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'Fallout' Stars Salute Crew of Artisans for Crafting Original Post-Apocalyptic Story Within Video Game Universe

Actors Ella Purnell and Walton Goggins speak about how the crew's meticulous attention to detail helped them find their characters

By [Randee Dawn](#) ▾

The end of the world, thanks to a nuclear exchange between superpowers, isn't how most TV series would want to start a season. But in the case of Amazon Prime's "Fallout," beginning at the end allowed the eight-episode show to craft a new and far more dangerous future.

Creating that world required top-level expertise on all sides. Enter executive producer and director Jonathan Nolan; creators, executive producers and showrunners Geneva Robertson-Dworet and Graham Wagner; and actors Ella Purnell (Lucy), Walton Goggins (The Ghoul), Aaron Moten (Maximus) and Kyle MacLachlan (Hank). For the series adaptation, based on the role-playing game franchise by the same name, the cast and crew had to imagine what the world of 2296 – 200 years after that Great War of 2077 apocalypse – might look and feel like. And their vision was bleak, sometimes funny and occasionally primary

colored.

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For Nolan, the big “challenge” of adapting a video game franchise was different from adapting a book (something he did with his brother for the 2006 feature “The Prestige”) because the visuals are already in fans’ minds. “You’re not adding things; in fact, you’re taking some things away,” he said during a FYC panel in May. “There’s an enormous sense of responsibility there, but also an enormous challenge ... to figure out how on Earth are we going to realize this?”

One of the most important steps came in hiring award-winning heads of departments, including cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh, production designer Howard Cummings, costume designer Amy Westcott and visual effects designer Jay Worth. Much of the cast and crew relocated to the vast, desolate landscapes of Namibia for much of production, which Nolan said “freed [them] up to do all kinds of other things.”

“Right out of the gate, we talked about what we wanted,” said Goggins, who did his Ghoul work behind prosthetics designed by Vincent Van Dyke and applied by Jake Garber. “We all wanted the audience to lean into the experience and not be repulsed by his face, but rather ... want[ed] it to be a roadmap of the absorption of 200 years of pain walking the earth in an irradiated landscape.”

The Ghoul's face needed shaping and consideration. The first time out, Goggins said they were "80% there" – but they needed to add more character, like taking a piece from an ear, as suggested by Nolan. Ultimately the prosthetics were fully effective, but thin enough that the actor's expressive performance never felt buried. "[Jonathan] said, 'Everything that you're doing is all in your eyes,'" he recalled. "Once I felt confident about that and I had permission to do that, then we were just off to the races."

Establishing the tone was equally challenging, as Wagner noted that they were dealing with horrifying scenarios but leavened everything with dark humor and bold colors. "We were in the edit deciding a lot of this stuff, being like, 'Is this too broad? Is this too grim?'" he said. "It's a massive show. Incorporating some with intention, some silliness into it, is actually one of the most subversive things I've ever seen."

Such meticulous attention to detail helped the actors find their characters. For Purnell, Lucy starts out "naïve and innocent because she doesn't know any better." Having been raised in a bunker underground, Lucy sees the destroyed world for the first time after she's fully grown (and has survived a massacre). "The idea of Lucy, the essence of Lucy, is the same," she added, "but it changes as it always does for people as they go through the human experience. I just got to trust the writers and the directors."

While Lucy's story had its moments of physical action, Maximus – whether in a giant "knight" suit or not – was deeply physical most of the time. "I'm 35," Moten said. "I know I look younger, but I have to keep my body ready and healthy." One day, while filming the third episode, six men were jumping on him while he was in the suit – not an easy scene to film. "That day, after, I couldn't walk," he recalled. "I woke up and hobbled over to my phone to call home ... It was extreme [but], honestly, really rewarding. ... We all really want to sacrifice for it to be successful."

Goggins might have suspected he was a part of something special the moment he landed the job, but it was in the middle of shooting the opening scenes of the first episode that he really “understood exactly what the opportunity that Graham and Geneva and [Jonathan] had given me,” he said. It was “horrifying” and “terrific,” he noted. But it’s also part of the job of being an actor.

“You turn yourself over to an imaginary set of circumstances,” he said. “They just set the table, and you just try to live in that moment as honestly as possible – and it was a real gift.”

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