

# Bloody Kite



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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A young woman becomes a merciless teen assassin in *Kite*, blasting her way through the dark world of human trafficking only to uncover a devastating truth.

Based on the ground-breaking cult classic anime, *Kite* tells the story of Sawa (India Eisley, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, *Underworld: Awakening*), a young woman living in a corrupt society where crime and gangs terrorise the streets. When Sawa's mother and policeman father are found victims of a grisly double homicide, she begins a ruthless pursuit for the man who murdered them and teams up with her father's ex-partner, Karl Aker (Samuel L Jackson, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *The Avengers*, *Django Unchained*), and a mysterious friend from her past (Callan McAuliffe, *The Great Gatsby*, *I Am Number Four*).

Merging two extremes of bloody violence and blatant eroticism, the original version of Yasoumi Umetsu's *Kite* was banned in many countries, while heavily censored versions were released in others. Steeped in controversy the anime earned its status as a cult classic. It was 10 years ago that *Kite* was first brought to the attention of producer Anant Singh, via the Tokyo representative for his distribution company, Distant Horizon.



## Graphic violence and explicit sex

Producer and screenwriter Brian Cox, recalls: "When Anant and I saw Japanese animator Yasuomi Umetsu's anime, we were flawed by its graphic violence and explicit sex scenes. We knew we would never include the sexual aspect of that version on screen, it was the inventive nature of the action that appealed to us and we thought that adaptation of the action would make for a very interesting commercial movie for an international audience."

Thinking it was 'crazy enough to work', Singh acquired the live-action remake rights from Yasoumi Umetsu and Singh and Cox were in active development for three years prior to principal photography. "It took a long time to find right team of people," says Cox.

Singh adds: "Yasoumi was very enthusiastic about us making a motion picture from his anime and at the start of principal photography he sent a note to everyone on the production of Kite, congratulating us for finally going ahead and he was delighted the film would be starring Sam, India and Callan."

Anant Singh and his team took a creative decision to tone down their live-action rendering. "The script is loosely based upon the anime, and the three lead characters of Sawa, Oburi and Aker (the character Akai in the original) are directly lifted from the anime, so the essential triangle and the tension within, still exists," says Cox.

"We have scenes lifted directly out of the anime, which we've attempted to recreate in live action, but, of course, human beings cannot achieve the same as cartoon characters can and they are more dimensional in terms of their psychological inhibitions and we have tried to adapt that."



## A full-length feature

Umetsu's original ran for two 30-minutes episodes, thus the filmmakers had to expand the story to create a full-length feature show. "The context in which the Anime is set is undefined," informs Cox, "it's a world in which there are human traffickers who a young girl is assigned to kill, but the underlying story is not fully developed in the anime, so it was up to us to figure out how to create a feature-length linear narrative in which the lead characters had a dramatic arc. There was a lot of room in which we needed to invent and add on to the story and we developed the back-story of the lead characters: Karl Aker and Sawa.

Fighting to exist in a dystopian post-apocalyptic world, Sawa's burning quest to avenge her parent's murder has turned her into a killing machine. But she cannot recall the details of the event that left her orphaned as a young child. Her guardian, Detective Aker, is the only one she can trust, but he has her on a powerful drug to obliterate her memory. Another lost teenager in this twilight world is Oburi, whose guilty knowledge of her past drives him to help the confused young girl.

"Kite is very narrative driven and the characters are very well written," says director, Ralph Ziman (Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema)

"It is amazing material to create a movie, to see how this vivid set of characters has been drawn out and created from a comic book; Karl Aker is an egomaniacal cop, Sawa is strung out and avenging her parents, Oburi is enigmatic character linked to her past, and her world is an assortment of bad guys from The Emir, Staggie, the Russian mafia, Kratzhof and the flesh dealing cartel - this strong female character is the strongest element of the film."

## South Africa's acting talent

Cox, who has worked with Singh for more than two decades, has a keen knowledge of South African cinema, and he acknowledges that in *Kite* he enjoyed the privilege of working with the cream of South Africa's acting talent in other key roles. "I knew who I wanted to cast before I even got to South Africa."

Talking about the sleazy, flesh merchant, cockney, Vic Thornhill, Cox reveals: "I wasn't even sure whether or not Carl Buekes could render the tricky cockney accent, but I wanted him in the role. He easily assumed the role when he took it on, he nailed it in his first performance and delivered every nuance and rhythm in some very complicated dialogue blocks," says Cox.

Line Producer Greig Buckle, adds, "The casting of South African talent has been phenomenal, from Lionel Newton, Carl Buekes, Deon Lotz, Terence Bridgett and Danny Keogh, each and every one has brought so much to their characters, even if they are just day players they come into the story and go out of the story."

Deon Lotz, who plays the role of Detective Prinsloo, recalls that Cox said: "Choose a character," when he sent him the script. "I chose Karl Aker, but it had been taken! The appeal of the story was the interaction of the characters and their 'live performances' within the anime, and I really wanted to work with Sam so I moved heaven and Earth to be here," says Lotz, whose schedule overlapped another movie with *Kite*. "Prinsloo has worked the beat as a cop for many years, and after the collapse of the world economy he carries on fighting crime."

"There is a lot of animosity between Prinsloo, the last remaining 'good' cop, and Sam's corrupt Lieutenant Aker, but working with Sam has been a highlight of my career. He is as extremely generous actor."



## The flesh trade of young girls

Rather than being overwhelmed, Terence Bridgett was excited to take on the challenge of playing the roles of the twin brothers, Staggie and Sasha, simultaneously. "Both are dodgy guys dealing in the flesh trade of young girls, but it was fun to create a difference in their characters. Staggie is a dodgy, lounge lizard who combines a purple- and apricot-coloured wardrobe, and I tried to make Sasha less cheesy and a little more aspirant, and I gave him a stutter," muses the actor who confesses that despite this is only a cameo role it was intense work and challenging on a technical level. "There were four cameras on me for eight hours doing dialogue with the twins in bathroom," says the versatile actor who has played a wide spectrum of characters, and this marks his third occasion playing twins.

The 'Numbers Gang', a band of lost and feral youths, plays a key role in the illustration of the gritty, urban wasteland in which *Kite* is set. In this post-apocalyptic world, where all infrastructures have disintegrated and society has robbed the youth of childhood.

"Our gang is based upon an existing group in South Africa's Pollsmoor Prison," explains Cox. "We lifted their name, the

idea of their identity, and their look and set them in this future world."

Like remnants of society, the wasted adolescents in the Numbers Gang have to scavenge on the edge of this deteriorated civilisation in order to survive. They snatch whatever is left in their ghetto, and 'flesh' is the last remaining commodity and to persevere, these wasted adolescents do Aker's dirty work by snatching young girls off the street for his human trafficking operation. The pack leaders are Mandla, played by Mathew van Leeve, and Margrit, played by Cleo Rinkwest. As one of Aker's key henchmen, Van Leeve discusses his partnership with Margrit. We grew up in the rubble as kids and formed a sibling bond at a young age. We have to watch each other's backs in this dangerous place where kids are willing to stab you for food or weapons. The police are corrupt and no one cares because there are too many of us and we have grown into vicious fighters armed with any scrap, screwdrivers and skewers that we find on the streets that will serve as a weapon.

## **Intense fighting stunts**

Having started his career in film as a stuntman, Van Leeve is perfect for the physical role, which requires intense fighting stunts and escape at any means, including vigorous Parkour acrobatics. "It's second nature to me and it doesn't feel like work at all."

Cleo Rinkwest was equally at home in her very physical role, and the chance to play a wildcat. "I have always been cast as the model, the romantic lead, or the bitchy PA, and this is gritty and ugly, I have a chance to put it all out there. Margrit is tainted by the darkness of her world and she is beyond redemption."

"Margrit' is very strong and very wild, and I love that she's uninhibited and can do stuff without any filter, and she can get away with a lot." I have certain of her characteristics: the wildness, the tomboy, and the physical aspect. She is a real badass," says Rinkwest who shares that she always to put her personality into a role."

"The layered mix of talent is ideal for our story," says Buckle, "having youngsters play opposite such a seasoned actor, and they are all very unique; India has English accent, Callan's is Australian, and Sam's American accent, and South African players with their local accent - are part of the melting pot that is their location.

## **Neglected areas of downtown Joburg**

The filmmakers were able to establish this desolate world of wretched abandonment in neglected areas of downtown Johannesburg, now mostly inhabited by illegal immigrants.

Cox adds that this area of the city is "Mad Max in many places. When I did some location scouting I found a city centre the

size of Philadelphia in which entire towers had been stripped of everything and every window broken and offered the natural resources necessary for Kite."

Director of Photography, Lance Gewer, concurs: "The locations offered so much in depicting this story, we could go to set and make it up from there. Our art department added 100% to those locations to take it to another level."

The designers co-opted the washed-out monochromatic colour of the concrete buildings into their palette, but Botha says: "Because our story is derived from an animation, we wanted to bring in some colour and we did this by means of graffiti. Botha worked with a team of graffiti artists whose work is prominent all over Johannesburg's city streets. "As graffiti is not yet accepted as an art form and, thus, it is illegal, these artists were very happy and had fun doing it legally."

"It was not important to our story to explain where we were, and in which time period," says Production Designer Willie Botha. "The inhabitants of the Kite world are different nations, races and colours. We are somewhere on this planet, somewhere in this decade and the world is broken down and society is beyond repair. There is no formal structure, no shops, no vehicles, and people live alongside vermin and garbage in the streets. It is about survival of the fittest and only the brave would venture out, thus there are few people around, and the pavements are empty."

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## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Derksen 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](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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