MODERATOR:

Hi everyone. Welcome to this fabulous global press conference for The Odyssey. I'm Carrie your moderator, excited to facilitate the many great questions today. We're going to be doing a little virtual and a little in person. If you are joining us virtually, please feel free to submit your questions in the Q&A function. We have a lot of great ones already submitted, so I'm going to kick off with those and then we'll get to the in-person folks as well. Without further ado, the reason we are all here, I would love to introduce Writer, Director, Producer, Christopher Nolan, and Producer Emma Thomas. Welcome, welcome. Yes. Emma here. Yes. Hi, hi. Thank you for joining us.

Christopher Nolan:

Sure.

MODERATOR:

Okay. First question, Ayala from Israel. I would love to know about your first experience reading Homer in your youth, kind of what the reaction was then and how it has evolved since, if there were connections to certain characters then and versus now.

Christopher Nolan:

Yeah. I first read Homer in the original Greek when I was three years old. No, I think like most people, I don't really remember that well my first experience of the story. It's one of the interesting things about The Odyssey, is it infuses our kind of cultural upbringing in the West in a really interesting way. The earliest one I could pinpoint is being a kid in school and watching the older kids do a play of The Odyssey when I was six or seven years old. And I remember the sirens specifically. I remember a kid pretending to be Odyssey strapped to the mast and that kind of thing. And they did some version of the horse with big cardboard boxes or whatever it was. But there's such fundamental sort of primal things in the story that it sort of sticks in your head wherever you get it from and stays with you.

And then in re-approaching the text, I looked at it in school when I was older and stuff, but coming back to it, I hadn't read it in many, many years. Coming back to it for this, you suddenly start to find all of these other things that are in your other movies and other stories you've told because it really is just this incredible foundational text. And that was one of the joys really of working on the film was that process of adaptation, that process of absorbing what the text is and then trying to make it a movie really.

MODERATOR:

Yeah. Emma, how about you?

Emma Thomas:

Same as Chris. I don't remember the first time I read it at all. And it's been really interesting actually as we put the movie out talking to people about what their experiences were. And it feels like in the US certainly a lot of people read it in school. In the UK, certainly when I was in school, we did not. It was not a sort of fundamental text that we all read and were familiar with. We did The Aeneid in my school. And then I think I probably just read pieces of it. I was so familiar with the overall story that it was kind of a revelation when Chris said, "This is what I want to do." And I started reading the whole tome. And I had this idea of it as being this sort of fusty dusty archaic narrative, but I was so excited by how current the storytelling felt, this kind of flashbacks within flashbacks.

And it just felt like a very, there was a real tie to the way we tell stories today, which was really exciting to me.

MODERATOR:

Yes. My favorite thing in watching the film come out is people who think the Trojan War happened with the Trojan horse, seeing that it's so in our culture that they think it's like real history. I love that. Kathia from Cup of Soul Show would love to know for Emma, after so many films together, how has your creative partnership evolved with Chris and do you ever challenge his vision?

Emma Thomas:

That's a question for Grace.

MODERATOR:

That also ultimately makes things better?

Emma Thomas:

My role has kind of stayed the same from the beginning on in the sense that I very much see what I do as being a sort of, I'm a facilitator. I help Chris to realize his vision of whatever the movie is. Obviously that changes slightly based on what the film is because The Odyssey is extremely different to, I don't know, The Prestige, for example. And so oftentimes I'm a sounding board. I do feel like I challenge him.

Christopher Nolan:

You challenge my vision at home all the time.

Emma Thomas:

But that again, I think part of being a facilitator is also being somebody who sort of asks questions and challenges because oftentimes in asking whether something is necessary or why it is a certain way, that forces Chris to think about that, defend it or not. And it sort of helps cement his vision in some ways.

MODERATOR:

Yeah. Vincent from Deep Focus would love to know Mr. Nolan, your conversation with Chinese podcaster, I hope I pronounce this right, Zhong Shu, about the Odyssey went viral on social media, were you surprised by the reaction? Do you think the enduring power of a classic like The Odyssey lies in its universality, the experiences we all share and the human condition, people from different cultures and experiences?

Christopher Nolan:

I don't know if I'd be surprised by the reaction so much as the interview because I hadn't really looked ahead at who I was talking to.

MODERATOR:

Sure.

Christopher Nolan:

I thought it was going to be another one of these interviews where it's like, what's your favorite color or whatever. And she came in with a really interesting point of view and really wanted to push me on some of the thematic concerns, different interpretations that I put on the work. And it was really fun. It was really engaging actually to have a lively conversation about that. And I think one of the things about The Odyssey that has kept it alive and such a part of the culture for thousands of years is it invites interpretation, it invites argument and discussion. And it had been a while since I had had to think about why I had made some of the choices I had made in terms of putting my interpretation on this adaptation and certain thematic elements. And yeah, I thought she brought that out in a really, really interesting way. It was fun.

MODERATOR:

Nice. Going to come out to in person. Scott, coming to you. We do have microphones, but you can project as well.

Scott:

Hi, Scott with Cinema Magazine. Great to see you again. As a director, you're overall in charge, you have the vision like we were talking about, but you're also the head of the Director's Guild of America. And I'm wondering what type of learning curve has that been for you now with studio consolidation, with AI coming forward? How interesting has that been? And if real quick with specifically on the movie, can you talk about it's coming out with home entertainment? Are there any deleted scenes? Are you able to add anything extra?

Christopher Nolan:

Okay. Two very different questions. Let me get my head around the first part. No, as president of the Director's Guild, I'm having an incredible time working with fellow directors. It's a tricky time. It's a time of transition. We're in a 10-year contraction in the television world, for example. And the issues that we deal with in the Directors Guild, things like AI, they're constantly changing, constantly pushing in different directions and needing different responses. And our focus right now is very heavily on trying to get a federal tax rebate in the United States to level the playing field with a lot of other places in the world where there are excellent tax rebates and excellent crews. So we have to be more competitive in America, things like that.

The threat of AI, I think that's something that our members expect a strong response to. I think we're doing a good job with getting protections in place and so forth.

As far as industry consolidation, things like that, I mean, we're always in a transitional time in the movie business. On an optimistic level, I mean, I think the box office this year in theatrical is very, very robust. So as television has been contracting, we're seeing theatrical come back more to where it was before.

So yeah, it's been really interesting being with other directors a lot, talking to them a lot about their concerns, particularly in the television world, which I don't know a lot about. I'm learning more and more about every day. It's really a fun thing and an honor to represent directors, and ADs, and UPMs, and location managers. I mean, it's a really great union and a great bunch of people.

MODERATOR:

[inaudible 00:09:09]

Christopher Nolan:

That part, yes. I don't really deal in deleted scenes. I kind of never have. If you know my work on Blu-ray as it's come out over the years and DVD before that, I think we've only ever put two deleted scenes on Insomnia. I think it's the only film we ever had them. A lot of that is because as a writer-director, as I sit there rewriting the script, I try not to be aware of the challenges of directing as I'm writing the adaptation, as I'm sort of working on the first draft. But once you enter the second or third draft, you allow a bit of that practical, "I'm going to be the director, I'm actually going to have to be on this boat for months," or whatever that is. That stuff creeps in.

What you know as a director is it's so painful to shoot for a day. Every day is so challenging and difficult in a film like this. You really don't want to be shooting things that don't wind up in the film. So I do have the advantage of being a writer-director, so I could do a lot of that on the page. So there's plenty of deleted scenes crumbled up in my wastebasket that you won't ever see.

But as far as on the Blu-ray, no. I mean, there's some terrific extras. I think a lot of you probably saw last night are behind the scenes material, how the guys have put that together for the Blu-ray. I'm extremely happy with the transfer. Hoyte and myself spent a lot of time getting it exactly right. I think it's a really great DVD, Blu-ray, and 4K UHD. It's pretty cool, but no deleted scenes, I'm afraid.

MODERATOR:

Nice. Harry, coming to you next.

Harry Medved:

Thank you. Hi, it's Harry Medved at Cinema United. Thank you both for your leadership. Among all theater owners, they're so grateful for all the physical prints and 70 millimeter, especially with the independent theaters, that really made their day. So I wanted to find out from you how important, from each of you, how important do you think the theatrical window was having a very long window to inspire audiences to see the film? Do you think the success of the Odyssey will inspire other filmmakers to seek even longer windows?

Christopher Nolan:

You want to go first?

Emma Thomas:

I think it's become very clear how important the theatrical window is. I think that we had this sort of moment in time where this sort of grand experiment of collapsing the windows, and I think it's fair to say that we saw that it didn't work. It hurt cinemas, it hurt the whole ecosystem. It's a finely tuned ecosystem that has developed over many years. I am thrilled to see a sort of recommitment to theatrical windows. I think 45 days is, I would prefer it to be longer, but it's a great start. I think that it reminds audiences ... I mean, it's sort of bringing people back to theaters. As long as movies are available to be seen in the home, people are going to take the opportunity. Whilst I love people watching movies in the home eventually, it just doesn't work for the economics of our business for anybody. So obviously very happy for all of us.

Christopher Nolan:

Well, we're here promoting the home video release.

Emma Thomas:

Sorry. Not even thinking about that.

Christopher Nolan:

It's fantastic that we all watch movies.

Emma Thomas:

It's a two parter.

Christopher Nolan:

It's a two parter.

Emma Thomas:

But it increases the value of the movie when it gets to the home.

Christopher Nolan:

Massively. I mean, actually it's a really good point to make. I mean, I guess it gets a little esoteric on the business side, but one of the reasons we fought for very long windows, appropriately only long windows for our movies is not just so people have time to get to see them in the movie theater. It's to increase the demand on home video. It's a solid model. It's worked very well for decades. It's coming back into prominence.

In the case of the Odyssey, we had the unique situation of our IMAX film prints and our 70 mil film prints were playing so well. They were selling out for months, and months, and months. So there's still people ... We're re-releasing in that format on December 11th because there's still a lot of people who didn't get to see it that way, want to. Obviously to us, that means we need more of these screens out there, that would help. But it's also a return to the economics of an older model of theatrical distribution where it takes longer. Your film plays for a longer amount of time in theaters.

That's a great joy for us. I mean, we spend years making these films, and so the idea that they would just come and go in 17 days or whatever it is frustrating for us just emotionally. I mean, it's just as a creator of something, to have a longer relationship with the audience, to have people talking about it, coming to see it over months, I mean, that's just been an incredible joy.

As far as the industry side on the windowing, yeah, 45 days is a great improvement this year over the 17 days and even day and day that was there before, even at the start of this year. But at the Director's Guild, all the numbers we've looked at, all the research tells us that 60 days is really the minimum. We have to have that window to have a sustainable, viable ecosystem, but we're getting there. The results box office-wise this year with all these films coming out, I mean like Spider-Man and everything, I mean, incredible results for movies, things like Obsession, connecting with audiences. It's a great time for theatrical film and we're really thrilled to be a part of that.

MODERATOR:

I also love the secondary spotlight on some of your projectionists, like the IMAX projectionist. That was so fun to read about the people that are so skilled and specific. Barbara, behind me, I'm coming to you.

Barbara:

Thank you very much. That was fast. Hello. Good morning, both of you. I have a question relating to archeology and Schliemann maybe, have you been to the excavations or tried to go there? Have you ever been interested in excavations or archeology to find out what's behind basically the poem, what the poetry is of Odysseus?

Christopher Nolan:

Yeah. I mean, we did a lot of research right at the beginning of the process, particularly in terms of traveling to something and going to see Lion Gate, things like that. Looking at what's known about that period, a lot of which Homer wouldn't have known because he was 400 years later and we actually have in some ways a bit more knowledge than he, or they, or she or whoever Homer was had writing 400 years later. I don't want to be controversial, but with Schliemann, with the idea that Troy was real historical place, the truth is there's very little evidence for that. And it's really only in the last hundred years that historians have seriously considered the possibility that there might have been a real conflict and a real place. Prior to that, everybody accepted the idea that the Trojan War was mythology, was storytelling.

It's a fascinating exploration, but yeah, certainly Schliemann has a somewhat spotty track record in terms of veracity, in terms of qualification, and everything. But the discoveries there, and the archeological finds from the Bronze Age are incredible. So it was really fun to engage with that, to go to museums, to look at accents, to look at sources, to look at what we could be inspired by and how we could bring it into our storytelling. But at the same time, it was pretty daunting how fragmentary that record is.

There's not that much to grab a hold of, particularly when it came to the boats, for example, there are no archeological remains of Mycenaean ships. So we don't really know. We can look at the art and say, okay, they were sort of symmetrical hulls and similar to a Viking ship. And we wound up using Viking ships and repurposing them, because it's a pretty similar hull shape and seems credible that it might have been.

But historians and people in the literature of it have been really fascinated and possessed by the idea that there could have been a historical basis for this. And I think that's a pretty cool thing, and a pretty fun thing. And Schliemann was definitely possessed by that passion to see that it's real.

I think to me, if it is based on a real conflict and a real place, it's pretty lost in the mists of time. And it's pretty humbling and daunting when you drill down on this stuff and you spend years, as I have here, trying to create a world out of these fragments. It's just a very long period of time, and so little is known, and so much gets lost.

And I tried to incorporate that really into the fabric of the film. It's this idea at the end of, there'll be a Dark Age. There was this Bronze Age collapse. There's about 400 years where language gets lost, Linear B, and everything goes away for hundreds of years. And in Homer's Time, it was sort of a renaissance. It was kind of like a light dawning there. So tried to put that into the text of the film, because I found it really, as I say, humbling and evocative to be a human being living in the world and realize just how difficult it is to grasp what our ancestors, how they lived, where we really are.

Linear B, for example, the written language of that period, it only exists in a couple of tablets really that are essentially lists of stores, shopping lists, as it were. There's just not much there. But Emma can speak to this because she's studied history.

Emma Thomas:

Oh, thanks. Yeah.

I may be sort of the least well-qualified producer to produce a film like The Odyssey, because I started actually when I went to university for my undergraduate degree, I actually started studying ancient history, and I found it extremely frustrating, frankly, because whilst I love, love, love the idea of artifacts and the fact that we can dig the ground that we walk on and find layers of history below us, I also found it kind of made me itch the way entire stories are created about civilizations based on the most tiny, tiny fragments. And I need a little bit more firmness in my life. I'm not somebody who can kind of tie myself to the mast on a sort of theory of what something was based on such tiny, tiny evidence. So I ended up studying early modern history, which there was a lot more evidence for, and so on.

But as Chris said, one of the things I loved about what he did with the script was, he made it more about the human story than getting too stuck on ideas of historical veracity. It really was about, we live in a world that we know and feels very solid to us, but there's a lot about our world that if you took away our technology, our phones, our electricity, our airplanes, all of these sort of developments, what would the world look like? And I think that that was the thing that was so exciting to me about what Chris was pitching with this, was he telling a very human story in a world that was threatening and recognizable to us in its most basic elements, and so therefore kind of felt a certain amount of current tangibility because I'm clearly all about tangibility.

MODERATOR:

Mohamed from Saudi Arabia would love to know, Emma, what creative choice in The Odyssey looked straightforward on the page and turned out to be the hardest to make possible as a producer?

Emma Thomas:

Gosh.

MODERATOR:

I feel like those of us that were there last night, there were several that we saw glimpses of along the way.

Emma Thomas:

Gosh, I don't know that there was anything that looked straightforward on the page.

As a producer, I never really get to read a script just as an audience member. I'm always slightly thinking, "Oh gosh, how are we going to do that?" And I think I would say probably the boats, honestly, were the thing that seemed fairly straightforward. It's a boat, it's the sea, it's whatever, but it was so complex.

We had an amazing production and marine team figuring it all out, but just getting these boats from one location to another within our schedule was fully insane. There were a lot of other things that kind of read complex and were complex. The boats, which would've been seemingly simple, there were just so many challenges.

Christopher Nolan:

Well, I would say in particular with the boats, one of the things when you read in the script, when I wrote in the script-

Emma Thomas:

Thanks, Chris.

Christopher Nolan:

The boat pulls up, people jump out, and they get in. And Dunkirk is a film that is entirely about how difficult it is to get people from shore onto a ship. And so I knew that it wasn't going to be completely straightforward, but I was shocked how difficult it was with these real boats, you could not, because of the way they would draft, you could not bring them into shallow water, you can't bring them inside the break of the waves, for example. And we could not find any information.

There's a lot of dispute, there's a lot of discussion, about how people in Mycenaean times would've beached a boat. What we found, for example, is the idea that you take a boat the size of the drakkar, which is the real ship that we used, the idea that you would run this thing up a beach and then push it off again, that's probably the most fantastical thing in the film, actually.

The thing weighs 100 tons. There's no pushing that boat off the sand. You have to wait for the tide to come in and float it and then move out, so there's things like that, that. And I'm aware of the fact that the audience isn't going to be thinking about that. I mean, with Dunkirk, we spent the entire length of the film trying to make the audience think about that. And it's a very difficult challenge because unless you know boats, unless you've done these things and tried to bring a ship to the shore and then get out, get into a tender or whatever, come through the wave line to the beach, it sort of reads like nothing. It reads like shoe leather in a script. You're like, "Okay, they turn up in the boat, they jump out, they are." And with Neil Andrea, our marine coordinator, every location, it'd be like, "How close can we get the ship in?" It'd be like, "Oh, it can be half a mile offshore," whatever. Well, hang on, how does that work?

But we had an incredible team who found really good solutions to all that. And so when you watch the film, I don't think it looks effortless because you want it to look difficult, particularly when the cyclops is chasing them and getting back onto their boat. You want to feel how difficult all that stuff is, but you also don't want to get too hung up on it. You want to move the story forwards. But I think that to me is probably one of the more misleading elements of the screenplay.

MODERATOR:

Yeah. Well, I feel watching it, we take it for granted just because it seems, "Oh, of course they get on the boat, they're on the boat, the storm is happening, it's part of the story." And then you see the arduous efforts put in.

Becky from Taiwan asks, "The Odyssey was written thousands of years ago, yet the themes of home identity survival still feel deeply relevant. What resonated most with you personally? How did you bring that connection to life for a modern audience? And how is it relevant today?"

Christopher Nolan:

I mean, for me, when I really drilled down on the text and I started writing it, I was surprised to realize that for me, it's a middle aged love story and the coming together and I can't imagine where that comes from, but there's an incredible... I was worried about writing the scene between Penelope and Odysseus when he returns home because when you read the poem, you realize how important that is. And so for me, that became everything and I avoided writing it for a long time. Luckily there's a lot of story to write before you get there. And I was very worried about shooting it as well, particularly trying to shoot it on IMAX with those actors and everything.

Because what I had come to realize in adapting the poem was, for me, that is the crux of it. It's these people coming together after so many years with so many different experiences and having a conversation that's completely without judgment. There's a sort of maturity there to the way they're coming together, this kind of in the nakedness really, and a lack of judgment there. And that for me

became the absolute focus and heart of the story. There's so many other things going on, but for me that was it.

MODERATOR:

Yeah. How about you?

Emma Thomas:

Yeah, for me, again, it's that humanity. It's the human story. It's what we can... I mean, in a film with monsters and action and supernatural, the idea that at the heart of it, these are people with human relationships, that it's about a family that their overriding goal is to get back together. And that for me was what almost surprised me about the film, honestly, when I saw it. I knew that we had talked about it a lot as we prepped the film and as Chris was conceiving the script and how he was going to adapt it. But when I actually saw the film for the first time and really was moved by the performances of the actors, it really was about those things that we can all relate to.

MODERATOR:

Yeah. For me, I like all the women using their power for destruction personally.

Barbaros, I'm coming to you next. Where are you? Oh yeah, right here.

Barbaros:

[inaudible 00:28:07] So this story is very important for us. In Greek mythology, the physical and historical journey of the Odyssey begins at Troy modern day Hisarlık, Northwest Türkiye, and at the end of the Trojan War, as you know. So I would like to know what's your criteria when you choose locations for your films? I mean, you use different locations such as Morocco, Iceland, Los Angeles, Greece, Italy. So have you ever taught doing something in Türkiye, the original homeland?

Christopher Nolan:

We certainly consider Turkey and I've been to Turkey several times and it's an incredible place with amazing landscapes. There are so many factors that go into why you choose a particular location. We've discussed Selime and discussed Hisarlık a little bit, but I don't want to be any more controversial about that because it is an incredible wonder of the world, that archeological site. But when you look at the history of historians and academics trying to plot the real course of Odysseus's journey, it becomes apparent that certainly in the poem, it's a mythological landscape. It's not a historical landscape. And there are a lot of modern place names, including Ithaca today. They're named after the poem, essentially. They're not necessarily where... No one knows whether it's where these places took place. There's a thinking now that Ithaca, rather than being the island of Ithaca was a peninsula. This has been going on for thousands of years, people arguing about this.

What I decided, what drove me, my creative choices of where to shoot was to create a mythological landscape where the further off course they got, the more different from the Mediterranean, essentially, the landscape gets. And that's what took us to Scotland and Iceland and everything. We wanted different weather. We wanted different landscapes that would've felt very, very alien to those characters. So we wanted to begin and end with a more Mediterranean feel, which we got in Sicily.

But no, the decisions were not based on what we think is the historical aspect of it at all. It was really based on trying to create the appropriate feeling in the audience that these characters would've had of how far from home they were. So for example, shooting in Morocco for Troy, to be as different as

possible from Sicily, with Ithaca, as far from home as possible in a different way than Hades is as far as home as is possible, so you get Iceland for that. And so I was really pleased with Ruth DeYoung, my designer and myself, we traveled all over the world. We went as many places as we could in the time that we had. We earned a lot of air miles and we settled in on the six or seven locations that we really felt would take the audience on as big a geographical journey, the feeling of it, the environments as possible.

MODERATOR:

I'm so sorry. I got cut off with our time, but it's mainly because it's a very busy schedule. So I thank you all for joining us. Fabulous questions. Thank you, Chris and Emma for being here for the wonderful first session.

Christopher Nolan:

Thank you.

Emma Thomas:

Thank you.