

I Came By (2022) Anvari

P Michell, 2023

British crime thriller about a graffiti artist who home invades and discovers a secret that has serious consequences for his investigating further. Some murders occur. Few squeamish scenes.

Example of how small budget films are developed by Netflix.

Mostly young film makers and actors.

As in *The Last Bus* just screened, Hugh Bonneville is also acting against type and in a low budget film.

Creative Personnel

Babak Anvari – Producer / Director / Writer (11 credits)

British / Iranian. See below interview.

A BAFTA nominated, award winning filmmaker based in London. His feature debut ‘Under the Shadow’ premiered at Sundance Festival in 2016. He also worked for MTV UK and Ireland as one of the directors of MTV Live Sessions and rected live performance for renowned artists such as Lady Gaga, Florence & The Machine, Pixie Lott, Tinnie Tempah, etc.

Anvari (story) & Namsi Khan – script (6 credits)

Namsi Khan has gone from working in asset finance to having credits on some of the biggest international co-productions such as *Humans*, *The Night Manager* and *His Dark Materials*. She moved from Pakistan to Manchester in the 1990s with her pop star father. “*I wasn’t always sure I wanted to be a writer but I was very introverted and read a lot of books ...*” Listed as one of ten rising TV scribes to watch for in 2020.

Isobel Waller-Bridge – Music (15 credits)

Composed the soundtrack for the [BBC](#) comedy-drama series [Fleabag](#) (2016–2019), which was written by and starred her sister, [Phoebe Waller-Bridge](#).^[3] She also wrote the score for the feature films [Vita and Virginia](#) (2018) and [Emma](#) (2020).^{[4][5]} In 2021, she scored Netflix's [Munich: The Edge of War](#),^[6] which was released by Milan Records/Sony Music, and [The Phantom of the Open](#).

Waller-Bridge is also a performer, playing in venues such as the [St James Theatre](#) and [Union Chapel](#). In 2016, her music appeared on albums with the Icelandic composers [Ólafur Arnalds](#) and [Jóhann Jóhannsson](#).^[2] In 2021, she was commissioned by the [Philharmonia Orchestra](#) to write music for their *Human/Nature* series. Her piece, *Temperatures*, was premiered in November 2021, conducted by [Pekka Kuusisto](#) at the [Royal Festival Hall](#).

Kit Fraser - Cinematographer (26 credits)

Known for *Railway Children Return* (2022), *Phantom of the Open* (2021), *Eternal Beauty* (2019).

As a teenager, Kit thought he might be a graphic designer, but his teachers told him he couldn’t draw well enough. Instead, they encouraged him and his friends to use the school’s media facilities. Kit went on to study cinematography at Westminster Film School where he met some of his future collaborators, amongst them Babak Anvari, the director of Kit’s breakthrough feature *Under The Shadow*. Graduating in 2005, Kit went to work on music

videos and commercials until he was fluent in his craft. He notes that it isn't uncommon to clock 72-hour weeks on features, so it's important to love the projects you're working on. Kit has built an impressive portfolio that ranges from film to television features to commercials. Today, he specialises in high-end beauty and fashion commercials, a niche he has taken to primarily because of a focus on the quality of the final picture.

Hugh Bonneville – Blake (142 credits)

Hugely successful actor on TV, Cinema and Theatre. Acting against type in this film. Hugh Bonneville is a British actor, known for his stage work at the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company as well as the West End. His extensive film and television work includes *Twenty Twelve*, *W1A*, *Downton Abbey*, *Paddington*, *The Gold and I Came By*.

Trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, whose alumni include [Minnie Driver](#), [Matthew Goode](#), [Julian Fellowes](#), [Rupert Friend](#), [Sue Johnston](#), [Angela Lansbury](#), [David Macmillan](#), [Daniel Hunt](#), [Julia Ormond](#) and [Terence Stamp](#).

At home I have a Tibetan terrier. I'm still not sure if he's a genius or very thick. It's a fine line.

[on the appeal of [Downton Abbey \(2010\)](#)] *It's [Breaking Bad \(2008\)](#) with tea instead of meth.*

George McKay – Toby (49 credits)

Partly Australian – father's side. Both parents worked in theatre.

George worked with [Tim Roth](#), [Chiwetel Ejiofor](#) and [Sophie Okonedo](#) for the HBO Movie [Tsunami: The Aftermath \(2006\)](#) and later took a part in the Dickensian drama, [The Old Curiosity Shop \(2007\)](#). Soon after, George co-starred with [Daniel Craig](#) and [Liev Schreiber](#) on [Defiance \(2008\)](#). In 2009, George took on the role of Harry, in [The Boys Are Back \(2009\)](#) alongside [Clive Owen](#), for which he received 2 award nominations.

Percelle Ascott – Jameel 'Jay' Agassi (36 credits)

Zimbabwean-English actor and writer.^[1] He is known for his roles in the [CBBC](#) series [Wizards vs Aliens](#) (2012–2014) and the [Netflix](#) series [The Innocents](#) (2018). As a trio, Ascott collaborated with [Joivan Wade](#) and Dee Kaate on the web comedy *Mandem on the Wall* (2011–2013), the [E4](#) series [Youngers](#) (2013–2014), and the film [The Weekend](#) (2016).

Kelly MacDonald – Toby's Mother (61 credits)

Macdonald made her film debut in [Danny Boyle's](#) [Trainspotting](#) (1996). Her notable film roles include in the acclaimed films [Elizabeth](#) (1998), [Gosford Park](#) (2001), [Intermission](#) (2003), and [Nanny McPhee](#) (2005). She received a nomination for the [BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role](#) for her role in the [Coen brothers](#) film [No Country for Old Men](#) (2007). She also appeared in [Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2](#) (2011), [Anna Karenina](#) (2012), [T2 Trainspotting](#) (2017), and [Operation Mincemeat](#) (2021). She voiced [Princess Merida](#) in the [Disney Pixar](#) animated film [Brave](#) (2012).

Trivia

Recommended by Stephen King on Twitter.

Released in cinemas 19 Aug 2022, then Netflix streaming 31 Aug 2022.

Interview with the Director ‘I always make the films that I would rush to watch ...’

The director of *Under the Shadow* on his Hitchcockian home-invasion drama ...

Leila Latif, Aug, 2022

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/interviews/babak-anvari-i-always-make-film-that-i-would-rush-watch>

► **I Came By** is streaming on Netflix from 31 August.

Babak Anvari had his characters pursued by djinns in *Under the Shadow* (2016) and lacerated by a higher power in *Wounds* (2019). The British-Iranian director returns with a more human threat in thriller *I Came By*, in which his stated aim was to always “pull the rug from under the audience”. The story is one he’s had in mind since film school and thought would be the basis of his first feature: two best friends, Toby (George Mackay) and Jay (Percelle Ascott), spend their time breaking into the flats of the wealthy and corrupt and emblazoning their walls with their graffiti tag “I Came By”. While Jay has tired of their antics, Toby cannot resist visiting the home of ‘progressive’ high court judge Sir Hector Blake (Hugh Bonneville) – but he is unprepared for what he finds there.

Q The film’s twists involve the protagonist changing multiple times. Why?

A It was always part of my initial pitch that I wanted to do double *Psycho*. [Co-writer] Namsi Khan really helped me to navigate through the different points of view. I wanted to do a Hitchcock thriller in London, because we’ve slightly lost touch with Hitchcockian sensibilities in Britain even though he was British.

You call this a thriller, even though it is terrifying, while *Under the Shadow* you called a horror. Are those distinctions important?

My motto is: always make the film that I would rush to go and watch. Part of me likes to get terrified, even though I’m a massive wimp in real life. With *Under the Shadow* there was a lot of snobbery around being labelled horror. It’s much better now, but then people would tell me it ‘wasn’t really a horror’ as a compliment. With this one I’m drawing from classic thrillers as inspiration but I was also inspired by 90s slasher films. I’m glad it terrified you. I love suspense and I learned from the master how you can play with the audience knowing a bit more than the character. So they’re on the edge of their seats, covering their eyes saying, ‘Please don’t go there!’

Unlike Hitchcock, your thriller is set in a world with advanced police investigation techniques and a surveillance state. You can’t do what Hitchcock did and have Marion Crane – Janet Leigh’s character in *Psycho* (1960) – disappear so easily...

We had this lovely police adviser on the film and when I talked to him and to a few other people from the police force I learned that it’s not so different. If the police get called to a judge’s house, as soon as they find out that it’s a judge, especially a High Court judge, they will immediately be like, ‘OK, there’s only so much we can do.’ There are limitations

because there's still a hierarchy. I found that fascinating. In many ways actually I think our story gives them a bit more freedom to do things compared to the actual police force, because in reality, things are far more limited and complicated when it comes to these types of investigations.

Why did you add the detail of the judge sleeping in a single bed?

He's in his childhood bedroom. It's almost my Citizen Kane (1941) wink of when he goes back to his family home, he chooses not to sleep in the master bedroom where his father used to be and [instead, sleeps] in that tiny single bed. When we were filming it, my crew members said that it was really creepy and so I knew it was good.

So much of this film is about fathers, even in their absence.

It's related to the overall theme of how institutions fail us. Whether that is on a macro level like the government or the police, or on the micro level, like your family or friends. Everyone in this film has daddy issues. Toby's anger is so misguided because he's trying to take revenge on his father. It's one of the reasons he's targeting these people without the sincere political motives of Jay.

Twenty years after your initial idea, what was reshaped to make the film feel so politically current?

Sadly, we're still having the same struggles and mistrust when it comes to institutions and the people they protect. Details aside, what's changed is me. When I was younger, I was more like these angry young men who want to change the world and they don't know how to do it so it was a lot more earnest, the original idea. As I grew older, I realised that the world doesn't work like that, things are far more complex.

I'm obviously Iranian and Namsi [Khan], my co-writer, she's British-Pakistani. And with Percelle Ascott [who is Black] we're constantly talking about things that are in the film, and similar experiences at some points in our lives, which makes it a bit scary. I think the best way is to actually go there and show it because people still think, 'Oh that was the past,' you know? But it still happens to this day and it's sad. One of the things is to just basically hold mirrors up to it and say 'Look.' But you have to be mindful because it's hurtful to see.

Reviews

RogerEbert.com
Brian Tallerico, 2022

It's rare to accuse a Netflix thriller of being too ambitious but that's the case with [Babak Anvari](#)'s "I Came By," a mostly effective potboiler that has the opposite problem of so many mini-series on the streaming service in that it has a TV season worth of ideas crammed into its runtime. Thrillers are all about tension, but Anvari, the fascinating filmmaker behind the excellent "[Under the Shadow](#)" and bonkers "[Wounds](#)," keeps struggling with the balance between social commentary and old-fashioned genre thrills, mostly losing his hold on the latter. He constantly subverts expectations about where "I Came By" is headed by shifting POVs and jumping major passages in time, but it leads to a film that's uncertain of its own

identity, not quite able to wed its ideas with its execution. Having said that, there are some fun performances and clever themes in “I Came By,” two things that elevate it above a lot of the product coming out of the Netflix Thriller Factory.

[George MacKay](#) of “1917” plays Toby, a young graffiti artist who has the unique M.O. of not painting his art in public for everyone to see but in the private homes of the wealthy and powerful. With his buddy Jay ([Percelle Ascott](#)), Toby breaks into expensive homes and tags a wall with the phrase “I Came By.” Why? It’s not completely clear, but Toby probably likes to make those who are insulated from society realize that they’re vulnerable too. He will learn that isn’t always the case.

After Jay breaks up the duo because the pregnancy of his girlfriend makes him shift his priorities, Toby decides to do the next job alone. This leads him to the home of a former judge named Hector Blake ([Hugh Bonneville](#), relishing the opportunity to turn his stately demeanour into something menacing), who looks like an upstanding member of his community. Inside Blake's basement, Toby sees a light under a hidden door, and finds, well, you’ve probably seen “Don’t Breathe.”

However, this is not quite that movie as Toby doesn’t get into a battle of wills with Blake. “I Came By” shifts protagonists here to Toby’s mother (Kelly Macdonald), who grows increasingly concerned that her 23-year-old son has disappeared off the face of the earth. Her quest to find him leads her into the life of Jay, and Anvari and co-writer [Namsi Khan](#) have at least one more POV turn left to take as their film puts together the story of Blake’s dark secrets and Toby’s fate.

Anvari’s film almost seems more interested in its social consciousness than in raising the viewer’s heart rate. Blake is the kind of guy who can drop the name of his police chief buddy during an investigation in order to shield himself from inquiry. There’s an element of “I Came By” that isn’t so much about what happens behind closed doors as it is about how often powerful people can get away with murder in plain sight. Bonneville nails this kind of haughty malevolence—the kind that knows it’s too powerful to get in any trouble, right? In fact, his performance arguably shifts the balance of the film a bit too much in that the “good guys” don’t feel like they have enough character to counter it. MacKay is particularly shallow as Toby, although that could be part of the point. There’s a reading of this film that it’s about a young man making hollow gestures against a system that he hasn’t really taken the time to understand, or adequately fear.

“I Came By” is undeniably well-composed and entertaining enough for its missteps to be overlooked most of the time. Yes, it’s a rewrite short of greatness, but Bonneville makes it worth a visit even if its final needle drop over the credits is indicative of its shallowness. Yes, sure, “Everybody Wants to Rule the World.” What else is new?

Matt Fowler, 2022 (ign.com)

I Came By is a slow, wicked thriller that contains a handful of surprising breaks to convention. It's a small, unassuming film featuring [1917](#)'s George MacKay as a vandal who, after a streak of breaking into rich people's homes, accidentally picks the wrong target in a devious serial killer played by [Paddington](#) and [Downton Abbey](#)'s Hugh Bonneville. I Came

By's third act may devolve a little bit into slugfest territory, but overall this is a rather shifty and shocking game of cat(s) and mouse.

Aside from the perverse fun found in watching Bonneville get gruesome, *I Came By* is a neatly packaged crime story that unspools a rather morbid vigilante tale. Without digging too much into specifics, due to the aforementioned bending/breaking of traditional narrative structure, this is a film that's figured out a way to keep you engaged and guessing through a very simple story in a manner that also helps it stand apart from other maniac movies. Characters who you assume are supplemental at the start become integral as the acts progress.

MacKay and Percelle Ascott play Toby and Jay, childhood friends who, in adulthood, moonlight as renegade eat-the-rich graffiti artists who spray-paint "I CAME BY" on the penthouse walls of the wealthy and corrupt. After Jay bows out of their small two-person movement because he wants to focus on starting a family with his girlfriend ([Strike Back's](#) Varada Sethu), Toby plots to rob the estate of activist judge Sir Hector Blake (Bonneville) by himself. But down in Sir Hector's basement, Toby uncovers more than he bargained for.

In the tradition of movies like 2018's *Bad Samaritan*, 2016's [Don't Breathe](#), or even Hitchcock's *Psycho*, *I Came By* revels in the idea of a low-level rule breaker entering the wrong body of water and crossing paths with a truly dangerous shark. And Bonneville is [Dexter](#)-esque here (if, say, you were meant to hate Dexter Morgan) as a killer who seems to almost operate at his best when he's cornered.

Kelly Macdonald ([Boardwalk Empire](#), [Trainspotting](#)) plays Toby's mother, a therapist who has now wound up with a very "angry young man" in her house. The film touches on their mother/son rift, hinting that it has to do with Toby's late father and an inheritance she won't allow Toby to have, giving Toby a nice complicated center as someone who despises the rich but is also pushing away his mom because of money. Macdonald is great as an embattled working mom who gets caught up in her son's malicious misadventure.

And, of course, Bonneville is memorable as well as a monster whose sociopathic charm has a very short leash. You'll long to see Sir Hector take the fall here, even as the movie tries to make a clumsy point about false altruism making evil intentions. Plus, you'll actually learn more about why Sir Hector does what he does than you do about the other characters in the movie, which works because he's the whirlpool in the equation -- and everyone else starts to circle, and get sucked into, his torrent.

Verdict

I Came By is a small-but-gripping flick that takes a well-used premise and gives it enough narrative zest to provide a few surprises. With its casting and unconventional flow, *I Came By* creates a nicely frustrating atmosphere of the untouchable rich being able to get away with murder and a desperate desire to find answers to unknowable events.