



Armageddon Road mixes new, old tech to rev up classic horror take

Writer-director Karen Lam discusses her self-funding and distribution strategy and how advances in virtual production made an "impossible" script possible.

BY JAMIE CASEMORE

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he team behind writer-director Karen Lam's apocalyptic thriller *Armageddon Road* (pictured) melded new and age-old filmmaking technology to produce what was initially thought of as an unfilmable script.

Lam first wrote the film in 2014, but deemed it "impossible to make" due to its period Las Vegas setting and the quantity of car chases. It wasn't until 2023 that advances in LED volume wall technology allowed Lam to revisit the project at an affordable budget for independent film.

"The technology available through the volume wall made it possible to make this and make it fun and watchable," Lam's longtime cinematographer Thomas Billingsley tells *Playback Daily*. "You might have been able to cobble something together, but it never would have been what it is without that."

To make the financing even more accessible, Lam and her team combined that volume wall technology with practical miniatures to create a surreal genre-bending throwback to grindhouse low-budget horror.

Armageddon Road is produced by Lam and Kate Kroll under their joint Vancouver-based banner Black Opiate Entertainment. It stars Brian McCaig as an ex-con in 1976 Las Vegas who takes the seemingly easy job of escorting a mob boss' girlfriend, played by Natalie Grace. Things take a turn for the worse, however, when the girlfriend becomes possessed by one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, setting in motion a series of disastrous events.

Lam is now taking the film and its miniatures on a Canadian theatrical tour, which began in Toronto this September. Lam is now looking to book additional independent theatres across the Prairies, Atlantic Canada and Montreal.

Development and financing

Lam wrote the script for *Armageddon Road* in 2014, but, due to the film's setting and extent of car chases, Lam was sure that the project would be impossible to finance and set it aside.



Lam later directed the horror features *The Curse of Willow Song* (2020) and Universal Studio's *Bring It On: Cheer or Die* (2022). In 2023, she and Billingsley utilized a volume wall for Lam's sci-fi short film *Alt-X* and the two realized how the technology could be used to lower costs for *Armageddon Road*.

The team booked the volume wall at Vancouver's Lumostage Virtual Production, but still needed a way to film the car chases. For those, Lumostage

suggested Lam look into miniatures.

Using miniatures, however, required Lam to revisit the script. She cut a number of characters who represented the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and repurposed them as miniature cars, leaning into their symbolism through car selection and colour scheme.

For *Armageddon Road*'s miniature strategy, Lam reached out to visual FX artist and sculptor Gary Young, whose credits include *Final Destination: Bloodlines*, Showtime's *Yellowjackets* and Netflix's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

Lam believed Young would be out of the film's budget range and initially reached out for consultation. Young, however, was sold on Lam's script and joined the project, assuring the team that his price would not go over the film's budget.

From there, the team began organizing and documenting the volume wall plates and miniature assets they'd need ahead of production.

The overall budget for *Armageddon Road* was above \$400,000. The film was self-financed through Lam's directors fees from *Armageddon Road* and *Bring It On: Cheer or Die*, as well as with her condo's credit line and federal and provincial tax credits.

Lam says she had spoken with distributors about the budget and funding during the financing stage, but ultimately decided not to pursue outside financing over concerns that it might hold up production.

"I've found that when there's external money, there's always a holding pattern and a chase," she says. "It's like being put back into development, sometimes for years, as you go through script rewrites, chase 'marquee' cast ... and the missing 30% that never quite materializes."

Shortly before beginning pre-production, Lam met with Kroll and asked her to serve as the lead producer. Kroll brought on additional crew members who she worked with on the feature *What Comes Next*.

Production and post-production

The heavy use of the volume wall on *Armageddon Road* pushed many aspects that are normally reserved for post-production into pre-production, since all of the volume wall plates had to be colour graded in advance. Lam says the pre-production process began in February 2024 when the team flew to Las Vegas (using Kroll's rewards points) to capture plates for the film.

The team filmed more plates across B.C. in April ahead of going to camera in May 2024.

Armageddon Road followed a 15-day production schedule over three weeks to stay within budget. The tight timeframe and the planned out shots and sequences affected the actors, who were told to get comfortable with their scenes three months in advance of their filming window since the timing meant they had upwards of two takes per scene.



The first week of production in May was dedicated to shooting the miniature and action sequences. The team utilized 1/8 size models of the vehicles for car chase scenes and filmed them in reverse using fishing lines to achieve more natural movement.

The actors were not incorporated into the shoot until week two, but visited the set multiple times to get a sense of their scenes.

Mimicking natural lighting was important throughout the shoot. The production team had to change the lighting set-ups depending on the time of day, but also take care that none of the light spilled onto the volume wall.

"We had to be precise, and we had to work fast," says Billingsley. "We didn't have a lot of time to experiment and not a lot of wiggle room in the schedule at all. Everything needed to be in place beforehand, and we had to execute as quickly as possible."

Production wrapped in early June, but the post-production process did not begin until October because of Lam and Billingsley's commitments to a short film.

The post-production process lasted around a year. Lam says the most time-consuming aspect was adapting the visual style to that of 1970s grindhouse cinema. For part of that process, editor Jeanne Slater and key animation artist Bonni Reid went on a deep dive for old stock footage, which was used throughout the film.

The different sources of stock footage, however, used different film formats and mediums, causing variances in the colour and film grain. Colourist Gary Shaw of

Infinity Post was responsible for altering the footage to create a singular and consistent look for the film.

Sales and marketing

Lam says the biggest challenge in marketing *Armageddon Road* is selling a classic genre to a modern horror audience.

"People who are expecting blood and guts are going to end up on a retro road trip with genre twists but not the usual horror tropes," she says. "What we realized was that there were so many layers and elements, we needed to use our social media platform to try to set the stage for the film."

Lam and star McCaig turned to social media to build word of mouth via short clips. In early 2026, Lam began seeking a festival premiere to further grow the film's presence. Around that time, Avi Federgreen of Indiecan Entertainment and genre label Red Water Entertainment reached out to acquire the rights for Canada and the U.S.

Lam and Kroll, however, opted to keep the theatrical rights for self-distribution. Red Water instead settled for the VOD and home video rights, for which the release dates have not yet been determined.



Armageddon Road made its world premiere in April at the Fantaspoa Film Festival in Brazil. It made its U.S. premiere at the Popcorn Frights Film Festival in August, followed by its Mexican premiere at the Macabro film festival.

Lam says the film received positive audience feedback at those festivals, but added that the experience cemented the need for a theatrical rollout that set the stage for what audiences should expect.

To accomplish that, Lam contacted Sonya Yokota William, founder and director of the Network of Independent Canadian Exhibitors. William put Lam in touch with booking agent Chris Emery, who helped Lam compose a marketing plan for a Canada-wide tour across independent theatres.

After Lam began promoting the tour on social media, Telefilm Canada reached out for a meeting at the funder's Vancouver office.

"I explained that I was taking the film on the road," says Lam. "I had no idea how I was even going to do it at the time, and they asked if we needed help. They literally came in like superheroes."

With promotional funding from Telefilm, the tour kicked off at Toronto's Revue Cinema on Sept. 3. Lam booked other theatres in Ontario before flying back for additional showings in Vancouver. The ticket sales were not disclosed, but Lam says the tour is still in its early stages and is in the process of building word of mouth.

Lam is also selling branded merchandise online as part of the tour, including trucker hats and t-shirts designed by animation artist Reid. She says the trucker hats have sold out twice, and that she is on her third-run of t-shirts. Sales are currently limited to online requests, but Lam says she plans to eventually set up a digital storefront. She also plans to add more merchandise, including car refreshers and a mixtape of the film's soundtrack.

Images courtesy of Black Opiate Entertainment

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