

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

At the Whim of the Jungle

*Jessica Rothe, Kiana Madeira, and Mike P. Nelson crawled out of the Amazon with **Beware Boiúna**. At Fantastic Fest, they talked patina, cringe, and the day a caiman shoot went to hell.*

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Official theatrical poster. Courtesy Lionsgate.

The inflatable snake floated above the line of moviegoers at the entrance to the Alamo Drafthouse.

Fantastic Fest does that to a premiere. It does not wait for you to be ready. It puts the joke, the shrine, and the dare over the door and asks whether you meant it. Director Mike P. Nelson meant it. So did Jessica Rothe and Kiana Madeira, who had never been to this particular circus before and spent the morning after the *Beware Boiúna* premiere trying to metabolize the noise.

“This is my favorite fest,” Nelson told Paul Salfen the next day, still a little wrecked from a sleepless night. He had been here before with *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night*. He could not be in two places at once. He could, however, watch a giant fake serpent bob over a room full of people who had just watched a much less fake one try to eat his cast. “When you came here and that big inflatable snake was there,” Salfen said, “you’re like, all right, we did it.”

They did it in the actual jungle.

Beware Boiúna — Lionsgate, R-rated, 104 minutes, in theaters October 2 — follows a medical mission deep in the Amazon that wakes something older than the mission, older than the road surveyors, older than the gold camps. Boiúna, mother of the waters in the folklore the film

borrowed and then weaponizes, hunts on land and in the river. She does not care who brought the medicine. She decides who lives.

Rothe plays Alli, the bighearted medical student who steps off the boat smiling like the place has been waiting for her. Madeira plays Lena, the mechanic who grew up in that green and left it for reasons the jungle has not forgotten. Logan Marshall-Green, not in the room for this conversation, plays Brennan, the man who would be the villain in a dumber movie and is something more complicated here. Nelson, coming off the *Wrong Turn* reboot and last year's *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night* remake, shot the picture in and around Leticia, Colombia, where Peru, Brazil, and Colombia meet on the water and the heat does not negotiate.



Kiana Madeira as Lena and Jessica Rothe as Alli. Courtesy Lionsgate.

CHILD US, GROWN UP

“Ten-year-old Jessica would have been like, wait, I get to do what? I get to be in a movie in the Amazon?” Madeira said. “My brain would have just exploded.”

Rothe did not argue the point. “You win,” she said. Then, because this is the kind of set that makes a person revise the childhood fantasy in real time: “When we grow up, we think, how cool would it be to be in a movie and be on a TV set? And then you get there and then you go, oh man, maybe this isn’t so fun. And sometimes it is, sometimes it’s not.” She had been looking at the footage the night before with mixed feelings that resolved, as they tend to on a good premiere morning, into the only sentence that matters. “It was great what came out of it. But yeah, there’s a lot of creepy crawlies out there.”

They still told Salfen to go.

“We’re telling everyone you should go to the Amazon,” Rothe said. “Even though our film is obviously scary and some crazy stuff happens. Like Mike’s been saying, we all went and we all came back. It’s a beautiful experience. So if you can go, definitely go.”

A FILM YOU CAN PUT YOUR HAND ON

Nelson would not sand that down into a tourism board. He likes a film you can put your hand on. “A lot of my films are a little bit more on the gritty edge of filmmaking,” he said. “I like when my films have a patina to them — you feel like you rub your hand on it and you know it’s going to either stick to it or feel like sandpaper or you’re going to go, ick.” The snake helped. The location did the rest. “You’re at the whim of the jungle. And I think that’s why we got the movie that we got. So much of it influenced, just being there, what the film ended up being.”

That is the whole thesis, if a giant-snake picture is allowed to have one. Not how do we show a hundred-foot reptile. How do we tell a story that has one in it, in a place that will punish anyone who treats the place like a backdrop. Production notes from Lionsgate put a number on the creature — roughly 100 feet long, three and a half feet across, designed with Bogotá’s Folks VFX from green-anaconda reference and Titanoboa fossil math — but Nelson’s on-the-record instinct at Fantastic Fest was smaller and meaner. Hide it. Let water and canopy do work. Let the jungle be the co-director that does not take notes.

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— Mike P. Nelson

Rothe and Madeira felt the other half of that bargain: a room that wanted them specifically because they love this junk.

“Neither of us have ever been to Fantastic Fest,” Madeira said, “but just the reception and the joy and the energy that everyone is bringing — it truly seems like we are in a place with people who just love this. Love to geek out over all things horror and all things, kind of like, whatever your niche may be. It’s just an honor to be in a place where people are just like, their freak flag fly.”

Salfen had seen Ida Frankenstein walking the halls the night before. That is the house style here. He used it the way he always does, turning the love back on the people who made the thing and asking what they would tell the sparring filmmakers and aspiring actors in the dark.

DON'T BE PRECIOUS

Nelson did not dress it up.

“You have to create,” he said. “I know that sounds very rudimentary, but go and try it. It’s hard no matter what it is. It’s one thing for me to tell you you just have to go and make stuff. That even for me is still one of the hardest things to actually just sit down and do. You start getting into your head. You start overthinking things. The most fun that I have when I’m creating is when I can leave that aside and I can just say, fuck it. I’m just going to put this down and it’s probably going to be terrible. That’s also a hard thing to do. But it is so necessary to find greatness in telling your story.”

Then the part he wanted carved on a wall.

“Make stuff and then don’t stop making stuff. Don’t be precious about anything. Make something and throw it out to the world. Let the world eat it, eat it up, spit it out, cannibalize it, whatever. But just make sure that the world is able to take it in, because then you are honestly a thousand steps ahead of everybody else.”

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— Mike P. Nelson

Rothe ran the same current through acting.

“Just do the thing,” she said. “The beauty of the generation that we live in is you can get friends together and put something on camera. You can do a play. There’s so many plays that exist that are written there for you to start developing characters and just diving into the craft. And even if you’re further along in your career now, you’re deciding on what projects to take on. Try not to be too precious. Just have fun. Remember the heart of why you want to do what you do.”

A lot of that heart, for her, is childlike on purpose. Curious. Fearless. The opposite of the feed.

“With social media, this fear of cringe is way too prevalent,” Rothe said. “Who cares about people who are going to be hating on you doing what you want to do? You might not be the best at the start or the end, but are you having fun? Do you love it? And if you do, keep doing it. And let’s be real here — the people who hate everything aren’t creating anything.”

She keeps a smaller rule for the days when love is not loud enough. “One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was, every single day do three things for your career.” Gym. Coffee with someone you want to work with. A play. A page. Thirty minutes of thinking. Big or small. “If you do three things every single day for your art, for your craft, for your career, you inevitably will move forward. At the end of the day, this is a job that takes perseverance.”

She reached for Chekhov because of course she did. Nina’s monologue in *The Seagull*: acting is not the fame she dreamed. It is faith in the craft, and the long walk through the low years. “All three of us have had really high highs and really low lows,” Rothe said. “You just got to keep that moment. Slowly, one step at a time.”

Let’s be real here — the people who hate everything aren’t creating anything.

— Jessica Rothe

WHAT YOU’RE RUNNING FROM

Salfen asked the question the movie itself asks when the water goes black. When it is go time — face to face with the snake, in the river, in the scene that will not wait — what do you tell yourself?

Rothe did not reach for a locker-room speech.

“If I’m lucky, we’re in the moment enough all together that I don’t have to necessarily hype myself up, especially once we’re in the thick of filming,” she said. There were nights of push-ups and jumping jacks, cheap tricks to shove the body back into panic. Underneath the tricks, a cleaner pair of questions. “It always comes down to, especially in a horror movie: what am I running from and what am I running to? What are the fears that my character is trying to get away from? What are the things that they are aspiring to get to that are important to them? If you keep those two things in mind, I think you’ll at least have some semblance of it.”

Madeira had the same map and a different weather system. Lena is hardened. Alli is not. The script Alan McElroy wrote from a story he shared with Tony Giglio gave both women enough interior life that the actresses did not have to loot their own biographies every time the camera rolled.

“We were blessed with such great material,” Madeira said. “What they wrote for us was so much to work with that a lot of times it didn’t feel like we had to be drawing from something of a personal experience. If you could just tap into the mindset of your character and be kind of dipped in that way. Our characters had a lot going on. There was a lot to work with there, so just being grounded in that was very helpful.”

Nelson’s version of go-time is a surrender he has to relearn on every picture.

“I love the organic process of filmmaking, but there’s also these ideas of, I want things a certain way,” he said. “I always have to remind myself that in filmmaking, that’s not always going to happen. Especially with this project, I learned very early on that the more that you can embrace the things that you’re not expecting — or the things that, in this case, the jungle is allowing us to do — it’s going to give you something that’s even better than what you were expecting. Embrace those imperfections and those unexpected moments and run with it.”



The jungle does not give notes. Courtesy Lionsgate.

THE CAIMAN DAY

They had a receipt.

“I even remember the caiman scene,” Rothe said. “That day did not go. That was a fucking nightmare. That day did not go how we thought it was going to go. It was really, really hard. There were all kinds of technical issues happening. There were safety issues happening. It was incredibly hot. The sun was setting. Everything that could have gone wrong was kind of going wrong. Yet you look at the scene and it’s so visceral and alive, and I don’t think anyone watching the movie would ever know that that day Mike was on the side being like, oh.”

Nelson did not fight the memory. “That was flexibility. That was one of the harder days for sure. Yeah, that was intense.”

They made it to the premiere anyway. They did not get eaten by a snake. “We survived,” someone said, which in this genre is both a joke and a production report.

Salfen sent them back into the festival the way Fantastic Fest likes to send people back into the festival. Get some beer. Get some barbecue. Stay tuned. The movie they dragged out of the Amazon — the one with the patina you can feel, the one that hides its god in the water until it is too late — opens wide on October 2.

Ten-year-old Jessica would still explode. Adult Jessica would tell her to pack more water, do three things before lunch, and not be precious about the take that goes to hell. The jungle, as Nelson and his crew kept reminding each other on the river, does not take notes. That is why the movie works.

FIND BEWARE BOIÚNA

Beware Boiúna — only in theaters October 2, 2026, from Lionsgate.

Directed by Mike P. Nelson. Screenplay by Alan McElroy. Story by Tony Giglio and Alan McElroy.

Starring Kiana Madeira, Jessica Rothe, and Logan Marshall-Green.

Runtime 104 minutes. Rated R for bloody violent content, some grisly images, and language.

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Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, September 2026.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.