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Immigrant thriller 'Nanny' wins top prize at Sundance

"Nanny," a supernatural thriller about an undocumented immigrant working for a wealthy New York family, won the Sundance film festival's top prize Friday. Starring Anna Diop and Michelle Monaghan, Nikyatu Jusu's debut feature portrays the sacrifices Senegalese nanny Aisha makes to leave her home country and young son behind in order to build a new life. "In America in particular, we haven't seen enough films that truly reflect the disproportionate level of Black and brown women... domestic workers that keep this country afloat," Jusu told a virtual panel at the festival.

"I wanted to center women who typical-



Anna Diop, the star of 'Nanny'. — AFP

ly are on the periphery of other women's stories," said Jusu, a first-generation American whose family is from Sierra Leone. Diop, the film's star who is also known for television series "Titans," was

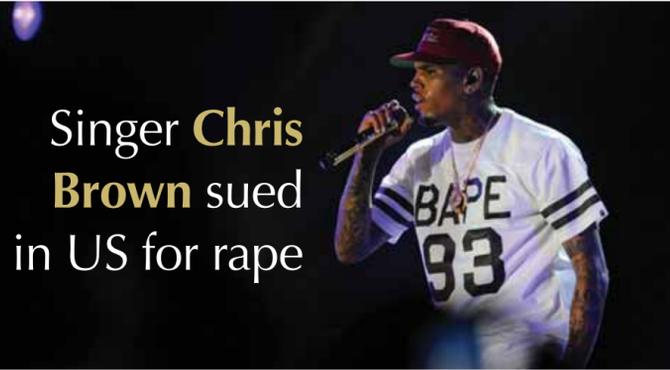
born in Senegal and moved to the United States as a child. The movie, which taps into the horror genre and African folklore as well as issues of race and motherhood, does not yet have a release date. Sundance, which celebrates independent cinema, was forced to go virtual for a second year running by the surge in COVID-19 cases across the United States driven by the Omicron variant.

The Robert Redford-founded festival usually takes place in the mountains of the western US state of Utah. The festival's documentary prize went to "The Exiles," in which filmmaker Christine Choy tracks down three exiled dissidents from China's 1989 Tiananmen Square crack-

down. The separate audience prize for best drama went to "Cha Cha Real Smooth," starring Dakota Johnson as an older, engaged woman who strikes up a flirtatious relationship with a directionless recent graduate played by writer-director Cooper Raiff. The film was bought by Apple TV+ during the festival for a reported \$15 million—the largest deal so far at this year's event.

And "Navalny," a secretive new fly-on-the-wall documentary about top Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, which was added to the festival line-up at the last minute, won the audience documentary prize. Director Daniel Roher said he wanted the film to spark "global outrage and outcry" over

Navalny's imprisonment. The film, which airs on CNN and HBO Max later this year, follows the Russian opposition leader—as well as his family and aides—during the five months he spent in Germany recovering from poisoning in late 2020 and early 2021. "I want every single human being on the planet Earth to know the name Alexei Navalny," said Roher. "I want that name to be associated with a grotesque injustice being perpetrated by the Russian state against a man who survived a murder attempt and then was arrested for merely surviving." Sundance runs until Sunday. — AFP



Singer Chris Brown sued in US for rape

Singer Chris Brown is being sued for rape in California, with his alleged victim claiming he drugged her and attacked her on a yacht at rap mogul Diddy's Florida home. The woman, identified in court papers only as Jane Doe, is demanding \$20 million in damages from the R&B star. According to the civil suit, which was filed on Thursday and seen by AFP, Brown invited the woman—described as a choreographer, dancer, model and musical artist—to the yacht shortly after she arrived in Miami on December 30, 2020.

She says the drink he offered her there made her feel "disoriented (and) physically unstable." The filing says Brown led her into a bedroom where, despite her protests, he raped her. "The traumatic events that Plaintiff Jane Doe experienced shock the conscience and should horrify all of us," says the suit, filed in Los Angeles. "The time has come to send a message to Defendant Chris Brown that enough is enough. Accordingly, Plaintiff Jane Doe brings this complaint seeking justice for herself (and also with the hope it may serve as an example for others)

who may now or have in the past found themselves at the mercy of Defendant Chris Brown."

Lawyers Ariel Mitchell and George Vrabec told TMZ their client did not report the alleged attack to the police because she was embarrassed. AFP asked the firm if a criminal complaint would be forthcoming in the wake of the civil case, but there was no immediate reply. Grammy Award-winning Brown took to Instagram after news of the suit broke. "I HOPE YALL SEE THIS PATTERN OF [blue cap emoji]," he wrote. The blue cap emoji is used to denote untruths. "Whenever im releasing music or projects THEY try to pull some real b****t." Brown did not specify who "they" were. In 2009, Brown was convicted of beating fellow singer Rihanna, his girlfriend at the time, who missed the Grammy Awards because of her injuries. He also was previously accused of raping a woman in a luxury Paris hotel. He denied the claim, and was not charged. — AFP



This undated image shows the new presidential cat "Willow" The dog-loving Bidens have finally fulfilled a key White House pledge: they got a cat. — AFP

First Feline takes up residence in Biden White House

The dog-loving Bidens have finally fulfilled a key White House pledge—they got a cat. The political pussycat is a short-haired tabby named Willow, a spokesman for Jill Biden said Friday. Pictures posted by the first lady on Twitter showed the gray-and-white-striped pet prowling in the red-carpeted splendor of the presidential residence. It was the kind of soft, even cuddly Friday news the White House might need in these days of tension with Russia, soaring inflation and a stubborn, if receding, COVID-19 pandemic. "We're waiting for a bad news day," Press Secretary Jen Psaki joked back in June about going through with the long-expected cat plan. "If you see a tail wagging coming out of the briefing room, you'll know something bad is about to happen."

Willow brings serious political chops: she's a farm cat from Pennsylvania-ground zero in tight presidential elections—and was first encountered in 2020 when she jumped onto a stage where the future first lady was campaigning. "Willow made quite an impression on Dr Biden," Michael LaRosa, the first lady's press secretary, said. "Seeing their immediate bond, the owner of the farm knew that Willow belonged with Dr Biden." LaRosa said, "Willow is settling into the White House with her favorite toys, treats, and plenty of room to smell and explore." There was no answer to questions on Willow's ability to bridge the bipartisan divide with dogs, but Washington probably won't have to wait

long to find out: the Bidens got a new German Shepherd puppy, Commander, just before Christmas.

The Bidens used to have two adult German Shepherds but one, Champ, died last year and the other, Major, was sent away to live with family friends because of a series of biting incidents involving White House staff. Indeed, the US presidential mansion has a long and storied history as a pro-dog house. Pooches—more than 100 — have roamed and sniffed its corridors as far back as the days of George Washington. America's first president actually bred a kind of dog called the American Foxhound, and his journals feature specimens with names like Sweet Lips and Drunkard, the American Kennel Club says.

In modern times, well-liked presidential dogs have included George Bush Sr's English Springer spaniel Millie and Barack Obama's Portuguese water dogs Bo and Sunny. Donald Trump, famously germophobic, stood out from the pack by not having a dog. White House cats are a much rarer species. One of the most popular was Socks-Bill, Hillary and Chelsea Clinton's black and white short-haired cat in the 1990s. An adopted stray, Socks made it big, even being photographed sitting at the presidential desk in the Oval Office. — AFP

Janet Jackson doc offers skin-deep account of superstar's rise

A new Janet Jackson documentary out Friday offers a narrow glimpse into the fiercely private superstar's early life and rise to fame. But rather than the juicy tell-all the series was billed as, "Janet Jackson" offers a retelling of her story dictated by the "Rhythm Nation" star herself, and so far stops short of revelation. The first half of the four-hour series, sees Jackson, 55, discuss her complex relationships with her father and brother Michael, her reticence to join the entertainment industry and her early marriages.

The documentary, which Jackson and her brother Randy executive produced, features home movie footage made public for the first time, along with interviews with stars including Tyler Perry, Samuel L Jackson and Missy Elliott. It begins with Jackson and Randy visiting their small childhood home in Gary, Indiana, which serves as the backdrop as she recounts the rise of the Jackson 5. She recalls the "tough" love of her father Joe, who for years was accused of physically and emotionally abusing his children.

Jackson doesn't explicitly deny abuse but instead says her father's "discipline" was out of his desire for his children to succeed, and she says she owes her career to him. The Grammy winner—whose "Control" album came to define 1980s dance music and served as a model for artists to come—details growing up as a child star, talking about later wanting to attend college and study business. Her father, who died in 2018 at age 89, said no, according to Jackson, pushing her further into a show business career.



In this file photo inductee Janet Jackson attends the 34th Annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at Barclay's Center in New York City.— AFP

"It has opened a great deal of doors for me...having that name," she says at one point. "[But] I wanted my own identity." She said she married young-elooping with childhood friend James DeBarge in 1984, when she was 18 — in order to escape from under her father's thumb and make her own career moves. The marriage was annulled one year later, with Jackson citing his frequent drug use. Jackson also briefly discusses how she and brother Michael drifted as the King of Pop found immeasurable global success.

She also reiterates without much additional detail her family's long-time denial that she had a secret baby which, according to rumors, she either gave to her sister to raise or put up for adoption. The series pivots to her second marriage to Rene Elizondo in 1991, who documented much of the couple's life on home video, footage that features prominently in the first half of the docuseries.

The second half, which will air Saturday, promises to discuss the child molestation accusations against her late brother Michael. It's also teased that she will offer her side of the story surrounding the infamous "wardrobe malfunction" when Justin Timberlake briefly exposed her breast on live television during the 2004 Super Bowl. — AFP

Man arrested outside Swift's Manhattan home after attempting to enter

New York police on Friday said they arrested a man outside Taylor Swift's building, which he had crashed his vehicle into and attempted to forcibly enter. Morgan Mank, 31, was charged after police say he was driving the wrong way on a street in lower Manhattan. He faces charges of driving while intoxicated and driving while ability-impaired. Superstar Swift, 32, has long suffered from attention from stalkers. The pop phenom has cited threats to her safety as one of her "greatest fears," and in the past reportedly has deployed facial recognition technology at some concerts to identify potential stalkers in the crowd. "You get enough stalkers trying to break into your house and you kind of start prep-



In this file photo Taylor Swift attends the 'All Too Well' premiere at AMC Lincoln Square in New York. — AFP

ping for bad things," she wrote in a 2019 essay for Elle.

"Every day I try to remind myself of the good in the world, the love I've witnessed, and the faith I have in humanity." In June 2019 an Iowa man was arrested after traveling to Rhode Island, where she owns a home, with burglary tools including an aluminum baseball bat and plans to "visit" Swift. And a man named Roger Alvarado has been arrested multiple times for breaking into her Manhattan home in recent years. — AFP



Brad Pitt and Edward Norton in Fight Club.

China's 'Fight Club' ending closer to original book

The new ending to the Chinese release of "Fight Club" in which the authorities win is actually closer to the original book, the author has said. Film fans in China noticed this week that a streaming version of David Fincher's 1999 cult classic had been transformed to lose its anarchist finale. Instead of Edward Norton's Narrator character blowing up buildings, a black screen and coda appears.

"The police rapidly figured out the whole plan and arrested all criminals, successfully preventing the bomb from exploding," it says. While some film fans were outraged by the edit, blasting China's heavy hand, Chuck Palahniuk, on whose 1996 novel the movie was based, shrugged it off. "The

irony is that the way the Chinese have changed it, they have aligned the ending almost exactly with the ending of the book, as opposed to Fincher's ending, which was the more spectacular visual ending," Palahniuk told the TMZ website.

"So in a way, the Chinese brought the movie back to the book a little bit." And, he added, the book has frequently been altered to more closely follow the plot of the film, which also starred Brad Pitt. "A lot of my overseas publishers have edited the novel itself, so that the novel ends the way the movie ends," he said. "So I've been dealing with this kind of revision for, like, 25 years." — AFP



In this undated photo courtesy of Netflix shows Joseph "Joe Exotic" Maldonado-Passage with one of his tigers. — AFP

Joe Exotic loses appeal, gets new 21-year jail term

Joe Exotic, the jailed former private zoo owner who shot to fame as the star of the "Tiger King" series, on Friday failed to convince a US judge to release him and received a new sentence of 21 years for attempted murder. Exotic, whose real name is Joe Maldonado-Passage, was sentenced in January 2020 to 22 years in prison for attempting to kill a

rival animal refuge owner, Carole Baskin. Owing to a procedural error, a federal court then ordered that the sentence be reduced. At a hearing in Oklahoma City to determine his new sentence, the 58-year-old impresario asked for a "second chance," local media reported Friday. "Please don't make me die in prison waiting for my freedom," pleaded Exotic, who suffers from prostate cancer. Baskin had urged the judge to leave him behind bars, saying she still feared for her life. The judge finally retained a sentence of 21 years of imprisonment, according to court documents. — AFP