



NEW RELEASES

Kinds of Kindness

Kinds of Kindness

Directed by: Yorgos Lanthimos
Presented by: Searchlight Pictures
In association with: Film4, TSG Entertainment
An Element Pictures production
Produced by: Ed Guiney, Andrew Lowe, Yorgos Lanthimos, Kasia Malipan
Casting Director: Dixie Chassay
Written by: Yorgos Lanthimos, Efthimis Filippou
Director of Photography: Robbie Ryan
Edited by: Yorgos Mavropsaridis
Production Designer: Anthony Gasparro
Costume Designer: Jennifer Johnson
Make-up Department Head: Jennifer Serio
Music by: Jerskin Fendrix
Cast:
Emma Stone (*Rita, Liz, Emily*)
Jesse Plemons (*Robert, Daniel, Andrew*)
Willem Dafoe (*Raymond, George, Omi*)
Margaret Qualley (*Vivian, Martha, twins Ruth and Rebecca*)
Hong Chau (*Sarah, Sharon, Aka*)
Joe Alwyn (*collectibles appraiser man 1, Jerry, Joseph*)
Mamoudou Athie (*Will, Neil, morgue nurse*)
Hunter Schafer (*Anna*)
Ireland-UK-USA 2024
164 mins
Digital

Searchlight Pictures release

NEW RELEASES

Àma Gloria

From Fri 14 Jun

Green Border

Zielona granica
From Fri 21 Jun

Bye Bye Tiberias

Bye Bye Tibériade
From Fri 28 Jun + Q&A on Fri 28 Jun 18:00

Kinds of Kindness

From 5 July

Sleep Jam

From Fri 12 Jul

About Dry Grasses

Kuru Otlar Üstüne
From Fri 26 Jul

Sky Peals

From 9 August

Kneecap

From 23 August

RE-RELEASES

Network

From Fri 28 Jun

The Conversation

From Fri 5 Jul

Alma's Rainbow

From 2 August

Werckmeister Harmonies

Werckmeister Harmoniak

From 2 August

In Yorgos Lanthimos's comic epic fantasy *Poor Things* (2023), Emma Stone was electrifying as a Frankensteinian creature, Bella Baxter – a deceased pregnant woman, reanimated with the transplanted brain of her foetus. From a laboratory to a world voyage and peril, then back again to practise medicine, Bella's rapid development defied biological expectations and societal norms. In the Greek director's new science-fiction triptych, *Kinds of Kindness* (2024), the women Stone plays are far darker scientific and social experiments: never quite in charge of their destinies, driven by the yearnings of others. Indeed, in this deadpan, disquieting film, the demands for manifestations of love and selflessness take on frighteningly narcissistic and abusive proportions.

Stone plays a different character in each of the film's three parts, as do her principal co-stars Willem Dafoe, Jesse Plemons, Margaret Qualley, and Hong Chau. In the first part, she's Rita, a young woman under the spell of a chillingly manipulative corporate magnate, Raymond (Dafoe). Raymond dictates every detail – including diet and sex – of the comfortable life and daily routine of his employee Robert (Plemons). When Robert fails to cause a car accident and kill a man as instructed, Rita steps in to complete the task. For the second, Stone plays a marine biologist who disappears at sea, and whose husband (Plemons) then believes she has been replaced by a near-perfect replica.

In one of the film's many absurdist scenes, Robert tests the impostor by demanding that she feed him her finger; after she complies, he demands her liver, only to find her dead, stomach slashed, with her meaty organ splayed on the carpet. The final segment finds Stone as a young woman who decides to abandon her family and take on a new identity: she joins a cult, alongside another member (Plemons again) who is searching for a mysterious young woman rumoured to be able to resurrect the dead. Throughout, the characters in subordinate positions – Plemons, in particular, but also Stone as a devoted, increasingly frantic fanatic – fear yet also crave tyranny, which relieves them of the inconvenience of having to think for themselves or experience doubt. Desperate for approval in the first story, conscientious Robert gives in and commits a crime to regain Raymond's favour.

Dafoe and Plemons are brilliant playing variations on a sadistic master-slave relationship. Metamorphosed from a cruel corporate overlord to a hipsterish cult leader, his manic eyes accentuated with a heavy eyeliner, Dafoe dazzles with his devilish, chameleon charms. Plemons is heartbreaking as, in turns, a man too addicted to praise to break out of his cage, a paranoid husband plunged into desperation and cruelty, and a religious sect member carrying out orders with an unwavering, unfeeling efficiency. Meanwhile, Stone's characters anchor the film, particularly her desperado researcher on an elusive quest for a Lazarus-like miracle in part three, where delusion reaches crescendo once her character is ostracised. When a test of purity (done by submitting her to a sauna and licking her sweat) reveals her character was raped, Dafoe's merciless cult leader casts her out – just as his Raymond cast out Plemons in part one. It's a vicious cycle of mind control and subjugation, in which kindness is in short supply and love slips from altruism to something more sinister, annihilating rationality and destroying wills and lives.

Brainwashing, mutilation, murder and self-sacrifice don't immediately sound like the stuff of comedy. Nevertheless, Lanthimos has wicked fun spinning intertwined yarns which all revolve around the motif of tyrannical love and various forms of unfreedom. The film's increasingly absurdist scenarios and endless quirky details guarantee that the story never settles into comforting naturalism, but retains a surreal edge. Sometimes a single object elicits multiple gags, such as 'an authentic smashed-in' racket of John McEnroe – a hilariously misshapen object, which joins a treasure trove of sports memorabilia given to Robert by Raymond, and which Robert's wife (Chau) insists is the best gift they've ever received. When the racket vanishes, Robert suspects that the theft is a punishment by Raymond, and steals it back.

Robbie Ryan, who shot *Poor Things* and *The Favourite* (2018), delivers limpid images, whose elegance is unfailingly unsettling, matched by the anguished, discordant piano score by Jerskin Fendrix. Some of Lanthimos's insights (that men behave worse than beasts, for example) come across as banal and obvious, as does his overreliance on dreams as a framing device. But for all its coolness, *Kinds of Kindness* is also dead earnest about the many ways in which kindness can be a cruel and deviant master in a decaying society that's lost its moral compass.

Ela Bittencourt, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 21 May 2024

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'It is all about the human condition and human behaviour. It's about identity, and control, and wanting to belong, wanting to be free'. - Yorgos Lanthimos

The themes of *Kinds of Kindness* are prevalent throughout, specifically those of power, control, free will, and the dynamics of human relationships. Explains producer Andre Lowe, 'A lot of Yorgos' work explores how people live their lives according to their own rules and those of society or a higher authority. These themes are often taken to absurd (but darkly funny) heights and that is certainly the case in *Kinds of Kindness*.' 'The stories play with the notions of faith and trust in human relationships,' notes producer Ed Guiney. 'They are set in a non-specific place, one that is sort of removed from our own, which heightens our interest. Yorgos and Efthimis' films always deal with the power dynamics in human relationships, using the behaviour of the characters to force us to think about our own lives and relationships, and what we believe to be true.' 'It's about faith and the lack of it. Love and the lack of it. Our beloved ones and the lack of them,' continues Filippou.

A specific theme that Lanthimos was keen to examine throughout the three stories was that of authority and how free will fluctuates, along with one's struggle between the freedom of choice and the freedom from choice. 'I think it's interesting to observe how one might think they have control over things or that they're free to decide things,' Lanthimos states. 'Then, when they are given the absolute freedom, it's hard for them to deal with it and navigate it. It's a microcosm of real life, and how people who seem to have no power at all are in control of people that might seem much stronger.'

For Margaret Qualley, who plays the roles of Vivian, Martha, and twins Ruth and Rebecca, the theme of control was extremely prevalent, and the film questions how far people will go to feel a sense of belonging. 'One of the things we're exploring is that of people wanting to be in control – how far will people go to fit in?', she observes. 'There are various facets, including controlling your own life, controlling other people's lives, feeling controlled by someone else, and trying to find control.'

Emma Stone, who plays Rita, Liz, and Emily, agrees with this, noting the motif through all three of her characters and the stories they appear in: 'The characters are totally different in many ways, but the throughline I found is this balance between wanting to be loved, accepted, and controlled, and also wanting to be free and in charge of yourself, but then losing love because of that.'

Jesse Plemons noted that, upon developing his characters, there were themes of safety and security, and the usual dynamics where that takes place. 'The stories illuminate the constructs that we put ourselves in to make us feel safe and secure, even though it's not always true,' he elaborates. 'The first story is this odd, almost father and son relationship. The second one is safety in marriage and in home. Then, the third has to do with the security that faith provides. Some of Yorgos' characters feel like their own islands, desperately trying to reach each other. It's awkward and uncomfortable and tragic and funny.' As Robert, in the first story, Plemons notes how the power dynamics shift and develop: 'Once Robert is set free from Raymond, there is this weird, almost teenage like freedom that he has where he can do whatever he wants. Then, like most teenagers, you come crawling back to your parents, realising that the world is much bigger and scarier than you thought.'

Mamoudou Athie, who plays Will, Neil, and the morgue nurse, agrees with this, stating that the elements of control are purposely undermined and challenged: 'The characters of Raymond and Robert have this strange, dominant-submissive relationship, which is taken to the extreme. Ultimately, this is the same with the second story between Daniel and Liz. Then, with the cult, there is the same atmosphere.'

Willem Dafoe, who plays Raymond, George and Omi, summarizes how Lanthimos subverts classic themes and transposes them onto a different dynamic. 'Yorgos takes the dynamics of a sentimental relationship, like a marriage, and puts them onto a business relationship with two men. It lets us see the social conventions that we have grown to accept in a different context,' he explains. 'It gives an objectivity and a distance that really makes you see things in a different light. You can see the ironies and the blindness. Sometimes we accept certain conventions because they are handed down to us from society.'

Production notes