



PREVIEW

# Starve Acre

**Starve Acre**

Directed by: Daniel Kokotajlo  
©: House Starve Acre Limited, Acre Films LLC,  
British Broadcasting Corporation,  
The British Film Institute  
A House production  
Presented by: Access Entertainment, BBC Film, BFI  
Executive Producers: Harry Dixon,  
Derrin Schlesinger, Len Blavatnik, Danny Cohen,  
Eva Yates, Rose Garnett, Lizzie Francke,  
Alison Thompson, Mark Gooder  
Produced by: Tessa Ross, Juliette Howell,  
Emma Duffy  
Co-producer: Ross Williams  
Production Manager: Rob Yeomans  
Location Manager: Mike Higsom  
Post-production Co-ordinator: Tarek Geddawy  
1st Assistant Directors: Christiaan Faberij de Jonge,  
Ursula Haworth  
Script Supervisor: Jemima Thomas  
Casting Director: Shaheen Baig  
Written by: Daniel Kokotajlo  
Based on the book by: Andrew Michael Hurley  
Director of Photography: Adam Scarth  
VFX Producer: Joe Carhart  
Visual Effects by: Atomic Arts, Ghost VFX,  
Thank You Mam  
Assitional Visual Effects by: Bad Studio  
SFX Supervisor: Rob Rowley  
Animatronic Designer: Matt MacMurray  
Editor: Brenna Rangott  
Production Designer: Francesca Massariol  
Supervising Art Director: Katherine Black  
Costume Designer: Emma Fryer  
Hair and Make-up Supervisor: Joanne Tudra  
Hair and Make-up Designer: Lisa Parkinson  
Creature Effects Supervisor: Sharna Rothwell  
Creature Design and Creation: Millennium FX  
Main and End Titles Designed by:  
The Morrison Studio  
Music by: Matthew Herbert  
Music Performed by:  
The London Contemporary Orchestra  
Sound Designer: Steve Fanagan  
Production Sound Mixer: Tarn Willers  
Re-recording Mixer: Ben Baird  
Stunt Co-ordinators: Gordon Seed, Gary Kane,  
Dean Forster  
Cast:  
Matt Smith (*Richard*)  
Morfydd Clark (*Juliette*)  
Erin Richards (*Harrie*)  
Robert Emms (*Steven*)  
Sean Gilder (*Gordon*)  
Melanie Kilburn (*Mrs Forde*)  
Arthur Shaw (*Owen*)  
Robert Goodale (*Medhurst*)  
Roger Barclay (*Dr Monk*)  
Matilda Firth (*younger Burnsall sister*)  
Daisy Exley (*older Burnsall sister*)  
Rocco Haynes (*football boy*)  
Niall Costigan (*cricket player*)  
Tess Hodgson-Sakamoto (*female student*)  
Derek the dog (*Corey played by*)  
UK 2023  
98 mins  
Digital

Courtesy of BFI Distribution

+ Q&A with director Daniel Kokotajlo and actors Morfydd Clark and Robert Emms

## Daniel Kokotajlo on 'Starve Acre'

*What first drew you to Andrew Michael Hurley's novella?*

I like Andrew's affinity for gothic storytelling, and by that I mean the feeling of unease you experience when you don't quite know what it is you're getting into – the anxiety that comes with reading something different and strange – this is something I've tried to emulate in the film. I also connected to Andrew's appreciation of northern landscapes, his chilling atmosphere and attention to detail. *Starve Acre* had all these elements but also a simple but effective symbol in the brown hare. I've always been intrigued by the role of the hare in different cultures and beliefs, and its connection to springtime and spiritual rebirth.

*How did you find the process of adapting the novella for screen?*

The process wasn't dissimilar to writing original material. I took the elements that I felt were visual and dramatic in Andrew's novel (much like how I would with any story or idea) and found ways to make them work in a feature length format. I had the opportunity to expand and alter some of the story and characters to connect them to themes that I felt were relevant for how the script was evolving.

*How did the process of writing and directing Starve Acre feel different to your first feature, Apostasy?*

The writing process was similar – lots of talking to myself, going on long walks and cold showers. Directing was more of a challenge on *Starve Acre* because of all the additional elements. Shooting on location in a remote environment prone to hostile climatic conditions was hard enough... then throw in several animals, complicated puppetry, child actors, a covid outbreak that shut us down, and you're getting close to what felt like our own little *Burden of Dreams*.

*Have you always been drawn to the horror genre? What were your influences in your approach to this film?*

I was a horror fan growing up, although that came with irritating religious guilt and often meant I would purge my VHS collection... Obviously as I got older and sensible enough not to throw out my film collection every few months, what frightened and provoked me started to change; absurd and surreal horror – horror that also worked as black comedy or had existential themes would continue to unsettle me.

A lot of old British gothic films had an influence over *Starve Acre*. Films like *Whistle and I'll Come to You*. One recent discovery that really struck me was Nigel Kneale's TV film *Murraïn* for its sparse, northern landscape, but also its tongue in cheek style. Also, when I was around 4 or 5 years old, I was subjected to Jan Svankmajer's *Alice* – which scared the living daylights out of me. The stop-motion taxidermy white rabbit was something I instantly thought back to when considering how to approach shooting the animal.

## ROOTS, RITUALS AND PHANTASMAGORIA

Created by Daniel Kokotajlo, director of *Starve Acre*

### Dead of Night

Mon 2 Sep 20:40; Sat 14 Sep 12:30

Against the Crowd: Murrain (+ intro by novelist

Andrew Michael Hurley) + Omnibus: Whistle and

I'll Come to You

Sat 7 Sep 18:20

Little Otik Otesánek

Wed 4 Sep 20:15 (+ intro by musician and *Starve*

*Acre* composer Matthew Herbert); Sat 21 Sep 17:45

Play for Today: Robin Redbreast

Mon 9 Sep 18:30

Don't Look Now

Tue 10 Sep 20:45; Thu 26 Sep 20:50;

Sun 29 Sep 18:10

A Ghost Story for Christmas: A Warning to the

Curious + Beasts: Baby

Fri 13 Sep 18:15

Eraserhead

Fri 13 Sep 20:45; Tue 1 Oct 21:00; Mon 7 Oct 18:10

Screenplay: White Lady (+ intro by filmmaker

and season curator Daniel Kokotajlo) + Children

of the Stones (episode 1)

Mon 16 Sep 20:40

The Shout

Wed 18 Sep 18:10 (+ Q&A with filmmakers Daniel

Kokotajlo and Mark Jenkin); Sat 21 Sep 15:00;

Wed 2 Oct 20:50

The Hunger

Thu 19 Sep 20:35; Sun 6 Oct 18:10

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

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*What role does the English landscape play in the story you are seeking to tell here? Did you enjoy working with the period setting of the film?*

I love films from all periods, but I especially love what was happening in the 70s – the new Hollywood influence, the rough edge, the hairstyles. I rewatched *Scarecrow* not long ago was drawn into its truthful acting and soft lighting – it felt raw but intimate unlike anything before the early 70s. I first saw *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* during a rerun at showcase cinema in Manchester, and as a teen, I remember thinking that it felt so filthy that maybe the devil had spawned it. So I was initially excited about recreating this aesthetic and having a modern audience experience this same feeling. Then at the same time, I took pleasure in using the attitudes of the north of England in the 70s to tell a gothic tale. I peppered the script with little details that were typical of the time – e.g. attitudes towards mental health, the rise in domestic violence, the advances in social sciences etc. Plus there was something wry about this boomer generation couple and how they inadvertently unearthed a demon.

I think the British landscape is fundamental to the genre, for its nostalgic quality. In a way, the British landscape is representative of something we've left behind, along with our childish notions and superstitions, with the intention of never going back. Then of course, we get older, get priced out, or get homesick, and we start to consider moving back. *Starve Acre* plays on these anxieties. What is waiting for you when you return to your roots? Which buried memories and superstitions will resurface to haunt you? Like Richard, you can try to tackle them in a modern, rational way, but there's always an existential fear that something lies beneath the surface that you can't control.

*What are the themes you wanted to explore through this film?*

I first saw this film as an ode to the hare and what it represents to us in myth and religion. The hare was sacred to Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Eros, the god of passion. And, the hare was a crucial part of the mythology of Eostre, or Ostara, the Saxon goddess of spring, that inspired our modern Easter. So it felt natural to use this symbol of love and rebirth, to tell a story of gothic romance. I've always found the way that love seems to overcome and pull people together despite all odds, as a strange, supernatural force in gothic stories. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frankenstein*, most vampire stories, tend to critique the traditional concept of love. Rewatching Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* recently, I was struck by love's power; it seems to grip Belle, like a demonic possession. In Cocteau's hands, the fairytale tips over into the gothic. Love in his world is continually connected to dreams, madness, and poetry. This is something I've tried to infuse into the script while adapting *Starve Acre*. After all, the hare has often, throughout history, represented an incantation of love. And when would someone need that more than when they're dealing with the tragedy of losing a child?

Production notes