

VENICE REVIEW DAILY

COMPETITION

POOR THINGS



Atsushi Nishijima/Venice Film Festival

VERDICT: Yorgos Lanthimos and Emma Stone reteam for an audacious comic odyssey that defies genre and convention.

Alonso Duralde, September 1st, 2023

Part Frankenstein, part Belle de Jour, Yorgos Lanthimos' *Poor Things* is the latest career summit for the Greek auteur known for telling stories about rela-

tionships, families, and sexuality while tossing many of the rules of filmmaking out of a high window. His first feature since 2018's *The Favourite* — reteam-ing him with Emma Stone — follows an unusual heroine on a grotesque picaresque journey, as she defies the gender roles of the Victorian era and instead

Continues next page

IMMERSIVE

First VR Review In The Immersive Series

WALLACE & GROMIT IN 'THE GRAND GETAWAY'

VERDICT: Aardman's beloved duo returns in a demanding but fun VR experience that is part of the 2023 Venice Immersive competition.

Max Borg, September 1st, 2023

As we wait for the new Wallace & Gromit feature film to reach our screens (first announced in 2022, it's due in 2024 on Netflix internationally, with the BBC getting first dibs in the UK), one way to maintain brand awareness is a new VR project involving Aardman's beloved animated duo, unveiled at the Venice Film Festival as part of the Venice Immersivesidebar.

Specifically, Wallace & Gromit in *The Grand Getaway* is part of the section's competitive strand, which speaks to somewhat loftier ambitions for this interactive experience that is aimed mainly at adult fans of the franchise (the 60-minute running time and slightly demanding setup might be a deterrent for younger viewers).

The premise is very simple: Wal-

Continues next page



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From previous page

discovers her own agency.

Of course, in a Yorgos Lanthimos film, this journey never travels a predictable route. Bella (Stone) at first appears to be a feral creature, dropping plates, spitting out food, and gleefully stabbing the eyeballs of cadavers being stored by her caretaker, physician and professor Godwin Baxter (Willem Dafoe), whom she calls “God.” Baxter — his face a mass of scars and his body in constant need of hook-ups to external machines because of his surgeon-father’s experiments upon him — brings medical student Max McCandles (Ramy Youssef) home to observe Bella’s progress.

Max becomes smitten with Bella, and Baxter confesses how she came to enter his household: Baxter found the body of a pregnant woman who had just jumped off a bridge to her death, and rather than revive her (and have her subjected to life in an asylum for having attempted suicide), the doctor transplanted the fetus’ brain into the mother’s body, creating an adult discovering the world again as a child. Baxter keeps Bella hidden away from

[Full Review, click here](#)



Venice Film Festival

lace, the eccentric, cheese-loving inventor, and Gromit, his

brilliant and trusted canine companion, are planning a vacation, and decide to use their old rocket (from the very first W&G short *A Grand Day Out*) to get to their destination as quickly as possible. Throughout the two chapters, the viewer, equipped with a headset and controllers, must help either Wallace or Gromit with various tasks, essentially solving small puzzles to advance the story. Assistance comes in the form of BERYL, a new invention voiced by British actress/comedienne Miriam Margolyes (Wallace’s lines are supplied by his current voice actor Ben Whitehead, while Gromit remains silent as usual).

Now, full disclosure: this writer

didn’t get to experience the adventure in its complete form,

as the version available for the press preview day had a minor bug that made it necessary to skip ahead to Chapter 2 instead of completing the very last task at the end of Chapter 1. That said, the technical incident didn’t have that big an impact on the enjoyment factor, a key component when having to spend an hour being an active participant in the virtual, almost 360-degree environment.

That *The Grand Getaway* succeeds on the entertainment level is mainly due to the painstaking attention to detail in recreating the world of Wallace and Gromit, specifically the interiors of their house at 62 West Wallaby Street in Wigan (a

[Full Review, click here](#)

GERMAN FILMS IN VENICE



THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

by Timm Kröger



HOLLYWOOD GATE

by Ibrahim Nash'at

german films



Venice Film Festival

COMPETITION

DOGMAN

VERDICT: In a multi-faceted role, Caleb Landry Jones dazzles as the survivor of an inhuman childhood who believes only dogs can love him, in Luc Besson's calculated, over-the-top yet poignant shaggy-dog story.

Deborah Young, August 31st, 2023

Prolific French writer, director and producer Luc Besson returns to the big screen with Dogman, a highly watchable concoction stuffed with emotion and its own brand of suspenseful action.

Already dubbed his “comeback” film, it offers the audience an entertaining, offbeat character study of a deeply hurt man who isolates himself from human beings and surrounds himself with loyal, loving dogs who do his bidding, even killing for him. It is hard not to feel there are autobiographical elements underlying parts of the film, which Besson wrote before he was acquitted in June of rape allegations brought by an actress in 2018.

Fans of this imaginative director will find plenty to enjoy – the resilience and humanity of Douglas (a.k.a. Dogman), his fondness for make-up and his splendid drag impersonations, from Piaf to Monroe; his incredible dogs, his lack of self-pity, and his underlying ruthlessness in defending himself and his canines (“my babies”). Filling this hunky central role with charm and wit is Caleb Landry Jones, who played the ad salesman in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, and who gets a chance to let his talent really shine. His performance, taking in all the complexity of the character's split personalities, flashes on Michael Keaton in *Birdman*, and will no doubt be remembered when the Venice jury deliberates this competition entry.

But while *Dogman* effortlessly stirs up pathos, it lacks the literary and theatrical layers that won González Iñárritu's black comedy four Academy Awards including Best Picture. *Dogman* is not a comedy at all, but a casual mix of atmospheres ranging from *American Gothic* (his nightmare childhood) to TV police shows (he recounts the story of his life to prison psychologist Dr. Eve-

[Full review, click here](#)



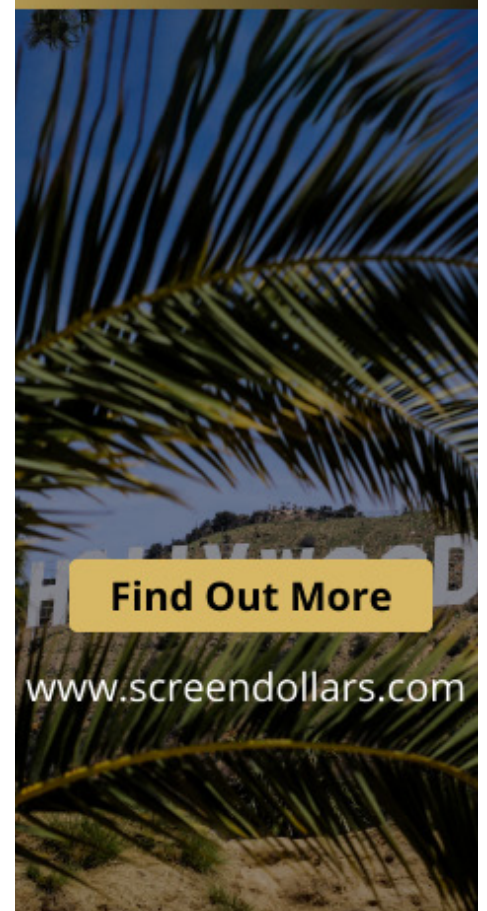
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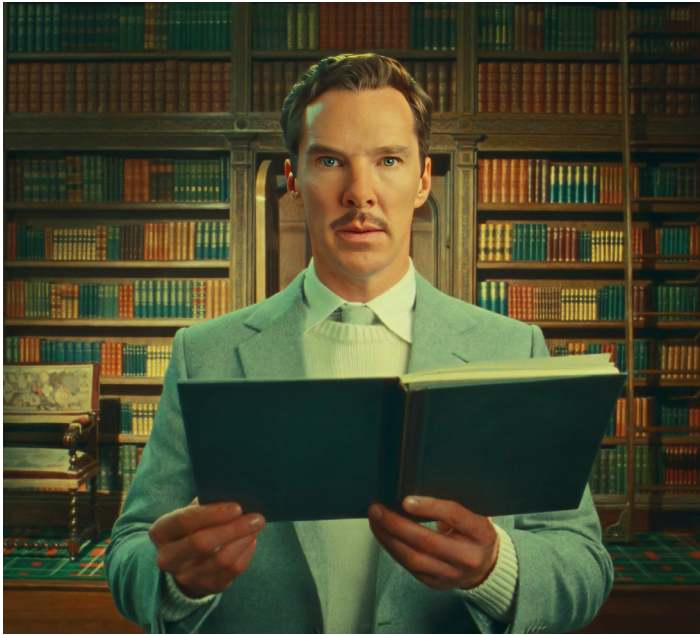
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Netflix

OUT OF COMPETITION

THE WONDERFUL STORY OF HENRY SUGAR

VERDICT: Wes Anderson's second Roald Dahl adaptation packs a feature's worth of deadpan humor and aggressive visual style into just 37 minutes.

Alonso Duralde, September 1st, 2023

If Asteroid City was writer-director Wes Anderson's love letter to the stage, his new Netflix short pays homage to stagecraft, with flats, backdrops, props, and even hair and makeup changes flying in from the wings.

An adaptation of the Roald Dahl story, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* is as much about the director's love of arch humor, fourth-wall shattering, and aggressive art direction as it is a redemption saga about a rich man who finds purpose in his life.

As such, it's another entry in Anderson's filmography which will delight his admirers while alienating his detractors, a commitment to a personal aesthetic that's all too rare in contemporary cinema.

Another comparison to *Asteroid City* lies in the fact that *Henry Sugar* wraps a story within a story within a story: we open with Ralph Fiennes as Dahl, showing us his author's hut before launching into the tale of *Henry Sugar* (Benedict Cumberbatch), a useless rich man drifting through life without any real purpose

[Full review, click here](#)

COMPETITION

THE PROMISED LAND

VERDICT: A beautifully imagined and played tale of men at war with the elements and each other with just a few screenplay hiccoughs.

Boyd van Hoeij, September 1st, 2023

*After *The Royal Affair*, which gave us Mads Mikkelsen and a then-unknown Alicia Vikander in a tumultuous Rococo-era court romance, Danish writer-director Nikolaj Arcel goes back to the 18th century for another story of power struggles and romance in *The Promised Land* (*Bastarden*). In this gorgeously lensed adaptation of a novel by Ida Jessen, Mikkelsen stars as Ludvig Kahlen, a former army captain who has decided he will be the one to finally tame the Jutland heath, a gigantic, barely fertile region that corresponds to roughly the western half of Denmark. Besides the elements, the almost penniless Kahlen has to brave the desire of a wealthy and extremely cruel local aristocrat to get the king to recognise his (invented) ownership over this hostile land.*



Biennale di Venezia

Arcel again works his magic on a widescreen canvas, while Mikkelsen, fresh off his *Indiana Jones* shenanigans, proves once more he's one of the world's most charismatic actors — even, or perhaps especially, when he seems to be doing very little. *The Promised Land* premiered in competition in Venice, the first Danish film to do so in over two decades, and should see solid play beyond home turf after its fall festival run that also includes TIFF, San Sebastian and Busan.

[Full review, click here](#)

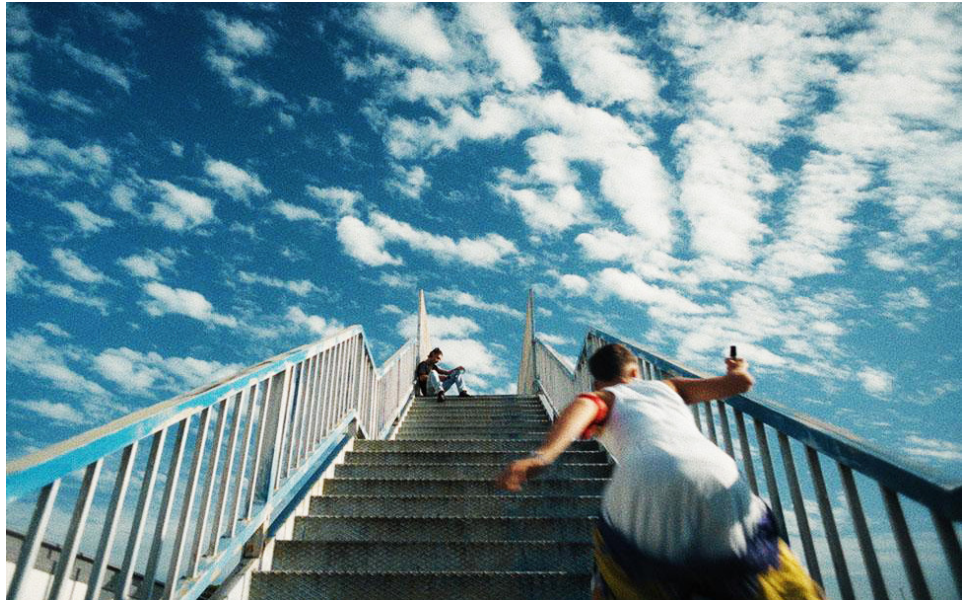
ORIZZONTI**AN ENDLESS SUNDAY**

VERDICT: Dazzling camerawork and an exceptional trio of teenage actors dangle from a weak narrative thread in Alain Parroni's intense first feature about underprivileged kids growing up without a future.

Deborah Young, September 1st, 2023

Three inseparable friends, two boys and a girl, grow up in grinding poverty in the hinterlands outside of Rome in *An Endless Sunday* (*Una sterminata domenica*).

It's a scenario out of an early Pasolini movie like *Accattone* or *Mamma Roma*, skillfully updated to reflect a contemporary world so bleak and futureless it hardly seems like it's in Europe, and only



Venice Film Festival

the energy of the young protags lifts the spirits. Strong on establishing atmosphere, it's much less convincing when a strained drama finally gets underway towards the end. The film, which counts Domenico Procacci and Wim Wenders

among its producers, should anyway get noticed when it bows in the Venice Orizzonti section.

Debuting director Alain Parroni, who has a solid background in cinematography and short films, does [Full review, click here](#)

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ORIZZONTI

STOLEN

VERDICT: The rich/poor divide in India is staggeringly vivid in Karan Tejpal’s first feature ‘Stolen’, the desperate search for a stolen baby that is powered by exciting chases and the constant threat of violence.

Deborah Young, September 1st, 2023

Karan Tejpal makes a striking feature debut with *Stolen*, engaging audiences in the frightful, all-too-real situations that can arise in India over a minor misunderstanding with the police, which snowballs into full-fledged danger for two brothers.

Meanwhile, a poor tribal woman sleeping on a bench in the train



Venice Film Festival

station awakens to find her infant daughter gone. The intersection of these three characters explodes in a cross-country hunt for the stolen baby that astutely blends the excitement of action scenes with deeper social themes and, for one of the brothers, a coming to terms with the need to become person-

ally involved in a stranger’s problems.

The screenplay also walks a fine line in exposing police corruption and incompetence, in a story that requires their assistance to come out right in the end. Shot entirely

[Full review, click here](#)

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GUILLERMO ARRIAGA OPENS UP

Feted Scribe's Near Fatal Car Crash Inspired Venice Title 'Upon Open Sky'



On the first full day of the 80th Venice International Film Festival, The Film Verdict caught up exclusively with Guillermo Arriaga in a one-on-one interview about the Mexican road movie *Upon Open Sky*.

by Liza Foreman

Oscar-winning writer Guillermo Arriaga (21 Grams, Amores Perros, Babel) wasn't even 30 when he was asleep in a car which fell off a cliff.

But instead of ending his life, the near-fatal accident inspired the Mexican multihyphenate's first screenplay entitled 'A Cielo Abierto' in his native tongue.

Written in his mid 30s, three decades later the script has become the basis for his children, Santiago and Mariana Arriaga's feature debut. The siblings co-directed the film from their father's original screenplay.

"What ignited our wish to do this

film was to imagine our father being killed. This fear was huge," says Santiago.

"It was and still is our fear," Mariana adds. "And the characters being brothers was something we could identify with."

This story of revenge follows three teens who take a road trip through the Mexican desert to the American border to track down the man that caused their father's death in a car accident.

The dramatic road movie world premiered in the Orizzonti section of the festival August 31, 2023.

Eight years in the making, Santiago found the manuscript in a box

while the siblings were studying, he tells The Film Verdict. "It's a work of art in itself," he adds, sitting alongside his sister and father - his collaborators on the project.

Discussing working as a family, Santiago says: "We have a rule that the story is the one that rules. Everyone wants the best for the story. We work things out."

The project is the first feature produced entirely by K&S Films Mexico. The main company is based in Argentina. Sales are being handled by Vicente Canales' Barcelona-based Film Factory.

Shot in the desert where the family often went on trips, the feature was filmed over a period of forty days, between October and December.

"It was a huge challenge. The desert. Extreme temperatures. New actors. But we had a solid team," says Mariana, adding, "We went to the border very often as a family. We have an emotional attachment to the area."

Newcomers Federica García, Máximo Hollander and Theo Goldin head the cast that includes Cecilia Suárez, Sergio Mayer Mori, Julio César Cedillo, Julio Bracho and Manolo Cardona.

"Drawing on personal experience is key to filmmaking," says Guillermo. "I had a car accident.

[Full article, click here](#)

CINECITTÀ



PROGRAM
31 AUGUST
4 SEPTEMBER
2023

THURSDAY, 31 AUGUST

- 09:00 - 11:00
FOCUS ON CHINA | VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Volpi
Blue Planet Sci-Fi Film Festival: Short Films Selection
- 10:30 - 12:00
VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Pasinetti
When Your Eyes Linger by Hwang Da-seul
- 12:00 - 13:40
FOCUS ON KYRGYZSTAN | VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Pasinetti
The Gift by Dalmira Tilebergenova
- 12:00-14:30
VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Casinò
Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms by Wuershan
- 14:00 - 15:30
FOCUS ON CHINA | The Most Beautiful Shooting Locations in China
in collaboration with Xinhua
- 16:00-16:50
PANEL | Co-Producing with Japan:
New Opportunities for the Italian Film Industry
- 17:00 - 18:00
FOCUS ON KYRGYZSTAN | Cooperation Strategies & Perspectives
in collaboration with the Cinema Department - Minister of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy of Kyrgyzstan & Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to Italy

FRIDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER

- 14:30 - 16:00
PANEL | New Image, New Lifestyle. Cinema in the New Media Time,
Capture Your Own Story
in collaboration with Infinix

SATURDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER

- 11:45 - 13:30
PANEL | Spotlight on Hong Kong Film Industry:
The Past, Present and Exciting Future
in collaboration with Create Hong Kong
- 15:00 - 16:50
PANEL | The New Anti-Piracy Law:
Opportunities for the Audiovisual Industry
in collaboration with FAPAV
- 18:10 - 19:10
FOCUS ON CHINA | Blue Planet Sci-Fi Film Festival Cooperation Forum
in collaboration with Xinhua

SUNDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER

- 10:30 - 12:15
PANEL | Genre Trends in Global Film Production
in collaboration with C-stars Consulting
- 15:00 - 16:30
PANEL | Next Generation Movie Creatives: from Schools to Showbiz.
Spotlight on Animation
in collaboration with MPA
- 18:10 - 19:00
FOCUS ON CHINA | Unravelling China's
Cultural Tapestry through Wine and Film
in collaboration with LIPP & NYSH Productions

MONDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER

- 15:00 - 17:00
PANEL | We Are Stories Campaign: Protecting Creativity
and Supporting Young Talents
in collaboration with FAPAV

Events: Open to all
Focus on Kyrgyzstan: Italian/Russian with translation
All the other panels: Italian/English with translation

Screenings: Gold and Trade Accreditation
For info: italianpavilion.it

VENICE FAST FACTS

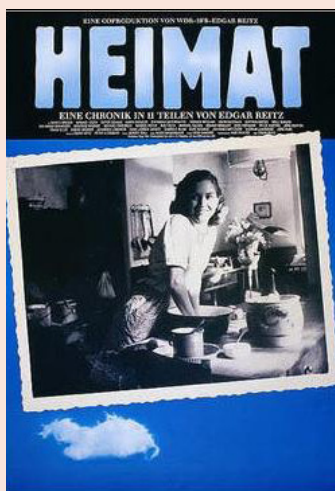
Biennale celebrates 80 years

1983



Under the direction of Gian Luigi Rondi, the Festivals were numbered once again, the sections were made permanent fixtures and greater attention was given to the masters of cinema from the past and present.

1984



The main event of this edition was, out of competition, the premiere of Heimat, an almost 16 hours-long film directed by Edgar Reitz.

1984 also saw the creation of SIC, the International Critics' Week, run independently by the National Italian Film Critics Union and devoted to debut and second works.

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Sept 3

10:30 – 12:15

GENRE TRENDS IN GLOBAL FILM PRODUCTION

New trends in film production and how the most popular genres change from one country to another will be discussed during the panel Genre Trends in Global Film Production (3 September, 10:30-12:15), in collaboration with C-stars Consulting and with speeches by: Élise Girard, Film Director and Screenwriter of the movie *Sidonie au Japon*, which will be presented in competition at Venice “Giornate degli Autori”; Shozo Ichiyama, Film Producer, Kris Phillips, singer and actor, starring in the blockbuster *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, by Chinese director Wuershan, who will also be a guest of the panel.

15:00 – 16:30

FOCUS ON ANIMATION

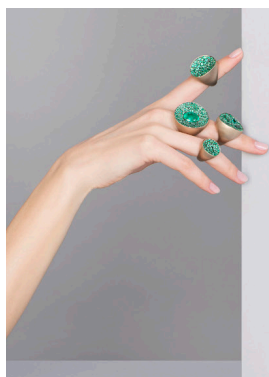
The now well-established collaboration with MPA will be renewed: every year, as part of the Venice Film Festival, the Motion Pictures Association will dedicate an in-depth study to a different aspect of the audiovisual industry. This time the spotlight will

be on animation, as part of the panel Next Generation Movie Creatives: from Schools to Showbiz. A Spotlight on Animation. A number of leading figures in the sector will participate, and on this occasion they will have the opportunity to exchange views with representatives of the Italian institutions. Speakers will be: Lucia Borgonzoni, Undersecretary of State for Culture, Italian Government; Emilie Anthonis, Senior Vice President Government Affairs, Head of Policy, MPA EMEA; Nicola Borrelli, Director General, DGCA-MiC; Nicola Maccanico, CEO, Cinecittà; Roberto Stabile, Advisor for International Relations | Head of Special Projects, DGCA-MiC/Cinecittà; Alfio Bastiancich, Vice President, Cartoon Italia; Iole Maria Giannattasio, Head of Public Policy, Netflix Italia; Manuela Cacciamani, Founder and Producer, One More Pictures; Giulio Carcano, Head of Theatrical Distribution, Disney Italia; Marco Chimenz, CEO, Cattleya; Sergio Del Prete, Director, Anica Academy; Giorgio Scorza, CEO, Movimenti Production and Scott Votaw, Executive Director, Georgia Film Academy.

18:10 – 19:00

CHINA'S CULTURAL TAPESTRY THROUGH WINE & FILM

A new in-depth discussion that will bring together film enthusiasts, industry experts and food lovers will be offered by the panel Unravelling China's Cultural Tapestry through Wine & Film (3 September, 18:10-19:00), in collaboration with LIPP and NYSH Productions. The meeting will celebrate China's passion for viticulture, which is the focus of Sebastian Basco's documentary *Waking the Sleeping Grape*, to be screened the same day in the Sala degli Specchi of the Grand Hotel Ausonia Hungaria.



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HONORI FICABILI TUDINITA TIBUS

What is past is prologue. From September 13 until September 17.

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