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MONSTER MOVIES & HORROR CREATURES



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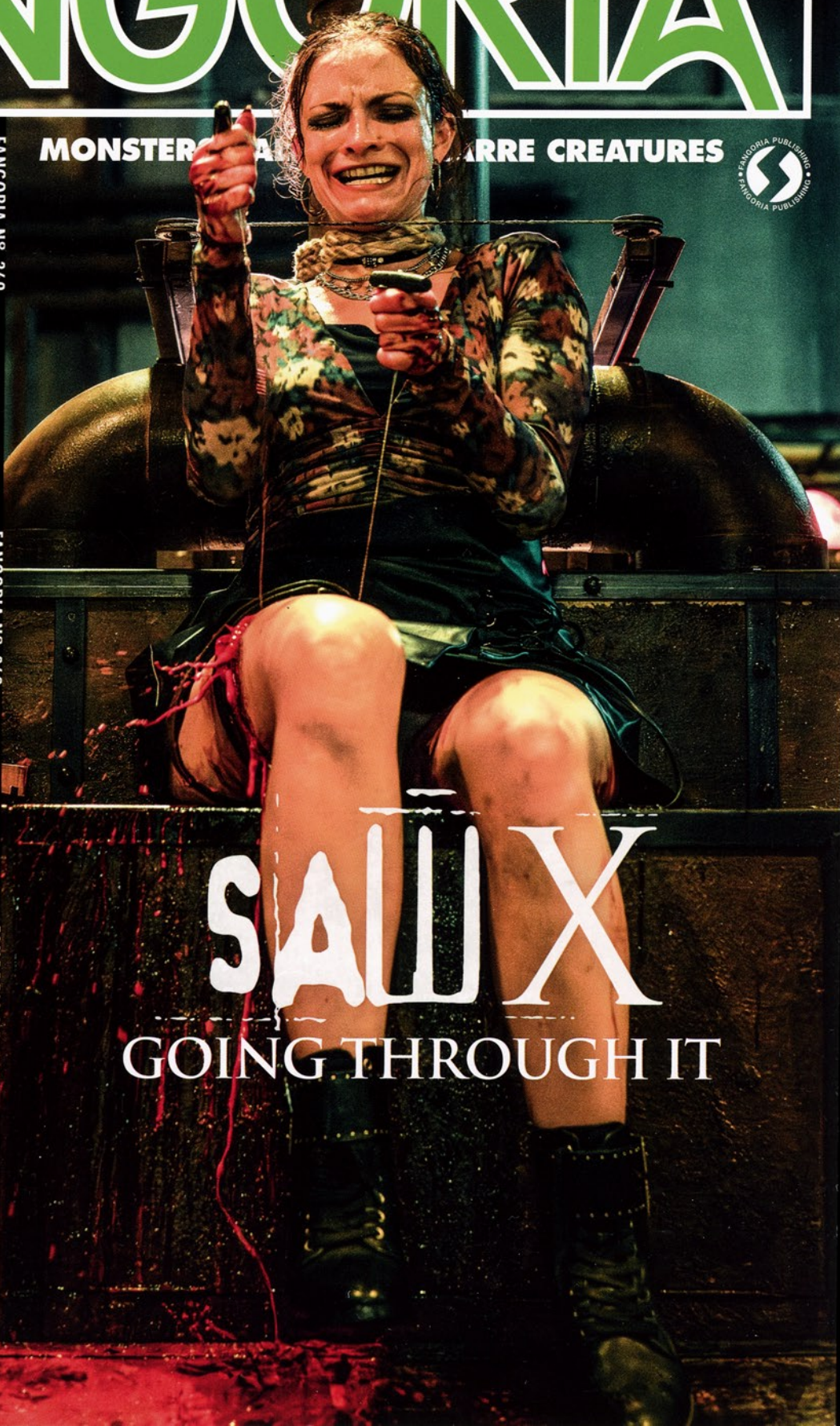
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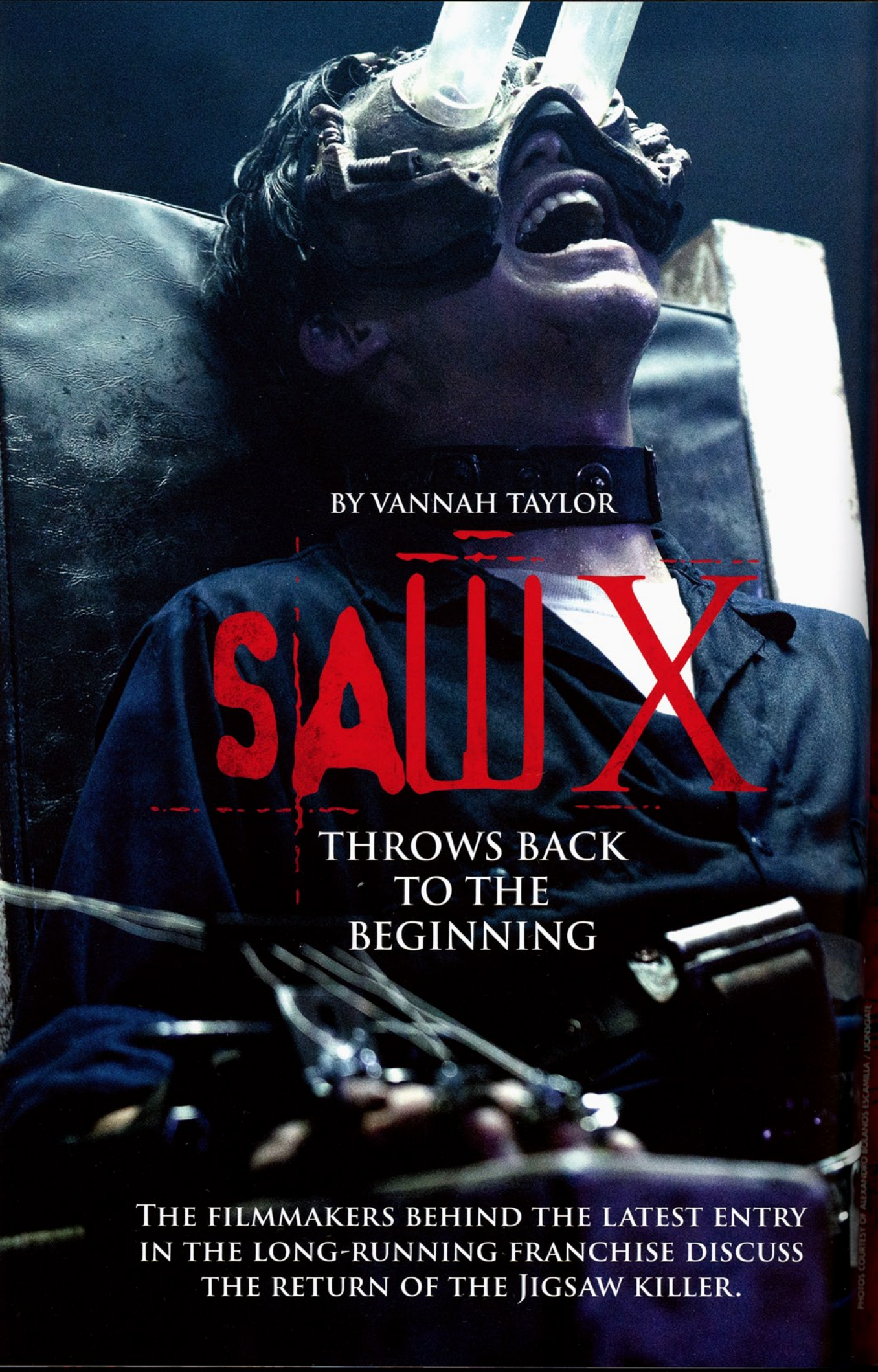
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BY VANNAH TAYLOR

SILENCE

THROWS BACK
TO THE
BEGINNING

THE FILMMAKERS BEHIND THE LATEST ENTRY
IN THE LONG-RUNNING FRANCHISE DISCUSS
THE RETURN OF THE JIGSAW KILLER.

For years, it wasn't October for most horror fans without hitting the theater to see the latest *Saw* film. Throughout the last two decades, audiences were left shocked and awed by the gruesome traps of the franchise's infamous Jigsaw Killer, but after exploring various apprentices, admirers and copycats, *Saw X* turns back time and returns the franchise to its roots. Ahead of the film's theatrical release, we sat down with the team responsible for conjuring the most personal chapter in the story of John Kramer, including franchise veterans like director Kevin Greutert and producers Oren Koules and Mark Burg, as well as the new blood joining the creative team: cinematographer Nick Matthews and production designer Anthony Stabley.

Though the most recent films, 2017's *Jigsaw* and 2021's *Spiral: From the Book of Saw*, sought to expand the world of *Saw*, *Saw X* stays true to what fans love and strips the franchise down to what the filmmakers believe is the "lightning in a bottle about the whole *Saw* saga" – namely, John Kramer. Taking place between the events of *Saw* and *Saw II*, the film follows John Kramer as he travels to Mexico, seeking what could be the last chance to find a cure for his cancer. After realizing that he has been played by connen, he moves from his most vulnerable to most vengeful hour.

“HE ISN'T
LOOKING
TO BE JIGSAW.
HE IS A MAN
WITH AN
ILLNESS
LOOKING
FOR A CURE.”

—OREN KOULES

A KILLER AND HIS MASCOT:
JOHN KRAMER (TOBIN BELL)
AND BILLY ARE BACK.

WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT THIS TRAP IS, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE DIEGO (JOSHUA OKAMOTO) IS NOT BEATING IT?



But Kramer wasn't the only crucial ingredient in *X*'s return to form. Twisted Pictures' Koules and Burg were committed to bringing back Greutert (*Saw VI*, *Saw 3D*) as director.

"Kevin basically created our look as the editor of the first five. From the camera work to those flashback montages that ended every film – that was all him. It wasn't in the original script. It was Kevin," says Koules. With a team led by some of the minds that have been with *Saw* from the beginning, "the stars were aligning," Greutert says. Indeed, beloved actors Tobin Bell and Shawnee Smith agreed to reprise their iconic roles as Kramer and Amanda Young. "The confidence that all of us have in the film is sky high," says Greutert, "and I've never said that before about the films I've worked on."

This time, audiences will see John Kramer like never before in what Greutert is calling "the performance of [Bell's] lifetime." He adds, "John Kramer IS *Saw*," and while the director is hesitant on whether *Jigsaw* can truly be defined by our typical understanding of a "villain" or "anti-hero," he believes

I WANTED US TO BE ABLE TO GET BACK TO THE GRIT, THE RUSTINESS, THE DIRTINESS, THE SCUZZINESS, THE KIND OF GRIME THAT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEED A TETANUS SHOT,"

- NICK MATTHEWS

that "part of the magic is that Tobin Bell is always careful about the idea that John Kramer is not a killer." Rather, it's his artistic integrity that defines the character so well.

Koules takes that idea even further, stating that in *Saw X*, "He's the protagonist. He innocently ends up in this situation. This wasn't something he looked for. We are following his journey, a personal thing he was trying to do to better himself and ended up in a situation that he had zero control over... He isn't looking to be *Jigsaw*. He is a man with an illness looking for a cure."

It's a critical piece of the puzzle, that element of humanity, explaining why a character like *Jigsaw* has

endured and captured the hearts of so many horror fans. The philosophical motivations behind *Jigsaw* allowed for a never-ending list of victims to be put to the test, but the evils that John Kramer has faced in his medical journey make for a major throughline, particularly in the films helmed by Greutert himself. Greutert confesses that it was never his intention to make a statement but that, especially in the new film, there is a "powerful notion that there are liars and connen out there that continue to feel free to con and lie. This can be interpreted in a lot of different ways, and there will be a familiarity and relevance that will touch a lot of people when they see how it plays out."



Greutert recruited fresh talent to help complement the narrative with visual callbacks to the first three films. “*Saw X* is an homage to the other *Saw* movies,” says production designer Anthony Stabley. “We looked at what we loved about them and made sure we included all those ingredients.” Stabley, who has worked on films like *Stigmata* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, is new to the world of *Saw* and was tasked with the tall order of designing and testing John Kramer’s arsenal of traps – an essential element in any *Saw* experience. Stabley sought to bring forth viewer empathy for John, even in his traps. “I’m really proud that the traps we put together are thematic, integrating the medical aspects of the film, and creating a connection between what you’re seeing and what relation the people in the traps have with John. It all makes sense in a bizarre way... It’s a really beautiful combination.”

This combination is made possible by the gorgeous lighting and camerawork mastered by cinematographer Nick Matthews, whose work on the psychedelic

PRO TIP FROM VALENTINA (PAULETTE HERNANDEZ):
IF YOU EVER HAVE TO RAZOR-WIRE OFF YOUR
OWN LEG, DRESS FOR THE OCCASION.



MATEO (OCTAVIO HINOJOSA)
HAS TO PERFORM BRAIN
SURGERY ON HIMSELF. LUCKILY
FOR A HIMBO LIKE HIM, IT’S A
MINOR PROCEDURE.

THIS IS ONE OF THE
MILDER TRAPS IN *SAW X*.

fever dream *Spoonful of Sugar* was released on Shudder earlier this year. Matthews is thrilled to join the iconic franchise in part because, "*Saw X* takes you into the emotional space of John Kramer. Tobin Bell is such a brilliant actor, and he's able to make you care and feel in all the ways that make you want to root for him. Not everyone can hold that sort of space where you have compassion for who he is as a character and where he's coming from. It allows you to access the sort of morality of this character."

Matthews discussed shared artistic inspirations with Greutert, mining from films by the likes of Tarkovsky and Kurosawa to deliver a new elegance to the *Saw* universe, while maintaining the giallo influence of films like *Deep Red*, which famously inspired the look for Jigsaw's puppet Billy. Matthews incorporates a similar color and composition from the first few films in this latest installment, and even though the film is shot digitally, the cinematographer worked hard to give the film a textural quality.

"As somebody who loves these sorts of films myself, I wanted us to be able to get back to the grit, the rustiness, the dirtiness, the scuzziness, the kind of grime that makes you feel like you need a tetanus shot," says Matthews. "But how do we

take the audience from this place of beauty to a place of brutality? When talking about the color palettes of the earlier films, those movies tend to land in monochromatic greens or ochre yellows. I wanted to bring that kind of color separation into this movie, paying homage to *Saw I*, *II* and *III*. While *Spiral* and *Jigsaw* had gone for a widescreen look, we wanted to take this back to 1:8:5 for a taller image. When you see John Kramer, you get this landscape of the face. *Saw* films have such a unique and fun visual style, and we play with that."

All of these disparate elements confirm that *Saw X* is cheerfully embracing what fans loved about the original trilogy. And Koules confirms it: "We are very excited to be going back to our roots." 🧠

SURPRISE! SHAWNEE SMITH
IS BACK AS AMANDA, COMPLETE
WITH GOING-THROUGH-IT BANGS.