

= Escape from Tomorrow =

Escape from Tomorrow is a 2013 American black @-@ and @-@ white independent fantasy horror film , the debut of writer and director Randy Moore . It follows an unemployed father having increasingly bizarre experiences and disturbing visions on the last day of a family vacation at the Walt Disney World Resort . It premiered in January at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and was later a personal selection of Roger Ebert , shown at his 15th annual film festival in Champaign , Illinois . The film was a 2012 official selection of the PollyGrind Film Festival , but at the time filmmakers were still working on some legal issues and asked that it not be screened .

It drew attention because Moore had shot most of it on location at both Walt Disney World and Disneyland without permission from The Walt Disney Company , owner and operator of both parks . Due to Disney 's reputation of being protective of its intellectual property , the cast and crew used guerrilla filmmaking techniques to avoid attracting attention , such as keeping their scripts on their iPhones and shooting on handheld video cameras similar to those used by park visitors . After principal photography was complete , Moore was so determined to keep the project a secret from Disney that he edited it in South Korea . Sundance similarly declined to discuss the film in detail before it was shown . It was called " the ultimate guerrilla film " .

It has been compared to the work of Roman Polanski and David Lynch . However , many who saw it expressed strong doubts that the film would be shown to a wider audience due to the legal issues involved and the negative depiction of the parks . At the time of its premiere , Disney said that it was " aware " of the film ; since then the online supplement to Disney A to Z : The Official Encyclopedia has included an entry for the film . Rather than suppressing the film , Disney chose to ignore it .

Escape from Tomorrow was released simultaneously to theaters and video on @-@ demand on October 11 , 2013 , through PDA , a Cinetic Media company .

= = Plot = =

A montage shows visitors on the rides at Walt Disney World Resort and the many visuals and animatronics that accompany the rides . It ends with a man losing his head while riding Big Thunder Mountain Railroad . On the last day of a family vacation at Walt Disney World , Jim White ( Roy Abramsohn ) gets fired by his boss during a phone call on the balcony of the Contemporary Resort Hotel with his family . He keeps the news to himself to avoid spoiling their vacation . During the call , he finds a white van pulling up to the hotel . Behind him , his son Elliot ( Jack Dalton ) locks the balcony door and Jim calls his wife Emily ( Elena Schuber ) to let him back in . The family leaves their room and takes the monorail to the park , alongside two French teenagers , Isabelle ( Annet Mahendru ) and Sophie ( Danielle Safady ) .

As chance encounters with the girls increase interests and Jim begins to pursue them , he has disturbing visions during the rides , such as the evil faces of audio @-@ animatronic characters and his family talking badly . After fighting with Emily and springing from decision to take Elliot on Space Mountain ( which gives Elliot motion sickness ) to keep chasing after the French girls , Jim takes his daughter Sara ( Katelyn Rodriguez ) to the Magic Kingdom and keeps tracking the girls , while his wife and son return to the hotel . Later , the son of a wheelchair @-@ bound man , whom Jim spotted earlier , shoves Sara , who scrapes her knee . Jim takes her to the park nurse , who while treating his daughter , seems extremely unsettled by the " cat flu " apparently spreading among the parks ' patrons , noting " You could be a host and not even know it . " Jim and Sara meet a mysterious woman with a glimmering amulet necklace which hypnotizes Jim . He blacks out and regains consciousness mid @-@ coitus with the woman in her room . Afterwards , she claims that the parks ' wholesome , costumed princesses are actually part of a secret prostitution ring that services " rich Asian businessmen " . Increasingly unnerved , he makes an awkward exit with Sara and eventually joins his wife and son at the pool , where he sees the French girls . He swims closer to converse with them , but his wife sees and berates him .

His family returns to Epcot , where the tension between Jim and Emily comes to a head after a drunk Jim vomits while on the Gran Fiesta Tour . Spotting the French girls , Emily argues with Jim

about his obvious interest in them and slaps Sara . Embarrassed , she returns to the hotel with Elliot , leaving Jim and Sara to ride on the Soarin ' attraction , where Jim imagines a beautiful topless woman ( Zan Naar ) superimposed over the ride 's video footage of landscapes , who promises they will be together soon . After the ride and spotting the French girls once again , Sophie approaches and invites Jim to come with them , but he refuses after having a brief vision of Spaceship Earth crumbling and exploding . After Sophie spits on Jim 's face and she walks off , Jim notices that Sara disappears and searches frantically for her , but the park guards knock him unconscious , electrocuting him in the testicles with a Taser . Jim awakes in a secret detention facility under Epcot 's Spaceship Earth , where the pictures of the woman he imagined on the Soarin ' ride and video screens display images of events that happened earlier . A scientist activates a Spaceship Earth resembling helmet which covers Jim 's head and scans him while images of what the scientist calls " the real Jim " appear on the screens , being himself dressed differently and apparently part of another family . The scientist discusses Jim 's flights of fantasy and imagination that he is part of the experiment by the Siemens Corporation , since he first went to the theme park as a child with his father , his boss is in on the conspiracy and his firing was all part of the plan , and the closure of the Buzz Lightyear ride just as he and Elliot approached the boarding area , much to his son 's distress . The scientists also tells Jim that he had turned in Elliot to them , like Jim 's father had done to him as a child . After damaging the instrument panel with a medical ointment and decapitating the scientist which turns out to be an android , Jim escapes from the laboratory through the sewer . While searching for Sara , Jim trips next to the wheelchair @-@ bound man , suspects and attacks him . After realizing that he caused a scene and doubts the man 's involvement , he returns to the room of the woman , where he discovers she has captured Sara , now wearing a Snow White costume . The woman rambles about her time as a character princess and tells him how bad things happen everywhere , including the decapitation at the park . She again hypnotizes Jim with the necklace , but Sara pulls it off and smashes it , freeing Jim from her spell . He returns to his hotel room and puts his family to bed . Jim suffers with digestive distress , vomits up a large amount of blood and hairballs , which he recognizes as symptoms of the cat flu . He begins to panic and bleed uncontrollably in the bathroom . Elliot enters and Jim begs him for help , but he closes the door on him .

The next morning , Emily finds Jim 's corpse , which now has cat eyes and a grinning face . Disney cleaning staff arrive to remove proof of death and fill Elliot 's head with false memories of riding the Buzz Lightyear attraction . They take Jim 's body to the unmarked white van from the opening . Meanwhile , the valet from the video screens greets the " real Jim " , accompanied by the fantasy woman and a young girl , before they check into the hotel as the valet watches the van drive away .

= = Cast = =

Roy Abramsohn as Jim White , a repressed middle @-@ aged father of two  
Elena Schuber as Emily , Jim 's frustrated wife  
Katelynn Rodriguez as Sara , Jim and Emily 's daughter  
Jack Dalton as Elliott , Jim and Emily 's son  
Danielle Safady and Annet Mahendru as Sophie and Isabelle , the two French teen girls  
Alison Lees @-@ Taylor as the Other Woman  
Lee Armstrong as the Man on Scooter  
Amy Lucas as the Nurse  
Zan Naar as the Fantasy Woman / New Wife  
Stass Klassen as The Scientist  
Trevor McCune as Valet

= = Background = =

Moore , a native of Lake Bluff , Illinois , frequently visited his father in Orlando following his parents ' divorce . The two often spent time together at Walt Disney World nearby . " It was a special ,

physical place , and it became an emotional space , " he told Filmmaker . " Obviously , I have a lot of father issues that I can 't separate from that place . " Later , their relationship deteriorated .

He decided to pursue a career in film . After attending two other film schools , he graduated from Full Sail University in another Central Florida town , Winter Park , as the class valedictorian . He moved to Southern California and began working as a story editor , primarily doing uncredited rewrites .

In Hollywood , he married and started a family . Much like his own father , he frequently took his own children to Disneyland . " It wasn 't until our first family trip together that this very visceral emotional landscape of my past , that I had by now nearly all but forgotten , hit me again like [ a ] bullet . " On the family 's first trip to Walt Disney World , the emotions grew stronger . " [ I ] t was like he was there as a ghost . We were going on the same rides I used to go on with him , but now we 're no longer talking anymore . "

His wife , a native of the former Soviet Union who had no memories or expectations like his , saw things with fresh eyes . " She 's a nurse and goes between floors at hospitals . At one point she turned to me at some princess fair or something and said , ' This is worse than working the psych [ ward ] at the hospital . ' "

He read Neal Gabler 's biography of Walt Disney and took the children to Disneyland more frequently . " I became obsessed with finding a connection , " he recalled later . He wrote the screenplay for *Escape from Tomorrow* in a month along with two others . An inheritance from his grandparents provided the bulk of the film 's budget , which he put at around \$ 650 @, @ 000 , triple what he had originally planned .

= = Production = =

" There was nowhere else to do it , " Moore says of his decision to use Disney World as a setting and shoot at the parks . Disney , which has a reputation for aggressively protecting its intellectual property , has been tolerant of visitors uploading videos of their visits to YouTube and elsewhere since most of those user @-@ created videos project a positive image of the parks . But Moore did not expect to get permission from Disney to shoot there given his negative , surrealistic portrayal of the park .

Instead he used guerrilla filmmaking techniques , which sometimes call for using locations without getting permission . *Escape from Tomorrow* is not the first film made in whole , or part , this way at the Disney parks . In 2010 , the British street artist Banksy shot a scene for *Exit Through the Gift Shop* in one of the parks with his collaborator Mr. Brainwash . They managed to smuggle the footage out after being detained and questioned by park security . The following year , a viral found footage short , *Missing in the Mansion* , filmed in the Haunted Mansion , was distributed online without interference from Disney .

Extensive pre @-@ production was necessary . The unique nature of the film shoot dictated steps not normally taken in filmmaking , such as charting the position of the sun weeks in advance since they could not use lighting equipment . Scenes were rehearsed and blocked in hotel rooms , rather than the actual locations . " We must have walked through the entire movie at least eight or nine times during multiple scouting trips before we ever rolled camera , " Moore says .

Before principal photography , the cast and crew bought season passes to both the Disneyland and Walt Disney World resorts . They spent ten days in Florida , then returned to California for two weeks at Disneyland , making the parks depicted in the film a combination of both resorts . Actors and crew entered the parks in small groups to avoid attracting attention . " At one point , I even made the camera department shave off their facial hair and dress in tourist attire , which almost provoked a mutiny , " says Moore . Despite the actors wearing the same clothes for days on end , Moore told the *Los Angeles Times* , no one at the gates seemed to suspect anything , save for one day near the end of filming when Disneyland security thought they were paparazzi harassing a celebrity family .

The film was shot using the video mode of two Canon EOS 5D Mark II and one Canon EOS 1D Mark IV digital single @-@ lens reflex cameras , which helped the filmmakers look more like typical

park visitors . To compensate for their inability to control the lighting , the film was shot in monochrome mode . " [ W ] e were shooting with really fast lenses wide open , so our depth of field was razor thin . Black and white helped us enormously with focus and composition , since we were doing almost everything in camera and didn 't use a focus puller , " Moore recalled . It was an irreversible choice . " [ B ] ecause the 5D doesn 't shoot RAW , we customized settings in its monochromatic mode and couldn 't go back to color , even if we had wanted to . " Moore was comfortable with the result because of the surrealistic , dreamlike quality it created , forcing viewers to see the familiar sights of the Disney parks in a new way .

Actors and crew used their iPhones to communicate and store information such as the script ? that way , they looked like guests casually using their phones . The phones were also used to record sound , in addition to digital recorders taped to each actor 's body that were left running all day . For day scenes , Moore felt comfortable risking only three or four takes of each scene , but found he could do more at night .

Scenes involved riding on eight recognizable attractions in the parks . One required waiting in a long line for the Buzz Lightyear ride at Disneyland , and the actors rode It 's a Small World at least 12 times to get the scene right . " I was surprised the ride operators weren 't a little more savvy , " Moore told The New York Times . For a scene where two characters pass on the People Mover , Moore had the actors ride it for hours while he worked out the timing .

After the location filming , production went back to soundstages for interiors . Some scenes were shot against a green screen background for second unit footage of other locations to be substituted , allowing the use of crane shots . With the photography done , Moore took the film to South Korea to edit to prevent Disney from finding out ; he also refused to tell most of his close friends what he was doing . Visual effects were done by the same company there that had done them for the 2006 South Korean monster film , The Host .

The post @-@ production tasks were as challenging as the production itself . Sound editors had to listen to the entire uncut tracks from the recorders taped to the actors ' bodies in order to find the dialogue . Content proprietary to Disney , such as the lyrics to " It 's a Small World " and footage from Soarin ' , was removed from the film to avoid copyright infringement . Composer Abel Korzeniowski contributed a light , airy score similar to those used in Hollywood 's Golden Age .

= = Sundance = =

Moore submitted the completed film to the Sundance Film Festival , where many independent films seek distributors . He had little hope that it would be accepted due to the festival 's corporate sponsors . But Trevor Groth , the festival 's new director of programming , was " blown away " by Escape from Tomorrow , and accepted it for the festival 's non @-@ competitive " Next " category , for films that transcend the limitations of the low budgets common to most independent films .

When the 2013 festival began in Park City , Utah , the secrecy about the movie continued . The festival 's website only identified the setting as a theme park . Nan Chalat @-@ Noaker , critic for the Park Record , recalls that the festival and even the film 's publicist were unwilling to share further details about the film , but strongly urged critics to see it . In her review , she declined to identify the setting of the film by name , although she dropped broad hints , out of fear it would alert Disney 's lawyers . The premiere , on the festival 's first night , was not fully attended ; when word got out to the attendees , all the other shows were effectively sold out .

= = Reception = =

Review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes gave the film a rating of 56 % based on 78 reviews . The site 's critical consensus reads : " Conceptually audacious but only intermittently successful in execution , Escape From Tomorrow is nonetheless visually inventive and darkly surreal . " On Metacritic , the film has a score of 58 out of 100 , based on 27 critics , indicating " mixed or average reviews " .

Before the Martin Luther King Day weekend was over , Escape from Tomorrow was being widely

discussed by festival attendees . The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times both ran articles about the film and Moore . Much of the attention focused on the audacity of the filmmaking . Movies.com reported that people were already calling it " the ultimate guerrilla film " . On the night of the premiere , Drew McWeeny wrote :

It is not possible that this film exists . It is not possible that they shot long scripted sequences on the actual rides . It is not possible that I just saw a film in which it is suggested and then shown that the various Disney princesses all work as high @-@ priced hookers who sell their wares to wealthy Asian businessmen . It simply cannot be true .

I grew up in Florida , and I have been going to Walt Disney World my entire life . I worked at that park . I 've been there as a child , as a teenager , as an employee , and as a parent . I 've done Disney sitting on my father 's shoulders , and I 've done the Disney parks with my kids sitting on my shoulders . It is a huge part of my DNA , and I can tell you that there is no way Randy Moore pulled off what I saw tonight . It is a film that should not exist by any rational definition .

And yet ... not only does it exist , but it 's fascinating .

He allowed that it was " undisciplined at times , rough around the edges in places , technically uneven , and there 's no sense of pacing to it at all . Even so , " he concluded , " there is a sort of naive charm that makes it impossible to look away . "

Other critics concurred that the film had artistic merit . " [ W ] atching Moore 's noir tale is like being super @-@ glued to your seat while getting poked in the eye , " Chalat @-@ Noaker wrote . " It 's both fascinating and repelling . " Stephen Zeitchik of the Los Angeles Times called it " one of the strangest and most provocative movies this reporter has seen in eight years attending the Sundance Film Festival " . At Indiewire , Eric Kohn wrote that " Moore portrays Disney World as the ultimate horror show ? and gets the point across in nearly every scene " . While they conceded the film 's audacious production made it worth their time to watch , other critics found flaws . " It 's not a great film . The story has some good ideas , but the execution is uneven , " wrote Peter Sciretta at / Film , while still recommending it as " unlike anything you 've seen before [ or will ] see again " . Similarly , CraveOnline 's William Bibbiani " wouldn 't have missed it for the world " but qualified it by noting that the film often lacked " cohesion and clarity " .

Musician and comedian Tony Goldmark , on his Channel Awesome produced webseries " Some Jerk With A Camera " ( which also films on @-@ site at the Disney parks ) , criticized the film in a three part review , saying " Half of it bores me , half of it confuses me , and all of it pisses me off . It 's not even pretentious . You need ambition to be pretentious . This is just fucking inept . " Goldmark also stated in his review that he is " not the least bit surprised " that Disney didn 't push legal action against the film , claiming that " They would have Streisand Effected themselves into a laughingstock . " Despite his dissenting opinion on the film , Goldmark also claimed that the film 's existence shows what anybody can do with modern technology , Saying :

Drew McWeeny couldn 't have been more wrong . This film wasn 't just possible , It was inevitable . No matter what some soulless YouTube bot on the wrong side of history may tell you , no one needs anyone 's permission to make stuff anymore . We never did really , we just thought we did because they had all the resources . But now , we all have HD cameras in our pockets and worldwide distribution at our fingertips . And the very existence of Escape From Tomorrow means more symbolically than its content ever could , but its content is borderline unwatchable . Like a less racist Birth Of A Nation .

Kyle Smith of the New York Post had the most negative assessment , calling it " more fun to discuss than to sit through " . While he found the guerilla filmmaking aspect of it " intriguing " , all it amounted to for him was " a couple of amusingly surreal moments " that could have taken place at any sufficiently large amusement park : " Even Disney @-@ hating hipsters are going to be disappointed ; the film is a pure festival play that is more or less unreleasable unless theater owners start selling weed along with popcorn . "

= = Legal issues = =

Every reviewer at Sundance who saw the film speculated that it was likely that Disney would take

legal action to prevent the film from being shown outside the festival , or perhaps even during it . " Disney 's lawyers are probably climbing onto helicopters and planning a raid on Park City right now , " wrote McWeeny . Reviewers urged others present to see it before it was too late , and expressed regret that their readers elsewhere would likely be denied a chance to see the film for themselves .

However , it was unclear what the basis of such a legal claim on Disney 's part could be . Moore took care to avoid direct copyright infringement of songs or films played as part of attractions , and intellectual property law is less clear on the other aspects of the film . Science fiction writer Cory Doctorow , who distributed his first novel , *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* , set in a 22nd @-@ century Disney World , under a Creative Commons license , believes there 's at most " a possible trademark claim , and I suppose that Disney could conceivabl [ y ] bring suit for violating the park 's terms of use , but these are much harder cases to make than copyright . "

Columbia Law School professor Tim Wu does not think Disney would have any defensible intellectual property claim . " Though the filmmakers may have committed trespass when they broke Disney World 's rules and if it violated the terms of entry on their tickets , the film itself is a different matter , " he wrote on The New Yorker 's blog . " As commentary on the social ideals of Disney World , it seems to clearly fall within a well @-@ recognized category of fair use , and therefore probably will not be stopped by a court using copyright or trademark laws . "

Despite the film 's repeated use of Disney 's characters and iconography , Wu explained , trademark law was not sufficient . " Disney does not have some kind of general intellectual @-@ property right in Disney World itself . " To make a trademark @-@ infringement case against Moore , he continued , Disney would have to convince a court that the use of its protected imagery in the movie could reasonably lead viewers to believe that it had a role in the film 's production , and he did not think that was a plausible argument . " The scene where a Disney Princess attempts to crush a child seems to eliminate that possibility . "

As for copyright , Wu sees Moore 's use of the Disney parks as transformative :

... [ H ] is use of Disney World is not as simple window dressing ; he transforms it into something gruesome and disturbing ? a place where , for example , guests are sometimes tasered and have their imaginations purged ... It might be a violation if Moore had made a film designed for viewers who wanted to see Disney World but were too lazy to go to Florida . *Escape from Tomorrow* , however , is clearly no substitute for buying a ticket .

As such , he sees the film as offering artistic commentary on the cultural impact of Disney , and thus clearly falling under fair use . Wu likens it to a 1990s case brought by Mattel against artist Thomas Forsythe , after he sold some of his photographs depicting another American icon , Barbie , being eaten by vintage appliances as a way of calling attention to the toy doll 's role in promoting the objectification of women in American culture . Not only did the court dismiss Mattel 's complaint , " [ t ] he judges were so annoyed by the lawsuits that they awarded attorney 's fees of nearly two million dollars to the artist ... A judge has to think of the First Amendment when asked to ban art work . "

In his / Film review , Sciretta raised another issue :

Intellectual property and copyrights aside , many people appear in this film who have never signed a release . Real families and children are seen in the background of almost every shot . None of them gave permission or knew they were being filmed for a feature film .

At Slate , Aisha Harris allowed that this was a possibility , especially if children were filmed without their parents ' consent , but noted " the law on that issue is not black and white either . "

== = Response by Disney == =

Disney did not return reporters ' calls or emails for comment , nor took any legal action during the festival , although it confirmed to CNN that it was " aware " of the movie . Despite critical apprehension that the film would never be shown outside the festival , some observers saw the situation as more complex . Were Disney to attempt to forcefully suppress the film , that effort could serve to draw even more attention to it , a phenomenon known as the Streisand effect . Even if Disney were to successfully prevent official distribution , the film could easily be pirated and distributed over the Internet . In his Post review , Smith suggested that Disney prevent this by taking

the opposite course , simply ignoring *Escape from Tomorrow* and letting the attention dissipate by itself .

Michael Ryan , director of The YoungCuts Film Festival , noted that there was a precedent for the film in the *Air Pirates* lawsuit , in which Disney spent eight years in court with some underground cartoonists who had published an underground comix parody in which Mickey Mouse and the other Disney characters engaged in explicit sex and used illegal drugs , among other behavior they avoided in Disney 's own narratives . He suggested that Disney buy the rights and release the film itself , which it could easily do as its announced interest would guarantee it a monopsony on the film since no other distributor would want to match Disney 's deep pockets or its feared legal response . As a Disney release , *Escape from Tomorrow* would have a large potential audience of both Disney enthusiasts and antagonists , Disney would be making money from property it already owns instead of someone else and the company 's apparent willingness to go in the joke would take some of the satiric edge off .

Moore expressed hope that the film could be shown and released , even if it meant a legal battle .

It depends on how good a case lawyers can make for it . If they say I have a chance , I 'll definitely fight for it . I worked on it really hard for three years and it took a lot out of me . Just to let it disappear would be a waste of time .

Since the film 's release Disney has discreetly acknowledged it in another way . The online supplement to *Disney A to Z : The Official Encyclopedia* includes an entry for *Escape from Tomorrow* , describing it as " An independent surrealistic cult film surreptitiously filmed at Walt Disney World and Disneyland . "

According to *The Hollywood Reporter* , Disney chose to avoid responding to the film altogether , rather than seeking legal action , in an effort to prevent increased publicity .