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## Woody Allen says 'thrill is gone,' next movie may be his last

In a rare interview on Tuesday, filmmaker Woody Allen did not rule out Tuesday that his next movie, to be shot in Paris, will be his last, saying that "a lot of the thrill is gone." The 86-year-old director and comedian, who fell from grace in the United States after his adopted daughter accused him of sexually abusing her as a child, spoke for about half an hour with actor Alec Baldwin on the latter's Instagram show.

Baldwin has himself been at the center of recent controversy after he accidentally shot dead the director of photography on one of his own movies last October while handling a firearm. "I'm probably making this one more movie but a lot of the thrill is gone," the director of "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan" told Baldwin. He said the excitement had been in showing his films



US director Woody Allen holds a press conference in the northern Spanish Basque city of San Sebastian, where he will start shooting his yet-untitled next film. — AFP

on the big screen in cinemas, while these days so many people stream their movies at home.

"I don't get the same fun [as] doing a

movie and putting it in a theater," Allen said. "It was a nice feeling to know that 500 people were seeing it at once." "I don't know how I feel about making movies. I'm going to make another one and I'll see how it feels," he said.

Baldwin had announced the controversial interview on his Instagram account on Sunday to talk about Allen's new book "Zero Gravity," but he anticipated the emotions that would be stirred up. "I have ZERO INTEREST in anyone's judgments and sanctimonious posts here," Baldwin said in his trailer for the interview. He did not mention the accusations of sexual abuse in the interview. Allen has always denied them. —AFP

## Sony launches PC gaming gear, expanding beyond PlayStation

Japan's Sony is launching a new brand that will offer PC gaming gear, the company announced Wednesday, as it tries to compete for a share of the lucrative gaming peripherals market. Sony is looking to expand beyond its flagship PlayStation console and boost revenue from other sectors, including PC and mobile gaming.

The gaming peripherals market of items used by players was valued at \$3.88 billion globally in 2019 according to Grand View Research. Sony's first offerings from its new Inzone brand will be three wireless headsets and two monitors, the priciest of which will retail for a suggested \$899.99 in the United States.

"The market has been expanding with a higher interest in gaming with the spread of esports tournaments and the advancement of gaming entertainment," said

Yukihiro Kitajima, head of Sony's game business and marketing office, in a statement. Sony is "very late" to the "hopelessly crowded" sector, said Serkan Toto, CEO of game industry consultancy Kantan Games.



Rival Microsoft is already well-positioned, along with competitors like Razer, though Sony will bring unique hardware features, he told AFP. The firm's decision to enter the market now is linked to its "aggressive plan to boost sales from PC and mobile for its PlayStation unit to around 50 percent by fiscal 2025," Toto said. It "apparently believes that the goal is easier to achieve by leveraging its position in hardware to raise awareness among PC gamers." —AFP

## Early human ancestors one million years older than thought

The fossils of our earliest ancestors found in South Africa are a million years older than previously thought, meaning they walked the Earth around the same time as their East African relatives like the famous "Lucy", according to new research. The Sterkfontein caves at the Cradle of Humankind world heritage site southwest of Johannesburg have yielded more Australopithecus fossils than any other site in the world.

Among them was "Mrs Ples", the most complete skull of an Australopithecus africanus found in South Africa in 1947. Based on previous measurements, Mrs Ples and other fossils found at a similar depth of the cave were estimated to be between 2.1 and 2.6 million years old. But "chronologically that didn't fit," said French scientist Laurent Bruxelles, one of the authors of a study published Monday in the PNAS science journal. "It was bizarre to see some Australopithecus lasting for such a long time," the geologist told AFP. Around 2.2 million years ago the Homo habilis—the earliest species of the Homo genus that includes Homo sapiens—was already roaming the region. But there were no signs of Homo habilis at the depth of the cave where Mrs Ples was found.



This file photograph French anthropologist Yves Coppens poses next to a model of Lucy.

calcite flowstone mineral deposits, which were younger than the rest of that cave section, the study said. For the latest study, the researchers used a technique called cosmogenic nuclide dating, which looked at levels of rare isotopes created when rocks containing quartz were hit by high-speed particles that arrived from outer space.

"Their radioactive decay dates when the rocks were buried in the cave when they fell in the entrance together with the fossils," said the study's lead author, Darryl Granger of Purdue University in the US. The researchers found that Mrs Ples and other fossils near her were between 3.4 and 3.7 million years old. This means that members of Australopithecus africanus like Mrs Ples were "contemporaries" of East Africa's Australopithecus afarensis, including 3.2-million-year-old Lucy who was found in Ethiopia, said Dominic Stratford, director of research at the caves and one of study's authors.

### Our family tree 'more like a bush'

It could also possibly alter our understanding of our ancestral history. The South African Australopithecus had previ-



This file photograph shows French paleontologist Yves Coppens posing at his home in Paris, while holding a head model of Lucy, a female Australopithecus. — AFP

ously been considered "too young" to be the ancestor of the Homo genus, Stratford said. That meant that Lucy's home of East Africa was thought to be the more likely place where the Homo genus evolved. But the new research shows that the South African Australopithecus had almost a million years to evolve into our Homo ancestor. Or they could have worked on it together.

"Over a timeframe of millions of years, at only 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) away, these species had plenty of time to travel, to breed with each other... so we can largely imagine a common evolution across Africa," Bruxelles said. The research showed that the history of hominids was "more complex than linear evolution", he added. Our family tree is in fact "more like a bush, to use the words of our late friend Yves Coppens," Bruxelles said, referring to the French palaeontologist credited with co-discovering Lucy. Coppens died last week. "He had long understood the pan-African nature of evolution," Bruxelles said. — AFP



These An undated handout photographs show researchers collecting samples at a dig-site around the caves in Sterkfontein, also known as the "Cradle of Humankind".



## Tunisian film star Hichem Rostom dies

Tunisian actor Hichem Rostom, who starred in The English Patient and dozens of films across Europe, died on Tuesday at the age of 75, the culture ministry said. Rostom, seen as the most influential Tunisian actor of his generation, had started his career during his studies in

France, where he worked as a presenter at the People's National Theatre.

He moved into cinema in the mid-1970s, going on to star in dozens of Tunisians, French, Italian, English and German films. They included Alain Berberian's 1998 comedy Paparazzi and Jean-Jacques Annaud's 2011 drama Or Noir (Black Gold), filmed in Tunisia. He returned to Tunisia in 1988 and worked on a string of films and local television shows. — AFP

## Singer R Kelly faces sentencing over sex crimes case

A US federal judge on Wednesday was set to sentence disgraced R&B singer R Kelly nearly a year after he was convicted of leading a decades-long effort to recruit and trap teenagers and women for sex. Prosecutors have urged the court to put the "I Believe I Can Fly" artist behind bars for at least 25 years, saying he still "poses a serious danger to the public."

In September, a jury in Brooklyn federal court found the fallen superstar guilty on all nine charges he faced, including the most serious of racketeering. "His actions were brazen, manipulative, controlling and coercive. He has shown no remorse or respect for the law," prosecutors wrote in their sentencing memo.

"A lengthy sentence of imprisonment will serve to deter others—including those with wealth, fame and the outsized power such status brings—from engaging in similar crimes," they added. The legal team representing the 55-year-old Kelly, who is currently incarcerated in Brooklyn awaiting his fate, have urged a lighter sentence with a maximum of approximately 17 years.

Jury selection in Kelly's separate, long-delayed federal trial in Chicago is meanwhile scheduled to begin August 15. In that case, Kelly and two of his former associates are alleged to have rigged the singer's 2008 pornography trial and hid years of sexual abuse of minors. The musician who once dominated R&B also faces prosecution in two other state jurisdictions.

### #MeToo milestone

Kelly's conviction in New York was widely seen as a milestone for the #MeToo movement: it was the first major sex abuse trial where the majority of accusers were Black women. It was also the first time Kelly faced criminal consequences for the abuse he for decades was rumored to

have inflicted on women and children. Prosecutors were tasked with proving Kelly guilty of racketeering, a federal charge commonly associated with organized crime syndicates that depicted Kelly as the boss of an enterprise of associates who facilitated his abuse.

Calling 45 witnesses including 11 alleged victims to the stand, they painstakingly presented a pattern of crimes they say the artist born Robert Sylvester Kelly carried out for years with impunity, capitalizing on his fame to prey on the less powerful. To convict Kelly of racketeering, jurors had to find him guilty of at least two of 14 "predicate acts"—the crimes elemental to the wider pattern of illegal wrongdoing.

Lurid testimony intended to prove those acts included accusations of rape, druggings, imprisonment and child pornography. His accusers described events that often mirrored one another: many of the alleged victims said they had met the singer at concerts or mall performances and were then handed slips of paper with Kelly's contact details by members of his entourage. Several said they were told he could bolster their music industry aspirations. But prosecutors argued all were instead "indoctrinated" into Kelly's world-groomed for sex at his whim and kept in line by "coercive means of control," including isolation and cruel disciplinary measures, recordings of which were played for the jury.

Core to the state's case was Kelly's relationship with the late singer Aaliyah. Kelly wrote and produced her first album "Age Ain't Nothin' But A Number"—before illegally marrying her when she was just 15 because he feared he had impregnated her. His former manager admitted in court to bribing a worker to obtain fake identification allowing the union, which was later annulled. — AFP

### 'Contemporaries'

Also casting doubt on Mrs Ples's age was recent research showing that the almost-complete skeleton of an Australopithecus known as "Little Foot" was 3.67 million years old. Such a big gap in ages between Mrs Ples and Little Foot seemed unlikely given they were separated by so few sedimentary layers. Because the fossils are too old and fragile to test, scientists analyze the sediment near where they were found. The previous dates underestimated the age of the fossils because they measured

## Netflix 'actively' working on ad-supported subscription

Netflix is "actively" working on building its cheaper, ad-supported deal, the company's French team said on Tuesday, but added there was no clear timeline. It was revealed last month that the streaming platform was planning to introduce a new cheaper subscription model by the end of the year that would break its taboo on advertising. That leak to the New York Times followed news that Netflix had lost 200,000 subscribers in the

first quarter of the year—its first decline in a decade. "We don't have a precise timeline yet," Anne-Gabrielle Dauba-Pantanacce, head of communications for Netflix France, told AFP.

"We are actively working on it. It's a priority—this idea of giving subscribers more options in the context of high inflation," she added. Bloomberg reported over the weekend that Netflix has yet to appoint a head of advertising or build a sales team. The Wall Street Journal said Netflix is actively looking into partnerships with

Google and Comcast to provide ads. There are also tricky questions about where to place the ads.

Should they come only at the start of programming? Or will their teams have to go back through countless hours of content to find suitable moments for an ad break in shows like "Stranger Things" that were never created with ads in mind? "For now, nothing is decided," said Dauba-Pantanacce.

In its bid to rake in more cash, Netflix is also looking to crackdown on users who share their passwords with others. Despite losing subscribers, which led to a tumble in its share price, Netflix remains by far the most popular streaming service in the world with 222 million subscribers. But they are shared with an estimated 100 million other households that are not paying for the service. — AFP



In this file photo singer R Kelly leaves the Leighton Criminal Court Building after a hearing on sexual abuse charges in Chicago.

