

Vieentives

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*Joshua
Morgan.*

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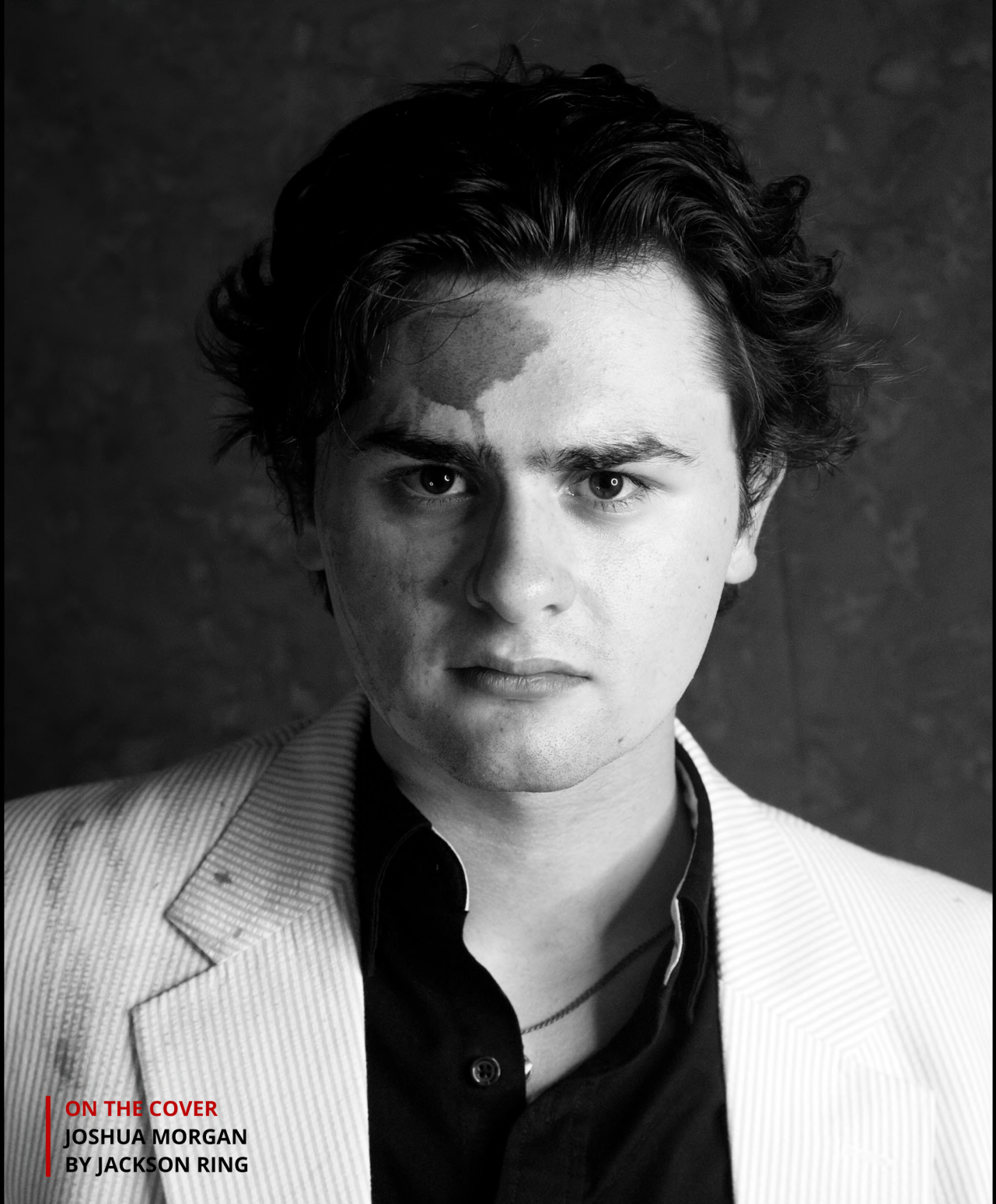
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NO. 149 - OCTOBER 2022

FEATURES



ON THE COVER
JOSHUA MORGAN
BY JACKSON RING



*Joshua
Morgan.*

Editor's Letter

Welcome to **VIEWTIES**, a digital magazine written for the fans, the talent, and the art lovers who loyally read every issue. Each month, we select and organize features that will resonate with you and will inspire your self-welling journey. We hope to facilitate the connection between you and your favourite artists, find the beauty behind the lens and hope that you will enjoy the experience as you read the pages of our magazine. Remember this is a fast-read digital publication to celebrate art and value the talent, to know the other side of the story, one artist at a time.

Don't miss any of our issues, as **Viewties** goes on bringing you the latest on film and television, introducing artists whose passion is to make you feel something with their work and dedication that brings a project / character to life requires. As I always say, If I can take something from my job, I believe you will take something from it too. Enjoy the ride and prepare your heart for being touched by our content.

Happy month!

Vanessa Miraglia

Founding editor-in-chief
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Joshua Morgan.

VIEWTIES sits down with the lovely and talented actor and director **Joshua Morgan** to discuss his directorial debut in **Children Of The Pines**, produced by **Lucas A. Ferrara**.

Filmed in **Oregon** during the pandemic (March, 2021), "**Children Of The Pines**" follows the story of *Riley*, a junior in college, who is persuaded by her estranged parents to visit during winter break, only to find they have taken up a supernatural practice to fix the deep-rooted issues plaguing their family. The film is currently doing a festival circuit, with additional footage being shot with a second unit in the coming months to add to the narrative.

In our conversation, the 19 years old explains his interest in the genre, making clear that he's into providing something new to the genre, something that feels fresh and unique. He finds it important to constantly take risks and tell a story in a way he hasn't seen yet. He also shares his experience and thoughts about filming his first feature film and anticipates what's next for him!



V: Before we chat about your directorial debut, I would like to start our conversation by talking about your introduction to the cinema. What was the piece of work that you feel got you started in your profession? Was it a particular film, or was it doing it that inspired you and motivated you to pursue this art?

JOSHUA: Strangely enough, I felt that my start in filmmaking came from doing it before knowing anything about the medium. When I was in elementary school, I began making shorts on a little pocket camera with my friends. Of course, they were only the product of messing around or trying to make others laugh at the time. Over time, the dots began to connect that there are those who are not only able to do this for a living, but are able to tell beautiful stories that are completely immersive and build new worlds from the ground up. One of the first films that ever did that for me, was when I watched "The Shining" in middle school. It felt as though there was a certain kind of precision to every move and moment. The brilliant performances by Shelly Duvall and Jack Nicholson will be forever cemented as some of the best work within the genre, in my opinion. Within the realm of horror, movies such as Mulholland Drive, Possession, The Brood, and Invasion Of The Body Snatchers stand out as some of my all-time favorites because of their otherworldly atmosphere and puzzling, symbolic narratives. The kind of films I continuously seek out, revisit, and the ones I intend to make, are those that feel ambiguous in their motivations but are felt on the most guttural level.

V: You were one of those artists affected when the pandemic hit, in that your projects came to a halt. What was your fear at that moment; did you come to think that maybe you wouldn't be able to go on doing what you love?

JOSHUA: It was during the height of the pandemic that things started opening up for me. When things shut down, I was still a junior in high school with only a few student films under my belt. The experience making those all throughout my late-teenage years was one of the most exciting >>>

<<< times of my life where there was total openness to experimentation. When I couldn't regularly meet with my peers it was devastating. I started making an iPhone feature film around the house to pass the time and was even able to have a friend edit, remotely, by sending all the footage to him. There was a certain point in quarantine when I felt so disconnected from the world, and the judgment of others, that anything was possible. With all that time on my hands, I wanted to challenge myself to take on something large and special. It was during the lockdown, when I joined forces with Producers Lucas A. Ferrara and Danielle J. Bowman (who also plays Kathy in the film) and found our cast and crew online, raised funds, and executed a COVID-safe shoot in Oregon.

V: It leads me to my next question about dealing with rejection, criticism, and expectations. How do you look after yourself when facing these negative aspects of your job?

JOSHUA: That is still something I'm trying to figure out. What I know, at this point, is there are a million different perceptions of you, your work, and what you are trying to convey. And you certainly can't control the actions or words of others. The one thing you can do, is choose the people you work with and let into your life. More important than the people you have in your inner circle when you first start out, are the people who you continuously choose to surround yourself with that will build you up when the rest of the world is telling you that what you did, or want to do, is wrong, juvenile, or incomplete. At the end of the day, the work I choose to take on are projects that feel special to me and are the kind of movies I would like to see being made. Maybe it's wishful thinking, but in times of doubt, I remind myself that although some might not enjoy the execution, I can sleep well at night knowing every moment was carefully plotted out and effectuated in a way that made complete sense to me. As long as I know I did my best to find the purpose of everything captured in the frame, everything after that is simply up to someone's own objective taste.



V: Let's talk about your directorial debut in *Children of the Pines*. How did this story come to you, and why did you feel the need to tell it?

JOSHUA: The absolute first thing that came to me was a haunting image of a young child murdering their parents in a large house with massive windows, somewhere in the middle of the woods, late at night. Where this came from is beyond me, but something about that visual felt like it could be attached to an equally disturbing narrative while presenting a more profound subtext for relinquishing some aspect in your life you might feel holds you back. The story itself followed quickly after. It didn't develop around the image, itself, but what it meant to me on a moral scale. After I had written the initial draft, my girlfriend was starting her first year of college which also meant that would be our first year of a long-distance relationship. While there is absolutely no resemblance to any of the characters to any of the people in my life, I viewed the narrative as an almost nightmare scenario if I were not able to find my own footing following what could have been an untimely end to a beautiful thing. Upon rewrites, rehearsals, and the shooting days, my direction for the characters of Riley (Kelly Tappan) and Gordon (Vas Provatakis) felt quite easy for me. As to any overarching significance as to why this story should be told, I feel that relationships -- platonic or not -- don't have to maintain their strength to be worthy of remembrance. It's more about the foundation they were built upon and the point in your life they impacted the most. A large part of the film is based on the idea that your soul is simply an embodiment of the most impactful parts of your life. Oftentimes for better ... or worse.

V: While watching the film, I felt seduced by its aesthetics. What was your vision for this project? Did you visualize the way you wanted the film to look while >>>

<<< you were writing it?

JOSHUA: The kinds of films I love are not only those with a strong sense of atmosphere but that are heightened visually and in tone. At the end of the day, it's about throwing the audience headfirst into a world that establishes whether it is reality or a heightened version. I knew from the start that *Children of the Pines* could only exist in this dark fairy tale-like world, based on its bizarre premise, location, and fatally flawed characters. We were very fortunate to have our DoP, Ben Bach, on this project who brought his own technical and artistic wisdom to the table when collaborating on each composition. We spoke about tons of films we admired, which tended to be a great deal of horror from the '70s, '80s, and some of the more recent indie horror over the last five or so years. Another huge influence was the entire feel of *The Twilight Zone* series. This led to having a very active camera on set, which at times had a theatrical-like composition. There is a scene in *Paths of Glory I* adore, where the camera is a ballroom-like dance with the scene motivated by intention and nothing else. *Children of the Pines* is a movie with a rather passive protagonist, so it's a nice contrast to have the camera constantly affected by the action around it and choosing whether to investigate or escape from it. When writing, there are many moments where you can only power through a scene if you can clearly picture the overall look it will have upon completion. I am a believer that everything needs to be working in tandem with the writing. That is, without a doubt, not a very unorthodox belief, but it is a priority that the frames must compliment the moment or piece of dialogue being portrayed. This did lead to an over-saturated shot list that couldn't have been fully incorporated over the course of our week-long shoot, but because I wrote many scenes with an already visual intention, finding quick compromises wasn't as massive of a hurdle as it could have been.

Any kind of respect I have been shown, is not because of the work I do, but because of how I conduct myself. The first couple of days on a set was rough for all involved. We had a small cast and crew, a young director, and a low budget. At that point, everything was still a learning experience for me and unfortunately there were times on some of my other early sets when egos got in the way and, because of that, an otherwise difficult environment was elevated to a plain terrible one. But time after time, I have done my best to keep people happy, moving, inspired, and worked quickly to resolve problems. Respect from a crew doesn't come from the ideas you have on set but from how it's managed and the attitude you have towards others. As I am just now entering adulthood, and looking back on this project, the one thing that has always gotten me through difficult situations, either with people or a project itself, is the belief that once must foster a healthy, creative work environment, and one filming is wrapped, it will yield a vision I deemed to be worthy for audiences to enjoy. Young artists are some of the most important minds out there for that exact reason. Their experience has been untouched by the scope of any prior work, allowing an undiluted imagination to run free. While that can certainly be a recipe for disaster, if you work with people who want you to succeed and will guide you throughout the process, no matter their role in the crew hierarchy, you are destined to surmount any challenges.

V: What was the hardest scene for you to shoot or that you felt required more work and that you needed to pay more attention to?

JOSHUA: That's a tricky question, only because I went into this production without the experience to judge how much time certain scenes would take to set up and film. As the shoot continued, it quickly became apparent what hurdles were ahead and quickly needed revision. Any of the scenes taking place in the living room, here you are bouncing back between multiple characters, became tricky. I needed to make sure we were capturing all the footage to complete the scene as intended while sticking stylistically to a very established look. >>>

<<< Our 1st AD, Madison Bowman, would sit down with me in between takes alongside our DoP, to see what moments could be combined within a single take. This process allowed us to keep the camera work interesting, permitted the actors to play through the scene fluidly, and gave the crew enough time to set up. Overall, the hardest scenes to shoot, in my experience but especially with this project, have been the ones where time is working against you. No matter how prepared you think you are, only experience will allow you anticipate the unexpected.

V: I like that you're all about creating characters in heightened realities where the plot only serves as a symbolic representation of an internal struggle. It makes the horror genre feel deeper than people think it is. As a writer myself, I agree that horror is a bridge to tell many meaningful stories, just like any other genre. So, besides your influences, what other things inspire you to be genuine and realistic in your storytelling? How do you avoid copying, and what do you do to be authentic?

JOSHUA: I love the idea of directors having a specific look or feel to their work, but any time I try to force a signature style to my visuals or writing, the harder it is to be truthful to what the moment calls for. My approach is to be authentic by combining different thought processes. My process includes reflecting on the intention of scenes that I admire from other films and emulating the same feeling they gave off whether that be by way of the camera work, dialogue, or scene structure, but in a way that could be considered possibly unconventional. Same goes for the more realistic aspects of the film. How can those moments take on new or elevated meanings? What would be the emotional result of shooting a terrifying plot point from an unflinching point of view or a simple conversation captured in such a way that visually draws attention to itself in a way the words could not? My inspiration, for keeping things fresh and within a realm I feel is unique, is to do everything in my power to add as much information into a scene as possible, subtle or not. Depends on what the project calls for.



V: What was the cast like to work with, and what was the experience like guiding them in their job?

JOSHUA: The cast was an absolute dream team. In our Backstage casting call, we got some 3,700 submissions for the four main roles. My entire time was consumed viewing self-tapes, meeting actors over Zoom, holding “chemistry tests.” The whole nine yards. These actors showed time-after-time they are not only open to direction, but intelligent enough to bring their own character perspectives to the table. After they were cast, we held Zoom rehearsals, over four months, before our shoot. It was during that time that I worked with the actors both together and separately to break down the script in pieces to find out who these characters really were, at their core. A lot of the conversations revolved around what their history could have entailed. During the shoot, the cast became like family, as we were all staying in this little cabin together in the middle of nowhere, Oregon. Their kindness and enthusiasm sparked an energy that not only created a wonderful environment, but made us feel we were a part of something special because of their intense performances. For that, I will be forever grateful, and a new bar is set for what I look for in any actor.

V: In what way do you believe this experience has helped you grow as a filmmaker?

JOSHUA: This experience helped put things into perspective, particularly as to the growth and resilience needed to succeed in this crazy business. This was my first large project and thank God, at the very least, we got the thing completed. I am so proud of the work we did, but at the end of the day, this is only my first of many more endeavors. Looking back on the set, the amazing crew, and the film itself, the most I hope for with a first feature – especially at this point in my life -- is that it gives a preview of the themes and stories that I am eager to explore in future films. *Children of the Pines* allowed me to flex a creative muscle that had not otherwise been used on smaller projects done on a true shoestring budget. There is so much time and sacrifice needed to get a project completed and that has taught me to be painstakingly selective of >>>

<<< the future projects I will take on. Another thing is to always prioritize your own mental health, and nurturing your personal relationships, instead of working yourself to death. Over the course of the project, there have been numerous times where the people I love, and trust, have gotten me through times of doubt. Filmmaking has not only helped me grow my craft but to develop as a human being. There are so many ups and downs that it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture and to let that all that “noise” get the better of you. But if you want to make it in the long haul, crumbling under your own self-image will only set you back.

V: Before we wrap up this interview, I would like you to tell us more about your new dark comedy short film entitled “Tapioca”. It is currently in the last stages of post-production and co-produced, written, directed, and performed by you. Any advance you can give about that?

JOSHUA: *Tapioca* was another interesting challenge, as I had never produced a film before, let alone on the same scale as *Children of the Pines*. The other aspects of the process, like pre-production, were quite like how I structured it all in the past. Going back to my claim about making sure you're taking on projects you're passionate about to push through the hard work, *Tapioca* is precisely that. Also co-produced with my friend, Lucas A. Ferrara, it's a fun, over-the-top farce revolving around two older men sharing a semi-private assisted-living suite. While the guys can't agree on much, the one thing they have in common is a love for pudding. However, when a volunteer nurse claims the dessert is no longer being served, a tonal switch can be felt, as we venture into a bizarre buddy comedy as the two men investigate the cause. The cast was tremendous to work with, as they all brought their own wisdom and comedic flair to the table. As for my performance, it was a blast to step back into my acting roots and push just how zany I can portray a character. It's a far sight away from anything I've ever made, and that offered a great opportunity to experiment with story structure, world building, and comedy, in general. The film is now being scored and on track to have a festival run throughout 2023-2024.”



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