

Dear Bestie,

How can I thank you  
for being in my life?

For those unladylike laughter sessions.

For those long, tight,  
it-will-be-alright hugs.

For telling me to 'dump that loser'!

For hyping me by saying 'you got this'

Bestie, how can I thank you  
for the khichdi you send  
when I'm sick.

For spoiling my 5-year-old  
like she is yours.

For healing me with love and memes.

For growing old with me.

The truth is, there are no words.

Just an infinite amount of gratitude.

For being my partner-in-shine.

my fill-in-the-blank,

my perfect fit,

my bestie.



Love so natural  
only a natural  
diamond will do.



Priya and Suman never missed a beat going from tiffins to tandavam.

love,  
from  
bestie

B R A C E L E T  
C O L L E C T I O N



FIND A JEWELLER

DE BEERS GROUP  
A DIAMOND IS FOREVER





metro PLUS THE HINDU

Bhuvanesh Chandar

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I vividly remember my late father calling me every time a Rajinikanth song played on TV. Somehow, even though much from that age is a blur, I recollect the excitement with which I would run to pick up a black coat with big white buttons on it – that was the closest I had to the ones the star wore in *Baashha* and *Padayappa*. I had to put on my ‘Rajini jacket,’ grab sunglasses, and dance in front of my ever-encouraging audience. It felt like an experience uniquely my own – at least until I grew up and realised that Superstar Rajinikanth is a phenomenon who peddled dreams, instilled hope, and defined style to millions, a journey now spanning 50 years.

For actor Manikandan K (of *Jai Bhim*, *Good Night* and *Lover* fame), the spell was cast quite early as well, by a shot of Rajini lighting up a matchstick with nothing but his gaze. “At that age – I must have been three or four – I believed that maybe Rajini sir could really light up things by just looking at them. He had the charisma to sell that illusion to a child. But Rajini sir’s greatness lies in this: *Sivaji* released when I was studying in college, and even in that film, there’s a shot in a song where he returns a bullet shot at him by merely looking at it. And even after growing up, I enjoyed that a lot.”

Smoking is integral in Rajini’s arsenal of style statements; from *Moondru Mudichu* to the recently released *Coolie*, only he could make a vice look *that* cool. Even school children used to roll sheets of paper to

***“I don’t smoke, but I used to do the cigarette flip with pencils when I was in school. You can’t flip a full-sized pencil, obviously, so I’d wait till it reaches the right size to do it***

SATHYAKUMARAN G,  
Chennai-based software engineer

emulate his iconic cigarette flip (throwing and catching it smoothly between the lips). This, of course, has had its own share of criticism, as it allegedly incited youth to start smoking. “Look, ‘Rajinism’ came to be because youngsters saw themselves in Rajinikanth – he was a dark-skinned man who instilled self-esteem in young southern Indian men. He was the hero they could be. The flipside was that many, like myself, picked up smoking along with everything else,” says 40-year-old Erode-based auditor and an ardent fan, Narendar B, adding that perhaps he should have considered the star’s no-smoking advice.

“I don’t smoke, but I used to do the cigarette flip with pencils when I was in school. You can’t flip a full-sized pencil, obviously, so I’d wait till it reaches the right size to do it,” reminisces Sathyakumaran G, a 36-year-old Chennai-based software engineer and a diehard fan. Rajinikanth’s iconic sunglass flip captivated Sathyakumaran. “Whenever a film releases, I would somehow buy the sunglasses in the shape that he wears in that film, and click some 10 pictures wearing them. I used to perform his sunglass flip well when I was about 9 or 10 years old, and even now, I do it to show off to my children,” he adds.

It is not mere luck that an actor’s name has become a style statement by itself – even ‘style’ looks much cooler with ‘Rajini’ as a prefix. From how he opens a bottle of cola (like in a rare commercial for the

In a career spanning over five decades, Rajinikanth has defined swag to millions, with his iconic body language, signature sunglasses, and era-defining fashion statements. As stores flood with denim shirts after *Coolie*, we explore why we still want to look like him

# Style of the Superstar



(Clockwise from below)  
Rajinikanth in stills from *Coolie*; *Thai Meethu* Sathiyam, and *Moondru Mudichu*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## DRAPED IN DESIGN

H&M'S minimalist cousin COS, packaged as affordable luxury, makes a pit stop in Mumbai before taking root in Delhi **P2**

government-owned cola product Palm Cola), the way he pops bubble gum to something as ordinary as pulling the coats to slip hands into pockets, or simply walking, Rajinikanth has often shown an instinct for turning even the simplest acts into something larger-than-life. But the aura of the superstar is not just about the cigarette-flips and sunglasses. He single-handedly influenced how Tamil men, and possibly even women, dressed and carried themselves.

### Rajinikanth, the trendsetter

Even today, the star’s many outfits from the ‘80s remain chic and contemporary. Sathyakumaran reminisces about a T-shirt the star wore in the double-action film *Johnny*, which features arguably one of the most charming on-screen Rajinis. “He wore a T-shirt that reads ‘Music The Life Giver’ with a denim jacket. In a specific scene, wearing a white overcoat, he lit a cigarette while leaning on a pillar. Be it that pipe, the thick-framed glasses, or the hairstyle he opted for... he looked so elegant.”

Speaking of hairstyles, Manikandan reminds us of how the star carried off his centre-parting. “The song ‘Rajavukku Raja Naan Thaan’ comes to mind. Also, he was so handsome in the ‘Malayala Karayoram’ song from *Rajadhi Raja*; in fact, that is his best look in my opinion,” says the actor. Narendar says he still flips his hair back the way Rajini did in countless films. “It’s so ingrained. There’s this staple Rajini hairstyle that is so hard to maintain but looks slick on thalaivar,” says the fan.

Costume designer Praveen Raja, who styled the superstar in his latest film *Coolie*, agrees that there is something special about how a denim-on-denim outfit rests on Rajini. “The first thing we shot was the poster in which he wears a denim-on-denim. Director Lokesh Kanagaraj’s gist for me was that the look had to emulate *Thalapathy* – that it had to be a slipper, a denim, and a shirt.”

Interestingly, denim has taken over theatres in Tamil Nadu ever since *Coolie* released on August 14 – all thanks to Anirudh Ravichander’s ‘Chikutu,’ a T Rajendar-styled earworm that features Rajini in a denim-on-denim. “Right from the day the song was released, people began to wear denim-on-denim outfits. Later, after the audio launch, I saw many wearing that outfit. Even Lokesh wore denim-on-denim for the interviews during the film’s promotion,” says Praveen, who was elated by how even the ‘Coolie badge’ from the film has become a part of the ensemble audiences wear to watch *Coolie*. *Padayappa* also featured one of the many times the superstar

has donned an oversized jacket. “The denim shirt, the printed shirt, and that dark blazer that he wore in the ‘Kikku Yerudhey’ song were all trendsetting,” Praveen says. He grew up watching the star wear oversized jackets in films like *Mannan* and *Rajadhi Raja*. “In fact, we tried the oversized fit in *Coolie* – for the denim shirt you see in the photoshoot with the watches.”

Sathyakumaran gets nostalgic about the white overalls from *Padayappa*. “He paired it with a brown shawl. There are many films, like *Manithan* and *Arunachalam*, in which he looks so charismatic in white-and-white,” says the fan.

Rajini also glamorised the big boots that had you tuck in the pants. The white shoes in *Annaamalai*, the thundu he wears around his waist in *Muthu*, and the iconic scarf he dons in *Thalapathy* were all special looks that became a trend in the ‘90s. Tamil Nadu, say fans.

### Understanding Rajinism

Even after 50 years since his debut, the mystique of Rajinikanth still puzzles many. “Perhaps there may never come a star in Tamil with mannerisms that aren’t inspired by Rajini sir,” says Narendar.

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PRAVEEN RAJA,  
Costume Designer

Is this talent he was born with? Manikandan disagrees. “It all comes down to one philosophy that he staunchly follows – to do things differently. Walking is a mundane thing, but with Rajini sir, it looks different,” says the actor who shared screen with the superstar in *Kaala*.

From how Praveen describes his experience working with the star, you get the sense of a man who wishes to redefine himself, even at 74. “He is still in his styling era. To date, whatever you give him, he will wear it and stand in front of the mirror. He will see how it feels when he moves; only if he is confident, he will say, ‘Let’s proceed.’”

Now, 50 years after his debut, Rajinikanth still has impact on our wardrobes. Watching fans dress up for *Coolie*, I think about why that ‘Rajini jacket’ meant so much to me – and I realise I did not just emulate him to look cool. He was one of my first heroes. Teenagers insecure about their looks need a role model to teach them swag, self-assurance and the sense that they are worthy of love. Just putting on a my Rajini jacket gave me that confidence. As they say, “thalaivar nirandharam” – this legacy is for all eternity.

### Praveen Raja on designing the two crucial scenes featuring Rajinikanth and Nagarjuna in *Coolie*:

“We wanted Nagarjuna sir’s costumes to be off-white, because it’s a mining area and there will be a splash of colours in his office. For Rajini sir, we didn’t want to go for black, since it’s night, or white; so we went for grey. It was also because the scene had warm light. Thankfully, it worked out well, even from a continuity perspective. Lokesh, of course, loves DC’s Joker, and so he wanted a purple colour suit for Nag sir. But we didn’t want to repeat the mustard yellow, green and purple. However, the purple suit wouldn’t work with any other colour, so we opted for a purple-on-purple tone. For the bottom, I gave a nice fleeted off-white baggy trousers because the purple had to pop, and there had to be a good contrast between the top and bottom.”



pick of the week



Madras mind

When Chennai turns 386, the Madras Quiz returns as one of the city's most beloved traditions. Presented by the Murugappa Group and conducted by Dr. Sumanth C Raman, this year's theme — Madras: Idhu Oru Thani Vibe — honours the city's inclusive spirit, inviting participants to celebrate its many moods through quizzing and creative flair. Open to all, with prizes worth ₹50,000. On August 24, at 2.30pm at the MMA Auditorium, Pathari Road.



Sparkling tales

Vimonisha Exhibitions & Events, a luxury showcase curator in Chennai for over three decades, presents the city debut of Neha Roongta Fine Jewellery. The collection features 18K gold creations set with Burmese rubies, champagne diamonds and vibrant sapphires, plus India's first tulip-inspired diamond series, where hand-cut stones capture the grace of tulip petals. At Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. August 30, 11am to 8pm, For more details, call: 9820043549.



Living stories

At Kannadi Cupboard, writer Krupa GE's latest work *Burns Boy* takes shape as an immersive installation that invites people to wander through the boy's home, follow the clues, and piece together what really happened. Expect a scavenger hunt tucked into the setting, along with a writing activity. The top ten write ups will receive a complementary Zoom session with the author on creative writing, August 23 and 24, 5pm to 7pm, at Kannadi Cupboard, Tambaram.



Eat Chennai

This Madras Day, savour the city's culinary heritage with a special heritage brunch. On the menu find temple-style thayir sadam and sundal thalichathu, comforting podi sambar Idlis, raw mango fish curry, and slow-cooked lamb stew with steamed string hoppers. Sweet endings include coconut cake and caramel custard. Priced ₹3250 including taxes, on August 24, from 12.30pm to 3.30pm, at Anise, Taj Coromandel. For reservations call +91 78248 62310



(Clockwise from left) Stills from *Lord of Myteries*; and *Caught by the Tides*.CRUNCHYROLL and MUBI

Made in China

These two films are a masterclass in Chinese storytelling — one plunges into the Lovecraftian world of eldritch nightmares, the other drifts through two decades of love and loss

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This week, the Chinese cultural imagination seems to be in overdrive. On one hand, we have a lavish anime adaptation of a beloved web novel; on the other hand, one of the most-celebrated Chinese filmmakers, Jia Zhangke, has turned two decades of stray footage into a portrait of love and loss. *Lord of Myteries* (now streaming on Crunchyroll) and *Caught by the Tides* (playing on MUBI) are from opposite corners

of the medium, but both explore how Chinese storytelling today is wrestling with forces larger than life.

From the drawing board *Lord of Myteries* has arrived like a thunderclap in the anime community. Based on the eponymous cult web novel the by pseudonymous Cuttlefish That Loves Diving, it follows Zhou Mingrui, who transmigrates into the body of protagonist, Klein Moretti after a mysterious death, only to find himself navigating a Victorian-inspired world of tarot rituals, alchemy,

and unknowable horrors. On paper, it sounds like familiar isekai (other-world) territory, but the series resists those genre comforts. Where most isekai stories promise escape, this one doubles down on unease. Every sinister new ritual, every clandestine order, and every eldritch encounter makes the world feel all the more strange. The production is rich and exacting, featuring a dazzling palette of gothic pastels and some of the most outstanding animated sequences produced this year. The *Solo Leveling* crowd might have come for the spectacle, but what has kept them hooked is the intricate *The Beyonder* power system and the web novel's dense worldbuilding.

Fans of *Fullmetal Alchemist* will also admire the anime's narrative machinery, while those attuned to the gnawing anxiety of *Requiem for a Dream* will recognise the creeping sense that every step forward comes with a cost. And those fond of the cosmic terrors of H.P. Lovecraft, will feel like a homecoming to the abyss.

Foreign affairs If *Lord of Myteries* thrives on conjuring strange worlds anew, the legendary Chinese auteur, Jia Zhangke's *Caught by the Tides* shows us how to carve a world from fragments. Drawn from 22



years of footage, Jia's latest film is a palimpsest of memories from Datong's fading mines, the scars of the Three Gorges Dam, and the silence of COVID-era streets, all woven into the doomed orbit of Chinese actress and Jia's partner, Zhao Tao. The concept of repurposing fragments of past projects and weaving them into a new narrative sounds experimental, but the result is startlingly intimate. Scenes of Zhao's *Qiao Qiao* wandering through demolished towns, or coaxing a robot into reading her emotions, chart a nation learning, forgetting, and remaking itself in real time. The jukebox of pop songs and operatic refrains that threads through the film only sharpens this sense of history as lived collage. Like Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, the film lingers on two people rarely in sync, with their love stranded amid historical upheaval. Recall the intimacy of Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* refracted through the elliptical memory-work of Terrence Malick, and you're close to the register Jia is reaching for here. The film also serves as a companion piece to Zhangke's *Still Life* and *Unknown Pleasures*, which somehow also feel like a culmination. For viewers willing to surrender to its silences, *Caught by the Tides* is an elegy for vanished landscapes, missed chances, and for the resilience of those left waiting. If *Lord of Myteries* confronts the abyss through invention, Zhangke confronts it through memory. But both works remind us that what cannot be grasped is often what defines us most.

Ctrl+Alt+Cinema is a fortnightly column that brings you handpicked gems from the boundless offerings of world cinema and anime.



The popular London-based brand, owned by H&M, will open in Delhi in October. We attend their Mumbai launch event, where design director, Karin Gustafsson, shows us the Autumn-Winter collection you will be shopping from

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When a minimalist brand launches in Maximum City, you expect the contrast to jar. After all, there is nothing minimalist about India. Luxury here typically envelops you in sparkle, opulence, and chaotic colour. Yet, COS, known for its unapologetically practical aesthetic, manages to fit right in with its soon-to-be-launched Autumn/Winter collection, which is flamboyant with texture and extravagant with detail. We are in Mumbai for COS's



When less is more

India launch, and the city is framed by brooding skies and lashing rain. An apt setting for the clothes, with their inky colours and liquid drapes. In October, the brand, which is an acronym for Collection Of Style, will open its first store in India, at Delhi's Saket City Walk and this is a sneak peek. Although it is owned by the Swedish multinational, H&M Group, best known for fast fashion, COS is packaged as affordable luxury, offering elevated basics. With a focus on timeless design and quality, innovative fabric, these are clothes that are meant to last. So the brand does just two

collections a year, punctuated with drops and collaborations. In the spirit of quiet luxury, minus the obnoxious price tags, these are clothes for people who have the confidence to step away from the storm of micro-trends. We are at the plush Four Seasons Hotel ballroom with influential design director, Karin Gustafsson, who has been with the brand since it began in London in 2007. The Spring-Summer collection, currently available at COS's



(Clockwise from left) Karin Gustafsson, and outfits from the Spring-Summer collection. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



239 stores in 48 countries is on display: neat rows of sculptured dresses, shirts and pants, set beside pointed suede mules, jelly ballet flats, and edgy translucent sock boots. While Karin states that Delhi's COS will not be launching any India-specific pieces, she does admit to being inspired by an afternoon in the raging Mumbai monsoon. "There were pastel covered rain capes everywhere," she exclaims in delight. "Peach, blue, yellow, pink... It would have been good for us to have a stylish raincoat." The Autumn-Winter collection, which will officially unveiled at New York Fashion Week next month, is under embargo for now. But Karin walks us through the highlights, and although the colours are restrained, the clothes and accessories are a joyous celebration of texture, which will appeal to Indian customers. Stating that India has "been on the cards for quite some time," Karin says they finally chose Delhi because they found what felt like the right location. While she does say that they plan to open more

stores in the country, Karin adds, "We have nothing official now. We are obviously always looking out for potential spaces." COS will not be available online for Indian customers when they launch, so Delhi locals get first dibs. Prices will be on a par with London. Describing her own aesthetic as "Probably quite timeless in a way," Karin says, "I like to dress in a way that makes me feel at ease." This influences to COS's aesthetic, which she calls "Refined, effortless, timeless... But also modern." She adds, "We do our own research. We like to stay relevant." While there are lines for men and women, the style is fairly androgynous, ideal for today's gender fluidity: Karin says men wear the women's clothes, and vice versa. "The clothes are a blank canvas for your personality," she states. I have my eye on a couple of the sleek men's jackets, one of which has what Karin calls "pony effect fur," adding quickly with a laugh, "No horses were harmed." A faux fur, this has a textured, short-pile vintage look and feel. Discussing the inspiration, she says "We looked into mid-century Elizabethan fashion for the men's line. We also looked at old uniforms. The feel is utilitarian, with a lot of heritage textures and a lot of craft elements, like herringbone and leather suede." For women, there is retro glamour from the fifties. "It's an interesting silhouette," says Karin, holding up a dress and explaining how it can be draped in multiple ways. She also picks out her favourites: a sleek investment coat with a glimmering dress underneath. COS typically does not do shine, so the Marilyn Monroe glamour of the new collection is a departure, and one that India is likely to appreciate. In keeping with tradition, the fabrics are luxurious: rippling cashmere, flowing silks and chenille with its subtle velvety sheen. As for those of us hoping for an India-collab: never say never. "We haven't got anything planned. When we do it, it will be when something resonates," she says, adding seriously, "I won't say no. We would never say no."



Centennial celebration

It has been 100 years since half a dozen sisters laid the foundation of Good Shepherd Convent School. For its centennial celebrations, the convent will host a thanksgiving service, presided over by Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, today. At 5pm, the valedictory function will have speaker M Appavu and Joseph Emmanuel, CEO and secretary, CISCE. There will be an alumni meet tomorrow, 4.30pm, at GSC Auditorium, Chennai. Registration opens at 3pm at Good Shepherd Convent School, desk near Gate No. 2, College Road entrance; entry is free.



Shadows, lines, and emotions

Step into a world where shadow, line, and emotion converge. Chhaya Rekha Bhava: Tales from the Southern Line brings together three seminal voices of the Baroda School — Laxma Goud, Thota Vaikuntam, and D. L. N. Reddy — whose practices shaped figurative art in India. From Goud's lyrical linework to Vaikuntam's iconic figures and Reddy's meditative forms, the exhibition traces how figuration becomes atmosphere, archetype, and mood. At Apparao Galleries, Nungambakkam, till September 13. Tuesday to Saturday, 3pm to 6.30pm.





Morgan ear studs.  
SPECIAL  
ARRANGEMENT

# The bead goes on

Aurus and Moi's The Collectibles is an exclusive jewellery event blending heritage beadwork, fine gems, and modern design

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Just in time for the year's festive season, Aurus and Moi, the sister jewellery houses founded by Puja and Kunal Shah, will host The Collectibles in the city this weekend.

At the event, a limited-edition collection inspired by Gujarat's beadwork traditions, 'integrating glass beads with gold, silver, diamonds, and gemstones', will be unveiled. This showcase follows the duo's recently curated exhibit hosted in London where they presented 'Kutch Collectibles' alongside a panel discussion on the beadwork traditions of Kutch and Kathiawar in western India.

The highlight of the event is Aurus and Moi jewellery featuring memory pendants, earrings, necklaces, and brooches. "The curation includes signature designs from Aurus and Moi but what makes it special are the new collections. The Rosewood Muse range at Aurus brings our signature designs using combination of different *tukdis* (charms) and Moi's The Green Room collection is a

curated capsule with an interesting take on the colour green in jewellery," says Puja, adding that the showstopper is The Collectibles collection with limited-edition pieces such as necklaces, brooches, and more.

Puja adds, "The Shaheen pearl necklace, rais hasli necklace, and asra necklace are the top pieces we will be bringing from the Aurus range. For Moi, the Morgan ear studs, Melissa blue sapphire earrings, and Debora brooch and pendant necklace will be spotlighted."

The event will also feature a panel discussion (on August 24) 'What does one pass; what does one keep' that will have luxury hotelier Abhimanyu Alsisar, historian Manu Pillai, and jewellery designer Puja Shah interpret what does actually become a collectible in today's times, and the role of craft in shaping cultural identity. This will be hosted by Doyel Joshi and Neil Ghose Balser of Mumbai's a multidisciplinary art space and studio, Howareyoufeeling.studio.

The specially curated sessions on August 24, 25 will be followed by a public exhibition of The Collectibles on August 25 and 26. At The Folly, Amethyst, Whites Rd, Express Estate, Roypettah. For details, call +918866286000

The 2025 edition of Mumbai's Wild Foods Festival promises forager-led ingredient displays, native seed displays, a dinner by 30 adivasi home cooks, and more

# Flavours of the forest



Attendees sampled over 40 dishes cooked by members of adivasi communities at the 2024 edition of the Wild Foods Festival CASSIDIX MEDIA

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Seven years ago, the team behind Maharashtra's Out of 0 (zero) Farms, also known as OOO Farms, launched a festival to celebrate India's wild and foraged foods. Since its inception, Wild Foods Festival (WFF) has been rooted in the forests and fields of the Western Ghats where Adivasi communities have been at the forefront across generations. In 2022, OOO Farms collaborated with Chef Thomas Zacharias' The Locavore – a platform that champions regional food cultures via storytelling, events, etc – for WFF.

With the 2025 edition being held

today, the Festival will focus on the theme Safeguarding the Future of Wild Food. Visitors can look forward to 200+ varieties of wild vegetables and native seeds, a farmers' market, a Wild Food Dinner curated by Adivasi cooks, to name a few. "The festival will be centred on climate action – grounded in the lived realities of communities who forage, farm, and protect these ecosystems," says Thomas, who is bringing together foragers, chefs, scientists, and policymakers.

In addition, chefs across Mumbai and Pune will commemorate the Festival by curating a menu spotlighting indigenous ingredients at their respective restaurants. In July this year, these chefs participated in a field trip to Palghar to learn about wild foods.

Here are the event's highlights:

On August 23, from 2 pm to 9 pm. At Bunts Sangha's Ramanath Payyade College of Hospitality Management Studies, Mumbai.



## Special Menus

Through August, chefs from the likes of Mizu Izakaya, Folk, Ground Up will be curating a wild food-led menu at their restaurants. New names on the list are Malaka Spice, The Bombay Canteen, Ishaaara, and Slink and Bardot. For instance, Heena Punwani at Maska Bakery is working with mahua to create a mahua sticky toffee pudding and mahua cinnamon roll; and Chef Nikhil Menon at Mizu Izakaya is also turning the mahua flowers into an ice cream sando.



CHEF THOMAS ZACHARIAS

## Wild Food High Tea

Students at Bunts Sangha's Ramanath Payyade College of Hospitality Management Studies (RPH) will be mentored by Shailesh Awate, co-founder, OOO Farms, and Thomas, to serve over 450 guests. The student-led menu will comprise savoury dishes such as kurdu chaat, khurasni gyoza dumplings, pendhra Bombay sandwich, and desserts like mahua patolya, mahua sandwich biscuits, to name a few. From learning about wild ingredients and traditional recipes, to experimenting with formats that would work in a high tea setting, and then testing and refining dishes together, Thomas says the process of curating the high tea is as much about the food as it is about mentorship and collaboration.



TANVI KUCKIAN

## Wild Foods Dinner

This year's dinner will see about 30 home cooks from the Kokni, Warli, Mahadeo Koli, Katkari, and Bhil communities come together. The menu will feature close to 30 dishes such as pendhara raanbhaji, terda pumpkin tuvar dal, brined kharshinga, akarghoda fern pickle, mahua kheer, vaaste (bamboo shoot), terda patrode, mahua fritters, mahua ladoos, black rice pudding, nachani bhakri, khurasni chutney and more. All these ingredients are sourced within 100 kms of Mumbai and prepared in the ways these communities have done for generations. For many guests, it will be their first time tasting such dishes outside the communities themselves, making it a rare and memorable experience.

## Educational materials

In 2022, a Wild Foods Zine was created with 20 volunteers over four months. It was later translated into Marathi so the communities themselves could use it as a resource. This year, the team is creating wild food flashcards in English and Marathi for schools and homes in tribal areas. Each card features a photo of the ingredient, its local name, where it grows, when it is in season, and how it is cooked. These are simple tools to help children recognise, name, and take pride in their food heritage.



TANVI KUCKIAN

# Glazed in grace

Luxury porcelain house Lladró collaborates with sculptor Arun Yogiraj for Ram Lalla sculptures

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Twenty-five years since it first launched its Spirit of India collection, Lladró, the Spanish luxury porcelain house has collaborated with Indian sculptor Arun Yogiraj, marking this their first collaboration with an Indian artist. The brand has unveiled a limited edition High Porcelain sculpture of Ram Lalla. "This collaboration, which combines Indian spirit and heritage with Spanish artistry is a coming together of patience, devotion and craft," says Arun, the Mysuru-based artist who came into prominence after sculpting the Ram Lalla idol, which depicts a five-year-old Lord Ram, for the Ayodhya temple.

Launched in 2001, the Spirit of India collection began with Lord Ganesha and has since launched several limited-edition idols inspired by Hindu mythology.

Arun's collaborative process with Lladró began in 2024 when the brand reached out to him, and he spent nearly a year working on this launch. "While the sculpture carved out of stone in Ayodhya is seven feet, we had to work on making an idol here that was one-and-a-half-feet tall. I was not very aware of how to work with porcelain as well, and learnt through this process that the material is fired at high temperatures to give it



The porcelain Ram Lalla created by Arun Yogiraj and Lladró. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

strength and ensure it is long lasting, with a luminous finish. The entire process took several months and combined the essence of two traditions into one work of art," Arun explains.

This also involved a trip to Lladró's workshop in Valencia, Spain, where Arun worked with the sculptors there led by the brand's master sculptor Raúl Rubio.

Each piece took over 20 days of handcrafting to complete, and Arun says he was in awe of the passion, craftsmanship and experience he witnessed at work. "For instance, the garland in each idol has 500 individual porcelain flowers made entirely by hand. Each individual artist having different skill sets came together for this, and I had the opportunity to share my experience and knowledge

as well," he says.

Reflecting on 25 years of the Spirit of India collection, Nieves Contrares, Lladró's creative director says that it was natural for them to launch in the Indian market with a collection that blended spirituality, culture, and craftsmanship. "The iconography of Indian sculptures; all the colours and the jewels are very interesting to work with on porcelain because it is a material that allows so many possibilities in terms of shapes, colours and finishing," she explains.

India is currently Lladró's third largest market globally, and 499 units form a part of this limited-edition collaboration, significant for collectors both in India and across the world.

The limited-edition Ram Lalla sculpture is priced at ₹12,50,000 and is available at Lladró's boutiques across the country.

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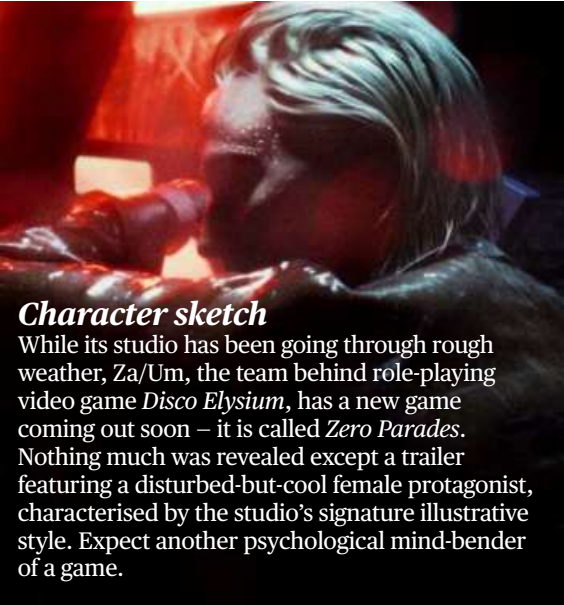


# Stay ahead of the game

The gaming world is embracing a new era of evolution, with a portable Xbox, limited-edition graphic cards and iconic games

Julian Almeida

Gamescom, the biggest gaming expo in the world, sets the stage for top brands and trendsetters in the world of gaming. In its 16th year, Gamescom stands witness to over 4 lakh passionate gamers from across the world, flocking to Germany – braving the hot European summer from August 19 to 24 in Koelnmesse GmbH (Cologne Trade Fair) – to witness the launch of the new Xbox as well as the reveal of several video games, like *Call of Duty* and *Borderlands 4*. Based on reaction, popularity and the buzz on the ground, we have cherry-picked a few trends that will make waves in the gaming world.



### Character sketch

While its studio has been going through rough weather, *Za/Um*, the team behind role-playing video game *Disco Elysium*, has a new game coming out soon – it is called *Zero Parades*. Nothing much was revealed except a trailer featuring a disturbed-but-cool female protagonist, characterised by the studio's signature illustrative style. Expect another psychological mind-bender of a game.

### Chinese whisper

Another reveal was the curtain closer of Game Science's new game *Black Myth: Zhong Kui*. After the roaring success of *Black Myth: Wukong*, featuring its take on unique deities from Chinese mythology, Zhong Kui brings another godlike figure to light, this time the titular protagonist is a ghost hunter. As the cinematic trailer depicts, a couple of ghosts are seen hiding from a bearded stranger riding a tiger.

### In the shadows

No one does cinematic trailers better than Blizzard, and we got to see a brand new *World of Warcraft* expansion. This time, it will feature a new threat to the dark elves, a shadowy figure. This sees the elves harness the power of the sun to fight back the might of midnight.



### Cyber crime

Before video-game developer FromSoftware's *Bloodborne* and *Souls* series brought the appetite for tough games into the mainstream, there was *Ninja Gaiden*. The game's up and coming fourth instalment features the return of Ryu Hyabusa taking on a host of cyber enemies. With action game masters Platinum Games at the helm, the game looks like a marriage between the original *Ninja Gaiden* and *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*. It will be released on October 21 this year.



### Chills and thrills

*Resident Evil Requiem* has a bone-chilling new trailer, from developers Capcom, featuring a mother and daughter's escape from a monster. Then there is Bloober, the team behind many horror hits, with its new sci-fi horror *Chronos: The New Dawn*. Lastly, there is new *Onimusha: Way of the Sword* bringing those demon samurai vibes. All three will be out next year.



### Doomscrolling?

Video game designer, programmer and producer Ron Gilbert, who created *Monkey Island* series, from the good-old era of point and click adventures, is back with a new game. It is a top-down pixel game like *Zelda*, but with a twist. You have to keep running away from the reaper, as the game keeps scrolling. It is a fresh take on a roguelike (a subgenre of role-playing video games) where you have to dodge death while making sure you get your adventurous chores and shopping done.

### Unboxing X factor

We went hands-on with the new portable Xbox, a customised ROG Ally X running a tailored version of Windows. The ROG Xbox Ally X suggests a clear move from Microsoft towards the handheld space. Meanwhile, on its 30th anniversary, ASUS Republic of Gamers revealed its fastest graphics processing unit (GPU), the ROG Matrix GeForce RTX 5090 (limited to only 1,000 cards). To achieve enough overclocking headroom and push the RTX 5090 chipset to its limit, the juggernaut of a card is clad in red turbines, with a dual-rotary fan setup.



### Netflix and chill

Netflix wowed the fans of *One Piece*, with a life-size replica of pirate ship Going Merry made out of LEGO, the beloved crew of Monkey D Luffy's sails on. *One Piece* is a unique take on the pirate adventure with super-powered pirates and fantastical creatures of the seas. Originally a Japanese anime, it is now a hot show on Netflix.



# Once upon a cruise

The Disney Adventure Cruise will sail from Singapore this year. We get a preview of what to expect on board, with help from Donald Duck

Sangita Rajan

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“And now, we invite you to relax, and pull up a chair, as the dining room proudly presents... your dinner,” says the host, mimicking the song ‘Be Our Guest’ from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. The lights dim, music swells, and servers glide across the room in perfect sync – the 12-course feast begins. At Oryx, Fairmont Mumbai, guests got a landlocked preview of the dining that awaits aboard the first-ever Disney Cruise Line ship to homeport in Asia.

The Disney Adventure Cruise will dock and sail from Singapore on three, four-day cruises from December this year. Bookings have been open and selling like hot Disney waffles. Now, new sailing dates for late 2026 have also been released. Spread across decks are seven themed zones designed to pull guests into the worlds of Disney, Pixar, and Marvel. The dinner hints at how those worlds might taste. Each of the 12 courses echoes a different corner of the Disney Adventure's dining landscape, beginning with an amuse bouche of potato gnocchi in porcini mushroom and parmesan sauce from Palo Café,

paired with a zero-proof Amaretto. Courses from restaurants like Enchanted Summer, Animator's Table and Mowgli's Eatery follow, with dishes like dum alloo blackberry, jackfruit masala kosha tacos, tandoori habanero paneer tikka, and lemon Thai basil tart – each paired with drinks ranging from zero-proof cocktails to champagne and wines from around the world.

Curated to cater to international and Southeast Asian preferences, Mickey Mouse waffles sit comfortably on the same menu as laksa lemak, Hainanese chicken rice and tandoori platters. “On Disney Adventure, we cater to all dietary needs – whether that's vegetarian, Jain, halal, gluten-free or allergen-specific,” says Sarah Fox, vice president and regional



(Left) Concierge Kitchen's Pacific scallops; and (below) Enchanted Summer Restaurant's jackfruit tacos. DISNEY

general manager for Disney Cruise Line in Southeast Asia. Guests with particular restrictions can even inform the team five weeks before sailing, ensuring the menus are tailored in advance.

But food is only one pillar of the evening, and of the Disney Adventure itself. The spirited discussion that follows the dessert sketches out a ship built as much for families and adults, as for food lovers. On the cruise, dedicated youth clubs will split activities by age, giving children and teens their own spaces, while parents can slip away to Broadway-scale shows at the Walt Disney Theatre or outdoor productions. For multi-generational travellers, there are quieter corners too: tea at the *Beauty and the Beast*-inspired TWG lounge, or coffee in the *Aladdin*-themed Bacha Coffee Room. Then comes the service – Disney's calling card. “It's not just the dining that changes every night, it's the service that follows you,” says Ozer Balli, senior vice president of hotel operations for Disney Cruise Line. “Your crew moves with you from restaurant to restaurant, learning your preferences. Whether it's what wine you like or making a Mickey head out of ketchup for your child. It's those little touches that make the experience special.”

Beyond food and dining, entertainment, the team promised, will rarely stay on stage. A Marvel spectacular called *Avengers Assemble* will unfold under the open sky, while an all-new *Duffy and Friends* story will premiere exclusively on board.

The 12 courses end, but the sense of spectacle lingers. If this dinner was a preview, the Disney Adventure itself will be the full production. At one point in the evening, Donald Duck waddles in with a sailor's hat, and even the most composed guests line up for photos. It is a reminder that while the experience is designed for all ages, Disney's magic lies in how easily it draws out the inner child in everyone.

The writer was at Fairmont Mumbai at the invitation of Disney Cruise Line.

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Hindi

Timely political thriller



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For a change, Pakistan is not the pivot of a Bollywood script that has a terror attack at its centre. Based on real events, *Tehran* draws from the alleged concerted Iranian attack on Israeli embassies in India, Georgia, and Thailand in 2012.

Waiting in the wings for a while, *Tehran* assumes importance at a time when West Asia is on the boil again because of strained relations between Iran and Israel. The film shows how the two countries attack each other's interests, but in this case, India, which has friendly ties with both Iran and Israel, gets caught in the crossfire between the two countries.

In the fictional realm, when a little roadside flower seller gets killed by a low-intensity blast targeting the family of an Israeli diplomat, Delhi Police puts Special Cell officer Rajiv Kumar (John Abraham) on the trail of the culprit. The bigwigs want quick results, and Pakistan is the obvious suspect. As Rajiv investigates, he develops a personal connection with the dead, but is alive to evidence that points to an Iranian connection.

Best remembered by fans of spy sagas for *Madras Cafe*, John has recently been exploring subjects that focus on geopolitics. While *Diplomat* was a little rough around the edges, here, he gets the game right, as director Arun Gopalan turns to recent history to comment on India's strategic ties in West Asia in the garb of a measured thriller.

As Rajeev digs deeper, he discovers that nationalism is a relative term. Abandoned by his superiors, Rajeev becomes a one-man army. Suited to play characters that can implode, John's impassive face and strong physique lend him naturally to the role of an intelligence officer.

Cinematographer Ievgen Gubrebko's gaze lends it a distinct look. Like most elements in the film, the action choreography is also understated but impactful. The emotional triggers that dot the narrative are not novel, but the treatment makes them believable.

When the characters don't demand empathy, you start feeling for their situation. Amidst the dry terrain of intelligence, writers Ritesh Shah and Ashish Verma create space for wry humour. When higher-ups push Rajiv to drop the Iran angle in his investigation, he remarks, *aur justice gaya tel lena*, a comment on India's reliance on Tehran's oil reserves.

The support cast is strong. Iranian actor Haji Khanjanpour is striking as the lone wolf who crosses his brief. It is good to have the suave Alyy Khan back in action. Together with Quashik Mukherjee, he generates the mystique that surrounds the spies and spooks. For a change, Neeru Bajwa gets out of the bubbly Punjabi mould and shows her worth as a performer.

After the setup, we know where it is headed, but Arun places his commas and colons with precision and knows where to put the full stop.

*Tehran* is currently streaming on Zee5



A dull crime drama

By the end of this sobering Rajinikanth film you are left asking one pertinent question: where is the Rajini-Lokesh Kanagaraj film that was promised?

Tamil

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Very few moments in life match the excitement you see in the days ahead of a Rajinikanth film. In a career that has now reached the milestone of 50 years, the superstar is a brand that's as large as cinema itself. So when a Rajini film is arriving on screens, the anticipation is rarely for how Rajinikanth has performed – Helios never needed a torch to blaze – but whether the director at the helm has managed to achieve what less than a handful have in recent years: the difficult task of making a 'Superstar' film with present-day filmmaking standards. And now, in *Coolie*, the player in the game is Tamil mass action cinema's modern messiah, Lokesh Kanagaraj. This was a formula you could bet on. Lokesh, a filmmaker who dares to take on multi-starrers, is inching for a comeback to form after *Leo*.

Apart from the knack to marry mass with realism, he is also known for inventive fan service – a requisite for a 2020s Rajini film – which is why I had to visit Rajinikanth's 1981 *Deewar* remake, *Thee*, which found renewed interest since the trailer of *Coolie* tipped its hat to the R Krishnamoorthy directorial. Lokesh takes a leaf out of Thee and spruces it up to suit the star power of today's Rajinikanth; the many flashbacks sprinkled throughout *Coolie* show Rajinikanth as a young Deva, a blue-collar worker at a port who stands up for his fellow labourers. This spares Lokesh the struggle to use screen time to revive Rajinikanth as the hero of the proletariat. Now the weight of the film falls entirely on the story mounted over this fascinating backdrop, and unfortunately, *Coolie* ends up with a bag of mixed results.

Interestingly, this is easily the most plot-heavy first half we have seen in a Rajinikanth film in a long time, which is not necessarily a good thing, or bad. *Coolie* kickstarts with a sampling of the iron fist with which the ruthless Dayalan (Soubin Shahir) operates a port for his

Coolie

**Director:** Lokesh Kanagaraj

**Cast:** Rajinikanth, Nagarjuna Akkineni, Soubin Shahir, Upendra

**Storyline:** A mansion owner investigates the death of his friend, which puts him in the cross hairs of a crime syndicate

boss, Simon (Nagarjuna Akkineni), a crime kingpin who deals in luxury watches. A police infiltrator is hanged, and there's talk of more such sheep in the herd. Meanwhile, we are introduced to Deva, now the owner of a mansion. You can't help but stay glued to the superstar, who now looks tired. A close-up shot on a mirror shows his ageing, and it dawns how our 74-year-young superstar can no longer fight or dance like he used to – or that's what you thought! We get the hero introduction song, 'Chikutu,' in which he performs a leg sweep with his back on the floor! And yet, there's this unmissable weariness in the close-ups, which thankfully here, adds to the pathos of his character Deva, who quickly learns that his best friend Rajasekhar (Sathyaraj; interestingly, Rajasekhar was Rajini's name in Thee) has passed in a heart attack.

Deva, learning that Raja's death wasn't natural, vows to find out who killed his friend and why, which entangles him with Dayalan's crew, who had been doing business with Raja. Who killed Raja, and what business did watch smugglers have with Raja? Why is Rajasekhar's daughter Preethi (Shruti Haasan) so annoyed at Deva? Why did Rajasekhar do what he did? *Coolie* explores these questions in a grounded yet haphazard manner.

The chief issue with the first half is how there is hardly a sense of urgency or impending danger in these proceedings, at least until the terrific pre-intermission sequence that begins at a graveyard. It's also largely bereft of the Rajinisms you expect in this phase of a Rajini film – there are, of course, reminders of it, like in a hilarious fight scene at a women's hostel. While the intermission sequence ends on a high note, the second half also finds Deva and Preethi in some very dull stretches, with Preethi pushed around like a pawn on the board. An arc that begins with Simon's son Arjun's (Kanna Ravi) romance with his girlfriend (Rachita Ram) seems interesting on paper, especially with how it helps tie the knots in the end, but it drags on, and the final effect is not worth the effort.

For much of the second half, Nagarjuna's character Simon recedes to the background as it is Dayalan who pulls the weight. In fact, Soubin is easily the

performer to watch out for in *Coolie* – even in a speed-breaker like the item-number 'Monica,' Soubin compels your attention with his eccentricities. Nagarjuna, on the other hand, appears menacing and quite convincing as the villain, but there isn't enough on paper to tap into his villainy. Also impressive is Shruti, who, despite bringing her A-game whenever required, gets a character who ends up underserved by the plot.

A big drawback we feel in connecting to some of these characters is how we hardly get good scenes that feature them with Deva, which is a problem for a story mounted on his wide shoulders. This is also why, after their introduction shots, the characters in the cameos do not appear real. It's also time Lokesh understands that a mere cameo in the end can no longer work – yes, it worked in *Vikram*, but as we see in *Coolie*, merely foreshadowing a villain throughout the film and having an actor with a diametrically opposite image play him aren't enough. The logic behind Dahaa's (Aamir Khan's not-so-surprising cameo) feelings for Deva goes for a toss, and you are left searching for the menacing flashback of Deva that everyone's talking about.

In fact, one feels compelled to say that perhaps it's time for Lokesh to renew most of his signature flourishes – the use of a '90s song feels off here, and can the Mocobot be finally put to rest? The action set pieces too, for the second time in Lokesh Kanagaraj's career, feel bland. The technician who shines the most is ace composer Anirudh Ravichander, whose pulsating music keeps you engaged throughout.

*Coolie*, on paper, must have had the promised potential. It's a grounded crime action drama with Rajini moments to keep it going. But if Lokesh's previous films say something, it is that a strong emotional core is the necessary ingredient to make even a realistically shot action drama feel real and present, and this core is what is missing in *Coolie*.

In the end, after a sobering Rajini film (consecutively after *Vettaiyan*), you are left asking one pertinent question – where is the Rajini-Lokesh film that was promised?

*Coolie* is currently running in theatres

Hrithik Roshan and NTR keep this bloated sequel afloat

Hindi

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In childhood, we were attracted to comic digests by their girth. One used to believe that the more the stories, the more the fun. The pages were glossy, and the packaging used to be fetching. However, the excitement often dissipated into disappointment when one discovered that it was a marketing gimmick, where the publishers added only a couple of new adventures of our favourite characters, the rest were just a repetition.

Ayan Mukerji's sequel to *War* gives the same feeling of a recycled product that shines. It starts with a bang but soon becomes a rudderless star vehicle. In the race to populate the spy universe, screenwriters have compromised on substance, indulging in hero worship and flag-waving to pass the box office test. Yes, the trailer looks attractive,



the stars shine bright, and the post-credit scenes are appetizing. However, when it comes to telling a story, the makers prove more successful in highlighting Kiara Advani's curves than in conveying

the contours of the storyline. It features a variety of stunts with a script that appears to be powered by artificial intelligence.

Hrithik Roshan returns as Kabir, a secret agent like no other, who

infiltrates a powerful global syndicate that wants to rule the world. The film feebly suggests that democracy is an outdated idea for the corporate villain. For a change, it promises to put Hrithik in a morally ambiguous space, but as the mood is jingoistic and the star wants to play safe, the not-so-secret sauce of the script is 'nation first'.

Soon, the narrative takes a straitjacketed, predictable path where the only obstacle in Kabir's way is agent Vikram. The two have a history, and as they take on each other, sparks fly. Jr NTR. makes a bombastic entry into Bollywood. He impresses with his screen presence and emotional depth, but he needs to work on his diction. The two jostle on land, air, and water to match the screen time, not realising that stunts too demand a script and parity in screen time paralyses the narrative. None of the stars seems to be interested in testing their image. So the writers contort the story to keep serving their purpose. While the gist of the story is 'nation before self,' the crux of this kind of filmmaking is 'star before story,' with

makers prioritising fans over the audience.

The story takes root in the second half, when we learn the backstory of Kabir and Vikram. One hails from the gentry, and the other comes from the road. Here is a passage where writers Shridhar Raghavan and Abbas Tyrewala make their presence felt, as an interesting battle of two points of view promises to unfold. However, the conflict remains cosmetic. It doesn't grow on us and gradually devolves into a

War 2

**Director:** Ayan Mukerji

**Cast:** Hrithik Roshan, Jr NTR, Kiara Advani, Anil Kapoor, Ashutosh Rana

**Storyline:** Secret agent Kabir is accused of betraying the nation when he infiltrates a cartel, and his erstwhile mate Vikram is assigned the task of catching him

mere rhetorical war of words.

Hrithik tries to be a brooding Bond, but the writing doesn't give him enough emotional heft to translate his elasticity on the dance floor into the character's spine. He has been consistently eye-catching, but there is more to him than his larger-than-life persona, which needs to be tapped. In a short screen time, veteran Anil Kapoor shows how to look menacing and sound meaningful with hollow words.

You can see that a lot of money has been spent on choreographing action sequences in global tourist hotspots, but none of them have the intensity that could bring one to the edge of one's seat. Curiously, the camera cuts to Jr. NTR's face in the middle of the action, slowing down the sequence unnecessarily. The face-offs between Kabir and Vikram look like variants of a soft drink commercial, where the star would come up with a punchline about winning over your fear. It's cinema without fizz!

*War 2* is currently running in theatres.



And Just Like That...

Season: 3

Episode: 12

Creator: Darren Star

**Starring:** Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon, Kristin Davis, Mario Cantone, David Eigenberg, Evan Handler, Sarita Choudhury, Niall Cunningham, Chris Jackson, Nicole Ari Parker, John Corbett

**Storyline:** Carrie, Miranda and Charlotte and their extended side of side characters potter around un-hip parts of New York with their increasingly irrelevant problems



It's a sad ending

Streaming

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With every episode of the third and final season of *And Just Like That...*, one hoped the sequel/spin off of *Sex and the City* would become at least slightly better. Every episode, however, was a disappointment, setting the bar progressively lower. While the '90s show (and two movies) *SATC*, followed four New York women in their 30s, *And Just Like*

*That...* followed the adventures of Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker), Miranda (Cynthia Nixon), and Charlotte (Kristin Davis) in their 50s. The fourth woman, PR professional, Samantha (Kim Cattrall), very publicly declared she was done with the character.

Looking at the mess that is *And Just Like That...*, Cattrall was wise to move away from the reboot.

Twenty years after *SATC* would have been a chance to comment on so many things, including dating, labels, love and life in the digital age. Every episode of *And Just Like That...*, is crushing for its refusal to engage with our rapidly changing landscape.

Instead all that made *SATC* so relatable and aspirational – fashion, sex and timely comments on the zeitgeist, is completely missing from *And Just Like That...* Carrie lives in an unbelievable mansion, clacking around in heels (did she not have hip surgery last season?), Miranda has lost her smart sarcastic lawyer self to an incompetent alien

while Charlotte is unbelievable shrieky.

The loves are uninteresting, from Miranda's dog-obsessed Joy (Dolly Wells) to Carrie's nth break-up with Aiden (John Corbett) and her relationship with her author neighbour Duncan Reeves (Jonathan Cake). The fact that Joy and Duncan are single-note characters, with tweeds and an accent to signify their Britishness is unforgivably lazy.

Seema (Sarita Choudhury), the savvy real estate agent who was supposed to be the Samantha in the quartet, like the rest of the characters, has an unbelievable arc, including how despite being the top real estate agent, she has no savings. Her relationship with the hippie gardener, Adam (Logan Marshall-Green), despite showing lots of skin, has zero chemistry. Ditto for Lisa (Nicole Ari Parker) and her editor Marion (Mehcad Brooks), or Anthony (Mario Cantone) and his beautiful

Giuseppe (Sebastiano Pigazzi).

All the young people are shown to be entitled blobs and the side characters, who were an integral part of *SATC*, bring along dun-coloured side characters, all of whom are eternally boring.

While creator, Michael Patrick King has said, the decision to end the show was a creative one, it might have been cancelled because of falling viewership numbers. Whatever the reason, the show did not deserve that horribly meta finale with the Thanksgiving dinner, and that lingering shot of the contents of a stopped-up toilet bowl.

Even if the book Carrie is writing sounded all-round terrible, the finale could have been a glittering party celebrating the success of the novel and the rebirth of Carrie as a novelist. Coulda, woulda, shoulda indeed.

*And Just Like That...* currently streams on JioCinema

Snippets



Rise of a star

Netflix has released the preview of *The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood*, Aryan Khan's highly anticipated directorial debut that launches on September 18. Produced by Red Chillies Entertainments Pvt. Ltd, the series is created by Aryan Khan, and co-created by Bilal Siddiqi and Manav Chauhan, all of whom have also written the series. The preview of Netflix's *The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood* reveals a stylised yet chaotic world, laced with self-aware humour. "It's the ultimate underdog story that asks: how far will you go for your dream, what are you willing to lose, and can you survive a few Bollywood baddies along the way (pun totally intended!)," said the makers in a release. During the launch, Shah Rukh Khan introduced the cast of the show in his inimitable style and playful humour.



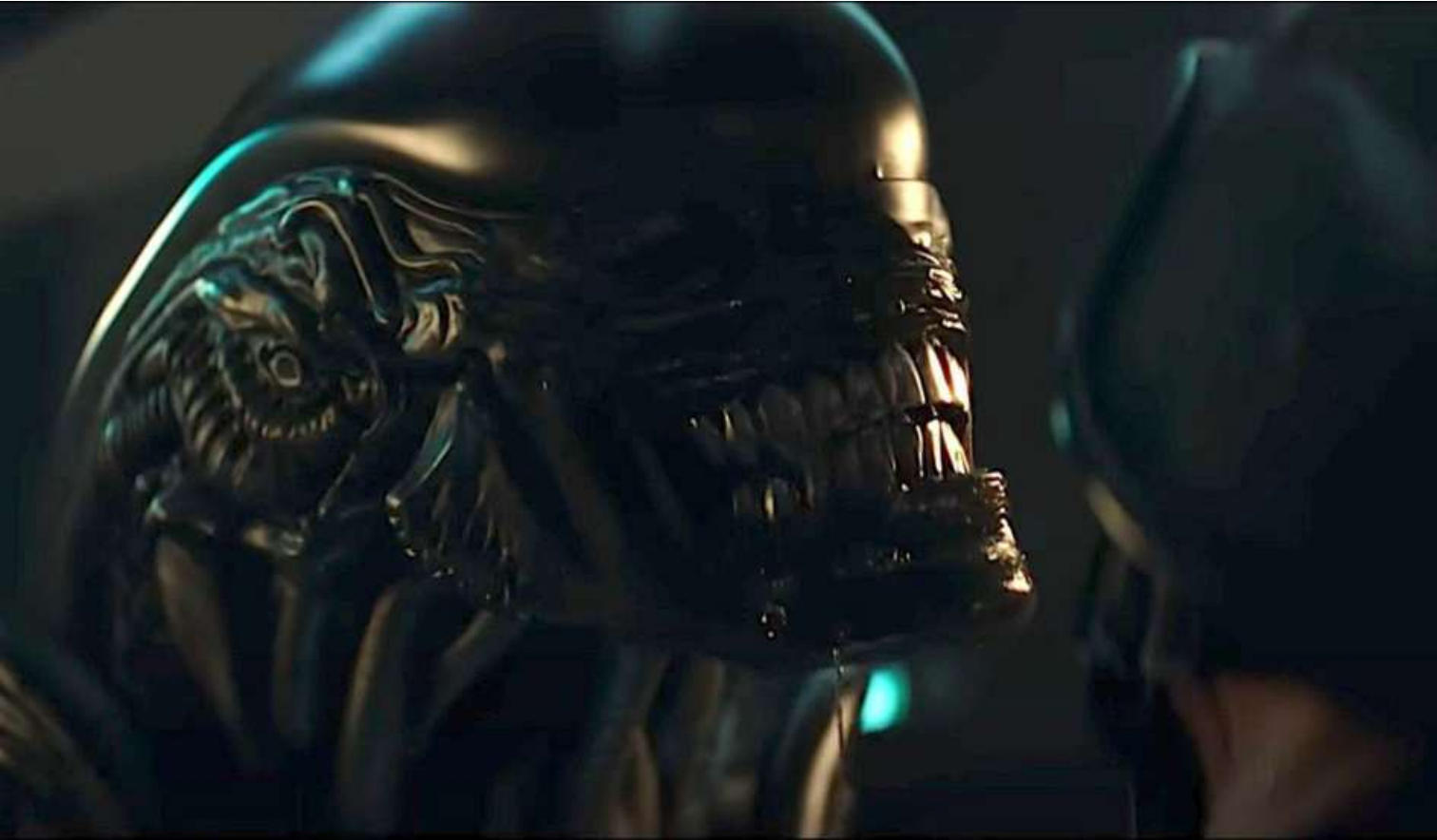
Time for revenge

Director Shaji Kailas, known for his mass entertainers, is teaming up with Joju George for *Varavu*. This is the first collaboration of the duo. The title poster with the tagline 'Revenge is not a dirty business' hints at another action movie for Shaji, known for his commercial potboilers in political and crime genres. He is joining hands with scriptwriter AK Saajan again after *Chintamani Kolacase* (2005), *Red Chillies* (2009) and *Dhrona 2010* (2010). Saajan himself has directed films such as *Pulimada*, starring Joju in the lead, the Mammooty-Nayanthara starrer *Puthiya Niyamam* and Asif Ali's *Asuravithu*. *Varavu* will go on floors on September 6, and the locations include Munnar, Marayoor, Kanthalloor and Theni.



A matter of crime

Prime Video announced the cast of its upcoming fictional series, *Raakh*, an investigative crime thriller that delves into the psychological complexities of morality and justice. The series is executive produced and directed by Prosit Roy, and created, written and co-directed by Anusha Nandakumar and Sandeep Saket along with dialogues by Ayush Trivedi. *Raakh* boasts of an ensemble cast led by Ali Fazal, Sonali Bendre and Aamir Bashir. The series is slated to premiere in 2026 on Prime Video in over 240 countries and territories worldwide. "As filmmakers and storytellers, we are drawn to narratives that not only entertain but also challenge perspectives and ignite meaningful conversations," said executive producer and director Prosit Roy.



A surprise guest in the planet

With new feeding ground, Noah Hawley embalms the ghosts of Ridley Scott and James Cameron in reverence while grafting on new monstrosities

English

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The first minutes of Noah Hawley's *Alien: Earth* are a strangely beautiful conjuring act carved from chrome and bone that feel merciless. This is a magic trick that works even as it shows you every card up its sleeve. We're back in the antiseptic corridors of a Weyland-Yutani vessel, with its white panels glowing like bone, consoles chattering ominously in green text, and crew members swapping casual complaints over breakfast. The USSC Maginot isn't the Nostromo, but you can almost feel Hawley grinning ear-to-ear as he leans into the resemblance. Sixty minutes later, the old pas de deux between fragile humans and a universe that couldn't care less is back in motion, and the music is loud enough to drown out the sound of us being eaten alive by dread.

Hawley has made a career out of respectful trespassing. *Fargo* treated the Coen Brothers' snow-swept noir as a state of mind, and *Legion* turned the superhero drama inside out until it resembled a lucid dream. With *Alien: Earth*, he repeats the move, absorbing Ridley Scott's methodical dread and James Cameron's kinetic bravado, then twisting them into a strange, disquieting new shape. The first two episodes are, in large part, a deliberate echo of *Alien*'s beats, condensed and re-lit to a familiar lull before the real terror begins.

If the films have traditionally confined their horror to dark corridors and airlocks, Hawley expands the geography. The year is two ticks before Ripley's own misadventure, but *Earth* has already surrendered itself to corporate dominion. Five megacorporations divide the planet like a Monopoly board, extending their reach to the Moon and beyond. The sci-fi

Alien: Earth

Creator: Noah Hawey

**Cast:** Sydney Chandler, Alex Lawther, Essie Davis, Samuel Blenkin, Babou Ceesay, Adarsh Gourav, Timothy Olyphant

Episodes: 2 of 8

**Storyline:** When a mysterious space vessel crash-lands on Earth, Wendy and a ragtag group of tactical soldiers make a fateful discovery that puts them face-to-face with the planet's greatest threat

trappings only barely outpace our headlines, as the premise feels more and more like an inevitability.

The inciting event of the *Maginot* limping home with live specimens in tow is staged with a mischievous reverence. Babou Ceesay's Morrow, a cyborg security officer with the morality of a man already half-machine, takes the Nostromo's sacrificial logic to a new extreme, crashing the ship into New Siam to preserve the prize. The Weyland-Yutani wreck lands in the lap of a rival: Prodigy, run by Samuel Blenkin's Boy Kavalier, a barefoot, silk-pyjama-clad CEO who fancies himself as a technocrat Peter Pan.

From here, Hawley pivots into the grotesque. The xenomorph is rendered with a brutality the franchise hasn't mustered in decades, but it's only one monster among several. There's "The Eye," an ocular nightmare on tentacles that prefers its hosts to be eye sockets deep. A menagerie of other specimens are also teased, all with the kind of anatomical inventiveness that suggests the props department had no adult supervision.

But *Alien: Earth*'s most unsettling creation isn't even a beast at all. Sydney Chandler's Wendy, a sickly child whose consciousness is transplanted into a synthetic adult body, is a superhuman victim. She's a being of terrifying potential still thinking, impulsively, like a little girl. As the moral hinge of the series, Wendy embodies its questions about what's worth saving, and what's worth sacrificing, when the line between human and machine has been blurred to the point of abstraction.

Hawley keeps circling themes of corporate amorality, the violence of exploitation, and the perverse elasticity of family, that the franchise has always pondered, but here they play out in an overtly capitalist theatre. Kavalier's "Neverland" is a literal research island stocked with "Lost Boys" (hybrids named Slightly, Tootles, Smee, Curly, Nibs) and run with a cheerfully sadistic paternalism.

Timothy Olyphant's Kirsh, an android mentor with the air of a babysitter two hours past his shift, brings a welcome vein of dry humor.

The production itself is as tactile and deliberate as the films that spawned it, with claustrophobic set designs, lingering dissolves, and an unpredictable editing rhythm that sometimes slips into *Westworld*-style opacity. When it works, the unease is eclipsing, and every angled corridor or hiss of steam seems to carry the hint of a shadow just out of sight. When it falters with overzealous needle drops, and a particularly strained recurring pop-culture reference, the spell wavers.

What's remarkable, even this early, is how Hawley manages to both embalm and electrify the franchise. The callbacks to *Alien* are affectionate without being inert, and the expansion into new narrative territory feels organic. If the plotting occasionally sprawls, and the dialogue sometimes hammers themes that could be more subtle, the texture and ambition more than compensate.

By the end of the second hour, it's hard not to see *Alien: Earth* as more than just a strong television debut, because it feels like a recalibration for the entire franchise. Last year's *Alien: Romulus* proved the old haunted-house-in-space formula still works when handled with care, and later this year *Predator: Badlands* will test whether these two cinematic apex predators can circle each other again without drifting into camp.

With *Alien: Earth*, the franchise is learning to shed its weakest skins and grow in new, unpredictable directions. Through it all, H.R. Giger's biomechanical nightmare remains untouched by time. It's still elegant, still obscene, and still the most beautiful thing you'd never want to meet in a dark corridor.

*Alien: Earth* is currently streaming on JioHotstar. New episodes drop every Wednesday