed the episode. With AR Rahman punctuating the enchanting ‘Anju Vanna Poove’ score with

Thug Life

Director: Mani Ratnam

Cast: Kamal Haasan, Silambarasan TR, Trisha, Abhirami

Storyline: An ageing gangster has to protect his family when a power struggle tears through his clan, and enemies return seeking vengeance

silences, the sequence tugs at your heartstrings. This is where the heart of this narrative resides, and this is the pulse of narration you expect from Mani Ratnam’s school of filmmaking. This is also what you hold onto as scenes move on to depict the life of Sakthivel from 2016 onwards – his tender moments with his wife Jeeva (Abhirami); his lust for his mistress Indrani (an underutilised Trisha); the warmth he shows Amar (a restrained Silambarasan TR); his enmity with his nemesis Sadhanand and the trouble it is sprouting in the form of Sadhanand’s revenge-thirsty brother-in-law Deepak (Ali Fazal); and a silent thirst for power that is growing among his men. Unfortunately, *Thug Life* winds its way hastily, unanchored to that potent crux.

The film shares at least six parallels with Kamal and Mani’s iconic 1987 gangster crime drama *Nayakan* – like a daughter-figure’s moral compass, a police officer’s quest to clean the city and his marital life, a grandson named after Sakthivel Naicker, and a son adopted from the weight of a sin – and it only makes the flaws more apparent in the modern take on the genre. Both films explore themes of guilt, morality and destiny, but *Thug Life* doesn’t bother itself with selling the emotional beats of the story. It seems like the urge to cater to modern, impatient audiences is not to be burdened by human drama and building strong characters with clear interpersonal dynamics, but rather make grand strokes with the action sequences.

Perhaps this is also why letting the dialogue convey necessary backstories, like Sakthivel’s equation with Manickam, comes across as weak and uneven; you must necessarily recollect the few rushed-through moments between Manickam and Amar to get a comprehensive understanding of the former’s dynamics with the latter and Sakthivel. You wonder why the scene of how Sakthi met Indrani wasn’t shrunk into a dialogue as well. Fascinatingly, the same film shows what could have been had there been more space to make these emotional beats felt. Jeeva’s arc with Sakthi gets superbly fleshed out; again,

dialogue tells you how they met, the unspoken bond they share (“*Kuthi pesra na azhugaya ulla vechikutu irukka nu artham,*” he tells her at one moment), and you get set-ups with effective pay-offs, like a line she utters during a tiff.

This is a film that hardly takes a moment to breathe, and any scope for such drama is traded for pulsating action set pieces. Like a certain car chase scene that, while it may prove necessary for the larger scheme of things, overstays its welcome. This inclination towards making the film action-heavy is why a fight scene in which Sakthivel powers through a potent sedative does nothing except remind you of another such fight scene in *Vikram*, where Kamal’s character had to fight henchmen without making a noise.

Beyond this, it also doesn’t help that the film fails to add more to its archaic fight-for-the-throne conflict at the centre of the film. Subplots and layers seem added purely for convenience, like a character that returns in the climax to serve a meagre purpose. You also feel bad for Silambarasan since Amar never comes into his own or grows beyond what the plot requires him to do. A lion’s share of the screen space is given to Kamal, and the veteran aces his role as an ageing man fighting the God of Death – be it in the more tender moments like the aforementioned scene with Abhirami, or the many face-offs he has on rooftops and cliffs. But is he really feeling the weight of his actions or questioning his morality as the Sakthivel Naicker we once knew? The verdict is still out.

As has been the case with many recent Mani Ratnam films, songs feature sparingly and yet it does somehow feel like it is Rahman who is doing all the heavy lifting in selling the emotions. Touted as one of the biggest Tamil films of the year, *Thug Life* boasts exquisite production design and striking cinematography.

However, despite a master filmmaker at the helm, all the star power in its arsenal and the right ingredients to make a heady modern gangster drama, it makes you grope in the dark for its beating heart.

Thug Life is currently running in theatres

Entertainment for imbeciles

Hindi

Anuj Kumar  
anuj.kumar@thehindu.co.in

In a bid to cash in on the goodwill around the frat-boy comedy, writer-producer Sajid Nadiadwala, this time, lines his boisterous drollery with a layer of mystery in the vacation season. Set on a luxury cruise ship, where a billionaire (Ranjeet) dies and a doctor is silenced, it literally spirals into a search for the Jolly on the high seas. By the end, we encounter multiple claimants, but none pass muster. Sajid has once again put together a galaxy of stars of different wattage, but in the absence of a supple string of wisecracks, the flash of wit loses its lustre.

He draws from Todd Phillips’s *The Hangover*, where temporary memory loss generates unintended chaos, but the way it plays out, *Housefull 5* remains a hollow play of words. The gags outlive their welcome, and the political



incorrectness and situational humour that are the hallmarks of the franchise no longer organically fit into the narrative.

Director Tarun Mansukhani falters in carrying forward the unapologetic tone set by Sajid Khan. Hailing from the Dharma school, Tarun cocks a snook at animal lovers, generates

racist jokes, and lets the camera loose on the cleavage but his heavy-handed approach results in diminishing returns. It is like descending into the gutter with the confidence that the clothes will remain unspoiled. The strand of suspense thriller is more potent, but the comic element does not serve it

effectively.

It has been 15 years since the original hit the turnstiles. The rust on characters is palpable and demands reimagination. Chunky Panday’s Pasta has gone stale, and so is the tribute to Ranjeet’s salacious gestures. Though no longer frat boys, it is left to Akshay Kumar and

Riteish Deshmukh to squeeze out some crumbs of comic relief from the corny dialogues penned by Farhad Samji. Masters of slapstick, Akshay and Riteish can survive the flaws and troughs in storytelling. Not Abhishek Bachchan and Sanjay Dutt, but when Fardeen Khan is around,

Housefull 5

Director: Tarun Mansukhani

Cast: Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh, Abhishek Bachchan, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Fardeen Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Nargis Fakhri, Chitrangada Singh, Sonam Bajwa, Ranjeet, Johnny Lever

Storyline: After a billionaire dies on his luxury cruise, three different claimants turn up to be the heir, making the air thick with suspense and comic chaos.

not many can outwit him in ‘stiff’ competition. Shreyas Talpade and Johnny Lever demonstrate how to make the most of clichés, but they don’t get enough screen time to showcase their talent.

Tarun wastes a lot of screen time playing on the *Khalnayak* chemistry between Jackie Shroff and Dutt, but it doesn’t work. And Nana Patekar’s late entry fails to redeem the trite proceedings.

As always, the film is high on the glamour quotient, creating some thinly veiled sexual humour. However, the jokes don’t land. It is hard to expect anything fresh from Nargis Fakhri and Jacqueline Fernandez. Soundarya Sharma joins their league here. One gets a feeling they are cast in multi-starrers because their dates don’t clash with male stars. Chitrangada Singh and Sonam Bajwa are better actors, but this is a stage meant for giggling, shrieking, and shaking a leg in revealing outfits.

Housefull 5 is currently running in theatres



The Accountant 2

Director: Gavin O'Connor

Cast: Ben Affleck, Jon Bernthal, Cynthia Addai-Robinson, Daniella Pineda, J.K. Simmons

Storyline: A family goes missing, and everyone searching for them ends up in deep trouble.



Adds up to a good time

English

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

An assassin, Anaïs (Daniella Pineda), walks into a bar to meet Raymond King (J.K. Simmons), a former Treasury agent. He tells her he needs help finding a missing Salvadoran family and is then killed in the ensuing shootout. Treasury agent and King's protégée, Marybeth Medina (Cynthia Addai-Robinson), finds King's body with "Find the Accountant" scrawled on his arm.

Meanwhile, Christian Wolff (Ben Affleck), aka the Accountant, has gamed the dating app system and finds

himself at a singles night, baring his teeth in what he imagines to be a pleasant smile. Though skeptical, Medina contacts Wolff, who ropes in his brother Braxton (Jon Bernthal) for backup. Braxton is still a lethal assassin, despite being two weeks away from adopting a corgi puppy (aww) and sharing stories about the well-paid terrier from *The Wizard of Oz* with the lady at his job site.

Chris, who is on the spectrum and brilliant with numbers, works as an accountant for dangerous people around the world. He stays one step ahead of the villains with help from Justine (Allison Robertson, Alison Wright, voice), whom he met as a boy at the Harbor Neuroscience Academy.

The hunt for the Salvadoran family pits the trio against human traffickers and all-around bad guys, including Burke (Robert Morgan), Cobb (Grant Harvey), and Batu (Andrew Howard).

While not as tightly written as 2016's *The Accountant*, and therefore not quite as fun, *The Accountant 2* shines in scenes where Bernthal and Affleck riff off each other. Shifting the focus

away from Affleck's autistic accountant makes the sequel feel more like a standard action flick.

The sequel also suffers from several inexplicable plot points. Unlike the original, where Medina's methodical tracking of Christian felt detailed and believable, this film skips over key motivations, starting with why King spent his retirement searching for this one family.

Christian's back-story and where he got his particular set of skills added layers of authenticity to the character while helping in the world building.

Still, Affleck remains watchable as ever, and even busts out some cool dance moves. What is with all these dancing accountants? We just saw Tom Hiddleston burn up the dance floor in *The Life of Chuck*!

Apparently, a third film and a series are in the works. For fans of *The Accountant*, the sequel may not deliver the same delight, but it is still a fairly engrossing action film with slick fights and high-octane chases.

The Accountant 2 is currently streaming on Amazon Prime Video

Snippets



Nivin Pauly joins Lokesh Cinematic Universe with Benz

Malayalam star Nivin Pauly has joined the popular Lokesh Cinematic Universe with the upcoming movie *Benz*. Produced by Lokesh Kanagaraj, the movie stars Raghava Lawrence in the lead.

The movie is director Bakkiyaraj Kannan. On June 5 Bakkiyaraj took to X to announce the development with a video. In the teaser, Pauly appears in a maniacal avatar. He is set to play a character named Walter in the movie.

The role is expected to be Pauly's full-fledged antagonist character in Tamil cinema. The actor's other Tamil projects are Gautham Ramachandran's *Richie* and Ram's *Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai*.

Bakkiyaraj had previously directed *Remo* and *Sulthan*.



Shane Nigam's 25th film, co-starring Shanthnu Bhagyaraj, titled Balti

Malayalam star Shane Nigam's 25th film, a Tamil-Malayalam bilingual sports action drama co-starring Preethi Asrani and Shanthnu Bhagyaraj, had locked a release date. On June 10, the makers announced that the film's been titled *Balti*.

The makers unveiled a glimpse video which introduces Shane as a kabaddi player, Udhayan, who is being chased by the police through the narrow streets of a town, a riveting scene that ends at a kabaddi court where Udhayan gets a hero's welcome.

Produced by Santhosh T Kuruvilla & Binu George Alexander, *Balti* is set for a release in theatres on August 27.



Revolver Rita: Keerthy Suresh starrer locks release date

The makers of *Revolver Rita* have announced the movie's release date. Starring Keerthy Suresh in the lead, the film is directed by J K Chandru.

The Tamil movie will hit the screens on August 27, 2025, on the account of Ganesh Chaturthi. The makers released a video to reveal the release date.

A comedy action drama, *Revolver Rita* sees Keerthy Suresh in a messy avatar. The actor plays a character who takes on a bunch of goons. The promotional video kept the viewer guessing about Keerthy's character as a bunch of miscreants wonder if she is a RAW agent, police officer or a don.



Thrilling trinity of ultra-violence

This page off an AskScienceFiction subreddit thread has shaped into a richly imagined R-rated animated spectacle that is ferociously stylish

Multilingual

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury

ayaan.paul@thehindu.co.in

By all means, *Predator: Killer of Killers* had no business being as exhilarating as it is. On paper, the premise read like the (very real) sandbox fantasies of a twelve-year-old freshly chancing upon a dusty DVD with the cool, gun-toting muscle-man on the cover: What if the Predator fought a Viking? Or a samurai? Or a WWII pilot? In the deft hands of Dan Trachtenberg and Joshua Wassung, however, this page off an AskScienceFiction subreddit thread has instead shaped into a richly imagined R-rated animated spectacle that is ferociously stylish.

Structured as a triptych of ultraviolent vignettes, *Killer of Killers* sidesteps the predictable bloat of franchise expansion. Clocking in at just over 80 minutes, each chapter feels like a beautifully illustrated poem of death, framed in a moody chiaroscuro. There's a sort of austere theatricality to its construction. A bit of *Assassin's Creed* meets *Heavy Metal*, with the gorgeous aesthetic sensibilities of Netflix's *Blue Eye Samurai*.

The three chapters – "The Shield," "The Sword," and "The Bullet" – each pit a member of humanity's warrior class against one of the universe's most militant tourists: the Yautja, or what the less-unhinged fans commonly call "Predators." They are apex hobbyists, slicing their way across centuries in search of worthy opponents.

"The Shield" begins on the windy

Predator: Killer of Killers

Director: Dan Trachtenberg and Joshua Wassung

Cast: Lindsay LaVanchy, Louis Ozawa Changchien, Rick Gonzalez, Michael Biehn

Storyline: A Viking raider, a ninja in feudal Japan, and a World War II pilot encounter the titular intergalactic hunter

coasts of Scandinavia. Ursa, a shieldmaiden fueled by a Hamletian bloodthirst, storms an enemy stronghold in pursuit of revenge. Just as she triumphs, a cloaked interloper enters the stage, dispatching her comrades' heads from their bodies. The carnage is operatic, and choreographed with a balletic rhythm. Ursa's duel with this armour-less behemoth with a bionic sonic cannon is the stuff of legends.

Rendered in Unreal Engine, the style blends 3D depth with hand-painted 2D textures, creating a look that hovers somewhere between graphic novel and moving fresco. The Viking sequence alone feels like Frank Frazetta's sketchpad sprung to life, full of fog-drenched fjords, flailing limbs, and the glint of bloodied steel.

From there, we move east to feudal Japan. "The Sword" follows twin brothers trained in the art of war, who find themselves entangled in a duel for succession. The Predator in this segment is stealthy and precise, cutting through shadows with a chain-sickle and cloaking tech that makes even a shinobi nervous. The storytelling is sparse and nearly silent, which lends it the air of a Noh play, though one in which the masks are eventually ripped off and the faces underneath are cleaved in two. The chapter comes to a beautiful, poetic bookend with the same haiku that opens it.

Then, in "The Bullet," the film takes to the skies above the Pacific during the second World War. A chatty Navy mechanic-turned-pilot's cocky optimism is tested when his dogfight with Nazi planes is interrupted by something otherworldly. The Predator here is like a space pirate, complete with a cybernetic eyepatch and a ship that spits alien

harpoons. Of the three stories, this one takes the longest to get airborne, weighed down slightly by its earnest backstory. But once it lifts off, it does so with a gory *Top Gun*-like panache.

These segments are not connected by plot so much as by theme. Each hero is fighting their own war that's just as much against their interstellar enemies, as it is against the crushing weight of expectation, legacy, and self-worth. This makes *Killer of Killers* feel, unexpectedly (and unpretentiously), like a meditation on the cost of proving oneself. Even the Predators' motives are encoded in the title. They're hunting killers, to become better killers themselves, and that logic feels aptly circular.

The final act brings these disparate warriors together for a last stand on Yautja Prime, and the tone pivots slightly toward the absurd. The physics get looser, the pacing accelerates, and the final battle is a delirious jamboree of swords, shields, and alien tech. But even here, the film never loses sight of its confidence.

Perhaps the real shocker here is that *Killer of Killers* never once feels like a commercial for something else. Granted, there's a little nod to Trachtenberg's *Prey*, and a breadcrumb or two pointing toward his upcoming *Predator: Badlands*. But for once, the fan-service feels exciting, and that's only because *Killer of Killers* is a full-course meal under the guise of an animated amuse-bouche for bigger things to come. It knows exactly what kind of lean, mean and mercifully self-contained franchise extension it is, and like a perfectly executed decapitation, it's all the more satisfying for how clean the cut is.

Predator: Killer of Killers is currently streaming on JioHotstar