

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2019

First Thai cave rescue movie promises thrills at Busan premiere

From flooded passages lit by headlamps to urgent voices echoing off cramped walls, the director of "The Cave"—the first big-screen retelling of Thai rescue operation—promises to capture the peril of the mission when it premieres at Busan International Film Festival. "No one is going to say, 'Oh that looks like a set,'" Thai-Irish filmmaker Tom Waller told AFP ahead of the Saturday debut at Asia's biggest film festival in South Korea. "Those who suffer from claustrophobia, there should be a warning... (you) might get a little bit anxious," he joked.

The 2018 mission to extract 12 young Thai footballers and their coach—known as the "Wild Boars"—from Tham Luang cave in northern Thailand captivated people around the world. After wandering into the complex during the rainy season, the team were trapped by floodwaters for 18 days before they were sedated, fitted with masks, and dragged to freedom through kilometers of narrow passageways.

Waller's challenge: to recreate the conditions of the dank, dark environment that made the rescue of the "Wild Boars" so harrowing and unprecedented. To do so he filmed in similar caves around Thailand and employed four of the rescue divers to star as themselves. "We had to deal with snakes, huge spiders," Waller said. The movie is hitting theatres ahead of bigger and better-financed projects, and he hopes the festival will give the independent film the profile it needs to go truly global.



This photo shows Belgian diver Jim Warny, who took part in the Thai cave rescue mission in 2018, speaking during an interview in Bangkok. — AFP

"Us being shown at Busan first, it's playing the film on a world stage," Waller said, adding that it will debut in Thailand in November after a festival tour. Appetite for the incredible tale remains strong more than one year after the operation as companies pump out books, shows, and documentaries. In the pipeline is a Netflix production from the producers of "Crazy Rich Asians" for which the rescued footballers were reportedly paid \$100,000 each.

National Geographic is stepping into the competition with a documentary by the team behind the Oscar-winning film "Free Solo". But Waller's film will have the advantage of being first to screen, and is taking a cinema verite approach. Four divers from Canada, China, Finland, and Belgium are acting in it under their real names, as is an American journalist who covered the saga. Ireland-based Belgian diver Jim Warny, who helped pull the team's coach out, said he had a flashback when they recreated the scene.

And he wants the film to inspire others to dream big. "I was afraid in the cave, I'm always afraid when I go cave diving," he said. "I see it as a duty to show people that they can do amazing stuff against the odds." — AFP



US - Palestinian model Gigi Hadid presents a creation by Chanel during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show at the Grand Palais in Paris. — AFP

ESPORTS A HARD SELL IN GRADES-OBSESSED SINGAPORE

In a country highly focused on academic achievement, Singaporean Galvin Kang Jian Wen did something almost unthinkable—he stopped studying as a teenager to spend more time playing computer games. He defied parental and social disapproval after his high school finals to pursue his dream of becoming an eSports champion, but believes the sacrifice has paid off as he heads with his national team to Southeast Asia's mini-Olympics.

Teenage gamers worldwide are shunning mainstream education in favor of spending hours tapping away on computers and phones, attracted by a booming eSports scene where prizes at major tournaments reach millions of dollars. But perhaps nowhere is the prospect of swapping textbooks for joysticks more daunting than in Singapore, which tops global education rankings and where striving for academic excellence is deeply ingrained in the national psyche.

Kang—who is his national side's coach and competes in multiplayer battle game Dota 2 under the moniker "Meracle"—said his belief in his own playing skills was so great he had the courage to what most would not dare. "I stopped studying and went to pursue this passion of mine," the 23-year-old told AFP at a Southeast Asian Games boot camp in Singapore, which was organized by the tournament's eSports partner, gaming hardware company Razer. "Obviously (my parents) were not very happy about my decision because nobody wants their kids to stop studying."

Education pressure

He is the exception, however, in a country known for a strict education system, a focus on getting good exam results and where a growing number of students go on to university or another form of tertiary education. The pressure starts as early as primary school, and critics say it has contributed to the growing incidence of mental illness

among the young, although the government is seeking to make things easier through steps like reducing exams.

The focus on education and a choice of well-paying jobs in the affluent country mean few are willing to pursue a career in the fledgling eSports scene—Singapore has only around 15 professional gamers. "Singapore is very focused on study," said the country's eSports association president Ng Chong Geng, recalling how when he gave a talk at a university, not a single student expressed an interest in becoming a professional player.

"Now more or less everyone graduates with some sort of degree... If you try to be an eSports athlete you have to give up on a lot of other opportunities." Players also complain the country's system of conscription—male citizens

undergo two years of national service from the age of 18 — is a hindrance for promising gamers who need time to develop their skills.

But after retirement?

Kang is not alone among players heading to the SEA Games, taking place in the Philippines in November and December, in having chosen to focus on gaming rather than study. "The thing that most changed me was quitting school so I can play for the whole day, play full time," said 17-year-old Thai Dota2 gamer Nuengnara Teeramahanon, who quit school aged 16. "I just did not want to study any more, I just feel like it's so boring."

However, the lack of qualifications could be a disadvantage for players when they retire, which can come at a young age in eSports. In some games, players can be finished by 23 as their reactions slow. Players from nine countries will compete in six titles at the SEA Games—Mobile Legends, Arena of Valor, Dota 2, Starcraft II, Tekken 7, and Hearthstone. Supporters hope the tournament could be a step towards a spot at the Olympics although that seems unlikely any time soon, with the venerable institution so far unenthusiastic about the discipline.

Players who cut short their education and made a success of eSports say their families have, for the most part, accepted their choice—although they stress they are not encouraging other gamers to follow their lead. Kang used to be part of a team in the United States, where his accommodation was paid for and he received a salary and prize money. He currently plays for a Thailand-based team. "Eventually they (my parents) were convinced," he said. "I could pay for my own food, live on my own." — AFP



This photograph shows participants attending an Esports bootcamp training session in Singapore. — AFP

'Sinatra of the East' Karel Gott dies at 80

Czech pop singer Karel Gott, who was a particular favorite in neighboring Germany where media once dubbed him the "Sinatra of the East", died at 80, his family said yesterday. "With the deepest sadness in my heart I announce that shortly before midnight on Tuesday my beloved husband Karel Gott passed away after a long and serious illness," his wife Ivana Gottova wrote on his website. "He passed away at home, in quiet sleep, surrounded by his family."

Gott revealed last month he was undergoing treatment for acute leukemia, years after recovering from a cancer. "Extremely sad news for our whole country. Karel Gott was a real artist who gave himself to others," said Czech President Milos Zeman. "Karel Gott gave his life to gen-

erations, he gave himself to us all," he added in a message tweeted by his spokesman. Prime Minister Andrej Babis said he would propose to cabinet to hold a state funeral for Gott at Prague's St Vitus Cathedral.

"Divine Karel" as he was known for his impeccable tenor voice, had been voted the most popular singer 42 times in the annual Golden Nightingale poll of Czech music fans. He released almost 300 records and CDs, selling dozens of millions of them. His hits include cover versions of Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman" and Alphaville's "Forever Young", but most were written by Czech composers. Born on July 14, 1939, Gott trained as an electrical mechanic before studying to be an opera singer.

He rose to stardom in the 1960s touring the US and what was then West Germany, and represented Austria in the Eurovision song contest. That was when German papers described him as the "Sinatra of the East". Gott managed to retain his popularity following the 1968 invasion of Prague by Soviet-led armies, a time when many singers were banned from the stage for political reasons. Gott, who was also a skilled painter and an occasional actor, won awards in countries including Germany, Poland and Russia. He had two daughters with his wife Ivana, 37 years his junior, as well as two older daughters with previous partners. — AFP



This photo in Hamburg shows Czech pop singer Karel Gott, performing on stage during the award ceremony of the reader's prize My Star of the Year. — AFP