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S Poorvaja

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Every other weekend at Cubbon Park in Bengaluru, a small group comes together. You might see them, heads bent over yarn or fabric, embroidering a denim jacket or crocheting a square. Rahul Jhadav, a 36-year-old content publisher who brought together this community says he always carries extra yarn, for people who spot them, and want to come and learn.

We watched in delight when Olympian Tom Daley furiously knitted from the stands during the Paris Olympic Games, and later, the joy with which American rugby player Ilona Maher received a crocheted medal pouch from him this year. A much-shared reel by @crochet_wizard on Instagram, shows him studiously crocheting, with the caption – “Millennials skipping past their ‘mid life crisis’ phase and going straight to granny hobbies”.

Today, pubs in India offer their spaces for crochet, knitting and art workshops, and elsewhere in the world, movie theatres even have knitting and crochet nights, where they leave the lights on so that you can indulge in your favourite hobby while watching a film. For the millennials and even the Gen Z desperate to get away from their screens and eagerly seeking creative outlets, there seems to be no better time to knit, crochet, tuft, or embroider than the present.

Rahul’s community, called Crafty, has been meeting up at Cubbon Park for 10 months now. “The idea was born out of wanting to have a picnic, while crocheting, knitting, embroidering, or even coming in to learn the basics. The park felt like a perfect backdrop for unwinding, and engaging with a community that is equally eager to indulge in these hobbies,” he says.

For many, the pandemic proved to be a starting point into the world of threads, yarn, and stitches. Chandhini Syed, a Chennai-based dancer and Psychology student, remembers stumbling upon YouTube videos of people making clay charms, and crocheting. “My love language is gift-giving, and I was enthused by the idea of making cute things for myself as well,” she laughs. While she taught herself to crochet and began taking orders for small gifts, she loves the small but steadily growing community that seeks her out to learn how to make scarves or even small, cute keepsakes. “Crochet makes me think, brainstorm, and even helps with my dance choreography,” she says.

With over 1 lakh followers on Instagram who eagerly wait for videos of his crochet creations, Mumbai-based Kunal Jaikumar Chourasia (@crochet_by_kunal) recalls learning from his grandmother when he was 10 years old. “I however got back into the hobby during the lockdown, and began to post about my art online. What started off as an activity I looked forward to as a break from my hectic job is now something I have delved into full-time,” he says.

Kunal sells his creations, and conducts classes and



(Clockwise from left) Anjali Dulwani; Kunal Jaikumar Chourasia with his crochet creations; visitors at The Clumsy Studio with their tufted rugs; Chandhini Syed; and Crafty’s session in Cubbon Park, Bengaluru. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



from going out to eat and staying glued to their phones. The idea that you can make and take something back with you after a session at our tufting studio also adds to the excitement,” she says.

Mindfulness and more

A lawyer, Anushka says she began tufting a year-and-a-half ago in her bedroom after building a frame and buying a tufting gun. “I delved into this as a therapeutic getaway. It wasn’t long before I began toying with the idea of setting up a tufting studio,” she says.

Visitors who walk into The Clumsy Studio are beginners, and get to try their hand at tufting. At the end of their three-hour session, they walk out with a brightly coloured rug they have made. “My target audience was anyone above the age of 14 years. I have however had such a diverse mix of people come in – from college students, to mothers and daughters wanting a fun activity on a day out, and have even hosted birthdays and bachelorette parties centred around tufting as a fun, group activity,” she says.

Given the abundance of reels, online tutorials, and budding communities, what is it that has resonated with these unlikely generations? “Housewives, school students, psychiatrists, software engineers and a host of other people have turned to crochet and amigurumi, a Japanese craft form where one uses crochet to make 3D figures, for a break from the digital grind. Instead of endless scrolling, they chose to spend their time crafting something unique with their own hands,” says Anjali Dulwani, who goes by @missloombastic on Instagram.

Seated amidst her amigurumi creations at her Vadodara-based studio, Anjali explains how she has taught over 250 people in the last five years, and says there is a steadily growing community of young people across the world finding something special in amigurumi.

With an increasing spotlight on the enrichment that art and craft bring about, and the creative outlets that these hobbies offer, Anjali sums up this surge in interest, and the positive impact taking to yarn has had.

“This is a sign that the millennials and the Gen Z value community and creativity, and these hobbies are a form of mindfulness that is much needed for our fast-paced world,” concludes the artist.

Stay in the loop

Need a break from doomscrolling? An increasing number of millenials and Gen Z are now taking to fun, crafty hobbies which include knitting, crochet, and tufting

workshops for hobbyists, a majority of whom he says are between the ages of 22 and 30 years. “They all want to explore art, want to do something in their free time, and give cute gifts to their friends,” he explains. Kunal’s videos showcase a range – he is either crocheting characters from Super Mario, a bouquet of sunflowers and tulips, or is making handy cases for earphones, bags, and bucket hats.

In perhaps the most direct impact, the surge in interest in these hobbies is best seen at the source of it all: art stores. In Chennai, Amritha Venketakrishnan, proprietrix, Hindustan Trading Company says they have increased their offerings quite a bit and if the trend continues, will be sourcing a lot more supplies as well.

At this store, one can take their pick from balls of fluffy multi-coloured yarn, needles for crochet, and more among other art supplies.



“There’s a sense of pride that comes with making something completely by hand. We see a lot of young people taking to these hobbies now, and enjoying the calming, and sometimes repetitive patterns involved,” says Amritha.

If not physical classes or workshops, there are YouTube

videos, Instagram tutorials and other avenues one can get started with.

Gurgaon-based startup The Original Knit has DIY kits so far, and Kanchan says they regularly conduct workshops, at organisations such as LinkedIn and Google, where employees are choosing to learn and delve into crochet as a hobby.

customers that included expectant mothers reaching out to ask them if they would conduct workshops.

DIY kits and workshops

The Original Knit has sold over 30,000 DIY kits so far, and Kanchan says they regularly conduct workshops, at organisations such as LinkedIn and Google, where employees are choosing to learn and delve into crochet as a hobby.

“The DIY kits come with access to pre-recorded videos, chat, and email support. For beginners, a DIY kit is a great way to start.

People pick up crochet or knitting wanting to relax, and feel a sense of accomplishment when they see what they finally make. This is a hobby, as well as a skill for life,” she says. While her DIY crochet kits can help a beginner make a range of plushies and even beanie hats, the knitting kits are perfect for beginners looking to make small scarves or even headbands.

It has been eight months since The Clumsy Studio in Mumbai opened, and 25-year-old Anushka Agarwal, the founder, says there is a steady stream of people making a beeline for the tufting studio. “People are always looking to find something new to do apart





Instapick

Vintage relic: The first car produced in Soviet-era Poland after the Second World War, the 1951 Warszawa M-20, is now on display at the Otrebusy Museum near Warsaw after being tracked down in Finland. This rare vehicle, once owned by Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, marks Poland's Soviet dependency.



Talkingpoint

Green comeback: Brazil's Amazon deforestation dropped by 30.6% in the past year, reaching its lowest level in nine years at 6,288 square kilometers lost. Meanwhile, deforestation in the Cerrado, Brazil's biodiverse savannah, fell by 25.7%. The results mark a shift under President Lula da Silva's policies.



SCREEN SHARE

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Life has been awfully still since my father passed some weeks ago. As I flip through pictures he had taken of us and ruminate about our shared love for photography and tangible art, I recall what Ed Harris' photographer said to his son in 2017's *Kodachrome*: "Photography is human nature made tangible." The photographer has found several such iconic moments on screen – a reflection that stretches from Mohanlal's *Photographer* (2006) to Fahadh Faasil's *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016). The still camera has lent storytellers several captivating

Depth of field

Here are some films that used photography as a lens to reveal the inner landscapes of the protagonist

narratives; be it how a photograph becomes indisputable evidence in thrillers like *Memento*, *Rear Window* and *Blow-Up*, or as Cupid that strikes an unlikely match (2019's *Photograph*). It can reveal ghosts and premonitions (*Sivi* or *Aa Dekhen Zara*), or even tear down political dreams (*Scoop* or 2011's *Ko*).

However, beyond such pulpy titles lie films that have used photography as a lens to reveal the inner landscapes of the protagonist. For instance, the war photographer lead in films like *Civil War* and *A Thousand Times Good Night* crumbles under her existential search for meaning in the chaos, or

discovers the scars her risky endeavours have left in her life.

I often think about how a camera bears witness to a person's life like no other document – a notion that parallels our existential need for a partner to 'witness' our lives. Perhaps that is what Meryl Streep sees in the grey-haired Clint

Eastwood, flashing his chiselled jawline, tawny suspenders, and a 35mm Nikon F, in *The Bridges of Madison County*, a heartbreaking portrait of a hopeless affair. As she recounts her fling with this photographer, who let her be who she had forgotten to be, the covered bridges he came to photograph become a metaphor for their secret respite.

An unusual addition to this list, Robin Williams' *One Hour Photo*, in its twisted ways, speaks of our conditioning to photograph happiness (there is an enchanting montage of 35mm being processed in a minilab). On the non-fiction front, BBC's *The Many Lives of William Klein* serves as a fascinating close-up of an inspiring photo artist.

As I wrestle with my grief over my father's passing, I regret not clicking a simple, eye-level portrait of him on film. Why did I not? I wonder if the answer lies in my conviction that a photograph is a souvenir best collected after the moment is fully lived. As Sean Penn's character says in *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*, "If I like a moment – personally – I don't like to have the distraction of the camera. I just want to stay in it." And so perhaps I have already captured the best portraits of my father, only that I did not need to use a camera.

From The Hindu cinema team, a fortnightly column recommending films and shows tied to a mood, theme, or pop cultural event.

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.



Tasty retreat

Unwind after a long week at **Twist Lounge Bar, Turyaa**, with the classic kebab and beer combo all month long starting ₹999 every evening. Call 7358099335 for reservations. Alternatively, go on a culinary journey through Southeast Asia, at **Hyatt Regency** until November 10. Indulge in delicacies like Penang curry, and gai yang lanna style chicken starting ₹1,500. Call 988433633.



Artistic escape

It is time to bring out the Picasso in you! **Chaya Arts & Crafts Gallery** hosts an interactive art workshop at **Sai Villa event space**, Neelankarai with artist Keerthana Muthu on November 17 from 2.30pm to 4.30pm accompanied by music, tea, and snacks. Open to ages 16 and above, participants will create an acrylic painting with gold foil. Limited to 20 spots. For registration, contact 9600126355.



Clowning around

Celebrate the 10th anniversary of India's **International Clown Festival** with a talented cast of international clowns from 10 countries. Experience two unforgettable days of laughter, featuring jaw-dropping acrobatics, juggling, unicycling, and music. Join families and fans of all ages at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall on November 23 and 24. Tickets on in.bookmyshow starting ₹800.



Comedy central

Chennai homeboy **Rahul Subramanian** is bringing his latest comedy special *Who Are You* to the city. The show, which has travelled all over the world, including to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe will deal with the absurdities of life in the corporate world. Head to **The Music Academy** on November 16 at 3.30pm or 7pm for much-needed laughter therapy. Tickets on bookmyshow; ₹1,200 onwards.



Designer treasures

Go on a shopping spree! The **Amethyst Room** at Chamiers is hosting an exclusive exhibition featuring designer labels like Anupamaa by Anupama Dayal, PIAR by Priyadarshini Rao, and Akirahin by Niharika Bhasin. Explore collections ranging from Bohemian kaftans, tunics and skirts to statement jewellery pieces, and fusion co-ord sets starting ₹4,000 until November 13.



Jazzy evening

Indulge in an evening of smooth jazz at 365 A S, Hyatt Regency. Jazz vocalist **Radha Thomas** and pianist **Aman Mahajan** will take the stage on November 15, from 8pm onwards. The duo has performed widely with multiple live concerts, tours, club appearances and video recordings since 2011 and is back to Chennai after a long break. For reservations, call 9790787813.



Chic carryalls

If you appreciate a good handbag, shop **Kate Spade's** oversized tote collection. Available in iconic prints solid colours, these totes are the style of the season. Shop on luxe.ajio starting ₹15,000. If you have year-end travel plans, check out **Aeropostale's** new luggage collection by Bagline. Fit for all young, budget conscious travellers, the bags are available on bagline.com starting ₹900.

(Below) The Kashmiri wazwan served in a tarami, a beaten copper dish; (right) the vintage car turned chaat-mobile. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



and is visibly proud to "once again serve real India on a plate". Hence, here, neither the music overpowers conversations nor it is the other way round. It is only when the food arrives at the table that the clinking of the cutlery drowns the crooning of Rafi, Kishore, Lata or Asha.

Old city touch
The hotel, meanwhile, having stood at the confluence of two Delhis on Asaf Ali Road since 1956, is undergoing refurbishments and should be open for guests in a couple of months. On a road that has lost many of its landmarks to time, Delite Cinema among the few still breathing, Hotel Broadway might have a come a long way from the ₹15-a-room days, but Rohit promises its spirit remains the same.

For the uninitiated, it opened when a businessman from Kashmir - Tirath Ram Amla bought the building in an auction. The goal was to convert it into a summer home for the family. The fine print, that he missed, was a mandate to run it like a four-storeyed hotel. Rohit's mother inherited it from her father and ran it till the family had to shut it down in 2020 due to COVID-19.

There were even rumours of the family parting with the property. "No. We were always very sentimental about it. My grandfather built it. My mother ran it during the 1970s, '80s, '90s. So, there was never an intention to sell it at all. Who knows! By the time I get older, perhaps my kids will take over. We'll see," Rohit says. The hotel's dingy bar, Thugs, that paid an ode to Hindi film villains, might make a comeback too.

After all, there are still basements full of myriad pieces collected from across the globe, many old Bollywood posters waiting to get framed, and perhaps many more mismatched chairs waiting for their place around a table.

Garima Verma

Hotel Broadway stands where Delhi ends and Dilli begins – where chaos in rhythm gives way to rhythm in chaos. Its iconic restaurant Chor Bizarre, which made fans out of many leaders, diplomats, politicians, artists, writers, and Bollywood legends, has started humming those notes of days gone by once again. Opened in 1990, it was single-handedly responsible for introducing many to Kashmiri wazwan, and reintroducing many more to that classic era of Hindi film music. It threw open the gates of nostalgia again on October 16. The playlist has remained unchanged. Just like most of the restaurant – the Tiffany lamps, the likes of Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe, and Steve McQueen looking

The return of an icon

Established in 1956, Hotel Broadway hosted diplomats, politicians, artists, and writers till it closed in 2020. It is now gearing up for another innings

at you from the corner, that staircase going nowhere, the vintage car turned into a chaat-mobile... Even the crack in the floor. For, when it comes to this one, Rohit Khattar, founder-chairman, Old World Hospitality, credited for introducing Indian cuisine via Indian Accent, and contemporary brands like Comorin, Fireback and Hosa, would rather continue to celebrate the past. "Chor Bizarre is an icon. It is from the '90s. So, I'm not going to mess around with that. People love nostalgia," says Rohit. He was 27 when he converted

part of Hotel Broadway's guest lounge into the themed restaurant, and in an age-appropriate attempt at being "cool", chose to pun it. Yet, his collection of seemingly mismatched art and knick-knacks somehow brought everything together. "Of all my brands, this one is closest to my heart. It was my first," adds Rohit. **On the guest list** It was where once he missed meeting the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif. Having heard about the place's Kashmiri tarami, Sharif had decided to visit. It

was late in the night and Rohit, after having been "disturbed for a lot of celebrity visits, had just asked the staff a few days back to treat all guests alike and not wake me up every time". So, they did not! He quickly took back his decision. For, who knows, despite howsoever embarrassing it might have been, he might have otherwise missed that meeting with Sharmila Tagore too. "I used to sing her movie songs all the time, and 'Mere sapnon ki rani' (from her 1969 hit *Aradhana*) was my favourite," he recalls. Chor Bizarre has a bigger bar and

a lengthier menu now. Yet, its tarami (the beaten copper dish in which traditional wazwan is served), galouti kebabs, and palak-patta chaat, among many other items on the menu, still invoke the same feeling of warmth and unpretentiousness that has always defined old Delhi. Chef Srinivas A, whose association with Chor Bizarre goes back to 2008, could not be happier at the reunion

We were always very sentimental about it. My grandfather built it. My mother ran it during the 1970s, '80s, '90s. So, there was never an intention to sell it at all

ROHIT KHATTAR
Founder-chairman, Old World Hospitality

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When *The Walking Dead* first lurched onto screens in 2010, few would have wagered on a scrappy, crossbow-slinging loner and a battered, grieving mother to emerge as the show's enduring emotional backbone. Yet, over a decade of unrelenting apocalypse, Daryl Dixon and Carol Peletier – brought to life by Norman Reedus and Melissa McBride – have come to embody resilience in its most understated form.

As the series stretched far beyond its original premise, their friendship became its beating heart. As we step into the second season of *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon* – the spinoff that launched Reedus' lone-wolf survivalist into a fractured France – fans are in for the long-awaited reunion. With McBride finally returning to her role as Carol, after a season's hiatus, this second act looks to deliver more than just a familiar face; it is a revival of the show's truest, quietest intimacy, still thriving amid the wreckage.

Titled *The Book of Carol*, this season brings back that delicate chemistry that kept viewers glued to their screens during the original series. But what exactly can audiences expect from their reunion in a world that is even more fractured than the one they left behind?

"I came here to look for Daryl. I have come a very long way," Carol says in a teaser for the new season. The nostalgia-soaked line calls back to the countless times the two characters have thrown themselves in danger for the other. Yet, as Norman and Melissa pointed in an interview, this fresh chapter dives deeper than merely a fan-pleasing reunion.

"We never really got the opportunity to have certain story arcs come full circle," Norman admits, the unmistakable rasp of his voice betraying his weary anticipation.



Resilience, reclamation and revival

The Walking Dead veterans seem destined to wrestle with unspoken histories, haunted less by the horrors of the apocalypse than by what they have had to bury to get this far

have always rested with the characters – those bruised and battered souls clinging to one another as fiercely as they cling to survival. *Daryl Dixon*, however, strips it all down to something more raw, more personal. Set against the picturesque desolation of the French countryside, far from the chaos of *The Walking Dead*, the new spinoff offers Norman and Melissa the rare chance to zero in on the very same unspoken history – a history brimming with wordless glances, silent understandings, and a loyalty that neither time nor terror could shake.

"We've had time to really unpack a lot of those bottled-up emotions," Norman said, reflecting on how the series has shifted its focus. "A lot of those emotions are what drive our decisions as characters, and you'll

In conversation with the cast of Daryl Dixon

Question: Do you view Madam Genet's character as inherently fascist, or more of a necessary evil to combat the Union de l'Espoir? Also, did the opening sequence from *IngLOURIOUS BASTERDS* serve as inspiration?

Anne Charrier: I wouldn't say Genet is inherently fascist. Personally, I drew inspiration from tyrants throughout history. As for *IngLOURIOUS BASTERDS*, while it may have inspired the writers, I didn't consider it myself, though I love that scene.

Q: Daryl and Laurent's relationship reminded me of Joel and Ellie from *The Last of Us*.

Louis Puech Scigliuzzi: I haven't watched *The Last of Us*, but I've heard great things. I know there's a girl in it, like Laurent, who's seen as a kind of "messiah" or cure, so I can see the similarity. I didn't really draw inspiration from other zombie shows except *The Walking Dead*.

Stills of Norman Reedus and Melissa McBride in *The Walking Dead*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

start to see that coming full circle." The journey through hordes of French undead is no mere jaunt through scenic decay – Daryl and Carol are lugging years of emotional baggage right along with their crossbows. Now, removed from the sprawling ensemble that once provided a buffer, they are compelled to face their trauma head-on, as though France itself demands a reckoning with their past.

In the first season of *Daryl Dixon*, our gruff titular hero found himself grappling not just with a foreign landscape but with new allies and enemies, the kind that sneer and backstab in fine French style. But with Carol's return this season, those external battles are poised to reflect the internal ones in a way that only these two coarsened survivors can deliver – less sentimental, more scars over stories. "Bouncing off of other people, especially in a new environment, forces you to reimagine your place in the world," Melissa observed. "Daryl had to do that in season one, and now it's Carol's turn."

What makes Daryl and Carol's reunion so irresistibly compelling is the way it is framed against a backdrop of gnawing uncertainty. Can the shared history between these two survivors really see them through a world that seems bent on devouring them whole? Or will the relentless pressure to survive drive a wedge between them yet again? These questions will surely fuel the series, yet both Norman and Melissa remain stubbornly optimistic about their characters' resilience.

"There's a purity of spirit between the two of them," Norman said. "It's not just luck that's kept them alive. There's a willingness to keep going, to fight for each other. Even when one has no optimism left, the other fills in the gaps."

This dynamic – the way they prop each other up when all hope seems lost – has always been at the core of their relationship. It is the introspective moments and the tempestuous ones alike that reveal a connection rooted in something beyond survival. It is faith, yes, but not in the decaying world around them; it is faith in each other.

As the second season of *Daryl Dixon* premieres, fans will undoubtedly be on high alert for those subtleties. For Norman and Melissa, it is a chance to finally tell the stories they have been wanting to tell, and for all of us watching, it is a long-awaited homecoming that will bring up worlds of pain, but stay hopeful nonetheless.

"I hope these characters never give up," Melissa says. Neither, it seems, do the fans who have been following them through every turn of the apocalypse. And as Norman wryly puts it: "We've come too far to stop now."

The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon is available to stream on Prime Video



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Dune's tune

According to an article in *Variety*, the makers of *Dune: Part Two* have submitted the film's score for the Oscars. This comes after an independent review questioned Denis Villeneuve's sci-fi

epic and whether the score met the Academy's eligibility standards. The film was not officially submitted at that time. Hans Zimmer's score includes thematic elements from his Academy Award-winning work on 2021's *Dune*, which could potentially exceed the limit for pre-existing music allowed under the Academy's guidelines.



Worth the wait?

Oscar-winning *Parasite* director Bong Joon-ho's upcoming film *Mickey 17* will hit theatres in April 2025, as reported by *The Hollywood Reporter*. Warner Bros. announced that it is pushing the film's

release from January 31 to April 18 next year. Previously, in February, Warner Bros. rescheduled the sci-fi film's release date from March 29, 2024, to January 31, 2025. *Mickey 17* marks the Korean auteur's first feature since *Parasite*, the highest-grossing Korean film that was the first non-English language movie to win Best Picture at the Oscars.

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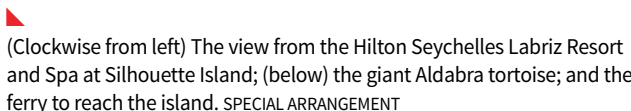
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How to get to Silhouette Island

Air Seychelles has a direct flight every week from Mumbai to Mahé; it takes about 4.5 hours to reach. Carriers like Emirates and Qatar Airways offer connecting flights to the destination from other Indian cities.

Once you arrive at Victoria (or Mahe Island), the capital of Seychelles, you can travel aboard one of the scheduled ferries to Silhouette Island (20 km away), an hour-long ride costing about €120.

Within the island, the only mode of transport is rented bicycles or golf carts, only for the guests of the Hilton. The population here is less than 300, and consists mostly of staff of the resort.

the world, next only to the Galapagos tortoises, and can weigh up to 250 kilograms.

“They are truly iconic,” says Rico, assistant conservation officer with the Island Conservation Society (ICS). “Their numbers dwindled significantly from the late 1800s till the 1970s due to hunting and habitat destruction. However, they have made an impressive recovery. Today, they have been relocated across various islands in the Seychelles to boost their chances of survival.”

The whole of Silhouette Island is a national park. So, tourists who arrive on the daily ferry to this picturesque island can, apart from taking pretty selfies and indulging in sea food, also witness this ecological

biodiversity. An exciting night walk here gives tourists a chance to catch a glimpse of the elusive sheath-tailed bat, known locally as Sousouri Bannann. This bat, one of the rarest in the world, with only 83 left globally, can be found only on Silhouette Island and the capital, Mahé. “As the species is critically endangered, all our efforts need to be research-driven. We’re also studying their habitat needs to inform better restoration and management plans, and collaborating with international researchers,” adds Rico.

There are more varieties of unique species that are found only in the Seychelles islands and nowhere else in the world, like the Seychelles magpie robin, the Seychelles white-eye and the sunbird. Also found on the islands are endangered amphibians like the palm frog and Thomasset's frog. "We also have the Seychelles caecilian, an amphibian that is endemic to the islands," informs Steven Boodna, assistant activity manager at the Hilton who regularly shows tourists around the island.

Steven and the ICS team often do little treks and walks, including through the Silhouette Native Plants Garden Trail, where visitors can see a wide variety of native plants apart from trying to catch a glimpse of birds and frogs. This is not just a chance to get away from the bustle of everyday city life but also an opportunity to learn a thing or two about Nature. “The biodiversity of Seychelles is absolutely critical, not just for ecological balance but also for tourism. The delicate ecosystems here include a mix of endemic species that are found nowhere else in the world. Ensuring that these species thrive is vital not only for the environment but for tourism itself, as visitors come to experience this unique environment,” says Rico.

Because, even as the tortoises are taking slow steps, Seychelles is taking a giant leap.

The writer was in Seychelles at the invitation of Tourism Seychelles

How Seychelles' Silhouette Island, home to the Aldabra giant tortoise and sheath-tailed bat, is showcasing its flora and fauna

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In his lazy morning stroll, Jonathan hears the familiar footsteps of Rico Payet, who is bringing him some leaves to chew. Jonathan, an Aldabra giant tortoise basks in the sun at the Hilton Seychelles Labriz Resort and Spa at Silhouette Island. His age is not known, but he has other friends, not too far away on the island, who have lived 100 years and are still going strong.

Aldabra giant tortoises are the second-largest species of tortoise in

In its fourth edition, Shillong Cherry Blossom Music Festival brings icons like Boney M and Akon on stage and ropes in Japan as its partner country.



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It is that time of the year when the Khasi hills don the pink-toned floral cloak of the cherry blossom trees. In full bloom, they meet Shillong at the crossroads of autumn and winter, inspiring a league of legendary international artists crooning at the annual Cherry Blossom Music Festival.

Organised by Meghalaya Tourism and managed by event company Rockski EMG, this year the festival is themed Year of Legends and will welcome nearly 100 artistes, including the iconic R&B, reggae, funk and disco music group Boney M from the 1970s and hip-hop star of the early Noughties, Akon, on stage.

The festival takes the fragrance of cherry blossoms beyond music, extending it to the cultural ties between India and Japan. Announcing Japan as its partner country, the organisers shared that the collaboration was sparked by the striking resemblance of cherry blossoms in Meghalaya and Japan. This was noted by the Japanese Ambassador during his visit to Meghalaya in 2023.

Jason Manners, owner of Rockski EMG, says, “This unique collaboration celebrates the shared beauty of cherry blossoms, with a dedicated stall offering insights into Japanese culture and heritage. The festival will feature Boney M’s Farewell Tour, making it a rare chance to see this iconic band live.” Additionally, the festival showcases local talents from the Meghalaya



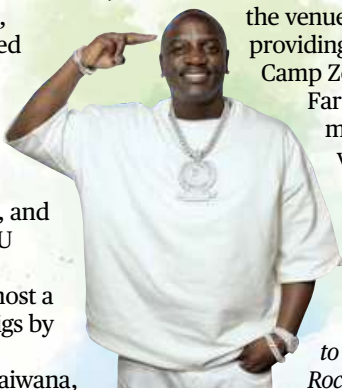
(Clockwise from above) Boney M, Akon and cherry blossom trees in Shillong. GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Grassroots Music Project, creating a perfect fusion of international and regional music.

Slated for November 15 and 16 at the RBD SA Sports Complex in Shillong, the festival will have performances by Akon, Jasleen Royal, Boney M, Lucas, Queen Sensation, The Great Society, Rito Riba and Jessie Lyngdoh on the first day. On the second, bands and artistes Clean Bandit, Kanika Kapoor, REHAB, Khasi Bloodz, Korn SK, Dewdrops, Reble and Artsourced will take the stage.

"We also have performances by magician John, jazz singer Mebalajied Kyrmen, and Khasi folk band Na U Bnai," adds Jason.

The festival will host a Japan arena, with gigs by Japanese artistes
Zombie-Chang, Amaiwana,



DYGL, Nonoc, Newspeak and Lillies and Remains. You can also expect J Hind, a band formed by JETRO a Japanese government-related organisation, and a sumo performance by Hirakuza Sumo Team. There will be anime screening along with a fashion contest and cosplay competition. "Additionally, we'll have activities like origami, calligraphy, a Japanese tea ceremony and Japanese cuisine and brands at the stalls too," shares Jason.

During a press conference held last year, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad K Sangma stated that over 50,000 people had attended the festival. “The official Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival page mentions that 60% of tickets have been sold till date for the upcoming Festival 2024,” Jason informs.

A scented love letter to cultural ties and touristy sojourns, the festival will have an additional stage, The Dome, aiming to regale visitors with tunes of the soil by local artistes like Ashley, Abstrakt, Varun Vohra, and Warrior.

While attendees can book hotels, resorts and guest houses around the venue, Rockski is also providing campsites such as Camp Zen located at Mebada Farms which is 10 minutes from the venue, Nomads campsite and Camp Naskvia.

For festival tickets,
starting ₹2,399, log on
to in.bookmyshow.com or
RockskiTickets.com



Hindi

Ajay Devgn in a deathly dull franchise



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There was a time when Hindi blockbuster cinema could stand on its own – distinguishable from tacky non-fiction programming on satellite TV. But the laziness and opportunism of the last few years have all but vaporised that distinction. *Singham Again*, ostensibly an action potboiler and an *Avengers*-like ‘team-up’ movie but plays like an ad for the tourism ministry’s Ramayana trail. Headlined by Ajay Devgn, this is the latest in director Rohit Shetty’s ever-expanding cop universe, preceded by two *Singham* films as well as the standalones *Simmba* (2018) and *Sooryavanshi* (2021). Near the start, a disclaimer informs us that, although the new film is inspired by the story of Lord Ram, “neither its narrative nor its characters should be viewed as revered deities”.

After his stints in Goa and Mumbai, Singham (Devgn) is now posted in Kashmir, heading a Special Operations Group of the local police. The appearance of Omar Hafeez (Jackie Shroff), an old nemesis, sets the film in motion. Hafeez’s grandson, Zubair (Arjun Kapoor), is a dreaded drug lord embedded in Sri Lanka, bent on revenge. After Singham’s newfangled ‘Shiva’ squad – a covert unit of cops with no “jurisdiction” – busts Zubair’s ring, he responds by kidnapping Singham’s wife, Ramleela impresario Avni (Kareena Kapoor Khan). Zubair is talked up as a sadistic, fire-breathing butcher known as ‘Danger Lanka’, though that is not the scariest part. The scariest part is Shetty and his writers mobilising the might of half of Bollywood to bring down a character played by Arjun Kapoor. The trailer for *Singham Again* was nearly five minutes long. In addition to spoiling several surprises it revealed the film’s central framing device: the *Ramayana*. The parallels are toe-curlingly awkward, like a character assuming the fake name of Mrigaya (deer) to assist in Sita Haran.

As the Bajrang Bali equivalent, Ranveer Singh’s Simmba makes the most of his hour. The film’s ‘Lanka Dahan’ sequence is not propulsive or spectacularly staged, but Singh is his usual, goofy self. In the film’s trailer, we see Devgn standing under a saffron flag; it has ‘Jai Shri Ram’ written on it, and bears a vector of the Hindu god. At the behest of the censor board, the flag has been altered to an impartial red. Past *Singham* films have fixated on the character’s Maratha and Hindu identity. This one does the same, linking religion with regional and national pride.

Shetty would likely defend his film as a work of escapist entertainment. But by that metric too it disappoints. The assembly of stars in the climax is as slapdash and bereft of fresh ideas as the one that capped *Sooryavanshi*. The Cop Universe is nearing a heat death. No cameo – not even one by a famously effervescent Bihar cop – can mask its creative shortfall.

Singham Again is currently running in theatres.



A soul-stirring action film

A pacy screenplay, marvellous performances and excellent technical prowess make *Amaran* a brilliant ode to the resilient families who love their bravehearts

Tamil

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When the guns roar, the arts die,” said celebrated playwright Arthur Miller. Many art masterpieces have been swallowed up by wars but art, like the ever-forgiving land that has caused countless battles, has withstood it all. It has been the blank canvas to paint everything from propaganda films to anti-war movies. While many of them resort to skewed agendas, director Rajkumar Periasamy takes the road less travelled with *Amaran*, and along with producer Kamal Haasan and powerhouse performances from Sivakarthiskeyan and Sai Pallavi, the filmmaker delivers an evocative biopic of Major Mukund Varadarajan.

The perfectly titled *Amaran* is everything we expected it to be. While we know about the war that came in the form of an operation in which Major Mukund was killed in action, *Amaran* builds up to it by showcasing the battles Mukund (played by Sivakarthiskeyan) and his lady love Indhu Rebecca Varghese (Sai Pallavi) had in their personal and professional lives amidst their beautiful love story. Technically, *Amaran* would make for a near-perfect biographical war film but at its heart, it is an endearing love story. Partly fiction and mostly adapted from a segment of *India’s Most Fearless: True Stories of Modern Military Heroes*, *Amaran* journals the lives of Mukund and Indhu from the first time they met at college. Of course, the film follows the template of the tried and tested romance story with everything from meet-cute, convincing the families and entering into wedlock. But the army backdrop, set in the picturesque valleys of Kashmir, makes the film stand apart.

Apart from the beautiful love story, *Amaran* offers a glimpse into a counter-insurgency/terrorism battalion and their everyday lives. Rajkumar Periasamy isn’t new to the game of

Amaran

Director: Rajkumar Periasamy

Cast: Sivakarthiskeyan, Sai Pallavi, Bhuvan Arora, Rahul Bose, Geetha Kailasam

Storyline: A fearless soldier and his spirited lady love face their battles with courage and brave it all out

bringing to life the everyday actualities of a group of people; his fantastic debut *Rangoon* (2017) was about Tamil Burma repatriates and similarly, in *Amaran*, the filmmaker puts us right in the middle of the action and reaction of our soldiers.

What works in the favour of *Amaran* is how it stays with its characters instead of dwelling at length on the history and politics behind the territorial conflict over the Kashmir region. We get throwaway lines on how those who are supposed to sit and talk are yet to do it and even a glimpse into the ‘other’ side when militants face losses. From a cinematic standpoint, *Amaran*, to our pleasant surprise, is more akin to *Vaaranam Aayiram* than *Vishwaroopam*. Though our counterparts in the North have a richer history when it comes to the genre of war films, some of the recent Bollywood outings reek of jingoism hastened by hypernationalism and xenophobia. *Amaran* avoids such pitfalls like an expert soldier manoeuvring across a minefield.

Without throwing military jargon at us, the film skillfully teaches us concepts like white and black villages, why certain battalions are allowed to grow facial hair and how the Indian Army works closely with camps for reformed militants. Another line, “Suspect all but respect all”, mouthed by the dependable Rahul Bose, embodies the means through which the army operates in sensitive areas.

It wouldn’t be an overstatement to call Sivakarthiskeyan and Sai Pallavi the pillars that prop up this film. Sivakarthiskeyan’s introduction shot featuring a planking competition with two soldiers standing on his back lingers in the mind. More than the physical transformation – which makes him look the best he has ever looked on screen – it’s the restrained performance of Siva that makes it one of his most career-defining roles. His character’s braveness is underlined by his persona rather than an assembly of heroic moments. While Siva aces through the action sequences, he’s in his element in scenes where his character is vulnerable – and that happens often, be it when his team is ambushed or when his love story hits a roadblock.

If Sivakarthiskeyan is the heart of the film, pumping blood that accelerates through our veins during the action

sequences, it’s Sai Pallavi who happens to be the soul of *Amaran*. The resilient Indhu Rebecca Varghese compares their long-distance relationship with that of the sky and the sea. While Mukund, with desires and passion like the boundless sky, flies high as a kite, it’s Indhu who, like the serene sea, endures the brunt of their relationship’s rocky start and the solo responsibilities of being a parent while simultaneously being the source of power for Mukund’s perilous journey. In the hands of a less capable actor, the chances of Indhu coming off as a one-dimensional turning the film into a sobfest were painfully high but Sai Pallavi aces it.

Apart from the lead pair, who complement each other well, Geetha Kailasam shines the most as Mukund’s mother. The thoughtful decision to stick to a not-so-familiar cast makes it easier to see them as characters, lending a sense of legitimacy to the story. The lighter moments – like the romance montages or the scenes showcasing the brotherhood within the force, including a sequence where the soldiers discuss their favourite films from *Thuppaki* to *Anbe Sivam* – add depth to the characters which may otherwise feel superficial.

While shedding light on the personal and professional tribulations a soldier faces, the film is primarily an ode to the family members and what they go through after sending their loved ones to the army. The brilliant writing overshadows the minor flaws of *Amaran* and while I’m personally not a fan of films reusing yesteryear titles, this one happens to be a rare case where it feels befitting to the newer film. With *Amaran*, Rajkumar Periasamy hits it out of the park once again thanks to a pacy screenplay, marvellous performances and brilliant technical prowess, especially from GV Prakash who, apart from accentuating the mass sequences with rousing music, skillfully uses silence during the poignant moments.

Vijay handed over the ‘*thuppaki*’ to Sivakarthiskeyan in *GOAT* as a gesture to announce his successor in Tamil cinema, and with *Amaran*, Sivakarthiskeyan shows us that the gun is in safe hands.

Amaran is currently running in theatres

Venky Atluri, Dulquer Salmaan deliver an entertaining drama

Telugu

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Lucky Baskhar employs the narrative technique of creating tense moments before a twist, then retracing a few steps to reveal the events that led to it, at sporadic intervals. The first time this happens, it is an indication of what the titular character is capable of. When this technique is repeated, there is the danger of it falling flat. There are occasions when we can pre-empt a twist. This relationship drama woven around a financial scam is Atluri’s best work till date and is anchored by a powerhouse Dulquer Salmaan.

The film begins with Baskhar breaking the fourth wall and telling us his story. Banglan’s production design recreates a lower middle class locality of Bombay of 1989-92, with Nimish Ravi’s camera snaking through the grey-tinged walls of the houses and the narrow, congested lanes. The first hour of the film moves



along familiar lines. Baskhar leads a hand-to-mouth existence, having to support his wife, son, two siblings and an ailing father. He is forever in debt and cannot afford three plates of vada pav. It is no surprise when Baskhar faces the wrath of a money lender, or when his family gets humiliated.

It is easy to guess that Baskhar will take the bait to make quick money. In these portions, the writing spells

out every single detail in a bid to make it easier for everyone to understand Baskhar’s stealthy methods at the bank.

The relationship drama unravels simultaneously. When we first see Baskhar and Sumathi (Meenakshi Chaudhary), they are in sync with each other, having shouldered each other through tough times. The origins of their romance and the family frictions are revealed briefly in

a song. While some characters in the family are on expected lines, a few characters – the father who keeps to himself and the six-year-old son – hold a few surprises.

The 1989-1992 setting allows the makers to bring in references to manipulation of the stock market and money laundering through a character similar to Harshad Mehta. The name is slightly tweaked and Atluri uses this creative liberty to present his own version of a banking and trading scam. If the fraud done by Baskhar in the initial portions can be attributed partly to his luck and partly to the lack of surveillance, the later portions hold the key to smart storytelling.

At midpoint, when Baskhar breaks the fourth wall once again to tell us that the story has just begun, he means every word.

Venky Atluri shifts to top gear in the later portions and gets into the murky ways of money laundering and how everyone, from bank managers to small time businesses, willingly or unwittingly, are a part of a large scam. The writing explains the modus operandi in simple terms

but does not spoon feed. The story skillfully uses some of its supporting characters to make Baskhar introspect. But having gone too deep into the mess, can he swim to safety? The narrative rarely pauses and keeps us guessing on Baskhar’s next move.

Dulquer portrays Baskhar with all sincerity. He is endearing as a middle class man and does not hesitate to wear his arrogance on his sleeve in the later portions. The look also

helps to enhance his transformation into a man who splurges at the drop of a hat. The silver strands that have begun to show are signs of his mounting stress. In scenes where he hardly has a word or two to speak, he conveys it all through his emotions and makes it look effortless. Meenakshi gets a reasonably well-written part and portrays her character effectively. Rajkumar Kasireddy, Maganti Srikanth, Hyper Aadhi, Ramki, Tinnu Anand and Sachin Khedekar are adequate in their parts.

GV Prakash Kumar’s score considerably infuses life into the proceedings, but in a few portions it makes it easy to gauge what is in store. Perhaps some ambiguity would have helped maintain the suspense.

The film discusses Baskhar’s moral compass without getting preachy and scores when it talks about knowing when and how to stop. In Baskhar’s words, well played, indeed!

Lucky Baskhar is currently running in theatres

A marital political drama

The Diplomat Season 2

Creator: Debora Cahn

Cast: Keri Russell, Rufus Sewell, David Gyasi, Ali Ahn, Rory Kinnear, Ato Essandoh

Episodes: 6

Storyline: The ambassador digs deeper into the conspiracy of the attack on the British aircraft carrier and the bombing in London, while relationships detonate around her



Streaming

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When the British Prime Minister, Nicol Trowbridge (Rory Kinnear) says the aircraft carrier HMS Courageous was attacked three weeks ago, one is suitably stunned. Did all the events of season 1 of *The Diplomat*, including the car bomb in the finale and the time required for the injured to heal happen in 21 days? Seems a stretch, but then while *The West Wing*'s Debora Cahn plays fast and loose with facts and time, she has created a brilliantly bingeable show. Season 1 ended with a car bomb involving the US ambassador to the UK, Kate Wyler's (Keri Russell) husband Hal (Rufus Sewell), Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Hayford (Ato Essandoh), embassy staffer, the all-round good guy, Ronnie (Jess Chanliau) and a British MP Merritt Grove (Simon Chandler). Kate was in Paris in a scarlet dress on the arm of the UK

Foreign Secretary Austin Dennison (David Gyasi), all ready to be adulterous, when she heard the news which shocked her and made her all teary. There was a year-and-a-half wait to know whether Hal made it. The show is an enjoyably soapy take on diplomacy and international relations. Kate and Hal's on-off marriage continues to be absorbing. Russell and Sewell as the career diplomats Hal and Kate, riff off each other, loving, hating, being proud, envious and jealous of each other by turns. Sewell radiates Hal's confidence, a poise brought on by negotiating with warlords and similar animals, as well as the insecurity brought on by his wife's ascendance. Russell as Kate, has to choose between her husband's broad shadow, and the polite and proper Dennison, who Hal sarcastically calls "a good man", in between all the other duties of being an ambassador. There is also Stuart's relationship with CIA Station chief, Eidra Park (Ali Ahn), which ended last season, but you need to cut a man some slack after surviving an explosion. Trowbridge is all bluff and bluster but the real power behind

the throne is his wife, Lydia (Pandora Colin) and his campaign manager, the mysterious Margaret Roylin (Celia Imrie), who seems to be in the know of everything. The main reason Kate was in London and not Kabul, where she wanted to be, was to be whetted for the Vice President's post, as the incumbent VP, Grace Penn (Allison Janney) is set to step down under a cloud of her greedy husband's doings. Penn makes an appearance making evil eyes and is set up to be a major player in Season 3. There is talk of Kate's clothes as well as mention of her underwear and hair. Towards the end of the season, she appears in a Vice-President bun. She wears dresses more easily and also appears in a skirt for a meeting. The paper clip Kate uses to keep her trousers up might be evocative of what is keeping the show together as well – great performances, breathless plot turns, snappy dialogue ("Is Lee Harvey Oswald my anaesthesiologist?") and gracious, soaring staircases.

The Diplomat is streaming on Netflix

Snippets



Ridley Scott confirms new Alien movie in development

Director Ridley Scott has confirmed he is developing a new *Alien* film for 20th Century Studios, according to a recent profile in *The Hollywood Reporter*. However, Scott, 86, left fans in suspense by sharing no further details about the direction of the project. With *Alien: Romulus* recently revitalizing interest in the franchise, speculation is swirling over the nature of Scott's next steps. Given *Romulus*' success, the new film could potentially follow in its footsteps, continuing its storyline or exploring a fresh facet of the dystopian sci-fi universe. However, earlier reports had described *Romulus* as a "stand-alone" film, raising questions about how closely tied it may be to a larger narrative.



Shoojit Sircar film promises a heartwarming slice-of-life drama

Directed by Shoojit Sircar, *I Want to Talk* stars Abhishek Bachchan in the lead. In the trailer, Abhishek is seen in multiple looks as he portrays the extra ordinary journey of Arjun through his various challenges and a unique perspective of the way he sees life. The promise of some life changing lesson is evident but is complimented with the subtle situational humour, which is a signature Sircar style. The other actors in the movie are Johnny Lever, Jayant Kriplani and Ahilya Bamroo. The film promises a heart-warming slice-of-life drama. Set to be released in theatres on November 22, 2024.



Kannada short film qualifies for Oscars 2025

The Kannada short film *Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know* has qualified for the Oscars 2025. The movie, directed by Chidananda S Naik, has been selected in the Live Action Short Film category. The 15-minute film was part of Chidananda's year-end exercise at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). On November 05, 2024, the FTII took to social media to announce that the Kannada film has been qualified for the Oscars. The film's narrative is centred around an elderly woman who steals the village rooster. This act sets the villagers on a desperate quest to retrieve the missing bird.



Morbid comedy of horrors

The Substance is body horror for the Instagram generation, a delirious plunge into the psyche's darkest corners

English

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Coralie Fargeat's Cannes-winning nightmare is a carnivorous, candy-coloured satire that sinks its teeth into Hollywood's ageism in an outrageous meditation on self-perception and vanity. The French director, infamous for the brutal *Revenge* (2017), turns her lens back on an industry that devours women, digesting their youth and spitting them out like last season's trend. What starts as the familiar story of an ageing star, dumped and forgotten, spirals into a hallucinatory tug-of-war between flesh and spirit – a kind of crack-fueled *Dorian Gray* on a bender across Hollywood. The film introduces us to Elisabeth Sparkle (Demi Moore), a former fitness queen whose heyday was back in the Spandex-drenched aerobics boom. Once the darling of televised workouts, Elisabeth now finds herself unceremoniously discarded by her vulgar, shrimp-slurping boss, Harvey (played with nauseating camp by Dennis Quaid) for no greater crime than turning fifty. Quaid chomps on shrimp with a repulsive vigour, his face so close that you can almost smell the seafood – a perfect encapsulation of Elisabeth's seething disgust with the men who scrutinize and exploit her. Devastated and desperate, Elisabeth's solution comes in the form of a mysterious *Brat* summer-coded green goo, a Frankensteinian tonic promising a rebirth of sorts. Called simply *The Substance*, the titular potion promises to reverse the cruel markers of age, restoring Elisabeth to a more vibrant, youthful self. But here's the kicker: after

The Substance

Director: Coralie Fargeat

Cast: Demi Moore, Margaret Qualley, Dennis Quaid

Storyline: A fading celebrity uses a black market drug that creates a much younger version of herself with unexpected side effects

injecting it, her body doesn't just revert, rather, endures a spine-splitting metamorphosis, peeling away her skin to reveal her younger, lithier, and ravenously self-confident doppelgänger – Margaret Qualley's Sue. The twisted new tag team takes turns each week, swapping control of their shared life, navigating their existence with a set of rules that, if broken, risk ruining them both. Mirrors and reflections are everywhere. Tortured by her ageing visage, Elisabeth returns obsessively to the looking glass, her own Medusa. Every wrinkle, every sag is a reminder of her fall from grace, of Hollywood's merciless gaze. And though Sue is her physical "better half," Elisabeth's jealousy and horror build in equal measure as Sue revels in the newfound attention her youthful form garners. Through Sue, Elisabeth can reclaim her old show, but the lustrous new skin doesn't make her life any smoother. If anything, it amplifies the dread. The film's brilliance lies in how it mines the duality between Elisabeth's desire and disgust and Sue's ambition and entitlement. With scant dialogue, the film's visual language is quite extraordinary. Cinematographer Benjamin Kracun makes sure no inch of flesh goes unexamined, each camera shot lingers hungrily on every curve, wrinkle, and imperfection. Fargeat's clever choice of Kubrickian set design – a lurid, plastic-y Los Angeles world straight out of an '80s exercise video – only amplifies the claustrophobia. But the film of course revels in its grotesquery with a gusto rarely seen outside Cronenbergian horror. Fargeat's vision is complicit in the carnage, using fish-eye lenses and extreme close-ups to exaggerate each disgusting detail. Every squelch, every drip and tear is magnified to lurid, inescapable extremes, serving up a feast for body-horror fans with a stinging indictment of the lengths to which we go to fight age.

The men of *The Substance* are predictably vile. They're caricatures of chauvinism, united in their dismissal of Elisabeth's personhood the moment she loses her youthful lustre. Yet, she doesn't shy away from implicating Elisabeth herself. As Sue steals Elisabeth's life, Elisabeth realizes that she's not just fighting for relevance; she's fighting a psychological war against herself, against the expectations and insecurities that have invaded her mind. Caught in a cycle of envy, she grows jealous of her own creation, feeling replaced by the younger body she sought so desperately to reclaim. There's a rawness to how Fargeat tackles these themes. She invokes the specter of aging not with pathos, but with rage – a rage that feels, at times, like a pointed critique of Hollywood's "hagsploitation" tradition, where older women's bodies are exploited for horror and repulsion. But here, the horror is interiorized. Elisabeth is terrified not of what others see, but of what she herself has come to believe – that without youth, her worth is lost. Moore's performance is so fearless and unfiltered that we can feel Elisabeth's desperation seep from the screen, a plea for validation that seems, ironically, more poignant as it fails. In the end, *The Substance* is a pitch-black parable, a reflection on the cost of self-worship and the delusion of control. Fargeat's comedy of horrors shows us the lengths one might go to recapture the feeling of being seen – only to realize that what truly haunts us is our own image. This is body horror for the Instagram generation, a delirious plunge into the psyche's darkest corners, and a Faustian reminder that our most frightening critic is often the one staring back from the mirror.

The Substance is currently streaming on MUBI