



The Infectious Imagination of Henry Bramble

Henry Bramble was an extraordinary boy, with an
incredible imagination



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Screen South presents a Hopscotch Films production

The Infectious Imagination Of Henry Bramble

Written and Directed by
Derek Boyes

Produced by
Charlotte Wontner and Annabel Bates

Starring
Paul Copley
Maxwell Laird
Kate Henry

And Introducing
Archie Lyndhurst

14.5 min | Colour | 2k DCP | 16:9 - 2.35:1 | 5.1 Surround | UK

Logline

When you've lost your imagination, there's only one boy who can get it back!

Short Synopsis

When a stuffy retired Judge is forced to spend time with his 10 year-old Nephew, the boy unexpectedly reignites his lost imagination.

Long Synopsis

Geoffrey, a retired, dispassionate Judge, is unexpectedly asked to look after Henry, his 10-year-old nephew. Geoffrey is trying to write a very important book and not wanting to be disturbed, banishes the boy to a dusty attic bedroom. Unable to sit still, Henry quickly learns that his Uncle is suffering from writer's block and slips into an imaginary world in search of a cure. There he meets Raygo, a dwarf-like hunter who informs him that to restore his Uncle's imagination, he needs a drop of blood from a Voydarkatron - an unworldly beast that sucks people's brains out of their eye sockets.

Screening Information

Genre: Family Fantasy
Original Format: 4k Red UHD 16:9
Screening Format: DCP 2k Scope 2.35:1
Original Language: English
Suggested Rating: PG (8 years and older)



Cast and Key Crew

HENRY BRAMBLE
GREAT UNCLE GEOFFREY
RAYGO RATTLEGUM
HENRY'S MOTHER

Archie Lyndhurst
Paul Copley
Maxwell Laird
Kate Henry

WRITER, DIRECTOR, EDITOR
PRODUCER
PRODUCER
CINEMATOGRAPHER
COMPOSER
PRODUCTION DESIGNER
COSTUME DESIGNER
SOUND DESIGNERS
VFX SUPERVISOR

Derek Boyes
Charlotte Wontner
Annabel Bates
Sara Deane
Evan Jolly
Damien Creagh
Nicole Pitchers
Miha Jaramaz & Ian McBeth
Simon Frame

About the Film

The Infectious Imagination Of Henry Bramble is a touching and magical fantasy short film for the whole family, inspired by films like Pixar's *Up*, *The Lion The Witch & The Wardrobe*, and *The Wizard Of Oz*. It is a beautiful tale with a universal message, reminding us of the importance of imagination.



In 2010 writer/director Derek Boyes came up with the basic premise of the film during a children's filmmaking class he was teaching that summer. The idea lingered in his mind and he was keen to explore it further.

With a family on the way and temping full-time as an usher at Maidstone crown court, Derek had little space to write. However, during long drawn out 'points of law' he discovered he could use this wasted time at work to develop the screenplay, scribbling down ideas and sketches on the back of recycled scrap court paper.

Screen South funded the project through their Innovation Shorts Scheme that ran in 2011. Derek and his team were awarded a £20,000 budget, half of which would be allocated to VERL (Visual Effects Research Lab) in Dundee, who would complete the visual effects of the film.

Filming took place over three days from the 18th to the 20th of October 2011 on location at *Boughton Monchelsea Place*, on the outskirts of Maidstone in Kent.



Traditionally, a film of this length with so many vfx elements would be shot over five to seven days, so having only three days was almost an impossible challenge.

For example, if a performance in the first take was acceptable, Derek often had to move on to the next shot, just to stay on schedule, which left him little room for options in the edit.

This was incredibly frustrating for Derek, as it gave him very little room for mistakes. This meant that sustained focus and professionalism from both cast and crew was vital to the success of the film.

The short was shot on the *Red Epic* in 4k and converted to 2K for the final DCP. With limited time to get coverage, shooting in 4K allowed for a certain amount of cropping, frame re-adjustment and shot size flexibility in post (which was still something of a novelty in 2011).



Unfortunately the post visual effects work came to an abrupt halt in mid 2012, when VERL unexpectedly disbanded without completing a single VFX shot. Two more teams failed to deliver the required work, due to file corruption and software issues and by 2014, all hope of

completing the film was lost. It was a very frustrating, costly and emotionally exhausting experience for the director, who continued to work tirelessly to find alternative ways to finish the film.

Meanwhile, composer Evan Jolly managed to create an incredibly rich and authentic, orchestral score just using samples. Derek had been concerned that without a budget for live musicians, the score would suffer, but on hearing it, the director welled up. "Having had so many problems in post, to hear such a beautifully composed score that emotionally hit all the right moments, was simply overwhelming."

By 2018, having exhausting all other possibilities, Derek began to tackle the remaining VFX work all by himself, filming additional live-action elements against a blue screen and learning the compositing capabilities of After Effects.

The Covid lockdown was a blessing in disguise for Derek, who used this time to complete all the vfx work. At the same time, sound mixer Miha Jaramaz, another NFTS alumni based in Slovenia, snuck into the deserted sound studio to complete the final sound mix remotely.

Nearly a decade after filming, this wonderful heart-warming family fantasy short can finally get a chance to captivate audiences around the world.

Biographies



Paul Copley who plays *Great Uncle Geoffrey*, has starred in some of the best award winning British television of the last twenty years including *Downton Abbey*, *Torchwood*, *Life On Mars*, *Shameless*, *The Street*, *The Lakes*, *This Life*, *Cracker* and *Queer As Folk*. His film credits include Michael Winterbottom's *Jude*, and James Ivory's *Remains Of The Day*.



Writer/Director Derek Boyes graduated from the National Film and Television School in 2004 with the incredible award winning short, *The Happiness Thief* that was officially selected in competition at Cannes. Derek continues to direct independent and lottery funded shorts, while developing a slate of fantastical features.



Producer Charlotte Wontner has made several feature films including *The Sick House* (2008) and *Island* (2011) and most recently *The Carer* (2016). Her fantasy short *A Fairy Story* was selected for Critics Week at Cannes and *It's not You It's Me*, was selected for the TCM and Kodak Shorts competitions.

Producer Annabel Bates founded Honeybee Films in 2013. producing *RINK*, a short film selected for Eastern Edge Film Fund and the Film London scheme: London Calling. She has worked as a Producer, Line Producer, Assistant Producer, Production Manager and Production Coordinator on several other projects.



Cinematographer Sara Deane graduated from the National Film and Television School in 2008. Since then she has shot 14 features including *Hard Boiled Sweets* released by Universal Pictures and *Veritys Summer* - winner of Best Cinematography at the Van D'or Independent Film Awards 2012.



Composer Evan Jolly graduated from the National Film & Television School in 2004 and has since composed music for Netflix's *The Crown*, BBC's *Prime Evil* and Channel 4's *Catch 22* miniseries, as well as additional music for *Aquaman* (2018) and *Wonder Woman* (2017).



Director's Statement

I never expected to get the chance to direct a short film as ambitious as my 2004 graduation film *The Happiness Thief*. By 2010 my career had taken a turn for the worse and my only creative release at that time was teaching kids filmmaking at weekends. Although the work they could produce was limited, their imaginations were on fire and helped me to reignite my own. It was during one of their five-day summer schools that I came up with the concept of Henry Bramble.

I wanted to create an original, sweet, heart-warming film that touches audience of all ages, pushing the traditional boundaries of storytelling to a new level, by featuring a fully computer generated character. I wanted to offer a more enriched cinematic experience for a broader family audience, encouraging the UK film industry not to shy away from developing and financing more original, innovative and imaginative films.

While developing the story, my wife was pregnant with our daughter. It never occurred to me until the day before our mid-pregnancy scan that she might in fact be a boy. In a sudden panic I tried to imagine what he might be like and what formed in my head was essentially the character of Henry Bramble. Henry is my homage to the son I might have had.

I had spent seven frustrating years struggling to get my first feature film off the ground and in that time had done very little directing. When I came up with the idea for *The Infections*

Imagination of Henry Bramble, I knew straight away it was something special and that it had the potential to jump-start that elusive directing career. Essentially it was a second chance to turn heads in the industry and remind them I'm still here.



Director Derek Boyes acts out the Voydarkatron creature in rehearsals.



Frequently Asked Questions

Where did such an imaginative idea come from?

I was teaching 7 - 15 year olds filmmaking on a Saturday morning to earn a little extra cash. The great thing about kid's imaginations is that they are pure and free. They have not yet been restricted or censored by the process of growing up and so they're heads are constantly full of wonderful crazy ideas that grown-ups could never conceive of.

Each term we would develop a new idea for a film. The kids would come up with ideas, characters, locations and themes and I would then form a story out of all these elements. Secretly it was a valuable writing and directing exercise for me in how to improvise creatively and think on your feet.

HB was developed out of a summer school film we made called Elliot Hardy - The Zombie Slayer. It was essentially a story about a frustrated writer whose over-imaginative son kept distracting him from his writing. I loved the dynamic between the over-imaginative son and his father with writer's block. I wanted to delve deeper into this idea. In doing so I changed the father to a great uncle to increase the polarity.

I think there's something quite magical that happens between a child and an elderly person (something I had explored before in a somewhat darker short film called *In-Between*) and with this simple adjustment, the story literally wrote itself. The first draft was pretty much the final draft, in that there

was no rewriting required. It was just edited down from twenty pages down to a more manageable ten, in order to fit the Innovative Shorts scheme budget.

How did Screen South come on board?

I knew I had written a terrific short film, but I was also well aware that it was unlikely I was going to find anyone who could fund it - It was just too ambitious.

With my previous family fantasy *The Happiness Thief*, I had been in a unique position, as it was an NFTS graduation film. I didn't need to pay the crew, the equipment was free, the shooting stage was free, the basic set building was free and we were able to get a lot of favors and discounts because of the NFTS' reputation. This meant that our budget of £14,000 stretched a very long way.



With HB I was out in the real world, on my own and with the closure of the UK Film Council, there was very little financial support out there for any kind of short filmmaking, never

FAQ Continued

mind an ambitious visual effects laden fantasy film such as this. I didn't really know what to do with it.

By complete coincidence Screen South were in the final stages of packaging an innovative shorts scheme that would be awarding a whopping £20,000 to four potential projects. During an unrelated meeting with them I was asked if I had any film ideas that would require vfx or 3D. I immediately said yes and gave them HB to read. Miranda Fleming (the head of development for Screen South at the time) absolutely loved it and encouraged me to apply to the scheme. A few months later I was informed that HB had been selected for an award.



Wasn't this film supposed to be in 3D?

It was something Screen South suggested and as soon as they did I knew HB had a legitimate use for it in terms of enriching the story. I am a big fan of *The Wizard of Oz*. They used Technicolor to emphasise the magical world of Oz, keeping the scenes of mundane real-life in black and white. 3D was a modern equivalent of this story enhancing idea. In HB, the fantasy world would be 3D, while the reserved world of Great Uncle Geoffrey would start off in 2D, but as he learns to imagine again, his world slowly gets more three dimensional. Sadly the budget did not stretch far enough to shoot in 3D and in 2021, audiences seem to have lost their taste for it.

How did you manage to shoot the film in just three days?

I have no idea. I was just very, very lucky. I actually felt pretty depressed after the shoot. I was convinced I had not managed to get enough coverage of the scenes to make it work. There were two reverse shots in particular that I never had the chance to shoot and that I considered vital to the emotional spine of the story. Without them I feared we didn't have a film. A few more days past and my curiosity got the better of me. I started putting sequences together and with fresh eyes, my passion for the project quickly re-ignited. To my surprise there was very little in terms of emotional impact missing from the film. There's a pivotal scene in the film where Geoffrey slaps the boy. I knew from auditions that a

FAQ Continued

ten year-old was very unlikely to be able to give me the performance I needed within such a tight schedule, but I quickly realised they didn't have to. We didn't necessarily have to see the tears of betrayal in Henry's eyes, what was more important to the story, was seeing Geoffrey's immediate shame and deep regret, as this is the pivotal moment of his character's journey.

After the shocking slap, I cut straight to the wide instead. I figured if you don't have the performance, then by pulling back to a wide, you give the audience breathing space to contemplate what's just happened. It's not as emotionally triggering as my original intention, but it still serves the story.

I also didn't get enough coverage of the Voydarkatron scenes, due to time constraints. I had to cut down this sequence extensively. Fortunately shooting in 4k allowed me to create an additional shot size from the wide shots and we were able to create close-ups of the creature, using back plates of the woods from footage previously shot.

What made you choose the son of Only Fools & Horses star Nicholas Lyndhurst to play Henry Bramble?

I had no idea Archie was the 'son of Rodney' until the day of the audition, so it was a nice surprise. Initially we thought we could find a child actor from local schools around Kent.

We held a couple of auditions, but despite some great characters, their acting ability was not quite up to scratch.

We held a third audition in Hyde Park, London, with a handful of drama school kids. I was hopeful that this time we would get the level of acting talent we required.



Archie made a lasting impression from the very beginning. In a superbly polite voice he held out his hand and said something like "I'm Archie, very nice to meet you." It was so very Henry Bramble. He also had these wonderfully soft day-dreamy eyes and spoke excitedly about everything and anything in a continual stream of enthusiasm. I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that we had found our Henry Bramble.

It was officially his first time in front of the camera and he did really, really well. Thoughtful and professional, he was a

FAQ Continued

joy to have on set. A genuinely likeable, entertaining and polite young man who bonded with the crew and his co-star Paul Copley, effortlessly.

It was truly heart-breaking to learn of his tragic passing last year, just days before his twentieth birthday. I'm extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to have spent time with him. He really was a very special boy.

Paul Copley has appeared in some of the best British television drama of the last twenty years. How did you convince him to come on board?

I confess he was not my first choice (such luck is a rarity in this industry). At the top of my wish list was John Hurt, but he was apparently unavailable. In fact every actor that I initially thought of, seemed to be unavailable, which I found surprising considering we were in middle of a recession.



I then went through my nostalgic phase, thinking of past childhood idols like Tom Baker and Bernard Cribbins, but once again they were also unavailable.

Finally I started to think harder about the good actors I'd seen on TV - Actors I may not remember by name, but whose performances stuck in my mind. I made a list of all the best British drama I had seen in the last twenty years, including everything written by Jimmy McGovern. I started searching on IMDb and while browsing through the cast list of *The Lakes* I came across Paul Copley. I instantly remembered him as the quietly suffering husband whose wife was 'having it off' with the local vicar. I realised I'd also seen him more recently in an episode of *Torchwood*. His performance in both were staggering. He immediately went on my final list of suggestions to the casting director and within a few days I received an email saying he was available. I said 'yes', he said 'yes' and just like that we had found our Uncle Geoffrey.

Fortunately Paul is a very easy-going, charming and considerate actor who understands the restraints of low budget filmmaking. He gave it his all over the three days, working into the night despite a very modest wage.

The first cut of the film came in at just over 20 minutes. I think this was mostly due to the fact that I wanted to linger on his performance as long as possible. Each expression of

FAQ Continued

frustration, disappointment and disdain were equally as entertaining and I struggled to choose which ones to keep and which ones to loose. My favorite scene is in the attic bedroom where Geoffrey sits down next to the sleeping Henry and looking around the room, suddenly understands everything. His face tells you exactly what he's thinking beat by beat, it's incredible!

How difficult was it directing actors against a completely cgi creature like the Voydarkatron?

I have always had an interest in film effects ever since I was a kid and from my experience working on *Star Wars Episode One*, I knew the basic process of how cgi characters were created. I also had a couple of friends in the visual effects industry who advised me on the do's and don'ts. The biggest shock though was discovering that the industry would have scheduled five days to complete what we achieved in just over half a day. So the main difficulty was exactly the same as the rest of the shoot - time.

Blue screen work is pretty simple with today's software. My biggest concern was that Archie had a visual reference on set to be able to imagine the creature in front of him and react convincingly. During rehearsal I played the monster, stomping around and growling, so that everyone knew where the creature was supposed to be. The only hard part was giving the actors a convincing eye-line, as I was not seven foot tall.

The hardest shot turned out to be the Voydarkatron's trunk releasing Henry's face, causing him to fall to the ground. I couldn't get Archie to push away from the bucket (a practical substitute trunk) convincingly. In the end I ran out of time and later, made sure I only used as little of the shot as necessary in the edit. I hoped this would disguise the clumsiness of the action and that perhaps the vfx team could fix it.



How did the vfx delay the film by nearly a decade?

Two reasons really. Firstly I think we all underestimated the amount of time, effort and talent required to create a cgi character. Although we only needed less than a minute worth of creature animation, it takes the same amount of time to create a cgi character for one frame as it does for a whole film. In

FAQ Continued

comparison, the animation was a relatively quick process. Secondly I think we were particularly unlucky. The company who were assigned to complete the vfx as part of the funding deal, unexpectedly disbanded without completing a single vfx shot.



Screen South managed to raise additional funds through a generous donation from Maidstone Studios, but over the next two years, two more vfx teams failed to deliver any usable footage, due to file corruption and software incompatibility.

I spent the next few years looking into other ways of raising money, including crowdfunding through Indigogo, but with insufficient manpower to run the campaign, it ended in failure. I then asked vfx schools and the online vfx community

for help. Two very generous vfx artists did come forward, one fixed the file corruption and another helped me to break down the remaining vfx work (in terms of what needed to be done and in what order). Unfortunately artists with the relevant skills and experience are all in high demand and work long hours, so despite being sympathetic, they understandably didn't want to sacrifice what little free time they did have.

Eventually I took a short online vfx course and started learning After Effects, completing all of the simpler vfx work myself. By the time we had locked-down for Covid last summer, I had learned how to composite VERL's original test renders of the monster into the live action pretty seamlessly. At that moment I realised I was finally going to finish this film.

The only disappointment with this film is that it is only fifteen minutes long. Have you thought of turning it into a feature length film?

Of course! My biggest regret with *The Happiness Thief's* success was that when everyone wanted to meet me and were excited about the possibility of a feature-length version, I hadn't yet thought about it. As a result I missed out on several potentially life-changing career opportunities. With HB I was adamant that I would not make the same mistake again and

FAQ Continued

so I was already developing ideas for a feature length version while I was editing the short. I'm now in the process of polishing a strong final draft, which I am very excited about, especially with opportunities opening up with streaming services like Netflix.

I hope to use the short film's festival success to leverage industry interest to gain some development finance. The feature length version is so much bigger visually and emotionally than I could have imagined (even though I did imagine it of course) and I'm very proud of the way it has turned out.

What did you learn about making this film and what would you do differently?

I've learned that there are very few true professionals in this industry and even less with genuine talent, so never assume someone knows more than you - they often don't.

Despite having large gaps between actual directing, I hadn't quite realised how much more I'd learned in recent years. The additional skills and experiences gained from screen-writing, teaching and packaging feature projects, has helped solidify my understanding of the craft, but without any recent industry recognition to attest this, it took me a while to fully recognize quite how skilled a filmmaker I had become. As a result I've learnt to trust my own instincts, to stand my ground on ideas and ways of working, where I might once

have conceded due to my own self-doubt.

If I was going to make this film today, I think I'd build a one-foot animatronic latex model of the Voydarkatron, on a miniature set, built in someone's garage using traditional stop-motion animation. It's just so much more accessible, it offers you more control and has a magical, unworldly feel about it that is still aesthetically pleasing to modern audiences. In comparison, even the best photorealistic CGI can feel soulless and is extremely hard to pull off on a small budget.

Inspired by the new wrap-around screen technology used in *The Mandalorian*, you could even incorporate large 4k monitors to accurately light the creature using frame-by-frame footage of the actual live-action shot on location. I think merging the best of traditional SFX with modern VFX is the key.



FAQ Continued

Where do you see the future of British filmmaking?

As technology gets cheaper and more available to the masses, I hope we will see more commercially ambitious films made and funded in the UK. As it stands we don't actually have a British film industry. We rely too much on soft money for it to be legitimate. It is a great shame and a reality that nobody seems to want to admit to.

The internet has been transforming the way films get discovered, funded and distributed. Unlike the traditional Studios, platforms like Netflix and Amazon are not afraid to take on new talent, original content or use innovative ways of making films. I'd love to see a British film industry that is not afraid of being ambitious and imaginative, that rewards and nurtures ALL genuine talent equally, no matter who they are or where they've come from.

Films should be budgeted and funded based on the filmmakers ability to deliver and on whether there is a sufficient audience out there who want to see it. Currently there are too many badly made films (and well-made films) being financed with budgets that exceed audience demand. I think soft money only encourages this.

THE END



Also by Derek Boyes - The Happiness Thief (2004)



Credits

Writer and Director: Derek Boyes, Producer: Matt King,
Starring: Tom Brooke, Chloe Smyth and Beans Balawi.

Synopsis

A miserable little girl curses her younger brother for being so happy, not realising that her curse would summon a grotesque figure who in the darkness of night, violently steals the boy's happiness. Horrified and ridden with guilt, the girl chases the Thief onto the city's rooftops in a desperate attempt to bargain with him, but he is not an easy creature to please.



Selected reviews and quotes

"This is such a wonderful little short. It is a success on all counts. It has a style all of its own, the cinematography is lovely and the acting great."

- Review by Elf, www.iofilm.co.uk

"A film that sets out to unapologetically entertain and enchant, delight and disturb. The production is just this side of Tim Burton - lavish, hyper-real, arresting and utterly beautiful. This is a film that can be enjoyed by everyone from children to overgrown kids."

- Miles Watts, *Asthetica Magazine*

"Director Derek Boyes pulled as many favours as possible to make the most expensive looking short film ever. The kids fairy story was pretty amazing stuff."

- Philip Halloween, *Artrocker 116 Editorial*

"I must congratulate you on the tremendous success you have had. I think it is a charming and arresting piece"

- Grainne Marmion, *Children's Film and Television Foundation*

"A very well made and interesting film, a credit to the National."

- B.S.C. (British Society Of Cinematographers)

"It is an impressive, original and really striking film."

- Chloe Sizer, *Magic Light Pictures*

"We loved the film. Derek has great vision."

- Lucy Main, *Baker Street Media Finance*

"I thought it was extremely good, a lovely simple idea, beautifully executed. The visual effects and the design you created were spectacular - well done!"

- Samantha Thomas, *Scott Free*

"I enjoyed your film at the NFTS screening - it reminded me of my childhood terror of the child catcher from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!"

- Rosie Alison, *Heyday Films*