

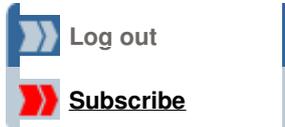


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REVIEW



CASINO ROYALE

Bond is back in a wildly successful mix of heart-thumping action, strong characterisation and gritty realism, says Allan



SCREEN DAILY STORIES

✉ mail story to a friend

✉ UK production trend develops into horror

Adam Minns in

29 November 2001 18:29

Don't look now, something spooky is occurring in the UK's development vaults. Elisabeth Murdoch's Shine Entertainment this month unveiled a slate of low-budget horror suspense titles with *The Hole* director Nick Hamm, while rising new directors such as *Ratcatcher's* Lynne Ramsay and *Sexy Beast's* Jonathan Glazer are bringing their own takes on the genre.

Classic horror brand Hammer is developing projects with director Charles Sturridge, and at Little Bird, former Edinburgh International Film Festival director Lizzie Francke is setting up a slate of features under the banner The Ministry Of Fear.

Fuelling the surge of interest in the horror-suspense genre is the fact that half of London's production community is trying to break away from the UK's glut of low-budget comedies and gangster flicks and produce large-scale films with international appeal.

The recent box-office successes of teen slasher flicks and more adult-oriented titles such as *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* have also shown it is possible to produce horror films that are both affordable and travel well.

"*The Gathering* is exactly the kind of film we want to do," says producer Marc Samuelson, joint head of Samuelson Productions, which has just wrapped the \$17m (£12m) Christina Ricci suspense film about an American backpacker who believes she is being followed by terrifying strangers.

Many of the current crop of UK horror projects are at the low-budget, more generic end of the spectrum. Upcoming examples include Working Title Films' local twist on US teen slashers, *Long Time Dead*. Pathe Distribution has just picked up UK rights on another British horror film, low-budget werewolf flick *Dog Soldiers*. Stalking similar territory, albeit in the trenches of World War I, is F&ME's supernatural action drama, which has the working title of *The Great War Project*. *Billy Elliot* lead Jamie Bell stars in the story of eight young soldiers on the front line having to face a terrifying, unknown force in addition to the enemy.

More individualistic takes on the genre are expected to come from the likes of Glazer, who is developing *Under The Skin* with FilmFour. The

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REVIEW



THE ESCAPE CLAUSE: THE SANTA CLAUSE 3

Third outing for seasonal franchise benefits from Martin Short's engagingly villainous performance, says Brent Simon

REVIEW



A DIRTY CARNIVAL

Ha Yu's gangster drama wins through thanks to some strongly defined characterisation, says Dan Fainaru

REVIEW



TENACIOUS D IN THE PICK OF DESTINY

Jack Black rock feature proves a sweetly raunchy slacker comedy, says John Hazelton

REVIEW



TAZZA: THE HIGH ROLLERS

Enjoyable card shark caper moves with enough vibrancy to paper over its cracks, says Dan Fainaru

REVIEW

film is a sci-fi horror about a female creature that trawls the Scottish Highlands looking for males to abduct. Ramsay's *The Lovely Bones*, also with FilmFour, is set in Philadelphia and tells the story of a murdered girl who observes the effect of her death from heaven. "It is a bit like *Wings Of Desire* with this cynical, gum-chewing teenager," says Ramsay.

At the bigger-budget end of the scale is Jim Gillespie's \$21m ghost thriller, *Julian*, which IAC intends to shoot next year. A host of projects are also in the works at Samuelson Productions, including *The Gathering*, produced with Granada Film. Most recently, the production company teamed with the Premiere Fund - the Film Council's National Lottery fund for commercial films - on *The Devil's Assassin*, to be directed by Suri Krishnamma.

Meanwhile, UK National Lottery franchise Pathe Pictures recently boarded the Samuelsons' *Hawksmoor*, a mystery thriller which *The Gathering's* Brian Gilbert is to direct. Additionally, Bill Eagles is to shoot *The Dark House*, an adaptation of M R James' short story *The Haunted Dolls House*, which is in development with Civilian Content, while Winchester Films has boarded *Tales Not Told*. Halloween writer-producer Debra Hill is to direct the \$20m supernatural love story about a woman who has to fight an evil spirit possessing her partner.

If the supernatural now runs the risk of becoming as over-familiar as cockney gangster films, the Samuelsons reckon they are ahead of the development game after having worked on these projects for years. They argue that they were among the first UK producers to focus on larger-budget films: large-scale projects in the works include Terry Gilliam's *Good Omens* and an untitled project about US marines being written by Michael Schiffer, who penned *Four Feathers* and *Crimson Tide*.

