

3 new local films and more at cinemas this May

By  Daniel Dercksen

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Three exciting new South African films headline the lineup for big screen releases in May - the coming-of-age comedy *Just Now Jeffrey*, drama *Snake* and the thriller, *Face Deep*.



3 May

From writers/directors Brett Morris and Hylton Tannenbaum, *Just Now Jeffrey* is a coming-of-age comedy set in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1989.

While the world was radically changing around him, teenager Jeffrey Greenbaum (Julian Robinson) hardly noticed. He just needed to get laid. Jeffrey convinces his best pal Brad Berman (Dino Vavatzanidis), to help devise a strategy to lose their virginity before they finish high school. But things don't go as planned and Jeffrey and Brad soon become entangled in a crazy web of love, lust, videotape piracy, rugby violence, political protest, and pornography.

Morris and Tannenbaum have been best friends since they were 12 years old. After more than 25 years of working in advertising, and winning several international awards, they finally realised their lifelong dream of making a movie.

“We intended to create a unique coming-of-age comedy that represented and normalised our youths as teens growing up in 1980s South Africa. We have also always wanted to give a voice to a generation that grew up in South Africa towards the end of apartheid. We found that South Africans were generally painted with the same brush, and we wanted to show all of the complexity and nuances across the political spectrum during that time: from right to left and everything in between.”

Based on the novel by celebrated author Tracey Farren, *Snake* is a thriller about land, truth and finding one's voice. Ten-year-old Stella lives with her family as squatters on a farm. When a luminous stranger called Jerry arrives, Stella is thrilled that her father stays sober, and her mother begins to laugh again.

However, her hope is shattered when she suspects Jerry of murdering a policeman. Jerry manipulates Stella into lying on his behalf and rewards her with a beautiful silver flute. Stella's lie is a password to Jerry's tragic past, for he burdens her with his boyhood trauma, which is slowly revealed to be closely connected to Stella's family.

Meanwhile, Jerry seduces Stella's mother and encourages her father to drink again. And he slyly sabotages their chances of buying land and their dream of a home. When Stella breaks down and tries to expose his evil deeds, Jerry shuts her up with a terrible threat: he swears to kill her baby sister.

Eventually, Stella defies Jerry's order of silence, driving Jerry into deadly violence. Stella is left to fight for her family and her life – and eventually triumphs, her blazing truth overcoming Jerry's insidious lies.

Written and directed by Meg Rickards, the film stars Lamiyah Barnard, Neels van Jaarsveld, Keenan Arrison, Tarryn Wyngaard, Carel Nel, Jennifer Steyn and Rika Sennett.

“Through the power of narrative, we have tried to unveil a hidden world and to throw light on inequality. Despite its local subtext, is a universal story of hope. Although the child character is initially voiceless, her journey is one of finding her voice. Stella survives because she believes in herself and identifies her way of conquering violence: speaking the truth, even when it is life-threatening to do so,” says Rickards.

The romantic sports drama *Challengers* follows a professional tennis champion (Mike Faist) who plots a comeback with the help of his wife (Zendaya), a former tennis prodigy who retired after an injury, as he goes up against another player (Josh O'Connor), who also happens to be his former best friend and wife's former lover. It is directed by Luca Guadagnino from a screenplay by Justin Kuritzkes.

The sci-fi action thriller *Breathe* is set in a world where oxygen levels on Earth have dropped making it impossible to live on the planet's surface without specialised equipment. After a tipping point catastrophe, Earth is void of plants and global oxygen levels have dropped to 5%. Instead of communicating properly and working together, the survivors create artificial conflict and fight for an "oxygen generator", killing each other and destroying the machine. The survivors move on to the next place with an oxygen generator. It is directed by Stefon Bristol, written by Doug Simon, and stars Jennifer Hudson, Milla Jovovich, Quvenzhané Wallis, Common, and Sam Worthington.

Start your podracer engines! *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* celebrates 25 years with a return to cinemas. The Phantom Menace, Episode I of the Star Wars saga and the first film in the prequel trilogy, originally arrived in cinemas on 19 May 1999, following tremendous hype.

Written and directed by George Lucas, it introduced the world to young Anakin Skywalker, Padawan Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn, Queen Padmé Amidala, and the evil Sith duo, Darth Sidious and Darth Maul. The Phantom Menace would be a landmark in the development of visual effects and become one of the highest-grossing movies of all time. Fans will also be treated to an exclusive look at *The Acolyte*, the upcoming Disney+ series, as part of The Phantom Menace screenings.

10 May

Kingdom Of The Planet Of The Apes takes place 300 years after the events of *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017). Ape civilizations have emerged from the oasis to which Caesar led his fellow apes, while humans have regressed into a feral, primitive state. When the ape leader, Proximus Caesar, perverts Caesar's teachings to enslave other clans in search of remnants of human technologies, Noa, a common chimpanzee, embarks on a harrowing journey alongside a human girl named Mae to determine the future for apes and humans alike.

It is directed by Wes Ball from a screenplay by Josh Friedman, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, and Patrick Aison, and produced by Joe Hartwick Jr., Jaffa, Silver, and Jason Reed. The film stars Owen Teague in the lead role alongside Freya Allan, Kevin Durand, Peter Macon, and William H. Macy. This sequel to *War for the Planet of the Apes* (is the fourth instalment in the Planet of the Apes reboot franchise.

In the supernatural horror *Tarot*, a group of college friends start dying in ways that are related to their fortunes after having their tarot cards read. Before their time runs out, they have to work together to uncover the mystery.

It is written and directed by Spenser Cohen and Anna Halberg (in their feature film directorial debut) and co-written by Nicholas Adams. It is based on a 1992 novel, *Horrorscope*, by Nicholas Adams. The film stars Harriet Slater, Adain Bradley, Avantika Vandanapu, Wolfgang Novogratz, Humberly González, Larsen Thompson, and Jacob Batalon.

17 May

In the tiling horror *The Strangers: Chapter 1*, Maya drives across the country with her longtime boyfriend, Ryan, as the pair begin a new life together in the Pacific Northwest. Along the way, their car breaks down in Venus, Oregon and they are forced to spend the night in an isolated Airbnb home. Through the night they are terrorized by three murderous masked strangers. Under the direction of Renny Harlin, with a screenplay by Alan R. Cohen and Alan Freeland, from a story by Bryan Bertino stars. Madelaine Petsch and Froy Gutierrez as a couple who come into contact with the three psychopathic masked strangers. It marks the third film in The Strangers film series created by Bryan Bertino, and the first instalment of a new trilogy of standalone films, where Chapter 1 is a prequel to the first film.

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/DSudLoJy2ok>

In the live-action animated fantasy comedy *Imaginary Friends*, a young girl named Bea, who has been going through a troubling experience in her life, unexpectedly gains the ability to see people's imaginary friends (referred to as "IFs" for short) who have been abandoned by the kids they helped. Bea then discovers that her neighbour, Cal, has the same ability. Together they join forces to reunite the IFs with their former kids.

The film is written, produced, and directed by John Krasinski and features an ensemble cast that includes Cailey Fleming, Ryan Reynolds, Krasinski, Fiona Shaw, Alan Kim, and Liza Colón-Zayas, along with the voices of Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Louis Gossett Jr., and Steve Carell.

24 May

In the animated *The Garfield Movie*, Garfield, the world-famous, Monday-hating, lasagna-loving indoor cat, is about to have a wild outdoor adventure! After an unexpected reunion with his long-lost father – scruffy street cat Vic, Garfield and his canine friend Odie are forced from their perfectly pampered life into joining Vic in a hilarious, high-stakes heist.

Directed by Mark Dindal from a screenplay written by David Reynolds and the writing team of Paul A. Kaplan and Mark Torgove, the film stars Chris Pratt as the voice of the titular character, alongside the voices of Samuel L. Jackson, Hannah Waddingham, Ving Rhames, Nicholas Hoult, Cecily Strong, Harvey Guillén, Brett Goldstein, Bowen Yang, and Snoop Dogg.

Snatched from the Green Place of Many Mothers, young Furiosa falls into the hands of a great biker horde led by the warlord Dementus in *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*. Sweeping through the Wasteland, they come across the Citadel, presided over by the Immortan Joe. As the two tyrants fight for dominance, Furiosa soon finds herself in a nonstop battle to make her way home.

Directed by George Miller, who co-wrote it with Nico Lathouris. It is the fifth instalment in the Mad Max franchise, serving as both a spin-off and prequel to *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). The film stars Anya Taylor-Joy as the titular character Imperator Furiosa, with Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke, and Aylia Browne also starring. Miller is best known for his Mad Max franchise, whose second instalment, *Mad Max 2*, and fourth, *Fury Road*, have been hailed two of the greatest action films of all time.

Richard Linklater's *Hit Man* is a jaunty action comedy an undercover Houston police officer poses as a reliable hitman to arrest those trying to hire him until he tries to save a woman in need. It is based on the 2001 Texas Monthly magazine article of the same name by Skip Hollandsworth. The film stars Powell, Adria Arjona, Austin Amelio, Retta, Molly Bernard.

31 May

In the comedy-drama *Ezra*, Max Brandel, a stand-up comedian living with his father, Stan, struggles to co-parent his autistic son Ezra with his ex-wife, Jenna. When faced with difficult decisions about their son's future, Max and Ezra set out on a cross-country road trip. It is directed by Tony Goldwyn and written by Tony Spiridakis. It stars Bobby Cannavale, Rose Byrne, Vera Farmiga, Whoopi Goldberg, Rainn Wilson, Goldwyn, William Fitzgerald, and Robert De Niro.

In *Haikyu: The Dumpster Battle*, Shoyo Hinata joins Karasuno High's volleyball club to be like his idol, a former Karasuno player known as the "Little Giant." But, Hinata soon finds that he must team up with his middle school nemesis, Tobio Kageyama. Their clashing styles turn into a surprising weapon, but can they beat their rival Nekoma High in the highly anticipated "Dumpster Battle," the long-awaited ultimate showdown between two opposing underdog teams? It is directed and written by Susumu Mitsunaka who worked on the anime series.

In the thriller *Face Deep*, Luna and her pensioner lover Noah's dream life comes crashing down when Noah's estranged daughter, Bonnie returns to reconcile with her father. Strange things come to light when old memories are revoked. Luna will do anything to keep her secrets in the past and won't let anyone get in her way. Directed by Vuyani Bila, the film stars Lerato Walaza, Kgomotso Motsiane, and Phillip 'Tipo' Tindisa.

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ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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