

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Got My Mind Set On You

Writer/director Daniel Benmayor on his new Spanish-language SF thriller **Awareness** WORDS: STEVE O'BRIEN

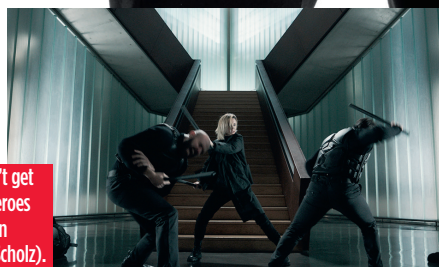
➔ “DID IT SURPRISE YOU, A SPANISH language sci-fi film?” Daniel Benmayor asks *SFX*. “This is a rare species.” Off the top of our heads, we can only name a few SF movies from the country (*Autómata*, *The Antares Paradox*, anyone?), so Benmayor is right: a meaty science fiction thriller in Español is indeed an uncommon offering.

“Usually, when we do it,” he goes on, “it’s a small science fiction concept, it’s never action and adventure.” Certainly, nobody will be able to accuse Benmayor of thinking small with his first SF movie (his previous pictures, including 2021’s *Xtreme* and 2015’s *Tracers*, were more grounded actioners). It’s a full-blooded, action-specked drama about a rebellious teen (*Toy Boy*’s Carlos Scholz) who has the power to manipulate minds, and who finds himself hunted by two rival organisations.

Set against a detailed socio-political backdrop, this isn’t a Spanish take on *The New Mutants* or some MCU wannabe, instead taking its cues from contemporary real-life fears. If we can be made to see whatever a politician or dictator or tech magnate wants us to see, then our very perception of reality is in their hands. That’s power, 21st century style.

“Every day, you’re constantly fed with these things,” Benmayor says about the genesis of the idea. “It’s all about how the media tries to trick you. I think that nowadays, when you see the news, how can it be that one single event has so many points of view?”

“The film is all about the manipulation that we’re exposed to through the media constantly. You only have to switch from one channel to the other and you see different versions of the same thing. How can that be? So that’s why I



You don't get many heroes called Ian (Carlos Scholz).

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thought it would be interesting to integrate into the film the concept of manipulation through mental powers. True strength is to convince people of a lie. This is why the organisation headed by Adriana [Lela Loren] is trying to get hold of the kid because they can use him as a tool, weaponise him.”

Though *Awareness* isn’t blessed with the skyscraping budget of a *Winter Soldier* or an *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, it’s certainly a handsome looking film, with a groundedness that gives it a thrilling verisimilitude.

“We were very aware of the restrictions that we have when we do a film like this in Spain,” Benmayor says. “I mean, this cannot be a super-big sky dream, it has to be kind of contained into a realistic and affordable story. It’s an intimate film about a kid who has these powers and he’s been hidden from the world by someone trying to protect him, and he wants to find out what his true nature is.”

PRIME NUMBERS

Awareness’ acute sense of realism is helped by a general avoidance of CG. Though the film has plenty of special effects, there’s a refreshing lack of digital mayhem on screen.

“It’s all very practical,” the director tells us. “Because of the scale and nature of it we didn’t want to step into that superhero Marvel-ish world, we wanted to stay away from it. We’re a different thing. We can’t step into that world, because it’s a lost battle, you know?”

Benmayor made the movie for Prime Video, who he said were helpful in helping him tailor the film to “certain targets”. “When Prime stepped in, obviously, they had their thoughts,” he explains. “Eventually one of the characters, Esther, grew a bit more – that’s the love story between the two youngsters.

“That was basically it, as well as clarifying a lot of the concepts that are seen in the movie. This is the kind of film which is easier seen than written. When you read it on paper, the concepts which are visually driven are very complicated to swallow, but once you see them on screen, it needs no words. So that’s something that went back and forth.”

Although it’s a complete story in itself, should *Awareness* do well for Prime there’s certainly scope for more films, something Benmayor is clearly hopeful about.

“There are a lot of things planted in this story as possible follow-up,” he teases, “the origins of the agency, the origins of the perceivers [the name for those with superpowers]. It was originally conceived as a trilogy, but it all depends on how this one performs. The storyline of what happens next is already outlined and has been spoken about. Hopefully if this movie performs nicely, we’ll get to see a second part.”

Awareness is on Prime Video from 11 October.

The film’s stars do a pretty good album cover.

► **SCI-FACT!** As well as his work in films, Benmayor has also directed six episodes of Netflix’s Spanish-language thriller *Welcome To Eden*.