

NETFLIX

BLACK MIRROR

Season Six

PRESS PACK

A Netflix Series

Produced by Broke & Bones



Remember, no matter how dark the world gets, there's always BLACK MIRROR.

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Paapa Essiedu - Gaap

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Udo Kramer - Production Designer (all eps)

Ally Pankiw - Director (*Joan is Awful*)

Bisha K. Ali - Co-Writer (Demon 79) and EP (*Demon 79 & Joan is Awful*)

Jina Jay - Casting Director (all eps)

Jeanie Bacharach - Co-Casting Director (*Joan is Awful*)

KEY CREDITS AND INFORMATION

Release Date: June 2023

Episodes: 5 Episodes x 1 hour

Writer/Creator: Charlie Brooker

Executive Producers: Charlie Brooker, Jessica Rhoades, Annabel Jones, and Bisha K.

Ali

Starring: Aaron Paul, Anjana Vasana, Annie Murphy, Auden Thornton, Ben Barnes, Clara Rugaard, Daniel Portman, Danny Ramirez, David Shields, Himesh Patel, John Hannah, Josh Hartnett, Kate Mara, Michael Cera, Monica Dolan, Myha'la Herrold, Paapa Essiedu, Rob Delaney, Rory Culkin, Salma Hayek Pinault, Samuel Blenkin and Zazie Beetz.

SERIES SYNOPSIS

Expect the unexpected. The long-awaited return of Charlie Brooker's dark, satirical anthology series, which reinvents itself in each new season, with five new episodes sure to surprise and shock. The sixth season of BLACK MIRROR is the most unpredictable, unclassifiable, and unexpected yet. Remember, no matter how dark the world gets, there is always BLACK MIRROR.

EPISODE CREDITS

Episode 1: Joan Is Awful

Director: Ally Pankiw

Writer: Charlie Brooker

Starring: Annie Murphy, Salma Hayek Pinault, Michael Cera, Himesh Patel, Rob Delaney, Ben Barnes

Episode 2: Loch Henry

Director: Sam Miller

Writer: Charlie Brooker

Starring: Samuel Blenkin, Myha'la Herrold, Daniel Portman, John Hannah, Monica Dolan

Episode 3: Beyond the Sea

Director: John Crowley

Writer: Charlie Brooker

Starring: Aaron Paul, Josh Hartnett, Kate Mara, Auden Thornton, Rory Culkin

Episode 4: Mazey Day

Director: Uta Briesewitz

Writer: Charlie Brooker

Starring: Zazie Beetz, Clara Rugaard, Danny Ramirez

Episode 5: Demon 79

Director: Toby Haynes

Writers: Charlie Brooker and Bisha K. Ali

Starring: Anjana Vasana, Paapa Essiedu, Katherine Rose Morley, David Shields

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

JOAN IS AWFUL

An average woman is stunned to discover a global streaming platform has launched a prestige TV drama adaptation of her life -- in which she is portrayed by Hollywood A-lister Salma Hayek.

LOCH HENRY

A young couple travel to a sleepy Scottish town to start work on a genteel nature documentary - but find themselves drawn to a juicy local story involving shocking events of the past.

BEYOND THE SEA

In an alternative 1969, two men on a perilous high-tech mission wrestle with the consequences of an unimaginable tragedy.

MAZEY DAY

A troubled starlet is dogged by invasive paparazzi while dealing with the consequences of a hit-and-run incident.

DEMON 79

Northern England, 1979. A meek sales assistant is told she must commit terrible acts to prevent disaster.

Charlie Brooker - Writer and Creator

What was your approach to the sixth season of BLACK MIRROR?

With this series, I wanted to throw out some of the core assumptions of what a BLACK MIRROR episode is. When we started doing the show, there weren't many dystopian sci-fi shows around. These days, you can't hurl a smartphone across a room without hitting three dystopian sci-fi shows. With season six, there has been a conscious effort to rip up the rule book, keep it unpredictable for viewers, and maybe expand its remit.

In some ways, this season starts very traditional BLACK MIRROR and gets weirder as the series goes along. There are episodes this season that I am intrigued to see how the audience reacts to, because we have done things that we have never done before.

I also believe that all five episodes have some of the strongest endings we have ever done. I hope people don't spoil too many details because BLACK MIRROR always works best when viewers go in completely blind. If you go in blind, you'll be surprised.

And lastly, more than ever in this series, I feel we have a greater variety of stories because each episode is so radically different in terms of setting and tone.

What is your writing process, and how do you generate ideas?

My writing process is a slow-motion combination of panic and bewilderment. It's like solving a maths problem or a Wordle - there are plot mechanics you're trying to work out, but ultimately it involves me sitting in a small room in Ealing, typing. I've learnt you must trick yourself while doing your first draft because a voice in your head always says, 'This is shit, give up, go away. You're at home already, go to another room'. You must convince yourself that you'll get there in the end.

As for ideas themselves - they're sort of like welcome intruders. The seed of an idea often pops up unexpectedly when I'm in the middle of doing something else - watching TV, going for a run, nattering with a friend - often when I'm brainstorming a *different* idea I suddenly find I've thought of a different, more interesting one. Then of course you've got to work out how to make a story out of it. That's the really tough bit. Sometimes I find I have a concept at the back of my mind for literally years, but I can't think of a story to attach it to. And then suddenly it'll come to me out of the blue.

I think the best, most surprising ideas emerge when you're relaxed and ostensibly supposed to be thinking about something else, and suddenly your mind wanders into a room it hadn't planned on entering. Something like ChatGPT can't do that. It has no genuinely original ideas of its own: it hoovers up material other people have already written - without paying them for the privilege -- and attempts to pass itself off as human. And in doing so it churns out stuff that's either generic or derivative. I can see its eventual potential value as part of a human writer's toolkit - a sort of author's equivalent of the 'autofill' tool in Photoshop - but certainly for now the stuff it creates only looks imaginative to people with no imagination of their own.

Over the years, BLACK MIRROR has generated a huge fanbase. Why do you think it has been so successful?

I hope because people enjoy the stories and find them entertaining - I hope it's as simple as that. From the beginning, it's had a tone to it, unlike most other things that have been around on TV. I'm the worst possible judge of why people like the show.

Do you think of the fanbase of BLACK MIRROR when writing, or does it impact your creativity? This season, more than any other, has had me thinking about what exactly BLACK MIRROR is. In terms of audience expectation, you could easily end up in a rut by doing what is expected of a BLACK MIRROR episode. I know the show has fans, and I hope that true BLACK MIRROR fans expect strange, slightly unusual, and ultimately unpredictable stories. The challenge is keeping it unpredictable, which means not giving people what they expect. I wanted to shake the box of what BLACK MIRROR is and attack my core assumptions of what I think the show is. Part of the impetus for doing the show in the first place was to try to make something unlike anything else on television. I reminded myself that this is first and foremost an anthology. Ultimately, a BLACK MIRROR episode can be whatever the hell we want it to be. There are no rules.

With this season, I feel that in some ways, whilst I aimed to create something different, I'm also going back to the early roots of the show. Take *Loch Henry*, which is about media more than technology. Then, *Beyond the Sea* is set in a retro-futuristic past, and that unmoors audience expectations. The

setting provides some creative space. Whilst the tone is typical of the show, it allows us to shake things up by being set in a past that never happened but has elements akin to the time in which it is set.

I feel we have some of the strongest episodes we have ever done. *Joan is Awful* is in some way a traditional BLACK MIRROR story in that it has a near-future setting, high-tech gizmos, and an existential nightmare. On the other hand, it's also the most overtly comical episode that we have ever done. We've done dark comedy before, but this is the most ridiculous.

There are some notable differences this season. Tell us why you decided to set some of the episodes in the past for season six.

We have done it before with *Bandersnatch*, which was set in 1984 and *San Junipero* appeared to be set in 1987. It feels like a fun challenge because you aren't bound by having people surrounded by chrome and glass staring mournfully into their smartphones. It makes you rethink all the technology that you're depicting. We're not just going for transparent phones or electric cars. It ties into audience expectations; it allows us to disorientate the audience and think about what a BLACK MIRROR episode is. Also, it meant I didn't have to think, "What's the episode of BLACK MIRROR about NFTs," which is an idea that depressed me greatly.

Can you talk about the streaming platform featured in the series, Streamberry?

Put it this way, if we weren't showing the series on Netflix, we would be being sued by Netflix for how it looks in terms of corporate identity. Many conversations asked if we could ape the front end of Netflix, and they said yes. It's not quite biting the hand that feeds because it's funny. It meant we could throw in lots of easter eggs in the show. You could argue that BLACK MIRROR is a fictional universe within the Streamberry platform. If anyone asks me, "Is it a shared universe?" I can say yes, and that can also be my get-out clause for any inconsistencies across the series.

I wrote *Loch Henry* before *Joan is Awful* and had to go back and retrofit the idea of the Streamberry into the show. BLACK MIRROR, when it isn't a technology satire, it is a media satire.

How did you come up with the concept for *Joan is Awful*?

Annie Murphy plays an average woman called Joan; we see her go to work, fire someone, go to her therapist, and meet up with her ex. Then when she gets home, she sits down with her fiancé and starts watching a new show on a familiar-looking streaming platform, Streamberry. The twist is that the show is about her life, where Salma Hayek is playing her on a streaming series, and once the show airs, her life begins to implode.

The inspiration for *Joan is Awful* came from several disconnected thoughts that glommed together. I'd had a loose idea for a story about an average woman who suddenly and inexplicably finds she's on the front cover of the New York Times, not because of some huge scandal, but for really minor things like co-workers not liking the way she chews her food or whatever. And I'd also been toying with an idea about a TV network that pumped out laser-targeted AI-generated content. And then one night, I was watching *The Dropout*, the limited series about the CEO of Theranos. It depicted recent events, and me and my wife were talking about how weird it would be if you were one of the people that worked for Theranos and then got to see these events that happened to you just a couple of years ago being

played back to you by a celebrity cast in a prestige drama. And then suddenly, literally in that moment, all these disconnected ideas fused into one, and bingo – Joan is Awful.

The episode is a bizarre postmodern romp. It's the first time we have done an out-and-out comic episode.

Tell us about casting Salma Hayek Pinault.

Thankfully Salma Hayek signed up to play Salma Hayek because who else will play Salma Hayek? We had a Zoom call with her, and I was nervous because I had just sent a script with her name in it, asking her to play herself. She loved it and started encouraging us to do all this stuff that I would never have dared write into the first draft of the script.

Tell us about crafting the story for *Loch Henry*.

The story follows Davis, played by Samuel Blenkin, who grew up in this small Scottish village. He returns to his hometown with his girlfriend, Pia, played by Myha'la Herrold. They're both filmmakers and supposed to be making a nature documentary, but then they stumble on a terrible crime that happened decades ago and decide to make a film about that because true crime is so trendy.

A bit like Joan is Awful, the original idea for this episode came to me while I was watching TV with my wife Konnie, only this time it was a true crime documentary about something terrible that happened in Scotland. Like all true crime documentaries, it had millions of drone shots over Lochs and forests. Oddly, despite this horrible story, the stunning landscapes were so beautiful we found ourselves googling where it was and wanting to go on holiday there.

True crime documentaries look so high-end now. They're so classy-looking that it helpfully disguises what you're there for. You know what you're there for. You're there to have a good old bloody gawp. True crime docs are like a gourmet burger in that respect. You're still eating something full of fat and salt, but because it's called an artisan burger, you almost feel good about yourself rather than like a horrible pig. What was great about *Loch Henry* was that we hadn't ever used Scotland in a BLACK MIRROR episode.

Tell us about the concepts behind *Beyond The Sea*.

Beyond The Sea is set in a fictionalised 1969. We encounter two astronauts, David and Cliff, played by Aaron Paul and Josh Hartnett. They are on board a spaceship that's undergoing a lengthy mission. And there's a very 'Black Mirror' bit of tech at work that's central to their mission – and that's all I'm going to say about that for now! When I'd first envisaged this, it was set in the near future – but in keeping with shaking things up this season I thought “fuck it, what if it's set in the 60s instead”. And then doing that immediately gave it a slightly different tone, and also informed the characters -- because they have the mindset and attitudes of people from that era. Alongside that, this episode has a classic sci-fi feel with a dreamlike quality.

One of our producers said to me, “This is your pandemic episode”. I stopped and thought about it, and it kind of is. But not in the way you might think. The story does deal with isolation, loneliness, and confinement, all things we felt during the pandemic. Something about the premise is very

straightforward but it's also a real actor's piece and needed a strong cast which we were very lucky to have.

Tell us about the cast of *Beyond The Sea*.

We've been very lucky with BLACK MIRROR across all the seasons, but we have a very strong cast this season. Aaron Paul was great as Cliff, as was Josh Hartnett. Aaron Paul had the tough job of playing both characters simultaneously, and he had to wrestle with some grim material. We were filming in a heatwave, and I have no idea how he stayed sane. Josh Hartnett captured the golden boy nature of his character mixed with vulnerability. Both did an astonishing job. Then there was Kate Mara, who was amazing. Her performance is heartbreaking. Honestly, I am in awe of all their performances.

Tell us about *Mazey Day*.

Mazey Day is set in the early 2000s. Mazey Day, played by Clara Ruggard, is a troubled actress whom the paparazzi are stalking. We follow a particular pap, Bo, played by Zazie Beetz, who discovers that Mazey Day has gone into hiding following a car accident. The outside world thinks that Mazey Day has had a mental breakdown. Bo knows there is a big paycheck for the first photo of the celebrity but finds herself morally conflicted.

The story is set before everyone has a camera in their phone, and there is a crueller attitude towards people in the public eye. That's all I can say about it because this episode is best seen knowing nothing going in.

Tell us about casting Zazie Beetz as Bo.

Bo is a flintier character having to make some hard choices, but she's got a conscience. We see that she's slightly troubled by what she's doing, but she's also quite tough in that episode as well. Zazie is very charismatic, but she balances the complexity of the character. It's a tricky role to pull off, but she's more than capable of it.

Tell us about the concepts behind *Demon '79*.

Demon '79 opens with a 'RED MIRROR presents' title sequence, marking it out as 'different-from-yet-adjacent-to' BLACK MIRROR. This is because, typically, BLACK MIRROR has focused on tech dystopias or media satire, whereas this story has a stronger supernatural element, harking back to 1970s horror. The episode is almost unclassifiable. I co-wrote it with Bisha K. Ali (Ms. Marvel) – I think she's brilliant. And it was directed by Toby Haynes (also brilliant), who previously directed USS Callister in Season 4.

The story takes place in a Northern English town in 1979. A mild-mannered shop assistant called Nida, played by Anjana Vasan (another brilliant person), finds a talisman with a symbol on it, which fans of the show might recognise. And then Paapa Essiedu (yet another brilliant individual) shows up and before you know it we're into a darkly comic, bizarre kind of fable.

It's a medley - part horror, but also a fantasy, with elements of romance. One of the things I love about it is that it doesn't classify neatly into any particular genre. It draws on Hammer House of Horror and is deliberately old school. I expect it to be divisive – which is half the fun! -- but I think it is absolutely

tonally consistent with what BLACK MIRROR is, even if it's not what audiences expect. And of course "not being what audiences expect" is very BLACK MIRROR in itself.

Whilst set in the past, Demon 79 also speaks to some of what is happening today. How did you balance the political elements of the story with the surreal horror?

Demon 79 may be set in the past, but like many BLACK MIRROR episodes it draws on things that are in the ether right now, so it speaks to the present. There is a particular plot point and a character that echoes some of what we are currently going through. So it's not nostalgia. It's hopefully something jumpier, more anxious, more worried than that.

What do you hope audiences will take away from their experience watching this new season of BLACK MIRROR?

One thing - I hope people watch it (obviously). And two, I hope they're entertained by it... or appalled by it. I never think it's on me to tell people what they should think about the story. I have failed as a writer if a story feels too preachy or too didactic.

This season the episodes are more dreamlike in many ways. There's not a fixed moral lesson that you could draw from these stories, and I think that's more interesting. I'm often quite suspicious of things if I'm watching them, and they try to make me agree with a point of view. I'm allergic to that type of storytelling. My main hope is that people come away having had several hours of this miserable existence on this stupid planet made a little easier.

Jessica Rhoades – Executive Producer

So how does this series of BLACK MIRROR differ from those that came before?

More than any other season of BLACK MIRROR, this has a lot of range in terms of tone, setting and even genre. I think audiences will be surprised, but the episodes retain that core BLACK MIRROR feel. Like previous seasons, the trick to keeping all the episodes feeling like BLACK MIRROR is remembering 'what would Charlie Brooker do?' Charlie has such a clear vision and understanding of what BLACK MIRROR is, and isn't afraid to push what that might mean. Take for example this season, which looks not just at media and technology, but communication, and what that looks like in today's world.

What is the biggest challenge for this season of BLACK MIRROR?

Like other seasons, the biggest challenge is that you are making individual episodes each telling their own story. It's essentially like running five film productions, with their own crews, creative visions, and cast. The challenge is keeping the plates spinning, and it's an extreme challenge, but also an enjoyable one.

Now into its sixth season, what keeps BLACK MIRROR entertaining audiences?

One of the key draws is that you never know what you're going to get. BLACK MIRROR is like a box of chocolates – one episode is going to taste like this, and the next like that. Whilst they are different, you know that each one is going to provoke you, maybe even make you feel a little uncomfortable, but always make you think.

How have you found collaborating with Charlie?

He's a genius. I know it has been said before, but it is remarkable that all these ideas come from his mind, and not just the initial idea, but all the finer details. Each episode is clearly thought out.

What do you think audiences will take away from this season?

This season plays on the ideas of media and communication. It explores not just what we all take away from media, but also how media and communication shape how we see one another.

Let's discuss the individual episodes. Can you talk to us about your thoughts on *Beyond the Sea*?

Beyond The Sea is the episode of the season that most comments on the last several years that we've all experienced in the wake of the pandemic. It takes a hard look at how we communicate and connect remotely with one another in an unexpected way.

Aaron Paul really is astounding in his role. We wanted him back after his small cameo in *USS Callister*. At the time of casting, he had just had his second child, so we were concerned it wasn't going to work out. We sent him the script, and he fell in love with it. The thing about Aaron is, aside from being an incredible actor, his ability in finding the most amazing ways to connect the character and then the scene.

Then with Josh, we get to see a different side of how viewers have typically experienced his work. With this episode, he gets to explore a leading man charm, which audiences have seen before, but then things take a twist in a way that I don't think will be expected.

What was the greatest challenge for *Beyond the Sea*?

The creation of the space shuttle was complex. We had to take into consideration how these two men were living in the spaceship, in this confined shared space. It really was a collaborative process between Charlie Brooker, our director John Crowley, and our production designer Udo Kramer. We wanted to lean into preconceptions that viewers have of spaceships of the era, even though this is a fictionalised alternative 1960s, but give them something they hadn't seen before.

Let's discuss *Demon '79*, which is very different to episodes of **BLACK MIRROR that we have seen before.**

Demon '79 is about a woman who has what might be called 'an awakening'. The core of that episode is the relationship between Nida and Gaap, played by Anjana Vasan and Paapa Essiedu. The chemistry between the characters was obviously on the page in the script, but Anjana and Paapa made it so much more. This episode catches you off guard. Anjana's amazing, we had seen her work in *We Are Lady Parts*. When she came in for Nida, there was no question that she embodied the role. Anjana's eyes could have their own series. They are the most expressive, captivating eyes of any human I've ever met. She's incredible. And Paapa did the impossible. Paapa came in, let us dress him in disco-wear and pulled it off, and had more swagger than I think anyone saw coming.

Now we come on to *Joan Is Awful*, the first time BLACK MIRROR has done such a comedic episode. I think it's incredible that Charlie wrote *Joan Is Awful*. It captures how hard it is to be a woman and be perceived and seen by the rest of the world, to be judged in every situation slightly differently than you intended, obviously to an exaggerated degree in Joan, but there is a truth to it.

Annie is amazing as Joan. She has an everywoman quality that you can empathise with her, whilst being this brilliant comedian. Then of course there's Salma Hayek. It was so amazing to be able to have her come in. Salma walks into a space, and every single person is aware that she is there. And that's the energy, and it was exactly what was needed in this episode.

Now let's discuss *Loch Henry*, which is BLACK MIRROR's exploration of people's love of true crime. *Loch Henry* explores our fascination with true crime. It shows that, when the production values are high and feel almost arthouse, we convince ourselves that it's less ghoulish. I am a huge fan of true crime, and I have caught myself being taken in by the well-crafted, highly cinematic quality of contemporary true-crime documentaries. Still, we are being ghouls, but it's okay because it's human nature.

The episode is set in Scotland, and we went into the beautiful landscapes. I'm American and hadn't been to the highlands before. I was astounded by how beautiful it was. We would be filming, and I would look out the window to these stunning vistas. We had a base camp of Loch Lomond, which was just a stunningly rare experience working on a production.

Finally, let's discuss *Mazey Day*.

Mazey Day is about the paparazzi and the carnivorous nature of the media. And, it's set in the time right before every single person had a high-end camera in their phone and became a paparazzi themselves, around the mid-2000s. We managed to get Zazie Beetz to play Bo, and she really captures the character. It's a tricky role because her character is doing an unsavoury job, yet she makes the audience sympathise with her character. It was also a lot of fun having it set in the recent past. Then there was Clara Rugaard, who played Mazey. She has a difficult role, that I am not going to spoil, but she did it brilliantly. Honestly, *Mazey Day* is an episode where it is best you go in knowing nothing.

Q&As for *Joan Is Awful*

Annie Murphy - Joan Tate

What is *Joan Is Awful* about?

Joan Is Awful is about a woman who has faded into the background of her own life, and is going through the motions. One day she gets home after a long, difficult day, turns on the TV and sees Salma Hayek playing her in the day that has just happened. Hilarity and insanity ensue – and it just gets weird.

How would you describe your character, Joan?

Joan is a woman who's found herself in a job that she doesn't love and engaged to a guy she doesn't necessarily love either. She's just cruising through her life and making questionable decisions.

What attracted you to working on a BLACK MIRROR episode?

BLACK MIRROR is one of my favourite shows on TV. When the chance to be in the show was offered to me, it was a no-brainer. I didn't have to bribe anyone or do audition after audition after audition. It was one of the first times that I've had an offer on a great show that I'm excited about. I said yes before I'd even read the script. I was grateful to realise it wasn't a BLACK MIRROR episode that would haunt you for the rest of your days. The episode, *Joan Is Awful*, has a much more optimistic tone compared to the more dystopian or nihilistic episodes fans are familiar with.

What do you believe draws fans back time and again to BLACK MIRROR?

When you go to see a great stand-up show, and the comic is strong and can articulate everyone's inner everyday thoughts, you walk away feeling satisfied. That is what Charlie Brooker has done. Charlie taps into people's deepest, darkest nightmares. It is as if he's collected them all and made these incredibly insightful shows about people's deepest fears. I think that creates a bit of a community or a fandom. Everyone shares those scary anxieties, and Charlie channels those into well-constructed narratives. The show is fictional, but it's adjacent to reality. When you're watching the show, you think that what is explored in each episode could be a reality in five or ten years' time.

How does Charlie Brooker's writing help you as an actor?

Charlie's writing is so incredible. Every season, what he does is present us with a collection of good movies. BLACK MIRROR isn't your average TV show. They're incredible films, and each one is different from the last. I find it so mind-blowing that that comes from one crazy mind.

What was it like working with Salma Hayek Pinault?

On my first day working with Salma on set, I was trying to be chilled out around Salma, which was a tricky thing to do. It was hard to stop myself from sitting back with some popcorn and watching her doing her thing because she was mesmerising to watch work.

We rehearsed together and spoke about our different interpretations of the character. We discussed what the similarities and differences would be in our approach to the role.

Getting to watch Salma Hayek play my version of Joan blew my mind. I never thought that I would work with her. I was terrified. She is one of the most extroverted, passionate, hard-working, and kind women I've met in this business.

During the rehearsal, I spent a lot of time talking about the character of Joan, then we would all discuss our thoughts with the director, Ally Pankiw. Then we worked with the incredible hair and makeup team and the wardrobe department, who came up with the look for the different iterations of Joan.

What was it like working with Rob Delaney?

Rob plays Joan's ex-boyfriend, Mac, who is one of those guys you can't stop thinking about – even though he's bad news. Mac decides to make a reappearance in Joan's life, and he's the catalyst for the worst few days of Joan's life. He has very easy chemistry and is also a tall guy who makes me feel small, which never happens.

How did the sets inform your performance?

The sets also played a big role in my performance. They have built an entire floor of a house, and it's not your typical set with flimsy walls in a warehouse. There is incredible attention to detail, and the way the set shifts for each iteration of Joan is incredible. You can tell that everyone involved in BLACK MIRROR is giving their A-game. The combination of all these factors made the character come together.

Were you surprised when you read the script for *Joan is Awful* that it was an out-and-out comedy?

Joan Is Awful is a real brain-twister, but it's not one of those bleak, haunting episodes that Charlie is notorious for. That was part of the appeal for me, being involved in an episode that is tonally different to the other series. There have been times I have laid awake at night, completely horrified thinking about some of Charlie's past episodes. When I found out that *Joan Is Awful* is a light-hearted romp, I was excited to be involved.

What do you think *Joan Is Awful* tells us about the world we live in today?

There is so much misinformation and information these days that is taken in, digested, and spat out in an information-adjacent way. We're all very quick to take information as gospel without being analytical. The *Joan Is Awful* episode encourages people to be more thoughtful about what they read. I've been guilty of reading an article and judging, even though it's more than likely false garbage. Ultimately it says: don't trust everything you see and read, be more analytical.

How do you think audiences will react to this episode of BLACK MIRROR?

I hope they have a good belly laugh from this episode. Also, I hope people are more careful about what they sign up for on the internet...

Salma Hayek Pinault – TV Joan**Whilst not spoiling the episode, tell us about whom you play in *Joan is Awful*.**

The episode's concept is that a woman called Joan, played by Annie Murphy, discovers that her life is now the subject of a new TV show. I am playing a fictionalised version of myself, who is then playing Joan on the TV show. This woman's life is laid bare, and all the secrets that you don't want people to know - get played out on the screen. I play both an exaggerated version of myself and of Joan.

What was it like playing a version of yourself on screen?

It's been absurd and a lot of fun. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to play an interpretation of myself. I got to explore the concepts and cliches people have about me and be self-deprecating. It's as if I created an alter-ego where I could do the most disgusting, grotesque things that you would never do in real life, and have permission to do that. It's been surreal, and I think only a mind like Charlie Brooker's could have come up with such a concept.

What attracted you to *Joan Is Awful*?

The script blew me away. Charlie offered such an original concept, and the chance to be involved in a show where you constantly keep the audience guessing. It's rare today to be watching something where you have absolutely no idea where the story is going to take you, and this one will have audiences guessing right up to the end.

What was it like working with Annie Murphy?

What a wonderful partner to collaborate with. My favourite thing about working on *Joan Is Awful* was the physical comedy, which isn't something you often get the opportunity to do as an actor. It was wonderful working with Annie on those comic moments, and we developed a natural synchronicity, where we could bounce off each other's performances without having to talk about it.

BLACK MIRROR has a history of shocking their audience, and *Joan Is Awful* follows in that tradition. Did you have any reservations about the episode?

There are so many moments that shock me in the script. There is one huge one, that I had to come to terms with, and made me ask myself "Do I really want to do this? Am I going to get in trouble?" Ultimately, there is too much talent involved in the project to miss out on such a golden opportunity. I decided to be brave and say, "Let's go". After that, there's no turning back. You've got to embrace it and go for it.

Why do you think BLACK MIRROR has connected so well with audiences?

One of the great virtues of BLACK MIRROR is the ability to be free and original in a world overloaded with media. A lot of the time in this industry, there is a formula to storytelling, and people don't always take chances. BLACK MIRROR *always* takes chances. Every season, you know that each episode is going to offer something new, and you don't know what you're going to get from one moment to the next. Audiences crave being surprised and have this sense of wonder, and that's what BLACK MIRROR provides.

What is it like working with Charlie Brooker?

It's a privilege to go into the labyrinth that is Charlie's mind. He's so lovely, and so kind, and so generous. And he has spent so much time with us, rehearsing and talking. Being able to ask him a million questions about myself, because the character is Salma Hayek, and watching this from the perspective of his brain, has been such a bizarre honour and fascinating situation.

Rob Delaney – Mac

Tell us about your character.

Mac is Joan's ex-boyfriend. He's trying to weasel his way back into her life. Not weasel, you know, he's a nice guy, but Joan has a fiancée, and Mac would like to get back on the scene, so he's doing his best. Mac is the catalyst for what goes wrong in Joan's life. Then we eventually discover what he is really like deep down, and it's not great.

What was your attraction to the role?

Charlie Brooker! I just wanted to get inside his scripts and see how they worked. I watch BLACK MIRROR, and I've watched all of Charlie's shows that I know about. I wanted to see how he makes the sausage, to see behind the scenes, and watch the show's mechanics from the inside.

What was your reaction when you first read the script?

What I liked about this episode is that it's very funny. Everyone expects BLACK MIRROR to have dystopian elements, where technology has run rampant. With *Joan Is Awful* there's also major comedic elements. For me, that is a beautiful fusion of all the stuff Charlie's done over the years.

What makes audiences come back time and time again to watch BLACK MIRROR?

The authorial imprint. The stamp of Charlie Brooker, that's what makes BLACK MIRROR different from other shows. It's not just satire. Most anthology shows lack an authorial through-line, which isn't the case with BLACK MIRROR. Even though each episode is different in subject and tone, they build on one another, and it's crazy that they have all poured out of one crazy mind.

How did you find working with Annie Murphy on this project?

She has a gift for tuning out all the static and finding something new in each take. There is a sense she's always listening to you, and not thinking about what is going to be for lunch. I was a fan of her work before, but working with her has been such a wonderful experience.

Do you think audiences will be surprised that *Joan Is Awful* is a comedy?

BLACK MIRROR episodes are compelling, and pull you along, and are interesting, and frightening, and have humour in them. But this one is more comedic than any other I have seen, with its own flavour of humour.

Q&AS FOR LOCH HENRY**Samuel Blenkin - Davis****Can you tell us about your character, Davis?**

Davis is a film school student who wants to be the next Stanley Kubrick. He has a good heart but is insecure about what he likes and wants. He has a girlfriend, Pia, played by Myha'la Herrold. Together they are making a nature documentary film in Davis' hometown. The subject of the documentary changes to investigating a true crime that has desolated the local community.

How have you found shooting on location in Scotland?

We've shot in some amazing locations, and it's been a visually stunning environment to work in. We shot the episode by Loch Long in a village called Arrochar, near the Argyll Forest. We also shot 40 minutes outside Glasgow, and it's been a privilege to work in this area, surrounded by mountains and lochs.

What has working with Charlie Brooker and being in the BLACK MIRROR universe been like?

Charlie is a wonderful showrunner to work with. *Loch Henry* feels different to other BLACK MIRROR episodes. Whilst all the episodes are self-contained, this episode feels different. Charlie and I spoke about the character a lot, and really tried to understand where he is coming from.

Myha'la Herrold - Pia

What attracted you to the role of Pia in *Loch Henry*?

As well as being an actor, I also consider myself a filmmaker, so the character of Pia appealed to me because I could relate. Then there was the opportunity of working with Sam Miller, who directed this episode. Lastly, it's part of the BLACK MIRROR universe, an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I have always been a fan of BLACK MIRROR.

What was it like working with Charlie Brooker?

BLACK MIRROR has always been revolutionary, and Charlie is the show's heartbeat. He's a collaborative showrunner, which I like, and we spoke at length about what I could bring to the role, and he was very open about the process.

What has the atmosphere been like on set?

Like any production, we are all strangers until we meet on set on day one. I have been shocked and pleasantly amazed by how well we have all bonded. It's been a lot of fun working with other artists and making friends.

How have you found working in Scotland?

It's been a stunning environment to work in, although I can't say I am a fan of the midges I had to battle in one scene when I was wading in water. That was one of my favourite scenes to shoot because it had this creepy and eerie atmosphere. I can't wait to see how it turns out.

Q&As for *Beyond the Sea*

Aaron Paul - Cliff

How would you summarise the plot of *Beyond The Sea*?

This story is about two astronauts travelling further than any other human into space. It becomes a survival story, but in a very unconventional way – which you might expect from BLACK MIRROR. It's also a story about being a husband and a father.

How would you describe your character, Cliff?

Cliff is a married man and has a beautiful baby boy. He is now spending six years away from his family on a mission in deep space. He is joined on the mission by David, played by Josh (Hartnett). They are both part of a replica programme. This cutting-edge tech allows them to beam their consciousness back to Earth and live out their day-to-day existence with their families.

What attracted you to the role?

I'm a massive fan of Charlie and his beautiful mind. Every season of BLACK MIRROR is so different, but they are all linked tonally. I have wanted to be part of this universe for a long time. I did a voiceover for the *USS Callister* episode. I begged Charlie not to check me off the list and consider me for future episodes. When this landed on my desk, I instantly read it, and it was a no-brainer to say yes.

What's it been like working with Josh Hartnett?

I've known Josh for a long time, and I have been a fan of his work for as long as I've known him. *Beyond the Sea* is the first time we've got to go toe-to-toe with each other. Josh plays David, who is charismatic and charming. He's a man with the world at his fingertips. My character, Cliff, is the opposite. He's stiff, not a talker, and just goes by the book. It's been a dream to explore the two characters and how they interact.

What was it like working on the set of the spaceship?

For most of the episode, we are playing the Earth-bound versions of ourselves - living within our replicas. Then we are beamed back to the ship to run maintenance and routine checks and physicals, so we didn't film lots on the ship, but it was a wonderful set. We had to do a lot of wire work using harnesses, which I have done before on other projects, but this is the first time I've gone completely weightless in space. Then there was the space suit - which brought out the little kid in me, but it wasn't the most comfortable costume I have ever worn.

How have you found the shoot in the UK?

I love coming to the UK because we know when we will wrap. You come to work 8am, you wrap at 6pm, and then you're done. In the States, you keep going until you get the job done. Plus, it's fun being surrounded by Brits.

Josh Hartnett - David

When did you first encounter BLACK MIRROR?

I've been a fan of BLACK MIRROR since the very first season. I worked with Rory Kinnear on *Penny Dreadful*, who was in *The National Anthem*, which I think everyone remembers. He told me about BLACK MIRROR, and as soon as I saw it, I realised that it was marking itself out as a must-watch show because there was nothing like it on TV. I have watched every episode, and there is always something thought-provoking that makes you think about the world differently.

What has it been like working with Charlie Brooker?

Charlie's scripts are so beautifully subtle and not overwritten, full of complex character relationships, and brimming with emotions. He always finds these incredible settings and pushes from there to creating stories that always surprise and delight. Charlie is exacting in his vision for each show, and that places a lot of responsibility on me as a performer. You want to do justice to what he has written.

What attracted you to the role?

One of the biggest reasons was that I'm a big fan of the show. I would have done anything to be in an episode. When the role came along, I jumped at the chance. *Beyond the Sea* is one of the darkest episodes I have seen in the series, and David is a challenging character to play, but it was an incredibly enjoyable experience being involved.

Tell us about your character David.

David is an astronaut but also a psychologist, living in an alternative timeline, in the late 1960s. He is on a mission to study the effects of deep space travel on a psychological level. He's there to observe both

his and his colleague Cliff's behaviour. When the episode opens, David and Cliff are two years through a six-year mission. David had to abandon his life on Earth for the mission, but thanks to new technology, he's able to beam his consciousness back to Earth and live his family life via a physical avatar.

What has been the most challenging scene for you?

The scenes that are most interesting to shoot are also the scenes that are the most devastating. We wrestle with some dark material in this episode. I find that the scenes Aaron and I have done here on the spaceship have been a lot of fun from an acting perspective, but they're challenging both mentally and physically.

Speaking of the spaceship, what was it like filming on that set?

The set was designed by a brilliant artist, Udo Kramer, who is a genius. Udo brought in a lot of interesting elements to the design that blended history with the fictional history of the episode. He's amplified a lot of the ideas we are familiar with, from films like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but made it his own. His work is very detailed and that's a joy as an actor. But being an actor who is over 6ft it was a challenge working in cramped conditions, but it added to the claustrophobic atmosphere of the story. It was a brilliant set to work on.

What was it like working with Aaron Paul?

This episode, for me, felt like a two-hander. While I got to work with other actors, it was primarily Aaron and me for most of the shoot. Aaron has a gift where he can flick the switch, and he's in character and hits the performance every time. That could sound intense, but he is a very easy-going guy, which you need on a story like this.

Q&A for *Mazey Day*

Clara Rugaard - *Mazey Day*

What was your attraction to becoming involved in the BLACK MIRROR universe?

BLACK MIRROR is one of my all-time favourite shows, so it was exciting to be part of it. Charlie Brooker can create these dystopian visions and pull on your heartstrings. I remember being so taken aback when I watched *San Junipero* - it was beautiful.

What was your reaction when you read the script for *Mazey Day*?

I got the offer through before I was sent the script, and it almost didn't matter what was in the script because I was so excited to work on an episode of BLACK MIRROR. The bar is set very high with this show, and this script kept me on my toes. I love that you can never guess what will happen in an episode of BLACK MIRROR, and more than ever, that is the case with this episode. There is no way the audience will see what is coming. I think this is a clever script that has a lot to say.

What was the atmosphere like on set?

We shot in Spain at the height of summer, which wasn't too shabby. As expected of a BLACK MIRROR episode, there is some dark material, but I managed to have a lot of fun. Charlie Brooker was running

around whispering brilliant notes into people's ears. There were also amazing producers on the ground taking such good care of us, and our director, Uta Briesewitz, was great at creating a safe and creative space that allowed us to live and breathe our characters.

Unlike previous episodes of BLACK MIRROR, *Mazey Day* is set in the past. Were you surprised by that?

Yes, surprised by the fact that it's set in the past. Most of all, the most intriguing element of this episode is the idea that public figures are treated like public property. It reached a boiling point in the mid-2000s, which was not a great time to be a celebrity. The film and TV industry is built by putting actors on pedestals and audiences feeding off the information generated, which is problematic. The digital age exploded celebrity culture, but putting yourself in the public eye is a choice. It's a Faustian bargain.

What is it like working with Charlie Brooker?

He's a genius. The most enjoyable thing about working on a BLACK MIRROR episode is witnessing how Charlie's mind works and getting to know him. He's a very cool, very clever guy.

Did you get a chance to get to know your other cast members?

Even though my character is isolated from the other characters on screen, I got to spend time with Zazie Beetz and Danny Ramirez. We lived in this little bubble. We were close to the beach, and we spent a lot of our time off together. I have a lot of admiration and respect for them. I didn't get many scenes with both of them, but what time we did work together was fun.

What were the greatest challenges for the role?

It exposed and tested my comfort zone. It was an exhausting role but in a good way. The character is suffering and in turmoil, but I loved every second of it.

BLACK MIRROR has a loyal fan base. Does that add pressure when you're involved in such a beloved series?

After I had stopped running around the house, being so excited to be cast in a BLACK MIRROR episode, it hit me that I would be in a BLACK MIRROR episode – and that's a great deal of pressure. I spoke with Zazie and Danny about this, and we all agreed that it being an anthology series takes some of the pressure off.

Q&A for *Demon 79*

Paapa Essiedu - Gaap

Tell us about your character in the *Demon 79* episode of this season's BLACK MIRROR.

Gaap is a unique individual with an incredible dress sense. He's charming and persuasive and he and Nida have a fun dynamic together.

What is *Demon 79* about?

We follow a character called Nida, played by Anjana Vasana, a shop assistant in a town in the north of England on the cusp of Margaret Thatcher getting into power around 1979. She has a chance incident with a talisman and meets a charming stranger called Gaap, who tells her that she has signed up to a deal where she must commit acts of violence to prevent a horrific disaster. We watch her struggle with the moral complexity of the situation.

What attracted you to the role of Gaap?

Like many people, I am an enormous BLACK MIRROR fan. I've always been a fan of Charlie Brooker's work in general. This script was political, funny and full of humanity. There's something very human about the challenges that Nida faces.

What was it like recreating the disco music video?

There I was in silver platform shoes doing my best to recreate a legendary dance routine... to begin with, it felt like a televised panic attack. But once I got into the groove of it... The backing dancers and vocalists, these elaborate costumes, the spirit of disco really took over. Watching it back, I'm expecting feelings to land somewhere between pride and horror...but it was a proper laugh though. Loved it.

What was it like working with Anjana Vasana?

She is one of the most talented women I've ever worked with. She's so kind and patient. Every single day I'm buzzing to come to work, mainly because I get to hang out with her all day. The same can be said of the rest of the cast. Katherine Rose Morley and Nick Burns have also been wonderful to work with.

What was it like working with Charlie Brooker?

Charlie is amazing to collaborate with, particularly on an episode that is so different from what you might expect of a BLACK MIRROR episode. Charlie, and the show, has always been ahead of the curve, and there is nothing like it either on British TV or internationally. It's been a dream working on this project.

Q&As with Creatives

Udo Kramer – Series Production Designer

How did you come to work on the latest season of BLACK MIRROR?

One of the producers, Joel Stokes, contacted me and suggested I introduce myself to Charlie Brooker, which is a little unusual. They sent over the scripts, and they are fantastic. Truly outstanding. These scripts were inspiring, not just because the stories are so great, but because Charlie has a unique way of expressing the look and feel of the episodes. He has a very visual way of writing that helps envisage what he wants to create. Because Charlie is the showrunner and a good writer, he has the talent to put what he imagines into words, which is very inspiring to work with.

Did you have a collaborative relationship with Charlie Brooker?

I found him very collaborative. Again, having a good script is the first step, but then it is about finding the right team to bring it to life, and Charlie is very good at building the right team for each episode.

What was your greatest challenge working on season six of BLACK MIRROR?

Previously I worked on a series called *Dark*, also for NETFLIX, and that show jumped through different periods, as we do in this season of BLACK MIRROR. We had to imagine different periods and scenarios at the same time. *Dark* takes place in the 1980s, 19th Century, and the near and distant future. We had similar challenges this season.

It was a challenge but super exciting. My job means you must be able to jump into the characters, and the look and feel of the world they inhabit. The other part of the job is to be disciplined and not get overwhelmed by the work you must get through. You must envisage the whole project simultaneously, including the resources and money available, and focus on each episode. It's a balancing act. It's complex, but that is also part of the job's pleasure.

This job was also a wonderful opportunity in the wake of the pandemic. For the first time in years, I was working in different countries. It meant living in different cities, working with one of my favourite showrunners of all time, and this wonderful array of directors. Whilst the schedule was tight, there was this inspiring atmosphere around the production, with these creative people coming in and out of the production. My job was to serve the production as best I could, ensuring everyone got a fair share of the resources across the season.

***Beyond the Sea* had a different challenge in that you are creating an alternative timeline set in the past with a futuristic feel. What was your approach? For example, with the design of the Gemini spaceship.**

Again, Charlie's script was a key reference point to inspire the design. We wanted to pay homage to ideas or cinematic references of the 1960s, like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but do something different. *Moonraker* was another influence. Beyond cinematic references, we didn't want to fall into the trap of 1960s naivety of what the future looked like, with flashing buttons and blinking lights. We wanted to take seriously what a more technologically advanced 1960s might have looked like. It had to feel like the 1960s whilst taking away any projections or assumptions about what we think the 1960s attitudes and thoughts of the future were. It's almost like time travel. It was a futuristic setting but limited by the confines of the 1960s. Again, Charlie gave clues for this in the script. It was about creating a committed idea that we took seriously about how this world would look. So many of our preconceived notions about the future, let alone a future envisioned in a past setting, come from cinema and TV, which in turn were set by the limits of the technology of the time available to productions.

Ally Pankiw – Director, *Joan is Awful***What is *Joan is Awful* about?**

Joan is Awful is about a woman who feels restless and unfulfilled. She's in her twenties and starts making decisions that aren't the most selfless. Our story explores what happens when those small decisions are looked at under a very large microscope.

How did you come to be involved in this project?

I met with Jessica Rhoades, an Executive Producer of the series who works very closely with Charlie Brooker. We had a general meeting, and she saw a show I directed called *Feel Good*. My work focuses on female characters from different walks of life. I tend to work on projects with complicated or intergenerational relationships between women. That made me a good fit for the script. I met with Charlie, and my only proviso was that I wouldn't do the episode if it were too scary or perverted. Charlie explained that it was a comic episode of BLACK MIRROR. I read the script, and I was thrilled to be involved.

What was it like collaborating with Charlie Brooker?

Charlie's a genius and a fortune teller, which you will know if you have ever watched an episode of BLACK MIRROR. He's the best kind of creator and showrunner because he knows exactly what he wants whilst being willing to explore and be open to collaboration. The worst kind of collaborator is someone that doesn't know what they want. Charlie is the opposite. He's very specific but not controlling and maintains a clear and singular vision.

What appealed to you about the screenplay?

For a straight dude, Charlie writes women very well. People will be surprised that this episode of BLACK MIRROR is so comedic. What Charlie does well is balance the comedy with darker elements. I think the episode says a lot about the true horror women feel when their image is consumed by other people or society, especially when that control is taken away. This episode is a wild ride. When I first read the script, I was immediately blown away by how absurd and bold it was. When I read it again, I realised that there was a lot more going on. Every time I read it was like peeling back another layer of an onion. I love making comedies, but I also like making comedies that have depth. *Joan is Awful* was a perfect encapsulation of what I love to do.

What is it about BLACK MIRROR that appeals to audiences?

BLACK MIRROR is successful and has longevity because it isn't hitting you over the head with a message. Take *San Junipero*, one of my favourite episodes, which has queer characters, but the story is about something other than being queer. There is an extra perspective that adds to the story. I feel that is the same with the episode I am directing. *Joan is Awful* is ultimately about consent. It's about how women are consumed by media and by society. It's not heavy-handed, though, because it's also about poop jokes and female friendship. *Joan is Awful* is an episode that I hope people watch more than once because the themes reveal themselves over time. We have tried to weave those themes through in a subtle way, as opposed to bashing you over the head with it.

This episode has a very strong cast, even for a BLACK MIRROR episode. Can you talk about that?

We have a great cast, including Michael Cera and Lolly Adefope. I feel so lucky. It's been a fun challenge to balance all those comedic styles. I think we've found a cool through-line and tone. Annie and Salma coming together and finding a middle ground between their tones and styles set the pace for the rest of the episode. One of the strengths of this episode is that you're never expecting anything that happens from scene to scene and from cast pairing to cast pairing.

What do you think audiences will think about after watching *Joan Is Awful*?

Always remember to read the terms and conditions before they sign something. I would also love audiences to be reminded that you don't have to resign yourself to any fate, whether it is the relationship you're in, your job, or just about anything in your life that you feel like you don't have control over. Maybe you don't need Salma Hayek to remind you of that. Instead, you can find the strength in your heart.

Bisha K. Ali – Co-Writer (*Demon 79*) and Executive Producer (*Demon 79* and *Joan is Awful*)

How did you become involved in the sixth season of BLACK MIRROR?

I moved back to the UK in 2021, and not long after, I was introduced to Charlie Brooker. We hit it off immediately, and when two creatives find a similar rhythm with each other in the wilderness, you think, "this is good, let's not let this disappear!"

I spent time with Charlie talking about the upcoming season and what he wanted to do next and throwing ideas around. We were egging each other on - to lean into our best (and worst) instincts. For the one we'd write together, we had a couple of ideas and kept returning to this one in particular, which became *Demon 79*. There was this one lunch where we managed to break out the entire episode arc, and we were a little shocked by how quick and relatively painless that part of the creative process was.

It was also an opportunity to work on a British project after working in America for so long. Being British, getting to work on a show that is so inherently British was wonderful after working in the US. We have an all-British cast, it was shot in Britain, and it is a British episode to the core - it felt like a homecoming.

What was the inspiration for *Demon 79*?

Charlie has a very specific way of building his episodes of BLACK MIRROR, and I have a different approach creatively. I am very character-driven, and Charlie often starts with the concept or the punchline. We were throwing these two aspects back and forth and working out how our styles of construction would mesh.

We both saw the potential for tragic humour in a character that is outwardly passive being forced to carry out terrible actions. We asked what could push someone to commit these violent acts, even though they present as meek and powerless, and questioned whether this potential exists in all of us.

Unlike previous episodes of BLACK MIRROR, *Demon 79* is set in the past. Why did you set it in the past, and what challenges did that present?

There was a feeling with this season that we could broaden what BLACK MIRROR could be. All the episodes, bar *Joan Is Awful*, are set in the past, even *Loch Henry*. I'm not sure it was an intentional decision at first, but it became about technology in different contexts, and it happened that many of those contexts we wanted to explore were in the past, which felt exciting.

I liked the limitations being in the past gave us, for character and for story elements - compared to today, there's a limit on the speed and mode of information passing between characters, as well as a

limit on the scope of their worlds. With *Demon 79*, it felt important that the character of Nida was isolated from other people, but especially from her community and people like her.

It's also creatively exciting to develop the world. I remember one day on set, Charlie clocked a ketchup bottle on the counter and said he didn't think that brand of ketchup existed in 1979. We swapped it out - Charlie is apparently more au fait with late '70s ketchup labels than I am. We were highly detailed, which is in both mine and Charlie's nature - to be, dare I say, irritatingly detailed and committed to chasing accuracy. We'd be happy to spend a half day arguing over whether or not certain book covers on screen are anachronistic, or even if they just *feel* anachronistic. It's another layer to how you tell a story.

Whilst the show is set in the past, it speaks to contemporary society. How did you approach the political elements of the story?

When writing the episode, I was reflecting on those feelings of pre- and post-Brexit and feeling a sense of growing dread. The optimism that I felt when I graduated from University, and then slammed straight into the crash - all that promise of the future fell apart and my awareness was more heightened than ever. That's when the dread started getting louder for me. Now that I'm much further away from that, I can reflect on the pieces of the puzzle and how we have ended up where we are now, and contextualise it in our country's history. On my part, all of that personal context fed into this episode.

How did you come up with the character of Gaap?

There is a point of connection between Nida and Gaap, in that when they first meet they both accept their lot in life and operate from a sense of oppressive inevitability. There were different iterations of Gaap, but I never wanted him to feel like a trickster - not a devil at the crossroads type - he always had a sympathetic core to him. I mean, he does psychologically torture Nida, but it's *Black Mirror*. There was this thread of softness throughout the character. I won't speak for him, but I think both Charlie and I are secretly hopeless romantics. (Look at *San Junipero*, or *Be Right Back* for Exhibits A and B.) It was important to us that Gaap had that softness, because that's a key element of this episode.

More than any other episode, this is an out-and-out horror episode. What were your inspirations?

My credits on the likes of *Loki* and *Ms Marvel* don't demonstrate this, but I am a massive horror head. We went back and watched a lot of Dario Argento, especially looking at things like the colour of the blood they used. It was fun to experiment and create something new that we also hope feels like a love letter to what's come before. Our director, the incredible Toby Haynes, is also a horror buff, and his eye through the episode added and brought out so many elements that weren't in the script that spoke to our mutual love of the genre.

What do you hope audiences take away from *Demon 79*?

I have an inherent sense of hopelessness, and this episode certainly reflects that. But there *is* a spark of optimism in *Demon 79* - even though it is probably the weirdest, most twisted spark of optimism - and I hope people can take that away from the episode.

Casting Director - Jina Jay

What was your approach to casting season six of BLACK MIRROR?

Always thinking about singular actors who capture the tone of the space between the words when nothing and everything is spoken.

***Joan Is Awful* has some particularly great casting; how did you get Salma involved and get her to play herself?**

Charlie intentionally wrote the role for an icon. Salma was a fan of Charlie's writing and instantly understood his singular vision and what he wanted to say on screen about the world.

Charlie has this extraordinary gift to write roles that belong to an existing actor – like they were born to play the role – but sometimes I need to work out who it is!

Michael Cera has such an interesting and unexpected role, how did you come up with that casting?

Michael Cera and Charlie were fans of each other for years. It was just waiting for the right role and schedule to align, and it finally did. Michael is interested in storytelling, and he is generous. His role needed to say and amplify many ideas in a short amount of time and share himself with the audience.

Were certain episodes more challenging to cast than others?

They *all* have their challenges! It's always fast, dynamic, ambitious, and very nuanced. We are very thoughtful about why an actor might find the role and storytelling interesting. We will try and anticipate this. It's a little bit of science and much gut.

How did you find balancing established with emerging talent?

I have always found new and established talent working together most exciting.

What is it like working with Charlie Brooker? Does he give any brief or indication of the actors he would like to be involved with the show?

Charlie's focus is razor-sharp, especially concerning the actors. He values them and has watched their work. He's always interested in new talent or actors he doesn't know. Time and time again, younger actors own a role in the audition process, and he supports their casting. His observations cut to the heart of a role. He is frank, collaborative, respectful and very funny. He provides a creative space which I cherish.

Jeanie Bacharach - Co-Casting Director on *Joan Is Awful*

How did you come to be the co-casting director for *Joan Is Awful*?

It was important for this episode that they had a lot of American actors for storytelling purposes. I had the great fortune of working with Jessica Rhoades, the executive producer of BLACK MIRROR, on another project, *Station Eleven*. She contacted me for *Joan Is Awful* and asked if I would be involved and work alongside Jina Jay, the series casting director.

Charlie Brooker mentioned that *The Dropout*, which you worked on, inspired him to write *Joan Is Awful*. Did you both discuss the inspiration?

This episode of BLACK MIRROR was a perfect storm, with *The Dropout* and me having worked with Jessica (Rhoades). It made sense to bring me in.

What was your approach to casting *Joan Is Awful*?

It was an embarrassment of riches – people wanted to be involved in the show. It has an incredible reputation in the US, and people want to be in it, whether for a cameo or a main role. *Joan Is Awful* has a lot of smaller parts, with fun little cameos, and so many people wanted to be involved. It has been one of the easiest projects I have worked on to get people involved. People are eager to be part of BLACK MIRROR.

There is an eclectic bunch of actors in this episode, many of whom you wouldn't expect to appear on screen together. Can you talk about how that worked?

Comedy was always going to be important in this episode. It's a heightened comedy that must also work within the world of BLACK MIRROR tonally and believe in the character's journey. We used more and less familiar faces. The episode director, Ally Pankiw, comes from the comedy world. Together we shared names that Charlie was familiar with and names he was less familiar with. What is wonderful about Charlie is that he is so receptive, and we could talk about who would work well for the episode.

Do you have a different approach depending on whether you're casting for comedy or drama?

Comedy is hard and about balancing and grounding the comedy in the drama. We needed performers who could be broad, like those who come from the world of sitcoms, but were also able to ground themselves in the drama. Not everyone can do comedy. It is easier to tap into drama.

What is Charlie Brooker like to work with?

It was the thrill of a lifetime. He's a genius with a clarity of vision in his writing and an ability to be open to new suggestions. He's so smart and never precious. He always explains why something would or wouldn't work.

It's not typical to have two casting directors working on one project. How did that collaborative process work?

Jina is wonderfully talented, and she's been in the BLACK MIRROR universe since the beginning. I was so happy to co-cast with her and be able to take her lead. She knows the world and Charlie and could guide me as I suggested ideas and what works for the show.

This is the first time that BLACK MIRROR has done an out-and-out comedy. Were you at all nervous about that?

It comes back to balance. BLACK MIRROR has a very loyal fanbase, and that brings a tremendous amount of responsibility. There is a lot of audience expectation. It's about managing what people love about the show and broadening the experience of what the show can be without going too far and losing them. As someone new to working on BLACK MIRROR, it was a mixture of exhilarating and nerve-wracking. As an outsider on an outlier episode, it was thrilling and intimidating. It is about staying true to the show and taking it on a left turn.

What was the most challenging aspect of casting *Joan Is Awful*?

The main thing was not giving too much away when contacting actors and agents. I would engage their interest, but I wanted to walk the right line of not giving too much information. It was hard because I tried explaining the episode without telling them what happened, and after you have seen the episode, you will understand why it was such a challenge.

What was your favourite thing about working on this episode?

Getting to cast Himesh Patel, whom I worked with on *Station Eleven*, and Ayo Edebiri, whom I worked with on *The Bear*, and bring them together. When you get worlds to collide, that's my favourite thing in my job.