

A FILM BY

TERRY GILLIAM

# TIDELAND



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# CAST & CREW

**Jodelle Ferland** Jeliza-Rose

**Brendan Fletcher** Dickens

**Janet McTeer** Dell

with

**Jennifer Tilly** Queen Gunhilda

**Jeff Bridges** Noah

Directed by

**Terry Gilliam**

Produced by

**Jeremy Thomas** and **Gabriella Martinelli**

Screenplay by

**Tony Grisoni** and **Terry Gilliam**

Based on the Novel 'Tideland'

by **Mitch Cullin**

Cinematographer

**Nicola Pecorini**

Production Designer

**Jasna Stefanovic**

Editor

**Lesley Walker**

Music

**Michael Danna** and **Jeff Danna**

Costume Designers

**Mario Davignon** and **Delphine White**

# DON'T FORGET TO LAUGH

by Neil Mitchell

With the release of his tenth feature, *Tideland* (2005), 30 years into a rollercoaster directorial career marked by dizzying artistic highs, crushing critical/box-office failures, and catastrophic production problems that would have permanently broken lesser filmmakers, the irrepressible Terry Gilliam delivered his most critically and artistically polarising film to date. Coming from the man responsible for *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (co-directed with Terry Jones in 1975), *Brazil* (1985) and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1988) – the individual production issues and/or divisive critical/public receptions that befell each of these films being well-documented parts of Gilliam lore – that's impressive going even by his uniquely haphazard standards. *Tideland* is also a contender for being the most personal entry on Gilliam's artistically visionary CV, the film in which the then 64-year-old finally discovered his inner child. That Gilliam's inner child turned out to be a nine-year-old girl with an exceedingly vivid, dark imagination should come as no surprise to anyone armed with even the most basic knowledge of the man and his endlessly inventive work.

Fittingly described by fellow Monty Python member Michael Palin as “either the best thing he's ever done, or the worst”, *Tideland* would, in true contrasting Gilliam fashion, win awards while simultaneously being described as “gruesomely awful” by Owen Gleiberman for *Entertainment*







*Weekly* and “an excruciating exercise in Gothic excess” by Ann Hornaday in *The Washington Post*. Controversially awarded the FIPRESCI prize at the 2005 San Sebastián Film Festival, *Tideland* became an unexpected critical and commercial success in Japan. Gilliam’s provocative, challenging feature did, however, largely spectacularly fail on both counts in most other territories. An aggrieved and frustrated Gilliam would later point fingers at the now defunct American distribution company, ThinkFilm, for its brief, unsuccessful US release, during which it grossed a meagre \$66,453 from just nine theatres.

An adaptation of author Mitch Cullin’s 2000 novel of the same name – the third part of his ‘Texas Trilogy’ that also included *Whompyjawed* (1999) and *Branches* (2000) – *Tideland* proved (despite what the film’s many naysayers would have you believe) ideal material for Gilliam to bring to the big screen. Cullin’s Southern Gothic tale, narrated in the first person by spirited nine-year-old Jeliza-Rose, populated by exaggerated characters, and where the lines between colourful, whimsical fantasy and hard, unsettling reality become increasingly, surreally blurred is as ‘Gilliamesque’ as it gets. An admirer of the director’s body of work, Cullin had speculatively sent Gilliam an advance copy of *Tideland* in the hope of securing a quote to be used to promote the novel on publication. In a double-whammy for the author, not only did the clearly impressed and inspired Gilliam provide the now-infamous cover blurb – the beautifully succinct “fucking wonderful” – he also immediately optioned the book for a future directorial project. His later statement that Cullin’s

novel contained one of the most “truthful, unsentimental and unromanticised” portrayals of childhood can be equally applied to the film that Gilliam would subsequently go on to co-adapt with British screenwriter Tony Grisoni. With the use of expressive off-kilter camerawork, alternately macabre and amusing mise-en-scène, and seamless blending of the actual and the imagined, Gilliam evocatively and confrontationally brought to life the striking physical spaces and emotionally turbulent inner landscapes inhabited by Jeliza-Rose.

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*Tideland*'s production and reception would be inextricably linked with that of Gilliam's other feature release of 2005, *The Brothers Grimm*. The fate of both films highlights how the stars never seem to cosmically align themselves in just the right fashion for this most singular of filmmakers. A studio movie with the Weinstein Brothers – Bob and a pre-infamy Harvey – as executive producers, *The Brothers Grimm* would be an unhappy and fractious experience for Gilliam. The bullish Weinsteins clashed with the equally forthright director over numerous matters on set, going as far as firing cinematographer and subsequently frequent Gilliam collaborator Nicola Pecorini. With the film's original shooting date of April 2003 already delayed until June of that year, *The Brothers Grimm* would fall further behind schedule when Gilliam stopped filming for almost two weeks, such was his anger at the Weinsteins. Shot in the Czech Republic on an \$88 million budget, and starring A-listers Matt Damon and Heath Ledger, *The Brothers Grimm* should have been



classic Gilliam fare, especially given the director's lifelong love of *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Unfortunately, more disputes with the Weinsteins – this time over final cut privilege during the post-production phase – would further taint Gilliam's involvement on the project.

Finally released on August 26th, 2005, ten months later than originally planned, *The Brothers Grimm* would go on to take a healthy \$105,316,267 at the box office, no doubt helped by the film's MPAA PG-13 rating, the first of Gilliam's films to be awarded the more family-friendly classification. Critically, however, it fared less well. *The Guardian's* chief film critic, Peter Bradshaw, dismissively likened the film to “a multi-coloured fairground ride that offers everything but enjoyment”, while the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Mick LaSalle charged Gilliam with “putting audiences to sleep all over America”. While *The Brothers Grimm* made a reasonable profit and exposed a younger generation to the director's work, the troubled shoot, artistically compromised end-product and largely ambivalent critical reaction would ultimately mark it as another bruising chapter for Gilliam. To add further salt to the wound, the Writers Guild of America insisted on a sole screenwriting credit for Ehren Kruger, whose spec script had been comprehensively rewritten by Gilliam and Grisoni before shooting began.

In contrast, the smaller scale, studio-free *Tideland* would be a relatively straightforward shoot – despite a processing lab managing to wipe the first days' worth of material – that came in on time, on budget and had rolled cameras after

only five weeks of pre-production. That it went from pre- to post-production during *The Brothers Grimm*'s final cut issues says as much about the Weinsteins as it does the altogether more hands-off and trusting *Tideland* producers, Jeremy Thomas and Gabriella Martinelli.

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A \$12 million co-production between the UK and Canada, *Tideland* was shot in late 2004, with the area in and around Regina, Saskatchewan in the south of Canada standing in for rural Texas. Nicola Pecorini was hired as cinematographer and editor Lesley Walker continued her collaborations with Gilliam following *The Fisher King* (1991), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and *The Brothers Grimm*. The film's many striking, and occasionally disturbing visual effects, were overseen by Richard Bain, who had worked on both *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) and *The Brothers Grimm*, and would go on to become to the visual effects supervisor on Gilliam's *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009), Tom Hooper's *Les Misérables* (2012) and Rian Johnson's *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017). For his menagerie of characters, Gilliam assembled a cast who uniformly bought into *Tideland*'s world and the director's vision of it. Veteran Hollywood star Jeff Bridges as Jeliza-Rose's irresponsible, heroin-addicted father, cult favourite Jennifer Tilly as her frazzled mother, and Olivier Award-winning Brit Janet McTeer as the eccentric Dell all put their indelible individual fingerprints on *Tideland*'s flawed, cracked and emotionally dysfunctional adults. Ten-year-old Jodelle Ferland and prolific character











actor Brendan Fletcher also fully inhabited their respective roles as Jeliza-Rose and Dell's younger brother Dickens, the 20-year-old mentally impaired young man whose (at first tender but increasingly sexualised) relationship with Jeliza-Rose attracted so much critical controversy. Eventually rated R by the MPAA for "bizarre and disturbing content, including drug use, sexuality, and gruesome situations – all involving a child", it would be *Tideland's* challenging themes (which also included necrophilia) and Gilliam's fearless approach to representing them onscreen, that would prove to be too much for many viewers and critics.

Drawing inspiration from the magic realism of Andrew Wyeth's 1948 painting *Christina's World* – which depicts a young woman lying in a barren field and looking at a grey house in the distance – *Tideland* explores the realms of innocence and experience, emotional-longing and resilience, and imagination and madness in ways that are alternately poignant, blackly comedic and confrontational. A bastardised take on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) with clear nods to *Psycho* (1960), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), Gilliam's adaptation is a realist fantasy in which its clear horror tropes are consistently upended throughout. The hermetically sealed rabbit-hole-within-a-rabbit-hole universe the narrative unfolds within is one in which fantasy provides a buffeting, comforting escape from reality for young Jeliza-Rose after her parents' deaths leave her an orphan. With only her collection of decapitated dolls heads for company – each with a distinct voice representing an aspect of

Jeliza-Rose's personality – the young girl is thrown from a dysfunctional family life into an unknown future where she will seek the emotional connection and nurture that her mother and father only sporadically provided.

By design, the viewer's fear of where Jeliza-Rose's relationship with Dickens is headed proves to be more disturbing than the imagined worlds either character can conjure up. In a perceptive and clear-eyed essay entitled "Won't Somebody Please Think of the Children? The Case for Terry Gilliam's *Tideland*" in the 2013 volume *The Cinema of Terry Gilliam: It's a Mad World*, author K.A. Laity convincingly dissects the largely negative reaction. Stating that "many critics missed Gilliam's skilful exploitation and subversion of horror conventions", Laity also saw *Tideland* as an attack on nanny culture and its "seemingly ever-present anxiety over the sexual exploitation of children". With its abandoned child, decrepit house in a remote, rural Texas location, stuffed corpses and apparently sinister but definitely bizarre neighbours, *Tideland* is a horror movie waiting to happen. In Gilliam's hands, however, unpredictability reigns, as there are no clearly definable monsters for the viewer to pinpoint. Similarly, the real squalor, horrific situations and bleak incidents experienced or witnessed by Jeliza-Rose are either very much borne of this world or are imagined outcomes that the viewer believes could befall her. Judging by the critical opprobrium, the greatest horror imaginable in the tale turns out to be that of sex associated with a child. This element of the narrative was no doubt made doubly horrifying and uncomfortable for those who took against

the film by the fact that it is Jeliza-Rose's longing for love, misplaced affection and curious nature rather than any predatory instinct on Dickens' part that raises the spectre of child sexual abuse. Indeed, it is Dickens himself that turns out to have been the victim of sexual abuse by his long-dead grandma.

Whereas the undoubted style of *The Brothers Grimm* couldn't mask its lack of characterisation and meandering narrative, *Tideland* successfully married visual flair and emotional substance. Amid the rotting/stuffed corpses, fart gags, submarines called Lisa and "monster sharks" there is a deeply affectionate and resonant tale of familial love, yearning and the wondrousness of childhood, however tainted it is by adults. The film is also about play and playing, of adapting to the strangest of circumstances and of how even the most difficult of experiences can be survived. In the wry black and white intro Gilliam urges us to "try to remember what it was like to be a child", and warns/taunts the viewer that some will like the film and others will loathe it. In an equally mischievous interview on National Public Radio in 2007, Gilliam summed *Tideland* up as being "about people in search for love, it's about relationships. It's also about drugs, sex and necrophilia" before not unreasonably asking, "What more would you want in a movie?"

**Neil Mitchell is a writer and editor based in Brighton. He is the author of *Devil's Advocates: Carrie* for Auteur Publishing and the editor of the London, Melbourne and Sydney editions of Intellect Books' World Film Locations series.**

## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Tideland* is presented in its original  
2.35:1 aspect ratio with 5.1 audio.  
The High Definition master was supplied  
by Universal.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by  
**Anthony Nield**

Executive Producers  
**Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer  
**James White**

QC Manager  
**Nora Mehenni**

Authoring Visual  
**Date Media Services**

Design  
**Obviously Creative / Oink Creative**









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