

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Happiness Will Prevail

Writer/director Finn Parker talks about new horror movie **Smile**



IN 2020, PARKER FINN DEBUTED HIS SECOND short, “Laura Hasn’t Slept”, about a young woman who seeks the help of a therapist after suffering a series of nightmares. Not only did it scoop the Special Jury Recognition Prize at the South By Southwest film festival, but the word got out that this was something special. “It just started spreading around town like wildfire,” Finn tells Red Alert. “And then people started reaching out...”

Smile is not only Parker Finn’s first studio film, but his first ever feature, such was Paramount’s trust in this promising up-and-comer. And while *Smile* isn’t exactly a big-budget, full-length remake of “Laura Hasn’t Slept”, it’s certainly a riff on it.

“While I’d been in post[-production] I’d had this idea for a much bigger movie, one that used the short film as a springboard,” he reveals. “There are threads of DNA from ‘Laura Hasn’t Slept’ running through *Smile*.”

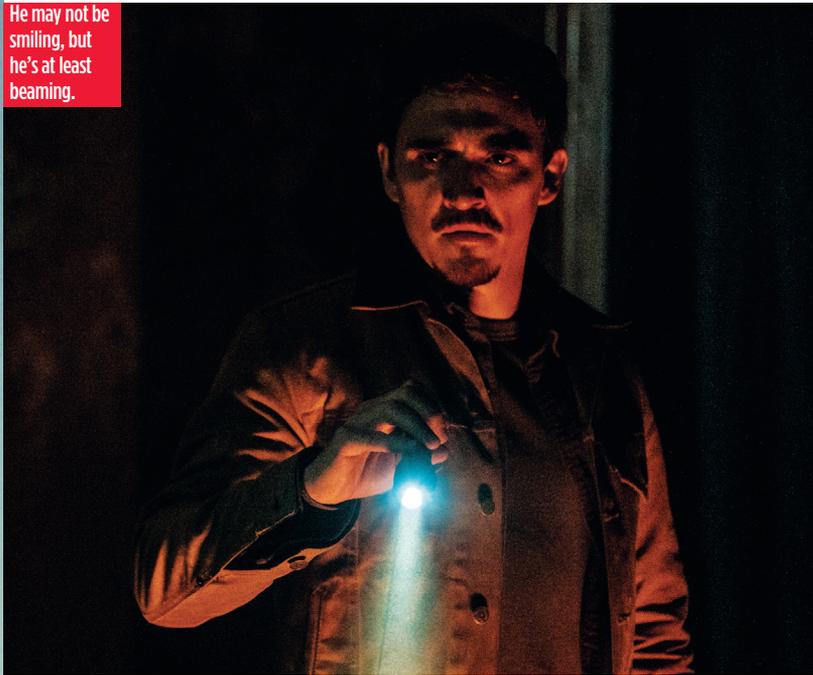
Anyone who’s seen the trailer for *Smile* will already know how soul-freezing scary it looks. A doctor is haunted by visions of smiling people, but not the kind that puts a spring in your step or that Katy Perry or Justin Bieber ever sang songs about.

Kyle Gallner
(*Scream 2022*)
also stars, as
Joel.

“I chose to use the smile to represent the evil in the film, because I think there’s a real strength in the inherent contradiction of it,” Finn explains. “A smile is a gesture of warmth and kindness and friendliness. It’s something that’s really primal – we learn to smile as babies before we even learn to speak. I wanted to see if I could flip that on its head and allow the evil in the film to use a smile as a mask.”



He may not be smiling, but he's at least beaming.



“What I loved about *The Shining* was the feeling of going mad with Jack”

Sosie Bacon as Rose Cotter: not much to smile about.

A lifelong movie nut and horror fan (“My dad was a big cinephile and I was consuming movies constantly as a kid”), Finn says that Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* and Hideo Nakata’s *Ring* were among the inspirations for his film. “What I loved about *The Shining* was the feeling of going mad with Jack Torrance, and I wanted to see if I could instil that in *Smile*,” he says. “And I love the nightmarish quality of *Ring* and the investigative angle.

“There’s also a film called *Safe* by Todd Haynes which is one of my favourite movies. What I love about it is how intensely it puts you in the subjective [point of view] of Julianne Moore’s character as she’s dealing with all this anxiety in her life as it’s spiralling out of control. That film was definitely on my mind in a big way.”

Smile’s own Julianne Moore is Sosie Bacon, who, as Dr Rose Cotter, appears in virtually every scene. Despite being the daughter of A-list parents (Sosie’s father is Kevin Bacon and her mother is Kyra Sedgwick), this is the actor’s first headlining role. And Finn couldn’t be happier with his leading lady.

“I knew from the very beginning that the film would totally hinge on the performance of Rose,” the director says. “Sosie is an amazing actress and incredibly emotionally intuitive. She has this ability to draw you in as a real, grounded human character who is going through these really extraordinary things. I think that she’s given one of the most incredible debut performances in recent years, and I can’t wait for people to see it.”

Although this is Finn’s first feature-length movie as writer-director, he says that it didn’t differ too much from his experience making shorts, despite the more generous budget and longer time frame.

“While you’re in production,” he says, “you’re just trying to put one foot in front of the other, and you hope that the plan that you’ve built is going to come to fruition, because you’re always up against it with time and money.

“Whatever the world is throwing at you, whether it’s weather or noisy neighbours or whatever, you’re trying to stick to that north star that you’ve created for yourself. Production’s always an incredibly mad dash. I mean, we were a studio movie, but we also had a modest budget, so it almost felt like an independent film.”

As for what’s next on the agenda, Finn says he’s keen to play some more in the horror sandpit. “I love genre filmmaking,” he beams. “Horror is one of my absolute first loves and I would love to continue telling stories that are horror, or horror-adjacent.

“I always want to be able to explore the human condition, and I love the ways that the genre allows you to do that in really unexpected methods. So yeah, my goal is to continue telling things that have a real sense of human emotion and fright built into them.” **so**

Smile is in cinemas from 30 September.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Batfleck returns! Ben’s back as Bruce Wayne in 2023’s **Aquaman And The Lost Kingdom**.

→ Stephen King novel **The Regulators** heading to the big screen.

→ Pellet-gobbling arcade classic **Pac-Man** in line for movie adaptation... somehow.

→ **Sonic The Hedgehog 3** out 20 December 2024.

→ *Godzilla Vs Kong* sequel going by working title **Origins**.

→ Gagastastic sequel **Joker: Folie à Deux** set for 4 October 2024 release.

→ *The Black Phone* team producing **Room 428**, written and directed by Brett and Drew Pierce.

→ French master criminal **Fantomas** returning to the screen 109 years after his cinema debut. Still looking good, Monsieur F!

→ *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s Ann Dowd joining the Blumhouse

Exorcist sequel.

→ Seth Rogen’s CG-animated reboot **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem** targeting 4 August 2023 release.

→ Carla Gugino joining ’80s-set horror-comedy **Lisa Frankenstein**, scripted by *Juno’s* Diablo Cody.



▶ **SCI-FACT!** Parker Finn’s first short was “The Hidebehind”, a 19th century folk-horror about a monster.