

# Jail Caesar

*Wentworth* is so dark and confronting that star Danielle Cormack remains haunted by the material, writes **SHANNON MOLLOY**

WOULD you go to extreme lengths to enact a murderous plan for vengeance on the man responsible for your only child's death?

Thankfully it's not a hypothetical many of us would have to confront. But for Danielle Cormack, asking herself those sorts of dark and disturbing questions is all part of the job.

While filming the third season of hit Foxtel series *Wentworth*, which makes its dramatic return this week, the actress who plays lead character Bea Smith often found herself needing "a moment" at the end of a long and dark day.

"This is what I do and what I get paid for, but with a series like this you're bound to be handed some things you'll find challenging," Cormack admits.

"It's scary to then leave that world and really think about the situations. Not what it's like for Bea, but for actual people – there are people who've lost children to drugs, who've been in domestic violence situations, who've tried to commit suicide, who are in prison ... the world is full of weight."

Immersing herself in those emotionally heavy scenarios, particularly those involving extreme grief and loss, took its toll, she says.

"It's exhausting. I have to employ a lot of personal care in those moments. I have to be kind to myself afterwards. I work with an incredibly supportive cast and crew too, which helps."

The previous season of the acclaimed drama, based on the hit 1980s series *Prisoner*, saw several main storylines come to explosive conclusions.

The next instalment of the captivating jailhouse story only ups the ante, Cormack promises.

"Bea has achieved her goal and now she's dealing with the mess she left behind," she says.

"This season seems to have a greater exploration of the psychology of these women. It has a darker feel – it's very

moody. That's really indicative of what's happening to the characters psychologically, I think."

A central plot will be Bea's struggle with prison governor Joan Ferguson, whose thirst for absolute power and penchant for sadistic manipulation is dialled up a notch.

"At this point, Ferguson is showing heavy dollops of sociopathic behaviour," Cormack says. "She's an incredibly damaged person. There's something unstable about her."

"It's such an insidious and dark power, and when a world is being ruled with that heavy a hand, it can kill the fire in some people and ignite it in others."

"That's what we'll see. She raises the stakes. It makes for great drama."

With Bea assuming the status of top dog – the inmates' voice of unquestioned authority – she's bound to face a challenging relationship with Franky, who previously held that mantle.

Nicole da Silva, who plays the tough-as-nails and heavily tattooed prisoner, hints that loyalties will shift over the course of the new season.

"What I love about the Franky-Bea-Ferguson triangle that's emerging is that it constantly shifts," she says.

With Franky taking "a few steps down the ladder", there will be room to explore some of the other elements that make up her complex but fascinating personality, da Silva says.

"So many people boil her down to her sexuality or tough persona. She's so much more than that – she's complicated."

"It's been a real joy exploring that and figuring out the breadth of who she is."

"She's strong on the outside but completely vulnerable and empathetic on the inside, for sure. I can relate to that."

"It's what I wanted to bring to

the character. There's a real joy in playing Franky."

As part of her preparation for first taking on the role, da Silva reveals she visited two prisons and even met with a former inmate – a woman who helped shape the character.

It was an experience she describes as "enlightening and totally eye-opening" and while da Silva is protective of the woman's story, refusing to even discuss the crime that landed her in jail, she says the pair are still in touch.

"She was so generous with all of my questions. Without her, you wouldn't have the Franky that you see on screen, hands down."

"We've stayed in touch."

She loves Franky – absolutely loves her. She told me Franky is her mum's favourite too, which made me very happy."

**WENTWORTH**  
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## INK BEFORE YOU ACT

AFTER three seasons of putting herself in Franky's heavily tattooed skin, actress Nicole da Silva admits she's tempted to get some ink for herself.

Although it's unlikely to be quite as big or elaborate as the colourful sleeve her prison alter ego sports.

"I'd have to get something small, for purely practical reasons," da Silva laughs. "The make-up artists [on other jobs] would kill me. Covering up a big sleeve would be a big task."

Even though some aren't to her taste – especially the more graphic ones – da Silva says she's become very attached to the tats.

"I remember during season one we took a two-week break and they removed them for me and I just felt very strange," she says. "It was like I'd gotten so used to them that they were part of my identity. It was odd. I can see why tattoos are a stamp of ownership for people."

