

You're Better Than This



Listening Fail #28 "Barely Hanging On"



Listening Fail #15 "RCA Jungle"



Listening Fail #09 "Extreme Pairing Fail"



Listening Fail #30 "Cord Nightmare"



Listening Fail #14 "Mug o' Bass"



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SHERLOCK

SERIES FOUR

'stellar...impressive...spectacular'







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SANIT





THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

GRITTY. BLOODY. EMOTIONALLY RAW. These are just some of the terms that accurately describe my underwear, but they also apply to *Logan*, the ninth outing for Hugh Jackman as the cutlery-handed cigar-chomper. (And apparently the final time, although that's what they said about the *Fast & Furious* movies before it made a billion dollars and spawned three more.)

Even without that Johnny Cash cover of *Hurt* on the trailer (aka The Saddest Song In The World), expectations were high for *Logan*: Wolverine is a beloved character, but his animalistic urges have always been blunted by the need for kid-friendly ratings. Letting Logan off his leash is a dream for fans and Jackman alike, and director James Mangold and his perma-buffed star take full advantage of it – for all the gory details, head for page 34.

Is it the *Deadpool* effect? No doubt the R-rated anti-hero (and unexpectedly successful awards season darling) has moved the bar for what is permissible in a comicbook movie, although Jackman insists they had already found their new level before Ryan Reynolds got hit with the ugly stick.

And to be fair, the drive towards grittier, more brutal fare started before Mr Pool, not least on the small screen: *Game Of Thrones, Walking Dead, True Detective* and others, all have more graphic viciousness than you'd find in most movies. Just as the amount of sex and nudity that ratings boards (and the general public) would accept on screen skyrocketed from the Eighties to the Naughties, so the amount of explicit gore is on the rise. Is it a good thing? A bad thing? It's not necessarily either, it all depends on how it's used; for now, watching Wolverine drive his claws right through a man's head is what the character really should have been from the beginning.

Where to now? If a more violent *Logan* does the same sort of brisk business as *Deadpool*, it'll be open season on everything for comic heroes. Which could mean versions of The Punisher, Spawn, Lobo and others that really let the claret fly.

May you win everything in the skill tester while you wait for your session to start,





(...and our fave Carrie Fisher performance besides *Star Wars*)

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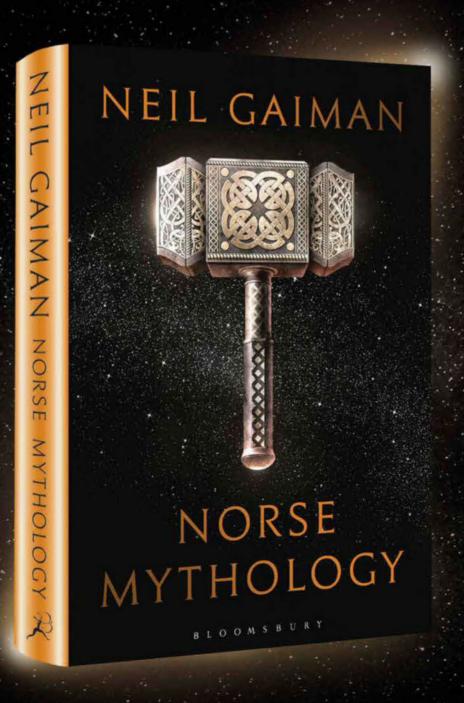
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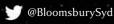
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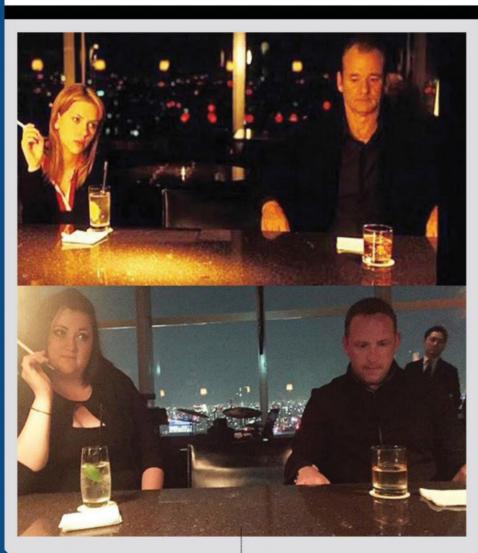












LETTER OF THE MONTH

WHILST IN JAPAN recently, my wife and I took the opportunity to visit the New York Sky Bar in the Park Hyatt Hotel made famous by the Bill Murray classic Lost In Translation. Upon being given the exact table both Bill and Scarlett were sitting, we couldn't miss out on this opportunity

to recreate this classic scene! Clearly I'm not as cool as Bill but I did my best!

MARK FELLOWES, PERTH, WA

Those look like good times — even Suntory times! Please tell us you went out and sang Brass In Pocket and More Than This at a karaoke bar and whispered something mysterious to your wife.

Letter Of The Month this month scores a selection of DVDs from this month's new releases.



IF TRYANGOSLING AND *RANCITYREYNOLDS STARRED* IN A MOVIE TOGETHER THE INTERWEBS, AND POSSIBLY THE **WORLD. WOULD EXPLODE!**

@DAVEMBROWN

THE BENAISSANCE IS HERE

Reading through the Comments section of your December mag I was taken aback by Simon Fallows' letter regarding Mel Gibson and the idea that "Mad Mel" is deserving of the "Gibsonaissance" moniker.

Were it only that, like McConaughey, Gibson had appeared in a few crap films, then I would still have to say that one decent acting job (Blood Father) and one decent directing job (Hacksaw Ridge) does not a "'naissance" make. The "McConaissance" no doubt began with Matthew's role in The Lincoln Lawyer, but it wasn't actually until his role in Mud that the moniker emerged. He has continued to make the title a worthwhile description, with his incredible roles in Dallas Buyers Club, Interstellar, Free State of Jones and even a scene-stealing part in The Wolf of Wall Street.

Gibson, on the other hand, has done some truly despicable things as a human being, well outside his professional career, which should keep him from being tagged with any "rather lovely monikers" for many years to come, if at all. Be that as it may, the "'naissance" tag should only be bestowed on those who can consistently live up to it, which Gibson has yet to prove he can do, professionally speaking.

If anyone is deserving of a little "'naissancing" recently it's the amazing Ben Mendelsohn. Thank you for brilliant articles on this gifted actor in both your movie and TV magazines. He has been a favourite actor of mine



since I first saw The Year My Voice Broke back in the '80s, and I watched his career take off in Australia throughout the '90s. It seemed international fame would soon be knocking but it wasn't to be, not until stand-out performances in Beautiful Kate and Animal Kingdom brought this gifted Aussie back onto people's radars. I'm so glad to see him getting the recognition and the roles he deserves. Something I realised while watching him in Rogue One: when he is on screen you really can't take your eyes off him, he just has that way about him. From the superb Bloodlines TV series, to smaller roles in the likes of The Dark Knight Rises, it would seem we are well and truly in the grip of the "Benaissance". PETER HORSMAN, TURNERS BEACH, TASMANIA

Benaissance... hey, that's catchy. We were just about to call it the Mendelsohnaissance but we got carpal tunnel syndrome halfway through typing it.

YODA'S BIGGEST FAN

I picked up the December Empire Magazine with great anticipation: not only was it sealed, but it was all about Star Wars. I rushed home all excited about reading some new and interesting facts about my favorite movies. As i tore open the sealed section, took note of the posters and hurriedly flicked through as I looked to find my favorite character, noted Han Solo had received a large write up so mentally noted that's what I would read about Yoda. My anticipation grew as I saw 2 pages dedicated to Caravan of Courage: Yoda will have that and more, I thought. Then one page from the end there it was: 21 lines, some of which some was not even correct. You stated Yoda was the

only representative of his species. Well he's not: during the Jedi Council debate on whether to allow Anakin Skywalker to be trained on said council is one Yaddle. She looks like Yoda just with hair. I have attached a picture for you to see.

BRIAN, VIA EMAIL

Are you absolutely sure that's not just Yoda after going to the Shane Warne Advanced Hair Studio? It's quite a magnificent space-mullet. Yoda is the Danny McBride of the Dagobah system! Fact.

HOME ON THE RANCH

Over the last half-century I have lived in every state of Australia except Victoria. I've generally lived in the rural areas of each state and I have never, never, never heard anyone use the word 'ranch'. While I can't vouch for Victoria, the rest of us call them stations or properties, we have cattle stations or cattle properties in Australia. Could have kept it true blue when reviewing Red Dog: True Blue.

ANN STUHT, HOBART, TAS

What have you got against Victoria?

NO EXTRA STAR FOR TREK BEYOND: #1

I implore you, take back that extra star you gave Star Trek Beyond at Christopher Spencer's insistence in the January issue. Your review and subsequent reasoning was on point. You can't put Idris Elba in a film and then cover up his beautiful face for all but a few moments and make his distinctive voice all-but indecipherable. Stay strong, Empire, two stars was a fitting rating!

JESS LAYT, BONNYRIGG HEIGHTS, NSW

We can't resist a good imploring. Just for you, here's a negative star: -★

NO EXTRA STAR FOR TREK BEYOND: #2

As a card-carrying Trekkie I was saddened while reading Christopher Spencer's letter to find that I actually couldn't remember a thing about the film. I conjured up characters faces in a desperate attempt to remember scenes, a hint of plot... nothing... not a sausage. So two stars for a "middling drama ... no-one will remember come next year" seems appropriate.

ANN STUHT, VIA EMAIL

Wait, you have a Trekkie card?

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

On page thirty of Issue 190, by means of smart referential humour, Empire inadvertently spoiled the twist to one of the greatest films of the '90s. If and when I have children and show them the classics, I would never dream of revealing the significance of "Rosebud", or the deadly mystery within the walls of "Bates Motel". However, in this age of social media and internet leaks, people seem to care less and less about the unwritten clause of silence in the cinematic twist contract. Is the twist still sacred?

THE

EBRUARY 2017 EMPIRE 9

DYLAN R. VIA FMAIL

Spoiler: Dylan is actually a ghost.

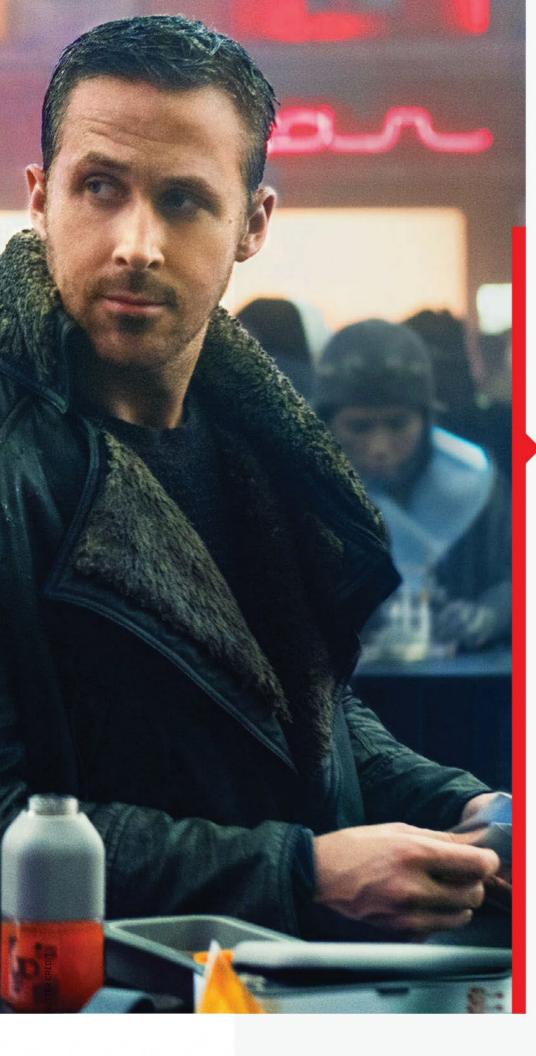


PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS





Clockwise from left:
Producer Ridley Scott
on set with Harrison
Ford; director Denis
Villeneuve running
through the script
between shots; K (Ryan
Gosling) wet with rain
(or tears in rain, we're
not sure which.)



BLADES OF GLORY

Denis Villeneuve aims to capture the spirit of *Blade Runner*

WORDS IAN NATHAN

"I'M HAVING THE time of my life on this, but it is insane for sure," admits director Denis Villeneuve (Arrival), well aware of the weight of expectations that surround a film as deeply analysed, and deeply revered, as Blade Runner. "Because it is so insane, it gives you freedom. A lot of people on this [film] are children of Blade Runner, raised with the imagination and energy of the original, and have been inspired by those images all our lives." Not to mention that the director of the original, Ridley Scott, is a producer on Blade Runner 2049 — and from rumours on set, a very hands-on producer at that.

Here's the official synopsis for *Blade Runner* 2049: Thirty years after the events of the first film, a new blade runner, LAPD Officer K (Ryan Gosling), unearths a long-buried secret that has the potential to plunge what's left of society into chaos. K's discovery leads him on a quest to find Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), a former LAPD blade runner who has been missing for three decades. It's actually been 34 years since *Blade Runner* came out, so Ford has thoughtfully aged the appropriate amount to aid production.

The familiar neo-noir streets shown in the first trailer undeniably capture the feel of the original, along with some astonishing shots of a dusty future-LA. Villeneuve has brought his semi-regular cinematographer, the great Roger Deakins (who shot Sicario and Prisoners; he's also the Coen brothers' go-to DP) for the ride, so expect great things for the visuals. Despite synth-god Vangelis being replaced as composer by Villeneuve regular Jóhann Jóhannsson, the director reassures fans that his sequel comes fully retrofitted. "There are a lot of digital effects," he says, "but we are trying our best to do it in the spirit of the original." We haven't run a Voight-Kampff test on him, but we're willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

BLADE RUNNER 2049 IS IN CINEMAS OCTOBER 5.

SOLO PROJECT

The lowdown on the next Star Wars spin-off

WORDS IAN FREER ILLUSTRATION JAMES CAREY

AS THE FIRST Star Wars standalone story, Rogue One, continues its box-office domination, the second is about to get underway. 'Young Han Solo: A Star Wars Story' (not the official title) will start to shoot in January or early February. So with a 25 May 2018 release date (up against Madagascar 4!), 41 years to the day since we first met the Corellian smuggler, this is what we know so far...

THE FILMMAKERS

On 7 July 2015, Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy announced Phil Lord and Chris Miller, the duo behind the *Jump Street* franchise and *The LEGO Movie*, as directors. For all their hip, flip sensibility, they have a clear grasp of what makes Solo tick. "He is clever but smart," Lord told Star Wars Celebration. "He doesn't want to do anything that he's told, and if he's told not to do something, he only wants to do it more. He's very sarcastic and yet unreasonably optimistic. He's basically a cynical guy with the biggest heart in the galaxy." Surely they think Solo shoots first.

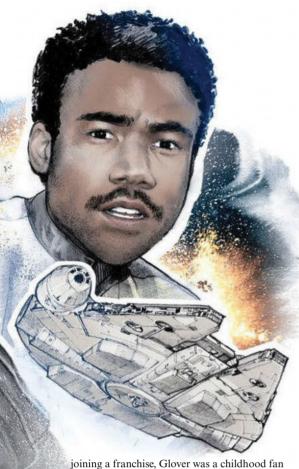
THE HERO

Alden Ehrenreich, best known for *Hail, Caesar!*, was chosen from 300 hopefuls including established names like Dave Franco, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Ansel Elgort, Jack Reynor and Miles Teller. "Turns out that was a total waste of money because the person who got the part was the first person to audition, literally the first person to walk in the door," Lord said. Ehrenreich was buzzed to do a chemistry test with Chewbacca — confirming the unsurprising news that the Wookiee stays in the picture — and revealed, "The coolest part of that audition process was when I went on the Falcon. It was pretty unbelievable."

THE COHORTS

Lando Calrissian, Han's old buddy, will be played by modern renaissance man Donald Glover, best known for *Community*, his self-penned show *Atlanta* and his musical alter-egos Childish Gambino and mcDJ. As seems compulsory these days for any actor





joining a franchise, Glover was a childhood fan — his first action figure was a Lando — and he has been read the riot act by his mother: "Don't mess it up!" Lord and Miller seem confident. "These are big shoes to fill, and an even bigger cape, and this one fits him perfectly, which will save us money on alterations," the pair said in a typically dry press release. Completing the central triangle (or square, if you include Chewie) is Emilia Clarke as a yet-to-be-named character. With Game Of Thrones, Terminator Genisys and now Star Wars, Clarke is cycling through sci-fi/fantasy franchises faster than Warwick Davis.

THE PLOT

"This moves closer to a heist or Western-type feel," Kennedy told *Variety* recently, playing squarely into the character's roguish smuggler's wheelhouse. Co-writer Lawrence Kasdan, working with son Jon, is a huge student of Westerns, with a particular penchant for *The Magnificent Seven*'s Steve McQueen: the character will likely be imbued with McQueen's trademark swagger and poise. Expect meeting Chewie, winning the Millennium Falcon from Lando in a session of dice game sabacc, and an intro for Boba Fett (another potential standalone) to figure.

THE LOOK

Kathleen Kennedy recently revealed a key visual source for the film. "We've talked about [Frederic] Remington and those primary colours that are used in his paintings defining the look and feel for the film." Arrival cinematographer Bradford Young will be behind the camera: "It's gonna feel like a Star Wars film, but we're definitely gonna break some rules, and we're encouraged to do that." Solo wouldn't have it any other way.

'UNTITLED HAN SOLO STAR WARS ANTHOLOGY FILM'

ON-SET EXCLUSIVE

SS-GB

AIRS LATER IN 2017, BBC FIRST



LONDON FALLING

Sam Riley tackles violent crime – and the SS – in Nazi-held London

WORDS SCARLETT RUSSELL

A RED FLAG emblazoned with a giant swastika hangs from the ceiling at Central Saint Martins art school in London. Beneath it, two SS men slouch against a wall; rifles in one hand, iPhones in the other. Dressed in a navy overcoat and trilby, Sam Riley leans out of a window and lights a cigarette. *Empire* is on the set of *SS-GB*, Robert Wade and Neal Purvis' take on Len Deighton's 1978 thriller. It's set in an alternative 1941 where Germany has won World War II, the Nazis control London and Scotland Yard is run by the SS. Still, "no smoking" signs must be obeyed.

The five-part BBC series pitches Riley into this murky world as homicide cop Douglas Archer, who faces a bleak moral dilemma: collude with the enemy or join an unstable resistance. "He's ambiguous," says Riley. "He's not a Nazi, but he thinks there has to be law and order... His neighbours see him driven to work by the Gestapo and don't know if they can trust him."

The adaptation sees Bond writing pair Wade and Purvis (they wrote all the Daniel Craig 007 movies) working on the small screen for the first time. "We had more freedom than with the Bond films, which are so heavily deconstructed," explains Purvis. "It's great fun having a large canvas to tell a story with twists, turns and subtle plot [shifts]." And if SS-GB seems to be following in the jackbooted steps of Amazon's The Man In The High Castle, the writers disagree. "We see that as science-fiction," stresses Wade, "whereas we're exploring the consequences of what living through the occupation could really have been like."

The series will be long on historical verisimilitude and short on heel-clicking clichés. "We have Germans playing crucial roles, instead of English actors putting on dodgy accents," says Riley. For the actor, a "film noir with Nazis" was too good to turn down. "As my dad put it, people might actually watch something I'm in now," he laughs. "Plus, I've always wanted to play a detective and my ego saw I was in every scene. I'm hoping it will up my odds for playing Bond, too." Well, now he has Purvis and Wade to put in a good word.



James Gray's *The Lost City Of Z* takes the indie filmmaker deep into uncharted terrain

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

AS A DIRECTOR, James Gray likes to ring the changes. Vaudevillian 1920s drama *The Immigrant* was very different from the modern romance of *Two Lovers*, which was entirely unlike the gangland rhythms of *We Own The Night*. And *The Lost City Of Z* is yet another extreme departure: a historical jungle epic. "You don't want to repeat yourself," Gray tells *Empire* of his latest adventure. "The opportunity to explore new and different stories is a major attraction of this job."

The film, starring Charlie Hunnam as real-life Edwardian explorer Percival Fawcett, is an adaptation of a book by *The New Yorker*'s David Grann. But Gray jettisoned the parallel story of Grann's present-day obsession with the yarn and focused entirely on Fawcett, who vanished in the Amazon in 1925 while searching for the ancient Lost City Of Z. The postmodern take, Gray believes, "has been done before, and recently, and well. I figured that sometimes the best way to go forward is to look backward."

Well aware of the pitfalls of that approach, Gray says political sensitivity to the colonial era was crucial. He didn't want to mimic *Lawrence* Of Arabia. "That doesn't mean I think I'm better than David Lean," Gray is quick to insist, "but that work is both beneficiary and hostage to its cultural context; Alec Guinness plays an Arab! I was trying to update that." Gray says that every character in *The Lost City Of Z*, whether British or indigenous South American, is "validated as an independent being".

That quest for legitimacy also led Gray to attempt the outlandish, channelling Francis Ford Coppola and Werner Herzog by heading deep into the Colombian rainforest (the historically correct bits of Brazil now look, according to the director, "like Nebraska") for a flirt with catastrophe. Extreme heat and humidity, thunderstorms, insects and snakes, and the Zika virus were among the perils, as was the rather more avoidable difficulty of shooting on film and having to ship the reels back to London every day. A studio set and digital cameras would have been cheaper and more controllable, but for Gray, "The authenticity was critical."

There is, however, no *Burden Of Dreams* or *Hearts Of Darkness*-style documentary to chart the madness. "My wife was going to make a film about me making the film," Gray laughs, "but we actually didn't get enough footage to make a great documentary from. I don't like to harp on about the 'hardships' of this job. I know I'm in a very fortunate position."

THE LOST CITY OF Z SCREENS LATER IN 2017.













'An amazing moment in Doctor Who history'

-Gizmodo

'The holy grail of lost Doctor Who episodes'

'charming..spectacular'







MEET MISS SLOANE

Jessica Chastain's lobbyist is the hero we need right now
WORDS HELEN O'HARA

JESSICA CHASTAIN'S LATEST

character, Elizabeth Sloane, is hyper-competitive. "If Sloane was a man we'd be like, 'I know this guy,'" says Chastain. "He's gonna get things done, he's the rebel, he's the renegade. But we don't see a woman in this kind of role. Someone asked me yesterday, is that because women aren't like this? I just think that for some reason our industry and our media hasn't shown women that way."

The protagonist of John Madden's *Miss Sloane* is a Washington DC lobbyist for right-wing trade initiatives who armours herself with high fashion, higher heels and Machiavellian plans. Her look is based on one of the "formidable" real lobbyists Chastain met ("She was so *done* it put me off-guard," she recalls of one), but Sloane's drug-abusing, escort-using control freakery is all her own work. She's offered a job by Mark Strong's idealist to fight for gun control legislation and accepts, though it's not clear she's a true believer.

For Chastain, it is a story whose time has come: "At first, I thought it would be interesting because of the gun violence in the United States." But the recent US Presidential election made the character even more relevant. "After the first debate the big criticism against Hillary Clinton was that she was over-prepared, which I've never heard anyone say about a man. I think we as a society have difficulty with female ambition and women who don't apologise for knowing what they're talking about. People know I'm passionate about interesting roles for women, [yet] I still get scripts from directors I'd love to work with, and I'm like, 'Are you kidding me? She's the set dressing!"

The often ruthless Sloane — who is anything but set dressing — gradually finds her methods challenged, in particular by Gugu Mbatha-Raw's campaigner, Esme. "What Gugu's doing is the heart of the film," says Chastain. "Before her, people were just collateral damage [to Elizabeth]. She'll sacrifice herself, she'll sacrifice everyone around her. But Esme is the first time she's forced to confront other people's feelings and how she's responsible."

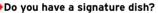
Despite Sloane's methods, Chastain sees her as a positive, if unlikely, role model. "What we realise is she will sacrifice herself because she's gotta accomplish what she set out to, and I think that's a really good role model for men and women right now: Sloane at the end of the movie; not necessarily at the beginning!" Dogged, driven and adaptable, Miss Sloane could just be the first in a new breed of political heroes.

MISS SLOANE IS IN CINEMAS FROM MARCH 2.

THE GRILL MICHAEL SHEEN

The Master of Sex and space bartender makes a mean pavlova

WORDS HELEN O'HARA



Well, I won [Star Baker on] The Great Comic Relief Bake Off with my lemon pavlova, but I refuse to ever make it again. It was a miracle that happened, so I don't want to try to repeat it.

When were you most starstruck?

I was in a restaurant with Arthur Miller once. A formative moment for me was watching *The Crucible* when I was about 13, but he did also have sex with Marilyn Monroe, and shamefully that did sweep through my mind. Also, I once walked around Pinewood Studios with Barbara Windsor, and I remember her saying, "This is where we shot the bit where my bikini came flying off in *Carry On Camping*." That was possibly the moment I got the biggest chills.

Who did you play in your first school play?

Farmer Munchkin in *The Wizard Of Oz*. I only had one word: "ZOOOOOM." I gave it gusto! I think I marked myself out as a potential star.

What would you call your autobiography?

I'm always saying, "Oh, that'll be the name of my autobiography," when I hear a really funny line. Maybe I'd call it, 'That'll Be The Name Of My Autobiography'.



What is the strangest interaction you've ever had with a fan?

There was a lady who came to hundreds of performances of a play I did. [At] the stage door, she'd say, "Hello, Michael," and I'd say, "Hello." Because of its unstrangeness, that was very strange.

What is the most unusual place you have ever thrown up?

When I first came to LA, I'd have meetings with people who run studio casting departments. [In one of them] I started to feel really rough. I was being asked a question and I said, "I'm terribly sorry, but I think I'm about to be sick." I started throwing up as I was walking out of her office, and I threw up all over the walls of the waiting room. She never gave me a part, but she remembered me.

Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

Me and a friend thought it would be interesting to see if we could get from one end of the street to the other, just on people's roofs. At night. We managed, until a police car turned up. So we jumped off someone's roof into what turned out to be a muddy bog. Then we had the slowest chase in the universe as we waded through this bog.

What is your earliest memory?

I'm walking down a corridor towards this door. I open the door and a voice from downstairs says, "Michael, what are you doing?" I realise I'm doing something naughty and I close the door again. On the other side of the door my new baby sister is sleeping, and I think I'm going in there to kill her. I think! We'll never know because my mother's voice stopped me. Maybe that's the title of my autobiography: 'Michael, What Are You Doing?'

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

I'm going to get some help with this. [Shouts] Sarah! [Silverman, Sheen's girlfriend] On a scale of one to ten, how hairy is my arse? [Pause] It's immaculate, she says. I wouldn't trust anything she says. Sarah once told me she liked the smell of my armpit, so for her birthday I put bits of cotton under my armpit, my arse crack and my ball sack all day, then I put each one into a little test tube, in a presentation box. She says she didn't need arse crack, but that was a little freebie.

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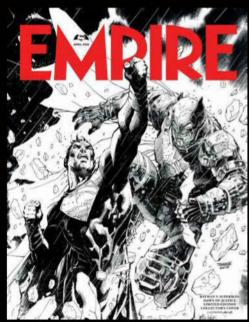
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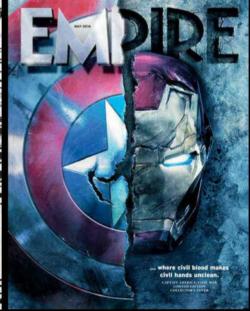
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THE DEBATE

IS WESTWORLD THE NEW GAME OF THRONES?

With ratings sky-high and a new season commissioned, Westworld is officially a hit. But does the sci-fi Western match HBO's other blockbuster show for quality?

ILLUSTRATIONS DAVID MAHONEY



YES
JAMES WHITE,
CONTRIBUTOR

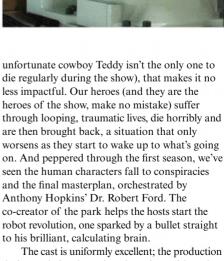
LEAVING ASIDE THE obvious similarities for a moment — the outbreaks of bloody violence, the clothing-optional scenes — *Westworld* is a more than worthy successor to the triumphs and tragedies of Westeros. In just one season, the show has developed into a complex, compelling and vibrant series, full of scenes and ideas that stick in your brain long after the credits have rolled.

The show has been accused of being overly concerned with impenetrable mysteries and lacking characters you can truly connect with in

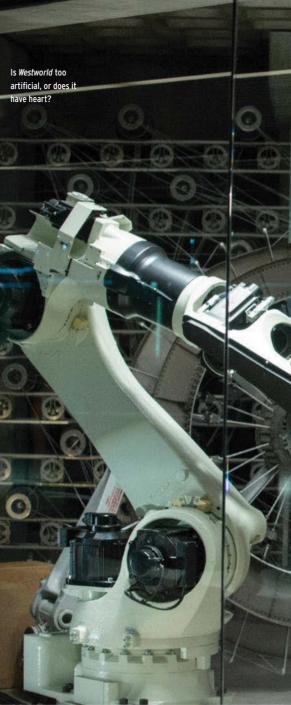
the manner of an Arya Stark or Tyrion Lannister. Which is abject rubbish: the fascinating storylines, played out through clever writing and careful drip-feeding of information, kept you thinking. Some fans figured out a few of the bigger reveals earlier than the creators might have wished, but that didn't remove the power of the first season finale, which had plenty more on its mind.

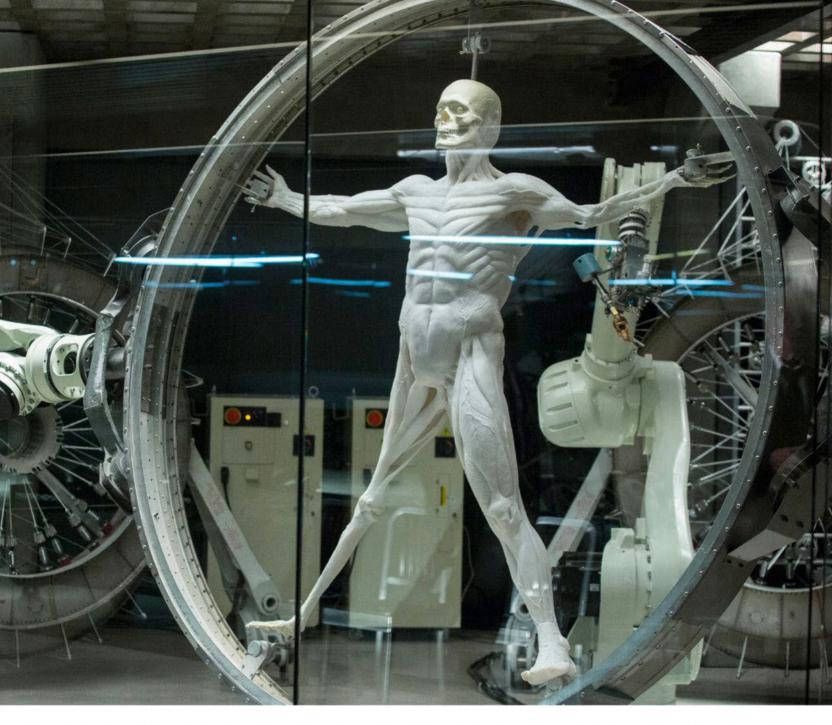
And as for connecting to characters? If you don't feel for the 'hosts' — the human-like AIs populating the titular park, including Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton) — as they struggle with the hellish nightmare that is their reality, you must surely have a heart made of pure, chilly titanium. Have you checked for the quiet whirr of cogs and gears?

Death is a constant on *Game Of Thrones*, and while *Westworld's* hosts don't necessarily have to worry about that (James Marsden's



The cast is uniformly excellent; the production design and visuals are jaw-dropping, with nods to both classic Westerns and science-fiction stories, and the show has proved it has plots to spin for years to come. If that's not the platonic ideal of the zeitgeist-prickling show, and a worthy replacement for *Thrones*, then what is?







NO OLLY RICHARDS, CONTRIBUTOR

TO ILLUSTRATE THE difference between Westworld and Game Of Thrones, you only need to ask one question: what is the show's story? Game Of Thrones, from its first episode, established it was about the battle for the Iron Throne. Every episode has brought us closer to finding out who would claim it and why they want it. After a whole season, Westworld hasn't truly told us what it's about. We know the robots believe they're real and don't want to be killed for entertainment anymore. They're now fighting back. Okay, but what is the endgame of that

fight? What are we aiming for? It's not clear.

Westworld has much more in common with Lost or Heroes, and like those it confuses teasing with storytelling. It's not trying to help us get to know its characters better, but to continually show us that what we thought we knew about them is untrue. They exist to facilitate twists, props in parlour tricks. There is nobody to invest in. The humans have mostly been dispatched and the heroes are now exclusively the 'hosts', whose stakes couldn't be lower. Dolores, Maeve and Teddy all have the same motivation: to prove they are more than machine. There is no variation in their stories because they haven't lived lives. They haven't formed relationships. Death or suffering in Game Of Thrones has consequence. When Joffrey dies, it has multiple knock-on effects for others who love or hate him. If a host dies, it affects nothing. Each individual's existence matters only to them. It makes the show a series of dead-ends.

Westworld is a great idea for a TV show, with lots of huge themes to explore. What is it that makes us human? Without fear of consequences, what are we capable of? A great idea, yes, but a frustrating show, because it's only glancingly interested in exploring those themes. If it wanted to investigate them it would balance the robots with empathetic humans (see: Ex Machina). Westworld is more concerned with examining itself as a TV show, continually rearranging its elements like a Rubik's Cube being twisted by someone who has no idea how to solve the thing but just likes the colours.

Game Of Thrones is a story of people who all want the same thing, power, for very different reasons. The stories within that are infinite. Westworld is a saga of automatons that all want the same thing, autonomy, for the same reason: it's better than what they currently have. That's empty. Like the hosts, Westworld has no soul.





HIDDEN FIGURES



OUT **16 FEBRUARY**RATED **PG / 127 MINS**

DIRECTOR Theodore Melfi

CAST Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, Janelle Monáe, Kevin Costner, Kirsten Dunst, Jim Parsons

PLOT NASA is determined to send an astronaut on a trip around the Earth before Russia beats them to it. As the space agency becomes increasingly more desperate, three big brains are drafted in to help. The problem? It's 1962, they're women and they're black.

WE'VE CRUNCHED THE numbers

and it's official: there could be no better time for Hidden Figures to come out. At a time when the United States is locked in turmoil, with racial divisions widening, misogny rife and science itself under fire, along comes the incredible true-life story of three female African-American mathematicians, or "computors" as they were known in the parlance of the time, who played crucial roles at NASA in the early 1960s. You've seen films about the Space Race before — but probably never one about space racism.

Theodore Melfi's film is both a thunderously effective feel-good experience and a reminder that even as we look to other planets, Earth still has a long way to go.

Despite the serious, potentially stodgy subject matter — this is a movie that deals with both prejudice and Cartesian coordinates the material is handled with a light touch. The lead trio are introduced at the side of a road: their ride, a sky-blue Chrysler, has broken down and a police officer is nosing about, suspicious. These two obstacles are deftly overcome, revealing the traits of each of the heroines and establishing their tight bond. Mary (Monáe) is a quick-witted thrillseeker; Dorothy (Spencer) is practical and unflappable; Katherine (Henson) is quiet but needle-sharp. As they are drafted into NASA, in demand for their smarts as the agency races to beat Russia to the moon, they are split up and have fewer scenes together. But each of them brings a different kind of strength to the screen. Henson gets the A-plot, pulled out of an all-women pool of computors and dropped into the main event, the previously male-only,

Caucasian flight research team. Despite her promotion, here she is still subject to all manner of demeaning rules: she cannot pour herself a drink from the communal coffee pot, she is not allowed to attend briefing meetings, and when she needs the toilet she has to jog for 20 minutes to a distant restroom. As she suffers these indignities stoically (there are perhaps one or two too many musical montages involving her legging it around the campus while clutching stacks of paperwork), you can see the pressure gauge inside her cranking up and up. The release, when it comes, is glorious.

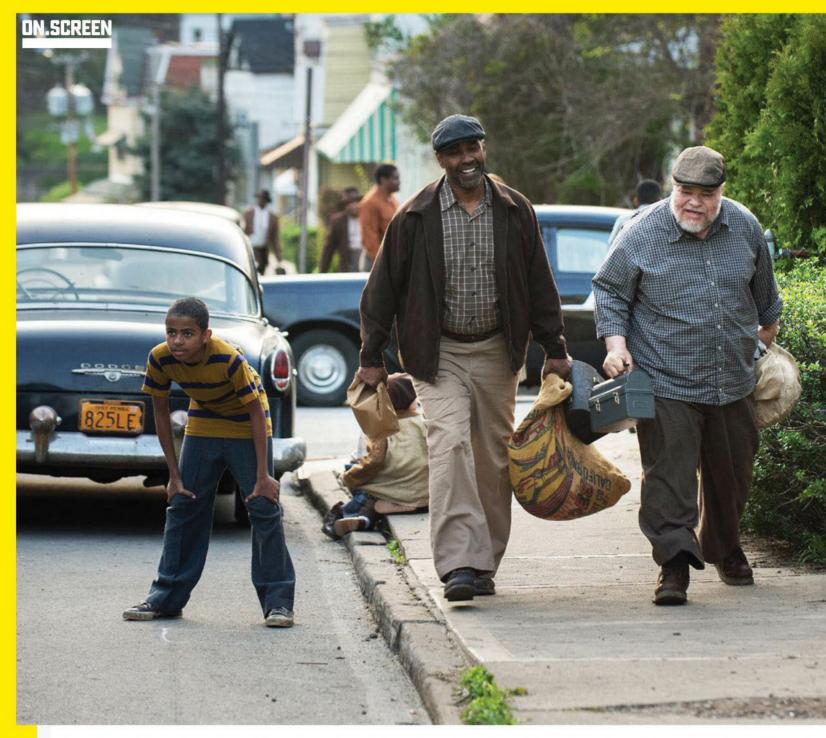
There has been awards chatter too for her two co-stars, even if they don't make quite so much of an impression. The drama is more rote in Spencer's subplot, though she gets to deliver a couple of eloquent monologues. Monáe's strand, meanwhile, involves her fight to get enrolled in a segregated school, and she is as good as she is in *Moonlight*, leavening the earnestness with flirty lines such as, "Equal rights mean I have the right to see the fine in every colour."

Perhaps inevitably, it's the supporting cast who get the thinnest material. Hidden Figures features more racist old white men than a Trump cabinet, and even the more fleshed-out secondary characters are still pretty broad. Dunst simpers and smirks as Dorothy's supervisor, while Parsons (though perfectly cast for such a maths-heavy project, given his Big Bang Theory background) struggles to bring more than one dimension to his snippy egghead. Fortunately, Costner is present to bring both gravitas and heart to the NASA workforce. A waist-coated ballbuster, chewing furiously on gum and calculus problems alike, his Al Harrison is a great representation of an American idealist, slowly waking up to the fact he's lost his moral moorings.

It's unashamedly pitched at a mass audience — Pharrell's poppy soundtrack drives that home — and if you're allergic to clichés, you may want to pick up the non-fiction book upon which it's based instead. But you'd be missing out on a moving, important and furiously upbeat tale for our times.

NICK DE SEMLYEN

VERDICT Essentially Parabolas & Prejudice, it isn't the most nuanced piece of work out this month. But nuance be damned – an uplifting plea for equality, this is a story calibrated for maximum effect.



FENCES



OUT **9 FEBRUARY**RATED **PG / 139 MINS**

DIRECTOR Denzel Washington

CAST Denzel Washington, Viola Davis, Mykelti Williamson, Russell Hornsby, Saniyya Sidney, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Jovan Adepo

PLOT An adaptation of August Wilson's award-winning play in which fiftysomething garbage collector (and almost-pro baseball player) Troy Maxson (Washington) struggles with a fatigued marriage to Rose (Davis), a strained relationship with his son (Adepo) and the crippling weight of past disappointments.

NEVER MIND VIDEO games, plays are the real tricky beast when it comes to wrangling film adaptations. Too literal and they are simply a retreading without a live audience; too cinematic and they become warped, a new kind of wood from the bark from which they were born.

So expect to see much made of *Fences* being 'too stagey', but believe that — along with its rich heart — its strengths are its faith to the source material and staunch refusal to throw in filmic architecture or bombastic cinematography to warrant its place on screen and your backside on a seat.

It's Pittsburgh in the 1950s. It's Friday, it's payday, and as their shift hauling trash ends, Troy (Washington, who also directs) and best friend Bono (Henderson) do what they do every Friday: sit in Troy's back yard and weave intricate, bawdy stories, half-drunk bottle of gin

in hand, before being joined by Troy's wife of 18 years, Rose (Davis). With little in the way of action in that stark yard — or even physical movement — it's a first act Washington delivers pretty much single-handedly, dense dialogue tripping from his tongue with the beat and the bounce of poetry. At times, you could swear you hear jazz. Here, Washington is tilling the earth by hand, laying the soil even for the story set to unfurl before us.

Troy is a man stitched together from the hurt of his first five decades on earth — a promising ballplayer who, through institutional racism (and perhaps other factors more of his own doing) was robbed of the chance to go pro. This is only one welt he carries close to the skin (see also the fact that there is no black sanitation truck driver in his company), but the one that continually raises to the surface, as fresh as when it was first made. It's felt in every decision, every spat word,







every harboured resentment; from his flagging relationship with Rose to the dysfunctional dynamic with youngest son — himself a promising athlete — Cory (Adepo).

A frustrating, toxic combination of ego, pain and injustice proves to be Troy's undoing as both a husband and a father, if not entirely as a man. The complexity of characterisation is handled deftly by Washington who takes him to the brink of redemption and back again, never fully losing the sympathies of the audience along the way.

It's not an epic story, but it is a story told epically. It's one of the creaks and cracks and tiny hairline fractures that deepen and expose within a family, almost without notice, until they're beyond repair. But it's also one with a singularity of perspective, it being that of a working-class African-American family in the 1950s. It's a narrative that playwright August Wilson — who receives the only screenplay credit

— mined beautifully, *Fences* being one of the ten plays in his 'Century Cycle' exploring 100 years of everyday family life in black America. A narrative that arguably has more resonance and relevance than ever.

It's material that demands much of its cast — almost all of whom starred in the Tony Award-winning 2010 Broadway revival — and while Washington holds the first hour exquisitely, Golden Globe winner Viola Davis, initially tiptoeing the landmines that circle her husband, ultimately moves towards the heart of the story. Her passion and sheer power is never greater than in the scene that follows a shock confession from Troy, notably the seven words, "What about my life, what about me?", delivered with an emotional nuance and gut-punching authenticity that most actors stretch for over the course of two hours (if not two decades).

Outside of Washington and Davis, Russell

Hornsby fizzes with resentment and bows with need as Lyons, Troy's son from a previous relationship, and while the character of Gabe (Williamson), Troy's brother who suffered a brain injury, doesn't translate as fully or smoothly to screen, it's a relatively small note in an otherwise flawless film. Denzel Washington's third directorial outing is undoubtedly a work of meat and substance; of ambition executed with precision. There are no frills, no flights of fancy or footwork to distract and relieve. Yes, you've got to work hard for this film, but by god, it's worth the graft. TERRI WHITE

VERDICT A simply extraordinary film without crashes, bangs and wallops but full of towering performances delivered with intelligence, power and heart.

SILENCE



OUT 16 FEBRUARY
RATED MA15+ / 161 MINS

DIRECTOR Martin Scorsese

CAST Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver, Issei Ogata,
Tadanobu Asano, Liam Neeson, Yôsuke Kubozuka

PLOT In 17th century Japan, two Jesuit priests risk their lives to search for their mentor who has gone missing amidst a widespread purge of Christianity. But their convictions are tested as they find themselves struggling for survival.

IF MARTIN SCORSESE inflamed

Catholic ire with 1988's *The Last Temptation Of Christ*, he might find absolution with *Silence*, an exploration of the nature of faith and what we should expect from God: if He remains silent (hence the title) during the suffering of His flock, what does that mean about our relationship with Him? On the other hand, Mr Scorsese might find a cooler reception from movie-goers in general.

Based on the 1966 novel by revered Japanese author Shusaku Endo, it's set in 17th-century Japan, during a brutal purge of Christians by the Shogunate. After a Jesuit priest, Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson) goes missing in Japan, two of his former students, Fathers Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Garupe (Adam Driver) sneak into the country to find him. If it sounds like a historical Argo, well, a thrill ride this is not. Rodrigues and Garupe connect with a group of "Hidden Christians", and so draw the attention of the local Inquisitor (a coyly serpentine Issei Ogata), who tortures and kills those who refuse to renounce their faith. Scorsese lingers on those awful images people being drowned, decapitated, burned alive to drive home the unquenchable faith of the persecuted Christians. But the Inquisitor and his wily interpreter (Tadanobu Asano) come across not as evil caricatures, but as quite rational (albeit callous) politicians: why not make one small gesture to avoid a great deal of suffering?

As you'd expect from any Scorsese film, let alone one he's been planning for so long, it's a beautiful piece of cinema, and for the most part, very restrained — there's a couple of flashy moments, but mostly Scorsese, perhaps as an act of Catholic humility, keeps his more masterly cinematic flourishes in his pocket. The characters are at the forefront, rarely the director.

A very personal film for Scorsese — he worked for more than 20 years to get it made, after being given the book by the Archbishop of New York in the 1980s; Scorsese says he's read the book "countless times ... it has given me a kind of sustenance that I have found in only a very few works of art"— it's fascinating in a very specific way, as perhaps the most explicit investigation of themes that Scorsese has touched on over his entire career: how the temptations of the world conflict with the demands of a moral life.

And for super-devout Catholics — probably for super-devout people of any faith — it presents an interesting debate: is it a greater sin to betray one's fellow man, or betray one's god? But it's not a lively debate — the polite word is measured; the less polite term is glacial. If you are less than pious, it's hard to sustain the debate at all: how could you abide the horrific suffering of innocents to avoid a small symbolic gesture? And that runtime (two hours, 41 minutes) is relentless: it's not as long as Wolf Of Wall Street, but it's not nearly as entertaining either. It becomes a bit like watching a traditional Mass at a historic church: you appreciate the artistry, the history, the devotion, but you still get restless around the two-hour mark. The same questions are debated in the same terms over and over for long stretches: the same characters struggle with the same problems again and again and again. In particular, about the fourth or fifth time the weaselly Kichijiro (Yôsuke Kubozuka) returns to ask the same thing of Father Rodrigues, it's hard not to laugh out loud

Andrew Garfield (backing up his turn as the religious Desmond Doss in *Hacksaw Ridge*) uses every club in the bag to work through Father Rodrigues' arc, as his faith is tested. Garfield manages to carry several scenes where he implores others to do what he cannot bring himself to, and still keep the character grounded in compassion, while also showing an undercurrent of pride in his own purity. Adam Driver, looking more weirdly insectile than ever, is excellent despite a slightly dodgy stab at a Portuguese accent.

It's hard to give anything other than a prayer of thanks for a passion project made by one of the world's greatest directors. But it's hard to embrace it like a prodigal son. It feels more like going to church. TIM KEEN

VERDICT Gorgeous, ambitious and rigorously executed, but solemnly paced to the point of being gruelling.

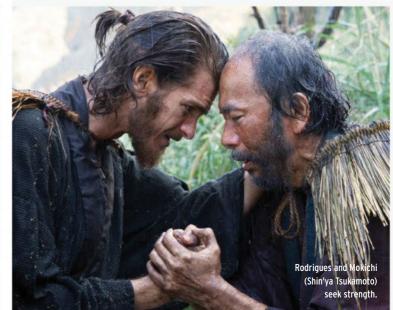














PATRIOTS DAY



OUT NOW RATED M / 133 MINS

DIRECTOR Peter Berg

CAST Mark Wahlberg, John Goodman, J.K. Simmons, Kevin Bacon, Michelle Monaghan, Jimmy O. Yang, Alex Wolff, Themo Melikidze

PLOT April 15, 2013: two radicalised brothers plant home-made bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, which kill three and injure hundreds. The Boston PD and FBI launch a massive manhunt for the killers, while the brothers attempt to flee the city; all of Boston is caught up in the escalating chaos.

AFTER LONE SURVIVOR and

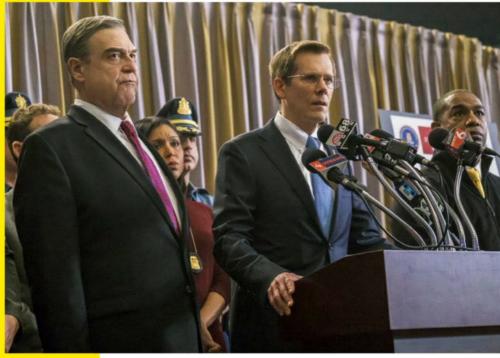
Deepwater Horizon, Peter Berg has completed a trilogy of recent-history odes to salt-of-the-Earth Americans starring Mark Wahlberg. (Although Wahlberg is pencilled into Berg's next movie as well, so the run may continue.) Focussing on the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, which claimed three lives and injured hundreds, Berg has hit a high point – an engrossing, and often harrowing, thrill ride. If you're hoping for an exploration of what could drive two brothers to such vile deeds, look elsewhere: Berg doesn't excessively demonise the Tsarnaev brothers, but this is presented from Team Blue's POV. What you get is a textbook case on how to build tension when you already know most of what's coming.

The lead-up to the bombing itself is deftly handled. Knowing it's about to happen, watching the people standing next to the bags, is torturous — a rising storm of tension fed by

the score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (*The Social Network*, *Gone Girl*). The movie is rated M, for moderate impact violence, but the bombing and its immediate aftermath is gruesomely affecting; those with weak stomachs might avoid eating steak tartare beforehand. But Berg has judged just how much gore to show, and just how long to show it, to maximise the impact without actually wallowing in suffering.

The screenplay is based on the meticulously researched non-fiction account of the Boston Marathon bombings *Boston Strong*, by Casey Sherman and Dave Wedge, and is shot in a slightly shaky cinema verite style (a Berg favourite), so it's tempting to regard it as a quasi-documentary. But for all the detail Berg has crammed into the film, it has also been moulded to conform very neatly to Berg's cinematic worldview, centred around working-







class Americans wearing some kind of uniform. The letter of the law gets short shrift here — following the gut instincts of beat cops is more important. While some of the casting is remarkable, for both talent and verisimilitude, Mark Wahlberg's character isn't based on a real cop, but rather an amalgam of several Boston cops. It's not a bad decision – it helps provide one consistent presence for the entire film, which could otherwise feel a tad episodic as it moves through the different phases of the investigation. But it's worth remembering that this is a fictionalised account of those

four or five days.

Patriots Day is really a police procedural

— there's some screentime devoted to the victims, but mostly this is about the manhunt.

Which means juggling multiple strands, so Berg relies on some heavyweight actors who can make their scenes feel bigger than they are. John

Goodman sports a startling pair of eyebrows as Boston police commissioner Ed Davis; Kevin Bacon manages both laser focus and frazzled frustration as FBI Special Agent Richard DesLauriers, who has the thankless task of coordinating the investigation; JK Simmons is a suburban police sergeant who finds himself unexpectedly drawn into the mounting manhunt.

The other major strand is, of course, the killers. And here you have two actors absolutely killing it (as it were) in very unsympathetic roles. Themo Melikidze as alpha-dog brother Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and Alex Wolff as the more Americanised younger brother Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, are both sensational. They radiate genuine instability and danger without sliding into easy caricature, and they hint at complexities that the script doesn't even attempt to grapple with. There's no moral ambiguity

here: the Tsarnaevs are bad guys who did, after all, brutally kill and maim; but as characters, they aren't cardboard cutouts, either.

There's always a danger with this sort of film — especially coming only a few years after the event — that it can veer towards being exploitative; Berg avoids that trap by wearing his heart on his sleeve at all times, and closes with interviews with some of the real people portrayed in the film — a not-so-subtle way of announcing you have the imprimatur of the survivors. (And for Red Sox fans, a cameo from David "Big Papi" Ortiz — a surefire way to get the people of Boston onside.)

TIM KEEN

VERDICT Berg captures the horror of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, and the breathless manhunt that followed, in a gripping, if largely nuance-free, thrill ride.



TONI ERDMANN



OUT **9 FEBRUARY**RATED **M / 162 MINS**

DIRECTOR Maren Ade

CAST Peter Simonischek, Sandra Hüller,
Michael Wittenborn, Thomas Loibl

PLOT Winfried Conradi (Simonischek) is a divorced piano teacher with a passion for practical jokes. Grieving the death of his pet dog, he travels to Bucharest to reconnect with his daughter in the guise of his alter-ego, life coach Toni Erdmann.

IF YOU WANT a snapshot of the oddball brilliance of *Toni Erdmann*, just hoover up some of the IMDb plot keywords: "father-daughter relationship", "false teeth", "woman watching man masturbate", "capitalism", "zombie make-up", and "reference to Whitney Houston". Writer-director Maren Ade's 2016 Cannes darling works very hard to stack the odds against itself. It's nearly three hours long. It's set in the densely detailed world of German business consultants. It's a comedy built around wigs, whoopee cushions and jizzing on *petits fours*. Yet the result is funny, perceptive, alive to life's richness and absurdities and in its final moments, absolutely devastating.

The set-up sounds like well-tooled Hollywood comedy: prankster dad cheers up his workaholic daughter through wacky personas — saccharine life lessons ensue. Happily, Ade has no truck with formula. Thanks to great writing and superlative performances, the relationship between good-hearted, hang-dog Winfried (Simonischek) and his daughter, built-for-business Ines (Hüller), feels authentic — deftly toggling between affection and stone-cold exasperation. There is no ill intent or malice on either side but the pair

can't help but disappoint each other over and over again. And it's a joy to watch.

Ade delivers laughs in spades — there is something of the deadpan absurdity of *A Swedish Love Story* director Roy Andersson in her worldview — and creates a malleable tone that can take in a man dressed as a tree and always feel real. Yet she never forgets to mine the human from the high concept. It's in beautifully observed moments such as when Ines and Winfried say goodbye to each other yet have to endure an awkward, agonising wait for a lift. From its opening scene — Winfried plays an elaborate joke on a courier — to a naked party set-piece to its climactic moment of heart-rending surrealism, *Toni Erdmann* hits so many different notes and colours. The effect is dazzling.

This range also runs to telling social commentary. It is a film with a keen sense of the shifting landscape of Europe (as Ines plans to make people redundant, Ade's camera pointedly wanders from the meeting room to capture the poverty outside) and gender dynamics in the workplace, quietly etching the way women are subtly demeaned in professional life. Just watch how Ines is taken infinitely more seriously just

because she has a man by her side, even if he is a weapons-grade buffoon.

One of its manifold pleasures is seeing its initially unsympathetic, borderline unlikeable protagonists reveal previously untapped depths, softer sides and vulnerabilities. Beneath Winfried's irritating Beadle-like penchant for wind-ups and dad jokes comes an openness about the world. Similarly Ines' career-girl defences come down gradually, charting a course from business-like reserve to exhibitionism, until, in spectacular fashion, she is warbling Whitney's The Greatest Love. Hüller's performance is beautifully modulated. In an alternative universe, she will be bounding up the stairs of the Dolby Theatre to the podium come 26 February. But in the real world, let's just marvel at the achievements of a stunning central performance in a genuine, droll, emotionally powerful oddity. IAN FREER

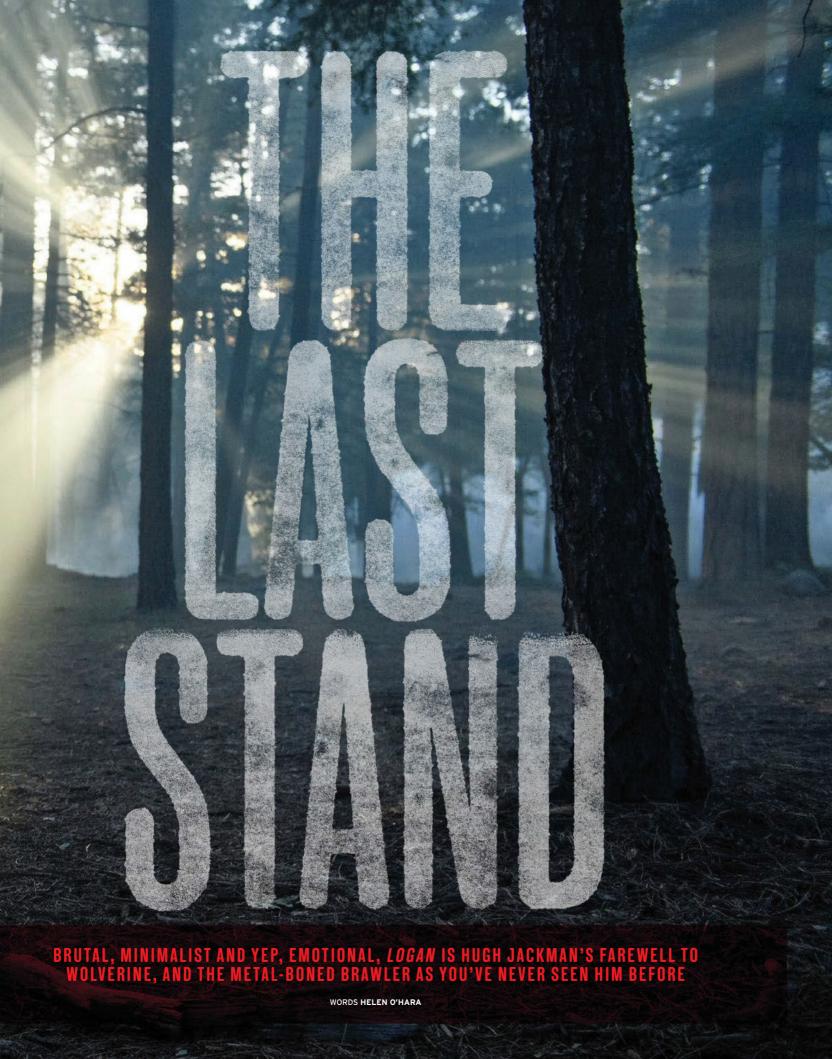
VERDICT Set in the unpromising world of German business consultancy, *Toni Erdmann* is a low-key triumph, especially for writer-director Maren Ade and star Sandra Hüller. A weird, thoughtful, hugely affecting treat.





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IN THE END IT WAS JERRY SEINFELD WHO FINISHED OFF WOLVERINE.

After eight films and well over a decade as the quick-healing breakout star of the X-Men films, Hugh Jackman was beginning to wonder when the time would come to step away from his signature role. At Seinfeld's birthday party in April 2014, he asked for advice that changed his life. "He doesn't particularly like parties, and I'm a little the same," says Jackman of the legendary comedian. "So we always end up in a corner chatting. I started asking about Seinfeld. Jerry said, 'I always had a belief that creatively you should leave on a high.' Not just for legacy, though I'm sure that was a part of it. But he said that if you are tapped out, it's Herculean to work out what the next thing is. If you leave something in the tank creatively, then you just spark onto the next thing. I went home from that dinner, and I just knew. This was it."

Excited, Jackman recorded his thoughts as a voice memo on his cell phone. Then, the next morning, he emailed senior executives at 20th Century Fox, proposing he make one final solo film as Logan/Wolverine, before hanging up the mutant's claws for good. He wanted his swansong to be something different, a character-focused drama pitched somewhere between *Unforgiven* and *The Wrestler* in tone. "I was expecting a little more resistance, I suppose, at the studio level," he recalls. "But I didn't get that at all."

The result is *Logan*. And it could be the most surprising comic-book film yet.

JACKMAN'S PITCH DEPENDED on a key

collaborator, *The Wolverine* director James Mangold. The pair had chatted, on the set of that 2013 film, about their ideal story for the character — and miraculously the studio was willing to support their new, dialled-back vision. Mangold shaped *Logan*'s narrative and cowrote the script with Scott Frank. In addition to *Unforgiven* and *The Wrestler*, he drew on classic Western *Shane* (which plays on TV at one point in the film). He gave the story a father-son element, in the relationship between Logan and the ageing Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart), and a father-daughter dynamic with an 11-year-old named Laura (Dafne Keen). Then he decided to put Wolverine on wheels.

"The idea of a road picture with Logan, Laura and Xavier in an average car was a driving image for me," says Mangold, pun quite possibly intended. "Taking heroes and putting them in normalcy — and nothing makes them more normal than to cram them into a car and make them have to deal with each other — that seemed the ultimate contradiction of what tentpole movies tend to do."

The scale would be huge, with the kind of widescreen vistas usually reserved for Westerns. "This must be one of the biggest road movies done in a while," says Jackman. But the radical aim was to give the film an intimate, independent feel a world away from the glossy superhero norm, including previous *X-Men* instalments. "It's a darker version of *Little Miss Sunshine*, with the three of us on the road," the star laughs. "Slightly more violence!"

The action would be relatively low-key. A script page tweeted by Mangold in October includes a note specifically disavowing the usual "CG fuckathon". Boyd Holbrook, who plays villain Donald Pierce, says, "There was a note in the script that, basically, if a building falls on you, you die. Every relationship is really thought about and connected; it's rooted in something real. We were constantly talking about the line between fantasy and reality."

As for the lead character, Mangold and Frank began to consider how far they could move away from the usual super-punching. Mangold concluded that there is actually no superhero genre: "It's a term of marketing and origin, but most superhero films are war pictures, Westerns and gangster movies." The challenge was to overturn the audience's expectation and find a new way to approach a near-unkillable mutant. And almost unheard of in modern blockbusters, the film wasn't greenlit until Jackman and Mangold were entirely happy with the finished script, and wasn't given a release date until well into production.

So the opening scene of the movie sees a greying, grizzled Logan — hands shaking; reliant on alcohol and pain medication — brutally beaten by four human hoodlums. "It's set up typically: here come the douchebags, and Logan's going to take them out," grins Jackman. "And then he gets the shit kicked out of him. I just loved the tone that was set by that."

This is a near-future, one in which no new mutants have been born in two decades. As their numbers dwindled, Professor X's dreams of a new stage in evolution slowly died. Logan is scraping a living as a limo driver in a town on the Mexican border and hustling for medication that he takes south to a remote, makeshift home he



shares with Caliban (Stephen Merchant on non-comedic form), nursemaid to the infirm Xavier. But when a mysterious woman (Elizabeth Rodriguez) asks for Logan's help with Laura, he is drawn back into action despite his hopelessness.

"At the beginning of this movie, he 100 per cent believes that the world would be better off if he was never born," says Jackman. "Pain and destruction surround him, people die around him. Through duty and through love, I think, he is caring for Charles. But he doesn't have, within him, even the seeds of hope and belief."

Circumstances — namely Holbrook's Pierce and his Reavers, a team of former soldiers with cyborg limbs — force Logan to go on the run



with Laura and Xavier. Pierce is a genius engineer who builds and designs those enhanced prosthetics for his team. He's also security head for the genetic-engineering corporation that grew out of the Alkali Lake experiments which, long ago, gave Wolverine his metal skeleton. The same company employs Richard E. Grant's Dr Zander Rice, whom comic fans will recognise as the son of a man Wolverine murdered during his escape from the Weapon X programme. Mangold describes Rice as a "believer" in his own research rather than someone driven by a grudge. Even the bad guys here have their feet on more realistic ground.

But setting that tone required moving away from the previous films, in what is likely to be the most controversial element of *Logan*'s

story ("I see him as Logan," says Jackman of his mutant alter-ego. "His job - which he doesn't want - is Wolverine"). In a time of interconnected film universes and multi-film world-building, this largely jettisons wider X-continuity. "Simon Kinberg came in on a couple of the story meetings and we did talk about it, but Jim rightly never got hung up on it," says Jackman. Rather than focus on that tangled chronology, in fact, this is a world in which the X-Men comics — and perhaps even movies exist. It's X-Men comics that convince Laura this grumpy old wreck is the hero she needs, and so Logan's own mythology is thrust in his face. "Dealing with your own legend is very much a part of life for most heroes, even in Westerns,"

explains Mangold, who played with the notion previously in 3.10 To Yuma. "So as Scott Frank and I were working on the script, it occurred to us, what would it be like to live with this notoriety? What if the reality is less sparkling? That fit very much with what we were trying to do in style. How could we give ourselves permission to change not only the aesthetic — because the aesthetic is too easy — but how could we get inside?"

Linking to the comics in this meta fashion allows the creators of *Logan* to make bone-deep changes. If this is the real-life version of the shinier, previous *X-Men* films — which were, in Jackman's words, "propaganda" — it doesn't have to match them. *This* is mutant reality.



LAST ACTION HERO

EXPLORING OLD MAN LOGAN, THE STARTLING STARTING POINT FOR THE NEW FILM

IN 2008, AT the end of his Marvel run, comic-book legend Mark Millar had one last idea for Wolverine: he wanted to visit the character 50 years on. "I always saw Wolverine as a Clint Eastwood-type mysterious guy," he says. "And that was my inspiration for doing *Old Man Logan* – I thought if the early Wolverine stories were The Man With No Name, then the final one is Bill Munny from *Unforgiven*."

As Millar's story opens, we find Logan on barren land, living a simple life with his wife and kids. Mysterio has massacred all the superheroes and times are dark. The villains now rule, including the Hulk and his inbred hillbilly family, who run California like ganglords. Logan, meanwhile, due to immense trauma, is now a pacifist who hasn't popped his claws in 50 years. Naturally, things don't stay like that. When the violence comes, it's extreme and bizarre.

Although some shots in the film are identical to the comic panels, James Mangold's film takes only the germ of the story as inspiration. "Jim definitely used the book as a template, but he's done his own thing with it," says Millar. "Something more serious, more emotional, more adult, a dark sci-fi thing. Whereas mine was like a crazy Mad Max."

Crazy indeed. Millar had enjoyed such a successful run at Marvel, by this point they were letting him do what he wanted, he says. "So even [with] the most objectionable stuff in *Old Man Logan*, nobody batted an eyelid. The Hulk's fucking his cousin, and they were like, 'Yeah, that sounds good, go ahead." Neither, he says, did they mind him killing all their superheroes. "That was my goodbye, that was me leaving. *Sayonara!* Here are all your characters, dead!" ALEX GODFREY





And in this reality, Logan's healing factor is fading as he gets older. It was an idea Darren Aronofsky had mooted when he was attached to make The Wolverine: certainly Logan has greater healing powers, but does he recover completely each time? Shouldn't there be scars — at least for a few years — for massive injuries? And might his healing factor not weaken with age? "There was one test where I was completely disfigured," says Jackman. "Which I loved, and they [the studio] were like, 'Okay, we've given you almost everything. Can we pull back just a little? Instead of 29 scars can we have, like, 16? Or three?" They settled on keeping the scars largely off his face, but his body is a patchwork of damage and suffering that would make Frankenstein proud.

Worse, the toxic adamantium on Logan's bones is slowly killing him as his powers fade — something inspired not just by comic-book history but by Jackman's own experience with metal poisoning. "I had high mercury levels from eating tins of tuna," the star reveals. "My doctor said, 'You're meant to be five,' whatever that number means, and I was at 37. The effect of metal poisoning, on what for Logan would be a massive level, would be depression, tiredness, massive joint pain. The adamantium will eventually kill him. I loved the metaphor of his weapon being the thing that's killing him, on every level."



THIS NEW WORLD would demand something

extraordinary to force Logan back into action. It would, in fact, take a girl called Laura. She is a scowling force of nature, as ferocious as she is tiny, the latest in a series of youngsters for Logan to take under his wing. "He's archetypally the reluctant hero," says Jackman. "So the only place where you can just see his heart open up is with kids." From Jubilee in the cartoons to the lost, lonely Rogue of the first *X-Men*, there's something in the combination of the wounded Wolverine and a child that works — perhaps because he's always warier of them than the reverse.

But Laura is made of tougher stuff than most; in fact, she's made of exactly the same

stuff as Logan, with an adamantium skeleton and regenerative powers. X-Men experts (X-perts?) will know her better as X-23, a character created in the early 1990s for animated TV series *X-Men: Evolution*. In *Logan*, she'll give her mentor a run for his mutant money, in one intense scene making him lose his temper. At Mangold's insistence Jackman gave it all he had. "I just yelled, 'SHUT THE FUCK UP!' At the end of 40 minutes of this I went up to Maria, Dafne's mum, and I said, 'Maria, I've got an 11-year-old and I'm just really sorry.' Maria said, 'Aw, don't worry, she just called you a cunt. In Spanish."

Patrick Stewart was similarly enamoured of his bilingual co-star. "Hugh and I adored her. We all spent days together in that fucking truck, in 100-degree temperatures with no air conditioning."

With everyone feeling they were making something special, cast and crew pushed themselves harder than is standard on movies that don't feature a bear-attack. The desert shoot required the crew to pump cool air into the vehicle to keep the cast functional; altitude also proved problematic. One action sequence saw Jackman running up a hill, past various obstacles. But the spectacular wooded landscape of the shoot was at 9,000 feet above sea level, and by the end of the first day Jackman was falling down before he reached the top. "The secondunit director said, 'Man, I think we should call it a day.' I said, 'Naaah, mate, I just tripped.'



ESSENTIAL WOLVERINE DATA, FROM HUGH JACKMAN'S APPEARANCES SO FAR



Number of cigars smoked by Wolverine (unless it's a single, regenerating mutant cigar)

2000

The year Jackman's Wolverine first appeared on the big screen



Number of flashbacks to Alkali Lake



Women wooed by Wolverine (Jean Grey, Mystique as Jean Grey,

> Silver Fox, Mariko and

> > Gwen)

UWU

Number of times Wolverine has been impersonated by Mystique



TWO

Number of times Wolverine has dropped an F-bomb (the Extended Cut of *The* Wolverine adds two more)

\$3.597 BILLION

Total box office (worldwide) for the films in which Hugh Jackman's Wolverine has appeared



Wolverine's dog-tag number X-Men: First Class



Wolverine's shortest appearance, in



Number of people defeated by Wolverine in combat





And he goes, 'You tripped on the take before. You fainted on this one."

In his final turn as Xavier, Stewart pushed himself too. "I was immediately intrigued by this bleak and ill future for Logan and Xavier, the idea of this vigorous, intellectual, compassionate man crumbling," says Stewart. "Charles is profoundly disturbed, drugged a lot of the time, struggling to make sense of what's around him. It was very intense, but a marvellous experience." Stewart eschewed prosthetics to age himself 20 years or so, but lost 9kg so he would look gaunt, and wore milky contact lenses to add to the superannuated effect.

"Really, I hope Patrick gets [Oscar] nominated for this," says Jackman. Their first shared scene

has, he says, more character drama than all their previous films put together. As it finished, Jackman hugged his co-star from sheer exhilaration. "My two adult leads, they have huge arcs," says

"My two adult leads, they have huge arcs," says Mangold. "They had to be brave enough to find a new aspect of the character, to forego vanity."

WITH VANITY AND comfort stripped away, the results should feel unique. "You have got to hit it out of the park," says Jackman. "An average one is not good enough." But he and Mangold promise it'll still hit the beats fans want, and with unprecedented fury.

Amping up Wolverine's crazed combat style, *Logan* will be the most violent X-film yet.



Mangold shot an R-rated script, and says Jackman took a pay cut to ensure the studio-mandated, PG-13 back-up scenes would not be used instead. Moreover, that R-rated aim was established long before *Deadpool* showed it could be commercially viable. "It kind of annoyed me because people said, 'Now you're going to be R-rated,'" says Jackman. "But guys, we'd had the script for 18 months! It was a weighty decision for me because I get stopped every day by 11- and 12-year-olds. I kept saying to Jim, 'If we're going to officially exclude them, we better have a really good reason."

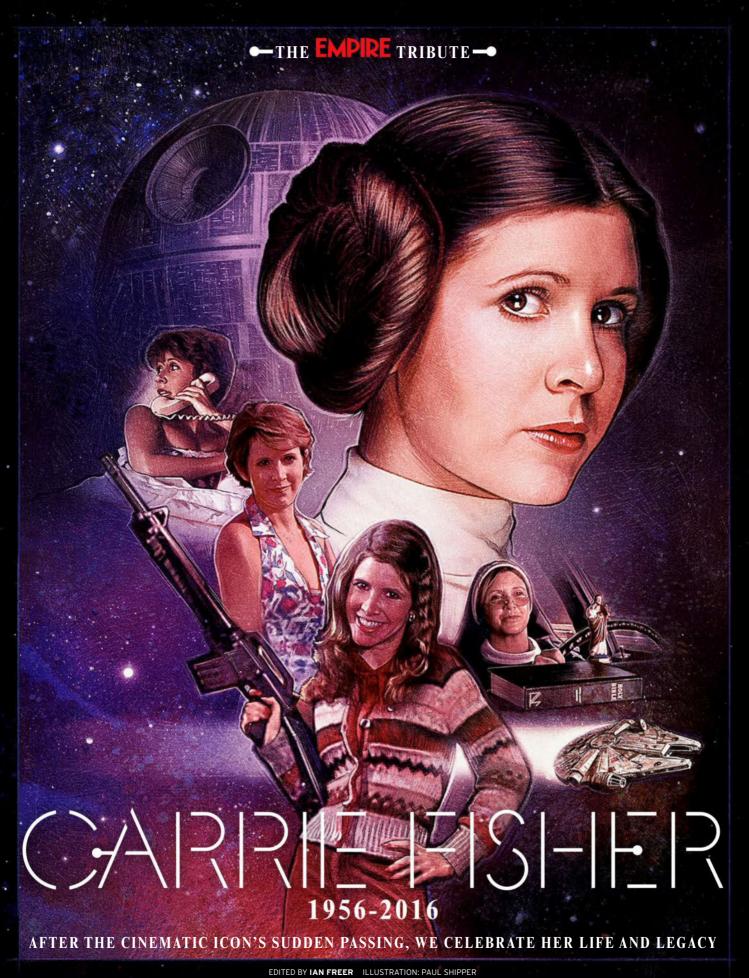
Gory fight scenes see characters chopped up with ruthless abandon: a particularly nasty moment in one trailer sees Wolverine stab a soldier up through the chin, the tip of his claw reappearing out of the top of his victim's head. "I love that berserker part of him," says Jackman. "You see a lot of it in this. It's the worst side of him and it's out of control."

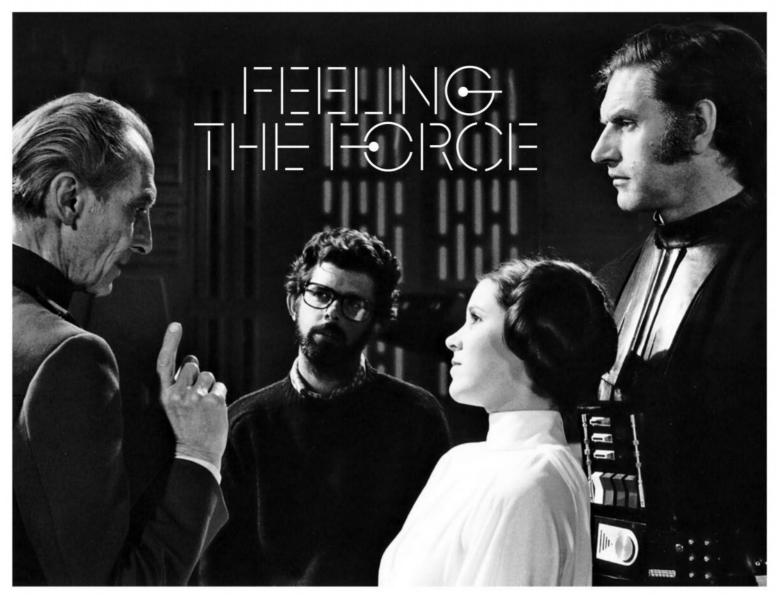
The gloves are off, the claws are out and the blood will splatter. "What we're seeing here is a kind of unvarnished, unslicked-up version of what it might be like to *really* be a superhero in his 200th year, roaming the Earth, trying to figure out how to participate in a world that never seems to get better," says Mangold. The title reflects that scaled-down approach: these solo films have gone from *X-Men Origins:* Wolverine to *The Wolverine* to *Logan*. This time, it's a personal story, about a man who feels his

mutant powers are a curse. "That's always been really his dilemma, coming to terms with who he is," says Jackman. "All of our dilemmas, maybe."

Not that coming to terms with violence, or yourself, is a new idea. At the end of *Shane*, the hero says that "killing... is a brand that sticks". Logan has always known that much; it's part of the contradiction between animalistic fighter and tragic hero that makes him so fascinating. The corrosive effects of violence drive this drama, and if it works as Mangold and Jackman hope, *Logan* will be a high note for the mutant fighter to finish on. Just like Seinfeld, he'll be master of his domain.

LOGAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM MARCH 2.





IN THIS EXCERPT FROM HER FINAL BOOK, 2016'S THE PRINCESS DIARIST, CARRIE FISHER RECOUNTS READING THE STAR WARS SCRIPT FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME

FROM THE FIRST page —

STAR WARS: A SPACE FANTASY — the images and characters jumped off the pages. Not only into our minds, but into the chairs and other furniture that surrounded us. I'm exaggerating (a little) but it could have jumped onto the furniture, eaten all of it, and drank the blood of an Englishman — because it was as epic as any fee-fi-fo-fum rhyme you ever heard.

The images of space opened around us, planets and stars floated by. The character I was reading for, Leia, was kidnapped by the evil Darth Vader — kidnapped and hung upside down when the smuggler pilot Han Solo (who Miguel [Ferrer, star of RoboCop and Twin Peaks] was reading for) and his giant monkey creature co-pilot Chewbacca rescued me. I had been (in the script) upside down and unconscious with yellow eyes. I'll never forget that image. Whoever got the part of the princess named Leia would get to do this. I would potentially get to do this! Maybe — if I was lucky — I would be rescued by Han and Chewbacca (Chewie!) from the caverns underneath wherever they'd tortured me, and Chewie would carry me, slung over his shoulder through thigh-deep water as we made it out of

(interplanetary) harm's way.

Unfortunately, none of this imagery was ever realised due to a combination of cost and the fact that Peter Mayhew — who they hired to play Chewie — couldn't do the stunt due to his extreme height of over 7 feet.

I ended up reading for the film with a new actor, an actor I'd never seen before, but then he had never seen me, either. I'll bet since that reading with me he's rued the day — if he can get his strong hands on a rue that is — and if anyone could get their hands on a rue or a Woo it was Harrison Ford. We read together in a room in that same building I'd met George and Brian De Palma in. I was so nervous about the reading I don't remember much about Harrison, and given how nervous Harrison would come to make me, that was plenty frightened indeed.

The following week, my agent, a man who'd been my mother's agent, Wilt Melnick, and was now mine, called me.

"Carrie?" he asked. I knew my name. So I let him know I knew it. "Yeah," I said in a voice very like mine. Mine but hollow, mine but it didn't matter because my stomach had swung into action. "They called," he said. Great, 'cause that was really all I wanted to know. If they called, that they called, not what they said — that didn't matter.

"They want you," he continued.

There was a silence.

"They do? I mean they did?"

He laughed, then I laughed and dropped the phone and ran out into the front yard and into the street. It was raining. It didn't rain in LA. It was raining in LA and I was Princess Leia. I had never been Princess Leia before and now I would be her forever. I would never not be Princess Leia. I had no idea how profoundly true that was and how long forever was. They would pay me nothing and fly me economy — a fact that would haunt my mother for months — but I was Leia and that was all that truly mattered. I'm Leia — I can live in a tree, but you can't take that away from me.

I never dreamt there actually might be a day when I maybe hoped that you could.

THIS IS AN ABRIDGED EXCERPT FROM THE PRINCESS DIARIST, PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AND AVAILABLE NOW IN HARDBACK AND E-BOOK.

REBIEL

HOW CARRIE FISHER'S PRINCESS LEIA EVOLVED FROM TEENAGE BRAT TO BONA FIDE FEMINIST ICON, CHANGING SCIENCE-FICTION FOREVER

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

PEIBEI_

"THESE MOVIES are basically

boys' fantasies," said Carrie Fisher in 1983, after the release of Star Wars Episode VI: Return Of The Jedi. Leia aside, the original Star Wars trilogy has one female speaking role per film, their total lines amounting to barely a minute of screen time. The cast is almost entirely composed of male pairings: Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan, Han and Chewbacca, Vader and the Emperor. After lining up in droves to see it, little boys could roleplay as the humble farmboy who saves the day, or the cool hot-shot, or the biggest bad guy. The galaxy was theirs. But Fisher knew something instinctively that it took George Lucas years of drafts to realise: in space, there's no reason to be sexist. "You can portray a woman who's a master and get through all the [anti-] female prejudice if you travel in time, if you add a magical quality, if you're dealing in fairy-tale terms," said Fisher. "People need these biggerthan-life projections."

In fairy tales, it's traditional for the male hero to save the day, slay the monster and gain a princess' hand in marriage. So the early iterations of George Lucas' *Star Wars* script almost always featured a princess as a sort of reward. But the story didn't work as space opera from a galaxy far, far away until he turned Leia into something else. Myth only took him so far. After that, he needed a heroine and not a china doll.

THE FIRST DRAFT of the A

New Hope (then simply Star Wars) script had Leia as a spoiled 14-year-old. Worse, a May 1975 draft saw Han punch her in the face and knock her out as part of his rescue — demeaning even in the 1970s. Through subsequent drafts, Leia became more and more capable, and it made the whole story work better. Lucas grasped a great truth: working with a formidable woman makes his male heroes look stronger, not weaker.

From the off Leia defies Vader, sending the plans to the Death Star out of his reach and passing her father's message to Obi-Wan Kenobi just before she is captured. She endures torture with only a single intake of breath to steel herself, and suffers the "foul stench" of Grand Moff Tarkin (his bland response to her barbs feels like the product of previous clashes). Leia sends the Empire on a wild goose-chase to protect the Rebellion and her home planet of Alderaan. She fails to save the latter, the one moment in *A New Hope* where her defiance slips and desperation shows. And still Leia emerges not *as* a prize but handing out the medals.

"The story is ultimately about Princess Leia," George Lucas once acknowledged of *A New Hope*. "If Luke had stayed put on Tatooine, he wouldn't even know the Death Star existed. Luke is coming into this world that she already is a part of. She is the key; it's her battle with Darth Vader and the Empire. The boys tag along on her adventure."





MEMORIES OF CARRIE

DAN AYKROYD

I GREW UP as a simple Catholic kid from a government family in Hull, Quebec, so you can imagine how much of a privilege and honour it was for me to have known this one-off, broke-the-mould woman as a great friend. When we were both in our twenties, Carrie and I associated as intimates, occasionally co-habiting in her New York apartment, Hollywood Cottage and Debbie's [Reynolds] house.

I met Carrie at Saturday Night Live. She and John Belushi became instant pals. I remember how much she made him laugh. Later, while filming Blues Brothers, Carrie and I fell in love and she moved in with me into a penthouse suite in the futuristic, aluminium-clad Astro Tower, which I knew to apologise for. Carrie had the most refined eye for art and design.

While in Chicago we obtained blood tests for compatibility from an East Indian female doctor. Contemplating marriage, I gave Carrie a sapphire ring and subsequently in the romance she gave me a Donald Roller Wilson oil painting of a monkey in a blue dress next to a tiny floating pencil, which I kept for years until it began to frighten my children.

One of the most brilliant and hilarious minds of our eon, Carrie would say things like: "I love tiny babies. When they cry they turn red and look like screaming tomatoes." OR "This romance is finished the second you let out even a threep. I'll be sick for a year." AND "You have a jawline, hold your chin up otherwise you look like a tuna." From then on I would identify myself on the phone as Tuna Neck.

Carrie embraced my friends and I was embraced in warmly human and Hollywood-glamorous emotional comfort, elegance and excitement. Debbie would cook for us and Carrie's tech-wizard brother Todd would take me on high-intensity cruises in muscle cars and on motorcycles through Beverly Hills with great young people, José Ferrer and Donna Ebsen. These were the wonderfully inspired and smart sons and daughters of world-famous show-business professionals whom Carrie ran with.

One Christmas Carrie asked Debbie to call Harrah's security to arrange a private weekend in a guest house on Bill Harrah's legendary Lake Tahoe estate. At this point our love was soaring on laugh-filled exhilaration and a vibrant, wholly satisfying physical intimacy. Having obtained some original Owsley from our friend Tom Davis, we flew up to Reno, rented a wagon and checked in for three days of full-on weeping to Christmas classics. Certainly one of the planet's greatest occasions where LSD was a factor.

The romantic relationship ended the weekend of our final evacuation from Chicago by Lear 24 with Judy and John Belushi to our homes in Martha's Vineyard. It was night. Judy and John went home. Carrie and I went home to a house which Judy had purchased for me but unseen by me until the moment of our arrival. It was a fixer-upper, mid-century oil-guzzler, albeit designed by Hideo Sasaki. Carrie said, "It looks like it was abandoned by Fred and Wilma Flintstone." The next morning she asked me to drive her to the airport and she flew to New York. Architectural reservations notwithstanding, Carrie wasn't shallow, we had a great time. She was also in love with Paul Simon. She married him but I hope she kept my ring.



That Leia was so central to the story was unusual, a significant evolution of the mythical models Lucas used. Famously, he consulted scholar Joseph Campbell's The Hero With A Thousand Faces to shape a story with universal appeal. But only two stages in Campbell's 'hero's journey' identify a female role: The Meeting With The Goddess and Woman As Temptress. The latter stage was co-opted by the Emperor; Leia fulfilled the 'goddess' role (her name comes from the call of the Rhinemaidens in Wagner's Ring Cycle). Dressed in dazzling white, she fascinated our farmboy hero and set him on his quest. Like those goddesses, he saw her as a figure to be honoured rather than an equal - but Leia abandoned such limitations with a raised eyebrow and a casual quip ("Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?") that signalled a very human intellect.

This goddess came down off her cloud and got her hands dirty — literally, in Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back, trying to repair the Millennium Falcon. The grease does not deter the advances of Han Solo, who knows a good thing when he sees one. Leia's taken prisoner in Cloud City, and again in Jabba's Palace in Return Of The Jedi, but her poise endures. Even in chains and extreme underwiring, she projects self-possession and mild exasperation that she can't get on with more important things. You sense Leia spends these downtimes plotting; her response to confinement is a surge of energy afterwards. After being held by Jabba she joins the strike team on Endor and takes off on a speeder bike, her evolution from stateswoman to action heroine complete.

"TO FIND AN actress who could be young and play with authority..." said Lucas. "I was lucky to find Carrie, who is very sure in the way she presents herself, very worldly. It made that character work." Fisher's privileged background contributed, but it was her huge intelligence that added steel to Leia's spine and conviction to lines that she didn't understand ("This was the longest speech on the planet Earth," Fisher said of her Hoth evacuation plan. "I had no idea what I was talking about. I was in the gobbledegook of George's typewriter"). Stories of Fisher rewriting Star Wars scripts have been exaggerated: a page of The Empire Strikes Back shared widely on Twitter actually bears scribbles by director Irvin Kershner, while Ford did more tweaking of dialogue during A New Hope, with Fisher watching the older, more experienced actor in awe and envy. She had more say in the sequels, but her style did not lend itself to Leia. "I could rewrite his [Ford's] stuff any day of the week, but it's not as easy to change my dialogue, because when I would change it I would make it funny and really, she's not that funny."

Instead, Leia's dialogue softened during those first two sequels, after her fury in *A New Hope* ("I don't know who you are or where you come from, but from now on you'll do what I tell you, okay?"). There's an argument that her edge was blunted to



make her more conventionally female, but you could blame a growing maturity, a philosophical acceptance of the changeable fortunes of war or her growing love for both Luke and Han. Certainly the romantic figure on the Ewok bridge, telling Han after Luke's departure, "Hold me," seems a world away from her early defiance. "It was better when we were fighting," sighed Fisher of the line. Explains Lucas, "Mostly Saturday-morning serials have no love story at all. The love story was 'hero meets heroine and they fall in love'. It's sort of a given. [So] it's a very subtle movement of the emotional relationship they have."

Yet it was still Leia, and even at her soppiest she's still fierce. Immediately after being shot in the assault on Endor's shield generator in *Jedi*, she pulls a hidden gun and shoots two stormtroopers threatening Han, prompting him to finally declare love. Her final kiss with Han in *Jedi* sees Leia as the slightly smug one and Han as the befuddled, lovestruck naif. Both need someone to challenge them and rock their carefully cultivated pose.

In hindsight, that subplot felt bigger than it was because of the chemistry between Han and Leia — or between Ford and Fisher. As we now know, the pair had a relationship behind the scenes, though even Fisher wasn't sure whether the on-screen chemistry preceded or followed their affair. She said in November 2016, "I think it made us more comfortable with one another. It made me more able to wisecrack to him. Even if I was insecure, we were having an affair, so there was something to base some security on..."

Their on-screen chemistry endured, and Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens conclusively proved Leia was more than a romantic subplot. Thirty years after the Battle Of Endor, General Leia is still leading, still fighting fascism. And that mission comes before her romance — or even motherhood, a quietly radical plot point. Even

her son Ben's defection to the dark side did not shake Leia's devotion to the cause. Leia reportedly has a bigger role in 2017's *Episode VIII*, presumably guiding her new protégées Rey, Finn and Poe against the First Order and her son. Fisher had finished shooting Rian Johnson's film, but she will now, presumably, be absent from Colin Trevorrow's *Episode IX*, and that is a huge loss to the reborn *Star Wars* universe. That film will have to work without one of the greatest parts of its heritage.

LEIA'S REAPPEARANCE

in *The Force Awakens* wasn't welcomed only by die-hard *Star Wars* fans. Leia became a pop-culture icon — and that's largely due to the influence of the serialised science-fiction of George Lucas' youth. The cinnamon-bun hair in *A New Hope* was a trial ("Some tests were even worse!" claimed Fisher) but it fascinated audiences at once. The coils echoed *Buck Rogers*' Wilma Deering, who originally wore a sort of metallic bathing cap with built-in headphones, and were parodied as *actual* headphones in *Spaceballs*. Fisher hated *A New Hope*'s pristine white dress, but got better outfits in the sequels and reached peak hair with the more flattering braids in *Jedi*. She particularly liked her "gas-station attendant" look in *The Force Awakens*.

But it was another, scantier outfit that made her notorious — again based on her sci-fi predecessors. Edgar Rice Burroughs' A Princess Of Mars was Dejah Thoris, Martian stateswoman and love interest for human John Carter. Dejah was courageous and resolute, like Leia, and also ended up getting kidnapped with remarkable frequency. But it was the near-naked Dejah, all lithe limbs and improbable underwear on the Frank Frazetta covers to the John Carter paperbacks that were contemporary when Star Wars was made, that provided a clear inspiration for what would become Leia's slave bikini.



Fisher in *that* bikini in *Return Of The Jedi*.

Fisher thought Lucas was joking when he proposed the costume. But she was 24, and in shape, and went along with it because she knew she looked good. She had to sit at an unnatural angle to avoid even the slightest crease in her middle, aware that a wrong move would allow Boba Fett to see "all the way to Florida". It's a look that's become controversial for feminist fans over the years, turning Leia from heroine to sex slave in a beat - not that Fisher was aware of that until much later. "And I'm very glad of that. Maybe eight years ago [Fisher said in 2015] some guy said to me, 'I thought about you every day from when I was 12 to when I was 22.' And I said, 'Every day?' And he said, 'Well, four times a day...' What do you say to that? Thank you? But then I started becoming aware of it in an uncomfortable way.

The bikini launched a generation of men into puberty and became a geek punchline. On screen, Rachel in *Friends* and Kristen Bell in *Fanboys* mimicked the look, and generations of cosplayers have attempted it. "My favourite one to see is the metal bikini on men, and not thin men," said Fisher. "That makes me feel good about myself, kind of a before and after thing." Even the harshest critics concede that Leia strangling her captor with her slave chain is a compelling metaphor.

And Leia endures as a feminist icon because of her strength. She never developed her Force skills, although judging by her son, they could have been considerable. But what would she have gained? She already has the compassion and sense of duty that drove the Jedi. She wielded power and learned patience, and never gave in to anger or suffering. Does she really need a lightsaber, too?

Without fanfare, Leia may be the most perfect Jedi in the *Star Wars* canon. It's a rare Skywalker who's never been tempted by the dark side, even in the no-longer-canon extended universe of the novels and comics. Through a torrent of loss that would break anyone — parents, adoptive parents, *planet*, allies, brother, son, husband — she never wavered. Perhaps the biggest moment of fan service in *The Force Awakens* is simply seeing Leia surviving, fighting, and still in charge ("From now on you do what I say, okay?").

The new generation of *Star Wars* films have built on Leia's success with a few more female roles. But Leia remains singular. Said Daisy Ridley, "I don't think anything can top that in the *Star Wars* world. She is, and was, beautiful, and smart, and strong, and vulnerable; all those cool things that I think made her so loved."

Interviewed on NPR just a couple of months ago, Fisher expressed her affection for her iconic role. "I like Princess Leia. I like how she handles things. I like how she treats people. She tells the truth. She gets what she wants done. I've sort of melded with her over time."

Numerically speaking, *Star Wars* remains a boy's fantasy, chocka with great male characters. But in terms of quality role models? The guys have nothing on Carrie Fisher's Leia.

MEMORIES OF CARRIE

WARWICK DAVIS

THE FIRST TIME I met Carrie was on the set of *Return Of The Jedi*. As an 11-year-old Star Wars fan, all I could see her as was Princess Leia. I didn't understand on-set etiquette back then – you don't just wander up to the lead in a movie and start having a chat – so I would often talk to her. I would ask her questions about her character, her adventures and how her blaster worked. Many of our meetings were like that until we went to America to shoot the Endor forest sequences in Crescent City. Kenny Baker got poorly, so I got to play the scene where Princess Leia is discovered by Wicket the Ewok. I remember Carrie was worried about how hot I was in the costume and would bring me chocolate, milk and cookies from the craft services table. It was then I started to know Carrie Fisher.

Back at Elstree studios, they were shooting the sequence inside Jabba's sail barge. The on-set photographer said, "Why don't you sit on Jabba's tail and have a picture with Carrie?" It is a really lovely picture and the expression on my face speaks volumes about my excitement and the mild embarrassment of an 11-year-old next to a lady in a metal bikini. It's pretty special.

For me, Leia was a very unique portrayal of a woman in a movie in that she was a very strong female lead character. We see quite a lot of that now, but Carrie paved the way for the likes of Daisy Ridley and Felicity Jones. Those characters very much come out of the mould that Carrie created. A lot of Princess Leia is Carrie Fisher as well. She was so confident, and you get a hint of her wry sense of humour within the character, too. She delighted fans with that performance and will continue to do so for generations to come.

Years later, when I started hosting Star Wars Celebration events, I had the pleasure of interviewing Carrie on stage. I'd spend a lot of time writing those shows but I didn't really need to plan Carrie's sections. I knew if she sat opposite me and we'd start talking, some magic would happen. She was so relaxed on stage, kicking her shoes off and lying down on the sofa before 4,000 people like it was her living room. I asked Carrie to close her eyes while I put on a stormtrooper helmet and said, "Now open them and say the first thing that comes into your head," thinking she'd say, "Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?" She said, "There's always a bigger fish," which is a line from The Phantom Menace. It was a very funny and special moment. We also re-enacted Leia's meeting with Wicket twice. The first time, her dog, Gary, had to be ushered off stage because he attacked my cuddly Ewoks. The second time, when I got a broom handle to use as a spear, Gary took exception and turned on me. Carrie was never word-perfect, but she committed to our skits and the fans adored her for it.

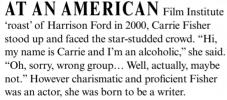
There was no smokescreen with Carrie. You felt she could be part of your family; she wasn't starry at all. What you saw was what you got. I think that's why she will be remembered so fondly, because she gave everybody everything. There wasn't a secret side to Carrie Fisher the fans don't know. That's just who she was.



WCHAN OF IFTERS

IF CARRIE FISHER FOUND FAME AS A PRINCESS, SHE DISCOVERED HER TRUE CALLING AS A WRITER

WORDS IAN FREER



Her credited output runs to four novels (Postcards From The Edge, Surrender The Pink, Delusions Of Grandma, The Best Awful There Is), three memoirs (Wishful Drinking, Shockaholic, The Princess Diarist) and two screenplays (Postcards, These Old Broads). Yet she first put pen to paper seriously aged 12. "That was therapeutic for me in those days," she said. "I wrote things to get out of feeling them, and onto paper. So writing in a way saved me." It rescued her from one of the most tumultuous Tinseltown upbringings imaginable.

FISHER OFTEN JOKED

that *Star Wars* sounded like a fight between her mother and father. She was the first child of *Singin' In The Rain* star Debbie Reynolds and pop star Eddie Fisher, a couple so golden they made Brangelina look like Alf and Ailsa Stewart. When Carrie was two, Eddie Fisher left Reynolds to be with Elizabeth Taylor. Seeing her father "more on TV than on the planet" and with her mother away maintaining a career, Fisher's childhood became defined by absence. And when Reynolds was present, Carrie had to share her mother with the world. "People sort of walked over me to get to her," Fisher told *The New York Times*.

Her relationship with her mother was complex, a mixt of love and rivalry (Fisher joined Reynolds'

stage act as a 13-year-old), pointedly satirised in *Postcards From The Edge*. The pair hardly spoke during Fisher's thirties yet achieved peace later in life, living next door to each other until their deaths in December, just one day apart.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in such an isolated childhood, the young Fisher found solace in books.

"I was a freaky kid," she told *Rolling Stone* in 2016. "I loved language and I would read all these books. I liked Truman Capote and I was obsessed with Dorothy Parker. I wanted to be her. I was just in love with words and they saved me from a lot of stuff. Books were my first drug. They took me away from everything and I would just consume them."

Fisher's writing details a Hollywood life as full as any ever put on paper. From Wishful Drinking alone, she remembers Elizabeth Taylor as a stepmom, the fallout of being in the biggest film franchise of all time, a year-long marriage to Paul Simon, having partner Bryan Lourd leave her for another man, waking up next to the dead body of her friend Greg Stevens, then believing for years his ghost haunted her mansion. And there was enough left for two more autobiographies.

Yet in between the biographical landmarks were lifelong struggles. Fisher discovered actual (rather than literary) drugs about the same time she started writing. Pot at 13. LSD at 21. Cocaine on the set of *Empire*. Snorting heroin rather than injecting. Her writing always displayed a clear-eyed view of her own addictions. "I was very offended someone would think I was suicidal," she once said. "They said, 'Well, your behaviour is suicidal.' And I said, 'Well, my behaviour might be, but I'm not.' I literally thought that way."



















FISHER ONLY GOT clean after

a 30-day spell in rehab in 1985, following a near-fatal overdose. It is a period of her life deftly satirised in her novel Postcards From The Edge, a book that crystallised many of the popular perceptions of rehab culture that still pervade today. The famed 12-step programme also got her to confront her long-standing issues with mental illness. Following in her father's troubled footsteps. Fisher was officially diagnosed with bipolar disorder aged 24, although she refused to accept it (she once signed into a hospital under the name 'Shame'). If she remained largely drug- and drink-free for the rest of her life, her disorder remained a constant struggle, which she never shied away from discussing. Her words gave succour to many going through similar struggles; she once even suggested there be a Bipolar Pride Day.

"Writing about [having bipolar disorder] did help me to be able to talk about my illness in the abstract, to make light of it," she told *People* in 2013. "That's my way of surviving, to abstract it into something that's funny and not dangerous."

Fisher lived with her issues while fashioning a ridiculously successful screenwriting career. The success of her adaptation of *Postcards*From The Edge led to her becoming one of Hollywood's most prolific script doctors (she was also a gag-writer for many Academy Awards ceremonies). Fisher was hired by Steven Spielberg to rewrite Hook, and soon a raft of rewriting projects emerged: Sister Act (Whoopi Goldberg rehired her for Made In America), The River Wild and Outbreak, by which time she was reputedly on \$100,000 per week.

Fisher's script-doctoring reputation was built on her ability to breathe life and depth into lacklustre female characters. She reworked Rene Russo's character in *Lethal Weapon 3* and then tinkered with another Shane Black project, *Last Action Hero*. More projects followed, some successful (*Mr. & Mrs. Smith*), some not (*My Girl 2, Kate & Leopold*), many forgettable (*Milk Money, Love Affair, The Out-Of-Towners, Coyote Ugly*), until changes in the industry saw Fisher bow out.

"It was a long, very lucrative episode of my life," she told *Newsweek* in 2008. "Now in order to get a rewrite job, you have to submit your notes for your ideas on how to fix the script. So they can get all the notes from all the different writers, keep the notes and not hire you. That's free work and that's what I always call life-wasting events."

The screenwriter was looking for her third act.

WHEN SHE PASSED away on

27 December 2016, aged 60, many Fisher retrospectives reported that she "drowned in moonlight, strangled by my own bra". It was a request made to obituary writers in *Wishful Drinking* and one that seemed perfectly in keeping with her colourful life. Her final book, *The Princess Diarist*, made sense (and fun) out of her *Star Wars* legacy. She remained the most gloriously human element in that galaxy far, far away. And, as her thousands of words are powerful testament to, right here on Earth too.

MEMORIES OF CARRIE

JOE DANTE

I WORKED WITH Carrie on *Amazon Women On The Moon*, which was a sketch comedy, and the parts were all famous cameos. The episode I did with her was called *Reckless Youth* and was a parody of 1930s sex exploitation movies. The first thing that struck me about Carrie was how there was an inner light that came out of her. Plus, she had this killer sense of humour. She managed to pull out a reserve of bad acting that I didn't think was even possible. We just had a ball.

On *The 'Burbs*, she played Tom Hanks' wife, Carol. What she brought to that role, which is generally a thankless one because everybody else got all the funny lines, was phenomenal. Not only was she very sexy and cute, but because we shot the picture in sequence during a writers' strike, we were able to do a lot of ad-libbing. Much of Carrie and Tom's relationship came out of improv.

She was able to bring a lot of her personality into every part. Later, I was supposed to do a picture with Sylvester Stallone called *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* and Carrie came in to do some script-doctoring. We got up to about 40 pages, realised it wasn't working and bowed out. But I got a glimpse of one of the most brilliant people I ever knew. She was always on. Frankly after a little while it would get exhausting trying to keep up. She was so good at it and it came so effortlessly. As a person to have in your life, she was really one of a kind.

ANTHONY DANIELS

I CAN'T ACTUALLY remember the first or the last time Carrie and I met. On set. At a party. Over dinner. Over dinner with Gary. It doesn't matter.

But back in 1976, trotting next to her, racing to congratulate Luke for nixing the Death Star, her boobs bouncing too high for a PG-13 as she clutched them, giggling, I laughed too. And we both laughed after dinner a year later when the maître'd at Dar Maghreb on Hollywood Boulevard congratulated her on her performance in A New Hope, adding that the only thing he hadn't liked in the film was that silly gold robot. He was English. She doubled the tip. She was always generous and kind.

I am one of the few who have looked into her beautiful eyes and had them look directly, deeply, warmly back into mine. And back into See-Threepio's eyes, too. The reality and honesty of her performance coaxed the audience to believe my gold man was a real, valued companion (even though she did brutally switch me off in *Empire*).

She is Leia. She was Carrie. I have yet to tell Threepio of the news. I know he will be inconsolable. Utterly. Long after I have had my memory wiped, our Princess will live on. I wish her eternal peace.



GARRIE ON LAUGHING

THE STANDOUT MOMENTS FROM THE LIGHT SIDE OF CARRIE FISHER'S CAREER

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

THE DEBUT

SHAMPOO (1975)

Fisher was 17 when she made this memorable two-scene appearance in her very first film. When Warren Beatty's randy hairdresser George turns up at the mansion of his latest conquest Felicia (Lee Grant), he finds her young daughter Lorna (Fisher) instead. Clad in a tight tennis outfit, the precocious Lorna takes George to the kitchen, where they flirt awkwardly while munching on crunchy metaphors, until Fisher breaks the tension with a masterfully delivered, "You wanna fuck?" As calling cards go, it's a doozy.



THE BLUES BROTHERS (1980)

Released a month after The Empire Strikes Back, this saw her teaming up with Dan Aykroyd, who not only saved her life by performing the Heimlich manoeuvre when she choked on a Brussels sprout in her trailer, but later asked her to marry him. Despite that Aykroyd affiliation, she played the spurned ex of John Belushi's Jake Blues in the famously out-of-control John Landis comedy. In the film's best running gag, Fisher's Mystery Woman (we never learn her name) rocks up out of nowhere and tries to kill the oblivious brothers with an impressive armoury including a rocket launcher, a flamethrower and a submachine gun. And each time the Blues dust themselves off and walk away. After being largely silent throughout, Fisher's big scene comes at the end, when she finally corners Jake in a sewer and reveals her motive: he left her at the altar. "I remained celibate for you," she hisses. "To obtain the seven limousines for the wedding party, my father used up his last favours with Mad Pete Trullo." Sadly, after Jake seduces her with a flash of his baby browns, he leaves her lying in the dirt. That's no way to treat a princess.

THE MASTERCLASS

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY... (1989)

It would have been all too easy for this role to be a standard romcom best friend, dispensing wisdom and memorable quotes with equal aplomb. And while Fisher's Marie does do











plenty of that in When Harry Met Sally..., Nora Ephron was incapable of writing a role like that, Rob Reiner (then) of directing it, and Fisher of acting it. Instead, she gets an inner life, and her own actual honest-to-goodness arc. When we first meet her, Marie is already Sally's best friend, but is coming out of a disruptive affair with a married man. Over the course of the film, she finds love with Bruno Kirby's Jess...

THE FUN CAMEO JAY AND SILENT BOB STRIKE

BACK (2001)

Showing up in Scream 3 meant Fisher shared a credit with Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes as Jay and Silent Bob, who also cameoed in that film. A year later she found herself sharing a scene — and a car — with the duo in their big breakout road movie. It's a brief (just over a minute) cameo from Fisher, as a nun who picks up the pair, but she still manages to score some laughs, not least when a confused Jay tries to go down on her as she's driving.

THE HURRICANE

CATASTROPHE (2015-'17)

When Rob Delaney and Sharon Horgan needed an actress to play Rob's mother on their pin-sharp sitcom, there was only one choice. Well, choice may not be the right word. "She let us put her in our show," Delaney wrote in a piece just after Fisher's death. As Mia, a foul-mouthed force of nature described by Sharon as "a haemorrhoid on an arsehole", Fisher is deliciously, devilishly hilarious. She's only in four episodes of the first two series (she had a bigger role in the third series, which she finished filming just days before her death), but she's perfectly deployed in each. The standout is the excruciating moment at the party thrown after Rob and Sharon's baby is born when, having asked Sharon's parents which part of Ireland they're from, Mia launches into a couldn't-give-a-shit reply just so she can crowbar in her one Irish frame of reference: Riverdance. A glorious monster, and a gift of a role. 0

ON HER DRUG-TAKING

"YOU KNOW HOW THEY SAY THAT RELIGION IS THE OPIATE OF THE MASSES? WELL, I TOOK MASSES OF OPIATES RELIGIOUSLY."

Wishful Drinking

ON HER LEGACY

"I am Princess Leia, no matter what.

If I were trying to get a good table,
I wouldn't say I wrote *Postcards*.

Or, if I'm trying to get someone to
take my check and I don't have ID,
I wouldn't say, 'Have you seen
When Harry Met Sally...?"

WehMD

ON HER UPBRINGING

"I AM A PRODUCT OF HOLLYWOOD IN-BREEDING. WHEN TWO CELEBRITIES MATE, SOMEONE LIKE ME IS THE RESULT."

Wishful Drinking

ON THE LURE OF STAR WARS

"George is a sadist. But like any abused child wearing a metal bikini, chained to a giant slug about to die, I keep coming back for more."

Presenting the AFI Life Achievement Award to George Lucas



ON PRIVILEGE

"I'M A PEZ DISPENSER
AND I'M IN THE
ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY
TEXTBOOK. WHO SAYS
YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL?"

Wishful Drinking

ON INTERGALACTIC SEXISM

"Even in space there's a double standard for women."

The Late Show With Stephen Colbert

ON PRIVILEGE

"I BASICALLY CONSIDER MYSELF STREET SMART... UNFORTUNATELY THAT STREET IS RODEO DRIVE."

Twitter

ON RAISING KYLO REN

"Han and I had a volatile relationship... We had a child who turned out to be Hitler. You'd feel bad if he turned out like that. I did spank Adam [*Driver*] when I first met him."

Star Wars Celebration, 2016

ON HAVING HER BODY COMPARED
TO ELTON JOHN'S

"BLOW MY BIG BOVINE TINY DANCER COCK."

Fisher's blog

THE FINAL WORD

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF CARRIE FISHER

ON BEING A POSTER GIRL FOR BIPOLAR DISORDER

"I'M HOPING TO GET THE CENTREFOLD IN PSYCHOLOGY TODAY."

WebMD

ON HER FATHER EDDIE FISHER COMFORTING ELIZABETH TAYLOR

"He first dried her eyes with his handkerchief, then he consoled her with flowers, and he ultimately consoled her with his penis. This made marriage to my mother awkward."

Wishful Drinking

ON FINDING A PATH

"SOMETIMES YOU CAN ONLY FIND HEAVEN BY SLOWLY BACKING AWAY FROM HELL."

Wishful Drinking

ON AGEING

"As you get older, the pickings get slimmer, but the people don't."

Shockaholic

ON KEEPING FIT

"The only exercise I get lately is running off at the mouth & jumping to conclusions..."

Twitter

ON HOLLYWOOD

"YOU CAN'T FIND ANY TRUE CLOSENESS IN HOLLYWOOD, BECAUSE EVERYBODY DOES THE FAKE CLOSENESS SO WELL."

Postcards From The Edge

RISING ABOVE

SHE'S BATTLED HER WAY FROM POVERTY TO THE HOLLYWOOD A-LIST. FENCES STAR VIOLA DAVIS EXPLAINS WHY OUITTING WAS NEVER AN OPTION

WORDS OLLY RICHARDS PORTRAITS MARTIN SCHOELLER







VIOLA DAVIS IS, no doubt about it, a big deal. Since her breakthrough in 2008, she has quickly established herself as one of the most consistently excellent actors currently working. In any film she turns up in, be it an awards heavyweight like *The Help* or silly summer movie like *Suicide Squad*, you know that, regardless of what's around her or what kind of script she's given, *she* will be great. Her characters tend to be tough, commanding and memorable. She has been nominated for an Oscar twice. She has won an Emmy.

But what she's experienced is the opposite of overnight success. As a child growing up in Central Falls, Rhode Island, she never knew where her next meal was coming from, sometimes jumping into maggot-infested trash cans to find something to eat. She began acting at the age of eight, using performance as a way to take her mind off her family's troubles. Slowly perfecting her craft, she spent decades doing stage work, garnering a reputation as an in-demand actress with vast range. Finally, at the age of 43, her acclaimed screen performance in *Doubt* put her on the path to fame and fortune.

Her latest project, *Fences*, brings the two parts of Davis' career together. An adaptation of an August Wilson play, directed by and co-starring Denzel Washington, it sees her play Rose, the submissive wife of Troy, a man who never realised his potential and has let his resentments sour his relationships with the rest of his family. Both Davis and Washington played the same roles on stage in New York in 2010, winning Tonys. A woman who keeps her own grievances quiet until she can hold them in no longer, Rose is a part that stretches all Davis' acting muscles. Unsurprisingly, it's made her the favourite for this year's Best Supporting Actress Oscar. If she wins it, she'll have a set of the biggest awards in stage, film and TV (she won an Emmy for her show *How To Get Away With Murder*).

When we meet Davis at the Four Seasons hotel in Los Angeles, there's a sense she still hasn't adjusted to her massive upswing of fortune. She's initially rather shy — she is "very much an introvert" — and says the peculiarities of celebrity still confuse her. Over the course of our hour together, though, she becomes more relaxed and animated, her gesticulations getting larger and her laugh louder with every anecdote. She loves to entertain. After four decades of practice, she's very, very good at it.

You performed the role of Rose for 13 weeks on stage. What made you want to play her again on screen?

The characters in this are endlessly fascinating. They're vast. There isn't any amount of re-examining of it that could be enough... I always tell people I never got the final scene [right] in 13 weeks in New York. Never hit it, until we did [the film].

Rose is marginalised in her own marriage. Everything is according to Troy's desires. What interested you about their relationship?

I first saw *Fences* in a production years ago in Providence. A great actress played Rose, but I felt like when she first came out on stage she was mad. Every time she gave Troy a line it was harsh and hard, so by the time the marriage fell apart, I never felt the loss. I just thought it was fractured from the very beginning. I was adamant not to do that. I wanted it to look like something that may not be perfect, but was working. Listen, man, they're having sex after 18 years. That's something. They're always









having sex. I wanted to pack a wallop with Rose. I wanted people to feel like they could envelop her.

With films like Fences, Loving, Moonlight and Hidden Figures, it's been said this is one of the best years ever for films focused on people of colour. What's your perspective on that?

That's absolutely true. And it's not only films with African Americans in them and about African American life — it's actors finally getting their due. That's what I really want people to know, that we're out there. Look at Stephen McKinley Henderson [Bono in Fences]. He's been out there for 40 years. He was in the first class at Juilliard. This guy has done hundreds of plays... Taraji P. Henson. Octavia Spencer. Naomie Harris. These are actors. These are not just black actors who are getting attention because of the colour of their skin. They're getting attention because the opportunity has met the preparation. That's what's exhilarating to watch. And it's deserving.

Why do you think it's happening now?

A lot of people would say it's partly a response to 'Oscars So White'. It's the Obama effect. Who knows? I think America is changing. Or America is just being revealed for what it's always been: a melting pot of different cultures, of people who are interracial, people who want to see their own images on the screen, who are desperate for it. People need the volume of different narratives. The audience is changing.

How do you square that progress with what's happening in America more generally? Trump represents the opposite of multiculturalism.

To almost shy away from the political answer, but not to shy away from it, I'm going to answer it like an artist. During *Doubt*, [the writer]
John Patrick Shanley said a lot of the nuns who were his teachers in Catholic school came to see the play. They loved it, but they said, "We weren't that mean." I thought that was hysterical because it's a known fact that it's brutal in Catholic school. People have an inability to see themselves for who they are. I think America is

very much a country that embraces redefinition of oneself. That's what happened when people came through Ellis Island. We traded in our names, giving up ones that reflected our culture in order to become a part of the American dream. And you're embraced because of that. In America, you can be anyone you want to be. But then who are you? That's always the conflict with our political structure. People vote against their own interests because we don't know who we are.

You're a very good illustration of the American dream. You grew up very poor and now you're extremely successful. As a child, what made you believe being an actor was something you could do?

Unless you grew up poor, you don't know how hard it is. It is brutal on your psyche. It's traumatic. When you're poor you don't have a choice; you have to either dream big or not at all. There's no middle ground. You can't be passive about your future. You've got to be passionate and very clear. A therapist once told me, "Viola, you've always had drive. Drive has never been your problem."



That's true. Dreaming was something to do, as opposed to having nothing to do.

When did you start to feel it might really happen?

When I was 14, Mr Yates, my English and drama teacher, told me, "Viola, this could be a possibility for you. You need more technique, but if you get it, this could be something you could do. You're that good." I was like, "Wow, really?" Or it could have been when I was 18. I was in my freshman year of college and I had no money. I had to get a job so I could get an apartment and a car. I didn't have parents who even had the money to send me a care package. I didn't have a way into acting that was practical, so I gave it up. For my first semester I became an English major. I dropped into a huge depression. It felt like a death. I had to act in order to be happy, so I decided I had to do it no matter what.

For many years your success was on stage. Did you ever have an eye on film?

That's like someone saying, "Did you ever think about climbing mountains or going to Antarctica?" When you're from Central Any time a role said "girlfriend" I knew I wouldn't get it. "Attractive", I knew I wouldn't get it. So me playing someone's girlfriend... Then I went to do it and said, "Steven, so what was it?" He said, "It was two things. It was your stillness, and it was that *hair*. I couldn't get past the hair." Okay! Him and me just click.

You call Out Of Sight your big break, but most people would say it was Doubt. You had a single scene in that film but it brought you an Oscar nomination and a film career. How did you react to that?

I felt like I won the lottery. At that point I was a journeyman actor. Someone who's been out there in the field, doing character roles. Then something pops you out that makes people start saying your name. I couldn't believe it.

Of all the films you've made since then, one stands out as unusual: Suicide Squad. Why did that appeal?

Are you serious? Why not?! It's an action movie. I got to play Amanda Waller. Are you serious? Sometimes I just want to have fun. I'm getting a little long in the tooth now, but there are times I wish I was 20 years younger because

By virtue of being African American and achieving what you have, you are put in a position of being a figurehead. How do you feel about that?

It's twofold. I feel okay about the responsibility of being the first African American woman to win [an Emmy for] Best Lead Actress in a Drama. I feel okay about being a role model, a dark-skinned woman who's 51, who's given other women of colour who are a different size, a different hue, almost permission to do what they do. The part I have difficulty with is the unspoken responsibility. For instance, I'm on Facebook and I have people write to me about anything from money to reading their scripts to coming to their house and giving their children advice. That's when I have issues, because I didn't know that was part of the whole game. I didn't know that was my responsibility. That's too much for me. I try to the best of my ability to give people comfort. I think I have enough heart to want to do that, but people will be like, "Can you talk to my dying mom, or someone who's going through something traumatic? Can you just say your lines from The Help? That would help them a lot." That's hard for me. And I'm not criticising, at all. At

"When you're poor you don't have a choice; you have to dream big or not at all. There's no middle ground. You can't be passive about your future. You've got to be passionate and very clear."

Falls, Rhode Island? No. I didn't see myself in movies. I never won any beauty contests. I was never a cheerleader.

One of the very first people to put you in his films was Steven Soderbergh, who gave you small roles in *Out Of Sight, Traffic* and *Solaris*. How did that relationship originally come about?

I don't know. I would audition a lot for TV and film and never get anything. The audition for Out Of Sight... I remember they put me on tape at my agency. That's when I would do my own hair, because I couldn't afford to pay for anyone to do it. I would buy hair from a shop in California, His 'N' Hers Beauty Supply, that would mail me the hair and I would braid it all in myself. I didn't know what I was doing, I just knew my hair couldn't be big enough. Remember Chaka Khan back in the day? She didn't even have as much hair as I had. You could not tell me I did not look cute. My agent said I had to audition for Out Of Sight and I said, "I'm not going to get that. I never get these auditions. And it's two lines? Okay, I'm just gonna memorise them and say them, that's it." That's what I did. And I got it! That was my first big break. I was shocked. "I'm playing someone's girlfriend? I'm playing Don Cheadle's girlfriend?"

I want to kick somebody's ass on film. I just want to kick somebody's ass. Amanda Waller was a chance to do a little bit of that. I loved being a badass. And I'm wondering where people thought I was in my career that I had the kind of power to not do something like Suicide Squad. I don't get seven-figure salaries. I've always been the journeyman actor. On Prisoners I did eight days. Ender's Game I did five. Beautiful Creatures I did eight days. Doubt I did two weeks. I could go on. Most of my jobs have been three days here, one day there, and that's it. It wouldn't be like you asking Julia Roberts or Sandra Bullock. I'm not on that level in terms of money or exposure. In fact, How To Get Away With Murder is the job that changed my life. That and The Help.

How did The Help change your life?

I was nominated for Best Actress and it made money. It's like Denzel says, the business part of show business is so important that it might as well be called 'business show'. It's a business. I was in a big money-making, crowd-pleasing film. How To Get Away With Murder was the highest-rated pilot in history. Now it's in its third season and it's in 158 territories. It's as simple as that. And then I won the Emmy... I have more opportunities now.

all. I get it. But it's difficult. I try to give them what they want, to the best of my ability. I've done a lot of videos of, "You are smart. You are kind. You are important." But always it makes me feel uncomfortable, because I'm not God. I'm just an actor.

As you say, you're 51 and you've worked incredibly hard to get where you are. What is there still to do?

There's a lot of things I haven't done. I'll tell you one thing coming up that's scaring the crap out of me: Steve McQueen's *Widows* [an adaptation of the Lynda La Plante drama about a group of women who take over from their criminal husbands after they're killed].

Why does it scare you?

I can't tell you. If I even say it I'm going to be hitting the vodka, seriously. But I would say it's a role that is going to force me to do things a little outside my comfort zone.

Will you get to kick some ass?

Oh, I most definitely will kick somebody's ass. And I'm going to kick ass as a 51-year-old woman. How is *that*? That is *beautiful*.

FENCES IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 FEBRUARY.





ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE EAST



The future of international filmmaking, or a colossal folly? Empire scales
The Great Wall, 2017's strangest blockbuster

WORDS DAN JOLIN





Thomas Tull Was eight years old when he first heard that the Great Wall Of China is the only man-made object you can see from space. Like all powerful myths, it lodged itself in this New York boy's imagination and dug its roots in deep, never to be withered by the fact it's totally untrue. "It might be an urban myth, but I found it fascinating," Tull says now. "I couldn't get it out of my head." Questions buzzed around his young mind: "Why would they build something like that? What were they trying to keep out?"

It wasn't until 2010 that the answer — the mythical answer, that is — came to him, during a trip (of course) to China. By this point, Tull was 40 years old and had set up the appropriately named Legendary Entertainment, a production outfit specialising in bombastic sci-fi and fantasy films such as *The Dark Knight, Watchmen, Clash Of The Titans* and *Inception*. "I started thinking, 'Well, what if this feat of engineering — this incredible undertaking that required sheer force of will — was really to repel not people or a band of raiders, but mythical creatures?"

That was the moment Thomas Tull started building his *own* Great Wall.

For years now, Hollywood has had to adapt to the rapid growth and intensifying enthusiasm of Chinese cinema audiences; according to the most confident current estimates, China will be the world's biggest film market in just two years. It's a tough market to crack, though, given the strict state controls over the business there, not to mention the differences in audience taste and sensibility. One way in has been to cast Chinese stars in prominent roles (such as Jiang Wen and Donnie Yen in Rogue One); another more recent development has been to co-produce with Chinese companies — the approach taken by Warner Bros.' New Zealand-shot Statham-versus-giant-shark movie Meg, due out in early 2018. Tull, however, has taken it a step further. The Great Wall is the first-ever Hollywood-sourced movie to be made in China by a Chinese director, with a mostly Chinese cast and a Chinese/Western crew. Oh, and with an estimated budget of \$150 million, it's also the most expensive movie ever filmed in the country. It is a whole new kind of blockbuster.

Not that he was playing a smartly strategic long game, insists Tull, whose company is now owned by a Chinese conglomerate (the Dalian Wanda Group bought Legendary for \$3.5 billion in January 2016). "The Chinese market was not then what it is now," he says of the time the creative spark first happened, "and it wasn't fashionable to be doing this. I'd love to tell you there was a plan to get here, but the Great Wall is an iconic worldwide image, so I just thought it would be cool to set a story around that."

Tull put together a story outline with his friend and *World War Z* novelist Max Brooks, which over the past six years has been through several screenwriters and countless permutations. Back in 2012, it was all set to roll in New Zealand and China with *Last Samurai* director Ed Zwick, and Henry Cavill, Ben Walker and Zhang Ziyi in the lead roles, until the project crumbled under the pressure of studio politics (Legendary was coming to









the end of its deal with Warner Bros at the time). But the central concept has always been the same: a pair of 11th-century European mercenaries hit the Silk Road on a mission to filch the secrets of gunpowder from the Chinese, when they stumble on a fantasised, weaponised version of the Great Wall. Here, they witness a secret Chinese army, The Nameless Order, tackling an onslaught of voracious, lizard-like demons known as the Tao Tei, which make a *Pacific Rim*-like assault on humanity once every 60 years.

It was a concept that clicked with Beijing-based veteran filmmaker Zhang Yimou, who has orchestrated elaborate and visually inventive action before in martial-arts epics *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers*, and marshalled grand-scale spectacle with his direction of the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. When offered the gig in 2013, he wasn't deterred by its American origin, or the fact that he can't speak English. "I knew this was always going to be a popcorn blockbuster in the States," he tells *Empire* (via a translator), "but I saw a lot of potential for myself to showcase my own abilities, and to showcase the culture of China."

To Tull, the Great Wall was a rich, exotic myth, a faraway feat of engineering which fed a vivid childhood imagination. What, we ask, does it mean to Zhang, who grew up in its shadow?

"It's a symbol of China's national spirit," he says. "It represents the Chinese people protecting their homeland. It's also about persistence — in how we built it, but also about being eager to fight and to withstand a difficulty. When thinking of these things, it's inevitable that I want to bring them into the film. I want to infuse the spirit of the Great Wall into the characters and the main theme of the movie."

Protection, persistence, eagerness to meet a challenge... all things which Zhang says also represented the task of *making* this colossal, crazy movie.

Matt Damon is no stranger to big productions, but he'd never seen anything like *this*. "I kind of felt like I was making a Hollywood movie in the 1940s," says the star, speaking from Beijing in early December where, in a little over a week, the film will premiere. "The scale of it was so massive. We'd go to work and there'd be 500 extras all in battle armour. It felt like one of those old MGM musicals, or like I was making a movie with Cecil B. DeMille. It was absolutely overwhelming, in the best possible way."

With all those extras decked out in brightly coloured armour (gold, purple, blue, red or black, depending on which corps they're in), and teeming around a Great Wall that bristles with ingenious, mechanical siege weapons, Damon's not wrong. The footage that *Empire* views feels like *The Two Towers* by way of *Cirque du Soleil*, with golden-armoured, spear-wielding female 'Crane' warriors taking vertiginous bungee-dives off the ramparts to stab at the scrabbling creatures below.

And what creatures. Inspired by permanently ravenous, gargoyle-ish beasts from ancient Chinese mythology and conjured up by ILM, these CG nasties feel like they've been exiled from *Avatar*'s Pandora for being too damn ugly. With heads that are all dagger-toothed mouth and an eye planted on each shoulder of their sinewy forelegs, the Tao Tei are as relentless as *Game Of Thrones*' White Walkers, and speedier and more vicious than famished velociraptors.

"I would have done this if it were a tiny little kitchen-sink drama, but it turned out to be this giant popcorn movie," says Damon, who was Zhang's first choice for the role of William Garin, the roguish archer who, along with his swordsman compadre Tovar (*Narcos*' Pedro Pascal), must collaborate with his captors Commander Lin Mei (Tian Jing) and Strategist Wang (Andy Lau) if this demon menace is to be vanquished. "The chance to stand next to one of the great visionary directors in the





world as he paints on the largest canvas he's ever been given was something I couldn't pass up."

For all the visual effects (and Zhang confirms there are "1,500 shots with pure computer graphics"), this was also a production that involved extensive set construction. During the six-month shoot from March to August 2015, four sections of Zhang's Great Wall were erected in the village of Huangdao, on the coast of the Yellow Sea. The largest was 500 feet long, 40 feet high and comprised of actual stone bricks. And this was in addition to the huge interior sets built at Beijing's China Film Group Corporation.

It was a massive endeavour — even without the communication challenges. Damon says that while things ran smoothly, "Things took a tiny bit longer because you had to translate everything — every direction was shouted out on a bullhorn in two languages." The production required no fewer than 100 translators, which meant, says producer Charles Roven (who's worked with Legendary since *Batman Begins*), that occasionally, "Things got lost in translation. These kinds of collaborations are not always perfect or easy, but everybody just rallied around Yimou. They knew we were definitely part of something unique, that had never been done before."

Zhang knowingly took on a tricky challenge when he accepted this "mission" to direct a movie that would satisfy his Hollywood producers, but which he'd also have to remould to his own preferences and realise using his own exacting methods. "It's not an easy process because there's a lot of negotiation with Hollywood," he says. Zhang introduced the idea of The Nameless Order being divided into five colour-coded corps. He also concocted a tense, fog-wreathed battle sequence, transformed the wall into something Roven describes as being more like an "aircraft carrier in terms of the armaments that ultimately show themselves", and opened out the climax so the action would move beyond the wall.

But it wasn't just the spectacle Zhang tweaked. There was one part of the script he'd inherited that particularly bothered him. "They had one of those very clichéd relationships between the hero of the movie and the main female lead, like you would see in 007 movies where the hero would end up in bed with her," he explains. "I wasn't very comfortable with this idea, especially given the female character is a war general. I wanted to portray Matt Damon and Jing Tian's relationship as more like a relationship between two trusted warriors. During this negotiation Hollywood was very worried about giving up the sexual elements, but I was quite persistent on it."

For Tull, such negotiations were part and parcel of hiring a strong-willed filmmaker. "We've been fortunate enough, from Chris Nolan right on down, to work with some amazing directors," he says. "And they always have a strong point of view. If they don't, then to me that's a red flag." And Tull says there were no notes from the Chinese government itself, which has previously censored such films as *Skyfall* and *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End.* "No-one came in and said, 'Look, the monsters need to look slightly different 'cause that's not accurate.' Fortunately we were just able to tell the story."

Even so, it was a story that started drawing criticism before the film had even been seen. After the first trailer debuted on 28 July 2016, it didn't take long for the film to be accused of 'whitewashing', or submitting to 'White Saviour Complex' through its positioning of Damon at the heart of a mostly Chinese cast. *Fresh Off The Boat* actor Constance Wu tweeted, "Our heroes don't look like Matt Damon. They look like Malala. Gandhi. Mandela... We don't need salvation." It's a subject Zhang respectfully declines to even discuss when *Empire* raises it, but Damon himself is willing to grasp the nettle.

"I want to be sensitive to that point of view," he says, "and certainly there's a longer conversation to be had about the systemic nature of that kind of thing, but in terms of this movie I would love people to at least see it first before they label it or judge it." Roven concurs, while highlighting the fact that the plot requires two key characters to be outsiders. "You can't have outsiders if you don't have outsiders," he argues. "I mean, I guess we could have made the outsiders Chinese, but then they wouldn't have been outsiders."

Tull, as you'd expect, finds the accusations frustrating because, he says, "It's the opposite of the spirit of the film. This is about a man, a mercenary from European culture, coming to China and learning about honour, humility and technology. And to this point, every single person of Chinese descent, or in China, that we've shown the film to has had an incredibly positive reaction. So I really do think the film is gonna speak for itself."

A few days after we speak, *The Great Wall* will not only open in China with an opening-weekend haul of \$67.4 million (the country's fourth-biggest of the year, after Stephen Chow's eco-fantasy *The Mermaid*, *Captain America: Civil War* and *Warcraft*), but also to reviews that to some degree contest the whitewashing accusation. "Those who ranted against the project as another case of Hollywood 'whitewashing'... may have to bite their tongue, for [*Matt Damon's*] character... spends the course of the film being humbled, out-smarted, and re-educated in Chinese virtues of bravery, selflessness, discipline, and invention," wrote *Variety*, for example. Though the worldwide release and response has yet to come, it seems the great gamble — plus Zhang's persistence and protectiveness — is paying off.

And it's not just about adapting to a huge new market, Roven insists. "This is a singular opportunity to create something for worldwide consumption that, in a very entertaining, pop-culture way, is a way of exporting Chinese culture." Tull says that though seeing Zhang's vast sets blew his eight-year-old self's mind, what impressed him most was witnessing "a truly international collaboration on a massive scale. It was an exceptional experience of how our different cultures and countries can work together." Zhang, meanwhile, says, "If this film were to succeed, I believe it would open many doors."

So it turns out Thomas Tull's own Great Wall, though designed to keep out ravenous green monsters, might not be a barrier at all. In fact, in terms of American-Chinese filmmaking relations, it could prove the exact opposite. The gates have been thrown wide open.

THE GREAT WALL IS IN CINEMAS FROM 16 FEBRUARY.











ORIENT EXCESS

The Great Wall isn't the first magic-filled fantasy epic to come out of China



PRINCESS IRON FAN (1941)

The first Chinese animated feature, made in Shanghai during Japanese occupation, this adapts a sequence from the novel *Journey To The West* in which the wily Monkey King battles a princess who wields a supernatural, fire-fighting fan.



ZU WARRIORS FROM MAGIC MOUNTAIN (1983)

Tsui Hark's Hong Kong fantasy is told from the downtrodden POV of a soldier (Yuen Biao) caught up in clashes between a monk who fights with his extensive eyebrows, a red blanket out to conquer the world and a shape-changing sorceress.



MR. VAMPIRE (1985)

A period-set mix of kung fu, occult, Hammer horror and Carry On hijinx, as a priest-exorcist-undertaker (Lam Chingying) and clumsy apprentices battle a Mandarin-robed, long-nailed bloodsucking corpse who hops like a wind-up toy on springs (a Chinese vampire trait).



DETECTIVE DEE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PHANTOM FLAME (2010)

Judge Dee features in many books and films bigging up his Sherlockian skills; director Tsui Hark and star Andy Lau make him a psychic superhero in this huge Chinese-Hong Kong fantasy. Climaxes with a statue-toppling set-piece. KIM NEWMAN



THE MING CYCLE

TO CELEBRATE THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING,

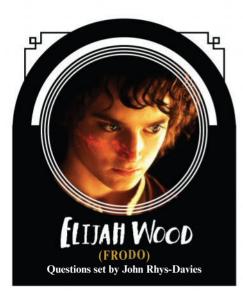
WE ASKED EACH OF ITS NINE HEROES TO POSE NINE QUESTIONS

TO ANOTHER. PREPARE FOR NOSTALGIA, PHILOSOPHY AND

SHOCKING VINEGAR-BASED REVELATIONS

RINGMASTER NICK DE SEMLYEN
ILLUSTRATION JUSTIN METZ
TYPE PETER STRAIN

Lowelliet



What surprised you most about The Lord Of The Rings?

How intimate it felt. I had nothing to compare it to then, but this quality has become more special over time. All of us embarked on something that had never been done before, tucked away in beautiful New Zealand, and it all felt homegrown, like the world's largest independent film.

Did it open new doors for you?

Certainly. More profoundly, living abroad for the first time and the personal growth

I experienced as a result set me forth on the rest of my life.

Was there any detriment workwise to doing it?

I don't think so. I definitely remember a feeling of not wanting to rest on the success of the films, but I didn't feel pigeonholed. I just knew I had to keep working and challenging myself.

Have you acquired new interests?
I DJ as a hobby, which has increasingly become a source of enjoyment and expression. I've always wanted to open a restaurant, as I'd love to marry the creativity of designing a space whilst giving a great chef a place to create. And opening a record store is something I've wanted to do since I was a teenager. Certainly no shortage of things I've dreamed about.

5 What car do you drive?
I have a 1984 Mercedes diesel wagon. It's long been a favourite car of mine and I finally found one in excellent condition last year.

I hear you have a new TV series. What is it about?

It's called *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and it's based on Douglas Adams' series of books. It's difficult to summarise, but essentially a wild, funny, mad detective show with a case that is constantly revealing itself as it goes along. I'm excited for people to dig in.



Still making films and hopefully directing. And I imagine I'll still be talking about these films: my love of New Zealand, the closeness of the cast and crew, the craftsmanship of the various departments and the new roads they paved, and so much more.



1 It's been nearly 20 years since we all first arrived in New Zealand. What are your memories of those first months?

I am the sort of optimist who only remembers the positives. So discovering New Zealand's culture and scenery sums up the joy of it all, and the family atmosphere Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh nurtured.

What were your favourite parts of the country you visited on free time?

Milford Sound, despite the biting, flying insects. The Coromandel coast in the North Island, where you can bathe in hot water on the beach and stare out at the South Pacific, green and sparkling.

How long did it take you to recover from the constant barrage of script revisions?

It was tiresome, wasn't it? Particularly for this theatre actor who has spent a career honouring a text, honed and settled before production starts. Still, it kept us on our toes and I always had the paperback hidden in my robe, to refer to.

4 It's not often discussed that every line of dialogue was re-recorded in ADR for the entire trilogy. Though daunting, I remember it being a very intricate creative process. How was your experience?

ADR is fun — a technical challenge that sometimes can improve original readings. Has it occurred to you that everyone in Middle-earth wore a wig and most of us a prosthetic of some sort? Feet and ears for you, nose for me.

5 At the end of all things, I'll never forget returning home and finding it quite bizarre to assimilate to life again. How did you find it?

A bit different for me, as I've often done wonderful long-lasting jobs away from home. But as it turned out I was back for the three *Hobbit* movies — it was such a joy that you were there too, for a little while.





What felt most unique to you about the project?

The real thrill — and an unusual one — was to know that millions of Tolkien fans wanted the film to be made. When we returned to complete filming after the release of the first one, there were none of the usual worries about whether our efforts would be appreciated.

What did you keep from your time as Gandalf?

I keep Glamdring in my hatstand and the pointy hat in the basement, often worn by visiting youngsters. Gandalf's staff is behind the bar in my Thames-side pub The Grapes. Don't tell Peter, but the keys to Bag End are hanging up at home.

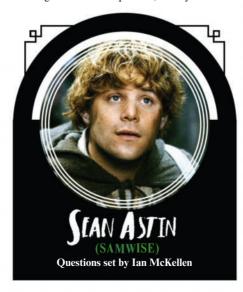
Upon visiting Bag End for the first time since it was relocated to Peter's home, I discovered a letter Gandalf had written to Frodo sitting on the mantelpiece. Do you know if he received Frodo's reply?

I don't recall Gandalf mentioning it last time we spoke. Perhaps he simply forgot — not even wizards are perfect.

How did your Hobbit experience differ from The Lord Of The Rings?
Oh, and I'm sorry about the loud music the Hobbits often played in our shared make-up trailer. (And I miss and love you.)
So many old friends behind the camera, but



I missed the old team of actors. Mind you, it was a joy to work with Martin Freeman and the dwarves. I was glad to be rid of that old stick Gandalf The White. The Grey was always my favourite. Don't you remember when it was my turn to play a track, I asked for silence instead? Now I'm nostalgic, remembering those early mornings in the make-up trailer, six days a week.



Coming from an acting family, was there ever anything else you imagined doing?

By 14. I had decided on three modest goals:

By 14, I had decided on three modest goals: world-class filmmaker, CEO of a multi-billion-

dollar entertainment company and President of the United States. I've had to settle for journeyman actor. *C'est la vie*.

Without checking your website, how many awards have you won?

Not as many as my mom used to think I should have. Maybe ten? I'm most proud of the SAG Ensemble Award we claimed together for *The Return Of The King*. The statue is quite heavy — I tell folks that it weighs the exact same as my sense of self-worth.

How's the foundation in your mother's memory proceeding?

Slowly. Thank you so much for asking. We've raised \$46,000, one fifth of the target. This is a generous and beautiful expression of love. At the moment, we are exploring holding a 5k walk/run in the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, her home town of 30 years. I think it would be a cool living memorial for her. Pretty please stay tuned!

Did you ever discover how Samwise got his name?

As a half-wise or simple person myself, like ol' Sam, I never saw the need to know.

Where do you keep the sword you were given when you completed *LOTR*?

The garage, or maybe a cupboard, or in storage with a ton of fan art. I cried heavily through my send-off. I remember being presented with my costume, including Sam's backpack (pots, pans, sausages, elven rope, lembas bread, box of salt) and sword. But the most moving trophy was the wee dress [my daughter] Ali wore as she portrayed Elanor in the last moments of ROTK.

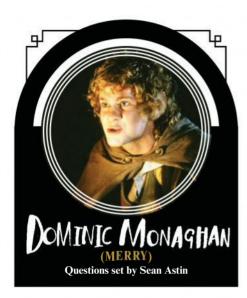
Will you ever do a New Zealand marathon? It is possible — you know I completed the Ironman triathlon in Kona, Hawaii, last October? Ironman invited me to participate in one of their New Zealand triathlons, in the shadow of Mount Doom [Ruapehu]. I'm seriously considering it for March 2018.

Would you like to be a guide at what remains of Hobbiton?

No. I wouldn't mind building a Hobbit hotel there, though.

Not yet. But I like the idea of someday getting a tattoo of my running charity #Run3rd's colourful logo.

Will you give my love to the family? I can't give them something they will never lose. The impact you've had on Ali was greater than you could ever know. She studies drama at Harvard and did a report on one of your Shakespeare masterclasses (thanks, YouTube). Okay, I will give them your love. But, it's only polite for you to accept ours right back:-)))



Why haven't we seen each other in forever?

Because we are both busy, successful people with families and we live well over an hour away from each other. But you will always be in my heart, Hobbit brother. Also, you smell of vinegar.

I heard you got hurt. Are you okay? Hmm, this week? I'm always getting hurt. I want my dead body to be strewn with scars. I broke my foot in Bali and healed poorly. So, I needed surgery to make sure all my toe and foot bones behave well moving forward.

Are you ever going to manage Man United? Ha, I wish. Manchester United is one of my happy places. I converted many people to United fans. Including you!

What is the state of your body, vis-à-vis

I think I have 12. My last one says, "What matters most is how well we walk through fire."

If there is ever a Goonies sequel, would you be in it?

Of course! It's one of my favourite childhood movies. Up there with Labyrinth and The Dark Crystal. I want to go down into the treasure spot!

You spend so much time with deadly creatures [in TV show Wild Things]... do you think people can be poisonous too?

You mean venomous? Certainly in terms of energy. We are all sponges to other humans' vibes and want to empathise. But I will not seek out complainers or blamers. Good vibes only.

Which Beatle would you be and why? Even though Lennon is my favourite, I think he was in hell a lot of the time, so living as him might be torture. George seemed to have the most fun. Great garden. Gorgeous women. Cosmic.



Hollywood Boulevard. Thankfully, my body is tight like a Ukrainian gymnast's and I made the money back in days. Well, nights.

I gave it away after it almost killed me on my driveway. I was having it towed and it pinned me to my house. I was very close to death. Maybe the closest I've been. So yes, Sean Astin almost killed me. After taking my cash. I love you, Sean!

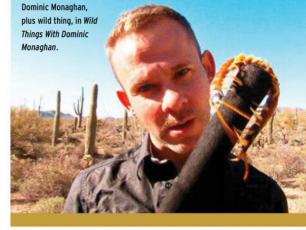


What has been the greatest lesson of being a dad?

Seeing the world through a new pair of eyes. It teaches you how exciting everything can be if we really try to look at it anew. How joy can be everywhere if we open ourselves up to it.

Which historical figure do you most identify with?

This is so hard because it will always sound egotistical. Can I identify myself with Stan



Laurel? I'm not that funny! Gandhi? I'm not that good! But to answer off the top of my head I would say George Harrison. When I read about him or see him talking I can identify with his thinking. He loved to create but was not overly comfortable with promoting.

What inspires you more than anything else?

The size of the universe. I find if I just sit and think about it, it makes me happy and somehow inspires me.

Give an example of a genius.

Prince. Probably no-one had a bigger impact in my growing up. So sad that he passed away so young.

Which existing song do you wish you had written?

I could easily pick a Prince song! But to mix it up





a bit, I will pick one from George Harrison. Can you imagine being the other songwriter in a band with Lennon and McCartney? It must have been so hard to bring a song to the table, but we are so blessed that he did. I will go with Something. Such a beautiful, beautiful song.

What is your favourite thing about our friendship?

So many things, my dearest Dom! I love how relaxed we are in each other's company. And the ability for our time together to take us anywhere. We might be chatting about music, which brings us to watching a documentary about The Stone Roses — then there's a part in it where they are eating Indian food so we pause it to go to an Indian restaurant, where we will talk through a film idea where we play sound men for The Hollies in the Himalayas or something. I like the adventures we go on, even when we're just sitting on your sofa drinking a bottle of wine.

What would be your one magic wish for planet Earth?

Peace, peace, peace. While we have an "us" and "them", there will always be tension and violence, so we have to all stand together to make real changes to the world.

What would you tell the 18-year-old Billy and what would you ask the 100-year-old Billy?

To 18: Have fun, travel, read more. Don't worry

about being bad at something. Oh... and learn a language.

To 100: If you could live again, where in the world would you spend most of your time?

You are stranded on an island. You can know only one concept fully and truly. What is it? Meditation.



Is there a Shakespearean character you would like to play?

I would, at this time in my life, choose either Shylock or Timon. Of the female characters, Margaret of Anjou.

If you could speak one other language, what would it be?

Arabic. I speak a little, but would like to be fluent: it would allow me to better understand, and more ably try to make myself understood, in countries that have Arabic as their primary language. It would also give me a better chance to do something concrete, in the field, to help refugees in and from the Middle East.

If you could play for one sports team in the world, which would it be?

As an attacking midfielder for Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro, of Boedo, Argentina.

If you could live one day over, which would you pick?

I would rather not live any day over again. Things have been, are, and will be just so, and justly so.

Is there a scene from Tolkien not in the films that you wish was?

I'd like to have seen what Peter Jackson would have done with the character Ghân-buri-Ghân, the chief of the Drúedain, wild men of the Drúadan Forest. Seeing him lead King Théoden and his army of Rohirrim through the forest to join the fight to save Minas Tirith would have been thrilling.

If you could eat one thing right now, what would it be?

Cedar-wood campfire-roasted Agria potatoes with aioli sauce on the side.

If you could kiss me again, would you? I am anxiously counting the interminable minutes that pass until it happens again.

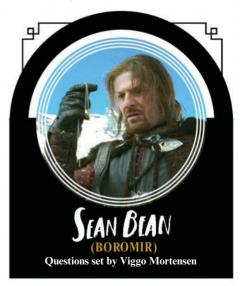
If you could own any piece of art, what would it be?

A Poplar-Lined Road At Sunset, France by Minerva Chapman.

If you could play with one band, who would it be?

I would love to tour with guitarist Buckethead, with the accompaniment, as needed, of high-tide surf in winter, running up and down a gravel beach, the morning tunes of song sparrows, different kinds of rain on a variety of tin roofs, and Johnny Hartman singing Irving Berlin's They Say It's Wonderful from the 1963 LP John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman.

I'd play piano and maybe sing now and then, or recite poems — and we'd jam together in ancient movie houses and natural outdoor settings, with projected silent movies for inspiration. Movies like Dreyer's The Passion Of Joan Of Arc, Murnau's Sunrise, Vidor's The Crowd, Steiner's H2O, or Reiniger's The Adventures Of Prince Achmed, as well as anonymous home movies. Or perhaps simply just you and me, a guitar, a piano, and your lovely voice. And Buckethead ought to come with us - why not?



Is there a scene from LOTR you would want to reshoot?

I wouldn't say I'd like to reshoot anything, but I wouldn't mind going back and doing it all again. The first one, anyway:)

What character have you most enjoyed playing in the theatre?

Macbeth. The darkness of the story always fascinated me. I first saw it performed with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench in Wath-upon-Dearne near Rotherham and found it totally enthralling. I suppose it was always an ambition to play the part and I went on to do so in the West End. But basically, I just like evil shit!

Did you watch Peter Jackson's Hobbit trilogy?

Yes, I did, and was very impressed. It was so interesting to see characters like Bilbo and Gandalf in their early years. The landscapes and ancient woodland settings jolted my memories of being on the set of *Lord Of The Rings*. And you in full costume, fishing in a river in the middle of the night like a nutcase.

When were you last in New Zealand?
Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to go back since we finished filming. One conciliation is that my daughter married a Kiwi earlier this year. He has a large family there, so we'll always have a place to stay when I make the journey back one day.

Which of the books you've read this year is your favourite?

My favourite, as usual, is the one I am reading presently. Which is *Berlin Noir* by Philip Kerr.

I've been preparing some new trees — Basque Country oaks, a silver birch, and a few sugar maples. What have you been planting lately?

Some weeping silver birch and willow. I intend to plant more saplings of elder, hornbeam, dogwood and hawthorn every autumn, so in time I'll create a small wood with various leaf colours. My garden is a mixture of topiaries and evergreens, with areas of wilderness you can get lost in.

What is the worst injury you have ever suffered?

I fell through a glass door as a child and almost lost my leg. It was hanging off and took me nearly a year to recover. But I'm alright now, thanks.

Do you believe we humans have free will?

Yes, I believe we have if we allow it to thrive and develop, without the impositions of propaganda and prejudice. Free will can only flourish when we are surrounded by art, literature and music.

9 It has been a while since you and I have seen each other — I believe the last time was at the Empire Awards a few years ago — and I miss your company. I cannot for the life of me remember whose turn it is to buy the next round. Do you? I think it's yours. Actually, I don't remember either. I do remember sharing a bottle of whiskey with you, which you took up onto the stage when you won your well-earned award. (After your critique of Russell Crowe.) It was a fine night.





1 Do you find yourself always having to explain the meaning of your *LOTR* tattoo?

All day and night.

Have you still got any of the stuff you nicked from the set?

Er... I did not "nick" anything! I was too young and innocent for that. Actually I lie, I may

have somehow managed to wander off with an elven brooch.

Where do you call home these days?

Between the US and the UK. Too long in one and I crave the other. I've called Shanghai home for the last two months: I am here filming.

What is your TV guilty pleasure? Most recently Stranger Things — reminds me of the Americana Lwatched and loved on

me of the Americana I watched and loved on TV growing up. I tend to wait until the whole season is out and then binge.

What do you believe is most destructive to the soul?

Are you forcing me to think and feel, Sean? Well, Albert Einstein, one of the wizards of our time, said "stupidity, fear and greed". There's a lot of that around, particularly if you turn on the news. The antidotes are courage, wisdom and compassion — which are coincidentally the qualities of most Hobbits. The rest of us elves and humans have to work harder to manifest them.

The last time I enjoyed your company was in a pub in North London on a hot summer's afternoon. What memory occurs to you of us together?









Remember when you and I got stranded between two landslides? We were driving from the top of the South Island to the bottom. We all know how you hate to fly and this was a way to avoid that flight down. The rain started just before we left and didn't stop for 12 hours. We had to manoeuvre around tree debris and I remember thinking, "I wish this car was a 4x4." Then we drove up to a landslide that had taken out the

whole road. We had to turn back, only to be told while refuelling at a petrol station that there'd been an even bigger slide in the other direction. We had to be on set the next day, so ended up being choppered out in torrential rain and howling wind. It had compounded into your worst nightmare! I'll never forget those white knuckles of yours clasping my knee as the chopper took off.

What was it like becoming a father?

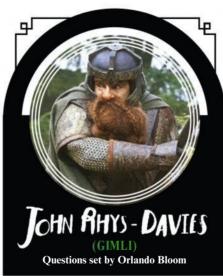
No single moment has had such a profound effect on my life as when I held my son after his mother had endured 27 hours of labour. That should teach any man the meaning

As a heartthrob myself, I wondered if you had any tips to stop the signs of ageing? (Just asking for a friend.)

of respect for mothers the world over.

Being a heartthrob yourself, you'll know that there's only one answer to tell your friend: love. When your heart throbs it keeps you younger. That's why we're called heartthrobs — duh.

What is your passion, apart from acting?
Mastering the art of living, which I will
never do, so that learning curve keeps me
thoroughly occupied.



What was the last photo you took on your phone?

Mock me, would you, you piss-taking, pointyeared devil! He knows, gentle readers, that I still use the phone I had in New Zealand in 1999, a Nokia 6310i, which has no camera! Actually I have 11 of them, six working at any given time. Tri-band, almost unbreakable, work anywhere in the world. Downside? Battery life. I'm having to charge mine every nine days now.

What advice would you give drama students? This sums up everything involved in a successful entertainment career: "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give / And we, who live

to please, must please to live." Learn it. Think about it every day of your working life.

What's been your happiest moment?
You mean apart from holding my children in my arms, exultation between the sheets, flying a plane into a sweet landing? It must have been working with you, dear chap!

Do you regret not getting the Fellowship tattoo? There's still time!

Tattoo is herd identification, and I'm not a herd animal. That's not to say I think of any of the Fellowship as herd animals. (Animals, certainly!) If you want to show you can take the pain, give a kidney and save a life!

My father Rhys, an unarmed colonial policeman whom I once saw talk down a mob trying to kill a drunken driver who'd hit and killed a child. There were 300 angry people around him and he must have known how close he was to death, but he was calm and serene and carried the day by his authority. What a gift to give a son! To show moral and physical courage at the same time!

When you procrastinate, what do you do?

Wot! Me procrastinate? Never! What others may perceive as my procrastination is, of course, deep thought, a detailed and exhaustive analysis of the pros and cons of each question and the myriad multi-faceted implications that might result from any seemingly straightforward utterance. A letter from the IRS is as challenging as a game of postal chess with Korchnoi. It's not procrastination — it's Ent-think. Let Treebeard be your model for such deliberations!

What is a skill you would like to learn?
Brevity.

Can you share one memory from your childhood in Tanzania?

I saw a slave ship — a *dhow* — in Dar es Salaam harbour in 1955. Saudi Arabia only abolished slavery ten years later. I have a fury against any religion that justifies slavery. It is an abomination and still widespread.

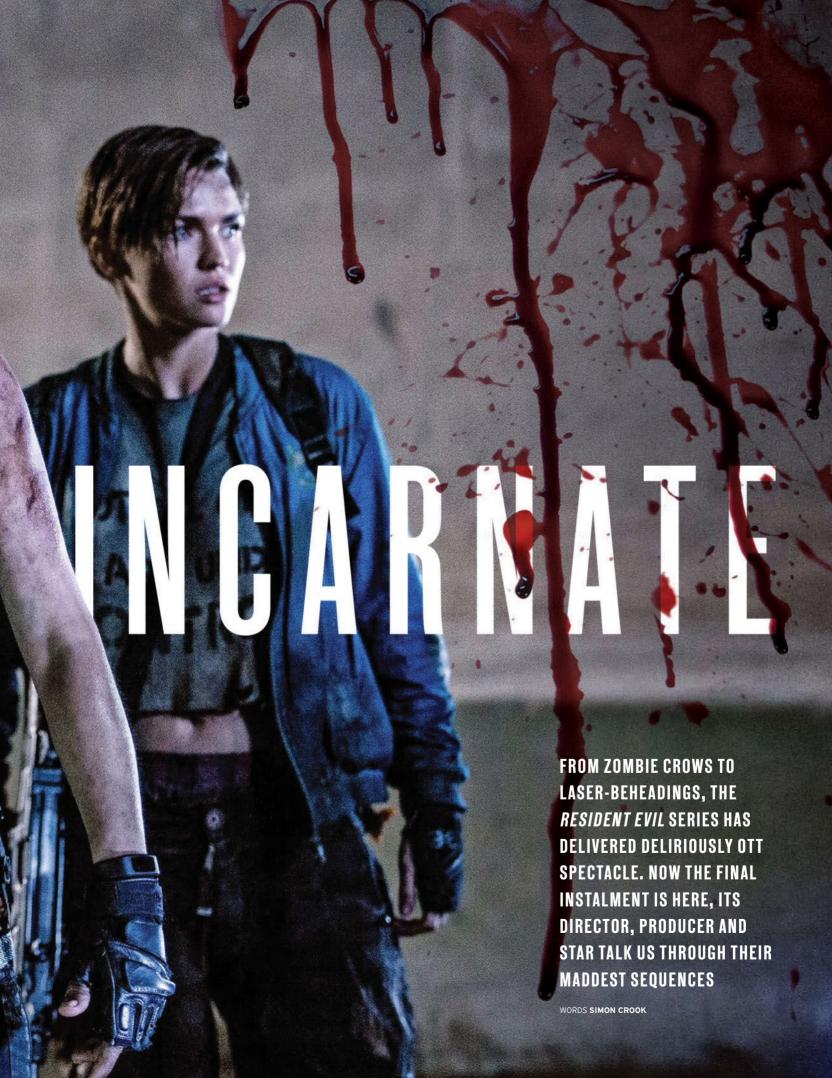
If you could be any animal, what would it be?

I see myself as an old silverback gorilla, keeping watch for possible places for ambush, whilst the troop grazes. And there are far too many places for an ambush. More than in my youth.

Glad to see you've learned not to capsize canoes. Though looking at the pictures, I'm glad I'm not hanging out with you these days. Stay the course, my elvish friend. Love to you and yours, and all of the Nine and the Greater Fellowship of fans and readers.

PS Say "hi" to Mum. 1









RESIDENT EVIL (2002) THE LASER CHAMBER

The series' first film introduces Alice (Milla Jovovich), a woman who wakes up with amnesia, and the Hive, a booby-trapped genetic research facility. In this scene, a SWAT team enters the latter in an attempt to shut down rogue computer the Red Queen. Cue panic, decapitation and Colin Salmon diced into human Jenga blocks by lasers...

Paul W.S. Anderson (director): I'm obsessed with Lewis Carroll. Back in 2000, I was toying with adapting a video game called *American McGee's Alice* but it had already been optioned. So *Resident Evil* turned into my version of *Alice In Wonderland*. The central character's called Alice, she enters the Hive through a looking glass, and the computer, the Red Queen, has a thing for chopping off people's heads — hence the laser-chamber decapitations.

Jeremy Bolt (producer): The sequence was our take on the sentient laser grid in Vincenzo Natali's *Cube*. That was a sci-fi horror with an art-house sensibility, and a big influence — people forget the original *Resi* wasn't a Hollywood film. It was a UK/German coproduction, with a pretty modest budget.

Anderson: Visually, the key inspiration was Peter Greenaway — his films always deliver lush, painterly images on a shoestring. He proved you

can make great-looking movies for very little money. The effects are by Richard Yuricich, who designed the opening shots in *Blade Runner*. Nothing dates faster than cutting-edge CGI, so 90 per cent of that sequence is practical FX. He built a full-scale Colin Salmon model out of prosthetic cubes with rods going into them. You pull the rods and the body falls apart.

Milla Jovovich ('Alice'): Watching that model of Colin getting diced was unbelievably gross! There was a sense on set that we were making a classic scene. Alice witnesses the massacre from outside the chamber. It's almost like a premonition — she has to survive the chamber herself in later movies.

Anderson: I'm from a family of coal miners, so I'm fascinated by oppressive, underground spaces. The idea of a building trying to kill people comes from personal experience. Back in the '90s, I was on a writing team for a Granada TV show called El C.I.D. and we'd gone to interview a private eye in Spain for research. Our producer bundled the writers into a lift, the elevator cable snapped, the lights went out and we just plummeted. One guy was halfway in, halfway out of the elevator. He froze in fear and was nearly chopped in half. When the lift hit the springs at the bottom of the shaft we managed to climb out. Our producer had taken the stairs, so when he saw all his writers splayed on the floor, I remember saying to him, "If you didn't like our work, you could've just fired us..." I laugh now but it was super-chilling. The Hive and the laser chamber both came from that experience.

APOCALYPSE (2004) THE CHURCH

In this sequel, Alice wakes up in an empty Raccoon City hospital to find the entire metropolis deserted. After tooling up and then jacking a motorbike, she ramraids a church to rescue survivors being menaced by a trio of mutant 'Lickers'. One gets catapulted into the rafters. The second is crushed by a crucifix. The third receives a shotgun lobotomy...

Bolt: There are times I read Paul's scripts and think, "This is impossible..." The church Licker fight was one of those. It took four reads to take it in.

Anderson: That scene started with an operatic image — a motorbike crashing through a stained-glass window. Setting it in a church underlined Alice's rebirth as this modern messiah figure: it's a deliberate nod to Charlton Heston in *The Omega Man*. The Lickers are half-gecko, half-human, the result of Umbrella's genetic experiments. I loved the idea of presenting them as modern-day gargoyles.

Bolt: Because of the subject matter and the pyrotechnics, even disused churches wouldn't allow us to shoot that scene. So we built our own. We got that motorbike smashing through the window on the first take.

Jovovich: If we can shoot something practically, we'll go for it. That bike was on a rig and really did descend from the ceiling, with me flying down on it. I'm always up for doing my own stunts and wirework. I start training two months before a Resi shoot it's like Camp Evil. What I'm not a fan of is driving heavy machinery. Anything involving motorbikes terrifies the life out of me. Anderson: There was a lot more about the Biblical interpretation of the apocalypse in the script. The priest had a much bigger role, but the guy playing him really sucked. [Laughs] You see him being eaten: the rest of him ended up on the cutting-room floor. As a result of him being so bad, we decided we had to up the acting stakes with the supporting cast. Towards the end of production, we hired Iain Glen to play Dr Isaacs, the face of the Umbrella Corporation: he came in to kick everyone up the backside. Got some acting problems? Give it some Iain Glen! Jovovich: That scene really shows off Alice's signature shooting skills. It's one of the perks of Resident Evil. I'm practically ambidextrous now. I can shoot, twirl swords, even do the

hoovering with both hands.





EXTINCTION (2007) THE BIRD ATTACK

Alice and her fellow survivors attempt to cross the Mojave desert to reach sanctuary in Alaska. The film's stand-out set-piece plays like an undead remix of *The Birds* with added flamethrowers, as the convoy battles a swarm of zombie ravens. It concludes with Alice, now with telekinetic powers, frying the feathered monsters in a spectacular skyfire...

Anderson: Each Resident Evil has its own identity. The original is a haunted-house horror, the second is Escape From New York with zombies. For Extinction, I wanted to show the effects of the T-virus on the planet, so putting Alice in a desolate, abandoned world was perfect. I love Mad Max, and there hadn't been a post-apocalyptic movie for years. Getting Russell Mulcahy to direct was a fanboy's dream. He used the same sweeping crane shots he perfected in Highlander for that crow sequence.

Bolt: We shot just outside Mexicali, near Tijuana, in Northern Mexico. We built Las Vegas on a deserted dune-buggy track. The heat was insane:

55 degrees in the shade. My main worry was the crew drinking too much tequila, but the big problem wasn't the crows: it was the rattlesnakes. We'd come in every morning and there'd be snake tracks all across the set. We had snake-catchers constantly on call, armed with buckets and sticks. Jovovich: They didn't tell me about the rattlesnakes! That was a gruelling shoot. There were sandstorms, the cameras kept breaking down in the heat, and I had to do wirework in the desert wearing a big coat and boots [Jovovich designed Alice's costume herself]. The zombie extras were sweltering but poor Russell got dehydrated and passed out on set — he ended up in hospital for a week.

Anderson: You can't do a Resident Evil movie series without the game's crows. Obviously we watched The Birds. It's interesting. Hitchcock realised birds just aren't scary in an urban environment. The eeriest scenes are when they're in a sparse, empty landscape, so the bleak desert setting is really effective. There was talk of remaking The Birds at the time. I heard later that Extinction stuck it to them with that five-minute sequence.

Bolt: The bird swarm and skyfire were all CG: we only used two real birds on set. No crows were harmed during the making of that movie. And, I hasten to add, no rattlesnakes.





AFTERLIFE (2010) THE BURLY BRAWL

Anderson has a flair for face-spanking 3D sequences. Staged on research ship the Arcadia, this three-on-one brawl between villain Albert Wesker (Shawn Roberts) and Alice, Chris Redfield (Wentworth Miller) and his sister Claire (Ali Larter) is a 3D action masterclass featuring Matrix-fu, coin-loaded shotguns and mutant Dobermans...

Anderson: As far I'm aware, it's the first time an entire video-game sequence has been converted for the big screen. The fight is taken from Resident Evil 5. We replicated the moves, Wesker's costume, even some of the angles. It sounds simple, but my head hurts thinking about it. You can do anything with a computer, but it's a real challenge with live human beings. Where it differs is the environment — the Arcadia is bright, white and clinical. I imagined it as a brawl breaking out on the set of 2001. **Jovovich:** Shooting fights in 3D requires a certain degree of contact — there's that extra dimension of depth, and you can see when punches don't land. Getting the timing right takes weeks of training, and you get way too close for comfort. I've lost count of the bumps, swellings and bone-bruises I've picked up.

Bolt: I remember that set for three reasons: it was very hot, incredibly bright, and the dogs... Well, the dogs are always challenging. It's never easy putting zombie make-up on a Doberman.

Jovovich: It's been a constant on-set joke that the Umbrella Corporation build these completely impractical outposts. It's all about the style, very Third Reich. The rehearsals were hilarious: we'd all be dressed up like badasses in full costume, wearing these ridiculous booties to protect the pristine white floor. Impractical, right? It took forever. They'd have to repaint the floor after every single take.

Anderson: You wouldn't know it from looking at the scene, but that set was tiny. It only had two walls, so you could only shoot in one direction. We used CGI with the wide shots but most of it is trickery, If I've learned anything from the Resident Evil series, it's how to turn a small, two-wall set into something epic.



Opening with an avant-garde action sequence that unspools in reverse, Retribution traps Alice and Ada Wong (Li Bingbing) in a series of sadistic computer simulations. This sequence, set in a virtual Times Square, pits them against two hulking 'Axemen'. Taxis explode. Buses are scalped. It's action staged as an abstract nightmare...

Bolt: We came up with that scene after principal photography had wrapped. It's unusual for a studio to dust off the wallet and give you extra money to shoot, but we all felt *Retribution* would benefit from another action sequence. The Axeman shower fight was a big hit in *Afterlife*, so we resurrected two of them for this.

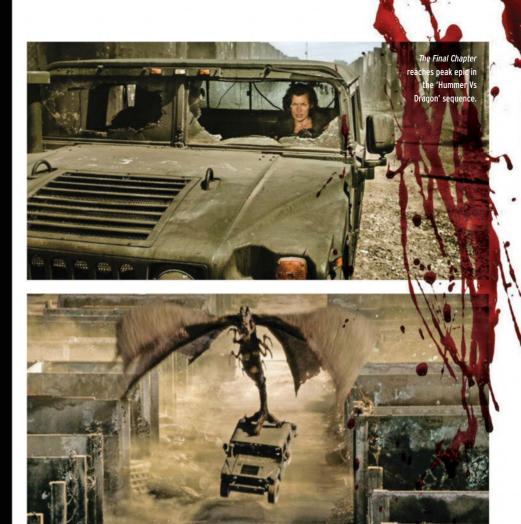
Anderson: I do most of my writing when I walk my dog, Cromwell [a Giant Schnauzer, Anderson's canine muse and a regular fixture on his film sets]. Give me two hours of peace and serenity and I tend to come up with all sorts of great violence. The Axemen, the virtual New York setting, the bus getting sliced — that's all from walking the dog. Bolt: It was hugely stressful. We only had a short number of days to shoot on a Toronto sound stage. We'd already trashed three Rolls-Royce Phantoms for Retribution's Moscow car chase, and went through five yellow cabs for this. The Axemen weren't CG — they were played by a boxer [Raymond Olubowale] and a basketball player [Kevin Shand].

Jovovich: The Axemen are just so lovable, aren't they? We referred to them as 'The Gay Couple' on set.

Anderson: There's a 1957 book I love called The Stars My Destination by Alfred Bester, which has been ripped off by countless sci-fi movies, from Terminator to Star Trek. It's like Gulliver's Travels in space. The protagonist, Gully Foyle, keeps passing out, then waking up somewhere horrible and new. It's that sense of a tumbling nightmare that fed itself into Retribution's dream logic. Jovovich: Do I get weird dreams when I'm filming? Are you kidding? I started getting zombie nightmares around the third one. I'd wake up, tell Paul about them, and he'd immediately start writing them down. [Jovovich and Anderson married in 2009]. I've always thought Alice and Ada Wong would make a great double act for a spin-off movie. Resident Evil is one of the few games where the female characters are way cooler than the guys. It's the same with the films: you could argue they're feminist action movies. Anderson: Look out for a little in-joke:

the name on the petrol tanker, Hartley

Gorenstein, is our production designer.



THE FINAL CHAPTER (2017) THE DRAGON

The franchise-ending instalment opens with an unholy battle in the wastelands of Washington between a Hummer-driving Alice and Umbrella's latest bio-weapon: the dreaded Popokarimu...

Anderson: In the final shot of *Retribution*, you see a helicopter torn from the sky over a zombie-infested Washington and a creature flying into the lens. Each film's connected, so *Final Chapter* opens with a pay-off. Alice climbs out of a smoking bunker, clambers into a Hummer and gets attacked by a Popokarimu — if you've played *Resident Evil 5*, you'll immediately recognise it.

Jovovich: It looks like a cross between a bat, a dragon and flea. We called that sequence 'Hummer Vs Dragon', because nobody could pronounce Popokarimu.

Bolt: Final Chapter was filmed entirely in South Africa. This sequence was shot in the Belhar bus station, a derelict Cape Town suburb that had a bombed-out Beirut feel to it. Africa's full of giant locations: we found two miles of abandoned freeway to play with.

Anderson: It was the very last scene we shot: just me, Milla and a skeleton crew for two weeks. Most directors leave the action to a second unit, but for me action *is* character, so I always direct

them. Hummers are seriously heavy, even for stunt drivers. The challenge was making it look like Jason Bourne was driving it. We actually made a Hummer powerslide...

Bolt: The look is completely different to *Retribution*'s clinical, symmetrical sci-fi. It's like cracked granite: burnt-out, blistered and dirty. You don't need to shoot with unwieldy 3D cameras anymore; the conversion technology has finally caught up, so Paul shot the film almost entirely handheld.

Anderson: The final day of filming was very bittersweet, but we're going out with a substantial bang: it's the best film in the franchise. I've known the truth about Alice's identity for 15 years. When she wakes up in the first movie without a memory, she has no idea who she is: is she good or bad? It's why she never forms relationships in the series; how do you relate to people if you don't know yourself? The reveal makes sense of the whole franchise, so it should send people back to watch the entire series again. Alice finally gets the answer she's been looking for... and might not necessarily like it.

Jovovich: Being a part of *Resident Evil* has changed my life. I mean, I even have a husband and two kids because of it. What started off as this small European action-horror flick snowballed into six movies and over a billion at the box office. It's *The Little Engine That Could...* with zombies.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER IS IN CINEMAS NOW.

Ouija: Origin Of Evil and Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk on DVD or Blu-ray, and Fear The Walking Dead season 2 on Blu-ray. Get in there!

THE BEST FILM & TV — REVISITED, REDISCOVERED, REEXPLORED





The director and screenwriter of Hell Or High Water on the seven secrets behind the neo-Western's success. Yee-haw!



Netflix is very sorry indeed to bring you A Series Of Unfortunate Events. (They needn't worry. It's actually quite good.)



Like to kill people? Of course you do! But in between, you can play video games, like the new Hitman. Snap.



A rhino gives birth to an idiot for the amusement of a gingery British Trekkie. Aaaaaallrighty then!

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ARRIVAL



FROM **FEBRUARY 20** / RATED **M** / **DIRECTOR** Denis Villeneuve / **CAST** Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner, Forest Whitaker, Michael Stuhlbarg, Tzi Ma

DVD BR &

Stop watching the skies



SOME MOVIES ARE best

watched with others just so you can discuss them afterwards. *Arrival* is such a one, but without spoiling anything, the most likely discussion is not about aliens at all: it's a much

more human "Would you make Decision X if you knew Outcome Y?" Like the best sci-fi, *Arrival* isn't really about what it looks like: on the surface it's about the struggle of first contact with aliens, but at heart it's about the struggle of genuine contact with each other, and even with our own memories.

Twelve alien ships arrive on Earth, scattered apparently at random around the globe, but it's not clear why they're here. Hence the US military



brings in a top linguist Dr Louise Banks (Amy Adams; and no, she's not especially cunning) to make contact with the ship in Montana. Working with a theoretical physicist (Jeremy Renner), Dr Banks tries to uncover common ground between human and heptapod, under mounting pressure from the military (in the person of Forest Whitaker as a US colonel) and the CIA (a slimy Michael Stuhlbarg).

As 11 other nations vie for control of the situation, tensions run high, and trigger fingers get itchy. The rigours of translation are an elegant metaphor: Dr Banks makes more progress in communicating with an alien race, than most of the humans do in communicating with each other. As she tries to explain to her military hosts, much of meaning is contained in nuance, which is rarely clarified; the relationship between intention and



meaning is not always clear, even for people speaking the same language.

The scope of the challenge is brilliantly visualised by the design of the alien heptapods themselves (part squid, part Venus fly trap, part old-person's-hand — we half-expected them to offer Amy Adams a giant Werther's Original), and especially their language, which is utterly unlike human language (although sounds vaguely like a whale trying to escape from an echo chamber.)

And as Dr Banks starts to understand more about their unique written language (which looks like a coffee cup ring on a paper towel), other changes begin to occur to her perception of reality - like downloading a new programming language that starts to reformat her neural software. Or hardware. Or... look, we don't know how computers work, alright? The point is, it's a fascinating concept, backed up with a smattering of actual science, although one wonders how deeply those scientists sighed when they watched the movie. Arrival is best considered within the dreamy context of both Dr Banks' expanding worldview and the film itself, which proceeds within its own self-referential bubble; start taking things to their logical conclusions and conundrums begin to appear. But we're not here to pick nits, and indeed the film never aims to be

a TED talk; certainly screenwriter Eric Heisserer (*Lights Out*) and Villeneuve balance middleweight intellectual aspirations with an emotional core more successfully than, say, Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*.

Some of that credit should go to Amy Adams, who manages to convey multitudes while portraying a quiet and interior character, struggling with very personal demons. As the focal point for the entire narrative — past, present and future — Adams embodies a mixture of confidence and doubt, of openness and fear, of scientific caution and recklessness.

We are completely embedded with Dr Banks, thanks to clever camerawork and editing — we don't even really see the alien ships properly until the first time Louise sees them; and the more Louise understands about the heptapods, the more clearly they are shown on screen. If the story is mysterious to us, it's because it's equally mysterious to her.

If language is the tool of peace, and ambiguity is the enemy of diplomacy, what does a world — and some very powerful individuals — addicted to bite-sized tweets and post-factual status updates mean for the future? *Arrival* contemplates these questions at a very timely moment.

EXTRAS Featurettes. TIM KEEN



THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS

FROM FEBRUARY 15 / RATED MA15+

Set at the end of WWI, Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander are a couple beginning their life together off the coast of WA. Pairing those two actors together is smart casting – they're a terrific team and the film's greatest strength. Vikander puts in an absorbing performance as Isabel, the small-town girl who spies an escape in the handsome new lighthouse keeper. But things don't stay perfect forever, becoming darker as Isabel's desire to become a mother becomes more urgent. This burning maternal desire leads the pair to make a fateful decision - one that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. But in the third act, it becomes increasingly contrived as it tries to wring as much drama as possible from its set-up. Still, despite the contrivances that got us there, it's a hardy soul who won't leave feeling moved.

EXTRAS TBC. ANNA SMITH



THE ACCOUNTANT

FROM FEBRUARY 15 / RATED M DVD

Ben Affleck plays an autistic savant whose skills include advanced math and killing people: he's Rain Man crossed with Jason Bourne, and he's here to kick ass, take names and enter them into a database. If those familiar with autism might sneer at this portrayal, at least director Gavin O'Connor (Warrior) presents the disorder as a double-edged gift, rather than merely a disability. Affleck tamps down his natural charisma as a man who struggles with social interaction, but he's in fine form when the action starts: the fight scenes are brutal, efficient and plentiful. Anna Kendrick is wasted as the dorky and helpless love interest, Jon Bernthal gets to use his Punisher training as a rival hitman, and JK Simmons looks great in a hat as a G-man on Affleck's trail.

EXTRAS Featurettes. TIM KEEN



OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL

FROM FEBRUARY 8 / RATED M / DIRECTOR MIKE FLANAGAN / CAST ANNALISE BASSO, ELIZABETH REASER, LULU WILSON, HENRY THOMAS

DVD BR &

Possession is 9/10 of the law



THE BANE OF ANY

paranormal horror movie is showing too much. Almost by definition, the paranormal is most potent when we don't fully understand it; the urge to explain

exactly what's happening is like turning on the light in a dark room — it's suddenly not so scary any more. The prequel to 2014's underwhelming Ouija is a better movie all round, but does most of its best work early on. Set in 1967, it directly references the first flick; if you've seen Ouija you'll have a head-start figuring out who lives and who dies. This time around, director Mike Flanagan (Oculus) starts out generating some genuine goosebumpy raised-hair creepiness as Alice (Elizabeth Reaser), who runs a harmless psychic scam business from her front room, brings a Ouija board into the house, and her two daughters start playing with it. At first the unsettling phenomena are all at the edges of the frame, and are all the more eerie for it. But it starts to unwind once the otherworldly villain of the piece is revealed in all its gimp-like glory: the subtle creepiness is mostly replaced with CGI, and by the final reel, it takes jump scares to regain anything like the horror of the first half. Taking many cues straight from the Exorcist playbook (blonde poppet Lulu Wilson is the possessed girl, Henry "Elliott From ET" Thomas is in full Father Karras mode as the square-jawed priest) it delivers its share of terrors, but could have delivered more by showing less.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, featurettes, commentary. RICH YEAGER



AMERICAN HERO

FROM NOW / RATED MA15+



THIS "STONER CHRONICLE" would be a 12-minute short movie if you cut out all the scenes of Stephen Dorff getting drunk and high. It's not boring - it evokes the humid hedonism of New Orleans, and meanders along in amiably aimless fashion. But for a movie about a man with superpowers, almost nothing happens. For Mel (Dorff) and Lucille (Eddie Griffin), life is an endless loop of parties and low-level street hustling. And, oh by the way, Mel can move objects with his mind. Writer/director Nick Love sets very few rules about Mel's telekinesis - at one point moving small objects causes his pulse to skyrocket, in another he flings cars around easily. But for long stretches, it's simply about Mel getting wasted, recovering, and getting wasted again. Drug-hazed fun, if you don't overthink it. EXTRAS None. MICHAEL BROOKER



I SMILE BACK

FROM NOW / RATED MA15+ DVD >



SARAH SILVERMAN GOES all-in for this wrenching look at depression and addiction - it's an amazing performance, but the film's not quite up to the same standard. It's a brutal indictment of suburban life, as Laney (Silverman), suffering from chronic depression, is tormented by smug friends of her husband and bureaucratic school officials, and wracked by fear that to love anything or anyone is to invite loss into your life. Her response is to self-medicate with booze and drugs and screwing around. But it all feels a bit voyeuristic, both emotionally and literally (like watching Silverman diddling herself in her young daughter's bedroom). It feels less like an exploration of Laney's pain and personal history than the morbid fascination of watching a car wreck in slow motion.

EXTRAS None. TIM KEEN



What do you dress up as to seduce Viggo Mortensen in A History Of Violence?

A cheerleader. You see David Cronenberg's films and think he's insane, but he's *the* loveliest guy. That movie was the greatest acting experience of my life. Hey, here's a challenge for *Empire*'s readers: in one of the bedroom scenes, see if they can spot the plastic seabass. We had this thing about hiding fish in various scenes and it got way out of control.

Correct.

Which dogs does Jocelyn breed in The Jane Austen Book Club?

No idea. [Hears answer] Rhodesian Ridgeback? How can I forget that! My ex is from Rhodesia. I don't remember the dogs as much as I remember the cast. The director [Robin Swicord] made us do an actual book club and the only person who read all the books was Maggie Grace. Shameful, right? I was the worst book club member.

The correct answer is Rhodesian Ridgeback.

In Assault On Precinct 13, Ja Rule guesses your star sign. Which is?

Easy — Aries, the same as my own star sign. **Correct.**

In Thank You For Smoking, David Koechner's Bobby Jay Bliss tells you the secret to fooling a breathalyzer. What is it – and what's the slogan you create?

I don't know. It's crazy to think that was Jason Reitman's first film — he was like a baby director

back then. I love those characters: they deserved their own sitcom spin-off.

The correct answer is by chewing activated charcoal tablets. The slogan is: "If you must drink and drive, suck charcoal."

In The Mummy: Tomb Of The Dragon Emperor, Evelyn asks, "What is that godawful smell?" What is it?

Yak shit? No, wait... Yak sick! "The yak yakked!" Correct.

In *Lights Out*, you enjoy a movie night with your son. Which film do you watch?

You got me there. [Hears the answer] Auntie what? Never heard of it. We pretended we were watching the movie while we were shooting then they added it digitally. You know, I've always wanted to see a ghost. I stayed at the Padre Hotel in Bakersfield where two phantom girls walk the hallways, and set the alarm for 3am. They didn't show up.

The correct answer is Auntie Mame.

7 "Slow down, honey" is a line from which of your movies?

The Cooler? No? [Hears the answer] It was Grown Ups? People still talk about that scene because I'm breastfeeding, like, a five-year-old!

The correct answer is Grown Ups.

Lil lists her five favourite men in Coyote Ugly. Who are they?

They're all liquor. Jim, Jack, Johnny Red, Johnny Black... and... Argh! José! I was a bartender in

the West Village a year before I was cast in that movie so I didn't do any research: I was Lil. I was the girl running around in cowboy boots, hanging out at Hogs & Heifers and getting into fights. **Correct.**

When you first hook up with William H. Macy's Bernie in *The Cooler*, you ask for some music. What record does he put on?

[Starts singing] 'Luck, be a lady tonight...' Bill and me were naked so much on set that we threw a 'Show Us Your Ass' party on the last day. We had a photobooth and prizes for Most Original Ass, Hottest Ass, Most Artistic Ass... There's a book somewhere of the entire crew's asses.

Correct.

Since ER, you've played two doctors. Which films do they appear in?

I was a psychiatrist in Assault On Precinct 13. What the fuck was the other one? [Hears answer] Demonic? I've still not seen that film! Half a point. The correct answer is Dr Alex Sabian (Assault On Precinct 13) and Dr Elizabeth Klein (Demonic).

MARIA BELLO SCORES 5.5

"I have a *terrible* memory. People ask me what I ate for lunch yesterday and I don't even remember that. But that was fun."

LIGHTS OUT IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.

Q&A ROGER CORMAN

The B-movie king returns with Death Race 2050...

WORDS TIM KEEN

What made you want to go back to Death Race?

I'm thinking about the original *Death Race 2000* which I made around '75, I projected what I thought certain aspects of society would be like in the year 2000. And I'm doing the same thing again for the year 2050, with the basis being futuristic car racing in which you get points for how fast you can drive, and how many pedestrians you can kill. We combine it with a little bit of social comment on what we think is happening with society, and that's overlaid with comedy. It's a funny picture. So a sort of futuristic, fast, action, funny, hopefully somewhat meaningful film. I'm not sure we achieved every one of those goals, but we came close.

It must be the fifth or sixth Death Race...

I sold the remake rights to Universal and I think they made three versions of it, but they concentrated on the action of the racing. Which is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. So their versions were car racing pictures, stepping away from the little bit of social commentary, and the comedy. I tried to take characters from the society of today and make them the racers. One of my favourites [from Death Race 2050] is Tammy the Terrorist. The name Tammy The Terrorist just came to me. I was thinking of pop culture, so she's the bomb-throwing pope of a pop-culture church, and the saints are Saint Elvis Presley, Saint Justin Bieber and so forth. So I had a lot of fun with that. And we have a self driving car, those are already on the road in an experimental way. I was trying to take all these elements of today, and say what would they be like in the year 2050. For instance, the United States of America is now the United Corporations of America, the president is now the Chairman of the Board. We did something as a little bit of a joke and we got kind of lucky, it was early in the presidential race and the Chairman of the Board, played by Malcolm McDowell, we patterned him after Trump, with the hairdo and everything. We thought it was just a funny thing to do, we never dreamed that he would actually emerge as the president. So we made the first President Trump picture out there.

Did your lawyers have a heart attack when they saw the names of some of the regions of the



country, like the Googleplex?

Funnily enough that never occurred to me, I never talked to a lawyer about it. I'm not a lawyer but I think if something is in the public eye, it's available. So let's say I'm going on that basis.

You're 90 years old now, do you ever think about slowing down?

I'm slowing down a little bit. I used to make seven or eight films a year — one year I made 10 films — now I make three or four. The years have caught up with me but I hope it never drops to zero.

You've produced more than 400 movies and directed 56... which are you most proud of?

As both a failure and a favourite I might go back to *The Intruder*, a picture I made about the integration of schools in the American south in 1960, with a new young actor playing his first picture, Bill Shatner. It was a very tough picture that I shot in the South, it got wonderful reviews, won a couple of minor film festivals, and was the first film I ever made that lost money. So that picture stays in my mind. Oh, I forgot! I shot the film in 1960, and Bill and I did a commentary for a DVD version around 2000, so I just realised I finally got my money back 40 years later.

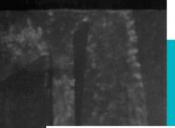
You helped to launch dozens of major Hollywood careers – Martin Scorsese, James Cameron, Francis Ford Coppola, Ron Howard, Peter Bogdanovich... Are more proud of films you made, or the culture you helped create? I think it's all of one. I think it's all working in the film medium. Now, even as I say that, I realise that dates me, because we don't use film anymore, it's digital now. But I've been, at various times, a writer, director or producer, and as a producer maybe there is a little bit of mentoring or teaching involved... but it's all just working in the medium of film. for lack of a better word.

What's your take on the industry right now?

I love the experience of seeing a picture at a theatre. When I started, every picture that was at least halfway decently made got a full theatrical release. Today most medium or low budget films do not get a theatrical release, and I regret that.

What is your advice to someone just starting out in filmmaking?

I would say, if you have the opportunity, go to a film school. There were only one or two film schools in the United States when I started, and I and my contemporaries, we learned on the job... but I think the best way to learn is actually in a



Left: Roger Corman in the 1970s. Below left: Burt Grinstead as Jed Perfectus in *Death Race* 2050. Below right: Folake Olowofoyeku as Minerva Jefferson. Bottom: Manu Bennett as the Death Racer Frankenstein.







film school. On the other hand, if you can't go to a film school, films can now be made very inexpensively. It's tough to get a job in a major studio, but it's easy to get a job, if you look around a little bit, on one of these low-budget independent films. And I would say get a job on that film, for two reasons. One, you're going to do your job and get paid. But number two is, look around, see what everyone else is doing on the set, and learn production while you're actually *in* production. I started as a writer and saw what the directors were doing, and I thought, "I could do that!", and I did. It was a little shaky at the beginning but you learn as you go along.

What's next? Please tell us you're working on a Death Race 2075!

I don't have another *Death Race* but I'm working on a treatment, I have an idea about the leader of a country who loses faith in the traditional system, feeling that it's all corrupt, and decides that he

doesn't need the courts any more, he can decide who is guilty and he just kills them. So that'll be a futuristic science fiction film based somewhat on what is actually happening today.

DEATH RACE 2050 IS OUT FEBRUARY 22 ON DVD AND BLU-RAY.



DEATH RACE
2050

RATED MA15+

Weird, camp, gory, hilarious – Corman's latest iteration of the *Death Race* series forgets the grittier versions to recapture the B-movie spirit of the 1975 original. The cars and SFX are gloriously crappy, and Malcolm McDowell is great as a Trump-esque president. Not exactly good, but fun.

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



JOSEPH HOWES — 6 HIGH NOON

What do you think the film was about? It was about a cowboy [Will Kane] who was worried about this evil cowboy coming back, because the main character was worried he would kill him because he sent him to prison.

But why wouldn't anyone help the marshal in his fight?

They were afraid they would get killed as well.

Would you have helped him? Not really...

Why not?

I don't want myself to be killed.

And what if you were the marshal?

At one point he's leaving town but then he changes his mind and comes back, saying he's never run away from anything. I'd probably just continue with my run, to be honest. Because I don't really want to kill myself in a battle.

So what do you think of the marshal? Did you like Will Kane?

He's brave and bold and doesn't think about how he might hurt himself.

At the end, you were quite nervous. Why was that?

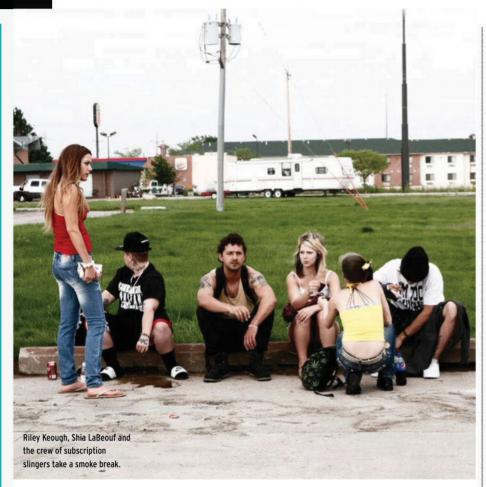
If he was going to win or lose or not, it iust made me tense.

Did you mind that it was in blackand-white?

No, not at all. I think I might prefer it in black-and-white than colour.

What would you give the film out of five stars?

Four, because I don't see the point in going back for guns. Why would you go back to fight? Is it the most precious thing in your life? Why would you go back for it?



AMERICAN HONEY

FROM FEBRUARY 20 / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR
ANDREA ARNOLD / CAST SASHA LANE, SHIA LABEOUF,
RILEY KEOUGH, MCCAUL LOMBARDI

DVD BR

Dazed and confused



TEENAGE TROUBLE-MAGNET Star (newcomer Sasha Lane, in one of the most impressive debuts of recent memory) flees her grim life in Oklahoma with an anarchic

vanful of teens travelling across middle America selling magazine subscriptions.

This semi-improvised road movie starts strong out of the gate, building a sense of impending menace — running away from one abusive dead-end relationship into a van full of stoned misfits is perhaps the definition of frying pan to fire — and things only seem grimmer when Star's non-conformist streak, and instant chemistry with Shia LaBeouf's Jake, puts her in the bomb sights of crew leader Krystal (Riley Keough, nailing the character of a dead-eyed trailer-trash entrepreneur.)

Powered by self-destructive tendencies

— part naïve faith in others, part indifference to

her own future — Star seems destined for immolation. But writer-director Andrea Arnold doesn't seem quite sure what to do with the machine she has set in motion, and it's hard to blame her for being too protective of her leading lady — if the word "luminous" is overused, it truly suits Lane. And so the third act fizzles, or at least fails to capitalise on the energy of the beginning.

For all the dourness of the storyline, it's shot in glorious sun-drenched colour and looks like a love letter to Americana from the thoroughly English Arnold (this is her first film set outside the UK.) Arnold and regular cinematographer Robbie Ryan have captured the rough beauty of rural USA: for our crew of poor and addled travellers, it's a landscape of truckstops, cheap motels and trash-strewn roadsides, and signs of wealth and suburban happiness are oddities.

Shia LaBeouf is perfectly cast as an irritating douchebag, and as such, is utterly convincing in the role. Arnold scouted most of the cast from drunken American spring-breakers, including Sasha Lane, and so at times it feels less like fiction and more like a documentary about the hazy dregs of American millennials: watching them boozing and brawling with no ambition and no hope for the future is an eye-opening insight into the distance between the haves and the have-nots in modern America. For a road movie, it has no real sense of where it's heading, and would have benefitted from more ruthless editing, but *American Honey* is an engrossing ride all the same.

EXTRAS TBC. TIM KEEN



THE FAMILY FANG

FROM **FEBRUARY 27** / RATED **M**



JASON BATEMAN DIRECTS this bittersweet mystery that is less wilfully quirky than the set-up suggests. The Family Fang are performance artists Caleb and Camille, who once achieved minor celebrity from incorporating their young kids into their quirky art "happenings". Now the kids are all grown up - Jason Bateman is the sad sack Baxter, Nicole Kidman is the livewire Annie - and Caleb and Camille, now washed up without their child muses, are missing. The police suspect foul play; Annie and Baxter suspect yet another deranged performance piece. Christopher Walken is superb as trickster tyrant Caleb, part goofball, part bully; Nicole Kidman is on top form as actress/addict Annie. An often very funny, occasionally heart-bruising, look at how selfish parental love can be, and the damage that can cause.

EXTRAS None. MICHAEL BROOKER



KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

FROM NOW / RATED M DVD

A SOUND PREMISE - a boring suburban couple (Zach Galifianakis and Isla Fisher) tries to figure out if the new couple next door (Jon Hamm and Gal Gadot) are dangerous killers or not: none the worse for being cribbed from Joe Dante's The 'Burbs - ends up missing the mark on a few fronts. Zach Galifianakis is hamstrung from having to play the straight man, instead of giving his talent for lunacy free rein; the mystery is answered too soon, which sucks the tension out of the storyline; many of the jokes aren't funny enough (although Patton Oswalt is worth a cackle as always), and the action sequences are more sitcom standard than Hollywood. On the other hand, you get to see Gal Gadot in her undies, and that makes up for a lot.

EXTRAS TBC. RICH YEAGER



RELEASED IN 1954, Seven Samurai is one of cinema's elastic classics: it's been stretched, twanged and jerked into countless contortions. How a movie set in feudal Japan can re-materialise in space one minute, an ant-hill the next, is down to its universal three-act blueprint: all the films here feature an under-siege community, a gathering of heroic misfits and a Pyrrhic victory over impossible odds. So, here we go. Seven versions: 13 hours of the same story, again and again.

Akira Kurosawa's epic spawned numerous men-on-a-mission imitators, but its remorseless mood remains unique. Get this for desolate: the Seven Samurai aren't in it for glory; they're fighting for *food*. Add crop-stealing bandits to a world that hostile, and any heroics hit all the harder. Paced like an approaching war-drum, here's a film drenched in jeopardy that peaks in a hellish Somme of muddy slaughter. Toshiro Mifune's arse-flashing, volatile maniac is rightly celebrated, but the film wouldn't work without Takashi Shimura's shrewd, weary ronin. Mifune's the movie's guts. But Shimura's the heartbeat.

After three-and-a-half hours immersed in Kurosawa's bleak, stormy nihilism, John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven*, the first official remake, coming six years after the original, feels bizarrely lightweight. Translated to a lawless frontier of

gun-slinging vigilantes, the setting fits the story, but any complexity's lost to the Western's simpler macho code. Yul Brynner's all-stars sacrifice themselves for the hell of it. Still, you can't knock the coolly rugged cast (McQueen! Coburn! Bronson!) or Elmer Bernstein's score.

1980 was blessed with two Samurai clones, both under the spell of Star Wars. Battle Beyond The Stars swaps swords for spaceships as John Saxon's galacto-Nazi threatens to vaporise the planet Akir. Cue an unholy casserole of alien warriors, space Vikings and the late Robert Vaughn riffing on his mercenary from The Magnificent Seven. It's vintage cheddar, surprisingly faithful and throbbing with dodgy innuendo. Also from 1980: Hawk The Slayer. Given they share similar quest-recruit traits, a dungeons-and-dragons Samurai makes perfect sense, but the result is Tolkien staged as pantomime. This time, we get Mr Slayer enlisting a dwarf, an elf, a witch and a giant to protect a nunnery from Jack Palance's scenery-gobbling mega-bastard. That distant whirring sound? Kurosawa, spinning in his grave.

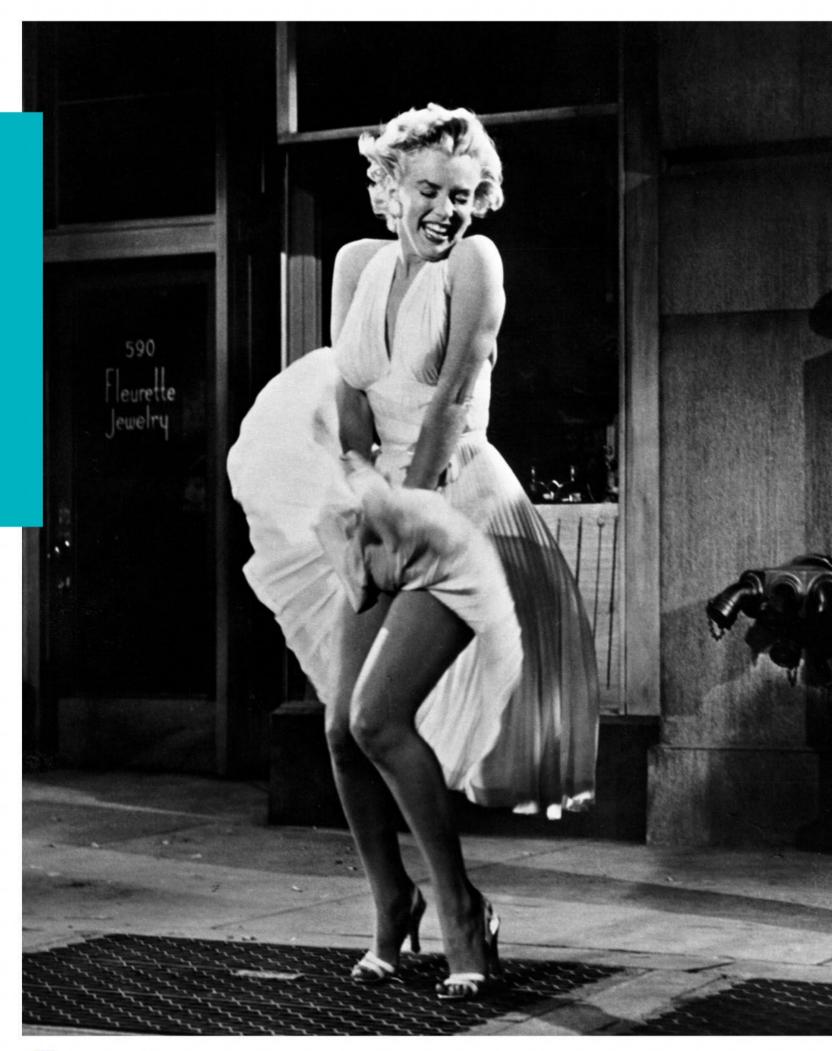
The format's now so familiar it's crying out for parody: enter *¡Three Amigos!* (1986). In John Landis' comedy Western, Steve Martin, Martin Short and Chevy Chase rescue a village from Mexican bandits. Or at least, *pretend* to —

they're actually film stars on holiday by mistake. Not all the gags land, but the casting's innately funny: every cowboy cliché gets skewered by the Amigos' gormless naivety. Especially notable for Chase getting upstaged by a singing bush.

Next up: Seven Samurai on six legs. Pixar's audacious, underrated A Bug's Life (1998) shrinks the story into an ant colony menaced by Kevin Spacey's grasshopper. It's packed with in-jokes and callbacks to previous incarnations: pill bugs Tuck and Roll look suspiciously like mini-Mifunes, all shaggy eyebrows and samurai-armour shells.

Antoine Fuqua's recent reboot retools the story as a capitalist allegory — razing a town for the sake of a gold mine, Peter Sarsgaard's robber-baron is the One Percent personified. The movie's USP, however, is its multi-ethnic mercenaries — Comanche Indian, fiery Latino, Korean knife-thrower, Denzel Washington's badass cow-bro... I'm all for diversity, but it's used as character shorthand here — there's no depth to the Seven, or Fuqua's direction, who quotes so many classic Westerns it wanders into nostalgia tourism. Fuqua's film is a quick-draw remix: it goes in one eye and out the other.

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN IS OUT NOW ON DVD. BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.





MARILYN MONROE, STANDING

on a subway grate, cooing in delight as her white, pleated skirt billows around her hips. It's an image so iconic that it's been riffed on by everything from *Pulp Fiction* to *The Tigger Movie*. Other tributes have been more elaborate. In 2011, artist Seward Johnson created a eight-metre-tall, 15,000kg statue of the moment which has been displayed in New Jersey, Chicago and Bendigo. More bizarrely in Japan, villagers from Inakadate, a prefecture of Aomori, paid homage to it in 2013 with a 140-by-100m recreation in a rice field made from nine different types of rice.

Yet, when he captured the moment while shooting *The Seven Year Itch* on 15 September, 1954, Billy Wilder took a while to realise just what he had. "I was so stupid, because we were looking for a representative ad," he told interviewer and superfan Cameron Crowe, "and it did not occur to me that this thing, where she's kind of trying to keep the dress down, that this is it!"

The set-up: having just seen *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*, married Richard Sherman (Tom Ewell) and The Girl (Marilyn Monroe, whose character is never named) exit the Trans-Lux Theater in Manhattan on an illicit date and, as a subway train passes below, a breeze blooms her skirt. Yet, rather than rushing to cover her modesty, she boldly revels in the moment. "Isn't it delicious?" she asks, perhaps rhetorically. The result is multi-faceted: a provocative encapsulation of Monroe's appeal, a totem for a 1950s Hollywood (male) fantasy, and a fleeting depiction of onscreen joy that belies the pain coursing through Monroe's offscreen life. And, of course, it graces the film's poster.

The shot was initially captured in the earlymorning hours on the corner of Lexington and 52nd Street. Some 1,500 spectators and photographers watched Wilder put Monroe through 14 takes. "At first it was all innocent and fun," recalled Monroe. "But when Billy kept shooting the scene over and over, the crowd of men kept on applauding and shouting, 'More, more Marilyn - let's see more.' What was supposed to be a fun scene turned into a sex scene." Monroe took steps against inadvertent exposure — she doubled up on two pairs of white underwear — but all for naught: legend has it the loud cat calls ruined the sound recording and led to the scene being re-shot under controllable conditions on the Fox lot.

The iconic white dress — actually ivory-coloured rayon acetate crepe, because white registered grey on film — was created by Monroe's go-to designer William Travilla, who dismissed it as "that silly little dress". In 1971, the late Hollywood legend Debbie Reynolds bought the dress for \$200. In 2011, when Reynolds auctioned it off to stave off bankruptcy, it went for a silly little \$4.6 million. Some itches, it seems, never go away.

THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.



1_BUILDING CHEMISTRY

A four-hander with Jeff Bridges and Gil Birmingham as laconic cops on the trail of bank-robbing brothers Chris Pine and Ben Foster, Hell Or High Water offered an immediate kind of alchemy that made it stand out as one of the best films of last year. "Usually there are big fights in casting," says screenwriter Taylor Sheridan, "but here it just seemed obvious. The chemistry worked so well, and you care about these characters." Having the pairs shoot their scenes in two separate blocks in New Mexico added depth to their dynamics, explains director David Mackenzie. "The first half was a real adrenaline ride with the young ones, because we shot so quickly, but we found lots of lovely pleasures in that second odd couple." Bridges and Birmingham took their guitars along to screenings of the cut-in-progress

and serenaded the cast and crew. "There was a real sense of family," remembers Mackenzie, "and I know that fed into the chemistry on camera."

2_DODGING CLICHÉS

A devoted cineaste, Mackenzie took inspiration but not direct influence from films like *Charley Varrick*, *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot* and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. "I'm not a fanboy director," he stresses. "I'm highly attuned to clichés and was quite keen to avoid them." Each of the film's bank robberies plays out in unexpected ways. Smaller characters lend texture in surprising standout moments, as when a routine diner scene is stolen by Margaret Bowman's crotchety waitress. "In the script she's just 'Waitress'," says Mackenzie, "but Margaret called her Maisie and gave her an enormously elaborate backstory."

Sheridan lauds the director for not varnishing the film with a Hollywood gloss. "There's a lack of sentimentality to the way David directs," he stresses, "and that was really important for this."

3_CRANKING UP TENSION

The stakes are perilously high for Pine and Foster's Howard brothers. Jail, or worse, awaits them if their plan unravels. "There's a line where someone says, 'You don't do these things and live to spend the money," recalls Mackenzie. One robbery ends with the pair discovering they're far from the most heavily armed customers in the bank. "It's an NRA version of a Western," laughs the director. "I was worried about sailing on the wrong side of poor taste with that one, but while there's a lot of serious things in the film, it was about making it exciting [too]."







Sicario scribe Taylor Sheridan, throws us straight into a West Texan bank robbery. We soon meet the two brothers behind the heist - Toby (Pine), a former gas company worker and divorced father of two, and Tanner (Foster), an unpredictable career criminal – and discover they're on a meticulously planned mission to gather enough unmarked bills to prevent the foreclosure of their late mother's farmland. Enter Marcus (Jeff Bridges reviving his marble-gargling Rooster Cogburn drawl from the Coen brothers' True Grit remake), an uncompromising, zinger-ready Texas Ranger who, alongside his part-Comanche partner Alberto (Twilight's Birmingham), saddles up to track down the brothers before their next big score. Taut, tense and with Jeff Bridges at his best, this is a deceptively simple tale of Texan cops and robbers that drags the Old West into

EXTRAS Featurettes, Q&A, trailer. JIMI FAMUREWA

4_KEEPING IT REAL

Despite riffing on Western traditions of bank robbers and lawmen, the story is anchored in relatable, contemporary concerns. Poverty and struggle are ubiquitous. "A film has to be about something that matters to me," stresses Sheridan. "This is not a stylised version of rural America; the exodus [of people] is a constant wherever you go." Sheridan's own Texan upbringing added authenticity. "I know these towns so well you could draw a road map from the script." He lent his local knowledge to a cameo as a cowboy, too. "I think that clinched the deal," he laughs.

5_FINDING THE FUNNY

Much faster to shoot the shit than their side arms, both robbers and cops have a lovely line in playful (and occasionally not-so-playful) banter.

It provides a handy tension-breaker, even in Bridges' racist slurs against his Mexican partner. "It's an interesting game, that," admits Mackenzie. "We were sensitive and awkward about it when we were doing it, but we all agreed we should just confront it. It felt like it's part of the world. There's a lot of humour between Ben and Chris, too."

6_MAKING IT COOK

Mackenzie reunited with his long-standing cinematographer Giles Nuttgens to capture the full heat haze of America's Southwest. "Most [DPs] like to shoot in magic hour when the light is going down," says Mackenzie, "but I wanted to go for that extreme contrast, midday-sun kind of feeling. It seemed like such an important part of what this world is."

7_NAILING THE SCORE

Unknown to Nick Cave and Warren Ellis bandmates in the Bad Seeds and Grinderman, and frequent film composers their scores for Westerns like The Proposition and Lawless were Mackenzie's choice of temp music. After he'd toyed with using female country vocals or no score at all, the solution became obvious. "We thought, 'Why don't we ask them?', recalls the director. "We sent them a copy, apologising for having appropriated their music already." By turns mournful and epic, Cave and Ellis' "atmospheric without being twee" cues offer an elegy to an Old West beset by modern woes.

HELL OR HIGH WATER IS OUT NOW ON DVD. BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.

THERISE AND RISE OF HARLES QUINN

The creator of Suicide Squad's standout on the cultural evolution of "Daddy's little monster"

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

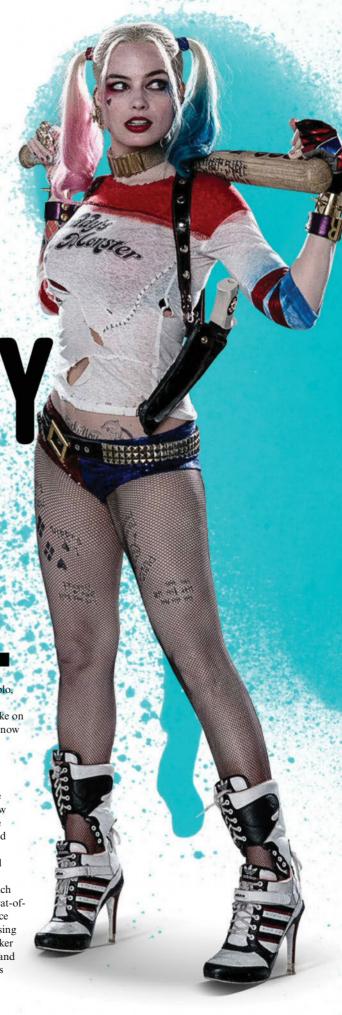
PAUL DINI, THE man behind Harley Quinn, can pinpoint the moment when he knew his creation had truly made it. It was last October, in fact. The Saturday before Hallowe'en, a time for most Los Angelenos to have a massive hooley. And then Dini peered out of his window. "I saw a roving gang of Harley Quinns going down the street," he laughs. "There was a schoolgirl Harley, in a red-and-black outfit with the mask, a steampunk Harley, and the regular movie Harley. They were everywhere. I looked at my wife and said, 'Well, there's Daddy's little monster."

Yes, 24 years after Dini, then a writer on *Batman: The Animated Series*, first introduced Harley Quinn, it's fair to say she's having a moment. A zeitgeist-piercing surge that can be traced back to that "regular movie", *Suicide Squad.* David Ayer's wildly successful caper (\$745 million worldwide) brought together a bunch of the DC Universe's baddest bad guys, including Will Smith's Deadshot, Jai Courtney's Captain

Boomerang and Jay Hernandez's El Diablo, and watched them cede the spotlight to Margot Robbie's colourful, capricious take on the Joker's mad, bad and dangerous-to-know girlfriend.

She gets almost all of the best lines. She gets the meatiest story, as she begins to establish an identity away from her psychotic paramour. And the lion's share of the film's key moments. And in the new Extended Edition version of the film, the bulk of the additional 13 minutes restored to Ayer's film involve Harley.

There's a deeper dive into the twisted mechanics behind her relationship with Jared Leto's Joker: a lengthy scene in which a distraught and pre-transformation-in-vat-of-acid Harley chases down the Clown Prince Of Crime and, pausing only to kill a passing trucker, demands at gunpoint that the Joker fall in love with her. "A heart scares you and a gun doesn't?" she asks. And then there's









a sequence in which she deliberately antagonises various members of the Squad, trying to provoke them into a response. "She's a rabbit hole," counsels Captain Boomerang. "Don't fall in."

It's no surprise that the Extended Edition ups the ante on Harley. For, even in a movie starring Will Smith and Jared Leto, even in a film that has Batman swoop in every now and again to bust some heads, she is the undoubted stand-out. The reason why you're not reading a piece about Killer Croc right now. But where did it all begin?

"IT IS TO laugh, huh, Mr J?" With that one line, delivered while perched on a desk as the Joker throws darts backwards at a picture of Commissioner Gordon, Harley Quinn announced herself to the world in Joker's Favor, a 1992 episode of The Animated Series. It's fascinating to note just how complete the character already was. The costume may have changed — no redand-blue pigtails or hot pants for this Harley, who's clad in a red-and-black jester's costume — and certain intricacies of her relationship with the Joker had yet to be filled in, but otherwise it's all there: the "Mr J" catchphrase (that's studded throughout Suicide Squad), the insoucjant attitude, the welcome dollop of female

energy that enlivened the Joker, a character whose henchmen had traditionally been manly hunks of meat. They might as well have called him the Bloker.

Dini wanted to shake that up a little.
"I thought a girl would be good in the mix.
I came up with an idea for a snappy blonde girl who would hang out with the Joker," he explains of Harley Quinn's origin. "And she really did have a purpose for him. He can't go into a lot of places without being recognised, so it helps to have a couple of allies to do the dirty work for him."

Although Harley's personality sprang almost fully formed from Dini's fingers, Bruce Timm — the animation director on *Batman: The Animated Series* — is credited as her co-creator. "I don't think Bruce really knew about the character until I'd handed him the outline," laughs Dini. Timm was entirely responsible for the look and movement of the character. "He came up with a design for Harley in her jester costume, and what she looked like when she was in disguise," adds Dini. "She almost looked like a dancer in the way she was posed. That was the idea, that she was very athletic and capable if she got into a fight."

There have been murmurings over the years that Harley Quinn was initially intended as a one-and-done character. Not the case. "I liked >

the fact she added some humour to Batman's world, and expanded it a little bit. I liked writing stories about her and putting her in episodes where she fit. I liked the character from the get-go and hoped she would catch on."

That she did. Although she pops up in relatively few episodes of *Batman: The Animated Series*, Harley turned heads right away. Just a year later, DC Comics started including the character in some of their own titles. And then, in 1994, they approached Dini and Timm with an offer that would change the course of the character forever, and lead to Robbie waltzing away with a film just over two decades later.

THAT OFFER WAS to produce a comic, *Mad Love*, in the style of *The Animated Series*, that would tackle Harley's origin. It was something Dini hadn't given a great deal of thought to but, "She couldn't just be a girl that went wrong that he keeps calling up every time he escapes."

From that sprang the idea — used in *Suicide Squad* — that Harley Quinn was once Dr Harleen Quinzel, a psychiatrist assigned to the Joker during one of his stints at Arkham Asylum. During that time, Dr Quinzel was seduced — emotionally and mentally at the very least — by the Joker, and fell in love with him. Or was convinced she had fallen in love with him. "The idea we liked a lot was that he had somehow gotten into her head, snapped her and brought her over to his point of view," says Dini.

From the off, pretty much, it was clear Harley was suffering at the hands of the Joker. He constantly demeans her, belittles her, slaps her. He even pushes her out of a window. And yet she kept coming back for more, kept excusing away his violence. Some critics have argued Harley's unblinking devotion to the Joker reduces her to mere chattel, another so-called strong woman who becomes nothing more than a plaything at the hands of an abusive man. But Dini, who was inspired by what he saw happening in some friends' relationships at the time, says he wanted to shine a light on the plight of women trapped in cycles of violence. In, don't forget, a show ostensibly aimed at younger viewers. "She was an interesting character in that she did have this tragic flaw, this weird co-dependency with the Joker," says Dini. "We were saying, 'Hey, kids, don't be this. Watch out, this is the consequence of hanging out with a maniac like the Joker.' If anything, it's a cautionary story."

In the comic books, Harley Quinn has long since found the inner strength to move away from the Joker. She's more antihero now than villain, a part of the Suicide Squad on the printed page and someone who enjoys a polyamorous relationship with Poison Ivy. (The seeds for which were sown in *The Animated Series*, principally the episode *Harley & Ivy*). Dini continues to write for the character across media as varied as *Arkham Asylum*, the video game, and one-off stories for DC Comics. But he has ceded the character's development on the printed









From top to bottom: Co-creator Paul Dini; Margot Robbie as Dr Quinzel with Jared Leto's Joker; Batman: The Animated Series' red-and-black creation; Cosplay Joker and Harley.

page to the likes of Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti on the *Suicide Squad* ongoing series, believing he laid the foundation for that change. "We gave her a place to grow from," he says. "The other writers who have taken over Harley have acknowledged where she's come from and are keeping her evolution going."

In Suicide Squad, with which Dini was not involved that evolution seemed to halt somewhat, with the back-to-square-one iteration of Harley Quinn attracting criticism from some quarters. Throughout, she's defined by her relationship with the Joker, and even though Ayer thrives with notions of her breaking the cycle of co-dependency, it ends with her being rescued from prison by Mr J, her knight in purple shining armour. "People say she should have walked out on the Joker," muses Dini. "The Joker was barely in the movie. So even if he comes off as a psychotic, murderous but ardent boyfriend, why not show the two of them in love as they run off together? That way, the relationship has a place to go — then the whole thing can sour and she can move away from him."

Perhaps wings will be spread the next time we see Robbie as the character, whether that's in Suicide Squad 2 or the solo movie on which she is a producer. For one thing has been universal even if some have been unhappy with certain aspects of Harley Quinn's character or costume in Suicide Squad, Robbie's performance has been acclaimed across the board. Like Robert Downey Jr. and Tony Stark, or Hugh Jackman and Wolverine, it seems one of those perfect marriages of actor and comic-book character. The playfulness. The willingness to embrace the darkness lurking under the surface. The vivacity. And, of course, the ability to take a character that had been previously merely popular (just ask Kevin Smith, who named his daughter Harley Quinn), and turn her into a phenomenon. The kind of phenomenon that inspires people to dress up as Daddy's little monster. "There's always going to be supercilious finger-waggers and people who are ready to shame anybody else for anything," says Dini. "But Harley is like a walking, smiling middle finger to all those people. Harley's gonna do what she wants, she's gonna look the way she wants. That's what people embrace."

Needless to say, she had the last laugh.

SUICIDE SQUAD EXTENDED CUT IS OUT NOW.



What we said: "Like Avengers Assemble forced through a Deadpool mangle, Suicide Squad gives new life to DC's big-screen universe. So bad-to-the-bone it's good."

Notable extras: Various featurettes, including one on Harley Quinn and the Joker's relationship.

NOCTURNAL ANIMALS

FROM MARCH 1 / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR Tom Ford / CAST Jake Gyllenhaal, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Isla Fisher

DVD BR &

A story within a (worse) story



IT'S WON A swag of awards, and sits firmly on last year's must-see lists. But like the eye-popping opening sequence (which is perhaps the most out-there two minutes of film you'll

see all year), Tom Ford's second outing feels more like an arty curiosity than a triumph of story-telling.

Art gallery owner Susan (Amy Adams) divorced aspiring novelist Edward (Jake Gyllenhaal) for non-specific Wall St moneyman Hutton (Armie Hammer), but she secretly wonders if she made the right choice when his manuscript, dedicated to her, arrives in the mail; Susan becomes increasingly engrossed in Edward's story as the parallels to her real life are revealed. Gyllenhaal also plays Tony, the main character of Edward's book: Tony's life is shattered when a gang of rednecks accosts his family in the middle of nowhere. West Texas.

Gyllenhaal as Tony is all electric anxiety and crushing guilt; he's a convincing stand-in for who we fear we'd be in an emergency. Is it un-masculine to avoid violence? When does principle merge into cowardice? It's compelling stuff. Michael Shannon is typically brilliant as the Texan detective Bobby Andes; Aaron Taylor-Johnson is seductively menacing as the alpha redneck.

The "book-within-a-movie" storyline is by far



the most gripping part of the film; outside of the novel, the "real-life" storylines feel like the ultimate distillation of first world problems ('I'm unfulfilled by running my expensive art gallery, and I feel so lonely in my enormous mansion. Should I dismiss the staff and stay at the beach house?'), which serves well to underscore the emptiness of Susan's life, but equally works as a barrier to the audience caring in any way at all.

Amy Adams works hard to bring depth to those portions of the film, but the struggles of fictional Tony (yes, they're all fictional, but you know what we mean) contrast sharply to Susan's petty concerns. And when, as a filmmaker, you manage to prove that half your film is shallow and irrelevant, is that a success or not?

It's artfully constructed — the film weaves between two real-world time periods and the fictional world, as each helps shade the others — and visually beautifully (even when it perhaps shouldn't be: the artfully staged bodies in the fictional world look more like a *Vogue* shoot than a crime scene). But the "real life" scenes feel very staged, and their coldness saps the tension from the more vital "fictional" scenes. It's ironic that a film that ultimately lauds feeling over thinking, should be so coldly calculated.

EXTRAS TBC. RICH YEAGER



BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK

FROM MARCH 1 / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR Ang Lee / CAST Joe Alwyn, Garrett Hedlund, Steve Martin, Chris Tucker, Vin Diesel, Kristen Stewart

DVD BR 🕻 🕨

Ang Lee's Long Disappointing Film



THE BIGGEST GRIPE

about Ang Lee's adaptation was that it was shot at a super-high frame rate that was even more obnoxious than Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* movies. But the real

problem with *BLLHW* isn't the technical aspect; it's the film itself. Somehow, one of the great

filmmakers of our time has taken two giant American spectacles — war, and the Super Bowl halftime show — and managed to make them slightly dull. In part, it's because it feels like there's nothing real at stake. There's a few bad-ass moments from Lynn's Iraq deployment, but since they're all flashbacks, it's obvious that almost everyone comes out of them ok: the only person who doesn't, also gets almost no screentime, so it never really hits home. There's a tentative romance, but it feels largely unearned; there's a subplot with Lynn's sister (Kristen Stewart) that never gets very far off the ground; there's a grumble with an NFL team owner (Steve Martin) that feels like a storm in a teacup: it's all just a bit... meh. And after all that, the super talky ending (it's pretty much the polar opposite of show-don't-tell) manages to feel even more like an anti-climax. Also - spoiler alert - Billy does take a walk at halftime, but it's not very long at all. Like, 10 steps, tops.

EXTRAS Five featurettes on different elements, deleted scenes. TIM KEEN



Producer Jason Blum - the king of low-budget horror on his greatest hits

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

BLUMHOUSE PRODUCTIONS, run

by the indefatigable Jason Blum, has become one of the biggest success stories in Hollywood by sticking to one simple rule: making a succession of horror movies with the emphasis on low budgets and big profits. We asked Blum to talk us through its standouts.

PARANDRMAL ACTIVITY __ (2007)

Oren Peli's micro-budget (it cost just \$15,000), supernatural home-invasion story was looking for a distributor when Blum first saw it. "I didn't

think it was the greatest movie ever made, but I definitely thought it was effective." Blum hooked up with Peli and screened the film at his house multiple times before he sold it to Paramount. "It took three years," he laughs. "It was a wild ride." But one that led to five sequels and a total gross of \$887 million, before bowing out with *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension* in 2015. Was Blum quitting while he was ahead? "That's generous," he laughs. "We might have quit one earlier!"

INSIDIOUS (2010)

Still thrumming from the success of *Paranormal Activity*, Blum recalls getting a pitch in his "little office" from the guys who had made *Saw*, director James Wan and screenwriter Leigh Whannell. Their idea: a haunted-house movie that goes full-on berserk by the end. "James said the third act was going to be very David Lynch, which scared a lot of people," recalls Blum. "Most

executives don't like scary movies. Happily, I love them." Blum said yes to Wan, as long as he could make it for \$1 million. He did. And so far the series — three and counting, with Whannell now directing — has made over \$350 million worldwide.

SINISTER __ (2012)

Blum went to college with Ethan Hawke, so when he was looking for a name to anchor Scott Derrickson's demonic thriller, he knew just the guy to call. "Ethan doesn't like horror movies!" laughs Blum. "One of the reasons he didn't want to do one was that he thought acting in a horror movie would be scary. But he loved this idea that it was about a guy choosing his career over his family, and that we could use genre as a way to deliver drama."

THE PURGE __ (2013)

Hawke enjoyed his first dalliance with the horror genre so much, he immediately signed





on to star in dystopian home-invasion movie *The Purge*. And, with Blumhouse aiming to bring all original movies in for \$5 million, Hawke agreed to help keep costs down in an unorthodox fashion. "He stayed on our sofa," laughs Blum. "He actually did." Blum is proud of the success of his formula, with big-name actors working for scale in the hope of big percentages coming their way further down the line. "We've paid out a lot of money to people," admits the producer. "I put the cheque in the mail and film myself putting it through the post office."

WHIPLASH __ (2014)

At first glance, Damien Chazelle's drama about the battle between a young jazz drummer and his tyrannical teacher is the outlier in the producer's recent output. Not just because it won three Oscars, but it's not a scary movie. Blum disagrees. "It's a Sundance version of

a horror movie," he says. "Especially in terms of its themes and tone." Blum also produced the original short that was a proof of concept for the movie, which cost around \$3 million to make, but then struggled to sell the full-length feature. "We did a pretty crummy deal with Sony Classics, but it's a great reminder: keep your head down and do your thing. If you listen to the noise, you won't do anything."

THE GIFT __ (2015)

Another Blumhouse maxim: the director is in control. And that extends to first-time directors and actors-turned-directors. In the case of Joel Edgerton, he was both when he pitched the dark psychological thriller (initially called *Weirdo*) that is now recognised as one of Blumhouse's very best. "I feel a movie either works or doesn't work because of performance," says Blum. "Who better to deal with that than actors? I'll hopefully do another movie with Joel."

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR __ (2016)

When it comes to sequels, Blum loosens the purse strings a bit. "If you have a movie that works, the risk goes down exponentially," he explains. "The Purge: Election Year was \$10 million. That's still incredibly cheap by Hollywood standards, but by Blumhouse standards it wasn't." The Purge series bloomed — or Blumed — from that first house-bound horror, with writer-director James DeMonaco introducing more characters, bigger action, and a political streak a mile wide. Releasing a movie about a dystopian America in 2016, and calling it Election Year, takes some cojones. "We were very cognisant that it was an election year, and we wanted to make the third one more political for sure," says Blum. "I think James has a crystal ball. He saw into the future."

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR IS OUT NOW ON DVD,
BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN

Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder's monster monster comedy

1974 / RATED PG WORDS OLLY RICHARDS TO SAY THAT in the early '70s Gene Wilder was in the midst of a career slump might sound absurd. The string of flops he was enduring included the incontrovertibly brilliant *The Producers* and the now cult hit *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*. Sure, people may love them now, but not many wanted to see them then. Off the boil as an actor, it was both the worst and best time for Wilder to venture into screenwriting. On the downside, nobody was really watching him. On the plus side, nobody was really watching him.

Wilder started playing with an idea he'd had for a little while: what if Victor Frankenstein, the hero/villain of Mary Shelley's classic novel Frankenstein, had a grandson who was embarrassed by his ancestor's experiments with cut-and-shut cadavers? What if he wanted to lead a normal life but was tempted back to his genetic destiny, finishing what ol' grandpappy started, with the help of sundry idiots in a spooky castle? During shooting on Blazing Saddles, which would soon be the massive hit Wilder needed, not that he knew it at the time, he approached that film's director, Mel Brooks, with the suggestion of collaboration. Tickled by the idea, Brooks agreed to co-write and direct. Together they constructed one of the most ingeniously stupid films ever made.



Visually, it's a very calm film, with Brooks and DP Gerald Hirschfeld painstakingly recreating the stately camera work and elegant black-and-white look that James Whale (director of the Boris Karloff *Frankenstein* movies) or Tod Browning (who turned Bela Lugosi into Dracula) gave their 1930s Universal horrors. If it weren't it might not get away with many of its gags, which can teeter on the edge of end-of-the-pier corniness. Whether it's horses whinnying in fear at every mention of the name Frau Blücher (*nneeeiiggghh*) or Marty Feldman delivering punchlines directly into the camera, eyebrows awaggle and googly eyes agoggling, it's frequently

the stuff of panto, all arch innuendo and deliberate misunderstanding. This is much of the film's pleasure, the combining of gags written with intricate wit with those that slap you round the face with a big, daft, honking crassness. It's all in the telling. Even the punchline you can see charging towards you from miles away can still land when the delivery is perfect, and there is not a single joke here that's badly told. That's what happens when you give one of the great comedy directors a cast of unrivalled gifts.

Rarely has there been this much comic talent in a single film. Wilder, Feldman, Madeline Kahn—these are among the finest comic performers

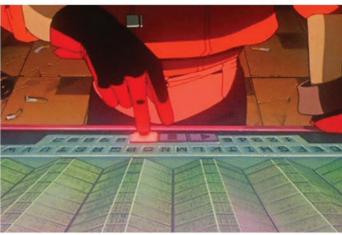
in cinema history, which is to take nothing from the enormously good Teri Garr, Peter Boyle, Cloris Leachman and Kenneth Mars (whose manic, Peter Sellers-esque turns in this and The Producers mean he should never be forgotten). Even Gene Hackman, not exactly renowned for being able to find the funnybone, is a riot in a glorious cameo as the blind hermit who tries to assist the Monster. Yet there is no evidence of competition between them. Nobody is trying to elbow anyone else out of the way for the bigger laugh. If you watch a modern cast of comparable fame you can often see the improvisation, a desperate need to have the final, funniest word. In Young Frankenstein there is not a syllable that doesn't need to be there. Joke done, move on. Sometimes it's one actor's turn to deliver the laugh; sometimes it's someone else's. Take the legendary 'Puttin' On The Ritz' sequence. Wilder, as anyone who's watched The Producers knows, is not averse to a screaming, limbs-flailing performance, yelling at a joke until it crawls, wrung-dry, off stage. Though there's every opportunity to mug, throughout Frederick's tap dance with his Monster, Wilder's face is inert. As Boyle, as the Monster, passionately keens his "HEETNONNARREEZ" line, Frederick just stares on quietly, proudly. And it's weepingly funny. It's one joke throughout the whole song, and it never loses its strength by repetition, because everyone is absolutely committed. That's the kind of teamwork that makes a great comedy, and it happens throughout Young Frankenstein.

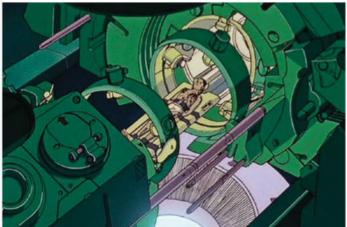
There is a heart here, too. It's a story, for most of the characters, about accepting who you are, rather than being who society believes you should be. Whether it's Frederick facing up to his past, Kahn's Elizabeth throwing off her society lady furs to become the shock-haired sexually liberated lunatic squealing to get out, or the Monster learning to live with the fact that he's alive, there are genuine, well-drafted character arcs. With jokes about huge *schwanzstuckers*.

Wilder would go on to write many screenplays after Young Frankenstein, but none would match its wit. He would have many more hits as an actor, but none would so well employ his loudest and quietest gifts. This would, creatively, be his apex. Wilder died on 29 August 2016, aged 83, 42 years after the release of Young Frankenstein. Is it sad that one of the great comedians did his best work when he still had exactly half his life to go, that he'd never reach those highs again? No, because he did what anyone wants before they die: he left behind something to show he mattered, that he was here, and he left the place more cheerful than when he arrived. He will always have this one perfect, strange creation to his name, a beast made of mismatched pieces that somehow seamlessly lock. It screamed into life from hopelessness, and as long as there is breath to laugh, it will never die.

YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN IS OUT NOW ON DVD. BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.













THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

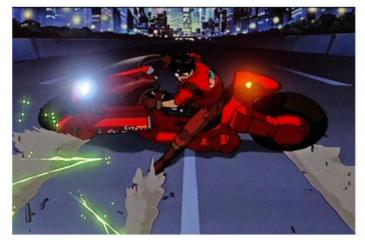
Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

#7 EDITH BOWMAN ON AKIRA

THE RULES OF the First-Take Club are incredibly simple. Each month, we ask someone to peruse our list of the 500 Greatest Movies Of All Time (published in 2013) and select a film they haven't seen before. Then they watch the film and tell us a) why the devil it took them so long and b) what the devil they think about it. This month's inductee into the club is broadcaster, DJ and author Edith Bowman, whose movie-based soundtracks podcast, Soundtracking, is a must-listen. And Edith's choice? The film that she hadn't seen, to her eternal shame? It's number 440 on our list, widely considered the greatest anime of all time - Katsuhiro Ôtomo's 1988 classic, Akira. Over to you, Edith.

I'll admit I'm not any kind of expert on Japanese animation. The closest I get to it is my eight-year-old's obsession with Pokémon, which I'm well aware began life as a game for Game Boy. So, *Akira* had passed me by until now. I'm glad I've seen it — it's a different league of animation altogether. I've never seen anything like it.

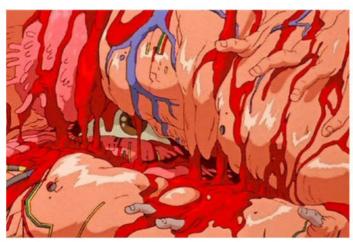
I won't recount the plot details here. Largely because it would take me a very long time, as the story is incredibly complicated. Short version: Tetsuo Shima is a psychic who runs with a biker gang in a dystopian futuristic Tokyo (or not that futuristic — the story is set three years from now). It's directed by Katsuhiro Ôtomo, who adapted his original manga series, which had over 2,000 pages of artwork. No wonder it took him eight













years to make. It's tense, funny and wonderfully entertaining. And, when Tetsuo hallucinates toys coming to life, terrifying and revelatory.

Doing some reading around the movie, I noticed that Ôtomo cites both *Rebel Without A Cause* and 2001: A Space Odyssey as an influence on his work. A lot of similar themes — alienation, the nature of humanity, the dangers of technology — can be found in Akira. Other themes are universal and so relevant — the battle between science and the military is something we see time and time again in sci-fi. Yet it's one that constantly fascinates me, and one that is not always done well. I had very low expectations of an animated film being able to get so deep and touch on such heavy subject

matter. Then I watched *Akira*. In fact, I forgot I was watching animation after a while.

It is not just considered a landmark of Japanese animation, but regarded by many as one of the greatest animated movies of all time. I have to agree. It's certainly influential — you can see elements in films like *The Matrix* or even TV show *Stranger Things*. The animation is faultless and uses light in a way that I can't quite get my head around. It's the simple things, like how Ôtomo and his team capture the buzz of neon. And the soundscape is stunning — bursts of traditional music through sparks of Shoji Yamashiro's score blend perfectly with the explosions, gunfire and loud vehicles, to add real depth of emotion and tension.

In a way, it's timeless. About 15 years ago I hosted a series of the travel show *Rough Guide*, and Japan was one of the countries we were lucky enough to film in. For one segment I got to hang out with a real Bosozoku motorcycle gang for a night. The specificity of the gang mentality that I witnessed first hand is told with such honesty and colour in *Akira*, from the noise of the bikes to the blatant disregard for life and their fearlessness. It's astounding for animation to capture this. For me, it's definitely ignited an interest in Japanese animation. Perhaps my son can put away the Pokémon and join me.

AKIRA IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.



Travis Knight, director of Kubo And The Two Strings and CEO of Laika, on the inspiration behind the stop-motion awards darling

WORDS TRAVIS KNIGHT

THE EPIC INSPIRATION

The idea was simple, and it was ridiculously hard. The challenge I set for the team was to do a stopmotion David Lean film, a Kurosawian myth in miniature. On *Kubo*, we really learned how to push the medium to its breaking point, and then push beyond it. Tolkien has been a north star for me since my mom tucked the *Lord Of The Rings* series into her hospital bag when she was recovering from giving birth to me. I have always wanted Laika to tackle fantasy, grand adventures and transporting journeys, so when *Kubo And The Two Strings* came to us as an idea, it really spoke to me and I felt we were finally ready as a studio to attempt the scale and scope.

The idea of making a small-scale film look like a large-scale epic that's been shot on a sweeping, endless vista was kind of absurd on the face of it, but we've got such a wide array of techniques — people who are creating technology and people who are doing things the way Georges Méliès was doing [them] when he sent rockets to the moon. It's that combination of craft and technology — we take the raw and the refined and we merge them.

THE JAPANESE INFLUENCE

In conceiving and designing the characters of Monkey and Beetle, we looked to animals indigenous to Japan. For Beetle, we drew from the Japanese rhinoceros beetle, known natively as kabutomushi, which literally means "helmet bug". The insect's features resemble the headgear worn by medieval samurai. In Japan, the rhinoceros beetle is associated with strength and fighting prowess. And in mythologies and cultures around the world, the beetle is a symbol of transformation and metamorphosis. Since transformation is a central theme of the film, this is an instance where the film's thematic core fused with design for a perfect narrative synthesis. We based the face design of Kubo's evil aunties, The Sisters, on classical Japanese Noh theatre masks. The Sisters' masks have the traditional 'neutral' expression which worked well to cover the nature of their true characters and lent itself nicely to a spooky effect wherein we hear them, but don't see their lips moving.





THE SAITO IMPACT

We delved into so much of the Japanese arts that we revere, but ended up returning again and again to a 20th-century block-print artist named Kiyoshi Saito. He was trained in traditional Japanese block printing, but he was inspired and highly influenced by other European artists including the French Impressionists. Saito's use of the natural grain of the wood texture in his block-print art inspired us to use it as a signature throughout the film. Not only did we think of each frame as a wood-block print on its own, we used the idea of the lovely wood-grain texture in many applications: from ground plane in Kubo's cave, to the sides of his sharply angled mountain, to textures we see on the village homes and roofs. We used that same texture across every sequence in the movie — it became Kubo's visual signature.

THE OBLIGATORY STAR WARS REFERENCE

It made sense to us to include an homage to the magnificent *Star Wars* in the underwater sequence when Kubo is beneath the surface attempting to bring the armour up.

Kubo encounters a monstrous sea creature with a hundred giant eyeballs that are hypnotising our hero and attempting to drag him to the depths below to devour him. It's clearly our take on the Sarlacc. It's also a call back to Steven Spielberg, whom I adore (along with the rest of the world), and who is the reason I was introduced to Akira Kurosawa.

THE HARRYHAUSEN EFFECT

Our young hero Kubo battles with colossal creatures. We at Laika are huge fans of the great Ray Harryhausen and his animated fantasy epics. The opportunity to make the giant skeleton practically [in-camera] inspired our crew to pay tribute to the master stop-motion filmmaker. One of the key influences for the Hall Of Bones scene was the iconic skeleton fight from Harryhausen's Jason And The Argonauts. It's our attempt at one-upping our idol with a pitched battle showcasing a skeleton puppet so immense that it dwarfed the animator bringing it to life. I think Uncle Ray would be proud of us!

KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD.



KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS

RATED **PG**

Kubo sets out on a quest to locate a magical suit of armour with a monkey (Charlize Theron) and a giant beetle (Matthew McConaughey). A beautifully animated tale that balances story with comedy and moments of effective (if light) horror, with undeniable emotion at its heart.

SETH OWEN ON... MORGAN

The writer of the sci-fi/horror Al movie on borrowing from Blade Runner and remembering Skynet...



How did you come up with the concept for *Morgan*?

As a child that grew up in the 1980s, AI was defined almost entirely by the work of Ridley Scott. In *Alien*, in *Blade Runner*. I was really obsessed with *Blade Runner*. I still am. Its one of my favorite films. So of course the idea of the "replicant" and that kind of Roy Batty existential dilemma has always stayed with me, and I gave myself ample license to steal from it on the little pulp nightmare I was concocting. At that time I had no idea it would end up at Scott Free, with Ridley Scott's son directing. That crazy irony was never lost on me. I'm still kind of in disbelief.

Morgan is the modern day Frankenstein – how closely do they overlap?

Well, Morgan's hyper-intelligent, she's manipulative, she's very mercurial.

Frankenstein's a lunk. He's a heavy footed brute. But they're both coming to terms with what and why they are – how they are basically byproducts of their creators' unchecked egotism. And now have to face the world, alone. Just like all of us!

What films drew you to sci-fi?

Well, I've already mentioned some of them – Blade Runner, Alien – Aliens, too, that was a big one. All the usual suspects of that magical time in popcorn cinema. Star Wars, John Carpenter, Indiana Jones, the Mike Hodges Flash Gordon. And for whatever reason, as a little kid I was just nuts for the old horror stuff from the 30s. The Old Dark House. The Black Cat. Lugosi, Karloff, Lon Chaney Jr. Abbot & Costello Meet Frankenstein. But I've never been narrowly fixated on sci-fi and horror. I just like going to the movies. And growing up in Toronto in the '80s, that was a great time and place to go the movies.

Do you view artificial intelligence as a potential threat?

Sure. I think AI – as overly used as a "cautionary" horror trope as it is – is still criminally under-thought-out in the real world. People are pretty casual about it. A lot of that feels like all the kids who saw *T2* when it came out grew up and went to work for Cyberdyne. Don't forget about Skynet, folks!

...AND THE EMPIRE REVIEW

MORGAN

FROM **FEBRUARY 15** / RATED **MA15+**

MORGAN (ANYA TAYLOR-JOY), is an artificial human – developed in secret and subtly enhanced to be faster, stronger, better. But when she starts to display troubling and violent emotional outbursts, the corporation that owns her sends a "risk management consultant", Lee (Kate Mara), and a psychologist, Dr Shapiro (Paul Giamatti) to determine whether she remains a viable project. Which Morgan doesn't

like at all. And so begins a cat-and-mouse game of threat and manipulation. Smart and tense, this film inevitably plays second-fiddle to *Ex Machina*, which covers much the same ground but is simply smarter and tenser – the Usain Bolt to *Morgan*'s Tyson Gay. Director Luke Scott, son of Ridley Scott, does a fair job of building suspense, but the twists are not entirely unexpected, and cramming more characters into the secret lab clutters up the main thrust of the story. Worth it for "rogue Al" lovers.

EXTRAS TBC. RICH YEAGER



IF YOU HAVEN'T seen Yonderland, the fantasy-tinged sitcom from the original Horrible Histories gang, you're missing one of the most inventive, surreal and hilarious TV comedies of recent years. Still not convinced? Think of it as Monty Python meets Labyrinth. We asked its six creators/writers/stars to pick their favourite moments from its three series to date.

'THE INTERROGATION' (S1, E3)

CHOSEN BY MATHEW BAYNTON

"As bounty hunters interrogating the monks who cannot lie, me and Jim Howick decided we wanted to both be made up like Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*. Their dialogue was threatening but we started imagining their backstory and they became a couple with a long history. We were really excited to get to set and see how the others responded to it. That's the great fun of working in a gang — we get to fill every tiny role with detail that, for us, makes every scene a chance to have fun and make each other laugh."

'THE KRAFTWERK PARODY' (S2, E6)

CHOSEN BY JIM HOWICK

"We were always very aware of how popular the songs in *Horrible Histories* were, so when we started making *Yonderland* it was a no-brainer that the show should have a musical element of some kind. In this episode we wanted to create a fantasy version of state security that Debbie (disguised as a crone) comes face-to-face with as she tries to cross a border checkpoint. We really liked the idea of the guards having monotone accents and

applying painfully careful examinations. Four guards in a row? Fastidiously groomed in Stasi-like uniforms? The perfect opportunity for a Kraftwerk parody. You've *got* to take those. So we wrote a song loosely based on their hit *The Robots*, and Philip Pope composed the music. It's safe to say we indulged ourselves. A lot."

'THE SUPERHERO SPOOF' (S3, E3)

CHOSEN BY BEN WILLBOND

"We'd started to talk about superheroes and really wanted to get them into *Yonderland*, but it's hard to do because the series is getting really story-heavy. We came up with this concept of a vigilante called The Bird [*Baynton*]. I just really wanted to do an opening where it would start in a brooding *Batman* style on a rooftop and then there's a guy at the window going, "Seriously, mate, what are you doing?" I was massively sleep-deprived at the time with my second child, hence the guy has got loads of babies. Larry said, "Why isn't he just a creature?" So we came up with a dog who had loads of babies, the worst-case scenario. The payoff of the roof being at floor height is one of my favourite comic beats."

'THE CAKE WAR' (S3, E4)

CHOSEN BY MARTHA HOWE-DOUGLAS

"Basically, this is our take on *The Great British Bake Off*, with three of the boys — Jim, Ben and Larry — dressed up as WI-type women. They each think the other has sabotaged their cake efforts, and basically start a full-on war. It's ridiculous. We're in trenches and firing machine

guns and grenades at each other, and it's utterly ridiculous. I was absolutely pissing myself. The amount of takes we had to do... it took so long to film because I couldn't keep a straight face."

'THE QGM' (S2, E5)

CHOSEN BY SIMON FARNABY

"This was actually a touchstone idea we'd had when we were creating the show, to have an AGM—the Quillenial General Meeting—for evil overlords. Like people who work for Nokia have at a Radisson, but for baddies. I had been Negatus the evil overlord since Series 1, but now the others had free rein to design their own. For example, Matt made a ludicrous choice to have Don Corleone-style cotton wool in his mouth, which he instantly regretted. I think you can tell a lot about someone from the type of baddy they'd like to be."

'THE CHAMBER BREAK-IN' (S3, E2)

CHOSEN BY LAURENCE RICKARD

"As a film nut, writing an *Ocean's Eleven*-style heist was a complete joy. It starts with a tremendously silly joke, as three armed guards with unlikely names greet each other ("Michael"/ "Douglas"/"Kirk"/"Douglas"), and then cuts to one of my favourite Jim Howick performances, as he acts out his own horrific death, in far too much detail. I'll never forget the amount of corpsing when shooting that. Even in the cut, you can see how close our faces are to cracking."

YONDERLAND SCREENS ON ABC; SERIES 1 IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY.



FEAR THE WALKING DEAD SEASON 2

FROM FEBRUARY 8 / RATED MA15+ DVD BR



AS A PREQUEL to The Walking Dead, fans expected Fear The Walking Dead to provide backstory; what they got in season one was more of a slow-burn family drama. But now it's LA that's burning as the military try to bomb it clean of the zombie infection. It's no surprise that this season is a series of dashes between safe havens that turn out to be not very safe. More surprising is how rapidly this series - which started out as a character-based take on a slow-motion disaster, and can still deliver thoughtful moments when it wants to - turns into a Walking Dead clone. Bad enough that society has all but collapsed a few episodes in, and that the unsafe safe haven is a plot gone stale after six seasons of TWD. Now the characters have also become the same kind of "kill them before they kill you" types that populate the original series, only plausible as good guys because everyone else is worse. We've seen it all before: only the gore remains shocking. EXTRAS The Making Of Season 2; Flight 462 webisodes. ANTHONY MORRIS



ARCHER SEASON 7

FROM FEBRUARY 15 / RATED M DVD



ARCHER PULLS THE reboot switch again for its seventh season, and while it's not as big a shift as season five (AKA Archer Vice) it does see the cast dropped into a new environment. After ditching the CIA at the end of last season, the team head out to Los Angeles to set up a private detective agency, where they... basically do all the same stuff they've been doing for the last 80 episodes. There are a few new angles here but there's not a whole lot that's surprising or new - which is a good thing: Archer's survived this long because it has great comedy characters and loads of brilliant one-liners, not because audiences were clamouring to see an animated spy series. Some elements are showing their age - Archer and Lana's relationship is just stale bickering now – but so long as Pam and Cheryl get to display their crazy. Archer is on target. **EXTRAS** None. **ANTHONY MORRIS**



SHERLOCK SEASON 4

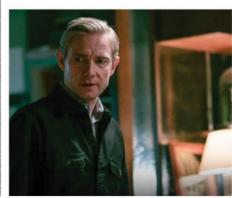
FROM NOW / SHOWRUNNERS STEVEN MOFFAT, MARK GATISS / CAST BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH. MARTIN FREEMAN, AMANDA ABBINGTON, UNA STUBBS, MARK GATISS

Needs to get back to elementary

IT'S BEEN THREE years since the last series of Sherlock, with only a single Christmas special since then, but those expecting a traditional re-introduction to the BBC's re-imagination of Sherlock Holmes are in for a shock. This fourth (and most likely, last) season starts with a breathless episode more interested in the foibles of the cast especially Watson's wife, former super-spy Mary (Abbington) — than solving mysteries. The second presents a very Jimmy Saville-like supervillain (played by a scenery-chewing Toby Jones) but the focus is more on Holmes's drug experiences (again), while at least the third and final episode promises to answer a range of questions hanging over the series for years. Unfortunately those questions are, again, more to do with the cast's personal relationships than actually solving mysteries. Sherlock has

always been a series about how amazing Sherlock Holmes is, but with the mystery side of things largely sidelined his narcissism feels oppressive, his blatantly supernatural abilities mere showing off. What makes it all the more frustrating is that the writing is still sometimes as good as it thinks it is (the end of episode one especially) while performance-wise all the pieces remain in place: Cumberbatch is often captivating, Freeman is excellent as the increasingly tormented Watson, and Stubbs as Holmes' not-housekeeper remains a delight. It's always been flashy and fast-paced, and the constant stream of shock twists and big revelations shouldn't be fatal. But too often this season ignores the core of Sherlock's appeal: two friends solving puzzles. Getting that right shouldn't be a mystery.

ANTHONY MORRIS



A SERIES OF Unfortunate events



FROM NOW / DIRECTORS BARRY SONNENFELD,
MARK PALANSKY, BO WELCH / CAST NEIL PATRICK
HARRIS , PATRICK WARBURTON, MALINA WEISSMAN,
LOUIS HYNES, PRESLEY SMITH

N

Good fortune for Netflix

A SERIES OF Unfortunate Events is just that. In it, three people are driven from one outlandishly miserable circumstance to another, pursued by a group of malicious brutes after their money. There is deceit, arson, murder, enforced labour and terrible, terrible luck. Did we mention it's for kids?

As a series of addictive books, written by Daniel Handler under the nom de plume Lemony Snicket between 1999 and 2006, the tale deftly mixed comedy and horror, frequently warning the reader off and encouraging them to pick another, cheerier form of entertainment. A 2004 movie crammed the first three stories into one feature-length carnival of catastrophes, but a sequel never materialised, leaving the future of the Baudelaire orphans uncertain. Now, 13 years on, Netflix has stepped up to have a go at it. And the results are splendiferous, a word which here means they pretty much nailed it.

Instead of whizzing through each book as the film did, the show dedicates two whole episodes — runtimes of which last anywhere between 40 minutes and an hour — to each novel. This allows a lot more time for us to get to know the three beleaguered Baudelaire children: Violet (Weissman), Klaus (Hynes) and baby Sunny (Smith). As in the books they each have a singular trait (invents; reads; bites), and are both charming and so precocious they're able to quote Haruki Murakami and Samuel Beckett at the drop of a hat. In this topsy-turvy universe, children are the only ones equipped to face the dark realities of the world. Every adult they encounter along the way is either sordid, a simpleton or both.

Which brings us to Count Olaf. One of the greatest literary ne'er-do-wells of the past two decades, the man described at one point as "a villainous actor and active villain" (his minions

double as a theatrical troupe) is gloriously, fathomlessly despicable. As played by Jim Carrey in the movie, he was a highly strung ham who practically hummed with malevolence. Here, Neil Patrick Harris' performance is more subdued, less bug-eyed, than Carrey's; instead, the consummate awards host accentuates the character's theatricality. With spiky tufts of eyebrow hair, a goaty goatee and a pointy prosthetic nose, plus a panoply of hilariously unconvincing disguises, Harris has a ball as the Lon Chaney wannabe. Olaf gets a big musical number (aside from the infectiously catchy, ever-mutating theme song, which Harris also sings) and bounteous time to indulge in his favourite pastime: evil monologuing.

Therein lies the main strength of the show. Handler's books revelled in wordplay, with a delightful precision to the language. By giving each vignette space to breathe, the Netflix show, which has Handler on board as a writer, allows for the kind of witty asides the movie had to rush past. "You left me to drown," one character angrily tells the Count. "Water under the bridge," he replies, placatingly. "That's where you left me!" comes the retort. With a strong pro-literacy message — the plot of one instalment even hinges on grammatical inaccuracies — it's a celebration of smarts that never comes off as preachy. Most entertainingly eloquent of all is Patrick Warburton as Lemony Snicket himself, a lugubrious and dapper narrator who wanders through scenes like a ghost. His delivery ever desert-dry, he comes close to stealing the whole shebang.

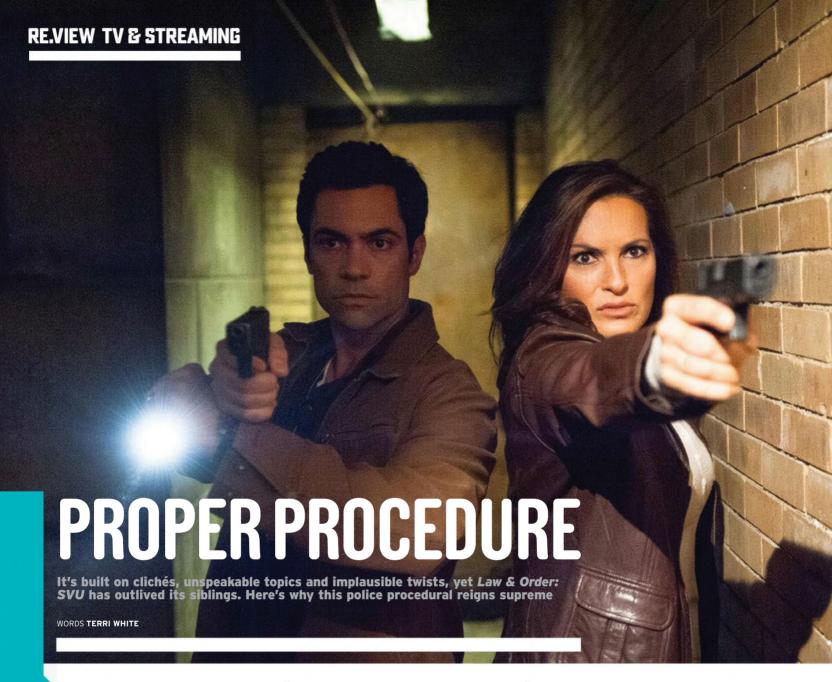
Visually, the show is also a treat. *Men In Black* director Barry Sonnenfeld originally planned to direct the feature film; in the end he stepped aside for Brad Silberling and produced instead. Now he's finally got his chance, directing four of these eight episodes. It's a return to form, making up for awful cat caper *Mr Fuzzypants* — well, almost. With outlandish locations including Lake Lachrymose (a body of water so large it has its own weather system) and Lucky Smells Lumbermill (a timber-based Gulag with signs such as, "Safety goggles are unnecessary if they slow you down"), the sets are sometimes Tim Burton-y, sometimes Wes Anderson-y, but always fantastic.

It's not perfect. Episodes can feel a little baggy and, by the story's nature, it does get repetitive — binge-watching the Baudelaires is like mainlining Wile E. Coyote cartoons. But it's hard to quibble with an adaptation done with such gusto. By the end, you'll likely be willing the next series of *Unfortunate Events* to arrive.

NICK DE SEMLYEN







PIT BEGINS, ALWAYS, with a sound. DUN-DUN (or chung-chung, or even doink-doink, depending on phonetic preference). A sound that, along with the authoritative voiceover proclaiming, "In the criminal justice system, sexual-based offences are considered especially heinous...", is the rigorously adhered-to opening gambit of a show that, while being dismissed as pulpy, remains one of the longestrunning and most successful procedural dramas in television. After 17 years, with countless "I'm sorry, what?!" plotlines and most of its police procedural kin — CSI, NYPD Blue, Cold Case, all the other Law & Orders — lying cold in the telly graveyard, what is it about SVU?

SVU APPEARED IN 1999, EXPELLED FROM the brain of the creator of the original Law & Order, Dick Wolf. Wolf, an ex-staff writer on Hill Street Blues, had gone to NBC bosses nine years before with a simple premise: an episodic drama series in which the first half focuses on the investigation of a crime, the second half the prosecution. SVU, the first spin-off from the main show, zeroed in on sex

crimes (its original title) and premiered with a solid 18 million viewers.

Crucially, while the individual story explored is new each week — and often based on real-life cases like the Cleveland house of horrors and Rihanna's assault (though their version killed off a singer whose likeness is, of course, purely coincidental) — the storytelling arc remains consistent: the crime, the investigation on the wrong track, the investigation on the right track, and resolution (spoiler: they're guilty).

The other constant: the cast. They provide a perspective; the perp always viewed through them. In this case, the eyes belong to Sergeant Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay), a tough-astacks woman in a man's world investigating — primarily — crimes against women (backstory: she's a product of rape herself). She's the moral compass who — comfortingly, but yes, in a stretch of credulity — believes the victim without question and fights, often at personal cost, for what is just.

Alongside original partner Elliot Stabler (*Oz*'s Christopher Meloni) and now DA Rafael

Barba (Raúl Esparza) and Det. Fin Tutuola (Ice-T, who has some of the best lines including: "They glued pubic hair to his face and told him he was the wolfman!"), Benson is the anchor of this dysfunctional yet familiar family. They fight (Benson and Barba), bond (Benson and Stabler) and protect (Tutuola and Benson). They make the shadowy streets of New York and brown walls of the squad room feel like home. One we're welcomed into every week. In there it's warm. It smells of burned coffee.

Outside of the core cast, the guest stars are impressive — Bradley Cooper, Whoopi Goldberg, Zoe Saldana, Patricia Arquette, Chloë Sevigny, Sharon Stone and Norman Reedus have appeared, as has Martin Short as a demented killer psychic; Sarah Hyland as a demented killer teenager, and Robin Williams as a demented audio engineer (more terrifying than it may initially sound).

NATURALLY (AND NARRATIVELY), tropes are relied upon, offering a strange security in their recognition. The squabbling couple — he's balding — return to a blood-stained





Left: Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) and Nick Amaro Top: The crew looking delighted Above: Safety first while jogging: the NYPD way. Below: Elliot Stabler (Christopher Meloni) was Benson's partner for 12 seasons.

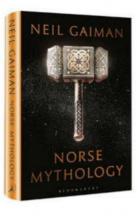


bedroom, the kindly counsellor takes too close an interest in an artistic but troubled student, the pink-cheeked Midwestern girl tiptoes into a frat party.

While SVU prods our primal fears, and though not every episode sees a pounded gavel and declaration of, "Guilty!", it simultaneously offers reassurance that if the worst happens, it will be okay in the end. The verdict is delivered and the world, which 50 minutes ago had gone wonky, is righted.

Law & Order, and star Sam Waterston's ever-expanding eyebrows, left this world in 2010 having tied the record for longest-running live-action drama serial with Gunsmoke, but SVU shows no sign of following it to the knackers' yard. In fact, it's on season 18, just three away from breaking that record. Be it that it feels like a pair of warm slippers. Be it Ice-T's zingers. Be it the dun-dun/the chung-chung/the doink-doink. Maybe the heart does just want what the heart wants. As Amanda Palmer sang, "Who needs love when there's Law & Order?"

LAW & ORDER: SVU SEASON 17 IS OUT NOW ON DVD.



NORSE MYTHOLOGY ****

FROM **NOW**

Neil Gaiman (American Gods, The Ocean At The End Of The Lane) was first exposed to Norse mythology through - you guessed it - Jack Kirby's Thor comics in the 1960s. As a boy he was so enchanted that he devoured all he could read about Odin and Thor and Loki and Freya, and about Asgard and Yggdrasil and Ragnarok; later he realised how deeply many of those myths were ingrained in the work of everyone and everything from Tolkien to Alan Garner to George RR Martin.

Now Gaiman has created his own retelling of those classic myths ("Old stories for a new boy", as he notes in his dedication to his first grandson Everett), based at least in part on the Edda, a 13th-century Norse manuscript detailing some of the Nordic myths. Gaiman has written his version of the tales in lyrical, faintly archaic prose ("Three times he went away, three times he - eventually - returned") that carry a certain weight of history, as though vou're hearing them intoned from a wise old man sitting by a fire. It's probably best consumed over several sittings rather than at a gulp, but while the stories are all basically standalone pieces, the book as a whole does follow an arc, from the creation of the world, through the stories of the gods (often based around Loki being an asshat), to Ragnarok and the end of all things. Gaiman's genuine affection for these stories is obvious, and he salts each of them with dry humour and phrases that beg to be read aloud. There's also a glossary for when you've had an extra horn of mead and are getting Thrud, Thrym and Thokk confused. A welcome change of pace for fantasy fiends who want of a taste of where it all began. TK



CRIMSON LAKE

FROM **NOW**

IN THE OPENING pages of Crimson Lake, the latest novel by Australian crime-writing darling Candice Fox, hungry crocs lurk and hide just below the surface of the stifling Cairns wetlands. But in this oppressive small town, who are the real monsters? The two private eyes with murky pasts, or a sweaty, angry mob who will stop at nothing in their bid to expose them?

Two-time Ned Kelly Award-winner

Fox, fresh from a successful collaboration with crime-writing king James Patterson, has once again created protagonists soaked in an edgy, black-humour-laced vulnerability. Detective Ted Conkaffey was a content married police officer until his life was destroyed by the six minutes in between him being seen talking to a young girl at a bus stop and her abduction. Charged but set free after the trial was aborted due to lack of evidence, Ted escapes to Crimson Lake where, in the eyes of a community baying for blood, he is a guilty man. He forms an unlikely partnership with local woman-turned-private investigator, Amanda. Though seemingly more eccentric than evil, she served ten years for a murder she admitted to committing without ever disclosing why. As the novel weaves in details of the circumstances of their cases, the book zeroes in on a third crime - the pair's hunt to solve the disappearance of prominent local author Jake Scully. Fox masterfully pulls together all three threads - Ted's alleged crime, Amanda's past and the mystery of what happened to Jake - into a heart-pounding conclusion.

AMY DALE

BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

DOUGRAY SCOTT

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT





When I did Ever After, I had this medieval prince outfit. It had a massive codpiece and I enjoyed parading around in that and wearing a sword and big leather boots. Did I insist on the big codpiece? It was just practical.

I remember playing Moses in *The Ten Commandments*, and wearing a fucking hair shirt. It was so uncomfortable and I didn't wear underwear, so it was grinding against *that*. That was a real pain in the arse. Literally.

PERFORMANCE

I did a [four-part Irish] TV series called Father & Son. I was playing this Manchester gangster [who returns to Ireland after seven years in a British prison]. I'm not that, but I loved the journey of discovery through that process, the research in creating that character. He was a million miles away from me. If the writing's there, it makes your job so much easier.



I did a movie with my wife [Claire Forlani], which was a disaster. It was called Love's Kitchen. They lost all their money, so we had to shoot it in two weeks. It was a kick-bollock scramble and it looked like shit. I don't think I was bad, I think the movie was bad. I've never been bad. You know I'm lying, don't you?

AUDITION

It was to play this New York cop in *Frequency*, and the dialect coach and I went walking around talking in a Queens accent to prepare for the screen test. They offered it to me as soon as it was over, but the actor who was also in it pulled out, and then I had to go do this other movie.

I'm lucky. The ones I do are the ones I get offered. Auditioning is painful. I remember once when I was auditioning for a play, and I had to say, "I'm just going to the lavatory." But all I could say was, "I'm going to the lavoratory." All I could think of was "laboratory". Didn't get that one.

LOCATION

I did a movie called Perfect Creature in New Zealand. I stayed in this place called Kauri Cliffs, and it was exquisite, beautiful, magical countryside. It reminded me a lot of Scotland, actually.





People get so offended if you say somewhere's a shithole. But Hamilton in Canada? Not a great place to film on Hemlock Grove. Your fucking face freezes off. Don't want to go there again. Put that down.

On Ripley's Game, I remember doing this scene with [John] Malkovich where we've laid traps outside the house. He said, "Let's throw it around a bit." He's an incredibly generous guy. I don't think I'm ever going to work with someone as genius as he is as a fucking actor. That moment, on that day, on that set, I thought, "I don't think I'll ever be happier."



A couple of years ago I was so frustrated about not, I felt, getting the opportunity to do the things I really wanted to do. I'd be offered things and think, "This is fucking shit." So I decided I was going to develop stuff on my own again, and that became exciting.

LONDON TOWN IS OUT NOW ON GOOGLE PLAY.



CAPTION COMP



WN!

Write a brilliantly witty caption to the image above from Dax Shepard's upcoming reboot of *CHiPs*, starring Dax himself and Michael Peña, and you could be a winner! To enter, email empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au

CHIPS WILL BE PATROLLING CINEMAS FROM APRIL 6.

WE HAVE 10 COPIES OF HELL OR HIGH WATER ON DVD TO GIVE AWAY FOR BRILLIANT CAPTIONEERS! CHECK OUT THE REVIEW ON PAGE 90 TO WHET YOUR APPETITE, PARDNER!





GIVEAWAYS

WIN! OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL ON BLU-RAY OR DVD

POSSESSED CHILDREN are the scariest kind of children... well, they're in the top three kinds, anyway. The follow-up to 2014's *Ouija* is scarier than the original, and it's hard to say whether it will boost sales of the only boardgame to risk banishing your soul to the eternal darkness for practicing witchcraft, or make everyone run

screaming the moment they see it on shelves. Either way, we have 10 copies to give away: tell us when you enter whether you want Blu-Ray or DVD.

TO ENTER, TELL US WHICH DEAD CELEBRITY YOU WOULD CONTACT, AND WHAT YOU'D ASK THEM.



WIN! BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK ON DVD OR BR

WAR AND FOOTBALL: some Americans would be hard-pressed to tell you which is more serious. Ang Lee, the man behind *Life Of Pi* and *Brokeback Mountain*, has adapted the hit novel about a team of US soldiers thrust in the limelight after a battle in Iraq is captured on camera, and how they deal with an abrupt re-entry into the

civilian world as celebrities, right in the middle of the NFL Super Bowl. We have 10 copies on either Blu-ray or DVD to give away. TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT IS YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE WAR MOVIE, AND WHY.



WIN! FEAR THE WALKING DEAD SEASON 2 ON BLU-RAY

DOES ANYONE really need to be told to fear the walking dead? If you saw a walking corpse, would you feel anything other than fear? Or the suspicion that you'd walked into Macaulay Culkin's house. The prequel series to the mega-hit The Walking Dead is now up to season 2

on Blu-ray, and we have five copies to give away, to track the progress of Madison, Travis and the rest of them.
TO ENTER, TELL US WHICH CELEBRITY ZOMBIE YOU'D MOST LIKE TO BEHEAD WITH A MACHETE, AND WHY.



RE.VIEW GAMES



SUPER MARIO RUN

OUT **NOW / ioS DIRECTOR** Takashi Tezuka **CAST** Charles Martinet, Maritta
Viola Sattelmaier

FOR YEARS NINTENDO has jealously forbidden its characters from appearing on smartphones. No more. In Super Mario Run. Nintendo's moustachioed mascot makes the cross-platform leap, first to iPhone, then to Android. It's a familiar proposition: tour six worlds, leaping flame pits and squishing Goombas in order to save your beloved, kidnapped by a spike-shelled dinosaur. Mario now sprints automatically; you time your taps to clear traps and bounce up walls. The 24 main stages, each stuffed with secrets, are rich and challenging, but Toad Rally is where the game's genius lies. There you compete against other players around the world in short, timed stages to show off your virtuosity. **SP**



THE WALKING DEAD: A NEW FRONTIER

OUT **NOW / ANDROID, iOS, MAC, PC, PS3, PS4, VITA, 360, XB1 DIRECTORS** Rebekah Gamin Arcovitch,

Jason Latino

CAST Jeff Schine, Melissa Hutchison

WITH TWO TV shows, the long-running comic and this video game series, it must be increasingly tough to come up with a Walking Dead story that feels fresh. Telltale's third batch of playable episodes begins hewing disappointingly close to formula: there's a deserted location to raid, evil thugs to contend with and, of course, undead skulls into which to sink axes. The new lead character, meanwhile, disgraced baseball star Javier, is a little thin, with the badass Clementine back on the sidelines after taking centre stage in Season 2. Still, the visuals are richer than ever and The Walking Dead's paranoia-steeped mood remains a fine fit for Telltale's what-to-say-next gameplay. NDS



HITMAN: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON



OUT NOW FORMAT PS4

DIRECTOR Christian Elverdam **CAST** David Bateson, Jane Perry, John Hopkins

PLOT Agent 47 is commissioned to fulfil a series of assassination contracts for the International Contracts Agency (ICA). While each contract seems unrelated, soon enough a link emerges...

AT SOME POINT, Agent 47 will have to pay for all the damage he's dealt over the years. A shuddering stab of PTSD whenever he saunters into a hotel and imagines every linen basket is bulging, not with dirty laundry, but with a body, maybe. Or perhaps an inability to walk into a Mitre 10 without seeing the racks of gleaming tools as a smorgasbord of improvised weaponry. For now, however, the bald-headed killer gets to enjoy one of the major perks of being an international assassin. From the glittering blue waters of coastal Italy to the sweltering bustle of

a Marrakesh market, *Hitman: The Complete First Season* offers sights of unimaginable splendour and variety. It is quite the grand tour.

Released throughout 2016 in an episodic format that mimicked the rhythms of prestige TV rather than those of blockbuster video games, this collection brings the six main chapters and a clutch of bonus missions into one sinuous whole. It's a return to the freeform, improvisational style of the earlier *Hitman* games, where you're given a rich locale to explore and an unwitting target to eliminate. The 'how' and 'when' of the hit is, meanwhile, left up to your imagination.

In the fictional town of Sapienza, for example, which provides the location for the second chapter in the series, you're given the run of a bustling market town by the seaside. Your targets are Silvio Caruso and Francesca De Santis, members of Ether, a pharmaceutical company who have created a virus that can assassinate specific people by targeting their DNA strands. Caruso and De Santis are stationed inside a heavily guarded stately home, which you must infiltrate by disguising yourself as either a groundsman, a sports coach, a private investigator or a scientist. By eavesdropping on the locals you gather clues; then, when you finally manage to isolate your targets, you can choose the means of murder: a blunt swing of a golf club, the fix of a poison pill in a glass of water or something more spectacular, such as an explosive propane tank dropped down a chimney.





To help inspire you, the game lists a number of 'Opportunities'. Track one of these, and you'll be prodded along a certain path and timetable, where you'll be able to catch your mark in a vulnerable moment. The emphasis is on replaying each mission over and over again in order to wheedle out the many creative options in which you can assassinate or incapacitate your targets, often in troublingly hilarious ways. Then, of course, there's the challenge of executing your plan without being spotted or causing collateral damage. The buzz that comes from planning a unique execution, and then carrying it out as planned and without a mistake, is peerless.

For players who were frustrated by the previous game in the series, *Hitman: Absolution*, with its lunge towards prescribed plot lines and predefined murders, this freedom is exhilarating if sometimes daunting. With each new locale you feel the frisson of the newly landed tourist: the thrill of the unfamiliar. The urge to see and do it all and, in doing so, to understand the new rules, limits and challenges of the place. Unlike tourism, however, you always leave with blood on your gloves. The challenge is to ensure that nobody else notices. **SIMON PARKIN**

VERDICT Hitman's clutch of missions offers not only tremendous variety, but also supreme depth. Each locale provides a rich seam of interactive possibility for the imaginative, or more specifically, the imaginatively murderous.

CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

7/17 Benedict Cumberbatch's part surgeon, part sorcerer superhero (6,7)

- **8** *Than Bombs* for Jesse Eisenberg and Isabelle Huppert (6)
- 9 Simon, known to the dead as Shaun (4)
- 10 The location of Wes Anderson's Grand Hotel (8)
- 11 Top Gun-style fun for Josh Lucas (7)
- **13** For which Michael Fassbender donned a papier-mâché head (5)
- **15** Hawke lost amid Kenneth Anger (5)
- 17 See 7 Across
- **20** Director who launched the *Fast And The Furious* film franchise (3.5)
- 21 Sodium chloride or an Angelina Jolie-starrer (4)
- 22 Could be Beatty, could be Oates (6)
- 23 "You see what it wants you to see" ran the tagline for this 2013 horror movie (6)

DOWN

- Pattinson or a 2015 horror movie (6)
- 2 This 1997 thriller starred Mario Van Peebles and Andrew McCarthy (4)
- 3 Film for which Jack Lemmon won
- a Best Actor Oscar nomination in 1981 (7)
- 4 Wesley Snipe's vampire superhero (5)
- 5 Dario Argento's classic Italian horror release(8)
- 6 Could be Judd, could be Willie (6)
- 12 Federico Fellini's 1973 classic (8)
- **14** Harry Dean seen in *The Green Mile* (7)
- **16** Pierce Brosnan found himself entangled in *The Crown Affair* (6)
- **18** The bad side of Andy Serkis' *The Lord Of The Rings* character (6)
- 19 Ashen, like George Stevens' great gunfighter Western (5)
- 21 Sounds twisted, this Jason Schwartzman and John Leguizamo release (4)

JANUARY ANSWERS

ACROSS: 7 Lolita, 8 Ed Wood, 9 Gere, 10 Polanski, 11/13 Sausage Party, 15 Alice, 17 Del Toro, 20 Angry Men, 21 Nemo, 23 Rififi, 24 Thelma. DOWN: 1 Code, 2 Pixels, 3 Rampage, 4 Belle, 5 Rwanda, 6 Rock Star, 12 Atlantic, 14 Kenneth, 16 Carrie, 18 Tender, 19 Imrie, 22 Mama. ANAGRAM MICHAEL FASSBENDER





THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

ACE VENTURA: WHEN NATURE CALLS CHOSEN BY SIMON PEGG



Simon Pegg: "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls is not the best film ever made, but it boasts a sequence so brilliant in execution, so artful in set up, it deserves recognition. I love the sheer industry involved in the set-up — a series of dummy gags used to carry exposition — all to facilitate a wildly ridiculous visual gag, executed with expertise by Jim Carrey."

INT. FAKE RHINO - DAY

Ace (Jim Carrey) has constructed a fake rhino from which to surveil Burton Quinn (Bob Gunton) as he has a clandestine rendezvous with a man.

ACE: Meeting secretly with sinister types much? Ah, not too much. Ah, much too much!

Then the fan packs in. Ace taps it. It's dead. He groans, and takes off his shirt.

ACE: Kinda hot in these rhinos.

Time passes. The sun beats down. A nownaked Ace peels off his underwear with a wet plop.

ACE: WARM!

Sweat pours down his face. But then he sees Quinn hand the man an envelope.

ACE: I had a dog, and his name was... BINGO!

Quinn and the man go their separate ways.

ACE: Time to get some oxygen.

He turns the wheel to open the door, but nothing happens.

ACE: No! Come on...

The wheel comes off in his hand. Panicking, Ace thrusts his shoulder against the exit to no avail.

ACE: MAYDAY!

Now a cable breaks, covering him in fluid. Alarms begin to sound. Ace gasps for oxygen.

ACE: Must... have... air!

Ace spies a shaft of sunlight behind him.

EXT. BUSH - DAY

From outside the rhino, we see a finger poke out

from a hole in its rear end. Then Ace's arm appears. A pair of safari vehicles pull up. A family – dad, mom, two kids – gets out of the first Jeep.

DAD: Come on, girls! Quiet quiet quiet quiet... look look look.

Now Ace's head is pushing against the fabric of the rhino's rectum. It looks like...

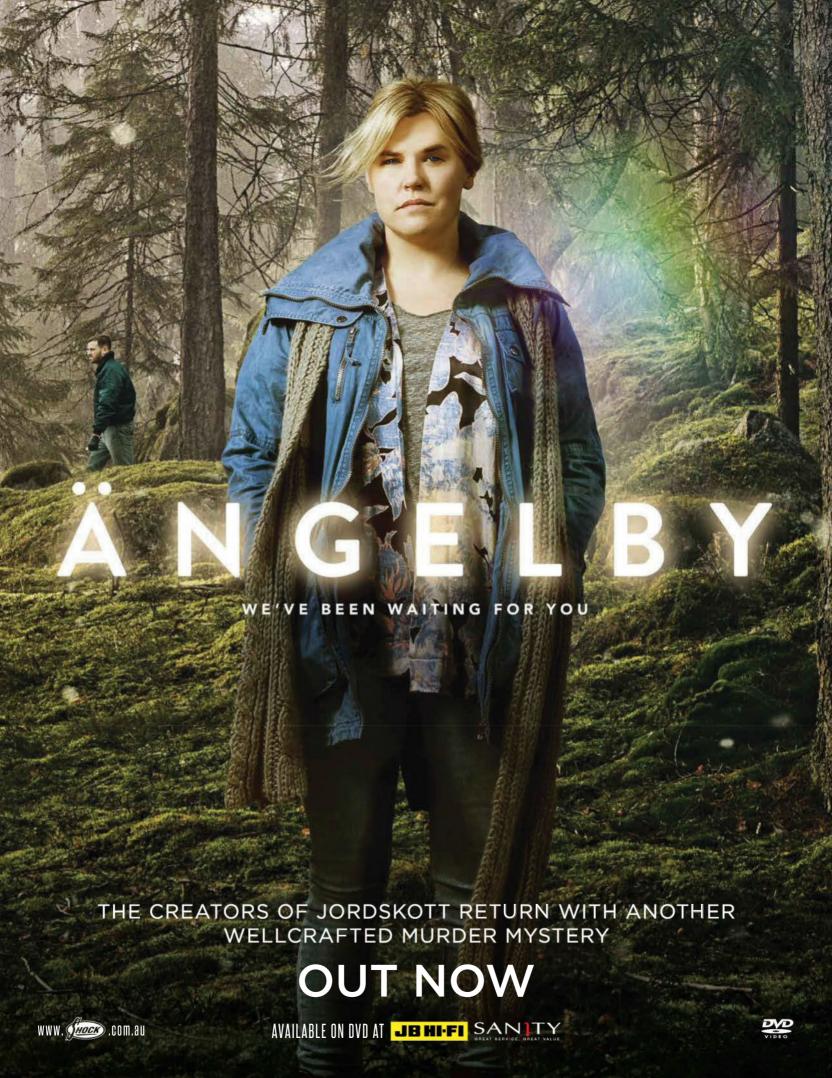
Ace's face emerges, tongue-first. He's making an inhuman squalling noise. The mother looks on and sighs, awestruck. Then, as two arms emerge from the rhino, she looks concerned. Next is Ace's head, as he begins to chew his way out of the rhino.

LITTLE GIRL: Mommy!

Now Ace's upper half slithers out. He roars like an angry walrus. The dad gags. Ace then slides out of the rhino and falls onto the ground in a foetal position. Completely naked.

LITTLE BOY: Cool!

The boy's parents don't agree. They hustle their kids back into the Jeep.



MATT DAMON

FEBRUARY 16

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