

SEARCHING (2018)

- August 31st, 2018
- 1 hr 42 mins
- \$X (estimated)
- Directed by Aneesh Chaganty
- Written by Aneesh Chaganty, Sev Ohanian
- Production company: Bazelevs Entertainment, Bazelevs Production
- Rated PG-13 for thematic content, some drug and sexual references, and for language

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- Formerly called "Search."
- Producers are Timur Bekmambetov, Ohanian, Adam Sidman and Natalie Qasabian.
- Sony bought worldwide rights at Sundance for \$5 million.
- Timur Bekmambetov, who produced both "Searching" and the "Unfriended" franchise.
- Won the 2018 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize for works pertaining to science or technology.
- Won the NEXT Audience Award at Sundance.
- "We live in a world of ultra connectivity and yet, wouldn't it be interesting if at the heart of the story were two people who have all the means to be connected but find themselves disconnected?" he said. "The film is about how those wires can be reconnected before it is too late." - Chaganty
- "Timur Bekmambetov's production company Bazelevs were eager to make more projects [Unfriended] and invited [Ohanian] to pitch a short film that would take place on a screen. I recruited Aneesh, and together we came up with the idea for SEARCHING... but as an eight minute short film. Once we submitted our pitch to them, they called us into their offices to discuss. The bad news: they didn't want to make the film we pitched. The good news: they wanted to turn our concept into a full-length feature film. The crazy news: they wanted to pay Aneesh to direct, me to produce, and both of us to write it. Aneesh immediately said, "No thanks." My heart skipped and I remember kicking him under the table. It was insane that anyone would offer a first time filmmaker money to make a feature, and it was even more insane that the director would turn it down. But at the same time, I understood Aneesh's hesitation." - Ohanian
- "Five people made a movie working in a single editing room and they hoped five other people will watch it. We applied to the Sundance Film Festival, got accepted and then within 12 hours of the screening, we got bought by Sony Pictures. Within 12 hours, my life changed. It was unreal." -Chaganty

WRITING (Aneesh Chaganty, Sev Ohanian)

- Sev Ohanian is a 25-year-old writer-director whose two-minute short film, a Google Glass spot called *Seeds*, got over 1 million YouTube views in 24 hours.
- "The major central twists in the film were part of the story from the very beginning for us, and it was important that we avoid any twists that would happen just to have a twist." -Ohanian

- “Our process of getting script feedback, and later editing feedback, is pretty neurotic. We sent the script out to 5 close friends, and then interrogated them on the phone for an hour each, asking around 100 questions about every page and whether they picked up on certain clues, etc. And we do the same thing with our test screenings. The goal was for us to make sure audiences were following along with the clues and mystery... but not following along *too* closely.
- “There are so many characters in this movie that you never actually meet face to face. They just exist in text or avatars or on Skype. We’re constructing a world. There are [a] few characters whose online personas are in the script and directly affect the storyline. A lot of these characters really exist on the side frame, right next to the main plot of the movie.”

STORY/TOPICS

- World of Computer Screens/Technology
- Father/Daughter Relationship
- Daughter Friendships/Relationships
- Twists, Twists, TWists

CAST:

JOHN CHO (David Kim)

- “It was a page turner — it was a very unusual script,” Cho tells Deadline. “They couldn’t use the normal format to describe all the computer screens, so it was much more prose, it read much more like prose.”
- “This movie’s beat sheet was tight and I think, even in that 35-page version that I first read,” Cho said. He added that the movie wasn’t trying to reinvent a new perspective for character or writing. Instead, they were trying to do something that was more technically new.

MICHELLE LA (Margot)

- La makes her feature debut with *Searching*
- Groupon offer inspired her to take an acting class.
- “So I saved up for a year, and then after a year, I decided to make the transition, because I really felt that my passion had just kind of switched. It’s not that I don’t like science anymore, but I just found something that was worth pursuing. What inspired me about acting was just understanding somebody else who has experiences that might not be the same as yours — just putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and walking a mile in them. I really just vibed with that plight, I guess. I don’t know, it’s crazy. *Searching* is my first feature film, and I think my career is just taking off...”
- “I got pulled in for the first audition by the casting director Lindsey Weissmueller, who set up the audition with a DVR-type home camera system. They’d sent us the proof-of-concept short film, but it was different from every audition. The sides, which are the part of the script you audition with, were totally different. It was just me and a camera, me talking to the camera, and a bunch of scenes. I thought, ‘okay, this is weird.’ I’m supposed to be on a computer screen right now. I was first to go in for the audition.”
- Born in Orange County and raised in Glendale, California, La booked small roles on CBS’ *Mom* and Netflix’s *Gilmore Girls*.

SARAH SOHN (Pamela Nam Kim)

JOSEPH LEE (Peter)

DEBORAH MESSING (Detective Vick)

- “I am a mother of a child. And I immediately responded to the main story. Nothing could be more horrific than your child going missing. So, I realized that even though the device that Aneesh created, that had never been done in the history of cinema, that I couldn't really connect with emotionally. But the story underneath it, that was a classic suspense thriller and that it was a very emotional story. And once I realized that if you took that device out, the story could stand on its own, then I felt like I felt comfortable about it.”
- “All I had was an empty screen and [John Cho's] voice in my ear. And so, it literally was, I was an island and it required that I imagine everything. And that was uncomfortable.”
- “I was a camera operator. When I was running through the hall, I literally was holding the phone with the GoPro on it, running. And so, I had to think about the angles for them. And also act the scene which was, very, very high stakes.”
- “I did research into the missing persons department, and specifically in California. And it was this just the statistics of how many kids under 17 go missing, how many are found, how many are runaways, how many remain cold cases forever. And that information was helpful for me to be a jumping off point.”

DIRECTING: (Aneesh Chaganty)

- 27-year-old Aneesh Chaganty.
- Feature film directorial debut of Aneesh Chaganty.
- Studied filmmaking at the University of Southern California
- Former Google commercials creator. Chaganty was asked to join the Google Creative Lab in New York City, where he spent two years developing, writing, and directing Google commercials.
- Chaganty's *Seeds* (2014), shot entirely on Google Glass, traced a man's journey to India to deliver an envelope.
- “At Google Creative Lab, my job was essentially to take a bunch of tech products—either physical or just an app—and frame them as a narrative for general audiences to understand them. It was here where I learned how to make something as seemingly cold and mundane as a screen into an emotional canvas.” - Chaganty
- “I feel that technology as a whole has such a terrible reputation in media, despite the intentions of everyone who is involved in the making of technology.”
- “Chaganty credits his mother, who accompanied him on his India visit, for his love for movies. His exposure to Indian cinema gave *Searching* its emotional root.”

TRIVIA

- The name "Laura Barns" a character name from the movie *Unfriended* appears on the top right screen as a trending topic. It was shown very briefly.
- The word "Catfish" can be seen during a Twitter search at one point in the film, and also as the name of the mascot of the school that Margot attends. This is a hint to user fish_n_chips being a catfish.
- When David discovers his brother's t-shirt in Margot's car and is searching for his number through his contacts, you can see one of the contact's is Aneesh Chaganty, the director.

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Juan Sebastian Baron)

- “Aneesh and I met at USC when we were partnered up to do an intermediate project. We clicked immediately. I have always appreciated his passion for storytelling as well as his values and ethic. I’m drawn to directors with strong visions, and I’m all about supporting them on their crazy adventures. I think Aneesh trusted the process that we’ve continued to develop together. The bulk of the team came from USC and that gave us the fundamentals and shared experience to tackle the challenges on this project, on something as out there as this it really anchored us.”
- The film took just 13 days to shoot, however it took two years to make due to the prep, editing and animating.
- “From the get-go, we decided that we wanted to film this movie with authentic tools, with the right cameras instead of shooting the whole thing on an Alexa and degrading the movie to fit the different looks, Barón said. That meant that we were shooting with consumer products. We were shooting with GoPros, iPhones, cameras that had been discontinued ten years ago, camcorders and still cameras.”
- Instead of being able to pan around, or shoot from multiple angles, Barón was often stuck with one, static angle and was forced to be creative in that space.
- “By lighting [Margot’s] room in a certain way, we learn more about the pain that Margot experiences and we learn how David is oblivious to the sorrow that Margot is in.”
- “There are moments when David is really vulnerable, and that’s when we played around with the lights from the laptop, how that’s an element that gives you the impression that he’s suffering through the screen a little bit. The screen becomes a component that maybe you didn’t notice before.”
- “We did treat this film like we would any other narrative project, and there were specific beats and character arcs we wanted to enhance with the cinematography. I knew I could use the lighting to push the vulnerability of a scene or link moments across the narrative. As a personal goal I wanted the film to feel crafted and have a sense of direction, and I didn’t want the technology to get in the way of that.”
- “we looked at news helicopter footage and paid attention to how the pilots and operators react to situations unfolding live. We binged video blogger material. The aim was to understand the grammar viewers are familiar with so we could lure them into that suspension of disbelief and manipulate their emotions. I pored over coverage of big events, reaction videos online, the general zeitgeist of content. When you view all of it through the lens of narrative cinematography there’s endless inspiration for techniques.”
- FaceTime sequences in this movie were extremely difficult to shoot. We had to have two actors, in different spaces, interacting with each other live, while Aneesh and his team monitored the performances. Luckily Adam Sidman developed a proprietary system at Bazelevs using GoPros and laptops running off a CCTV switching system. It’s a bit of a frankenstein rig but a brilliant solution to the problem.
- “I found a Sony HD camcorder (the Z100) that matched the sensor size of news cameras but shot 4K so we could get the push ins that were critical to the storytelling.”

EDITING/VFX (Nicholas D. Johnson, Will Merrick)

- Director Aneesh Chaganty and producer Sev Ohanian hired the editors and together they made a rough version of the film, with Chagnaty playing all of the characters, that lasted for an hour and forty minutes. They showed this version of the film to the crew before shooting began in order to give everyone a feel for what they were making.

- “We had a joke that a normal movie is pre-production, production, and post-production. And our movie is pre-post, post, and post-post. The editors were involved at every single stage of it. Not only every single stage, before every single stage. We hired them seven weeks before we even started shooting.”
- “The editors compiled low-res images off the internet and then we shot Aneesh playing the role of every single character, including the 16-year-old teenage girl. By the end of those 7 weeks, we had a full-length version of our movie that just happened to be really ugly.”
- “Made a mock-up of the entire film before we even shot a frame of it to show the cast and crew. To show them what we were making in the first place. They needed to understand the context that we were shooting. And John needs to know where every button he’s pressing is because we’re recording his eyeline. So, he needs to always going to be dragging things the right way. It was an absolute technical forest to kind of go through it.”
- “Every single bubbling of a text, every single message coming in and every single backspace – the way we cut to it, the way we allow it in the pacing of the film – has dramatic weight,” - Chaganty
- “The biggest challenge for us was simply that our computers kept crashing. We were using two regular iMacs and an editing software that was not designed to do what we were asking it to do. Every time we’d ask our editors to make an edit, they’d say to come back in 20 minutes so that it could render.”

SOUND/MUSIC (Torin Borrowdale)

- Received Composition degree from USC's Thornton School of Music in addition to a minor in Cinematic Arts.
- Have scored over 50 student projects (including many 310s and 480s), 6 videogames (including several Advanced Game Projects) and several television show themes.
- Interned with film composers across Los Angeles including: James Newton Howard (*The Hunger Games Trilogy*), Christopher YOUNG (*Identity Thief*), and Austin Wintory (*Journey*).

PROMOTION

- The Sony Pictures Entertainment production had its world premiere at Sundance in January before touring several other festivals.

BOX OFFICE

- (As of Sept 5th, 2018)
- Domestic: \$9,446,589
- Foreign: \$7,088,951
- Worldwide: \$16,535,540
- Opening Weekend: \$6,066,463
 - (#4 rank, 1,207 theaters, \$5,026 average)

RECEPTION

- Rotten Tomatoes: 91% Tomometer, 89% Audience
- Cinemascore: X
- IMDb: 7.9/10

- *“Searching is a technical marvel with a beating heart at its core, which makes all the difference.”* - Peter Travers
- *Searching is a suspenseful drama, buoyed by its innovative filmmaking style and collection of strong performances by its leads.”* - Chris Agar

SEQUELS/LEGACY

