

# SEND IN THE CLOWN

BY MATTHEW HOLLAND

**CLOWN** – Noun: A comic entertainer, especially one in a circus, wearing a traditional costume and exaggerated make-up...



**T**HIS, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and a pretty accurate description... Of course, for many people 'comic entertainer' works rather poorly as a synonymous term for 'demonic nightmare'.

Because the fact of the matter is, clowns are terrifying. It's difficult to put a finger on exactly where the innate horror

lies, but the one thing that's certain is that for the last 30 years, that horror has been propagated in popular culture by one figure: Pennywise the Dancing Clown. The eponymous character of Stephen King's (who else?) 1986 epic novel *It*, Pennywise has been behind many a trepidatious trip to the bathroom, many a hurried walk past an abandoned house and most certainly many a second (and probably third) glance thrown at a storm drain. But why make mention of such an unpleasant manifestation? For the simple fact that the frequency of the occurrences mentioned is only set to skyrocket now that the long and eagerly awaited film adaptation of King's masterpiece has finally hit cinemas.



# Getting The Circus To Town

WITH a production history almost as long as its source material, the fact that *It* is actually out seems something of a miracle to fans, because the project has been in a bit of a production hell for the better part of eight years. Plans to bring Pennywise to the big screen have been in place since 2009 – *Variety* magazine announced on March 12 of that year that Warner Bros. were looking to produce an adaptation, and since then the film has been through two major planning phases, with *True Detective*'s Cary Fukunaga helming the project from 2012 to 2015, and newish director Andrés Muschietti – who brought us the 2013 horror *Mama* – taking over from that point onward. This change of direction was almost the death knell for *It* – Fukunaga had been an integral part of production, having joined not only as director but as co-screenwriter, too. As such, source material notwithstanding, much rested upon his 'vision' – a vision which producers apparently weren't too happy with. Production faltered when Fukunaga and Warner Bros. were at loggerheads about where Fukunaga was taking the script, and seemed dead in the water when he, unwilling to acquiesce to WB's wishes, abruptly left, despite a near-complete script and an already-begun casting process. Even King himself was doubtful about the whole thing, tweeting, "...It may be dead – or undead..." Thankfully, Argentinean Muschietti stepped in to resurrect the project, and although this meant further delays – with a reworking of the script still required and a new casting call put into motion – the rest of the process was pretty smooth sailing, and on September 8, 2017 (September 15 for us in SA) Pennywise took to the stage in all his g(l)ory.

## Just What Is It All About?

IT all takes place in the small fictional US town of Derry – a town that, on paper, seems, if not ideal, then at least a comfortable place to grow up. The truth, however, is that something is horribly wrong with Derry, something which only the children there seem to be able to see. A presence lives beneath, lurking in the sewers, occasionally emerging to prey upon the young. It has many forms, able to take the shape of a child's deepest, darkest dread, but the form it uses most is that of a clown, luring innocents into its clutches with a supposedly friendly face and promises of balloons that float. This is something illustrated in the very first scene of King's work, which sees a young boy named Georgie encounter Pennywise in a storm drain. Things don't turn out all that well for Georgie, whose fate serves as a catalyst for the events of the novel. His older brother Bill,

11, and his best friends, are pushed into a confrontation with it. They come away, scarred but alive, with the evil of the town seemingly defeated. Life resumes in Derry, and the childhood friends move away and grow up, each carving his own particular niche in the safety of adulthood. Almost three decades pass, and the horror of their youth has become something less than a memory... until the killings begin again. Then they're all called back – to their home, to their childhoods – to face off against the nightmare that lives under Derry – once and for all.

## We've Seen This Act Before...

YES, this month may have seen Pennywise's big-screen debut, but the dancing clown is by no means a stranger to film. Way back in 1990 a two-part series was produced for television, and has arguably had as much a cultural impact as its source material. So why revisit covered ground? Well, for one thing, the series differed from the book. And by 'differed' we mean *differed*! Some might go so far as to say the series gutted it. Although this was wasn't done senselessly – there were three major factors: length, budget, and audience. It is long – very long – and needs more than a two-episode series to do its 1 000-plus pages justice; and in the early stages it was set to have more. ABC, who had acquired the film rights, had initially ordered an eight to 10 hour series that was to be divided into four segments. But the company had always been a little tentative about investing so much into a horror, and when its chosen directors began bowing out due to scheduling conflicts, it whittled the allocated time and budget down to just to a two-90-minute-episode series to be completed within the bounds of \$12-million. Further diluting the book was audience consideration. Because

this was a television production at the dawn of 1990, the content was very much dictated to by network content restrictions, which saw basically 90 percent of the adult nature of the original work hit the cutting floor. What resulted was something that fell within the PG-13 classification. Nevertheless, the series made its mark, and while the acting and direction were certainly nothing to sneeze at, it was the iconic portrayal of Pennywise that really made it shine.

## Swings And Roundabouts

SO what can we expect from this new film? Fans of the novel will be delighted to know that a lot of what was lost in the making of the miniseries has been retained in the Hollywood adaptation. Firstly, its adult nature. This is according to Muschietti himself, who says that the freedom to work within the bounds of an R rating – which is what it has been rated, and is pretty much one of the strictest age classifications in the States – allowed for a more faithful and graphic production. Secondly, Derry's history, which was barely even referenced in the series but which is fundamentally connected to Pennywise's appearance in the novel, will be given a bit of stage time. That's not to say the film won't come without its own set of changes. While the narrative of both the novel and the series saw a structure of alternation between the characters' childhood and adulthood, this adaptation will focus only on the childhood side of the story, with the grown-up narrative serving as the basis for a planned sequel, should this production do well. The good news, though, is that this will allow for more of King's original work to be adapted, because while the series all in all had a running time of around three hours, this first instalment alone is reportedly over two hours long. But perhaps the biggest change is the time setting of the story. The events of the novel take place within the years 1958 and 1985. This film, however, has sought to make the story more relevant to the modern moviegoer by updating the period, with part one taking place in the 1980s and part two, should it be greenlit, taking place around the 2010s.



Stephen King



# MEET THE LOSERS

**T**HE heroes of the novel, Bill Denbrough and his six best friends, are a motley crew of personalities which make up what they affectionately refer to as 'The Losers Club'. This is because, in addition to a shape-shifting creature, each has his own personal demons to face, some burden which makes him an outcast in some way:

## Bill Denbrough

THE leader of the Losers, 11-year-old Bill is the one they all turn to when times are tough. This would be burden enough to bear, but Bill also has to deal with the recent loss of his younger brother, Georgie, his parents' emotional distance following this loss, as well as a terrible stutter.

Bill is played by up-and-coming actor **Jaeden Lieberher**, who has already has a good few titles under his belt, including *Midnight*

*Special*, *The Confirmation* and *The Book Of Henry*.

Born on January 4, 2003, he is the son of American executive chef Wes Lieberher.

In the miniseries, Bill was played by **Jonathan Brandis**, who had a lot of promise as an actor at the time. He'd played the lead role of Bastian Balthazar Bux in the *The Neverending Story II*, and had garnered quite the female fanbase during his time as Lucas Wolenczak on the series *seaQuest DSV*. Tragically **Brandis** committed suicide in 2003 at the age of 27, after a lag in his career saw him go into a deep depression, according to speculation.

## Eddie Kaspbrak

PHYSICALLY speaking, Eddie comes across as the weakest of the Losers, an appearance put forward not least because of his so-called asthma and frailty of frame. His condition is almost completely mental, however, and comes as the result of an overbearing and fiercely overprotective mother.

Eddie is played by **Jack Dylan Grazer**, born September 3, 2003. Jack has had some experience in film before, having had a brief appearance in the 2015 production *Tales Of Halloween* and the 2017 series *Me Myself And I*, though *It* is his first major film role.

Eddie was played in the 1990 miniseries by **Adam Faraizl**, who retired from acting a while ago but who did have parts in movies like *RoboCop 2* and *Where The Red Fern Grows*. He reportedly went on to graduate with a degree in Pacific & Asian Studies, and is said to be the resident beverage director at Kenichi in Austin, Texas.

## Richie Tozier

THE other clown in the novel – though one decidedly more personable than Pennywise – Richie is the wisecracking smart alec who loves making (or at least trying to make) different voices, and whose mouth seems to have a mind of its own (something which frequently gets him into trouble with school bullies). His 'loser' social standing is further cemented by his wearing glasses. Richie is played **Finn Wolfhard**, perhaps the most well-known name in this gang of up-and-coming stars. Born in Canada on

December 23, 2002, **Finn** has already made his mark in Hollywood with his role as Mike Wheeler in the smash-hit sci-fi series *Stranger Things*. Interestingly, he was the only actor to be kept from Cary Fukunaga's original casting choice. Strangely enough, the Richie from the original adaptation was also played by the star with the biggest name out of the Losers' Club back then – **Seth Green**. **Seth** has become instantly recognisable following his roles in many popular productions such as the *Austin Powers* series of films and the television series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. He is also co-creator of and executive producer, writer, director and voice actor for the offbeat stop-motion sketch comedy *Robot Chicken*.

## Beverly Marsh

BEVERLY is in the unique position of being the only girl in the group, and while she is very pretty, with burning red hair, she doesn't quite conform to the preconceived ideas of femininity, and has something of the tomboy about her. She is brave and strong and puts on a face to mask the effects of the abuse she suffers at home at the hands of her father.

Budding actress **Sophia Lillis** plays the tough redhead who isn't afraid to get her hands dirty. Born on February 12, 2002, Sophia has also had a bit of acting experience, having appeared in a few short films like *The Garden* and *The Lipstick Stain*, and is set to appear as the young version of Camille, the main character in the series adaptation of Gillian Flynn's debut novel, *Sharp Objects*.

Canadian actress **Emily Perkins** played Beverly in the 1990 version, and obviously found the horror genre suited her, because she went on to star in the *Ginger Snaps* series of films, as well as have a recurring role on the show *Supernatural*, in which she played the huge fan of the Winchesters, Becky Rosen. You can also see her in the films *Juno* and *She's The Man*.

## Mike Hanlon

MIKE has racial prejudice to contend with because his is the only black family in town – something which earns him the most hatred of Derry's psychotic bully Henry Bowers. Mike is something of an historian when it comes to the town, and knows all about its macabre past, all the disturbing events of which can be linked back to one presence...

Mike is played **Chosen Jacobs**, born July 3, 2001, someone who could have a flair for music as well as acting. In addition to having a recurring role in the series *Hawaii Five-O*, **Chosen** has also reportedly done stage productions for shows such as *The King And I* and *Hairspray*, and sang opera for the Atlanta Boys Choir when he was six. He's said to dream of playing **Muhammad Ali** in the future. **Marlon Taylor** took the role of Mike in the series, and accounts vary as to what he's doing with himself now.

While IMDb lists him as having returned to acting after a 15-year hiatus with the movie *Know Thy Enemy* in 2009, other sources claim this may be a different **Marlon Taylor**, since the actor in the 2009 film supposedly said that it was his first ever film role. Whether they are the same person or not, the photo of the individual on the IMDb site certainly bears a resemblance to the young boy in the *It* miniseries.

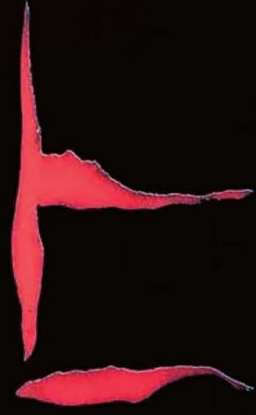
**FACTS THAT FLOAT...**  
WHILE STEPHEN KING DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE PRODUCTION OF THE FILM, HE ONLY HAD PRAISE TO GIVE, AND HAS ALREADY SEEN IT TWICE. "I HAD HOPES, BUT I WAS NOT PREPARED FOR HOW GOOD IT REALLY WAS," HE SAID.



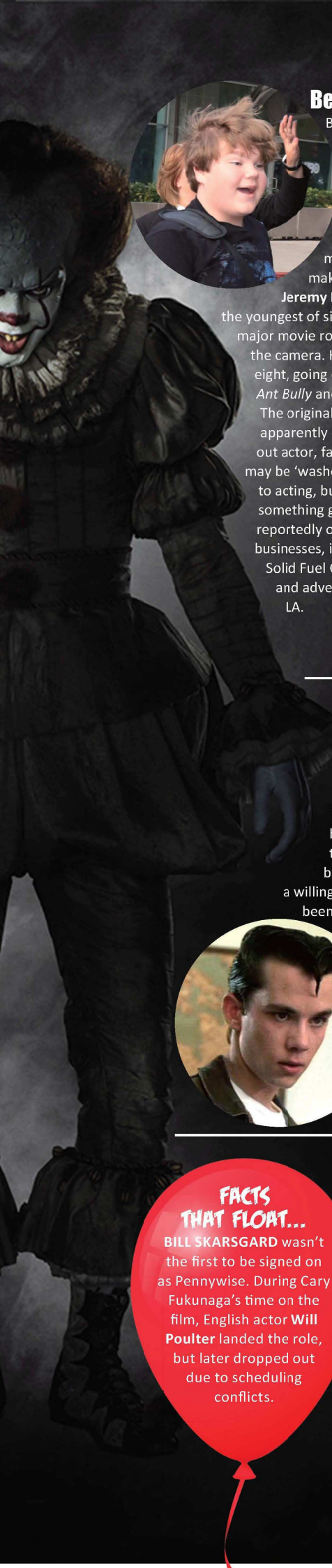




You'll float too...







### Ben Hanscom

BEN is probably the Loser with the most booksmarts, and shows a flair for construction and architecture. Despite his intelligence, however, his self-esteem is weighted down (pun sort of intended) by his obesity, which makes him an easy target for bullying. He is also madly in love with Beverly, something which makes him quite awkward when in her presence.

**Jeremy Ray Taylor**, born June 23, 2003, (and reportedly the youngest of six kids) takes the role of Ben, which is his first major movie role – although he has had some time in front of the camera. He's said to have started acting at the age of eight, going on to have an uncredited role in the animation *Ant Bully* and a small role in the sports biography *42*. The original Ben was played by **Brandon Crane**, who apparently describes himself as a 'washed-out actor, father and tech nerd'. He may be 'washed-up' when it comes to acting, but he certainly has something going for him, having reportedly owned several businesses, including such as Solid Fuel Creative, a marketing and advertising firm based in LA.



### Stan Uris

WHILE Eddie may be the weakest physically, Stan definitely comes across as the most vulnerable of the group from a psyche perspective. With an obsessive concern for orderliness, his mind is adult-like in its rejection of the irrational, and therefore almost incapable of handling the supernatural phenomena that happen around Derry (an inflexibility that proves tragic in adulthood).

As one of the few Jewish people in Derry, Stan is also no stranger to the prejudices of small-town America. Marvel fans might recognise young **Wyatt Oleff** from his portrayal of the child version of **Chris Pratt's** character Peter Quill in the film *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. Born on July 13, 2003 in Maine (the actual state where King's Derry is set), **Oleff** reportedly started off in the acting world in 2012 with a minor role in the short-lived series *Animal Practice*.

It seems to have been the sole venture into the world of film for the actor who played young Stan in 1990, **Ben Heller**. The Canadian did nothing else for the screen before or after his face-off against Pennywise (at least nothing that has been listed), and now, according to reports, works in sales.



## BAD PENNIES W

WHILE there are a good few unlikable characters within King's massive story, two stand out as the main antagonists. Pennywise, of course, is the one – the other is Henry Bowers.

### Henry Bowers

HENRY BOWERS is troubled – to say the very least. He's only a year or so older than the Losers, but he soon distinguishes himself as as dangerous as any criminal, commanding a small group of thuggish friends and taking his predilection for cruelty from the level of standard schoolyard bully to that of full-blown psychopath. He loathes all the Losers (something which renders him a willing pawn of It) but has a particularly fierce hatred for Mike, whose family has for many years been the object of scorn of Henry's lowlife and abusive father Butch.

Australian actor Nicholas Hamilton takes the role of the deranged Henry, and this isn't his first work on a King adaptation. He featured recently in *The Dark Tower*, in which he played Lucas Hanson opposite Hollywood bigwigs **Idris Elba** and **Matthew McConaughey**. Speaking of his role as Henry, Hamilton said, "There's stuff that I have to do that is really creepy, and the opportunity to help share my psychotic side has been really fun."

Henry was played by **Jarred Blancard** in the series, an actor who, co-incidentally, seems to have had a bit of a troubled life himself. A recovering alcoholic, he set his acting career aside, after a few bit parts in other series and TV movies, to work as an addiction counsellor in Canada. Additionally, he's produced a few YouTube videos in which he shares his experiences with addiction.



#### FACTS THAT FLOAT...

**BILL SKARSGARD** wasn't the first to be signed on as Pennywise. During Cary Fukunaga's time on the film, English actor **Will Poulter** landed the role, but later dropped out due to scheduling conflicts.

#### FACTS THAT FLOAT...

THE first official trailer for *It* broke records, generating a reported 197-million views in the first 24 hours after its release and beating *The Fate Of The Furious*' 139-million. Thirty six hours after the trailer released, the number of views stood at 246-million.

#### FACTS THAT FLOAT...

THERE'S an eerie coincidence: in the novel, Pennywise awakens in Derry for his child buffet about every 27 years; the *It* miniseries was released in 1990 – the movie is being released in 2017... 27 years later.

#### FACTS THAT FLOAT...

THE buzz around the film has apparently seen a bit of a downturn in the clown business, and clowns aren't happy. King tweeted this in response: "The clowns are p\*ssed at me. Sorry, most are great. BUT...kids have always been scared of clowns. Don't kill the messengers for the message."



# PENNYWISE THEN

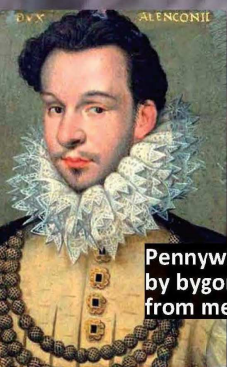
GIVEN the limits of the 1990 series, it's no surprise that the production came off as somewhat tame – most certainly by today's standards. Nevertheless, its titular character became an inimitable icon in horror film history, and this was due to the unforgettable performance of **Tim Curry**. The English actor from Cheshire, who was born on April 19, 1946, and was in his 40s, had already achieved somewhat of an iconic status himself with his role of the deranged Dr Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in 1975, and so make-up and villainous eccentricity were not new ground for him. In fact only a few years before he'd donned the red skin and massive horns of the Lord Of Darkness in the 1985 fantasy film *Legend*. However, it was the prospect of another performance in heavy cosmetics and prosthetics that had him initially reluctant to take on the role of the child-eating clown, since it suggested many more excruciating hours buried under paint and sweating rubber. Thankfully director Tommy Lee Wallace agreed to cut down on the amount of make-up **Curry** would have to wear, which, given his stellar performance, didn't need to be depended upon too greatly in any case. That's not to say, though, that appearance of Pennywise was redundant or even close to – the white face, the red hair and the baggy suit were all essential in establishing a generation of coulrophobics, and for this make-up artist Bart Nixon is to be commended. According to Nixon, the essence of Pennywise's design was a clown treatment of Lon Chaney's *Phantom Of The Opera* (1925), especially regarding the 'shape of the head and the upturned nose'. While Nixon hadn't actually read the novel, he did go over some of the paragraphs that dealt with Pennywise's description – however, he admits that most of the work was done according to information he got from the script, rather than the book, stark evidence of which can be seen in the clown's suit, which involved a garish medley of colours as opposed to the original's plain silver.



Tim Curry



Lon Chaney in *Phantom Of The Opera*



Pennywise's attire was inspired by bygone fashions, like those from medieval times



Bill Skarsgård

# PENNYWISE NOW

IT goes without saying that finding someone to fill **Tim Curry**'s clown shoes would be something of a challenge, and indeed a good many names were put down for consideration – a few of them big ones. Richard Armitage, Hugo Weaving and, believe it or not, even Tilda Swinton were all stars given serious consideration. In the end, though, it was rising Swedish star **Bill Skarsgård** who landed the honour, despite being around 17 years younger than Curry had been. Born August 9, 1990 in Vällingby, Sweden, Bill comes from a family already rooted in the entertainment industry. His father, **Stellan Skarsgård**, has an impressive filmography to his name, and several of **Bill**'s siblings are in show business too, the most famous being **Alexander**, who grabbed attention with his role as vampire Eric Northman in HBO's *True Blood* series. **Bill** himself has had some involvement in monster horror, having starred in the werewolf-centric *Hemlock Grove* series, and so the realm of the weird and wonderful isn't new to him, just as it wasn't to his predecessor. But what earned him the role ultimately was his reinterpretation of Pennywise. "I'll never be able to make a **Tim Curry** performance as good as **Tim Curry**," **Skarsgård** has said about the role. "His performance was truly great, but it's important for me to do something different because of that." He elaborated, "There's a childishness to the character, because he's so closely linked to the kids. The clown is the manifestation of children's imaginations, so there's something childlike about that." Director Andres Muschietti echoed this, saying, "**Bill Skarsgård** caught my attention. The character has a childish and sweet demeanour, but there's something very off about him. Bill has that balance in him. He can be sweet and cute, but he can be pretty disturbing." But while this Pennywise was imagined with something childlike to him, his costume was designed to illustrate how old he actually is. Pennywise has existed in the area of Derry for centuries, and his clothing took elements of various ages to show that. Costume designer Janie explained that she drew from the Medieval, Renaissance, Elizabethan, and Victorian eras, commenting on the Fortuny pleating, "It's a different technique [from] what the Elizabethans would do...it has a whimsical, floppy quality to it. It's not a direct translation of a ruff or a whisk, which were two of the collars popular during the Elizabethan period."



# IT HITS THE FANS

We aren't the only ones excited about the remake! There are scores of pieces of fan art out there showing just how amped people are. These are just some of our favourites.

Welcome to Derry! This unbelievable model of King's fictional town is from Austrian artist Kassiopeya, used a 1958 stereo corner unit as the base. Head to [www.kassiopeya.sachenwerkler.de](http://www.kassiopeya.sachenwerkler.de) for more images of this impossibly intricate piece.

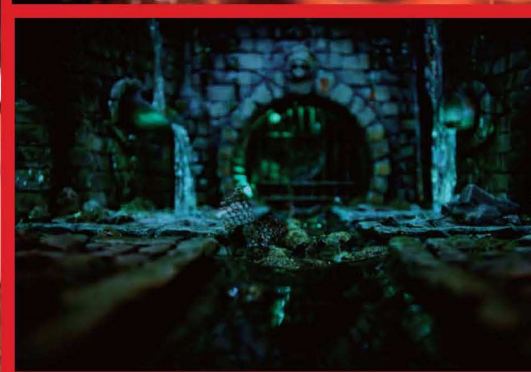
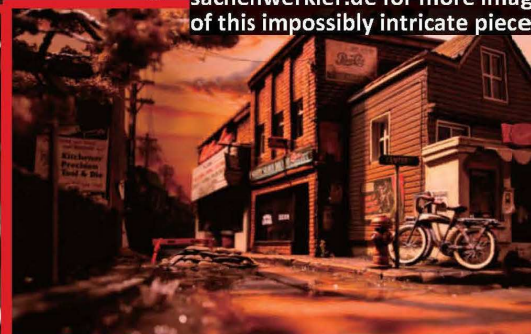


You can skate *and* float with Pennywise on this creation from artist Californian-based Alfred Armenta. Visit his Facebook profile for more incredible designs: <https://www.facebook.com/pyrography.by.alfred.armenta/>

@Pyrography\_by\_alfred\_armenta



This frighteningly adorable mini-It is three-year-old Louie Tilghman from the US, whose 17-year-old brother Eagan did a spectacular job in transforming his little sibling into the stuff of mini-nightmares. Visit Eagan's Instagram account for more exceptional work: <https://www.instagram.com/eag2n/>



This stunning piece from Florida artist Michael Pasquale from 800 Pound Productions really, er, floats our boat (sorry, we had to...). There's a lot more phenomenal talent where this came from at <https://www.800lbprods.com>



The hype's hit SA! Local artist AJ van der Westhuyzen from YouKnowThoseDudes created this awesome collection of *It* moments in the style of cartoon series *The Loud House*. Head to his Twitter profile to see his other amazing artworks: <https://twitter.com/uknowthosedudes>

