

Get A Grip

GET A GRIP: *The Film*
A British Psychological Thriller



A Red Imp Films Production





A BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

A traumatised WWII veteran tries to outrun a dark secret during the infamous 1976 British summer drought

Get a Grip unfolds as a psychological thriller and intimate tragedy, blending the haunting naturalism of 1970s British cinema with the visceral subjectivity of modern psychological drama.

England, summer 1976 — the country swelters under a record drought, and ex-naval veteran Norman “Norm” Mills begins to unravel. Haunted by flashes of the final days of the Pacific War in 1945, fearful of his teenage son Nicholas joining the Royal Air Force, and trapped in the routines of small-town East Midlands life — a plastic shopping bag factory, his wife’s amateur production of *Kiss Me Kate* — Norm is suddenly confronted by a naval comrade he prayed he’d never see again, a man who could expose a dark secret buried for over thirty years.

As torment escalates, or sanity disintegrates, the heatwave becomes a fever dream of guilt, repression, and inherited trauma. With reality blurring, Norm must face the shame of PTSD and protect his family from the sadistic veteran...or himself...or both.



“THERE ARE PLENTY OF THRILLS
TO BE HAD HERE.

WHAT YOU DO UNDENIABLY HAVE
IS A STRONG SCREENPLAY.”

This is a well-written script which made for an enjoyable read. Your scene description is concise and evocative, directorial, but not overbearingly so. Images come to mind fluently when reading. Scene length and sequence construction are both handled well. You create and sustain tension effectively, and I'm in no disagreement with your classification of the script as a 'psychological thriller' — in the right hands, there are plenty of thrills to be had here. The moral scales of the piece are balanced with intelligence and sensitivity.

Allan Scott,
writer of *Don't Look Now* and *The Queen's Gambit*

Part 1: THE WORLD

1976 Lincolnshire, England

Characters Pages 6 to 19
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Themes and Motifs Pages 34 to 41

THE WORLD: Characters



Key Players

NORMAN "NORM" MILLS

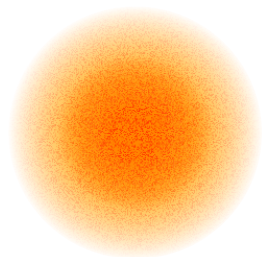
JOAN MILLS

NICHOLAS MILLS

JAMES HARDWICKE

○ *Get a Grip* inhabits a world shaped by routine, restraint, and the lingering shadows of a country still negotiating its post-war identity. Pride in appearances and familiar suburban rhythms prevails, with forced civility and emotional repression favoured over expression, at least for as long as the oppressive heatwave allows before those surfaces begin to crack.

○ The film centres on the Mills family, who live at the end of a modest, working and aspiring middle-class close in an industrial East Midlands city.





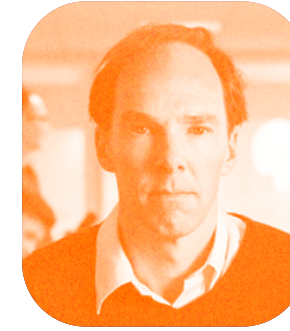
Norman

○ Norman “Norm” Mills, 50 — salt of the earth and aspiring middle-class plastic bag factory owner from South Yorkshire, always ready with a quip and a wink but hiding a darker underbelly. His memories from the final days of the Pacific War in 1945 have calcified into recurring, violent hallucinations and hyper-vigilant overprotection of his wife, Joan, and their teenage son, Nicholas.

○ He has fashioned a lead-lined “bunker” shed full of stockpiled food in case of Soviet

nuclear attack, which he uses as a refuge to “secretly” smoke and paint stunningly realistic landscapes. He’s loving but emotionally constricted, finds it easier to express love for his chickens than his son, and is prone to dissociation, panic, and sudden violence when his past is triggered — a man who cannot reliably tell what is real or not.

○ He is desperate to let the past die and, with it, his shameful secret. When a former naval comrade and superior officer, Lieutenant



○
Target Actor
Benedict Cumberbatch

Mills

Characteristics
CHARMING
WITTY
DAMAGED
MERCURIAL

Hardwicke, returns to terrorise him for his past deeds, his attempts to keep life “normal” including running his factory, joking in the pub, and doing backstage theatre in support of Joan’s amateur musical performance, only thinly hide a breakdown that threatens his family, business, and sense of self.

○ Norm’s history of delusion and PTSD prevents those around him from taking his warnings seriously. Norm must act alone in stopping the sadistic, revenge-driven comrade



Joan

○ Joan Mills, 48, is a glamorous, quick-witted housewife whose charisma feels too big for the confines of her 1976 Lincolnshire life. Aside from her accent, she carries herself like a Golden Age leading lady — pearl earrings, charm, and a striking presence — yet she's boxed in by the era's expectations and the family's middle-class image. Beneath a stained apron is a woman who could have been more.

○ At home, she is the ballast of the Mills family: playful and perceptive. She and Norm

share a sparky, affectionate rapport — a dance of teasing, giggles, and amateur *Kiss Me, Kate* rehearsals — and she quietly carries more weight than she lets on. The stage offers her a sliver of the life she might have pursued: she approaches her amateur musical with dedication and talent, nerves sharpened by a desire to prove she's more than “the housewife.”

○ Joan is loving but not naïve. She senses Norm's fragility before he speaks it aloud, comforts him when he breaks, and joins him



○
Target Actress
Samantha Morton

Mills

Characteristics
PRAGMATIC
LOYAL
TALENTED

and their son Nicholas in confronting the trauma he's buried. She's practical, empathetic and sharp — grounded to keep the household running, brave to stand beside Norm through his unravelling, and quietly yearning for a life where her talents and spirit aren't limited by her postcode or expectations.

○ A woman of warmth, dignity, and unrealised potential, Joan brings depth, humour, and strength — a character who softens a thriller while holding her own at its dramatic centre.



Nicholas

○ Nicholas Mills, 15, is Norm and Joan's determined and devoted son, driven by a quiet, constant desperation to make his father proud. Convinced that the only way to earn Norm's respect is through service and discipline, Nicholas fixates on joining the Royal Air Force, channelling his energy into proving his worth and emerging sense of manliness. He learns from his father to suppress, repress, and ridicule emotion, believing affection or fear to be clear signs of weakness.

○ A skilled Air Cadet, keen but clumsy Raleigh Chopper bicycle rider, and head-banging fan of Slade, Nicholas sits uneasily between childhood, expectation, and self-imposed responsibility.

○ Nicholas's relationship with Norm forms the emotional centre of the film. Tender moments, such as a scraped knee carefully mended in the shed, sit alongside crushing misunderstandings as Norm's inner paranoia deepens and Lieutenant Hardwicke's sudden



○
Target Actor
Owen Cooper

Mills

Characteristics
WIDE-EYED
NAIVE
PROUD
REPRESSED

campaign of terror and murderous antics steadily escalate.

○ Forced to grow up quickly, Nicholas comes of age through necessity rather than choice. Despite being only fifteen years of age, he is often the most grounded member of the family, ultimately joining Norm in a desperate effort to stop the violence and protect their already fragile world.



○ On the surface, the Mills family embodies the aspiring middle-class; underneath, tension and conflict simmer

○ The Mills family performs a united front, shaped by routine, ambition, and the desire to project stability within their suburban community. Their home operates through familiar habits, with shared breakfasts, careful politeness on the doorstep, and a commitment to maintaining respectability.

Dynamics

TENSE
PROTECTIVE
CONFLICTED



○ The neighbours maintain an appearance of harmony and normalcy, but beneath their smiles and small talk, gossip, envy, and suspicion weave a network of silent tension across the streets

○ The neighbours of Egham Close form a community that prides itself on order, courtesy, and predictability. Front gardens are tended, greetings are exchanged, and everyone observes one another with the quiet vigilance typical of close suburban living.

Dynamics

OBSERVANT
CONFORMING
SUSPICIOUS



James

○ Lieutenant Hardwicke is an imposing, upper-class former Royal Navy officer and the film's central antagonist, carrying an air of authority that has curdled into menace. In flashbacks of 1945, he is seen as deceitful and self-serving; by 1976, he has become volatile, unmoored, and deeply damaged by decades of unprocessed guilt and untreated PTSD that he refuses to acknowledge.

○ He is the only person alive who knows what Norm did at the end of the war, a bond forged

through secrecy, resentment, and shared complicity. Norm made it clear he never wanted to see him again, yet Hardwicke reappears more than three decades later, sitting front row at Joan's amateur production of *Kiss Me, Kate*, calmly signalling a reckoning long deferred.

○ Trapped in an unresolved war of his own, Hardwicke has convinced himself that psychologically tormenting Norm, and ultimately killing him, is the only possible path to relief. At times, he is uncomfortably similar



○
Target Actor
James Purefoy

Hardwicke

Characteristics
PRAGMATIC
LOYAL
TALENTED

to Norm, a distorted mirror of what unchecked trauma can become.

○ As Norm spirals, the psychological cat-and-mouse game between him and Hardwicke intensifies, raising uneasy questions about culpability, responsibility, trauma, and which of the two men is truly the villain.



Target Actor
Jim Broadbent (Cameo)

Lionel Dickinson

- Lionel Dickinson, 70s, is a slimy, new-money supermarket magnate. A product of 1970s British capitalism, he values scale, efficiency, and profit above all else. In Norm, he sees opportunity rather than fragility, rewarding him financially while accelerating his collapse. Lionel functions as a pressure point in the film: a man whose decisions carry real weight.
- Imagined as Jim Broadbent, himself from Lincolnshire, Lionel blends warmth, humour, and menace in a deceptively affable presence.

Characteristics

**SLIMY
POMPOUS
ARROGANT**



Actress
Adrienne Posta (Cameo)

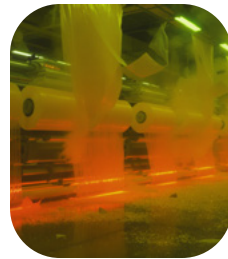
Market Shopper

- Adrienne Posta, star of *To Stir with Love*, *Up Pompeii!*, and *Up The Junction*, will cameo as a shopper having difficulty opening the new-fangled plastic bags produced by Norm's factory in a supermarket. Adrienne Posta has already agreed, and excitingly, this will mark her first feature in over 40 years.
- A stalwart of the era and British cinema legend, briefly coming out of retirement for *Get a Grip*.

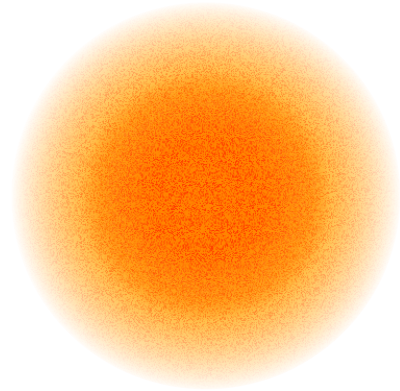
Characteristics

**ICONIC
RECOGNIZABLE
COMICAL**

THE WORLD: Location



Location Details
JULY 1976
LINCOLNSHIRE, ENGLAND
THE EAST MIDLANDS





Place

○ *Get a Grip* unfolds in a small East Midlands town shaped by factories, suburban streets, and the steady order of working life. Rows of semi-detached houses sit beside industrial yards, their chimneys and metalwork forming part of the daily view. The town is practical rather than picturesque, built on reliability and established patterns.

Lincolnshire, England

**INDUSTRIAL
WORKING-CLASS
SUBURBAN**



Time

○ *Get a Grip* takes place at the height of the summer of 1976, one of the hottest and driest periods recorded in Britain. Weeks without rain leave the ground cracked and the air heavy, creating an atmosphere that feels both slow and volatile. Daily life is shaped by water restrictions, sleepless nights, and a constant search for relief from the oppressive heat.

July 1976

**POST-WAR
SUMMERTIME
TRANSITIONAL**

Home

Theatre

Holiday

Factory

Suburbia

WWII



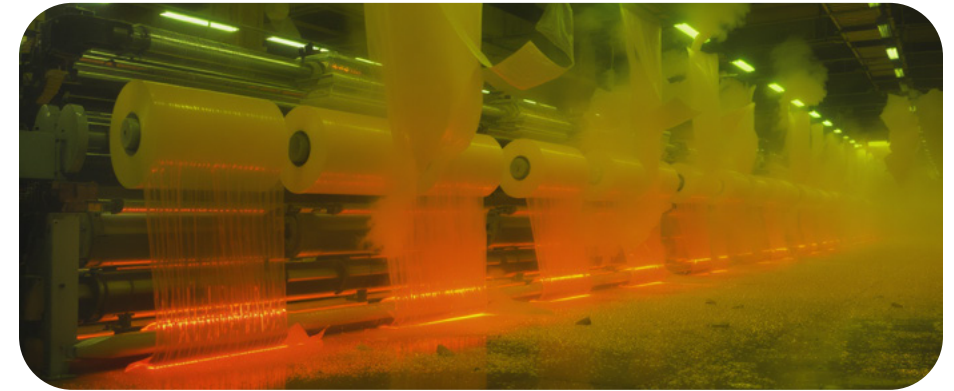
Home
The Mills Residence



Theatre
Lincolnshire Amateur Dramatics and Operatics Society



Holiday
Butlin's Holiday Camp



Factory
Mills Plastics Manufacturing LTD



Suburbia
Egham Close, Lincolnshire



WWII
HMS Indefatigable



East Midlands, 1976
Egham Close, Exterior Daytime



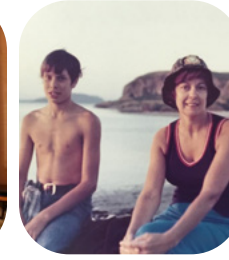
1945



Veterans carry the invisible scars of WWII, with PTSD and the weight of duty shaping daily life and relationships

○ In 1945, Britain emerged from the Second World War exhausted and deeply changed. Soldiers returned home carrying memories they rarely spoke about, expected to resume ordinary life with little support or understanding of their psychological wounds.

- LEFT *Writer's grandparents, whom the characters of Norm and Joan are based upon*
- CENTRE *World War II, Tokyo Bay*
- RIGHT *World War II, British Royal Navy, crew of HMS Indefatigable*



1976



Britain struggles with economic uncertainty, shifting social norms, and the lingering effects of post-war austerity

○ By 1976, Britain is navigating a period of transition marked by inflation, industrial unrest, and a growing sense of social unease. Communities that once relied on steady work and familiar structures now face wavering economic confidence and cultural change.

- LEFT *Mills family living room*
- CENTRE *Writer's father and grandmother, whom the characters of Nicholas and Joan are based upon*
- RIGHT *Lincolnshire, 1976*



1



2



3



4



5



6

The Heatwave

The heatwave of 1976 shapes every part of life in *Get a Grip*. Temperatures rise for weeks without relief, with parts of the country reaching more than 35 degrees and some areas going over forty days without rain. Gardens scorch, pavements crack, and nights remain thick with heat. Water shortages force residents to queue at standpipes, ration baths, and adjust routines, turning basic needs into daily challenges that expose both cooperation and quiet frustration within the community.

- 1 *Dried up reservoirs*
- 2 *Neighbours gather at a standpipe to gather water for their households*
- 3 *Drought areas covered most of England*
- 4 *Ladybirds moved in frightening swarms*
- 5 *Dried and cracked soil*
- 6 *Fires were unstoppable due to water shortages*

Historic Facts

15+ DAYS
RECORD TEMPERATURE OF 35.9°C
28,000,000 AFFECTED

The landscape reacts in unsettling ways. Reservoirs shrink to record lows, revealing long-submerged ground, and ladybirds with a painful bite arrive in large swarms due to being starved and dehydrated.

Familiar places take on a brittle, strained quality, as if the town itself is beginning to buckle under the pressure. The stillness of the drought creates an atmosphere of tension and fatigue, deepening the unease already present beneath the surface of suburban life.

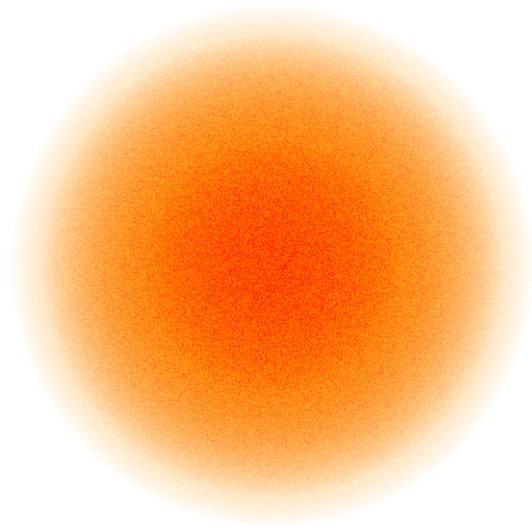
THE WORLD: Themes and Motifs

Key Themes

PERFORMANCE
TRAUMA
HEAT
PARANOIA

○ Tonally, *Get a Grip* is a Hitchcockian thriller for modern-day audiences. The net tightens around Norm as Lieutenant Hardwicke amps up his campaign of terror against him. With every act of destruction, his family and neighbours become more convinced that Norm is losing it.

○ He must stop Lieutenant Hardwicke and get a grip on his PTSD hallucinations and paranoia, differentiating which is which, before it's too late.





Reflects social masks, gendered expectations, and family obligations

○ Performative behaviour guides *Get a Grip*. In this suburban world, people do not simply live their lives, they present them. Neighbours keep up appearances, families rehearse politeness and everyone behaves as though being observed.

Expressions

**ROLE
FACADE
DUTY**



Highlights guilt and PTSD, emotional weight, and generational legacy

○ Trauma shapes the emotional core of *Get a Grip*. Norm carries the weight of wartime experiences he has never been able to name, let alone confront. His memories intrude without warning, distorting his sense of safety and blurring the boundaries between past and present.

○ Trauma informs his emotional reactions to his young son Nicholas's determination to join the Royal Air Force.

Expressions

**GUILT
BURDEN
WEIGHT**





Heat



Evokes the literal drought, psychological tension, and emotional boiling point

○ Heat is an ever-present force in *Get a Grip*, pressing down on characters until even simple moments feel strained. The drought strips comfort from daily life and leaves everyone slightly on edge, amplifying frustrations that would otherwise pass unnoticed. Rooms feel airless, tempers shorten, and routines become harder to maintain.

Expressions

**PRESSURE
OPPRESSION
INTENSITY**



Paranoia



Highlights personal and generational PTSD, emotional weight, and generational legacy

○ Paranoia grows steadily throughout *Get a Grip*, fed by memory, fear and the pressure of the heat. Norm begins to question what he sees, what he hears and who might be watching him, caught between genuine threat and the distortions of his own mind. Small events take on exaggerated meaning, turning familiar spaces into sources of doubt.

Expressions

**OBSERVATION
SURVEILLANCE
TENSION**

“I WROTE THIS STORY TO HONOUR
WHERE I COME FROM, AND
TO STARE DIRECTLY AT THE
EMOTIONAL INHERITANCE BETWEEN
GENERATIONS OF MEN.”

Get a Grip is deeply personal to me. Norm, Joan, and Nicholas are drawn directly from my grandparents and my dad; the dynamics, the humour, and some elements of the film come from my family's lives and memories I grew up hearing about in the North end of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Times of great joy and hardship in equal measure. Stories of my grandfather's naval service in the Pacific War in 1945, when he was a mere boy, my grandmother starring to great acclaim in her production of *Kiss Me, Kate* in 1976, their plastic shopping bag factory burning down, my father being a fanatical air cadet and determined to join the Royal Air Force against family wishes, are just a few examples.

○ Via an exciting and suspenseful psychological thriller, I wanted to explore something I've witnessed and experienced myself in many of us men — that ingrained inability to talk honestly about fear, pain, or love. The film becomes, at its core, a story about suppressed emotion, masculinity, the weight fathers pass on to sons, and the consequences that unfold when people don't have the tools to process what they need to. All the while remaining a thrilling and suspenseful, character-driven cinematic adventure à la Hitchcock. *Get a Grip* draws from the style of the gritty 60s and 70s films that I adore and made me

unwavering in the pursuit of film. The eeriness of *The Wicker Man*, the spiralling urgency of *Marathon Man*, the real-world relatability in the terror of *Frenzy*, the heart-wrenching tragedy of *Don't Look Now* — whose screenwriter, Allan Scott, has generously mentored, guided and endorsed my writing for a decade now.

○ My intention was never just to make a period piece, but something that still speaks powerfully to today. Although the film spans 1945 and 1976, the emotional landscape is current: men still struggle to communicate, families still fracture around silence, and unresolved trauma still finds a way to resurface. The setting and era simply sharpen those pressures and provide a rich world to play in. If you're from Britain, you won't have been able to escape someone of that generation comparing every single hot day ever since to the summer of 1976!

○ Ultimately, I wrote this story to honour where I come from, to stare directly at the emotional inheritance between generations of men, and to build an exciting thriller that feels truthful and rather uncomfortable to face up to. If the film works, audiences will recognise their own families in it — the love, the loyalty, the fear, and the things left unsaid that echo for years.

○ I love *Get a Grip* because I love my family.

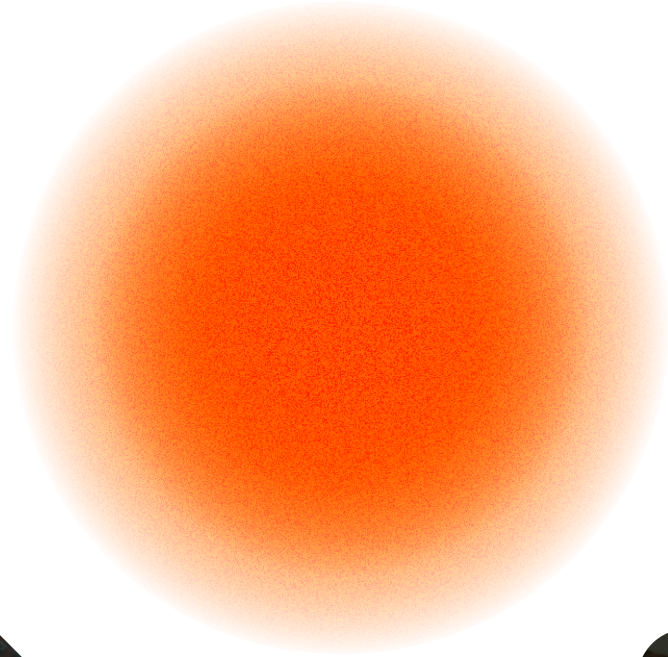
Will Jeffs,
writer of *Get a Grip*

Part 2: THE VISION

Producing *Get a Grip*

Cinematography ○ Pages 44 to 51
Production Design ○ Pages 52 to 61
Production Notes ○ Pages 62 to 63

THE VISION: Cinematography



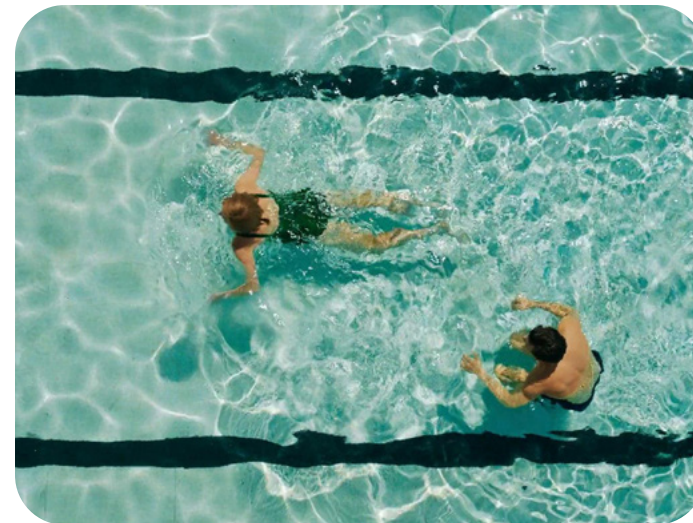
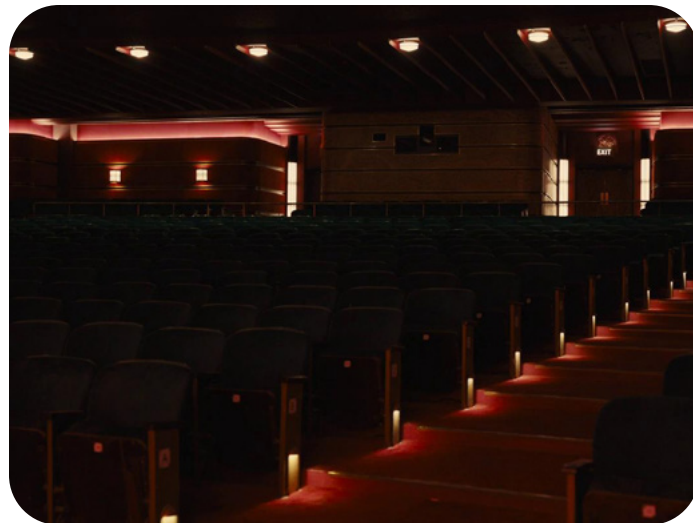
Film Comps
TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY 2011
THE MASTER 2012
FRENZY 1972
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA 1962



Cinematography

35MM FILM

Cinematography inspired by 70s auteur cinema, pairing restrained naturalism with a contemporary psychological edge





Director

James Watkins is a filmmaker with a proven mastery of tension, character-driven dread, and psychologically rich genre storytelling — exactly the tonal blend *Get a Grip* demands. He has previously stated that his favourite filmmaker is Alfred Hitchcock, evident in his choice of work, and this film is largely inspired by the ‘Master of Suspense’.

Born in Nottingham in the East Midlands, Watkins has consistently delivered elevated, emotionally grounded thrillers: the acclaimed

Eden Lake showed his ability to extract raw, intimate terror from small, unassuming communities; his film *The Woman in Black* demonstrated his precision with atmospheric period storytelling and mainstream audience engagement; and *Speak No Evil* reaffirmed his command of slow-burn psychological suspense rooted in human behaviour rather than spectacle. Watkins brings both a British, even region-specific, sensibility and international commercial pedigree, making



Target Director
James Watkins

James Watkins

Filmography

EDEN LAKE 2008
THE WOMAN IN BLACK 2012
THE TAKE 2016
THE IPCRESS FILE 2022
SPEAK NO EVIL 2024

him uniquely positioned to handle the film’s blend of domestic realism, wartime trauma, and escalating paranoia.

Creatively, Watkins understands fractured masculinity, guilt, and fear; from a producer’s perspective, he has a strong track record of delivering prestige genre films that are contained, character-led, and commercially viable — a perfect fit for *Get a Grip*.



Speak No Evil, 2025
Directed by James Watkins



THE VISION: Production Design

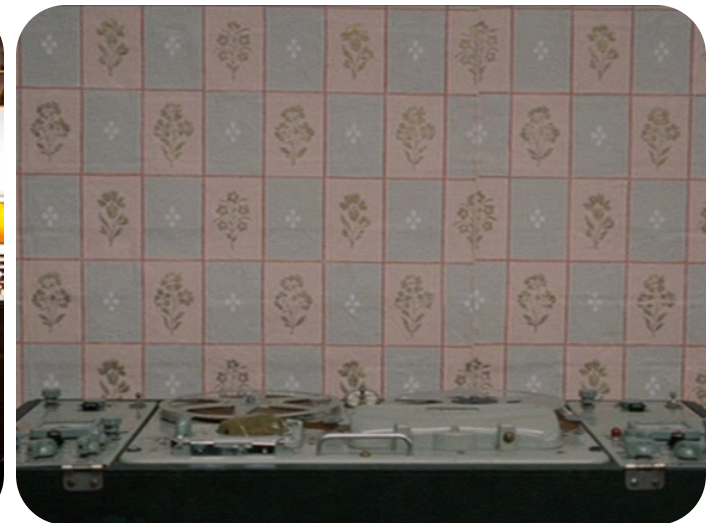


Film Comps
TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY 2011
THE WICKER MAN 1973
HIGH RISE 2015
THE ICPRESS FILE 2022



Production Design

Authentic 1970s interiors, factories, theatres, and suburban streets are meticulously crafted to reflect post-war Britain, where vibrant period colours, textures, and props immerse the viewer in both everyday life and simmering psychological tension







Production Designer

James Price is an Academy Award-winning British production designer with a rare gift for creating authentic, character-driven spaces that feel both specific and emotionally resonant. His work with James Watkins on *The Ipcress File* and *Speak No Evil* demonstrates how deftly he handles period detail, psychological tension, and environments that quietly shape the drama without drawing attention to themselves.

Price excels at making spaces feel lived-in and charged with unspoken history, and

he understands how to let design support performance rather than dominate it. For *Get a Grip*, Price is the ideal production designer for a film rooted in atmosphere, memory, and restraint.

Price has the ability to ground 1970s East Midlands life in truthful texture, build Norm and Joan's house as a subtle pressure cooker, and contrast it with sharp, disciplined wartime environments that mirror Norm's fractured inner world, all handled with restraint, clarity,



Target Production Designer
James Price

James Price

Filmography

THE ICPRESS FILE 2022

POOR THINGS 2023

SPEAK NO EVIL 2024

BUGONIA 2025

THE NEST 2020

and a strong instinct for visual storytelling.

It would be genuinely exciting to see James's interpretation of Norman Mills' world of the 1976 drought, shaped by heat, pressure, and the quiet erosion of everyday stability.



Sound

Sound Design

Surrealist sound design heightens psychological unease, blending naturalistic ambience with subtle, disorienting cues to reflect Norm's fractured perceptions.

Sound Inspiration

NUCLEAR FALLOUT
HEAT BUZZ

1. **DON'T GO BREAKING MY HEART** Elton John, Kiki Dee
2. **BRING ME SUNSHINE** Morecambe & Wise
3. **WHISKEY IN THE JAR** Thin Lizzy
4. **TOO DARN HOT** from Kiss me Kate
5. **IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND** Sarah Vaughan
6. **MYSTERY SONG** Status Quo
7. **JEANS ON** David Dundas
8. **POSITIVE THINKING** Morecambe & Wise



Music

Soundtrack

A curated blend of upbeat and lyrically comedic period songs paired with an original score emphasises the emotional tension and period authenticity throughout the film.

Genre

NOSTALGIC
THEATRICAL
BITTERSWEET

Production Notes

Primary Shoot Location
Yorkshire or Northern England

Budget
£8,000,000, to £10,000,000 GBP

Tax Relief
Up to 25% (UK)

Regional Support
Screen Yorkshire (*Local Funding and Resources*)

UK Partners and Funding
BFI, BBC, Film4 Involvement
Private Investment

Production Team

Co-founder, Red Imp Films
Will Jeffs

Co-founder, Red Imp Films
John Hauber

Will is a British-Canadian producer and an award-winning screenwriter whose work has screened and placed at festivals worldwide, including The Toronto Independent Film Festival. He was mentored by the Emmy-winning writer-producer Allan Scott (*The Queen's Gambit, Don't Look Now*).

As an actor, Will played Logan in MGM+'s *The Westies* with J.K. Simmons, the latest series from the creator of *Narcos*. Other credits include: Netflix's *FUBAR* opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and Zazu in Disney's *The Lion King* stage musical.

As co-founder of *Red Imp Films*, Will channels his passion for telling bold stories — producing daring, provocative and psychologically rich television and feature films that leave a lasting emotional mark, whatever the genre.

John is a Canadian/Argentine/British producer who started his career, in radio, as producer and host of the English language shortwave radio broadcasts of Argentina's national radio. After moving to Toronto in 1990, he continued his work with several radio services in North and South America, in both English and Spanish. At the same time, he started producing language versions for broadcast, commercial and corporate clients in Canada, including Chum/City, Imax and Northern Telecom.

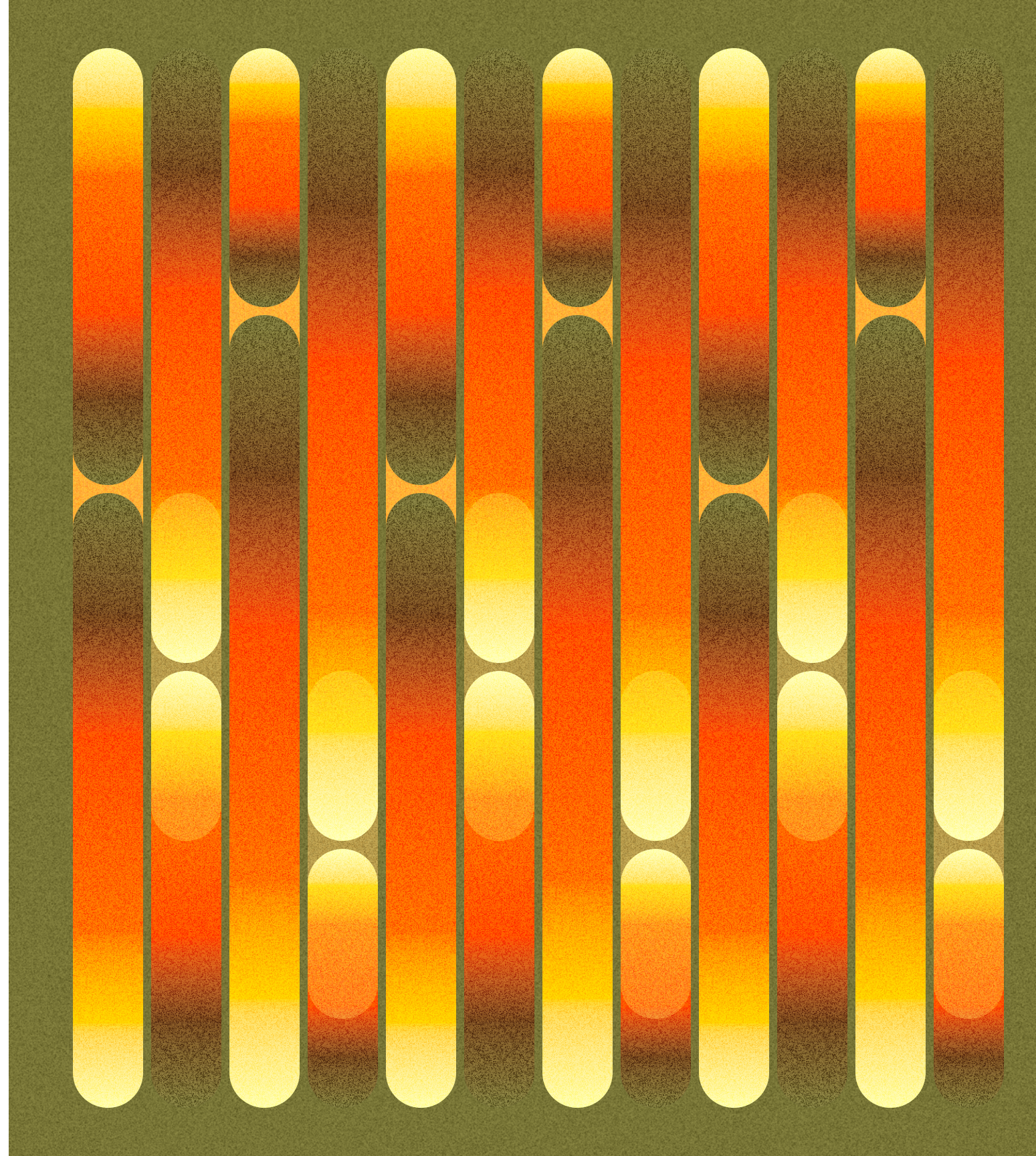
In 2001, his company, *Galaviz & Hauber Productions*, started creating Described Video for Canadian clients, including GlobalTV, at the time the first broadcaster in the world to include DV for the vision impaired as part of their regular programming. In the mid 2010's, as head of *John Hauber Productions*, John was part of the working group that established the broadcast standards for described video in Canada.

In 2023, while producing the musical *Rock of Ages* at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto, and just as he was becoming keenly aware of his many limitations, good fortune brought John into contact with the immensely talented Will Jeffs, whom he cajoled into co-founding *Red Imp Films*.



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WRITTEN BY

Will Jeffs



A

Red Imp Films

PRODUCTION
