

# GOODBYE BRED

## THE MAKING OF *28 WEEKS LATER*

DANNY BOYLE AND ALEX GARLAND WOULD TAKE A BACKSEAT ROLE FOR *28 DAYS LATER*'S FIRST SEQUEL, ENTRUSTING THE MOVIE TO SPANISH FILMMAKER JUAN CARLOS FRESNADILLO, WITH MIXED RESULTS...









Rose Byrne and Jeremy Renner help the children escape London.

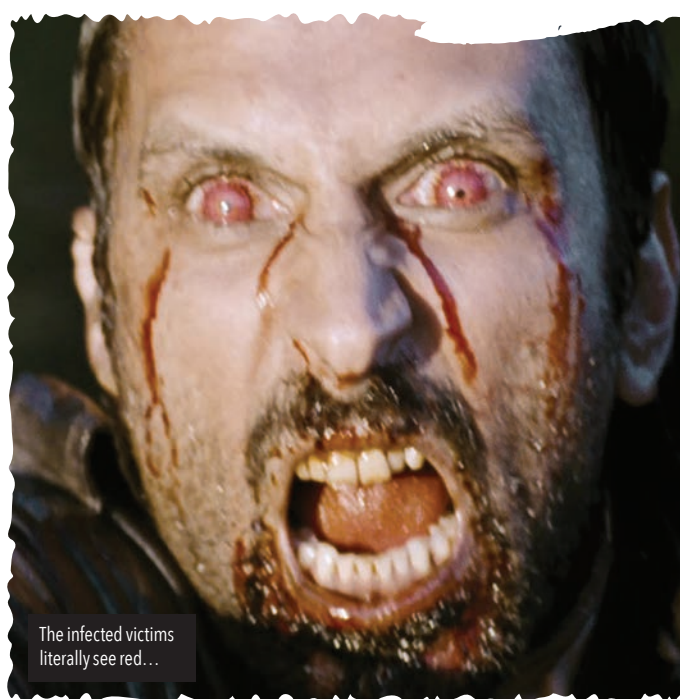
**FAST FACT!**  
THE EYE HAEMORRHAGE THAT DENOTES ASYMPTOMATIC VIRUS CARRIERS WAS AN IDEA OF DANNY BOYLE'S.

**O**n 1 September 2006, five years to the day since those digi-cameras started whirring on *28 Days Later*, work on its sequel began on the streets of London. Except this time, there was no Danny Boyle to be seen and no Cillian Murphy wandering around in hospital scrubs. Instead of overturned buses, abandoned cars and the sound of birdsong, this would be a fully militarised capital, peopled by soldiers and survivors as the UK learns to rebuild itself 28 weeks later...

A follow-up to 2002's superhit *28 Days Later* could have gone anywhere, and nearly did. There was talk of something called *29 Days Later*, which would have continued from the point the first movie ended,

possibly following the story of Jim and Selena, possibly not. Then there was another pitch, taking place before the events of the first film, sometime in the middle of those 28 days, about a band of British Marines tasked with saving the lives of the Prime Minister and the Queen. The only rule Andrew Macdonald, Danny Boyle and Alex Garland gave themselves was not to repeat the first movie. "I don't think you start out trying to make a franchise or a sequel," Macdonald explained on the follow-up's *Making Of* documentary, "but it seems so obvious that if somebody could come up with a decent idea, it seemed like a really good opportunity."

That "decent idea" eventually emerged, courtesy of Alex Garland. "Eventually we agreed upon a concept about what would happen to the UK after the disease had been



The infected victims literally see red...





Juan Carlos Fresnadillo took over directing duties for the sequel.

"Who would be there to organise the survivors and refugees coming back from overseas?"

eradicated," Macdonald said in the film's production notes. "What would happen if there were only 500 people populating the UK? Who would be there to organise the survivors and refugees coming back from overseas, and what would happen to the Brits who survived? All those questions seemed interesting to us and it was out of them that the story evolved."

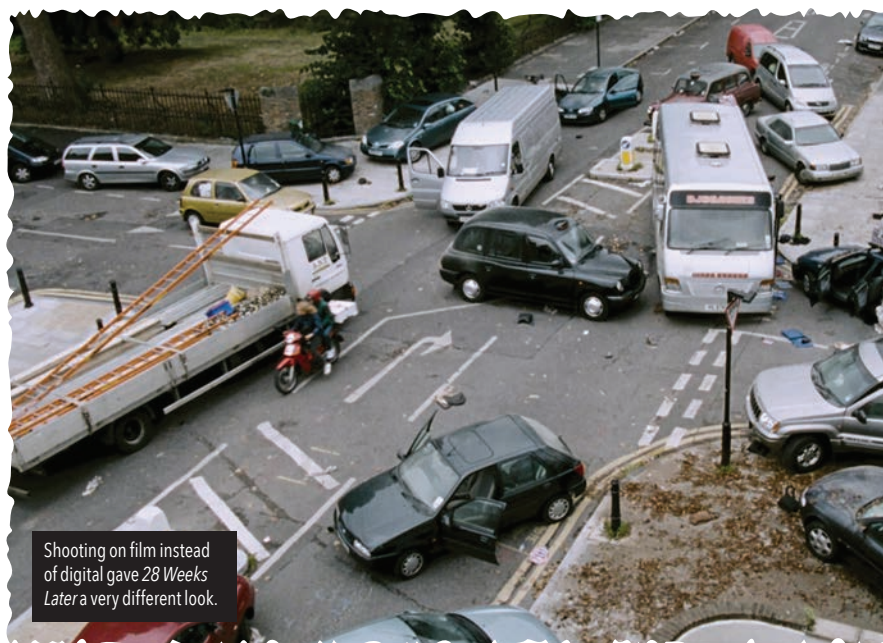
## BRAVE NEW WORLD

At the beginning of *28 Weeks Later*, the infected have starved to death, Britain is under quarantine, and NATO are in charge of an area of London now known as District One. Crucially with the new film, the decision was made not to feature any characters from the original – instead, this would tell a new story, through fresh eyes: specifically two children, Andy and Tammy, as they navigate this post-virus world.

But while Boyle and Garland stayed on as executive producers, and certainly helped marshal the concept through pre-production, they opted out of writing and directing *28 Weeks Later*, both being otherwise occupied with the science-fiction film *Sunshine*. For the script, they turned to Rowan Joffé, the son of filmmaker Roland Joffé (*The Killing Fields*), whose only previous screen credit was the 2000 drama *Last Resort*. As for the director, it was Boyle who zeroed



Catherine McCormack played Alice, left to die by her husband at the start of the film.



Shooting on film instead of digital gave *28 Weeks Later* a very different look.



in on his replacement, having been wowed by a screening of Spanish film *Intacto*, which he called “a terrific thriller with tremendous flair and energy, as well as being a highly individual piece of filmmaking.”

“I would have loved to have been more involved in it, but I just couldn’t be,” Boyle reflected to *The Guardian* in 2007. “We were very lucky to get this Spanish director to do it, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, and he’s done a fantastic job. It’s got a very interesting depiction of London. It’s very compelling but very different from the first film. And it was very interesting handing over London to an outsider.”

## TAKING THINGS FORWARD

That said, Boyle wasn’t completely hands-off. There is a small segment of the movie that he directed himself, as part of its second unit. Those shots of the old couple protecting themselves from the infected at the beginning of the film were overseen by Boyle, who spent three days on set, after finishing editing on *Sunshine*. But generally, he and Garland stayed in the background, giving Fresnadillo free reign over the picture. It was Fresnadillo, along with his producing partner Enrique López-Lavigne, who expanded on the roles of the two children, working on the final version of the screenplay for a whole year before cameras started rolling.

“The family was a good idea for us, and we wanted to develop this into something,” Fresnadillo stated in the production notes. “But there is always a problem with this kind of structure in which you are looking at the new world through four different eyes, instead of one. That’s why we



28 Weeks Later showed off a different side of London to the original.



The sequel is not short of shocking imagery – or for the squeamish...



## THE JUAN THAT GOT AWAY

**Whatever happened to 28 Weeks Later's director, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo?**

Not much has been heard of Juan Carlos Fresnadillo in the 18 years since *28 Weeks Later's* release.

In 2011, he directed the supernatural thriller *Intruders*, starring Clive Owen, which opened to dismal reviews and even worse box office. In April of that year, it was reported that Fresnadillo was scheduled to write and direct a remake of the cult 1994 film *The Crow*. Just six months later, he'd departed the project.

A few years later, his name was attached to a Boston-set drama titled *The Last Witness*,



but again this came to nothing. In the meantime, he directed an episode of the USA network series *Falling Water* and a TV movie, *Prototype*. He returned to episodic TV for the pilot of the CBS show *Salvation* and in 2024 was a director-for-hire for the Millie Bobby Brown-headlining Netflix movie *Damsel*.

Speaking to *Film Stories* last year, Fresnadillo revealed that a planned remake of *The Sword In The Stone* for Disney was “on hold” and that he was currently working on a romantic thriller in the style of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Notorious*, telling the website: “It’s a genre that I’ve never done, but I’m so excited and thrilled about making it.”

had to find a really strong concept for the actual storyline. And what we came up with is a storyline that we really believe; it’s about the idea that no one is unaffected from his past.”

One of the film’s canniest bits of casting came early. Though *28 Weeks Later* wasn’t a bona fide Danny Boyle film, it was made to feel like one by the hiring of Robert Carlyle (who’d starred in both *Trainspotting* and *The Beach*) as the film’s anti-hero, Don, father to Tammy and Andy. Having left his wife for dead in the film’s opening scenes, it’s discovered that she survived the attack on the cottage, but is a symptomless carrier of the virus. After kissing her, the virus transfers to Don and all hell breaks loose.

“In *28 Weeks Later*, there’s more action, there’s more jumps, there’s less suspense,” Andrew Macdonald



**FAST FACT!**  
WHEN THE FILMMAKERS  
PICKED IDRIS ELBA FOR  
THE PART OF THE US GENERAL,  
THEY BELIEVED THE ACTOR  
REALLY WAS AMERICAN,  
THANKS TO HIS ROLE  
IN *THE WIRE*.

Lost actor Harold Perrineau  
played the helicopter pilot who  
helps them escape the UK.

explained about the differences between the two movies. “In the first film, you didn’t know what was happening. The audience woke up with this guy who was in hospital, and they were with him – ‘What the hell is going on in this city?’ This time you see exactly what happens, from patient zero to the disease spreading, you see it on a much bigger scale.”

That widened scale is one of the most striking contrasts between the first and second films – there are more aerial shots of the capital in *Weeks* and many more action sequences (its budget was almost twice that of the original). Even the locations chosen lend the movie a distinct aesthetic, despite both being primarily set in London. While the first film’s opening scenes orbit around W1, the sequel’s key location is the more contemporary environs of Canary Wharf. “In the last film,” production designer Mark Tildesley explained on the *Making Of* documentary, “you see old London, which is all those classic places, and in this it’s a clean new world.”

## RISE STARS

The sense of newness is also represented by the cast. Carlyle aside, *Weeks* echoes its predecessor by showcasing mostly fresh faces. Though many of its cast are now comfortably A-list, at the time Jeremy Renner, Rose Byrne and Idris Elba weren’t exactly marquee names. The biggest challenge for the filmmakers, however, was finding their Tammy and Andy. For the girl, they saw hundreds of actors, eventually landing on 17-year-old Imogen Poots, whose name had been put forward by her agent. “As soon as we saw her we were in no doubt there was nobody better suited for the part,” Macdonald said. “She was absolutely terrific in her audition and



Jeremy Renner was a  
jobbing actor here – soon  
he’d be a superstar.

had in her that inner strength we were looking for. An inner strength to make the audience believe she could lead Andy to safety.”

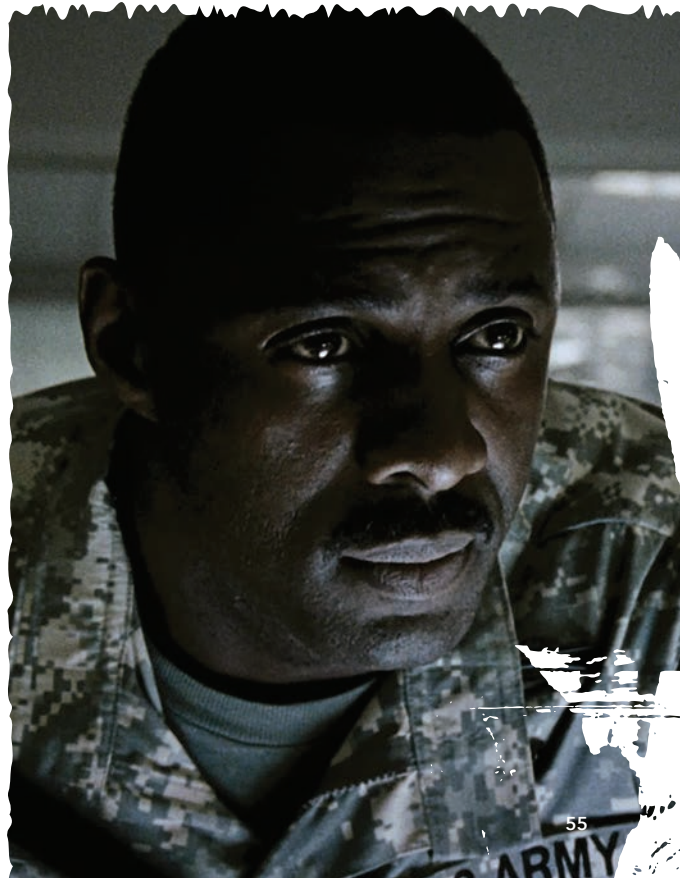
Finding their Andy proved more challenging. Casting director Shaheen Baig visited schools, drama groups and contacted agents, inviting over 600 children to attend workshops with Fresnadillo before settling on 12-year-old Mackintosh Muggleton. Recalled the director: “He delivers in the story this unique feeling, and especially that feeling about the curse. His family is completely cursed. So, we needed somebody like Mackintosh who could play this kid [who is] absolutely overwhelmed in the situation, but at the same time he is trying to make his best in this new world.”

Though Danny Boyle has always been keen to stress how much this was Fresnadillo’s film, 20th Century Fox clearly believed Boyle’s name was vital to the *28 Days Later* brand, and

## THE GENE GENIES

**Who are DNA Films,  
the independent  
production company  
behind all three  
28 Days films?**

DNA Films was founded in 1997 by producers Andrew Macdonald and Duncan Kenworthy. Kenworthy departed in 2003 (he would go on to produce *Love Actually*), but Macdonald remains at the helm of the production company, with the title of managing director. Films made by DNA over the years include many of Danny Boyle’s and Alex Garland’s features, as well as such movies as *The Parole Officer* (2001), *The History Boys* (2006) and *Sir Alex Ferguson: Never Give In* (2021). On the small screen they’ve been credited on series like 2020’s *Devs* and *Black Narcissus* (the original of which was co-directed by Macdonald’s grandfather, Emeric Pressburger) as well as 2024’s critically-acclaimed *Shōgun*. Next up are, of course, both *28 Years Later* films and Alex Garland’s latest project, *Warfare*. Find out more at [dnafilms.com](http://dnafilms.com).





## LONDON CALLING

*28 Weeks Later* showcases a different corner of the UK capital...

London plays a leading role in *28 Weeks Later*, even more so than the original. And part of the reason why Juan Carlos Fresnadillo was chosen was because, as a Spanish director, he was able to bring an outsider's eye to the Big Smoke.

"We were looking for a filmmaker of some individuality who could bring something different to the film," Boyle explained. "London was such a big part of the first film we thought that getting somebody from outside the UK to come in and direct would be an interesting approach as they would give the capital a fresh look."

That meant turning the cameras away, at least for most of the film, from many of the locations used in the original, and focusing

instead on the Isle of Dogs, setting for "District One", which houses the remaining population of the UK.

"In the last film you see old London, which is sort of the city and the sort of classic places, and so actually to start this world it would be quite nice if it was like a sort of clean new world," said production designer Mark Tildesley. "So that was the idea to try and make the film look quite stark and sharp and actually quite sad really in a way that this was the beginning of a new London. And then there was

a sense that, when the kids made their journey to Wembley, that they cross through the old film, which is back through the old city. So there's a sort of contrast between the two worlds."



thus, though he was only an executive producer here, he was all over the movie's marketing. Yet having Danny Boyle as its primary cheerleader wasn't enough to make *28 Weeks Later* the success Fox were hoping for. Though it ended up grossing over £50 million, it was well short of the first film's £65 million haul. Critically, it performed well, however. *Empire* magazine awarded it four stars, with Kim Newman writing: "The set-pieces escalate with mostly excellent results: watching it all go wrong for the military – and their desperate response – is harrowing, but the tonal shift in a scene involving a helicopter and the infected on a heath which strays into Peter Jackson/Sam Raimi comic-horror territory is less effective. Momentum is regained, though, for a strong, dark finish." *Fangoria*, meanwhile, said it was "one of the rare filmic returns to the well that is just as satisfying as the first trip, and stands as a worthy companion piece to its popular



Robert Carlyle's Don is infected by a simple kiss...

**FAST FACT!**  
THE FARM THAT DON AND ALICE HIDE OUT IN THE START OF THE FILM IS THE SAME ONE THAT APPEARS IN THE MOVIES *CHILDREN OF MEN* AND *NEVER LET ME GO*.





**FAST FACT!**  
SPECIAL FORCES  
SERGEANT DOYLE'S  
NAME IS A HOMAGE TO  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
DANNY BOYLE.

Imogen Poots and  
Mackintosh Muggleton  
hold the potential cure.



*28 Weeks Later* was less  
about suspense, more about  
action and jump scares.

predecessor.” Philip French in *The Guardian* even went so far as to call it superior to Boyle’s original.

*28 Weeks Later* ends on a cliffhanger, with a horde of infected emerging from the Paris Métro and sprinting towards the Eiffel Tower, revealing that the virus has spread to continental Europe. How this ties in with this year’s UK-set *28 Years Later* we don’t yet know. When asked by *Empire* if Fresnadillo’s film is still part of the series’ canon, Alex Garland responded, “[*28 Years Later*] is not in conflict with [*28 Weeks Later*], but] ‘canon’ [is] not a very Danny Boyle word.”

Though *28 Weeks Later* is hardly in the *Aliens* or *Terminator 2* class of being a sequel that betters its predecessor (sorry, Philip French, it simply doesn’t), there’s still much

to cherish here. Fresnadillo’s film enriches the series’ mythology, establishing as it does the possibility of a cure. And it’s also a movie that expands on Boyle and Garland’s original, painting a unsettling picture of the UK as it attempts to rebuild and repopulate itself.

But at the time of its release, the zombie genre was no longer as moribund as it had been five years before. The children of *28 Days Later* – from *Shaun Of The Dead* to *Dawn Of The Dead*, even to *Children Of Men* – were filling cinemas and so *28 Weeks Later* arrived, unlike the first film, to a market flooded with the undead. It was, then, a victim of its predecessor’s success. Yet viewed now, 18 years on from its release, it’s a worthy sequel that deserved a better fate at the box office. ■

## WHAT THE CRITICS SAID...

**“*28 Days Later* was a tough and uncompromising horror film, but it’s all sunshine and laughter in comparison to the sequel.” *Slant***

**“It’s not for the faint of heart or the weak of stomach. It is brutal and almost exhaustingly terrifying, as any respectable zombie movie should be. It is also bracingly smart, both in its ideas and in its techniques.” *The New York Times***

**“While it’s a fun addition to the genre, *28 Weeks Later* feels a tad redundant – it doesn’t do anything that the original didn’t do better, and it lacks that film’s understated lyricism.” *BBC Movies***

**“*28 Weeks Later* is a breathtakingly ferocious horror film that’s easily the best thing to hit the genre since Neil Marshall’s *The Descent*. It’s tense, gory and relentlessly exciting, yet it also makes you care.” *IndieLondon***

**“The action flows thick and fast, culminating in a genuinely scary descent into the pitch-black Underground, but at close quarters the director’s reliance on a murky palette and blurrily frenetic handheld camera slips from intentionally disorienting to downright confusing.” *CNN***