

ALIEN: COVENANT SECRETS OF SUMMER'S BIGGEST FILM!

EMPIRE

I GOT THIS!

CHRIS PRATT
TALKS GUARDIANS
OF THE GALAXY
VOL. 2

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

WONDER WOMAN

INSIDE HER 75-YEAR QUEST
TO REACH THE BIG SCREEN

ON SET!
GHOST IN
THE SHELL
IRON FIST
KING ARTHUR:
LEGEND OF
THE SWORD



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THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

IT'S BEEN A LONG WAIT. For both us and for Diana Prince. A 75-year wait, to be exact. In those almost-eight decades we've had many (many) Batmen, many (many) Supermen, a Catwoman or two and hell, even a Poison Ivy. Wonder Woman in that time has leapt off the page for a TV series and popped up in a pilot, but otherwise been denied her moment on the big screen. We call bullshit ("bullshit artist!"). As did director Patty Jenkins, who has done what so many circled around doing before and dragged this most iconic of superheroes into cinemas. We presume by the lasso.

Our first look at this very modern Wonder Woman was in *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice* last year, when Gal Gadot stole the entire movie in a total screen time of about seven minutes (don't get me started on that epic music). We've been gleefully awaiting her solo show ever since and, while we've still got that little bit longer to wait, we wanted to sate your appetite with this: a world exclusive look at how she was brought to (cinematic) life. Gal Gadot: we bow down.

This issue truly packs a punch: we have the story of *Raw*, the French-Belgian feminist horror film about a teenage cannibal; Scarlett Johansson taking names in anime adaptation *Ghost In The Shell*; an exclusive on-set report from the testosterone-soaked *Iron Fist*, and Ian McShane ducking and diving through the big interview.

I don't know about you, but as the world becomes every more off-kilter and bananas, I've never needed my arse in a cinema seat more. For a few hours, the world is not as bloody or vicious. Not even in the tale of a teen flesh-eater.

Until next time.

Terri.



TERRI WHITE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



ILLUSTRATION: DAVID MAHONEY



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CONTENTS

FEATURES

60 WONDER WOMAN

Great dialogue from the newest DC flick: "Get off my invisible plane!" "You can't handle the Lasso Of Truth!" "Where does she get those wonderwomanful toys?"

68 FREE FIRE

Ben Wheatley needs guns. Lots of guns.

74 GHOST IN THE SHELL

Scarlett Johansson boldly goes where no manga has gone before, and we follow like the lovestruck fools we are.

80 RAW

The French cannibal flick that we're giving three stars. Three Michelin stars.

86 BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Want to read an in-depth report about the latest Disney live-action animation adaptation? Be our guest. No, seriously, go on. It's a laugh.

90 THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

Ian McShane. If you love joy, but hate dead wood, this is the interview for you.

96 IRON FIST

Great dialogue from the latest Marvel/Netflix series: "Suck my fist!" "The fist is life!" "I'll fist you, Captain Evil!"

102 HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY

The story of the movie the Academy thought was better than *Citizen Kane*. Next month: the movie that's better than *Citizen Cohn*.

PRE.VIEW

10 ALIEN: COVENANT

In space, no-one can hear you call it *Prometheus 2*.

18 GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2

I am Groot. I am Groot? I am Groot.

28 BORG/MCENROE

Sverrir Gudnason is Björn Borg. Shia LaBeouf is John McEnroe. Resistance is futile.

36 HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

No, we didn't ask Dame Joan Collins how hairy her arse is, we have to draw the line somewhere. But we did talk about camel porn.



Clockwise from here: Wonder Woman; John Wick: Chapter 2; Arrival; Borg/McEnroe; Ghost In The Shell.



ON.SCREEN

38 JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2

Read this review — or the dog gets it.

40 TRESPASS AGAINST US

Fassbender! Gleeson! If you've been having withdrawal symptoms after their one scene together in *Assassin's Creed*, it's your lucky day.

46 THE GREAT WALL

We're gonna review a film about a wall. It'll be a beautiful review. Many people are saying it.

54 GIRLS: SEASON 6

Has Lena Dunham dunwell now she's dunwith her HBO sitcom? Find out here...

RE.VIEW

108 THE VIEWING GUIDE

Make an appointment with *Doctor Strange*.

114 JOHN WATERS

A divine audience with the Pope Of Trash.

116 ARRIVAL

Denis Villeneuve gives us a crash course in creating an alien language. We can now say, "Where's the library?" in Heptapod.

128 I, DANIEL BLAKE

He, Ken Loach. They, Hayley Squires and Dave Johns. We, still in bits about 2016's most important film.

SPINE LINE ANSWERS ISSUE 333: NEWSSTAND COVER: "HE HAD A VOICE THAT COULD MAKE A WOLVERINE PURR AND SUITS SO FINE THEY MADE SINATRA LOOK LIKE A HOBO" IS FROM ANCHORMAN: THE LEGEND OF RON BURGLUNDY. SUBSCRIBERS' COVER: "FREDDY KRUEGER HAS FOUR BLADES, MAN, THAT'S ONLY THREE. THAT'S WOLVERINE" IS FROM TRANSFORMERS.

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TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH



ROGUE YUM

Dear *Empire*, do you dig the attached piccie of a Yorkshire pudding that my wife made that kind of looks like the Millennium Falcon? It's the pud that made the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsnips!

I'll get my *Star Wars*-themed coat.

PHIL SLOAN, BEXLEY

To steal a joke from *The Simpsons*, hope you used the forks, Phil. Readers, have you spotted a sausage that looks like Mon Mothma or a piece of cabbage resembling the planet Hoth? Please send in photos of any *Star Wars* foodstuff lookalikes you may encounter as a matter of urgency.



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



"GREAT MEN ARE FORGED IN FIRE. IT IS THE PRIVILEGE OF LESSER MEN TO LIGHT THE FLAME." RIP JOHN HURT.

PATRICK WILLIAMS

RHYME LORD

Thank you so much for the Daleks feature. It inspired me to write this poem:
Am I human? Or am I Davros?
My chair is mobile
My heart is cold
Since I have no knees
And I look cadaverous
Am I human?
Or am I Davros?
Regards,
HENRIK HANSEN, YALDING
Thanks for this, Henrik. Please don't exterminate us.

FAKE NEWS?

Dear *Empire*,
How do we know for reals that you interview the stars etc? You could be making it all up.

ANON

We can assure you that every interview run in these pages is 100 per cent legit. As Humphrey Bogart said recently, "*Empire is on the level.*"



LISTENED TO THE @EMPIREMAGAZINE PODCAST LAST NIGHT AND HAD NIGHTMARES. PLEASE DON'T MENTION LUBE AGAIN.

@QUIZMASTERPW75

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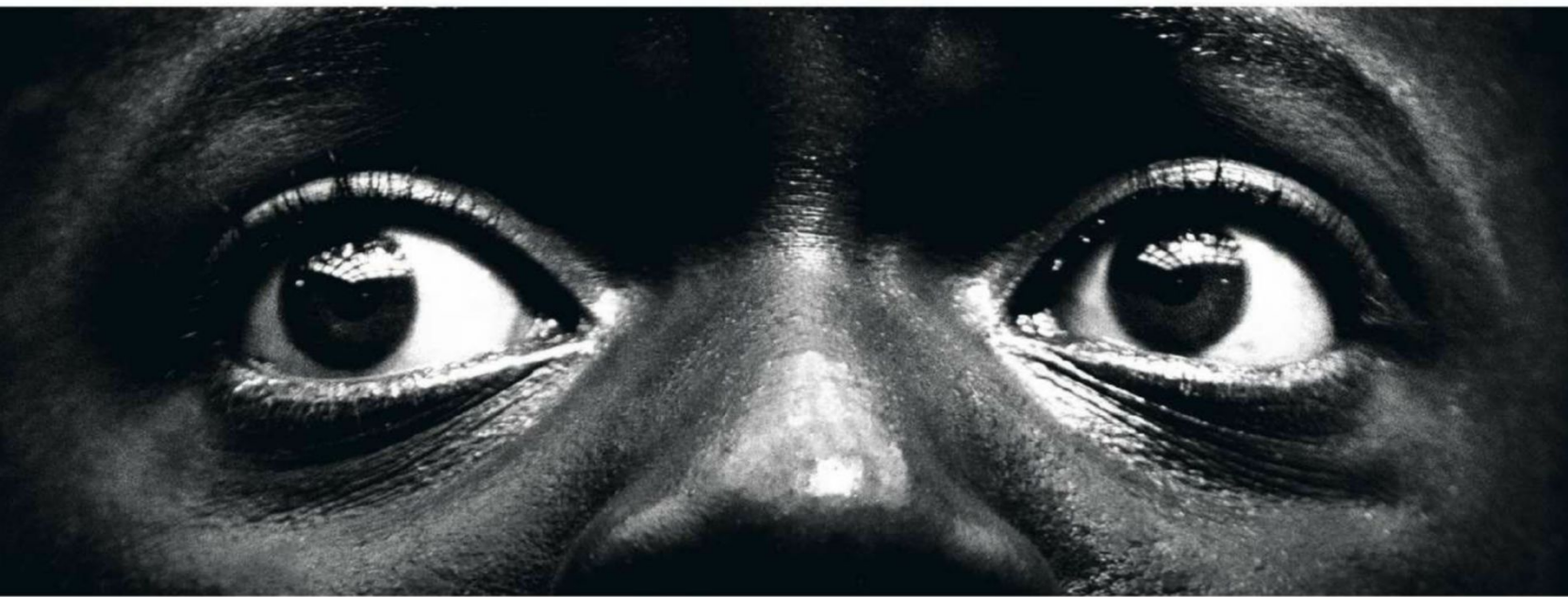
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"He hasn't gone through cup puberty."

FROM THE MIND OF JORDAN PEELE AND
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JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE INVITED,
DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE WELCOME.



GET OUT

IN CINEMAS MARCH 17





PRE.VIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY PHIL DE SEMLYEN



FIRST LOOK

**ALIEN:
COVENANT**

OUT 19 MAY

THERE WILL BE ACID BLOOD

Ridley Scott's new *Alien* promises to up the scares — and the gore — in a thrilling franchise reset

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

THE *ALIEN* FILMS have a long history of synthetic characters villainous and heroic, but *Alien: Covenant* offers the first visual evidence that Weyland-Yutani manufactures identical models on an industrial scale. That's how we get Michael Fassbender's second synthetic, Walter, joining his doppelgänger David in Ridley Scott's prequel-sequel.

So how does Walter differ from the previously beheaded David? "Walter is the next evolution of David, or several evolutions down the line," explains Fassbender. "[He was] made in a way that doesn't incorporate emotions, because, as we found out, that started to make people uncomfortable."

Alien: Covenant sees the crew of the Covenant colony ship emerge onto the surface of a new world. It's not their original destination: they have detoured to answer a distress call. And given this franchise, it's a good guess that "distress" will soon be too mild a description.

"What's great about this story is the characters are so different," says Fassbender. "They're not just filling out a spaceship, their characters have been thought about. It harks back to those really cool characters in the original *Alien*, where there are great relationships going on outside of the [alien]."

Great characters we grow to love before they're horrifically kebabed by a vicious xenomorph? Brace yourselves, because things are about to get gory.

ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

CITY OF
TINY LIGHTS

OUT 7 APRIL

ROGUE TOO

Empire sees Riz Ahmed return to his roots in a gritty London noir

WORDS WILL LAWRENCE

A DESIGNER KITCHEN in an upmarket north London home is galaxies away from the paradise planet of Scarif, or a 200-storey slum in Mega-City One. But it's no less exciting for leading man Riz Ahmed and his director, Pete Travis. The *Rogue One* star and *Dredd* director have teamed up for an adaptation of Patrick Neate's noir novel *City Of Tiny Lights*, and they think they've hit upon something special.

"This is interesting because it deals with people and places that don't often get a voice," notes Travis as he joins *Empire* at the kitchen island. "You don't often see an Asian character who isn't defined by his race."

Travis' film is shot almost exclusively after dark. The title refers not only to London's twinkling nightscape, but also its myriad lonely souls. "That's important," Travis adds. "Living somewhere like London, it is often about trying to connect with people. You get fresh opportunities every day, but people often stay rooted in the past."

At the centre of the story is Ahmed's solitary PI Tommy Akhtar, a heavy drinker who's shackled to his past. The film charts Tommy's investigation into the disappearance of a sex worker, while also cutting back to his youth, when his love for a best friend's girl (the adult version of whom is played by Billie Piper) leads to a tragedy he's yet to overcome.

The film's multicultural backdrop and its themes, from religious extremism to the prevalence of drugs, give it a real relevance. "It's great to see a British film which is really about modern Britain," says Ahmed. "Not that many contemporary British films seem to be about Britain at all."

An important scene soon unfolds in the suburban home. The kitchen belongs to one of Tommy's childhood friends, Lovely (James Floyd), and though both men shared in the tragedy that blighted their youth, the latter has left it behind. "Whereas Tommy's chained to his nostalgia and it is slowly ageing him," says Ahmed.

With the fragile hero far removed from the archetypal hardboiled gumshoe, the filmmakers feel theirs is a fresh take on the genre. If you're expecting Marlowe or Spade, think again. This is Tommy's tale, and he's cut from a different cloth.

Clockwise from above: Riz Ahmed's PI Tommy Akhtar inhabits Pete Travis' neon-soaked vision of modern London; Travis and Ahmed prep a scene; Billie Piper as Shelley, the woman who plays on Tommy's mind; The emotionally brittle investigator struggles to forget a past tragedy.





AMERICAN HORROR STORY

Jordan Peele's political horror flick *Get Out* couldn't be more timely

WORDS ALEX GODFREY

"I STARTED WRITING this film in the era I call the post-racial lie America," says Jordan Peele, pulling no punches. "After Obama was elected there was this sentiment going around that we were in this post-racial America. The movie was meant to point out that no, in fact, racism is in our DNA. It's in the marrow of the country."

Following that through, Peele busted out of the gates with the sort of debut the word "audacious" was invented for. Deftly serving up scares, thrills and incisive social commentary, *Get Out* centres on young couple Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) and Rose (Allison Williams). Off to meet her (white) parents for the first time, he's concerned that she hasn't told them he's black. She assuages his fears, but when they arrive at their country estate, there's something decidedly creepy about their cloying white liberalism. And then things get really weird.

"The intention was to bring something to the genre that nobody else has yet," says Peele. "I just felt that horror is an exploration of our real-life fears. Every great fear has a classic horror movie that deals with it.



And I haven't seen one that really captured the horror of racism since *Night Of The Living Dead*."

As half of the wild Comedy Central double-act Key & Peele, Peele has often delved into dark satire, and bringing a black perspective to mainstream horror, he says, is "a missing piece of the big conversation. Genre films are great ways to immerse somebody in the experience of the protagonist."

For that protagonist he cast British actor Kaluuya; Peele became a fan after seeing him in *Black Mirror* and *Sicario*, and initial talks with him gave Peele more confidence in the material. "I initially had concerns [over] hiring

a British actor for what I thought was a uniquely American social dynamic. But he said there are very much parallel issues going on in the UK."

Since Peele wrote *Get Out*, America has, of course, become dramatically more divided. "The film is coming out at an even more perfect time than when it was invented," he says, but he hopes everybody, no matter their politics, will see it. "More than a social commentary, it's just a good story. It has a protagonist that, whoever we are, we can all relate to."

That said, Peele's perspective is a shot in the arm. And not a moment too soon.

GET OUT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 17 MARCH



Above left: Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) wishes he'd never decided to meet the parents. **Above:** Writer-director Jordan Peele on set. **Left:** Chris and Rose (Allison Williams) have a prang en route to a weekend away they might come to regret.

[un]earth

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THE INTRO

Empire showcases tomorrow's stars today

SAMANTHA ROBINSON

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN PORTRAIT SARAH DUNN

AG — 25

PLAY — Elaine, a modern-day sorceress who uses her powers to seduce men in Anna Biller's retro fantasy *The Love Witch*.

BACK STORY — "I was born in New York, moved to the UK when I was three and stayed until I was 14. Then I moved to Miami for high school, and studied performing at UCLA. When I lived in London I trained at LAMDA... *The Love Witch* is a very theatrical, stylistic style of acting and I think my theatre training helped me."

EARLY ROLE — "I was in the chorus of *Joseph And His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* — my little taste of the West End. I was, like, ten."

THE BIG BREA — "Elaine is a woman who's been objectified her whole life and been ruined by it. She's an interesting character — she's a witch who is strong and rebellious and yet she sounds like she is a Stepford wife. I watched a lot of Liz Taylor films, Joseph Losey's *Secret Ceremony*, some Catherine Deneuve and Gene Tierney films."

NEXT U — "[*The Love Witch*] has just elevated me to a different level. Just getting a good agent. My agent said, 'This sounds like either the best film ever made or the worst.' He went to see the movie and was really blown away and signed me."

HOBBIE — "I like to dabble taking pictures on film; I like to take portraits, just random people, landscapes, everything — I'm not that great."

TELL US A JOK — "OK. Well, my dad used to tell me a joke every Hallowe'en. It's terrible, please don't judge me: 'I used to be a werewolf but I'm OK noooooooooooooooooow!' It is so cheesy."

THE LOVE WITCH IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 MARCH



Samantha Robinson,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
17 January 2017.



PREVIEW



Above: Tony (Jim Broadbent) with daughter Susie (Michelle Dockery).
Left: Charlotte Rampling plays Tony's university friend and former lover, Veronica.
Below: Producer David M. Thompson with director Ritesh Batra on location.

THE WRITE STUFF

Screenwriter Nick Payne on how to adapt a Booker Prize winner

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

1 — KEEP THE BOOK HANDY

Best known for his play *Constellations*, Nick Payne's first film script involved the formidable task of adapting Julian Barnes' ruminative 2011 Booker Prize winner, *The Sense Of An Ending*. "I've got three copies," he tells *Empire*, "with varying degrees of notes scribbled in them. I must have read the book over 40 times."

2 — FIND A CONNECTION

The story of an ageing man, Tony Webster (Jim Broadbent), reflecting on the loves and friendships of his youth, Barnes' novel chimed with Payne. "I loved that it was about memory," he explains. "How we convince ourselves we've behaved honourably, when in fact we behaved awfully."



3 — FOLLOW IN THE CHARACTERS' FOOTSTEPS

The book has a sense of place that Payne carefully replicated. "The script was boringly specific about the characters' journeys [around London]," laughs Payne. "I went to all the places in it. Even the same pub as Tony. I took the pub bit really seriously."

4 — DON'T BE AFRAID TO MAKE CHANGES

To add warmth, Payne amped up the role of Tony's daughter (Michelle Dockery). "Julian, tonally, is probably a bit chillier than I am," he says. "It's not that he's cold, but I felt Tony needed someone else present in his life to give him somewhere to go."

5 — DON'T OVERTHINK IT

Payne didn't let the book's stature weigh too heavily. "I don't know what good it would do to worry about the pressure," he laughs, "although I did take the responsibility of not fucking up his book seriously!"

THE SENSE OF AN ENDING IS IN CINEMAS FROM 14 APRIL





FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

**GUARDIANS
OF THE
GALAXY
VOL. 2**

OUT 28 APRIL

MASTER BLASTERS

The *Guardians* sequel sees Star-Lord, Gamora, Rocket and co tooling up for more mayhem

WORDS DAN JOLIN

CHRIS PRATT WANTS to make one thing very clear about *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*: “You can expect to see everything you loved in the first movie, but you’re also going to... but it... oh, I should rephrase that.” Clearing his throat, the man who plays Star-Lord (aka Peter Quill) has another go: “*Don’t* expect to see everything you saw in the first movie. But expect to be charmed and thrilled and entertained like you were watching the first movie.”

For most of us, ‘more of the same’ would have done just fine. *Guardians Of The Galaxy* was a triumph of group chemistry, interstellar spectacle and action-driven comedy. Still, writer-director James Gunn knew he had to push Peter, Drax and their fellow loveable space-rogues on to bigger challenges, with Star-Lord finally tracking down his long-lost dad, played by Kurt Russell.

For Pratt, the experience of playing Russell Jr was “humbling and exceptional. He’s surpassed any expectation I could have had.” And if you had any doubt, Russell was bang-on casting as the mysterious and “very ancient” being referred to in the first film... “Well, I don’t know how old he is,” laughs Pratt, “but he told me that when he was [doing a] TV show as a kid, he heard about this new band. Called The Beatles...” Who knows, maybe they’ll make it onto *Vol. 2*’s *Awesome Mix*.



Catrin (Gemma Arterton) and Tom (Sam Claflin) shooting their film-within-a-film. Below, from top: The pair get close behind the scenes; The fictional Starlings aboard their rescue boat.

MAKING HISTORY

Lone Scherfig's *Their Finest* tackles Dunkirk and Dunkirk

WORDS DAN JOLIN

WHEN LONE SCHERFIG signed up for British World War II comedy *Their Finest*, she didn't realise she'd be taking on Christopher Nolan. Well, not *literally*. But, in a twist of timing, it turns out she's releasing a movie about the 1940 Dunkirk evacuation three months before he is.

Though Scherfig seems as excited by Nolan's epic as she is people seeing her own film. "I'm a big fan of his," she says, "and it's so obvious someone had to tell that story. I'm really looking forward to seeing it on screen at the scale he can operate in..." The Danish director of *An Education* and *The Riot Club* pauses. "But maybe it's a good thing they come out in that order!"

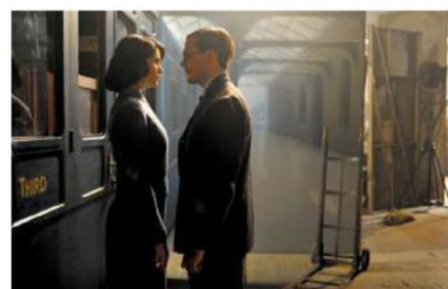
Their Finest isn't strictly a film about Dunkirk. It's a film about making a film about Dunkirk. An adaptation of Lissa Evans' novel *Their Finest Hour And A Half*, it stars Gemma Arterton as Catrin Cole, a copywriter recruited by the Ministry of Information to be "an authentic female voice" and inspire the women on the home front. Catrin's big pitch is to adapt the true (really fictional) story of twin sisters

who, during the British retreat from German-occupied France, went to sea in their dad's boat, The Nancy Starling, to help the evacuation effort.

Sent a list of '40s films (including *Millions Like Us* and *Went The Day Well?*) by producer Stephen Woolley, Arterton was impressed by "how important those films were. They were a unifier and people really needed them to keep positive. If only films were seen in that way now."

For the film-within-a-film (titled *The Nancy Starling*), Scherfig used only techniques employed in 1940: "The framing, lensing, how you pull the focus." But, she says, "It shouldn't be kitsch. It should just be right and be carried by this joy of making films and telling stories."

Their Finest features film set-chaos comedy (mostly from Bill Nighy's primadonna-ish old ham), romance (between Catrin and Sam Claflin's fellow writer, Tom) and tragedy (thanks to the Blitz), but it's primarily a story of empowerment. Though billed as a romcom, Scherfig points out



"the overall arc is Catrin finding her feet professionally and falling in love with work."

So it will be considerably different to the other Dunkirk movie. After all, as Arterton points out, "I don't think there are any women in the Christopher Nolan one..."

THEIR FINEST IS IN CINEMAS FROM 21 APRIL

THE QUOTE QUOTA

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

"THE WORLD IS BIG, BUT IT ALWAYS FITS IN YOUR HEART."

XANDER CAGE (VIN DIESEL) IN *XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE*



"NEVER KISS A WOMAN UNLESS YOU'RE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS."

DOROTHEA (ANNETTE BENING) IN *20TH CENTURY WOMEN*



"I DON'T TALK ABOUT FEELINGS, ALFRED. I DON'T HAVE ANY. I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE. I'M A NIGHT-STALKING, CRIME-FIGHTING VIGILANTE. AND A HEAVY METAL RAPPING MACHINE."

BATMAN (WILL ARNETT) IN *THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE*



"I'M A CONFIDENCE MAN, I GIVE PEOPLE CONFIDENCE, THEY GIVE ME THEIR MONEY."

PETE (GIOVANNI RIBISI) IN *SNEAKY PETE*



"RIGHT NOW, I'M THE ONLY ONE I CAN TRUST"

ERIC CARTER (COREY HAWKINS) IN *24: LEGACY*



"YOU'RE A TOURIST IN YOUR OWN YOUTH."

SICK BOY (JONNY LEE MILLER) IN *T2 TRAINSPOTTING*



From top: Kyle MacLachlan's Special Agent Dale Cooper from the original '90s series; The many trophies of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), whose death shook the town.



LYNCH PINNED

Five crucial questions about the *Twin Peaks* reboot

WORDS IAN FREER

WHEN WILL IT AIR?

Pour yourself a pot of damn fine coffee. The two-hour season opener — reputedly a real head-scrumbler — premieres at 2am GMT on Monday 22 May on Sky Atlantic, a simulcast with the US broadcast. Non-night owls can catch it on Tuesday 23 May, at the more sensible time of 9pm. Yet Showtime president David Nevins has suggested the show might not follow "a traditional release pattern", hinting at erratic episode running times. However it plays, Nevins expects it to be addictive. "We've seen the whole thing and the version of *Twin Peaks* you're going to see is the pure-heroin version of David Lynch," he said at January's Television Critics Association (TCA) showcase. "I hear heroin is a very popular drug these days!" quipped Lynch.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

At this late stage your guess is as good as ours. At the TCA event, Lynch was asked about the

1992 theatrical film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, which revolves around the last seven days of Laura Palmer. "It is very important for this," he confirmed. Sheryl Lee, who played Palmer and her cousin Maddy in the original show, is also returning, so flashback shenanigans may ensue.

WHO IS IN IT?

The TV regulars are mostly back. Newbies include Monica Bellucci, Jim Belushi, Michael Cera, Jeremy Davies, Laura Dern, Robert Forster, Balthazar Getty, Ashley Judd, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Matthew Lillard, Tim Roth, John Savage, Amanda Seyfried and Naomi Watts. Lynch has directed all 18 episodes. "I see it as a film," he said. "A film in parts is what people will experience."

IS THE OLD SERIES REQUIRED VIEWING?

Co-creator Mark Frost has acknowledged the fan base for "keeping the flame alive", then added, "At the same time, we hope a whole bunch of people want to come to the party as well." This is the equivalent of having your cherry pie and eating it.

WILL THIS BE THE END?

Ambiguity rules in *Twin Peaks* but... "It's our hope that these episodes will give the fans everything they felt they hadn't gotten the last time we left off," said Frost. Lynch is more philosophical. "Well, before I said I wasn't going to revisit it and I did. But right now, there's no plans for anything more."

TWIN PEAKS SEASON 3 IS ON SKY ATLANTIC FROM 22 MAY

6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

AMERICAN GODS

Neil Gaiman unveils his cult fantasy epic *American Gods*

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

Starz's new fantasy epic *American Gods* follows Shadow Moon (Ricky Whittle), an ex-con who encounters the mysterious Mr Wednesday (Ian McShane) and learns that ancient and modern gods are fighting a covert war in our midst. We spoke with writer Neil Gaiman to learn more.

1 IT'S HUGE TOPICAL

"If there was ever a completely right time or a completely wrong time to be making *American Gods*, it's now," says Gaiman of a show that pulls no punches in its diverse casting or its story. "It's about America as an immigrant country, which I think the people currently running America would like to be forgotten. Either people will love us or, at this point in time, they will lynch us."

2 IT'S BIGGER THAN THE BOOK

This first season will cover about a third of Gaiman's novel, with showrunner Bryan Fuller saying he wants to make the book into the "Reader's Digest" version of a more expansive story. But he's not just adding extra plot. "As you go further in, you get more detail," explains Gaiman.

3 IT'S PAINSTAKINGLY CAST

The casting process for Shadow was "maddening, terrifying, weird", says Gaiman. *The 100*'s Ricky Whittle was initially low in the top ten. But "his auditions kept getting sharper", he continues. "You thought, [this Shadow is] making the best of a really weird situation. His head is broken a little bit but he's hanging in there."

4 THE DEAD WILL LIVE AGAIN

A bumped-up role is that of Shadow's wife Laura (Emily Browning), who keeps trying to reconnect with her husband despite her death. "She's a huge, important character even in the book," says Gaiman, "[but here] we're finding out, what is she doing when she's off-page?"

5 YOU'LL RECOGNISE THE GODS

The New Gods have had an upgrade, with the novel's "Technical Boy", a basement-dwelling nerd, now closer to Mark Zuckerberg. "Bryan had to convince me," recalls Gaiman. "He was like, 'Now those people are still irritating nerds, but they're vaping hipsters.' He was right."

6 THERE'S LOTS MORE TO COME

Gaiman is working on a sequel to the novel but he rarely had to pull the showrunners back. "It's tended to go more the other way. I could say, 'This is what I'm planning, which means *this* character is important, so cast her well.'" If this first season works, these Gods could be here to stay.

AMERICAN GODS IS ON AMAZON PRIME VIDEO
THIS SPRING

Old allies Mr Wednesday (Ian McShane) and god of weaponry and fire Vulcan (Corbin Bernsen) with Shadow Moon (Ricky Whittle). **Below, top to bottom:** Shadow Moon scuffles with leprechaun Mad Sweeney (Pablo Schreiber) in Jack's Crocodile Bar; Yetide Badaki as ancient goddess of love Bilquis; Neil Gaiman on set for Take 1.



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ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

THE AUTOPSY OF JANE DOE

OUT SUMMER TBC
(LIMITED RELEASE:
31 MARCH)

DEATH DUTIES

Emile Hirsch and Brian Cox will
get under your skin. Literally

WORDS SIMON CROOK

SCENE 230, TAKE Five. Bent over a brightly lit mortuary slab, Emile Hirsch and Brian Cox are rummaging inside a corpse spatchcocked like a chicken. “What the hell?” Cox mutters as he tweezers a package from the guts. Wrapped inside an inscribed shroud is a human tooth. Never mind how it got there: Cox is struggling to pull the bloody thing out. Not for the first time, the take collapses into laughter. This really is next-level corpsing.

“You need a sense of humour when you’re making a horror as intense as this,” says Cox as he wipes his blood-spattered apron. “But this set is particularly claustrophobic. I think we’re starting to go a bit stir-crazy.” You can sense morgue fever setting in: between takes, Hirsch has sculpted a huge balloon animal out of inflated surgical gloves.

The two actors have spent a month bunkered inside an East End warehouse converted into a creepy Virginia mortuary. Set over one night, *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* casts Cox and Hirsch as father-son coroners attempting to work out the cause of death of an unidentified female. What starts as a whodunnit mutates into a what-the-hell-is-it as the pristine corpse reveals a new secret with every incision. Imagine a supernatural *CSI* realised with 100 per cent medical accuracy: to prep Hirsch visited LA County Morgue, there’s an alarmingly jolly coroner on set as autopsy advisor, and the Jane Doe on the slab is an actor, Olwen Catherine Kelly, playing dead. Kelly tells *Empire* it took a year to master invisible breathing.

Described by producer Eric Garcia as “part *Seven*, part *The Shining*”, *Jane Doe* is the highly anticipated English-language debut of André Øvredal, who directed *Trollhunter* back in 2010. Why the delay? “I spent two years developing a Chris Columbus movie, *Carpe Demon*,” he says. “When it fell through, I went looking for a pure horror script and found it in *Jane Doe*. The screenplay’s been on Hollywood’s Black List and it’s smart, tight and very scary.” So terrifying, in fact, that Stephen King has declared its body-horrors a “rival to *Alien* and early Cronenberg”. Pardon the pun, but prepare to be scared stiff...

**Clockwise from
above:** Olwen
Catherine Kelly keeps
her feet very, very still
as the mysterious
corpse; Emma
(Ophelia Lovibond),
Austin (Emile Hirsch)
and Sheriff Sheldon
(Michael McElhatton)
bring Jane in; Tommy
(Brian Cox) and
Austin prepare for the
autopsy; Director
André Øvredal with
Hirsch and Lovibond
on set.



THE DEBATE

ARE MOVIES GETTING TOO LONG?

With blockbusters and awards season releases now routinely breaching the two-hour mark, we ask if it's time for Hollywood to remember that short can also be sweet

ILLUSTRATIONS DAVID MAHONEY



YES
CHRIS HEWITT
ASSOCIATE
EDITOR/EMPIRE
PODCAST HOST

THE OTHER DAY I wanted to take my wife to the cinema (paid for with actual money; not one of these fancy-dan screenings where you are given sandwiches and can't laugh too loudly in case you offend the bloke from the *Daily Mail*), so I called up a popular movie times app on my phone. And realised that Hollywood has a major problem.

The app, you see, not only lists start times for films, but their running time. Choices included Scorsese's *Silence* (two hours, 41 minutes), *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (two hours, 14 minutes), and *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* (two hours, 13 minutes). Even the knockabout comedy option *Why Him?* clocked in at almost two hours. This is a John Holmes scenario: too much length can be a bad thing.

Don't get me wrong. I love to luxuriate in a long movie. Wallowing in a perfectly calibrated epic is one of the greatest pleasures in cinema, whether it's *JFK* or *Lawrence Of Arabia*. But there's an undeniable appeal to a story that gets in and out again with the minimum of fuss. My favourite movie, *Evil Dead II*, manages to cram every camera move known to man into 82 minutes. More should follow its example.

These days it's rare to find a movie that needs to be as long as it is, or doesn't outstay its welcome. Blockbusters, in particular, have a bloat problem. We have so many sequels and shared universes that movies are clogged with acres of exposition and characters who have to do *something* just because people liked them in the last movie. Or it could be that directors are becoming increasingly indulgent, and are being increasingly indulged. And in some cases, it could be both. Did *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice* have to be two-and-a-half hours long? For all its excellence, could *Captain America: Civil War* (at just two hours, 26 minutes) have stood to lose a scene or two?

Hollywood is under threat as people balk at going to the cinema, sitting through trailers and

ads, then ploughing through a long movie and slogging home again, when you can watch an entire season of TV in not much more time. (Yes, that's what my wife and I did on the night in question). Perhaps the movie studios have made an unspoken pact to combat this by going longer, but perhaps the smart play lies in the opposite direction. Go shorter, a little snappier. Free sandwiches wouldn't hurt either.



NO
IAN FREER
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

ALFRED HITCHCOCK ONCE said the length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder. In that case, call me Titanium Bladder. I love long, slow





Hold on: *Silence* is 161 minutes long.

movies. I would have been happy if Omar Sharif's camel in *Lawrence Of Arabia* started from even further back. So this notion that films are somehow suddenly too long mystifies me. If nothing else, if you love movies — truly love movies — where else would you rather be than lost in a long movie?

It's a whinge that particularly emerges around awards season. Take Martin Scorsese's 161-minute *Silence*. It's a film that needs to etch a priest's undulating relationship to faith, so to make that feel real, nuanced and palpable, you can't knock it out in an hour-and-a-half. Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* uses all of its 162 minutes to earn the emotion in a shifting, touching father-daughter relationship. Length doesn't guarantee importance or quality, but the long running time can gift you an amazing, deeply satisfying experience without requiring the commitment of a Netflix series.

Historically, as suggested by research conducted by professional number cruncher Dr Randal Olson, movie running times are cyclical. They get longer or shorter in response to external factors. For example, in the '50s and '60s, the average movie length increased by 20

minutes to 130 minutes to create a more value-for-money, epic feel as a means to challenge the rise of TV. The emergence of video in the '70s/'80s saw average running times shorten because VHS couldn't handle the longer runtimes. It is perhaps here where the idea that short equals good/palatable among modern audiences is birthed. This generation, weaned on watching '80s classics and battered by attention-shortening social media, would feel that anything over two hours is *looong*, but the reality is we are just moving back to a pre-'80s average.

Much of the current debate around the length of films is centred on superhero films. The idea is that so-called blockbusters should be short, zippy and fun yet lest we forget, *Superman The Movie* runs 137 minutes and it doesn't matter a jot. In fact, the popular hits of the golden age of the '70s — *The Godfather* (176 minutes), *Jaws* (124 minutes), *Star Wars* (121 minutes) — regularly crown the two-hour mark. So surely this is the rub. If you're watching *The Godfather*, you're golden. If you're watching *Batman v Superman...*

PRODUCTION NOTES

Movies and TV shows in the works



1_

Michelle Williams is in negotiations to join Jonah Hill's directorial debut *Mid '90s*. Written by Hill, it's a fictionalised account of his coming of age in LA. Williams will play the mother after tackling Janis Joplin biopic, *Janis*.



2_

Fresh from awards love for *Moonlight*, Naomie Harris goes blockbuster for *Rampage*, based on the arcade game about giant monsters. Speaking of which, Dwayne Johnson also stars. *San Andreas*' Brad Peyton directs.



3_

Shane Black's *The Predator* adds *Room*'s Jacob Tremblay to an already impressive cast of Olivia Munn, Boyd Holbrook and Keegan-Michael Key. He will play an autistic kid with a facility for languages — great for alien hunting.



4_

Serenity — nothing to do with *Firefly* — sees Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway re-team following *Interstellar*. Little is known about the plot, but Steven Knight's script reputedly has 'film noir' elements.





FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

**BORG/
MCENROE**

OUT SUMMER 2017

MATCH OF THE CENTURY

*Borg/McEnroe serves up
the greatest tennis rivalry
in history*

WORDS IAN FREER

“WE’RE NOT WAVING tennis racquets around for the sake of it,” says *Borg/McEnroe* director Janus Metz Pedersen. “Tennis is such a psychologically driven sport. It all comes down to what it means for Borg or McEnroe at a particular moment.”

The match at the heart of Pedersen’s film is the legendary 1980 Wimbledon final billed as a battle of opposites: Borg (Sverrir Gudnason) was the ice-cool hero, McEnroe (Shia LaBeouf) the hot-headed bad boy. With contemporary Wimbledon looking far too modern, the stadium was recreated in Prague with Gudnason and LaBeouf replicating every shot of the four-hour final (“like a ballet” says LaBeouf), the fluffy balls added in digitally later.

“Even their playing style becomes part of telling the story,” says Pedersen. “Borg was a baseline player. He put a lid on his emotions even while he was fuming on the inside. John McEnroe played serve and volley very aggressively, always tried to dominate the points. Even in their tennis, you have traces of two very different ways of being.”

For LaBeouf, recreating tennis history was punishing. “Some of our most emotional shit is in that final,” he says. “You are prepping heavy scenes but you’re also running full-speed and trying to keep your breath. It was intense, very full-throttle. We left it all on the field.” Or the centre court.

MAKE MOVIE HISTORY!

The Three Empire Awards winners are in your hands...

THE THREE EMPIRE AWARDS 2017, with a city of stars bigger than *La La Land*, is back on 19 March. Following the initial round of voting, the *Empire* readership has created a stunning shortlist of candidates marked by the impeccable taste that comes from the most film-savvy audience on the planet. Which makes the task ahead of you now even more challenging. This shortlist has to be whittled down to the winners who will grace the stage of London's Roundhouse to collect the coveted awards. Let's face it. Stealing Death Star plans is a doddle in comparison.

The past 12 months have been a banner year for movies of every stripe. At the blockbuster end of the scale, the shortlist gives us the derring-do suicide mission of Gareth Edwards' *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* and the cerebral sci-fi of Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*. If indie drama is your bag, *Manchester By The Sea*, Kenneth Lonergan's heartbreaking study of loss, and *I, Daniel Blake*, Ken Loach's searing social polemic, lead a strong field. And if you have a jones for Bittersweet Throwback Musicals, then *La La Land* has your back. In the acting categories, you can



choose from the likes of Felicity Jones, Emma Stone, Hayley Squires and Amy Adams (so rudely overlooked by the Oscars). Or Dave Johns, Ryan Gosling, Casey Affleck and Ryan Reynolds.

To cast your crucial vote, just head on over to empireonline.com/awards and choose away. Of course, don't forget to keep an eye on @empiremagazine on Twitter for the latest updates and all the build-up to the big night. And remember, not only do you help cultivate the most credible list of awards winners around, you could also be in with a chance to win a pair of tickets to attend the awards itself. So don't delay. *Empire* needs you!



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EMPIRE AWARDS 2017

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BEST FILM
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SKY CINEMA

BEST TV SERIES
PRESENTED BY
MAGIC

**BEST MALE
NEWCOMER**

**BEST BRITISH
FILM**
PRESENTED BY
THE HOLLYWOOD
REPORTER

**BEST FEMALE
NEWCOMER**

BEST SCREENPLAY

**BEST SCI-FI/
FANTASY**

**BEST
DOCUMENTARY**

BEST COMEDY
PRESENTED BY
ABSOLUTE

BEST SOUNDTRACK

BEST HORROR

**BEST COSTUME
DESIGN**

BEST THRILLER

**BEST MAKE-UP
AND HAIRSTYLING**

**BEST
ANIMATED FILM**

**BEST VISUAL
EFFECTS**

BEST ACTOR
PRESENTED BY
THREE

BEST USE OF 3D

BEST ACTRESS
PRESENTED BY
THREE

BEST SHORT FILM

BEST DIRECTOR
PRESENTED BY
VUE ENTERTAINMENT

**BEST PRODUCTION
DESIGN**

BEST GAME

**Absolute
Radio**

**Hollywood
REPORTER**

**ROUND
HOUSE**

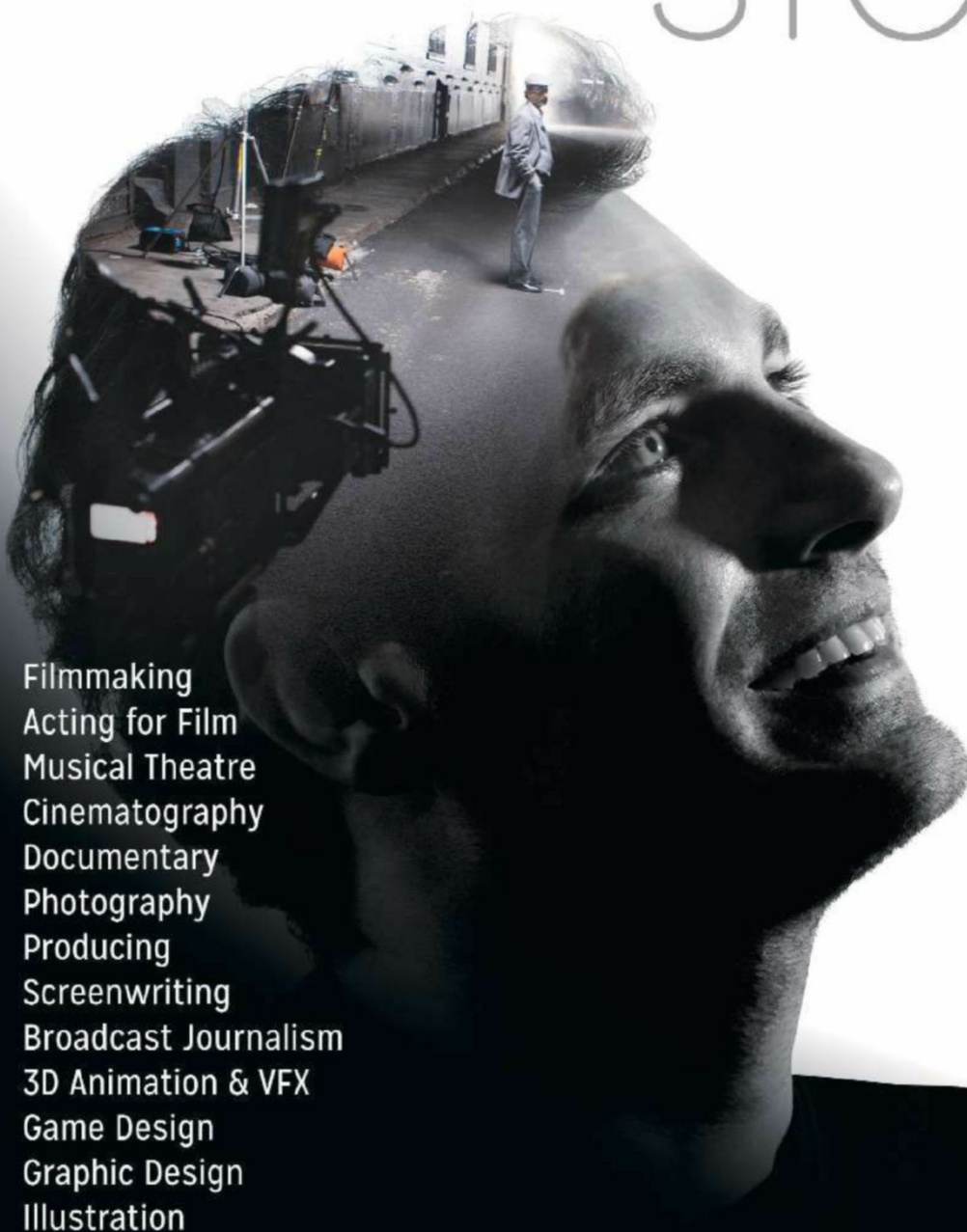
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NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

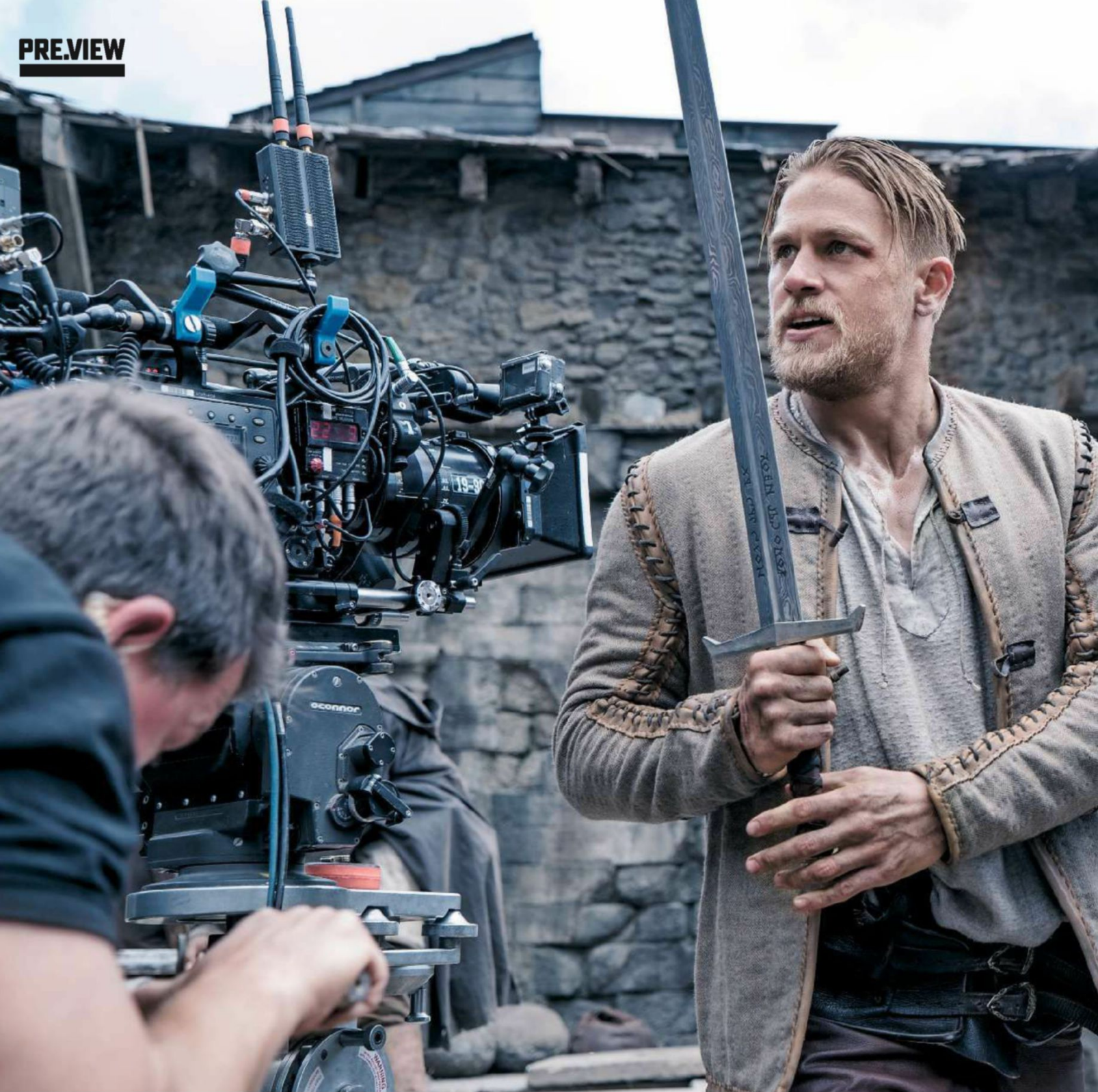


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ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

KING ARTHUR:
LEGEND OF
THE SWORD

OUT 12 MAY

URBAN LEGEND

Britain's greatest myth gets
the Guy Ritchie spin

WORDS DAN JOLIN

ARTHUR, TRUE KING of the Britons, is addressing the land's eight greatest barons, calling them to war. He stands on a hillock in the Forest Of Dean, decked in a brown leather jacket, his blond hair cropped short: a modern-looking figure in a dark-age setting. And he's not happy. "You lot," he announces, "haven't got a bollock among you."

This is what happens when you let Guy Ritchie loose on a legend. "The fundamental challenge with King Arthur is to make him likeable," the director tells *Empire*. "If you're not careful, he's worthy. And once someone's worthy they're not likeable. So we had to create a character naughty enough for us to like him and simultaneously have him go on a journey that makes him respectable."

That journey will involve a magic sword, a throne-usurping uncle (Jude Law's Vortigern) and giant monster-elephants. Despite all that, Ritchie wants this story's boots planted firmly in the muck of the streets, so his Arthur, played by Charlie Hunnam, was raised in a brothel in a crumbling, post-Roman Londinium (represented by a sprawling set at Leavesden Studios). "He's more streetwise and rough around the edges than most of the Arthurs we've seen," Hunnam explains. "He's a wide-boy scoundrel with a heart of gold, who has a healthy disdain for the ruling class."

Meanwhile, Ritchie's dark-age Britain, says the director, "was gonna be a rather dour, gloomy world..." until modern-day Britain refused to cooperate. On this late April morning of 2015 it is, as Ritchie puts it, "fucking stunning" in the forest. The trees are vivid green. A warm breeze sends dandelion seeds dancing through the scene. Sunlight plays on mossy ground.

"There's all this tough-speak going on, and you have all these fluffy seed-pods blowing around!" laughs Ritchie. "Not the aesthetic I was going for." But he's not fazed. "I've learned that if you've got *this* in mind, then you get *that*. So you work with that." Which means the most surprising thing about Guy Ritchie's take on the fantasy genre will not be his street-king Arthur, but the fact that, as he says, "It looks like fucking fantasy!"

Clockwise from above: Charlie Hunnam's Arthur gets to grips with magical sword Excalibur; Arthur's nemesis, the tyrannical, crown-filching Vortigern, played by a suitably grim-faced Jude Law; Director Guy Ritchie (centre) joins his leads in the cells; Vortigern plots more dastardly deeds.



JOHN HURT 1940-2017

Empire pays tribute to the talents of a true acting legend

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

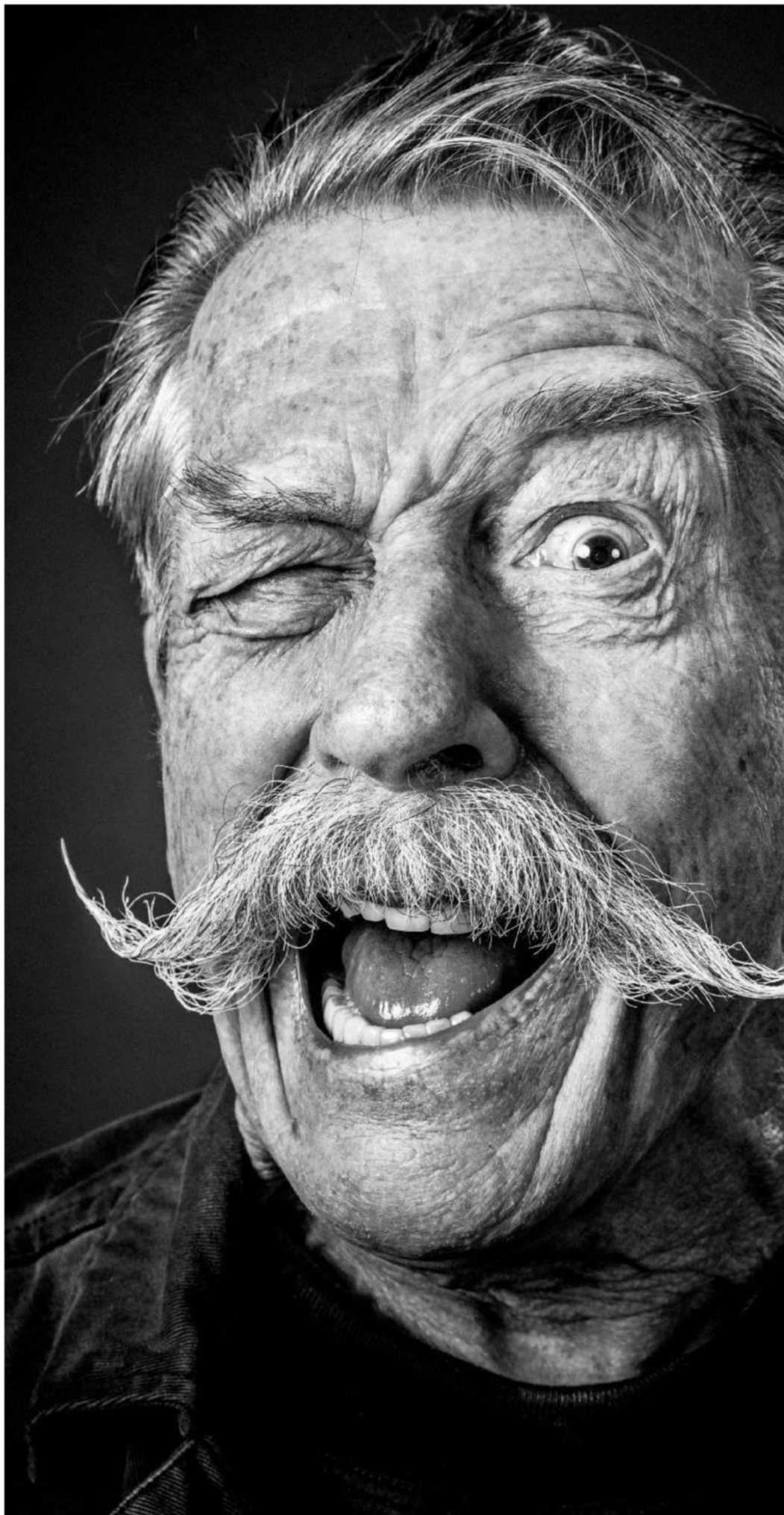
HERE'S SOMETHING YOU can try at home. Gather together a group of friends and ask them to name their favourite John Hurt performance. Chances are no two people will pick the same turn. That says it all about the versatility of one of Britain's greatest screen actors. There was no shortage of great roles in the Hurt locker.

He was an actor of great tenderness and compassion, teasing tears from the toughest of ducts even when buried under a swathe of prosthetics in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (for which he was nominated for an Oscar, losing to an actor buried under a swathe of blubber, *Raging Bull*'s Robert De Niro).

He had a gift for whimsy, as evidenced in the *Hellboy* movies. He could be tragic (*1984* and *Scandal*). He could be sinister (his ranting dictator in *V For Vendetta* is more relevant and chilling than ever). He was an actor who could do anything, and proved it by doing everything.

He was so talented, in fact, that he endured things that would have floored lesser people, let alone lesser actors. He starred in *Heaven's Gate* and continued to get work. And, most famous of all, he had an alien rip its way out of his ribcage and lived to tell the tale.

It's easy to think that *Alien*, and the role of Kane, the first member of the crew of the Nostromo that we see and the first to die (as it was, sadly, in real life), was Hurt's breakthrough





Clockwise from main: John Hurt in 2014; As Max with Brad Davis' Billy in *Midnight Express*; Playing Winston Smith in 1984 movie *1984*; As John Merrick in David Lynch's 1980 adaptation of *The Elephant Man*; The doomed Kane, alongside Tom Skerritt's Dallas in *Alien* (1979).

on the big screen. In truth, he'd been around for a decade and more, with an excellent supporting turn in *A Man For All Seasons* under his belt. He'd even been nominated for an Oscar just the year before for his heart-wrenching performance in *Midnight Express*.

But Ridley Scott's *Alien*, and that dinner table scene where Kane's sudden bout of indigestion turns into something no amount of Rennies could remedy, made one heck of a splash. Literal and figurative. And make no mistake — being an active participant in one of the greatest death scenes in cinema history could have confined Hurt to a career of pigeonholing, typecasting and, "Hey, aren't you...?" encounters in the street. Just ask Janet Leigh, who struggled to emerge from *Psycho*'s shower.

Hurt, though, strode fearlessly onwards. So much so he was even able to take the piss out of *Alien*, recreating the chestbuster scene for Mel Brooks in *Spaceballs* ("Not again!"). Perhaps it was his prolific nature that dulled the impact (he had 145 movie credits to his name at the time of his death, with four more to come). Perhaps it was the diversity of a career that could take in *Harry Potter* one minute, *Dogville* the next. He just kept doing whatever interested him, whether it was a voiceover gig (he was the first actor to play Aragorn, for Ralph Bakshi's *The Lord Of The Rings*; Bakshi tweeted that most of Hurt's performance was nailed in first takes), or

TV, where he acted alongside Muppets (Jim Henson's *The Storyteller*), breathed life into a dragon (*Merlin*) and shocked everyone by showing up as The War Doctor in *Doctor Who*.

Or perhaps it was just that he was so bloody good. With his rumpled sofa of a face and his overflowing Friday-night ashtray of a voice, he was born to be a character actor. And few were better at imbuing their eyes with wickedness, wit and wisdom.

He died in January following a battle with cancer which had forced him to bow out of what would have been his last stage role, opposite Kenneth Branagh in *The Entertainer*. His last screen role — as Neville Chamberlain in Joe Wright's *Darkest Hour* — will be seen later this year. But he can be most recently seen in a small role as an Irish priest in *Jackie*. It's a movie that's been all about Natalie Portman's remarkable performance as Jackie Onassis, but from the second Hurt turns up, looking understandably tired and frail with close-cropped white hair and a goatee, you can't take your eyes off him as he guides Jackie through a major decision. It might be too slight for consideration when discussing his best performances, but it reminds us that here was an actor who couldn't do anything other than tell the truth. Here was an actor whose intelligence and innate decency shone through. Here was an actor who will be bloody well missed.

HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

DAME JOAN COLLINS

Does the *Dynasty* diva know her dairy?

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN



Which movie have you seen the most?

It's a tie between *Some Like It Hot* and *Gone With The Wind*. I've seen *Gone With The Wind* about 30 times. I don't think two other actors have ever achieved as much glamour and charisma [as Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable].

Do you have a nickname?

Some people call me JC, some people call me Jace. There's also DJC and Joanie. I don't mind which one they use, but I quite like JC.

Do you have a signature dish?

It's spaghetti Bolognese. I learnt to make it when I was making *Esther And The King* in Rome. It's my go-to dish when I have my children and grandchildren over, and it's fabulous. You simmer it for a very long time, with plenty of onion, tomatoes and olive oil.

When were you most starstruck?

I was completely starstruck by Robert [F.] Kennedy. I met him at [Moon River singer] Andy Williams' house and I thought he was absolutely wonderful. He told me he'd enjoyed a movie I'd been in, *The Girl In The Red Velvet Swing*. I was desperately upset when he was assassinated; he would have made a fantastic President.

Whose poster was on your wall growing up?

I had lots, like Danny Kaye and Marlon Brando. I was a big movie fan.

Have you ever walked out of a film?

Yes, last year. I'm not going to tell you what it was. What would make me leave the cinema? Boredom, really. Violence as well.

Who or what did you play in your school play?

It was a Greek drama called *Alceste* and I played the lead. I was 14, so it was quite a long time ago [laughs]. I was told by my acting teacher at school that I had "a lot of potential".

What thing do you do better than anyone else?

Oh my god! Enjoy my life to the hilt? I design clothes. I would say I design a good 50 per cent of my clothes.

Do you have any tattoos?

Are you kidding?! Never, ever, ever.

How much is a pint of milk?

I only drink organic milk and I know it's really expensive. Around £1.70? How much is bog-standard Sainsbury's milk? Maybe 80p? I go to Waitrose, so I think it's more expensive [laughs].

What's the worst smell in the world?

It used to be my next-door neighbours, but luckily they've moved. It was the smell of their cooking, and they left their garbage out.

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

I'm very careful of what I put in my mouth, because I almost died from eating a bad oyster. I won't eat anything that lives at the bottom of the sea.

What's your earliest memory?

Being in the car with my mother and father coming back from a day at my grandmother's and seeing firemen outside our building because our flat had burnt down — definitely something you remember!

What's your favourite animal?

The camel. I think it started when I first came to Hollywood aged 20 and I became enamoured of palm trees. I started collecting pictures of palm trees and a lot of them had camels in them. I thought, "That's a really different animal," and I started collecting camels in brass, silver, ceramics and paintings. I've got rid of it now, but I had a huge collection. I like dromedaries too.

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EDITED BY JONATHAN PILE



NEVER try to steal
Keanu's cab.

CINEMA

JOHN WICK:
CHAPTER 2

OUT 10 FEBRUARY
CERT 15 / 122 MINS

DIRECTOR Chad Stahelski

CAST Keanu Reeves, Ian McShane, Common, Ruby Rose, Lance Reddick, Riccardo Scamarcio, Laurence Fishburne, Bridget Moynahan

PLOT Legendary hitman John Wick (Reeves) travels to Europe to take on a contract against his will, triggering a chain of events that puts him firmly in the sights of the world's greatest assassins.

OF ALL THE characters Keanu Reeves has played since hanging up Neo's sunglasses a decade and change ago, it's probably fair to say he didn't expect John Wick to be the one to stick around. When the hirsute hitman first showed up in the self-titled 2014 film, it seemed to be just another entry in the recent cycle of geriaction movies (although Reeves, then just about to hit 50, might have balked at the description). That year alone it shared multiplex time with Denzel Washington's *The Equalizer*, Kevin Costner's *3 Days To Kill* and the granddaddy of them all, Liam Neeson in *Taken 3*.

On the surface, *John Wick* seemed the same old guff about a world-class assassin called out of a peaceful retirement when he loses something near and dear to him. But from the off it was perfectly coiffed head and shoulders above the competition, with a slick, seriously stylish swagger and a darker, more playful wit (it's not the death of Wick's wife that puts him back in the game, but his new puppy and the theft of his car). It did well enough to warrant a second go-round.

The title *Chapter 2* indicates that it's part of a larger work, and the predictable play would be to simply ape the contours of the first movie. For a while, that's where this seems to be going, picking up almost immediately after the first movie ends with a protracted and preposterous sequence of car-fu. From there it slides into familiar territory — an attack on Wick's home, the presence of Thomas Sadoski's friendly cop Jimmy ("You workin' again, John?"), a visit to hitman hotel The Continental, with its enigmatic front desk manager Charon (Reddick) and gregarious manager Winston (McShane). Only the dog is different.

Then, against his will, bound by a blood debt to slimy gangster Santino (Scamarcio), Wick winds up in Italy and the game dramatically changes. After a fun montage where Wick suits up, tools up and checks into the Rome branch of The Continental (looking worthy of a great TripAdvisor review), the film begins to move away from the predictable rhythms of a retread. The original movie had a quirky vein running throughout in the form of its criminal underworld governed by contracts and honour, where

bespoke gold coins are the currency. *Chapter 2* expands upon that mythology and in doing so doubles down on the weirdness. One scene where Wick prepares to take down a mark suddenly lurches into a wholly unexpected and quieter reflection on mortality and guilt. Derek Kolstad's screenplay never quite heads in the direction you expect. As chapters go, this is quite the page-turner.

Still, an action film can be as stylish and odd as all get-out, but it matters not if it skimps on the actual action. That's not an issue here. Returning director Chad Stahelski, operating this time without creative partner David Leitch, crafts a succession of stunning slaughter scenes as the plot kicks in and Wick — using that peculiar stab/shooting method of his — finds himself dealing with some of the world's best assassins. Gorgeously shot by DP Dan Laustsen, only one sequence — an escape attempt through Roman catacombs — outstays its welcome.

And when the brutality (there are more headshots here than on a casting director's desk) threatens to overwhelm, Stahelski leavens the tone with traces of sly humour. You'll smile at Laurence Fishburne's knowing cameo, making this a *Matrix* reunion. You'll laugh at a sequence where Wick and one rival take sly, silenced potshots at each other in a crowded public area, like kids playing cops and robbers with their fingers.

And striding through it all like a coutured colossus is Reeves. Keanu famously means "cool breeze over the mountains" in Hawaiian. Here it should stand for "cool beard shoots you in the face". Wick is a man of few words but many bullets — it's a role that fits the taciturn Reeves like a glove. Few actors can boast one great action role. With this, Neo, *Speed*'s Jack Traven and *Point Break*'s Johnny Utah, Reeves is up to four. Not bad for a geriaction star. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT A brutal, bruising bullet ballet of a sequel that builds upon the promise of the original. Characters keep asking if John Wick is back. Yeah, we're thinking he's back.



Fassbender was floored by the Gloucestershire countryside's unique gravitational pull.

CINEMA

TRESPASS AGAINST US



OUT 3 MARCH
CERT 15 / 100 MINS

DIRECTOR Adam Smith

CAST Michael Fassbender, Brendan Gleeson, Lyndsey Marshal, Rory Kinnear, Sean Harris

PLOT The Cutlers are an outlaw clan feared by others in their Gloucestershire traveller community. Patriarch Colby (Gleeson) cares nothing for authority and masterminds stately home raids. But his son Chad (Fassbender) craves a better life for his own children, and plans to break free.

OF THE FEW things *Assassin's Creed* got right, the casting of Brendan Gleeson as Michael Fassbender's father stood out in the muddled video game adaptation as one that made perfect sense. So it's a treat to get a film so soon after which allows these two magnetic Irish actors to fully explore a father/son relationship across its entire running time, rather than during a brief respite from some magic-apple-chasing parkour.

The setting couldn't be more different. In

Trespass Against Us we find Fassbender and Gleeson in a ramshackle caravan compound, where a model of a policeman is used for target practice by catapult-wielding scamps, and Gleeson's heavy-set, small-time crime lord Colby holds court at the campfire.

As his illiterate son Chad, Fassbender has the tougher role, playing a man who knows no other life than the school-shunning, smash-and-grab antics encouraged by his dad, but who is desperate to slip free to do right by his own kids. Still, he pulls it off — successfully portraying a man strong enough to start planning an escape, yet exasperatingly weak enough to still be there at his age. Gleeson, meanwhile, is a joy to behold, gifted with dialogue such as, “Nobody is about to tell me I came from the arse of an ape,” and one gloriously illogical rant at a police officer which concludes with the punchline, “Hell hath no fury like a locked-up super-goat.” Colby is monstrous, but depicted with a welcome light touch.

Both men, it should be noted, are loosely based on members of real-life crime family The Johnsons, aka “the Godfathers of Cheltenham”, with Colby and Chad no more presented as typical of the traveller community than Don and Michael Corleone were of Italian-Americans. And though director Adam Smith (here making his feature debut, after the superbly immersive

Chemical Brothers concert movie *Don't Think*) had once planned to make a documentary about the Johnsons, he and cinematographer Eduard Grau (*A Single Man*, *Suffragette*) allow for some gently lyrical flourishes that lift the film above the expected grimy docu-drama feel. There are a pair of inventive car-chases, too, one with Chad at the wheel of motor whose windscreen is covered in paint, but for a letterbox-sized view hole.

There are missteps, though. The script (by Alastair Siddons) is let down by its weaker female roles — Chad's daughter Mini (Kacie Anderson) is sidelined by the narrative neatness of his focus on his son, Tyson (Georgie Smith), while Lyndsey Marshal has little to do in her stand-by-your-man other-half role. And the treatment of a mentally challenged character played by Sean Harris leaves an unfortunately sour taste.

It's also frustrating that the promised drama of the family rift never truly catches fire, instead building to a climax that never really comes. But through all this Smith remains true to his central pairing, putting that complex relationship before melodramatic fireworks. Thanks to Gleeson and Fassbender's chemistry, he pulls it off. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT A family/crime drama with shades of *Shane Meadows'* early work and a satisfying double act in Fassbender and Gleeson.



HEADSHOT

★★★

OUT 3 MARCH / CERT TBC / 117 MINS

DIRECTORS Timo Tjahjanto, Kimo Stamboel

CAST Iko Uwais, Chelsea Islan, Sunny Pang, Julie Estelle

TIMO TJAHJANTO AND Kimo Stamboel, the directorial duo nicknamed 'The Mo Brothers', are no mugs when it comes to fight sequences. And here, in this Indonesian martial arts film, the fists and feet fly faster than bullets as Iko Uwais' amnesiac Ishmael attempts to remember his connection to crime boss Lee (Pang). The set-pieces come thick and fast, as Ishmael bids to rescue kidnapped medical student Ailin (Islan). Showdowns on a cross-country bus, inside a police station, in a forest clearing and on an idyllic beach display a balletic savagery that atones for the creeping sense of repetition. It's trashily slick, but a touch more wit and complexity would not have gone amiss. **DP**



A CURE FOR WELLNESS

★★★

OUT 24 FEBRUARY / CERT TBC / 146 MINS

DIRECTOR Gore Verbinski

CAST Dane DeHaan, Mia Goth, Jason Isaacs, Celia Imrie

GORE VERBINSKI'S STYLISH, icky but seriously overlong modern Gothic sends Dane DeHaan's obnoxious Wall Street gun to an Alpine spa to retrieve his firm's CEO (Harry Groener) in time to complete a major deal. For two hours of the runtime, the writer/director skilfully applies all the tools at his disposal to create a high-altitude world that's queasy with atmospherics and riddled with mysteries, most fronted by the spa's enigmatic head (Isaacs). Think a Bram Stoker reworking of *The Shining* or, if you will, 'Shutter Highland'. Unfortunately, the plot turns out to be thinner than the air, as a final act unfolds that's so jarring it feels like it's been bolted on from an entirely different movie. **PDS**



CINEMA

THE SALESMAN

★★★★★

OUT 17 MARCH

CERT 12A / 124 MINS

DIRECTOR Asghar Farhadi

CAST Shahab Hosseini, Taraneh Alidoosti, Babak Karimi

PLOT While staying in a flat formerly used by a prostitute, Rana (Alidoosti) is sexually assaulted. Her teacher husband Emad (Hosseini) investigates who was behind it, while the couple are also acting in a production of *Death Of A Salesman*.

THE RAPE/REVENGE subgenre doesn't exactly drip with prestige, tending to descend into flatulent celebrations of male rage in films such as *Death Wish*. But trust Asghar Farhadi, Iranian cinema's leading light in the West since the success of *A Separation*, to bring some class to proceedings. There's a seriousness of moral inquiry here that could only come from a culture where shame weighs so heavy. As the central marriage strains under the weight of the assault and Emad's (Hosseini) clumsy reaction, the question of this shame and where it belongs grows to define proceedings — it's not often you can call a film *wise*, but as our sympathies shift along with the complexities of the situation, this one certainly is.

Taking off from pre-revolutionary films such as *Qeyssar* — also a rape/revenge narrative, but far more macho — the central couple are polite, middle-class people enjoying a comfortable life in Tehran. Censorship means the job of the woman whose former flat they move into is only hinted at, but it's pretty clear what "promiscuous" is code for. The central assault is left vague for the same reasons, but while its exact nature is oblique, Alidoosti's superb performance fills in the blanks — alternately stand-off-ish and clingy, she sells beautifully the disorientation of trauma, but also the decency of not wanting cheap justice.

Hosseini is equally terrific as her husband, charting a both plausible and subtle decline from

being the most popular teacher at his school to being the kind of man who's tempted by simple revenge — all while conveying his bewilderment and confusion as he muddles through an amateurish search for his wife's attacker.

For all Farhadi's arthouse cred and commitment to Iranian film's tradition of arty types frowning in flats, he's actually the kind of disciplined watchmaker Hitchcock would clutch to his considerable breast, especially in the sadistically drawn-out confrontation that climaxes Emad's investigation, where the only weapon on screen is the threat of a phone call — it has more tension than most straight-up thrillers. Despite the low-key, observational feel, information is doled out precisely when we need it, and not a moment passes without setting up or paying off something else.

Farhadi's also not above reaching for the sledgehammer — the opening, a virtuosic long take as a collapsing block of flats is evacuated, may well be symbolic. So too might the couple's roles as *Death Of A Salesman*'s Willy Loman and his wife (apparently Iranian stagings of American plays are more common than you might think), a pretty crystal-clear reference to another narrative where a besieged male's adherence to bullshit ideas of masculinity get him into trouble.

However, Arthur Miller's play comes down decisively against these codes; Farhadi seems not so sure. For all the destruction caused by Rana's assault, it's the impact on her husband that is dwelt on in far more detail, and the final ethical quandary is presented as his, not hers. It's traditional in stories that think about it for more than two seconds that revenge ends up punishing the revenger just as much as their target; Emad is probed by the story, but nothing more. This is a film that flies very high indeed, and had it been a tad more interested in the horrors not only of being raped, but then having your husband make it all about himself, it could have flown higher still. **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT Flawless performances, meticulous construction, elegant visuals — *The Salesman* comes close to greatness, but seems unaware of its participation in social problems it critiques.



Huppert's Michèle,
relaxing with a colleague.

CINEMA

ELLE

★★★★★

OUT 10 MARCH
CERT 18 / 131 MINS

DIRECTOR Paul Verhoeven

CAST Isabelle Huppert, Anne Consigny, Charles Berling, Laurent Lafitte, Alice Isaaz, Jonas Bloquet

PLOT Michèle (Huppert) is raped by a stranger who invades her house. She goes on with her life as head of a company producing violent video games, but as her attacker taunts her, she begins to investigate who he could be.

ONLY IN A French film would a woman emerge from a violent rape, take a long bubble bath and basically give a Gallic shrug before continuing on about her business, glass of wine in hand. It's shocking in her refusal to be devastated by the brutal attack, but thanks to Isabelle Huppert's multifaceted performance, the scenario is not just convincing but powerful.

The contradiction at the heart of this film is that it takes rape seriously but refuses to give it

power. It's like a bourgeois *The Last House On The Left*, where the victim takes back her agency in surprising, and at times horrifying, fashion. Verhoeven emphasises throughout that the rape is the least important aspect of Michèle's life. With the video game company she founded, she has a gory new title to get to market, and hostile developers to wrangle. She doesn't so much as flinch when the game's ogre brutally attacks its heroine. It's clear that something in her life has already exhausted this woman's capacity for grief, though she wonders sometimes if she ever had normal feelings to begin with.

Meanwhile Michèle's feckless son (Bloquet) has a bullying girlfriend (Isaaz), her ex-husband (Berling) has an idea for a game and she's having an affair — of course — with the husband of her business partner (Consigny), while flirting with her neighbour (Lafitte). But something dark lurks in Michèle's past that makes her feel at home around monsters in a way she can't recreate without them. When she eventually confronts her rapist, she visibly discomfits him with an account of her own history. The battle lines are drawn: I am more like you than you know, and you do not have power over me.

That this extraordinary approach works is down to Huppert. She's coquettish, controlling, traumatised and capable, gruff to those she loves

but not without tenderness. It's an extraordinary, mercurial portrayal of a woman who does not give a damn what you think of her, but who would prefer that you not fuss.

That's not to say this is an easy watch. There are intensely troubling questions about the boundaries between consent and coercion, ideas meant to challenge our blanket rules. This is, after all, a film by serial provocateur Paul Verhoeven. But, while it will disturb, at heart it's fiercely feminist. This is a heroine who fights her way free of everyone else's control, who is determined to set her own path. Meanwhile male violence is everywhere in the background: Michèle's lover enjoys it when she plays dead; she left her husband after he hit her; her employees are sexual creeps. Only her son is more a victim of violence than its cause, yet Michèle seems to doubt his connection to her as a result.

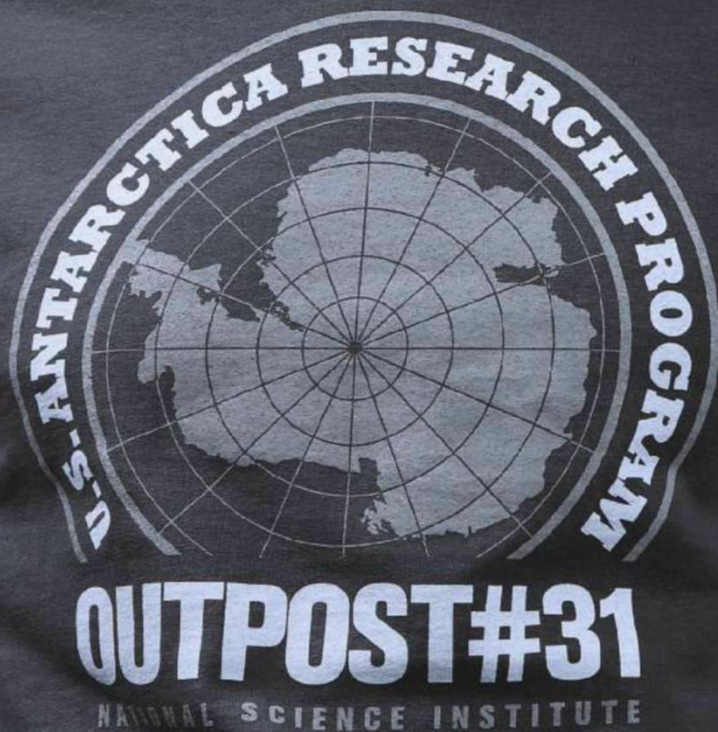
Michèle begins the film convinced there is something wrong with her and, through a violent ordeal, realises that maybe she is a better person than she thought. It may be counter-intuitive, but it's never less than compelling. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT Huppert has always been good, but she's never been better than this. Often shocking, surprisingly funny and strangely powerful, this is intense and fascinating.

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Michelle Williams' Gina imagines when it won't be all fields round here.

CINEMA

CERTAIN WOMEN



OUT 3 MARCH
CERT 12A / 107 MINS

DIRECTOR Kelly Reichardt

CAST Laura Dern, Michelle Williams, Lily Gladstone, Kristen Stewart

PLOT A look at the intersecting lives of four Livingston, Montana women: smalltown lawyer Laura (Dern), wife and mother Gina (Williams), an unnamed horse rancher (Gladstone) and law grad/teacher Elizabeth (Stewart).

CERTAIN WOMEN COMES laden with a certain expectation — writer-director Kelly Reichardt's follow-up to 2013's *Night Moves* was a Sundance favourite and won Best Film at the 2016 London Film Festival. Based on Maile Meloy's tellingly titled short story collection *Both Ways Is The Only Way I Want It*, it presents a snapshot of four Montana women's lives in three lightly connected vignettes. Make no mistake, there are no fireworks here in the conventional narrative sense — even lawyer Laura's (Dern) affair with

a married man is fizzling to nothing with little evident regret on either side — and story arcs are so gentle, the word “plot” seems an overstatement. If you left *Lost In Translation* feeling short-changed because “nothing really happened”, this film could leave you similarly frustrated.

Yet what Reichardt offers is a rich, gently humorous character study luxuriating in the minutiae of these women's outwardly small-scale lives — a piece that pays tribute to the quotidian slings and arrows fended off by the anonymous (in the case of Gladstone's unnamed rancher, quite literally) everywoman. Reichardt celebrates their modest ambitions (a new home; a career; a connection), given epic context by those big, western plains that stretch to the Rockies far beyond. This is pointedly a landscape — looking magnificent through the lens of longtime Reichardt collaborator Christopher Blauvelt — ringed in the distance by mountains, but with vast spaces and wide, open skies.

Material so gossamer-delicate needs gentle hands, and Reichardt has picked her actors well in Dern, Williams, Stewart and Gladstone. Performances from all four are note-perfect, radiating strength, and eking out the big emotions in small disappointments and triumphs with just a look or a demeanour. With few words to work with, each actor convinces as a relatable individual.

Witness Laura's wry amusement as client Fuller (Jared Harris), for whom she has fought for months, refuses to accept her advice until it's repeated by a man. Or Gina's satisfaction as the home her (cheating) husband is building for her starts to take shape. It's not that these women don't appreciate or like men; they do. It's more that the men in their life are, of course, just one part of it. Both women project a detachment that stops short of coldness, more suggestive of self-possession. In the third story strand, special mention goes to newcomer Lily Gladstone as the horse rancher who joins Elizabeth's teacher-training classes purely in order to find some kind of human interaction. Artlessly enthralled by Stewart's tutor, in her handful of scenes she conveys the implicitly lifelong solitariness that sees student become, just for a moment, near-stalker.

If this all sounds rather worthy, Reichardt leavens the tales with comic flashes and empathy not just for her women but the workaday tribulations of all her characters. It's a slow-burn piece for sure, but in a world that seems increasingly set to ‘crazy’, there's some comfort to be taken from that. **LIZ BEARDSWORTH**

VERDICT A languid, leisurely paced drama. Not much happens, but Reichardt's light touch and the performances of the leads make it soar.



RULES DON'T APPLY

★★

OUT 10 MARCH / CERT 12A / 127 MINS

DIRECTOR Warren Beatty

CAST Alden Ehrenreich, Lily Collins, Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, Matthew Broderick

A ROMCOM SET in the orbit of a giant, this is a slender and slightly muddled addition to Warren Beatty's career as a director. Alden Ehrenreich and Lily Collins are the young lovers whose romance is stymied by the fact they're both dependent on ageing, eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes (Beatty), who forbids their courtship. The performances are all committed, but the film can't find its feet, story-wise, torn between focusing on this hesitant romance and Hughes' grand schemes to recapture his glory days. As a love letter to classic Hollywood and to one of Tinseltown's wildest characters it just about holds the interest, but this is more a minor curio than an essential Beatty effort. **HOH**



THE OLIVE TREE

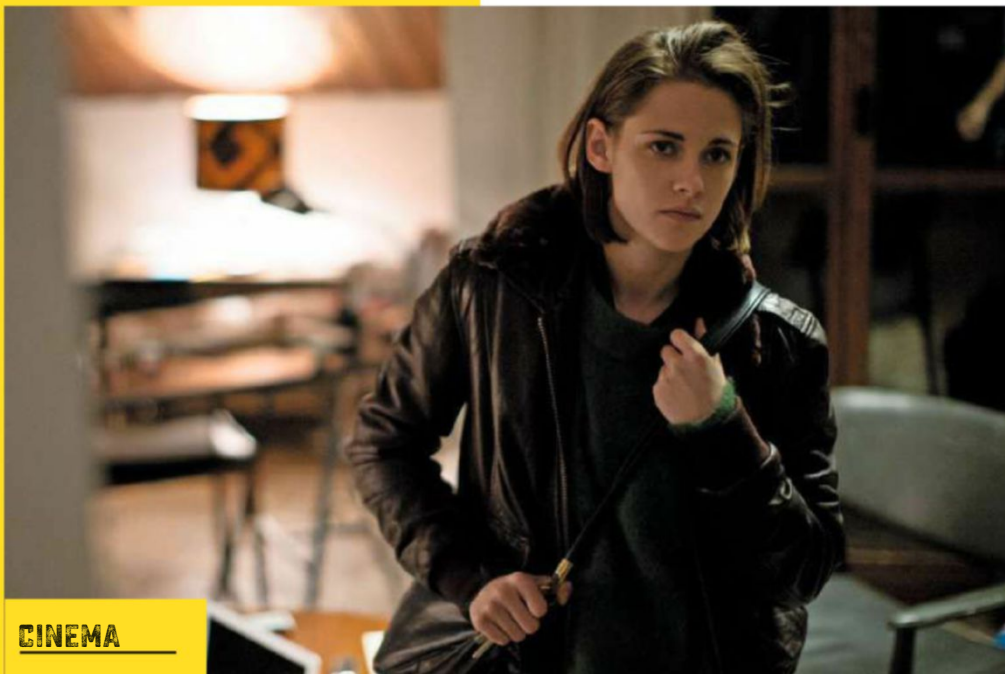
★★★

OUT 17 MARCH / CERT TBC / 98 MINS

DIRECTOR Icíar Bollaín

CAST Anna Castillo, Javier Gutiérrez, Pep Ambrós, Manuel Cucala

PAUL LAVERTY DOESN'T do subtle. But Ken Loach's longtime screenwriter has always had his heart in the right place and this third collaboration with Icíar Bollaín tackles the themes of family and tradition in the age of social media and decimating recession with a judicious blend of wit, sentiment and quiet fury. Following 20-year-old Spaniard Alma (Castillo) to Düsseldorf to reclaim a gnarled olive tree loved by ailing grandfather Ramón (Cucala), the plot is undeniably melodramatic. Moreover, the belief in the millennial generation's ability to right past wrongs is rooted in naive idealism. But such is the picture's faith in essential human goodness that it's all-but impossible to resist. **DP**



CINEMA

PERSONAL SHOPPER

★★★

OUT 17 MARCH

CERT 15 / 105 MINS

DIRECTOR Olivier Assayas

CAST Kristen Stewart, Lars Eidinger, Sigrid Bouaziz

PLOT Maureen (Stewart) lives in Paris, working as a personal shopper. She is also a medium, an ability also possessed by her twin brother. Following his death, from a condition she shares, Maureen cannot move on with her life until she's had a sign from her brother that he's now at peace.

THERE'S NO ONE aspect of Olivier Assayas' latest film that entirely works. As a ghost story it swoops between being genuinely creepy and almost laughably silly, with some theme park-level scares. As a mystery-thriller it takes you down frightening roads but to a glaringly obvious destination. And by its end, it's left an unruly pile of loose ends. Yet as unsatisfying as it is in its details, it's so thick with atmosphere and so strong as a character piece that its many shortcomings can be, if not forgotten, at least forgiven. It's such a peculiar muddle that it's impossible to categorise, but it revels in its weirdness. That is its greatest strength.

Kristen Stewart is on the best form of her career as Maureen, the least comfortable match of name and actor since Angelina Jolie played Evelyn Salt. Maureen organises outfits for a horrible celebrity, who we barely see but hear a lot about behind her back. Maureen hates her job, which she's very good at, and her temporary home town Paris. The only reason she's still in the city is because her twin brother died there and she's waiting for a sign from his spirit. For Maureen sees ghosts. She doesn't understand them, but she sees them. She's every bit as confused by the living. When Maureen starts receiving text messages from an unknown number, she enters into a phone-based relationship that's far more open than any she has in real life. As the messages

become more sinister we, and Maureen, can sense danger racing towards her, claws outstretched, but she's too desperate to feel something, anything, to retreat from it.

Stewart has often looked uncomfortable in her own skin on screen, seeming like she'd rather be elsewhere in films such as *Twilight* and *Snow White & The Huntsman*. Here, playing someone who can't work out who she is, she shows total control. Her Maureen is fluid and relaxed going through the motions at work, spiky and hurried when pulled into anything like a meaningful conversation and, in one darkly sexy sequence in which she enjoys her boss' home and wardrobe while she's away, swells to become the confident creature she says she can't imagine she truly is. We can't get a grip on which of these shows the real her, if any of them do, but it's that slipperiness that makes her magnetic. She leaves us with plenty of questions at the end, just as a great character should. Much of her role is played without dialogue. Stewart manages to bring a range of emotions to the simple act of tapping messages into a phone. (Although who knows whether we're meant to read anything into the fact she's the sort of selfish monster who has left her key-tones switched on or if the noisy clacking just plays better on screen.) Her last film with Assayas, *Clouds Of Sils Maria*, won Stewart a César. She's found herself as an actress with him, in the same way Keira Knightley did with Joe Wright.

But there's a distinct lack of flow between the scenes of Maureen sloping around a bedraggled mansion waiting for spirits and those of her conducting a psychosexual entirely textual affair as she races round the city. This makes it feel like two films bolted together. If it's a bit messy, it's a beautiful mess. It puts the viewer in much the same position as Maureen: uncertain of what's going on or what we're waiting for, but unable to pull away. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT A Hitchcockian *Poltergeist* with a little bit of *Single White Female* chunked in, it's every bit as confused as that combo sounds, but also just as intriguing. Stewart shows she's now one of the most interesting actresses of her generation.



CINEMA

THE GREAT WALL

★★★

OUT NOW

CERT 12A / 103 MINS

DIRECTOR Zhang Yimou**CAST** Matt Damon, Jing Tian, Pedro Pascal, Willem Dafoe, Andy Lau

PLOT In medieval China, mercenary soldier William (Damon) runs into an enormous army charged with defending the Great Wall Of China from marauding monsters. He ends up getting involved in the longer-term battle to protect the human world from the beasts: creatures that must be studied as well as fought if they are to be overcome.

AS IS PERHAPS fitting for a film based on a 13,000-mile-long stone structure, *The Great Wall* bears a huge weight of expectation. It is the biggest-ever China-Hollywood co-production, the most expensive film shot entirely in China, and arrives at a time when the global industry is increasingly facing towards the East. It's also the most epic project fêted Chinese director Zhang Yimou has taken on since he directed the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, as well as his first English-language film. No pressure, then.

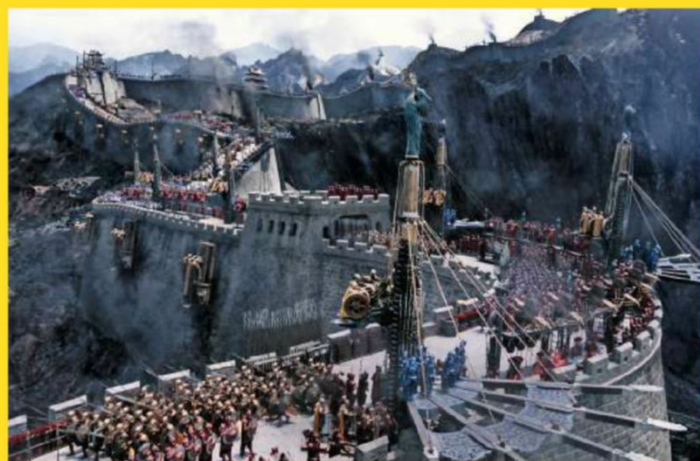
Matt Damon plays William, a mercenary soldier whose accent suggests he's from Ireland, or has at least spent a lot of time swigging Guinness in Irish bars. William and his fellow fighter-for-hire Tovar (Pascal) are poking around the Chinese border in search of valuable "black powder" when they run into an army deployed on the Great Wall to defend China from monsters. Via a witheringly lazy plot device — a guard has lost the key to a cell

— they end up getting caught up in the combat.

The army's fighting techniques seem as influenced by extreme sports as they are war history books — a troupe of lance-wielding, bungee-jumping female warriors provides the film's most thrilling, rope-twanging spectacle. The acting, though, is largely as rigid as the spears thrusting in and out of leathery monster flesh.

This can't only be explained away by some of the Chinese cast having to deliver lines in English. Jing Tian, who plays the steely Commander Lin Mei, seems so detached she seems to be living life half a second off the pace of everyone else. Sporting a uniform more suited to a Power Ranger than a medieval soldier, she appears a pixel width away from being an RPG video-game character.

The film was trailed as a cultural mash-up but, being set and filmed in China, the casting of Damon, Pedro Pascal and Willem Dafoe (whose character, Ballard, seems there purely to explain



Clockwise from left: 'The Hunger Games: East Meets West — Part I'; Junkai Wang's Emperor goes for gold; Aggressors assemble on the Great Wall; Tovar (Pedro Pascal) and William (Matt Damon) await orders.

how Commander Lin learned English) is the only element representing the West. Instead, Chinese cultural clichés abound, from speeches about working together to help the greater cause to Olympic-level gymnastics. These are more cause for complaint than the “whitewashing” Damon’s casting supposedly represents. William is not presented as a white knight, rather a mercenary caught in the chaos. A conversation about his past comes across as a tacked-on attempt to make him seem dark and set up his potential redemption but really, he’s not whitewashing; he’s just grey-dull.

The vicious Tao Ties aren’t much more memorable, despite being impressively rendered and bred from the usual *Lord Of The Rings*/Games Workshop monster farm — the only significant design twists being Chinese-style designs on their foreheads and having eyes on their shoulders. Every major aspect of their behaviour — such as their main vulnerability and communication

methods — comes across as shoehorned in, designed to provide a sledgehammer-blatant path for the heroes to follow to overcome them. If William had found a KitKat in his bag we would have no doubt discovered the monsters happen to have a kryptonite-like aversion to chocolatey wafer.

The film, as a landmark China-Hollywood co-op, probably only had to be a decent popcorn action flick to be considered a success, but the only sound louder than the Tao Ties’ screeching is that of square pegs being bashed into round holes. Its artistic failures are unlikely to put a halt to the tilting of the film industry towards China, but *The Great Wall* doesn’t deserve to be considered the definitive monument to this shift. **JAMIE FULLERTON**

VERDICT There are plenty of fun CGI monster-skewering scenes, but a clunky plot, rigid script and equally stiff acting make this a crumbling disappointment, if not quite a disaster.



CATFIGHT

★★★

OUT 10 MARCH / CERT TBC / 96 MINS

DIRECTOR Onur Tukel

CAST Sandra Oh, Anne Heche, Alicia Silverstone, Tituss Burgess, Ariel Kavoussi

BUILT AROUND THREE brutal punch-ups between former friends Ashley (Heche) and Veronica (Oh), this savage satire on America’s social fissures verges on bad taste and is far from subtle — both women are painted as monsters. But it’s also audacious and acerbic. Moreover, it has the courage of its quirky convictions, as fortune plays games with Oh’s bibulous Manhattan snob and Heche’s struggling Brooklyn artist. The leads are admirably committed, while Silverstone and Kavoussi excel as Ashley’s passive-aggressive girlfriend and calculatingly winsome assistant. Yet, for all the digs at populism, patriotism and prejudice, all anyone will want to talk about afterwards will be the epic scraps. **DP**



BITTER HARVEST

★

OUT 24 FEBRUARY / CERT 15 / 103 MINS

DIRECTOR George Mendeluk

CAST Max Irons, Samantha Barks, Terence Stamp, Barry Pepper, Tamer Hassan

THE MAN-MADE FAMINE in Ukraine in the 1930s was one of the great crimes of the 20th century, and here it receives a treatment so clumsy it’s almost an insult to the people who died. Max Irons plays the world’s poshest peasant, who leaves his village to study art in Kiev with Samantha Barks as the wife he leaves behind. Despite the occasional arrestingly matter-of-fact shot of bodies in train cars, you have to battle your way through Google-translate-sounding dialogue, starvation make-up that makes a plump cast look like *Dawn Of The Dead*-era zombies, and a queasily nationalistic slant that sits uneasily with the supposedly individualist message. Barks shines, but she deserves so much better than the likes of this. **AL**



CINEMA

THE AGE OF SHADOWS

★★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH
CERT TBC / 140 MINS

DIRECTOR Kim Jee-woon
CAST Song Kang-ho, Gong Yoo, Han Ji-min, Park Hee-soon

PLOT Despised as a traitor during the Japanese occupation of Korea, Captain Lee Jung-chool (Song Kang-ho) is dispatched to Shanghai to prevent resistance fighter Kim Woo-jin (Gong Yoo) from smuggling explosives into Seoul.

WHAT IS IT about South Korean filmmakers and railroads? Following last year's *Train To Busan*, and his own *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*, Kim Jee-woon stages a tense, pivotal sequence aboard an elegant 1920s train in this riveting espionage saga. Inspired by actual events, it represents a departure from Kim's Hollywood debut, Arnie comeback clunker *The Last Stand*, but emulates Choi Dong-hoon's *Assassination* (2015) and Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016) in exploring Japan's domination of the Korean peninsula between 1910 and 1945.

As with any good espionage thriller, the plot is densely intricate. At its heart is Lee Jung-chool (Song), a Korean police chief with a history of selling out his countrymen, who's instructed by the Japanese to track down resistance fighter Kim Woo-jin (Gong). But, hit hard by the recent death of a resistance member, he's torn between the two sides. Under suspicion of lingering patriotism, Jung-chool is paired with impetuous agent Hashimoto (Eom Tae-goo) for a mission in Shanghai where Woo-jin and fellow rebels Chae-san (Lee Byung-hun) and Gye-soon (Han Ji-min) are collecting a consignment of dynamite.

With its elegant evocation of an age of subterfuge and bygone glamour, the Chinese segment recalls Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution*, especially as Jung-chool isn't entirely certain he can trust Gye-soon. But, thanks to an

informer within the cell, Hashimoto knows Woo-jin is aboard the Seoul express and he stalks the corridors while the conflicted Jung-chool attempts to distract him.

A shootout in the train's dining car is superb, with Kim relishing the contrasts production designer Cho Hwa-sung creates between the crowded third-class wagons, the chandelier-lit second-class carriages and the shuttered first-class compartments. But Kim and editor Yang Jin-mo also make a magnificent job of a suspect round-up montage, which is accompanied by Louis Armstrong's jaunty *When You're Smiling*, and the *Godfather*-like climax which builds to the gradual crescendo of Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*, as it cross-cuts between the execution of a snitch and the explosive assault on police headquarters.

Few concessions are made to those unfamiliar with the period and the audience are bombarded with thinly sketched characters early on. More might have been made of the cloche-hatted Gye-soon and the debonair Chae-san, particularly after Woo-jin realises one of his inner circle is a traitor. But, prioritising the explosive over the expository, the action is unrelenting, from the opening rooftop chase and the shootout at Gyeongsan Station to the harrowing torture sessions and the invidious courtroom speech delivered by the dolefully ambiguous Jung-chool. He is ably supported by the resourceful Woo-jin and Hashimoto, whose hissable villainy comes into its own en route to China, as the camera follows him and his pistol-packing henchmen through the claustrophobic confines of the train.

Some will lament that Kim plumps for Spaghetti homages over psychological realism. But this is more subtly delineated than it initially appears, as Kim efficiently dots conversations with the crucial plot details and character insights that allow him to focus on the slickly choreographed set-pieces that make this so accomplished and compelling. **DAVID PARKINSON**

VERDICT Serviceably convoluted and visually sumptuous, this is an intelligent treatise on patriotism and duty that shifts between intrigue, suspense and ferocity with ease.



VICEROY'S HOUSE

★★★

OUT 3 MARCH / CERT 12A / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR Gurinder Chadha

CAST Hugh Bonneville, Gillian Anderson, Manish Dayal, Huma Qureshi

THERE IS A laudable intention at the heart of Gurinder Chadha's end-of-Empire drama: to count the human cost of the Partition Of India in 1947 through the prism of the Viceroy's House, the sumptuous Delhi home of the country's British rulers. Upstairs, we get Lord Mountbatten's (Bonneville) political negotiations trying to effect a peaceful handover. Downstairs, the film charts the love story between the Lord's Hindu valet (Dayal, likeable) and the Muslim lady in waiting (Qureshi). It's an overstuffed mixed bag of men in rooms talking, an unearned romance and powerful newsreel footage. There's a sharper film to be made here, but it's still sadly prescient about the hate generated by carving up countries. **IF**



SOUTHERN FURY

★

OUT 24 FEBRUARY / CERT 18 / 93 MINS

DIRECTOR Steven C. Miller

CAST Adrian Grenier, Johnathon Schaech, Nicolas Cage, John Cusack

INEXPLICABLY STYLED AS Rupert Pupkin from *The King Of Comedy*, Nicolas Cage's psycho-villain barely even appears here until an hour in. He then delivers a lengthy monologue that is — even by Cage standards — preposterously over-the-top, and which stands as a lone moment of fun in an otherwise interminably dull film. John Cusack does what he can in a sidekick role, but the main problem is that neither Adrian Grenier nor Johnathon Schaech — who lead here, playing two very close-but-very-different brothers, one of whom is kidnapped by Cage — are strong enough to carry a thriller of this kind, let alone one littered with bland dialogue and dated, budget-bullet-time special effects. **HM**



CINEMA

It was two-for-one cocktails down the Wetheys.

THE LOVE WITCH

★★★★

CERT 15 / 121 MINS
OUT 10 MARCH**DIRECTOR** Anna Biller**CAST** Samantha Robinson, Gian Keys, Laura Waddell, Jeffrey Vincent Parise, Jared Sanford

PLOT Elaine (Robinson), a practising witch, settles in a Northern California town and begins looking for love, using magic potions and rituals. As her search racks up a body count, she sets her sights on Griff (Keys), the cop investigating the deaths.

“WHAT YOU CALL love is a borderline personality disorder... or worse!”

Few central characters — or films — announce themselves as strongly as Samantha Robinson's femme fatale Elaine, driving into a small town in a scarlet sports car (with matching lipstick, luggage and cigarette case), fixing the audience with an unblinking gaze. She acts like a feminist hero, in single-minded pursuit of her own fulfilment, but talks like a would-be Stepford Wife, devoting her every waking moment to

getting a man — though the ones she gets inevitably disappoint, and she has witchy means of disposing of them or getting them to dispose of themselves before she moves on. She's almost a female counterpart to the family values serial killer of 1987's *The Stepfather*, focused on the appearance of happiness and the American dream but driven to punish those who can't join in her fantasy.

Director-writer-producer-editor Anna Biller (*Viva*) also puts together the soundtrack (which includes catchy, sinister folk-rock anthem *Love Is A Magical Thing*), decorates the sets and handcrafts many of the props. Like Whit Stillman, John Waters or Wes Anderson, she creates and populates her own self-contained, richly imagined film universe, with a fetishist reverence for 1960s and '70s design, costume and bric-a-brac. Few films contain as many seductive *things* — a carpet with a magic circle, Elaine's outfits, wallpaper, cakes — and work them into the texture of the film. Biller casts people who have the clean-cut faces of vintage soap-opera stars and has them act with chilling, persuasive understatement that's creepier than full-on shrieking. Tone and pace are even — perhaps too much so, since the tightly plotted film clocks in at two hours, as if Biller the editor met a self-imposed ritual requirement.

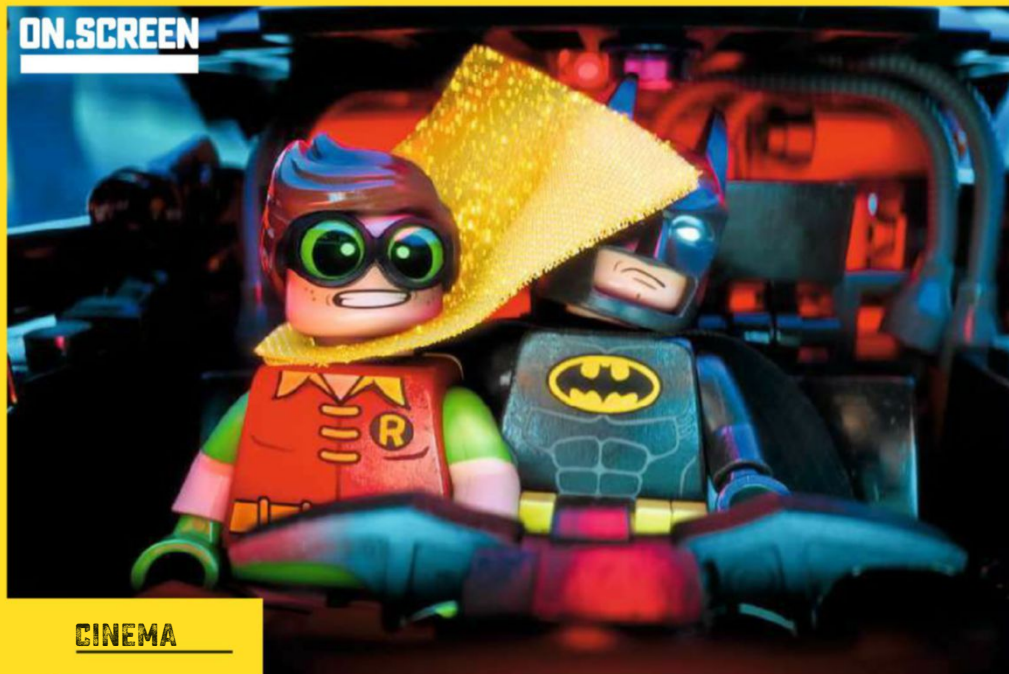
The Love Witch offers a great deal of deadpan comedy between charms and horrors. Star (Elle

Evans) and Moon (Fair Micaela Griffin), the lookalike blonde Wiccans who become terrible if eye-catching burlesque dancers after their coven initiation, are drily hilarious, and Jared Sanford is a hoot as the lecherous warlock Elaine repeatedly freezes out as he harps on about sensual excess.

Most of the action takes place in a few extraordinary institutions which stress ritual and romance: a women-only Victorian tea room, a burlesque dance bar (patronised by drunken witch-haters), a renaissance fair which doubles as a witches' coven, even the police station where the strong coffee is equivalent to Elaine's philtres of “hallucinogenic herbs”. It's eerily minimalistic and so suggestive of a bygone time that it's a shock half-way through when Elaine's possible nemesis/would-be doppelgänger Trish (Waddell) pulls out a mobile phone to take a call, revealing that this isn't a period-set movie after all — as if Elaine has by force of will made a whole community live in her own design-fetish world the way Biller has stocked her filmic doll-house with beautiful puppets. And somehow it works — one of the most gorgeous films of recent years. **KIM NEWMAN**

VERDICT A genre-stretching horror melodrama crafted with extraordinary detail and style.

A touch languid, it's also mesmerising, provocative, unsettling and sensual.



CINEMA

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

★★★★★

OUT NOW
CERT U / 104 MINS

DIRECTOR Chris McKay

CAST Will Arnett, Zach Galifianakis, Michael Cera, Rosario Dawson, Ralph Fiennes

PLOT Slighted by Batman's (Arnett) refusal to recognise him as his arch enemy, the Joker (Galifianakis) hatches a plan to make him take notice — involving the Lego universe's greatest villains descending on Gotham to take control of the city once and for all.

HISTORICALLY, THE PREVAILING wisdom about Batman is this: dark and moody is good, comedic and silly is bad. Just compare and contrast the reputations of *The Dark Knight* (anarchy and politics) and *Batman & Robin* (ice skating and Bat-nipples). The truth (as is usually the case) is more complex, but it highlights the problem facing *The Lego Batman Movie* — can this comedic take on the Dark Knight work?

Of course, the signs were good — Will Arnett's tongue-in-cheek take on the character was one of *The Lego Movie's* many joys, and his promotion to the lead role here takes away none of his impact.

Batman is Gotham's hero, singular, and that's the way he likes it. But when Barbara Gordon (Dawson) succeeds her father as commissioner, she suggests Batman's history of always foiling the villains' evil plots, but mostly letting them escape to plot again, perhaps isn't the ideal state of affairs and proposes a closer working relationship. Not that it matters; no sooner has she taken office than the Joker (Galifianakis), offended by Batman's refusal to acknowledge him as his main adversary ("I'm fighting a few different people. I like to fight around") gathers up his cronies and surrenders. But to Gordon, not Batman. Outraged, Batman decides to go rogue — breaking into Arkham

Asylum to banish the Joker to the Phantom Zone.

It's a film dense with jokes, the writers riffing successfully on both this sullen, arrogant iteration of Batman and the character's rich and varied history. The films are referenced ("That time with the parade and the Prince music"), as are the TV series and comics. And all the sources are mined for the film's stuffed rogues' gallery — Polka-Dot Man, Gentleman Ghost and the Condiment King among the villains appearing in cameo roles.

And then, for the final battle, more are unleashed. A standard complaint about superhero films is there are too many bad guys (*Spider-Man 3* overstretched by adding *Venom* to Sandman and the New Goblin), but here Gremlins, Daleks, *The Matrix's* Agent Smith, Dracula, Godzilla, Sauron, Lord Voldemort and more are all unleashed without any issue. Just occasionally more is more, and so it proves here.

But for all the fan service and subtle jokes, this is still ostensibly a film for kids to be taken to (and it's been two decades since we had a Batman film like that) and, as such, there are lessons for Batman (and the kids) to learn. Namely, teamwork is good, friends are important, don't spend your nights alone eating reheated lobster thermidor.

This manifests itself in confirmed loner Bruce Wayne absent-mindedly adopting orphan Dick Grayson (Cera) who discovers the Batcave and wants to become his sidekick. And later, to Batman's dismay, the Bat-team grows further. Only if they work together will they defeat the Joker's growing army. This point does become laboured as Bats continually refuses to accept it, but there's so much going on, it's easy to forgive.

This is the third time Batman has featured in a major cinematic release in the past 11 months. And, if anything, with the release of *The Lego Batman Movie*, those films have reversed the prevailing wisdom: dark and moody is bad, comedic and silly is good. Whether or not we deserve it is irrelevant — this is the Batman movie we needed right now. And it delivers. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT A highly quotable, visual treat that's packed with in-jokes but is entertaining enough on its own terms to work for fans and non-fans alike. The best Batman film in years.



THE SPACE BETWEEN US

★★

OUT NOW / CERT PG / 120 MINS

DIRECTOR Peter Chelsom

CAST Asa Butterfield, Britt Robertson, Carla Gugino, Gary Oldman

ASA BUTTERFIELD PLAYS a Martian. Or rather, he's human, born on our first colony on Mars (in 2018! — optimistic), whose existence is classified (to avoid bad PR) and who, aged 16, decides it's time to go to Earth even though the different gravity may kill him. Once there he breaks out of quarantine to meet his intergalactic Skype girlfriend Tulsa (Robertson). Playing fast and loose with science (there's real-time video conferencing over 54.6 million km of space) and logic, it's an often eye-rolling ride as the youngsters' passion for each other grows amid a road trip and some gentle culture-shock comedy. But this type of teen melodrama has been done so much better before. **JP**



RINGS

★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 102 MINS

DIRECTOR F. Javier Gutiérrez

CAST Vincent D'Onofrio, Johnny Galecki, Laura Wiggins

IT'S OVER A decade since the J-horror remake craze died with *The Ring Two*. Despite imaginative direction from F. Javier Gutiérrez, this mess isn't likely to reboot or revive the American franchise. The plot stutters as if radically different *Ring* scripts were commissioned and then shuffled together to justify creepy set-pieces without giving thought to the collapsing storyline (a key image on that tape is a snake swallowing itself) or engaging characters. The VHS angle is quaint now, so Samara (Bonnie Morgan) upgrades her curse and crawls out of flatscreens and mobile phones while her video threatens to go viral — but all of this is crammed into a busy yet uninvolved finish. **KN**



A day of joy will swiftly turn to tragedy for Boston.

CINEMA

PATRIOTS DAY

★★★★

OUT NOW

CERT 15 / 133 MINS

DIRECTOR Peter Berg

CAST Mark Wahlberg, Michelle Monaghan, J.K. Simmons, Kevin Bacon

PLOT 15 April 2013. It's the day of the Boston Marathon and Sgt Tommy Saunders (Wahlberg) is reluctantly back in uniform and on station at the finish line to babysit the VIPs in attendance. Then at 2.49pm, two homemade bombs go off and the event is plunged into chaos.

TOPICAL, GRITTY AND competent to a tee, Peter Berg's movies have also become stonkingly predictable of late. The hallmarks — a maverick everyman-in-peril, a thinly sketched wife back home, bursts of well-choreographed violence, and a moody post-rock soundscape (Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross here) — are so dependable, you can play Berg bingo with them. They're coming thick and fast, too. *Patriots Day*, a sporadically exciting true-life account of the

2013 Boston bombings drama, comes so soon after his oil-rig disaster flick *Deepwater Horizon*, we've barely had time to wash the crude off.

This is another disaster procedural that stamps its director as modern cinema's Irwin Allen. Where Allen stocked *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* with as many movie stars as he could fit on a poster, Berg leans heavily on one. Mark Wahlberg, reuniting with the director for the third film in a row, is Boston 'tec Tommy Saunders, a hot-tempered cop on his final day doing penance back in uniform for a never-specified misdemeanour. As chance would have it, it's the day a pair of radicalised Chechen immigrants, Dzhokhar (Alex Wolff) and Tamerlan Tsarnaev (Themo Melikidze), choose to attack the city.

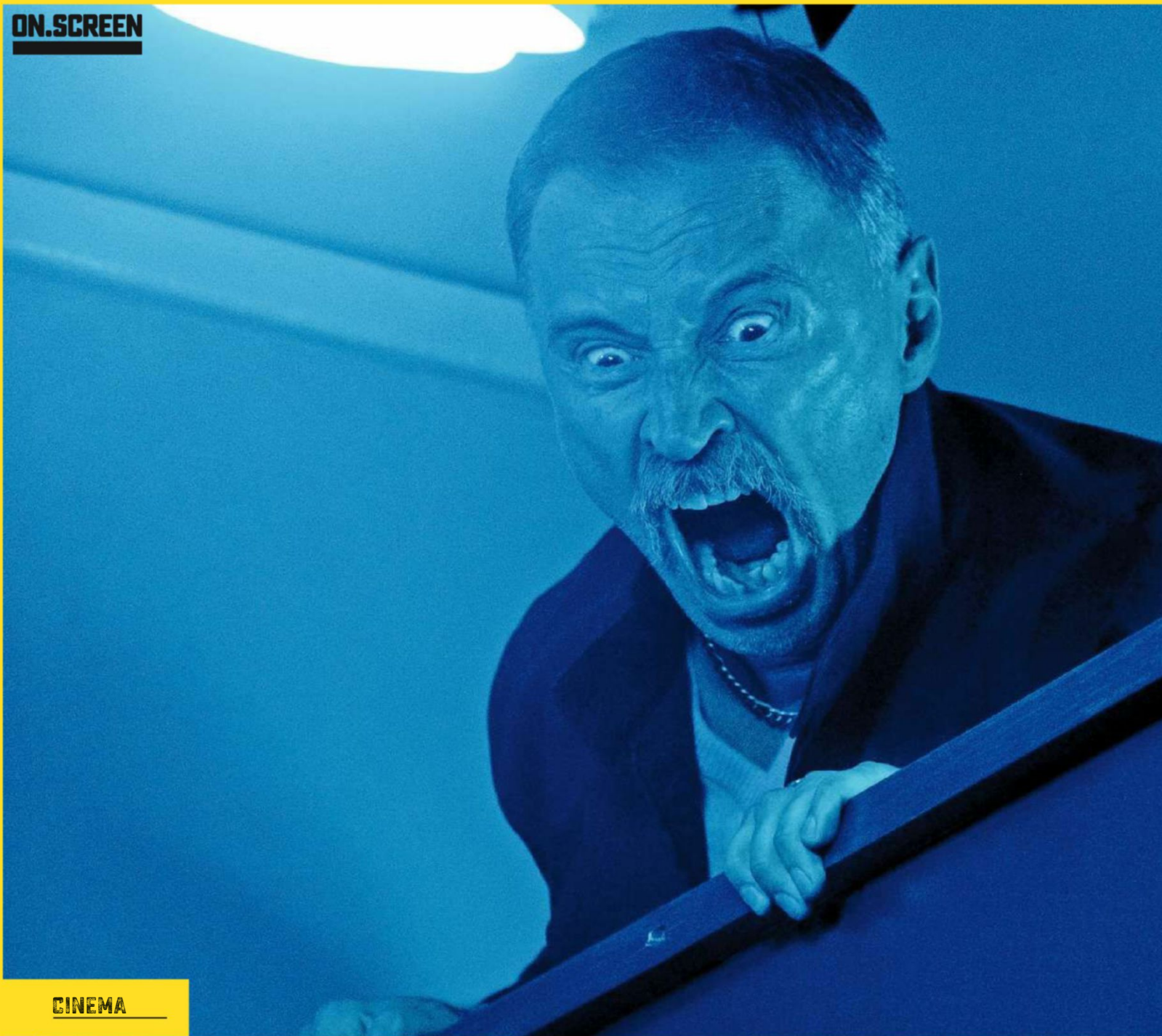
After a brief prelude to establish a clutch of other characters and showcase the buzz of Boston on race day, the bombs go off and the movie lurches forward. In two flashes, Wahlberg's cop is surveying a scene littered with broken bodies and panicked people. If there's an uncomfortable hint of disaster porn as the camera pans across the carnage, there's little time to dwell on it. Before we've caught breath, Kevin Bacon's FBI team have set up shop in a neighbouring warehouse to find the culprits. There are some fiery encounters between Bacon, Boston's mayor (Vincent Curatola) and police commissioner

(John Goodman) as they clash over jurisdictions and bark Bostonian epithets at each other.

A composite of several real people, Saunders boasts all the swears and no-bullshit manner Wahlberg excels at (Michelle Monaghan takes the thankless wife role). Helpfully, he's also on hand at every key juncture of the bombing, its immediate aftermath and the subsequent pursuit of the perpetrators. You're half-surprised he doesn't pop out of the terrorists' cutlery drawer when they're packing for their next atrocity.

While the pursuit is briskly handled, there's little light shone on the terrorists themselves. Wolff is terrific as the boyish but casually cruel Dzhokhar, but there's more interest in what makes his bombs tick than him. Lazily, Berg's trademark end surtitles (bingo!) tie up several loose ends the movie has left hanging. In this case, a trio of Dzhokhar's college friends discover his plan but do nothing to report it. Their destinies, along with those of other key characters, are only revealed as the credits roll. Would that there were a little more human insight to go along with the pyrotechnics. **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT The third part of Berg's unofficial Americans-in-crisis trilogy will play better for US audiences than overseas, but it's still a pacy and often enthralling disaster movie.



CINEMA

T2 TRAINSPOTTING



OUT NOW

CERT 18 / 117 MINS

DIRECTOR Danny Boyle**CAST** Ewan McGregor, Ewen Bremner, Jonny Lee Miller, Robert Carlyle, Anjela Nedyalkova

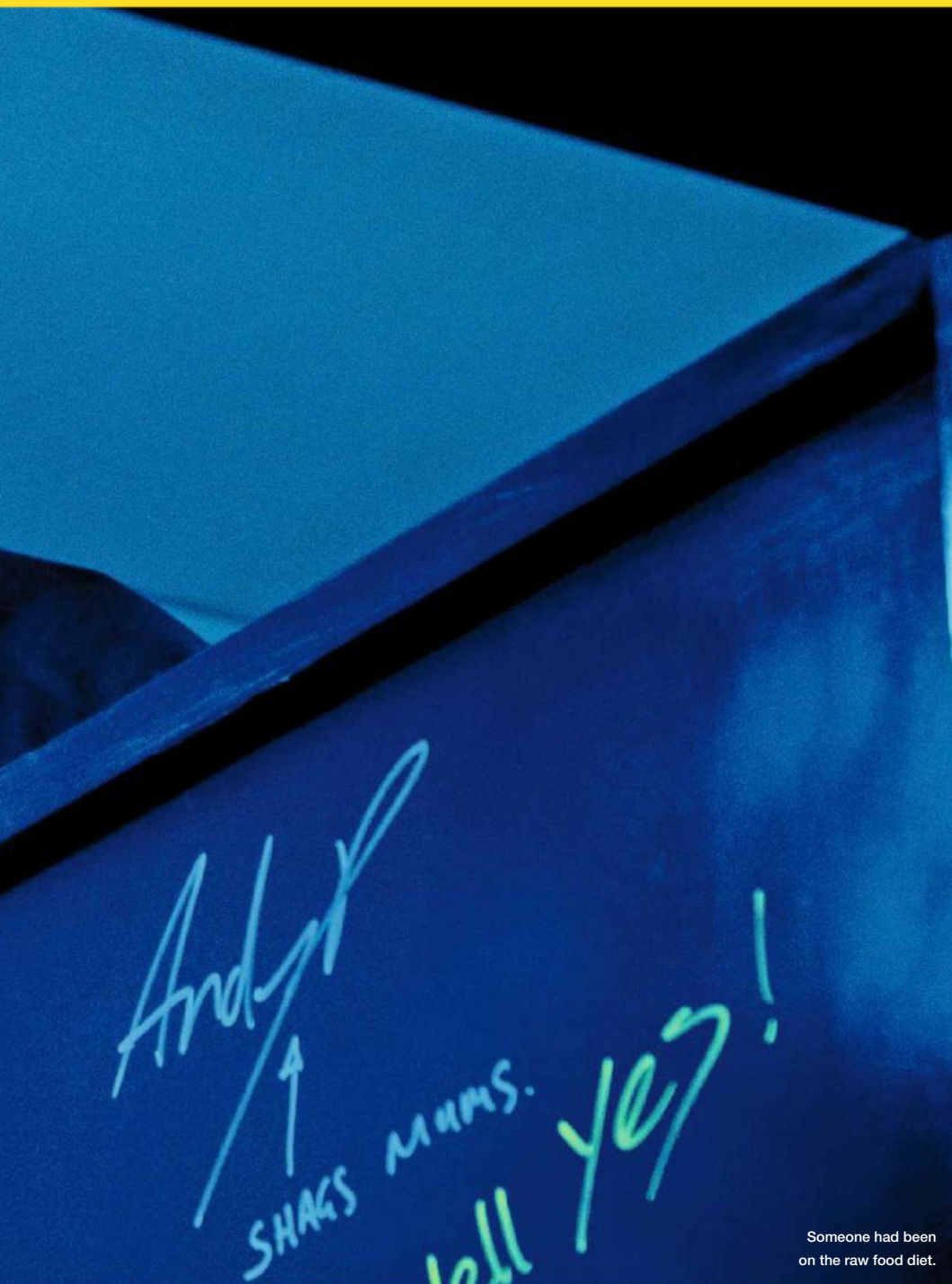
PLOT After living in Amsterdam for the past 20 years following his 1996 drug swindle, Mark Renton (McGregor) returns to Edinburgh to reconnect with old pals Spud/Daniel (Bremner) and Sick Boy/Simon (Miller). Yet as he moves into a business partnership with Sick Boy, Begbie (Carlyle), the psycho he betrayed, escapes from prison.

“HELLO MARK,” SAYS Jonny Lee Miller’s Simon aka Sick Boy to Ewan McGregor’s Renton near the start of *T2 Trainspotting*. “So what have you been up to... for 20 years?” It’s a question that felt like it would never get an answer. Danny Boyle’s 1996 adaptation of Irvine Welsh’s 1993 novel became the movie avatar of Cool Britannia, born out of the ashes and anger of Thatcher, hopped up on the sweaty, squalid optimism of dance culture (“Drive boy dog boy/Dirty numb angel boy”). Yet a middling follow-up novel (*Porno*), well-documented director-star issues and plain old fear of botching up a beloved original have kept it from multiplexes. Until now.

In a disjointed start, we learn their fates. Two decades on, Renton has swapped running from security guards to running on treadmills, high purely on endorphins. Since double-crossing his best friends in a drug deal, he’s been living in Amsterdam yet — for reasons never spelled out,

possibly guilt — decides to return to Edinburgh to look up old pals; Sick Boy is running an extortion business filming the well-off with his prostitute/business partner Veronika (Nedyalkova); Spud (Bremner) is still on smack and estranged from his wife (Shirley Henderson) and kid. And then there’s Begbie (Carlyle), locked up inside but with a stomach-churning way of getting out of prison, before revisiting his wife and son, and still harbouring a grudge against Renton.

How this all builds won’t be spoiled here. McGregor and Miller play the shifting dynamics between friends well — especially given one left the other high and dry. Their mutual attraction to Veronika also adds intrigue and Nedyalkova makes her skimpy role seem rounded and likeable. Best of all is Carlyle’s Begbie, still a terrifying hard man — he is cinema’s greatest C-bomber — but especially in later scenes revealing vulnerabilities



Someone had been
on the raw food diet.

that make you feel for him. Bremner's Spud is the least served — bizarrely he becomes the group's stenographer but isn't given much more to round out his endearing idiot routine.

Pointedly, during Renton's updating of his "Choose life" spiel he utters, "Choose watching history repeat itself." It's a mantra that pervades *T2 Trainspotting*. If the first film is really about the joy of being young — the hedonism, the mistakes, the camaraderie — *T2* is about the disappointments of growing old — the limitations, the regrets, the need for reconnection. The shared past of these four friends is inextricably intertwined in their present and this is where the poignancy lives. Bravely Boyle has made a mostly sombre film about how fortysomething lives work out and it's well observed and well-acted. Yet is this what you want from a *Trainspotting* film?

There is a ten-minute section where Renton and Sick Boy have to improvise a song about the

Battle Of The Boyne in a pro-Protestant club followed by a tribute to George Best scored to John Barry's 007 theme that captures some of the old zest and energy. There is also a fantastic split-screen scene in a toilet cubicle. Stylistically Boyle still trades in the original's blend of hard-nosed realism and flights of fantasy, but his grasp on technique and tone is not as tight as first time round. The soundtrack, a mixture of the old (Queen, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Blondie) and new (Young Fathers, Wolf Alice) also doesn't create the same impact (what could?). The Prodigy remix of Iggy Pop's *Lust For Life* in some sense sums the film up. It rides along similar lines but is just not quite as good. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT In some ways *T2* shares elements with its *Terminator* namesake. It's inventive, well-played and surprising, but it doesn't reimagine the original in quite the same glorious way.



RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER

★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR Paul W.S. Anderson

CAST Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Ruby Rose

AMNESIAC ALICE (JOVOVICH) returns to Raccoon City intent on thwarting the endgame of the evil corporation responsible for the mutant zombie apocalypse and discovering her true identity. Paul W.S. Anderson directs good, imaginative action — punched up by loud noises and jittery edits — but writes terrible word-balloon dialogue (nail-on-the-head department: "I feel like I've been doing this my whole life — running and killing"). For what it's worth, it's a brand-leader in its field — consistently more entertaining than the *Underworld* films, for instance. But this entry finds the invention flagging — one plot twist is a blatant lift from *RoboCop* — and winds up hurrying through its supposed end-of-an-era finish just to get it over with. **KN**



XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 12A / 107 MINS

DIRECTOR D.J. Caruso

CAST Vin Diesel, Donnie Yen, Deepika Padukone, Kris Wu, Tony Jaa, Ruby Rose

VIN DIESEL JUST can't resist a comeback, returning after lengthy hiatuses to both Dominic Toretto in the *Fast And Furious* franchise and Riddick. And now, almost 15 years since last playing extreme sports dude-turned-superspy Xander Cage, here he is again — ripped and ready to save another day. An international mix of slinky chicks, chunky hunks and plucky wisecracks, *Return Of Xander Cage* plays like someone slammed the *F&F* crew on a photocopier. Still, his heart's in the right place (his fist) and so's his tongue (right there in his cheek), although Diesel still can't quite sell a zinger, bless him. We've seen all these stunts pulled before, and done better, but there's pleasure to be had — even if it's of the extremely guilty kind. **DJ**



Surf's up! Riz Ahmed's Paul-Louis creates ripples.

TV & STREAMING

GIRLS: SEASON 6



SKY ATLANTIC

STARTS 10PM, 13 FEBRUARY
EPISODES VIEWED 1-3

CREATOR Lena Dunham

CAST Lena Dunham, Allison Williams, Jemima Kirke, Zosia Mamet, Adam Driver, Alex Karpovsky

PLOT After documenting the relationship between her ex Adam (Driver) and best friend Jessa (Kirke), Hannah (Dunham) is finally thriving as a journalist. But can she stay clear of Marnie (Williams) and Shoshanna's (Mamet) romantic dramas? And aren't they all getting a bit old for millennial dysfunction?

IF YOU WERE feeling especially uncharitable you might suggest that, since its launch in 2012, *Girls* has been famous for garnering as many angry blogposts as actual viewers. But in recent years, something curious has happened to Lena Dunham's embattled cult dramedy. Just as the invective about the series died down, the team behind the show found their feet in miraculous fashion. This reached its peak with a stormingly

assured fifth season, which underpinned the usual hipster-skewering hijinks with the deftly played emotional wallop of Dunham avatar Hannah discovering her best friend Jessa (Kirke) had hooked up with her ex-boyfriend Adam (Driver). For the most part, this sixth (and final) season falls in step with the late creative surge. *Girls* seems to prosper away from the glare.

'All I Ever Wanted', the first episode, is a confident case in point, opening as Hannah turns her heartbreak into a career breakthrough. Her account of Adam and Jessa's betrayal has, in true Carrie Bradshaw fashion, become the subject of a hit newspaper essay and she soon parlays this acclaim into a commission reporting on a well-heeled Montauk surf camp (yes, we are in *Girls* country). As well as facilitating some typically sharp lines (Hannah: "Everyone here kind of talks in this slow, unintelligible way that borders on just, like, Matthew McConaughey hell") and a mortifying misunderstanding with a wetsuit, this assignment also brings Hannah into transformative contact with a surfer-dude instructor, Paul-Louis (Riz Ahmed, continuing his hot streak in charismatic, spaced-out style).

Elsewhere, the usual *Girls* hallmarks of awkward sex, soapy love triangles and pop-culture zingers arrive tinged with the ennui of advancing years. Ray (Alex Karpovsky) is in

a tentative romance with highly strung Marnie (Williams) but — after a stint at his old apartment with Kylo Ren and a very naked Kirke — he moves in with his ex Shoshanna (Mamet), who's going through her own career crisis. If this all sounds like Brooklynite farce, that's exactly how it's played, particularly in the first two episodes which successfully lean into traditional sitcom set-pieces.

It doesn't always work, of course. Episode two shuffles the pack of characters before leading them through familiar plot points — Marnie's toxic love affair with erstwhile husband Desi (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) and a disastrous networking event — and episode three is a suffocatingly wordy two-hander between Hannah and a sleazy author (an admittedly good Matthew Rhys) which turns on an outrageous moment sure to light up Twitter. It comes out of nowhere, and leaves you craving the narrative cohesion that will surely come with Hannah, Adam and Jessa's final reckoning.

But this is Dunham's zeitgeisty baby all over: hyperactive, unpredictable, measured and maddening. For better or for worse, *Girls* is an authentic document of its time. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT It probably won't convert any of the anti-Dunham brigade but *Girls'* final fling kicks off with big laughs, eye-catching guest stars and an effective undertow of millennial sadness.



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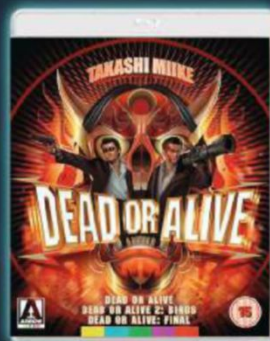
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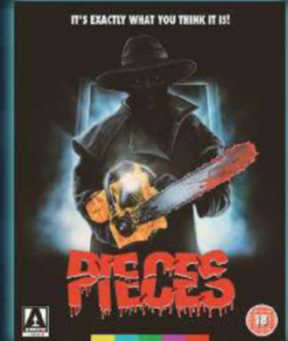
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TV & STREAMING

BIG LITTLE LIES



SKY ATLANTIC

STARTS MARCH TBC

EPISODES VIEWED 1-4

SHOWRUNNER David E. Kelley

CAST Reese Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Shailene Woodley, Alexander Skarsgård, Laura Dern, Adam Scott, Zoë Kravitz, James Tupper, Kathryn Newton

PLOT Relocating the story told in Liane Moriarty's 2014 novel from Australia to Monterey, HBO's latest blockbuster seven-parter follows three mothers who seem to have perfect lives, but are revealed to have been involved in a murder.

POST *THE NIGHT* *Manager* and *The Night Of*, it feels as though the standalone miniseries is having a moment. Just short enough to devour over the course of a weekend and with satisfying endings that don't leave you immediately craving a second season, they are the perfect length for a generation hooked on the deep character development that comes with decent, 21st-century TV, but also daunted by the prospect of another arduous, decade-long commitment to a show that might ultimately turn out to be only so-so. We're looking at you, *Homeland*. It is no wonder, really, that Hollywood's A-listers are signing up for them in their droves.

Still, even by the standards of the aforementioned two shows, HBO's latest packs serious star power. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée (*Dallas Buyers Club*), it has also enticed both Nicole Kidman and Reese Witherspoon (with whom Vallée made the underrated *Wild*), offering them the sort

of rich, leading roles that their long-underused talents deserve. Into this category you can also add the fantastic Laura Dern (another *Wild* alumna), who's already had a taste of small-screen/HBO life as the lead in the excellent *Enlightened*.

The premise, though simple, is compelling from the off. Beginning with a pair of detectives turning up at a pre-school that's the scene of a murder, we soon flash back to Witherspoon's Madeline Martha Mackenzie, driving her daughter to school, then back forward to an interrogation room where other parents are giving their versions of events ("What Madeline had," says one, "was a nose for other people's business"). Mackenzie and her friend Celeste Wright (Kidman) befriend newcomer to the area Jane (Woodley). Jane's son, Ziggy, is involved in a fight on his first day at school, and from there much darkness unfolds as the inner workings of the trio's lives are slowly revealed. Much of *Big*



Little Lies' pre-release hype has billed it as a comedy-drama, but on the evidence of the first four hours at least, it is weighted strongly in favour of the latter. By the second episode, uncomfortable, abusive sex scenes are being juxtaposed with hyper-normal yoga 'n' gossip sessions: a peek through the immaculate curtains into the often dark reality of middle-class life.

Witherspoon and Kidman steal the show from the off, every polished smile delivered with an undercurrent of over-competitive venom and their glances conveying the emptiness of their existences. There are great performances from the supporting cast, too — the likes of Shailene Woodley, Alexander Skarsgård, Adam Scott and Zoë Kravitz — but it quickly becomes clear this will be a series defined and owned by women in their forties. There's a smattering of hammy dialogue ("The metric of success is not always monetary or career-related, it can be

a much more holistic equation," says a teenage daughter at one point), but the story unfolds at a delicious pace, the small-town setting growing ever more sinister, to the point where you ponder whether something as innocent as a child on a slide is a piece of the puzzle.

The irony of the miniseries, of course, is that when the ratings come in and the word-of-mouth buzz just won't subside, the networks are left scratching their heads, trying to figure out how their perfectly rounded one-off stories can be revived for a second series. *Big Little Lies* is going to be another one of those problems. **HAMISH MACBAIN**

VERDICT Teaming a tense, endlessly twisting story with an absolutely stellar cast and stylish, cinematic visuals, this is 2017's first must-see — and more importantly, must-discuss — small-screen show.



SANTA CLARITA DIET

★★

NETFLIX / OUT NOW

EPISODES VIEWED ALL

CREATOR Victor Fresco

CAST Drew Barrymore, Timothy Olyphant, Liv Hewson, Skyler Gisondo

IN NETFLIX'S TONE-DEAF new comedy, Drew Barrymore is Sheila, a suburban estate agent with a kind, meek husband (Olyphant) and a teenage daughter (Hewson). Things are mundane but happy, until Sheila becomes a zombie and craves human flesh. The mix of relationship comedy and gore sits uncomfortably because it's written and directed too broadly. Barrymore and Olyphant play for laughs not for believability, underlining how *crazy* it is that this woman's a zombie. It's delivered like a sitcom but isn't written with the punchline jokes that needs, so repeatedly falls flat. It's not the fault of a talented cast, but of an idea misconceived. **OR**



SS-GB

★★★★

BBC ONE / STARTS FEBRUARY TBC

EPISODES VIEWED 1

DIRECTOR Philipp Kadelbach

CAST Sam Riley, Kate Bosworth

WE NOW HAVE two separate TV dramas examining a hypothetical world of Nazi rule in the age of politically emboldened fascists. So is it accident or some form of subliminal prescience? Whatever the truth, it means that — hot on the jackbooted heels of *The Man In The High Castle*'s second season — we also get this excellent five-parter based on Len Deighton's alternative-history novel. It's 1941 and, amid the swastika banners and roadblocks of German-occupied London, detective Douglas Archer (Riley) investigates a murder that intersects with a secret Nazi weapon, Bosworth's mysterious US journalist and members of the British resistance. Tense, disquieting and delivered with an understated élan. **JF**



GAMES

SNIPER ELITE 4

★★★★

OUT NOW
FORMATS PC, PS4, XB1DIRECTOR Jason Kingsley
CAST Tom Clarke-Hill

PLOT As growly voiced Office of Strategic Services agent Karl Fairburne (Clarke-Hill), the player must aid the Italian resistance against the rising force of fascism in Italy, 1943. Mostly it's all about fatally collapsing Nazi lungs from 200 yards.

WE CAN'T ALL go around punching Nazis, Neo- or otherwise, no matter how much some people wish we could. But everyone who gets their eager mitts on this fourth main instalment of British indie studio Rebellion's *Sniper Elite* series can absolutely, positively look forward to blowing some Nazi nuts clean off their wicked bodies.

Ever since the second game came out in 2012, that's been the series' USP: grotesquely moreish close-ups of high-velocity ballistics breaking enemy bodies, courtesy of an X-ray-style kill-cam. Never mind that you can get your basic sniping kicks in all manner of other shooters. Here, a successful zoom and a calmly squeezed trigger is rewarded with an explosion of gore, as an enemy brain turns to mush inside a shattered cranium, or a pair of testicles burst with legs-immediately-crossed ferocity.

But if you come for the slaughter, do you stay for the story? *Sniper Elite 4* has one, wrapped around a generous cluster of missions set within expansive open areas with rich environmental variety and, more pertinently, plenty of cover spots for long-range head shots. But it's not that compelling, not beside the moment-to-moment action that really has this game singing.

You are the couldn't-be-more-generic Karl Fairburne, a thick-jawed avatar like countless gaming protagonists before him — all growls, scowls and magical back-sticking guns. An agent within the American Office of Strategic Services,

a very real World War II intelligence agency, he's sent to Italy in 1943 to assist local rebels with combating the invading Nazis.

But helping them is only half the picture — across the game's campaign you'll learn about a new weapon Hitler's been developing, which you then have to stop reaching mass production. It isn't going to be easy. This isn't a gung-ho action adventure, and you simply can't rush in. Moving slowly, sticking to cover, choosing your shots when the sound will be masked by passing planes — very strategic murder yields the best results. Get spotted, and Karl really can't stand up to much punishment before he's KIA.

Thankfully, he's not alone in taking on the fascists. Before each mission, Karl can talk to supporting characters such as rebel Sofia and creepy Colonel Weaver. These conversations unlock side missions — so as well as taking out a prime target, you'll also be locating items and equipment, and clearing out checkpoints, slowly easing the oppression of the *Resistenza*.

Before long, each stage's map is dotted with multiple markers — and scouting ahead with binoculars tags further targets, immobile and moving, leading to a cluttered UI. But to play the perfect game you really have to grab and gut everything, acquiring dozens of collectibles, which is a distraction from the raw thrill of the appealing elevator pitch: stay in the shadows, eliminate everyone wearing a Wehrmacht emblem, then get out alive.

And this is a game of uncommon risk and reward, high-tension drama that will have you holding your breath as Karl does his, to steady an aim and make that bullet fly true. It's fabulous when bodies are falling and the enemy has no idea where you're hiding, and a genuinely fraught experience when Karl's position is compromised and rushed by overwhelming forces. In those moments, *Sniper Elite 4* absolutely excels. It is, truly, an elite sniping simulator. Just don't expect a great deal more. **MIKE DIVER**

VERDICT The sniping itself is terrific, with a wealth of multiplayer and co-op modes. But stiff acting and occasional gameplay hiccups leave its firearms fun shorn of lasting impact.



RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD

★★★★

OUT NOW / PC, PS4, XB1

DIRECTOR Koushi Nakanishi

CAST Todd Soley, Katie O'Hagan

IT'S THE FRANCHISE that originally established survival-horror as its own genre, but *Resident Evil* seriously lost its way in recent years. Luckily, *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* marks a major rethink — the big Michael Bay-esque action sequences are out and, instead, turn-you-into-quivering-jelly horror is very firmly in, as the series veers back to the more confined settings seen in its PS1 origins. From the off, as you explore an apparently abandoned Louisiana house, the atmosphere is thickly claustrophobic, intensely creepy and never lets up on the tension. And, on PC and PS4, there's also the opportunity to play in VR, which ratchets up the impact of the game's jump-shocks to near heart attack levels. You have been warned. **SB**



NIOH

★★★★

OUT NOW / PS4

DIRECTORS Yosuke Hayashi, Fumihiko Yasuda

CAST Ben Peel, Masachika Ichimura

IT WOULD BE easy to dismiss *Nioh* as merely a *Dark Souls* clone. From the strike-and-retreat, stamina-oriented combat to the dark and foreboding environments, it certainly feels similar — for added frustration, there's even the inability to pause the game when you need to swap out equipment. But combat is interesting, with different stances affecting power and speed, and spirit animals that you can bond to weapons to add elemental powers. And the Japanese landscapes are glorious. It does suffer in its scale though, the environments smaller than *Dark Souls*' vast, maddening labyrinths. Still, despite its obvious influences, *Nioh* emerges more than the sum of its parts — a hardcore gem. **MK**

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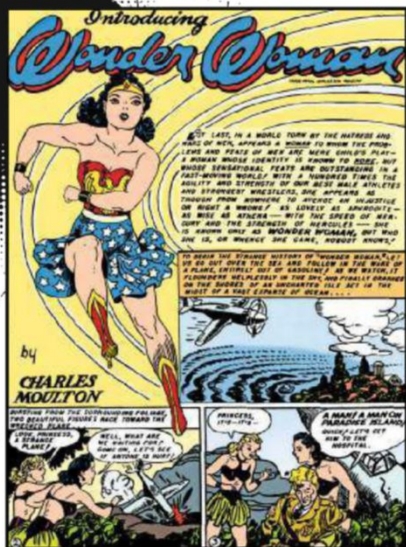
ALPHA FEMALE

HER RACE TO THE BIG SCREEN HAS LASTED AN ASTONISHING 75 YEARS. BUT THE INDOMITABLE WONDER WOMAN'S JOURNEY IS ALMOST AT AN END

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE





→ IN HER VERY FIRST APPEARANCE,

within the pages of *All Star Comics* #8, Wonder Woman appeared to leap out of the page, one booted leg forward, arms pumping, star-spangled skirt swirling around her. She looked powerful, beautiful, unlike anything seen before. “AT LAST, IN A WORLD TORN BY THE HATREDS AND WARS OF MEN,” the accompanying text boomed, “APPEARS A WOMAN TO WHOM THE PROBLEMS AND FEATS OF MEN ARE MERE CHILD’S PLAY...”

It was December 1941, the United States had just joined World War II, and this goddess had come to fight for truth, justice and a better world. She was an instant sensation, prompting a flood of enthusiastic letters from readers and winning a comic of her own. But despite that debut, in the 75 years (and change) since, she’s never had her own film on the big screen. Her fellow members of DC’s Holy Trinity, Superman and Batman, have had six and eight films respectively. Wonder Woman’s big-screen credits, however, are a supporting role in *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, a tiny (though funny) cameo in *The Lego Movie*, and a blink-and-you’ll miss it spot in *The Lego Batman Movie*. So this year’s Wonder

Woman, starring Gal Gadot and directed by *Monster’s* Patty Jenkins, will be a landmark.

But it’s not been for lack of trying.

Warner Bros. spent two decades labouring to bring *Wonder Woman* to the big screen, with efforts failing due to bad timing, creative clashes or spectacular bad luck. It took the relaunched and reinvigorated DC Extended Universe, starting with Zack Snyder’s *Man Of Steel*, to give the hero, also known as Diana of Themyscira, the opening fans had been waiting for. “People had been trying to develop it, and I think the success of female-driven action films like *The Hunger Games* really helped people realise there’s an audience,” says producer Deborah Snyder. “There’s a longevity to the character and what she stands for. She’s stood the test of time.”

Perhaps the delay should be no surprise. Both on the page or off it, Wonder Woman has never had it easy. After that strong start, she was swiftly relegated to secretary to her superhero brethren, while her comics have been attacked by sexist critics and occasionally cancelled. At her lowest ebb the character was rescued from obscurity by the unlikely pairing of a feminist icon and a beauty queen. But perhaps the most unlikely story of all was that of her creation.

WONDER WOMAN WAS conceived by William Moulton Marston, a “consulting psychologist”, screenwriter and advocate of women’s rights who co-created one of the first lie-detector machines, sparking a lifelong interest in deception that tied into Wonder Woman’s ‘Lasso Of Truth’. He was studying at Harvard when suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst spoke there and was deeply impressed by what he heard. But after graduation into the still-new field of psychology, Marston was exposed as a quack, prone to dubious experiments and wild claims that his research could not support. As his academic reputation declined, he transformed himself into a popular scientist, researching film audience responses for Universal and staging lie-detector stunts for advertisers.

At home, Marston led an unconventional life. He was married to Elizabeth Holloway Marston, a Boston University-educated editor. But the couple lived with Olive Byrne, a former student of Marston’s, and both women had children with him. Part of Marston’s idiosyncratic feminism was an early sort of free love, and an espousal of ideas about “loving submission”, by which women could control men and bring about world peace. Little wonder that Marston himself is the subject of a biopic, *Professor Marston & The Wonder Women*, starring Luke Evans and due later this year.

Byrne began Marston’s association with comics. As a freelance journalist, she interviewed this supposedly eminent psychologist about comics and he issued a robust defence. The publisher DC, under attack from family-values forces, brought him aboard to add respectability to their battered brand. But Marston took his role further when he pitched a female superhero.

“It’s smart to be strong,” he explained. “It’s big to be generous. But it’s sissified, according





to exclusively masculine rules, to be tender, loving, affectionate and alluring... Not even girls want to be girls as long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength and power... The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman, plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman."

The resulting heroine, Wonder Woman, was shaped by Holloway and Byrne as well as Marston himself. Byrne wore wide bracelets that were a model for Diana's, while Holloway had been a much keener student of Greek myth than her husband. There's also some suggestion, in Jill Lepore's book *The Secret History Of Wonder Woman*, that the gang were into bondage they called "love binding", significant given Wonder Woman's lasso and the fact that she lost all power if tied up by a man.

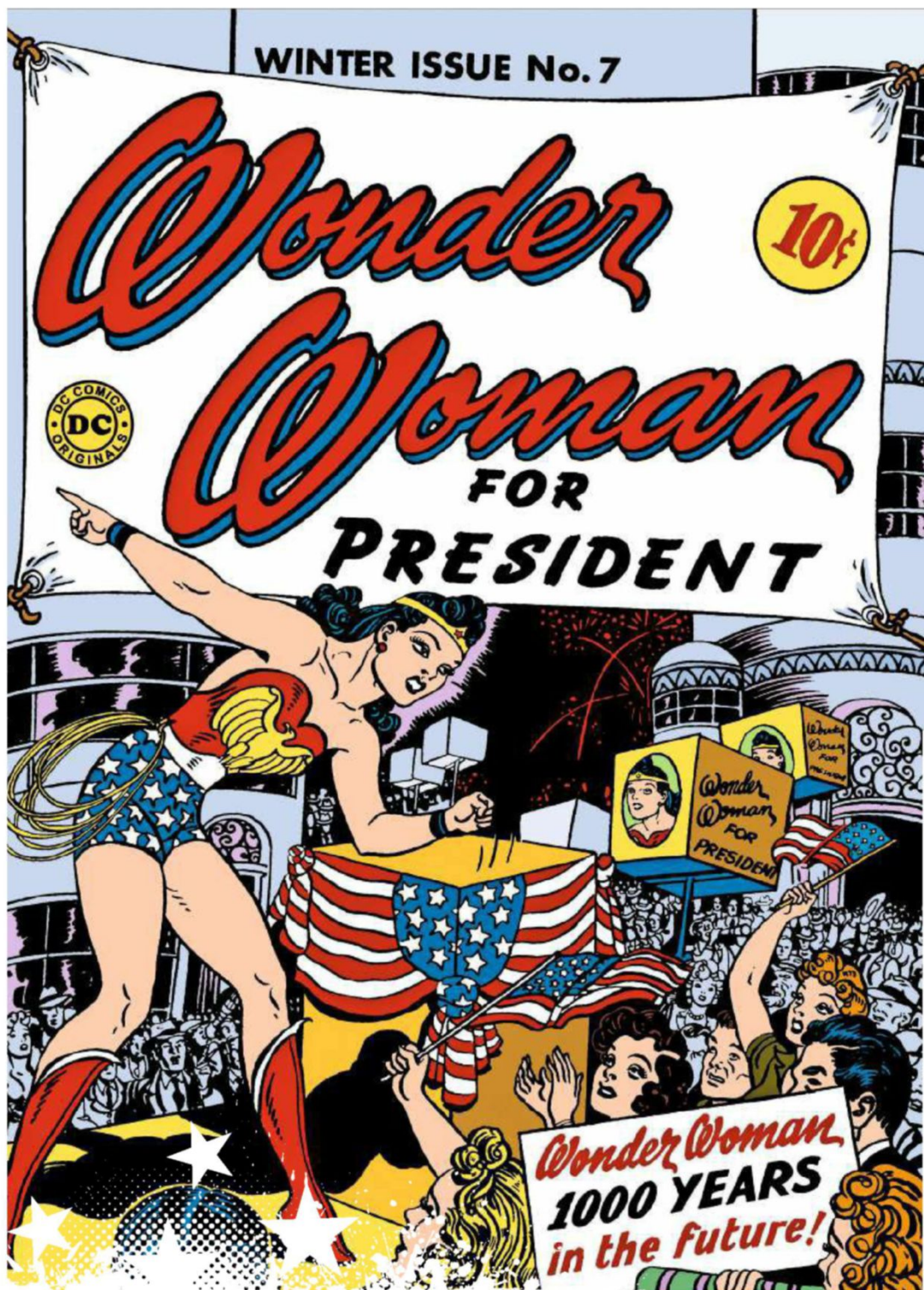
The early strips showed a figure who was strong, independent, opposed to war but willing to fight for democracy. Wonder Woman fought milk profiteers and domineering husbands and department-store workers on strike. Her 1941 debut proved a hit, and sales soon outstripped everything bar Superman and Batman. By her third issue she was shifting 500,000 copies, and in 1944 she had ten million readers. A winter 1943 issue saw her elected President, albeit in the year 3004. In August 1942, by popular demand, she formally joined the Justice Society, precursor to the Justice League. Alas, there she was put on secretarial duties by writer Gardner Fox, who portrayed the character as a helpless hanger-on. But bigger trouble was to come.

Marston was crippled by polio in August 1944 and though he continued working, couldn't keep up with demand. He died of cancer in May 1947. Without him, Wonder Woman lost her way. Holloway's offer to take over the comic was rejected by DC, and Robert Kanigher was hired instead, despite the fact he didn't like "the grotesque, inhuman original Wonder Woman".

In the early 1950s, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham began a moral crusade against violence in comics and dozens of cities and states banned comic books. While Wertham was commendably hard on comic books' casual racism, he was near-hysterical at hints of kink and considered Wonder Woman a vicious, racist lesbian. "Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic-book industry," he claimed. Amid a tidal wave of outrage, a Comics Code was put in place to ensure decency in costumes (bye bye, hot pants) and no hint of impropriety (less bondage).

So Wonder Woman made like the millions of real woman who had worked for victory in the War, and ceded her place to the men. The 1950s saw her reinvented as an advice columnist, a babysitter, a model, a movie star. By the late '60s she gave up her powers to remain on Earth when her fellow Amazons retreated to another dimension. The mortal Diana opened a boutique.

Salvation came in 1972, when *Ms.* magazine, under editor and feminist icon Glorian Steinem, put Wonder Woman on its debut cover, under the headline "Wonder Woman For President". She



quickly became the face of the second-wave feminist movement. And after the success of *The Bionic Woman's* appearance in *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Wonder Woman landed her very own small-screen serial. There had been two false starts — 1967's awful *Who's Afraid Of Diana Prince?* and a 1974 TV movie starring Cathy Lee Crosby as a blonde spy with no obvious super-powers — but the third attempt, in November 1975, hit the spot.

The New, Original Wonder Woman (re-titled *Wonder Woman*, re-re-titled *The New Adventures Of Wonder Woman*) starred singer and beauty queen Lynda Carter in the title role and ran for three seasons — one set in the 1940s and then two in the present day, to cut costs. Carter imbued Diana with kindness as well as super-strength. "When the show first started," said Carter,

"everything and everyone around [Diana] was tongue-in-cheek. But I played her for real, and totally straight. I gave her a sense of humour about herself, so she wouldn't take herself too seriously. I believed in her and what she was about."

Whether amid the pastel togas of homeland Themyscira or in 'Man's World', Carter moved with a dancer's grace. Her trademark spin saw her transform from street clothes into costume; she flicked bullets away with a slash of her wrist. "I wanted her to be capable and smart," Carter said. "She didn't have any particularly super X-ray vision or anything. She just wasn't going to put up with anything from anybody."

Repeated for decades afterwards, Carter's show was the entry point to Wonder Woman for many modern-day adult fans. "I have a vivid



Far left: Wonder Woman for POTUS!
Left: Lynda Carter in TV's *Wonder Woman* (1975). **Below left:** Wonder Woman Begins, in 1941's *All-Star Comics* #8.
Below: Adrienne Palicki in 2011's ill-fated TV pilot *Wonder Woman*.
Right, top to bottom: Director Patty Jenkins and Gal Gadot go green for 2017; Diana with mum Hippolyta (Connie Nielsen); The mythical 'god killer' sword.



memory of standing in the playground," recalls Patty Jenkins, "and arguing with another girl about who was going to be Wonder Woman." Says Deborah Snyder: "The spin and the hands on the hips, that's what I remember the most. I was in awe of her."

But poor ratings in the revamped third season — wherein Wonder Woman moved to LA and got an entirely new supporting cast — killed the show, and Wonder Woman went back to the page. An animated series was mooted in 1993, called *Wonder Woman And The Star Riders* and featuring "sparkling superheroines" called Dolphin and Starlily as well as a winged unicorn for Diana to ride, but mercifully this *My Little Pony*-style take never went into production.

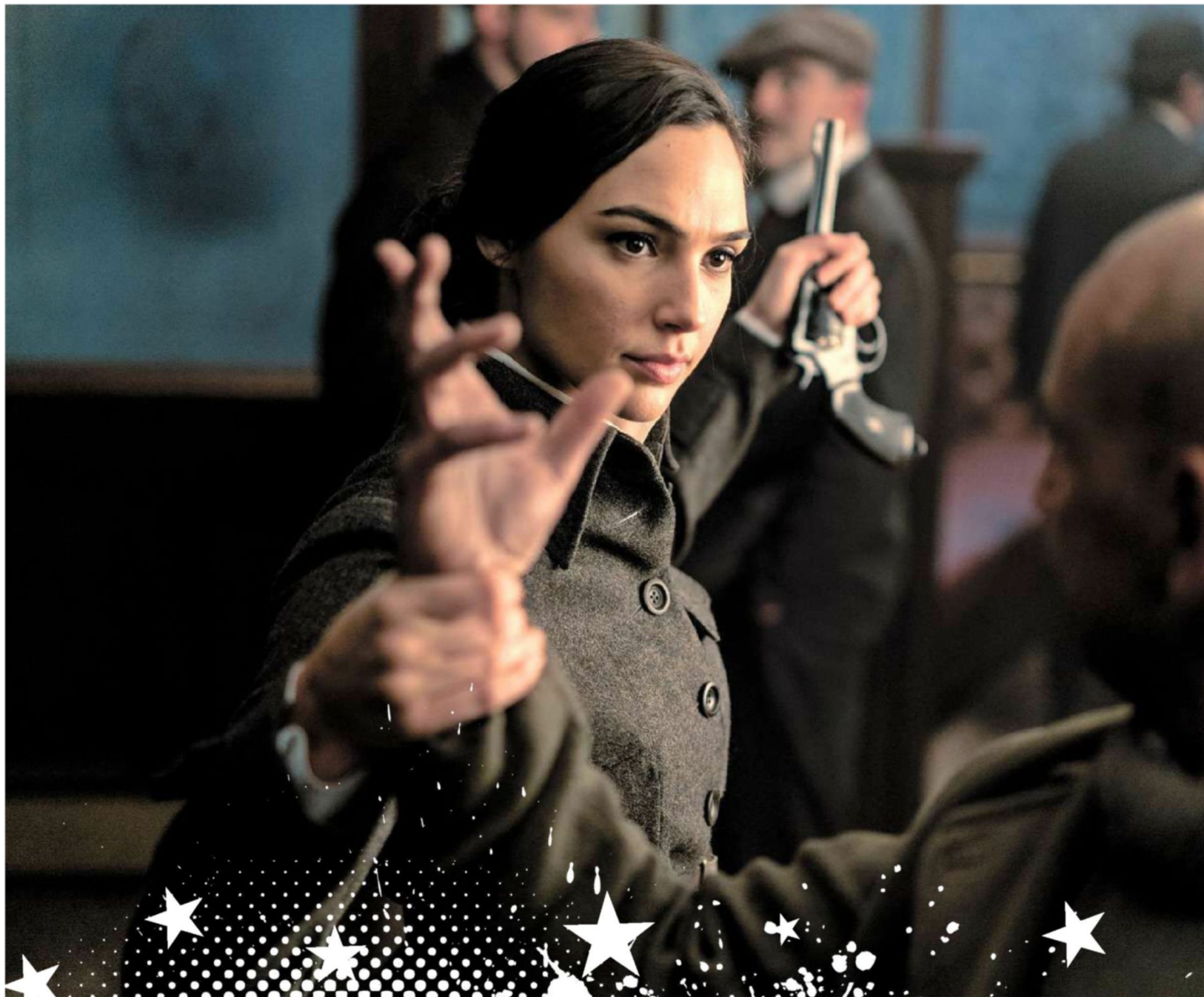
FOR MANY IN Hollywood, a Wonder Woman movie has been a Holy Grail. In April 1996, *Entertainment Weekly* reported that *Ghostbusters* director Ivan Reitman was attached to a big-screen adaptation, following his attempts in the mid-'80s to make a Batman film starring Bill Murray. Reitman stayed attached for three years before leaving the project, and it's hard not to see 2006's *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* as either a mutated version of a super-romcom he hoped to make, or a satire on the whole disappointment.

The early 2000s brought further attempts. Screenwriter Laeta Kalogridis (*Shutter Island*) came up with an epic, mythological take in 2003, centred around Amazons, Themyscira and a fight against Ares, god of war. Maybe that take was too fantastical: it too floundered in development

hell. Next, a pre-*Avengers* Joss Whedon was brought aboard to write a modern-day tale.

In Whedon's tale, Diana leaves Themyscira with human friend Steve Trevor to deliver aid to refugees — only to tangle with drug-dealers and worse back in his home of Gateway City. "I worked really hard on that movie and it meant a lot [to me]," said Whedon, "but I don't know if what I was trying to do would fit in with what [the studio's] vision is. I had a take on the film that, well, nobody liked...We just saw different movies, and at the price range this kind of movie hangs in, that's never gonna work."

Next was George Miller's attempted *Justice League* film, with Megan Gale set to star as Wonder Woman. In 2007 the project was cast, costumed and almost ready to go, when the



fatal combination of a writers' strike and a change in Australia's tax credits killed it. Fans began to lose hope that the lady with the golden lasso would ever hit the silver screen.

Enter Patty Jenkins. The same year that *Justice League* collapsed, Jenkins first pitched to direct a solo Wonder Woman movie. She suggested a modern-day tale, similar in tone but not in context to the period film she's now making. "Ten years ago!" marvels Jenkins. "I was trying to make an essential origin story out of modern times. I was afraid of whole-hog doing the right thing, which is the historical origin story." Warner Bros. didn't bite. "People were just afraid to go into what was considered a male-dominated market with a female lead."

With the film stalled, in 2011 *Ally McBeal*'s David E. Kelley attempted another adaptation in the more female-friendly world of TV. It starred Adrienne Palicki as Wonder Woman, aka tech CEO Diana Themyscira, aka Diana Prince, a shy spinster who spends evenings with her cat watching *The Notebook*. Early stills looked slick, and boasted

a solid supporting cast including Cary Elwes as her right-hand man and Liz Hurley as a baddie. But when it leaked onto the internet it became clear that there was a major problem: it was not remotely true to the character. Wonder Woman first appears with a snarl on her face, tortures information from a suspect, kills henchmen with abandon and delivers the line, "I never said to merchandise my tits!" Responses were savage — one critic for TV.com deemed scenes "glorious in their craptitude" — and the pilot was never officially released. "I know she's famous as a television show, but I don't think she lends herself to television," noted Whedon in 2013. "I think she only works on an epic scale."

Happily, epic scale was about to come back on the menu.

PRODUCER CHARLES ROVEN has been involved with DC since Christopher Nolan began *Batman Begins* in 2003, but Nolan's was "a very closed universe" that didn't lend itself to DC's more godlike characters. With *Man Of Steel* and Zack

Snyder, however, things opened up. "We started to get into it," says Roven, "and of course Zack went, 'Let's do *Batman v Superman*!' Everyone went, 'What?!' [Now] you have this unbelievable exciting expansion. It's constantly evolving."

His fellow producer, Deborah Snyder, remembers the moment her husband first brought up Wonder Woman. "Zack was working on the [*Batman v Superman*] script and he was like, 'You know what? Wouldn't it be great to introduce this mysterious woman?' We started talking about connecting the universes."

A worldwide search found Gal Gadot. She had briefly been mooted for a role in *Man Of Steel* — Zod's right-hand woman, Faora-Ul. But she was pregnant with her daughter and the role went to Antje Traue. After that film came out, Gadot was called in for another meeting for Zack Snyder. It turned out to be a camera test. "I said, 'Great, but who's the character?'" Gadot recalls. "My agent said, 'Oh, you don't know? I don't know either.' Zack called me about two days before I was to travel from Tel Aviv to Los



Wonder Woman finds trouble in a London pub. Did she spill his pint? **Top right:** Danny Huston's General Ludendorff with Elena Anaya as Maru — aka Doctor Poison... **Middle right:** Lindy Hemming and Kimberley Pope's cape design. **Right:** Concept art of Diana and Steve in London.

Angeles. Super-nonchalantly, he said, 'By the way, you know who you're testing for? I don't know if you have her in Israel, but do you know Wonder Woman?' Then I literally passed out, came back to life, tried to put on my coolest voice and was like, 'Yeah, I know of her.'

For Deborah Snyder, the most crucial thing was to cast someone who embodied Wonder Woman's kindness off-screen as well as on. "We narrowed it down to five women, then decided to do a chemistry test with Ben [Affleck]," she says. "The thing that resonated more than even the test — because she did an amazing job and just lit up on screen — was the fact that every single department was pulling for her, because they loved her."

They didn't mention a solo movie to Gadot until the shoot for *BvS* was almost over — "I think they were still auditioning me while I was doing the movie," she smiles — but then things started to move fast. Michelle MacLaren was initially brought aboard to direct, but left after creative differences with the studio, freeing the

path for Jenkins to finally get her shot. At first, she was apprehensive of having her leading lady already in place. "I was like, 'Whoop, there goes that,' you know?" says Jenkins. "But she's like a miracle; it sounds like I'm just talking up my star but I can't say it enough. I don't know that I ever would have thought to look all over the world, but thank God they did and thank God it's her."

So the pieces have finally fallen into place. Three-quarters of a century after her debut, Wonder Woman has completed her leap from comic-book page to the big screen. "Better late than never!" says Gadot. "I'm just grateful it took so long, because I got the opportunity to play her."

Once, the character represented all William Moulton Marston's hopes for a future where women would be strong, independent and equal. Now Jenkins, Snyder and Gadot have taken up that same cause. If all goes to plan this summer, audiences will feel the same wonder those comic-book fans did back in 1941. 🍌

WONDER WOMAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 2 JUNE

ROPE AND GLORY

Five astonishing things Wonder Woman's lasso can do

PREVENT THE APOCALYPSE!

WONDER WOMAN VOL 2 #6, 1987

War-god Ares is bent on obliterating Earth with nuclear missiles. But just before they're launched, Wonder Woman nets the belligerent deity with her Lasso Of Truth. Its powers show him a future in which there's no-one around to worship him, and he steps down.

TURN THE MOON TO CHEESE!

JLA #64: GOLDEN PERFECT, 2002

When the lasso is destroyed, a perception ripple sweeps across the world, turning people's beliefs into reality. The trippy results include the appearance of Hindu god Vishnu and the moon being transformed into green cheese. Fortunately everything is soon restored to normal, ending the *fromage* fiasco.

PUT OUT FIRE!

WONDER WOMAN VOL 1, #226, 1976

Hephaestus, the god of fire, unleashes golden robots that create raging infernos all over New York. After defeating one of the robots in combat atop the Statue Of Liberty, Wonder Woman uses her lasso to whip up the sea around Liberty Island, dousing the flames.

STOP BEES!

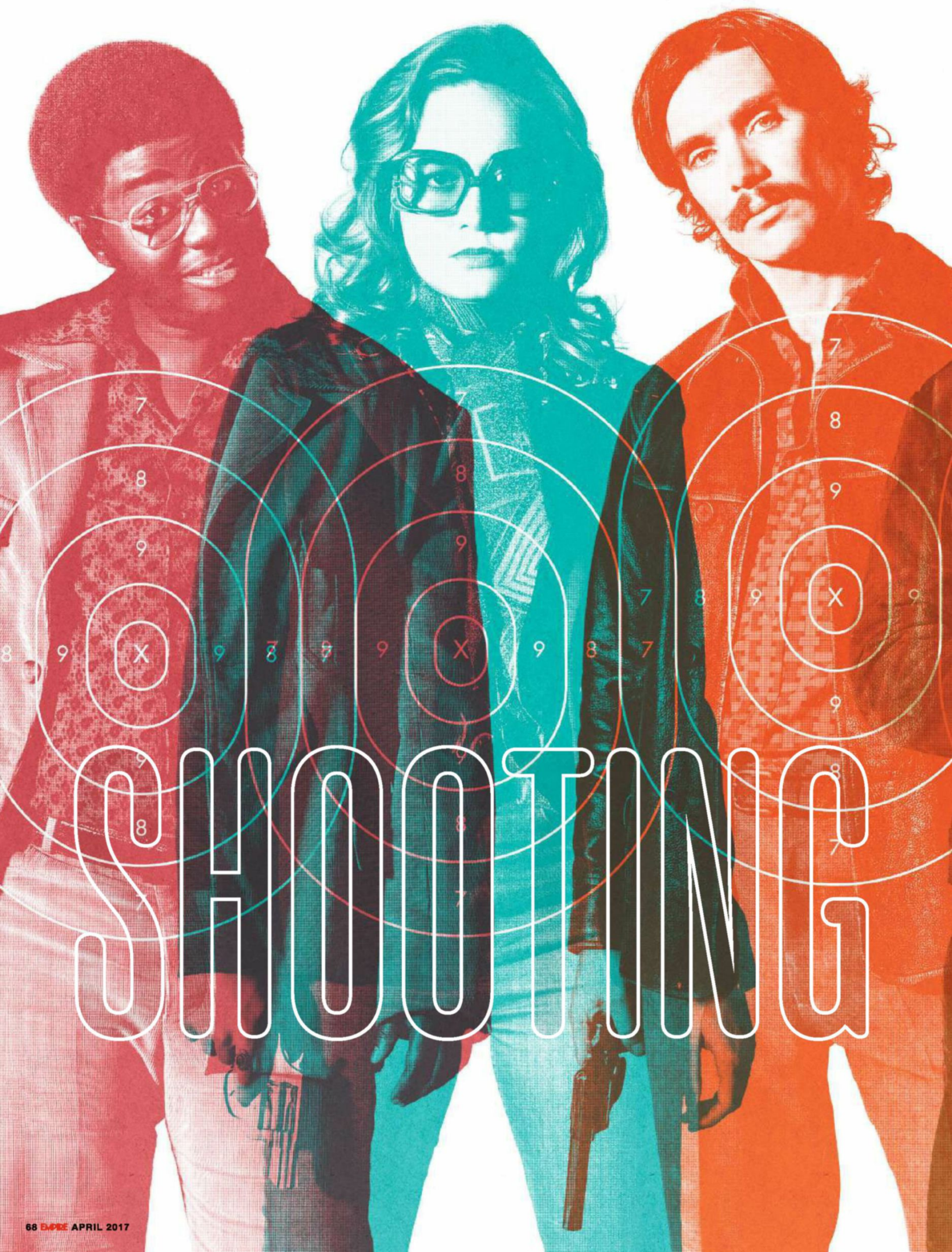
ADVENTURE COMICS #463, 1979

While patrolling Texas in her invisible plane, Wonder Woman spots a swarm of super-smart, alien bees. When they attack the nearby Space Centre, she twirls her lasso at the vibrational frequency of a queen bee's mating call, luring them into an airlock chamber.

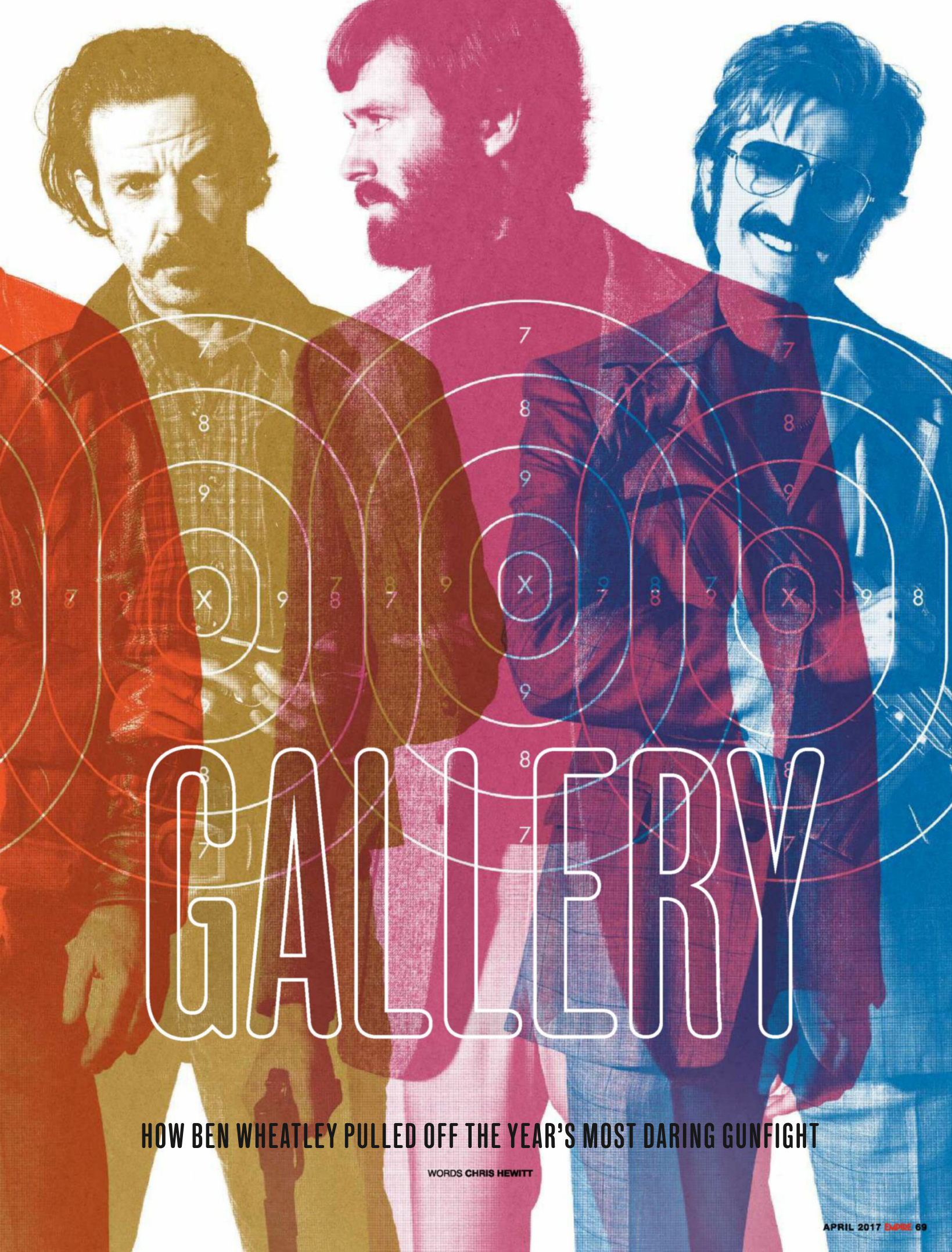
HYPNOTISE PEOPLE!

SUPERMAN/WONDER WOMAN VOL 1, #8, 2014

Rebooted in 2011 for DC Comics revamp *The New 52*, Wonder Woman acquired new powers, including the ability to control the minds of members of the military. In this issue she rescues a captured Lois Lane by telepathically commanding a soldier to release her. **JOE CAMERON**



SHOOTING



GALLERY

HOW BEN WHEATLEY PULLED OFF THE YEAR'S MOST DARING GUNFIGHT

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

CILLIAN MURPHY

POINTS TO A SMALL, BLOODY HOLE IN HIS LEFT ARM.

"That's a ricochet," he says. "That's from the first time I'm shot. Then he gestures to a makeshift tourniquet wrapped tightly around his right thigh. "And I got one in the leg. We're all fucking wounded."

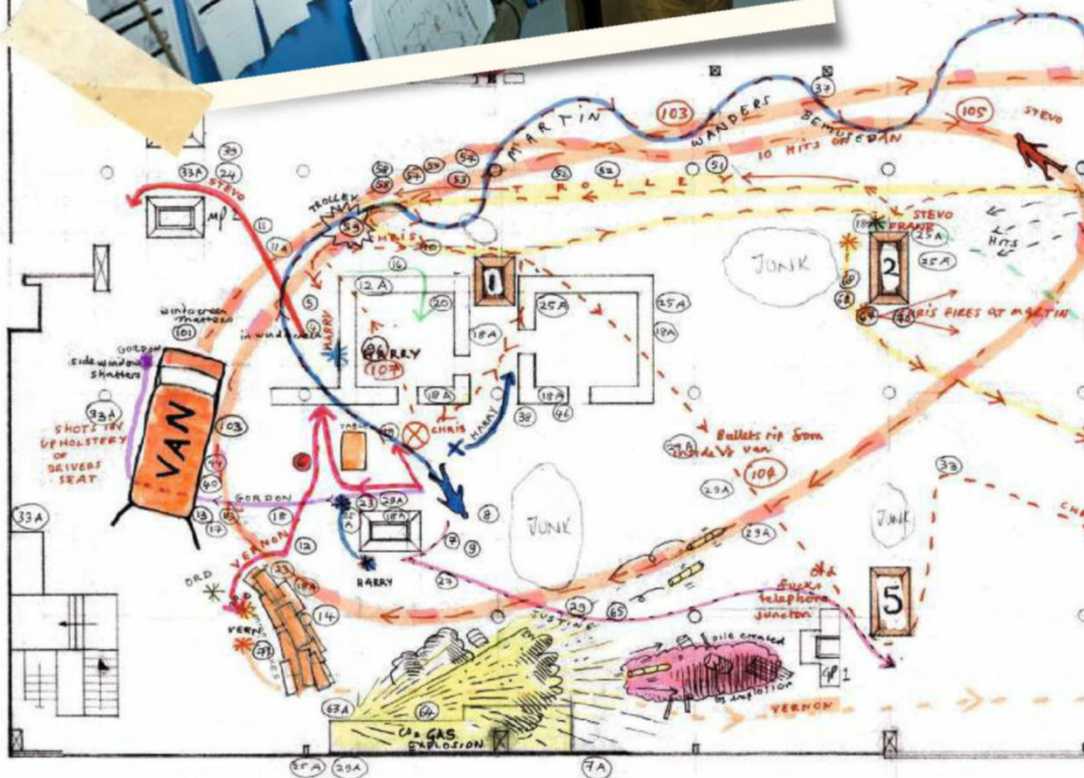
That's an understatement. "I get clipped on top of the shoulder," sighs Sharlto Copley. "I got shot in the arm," says Armie Hammer, pointing out a flesh wound. "And the calf." Brie Larson, with a certain glee, admits to an arm wound and "my leg, the back upper thigh. I'm running away and get shot there."

Welcome to Ben Wheatley's *Free Fire*, a blackly comedic thriller that is built around one of the most extraordinary and elaborate shoot-outs in cinema history. Here, Wheatley, his cast and key collaborators, including cinematographer Laurie Rose, tell us how they pulled it off.

LOCK AND LOAD

If the single-location *Free Fire* seems as if it was intended as a palate cleanser for Wheatley — an 'amuse ambouche', if you will — after the exertions of last year's *High-Rise*, the opposite is true. In fact, the project was on Wheatley's to-do list before the ambitious J.G. Ballard adaptation. "It was written a while ago [around 2013]," says Wheatley, who once again co-wrote the script with his wife and editor, Amy Jump. "I'd written a different script a while back which, in the middle of it, had this fight scene where people are really drugged-out and crawling around. I thought there was something in that."

Taking that basic idea, Wheatley just said no to drugs and decided to push the fight scene in an unorthodox direction. Namely, he wanted





Sharlto Copley's gunrunner Vernon.
Above: Cillian Murphy as IRA man Chris. **Left:** Director Ben Wheatley.
Below: Production diagrams for the shootout action.



a movie where the action is the juice, the whole juice, and nothing but the juice. "It came out of wanting to do a procedural action film," he explains. "I started thinking, 'What are action beats?' Having made movies with bits of action, I thought the bits that worked best were relatable to human scale. That kind of storytelling is very specific. You see it in [James] Cameron, [Don] Siegel and going back to [Howard] Hawks. You have the characters, the rules of what they've got are very clear, the weapons and what they do."

Everything slotted into place when Wheatley discovered the transcript of an old shootout involving the FBI in Dade County, Miami, in 1986. The FBI had .38 Police Specials. The bad guys, on their way to rob a bank, had automatic weapons. The face-off went down in a confined space and lasted for roughly 40 minutes. The bank robbers, and two FBI agents, were killed. "They had to write a ballistics report," says Wheatley. "It's crazy. People were shooting at each other at point blank range and missing. People would be shot multiple times and not die. It's no massive epiphany that Hollywood shootouts aren't that realistic, but I thought that was really odd and started looking more into it."

Thus came the story of the 1970s-set *Free Fire*, which sees an illicit arms deal in a Boston warehouse between Sharlto Copley's effervescent gunrunner Vernon and IRA guys Cillian Murphy and Michael Smiley go titanicly tits-up. With the bullets flying, the wounded survivors dive, crawl and drag themselves to cover. The only question, as a great horror film poster once said, is: who will survive, and what will be left of them? "I wanted to make something where people's options get reduced dramatically and quickly," says Wheatley. "It's just people trying to survive."

Shootouts are nothing new, of course. Wheatley knows that. But what sets *Free Fire* apart is that he didn't just want his shootout to be a set-piece in the movie. He wanted it to be the movie.

Now all he had to do was stage the thing.

TAKE AIM

If you've ever gambolled through the virtual fields of world-building video game *Minecraft*, you might just have stumbled across a large building in the middle of nowhere. A building that, inside, features a cavernous space kitted out with strategically placed (and suitably pixelated) boxes, pillars, and even a speedboat. Congratulations — you stumbled upon the *Free Fire* warehouse. "Yeah, I built a warehouse in *Minecraft* to look at the dimensions," laughs Wheatley. "It was online for ages. We were all running around inside it, but we didn't tell anyone. All the *Minecraft* characters had the names of the *Free Fire* characters written over the top."

Once Wheatley and Jump had finished their screenplay, the director knew what he needed in order to stage the shootout. "It was always a warehouse," he says. "Somewhere that was going to be contained."

Having built his virtual version, Wheatley and his production designer, Paki Hughes, had to look for the real thing. At first, they looked at a number of old, crumbling buildings in various forms of disrepair, before they realised they needed to create their own. Which they did, moving into the recently vacated former HQ of Brighton's leading paper, *The Argus*; just round the corner, handily enough, from Wheatley's own house. "It was perfect," says Hughes. "It was a lovely empty space with nicely painted walls and floors. We made a complete fuck-up of it, which was great."

The pre-production phase on *Free Fire* seems like the sort of simply capital wheeze you tend to read about in Boy's Own books. As well as logging serious *Minecraft* time, it also saw Hughes and Wheatley playing with toy soldiers ("and a 1/16th scale Chevy van, which was terribly important") on the floor of Wheatley's attic in an attempt to figure out where the characters all scatter once the shit/fan intersection gets underway. And once the warehouse had been suitably fucked up, Wheatley, his cinematographer Laurie Rose, Hughes and other key crew members took to running around it wielding Nerf guns and sticks with principal cast members' faces stuck on them. They hadn't taken leave of their senses. Instead, they had several damn good reasons for having the time of their lives.

"The lighting had to be in place," says Rose, who's worked with Wheatley on all his movies. "That's relatively unusual. Usually any story might loop around a location and span different times of day, but the real-time nature of this killed that." With Wheatley keen for ultimate control of his environment, Rose had to devise a lighting system (controlled by an iPad) that would deliver consistency and mood while allowing his director to film any portion of the warehouse at any time, and the actors who'd be kicking and a-gouging in the mud and the blood and the beer. Which explains the sticks.

And the Nerf guns.

"Seven weeks before we started filming, we had to decide where all the bullet hits were going," says Wheatley. "The action couldn't really change. You could come unstuck quite badly if you didn't think about how someone was going to get from A to B, and fuck, if all along they could see each other and shoot at each other. So as we were building it, I would say, 'These walls are too high or too low,' and we adjusted it as we went along." With pillars, walls and other obstacles soon built for cast members to cower behind, it was time to let the shooting — and the shooting — begin in earnest.

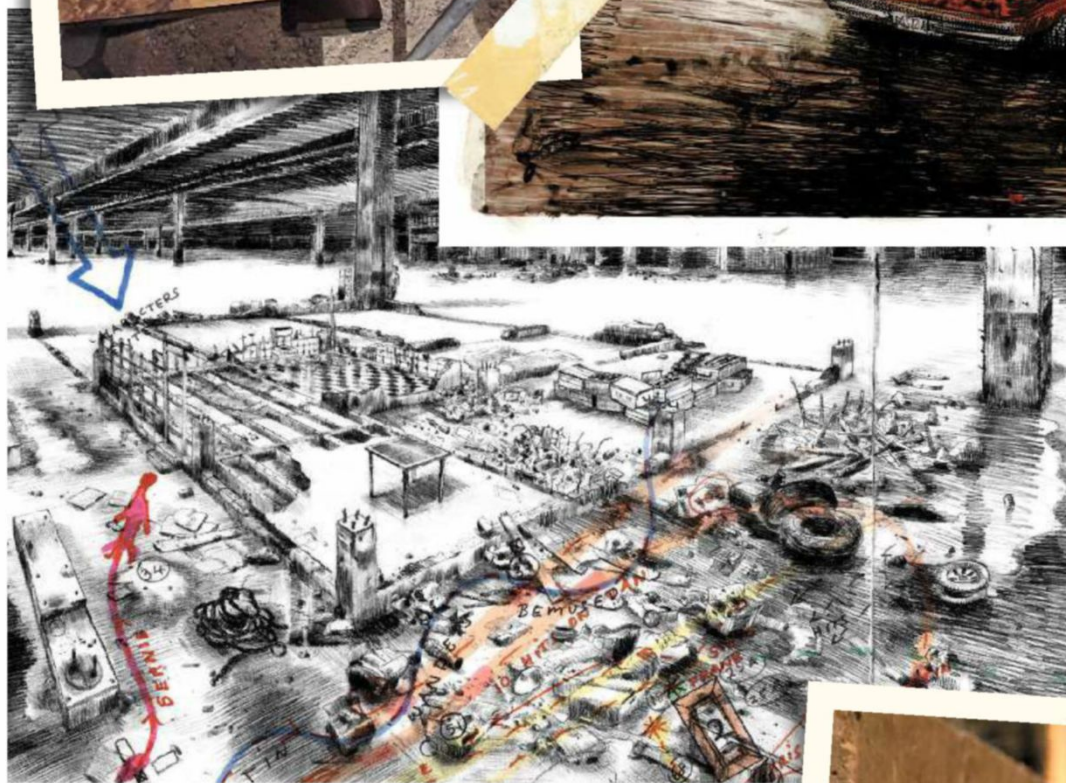
... AND (FREE) FIRE!

"BANGBANGBANGBANG!"

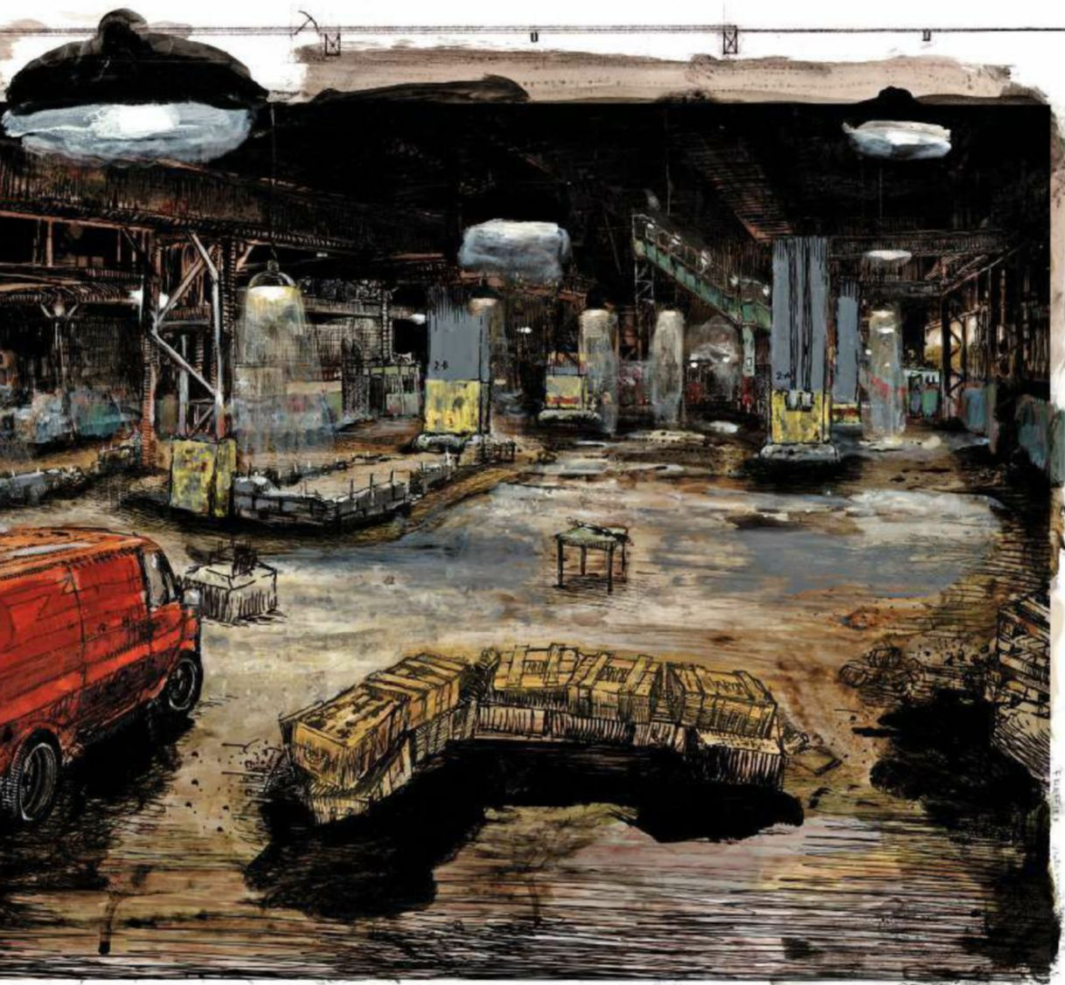
It's a baking-hot June day in 2015 and *Empire* has come to the Brighton Retail Park where, tucked away behind an Argos and an M&S, sits the former home of *The Argus* and the current home of *Free Fire*. After we've stepped inside, into the shell of a warehouse formerly belonging to the fictional Watson Umbrella Company ("WE GOT YOU COVERED!" bellows a helpful sign), past the old oil drums and a speedboat called Royal Flush, and the dummy corpse of an unfortunate who's the first cast member to expire, we get to witness rehearsal for today's scene. It involves a fight between Cillian Murphy's Chris and Armie Hammer's cool-as-ice Ord that is rudely interrupted by the explosion of some gas canisters. Right now, they're in the final stages of prep, Murphy and Hammer practising the moves of their grapple on the ground, complete with a rubber crowbar Hammer clocks himself on the head with at one point. An AD is helpfully filling in the blanks — literally. "BANGBANGBANG!" he shouts again, to simulate the errant gunfire that will trigger the explosion. And then he screams one *huge* "BANG!" to indicate the main event. Satisfied, they get ready to shoot. *Empire* is handed a pair of ear plugs. And, disconcertingly, a huge pair of yellow ear protectors as insurance. Then a plastic sheet is erected between the set and Wheatley's video village, in case shrapnel heads our way.

Before we can check our life insurance, though, the cue is given. The gas canisters blow apart, accompanied by a thunderclap that could probably be heard on Brighton Pier. A sulphuric smell suffuses the air, and a cloud of dust coats the scene. There's a second of stunned silence — the explosion has gone better than anyone had dared hope — and then Wheatley remembers that he's meant to call an end to proceedings. "Cut?" he laughs, tentatively.

Here's where they are. Roughly four weeks into a six-week shoot, each of the characters has been shot at least once in the opening skirmish and all have sought cover, or have begun what Michael Smiley calls "the Big Crawl" across the



Top left: Wheatley's armoury, as snapped by the director himself. Here: Wheatley chats to Taylor, Michael Smiley (Frank) and Sam Riley (Stevo) on set.



dusty, debris-strewn floor to a room where possible salvation lies. "I don't think any of us knew there would be debris on the ground, which is a game changer," says Larson, whose mysterious Justine brokers the deal and ends up fighting for her life. "Mentally I'm fine, I feel very loved, but my body has taken it. We're all pretty beat up. I'm deeply bruised."

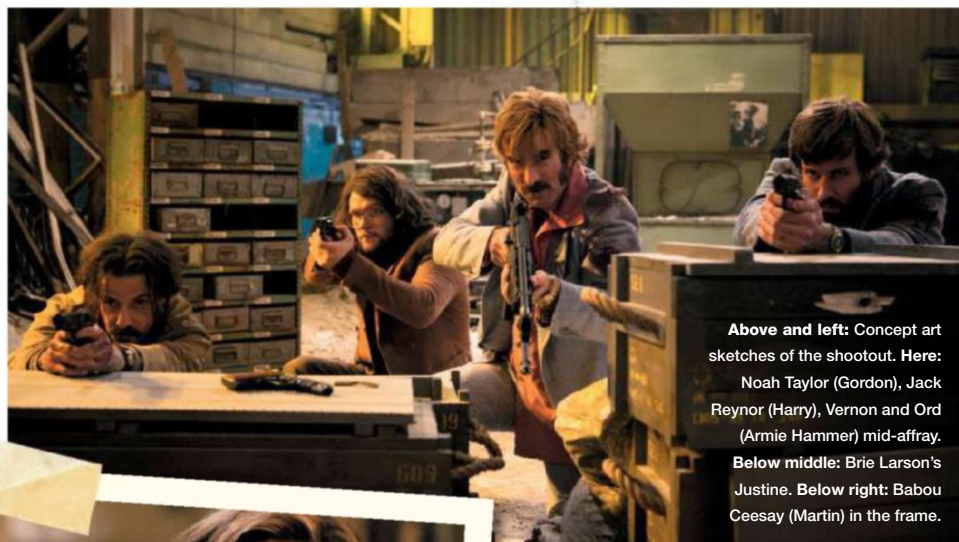
In order to aid the actors, the costume department and, well, everyone, Wheatley has been shooting the film as close to chronologically as he can. And with his desire to be able to work anywhere at any time remaining intact, that means the cast have to remain constantly on call in case they're needed to loiter in the background of someone else's close-up. "It feels like *Groundhog Day*," laughs Hammer. "Because you show up to work, shoot ten minutes, and you show up the next day and you're right in the same spot, but five minutes later in the movie."

At this stage, almost everything is set. "My job was done before day one!" laughs Paki Hughes. The lighting pre-sets allow Rose and Wheatley to shoot fast and loose with multiple camera crews capturing the mayhem. The actors' journeys across the warehouse have been diligently delineated on a series of storyboards and charts that Rose says "are like the Marauder's Map in *Harry Potter*". Wheatley admits there's not been much physical room for manoeuvre. "Once you're on the ground there's not much marauding around. They can't crawl off somewhere and crawl back," he says. But he has given the actors licence with regards to dialogue and characterisation. "We ran long takes, building up to eight or nine minutes, and the film has the feel of improv. It was a mixture of reportage and a play and filming."

When it comes to the action, Wheatley is keen to emphasise realism. There are no slow-mo John Woo-style heroics here. No backflips. Nobody swings on anything. The actors, for the most part, do their own stunts (Copley performs one, in particular, that is so dangerous Wheatley could barely sleep the night before; you'll know it when you see it). That realism extends to the weapons used. "In movies like *Dirty Harry* and even Schwarzenegger movies, guns were a character," says Wheatley. "Now there's no differences between them. I wanted to pull it back to that." Therefore, each character has a different gun, including snub-nosed .38 revolvers, M1 Garands and Browning pistols. And, just to ensure that the movie doesn't simply become a bland bullet-fest (some 5,000 rounds of blanks have been fired during the shoot), each of the guns has its own sound. "When we built the sound design, that experience was very specific," says Wheatley. So when you watch the movie, the keen-eared amongst you will be able to know who's shooting whom.

Bangbangbangbang and then some. ●

FREE FIRE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 31 MARCH



Above and left: Concept art sketches of the shootout. Here: Noah Taylor (Gordon), Jack Reynor (Harry), Vernon and Ord (Armie Hammer) mid-affray. Below middle: Brie Larson's Justine. Below right: Babou Ceesay (Martin) in the frame.







NOTHING LOST

IT HAS A NEW PLOT AND AN AMERICAN A-LIST STAR. BUT, SAY THE MAKERS OF BIG-BUDGET ANIME ADAPTATION *GHOST IN THE SHELL*, THE CYBERPUNK SPIRIT IS STILL ALIVE

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

IN TRANS LATION



As eerie music swells, a figure takes shape on the giant screen. Identifiably female, it rises from a pool of fluid, its ivory-white outer layer detaching and flying from it in paper-like shreds. LED lights twinkle on either side of the screen; the monitor glitches. And as the soundtrack builds to a crescendo, the figure completes its metamorphosis. It's Scarlett Johansson.

Hollywood has for some time been on a quest to crack anime. With intricate mythologies and devoted armies of fans, the medium has obvious appeal for movie producers. But adapting it is no easy task. James Wong's *Dragonball: Evolution* (2009) is a cautionary tale, grossing \$57 million from a \$30 million budget but drawing scorn from critics. Even the biggest names in moviemaking have struggled. An adaptation of 1988's landmark sci-fi anime *Akira* remains unmade, despite 15 years' worth of attempts (see page 77). James Cameron puzzled over his spin on *Battle Angel Alita* for over a decade, before passing it on to Robert Rodriguez (production recently wrapped at Austin's Troublemaker Studios). Shane Black toyed with *Death Note*, before ultimately departing to make a new *Predator*.

All of which means *Ghost In The Shell* is the first mega-budget anime adaptation to arrive in cinemas. The tenacious director who made it happen is not the big name you might expect, but Rupert Sanders, best known for 2012's *Snow White & The Huntsman*.

Empire sits down with Sanders in November 2016 at Tokyo's Tabloid gallery, a swish space in the Creator's District. Tonight is Paramount's launch event for the film, hence the showreel being shown to press, accompanied by live score from composer Kenji Kawai and mini-orchestra. The event is slick and high-energy, but Sanders himself is clearly tired. "It's been a difficult journey," he admits. "But sometimes the best ones are."

It was actually Steven Spielberg who hand-picked him, after seeing the director's 2009 advert for video game *Halo 3: ODST*, and having already commissioned several screenwriters to wrestle with the source material. "My immediate instinct was to

pitch a closer version to the anime than I think they had imagined," Sanders recalls. "The first thing I did when Steven approached me was collage together a pitch using everything I loved from the franchise. Like a DJ looking for breaks!"

Anyone familiar with *Ghost In The Shell* will understand that it's a tough carapace to crack as a mainstream blockbuster. Originally a manga by Masamune Shirow (serialised in Kodansha's *Young Magazine* between 1989 and 1997), it has been spun off into various animated TV series and movies, with such excellent monikers as *Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex — Solid State Society* (2006) and 2015's *Ghost In The Shell: The New Movie*. But the instalment that gained the property international recognition was Mamoru Oshii's acclaimed 1995 film. Its disciples include many prominent sci-fi filmmakers, including James Cameron, who called it "the first truly adult animation film to reach a level of literary and visual excellence", and the Wachowskis, who have been cheerfully honest about plundering parts of it for *The Matrix*.

Put as simply as possible, it's the tale of cyber cops working for Section 9, on the trail of a hacker known as the Puppet Master, who turns out to be no human terrorist but a rogue artificial intelligence. But beneath the familiar manga tropes are embedded deep philosophical themes. The titular "shell" refers to the artificial bodies that populate the tale: most of the franchise's human characters sport cyborg enhancements. The "ghost", meanwhile, refers to the soul, or consciousness within that frame: the intangible, incorporeal spark that makes us unique. If we're replacing our bodies wholesale, the series asks, what keeps us human?

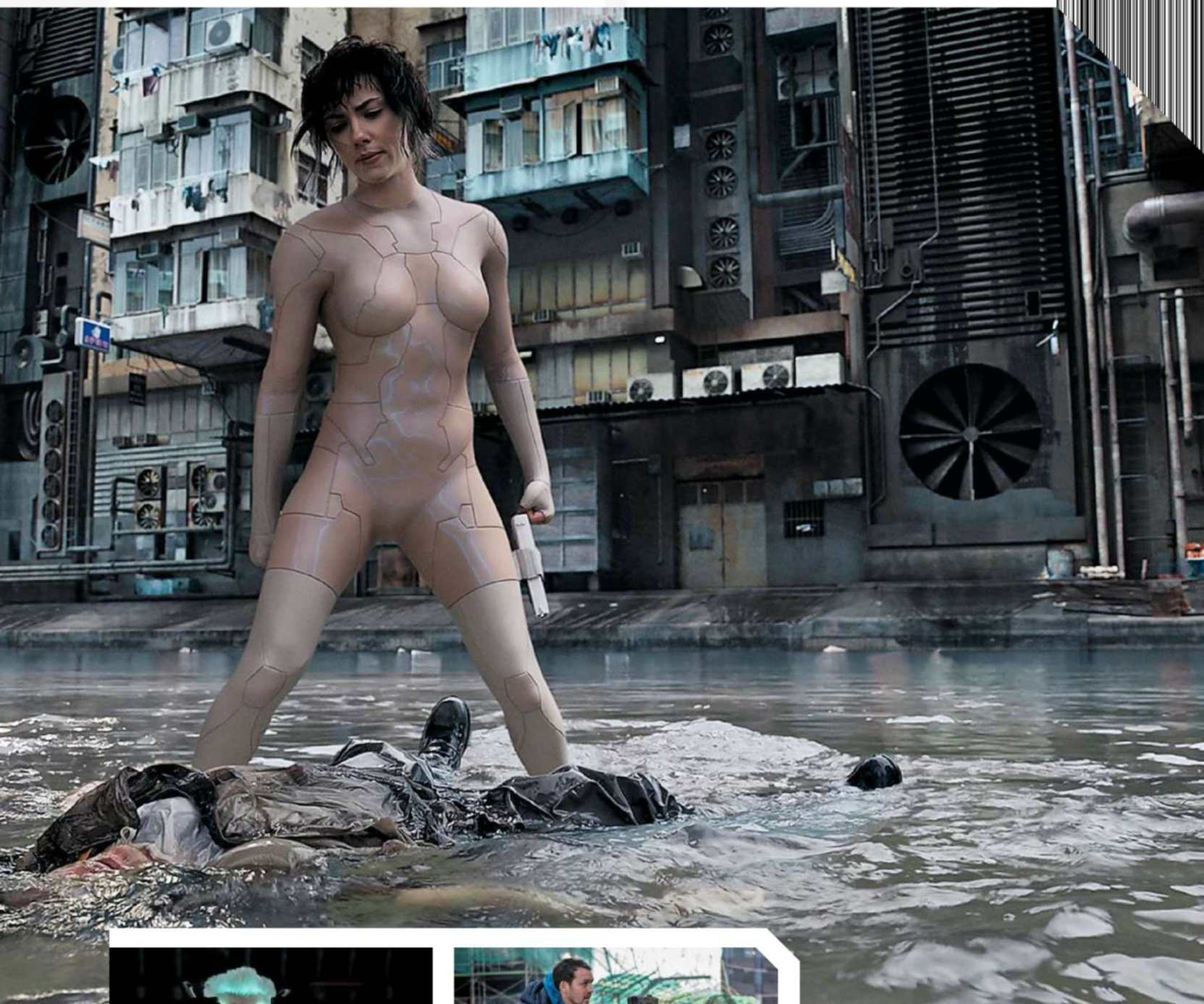
Personifying that dilemma in the new version is Johansson's heroine: apparently no longer named Motoko Kusanagi, but instead referred to simply as 'the Major'. There have been many iterations of this character over the years. Sanders' take is that she's the first-ever entirely artificial human: a completely cyborg body and brain, inhabited by the consciousness of the human she once was.

"It's a woman who's basically trying to ask the question of, first, 'What am I?' and then later, 'Who was I?'" says the director. "In a weird way, it's a story about adolescence."

SIX MONTHS BEFORE Tokyo, *Empire* is on set at Stone Street Studios in Wellington, New Zealand. Outside, a large circular plaza has been constructed, based specifically on Cityplaza in Taikoo Shing, Hong Kong (a detail sometimes missed, dating back to Oshii's anime film, is that *Ghost In The Shell* is not explicitly set in Japan, but in a nebulous pan-Asian megalopolis inspired by Hong Kong). An ancient-looking wooden pagoda with a gnarly tree growing out of it sits incongruously beside a high concrete walkway. The walls are riddled with bullet holes, the streets littered with rubble and burned-out cars. As the light fades towards evening, a crew scatters yet more pulverised masonry, and we watch a diminutive female figure taking a severe beating from one of the franchise's instantly recognisable spider-like tanks. The tank itself will be CG, but there's an impressive full-sized representation



Main: Scarlett Johansson dons her flesh-coloured camouflage suit as the Major engages in soggy combat with a hacker.
Clockwise from top left: Pilou Asbæk as Section 9's Batou; Director Rupert Sanders; The Major's cyber core revealed; Beware the robot geisha.



in situ for the Major to butt heads with. It's only when she turns to face us that we realise we're not watching Johansson, but her stunt double, Carly Rees.

We catch up with Johansson herself when we get back inside the studio. Wrapped in a black hoodie, her black hair streaked with electric blue, she looks tired: drained both from the physical action (Rees isn't doing *all* the heavy lifting) and the cerebral exertion of tracking her character's quest for identity.

"She's living a unique experience," the star explains, deep in philosophical mode, "as somebody who has an idea of who she thinks she was, and then who she is now, and the person that she *feels* she is, this sort of gnawing

feeling she has in her ghost. Being able to play those three sides: the ego, the super-ego and the id... That was pretty enticing.”

While Rees was scrapping with the tank, Johansson has been otherwise engaged on another set: a dark interior “lair” for the film’s nominal villain Kuze, played by Michael Pitt. The scene itself is kept secret from *Empire*’s prying eyes — Johansson hints that it is “a tactical approach to a target the Major’s been hunting” — but we do catch a glimpse of thick black cables trailing from a central hub to a bank of tall computers. Apparently they can be attached to people for “information harvest”.

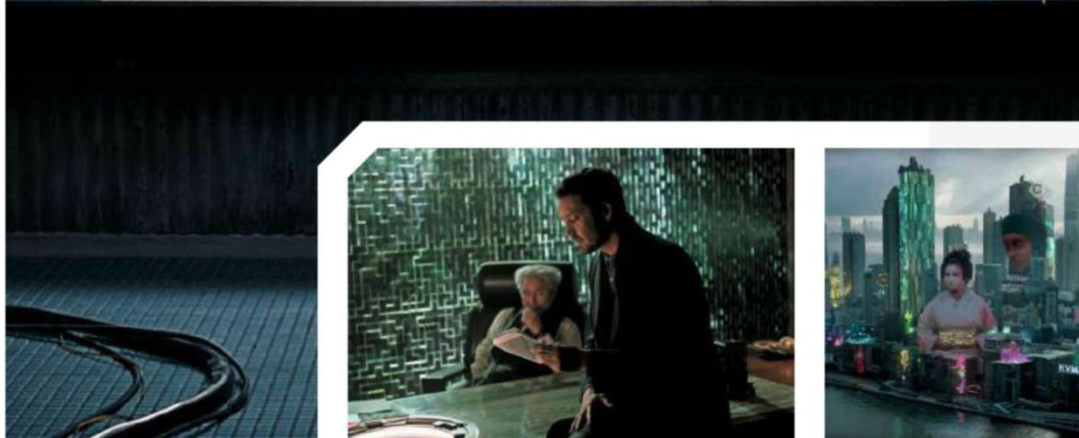
The plaza and tank tell us specific scenes from Oshii’s film are being faithfully recreated, but the presence of Kuze reveals that changes are being made. Kuze doesn’t come from Oshii or Shirow, but from the second season of *Stand Alone Complex*, a TV series overseen by Kenji Kamiyama. There, the messianic hacker revolutionary wants to force human evolution by breaking everyone free of their corporeal bodies and taking their consciousness into cyberspace. In the live-action *Ghost In The Shell*, however, Kuze’s mission is to bring down Hanka Robotics, the company that created the Major. The film begins with a tea house-set assassination (by robot geishas, no less) and an audacious case of data-hacking, putting Section 9 on the case of who took it and why.

It is, in essence, a mash-up of *Ghost In The Shell*’s various stories and continuities — a new story with familiar set-pieces. It seems a necessary approach to an original anime that would basically be unfilmable as a Hollywood blockbuster action-sci-fi. There’s something uniquely dreamlike about Oshii’s film, its somnambulant pacing allowing for sequences like the wordless five minutes where a character goes home and feeds his basset hound.

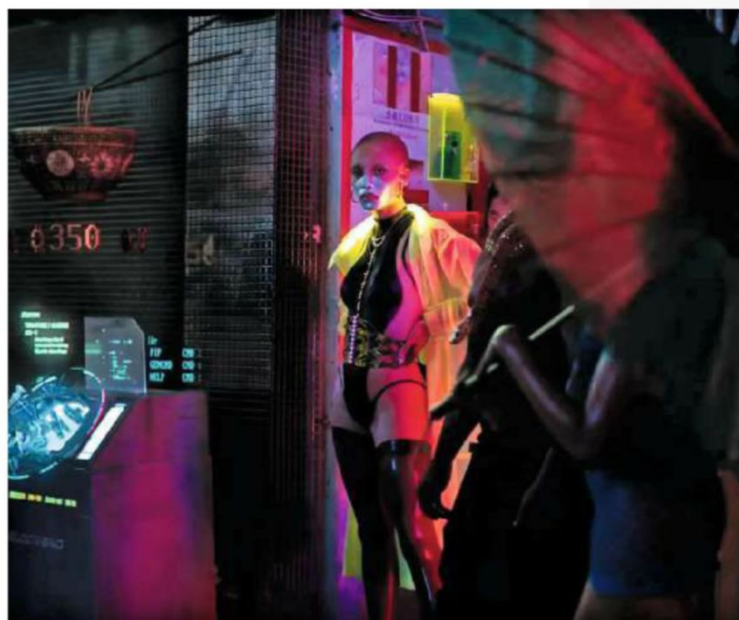
“Oshii was clear that we could use what we wanted but make it our own,” says Sanders. “So our driving story is a suspenseful, action-driven character discovery, and around that is the thematic stuff, which I hope comes across. It can’t be that the introspection and philosophy of the first anime propels you forward, with the action secondary to that. We had to do it the other way round.”

Other repurposed set-pieces from the Oshii original — already glimpsed in the first trailer — include the Major’s iconic backwards swan dive from a high building and confrontation in ankle-deep water with a fleeing hacker. Apparently naked in both, Johansson is actually sporting a flesh-toned silicone camouflage suit. “I don’t wear that too often, thankfully,” she grins sheepishly. “It’s hot where you don’t want it to be and cold where you don’t want it to be.”

Empire doesn’t see her in it on set, but there are startling nude representations of her all over the Weta design departments, including a nylon-and-steel mannequin intricately constructed for the shelling sequence from more than 200 3D-printed components. Sanders jokes that when production’s finished he’s taking it home.



Clockwise from above: The Major, though fully cyborg, is troubled by a “gnawing feeling”; The colourful skyline of the pan-Asian megalopolis; What secrets lurk in its neon-lit nightspots?; Sanders with Japanese legend Takeshi Kitano on set.





THE BATTLE FOR AKIRA

THE LIVE-ACTION ADAPTATION OF '80S ANIME FILM *AKIRA* IS STILL STUCK IN DEVELOPMENT HELL

2002

Warner Bros. acquires the rights for a live-action adaptation of *Akira* (1988), about a dystopian Tokyo in the year 2019.

2003

Stephen Norrington (*The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*) is attached to direct, from a screenplay by James Robinson.

2007

Irish first-time director and animator Ruairi Robinson replaces Norrington.

2008

Warner Bros. announces that its *Akira* will be two films, each adapting three

volumes of Katsuhiro Otomo's manga. Gary Whitta writes new screenplays, taking place in a Japanese-owned Manhattan. Leonardo DiCaprio's Appian Way production company gets involved.

2009

Mark Fergus and Hawk Ostby take a crack at the screenplay.

2010

Albert Hughes is brought on to replace Ruairi Robinson. Rumoured casting includes Zac Efron and Morgan Freeman.

EARLY 2011

Steve Kloves is brought in to write yet

another draft. Andrew Garfield, Robert Pattinson, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, James Franco and James McAvoy are all said to be on the studio's casting radar. Keanu Reeves gets close, but ultimately declines. Rumours surface of a deal with Universal to share the sizeable budget, but it falls through. Early pre-production is shut down and staff are let go.

LATE 2011

Jaume Collet-Serra is the latest director. Garrett Hedlund, Gary Oldman, Helena Bonham Carter, Kristen Stewart, Keira Knightley and Ken Watanabe are reportedly approached for roles.

2012

Production offices are closed again.

2015

Marco Ramirez starts a new screenplay from scratch. Warner Bros. is apparently now thinking in terms of a trilogy. Christopher Nolan's name is mentioned.

2016

Warner Bros. is rumoured to be discussing the project with Justin Lin, but nothing more is heard.


AS SANDERS TELLS it, Johansson's casting was the moment when "there was finally a real motor behind the film". But it has proved somewhat controversial. Last April, *Marvel's Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.* star Ming-Na Wen tweeted, "Nothing against Scarlett Johansson. In fact, I'm a big fan. But everything against this Whitewashing of Asian role". The same month, comic-book writer Jon Tsuei complained, "It is inherently a Japanese story, not a universal one." There have surely been no gripes, however, about *Ghost In The Shell*'s eclectic supporting cast, an impressive assortment of talent from around the globe.

The members of Section 9 include Pilou Asbaek (Danish), Lasarus Ratuere (Australian), Tawanda Manyimo (Zimbabwean), Yutaka Izumihara (Japanese), Danusia Samal (British, via Turkey and Yemen), and Chin Han (Singaporean). On the edges of the core team are Juliette Binoche (French) as Dr Ouelet, a Hanka scientist ("almost the Major's mother, in a way" according to Sanders). And, in a casting coup, the legendary Japanese polymath Takeshi Kitano plays Aramaki, the head of the unit: it's his first full feature outside Japan since 2000's *Brother*. Bristolian trip-hopper Tricky has also taken his first film acting role since *The Fifth Element* as a cyber-monk, cable-connected to his brotherhood and a step on the Major's spiritual path.

It's a heady mix of cultures and aesthetics, and if a multi-ethnic cast undeniably swaps out further characters who could have been Japanese (although the Major, canonically in some parts of the anime, has actually chosen a European-looking shell), it's at least deliberately intended as a forward-looking proto-utopia: a melting-pot city of the future where national identities go barely noticed. The English-language film will see Kitano retaining his native Japanese language, but it's a detail that goes unremarked within the movie's world. "I just can't really speak English," Kitano shrugs, typically deadpan. "I can't memorise dialogue either. I got Scarlett to hold up my cue cards."

Unveiling the first glimpse of the movie on the home turf of Tokyo is part of the strategy to placate online mutterers, and Sanders is unrepentant as he explains his vision. "We're not taking this beloved, cherished property and stamping all over it," he insists. "We're not steamrolling anything that was great about it. I think we've got a very fresh take on futurism that people haven't seen before. Hopefully the sounds of *Ghost In The Shell* resonate around the world and come back to Japan."

One thing is for sure: Hollywood is watching with interest, calculating which anime could be next for adaptation if this is a success. *Alita: Battle Angel* and *Death Note* are on their way. Maybe one day we'll get a big-budget, English-language *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, or an *Appleseed*, or maybe even a *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*. Who knows, *Akira* might even finally see the light of day.

For now, the focus is on the present and Sanders' reborn cyborg. The shell has changed; hopefully the ghost remains intact. 

GHOST IN THE SHELL IS IN CINEMAS FROM 31 MARCH



SINS OF THE FLESH

HOW FIRST-TIME FILM DIRECTOR JULIA DUCOURNAU MADE *RAW*, A FEMINIST CANNIBAL MOVIE
WITH HORROR AND HEART THAT COULD BE 2017'S WILDEST RIDE

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**

PHOTOGRAPHY **DAVID NEWTON**



IN THE EARLY hours of Tuesday 13 September 2016, two ambulances parked up at Gerrard Street East. There was a medical emergency at Toronto's Ryerson Theatre. Inside the 1,237-seater cinema, packed to capacity, cannibal-horror *Raw* was premiering in the Midnight Madness slot, the Toronto Film Festival's self-styled "twilight zone for movie-buffs". According to news reports, "multiple audience members" had either fainted, vomited or fallen ill. By the time social media latched onto it, it sounded less like a screening, more like an outbreak of mass hysteria.

While some have howled publicity stunt, something *did* happen that night. *Fandango's* Alicia Malone was at the screening. "Midway through the movie, there was some movement around me, a commotion, and multiple people going in and out of the cinema," she tells *Empire*. "I saw one guy slumped on the floor by the exit, clutching a bottle of water. When I left the Ryerson after the movie, there were ambulances stationed outside. I honestly don't think it was a PR stunt."



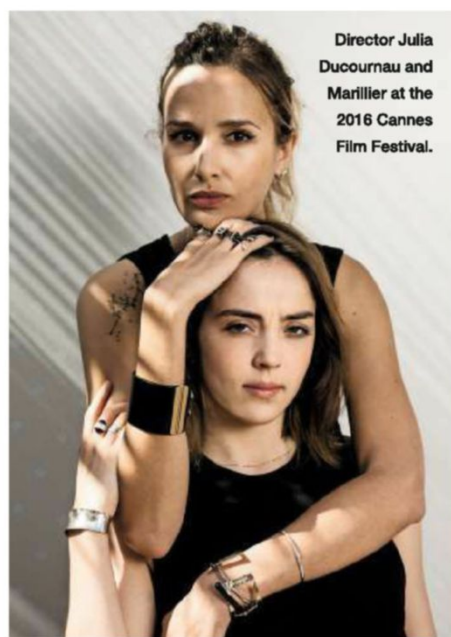
Above: Justine (Garance Marillier, right) with her fellow vet-schoolers. **Here:** Justine with sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf).

It's safe to say 13 September was the night *Raw's* notoriety was sealed. The French horror's reputation now precedes it, radiating a dare-you-see-it video-nasty vibe. True, *Raw* has its moments of hard-gore horror, but the hype is a distraction. When things calm down and the fainters get up, the focus should finally turn to the film's extraordinary dual debuts: writer-director Julia Ducournau and breakout star Garance Marillier.

"I'm not offended — I'm just sorry for the people who fainted," says Ducournau when

we meet in London, a month after the Toronto faint-a-thon. Tall, charismatic and an easy talker, the 33-year-old filmmaker commands quite a presence. She puts the blackouts down to a confluence of ingredients: a midnight screening, empty stomachs, too much booze and, of course, *Raw's* own graphic power. The more reserved Marillier is considerably more blunt. "I thought it was ridiculous," she says, rolling her eyes.

Set in the bleak, blank spaces of a veterinary college, Ducournau's coming-of-age horror



Director Julia Ducournau and Marillier at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival.

follows Marillier's Justine in her freshman year. Urged on by her older sister (newcomer Ella Rumpf), Justine is subjected to a vicious hazing ritual that sees her fed a raw rabbit's liver. The hazing triggers a metamorphosis: Justine slowly mutates from callow vegetarian to flesh-craving beast with a vicious carnal appetite. All the great horrors are defined by mood and moments, and *Raw* rages with unforgettable scenes. It seems to have beamed out of nowhere, likewise its director. Where the hell did she come from?

JULIA DUCOURNAU WAS born in Paris on 18 November 1983, the second daughter of a gynaecologist and a dermatologist. It's hard not to think of Brian De Palma when she reveals this: De Palma's dad was an orthopaedic surgeon, and little Brian would often sit in on operations, watching a bone transplant or a skin graft. "It must have had an influence on the way I see things," she says. "I'm not remotely squeamish, and I'm obsessed with the human body."

Ducournau's other obsession, horror movies, defined her childhood. She'd consume them like other kids did cartoons. She was six when she first saw *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. "Then I got into Poe and the whole gothic thing." Raised by movie-buff parents with classical tastes and no genre prejudice, Ducournau began dabbling with scripts when she was a teen. When we ask about her first-ever screenplay, Ducournau starts laughing. And laughing. And doesn't stop. It takes over a minute for her to recover. "No-one's asked me this before," she finally says, face burning with embarrassment. "It was about a schizophrenic magician." About a *what*? "A schizophrenic magician. I honestly have no idea why. I haven't thought about it in years. I don't know *anything* about magic. It was stupidly bad. Thank God nobody ever read it." After studying literature at Paris-Sorbonne

University, Ducournau spent four years in the script department of La Fémis, France's state film school with legendary alumni as long as your arm — Louis Malle, Alain Resnais, Claire Denis, François Ozon, Theo Angelopoulos... She graduated in 2008, freelanced for French *Elle* magazine, and dabbled in script doctoring, including consulting on critically lauded Afghanistan war drama *The Wakhan Front* (2015). In 2011 she shot *Junior*. Ducournau's wickedly funny 22-minute short follows a tomboy's mutation into girlhood, with a gutsy supernatural twist — after contracting an exotic stomach bug, she starts shedding her skin like a snake. Or, in Ducournau's words, "like an android reptile".

Junior is hugely significant in terms of *Raw*'s backstory. It's the first of three times she's worked with Garance Marillier. The actress was 13 when they met at the auditions for *Junior*'s lead role. Marillier thought Ducournau was the casting assistant. "When Garance came in, she was skinny, tiny, with braces, and completely mute," remembers Ducournau. "I thought, God, not *another* mummy's girl. We started an improv, with me baiting her into an argument, and she gets up and starts yelling, full-force. I was like, 'The shrimp has woken up!' I actually got scared of her. Can you believe that? Scared of a 13-year-old!"



To Ducournau's shock, *Junior* took 2011's Petit Rail d'Or, the Cannes short-film prize. She was immediately hired by Canal Plus to make a TV movie, co-directed with actor Virgile Bramly. The blackly comic *Mange* is a demented tale of body-shaming and revenge, following a successful lawyer and recovering bulimic who meets the woman that hazed her as a teenager. She pledges to ruin her life. This time, Marillier was cast as the antagonist's step-daughter. "*Mange* is the tonal opposite of *Raw*," says Ducournau. "We only had 18 days to film, didn't have time for subtle lighting, so it looks high contrast, all burning reds. I watched it again just last week and it's full-on. I hope they re-release it some day."

As you may have gathered, Ducournau harbours a distinct set of fixations. "Yeah, I tackle the same themes, over and over," she admits. "Metamorphosis, the quest for identity, and body image. It's an endless pit I can look into forever — and I gazed deeply into it with *Raw*."

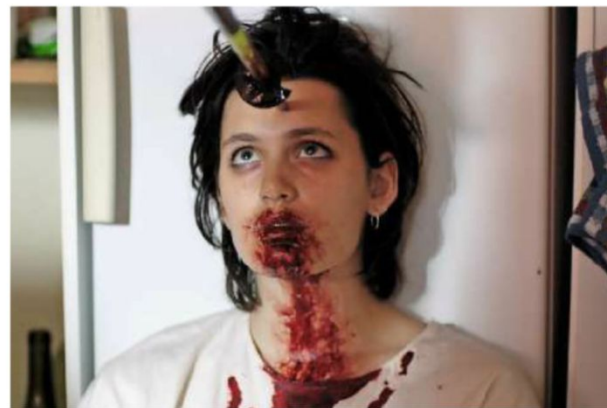
RAW WAS BORN out of a conversation with a producer about cinematic taboos. What was the worst thing a character could do? And how would you keep the audience in the room? When cannibalism came up, a light bulb dinged over Ducournau's head. "It sounded like a challenge — could you make a viewer love a cannibal? Instead of staring at them from the outside, like a circus freak, I wanted to place the audience in

the shoes of a monster, reverse the mould, and reveal a human."

Ducournau started writing *Raw* way back in 2011, while she was shooting *Junior*. "Julia kept telling me, 'It won't be you, you're too young,'" laughs Marillier. "But the film took so long to go into production, time passed, I got older, and she eventually cast me." The reason for the five-year delay, says Ducournau, is down to her country's attitude to the genre. "When you make a horror in France, you're completely alone. In England, you have Ben Wheatley, for instance, who blends genres. *Raw* is a weird crossover of comedy-horror-drama: that sort of film is still a rarity in French cinema. It took forever to get financed."

On 3 November 2015, *Raw* started its 37-day shoot near Seraing, Liège in Belgium — the Dardenne brothers' cinematic stomping ground ("Weirdly, they were shooting *The Unknown Girl* just one kilometre away from us"). To prepare for the role of Justine, Marillier focused her research not on hazing or vet schools, but her own physicality. "I studied dance, and tapped into the animal inside. The main inspiration for the character wasn't a real-life cannibal, like Jeffrey Dahmer — it was [drug lord] Pablo Escobar."

For Ducournau, there was never a sense she'd bitten more off than she could chew, but her commitment to realism meant there were few short-cuts available. Gallic FX genius Olivier Alonso, infamous for his work on New French



FALLING DOWN

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAINTING AT THE MOVIES

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925)

The dare-you-see-it sensation of its day, Lon Chaney's grand unmasking of his waxy phantom phizog shocks the knickerbockers off audiences: fainting fits are reported across the globe.

FREAKS (1932)

Disastrous test-screenings for Tod Browning's classic has audiences collapsing like Jenga: a woman sues MGM for suffering a miscarriage during its castration finale. MGM cut 30 minutes from the film. It still flops.

THE EXORCIST (1973)

The non-demonic, squirty arteriography sequence causes hurling and heart-attacks. A Canadian cinema suffers so many vomit-blocked toilets, they hire a plumber after each screening.

IRREVERSIBLE (2002)

When Gaspar Noé's rape-revenge-in-reverse shocker launches at Cannes, there are 250 walk-outs; 20 swoony patrons are administered oxygen. The festival's fire brigade call the mass panic "unbearable".

SAW 3 (2006)

The grim threequel's UK opening weekend sees a rash of faintings in Stevenage, Cambridge and Peterborough. East England's ambulance service field so many emergency calls that they issue a warning: "If you're squeamish, don't go."

127 HOURS (2010)

Danny Boyle's arm-amputation endurance pic claims four victims at a gala screening: three collapses and a seizure. The Toronto Film Festival becomes cinema's fainting hot-spot.

PERHAPS THE REAL taboo *Raw* tackles isn't cannibalism at all — it's Ducournau's explicit, unfiltered and frank celebration of the female form. While the film is left wide open to interpretation, it's been embraced by countless critics as a fiercely original feminist horror movie. Marillier remains suspicious of the feminist tag ("You don't say to a guy, 'Wow, you've made a great masculine horror movie,' do you?"). Ducournau, on the other hand, welcomes it. "*Raw* does tackle female taboo subjects: body-shaming, eating disorders and, especially, female sexuality," she considers. "Through Justine, I wanted to show girls you can be young, a virgin, be deflowered, and instead of being ashamed, you can be fucking proud of it."

Which leads us to the elephant in the room. Women in horror used to mean the final girl, the bikini victim, the seductive scream-queen. For over a century, the genre has operated like an old boys' network. Over the past few years, however, a chorus of exciting female voices have been rising up and shouting down the idea that horror should be a male reserve. There's Leigh Janiak's *Honeymoon*, Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook*, Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, Karyn Kusama's *The Invitation*... If it's not quite a wave, there's certainly a forward momentum. When we ask why there are so few female directors working in horror, Ducournau lets rip. "As long as the director ratio isn't 50/50, there will never be enough female horror directors," she says, arms motioning. "The fact is that women, and society in general, have been brainwashed. Women have been taught to like love stories and pink, and be 'soft creatures'. Soft creatures? What the fuck is that about? I know a lot of women who are into gore, or cop movies, or whatever. When you make a horror movie, it's an expression of violence that you feel inside. I really do think it's time we recognised women feel violence and anger too."

Unlikely as it sounds, *Raw* could well be this year's *The Witch* — artistically and commercially. Both films share core themes of sexual awakening and family determinism. Both are auteur-driven arthouse horrors that have converted festival buzz into major studio deals (they're distributed by Universal). And both have seen its directors swatting away Hollywood's advances. After *The Witch* bowed at Sundance, Robert Eggers was mobbed by agents, managers and industry suits. The same happened to Ducournau at the now-notorious Toronto screening. The French director, whose metamorphosis obsessions have powered everything she's written is, for now, resisting any kind of Hollywood transformation. "I haven't signed with any agents yet," insists Ducournau. "I'm just trying to keep a grasp on reality. All this attention isn't normal for me." Anyhow, she adds, her follow-up is a serial-killer movie set in France, dubbed 'Project Blue'. "It'll share the same tone as *Raw* but it's dark — really — dark. We'll see. I still haven't finished the script."

And if writer's block should hit? Well, there's always the schizophrenic magician to fall back on. 🍄

RAW IS IN CINEMAS FROM 7 APRIL

Marillier gets her teeth into the role.
Below: Rabah Nait Oufella plays Justine's roommate, Adrien.
Bottom: Alexia gets the point.

Extremity horror *Inside*, hand-crafted *Raw*'s gore. In fact, aside from a pinch of digital magic (a chewed leg, gnawed to the bone, had to be enhanced with CGI), all of the effects are practical. The scene in which Justine hacks up a clump of hair was achieved by Marillier wrapping silicon strands around her front teeth, gagging as she pulled them out strand by strand. An eye-wateringly graphic bikini-waxing scene, meanwhile, didn't require any effects at all. As Ducournau recalls, "We went through a load of body-doubles because we shot so many close-ups — I must say, they were incredibly fucking brave." As for the sequence in which Justine nibbles on a freshly ripped-off finger (a major contributor to *Raw*'s fainting fits): how the hell did they do that? "Oh, that was made of raw chicken," says Marillier, deadpan as ever. You've got to be kidding... "Okay, I'm joking. It was a finger that Olivier made, entirely out of sugar. It tasted quite nice."

Marillier, it has to be said, is a trooper. She was completely unfazed by the gore, the showers of blood, and the savage sex scenes she was required to shoot (so ferocious they had to be choreographed by a stuntman). The scene that really gave her the fear was a solo mirror dance (imagine a disco Travis Bickle) that signals Justine's transformation into a cannibal. "I really didn't want to do it — sexy dancing isn't my thing, especially in front of 40 people," Marillier remembers, wrinkling her nose in mild disgust.

"Julia and I had, er, a bit of an argument." This, it turns out, was a common thread during *Raw*'s shoot. The two share such a tight artistic and personal bond, any creative differences were resolved through bouts of cathartic yelling. "There's a 14-year age gap between us," says Marillier. "But we're both strong characters, and very alike. There's a definite fusion but also clashes." "Garance said we clashed?" asks Ducournau. "We clashed a lot. We completely trust each other but we're both incredibly temperamental. If we're both angry, we're very angry. We scream for two minutes, then everything's cool." Sounds like the sister relationship in *Raw*. "Well, it's not that extreme. I'm supposed to be older, wiser and calmer, but yeah, there were times when Garance felt like an annoying little sister that I wanted to tease."

Twice Upon A Time

MAKING A TALE AS OLD AS TIME FEEL FRESH IS NO EASY TASK. HOW DISNEY'S LIVE-ACTION *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* RE-ANIMATED A MUCH-LOVED CLASSIC

WORDS IAN FREER TYPE ALÁN GUZMÁN



elcome to your childhood," says Josh Gad, greeting *Empire* on the beautifully realised village set of *Beauty And The Beast* at Shepperton Studios. Following on from *Maleficent*, *Cinderella* and *The Jungle Book*, this is Disney's latest flesh-and-blood reimagining of a legendary title from its animated back catalogue. The watchword here is realism, both aesthetically and psychologically. Set in 18th century France, rather than an airy-fairy once upon a time, the period has informed all the artistic choices. "We wanted to give it as much depth and detail as possible," says Emma Watson, who plays Belle. "It's our job to fill in the gaps, to give it more layers and detail than you could ever get in an animation."

This project is a challenge, even by Disney-reboot standards. In 1991, *Beauty And The Beast* was nominated for Best Picture — the first animated feature to get the big nod — and created instant icons out of Belle, Beast, Gaston and a singing teapot. Here, the cast and director Bill Condon explain how they turned classic moments into live action.





BELLE'S SONG

As with the animated version, our introduction to Belle sees her dreamily walk through the village (named Villeneuve after Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, writer of the original 1740 story), lamenting humdrum small-town life via song. The sequence not only sets the tone — “You help the audience relax into the fact that you are going to express things musically,” says Condon — but sets up the key elements of the story. The ultimate Disney ‘I want’ number, it clearly lays out the character’s hopes and dreams.

“It sets the scene of a young woman who doesn’t quite fit into the society she lives in,” says Emma Watson. “She’s a woman who loves to read and go on adventures, and isn’t particularly interested in being saved or married off to the handsome village alpha male. It paints that picture really well, with a good dose of comedy.”

This comedy comes from carefully choreographed background business, involving both villagers and the double act of Belle’s oafish suitor Gaston (Luke Evans) and his sidekick Le Fou (Josh Gad). Here the film diverges from the cartoon for obvious reasons. “Le Fou in the animated version has his teeth knocked out and is trampled on by horses,” says Gad. “You can’t get away with that [in live-action] unless you are doing a Marx Brothers movie.”

Gad’s chief memory of Belle’s opening number was riding in on a nag with a death wish: “I thought, ‘Oh my God! I am going to die on this horse...’” But his terror was soon replaced by pride. “My feeling was, ‘We’ve done it,’” he says. “We have perfectly recreated this iconic moment. All of it felt right.” >

MEETING THE BEAST

The curse that has turned the Prince into a Beast (Dan Stevens) also makes his castle 'enchanted', with inanimate objects come to life. These include clock Cogsworth (Ian McKellen), wardrobe Garderobe (Audra McDonald), feather duster Plumette (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) and harpsichord Cadenza (Stanley Tucci), a character created for this movie. As Belle first meets Beast in the castle's tower, the enchantment takes the form of a haunting homage from Jean Cocteau's shimmering 1946 classic *La Belle Et La Bête*. "We have the hands holding torches," says Condon. "That was such a memorable sequence in his film. It is extremely stylised but we kept it as real as possible." There are other nods to the Cocteau classic, too. "We have the stone animals on the top of the colonnades," says production designer Sarah Greenwood. "I love that tangibility."

If the sets are practical, the effects to create Beast are anything but. To provide the neck-down performance, Stevens would stalk the practical sets in a muscle suit covered in grey Lycra and on steel-capped stilts. "I got very good at stairs," Stevens says proudly about the tower scene. For the facial capture he was scanned by 27 cameras. "Emma would come in, sit on the other side of the camera and play the scene again just to capture the facial expression," he recalls. "It was very liberating — you got two cracks at a scene."

GASTON'S SONG

"It's the very definition of an earworm," smiles Gad about Gaston's big number. "It's a song that you can't help but sing, smile and join in [with]."

The egomaniacal villain's drinking ditty, belted out in a tavern, is an ode to himself. While the (genius) lyrical content has remained the same — "No-one's slick as Gaston/No-one's quick as Gaston/No-one's neck's as incredibly thick as Gaston's!" — Condon has tweaked the staging. This Gaston is an ex-soldier, trading on former glories like an over-the-hill quarterback — the inn features heroic portraits of him on the wall — so the story takes on an extra dimension as a rallying cry.

"Le Fou has to work hard to cheer him up," says Condon. "He offers everybody free drinks. He slips coins to people and convinces everyone to recreate Gaston's triumphs. So it becomes a musical battle, in the style of classic '40s and '50s Gene Kelly movies. It's very different from the animated film."

The scene took four days to shoot but was rehearsed for over a month. It had its first airing at a table read that Luke Evans describes as a "multimedia experience" with an intimidating audience. "The whole cast was there," he remembers. "They built a whole set of the tavern and I got up in front of everybody and did a performance. It was scary but wonderful."

Both Evans and Gad have musical-theatre form, the former in West End shows ranging



Clockwise from main: Belle (Emma Watson) stands out from the crowd; The Beast (Dan Stevens) surveys his enchanted castle; Ewan McGregor lights up the screen as singing candelabra Lumière.



from *Rent* and *Miss Saigon* to *Avenue Q*, the latter in the original Broadway production of *Book Of Mormon*. This is why both took the unusual step of singing live over the pre-recorded backing track.

"When you sing something happens in your throat and your eyes," says Evans. "Whenever I've seen someone miming in a film or on stage, I just know. So I felt as a singer, why the hell shouldn't I?" Gad agrees. "You just dream of that stuff as a kid." Box ticked.

BE OUR GUEST

Led by singing candelabra Lumière (Ewan McGregor), the film's dinner-time showstopper *Be Our Guest* draws on moments from many famous musicals. "We have dozens of references," Condon says. "*Singin' In The Rain*, *Les Mis*, *Chicago*, *Cabaret*, *The Sound Of Music*... There's some Martha Graham, some Esther Williams, some Bollywood. Lumière is kind of a crazy musicals fanatic." For Emma Watson, shooting the sequence involved watching "lots of dancing LED lights" while sitting alone in a room. "It was an excruciating process," she says. "I am fortunate I had done *Harry Potter*, or I might have felt a bit overwhelmed."

Condon's new spin on the number sees various kitchen utensils "trying to feed her and never succeeding". Given the shortage of dancing plates currently working in Hollywood, the

sequence is heavily CGI-animated. Says Condon: "I asked someone to add it up and that three-and-a-half minutes cost more than [*Mr. Holmes*, his 2015 Sherlock Holmes film with McKellen]. I dare to say it's the most expensive musical number ever shot." Take that, *La La Land*.

THE WALTZ

"Both a little scared/Neither one prepared." Howard Ashman's lyrics to describe Belle and Beast's tentative dance in a gigantic ballroom could equally be applied to Watson and Stevens in the run-up to shooting *Beauty And The Beast*'s most iconic scene — a full-blown waltz to the title song, sung by warbling tea-pot Mrs Potts (Emma Thompson, taking over from Angela Lansbury). But when the stars met early on in a London dance studio to rehearse the sequence, their nerves quickly melted away.

"It was actually a really good pre-film bonding," says Watson. "We got to know each other and learned to trust each other. I would recommend all couples go and dance together, stamp on each other's toes, be completely off-beat. It's perfect."

The scene is hallowed turf for Disney fans, but Condon has dared to make a couple of changes. Firstly, the ballroom itself will come to life, with wood carvings of musical instruments on the ceiling starting to play. Secondly, says Condon, Belle "has the quality of a teacher", to help Beast re-connect with his dancing days. "He's a playboy ballroom lothario, but loses that side of himself when he becomes the Beast," says Stevens. "Belle connects him with that thing he loves, even on big paws." But the dance serves the same narrative function — it is, as the actor puts it, "a real tipping-point in the romance".

"A waltz is the perfect way to do that because you are dizzy and breathless," says Watson. "You are having to put trust in the other person. You are learning how to keep time and rhythm with another person, not just yourself. It's the perfect metaphor."

Adding to the pressure, when the scene went before the camera — around a third of the way through the shoot — the entire supporting cast gathered around to watch. But it was something else that was racking Watson's nerves. "Dan was essentially wearing steel-capped stilts," she remembers. "I was slightly terrified my foot was going to get broken or we were going to end up in a heap on the floor. So it had an extra edge to it."

Watson and Stevens' on-point proficiency gave Condon the opportunity to be fluid with his filmmaking. "We would do big chunks of it," he says. "It wasn't like, 'Let's do these four bars here.' It was one of those things where you thought, 'I wish we could just put them on a stage tonight so people can see how well they do it.' If you want to go ahead with that, Bill, be our guest."



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST IS IN CINEMAS FROM 17 MARCH

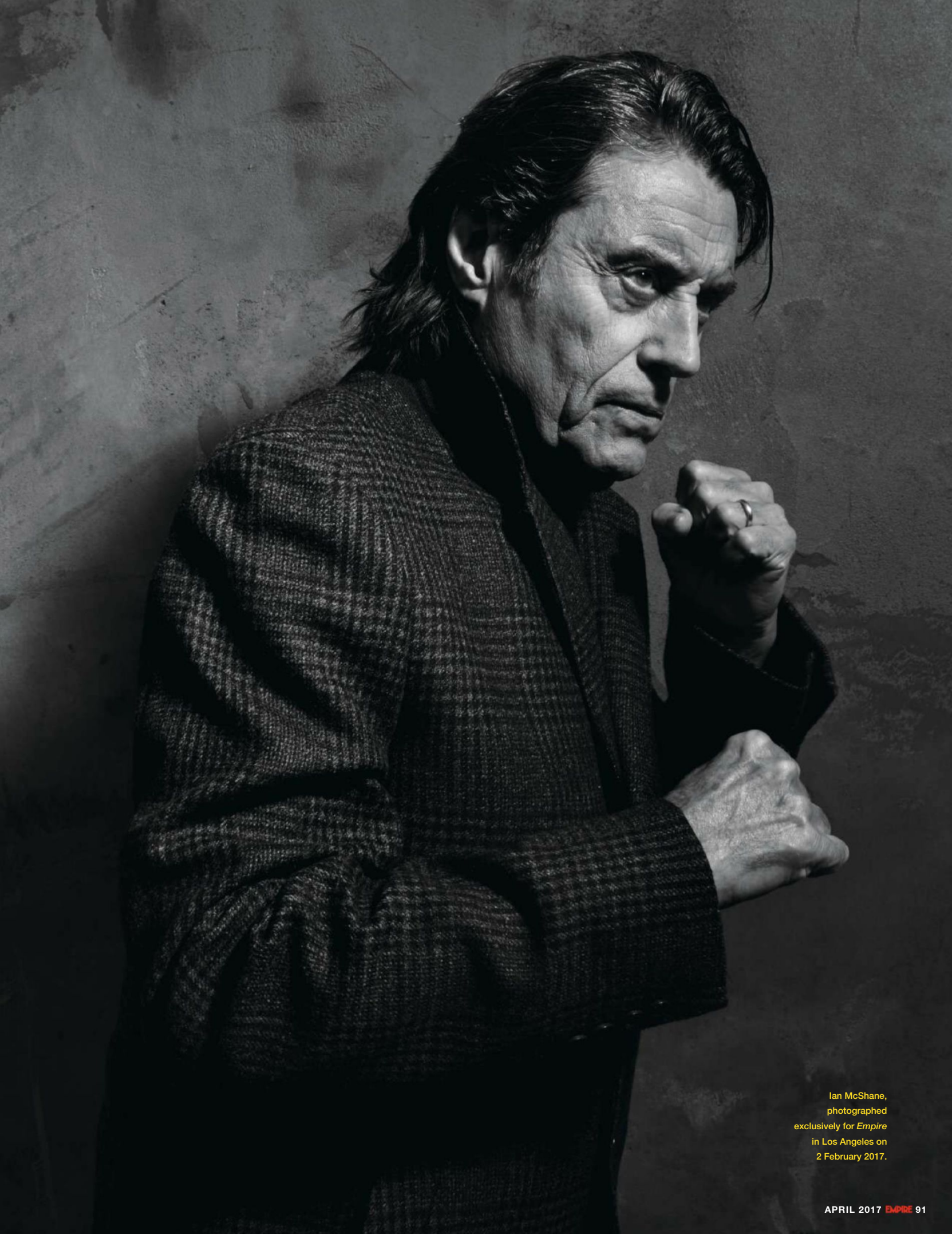


THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

THE BRUISER

FROM *LOVEJOY* TO *DEADWOOD* TO NEW BOXING DRAMA *JAWBONE*, **IAN McSHANE** HAS TRANSFORMED HIMSELF INTO HOLLYWOOD'S MOST RELIABLE TOUGH GUY. HE GOES FIVE ROUNDS WITH *EMPIRE*

WORDS **JIMI FAMUREWA** PORTRAITS **STEVE SCHOFIELD**



Ian McShane,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
2 February 2017.

IAN McSHANE IS AN INTENSE MAN.

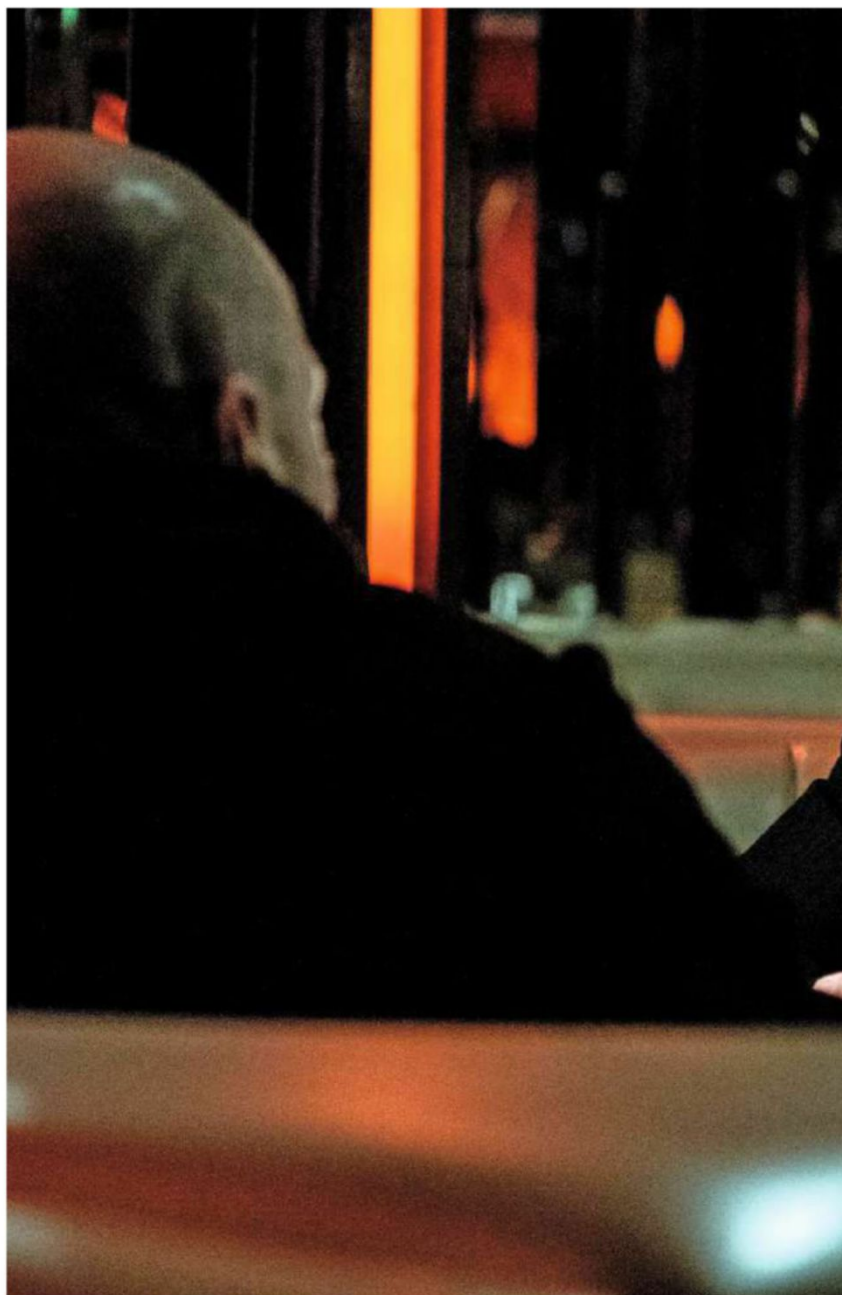
On his feet and with his face mere inches from *Empire's*, McShane is whipping through an anecdote with full-bore gusto. It's ostensibly a funny story. But it's hard to keep this fact in mind when that gravelly Lancashire burr is in full flow and those distinctive features — the bronzed skin, the lustrous wavy hair, the expressive black eyebrows and hypnotic, washed-grey eyes — are looming over you at such close proximity.

That intensity is one of the key factors behind his astonishing career. Since getting his start 55 years ago in British youthquake drama *The Wild And The Willing*, McShane has turned vengeful gangsters (*Sexy Beast*), murderous brothel-keepers (*Deadwood*), blockbuster Big Bads (*Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*) and intimidating patriarchs (*Hot Rod*) into his specialism. His career-making turn as a leather-jacketed, cheeky-chappie antiques dealer in TV's *Lovejoy* notwithstanding, McShane's most memorable roles come laced with a kind of silkily beguiling malevolence.

We've come to a stripped-back Los Angeles photography studio (a short hop from the Venice Beach home McShane has owned since the early noughties) to talk about a few more impending entries to his ever-expanding rogues' gallery. Most pressingly, there's *Jawbone* — Johnny Harris' low-budget boxing drama which features McShane in a small-but-significant-role — and *John Wick: Chapter 2* (where he returns as mysterious hotelier-cum-assassin-wrangler Winston).

But the sprightly 74-year-old is also adding a mystical edge to his anti-heroic chops as Mr Wednesday in *American Gods* (the upcoming small-screen adaptation of Neil Gaiman's mischievous fantasy novel), and starring alongside Dr. Dre in *Vital Signs*, Apple's intriguing first foray into original programming. Then there's the small matter of a return to his Golden Globe-winning role as filthy-mouthed saloon-owner Al Swearengen in a long-rumoured *Deadwood* movie.

A packed schedule for an almost-octogenarian? You bet. But McShane — as well as being a master of fictional intimidation and a real-life font of profane, unfiltered opinions — is a man of unapologetic industry. "I do like to work," he says, fiddling idly with his paper cup of morning coffee. "I love it. And I live at the beach — right on the ocean — so every time I finish a gig I get to come back here. I'm very lucky, very privileged." And in a sense, so are we. Because as long as McShane keeps taking his talents everywhere from Westeros to the Old West, on-screen bad guys will be that bit more complex, more charismatic and, yes, more terrifying.





As a low-budget film about an alcoholic former boxer, *Jawbone* seems a world away from some of your more recent high-profile projects. How did you get involved?

Johnny [Harris, writer and star] and I got to know each other on *Snow White & The Huntsman*, as we were playing the dwarves. We got on very well and this film is partly autobiographical for him, so we had a good time talking about that and about what it's like not being able to drink anymore. [McShane has been sober for nearly 30 years.] So we have a shared history. And Johnny, about a year-and-a-half ago, said, "I've written this film, Ray [Winstone] is going to do it and I'd love you to be in it." The first thing you do in that situation is say, "Count me in."

Is it important to you to make time for smaller stories like this?

Of course, if you can. I must say I was influenced by the fact I knew Johnny. But I love him dearly and he wrote a fine script. I identified with a lot of it and I just hope it gets the recognition it deserves. It's a tale we've been told before, about the boxer's redemptive last shot, but it's got a different twist to it and Johnny's a very sympathetic guy. He's a mensch.

Your character, a shady unlicensed boxing promoter, is in keeping with a lot of the villainous roles you've played since *Deadwood*. Was there a point where it felt like you were only being offered Al Swearengen types?

Not really. The thing is, [series creator] David Milch, who wrote *Swearengen*, is a certifiable genius. And working on that show was the best three years of any actor's life. It was almost like you were doing a rehearsal, workshop and a filmed version of a script all at the same time, because we were all on the same [set]. So [Milch] could do whatever he wanted. He'd give you a page, cross it out and go, "No, that's not it," and give you another one. Every actor was up for it and had a wonderful time. But after that I had freedom with my choices and I still do. I've been lucky enough to be able to pick and choose. There's only one *Swearengen*. But after that I decided to try every genre, and I even did some comedy with *Hot Rod*.

That film, in which you repeatedly attack on-screen stepson Andy Samberg in an attempt to toughen him up, flopped at the box office but has become a cult favourite.

That's one of those movies I knew was great when we did it. Sometimes critics just take against a movie and pick on it. They really had a pop at Andy Samberg and Akiva Schaffer, who was the director. But since then, of course, people come up to me and they'll suddenly go, "*Hot Rod!*" That's really nice. To get a *Hot Rod* mention among all the *Deadwoods* and the *Lovejoys*.

Obviously it won Emmys during its short run, but do you think people give *Deadwood* the acclaim it deserves?

No, they don't, they never do. I think it's one of the greatest television shows ever made, but Sky fucked it up when they showed it in the UK. I had meetings with them and asked, "So when are you going to show it?" "Monday night at 10 o'clock." You wanna go, "What the fuck? Monday night at 10 o'clock?" It's like, "Oh, so you really don't want anyone to watch it. Why have you paid all this money?" They were scared stiff, basically. Even though it was only 13 years ago, "fuck" was hardly ever said on TV at the time, and they were scared of it. I remember HBO asked me to come in and do some ADR work at some point. And they said, "We'd like to try some other words for the swearwords." I said, "Excuse me? For the whole fucking series?" [Laughs] I think they had "lemon-sucker" instead of cocksucker and "doodlebugger" or something else. I said, "You've got to be out of your fucking mind. I'm not doing this. Get some other mug to do it." Because they didn't even have a lexicon ready. And, also, that was part of the charm of the whole show.

Another charming element was *Swearengen*'s habit of delivering monologues while he was, ahem, with a woman...

Amazing. He could only talk about himself when he was getting a blow job. My kinda guy. [Laughs]



Clockwise from above: As *Jawbone*'s boxing promoter, Joe; Reuniting with Keanu Reeves in *John Wick: Chapter 2*; In the upcoming *American Gods*, alongside Ricky Whittle; As *Deadwood*'s aptly named Al Swearengen.



What's the latest with the proposed *Deadwood* film?

It's still being talked about. I had lunch with David Milch but I haven't seen him in six weeks, so we're going to have lunch again and talk about it. HBO have got [the script], they're doing rewrites and they keep threatening to get us all together again. But as I keep saying, they better hurry up. We've only got so many more years. Listen, if it works out, it works out. And if it doesn't, we have the three years of great memories.

Is it true that *Westworld* is even using *Deadwood*'s old sets?

That's right. They're our sets! Get off our sets, *Westworld*!

As well as calling the show "just tits and dragons", you angered some *Game Of Thrones* fans by revealing details about your cameo before it aired last year. What did you make of the furore?

Can you believe it? "Oh, you're giving it away." Firstly, you love it and secondly, you'll have forgotten by the time it comes out. And what am I giving away? A character beloved by everybody returns. Get a fucking life. The show is huge but some fans seem to identify with it [too closely]. You want to say, "Have you thought about your lifestyle? Maybe you should get out a little more." [Laughs] But it was great. I liked playing a former warrior who became a real believer in peace, and it's one to tell the grandkids.

You're returning to fantasy with the adaptation of *American Gods*. What was the appeal of that?

It's something very different. It's got animation in it, it's got huge special effects, it's set in the present but the not-quite-present. [Neil] Gaiman's book is a great blueprint for the two showrunners, Bryan Fuller and Michael Green. They're very talented writers. I worked with Michael Green before on [modern-day Biblical thriller] *Kings*, which was very underrated. It was a classic case of a network, in this case NBC, saying, "We want a cable show!" Then you give them one and they don't know what the fuck to do with it. That audience likes to know where they are every week. It's like watching *NCIS* — there's a certain regularity and a formula. There's nothing wrong with those shows, but that's what they are.

Your *American Gods* character, Mr Wednesday, seems like a fresh spin on other mythic antiheroes you've played too...

It's a really fascinating story of this released prisoner called Shadow Moon [Ricky Whittle], who's accosted by this old sort of charming conman, Mr Wednesday, which is me. He gets him to work for him as a chauffeur and a bodyguard and Shadow Moon doesn't know what he's got himself into. Then you realise Mr Wednesday's an ancient god, and he's come back to get all the old gods together to fuck the new gods of media. Twitter, Facebook and all those motherfuckers. [Laughs]

Your love of staying busy seems to be something you had in common with your late RADA classmate, John Hurt. How close were you?

Oh, Johnny, he was my oldest friend. It was weird, you know, because I'd been expecting [his death] as I knew about his condition. But it was still a shock as he'd made a few miraculous recoveries before from near-death experiences, and I thought he was well-pickled enough to survive anything. I loved him dearly and I miss him a lot. *The Wild And The Willing* was our first role, then we did our first stage play together and made his first television show together. Over the last ten years we did two movies together: *44 Inch Chest*, which is the sister movie to *Sexy Beast*, and *Hercules*, which filmed in Budapest three years ago. We had many a long Hungarian lunch waiting to be called to this boring set to go... [puts on Shakespearean voice], "Hercules!"

You've been quite honest about your past hellraising days with people like Hurt, Oliver Reed and George Best. Did the drinking ever affect your work?

Never. I was what they'd call a very high-functioning [alcoholic]. I'd go to bed at three in the morning, have two hours' sleep and come out with a page of dialogue. At the time, of course, I thought, "Oh, two hours sleep? Perfectly fine." Now I'd go, "Jesus Christ."

"I USED TO GO TO BED AT THREE IN THE MORNING, HAVE TWO HOURS' SLEEP AND COME OUT WITH A PAGE OF DIALOGUE."

You and Dr. Dre make an intriguing pairing. What can you tell us about *Vital Signs*? Is it correct that you're playing a character called Vengeance?

Yes, you're absolutely right. Sam Rockwell's in it and so is Michael K. Williams. We all play figments of Dre's imagination who come together in scenes when he's there. Sam plays Ego and Michael plays Negativity. So Sam does a lot of, "Hmmm, I don't know." Michael does a lot of, "Arrgh, grrr." And I just go, "Fuck it, kill 'em all!" So who wins out? Vengeance does, of course! It's about Dr. Dre's life now as a billionaire mogul, coming from where he comes from. Are his friends real? Can he trust them? All this turmoil goes on in his brain and occasionally he'll be doing something like having a steak and there we are at the end of the table, talking. It's very funny. Dre was such a gent and very much just sat there and observed. I think it would be like me walking into a hip hop studio. I'd shut my mouth for a while to at least find out what was going on, or else it might be a case of, "Erm, I don't think so, Vanilla Ice." [Laughs]

In this age of endless reboots, have you been approached about reviving *Lovejoy*?

They've asked about that loads of times. Look, I did it and it was great. I loved the people, I got to direct, I produced it and the show was acclaimed in its time. If they want to do it again, why don't they get a 35-year-old girl to do it? You've got a perfect opener there. You talk about *Lovejoy* for 15 minutes and everyone's thinking, "Has *Lovejoy* gone transgender?" [Laughs] No, he hasn't: it's his gorgeous daughter. And then maybe I can pop in and do the occasional cameo.

Finally, it seems to be an incredibly fruitful time for scripted television. How do you feel about that, both as an actor and a punter?

Well, there are about 430 TV shows vying to be seen. People say, "Do you watch this?" And I think, "Where do you get the time?" I started watching *Mr. Robot* and that's really good. The camerawork, the script and the intent of it. *Stranger Things* is on my list. The great thing is, now you can just dip in when you want.

Do you think the boom is sustainable?

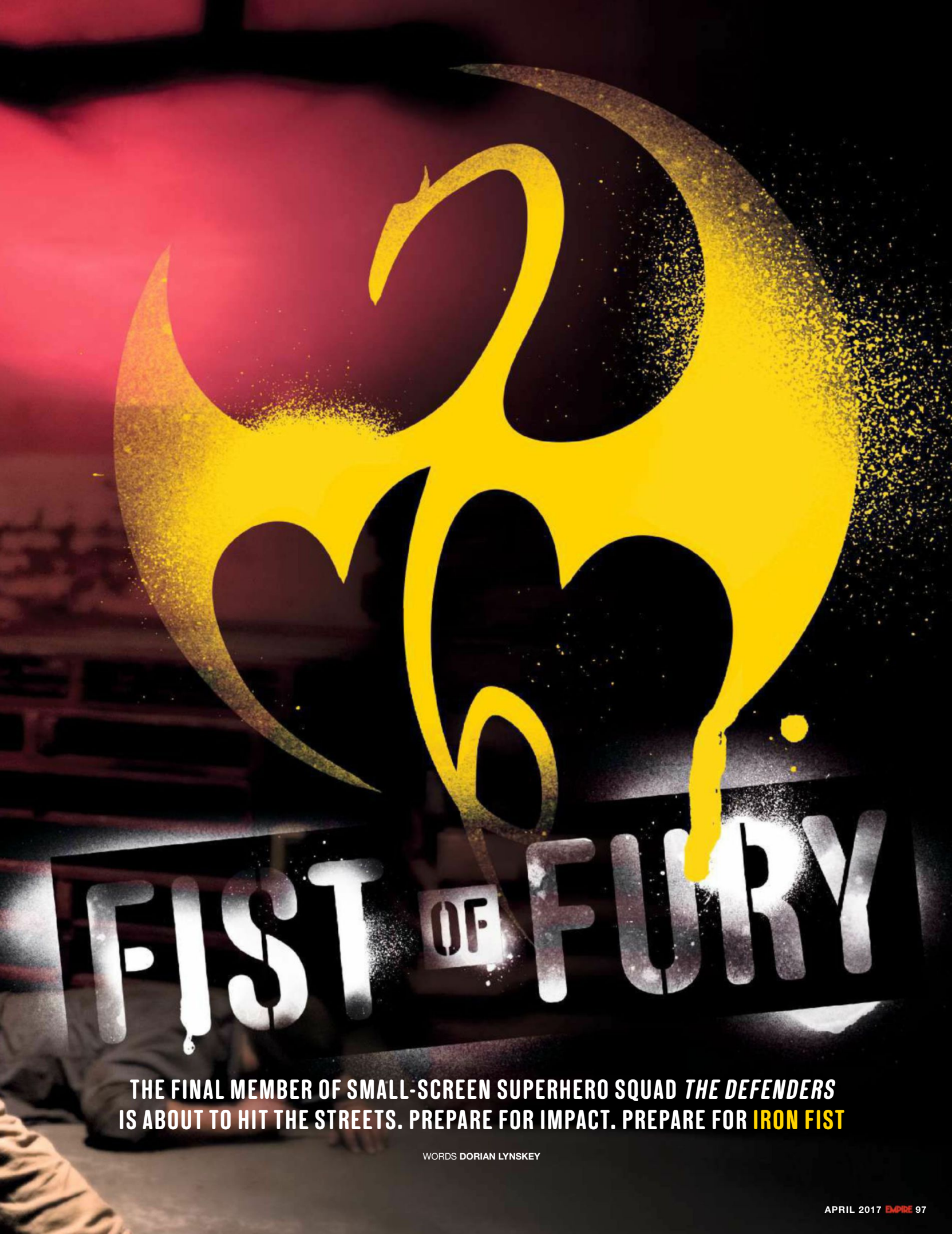
No, there'll be a bust. But Amazon have got their first film up for an Oscar in *Manchester By The Sea*, which shows you how the business has changed. Johnny Hurt and me made our first film 55 years ago — 55 years. Young actors now have never had it so easy and God bless [the streaming services] in a way, because there's so much work for everybody. Technicians, film people, everything. But once the cull comes, look out. All I can say is, "Save your money, guys!" 🍎

JAWBONE IS OUT IN CINEMAS FROM 5 MAY

GROOMING BY HELEN ROBERTSON FOR CELESTINE AGENCY USING ORLANE PARIS. HAIR: STEVE LOCOCO @B2VSALON. STYLING: LINDA MEDVENE. Grey T-shirt: James Perse, available at Saks Fifth Avenue. Overcoat: Loro Piana, available at Saks Fifth Avenue. Trousers: John Varvatos. Shoes: John Varvatos.







FIST OF FURY

THE FINAL MEMBER OF SMALL-SCREEN SUPERHERO SQUAD *THE DEFENDERS* IS ABOUT TO HIT THE STREETS. PREPARE FOR IMPACT. PREPARE FOR **IRON FIST**

WORDS DORIAN LYNSKEY



Some superhero origin stories require more suspension of disbelief than others. Take

Iron Fist. Danny Rand is the gilded heir to Manhattan's billion-dollar Rand Corporation until, at the age of ten, he loses both his parents during a trip to Asia and is adopted by the warrior monks of K'un Lun, a mystical city that rarely intersects with the Earthly plane. Under their guidance, he becomes a formidable fighter and earns the title of the Iron Fist by slaying the ancient dragon Shou-Lao. When the portal finally reopens 15 years later, Danny decides to return to New York to reclaim his identity and discover who's to blame for his parents' untimely end. Got it so far?

Now, in the context of Marvel comics, Danny's story is par for the course, no more outlandish than that of Thor or Doctor Strange. But in the world of Marvel's Netflix shows, firmly grounded in the streets of contemporary New York, it sounds rather like the ramblings of a madman.

"Danny has to deal with society's reaction," says Finn Jones, the British actor who plays Iron Fist. "He comes back and says: 'Hey, guess what? I've been in this place called K'un Lun for years, I've got this thing called the Iron Fist and I met a dragon!' And everybody's like, 'What the fuck are you talking about? You're insane.'"

Jessica Henwick, who plays Danny's ally Colleen Wing, compares it to Dorothy's situation at the end of *The Wizard Of Oz*. "She has a full, rich memory of this mystical city," she says. "And she tells people in Kansas about it and they think she's crazy. We kind of have the same situation here."

Danny's challenge is persuading others that Iron Fist is the real deal. The team bringing the adventures of Danny Rand to a whole new audience faces a similar task.



IRON FIST IS the fourth and final component of *The Defenders*, the all-star show towards which Marvel and Netflix have been working since the first *Daredevil* development meetings in 2013. The character wasn't an obvious choice. An Iron Fist film had floundered in development hell since 2000, when Ray Park (Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace*) was mooted as Danny, before Jeph Loeb (head of Marvel TV) revived the character as a Defender.

He has always been one of Marvel's B-listers. Just as Luke Cage was Stan Lee's attempt to grab a slice of the blaxploitation pie, Iron Fist shamelessly exploited the martial-arts craze spearheaded by the late Bruce Lee. Launched in 1974, the character combined writer Roy Thomas' kung-fu fandom with artist Gil Kane's affection for the 1940s character Amazing-Man, another orphan raised by monks. When his solo title struggled, Iron Fist was teamed up with Luke Cage as the street-smart 'Heroes For Hire', but he never made it to Marvel's top table. When writers Ed Brubaker and Matt Fraction pitched their 2006 comic-book reboot *The Immortal Iron Fist* (Jones' favourite), they said Marvel

still needed to "reposition Iron Fist as more than just a kung-fu riff from the '70s".

It's not entirely surprising, then, that neither Finn Jones nor showrunner Scott Buck had heard of Iron Fist before becoming involved in the TV show. Buck, an unflappably business-like veteran of *Six Feet Under*, *Rome* and *Dexter*, considers his ignorance of Marvel lore prior to meeting Loeb in late 2015 a virtue. "When Jeph pitched me the idea, he said, 'Don't take the comic books too seriously, because that's just a jumping-off point.' There wasn't a really clear iconography, so that enabled us to be more creative."

We first meet 25-year-old Danny on his return to New York, culture-shocked and bedraggled, trying to convince people he is indeed the long-lost Danny Rand and find a way back into his interrupted life. "It's a coming-of-age story, but played a hundred times bigger because he's not just figuring out who he is as a person, but who he's going to be as the Iron Fist," explains Buck. "It creates an interesting dichotomy because he's this New York billionaire boy, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and also this monk warrior. He's part of two different



Finn Jones finds himself in a new 'hood as Danny Rand/Iron Fist. **Right, from top:** With Jessica Henwick's Colleen Wing and Rosario Dawson's Claire Temple; Wing shows off her martial-arts skills; Iron Fist. How did he get that name?



worlds, but doesn't feel fully comfortable in either one of them."

Henwick compares Danny's disjointed boyishness after spending 15 years in an all-male monastery to Tom Hanks' character in *Big*. "He's a bit socially inept. He doesn't understand that he sounds weird and ludicrous," Jones agrees: "He's almost like a child in a man's body. He has no idea what he's doing. There's a lot of inner torment to work through while trying to come to terms with modern-day life."

Buck says he cast Jones for his "youthful innocence". For the actor, the call to audition for *Iron Fist* came at the perfect time. He was at the airport, having just filmed the final scene of his six-year run as disgraced gadabout Ser Loras Tyrell in *Game Of Thrones*. "I was only just starting to think about life beyond *Thrones* and then this character suddenly appeared," recalls Jones. "I knew just from reading the character breakdown on the Marvel website that I'd be interested. He has a quieter spiritual element to his superpowers."

The first friend Danny manages to make when he returns to New York is Colleen Wing, a Japanese-American woman who

runs a martial-arts dojo in Chinatown. Buck says Colleen's arc mirrors Danny's. "She thinks her destiny is meant to be one thing, but her life is completely upturned so she's left in a similar situation. Who is she? What is she going to do with her life?"

Henwick also has *Game Of Thrones* experience, although her whip-toting killer Nymeria Sand is so far faring rather better than Ser Loras. Henwick first came across Wing when she was combing the Marvel Universe for Asian women she might conceivably play. There weren't many options, so when her agent alerted her to an audition for a codenamed character that sounded like Wing, she jumped on it.

"It was a shot in the dark but it came together," she says. "Colleen was raised in New York until her mother died and her father sent her away to Japan. She's a chameleon who's had to assimilate to jarringly different cultures." Henwick's aware of the minor controversy last year when Marvel comics writer Marjorie Liu used Twitter to call *Iron Fist* an "orientalist-white-man-yellow-fever narrative" that could only be subverted by casting an Asian actor, but thinks people should hold fire until they see

the show. "Marvel and Netflix have transformed Luke Cage and I've tried to do the same for Colleen," she says. "So I hope Asians will give the show a chance and see what I've done. I'm Asian, I'm female and I'm an actor. If anyone understands misrepresentation and underrepresentation, it's me."

Iron Fist's third lead is David Wenham as Harold Meachum, the former Rand business partner who now runs the corporation with his daughter, Joy, and son, Ward. In the comic books he was knocked off after four issues, but could this iteration of Meachum be *Iron Fist*'s super-bad equivalent of Kilgrave or the Kingpin? "Meachum brings a big mystery with him," Buck says, cagily. "We have one major enemy but we don't fully realise who that is until we get closer to the end of the season. Danny finds himself fighting multiple people. He thinks he's returning to the comforts of home, but he's surprised to learn that wherever he turns there's an enemy he wasn't fully aware of."

Among his foes are The Hand, the murderous ninja clan introduced in *Daredevil*'s second season. "The *Iron Fist* is the antithesis of The Hand: the light to the darkness," explains >



DEFENDERS ASSEMBLE

TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT UPCOMING MARVEL/NETFLIX SERIES *THE DEFENDERS*...

1 Now shooting in New York, the superhero series will run shorter than the solo shows, coming in at a nice, tight eight episodes.

2 The comic which inspired it was created by Roy Thomas in 1971 to unite a group of heroes typically seen as outsiders. The original line-up was: Doctor Strange, the Hulk and Namor the Sub-Mariner (with Silver Surfer joining later).

3 Details of the villain, Alexandra, remain under wraps, but we know she'll be played by Sigourney Weaver. Showrunner Marco Ramirez describes her as "a very powerful force in New York City: sophisticated, intellectual, dangerous".

4 Though the comic-book Defenders usually faced otherworldly foes, Ramirez says that while Alexandra represents a huge threat, she'll also be behind "a very street-level crisis", keeping the same gritty tone as the other shows.

5 As well as the core team of Daredevil, Luke Cage, Jessica Jones and Iron Fist, the show will include Misty Knight (Simone Missick), Stick (Scott Glenn), Colleen Wing (Jessica Henwick), Foggy and Karen (Elden Henson and Deborah Ann Woll) and Claire Temple (Rosario Dawson), who will likely bring the Defenders together.

6 The show's production title is, appropriately, *Group Therapy*. Something the characters of the Marvel/Netflix shows so far could do with.

7 Charlie Cox has suggested we'll see some sparks flying between Daredevil and Jessica Jones (Krysten Ritter); "I imagine it'll be quite a fiery relationship," he says.

8 Luke Cage (Mike Colter) will be a voice of reason. He'll "use his wisdom" says Colter, who's also revealed he'll play mentor to Iron Fist.

9 Ramirez has been consulting the showrunners of the other solo shows, just as Joss Whedon spoke with the directors of the solo movies before *Avengers Assemble*.

10 Don't expect this fractious group to still be a solid unit come the finale. They've all got their own solo shows, after all... **DAN JOLIN**



Wing rules the ring inside her martial-arts dojo. **Left, from top:** Snowy wastes hold no fear for someone as hard as Iron; Wing turns her skills to the streets; Director Peter Hoar gives Jones some tips on making his fist more, well, iron.

Jones. "Or so Danny thinks. What Danny didn't realise is that once he earned the title of the Iron Fist his job was to protect the gate from The Hand coming in to destroy K'un Lun. And Danny has left his post to come to New York. He's a difficult kid who doesn't take his responsibilities seriously and there are repercussions."

BUCK MAY NOT have been a comic-book aficionado growing up, but he did like martial-arts movies. Each episode of *Iron Fist* is named in the style of a Shaolin kung-fu move — some real ('Rolling Thunder Cannon Punch'), some invented ('The Blessing Of Many Fractures') — and features at least one highly choreographed bust-up. As soon as Jones got the role last February, he plunged into an intensive six-week training regime to learn the basics of wushu, kung fu and t'ai chi. "It's about choreography, because really you're doing a dance," he says. "You're learning the steps and working with your partner."

With this kind of dance, though, you get hurt. A lot. "When you're in the midst of fights your adrenaline's so pumped you don't think

about what you're doing to your body until you wake up the next day and think, 'Fucking hell!'" says Jones, who pulled a muscle in his groin by kicking too hard. "It comes with the territory. If you're doing two or three fights per week for six months you're going to get some injuries." Henwick catalogues her own battle scars: "I was covered in bruises, I tore my Achilles heel, I sprained my wrist, I fucked up my knee, I got a black eye... It was full-on."

It's not just the super-stylised combat — much more elaborately choreographed than even the brawls we've seen in *Daredevil* — that sets *Iron Fist* apart from Marvel's other Netflix shows. It investigates a new dimension of New York, a city which Loeb has described as "the fifth Defender". After Harlem and Hell's Kitchen, we're introduced to Manhattan's tonier districts: Central Park, the Upper West Side and, crucially, the Financial District. While the other Defenders are blue-collar heroes whose finances range from modest to desperate, Rand is, at least in theory, absolutely loaded. Like, Tony Stark loaded. The Rand Corporation is Marvel Television's gateway into the world of the super-rich.



"The Netflix shows not only present different sides of New York but make social comments on them," says Jones. "So *Luke Cage* showed black culture, *Jessica Jones* dealt with rape culture and women's rights, and *Daredevil* dealt with corruption. What we're dealing with here is corporate responsibility. We're looking very closely at the one per cent of the one per cent, and how much influence they have on the world."

It looks different, too. Danny's relative naivety pointed Buck towards a brighter, more youthful tone. "Luke, *Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones* are all a bit older and have very dark outlooks on life, whereas Danny Rand is optimistic to the point that whatever happens to him he thinks everything is going to work out OK," the showrunner says. "That colours the whole show." The machinations of Meachum and The Hand aren't exactly cheery, nor is Danny without his demons, but the show is literally lighter. Filming last summer, directors including prestige-TV pro John Dahl, Wu-Tang Clan veteran RZA and *Game Of Thrones* stand-out Miguel Sapochnik used outdoor locations, daytime shoots and a colour palette majoring in greens and yellows.

"It's gorgeous," says Jones. "It feels like a summer show." But, he adds, "There are still dark, gritty aspects. There's a lot of violence."

THE MARVEL NETFLIX universe has been established with remarkable haste. *Iron Fist* will debut less than two years after *Daredevil*, with *The Defenders* hard on its heels. The solo shows already overlap — *Iron Fist* features nurse Claire Temple (Rosario Dawson) and Jessica Jones' lawyer Jeri Hogarth (Carrie-Anne Moss) — but they're about to collide on a grand scale in the way Loeb always intended. "Bringing together all these different fan bases and different styles in one show is pretty groundbreaking," says Henwick. "I'm having a blast just watching them."

Iron Fist was meant to be the third show to launch, but the breakout appearance of Mike Colter's Luke Cage in *Jessica Jones* bumped Danny Rand to the back of the queue. The tight schedule means Finn Jones had just two weeks off after six months on *Iron Fist* before joining *The Defenders*. "As intense and physically demanding as it is to film solidly for a year, it's really beneficial for character development,"

he says, cheerfully. "I see *Iron Fist* as Danny in his adolescence and *The Defenders* as Danny growing into his responsibilities."

Among other things, *The Defenders* will give us the first TV meeting between Danny and Luke, who constitute one of the Marvel Universe's most enduring bromances. "When you know you have to work with someone quite intensely, it's a little bit daunting," Finn admits. "What if we hate each other? What if the chemistry just isn't there? But I can't help being enamoured of Mike. We're all accomplished and experienced in our own right, so we can get on set and play with each other."

Buck is currently overseeing Marvel's upcoming ABC show *The Inhumans* (about a reclusive race of genetically altered beings) and doesn't yet know how *The Defenders* will inform *Iron Fist*'s second season. But he sounds relaxed. "I know they'll leave him in a place that gives us many opportunities for more stories. The characters are in very good hands."

Like the gateway to K'un Lun, *Iron Fist*'s window of opportunity opens once in a blue moon. Finally, he's made it through. ●

IRON FIST IS ON NETFLIX FROM 17 MARCH

Empire Presents



THE KANE SLAYER

WHAT'S GREATER THAN THE
GREATEST MOVIE EVER MADE?
THE ANSWER, ACCORDING TO
OSCAR-VOTERS, WAS *HOW GREEN
WAS MY VALLEY*, THE FILM THAT
TRIUMPHED OVER *CITIZEN KANE*...

WORDS JONATHAN PILE ILLUSTRATION THE RED DRESS





Left: 1942 Oscar winners (l-r) Gary Cooper (Best Actor for *Sergeant York*), Joan Fontaine (Best Actress for *Suspicion*), Mary Astor (Best Supporting Actress for *The Great Lie*) and Donald Crisp (Best Supporting Actor for *How Green Was My Valley*). **Right:** Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane*. **Far right:** *Citizen Kane*'s 1941 poster. It's terrific! **Below:** *How Green Was My Valley* producer Darryl F. Zanuck chats with Norma Shearer at the 1942 Oscars.



THE 14TH ACADEMY AWARDS ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN.

In December 1941, a little over two months prior to the ceremony, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and, with that, America was at war. Hardly the time for a spare-no-expense, backslapping awards ceremony. Various alternatives were discussed (including the idea of allowing the public to buy tickets with proceeds going to the Red Cross) before a scaled-back solution was approved. The banquet would become a simpler dinner and formal dress was banned — neckties rather than bow ties, a state of affairs that would last the length of the conflict. And so, with these austerity measures (and more) in effect, on 26 February 1942, the 14th Academy Awards did finally go ahead. At 7.45pm Bob Hope took to the stage in downtown Los Angeles' Biltmore Hotel's ballroom to host the event. At the time he had no idea it would be one of the most controversial in Oscars history.

Why so controversial? Scrolling through the lists of that night's nominees, one clearly stands out — *Citizen Kane*. Not just a good film. Not just a great film. But 'The Greatest Film Ever Made'. It went into the night with nine nominations, but ended it with just one win — for Best Original Screenplay. Instead John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* was the big winner. Nominated for ten awards it took home five, including a second

consecutive Best Director win for Ford (his third overall) and Best Picture (then called Outstanding Motion Picture). But in the years since its reputation has been besmirched and its victory ridiculed. Now known to most, if at all, only as the film that won Best Picture over *Citizen Kane*, it's routinely counted in lists that collate the "worst Oscar winners ever" (including coming tenth in a 2005 *Empire* poll). But is it that bad? Or is its only crime beating *Citizen Kane* to the Academy's top prize? And how did it come to be that year's big winner?

There wasn't any particular outcry on the night. By the end of the ceremony, the big talking point for the public wasn't *Citizen Kane*'s snub, but the Best Actress category. Joan Fontaine (*Suspicion*) had beaten her sister Olivia de Havilland (*Hold Back The Dawn*) to the award. Elsewhere Bette Davis-starring drama *The Little Foxes* set a then record for the most nominations without a single win with nine. And Walt Disney had a good night — he won two honorary awards, while *Dumbo* and short animation *Lend A Paw* both won their categories. Overall, it seemed like a job well done in difficult circumstances. A morale-boosting demonstration of the best of Hollywood and, with a John Ford film successful, a comforting celebration of one of their most revered directors. But *How Green Was My Valley* started life as a very different film.

The original aim was the next *Gone With The Wind*. Richard Llewellyn's 1939 novel *How Green Was My Valley* was a huge hit on its release, and 20th Century Fox co-founder Darryl F. Zanuck wasted no time snapping up the rights. He planned to take Llewellyn's nostalgic story of a family living in a 19th century Welsh mining village and turn it into a four-hour Technicolor epic to rival MGM's American Civil War-set smash. He wanted Llewellyn's book and nothing would be left to chance — a then-record \$300,000 was paid to secure it (more than \$5 million in today's money). Bankable, big-name director William Wyler was hired, the screenplay was started and plans were made to shoot on location in South Wales. But then Zanuck hit a snag



— World War II was playing out over UK skies.

In July 1940 the Battle Of Britain began, with Wales a major target for Hitler's Luftwaffe. A rethink was required, and Zanuck's solution changed everything. The production was instead scheduled to take place near Malibu in the Santa Monica Mountains but, with its brown hills unable to pass for Rhondda's green valleys, it was decided the film should be shot in black-and-white. And, with its Technicolor status removed, so too went the plans for an epic and the running time was shortened as well. But despite that workaround being put in place, Zanuck's troubles weren't over. With it becoming ever more likely that America would be dragged into the war, 20th Century Fox's shareholders abruptly threatened to cancel the film.

"The stockholders thought it was an unwise idea to make a film to do with unions," remembered lead actor Roddy McDowall, speaking in 1995. "It seemed to be a 'down' idea. [Also] there was no star, and it was an expensive film."

Expensive was right. The relocation to Santa Monica, rather than making life easier, instead meant an entire 80-acre Welsh mining town had to be built from scratch, a \$110,000 undertaking that would take six months. And William Wyler was notorious for shooting multiple takes (often running into the fifties), something which would no doubt further drive up the cost of shooting the film.

Zanuck was anxious. So much so that he considered taking the film away from Fox and making it independently — a huge deal in the studio system of the time. In the end it didn't come to that. As the standoff continued and the months went by, Wyler's contract with Fox ran out and he left the production. Just as he did so, John Ford became available. Ford and Zanuck had worked together the previous year on *The Grapes Of Wrath*, a film with similar pro-working-class themes, and he seemed the perfect choice. Not least because he rarely filmed more than three takes. And so Zanuck went back to the shareholders with a new proposition — John Ford would direct, and he'd bring it in for under \$1 million. That

did it. The shareholders said yes. On 10 June 1941, a year-and-a-half after Zanuck bought the rights, filming finally began.

How *Green Was My Valley* tells the tale of Welsh mining family the Morgans through the eyes of the youngest child Huw (McDowall). Mining, it seems, has rarely been a happy profession, even in the decades before Margaret Thatcher set her sights on Britain's pits. Wages are slashed, men are laid off, and life becomes a struggle.

The daughter of the family, Angharad (Maureen O'Hara) is forced to turn her back on someone she loves — Walter Pidgeon's pastor Mr Gruffydd — to marry someone she doesn't, but who has money. And the dangers of mining mean the villagers are perpetually only a fire or cave-in away from disaster.

It's a story that clearly dallies with melodrama, but has a vein of social commentary running through it, much as *The Grapes Of Wrath* did. Ford was a meticulous planner and had a lean shooting style, editing in-camera to ensure his vision couldn't be re-cut by the studio. One memorable scene in *How Green Was My Valley* stands as a classic example of both these things. After Angharad's wedding, she stoically walks down the church steps when suddenly her veil blows up, spiralling high into the air above her head as if attempting to escape. It's only brought back down when her new husband takes hold of it, pulling it under control. The implication about what her life will be like with him is clear. Often referred to as a happy accident, the truth is Ford brought in three wind machines, and continually shifted their positioning until he was happy he'd get the exact effect he wanted. The scene continues with Angharad being driven away, just as the silhouette of Mr Gruffydd — the man who loved her, but let her go — appears in the background. He stands, watching for a moment, then walks solemnly away. "Should we get a close-up?" Ford was asked after he called cut. "Oh Jesus, no," came the reply. "If we do, they'd just use it." Powerfully conveying Mr Gruffydd's wistful sorrow, it's a heartbreaking moment in an emotionally charged film, and is testament to Ford's skill as a director. >



Above: Angharad (Maureen O'Hara) marries Iestyn Evans (Marten Lamont), whom she doesn't love. **Left:** Director John Ford, who would win one of his four Oscars for *How Green Was My Valley*. **Right:** The theatrical poster. Zanuck hoped the film would be as successful as the epic *Gone With The Wind*. **Far right:** The 'Welsh' mining village, based on Giffach Goch, recreated in the Santa Monica Mountains.



Critics at the time agreed. Released on 28 October 1941, it received rave reviews. *Variety* called it “an ultra achievement”. The *Chicago Reader* said it was a “magnificent movie experience”. And *Time* claimed it was “a credit to Director Ford”. Audiences agreed — the film made over \$6 million, becoming 20th Century Fox’s highest-grossing of the year.

Yet as Ford and Zanuck were enjoying the runaway success of their film, the man who would later be seen as their big rival at the 1942 Academy Awards was enduring a rather more mixed experience with his. Orson Welles’ debut *Citizen Kane* had received similarly positive reviews, but had had far less impact in theatres, making just \$1.6 million. Not least because so many weren’t showing it — owners cowing to the will (and threats) of media magnate William Randolph Hearst, on whom the film was at least partly based. Hearst had ordered that his newspapers not cover the film at all. But that didn’t stop them targeting Welles himself — they accused him of being a Communist and, in later life, Welles spoke of one notable attempt at entrapment when a reporter for a Hearst publication hid a 14-year-old girl in his hotel room’s closet, priming photographers to burst into the room to take pictures of her and Welles ‘together’. Welles was warned in advance and skipped town.

Despite all this, he was well rewarded when the Oscar nominations were announced. As producer, director, star and co-screenwriter, Welles was up for four of the film’s nine potential awards. But that the film’s only win was for Best Original Screenplay, an award he would share, is telling. The established narrative is that Welles’ name was hissed by the crowd every time it was read out on the night, although these reports are disputed. True or not, Welles was not a popular man in Hollywood. The size of his RKO contract and the bombast surrounding its announcement saw to that. As did his unwillingness to play nice with the established hierarchy. Just who did this young upstart think he was?

Whether or not his name was hissed that night was of little consequence to Welles anyway. He wasn’t there. Instead he was in Brazil shooting doomed anthology film *It’s All True*. As it happens, neither was

the man he’d share the award with — veteran screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz. Perhaps sensing all was not well with *Kane*’s chances he’d stayed at home, convinced he wouldn’t win either. He heard about his only Oscar victory over the radio.

In the days that followed, there were rumblings that *Citizen Kane* was deserving of more. *Variety* called it “the biggest enigma of the voting” and reported that the blame lay with the “6,000” members of the extras union, ending its article by saying, “The mob prefers a regular guy to a genius.” But *Life* magazine writer and biographer Richard Meryman summed it up best in his book *Mank: The Wit, World, And Life Of Herman Mankiewicz*: “Except for his co-author award, the Motion Picture Academy excommunicated Orson Welles.”

All of this answers why *Citizen Kane* failed to win big at the 14th Academy Awards, but what of *How Green Was My Valley*? Does it really deserve to be listed alongside *The Broadway Melody* (the second awards) or *The Greatest Show On Earth* (the 25th awards) as one of the Oscars’ greatest missteps? At the time, there certainly weren’t any alarm bells ringing. On presenting Zanuck with his Best Picture award, Walter Wanger (rhymes with “danger”) called it “a picture which has brought great credit to the industry and to Commander Ford who made it, and to you who produced it”.

As the ‘40s came to an end, no-one was even mentioning *Citizen Kane* anymore. Consigned to RKO’s vaults, its central mystery was summed up in landmark book *The Film Till Now* as “crackpot Freud”, and Welles’ obsession with the technical aspects of filmmaking was criticised for being at the expense of the film’s themes.

But by 1972, the year before Ford died, *Citizen Kane*’s modern reputation had been established — it topped *Sight & Sound*’s ten-yearly poll for the second time that year, having also taken top spot in 1962. Meanwhile, in October of the same year, the Screen Directors Guild hosted a tribute to



Ford. He had to choose a film from his long career to screen that evening. He could have chosen *Stagecoach*, or *The Searchers*, or *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, or many others that are still widely held in high regard today. But he didn't — he chose *How Green Was My Valley*.

These two events are, of course, unrelated. The films were no longer in competition with each other by then, just as they shouldn't be now. As with many films since pitched as rivals because of the Oscars (from *Forrest Gump* and *Pulp Fiction* to *Dances With Wolves* and *GoodFellas*), their only common ground is that they happened to be released within the same 12-month period. If *How Green Was My Valley* hadn't been so delayed, perhaps *Citizen Kane* would have won. Or maybe the anti-Welles sentiment would have ignited mass voting for a different film, and the controversy that surrounds it would instead have fallen on another of the nominees — *Sergeant York* or *Suspicion*.

Certainly, Orson Welles and John Ford never bore each other any ill will. Interviewed by film writer Kenneth Tynan for *Playboy* in 1967, Welles was asked to name his favourite American directors. He responded, with deadpan wit, "The old masters. By which I mean John Ford, John Ford and John Ford." Filmmaker and Welles biographer Peter Bogdanovich later recounted the full line to Ford, which continued, "With Ford at his best, you get a sense of what the earth is made of — even if the script is by *Mother Machree*", a playful quip at the expense of a hugely sentimental silent Ford film from 1928. Two days later, Bogdanovich received a phone call. It was Welles. Ford had sent him a telegram that read: "Dear Orson. Thanks for the compliment. Signed, Mother Machree."

If the two key players can get on, there's no reason for this invented feud to continue. It's simple: *How Green Was My Valley* isn't one of the worst Best Picture winners ever. And just because most people prefer *Citizen Kane*, it doesn't automatically make it a bad film. It's a very good one. A classic, even. Putting the two of them up against each other 75 years later is a pointless exercise.

And besides, *The Maltese Falcon* should have won. ●

THE REST OF THE BEST

THE OTHER FILMS VYING FOR THE OUTSTANDING MOTION PICTURE CROWN IN 1942

BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST

Fictionalised drama about Edna Gladney (Greer Garson) — an advocate for the rights of illegitimate children in Texas.

CURIOUS FACT: This film marked the first of five consecutive Best Actress nominations for Garson. She'd win the next year for *Mrs. Miniver*.

THE MALTESE FALCON

Now-classic film noir starring Humphrey Bogart as private investigator Sam Spade, who's hired to track down a missing statue.

CURIOUS FACT: This version was the third adaptation of Dashiell Hammett's novel, all made within a decade of each other.

HERE COMES MR. JORDAN

Romantic comedy in which a boxer (Robert Montgomery) dies, but is returned to Earth in another body for a second chance at life.

CURIOUS FACT: *Heaven Can Wait*, the 1978 Warren Beatty film, is adapted from the same play.

ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN

Biopic of preacher William Spence (Fredric March), who was posted to a run-down parsonage in rural Iowa.

CURIOUS FACT: The writer of the original book, Hartzell Spence (son of William), is credited with coining the term "pin-up".

HOLD BACK THE DAWN

A Romanian gigolo (Charles Boyer) marries an American (Olivia de Havilland) for a US visa, but is soon investigated by immigration officials.

CURIOUS FACT: Co-written by Billy Wilder, it was the final script he wrote but didn't direct as he was incensed by director Mitchell Leisen deleting one of the scenes.

SERGEANT YORK

Howard Hawks biopic of World War I hero Alvin York, played by Gary Cooper, who won his first Best Actor Oscar for the role.

CURIOUS FACT: Thanks to the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Sergeant York* was the highest-grossing film of 1941.

THE LITTLE FOXES

William Wyler adaptation of a 1939 play about a once-wealthy Southern woman (Bette Davis) battling with her family to secure her financial status.

CURIOUS FACT: Was re-released in 1942 in a double-bill with *Citizen Kane* as RKO attempted to recover its losses on Welles' film.

SUSPICION

Alfred Hitchcock thriller in which Lina (Joan Fontaine) runs off with a playboy (Cary Grant), only to discover he's a conman and, possibly, trying to kill her.

CURIOUS FACT: Joan Fontaine won Best Actress — it's the only Oscar-winning performance in a Hitchcock film.

SPOILER
WARNING

RE.VIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT

EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT





THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

DOCTOR STRANGE

We go trippin' with director Scott Derrickson through Marvel's mystical adventure

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



0:03:37

MAGIC HOUR — The movie starts with a magical fight between Tilda Swinton's The Ancient One and her student Kaecilius (Mads Mikkelsen). "There isn't any magic for so long in the movie that I felt it necessary to start with something big," says director Scott Derrickson. The style here, as buildings churn and warp, is called Mandelbrotting, after mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. "It's a fractal manipulation. It looks like magic." >

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

DOCTOR
STRANGE
★★★★
CERT 12

What we said: "Rolls the Marvel paradigm into a hefty joint and invites us to smoke it over the course of two stunning, psychedelic hours."

Notable extras: Scott Derrickson commentary, deleted scenes, featurettes, Phase 3 preview, second part of Team Thor sketch.



0:30:57

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR __ Strange's (Benedict Cumberbatch) intro to magic takes him, and us, on a trippy ride that showcases several worlds inspired by the art of *Strange* co-creator Steve Ditko. It lasts around two minutes but, "I thought this could go a good six minutes," says Derrickson. "I wanted this to be a rollercoaster ride we're on with Strange. But nobody can be on a rollercoaster for six minutes. You'd die."



0:41:41

BECAUSE IT'S THERE __ Part of Strange's training as a sorcerer sees The Ancient One strand him on Mount Everest, to force him to master the use of portals. "That was Kevin Feige's idea," says Derrickson. "Everest is local to Kamar-Taj [The Ancient One's temple], they're in Kathmandu already. And while I was scouting in Nepal I took a helicopter ride to the base where you could see the tip of Everest. It just fit that Nepal aesthetic."



0:50:05

ABOUT TIME __ In the comic books, the Eye Of Agamotto is a versatile magical relic. In the movie it does one thing only: control time. "We made the mistake in early drafts of having it do too many things," says Derrickson. The revelation that it's the fifth Infinity Stone, the baubles sought by MCU Big Bad Thanos, came equally late. "Kevin Feige is the one who's always thinking about how these things fit together," says Derrickson.



0:56:26

CLOAK AND DAGGER __ "We always wanted it to have some personality," says Scott Derrickson. "It ended up having a lot more than expected." The "it" is the Cloak Of Levitation, a magical artefact that chooses to bond with Strange during his battle with Kaecilius in the New York Sanctum Sanctorum. "I went through the movie and found all the places we could display its personality. It's everybody's favourite supporting character."



1:00:54

A HERO WILL RISE __ In fact, Strange is soon saved by the Cloak Of Levitation, giving rise (literally) to the film's first full unabashed hero shot. "I knew that needed to be a big moment, which is why we framed him against the Sanctum window," says Derrickson. "We were aware that this would be a hero moment, the first time, for people who know the comics, you see the iconic Doctor Strange."



1:15:46

JUSTIFIED AND ANCIENT? __ In a twist, it turns out that The Ancient One has been extending her very long life by siphoning power from the Dark Dimension of über-baddie, Dormammu. "She is a hypocrite," says Derrickson of the moral compromise that is a deviation from the source material. "Test audiences would go, 'Wait, is The Ancient One evil?' There is no clear answer. That's the point."



1:18:52

LLING FOR NEW YORK __ "I'd envisioned splitting the East River and inverting that," says Derrickson of Strange and Mordo (Chiwetel Ejiofor) finding themselves falling through an undulating New York. Derrickson eventually saw a test sketch that nailed it. "That was an image I kept above my desk in my pre-production office," he says. "I thought, 'This is a key frame for the film.'" Sure enough, it was in the very first trailer.



1:31:46

HONG KONG PHOOEY __ The final battle is a set-piece in which Strange reverses time and undoes the damage wrought to Hong Kong by Kaecilius. "All our initial ideas were just more of those spectacle fights," admits Derrickson. "I was playing on the cliché of every Marvel movie ending with a city being destroyed while a portal opens up. I said, 'What if we do the opposite? Repair a city and don't close the portal, but go into it?'"



1:37:21

BARGAINING CHIP __ Strange finally outsmarts multi-dimensional dickhead Dormammu by snaring them both in a time loop. Downside: Strange will be doomed to die in various ways. Forever. "It's a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, in front of the devil himself," says Derrickson.

DOCTOR STRANGE IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 6 MARCH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

★★★★
DEN OF GEEK

★★★★
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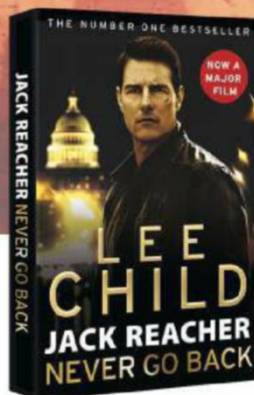
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THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE

BLOW OUT

Brian De Palma's most obsessive thriller. Sound

1981 / CERT 18

WORDS HAYLEY CAMPBELL

THE POINT OF BRIAN De Palma's *Blow Out* is laid out in the opening moments: it's all about finding a better scream. A low-budget sleazy horror-film director and his sound technician sit in a dark theatre somewhere in Philadelphia, playing back their showcase murder: the college dorm, the naked girls, the raising of the knife, the shower curtain pulled back by the gloved hand. The schlocky tension creeps to a white buzz and is swiftly deflated by a completely flaccid scream. It's just some actress who doesn't mean it, they only hired her for her tits. The sound guy has to do better.

John Travolta is Jack Terry, that sound guy, who inadvertently records a murder while out at night collecting sounds by the river — a toad, a hooting owl, a couple on a late-night stroll, all

illustrated in trademark Brian De Palma split screen by cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond (*Deliverance*, *The Deer Hunter*). There's a loud bang and a car plunges through the barrier, into the river, taking its two passengers with it. Travolta dives in and pulls out Nancy Allen's escort from the wreckage (previously seen with Travolta five years prior to this hiding under the steps at Carrie's senior prom), but the driver, a politician, is dead. Later, Jack pieces together footage from the incident courtesy of another witness (De Palma regular Dennis Franz) and analyses it as though it's the Zapruder film capturing JFK's assassination. He begins to believe that the blow out was more than an accident, and becomes a man obsessed, embroiled in a political conspiracy



John Travolta's Jack Terry can't believe his ears.

and a cover-up so neat the police don't believe it exists.

Like Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation*, *Blow Out* is the sound guy's answer to Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, with a murder captured not by a camera lens but a microphone. And because it's a film about sound, even the silences mean something. Sounds are the source of Terry's everything: his art, his income, his strategy for doing good, and the thing that ultimately ruins him. He thinks his machines can save the world and all they do is destroy it. The tapes fall silent.

In the scheme of Travolta's filmography, *Blow Out* comes after *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*, and immediately follows *Urban Cowboy*. It was a serious adult role, an anomaly

in his filmography at that point to date. After this, Sylvester Stallone directed him in the extremely camp and arguably terrible *Staying Alive*, Jamie Lee Curtis had him sweating in short shorts in *Perfect*, and then he fell down the *Look Who's Talking* hole. He would have stayed there had it not been for *Blow Out* — it's a film so beloved by Quentin Tarantino that when he was casting *Pulp Fiction*, he only ever had one person in mind for Vincent Vega, even though Jack couldn't be further apart from that addled assassin.

And in the scheme of De Palma's filmography, this more than any other illustrates the director's extraordinary control over image and obsessive attention to detail. There are nods to Hitchcock, as ever, in the silhouette of an extremely creepy John Lithgow ice-picking the shape of a Liberty Bell into the belly of a dead woman, and the omnipresent colour scheme of blue and red steadily builds — from the clothes to the cars, to the way a prostitute's red high heels jerk as she's being strangled, her blue toothbrush clattering to the floor beneath them — until it completely saturates the horrific climax under the flashes of the Liberty Day fireworks. Nothing is throwaway. It's the kind of film that rewards rewatching: everything is handed to you in the first five minutes, the rest is just picking it apart.

The ending is a fist to the guts, the kind that makes you sit in the cinema until long after the lights come up and the guy with the bin comes around and asks if you're leaving. It premiered in 1981, and ran afoul of audiences who, after a decade of darkness, didn't want to feel punished by movies; they just wanted a happy escape. Pauline Kael raved about it, Roger Ebert gave it four stars, his highest possible mark, but the movie made just \$12 million, two-thirds of its budget. De Palma himself called it "a catastrophe".

But *Blow Out* isn't a catastrophe. Not even remotely close. It's an extraordinarily perceptive film about filmmaking, and it feels intensely personal. De Palma wrote the role of Sally for Allen, his then wife, and it's the kind of script, originally called *Personal Effects*, that only a filmmaker could write. It's about a tortured man torturing himself in only the way an obsessive creative whose art lies in the miniscule can: over and over, not until it has no meaning, but until it grows and has so much meaning that it utterly consumes him. But it's a good scream. It's a good scream.

BLOW OUT IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



RIA VIJAY – 10
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS

What did you think of the film?

It was really exciting and there were bits that surprised me. Like when the orcs were riding on these hyena things.

How many stars would you give it?

Four and three quarters.

That's nearly five. What's missing?

Well, there's not much gore in it.

You want more gore?

Yeah.

Last time you watched *The Fellowship Of The Ring*. How did you think this changed from that one?

The Two Towers has big battles in it.

Whose storyline was the most exciting?

Frodo's, because he had to go through a lot of things with Sam. I liked Aragorn, Frodo and Gandalf The White.

What did you think of Gollum?

He's freaky, but I liked his characteristics. He's adventurous and he's very sneaky.

Do you think he'll help the hobbits?

I think he's going to deceive them. [Does *Gollum* impression] "Thieves."

What's going to happen next in *The Return Of The King*?

I think they're going to get to the volcano and have a huge battle. The Eye Of Sauron might become human again.

Do you think anybody else will die?

I think Sam's going to go.

You said that last time.

Yeah.

What would you want to see more of?

Gore.

TALKING TRASH

Bask in the presence of the Prince Of Puke, *Multiple Maniacs* director John Waters

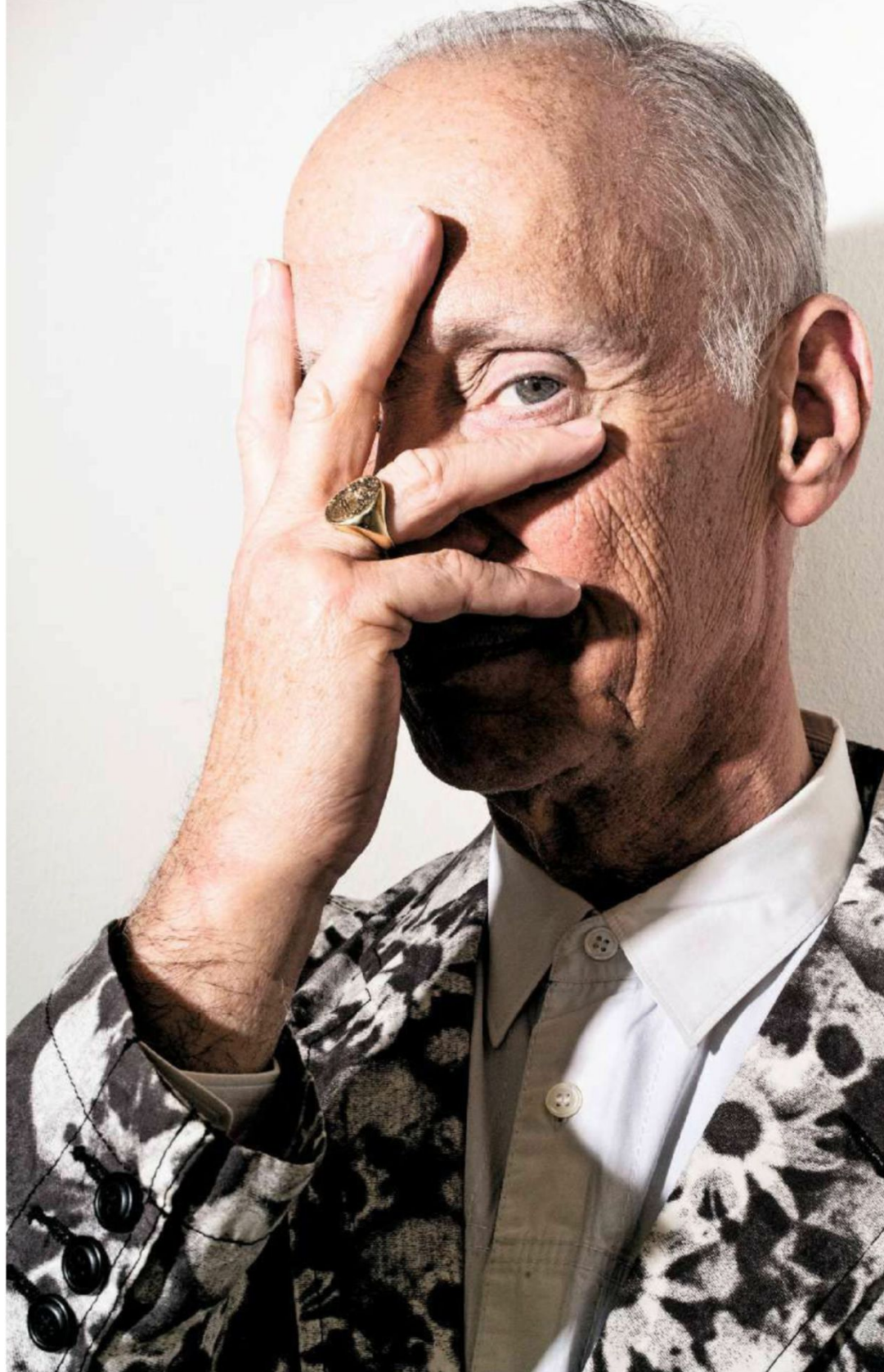
WORDS TERRI WHITE

JOHN WATERS, THE Pope Of Trash/Prince Of Puke (depending on your preference of moniker), has carved his five-decade career out of bad-taste, pulpy, transgressive, underground cult movies. The kind that were only fit to be shown after midnight in the most dangerous parts of downtown New York. And there is probably no film that so typifies the Baltimore director's oeuvre than 1970 black comedy *Multiple Maniacs*. Yes, even more than *Pink Flamingos*. How so? Here's the plot (SPOILER ALERT): Lady Divine (Divine) robs and murders the customers who visit her travelling sideshow of sexual misfits and fetish acts, The Cavalcade Of Perversion. After discovering her lover (who accidentally kills her daughter, played by Cookie Mueller) is having an affair, she kills him; is sexually assaulted by a lobster and goes on one last fatal, bloodied rampage. Oh, and along the way she eats a (real) cow's heart and is anally penetrated with a rosary. Still with us? Good.

Though previously little-watched (though those that did raved — it has 100% on Rotten Tomatoes), a new restoration by Criterion guarantees a fresh generation of filth-seekers can watch Water's second film agog.

You made *Multiple Maniacs* in your early twenties. What were you thinking?!

That's what my father always used to say to me and Divine's parents always used to say to him: "What are you thinking?!" I was trying to combine genres of art movies and exploitation movies and gore movies and make a new genre all of my own. It was almost a terrorist attack on hippie culture, even though we were hippies. The fall of 1969 [when shooting began] was when the most insane things happened, in the whole century almost. Now we've got a lot of competition on that, but it was a time when people believed the revolution was coming.



I didn't, but I certainly loved comic activism, where humour was terrorism.

And your parents funded this film?

Yes, and they never saw it, I don't think.

Did you pay them back?

Yes. And then they lent me the money to make *Pink Flamingos* and then my father, when I started to pay that back, said, "Don't pay it back and put it in your next movie and don't ask me again."

SARAH LEE/EYEVINE, LAWRENCE IRVINE © DREAMLAND STUDIOS



MAN ON TRAIN

The bit-part players who stand out



THIS MONTH: THE MAN IN THE SUIT, THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN

THIS MONTH'S MAN On Train is literally a man on a train, even if the credits stop just short of calling him that. Instead, Darren Goldstein's The Man In The Suit is a vital presence in *The Girl On The Train*: part of a key scene with Emily Blunt's alcoholic that we constantly revisit in flashbacks via her hazy memories. But we also repeatedly spot him on the train itself, the set he worked on most.

"There was no dialogue on any of those days," Goldstein tells *Empire*, "so the director, Tate Taylor, would just be telling me, 'Look intense; look up at Emily; look at her like she's shifty...'" He'd walk me through how we wanted the scene to read. I kind of had no idea how that character was going to turn out." He did get to speak eventually though, in a sequence where Blunt confronts him at a bar. "She was amazing," he says. "She'd have to do these emotional, intense scenes where she's drunk, and then Tate would yell, 'Cut!' and she'd be back to just chatting away again."

A jobbing actor since 2004, Goldstein has a family with *Bloodline* actress Katie Finneran and works mainly in Miami and New York. Racking up plenty of TV work, you may also have seen him on film in *Win Win* or *Limitless*, but he says he's most recognised for Showtime series *The Affair*.

Next he'll pop up in Kathryn Bigelow's as-yet-untitled film about the 1967 Detroit riots and Justin Long's comedy web series *The Real Stephen Blatt*. After that he isn't sure. "I could get dressed up in a three-piece suit and just stare at people on the subway," he chuckles. "That's actually a funny idea for a sketch..." OW

THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

Did they watch *any* of them?

They didn't see that one. They did meet Divine the very first time when Divine was in the scene smashing the car, dressed in a woman's one-piece bathing suit — it was in the driveway of my parent's house. After it was over, my mother met Divine — Divine was so uptight when he took the wig off, which just made it a hundred times worse because then it was a *man* in a woman's bathing suit.

How did *Multiple Maniacs* follow on from what you had made before?

It was in the same vein as [first film] *Mondo Trasho*, however they *did* see *Mondo Trasho*. And they were horrified but they respected the fact that I started my own business, that I made enough money to keep going. They respected that I did it without a lot of help, that I didn't go to school for this. They were very supportive and loving [but] what parent would be glad their son made *Multiple Maniacs*, really? Even today! Rosary jobs... What was I thinking? Rosary jobs! I've never given one. Or gotten one. I'm not a rosary top or bottom.

How would you describe it to someone who's never seen it?

A rosary job?

Um, not a rosary job — the film

Oh. I think "a celluloid atrocity" still works.

Does the film still have the power to shock, even today?

I think it's worse today. I've seen it with young kids who had never seen it and they were stupefied by it.

During the shoot, were there any scenes where you thought, "This is a bit much," whether it was the rosary job or Divine being raped by a lobster?

No. I think making it too much has always been a thing I've worked with. I think if I ever regretted anything it's a scene in *Mondo Trasho* where they were executing chickens and I wouldn't do that today. In *Pink Flamingos* the chicken is killed but we ate the chicken; we didn't eat them in *Mondo Trasho* so I do think that's wrong. But no, I don't think I did anything else that I thought went too far. I mean, there is something that's really gratuitous: right after the rosary job, I cut to somebody shooting up on the altar. It had nothing to do with the shot and he's *literally* shooting up. It's so ludicrous, that I didn't cut it out. It has no reason to be in the film in any way.

How did *Multiple Maniacs* lay the groundwork for what came next?

When Divine ate the cow heart — that was definitely a warm-up for him eating shit in *Pink Flamingos*.

Clockwise from left: The Pope Of Trash during his art exhibition in Mayfair in 2015; Waters (front) heads up the *Multiple Maniacs* cast; A celluloid atrocity! The infamous puke-eater; The divine Divine as Lady Divine; Divine and Mink Stole, causing havoc on the streets of Baltimore.



MULTIPLE MANIACS IS OUT ON 20 MARCH ON BLU-RAY



CIRCULAR LOGIC

The secrets of how *Arrival's* extra-terrestrial language came into being

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

WHEN DIRECTOR DENIS Villeneuve first read the Ted Chiang short story that inspired *Arrival*, the prospect of creating a new, alien language was “a dream”. After all, the film hinges on the efforts of linguist Louise (Amy Adams) and physicist Ian (Jeremy Renner) to communicate with the seven-limbed ‘heptapod’ aliens who arrive on the planet. But the process of creating the symbols or ‘logograms’ of Heptapod B, the aliens’ unique written form of communication, was far more challenging than Villeneuve could ever have anticipated.

“I wanted a new form of language that would seem fresh for the audience, something away from any human language,” he explains. “I was looking for something that would have

nightmarish qualities, something that could have subconscious patterns like Rorschach drawings.”

There was one clue to the alien language in the story: it should be circular, to fit with the aliens’ perception of time. So Villeneuve and production designer Patrice Vermette set to work, talking to anthropologists about the history of human language and engaging multiple graphic designers to conceive circular symbols. They wanted something aesthetically pleasing that could also make sense. But all the options seemed too human. The solution, when it came, was close to home.

“My wife [Martine Bertrand], she’s a painter, she said, ‘Do you mind if I give it a try?’” explains Vermette. “I came home that night and there on the kitchen table she had, like, 15 interpretations. It was the little circular logograms that we see in the movie. I was like, ‘Holy crap, this is it!’”

Vermette showed the designs to Villeneuve among a pile of other options, and the director

instantly zeroed in — but he still had concerns. “I was mesmerised,” says Villeneuve. “But I was saying to myself, ‘OK, it’s exactly what we need; it’s powerful, beautiful, new. But if I choose that will I paint myself in a corner?’ I didn’t want the heptapod to keep starting to draw on the barrier for 15 minutes every time they talk.”

Eventually the solution came: the alien heptapods project the ink of the logograms into the thick air of their atmosphere, elegantly echoing Earth squid. The logograms were created by blowing ink on paper, before the most aesthetically pleasing blotches were combined into circular forms of a lexicon that reached over a hundred words. The swirl patterns as the logograms flow into shape were modelled from ink in water and the patterns of flies swarming over Lake Victoria in wildlife footage.

While the language was evolving, Vermette met with expert linguist Jessica Coon at McGill



Amy Adams as linguist Louise Banks with Jeremy Renner's physicist Ian Donnelly. **Right:** The 'logograms' created by blowing ink. **Far right:** Banks attempts to communicate with the aliens using Heptapod B.



University, and **suggested she attempt to decipher** it, along with Mathematica's Christopher and Stephen Wolfram, the coders brought in to create graphics for the on-screen team's analysis work. "Patrice did a fantastic job because the language was evolving as the linguist made sure it made sense and the mathematician was creating the software to decode it," says Villeneuve. "They did the reverse process of Louise and Ian. It's always the same thing: to describe a job, the perfect way to do it is always to go back to reality."

Villeneuve decided the spoken language, Heptapod A, should be tied into their emotions. He worked with sound designers Dave Whitehead and Michelle Child to create something "as far as possible from anything we can find on Earth". The pair based their sounds on the aliens' body shape. "It was not random," says Villeneuve. "They thought the alien would have two spines that would clack together when they were

coming out with some sounds. The alien is so big that it is like a drum, so it would resonate very loudly."

Still, the real focus was Heptapod B. The vocabulary grew, with new words added as the script was tweaked. And, as Louise and Ian learn more and more of the language, they begin to understand how the aliens think, and grasp their concept of time — which answers the question of, why didn't the aliens just write in English? "They want the humans to do the effort," says Vermette. "The gift is their language. The interview room is a classroom, and we think we are teaching them, but it is they that are teaching us."

Villeneuve, who has had a lifelong fascination with languages, was pleased with the result. "It's the beauty of cinema: you never know where a movie will bring you. It was a slow process, but at the end it made sense." Creating an alien language may not have had quite such seismic

effects as learning Heptapod B did in the film, but if they ever make 'Arrival 2: We Left The Kettle On', at least they'll have a dictionary ready.

ARRIVAL IS OUT ON 6 MARCH ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 20 MARCH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



ARRIVAL



CERT 12

What we said: "A fresh take on the cosmic-encounter movie that grips you with the strength of its ideas and the quality of its execution."

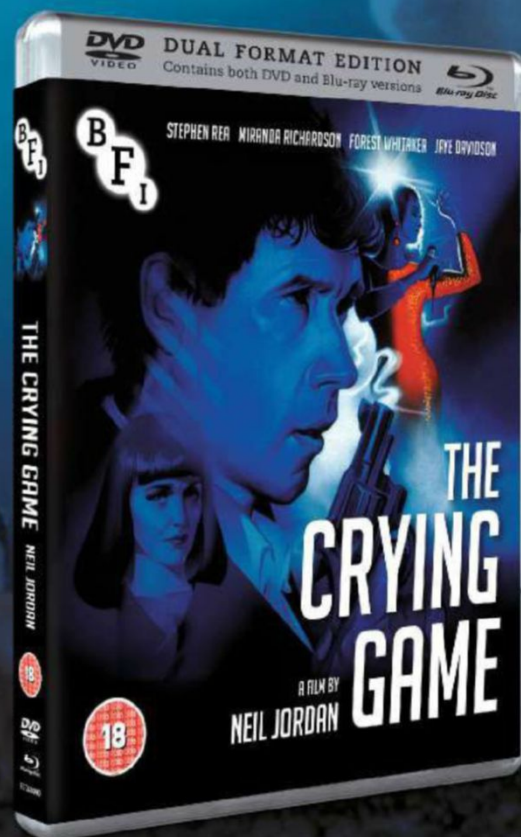
Notable extras: Several featurettes on the alien language, the sound design, the editing process and the score.

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BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

LENNIE JAMES

WORDS OLLY RICHARDS



LOCATION

My first job out of drama school was [post-World War I TV drama series] *The Orchid House*. We shot on the Caribbean island of Dominica for two-and-a-half months. We were there so long that it felt like where I lived.

For ['90s BBC police drama] *Out Of The Blue* we needed a run-down neighbourhood and we went to a part of Rotherham so run-down that there were only a few people living there. Most had moved out. It was heartbreaking, seeing a dead community.

AUDITION

Snatch. There were two actors cast in the roles Robbie Gee and I played, but Guy Ritchie wanted more experienced actors. Robbie and I were paired for the audition, and we left it all in the room, as they say. We didn't speak about it after because we didn't want to jinx it. Three days later we were filming.



I auditioned to play a cop in a Jude Law movie [*Shopping*]. No reflection on the movie, but the audition was horrible. In the script he has a rock thrown at him and the director said, "When I clap my hands, react as if you've been hit." I said, "I dunno. What do you get from that?" That was a long, horrible moment.

ADVICE

An actor who's no longer with us, Guy Gregory, told me on a show called *Man In The Moon*, "Just do the job in front of you. Don't think about what you might get from it or where it might take you. Just do the job."

I've had this from a couple of actors who'll watch what you're going to do and say, "Just save it, mate." Why? Do you want me to only try when I'm in a close-up? I think usually it just means, "Don't show me up."

MOMENT

On *Comics*, a Lynda La Plante drama, my character had this big speech where he tells another character why he matters to him. It was a big, soppy scene and it was the first time I ever got a round of applause from the crew. I never knew that was possible! It was also the first time I saw members of the crew crying. That was a biggie.



[Army drama series] *Civvies*. We had a great Welsh director called Karl Francis. I was struggling with a scene and he kept going, "Come on, boy. Just do it, boy." I blew up, shouted, "I'm not your boy!" My friend Jason Isaacs came up and said, "Mate, it's not a race thing. It's a Welsh thing. Calls everybody 'boy'." Oh fuck! I wanted to run all the way home.

FAN ENCOUNTER

Norman Reedus on *The Walking Dead* took me to see Mötley Crüe. Alice Cooper was supporting. After his set someone came over and said, "Alice would like to meet you." We go backstage and Alice Cooper is throwing stars at a cut-out of Rick Grimes. "You want a go?" "Sure!"



A guy stopped me and said, "You're him from that show, aren't you?" I dunno, mate. He made me reel off half my CV. After ten minutes he said, "Oh fuck, it's not you," and he was gone.

THE WALKING DEAD SEASON 6 IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

GUNFIGHTS AT THE O.K. CORRAL

Big-screen versions of the classic shootout dissected, including the good, the bad... and the Kilmer

WORDS IAN FREER

THE GUNFIGHT AT The O.K. Corral is arguably the most famous shootout in history. It took place on 26 October 1881 in an alleyway that was actually a few doors down from the Old Kindersley corral, and saw lawmen Wyatt Earp, his brothers Morgan and Virgil, and their compadre Doc Holliday face off against a collection of ne'er-do-wells including Ike and Billy Clanton. Despite its reputation, it only lasted roughly 30 seconds. Still, that hasn't stopped the movies and TV from replaying it over and over again. As John Ford's majestic *My Darling Clementine* is reissued on Blu-ray, we look at some of the finest versions and separate the OK from the Oh No...

1 **MY DARLING CLEMENTINE** (1946)

GUN MEN: Henry Fonda (Wyatt Earp), Ward Bond (Morgan Earp), Victor Mature (Doc Holliday)
DURATION: 3 minutes 12 seconds

GUN PLAY: John Ford actually knew Wyatt Earp but prints the legend rather than the truth. "Let's go," offers Fonda's Earp casually before taking a long walk to the Corral. After a verbal attempt at an arrest, Earp cleverly uses the dust left by a stagecoach as a cover to start firing and the shootout is exciting, graced with big skies and telling details (bullet splashing water in a trough, Holliday's hankie on a post following his death).

VERACITY: ★★★

2 **GUNFIGHT AT THE O.K. CORRAL** (1957)

GUN MEN: Burt Lancaster (Wyatt Earp), John Hudson and DeForest Kelley (Earp's brothers), Kirk Douglas (Doc Holliday)

DURATION: 8 minutes 6 seconds

GUN PLAY: John Sturges' film actually gave the conflict its name. A bigger, longer, more 'Hollywood' take, this has wagons on fire, a Clanton running to a kamikaze death and Lancaster's Earp doing a spectacular dive for cover. The action moves inside a shop, with Earp giving Billy Clanton (a young Dennis Hopper!) a chance to surrender, until Holliday shoots through the window to kill the kid.

VERACITY: ★★

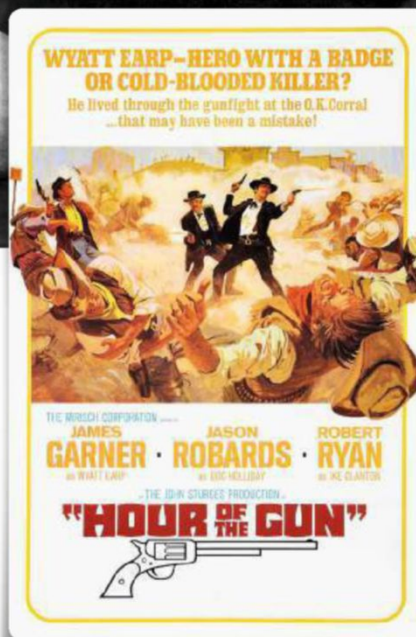
3 **HOURLY OF THE GUN** (1967)

GUN MEN: James Garner (Wyatt Earp), Frank Converse and Sam Melville (Earp's brothers), Jason Robards (Doc Holliday)

DURATION: 12 seconds

GUN PLAY: Sturges' spiritual 'sequel' to *Gunfight* is also an apology, offering a more realistic take. Opening with the shootout, there is a long, elegant build-up — including a great shot of the heroes walking four abreast down the street — expertly scored by Jerry Goldsmith. When it comes, the shooting is brief (even shorter than the real thing) but impactful.

VERACITY: ★★★★★



4 **'SPECTRE OF THE GUN':**

(1968)

GUN MEN: Ron Soble (Wyatt Earp), Charles Maxwell and Rex Holman (Earp's brothers), Sam Gilman (Doc Holliday)

DURATION: 30 seconds

GUN PLAY: After invading Melkotian space, the Enterprise crew are sent to execution by taking the place of the Clanton brothers at O.K. Corral. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) realises this is all in their head, and Earp and co's bullets will pass right through them if they keep this in mind. Of course, with Kirk (William Shatner) involved, it becomes Dropkick At The O.K. Corral as he

Henry Fonda and Victor Mature in *My Darling Clementine*.

Above right: *Star Trek's* 'Spectre Of The Gun'.

Below: The US poster for *Hour Of The Gun*.



starts karate-chopping Wyatt. But the least realistic aspect of the whole thing? It's portrayed as happening on a rainy, thundery night.

VERACITY: ★

5 — **TOMBSTONE** (1993)

GUN MEN: Kurt Russell (Wyatt Earp), Sam Elliott and Bill Paxton (Earp's brothers), Val Kilmer (Doc Holliday)

DURATION: 1 minute 27 seconds

GUN PLAY: That Val Kilmer's Doc Holliday whistles as he is walking to his fate is an indication of *Tombstone's* broader take (helpfully the bad guys all wear red sashes). The stand-off is all Sergio Leone close-ups — watch out for a youthful Thomas Haden Church as Ike Clanton — before all hell breaks loose. It's theatrical — Earp and Holliday unload into Clanton — and full of movie moments, including a last-gasp save. Unrealistic but fun.

VERACITY: ★★

6 — **WYATT EARP** (1994)

GUN MEN: Kevin Costner (Wyatt Earp), Linden Ashby and Michael Madsen (Earp's brothers), Dennis Quaid (Doc Holliday)

DURATION: 43 seconds

GUNPLAY: Lawrence Kasdan's stately take features the most dynamic walk-down-the-street scene, with the heroes' march captured in a low-angled tracking shot accompanied by James Newton Howard's bellicose score. When we get to it, the shootout is brisk. No running, hiding or heroics, just straight out, close-range firing in-between some buildings — just like the real thing.

VERACITY: ★★★★★

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE IS OUT ON 27 FEBRUARY ON BLU-RAY



MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

★★★★★

CERT U

What we said: "Ford was interested in the myth this story represented, not the reality, and the portrait of the Old West he paints ranks among the most evocative he has ever produced."

Notable extras: Ford documentary, commentary featuring Earp's grandson, *Movie Masterclass* episode

KIM NEWMAN'S VIDEO DUNGEON

If it's DTV, our Dungeon Master is GTG. FTW



THE BREAK-OUT: PET

THE SUSPENSEFUL *PET* rings the changes on the caged-in-the-basement psycho-horror genre. The first reel deliberately sticks to torture-porn conventions, but the film then takes surprising, nastily satisfying turns. It's a movie you'll want to see twice, working equally well if you know what's going on as it does as a mystery.

Lonely loser Seth (Dominic Monaghan), who works in an LA animal shelter, makes clumsy attempts to woo old high school acquaintance Holly (Ksenia Solo). He researches her tastes on social media and rehearses pick-up lines, but his stratagems rebound because Holly is too fixated on her own complicated life to notice him stalking her. When he gets hold of her journal, Seth devises a fresh, more sinister plan.

Just when it seems *Pet* is settling into a well-worn groove, screenwriter Jeremy Slater has the balance of power change.

The opening is told from Seth's quirky point of view, then Holly takes over and the film starts springing unexpected traps. It turns out the victim is much stranger than Seth's image of her, and he may not be the most dangerous person in the room.

This American-Spanish co-production — directed by Carles

Torrens (found-footage ghost story *Apartment 143*) — showcases complex performances in initially standard-seeming roles from the leads. Monaghan manages a balance between creepy and pathetic as a weak antagonist fated to become as much a captive of the

situation as the girl he has locked up, while Solo sells a series of far-fetched twists as an unusual heroine with dark secrets, inner resources and a long-term plan. Monaghan has a solid rep as an oddball character actor, but Solo displays her range in a literal breakout role.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I didn't suspect Marlene until I remembered an incident with an exiled lady wrestler." *The Gore Gore Girls*

THE ROUND-UP: VIVA ESPANA!

THIS MONTH, A tapas-of-terror round-up. The 1950s-set gothic *Musarañas* (*Shrew's Nest*) has an agoraphobic dressmaker (Macarena Gómez) 'collect' and trap a broken-legged neighbour, *Misery*-style. A stunning opening scene riffs on scary bedtime stories, then the film simmers for an hour of crack-up before a violent finale.

Marc Carreté's impressive *Asmodexia* sees a craggy old exorcist (Lluís Marco) and his granddaughter (Clàudia Pons) visiting folks who are beset by supernatural issues. It's a fiendishly clever story as plot-threads coalesce to prompt apocalyptic revelations.

Hèctor Hernández Vicens' *El Cadáver*

de Anna Fritz (*The Corpse Of Anna Fritz*) demands a stronger stomach. It's a morgue-set sick thriller which pushes well past the bad-taste barrier, as a trio of dolts find necrophile larks lead them deep into trouble.

Director Aléx de la Iglesia instead opts for laughs in *Las Brujas De Zugarramurdi* (*Witching And Bitching*), but also tackles sexual politics, pitting bungling bloke bank robbers against maybe supernatural women.

I believe every film comedian should do a scary mystery once, but writer-director star Tyler Perry botches the laugh- and scare-free mess *Boo! A Madea Halloween*. Even *Ernest Scared Stupid* was better.

MOVIE MEMOIRS

Madonna as Susan,
in the groove.

Sali Hughes on the films that shaped her life

#9: THE LYING ABOUT YOUR AGE FILM: DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN



ILLUSTRATION DAVID MAHONEY

I WAS BORN in 1975 and it's taken me a good 20 years to develop the instinct to come clean about it. Not that I'm in denial about getting old, but because I've spent so much of my life rolling back my birthdate in order to gain entry to pubs and clubs, buy pints of snakebite and ten-packs of Consulate, give blood (there wasn't much to do in late 1980s South Wales, and they gave you free cans of Guinness), that when asked the question as a fully grown adult, my hard-wired instinct is to tell a fat lie.

Of course, it all began with a film. In 1985, my big brother, unavoidably aware of my full-

blown Madonna obsession, shoplifted from WHSmith the novelisation of her forthcoming movie, *Desperately Seeking Susan* (by Susan Dworkin; still available on eBay), and threw it onto my bunk bed. I pored over every word, attempting to pair each scene with a clip from the *Into The Groove* video released ahead of the film. I thought I'd die if I didn't see the feature-length version but the BBFC ruled that at ten, I was five years too young to hear Laurie Metcalf talk of popping Valium like Polos, or see Rosanna Arquette huffing fags, or Madonna's Susan being dry-humped against a pinball machine by a druggie New Wave punk.

So when *Desperately Seeking Susan* premiered at the Cameo Cinema, Bargoed, I was left with no option but to make like its lawless heroine and sneak in. With brothers in tow, I tottered past the box office in my jelly slingbacks and drowning in my mum's batwing blazer, semi-convincingly blurted out a rehearsed date of birth and, high on adrenaline, took my shabby seat.

You'd think I'd scored a front row ticket for Live Aid. Like any forbidden fruit, an illicit, age-inappropriate film (even one hinged on amnesia, a case of mistaken identity and an unfeasible coincidence involving a thrift shop jacket) is guaranteed to be more delicious than one that comes with society's blessing. I drank in every costume, every beat of the soundtrack, every off-colour joke and unknowable reference. By the time

Into The Groove kicked in for the closing credits, I knew a whole world of films was now within grasp.

Soon, I was ducking in to see everything. My methods varied according to the cinema and popularity of film (try hiding in a school afternoon screening of *Betty Blue*). Sometimes I'd pay adults to go to the kiosk with my pocket money, sometimes I bought my own ticket for some Disney animation then, in darkness, diverted to whichever screen was showing *Die Hard* or similar. For Tom Cruise's woeful *Cocktail*, my friends and I stood at the fire exit, sneaked into the loos from street level, then strode back into the auditorium as though we'd been there all along (frankly, we'd have been better off staying in the lavs).

As the '80s advanced, so did the multiplex — bad news for the local fleapits but a boon to the underage cinéaste, as the multiscreen sheds gave less and less of a damn about what you saw, provided you bought enough popcorn, sat at the back and kept it down. I shamelessly strolled in to see *Ruthless People*, *Working Girl*, even *The Accused*. It must be easier still now, in an age of 12-screen cinemas, automated ticket machines and skeleton staffing. But does this make for the same thrilling experience as my first screening of *Desperately Seeking Susan*? Nothing worthwhile comes without effort, after all. And a good, healthy fear of arrest.

SHERLOCK: SERIES 4

The best bits from the detective's final problems



1_ DIAGNOSIS: MURDER

An opening episode which contrived to largely keep Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch) and John Watson (Martin Freeman) apart came together nicely as Watson's wife Mary (Amanda Abbington) sacrificed herself to save Sherlock's life. Watson's grief-stricken growls and vow to blame Holmes were heartrending.



2_ THE RISE OF EURUS

After much fun with Toby Jones' tombstone-toothed terror Culverton Smith, creators Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat dropped the sister of all twists at the episode's end as John Watson's shrink (Sian Brooke) turned out to be Sherlock and Mycroft's smarter, malevolent sibling. Not in the Conan Doyle canon.



3_ LESSIARTY IS MORIARTY

Although it turned out to be a flashback-cum-red herring, the return of Andrew Scott's Moriarty, grandstanding to Queen as he emerged from a helicopter, was a hilarious high point of the dark and twisty puzzle-centric 'The Final Problem'.

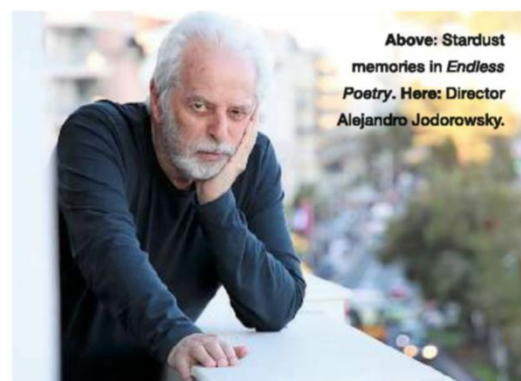
SHERLOCK SERIES 4 IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



POETRY CORNER

The mad, marvellous movies of Alejandro Jodorowsky

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



Above: Stardust memories in *Endless Poetry*. Here: Director Alejandro Jodorowsky.

ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY HAS done many things in his 88 years on this planet. The Chilean-French filmmaker has presided over the marriage of Marilyn Manson and Dita Von Teese. He claims to have invented Marcel Marceau's 'trapped in a glass box' routine. And he's directed some of the most psychedelic, indelible and influential movies of all time. If your knowledge of one of the movies' most enduring leftfield auteurs is lacking, this should see you through...

THE VISION QUEST — Part-Western, part-odyssey, utterly unique, *El Topo* (1970) stars Jodorowsky as a man in black on a dangerous metaphysical quest (it's likely Stephen King had this on his mind when he was writing *The Dark Tower*). Dark, powerful and surreal, it also features a Russian roulette scene even more horrifying than *The Deer Hunter*'s.

THE FULL-ON FOLLOW-UP — Produced by The Beatles' former manager Allen Klein (John Lennon and Yoko Ono also put in a few bob), *The Holy Mountain* (1973) combines mysticism, tarot cards, sexual symbolism, post-modernism and much more. Features an amazing scene where a group of people sit around a table, shaped like an eye, and pour piles of cash onto a fire. Lennon and Ono's might have been amongst it.

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY — Almost a decade before David Lynch, Jodorowsky announced he was going to direct an adaptation of Frank Herbert's classic sci-fi novel *Dune*. Sadly, it never actually made it to the screen, despite flirting with a bonkers cast including Orson Welles and Salvador Dalí, but Frank Pavich's fantastic 2013 documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune* is a fascinating portrait of what might have been, complete with eye-opening and mind-blowing concept art.

THE CLASSIC HORROR — Having not directed since 1980's *Tusk*, Jodorowsky returned in 1989 with *Santa Sangre*, an utterly demented Mexican horror film about a young man who watched his mother have her arms cut off, and then goes on a killing spree with 'her' hands controlling his. A beautiful mixture of the perverse and macabre.

THE BONKERS BIOPIC — This year's *Endless Poetry* is part two in a planned autobiographical trilogy, following on from 2013's *The Dance Of Reality*. But this is no mere biopic — it's filled with clowns, dwarves, eroticism, poetry, romance and striking, colourful images. Jodorowsky and his father are played by the director's sons, Adan and Brontis. Keep it in the family.

ENDLESS POETRY IS OUT ON 6 MARCH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

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BINGEWATCH

Each month, our master of marathons straps onto a sofa for a mammoth viewing session

THIS MONTH: ROCK DOCUMENTARIES

WORDS SIMON CROOK
ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

ROCK DOCUMENTARIES — or, if you will, rockumentaries — are cinema's backstage pass, turning fans into voyeurs and pop idols into humans. They're also weirdly contradictory. Whereas pop videos construct an image, rockumentaries deconstruct them. Some in this month's marathon are revealing, others unwise and one utterly devastating.

There's only one place to start: *Bob Dylan: Dont Look Back*, the rockumentary's big bang. Shot 52 years ago, D.A. Pennebaker's pioneering chronicle of Dylan's UK tour captures the troubadour awkwardly adjusting to rock-star status. Groupies attack. The press lay siege. No wonder he's dying to get on stage. The genius of the movie is that its fly-on-the-wall style separates Dylan's folk-hero public persona from the private man, revealed as an itch of contradictions: mean, benign, crabby, calm, deadpan, wired and effortlessly cool as fuck.

Practically every rock-doc since is an attempt to recapture the vibes of this unguarded classic. *In Bed With Madonna* steals its style but the subject, not the director, is in total control. If *Dont Look Back* is about how fame corrupts art, Alek Keshishian's diary of 1990's *Blonde Ambition* tour is pure popaganda. Electric live footage celebrates the Queen Of Pop in her pointy-bra pomp but, off stage, the performance never stops. One minute

she's Marilyn Monroe, the next Mother Teresa. Guessing who the 'real' Madonna is all part of the game. Her exchange with Kevin Costner remains a classic of cringe comedy. Neat.

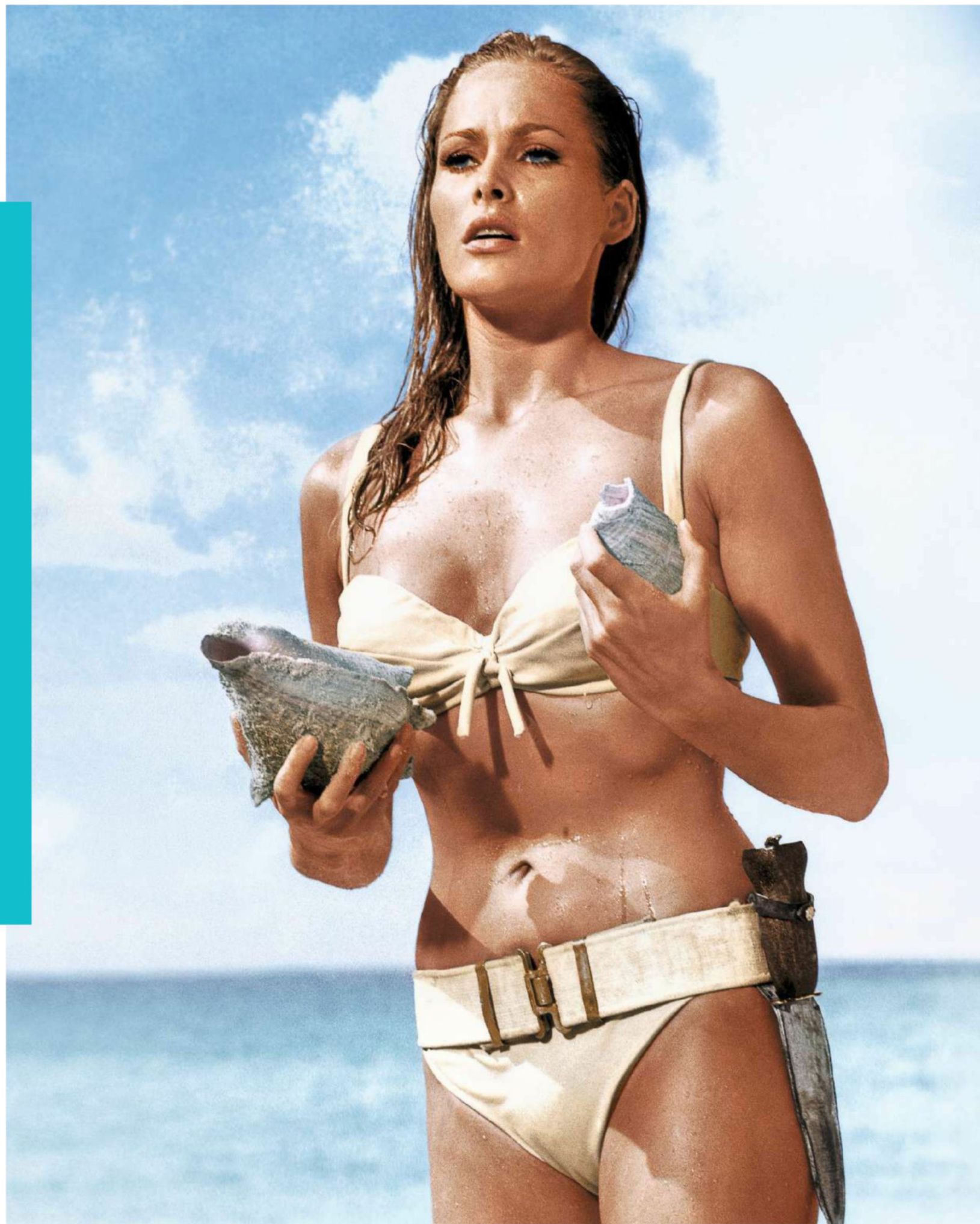
The next two movies tackle the creative process. Shot in long, prowling takes, *Sympathy For The Devil* circles Olympic Studios as The Rolling Stones craft the titular track. This being Jean-Luc Godard, the footage gets intercepted with Marxist monologues, but seeing the tune evolve from guitar demo into woo-wooing, samba-grinding epic entirely demystifies the song-writing process. *I Am Trying To Break Your Heart* follows Wilco's implosion as they record masterwork *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* in a shabby Chicago loft. Shot in black-and-white, the lasting shade is of an angry, purple bruise caused by the power-struggle between Jeff Tweedy and Jay Bennett. The result is one of the most naked accounts of creative anxiety on film.

By now there are so many earworms in my bulging head, I feel like I've swallowed Spotify. Onwards. *Anvil! The Story Of Anvil* follows forgotten thrash-metal pioneers on a disastrous comeback tour. With tiny audiences and dildopowered guitars, it's often dubbed 'The Real Spinal Tap', but the film seizes on something far sadder: the perils of chasing a long-dead dream.

Then, filmed over seven years, *Dig!* follows two feuding '90s bands as they try to make it big. As The Dandy Warhols take off, The Brian Jonestown Massacre crash. The contrasting fates expose the Faustian pact bands sign — how do you succeed without selling out? — yet too often *Dig!*s guilty of gawping at the breakdown of Jonestown's Anton Newcombe. It's hilarious ("You broke my sitar, motherfucker!") and horrifying.

Nine hours into Outlastonbury, the final act jolts my heart like a needle ripping off vinyl. *One More Time With Feeling* started life as a promo for Nick Cave's 16th studio album, *Skeleton Tree*. Mid-way through recording, Arthur, his teenage son, fell to his death from a cliff in Brighton. A fragmented collage of concert doc, candid diary and retrospective voice-over, Andrew Dominik's film is rockumentary as requiem, and unbearably intimate. Cave's gothic shaman persona utterly dissolves here, his mystique peeled away by aftershock and raw emotion. When he finally sings *I Need You*, a shivering waltz, I'm soul-burnt and red-eyed. Odd as it sounds, life springs from Cave's loss: Dominik's experimental collaboration finds the rockumentary reborn. Experience it.

ONE MORE TIME WITH FEELING IS OUT ON 3 MARCH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



STORY OF THE SHOT

DR. NO

WORDS IAN FREER

URSULA ANDRESS HAS never understood the love for her iconic entrance in *Dr. No*. “I was just standing there doing my thing with shells by the sea and I couldn’t believe it appealed so much. *That’s* the fantastic opening? That was luck.” Honey Ryder (Andress) emerging from the water, watched by Bond (Sean Connery), is significant on more than one count: in the first 007 film, it cemented not only the notion of the ‘Bond girl’ but the feel of the series itself: impossibly glamorous, slightly cheeky and sexy in a PG way.

Producer Cubby Broccoli was looking for “an unknown with a new face who wouldn’t demand an outrageous salary”, effectively the criteria applied to his Bond. He cast the 25 year-old Andress after seeing a picture of her in the office of Fox head Darryl F. Zanuck. Ian Fleming’s novel describes Ryder, a shell scavenger, rising from the sea practically naked “like Botticelli’s Venus”. Censorship prevented nudity, so Andress sported a white bikini (it sold for £41,000 in 2001), a white webbing army belt and little else.

“Honey Ryder was a native girl and I was supposed to be very tanned,” recalled Andress. “I was just snow white. I had to stand naked in a room and get made up. Every other second, somebody was knocking on the door, ‘Breakfast!’ When we were finished there were about 20 trays of breakfast because everybody wanted to watch me get painted from top to bottom.”

The shot was captured on 6 February 1962 at the privately owned Laughing Waters Beach in Ocho Rios, St Ann, Jamaica, near Fleming’s home, Goldeneye. It was witnessed by the author and his wife Ann, who were out for a stroll with poet Stephen Spender and journo Peter Quennell, and were forced to dive to the ground to avoid the camera. The song Honey and Bond sing, *Underneath The Mango Tree*, was written by the film’s composer Monty Norman and sparked a war between the two co-stars. “Sean and I fought a bit trying to get the record player to learn how to sing the song,” said Andress. “He used to steal it away from me and I would steal it back. He sings much better than I do. I can’t carry a tune.” In the end, Andress’ thick Swiss speaking and singing voice was replaced by that of German actress Nikki van der Zyl.

The moment has carved out its own niche in pop culture, and has even been riffed on twice more in the Bond series: first in *Die Another Day* with Halle Berry and then in *Casino Royale* when Daniel Craig emerged from the sea clad in shorts so tight you could almost see his Q Branch. “I didn’t realise the repercussions of it,” Craig has said. “I had no idea I would be haunted by it for the rest of my life.” He should talk to Andress. Perhaps they could form a support group.

DR. NO IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

INSIDE, DANIEL BLAKE

How Ken Loach's takedown of the benefits system turned out to be the most controversial film of 2016

WORDS TERRI WHITE

THOSE WHO THOUGHT director Ken Loach may, at the age of 80, have lost the fire or ability to make a searing social polemic were firmly silenced by last year's *I, Daniel Blake*. Not only did it win the Palme d'Or in Cannes and two British Independent Film Awards, it racked up the biggest box office opening of Loach's career, sparked furious rows in Parliament and attracted the derision of certain newspaper columnists on social media. Few films, and certainly no *British* film, last year caused rucks and recriminations like *I, Daniel Blake*. Four months on from its initial release in cinemas, has the dust settled? And has real change come from the flecks and flakes?

It was precisely the deafening silence and lack of controversy around the welfare system that caused Ken Loach to waver from his previous resolve, made after a difficult production on previous film *Jimmy's Hall*, to not make another



Above: Dave Johns' Daniel Blake and Mad Scotsman (Malcolm Shields) make their voices heard. **Left:** Director Ken Loach with Johns on set.

feature. The provocation had come in the form of daily messages Loach and long-time screenwriter and collaborator Paul Laverty would send to each other, sometimes about football, sometimes about stories they'd heard.

"We found we were sending each other stories of people who were being humiliated and treated badly and going hungry," Loach remembers. "The rise of food banks and the absurd sanctions where people [who were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance] were having their money stopped".

Keen to learn more from those affected, they travelled to several different towns and cities in the UK including Stoke, Nuneaton, Nottingham, Glasgow and London as well as parts of the North West. Wherever they went, Loach and Laverty say they heard the same stories. Stories of the 1.1 million people currently dependent on food banks in the UK; stories they felt no-one was talking about. In fact, the only stories people were talking about, says Loach, were those told in shows such as *Benefits Britain* and *Undercover Benefits Cheat*, the narrative "refracted through vile





propaganda” shown on television and created in the pages of newspapers who would find people to ridicule and demean. “It then makes people who do claim [benefits] less than human,” he sighs. “You can treat them with cruelty and it doesn’t matter.”

What became important then was to not craft a story or characters from extremes, from the brittle bones of the most horrific stories they’d heard, but to show the normality of the situation. They created Daniel and Katie — the former a joiner in his late fifties, who can’t work after a heart attack but fails a Department for Work and Pensions eligibility test for sickness benefit, and the latter a single mother, new to the North East, who is sanctioned (her benefits stopped) for a minor infraction on her very first visit to the Jobcentre.

Katie was played by playwright and newcomer Hayley Squires, who researched the subject as exhaustively as Laverty and Loach.

Squires’ mum, a student support manager, put her in touch with social workers in the North East; she worked with Shelter and staff at housing associations; she met with women living in homeless hostels with their children.

“[We] wanted to show this is happening to ordinary people,” says Dave Johns, the stand-up comic turned first-time film actor who played Daniel Blake and himself claimed the dole in the ’70s. “Dan could be your grandfather, your uncle, your dad. Katie could be your sister, daughter. That’s what has really got people. It’s pulling those in the position of needing social security out of the narrative that’s been created — that they’re all malingerers and scroungers. It got people angry.”

IT UNDOUBTEDLY IMPACTED

audiences, including those who saw their own reality reflected on screen after distributor

eOne held affordable community showings. Many described being moved to tears by one moment in particular (also one of the most memorable scenes in any film last year), when Katie, driven by sheer hunger, rips a tin of beans open in a food bank and eats the contents with her bare hands. Later in the film she turns to selling sex.

“Seeing Katie humiliated like that, I think it just touched people,” says Loach. “We found so many people in that situation and we had spoken to a number of women who’d taken the appalling, horrendous decision that the only way they could raise money was to sell themselves.”

Yet, some critics and columnists criticised the film, with *The Sunday Times* film critic Camilla Long hailing it, “a povvo safari for middle class people” and “misery porn for smug Londoners”, while Toby Young in *The Mail On Sunday* called it “misty-eyed” and said it didn’t

“ring true”. Long also described the film as never feeling “quite genuine”, pointing specifically to the food bank scene to prove her point. “It is meant to feel raw, feral, real — the benefits system makes animals out of all of us,” she wrote. “But it felt manipulative and ridiculous.”

Loach remains steadfast and defiant in the face of these comments from Long. “I mean, the woman knows nothing. She will learn nothing. Her opinions are worth nothing. It’s good to see the ruling classes still as thick as ever. They lead a life of such privilege that anything that shakes their world view, they can’t deal with. It’s a refusal to look.”

Similarly and unsurprisingly to those involved with the film, Conservative politicians both current and previously serving challenged the reality portrayed in the film. Iain Duncan Smith, who was in charge of the welfare department in 2012 when the maximum length of benefit sanctions was increased from six months to three years, slammed it for focusing purely on “the very worst of anything that could happen to anybody”, while Welfare Secretary Damian Green — who then admitted to not having watched the film yet — called it “monstrously unfair”.

They’re comments that today draw a mixed response from Loach, Johns and Squires. Ken Loach says with a fatalistic laugh, “I’m very pleased they did [that]. Damian Green stood up and started attacking and then said he hadn’t seen this film! They never let the evidence spoil a good piece of bigotry, do they? They know exactly what they’re doing. It’s classic Tory attitudes — that the poor are to blame for their own poverty. And if they’re poor and don’t jump through the hoops you’ve set them, punish them.”

Squires has been vocal about her frustration and occasional anger — she herself off Twitter on a few occasions and used her acceptance speech for her Best Supporting Actress win at the Evening Standard Awards to respond to those who attacked the film, including the newspaper’s own David Sexton. “Who are they to stand up and tell us what’s true and what isn’t true? How dare they?” she says firmly. “It’s disgusting. They believe that because they come from a certain class of people, and have a certain voice, that they can tell you... It’s one thing that does [anger] me — when you read reviews or social commentary or political commentary and people tell you things like it’s fact. Who are you to say that and to question hours and hours of research?”

Loach confirms that Squires’ food bank scene was based on a real story Paul Laverty heard in Glasgow and the women who played the staff were real food bank employees who Squires spent two days with before shooting the scene.

A softly spoken Dave Johns speaks of a desire to take Damian Green and Camilla Long “by the hand to a food bank and to the people who’ve been sanctioned and have no food in the cupboards and say, ‘Now, you tell me that’s not real.’”

While there is certainly a sense of bitter



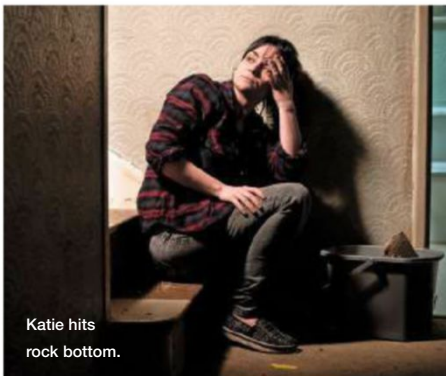
Katie (Hayley Squires) at breaking point in the food bank with Daniel.



Katie pleads her case at the Jobcentre.



Ann (Kate Rutter) tries to help Daniel in the Jobcentre.



Katie hits rock bottom.

inevitability from Loach, Squires and Johns that little in the way of policy is likely to change as a result of the film — “It significantly means changing their ideological position, which they can’t do,” says Loach — they do believe it may change *us*. “I think it can be the thing that leads to people galvanizing themselves,” states Squires. “Educating themselves, organising themselves and standing up for themselves. And standing up for *each other*.”

They are all clearly heartened by the feeling of recognition and support people found in Daniel and Katie, people who shared their stories on social media with the hashtag #wearealldanielblake or simply approached them in the street to say thank you for telling *their* stories.

“An old man, who’s about 86, came up to me in Whitley Bay, where I’m from,” says Johns with a smile. “He said, ‘Tell Ken Loach from me that this film has given the working class their voice back — a voice that hasn’t been heard for 40 years.’ That sums up the film, really.”

I, DANIEL BLAKE IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 27 FEBRUARY ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



I, DANIEL BLAKE
★★★★
CERT 15

What we said: “Instead of a firebrand approach of stereotype, Loach delivers a film of immense sadness. Someone should project this on the walls of the Department for Work and Pensions.”

Notable extras: Loach and Laverty commentary, deleted scenes and featurette.

MY MOVIE MASTERMIND

EDWARD ZWICK

Will he reach for the stars?

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



LEADER BOARD

Ben Kingsley	9.5
Christopher Lee	9.5
David O. Russell	9.5
Quentin Tarantino	9.5
Robert Rodriguez	9
Guillermo del Toro	9
Werner Herzog	9
Christian Slater	8.5
Bryan Singer	8.5
John Waters	8

1 Who shouts, "Give 'em hell, 54!" in *Glory*?

That was Kevin Jarre. He wrote the first draft of the script before I rewrote it and I wanted to honour him in that moment. He died soon after.

Correct.

2 In *The Last Samurai*, Katsumoto gives Nathan Algren a sword. On it is an inscription. What is the inscription?

Ooh. Ooh. "To the man who dadadada dadadada." [Hears the answer] That sword, I would have loved to have kept. I think Warner Bros. has that in a vault somewhere.

The correct answer is: "I belong to the warrior in whom the old ways have joined the new."

3 What's the name of the last episode of *Thirtysomething*?

[Long pause] 'California'. It had been our thought that if Elliot and Michael were ever to continue, they would have started to write bad screenplays in California.

Correct.

4 What's the full name of the book on which *Love & Other Drugs* is based?

Oh! Jamie Reidy wrote this book. *Confessions Of A Pharmaceutical Salesman*. [Hears the answer] It felt like a non-fiction title. Charles Randolph wrote the first draft and his first title was *Pharma*. We changed it to *Love & Other Drugs*.

The correct answer is *Hard Sell: The Evolution Of A Viagra Salesman*.

5 In *Pawn Sacrifice*, who does Bobby Fischer refer to as the fourth-best chess player in the world?

I think it's a Russian or Romanian name. I know it's right because we did our research, but fuck me if I can remember it. Visnikov?

The correct answer is Valentin Ivanovich.

6 What are the opening lines of *About Last Night*?

"So..." "So what?" "So tell me." "What?!" "About last night..." That wasn't its original title. The title was that of David Mamet's play, *Sexual Perversity In Chicago*. The marketing department came to us and said, "Sorry, the newspapers will not run ads because they don't understand the difference between perversity and perversion." This is how far we've come.

Correct.

7 You are credited with co-writing a song for *Blood Diamond*. What's it called?

When Da Dawgs Come Out To Play. That was my first and last contribution to songwriting. I'm a half-assed musician and I couldn't find the right song, so I worked with a Sierra Leonean rapper named Bullet Rhymes. We wanted it to be feral. [At this point Zwick howls like a wolf] I wanted the sound of howling and that became the song.

Correct.

8 You've made three movies with Denzel Washington. Name all of his characters.

Let's see. Trip is in *Glory*. Serling, Captain

Serling, in *Courage Under Fire*. And is it Hutch in *The Siege*? [Hears the answer] Two out of three ain't bad. I saw Denzel a couple of weeks ago. I like to think we'd work together again before we're in the Motion Picture Home, but who knows?

Half a point. The correct answer is Private Silas Trip, Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Serling and Anthony 'Hub' Hubbard.

9 In *Legends Of The Fall*, Brad Pitt plays Tristan. But who plays Teen Tristan?

The actor? He was a lovely boy and looked very much like Brad, but I have no clue.

The correct answer is Eric Johnson.

10 You won a Best Picture Oscar for producing *Shakespeare In Love*. With whom did you share it?

Sure. Donna Gigliotti, David Parfitt, Marc Norman... need I say the last name? We all know what the last name was. I think of him as He Who Shall Not Be Named [Harvey Weinstein]. The Oscar is in my office, placed in such a way as to be unpretentious but always visible.

Correct.

EDWARD ZWICK SCORES 5½/2

"I'd say that's a D. I've made 14 or 15 movies — I need to make five more so I can do this again..."

JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD, AND ON 27 FEBRUARY ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

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

#9 ANDY DIGGLE ON
THE APARTMENT

THE NOTION BEHIND the First-Take Club is simple. Each month, we ask someone to have a butcher's at our list of the 301 Greatest Movies Of All Time (as voted for by the *Empire* readers in 2014), choose one they haven't seen, watch it and tell us all about it. This month's selection is widely regarded as one of the greatest comedies of all time. Featuring wonderful performances from Jack Lemmon and Shirley MacLaine, it's a hugely quotable satire that scooped five Oscars. It is, of course, Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*, and to the shame of Andy Diggle — acclaimed writer of comic books such as *The Losers*, *Green Arrow: Year One* and *James Bond: Hammerhead* — he had never seen it. Over to you, Andy.

I've loved other Billy Wilder films — *Double Indemnity*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Sunset Boulevard* — but for some reason *The Apartment* never felt like a must-see. Maybe it's the title. Had it been called 'The Apartment Vs Mechagodzilla', I'd probably have had both eyes glued to the screen as a child. I dimly recall my dad watching it on our tiny black-and-white TV in the '70s, but because it didn't feature giant monsters or Clint Eastwood mowing down Nazis with a Schmeisser MP 40, I wandered off to play with my Action Men instead.

Seeing it now, the glimpse I'd seen as a child hit me — Jack Lemmon walking up the stairs. I hadn't wanted to watch a movie about a man walking up the stairs. Especially if there was only an apartment at the top of them. Nothing dramatic ever happens in an apartment, I thought. Hey, I was seven.



Aware of the premise — Jack Lemmon's C.C. 'Buddy' Baxter loans out his apartment so his bosses can cheat on their wives — I found myself wondering, are we supposed to like this guy? I mean, it's Jack Lemmon, so of course he's likeable. But are we supposed to feel sorry for him? He's a spineless worm, climbing the corporate ladder over the backs of betrayed women. He lives in New York, the greatest city on Earth, but what does he do with it? Crappy TV dinners in front of crappy TV. He doesn't just need a girl; he needs a life.

And, of course, that's the point. As the focus shifts to Shirley MacLaine's Fran Kubelik, Buddy starts to realise women aren't just prizes to be won. These men leave a trail of pain and broken lives in their wake. When sleazebag Sheldrake

(Fred MacMurray) gives Fran a \$100 bill for Christmas, he's giving her a knife in the heart; and the look she gives him was a knife in mine.

It's an incredibly effective bait-and-switch. The film presents itself as a light-hearted comedy before taking a dark turn: Fran weighing her decision in front of the bathroom mirror, with Sheldrake's money in one hand and a bottle of pills in the other. It's not about two people finding each other. It's about two people overcoming their demons so they're capable of finding each other.

When the camera pans to Sheldrake enjoying the New Year's celebrations I knew, *knew* it would pan back to Fran and her seat would be empty, because it would be a perfect movie moment; and it did, and it was. Fran running down the street, finally happy, was one of the

most simply joyous things I've ever seen. And then the gunshot. Christ.

Luckily, it's not actually a gun going off, and the film doesn't end with suicide. Still, it's not a fairy-tale romance where love conquers all. Love, in fact, is the problem. It's a fairy tale of New York and everyone is jaded, blunted by hard realities. And the ending is all the more honest and optimistic for it. Now that Fran has freed herself, and Buddy has found the moral courage to become a mensch — a man capable of empathy — they have a chance. Life is never perfect, but you play the hand you're dealt. "Shut up and deal."

THE APARTMENT IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD. JAMES BOND: HAMMERHEAD IS OUT ON 23 MAY IN TRADE PAPERBACK

A WOMAN'S TOUCH

How Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* changed the perception of cinema's raging bull

WORDS IAN FREER

THINK MARTIN SCORSESE, what comes to mind? Men. New York. Violence. Swearing. '70s rock. Which makes *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, his 1974 'woman's picture' (just after *Mean Streets*, just before *Taxi Driver*) all the more fascinating. The story of Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn) who, following her husband's death, hits the road on a trip from New Mexico to Arizona with her young son (Alfred Lutter) to pursue her dream of becoming a singer, it joins *New York, New York* and *The Age Of Innocence* in the Doesn't Fit Into Any Category category in Scorsese's back catalogue.

"Most Scorsese films are about a young man making his way in the world," says Ian Christie, co-editor of the 1996 book *Scorsese On Scorsese*. "The first thing about *Alice* is it is about a not-quite young woman making her way in the world. That immediately sets it apart. It belongs in that group of films that point to the different things

he could have done in his career."

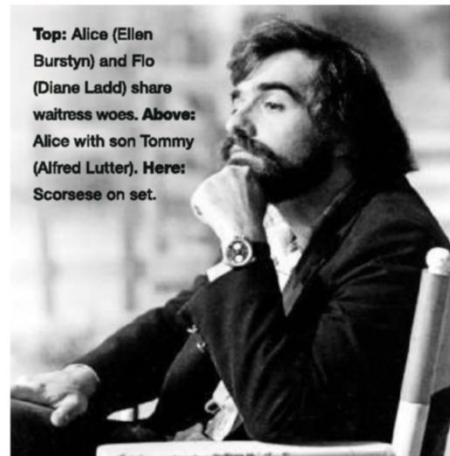
Alice came to Scorsese via a circuitous route. Burstyn, then hot off *The Exorcist*, was looking for a female-driven picture to chime with the early '70s women's movement and landed on Robert Getchell's *Alice* script. Burstyn called Francis Coppola to see who were the young, fresh, exciting filmmakers to bring *Alice* to life. Coppola suggested Scorsese, who had just finished but not released *Mean Streets*. You know, the one about men, New York, violence and swearing.

"When he came in, I said, 'Marty, I liked your film *Mean Streets* very much but I want this film told from a woman's point of view and I can't tell looking at your film if you know anything about women. Do you?'" remembers Burstyn. "And his answer was, 'No, but I'd like to learn.' I thought that was a brilliant answer."

It was a step up for the young Scorsese, gaining his first experience of working with a big studio (Warner Bros.), a big budget (\$1.8 million) and, in Burstyn, a big star. He didn't squander it. The film opens with a young Alice on a farm against a stylised red sunset singing like Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*. The last film to be shot on the old Columbia soundstages, it was Scorsese's first experience of working on a proper set. "This is the



Top: Alice (Ellen Burstyn) and Flo (Diane Ladd) share waitress woes. Above: Alice with son Tommy (Alfred Lutter). Here: Scorsese on set.



BFI, MOVIESTORE COLLECTION, RONALD GRANT

boldest thing he does in the film because it is very non-naturalistic," says Christie. "It's a reference that seems corny but is putting a marker down with his relationship with the American Dream."

For Christie, with *Alice*, Scorsese had "one foot in the big time and one foot in New York indie". For, as well as shooting on a huge set, it's a film that has bursts of Cassavetes-esque handheld camerawork. Burstyn also felt Getchell's script was "a bit Doris Day-Rock Hudson" and "needed to be roughed up. I wanted it to be more real. And guess who was very open to that?" Scorsese worked with Burstyn and the rest of the cast (Lutter, Kris Kristofferson, a pre-*Taxi Driver* Jodie Foster) on extensive improvisation to give the journey edge.

"When we came on the set it was like it was the ring for a boxing match and he was the referee, circling the edge of the ring," says Burstyn. "He sets an atmosphere of creativity where everybody focuses and gives their best. It's never dictatorial."

Yet Scorsese's desire to experiment created some uncomfortable moments for Burstyn. To play Ben, who starts a sexual relationship with Alice without telling her he is married, Scorsese hired his *Mean Streets* mucker Harvey Keitel. Shooting the scene in which Ben smashes up her apartment, Burstyn saw something unhinged in Keitel's eyes.

"It triggered something in me and I started crying and I couldn't stop," she recalls. "We went through lunch and I continued to cry, trying hard to stop, but it wouldn't end. Finally, Marty just had to call it for the day because I couldn't get past it. That has never happened to me before or since."

Scorsese's first cut came in at more than three-and-a-half hours. The shorter, finished version (just under two hours long) won Burstyn an Oscar for Best Actress and seemingly diversified Scorsese's persona in the minds of critics. Which makes his next move all the more baffling.

"If *Alice* persuaded people Scorsese could do things different from *Mean Streets*, then *Taxi Driver* went back into a hyper New York," says Christie. "When you look at the run of films that followed, *Alice* now looks like an exception." If nothing else, alongside *After Hours*, *Alice* is Scorsese's deepest foray into comedy (it spawned a long-running TV sitcom spin-off, starring Linda Lavin as Alice). If he'd stuck closer to it, we might have a very different perception of him today. *Grown Ups 3*, A Martin Scorsese Picture, anyone?

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE IS OUT ON 20 MARCH ON DVD

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

**ALICE DOESN'T
LIVE HERE
ANYMORE**
★★★★
CERT 15

What we said: "Alternating between gritty realism and red-hued fantasy, this is one of those '70s films that has worn well, managing to be universal in its heart while picking out specifics that now look exactly of their time."
Notable extras: Scorsese, Burstyn and Kris Kristofferson commentary; making of.



LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND BILLY ZANE

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

Hi Billy,

My husband gave me an awful cashmere sweater for Christmas, and I really, really hate it. I think it might be one of the worst presents I've ever received. Should I put it on once for show then bury it at the back of the cupboard? Wear it every now and again through gritted teeth? Give it away to a charity shop and hope he doesn't notice? Or just have the damn thing exorcised?

Yours, **KN**

Wear it for show once and bury it. Moths love cashmere. It's closet crack to them. After a few weeks, you pull it out and, "Oh horror! Look, honey! It's ruined." Done. Dusted. Besides, when was the last time he noticed, let alone commented on, what you were wearing? Please, sister.

Dear Billy,

I'm an expectant father, about to welcome into the world a baby daughter. I absolutely can't wait, and I'm particularly looking forward to sitting down with her and showing her the classic films that I love. You know the sort of thing — *Star Wars* (not the prequels), the Disney/Pixar greats, virtually all the early Spielbergs. But then I got to thinking — just how much of a role should a father take in shaping the movie tastes of his child? Any advice?

Thanks for your help, **WP**

My friend, forgive me, but why are you even questioning this? That said, you mentioned classics, so I assume by that you don't just mean you want to screen *Universal Soldier*, *Cobra* and *Force 10 From Navarone*. Share, brother! Kids need to be well-versed in classic cinema as much as they need to be well-read in the classics. It's often a doorway to classic literature. And watching your child experience those films for the first time should not be missed. Invite Mom, too. Group hug! Just pick wisely.

Dear Billy,

We share a communal bin with our next-door neighbours. But they never take it out for the rubbish men — should I go over and ask them to their faces to contribute their fair share to the bin removal process? Or go full British passive-aggressive and write them an angry note?

Yours, fed up, **BM**

One question, BM: Are you taking their bin out for them? If so, stop. If they still refuse to take out their rubbish, have a word. By all means, be direct. But no anger, unless you plan to move. Proceed with caution — that pig could bite.

Dear Billy,

I've been invited on a yachting holiday in the summer, but I don't know whether to go because I'm completely terrified of the open sea. I'll be honest — watching you in *Dead Calm* didn't help matters much. Help me face my fears. (Although, full disclosure, if I go on the holiday and you show up, I'm heading straight for the lifeboat!).

Thanks, **NR**

Sorry about that. But, just a warning, I do lifeboats too... Just saying... So, piracy is quite real, NR, as is unpredictable and extreme weather on the open seas. The question is where your charter is bound for. Do research. What kind of boat are we talking about? Who's the captain? How many people aboard? How long? How long between ports? Get me? If it smells like fish, it's probably a fish. And to quote one of my favourite films that make water sports much more interesting, "You're gonna need a bigger boat."

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

THE GUIDE

Everything else coming your way this month

27 FEBRUARY

3 HEARTS DVD
ABANDONED DEAD DVD
AMUCK! DVD, BLU-RAY
THE ANDERSON TAPES BLU-RAY
BROMANCE DVD
BUNNY LAKE IS MISSING DVD, BLU-RAY
BURN BURN BURN DVD
CHILDREN OF THE CORN II: THE FINAL SACRIFICE BLU-RAY
CHRISTINE DVD, BLU-RAY
DEAD HEAT DVD, BLU-RAY
FIRESTORM DVD
FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR BLU-RAY
JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK DVD, BLU-RAY
KING KONG LIVES DVD
LIFE ON THE LINE DVD
THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS DOWNLOAD (DVD, BLU-RAY 13 MARCH)



POLANSKI TALKS

CUL-DE-SAC BLU-RAY
 A Criterion release of Roman Polanski's claustrophobic, paranoid thriller, which includes a 2003 documentary about the film featuring interviews with Polanski.

MEADOWLAND DVD
MY DARLING CLEMENTINE BLU-RAY
NOCTURNAL ANIMALS DOWNLOAD (DVD, BLU-RAY 13 MARCH)
OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL DVD, BLU-RAY
Q. VOL 2: SERIES 4-5 DVD
A STREET CAT NAMED BOB DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD
TRAIN TO BUSAN DVD, BLU-RAY



FEATURE-LENGTH DOC

MILDRED PIERCE BLU-RAY
 A weighty 2002 Joan Crawford documentary is the highlight of a raft of features on this Criterion edition of the film, for which Crawford won her only Oscar.

3 MARCH

ONE MORE TIME WITH FEELING DVD, BLU-RAY

6 MARCH

ALIEN NATION BLU-RAY
AMERICAN PASTORAL DVD
BALLERS: SEASON 2 DVD, BLU-RAY
BARE BREASTED COUNTESS DVD
THE BORSTAL DVD
DARK MOON RISING DVD
DEAD END DVD
THE DOCTORS: THE JON PERTWEE YEARS DVD



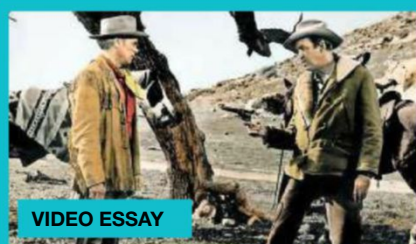
ROWDY RODDY PIPER INTERVIEW

HELL COMES TO FROGTOWN DVD
 The other insane Rowdy Roddy Piper '80s sci-fi (alongside John Carpenter's *They Live*) hits Blu-ray with a string of special features, the best being an interview with Piper himself.

FIVE WEEKS IN A BALLOON DVD, BLU-RAY
HELLGATE DVD
IN A VALLEY OF VIOLENCE DVD, BLU-RAY
IRREPLACEABLE DVD
JUSTICE LEAGUE DARK DVD, BLU-RAY
LUDWIG BLU-RAY
THE MAGICIANS: SEASON 1 DVD, BLU-RAY
NO SECOND CHANCE DVD
THE PACT 2 DVD
PANIC BUTTON DVD
PROPERTY IS NO LONGER A THEFT BLU-RAY
RESET DVD
A TOWN LIKE ALICE DVD, BLU-RAY
VICE PRINCIPALS DVD, BLU-RAY
WILD OATS DVD

13 MARCH

AENIGMA DVD, BLU-RAY
THE ALLIGATOR PEOPLE DVD, BLU-RAY
APOCALYPSE POMPEII DVD
BELLADONNA OF SADNESS BLU-RAY
THE BUTCHER OF PRAGUE DVD
THE CREEPING GARDEN BLU-RAY
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VIDEO ESSAY

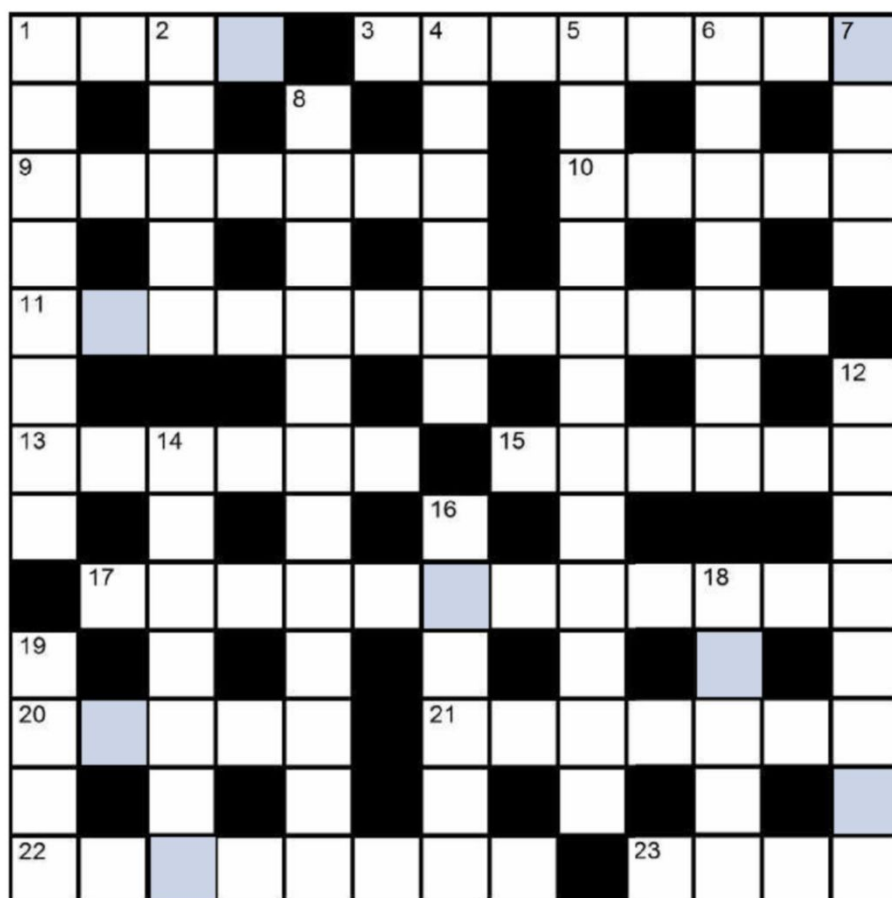
TWO RODE TOGETHER (DVD, BLU-RAY)
 The first Western to pair James Stewart and director John Ford comes with a video essay from Ford expert, and man who sounds like he has emerged from a Western, Tag Gallagher.

STORY OF SIN BLU-RAY
SYNDICATE SADISTS DVD, BLU-RAY
TROLLIED: COMPLETE SERIES 6 DVD

20 MARCH

1990: SERIES 1 DVD
ANNE OF GREEN GABLES DVD
ANOTHER WOMAN BLU-RAY
BORN FREE DVD, BLU-RAY
DECAY DVD
ELIMINATORS DVD
GHOST IN THE SHELL DVD, BLU-RAY
GHOST SHIP DVD
THE HALCYON: SEASON 1 DVD
HOUSE: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION BLU-RAY
THE IRON CURTAIN DVD, BLU-RAY
MAN HUNT DVD, BLU-RAY
THE MEPHISTO WALTZ DVD, BLU-RAY
OPERATION AVALANCHE DVD
PLANET OF THE SHARKS DVD
ROGER CORMAN'S DEATH RACE 2050 DVD, BLU-RAY
SEPTEMBER BLU-RAY
SKY RIDERS DVD, BLU-RAY
STAGECOACH DVD, BLU-RAY
THE TIME TUNNEL: THE COMPLETE SERIES BLU-RAY
TWO FILMS BY LINO BROCKA DVD, BLU-RAY
WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY DOOR DVD
ZOMBIE LAKE DVD

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 It was Ed Harris' first film (4)
- 3 Confused Al Fiddle provides a 2012 Eric Bana starrer (8)
- 9 Western that linked Sean Connery and Brigitte Bardot (7)
- 10 Kelly Macdonald-voiced archery-ace Merida in this Disney-Pixar release (5)
- 11 In which a classical foursome included Christopher Walken on cello (1,4,7)
- 13 Just the month for a Josh Hartnett-Naomie Harris get-together (6)
- 15 It was the only Elvis Presley film to feature no songs at all apart from the main title theme (6)
- 17 He directed *Rogue Trader* and *A Kiss Before Dying* (5,7)
- 20 *A Passage To* — (David Lean classic) (5)
- 21 No departure, this Amy Adams sci-fi adventure (7)
- 22 Year 2000 comedy In which Breckin Meyer and others embarked on a 1,800-mile journey (4,4)
- 23 Eddie Murphy and Owen Wilson's espionage caper (1,3)

DOWN

- 1 "At the edge of the world, his journey begins" ran the blurb for this Tom Hanks starrer (4,4)
- 2 Disney's 2016 animated Polynesian princess (5)
- 4 —: *Gods And Kings* (Ridley Scott film) (6)
- 5 Singer, born Angela Tremble, who starred in *Videodrome*, *Union City* etc (7,5)
- 6 In which Isabelle Huppert portrayed an ex-nun who writes pornography (7)
- 7 Big Arnie's true untruths (4)
- 8 He won the Best Actor Oscar for his role in *The Philadelphia Story* (5,7)
- 12 Jennifer seen in *Noah*, *House Of Sand And Fog* etc (8)
- 14 Lily Tomlin's family-related title role (7)
- 16 French actress Isabelle, twice Oscar-nominated (6)
- 18 Could be Geena, could be Bette (5)
- 19 Billy —, John Schlesinger's multi-BAFTA Award nominee (4)

COMPETITION ENDS 20 MARCH HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director, character or title. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, 20 March. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

MARCH ANSWERS ACROSS: 1 Camelot, 4 Rules, 7 Eisenberg, 8 Eve, 9 Metro, 11 Car Wash, 12 The Unforgiven, 14 Adamson, 16 Lange, 18 Ted, 19 Gladiator, 20 Rings, 21 Tom Horn. **DOWN:** 1 Cream, 2 Lincoln, 3 The Accountant, 4 Roger, 5 Lee Marvin, 6 Stephen, 10 The Garden, 12 Traitor, 13 Gilliam, 15 Signs, 17 Enron. **ANAGRAM WOLVERINE**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before 21 March or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

COMPETITION

WIN!

A 49" SMART LCD TV, BLU-RAY/DVD PLAYER PLUS DVD COPY OF LIFE ON THE LINE



John Travolta thriller *Life On The Line* is out now on digital platforms and on DVD from 27 February, and we've got a JVC 49" Smart LCD TV and a Samsung Blu-ray/DVD player plus a copy of the film up for grabs.

John Travolta (*Pulp Fiction*, *Face/Off*) headlines this new action thriller as Beau Ginner, a high-wire worker who is raising his niece alone after an accident killed his brother, and is now facing off against a major electrical storm that could destroy the local grid as well as everything, and everyone, in its path. Co-starring Kate Bosworth and Sharon Stone, it's not short on star power, so if you'd like to check it out and be in with a chance of getting your hands on the hardware, solve the crossword to the left, crack the anagram and text your answer to the number below. Good luck!

LIFE ON THE LINE IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 27 FEBRUARY ON DVD

THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW
CHOSEN BY DEREK CIANFRANCE



Derek Cianfrance: “When I was 23, I went to see *The Gospel According To St. Matthew* by Pier Paolo Pasolini, at the international film series at my film school [the University of Colorado]. I had loved *Accattone* and was curious to see what an atheist, homosexual neo-realist would do with a religious epic.

My friend and I arrived at the theatre about six minutes late, and had to park about a mile away, so we sprinted there. When we finally made it, I sat down in the darkened theatre, covered with sweat and out of breath.

I grew up Catholic, but I never really paid attention in church. I was always daydreaming. Yet I found myself sitting in that dark theatre, trying to catch my breath, witnessing all these stories I knew through sheer osmosis playing out on the screen. It was a true catharsis! I noticed my heart was not slowing down. It was speeding up and I was sweating more and more.

Then there was a scene where a deformed man is going to visit Jesus. The camera tracks back with him, handheld, as he walks for what seems to be an eternity (the photography by Tonino Delli Colli is sublime and intuitive). Never in my life had I felt such sheer presence of a moment on the screen — I was actually there! The deformed man asks, ‘Thou will make me

clean?’, and Jesus says, ‘I will. Be thou clean.’ And it straight cuts back to the deformed man, and he’s no longer deformed. It’s such a transcendent moment — a cinematic miracle achieved through the simplest visual grammar: a straight cut! And with that cut my body was jolted with a painful electricity, causing the entire left side of my torso to go numb. I couldn’t breathe. I felt like I was having a heart attack.

I knocked on the projectionist’s door, told him I was having a heart attack. He let me use his phone in the projection booth, and I called my girlfriend—my high-school sweetheart — and she came and picked me up in her Volvo. Then she took me to the emergency room, and I waited and waited for the doctor to come in. The whole time, I’m thinking to myself that if the doctor that opens this door looks like Jesus Christ from the Pasolini film, I’ll know I died watching that movie.”

EXT. DESERT — DAY

A man walks through the desert. He is heavily deformed, and cloaked in a robe that covers all but his face. The camera tracks with him. In

a wide shot, a group of people stand in the distance. They begin to approach the deformed man. At the front of the group is Jesus (Enrique Irazoqui). The deformed man carries on walking towards Jesus who, in turn, steps away from the group and approaches the man. At last, they meet. Jesus regards the man.

DEFORMED MAN: If thou wilt, make me clean.

JESUS: I will, be thou clean.

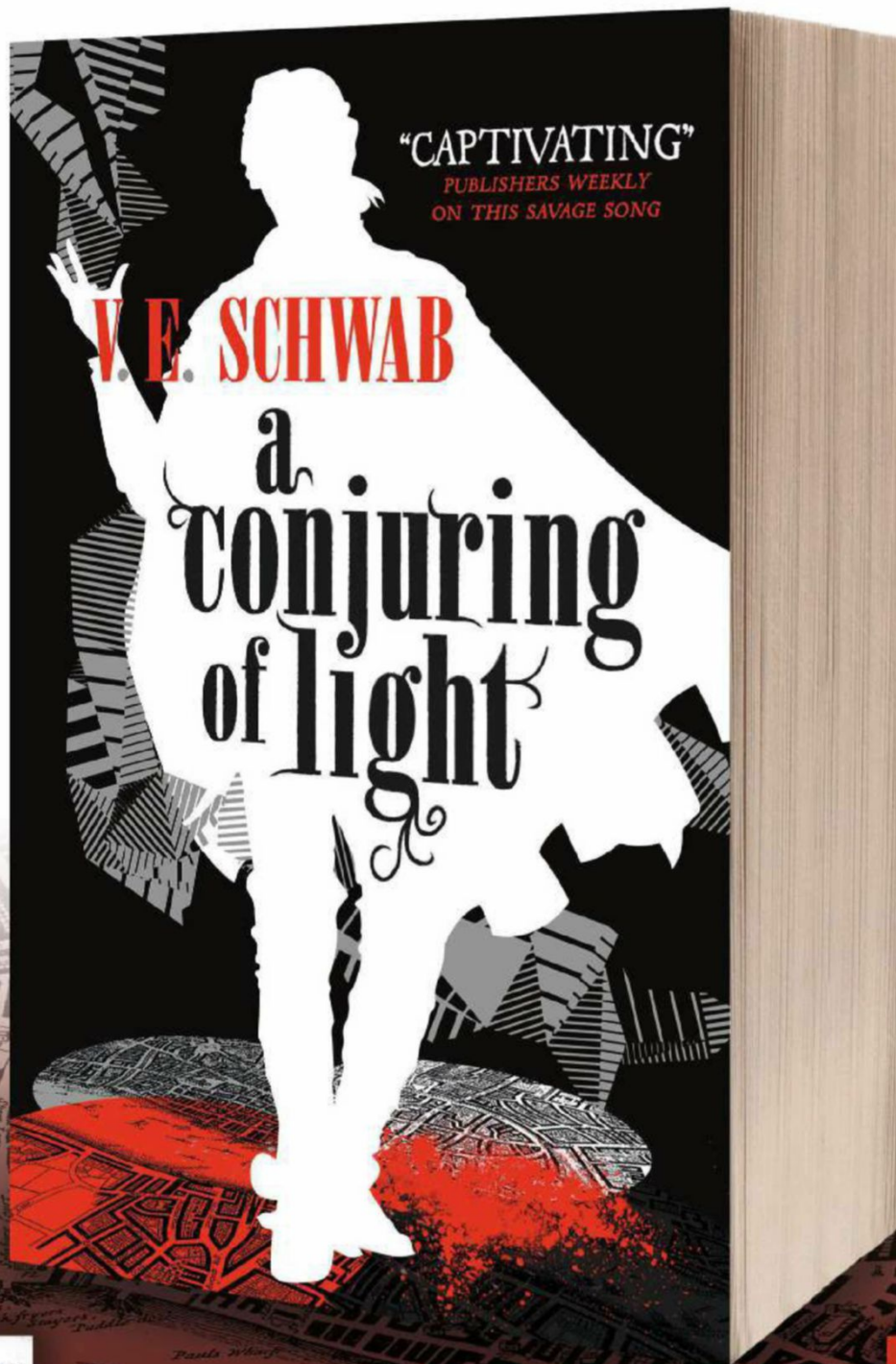
Cut to a close-up of the deformed man. But his deformity has now disappeared. A chorus of voices sing on the soundtrack, hailing Christ’s miracle. The man smiles in wonder, and reaches up to touch his nose with his hand. We cut to an extreme close-up of his eyes. They are swimming with tears.

JESUS: Tell no man, but show thyself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

Immediately, the man runs past Jesus and towards the crowd of people, who flock around him, astonished by this miracle. They run off into the mountains.

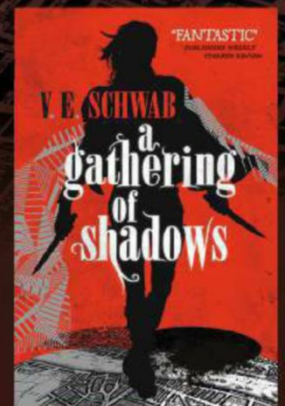
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