

ISAYAH SNOW

FELIX ELLIOTT

KAT FORRESTER

ROANNA DALZIEL

WITH KATHLEEN BURNS

AND ROY SNOW

a film by
RICKY TOWNSEND

the **BOSTROM** scenario

BEWARE THE CAMERAS

INTERFRAME PICTURES presents
a RICKY TOWNSEND film "THE BOSTROM SCENARIO" FELIX ELLIOTT, KAT FORRESTER, ROANNA DALZIEL with KATHLEEN BURNS and ROY SNOW
music by PETER LILEY vfx by JACK MCCONNELL, RICKY TOWNSEND cinematography & editing by RICKY TOWNSEND based on the short film "Truth.exe" by RICKY TOWNSEND
produced by HAYDON DICKIE, SELWYN GABLE, ELLA WARD, RICKY TOWNSEND written & directed by RICKY TOWNSEND

interFrame
PICTURES

PRESS KIT

113 minutes | New Zealand | 2024

the BOSTROM scenario

LOGLINE

Alice Wonder grieves over the murder of her brother but nobody knows he ever existed. Alice searches for answers, unraveling the story of a supernatural photographer and the film crew of a cursed documentary.



ABOUT THE FILM

Alice Wonder, a young girl from New Zealand is haunted by the visions of her brother's death, murdered by the impossible flash of a camera. But everyone is adamant her brother never existed; not even her mother believes her.

Alice travels the city of Christchurch for answers. She finds herself unraveling the story of Plato; a supernatural photographer of the H.E.B. A photographer torn by guilt and yearning for enlightenment. And the story of renegade film students on the set of a cursed documentary, uncovering the power of a dreaded computer experiment. As imposing forces tighten their noose round Alice, she discovers her brother's story is one that will break down reality itself.

Based on the short film *Truth.exe*. Official Selection for the Boston Science Fiction Film Festival and Winning Best Student Film at the 2020 Miami International Science Fiction Film Festival.



RICKY TOWNSEND | Writer - Director

Ricky Townsend is a young filmmaker from Christchurch/Ōtautahi, New Zealand. Ricky has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film from the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury. He is also pursuing an arts degree in Philosophy. Ricky has tutored film for Yoobee Colleges, Ilam School of Fine Arts and UC Digital Screen.

Ricky has written, directed and produced several independent short films that have been in international film festivals. His short *Tremble*, based on the 2010-2011 Christchurch quakes was selected for the Top of the South Film Festival (NZ) and was nominated for Best True Story at the Sydney indie Film Festival (AUS). Ricky's other short *Truth.exe*, the film this feature is based on, was selected at the Boston Science Fiction Film Festival (US), the Sci-Fi Film Festival (AUS) and won Best Student Film at the Miami International Science Fiction Film Festival (US).

Being an autistic filmmaker, Ricky believes in embracing his analytical, detail-focused thinking and explore cinema that celebrates such styles of storytelling.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There are very few films in Aotearoa/New Zealand that aim to explore the explicit philosophical themes and conflicts that science fiction evokes. For me, making this film was a chance to show that New Zealand is just as capable of making philosophical, plot-puzzle cinema that is usually reserved for the likes of *Donnie Darko*, *Primer*, *Inception*, *Mulholland Drive* and of course *Doctor Who* (all great film and TV). Inspired by the writings of philosophers such as Nick Bostrom, David Chalmers and Jack Copeland, my film takes the philosophy of their work and fuses it with Gnostic mythology. This is to create a world that lives beyond the frames of the shot and explores the spiritual, fantastical and even religious elements of modern Transhumanism (AI, minds uploaded to the net, simulation theory etc.).

This is a movie we spent more than 3 years filming, shooting before the global pandemic even started. That's a long time for a film to grow and develop an identity of its own. For me, this film has become many things. It is an expression of our personal COVID-19 paranoia and anxiety. It is a mirrored reflection of our time as green-horned students who made the mad choice to film a feature film. It is also in some ways a reflection of the trauma Christchurch represses about its past decade. And being at a tiny budget of approx \$20,000NZD, we strive to show that even a tiny film can tell a big story.



HAYDON DICKIE | Producer, *Hemlock*

Haydon trained in acting with The Court Youth company and started in four of their shows between 2019/2020 including their sell out seasons of *Boudica* and *Jekyll and Hyde*. These days, Haydon is a professional behind the scenes creative of the Christchurch theatre scene with some of his credits including *Rent*; *Appropriate*; *Cinderella*; *Next to Normal* (The Court Theatre) and *The Marriage of Figaro* (NZ Opera) to name a few.

He is also a playwright, having premiered his first one act show *Reminisce* in 2022 and has recently completed his second piece, *Tell Me Where to Start* Haydon's screen credits include *Mr Savant* (Winning Film, Somedays Stories Film Challenge 2019) and the short film *Truth.exe* (Official Selection: Boston Sci-Fi Film Festival; Sci Fi Film Festival (Sydney); Monthly Finalist - Changing Face International Film Festival; and Winner - Best Student Film, Miami International SciFi Film Festival)



SELWYN GAMBLE | Producer, *Damon*

Selwyn Gamble, a 23-year-old actor from North Canterbury, New Zealand, has embarked on a meaningful journey of artistic exploration. With Tongan and New Zealand European heritage, Selwyn's creative passion has driven his path. At the University of Canterbury, he majored in Film with Honours from 2018 to 2021. There, he connected with peers who collaborated on this film. Selwyn's pivotal role in the Court Youth Company from 2020 to 2021 allowed him to find his voice as a performer. In productions like "Jekyll and Hyde" (2020) and "Boys" (2021), he thrived, relishing every opportunity for growth and fun. His journey extended to the Court Jesters' apprenticeship program in 2021, where he honed his improvisational skills. Beyond the stage, Selwyn's commitment to storytelling led to the creation of "Langi and City" (2022), exploring the intersectionality of autistic and Pasifika experiences in New Zealand. Selwyn is a proud member of The Bostrom Scenario team, as both producer and actor. He eagerly anticipates how audiences will connect with and enjoy their collective efforts. Selwyn's journey is a celebration of the joy he finds in bringing stories to life and sharing meaningful narratives with audiences.



ELLA WASWO | Producer

Ella is an Ōtautahi-based artist, with a practice that spans multiple genres – from tattooing, to photography. After receiving a BFA Hons, Ella has been a part of numerous short films and music videos, as well as creating content for national organisations like Renew, RNZ, and The Arts Foundation.

CAST



ISAYAH SNOW | Alice Wonder

Isayah (Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Kahungunu) is a Christchurch based performer from West Auckland. She has performed at the Court Theatre, her credits include, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Boudicca* (Youth Company) and *Jekyll and Hyde* (Youth Company) and most recently *Te Kuia* and *the Spider*.

Other theatre credits include *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* and *Reminisce* (Little Andromeda) and *Love and Information* (Dramasoc).



FELIX ELLIOTT | Lewis Wonder

With a background in live theatre, Felix is currently undertaking an honors degree in film at the Ilam school of fine arts. Building a career in the digital field, he's undertaken video projects with household names such as Piki Films, Whitebait Media and Greenpeace.

As an actor in the original short film, *Truth.exe*, Felix has been on the Bostrom Scenario team for five years



KAT FORRESTER | Plato

Co-Director of Ōtautahi based Play Space Productions, Kat's capacity as a producer, director and actor was historically stage based, after obtaining her certificate of Performing Arts from Hagley Theatre Co. in 2019. Securing a starring role in *The Bostrom Scenario*, she quickly discovered her interest lay behind the camera.

She has since gone on to AD short films for *One Dollar Genre* (a Patreon driven filmmaking enterprise), and was OH&S and *Shadow* 1st AD in the Tamaki Makaurau based short film *The Black Lotus* (currently in pre-production stage for a feature length adaptation). Kat is excited to work with Ricky and the team in future projects and enjoys the fast-paced intensity and joy only filmmaking can bring.

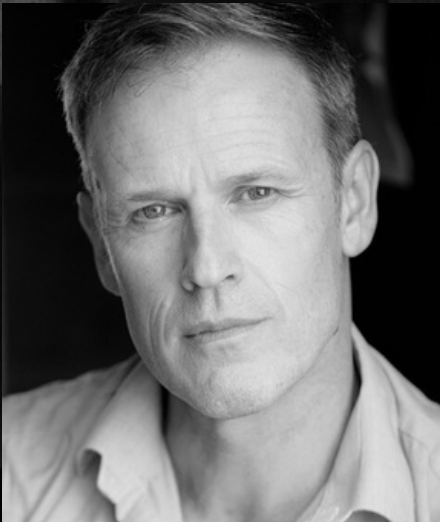
CAST



KATHLEEN BURNS | Starlet Seer

Kathleen began her career as a Court Jester in 2003 and still performs *Scared Scriptless*. She is a graduate of the National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art. She has performed with several theatre companies over her career including the Court Theatre, Circa Theatre and Little Andromeda.

Kathleen has starred in several film and TV shows including *Sextortion* (TVNZ), *Working Class*, *Ghost Shark 2*, and *The Push*.



ROY SNOW | Dr. Harris

Roy is a local actor hailing from the picturesque South Canterbury town of Geraldine. Across a nearly 30 year professional career he's graced screen and stage around Aotearoa and across the world.

Often found at the Court theatre Roy's recent highlights include the critically acclaimed "Appropriate" the comedy musical smash "Little Shop of Horrors" and a villainous turn in Auckland theatre company's blockbuster "North by Northwest"



ROANNA DALZIEL | The Actress

Roanna's resume is endless - acting in iconic New Zealand TV shows like *Shortland Street*, writing and producing stage shows in London. She has worked for Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and The Court Theatre, teaching improv, all while juggling a successful law career.

Her stage career has included playing Lady Macbeth and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*. She played The Actress in the original award winning short film *Truth.exe* with Ricky Townsend.



CAST



JOSIAH MORGAN | Socrates

Josiah Morgan (Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Maniapoto) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Ōtautahi. He has performed on stages and in schools all over Aotearoa in productions such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Top Dog Theatre, Helena), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Auckland Pride, The Reader), *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* (JMO Theatrics, Performer) and *Sexwise* (THETA, Timmy). He is also the author of four books, with a fifth forthcoming.

Josiah will be making his international stage debut in a Brisbane production of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* in November 2024.



MATT MCMENAMIN | Paul Messenger

A graduate of the National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art in 2015, Matthew has appeared in a range of stage productions, performing with Showbiz Christchurch in *Hairspray* in 2016 and as bashful cop Eddie Souther in *Sister Act* a year later. While studying for a Bachelor's Degree at the University of Canterbury he got involved with the local musical theatre community MUSOC, debuting with his role as Nicely Nicely Johnson in *Guys and Dolls* (2018), *Ram's Dad* in *Heathers* (2018), and finally the Lecturer and President Roosevelt in *Reefer Madness* (2021). In 2023 he played *The Baker* with Ovation Musical Theatre's debut production: *Into the Woods* and *Young Scrooge* in Toi Toi Opera's production of a *Christmas Carol*. Prior to the Bostrom Scenario Matthew's film credits involved working as a partisan on *Dynasty Warriors* (2017).





COMPLETE CAST

ISAYAH SNOW | Alice Wonder

FELIX ELLIOTT | Lewis Wonder

KAT FORRESTER | Plato

KATHLEEN BURNS | Starlet Seer

ROY SNOW | Dr. Harris

ROANNA DALZIEL | *The Actress*

MATT MCMENAMIN | Paul Messenger

OCEAN JONES | Mary Atawhai

SELWYN GAMBLE | Damon

JOSIAH MORGAN | Socrates

HAYDON DICKIE | Hemlock

ANNETTE SEARLE | Mrs. Wonder

LANCE MCBRIDE | Hypno

RICKY TOWNSEND | Samuel the Vagabond

EMMA MCBRIDE | Verity Seer [voice]

JASPER SUTCLIFFE | Mill [voice]

LAIKA ROUNTREE | Scientist [voice]

MEG HATHERLY | Doctor Assistant, Echo

DEREK DODDINGTON | Mr. Wonder

ARMAND LE ROUX | Photographer 1

VINCE CLARK | Photographer 2

WILLIAM WALLACE | Photographer 3



PETER LILEY | Music Composer

Peter is a British/NZ sound artist, composer and performer who has made a name for himself around the NZ capital for his visceral and entrancing performances, particularly on the rare bass saxophone. Described in equal measure as both meditative and frightening, his saxophone-centric compositions push the limits of what is possible on the instrument.

Away from the saxophone, Peter is also a singer and software engineer.



RICKY TOWNSEND | Writer - Director

FAQ

What challenges did you face as a first-time director, and how did you overcome them?

While I have directed several independent short films, this was my first time taking on a feature length project. I knew from the beginning that it would be a massive undertaking over a span of several years. But even then, with the global pandemic, the project took on a whole other collection of challenges that we had to problem-solve on top of the other ones. The fun of it though, is that those challenges shaped the film creatively as well as technically and took us in cinematic directions we would never have considered.

We had to figure out how to make the fantastical, science fiction elements feel integrated into the world both aesthetically and narratively. How do you make a fight scene with cameras intense and suspenseful!? But that was a fun challenge, it made us think and question what it is about violence on screen that compels us (as I felt guns was an aesthetic copout for this film and not the sort of imagery I wanted to have in Christchurch). We had to figure out how to best integrate VFX into the film so it could amplify the experience without breaking your suspension of disbelief. For an indie film especially, the VFX tends to be where the lack of budget and expertise can really show, so we really worked to do what we could to make the VFX shots feel just as integrated in the world and cinematic language as the practical shots.

Can you tell us about the genesis of your science fiction film's concept and how it evolved into a full-fledged project?

The film started as an exploration of contemporary philosophy and science fiction; the works of Nick Bostrom, David Chalmers and many others gave me ideas and inspiration to build a cinematic world that embodied their ideas of how reality could work. We made a short film as a sort of trial run. Truth.exe. We were stoked with how this little film turned out, winning Best Student Film at the Miami Int'l Sci-Fi Film Festival as well as being in the Boston Science Fiction Film Festival and others around the world. When watching the Truth.exe, I realised that we had in fact made not a short film, but the opening to a feature film. And so, we decided to make the rest of the film. Though later down the line we ended up reshooting the scenes from the original short. But I can say there are a couple shots in the film that are from the 2019 short including the fish; so, I'm glad those elements have survived the cut.

What was the most rewarding aspect of bringing your vision to life on screen?

After we shot the scenes on Mt Cheeseman in the New Zealand Southern Alps, I showed the dailies to Kat Forrester (who plays Plato in the film). I remember her crying when she saw the footage and she told me "We really are making a proper movie aren't we!". This project has been made through the passion and dedication of local New Zealand filmmakers, artists, and students. But that was the first time it hit us that we really were making something more than just a "little, short film". And sitting down, watching the full cut, we finally had the chance to see our years of hard work poured into this feature length journey. For me, it was the feeling that I really had created my own world that exists beyond the bounds of the cinematic frame. This film doesn't give you all the answers and secrets of my world, because the world we had created is much bigger than the film. That is something I am proud of.

What was the collaborative process like?

As a director, you have this paradoxical sense of identity with your film. On one hand, it is your movie, it is your vision, it is your world. But on the other hand, it isn't your film at all but the creative force of everyone who put a little of themselves into it. Peter Liley's score has a musical breadth and presence that is a character of its own in the movie. Our cast from Kat Forrester to Roy Snow to Kathleen and Isayah, they all add something to the film that you alone cannot bring as a director or even as a writer. And Jack McConnell, who collaborated on the VFX with me on the film, we worked together very closely in devising and creating these surreal sequences. I am incredibly grateful for the hard work and creative care that everyone had put into this movie. I find the collaboration with others helps to empower you and your own creative vision as a director, in the right environment it doesn't have to be a battle.

What role did New Zealand play in the production, and how did the local environment influence your storytelling?

We're not aiming to tokenise (or Tolkien-ise) New Zealand as a brand in the film. But at the same time, this is a story set in Christchurch/Ōtautahi and I didn't want to pretend otherwise. We get a lot of films that are shot here to exploit our scenery but are then set in the US or some other setting (Power of the Dog, Mulan, Guns Akimbo, Pete's Dragon, Cowboy Bepop etc.). This film is set in post-earthquake Christchurch, New Zealand. We show some of the scenery, but we also show our quake-torn Cathedral, we show the old Malthouse Theatre, Lake Forsyth (which is suffering from toxic algae). I think this also helps to set our world apart from that of the Wachowski's Matrix films. We're not showing an uncanny, homogenous, fabricated metropolis city. Our world is a very real place with its own history and aesthetic, which I think plays into the metaphysics of The Bostrom Scenario and the philosophy of David Chalmers.

Were there any standout moments or challenges during production that were particularly memorable or transformative for you?

I was almost blown off a mountain in the Southern Alps of New Zealand, but that's a story for another day. Maybe I'll tell that one if we get a Disney+ spinoff haha. There are so many memorable challenges and moments we faced.

I remember our first day shooting the feature in the beginning of 2020 (about a month before the covid lockdown). We were shooting a small scene in the middle of the film at the back of the Malthouse Theatre. At this point, I had three whole years of filming ahead of me, but all I had at this point was this one little scene. I could have quit that night and it would have become just that small unfinished movie everyone has. If I wanted to get this film done, and done well, I needed to just focus on putting one foot in front of the other. Thinking about the scale of the project was too overwhelming for me, so I just focused on one scene and one shot at a time. We had a crazy number of challenges and setbacks on this film (as you do with any), covid amplified it further. But I learnt to just keep my head down and keep problem solving. A problem's only unsolvable if you let it be unsolvable.

Shooting the last chapter of the film was both a nightmare and a joy. Everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. It really tested me as an indie filmmaker to think outside the box and make the story still work with a crazy schedule that kept having to radically change every day. Almost every day, what we planned to film, couldn't be filmed that day for whatever logistical reason. But the joy was despite that (and sometimes because of that) we were getting scenes and footage that I was very excited about. All that stress and problem solving felt worth it.

What advice would you give to other aspiring directors, especially those embarking on their first independent feature film?

If you want to do a good job making a feature, you will need to spend years making it. I started developing the idea to this film as early as December 2017. That is six years of writing, prepping, filming, and post. And I believe the film benefited from that time and dedication. But this means that you need to have a story you care about very deeply, one that you are happy to spend years of your life working away at it. Cos if you don't care deeply about your story, how can you expect your audience to? But my other advice, is just give it a go. You'll never truly be ready enough to make it, so just get on with it!

Can you describe the process of securing funding and support for your film?

This film was financed through a combination of cumulative self-funding and crowdfunding. Because I was a student at the Ilam School of Fine Arts at the time of production, it allowed us access to a whole array of resources that made the project much more affordable. Which meant we could allocate the budget towards other aspects of the production to make the film feel believable and creatively compelling.

What distinguishes your science fiction film from others in the genre, both in New Zealand and internationally?

New Zealand cinema has always had a bizarre relationship with the genre film. The only canonical NZ science fiction film I can think of is Geoff Murphy's *The Quiet Earth*. Most other genre films in New Zealand are usually too scared to take itself seriously. We've always been a quiet country and don't like telling big stories set in Aotearoa/New Zealand. But I want to change that. I want to show that New Zealand can make the plot puzzle pictures akin to *Donnie Darko*, *Inception* or *Mulholland Drive*. And by bringing these stories to New Zealand, we can offer a setting and perspective that has its own creative identity separate to the genre films of Hollywood.

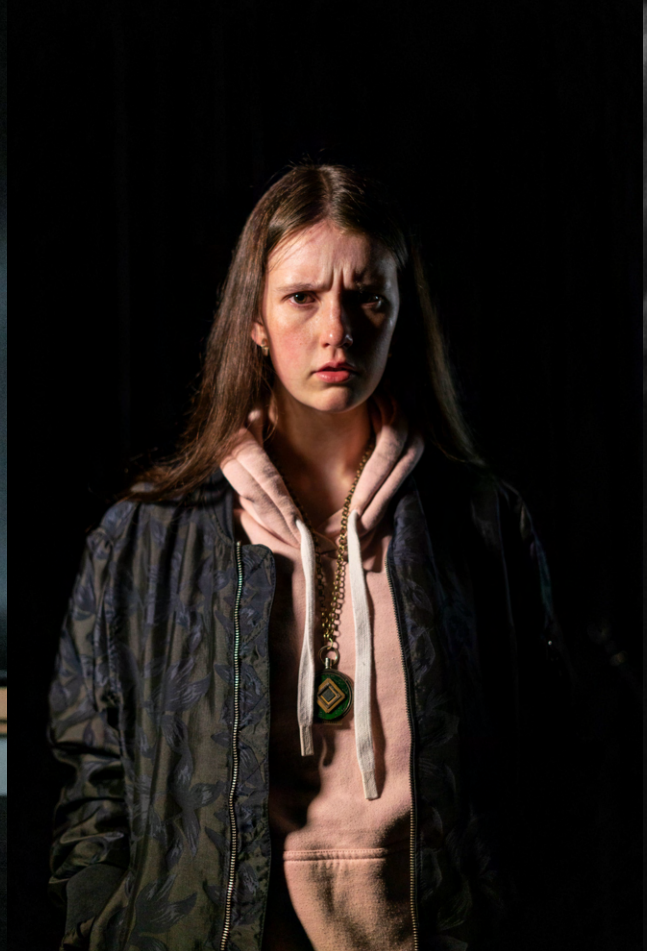
How do you hope your film will resonate with audiences, and what message or emotions do you want them to take away?

The real world is messy and confusing and enigmatic, so why should cinema be any different? For me, this film is about wanting to make sense of a world that is intrinsically complex and confusing. The film is not here to give you answers, that is for you to explore yourself. The film is what you make of it. You can see it as a fight between the ideals of truth and happiness. You can see it as an expression of covid anxiety and the seduction of conspiracy theories. You can see it as Christchurch and the denial of its own collective trauma. I hope though that the film will tap into people's curiosity and the spiritual need to pursue truth and enlightenment. It is a conviction not just for the religious, but for everyone. Pursuing truth is a fundamental human need.

What's next for you as a filmmaker? Any upcoming projects or goals you'd like to share?

I have several scripts written and in further development for pitching and funding. Both short films and feature films. This film was made for a tiny \$20,000 NZD (approx.). Our aim is to amp our budget with the next feature, get to \$100,000. Then go up and up from there. If this film is what we can pull off with only 20K, imagine what we could do with 100K!

PROMOTIONAL STILLS



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the **BOSTROM** *scenario*

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