

DIGITAL **Filmmaker** ISSUE 42 £2.99

YOUR NEW GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING



# THE FEAR FACTOR

Essential advice for the DIY filmmaker from Jason Figgis

### Digital storyboarding

The new software package that could transform your next film

### The brutal truth

Behind the scenes of a gritty new documentary project

### Motion magic

We explore the fascinating world of stop motion

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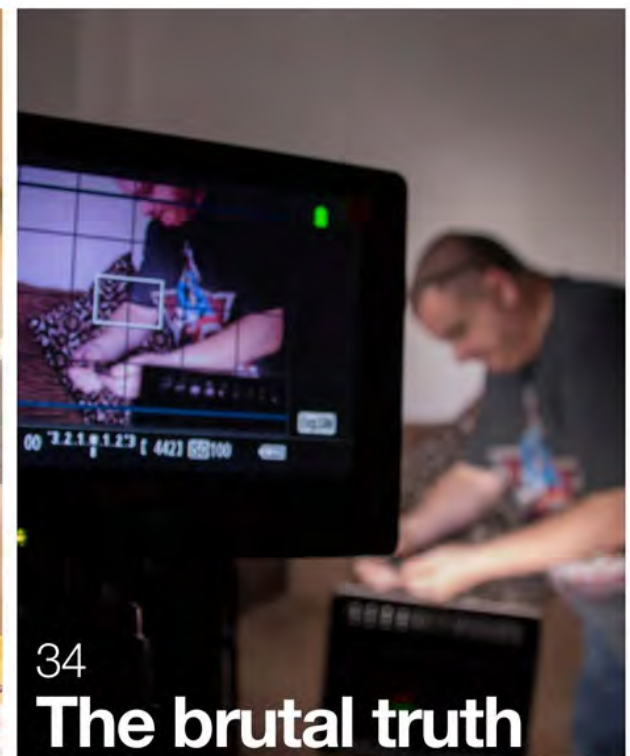
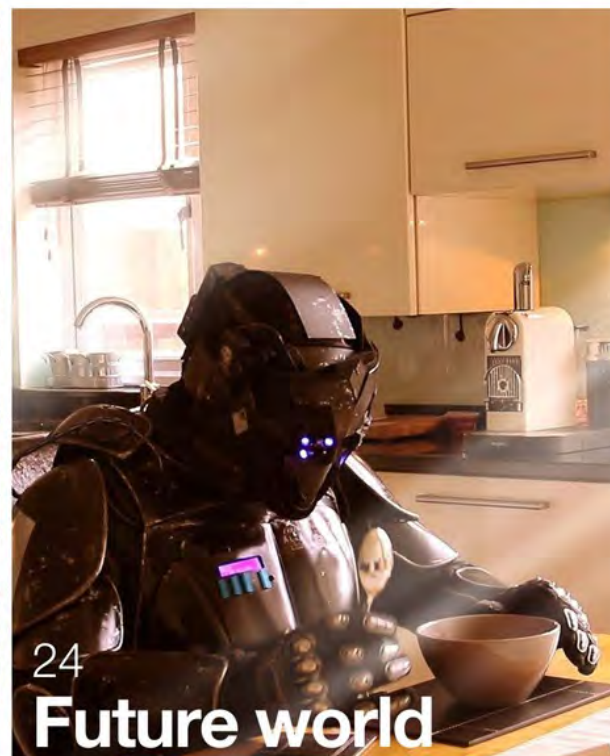
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# THE FEAR FACTOR

Jason Figgis is a producer and director who has embraced the world of digital and has been reaping the rewards with some prolific filmmaking output over the last few years...





Getting one film out is pretty good, but to release a series that not only look great but have, on the face of it, professional marketing behind them is quite something when you're a humble independent producer. Filmmaker Jason Figgis seems to have quite a good momentum going in that respect, having released several films in the space of the last few years. Jason got a real boost thanks to a deal he struck in America, but the pace and scale of his output is really down to his own determination to get things done, no matter what. "I'm an independent filmmaker who has always worked in the digital format and who refuses to allow a lack of funding stop me from continually developing, directing and distributing feature films and documentaries," he says defiantly. "I have managed to secure distribution in the United States for my projects and I work at feeding this distribution

channel with challenging work in the genres of horror, thriller and the documentary field (usually looking at the arts in its various guises). When I am not filming one of these projects, I can be found in the editing suite working on various aspects of post-production."

#### Quality output

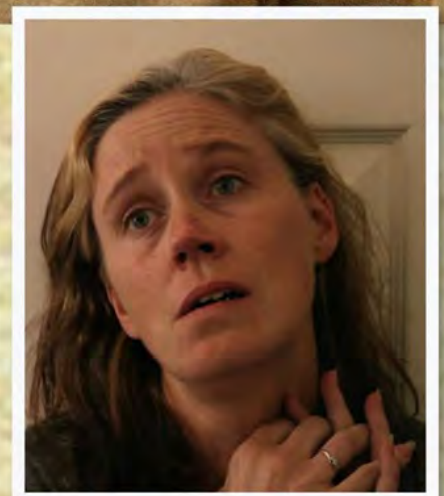
"My first feature project was a documentary acquired by Discovery Channel called The Twilight Hour," furthers the



filmmaker. "This film looked at the work of acclaimed photographer Sir Simon Marsden. I then directed a film (that Uri Geller presented) called Uri's Haunted Cities: Venice for Sky

*"I'm an independent filmmaker who has always worked in the digital format"*

One, followed by a feature documentary called A Maverick in London, which looked at the history of the famous King's Head Theatre in Islington. This film was acquired by Sky Arts. I then moved into dramatic features and directed a pulpy thriller called 3Crosses (released by MVD Entertainment Group as Once Upon a Time in Dublin) starring Emmett J. Scanlan (The Fall, Guardians of the Galaxy). Following this, MVD released



my teen post-apocalyptic chiller Children of a Darker Dawn, my adaptation of A Christmas Carol (which featured Brendan O'Carroll) and haunted house investigation double Cathnafolá/ Leap into Darkness. This Christmas sees MVD releasing my teen vampire chiller The Ecstasy of Isabel Mann and next spring follows with the release of my feature thriller Urban Traffik."

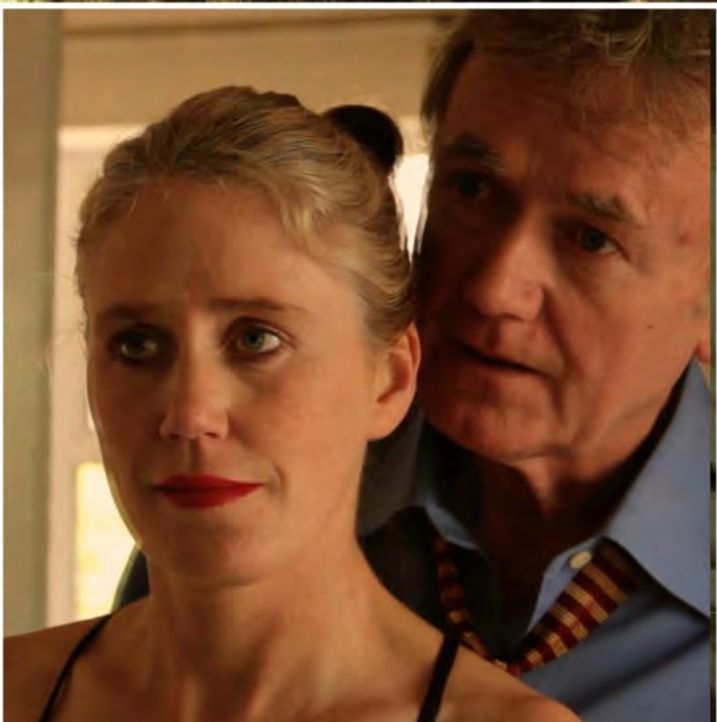
#### Taking control

Jason thrives on the control offered by independent filmmaking too, and relishes the





fact that he can wear a variety of different hats during the production process. "I wrote, directed and co-edited the film," he says of his latest project. "The edit was with longtime collaborator Darren Travers - who also stars in the film in two roles, as twins and took the overall best performance award at the Starburst Fantasy Awards in Manchester this year. It was produced by Matthew Toman (who first started with me as an actor) and my director of photography was Alan Rogers (The Ecstasy of Isabel Mann, Urban Traffik). Music was composed by Michael Richard Plowman (A Lonely Place to Die, Age of Heroes). As a writer/director, I come to a project with a clear understanding of what I want to and need to, achieve. I love to collaborate with actors and so give them breathing and growing room to develop their characters. I never want to see my writing all over a character as they emerge on







The fear factor

screen. Instead, I want to see fully-formed individuals. I find that by following this process, it is easier to care for the characters in the film. Obviously, their personal development in the roles must adhere to guidelines of narrative thrust but this, so far, has worked brilliantly well and allows for excellent performances and interaction on screen."

### Documentary concept

The latest project (Don't You Recognise Me) then calls up lots of what Jason has learnt over the last few years and blends it into a heady cocktail that he thinks audiences will love. "The film follows Tony (Matthew Toman) who is planning his next documentary," he explains. "He's going to spend a day in the life of someone who lives his life as a self-styled gangster on a rough

Dublin estate. Meeting up with K (Jason Sherlock), he's welcomed into the seemingly amiable young man's flat and introduced to his

*"Too many thrillers are surface when looking at hardcore characters but I wanted to look deep"*

friends and (multiple) girlfriends. K tells Tony that he's taken on his father's role in the community following his murder, and is seething at the similar loss of one of his 'brothers' the year previously. He appears to have his heart in the right place, but his genial side slips when they later bump into someone who owes him money. As the day progresses, Tony and his film crew will learn far more

than they bargained for about K's life, his family, and morals."

### Tough subject

It's a gritty piece of work that comes with an added touch of class thanks to Jason's eye for detail. "I wrote the film and what inspired it was the lack of gangster films that looked at generally 'feared' characters as the victims," he says. "I wanted to turn the tables on the genre and look at the emotional pain of the individual in crisis; in this case - the gangster. Too many thrillers are surface when looking at hardcore characters, but I really wanted to look deep into the psyche with this picture." And, thanks to a collaborative push with Toman, the end result is everything Figgis expected and more besides. "Even though Matthew Toman is billed as the



sole producer, it was really a joint effort between us to mount the production," Jason explains. "I cast the picture and he looked after the locations and scheduling the shoot days. I supervised all of the post-production (as in, I did it myself!). We shot the entire film over 72 hours - an incredibly intense and tiring 72 hours. When our DOP Alan Rogers completed the last day of shooting, he updated his Facebook status with



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one word - Traumatized!"

### Purse strings

A par-for-the-course scenario there without doubt, but the efforts of the team have helped to deliver a quality product that belies the amount of money that was spent on it. "We had a tiny, microscopic, thinnest of a shoestring budget for the film," adds Jason. "I have made a point of becoming proficient in

all aspects of post-production so as not to have to rely on anyone else to cut or post my films. This is an excellent way of keeping costs down, but understandably is very time-consuming for me, as an individual. Luckily, I love the process of post and, in many ways, prefer it to shooting the film. This is where I really get to shape the final version of the film that the audience will experience. We used exclusively

two Sony EX1s to shoot the film - which were excellent, and H4N Zooms for the audio. Again, they were perfect choices for this production. Because the shoot was very fast moving, we couldn't

***"It is the first found footage film that I have made. This is a much-maligned horror sub-genre"***

be worried about focus pulling so, with the EX1 set to auto focus, we had no issues of any soft images throughout the shoot. Everything came back crisp and clean. The only lighting we used was the various location's own lighting of overhead strips."

### Looking forwards

And, in some ways, Don't You Recognise Me represents

something of a new direction for Jason too. "It is the first found footage film that I have made," he grins. "This is a much-maligned horror sub-genre, but we had no other option for the film to work - without using this method of narrative structure or device. It worked for us with reviewers too - who were surprised how we turned the tables within the process - so that was gratifying. I try and tackle a different subject each time I make a film so I feel that it sits comfortably among the diversity of my work. Right now, the film is fully completed and has been selected for three great festivals in the last few months; Starburst International Film Festival in Manchester (where it walked away with the overall best performance award), the opening night late film at the 20th Horrorthon Film Festival at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin and what they call the 'Sundance of







Horror' - Fright Night Film Festival in Louisville, Kentucky. We have also had two offers of distribution and so it looks like the film will be available in Spring 2017 to buy and rent."

### On the up

Interestingly, during production of this issue, we also found out from Jason that the project had been shortlisted as a finalist in the USA film competition called Industry Boost Competition

*"Right now, the film is fully completed and has been selected for three great festivals"*

2016. "Thankfully, with the distribution offer on the table, the distributors will be looking after the promotion of the film," adds Jason on how he plans to





capitalize on the buzz surrounding his project. "We will also push it on all social media platforms and hopefully continue to get strong notices from reviewers. All of this will help to get the film out to the film-watching public. I am currently in post-production of a psychological horror film called The Paper Child

**"We will also push it on all social media platforms and continue to get reviews"**

too, which stars Bill Fellows (Broadchurch, Downton Abbey) and Bryan Murray (who played the notorious Trevor Jordache in Brookside). This film was written by my wife, Bernadette Manton and is a fabulously intense script. I remember at the first reading Bryan Murray said "we shouldn't alter a word of this dialogue". This film is almost completed post-production."

**Quality content**

And there's more going on too, with some real dream-cum-true people involved by the sound of it. "I am also a producer on Bernadette's feature film LadyWalker, which will star Hayley Mills (Whistle Down the Wind, Tiger Bay)," adds Jason. "Another film in post-production



is a revenger called The Sweetest Morsel, which again looks at the emotional motivations behind revenge. I also have another vampire film in development called Night Photography, which I feel is a new approach to the sub-genre, but I wanted to film it in black and white and feel that is now impossible because of the success of the creepily effective A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night. I feel that an audience will think that I am trying to emulate that film so may have to reconsider it in colour. I also

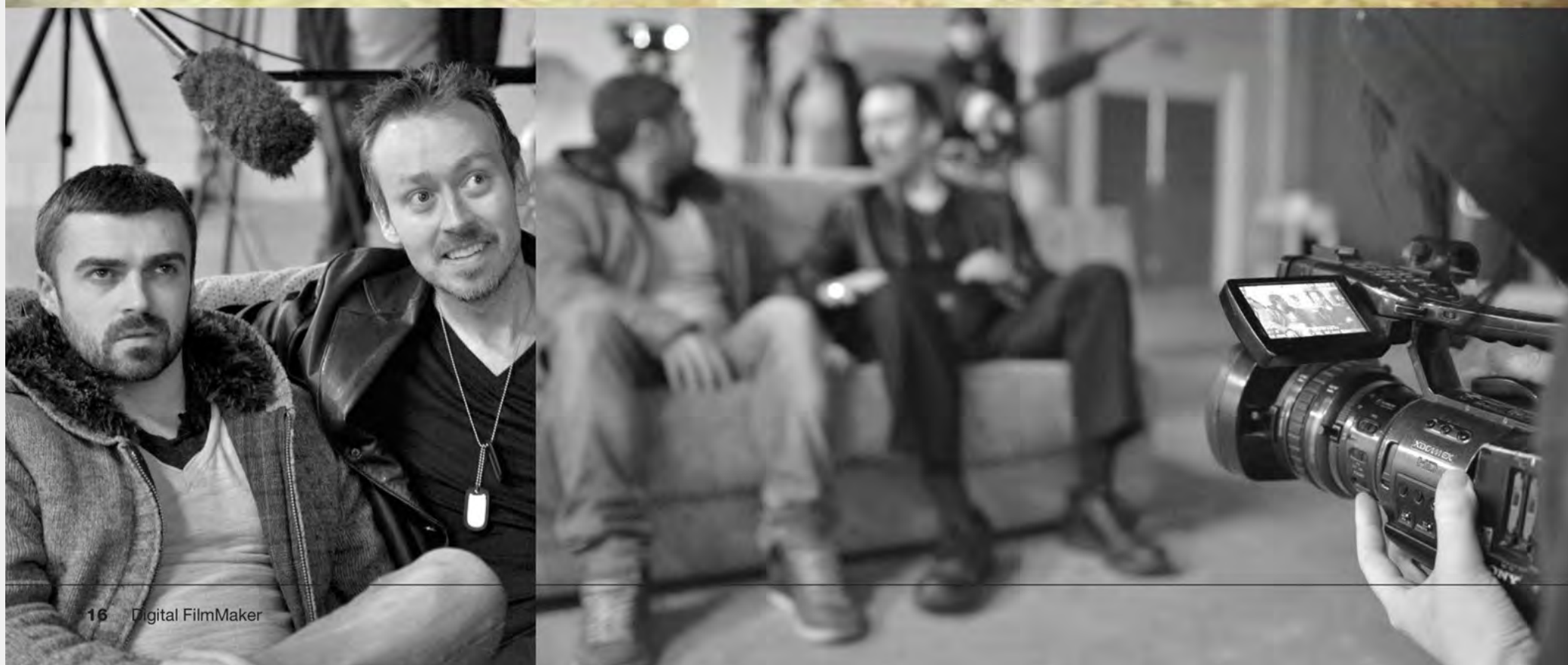


have another post-apocalyptic film in development, as well as a haunted house film called Winifred Meeks, which I am very excited about. There are also two serial

killer projects and two other ghost stories in development, as well as a werewolf picture called The Lycanthrope."

**Production line**

While it might sound like there's a non-stop flow of films from Jason, he comes across as hugely organised and is reaping the rewards of being in control of his own destiny. It sounds like a great place to be right now. "I am hoping that although my films have a certain style that hopefully can be recognised as my own,







The fear factor



called Shauna Ryan (Don't You Recognise Me?)."

### Typical challenge

While Jason might well be getting an awful lot of things right, he is still challenged by the same things we all are, especially geographically speaking. "It is quite difficult to get funding in Ireland," adds the filmmaker with a grin. "But I refuse to let this stop me from making films. If the desire is there to get the work done then it seems that the universe moves in mysterious ways to allow the progress to continue. I think that passion for a project inspires others to want to get involved and I have been very lucky with the actors and production crew that have been attracted to the projects so far. I get many approaches to collaborate on work from like-minded filmmakers who want to challenge themselves with the objective of getting a feature film completed and platformed. I am hoping that my films will continue to build from strength to strength and develop practically as well as intellectually. I want to progress the work in all aspects; story, shooting style and structure. I want to engage as many audiences as possible in the work and hopefully inspire other creatives to want to come on board and continue an ethos of collaboration and exploration of narrative. Oh, and I would love the budgets to get much bigger!" ■

all of these films differ in terms of the strong development of characters that punch a unique stamp on each production," he adds. "They also skip from drama to horror to thriller and a touch of comedy at times. I think strong drama is my favourite, but I feel that any genre that contains a strong dramatic narrative thrust is compelling. To me it is all about character. If I can develop strong characters with strong actors who will deliver these powerful and compelling performances, then I am not really that concerned by the genre of film that surrounds these performances. I am already

drawn in. I am already interested. I already want to know more."

### Wider variety

Although his portfolio is already pretty diverse, the filmmaker also reckons he's ready to branch out to other styles and genres over time. "Because I have developed this particular system of working with actors to deliver compelling and believable performances, I want to look at putting into production some pure dramas," says Jason. "These might be stories of everyday issues that need to be addressed within society, or a particular singular

character viewpoint. These are the kinds of projects that interest me now. I am looking at developing

*"I am hoping that my films will continue to build from strength to strength"*

a feature film within this idea of pure drama called Jane Finds the Sea Frightening. It looks at social exclusion and mental illness. I have an incredible actress lined up to play the central role