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GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

PUMP UP THE VOLUME FOR VOL. 2 OF MARVEL'S INTERSTELLAR ROGUES!

+ ON SET OF LIFE: RYAN REYNOLDS' TERRIFYING NEW SPACE HORROR

WAR FOR THE **PLANET** OF THE **APES**

IN CINEMAS JULY



#WARFORTHEPLANET



THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

"Risky as hell" was pretty much the consensus before *Guardians Of The Galaxy* danced into cinemas in 2014, taking a bucketload of cash and an armful of critical acclaim. After all, it wasn't anchored by one big, splashy, flashy A-list name. It rejected dark material ruminating on death, legacy and oh, Christ — is that the impending apocalypse? I should be able to tell once the storm that I'm brooding in clears! It was a bright, light, bonkers, completely original space film with a cracking soundtrack. It was that very dirty word in superhero movies of old: fun. Bloody good fun, to be more specific. *Vol. 2* was nailed on pretty much straightaway and, bearing in mind we've lived through some pretty gnarly scenes in the past few years, we are more than ready for it.

The *Guardians* stars weren't the only ones to get a grilling this month. On p.90 you'll find a world-exclusive interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger. James Dyer quizzed him on the very important topic of the day: which of his roles have been significant? (Oh, and there might also have been mention of some guy called Trump. See empireonline.com for more.)

As I write this, we are just ten days away from the Three Empire Awards. It's our 22nd, and shaping up to be one of the best yet. Pick up the next issue for all of the details and check empireonline.com for a blow-by-blow account of the night. We're banking on tears, celebrations and a 2am kebab run. Mine's a large doner.



NEXT ISSUE

Hey, we're on sale earlier!
(Well, we didn't want you to miss us.)

THE JUNE ISSUE IS OUT 20 APRIL



Heien O'Hara and James Dyer hang out with Keanu Reeves after recording an *Empire* podcast interview for *John Wick: Chapter 2*.



Dan Jolin makes an adorable new friend on the set of *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*.



Terri White takes part in the Strong Women panel after 20th Century Fox's special *Hidden Figures* screening at Picturehouse Central.



Paul Feig and Richard Curtis lark about at our LA shoot before Paul and Richard talk *Love Actually*.



Joanna Moran, Eric Bana and Chris Hewitt, taking a break in Dublin before Eric and Chris sit down for *The Empire* interview.



Christopher McQuarrie goes live for the 250th *Empire* podcast, in Leicester Square's Prince Charles Cinema.

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Political activists *not* monkeying around.

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Yes, we asked Pierce Brosnan how hairy his arse was. No, he didn't say, "007". We're not mad, Pierce, we're just disappointed.



Clockwise from here: *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*; *Guerrilla*; *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*; *Logan*; *The Running Man*.



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ALAMY. SPINE LINE ANSWERS ISSUE 334: NEWSSTAND: "IF MOPING AROUND OVER SOME BOY YOU'RE CRUSHING ON IS GROWING UP, THEN PASS ME MY WONDER WOMAN UNDEROOS" IS FROM JAY AND SILENT BOB STRIKE BACK. SUBS: "GET OUT OF MY LIFE YOU PERFECTLY WONDERFUL WOMAN, YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR ME" IS FROM REAR WINDOW.



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TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH

BIRDIE ON A WIRE

I had a strange dream last night. I was having a beer with Mel Gibson and he was showing me some of the work he had done recently in his new career as a golf-course architect. Have to say that one course in particular — which was in the middle of the desert — was absolutely spectacular! Looking forward to tonight, to see who the next movie star is to get an unlikely career change...

SCOTT PARMENTER, CUMBERNAULD

In terms of mad dreams involving movie stars, that's a hole in one. Can anyone beat it? Let us know. (Unless it's a sexy one involving Gérard Depardieu and a paddling pool full of jelly; you can keep that to yourself.)



Picturehouse Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the brand-new Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.



MOST PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER HIM FOR HIS ROLES IN ALIENS & TWISTER. BUT I PREFER HIS ROLE IN MIGHTY JOE YOUNG. RIP #BILLPAXTON

@SHAUN1NEO

NO-GAN

Call it sour grapes for not being part of the much-hyped extras casting when *Logan* filmed in my state of New Mexico last summer, but I don't have any desire to see Wolverine portrayed in complete decrepitude. If I want characters staggering in post-apocalyptic ruins I'll watch *The Walking Dead*. I prefer to remember Hugh's portrayal in all his cynical, smirking glory.

STEPHEN CONN, NEW MEXICO

Your loss, Bub.

PRO-GAN

Have to say that the March 2017 *Logan* article was pretty great — some amazing little stories they shared that make you believe they care and feel the movie they are making is really important to them. Anyway, I'm off to learn the C-word in Spanish.

STEPHEN YOUNG, VIA EMAIL



ON RUMOURS OF JARED LETO STARRING IN A NEW TRON FILM: "THE ONE BRIGHT SIDE IS THAT WE COULD ALL ENJOY LISTENING TO HIM CHAT ABOUT THE MONTHS HE SPENT LIVING INSIDE A SERVER IN PREP FOR THE ROLE."

GORDON MCBAIN

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"Have you ever inspected a cat's eyes? They're amazing!"





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PRE.VIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY PHIL DE SEMLYEN





FIRST LOOK

**WAR FOR THE
PLANET OF
THE APES**

OUT 14 JULY

THE APES OF WRATH

Caesar embarks on a personal quest in a franchise threequel that promises to unleash hell

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

“APES TOGETHER STRONG” may have been the mantra last time, but the cataclysm that broke 2014’s *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* has forced Caesar (Andy Serkis) to rethink. *War For The Planet Of The Apes* sees him ditching most of his simian tribe and storming off on a mission both to avenge a wrong and solve a mystery. He’d have gone alone had Maurice (Karin Konoval), Rocket (Terry Notary) and Luca (Michael Adamthwaite) not insisted on joining him.

“[Toby Kebbell’s renegade ape] Koba had the bigger arc in the last movie,” producer Dylan Clark tells *Empire*, “but this time it’s all about Caesar. His anger has led him to the position where he’s killed another ape. Now what? The stakes keep getting raised. And he will kill again.”

The trail of clues leads the dark ape detective inexorably towards the dangerous militia of Woody Harrelson’s Colonel, but the journey adds new members to Caesar’s adopted family, lightening his path. Steve Zahn’s ‘Bad Ape’ (not necessarily the villain that name suggests) is the first chimp we’ve encountered who’s evolved separately to Caesar’s troupe. And Amiah Miller plays a young human girl whose name you may recognise. Is her Nova related to the mute human Charlton Heston will meet in a cage in the future? Time will tell...



ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

THE TRIP TO SPAIN

AIRS APRIL,
SKY ATLANTIC

THIS IS SPINAL TAPAS

Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon
share more comic barbs in Spain

WORDS ALEX GODFREY

"I'LL TELL YOU what I think about Eddie Redmayne," says Rob Brydon to Steve Coogan, over lunch in the courtyard of a rustic restaurant an hour out of Madrid. "It sounds like the name a middle-class girl would give her pony. 'Would you like a ride on Eddie Redmayne? You can have a trot on Mr Hiddleston as well. Come along, Mr Hiddleston.'" Coogan smirks, then stops himself. "Don't mention their names," he says. "I might end up working with them one day."

Empire has no idea if Coogan is saying that in or out of character. We're in Spain as Brydon, Coogan and director Michael Winterbottom film the third series of *The Trip* which, of course, has the pair playing only slightly fictionalised versions of themselves. They riff and improvise, and their off-camera dialogue barely differs. Winterbottom watches, laughing and sipping on white wine.

"[Michael] decided this series would be in Spain and thought of the ideas — that we're following Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, that Steve will be thinking about George Orwell and the Spanish Civil War," says Brydon later, over drinks. "And that I'm happy to do light entertainment shows, but Steve has loftier ambitions."

Indeed, the first series focused on Coogan's attempts to make it big (well, bigger) in the movie business. Soon after they filmed *The Trip To Italy*, the acclaimed *Philomena* was released, providing grist for the mill this time around. Coogan relays a story about Brydon once, in real life, winding him up, and Coogan snapping, "Rob, I've got four Oscar nominations, I don't give a shit."

"So there's the idea that I'm wringing as much out of it as I can," says Coogan. "Rob plays it as even though I've got this degree of success, happiness still eludes me, whereas it comes easily to him. And also the fact I didn't win [the Oscars]. He uses that. 'But you didn't win.'"

From pain, such joy. With *The Trip*, we all win.

Clockwise from above: Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon take inspiration from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; Enjoying fine wine and food in the sun. Tough job, eh?; Michael Winterbottom shows off his extremely interesting ringbinder; The pair hit *el camino*.





From top to bottom:
Oscar Isaac's
Michael among the
fleeing Armenians;
Christian Bale's Chris
with girlfriend Ana
(Charlotte Le Bon);
The Ottoman troops.

APOCALYPSE THEN

Christian Bale and Oscar Isaac
pair up for a hard-hitting epic

WORDS MARTYN PALMER

THE PROMISE, A love story set against the backdrop of the Armenian genocide, was always likely to ruffle feathers — and so it's proved. When *Empire* met director Terry George on set in Spain, he was expecting hostility from the Turkish government. As he points out, they have form.

Back in the 1930s, MGM scrapped plans to adapt *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, a bestseller by Franz Werfel about the killing of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915, after threats from Turkey. Even Rocky took one on the chin trying to make a movie about it — Sylvester Stallone was interested in directing the novel, but dropped out after pressure by a genocide-denying group.

"It's more than denial," George tells *Empire*. "It's the active suppression of the truth. The Turkish government has a lot of muscle to throw around, but we're independent of that influence." The Irishman, who received Oscar acclaim for *Hotel Rwanda*, had a reported \$100 million budget and "complete freedom" to tell his story. A heavyweight cast, boasting Christian Bale and Oscar Isaac, offers box-office potential, too.

Even so, there are signs that *The Promise* has been targeted. Despite only a handful of festival screenings, at the time of writing 93,923 people have rated it on IMDb. That 59,360 have given it one star points to an orchestrated campaign.

Away from the controversies, George's film is an old-style epic with *Doctor Zhivago* and *Reds* as touchpoints. There is action on land and sea, filmed in Spain, Portugal and Malta, and hundreds of extras playing Armenians fleeing Ottoman troops.

Isaac plays Michael, a villager who moves to Constantinople to study medicine. There, he falls in love with Ana (Charlotte Le Bon), the girlfriend of American reporter Chris Myers (Bale), as war breaks out. "For me, it's about concentrating on my character because otherwise it's overwhelming and the tragedy of it is nearly incomprehensible," explains Isaac of the horrors.

Bale points to the modern resonance of this untold story. "I read Terry's script around the time the Yazidis were trapped on the mountains in Iraq with ISIS surrounding them," he recalls. "The correlation was remarkably similar."

But, for its director, politics come second to telling a story. "It's there for people to recognise the courage that was shown and empathise with the plight of these people," he says. "It's a piece of entertainment at the end of the day."



THE PROMISE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 APRIL

THE QUOTE QUOTA

The month's most notable
TV and movie *bon mots*

"I LOOK LIKE I TRIED TO FUCK
A RELUCTANT PANDA BEAR."

STEVO (SAM RILEY)
IN *FREE FIRE*



"DID YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU HEAR
A REALLY HIGH-PITCHED SOUND LATER
ON IN PREGNANCY YOU CAN JUST START
SPURTING MILK FROM YOUR BOOBS?
LIKE TWO ROCKETS!"

MIDWIFE (JO HARTLEY)
IN *PREVENCE*



"I'M A GLORIFIED TRUFFLE PIG,
NOT A CLAIRVOYANT."

CALIBAN (STEPHEN MERCHANT)
IN *LOGAN*



"YOU GOTTA GET OUT OF THERE. YOU'RE
IN SOME *EYES WIDE SHUT* SITUATION."

ROD (LIL REL HOWERY)
IN *GET OUT*



"A COLD WAR? LIKE... THEY TAKE THE
SUMMERS OFF?"

LIEUTENANT MARLOW (JOHN C. REILLY)
IN *KONG: SKULL ISLAND*



"HE LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE IN THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST KNT A MAN."

HANNAH (LENA DUNHAM) ON DESI
IN *GIRLS*



Above: Paula Beer
and Pierre Niney as
Anna and Adrien.
Here: It's time to
meet the parents
— thankfully not
Focker-style.

OZON LAYERS

François Ozon changes tack
again with period potboiler *Frantz*

WORDS IAN FREER

AVERAGING ONE FILM a year since his debut *Sitcom* in 1998, French filmmaker François Ozon is not only ridiculously quick, but remarkably restless. Often channelling his cinematic heroes, his CV runs the gamut from musicals (*8 Women*) to French farce (*Potiche*), via teen dramas (*Young & Beautiful*) and black comedy (*The New Girlfriend*). "I love different kinds of movies," he explains, "[and] I don't want to repeat myself. It's like your life. Sometimes you have the feeling of living in a Bergman movie. The day after, you are in a Frank Capra movie. It would be so depressing to spend every day in a Bergman movie."

His latest, *Frantz*, is more in the key of Bergman. Set in the aftermath of World War I, it is a melodrama charting the relationship between Anna (Paula Beer), a young German woman grieving over the death of her fiancé Frantz, and Adrien (Pierre Niney), a Frenchman she discovers laying flowers on Frantz's grave. Unusually for Ozon, it is sombre and political, and eschews his beloved Technicolor for black and white. "Checking the monitor, it was like watching Dreyer or Murnau," he enthuses.

What *Frantz* shares with Ozon's back catalogue is the power of secrets, a compelling female protagonist and a twisty-turny plot that drops a bombshell in the middle ("Everybody was afraid of that," he admits). But just don't put it to him that he has recurring obsessions.

"I don't think there is one unity to all my films," he says. "I don't analyse my work. Once the film is done, I turn the page. What is important is to make the next one."

The "next one" is an erotic thriller about a love triangle involving a woman and two twins. Ozon is keeping the plot under wraps, but describes it as "very disturbing and sexy". As always with this director, expect the unexpected.

FRANTZ IS IN CINEMAS FROM 12 MAY

FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

ATOMIC
BLONDE

OUT 11 AUGUST

COLD WAR KICKS

Charlize Theron tools up in David Leitch's punk-rock spy thriller

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

IT'S BERLIN, 1989. The Wall is about to be consigned to history, and the Cold War with it, but Charlize Theron's MI6 agent Lorraine Broughton is just getting warmed up. "Charlize transformed what you think a female action character can do [in this film]," says director David Leitch of his *Atomic Blonde* lead. "She's just fucking badass." With a key intel document missing and KGB goons all around, she'll have every chance to show it, as Sofia Boutella's night crawler Delphine Lasalle will discover. James McAvoy's edgy Berlin station chief — "a Tyler Durden spy" says Leitch — is also along for the ride. Boutella (pictured with Theron) is in the way.

As the title implies, *Atomic Blonde* is not your average cloak-and-dagger spy thriller. Leitch, who co-created *John Wick* and once stunt-doubled for Jason Bourne, is juicing up the genre with nods to Hong Kong action cinema and '80s New Wave needle drops. "It's a punk-rock spy movie," says Leitch, who cites Michael Mann, New Order and Berlin ex-pat David Bowie as touchpoints. "We actually asked David to play an MI6 head," reveals Leitch. Sadly, the Thin White Spook didn't come to pass — "He loved the script but wasn't able to do it" — but expect a Bowie or two on the soundtrack. Berlin, it's safe to say, is about to get very cool again.





ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

GUERRILLA

AIRS TBC,
SKY ATLANTIC

REBEL ALLIANCE

Writer John Ridley's Black Power drama *Guerrilla* pulls no punches

WORDS JIMI FAMUREWA

DEEP WITHIN THE bowels of a former London art college, *Empire* is doing its best to pretend that close proximity to a naked German activist is the most normal thing imaginable. "Are they planning any other operations?" barks Rory Kinnear's sadistic Rhodesian detective as he stalks a police cell, menacingly trailing a cricket bat over actor Giorgio Spiegelfeld's trembling flesh.

We're on the set of *Guerrilla*, Sky Atlantic's bold six-part look at the British Black Power movement of the early '70s, and this interrogation scene is a crunching introduction to its textured world of high-stakes, revolutionary rhetoric and crooked cops. It's the brainchild of Oscar-winning *12 Years A Slave* screenwriter John Ridley. But in a way, Jimi Hendrix was key to its inception.

"I was in the UK working on post-production on a film set in London in 1967," explains Ridley, referring to his 2013 biopic *Jimi: All Is By My Side*. "I got to meet people and start exploring what it meant to be black and British: very different to being black and American." This seed of an idea bloomed into the 1971-set tale of young immigrant couple Jas (Freida Pinto) and Marcus (Babou Ceesay) falling in with freedom fighters and taking on Special Branch's insidious 'Black Power desk'.

Ridley, who wrote five episodes and directed three, wrangled an impressive cast — including Daniel Mays, Zawe Ashton and Denise Gough — but the biggest name wasn't initially meant to be in front of the camera. Idris Elba was brought on as an executive producer, but Ridley couldn't help but create the role of Kent (a peaceable photographer who tempts Jas away from Marcus) just for him.

"We were lucky to get a performer like Idris," notes Ridley, who already has tentative plans for a second series. But if all this seems designed to capitalise on the issues of Brexit, Trump and Black Lives Matter, Ridley is quick to put you right.

"It's unfortunate serendipity," he notes.

"These stories are timely but, sadly, they're also timeless." Whatever the genesis, *Guerrilla* looks like a thrilling tonic for times of resistance.



Clockwise from
above: Babou
Ceesay gets radical
as Marcus; executive
producer Idris Elba
moves in front of
the camera as
photographer Kent;
Hardened detectives
Pence (Rory Kinnear)
and Cullen (Daniel
Mays) with Jumayn
Hunter as Stevie;
Freida Pinto's Jas
categorically joins
the resistance.







Here: Surf's up for Dwayne Johnson and Zac Efron. Below: Director Seth Gordon with his Mitch.

CHANGING OF THE LIFEGUARD

Reinventing The Hoff's finest hour for the 21st century

WORDS IAN FREER

"IT'S UP TO us to restore the Baywatch brand," Captain Thorpe (Rob Huebel) tells Mitch Buchanan (Dwayne Johnson) in the big-screen adaptation of David Hasselhoff's magnum TV opus (sorry, *Knight Rider* fans). In the film's fictional world, it speaks to the tarnished image of Buchanan's elite life-guarding team. It's about to be given a PR boost by ex-Olympian Matt Brody (Zac Efron) — the film is a mismatched buddy comedy about Buchanan schooling Brody in the Baywatch philosophy of looking out for other people. But in that meta *21 Jump Street* way, "restoring the Baywatch brand" is also a cheeky nod to the challenge of making the orange-filtered, soft-rock-anthemed cheese of the '80s TV show work for now.

"You can't spend the whole movie winking," says director Seth Gordon. "But we understand what the expectation is, with the red swimsuits and slow-motion running, and we certainly tease those, then try to go to a different place."

Much of the "expectation" of the show is wrapped up in a very '90s brand of objectifying



women. Gordon (*Horrible Bosses*, *The King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters*) and his writers have tackled the outdated viewpoints in different ways: partly by casting Bollywood star Priyanka Chopra as the sophisticated villain originally written, according to Gordon, "in the Gary Oldman mould" and without "making a deal of it", partly by reinventing old characters ("Kelly Rohrbach is [in] the Pam Anderson role, but a very different spin on that role — a real goofball"), and partly by confronting the sexism head on.

"We actually make fun of the fact that everybody expects us to be selling skin," Gordon says. "So Alexandra Daddario's character challenges Zac Efron's character, 'Did you look at my boobs? You should look at my face.' There are those kinds of moves throughout the movie. I wouldn't call it neo-feminist, but it does not get caught in the stuff the show had done. It is a different animal."

And of course, the show's most iconic feature, the slow-motion running, is also not going unchecked. "We did that a few times," says Gordon. "I know it's such an important part of what people know about the show, but we call it out. The characters say, 'Why does she always run in slo-mo?' Just to take the piss out of it a little bit."

Joey and Chandler might not be happy ("Run, Yasmine! Run like the wind"), but the rest of us will be just fine.

BAYWATCH IS IN CINEMAS FROM 2 JUNE



Empire's screening of *The Lost Boys*. Below: Teresa Palmer in *Berlin Syndrome*.



MEET THE TARTANS

The Glasgow Film Festival hits its teens in style

ONE OF BRITAIN'S fastest-growing movie events, the Glasgow Film Festival is ageing like a fine, 13-year-old malt. With quirky screenings (John Carpenter's *The Thing* played at an indoor ski slope, while an *Empire*-presented showing of *The Lost Boys* drew crowds to an abandoned theme park) and an eclectic line-up, the week-long festival broke attendance records in late February and early March. "It's been a thrill to witness how enthusiastically audiences have embraced the entire programme," notes the festival's co-director Allan Hunter.

The line-up married the best of British — Julian Barratt and Simon Farnaby's tribute to '80s TV detectives *Mindhorn* shared the bill with Ben Wheatley's bullet blitzkrieg *Free Fire* and Terence Davies' *A Quiet Passion* — with the latest from Terrence Malick (*Voyage Of Time: Life's Journey*), as well as Alankrita Shrivastava's edgy *Lipstick Under My Burkha*.

The critical favourite, though, was Australian director Cate Shortland's *Berlin Syndrome*. The *Lore* and *Somersault* filmmaker returned with a genre-bending thriller about a photographer (Teresa Palmer) who picks the wrong Berliner to hang out with. Controversial local psychiatrist R.D. Laing kept the home fires burning, meanwhile, courtesy of near-local David Tennant's turn in biopic *Mad To Be Normal*. The Scottish film couldn't have been more warmly received if it had been a Kenny Dalglish screamer into the top corner. PHIL DE SEMLYEN

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FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

6 DAYS

OUT TBC

KILLER ELITE

Jamie Bell joins the SAS in an embassy siege thriller

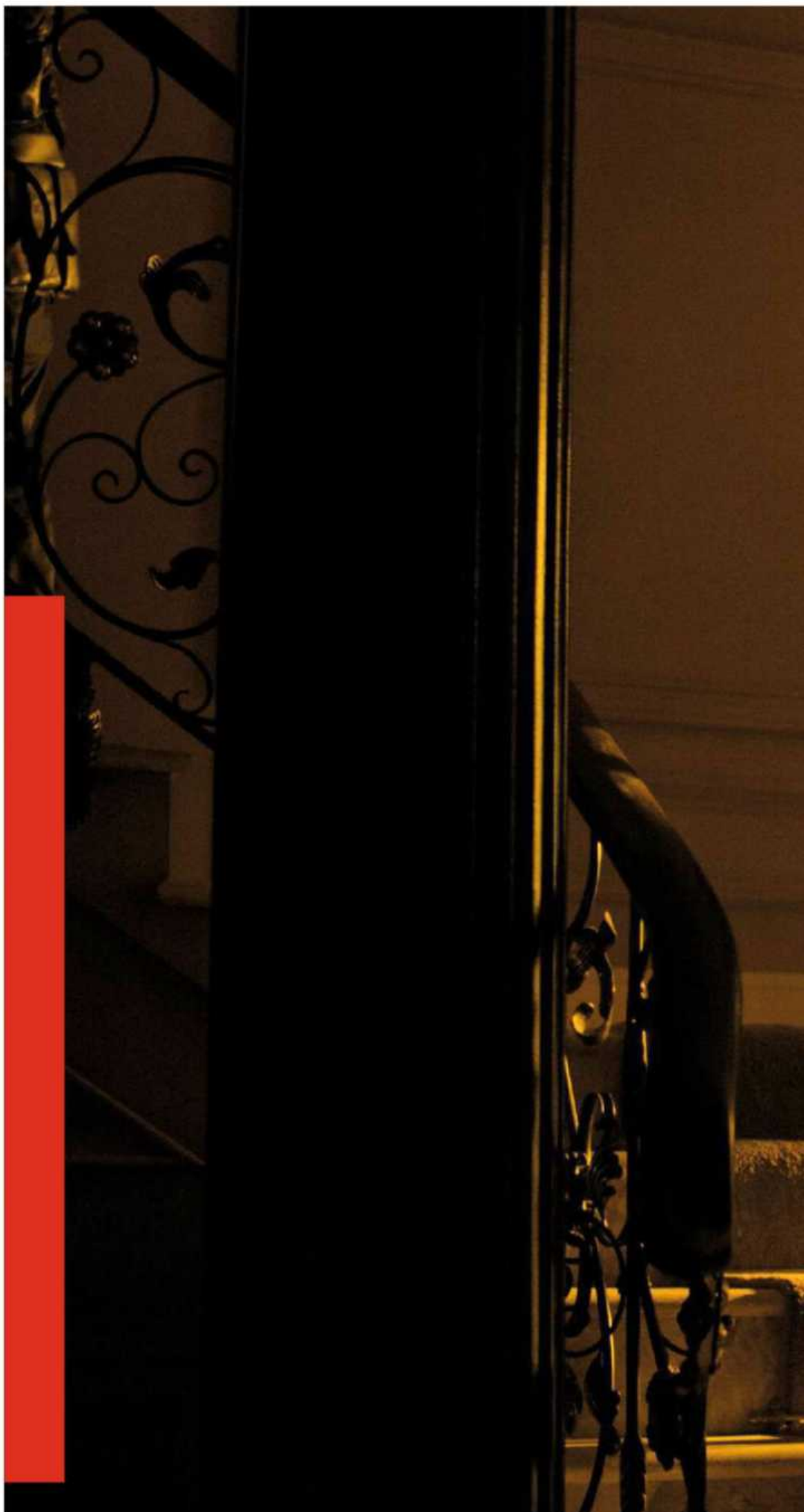
WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

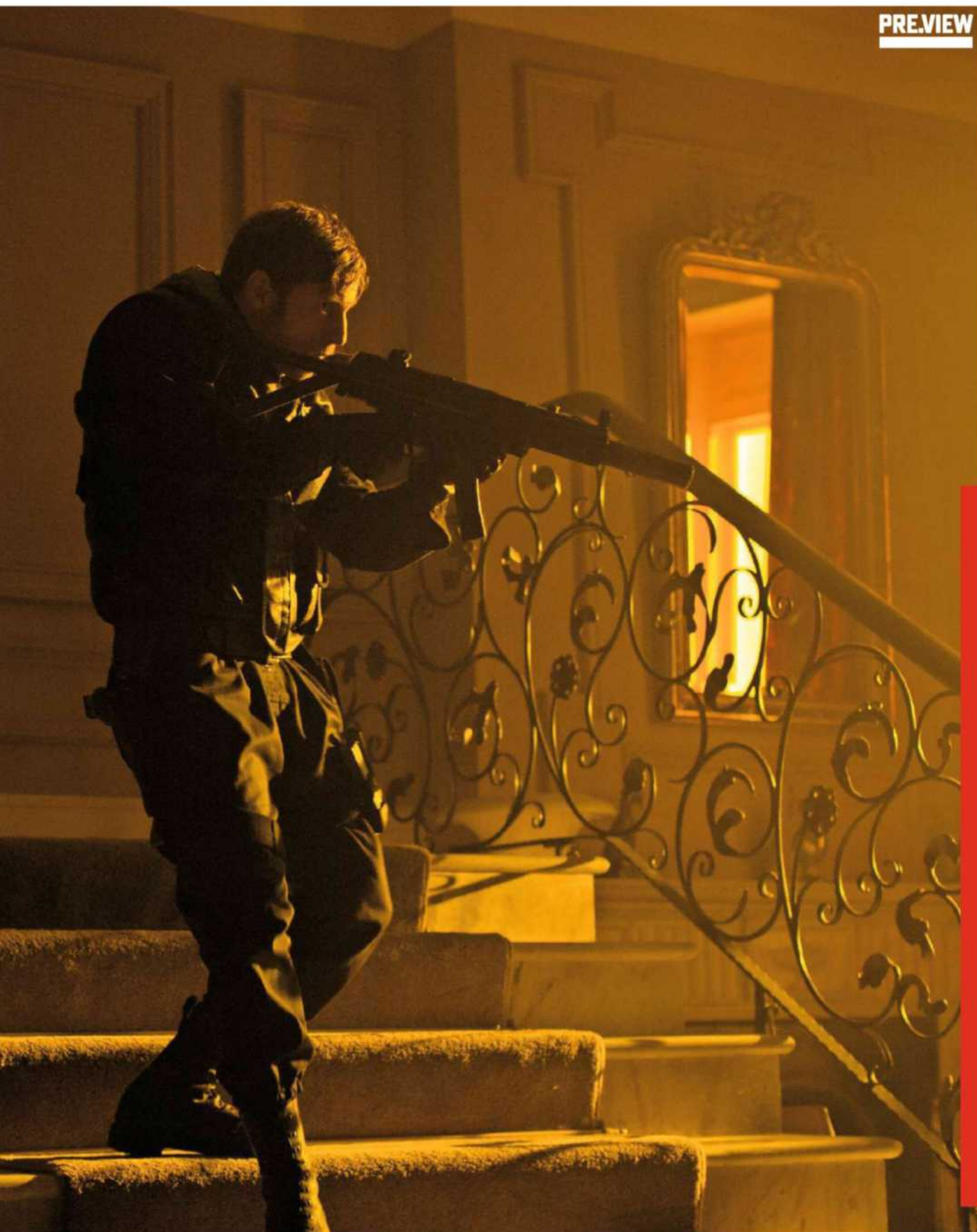
ON 30 APRIL 1980, six masked gunmen took 26 people hostage in the Iranian Embassy on Princes Gate, South Kensington. Six days later, on 5 May, the SAS were sent in. It was a defining moment in British military history. And (as it was broadcast live at prime time) a ratings hit.

6 Days follows the story of that raid — codenamed Operation Nimrod — from a nerve-fraying new perspective. Jamie Bell (pictured) plays SAS trooper Rusty Firmin, here seen advancing stealthily through the famous building. For the six Khuzestani terrorists who've taken up temporary residence inside, the Bell is about to toll in an entirely literal sense.

The film, as director Toa Fraser (*The Dead Lands*) is at pains to point out, is a very different beast to *Who Dares Wins*, a hokey '80s thriller loosely inspired by the siege. Fraser is looking to balance gritty realism with cinematic thrills. "I'm wary of the idea of authenticity, but I'm very happy to play with it," he explains. "The guns look cool and the uniforms look cool, so it's not like we had to change it up too much."

With the real Firmin, a grizzled veteran of 27 years' service, serving as the film's military advisor, it's probably a sensible strategy. He who dares fakery loses.





THE INTRO

Empire showcases tomorrow's stars today

FLORENCE PUGH

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN PORTRAIT OPHELIA WYNNE

AG — 21

PLAY — Katherine, a strong young woman trapped in a loveless marriage, in William Oldroyd's icy period drama *Lady Macbeth*.

BACKSTORY — "Acting was what I always wanted to do. I did *The Falling* in my A-level year, then I did the pilot for *Studio City*, a really big project in America. I auditioned for *Star Wars*, too."

EARLY ROLES — Pugh shared critical plaudits with Maisie Williams in Carol Morley's *The Falling*. "The casting people said it was like a young Kate Winslet walking in the door," remembers Morley of her audition. "That was my first-ever pay cheque," says Pugh. "I photocopied it and framed it."

THE BIG BREA — "A script like *Lady Macbeth* doesn't come around often and to cast an unknown is an incredible risk for a filmmaker. Katherine is bloody awesome, so kick-ass. I made sure I got her accent right, and how she carried herself in these period clothes."

NEXT U — "I play a bad girl in *The Commuter* with Liam Neeson. He came up to me one day on set and said, 'I hear you were in this incredible film called *Lady Macbeth*,' which was a shock. I'm also playing WWE wrestler Paige in *Fighting With My Family*. I'm getting my wrestle on."

HOBBIE — "I have a little off-road motorbike, which is exhilarating. When I was younger I had a snail shelter, until I learned that you're not supposed to touch them. All the snails my mum would chuck off a plant, I'd basically home them."

ACTING HEROE — "Kate Winslet and Natalie Portman... It's those women with on-screen oomph that you aspire to be like."

LADY MACBETH IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 APRIL





HAIR AND MAKE-UP: EMMA WHITE TURLE; THANKS TO THE LORD STANLEY, CAMDEN PARK ROAD
RED TURTLE: © 2016 STUDIO GHIBLI-WILD BUNCH-WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS-ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA-
CN4 PRODUCTIONS-BELVISION

Florence Pugh,
photographed exclusively
for *Empire* in London on
16 January 2017.



PREVIEW



From top to bottom:
Unnamed Man; Red
Turtle; Unnamed Man
meets Red Turtle.

DESERT ISLAND FLICK

Studio Ghibli's first non-Japanese director on the birth of *The Red Turtle*

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

MICHAËL DUDOK DE Wit was stunned when Studio Ghibli called him, late in 2006, to offer him a feature film. "It was so unexpected," smiles the Dutch-born, British-based director. "Usually people want to meet you first, have a meal or something." But the Japanese studio simply wanted the Oscar winner (for 2000's animated short *Father And Daughter*) to conceive a feature-length story for them to produce. "It was not my ambition to imitate Studio Ghibli," he stresses. "I would not have been good at it. But there was never any pressure; it was almost the opposite."

If the film he's crafted shares Ghibli's fascination with nature, it also bears the stamp of Western artists such as Hergé and Moebius. Wordlessly, it follows a desert island castaway and the turtle that shares his home. "I had a seed in my head since childhood when I saw



a televised series of *Robinson Crusoe*. Suppose you are not surrounded by society. What is your sense of yourself?"

While the story starts off small, its surreal touches build to moments of magic that are introduced without exposition. "Some people need things explained intellectually," notes the director, "[but] my desire was to explain things intuitively".

Dudok de Wit's biggest concern was in making the leap to feature filmmaking without losing his passion for the medium. "But my passion grew because I saw the animated scenes coming in," he says, "and I gasped because they were extraordinary." An Oscar nomination (he lost out to *Zootropolis*) suggests he's not the only one who thought so.

THE RED TURTLE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 MAY



IMMIGRANT SONG

Sherwan Haji's Syrian refugee Khaled.

Below: Khaled faces hostility from the self-styled Liberation Army Of Finland.

Finnish maverick Aki Kaurismäki offers his most topical film yet

WORDS DAMON WISE

THERE ARE TWO surprises in *The Other Side Of Hope*, the new film by Aki Kaurismäki. The first is that, though it sticks firmly to the Nordic master's 30-year template — fixed shots, rich, retro colours and a silent comedy-inspired love of sight gags — it is one of the year's timeliest films, which likely brought him the Golden Bear for direction at this year's Berlin Film Festival. Initially conceived as the second of a three-film cycle that began with 2011's *Le Havre*, in which an African migrant comes to a French fishing town, it's the story of Syrian refugee Khaled (Sherwan Haji) and the eccentric Finnish restaurateur he works for.

"It's the second and last part of the trilogy," the director states with a straight face over a lunchtime glass or two of white wine. Kaurismäki has made 'issue' films before, but why is he so drawn to this subject? "In the autumn of 2015," he recalls, "20,000 refugees came to Finland, and the country went into shock. All kinds of hunters started to carry guns. I thought, 'I have to do something.' So I did. I wanted to carry my human responsibility, and my only weapon is cinema."

Kaurismäki is capable of great poignancy, but the striking thing about *The Other Side Of Hope* is how funny it is, even though it never sugarcoats the darker themes. "You can easily make a tragic drama out of the refugee problem," the director explains, "but... it's too easy. So I put some comedy in. I work like Charlie Chaplin — not to compare



Aki Kaurismäki with his trusty Arriflex.

myself with Chaplin — but I want to bring the audience in. If you try to make a great statement and there's no audience, where is the statement?"

The other surprise for the famously boozy Kaurismäki is how little his Finnish protagonist, Wikström (Sakari Kuosmanen), drinks. The director smiles. "The cliché in Finnish cinema is that the man is a drunk, so I made it the opposite — his wife is a drunk." So does this mean there's going to be less drinking in his films in future? "Nah," he laughs. "I'll just save it for myself."

THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 MAY

PRODUCTION NOTES

Movies and TV shows in the works

1



Reteaming with Tom Hanks for a fifth film, Steven Spielberg has signed up to direct *The Post*. Co-starring Meryl Streep, it recounts *The Washington Post*'s battle to publish the Pentagon Papers, secret files on the Vietnam War.

2



Margot Robbie has signed on to play the titular maid in *Marian*. Sony's spin-off, billed as *Braveheart* meets *Game Of Thrones*, picks up after Robin Hood's death, with Marian taking up the fight against evil forces.

3



Cult Garry Marshall comedy *Overboard* is getting a do-over with Anna Faris and Eugenio Derbez on board to reprise the Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell roles. Production gets underway in Vancouver in May.

4



Michael K. Williams has signed up for an unspecified role in Phil Lord and Chris Miller's *Han Solo* movie. *The Wire* alumnus will be sent to a galaxy far, far away alongside Donald Glover, Alden Ehrenreich and Thandie Newton.

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FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

IT

OUT 8 SEPTEMBER

CLOWNING ABOUT

Are you ready for the return of Pennywise?

WORDS TOM ELLEN

“THERE’S SUPPOSED TO be a less-is-more thing in horror,” muses *It*’s Argentine director Andrés Muschietti. “It’s like you’re not really meant to show the monster. But Pennywise is different. With Pennywise, it’s like, ‘This is the monster, I’m showing it to you... and you’re going to shit a brick.’”

As the accompanying image proves, Muschietti is very much a man of his word. For his big-screen adaptation of Stephen King’s 1986 novel, the director was after “a baby-faced, off-balance Pennywise”, and he found him in 26-year-old Bill Skarsgård. “I was amazed by Bill’s body language,” he says. “I wanted this wall-eyed thing — the eyes looking in different directions. I thought we’d have to use VFX, but Bill’s like, ‘Oh, you mean *this*?’ He could already do it perfectly! I’m thinking, ‘Man, you just saved me \$200,000...’”

Those familiar with King’s creepy book, or the iconic Tim Curry-powered 1990 TV series, will know that Pennywise is just one of many nightmare-inducing forms adopted by ‘It’ — an ancient, trans-dimensional evil that wreaks havoc on a small US town. However, with his reimagined “child-like” clown monster at the helm, Muschietti gleefully promises his movie contains “fears that you definitely won’t find in the original”. Coulrophobics, you have been warned.



ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

JAWBONE

OUT 12 MAY

WELCOME TO THE PUNCH

Johnny Harris unleashes his hard-hitting screenwriting debut

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

THE JAWBONE IS the area of the head most vulnerable to a knockout blow. It's either the strongest or weakest part of a boxer, and that line between strength and vulnerability is the one Johnny Harris is negotiating with his debut film as both star and screenwriter. Taking elements from his own past, it's the story of Jimmy McCabe, who walked away from the ring having once been a contender, but finds himself drawn back. Amateur champion at 16, Harris says the boxing life "just fell away a bit. I was listening to The Smiths and Paul Weller and getting political. That's what I'm exploring here, to an extent. Something just changed." In a pleasing bit of synchronicity, Weller has provided the film's soundtrack.

Empire is on set at the former Spode pottery in Stoke, today transformed into a convincing gym. A dozen hard guys circle the ring, beating seven bells out of bags and pads and each other. It is hard to tell if the perspiration is make-up or real: it's cold in here, but they're working hard. Ray Winstone and Michael Smiley are on hand as the club's owner and chief trainer; and no less a boxing luminary than former featherweight champion Barry McGuigan is also keeping an eye on proceedings. "I'm always looking for what looks real, and Johnny's definitely authentic," he tells us. "You can see he knows what he's doing."

Two years of preparation and a gruelling six months of full-on training have paid off. Harris says being treated "like a fighter rather than an actor" by his trainers was crucial. "I got my nose split open really badly, and it sounds martyrish, but that's when I realised I was getting somewhere," he laughs. "I texted this picture of my face all fucked up to my agent and Ray. My agent was like, 'Oh my God, darling! Are you alright?' Ray just texted back, 'Keep your fucking hands up!'"

How's that for a punchline?



Clockwise from above: Jimmy McCabe (Johnny Harris, left) returns to the ring; With Michael Smiley as trainer Eddie; Director Thomas Q. Napper on set; Jimmy with promoter Joe Padgett, played by Ian McShane.





BILL PAXTON 1955-2017

Empire bids farewell to one of our favourite actors

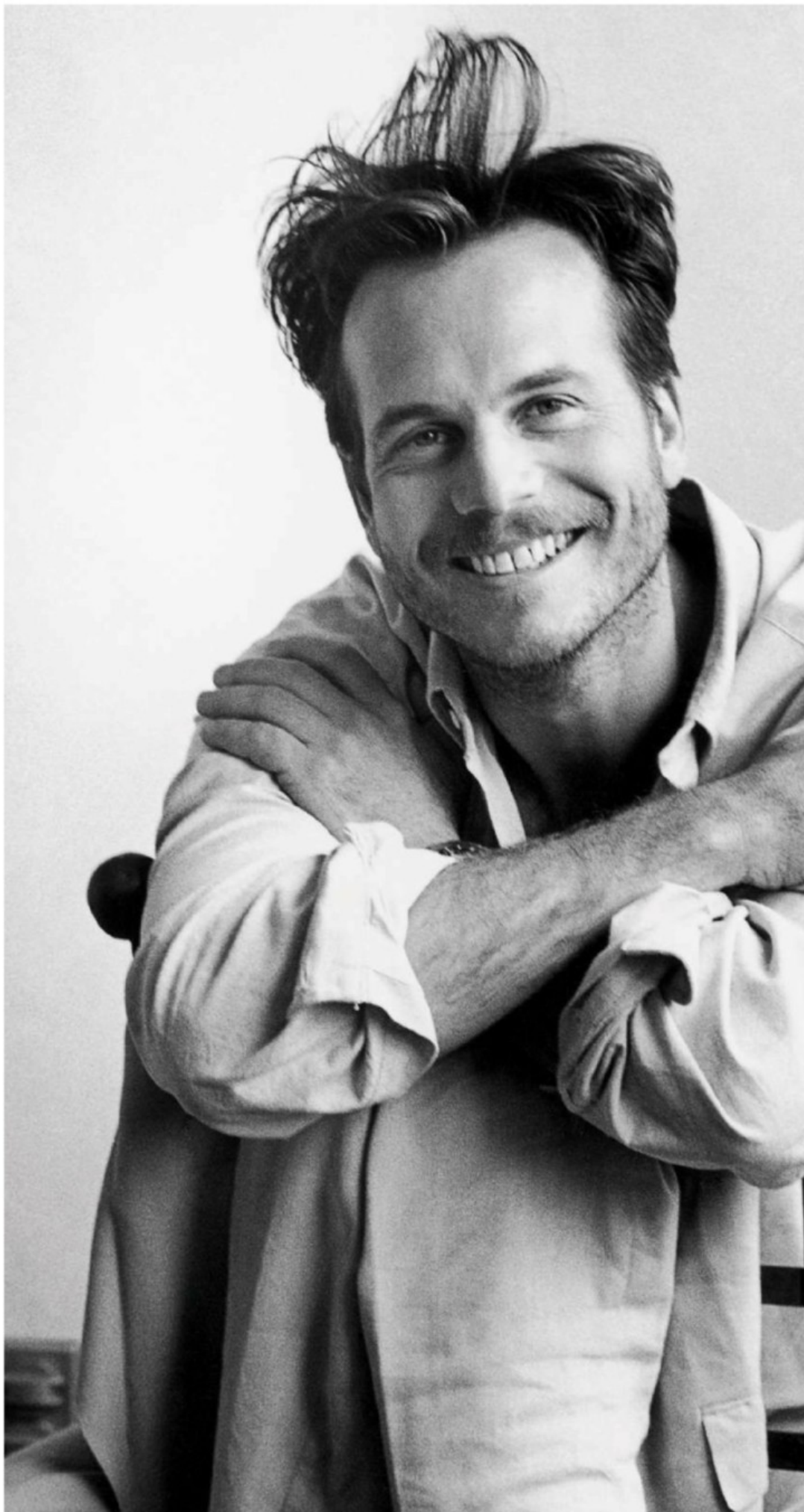
WORDS DAN JOLIN

IN EVERY DISASTER movie there's always one: you know, the braggart who, when subjected to the pressure of a crazy, deadly situation, starts to whine and panic. Usually, the audience can't wait for them to meet their inevitable demise.

Unless they're Private Hudson in *Aliens*.

In the hands of Bill Paxton, who himself worried he'd landed the most annoying character in the film, Hudson didn't merely resist derision, he turned out to be our *favourite*. It hardly hurt that writer-director James Cameron — a good pal of Paxton's since they'd met working in the art department for Roger Corman in the early 1980s — gave him most of the film's best lines. But it was more than that. Paxton was an actor who could make even the smallest roles *huge*. Though he never did anything so ungenerous as steal scenes.

By all accounts, the Fort Worth, Texas native was a bright, sparky and magnetic presence on any set, powered by a positive energy that he channelled to expand his roles and give them life. Cameron, in the heartfelt tribute he penned on the day of Paxton's passing, aptly describes the actor as "a creative dynamo". Kurt Russell, who played the Wyatt to his Morgan in 1993 Earp movie *Tombstone*, terms him "sneaky good". So on *Aliens*, Paxton snuck politely in there, and made that hysterical oaf the most relatable and likeable of all the Colonial Marines dispatched to the doomed LV-426. Hudson wasn't just a "pressure-release valve" who gave "the audience a little bit of a nervous laugh", as Paxton put it. He felt like one of us — or at least, the loud friend you always like to have around.





From top: Paxton suited and booted as Hudson with Jenette Goldstein's Vasquez in *Aliens* (1986); As NASA astronaut Fred Haise with Kevin Bacon and Tom Hanks in *Apollo 13* (1995); As the ill-fated Jerry Lambert with Maria Conchita Alonso in *Predator 2* (1990); As the spiky-haired Punk Leader with fellow punk Brian Thompson in *The Terminator* (1984); In his big blockbuster lead as storm-chaser Bill 'The Extreme' Harding with Helen Hunt in *Twister* (1996).



If Paxton never became a fully-fledged 'star' (he only ever fronted one blockbuster — *Twister*), he was certainly an icon for a generation of genre-cinema fans. To point out the actor was killed on screen by an Alien, a Predator (in *Predator 2*) and a Terminator (in his brief, spike-haired appearance in the 1984 original) might seem trivial to some, but for legions of us that really means something. It means he was part of the movies that made us love movies. And *always* a memorable part.

For an actor usually described as playing earthy, blue-collar, 'good ol' boy' types, there's great range in Paxton's work. He could just as easily be the blow-hard, big-brother bully in *Weird Science*; the live-wire psycho vampire in Kathryn Bigelow's genre-twisting Western *Near Dark* ("finger-lickin' good!"); or the cowardly, sleaze-bag car salesman who makes the mistake of attempting to cuckold Arnold Schwarzenegger in Cameron's *True Lies*.

Paxton's death at the age of 61 on Saturday 25 February was a truly savage bolt from the blue. During surgery for a heart condition that's plagued him since he contracted rheumatic fever as a 13-year-old, complications occurred and he suffered a fatal stroke. Kurt Russell believes Paxton should have had "25, 30 years more" in him. Years in which he would have continued maturing and evolving a career that, following his indelible contribution to the '80s sci-fi heyday, saw him deliver his best work in leading roles.

There was small-town police chief Dale 'Hurricane' Dixon, whose enthusiasm outweighed his effectiveness in the 1992 Billy Bob Thornton-written thriller *One False Move*; and six years later in that other Thornton collaboration *A Simple Plan*, the Sam Raimi film in which Paxton brings an earnest sensitivity to the role of a decent family guy whose conscience is corroded by the promise of vast wealth. Then, more recently, there was Bill Henrickson in HBO's off-the-wall domestic drama *Big Love*, a part which allowed Paxton to once more make an ostensibly unlikeable character appealing.

There's a sense, too, that his death deprived us of a developing director, Paxton showing impressive promise with the Matthew McConaughey-starring horror *Frailty* and Disney golf movie *The Greatest Game Ever Played*. During *Empire*'s last interview with Paxton, almost three years ago, he expressed a longing to get back behind the camera, and was hoping to pull together an adaptation of Joe R. Lansdale's Depression-era thriller *The Bottoms*, something that we'll sadly never see.

We at least have a little more Bill to look forward to in the CBS show *Training Day*, on which he was working at the time of his operation, not to mention his big-screen reunion with *Apollo 13* co-star Tom Hanks in *The Circle*. But if one Hudson zinger rings louder than any other right now, it's the one that's most quoted: "Game over, man. Game over." And it's the one that hurts the most.

HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

PIERCE BROSNAN

Does the *GoldenEye* star know the price of Gold Top?

WORDS NEIL ALCOCK



Do you have a nickname?

My nickname was 'Irish' when I was at Putney comprehensive. I think they thought it was a slight, but I wore it as an emblem. When I was at drama school I was called 'Hollywood', because I spoke of making movies in Hollywood.

Do you have a signature dish?

I used to bake bread — I was a good baker of soda bread — but I haven't picked up a pot in a long time.

When were you most starstruck?

It was at the *Night Of 100 Stars [2]* at Radio City [in 1985], and I met Robert De Niro. We were waiting to go on stage, and I got to shake his hand and tell him how much I appreciated his work. I met him again recently and once more told him how much I thought of him as an actor and as a dude.

What character were you in your first school play?

I always found school plays daunting, but my first time on stage was at Southwark Cathedral in *The Little Prince*. I was all of 18 years of age. I was The Little Prince.

Who's the most famous person in your phone?

President Bill Clinton comes to mind.

If you were to text him right now, what would you say?

Please come back!

When were you last naked outdoors?

Back in Kauai [Hawaii], because we have outdoor showers at our home. It's lovely, you should try it.

What's the worst thing you've ever put in your mouth?

Rat. I was in Nigeria making a movie called *Mister Johnson*, and we went into town one night and there were these delicacies on a stick. I thought it was beef, but it was rat skin. I was sick for a week.

Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

No. I save that for the movies.

Which movie have you seen the most?

Taxi Driver. Maybe six times. And *The Godfather*.

How much is a pint of milk?

A gallon of milk is \$3.98, but I think it's 79p for a pint? That's what Siri told me.

Do you have any scars?

I have a scar on my face I got from *Tomorrow Never Dies*. It was a fight scene and some guy

with a helmet snapped his head back and sliced my face open. There's another on my forehead, which I have from tidal boarding here in Malibu.

What's in your pocket right now?

Ain't got a dime! I'm sitting in front of the fireplace, the rain is pouring down, and I'm drawing as I talk to you. I'm drawing a man that looks like a tree.

What's your earliest memory?

In Ireland where I grew up, swimming in the River Boyne when I was five or six. Going down to the end of the garden and watching the big lads jump in the river. My grandparents had an orchard and I would wander down through it and find a quiet part of the river to swim in. It was beautiful.

Do you clean your own bathroom?

Not all the time, but I have been known to do it.

On a scale of one to ten, how hairy is your arse?

Zero.

Smooth as a baby's?

You got it.

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CINEMA

THE HANDMAIDEN



OUT 14 APRIL
CERT 18 / 145 MINS

DIRECTOR Park Chan-wook

CAST Kim Min-hee, Kim Tae-ri, Ha Jung-woo, Cho Jin-woong

PLOT In 1930s Korea, young pickpocket Sookee (Kim Tae-ri) teams up with a con artist (Ha Jung-woo) to take down a Japanese heiress (Kim Min-hee). But as feelings intervene, who's conning who?

THE HANDMAIDEN IS numerous things at once. It's a loose adaptation of British novelist Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*, it's a milestone of LGBT cinema in conservative South Korea, it's an unapologetically kinky slice of erotica Tinto Brass at his most florid would be proud of, it's a Byzantinely structured tale of con and counter-con that makes real demands of its audience to keep up, it's a stirring narrative of women escaping from bastard men, it's a vividly sketched chamber piece, and — most importantly — it's a damn good yarn. After the trip to America that seems to be a rite of passage for Asian directors (Kim Jee-woon and *The Last Stand*, for example), Park Chan-wook has followed up *Stoker* with what might be his best film — and that's not a claim you make lightly about the director of *Oldboy*.

What sounds like a rote set-up — two people teaming up to con a rich person out of their money — is the launchpad for a dazzlingly complex psycho-sexual thriller where names and identities shift as often as outward allegiances. Suffice to say that not all is as it seems, with key scenes revisited time and again to radically alter our perception of what was originally going on. Park — always a watchmaker of a writer — has created an elaborate, teasing, unruly construction that ultimately deeply satisfies.

There have always been strains of perversion in Park's work, and while his camera acrobatics have been toned down — perhaps due to the period setting — his flair for design and costume has gone into overdrive. The setting — largely a remote country house that combines Western and Korean architecture, in a likely nod to the origins of the material — is so exquisitely

realised, it takes a while to clock how barmy its layout is and, as usual with Park, watch out for the colour purple, which he uses to mark out important objects and rooms. There's not a costume here that goes unfetichised, in particular the corsets worn by Lady Hideko (Kim Min-hee), and as the plot develops into more outlandish territory, the writer in play feels less Waters and more the Marquis de Sade.

Ah yes, the sex. In these situations there's always the risk of 'male gaze' accusations, but unlike in, say, *Blue Is The Warmest Colour*, there is seldom the sense of it here. The three big sex scenes are key to both character and narrative, and manage that rare thing — every breath, every shudder, is telling you about the shifting relationships, rather than about the actor's time in the gym. In fact, in a very Parkian touch, the sexiest scene is one of amateur dentistry. The line between titillation and sensuality is straddled but not crossed — despite close-ups of post-cunnilingus moistened lips and one shot that appears to be from a vagina's POV. This is a film up-front and unembarrassed about its amatory elements, and it's all the stronger for it.

It takes place in a porny world where apparently everybody is horny all the time — as the sexual near-hysteria ramps up, nobody gets home knackered after a long day and just wants a cup of tea. But perhaps Nigel Tufnel was right: what's wrong with being sexy? There's a long tradition of erotic cinema in Asia, of which *The Handmaiden* is very self-consciously an update, and with which it's in explicit dialogue. Park is content to remain matter-of-fact and not bang a progressive gong, yet there is plenty of raw material for emancipatory readings there if you want it. But why reduce everything to a teachable moment, when there is so much purely aesthetic pleasure on offer?

Finally, though, for all the more baroque elements, there's a generosity here that's miles away from the cruelty of Park's earlier work, and even the more villainous characters have their time to shine. Who'd have thought a film with this many scenes of torture, wooden sex dolls, blood on sheets and octopus porn would turn out to ultimately be so sweet? **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT *The Handmaiden* is at once a superlative thriller and a deeply erotic character study, but it's the intelligence, mordant wit and depth of characterisation that are the real turn-ons.

Will Kim Min-hee and Kim Tae-ri find blue is the warmest colour?



CINEMA

THE LOST CITY OF Z

★★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH
CERT 15 / 141 MINS**DIRECTOR** James Gray**CAST** Charlie Hunnam, Sienna Miller, Robert Pattinson, Tom Holland, Angus Macfadyen

PLOT While on a 1906 expedition, explorer Percy Harrison Fawcett (Hunnam) finds what he believes to be evidence of a lost civilisation. Unearthing this Amazonian El Dorado — ‘Z’ — becomes his obsession and, he believes, his destiny.

HAVING SPENT MUCH of his career channelling the grit and glower of '70s crime cinema (see: *Little Odessa*, *The Yards* and *We Own The Night*), it's no surprise to find that James Gray's latest movie just as faithfully echoes the same era — albeit in a very different way. In *The Lost City Of Z* he takes us far from the Scorsese-esque mean streets of the East Coast and drops us deep into the verdant, even meaner murk of a Herzogian wilderness.

Aguirre, The Wrath Of God is the obvious touchpoint, with its own doomed quest to find a jungle-swallowed city. As in Herzog's unsettling 1972 epic, Gray's shadowy jungle is an amoral, brutal and sometimes surreal force to be warily respected, rather than some bright, romantic pulp-fiction playground. The Amazon rainforest is a “green desert” where any passing non-indigenous human is little more than a walking buffet for mosquitoes, piranha, jaguars and cannibals. It is a powerful and visceral portrayal of a truly unmerciful landscape.

Though Major Percy Fawcett is no wild-eyed Aguirre. Known to his contemporaries as “the David Livingstone of the Amazon”, and an inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, he was one of the last great British explorers — a man who, until he himself became as lost as the city he sought, kept his composure and dignity amid the heat, starvation and

occasional deluge of tribal arrows. In Gray's script (adapted from *The New Yorker* writer David Grann's superbly illuminating history) this fascinating character comes with the added baggage of social ostracism; “He's been rather unfortunate in his choice of ancestors,” one snooty superior notes. So success as an explorer is not merely a question of satisfying his intrepid nature; as Fawcett says to his boozy aide-de-camp Costin (Robert Pattinson, hidden beneath specs and a bushy beard), “My reputation as a man rests entirely on our success.”

In casting the role, Gray has taken something of a gamble. Charlie Hunnam's broad-shouldered, laddish swagger seems an odd fit for the rake-thin, ramrod-straight gentleman explorer, who we follow through two decades of life. And while Hunnam largely holds up well under the pressure of his most demanding role yet, he is a less compelling presence during the quieter scenes with Fawcett's ahead-of-her-time wife Nina (Miller, underused in yet another sidelined-spouse role) and, later, his grown-up son Jack (Holland). He is a man for hacking at the tangled undergrowth or, in a dramatic mid-film diversion, scrambling across the barbed-wire and chlorine-gas plagued no-man's land of the Somme.

Which isn't to place the blame for the film's lapses in momentum squarely at Hunnam's door. Gray's three-act/three-expedition structure necessitates in-between-adventure stretches which, while highlighting Fawcett's listlessness and impatience to get back to finding Z, may also test your own patience a little and make the 141-minute running time feel significantly longer.

It's a difficult story to end, too, its appeal to Grann being its status as one of modern history's great unsolved mysteries. But here Gray excels, going out on an oblique but elegant note that is somehow simultaneously unnerving and sublime. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Solid and stately, a '70s-feeling jungle adventure film that's more of a thought-provoker than an excitement-inducer. But there's nothing wrong with that.



ALL THIS PANIC

★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH / CERT 15 / 80 MINS

DIRECTOR Jenny Gage**CAST** Dusty Rose Ryan, Lena M., Delia Cunningham

SHOT WITH A dreamy, ad campaign-ready gloss, *All This Panic* follows a group of teenage girls over three years of drugs, parties, fallouts, crushes and parental strife as they fumble towards adulthood. Something so premise-light lives or dies on its characters, and this is where the documentary excels — their unscripted speech somehow sounding like movie dialogue (belatedly vindicating the *Dawson's Creek* writers' room). That could make it too much for some — all the earnest soul-searching will be like nails down a liberal arts college blackboard for those after something to puncture the privileged talkiness. But that they speak so profoundly seems remarkable. And to be along for the ride is a privilege. **JF**



A QUIET PASSION

★★★

OUT 7 APRIL / CERT 12A / 125 MINS

DIRECTOR Terence Davies**CAST** Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Ehle, Duncan Duff

DESPITE BEING ARGUABLY America's most celebrated female poet, Emily Dickinson has never enjoyed a proper cinematic treatment. She finds a worthy suitor in director Terence Davies, whose lyrical approach and appetite for familial/religious conflict makes for a potent portrayal. Anyone who enjoyed the sly wit of *Love And Friendship* will find a lot to like in this thoughtful if inconsistent biopic, which skewers 19th century New England high society with “delightful banter”, as one character puts it. But while *Sex And The City*'s Cynthia Nixon puts in a superb soul-baring performance as Dickinson, the last third focuses too heavily on her declining health, shifting gears from sparkling repartee into one-note melodrama. **JN**

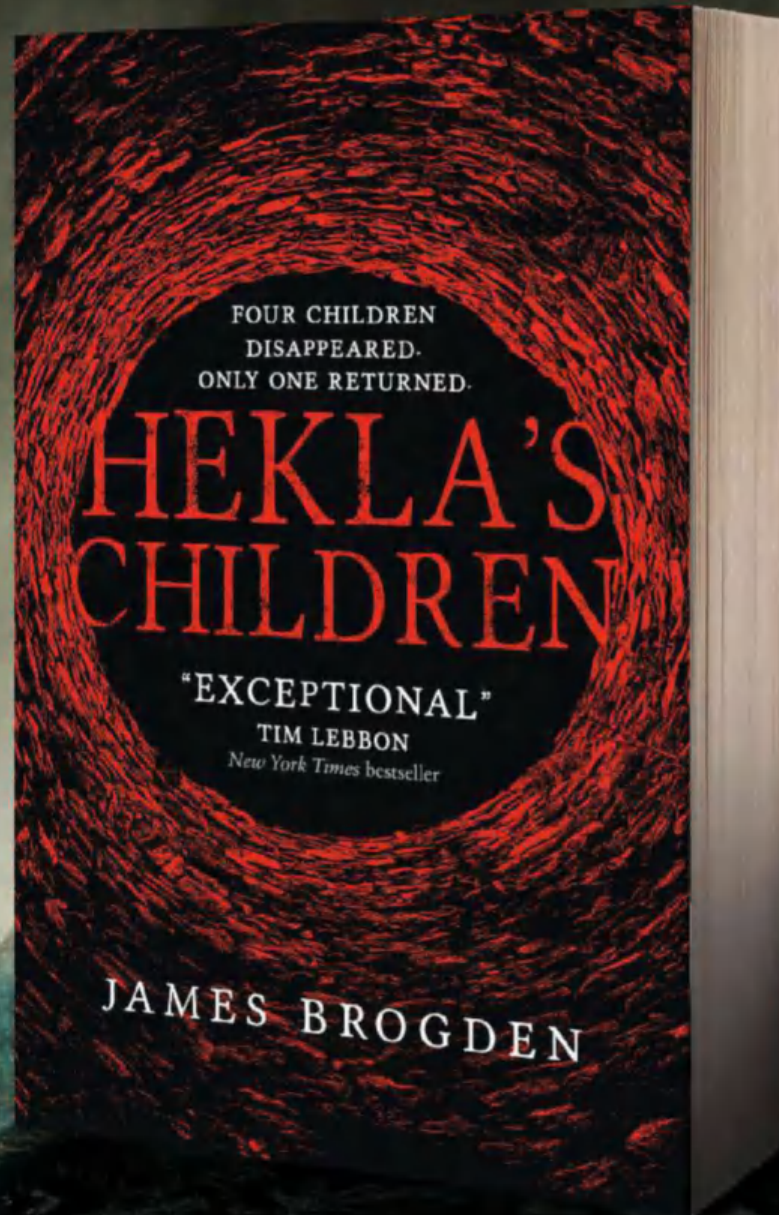
EVIL FINDS A WAY IN...

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WRITING"**

TIM LEBBON

**"COMPULSIVE
READING"**

MARK MORRIS



**"BRILLIANTLY
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CINEMA

RAW

★★★★★

OUT 7 APRIL
CERT 18 / 99 MINS

DIRECTOR Julia Ducournau
CAST Garance Marillier, Ella Rumpf, Rabah Nait Oufella

PLOT Timid Justine (Marillier), raised a strict vegetarian, undergoes severe hazing when she becomes a student vet. Forced by her sister Alexia (Rumpf) to eat raw rabbit's kidney, she discovers strange new carnivorous cravings.

IF IT WERE just about veterinary school initiation rites, writer-director Julia Ducournau's *Raw* — the English-language release title offers as many meanings as the original French *Grave* — would be unsettling and shocking enough. On her first night in a hall of residence, repressed rookie Justine (Marillier) and her new roommate, gregarious gay guy Adrien (Nait Oufella), are both hauled out of bed by veteran students who act like masked terrorists. All the freshers are made to crawl slowly through a car park in night-clothes to a raucous rave — one of many sequences here in which people are reduced to acting (and suffering) like animals. Later, the whole class is doused in blood *Carrie*-style and have to wear stained whites to lectures — while Justine's own older sister Alexia (Rumpf) makes her eat an unidentifiable lump of pickled meat she's told is a rabbit's kidney. The hazing gets even more personal as girls and boys are sloshed with blue and yellow paint respectively, then told to go into a room and not come out 'til they're all green.

Amid all this *Animal House*/*Jackass* business, virginal vegetarian Justine's awakening to the joys of eating meat might almost go unnoticed if it weren't for the gleam in her eye as she goes from being nauseated when a stray meatball turns up in her mashed potatoes to pocketing a burger, sneaking out for shawarma and gazing longingly at spilled blood. After a Cronenbergian

rash has peeled off her like a snakeskin, her mood swings and odd cravings — such as eating and sicking up her own hair — become more extreme. The film tips its hand in an astonishing sequence as a bizarre Brazilian waxing accident leads to Justine's sister Alexia snipping off her own finger. With a jolly dog around to shoulder the blame, Justine takes advantage of the situation to use the severed digit first as a lipstick... and then as a chewy snack.

After that, there's no going back to hummus, and Alexia, who has already undergone her own away-from-home transformation, shows her sister ways of satisfying her hunger, but long-simmering family tensions (and that gnawed finger) mean the relationship has startling downs between the genuinely moving ups. As often in classy horror, turning into a monster also means sexual liberation, with Justine exploring the far reaches of sexuality — though horny student guys (even theoretically not-interested Adrien) soon find she's more predator than prey.

Justine and Alexia are never explicitly characterised as supernatural creatures, but the sisters — affectinglly portrayed by newcomers Garance Marillier (who first played Justine in Ducournau's short, *Junior*) and Ella Rumpf — owe a kinship with (mostly female) movie monsters like the French gourmet vampires of *Trouble Every Day* and the Canadian werewolf sisters of *Ginger Snaps*. Ducournau turns an unflinching camera eye on physical processes, as the sisters bond by trying to pee standing up and a very un-James Herriot sequence involves that old vet standby of an arm up a cow's rectum. Often, *Raw* seems mercifully to elide horrors which take place between scenes only for a phone-video clip or a turned-back sheet to show the worst. And then there's Joana Preiss and Laurent Lucas, who contribute tiny, creepily perfect performances as the girls' parents. It turns out, despite its body horror credentials, it's also a tender, subtle film about family. **KIM NEWMAN**

VERDICT A classy French-Belgian horror with an unusual female perspective on monstrous taboos. Shocking but not sensationalist, this is a strong cannibal movie worth chewing over.



AQUARIUS

★★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH / CERT 18 / 146 MINS

DIRECTOR Kleber Mendonça Filho**CAST** Sonia Braga, Maeve Jinkings, Irandhir Santos, Humberto Carrão

SONIA BRAGA IS simply superb in this measured study of Brazil's myriad social problems, which centres on a sixtysomething music critic and cancer survivor whose battle with a property developer in the eastern coastal city of Recife reveals that her offspring have not inherited the values she learned from her free-spirited aunt. Yet for all the shrewd observations about class, age, race and gender, Kleber Mendonça Filho's second feature also has room for gentler insights into the way places, possessions and songs can conjure up memories that become increasingly precious with the passage of fleeting time. Full of intimate moments and magnificent tunes, this is 'slow cinema' at its best. **DP**



GRADUATION

★★★★★

OUT 31 MARCH / CERT 15 / 128 MINS

DIRECTOR Cristian Mungiu**CAST** Adrian Titieni, Maria-Victoria Dragus, Lia Bugnar, Malina Manovic

ROMANIAN AUTEUR CRISTIAN Mungiu shared the Best Director prize at Cannes for this uncompromising study of a society doomed to repeat past mistakes because its citizens lack the courage to break their shackles of corruption, intimidation and fear. Titieni excels as the provincial doctor who, when his daughter fails a university entrance exam the day after she survives an attempted rape, pulls some strings to ensure she gets in anyway. His actions later come back to haunt him in an engrossing and impeccably played slice of social realism that is directed with a stylistic finesse that complements the political insight, humanist compassion and melodramatic intelligence of the stealthily savage script. **DP**



Having weighed it up, he felt Cillian's 'tache just had the edge.

CINEMA

FREE FIRE

★★★★★

OUT 31 MARCH
CERT 15 / 91 MINS

DIRECTOR Ben Wheatley

CAST Brie Larson, Cillian Murphy, Sharlto Copley, Armie Hammer, Michael Smiley

PLOT 1970s Boston, and Irishmen Chris (Murphy) and Frank (Smiley) arrange to buy guns from Vernon (Copley) in a deal set up by Justine (Larson) and Ord (Hammer). But an old grudge between two participants leads to a gun battle.

THE MOST PROLIFIC and one of the most proficient filmmakers to come out of the UK in the last decade, Ben Wheatley has already proved himself across horror, thriller and whatever genre *High-Rise* was (period sci-fi psycho-drama?). Now he moves to America — not literally; he's still shooting in Brighton — and establishes himself as an action director too. Surely a nihilistic romcom is next.

Wheatley's economy of storytelling is impressive here. There are ten key characters and

at least four groups in this tale of an arms deal gone wrong, but their personalities and relationships are so briskly established that, when the bullets start flying 20 minutes in, we can predict who each person will target or protect. Or — this being Wheatley — we think we can. Comparisons to *Reservoir Dogs* are probably inevitable given the warehouse setting, copious firearms and endlessly quotable script, but this is a sleeker and more violent film (though perhaps less sadistic).

The story opens on a couple of Bostonian ne'er-do-wells, Bernie (Enzo Cilenti) and Stevo (Sam Riley). Stevo is bruised and sore after some sort of brawl the night before, but they've been hired by visiting Irishmen Chris (Murphy) and Frank (Smiley) as muscle at an exchange of arms for cash, so Bernie holds him in line. The Irish pair are presumably Republican terrorists, but among this crowd, terrorists are at the more sympathetic end of the spectrum — particularly given Murphy's shy flirtations with Brie Larson's Justine, the fixer who has introduced the parties to this deal.

Justine's counterpart is Ord (Hammer), a nattily dressed psychopath so calm he's almost horizontal, and the arms dealer is Sharlto Copley's Vernon. A peacocking braggart and obnoxious pervert in a bespoke suit, Copley commits utterly to his cringing attempts to flirt with Justine and

threatens to run away with the film. But instead, two supporting participants discover a standing grudge and a fight breaks out. Soon the air is filled with bullets — call it Chekhov's arms cache — and everyone is nursing at least one wound.

The hour of gunfighting that follows isn't quite as strong as Wheatley's previous films. While he and co-writer Amy Jump do a miraculously good job of shifting up the pace regularly, there's still a mid-film lag where the sniping threatens to become monotonous. And after a strong first half, it inches imperceptibly to its crescendo, a pay-off not quite as leftfield as his other work.

Still, unlike the familiar American slugfests, this has surprises. There are moments where everyone tries to step back from the brink of mutually assured destruction, and pauses where they look for an exit strategy. What's more, these gunshots really hurt. A wound to the leg leaves people crawling, not running slightly more slowly like most action heroes. By the third act most of the survivors are on their bellies, grasping desperately at weapons only just out of reach. It's astonishing how novel that seems. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT Wheatley continues an unbroken run of quality, helped by a great cast and a startlingly effective premise. This is seriously cool, stuffed with great dialogue and riddled with bullets.



CINEMA

Noir 101: Venetian blinds — tick.

CITY OF TINY LIGHTS

★★

OUT 7 APRIL
CERT 15 / 110 MINS

DIRECTOR Pete Travis

CAST Riz Ahmed, Billie Piper, James Floyd

PLOT London private eye Tommy (Ahmed) takes the case of a missing sex worker; as his investigation begins to take in radical Islam, property deals and the security services, he must confront a decades-old trauma.

THERE'S A LOT of promise to the premise of *City Of Tiny Lights* — a contemporary noir set in London, starring man-of-the-moment Riz Ahmed as a PI who seemingly subsists on nothing but whisky and fags. What could possibly go wrong? Sadly, quite a bit. That promise is squandered, and the results are ordinary in the extreme.

The set-up ticks so many noir boxes, you can imagine the ghost of Raymond Chandler standing in the shadows, nodding approvingly. We have the dingy office, the missing working girl, the world-weary hero, the dodgy feds and,

of course, shady business deals — it's just a pity that all this juicy stuff takes up only half the film, with a huge amount of screen time given to a narrative told in lengthy flashbacks that Philip Marlowe would convey in a line, a shrug and a slug of bourbon.

And what flashbacks these are — a sorry tale of teenage infidelity and betrayal in a cheaply realised 1997, it plays increasingly ludicrously, even if the young actors struggle gamely with weak material. The soapy tragedy builds to a conclusion so melodramatic, it would take a heart of stone not to laugh. There's also a severe case of flashback syndrome — every character knows what happened, but we're drip-fed information in a way that frustrates rather than tantalises.

Anyway, this nightmarish event goes some way to explain why Ahmed's Tommy is such a dour sort, even if he can occasionally come up with a nice zinger. Lines like, "I've got bog roll more abrasive than you," tease the noir-meets-kitchen sink feel we could have had, which is presumably what attracted a class act like Ahmed, but much of the gumshoe work feels perfunctory. His private detective actually does very little detecting, outsourcing a lot of the actual work to a young hanger-on, and the traditional noir pleasure of the scrappy

outsider being the smartest guy in the room is somewhat undermined by the fact that it takes him a full hour longer than the audience to realise there's something off about his property developer mate. Instead, we get endless brooding and a level of chain-smoking and boozing that sits oddly with Ahmed's gym-toned bod, as anyone who's hit the weights after a night on the suds will know.

There are flashes of what could have been: London is shot as if it's twinned with the city from *Seven*, and Ahmed finding himself caught between sinister War On Terror types and an Islamist group who might be a little too enthusiastic in their beliefs is potentially fascinating. Billie Piper shines in an under-developed role as the girl who got away, Roshan Seth is great fun as Ahmed's cricket-loving dad, and Alexander Siddig has a standout cameo as a hardcore mullah. Sadly, though, this noir leaves its best elements in the shadows. **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT Charmless and saddled with disastrous flashbacks, this doesn't have the street smarts to play its strongest hand. There's a great film in here struggling to get out, but the definitive London noir still remains unmade.



THE HATTON GARDEN JOB

★★

OUT 14 APRIL / CERT 15 / 89 MINS

DIRECTOR Ronnie Thompson

CAST Matthew Goode, Larry Lamb, Phil Daniels, Mark Harris

IN APRIL 2015, Londoners gawped as details emerged of a massive robbery which saw £200 million-worth of valuables stolen from the vaults of Hatton Garden. Just two years later comes this recreation of the caper. And 'caper' is the approach taken by director Ronnie Thompson as he tells how a group of elderly East End lags got together for one last job. Playing like diluted Guy Ritchie spliced with *The Italian Job* (note that title) and with engaging leads in Larry Lamb, Phil Daniels and Matthew Goode, the film falters thanks to an inescapable fact: with little peril (these chaps are more cuddly than Kray) and a central heist that largely involves a drill boring, and boring, and boring through concrete, it's all just a little dull. **LB**



ANOTHER MOTHER'S SON

★★

OUT 24 MARCH / CERT TBC / 98 MINS

DIRECTOR Christopher Menaul

CAST Jenny Seagrove, John Hannah, Amanda Abbington, Ronan Keating, Julian Kostov

NOTHING AGAINST TRUE stories of courage in defiance of evil, but this World War II drama is as irritating as it is inspirational. Having witnessed the cruelty of the occupying Germans, Jersey widow Louisa Gould (Seagrove) cannot say no to hiding the desperate Russian POW escapee (Kostov) on her doorstep. But Louisa's unshakeable faith in her community blinds her to the dangers of betrayal. After enlisting her sister (Abbington), brother-in-law (Hannah) and brother (Keating, yes, it is he, and he sings), she naively "hides" him in plain sight. Inevitably when rations run short the neighbours all start looking suspicious, and tragic consequences are a given in a film that plays out like a middling ITV3 drama. **AE**



CINEMA

NERUDA

★★★★

OUT 7 APRIL

CERT 15 / 108 MINS

DIRECTOR Pablo Larraín

CAST Gael García Bernal, Alfredo Castro, Luis Gnecco, Mercedes Morán

PLOT Chile, 1948. Poet and Communist senator Pablo Neruda (Gnecco) finds himself on the wrong side of the new pro-American regime. He goes on the run, but detective Peluchonneau (García Bernal) is on his trail.

ELEGANT, INTIMATE AND always playful (watch out for some old-fashioned back projection and one of the sight gags of the year), Pablo Larraín's latest comes to UK cinemas hot on the heels of *Jackie* (although he filmed it first). Neither a standard biopic nor a conventional chase movie, it fuses both into a grand narrative experiment that imagines the battle of wits between a poet, Chilean great Pablo Neruda (Gnecco), and policeman (García Bernal) — artist versus repressor — as a noirish travelogue where nothing is quite as it seems.

Unlike *Il Postino*, the 1994 Oscar-winner set two years later that had Neruda using his literary skills to help a humble postie woo his true love, this finds 'Don Pablo' a hedonistic but haunted figure. He's on the run from his homeland's repressive anti-Communist regime, but still makes time for his twin passions — women and words. Larraín doesn't spare his countryman in the former domain. His protagonist is a boozy, brothel-frequenting bon viveur whose high ideals rarely stretch to considering the feelings of his wife (Morán). Yet, he's redeemed in the latter. Crowds are held rapt at his political poems. He's a reminder that you don't have to mangle your native tongue to be a populist orator.

It's this kind of rabble-rousing power the new regime's ultimate paymaster, America ("the empire of the north"), wants crushed at the source,

so Gael García Bernal's detective Peluchonneau is sent to arrest him. Having presumably graduated from the same trail-sniffing school as *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*'s super posse or Yul Brynner in *Westworld*, Peluchonneau has an uncanny nose for his mark's movements, stalking him across the country. How he manages to be in the right place at almost exactly the right time is cloudy for reasons later made clear, though it makes for several narrow squeaks as the poet is ushered from one hiding place to another.

García Bernal plays the dogged 'tec as an almost hapless figure, a man with all the power but no control, as he finds himself foiled time and again in his quest to bring the ode-botherer to heel. The pair share hardly any screentime, yet by cutting judiciously between them, Larraín creates an eerie bond between two men locked in a shared destiny. It's one that eventually leads to the snows of the spectacular Andes and a denouement with surprising shades of *The Revenant*.

Larraín's long-term cinematographer Sergio Armstrong, who suffered through *Revenant*-like conditions to capture the sub-zero climax, has shared his director's restless creativity across five wildly distinctive movies. The pair's last collaboration, clerical drama *The Club*, was drab, wintry and claustrophobic; here, despite the constraints of its budget, the look is painterly and cinematic. It's an arthouse movie with an IMAX eye.

As with the cool *Jackie* and his sparky, lo-fi referendum drama *No*, Larraín's primary interest is in people, not politics. Against a backdrop of Big Events (Pablo Picasso and a young Augusto Pinochet both make fleeting cameos), we're never drawn far from the hunted artist and his inner circle. He's not afraid to burst Neruda's bubble either, casting comic actor Luis Gnecco as a poet politician with a visible streak of vanity. Gnecco played David Brent in the Chilean version of *The Office* and adds a touch of Brent-like self-regard to him. This Neruda is a poet first, lover second, and probably a Communist third. **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT An unusual and richly enjoyable love letter to a fellow artist and Chilean, *Neruda* further marks out Larraín as a director of serious range and ambition.



He'd always taught his son it's what's inside that counts.

CINEMA

THE AUTOPSY OF JANE DOE

★★★★★

OUT 31 MARCH
CERT 15 / 87 MINS

DIRECTOR André Øvredal

CAST Brian Cox, Emile Hirsch, Ophelia Lovibond, Olwen Kelly

PLOT Austin (Hirsch) has to assist his coroner father (Cox) on a rush overnight job — determining the cause of death of unidentified 'Jane Doe' (Kelly). As they work, they're plagued by perhaps-supernatural manifestations.

AN ESSAY IN gothic forensics, *The Autopsy Of Jane Doe* is Norwegian director André Øvredal's follow-up to *Troll Hunter*. This swaps the snowy wastes for the claustrophobic interiors of a retro-look morgue, yet, like *Troll Hunter*, it mixes suspense with black comedy, a high level of gore and spooky mystery. Despite the American setting, it begins as a Scandi-style small-town noir, then shades into ghost story chills.

The hook is that an unnamed female corpse (Kelly) is found half-buried in the basement of a crime scene. The local sheriff (Michael McElhatton) asks reliable old-school coroner Tom Tilden (Cox) to come up with a cause of death overnight. Tom's son Austin (Hirsch) puts off a date with his slightly ghoulish (she'd have to be) girlfriend Emma (Lovibond) to help his widowed dad examine the contradictory corpse. Her narrow waist suggests years strapped into a corset, while internal injuries (a cut-out tongue, scarring on her lungs, crushed ankle and wrist-bones, numbing jimsonweed in the stomach) suggest a longer history of abuse than she could possibly have been alive to suffer. Though no-one dares say as much, Jane is as voluptuously nude and supernaturally alluring as Mathilda May in *Lifeforce* — at least until the first incisions are made. Even with her chest cut open, she is a powerful sexual presence who disturbs both men.

Over the course of the night, the body is probed internally — with excellent physical effects work — and begins to exert a malign, magical influence. News reports suggest that a thunderstorm is raging outside, and an escape route from the morgue is blocked by a fallen tree after the elevator from the basement autopsy room stops working. The radio keeps interrupting

static with bursts of a sinister child's song, *Open Up Your Heart (And Let the Sunshine In)*. While all the attention is on Jane, other corpses start acting up in their mortuary drawers.

Screenwriters Ian B. Goldberg and Richard Naing worked on *Dead Of Summer*, the '80s-set nostalgia horror show that got ignored and cancelled while everyone was watching *Stranger Things*. They craft an effective mix of character interplay, spooky mystery and shock-and-scare tactics. The relationship between the Tildens, who both have secrets, is played well, but their well-meaning dishonesty still causes trouble.

Cox yet again proves he's a craggy character-acting legend, Hirsch is a low-key hero and Kelly does wonders through sheer presence (after this, her first walking-and-talking performance is highly anticipated). In contrast, the female lead with dialogue — the excellent Lovibond — is underused, returning only briefly after being established as intriguingly odd. But that's a small quibble in an otherwise satisfying mystery horror. Just bring a strong stomach. **KIM NEWMAN**

VERDICT Featuring excellent work from grandstanding Cox and just-lying-there Kelly, *The Autopsy Of Jane Doe* creates a successful feeling of mounting dread, punctuated by crashing thunder and surgical viscera.



WHO'S GONNA LOVE ME NOW?

★★★★

OUT 2 APRIL / CERT 15 / 89 MINS

DIRECTORS Tomer and Barak Heymann

CAST Saar Maoz, Katri Maoz, Driz Maoz, Dagan Maoz

AFTER A 17-YEAR exile, homosexual Israeli Saar Maoz considers quitting his beloved London Gay Men's Chorus and reconciling with the Orthodox Jewish family that disowned him. However, as this compassionate and disconcerting documentary reveals, numerous home truths and lingering prejudices have to be confronted before he can return to his deeply conservative clan's kibbutz home. An excruciating showdown with one brother exposes Israeli attitudes to LGBT issues. But intimate and amusing moments abound as Maoz reflects upon his own mistakes between visits from his parents Driz and Katri, whose love for their son is tainted by attitudes shaped by the Torah and the Paratroopers Brigade. **DP**



DON'T KNOCK TWICE

★★

OUT 31 MARCH / CERT 15 / 89 MINS

DIRECTOR Caradog W. James

CAST Katee Sackhoff, Lucy Boynton, Nick Moran, Pooneh Hajimohammadi

LESS THEMATICALLY AND stylistically audacious than 2013's *The Machine*, Caradog W. James' third feature is a formulaic supernatural thriller that short-changes the excellent Katee Sackhoff and Lucy Boynton as an estranged mother and daughter reuniting after a decade of drug abuse and foster neglect. Their common foe? The demonic witch summoned by two raps on the door of a burnt-out Welsh abode. Yet, while it lurches between the sketchy backstory, the red herrings, the cornball Eastern European folklore and the often perturbing set-pieces, the derivative narrative does manage to challenge the conventional depiction of female horror characters to mildly intriguing effect. **DP**



CINEMA

THE SENSE OF AN ENDING

★★★

OUT 14 APRIL

CERT 15 / 108 MINS

DIRECTOR Ritesh Batra

CAST Jim Broadbent, Charlotte Rampling, Michelle Dockery, Joe Alwyn, Freya Mavor

PLOT Retired and divorced, Tony (Broadbent) potters around his camera shop while helping his daughter (Dockery) prepare for her first baby. Then a surprising legacy in the will of an old friend sends him on a quest that stirs up distant memories.

BOOKER PRIZE WINNERS have long been a handy starting point for moviemakers. *The Remains Of The Day*, *Life Of Pi* and *Schindler's Ark* accrued 31 Oscar nominations between them in their big-screen incarnations. On the smaller screen, *Wolf Hall* added a Golden Globe and two BAFTAs to that haul. Julian Barnes' 2011 novella *The Sense Of An Ending*, a smaller parable about the way memories blur and mislead with age, hasn't translated quite as powerfully to the screen, but is certainly no disgrace. Split across two timelines, it's a thoughtful adaptation that's never quite the conventional character study it first appears.

At the heart of Ritesh Batra's (*The Lunchbox*) film is Jim Broadbent's Londoner, Tony Webster — a man growing older and, initially at least, short of purpose. Owlsh and cranky, he shuffles through a life of semi-activity, puzzling out the mysteries of social media ("Do people really communicate this way?" he grumbles of Facebook) and airily dismissing potential customers in his camera shop. His pregnant daughter, played with wry exasperation by *Downton Abbey*'s Michelle Dockery, and his loyal ex-wife Margaret (Harriet Walter), seem to be all that's keeping him from a hermit-like existence, until he's suddenly bequeathed the diary of an old school friend.

Flashing back to the young Tony's (Billy

Howle) *Another Country*-ish schooldays, we learn of his puppyish admiration for that friend, Camus-quoting intellectual Adrian Finn (Alwyn), as well as his crush on the distant but alluring Veronica (Mavor). The ties between the three are tangled. Tony, it turns out, discovering they'd cheated on him, mailed a venomous letter with far-reaching consequences. Partly from long-dormant guilt, partly to see if his memories tally with the events, and partly for something to do, the grown-up Tony hunts down the diary, now in the possession of (the still elusive) Veronica. Revisiting the themes of the superior *45 Years*, Charlotte Rampling brings her icy reserve to bear in their eventual encounter. Like a ghost roused irately from its slumbers, she drifts imperiously through the film in little more than a cameo role.

It takes all of Broadbent's outsized charm to dredge any likeability from a man of almost Olympian levels of self-absorption. To say that Barnes has created a polarising protagonist is an understatement. On the page (and recounted entirely from Tony's own perspective), his dogged quest is tempered by the nostalgic glow of autumnal reflection; on screen, he just seems like a bit of a tit. He's growing old, but still growing up.

Screenwriter Nick Payne — an award-winner in his own right for his play *Constellations* — has added a father-daughter subplot, and it brings much-needed amiability. A lovely scene at an NCT class sees Tony throw himself into the role of fish out of water as his daughter's birthing partner. Meanwhile, Batra uses a restaurant date for Tony and Margaret to cut cleverly between the timelines. As Tony tells his story, the picture of a youth clouded with secrets and tragedy slowly sharpens.

It's here that the film is most effective. There are even echoes of *Atonement* and Joseph Losey's '70s classic *The Go-Between* in the destructive power of the written word and the way memories can curl and distort like an old photo left in the light. If only its protagonist had been as easy to root for. **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT A handsome and well-acted rumination on memory, boyhood and ageing that sees Ritesh Batra deliver a solid rather than inspired interpretation of Julian Barnes' prize winner.



Shia had a curious phobia of bullets rebounding into his knees.

CINEMA

MAN DOWN



OUT 31 MARCH
CERT 15 / 88 MINS

DIRECTOR Dito Montiel

CAST Shia LaBeouf, Jai Courtney, Kate Mara, Gary Oldman

PLOT Returning from Afghanistan, US Marine Gabe Drummer (LaBeouf) looks for his lost family in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. The action flashes back to Drummer's home life, tour of duty and his interrogation by military shrink Peyton (Oldman) about his involvement in a mission snafu.

IN-BETWEEN THE art projects, arrests and Sia videos, Shia Saide LaBeouf is forging a body of work that is quietly as transformative as the McConaissance. Free from the shackles of Michael Bay and D.J. Caruso, his work post-2012 — chiefly *Nymphomaniac* and *American Honey* — is bold, wired and compelling. These days, he might not have the franchises on his résumé or the zeroes on his bank balance but he is creating a CV that is as eclectic as it is exciting.

Man Down, released over a year ago in the US, is a mess, but at the very least it's an interesting mess. Reuniting LaBeouf with director Dito Montiel, who directed the actor in his debut *A Guide To Recognizing Your Saints*, it is a heartfelt if misguided attempt to showcase the poor treatment of America's returning war vets. It's a potent idea — the battles faced by soldiers don't diminish when they leave the combat zone — but is mired in a dumb lack of finesse ("AMERICA WE HAVE A PROBLEM" screams some graffiti), a now over-familiar trudge through a desolate wasteland (*The Road*, *Fear The Walking Dead*) and inappropriate *Twilight Zone* tricksiness (the Big Reveal). This is all compounded by some shoddy filmmaking, bad CGI landscapes, ho-hum training montages and that rare thing in modern cinema: a forgettable Clint Mansell score.

The film fumbles three distinct but ambiguous timelines. One follows Marine Gabe Drummer (LaBeouf), leaving his sweet wife Natalie (Mara) and kid (Charlie Shotwell) to go to Afghanistan and back; another sees an intense session with military therapist Peyton (Oldman, representing the film's sympathetic POV) about a mysterious incident during an Afghan raid; and a third is set in a dystopian future where Drummer and best bud Devin (Courtney), with obligatory big beards, wander an America in ruins, laid to waste

by Islamic militants, chemical warfare and DP Shelly Johnson, whose desaturated images here feel like a poor man's Janusz Kaminski.

Yet rather than create intrigue about how the puzzle fits together, alternating between these story strands confounds and frustrates. It's difficult to keep track of where Gabe is on his emotional scale and therefore empathy dissipates. Individual scenes are decent — the Afghan raid is effective — but its splintered storytelling and knack of withholding its secrets to manufacture its twist are distancing rather than engaging.

Yet crucially the structure detracts from LaBeouf's fine work, be it lifting stock father-son bonding scenes with texture and emotion or adding desperation to scavenging for food. It's acting that is instinctive, displays impressive range and is completely committed, but perhaps suggests there is a gulf between LaBeouf's talent and taste. His talent is unimpeachable. But, if guided by his taste, the *Man Downs* could well outnumber the *American Honeys*. Either way, it will be a fascinating ride. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Featuring strong work from LaBeouf, *Man Down* is a fascinating example of how a powerful performance and good intentions can be derailed by a misguided concept and flawed execution.



TABLE 19

★★★★

OUT 7 APRIL / CERT 12A / 87 MINS

DIRECTOR Jeffrey Blitz

CAST Anna Kendrick, June Squibb, Craig Robinson, Lisa Kudrow, Wyatt Russell, Tony Revolori, Stephen Merchant

A LOW-KEY, high-concept dramedy, *Table 19* sees Anna Kendrick show up for a wedding at which she was once maid of honour. Downgraded to a table near the toilets, she finds herself forging bonds with her random RSVP-mates while keeping a close eye on her ex, who just happens to be best man. Reuniting Kendrick with her *Rocket Science* director Blitz a decade on, this is a peculiar but winning affair that captures the horror of enforced fun at weddings. Occasionally the comedy falls flat, but when it slows down to flesh out the characters, it's genuinely emotionally engaging. Kendrick excels, but points also to Wyatt Russell as a lunkhead who shows unexpected depths. **CH**



THE EYES OF MY MOTHER

★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH / CERT 15 / 76 MINS

DIRECTOR Nicolas Pesce

CAST Kika Magalhaes, Will Brill, Olivia Bond, Diana Agostini, Paul Nazak

THE LATEST IN a recent trend of horror movies with an art-house inflection, *The Eyes Of My Mother* is a deeply unsettling and often difficult to watch slice of neo-gothic Americana, which sees a typical young girl on a remote Midwest farm respond to family trauma in a nightmarish manner. As much about loneliness and grief as it is about grisly murder and disembowelment, first-time director Nicolas Pesce impressively establishes a confident tone and aesthetic within the film's thrifty 76-minute running time. At once beautiful and brutal, the striking imagery recalls the chilly sadism of *Under The Skin* and the monochrome visual savagery of *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*. Don't watch with mother, basically. **JN**



CINEMA

I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO

★★★★

OUT 7 APRIL

CERT TBC / 93 MINS

DIRECTOR Raoul Peck

CAST James Baldwin, Samuel L. Jackson

PLOT Before his death in 1987, African-American writer James Baldwin was working on an opus. Here, that uncompleted book — a biography of civil rights activists Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. — is revived with archive footage and an ever-present narrator (Jackson).

WHEN YOU THINK of searing examinations of race relations in the US, you possibly don't picture the studio lights, pot plants and gentle audience laughter of a 1968 chat show. But that's how *I Am Not Your Negro* begins, with James Baldwin — tie rakishly knotted, lit cigarette pluming smoke at his side — patiently answering a question from host Dick Cavett that essentially amounts to, "What have black people still got to be angry about?"

As a scene, it neatly illustrates one of the more urgent truths at the heart of this Oscar-nominated documentary — that racism lurks even amid the most outwardly polite American institutions — but it also acts as a perfect introduction to Baldwin himself. The Harlem-born author spent his life as an urbane public agitator for social and racial justice. And now, three decades after his death, Baldwin has inspired (and, technically, scripted) one of the fledgling year's most vital pieces of cinema.

It's fair to say that this particular story has taken the scenic route to release. As introductory on-screen text explains, the basis of the film is an uncompleted work Baldwin first began in 1979; an ambitious account of his various encounters with assassinated civil right leaders Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. At the time of his death, the book was still only 30 pages of notes but, undeterred, Haitian director

Raoul Peck spent a decade trying to finish what Baldwin had started. As every frame throbs with up-to-the-minute political purpose, you can't help but feel that this tale was just waiting for history to catch up.

Peck's master stroke is that he uses Baldwin's framework of a civil rights biography (itself intended to tell a wider story about the black experience in America) to appraise the similar times we find ourselves in. From the start, shots of Black Lives Matter protests are interlaced with Baldwin's narrated words (spoken with sombre intensity by a dialled down Samuel L. Jackson) and sickening scenes of segregationist mobs jeering the first black students at Deep South schools. When Baldwin, in a 1963 interview, says, "I am terrified at the moral apathy — the death of the heart — which is happening in my country," he could just as easily be talking about 2017.

And there's liberal use of other Baldwin essays, too, which cover everything from film analysis to his account of a notorious meeting with Bobby Kennedy. This means that, as well as paying intimate tribute to those three mythic civil rights figures, *I Am Not Your Negro* also functions as a kind of Baldwin memoir (covering his 1957 return to the US after a period of exile in Paris) and a visual pop-culture thesis. Peck showcases the exhaustiveness of his research by sprinting from belief-begging archive adverts to Sidney Poitier films to chat shows to a brief snippet of a certain Donald J. Trump and beyond.

In less capable hands all this might lack coherence. Mostly though, Peck's shrewd pacing is up to the challenge and the poise of Baldwin's prose — whether in old clips or Jackson's monologues — holds it all together. Yes, it's unrelenting in its anger and there's nothing subtle about its polemical juxtapositions (the grisly images of the finale may be too much for some), but this is an unflinching documentary that makes a powerful point about the repeated mistakes of the past. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Peck's film may have been an Oscars bridesmaid but it turns Baldwin's prescient words into a staggering achievement. It's an exhilarating blast of focused fury.



CINEMA

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

★★★★★

OUT NOW
CERT PG / 129 MINS

DIRECTOR Bill Condon

CAST Emma Watson, Dan Stevens, Luke Evans, Josh Gad, Kevin Kline, Ian McKellen, Emma Thompson, Ewan McGregor

PLOT Novel-loving Belle (Watson) enjoys a peaceful life with her father (Kline), until a chain of events leads her to a mysterious and decrepit castle occupied by a furry brute with anger issues (Stevens).

“LIVE-ACTIONIFICATION” IS not an actual word. It may be soon, though, given the frenetic pace at which Disney is turning its animated classics into films with human actors. *The Jungle Book*, *Dumbo*, *The Lion King*... it's only a matter of time before a photoreal *The Rescuers Down Under*. So far they have made major bank, yet those charged with rebooting *Beauty And The Beast* must have felt a thrill of foreboding — akin to, say, approaching a cursed castle teeming with living crockery. Many have floundered trying to adapt the classic 1740 fairy tale, from the Fran Drescher-starring *The Beautician And The Beast* to the ropery French version with Léa Seydoux and Vincent Cassel. Adding to the pressure was the passionate fans of the 'toon. Had this gone wrong, the Magic Kingdom may have been stormed by a pitchfork-wielding mob.

Happily, gone wrong it has not. Under the stewardship of Bill Condon, a director well used

to intense fans after making two *Twilight* films, the team behind this extravaganza rarely put a foot wrong. Following the blueprint of its predecessor, it hits all the big notes while adding a few new melodies of its own.

The story remains rock solid: a sweet two-hander (well, one hand, one paw) in which two bookworms fall in love, helped along by an assortment of sentient household items. Everything hangs upon the casting, but Condon has picked his leads well. Dan Stevens appears in human form during a new prologue, in which his vain prince is surrounded by simpering admirers, before an enchantress zaps him with a frankly unreasonable curse. From then on, he's in full Beast mode. The CGI used to furrify Stevens is variable, but as Beast storms around his dank keep's exquisitely designed turrets, the portrayal is consistently strong. As much as he bellows, the wounded soul beneath is always clear.



Clockwise from left: Dan Stevens' Beast turns a new page with Emma Watson's Belle; Cogsworth, Mrs. Potts, Lumière and Plumette; Luke Evans' Gaston with sidekick LeFou (Josh Gad); The iconic ballroom waltz.



As for *Beauty*, Emma Watson immediately charms in her big opening number, in which she suffers a village-worth of idiots. Watson faces one difficult sequence after another — full-throated songs, tussles with talking wardrobes, emotional exchanges with a grouchy heffalump — but finds just the right mix of innocence and grit.

The 1991 *Beauty And The Beast* is a film of big, memorable set-pieces, and this doesn't always manage to outdo them. The tavern singalong with Luke Evans' Gaston (more murderous in this iteration) and his acolyte LeFou (Josh Gad, playing him like a twattish Hobbit and almost stealing the film) never quite hits the heights of the 2D version. But it does pull out the stops when it counts, in the big ballroom waltz and the *Be Our Guest* dinner sequence. Here, Belle is regaled by a carnival of crockery, with a Lothario candlestick voiced by Ewan McGregor and a teapot channelling its inner Busby Berkeley.

Audaciously choreographed and playing out like a kitchen-based acid trip, it's a true tour de fork.

The film does struggle to make its inanimate objects visually appealing: photorealistic anthropomorphisation doesn't always lend itself to cuteness. But the starry voice-cast are fun, not least Ian McKellen as timepiece Cogsworth, with lines like, "Everything is moving like clockwork." Though sadly not, "You shall not half-past!"

With smart reworkings of some plot strands and a clutch of new songs, it's 45 minutes longer than its predecessor. The triumph is that the extra runtime flies by. An unabashed musical with its heart on its sleeve and energy to spare, it's decidedly unbeastly. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT Those who predicted this wouldn't hold a talking candle to the animated original will be surprised. The tale may be as old as time, but it's retold with freshness, brio and flair.



THE VOID

★★★

OUT 31 MARCH / CERT 18 / 90 MINS

DIRECTORS Jeremy Gillespie, Steven Kostanski
CAST Aaron Poole, Kenneth Welsh, Kathleen Munroe, Ellen Wong, Daniel Fathers

A SIEGE HORROR that wears its influences (Carpenter, Fulci, Romero, Barker, Lovecraft to name but five) on its blood-soaked sleeve, *The Void* pitches bewildered cop Carter (Poole) into a rundown hospital where the end of the world might actually be taking place in the basement. And you thought the NHS had problems. First-time directors Gillespie and Kostanski successfully conjure a bleak, constrictive atmosphere from the off, even if their pacing is a tad too ponderous to really grip. Still, the practical gore effects are nice and icky, and they know their way around a nightmarish image, whether it's a group of masked figures illuminated by cop car lights, or a killer nonchalantly sliding a scalpel into someone's eye. Don't a void. **CH**



AFTERMATH

★★★★

OUT 7 APRIL / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Elliott Lester
CAST Arnold Schwarzenegger, Maggie Grace, Kevin Zegers

THOUGH THE RELAUNCH of his acting career has thus far felt far from auspicious, on the few occasions when Arnold Schwarzenegger has been required to do something more than just knowingly send up his '80s roles, he has proved himself to be capable of incredible nuance and subtlety. We saw it in 2015's *Maggie* and here — in a role unlike any other he has taken on in his career so far — he is, again, quietly superb: playing a father whose family has been killed in a plane collision, desperately looking for someone to blame. If Liam Neeson can pull off a late-career renaissance as an action man, then why the hell can't Arnie do the same as a character actor? **HM**



Logan returns, rougher and readier.

CINEMA

LOGAN



OUT NOW
CERT 15 / 137 MINS

DIRECTOR James Mangold

CAST Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart, Dafne Keen, Boyd Holbrook, Richard E. Grant, Eriq La Salle

PLOT In 2029, Logan aka Wolverine (Jackman), mutant abilities in decline, keeps a low profile in a hideout with Charles Xavier (Stewart). But trouble finds him in the form of mutant-hunting mercenaries searching for a young girl named Laura (Keen) with very familiar powers.

WHEN ASKED WHAT his influences were for the latest Wolverine film, director James Mangold reeled off a list that included classic Western *Shane*, indie hit *Little Miss Sunshine* and bruising character piece *The Wrestler*. Well, he wasn't lying. *Logan* owes more to these films than it does Mark Millar's comic series *Old Man Logan*, of which this is the loosest of adaptations.

The overall mood is sombre and elegiac, much like the 1953 Alan Ladd movie; Mangold (co-

writing with Scott Frank and Michael Green) even has one character repeat Shane's "There's no livin' with a killin'" speech to tear-jerking effect. Logan himself, meanwhile, echoes Mickey Rourke's over-the-hill show-fighter in *The Wrestler*, as a shadow of his former perfect-killing-machine self. He still regenerates, but more slowly and painfully, every wound leaving a scar. And even his claws don't 'snikt' neatly like they used to — one now sticks.

Pursued by the kind of shadowy military-scientific organisation that would make William Stryker proud, ol' Logan hits the Tarmac (in true *Little Miss Sunshine* style) with a mute mutant girl named Laura and a cranky old geezer — namely Professor Charles Xavier, played with alternating tenderness and profane gusto by Stewart, who gives his finest turn yet in the role as Charles battles dementia with pharmaceuticals.

Smartly U-turning from the X-films' latter tendency to ramp up the world-threat via increasingly incomprehensible CGI, Mangold keeps things grounded and intimate. For the first time, the tension between Logan's animalistic killer instinct and his struggle to be a good, decent human being is fully explored. One is the croaking voice of his conscience, the other his chance to shape the future for the better. It feels less like a sprinkle of seasoning on the action-adventure stew and more the true meat of the drama.

Logan also lets berserker-rage Wolvie properly loose at last. He Fs, he blinds, he punctures baddies' brains and lacerates their limbs. Allowed to be more adult, it is without a doubt the best solo Wolverine yet; if Jackman truly did accept a pay cut to allow for the higher certification, then that is his payback.

Although, even without the commercial pressure that marred the last two Wolverine films, *Logan* shares a few of their weaknesses. The urge to serve up a stakes-raising big bad results in an unsatisfying reveal that externalises and personifies Logan's beneath-the-surface turmoil in a hoary way. And while sparing us the samurai-robot nonsense of *The Wolverine* (thank God), the final confrontation is a little unfocused in comparison with the taut set-pieces that came before.

Still, if this truly is Jackman's last run as Logan, then it's a worthy swansong that allows him to go out on a high. A reminder that, when it comes to playing a properly magnetic antihero with a dark reservoir of inner depth, Jackman really is the best at what he does. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT The Wolverine film without 'Wolverine' in the title is the best yet: grown-up, character-driven and grounded. It feels right that it should be the last one, but it also feels a bit of a shame.



GET OUT

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 104 MINS

DIRECTOR Jordan Peele

CAST Allison Williams, Daniel Kaluuya, Lakeith Stanfield

THE DIRECTING DEBUT of Jordan Peele, one half of US comedy duo Key & Peele, should make a lot of people feel pretty uncomfortable. Partly because it's a satire on racism in the United States that casts a challenging look at middle-class liberals, not the usual rednecks, and partly because it's a highly effective horror movie. It follows the story of Chris (Kaluuya), a young black man meeting his white girlfriend's parents for the first time. Their big over-compensatory friendliness masks something very strange. Peele unfurls his plot so confidently, and with such a consistently unsettling mood, that even when it takes absurd twists in the final act he sells it. It's every bit as smart as it is scary. **OR**



FIST FIGHT

★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 91 MINS

DIRECTOR Richie Keen

CAST Ice Cube, Charlie Day, Tracy Morgan

SET IN A struggling school, harried English teacher Andy Campbell (Day) is worried about being made redundant. Meanwhile, stern history teacher Ron Strickland (Cube) is more concerned about keeping the unruly pupils in line. But, through a series of dramatic calamities, Campbell manages to lose Strickland his job, which pushes Strickland over the line and to the only obvious means of revenge: he challenges Campbell to a fight after school. It's a ridiculous plot point, and makes absolutely no sense for the Strickland character, such as he is. But it's symptomatic of a haphazard film that results in little more than a madcap rush through a series of random skits. But the most important thing? It's just not funny. **OR**



CINEMA

KONG: SKULL ISLAND

★★★★

OUT NOW

CERT 12A / 118 MINS

DIRECTOR Jordan Vogt-Roberts

CAST Tom Hiddleston, Brie Larson, Samuel L. Jackson, John C. Reilly, John Goodman

PLOT In the final days of the Vietnam War, secretive organisation Monarch secures government funding to lead an expedition to a recently discovered island in search of new species. And they find them. Boy, do they find them.

THERE'S A TALE from the set of *Kong: Skull Island* that goes like this: faced with imagining the giant ape the audience would see standing in front of him, Samuel L. Jackson asked three questions. "How big is it? How fast is it? What it do?"

What it does and how fast it is will be familiar to anyone who's seen the beast on screen before. It wrestles similarly huge creatures, has a strained relationship with man (mostly man's fault) and is far quicker than any human (so it's best not to get caught at the back of a fleeing group). But that question of size? That's where things have changed.

This is the second film in Legendary Entertainment's MonsterVerse, following Gareth Edwards' *Godzilla*, and the plan eventually is to have the two creatures face off. And 25 feet of ape (size taken from the Peter Jackson version, other heights are available) isn't going to last long against 350 feet of nuclear-powered Japanese lizard, no matter how angry he is. As a result, while still noticeably smaller than *Godzilla* at 104 feet, this is the biggest Kong has ever been on screen. He's also the best thing in this hit-and-miss adventure. Fur and sinew moving naturally, he feels tangible — as though he really is swatting helicopters out of the sky or taking a moment to admire the *Southern Lights*. He's also got greater depth to his personality than most of the humans.

Close behind Kong are the rest of the creatures. Spiders, stick insects and squid (all

giant varieties) call the island home, and are on hand to terrorise the new arrivals. But most frightening of all are the skullcrawlers — giant, bipedal lizards who killed Kong's family and, given the chance, would wipe out all human life on the island. Their skeletal heads may look like the Maitlands' first pointy-faced attempts at being scary in *Beetlejuice*, but they're no less effective once you've put that to the back of your mind. And when all these beasts are doing battle, that's when the film flies.

But we do have to address the humans. A fair number head out to Skull Island, with many of the faceless ones dying in the initial battle with Kong — he taking none too kindly to their dropping seismic charges (bombs, basically) on his home. Of the survivors, few make much impact. The leads are lumbered with dull characters introduced with leaden dialogue — Larson's photographer Mason Weaver is asked within moments of her first appearing, "Why do you want a gig documenting a mapping mission when you're up for the cover of *Time*?" It's about as subtle as the thud of a giant ape stamping on you.

Perhaps it's a coincidence, but it's the two actors with a prominent middle initial who leave the biggest impression. (OK, it definitely is a coincidence.) John C. Reilly's marooned World War II soldier adds much-needed levity, although it does feel like he's in a different film to everyone else. So it's left to Samuel L. Jackson — all bulging eyes and Ezekiel 25:17 intensity as vengeful Lieutenant Colonel Preston Packard — to keep the energy high when the monsters are elsewhere.

Two films in to the MonsterVerse and it's been a mixed start — both *Godzilla* and *Kong: Skull Island* fumbling the human characters, but nailing the *kaiju*. There's potential, it's just yet to be fully realised. Of the two, *Kong* is the more entertaining film, so we're moving in the right direction. Next up: *Godzilla: King Of Monsters* in 2019. Lessons learned here, perhaps that can be the film that finally gets it right. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT King Kong lives! But only just. This is an uneven adventure that's saved by the spectacle of its towering title character and the various beasts with whom he shares his island home.



TV & STREAMING

IRON FIST



NETFLIX
OUT NOW
EPISODES VIEWED 1-6

CREATOR Scott Buck

CAST Finn Jones, Jessica Henwick, Jessica Stroup, Tom Pelphrey, David Wenham, Rosario Dawson

PLOT Danny Rand (Jones) has been presumed dead since a plane crash 15 years ago. Now he's returned to New York, claiming to have been in an extra-dimensional monastery. Is he deluded, or really the Iron Fist, Champion of K'un Lun?

IRON FIST IS later to the Marvel Netflix party than originally intended. He was supposed to arrive last year, kicking and streaming, on the gumshoe-heels of Jessica Jones. But his future bromancer Luke Cage so impressed everyone, the kung-fu master got shunted to the back of the queue. Which, in retrospect, feels just right.

Though the Defenders strand of the Marvel Cinematic Universe isn't really permitted to

cross over with its big-screen equivalent, it does help to have ushered Doctor Strange through the door, along with all his Eastern-mystical baggage, before Danny Rand. Especially as Rand arrives in the most grounded and gritty corner of the MCU, talking about a dragon named Shou-Lao the Undying and busting open thick, metal doors with a chi-infused fist that glows bright gold.

Yet, for all the bare-pated monks and gibberish, Iron Fist isn't merely Stephen Strange doing martial arts instead of magic. There's a fair bit of *Guardians Of The Galaxy's* Star-Lord in there, too. Both heroes are snatched from Planet Earth at a young age, leaving them in a state of arrested development. Neither can let go of their childhood. On his return, 15 years later, we even find Danny (Jones, with a wild blond frizz and hipster beard) sporting his own equivalent of Peter Quill's Walkman and mixtape: a first-generation iPod, playing turn-of-the-century hip-hop like OutKast's *So Fresh, So Clean*.

Compared with the less ostentatious power-sets and moody, conflicted heroism of Daredevil, Jessica and Luke, Iron Fist is a fresh presence. Here's a Defender-to-be who's actually keen to step up. He is, he says, "a living weapon", purpose-built to fight crime; it's his destiny.

But taken out of the Defenders context it feels much more superhero business as usual. Didn't we see this 'callow outsider returns to his wealthy life and secretly fights crime' business in *Batman Begins*? Or even a variant thereof in *Iron Man*? Once he has the funds to impulse-buy an Aston Martin, Iron Fist becomes less compelling: another rich orphan with a traumatic past and vigilante tendencies. "Darkness/no parents/super rich," as Lego Batman once sang.

Showrunner Scott Buck (*Dexter*, *Six Feet Under*) is a steady pair of hands, but there's no sense of connection to his subject. *Luke Cage* had its problems, but Cheo Hodari Coker's passion rang out, giving it a robust and unique identity. The same goes for Melissa Rosenberg and *Jessica Jones*, which felt like a smart, punchy feminist anthem. In *Iron Fist*, it's not until the sixth episode that you *really* feel the pulp martial-arts-movie-riffing origins, and that's thanks to its director, RZA. He finally gives the show a proper sense of flair, shamelessly revelling in the genre's campier elements through a fun, three-act combat-challenge structure. It's enough to make you wish they made *him* the showrunner.

Still, you can't fault the casting. Jessica Henwick graduates from *Game Of Thrones*

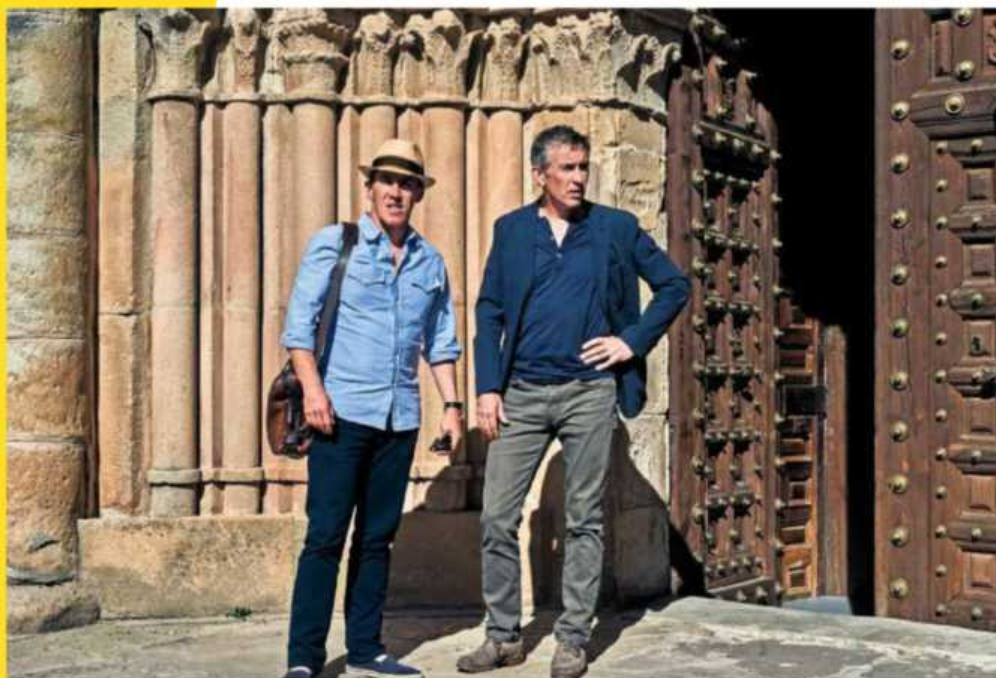


Danny Rand: he knows kung fu.

Sand Snake to Colleen Wing, a socially awkward dojo-owner who becomes Danny's kinda-sidekick, maybe-girlfriend. Jessica Stroup and Tom Pelphrey, meanwhile, are Joy and Ward Meachum, his childhood muckers who now run the Rand business. Operating in the shadow of their reclusive father Harold (Wenham), they deftly handle characters more complex and interesting than straight rich-git antagonists.

And then there's Henwick's fellow *Thrones* alumnus, Finn Jones, who gets to show a depth the petulant Ser Loras Tyrell never allowed. At times, it feels like watching Tom Hanks in *Big*; at others, when he's lazily despatching goons, Keanu Reeves as Neo. Though Danny has dark places to go — he is, in effect, a victim of sustained physical abuse — his charm and light touch help lift the show out of its drabber stretches (boy, do these Marvel Netflix shows know how to stretch). In fact, when the Defenders finally arrive, he should provide some zesty relief from the dourness of his fellow street-based crime-fighters. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT *Iron Fist* works some fantastical flavour into the MCU's down-to-earth Defenders nook, but it needs more proper kung-fu flair than showrunner Buck allows.



THE TRIP TO SPAIN



SKY ATLANTIC

STARTS APRIL

EPISODES VIEWED 1-2

DIRECTOR Michael Winterbottom

CAST Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon

PLOT Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon take their culinary tourism to sunny Spain. They dine in some of the best restaurants in the world while chewing over the advancing of their lives. Food will be eaten, wine will be drunk, the world will be put to rights... ish.

STEVE COOGAN DESCRIBES *The Trip To Spain* as "*Last Of The Summer Wine* for *Guardian* readers". The first half of that comparison references a sitcom so geriatric it had to keep replacing cast members who died of old age, and it likely means little to people under 30 years old. That is appropriate. *The Trip* makes no overtures to a young audience. It's a comedy about getting old and the ways in which we embrace it and rail against it. Those themes toddle more to the front in this third series, which finds its leads, Coogan and Rob Brydon, now entering their fifties. Following jaunts around the UK and Italy, the two are now gallivanting across Spain.

The structure remains the same as in previous series. Coogan and Brydon, playing close but still fictional versions of themselves, are sent on a tour of their host country's best restaurants — by newspapers with no eye on their expense account. This is just an excuse for a road trip along the gorgeous coastline. In each episode they enjoy a delicious meal, make fun of each other about their careers/bald spots/relationships and do hoary impressions of celebrities at one another. It's part gastronomic travelogue and part midlife crisis; two men at the end of the main course of their lives wondering if they've the appetite for any more.

There shouldn't be enough here to fill one half-hour of television, let alone 18 episodes, and hopefully more. In terms of plot there really isn't. Brydon's fictionalised self was very briefly unfaithful to his wife in the last series, and that's revisited here, but that's all there is in terms of incident. It's mostly just two men chatting, yet it's the sense of history in their chat and the teasing affection of their friendship that makes it so constantly engaging.

Coogan and Brydon are egoless in their depiction of themselves. Coogan plays a vain and insecure version of himself. He keeps bringing up his Oscar-nominated project *Philomena*, now over three years old, always trying to swing the spotlight back to him. Success for him is outdoing others. In the second episode of this series, when Brydon is imitating the singing of Elvis Costello, Coogan is irked that he's getting all the attention — the only attention available at their table is in fact Coogan's — and launches into his own more insistent impression. He plays himself as a loving friend, but one who wants to be the hero, not the co-star. Brydon plays himself as happy in his sidekick role. He likens them to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, with Brydon as the "stout guide". He flags his lack of international stardom and disappearing hair. He is content getting older while Coogan is looking for the brake.

Director Michael Winterbottom apparently gives the two almost no script, just plops them in a scene with the loosest of structure and asks them to chat. It gives every scene the sense of earwiggling on a natural conversation. They talk about things that will eventually come to us all — sore bones, diminished attractiveness and professional importance — in far wittier ways than most of us could ever manage. They'd probably be a nightmare to spend an entire holiday with, vying for attention always and turning every car journey into an extended skit, but they remain an absolute pleasure to drop in on. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT The menu is the same as ever: very funny, plot-light larks around attractive countries. But when it's this consistently delicious, why would you order anything else?



ON.SCREEN

TV & STREAMING

MIDNIGHT SUN

★★★

SKY ATLANTIC

STARTS 10PM, 15 MARCH

EPISODES VIEWED 1-4

CREATORS Måns Mårild, Björn Stein

CAST Leïla Bekhti, Gustaf Hammarsten, Albin Grenholm, Peter Stormare

PLOT After a Frenchman is killed in a Swedish town, a tough Parisian cop (Bekhti) travels north to solve the case alongside an uncompromising prosecutor (Stormare) and his untested colleague (Hammarsten). Cue more murders, encounters with the Sami people and a decade-long conspiracy.

A NO-NONSENSE FEMALE detective with her own personal demons, a criminal investigation that spills over into local politics, baroque murders rupturing the peace; yes, it's fair to say *Midnight Sun*, the latest hyped hunk of Nordic noir to be shipped to the UK, does not deviate wildly from the established formula.

However, while playing a cop show cliché drinking game will likely render you unconscious ("Mismatched partners are thrown together by circumstance — drink!"), this Sky Atlantic eight-parter mostly laces those established tropes with a welcome dose of twisty, complex weirdness.

And, whatever else, creator-directors Måns Mårild and Björn Stein (both lead writers on *The Bridge*) have conjured one of the more striking opening shots in recent TV history. We see the face of a man waking up, and the camera slowly pans out to reveal he's been trussed to the propeller of a helicopter: a propeller that rapidly rotates until he's a bloodied, headless corpse. This murder — in a real, screensaver-perfect town in Swedish Lapland called Kiruna — soon brings grizzled local prosecutor Rutger Burlin (*Fargo*'s Stormare) to the scene.

Burlin is initially partnered with puppyish Anders Harnesk (Hammarsten) but an early discovery about the deceased man's French

nationality gives us our requisite out-of-towner in the shape of Kahina Zadi (Bekhti). Zadi is a classic antihero in the Sarah Lund/Saga Norén mould (fearless, professionally committed to the detriment of her personal life, haunted by both a secret habit and a mysterious past) and from here on out *Midnight Sun* becomes as much a tale of her personal journey as it is about finding the culprit of that first murder and an inevitable spate of similarly ritualistic killings.

Zadi's fish-out-of-water stumbles through the dusk-free world of midsummer in Kiruna ("When does the sun go down?" she asks. "In a few weeks," comes the chirpy reply) may not feel wholly original — arguably, series one of *Fortitude* gave us the first Scandi-Arctic version of it — but it's both beautifully shot and eerily compelling. What's more, Bekhti is a soulful, spiky performer who shines in an eventual partnership with Hammarsten's browbeaten company man.

It's commendable, too, that the killings — which bear the hallmarks of Sweden's indigenous Sami people and are possibly linked to Kiruna's expensively acquired iron mine — open up an exploration of Scandinavian social issues. That said, by the midpoint (only four episodes were available for review), you can't help but feel that — possibly acknowledging the recognisable pillars of their story — Mårild and Stein are scrambling to overcompensate.

Shady high-ups in the French police, a ghost from Zadi's past, pansexual romantic subplots, a loner taking delivery of a Thai bride — new ingredients keep arriving for an already dense stew. And, while a lead character death raises the stakes, later fake-outs soon rob these 24-style cliffhangers of impact. But, these are lapses most will happily ignore if a satisfying, non-*Scooby-Doo* ending ties it all up. Mostly, *Midnight Sun* is so tense, slick and dazzlingly strange, you'll want to see where the hell it's going. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Addictive and unpredictable, but perhaps freighted with too many jostling ideas, this stylish Arctic procedural does occasionally add a fresh twist to a familiar tale of gloomy cops and cold-hearted killers.



HAND OF GOD: SEASON 2

★★

AMAZON VIDEO / OUT NOW

EPISODES VIEWED 1-3

SHOWRUNNER Ben Watkins

CAST Ron Perlman, Dana Delany, Andre Royo, Garret Dillahunt

Ron Perlman returns as corrupt Californian judge Pernell Harris, who in 2015 went on a vigilante revenge mission from God. Which is a surprise. You wonder why Amazon bothered with a second season after the first was so roundly savaged. Showrunner Ben Watkins has at least eased up a little on the nastiness that turned so many off, and Perlman imbues snarling hate-machine Pernell with more vulnerability as, charged with cop-killing, he's now at the mercy of the legal system he once lorded over. But, for all its sun-stained neo-noir style, the story careens around city-hall politics like a Prius with a broken axle, while the script's attempts to shock remain eye-rolling at best. **DJ**



WILDLANDS

★★★

AMAZON VIDEO, GOOGLE PLAY, ITUNES

OUT NOW / CERT TBC / 95 MINS

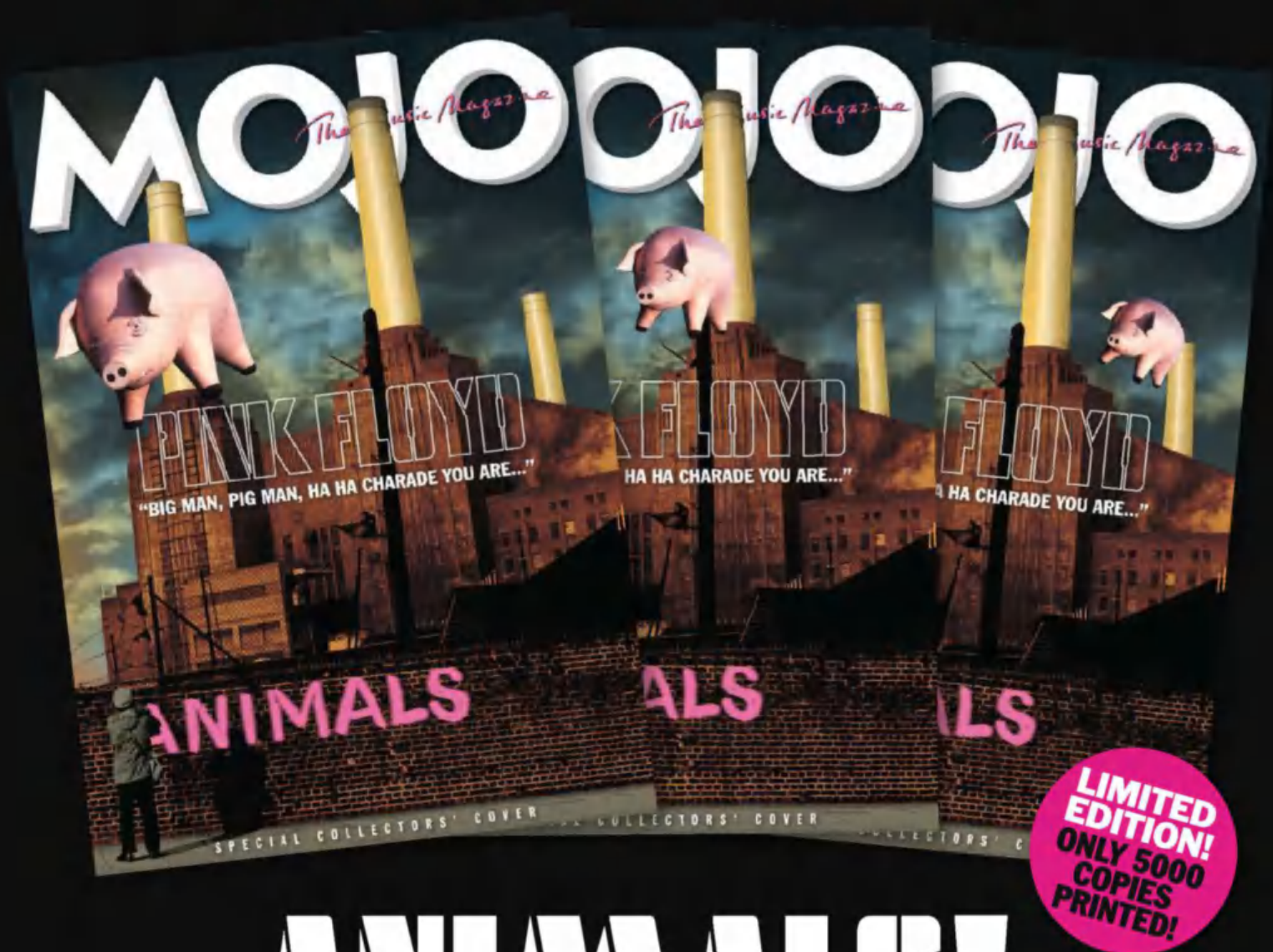
DIRECTOR Colin Offland

CAST Rusty Young, Thomas McFadden, George Jung, Carlos Toro, Pilar Angel

Produced as a 'companion piece' to Tom Clancy's *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* game, this is less a documentary, more a series of in-depth interviews with real-life players in the South American drug trade. Conducted by Australian lawyer-turned-writer Rusty Young (author of the excellent *Marching Powder*), the revelations are as shocking as you'd expect. Pablo Escobar's assassin-in-chief Popeye — responsible for over 3,000 kills — displays a staggering lack of remorse, detailing the time he oversaw the murder of his own lover. A retired DEA agent says his adversaries made ISIS look like "a bunch of choirboys". It's well-worn subject matter, but remains extremely chilling. **HM**

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GAMES

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD



OUT NOW
FORMATS SWITCH, Wii U

DIRECTOR Hidemaro Fujibayashi
CAST Patricia Summersett, Bill Rogers

PLOT On waking from a century-long slumber, Link finds Hyrule in ruins, Princess Zelda trapped in a castle and monsters terrorising the land. He must destroy the evil Calamity Ganon to save the day.

THE PRECISE MOMENT it becomes clear that *Breath Of The Wild* is not a traditional *Zelda* game comes about two hours in. Having just acquired a rudimentary hang glider, you float down from the game's tutorial plateau and set foot upon the plains of Hyrule proper. Hills and valleys reach out to the horizon, horses crop lazily at the grass and you, sword in hand, are left with no earthly idea what to do next.

Open-world games are hardly unusual, but the sheer insouciance with which this packs you off to write your own story is really quite bewildering. You've been coached in the game's core mechanics, bestowed with a Sheikah Slate (the Hyrulian equivalent of an iPhone 7), politely asked to slay the game's villain and sent on your merry way. How you choose to fill the next hundred-plus hours of gameplay is, by and large, entirely up to you.

The lack of a substantial guiding narrative might be a concern were the world not so enchanting. Gorgeously rendered in the game's Ghibli-esque style, Hyrule is as stunning an environment as gaming has produced: more expansive than *Skyrim*'s, with a buzzing inner life. There are creatures to kill and catch, ingredients to gather, secrets to uncover and ancient shrines to explore. These shrines are the closest the game comes to traditional *Zelda* dungeons — each posing a puzzle that must be overcome

with the aid of your abilities (remote bombs, magnetism, stasis and ice). The finding and solving of shrines quickly becomes compulsive, not least because they unlock fast travel nodes but also as a means to increase your stamina gauge and life hearts.

The life meter becomes a concern quickly as *Breath Of The Wild*'s combat is painfully unforgiving. Since no area of Hyrule is off limits, it's entirely possible (in fact inevitable) that you will wander into a zone only to be flattened by an angry troll — the game's only hint that you might want to pick another route. You will die in *Breath Of The Wild* and you will die a lot. A paradigm *Dark Souls* veterans will be all too familiar with.

Combat is further complicated by the impermanence of weaponry, which shatters after extended use, forcing you to improvise. Do you creep into that camp of slumbering Bokoblins to steal their weapons? Send boulders rolling through their ranks? Use magnetism to hurl large metal objects? Or do something demented like attach explosives to a balloon and waft it towards them with a giant palm leaf? Each encounter is an experiment in creative slaughter, stoking the euphoric sense of freedom that permeates every aspect of the game. If you see something, chances are you can climb it, smash it, glide off it, swim through it, burn it or push it over.

Sub-quests and low-level tasks abound in every village and outpost, so players who require more structure can find it if they wish. Similarly, the overarching goal is simplified by conquering the four giant robots — or Divine Beasts — found lumbering around the world. Each one is part puzzle dungeon, part boss fight and, once defeated, will be recruited to your cause.

It may be arriving two years later than promised, but *Breath Of The Wild* is an exquisite experience that proves well worth the wait. Nintendo's Switch has landed the best launch title since *Super Mario 64*. **JAMES DYER**

VERDICT An absorbing, intoxicating adventure in a vibrant world you'll never want to leave. This isn't just an elevation for open-world gaming but a new high for *Zelda*, surpassing even *The Ocarina Of Time*.



HORIZON ZERO DAWN



OUT NOW / PS4

DIRECTOR Mathijs de Jonge
CAST Ashly Burch, Laura van Tol, JB Blanc, Ava Potter, John Hopkins

SONY'S HEAVILY HYPED open-world action-adventure is a refreshingly original blend of sci-fi and fantasy that presents a post-apocalyptic world that isn't beset by zombies and mutants. Instead, you'll face a line-up of mechanical creatures — heavily influenced by prehistoric beasts, they're a sight to behold and a blast to fight on the battlefield. And, when not utilising a variety of pimped-out but primitive weapons to turn these threats into smoking heaps of twisted metal, there's also some *Uncharted*-like free-climbing and a bit of mystery-solving reminiscent of the *Batman* games' detective mode. Expertly paced and set in a breathtaking game world, this is an early contender for game of the year. **MC**



FOR HONOR



OUT NOW / PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

DIRECTORS Jason Vandenberghe, Roman Campos-Oriola, Damien Kaiken
CAST Amber Goldfarb, Andreas Apergis, Catherine Kidd

DIG INTO UBISOFT'S new historical brawler, and hints of other games become clear — most prominently the precise, tactical melee combat of *Dark Souls* and the hack-and-slash marathons of *Dynasty Warriors*. Set in a world where Vikings, Knights and Samurai have spent 1,000 years at each other's throats, the ten-hour campaign serves as a glorified tutorial for the online play. This is where *For Honor* is at its strongest, combat against human opponents taking on a new level of tension as you size each other up and try to get your blows in. The edges feel rough and there is a lot of grinding (or, ugh, micro-transactions if you want to speed it up), but it does reward dedicated players. **MK**

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GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY SHOT OUT OF NOWHERE TO BECOME ONE OF MARVEL'S BIGGEST HITS: ANARCHIC, HILARIOUS AND WITH THE COOLEST SOUNDTRACK IN YEARS. BUT HOW DO YOU FOLLOW THAT UP? HOW DO YOU STOP *VOL. 2* FROM BEING...

THE DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM

WORDS **DAN JOLIN** ILLUSTRATION **JUSTIN METZ**



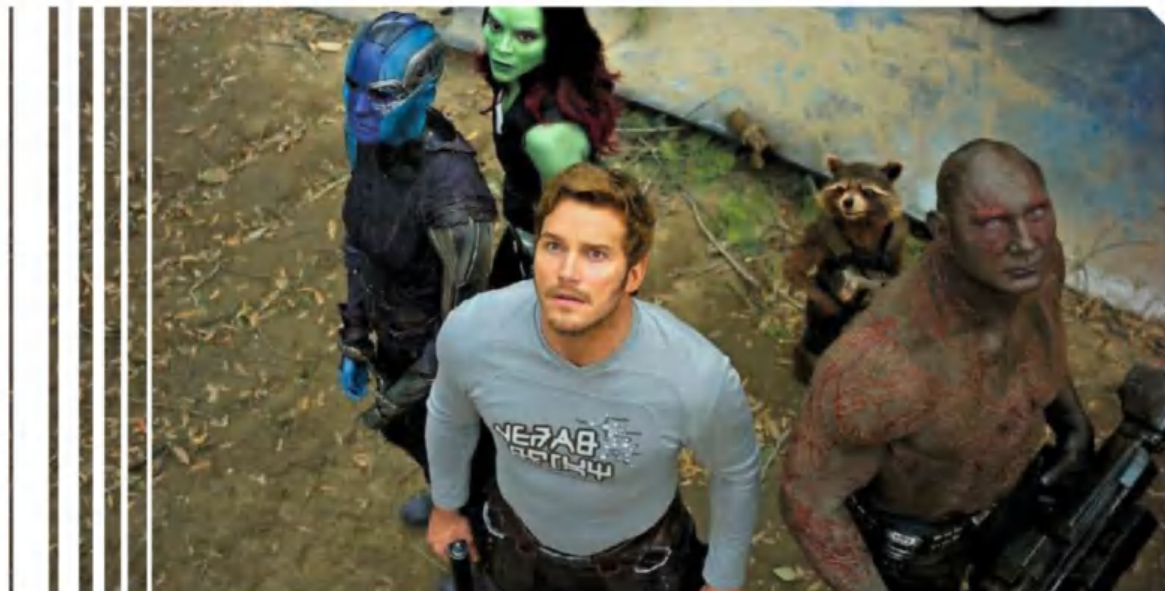


AMES GUNN REMEMBERS the exact day he started writing *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*. It's not really too hard. Because that day was 1 August 2014: the day *Guardians Of The Galaxy* (or 'Vol. 1', as it's now also known) was released in the United States.

That he wasn't just kicking back and sipping piña coladas after months of hard graft might suggest an impressive level of diligence on Gunn's part. And eagerness, too — after all, *Vol. 1* was the St. Louis-born filmmaker's first studio directing gig, and its reckless gang of space-rogues couldn't be closer to his heart. It may even smack of workaholicism; Sean Gunn (aka number-two Ravager Kraglin and the physical actor for Rocket Raccoon) says his brother dived back in so early "cause he's a maniac". But Gunn himself, speaking to *Empire* two-and-a-half years later during "a mad rush to complete" *Vol. 2*, insists it was for a different reason entirely. "It was the only way," he chuckles, "that I could distract myself from box-office numbers."

It's an understandable reaction. Especially as many articles at the time were predicting this would be Marvel's first flop. "I didn't totally buy into that," says Gunn. "I felt pretty good about what we were creating. But we had a lot of handicaps. Chris Pratt wasn't a movie star at the time. Even comic-book fans didn't know who the Guardians Of The Galaxy were. There were nights where I woke up, sweating and shivering. It was very scary."

Pratt remembers 1 August well, too. "Somebody sent me an email with a



long list of press articles, many of which had titles like, ‘Has Marvel Gotten Too Cocky?’” he tells us. “We were made to feel like a lower-class group of superheroes, with no reach, no familiarity.”

We all know what happened next. The biggest August release ever in the States.

A worldwide haul of \$773 million. A *Rotten Tomatoes* score of 91 per cent fresh. Pratt suddenly one of the world’s biggest stars. And the world going from, “What’s with the talking tree-guy?” to chanting, “We are Groot!”

Pratt recalls a family nervously approaching him on a golf course last year, while he was taking a day off from shooting *Vol. 2* at Pinewood Atlanta Studios. “A dad, a mom, two sisters, their little brother. And they all just knew *everything* about *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.”

There’s your reach. There’s your familiarity. And, more to the point, there are your stratospherically heightened expectations for *Vol. 2*.

Left: Zoe Saldana, Chris Pratt and director James Gunn laugh in the face of “difficult”. **Top:** Elizabeth Debecki is solid gold as the villainous Ayesha. **Above:** The band back together: Nebula (Karen Gillan), Gamora (Saldana), Star-Lord (Pratt), Baby Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel) — look closely, he’s there at the back — Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) and Drax (Dave Bautista).

WHEN EMPIRE MEETS

James Gunn on the Atlanta set in June 2015, the immense pressure isn’t showing. Though that may be because we’re a little distracted by his T-shirt, on which a cartoon zombie face squirts a nasty fountain of pus out of its left eye socket. It’s the 80th day of principal photography, so he’s tired. But, he insists, he’s feeling “pretty good about the results we’ve been getting”.

Gunn doesn’t for a moment actually think his massive, dark-horse achievement with *Guardians Of The Galaxy* makes *Vol. 2* a tougher task. “No lie, this movie has been a lot less stressful,” he declares. “I’ve had a lot longer to do it. I now know there’s an audience out there that wants to see it. And I don’t need to set everybody up like I did in the first film, so we’ve gained a half-hour of storytelling.”

Vol. 2 picks up just two months after the Guardians defeated mega-terrorist Ronan The Accuser on the planet Xandar. Peter ‘Star-Lord’ Quill (Pratt), Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) and Drax (Dave Bautista) are capitalising on their new-found fame by working as premium-rate mercenaries, while living together cheek by jowl on a spaceship, The Milano, built for two. Plus, they have an all-new Baby Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel) to deal with — a mischievous “young jerk tree” as producer Jonathan Schwartz puts it, who might be Groot



reborn or Groot's kid.

While Gunn was ice-cool, some in the cast felt jittery about returning. "You would think we'd come back cocky and high-fiving," says Zoe Saldana on set, slathered in Gamora green from the collarbones up and the elbows down. "*Guardians* felt to me like going to Vegas: you bet and you win. But the stakes are so much higher now. There's a fear of losing that specialty: becoming cavalier and comfortable and ruining it. So everybody's been on point."

Dave Bautista, the former pro-wrestler who earned some of the first film's biggest laughs as the overly literal warrior Drax, got over his own fears earlier than Saldana. While still on the press tour for *Vol. 1*, he collared Gunn in Mexico City and asked, "How in the hell are you gonna top this?" Gunn simply replied, "I'm not even gonna try. I'm just gonna make it different."

That, says Pratt, is the key to *Vol. 2*'s success. If the film was an album, he suggests it would be

The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, sprawling and trippy. "James wanted to go so outside of the box that he explodes the box," Pratt says. "It's a serious departure. And in a bigger, better, more explosive way. I really believe that."

AT FIRST GLANCE, not much has changed. All the trailers revel in the same punkish, spray-paint colourful, '80s-vibed space-opera world as the first film. And they tease a new 'Awesome Mix' soundtrack just as fun and savvy as the first (thus far only Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain* and *Come A Little Bit Closer* by Jay And The Americans have been confirmed).

There are new villains, of course: *The Night Manager*'s Elizabeth Debicki, gold-skinned and icily aloof as Ayesha, "high priestess of the Sovereign, a technically advanced race of genetically modified people", as the Australian

actor describes her. Ayesha recruits the Guardians to destroy a gigantic tentacled beast, then orders that the Guardians themselves be dispatched after they double-cross her. There's also Chris Sullivan as Taserface, who leads outlaw gang The Ravagers in mutiny against Yondu (Michael Rooker), outraged that he hasn't punished Star-Lord for switching that purple infinity stone for a Troll doll. But there are always new villains. That's a given in any sequel. What, really, has Gunn got up his sleeve?

Vol. 2 is, confirms the director, "bigger and crazier" than the last film, but that was not the goal. "The goal was to create something more honest," he says. "It's deeper in a lot of ways. If the first film was about outsiders who fight their basic nature to become a family, this movie's about *being* a family."

The F-word comes up again and again during *Empire*'s conversations with the cast. "It's about family, about *chosen* family," Bautista says. "It's





such a great topic, it hits a lot of emotional points.” Drax, for example, chooses to take under his wing new Guardian Mantis, an antennae empath played by Québécoise actor Pom Klementieff. “Mantis has never hung out with people before,” says Klementieff. “She grew up on this planet almost on her own, so she discovers everything for the first time. She’s wide-eyed and child-like and weird sometimes. That’s why she has this connection with Drax: they’re both a little off.”

We are promised further exploration into the backstories of Rocket (“That process of staying part of a family unit is more difficult for Rocket than any other member of the Guardians,” explains Sean Gunn, “because his background is so terribly lonely”); space-bandit Yondu (“Things you do in your past tend to come back to haunt you,” teases Rooker); and Gamora’s twisted sister, Nebula.

“We dive right into all the reasons she’s

Top left: Yondu (Michael Rooker) with Rocket. Did someone mention Trolls?

Left: Drax takes new addition Mantis (Pom Klementieff) under his not inconsiderable wing.

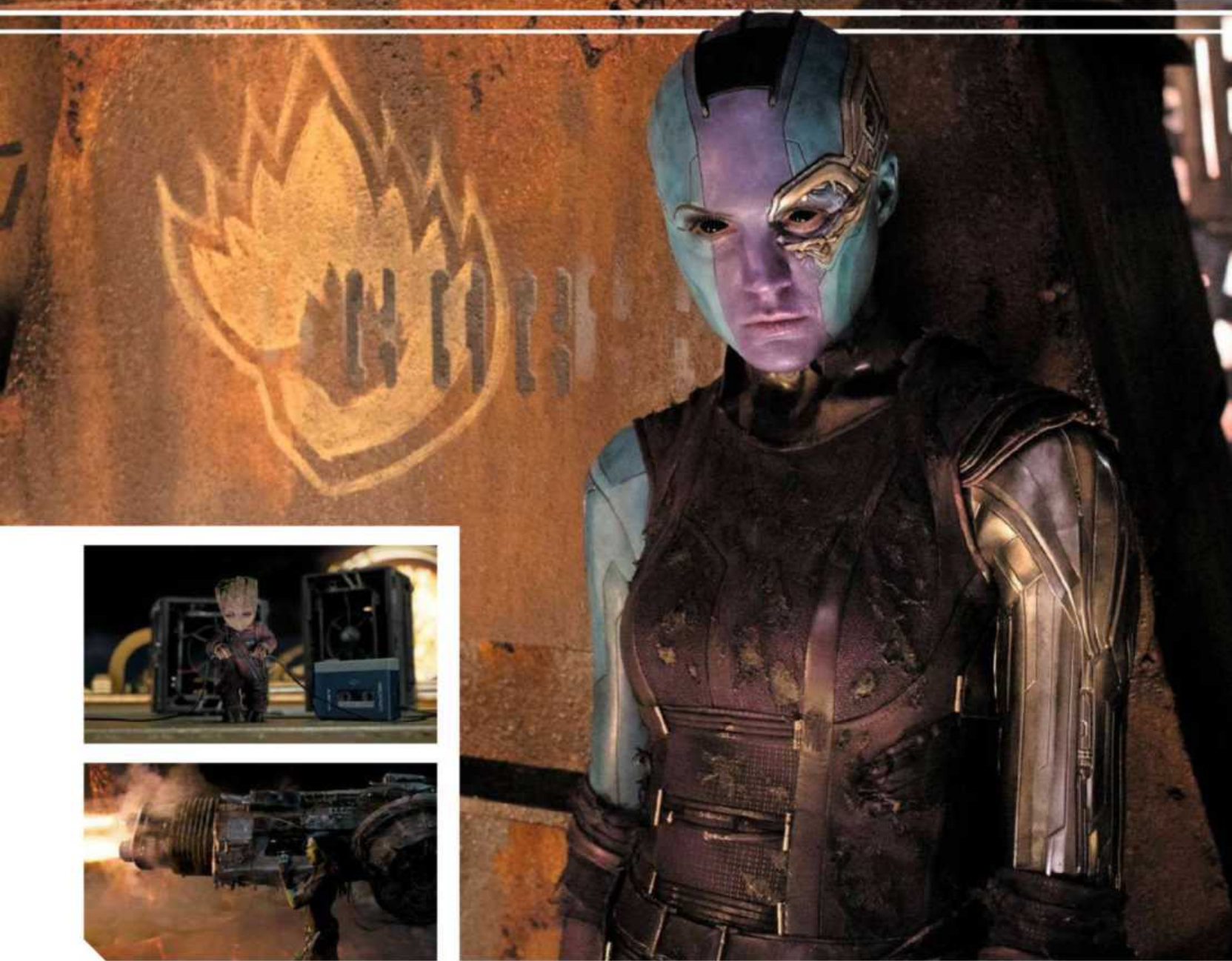
Above: Kurt Russell joins the cast as, er, living planet/Star-Lord’s dad Ego.

such a mean person,” Karen Gillan says of the last. “It was so much fun playing a villain in the first movie, but to understand *why* someone’s a villain is infinitely more interesting.” Like Yondu, Nebula becomes part of the main group. “But it’s particularly reluctant on her part. She doesn’t want to be running around with this group of superheroes doing good things. And she has issues with her sister [Gamora] that she wants to sort out.”

Empire experiences a taste of this sibling rivalry between the two daughters of mad titan Thanos while at Pinewood, Atlanta. A five-foot wide, 100-metre long strip of Mars-red scrubland has been laid across a greenscreen-walled soundstage. A zip-wire is strung above it, along which a nippy cable-camera slides as Saldana, in full Gamora battle-leather, sprints in a desperate zig-zag from an unseen aerial foe.

“It’s *North By Northwest* on steroids... with two women,” explains James Gunn with a sweep of his arm. “A big, big action sequence that is basically two sisters working out their differences.” Rather than a relentless biplane chasing Cary Grant, the aerial foe is Nebula, at the helm of a spaceship, raining fire down on her big sis. “Instead of pulling each other’s hair we just try to kill each other,” laughs Gillan after the scene is wrapped. “Like, actually kill each other.”

And if you think that’s nuts, wait ’til you get a load of the movie’s father-son reunion.



THERE WERE HINTS

during the first film that Quill Sr would be someone other than the version in the Marvel comics: J'son, Emperor of the Spartoi. Gunn, no slavish follower of canon, confesses he always found that character, a bearded space-tyrant who was voiced in the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* animated series by Jonathan Frakes, "rather trite". His vision had been sketched out vaguely in the first film, described as "an angel" by Peter's dying mother, "something very ancient" by Xandar boss Nova Prime, and "a jackass" by Yondu. Yet, even as Gunn wrote *Vol. 1* he hadn't quite pinned down exactly what that entity would be.

Then, halfway through shooting that film he realised the perfect candidate: one of Marvel's more out-there characters, Ego The Living Planet. Like Rocket or Groot, it was another seemingly ridiculous idea in which he saw juicy cinematic potential.

"If there was a living planet, how could that exist, and how would that happen?" says Gunn, remembering the dizzying cosmological questions he pondered at the time. "And now make it more difficult: a living planet who needs to give birth to a son. This is an ancient being who has been on the edges of the universe for aeons by himself."

As a casting challenge, it's up there with, say, finding a voice for a space-raccoon or a sentient tree. In the end, the man who would play

Clockwise from above: Nebula is still seriously at odds with older sister Gamora...; ...Which she might want to rethink given Gamora's firepower; "I am Baby Groot!" — get ready to fall in love all over again.

Ego (or at least, his human avatar) was landed upon during a casual chat between Gunn and Pratt, when the latter made an offhand suggestion: "Hey, what about Kurt Russell?" It made perfect sense: after all, Pratt's Star-Lord has all the swagger, bravado and klutziness of Russell's Jack Burton in *Big Trouble In Little China*. Gunn hastily booted up Final Draft, immediately seeing the possibilities. "I started writing for Kurt as I was finishing the screenplay," he recalls. "I would have been *really* disappointed if he'd said no."

Fortunately Russell said yes, after checking out the first movie, which he'd missed the first time around. "Fifteen minutes in, I said, 'I think I see why they're coming to me...'" the former Snake Plissken tells *Empire*. "The baggage I bring from some of the movies I've done is the right kind of baggage to bring into this one."

How does an actor, even one as experienced as Russell, start with a character who's a living

planet? "You start with the name," he laughs. "There's a line where he's asked by Peter, 'You mean, like a god?' And he turns around and says, 'Well, with a small 'g'." He's the guy who created his own world. He's the epitome of a self-made entity. So you start thinking about what it would be to be a baby in the jungle, bringing yourself up. But *he* created the jungle!"

Ego is, in a very real sense, his biggest-ever part. "That's true!" Russell roars. "I've never played anybody bigger! I've never played a character with broader possibilities, I'll say that." Indeed, Ego's trippy, Mandelbrot-baroque world (cheekily named 'J'son' in the concept art *Empire* was shown) proved the film's hugest technical challenge. Inspired by the elaborate fractal art of Hal Tenny, who Gunn hired to help design Ego's environment, it's pushed visual effects past the existing limit.

"We have over a trillion polygons on Ego's planet," says Gunn proudly. "It's the biggest visual effect of all time. There's nothing even close to it. Which is cool."

THE PRODUCTION NAME for the first *Guardians* movie was, appropriately enough, 'Full Tilt'. But the title *Empire* finds printed on its Pinewood Atlanta Studios visitor pass feels even more relevant: 'Level Up'.

Not merely because it applies to the scale of the film itself. It could describe pretty much everyone who's returned to take the *Guardians* into even deeper space. "Yes, we've *all* levelled up," agrees Gunn.

The last time *Empire* speaks with Pratt and his co-stars, nine months after *Vol. 2* wraps, they are already in the midst of playing the *Guardians again* — though not for *Vol. 3*. Gunn doesn't work that fast. Star-Lord, Rocket, Gamora, Drax and Groot — along with Mantis, Yondu and Nebula — have moved up to the next level to join forces with the Avengers for Joe and Anthony Russo's *Infinity War* two-parter. "It's been amazing," Pratt tells us. "I think people are gonna lose their minds over it."

Gunn says the actors have been calling him "every single day" to ask him questions. Not that he minds. To see them go off on an adventure without him "is not always the most comfortable thing for a control freak like me", but he can't complain. "I can't imagine Marvel treating me better than they have. And the truth is, they want me to do *Vol. 3* and I'm still trying to decide whether I want to. So they're being very kind to give me as much say as they are, considering I haven't committed to the next film yet."

Who knows, while the *Guardians* battle Thanos alongside Steve, Tony, Thor and the gang, Gunn may even allow himself to kick back for a bit. Drink a few piña coladas. He'll need the break. Especially if he decides to start recording the difficult *third* album... 🎧

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 APRIL

AWESOME MIX

THE CREATORS OF *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2* PROGRAMME A MIXTAPE ESPECIALLY FOR *EMPIRE* READERS



SHE'S GONE

HALL & OATES

JAMES GUNN (director)

"It's one of the greatest pop songs ever written. I really wanted to put it into [Vol. 2], but didn't have a place for it."



THE PRETTIEST STAR

DAVID BOWIE

ELIZABETH DEBICKI (Ayesha)

"It's one of my favourite songs, and I feel the lyrics suit our film so perfectly. Loss, love and the galaxy..."



SHARP DRESSED MAN

ZZ TOP

KURT RUSSELL (Ego)

"I can see this working in the movie, with the energy it has. It could be Ego's theme!"



FEIR LE BONHEUR DE PEUR QU'IL NE SE SAUVE

JANE BIRKIN

POM KLEMENTIEFF (Mantis)

"It means 'Fleeing happiness for fear it won't save you.' I used to sing it at theatre school."



WHISKEY AND YOU

CHRIS STAPLETON

CHRIS PRATT (Star-Lord)

"When I'm on the road, I tend to listen to songs that allow me to bask fully in my loneliness. When I want to dive headfirst into sorrow, I listen to this."



ANGEL BAND

THE STANLEY BROTHERS

MICHAEL ROOKER (Yondu)

"I love gospel and this is one of my favourite pieces. I like sitting down, having a whiskey and listenin' to some good music. Yeah!"



GIMME SHELTER

THE ROLLING STONES

DAVE BAUTISTA (Drax)

"This is the song that pops right into my head. I listen to it over and over, in my car or while working out. It's just something that resonates with me."



GENTLE ON MY MIND

JOHN HARTFORD

SEAN GUNN (Rocket/Kraglin)

"The great John Hartford song, made famous by Glen Campbell. I don't know why it means a lot to me. There's just something sad and beautiful about it."



THE OBVIOUS CHILD

PAUL SIMON

ZOE SALDANA (Gamora)

"We actors are obvious children. Too stubborn to grow up, picking a profession where you get to play pretend for the rest of your life. This song is very powerful."



NON, JE NE REGRETTE RIEN

EDITH PIAF

KAREN GILLAN (Nebula)

"One of the greatest songs ever written. It feels like an ultimate ending, and the message is great. That's *gotta* be the closing number for the mix."

VISIT EMPIREONLINE.COM/GUARDIANS2 TO LISTEN NOW!



DOMESTIC



DISTURBANCE

KOREAN THRILLER-MASTER
PARK CHAN-WOOK IS BACK
WITH *THE HANDMAIDEN*,
HIS KINKIEST HEADFUCK YET

WORDS ALEX GODFREY



Early

bath full of oils and petals, the naked Hideko sucking a lollipop. “One of my teeth is sharp. It keeps cutting me,” complains Hideko, and Sookee fits a thimble onto her thumb, reaches into Hideko’s mouth, and begins to delicately grind at the tooth’s sharp point. Their eyes meet, breasts bob in the water, lips are licked.

“God, my poor nan,” laughs writer Sarah Waters. “She’s been dead now for quite a few years, and I don’t know what she’d think about this having ended up in this particular film.” As a child, British author Waters once had a sharp tooth that kept cutting her, and her grandmother duly rubbed the end of it with a thimble. Waters recalled the moment for her 2002 Victorian novel *Fingersmith*, *The Handmaiden*’s source material.

“When it came to writing this book about the odd intimacy of a relationship that can spring up between a mistress and her lady’s maid, it seemed to fit,” she says. “It’s such a domestic image and yet it could be, in the right context, a very sexy one as well. Mouths and fingers and that

on in Park Chan-wook’s *The Handmaiden*, the elegant Lady Hideko (Kim Min-hee) is bathed by Sookee (Kim Tae-ri), her young new maid. It’s a sensual enough scene already: literally steamy, the

sort of thing,” Park further ramped up the sensuality; the scene in the novel took place by a window, fleetingly, with no nudity. There’s no ambiguity in the film, the eroticism charged. “I went to see it at the London Film Festival, so it was a big crowd,” says Waters. “And I must admit, seeing that moment there was odd.” She laughs. “Nice tribute to my nan!”

The Handmaiden is a curious piece of work, an edgy and pitch-black film set in 1930s Korea, interpreted from a book set in Victorian England. Park, the South Korean director behind psychological thrillers *Oldboy* (2003), *Lady Vengeance* (2005) and *Stoker* (2013), is largely faithful to Waters’ novel, plot-wise at least: young, lowly female fraudster, in cahoots with a conman, gets a job as a maid to a wealthy woman, intending to make her fall in love with her male cohort. That bouncer, masquerading as a count, is plotting to marry the woman, convince the authorities she’s gone mad, have



Clockwise from here: Sookee (Kim Tae-ri) and Hideko (Kim Min-hee) grow close; The film retains the flavour of the source novel's Victorian setting as Hideko walks out with Count Fujiwara (Ha Jung-woo); Hideko performs for Uncle Kouzuki's (Cho Jin-Woong) guests; Kouzuki in his trademark black gloves; Hideko with her exploitative uncle.



her shipped off to a mental institution, then inherit and split her fortune.

Waters was a success out of the gate, her debut 1998 novel *Tipping The Velvet* (Victorian slang for cunnilingus) a bestselling award-winner. It was exactly the kind of “rattling picaresque sexy lesbian story” (her description) she wanted it to be, but by the time she wrote her third novel, *Fingersmith* (slang for pickpocket with raunchy undertones), she had become fascinated with sensationalist Victorian yarns such as Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman In White*, and wanted to pay tribute. “They often feature interesting female characters, slightly kinky women who are on the verge of madness, or have committed murder,” says Waters. “It was this lovely stew of possibilities, and I felt I could take some of that and push it further into an underworld thing by having it tell a lesbian story.” And now it’s been pushed yet further.

Park

Chan-wook paces about his office. It’s 6pm in South Korea, and it’s cold: as he talks to *Empire*, he’s wearing a fully buttoned-up puffa jacket. The 53-year-old is rarely still: he sits,

stands, walks, ponders, assisted in our talk by Wonjo Jeong, his producer, who translates. *Oldboy*, Park’s fifth feature, made him a star. An instant cult classic, it brought him a new set of fans, who would turn up at events asking him to sign their hammers as a tribute to the film’s most arresting piece of violence (see page 74). A Spike Lee remake, released in 2013, received mostly negative reviews (Park claims not to have found the time to see it). Of late he’s ventured into some English-language filmmaking of his own, and here on his office wall are framed posters — beautiful, ornate pieces of art — for the results: *Stoker*, in which he directed Mia Wasikowska and Nicole Kidman, and Bong Joon-ho’s *Snowpiercer*, which he produced.

The Handmaiden was originally intended to be in English too, a faithful take on *Fingersmith* set in Victorian England. Park’s producer Syd Lim — who had also passed the director the original *Oldboy* manga book to consider — gave him *Fingersmith* five years ago, thinking Park might like it. He did. “I was feverishly enthusiastic as I read it,” says the director. “I was rooting for these characters, hoping things would turn out well for them. And for others, I was wishing for them to meet their comeuppance and be punished. I was really nervous and anxious.”

When he got to the thimble scene, he knew he wanted to make a film. “As a reader you are smelling the scents, you can hear the sound of the rustling clothes when they move,” he explains. “There was a level of sensory experience, something almost tangible, this feeling of realism. I wanted to recreate that moment for the audience.”

He loved *Fingersmith* so much, he read all of Waters’ books. And so taken was he by *Tipping The Velvet* that he took his wife, daughter and Wonjo Jeong on a trip to Whitstable, the Kent seaside town where the novel is set, inspired by Waters’ own experience at 19, when she lived there and fell in love with a woman. Park beams as he remembers his little holiday. Did he eat any of Whitstable’s famous oysters?

“We went to a very unassuming, small restaurant in Whitstable,” he says, “and I not only had their famous oysters, but I tried all different types of seafood and I loved every bite of everything. I would like to show you a photo I took in Whitstable.” Grinning, he opens his laptop and shows *Empire* a photo of a bench on the beach, and then a photo of another bench at the train station. Neither of them are particularly remarkable, but he’s delighted. >

The darkness of Park

AN UNHEALTHY REMINDER OF PARK CHAN-WOOK'S MOST DISQUIETING CINEMATIC MOMENTS

THE ANKLE ATTACK

SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE (2002)

There's a fair bit of nastiness in this, the first of Park's 'Vengeance' trilogy: a brutal baseball bat-pummelling, a screwdriver in the neck... But the Achilles heel-slashing is the one for the ages. The camera dives underwater as kidnapper Ryu's (Shin Ha-kyun) ankles erupt, blood seeping and swirling. It is gleefully disgusting. You feel it, and it makes you want to cry.

THE HAMMER FIGHT

OLDBOY (2003)

In a film famed for its shock moments – the self-inflicted tongue removal, the live-octopus-chomping – the standout is the hallway slaughter. Filmed in one shot, Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) makes his way through a multitude of attackers armed with only a hammer and his fists. Wonderfully choreographed, it plays like footage from the craziest video game never made.

THE VIDEOTAPE

LADY VENGEANCE (2005)

In an abandoned classroom, a group of parents are shown video footage of their missing children being tortured and killed by their preschool teacher. The kids cry for their mothers, and for their own lives, and the desperation and devastation is unbearable. These are not images you want in your head, but Park puts them there. It feels like genuine snuff. Upsetting, agonising viewing.

THE VISION

I'M A CYBORG, BUT THAT'S OK (2006)

Radio-factory worker Young-goon (Lim Soo-jung) believes she's a cyborg, and is institutionalised after attempting to connect her slashed wrist to a power cord. The most extravagant sequence has her hallucinating an enormous massacre, in which she relentlessly rains bullets from her mouth and smoking fingertips. It's balletic, bravura and as fun as murderous rampages get.

THE VAMPIRE FRENZY

THIRST (2009)

After lying about being abused, a fib that leads to the murder of her husband, distressed Tae-ju (Kim Ok-bin) begs vampire priest Sang-hyun (Song Kang-ho) to kill her. The ensuing transformation is immense: he snaps her neck and feasts on her blood, slashes his own wrists for her corpse to feed on, then cuts his tongue, properly resuscitating her with a mouthful of blood. It's erotic and exhausting. One imagines Bram Stoker would have approved.



Sookee and Hideko get to know each other. **Below:** Maid and lady fall out... **Middle:** Sookee peeks through the doors. **Bottom:** Hideko in ceremonial garb.

Soon

after deciding to adapt *Fingersmith*, Park discovered it had, in 2005, been serialised by the BBC, in a production starring Sally Hawkins. The news set him back – he didn't want to do what had already been

done. Lim, though, suggested the setting could be switched to 1930s Korea, which at the time was under Japanese rule. This, thought Park, would allow him to bring his own sensibility to the story and layer it with political weight – the lady would be Japanese and the maid Korean, providing a deeper dynamic.

Waters was informed of the plans, so watched *Oldboy*, and loved it. Nevertheless, she had some trepidation that a man was adapting her tender lesbian opus: she wasn't involved in the rights deal or the creative development, and Park didn't want to consult with her as he was such a fan, he feared he might be swayed by her thoughts. He did, though, send her a script draft out of courtesy. She began reading nervously.

"My big anxiety was that he was going to introduce some kind of heterosexual revolution, which I would have hated," she says. "Really hated. The tradition of people telling lesbian stories has often been to wheel in some man at the end, or kill one of them off. But it became obvious from the script that that wasn't going to happen. I see the novel as feminist. There are more men making films than there are women, and that's a problem, but I think Park has been pretty sensitive to those issues."

The director, as it happens, has been on a mission to portray strong women on screen since *Oldboy*. After he made that film, he realised its only female, Mi-do (Kang Hye-jeong), was the sole character not privy to the story's shocking truth. This made him uncomfortable to the extent that from then on, he wanted his leads to be women, which led immediately to



his follow-up, 2005's *Lady Vengeance*. This change, he says, provides for richer stories. And from *Lady Vengeance* on, he has co-written all of his films (except for *Stoker*) with female filmmaker Chung Seo-kyung.

"She also has influenced me to become a feminist," he says. "Although, the one who wants to portray the male characters more pathetically, and hold the female characters in a more favourable light, is actually me. She comes in and says, 'Hold on, Director Park, you're going too far. There are bad women too, you know.' True feminist films should subscribe to this kind of approach — it's better to make them complex and make them feel like living, feeling characters."

In *The Handmaiden*, the men are dogs. Reprehensible, exploitative, greedy good-for-nothings, devoid of morality; while the women find solidarity and wage war against not just individual men, but the patriarchal system. Generally, says Park, he enjoys having women put men through hell. "It's to do with this widespread prejudice in the society that we live in, that women are weak and need to be protected. When you see a moment where a female character who is supposedly weaker kicks the hell out of a man, I'm basically giving the middle finger to that notion. I get a kick out of it."



In

The Handmaiden, Park confronts the issue of the male gaze head-on with a series of scenes in which Hideko, under the control of her abusive uncle Kouzuki (Cho Jin-woong), is made to read out pornographic literature in

a makeshift theatre to feverish male guests. Park also took care, he says, for the heated sex scenes between Hideko and Sookee to be a celebration, rather than exploitation, of their sexual discovery. So determined was Park to get it right, he had Chung ask a lesbian friend to read through the script drafts. "She didn't find any problem," says Park. "But she did say, 'The scissors position, you need to have that, that's the best position ever!'" Waters hadn't heard this anecdote before. "Oh, did she?" she laughs. "Well, I certainly don't have a problem with the scissoring."

Park's presentation of the sex certainly isn't bashful. "He stays with those scenes a long time, you know," says Waters. "But that's partly just the nature of his filmmaking. I think, a sort of excess. The film relishes those moments. At the London Film Festival, Park said those scenes are telling us something about this emotional journey the two women are going on. And I think that's true, so in that sense I feel they're kind of special."

On some online lesbian forums, she mentions, those who have seen the film have been split over Park's handling of the material. "Some lesbian viewers have really loved it, and some have latched on to the whole male-gaze thing," she says. Is the latter view related to the length of the sex scenes? "Yeah, and also... it's clearly about those two characters and their emotional journey, but nevertheless we're watching them from a slight distance. There is a touch of voyeurism, I think, to those scenes. But also what's really interesting is that very fraught history between Korea and Japan, and what the film is doing with bringing those two young women together is charged in a way that lots of us in the West can't quite appreciate."

Ultimately, says Waters, *The Handmaiden* honours the spirit of *Fingersmith*, even though, for the last third of the film, Park changes gears, introducing new twists and bringing on the brutality. "From that point on," she says, "it's pretty much Park's story."

The director has called his film "fan fiction", admitting that he made changes based on the anger he felt towards the story's more distasteful characters. Besides, he says, the world is full of violence, and we need to face it. "In media, you often come across work full of love and peace and hope," he says. "It makes you think they are only looking at what they want to see. Some films should look directly into this kind of violence and say that it's

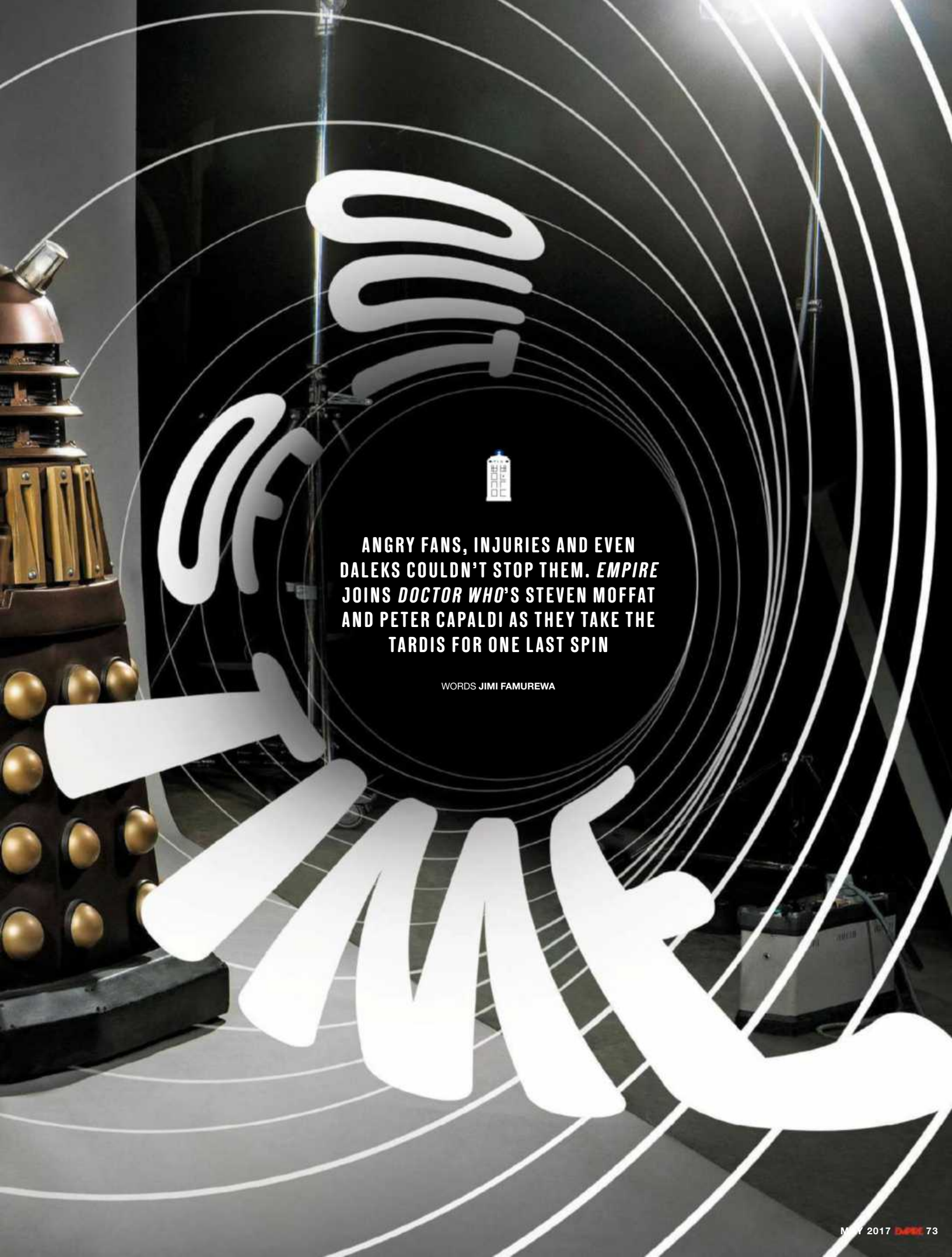
very much part of the world we live in. Although I make sure that these moments of violence are always infused with a sense of fear and guilt."

The Handmaiden certainly crescendos with everything you'd want from a Park film. "It's such an accomplished film," says Waters. "It's about women confined between social and family structures that rob them of their power. The book gives that power back to them, and that's exactly what the film does too." Park's biggest hit to date — it's so far made \$32 million in South Korea alone, knocking *X-Men: Apocalypse* off the weekly number-one spot — he posits that the film's twin themes of solidarity and liberation "perhaps give you a sense of pleasure, a sense of thrill".

Admittedly, this is from a man who gets a kick from seaside benches. Nevertheless, *The Handmaiden* is an unapologetic celebration of how it feels to be truly alive — whether you're in Seoul or, well, Whitstable. ●

THE HANDMAIDEN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 14 APRIL AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 36





ANGRY FANS, INJURIES AND EVEN
DALEKS COULDN'T STOP THEM. *EMPIRE*
JOINS *DOCTOR WHO*'S STEVEN MOFFAT
AND PETER CAPALDI AS THEY TAKE THE
TARDIS FOR ONE LAST SPIN

WORDS JIMI FAMUREWA



HEN PETER CAPALDI first got the keys to the Tardis — way back before all those invading Zygons and cosmic Mummies, disembodied intergalactic kings and lavish guitar solos — he seriously considered investing in some gym equipment. And you can see the reasoning. Aged 58 now (and 55 when he took over from 31-year-old 11th Doctor Matt Smith), the former Malcolm Tucker was keen to show he could flee Daleks and fling himself around alien planets just as vigorously as the recent, younger incarnations of the Time Lord.

“They had put me in a flat across the road [from the *Doctor Who* studios in Cardiff],” says Capaldi, taking up the tale. “And I thought, ‘I need to get a treadmill or something to sit in the flat, to make sure I’m keeping fit.’” He elevates his famous ‘attack eyebrows’ by about an inch. “But the idea that you could do any exercise after a day of running up and down corridors, chasing monsters or jumping off rocks is *ridiculous*.”

In fact, in 2015 Capaldi had to undergo keyhole surgery, having succumbed to the same injury that put Matt Smith on crutches in 2013. “I think the term is ‘Doctor’s Knee,’” he says, with a smile. “You run down a corridor, spin at the end to get in shot and it causes tension as you turn.”

Now, of course, after four years and what will ultimately be 40 full episodes, Capaldi is bidding farewell to Doctor’s Knee and far more besides. And what’s more, his boss Steven Moffat — regular writer since the series was revived in 2004 and showrunner since 2010 — is leaving too. Moffat may not have a dicky leg, but he has his own war stories of life aboard a physically and mentally taxing juggernaut.

“At the moment I still have an episode to write and I feel like I’m hanging from the end of a cliff by one hand,” he chuckles. “People keep asking me, ‘Are you going to miss this?’ And I think, ‘Well, I’m actually quite looking forward to not hanging from a cliff by one hand.’ It’s hard to preemptively imagine nostalgia for a job that might still kill you.”

By December, as the credits roll on this year’s Christmas special, a new double act — comprised of *Broadchurch* creator Chris Chibnall and an as-yet-unconfirmed new Time Lord or Time Lady — will be in place. It’s the



end of an era. But also, perhaps inevitably given the extermination-proof 54-year-old programme in question, the simultaneous dawn of a new one. What have Capaldi and Moffat got planned for their grand exit? How does Moffat reflect on his occasionally controversial stewardship of the show?

And, most pressingly, will the two of them make it out alive?

IT'S A GREY

February day in Cardiff as *Empire* arrives at *Doctor Who*’s sprawling bayside production base to watch Series 10 (or, for the truly pedantic, Series 36) take shape. Everywhere you look there are signs of the show’s newfound standing as a global behemoth — the nearby ‘*Doctor Who* Experience’ attraction, standees of Jenna Coleman’s



Clockwise from left: Peter Capaldi dives into his final series; Departing showrunner Steven Moffat; The Doctor and Bill Potts (Pearl Mackie) step out with one of the all-new emoji-bots; Exterminate!; Matt Lucas returns as Nardole.



departed companion Clara, plush Capaldi toys idling on desks. But we don't have to wait long for our first true hit of confounding, Time Lordly wonder.

Incumbent executive producer Brian Minchin leads us past a draughty cut-through dedicated to the man who revived the show in 2005 ("That's Russell T. Davies Alleyway," he grins) and straight onto Mars. Or rather, a recreation of a Martian mine that's, intriguingly, the scene for a conflict between Zulu War-era British soldiers and an awakened horde of classic reptilian *Who* baddies the Ice Warriors.

It's a late episode in the 12-part series — a Jules Verne-ish spectacle concocted by regular *Doctor Who* writer and *Sherlock* co-creator Mark Gatiss — and, for all the evergreen jokes about the show's bubblewrap monsters and Commodore 64-worthy VFX, the production design is breathtaking to behold up close. Extras in redcoats and dust-caked pith helmets loiter amid huge, looming rocks and atmospheric lamplight. There's a giant futuristic, drill-like weapon of mysterious provenance, red Martian sand underfoot, and a hulking actor in the tyre-tread shell of an Ice Warrior. Completing the picture is an approaching, familiar storm cloud of grey hair: the 12th Doctor is in the house.

Capaldi and Pearl Mackie (aka brand-new companion Bill Potts) are both sporting sleek, black spacesuits. And despite the shooting schedule now entering its eighth month, both are on bouncy, high-energy form. As phones are pocketed and cameras start to roll, *Empire* watches a pivotal three-way face-off between the Doctor and Bill, the British troops and the lone alien, which in one excellent aside is described as an "upright crocodile". Takes are efficient and the atmosphere is relaxed (a planned explosion effect later today is bawdily described by one crew member as "an afternoon of banging"), but there's a noticeable, deft seriousness to the performances. And, tellingly, the action turns on a key intervention

by Bill. Because for all the talk of departures, Moffat feels that his final series is, more than anything, shaped by an arrival.

"As ever with *Doctor Who*, although it's the thing you get in trouble for saying, the driving character is actually the companion," says Moffat. "And Bill's quite different from Clara. Clara from the off was complex and tricky, whereas Bill is much more guileless. So, far from feeling like any kind of victory lap or the end of days or anything, [this year] feels fresh and new and, 'Look at the mad things we can do!'"

As well as the Martian excursion, those mad things include a 19th century-set episode featuring a frozen River Thames, a historical adventure in ancient Scotland about an infamous, disappearing band of Roman soldiers, and robots with emoji-like faces. There are also planned returns for Nardole (Matt Lucas' servile alien companion), Missy (Michelle Gomez's gleefully deranged take on The Master) and, inevitably, the Daleks. And although we initially find the Doctor earthbound and working at a university ("His lectures are very thrilling, but I don't think he follows the curriculum," jokes Capaldi), Moffat is at pains to stress that the show is still, essentially, about "spanning the galaxy and blowing stuff up".

Mackie — a relative screen newcomer and *Doctor Who* agnostic who likens her first day on set to "starting secondary school after going to a remote primary school in a bunker" — didn't have to fake Bill's rapt incomprehension too much. "We had sets built up to the sky, crazy things happening, explosions," she says. "A lot of the time I was like, 'Guys, you know I've mostly done theatre, right?'"

The over-abundance of zaniness proves that Moffat had plenty of inspiration left as he sat down to chart out the new series. Which is perhaps surprising given that, in the manner of every retired movie criminal ever, he actually thought he'd already done his last job.

"I VAGUELY THOUGHT

I'd be going last year," admits Moffat, referring to the 2015 series that preceded a near year-long hiatus which many theorised was *Sherlock*-induced. "So the last scene of Christmas that year [festive episode 'The Husbands Of River Song'], with the Doctor finally making it to Darillium, which we hear about in the episode just before I took over, was as close as I'll ever get to making any sort of attempt at closure."

Whatever the precise circumstances of Moffat's decision to stay on for an extra series, that agreement takes his reign to seven years (and more than 65 hours of mostly family-friendly intergalactic derring-do) and makes him modern *Doctor Who*'s longest serving godhead. Does lasting for that long, and in particular being the man to marshal 2013's 50th anniversary multi-Doctor special, rank as his highest achievement on the show?

"Retrospectively I think so, because it has to be said that 'The Day Of The Doctor' was a monster hit," says Moffat. "I think I can say that. But the actual process of doing it was murder. It was an awful show to work on and I kept just wanting to give up. Because the truth is there is a reason why there is only one Doctor in *Doctor Who* and there is absolutely no reason to have more than one. There aren't multiple James Bonds. All we're doing with multiple Doctor episodes is fetishising a staffing problem."

That episode — which featured David Tennant and Matt Smith alongside the late John Hurt as the War Doctor — also happens to be the source of one of Moffat's biggest regrets. "I was sad we couldn't get Christopher Eccleston back," he admits, acknowledging the well-documented fact that his first version of that script featured the ninth Doctor. "Although he was a complete gentleman about it and, on the other hand, we got John, so it's hard to regard it as a complete loss."

This glass-half-full attitude seems to be Moffat's way when reflecting on his time in the head writer's throne. Any flicker of past disappointment over, say, the failure to fulfil Peter Jackson's stated wish to direct an episode ("How much of Peter Jackson's trademark brilliance would still be visible in a show like *Doctor Who* where, frankly, the showrunner will often recut it all?" wonders Moffat) is quickly brushed aside by the childish excitement you'd expect from a lifelong Whovian, whose first ever memory is a bemused response to Patrick Troughton's arrival as the second Doctor.

Moffat has had his share of detractors, and then some. "*Doctor Who*: is it now too scary for children?" fretted a 2014 *Daily Telegraph* article, bemoaning the bleak existentialism at the heart of Series 8's two-part finale. Reddit threads have erupted with subject headings such as "How Steven Moffat Ruined *Doctor Who*". And he's been the target of myriad angry tweets, complaining that his millennia-spanning story arcs and Russian-doll plotting has made the show too complicated. But Moffat brushes it all off. "People who express vigorous and loud opinions are, by definition, not typical members of the audience," he says. "That's not a good audience survey, because we're not a niche show appealing to a small number of people."

He is tough enough to take such complaints in his stride. But he does admit to feeling a painful stab of disappointment when Capaldi informed him he wanted to quit. "I don't like it when Doctors leave, just on principle because the star of my favourite show is leaving," he says. "I've had to receive, in effect, the resignation of three Doctors in David Tennant, Matt Smith and Peter Capaldi. I've had enough now. I'll need to go into bloody therapy. Stop quitting!"



SADLY, CAPALDI COULDN'T

be stopped, despite

having hit something of a critical purple patch in recent series. Although some were turned off by his initial decision to return some "Old *Who* strangeness" to what he saw as Matt Smith's "user-friendly" depiction of the Doctor, he established a nimbly comic groove as he clocked up adventures. In fact, by the time the credits rolled on landmark Series 9 single-hander 'Heaven Sent' — 55 minutes of an emotionally raw Capaldi being pursued by an unseen menace in a mysterious castle — he had pushed the role into bold new territory. So how does he feel to be leaving all that behind just as, from outside appearances at least, he seems to have hit his stride?

"The terrible thing is, the moment you get the job you know you're going to have to leave it," says Capaldi as we repair to a vacant production office to chat. He's now de-Doctored — wearing a chunky jumper and thick glasses — but the velvety, unquestionably alien delivery is still intact. "That might just be part of my doomy, melancholic nature, but as soon as



Left: The Doctor and Bill come over all Victorian. **Here:** Who knew a Dalek could look nonplussed?

I became the Doctor I immediately propelled my mind to this spot. But that's fine. I've never really done anything for three or four years [Malcolm Tucker in *The Thick Of It* excepted] — it's not my style really."

He admits that he'll miss the "fabulous, kind" crew and the starstruck young fans ("Sometimes they gasp because it's like seeing the Wizard Of Oz"). But when we ask if there was a particular episode or moment that unlocked the character of the Doctor for him, we alight, accidentally, on one of the major factors nudging him towards the door.

"Once you've figured it out, you've lost it," Capaldi ponders. "And that's one of the reasons I'm leaving. Because with this volume of work, it's hard to constantly be searching for new ways of doing things. But *Doctor Who* is weird because I love it so much. Part of me enjoys doing the same thing, while another part of me wants different challenges."

Capaldi is keeping schtum about what those challenges might entail. Moffat, for his part, has his other BBC flagship to attend to ("Mark [Gatiss] and I haven't held off from having a *Sherlock* meeting," he says of the possibly returning behemoth. "The question is, when the hell are we supposed to have had it?") and is open to squatting in other universes.

"I'd love to do a *Star Trek* and I'd love to do an episode of *Columbo* but, sadly, Peter Falk is probably staying dead," he laments. He has already said he won't return to write for *Doctor Who* and wants "the curtain to fall" as far as plot information goes.

Before all that of course, there's the small matter of an entire series and a festive regeneration for which Moffat plans to uphold an odd tradition, minted when he took over from Davies: any lines spoken by the 13th Doctor will be written by incoming showrunner Chris Chibnall. "I haven't completely planned it, but I quite like the insanity of the fact this is a job you quit two pages before you type 'End Titles,'" says Moffat, laughing. It's a passing of the baton that tallies with Moffat's fundamental understanding of the show.

"The Doctor doesn't go anywhere," he says, firmly. "He gets a new face and that's all that happens." It's a reminder that — having survived half a century of marauding Cybermen, Daleks, Weeping Angels and more — the Doctor abides. Whatever, and whoever, awaits come Christmas Day, we should expect an ellipsis, not a full stop. ●

DOCTOR WHO SERIES 10 IS ON BBC ONE FROM 15 APRIL

STARRY SPACE HORROR LIFE HAS BEEN
SHROUDED IN MYSTERY SINCE ITS INCEPTION.
WE DRILL DEEP INTO ITS DARK HEART

THE MEANING *of* LIFE

WORDS IAN FREER



W

When *Life* entered his life, Swedish filmmaker Daniel Espinosa was in a strange place. Personally, he had just gone through a divorce and was expecting a baby with a new partner. Professionally, he was still licking his wounds from Tom Hardy flop *Child 44*, having passed on a run of terrific scripts — including *The Martian*, *Prisoners* and *Sicario* — that went on to garner critical acclaim and box-office success. It was a time of self-examination.

“I was curious as to why I would say no to things that were obviously good for me,” he says, smoking furiously outside a Belsize Park coffee shop during a break from scoring. “I came to the conclusion that I just read them as finished movies. There was nothing for me to add. That’s why I did *Child 44*. It was a script everybody tried and failed [to make work]. Ridley tried it, Fincher tried it, Spielberg tried it. In my hubris, I thought, ‘I can do it.’ Then I did it and realised why everybody failed.”

So when Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick’s script *Life* arrived, Espinosa decided to attempt something new. Rather than fix a story that was broken, he would take a script he felt “worked beautifully and add myself into it”. Besides, it was a big old sci-fi movie, just like those made by his heroes.

“To walk in the footsteps of Scott, Kubrick, Tarkovsky,” he ponders. “All those who have created great images and big ideas. Who doesn’t want to do that?”

Taking a cue from his idols, what Espinosa added into *Life* — its secret sauce — is the kind of thing that separates it from cookie-cutter studio sci-fi blockbusters. But he didn’t get there without a fight.

The screenplay Espinosa responded to began with producers David Ellison and Dana Goldberg. During post-production on *G.I. Joe: Retaliation*, the pair became fascinated by the ‘Curiosity’, the car-sized exploratory rover that has been traversing the Gale Crater on Mars since 2012. “Dana and I had always talked

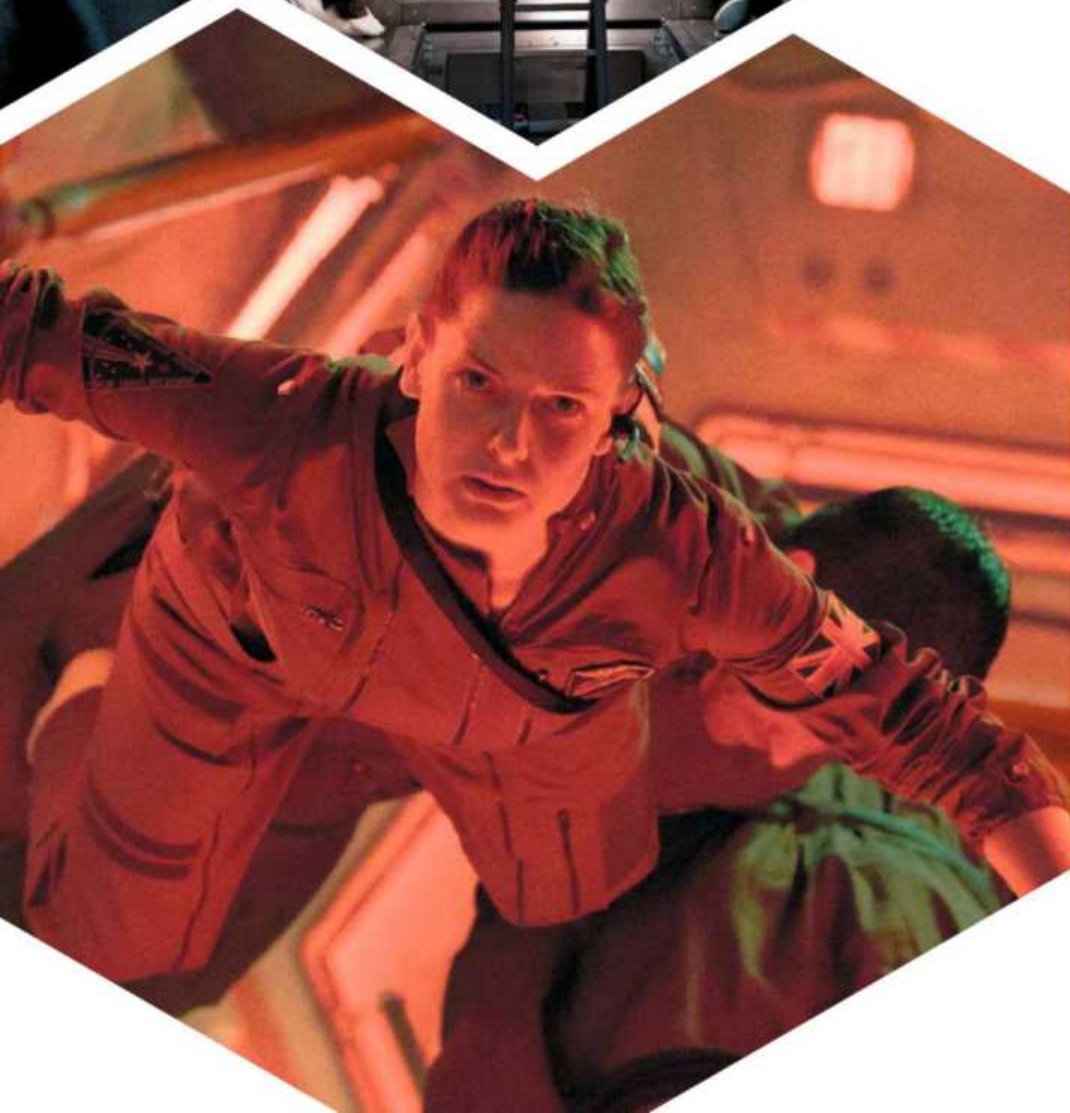
about doing a tense thriller on board the ISS, all in zero-G,” says Ellison. “What if the rover discovered new life on Mars and brought it back to the International Space Station [ISS] to investigate? And what if it started to show signs of intelligence?” Ellison and Goldberg pitched the idea to Reese and Wernick, the writing team behind *Deadpool* and *Zombieland*, who were looking to try their hand at something more serious. Together the quartet set out to fashion a monster with roots in reality. “Sometimes we like to use the phrase ‘science-fiction,’” says Goldberg.

Setting their story in the not-too-distant future, Reese and Wernick populated the film with the obligatory motley crew: mechanic/space walker Roy Adams, doctor David Jordan, disease specialist Miranda North, microbiologist Hugh Derry and flight engineer Sho Murakami, all bossed by badass Russian commander Katerina Golovkina. The crew, plus their lab rat Pluto, intercept a research pod from Mars carrying the planet’s first signs of life, a hibernating single-cell organism christened Calvin. But it turns out Calvin is something well above them on the evolutionary scale. And it’s not particularly friendly.

Modestly budgeted at \$20 million, the project was being sent out to first-time directors until it



Clockwise from main:
 Jake Gyllenhaal as doctor David Jordan; Rebecca Ferguson and Gyllenhaal with director Daniel Espinosa; Ferguson as disease expert Miranda North; Ariyon Bakare as microbiologist Derry; Espinosa on set with Olga Dihovichnaya.



fell into the lap of Espinosa. “I called my people and said, ‘I want it!’” he recalls. “They said, ‘We think you should try for something higher.’ I said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous. It’s not about “higher”. This is just good.’” Yet the budget would have to go north to satisfy the director’s appetite. “Alfonso Cuarón had \$120 million for *Gravity*,” he smiles. To convince the bean-counters, Espinosa knew he had to follow the lead of *Life*’s creature and get smart. That began with the casting.

AUGUST 2016, Shepperton Studios. Ryan Reynolds (grey flight suit) and Jake Gyllenhaal (brown flight suit) are chatting to *Empire* (geeky T-shirt) about whether they would, given the chance, go into space.

“I would if it were really comfortable, like Lufthansa first class,” says Reynolds. “Jake wouldn’t go. He’s still got LaserDiscs at home.”

“It’s awe-inspiring but also ultimately unfathomable,” says Gyllenhaal, ignoring Reynolds’ jibe. “I don’t know personally if I have the courage, but I guess that’s what courage is. So right now, probably not.”

The presence of Reynolds and Gyllenhaal helped *Life*’s budget move to what Espinosa calls “something that was doable”. Yet, beyond their box-office value, Espinosa also saw how the actors’ real-life traits could enrich the characters on the page. He saw Gyllenhaal, a “lone wolf who ploughed his own career path”, as a perfect fit for Jordan, a trauma doctor hiding in deep space from the sights he’s seen on Earth. As for Reynolds, with whom Espinosa worked on *Safe House*, the director sensed his cop family background (two of Reynolds’ three brothers are police officers in British Columbia) would allow him to embody Adams’ working-class ethic.

“Most astronauts are Ivy League assholes or military right-wing bastards,” says Espinosa. “The mechanics detest both of those types, so you have clear divisions.”

Gyllenhaal says this blurring of actor and character continues across the whole cast, with Espinosa “moving and changing things based on our relationships. We are not just ‘the rogue’ or ‘the doctor’.” Reynolds agrees: “Daniel listened to the movie. He watches, sees what is happening and adjusts.” This is what Espinosa is bringing to *Life*: a strong indie sensibility inside a big sci-fi gut-twister, complete with handheld cameras, improvisation, overlapping dialogue and pauses from the action to dive deeper into character. “You think about the scale of this and it is ginormous,” says Rebecca Ferguson, who plays Miranda North. “But it’s all done in a very creative way.”

Today’s scene is a critical one. On board the ISS, the crew, safely watching from behind reinforced lab doors, look on as microbiologist Derry (Ariyon Bakare) makes his first examination of the newly found life-form. Soon, to everyone’s horror, the tiny creature takes a shine to Derry’s hand. It’s a fun, happy set — “We are like the United Nations, except we get on,” says Reynolds of his multinational cast-mates — but today’s workload is high intensity. Adams is pushing to get Derry out, North is insisting he stay quarantined. It’s the moment hierarchies, bonds and pure reason dissolve.

“We are all experts in our own fields, but our expertise goes over the threshold into human instinct,” says Ferguson. “What is your behaviour when you are threatened or scared? When is your expertise better than mine? The dynamic between us makes it very real.”



BESIDES THE human dynamics, Espinosa worked hard to keep the space milieu not just believable but fresh. In the wake of *Gravity*'s success, there has been at least one non-franchise, studio-sponsored space movie every year — *Interstellar* (2014), *The Martian* (2015), *Passengers* (2016) — so Espinosa knew he had his work cut out to make *Life* novel.

"You can make [space movies] look different by digging down into the science," he reflects. "That's why we love Nolan. Nolan is the biggest nerd on the planet."

For Espinosa, "digging down" meant immersing himself completely in ISS lore. His space trivia is on a Brian Cox-ian level. Speaking about Pluto the lab rat, he recounts the sad tale of the first ISS rodent, used as a barometer of the effects of weightlessness on cognitive systems and vital organs, who died from just the shock of floating (for the record, in the movie Pluto is firmly strapped in). Espinosa gushes about big-picture stuff (the ISS itself is a co-production, so the US, Russian and Japanese sections have different feels and sounds) and waxes lyrical about the tiny details (his props team have created a replica of the space-station coffee machine, known as 'the ISSpresso'). This knowledge has been gleaned from three technical advisers, mountains of books and countless hours of documentaries.

"He didn't recommend anything really obvious, like, 'You have to see this movie called *Alien*,'" recalls Reynolds of his viewing homework. "I watched *There's Something About Mary*."

That the cast of *Life* are weightless for the entire running time is the film's USP. Claustrophobia is one thing. Claustrophobia in zero-G ratchets up the tension tenfold (if you are stuck in the middle of a room, you can't move). But it's a USP Espinosa had to fight for.

"For a while, all the producers were arguing for the idea of 'gravity chambers' to save money," says Espinosa. "I just thought, 'Oh, fuck that.'"

Having won that battle, Espinosa sought wisdom from the "masters"; Scott, Nolan, Cuarón. What came back were mostly thoughts





about creative camera angles — “You have to constantly make the audience understand there is no up and down,” the director says — until he spoke to Emmanuel ‘Chivo’ Lubezki, the cinematographer of *Gravity*. Remembers Espinosa: “I said to Chivo, ‘I am thinking of long shots in zero gravity.’ And he said, ‘Long shots in zero gravity? It’s like vomiting in your own face.’”

Espinosa rejected the idea of shooting in a vomit comet, the aircraft that rises then rapidly dives to create 25 seconds of weightlessness, in favour of elaborate wire-work. Essentially human puppeteering, the process saw the cast marionetted around by 40 technicians. The klutz of the cast proved to be Gyllenhaal. “Every other take I would hit something, go spinning off and hit a fucking wall,” he laughs.

Espinosa was keen to avoid the default ways actors float in sci-fi movies — “Arms by the side, then glide,” he notes — so hired a movement specialist to keep things organic. “She kept an eye on how we all move differently to reflect character,” remembers Gyllenhaal. “Some of us grab things to pull ourselves along, others are not as physical.”

Before shooting, Rebecca Ferguson sought tips from a pro. “I called Matt Damon,” says the actress, who sports a tight bun in the film so her hair doesn’t fan out like a Troll doll’s. “He just said, ‘Good luck.’” In fact, it was the star of *The Martian* who taught the production how to do zero-G in close-ups when no strings were attached. “He called it the ‘One Foot Zero Gravity,’” says Espinosa. “You stand on one foot and move really slowly...” It didn’t suit

all the cast. “You start to feel seasick,” says Bakula. Not an ideal state of affairs on a space station — not least when an alien creature is hunting you.

FEBRUARY 2017, AIR Studios in London’s Hampstead. Once again *Empire* is watching Derry’s investigation of the extra-terrestrial; this time, however, we’re viewing it on a monitor in a recording-studio control room, while standing alongside Espinosa and composer Jon Ekstrand. Through the glass, a quartet of percussionists are using a range of instrumentation — gongs, cymbals, anvils, even a metal trash can — to create crescendos and textures over the urgent rhythms already laid down by a 96-piece orchestra. Espinosa describes Ekstrand’s music as a mash-up of action maestro John Powell, Hitchcock legend Bernard Herrmann and contemporary Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki, whose music features in such happy-go-lucky films as *The Shining* and *Shutter Island*. “What I like about Jon is that he is not classically schooled,” says Espinosa, delighted with the sounds. “He approaches it on an instinctual level so it sounds different.”

As the music comes together, the one thing still incomplete is the creature Calvin, here represented by some nascent CGI. Espinosa shrugs, “We tried to do it practically, but you can’t get a piece of plastic to move like a single-cell being.” The conception of *Life*’s title star was guided by three things: the shape-shifting alien in John Carpenter’s *The Thing*; the sentient planet in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, and pure, hard science. Working with geneticist Adam Rutherford (who also consulted on *Ex Machina*), Espinosa studied the way single-cell organisms express themselves. “It came from a very biological perspective,” he says. “The creature changes throughout the picture. You meet him when he is the size of a cell. Then he is the size of a nickel, then a plate. As he grows, he adapts to his environment.”

It’s telling that the director refers to his monster as “he” rather than “it”. At the time he was considering making *Life*, Espinosa became a father. He became fascinated thinking about the input you invest into something innocent. “If you start giving your child stimulus that is negative, hostile and fearful,” he says, “won’t your child assume this is the environment that it is supposed to be alive in? For me, the creature just wants to communicate.”

The same could be said for Espinosa, smuggling heady ideas into a Sony-financed, A-list-driven thriller. “If you want to watch the movie as a fun space horror movie, it’s a fun space horror movie,” he says. “But if you want to look into it, you might find some small thoughts that will grow.” Scott, Kubrick and Tarkovsky would be proud. ●

LIFE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 MARCH

Clockwise from main:
Espinosa directs Ferguson;
Derry goes zero-G; Jordan kits up;
Ryan Reynolds, who plays
mechanic Roy Adams, on location
with Espinosa; Commander
Katerina Golovkina (Dihovichnaya)
with flight engineer Sho Murakami
(Hiroyuki Sanada).

BY 2017 THE WORLD ECONOMY HAS

COLLAPSED, FOOD, NATURAL RESOURCES

AND OIL ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY. A POLICE

STATE, DIVIDED INTO PARAMILITARY ZONES,

RULES WITH AN IRON HAND.

**NO DISSIDENT IS TOLERATED,
AND YET A SMALL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT
HAS MANAGED TO SURVIVE UNDERGROUND...**

THIRTY YEARS ON FROM ITS RELEASE, A SEEMINGLY MINDLESS ARNIE ACTION FLICK LOOKS STARTLINGLY PROPHETIC.

THE RUNNING MAN

SCREENWRITER STEVEN E. DE SOUZA TELLS THE WILD STORY BEHIND ITS CREATION



THE CALLS ALWAYS

come in around Thanksgiving.

So when my assistant told me I had

five messages from reporters, and two requests for on-air interviews, my response was, "Let me guess: the annual 'Is *Die Hard* a Christmas movie?' debate again?" "No, they're all about *The Running Man*."

I admit, I was surprised. True, since election day it had crossed my mind that reality was beginning to mirror my 30-year-old film, but I assumed that was simply my own insular navel-gazing from inside my Hollywood ivory tower. (Actually a one-storey California rancher, but the metaphor holds.) But apparently a film set in the amazing future year of 2017, in which the Department of Justice has an Entertainment Division, the President has a theatrical agent, two actors are future US Governors and a reality TV show host holds the reins of power, had not gone unnoticed by others — including *Empire*'s editors.

I'm not saying there's necessarily a connection between my keyboard and quantum reality: there are no flatscreen televisions or electric cars in the picture's vision of 2017, nary a mobile phone, and Maria Conchita Alonso's bootleg music is still on cassettes. But it's impossible to look at the film now and not think, "Wait a minute, am I watching

CNN?" Of course, the comparison between Trump and villainous game-show host Killian only goes so far: at least Killian doesn't tweet.

IT ALL STARTED with a book and a delayed flight. One of the producers, George Linder, bought it at an airport on a layover, and, not even knowing 'Richard Bachman' was Stephen King's *nom de plume*, optioned it.

He brought it to fellow producer Rob Cohen, then an executive on the Columbia lot. That's where I came in, when future *Die Hard* producer Joel Silver recommended me to Rob for the screenplay adaptation. The basics were there: the dystopian future, the TV show where people are hunted to their death. But on the journey from page to soundstage much would change, starting with the ending. The novel's climax had hero Ben Richards hijack a plane and crash it into the network building. The studio didn't want the hero to die — thus sparing us all yet another uncomfortable movie/reality comparison.

The studio's first casting idea was Christopher Reeve, envisioned as a high-school teacher whose liberal curriculum put him in the regime's crosshairs. Reeve was interested, pending a rewrite, but in the interim industry buzz was building about *Commando*, the movie I had just wrapped with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Though the taciturn roles of Conan The Barbarian and the Terminator had made him a household name, it was *Commando* that really introduced the Arnold persona that propelled him into superstardom and, yes, politics.

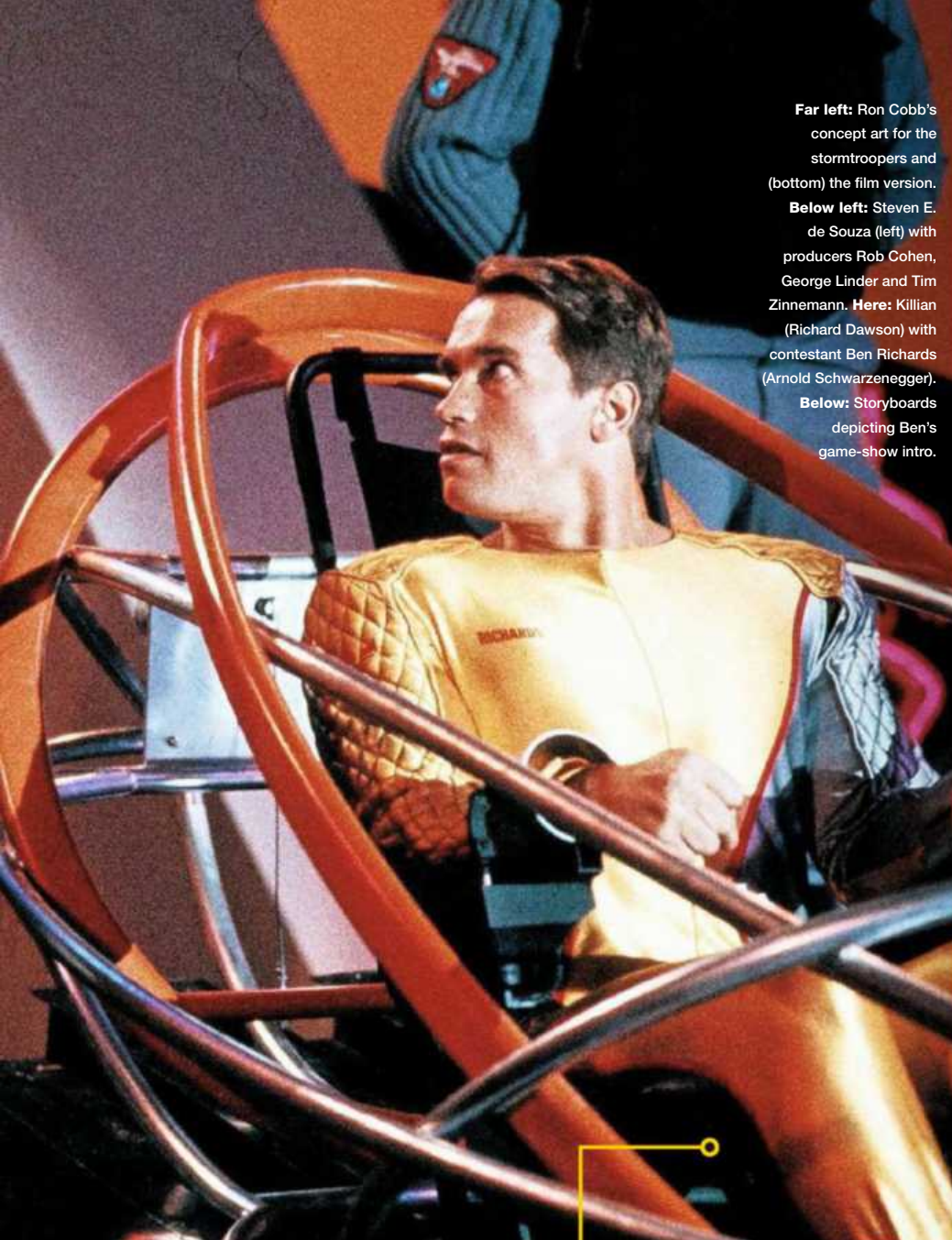
Once Arnold was in the frame, more deviations from the book were inevitable. A future so economically depressed that the hero had to volunteer for a brutal game show to feed his family becomes problematic with Arnold in the role — surely he could get a job delivering pianos? That led to the idea that other circumstances led him there, and the Roman Colosseum, gladiators and *panem et circenses* naturally followed. Arnold's casting also impacted the film's villains: the book's 'Hunters'



Far left: Ron Cobb's concept art for the stormtroopers and (bottom) the film version.

Below left: Steven E. de Souza (left) with producers Rob Cohen, George Linder and Tim Zinnemann. **Here:** Killian (Richard Dawson) with contestant Ben Richards (Arnold Schwarzenegger).

Below: Storyboards depicting Ben's game-show intro.



The shoot turned out to be that rare Hollywood production with more directors than writers. First through the revolving door was George Cosmatos, who had just done *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. His family in Greece had suffered under Nazi occupation, and with that history the Cosmatos draft got very dark. He also wanted to outdo *Rambo*'s stunts and locations. We went on a scout in Vancouver for a sequence in which Richards goes down some rapids to escape pursuers. George also wanted the world of the film's elites to be a biosphere insulated from the chaos outside, so another recee flagged the then-largest shopping centre in the world, the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada.

When I turned in the draft, the studio priced it up and said, "It's going to cost \$24 million. You need to get it down to \$17 million." George said that number was impossible, refused to budge, and left. (He was right: without ever leaving Los Angeles, the production ended up costing \$26 million.)

The studio pursued *Sid & Nancy* director Alex Cox, who dearly wanted to do it, but was too deep into *Walker* to fit us into his schedule. Next was Swiss director Carl Schenkel, who was on and off the movie so quickly my only glimpse of him was the back of his head in an elevator. Then came Ferdinand Fairfax. Ferdie had a fascinating idea that *The Running Man* should be in its entirety the actual broadcast of the fictional show. He also had the notion that a fixture of a British film set — the tea lady, with her cart of coffee, tea and biscuits — should periodically appear out of nowhere, whereupon Hunters, prey and studio crew alike would pause like the armies in *The Man Who Would Be King* when the Holy Men pass through the scene. Alas, this was perhaps too Python-esque for an American studio, and Ferdie was gone before you could say, "What is the capital of Assyria?"

Andrew Davis actually started shooting the movie. But seven days in, executive producer Rob Cohen called me and said, "Come to dailies today." I had just picked my young daughter up from gymnastics, so I brought her along. In the screening room were a handful of executives... and Arnold, direct from the set in his yellow jumpsuit. The film started: action footage of the ice-rink fight with Subzero, so there was no dialogue, just the hypnotic whirr of the projector, with the smoke curling up from Arnold's cigar in the light beam like the opening scene of *Citizen Kane*.

"UGH! That's so gross!" The stage whisper was at my elbow, coming from the only person in the room in a leotard. "Mister, could you please put that out?" Everyone froze. Then Arnold smiled and put out the cigar. Only the first stage in his chivalry, because Amy promptly fell asleep on Arnold, who left her undisturbed... a word that could hardly describe the mood in the room when the lights came up.

The last several shots had shown Arnold palming something from the ice: one of the dead Stalkers' exploding hockey pucks. This wasn't from the script, but something Andy had

were anonymous figures in the guise of ordinary citizens. While those were sufficient adversaries for a protagonist King described as "scrawny", we now had to come up with villains bigger and badder than our 6' 2", 230lb hero. So we brainstormed colourful, supersized, wrestler-like characters, who were revised as we went along. So 'the Hangman' morphed into 'Buzzsaw', while 'Captain Freedom' began as 'the Viking' (with Dolph Lundgren as the model before Jesse Ventura, later Governor of Minnesota, was cast).

A bigger problem was King's portrayal of the game show. I don't know whether he didn't get TV reception up in Maine when he was writing it, but the book's future game show resembled a programme from the 1950s: just a host with a microphone and a pretty girl with index cards. By the era of our production, game shows were in an arms race to outdo each other with gimmicks and eye candy. So ours became an outrageous potpourri of every trope imaginable, complete with audience participation, literal fireworks and dancing girls choreographed by Paula Abdul at the start of her career.



pitched in a meeting. In Act III, he'd suggested, when all seems lost, Ben Richards blows away Killian's last studio guards with the pilfered puck! When it was pointed out that would make Arnold's character a shitheel who'd let his friends die one by one, keeping the puck in reserve just to save his own ass, that had seemed to be the end of it. Instead, Andy shot it and it meant the end of his tenure. Fittingly enough, he went from this brief sentence in movie jail to *Above The Law*.

WITH OUR RELEASE date looming ahead like the Titanic's iceberg, Michael Mann came to the rescue. An old friend of Rob Cohen's from their *Miami Vice* days, he now recommended Paul Michael Glaser. Best known as the original Starsky on the '70s TV show, Glaser had moved more and more into directing. More importantly, after 20 years working at American television's brutal pace, he could hit the ground running.

Because the multiple start and stops had bled the already-stretched budget, we couldn't afford to shoot the other TV shows supposedly aired by the ICS Network. We did get in 'Climbing For Dollars' and a poster for 'The Hate Boat', but the other programmes were reduced to off-camera audio (listen carefully: they're still there). Dynamo's opera singing was a last-minute change. The Dutch actor, Erland van Lidth, mentioned he could do it and we thought it was funny. Sadly, he died of a heart attack before the film came out. (In a bizarre touch, his family asked for a preview print of the film to show at his memorial service, a scene I can barely imagine, and I make up stuff like this for a living.)

Richard Dawson was our casting director Jackie Burch's brilliant choice. Not only was he an experienced actor, he was the real-life host of *Family Feud*. But his performance as Killian became problematic on two levels. On the game-show set he was ad-libbing like mad, kissing Paula's dancers and engaging the extras. Wonderful as this was, it was tilting the balance of the film. And he simply refused to allow his character to show any fear of Arnold. In post-production we were so desperate for a moment like that, we printed a reaction shot of Dawson backwards to make him look nervous.

Killian's aren't the only good lines in the movie. What's funny is how many of them were put in after we shot it. Several days of ADR (automatic dialogue replacement) are built into actors' contracts, but you never have them come in until the movie is locked editorially. So as we prepared for our test screening, the question was, "What do we do about these missing lines for Arnold?" As it happened, I'm famous from Silver Lake to Malibu for my Arnold impression, which I've used over the years to prank studio executives on the phone. So I ended up recording multiple lines, several of which survive by accident in the finished film. At the 11th hour, another of our producers, Tim Zinnemann, penned a now eerily prescient opening crawl, the negative of which was still wet when we rushed the print to Palm Springs for our sneak preview.

Arnold's first appearance on screen was greeted by thunderous applause. The laughs were in all the right places, and once Dawson came on screen, I saw an audience embrace a villain to a degree I didn't encounter again until Hans Gruber.

And then Killian — the man the audience loved to hate — became the man they hated with a vengeance, when Arnold and Maria were both brutally killed by Jesse Ventura's Captain Freedom. The entire theatre gasped as one. Then, when they realised they'd been duped, their relief and joy was explosive.

Monday I came into the office and was surprised to see the tenth reel broken down. When I asked why, I was told two scenes were being swapped. Incredibly, these were the scenes where Jesse 'killed' Arnold and Maria, and the subsequent scene explaining that this had been staged by Killian with digital trickery. I was sure I wasn't hearing this right — it would be the equivalent of, in *The Sting*, having Redford and Newman say, "Let's pretend to kill each other..." The reasoning? A studio suit had fixated on the audience comment cards, where some viewers who otherwise gave the film a "Definitely Recommend" score filled out the, "Was there any part you didn't like, and why?" with, "I didn't understand how Killian fooled the audience." In an audience of over 600 people, there were less than a dozen cards like that, but such is the strength of audience research weighed against a studio executive's backbone. In the film as finished, watching the fight is like watching a replay of a horse race after you know the outcome. Your pulse doesn't even rise, and it's my biggest regret about the film to this day. Well, along with the yellow jumpsuits.

THIRTY YEARS ON, assuming "current reality" is not an option, what is the film's legacy? If you Google "Fuck You, Hunger Games", you'll find a video with someone doing an Arnold impersonation (mine is better), singing about the similarities between *The Hunger Games* and *The Running Man*. (You could throw *Battle Royale* in there, too.) The decapitation collar has been emulated many times, and a producer of *American Gladiators* admitted to me they deliberately copied us, even showing clips in their network pitch.

Arnold himself has been talking about plans for a sequel, reboot or hybrid blend of both. For myself, I'd like to see someone dive into the studio vault and dig out the original cut with Arnold's 'death' in it as planned. Fortunately with a Blu-ray, you can now use your remote control to put those scenes back in the original order and forget reality's version. And if you wish that that do-over also applied to the real world, take heart: although the opening scene takes place in 2017, the bulk of *The Running Man* unfolds two years later. So insert the "this is fine" dog meme here, and drink until 2019! ●

Clockwise from below: Ron Cobb's concept art for Ripsaw, and (here) his on-screen iteration, renamed Buzzsaw and played by Gus Rethwisch; Maria Conchita Alonso as Amber; Captain Freedom (Jesse Ventura) fights Ben; The running man.





POST-APOCALYPSE NOW

THREE MORE DYSTOPIAN MOVIES THAT TAKE PLACE IN 2017

CHERRY 2000 (1987)

The age-old tale of a man trying to take his sex-bot back to the factory for repairs, this curio had its release repeatedly postponed, before making just \$14,000 from a \$10 million budget. The plot sees tracker Edith (Melanie Griffith), businessman Sam (David Andrews) and his robotic love-mate Cherry (Pamela Gidley) travel across a ravaged wasteland, heading for the town of Glory Hole.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

Sexy robots haven't really caught on outside of certain technology conferences. Neither has the crimson bouffant hairdo sported by Griffith.

FORTRESS (1992)

The US government decrees that families may only have one child, so ex-soldier John Brennick (Christopher Lambert) and his wife (Loryn Locklin), who is pregnant for the second time, make for Canada. Alas, they're busted and Brennick is sentenced to 31 years in a prison called the Fortress. Inmates are given 'Intestinator' implants and monitored by a terrifying computer called Zed-10.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

American prisons are yet to be kitted out with flamethrower cyborgs and laser-guns. But give Trump time.

BARB WIRE (1996)

Essentially *Casablanca* with added stunts, cleavage and Meat Puppets In Vapourspace song, Paramount's lambasted actioner swaps Humphrey Bogart for Pamela Anderson, as Barb, owner of nightclub the Hammerhead during the Second American Civil War. She battles bad guys, often using a stiletto heel, in a bid to get a bioweapon scientist safely to Toronto.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

A dodgy cabal have seized control of the US government, racists are on the rise and times are so tough that Americans insist on payment in Canadian dollars. On the other hand, it depicts a world in which Tommy Lee's music is popular. NICK DE SEMLYEN



**BECAUSE ONE ARNOLD
SCHWARZENEGGER ARTICLE
IS NEVER ENOUGH... IN A
WORLD EXCLUSIVE, THE BIG
MAN HIMSELF REFLECTS ON
THE PIVOTAL PERFORMANCES
OF HIS CAREER**

WORDS JAMES DYER

LOOK BACK



THE BREAKTHROUGH



JOE SANTO

STAY HUNGRY, 1976

After bear-wrestling under the pseudonym Arnold Strong and playing an uncredited henchman in *The Long Goodbye*, Schwarzenegger bagged this breakout role. As Joe Santo, a kind-hearted bodybuilder set on winning Mr Universe, he not only got to keep his name but saw off Truman Capote (nominated for *Murder By Death*) to win a Golden Globe for New Star Of The Year.

"I wanted to be like Charles Bronson or Clint Eastwood — all these action heroes. So it was a surprise, in a way, that all of a sudden I was doing films like *Stay Hungry* and *Happy Anniversary & Goodbye*, which had nothing to do with action at all. *Stay Hungry* was very challenging as it was my first big movie. I did my best the way I understood it then, but if I could do it over again I'd do a much better job, partly because my knowledge of the English language is much better.

"It was a really sweet beginning to have my first movie open and to suddenly get a Golden Globe. That was great! I remember that the cameraman on *Stay Hungry* came up to me on the set and said, 'Arnold, I've been a cameraman for 30 years and you know something? The camera loves you. You cannot train for that. You're gonna go all the way!'"



THE WAR

CONAN

CONAN THE BARBARIAN, 1982

He crushed his enemies, saw them driven before him and heard the lamentations of every naysayer who'd ever thought to doubt him. Through Conan Schwarzenegger became a movie star, carving out a Hollywood career with one great stroke of his Atlantean sword.

"Back then, everyone was talking about the little guys. People said to me, 'You can never be an actor, you can never be a leading man.

THE PERFECT MACHINE



T-800

THE TERMINATOR, 1984

Swords and sorcery made him a star, but it was a machine that made Schwarzenegger an icon. As the soulless stalker of Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor and, seven years later, her unlikely saviour, Schwarzenegger crafted the screen persona with which he would forever be associated.

"I'm proud of most of my movies, but when I think about *The Terminator* I'm more proud of James Cameron. I'm the product of some really extraordinary directors. When I worked with someone like Ivan Reitman or Paul Verhoeven or James Cameron or John McTiernan in *Predator*, that's when I could shine. And when I didn't have that, some movies did well and some of them went right in the toilet, but none of them really stood out. I really give the credit to those directors that had vision and faith in me.

"When we promoted *The Terminator*, Jim Cameron said, 'Can you imagine if someone with a regular American accent had played him? It only works because you sound like a machine!' When I said, 'Fuck you, asshole,' it wasn't like a human being saying it, and that's what made everyone laugh.

"*Terminator 2* was more challenging from an acting point of view, because I still had to sell the idea I was a machine, but dial back a little bit so the vulnerability could come out. The T-1000 was more sophisticated, so that created tension: people thought, 'Oh shit, our Termie could get a beating!' The more I hang out with this kid, the more I adopt human characteristics. I was still mowing everyone down — I'm a Terminator! — but they were knee shots that would not kill if they got immediate treatment. I'm sure some of them died anyway."



WARRIOR

Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, Woody Allen — those are the sex symbols today. And they weigh, like, 150lb! Look at you — you look like a monster!"

"Then came the big bang, which was *Conan The Barbarian*. When [executive producer] Ed Pressman saw *Stay Hungry* and *Pumping Iron*, he got the idea to buy the Conan rights. He thought, 'Wow, we finally found an actor with the muscles!' The '70s had been an amazing decade for me. It was the decade where I won the top bodybuilding competitions and my dream of acting happened. Then in 1982, ten

years after beginning, I was swinging Conan's sword as part of a \$20 million movie — a movie directed by John Milius, who was one of the hottest directors at the time, and written by Oliver Stone! That was like, 'Wow, America really is the land of opportunity. Dreams can come true.'

"I worked very closely with Jeff Bridges and Sally Field when I did *Stay Hungry*, and when we did *Conan* I was fascinated by how James Earl Jones and Max von Sydow rehearsed. I would go to James Earl Jones' trailer and he would show me how to work my lines, because there were a lot of long monologues. First he would write out the dialogue vertically, only two words on each line. Then he would write it out horizontally. It was to break up the rhythm: it trained my brain to look at the page differently each time, so you start paying more attention to the words rather than where you are in the speech."

THE ZINGER-SLINGER

JOHN MATRIX

COMMANDO, 1985

The Arnie persona, deliverer of killer puns and wry quips, began here, in his first project with screenwriter Steven E. de Souza. The film is memorable for many reasons, from its steel-drum score to Vernon Wells' chain-mail vest, but it's the perfectly delivered one-liners ("I lied"/"Let off some steam") that made Schwarzenegger into a quote machine.

"Steve de Souza was a writer that immediately figured me out. That's why he wrote really well for me. There were many films where he didn't get credit, because he only did two or three one-liners — but they always worked. Each one of those lines only landed when I said it with a certain smirk, though. If you try to say them seriously they don't work. But if you do it the right way then people want you to say it to them when they meet you on the street.

"It was also the accent. You could have a hospital scene where a doctor says, 'I just looked at the X-rays, it's not a tumour.' No-one will ever repeat that. But in *Kindergarten Cop*, what I say is, 'It's not a *doo-mah!*' All the kids laughed because this fucking guy cannot even pronounce 'tumour' the right way. That's funny!"



THE COMEDIAN

JULIUS BENEDICT

TWINS, 1988

The first of three collaborations with Ivan Reitman, *Twins* threw a huge curveball, following action heavyweights *Predator*, *Red Heat* and *The Running Man* with a light-hearted buddy comedy. The *Terminator*, it turned out, was funny.

"I did a whole bunch of action movies in the '80s, maybe two a year, and my salary went

from \$1 million to \$3 million to \$5 million to \$10 million to \$50 million — it just kept going up! Studios were banking on my performances, but I had to convince them I could do a comedy. I convinced them by not taking any salary at all. I felt very strongly that I had a sense of humour and was funny. I'd had a good trainer in Milton Berle. Milton was my friend and the number-one television comedian — he was Mr Television. I'd learned a lot from him — he even wrote jokes for my speeches — so it was natural to want to go and do comedy.

"I finally convinced Ivan Reitman to develop something for me. He said, 'You have a certain innocence, a certain sweetness, a shyness. If we can capture all of this on the screen, we could have a big fucking movie. The question is: can you act that out?' That was the challenge. He developed five projects and one of them was 'The Experiment', which ended up being called *Twins*. And it worked!"





THE HEAVYWEIGHT

ROMAN MELNYK

AFTERMATH, 2017

Following 2015's zombie drama *Maggie*, *Aftermath* once again places Schwarzenegger in the role of a father riven by loss. Based on the 2002 Überlingen air collision, the film sees a family man facing devastation after his wife and pregnant daughter are killed in the crash. A role that swings from grief to nihilism to impotent rage, it's Schwarzenegger's most demanding to date and the performance of his career so far.

"I really had to immerse myself in the character of someone that had lost his family. And not only that, but the disappointment that no-one is taking responsibility for it. It's based on a true story but it's not exactly the way it really happened. There's already a German version called *Flug In Die Nacht* that I saw a long time ago, and they wanted to do this one a little different.

"I probably got the role because of *Maggie*. Hollywood is a town where people come up with great original stuff and are daring, but at the same time there's a huge percentage of people who do the same thing over and over. They told me 40 years ago to kick ass on screen. So you do *Conan*, then there's another *Conan* and then there's another thing. You do the action-hero stuff because that's what people like you in. Then they see you do a dramatic piece and all of a sudden they say, 'That is a whole new Schwarzenegger!' People always thought I didn't have that range. Now they know I do. I cannot rely on just action anymore.

"It's interesting the amount of projects I get now that are small movies with real character-driven issues. It gives me the opportunity to really work on those characters and do a good job. In the early days we'd spend five hours on the action, then half an hour on the character scene inside a car. I'd say, 'Wait a minute, it's a very dramatic scene!' But no, you cover it quickly with three cameras and do a few takes because we've got to move on to the shot where the car blows up and he flies through the air! Finally, in movies like *Aftermath*, I get to concentrate on the scenes." 🍷

AFTERMATH IS IN CINEMAS AND ON DOWNLOAD FROM 7 APRIL AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 49



HEART HEART

FOR THE THIRD IN OUR SERIES OF
DIRECTOR-ON-DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS,
PAUL FEIG SITS DOWN TO TALK *LOVE ACTUALLY*
WITH RICHARD CURTIS

PORTRAITS STEVE SCHOFIELD

Paul Feig and Richard
Curtis, photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
19 February 2017.





Ageing rocker Billy Mack (Bill Nighy) in his Robert Palmer-style music vid.

PAUL FEIG (director of *Ghostbusters* and *Bridesmaids*): “I’m not a cynical guy. Even though the genre-jumping Howard Hawks is my favourite director of all time, I’ve always loved movies that aren’t afraid to simply entertain. Frank Capra, the king of what his contemporaries disparagingly called ‘Capra-corn’, is a particular hero of mine, unapologetically making such feel-good classics as *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *Meet John Doe* and my favourite film, *It’s A Wonderful Life*. Capra wasn’t afraid to place ‘Making An Audience Happy’ at the top of his checklist, and audiences continue to respond by watching his movies again and again even after all these years.

When I first watched Richard Curtis’ film *Love Actually*, I got the same overwhelmed, emotional feeling I got back in film school in the 1980s when I saw George Bailey learn that taking care of his friends and family while living an honorable life made him “the richest man in town”. To discover a film this pure of heart and eager to please, made in one of the more turbulent times in recent history – post-9/11, Iraq War-era 2003 – felt like I had stumbled upon some sort of gift from the past. And yet there it was, an R-rated, British romantic comedy/drama that dared to proclaim that the greatest thing about humanity is our ability to love and be loved. Not making some sly statement about the hypocrisy of mankind; not some incitement of the general public’s desire for happy stories – just an honest-to-God hilarious, crowd-pleasing movie. The greatest movies are the ones you want to watch again and again, and *Love Actually* is one that’s religiously played on a loop every Christmas. So I couldn’t wait to meet its writer/director for the first time, and grill him on all things *Love*.”

Feig: I have to admit, I didn’t see *Love Actually* until just a few years ago.

Curtis: I thought you were going to say, “I didn’t pick it.” *[Laughter]* “I got a begging letter from *Empire*...”

Feig: “I haven’t seen it yet, but I hear it’s very good...” No, I actually didn’t see it when it first came out. It’s one of those movies everyone references, and I know and love everybody in it, so I finally watched it. And was blown away by how lovely it was. But let me back up a little bit. You’re responsible for one of my favourite shows of all time: *Blackadder*. So what was the journey for you like, from that to this?

Curtis: The funny thing is, *Blackadder* is not a very romantic, optimistic thing, even though it is in its own way joyful. But when I was doing TV, the one thing I found out is we couldn’t do anything emotional, really. Because people can agree on a joke much easier than they can agree on something that’s



heartfelt. So I used up my cynical side, and by the time we got to the end of *Blackadder* and *Not The Nine O'Clock News* I had a yearning to do something with a bit of heart. Because in my real life love had completely and utterly dominated the landscape.

Feig: Yeah. Because you write so many great — for lack of a better term — romantic comedies. And you embrace the form so much and are so effective at it. How do you approach these stories?

Curtis: I didn't actually know *Four Weddings And A Funeral* was a romantic comedy. It didn't occur to me. While we were making it the films in my mind were *Diner*, *Manhattan*, *Breaking Away*, *Gregory's Girl*...

But it didn't occur to me that that was a genre. I did know *Notting Hill* was a romantic comedy. I thought, "Well, I've done one by mistake. Now I know what I'm doing, I'll do another." But then I didn't want to do a third. [With] *Love Actually*, I'd worked out a whole film about the Hugh [Grant] story and another about the Colin [Firth] story. But I decided it would be fresher to weave a lot of storylines together. To just have the best scenes from ten films.

Feig: I read an interview where you said you were sick at the time and so couldn't write dialogue. You decided to take walks and just think up stories. I find that fascinating.

Curtis: Well, I'm not very good at story. As was revealed on the day when I realised *Notting Hill* has exactly the same plot as *Four Weddings*. [Laughs] It was like going out to look for a new house and ending up buying the one you're living in already. Anyway, yes, I'd had a back operation and ended up walking around a lot, figuring out each strand. How does it start? What's the complication? How do you end it? It was a joy. It took me back to my sitcom roots, where the plots have quick, simple arcs.

Feig: Did you write each story on its own?

Curtis: I think so. It's all coming back now... The movie originally started with a conversation between some guys in a bar. Oddly enough I think it was a joke that Judd [Apatow] then

wrote in a movie ten years later. So this guy was talking about how he fantasised a lot about his wife's death, because he thought there'd be a lot of women in cute black frocks at the funeral. Some of whom would hand him their phone number, saying, "I know it's going to be complicated for you. It doesn't have to be deep." I thought, "Well, there's one bit. What comes second?" Slowly building up this wave. I'm now feeling really mournful, because I'm remembering all the stuff that wasn't in it. There was a big story about a schoolgirl who fell in love with another schoolgirl. And then we zoomed into a photograph at Laura Linney's charity and it turned out these two Kenyan women were talking about how they didn't like their daughters' fiancés. There were a lot of fallers.

Feig: What I love about your writing is you find these little moments that aren't life-changing — they're little snippets of life. I also love the movie's framing device of people at the airport. On *Saturday Night Live* in the '70s, one of the short films was just slow motion of people running out of gates and hugging, set to a Simon & Garfunkel song, *Homeward Bound*. It just destroyed me, because that's what life is.

Curtis: I'm glad I never saw it! I remember the moment I thought of that framing device. We were filming the Mr Bean film and I landed and got stuck. No-one picked me up. And I literally sat for two hours and watched three planes come in and saw this happening. I thought, "Oh, that's proof of the pudding. Anybody that says that's not what the world's like is wrong."

Feig: Tell me about the casting. Because the cast is crazy. It's hysterical watching the Andrew Lincoln scenes now, because America really knows him as Rick Grimes.

Curtis: Back then it was a mixture of famous people and not-famous people. The problem now is all the not-famous people have become so fucking famous! Martin Freeman became the Hobbit. Andrew Lincoln joined *The Walking Dead*. Keira Knightley has had her career. It's a different movie now to the one we made.

But it was a lovely experience, because there was no pressure from the studio. Once Emma [Thompson] and Hugh were signed up they were happy. The weirdest story was Bill [Nighy].

Feig: Who is so brilliant.

Curtis: I was choosing between two people, one of whom is a very famous comedian and one of whom is a very famous actor. And I couldn't decide. So I said to Mary Selway, my casting director, "Get me an actor for the readthrough." She suggested Bill Nighy. I said, "Great," because I had seen him in a couple of leftwing, cynical plays and I knew I didn't like him.

Feig: Was he not famous at that point?

Curtis: No. He'd done a movie called *Still Crazy*, which hadn't been a success. And so he came along to the readthrough and was just so perfect we cast him five minutes later. And I've never done a movie he's not been in since. We didn't audition one person for that role except Bill.

PM David (Hugh Grant) falls for Natalie (Martine McCutcheon).



Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and Juliet (Keira Knightley) get hitched.



Sarah (Laura Linney) and Jamie (Colin Firth) unite at the wedding.



Future Stacey Joanne Page and future Hobbit Martin Freeman.



Feig: This still blows my mind, but you've only directed three movies.

Curtis: And my hair's white.

Feig: Well, one movie can do that to you. Were you always planning on moving towards directing?

Curtis: It was an interesting journey. I'm very, very, very unpictorial as a writer. You'll spot that from my movies — they're quite talky. As well as all being set on the street I live on. There's not a lot of pictorial skill there.

Feig: But a short commute.

Curtis: Well, yes. I was always amazed at Mike Newell's ability in *Four Weddings* to get to the truth by the choices he made. I didn't know how he was doing it. It was like watching a chef: "Why does my steak taste so disgusting and their steak so delicious?" So when I saw Mike at work I thought, "I'll never direct a film." But I was incredibly obsessed with the performances and what beats I thought were or weren't missing. I remember going up to him during one scene, after he'd done 17 takes of a really complicated camera move, and saying, "Look, we still haven't got it." He said, "Oh fucking hell. Another take for Mr Curtis!" I hid in the corner of the church and he shouted over at me, "Richard, yes or no?" I went, "Yes-ish..." He said, "Yes-ish means yes. Moving on!" On *Notting Hill*, Roger [Michell] had some tough times too, with me being a pain in the arse. I mean, after I started directing I thought, "It's incredible he didn't kill me." So I only directed in order to not get killed. But I'm very disappointed by some of the things in the films I've done, just because I know they could have been done better by someone who's better with the whole camera thing.

Feig: I beg to differ. Because as I've found out over the years, everything else is in support of what the audience really cares about, which is those actors interacting. I've said to a lot of young filmmakers, if you're going to pare anything away, lose the fancy shots. It's all about pictures of faces.



Left: Curtis and Feig take a trip down memory lane. **Here:** Grant (reluctantly) dances round 'Downing Street'; **Below:** Andrew Lincoln's bereft Mark in 'the stalker scene'.





Curtis: That's the decision I've made. And you're a better director than me, so you've made that decision with more to base it on. As we'd planned it, the most expensive shot in *Love Actually* was going to be right at the end of the movie, where eight out of the ten stories come together. One character was going to be driving over a bridge, one was going to be running under it, one was going to be at the Houses Of Parliament, and so on. It was going to cost us half a million dollars. Eventually the producer said, and I agreed, that I didn't have the skill to do it. It was very lucky, because we would have ended up throwing that away on day two of the edit. Editing that film was like playing three-dimensional chess, because any scene could go after any other scene. We moved the pieces around so much, that shot would no longer have made any sense.

Feig: For a first movie as director, it's hugely complicated. There are so many characters and locations. How did you feel the week before you started shooting it? I know I mostly panic.

Curtis: Well, I didn't know any better! And I had to start again ten times, in a sense. When I think back to the boat film [*The Boat That Rocked*] or *About Time*, I had a lot of time to get to know the actors. On *Love Actually* they were gone before they'd begun. Maybe that was a good thing, because they didn't get a chance to see through me. The worst moment for me was the Christmas scene in the Alan Rickman/Emma Thompson household. She's about to open the present and get this big, sad surprise [receiving a Joni Mitchell CD from her husband instead of the gold necklace she knows he's bought]. Then Emma turns to me and goes, "Richard, I don't even know my son's name. You haven't given us any information about their Christmas traditions. But I have to act the mother of these children..."

Feig: Wow. My stomach just dropped into my shoes.

Curtis: I know! That taught me a big lesson: I hadn't prepared enough.

Feig: I got yelled at by Joan Plowright once. We were rehearsing this movie *I Am David*. I'd blocked it all out, but suddenly she was moving all over.

I was like, "Maybe we'll try this..." And she goes, "If this is going to be a rehearsal where actors are asked for their input, I'll continue. But if you're just going to tell me where to sit, then just tell me." It was awful. And she was completely right. >



Love is all around.

Curtis: That's awkward. I can think of a few other dreadful *Love Actually* moments, but...

Feig: Tell me! I love the tough moments. What was the hardest story to get right?

Curtis: Probably Emma and Alan, because they had the realest story to tell. Hugh's story had its tricky moments too. He didn't want to dance. Hugh was fundamentally nervous that I was turning him back into a floppy-haired romantic lead. And the more he thought about it, the less likely he thought it was that the Prime Minister would dance down the stairs. But he changed his mind, due to contractual obligation. **[Laughs]** Look, a lot of the shoot was joyful. Most of it was. But I was scared from beginning to end every single day.

Feig: Were you feeling a lot of pressure, because of the unusual structure?

Curtis: Everyone thought it was a big gamble. People said, "Do we have to do this? Can't we just have Hugh's story?" But I didn't want to do that. It certainly wasn't a big hit: it made \$60 million

in the US or something, half as much as *Notting Hill*. But it's had this lovely afterlife. I think partly because it's a Christmas movie. And partly because it's fun to watch because you forget what's going to happen next.

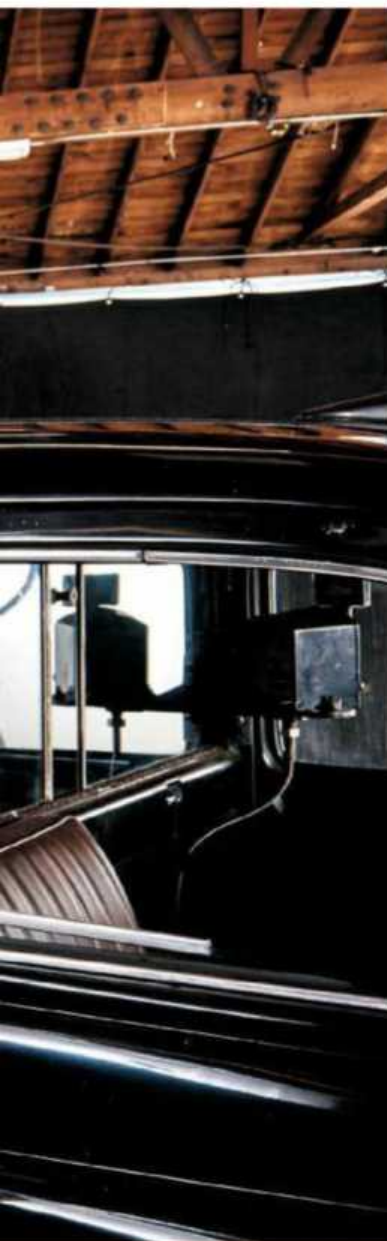
Feig: The goal for anyone doing comedy is always multiple viewings. For me [*Monty Python And The Holy Grail*] is that way: you're so happy when certain scenes come on...

Curtis: I'm ashamed to say that I just watched *Step Brothers* for the first time the other day. For my son Spike, who I saw it with, it would have been his 30th watch. It's Paul Greengrass' favourite movie of all time — that and *The Battle Of Algiers*.

Feig: Oh my God.

Curtis: I actually saw *Love Actually* recently for the first time in 15 years. My daughter booked us five seats for a midnight Christmas screening in New York. She said, "This is going to be great. There'll be lots of people there — they'll all boo when Heike Makatsch uncrosses her legs and

sing along with the soundtrack." We turned up and how wrong she was. There were nine people in the cinema, of whom we were five. Two were kissing, two were sleeping. But I liked the movie more than I thought I would. Because what's been worrying me for the past few years is that it's tonally inconsistent. Some of it's very sweet, some of it's really raunchy. I remember [Universal chairman/CEO] Stacey Snider saying to me, "It'll make \$50 million less if you put the nudity in." But I didn't want to lose it. As a teenager I only went to the movies for the nudity, and I didn't want to let my younger self down. **[Laughs]** As an older man, thinking of stopping, I do think I'm proudest of the sad stories, in particular Laura Linney's one, which is sort of autobiographical. But I'm delighted by the optimism. Because I've always felt that the reason I do comedy is that I had such a happy childhood. I had such friends, I had an unbelievably blessed time at university. Why then would I focus on child abuse? I do think



Curtis offers Emma Thompson some last-minute direction.



The married Harry (Alan Rickman) is tempted by Mia (Heike Makatsch).



Daniel (Liam Neeson) with son Sam (Thomas Brodie-Sangster).



Curtis is reunited with Rowan Atkinson's obsequious sales clerk for Red Nose Day 2017's sequel.

that somehow this film is a gift from my younger, more optimistic self. Even though I still believe in the fundamental message. This idea that love is somehow sentimental is an insane fallacy.

Feig: It's everywhere.

Curtis: A million people in love in Los Angeles. One serial killer if you're lucky. But yet, if you watch TV, there's all these serial killers running around. There'd be nobody left alive except you and me. And I'd be about to kill you.

Feig: That's our next movie! I feel like now, with the period we're coming into in the world, we're going to need more movies like *Love Actually*, to remind people that the human race is actually pretty wonderful. Which scene do people want to talk to you about the most?

Curtis: Well, it's funny. When I did *Blackadder*, someone working with Rowan [Atkinson] said that 93 per cent of the mail he received was about the last two minutes of the last episode [in World War I-set *Blackadder Goes Forth*] where they all go over the top. And the first thing most people talk to me about is that scene where Emma cries. The sign stuff between Andrew Lincoln and Keira Knightley comes up a lot too. Not always unconditionally praised. I met a woman the other day who just referred to it as 'the stalker scene'.

Feig: Oh God.

Curtis: "He was the best man! What was he doing there?" We're doing some more sign stuff with the Red Nose Day film, which I'm shooting at the moment. [It airs on BBC One as part of Red Nose Day on 24 March.] It's been touching to see many of the actors again and revisit those characters.

Feig: I'm lucky enough to have just seen the first two minutes of it, and it made me cry.

Curtis: I did toy with the idea of doing a proper *Love Actually* sequel. But I wonder what I think now about love, because I've experienced a lot of deaths and illness. I think therefore I would make a sadder film, and I'm not sure that would be great.

Feig: Called *Love Possibly*?

Curtis: *Love Eventually*. [Laughs] My son told me a good joke the other day. He said if he started an undertakers he would call it Four Funerals And A Funeral. That made me laugh. ●



INSIDE THE

THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

MIND OF ERIC BANA

ONCE A STAND-UP COMIC WITH A PASSABLE TOM CRUISE IMPRESSION, HE IS NOW AN ACTOR OF FORMIDABLE INTENSITY. ERIC BANA EXPLAINS THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND HIS UNUSUAL CAREER

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT PORTRAITS MATT HOLYOAK

Eric Bana,
photographed
exclusively for
Empire in Dublin on
18 February 2017.



ERIC BANA USED TO BE A COMEDIAN.

If you don't believe that, head to YouTube and have a browse of his sketch show and stand-up work. It's often very good. He does impressions (Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Columbo), and canny character comedy. His teen magician Alex Topolino, who often winds up severing fingers and limbs, is a particular standout.

When it's remarked upon in articles about him, it's usually with a degree of incredulity. And that's because the 48-year-old Melbourne native has long since become associated with work of a far more serious bent. While comedy has been dotted throughout his big-screen career — his debut film, *The Castle*; Adam Sandler vehicle *Funny People*; last year's *Special Correspondents* with Ricky Gervais — for the most part Bana is at his best when he's brooding. And since Andrew Dominik's *Chopper*, in which Bana played a hair-trigger psycho with a tattooed torso and sliced-off ears, thrust him into the Hollywood spotlight in 2000, he's given good grimace in the likes of *Black Hawk Down*, Ang Lee's *Hulk*, *Munich*, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and *Deliver Us From Evil*. Blessed with natural good looks, charisma and intensity, he's never less than compelling, and always excellent.

There's a sense that, had he wanted to, he could have used these natural talents to become one of the biggest stars in the world. Instead he chose to be a homebody who puts living in Melbourne with his wife and kids, and a lifelong hobby racing cars, above chasing the big bucks and tentpole pictures. Choosy to a fault, he's made just 25 films in 20 years, the latest of which is this month's Jim Sheridan-directed drama *The Secret Scripture*, in which he plays an Irish psychiatrist trying to unravel a decades-old mystery. It's in Dublin that *Empire* meets him, in a private room at The Merrion hotel. Bana is in town for the Dublin International Film Festival premiere of Sheridan's movie, and flew in just the day before from Melbourne, a 24-hour flight. He should be utterly destroyed, yet is relaxed and amiable throughout our time together. There's evidence of the focused, serious, introspective thinker we were expecting, of course, but every now and again another part of Bana's personality, and past, peeks through too.

There seems to be a pattern to your career over the years.

Fuck, can you help me? Is there a pattern? Fuck. Help me figure out what I'm doing next, then.

The pattern is you seem to be attracted to very intense, serious material, like this movie. Is that something that speaks more to your tastes?

It's a combination of what I get sent, and definitely my taste. I appreciate good comedy as well, but there's no doubt that if I'm scanning ten titles I'm going to go for something that's dramatically interesting as an audience member. It's only natural that I gravitate towards that stuff when it's in my reading pile. And it tends to be where I find the most interesting characters. I just always choose the best thing in the pile. That's nearly always been drama.

Your breakthrough movie, *Chopper*, set the tone: it's dark, violent and intense. How did you end up in that movie?

I got the phone call to audition when I was on my honeymoon, so August 1997. By Christmas that year I knew I had the part, but we didn't start making it for another two years or something. The experience of shooting it was a bit overwhelming. There was a lot to take in. More than anything else I felt like a sponge, or a receiving tower, overloaded with information and emotions to process. Every day was different. It was stressful, it was fun, it was tense, it was loose. It was like ten movies in one.

Then Hollywood started to call. You started in comedy, but were starring in *Black Hawk Down*, *Hulk* and *Troy*, none of which are laugh-fests. Did you feel pigeonholed?

I was certainly in no rush to disprove the theory that I could do drama. I didn't care at all what people knew or didn't know about my past. The quality of material and directors that was coming in, that more than anything was what I wasn't going to walk away from. I'm still tempted to return to comedy, though, now and again. My brain still thinks in sketch-comedy form: I see the world in two- or three-minute sketches.

It was an amazing run, though. You worked with Ridley Scott, Ang Lee, Wolfgang Petersen, Steven Spielberg, right off the bat... Curtis Hanson, too. Tiny film [*Lucky You*], but yeah, he was in there.

***Black Hawk Down* was first.**

That was a film I thought I could go and hide in. I had other offers at the time for three-handers

and four-handers, but in that you were just one of 33 guys in this film. And it was Ridley. I had no expectation that I was going to pop in that film, or that anything was going to come out of that. I just wanted to be a part of it. I had never worked on a project with that many other actors before. I've worked on big ensembles with sketch comedy, but in that there was 30-plus of us sharing the screen.

Do you remember what number you were on the call sheet?

I don't know why I was so high up on the call sheet, but I think it was five or six, or something. My character grew during pre-production and then, as we started shooting, he got more and more stuff to do.

Your character, Hoot, was alone for a lot of the movie. Was it a solitary experience?

I knew the character was very much a wolf, but that's who he was. I knew the real guy and he was a wolf amongst wolves. That felt like that was the right vibe for him. There was something about that solo-ness that made sense and it was something I was comfortable with. I've had a lot of solo-ness in terms of what I've done over the years.

As an actor, how do you approach roles? Do you do a lot of preparation, psychologically?

I try not to work the same way on every film. I try to be really open in terms of how I approach things. It's really important to me that I have a good working relationship with the director. I tend to try to be a bit malleable, so rather than resist methods, be open to methods. You want to prepare your character to the extent that you're then totally free on the day and the dialogue becomes not irrelevant, but almost. So if someone says, "That scene is gone, you're doing this instead," you're not totally reliant on the structure of those words.

After *Black Hawk Down* came *Hulk*. Was that the time when you consciously went for it, in terms of trying to be a huge movie star?

I don't think so. Maybe I'm completely naive, or was at the time, but it never felt like that to me. It had always felt like, particularly in Ang's version, the Hulk was the star. Jennifer and I, and Sam [Elliott] and Nick Nolte, was another ensemble that was occurring underneath that. It was early Marvel days. It wasn't like now. If you took on that role now, there's no denying it — you're that guy. That's big.

You sign up for six movies.

Exactly. It was very different for me. That was never, ever remotely part of the conscious thought behind that. That world hadn't been established.

I get the impression from past interviews that it wasn't a happy experience for you.

There's nothing I can add to whatever I've said over the last 17 years or whatever it is.



DENIM JACKET, DOLCE & GABBANA



Above (top to bottom): Bana in *Chopper* (2000); As Hoot in *Black Hawk Down* (2001); In Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003); As Avner in *Munich* (2005); Playing Dr. William Grene in his latest movie, *The Secret Scripture*.

You've said that Ang would do 140 takes on some scenes.

It was what it was. I literally couldn't add to it. I'd feel like I'm doing 140 takes of the same answer. *[Laughs]*

How about *Star Trek*? It's your only blockbuster since *Troy* and you took the small role of bad guy Nero. Did you sign up because you knew it would be one-and-done?

Absolutely. It was J.J., and I'd met J.J. in the past and knew him quite well. I really wanted to do the film, but I knew going in that was part of the deal. So I didn't have the angst. You just go in, do Nero, have the time of your life and then get out of there.

What have been your career ambitions?

My heroes in this business are people like Robert Duvall. I was always aware at the beginning that the kind of career I want is a long one, a very long one. I had no interest in the kind of larger, short-term career that would burn out. I know myself that I'd burn out from that. I don't think I'd last. I've tried to pace myself. The only way I can do it for the long haul is by being careful about what I choose. Otherwise I think I'd disappear.

Your role in your new film, *The Secret Scripture*, is a supporting one. Was the fact that Jim Sheridan was directing a big part of the appeal?

Jim's mad as a snake, but in the best possible way. There weren't too many days where I went to work and did the work that I had prepared for the night before, in terms of the scene, the dialogue, the character, what we were meant to do that day. It was a bit of a free-for-all. I loved Jim, and I was fine with all of it. Because of the process we were taking, I felt that in the end it was going to diminish my character's role in the film, which it did, but I was like, "Whatever." There was no other way but complete surrender.

In what way?

What we did with my character, it sort of meandered away into an investigation of some things that are not in the film. My instinct was that [a lot of the footage we shot] wasn't going to end up in the film, but it wasn't my place to fight that fight.

Let's talk about Spielberg's *Munich*. Where does that sit for you in your career?

It was everything. It was one of the most fun, energised, emotional, interesting experiences. All in one. I read that and was like, "This is going to be my favourite film of the year, even if I don't get the role."

Do you tend to get nervous on your first day of a movie?

I get very anxious in pre-production. I have a thing where I always try to go to the cinema the night before my first day of filming. I try to get my prep out of the way, and it doesn't matter

what I see. I think that anxiety is really important. If you lose that feeling of not being able to sleep and questioning yourself, I think it's all over. I've gotten better at putting it aside and being able to turn up for work on day one. But I have gone to work on no sleep on day one.

On *Munich*?

No, it was on *Closed Circuit*. Could not turn my brain off. It was scary as. And then it got to 4.30am and I went, "Okay, this is how day one is going to be. I'm not going to tell anyone and I'm going to get up now and I've read enough about adrenaline to know it's going to be totally fine."

Was it?

It was. I was in a courtroom scene with a fair bit of dialogue. It's not ideal, but I'd read stuff about Olympic athletes where they don't sleep the night before a race and your body just takes over. It was probably more scary during the night than it was during the day.

So what was your first day on *Munich*?

I literally worked on two films on the same day, because we went over on *Lucky You*. There was a massive logistical issue and I literally did a 16-hour day on *Lucky You*, hopped in a car, was driven to Burbank, hopped on a plane, flew to Malta, got out of the plane, went straight to the set, had my hair cut, walked on and did my first night of shooting. Which was me standing out on a balcony, in Greece, looking at people driving down the street. I didn't even have time for a shower. Then I went home to bed. I just remember saying, "Can someone please get me a Coke?" And there was a frantic search for a Coke, and I thought, "I'm going to sound like That Fucking Guy. It's my first day, and I've got a rider."

To change the subject completely, you are @EricBana67 on Twitter. Interesting choice of handle.

[It's] my race number. A lot of people don't know that. 67 was always my race number. I've got photos of me on my BMX bike as a kid with 67 on it. I should probably one day tweet that photo.

Somehow you don't strike me as an @TheEricBana.

Or @TheRealEricBana. But now I'm under pressure to go on Instagram because a bunch of fake Eric Banas are on there. *[Laughs]* I don't think I can do Instagram.

Intriguingly, in your Twitter bio you describe yourself as "Part time Actor".

Well, it's the truth. It's the God's honest truth. I'm not trying to be a smartarse about it. Full-time actors are people who work on series and soaps in television. I'm a guy who occasionally picks up a script and goes to work. If I called myself a full-time actor, I'd be lying. 🙄

THE SECRET SCRIPTURE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 19 MAY



TO LIVE AND FILE IN LA

Empire turns to Three's all-inclusive data roaming for 24 hours in Tinseltown

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

AS ANY FILM journalist will tell you, a trip to LA is a major buzz. For this one – which will take in one movie set, a press junket and a premiere – I'm taking my Dictaphone, iPhone and iPad. It's a tech trifecta that'll keep me in touch with the office while I'm away. And to make life easier, I'm trying out Three's Feel At Home roaming package that enables me to use my phone here in the USA as if at home, without that nagging fear of a huge bill when I get back to the UK.

MORNING

If New York is the city that never sleeps, Los Angeles is the city that has to be up early because it's got a drive ahead of it and, dude, have you seen the traffic? Unlike London, public transport is not really an option here. If Steve Martin's *L.A. Story* is anything to go by, you'd need a car to visit your next-door neighbour. I've got further to go – from my hotel in Downtown LA to a film set in Culver City – so there's only one option. I hop on my phone, click on the Uber app and am swiftly heading west.

Arriving on set, I'm greeted by the unit publicist. The presence of a journalist on a film set is always announced on the daily call sheet, a pamphlet that lets the cast and crew know exactly what's being filmed, who's required for it, and most importantly, when lunch is. As I scan it,

I'm told the production designer is free for a chat. I hastily head online for some last-minute research before she comes over. Having internet access is essential on set, because as well-researched as you think you are, it's a world of 1,001 moving parts and you never know which one will be thrown at you next. If it pays to be prepared, it pays equally to have worry-free data roaming and access to sites like IMDbPro.

AFTERNOON

Lunch, it turns out, is at noon. This gives me time to grab a bite to eat (unit publicists are a very hospitable bunch) and check email. As a section editor, I need to approve film stills for use in *Empire*, and there's one waiting for me in my inbox. Downloading huge images from long distance, an exercise that once virtually required

ILLUSTRATIONS: BILL MCCONKEY

Left: Phil gets in a few minutes' extra research before his first on-set interview. Cost? Nowt!

Below: Juicy exclusives from the press conference go straight to *Empire's* social media, at a cost of precisely 0p. **Bottom:** Thanks to Three's 'Feel At Home' package, sending over pics from the red carpet in the States is completely free.

bankruptcy insurance, is the work of a swift

download and zero outlay, thanks to my Three deal. The pic — a jaw-dropping shot from an upcoming blockbuster — gets approved, I pack up my gear, have a quick look at Google Maps to locate my next destination and order another car.

This time I'm heading to Beverly Hills' storied Four Seasons Hotel for a press conference promoting a big upcoming release. Rather than worrying about the hotel's Wi-Fi password, I log straight into *Empire's* social media and take pics of the stars as they file in to answer questions. I ask one and post the answer on Twitter. The press conference yields a big news story that I'm able to post on our social channels just as our UK readers are putting their dinner on.

EVENING

Then I'm in a cab for the short ride to Hollywood and the historic El Capitan theatre. This temple of cinema once hosted the premiere of *Citizen Kane*, and tonight it has its finery on again for the premiere of a big blockbuster. As the sun sets over Hollywood Boulevard, the stars come out. Showing my press accreditation to the relevant people, I find a spot in the press pen at the end of the red carpet, take some snaps and transfer them back to the office.

Red carpet clearing and the crowds drifting away, I make my way to nearby Sunset Boulevard and click online to order a final ride of the day — this time back downtown. It's time to check in on developments back in the office, and write up the day's news. Because I don't have to fret about data when I head online, I get started on my emails as we travel and check in for tomorrow's flight home. It also means I can stop off at one of my favourite diners and grab a cheeseburger (the Belcampo Meat Co., if you're ever in Downtown LA) while writing up my story from the press conference on my iPad and filing it. When that's done, it's time to wander back to the hotel for a beer and an episode of *Catastrophe*.



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RE.VIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT

EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT



THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

Dauids Yates and Heyman
take us on a tour of the
Harry Potter prequel

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN



00:04:56

NEWT IN A BIG POND __ Here, Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne) walks the streets of New York. Redmayniacs may be disappointed to learn that a shirtless scene was cut. "It showed all the scars he's gotten from beasts," explains director David Yates, "We put Eddie through a hellish body-building schedule, and he looked buff. But it felt gratuitous. So I had to sheepishly phone him up and say, 'Sorry, mate.'" >



**FANTASTIC
BEASTS AND
WHERE TO
FIND THEM**

★★★

CERT 12

What we said: "Big, bold and teeming with imagination, it is so busy world-building that it occasionally forgets to have fun."

Notable extras: Featurettes including J.K. Rowling's return to the wizarding world, 11 deleted scenes, detailed look at the beasts.



00:06:16

MILLER TIME __ Ezra Miller's character, Credence Barebone, was shrouded in mystery. Presumably because he's a neglected teen who turns into a big cloud. "Ezra goes in full-bore," enthuses producer David Heyman. "He met with various kids that had been abused and really went to these dark places. He's such a passionate person: he's probably in Dakota, fighting for the pipeline, as we speak."



00:30:29

BAKED MAGIC __ The ingredients of the delicious-looking strudel Queenie (Alison Sudol) prepares here: pixels. "The food is entirely digital," confirms Yates. "We spent months on this sequence. There were a lot of notes to the animators about the rhythm of the chopping of the apple: it had to have the finesse of a great chef. And we worked hard on the way the napkins fly, to make them graceful like birds."



00:39:54

INSIDE THE SUITCASE __ Newt and No-Maj buddy Jacob (Dan Fogler) find those fantastic beasts (including a Swooping Evil and Bowtruckles, seen here) inside the former's case. Puppeteers were recruited to help Redmayne and Fogler visualise the menagerie on set in a pivotal scene for Newt. "This is the scene where you see him in a new light," says Yates. "He's full of passion for these creatures."



00:47:14

THE GREAT NIFFLER CAPER __ Mole-like rascal the Niffler ram-raids a jewellery store. "The Niffler is a very clearly defined character," says Heyman. "He's like a naughty child with a twinkle in his eye." Animator Pablo Grillo was instrumental in figuring out the critter's body language. "Pablo even performed the Niffler on set," says Heyman, who worked with Grillo on *Paddington*. "And he's quite a big man!"



00:51:58

ERUMPY PUMPY __ More beastly hijinks, as Newt attempts to lure the Erumpent by imitating its mating ritual. The result, an extraordinary assortment of grunts and shuffles, was shot over three days. "Eddie really went for it," says Heyman. "He actually pulled a muscle in his leg because he spent several nights rolling around, crouching and squatting. It was also absolutely freezing, but he just kept going."



01:14:50

THE BLIND PIG __ The enchanted speakeasy has a magical jazz band and an otherworldly manager, Ron Perlman's goblin Gnarlack. "I just think Ron's such a vivid, wonderful, smoky actor," says Yates. "The Blind Pig set was fun, though in retrospect I think we should have made it a little bit sleazier and more dangerous. The second film [set in Paris] will allow us the licence to be little edgier, a bit more sensual."



01:39:49

A GR ES SECRET __ Colin Farrell's Percival Graves makes a last stand before being revealed as dark wizard Grindelwald (Johnny Depp). "I couldn't believe we managed to keep that secret for seven months," marvels Heyman. Depp signed up during the shoot. "Johnny and I had several Skype sessions," says Yates. "He's going to make an extraordinary Grindelwald in future films. He's gonna be really fruity."



01:47:43

MAGICAL REPAIRS __ The Thunderbird flies, signalling the restoration of the damage wrought to the Big Apple. Yates didn't realise his wasn't the only 2016 film to feature a city being put back together through magic until he sat down to watch *Doctor Strange*. "I have a film binge at Christmas, when all the BAFTA DVDs arrive, and when I watched that one I went, 'Oh my God, they did that too!'" he laughs.



01:53:02

KISS IN THE RAIN __ This farewell smooch between Queenie and Jacob required "dry takes and wet takes, to give us the option of using digital rain," says Yates. "But actors respond much more authentically when being doused with actual water."

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM
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THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE

JULES ET JIM

François Truffaut's majestic three-way

1962 / CERT PG
WORDS IAN FREER

ACCORDING TO A Reddit AMA in 2015, professor Stephen Hawking revealed his favourite film to be *Jules Et Jim* (just in front of *The Delta Force*, we reckon). If, as a theoretical physicist, Hawking is primarily concerned with answering the vast questions of the universe, François Truffaut's third feature film as a director, exploring the *ménage à trois* between shy Austrian Jules (Oskar Werner), confident Frenchman Jim (Henri Serre) and wild card Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), deals with exposing the equally unknowable mysteries of the human heart. By comparison Hawking has it easy.

Truffaut discovered Henri-Pierre Roché's 1953 semi-autobiographical novel at the bottom of a bargain bin outside a second-hand Parisian

bookstore and was instantly smitten with the story. "I was struck by the licentious nature of the situations and the overall purity," he noted. The threesome in the novel was based on the real-life relationships between Roché, Franz Hessel and Helen Grund (who later married Hessel) but from this distance, it all feels quintessentially Truffaut. *Jules Et Jim* is the perfect encapsulation of one of the key themes — the difficulty in finding true harmony in love — Truffaut would explore over the rest of his career. He never expressed it as well as he did here.

There is nothing in movies more joyous than *Jules Et Jim*'s first hour. It makes *La La Land* look like *EastEnders*. Using verbatim sections of the novel as voiceover (it became



Life's a beach
for Jim (Henri Sere),
Jules (Oskar Werner)
and Catherine
(Jeanne Moreau).

PHOTOEST

a big influence on Martin Scorsese, particularly in *GoodFellas*), Truffaut sketches the central friendship in sharp, funny, breathless strokes. Like a 1912 Parisian Ant and Dec, Jules and Jim are always seen together (although they don't always stand on the same side). Jules is blond and painful around women. Jim (pronounced the American way, not the French 'Jeem') is lanky and almost suave. Proto hipsters, the pair fence, discuss art in cafés and try to pick up women. The early stand-out is Thérèse (Marie Dubois) who, in one of the film's many iconic scenes, becomes a steam train by putting the lit end of a cigarette in her mouth and blowing smoke out of its other end, as Raoul Coutard's camera pans 360 degrees while she chugs around the room.

Yet nothing impacts their bond until they meet the daring, dangerous Catherine. Team Catherine go to the beach, see Strindberg plays and cycle. A lot. Both men are in love with her but it doesn't play out in a typical scenario of jealousy and recrimination. Instead, the trio behave with tenderness and compassion, displaying what Truffaut called "a new morality that is constantly reinvented". This is 1962. Flower power and free love are years away. It's an ideal that cannot be sustained.

If part of the pleasure is in its content, it is also present in Truffaut's form. *Jules Et Jim* surfs on the thrill of a filmmaker dismantling conventions — screw those establishing shots — before your very eyes. Truffaut has a ball experimenting with freeze-frames (capturing moments in time that become poignant), whip pans, stills, newsreel, superimpositions and making his camera mobile, be it hand-held, in wheelchairs or on bicycles. His nimble storytelling sprints through 25 years without taking a breath, all glued together by Georges Delerue's stunning music: it mixes boisterous circus carnival gaiety, lyrical sweep and melancholy moods in a score that has been sadly underrated over the years.

What separates Jules and Jim isn't Catherine but World War I. The voiceover tells us the pair, now on opposing sides, are scared they will shoot each other. When the troika reunite — Jules is now in an unhappy marriage with Catherine as Jim comes to visit — the film shifts from major to minor keys as the happiness of the first half comes home to roost. The second half poignantly captures the impossibility of rekindling the magic of youth. Yet it is not Jules or Jim who feels this most keenly. It is Moreau's Catherine.

On the face of it, Catherine appears to be Le Manic Pixie Dream Girl, the kooky woman who exists only to affect change in the male characters' lives. But, whatever the title tells you, this is Catherine and Moreau's film. She is a model of unpredictability who, be it initiating a running race or jumping in the Seine, wills herself into existence moment to moment. Like real life, motivations and emotions are never explained. Yet it is the skill of Moreau to underplay it all. She spins between capriciousness and ennui on a sixpence yet makes it all feel real. It is her story that resonates hardest.

Roche was 74 years old when he wrote the novel and, especially in its ending, it's a story and film suffused with loss; loss of love, loss of the past, loss of an idyll. What makes it all the more remarkable, then, was Truffaut was just 29 years old when he made it. As a critic, he later wrote: "I demand that a film express either the joy of making cinema or the agony of making cinema." With *Jules Et Jim*, he spectacularly managed to combine both.

**JULES ET JIM IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY
AND DOWNLOAD**

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



MAX JOLIN – 7 THE GREAT ESCAPE

Did you enjoy *The Great Escape*?

Yes, I liked it very much.

What did you like best about it?

I liked that lots of different escapes went wrong, because it makes it a bit more interesting. If it was just like, "Dig, dig, dig, dig... Done," that would be a bit boring.

What did you think about the fact it was a true story?

I can't believe it. I don't know how just one human thought of all of that.

Did you have a favourite character?

Roger [Richard Attenborough]. I liked the scar on his face.

Did the film teach you anything about World War II?

Yeah: how the Germans took over France. Didn't know that. And I didn't know a lot of the English were caught, and some of the Americans were caught, but then they still won the war.

Would you recommend *The Great Escape* to any of your friends?

Well, I think George or Daniel might like it. They're interested in bosses and planning and that type of thing.

How many stars would you give it?

Four-and-a-half.

Why not the full five?

I guess... Well... What I didn't like about it... No, I'd give it five. I always change my mind about that.

What was your favourite part?

I did really like it when they were digging. Every single time they were digging.

Would you like to go down in the tunnels, like they did?

No.

Demigod Maui (voiced by Dwayne Johnson). Right (top to bottom): Pua the pig with Heihei the rooster (voiced by Alan Tudyk); Face to face with Moana (voiced by Auli'i Cravalho).

THE ROCK MUSIC

Directors John Musker and Ron Clements walk us through *Moana's* best numbers

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

AN INNOCENT WARRIOR

This Polynesian song plays as toddler Moana first meets the character of the ocean.

Musker: We tried different songs and one was by Te Vaka, the band fronted by Opetia Foa'i [one of the film's songwriters]. Even without knowing what those words mean it set the mood.

Clements: He rewrote the lyrics to fit. The question Moana keeps asking is, "Why did the ocean choose me?"

WHERE YOU ARE

Moana's father Chief Tui (Temuera Morrison/Christopher Jackson) leads this song about their island home's laws and culture.

Musker: We thought of this [as] like *Tradition* in *Fiddler On The Roof*; it sets up the world. Lin [Manuel Miranda, the film's other songwriter] riffed on a melody by Opetia. [Broadway star] Christopher Jackson did the demo. Tem's register didn't fit the song.

Clements: For *Moana* the demos were done by the cast of *Hamilton*. We felt very blessed.

Musker: They would record demos in the dressing room of the theatre because [Lin] would be working until the last minute.



HOW FAR I'LL GO

Moana (Auli'i Cravalho) sings about her pull towards the ocean; it's a classic Disney heroine 'I want' song (see also: *Part Of Your World*).

Musker: It was at different spots and served different purposes. But we liked the wistfulness of the opening, then the empowerment and drive of the chorus. It deals with feeling like, "I want to test my limits and go beyond what I think I can do."

WE KNOW THE WAY

Moana discovers that her ancestors were navigators, and hears their song.

Musker: We wanted a song that celebrated the

culture of navigation and gave the audience a feeling of the exhilaration of the open sea.

Clements: We envisioned this like *The Lion King* where you had Elton John and Lebo M., who brought the African influences. Opetia brought the South Pacific, Lin a theatrical narrative, and Mark [Mancina, composer] was the fusion.

YOU'RE WELCOME

The demi-god Maui (Dwayne Johnson) plots to trick Moana. Yes, The Rock sings. And well.

Musker: Lin was a fan of Dwayne from his wrestling days, so he loved doing a song tailored to The Rock. Lin came up with [Maui singing] you owe me for everything I did, which was perfect.

Clements: It really is a theme song for Dwayne; he could take that with him anywhere. He was, I think, a little intimidated, but he did a great job.

SHINY

Moana accompanies Maui in search of his magical hook. It's held by the monstrous crab Tamatoa (Jemaine Clement), deep undersea.

Musker: He was based on the coconut crab — a big, scary-looking thing. We tried to make him look a little like Jemaine. We put rims round the eyes to suggest glasses and gave him a space between his teeth. Lin [wrote] a *Conchords*-type song.

I AM MOANA

Moana almost gives up — until her grandmother's spirit appears to spur her on.

Musker: For the emotion of the movie it's a pivotal point. It was Mark Mancina that pulled a phrase out of Opetia's material that becomes kind of a mantra. [Then] Mark suggested to Lin how he could use *How Far I'll Go* as a counter-melody.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE

In her final encounter with the lava monster, Te Kā, Moana sings to soothe the savage beast.

Musker: It was trying to figure out the resolution. We went back to *An Innocent Warrior*. That's what the ocean sings and she sings in counterpoint.

Clements: There's a rule that you can't do a new song in the third act. But the actual climax of the movie is musical and I don't think that's been done.

Musker: This felt right. Maui's been neutralised. If the day is going to be saved, it's got to be Moana.

MOANA IS OUT ON 27 MARCH ON DOWNLOAD AND 3 APRIL ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

MOANA
★★★★
CERT PG

What we said: "A crowd-pleasing oceanic musical with big tunes and beguiling characters, *Moana* is likely to thwack a big smile on your face."

Notable extras: *Inner Workings*, the short that accompanied the theatrical release; plus featurettes and a deleted song.



LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND BILLY ZANE

He's a cool guy. He's trying to help you

Hi Billy

Um... I forgot our anniversary, and my boyfriend is pissed. How do I make it up to him? What's the best way of worming your way back into someone's affections? Yours, ST

Sex.

Dear Billy

Great column. Really enjoying the advice you're dispensing. Which is good, as I need some now. My young son (13) wants to be an actor. I've heard it's a profession fraught with difficulty, and opportunities can be few and far between. I want him to do something that offers security, but I'm not sure I should talk him out of following his dream. Obviously you followed yours — what should I tell him? Yours, CW

Firstly, thank you for the kind words. We aim to please. Secondly, don't talk him out of his dream. Enable him or he will blame you for every mishap that will inevitably occur. That said, why is it a choice? Encourage the dream, but teach the virtues of balance, insurance, variety and stability as not only back-up plans but to ever deepen the artist's experience from which to draw from. Renaissance... man!

Hey Billy

I'm trying to woo a girl by cooking her the ultimate dish. What, in your expert opinion, should I serve her? And if you could recommend a film to follow up with, that would be great. You're the man, man!

Cheers FS

Call in the ancients. Irresistible food to be eaten with one's hands. Lamb chops. Greek style. Single cut about 12 of them, at least. Marinate them in the best Greek olive oil you can find (deep green in colour), lemon juice, and loads of dried Greek oregano and sea salt. Put them on a broiler and slightly over-cook them until the fat

is crispy. These are not medium-rare English lamb chops. These are Grecian lollipops you serve in a pile, grab from the bone and eat in one bite. Cold beer rather than wine. Greek salad. Feta cheese drizzled with olive oil and garnished with fresh oregano leaves. Use the same oregano to garnish the lamb chop platter along with two halves of a lemon that you squeeze over the lamb just before eating. Oily fingers and faces, beer soaked, proteined up and loving it! Good luck making it to the bedroom. A thought: while the lamb chops are cooking, slice four lemons in half. Trim the ends so that they stand up. Squeeze out some juice and the seeds, score with a knife and fill with a shot of amaretto. Keep the bottle close — you'll be refilling these delicious natural shot glasses as you bite into them and suck out the juice, perfectly cutting the sweet almond taste. Great primer and messy omen of things to come. Check, please!

Hey Billy

This is a weird question, but you seem able to deal with all sorts. After the release of *Rogue One*, what viewing order would you recommend for a *Star Wars* newbie? Should I go chronological or in the timeline of the *Star Wars* universe? I want to get this right. There's a chance I may be over-thinking this. May the Force be with you, TH

And also with you, TH. I say watch them in the order they were made. The dramatic shifts in style, acting, media and tone will not be a distraction then and will make more cohesive sense than following the plot of this intricate fantasy narrative chronologically. The pay-offs and nods to past films will mean much more, too. Trust the Force.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO BILLY ZANE VIA [BILLY@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM](mailto:billy@empiremagazine.com). BILLY HAS DONATED HIS FEE FOR THIS COLUMN TO CHARITY

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BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

JARED HARRIS

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



MOMENT

Watching Daniel Day-Lewis walk across a stubby field towards set on *Lincoln*. I wasn't watching Daniel Day-Lewis, I was watching Abraham Lincoln. You go, "Fucking hell, that's Abraham Lincoln coming towards me." That was pretty magnificent.

Going to the *Lost In Space* premiere and realising they'd decided to dub half my performance with someone else was pretty crazy. I sat there watching it going, "I didn't say that line." Did I get an explanation? Nobody ever explains anything to you.

FAN SERVICE

People have always been very polite with me. One of the funniest was at the premiere for *The Crown* [in which Harris played King George VI] last year. I signed something for someone and when the exchange ended, they curtsayed!



I haven't had a bad one. I'm always very touched that people have responded to my work and if they want to take a moment to chat and get you to sign something, I'm keen to do it. That's part of the interchange that one is hoping for.

AUDITION

Mad Men. It was a scene from that first episode I did in Season 3 where I offer a job to Pete and Ken. After I did it, [creator Matthew Weiner] goes, "You don't think it's a good idea that you've been told by your bosses to offer the same job to these two people." I got it and had to come up with an instant character in the next 20 seconds. And something happened.

A year out of drama school, Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*. The part I'm up for has no lines, but I think if I do a good job I can put myself in the running for Horatio. A guy pulls out a clipboard and goes, "Jason Isaacs, reading Laertes. James Purefoy, reading Laertes. Jared Harris, reading Horatio although he can't be cast in this part." It's an endless parade of humiliation, darling.

LOCATION

I spent three months in Africa shooting *To The Ends Of The Earth*. That was pretty damn amazing. That was KwaZulu-Natal on the East Coast, about two hours north of Durban. It's not often you have signs on a golf course saying, "Beware of the crocodiles because they'll eat you," or signposts on the road saying, "Beware of the hippopotamuses because they'll eat you."



One of the things that's fun about doing this job is going on location and going to different places. Even if they're rough, there's still something about them that you find exciting. But I spent a month filming *Lush* with Laura Linney and Campbell Scott, and I went into a hotel room in Baton Rouge, opened up the windows and there was literally a brick wall. It was all downhill from there.

Mad Men again. What Janie Bryant would do in cohort with the production designer, in terms of the way she had each of the characters, was incredible. The colours of the costumes they wore were so specific in terms of the palette in relation to the background and the set you were on.



I did a job where my first day, I didn't have a costume. All they had for me was a shirt. And I was the lead. It was quite extraordinary. They had to shoot me from the waist up.

ALLIED IS OUT ON 3 APRIL ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



Ray Liotta, Robert De Niro, Paul Sorvino and Joe Pesci: MEN!

MOVIE MEMOIRS

Sali Hughes on the films that shaped her life

#10 THE 'BOYS' FILM: GOODFELLAS



ILLUSTRATION DAVID MAHONEY

TWO YEARS AGO, the *New York Post*'s chief film critic, Kyle Smith, wrote an unfathomably stupid essay called "Women are not capable of understanding *GoodFellas*". There was righteous anger from male and female film fans worldwide as the piece went viral. Given Martin Scorsese's 1990 Mafia epic easily makes my top five films, it angered me, too — but came as no surprise. I've been fielding this sort of misconception my whole life, since my parents allowed me to watch *The Godfather* and *Once Upon A Time In America* at an inappropriately young age, sparking my deep and enduring passion for gangster films.

GoodFellas, should you not have seen it, is Scorsese and Nicholas Pileggi's adaptation of the latter's book, *Wiseguy*, the true story of American gangster-turned-FBI rat, Henry Hill. *GoodFellas* is told with exceptional craft, pace and care (the Steadicam shot alone, tracking Henry and his future wife Karen as they enter the Copacabana nightclub, is among the most legendary in film history) and features career-defining performances from Ray Liotta, Lorraine Bracco, Joe Pesci and Robert De Niro. Masterfully edited by Thelma Schoonmaker (yes, a woman!), it also includes some pretty graphic depictions of violence, from a gory pistol-whipping on a suburban front lawn to the garrotting of a toupee salesman and a cadaver hanging from a meat hook. Despite its glorious cinematography, *GoodFellas* is often decidedly unpretty and this, it seems, is why as a woman I shouldn't love it.

"Men's films" and "women's films" are baffling concepts, but they pervade nonetheless. The belief seems to be that women, incapable of understanding male character-centred storylines, must surely clutch their pearls in horror at blood, guts and profanity. Never mind that the likes of *GoodFellas*, *Mean Streets*, *Heat* and *Scarface* deal with universal themes of loyalty, betrayal, family and morality. They're depicted from a male point of view, so it would be safer all round if women stuck with a fruit-based cocktail, a "pampering"

face mask and a Blu-ray of something in which Colin Firth smoulders a turtleneck, or where Kate Hudson struggles to manage a relationship and a burgeoning cupcake business, or basically something with "shoes" in the title.

It's not only condescending to me and womankind, it presumes male audiences can appreciate only emotionally unresponsive men engaged in bullying and violence. In Hollywood meetings, men die of bullets, women die of cancer. Women adore their friends, men kill theirs.

Some filmmakers have managed to straddle the imaginary gender divide. Quentin Tarantino, in writing goddesses Alabama Whitman, Beatrix Kiddo and Jackie Brown, made it acceptable for a woman to enjoy, say, a toilet cistern being used to cave in a hitman's skull. Ridley Scott and Luc Besson, too, slipped through the net, but still, when I say I love Leone, Scorsese or Coppola, it's often as though I've confessed to membership at Spearmint Rhino. Great storytelling makes for a great film, regardless of the beholder's gender. I still love *Shadowlands*, *Terms Of Endearment*, *9 To 5* and *The Wedding Singer* (it's as if people are varied and three-dimensional), but a film lover wants to see an entire world through the lens, diverse stories told well, her imagination blown open. There are few greater rewards than *GoodFellas*. Show it to your daughters. But perhaps wait 'til they're out of primary school.

SILICON VALLEY

We judge the best bits from Mike Judge's tech-com



1 THE HAND-JOB ANALOGY

Season 1 climaxes, almost literally, with a gloriously puerile sequence where, instead of working on a big presentation, the team behind struggling software Pied Piper devote hours to the mathematical formula by which one guy could, well, jerk off a room full of other guys.



2 THE SWOT ANALYSIS

Season 2 sees nerds Dinesh (Kumail Nanjiani) and Gilfoyle (Martin Starr) work out the pros and cons of letting arrogant stunt biker Blaine do a trick that will end in his death. Key entries: "Blaine is dead" and "carbon footprint reduced by one Blaine". Naturally, he sees the board. He's not happy.



3 PIED PIPER'S ELEVEN

Forced to work for tyrannical CEO Jack (Stephen Tobolowsky), the Pied Piper boys scheme to ignore him and work on their own thing under his nose. But plans go awry when founder Richard (Thomas Middleditch) falls over and reveals the deception. The dolt.

SILICON VALLEY SEASON 3 IS OUT ON 10 APRIL ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



Marion Cotillard and Fabrizio Rongione in *Two Days, One Night*.

Luc (left) and Jean-Pierre Dardenne. Below: Thomas Doret and Cécile De France in *The Kid With A Bike*.

THE CHUCKLE BROTHERS

Your guide to those funloving Belgian bros, the Dardennes

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN



IN THE BIG debate about cinema's greatest directing siblings, some names come up over and over. The Coens, naturally. The Wachowskis, of course. The Brothers Strause, directors of *Aliens Vs Predator: Requiem*, almost never.

And then there's the Dardennes, the Belgian duo who've been beaver away on a string of social realist classics for the past few decades. If you don't know them yet, here's a helping hand.

WHO ARE THEY? Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne.

WHICH IS WHICH? At 65, Jean-Pierre is the eldest of the two by about three years. Yet they look so much alike, they could almost be twins. In our experience, Jean-Pierre is the one with the bigger hair. He also tends to stand on the right.

WHERE ARE THEY FROM? They're from the small town of Seraing, in Liège. The majority of their films have been set there. "The murderer always returns to the scene of the crime," Luc has joked. It's a place where jobs are parlous (*Two Days, One Night*; *Rosetta*), welfare uncertain (*The Child*) and you're more than likely to get your bicycle nicked (*The Kid With A Bike*).

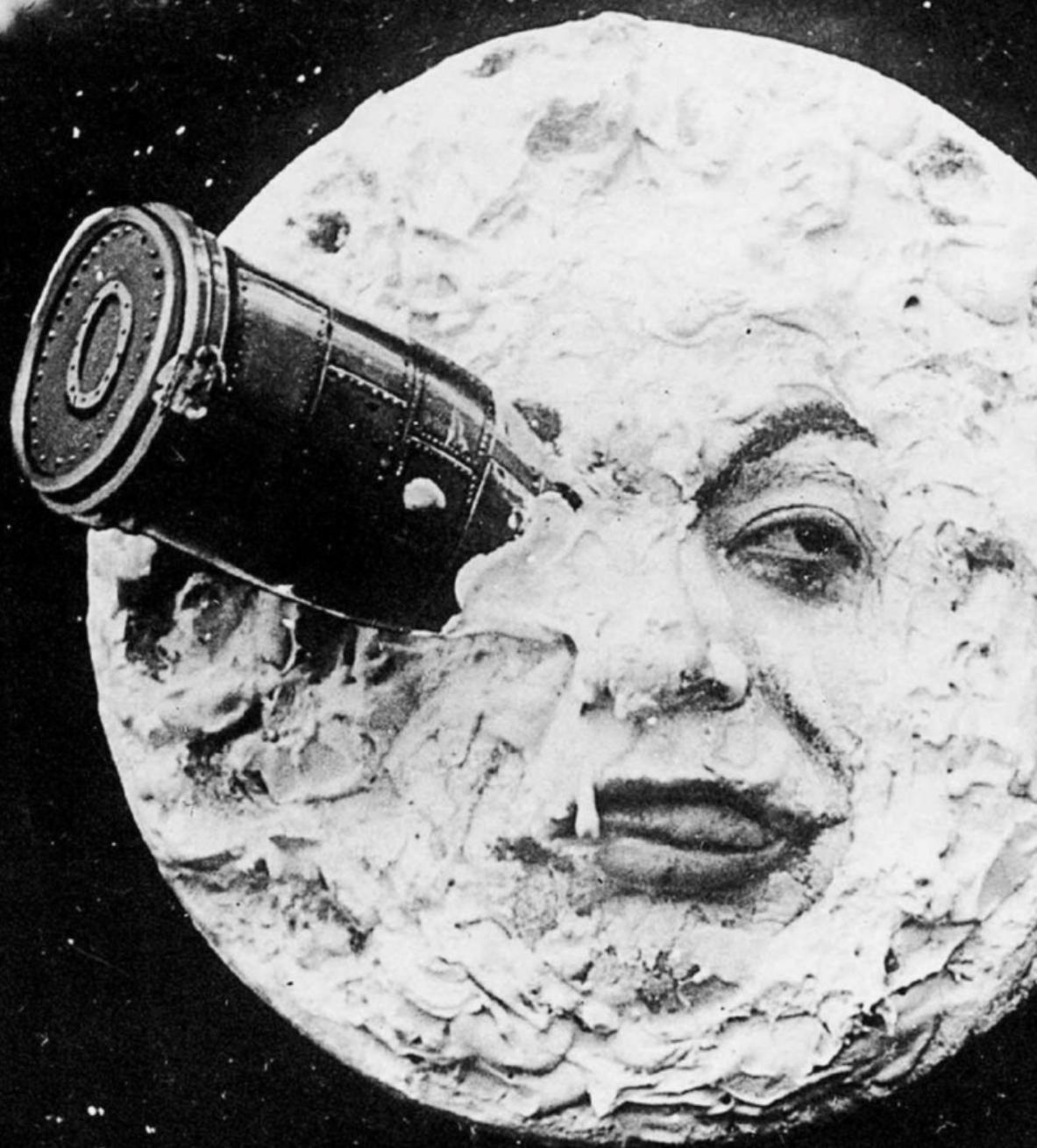
WHAT DO THEY DO? They cut their teeth on documentaries in the 1970s, and have since practically redefined modern realist cinema with a string of hardscrabble urban parables crafted over three distinguished decades. They marry the social conscience of, say, Ken Loach with wry humour, naturalistic acting and often in-your-face camera work. The opening scene of *Rosetta* (1999) opens with a three-minute handheld shot.

WHAT SHOULD WE SEE? They're in a select group (along with Loach again) of filmmakers to win the Palme d'Or twice at Cannes, for *Rosetta* and 2005's *L'Enfant*. But 1996's *La Promesse*, which stars Jérémie Renier (not the bloke who plays Hawkeye in *Avengers Assemble*), is also a must-see. It set up both their unique style of humane storytelling and their world.

ARE THEY THE BEST DIRECTING SIBLINGS?

They're up there, that's for sure, with an admirable consistency of style, tone and worldview. They've also made it 20 per cent easier to name ten famous Belgians. *Magnifique*.

LUC AND JEAN-PIERRE DARDENNE: THE EARLY WORKS IS OUT ON 3 APRIL ON DVD



STORY OF THE SHOT

LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE

WORDS IAN FREER

ASK FILMMAKERS ABOUT the film that changed their life, and a fair percentage would say *Star Wars*. Not Martin Scorsese. His life changed when, aged 13, he first saw Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*. It was his equivalent of the Star Destroyer sliding into shot and never stopping. "I was fascinated by the sleight of hand concept," he recalled. "Méliès saw the potential in these moving images, and these images that came up on the screen absolutely took me to another planet." One of these images — a rocket striking the moon in the eye, causing custard-y tears and a comedy grimace — became emblematic of Méliès' aesthetic: lo-fi, whimsical, utterly enchanting. But it's also an image that's rocketed around pop culture ever since, in music promos and stagecraft (Queen, The Smashing Pumpkins, Air, Cage The Elephant and Katy Perry), TV (*Futurama*) and movies (most recently *The Lords Of Salem*). Scorsese himself paid tribute in *Hugo*, in which Méliès (Sir Ben Kingsley) appears as Asa Butterfield and Chloë Grace Moretz are bewitched by the moon madness.

The 15-minute tale of astronomers on a lunar expedition, *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* was cinema's first science-fiction film but Méliès' 400th short. He was a frustrated cartoonist and essentially initiated the idea of concept art, committing key scenes to paper before a frame was exposed. His illustration of the moon/rocket ship was captioned in both French and English, revealing how Méliès always had one eye on the American market. This Yankophilia ultimately came to haunt him.

When it came to capturing the moment on film, the man in the moon was shot at Méliès' studio — imagine a huge greenhouse with glass walls and ceiling — at Montreuil, Seine-Saint-Denis in France. If you only know the image as a still, the camera appears to be moving towards the moon. Yet, rather than pushing a heavy camera forward, the actor (IMDb says the lunar body is played by Méliès himself but there are no official credits), draped in black velvet save his made-up face, was pulled on a chair running on a rail towards the camera. For the rocket ship gouging the planet in the eye, Méliès seamlessly cut two shots — one without a rocket, the next with rocket — together. Today it's called the substitution splice technique. In 1902, it was called magic.

Méliès' dream of a huge, lucrative US bow was scuppered when Thomas Edison's technicians made copies of the film and released it simultaneously with the French version. Edison made a mint out of *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*, retitled *A Trip To The Moon*. Méliès didn't make a dime and was left bankrupt. "He invented what we do now — blue screen, green screen — he invented all of that," Scorsese has marvelled. Seems Méliès' genius might have given rise to piracy as well.

LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE IS OUT NOW ON DVD

THE EVOLUTION OF MANNY

How three Daniels came together to create *Swiss Army Man*'s infamous farting corpse

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

OVER THE COURSE of the 95 demented, hilarious, surprising minutes of *Swiss Army Man*, Daniel Radcliffe's Manny — the multi-purpose titular tool — goes through a series of changes, emotional and physical. And all despite the fact that he's dead. We spoke to Radcliffe and the film's directors, Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (also known as the Daniels), for the skinny on cinema's greatest farting corpse.

THE CONCEPT OF MANNY

The idea behind *Swiss Army Man* — a suicidal man (Paul Dano) is saved when he teams up with a corpse that gradually regains life — had been on the Daniels' agenda for years as they made their name in the music-video world. "It was a subversion of the survival story, of a man stranded on an island," explains Kwan. "In earlier drafts, Manny was a little bit more snarky and smarter. But we ended up changing that when we met Daniel Radcliffe. The reason the movie has the heart it does is because Manny comes from such a sincere place."

THE CASTING OF MANNY

Radcliffe had already been on the Daniels' fairly short shortlist. "We knew we wanted someone who could sing the score," says Scheinert. When Paul Dano, who had already been cast as the suicidal Hank, suggested Radcliffe, who he'd met a couple of times, the die was cast. "We knew that if they didn't have chemistry, our two-man movie would suck," laughs Scheinert.

THE ABILITIES OF MANNY

When we first meet Manny, he's nothing more than a hollowed-out husk. But throughout the movie, he manifests an array of startling abilities that enable Hank to get out of various holes. These include felling trees with karate chops and

regurgitating water, but many more were on the Daniels' list. "At one point he had a hole in the back of his head, which Hank was able to look into and use him as binoculars," says Kwan. "Or he would put fire into the back of his head and use him as a torch. But every power Manny had had to have two requirements for us to get excited about it. We had to be able to visualise it in a way that felt authentic and bizarre, and it had to come from something that felt true to the human experience."

THE FARTING OF MANNY

The human experience doesn't get much more truthful than farting, which is how Manny announces his 'life' to Hank while lying on

a beach. Soon, the two are ripping through the sea, using Manny's arse as a motorboard. "None of it was me," protests Radcliffe. "They built a mould out of my arse and put a pipe in it so they could blow air out of it for the close-up shots in the water." And the sound of the farting? "Dan Scheinert would blow raspberries off-camera and I would convulse my body to the appropriate length and intensity. It was highly technical."

THE ERECTION OF MANNY

At one point, after perusing a grubby copy of *Sports Illustrated*, Manny gets a hard-on. Which also doubles as a handy GPS to guide the duo through the woods. "Our brains went something



THE REPUBLIC OF PHOTOGRAPHY, ALAMY

Left: Alive Daniel meets dead Daniel at 2016's Empire Live. **Below, from top:** Manny (Daniel Radcliffe) turns jet ski for Hank (Paul Dano) via a useful bout of flatulence; Call the boner police!; A strange but strangely beguiling friendship.



like, 'Sometimes corpses get boners.' Or that's the urban legend," says Kwan. "So what is something a boner would be useful for? The idea of a GPS is kinda funny, and it's some people's view of men in general — we're guided by our dicks." At first Radcliffe had to suffer the ignominy of having a Scheinert-manipulated broomstick shoved down his trousers, but that was soon upgraded to an animatronic device which was, as Radcliffe recalls, "a bit more penis-y. It had massive fucking levers and there was this bloke off-camera wrenching them around to operate me," he says. "It was very funny."

THE GROWTH OF MANNY

For all the physical travails endured by Manny, the movie very much hinges on his emotional development, as he races through childhood, adolescence and tortured adulthood. "It's about taking someone from total innocence of the world to being fucked up by it in a very short space of time," says Radcliffe. Daniel Scheinert says the directing duo almost happened upon the film's emotional skeleton, in which the boisterous Manny becomes everything the burned-out Hank was at the beginning of the movie. "This ridiculous relationship of a corpse and man would give us the chance to explore a parent-child relationship, a best friend relationship and a lovers' relationship," he explains. "And we got to do an existential crisis where there's talk about poop instead of big words." Dead right.

SWISS ARMY MAN IS OUT ON 10 APRIL ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



SWISS ARMY MAN
★★★★★
CERT 15

What we said: "[Radcliffe] is astonishing... The premise sounds like an off-Broadway play gone wrong. Far from it — this is extraordinary, vital, and fuelled by great performances." **Notable extras:** Commentary featuring Scheinert and Kwan, deleted scenes, featurettes.

MAN ON TRAIN

The bit-part players who stand out



THIS MONTH: EILIS CAHILL IN STAKE LAND

MORE ABOUT THE slow burn than shock tactics, Jim Mickle's 2010 vampire horror *Stake Land* still contains a classic scare. Searching a seemingly abandoned house, hero Connor Paolo finds a girl sleeping. Gently waking her with rescue in mind, he rears back as she suddenly beams a mouthful of sharp teeth and crawls with a bendy, jagged gait from her hidey-hole.

In a film full of vamps, this is Scamp. Eilis Cahill was cast, she thinks, because she looked younger than her years, but also because she was friendly with writer and co-star Nick Damici. "I have kind of a creepy body that's a little too thin and flexible and angular," she laughs, "so he thought of me. I'm not sure if that's flattering or not!"

Cahill's background is in off-off-Broadway stage work and "very indie films and shorts". *Stake Land* was itself shot for well under a million dollars, but seemed "pretty fancy" to the actress. "They had a big staff and bright lights and an office with assistants working on computers!" Her scene was filmed over one night, "so my memories of it groove well with what the movie actually was. The sun was starting to come up as I finished."

Her highest-profile project since has been Robert G. Putka's dysfunctional family dramedy *Mad*. "People who've gone through similar traumas have told me it meant a lot to them," she tells us. "It's mushy, but that feels good."

Her future plans include a possible film with director Michal Samir, co-writing a screenplay with indie filmmaker Jennifer Harlow, and more treading of the boards. While Damici will return in *Stake Land II*, Cahill won't, for obvious reasons. It sucks to be dead. **OWEN WILLIAMS**

STAKE LAND II IS OUT ON 3 APRIL ON DVD



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BINGEWATCH

Each month, our marathon man straps himself to a sofa and watches. And watches. And watches.

THIS MONTH: VEEP

WORDS SIMON CROOK ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN you watch five seasons of *Veep* in one sitting? After mega-marathoning 48 episodes in 24 hours, sleep deprivation, golf-ball haemorrhoids and chronic sofa-lag would be the physical answer, but psychologically? I'm absolutely fizzing. Here's a show so resplendently acidic I feel like my brain's been plunged into a vinegar Jacuzzi. Created by Armando Iannucci, *Veep* is *The Thick Of It*'s American cousin, and shares the same comedy genes: hand-held style, improvised bustle, shitloads of swearing and omnishambles plotting. I'm a huge *The Thick Of It* geek, but this isn't just faster and funnier — the entire show's powered by the fearless Julia Louis-Dreyfus, whose venal Vice President is the poster girl for post-truth politics. When your ego's the size of Iowa, there's simply no room left for pointless stuff like ethics, ideology and, most of all, people.

Season 1 hits the ground screaming with the fustercluck first term of VP Selina Meyer. With the never-seen President as distant as Pluto, Meyer and her hyena pack of aides scrabble uselessly as every one of her pet policies is put to sleep. You could fill a magazine with *Veep*'s verbal napalming but its speciality is mocking Capitol Hill's cynical double-speak (lying is "creative semantics"; documents aren't redacted — they're

"pencil-fucked"). I'm already hooked. Best insult: "Gold-plated shit gibbon."

Opening with the catastrophic midterms, Season 2 sees Selina capitalising on POTUS' fading popularity by bagging an enhanced foreign policy gig then fucking it up by insulting all of Europe, bodging a hostage crisis and endorsing Israel while eating a hog roast. In terms of political firefighting, it's like pointing a hose at a volcano, but Selina slowly transforms from White House doormat to setting a trap door in the Oval Office. Best insult: "Jolly Green Jizz Face."

Sure enough, *The Wicked Witch Of The West Wing* starts campaigning for President in Season 3. There's an old saying in politics — one day you're a rooster, the next you're a feather duster. Selina cycles from triumph to despair roughly 20 times per episode, but somehow spins every scandal to her advantage. When POTUS resigns, Meyer's crowned America's first female President. Best insult: "Tiny child balls."

Simultaneously the planet's most powerful and ineffective human, Selina's interim rule in Season 4 is, of course, an unholy disaster of data-breach scandals, financial crashes and craven budget cuts. Twenty hours into the *Veep*athon, I'm officially suffering from sitcom Stockholm syndrome. By the final episode,

I'm rooting for the fraudulent veep to officially win the election. In a stinging swipe at America's torturous NumberWang system, the vote ends in a draw. Best insult: "You're the worst thing to happen to this country since food in buckets."

With the Presidency decided by the House Of Representatives, the most recent fifth season counts down to the vote with clammy, time-bomb tension. My entire body morphs into a giant laughing ulcer as, bulging with stress-pimples and paranoia, Selina goes Full Metal Nixon, so desperate she turns her mother's death into a photo-op. If that makes you gasp, get a load of the episode 'C**tgate', in which Meyer launches an inquest into who called her one, only to find it's, er, everyone. Best insult: "Senile old piss sponge."

The season's final shot shows a slumped Selina in front of the Washington Monument, looking less an obelisk of the free world, more a middle-finger to democracy. With Season 6 in the can already, where next for *Veep*? Given Trump's reign is already lunging into satire-assassinating self-parody, early word suggests the focus will switch to Selina's life outside the DC bubble. Maybe they'll drop the V and just call it 'Eep'.

VEEP SEASON 5 IS OUT ON 11 APRIL ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

Chris Sarandon as
complex vampire
Jerry Dandrige.





FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES

**FRIGHT NIGHT DIRECTOR TOM HOLLAND
AND STAR CHRIS SARANDON ON CREATING
ONE OF THE GREAT SCREEN VAMPIRES**

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

THE VAMPIRE WAS dead. He hadn't been killed, as bloodsuckers usually are, by sunlight. Or a wooden stake pounded through his heart. Or even — and this is an old-school method — chopping off his head and stuffing the mouth with garlic. No, the vampire had been killed by a much more unlikely method.

George Hamilton.

"*Love At First Bite* had come out," says Tom Holland (the film director, not the historian or new Spider-Man), setting the scene: Hollywood in the early '80s, just a couple of years after Stan Dragoti's spoof, which saw Hamilton and his tan permanently cock his eyebrow as Dracula. "That tells you the genre was exhausted. Vampires were exhausted. You couldn't get a vampire film made to save your life."

But Holland had a plan to prove there was still life in the hoariest of screen monsters yet. And, helped by the heat surrounding him at the time thanks to the success of *Psycho II*, which he wrote, he managed it. That film was called *Fright Night*, and at its centre would be one of the great screen bloodsuckers: Jerry Dandrige.

ADMITTEDLY, JERRY DANDRIGE is a name that doesn't exactly strike fear into the hearts of those who hear it, but that's half the point. "It's the perfect cover," says Holland of Dandrige. "It's about the banality of evil. Who ever thought a vampire would be called Jerry Dandrige? And that he'd live next door?"

Which is *Fright Night*'s plot in an elevator-pitch nutshell: Charley Brewster (William Ragsdale), a typical teen who happens to be a horror-movie nut, discovers that his neighbour is a centuries-old vampire with a penchant for bumping off prostitutes. It sounds like a knowing twist on *Rear Window*, but for Holland the inspiration actually came from the similarly titled *The Window*, a 1949 thriller based on Cornell Woolrich's short story *The Boy Cried Murder*. All Holland had to do was add a vampire into the mix. With Dandrige he created a fanged fiend who was suave, sophisticated, sexual and, when he wanted to be, scary as all get-out. He created, in other words, a new take on an old faithful.

"Jerry was my attempt to do Dracula," admits Holland. "I wanted to have Christopher Lee appear in a modern setting, but I had to make him younger and hipper than Christopher."

In fact, Holland ended up creating not just a younger, hipper vampire, but arguably the best take on the horrible old Count since Lee. Dandrige is a complex creature — human enough to offer to spare Charley's life and tortured by his inability to love (but not in the overly operatic manner of Gary Oldman in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*). Finding an actor to embody all these virtues was not an easy task, but Holland eventually wound up having lunch with Chris Sarandon, who'd been Oscar nominated in 1976 for his role as Al Pacino's transgender lover in *Dog Day Afternoon*. "When I saw the title, I was a bit put off," admits Sarandon, "I had been >

doing 'prestige' projects and classic plays and was quite full of myself as a 'serious' actor. But my curiosity got the better of me, Tom literally described the movie shot by shot to me, and we shook hands on the spot."

From the off, Holland does something unusual with Dandrige (some *Fright Night* comic books, which continue Jerry's story after he's crispy fried, spell it 'Dandrige'); where other films might have spun out the question of whether he is a vampire, Holland is unequivocal: this guy will bite your neck and not blink. "That wouldn't have been as much fun," says Holland. "Your hero is only as heroic as your villain is monstrous. And I wanted to bring back vampires as an icon of fright. I wanted a teenage boy going *mano a mano* with the great vampire of the world. I'd watch that!"

Many of the quirks that breathed life into Dandrige came from Sarandon, most notably his habit of eating apples; not the sort of thing you expect from vampires. "I did research on vampire bats, which comprise only about ten per cent of the animal kingdom," says the actor. "The remaining 90 per cent or so are fruit bats, which was the inspiration for Jerry eating fruit." As for the distinctive duds, including a long, blue coat with a red scarf and a sweater worn in a nightclub scene that's so tight you can almost make out the blood freezing in his veins, "Tom and I went to a clothing store in LA and picked out most of Jerry's wardrobe," reveals Sarandon. "I kept a few of the sweaters, but sadly no longer have them."

For all its postmodern trappings (it's as much a horror film about horror films as *Scream*, which it predated by 11 years), *Fright Night* is, like many vampire flicks, about fucking. And that all revolves around Dandrige. It begins with Charley "trying to get laid", as Holland puts it, fumbling with his girlfriend Amy (Amanda Bearse) in a thick-fingered attempt to lose their mutual virginity, only to get distracted when he sees Dandrige chomping down on a bare-breasted victim across the street. It's sensual, pervy, sexy — everything Charley wants to be but can't. "It's the older guy stealing your girlfriend away, with all the sexual insecurities that brings up," says Holland. "You just know he's a better lover. I was trying to hit subtext everywhere I could in that movie."

Amongst the subtext packed in there is an interesting gay theme that runs throughout the movie. Although Jerry has a healthy interest in the opposite sex, he is also very comfortable with his live-in familiar, Billy Cole (Jonathan Stark), with numerous shots implying they do more together than bury bodies. He also seduces Charley's best friend, Evil Ed (the excellent Stephen Geoffreys, who coins the film's enduring catchphrase, "You're so cool, Brewster"), a lost teen who needs guidance and love in his life. Mainstream? "I think it's important to let the audience read whatever they wish into Jerry's sexuality," says Sarandon. "It would make sense that a being that has lived that long and with his history would be sexually sophisticated, but his drive is not primarily sexual."

No such fence-straddling for Holland. "He's



Vampire hunter Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall) faces off with Evil Ed (Stephen Geoffreys).



Amanda Bearse's Amy after a close encounter with Dandrige.



Tom Holland (second left) and Roddy McDowall watch the action.



Roddy McDowall and Tom Holland observe a supine Stephen Geoffreys.

sexually polymorphous," says Holland. "He's offering salvation to everybody. But that movie became a very important movie for a lot of gay kids. They got it."

WHEN *FRIGHT NIGHT* hit cinemas in 1985, it wasn't quite love at first bite ("I can't really say the movie had any impact on my career," admits Sarandon), but as the second-highest grossing horror of the year, just behind *A Nightmare On Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, it did well enough to spawn a risible sequel in 1988 (only Ragsdale and McDowall returned; Sarandon

and Holland reteamed the same year on *Child's Play*). And it can be at least partially credited with kickstarting the vogue for vampires that begat the likes of *Near Dark*, *Vamp* and *The Lost Boys*.

Its reputation continued to grow, though. "I didn't think about it for about 20 years, then I turned around and it was a classic," laughs Holland. The surviving cast (McDowall died in 1998) do reunions together on the convention circuit (the next, in Texas, is due in May). And, of course, there was the rather lamentable remake in 2011, with Colin Farrell as Dandrige, David Tennant as Peter Vincent and the late Anton Yelchin as Charley. "Don't get me started on what I think of the remake," says Holland, before getting started on what he thinks of the remake. "Oh my God, I couldn't fucking believe it! Does anybody have a clue? What they did to Jerry was criminal. And what they did to poor Peter Vincent, they should be taken out and shot!"

So Holland has decided to take matters into his own hands. He may be deep in post on his new horror movie, *Rock Paper Dead*, and also running his own website, THTerrortime, but that hasn't stopped him writing a new novel, *Fright Night: Resurrection*. "The specific purpose of that is to bring back Jerry Dandrige," he says. "I got so sick of not fulfilling the promise of the first one that I'm going to write what I like." And if that novel should get picked up for a film adaptation, then Jerry Dandrige might live to bite another day. Welcome back to *Fright Night*.

FRIGHT NIGHT IS OUT ON 27 MARCH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



FRIGHT NIGHT

★★★★

CERT 18

What we said: "Taking the John Hughes formula that broke out in the '80s like severe acne — tales of teens bucking the system while falling in love — and spicing it up with comedy-horror hijinks, this is a beast years before its time."

Notable extras: Two-hour documentary, featurettes.

MY MOVIE MASTERMIND

RAFE SPALL

Will Rafe score big, or fall short?

WORDS JONATHAN PILE

LEADER BOARD

Ben Kingsley	9.5
Christopher Lee	9.5
David O. Russell	9.5
Quentin Tarantino	9.5
Robert Rodriguez	9
Guillermo del Toro	9
Werner Herzog	9
Christian Slater	8.5
Bryan Singer	8.5
John Waters	8

1 In *Shaun Of The Dead*, what is the name of the store Noel and Shaun work in?

[Long pause] I've got no idea. It's a shop which is like a Dixons-type shop. Oh shit, it says it on the badge. [Hears the answer] What? Why? I'm going to be bad at this.

The correct answer is Foree Electric. It's named after *Dawn Of The Dead's* Ken Foree.

2 Complete your line from *Hot Fuzz*: "You wanna be a big cop in a small town..."

"... fuck off up the model village." That day is the only day in my entire career where a director [Edgar Wright] sent us home. We couldn't complete the scene, we were laughing so much. Paddy Considine was one of the main culprits. He is straight up the funniest man I've ever met. Actually, him and Nick Frost tied.

Correct.

3 What's the name of the snake-like creature that kills you in *Prometheus*?

Well, okay, I don't know what that snake thing's called. We were never told what that snake thing is called. So if that snake thing has a name, that was decided after the filming of the film. That alien snake, that I was eventually deep-throated to death by, was called 'Alien snake' on the day.

The correct answer is Hammerpede.

4 In *I Give It A Year*, you have to mime the name of a TV show. What is that show?

Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman. I was trying to make everyone realise that "Quinn" sounds like "quim",

so I was pointing to an old lady's vagina in order to get that reference across. It was a fun day.

Correct.

5 When Mr. Tibbs farts in *The BFG*, what does he blow up?

I'm going to have to pass. I can tell you something interesting about that day, though. That room was vast — maybe 100 metres long. And right over in one corner of the room, Steven Spielberg picked up and threw a fake bit of toast, and it spun like a [throwing] star all the way across the room. Rebecca Hall, who was standing at the other side talking to me, stuck her arm out and caught it without even looking at it. There is a video of it. It would be a sensation if it ever went on the internet. It was amazing.

The correct answer is a tea trolley.

6 Three celebrities turn up in *The Big Short* to explain difficult financial terms to the audience. Name two of them.

Margot Robbie. Anthony Bourdain. Can I remember the third? Shit, I can't. I'm racking my brain. Vanessa Hudgens? No. It's Justin Bieber's ex-girlfriend. I can't remember her name.

Correct. The third celebrity explainer is Selena Gomez.

7 At the beginning of *Get Santa*, you retrieve your personal belongings as you're released from prison. What are they?
Picture of his son. A Rubik's Cube. Is there more? Some coins? No? Keys for his van. Wallet?

Phone. I said it! I said it before you.

Correct.

8 What song are you forced to listen to over and over again in the 'White Christmas' episode of *Black Mirror*?

I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday. That song's an absolute banger. I defy anyone to not turn it up when it comes on the radio.

Correct.

9 In *Anonymous*, Shakespeare quotes one of 'his' plays in an attempt to seduce a barmaid. What is the play, and the quote?

Is it *Romeo And Juliet*? "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?" There's more? Oh, come on. "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."

Correct.

10 What is the name of the play *What If*, the romcom you made with Daniel Radcliffe and Zoe Kazan, was based on?

The F Word. It's not *The F Word*? Well, that was the original title of *What If*. When you said, "What If", I was like, "What the fuck's that?"

[Hears the answer] Hmm, that's catchy.

The correct answer is *Toothpaste And Cigars*.

RAFE SPALL SCORES 6

"That's a shame. I feel like I've let everyone down."

MUM'S LIST IS OUT NOW ON DVD



THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

#10 STUART HAZELDINE ON RIO BRAVO

THE IDEA OF *Empire's* First-Take Club is gloriously simple. Every month, we ask someone to watch a film they haven't seen from our 301 Greatest Movies Of All Time (published in 2014), and tell us what they thought. This month, Stuart Hazeldine — director of *Exam* and the upcoming *The Shack* — confronted a movie considered one of the best Westerns of all time. Bravo. Bravo.

50... 100... 150... My smug-o-meter rose ever higher as I scanned down *Empire's* 301 Greatest Movies list and realised I'd seen that, that and that... until *Rio Bravo* flashed by. Wait, which one was that? Not Michael Caine and a bikini babe on a faded VHS cover (that would be *Blame It On Rio*,

aka I blame it on teenage hormones), nor Andy McNab back for a third Bravo Two Zero: THIS TIME IN TEXAS. No, this was a Western, but which one? I mentally rewind through the oaters of childhood, all starring The Duke and all with similar names: *Rio Grande*, *Red River*... Nope, I can't picture it. Well, how about that Introduction To Narrative Cinema course at uni? *Stagecoach*, *Shane*, *The Searchers*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*... still nothing. So it looks like we have a winner: I have not seen this movie, so now I will watch it and love it, then I will tell you to love it, too. I mean, John Wayne with Howard Hawks at the helm, written by Leigh Brackett, aka The Less Well-Known Co-Writer Of *The Empire Strikes Back*: what's not to like?



For starters, the title, referring to the town where the movie is set, means relatively nothing. For seconds, there isn't much of a plot: a sheriff and his misfit deputies defend their town from a Rich Rancher In Black And His Private Army™ because his brother got sent to jail. Or something. Thankfully, where *Rio Bravo* comes alive is the cast and characters — and what a cast: Wayne is Sheriff John T. Chance: awesome name. Then we have Dean 'Pasta Fazool' Martin's drunk deputy trying to show he's still good enough, the multi-faceted Walter Brennan as an old, lame deputy trying to show he's still good enough, and the teen heartthrob Ricky Nelson as a young gun trying to show he's... good enough. You can picture *The Magnificent Seven* pitch a year later: "Whaddaya

mean, you've never heard of Kurosawa? Look, it's *Rio Bravo*. Only with four more!" And then there's Angie Dickinson. Hot diggity. Here, as a statuesque ingénue, she has it all: razor wit and sass with a smoky-eyed stare and a siren shape to wrap it up in a bow. Even playing the impassioned motormouth to Wayne's impassive man mountain, you still feel she'll get the better of him in the end.

But something was still off for me. This film is loved by Bogdanovich, Carpenter and QT, with Carpenter calling it "the ultimate Western", so why wasn't I won over? I think it's down to the reason many cineastes love it — it has a bit of everything. The opening has no dialogue and the orchestra punctuates fist impacts with comic strip "pows". Then it turns domestic sitcom set in

a saloon with physical comedy and Wayne's sheriff as the put-upon man of the house. Then it side-steps into a love story. Then Martin and Nelson croon in the jailhouse. Then the bad guy appears OVER AN HOUR IN and it stutters toward a showdown. The directors I admire — Weir, Mann, Nolan, Fincher, Spielberg — are masters of tonal consistency, but *Rio Bravo* doesn't know what it wants. So if you like a pot pourri of everything, I recommend you watch. As for me, I dug hanging out with the characters but not much more.

The other night I watched *Unforgiven* for the first time in years. Now *that's* a Western...

RIO BRAVO IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD. THE SHACK IS OUT LATER THIS YEAR

NOTES ON NOTES ON BLINDNESS

Illuminating a British docu-drama that's a true one-off

WORDS SIMON CROOK

HOW DO YOU visualise blindness? It sounds impossible, and about as cinematic as a blackboard, yet James Spinney and Peter Middleton's debut, *Notes On Blindness*, shines a light on sight-loss through the haunting story of John Hull. In 1983, the Australian-born theologian went blind. As his visual world faded, Hull recorded a vivid audio diary. His experiences are brought to life through pioneering lip-syncing and a deeply moving performance from Dan Renton Skinner (*Shooting Stars*' burger-van owner Angelos Epithemiou). "The film presents blindness in a way nobody's ever considered," says the actor, here credited as Dan Skinner. "What is it like to forget your own memories? To lose the faces of your family? It's a fascinating, inspiring story, and a role that will stay with me forever." Here's how they did it...

ORIGINS

"We first met John in 2010, researching a short, *Snow*," says Middleton. "There's a chapter in his book, *Touching The Rock*, that refers to it as 'blind people's fog'. Snow dampens acoustics and blurs the contours between the pavement and the road. We were so compelled by his life story, the film became less about snow, more about John." When Hull unearthed a shoebox of dusty C-90 cassettes recording his descent into blindness, the directors set about shaping this



30-year-old audio memoir into a feature. "We had 16 hours of this intimate voice talking about the effects of blindness on his family, his routines and his own identity," adds Spinney. "Those tapes were his quest to understand blindness. If he didn't, it would've destroyed him." Five years and two experimental shorts about Hull later, the feature finally went into production.

THAT SYNCING FEELING

Using Hull's voice as the heart of their movie, the duo faced a unique creative test. "We didn't want talking heads, wide-shots or for viewers to experience a blind person from the 'outside'," says Spinney. "We wanted audiences to follow



Above: Theologian John Hull (Dan Skinner) with son Thomas (Sidney Warbrick). **Left:** Rain pours down in one of John's evocative dreams. **Here:** Simone Kirby as wife Marilyn Hull.

John into this very internal journey, but how?" The answer hit them after seeing Clio Barnard's *The Arbor*, the 2010 Andrea Dunbar biopic that featured actors lip-syncing to recorded testimonies. The technique, inspired by the new wave of verbatim theatre, allowed an actor to fully 'embody' John's voice. Enter Dan Skinner. "It was such a different role for him," says Middleton. "He didn't just master the lip-syncing — he was the only actor able to capture John's warmth and sense of humour."

PERFECTING TIMING

As a comic, Skinner has the precision timing of a Rolex, but lip-syncing Hull's memoir required

KIM NEWMAN'S VIDEO DUNGEON

Many movies enter Kim's dungeon.
The lucky ones die first



timing down to the nanosecond. "Not only did you have John's voice," he says. "There was his breathing, coughs and stumbles. I ended up locking into every tiny fragment of the audio. Then, on top of that, I was miming with an Aussie accent, which, believe me, is every bit as bizarre as it sounds." The arduous, exacting method offered no shortcuts. On set, each line of dialogue was cut into clips with two pips before each line as a prompt: a process repeated over and over and over again. Perhaps strangest of all, the entire shoot was silent — no sound was recorded during filming.

OUT OF SIGHT

Alongside the lip-syncing, Skinner also took the decision to 'go blind' over the course of the 40-day shoot. "If you close your eyes and work your way around a room, you do find yourself entering John's world," he remembers. "It was an extremely isolating experience, and incredibly frustrating as an actor: I couldn't see, and couldn't use my own voice. It was a long, long process — at times I'd be asking myself, 'What *am* I doing? Is it any good?' — but the more you do it, the more meditative it becomes."

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE

"John described a lot dreams featuring water — being dragged down to the ocean depths, or his family being swept away by waves," says Spinney. "To communicate blindness, you operate through metaphor and his water dreams lent themselves to powerful cinematic imagery." One sequence featuring a tidal wave in a supermarket was inspired by *The Shining's* elevator of blood. Equally striking is a scene in which John imagines a rain shower inside his house. "We built the set on a raised platform, then flooded it," says Middleton. "It caused endless sleepless nights for our cinematographer [Gerry Floyd]: we only had two takes before the wallpaper started peeling off and the hairdos got drenched."

INTO DARKNESS

Nominated for three BAFTAs, *Notes On Blindness* is an illuminating vision in itself, but it also offers a sharp glimpse into cinema's future. Developed in tandem with the film is a six-chapter virtual reality project, *Into Darkness*, which immerses viewers even deeper into John's sensory journey using 3D binaural audio. "VR is an incredibly exciting new tool," says Spinney. "With *Into Darkness*, we're able to share John's concept of acoustic space, and how multilayered sound patterns can add detail to a world without sight." Intrigued? All you need is a VR headset, a smartphone and the free app. Download it from notesonblindness.co.uk and prepare for an enlightening experience.

NOTES ON BLINDNESS IS OUT ON 10 APRIL
ON BLU-RAY



THE BREAK-OUT: THE INVITATION

A SLOW-BURNING suspense-horror item set in the sort of upscale LA home film industry folk often live in, *The Invitation* is smartly written (a surprise since the writer-producer team of Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi have a CV studded with the likes of *Ride Along*, *R.I.P.D.* and the *Clash Of The Titans* remake) and deftly played by an interesting non-star cast. An essay in the occasional dinner-party-goes-hideously-wrong sub-genre of fright film, it gets its charge out of disturbing character interplay — though it's obvious from early on that this evening will end very badly indeed.

Will (Logan Marshall-Green) and his girlfriend Kira (Emayatzy Corinealdi) reluctantly turn up for a party in Will's former home, where his ex-wife Eden (Tammy Blanchard) now lives with her new husband David (Michiel Huisman). Will and Eden's break-up was hastened by the death of their

son, which has had repercussions for their social circle. An ominous touch is that Eden met David at a grief self-help group and they've recently joined *The Invitation*, a commune which sounds a lot like a cult. Will worries about the real purpose of this therapy, and fears for a guest who leaves early and one who hasn't turned up as expected.

This is especially strong on an escalation of social embarrassment into outright horror. The screws are tightened as Will finds himself appearing rude as he makes accusations against reasonable-seeming people who insist they only have his interests at heart. Director Karyn Kusama (*Girlfight*) ventured into gory horror with *Jennifer's Body*, but here goes for a subtler approach, relying on creepy nuance until the finish, when things kick off and we get a sense of horrors taking place outside the claustrophobic central location.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"When I was working at Columbia, I was working on a theory of pure evil as a form of electric energy."

House III: The Horror Show

THE ROUND-UP: HOLIDAY HORROR

THE ODDS ON two holiday-themed British zombie films set on islands off the coast of Spain being out at the same time would normally be fairly high. But all bets are off in zombieland, and so we have Steve Barker's *The Resort* (*Westworld* with zombies and Dougray Scott), and Andy Edwards' *Ibiza Undead* (*The Inbetweeners Movie* meets *Shaun Of The Dead*). *The Resort* is slightly more action-orientated as tourists try to survive disaster, though it has a satirical streak (the zombie safari is sabotaged by a zombie rights group), whereas *Ibiza Undead* offers scattershot gags. Both are pretty entertaining, even in an overtilld field.

Sunbaked Southern European locations and potential apocalypse also feature in two quirkier, more original pictures. Alberto Marini's *Summer Camp* is an Eli Roth-influenced something-in-the-water outbreak picture. The clever twist is that the madness infection wears off after 20 minutes and victims return to normal not remembering they've just assaulted and killed friends. Joyce A. Nashawati's *Blind Sun*, in which refugee Idriss (Ziad Bakri) takes a job looking after of the luxury second home of a French family, is an intense psychodrama with spooky elements and a feel for fraying, fractious contemporary Europe.

THE GUIDE

Everything else coming your way this month

27 MARCH

2019: AFTER THE FALL OF NEW YORK DVD, BLU-RAY
ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE DVD
ALL ABOUT THEM DVD
BLEED FOR THIS DVD, BLU-RAY
CHILDREN OF THE CORN III: URBAN HARVEST BLU-RAY
CHOSEN DVD
COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER BLU-RAY
DANNY SAYS: THE LIFE & TIMES OF DANNY FIELDS DVD
DIE SCREAMING, MARIANNE DVD, BLU-RAY
THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN DVD, DOWNLOAD
FRANTZ FANON: BLACK SKIN WHITE MASKS DVD, BLU-RAY
HOUSE: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION DVD, BLU-RAY
IDRIS ELBA: FIGHTER DVD
INSIDE NO 9: SERIES 3 DVD, BLU-RAY
LUDWIG BLU-RAY
JACK THE RIPPER DVD, BLU-RAY



EXTRA FILM

LONE WOLF AND CUB BLU-RAY

A Criterion Collection of all six live-action films based on the manga about an assassin and his son. Extras include 1980 flick *Shogun Assassin*, a re-edit of *Sword Of Vengeance*.

KILLER CONSTABLE

DVD, BLU-RAY

KILLER'S MOON BLU-RAY



SCORSESE TALKS

WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY DOOR

DVD, BLU-RAY

This BFI restoration of Martin Scorsese's first film has a new booklet and a partial audio commentary from The Bushy-Browed One.

MOBSTERS BLU-RAY
MULTIPLE MANIACS BLU-RAY
PATERSON DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD
PIECES DVD, BLU-RAY
THE PROUD VALLEY DVD, BLU-RAY
REAL BOY DVD
THE RIFT DVD
SS-CB DVD, BLU-RAY
TERRAHAWKS: VOLUME 3 DVD, BLU-RAY
VENGEANCE DVD, BLU-RAY

3 APRIL

ALICE BLU-RAY
THE CAT AND THE CANARY DVD



DIRECTOR COMMENTARY

SOLARIS BLU-RAY

Andrei Tarkovsky's existential space drama gets the Criterion treatment, with an archival audio commentary from the director and enough deleted scenes to fill a space station.

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS DVD, BLU-RAY
A DEMON WITHIN DVD
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7 APRIL

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17 APRIL

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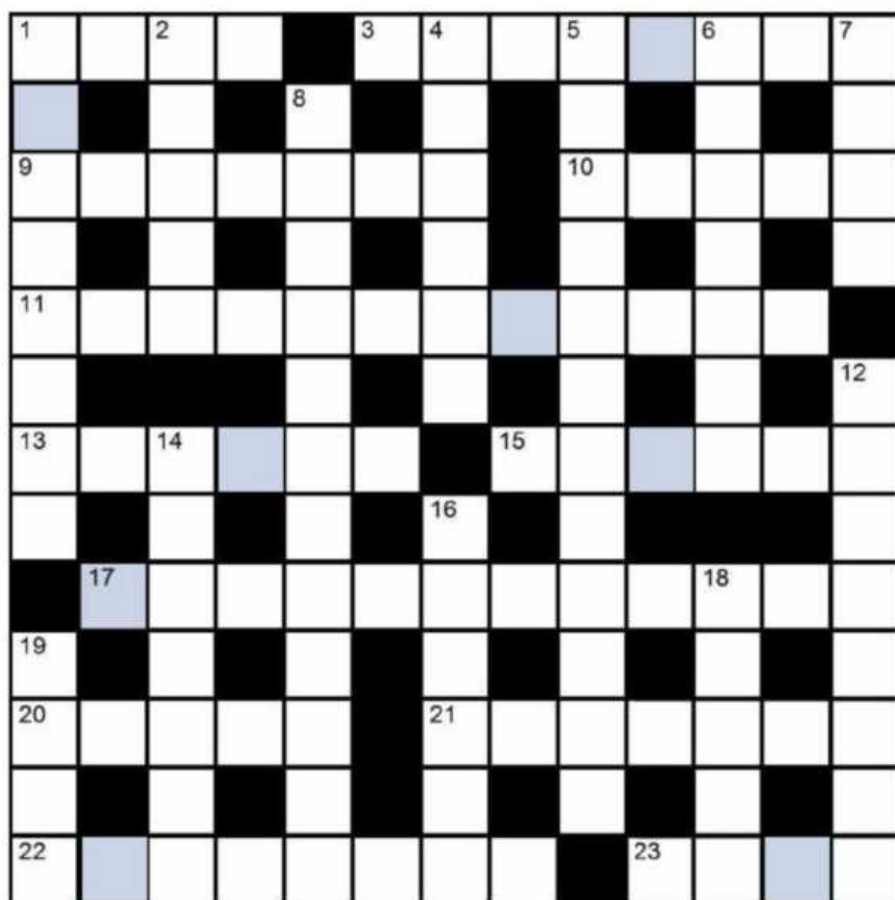


BONUS SHORT

THE BIRTH OF A NATION DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD

Nate Parker's slavery epic is a well-crafted film that demands your time. Among the extras is his impressive short, #AmeriCAN.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Gosling, Reynolds or O'Neal (4)
- 3 *Breaking —*, carnal love story that won Emily Watson an Oscar nomination (3,5)
- 9 Send god the wrong way for a Greg Kinnear starrer (7)
- 10 M. Night Shyamalan's 2017 kidnap horror flick (5)
- 11 This starship sci-fi drama starred Laurence Fishburne and Sam Neill (5,7)
- 13 Edward who portrayed identical twins in *Leaves Of Grass* (6)
- 15 Aka Marcy May and Marlene (2)
- 17 "Bad luck, bad attitude, bad back" ran the blurb for this Elizabeth Hurley starrer (6,6)
- 20 Cameron Crowe's welcoming Hawaiian venture (5)
- 21 Sofia who was Inez in *Chef* (7)
- 22 Spike Lee's film about a drug chain's lowest links (8)
- 23 Guys like Danny DeVito and Joe Piscopo (4)

DOWN

- 1 2016's *Star Wars* story (5,3)
- 2 Previn whose film scores include *Elmer Gantry* and *The 4 Horsemen Of The Apocalypse* (5)
- 4 This Kate appears in 5 Down (6)
- 5 Zack Braff's 2014 Kickstarter movie (4,1,3,4)
- 6 Milos Forman's take on *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (7)
- 7 MacFarlane, the voice of Ted (4)
- 8 In which Death looked a lot like Brad Pitt (4,3,5)
- 12 Whatever happened to this Bette Davis character? (4,4)
- 14 It was the last film directed by Howard Hawks (3,4)
- 16 Dennis or possibly Sigourney (6)
- 18 Alec Baldwin brought the blues to this city (5)
- 19 Jason Patric and Ray Liotta's cop drama (4)

COMPETITION ENDS 17 APRIL

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director, character or title. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!).

Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, 17 April. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

APRIL ANSWERS **ACROSS:** 1 Coma, 3 Deadfall, 9 Shalako, 10 Brave, 11 A Late Quartet, 13 August, 15 Charro, 17 James Dearden, 20 India, 21 Arrival, 22 Road Trip, 23 I Spy. **DOWN:** 1 Cast Away, 2 Moana, 4 Exodus, 5 Deborah Harry, 6 Amateur, 7 Lies, 8 James Stewart, 12 Connelly, 14 Grandma, 16 Adjani, 18 Davis, 19 Liar. **ANAGRAM** LA LA LAND

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before 18 April or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

COMPETITION

WIN!

A 49" SMART LCD TV, BLU-RAY PLAYER PLUS A COPY OF SWISS ARMY MAN



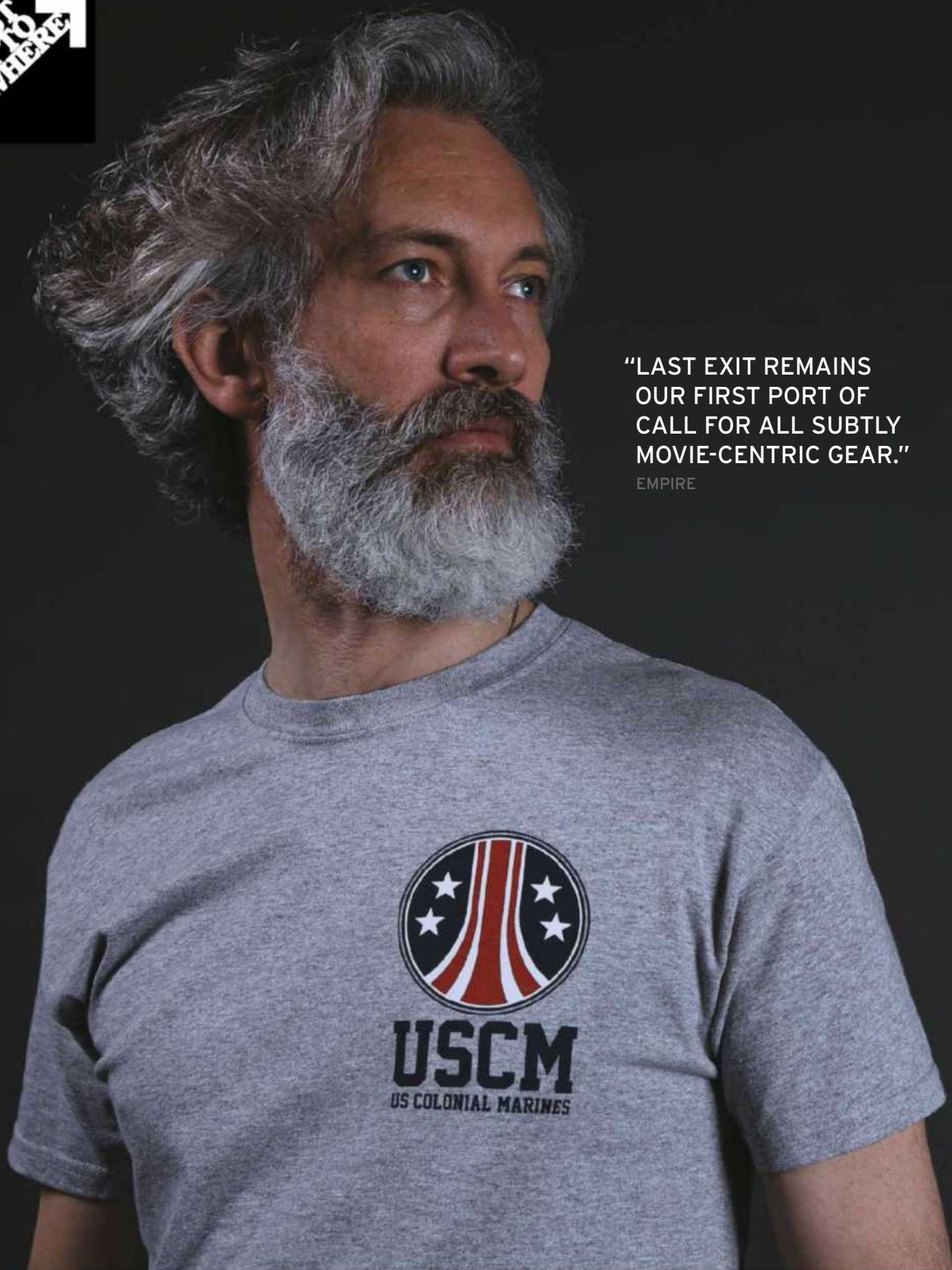
The rather wonderful — not to say unique — *Swiss Army Man* is out on DVD and Blu-ray on 10 April, and to celebrate its arrival, we've got a JVC 49" Smart LCD TV, a Samsung Blu-ray player plus a copy on Blu-ray up for grabs.

Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's film is the tale of a suicidal man (Paul Dano) who finds the inspiration to carry on in the unlikely form of a corpse he encounters on a beach. A corpse called Manny — played by Daniel Radcliffe — that powers jet skis with its farts and uses its erection as a GPS. But far from just a bad taste-fest, as 'reborn' Manny grows from man-child to adult, *Swiss Army Man* has much to say about the human condition, and delivers it with heart and empathy.

If you'd like to get your hands on the hardware and the film, you know the drill: complete the crossword, solve the anagram and text your answer to the number below.

SWISS ARMY MAN IS OUT ON 10 APRIL ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

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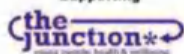
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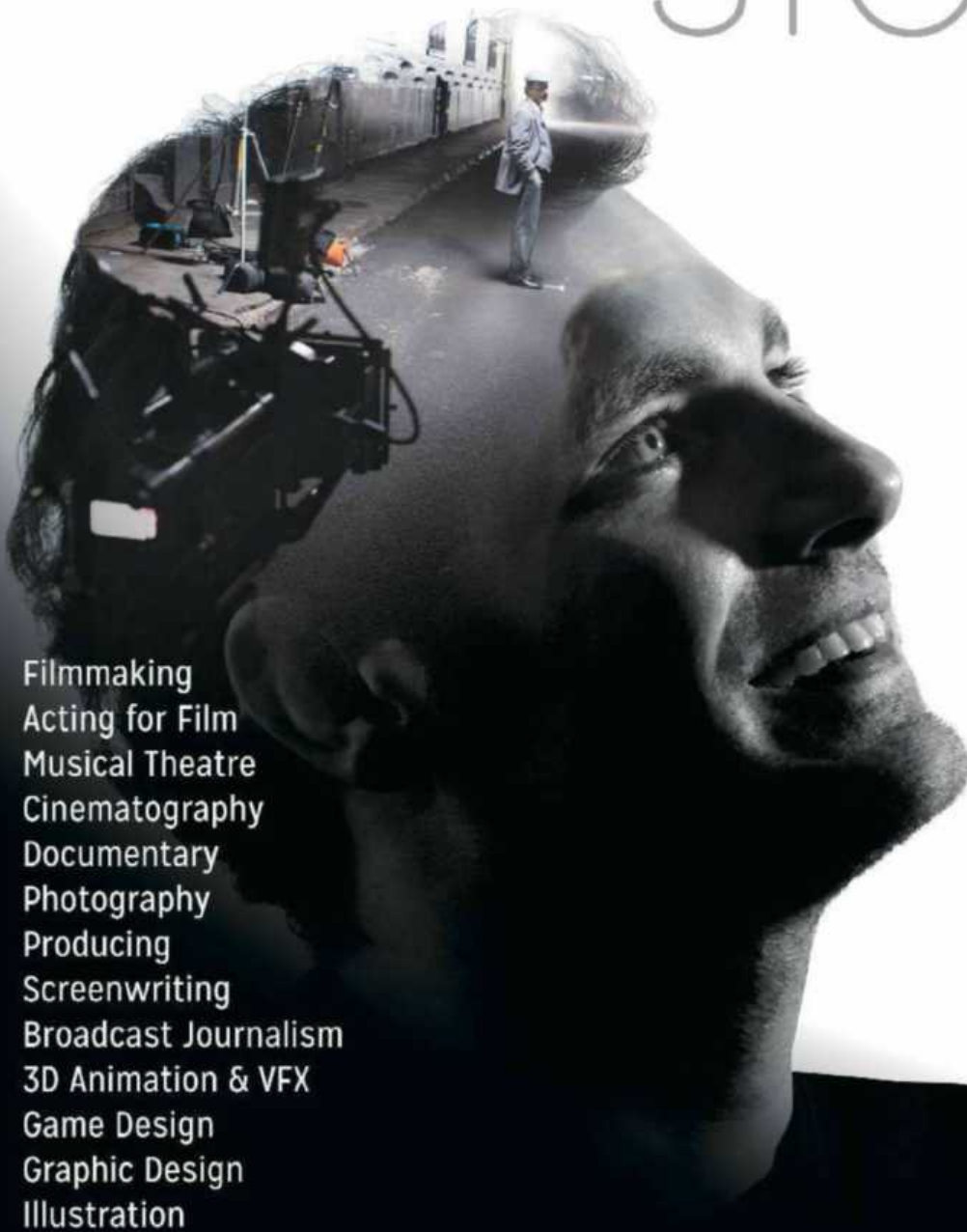
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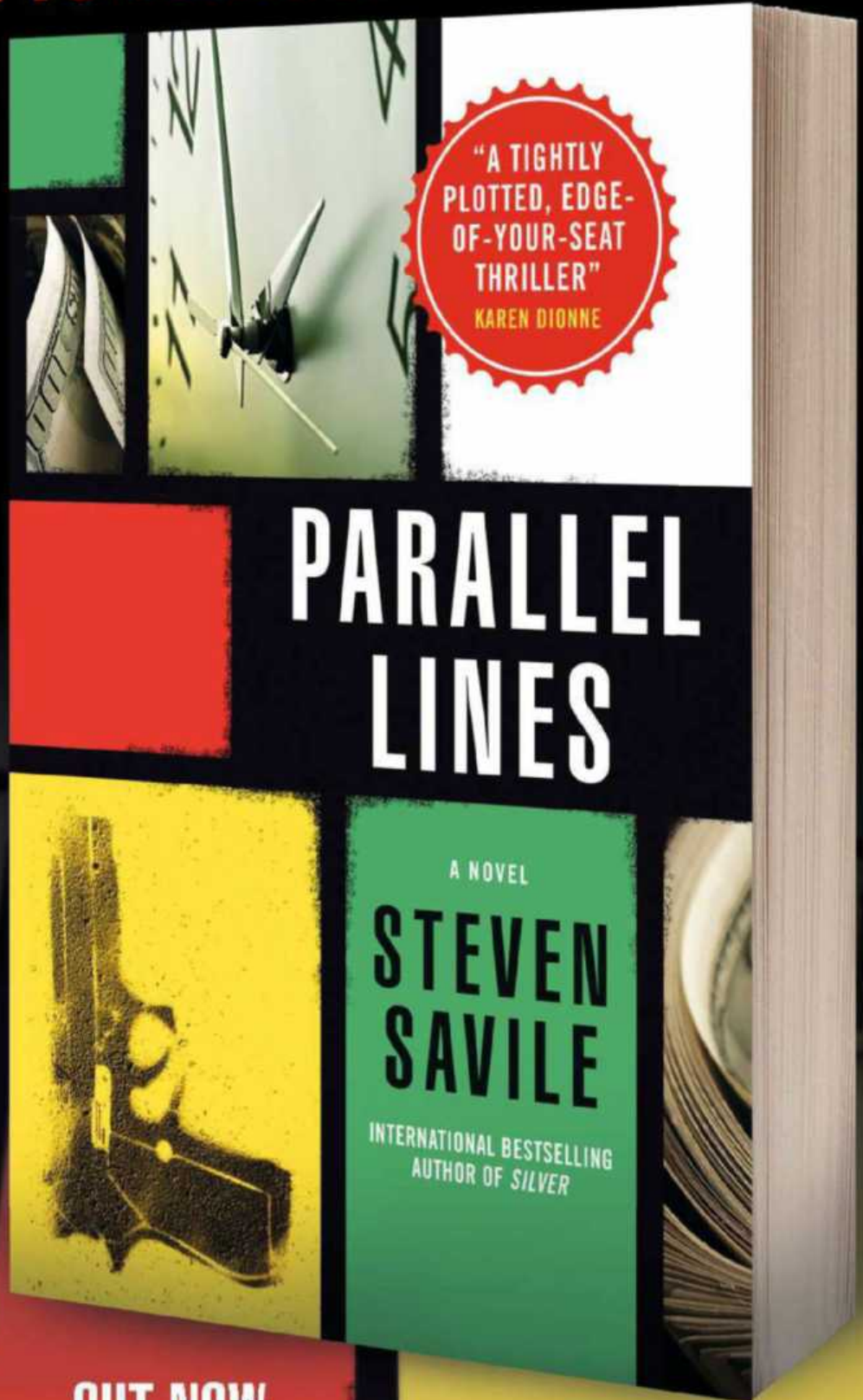
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RUSHMORE CHOSEN BY GARTH JENNINGS



Garth Jennings says: “When I first saw *Rushmore* it seemed so perfect to me that there was almost no reason to make any more films. Though every scene is gold, Bill Murray’s speech to the school still resonates deeply with me. Wes Anderson told me the speech was written by [co-writer] Owen Wilson’s father, Robert. He was briefed to write a speech he might have given himself.”

INT. SCHOOL CHAPEL — DAY

Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman) is nudged out of a daydream by his chapel partner Dirk Calloway (Mason Gamble). A man is at the lectern. This is Herman Blume (Bill Murray).

HERMAN: Thank you. You guys have it real easy. I never had it like this where I grew up, but I send my kids here because the fact is you go to one of the best schools in the country: Rushmore.

Dirk leans in to talk to Max, but Max is enraptured.

HERMAN: Now for some of you, it doesn’t matter. You were born rich and you’re going to stay rich. But here’s my advice to the rest of you.

Take dead aim on the rich boys. Get them in the crosshairs, and take them down.

Max is writing notes in his hymnal. He finishes with “This guy — best chapel speaker I have ever seen” then underlines the last four words.

HERMAN: Just remember — they can buy anything, but they can’t buy backbone. Don’t let them forget that. Thank you.

He steps down to a standing ovation... from Max.

EXT. SCHOOL CHAPEL — DAY

Herman and Dr Nelson Guggenheim (Brian Cox) exit the chapel, pursued by Max and Dirk.

GUGGENHEIM: Congratulations, Herman. Perhaps you can give us an encore. [To his dogs] Nicholas! Copernicus!

HERMAN: Oh, give a shit. I paid for the whole damn natatorium, the least these little pricks can do is hear me out.

MAX: Hi, Dr Guggenheim.

GUGGENHEIM: Hello, Max.

MAX: Hello, I’m Max Fischer. I just wanted to say that I strongly agree with your views concerning Rushmore. Your speech was excellent.

HERMAN: Thank you.

MAX: Thank you.

HERMAN: Thank you.

DIRK: Hello.

MAX: Oh Mr Blume, this is my chapel partner, Dirk Calloway.

HERMAN: Nice to meet you, Dirk.

MAX: Well, thanks. You know, I really think you’re right about Rushmore. [Leaving] Come on, Dirk.

HERMAN: What’s his name again?

GUGGENHEIM: Max Fischer.

HERMAN: Sharp little guy.

GUGGENHEIM: He’s one of the worst students we’ve got.

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