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Strange

Mysterious and terrifying demons roam the Earth once more as *Strange* returns to BBC ONE



Richard Coyle, Samantha Janus and Ian Richardson star in a new series of *Strange*, a mix of horror, fantasy and supernatural murder-mystery, which returns to BBC One following a successful pilot last year.

Richard Coyle (*Coupling*) returns as modern-day demon hunter John Strange, a former priest with a tortured past and one of the few people to realise that dark forces are walking the Earth and endangering the world. Samantha Janus (*Liverpool One*) is Jude Atkins, who became an unwitting ally to Strange in the one-off film shown screened in February last year on BBC One. In the new series, Jude once again becomes embroiled in Strange's investigations to hunt down and eliminate murderous demons.

In tales of supernatural happenings and unexplained deaths, Strange and Jude encounter terrifying demons that inhabit the Earth in different guises. During their investigations, Jude learns more about the mysterious life of John Strange, and their friendship deepens.

However, Strange is constantly haunted by the intimidating Canon Black (Ian Richardson), who is determined to suppress his work at every turn.

Creator and series writer Andrew Marshall originally came up with an idea about the Devil living somewhere in England and it was down to one man to catch him.

"I'm a long-time fan of things like *The Avengers*, *The*



Introduction

X Files and the great fantasy series of the past, as well as Agatha Christie,” explains Marshall.

The inspiration for the demons came from the myths and legends of old, with a little help from a fertile imagination.

“Legends of the battles between Light and Darkness have always been very important in our lives, from prehistoric times right through to *Star Wars*,” explains Marshall. “Although *Strange* is set in a cathedral city and many of the protagonists are clergymen, it is really that underlying ancient battle that is taking place here, in the tradition of ghost writer MR James.

“As for John Strange, I wanted to create a new English hero in the style of Dr Who and Sherlock Holmes, but with a contemporary slant. But more than anything, I wanted to make something that was exciting, intriguing and scary and that would get people watching from behind the sofa again!”

Strange and Jude are helped by Toby (Andrew Lee Potts), a cyber-hacker and technical genius; and Kevin (Timmy Lang), Canon Black’s gardener, who is more sensitive to supernatural vibes than most people, which enables him to detect the presence of demons.

Strange is written and created by Andrew Marshall (*2point4 Children*, *Poirot*) produced by Marcus Mortimer, directed by Joe Ahearne and Simon Massey and is a BBC production in association with Big Bear Films.

www.bbc.co.uk/strange



Cast and crew

Strange

Cast

Richard Coyle John Strange
Samantha Janus Jude Atkins
Ian Richardson Canon Black
Andrew Lee Potts Toby
Samuel Barnett Doddington
Timmy Lang Kevin
William Tomlin Joey
Colin McFarlane Rev Johnson (ep 1)
Michelle Joseph Marion (ep 1)
Anna Massey Miss Hawthorne (ep 1)
Ciaran McMenamin Liam (ep 2)
Imelda Staunton Rev Mary Truegood (ep 4)
Ian McNeice Harrison (ep 4)
Ralph Ineson Bill (ep 5)
Jim Carter Inspector Stuart (ep 6)
Tom Baker Father Bernard (ep 6)

Production credits

Writer and Executive Producer Andrew Marshall
Producer Marcus Mortimer
Production Designer Tom Brown
Director of Photography Paul Bond
Special/Digital Effects Supervisor Alan Marques (No Strings Attached)
Prosthetics Supervisor Neill Gorton
Costume Hazel Pethig
Make Up Jan Sewell
Composer Dan Jones
Executive Producers for BBC Jane Tranter
..... Sophie Clarke Jervoise
Director episodes 1,2,5 Joe Ahearne
Director episodes 3,4,6 Simon Massey

Samantha Janus plays Jude Atkins



Nurse Jude Atkins is a feisty and independent woman. Having discovered that her long-time partner, Rich, was a demon, she is now a lone parent to Joey, her young son. She has found herself embroiled in John Strange's dark and frightening world of demon-hunting.

Jude's life is in constant danger as she comes face to face with all sorts of evil incarnations. In the first episode of the series, she has to tackle one such fiend who instantly ages her 50 years.

"The worst bit about looking like an 80-year-old woman was the time it took to put on the make-up," she says. "I had to be in at 2.30 in the morning to have four hours of prosthetics make-up done. Having these silicone pieces attached to my face was quite claustrophobic at times, but there is

something strangely comforting about seeing yourself in years to come."

As if ageing several decades before her time wasn't scary enough, Janus also encountered some rather eerie goings on during filming.

"Often when things would go wrong – like the cameras failing to turn over or accidents on set – people were quick to jump to the conclusion that there were demonic forces at hand.

"One of the nurses that we had on set was called Jude and her staff number was 666 which was a bit scary," explains Janus. "But the only truly 'strange' event was a John Strange headstone that appeared in a cemetery that we were filming in. To this day I'm not sure if it was for real or whether the prop boys were having a laugh – probably the latter but who knows!"

Samantha Janus loves playing such feisty characters but, since becoming a mum herself, she prefers playing the part of a mother more.

"Jude's aptitude at work whilst worrying about her son was an interesting contrast to play. I must say, after having my son, playing mothers is more interesting as I'm constantly drawing from my own experiences, and some of the scenes with Joey were my favourite in *Strange*."

Jude has certainly been put through the mill recently. She first met John Strange when he was trying to track down a terrifying, murdering demon who turned out to be her boyfriend and Joey's father. She now has to face the very real possibility that Joey may have inherited some of his father's demonic traits.

Jude also starts to have disturbing dreams which, she later finds out, is a regular occurrence for Strange and the only way to abate these night-time nightmares is to eat raw steak. She probably speaks for the majority when she tells Strange: "I think I'd rather have the nightmares, thanks!"

It seems that the camaraderie on set managed to shorten the long days during the weeks of filming.



Samantha Janus

“Richard and I got on very well which made filming much easier and we both felt that the realism of the characters would make the subject matter easier to believe and so we both concentrated on making our characters as accessible and believable as possible.

“Working with Ian Richardson and Tom Baker was an incredible experience. They both have such presence. You can learn a lot from actors like that. But I have to say Tom Baker has the most abstract sense of humour I’ve ever encountered!”

Of course, Janus isn’t just known for her straight acting roles. Comedy is also one of her talents and her role as Mandy in *Game On* was one of her most successful.

“I look forward to doing as much varied work as possible over the next few years and would love a chance to do some comedy again. But possibly more drama-based comedy, which the Americans do so well, would be more fulfilling.”

Filming on *Strange* finished at the end of December 2002, so Samantha has been enjoying a well-earned break with her family. However, not one to sit on her laurels, she already has plans about what she wants to do next.

“I’d like in the future to do as much theatre as possible, as I haven’t done any for a while and I like the idea of spending some time at home in the afternoon and working in the evenings. I’m looking at the possibility of maybe bringing back *Educating Rita*; I think it’s a fantastic play and would love the chance to do it.”

So with so many projects on the go, what does her little boy think of her many talents?

“I try to keep my work and my family as separate as possible. I don’t often watch my work with them. I think it’s confusing for a young child to understand the difference between Mummy on the telly and Mummy at home but who knows, maybe he’ll be watching *Strange* when he’s older.”

Richard Coyle plays John Strange



Richard Coyle is best known for his role as Jeff in BBC Two's Coupling – the mad, breast-obsessed Welshman who struggles a bit when it comes to attracting members of the opposite sex.

Demon hunter John Strange, however, is much more of a tortured soul but he is rather more suave and sexy than Coyle's Welsh alter ego...

"In the pilot film, I played the character of John Strange as a wounded soul who's carrying this great weight around him the whole time," explains Coyle. "With the series, obviously you have more time to develop ideas and issues, and it just seemed to me that he was a lot more charming than I'd originally thought, a lot more suave or sexy. I found that one way I could lighten John Strange was to give him the odd 'James Bond' moment, like the raised eyebrow or a one-liner."

John Strange is a mysterious character and not much is known about him, although snippets about his past emerge throughout the series. Coyle reveals that he became almost obsessed while researching for the role.

"I spent a lot of time immersing myself in the occult and reading about demonology, myths, legends and folklore and there's an incredible bank of work about it all. I spooked myself so much that I found it difficult to sleep much during the shoot because I was having these vivid nightmares and dreams! I was reading the books during the daytime and then when I fell off to sleep, I would have these really vivid dreams inspired by these fantastic stories."

Filming such a dark and intense script certainly takes its toll. Coyle and his co-star, Samantha Janus, were in virtually every scene which meant long days filming in both Ealing Studios and on location in dark and quite often freezing parts of North London.

"It was a very long and hard shoot; long days and long weeks, and it does start to weigh on you, more so than even the subject matter of the series. So it's important to keep a smile on your face. Both Samantha and I like a good laugh and we spent a lot of time on set together so we would always be giggling and joking and japing about."

It wasn't all laughs for Richard on set though. He was totally speechless when he met one of his acting heroes whilst filming.

"Tom Baker guest stars in one episode and when I met him, I couldn't speak! I didn't know what to say to him for the first day he was on set because he's my Doctor Who – we all have a Doctor Who, like we have our favourite James Bond, and Tom is mine. I just didn't know what to say to him!"

John Strange was a young priest who witnessed some incidents involving demons, one of which was the murder of his girlfriend. "He was going around telling people that there are demons living amongst us on Earth, and Canon Black found this unacceptable behaviour for a priest, so he threw

him out of the clergy,” says Coyle. “Strange decided to set himself up privately to avenge the murder of his girlfriend; he’s on a revenge mission but he also wants to rid the world of these evil fiends.”

The series follows John Strange’s mission, undertaken with the help of Jude Atkins (Samantha Janus), who became embroiled after discovering her boyfriend was one such fiend.

“It is a long time since anything like *Strange* has been seen on British television,” observes Coyle. “When I read the script it really appealed to me because it came so out of leftfield for the BBC. I hadn’t seen anything like it on television before – well, nothing made by the Brits, anyway. It’s very gothic; it’s very sinister, like Tim Burton’s films with touches of *The X Files* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. That’s why I decided to do it; I love that sort of thing. I’m a big fan of science fiction anyway and to get the opportunity to work on something like this is quite rare.”

The cult following of sci-fi classics such as *Doctor Who*, gives Coyle high hopes for *Strange*. It seems that *Strange* could well become a favourite of sci-fi and regular drama fans alike with an unofficial website (www.geosites.com/strangenet/home) devoted to the programme already having been set up, following the airing of the pilot film last February.

“I’ve seen the unofficial *Strange* website and the guy who runs it has already made action figures of the characters – he’s even made Strange and Jude out of Lego! If they did ever do *Strange* merchandising, it would be quite surreal, I imagine, walking into Woolworths and seeing a little figurine of myself on the shelf!”

Coyle has also worked with some of the greats in the directing world, including Franco Zeffirelli and Mike Leigh. More recently, he starred on stage alongside Gwyneth Paltrow in *Proof*, directed by John Madden. However, Coyle is mostly recognised for his comedy performances as Jeff in hit sitcom, *Coupling*.

“It’s the most amazing feeling in the world if you can make somebody laugh. It was incredible, being in front of a live audience when we were doing *Coupling* and hearing them respond to something you’ve said or something you’ve done. That’s an

amazing experience. It’s priceless the buzz you get from that.”

For now, Coyle is more than happy just to take a break. Having recently finished shooting *Strange*, he is taking a well-earned rest – his first since leaving drama school. However, not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Coyle embarked on a trek along the Yangtze river in China in aid of the British Heart Foundation in March – an adventure that, hopefully, didn’t involve demons or spooks, or give him any nightmares!