

ยาบ้า

# MONK

พระภิกษุ

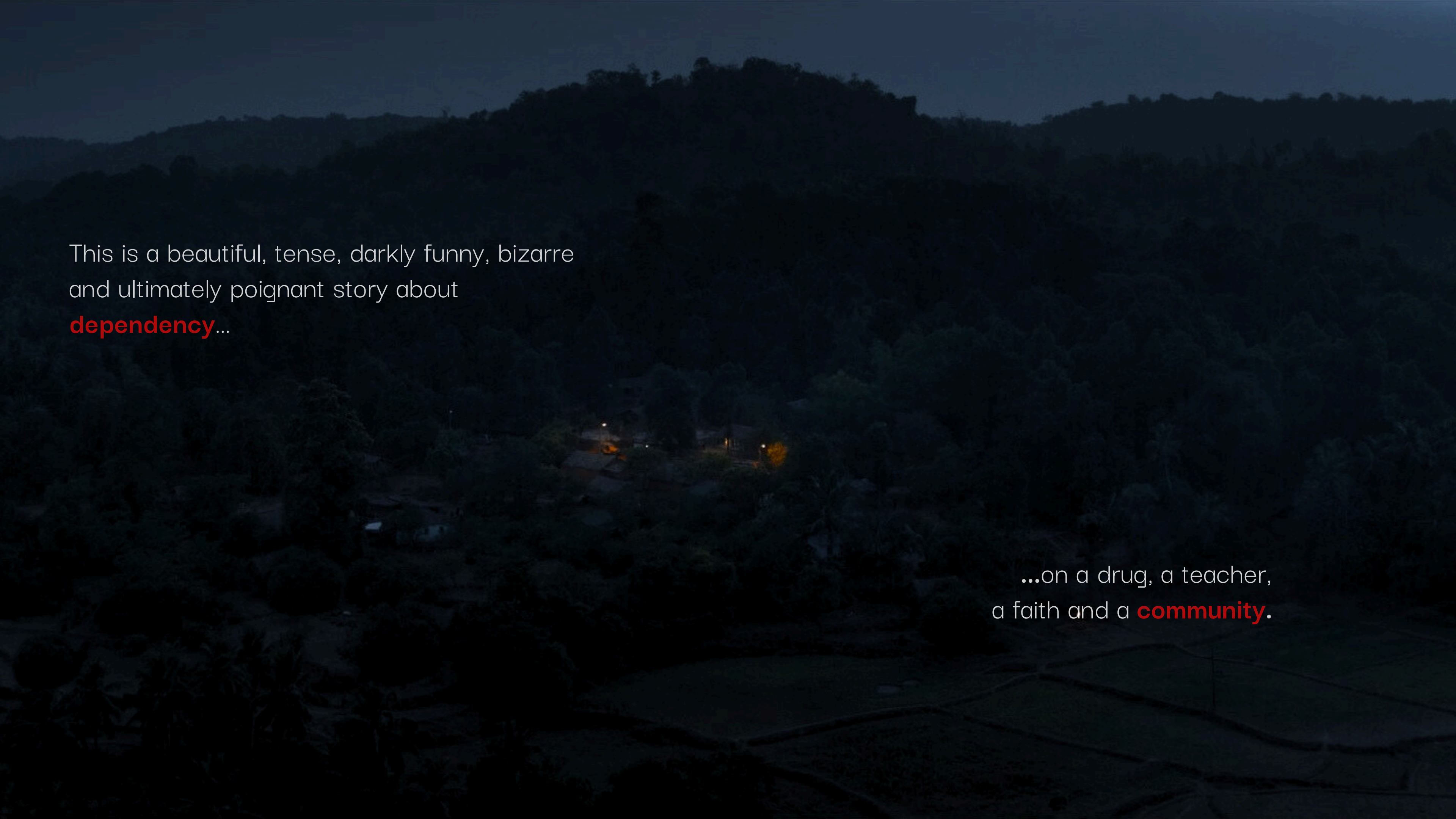
a short film by Rhavin Banda and the  
SWEET JUICES creative team

# LOGLINE

The background image shows a Buddhist temple interior. A large, golden, serene Buddha face is the central focus, set within an ornate, carved wooden frame. The face is illuminated from below, creating a warm, golden glow. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, their silhouettes dark against the lighter background. They appear to be in a state of prayer or meditation, looking towards the Buddha face. The overall atmosphere is solemn and reverent.

When the beloved abbot at a Buddhist temple is outed for smoking meth, his students must reckon with the fallout...

**...how can their monastery survive with a corrupt leader?**

A dark, atmospheric night scene of a forested hillside. In the center, a small village is visible, illuminated by a few warm yellow lights. The foreground shows a dark, textured surface, possibly a field or a path. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

This is a beautiful, tense, darkly funny, bizarre  
and ultimately poignant story about  
**dependency...**

...on a drug, a teacher,  
a faith and a **community.**



# THE WORLD

A large, ornate golden Buddha statue is the central focus, seated on a high, tiered pedestal. The statue is highly detailed, with multiple arms holding various objects. It is set within a grand, multi-tiered structure that appears to be part of a temple or monastery. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a dramatic and somewhat somber atmosphere. In the foreground, a large crowd of people is visible, their forms mostly in silhouette, looking towards the statue. The overall scene suggests a significant religious or cultural event.

**Dhamma Nivas** has become a well-known sanctuary on the outskirts of a critically under-supported rural town eaten from the inside out by poverty, violence, loneliness, unemployment and a meth epidemic.

Many students who undertake its 30-day silent retreats are users. The monastery has become a defacto rehab clinic for them.

We'll shoot at **Scheyville National Park** in rural NSW. Its Nissen huts will provide a run-down, alien atmosphere to our world.

While the exteriors will look hostile and oppressive, interiors will be decked out with lush and resplendent Buddhist furniture and iconography. We'll borrow it from real monasteries I've stayed at in and around Sydney.



# SOMCHAI

Somchai is 57 years old, but he's been a monk since he was seven.

Beloved and respected throughout town, his uniquely energetic and lively teaching style has attracted many new students to Dhamma Nivas over the years.

He's restlessly curious by nature, but stifled by his monastic lifestyle and tormented by **fantasies of escape**.

He's trapped in Dukkha Ñāna: a dangerous stage in the path to Enlightenment characterized by a paralysing understanding of how, from a Buddhist lens, existence is nothing more than decay and suffering.

A creeping nihilism and a sinking doubt in the power of the dhamma ultimately lead him down **taboo paths of exploration...**

A close-up, low-angle portrait of a man with a shaved head, looking slightly to the right. He has several tattoos on his face, including the word 'SPAIN' on his left cheek and 'TUSO' on his right cheek. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his forehead and nose, and deep shadows on the sides of his face. The background is dark and out of focus.

# TONY

Tony, 31, is the novice monk at Dhamma Nivas.

Having left all worldly possessions - and a painful, violent past - behind, he **committed his life** to serving Somchai at his temple.

He's unfailingly earnest and kind-hearted... a prime example of someone saved by the dhamma.

His commitment to the monastery - his home - is stronger than anything.

But most of all, Tony is **fearful**. He's afraid he'll never live up to Somchai's wisdom and charisma. And afraid of how he'll act if he's forced to step up...

A man is sitting on a bed in a dimly lit room, looking distressed with his hand to his face. The room is dark, with a blueish tint to the lighting. The man is shirtless and appears to be in a state of emotional pain or contemplation.

# ASHLEY

Ashley, 25, grew up in small-town poverty. His family, his social life... everything he knew revolved around meth.

He's deeply lonely, searching for genuine connections, purpose... **an anchor.**

Meth helps him escape an endless loop of self-harm fantasies... but when the euphoria wears off, it all comes hurtling back like a ton of bricks.

Desperate to break out of his addiction, he undertakes a grueling 30-day retreat at Dhamma Nivas...

But when Somchai's secret is revealed, his faith is tragically **betrayed...**



# BUDDHISM, CORRUPTED

My father is from Sri Lanka - the spiritual centre of Theravāda Buddhism worldwide.

Growing up, I naively saw it as the “**good religion**”, free from the recent tabloid controversies tainting Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

I’ve spent years of my life in SE Asia, and throughout my 20s, stayed at various monasteries across Thailand, Laos and Australia.

I quickly discovered that **modern Buddhism is riddled with corruption and hypocrisy.**



# BUDDHISM, CORRUPTED

(CONT'D)

Stories of respected monks taking advantage of followers and caving to egoism and hedonism reflect the **growing pains of centuries-old religious institutions** trying to adapt to a globalised 21st century world.

You may have heard about Luang Pu Nen Khum, the abbot who went viral on Youtube for flaunting Louis Vuitton sunglasses on a private jet.

Or about the Cambodian monks who were arrested and defrocked in 2014 for months of non-stop partying and orgies...

...monks getting **caught and arrested for smoking or selling meth** is, unfortunately, a soberingly common theme.

# THE METH CRISIS

This is in large part because SE Asia is one of the world's hotspots for meth production.

And it's Australia's **second most-regularly consumed** illicit drug - second only to cannabis.

Unfortunately, we know from extensive, peer-reviewed research\* that violent, simplistic and dehumanising portrayals of the drug's victims **actively discourage users from seeking help.**

So instead, I'm hoping to approach this very real crisis without condescension or preachiness, but with a touch of black humour belying deep empathy and compassion for our characters.

# THE METH CRISIS

(CONT'D)

Above all, this is a story about a broken community coming together and rebuilding itself around a **philosophy, rather than a charismatic leader.**



# THE LOOK

Our film is set in the **dead of winter**.

But while our world is cruel, stark and lonely, we find small beauty in it...

...frosty breath caught in the moonlight; eucalypts rustling in the breeze; a monk's silhouette fading into the midnight mist.

We'll shoot this with an urgent, dynamic camera - constantly roving, building tension with every shot, every cut.



# THE SOUND

We'll get **E-File**, one of my favourite Australian underground electronic artists, to soundtrack the film.

Our score will be inspired by **dark, progressive trance**, MIA's "Matangi" and Philip Glass' "Escape to India".

As the film escalates in tension, so will the music.

This will be a driving, hypnotic 10-15min piece...  
**sonically unique, dense and visceral.**



A dark, atmospheric scene featuring several lit red candles in the foreground, casting a warm glow. In the background, a faint, ethereal figure is visible, possibly a statue or a person, set against a dark, textured wall. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

# REFERENCES



Trainspotting (1996) dir. Danny Boyle



The Banshees of Inisherin (2022) dir. Martin McDonagh



Curfew (2013) dir. Shawn Christensen



Fairplay (2022) dir. Zoel Aeschbacher



Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring (2003) dir. Kim Ki-duk



Doubt (2008) dir. John Patrick Shanley



First Reformed (2017) dir. Paul Schrader



Fargo (1996) dir. Joel and Ethan Coen

# DIRECTOR'S BIO

Rhavin Banda (he/him) is a British-Australian filmmaker, born in 1997. He is of Sri Lankan, Malaysian and Punjabi descent, working between Sydney and London.

Stepping on his first film set at age 15 in MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, he worked his way up through projects such as THE INVISIBLE MAN, SHANG CHI and MR INBETWEEN (S2).

Today, he's the youngest location scout and manager in Australia, running the department on films such as A24's TALK TO ME.

His debut short film BONDI BOY, filmed in 2018 and completed in 2025, was recently acquired by Lights On, an international distribution agency based in Italy, and will begin its festival run in 2025.

Rhavin is currently developing a psychedelic slasher feature with Will Suen, set at a trance rave in the Australian bush.



Bondi Boy (2025) dir. Rhavin Banda

# THE TEAM



**WILL SUEN**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

WILL is a writer, director and producer, and one half of the directing duo "Will&Sej". Together they directed the short film SWEET JUICES, which swept the genre cinema world.

It won the Jury Mention at Fantasia, Best Picture at Fantastic Fest and was nominated for Best Direction for a Short Film at the Australian Director's Guild (ADG) Awards in 2024.

He's also the co-founder of Half Symbolic Films, a boutique film distribution company best known for bringing the films of Masaaki Yuasa to cinemas across Australia.



**SHIYANG ZHENG**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

SHIYANG is an award-winning screenwriter, director, producer and playwright from Western Sydney.

In 2022, Shiyang worked as a post-story consultant for Dev Patel's film MONKEY MAN. In 2023, Shiyang served as script editor for the multi-award-winning short film, SWEET JUICES.

Shiyang is currently the co-creator, EP and lead writer on THE SERMENT, a neo-noir crime series in development with Aquarius Films.

He is currently writing for Netflix's miniseries THE BADLANDS.

# A LARGER STORY...

While writing METH MONK, I felt myself increasingly drawn towards telling a grander tale of the rise and fall of Dhamma Nivas, spanning two continents, six decades and three timelines.

We begin in South Thailand, 1970s, in a drug mule village on the Malaysian border. A young boy is whisked away from a life of crime by a holy family and trained as a monk in the local temple.

Somchai's story will be interwoven with those of Tony and Ashley. From different cultures, growing up two generations apart on other sides of town. We'll chart the ebbs and flows of gangland conflict and the drug trade over two generations in Albury-Wodonga,

Much like Lion or The Brutalist, our scope will be large but our budget small, our focus intimate and character-driven.

The feature format will afford us a larger canvas to explore grander ideas such as the Theravadan conception of suffering, the samsaric cycles of life, death and rebirth... but above all, the growing pains of modern Buddhism in the West.





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THANK YOU