

RECEIVER

A CAVAN CAMPBELL FILM

PRESS NOTES

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TONIGHT SRIYANI IS ON THE LINE

RECEIVER

LOGLINE

Isolated on the night shift, an idealistic telephone counsellor is confronted by an insidious caller with the power to control her mind.

SYNOPSIS

Sriyani, an idealistic and overtaxed Sri Lankan-Canadian social worker, is a counsellor at a telephone help line. She has built her life around helping others, but always at the expense of those closest to her.

So who is going to defend Sriyani when she is hypnotized by a caller on the phone tonight?

AN INTERLOCK PICTURE
TAHIRAH VEJANI DAVID TOMPA "RECEIVER" PRODUCED BY DEANNA CHOI EDITED BY LUKE HIGGINSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER JENNIFER TAM DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TARVER, CSC
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS AARON KOPFF PRODUCED BY CAVAN CAMPBELL WRITTEN BY SEDINA FIATI EMILY ANDREWS DIRECTED BY CAVAN CAMPBELL CASTING BY LUKE HIGGINSON
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POSTER DESIGN BY NICK ALAFIO-ARMIS



CAVAN CAMPBELL – DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER

Cavan Campbell was raised on Prince Edward Island, Canada, his Island father a painter and his Sri Lankan mother a writer. Introduced first to those arts independently, filmmaking proved the natural synthesis of these early loves, and those islands.

Cavan's films have screened and been awarded on three continents, and his previous film *HANGNAIL* was lauded by Academy Award®-winner Paul Haggis as “very powerful, wonderful filmmaking”.

He has worked for nearly 20 years in film & TV production, a contributor to international feature films (*It, xXx: Return of Xander Cage*), series television (*Star Trek: Discovery, Heroes Reborn*), and commercials. Making his home in Toronto, he is a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

TAHIRIH VEJDANI – SRIYANI

Tahirih Vejdani is a Toronto actor, singer, and choral conductor originally from Regina, Saskatchewan. She has performed at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Young People's Theatre, Cleveland Playhouse Square, Tarragon Theatre, Shakespeare in the Ruff, and the Globe Theatre, among many others. Recent film/TV work includes: *Kim's Convenience, Let It Snow, and Insecurity*.

DAVID TOMPA – DRAKE

David Tompa has been a film & TV fixture in Toronto for over 15 years, working as an actor, director, and instructor. Currently teaching the Meisner Technique with John Riven, David has performed in shows ranging from *The Expanse* to *Odd Squad, Coconut Hero* to *The Handmaid's Tale*, playing everything from loveable villains to despicable heroes.



LUKE HIGGINSON – CO-WRITER, EDITOR

Luke Higginson is a picture editor, screenwriter, and director. A Ryerson University graduate, Luke bounces between feature films, TV, and commercials. A love of problem-solving & visual storytelling has guided him through extensive work with the CBC, Wango Films, and Lithium Studios, among others. RECEIVER is Luke's first horror film, and it scares him.

SEDINA FIATI – CO-PRODUCER

Sedina Fiati is a performer and producer, proudly queer and of African descent. Recently she produced *Maternal* (best short film at CaribbeanTales Film Festival), and performed in award-winning web series *Tokens*, feature *Shark Week*, and TV series *Coroner*. Former co-chair of ACTRA Toronto's Diversity Committee, Sedina is dedicated to uplifting marginalized artists.

EMILY ANDREWS – CO-PRODUCER

Producer Emily Andrews is a founding member of Filmcoop Inc, a collective that has produced over 20 short films, 5 features, and numerous commercials. Emily's films have screened and won awards at festivals including Cannes, TIFF, Venice, and Budapest. Recent work includes: Donald Shebib's *Nighttalk*, Warren P. Sonoda's *The Things I Do For Money*, and short film *Stuck*.



DIRECTORS' NOTES

RECEIVER questions how women are expected to wall off the assertive parts of themselves to fit society's expected compliance and modesty. It explores the manipulation of working women during a single night with Sriyani, a Sri Lankan-Canadian social worker at a telephone help line.

RECEIVER is a chamber horror film about toxic masculinity, isolation, and the commodification of empathy.

This film exists because of two women: my girlfriend Stephanie, and my mother Kumari.

STEPHANIE

My girlfriend is a social worker who was, like Sriyani, a telephone counsellor. Stephanie regularly described her frustrations with callers inclined to treat counsellors as programmed machines. The anonymity of the phone interactions encouraged this, exacerbated by a management obsession with metrics that minimized the counsellors themselves.

The descriptions of the job (even from counsellors themselves) were traditionally feminine—the language of empathy, deference, and reserve. Women in a lot of communities are routinely socialized as helpers; as if it's part of one gender's duty to mitigate other's problems, to 'make the peace' in person and profession.

'Helper' industries like social work are staffed largely by women, and significantly, women of minority backgrounds.

KUMARI

My mum came as a teenager to Canada from Sri Lanka in the 1960s. Educated, well-spoken, "one of the good ones". Hers is the literal newspaper-perfect immigrant story: a 1968 Toronto Herald article on a Model UN conference leads with a photo of her, representing Austria while in a traditional sari, to illustrate the incongruities of society's growing diversity.

But, in the rural Canada where my parents raised us, the most common polite descriptor used for her (and therefore us) was "from away". Even when she volunteered in community organizing, they questioned how a "black woman" was the appropriate representative for the region.

With half of my ancestry a childhood liability, I grew up with only basic knowledge of, and even less interest in, my history. Only after visiting Sri Lanka as an adult did I realize how hungry I was to know this part of myself.

I was now living in Toronto, and I had access to the Sri Lankan diaspora, but there were virtually no Sri Lankan-Canadians in the media.





SRIYANI

I knew there was a plot to be pulled from Stephanie's life: the core of hers and mum's stories overlapped—the steep expectations put on those who have to work the hardest to achieve their goals. This galvanized Sriyani's core as I wrote: justice, service, and hope. But there had to be something more lively than a workplace drama here. So I invited Luke Higginson to write a script with me.

We consulted regularly with Stephanie and my mum while developing RECEIVER. Truth was paramount. Stephanie kept us honest in writing industry procedures and protocols, and mum kept us true in relating the experiences of a young woman of colour.

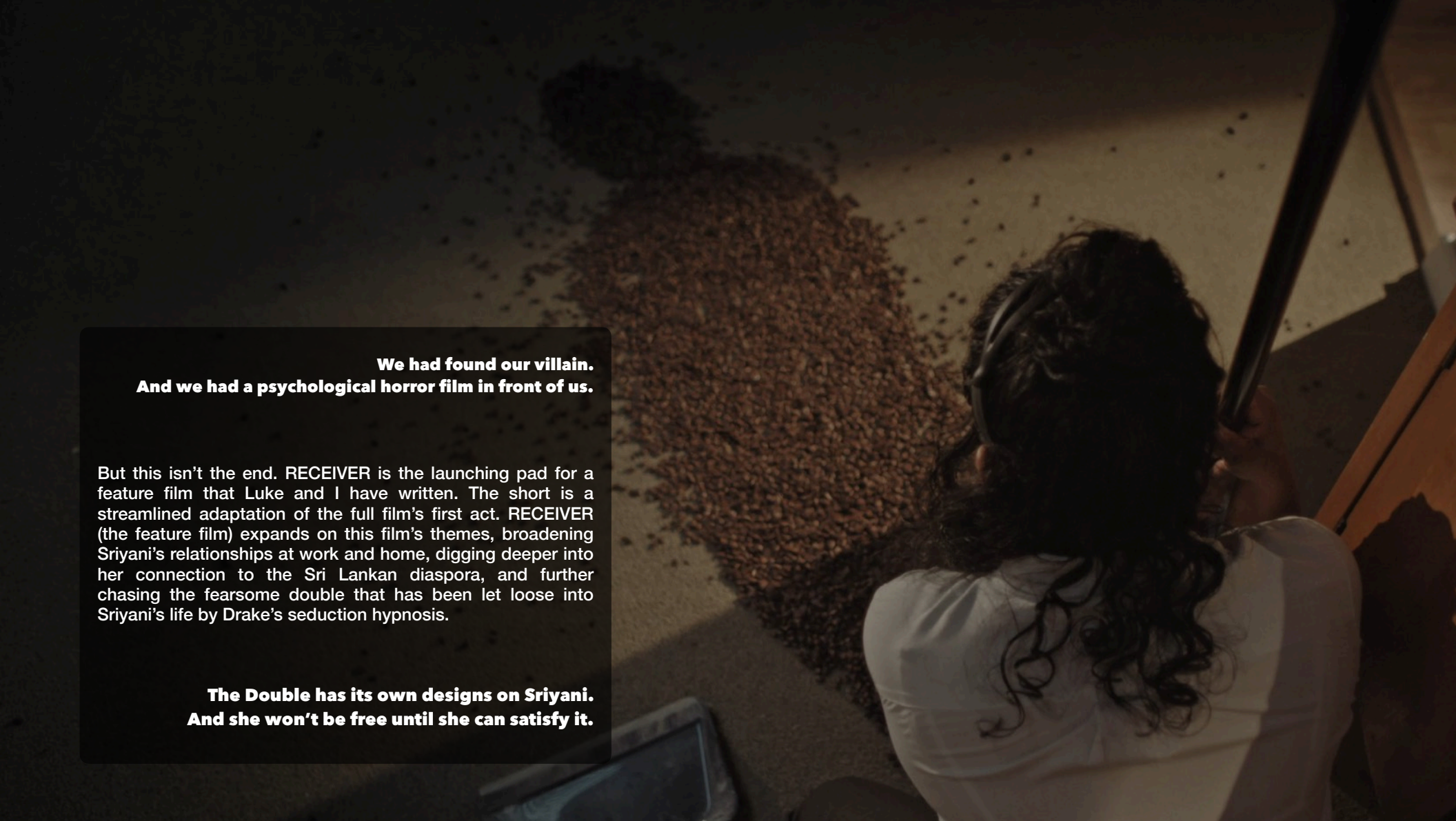
Truth drove our preparations. Stephanie served as a technical consultant for Tahirih Vejdani, who portrays Sriyani. RECEIVER's South Asian art is authentically Sri Lankan, a mix of contemporary and antique from the towns of Ambalangoda and Kandy. We used mum's family heirlooms and historical photos to decorate Sriyani's apartment. And yes, even that 1968 Toronto Herald article. Do you think you can find it in the scene?

We were exploring how the commoditization of empathy invites abuse, especially in an industry that expects its staff, driven by 'calling' or 'justice', to absorb its burdens without outlet. So what circumstances could throw 'helpers' and 'users' together?

DRAKE

When PUA [pickup artist] culture became mainstream, it was greeted with equal intrigue and mockery. But PUA communities are now only a small part the internet's network of men's spaces ("the Manosphere"), whose language is distinctly chauvinist—disdain, selfishness, and bombast.

PUA culture is a misty reflection of 'helper' work culture—both have a habit of treating women as commodities and reinforcing traditional gender roles. The anonymity central to online colonies mirrors those semi-anonymous encounters over telephone lines. And the 'hypnotic seduction' sub-community teaches men how to pair the appearance of 'feminine' empathy with language processing strategies to manipulate women.



**We had found our villain.
And we had a psychological horror film in front of us.**

But this isn't the end. RECEIVER is the launching pad for a feature film that Luke and I have written. The short is a streamlined adaptation of the full film's first act. RECEIVER (the feature film) expands on this film's themes, broadening Sriyani's relationships at work and home, digging deeper into her connection to the Sri Lankan diaspora, and further chasing the fearsome double that has been let loose into Sriyani's life by Drake's seduction hypnosis.

**The Double has its own designs on Sriyani.
And she won't be free until she can satisfy it.**

KEY CREDITS

Sriyani
Drake

Tahirih Vejdani
David Tompa

Directed by
Written by

Cavan Campbell
Cavan Campbell
Luke Higginson
Cavan Campbell

Produced by

Sedina Fiati
Emily Andrews

Production Designed by
Director of Photography

Jennifer Tam

Edited by

John Tarver, csc
Luke Higginson

Music Composed by

Deanna H. Choi

TECHNICAL DATA

Language
Country
Genre

English
Canada
Horror

Duration

15 minutes

Shooting Format

4k/Alexa Mini

Exhibition Format

Colour. DCP (4k, 2k),
Prores Digital File

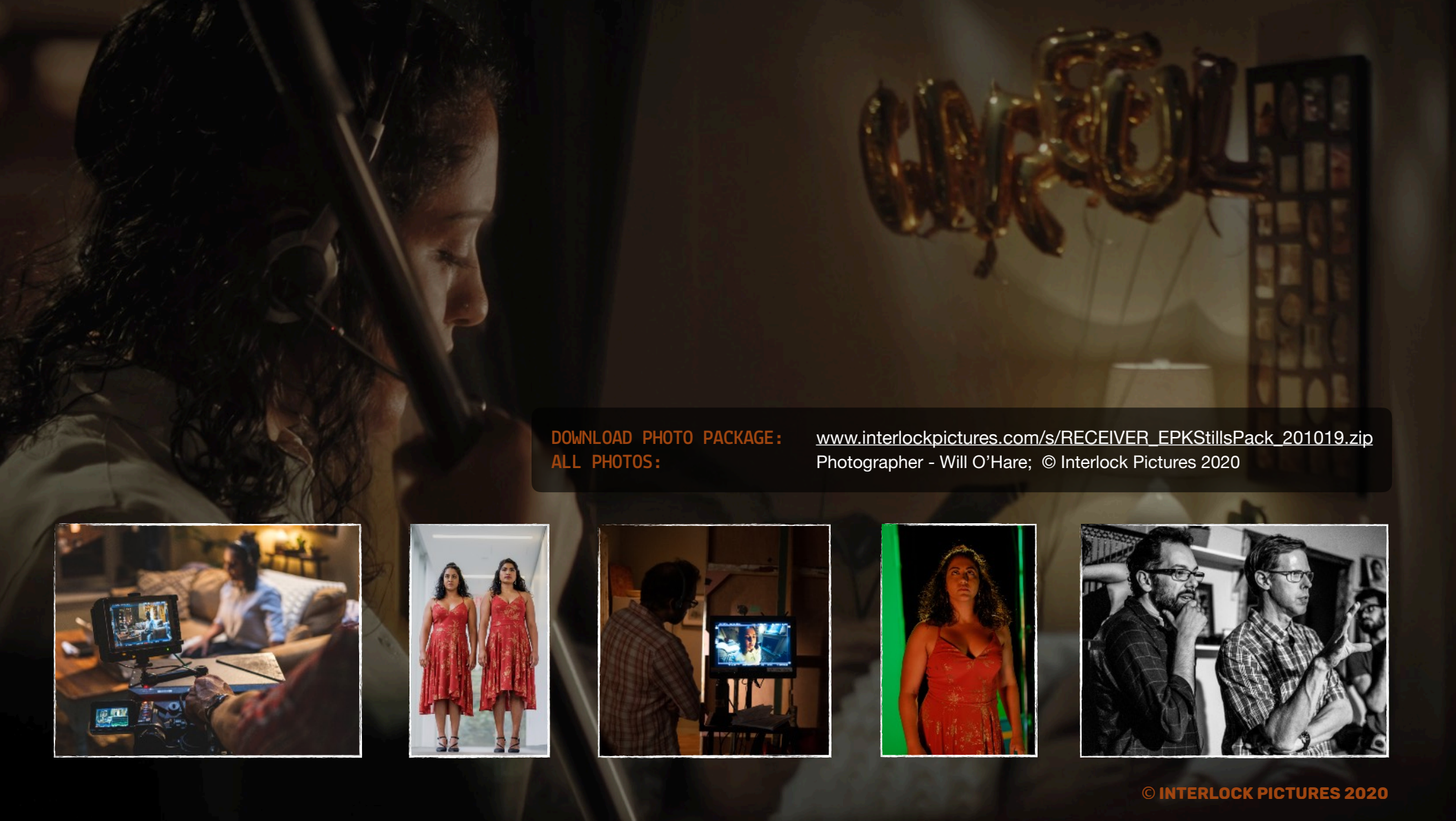
Aspect Ratio

1.85:1

Sound

5.1 Surround





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Photographer - Will O'Hare; © Interlock Pictures 2020

