

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Send In The Clones

"I told you we should have just gone with the E45."

Brandon Cronenberg's **Infinity Pool** takes us on a terrifying holiday

BRANDON CRONENBERG DOESN'T just want *Infinity Pool* to freak you out – he wants it to make you laugh, too. "We were always chuckling to ourselves when we were developing it, we thought it was going to be funny," he tells Red Alert.

That's quite a strange admission for a director whose latest film has been widely described as "shocking" thanks to scenes of Alexander Skarsgård naked and breastfeeding, and Mia Goth wildly screaming while pointing a loaded gun at a bus full of people. It's no wonder early audiences found it a bit much.

"During our early test screenings with friends and colleagues, there was very little laughter," the director says. "I thought, 'We're fucked. We really fucked up this film, it's a

disaster because nobody's laughing.' They seemed to politely enjoy it, but it was as if the film had no sense of humour."

That changed at Sundance Film Festival when Cronenberg – son of veteran director David, and previously best known for the 2020 body horror *Possessor* – saw the audience laughing along at Skarsgård wearing nothing but a dog leash. "I was incredibly relieved, because it was always intended to be funny," he adds.

Infinity Pool is certainly not all laughs. The film sees Skarsgård's character James, a struggling author, and his wealthy wife Em (Cleopatra Coleman) holidaying on a remote island where the rules are a little different.

One day, another couple – Gabi, played by Goth, and Alban (Jalil Lespert) – invites the pair on a trip outside of their resort's walls.

Things soon go terribly, terribly wrong. James kills a local man and, as punishment, he faces the death penalty. However, rather than being killed, James has the option of having



Mia Goth and Alexander Skarsgård: shady.



“You start to wonder what it would be like if everyone were slathered in blood”

himself cloned, with that clone executed in his stead.

“It started with this idea of someone at an execution witnessing a double of themselves being executed,” says Cronenberg. That initial premise led to a short story, which then led to Cronenberg inventing a group of characters who are each transformed by the experience of watching their own execution. “It connected to some JG Ballard novels, like *Super Cannes*, *Cocaine Nights*,” he continues. “That ended up leading me to a resort setting.”

Infinity Pool is essentially the most horrifying version of *White Lotus* that you can imagine – a group of overly wealthy, snobbish people (Cronenberg calls them “adult babies”) who use the mysterious island’s cloning laws to their advantage and terrorise other guests.

“A [holiday] is supposed to be a pleasurable experience, something that normally feels safe and mundane,” he says. “I’m very uncomfortable in that context. I can’t relax.”

“Maybe it’s just because I drink too much coffee. Being in that situation seems immediately sinister to me. You start to see what’s bad about it and what’s bad about yourself, and you start to wonder what it would be like if everyone were slathered in blood instead of suntan lotion.”

POOL OF TALENT

True to Cronenbergian form, there’s lots of blood in *Infinity Pool*, but also numerous colourful, provocative montage sequences. Were this any other director, you might believe they were created using heavy amounts of CG.

“None of the hallucinations have any VFX,” he says. “I don’t have a problem with VFX, but you can rely on them too much. To me, CGI blood doesn’t really land a lot of the time. There is a tactile quality to practical effects that I like. Those hallucination sequences feel physical in a certain way.”

Working with cinematographer Karim Hussain, Cronenberg experimented with distorting images and deforming shots using gels and layers of physical materials. “We

tended to stumble onto these happy accidents through that process, when we were trying one thing and did something else that’s interesting. That became a core aspect of the film’s aesthetic.”

Just as important were the actors’ performances, and both Skarsgård and Goth are fantastically unhinged throughout. “I cast them assuming that they would surprise me and they did,” Cronenberg says. “There were scenes in the script which, on paper, didn’t seem quite as pivotal.”

“For instance, the scene outside the bus where Mia has the gun. She’s yelling what was written, but I wasn’t expecting that to be quite such a fantastic stand-out scene. She just went to such an incredible place with it.”

Beyond *Infinity Pool*, Cronenberg is working next on a TV adaptation of the aforementioned *Super Cannes* by JG Ballard. “There are some themes and some tonal elements that are certainly related,” he says when comparing his latest and next projects.

“But it’s a very different story. *Super Cannes* is essentially a strange detective story. It’s not a sci-fi film in a conventional way. It’s a little future-tech for the time it was written. I don’t think it’ll feel the same. I don’t want to just repeat the same approach. I’ll do something very different with it.” **JS**

Infinity Pool is in cinemas from 24 March.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ By Gandalf’s beard! Warner Bros and New Line teaming on new series of **The Lord Of The Rings** movies.

→ Vin Diesel reuniting with David Twohy for **Riddick: Furya**.

→ *Crank*’s Brian Taylor helming **Hellboy: The Crooked Man**, from a script by Mike Mignola.

→ James Mangold in the frame to direct **Swamp Thing**.

→ Addison Rae to star in Eli Roth’s slasher **Thanksgiving**.

→ Weta Workshop handling the giant spider effects in Australian horror **Sting**.

→ Kevin Feige promises **Spider-Man 4** is on the way – “We have the story.”

→ Kane Parsons’s viral video **The Backrooms (Found Footage)** set for big-screen version from A24.

→ Sony to turn **I Know What You Did Last Summer** into a legacy franchise.

→ Live-action **How To Train Your Dragon** on the way from DreamWorks.

→ *The Crown*’s Emma Corrin joining **Deadpool 3** and Robert Eggers’s

Nosferatu. → Disney once again delaying **The Marvels**, from a release of 28 July to 10 November.



▶ SCI-FACT! *Infinity Pool*’s US opening weekend was bigger than the run of Cronenberg Sr’s *Crimes Of The Future*.