

# MARVEL'S **IRON FIST** EXCLUSIVE

Fighting talk with stars and showrunner



THE WORLD'S  
**No.1**  
SCI-FI  
MAGAZINE

# SNICK

285

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THE ULTIMATE STAR WARS EXPERT

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY

DOCTOR WHO

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

INSIDE NO 9

FANTASTIC BEASTS

GOODNIGHT SWEETHEART

LEGION

## BLOCKBUSTER SEASON STARTS HERE!

### LOGAN

WOLVERINE'S LAST STAND



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**LOGAN**

"This character's been amazing to me"



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"I was blown away by Joss's voice"



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"It helps that people won't have preconceptions"

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# EVEREST AUCTION

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# Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE SFX HIVE MIND

## RICHARD EDWARDS EDITOR

### RAVES

→ I'm going to miss Peter Capaldi's Doctor – I hope the upcoming series has plenty of stories worthy of one of the Time Lord's most intriguing incarnations.

### RANTS

→ Not loving the *Episode VIII* name – *The Last Jedi* sounds like it's been cranked out of a random *Star Wars* movie title generator.



## NICK SETCHFIELD FEATURES EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Enjoyed *Split* – trashy, yes, but entertaining. Shyamalan's mojo is slowly reforming. The final reveal gave me chills. You sly dog, sir!

### RIP

→ Sad about John Hurt. His quiet cup of tea in "The Day Of The Doctor" is one of my favourite things in all of *Doctor Who*.



## IAN BERRIMAN REVIEWS EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Intrigued by new DVD imprint Black House, who have lots of gothic '70s Euro-horror in the pipeline.

→ New book *Scarred For Life Volume One* looks promising: see @ScarredForLife2 for info.

→ Delighted to finally have the *Psychomania* score on vinyl, thanks to Trunk Records.



## JOSH WINNING NEWS EDITOR

### RAVES

→ In every generation there is a chosen one, and I've loved the past 10 months as *SFX* news slayer. Sadly, my time has come to an end, but thank you to all the sci-friends old and new I've discovered along the way. Find me on @JoshWinning if you want to chat *Stranger Things* season two when it finally drops!



## RUSSELL LEWIN PRODUCTION EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Delighted to see the UK film industry continues to thrive: bit.ly/sfxukfilm.

→ Went to a screening of *Prevenge* with a live Alice Lowe Q&A. Quite a night!

### RANTS

→ IMDb's decision to close its messageboards is absurd and wrong. Nut meet sledgehammer.



## JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Was gagging for the start of summer, right up until the *Stranger Things* season two trailer dropped. Now Halloween can't come around soon enough!

→ And with Bryan Talbot's latest Grandville instalment, *Force Majeure*, also due for release around then, autumn is already shaping up to be a cracker!



## CLIFF NEWMAN ART EDITOR

### RAVES

→ *Drew: The Man Behind The Poster* was a great documentary on legendary movie poster artist Drew Struzan. I was astonished that having painted most of Harrison Ford's movie career (*Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Blade Runner* etc) their first face-to-face wasn't until 2010. Bonkers!



## WILL SALMON SPECIALS EDITOR

### RAVES

→ *I Am Not A Serial Killer* is absolutely fantastic: warm, witty and genuinely scary in places. A beautiful film.

### RANTS

→ Sad to see Peter Capaldi leave the TARDIS. Three seasons may be standard now, but it really does feel like we're only just getting to know him.



## KIMBERLEY MARGAUX WRITER

### RAVES

→ Fantasy novel *Uprooted* by Naomi Novik is amazing! Ornate, old-school fantasy with enchanted forests and dragons.

### RANTS

→ Upset that *Skull Island* is leading to a crossover film where King Kong and Godzilla have to fight. Why can't they be friends and just hang out together?



## JONATHAN WRIGHT WRITER

### RAVES

→ The BBC Terry Pratchett biopic *Back In Black* continues to haunt me, especially for the way Paul Kaye so beautifully caught the mannerisms of a man I interviewed many, many times for *SFX*. Meantime, the near future feels worryingly like a dystopian science fiction novel from the 1970s...



When I was first interviewed for a job on *SFX*, the Powers That Be asked me to name the five most important sci-fi TV shows of all time. *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, *The Twilight Zone* and *Quatermass* were in there, of course, but sneaking in to round out the list was *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

Although Joss Whedon's seminal show wasn't quite a decade old at the time, it was already one of the most influential shows on TV and made a massive impact on popular culture. So much so that *SFX* had stars from the show, and its spin-off *Angel*, on the cover a whopping 20 times between 1998 and 2004.

So with *Sunnydale* set to turn 20 on 10 March (doesn't it make you feel old?) we're celebrating one of the seminal shows of *SFX*'s lifetime in a big way (p38). We've spoken to veterans of the series, rounded up its best moments, and got Russell T Davies to reveal how *Buffy* influenced *New Who*. You also tell us your memories of the show in *First Contact* (p26).

Looking ahead, we've got the lowdowns on the latest Marvel/Netflix show *Iron Fist* (p60), Hugh Jackman's last outing as Wolverine in *Logan* (p52), Disney's live-action remake of *Beauty And The Beast* (p76), and more other sci-fi goodness than you can shake a stake at.

And the sci-fi and fantasy action is only going to get bigger over the next few months, so subscribe now to make sure you don't miss a moment – details on p36.

See me on page 68

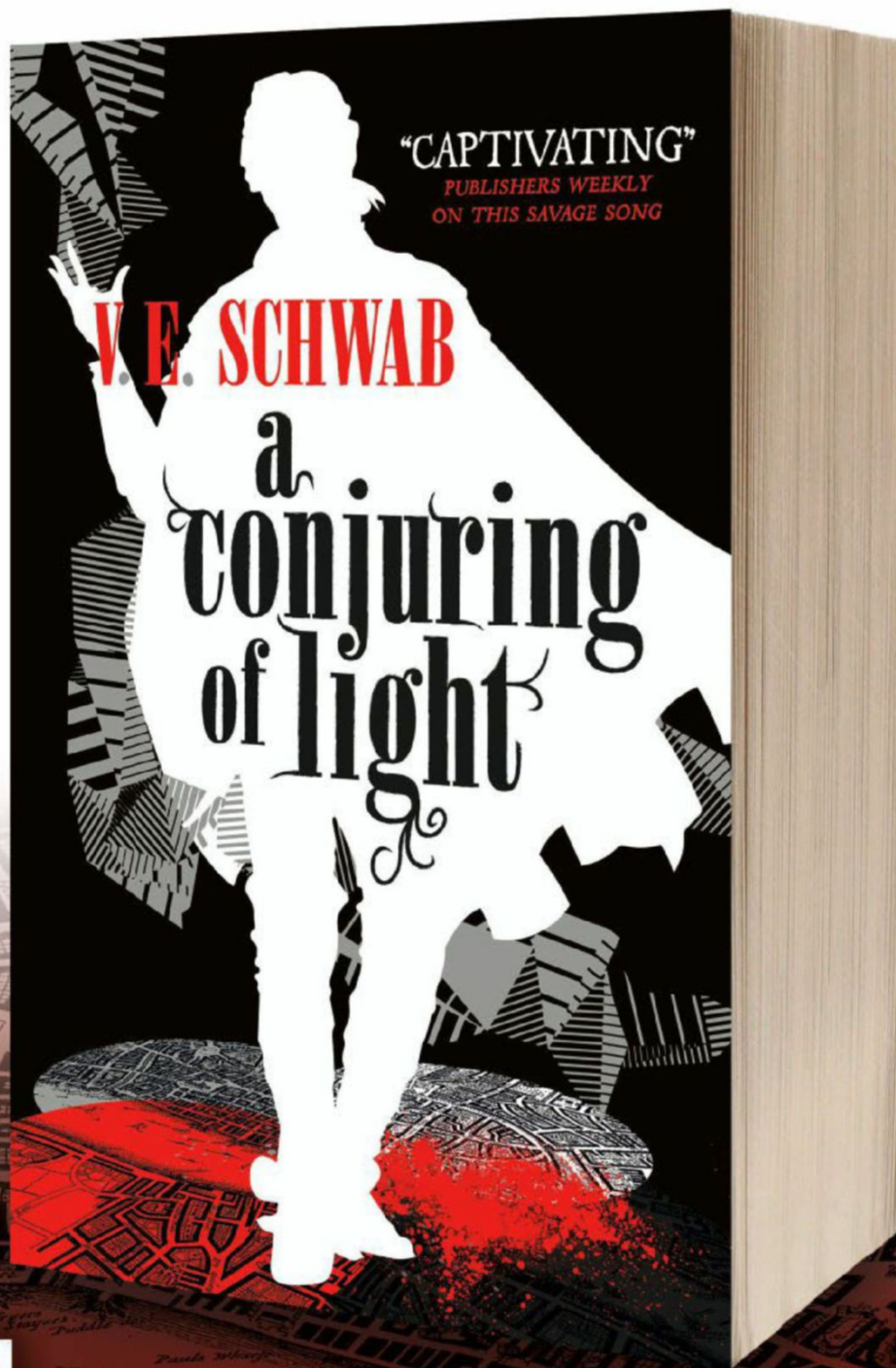
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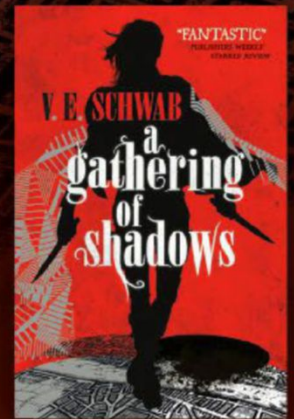
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MAY  
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→ NEWS /// INTERVIEWS /// INSIGHT /// HURT → *edited by Josh Winning*



TV EXCLUSIVE

## FEAR THE FUTURE

It's a scary new world in this timely adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*...



"The book's been around for 35 years, and every time someone reads it, they say, 'Wow, this is timely,'" Bruce Miller tells Red Alert of Margaret Atwood's defining dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. That couldn't be more true today. A chilling piece of speculative fiction, Atwood's award-winning 1985 novel unspools in a United States known as Gilead, where women's rights were crushed under a religion-based, totalitarian regime.

"I think one of the things that is most interesting about the book is how relevant it is all the time," says executive producer/showrunner Miller, who's adapted the book for TV, with Elisabeth Moss (*Mad Men*) starring as Offred, a handmaiden forced to breed for the sterile ruling class. A big fan of the book, Miller says TV was the perfect medium to explore Atwood's dark themes. →

### Highlights



#### 12 EXTREME WAYS

→ Rob Liefeld introduces his movie-bound Extreme Universe.



#### 13 WHO GOES THERE?

→ With Peter Capaldi out, we size up his potential replacements.



#### 15 SIREN'S SONG

→ Meet the love witch, Samantha Robinson. It's impossible not to fall for her.



**SCI-FACT!** *The Handmaid's Tale* won the first ever Arthur C Clarke Award in 1987.

“I was writing the script during all those US debates. We were mindful of that”

“People pick out different aspects of the book that really ring true for them, or seem to speak to the time that they’re living in,” he muses. “I was writing the pilot script during the primaries, during all those [US] debates so we were, of course, mindful of that.”

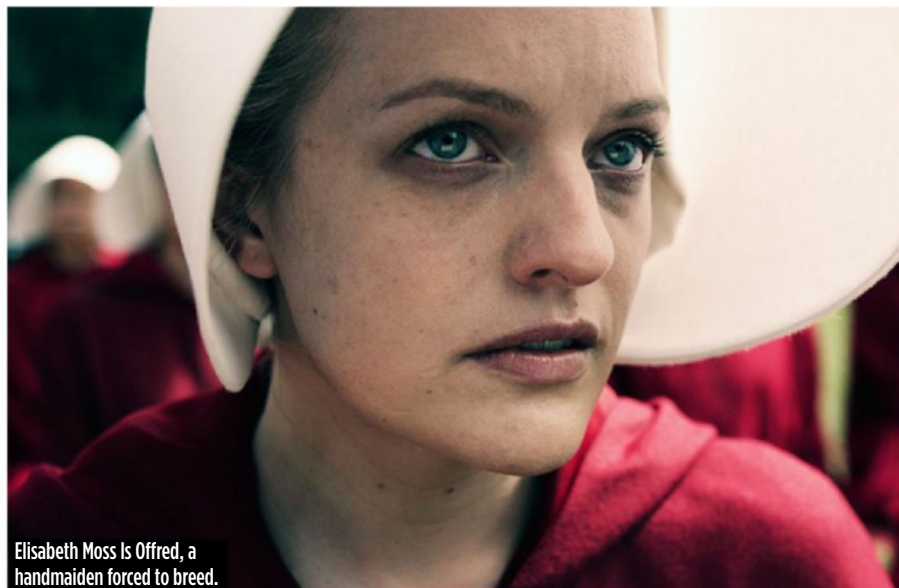
Which is why, despite the melting pot of sci-fi-infused material inherent to Atwood’s story, Miller didn’t adapt the series as straight science fiction. “It doesn’t really take place in a different technological world,” he reasons. “But I would say it’s a thriller as we’re always terrified something bad is going to happen to Offred and, by extension, to Lizzie.”

Miller had plenty of material to work with. As Lizzie is forced to work for Joseph Fiennes’s Commander and his brittle wife Serena Joy (Chuck’s Yvonne Strahovski), Miller says he stuck to the original story for the most part, while throwing in some exciting new twists.

“Not only is this a book that people have read and studied for years, it’s been a movie, it’s been a ballet, it’s been an opera, it’s been a play a couple of times,” he says. “We’re certainly loyal to the book. We think the book’s excellent. So, any changes we make are mindful of the fact that we’re connected to the original material. But I also think that when you do a television show and you’re telling a continuing story, you make lots of changes just because the story is continuing.”

As an example, Miller says Serena Joy is a character who has undergone a bit of a makeover in the series. “When you have a novel and when you have a TV show, the dynamics between the relationships have to be slightly different,” he says. “I was very mindful of the relationship between Serena Joy and Offred. And it bumped me when I saw in the movie [version] that Serena Joy was beyond child-bearing years. It felt like they weren’t in direct competition, that Offred wasn’t taking a role that Serena Joy, more than anything, wanted for herself. So, I thought it was a more interesting dynamic for the long term and a dynamic that could play out over time.”

However, the series does retain the book’s first-person narrative, with Offred narrating via voiceover so we can hear her thoughts as June, the spark left of her old self. “You need a way to get past what she’s allowed to show on her face



Elisabeth Moss is Offred, a handmaiden forced to breed.

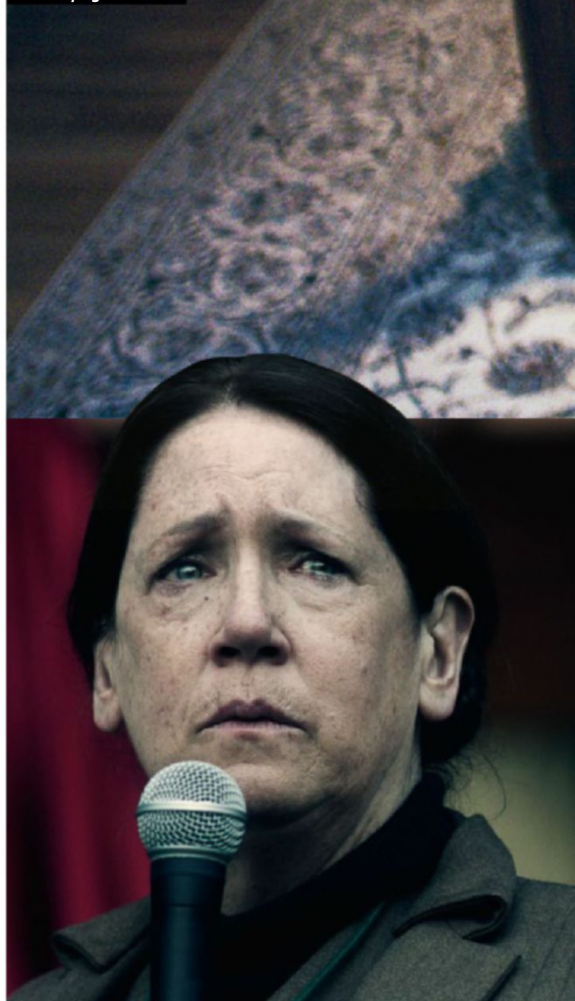
and what she’s really thinking and feeling, especially in a TV show where you need to get close to the character,” Miller explains. “I’ve never been involved in a show that had this much voiceover, but the voiceover is essential for drawing a difference between Offred and June and these two voices. So it’s been a work in progress. Lizzie has such an expressive acting style. She has a main circuit cable connecting her heart to her face that she can’t turn off even if she would like to, and so, because of that, we’ve had to use less voiceover because you know what she’s thinking, you know what she’s feeling.”

And Miller says the show has also been unafraid to lean into the religious issues that are at the root of the novel. “In the pilot, and in the next few episodes, they’re tearing churches down that are anything besides their sect,” he reveals. “I think there are a lot of parallels between the book and certainly the TV show and life in Puritan times. I would say that the writing staff has been using that as a big parallel.”

In our new era of Trump, *The Handmaid’s Tale* couldn’t be more relevant, and offers a shocking warning for what could happen in the future. “You know, [the US] gets a reputation for being a place where people came from religious freedom,” Miller says. “But the Puritans who came liked their religious freedom, but not anybody else’s. There were no other churches besides the Puritan church. I think they branded Quakers on the forehead with Qs and stuff like that, and sent them out of the state. So, we’re trying to harken back to that origin story that Margaret used as the beginning for this book.” ●

*The Handmaid’s Tale* airs on Hulu in the US from Wednesday 26 April.

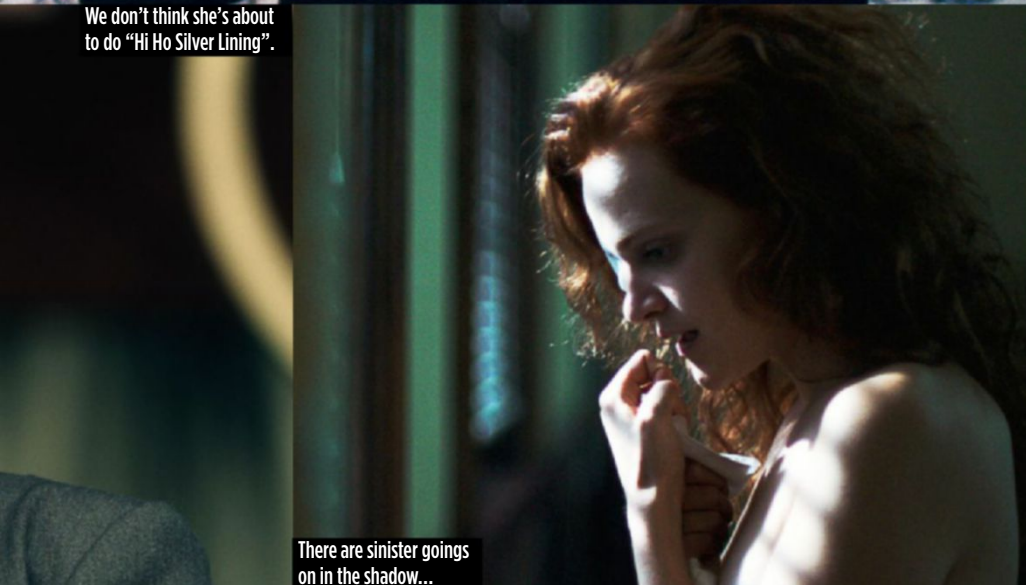
Joseph Fiennes adds to his collection of dark authority figures.







We don't think she's about to do "Hi Ho Silver Lining".



There are sinister goings on in the shadow...

## MAID IN AMERICA

Samira Wiley (Moirra) talks fear, flashbacks and prescient sci-fi...

### HAD YOU READ *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* BEFORE SIGNING ON TO THE SHOW?

→ I wasn't familiar with the book before, and I have zero idea how I escaped it. I talked to someone in my class and apparently he said we had read it in so-and-so's class, but I had no recollection. But because I came to it fresh, I didn't have any preconceived notions of who the people were. And a lot of people told me that if I mess this up, they're going to kill me [laughs].

### MOIRA IS JUNE'S BEST FRIEND BEFORE GILEAD TAKES HOLD. WHY DID SHE APPEAL TO YOU AS A ROLE?

→ In terms of the roles I want to take, I try to look for people that I admire something in them. She is someone who doesn't take no for an answer. She stands up for little people and what is right. Most of Moira's story is told in flashback. Towards the end of the season, you see her a little more. But I sort of think of her as this lone wolf and no one is really on her level because no one is thinking like she is.



Samira Wiley as Moira.

### HOW MUCH DOES THE SHOW STICK TO THE NOVEL?

→ One of the things I applaud this show for is staying true to the book in so many aspects. I immediately went and picked up the book and devoured it. People who are fans of the book will not be disappointed. The writers on the show have done a good job throughout the first season of being able to be exact. If there is another season, it would be more of creating your own path, which is where it gets very exciting.

### IN THE CURRENT WORLD POLITICAL CLIMATE, THIS STORY SEEMS EERILY MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER. IF AND WHEN DID YOU ALL FEEL THAT?

→ In the beginning when we first started working on this, we knew we were doing something that sort of reflected the climate of what people were talking about in the [US presidential] campaign but it felt like next year we'll see what it could have been like. But after [the election], you could feel in the air that this is even more important that we thought it could be. It's scary how timely and relevant it is.



**SCI-FACT!** The production built a parallelogram crane to hoist actors off their feet.

ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

## MOTHER COURAGE

Wallowing in the muck on set of Welsh horror *Don't Knock Twice*.

➔ "This is what Americans look like when we wake up in the morning," chuckles actress Katee Sackhoff, gesturing to her dishevelled appearance. The blonde-haired *Battlestar Galactica* heroine is covered in mud, blood and bruises, all for her role in grimy new horror *Don't Knock Twice*. "You go home and take a shower," she adds, "and it's just a sea of brown and red at the bottom of the tub."

Sackhoff plays Jess, a mother desperate to reconnect with her estranged daughter Chloe (Lucy Boynton, *Sing Street*). Unfortunately Chloe has just inadvertently unleashed a vengeful witch by rapping on a door not once but... you get the picture. By all accounts, it's been an exhausting shoot. "We just smashed our actors against a wardrobe," grins producer John Giwa-Amu, who has reteamed with director Caradog W James (*The Machine*) for this Cardiff-shot chiller.

Standing in the car-park near the trailers and catering bus, James is under no illusion how he wants audiences to react: "We wanted them frightened. We wanted them engaged," he says. "The best horrors tap into base fears." A swift glance inside at the set shows how. A cave, littered with skulls and bones, is dominated by a large iron cage hanging from the ceiling. Unwilling to reveal too much about this final-act mini-prison, James notes:

"It's part of where the children end up." Gulp.

Even scarier is an encounter with Javier Botet, all head-to-toe in black make-up. "Javier kind of is a special effect," says Giwa-Amu. With his spidery limbs, the Spanish actor – who appeared in *Mama* – has Marfan

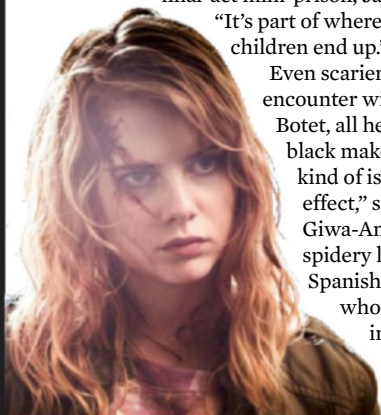
syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that gives his body hyper-elasticity. Beyond that, he's been sworn to silence on character specifics. "You're always in the movies, trying to see the monster and waiting," he teases.

With the script penned by Mark Huckerby and Nick Ostler, James is angling to use practical effects, rather than computer generated imagery – understandable with the budget hovering around £1 million. "There's a lot of stuff that's in camera as opposed to CGI," he reveals. "There will be a few bits and pieces but it's mostly in camera, as opposed to *The Machine*, which had 420 visual effects. This will

have about six, I think, so it's a bit of a relief."

Even so, when you're working on a supernatural movie, a vivid imagination comes in handy. "You take a leap of faith with a film like this – and you put a lot of trust in the director," admits co-star Nick Moran, who plays Detective Boardman, the copper on the hunt for the witch. "If Caradog says there's going to be a lavish forest that becomes a dark wood with a giant demon standing behind you – and I'm looking at a green screen in a quarry next to a recycling centre – you believe him."

For all its unsettling creepiness, James promises *Don't Knock Twice* grounds its fantastical elements in





“How far would you go for your children? I don't quite know yet”



Don't blink.

reality. “These aren't blondes running away from a monster,” he says. “These are very strong independent women dealing with very complex issues.” Sackhoff, despite not being a horror expert, nods in agreement. “[It asks] how far would you go for your children? I don't quite know the answer yet.”

*Don't Knock Twice opens on 31 March.*

“DON'T QUOTE ME”

“I WANT TO SEE SOMEBODY WHO SAVES THE EARTH WHO LOOKS LIKE ME. WHOSE BEHIND IS A LITTLE BIT BIGGER. BUT WHEN THE SUPERPOWERS KICK IN, WHEW!”

Whoopi Goldberg wants in on the spandex action.



## AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Marvel's **Runaways** TV series has a cast of grown-ups! It'll include Ryan Sands, Angel Parker and Brittany Ishibashi as sinister adults **The Pride**.

→ **The OA** will get a second season on Netflix. No air date has been announced yet.

→ The final season of **Orphan Black** will begin airing in June. “The focus of season five, obviously, is we all want answers, goddammit,” says showrunner John Fawcett.

→ Teri Hatcher will appear in season two of **Supergirl** – she'll play the show's new Big Bad. What would Lois say?

→ Also on **Supergirl**, **Crazy Ex-Girlfriend** star Rachel Bloom has written a song for the show's musical episode.

→ **Arrow** producer Marc Guggenheim says that season six will be all about “thinking about the end game”. Eek!

→ Matt Reeves will direct the pilot of Ridley Scott's adaptation of Justin Cronin's novel **The Passage**.

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## RICHARD FAIRBRASS

IS THE RIGHT SAID FRED STAR DEEPLY DIPPY ABOUT SCI-FI?

### Favourite SF/fantasy films

→ *Lord Of The Rings* knocked me sideways – I just thought it was made with such care and dedication, and although it was a fantasy movie, it stepped outside of that genre because it was such an amazing piece of drama. I like some science fiction – there have been particular films like *Alien*, *Total Recall* and *Event Horizon* I thought were great. And I love horror, because the director has one aim, which is to scare you shitless. He doesn't want to make you cry, or to make you laugh – if I had to pick a movie genre it would be horror.

### Favourite SF/fantasy TV

→ I grew up on a lot of *Star Trek*, but I preferred the *Picard* series to the *Kirk*. And when I was a kid I was obsessed with *Lost In Space*. I think I liked it because the family were isolated on a barren planet, so the interactions between them and the robot were completely unaffected by other influences. I also used to love *Thunderbirds* – I was kind of disappointed when I got a bit older and realised that you could see the strings.

### Favourite SF/fantasy books and comics

→ JG Ballard was such a fantastic writer. *The Drowned World* had fantasy futuristic ideas written in a very novelistic kind of way. I also used to buy a fantasy magazine because of a character called Thor for the drawings – I don't know if it was the *Marvel Thor*, it's a long time ago now. And I bought every single issue of *Man, Myth And Magic*, a periodical about things like witches, the devil and the supernatural. I've always tended to cherrypick stuff rather than have an obsession in a particular area.

*Right Said Fred's* new album, *Exactly*, is out now.





**SCI-FACT!** Released in Image Comics' early days, *Bloodstone* and *Brigade*'s first issues both sold over a million copies.

## 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

# EXTREME UNIVERSE

Deadpool creator Rob Liefeld's *Extreme Comics* line is multiplex-bound

### WHERE DEADPOOL RAMPAGED, EXTREME WILL FOLLOW

**1** *Deadpool* proving to be a hit paved the way for Rob Liefeld to strike a deal with producers Akiva Goldsman (*Transformers*), Graham King (*Tomb Raider*) and Fundamental Films to build a new film franchise around his Extreme stable of superhero titles. "*Deadpool* put us on the map, and reinforced what people were believing in when they were exploring the Extreme Universe," he says. "My catalogue of other properties is pretty vast, and interest in them continues to build as *Deadpool* keeps achieving these new heights."

### DEADPOOL AND EXTREME ARE KINDRED SPIRITS

**2** After departing Marvel, Liefeld co-founded Image Comics in 1992, launching titles like *Bloodstrike* and *Brigade*, with characters who share an unconventional worldview with *Deadpool* himself. "I create loveable rogues and rebels, because that's who I identify with," he says. "If you look at Marvel and DC's pantheon of characters, they're all these do-gooders but I never really bought into that. I take the more cynical view that if superheroes existed, they'd either be the biggest celebrities in the land, or be taking matters into their own hands."

### THE EXTREME CHARACTERS CONTROL THEIR OWN FATES

**3** While most Marvel or DC heroes have suffered some

tragedy or misfortune, Extreme's main protagonists are all active participants in what befalls them. "My characters always subjugate themselves willingly to the experiments, beginning with *Deadpool* trying to cure his cancer," says Liefeld. "It's more like Captain America, who submitted himself to the Super Soldier Serum than Bruce Wayne whose parents were shot or Peter Parker who was bitten by a radioactive spider. There's a lot more deliberate action in the Extreme Universe, as they become

willing guinea pigs either to get the perks of superpowers or a cure to some illness."

### THERE'S PLENTY OF VARIETY

**4** From the Shazam-esque *Kaboom* to alien bounty hunter *Bloodwolf*, the Extreme Universe runs the gamut of superheroic sub-genres. "We've got giant robots, cyborgs, wizards and undead armies," says Liefeld. "And at the centre of it, you've got this terrific character conflict. All of these guys have made decisions and are willing to stand by them even though, in the case of John Stone and Cabbot Stone, they're brothers. They're like the Cain and Abel of comic books, as they're two warring brothers, who both have these powerful organisations that they own, in *Brigade* and *Bloodstrike*, respectively. They've got completely different beliefs, and their guns are firmly focused on each other."

### THE ROLL CALL IS YET TO BE DETERMINED

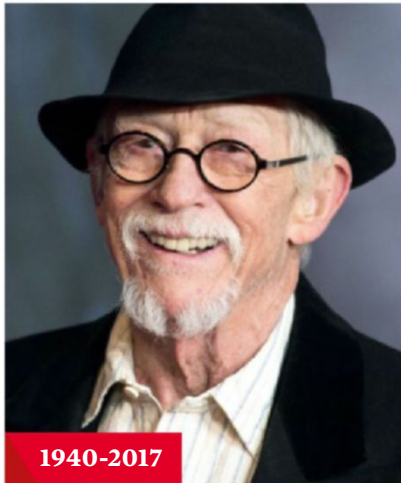
**5** Series like *Prophet*, *Supreme*, *Youngblood* and *Avengelyne* are not included, and Liefeld says it's still to be decided which characters will be first out. "We've got a writers' room that we're filling right now," he says. "Then there will be an intensive week of breaking the long-form stories, and after that maybe whoever we have at the top of the class right now will change. A lot of what will determine the pecking order will happen in that room, and I'll be there as well, as between myself, Akiva and the writers we'll come up with the best creative stuff that we can." ●

*The Extreme Universe film will be released some time in the future...*





**SCI-FACT!** Olivia Colman has already appeared in *Doctor Who*: 2010's "The Eleventh Hour".



1940-2017

## JOHN HURT

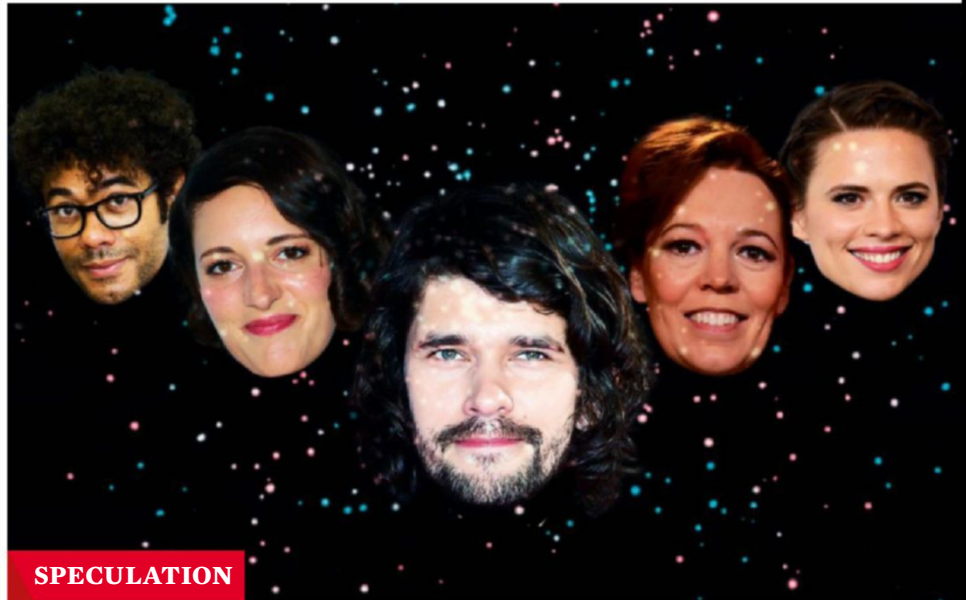
Remembering the sci-fi legend, who passed away in January

➔ "We're all just passing time, and occupy our chair very briefly," John Hurt said in 2015, and it's fair to say the actor – who sadly died on 25 January aged 77 – occupied a number of memorable spaces on screens both big and small. From intense roles in genre fare like *1984* to *V For Vendetta*, the Derbyshire native was always craggily magnetic, his quick eyes sparkling as if in on a fantastic joke.

Of course, in the case of *Alien*, his slyest joke was also the scene that saw him burst – quite literally – into the mainstream. Hurt's chest-rupturing horror show introduced the world to the terrifying Xenomorph, and terrified his unprepared co-stars. "I don't think anyone could have prepared us for John's performance," co-star Sigourney Weaver said in 2015. "It was such brilliant acting, I didn't realise he was acting!"

From there, Hurt returned to genre again and again, contributing gravitas and knowing humour to *Doctor Who* (he was a wonderful War Doctor in 50th anniversary special "The Day Of The Doctor"), *Hellboy* and *Harry Potter* (as master wand seller Mr Ollivander); even parodying his *Alien* scene in sci-spoof *Spaceballs*. And in 2015, Hurt was knighted for his contributions to drama.

"I like being Sir John," he said. "It works, doesn't it?" Here's to you, sir. ●



SPECULATION

Who's next?

## PETER'S OUT

It's the end of an era for *Doctor Who* as Peter Capaldi prepares to hang up his Sonic Screwdriver, but who'll take over in 2018?

➔ **Christmas Day will see Peter** Capaldi bowing out after three years in the thick of it as the Doctor – at the same time Steven Moffat steps down as showrunner. With Chris Chibnall introducing a new Doctor when he takes over Moffat's duties in 2018, will the Time Lord return as a man or a woman this time? Here are our top choices...

### RICHARD AYOADE

**Why?** There's something pleasing about the idea of the Doctor also being the host who shows you around *The Crystal Maze*. More importantly, Ayoade has an otherworldliness that is very Gallifreyan – and we reckon he could out-stare every alien race in the universe. **Why not?** Is he too well-known as a comedian to play serious scenes?

### BEN WHISHAW

**Why?** Could MI6's Q be a Time Lord? He's certainly an inventive genius – and he also has that long-suffering, "Why are humans so silly?" look about him. And thanks to his stint with 007, Whishaw has an international following. **Why not?** Would such a "serious" thesp commit to a show perceived as being aimed at kids?

### HAYLEY ATWELL

**Why?** If it is, indeed, time for a female Doctor, Atwell has already said she wants the role – and her immensely likeable Agent Peggy Carter was one hell of an audition. Atwell can nail emotional resonance while also retaining an authoritative edge. **Why not?** We can't think of anything. You?

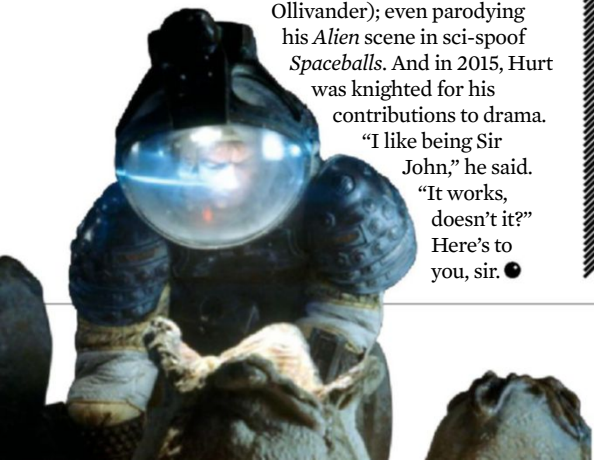
### OLIVIA COLMAN

**Why?** Colman is charismatic, quirky and charming. Plus if she told you to "Run!" you'd damn well run. **Why not?** Much as we're loath to say it, would the BBC prefer someone younger? Hmmph.

### PHOEBE WALLER-BRIDGE

**Why?** In her scabrous comedy *Fleabag*, Waller-Bridge proved she can make you laugh and break your heart playing a rude, socially awkward character (remind you of anyone?). **Why not?** It's a massive role for a relative newcomer – though that wasn't a problem for Matt Smith, of course. ●

*Doctor Who* series 10 airs on BBC One from 15 April. More on that next issue...





**SCI-FACT!** Martin Sheen was originally set to play the role that eventually went to Brian Cox.

Just another day at the office.



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

## CORPSE PRIDE

Trollhunter's André Øvredal returns with terrifying coroner horror  
*The Autopsy Of Jane Doe*

➔ “Visceral horror to rival *Alien* and early Cronenberg.” Not the hyperbolic spiel of an anonymous marketing bod, but a plain-talking tweet about *The Autopsy Of Jane Doe* from a man who knows a thing or two about scary stuff – Master of Horror Stephen King. Another man who knows his horror: *Jane Doe* director André Øvredal.

“There’s an art to making a horror film that is sometimes not appreciated enough,” says Øvredal, schooling Red Alert on the art of freaky filmmaking. “There’s another layer of mood and tone that other types of films don’t

really need to tell a story. You have to know how to use every piece of filmmaking to play with the audience, and also get the tension slowly building.”

Slowly building tension perfectly describes *Jane Doe*’s brand of frights. It’s the story of father/son coroners Tommy (Brian Cox) and Austen (Emile Hirsch) Tilden, who find themselves with an unidentified female (Olwen Kelly) on their slab after a mysterious massacre. But when the routine autopsy turns increasingly inexplicable, the pair question who – or rather what – their subject is. Set almost entirely in the Tildens’ small town mortuary, it’s a masterclass in claustrophobic terror that’s shot, impressively, in a warehouse in East London.

Hirsch in particular went above and beyond the call of duty in his research, sitting in on real autopsies to get in Austen’s headspace, but Cox was no slacker. “Both of the actors had such a blast, in a way, getting into the world of these characters,” Øvredal says. “Brian thought it was so much fun discussing with coroners how everything works and how their minds are.

They’re very normal people, but they have a fun sense of humour.”

Indeed, one of the film’s most satisfying elements is Tommy and Austen’s authentically human relationship, while both behave surprisingly logically for horror movie heroes. “That’s what intrigues me about telling stories – trying to portray people in a realistic manner,” Øvredal explains. “It’s something that was very exciting to me, to read a horror script where these adult characters were thinking in a smart way.”

The biggest question of all: how do you cast a protagonist who can’t speak, breathe or move? “I met, like, 20, 30 women who could be Jane. But Olwen was the very first one,” Øvredal says. “She immediately saw the combination of elements I was looking for. A woman who you can tell the story of and feel something for just by looking at her, and also has this menacing presence within this kind of innocence. It’s a weird mix.” ●

*The Autopsy Of Jane Doe* is in cinemas for one night only on 31 March, and on DVD/digitally in the summer.





**SCI-FACT!** Robinson's always been a lover of witches – she's also a fan of *Charmed*.



**FIVE MINUTES WITH...**

# SAMANTHA ROBINSON

*She's gorgeous, she's deadly, she wants you... Meet the Love Witch...*

## ANY WITCH WAY

➤ "It's about a lady called Elaine, who's a witch. She's been objectified by men her entire life and it's really ruined her – she thinks she needs to act like a Stepford Wife in order to get a man. *The Love Witch* puts a twist on traditional horror films where women get killed off. The tables are turned, so Elaine's killing off these men and reducing them to blubbling messes..."

## TAYLOR MADE

➤ "[Director Anna Biller] was inspired by the Technicolors of the '50s and '60s. We watched a lot of films to prepare, like *The Razor's Edge*, and Catherine Deneuve in *Belle De Jour* and *Repulsion*. Elizabeth Taylor was a huge inspiration for Elaine. My performance is extremely stylistic. I was worried we'd cross the line and people would think it's just bad acting!"

## BARING ALL

➤ "It was uncomfortable to be so naked on set. Though when I watched it I was like, 'This is so tame, what was I worried about?' But even though it's a closed set, there are people looking at you half-naked; it can get a little uncomfortable."

## EQUAL RITES

➤ "I've been shocked by how much men and women both love this film. I think because of the time it's come out, with Trump's election, people are really gravitating towards it – they find Elaine empowering."

## HEX CETERA

➤ "I am interested in the occult. When I got the role, Anna and I went to some rituals and meetings. I've always been interested in astrology, so I've dabbled in it a little bit... But I'm not a witch!"

*The Love Witch opens in cinemas and VOD from 10 March.*





**SCI-FACT!** The production team built full-scale replicas of 1920s New York streets at Leavesden Studios in Hertfordshire.

## DESIGNER INTERVIEW

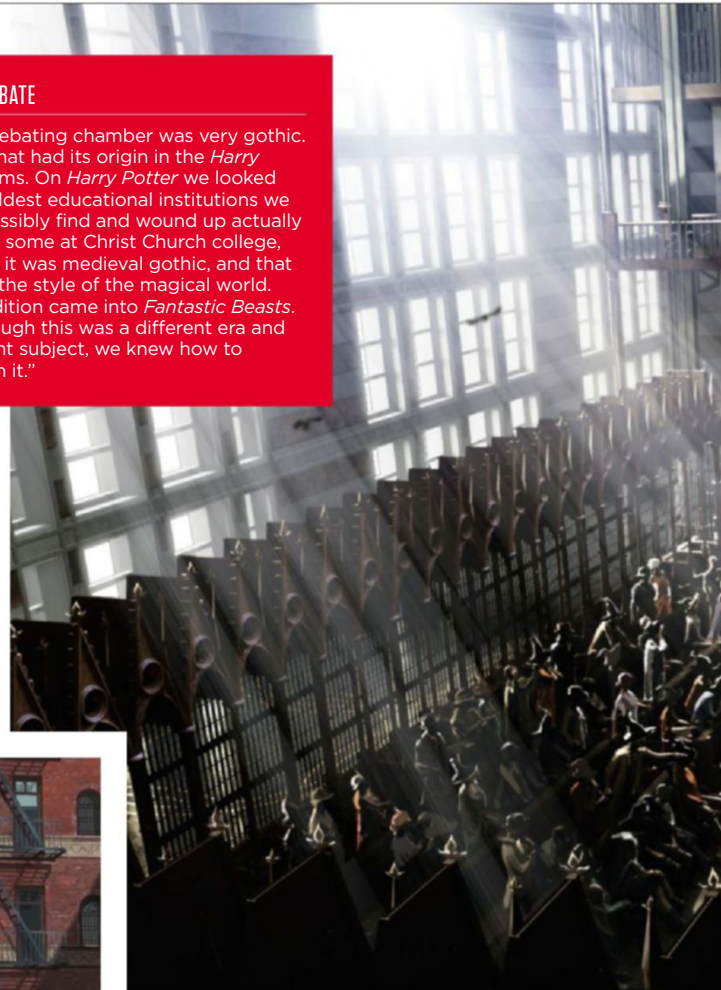
# NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Oscar-winning *Harry Potter* production designer Stuart Craig tells Red Alert how he recreated a 1920s Big Apple for *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*

*Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* is out on 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray 3D, Blu-ray, DVD and VOD from 27 March. It's available to download from 13 March.

## UP FOR DEBATE

“The debating chamber was very gothic. I guess that had its origin in the *Harry Potter* films. On *Harry Potter* we looked for the oldest educational institutions we could possibly find and wound up actually shooting some at Christ Church college, Oxford – it was medieval gothic, and that became the style of the magical world. That tradition came into *Fantastic Beasts*. Even though this was a different era and a different subject, we knew how to approach it.”

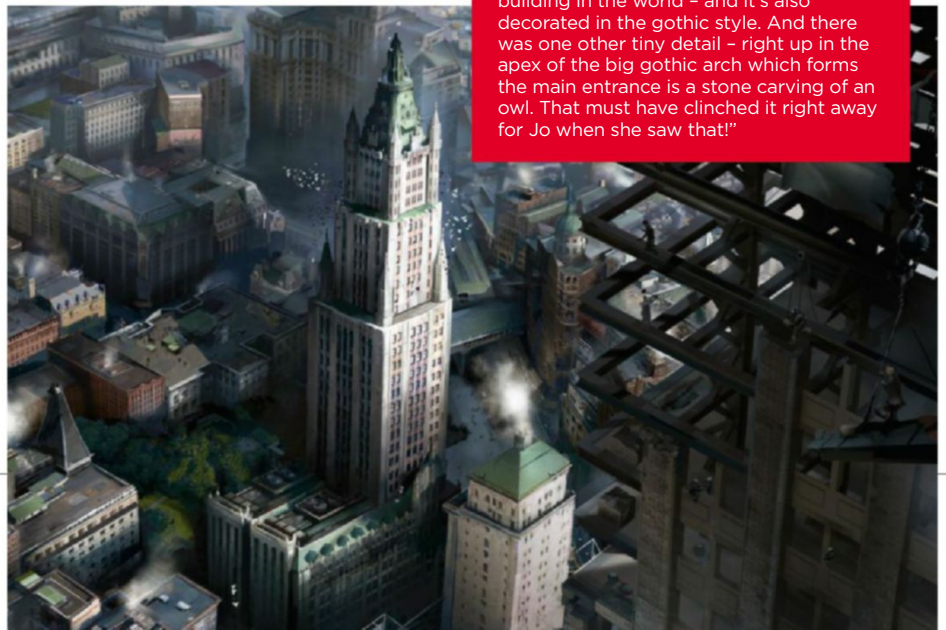


## IN THE CITY

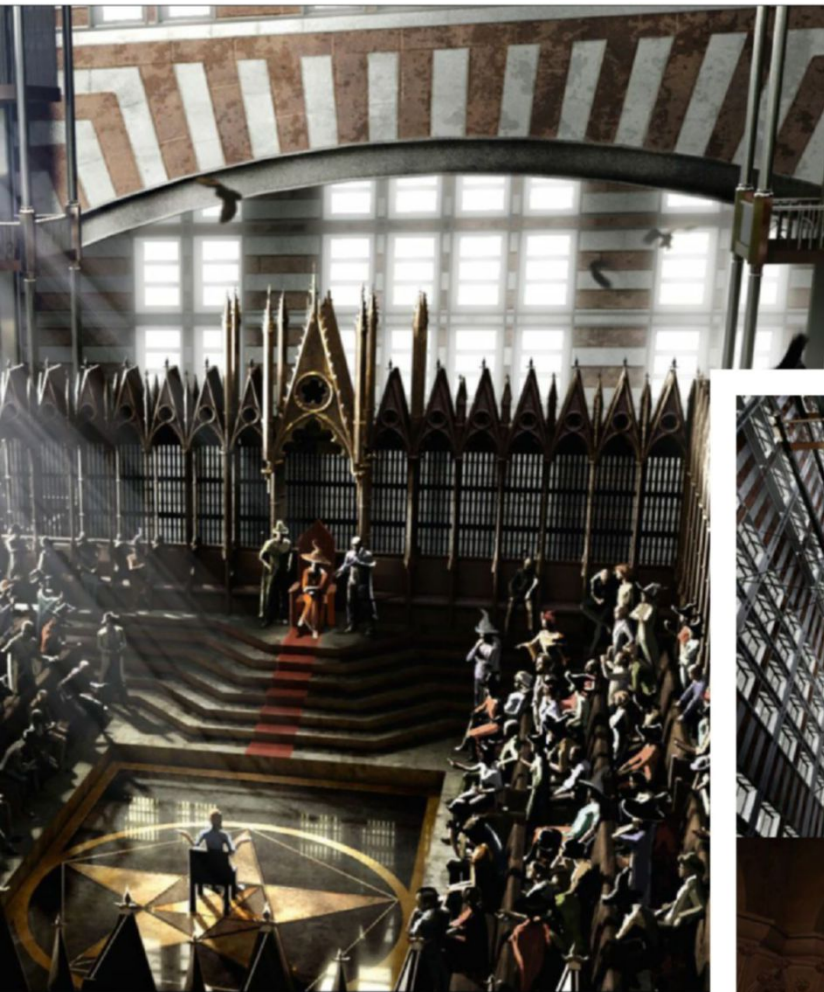
“Very early on we went on two scouting trips to New York. On the first we decided that we really couldn't make the film there – you couldn't interrupt the traffic for that long, so it was just impractical. Then our scouting trips became a journey of exploration, finding things that we liked, or found interesting or impressive in their scale. The internet makes it easier to research [the period] – it's a delight to have so much material so readily available. When the movie is set, in 1926, is such a rich period, both for architecture and costume. With Art Deco just beginning there's a modernity to it – the *Harry Potter* films in a way felt like the period films and *Fantastic Beasts*, which is a period film, felt more like a contemporary one because of the modernism in New York's architecture.”

## THE OWL SERVICE

“One of our principal buildings in the story is the Woolworth Building. It was Jo Rowling's idea [to make it the headquarters of the Magical Congress Of The United States Of America]. I think it was chosen because it's a modern building – at the time it was the tallest building in the world – and it's also decorated in the gothic style. And there was one other tiny detail – right up in the apex of the big gothic arch which forms the main entrance is a stone carving of an owl. That must have clinched it right away for Jo when she saw that!”

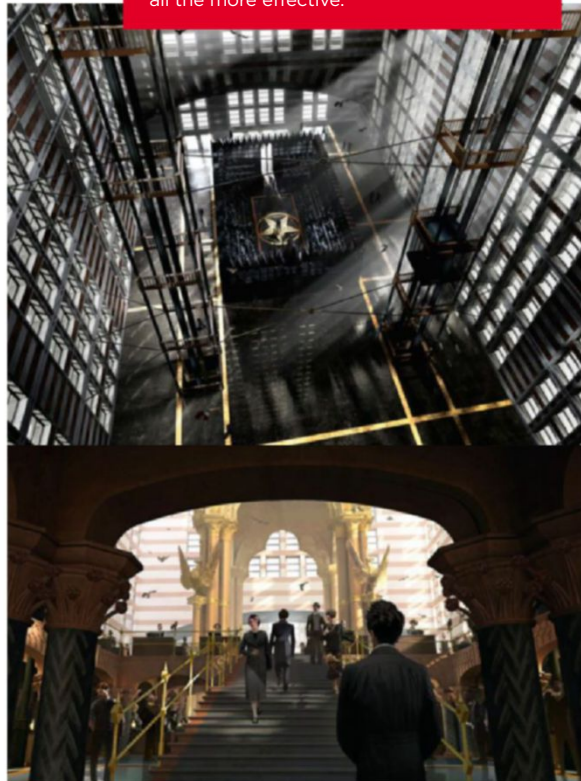






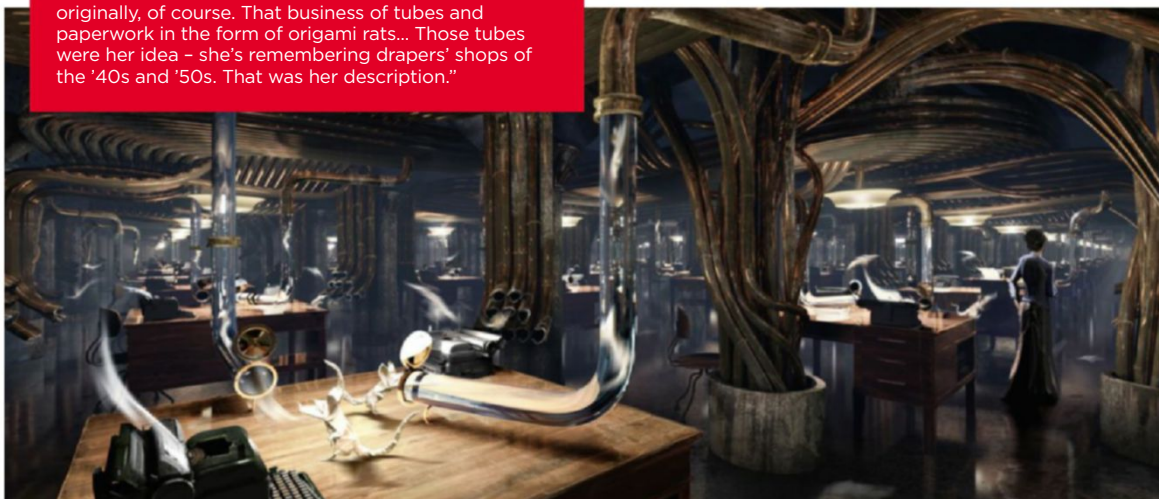
## PRACTICAL MAGIC

“Inside the Woolworth building, the MACUSA headquarters, there are five or six levels of basements where the work is done, and above that there are no floors at all until you get to the roof. We were taking real architectural elements and just by virtue of the omission of all these floors, we came up with something that was quite magical. We discovered on *Harry Potter* that it was very important to have something seemingly real and let the magic grow out of that. Then the magic is all the more effective.”



## PLAYING TO TYPE

“[The look of the MACUSA typing pool] was Jo Rowling’s idea. It’s easy to underestimate how much she tells you what the environments are and what they look like. So often she sets the brief in the stage directions in her script, and in the *Harry Potter* novels originally, of course. That business of tubes and paperwork in the form of origami rats... Those tubes were her idea – she’s remembering drapers’ shops of the ‘40s and ‘50s. That was her description.”



## AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Bryan Singer will direct the pilot of Fox’s upcoming live-action



**X-Men** TV series, which will fit into the canon of his movie-verse.

→ Neil Gaiman will write every episode of the **Good Omens** TV show – the six-episode series will air on the BBC and Amazon Prime Video in 2018.



→ Bad news: **Star Trek: Discovery** has been delayed again, pushed back from May until later in 2017. Good news: James Frain will play Sarek, Spock’s dad.

→ HBO’s **Casey Bloys** confirms they’re “exploring” ideas for a **Game Of Thrones** spin-off.

→ **Finding Nemo** and **WALL-E**



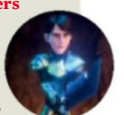
director **Andrew Stanton** will helm two episodes of

**Stranger Things** season two.

→ Syfy’s horror anthology **Channel Zero** will return in October and is expected to run until season four.

→ Season two of **Trollhunters**

will delve into the politics of the Darklands, and we’ll



learn more about the backstories of Blinky and AAARRRGHH!!!

© REX (3)



Red Alert May 2017

# Freeze Frame

Top trailers dissected

**SCI-FACT!** The first episode of season two is titled "Madmax". We'll get nine episodes in total.

# STRANGER THINGS S2

OUT  
31 OCT  
2017

Synth soundtrack, '80s references, monsters – the boys are baaaaack...



So here's some soft-focus scene-setting as we get a clip from an Eggo commercial that debuted in 1979 in the US. We're baaaaaack...



"Eleven!" yells Mike, and here's the lady herself. But how will Eleven come back and is she – as this shot hints – stuck in the Upside Down?



This wouldn't be *Stranger Things* without an Amblin-esque shot of the guys on their BMXs. But what are they pedalling away from?!



At first glance, it seems the guys are dressed up as Ghostbusters for Halloween, but why is nobody else at their school in costume...?



Um, what's Sheriff Jim Hopper (David Harbour) up to? Looks like he's burying something – or is he digging something up?



Oh, hello flamethrower! Seems we're back at Hawkins Laboratory, where security's been stepped up a bit. What are they up to now?



Will (Noah Schnapp) was rescued from the Upside Down a year ago, and it looks like he's being monitored. Is he at the Hawkins Lab?



This looks like Mike having a bit of a meltdown. Perhaps because, so far, there's been no sign of (sob) Barb.



Has Will been having prophetic nightmares? It certainly seems that way – somebody's been scribbling scary pictures in their notebook.



Something's at the door... This shot could have been rescued from the cutting room floor of *Close Encounters*, and we love it.



The big reveal! You thought the demogorgon was terrifying, but it seems we're getting a brand new (HUGE) monster in season two.



Cue credits. Will the number two be added to the show's opening credits when it lands on Netflix? We sort of hope it is. And we can't wait.

## The Buzz



**JOSH** This gives just enough away without revealing *anything* – I love the Halloween-y feel, and the theme tune still gives me chills. I'm more excited than a kid hopped up on Baby Ruths.



**WILL** Looks like a nice expansion of the first season and I love the shot of the tentacles in the red sky: very Cthulhu/Zenith. I just hope they don't hit the nostalgia button too hard.



**RICH** It's amazing how quickly the theme music has become iconic! Not much to go on here, but more than enough to whet the appetite – what the hell is that giant spider beast?



**NICK** The *Ghostbusters* cosplay is just a little too on the nose – hey, kids! The '80s! – but the sight of a giant, marauding, cross-dimensional spider-beastie has me sold.



**SCI-FACT!** John Scalzi was a creative consultant on *Stargate Universe*.

**NEW AUTHOR**

## DEBORAH WOLF

THE FORMER ARABIC LINGUIST BEHIND "SWEEPING EPIC FANTASY" *THE DRAGON'S LEGACY*



**Are the settings of *The Dragon's Legacy* comparable to any cultures in our reality?**

→ I'd say that Atualon references Greco/Roman civilisation, Sindan has definite Far East influences, and the Zeera has strong parallels with our ancient Middle East. Quarabala might be likened to a northern African civilisation, if it were also a fabled Atlantis-type society sunk deep below the Earth's crust!

**In the past you've worked as a linguist for the US army. Did that feed into the book at all?**

→ Oh heavens yes. Much of my story deals with cultural clashes, in particular the issues faced by indigenous peoples when faced with warring empires big and powerful enough to gobble them right up.

**There've been so many different takes on dragons: what was your approach?**

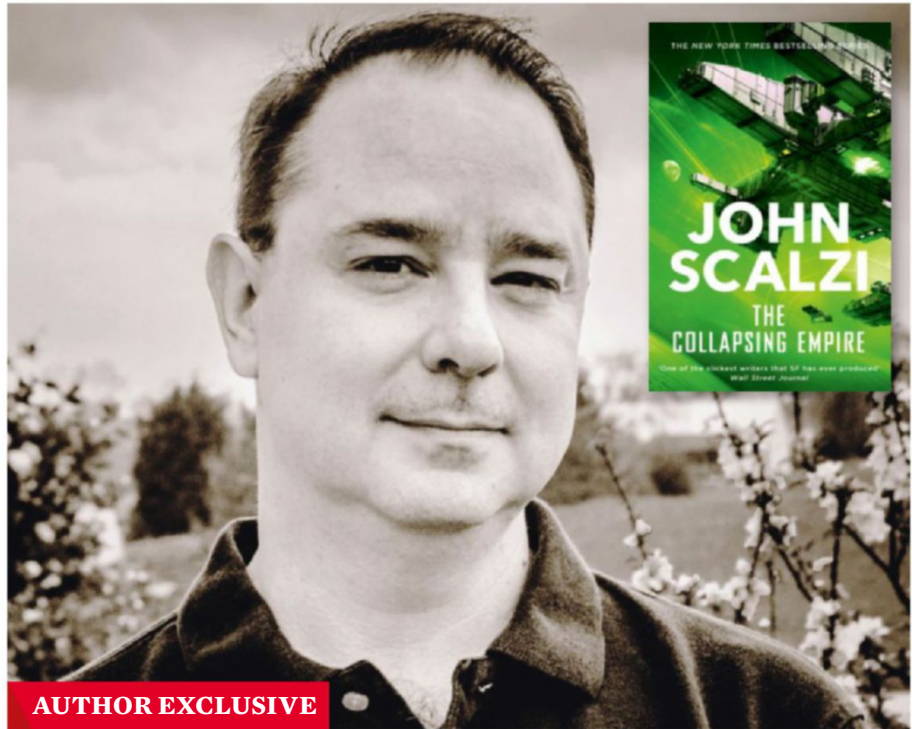
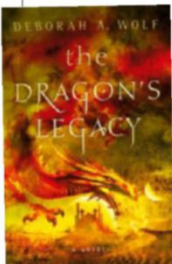
→ I wanted my dragons to be magical, but with a magic system loosely based in science so that it might feel organic. I wanted something big, something new and wondrous, and to avoid the familiar.

**How long did it take you to write the book?**

→ The ideas and characters have been banging around in my skull since 2009. In 2012 I drew my first map of the world, and shortly

thereafter committed myself to write this thing or die trying. I'm still here, so apparently it didn't kill me!

*The Dragon's Legacy* is published by Titan Books on 4 April.



**AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE**

## EMPIRE BUILDING

Scribbler extraordinaire John Scalzi discusses his new space opera, *The Collapsing Empire*



### John Scalzi not only writes

Hugo-award-winning novels but also runs a blog, is active on social media and has signed a 13-book deal with Tor, with *The Collapsing Empire* his first release. How does he find the time?

"Short answer: I type really fast," he tells us. "I started as a journalist and got used to writing fast, in volume and on deadline, so that helps. Also, I like to write. It's my hobby as well as the thing I get paid to do."

*The Collapsing Empire* explores a universe in which humanity has learned to travel faster than light and has headed far out into space. However, The Flow – the mechanism that enabled them to get there – has started to change, leaving the worlds stranded. "The 'science' in *The Collapsing Empire* is very speculative," reveals Scalzi, "but hopefully in a way that's intriguing rather than making actual scientists want to vomit all over their lab coats."

It's also the beginning of a new series, the name of which sounds strangely topical... "The title was chosen long before the events of the

last couple of years in the US and UK, so either it's amazingly well-timed or horribly badly-timed," says the author. "When you're writing a universe that's something like 1,500 years into the future, if you're doing a lot of direct overlap on today's political and social issues, you're possibly being lazy and/or heavy-handed in your allegory. Now, with that said, I write in the future but live today, so it's impossible for my fiction to be entirely unaffected by the world I and my readers live in."

*The Collapsing Empire* is a space opera, a genre that hasn't been in fashion of late. However, this doesn't worry Scalzi. "I'm old enough to have seen three different eras of boy bands and am looking forward to what the next popular iteration of punk will be," he laughs. "Likewise, some years will be better for space opera than others. And even in 'down' years, there will still be good space opera being made and finding an audience. That's how it comes back!"

*The Collapsing Empire* is out on 23 March from Tor.



# VOYAGE TO THE STARS...

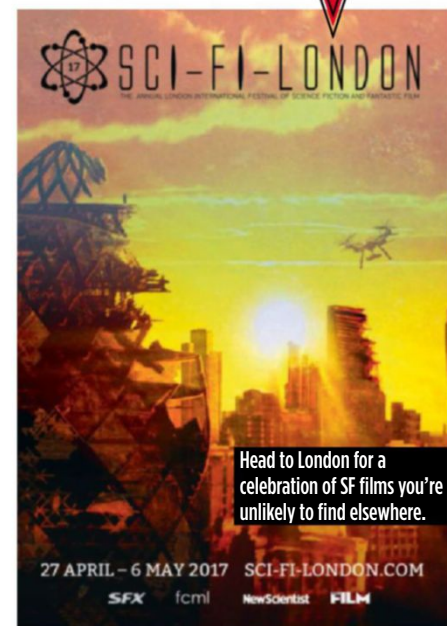
Get ready for **Sci-Fi-London** with its 48-Hour Filmmaking Challenge...

➔ Always fancied making the next great sci-fi film but never quite got around to it? Well, look no further than Sci-Fi-London, which returns next month with its one-and-only 48-hour filmmaking challenge – it should light a fire under the backsides of sci-fi creatives everywhere.

“The festival started primarily because there wasn’t anywhere for low-budget, interesting or foreign science fiction films,” says festival director, Louis Savy. “Its purpose was to show films that you’re not likely to see in the UK at all, or that are going to be difficult to get hold of.”

Before the main event kicks off on 27 April, the weekend of 8-10 April sees the latest instalment of the 48-Hour Film Challenge, where Sci-Fi-London challenges attendees to create a five-minute “microbuster” in just two days. Don’t worry, you don’t have to come up with it entirely on your own. You’ll be given a title for the film you have to make, plus a line of dialogue that must be included. You’ll also be handed a prop list that you’ll need to source as part of the two-day time period – plus an optional “science theme” to help get your synapses firing. It is a weekend, after all.

Armed with these elements, you’ll have to write, shoot, edit and deliver your complete film by Monday 10 April (like all the best filmmakers, you can count on a couple of sleepless nights). Previous winners include Gareth Edwards, who went



**DATE**  
8-10 April  
(Film challenge)  
27 April-6 May 2017  
(Festival)

**LOCATION**  
Stratford East  
Picturehouse

**DATE**  
From 1 March 2017

**LOCATION**  
South Bank,  
London

## BRICKING IT

DC’s comic heroes land in London...



➔ Hot on the heels of the release of *The Lego Batman Movie*, here’s a chance to get up close and personal with even more of DC’s superheroes and supervillains – all lovingly rendered in Lego form by artist Nathan Sawaya. Having already run to wild acclaim in Madrid, *The Art Of The Brick: DC Super Heroes* will land in an exclusively built space on London’s South Bank at the start of March, and will host a Batcave’s worth of art inspired by more than 80 years of Justice League history – expect Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman, plus the Joker and Harley Quinn, to make an appearance.

The immersive galleries will also showcase vehicles, environments and themes from the DC universe, with exhibitions aiming to transform and reinvent those well-known world-savers. With 120 original pieces created from Lego bricks, there’s even a life-size Batmobile, entirely constructed from half-a-million standard pieces. Expect to be wowed and then some. ●

Get more info about the exhibition at <http://bit.ly/DCLegoshow>.

on to a galaxy far, far away with *Rogue One*. The jury for this year’s competition includes author Pat Cadigan, BBC Radio 4’s Francine Stock and SFX’s very own Richard Edwards.

If filmmaking’s not your thing, there’s also the 48-Hour Flash Fiction challenge, which sets you the task of writing 2,000 words over the course of the weekend. As with the film challenge, you’ll be given a title, line of dialogue and optional science theme as a kicking-off point. Who needs JK Rowling? ●

<http://www.sci-fi-london.com>



Oscar Sharp’s *Sunspring* was created for the 2016 challenge.

## COMING UP

### STOKE CON TRENT

9 April  
Now in its sixth year, the genre con welcomes Sophie Aldred, Doug Naylor and a host of *Star Wars* players to Staffordshire University.  
[www.stokecon.trent.co.uk](http://www.stokecon.trent.co.uk)

### INNOMINATE – EASTERCON

14-17 April  
It’s time for the 68th British National Science Fiction Convention at the volunteer-run, not-for-profit event at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel.  
[www.eastercon2017.uk](http://www.eastercon2017.uk)

### WHITBY GOTH WEEKEND

21-23 April  
Bram Stoker obviously penned *Dracula* here, which makes Whitby the perfect place for a grand hoo-ha. Steampunks, emos, bikers and – yes – goths all welcome.  
[www.whitbygothweekend.co.uk](http://www.whitbygothweekend.co.uk)

### HORRORCON UK

13-14 May  
Guests have yet to be confirmed, but if last year’s Sheffield line-up is anything to go by – Kane Hodder! Doug Bradley! – we should all be in for a treat.  
[www.horrorconventions.co.uk](http://www.horrorconventions.co.uk)

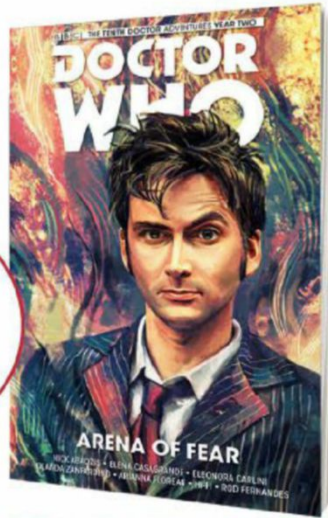
### MCM LONDON COMIC CON

26-28 May  
London’s Excel will once again be the setting for cosplayers, sci-fi stars and collectors as MCM returns. Hurrah!  
[www.mcmcomiccon.com/london](http://www.mcmcomiccon.com/london)



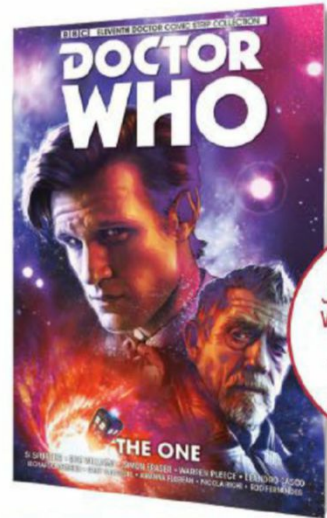
# BLOCKBUSTER GRAPHIC NOVELS FROM TITAN!

ALLONS-YI THE TENTH DOCTOR'S ADVENTURES CONTINUE INTO THE ARENA OF FEAR



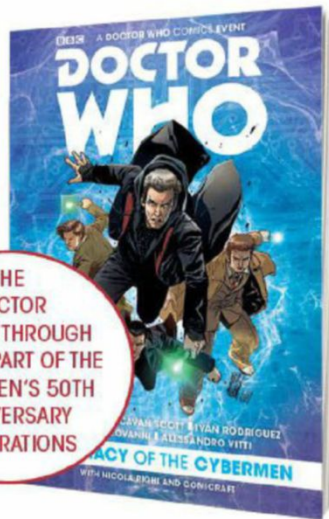
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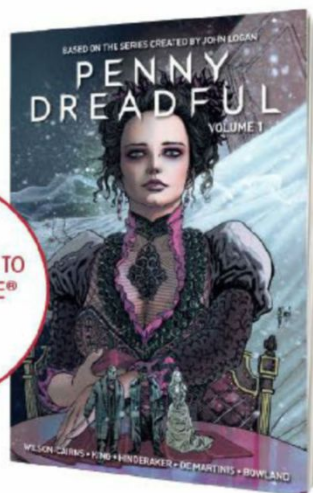
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Red Alert May 2017  
**Image Bank** Where pictures are greater than words

**SCI-FACT!** Thanos won't appear in *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 2* - but he'll be back in *Avengers: Infinity Wars*.



**SUPERFAN**

Meet Marco Zorzin. The Hertfordshire native has just soared into Guinness World Records as possessing the world's largest collection of Superman memorabilia - 1,518 items. Marco's been collecting for seven years, and says family and friends have helped him amass the stash. *Guinness World Records 2017: Blockbusters!* is out on 23 March.

**GIVE HIM A HAN**

"Han first shot," tweeted director Chris Miller at the end of January, with this snap from behind the scenes of the Han Solo movie. Yep, the Corellian's officially back in action, this time played by Alden Ehrenreich, with filming underway at Pinewood. The image has over 35k likes on Twitter at the time *SFX* went to press. The film smuggles its way into cinemas in 2018.

**GALAXY REQUEST**

Mix tapes, you say? In the world of sci-fi, that can only mean one thing - yes, this is the brand new one-sheet for *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 2*, featuring dusty old cassettes for each of the sequel's main characters. We don't know about you, but we're intrigued to find out what Yondu likes to listen to... *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 2* opens in cinemas on 28 April.



**SCI-FACT!** One of the episodes set for next year's season four is written entirely in iambic pentameter.



## NEWS WARP

### HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ Michael Douglas will return as Hank Pym in **Ant-Man And The Wasp**. Filming kicks off this summer.

→ **Richard Hatch**, Captain Apollo in the original *Battlestar Galactica* and Tom Zarek in the reboot, has passed away at the age of 71.

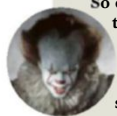
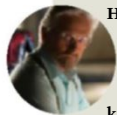
→ **Pandora: The World Of Avatar** will open at Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando on 27 May. Disney's **Star Wars** theme park opens in 2019.

→ Meryl Streep will play Mary Poppins's eccentric cousin Topsy in **Mary Poppins Returns**. → It will definitely be R-rated. "It is a scary clown that's trying to kill kids.

So of course that's going to be a rated-R movie," says the movie's

producer, Dan Lin. → Johannes Roberts (F) will direct **The Strangers 2**.

→ RL Stine is penning a new **Man-Thing** comic for Marvel, with German Peralta on illustration duties.



After-work drinks are never a good idea.



**CREATOR EXCLUSIVE**

## 9 LIVES

BBC Two's horror anthology is back for a third shocking season. Red Alert goes **Inside No 9...**

→ If the **Inside No 9** Christmas special left you desperate for more twisted tales, you're in luck – the five remaining episodes of season three are primed and ready to air on BBC Two this month.

Created by Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton – the *League Of Gentlemen* veterans behind the similarly sinister *Psychoville* – *Inside No 9* has proved to be an enduring hit for the BBC. "It's just thrilling to be doing an anthology, because you don't really get them any more," Shearsmith tells Red Alert. "We can do anything we want."

Indeed, the new season is typically diverse. Where "The Devil Of Christmas" was filmed in an old-fashioned manner using period cameras to perfectly pastiche 1970s

horror TV, the new episodes include a restaurant argument that goes to bloody extremes; a man's life unravelling after he finds a lost shoe, and the crossword-themed "The Riddle Of The Sphinx" – possibly the darkest thing the duo have ever written.

"We're not sadists," deadpans Pemberton when asked why the pair seem to glean such pleasure for putting their characters through the wringer. "Something big has to be at stake and because they're one-offs, something has to happen at the end that turns things on its head."

That said, the pair are keen to point out that it's not all doom and gloom – this is a comedy, after all. "We're aware that this season has gone quite dark," he continues. "You can fall into a trap of thinking that's what people expect – but we like to subvert expectations." Season four, then, will be "less harrowing" – if perhaps only a little. "The new series, which we start filming in a few weeks, is much lighter," says Shearsmith. "Though people might not agree with us on that when they've seen it," grins Pemberton. ●

*Inside No 9* airs on BBC Two.

“DON'T QUOTE ME”

“OUR EASTER EGG OBSESSION IS INSANE. WE HAVE SO MANY INCREDIBLY OBSCURE EASTER EGGS IN THIS MOVIE IT'S RIDICULOUS.”

James Gunn confirms we should keep our eyes peeled during *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 2*.







Nick Setchfield's

## DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



ROCK ON!

### BLACK ADAM

Can you smell what the Rock is cooking? If so, you may just catch a faint whiff of lightning. **Dwayne Johnson** was all set to embody the original Captain Marvel's arch-nemesis Black Adam in a *Shazam* movie for Warner Bros. Now he's jumped from that project to headline the bolt-tossing rogue's own solo movie – which, as

hero-shaming coups go, is a bit like the Joker beating Batman to the screen. Debuting in the comic books in 1945, Black Adam is an ancient Egyptian named Teth-Adam, granted magical powers by the wizard Shazam. He's a bad 'un, of course, but the film will play up his antihero credentials, echoing recent DCU stories where he's battling the enslavers of his people. Johnson promises "Hope,

optimism and fun... even when talking about the most ruthless/antihero of all time finally coming to life." We just earwormed ourselves singing the title to the *Blackadder* theme...

### WHO'S IN TO BAT?

#### THE BATMAN

**Ben Affleck** won't direct the *Batman* movie after all. While he's

still committed to wearing the cape, he's resolved to keep his face strictly one side of the lens. "There are certain characters who hold a special place in the hearts of millions," he recently told America in a fireside address. "Performing the role demands focus, passion and the very best performance I can give. It has become clear that I cannot do both jobs to the level they require. Together with the



studio, I have decided to find a partner in a director who will collaborate with me on this massive film." Current frontrunners are rumoured to include *Arrival*'s **Denis Villeneuve**, *Mad Max* master **George Miller** – please god, yes – and *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* helmer **Matt Reeves**. **Kevin Smith**, meanwhile, has ruled himself out, despite a Twitter campaign by stoned fans. "I'm flattered," he says, "but three things make me directing *Batman* impossible: 1) haven't spoken to Ben in years; 2) I made *Yoga Hosers*; 3) common sense."

## THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH!

### BOND 25

⊕ He's had his knackers lashed and threatened by lasers, dodged Oddjob's razor-edged bowler and escaped the clap on an hourly basis. But now James Bond is squaring up to his most lethal opponent yet: the real world. "I'm not sure how you would go about writing a James Bond film now," says **Neal Purvis**, co-writer alongside **Robert Wade** of every big screen mission since 1999's *The World Is Not Enough*. "Each time you've got to say something about Bond's place in the world, which is Britain's place in the world. But things are moving so quickly now, that becomes tricky. With people like Trump, the Bond villain has become a reality. So when they do another one, it will be interesting to see how they deal with the fact that the world has become a fantasy." Purvis won't rule out a return to Her Majesty's secret service: "Never say never, but for sure *SPECTRE* felt like it closed off a certain way of doing Bond. And I think whatever happens next will be quite different." *The Man With The Golden Elevator*, anyone?

## FREE YOUR MIND!

### DOCTOR STRANGE 2

⊕ Crushed by the daily tedium of three dimensions? Itching for another fix of *Doctor Strange*'s mind-expanding properties? Director **Scott Derrickson** promises that any potential sequel will feed your head. "The alternate dimensions and possibilities of the



→ **Fleabag**'s **Phoebe Waller-Bridge** orbiting the Han Solo movie... **Michael Bay** producing dystopia tale *Little America*... **Julius Avery** directing WWII horror *Overlord* for Paramount and *Bad Robot*... **Brenton Thwaites** starring in rival WWII horror *Ghosts Of War*... **Blink-182**'s **Tom DeLonge** directing paranormal-and-skateboarders tale *Strange Times*, based on his own YA trilogy... **David Fincher** rumoured to be interested in directing *World War Z 2*... **Joby Harold** rewriting *The Flash*... **The Lure**'s **Agnieszka Smoczynska** adapting **David Bowie**'s *1.Outside* album as *Deranged*... **Nicole Kidman**, **Temuera Morrison** and **Yahya Abdul-Mateen** in the frame for *Aquaman*... *Stranger Things*' **Millie Bobby Brown** joining *Godzilla: King Of The Monsters*, directed by **Michael Dougherty**... *Epic Movie*'s **Jason Friedberg** and **Aaron Seltzer** planning *Star Wars* spoof... **Jennifer Connelly** joining *Alita: Battle Angel*... *Avatar* sequels begin filming in August... **Karen Gillan** back for *Avengers: Infinity War*... **Thomas Jane** in talks for *Predator* reboot...



## “With people like Trump, the Bond villain has become a reality”

multiverse that we set up with the first film already give limitless possibilities," he tells *Coming Soon*. "The goal would not be to underutilise that, or to create something that was less innovative than the first *Doctor Strange*. The comics, especially the Lee/Ditko comics, were always pushing into unexpectedly weird places and storylines." But you may have to wait a while... "Right now I don't think the people at Marvel are calling anybody for anything." **Derrickson** tells *Entertainment Weekly*. "They're making way too many movies at once right now [to do that]." Marvel has three as yet untitled movies squatting in 2020. Could one of them be *Doctor Strange 2*? Alas the All-Seeing Eye of Agamotto is cloudy...

## BLAME IT ON THE BOOGEYMAN!

### HALLOWEEN

⊕ As the original *Halloween* tagline told us, "The trick is to stay alive". Now comes further compelling evidence that the slashy franchise itself is laughing in the face of the pathologist. Four decades after loosing **Michael Myers** upon the world, **John Carpenter** is back in the fold, serving as executive producer on a new version of every babysitter's favourite date flick. It's set to be brought to the screen by the *Vice Principals* team of director **David Gordon Green** and comedian/actor **Danny McBride**. "David and Danny both came to my office recently with [producer] **Jason Blum** and shared their vision for the new movie and... Wow. They get it," says **Carpenter**. "I think you're gonna dig it. They blew me away." **Carpenter** was so blown away he hints he may even bust out his *Moog* and do the score... Look for

shuffling, Shatner-masked doom to arrive on 19 October 2018.

## WHEELS OF FORTUNE!

### MORTAL ENGINES

⊕ The cast is aligning for **Peter Jackson**'s next stab at a sprawling, book-based fantasy saga. **Hera Hilmar** from *Da Vinci's Demons* has scored the female lead – she'll play scarred, vengeance-driven **Hester Shaw** – while **Robbie Sheehan**, smart-mouthed **Nathan** in *Misfits*, is **Tom Natsworthy**, the protagonist of **Philip Reeve**'s high-concept quartet of novels. Set thousands of years in the future, it's a world where Earth's cities trundle across the globe on giant wheels, battling each other for ever-diminishing resources. Come back, Barack Obama! **Jackson**'s producing alongside Middle-earth veterans **Fran Walsh** and **Philippa Boyens** with all three collaborating on the screenplay. **Filming**'s about to get underway in New Zealand – where else? – ahead of a 14 December 2018 release. Weta FX man **Christian Rivers** directs.

## JEDI HARDER!

### STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI

⊕ So now we know: *Episode VIII* of the *Star Wars* saga is *The Last Jedi*. Singular? Plural? Or just hot lightsaber action set to the easy listening sounds of **James Last** and **His Orchestra**? If only we knew. But we can tell you that despite being the middle chapter of a trilogy it won't take an *Empire*-style turn to the dark side. "I want it to be a blast and to be funny and to be a ride the way *The Force Awakens* and the original *Star Wars* movies were," director **Rian Johnson** tells *USA Today*. Expect some serious character-building for the new generation of heroes: "I wanted to know more about each of them, and that doesn't just mean information or backstory... [I figured] out what's the most difficult thing each of them could be challenged with now. Let's throw that at them and dig into what really makes them tick by seeing how they handle that." **Ruddy sadist**. ●



Illustration by Paul Cemmick



//// SFX HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN! ////

# First Contact



## THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

**IAN BERRIMAN,**  
REVIEWS EDITOR



It's a rather backwards-facing batch of reader comments

this month, though for understandable reasons. Firstly, with *Buffy The Vampire Slayer's* 20th birthday looming (on 9 March) we asked for your memories of the show. Cue a mass outpouring of love! *Star Wars'* 40th anniversary and the sad passing of John Hurt also put you in the mood for reminiscence.

Got some cutting-edge, up-to-the-minute comments about the SF&F of 2017 to make? Then drop us a line – you could see your name in the next issue!

## SFX Hot Topic Your views on the month's big issue

### #20 YEARS OF BUFFY

🔗 **Daniel Langrish-Beard, email** My new neighbour lent me the *Buffy* season one VHS box set.

Months later it was gathering dust. Then my boyfriend of seven years ran off with another guy. I was heartbroken, and signed off work. That box set called out to me... 12 hours later I was banging on the neighbour's door, asking for seasons two and three! It got me through one of the most difficult times of my life.

🔗 **Rob Horrock, email** The metaphorical aspect, with most of the monsters symbolising things people go through in real life, still works really well – people will always face these issues, no matter how much time passes.

🔗 **Allan Moverley, email** Just finished rewatching the entire series with my 10- and 12-year-old

sons, and it's now their favourite show as well. Special mention must go to Nicholas Brendon as Xander, who provides the real heart of the show; he proved to be my sons' favourite.

🔗 **SFX I'm doing a rewatch right now (@ianberriman #Buffyrewatch, if you fancy it) and am falling in love all over again. Some of the fashions are hideous, but the scripts are evergreen.**

🔗 **Tania Rahman, email** I got hooked during season two. I was really impressed by Angel turning evil – it was the first time I'd seen a major character's storyline change that drastically.

🔗 **Dean Orobia Basilio, Facebook** My favourite season was five. It could have ended with that and spared us the train-wreck of Buffy's dysfunctional relationship with Spike...

🔗 **Medium Atomic Weight, email** My fondest *Buffy* memories all consist of Vampire Willow and a pause button.

🔗 **Mary Bicknell, Birmingham** I still happily, loudly

The best group of the '90s?





## Get in touch!

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“The show taught me that being who you are was okay”

(and very out of key) sing my heart out to my “Once More With Feeling” CD when I’m doing housework!

👉 **BernhardVienna, Twitter** After a bad day, I only need to watch “Once More, With Feeling” and I immediately feel better. Works every time!

👉 **Thomas Huartson, Facebook** Season three’s “The Zeppo” blew me away. It’s this episode where Xander becomes a man. He realises fear will never stop him helping his friends, and the audience are reaffirmed that he was the glue that held the gang together. That’s when the Buffy-verse truly began.

**SFX That’s one of my favourites! The way it flips the usual A-plot and B-plot is so very clever.**

👉 **Stephen Aidan Wright, Facebook** Buffy got me through my childhood. Underneath the supernatural were just normal people struggling with teenage life. The show taught me that being who you are was okay.

👉 **Keon Woong Lee, Facebook** Buffy’s the series that made me be a feminist – that showed me it’s better to stand for something and fight against the forces of evil, from the obvious monsters to subtle human behaviour.

👉 **Ellie Parker, Brisbane Buffy** taught me so much about life, love and loss. It took me a long time to “come out” as a nerd, and Buffy was there to help me embrace that and feel happy about it!

👉 **Michela M, email** One of the things that helped me pull through the hardest time of my life (my father’s recent passing) was the “Once More, With Feeling” soundtrack. It may be just a TV show, but it managed to say it all – both for the younger me and the current me in her forties. She saved the world, a lot – and I think she’s still saving it, for many fans.

👉 **Curtis Jobling, Twitter** My wife and I met one another on a Buffy fans messageboard!

👉 **Helen Hitchcock, email** My daughter’s nickname is B. I deliberately chose a name that could be shortened to that!

**SFX Hmm, I wonder many humans now walking the Earth were conceived thanks to Joss Whedon?**



Memories are made of this.

Look out for the next SFX Hot Topic at [bit.ly/SFXhottopic](http://bit.ly/SFXhottopic)



## #A FORCE FOR GOOD

👉 **Steve Coffey, email** A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away – well, London, 1982 – an eight-year old boy saw the ad for *Star Wars*: “Coming to the small screen, this October”. It’s his first sight of Luke, Han, the Falcon and Vader. The weeks in the build-up to Sunday 24 October were spent talking about *Star Wars*, dreaming about it, and staring at the figures in the local toy emporium. By the day before the greatest TV event of 1982 he’d amassed quite a collection of figures – well, four! 2-1B, Imperial Commander, Luke Skywalker and – that Saturday morning – a Leia in Hoth gear.

It was up early with excitement on the Sunday. Dad took his son to the park – anything to fill the long hours before the movie. He distracted him with a game of football, a comic, a roast dinner... and ultimately by collapsing and dying.

The next few hours was a tear-streaked storm of hospitals, grief and family. When the world returned to focus he was sat at his uncle’s with two cousins for company, with the movie about to start. The opening crawl started and the boy was lost in a new world of Jedi and aliens. The next

day he was bought an AT-AT and IG-88 by the kindly uncle, and his journey to this new world was complete. The boy remained lost in it for the next three years.

Do I know what happened to this little boy? Of course I do, he’s me. Time moved on and life followed with it. Toys were packed away, lost or sold (even that Leia). New worlds were discovered: music, girls, pubs, work, travel, parenthood. Thirty-five years later there are now two small boys. I thought I’d been obsessed with *Star Wars*, but my sons are more so. I took them to *Star Wars Celebration* last summer. They loved every second – and I reconnected with something that had lain dormant for decades. It’s *Star Wars’* 40th now, and I finally have a man cave that I could store a collection in. I think you know where this is going...

**SFX Great letter, Steve – thanks for sharing. Both this and readers’ Buffy memories have reminded me how much comfort SF&F movies and TV can provide during difficult times. Don’t bankrupt yourself filling that man cave! →**







Walking away from that big blue box...



The late John Hurt as Winston Smith in the 1984 film of 1984.

## #WHO'S NEXT?

🔗 **Ian Salisbury, Facebook** I'm disappointed Peter Capaldi is leaving *Doctor Who* – I was hoping he'd break the three-season cycle, and it would have been interesting to see an actor play the part under two different showrunners (which hasn't happened since Tom Baker... unless you count Sylvester McCoy's 20 minutes in the TV movie!). I thought he was terrific in the role, easily the best since the relaunch. His comedic timing is faultless and he reminds me more of the Doctors I grew up with. As for who could replace him, I've long advocated Timothy Spall – but I doubt he'd be interested!

🔗 **James Newman, Facebook** I've enjoyed Peter Capaldi as the Doctor, but feel he's been let down by poor creative decisions and some mediocre and forgettable stories. He's a fantastic actor and has embodied the spirit of the character while, at times, being bogged down by poor attempts at quirkiness (sonic sunglasses, an electric guitar) which left me cold. As for the next actor, I have

no idea! I'm more excited about the new creative team.

🔗 **Michael Lupton, Facebook** I'm really disappointed. Capaldi has been consistently brilliant – a successful combination of classic mystery and gravitas with new-style kook and oddness.

“Heaven Sent”, “Flatline” and “Listen” are among my top episodes ever. I was hoping that Capaldi's early comments about rivalling Our Lord Tom of Baker's epic run would come to pass.

I just hope that he hasn't been “squeezed out” in some way – that would be such a betrayal of a keen, vocal, enthusiastic ambassador for the show.

I like the idea that Paul McGann could get a second crack at it – not as the same incarnation, but in a “revisiting some old favourites” way, as hinted at by the Curator in “The Day Of The Doctor”.

🔗 **Ben Dawson, Facebook** His first series will go down like Colin Baker's did, ruining his chances of ever being a Doctor



“ I hope he hasn't been ‘squeezed out’ in some way ”

loved by the masses. Such a crying shame when Capaldi has such a love for the series himself and of the fans that contact him.

As for my choice of next Doctor? If it *has* to be a known face (personally, I think they should do a Lloyd-Webber style contest to pick a Doctor from a range of unknowns) then I think it's time for the Doctor to be ginger and for Rupert Grint to get the part!

**SFX** *Though I warmed to Capaldi's Doctor eventually (and think he's a great actor) I am inclined to agree that they over-compensated by making him so brusque and apparently uncaring in his first year. First impressions count. Phoebe Waller-Bridge next, please!*

## #HURT FEELINGS

🔗 **Neil Hickman, Facebook** Sad to hear of the death of John Hurt. Though

he only appeared on TV once, the War Doctor instantly won me over as Steven Moffat's “mayfly” Doctor. Hurt invested the role with such world-weariness, but with just enough twinkle in his eyes that you could believe this man was as much the Doctor as any other incarnation, despite his own protests to the contrary. And of course his death scene in *Alien* has gone down in genre history.

🔗 **Richard Hayden, Facebook**

While I enjoyed his work everywhere I came across it, it was the voiceover work he did in the '70s that most resonated with me as a child. To this day, I can clearly hear his Hazel in *Watership Down* and his Aragorn in *The Lord Of The Rings*.

🔗 **David Bickerstaff, Facebook**

I had the privilege of interviewing John Hurt on stage last year.

Before we were due to go on he said, “How are you?” My reply was “Hungover to hell”. He giggled and said, “Ah the good old days!” with such a naughty gleam in his eyes!

**SFX** *John Hurt had such a rich and varied career that it almost seems trivial to focus on his genre credits – but hell, we are a sci-fi mag! I thought his harrowing performance as Winston Smith in 1984 was immaculate.*

## #THE NAME GAME

🔗 **Mark Howe, email** Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once. The aliens in the *Alien* film series are *not* called Xenomorphs! They are referred to as xenomorphs (note the lower case x) just once in *Aliens*. This isn't the name of their species, just a term used to describe non-earth lifeforms – similar to calling an alien an extra-terrestrial.



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"Safe In Silence", Six Nations weekends, BB-8 cake, Reading crawl, Avebury stones

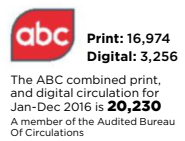


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"My porn name is Alderaan Cruiser."



## Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

→ Tom Jenkins says: "I can't remember where it came from, but I have a shiny gold C-3PO Lego minifig. I'd never thought anything of it - I'd just assumed it was an ordinary bit of Lego - until someone mentioned to me the other day that it was limited edition and might be worth something. I'd love to know if I've inadvertently got something special! Should I have left it in the packet?!"



### KATHY TAYLOR OF VECTIS SAYS:

Lego minifigures were first marketed in 1978. These tiny anthropomorphised toys are often highly collectable - their *Star Wars* range appeals to both Lego and *Star Wars* collectors alike.

In 2007, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Star Wars*, Lego randomly included a gold chrome-plated C-3PO protocol droid minifig in 10,000 *Star Wars* playsets. The figures were sealed in opaque white plastic bags - the bag states: "Congratulations you have found one of 10,000 limited edition Lego C-3POs!" It is also marked with the number 4521221. A still-sealed example commands a much higher price than when loose - in poor condition it would be worth £100-150, while bagged versions can be valued between £300-£600.

**NB** This is not to be confused with the 14k gold figure that was awarded as a prize to only five winners in a competition held by Lego in 2007.

Somehow the Xenomorph thing has stuck, probably because people keep perpetuating the error. Giving the aliens a name demystifies them. What next - individual names? "This is my pet Xeno, I call him Face biter. I've had him since he was a burster?" **SFX** *This is something we've debated at length over the years, and is a deliberate decision rather than being born out of ignorance. Problem is, referring to the creatures as Aliens (or aliens) can be terribly vague in many contexts! Whereas using the popular term for them makes things crystal clear. What we really need is for Ridley Scott to give the species a definitive name!*

### #WE ALSO HEARD FROM

👉 **Emma Rockley**, email Carrie Fisher appearing on the cover of *SFX* (issue 283) reduced me to tears again. To me, Leia was up there with sci-fi's great heroines. Carrie imbued all her characters with the fierce intelligence and honesty she possessed in real life. She will be missed.

**SFX** *Sorry to make you blub! Hope you liked our tribute in SFX 284.*

👉 **Mike Garner**, *Moorends Colony* season two's first episode is quite possibly the worst single episode of any show that I've seen - and I watched *Do No Harm!* It's boring, which for a show about alien invasion is unforgivable. I'm now routing for the aliens!

**SFX** *Bit harsh, Mike! Have you been possessed by the spirit of Comic Book Guy?*

👉 **Nicki Zero**, email Is it just me or has anybody else noticed that the Stormtrooper poster for the *Star Wars Identities* exhibition looks like a Koala when viewed upside-down?

**SFX** *Er, now that you mention it...*



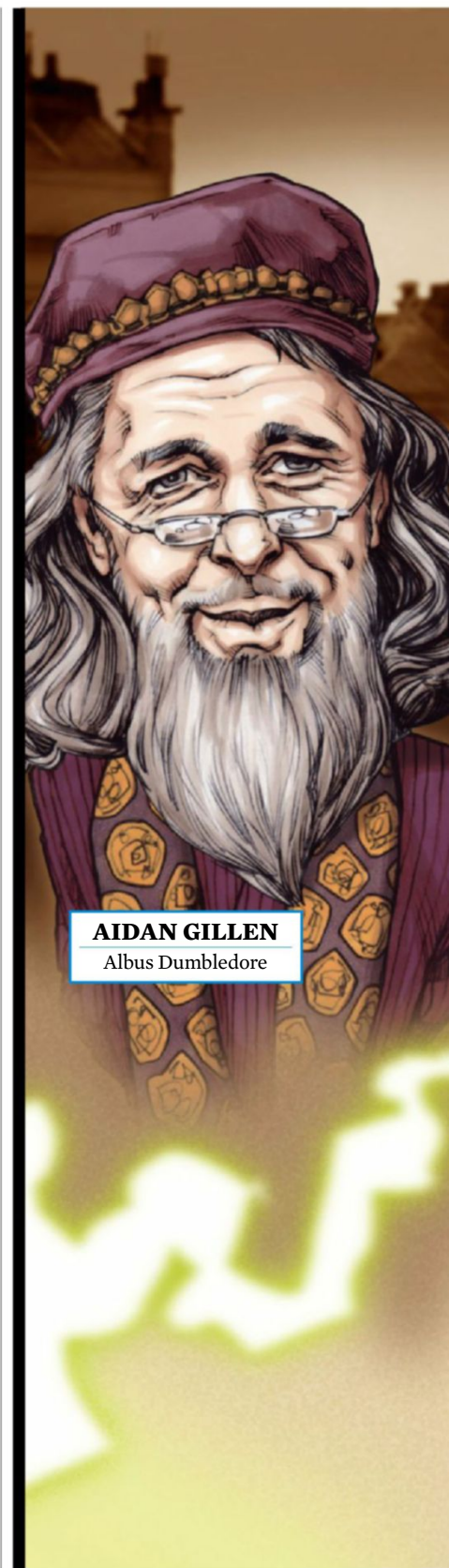
Turn mag upside down for Stormtrooper pic.



## FANTASTIC BEASTS 2



JK Rowling's prequel took a bite of the Big Apple, but where should the series head next? *Illustration by Paul Garner*



**AIDAN GILLEN**  
Albus Dumbledore

### YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

**HEY, JK! SFX READERS HAVE ISSUED THEIR DEMANDS. CONJURE UP THIS LITTLE LOT, OR WE'LL SEND THE DEMENTORS ROUND!**

#### AROUND THE WORLD

**1** Director David Yates has already confirmed that *Fantastic Beasts 2* will be "European-centric" and visit Paris and the UK. Good job, because leaving New York was one of your most common demands. "This is a chance to explore whole new areas of the Wizard world," said **James Kelly**. "Let's see some of them!" **Shannon Burns** agreed: "More countries! Let's see France, Germany, Spain..."

#### JOHNNY BE GONE!

**2** Poor old Johnny Depp, as Dexys Midnight Runners almost sang. Whatever the reason, something has turned a lot of you against the actor. **Chris Thomson** spoke for many when he said, "Recast Johnny Depp. His flamboyant Grindelwald could destabilise the entire franchise!"

#### GRINDELWALD (OR DUMBLEWALD?)

**3** Whether you like it or not, Depp will have a starring role in *FB2*. Way back in

2007 JK Rowling revealed that Dumbledore once fell in love with the dark wizard, but was "terribly let down". **Louis Butler** said: "Exploration of Grindelwald and Dumbledore's relationship please!"

#### DON'T GO TOO DARK

**4** The *Potter* series got darker as it progressed – will *Fantastic Beasts* do the same? There's obviously the potential to do so, given Grindelwald's role, but **David Tile** isn't keen. "I'm looking forward to seeing how Grindelwald fits into Newt's story, but I really hope they don't go too dark. The first film struck the perfect balance."

#### MORE NIFFLERS!

**5** Newt Scamanga's playful pet was a big hit, it seems, with several requests to see more of the shiny-thing-loving rodents. "I would like to see *Fantastic Beasts 2: Attack Of The Nifflers*," declared **Natasha Francis**. Failing that, a suitcase full of something equally adorable would probably keep you satisfied.

### And that's not all they want... ↓

- **Orange Car** What about Aidan Gillen for Dumbledore? At 48 he's not much younger than Depp, and he'd lend the character that darker edge we associate with the younger Albus.
- **Stuart Griffiths** Rufus Sewell would be great, I think.
- **Olivia Francies** Nothing less than a JK Rowling cameo!
- **Amber Howard** A dedication to John Hurt would be nice.
- **Mia Whitehouse** More Jacob and Queenie – they were the best things about *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*.
- **Chris Noble** It needs a decent reason to continue the story – it can't just be Newt Scamander having some screwball adventure

- before stumbling into an epic battle with Gellert Grindelwald.
- **Ian Fairbrother** Make a film that's better paced and more, you know, properly entertaining.
- **Jack Adams** Let's have a catch up with the authors of other key Hogwarts textbooks.
- **Cameron Stephenson** Quidditch!
- **Ewan Hayes** More exploration of magical culture in the US (and possibly elsewhere).
- **Abigail Owens** I want to find out what happened between Newt and Leta Lestrange!
- **Emily Brown** Less reliance on retconning existing *Harry Potter* lore – especially the mentioned relationship between Dumbledore and Grindelwald.

- **Keira Shaw** I hope the next film won't feel like someone's tried to squish together *Ace Ventura* and *Gangs Of New York*...
- **Seb George** Follow up Newt and Tina's relationship (JK Rowling has implied that she's Newt's wife by the time he writes the *Fantastic Beasts* textbook).
- **Katie Hebden** As long as they keep coming up with more inventive (and cute) beasts I'm happy with whatever JK and co want to do. Plus, surely the Niffler is due his own spin-off movie?!
- **James Daykin** More Johnny Depp – never thought I'd say that!
- **Ronnie Beaton** If the story is set in winter, how about the actors and actresses actually looking cold?



**YOUR DREAM CAST**



**JOHNNY DEPP**  
Gellert Grindelwald

**JK ROWLING**  
Minister for Magic

**EDDIE REDMAYNE**  
Newt Scamander

**KATHERINE WATERSTON**  
Porentina Goldstein





# Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

## TFI NOT FRIDAY

Friends! Dreadites! It is a time of great victory for us. Our silent clamouring call has been (un)heard and we have changed history with our lack of a voice. As you will all definitely remember, a year or two ago (I have no concept of time) a new **Friday The 13th** movie was announced. Breck Eisner was to direct. There was some talk of it being found footage. And then it was going to be an origin story. And I was not happy. Friends, you will all for certain have it burnt in your minds that we had an agreement. I promised not to write another word about the film if you promised not to see it or promote it in anyway. I took your silence as consent. And now our protest have come to fruition. It's been knocked off the schedule with no plan to reinstate. We should all be quietly pleased with ourselves.

## EXTREME VETTING

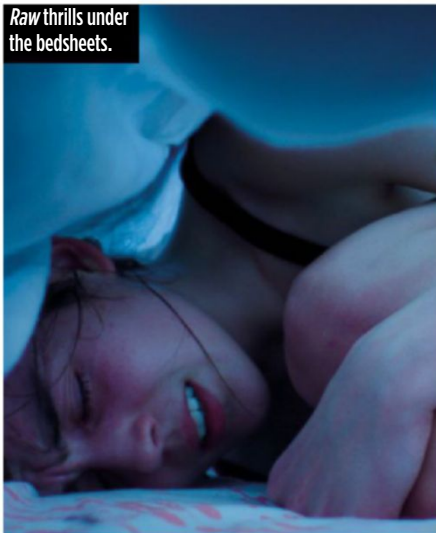
A thing I want to talk about incessantly however is **Raw**. I know it's only March but I am quite sure this is going to be one of my films of 2017. It's a French/Belgian production about a woman just starting out at veterinary school who discovers she has a taste for human flesh, just like her elder sister. **Raw** screened at festivals and became vaguely notorious after reports of faintings and walkouts. I promise you it really isn't that bad at all; instead it's an absolutely gorgeous, angry, intelligent coming of age tale about dark desires which has a very female narrative, and some really striking images. It's actually very funny too. See this!

## BINGE EATING

I crammed the entire series of **Santa Clarita Diet** in one day. It's great. This is the Drew Barrymore/Timothy Olyphant Netflix comedy which I almost completely ignored until I learned that it wasn't some hideous women's "lifestyle" show, and was in fact a zombie comedy. In episode one husband and wife realtors Barrymore and Olyphant are showing a couple around a house when inexplicably, lovely sunshiney Drew starts puking everywhere. It's disgusting, it's funny, and later in the series it gets a bit *Breaking Bad*/*Dexter*/*Pushing Daisies*/*Desperate Housewives*. Which

## Hairballs, cannibals and the satisfaction of a campaign well run

Raw thrills under the bedsheets.



All kitted out for the Santa Clarita Diet.

is ace. Shout-out too for the influx of female character zombies. This was a thing I noticed in 2014 when *Life After Beth* came out – okay *Dead Girl* is a thing, but from *Bub* to *Colin* to *Warm Bodies* and beyond I could only think of guy zombies. Not so now! With **iZombie** airing too, girls are ruling the undead world.

## BAD HABITS

I have mixed emotions about the **Conjuring** Cinematic Universe (the CCU). I'm so-so on the first one, liked the second and despised *Annabelle*. But now Corin Hardy has signed up to direct the scary nun spin-off (currently titled **The Nun**). His *The Hallow* is excellent, very frightening at times, and though the end goes a bit fantasy, he handles tension with panache. So, what, am I going to have to like this now? And with the director of *Lights Out* doing **Annabelle 2**, am I going to have to like that as well? Urgh. Good directors are the worst.

## HAIR TODAY

I've seen two films this month where young women cough up massive hairballs. *Raw* is one. The other is **Rings**. In case you were in any doubt, it's glossy but pointless. But one thing the stinky opening weekend of *Rings* did do is potentially have an influence on distributor Paramount deciding to ditch their other franchise reboot, the aforementioned *Friday The 13th*. The end of *Rings* heavily hints at a sequel which I now don't want. I propose, then, that we all agree not to talk about **Rings 2**. Say nothing if you're with me! ●

## Dreadful things to do

Become a horror movie maker, with help from Clive Barker! The *Books Of Blood* creator and *Hellraiser* director is running a competition to find a new horror director – candidates should upload a 1-3 minute pitch to <http://bit.ly/sfxbarker> – the winner will get \$300,000 and Barker as exec producer. You've got until 17 March.







# FORGET HEISENBERG...

Author **Charlie Fletcher** on uncertainty in changing times

Watney in *The Martian* had a properly unsure future...



“UNCERTAINTY HAS TO BE PART OF A TRULY CREATIVE PROCESS. AND NOT FEARED”

**know writers are not alone in finding it hard to concentrate on** the day job in what are – at the moment of writing and for the foreseeable future – uncertain times. Too much news, too much media, too much craziness. Plus why’s anyone going to read fiction when clearly reality needs to be focused on and fixed? Isn’t it just irresponsible escapism to bury yourself in a book in the face of all this uncertainty?

Uncertainty itself is a central pleasure of reading. We are gripped by hopes and misgivings about the ultimate fate of characters we have come to care about. (Will Mark Watney ever get off Mars in *The Martian*? Will William Mandella survive the Forever War? Will Lyra defeat the Magisterium in *His Dark Materials*?) The empathetic leap of imagination that has us care about the fortunes of fictional characters not only provides the hook that pulls you through a story, it crucially expands and exercises that most simple and important human skill, the ability to walk in another’s shoes. In a time of political polarisation that’s a vital thing: to be able to look beyond our own digital silo or listen to voices outside the echo chamber and see that the “other” has a point of view that needs to be engaged with.

Uncertainty is also an integral part of the process of writing. For me the real pleasure of the job is what happens in the blank spaces in your original outline, the exhilaration that comes from knowing where you’re going but not the precise route you’re going to take. Uncertainty is where serendipity blooms, the surprises you give yourself with characters or situations you hadn’t planned to create, but who become a vital part of your finished story, a story that would have been a lesser thing without them (there’s a character in my *Oversight* books who began on the dark side and who ends up somewhere the author absolutely didn’t intend at the outset, and the series is infinitely richer because of it). Uncertainty has to be part of a truly creative process. And not feared. Shaping uncertainty and coping with it *is* the job. And not just the job of a writer. It’s universal in its application.

So, as a reader and a writer, I say forget Heisenberg; when it comes to an Uncertainty Principle, I’m going with Le Guin, as laid out in *The Left Hand Of Darkness*: “The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next.”

When we think things are settled and safe – indeed when we bind ourselves to that comforting illusion called certainty – we’re only blinding ourselves to the inevitability of change. Entropy doesn’t sleep any more than rust does. Imagined futures, alternate realities, magical histories – all, if done well and read right, keep our minds open and expand our capacity to embrace the “other” in whatever shape it comes. They not only help us figure out what kind of futures we should be trying to avoid but also the better ones we could be working to make a reality. And anything that helps us do that is good. Because if we don’t choose where we want to go, the only certainty is we’re going to end up somewhere we didn’t intend to be. And that’s rarely optimal. ●

*The Remnant, the third book in Charlie Fletcher’s Oversight trilogy, is out on 16 March.*



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# WATERSHIP DOWN

by Richard Adams, 1972

**Benedict Jacka** on why the tale of rabbits on the run is a fantasy classic



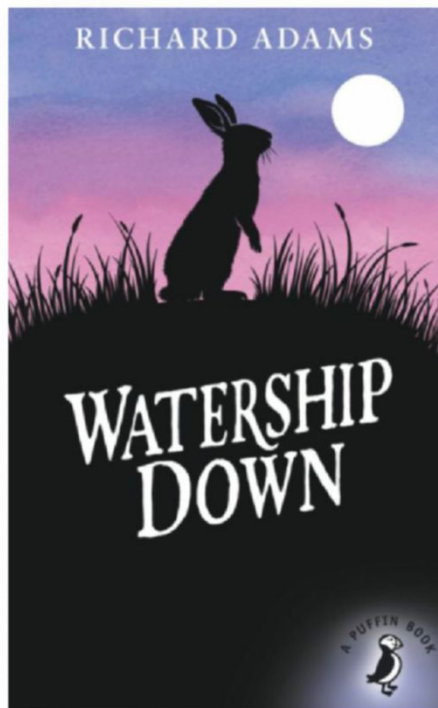
*“All the world will be your enemy, Prince with a Thousand Enemies, and when they catch you, they will kill you. But first they must catch you.”*

– The Blessing of El-Ahrrairah

One of the funnier bait-and-switches you can do to someone unfamiliar with *Watership Down* is to make them think it’s a children’s book. You tell them that it’s about a group of talking rabbits who go on a journey and have adventures (which is all strictly true) then wait for them to read it. They’ll be surprised, to put it mildly... though possibly unpleasantly so if they’re the nervous type.

In my case I didn’t come to the book with any expectations at all because I had it read to me when I was young. I loved it from the very first page, everything from the rabbit world and language to the quotations at the start of every chapter that related the struggles and situations of the protagonists to events out of classics and history. The characters were classic archetypes – the leader, the warrior, the prophet – as were many of the dangers they faced. I’d never heard the phrase “lotus-eaters” before reading *Watership Down*, but when I ran across it many years later I understood it instantly by relating it back to that chapter.

The best way to think of *Watership Down* is as an epic fantasy quest much like Tolkien’s *The Lord Of The Rings* or Homer’s *The Odyssey*, except that instead of being set across Middle-earth or the Mediterranean, it’s set across a few miles of the English countryside. The small scale doesn’t make the story any less exciting; the protagonists might not be



Frodo or Odysseus, but the stakes they fight for are just as high. Starting off as a simple flight, the rabbits’ goal eventually becomes the founding of a new community, but their world is a harsh and dangerous one, where predators hunt them and death is never very far away. Much of *Watership Down* was drawn from Richard Adams’s own harsh experiences in World War II, and there are few books that capture so well the feeling of living under a constant threat. Mixed in with the (often grim)

struggle to stay alive are the stories of El-Ahrrairah, the core of the rabbit mythology, something of a cross between Robin Hood and a trickster demigod.

*Watership Down* has a uniquely broad appeal. Animal lovers and anyone with an affection for the English countryside will obviously take it to heart, but it’s also very popular among fans of epic fantasy or adventure stories. Like Tolkien, Adams specifically denied writing the book as any kind of allegory or parallel, yet that hasn’t stopped groups of all kinds from reading their own narratives into the novel: the struggles of Hazel and his band have been identified with the fight against fascism, communism, materialism, the corporate state, and many more. The themes of the book are so universal that members of practically every culture can relate in some way or another. The book is also a study of leadership – Hazel was based on Adams’s WWII commanding officer, who apparently always said please when he gave Adams an order.

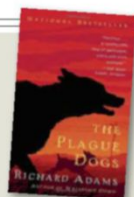
Richard Adams passed away in December 2016, barely a month prior to the writing of this piece, at the age of 96. He was survived by the two daughters who were the book’s original audience: he told them the stories that would one day become *Watership Down* during a series of long car journeys. ●

*Bound, Benedict Jacka’s latest Alex Verus novel, is out on 4 April.*

**Like this? Try these!**

**THE PLAGUE DOGS**  
by RICHARD ADAMS (1977)

→ Focuses on the animal/human aspects of *Watership Down* without any of the epic/mythological themes. It’s also much darker and more hopeless.



**MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS**  
by GERALD DURRELL (1956)

→ If you’re feeling sad and angry after reading *The Plague Dogs*, this gentle autobiographical tale will cheer you up.



**NEXT ISSUE** ↓

In our next Book Club (in SFX 286, on sale 29 March), *Traitor’s Blade* author Sebastien de Castell will be writing about Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s 1990 book *Good Omens*. Whether you’ve never read it before or fancy giving it another go, this is your chance to peruse it before a top writer gives his verdict.





*Next Issue*

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# THE CHOSEN ONES

## “THE SECRET SAUCE WAS JOSS!”

TARA BENNETT REVISITS *BUFFY*'S WRITERS' ROOM WITH TWO *of* SUNNYDALE'S STORYTELLING TEAM

**W**hen *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* debuted on 10 March 1997, no one thought it would last more than a few episodes, much less change the television landscape. But change TV it did, as Joss Whedon's bold, sassy and sometimes scary metaphor for our teen years placed a strong, witty heroine front and centre and had her save herself... and the world. A lot.

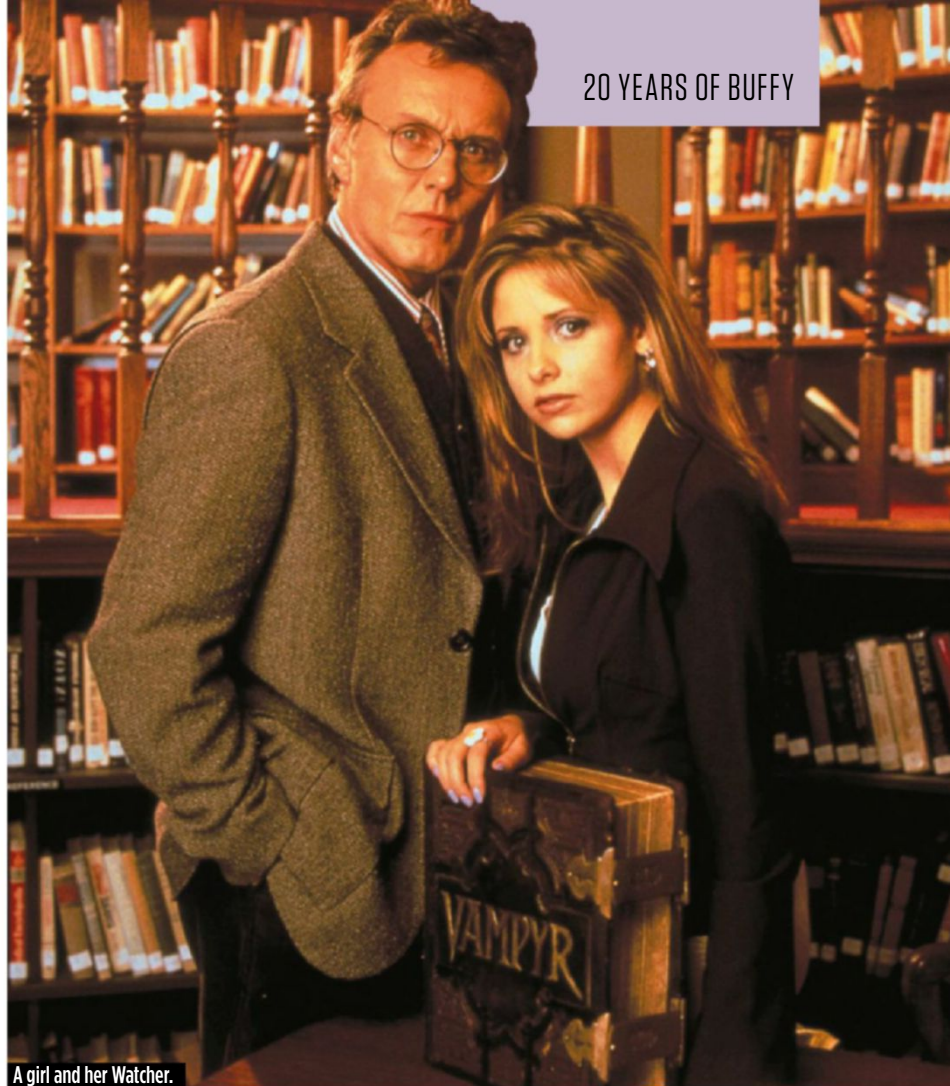
Two decades later, *Buffy* remains a TV icon with 144 bingeable episodes of adventures still captivating a new generation of fans – and making her original generation of viewers nostalgic for the show's indelible mix of humour, pathos, horror and the occasional helping of heartbreak. Two of the show's writers, Jane Espenson and Howard Gordon, are today respected figures in the current golden age of television. They've written for a host of classic series from *Battlestar Galactica* to *24*, yet both see their time on *Buffy The* →







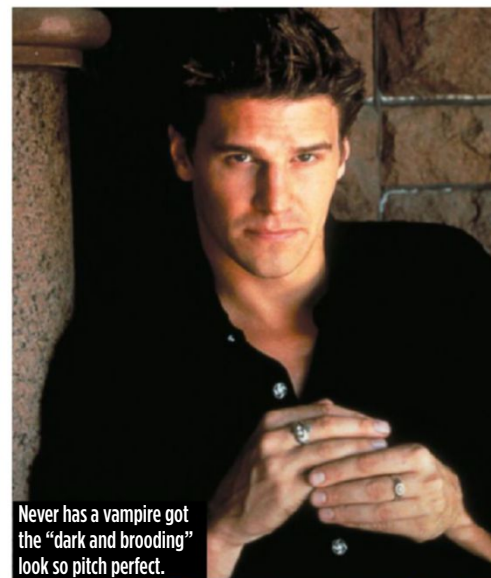
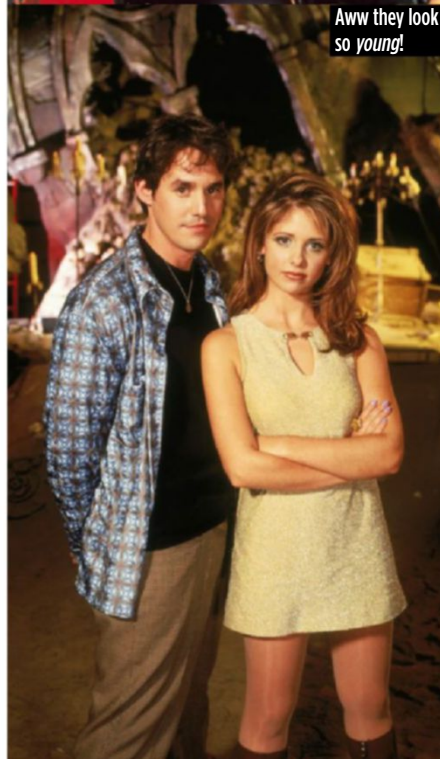
Is this the most '90s pic of all time?



A girl and her Watcher.



Aww they look so young!



Never has a vampire got the "dark and brooding" look so pitch perfect.







“Joss always made us focus on Buffy’s emotional experience and growth”

*Vampire Slayer* as career-changing in terms of what they learned to value as storytellers.

So why does the show’s popularity endure, 20 years on? “I think the secret sauce was Joss,” Espenson tells *SFX*. “He has a vision that seems so singular and clear, and yet we all found it impossible to capture when he wasn’t there. There really wasn’t a formula, which I guess is part of the formula. A lot of it had to do with having something underlying the episode that really needed to be said. Joss always made us focus on Buffy’s emotional experience and growth.”

Gordon agrees, adding, “Right off the bat, Joss was writing, directing and cutting, so he would not be in the writers’ room all the time. But everyone would wait for him to take something in an extraordinary direction. One

of the things I was really impressed by was the sense that Joss always worked towards an ending. He thought about the ending and built it backwards. Most writers start from the beginning and don’t know where they are going. With Joss, it was always a process but you could actually really see the light bulb go [on]. If you pay attention, there’s a brilliant construction to some of the episodes. I think he also had a very strong arc of what the season was about, so he thought about the beats of the episode and the architecture of the season.”

Howard Gordon came to *Buffy* after writing for series like *Beauty And The Beast* and *The X-Files*. In a development deal with Twentieth

Century Fox to make his own shows, he was placed on *Buffy* season two as a consultant in-between writing his own pilots, including *Strange World*.

“The buzz about the show was just starting,” Gordon remembers of his early days in *Buffy*’s season two writers’ room. “The moment I got there I could see why. I was blown away by Joss’s voice and the writers. By then he had a big staff. Marti Noxon was amazing and her work was so fresh. I remember David Fury had sold them a spec script.”

### SHOOTING STARS

Gordon was responsible for co-writing one episode in season two, “What’s My Line, Part 2” with Noxon and Whedon. “I like to think that if I wasn’t a star in the room, I was →





**"I'm finally saying exactly what I want to say, the way I want to say it, and this tiny little series on the Warner Brothers station has made me happier than any gigantic movie I have ever worked on."**

*Joss Whedon, SFX 35, February 1998*

**"She's mostly normal. That's the key to her, the way she tries to fit in, to do all the things that girls her age do. It's her destiny that keeps getting in the way."**

*Sarah Michelle Gellar, SFX 35, February 1998*



**"The whole series is grounded in the idea that high school is the most horrifying experience a human being can go through. So we just tried to extend our**

**metaphors of popularity, puberty, humiliation and isolation and turn them into monster movies."**

*Joss Whedon, SFX 35, February 1998*

**"[JOSS'S] SCHOOL TRAUMA HAS FUNDED AN AWFUL LOT OF BUFFY."**

*Anthony Head, SFX 56, October 1999*

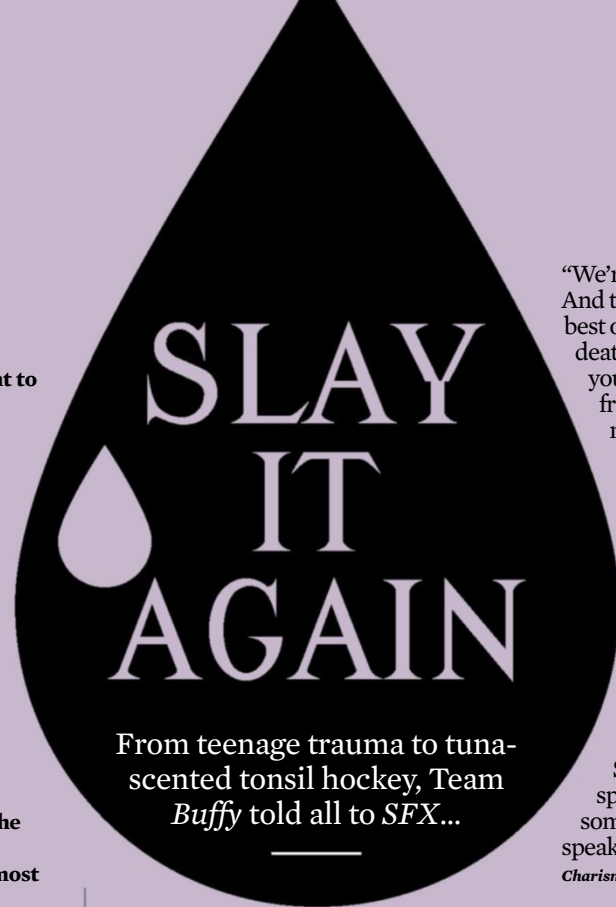
**"I called Alyson [Hannigan] to see how she was doing and she said, 'Have you looked at the net?' And I thought 'What?' And she said, 'Haven't you seen the websites? It's huge. And you've got your own. And it's huge!' And I went onto the websites and it was wonderful."**

*Anthony Head, SFX 56, October 1999*



**"I always intended this to be a cultural phenomenon. That's how I wrote it. I can never experience total, naked surprise. In the back of your mind you're picking up your Oscar or your Saturn and everyone is playing**

**with their Buffy dolls. You go through so much rejection and so much negativity – and believe me I did – you sort of have to develop this shell of incredible hubris; this arrogance where you say, 'This is going to be huge.'" Joss Whedon, SFX 61, February 2000**



**From teenage trauma to tuna-scented tonsil hockey, Team Buffy told all to SFX...**



**"FASHIONS COME AND GO. FIVE YEARS FROM NOW YOU MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT BUFFY."**

*Joss Whedon, SFX 66, July 2000*

**"I did at one time have a dream of doing 100 episodes and then just shutting the whole thing down. It has been made clear to me that this is the dream of a pipe. And there is opium in that pipe. Obviously the network isn't going to let go of a show that is working."** *Joss Whedon, SFX 66, July 2000*



**"We're like brothers and sisters, the cast. And there are days where you're just the best of friends, and you love each other to death, and there are other days where you're like, 'I just need to... be away from you.' We'll get on each other's nerves but I'm surprised no one's murdered anyone."**

*Alyson Hannigan, SFX 67, August 2000*

**"I used to think that the best episodes were the ones where I got to hit Buffy... but then I got to kiss her! Believe me, as hot as Sarah is on the screen, she's even better in real life!"**

*James Marsters, SFX 70, November 2000*

**"I wish I was as witty as [Cordelia]. She says hilarious stuff. I have Joss speaking in my ear 24/7, so thankfully some of the wittier things in her way of speaking have sunk in after five years."**

*Charisma Carpenter, SFX 75, March 2001*

**"I miss working with Sarah. Before kissing scenes we tried to gross each other out by eating things like onion rings and tuna fish. We'd have fun battling each other with disgusting foods."**

*David Boreanaz, SFX 88, March 2002*

**"I think we kicked the mould. We were really one of the first shows that showed a female kicking butt and I think we've paved the way for young heroines – for shows that can evolve around a three-dimensional female character. If you look at how the trend has gone since then, I really feel like we started that."**

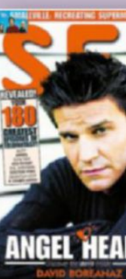
*Sarah Michelle Gellar, SFX 93, July 2002*

**"I THINK XANDER'S POWER WAS THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY BECAUSE IT WAS WIT. THE TONGUE IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD, MY FRIEND."**

*Nicholas Brendon, SFX 106, July 2003*

**"The thing we were trying to do was tell epic timeless stories on a small emotional scale. That sort of thing, if it's done right, can certainly live on. I do know that the character as a concept has affected the way people think about heroines and heroes and who can front a show and what boys will watch and a lot of different things. And that's a more important legacy to me than if they're still watching the episodes."**

*Joss Whedon, SFX 106, July 2003*





## 20 YEARS OF BUFFY



With the show finished, they all took up line dancing.



Sister act.



“Buffy was a show that gets it right out of the gate; it knew what it was and delivered”

a contributor,” he laughs. “I was probably more helpful with the emotional and dramatic structure of it. I

would say there was a rhythm to [Buffy’s scripts] that was challenging. I really enjoyed it but I also recognised it wasn’t exactly in my sweet spot. A fair bit of my writing remained in that script that I did, but I had to work really hard to get it there.”

Gordon left the show to work on his own series, but he returned to the Buffyverse to help launch *Angel*, the 1999 spin-off, along with Tim Minear and David Greenwalt.

“I had a sense at the same time that it probably wouldn’t be a long-term home for me,” Gordon says of his stint on *Angel*. “But I was really happy to be as helpful as I could be. I think I was pretty helpful on that show because it was closer to my strike zone than *Buffy* was.”

*Buffy* was by now a full-on hit for The WB, and *Angel* was an opportunity to expand the brand, with David Boreanaz as the vampire seeking redemption in Los Angeles. “It was an interesting process because unlike *Buffy*, *Angel* took longer to find itself. *Buffy* was a show that gets it right out of the gate; it knew what it was and continued to deliver. *Buffy* was fully imagined and *Angel* was more of an evolution, which sometimes shows have.”

### CITY OF ANGELS

“My memory was that [the launch] was a little bumpy for a couple of reasons,” Gordon

continues. “It did divide Joss and David’s attention. It was trying to find its own identity with a new group of writers. I think Joss and David

leaned a little heavily, not just on the *Buffy* mothership, but the mothership writers.”

One of the *Buffy* writers leaned on to help with both shows was Jane Espenson, who joined *Buffy* in its third season. She quickly became a fan favourite, and stayed with the series until its finale. Even with a lot of TV writing experience under her belt, Espenson admits she had to learn a lot on the job.

“Before I arrived on *Buffy*, I had only been in the writers’ rooms of half-hour comedies. The differences were pretty much just the ones between drama and comedy rooms, the primary one being that the room was used for breaking story only, not rewriting scripts. This →



# LOVE & MONSTERS

*Buffy* fan Russell T Davies tells us how the show influenced *Doctor Who*'s blockbuster comeback...

**W**ord gradually reached me of just how good *Buffy* was. For many years I was a box set viewer. I only got Sky when it came to season seven because I thought "I cannot be spoilt on this! I have to watch this on transmission!"

The writing was just brilliant. It very much reminded me of [Steven Moffat's] *Press Gang*. To have those cleverer-than-average teenage characters talking at a fast rate and throwing jokes at you – it's actually a very Steven Moffat pattern. Joss Whedon didn't invent that – writing's progressed in that direction over a couple of decades – but it had the same velocity, the same intelligence, the same wit. And to see that in a fantasy setting was absolutely brilliant.

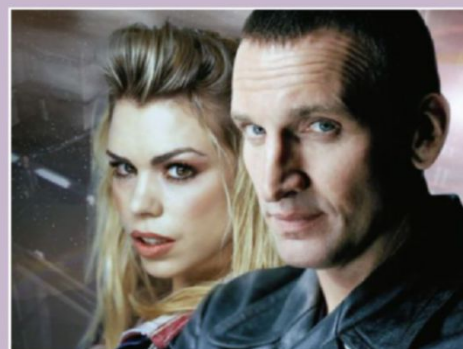
It was the kind of rat-a-tat dialogue that has antecedents in American sitcom dialogue, which at its finest is the sharpest, most compact in the world. It brought all that tradition into a genre that never had that before – we were used to creaky old melodramas up to that point, with all the solemnity of *Star Trek*.

But it wasn't just the writing: the casting was spot-on, the production was spot-on, the design

was spot-on. You forget that we didn't have screens full of vampires back then. We didn't have screens full of demons and monsters. And they got them right. They pitched it not too seriously, but with not too much comedy either. It's just a perfectly pitched show. Everything is in tune with everything else. Every department is talking to every other department.

People often say that I brought an emotional content to *Doctor Who*, which is true, but the BBC came to me knowing that I wouldn't write it in any other way. *Buffy* gave me the confidence to think that it could work in a fantasy setting.

You don't just lift things wholesale. Whenever you look at something you love you take some things and you leave other things behind. You do that if you're finding a boyfriend, let alone choosing your



favourite television show! You model it and get rid of the bits you don't like and exaggerate the bits you do.

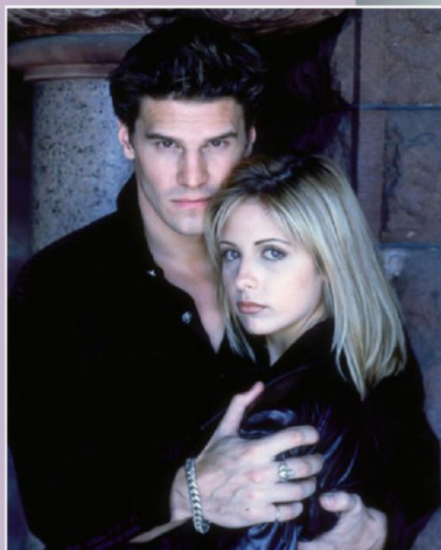
Rose isn't another Buffy – she's a reaction to Buffy. That's how you treat things you love. You react to them as opposed to replicating them. Buffy was the most special girl in the world, the Chosen One, but Rose is the opposite – she literally gives a speech in the first episode saying the only thing she's ever won is the bronze for gymnastics in junior school. She's deliberately the polar opposite of Buffy but nonetheless occupying the same space on screen. It's complete coincidence that we cast a blonde woman – it's a great comparison if you want to see it, but complete chance.

The glorious thing about *Buffy* is that we all know the name of its showrunner. And the reason is because he's brilliant. It's a great strength to know these shows are at their best when they are one person's vision. American shows taught us that, and Joss Whedon taught us that in particular. He showed you that having a vision and being a good, strong showrunner actually led to a better show. And that's still true of *Doctor Who* now.

Russell T Davies was talking to Nick Setchfield.

© GETTY (1)

Ex-*Who* showrunner Russell T Davies. Marvellous!







# BUFFY'S BEST BITS

Ten classic moments that'll make you tear up, chuckle or fist-pump. WORDS BY IAN BERRIMAN



## CALENDAR FATE

"Passion" (2.17) was the first *Buffy* episode to really *hurt* the audience, by killing off Giles's love interest, Jenny Calendar. He comes home to what looks like a romantic scene... then finds Jenny's corpse on his bed, a sick calling-card from Angelus. It's just the second in a sequence of four gut-punch scenes that leave you emotionally winded.



## HELL BOY

In the heartbreaking climax of "Becoming, Part Two" (2.22), Willow's spell returns Angel's soul... but just too late to stop the opening of a portal to a hell dimension that only his blood can close. Cue Buffy shish-kebabbing her bewildered beau with a sword. Ouch. Mind you, he kinda deserves it for wearing a shiny shirt tucked into leather strides...



## SOME CANDY TALKING

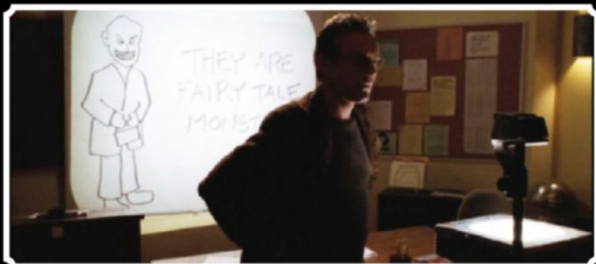
If you've met Anthony Head you'll know he's much cooler than Giles. His entire performance as bad-boy alter-ego Ripper in "Band Candy" (3.06) is a delight, but the highlight sees him sneering, "Ooh, cooper's got a gun!" at a policeman, then making out with Buffy's mum on the bonnet of said officer's car. Gloriously, it's later confirmed that the two *did it*.



## SHE'S A BROLLY GOOD FELLOW

*Buffy's* format kinda requires Sunnydale High students to have a weird collective blindness - otherwise they'd switch school! But just this once (3.20, "The Prom"), Buffy gets some recognition, given a special "Class Protector" award for her work keeping the mortality rate down. Sure, it's a glittery umbrella probably brought from a pound shop, but it's the thought that counts.





### CREATURE PRESENTATION

"Hush" (4.10) is rightly remembered for the sinister, voice-stealing Gentlemen. However, it also shows that Joss Whedon can make you crease up even when stripped of his whip-smart dialogue as, with the Scoobys rendered mute, Giles provides an expository slide presentation. Best bit: when Buffy accidentally makes a wanking gesture. Emmy nomination fully earned, right there.



### BODY BLOW

There are a host of contenders in "The Body" (5.16), in which Buffy finds her mum dead of a brain aneurysm. But the finest sees former-demon Anya tearfully struggling to comprehend mortality, with all the touching vulnerability of a child: "Joyce will never have any more fruit punch, ever!" Gulp. As Joss Whedon has said, Anya's unexpected sensitivity makes it particularly affecting.



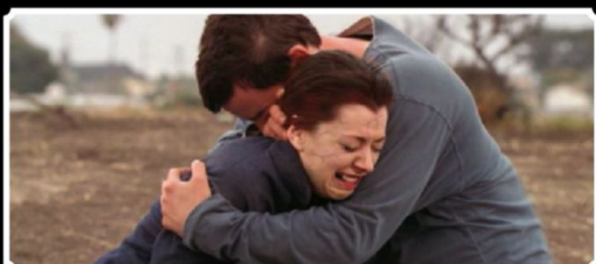
### SHE DIVE, NOT DAWN

Many found Buffy's whiny sister Dawn kinda annoying. This makes "The Gift" (5.22) even more of a kicker, with the Buffster carking it after taking little Dawnie's place to close another inter-dimensional portal by diving into it. If the final zoom-in on the slayer's epitaph - "She saved the world, a lot" - doesn't set your bottom lip a-quivering, you must be carved out of rock.



### FLAYING ALIVE

"Villains" (6.20) sees vengeance transform Willow into a black-eyed uber-witch after the death of her girlfriend Tara. Abruptly dismissing misogynist nerd Warren's arguments for mercy, she skins him with a casual hand gesture. "Bored now!" It's *Buffy's* most gruesome moment - and the fact that the kindest, geekiest Scooby is responsible makes it all the more gasp-worthy.



### THE POWER OF LOVE

As Dark Willow commences a world-destroying ritual in "Grave" (6.22), there's only one man who can save us all: average guy Xander Harris. Not by kicking ass, or using some cunning ploy... but by recounting an anecdote about a crayon, then simply telling Willow that he loves her, no matter what, over and over, until her defences finally crumble and it's time to bring the hugs. Aw.



### SISTER ACT

*Buffy* was always about female empowerment, and final episode "Chosen" (7.22) powerfully converts subtext to text. In a stirring speech, Buffy reveals her plan to beat the First Evil: smash the "one at a time" rule some OWG cooked up centuries ago, and unlock the abilities lying dormant in every potential slayer. "I say my power should be our power!" Preach, sister!

### BUBBLING UNDER

Angel being dissuaded from suicide by snow falling on Sunnydale (3.10); Willow pretending to be vampire Willow (3.16); "Actual size" (4.04); Jonathan appearing in the opening credits (4.17); the WTF? first appearance of Dawn (5.01); "Out for a walk... bitch!" (5.05); Giles suffocating Ben (5.22); Buffy singing "I was in heaven!" (6.07); the death of Tara (6.19); Spike sacrificing his life (7.22); and so many, many more...



# BUFFY SPEAK

How we all learned to talk like a Slayer

**F**ew TV shows can claim to have had as much impact on how its fans – and others – speak than *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Other series may invent their own frakking words along with their worlds, but Joss Whedon and his team blended California Valley-speak with their own pop culture-infused linguistic soup that nevertheless felt grounded and real for teenagers dealing with hormones and Hellmouths. It even spurred one lexicographer, Professor Michael Adams, to write a book on the subject, 2003's *Slayer Slang: A Buffy The Vampire Slayer Lexicon*. *SFX* asked him to explain the roots of “Buffy Speak”. “A lot of it is borrowed from the popular culture of the time or formed on it,” he says. “One example I use is the use of ‘...much?’ That form, that type of adjective plus ‘much’ thing, as far as we can tell, first appeared in a *Saturday Night Live* sketch in 1978 and then reappeared in the film *Heathers* in 1988, so there’s a 10-year gap in our understanding of what happened to that ‘much’! And we know that Whedon and the other writers had all seen *Heathers*, at least once.” Erudite, much?

## SLAY WHAT?

Some of our favourite *Buffy*-isms

**SMOOCHIES**  
Kissing

**CUDDLE MONKEY**  
Sexual partner

**SALTY GOODNESS**  
General sexiness

**BRONZING**  
Going to neighbourhood club the Bronze

**KISSING DAYLIGHT**  
When a vampire dies at sunrise

**FIVE BY FIVE**  
Faith's declaration that all is good

**THE UBERSUCK**  
When something's really bad

**THE WACKY**  
What love makes you do...

**SCOOBY GANG**  
Buffy's pals/associates fighting the good fight

**THE WIGGINS**  
A riff on “wig out” – to feel anxious or afraid

**BIG BAD**  
A main villain or threat to our heroes

**DUST**  
To kill a vampire



means, of course, that the writers get to do their own rewrites. *Buffy* was the first show where I'd ever written a third, and higher, draft. But the culture and environment were extremely positive: Joss, David Greenwalt and Marti Noxon were clearly good friends and were hilarious together. Doug Petrie and I were hired at the same time and he is also extremely funny, so it was a room full of good humour. It was also a culture that fitted my strengths because it valued dialogue writing so much.”

## ONLY JOKING

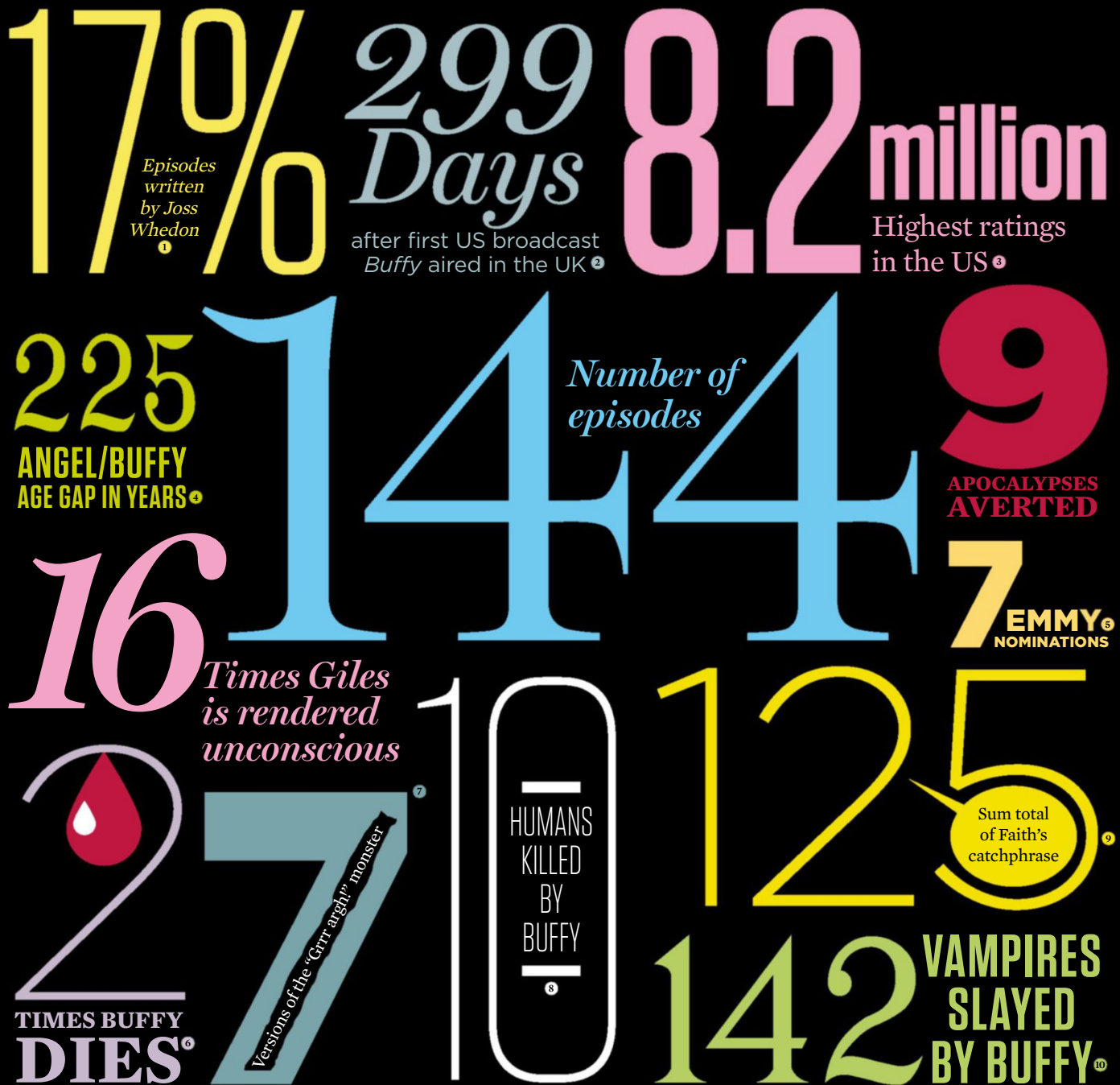
Ultimately the writer, or co-writer, on 23 *Buffy* episodes, Espenson particularly remembers her second episode, “Gingerbread”. “I had trouble with it because I tried too hard to make it funny, despite some grim story elements,” she reflects. “Joss explained that there were other ways to be entertaining, and I started a long journey – which I continue to this day – toward being able to not write every possible joke.”

She also cites “Band Candy”, “Superstar”, and “Pangs” as especially vivid scripting memories. “I recall that I was shockingly, inappropriately, confident about writing ‘Band Candy,’” she laughs. “I actually went to Las Vegas during the time I wrote it, and did a lot of the writing there. I remember the moment of thinking up Willow’s reaction to graffiti: “Kiss Rocks?” Why would anyone want to kiss rocks?” in a Vegas hotel room. I loved every minute of writing and rewriting that script; the process was such a better fit than writing half-hour. At the time, I adored the final result, but for whatever reason, this is an episode I’ve grown much more critical of over the years: some of the lines jangle in my ears now.”

Espenson stayed on the series for five seasons, working in the writers’ room with an array of talented peers who have all gone on to write, create, or showrun their own series, from Drew Goddard (*Daredevil*) to Marti →



# BUFFY *BY* NUMBERS



<sup>1</sup> 25 episodes - including his co-credit on 2.11. <sup>2</sup> On Sky One on 3 January 1998. (It came to BBC Two on 30 December 1998.) <sup>3</sup> 2.14 "Innocence" <sup>4</sup> In season one she's 16 and he's 241. <sup>5</sup> Only one for writing (for 4.10 "Hush"). <sup>6</sup> In 1.12 and 5.22. Three if Buffy flatlining in 6.20 counts (but Xander says it doesn't). Four if you count 3.09's alternate timeline. <sup>7</sup> Variants in 2.22, 3.10, 3.22, 4.7, 7.16 and 7.22. <sup>8</sup> Ten Knights of Byzantium, according to 5.20 (one seen on screen). Eleven if you count Caleb in 7.22 (but we don't). <sup>9</sup> That's "five by five", said five times, in three of her 20 *Buffy* episodes (once while in Buffy's body). Not counting Willow and Tara saying it. Or Faith and Wesley in *Angel*. <sup>10</sup> On-screen kills. Stat taken from *Dusted* (Mad Norwegian Press).





Date night was not going well.

Noxon (*Point Pleasant*). Asked who in the room impacted her writing the most, Espenson doesn't hesitate. "Joss. It was his voice that we were all striving to capture."

## FOREVER YOUNG

While Gordon and Espenson are both incredulous at how fast time has flown *Buffy* to her 20th anniversary, neither dispute why the show, and the character, remains so present in the pop culture zeitgeist.

"It's timeless," Gordon asserts. "I would say that maybe it being genre makes it a little bit out of time. Vampires and monsters keep very well! But my take would be that it was a really good story with vivid, beautifully drawn characters. Good stories really do hold up over time. It is a magic. I'm stunned when the same thing happens with *The X-Files*. I watched an episode I wrote on a plane. I tend not to watch things after, so to see something I had written 25 years ago brought back all of the trauma that went into writing that one episode. I was still proud of it, and it holds up for the same reason. All these shows also become part of people's lives. In the case of *Buffy*, everyone remembers their adolescence, and there are very strong archetypes that are recognisable even though the times have changed."

"*Buffy* is about something," concludes Espenson. "Joss always started with the theme: what needs to be said? Every episode contained a message that was something he really believed. So *Buffy* was important at the time for a lot of reasons, but most importantly, I think, it helped girls of the time get through the challenges of the teen years. We got a lot of letters saying, 'I only got through high school because of *Buffy*'. In more recent times, that message has started coming from boys as well, who aren't embarrassed to admit that they fully identify with Buffy. If the show accomplished nothing else, that would be worthy of celebration." ●

# THE BUFFY YOU NEVER SAW

For all the success of *Buffy* and *Angel*, there were several spin-offs that never quite materialised. James White looks at the might-have-beens of the Slayersverse...

**B**uffy *The Vampire Slayer* successfully spun off *Angel* and several comic book follow-up seasons. But there were plans for so much more, including a show built around Eliza Dushku's hard-charging, occasionally villainous fellow slayer Faith, *Slayer School* – a series about some of the Potentials who became slayers after *Buffy*'s finale – and even a movie about Spike, for which James Marsters wrote a script that eventually became Dark Horse comic *Spike: Into The Light*.

By far the closest to actual reality were the animated series and *Ripper*. The cartoon version of *Buffy*, which was supposed to take place during the first season, got as far as development deals more than once, with most of the cast agreeing to return to voice the characters. But despite the clear appeal, and the ability to create stories on a level the TV series' budget could never reach, no channel or studio would bite. "We just couldn't find a home for it," Joss Whedon told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "We had a great animation director, great visuals, six or seven hilarious scripts from our own staff – and nobody wanted it. I was baffled. I felt like I was sitting there with bags of money and nobody would take them from me." He did, however, admit that he was uncompromising when it came to the look of the show. "It was a question of people either not wanting it or not being able to put up the money because it was not a cheap show. I just don't think it's worth doing unless it's beautiful to look at as well as fun."

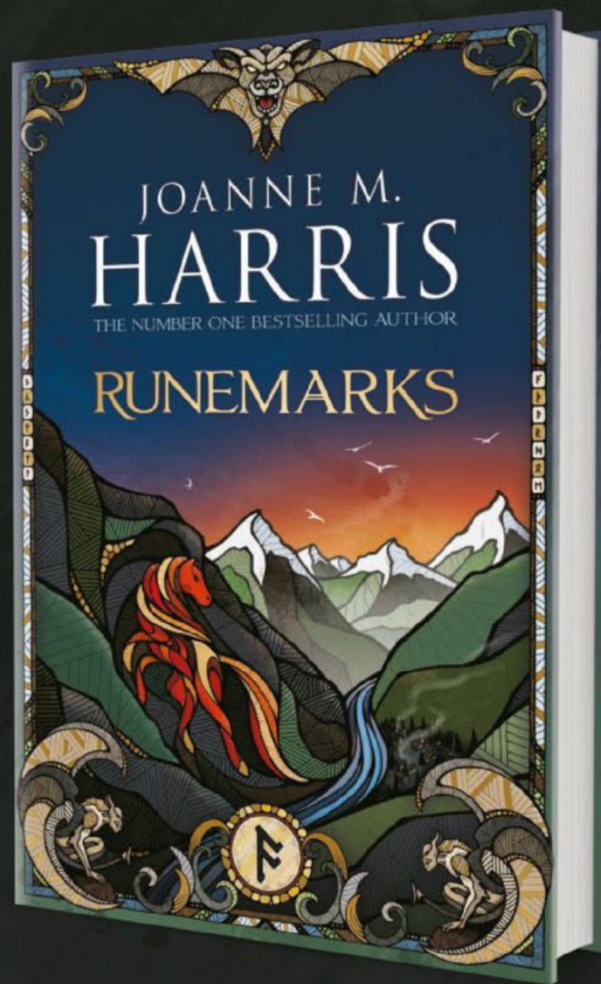


And then there was *Ripper* – a potential co-production with the BBC – which would have channelled ghost stories and explored loneliness as Giles dug into life post-*Buffy*, his dark past haunting him in England. "The people who live there, it's all very isolated," Whedon said. "Giles himself has been gone for many years. He was surrounded by a de facto family that he no longer has. And he is sort of picking up his life all alone, and then getting involved in the underbelly of other people's lives, and finding out all about them." The idea resurfaced a few times, as either a miniseries or a TV movie, but eventually went the way of most *Buffy* spin-offs and became fodder for the comics. But maybe, one day... We can still hope, right?





# THE OLD GODS HAVE RETURNED



A tale of magic, adventure and Norse mythology from the  
*Sunday Times* bestselling author of *The Gospel of Loki*

Out now in hardback, ebook and audio download





LOGAN







ADAMANTIUM

HISTORY

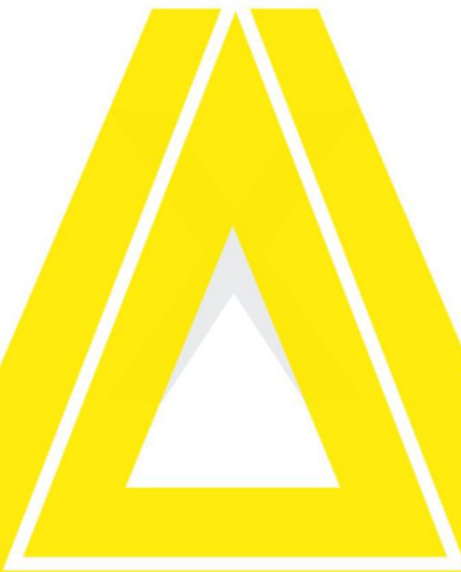
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Hugh  
Jackman  
is back for a  
brutal victory lap in

LOGAN.

As Kevin Harley discovers,  
the future is worth fighting for...





As any family knows, long-haul car journeys are a reliable source of heightened interpersonal emotions. Just ask Patrick Stewart, who got a potent dose of the feels while shooting a road-trip scene from *Logan* with his surrogate screen son-of-sorts Hugh Jackman and X-movie newcomer Dafne Keen. Sweltering in 110-degree heat in Mississippi, this alterna-family chafed, laughed and, by Jackman's reckoning, had a bit of a moment after a "classic, bickering-family kind of argument".

"We called cut," recalls the garrulous star, "and Patrick goes, 'Oh...'. And Dafne asks, 'What's the matter, are you hot?' He goes, 'No, I'm just sad. I'll never get to do that scene again. The hardest thing about film is when you get a great scene like that and you only get to do it for one day in your life and then it's gone.'"

*Logan* is a film of many farewells. It waves a goodbye claw to 12A ratings and X-Men saga continuity conundrums. R-rated in the US, the ninth screen outing for Jackman's Wolverine occupies a discreet temporal point beyond previous X-Men plot-lines; about five years after the conclusion to *Days Of Future Past*.

## LAST ORDERS

More crucially, it's a goodbye from the big guy. Jackman will stub out the stogie for #onelashtime in this, his final round as the muttonchop'd mutant. And if his departure brings closure to one aspect of the X-Men's screen stories, it is only one change among many in a film that, promises Jackman, goes for emotional broke to give his character a unique send-off. "This film felt different to all of them. This character's been amazing to me... So, every day, every scene for me was a battle to get the best out of that character, to get the best out of me and the situation. There was an element of life and death about it. I know that sounds dramatic but that's how it felt..."

After eight films of intimacy with James "Logan" Howlett, Jackman had a "clear vision" for his character's swansong. It would be raw



Swapping the body armour for plaid shirts and comfy cardigans.



Bounty hunter Donald Pierce, played by Boyd Holbrook, clashes with Logan.

and character-based. And it would recall *Unforgiven*, the 1992 Clint Eastwood oater where the Western vet played a retired killer and slowly, surely subverted both his and his character's legends.

If Jackman's formative ideas resemble strongly what unfolds in *Logan*, it's thanks in large part to his choice of simpatico collaborator. Having taken *Logan* east for 2013's *The Wolverine*, director/co-writer (with Michael Green and Scott Frank) James Mangold shared Jackman's passion for something final, something fresh. "There were some differences [between us], naturally," says Jackman, "but we both wanted a movie that was a standalone film – that wasn't necessarily intermingled with the history or the timeline of previous X-Men films."

For Mangold, *Logan* would stand equally far apart from most superhero movies. "When you put your brain in the mode of making a superhero movie, suddenly there's villains from the planet blah-blah and the earth is in jeopardy and the city of blah-blah is about to

be exploded by a giant blah-blah. Your brain goes into 'epic' mode. What I wanted is a story built on relationships... The movie doesn't necessarily operate on the stakes of, 'Will the world be destroyed?'

"When Chris Nolan made the Batman movies, they were noir films," Mangold explains, warming to his conviction that superhero movies can and should shift genres. "We're making kind of a Western... For me, the key is not to think about making a comic-book movie but to think about making a movie and just let the fact that your characters are superheroes be a reality."

Pleasingly, the studio concurred: and the "blah-blah" version of events was ignored. "The studio recognised a kind of exhaustion setting in with the formulaic format for quote-unquote superhero movies," says Mangold. "While people are coming to see them, there is a sense that people are getting tired. We were very encouraged to try something different."





Dafne Keen plays  
Wolverine clone X-23  
— complete with claws.

“THE STUDIO  
RECOGNISED A KIND  
OF EXHAUSTION  
SETTING IN WITH  
THE FORMAT FOR  
SUPERHERO MOVIES”

In Logan, “something different” translates as a frontier-chic road movie with an alternative-family emotional engine. Mark Millar’s 2008-9 comics storyline *Old Man Logan* was a starting point for ideas and themes, though not much more. Many of Millar’s characters are unavailable, their rights held by the MCU. Plus, Mangold’s vision is a grounded one – and Millar’s glorious “gorno *Mad Max*” aesthetic is anything but that. “There’s more differences than similarities,” says Jackman.

*Unforgiven* aside, clearer influences included Alan Ladd Western *Shane*, Eastwood actioner *The Gauntlet*, and Ryan and Tatum O’Neal’s road-based father/daughter dramedy *Paper Moon*. But none of these started with an F-bomb and a character hustling for medicine from the base of a disused smelting plant near Mexico.

In this near-future dystopia, mutants are dying out. Stewart’s Professor Charles Xavier is ailing and Logan isn’t doing so well. As his powers of recovery weaken, his scarred body resembles a sketch-pad for Hannibal Lecter’s

paring knife. Logan is despondent and broken (greying, too), though a duty of care for Charles motivates him. Alert to incoming threats, Stephen Merchant’s mutant tracker Caliban helps them out. Then something wild their way comes when a nurse (Elizabeth Rodriguez) arrives with a girl she wants Logan to keep safe: gifted youngster Laura (Dafne Keen).

As X-lore followers surmised early from on-set shots, this girl has got claws.

Laura is X-23, the Wolverine clone who entered mutant history in 2003’s TV series *X-Men: Evolution* before carving her way into comics with the →



## WHO IS X-23?

Meet Wolverine’s deadliest secret weapon...



Wolverine’s had a steady stream of young female partners, sidekicks and protégés over the years – from Kitty Pryde and Jubilee in the comics to Rogue and Yukio on the big screen. But few have affected him like X-23.

The successful result of an experiment – no less than 22 prior attempts were made – to clone Wolverine and duplicate his adamantium-coated claws and skeleton, X-23 was created by writer Craig Kyle for TV’s animated *X-Men: Evolution* in 2003 (in the third season episode “X-23”), in an attempt to make Wolverine more relevant for 21st century kids. Originally depicted as a HYDRA assassin tasked with killing Logan, she later joined him in battling against the terrorist organisation.

X-23 made her comics debut the following year in the NYX limited series, and her backstory was revealed in follow-up *X-23: Innocence Lost* (by Kyle and *Evolution* co-writer Christopher Yost). In the latter series, X-23’s full name, Laura Kinney, was revealed as well as her backstory, in which she was forced to kill the human scientist mother who bore her. In time, X-23 earned her own series, succeeding Logan as the *All-New Wolverine*.





Down but not out.

**“IT’S NOT R-RATED BECAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE, THOUGH THERE IS R-RATED VIOLENCE IN IT...”**

ferocity of someone who won't heed parental warnings about playing with sharp objects. No wonder Logan is reluctant to play dad.

While Logan's struggles with his nurturing side recall *X-Men* (2000), another struggle took place off-screen. How do you cast a child to embody adamantium-coated carnage? With difficulty, says Jackman, though Keen proved quite a find. "I was just blown away... She has to portray elements of Wolverine's personality and physicality, and that's not easy to pull off. I found it hard to pull off when I was 30, let alone 11! She's playing this constantly pissed-off, rage-filled mutant who will take your head off if you look at her sideways."

She doesn't keep nice company, either. Trouble follows Laura in the shape of Boyd Holbrook's bounty hunter Donald Pierce and his cyborg Reavers, deployed by Richard E Grant's Dr Zander Rice to retrieve her. Laura's history turns out to involve the Alkali Lake compound Wolverine knows so well, now a "very public business" in *Logan*, says Jackman. Operating in genetics, it also dabbles in weapons dealings. "And mutants are still weapons," says Jackman. "Therefore, they're an asset."

Although Rice's interests lie in Laura rather than in old man Logan, Logan has a beef with matters Alkali-based: "He's absolutely fuming that they are back in his life," says Jackman. And when his berserker

rage erupts, previous X-movie limits on screen violence are lacerated fast.

Gore will pour in *Logan*. The US R-rating tells us as much. But it doesn't tell us that Jackman, Mangold and producer Simon Kinberg had the R-rated idea before a certain mouthy merc made money. Or, says Jackman, that the R-rating is about character rather than carnage.

"It's not R rated because of the violence, though there is R-rated violence in it... That rating is about the subject matter, the way the characters are treated as well as the way violence is depicted. I think this is far more realistic than anything we've done before in the X-Men franchise and maybe many other comic-book movies, far more human."

## CHARACTER STUDY

So, is it the Wolverine film fans have been waiting for? For Jackman, yes. "It seems to me that Wolverine may be one of the darkest, most complex characters in the comic-book universe. Every time for the last 17 years I've seen PG-13, a little part of me has winced, going, 'Wolverine would never be in a PG-13 movie.' All Jim [Mangold] and I were apprehensive about was taking off the seatbelt: taking off any kind of restriction and just diving into this character."

Diving deep into characters, rather than just dismembering them, is *Logan's* main aim. It's



Stephen Merchant takes over as Caliban.

a film that will show us a Charles we haven't seen before, promises Jackman, brought to life by what he calls "a heart-breaking, beautifully layered" performance from Stewart. It's a film that finds Logan grappling with the gap between his legend and his true identity, a gap exposed by comics portrayals shown in-film. And it's a film that explores the emotional scars accrued by Logan from years of violence.

And it is not designed to let audiences off easy. If Jackman's entry point for the project was crystal-clear, his desired reaction among audiences leaving cinemas is no less so. "Hopefully, it's a movie that touches people. Yeah, it's exciting - but as they're walking out, I'm hoping that they've gone through the wringer!" "I want them to be emotionally wrung out, like we all were. I want them to feel everything. I want them to be outraged. I want them to laugh. I want them to yell. I want them by the end to feel like they've got to know fully and understand this human, this man called Logan." Buckle up. ●

*Logan opens on 1 March.*

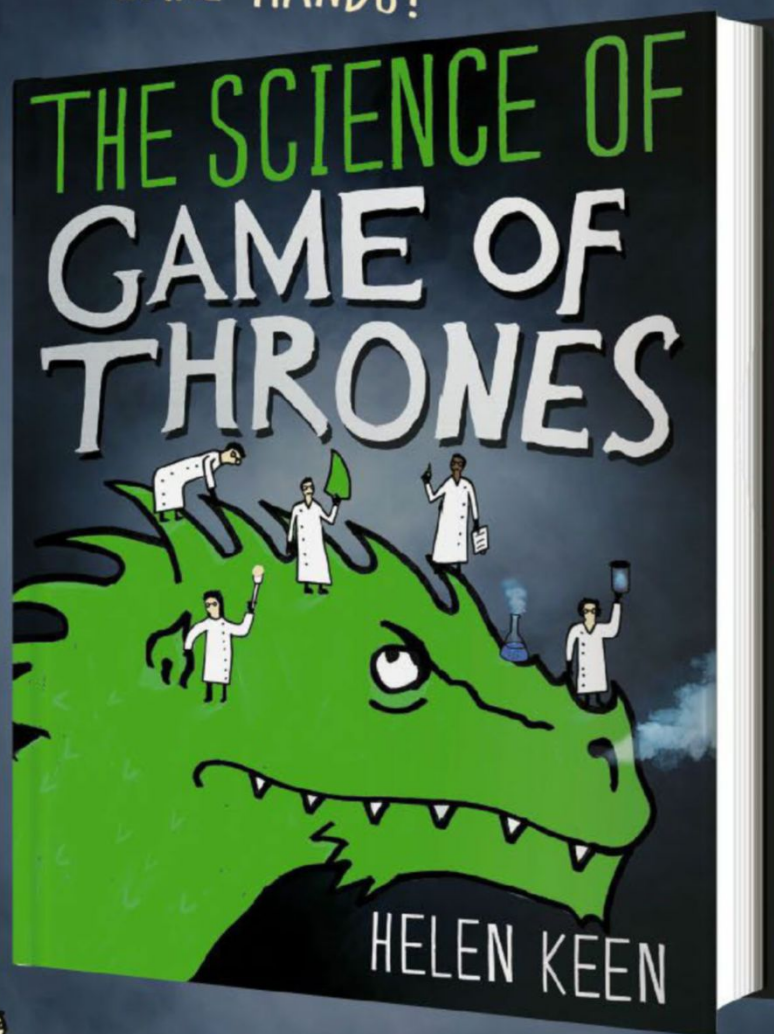


DO DRAGONS  
ACTUALLY EXIST?

OUT  
NOW

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A PERSON'S HEAD WITH  
YOUR BARE HANDS?

CAN YOU REALLY KILL  
SOMEONE WITH  
MOLTEN GOLD?



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*GAME OF THRONES*





## RACHEL KELLER

*Fargo's rising star has the superpowered touch in Legion*

Words by Nick Setchfield // Photography by Maarten de Boer

Rachel Keller is Syd Barrett. No, not Pink Floyd's tragic, acid-drenched visionary but a whole other Syd Barrett – named in his honour. This one's spiky and street-smart and has the power to trade bodies. You'll find her in *Legion*, *Fargo* creator Noah Hawley's stylised TV take on the X-Men universe. It's a creative reunion for Keller, who came to prominence as free-spirited mobster's daughter Simone in *Fargo's* second season. For all that Hawley's shaking up the franchise – a full-blown Bollywood dance routine is just one reality-bending treat in store – Keller says its essential mutant gene is intact. "At Comic-Con I saw people who felt like outsiders, decked out in their favourite costume, expertly and unapologetically asking about 'the omega level' or whatever. And I thought, 'I know exactly who we're making this show for. And I get you. And maybe I'm you too.'" Shine on, you crazy diamond.

**Simone was a break-out role for you. You need to follow a break-out role with a smart choice. Why was *Legion* the right choice for you?**

It had nothing to do with making any kind of right or wrong choice. At that point I was back to auditioning. I had lived a certain kind of dream that I'd had for myself, so I was like, "If that's the last thing I will ever do I will go peacefully..." [laughs] So I was ready to be patient and wait for something I could really put my heart behind. Noah texted me and casually asked if I'd come and read for his new show. In my wildest dreams I didn't think that I would work with someone like that twice, let alone once. So I was really honoured to be asked to come try it on.

**We're saturated with superheroes at the moment. What is it about Noah's take that appeals to you?**

We are, but it is so entertaining. I want more of them! I love watching them again and again. What we're saying is, whatever already exists within this gorgeous landscape of superhero stories, what if we could stretch it just a little bit this way? Maybe with the foundation of the story, maybe the style, maybe the writing, with the way that we shoot it?

**Noah prepped for this by watching *Quadrophenia* and David Lynch and '60s British movies. Did he give you homework?**

What's lovely about Noah is he's a man of few words and a lot of resources, so whenever you needed anything he would have a lovely path for you to go down. But he also allows you to do the thinking that you need to do. My name, for example, Syd Barrett – what an Easter egg for me. He didn't say, "Please go look that up," but I was thinking, "Well, that sounds familiar, and I'd like to know what that means..." So I went on this big spiral of Pink Floyd. It was a nice little homework lesson for me, which ended up being an integral part of the preparation – the soundscape of that album, *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, the way that he began as a young artist, so talented but so troubled, how his bandmates dealt with that and transitioned him out, the fact that he was deemed mentally ill... There were many parallels.

**How do Syd's powers impact on her life?**

She has an ability to switch bodies with someone when they have skin to skin contact. But it's a little more nuanced than that. She's a hopeful, naive, hopeless romantic, especially for David [played by Dan Stevens], who thinks, "My god, maybe I could have a normal life with this girl!" But maybe the closer she gets to him the less she feels like herself. So that's the challenge.

**She's described as the girl of his dreams. Given his mental state is that necessarily a good thing?**

Who knows what his dreams are. If he has a distortion of reality, if he's not sure what's real, then that adds another layer: "I think this is the girl of my dreams but I can't touch her, so I don't even know if she's real or not. Do I believe her? Do I believe myself?" These are things that we talk about, beyond a superhero or a power. These are questions that come up with people I talk to in Los Angeles!

**Who would you want to switch bodies with?**

Could it be alive or dead? I'm reading Charlie Chaplin's autobiography right now. It's outstanding. I think I would like to be him for a day. He lived a really polarised life. He began as a poor, struggling boy with a really sick mother in London and then he became what he became, where he couldn't go anywhere. I don't know where I'd want to jump into his life, at what time, but maybe on set, doing a silent film, like making *The Kid*. Just such a creative mind but a really simple storyteller. He said you can make anything with a park bench, a cop and a pretty girl. I like that mindset, that art can start so small, so simple. You don't have to suffer. ●

*Legion is on Fox in the UK on Thursdays.*

### Biodata

**Occupation**

→ Actress

**Born**

→ 25 December 1992

**From**

→ Minnesota

**Greatest Hits**

→ *Fargo*, *The Mentalist*, *Supernatural*

**Random Fact**

→ For *Legion* Keller took up the Brazilian martial art capoeira. "It's all about fluid movement, so you don't make a mistake. If you fall, you fall, and you flip and you do something else."



**“I WAS READY  
TO BE PATIENT  
AND WAIT FOR  
SOMETHING I  
COULD REALLY  
PUT MY HEART  
BEHIND”**



IRON FIST



**THE**

# **BOY**

**WITH  
THE**

# **DRAGON TATTOO**

**IRON FIST** is here –  
Marvel's latest Netflix fix.  
Nick Setchfield channels  
his chi as the master of the  
martial arts makes  
the leap to TV





### Scott Buck has a confession.

"Until I started this show I had never actually heard of Iron Fist," he tells *SFX*. "I liked comic books but I really didn't get into them as an adult. Iron Fist wasn't someone I'd ever come across until I met with Marvel."

It's a brave bit of honesty. People behind comic book adaptations routinely big up their geek credentials, flaunting their lifelong love of the characters they're bringing to the screen. But even though Buck's the showrunner of *Iron Fist* – the latest collaboration between Marvel and Netflix – he can be forgiven.

Originally a costumed cash-in on the '70s kung fu craze, Marvel's mystically-infused martial artist has never been part of the prime pantheon of superheroes, never pierced the public consciousness like the Hulk or Captain America, never quite earned the cartoon show or the lunchbox. He's a second-tier icon, a deeper cut – and Buck, it seems, wouldn't want it any other way.

"I think it helps that people won't have preconceptions," he says, weeks before the show drops. "Part of the appeal for me was that he didn't have as rich a story past as some of the other characters. Some of the stories that have been told about him kind of conflicted – they didn't all tell one consistent story. So that gave me a little more wriggle room with this character, to create him and his backstory in a way that would feel new and fresh to all of us."

"They supplied me with all the comic books but I was actually encouraged to feel that I didn't have to read any of them. I just thought it was helpful to look at them from beginning to end, just to see how the story of Danny Rand evolved over time. I picked things from all aspects of the character that had been told. It's a synthesis, in a way, but I think we came up



Finn Jones plays "billionaire Buddhist" Danny Rand, aka Iron Fist.



Netflix viewers may recognise a certain New York nurse...

with something very unique that doesn't necessarily live in the previous comics. You can tell a more complete story over 13 episodes than you can in a comic book. We've created a slightly more grounded and real character, who lives in our contemporary world.

"That's what was intriguing to me," Buck continues. "How do you bring this back in 2017 and make it feel real and fresh and relevant? That was part of the challenge and part of the fun of creating this show."

## WORLD BUILDING

The Marvel/Netflix axis has made New York the urban battleground for three street-level series: *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones* and *Luke Cage*. *Iron Fist* is the final piece building to franchise-masher *The Defenders* later this year. Is being the fourth show out of the gate an advantage or a disadvantage?

"I think it could be a little bit of both," says Buck, who's written for *Rome* and *Six Feet Under* and served as a showrunner on darkly comic serial killer drama *Dexter*. "When I started on this show the only one that had aired was *Daredevil*, so I was able to see that in its entirety. Along the way I was able to watch *Jessica Jones*, and then I was able to read the scripts of *Luke Cage*. It helped in a way because it suggested the tone and the world that we

were going to inhabit. But it also added a bit of pressure, because all three shows were really terrific. It raised the bar and said, 'This is what you need to live up to.'"

While the other shows have clung to the alleys and rooftops of Harlem and Hell's Kitchen, *Iron Fist* gazes up at the steel-and-glass towers of Manhattan's financial district. It's the story of Danny Rand, orphaned scion of Rand Enterprises, who returns to New York after a mysterious 15-year absence to reclaim his birthright. When we meet him he's a shoeless drifter – albeit one with superhuman abilities earned in the mysterious Himalayan kingdom of K'un-Lun. A bum with a black belt.

"Danny is the emotional heart of the show," says Buck. "He grew up as a rich boy in the heart of Manhattan and had everything at his feet, and then had all of that ripped away from him. We're not sure exactly what happened 15 years ago but we know it wasn't necessarily good. He suddenly returns to New York and now he's someone who's torn between two worlds and doesn't quite belong in either. Is he a rich New York kid or is he a warrior monk from K'un-Lun? And that's the struggle that Danny is trying to figure out. Who is he? Where does he belong? He's still a young man on a journey to discover who he is."

Finn Jones – alias Loras Tyrell in *Game Of Thrones* – gets to be the first live-action →



# TELL IT TO THE HAND

**Finn Jones**  
is Danny  
Rand

**You're bringing to life a character that's been in print for 40 years. Daunting?**

After working on *Game Of Thrones* for six years I've learnt about the advantages and the pitfalls of adapting a character which is already in print. There have been lots of different versions of Iron Fist throughout the 40 years. In a way that's a good thing, because it takes the pressure off me to play a certain version of Iron Fist. I can take different inspirations from different eras and essentially create my own version.

**Danny's been described as a billionaire Buddhist. Is that juxtaposition at the heart of the character?**

That's one of the great things about Danny Rand – he's full of these contradictions. On one hand

“He's a very confused, aggressive, raw, angst-ridden guy”



he's a Buddhist, on the other he's a billionaire. On the one hand he's this fierce, loyal, spiritual warrior – on the other he's a total livewire, a completely chaotic teenage mess, and it's in those juxtapositions and in those contradictions and in the middle of those opposing forces that the character really comes alive.

**What's key to Danny's fighting style?**

It's meant to come from a place of peace, almost – he's using the fight to redirect energies to calm a situation. It's not meant to come from a place of aggression. That's what he's been trained to do, but as we see, as much as Danny's trying to be a disciplined fighter, he's also this very confused, aggressive, raw, angst-ridden guy. He's meant to be this balletic martial artist but when it comes down to it, when he loses his edge, he's this scrappy brawler. There's a lot of nice contradictions in that as well.

**You're a DJ. What sort of playlist do you think Danny would have?**

Danny's a huge hip-hop head. He's into his '90s era hip-hop, so we're looking at things like the Wu-Tang Clan, A Tribe Called Quest, Jurassic 5... That's where Danny's heart lies. And I actually enjoy that music as well, so it was quite nice to share that.

**You've got the iconic dragon tattoo. How long did that take to apply?**

It's a simple lick and stick. It's like one of those tattoos you get in your Saturday magazines, one of those transfers! You put the tattoo on and you get a wet flannel and you dab it down and then you peel it off and there you go! Obviously they add more detail on top of it but it's a very simple application – which is handy. It means less time in the make-up chair!





The guy with the camera stayed very, very still.

“Our goal is to have you wondering exactly who the villain is”

incarnation of Danny Rand. Buck is quick to praise the boyish British star, a first-time leading man.

“Finn just seemed like exactly the right guy for this. He has this youthful optimism that carries through despite having this edge of someone who’s been through hell. He was one of the first actors that we saw for the role and we loved him immediately. We said, ‘Well, we can’t hire the very first guy we see, so let’s keep looking’ – but we knew from the beginning that he was our Danny Rand.”

## FIGHTING FIT

Jones’s own immersion in martial arts training came courtesy of stunt co-ordinator Brett Chan, a man with a 7th degree in Shotokan karate and a kung fu expert who’s brought slick, kinetic fight choreography to everything from *Arrow* to *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol*.

“Brett Chan is the best of the best,” acknowledges Buck. “We were very lucky to have him, simply because we’re not just doing stunts, we’re very specifically doing kung fu stunts whenever possible, so Brett’s background and training was able to raise that to the highest level we could achieve in the series.”

And Danny’s fighting style isn’t just about the dazzling, deadly moves. It helps define him as a character, Buck argues. “Danny Rand fights in a kung fu style in contemporary New York.



Jessica Henwick plays Colleen Wing, owner of Danny’s local dojo.

Most of our other characters, most of the people he is fighting against, are not necessarily fighting kung fu. He does encounter other martial artists but they are not necessarily fighting in the same style that he is. The idea was to make Danny stand out.”

While Danny makes allies on his return to the city – Jones’s *Game Of Thrones* co-star Jessica Henwick is katana-wielding Colleen Wing, owner of the local dojo – he’s also entangled in the corporate machinations of childhood friends Joy and Ward Meachum and their father, the ruthless Harold. The former partner of Danny’s parents, Harold now commands Rand Enterprises.

“Our goal is to have you wondering at times exactly who the villain is,” says Buck. “Is this a good guy or a bad guy? Much the same as Danny is wondering. David Wenham brings a tremendous amount of energy and dynamic strength to the character of Harold. We wanted to create characters who weren’t just one dimensional but are complex and have needs and desires that are relatable and understandable.”

*Iron Fist* deals with “the one per cent of the one per cent”, tycoons and power merchants, the financial elite lording it over America from penthouse suites. Given Trump’s in the White House, does Buck believe the timing’s right for this story? →





# DAUGHTER OF THE DRAGON

Jessica  
Henwick is  
Colleen Wing

## Did you dig into the comics when you got the part?

▮ They gave me a couple of issues and then they said, "Look, everything that you need is in the scripts, and if you have any questions come to us, don't necessarily believe that because it's in the comic it's going to be in our show." It was good to see her various incarnations over the years, the fashion, the styles, even just the way that she's drawn has changed so much. I think there was a period of time when she was a white redhead!

## This is your third big geek franchise after *Star Wars* and *Game Of Thrones*. Who's the most secretive?

▮ Every time I take one of these jobs I think I've experienced it all in terms of secrecy, and then the new job goes and adds another level to it. On *Star Wars* it culminated in this four-hour session where they took my phone away and they took my bag and my coat so I had no belongings with me. They led me into this tiny room which had a safe in it, and inside the safe was one envelope, and it was sealed, and inside the envelope were my pages. The pages were red so you couldn't photocopy them – I don't know where the fuck they thought I was hiding a photocopier! And then on *Iron Fist* it's a whole other level. They don't send you the script, you've got to get an app on your phone to access the scripts and the app has to be double-verification, like they've got to call you and you've got to get the passcode!

## We hear you and Finn Jones got up to some subterfuge at your screentest...

▮ Finn and I had met the previous night to practise the lines, and we said, "Oh, let's go in and pretend that we didn't get a chance to practise the lines, so it seems like we're amazing when really we worked at it for an hour!" So we went in and said to each other, "Hi, how are you, haven't seen you in ages!" And we did the scene and they were like, "Wow, the chemistry is so instant!"

## How did they react when they found out?

▮ They didn't find out...



## FIST FACTS!



Iron Fist debuted in *Marvel Premiere* 15 in 1974, the creation of writer Roy Thomas and artist Gil Kane. Thomas was inspired by a kung fu movie that referenced “the ceremony of the Iron Fist”.

Another inspiration was ‘40s hero Amazing Man, the creation of Bill Everett, who also gave us the Sub-Mariner. An orphan raised by Tibetan monks, Amazing Man attained superhuman physical ability before returning to the West.

Danny Rand possesses the mystical force known as the Iron Fist, harnessing the power of a dragon’s heart. Focusing his chi energy, or life force, he can intensify his strength and heal both himself and others.

He partnered with Luke Cage to form Heroes For Hire, sharing the comic *Power Man And Iron Fist* from 1978 to 1986.

Ray Park – alias Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace* – was set to play Iron Fist on the big screen in the early ‘00s, directed by Hong Kong helmer Kirk Wong. The film was never made.



Now *that's* the pose we've all been waiting for.

“We’re trying to keep things extremely grounded and real”

“I certainly hope so. As we wrote this I don’t think we could ever imagine in a million years that Donald Trump would become our president, but it touches on some of the issues that have created the world we’re living in right now. Politics was certainly not on our mind when we wrote it yet Danny lives in our contemporary society, so it’s kind of hard to completely avoid it.”

## TRUE GRIT

The comics that inspired the show are rooted in traditional pulp tropes that can feel uncomfortable in the 21st century – so-called Orientalism and the idea of the White Saviour, the West appropriating the culture of the East. “I was not familiar with the comic books and not familiar with the story beforehand,” says Buck. “I was not really aware of that issue as I approached it, so it didn’t necessarily colour my view of how we tackled this.”

The showrunner does acknowledge that it’s been a challenge to splice the character’s fantastical aspect with the grit and tarmac of the Netflix branch of the Marvel universe.

“We’re trying to keep things extremely grounded and real and tell our stories through characters. So the mystical aspect is something we like to hint at, the idea that there is something bigger and larger out there, but we don’t delve into it all that deeply.”

We won’t see the familiar green-and-yellow comic book costume, Buck reveals. “There was no good reason we could imagine to put Danny Rand in a costume. Because Danny Rand is still discovering who he is as a hero and where he is going to be, so he’s not yet ready to put on a mask or a costume. But at the same time he is someone who is rather well known as a billionaire, so he can’t necessarily go out in public and do the things he does without being recognised. It does become an issue for the character.”

But rest assured, Marvelites: he will have the glowing fist of power. “Danny Rand does indeed have the Iron Fist,” Buck shares. “We asked ourselves, ‘If such a thing existed, what would it look like?’ There was a lot of discussion, a lot of detail, not just from me but from everyone involved at Marvel as to how it should look, how we could make it work without seeming ridiculous and over the top.”

The comic book Danny earns his power from plunging his hand into the molten heart of a dragon. Surely that’s just a little outside the comfort zone of the Netflix shows?

“We have a dragon,” Buck teases.

You have a dragon?

“We have a dragon. But you’ll have to wait until the final episode to understand what I’m talking about...”

*Iron Fist* is on Netflix from 17 March.





It's always the quiet ones you have to watch...



IRON FIST

Carrie-Anne Moss is back as lawyer Jeri Hogarth.



"Yes, I am Iron Man."

# THE KINGPIN

Marvel TV boss **Jeph Loeb** on tying the Netflix shows together

Like Kevin Feige bringing together superhumans, sorcerers and gods on the big screen, Marvel's head of television is one of the masterminds responsible for integrating *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage* and *Iron Fist* as they build towards this year's team-up in *The Defenders*...

**Iron Fist isn't one of Marvel's most well known characters. Does that give you more creative freedom?**

These are characters who've been around for close to 40 years, so as with every Marvel character, *Iron Fist* is someone's favourite, and we have a responsibility to make sure that that fan feels like we got it right. The good news is that the original material that

came from the comic books is so strong that we've got an excellent foundation. The fact that some people haven't heard of who they are works for us because it gives us a chance to introduce another hero to people, and I think

We're pretty sure that's an ancient relic imbued with dark power.



that this has been true from when we first introduced *Iron Man* in the movies.

**How do you keep a character with a glowing fist realistic in the gritty, grounded world you've created in the Marvel Netflix shows?**

I think we do it the same way we do with anything else. You could look at Matt Murdock from the point of view that he's a blind attorney who puts on red pyjamas and does parkour all over the city. *Jessica Jones* has the ability to be able to leap up onto a fire escape. *Luke Cage* is bullet proof. Each of them has a fantastical element, but what we say is you get one bye from the audience, one chance to say to them there's going to be something a little different in this story, but everything else will be real and grounded.

**What have you learned from the previous shows that's fed into *Iron Fist*?**

I think the most obvious one is that we've gotten better from a production point of view because our crew has gelled – in many cases a lot of the same people have worked on all four series. So when a new cast comes in they feel like they're in a world they can feel safe and secure in. But each story is very different in tone and has a different storyteller. Our job at Marvel is to make sure that each of these talented writers and showrunners feel supported in their vision and can make a story that they want to tell.

**Has the journey to *The Defenders* evolved much as you've made the other shows?**

If you were to look at the document that we took to Netflix a little over three years ago you'd be amazed at the story that we set out to tell on all four shows, and what would take us to *The Defenders*, is the story we've told. **Richard Edwards**

© GETTY (1)







## SCARLETT JOHANSSON GOES CYBORG IN **GHOST IN THE SHELL**

# G H O S T H U N T I N G

## ANDREW OSMOND HEARS HOW THE ANIME CLASSIC GOT A LIVE-ACTION REBUILD

Additional reporting by Jordan Farley

**I**n recent years, we've been treated to a legion of superhuman Scarlett Johanssons. There's the disembodied girlfriend (*Her*), the alien succubus (*Under The Skin*), the brain-boasted drugs mule (*Lucy*) and of course there's Marvel's most eligible widow, who dates the Hulk and owns Loki.

Now Johansson is the Major in *Ghost In The Shell*, a terrorist-fighting cyborg with a customised body, diving off skyscrapers and kicking butt. But what makes her interesting is how uncanny she is, says Johansson.

"She doesn't have those little nuances that make us human. For instance, she's standing and listening. She's not got her hands in her pockets. Or maybe she has, but it's at a resting position. I just imagined this character doesn't do anything that is not necessary. Finding the physicality was challenging, because it was a combination of something that I liked, and something that Rupert also liked."

That's British director Rupert Sanders, returning after his 2012 debut *Snow White And The Huntsman*. He's been intrigued by the Major since he saw the character in the first *Ghost In The Shell* film, a 1995 anime. (She was "Major Kusanagi" in that version, but there's no confirmation if Johansson's character will pick up that moniker.)

"The Major was kind of hard and unusual," says Sanders. "You were quite unsure about what she was thinking. She was kind of remote. I like that kind of distant character."

It doesn't sound an easy Hollywood pitch, but then Hollywood had been wrestling with the strange Japanese property for seven years already. Sanders went through the various anime versions, including the

even stranger film sequel *Innocence* and the TV reboot *Stand Alone Complex*.

"There were so many ideas I wanted to maintain from the anime... But when you start to put them to a different narrative structure, you realise some of them won't work. There was shoehorning: 'How do we get the narrative to fit some of these ideas that we really want to bring forward from the anime?' I think, as a fan of the anime, hopefully people will be surprised and happy with how the transition was."

Like Sanders, Johansson was attracted by the central character. "There's no romantic through line in this film. The Major is not a woman who's trying to scratch out a life for herself in the workplace. The Major is a woman who is coming of age, who is accepting her fate, who is a reluctant hero. It's a really powerful story, not one that often comes across the desk. When it came to me, I was like, 'Ugh, this is a lot, and not necessarily what I imagined.' But it was hard to say no to it."

Sanders describes the Major's arc as "almost a coming of age, from machine to human. It's like an adolescence story, but the story of a machine becoming a human." However, he wanted to keep the mystery of the anime character. "She's still tough, and still quite closed. I think that's something the Major has. She's not letting the light in very deep."

Johansson, though, suggests that the Major is humanised by her brawny male cyborg comrade, Batou. He's played by Danish actor Pilou Asbæk (*Borgen*, *Game Of Thrones*), who briefly worked with Johansson on *Lucy*. Johansson describes their characters' relationship as "really touching... Perhaps the most human relationship in the film."



# OUTSIDE THE SHELL

*Ghost In The Shell* isn't the only anime property with Hollywood blockbuster potential (and no, we don't just mean *Akira*)

## PRINCESS MONONOKE

This epic Hayao Miyazaki fantasy, one of the director's most acclaimed films, already seemed to be referenced in Rupert Sanders' own *Snow White And The Huntsman* (the bit with the deer). More recently, its vision of a forest ruled by gods was cited as an inspiration for the monsters' ecosystems in *Kong: Skull Island*.



## YOUR NAME

▲ Last year's Japanese megahit movie begins as a familiar-seeming girl/boy bodyswap comedy, involving a boy in the city and a girl from the country... but it has a humdinger of a story twist midway through. It also features an apocalyptic explosion that's tailor-made for the trailer.

## ATTACK ON TITAN

In a steampunk-style future, humanity is under siege by hideous grinning humanoid giants (the titular Titans). They're out to gobble us up, and must be fought by flying soldiers who wield Spider-Man-style gadgets. This was already adapted as a couple of cheesy live-action Japanese films, but don't worry about them.



## TIGER & BUNNY

▲ This one's actually in development; the last we heard, Ron Howard was provisionally co-producing it at his company Imagine Entertainment. It's a superhero comedy-drama with an ensemble of costumed heroes, though everyone's favourite is the uncool but loveable middle-aged "Tiger".



Jacking in to the Net, '90s style.

Sanders recalls, "In our first meeting, Asbæk really had that wounded bear thing that Batou has... He had a great sense of humour. He really personified Batou."

While some versions of Batou's and the Major's adventures are set in Japan, the 1995 film was set in a city modelled on Hong Kong. The new version follows that lead, with much of the shoot done in the *real* Hong Kong. "Jan Roelfs [the production designer whose credits include *Gattaca* and *SimOne*] did some incredible sets," says Sanders. "We augmented a lot more than we created from the ground up, and that's why we went to shoot in Hong Kong."

Most of the effects are practical, from miniature buildings to a full skeleton of the Major for the Frankenstein creation of her body. "I like building things practically," says Sanders, who relished taking on an SF world. "You design everything, from shoes to the advertising on top of the skyscrapers... Every vehicle, every seat, every bit of tech."

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

Created in the 1990s, the world of *Ghost In The Shell* is now a retro-future. For example, in the anime film, the Major can connect to the virtual "Net" through her computer-enhanced brain, but she has to plug wires into her neck. "Everything's got massive cables running between everything," says Sanders. "Ghost is weird because I don't think it's a predictive future. It's a parallel future."

His cyborg star concurs. "It feels like some alternate life that we could be experiencing," says Johansson. "But the [Major]'s experience is timeless, in a way. I think the search for one's identity is a timeless one."



Scarlett Johansson takes on classic anime character the Major.



Hong Kong: the city of the retro-future.

Sanders sees the Major as following in a tradition of artificial characters. "People are always fascinated by the doll-like self and consciousness. Every generation, from *2001 to Pinocchio*, always examines itself by looking at our reflection as a machine."

When Johansson is asked why she's done so much SF recently, she reflects, "I'm a sucker for overly ambitious people and their vision for things... You look at Rupert, and [*Ghost In The Shell*] is something he's been working on for years. But I wouldn't say that sci-fi particularly draws me. Maybe more is possible in that genre. I feel I've had opportunities to stretch into places I may not have been able to in other genres."

Sanders, meanwhile, reflects on his place in one of Japan's biggest SF franchises.

"What was very important for me was that we were part of the legacy of *Ghost In The Shell*," he says. "I hope we've done something that fits into that legacy and becomes a next generation, or a new iteration, of the *Ghost* world." ●

*Ghost In The Shell* opens on 31 March.







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**"BREATH TAKINGLY BEAUTIFUL"**

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# GHOST SHELL

**OUT ON DVD & BLU-RAY 20 MARCH 2017**

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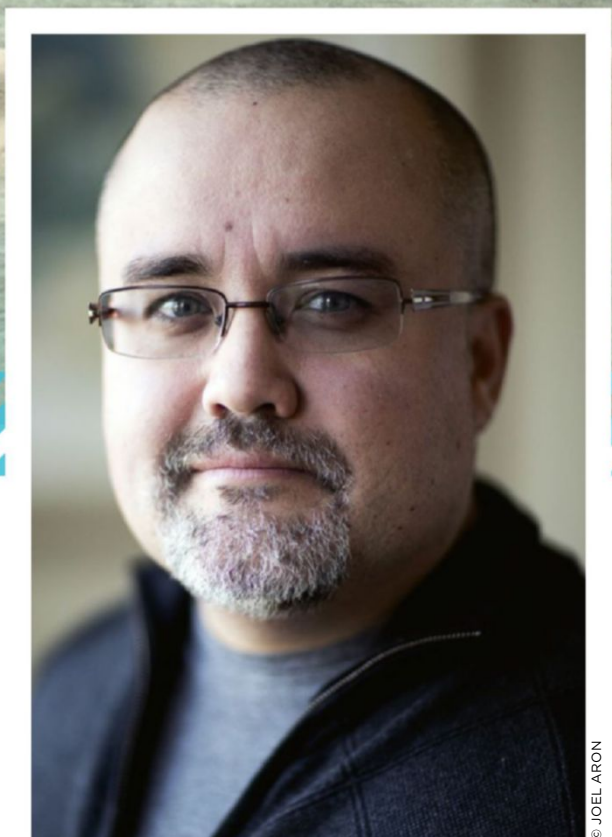




# MASTER OF THE

Meet the keeper of the **STAR WARS** canon. Nick Setchfield talks to





# UNIVERSE

crack continuity commando Pablo Hidalgo



# How does it feel to have an entire universe inside your head?

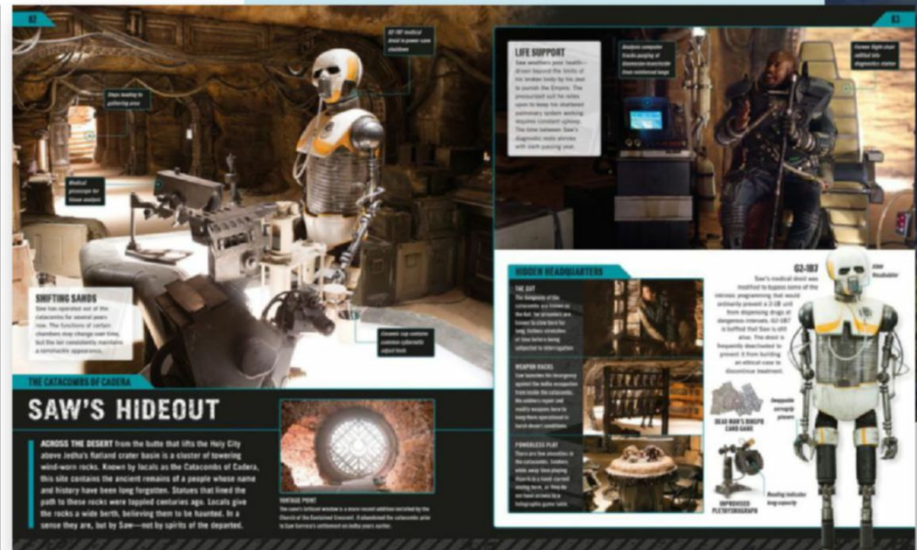
Best ask Pablo Hidalgo, a man whose skull is surely cracking at the seams with planets and starships, droids and Jedi, smugglers and Sith lords. As a fan in the '80s he nailed down *Star Wars* mythology for roleplaying friends; in the '90s he fact-checked the first official *Star Wars Encyclopedia*. He's now an integral part of the Lucasfilm Story Group, a team of canon masters dedicated to the upkeep of the sprawling lore of that galaxy far, far away. It's a galaxy that's expanding relentlessly: new book *Star Wars Rogue One – The Ultimate Visual Guide* finds Hidalgo cataloguing the newly-minted mythos in the franchise's first spin-off movie, everything from Jedha to Scarif, Death Troopers to U-wing gunships. *SFX* wanted to know more about the coolest, most crucial job this side of Emperor Palpatine's personal guard.

## WHO DECIDES ON THE DETAILS OF STAR WARS CANON? IS IT A DEMOCRACY OR DO YOU HAVE FINAL SAY?

It's case-by-case. In general, each storyteller gets a chance to define to what level he or she wants to define in their own chapter of *Star Wars* storytelling. In the case of *Rogue One*, it was a very collaborative process to arrive at the final story that appeared on the screen. But when it came to the tiny details, I would work with co-producer John Swartz to figure out what expansions would require further input from the filmmakers, and what they felt I was free to define. Contrasting examples would be, does anyone care if I name Raddus's warship the Profundity? No? Good, that's what it is. On the opposite side, the backstory of Krennic and Galen was something everyone worked on together to map out and define for further exploration in publishing.

## ARE THE NAMES AND BACKSTORIES OF OBJECTS, PLACES AND CHARACTERS ORGANIC TO THEIR CREATION – OR FILLED IN LATER, ONCE THE FILM IS DONE?

Again, it's a mix. Whenever possible, I pull from whatever inspired the costumers or creature shop or prop designers or whoever was responsible for creating an element. Visiting the set and talking to the artists who created them is incredibly helpful. I try not to etch something in stone until the movie is further along in postproduction and we can be assured a particular detail won't change.







Not just any old droid – SE-2, general worker droid.



Pretty faces like Cornelius Evazan and Ponda Baba can pop up again.



Galen Erso's story ties in beautifully with *A New Hope*.

**WHAT'S THE NAMING CONVENTION? WHAT MAKES A NAME RESONATE AS A "STAR WARS" NAME?**

☺ It is primarily phonetic. Does it sound *Star Wars-y*? There's no standard formula. In some cases, I may take an actor or performer's name as a base, but it's never as simple as spelling a name backwards. Toby Hefferman, who was an AD on the movie, played a rebel pilot named Heff Tobber. You can see bits of his name in there.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE ADDITION TO THE CANON FROM *ROGUE ONE*?**

☺ I wove a story thread about the surgically altered inhabitants of Jedha city that the Creature Shop created, and the kind of lowlife criminals who do such a thing and the bounty hunter who is searching for them. It ties into the Dr Evazan/Ponda Baba cameo in the film, and brings back their old 1989-era background into our storytelling.

**HOW HARD WAS IT TO HAVE *ROGUE ONE* LEAD SO SEAMLESSLY INTO *A NEW HOPE* – AND STILL SURPRISE PEOPLE?**

☺ Not at all. That was the fun part. Having new characters and new perspectives provided the surprises.

**IS IT A CHALLENGE TO BE TRUE TO GEORGE LUCAS'S VISION NOW HE'S STEPPED AWAY?**

☺ We benefit from having people who worked very closely with him over the years to remember his tenets and sensibilities.

**WE DISCOVER GALEN ERSO BUILT THE FLAW INTO THE DEATH STAR. IS IT SATISFYING TO RETROACTIVELY FIX OR EXPLAIN THINGS?**

☺ Not for its own sake. Only if it comes organically out of the story we're trying to tell, as it did during the development of *Rogue One*. It's better to have in mind what kind of story you're telling, what's the human message, and who are the characters and what drives them, than to start with a small point of trivia and work outward.

**IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'RE ITCHING TO FIX OR EXPLAIN?**

☺ Not really, though I would like to finally clarify that the Bothans never stole any Death Star plans. Not make a story about it, just call attention to what's in *Return Of The Jedi*, because the lead-in to *Rogue One* drew a lot of attention



to a basic misunderstanding. The Bothans just provided information on the Death Star's location, status and that the Emperor was to visit; Mon Mothma never once mentions plans. That hologram the rebels looked at weren't plans – blueprints wouldn't show an incomplete Death Star as if the Empire never intended to finish it.

**YOU WERE THE PERSON WHO NAMED PRUNEFACE AS ORRIMAARKO. DO YOU SEE POTENTIAL IN EVERY CHARACTER GLIMPSED ON SCREEN, HOWEVER BRIEF?**

☺ Absolutely. Though, sometimes that potential is just to be a bit of colour. Not everyone has a galaxy-shattering story in their background, but everyone could be interesting in their own little slice of the world.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE UNEXPLORED ERA IN THE *STAR WARS* TIMELINE – AND WHY?**

☺ It's whatever we're working on at the time.

**ARE THERE ERAS THAT ARE STILL OFF-LIMITS TO STORYTELLERS? ARE THERE STORIES YOU THINK SHOULDN'T BE TOLD?**

☺ There are certain things that George Lucas chose not to demystify that I think will always be kept under wraps. Like whatever species Yoda is doesn't need to be defined, I think.

**IS THERE EVER A CLASH BETWEEN THE FAN AND PROFESSIONAL SIDES OF YOUR BRAIN – OR ARE THEY ONE AND THE SAME?**

☺ I recently did the math and came to the realisation that I've been working professionally on *Star Wars* for half my life. So, I think both sides have definitely merged at this point. ●

*Star Wars: Rogue One – The Ultimate Visual Guide* by Pablo Hidalgo is out now from DK.







# BEAST in SHOW

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** is back – in live action. Kimberley Margaux talks enchantment and empowerment with director Bill Condon

**I**t's a sequence that anyone who was a '90s child will remember: a young woman wanders the halls of a dark, deserted castle, looking for her father. She is beautiful, but more importantly, she is brave. She eventually finds her father locked away, and he warns her against a terrible beast. When a strange figure speaks to her from the shadows, she asks him to come into the light. Thrusting her torch into his face, she sees what he really is: a hulking monstrosity riddled with fur and fangs. As fear spikes through her, she gasps and recoils...

Loosely based on the French fairytale from 1740, Walt Disney Pictures' *Beauty And The Beast* told the story of a cruel prince cursed to

look as ugly as he is inside, and of the beautiful woman he takes prisoner to help break the spell. Inspired by Jean Cocteau's sumptuous 1946 adaptation, Disney kept the story's dark sensuality but added musical numbers and talking household objects.

Now Disney's bringing us a live-action remake of 1991's animated classic, with director Bill Condon at the helm and a star-studded cast. Remaking a film with such a rich heritage is a daunting prospect, but Condon says he was immediately drawn to the project. With a lifelong passion for musicals, he saw *Beauty And The Beast* as his chance to create an old-school musical on a large scale, while introducing the story to a new audience. →





Set design is incredibly opulent, so dress up smart when you go and see it.

“I get that this is a remake, but it’s also bringing the story into a new medium,” he tells *SFX*. “Everything needs to be rethought when you don’t have a world in which people are drawn. Psychology and behaviour and all of that has to become more real.”

Cartoons are synonymous with magic; they’re the realm of fantasy and dream. In making *Beauty And The Beast* live-action, Condon had to find a way to keep the cinematic spell intact. Instead of putting pen to paper elements had to be created with CGI. So while the Beast was created from a suit that actor Dan Stevens wore during filming, and which was then augmented with visual effects, ornamental characters like Cogsworth and Lumière were completely digital.

“There were some real challenges in the making of the film,” Condon admits. “But they offered some thrilling solutions, too. We had to figure out a number like ‘Be Our Guest’ and make it feel like it’s really happening. And we had to figure out how to light it. How would the staff in the 18th century light a number like this that they’re putting on for Belle?”

While paying homage to the animation, Condon also wanted to better it, making everything sharper and more distinct. He describes the original film as being set in a nebulous fairytale world without a real time period. But with the help of “genius designer”

## “WE ALL HAVE FELT LIKE A MISUNDERSTOOD MONSTER IN SOME WAY”

Sarah Greenwood, Condon recreated the setting of the original tale: the French countryside of the early 18th century.

We’re promised a Baroque candy land: rooms are flooded with candles, like thousands of melting stars, and fields and forests look so lush you could trail your fingers through them. But it’s the little details that Condon really enjoyed putting together while researching the early 1700s. “We started looking at candlesticks, and they were just so ornate,” he enthuses. “We looked at clocks and candlesticks for the design of the household objects and you could almost see faces in the filigree work!”

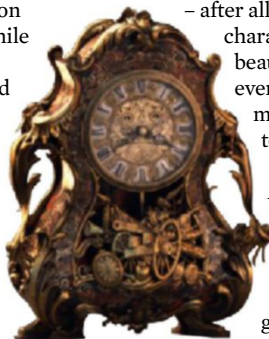
This isn’t the first live-action remake of a classic Disney animation – and Jon Favreau’s

critically applauded remake of ’60s favourite *The Jungle Book* was one of the biggest box office hits of last year. Yet the classic Disney heroine has been under attack. This is a character that’s often inquisitive and spunky, but just as often traditionally beautiful, feminine and slim. After the release of Kenneth Branagh’s 2015 *Cinderella* remake the filmmakers were accused of digitally shrinking Lily James’s waist and transforming her into a gorgeous, golden-haired sliver of a girl.

## MODERN GIRL

Aside from the Alice in Wonderland films, the traditional Disney heroine is also a character defined by her love for a man. You wonder if *Beauty And The Beast* will continue this trend – after all, this is a story where the main character’s name is French for beautiful. How can a belle of the ball ever hope to transfix or inspire modern young women who aspire to be more?

But Condon argues that *Beauty And The Beast* has always been a story to bolster young women. “Belle started that. She was the first Disney heroine that cared more about education than getting the guy, you know.”





# THE BELLES, THE BELLES

Five very different takes on the classic tale



## LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE

Jean Cocteau, 1946

This exquisite French adaptation sees director Jean Cocteau dial up the sensuality, turning the Beast into a leonine creature driven mad by Belle's beauty.



## PANNA A NETVOR

Juraj Herz, 1978

This moody Czech adaptation is the only one where the Beast is envisioned as a giant bird. In a grim twist, he tries to kill Beauty and can only survive by drinking blood.



## SPIKE

Robert Beaucage, 2008

A surreal, hallucinatory journey from an indie American director. Three young girls wander into a forest where an ancient force has been watching them for years.



## BEASTLY

Daniel Barnz, 2011

A fairytale reimagined as a teenage drama, with Alex Pettyfer as the high-school jerk who's turned into a bald, tattooed creep after mocking a girl for her appearance.



## LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE

Christophe Gans, 2014

A remake of Cocteau's masterpiece. It's lighter than the original but just as heady, especially as Léa Seydoux wanders around in a reel of gorgeous gowns.

What could set *Beauty And The Beast* apart from other Disney remakes is the casting of Emma Watson as Belle. Unlike her *Harry Potter* co-star, Daniel Radcliffe, Watson hasn't been that prolific over the last few years, choosing to fight for women's rights and work with the UN rather than hop between film sets. Known for her feminist ideals as much as her choice of roles, Watson doesn't seem like an actress who would play a damsel swooning into the arms of a man.

"What was striking and groundbreaking for Disney 20 years ago is something that the culture has caught up with and moved beyond," Condon says. "So the challenge was, how do we make Belle just as much of a pioneer now? First of all, I think you cast Emma Watson, who is that character in real life, and who became a great collaborator. In the original movie, Belle is someone who likes to read books. In this movie, she wants to teach other women how to read books. She has taken on a sense of community and wants to share her experiences with other women."

## BEASTLY STORY

But for all that Belle's a role model, it's the Beast that Condon thinks audiences will really connect with. "It's like *Phantom Of The Opera*; I think even though it's Belle's story, we all have a part of us that identifies with the Beast. We all have felt like a misunderstood monster in some way and want to reveal the more beautiful person inside of us."

Likening the Beast to the lonely and disfigured character in *Phantom Of The Opera* is telling. Although Condon is a director best known for musicals, it's his penchant for melancholy, misfit characters that threads his

films together. From *Candyman 2* and the two *Twilight: Breaking Dawn* films, to screenwriting debut, *Gods And Monsters*, about director James Whale, Condon has slowly revealed a fascination with characters that feel monstrous.

"I've always been attracted to people who are kind of out of step with the way that the world thinks and moves. I grew up loving monster movies, loving *Frankenstein*, *Bride Of Frankenstein*, and there was an appeal to take one of those monsters, the Beast [and make a film about him]. And there's this weird coincidence that it combines with my other fascination with musicals, so to have a monster that sings felt like, 'Wow, I'll never get that chance again.'"

Like monster movies, fairytales have often been used as conduits to relay darker, deeper truths. And at the crux of *Beauty And The Beast* is a commentary on identity and beauty. Condon says this makes it an essential story for a culture obsessed with outward appearance, from reading about the best-dressed celebrities to downloading beauty apps. "Every generation needs the reminder that external beauty isn't everything it's cracked up to be," Condon says, "and that we have to learn to look at the world in a different way. Like, how deep has a selfie ever got?"

"It's a film that will appeal to children but it's really for everyone, and it gets to some essential ideas about loneliness, isolation, brutality, in a way that can be frightening but powerful. I hope at the heart of it there's a real intimate story between these two outsiders: outsiders who connect because they've got a different take on the world. That's something I feel very connected to and feel very strongly about." ●

*Beauty And The Beast* opens on 17 March.



Gaston (Luke Evans) isn't a shy man.



Belle's father Maurice (Kevin Kline): slimmer than he was in '91.





Brought



To Book

# ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY

The Clarke Award winner returns to the genre that made his name

Words by Jonathan Wright // Photography by Joby Sessions

**E**ven in a post-truth world, there are moments in life when everything suddenly changes for the better. Spectacularly so. Just ask Adrian Tchaikovsky. Last year, his science fiction novel, *Children Of Time*, took the 30th Arthur C Clarke Award. To someone steeped in the genre and who reads the shortlist every year, it meant “everything” to see his name added to a list including the likes of Margaret Atwood, M John Harrison and China Miéville.

“I’m still over the moon about the whole thing,” says Tchaikovsky. “Every so often it comes back to me that, yes, this was a thing that actually happened.”

The win was particularly remarkable because Tchaikovsky was known primarily as a fantasy writer. Indeed, his new novel, *The Bear And The Serpent* is the second offering in his *Echoes Of The Fall* fantasy series, which is set in a society of shape-changers.

## CROSSING GENRES

So how different are the disciplines of writing SF and fantasy? After all, certain aspects of the novelist’s craft – plot, character, world-building – cut across genres. But not all. “Writing SF, I felt that I had a responsibility to get the science as plausible as possible, which was a different sort of constraint to the purely internal consistency I would look for in a fantasy,” says Tchaikovsky.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to see Tchaikovsky the SF writer and the fantasy writer as different people. Not only do they occupy the same body, but themes recur, notably a fascination with the natural world. As well as the shape-changers of the new book, *Children Of Time* sees humans fleeing a dying Earth and having to contend with uplifted spiders, while his 10-volume *Shadows Of The Apt* sequence revolves around “kinden”, different races of humans with insect-like characteristics. What is it with the animals?

“I was enthralled by nature documentaries from a very young age,” he says. “Animals have always been the most interesting thing in the world for me, which translates into a love of monsters and aliens in fiction and games.”

More than this, Tchaikovsky makes animal characteristics central to his protagonists. A forthcoming SF book will feature bioengineered dog soldiers. Meantime, in *Echoes Of The Fall*, “Every adult can shape-change to their totem animal, and their culture and beliefs are strongly built around that fact.” For his heroine, Maniye, whom we first meet in *The Tiger And The Wolf*, this is problematic because she has “to come to terms with a mixed [animal] ancestry that left her with too many souls in one body”.

For the new novel, Tchaikovsky shows us more of the world as Maniye “and some followers she’s acquired” travel south with another character from the first book, Asmander. They’re off “to be the foreign bodyguard of a prince of his nation just as it undergoes a civil war”. Meanwhile, “Back in the north, the doom that we’ve been hearing about in rumours and visions throughout the first book finally arrives.” A third book is in the pipeline.

Frankly, you wonder how Tchaikovsky keeps up the work rate considering he’s the parent of an autistic son who’s “an extremely accomplished arguer”, and works three-and-half days a week as a legal executive. “Getting that kind of additional input in your life can be a good source of inspiration,” he says, “keeping the mills of the brain turning, so to speak. Although I generally don’t let anything of my legal career bleed into my writing career, save for the odd borrowed name.”

## LIBRARY BUILDING

A few such names, you’d guess, turned up in his *Shadows Of The Apt* novels, of which Tchaikovsky wryly notes, “I am still staggered that anyone let me finish a 10-book series about steampunk insect people.” They probably wouldn’t have done if it hadn’t been so good, but it’s intriguing to note that he started out during the early 21st-century “new heroic fantasy” boom. Did this kill off old fantasy?

“It’s all cycles,” says Tchaikovsky. “Quite possibly, given that the actual real world outside is apparently heading back to all the joys of medievalism – you know, constant war between nations, a hereditary class with the power of life and death, religious bigotry, all those fun things – we’ll see a swing back to rose-tinted kings and prophecies fantasy as people want more escapism and less cynicism in their reading material...”

Beneath the gags, that’s quite a serious answer. How about the idea of the Sad Puppies as spiritual cousins to tub-thumping Trump enthusiasts? “I think there is a very clear continuum between Puppies, Gamergaters and the mainstream far-right political groups who are now gaining significant power all over,” says Tchaikovsky. “The fights within genre have proved to be the world in miniature.”

As to how much that should worry fans because, say, the US genre market becomes more conservative, Tchaikovsky is dubious. “Art that slavishly follows the dictates of the top is ‘safe’ art, and there will always be a counter-zeitgeist of art that is overtly or subversively attacking authority.” ●

*The Bear And The Serpent* is published by Tor.

## Biodata

### Occupation

→ Novelist

### Born

→ 14 June 1972

### From

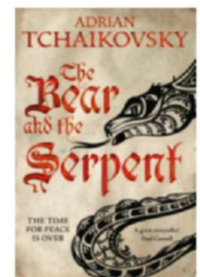
→ Woodhall Spa

### Greatest Hits

→ *Children Of Time* took the Clarke, while Tchaikovsky’s own favourite book in the Apt sequence is *War Master’s Gate*.

### Random Fact

→ Tchaikovsky would like to write comics: “I love hearing comics writers talk about how the finished product is a hybrid of their original ideas and the new perspective the artist brings.”





“ANIMALS HAVE  
ALWAYS BEEN  
THE MOST  
INTERESTING  
THING IN THE  
WORLD FOR ME”





ZORDON'S

ALIVE





*Project Almanac* director Dean Israelite wants to make **POWER RANGERS** relevant again. Will Salmon goes on set to find out how...

**P**uberty is tough. Your hormones are all over the place, your skin is a pus-filled battleground and your parents just don't understand you, man. No wonder coming of age stories are so popular, from *The Catcher In The Rye* to *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. And now, according to director Dean Israelite, Saban's new *Power Rangers* movie.

"This is a movie about five disenfranchised teenagers who are all going through their own problems and issues," says Israelite when *SFX* meets him on set in Vancouver. "The journey of these kids becoming the *Power Rangers* is the journey of them growing up, shedding their emotional armour and finding that they can fit into the skins that they belong in – and those skins happen to be the *Power Rangers* suits. To me, what's been exciting about this movie from the very first draft is that it's a metaphor for these kids finding out who they are."

Let's back up a little. *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* debuted on US TV in 1993. The brainchild of media mogul – and 143rd richest man in the United States – Haim Saban, it mixed kung-fu action with sci-fi adventure. Although a North American production, its effects sequences were cannibalised from Japanese show *Super Sentai* and, despite the show's undeniable cheesiness, it became an instant playground favourite with kids and →



nurtured a huge cult following around the world. The *Mighty Morphin* incarnation of the show ran for three seasons before splintering off into a bewildering array of spin-offs: *Power Rangers Zeo*, *Power Rangers Turbo*, *Power Rangers Ninja Storm* and many, many more.

## MORPHIN' TIME

Nowadays it's easy to laugh at the show. The ambition of its effects greatly exceeded the production team's budget and ability to do them justice, the acting was frequently terrible and, in its original version, its key villain was named Rita. And yet its fandom has persisted – so much so that Saban has teamed up with Lionsgate for a big-budget reinvention that looks set to replace the poor effects with dazzling CGI and the dodgy actors with an impressive line-up of international talent. They're still calling the villain Rita, though.

SFX is on set in Vancouver early in the filming process. The rain outside is torrential, but we're safe and warm in the mouth of an enormous cavern – actually a hugely impressive studio set that houses both the ersatz hoodoos we're standing on and, next door, mid-construction, the Rangers spaceship. It's the first time that the five teen heroes – Jason (Dacre Montgomery), Zack (Ludi Lin), Kimberly (Naomi Scott), Billy (RJ Cyler) and Trini (Becky G) – have been on this particular set and they're suitably impressed.

"This is the scene where we discover the entrance to the spaceship," says Montgomery while various members of the crew manoeuvre parts of the scenery around. "It's the first time we stumble upon it and in this scene we are

totally bewildered. This is huge, but the scale of what will be on screen is like, 10 times the size of this." Despite it being Montgomery's first major role he seems at ease and unflappable even when – in a wonderfully B-movie moment – a polystyrene boulder tumbles off the set and bounces towards him. He's full of praise for his fellow Rangers, and ebullient about their blossoming real-life friendship. "None of us had ever met prior to landing here three weeks before shooting. The first day I said, 'Let's take the script back to one of our houses and do a script read. The first night we sat down about 6pm and we didn't leave till 1am. We read and we laughed and we cried and on this first night there was this instant bond. Now we're, what, eight weeks down the track?'"

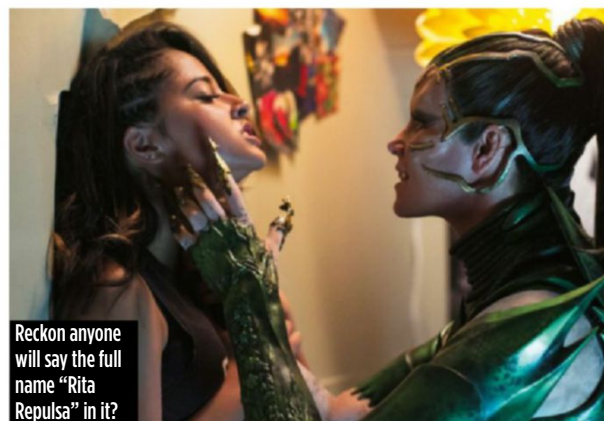
The scene being filmed this morning is the moment glimpsed in the trailer where the kids discover the Power Coins that will grant them their super-abilities. "We're trying to make everything feel as big and adventurous as possible," says Israelite. "When the kids find the Coins I think it feels different and interesting. The way they discover the ship is this incredible adventure through all of this water that you would never have seen in any of the TV shows. It takes them into this underground cave, which is where we are today, and what you are seeing is a 25th of what it will look like in the movie."

Israelite and his team cast their net far and wide to find the right Rangers. "We saw thousands of people," he says. "It was really important to find kids that really can be emblematic of those original characters."

Producer Marty Bowen, veteran of the *Twilight* and *Maze Runner* franchises, agrees.



The new-look Alpha-5.



Reckon anyone will say the full name "Rita Repulsa" in it?

# THE FAMOUS FIVE

Meet the new Rangers



**DACRE MONTGOMERY**  
IS THE RED RANGER

"Jason is a fallen high school football hero who's dealing with a whole bunch of issues at home. He's really lost at the beginning of the film, but he ends up meeting this group of teenagers and they form a bond. I think it's interesting because he's a jock, but he has such empathy for the rest of the group."



**BECKY G IS THE**  
YELLOW RANGER

"She's a bad-ass girl. I grew up wanting to be a Power Ranger and now I get to be that for another generation. Kids are going to be like, 'Mom, that's the Yellow Power Ranger! That's Trini!' Yellow is my favourite colour and when I found out I was the Yellow Ranger I thought 'this is meant to be.'"



**LUDI LIN IS THE**  
BLACK RANGER

"My character Zack Taylor, the Black Ranger, the best Ranger. The best colour is the absence of all colours. He's boisterous, he's loud, but that's kind of to cover up what he has inside because he's dealing with a lot of issues that he's not really prepared for until he finds the power he needs to overcome his challenges."



**NAOMI SCOTT**  
IS THE PINK RANGER

"She's the popular girl, the queen bee, but she does something and is ostracised by her group. I first auditioned for the Yellow Ranger, but they said can you read for the Pink one? I had a Skype session with Dean and he just said all the right things. When I knew his vision that was when I was like, 'this is mine.'"



**RJ CYLER**  
IS THE BLUE RANGER

"I used to get in trouble for doing superhero stuff around my house. I broke a ceiling fan doing Power Ranger activities with my brothers. We used to put a pillow on the ceiling fan and then put it on the lowest spin to try and catch it and say 'It's morphin' time!' before we hit the floor. That didn't end well."





For the colourblind among you, this goes Yellow, Black, Red, Pink and Blue.

“Everything should feel completely believable, completely grounded”

as teased in the trailers. Despite their inclusion (and that of Goldar – Rita’s enormous, none-more-gold winged ally), Israelite is keen to keep the action on a human scale. “Everything should feel completely believable, completely grounded. I think this should be more personal and character driven.”

## RANGER DANGER

Later, *SFX* is led up a flight of stairs to a platform overlooking an enormous indoor water tank and another fake cavern wall. In the film this will act as the portal to the Rangers’ spaceship; in reality it looks very deep, very dark and very ominous. It’s here that the kids spent two carefully planned days filming the sequence where they swim down to the Ranger spaceship. “It was very hard filming there,” says Israelite. “It’s so incredibly slow, because everything has to be meticulous. I usually like to shoot big chunks of a scene all at once so that the characters can really move and breathe and find things as they’re doing it. In the water, you can’t do that. Everything has to be exactly the shot that you’ve conceived. It’s rewarding, because you look at the images, and they’re stunning, but fatigue for the actors is a big deal. They’re in the water, under the water, all day. It’s very difficult on their bodies. Their eyes were burning, their ears started getting blocked and they couldn’t decompress properly.”

Not that the Rangers themselves seem to mind, they’re just thrilled to be involved. “There’s a lot of new elements – it’s more modern and our director has made it into such a real thing that I hope it connects with all the kids out there,” says Ludi Lin, while Naomi Scott states that it was a Skype call to Israelite and his enthusiasm for the project that sold her on the idea. “I hope this feels like more of an Amblin type of experience,” says Israelite when asked if this will follow recent trends for dark superhero movies. “I hope six-year-olds enjoy the fun of it, but I also hope it will feel meaningful and sophisticated enough for 17-year-olds and 25-year-olds. It should have a real sense of adventure and fun. There should be a real joy and buoyancy to the movie.” ●

*Power Rangers* opens on 23 March.



Even better than a school sightseeing trip.

“We looked all over the world to find our perfect five. The Red Ranger is from Australia, just got out of school – can you imagine landing *this* for your first job? The Blue Ranger is RJ Cyler who is a true breath of fresh air. Our Pink Ranger is from England and she’s a really incredible actress. Becky G is the Yellow Ranger and she’s from California and she’s also a pop star! Ludi Lin lives in both China and Vancouver. He’s the best built human being I’ve ever seen. He needs to eat more donuts!”

Pitted against the kids is villainous space witch Rita Repulsa, played in her 2017 incarnation by *The Hunger Games*’ Effie Trinket, Elizabeth Banks. Backed up by her army of shapeshifting henchmonsters, the Putties, Rita is intent on attacking Earth and destroying the Power Rangers forever. “She’s a deliciously weird villain,” says Israelite. “I think Elizabeth brings the perfect sensibility to the role, because you have to have someone who can take that weirdness and make it really entertaining but also completely believable.”

Luckily for the Power Rangers, help is on hand. In the afternoon we watch the cast run

through another early scene. Robot Alpha-5 (voiced by comedian Bill Hader) is guiding the team through a training session, overseen by the giant disembodied head of the squad’s mentor, Zordon. Bryan Cranston is lending his gravelly tones and a CGI impression of his face to the character – though at this point in the filming remained uncast, and the subject of much on-set speculation. It’s not the *Breaking Bad* man’s first brush with the franchise – in a peculiar twist, he provided voiceover work on the original series, and Billy Cranston, the Blue Ranger, was named in his honour. “Rather than do the typical hologram that everyone’s seen before we’re going to do this giant pinboard effect that Zordon’s face ripples and moves across,” explains production designer Andrew Menzies. “The paint we’re using on the spaceship has never been used on a movie.”

The Rangers won’t be unarmed, either. Aside from their brightly colour-coded suits, the Rangers have the Zords – enormous animal-shaped attack vehicles that should provide the film with some dazzling CGI action sequences when they come head to head with Rita’s army,





# Goodnight Sweetheart

It was the '90s sitcom that philandered across the fourth dimension. Steve O'Brien steps through the time portal

**W**hen the BBC ran its week-long, cross-channel knees up marking 60 years of the sitcom in September last year, it looked like a *fait accompli* that *Goodnight Sweetheart*, exhumed from its televisual grave after 17 years, would get the a-okay for a fresh series.

Three point seven million viewers tuned in to witness Nicholas Lyndhurst's Gary Sparrow return to the modern world on 2 September 2016 – that's a 19.5% audience chunk, beating out all its 9pm rivals. Twitter went crazy, as the show shot to the top of the trends. The BBC would be stupid, surely, to ignore those ratings, those reviews, those reactions...

But the BBC is a strange, unpredictable beast, and just over a month later, its writers, Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran, announced on Twitter, "Sadly the BBC have passed on *Goodnight Sweetheart*, whilst acknowledging its excellence. Gary will have to find another TV channel."

In its 1990s heyday, however, the BBC seemed a lot more appreciative of this peculiar

time-travel sitcom. Its first series averaged nine million viewers, with subsequent seasons hitting BBC-pleasing highs of 15 million. Ratings like that are near to unthinkable now, but *Goodnight Sweetheart* somehow hit the public's sweet spot. Which is curious because everything about *Goodnight Sweetheart* was bravely bizarre. A situation comedy about a man who time-travels back to wartime London in order to conduct a clandestine affair? Having an adulterer as the hero was lopsided enough, even without the sci-fi trimmings.

If there were two people who'd be able to sell a concept this gleefully nutty it was Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran. At the time, there were few comedy scribes hotter than this duo, who'd cut their writing teeth on another old-time comedy, ITV's *Shine On Harvey Moon*. But as the creators of ratings juggernaut *Birds Of A Feather*, it was relatively easy to book a meeting with the corporation bigwigs. Not that the BBC initially "got" the concept of *Goodnight Sweetheart* though.

"The BBC's Head of Comedy, Martin Fisher, said, 'I don't begin to understand it,'" Laurence →

REX (1)





News & C. CUTTLER General

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IT ALSO FEEDS POULTRY -- Your Council will collect

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Marks tells *SFX*. “He said, ‘What are you saying? A chap that lives now, a TV repairman, walks down an alleyway, arrives in 1940 and falls in love with a woman who works behind a bar in an East End pub? And are you seriously asking me to put on a show about adultery?’”

Fisher looked at the pair blankly.

“I can’t begin to understand what you’re talking about,” he told them. “I can only ask, is it going to be funny?”

They nodded.

“Well then give me six,” he said.

“That wouldn’t happen today,” smiles Marks.

## EAST END INSPIRATION

*Goodnight Sweetheart* took its TV bow on 18 November 1993, but the first rumblings of the concept happened three years before. They were working out a scene from their drama *Love Hurts*, when they began discussing Whitechapel Road in East London.

“I said, for reasons I now can’t remember, ‘Do you realise, Maurice, just two streets behind where we’ve situated these two characters, there are whole rows of houses that could be locked in the era of the Blitz?’ And he stopped what he was doing, looked at me and said, ‘I think you’ve just created our next series.’”

It took two years of creative bantering to flesh out the specifics. They knew they had a sitcom about a man who travels back through



Time-crossed lovers Phoebe (Dervla Kirwan) and Gary (Nicholas Lyndhurst).

*We'll Always Have Paris*  
Goodnight, Woody...

● A man wandering into the past simply by walking down a street and encountering some of the famous figures of the time? The plot of *Goodnight Sweetheart*, yes, but also of Woody Allen’s *Midnight In Paris* (made in 2011), which has Owen Wilson’s dejected Hollywood scriptwriter transported back from modern-day to the Paris of first the 1920s and then the 1890s. And where *Goodnight Sweetheart* has Gary encountering such figures as Noel Coward, the Kray twins and George Formby, Allen’s film has Gil Pender (Wilson) hooking up with such cultural giants as Ernest Hemingway, F Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso.



time (they quickly decided against finding an elaborate explanation for the time anomaly), but what kind of man would our hero be and why would he keep going back?

“Why would you leave the comfort of your own area in 1993?” Marks says. “Why would you go back to a war zone? Because although we weren’t invaded yet, it was a very dangerous place to be. And we both agreed that the only reason you’d go back is for love. Once we’d worked that little piece out, then of course things started to fall into place.”

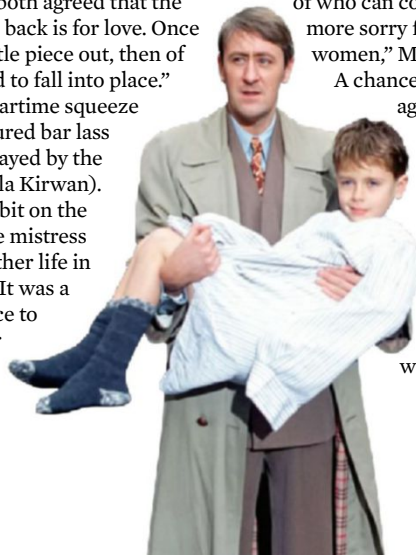
Gary Sparrow’s wartime squeeze would be sweet-natured bar lass Phoebe Bamford (played by the then unknown Dervla Kirwan). But she was Gary’s “bit on the side”, an untraceable mistress unaware of Gary’s other life in 1990s Cricklewood. It was a big ask of an audience to accept a philanderer as a sitcom’s

protagonist, even if his modern-day spouse was a careerist go-getter with little patience for her low-achieving hubby.

Marks and Gran told the BBC there was a shortlist of one to play Gary Sparrow – Nicholas Lyndhurst, then riding high as the hapless Rodney Trotter in *Only Fools And Horses*. “He was the only actor we could think of who can commit adultery, and you feel more sorry for him than you do for the two women,” Marks says.

A chance meeting with Lyndhurst’s agent at the 1991 Baftas began the dialogue with the then-30-year-old actor. Lunch was swiftly arranged at an eatery in Covent Garden where Marks and Gran laid down their plans for the show.

“Nick liked the idea,” recalls Marks. “So we wrote the script and he loved it and thus was born *Goodnight Sweetheart*.”







Yvonne (Michelle Holmes) is more at home with her '90s furnishings.



Best mate Ron (Victor McGuire) ends up going back to the past too.

The series started well, ratings-wise, but it was the repeat of the first season which saw its popularity begin to balloon. After the initial series of six, the BBC ordered another run of 10, such was their faith in the show.

After three series, however, Dervla Kirwan decided to move on ("I think there were boyfriend problems," Marks says). Not only that, but Michelle Holmes, who played Gary's high-flying wife, Yvonne, quit at the same time. A blow, surely?

"Not really," Marks shrugs. "We said, we can put different Phobes and Yvonnas in every series as long as we don't lose Nick. Had Nick wanted to go after series three, we'd have finished it. The girls could be replaced."

The show would live on for another four series after the departure of two of its main cast. Audiences quickly warmed to their replacements, Elizabeth Carling (Phoebe) and Emma Amos (Yvonne), but *Goodnight Sweetheart* was always set out as a finite series and series six was planned as the last.

"We'd always said, each series would represent a year of the war, and when we reach the end of the war, something will happen, we didn't know what," Marks says. "And then that's it! It's goodnight sweetheart!"

The final (ahem) episode takes place on VE Day and has Gary saving the life of then-Deputy Prime Minister (and future PM) Clement Attlee.

*"It had a lovely natural ending. It didn't need laughter, it's very poignant"*

"We knew that someone tried to poison Attlee, because they didn't want him to be Prime Minister," reveals Marks, "Gary knew he was going to be Prime Minister, Gary saves his life, and then realises that's the reason why he was ever brought to the 1940s in the first place, to make sure history follows its line."

But while early thoughts had the portal closing behind Gary in the present, it was decided to wrap the series with Gary staying put in the past.

"We knew what was going to happen, but we didn't know until quite late that he wouldn't get back to now," Marks says. "And when we discovered that we thought, that is a lovely natural ending. And it didn't need laughter. It's a very poignant end."

That last episode aired in 1999, but, Marks says, there wasn't a week in the following 17 years when the two of them hadn't been asked,

'When's it coming back?'

"Not just from England," he says, "from Australia, America, Canada, South Africa. 'Can't you just do a one-off, a Christmas special?' But it was never on the agenda. Ever."

## SLIGHT RETURN

Until early last year, that is. One of the top bods at Retort TV (who own Marks and Gran's bulging back catalogue) asked the pair if there was any way they could bring *Goodnight Sweetheart* back, with the idea of pitching a one-off revival to the BBC as part of their planned comedy season.

"But the portal's shut," came the answer from Marks and Gran. Still, they promised to think about it, and spent a fair few lunches spitballing ideas on how to bring Gary Sparrow back. Then a brainwave hit – it was 17 years since the end of the series. And 17 years after 1945 was 1962. Some of the lies that Gary had told – that he'd written all those Beatles hits, for instance – were about to come crashing around him. And not only that, he was about to cross over into his own infant existence.

"What if he attended his own birth?" Marks says excitedly. "That was the answer."

And while they toyed with the idea of a fresh portal opening and Gary exploring a new period in history, they eventually decided that it was too juicy an idea not to have him catapulted into the here and now.

"No greater change has there been between any period of 17 years than 1999 and 2016," Marks contends. "He doesn't know anything. He doesn't understand the language, the technology particularly. He nearly gets run over twice by a car with a silent engine. Life has changed beyond recognition."

The cast said yes to the return and soon found themselves in the same room together for the first time in 17 years.

"It was as if we'd read the previous episode about three weeks earlier," Marks enthuses. "Everyone was immediately in character, and everyone adored the script. Nick described it as putting on an old pair of slippers!"

The hopes were that this one-shot would act as a kind of pilot for a revived series. But although the Beeb failed to rubber stamp a new series, that may not be the end of it. Marks and Gran's other great sitcom, *Birds Of A Feather*, was resurrected on ITV after a 16-year gap after the BBC said 'thanks, but no thanks'. We may not have seen the last of the now fiftysomething Gary Sparrow.

"It was a bit like a rock concert," Marks recalls about the recording of that reunion episode, "inasmuch as there were 400 people sitting in an audience as if they were there to see the reformation of a band that meant a great deal to them 17 years ago. It was a stunning evening!" ●

REX (4)





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## THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

Those wonderful toys!

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CINEMA

## THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

Zack Snyder must be bricking it...



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

U | 104 minutes

▶ Director Chris McKay

▶ Cast Will Arnett, Zach Galifianakis, Michael Cera, Ralph Fiennes, Rosario Dawson, Mariah Carey

### ◆ Like an elaborate construction

of tiny plastic bricks, *The Lego Batman Movie* fulfils a ton of interlocking expectations. It's very funny. It has some great lines, many aimed squarely at the geek audience. It's charming in a way that no live-action *Batman* has been allowed to be since the days of Adam West. And it has a good story, which plays to simple emotions and allows for mad mashups, including the Lego Batman and Robin biffing and bashing a group of grating metallic guest stars (we'll even forgive the script for calling them "British robots"...). It's all so well done, but it's hard not to take it for granted after a while and start wishing for even more.

This is a sequel to 2014's *The Lego Movie*, though it could just as well be a reboot – there's no reference to the previous film's adventures, nor should there be.

All that's important is that Lego Batman is back, now in his home turf of Gotham City. He's still an egomaniacal monster with the graces and emotional intelligence of a very backward 13-year-old... or, one might say, of the Ben Affleck Batman we saw last year in *Batman V Superman*. Whether by design or by accident, *The Lego Batman Movie* mercilessly undercuts the machismo of the DC Extended Universe so ruthlessly that it might become the first parody film to kill a franchise by the same studio.

It starts in ultra-meta mode, with Batman commenting amusingly on the studio logos before the animation even starts. (Once again voiced by Will Arnett in a comically angry voice that still sounds ten times more believable than Christian Bale's Batman.) Then we're straight into a massive battle between Batman and the Joker... only it's quickly clear that the Joker is being subverted as much as Batman. Ordinary Gothamites aren't scared of ol' green hair any more. Why should they be, when they know that Batman beats him every time?

Then we get the real shocker:



Robin was cruelly throttled by the sweet wrapper.



"I'm so lonely."

Batman himself says that he doesn't rate the Joker as an enemy. In a flash, we're in the middle of a break-up comedy, featuring a hurt and betrayed Joker who can't face Batman tossing him aside like a pulled cracker. Heck, we're only 10 minutes into the film and already we're on the Joker's side.

Then it's time to set up Batman some more, as a guitar-playing poseur who revels in his adoring fans in Gotham City, but back in cavernous Wayne Manor is the world's biggest no-mates saddo. Perhaps the film's single best image is of Batman standing

“Has some great lines, many aimed at the geek audience”

gormlessly in front of a microwave, heating his one-person lobster supper while his famous shadow rotates forlornly round the room. Of course, there's an Alfred, voiced by a loveably grave Ralph Fiennes





with the tenderness that only a spiritual parent can feel towards a really horrid teenager.

There's a lot of Alfred in this film, including a bonkers makeover in the last act, but then the film has lots of everything. There's an eager beaver, puppy-dog Robin (*Scott Pilgrim's* Michael Cera), and an ass-kicking, flame-haired Barbara Gordon (Rosario Dawson). She's replaced her dad as Police Commissioner, and is understandably asking why Gotham is still crime central after umpteen decades of Batman.

Then there's the random stuff.

Everyone shouts "pew-pew" while firing guns. There's a brilliant running joke about Michael Jackson (no, not that kind of joke). There are enough character cameos to make *Captain America: Civil War* feel under-populated. True, the guest from *Harry Potter* looks so generic that at first you're not sure who he's even meant to be, but when he comes accompanied by Gremlins, King Kong and other surprises, it's hard to complain.

Like many Hollywood cartoons, *The Lego Batman Movie* is about a manchild who must learn to

handle relationships like a grown-up. These lessons are extremely on-the-nose, but Fiennes's Alfred stops them becoming cloying while we enjoy the huge, silly, whooshing battles. Our only complaint is that for all the meta cleverness and geeky play, there's nothing truly surprising about *The Lego Batman Movie* – no last burst of invention to match the end of the first film. It's very good fun, but it's not quite great. **Andrew Osmond**

**i** Harvey Dent is voiced by Billy Dee Williams, who also played Dent (albeit with just the one face) in Tim Burton's *Batman*.

## HOLY CROSSOVERS!

Batman's previous inter-franchise adventures



### SESAME STREET

Back in 1970, an animated Batman and Robin made a few early appearances in Jim Henson's educational Muppet show. One skit saw the Dynamic Duo interrupting their pursuit of the Joker to look for a sensible place to cross the road – a plotline the Nolan movies sorely lacked.

### SCOOBY-DOO MEETS BATMAN

They could have been fighting over who had the catchiest theme tune of the '60s. Instead this 1972 toon team-up saw the Caped Crusader joining forces with Scooby, Shaggy and co to thwart the Joker and the Penguin.

### BATMAN VS THE INCREDIBLE HULK

An age-old pub debate was answered in 1981 as Bats went mano-a-mano with Marvel's not-so-jolly green giant. Bruce Banner was working for Wayne Research when the Joker persuaded the Hulk that Batman was evil. Batman also had a ding-dong with Captain America in 1996's *DC Vs Marvel* series.

### JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM

In this 1991 *Batman/Judge Dredd* comic (the first of four), Bats found his way to Mega-City One. Dredd initially took a dim view of all the unauthorised weapons in Batman's utility belt, but the pair grudgingly united to defeat Judge Death.



CINEMA



The poisoning of Paul Hollywood began.

## THE LOVE WITCH

### The Potion Picture



▶ **RELEASED 10 MARCH**

15 | 120 minutes | Also VOD

▶ Director **Anna Biller**

▶ Cast **Samantha Robinson, Laura Waddell, Jeffrey Vincent Parise**

◉ **“How are we going to be equals to men if we keep giving them what they need?”** This line, uttered during a lengthy scene set in a women-only cake shop (during which the Bechdel test isn't just passed, but lapped multiple times), could sum up *The Love Witch*. It follows the misadventures of Elaine, a young sorceress who's determined to find the man of her dreams. But when she uses potions and spells to seduce potential contenders, mayhem and murder follow.

Directed by feminist auteur Anna Biller (who also scripted the film, produced it and designed the

costumes), *The Love Witch* is whip-smart horror. Exploring female fantasy on multiple levels, every element – from the scarily intense soundtrack to the lengthy, open-hearted monologues about male/female relationships – will leave commitment-phobes squirming/awkwardly laughing in their seats.

The film's late-'60s stylings provide a sense of heightened reality, with modern cars and mobile phones mixed in with the period costume. It all combines to create a tone that'll discomfort some, but delight most. Beautifully shot, creatively edited and impressively layered, it's an occult pulp potion that Film Studies students will be deconstructing for decades. **Sam Ashurst**

**i** Elaine's styling was inspired by pulp novel covers and cult '60s horror actresses such as Edwige Fenech and Barbara Steele.

## PERSONAL SHOPPER

### She's In Fashion



▶ **RELEASED 3 MARCH**

15 | 105 minutes

▶ Director **Olivier Assayas**

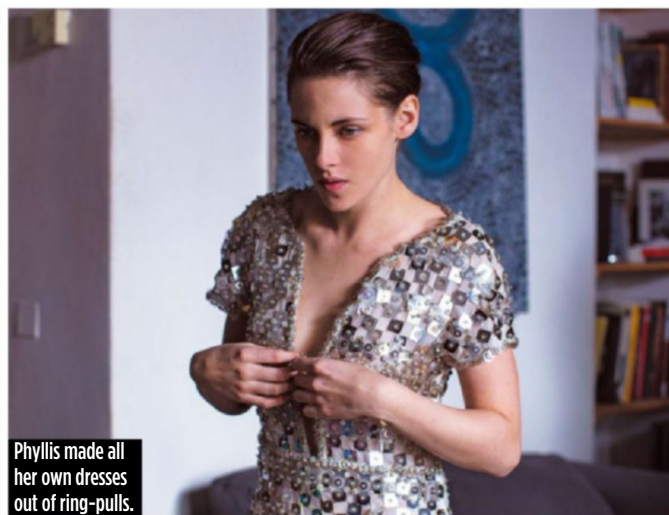
▶ Cast **Kristen Stewart, Lars Eidinger, Nora von Waldstätten**

◉ **First came Nicolas Winding Refn's cannibal-supermodels horror *The Neon Demon*; now French master Olivier Assayas (*Irma Vep*) has blindsided audiences by conjuring up a spooky tale of his own. Also set in the world of high fashion, the always intense, mostly compelling *Personal Shopper* is grounded and fantastical, terrifying and silly.**

Kristen Stewart plays Maureen, stuck in the unfulfilling job of purchasing couture and designer jewellery for German supermodel Kyra (Nora Von Waldstätten). It sounds glamorous, but the schedule is punishing and Kyra

barely acknowledges her existence. But Maureen is also a medium, who's trying to connect with her dead twin brother. Protracted scenes see her tiptoeing around a large, shadow-shrouded house in Paris, calling his name like she's wandered into a Ti West movie. Then she starts receiving mysterious, creepy texts, morphing *Personal Shopper* into a psychosexual thriller on top of a dramatic character study.

There's a lot here to admire, from Stewart's coiled, fidgety performance, to Assayas's absolute sincerity in exploring spiritualism and grief, to slippery subtexts that invite multiple interpretations. Maureen is both a part of this world of wealth and apart from it, guiltily staying in Kyra's apartment when she's out of town and trying on her outfits. Does her envy/



Phyllis made all her own dresses out of ring-pulls.

scorn unleash an insidious force upon Kyra? What to make of the doppelgänger motif that repeatedly rears its head?

One thing is certain: the suspense setpieces are first-rate, the air of menace so palpable you could stick a knife in it and watch the handle quiver. Much of the second act is Maureen playing text ping pong with her e-stalker, a

sequence so unrelentingly tense it demands viewers hold their breath for a good 20 minutes. *Personal Shopper* is a strange movie that doesn't always work, of that there can be little argument. But its very oddity is what makes it intriguing.

**Jamie Graham**

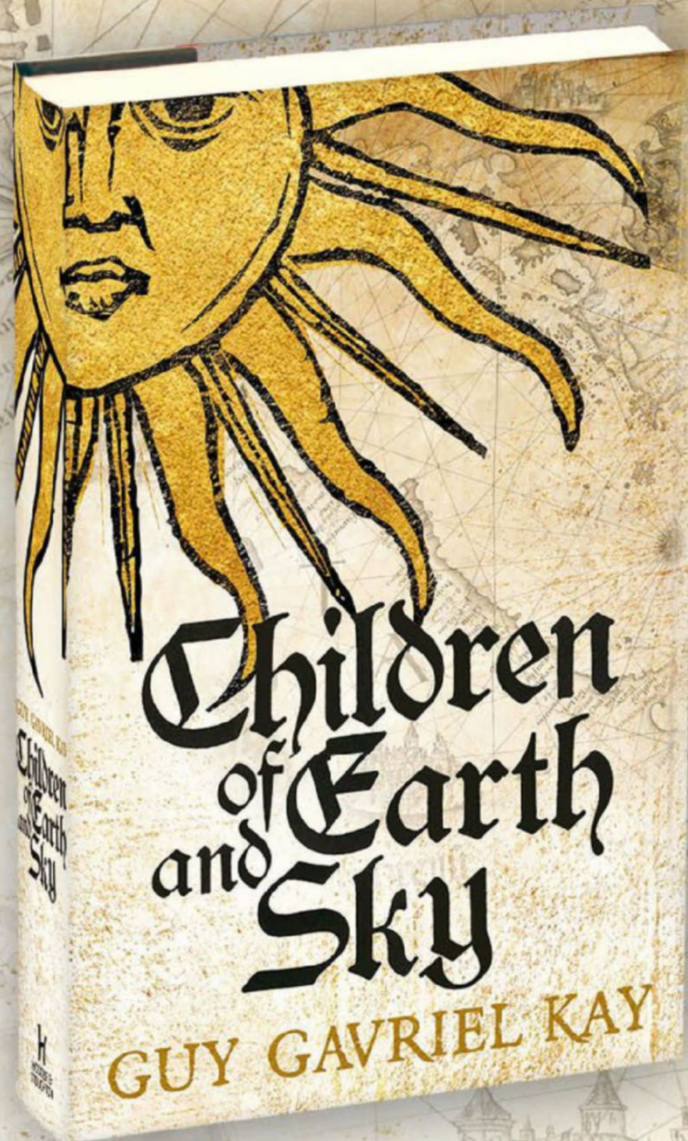
**i** The ghost's appearance was influenced by 19th century spirit photography; Assayas also spoke to France's leading spiritualist.



# When history changes Legends emerge

'[An] engrossing  
fantasy of  
plotting nations,  
colliding religions,  
and shifting  
alliances'

*Publisher's Weekly*



'The greatest  
living author of  
epic fantasy'

*Brandon Sanderson*

'The heir to  
Tolkien's tradition'

*Booklist*

The sweeping new novel  
from the beloved author of *Tigana*

[www.hodderscape.co.uk](http://www.hodderscape.co.uk)

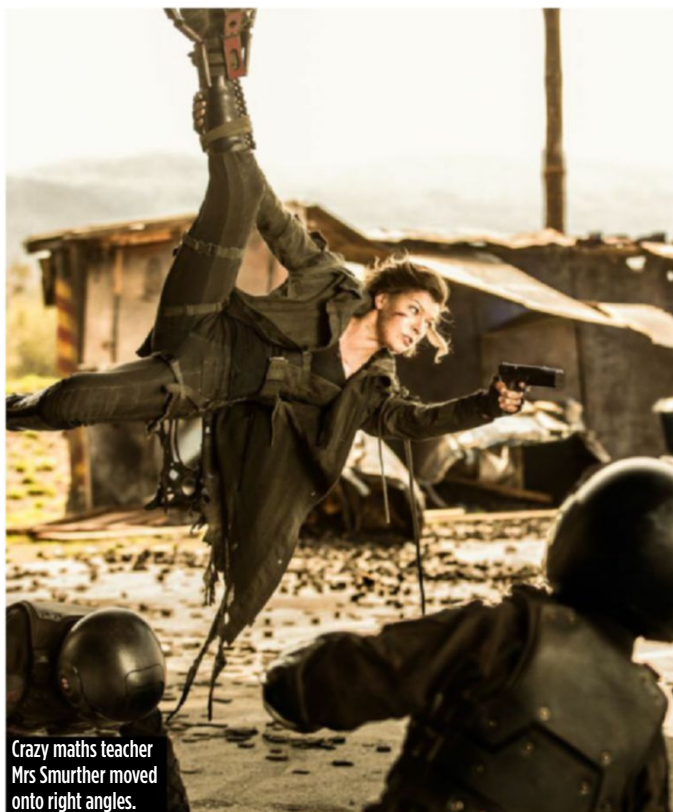
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 HODDERSCAPE



CINEMA



Crazy maths teacher Mrs Smurthorpe moved onto right angles.

## RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER

### Closing the Umbrella

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 106 minutes

▶ Director Paul WS Anderson

▶ Cast Milla Jovovich, Iain Glen, Ali

Larter, Ever Anderson

🕒 **Can't remember the last** *Resident Evil* movie? Not sure you've seen any of them since the first one? Doesn't matter. In fact, that's probably the best way to go into the sixth film, because not only does *The Final Chapter* include a quick prologue to sum up the story so far, it also completely retcons the earlier movies – so the less you remember, the better.

That's not to say this doesn't feel like a *Resi* movie, though. All

the necessary elements are present and correct: you get hordes of slavering undead, bizarre CG monsters, and many, many scenes of Milla Jovovich smashing stuff up. Director Paul WS Anderson seems to know exactly what his audience wants by this point in the franchise, and even though you always know who's going to win, most of the action sequences are pretty exhilarating.

Plot-wise, there's not a lot to it so it's maybe a bit overlong, but if you've got even a crumb of half-remembered affection for the other movies, this'll seem like a fitting enough send-off. **Sarah Dobbs**

**i** The Red Queen was recast for this movie: she's now played by Anderson and Jovovich's eldest daughter, Ever.

## RINGS

### Just going round in circles

★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 102 minutes

▶ Director F Javier Gutiérrez

▶ Cast Matilda Lutz, Johnny Galecki, Vincent D'Onofrio, Alex Roe

🕒 **There's a point at the start of** *Rings*, the long-awaited third instalment of the American franchise, where it looks as if the movie is actually going to be good. Johnny Galecki's nerdy science professor has been researching the curse of Samara, whereby anyone who watches a mysterious video receives a phone call, then dies seven days later. He's abusing his academic resources to essentially "game" the curse. Students are recruited to watch and given a "tail" – a volunteer to view their copy of the film before the seven days are up, meaning no one actually dies at the pasty hands of

the TV-bothering demon at all. Smart. But Samara doesn't like it. Where will this go?

The answer is, sadly, nowhere, as a canny and current premise gives way to what is essentially a reboot of the franchise which keeps the iconography but not the spirit. Julia (Matilda Lutz) is a young woman who's watched the tape to save her boyfriend after Galecki's experiment goes awry. But when she comes to copy it, new footage has somehow appeared. Thus begins an investigation into more of Samara's backstory which mirrors *The Ring* without any of the peril or surprises, changing the mythology, moving far away from the incredible Japanese original and converting this into a bog-standard ghost story which has bugga-all to do with technology, isn't at all scary and



Another sidesplitter for *You've Been Framed*.

frequently breaks its own rules.

Newcomers to the franchise may find F Javier Gutiérrez's film palatable and intriguing, if rather generic. But lovers of the originals aren't given anything worthwhile at all here until the coda, which sets things up for a

sequel we're not sure we can be bothered with now. Skip it and see the extremely silly but far more enjoyable *Sadako V Kayako* instead. **Penny Archer**

**i** The film reveals that Samara was almost called Sally or Stacy – which, frankly, would have been considerably less spooky.





Just as the doctor suspected, it was an eye.

## A CURE FOR WELLNESS

### Asylum seeker



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 146 minutes

▶ Director **Gore Verbinski**

▶ Cast **Dane DeHaan, Jason Isaacs, Mia Goth, Celia Imrie**

◉ **High in the mountains, its turrets soaring, stands a vast building full of locked doors and dark secrets, while huddled below is a village crowded with peasants. Two hundred years ago, the yokels stormed this ominous structure and burned the Baron's bride, spurred by tales of medical experiments and bodies buried in fields.**

No, it's not a Hammer movie but rather Gore Verbinski's first film since 2013's *The Lone Ranger*, and it's not a Transylvanian castle but instead a plush sanatorium where Lockhart (Dane DeHaan), a precocious Wall Street executive, is sent to retrieve the company's CEO Pembroke (Harry Groener). Only it's not that simple, as anyone who's seen *The Ninth Configuration*, *Shock Corridor* or *Shutter Island* will know – Lockhart is soon himself a patient of sinister head headshrinker Volmer (Jason Isaacs), damned to spend the rest of this lengthy movie sneaking from his bed to

roam subterranean corridors in search of both Pembroke and terrible truths.

Seemingly never quite sure if it's a serious attempt to take the temperature of our spiritual malaise as we worship at the altar of money and success, or a devilishly stylish ode to vintage horror (most notably Poe, *Dr Phibes* and, yes, *Hammer*), *A Cure For Wellness* is by turns frustrating and fun. Had Verbinski lopped 40 minutes off the film's indulgent running time and whole-heartedly embraced its pulpy roots, he might have fashioned a full-blooded entertainment. As it is, the bloated midsection and fumbled grasps for meaning are anaesthetic to the viewer, though a flurry of jump scares and some icky imagery – most of it involving eels – shock the eyes open.

Bizarrely, the final act lurches into genuinely nasty territory, securing an 18 certificate with a queasy sexual assault and a torture scene that would make Eli Roth quiver. It's effective shock treatment, but belongs in another movie. **Jamie Graham**

**i** Thomas Mann novel *The Magic Mountain* inspired the idea. Lockhart was originally called Castorp, after its protagonist.



"Welcome to Northerners And Sad Arses."

## THE SPACE BETWEEN US

Gardner's World



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 120 minutes

▶ Director **Peter Chelsom**

▶ Cast **Asa Butterfield, Britt Robertson, Gary Oldman**

◉ **Boy meets girl. Oldest** story in the book, right? Well, what if the boy had been born on Mars and could barely tolerate the gravity of Earth, the planet where the girl lives?

That's the twist explored by *The Space Between Us*, in which Asa Butterfield's astronaut-birtherd Gardner Elliot heads to his late mother's homeland to meet Britt Robertson's spunky, cynical Tulsa. Despite Butterfield's gawkward charm and Robertson doing what she can with an underwritten, familiar foster teen with issues, the film suffers from a lack of invention. The idea of Gardner suffering heart problems while on Earth is milked for every emotional metaphor – enough that it sinks the whole enterprise – and the relationship itself rarely takes flight.

Gary Oldman brings some spark to Nathaniel Shepherd, the Elon Musk-alike visionary who dreamt up the Mars mission, but even he can't quite compensate for a lack of drive and purpose. *The Space Between Us* feels like it was adapted from a particularly shoddy example of YA fiction, and proves that even non-novel-based attempts at well-worn narratives can get bogged down in the execution. **James White**

**i** Producer Richard Lewis hatched the idea, and consulted his heart specialist father about the cardiac issues.



"I think she died of being very flat."

## THE AUTOPSY OF JANE DOE



▶ **RELEASED 31 MARCH**

(One night only)

18 | 120 minutes

◉ **Working as a small town** coroner sounds like a tough gig at the best of times. But when a father-and-son team agree to pull an all-nighter to chop up a mysterious corpse, things get more hellish than they could ever have imagined.

Alternately stomach-churning and spooky, this is a bold, assured, and utterly straight-faced horror from the director of mockumentary *Trollhunter*. Word of warning: don't bring snacks. **Sarah Dobbs**

## ALSO+OUT



Five March releases to tell you about which didn't screen for critics in time to beat our deadline. Hugh Jackman returns as an aged Wolverine on 1 March, in **LOGAN**. On 10 March **KONG: SKULL ISLAND** brings the gorilla warfare. Emma Watson toplines Disney's new live-action **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**, opening on 17 March. Finally, 24 March brings two big releases: firstly it's Morphin Time as those brightly-coloured Saturday-morning heroes hit the big screen in **POWER RANGERS**; then Jake Gyllenhaal and Ryan Reynolds's astronauts discover a deadly Martian organism in SF-horror **LIFE**.



HOME ENTERTAINMENT

## DOCTOR STRANGE

Exploding the Marvel multiverse

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 6 MARCH** (Blu-ray/DVD)/**OUT NOW!** (download)

2016 | 12 | Blu-ray 3D, Blu-ray, DVD, download

▶ Director **Scott Derrickson**

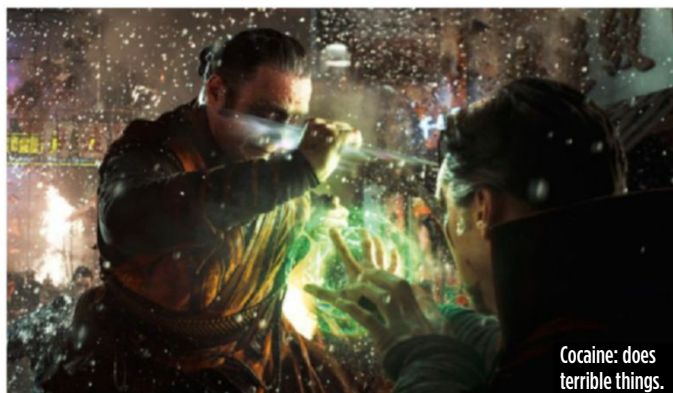
▶ Cast **Benedict Cumberbatch, Tilda Swinton, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Mads Mikkelsen, Rachel McAdams**

➤ **Early on in *Doctor Strange***, the egomaniacal title character – played by a sleekly tuxedoed Benedict Cumberbatch with the towering ego of his TV *Sherlock* – has a car crash. His car flies off a cliff, crunching and rolling; for poor Strange inside, it's a terrible whupping. The crash ends Strange's life as he'd lived it till now, as a worldbeating neurosurgeon. With his powers and stature gone, Strange becomes a raging, self-destructive loser. It's a Thor-sized sledgehammer of an origin story, executed with brio.

But soon you'll forget the accident, because Strange's next torment is far greater. Desperate to fix his ruined surgeon's hands, he travels to Nepal in search of a healer who performs even more incredible healings than he did. There he meets the bald-headed,

female Ancient One, played by Tilda Swinton with a wry twinkle like Alec Guinness's Ben Kenobi. Strange tries his best to be courteous, but explodes into a Dawkins-like rage when Swinton starts talking of energy and spirits. So she shoves Strange out of his body and sends him on a nightmare Stargate trip, a psychedelic rollercoaster. We see Strange atomised across light years, cosmically cannibalised and rebuilt. There's a bit with hundreds of hands that would give HP Lovecraft the willies.

So far, so wonderful... but after this dazzling first act the film sinks to being merely enjoyable. Too much of it is a series of fight-and-run setpieces through landscapes that unfurl and distort Escher-style – including a kaleidoscope New York with people rushing up the sides of skyscrapers. These scenes follow each other so fast that the viewer eventually gets jaded, especially since the characters are neglected. Rachel McAdams is wasted as Strange's estranged romantic interest, who's basically in the film to teach him a life lesson in humility. It's a worthy lesson, but still rotten use of a



Cocaine: does terrible things.



"I love these pyjamas – I'm buying 'em!"

character. Mads Mikkelsen (*Hannibal*) is the film's hellraising heavy; it should have been a deliciously funny central conflict, with him and Cumberbatch out-suaving each other. Instead, Mikkelsen's character is a comic-strip cipher, one of the most forgettable things in the film.

He's out-performed by Strange's floating magic cloak, which goes after his enemies with the single-minded ferocity of a pissed-off mongoose. And the film's Hong Kong finale is truly audacious, a battle with time running both backwards and

“The film sinks to being merely enjoyable”

forwards. By the end, there's no doubt that Strange could be a brilliant addition to the Marvel franchise... *if* his next outing doesn't fall into the trap this film does, and have the sorcerer and his fellow wonder-workers obscured by their own miracles.





➤ **Extras** Director Scott Derrickson provides commentary on his own, but is eloquent and interesting. He's not afraid to tackle thorny topics either, such as the "racebending" controversy over casting the white Tilda Swinton as the Nepal-based Ancient One; Derrickson says he did consider Asian actresses, but argues that casting one of them as the mysterious Ancient One would have pulled the film towards "dragon lady" stereotypes. Other issues that he discusses include the debt of the worldbending action scenes to *Inception*, which

he calls "the tip of a visual effects iceberg". He also goes into *Doctor Strange's* themes and its pivotal scene, even while acknowledging that his opus can be enjoyed just as a popcorn movie.

The five deleted scenes aren't particularly notable, barring a surprisingly blasphemous one where Mikkelsen's villain takes down a priest. Chris Hemsworth sends up his own Avenger in an amusing *Team Thor* short – a sequel to one on the *Captain America: Civil War* home release – in which the Norse god tries to live a mundane human life (four

minutes). One short featurette (seven minutes) drops hints about the next few Marvel films up to *Infinity War*, illustrated with concept paintings, but with no great revelations. The remaining five featurettes (55 minutes) can feel rather too quickfire, though there are plenty of behind-the-scenes glimpses. There's also a four-minute gag reel. Note that all the above are available on the Blu-ray formats: buy the DVD and you get nothing. **Andrew Osmond**

**i** The director says test audiences felt overwhelmed by the huge action scenes – but called for more of the training scenes!

MIND  
PROBE

## MADS MIKKELSEN

Kaecilius in *Doctor Strange*



**What do you think makes *Doctor Strange* different?**

→ The period that he's from, the '60s. All of the other characters grew out of the '50s, where you looked at the world in a different way. All of a sudden in the '60s people were asking different questions about the universe, about why we're here, and about religion as well. People were experimenting with the higher self, with something that was above us – and the comic books were doing it as well.

**What appealed to you about the script?**

→ In general the story appealed to me. We're dealing with a man who's a fantastic surgeon and has a touch of arrogance to him. When something terrible happens, he has to confront his fears and his beliefs. I thought that was a very human and brilliant way of setting up a superhero.

**How did you find the fight scenes?**

→ The preparation was immense in the sense of being physically prepared, because it's a certain fighting style they created for the film. They allowed us to do most, if not all of it. It was tough, but it was really fun. It's not every day you get to smash glass and get paid for it!

REX (1)





All four of the mirrors failed the reflection test.

## DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- 🍷 There's a *Star Trek* reference.
- 🍷 There's a *Doctor Who* reference.
- 🍷 There's a *Harry Potter* reference.
- 🍷 Someone casts a spell by doing a hand gesture that looks like someone playing Cat's Cradle, but without the string.
- 🍷 Quentin complains that he's just a rubbish magician.
- 🍷 Eliot is high or pissed.
- 🍷 Somebody says something "is real".

# THE MAGICIANS

## Season One

More than a potty-mouthed *Potter*

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED** 6 MARCH

2016 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Creators Sera Gamble,

John McNamara

▶ Cast Jason Ralph, Stella Maeve, Olivia

Taylor Dudley, Hale Appleman, Arjun

Gupta, Summer Bishil

🔴 **You are not going to believe** us. We're going to tell you that *The Magicians* is actually very good – possibly the sharpest-written YA fantasy series since *Buffy* – and you will snort with derision. Why? Because no matter how much we rave, as soon as you start reading any synopsis of the show, it *sounds* terrible. Because it sounds like *Harry Potter* with added sex and swearing.

And, to be fair, the first couple of episodes do little to dispel those fears. But pretty soon the series

reveals its true colours – that it's a kind of bastard hybrid of *Narnia* and Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series – and becomes a far more interesting beast. The trouble is, we can't talk too much about that because, well... spoilers!

Instead, we're duty bound to reveal the basics and pretty much damn the show. It opens with Quentin Coldwater, sci-fi geek and card trick expert, discovering he's a *real* magician and winning a place at Brakebills University, a kind of Hogwarts finishing school hidden behind magical barriers in upstate New York. There he learns to hone his skills, falls for a swotty girl and tries to protect the world from a supernatural baddie called the Beast. Yawn.

Luckily, while those earlier episodes are worryingly generic, the characters are strong enough

– and quirky enough – to keep you watching until the show becomes really interesting. Quentin is an adorably socially awkward nerd; Alice, his love interest at the school, is an enigmatic, Hitchcockian ice queen; Eliot, a bisexual, substance-abusing older student who takes Quentin under his wing, is frequently hilarious; and Penny, an oversexed magician student with an attitude problem brings some great snark to the table.

Already there are signs that there's more to this show. Quentin's best friend fails the Brakebills entry exam and becomes a rebel instead, introducing a whole parallel plot strand (which occasionally drags but builds to a hell of a twist). And Quentin is obsessed with a series of *Narnia*-style books, called

*Fillory And Further*, which has an increasingly meta influence on the arc plot.

But the main reason *The Magicians* is worth your time is that it's witty, inventive, full of clever pop culture references, and wonderfully smutty at times. This show has sex magic which relies on both parties coming at the same time. "No problem," says Quentin. "Erm, well..." mumbles Alice. Visually the show impresses too, with some gorgeous production design and eye-catching effects – the Beast is a man made of moths!

But you probably don't believe us. Ah well.

🔴 **Extras** Twelve deleted scenes (13 minutes), a gag reel (eight minutes) and "The World Of The Magicians" (13 minutes), a by-the-numbers clips-and-talking-heads Making Of that – if you watch it after watching the series – is about 75% pointless ("My character is a magician... blah, blah, blah"). **Dave Golder**

**i** Lev Grossman, author of the book the series is based on, cameo's in ep two as the author of the *Fillory And Further* books.





At last Harry had found a place to keep his pens.

## DEATH RACE 2050

Pedal to the mental

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆  
 ▶ **RELEASED 20 MARCH**  
 2017 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD  
 ▶ Director GJ Echternkamp  
 ▶ Cast Manu Bennett, Malcolm McDowell, Marci Miller, Burt Grinstead

◆ **This bracingly trashy sequel** to 1975's *Death Race 2000* might be the maddest movie Malcolm McDowell – here sporting a coiffure that trumps Trump as the President – has ever been in, and that's saying something. As the actor himself puts it: "There are no subtleties in this film whatsoever!"

The high concept of Roger Corman's cult favourite about a murderous cross-country road race is retained: drivers score points for killing pedestrians – 10 for adults, 20 for kids, 50 for OAPs. But that's just the bass line over which GJ Echternkamp improvises a madcap, John

Waters-esque assault on good taste featuring suicide bombers, gimpwear, and actors who've clearly been under the knife dialling it up to 12.

Ruggedly handsome though Tom Hardy-alike Manu Bennett is as champion driver Frankenstein, it feels sacrilegious that he rips his iconic mask off 15 minutes in. But generally *2050* is more in the spirit of the original than 2008's *Death Race*, and will certainly linger longer in the memory.

◆ **Extras** Four short behind-the-scenes featurettes (30 minutes) lay bare how penny-pinching this Peruvian production was, with bits of the cars chipping off cos they were made of *Styrofoam*! Also: seven deleted scenes. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Keep your eyes peeled about 48 minutes in as "self-driving car" ABE stops for gas: you can see the hands of the driver.

## KING KONG VS GODZILLA/KING KONG ESCAPES

Going ape, Japanese style

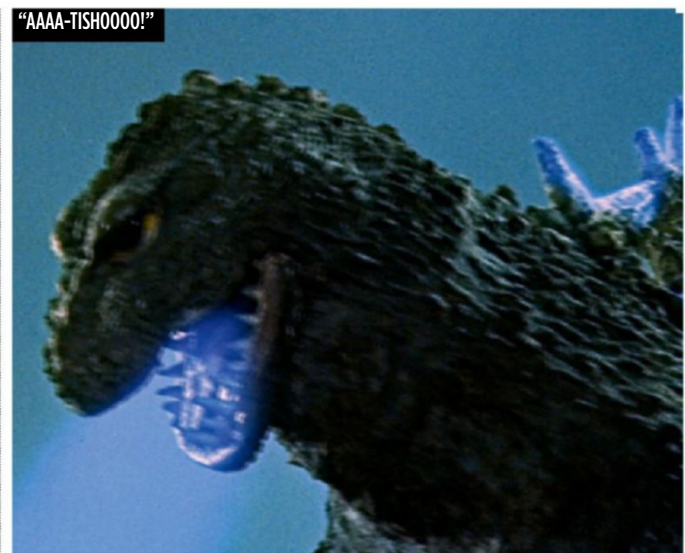
▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**  
 1962/1967 | PG | Blu-ray  
 ▶ Director Ishiro Honda  
 ▶ Cast Tadao Takashima, Kenji Sahara, Rhodes Reason, Mie Hama

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** **There ain't nothing** like a '60s Toho monster flick. Silly and basic as they may be, this duo of loopy pantos (released separately) still have charm, as long as you're prepared to overlook their obvious shortcomings.

The first, *King Kong Vs Godzilla* (★★★☆☆), has the scaly fella coming face to face with a leased-from-RKO Kong, 29 years

after his first rumble. It's not the most edifying monster mash-up. For starters, this US version includes lots of exposition delivered by a "UN official" – the moment things are threatening to happen, Mr Chatty comes back on and the thing grinds to a halt once again. Not that it would have been a masterpiece anyway – the story's crackers, the effects are primitive, and the titans' scrap only takes up the last nine minutes of the film (though it is the highlight). Brilliantly, the movie starts with a quote from Shakespeare!

*King Kong Escapes* (★★★★☆) is



a slight improvement, if only because it's better paced. A villain called Doctor Who (go on, make this canon, Steven Moffat!) builds a giant robot which ends up taking on a rather cute-looking Kong, and the two throw one another about like WWE wrestlers, only more sensibly dressed ones. The climax

is set on what looks like Blackpool Tower. Look, you either go with these films or you don't: they're nuts, but colourful, exuberant and harmless nuts.

◆ **Extras** None. **Russell Lewin**

**i** Four live octopuses were used shooting *KKVG*'s giant octopus scene. Afterwards FX director Elji Tsuburaya had one for dinner.



HOME ENTERTAINMENT

## ARRIVAL

### Mind Your Language



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 20 MARCH** (Blu-ray and DVD) / **6 MARCH** (download) 2016 | 12 | Blu-ray/Blu-ray Steelbook (Zavvi exclusive) / DVD/download  
 ▶ Director Denis Villeneuve  
 ▶ Cast Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner, Forest Whitaker, Michael Stuhlbarg

❖ **There's arguably more sci-fi and fantasy on the big screen these days than ever before.** Even so, *Arrival* is something of a rarity.

Whereas Hollywood's interest in the genre mostly consists of aliens/superheroes/[insert random threat] blowing stuff up with extreme prejudice, *Arrival* sits in more hard-SF territory, a thoughtful take on first contact that's as much a feast for your cerebellum as it is for your eyes.

It's the sort of intelligent story that's frequently seen in novels yet

rarely gets a run out on screen. Twelve featureless, disc-shaped alien craft appear all over the world. Amy Adams (cruelly denied an Oscar nomination for her understated but emotional performance) plays the linguist brought in to communicate with the alien visitors and find out why they're here before the world's military hits the ETs with everything they've got...

It's a film where scientists think and talk like scientists, with a central theme – let's work out what's going on here before rushing in – that feels especially poignant in these reactionary times. But while *Arrival* is stunning to look at (the hovering spaceships have a wonderfully ethereal quality, while the occupants of the interplanetary craft are genuinely innovative and

weird), director Denis Villeneuve is much more interested in the human side of the story. Adams's Louise Banks is absolutely the focus of the tale – as in *Signs*, there is no privileged observer; we know what she knows, and learn it when she does, her own experience inextricably linked with the fate of the planet.

The final act takes an *Interstellar*-like leap into the unknown – of the magnitude that makes you question everything you've just seen – but despite the major chronological gymnastics, it all hangs together beautifully. It's a masterclass of direction, pacing, editing and storytelling – on the evidence of *Arrival*, Villeneuve's upcoming *Blade Runner* sequel is in safe hands.

❖ **Extras** Appropriately for a film that wears its brains so proudly on its sleeve (*Ew!* – *Reviews Ed*), *Arrival* comes with suitably intelligent extras. On one level “Xenolinguistics: Understanding *Arrival*” (30 minutes) is just your standard Making Of featurette, but the assembled cast and crew talking heads clearly have rather loftier ambitions: keeping the science and linguistics plausible, creating unconventional aliens, and being faithful to author Ted Chiang's original short story, “The Story Of Your Life”.

“Principles Of Time, Memory, & Language” (15 minutes) takes a deeper look at the movie's science – stand by for genuinely intriguing conversation about the variational principle, the direction of entropy and the knowability/unknowability of the past and future. “Acoustic Signatures: The Sound Design” (14 minutes) shows how the movie's unique aural landscape was created. Perhaps best of all, “Nonlinear Thinking: The Editorial Process” (11 minutes) puts the spotlight on the editor's craft with the same measured, thoughtful approach as the rest of the docs.

Richard Edwards

**i** *Arrival*'s alien symbols were designed by Canadian artist Martine Bertrand – the wife of production designer Patrice Vermette.



No one could believe it wasn't butter.

## JUSTICE LEAGUE DARK

Who ya gonna call?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 6 MARCH** 2017 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD  
 ▶ Director Jay Oliva  
 ▶ Cast Matt Ryan, Jason O'Mara, Camilla Luddington, Alfred Molina

❖ **“The cape and tights crew,”** scoffs Scouse occultist John Constantine, wrapped in his familiar deadbeat raincoat. “Useless against dark magic.”

With that line as its call to arms, this animated feature assembles the DC Universe's frontline defence against the kooky, spooky and altogether ooky: Constantine (voiced by the short-lived TV show's Matt Ryan), Zatanna, Swamp Thing, Deadman and the Demon. Batman, meanwhile, makes for a killingly funny straight man, refusing to be fazed by all the reality-melting weirdness while clearly craving the reassuring certainties of street crime.

The plot's a rambling quest for a magical talisman but it's all about the banter and interplay. The dialogue's sharp and some surprisingly rich characterisation keeps you invested in this bunch of sorcerous misfits. Hollywood's planning a live-action take: consider this proof of concept.

❖ **Extras** A featurette on the history of Swamp Thing (17 minutes), a 2016 Comic-Con panel (25 minutes), a sneak peek at the next DCU animated movie, two old episodes of *Batman: The Brave And The Bold*, and a few other bits and bobs. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** DC launched the original JLD title in 2011. Founding members – unseen here – included Shade the Changing Man.



Everyone wrote down their fave '80s synth band.





The Andrex puppy continued to ruin lives.

## THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN

### Germ of an idea

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1971 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Robert Wise**

▶ Cast **Arthur Hill, James Olson**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Was there ever a director more unclassifiable than Robert Wise? From *The Haunting* to *West Side Story*, *The Sound Of Music* to *Star Trek*, you'll struggle to find a throughline on his CV.

Based on a novel by Michael Crichton – a satellite returns to Earth, carrying a deadly cosmic bacterium – *The Andromeda Strain* is another one-off career oddity. The title sequence hints at the kind of paranoid political thriller that defined the first half of Hollywood's '70s: credits play over

glimpses of classified documents stamped SECRET and BIOWAR; even the words Panavision and Technicolor look like entries in a government black budget ledger.

Wise brings a restrained, pseudo-documentary style. While the early scenes in a desert town are wonderfully eerie, the rest of the movie turns inwards, into the lab, shadowing a team of scientists as they hunt for a cure.

Fetishising cold procedure over thrills, pulsing with analogue technology, it's a clinical but intriguingly different take on the alien invasion tale.

▶ **Extras** None. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Michael Crichton toured Universal Studios during the filming. His guide? A young fella named Spielberg...



"Oil! I love it! Slurp slurp slurp! Yummy!"

## WE GO ON

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Miles is a severe thanatophobe. To overcome his fear of dying, he offers \$30,000 to anyone who can show him definitive proof of an afterlife. Inevitably, he gets a lot of crank responses, but after a few disappointing investigations, he gets what he wants – and then his problem becomes trying not to see ghosts...

Slightly too talky, and definitely thinkier than average, this low-budget indie horror is more philosophical than frightening – though actually, the more you think about it, the scarier it gets. **Sarah Dobbs**



"No, jam is much better than oil!"

## WHAT WE BECOME

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 15 | DVD

▶ **What do we become?** Zombies mostly, in this Danish drama. That or cowardly and selfish, turning away neighbours in need.

Centred on a street in suburban Copenhagen – and largely one family's home – this claustrophobic piece is well made, but the fact that practically every frame of the trailer comes from the last 10 minutes rather speaks volumes. The more expansive, action-based final act is impressively bleak, but it takes what seems like an age to get there.

▶ **Extras** Trailer. **Ian Berriman**



Karl's trust in Boots cosmetics plummeted.

## THE ALLIGATOR PEOPLE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 13 MARCH**

1959 | 12 | Blu-ray & DVD (dual format)

▶ **Double-billed with *Return Of The Fly***, this predictable SF horror shares some of its DNA, as a newly-wed discovers how hubby somehow came through a plane crash mark-free. You'll join the dots faster than you can say "alligator serum".

"Nerve-shattering terror!" says the poster, but it just looks like he has a skin condition. Still, the swampy Bayou country settings are distinctive, and Lon Chaney Jr adds colour as a hook-handed gator-hater.

**Ian Berriman**



Carol hated the new French restaurant.

## AENIGMA

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 13 MARCH**

1987 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** **Lucio Fulci** was never one to spend too much time on his scripts, but it looks like the director didn't spend much time on *any of Aenigma*.

Probably inspired by *Carrie* and *Patrick*, it sees a bullied high school girl, in a coma, tormenting her persecutors. But when the setpiece highlight is a girl lying on a bed being suffocated by snails, you know you're looking at one cheesy horror film. And wait till you hear the songs that bookend it!

▶ **Extras** A new 77-minute doc on Fulci's '80s output; Italian titles/credits; trailer. **Russell Lewin**



HOME ENTERTAINMENT



Barry's back cyst was truly horrible.

## DEAD HEAT

Cold Fuzz

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1988 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Mark Goldblatt

▶ Cast Treat Williams, Joe Piscopo, Lindsay Frost, Vincent Price

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Poor old Roger

Mortis. With a name like that it was surely only a matter of time before someone did him in in a nasty way. What his killers don't anticipate, however, is that Mortis – a cop – will be revived as a zombie and then, with his partner, come looking for them.

*Dead Heat* is ridiculous. It's cheesy and silly and a lot of the jokes don't land... and yet, it's also hugely enjoyable. Treat Williams and Joe Piscopo make for a likeable double-act at the heart of a shamelessly OTT buddy cop B-movie. In a surprise twist, it delivers several moments of effective body horror, thanks to some convincingly gruesome effects work. There's even a dash of understated pathos – Mortis may be back in the land of the living, but it's only a temporary situation and his body is failing him by the minute. It also makes good use of Vincent Price in one of his final roles and, for action fans, there's an ace bit where two zombies fire uzis at each other with negligible effect. Cool.

• **Extras** Commentary by the director, the screenwriter and two producers; a new interview with the make-up effects guy; deleted scenes; vintage EPK; promo piece; trailer; TV spot; gallery. **Will Salmon**

**i** Screenwriter Terry Black is the brother of *Lethal Weapon*'s Shane Black – who also cameos, as a highway patrolman.



Ken wished he'd chosen the quiet carriage.

## TRAIN TO BUSAN

Off the rails

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download/VOD

▶ Director Yeon Sang-ho

▶ Cast Yoo Gong, Yu-mi Jeong, Ma Dong-seok, An So-hee

• **It's not the best zombie film** of the last year (that honour still resides with *The Girl With All The Gifts*) but this bloody South Korean production comes impressively close.

Rather like British werewolf flick *Howl*, it sees a disparate group of train passengers – including high school kids, old ladies and a pregnant woman – menaced by monsters, after a biotech leak causes an outbreak of speedster zombies. Yoo Gong plays self-absorbed hedge fund manager/absentee dad Seok-woo, who's caught up in the chaos while taking his young daughter to see his estranged wife.

You'll never guess what: Seok-woo's character arc sees him re-examining his priorities and ultimately proving his worth as a father. This is one aspect of the script that feels a little hokey. The film is also pretty shameless about the sentimental tactics it uses to

try and jam a lump into your throat. But it works.

Satisfyingly, we see characters actually using their grey matter to survive, making use of the darkness afforded by tunnels or ringing mobiles as a distraction. In the shape of scumbag CEO Yon-suk (this movie *really* doesn't like businessmen!) there's a hissy-worthy, self-serving coward in the classic tradition of *Night Of The Living Dead*'s Harry. And the wildly-thrashing zombies are an impressive menace – tumbling through windows en masse, but never becoming as de-individualised as the CG hordes of *World War Z*.

Piling on the tension until you're digging your nails into your palms, it's a runaway train of a movie – and it's first class all the way.

• **Extras** A 17-minute Making Of that's pretty much all raw behind-the-scenes footage, plus a "sneak peek" and trailer for animated prequel *Seoul Station* (out on DVD here on 3 April).

**Ian Berriman**

**i** French studio Gaumont has bought the rights to make an English-language remake, which will be set in the US.



The new hotel cleaners were well potty.

## JOURNEY TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE SUN

Not Gerry good

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1969 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Parrish

▶ Cast Roy Thinnes, Ian Hendry, Patrick Wymark, Lynn Loring

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** After toiling

with TV puppets for many years, Gerry Anderson finally broke into live-action sci-fi cinema producing this intriguing but ultimately frustrating picture.

We'll have to give away plot details from beyond the hour mark, because only towards the end does the plot properly start! Roy Thinnes and Ian Hendry are astronauts sent on a mission to land on a newly-discovered planet. When they get there they discover it's just like Earth – or at least, a mirror image of it.

Agonisingly, this great – if somewhat absurd – concept simply isn't explored in satisfying detail: pretty much the full extent of it is writing that's reversed. And the *time* it takes to get there... it's 40 minutes before the chaps get in their rocket, and 60 minutes before they land on the planet (in-between we get inordinately long preparation followed by mimickry of 2001's psychedelia).

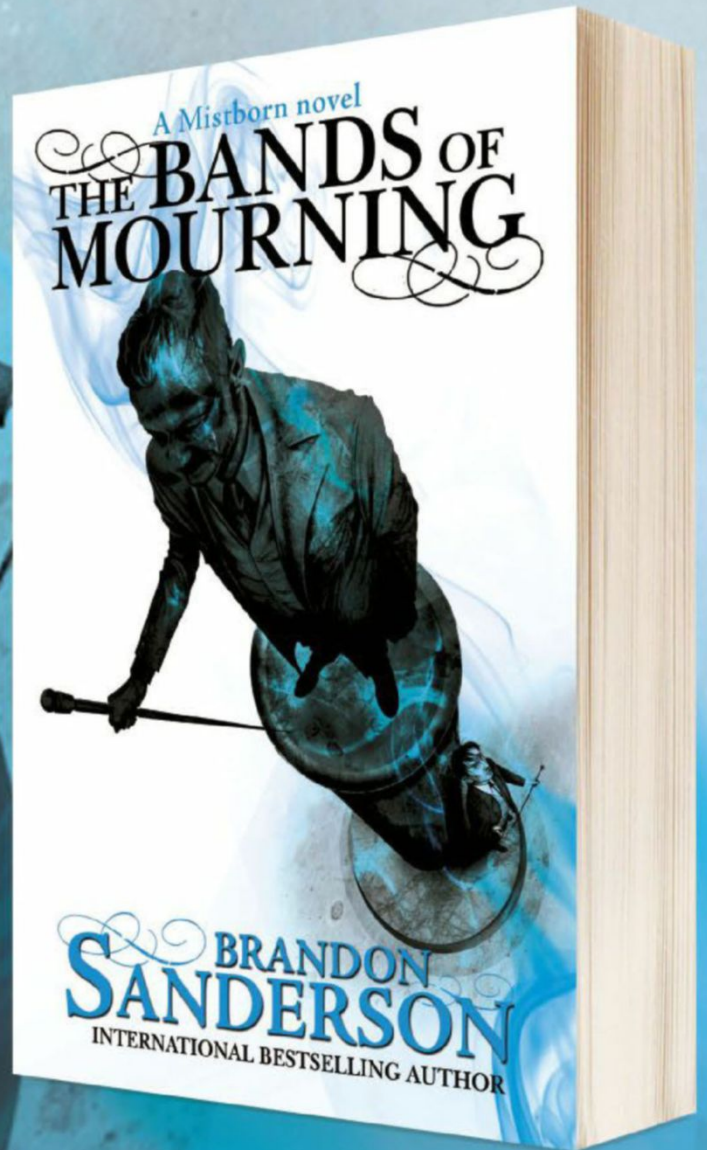
Bearing many familiar Anderson hallmarks – extensive model work, Ed Bishop, drinking and smoking at work – its scope is, in the end, not much broader than his puppet shows.

• **Extras** None. **Russell Lewin**

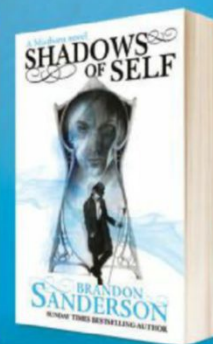
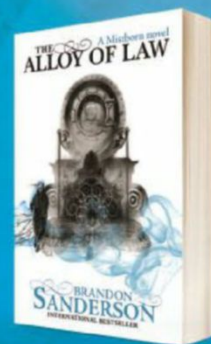
**i** Sylvia Anderson regretted casting Roy Thinnes in the lead role – "pain in the arse" was how she later described him!



# DISCOVER A WORLD UNLIKE ANY OTHER



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HOME ENTERTAINMENT

## 1990 Series One 1984 plus six

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 20 MARCH**

1977 | TBC | DVD

▶ Creator **Wilfred Greatorex**

▶ Cast **Edward Woodward, Barbara**

**Kellerman, Robert Lang, Clifton Jones, Tony Doyle, George Murcell**

🔹 **Hailing from the period** between star Edward Woodward's two biggest small-screen hits – *Callan* and *The Equaliser* – this mostly-forgotten series has taken an age to come back to our living rooms: in 40 years, this is its first release in any format. But arguably the timing couldn't be better. With mounting concern about a perceived growth in authoritarianism, this is a series that returns feeling rather in tune with the zeitgeist.

Though its title riffs on Orwell's *1984*, its near-future regime is a shade less brutally totalitarian.

Dumped in at the deep end, we're slowly drip-fed the background details. After the UK went bankrupt, the ruling government was voted into power – though only 22% bothered to cast a ballot. Their hardline tactics have made Britain an international pariah. It's a surveillance state, where government thugs are liable to rip up your floorboards at any moment. Dissidents are subjected to electroconvulsive therapy in former stately homes euphemistically dubbed "adult rehabilitation centres" (ARC for

“A serious-minded show, resolutely downbeat”

short). Emigration, not immigration, is the issue du jour, with skilled workers banned from leaving the country, in an echo of '60s concerns about the "brain drain". Don't expect much in the way of ambition from the production design: barring a few small tweaks – like Orwellian public information posters and phone calls via TV monitors – *1990* looks precisely like a product of its time, that grey moment when the Winter of Discontent was looming.

Woodward, excellent as ever, brings his signature steely determination and clipped delivery to the role of Jim Kyle, a columnist on the last remaining independent newspaper. An idealist hiding behind the armour of cynicism, Kyle spends the lion's share of these first eight episodes playing cat and mouse with the ruthless Department of Public Control. This involves much verbal fencing with PCD ice queen Delly Lomas (Barbara Kellerman, who later brought the same chilliness to the White Witch in the *Beeb's Narnia* adaptations). Well-stocked with hard-boiled barbs, Woodward serves every one as an ace. If you can get past the typical '70s tactic of matching a 47-year-old man with a woman two decades his junior, these sequences fair crackle with sexual tension.

This is a serious-minded show, resolutely downbeat, and talky; occasionally you may find yourself yearning for a bit of fisticuffs. It also gets bogged down in the fairly tedious business of people-smuggling (in which Kyle participates, for ideological reasons rather than profit) rather too often. However, the best episodes – like "Health Farm", in which an outspoken union leader ends up in an ARC, or "Non-Citizen", in which Kyle becomes part of the undocumented underclass – remain quite chilling in their depiction of the way that an unfeeling bureaucracy can crush an individual under its tank tracks; the latter makes *I, Daniel Blake* look like *La La Land*...

🔹 **Extras None.** **ian Berriman**

**i** Before taking up TV writing, 1990 creator Wilfred Greatorex was a journalist himself, working for the *Blackburn Times*.



"Wig shop? That way."

## ALIEN NATION

ETPD

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 6 MARCH**

1988 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Graham Baker**

▶ Cast **James Caan, Mandy Patinkin, Terence Stamp, Leslie Biev**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** This '80s classic arrives on Blu-ray with a topical shudder. "Why do we have to take them?" someone argues in the opening moments.

Welcome to the future, '80s classic. It may look familiar.

Los Angeles, 1991. Humans are sharing the city with an influx of immigrants: the Newcomers, a genetically-modified alien slave race. These cosmic refugees have tried to assimilate. Some are store keepers, others turn tricks on street corners. One's even a police detective – played by Mandy Patinkin as a lugubrious innocent – paired with James Caan's crumpled LAPD officer.

It's a high-concept buddy-buddy cop flick, giving a sci-fi spin to standard-issue car chases and shoot-outs. The action's gutsy and urgent – the movie's a brisk, entertaining watch – but there's room for humour and world-building too. The Newcomers eat takeaway beaver and get sloshed on sour milk.

Strip away the iconic, liver-spotted prosthetics and you'll expose a routine drug plot and extra-terrestrial villains with mundane, *Miami Vice* motivations. These Newcomers aren't so alien after all. They're just like us. Who'd have thought?

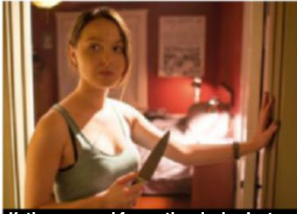
🔹 **Extras None.** **Nick Setchfield**

**i** The Newcomers were originally to have spines on their heads, which would rise whenever they got angry.



Chewbacca made a smashing coat.





Kathy prepared for mother-in-law's stay.

## THE PACT 2

They should've pact it in

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 6 MARCH

2014 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Directors Dallas Richard Hallam, Patrick Horvath

▶ Cast Camilla Luddington, Patrick Fischler, Caity Lotz

⊕ **A horror begins to creep** along your spine during the early scenes of this serial killer sequel. Unfortunately, it's mostly the feeling that this follow-up to the impressive 2012 effort isn't going to bottle the same mix of effective scares and sane plotting.

The focus is on June Abbott (Camilla Luddington), a crime scene cleaner haunted by lucid nightmares, who discovers that she's linked to the first film's Judas Killer in a way that frays her already stretched family ties. When an FBI profiler starts poking his nose into the case, it emerges that Judas might not be dead, or may have become something even more terrifying...

The idea of a serial killer copycat is an old chestnut, so you really have to try something new to make it feel fresh. Sadly, *The Pact 2* falls back on generic stalk-and-slash archetypes and cheap jump scares, largely wasting the charming, driven performance of the returning Caity Lotz as Annie – one of the best things about the original. Without an original frame to support it, there's only so much bloody fun you can hang on seeing characters from the first film reappear.

⊕ **Extras** A Making Of (17 minutes). **James White**

**i** Camilla Luddington also provided the voice for Katanna in *Justice League Dark*, reviewed over on page 102!



"It's spelt out, 'This is all cobblers!'"

## OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL

Six six sixties

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Mike Flanagan

▶ Cast Elizabeth Reaser, Annalise Basso, Lulu Wilson, Parker Mack

⊕ **Despite apocalyptically poor** reviews the first *Ouija* was a hit, hence the manifestation of this loose prequel.

It's 1967 and medium Alice (Elizabeth Reaser) makes her money putting grieving relatives in touch with their loved ones. Little do they know she's a fraud; the business is run with help from her daughters, who stage various spectral phenomena. One suggests they incorporate a ouija board into the act – and unleashes a possessing spirit in the process.

“As mainstream chillers go, it's solid”



"OMG!"

While the first film was entirely scare-free, this is more effective. The leads are all likeable and the throughline that Alice and Father Hogan (Henry Thomas) are both struggling with bereavement is nicely underplayed. The period setting is also a definite boon, with sets and costumes helping to conjure a strong atmosphere.

It's still not very frightening – there are only so many times you can jump at a CG-assisted stretchy face – but as mainstream chillers go, it's a solid effort.

⊕ **Extras** A good commentary by writer/director Mike Flanagan; 17 minutes of deleted scenes; a Making Of (nine minutes); featurettes on Doris and the main location (nine minutes). **Will Salmon**

**i** Mike Flanagan and his DoP pretended they were making the film in 1971, using antique lenses and zooms instead of Steadicam.

## (ROUND UP)



Good news for euro horror fans! Screenbound Entertainment has launched two new imprints: the sleazy Maison Rouge and the gothic-focused Black House. The former kicks off with **BARE-BREASTED COUNTESS** (6 March, DVD). One of director Jess Franco's better efforts, it follows a scantily-clad vamp (Franco's sultry muse, Lina Romay), who sucks the life out of her victims in, ahem, unconventional fashion – when she's not humping a bathful of blood. With many more titles by the likes of Franco and Jean Rollin scheduled, it's worth giving [www.facebook.com/ScreenboundPic](http://www.facebook.com/ScreenboundPic) a follow. Switching tone ever so slightly, there's also a UK hi-def debut for 1998's

**WHAT DREAMS MAY COME** (out now, Blu-ray). After Robin Williams's character dies in a car wreck, he ends up in a heaven composed of his wife's paintings... then, Orpheus-like, must rescue her from hell after the grief-stricken woman commits suicide. The special effects eye candy remains fairly impressive, but unfortunately there's no real drama here – only Californian psychobabble and incessant blubbing. Finally, *Doctor Who* fans might like to check out Reeltime Pictures' **THE DOCTORS: THE JON PERTWEE YEARS** (6 March, DVD). This two-disc set features six hour-long interviews (first released on VHS in the '80s and '90s) with the Third Doctor actor himself and other stalwarts of the UNIT era, including Katy Manning (Jo Grant), Caroline John (Liz Shaw) and Nicholas Courtney (the Brigadier). None of whom, thankfully, hump a bathful of blood.



“Adam Christopher has combined classic Chandlerian noir with vintage sci-fi with brilliant results: Ray the Robot, a contract killer with glimmers of half-remembered conscience, will break your heart.

Truly original, and deeply satisfying.” KELLY BRAFFET

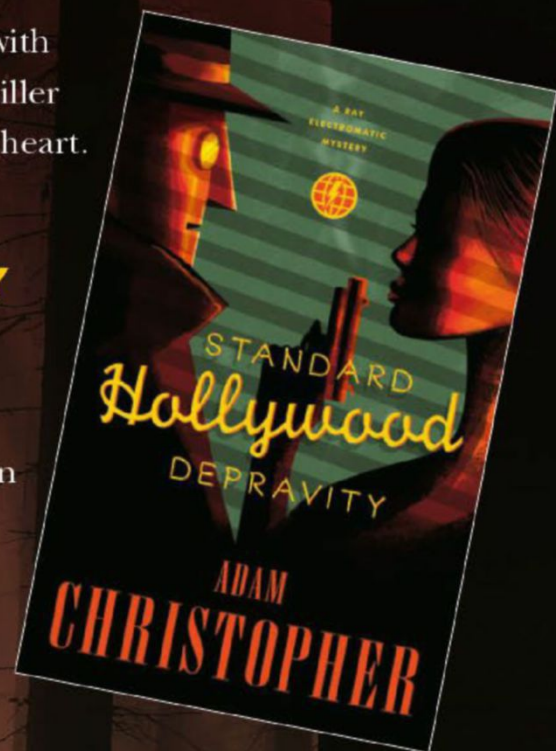
## STANDARD HOLLYWOOD DEPRAVITY

ON SALE MARCH 7TH, 2017

The moment Raymond Electromatic set eyes on her, he knew she was the dame marked in his optics, the woman that his boss had warned him about.

Honey.

Raymond Electromatic returns to solve a new mystery in Tinsel Town.



“A gripping story full of charm and adventure. Newman manages to keep her readers tense and delighted at the same time.” GAIL CARRIGER

## BROTHER'S RUIN

ON SALE MARCH 14TH, 2017

The year is 1850 and Great Britain is flourishing, thanks to the Royal Society of the Esoteric Arts. But Benjamin Gunn isn't a talented mage. His sister Charlotte is, however, and when she discovers a nefarious plot, Charlotte must use all her cunning and guile to protect her family, her secret and Victorian England – where magic is commonplace, dark adventure a certainty, and etiquette a necessity.



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A tale of revenge, of mistrust and of terror from

# Paul Cornell

“This book kept me up way too late reading it, and then I couldn’t sleep the rest of the night. Intense and horrific and gorgeous.”

DIANA ROWLAND, author of the White Trash Zombie series

# CHALK

ON SALE MARCH 31ST, 2017

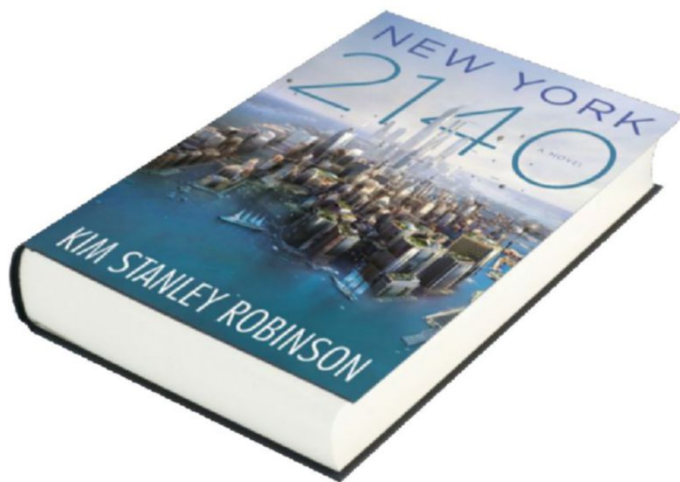
In the hills of the West Country a chalk horse stands vigil over a site of ancient power, and there Waggoner finds in himself a reflection of rage and vengeance, a power and persona to topple those who would bring him low.

Paul Cornell plumbs the depths of magic and despair in this brutal exploration of bullying in Margaret Thatcher’s England.





BOOKS



## NEW YORK 2140

After the deluge



▶ **RELEASED** 16 MARCH

624 pages | Hardback/ebook

▶ Author **Kim Stanley Robinson**

▶ Publisher **Orbit Books**

◉ **This, too, shall pass. So runs** one of the mantras you're likely to hear at a self-help meeting near you. Yet while sage reflection on the transience of things helps in coping with Trump, Farage and the panoply of vulgar chancers currently occupying the political stage, it doesn't work so well when it comes to the experiment currently being conducted with the world's climate.

As humankind continues to pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the planet is heating up. If we allow things to go so far that the ice sheets covering Greenland and the Antarctic melt, sea levels will inexorably rise. Many of the world's greatest cities will be deluged, including, as Kim Stanley Robinson imagines here, the unofficial capital of the world, New York.

The idea of rising seas has, of course, become an SF staple in recent years, yet there have been surprisingly few novels imagining what this may mean on a

day-to-day basis. What would it be like to wake up in a skyscraper built on what was once Manhattan Island, and look out at an intertidal world of boats and canals, New York as New Venice?

Riffing on one of his recurring themes – the practicalities of living in places where the environment would seem to be against humankind, unless we can be flexible and cooperative – Robinson shows us by focusing on the residents of a single skyscraper in the middle of the 22nd century. They range from quants (those who apply mathematical and statistical methods to the finance sector), through a “cloud star” (who broadcasts to the world from her airship), to a police chief, water rats of all kinds and, poignantly, two street kids who are uneducated yet clever, brave and endlessly resourceful – and lots of others besides.

“A better book than *Forty Signs Of Rain*”

What eventually unites these diverse characters, beyond geography, is a looming crisis. In this case, for all that water levels have risen 50 metres thanks to two “pulses” – moments when sections of ice shelf suddenly collapsed – it's money that's the problem. Specifically, New York's intertidal zone is emerging from a ruin-porn phase that drove the moneyed inland, and it's becoming a nice place to live. Unscrupulous speculators want a piece of the gentrification action, even as the global financial system starts to show signs of strain that suggest trouble ahead – as in bubble... pop!

In the wake of 2008, we know how such scenarios play out: the banks get propped up because the prospect of them failing is too scary; the citizenship bears the burden of austerity. Except a big part of what Robinson is doing here is exploring the idea of a different political approach. Think citizen-organised social democracy that doesn't make a fetish of profit but instead puts an onus on practical solutions to problems.

As with Robinson's similarly climate change-themed *Science In The Capital* trilogy, this sometimes results in *2140* having a pedagogic quality. Many of the protagonists, for instance, have a huge degree of familiarity with the details of what happened in the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

Nevertheless, this is a far better book than *Forty Signs Of Rain* and its sequels. Even at 600-plus pages, there's a leanness to the prose that keeps the plot moving forwards. The connections between the characters deepen in unexpected ways as the book progresses. And Robinson handles setpieces with aplomb.

Most of all, though, the book reminds us that changes in our world may be inevitable, but our reaction to these changes isn't pre-determined. Utopian? Perhaps, but so what? To paraphrase a septuagenarian who's already starting to look ominously weary in his new job: the future could yet be great folks, really great. **Jonathan Wright**

**i** Kim Stanley Robinson's next novel will apparently focus on China and close space – as in the Moon – colonisation.



## KINGS OF THE WYLD



Hex, thugs and rock 'n' roll



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

494 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author **Nicholas Eames**

▶ Publisher **Orbit**

◉ **It's a bold author who** forays into comic fantasy. Being funny isn't simple, and neither is writing an original swords-and-sorcery plot. Heavyweights like Terry Pratchett and Tom Holt cast shadows everywhere. So spare a thought for Nicholas Eames, venturing into occupied territory with his debut novel.

The conceit is that parties of adventurers behave like rock groups. They have bookers, fans and tour wagons, and if they're successful their names can live forever. In *Kings Of The Wyld*, our ageing heroes must “get the band back together” for one last skirmish. They need to save swordsman Gabriel's daughter, who's vamoosed with a crew of her own to join a siege. Told from the perspective of Clay “Slowhand” Cooper, it unfolds like a farcical *Magnificent Seven*.

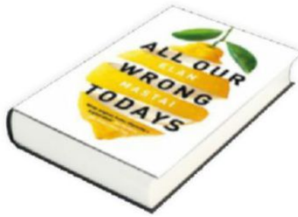
The characters are likeable, though the humour is occasionally crass (at one point a blast of magical Viagra gives them erections), and the world-building is a fun blend of comfortable tropes and innovative creatures. And amid all the airship battles and forest chases there's a vulnerability, a charm born from affection and nostalgia.

The crowd goes wild... Roll on the difficult second album.

**Dave Bradley**

**i** Nicholas Eames's mum made his family *Kings Of The Wyld* t-shirts at Christmas. Bless.





## ALL OUR WRONG TODAYS

Paradox Lost



▶ **RELEASED 2 MARCH**

384 pages | Hardback/ebook

▶ Author Elan Mastai

▶ Publisher Penguin

❖ **There's probably nothing** new to say about time travel, just new ways to say it. Elan Mastai certainly does that. The conceit with *All Our Wrong Todays* is that it's a memoir, not a novel. Nothing particularly new in that either, except that this memoir's written in a style somewhere between Lemony Snicket and Holden Caulfield.

Tom Barren is a slacker in a near-perfect world. That world is 2016, but not our 2016. It's the way we thought 2016 would be back in the '50s – jet packs, flying cars and world peace. A future that Tom blunderingly wipes out when he unexpectedly becomes the world's first time traveller.

There are as many plot twists and paradoxes as you'd expect, but it's the gimmicky prose style and meta storytelling tricks that keep it enjoyable. That, and the fact that the story has real heart and a charming love story at its core.

The plot skips along brightly for much of the book, but stumbles at the climax; temporal plothes aren't the problem so much as excess. As the ideas get bigger the exploration of them becomes skimpier. But don't let that put you off – this is a lot of fun.

Dave Golder

**i** The film rights have been bought by Paramount, with Amy Pascal (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*) set to produce.



## RELICS

London After Midnight



▶ **RELEASED 21 MARCH**

384 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author Tim Lebbon

▶ Publisher Titan Books

❖ **What would you do if you** discovered that fairytale creatures – nymphs, satyrs, and all the rest of them – were real? According to Tim Lebbon, not everyone would be awestruck. Some people would see an opportunity to make money by hunting and selling the bones, teeth and meat of some extremely exotic creatures.

There are dozens of stories about fantasy worlds hidden beneath the human one we know, but *Relics* distinguishes itself both by introducing a brutal kind of black market capitalism, and also by making smart use of its London setting. Protagonists Angela and Vince get shoved unceremoniously into a world not just filled with angels and monsters, but also with Soho gangsters and their knife-wielding heavies. London's backstreets and tower blocks make an appropriately grim backdrop for all the supernatural nastiness, because it's really not that hard to believe that people would look the other way if pixies were roaming the city.

Some scenes feel a bit self-consciously oversexed, as if Lebbon wants to make sure no one mistakes this for a kids' book, but there's genuine darkness, too. Read this as a bedtime story to under-13s only if you want to give them nightmares for life. **Sarah Dobbs**

**i** Tim Lebbon loves endurance sports, which he came to late in the day – he raced his first Iron Man aged 43.



## THE COLLAPSING EMPIRE

Go with the Flow



▶ **RELEASED 23 MARCH**

336 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author John Scalzi

▶ Publisher Tor

❖ **Science fiction is supposed to** feel new – ideally, it should take you to places you've never been, while exposing you to fresh ideas and unexpected concepts. However, there's nothing fundamentally wrong with sci-fi that goes for the familiar, telling stories that entertain and inform without reinventing the wheel.

One author who's done this in the past is John Scalzi, and while his latest saga kicks off in a familiar way, it ultimately transcends its set-up with some rousing storytelling and satisfying intrigue.

The first in a series, *The Collapsing Empire* is set generations in the future, where a spacefaring human civilisation called the Interdependency has spread across dozens of systems thanks to the Flow, a network of naturally occurring wormholes.

This merchant empire exists primarily in artificial habitats – except for one fully inhabitable

world, called End – but in the wake of the crowning of a new ruler, a terrible discovery is made. The Flow is starting to disappear, which means the Interdependency is now near total destruction...

Scalzi presents us with a universe that's a relatively typical mix of nuts-and-bolts space adventure and militaristic SF, and he gives the book a brisk pace, along with strong characterisation. Between unwitting Imperial heir Cardenia and the no-nonsense Lady Kiva, the protagonists are lively and attention-grabbing, while the various plot intrigues converge for effective pay-offs in the book's latter sections.

The familiarity is unavoidable, but Scalzi adds resonance by using political themes without ever lecturing. This is very much a story about climate change, but the book doesn't get bogged down by this subtext. Instead, it delivers an engaging, well-crafted sci-fi drama – while also pulling off a cliffhanger that'll have you eagerly awaiting volume two. **Saxon Bulcock**

**i** Scalzi started off trying to use a Frank Herbert-esque tone, but, "two chapters in I realised I had made a dreadful mistake."



BOOKS



## THE FEARLESS TRAVELERS' GUIDE TO WICKED PLACES

Dream a little dream



▶ **RELEASED 9 MARCH**

380 pages | Paperback

▶ Author **Pete Begler**

▶ Publisher **Curious Fox**

◉ **From *Alice to Labyrinth***, fiction is full of strange lands that young girls must traverse and conquer in order to survive and find their way home. This debut children's novel manages some intricate world-building but never quite hits the spot storytelling-wise.

Mothers are disappearing from the town of Mist Falls, and Nell Parker is laughed at when she insists they've been stolen by a malevolent purple cloud. But when her own mother is kidnapped by the "Dark Daughters" of nightmare, Nell and her brothers must journey into the Dreamlands to save her, helped by two Fearless Travellers who explain the dream world and its rules.

The book certainly has a dreamlike feel, with people and places constantly transforming and reality always slipping away. But this also means that it's hard to maintain a real sense of peril when nothing ever seems concrete. Despite the constant threat of real and terrible consequences, it's difficult to escape the continual feeling that "it's only a dream" and that any setback can be rewritten. **Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** Pete Begler is also a screenwriter, and has written for several US TV shows, including Hugh Laurie drama *Chance*.



## CARNIVALESQUE

Smoke and mirrors



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

282 pages | Hardback/ebook

▶ Author **Neil Jordan**

▶ Publisher **Bloomsbury**

◉ **Mysterious, freaks, "other"...** travelling carnivals, and specifically the people who work on them, have been mythologised and ostracised, feted and hated throughout the centuries. This new book from Neil Jordan, best known for directing films such as *Interview With The Vampire* and *The Company Of Wolves*, creates a mythology for one particular carnival, peopled with trapeze artists and animal trainers, bustling with ghost trains, big wheels... and an unusual hall of mirrors.

Irish teenager Andy, visiting the carnival with his parents, walked into Burleigh's Amazing Hall of Mirrors – but what walked out again was another thing entirely, a reflection that took form and left Andy himself trapped inside the mirrors, before heading home with Andy's mother and father. Andy himself is quickly released and takes up his own new role in the carnival, spinning ropes and packing caravans and barely thinking of his absent family.

*Carnavalesque* has a detached, dreamlike quality that suits its

subject, with musings on the treachery of memory and the nature of stories. This dreaminess doesn't always work, however, sometimes leaving you clutching for something you might have missed, as the carnies themselves refuse to explain, categorise or define who they really are or where they come from. Though some of the characters are interesting, particularly the older carnies with their stories woven through history, many aren't fully developed; even Andy's parents, as they try to decipher whether their son has truly changed or is merely struggling with adolescence, never truly feel real.

For the majority of the novel, it feels like the book isn't really about Andy – or his reflection – at all, less a story than a myth, with Andy merely an excuse for the author to create and expand on his own legends of the carnies, and the mysterious Land of Spices some of them once called home. Beginning as magical fantasy, it quickly builds up into folklore, before transforming into a horror by the end, as the true story of Andy's family and his origins emerges. **Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** Bristolian readers! Neil Jordan will be discussing *Carnavalesque* at Waterstones (11A Union Street) on Tuesday 14 March.



## THE APARTMENT

Slay Paree



▶ **RELEASED 23 MARCH**

368 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author **SL Grey**

▶ Publisher **Macmillan**

◉ **Home invasions occur with** alarming regularity in South Africa. Both Louis Greenberg and Sarah Lotz have endured them, so it's unsurprising that such a trauma is at the heart of the two authors' fifth novel as SL Grey.

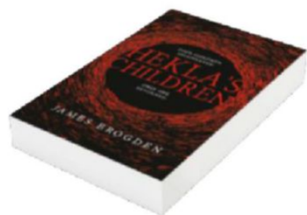
Mark and Steph are trying to put their lives back together after an armed break-in. A friend suggests that the couple try a foreign house swap, and they're soon on their way to Paris for what should be a romantic break. Instead, it's a nightmare. Their temporary home is a disgusting hole, the neighbour is mad, and there are bags of hair in the cupboards. And when they try to go home things really start to go wrong...

*The Apartment's* greatest strength is its two lead characters. It's told from their alternating viewpoints, and we feel every beat of their escalating panic and the fears driving them. Mark, especially, is dealing with unresolved issues that haunt him in a literal sense. As ever, Greenberg and Lotz also conjure terror from the everyday: an unanswered email, a rejected credit card. There are shades of *Don't Look Now* to the spectral encounters, though the book remains ambiguous on the nature of its supernatural menace until its brutal conclusion. **Rob Lockwood**

**i** Lotz's next solo novel, *The White Road*, is out in May. It follows a mountain climber haunted by a dead friend.



# Reviews



## HEKLA'S CHILDREN

An Ancient Hunger



▶ **RELEASED 7 MARCH**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author James Brogden

▶ Publisher Titan Books

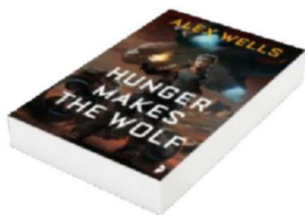
◆ **Ten years ago, Nathan Brookes's** teaching career ended in disgrace when four teenagers in his charge vanished on a hiking trip. Now Brookes is haunted by visions of the missing kids, pulling him back to the site of their disappearance, where a body has been found preserved in the peat. Meanwhile, in a blighted wood in the land called Un waits a creature called the afaugh. Crazed with hunger, teeth sharpened to points, the afaugh longs to sate its appetite on human prey...

James Brogden's tale begins with a mystery – what happened to the kids Brookes should have been watching – that suggests a ghost story, before growing in scope to something far grander, pulling in ancient curses, multiple realities, and the inexorability of fate. Brookes is not a particularly likeable protagonist – self-centred and obnoxious – but he's balanced by a strong cast that includes the lost teens, who take the tale into some very unexpected places.

The overlapping parallel worlds suggest a rural partner to Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, but Brogden's adventure is a darker experience, with plenty of bite and blood. It's an ambitious novel, skilfully plotted and evocatively realised.

David West

**i** The title refers to the Icelandic volcano whose eruption in 2000 grounded flights all over Europe.



## HUNGER MAKES THE WOLF

Girl On A Motorcycle



▶ **RELEASED 7 MARCH**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author Alex Wells

▶ Publisher Angry Robot

◆ **Sci-fi and the Western are** two genres that fit together surprisingly well at times, serving up eventful and resonant tales of life on the frontiers of civilisation. This is especially the case in the world of pulpy SF adventure. The latest novel to explore this rugged territory is a tale of strange powers, corporate intrigue and motorcycle gangs.

Set on Tanegawa's World, a distant colony planet run by the company TransRift Inc, it's the story of Hob, a rebellious young woman with unnatural powers who rides with a group of biker mercenaries. However, when a friend of hers is abducted, Hob is set on a collision course with both TransRift and the sinister "Weathermen" upon whom interplanetary travel depends...

Debut author Alex Wells has crafted an evocative world with a distinctive protagonist, and also pulls off some vivid setpieces. Unfortunately, while the book starts as a compulsive read, it soon loses focus and momentum, resulting in a haphazard and oddly-paced story. There are definite strengths and some effective, muscular action, but *Hunger Makes The Wolf* never quite pushes its SF/Western pastiche into something that feels truly fresh. **Saxon Bullock**

**i** Alex Wells (real name Rachael Acks) is also a host of the Hugo-nominated podcast *The Scify And Fanty Show*.

WHSmith

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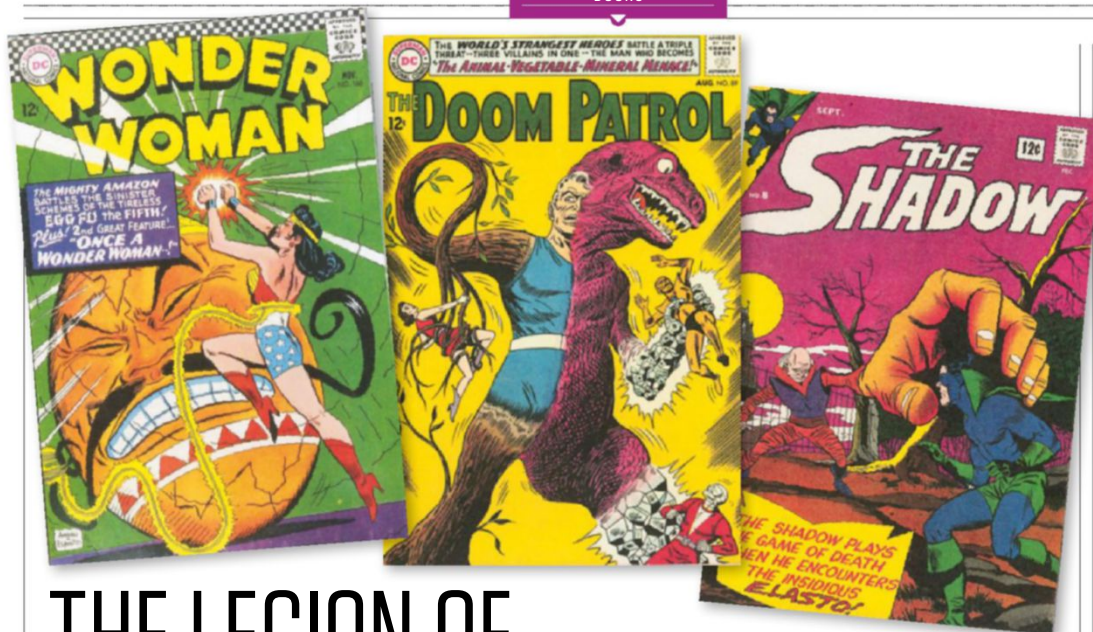
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BOOKS



## THE LEGION OF REGRETTABLE SUPERVILLAINS

Worst of a bad lot

★★★★★

▶ RELEASED 28 MARCH

254 pages | Hardback

▶ Author Jon Morris

▶ Publisher Quirk Books

“Nobody laughs at Mr Fish!” declares a speech bubble on the cover of *Luke Cage*, *Power Man* issue 29. Er, hate to break it to you mate...

Back in 2015, *The League Of Regrettable Superheroes* took an affectionate look at the comic characters who never quite

“Served up with lashings of delicious snark”

made it into the pantheon of greats. This follow-up does the same for the bad guys.

Split into Silver Age, Golden Age and Modern Age sections, *The Legion Of Regrettable Supervillains* covers 104 different evildoers. For each we're given a comic cover and a one-page character profile, served up with lashings of delicious snark.

Prepare to meet Brickbat, who dresses like a bat and lobs gas-filled bricks; dapper dresser The Dude, whose cufflinks fire poison darts; and murderous poet the Jingler! Then there are the more, er, problematic entries, like intersex villain He-She, and the compendium of

Chinese racial stereotypes that is Wonder Woman's Egg Fu.

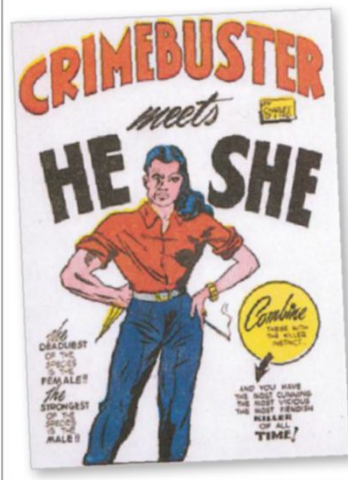
In the latter stages self-consciousness creeps in – Howard The Duck's creator knew exactly what he was doing when he dreamt up bell-headed baddie Doctor Bong. But elsewhere you can picture hopeful creatives convinced they've created the next Joker. It's that yawning chasm between ambition and achievement which makes this coffee-table book an all-you-can-eat schadenfreude buffet.

Ian Berriman

Author Jon Morris is also behind similarly-themed comics blog *Gone & Forgotten*: <http://gone-and-forgotten.blogspot.co.uk>

## REISSUES

Jenny Colgan brings the TARDIS team of the Tenth Doctor and Donna back to prose in **DOCTOR WHO: IN THE BLOOD** (★★★★, out now, BBC Books), where they fight internet trolls on modern-day Earth – or rather, alien parasites that feed on the rage of online commenters. We said: “The way Colgan captures all the characters is pitch-perfect... but the book takes the line of right-on cliché rather than genuine examination, and the various factions and interests never feel well explained.” Paul Crilley's **POISON CITY** (★★★★, 16 March, Hodder & Stoughton) introduces a new urban fantasy hero: Gideon Tau, a cop in Durban, South Africa, who comes up against African gods, vampires and Abrahamic angels. We said: “will suit readers of *The Dresden Files* or the *Rivers Of London* books right down to the ground. It would have been good if the story felt more African, though... little about it seems tied to its location. Similarly Tau is a little too much the stereotypical ‘cop with a tragic backstory’.” Finally, **THE IMMORTAL THRONE** (★★★★, out now, Corgi), Stella Gemmell's follow-up to *The City*, continues to track the fate of her enormous, unnamed city-state. In the wake of the emperor's death, a barbarian horde tens of thousands strong is on the way... Yikes! We said: “Much like its predecessor, *The Immortal Throne* starts slow and gradually builds up the action: the last hundred or so pages are so jam-packed with shock twists, revelations and action that you'll be left breathless.”







## SERIAL KILLER

Comics history remixed



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

310 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Authors Pat Mills, Kevin O'Neill

▶ Publisher Millsverse Books

◉ **When the team responsible for 2000 AD classic *Nemesis The Warlock* announce a new project, comics fans are guaranteed to sit up and pay attention. However, the latest collaboration between writer Pat Mills and artist Kevin O'Neill is something rather different: a self-published satirical novel pitched as a fictional alternate history of British comics of the '70s.**

This first of four volumes in the *Read 'Em And Weep* series follows Greg and Dave, two shambolic writers working on terrible comics like *The Spanker* and *Laarfl*, who plan a punk-style upset with violent boys' comic *Aaargh!* (a flipside version of controversial '70s title *Action!*). Despite a vague ghost story subplot, this is largely a rambling portrait of the era that's packed with in-jokes and references – especially around the development of *Space Warp*, an alternate version of *2000 AD*.

While the period details are impressive, the tasteless humour and grotesque tone soon turn this into a relentless trudge. Mills and O'Neill's ferocious style may work on the comics page, but in prose it's like being bashed around the head with a sledgehammer. Only dedicated fans will want to stick around for the next three volumes. **Saxon Bullock**

**i** *Serial Killer* was originally written as a TV sitcom. *Spaced*'s producer backed it, but the BBC thought it "too niche".



## THE DJINN FALLS IN LOVE

Little works of djinn-ius



▶ **RELEASED 9 MARCH**

384 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Editors Mahvesh Murad,

Jared Shurin

▶ Publisher Solaris

◉ **At their best, anthologies are the most exciting way there is to read genre fiction: satisfyingly self-contained bursts of story, in a host of invented, extrapolated, or subtly skewed worlds. They can be shop windows, too, for writers you haven't sampled before. Here critic/podcaster Mahvesh Murad and webzine editor Jared Shurin have gathered contributors from Egypt, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Singapore, Australia and the Netherlands (along with the UK and US), so chances are most readers will find something new to them.**

Moving nimbly between genres, tones and settings, this vibrant collection of 22 tales showcases djinn as tricksters, lovers, protectors, and antagonists. Kamila Shamsie's uplifting "The Congregation" unites djinn and human brothers in a contemporary Pakistani village; Kuzhali Manickavel's

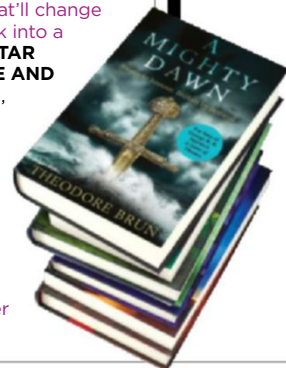
beautifully sad "How We Remember You" looks at human/djinn childhood bullying. Sami Shah's starkly affecting standout "Reap" makes US army drone operators complicit in tragedy in rural Pakistan, while Sophia Al-Maria's "The Righteous Guide Of Arabsat" examines sexism, media and populist religion as an Omani man becomes convinced his wife is possessed.

There is far-future SF, in EJ Swift's excellent "The Jinn Hunter's Apprentice", about a possessed spaceship; nearer-future environmental and social collapse, in Saad Z Hossain's touching "Bring Your Own Spoon", in which a man teams up with an underclass djinn to open a restaurant in a Dhaka slum; even secondary world fantasy, as KJ Parker's witty, clever "Message In A Bottle" confronts a scholar with a literal kill-or-cure dilemma. With only one real misfire (Jamal Mahjoub's heavy-handed non-thriller "Duende 2077"), there's a sparkling array of talent and imagination here. **Nic Clarke**

**i** The title is taken from a contribution by Egyptian poet Hermes. Previously, the working title was *Djinnthology!*

## ALSO OUT

Loads more books we couldn't quite squeeze in! First published in the US in 2015, Alastair Reynolds's Hugo-nominated novella **SLOW BULLETS** (out now, Gollancz) is now getting a proper UK release. If historical fiction with a fantasy twist is more your thing, you might like Theodore Brun's **A MIGHTY DAWN** (2 March, Corvus); set in eighth century Denmark, it features a dehumanised, underground-dwelling doomsday cult. There are also new books by Neal Asher, Samantha Shannon and Andrzej Sapkowski. **INFINITY ENGINE** (23 March, Pan) brings Asher's *Transformation* series to an action-packed conclusion; Shannon's **THE SONG RISING** (7 March, Bloomsbury) continues the series about clairvoyant humans in a dystopian society that began with *The Bone Season*; and Sapkowski's **LADY OF THE LAKE** (16 March, Gollancz) is the fifth entry in the *Witcher* saga. Science geeks should check out **MEGA TECH** (out now, The Economist Books), which brings together 20 scientists, academics and SF writers (including that Alastair Reynolds chap again) to speculate on what the technology of 2050 might look like. Apparently we can expect vat-grown meat, knitted cars and guided bullets! Finally, two titles for young 'uns. Aimed at ages nine to 11, Garth Nix's latest, **FROGKISSER!** (out now, Hot Key Books), sees a princess setting out to acquire the ingredients for a lip balm that'll change a prince back into a frog, while **STAR WARS MAKE AND DO** (9 March, Egmont) will keep the ankle-biters busy making a Wookiee puppet and a papier-mâché Stormtrooper helmet.





COMICS

## STAR WARS: DOCTOR APHRA



Keeping up with the Jones



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

▶ Publisher Marvel

▶ Writer Kieron Gillen

▶ Artist Kev Walker

**ISSUES 1-3** The conclusion of Kieron Gillen's highly acclaimed *Darth Vader* series at issue 25 was a classic good news/bad news situation. On the one hand, an outstanding spin-off comic finished on its own terms and wasn't dragged out too long; but on the other, it also seemed to spell the end for the series' memorable supporting characters.

Thankfully, the latest *Star Wars* comic solves this problem by picking up the ongoing adventures of *Darth Vader* co-star Doctor Aphra, an entertainingly dangerous archaeologist with a liking for ancient weapons. Having faked her death to escape Vader's employment, Aphra is now trying to keep a low profile, but these first three issues show how hard that's going to be...

The opening story arc follows her as she's forced into teaming up with her father to track down evidence of an ancient and possibly heretical group of Jedi called the Ordu Aspectu. Doctor Aphra's status as an amoral, remixed version of Indiana Jones gives this quest an extra frisson of enjoyment.



We like a grateful killer.



With Gillen once again writing and artist Kev Walker providing looser, more *2000 AD*-esque visuals, this is another characterful journey into the darker edges of the *Star Wars* universe that sets up a new status quo with style, while also throwing in expansive action sequences and providing new perspective on Aphra's character.

It's in the supporting cast, however, that the comic really shines, as Gillen has sensibly brought along his demented and lethal droid double-act B-T and Triple-Zero. The psychotic answer to the question, "What if Threepio and Artoo were torture-happy murderbots?", both characters regularly hijack scenes and give Gillen the chance to deliver some fantastic pitch-black humour. This combined with the presence of hyper-violent Wookiee bounty hunter Black Krrsantan, who's sticking with Aphra until she pays back the debt she owes him, means that the cast plays very much like a dark mirror image of

“Those looking for an edgier tone will find it here”

traditional *Star Wars*, and those looking for an edgier tone in the wake of *Rogue One* will find plenty to enjoy here.

It's certainly a different style to *Darth Vader* - while there's still a definite edge to the story, the tone is lighter, the protagonist is more relatable, and the death toll isn't as epic. Gillen's offbeat take on this universe remains hugely enjoyable; right now *Doctor Aphra* is a well-crafted spin-off that's off to a highly impressive start.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** Evil robotic duo B-T and Triple-Zero will soon be playable villains in an expansion pack for boardgame *Imperial Assault*.



Maybe he needs a trip to Kwik Fit.

## THE ORDER: DIE MENSCH MASCHINE

Alt Knight



▶ **RELEASED 9 MARCH**

▶ Publisher Rebellion

▶ Writer Kek-W

▶ Artist John M Burns

**GRAPHIC NOVEL** Having made his *2000 AD* debut in 1995, it's taken a while for Kek-W to really establish himself at the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. But with *The Order* the writer (aka Nigel Long) has finally made himself at home there.

Bringing to mind a more fantastical *Taboo*, it mixes historical fantasy with Lovecraftian horror and some Grant Morrison-style weirdness. The third series was recently serialised in the weekly *Prog*; this edition collects the first two arcs, which take place in both medieval Prague and Elizabethan London.

Setting out to discover what happened to her missing father, Anna Kohl teams up with mechanical knight Ritterstahl. With his rusty façade brought to life with real affection by veteran artist John M Burns, the titular Man Machine of the title resembles a cross between *Valiant's* Robot Archie and *Doom Patrol's* Robotman.

Read in a single sitting, it's easier to absorb the finer nuances of the plot, and with Burns producing some of the best work of his long career, *The Order* is proving to be a modern-day *2000 AD* classic in the making. **Stephen Jewell**

**i** *Die Mensch Maschine* was also the title of a 1978 album by Kraftwerk, which includes "The Robots".





The pop gun was surprisingly effective.

## CAVE CARSON HAS A CYBERNETIC EYE

Going Underground



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

- ▶ Publisher DC/Young Animal
- ▶ Writers Gerard Way, Jon Rivera
- ▶ Artist Michael Avon Oeming

**ISSUES 1-4** A good title goes a long way, and the latest comic from DC's Young Animal has one that's dripping with lurid pulp-style energy. It also continues the imprint's mission to revive lesser-known areas of the DC Universe, taking a seriously obscure character from the early '60s and giving him a new lease of life.

It's the tale of Cave Carson, an ageing explorer who used to battle evil in subterranean kingdoms, but now is left with a troubled relationship with his daughter and a malfunctioning cybernetic eye. His new corporate employers are up to something sinister, and Cave ends up on an action-packed journey to uncover the secrets lurking in his past.

These first four issues deliver a story that's equal parts Silver Age pulp craziness and dark, emotive angst. Michael Avon Oeming's art is striking and inventive, but unfortunately Gerard Way and Jon Rivera's script doesn't have the emotional focus of other Young Animal titles. Match this with a slight overload of hallucinatory weirdness and you have a comic that's distinctive and fascinating, but not always entirely successful.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** One of the main visual references for *Cave Carson* was Amicus films of the '70s like *The Earth's Core*.



Some people had been in the museum queue a really long time.

## THE MUMMY: PALIMPSEST

Stalk Like An Egyptian



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

- ▶ Publisher Titan Comics
- ▶ Writer Peter Milligan
- ▶ Artist Ronilson Freire

**ISSUES 1-3** Not the obvious candidate to launch Titan's new Hammer Comics line, this five-issue miniseries treads a fine line between evoking the classic Hammer spirit and updating it for more modern sensibilities.

There's a refreshing lack of shambling bandaged figures in these first three issues – although main character Angel Kostenko is partially embalmed in issue one. Illegally trafficked into the UK, the young Ukrainian is deemed to be the chosen one who, through a blood ritual called Palimpsest, will become the new vessel for

“The fast-paced script is steeped in Egyptian lore”

ancient Egyptian high priestess Nebatah. Making her escape, she's embroiled in a battle between two secret societies: the sinister Sect of Anubis and the equally dubious Pyramid Club, whose headquarters is handily located in the British Museum.

Steering clear of the big-bosomed Hammer babes of yore, Angel is far from the “defenceless little lady” that one of her adversaries mistakes her for. However, she is still forced to trust young Pyramid Club member Duncan Clarke, who conveniently finds an excuse to kiss her in issue three.

Adding some of the edginess of his Vertigo work to the Hammer schlock, Peter Milligan steeps his fast-paced script in plenty of intriguing Egyptian lore. He even throws in a demonic dog for good measure – depicted with gruesome flare by Ronilson Freire, whose moody artwork is enhanced by Ming Sen's evocative colours. Hopefully after wrapping up this promising series, Titan will produce a Hammer Dracula comic we can sink our teeth into. **Stephen Jewell**

**i** A palimpsest is an old book or scroll in which the original text has been scraped off and replaced by new material.



Somebody go out and buy him a biro.

## FORBIDDEN BRIDES OF THE FACELESS SLAVES...

Long title, high price



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

- ▶ Publisher Dark Horse Comics
- ▶ Writer Neil Gaiman
- ▶ Artist Shane Oakley

**GRAPHIC NOVEL** This graphic novel's full title, *Forbidden Brides Of The Faceless Slaves In The Secret House Of The Night Of Dread Desire*, gives a fair clue as to the content.

Based on a Neil Gaiman short story, it's a tricky tale of a writer living in a gothic world, who's trying to write realist fiction about hauntings and curses and dark, rambling houses, but secretly wishes he could write fantasy instead...

At first it just seems to be energetic, witty pastiche, but it reveals itself to be a smart, satisfying story – and clearly a personal statement from Gaiman. Shane Oakley adapts it perfectly, pacing out the revelations very well and using stylistic shifts to help sell the whole thing.

However, we have to take issue with the price. When you exclude title pages and concept sketches, the actual strip is just 38 pages long – less than you get in two issues of any monthly book. This could easily have been presented as a bumper-length one-shot – but it's Gaiman, so we get it as a lavish hardback (RRP £14.99).

Although the strip's very good, it's just not worth it. **Eddie Robson**

**i** Gaiman wrote the story in 1983, but didn't publish until 2004, after someone said it was “facetious rubbish”.



## RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD



### Getting up gross and personal

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

▶ Reviewed on PS4

▶ Also on XO, PC

▶ Publisher Capcom

**VIDEOGAME** The original *Resident*

*Evil* perched its camera far from your character, nestling it, fly-like, on distant windowsills and in cobwebbed corners. That was 1996. Then 2005's *Resident Evil 4* mounted its more energised lens to protagonist Leon Kennedy's shoulder, casting you as participant rather than observer. Now we're in phase three, where the closer your perspective, the more intense the scares – and you can't get closer than the view directly from your character's corneas. Those corneas belong to Ethan, a newlywed who receives a distressing video message from

his wife, Mia, who has been missing for three years.

She tells Ethan not to come looking for her, whatever happens. So naturally he does. It's a refreshingly simple premise with threadbare connections to *Resident Evil's* messy past; you're rescuing someone from a swamp, not saving the world from bioterrorism.

At this stage you don't know any of the game's rules – you're just trying to stay alive, and that puts you right inside Ethan's messed-up head. The first-person camera is a resounding success. It constricts your view, emphasising dark corners and blind corridors, and makes entering a new room a harrowing prospect.

A loot-filled monster maze this is not, though. *RE7's* blend of puzzling, combat and exploration

is classic *Resident Evil* hidden under a thick coat of grime. You're not angling beams of light or manoeuvring ancient statues but fishing trinkets from flooded toilets and plunging your hand into cadavers.

Molded are the rank and file enemy, oily black creatures that ooze from walls in a sludgy mess of teeth and tendrils. A lack of enemy variety lessens the payoff, though – you're essentially battling black jam all the way.

With *RE7* going back to its roots, it's poignant that one of the biggest flaws here lingers from its forebears: tank controls. Well, sort of. Yes, you have full range of movement, but your character's turning and walking speed are arbitrarily sluggish.

That can be excused, though, as a side effect of well-crafted claustrophobia. The globe-trotting, multi-character wildness of *Resident Evil 6* seems far away. Where that brainless episode was a glossy Blu-ray posted in crisp cardboard packaging, this is a grubby VHS you found between the bins in the park. Exquisitely horrific. **Ben Griffin**

**i** East meets west in the title: *Biohazard* is the Japanese name of the *Resident Evil* franchise.



## I, ROBOT

Positronic thinking

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

5x15 minutes | Now available via iPlayer

▶ Broadcaster Radio 4

▶ Director Andrew Mark Sewell

**AUDIO DRAMA** Self-aware

automatons are having a moment. With researchers Forrester predicting automation will eliminate 6% of US jobs by as early as 2021, they're starting to look like the future. What will this mean for humanity? Famously, Isaac Asimov thought about the issues this would raise back when few people even really knew what a robot was, coming up with his Three Laws of Robotics as early as 1942 and publishing the robot-themed fix-up novel *I, Robot* in 1950.

Fast forward more than six decades and those same stories form the basis of this loose radio dramatisation adapted by Richard Kurti. At its heart lies Stevie Byerley (Hermione Norris), an enigmatic and even duplicitous advocate for robots. In Stevie's words, we hear about the rise of the robots and, neatly, each of the stories she tells has a distinct mood and tone. Perhaps the most poignant is the tale of how young Stevie is closer to her robot childminder than her parents. The most frightening revolves around the idea of robots essentially running the world.

At times, Kurti's scripts don't quite escape the dryness of Asimov's source prose, but this is still a taut and cleverly paced adaptation. **Jonathan Wright**

**i** Harlan Ellison worked with Asimov on a movie script, later published as *I, Robot: The Illustrated Screenplay*.



See what happens if you upset Aunt Maud?





Sir John Hurt: a true great of the genre.

© BIG FINISH PRODUCTIONS 2016

## THE INVISIBLE MAN

Fading out



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

▶ 120 minutes | CD/download

▶ Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** Amazingly, for a

book of *The Invisible Man*'s skyscraping reputation, it's inspired surprisingly few adaptations. Though it's influenced untold shows and films, only the Universal film from 1933 and a 1984 BBC serial really stand as bona fide takes on HG Wells's trailblazing novella. But given how camped-up the Universal movie was and how bloated the BBC's effort was (three hours!), then it's arguable that Wells's book has never really had a proper adaptation.

It's a blessing for Big Finish, then, that Wells's story hasn't been

overdone and overtold. This atmospheric audio version, by Jonathan Barnes, is commendably faithful to the source, telling a lean and mean story about a megalomaniacal doctor named Griffin who, after discovering how to make his body invisible, plans a reign of terror across the UK.

It's a poignant listen, as it marks one of the last acting jobs completed by John Hurt before his death in January. Despite the eponymous invisible man being much younger in the story than Hurt sounds here, it's a bravura performance, and a fitting final bow for one of our most cherished thespis. **Steve O'Brien**



**i** Also available now: *Doctor Who: Casualties Of War*, Big Finish's latest (and sadly last) four-disc War Doctor box set.

## NIOH

Pretty fly for a samurai



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

▶ Reviewed on PS4

▶ Publisher Sony

**VIDEOGAME** *Ninja Gaiden* was ruddy great. It's been a long time since that series' dominance of the twitch action genre, and since then, studio Team Ninja's parped out a lacklustre third entry to the nails-hard dice-'em-up series. It then up-chucked the criminally bad *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z*.

So now we come to *Nioh*, the studio's latest stab at samurai swords and shurikens. And you couldn't ask for a more confident, slick, or consistently playable game to drag the studio back to the old best-in-the-business pedestal. Team Ninja is back, baby.

We take on the role of William Adams, an Irish seafarer who, after a spell rotting in the Tower of

London, whisks himself to the shores of fighty times-era Japan, where he must battle folkloric monsters known as Yōkai. The setting just oozes cool and it's been long enough since an action game tackled katanas and kunai for it to all feel fresh.

Combat wise, there's a stamina bar which you need to keep a close eye on as you fight, lest you run out of energy mid-combo and end up defenceless and wheezing. There are blood stains marking the position you last died, for you to suck up any lost experience points/souls you might otherwise lose.

Is it better than *Dark Souls*? No. While the balance towards combat over exploration might tickle some gamers' pickles, there's an element where *Dark Souls* utterly trounces *Nioh*: level design. The places you explore on your adventures across Japan just



Could someone put a few more lights on?

don't inspire as much as they should. Most locations are too dark and gloomy to be beautiful, and no one area sticks in the memory the way certain *Souls* locales have in the past.

In a way, with its loot drops, repeatable stages and nonsense story, *Nioh* is basically *Destiny* in

*Dark Souls* with samurai swords. For some it'll be essential. And the fact that Team Ninja is still capable of making essential games should bring a smile to any action game fan. Omedetou, indeed. **Ben Griffin**

**i** *Nioh* started as a half-finished screenplay worked on by the late, great Akira Kurosawa. Only a few elements remain.





## COLLECTABLES

What we've been playing with this month

**1** It must be mighty hard work being a mutant, but you wouldn't know it to look at these **X-Men Dorbz** (FPI price £8.99; product codes F5527, FF5528, FF5529, FF5530, FF5531, FF5532) – there's more smiles here than Bryan Singer's managed in four X-movies. With goodies and baddies all bearing the same fixed grin, Storm is more Light

Breeze, and Sabretooth is about as threatening as a teeny tabby cat. Cyclops, Psylocke and Emma Frost also appear to have been taking dangerously large doses of happy pills.

**2** Diners assemble! These four **Avengers plates** (FPI price £8.99; product code F4583) feature Thor, Hulk, Iron

Man and Captain America, are made of melamine, and so won't break if you drop them (probably). We're thinking they might be best used to serve up some square meals (arf) at a picnic on a day without a cloud in the sky. If the Chitauri should attack then the crockery will also make good weapons to lob at them with fearsome force. It will no doubt

astound you to know that this product is made in China.

**3** NECA's sixteenth (yes, sixteenth) wave of **7" Predator action figures** (FPI price £22.99 each; product codes F2091, F2092) once again pays homage to the Predator toys made by Kenner in the mid-'90s, in pleasingly garish style. On the left we have a Spiked Tail Predator, adorned with the robotic trophies of the non-organic beings he prefers to hunt. On the right is a Stalker Predator; hailing from a world of total darkness, he has phosphorescent blood, and so this figure glows in the dark. In case you can't make it out, that's a Xenomorph head on his chest –



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# Reviews



and yes, we put Xenomorph just to troll you, Mark Howe! Both come with removable masks and weaponry. A Ghost Predator is also available (F2093), but must have been off haunting someone else...

**4** You know that bit in *The Empire Strikes Back* where you got a tantalising glimpse under Darth Vader's helmet? Well, now's your chance to sneak a peek underneath the cloak, as this **Darth Vader grater** (FPI price £6.99; product code F5667) reveals a Sith Lord who's devoted his life to slicing up solid dairy products. Given the colour of the milk in the *Star Wars* galaxy, we suspect that this is particularly effective on blue

cheese – though we didn't have any stilton in the office to help us test our theory. Sorry.

**5** Add some comic book style to your breakfast bar or dining room table with these latest **Funko Pop! salt and pepper shakers**. Superman and Wonder Woman (FPI price £14.99; product code F3869) stand ready to defend your eggs and bacon – look, they even have their hands on their hips, the internationally recognised body language that declares, "We mean business, crime!" Meanwhile **Batman and the Joker** (product code F3870) are locked in their eternal existential dance of duality – just like salt and pepper, eh?

**6** BB-8's got a built-in cigarette lighter, a projector and loads of other gadgets to make him the ideal home companion. Now he'll even help you make cakes – and fool your loved ones about the level of your culinary expertise – via the medium of this **BB-8 cake mould** (FPI price £9.99; product code F5599) from Underground Toys, made of "food grade silicone". Just make your cake mixture, scoop it into the mould, put it into the oven and hope for the best. That's what we did, and the results were pleasingly edible – though cooking time was longer than expected because the cake's so much fatter than a standard Victoria sponge. May go well with blue milk. ●

## THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



### TWIN PEAKS POP VINYL FIGURES

◆ Yes, you will soon be able to buy a cutesy vinyl figure of a corpse wrapped in plastic (along with five others). This seems wrong on an almost infinite number of levels, but won't stop them selling like hot cherry pie.



### SPIDER-MAN BOOKENDS

◆ Made of polystone (ooh) and lined with felt (gasp) these Spidey-logo-bifurcating bookends are the perfect thing to keep your graphic novels tidy. Well, it's less messy than spraying webbing all over them.



### SILKY PLUSH

◆ Fancy cuddling up to a 10"-high mutant moth larva? Weirdo. DC's latest entry in DC's reliably bonkers Super Pets range features Starfire's pet Silky, star of animated show *Teen Titans Go!*

Photography by Olly Curris





Yep, it definitely looks like it could be a time machine.

SEASON 1

# TIMELESS

## Man, the Lifeboat

- ▶ UK Broadcast E4, Wednesdays
- ▶ US Broadcast NBC, finished
- ▶ Episodes Reviewed 1.01-1.11

Ever since HG Wells popularised it in *The Time Machine*, stories about travel into the past and future have captivated our imaginations. And television has been a particularly fertile ground for the idea of flinging ourselves around the timeline. There have been so many shows to explore it, from the classic one about an alien who flies through time and space in a ship “disguised” as a police box (maybe you’ve heard of it) to, well, *Time*

*Trax*. (Sorry, *Time Trax* fans.) And even now, when you might think every possible storyline has been mined to exhaustion, there it is, clogging up the schedules via *Travelers*, *11.22.63* and *Legends Of Tomorrow*, among others. *Timeless* puts itself firmly in the fun romp category, with *Supernatural* creator Eric Kripke and *The Shield*’s Shawn Ryan teaming up to send a trio spinning through the past in the hope of stopping an apparent terrorist who has swiped an experimental time machine with a mission to change history in his favour. But – fortunately for the show’s long-term future – it’s

not quite as simple as all that. Because the putative villain (Goran Visnjic’s Garcia Flynn) is trying to save his family and take down an even more insidious threat in the shape of Rittenhouse, the mysterious organisation with centuries-old roots that fills *Timeless*’s contractual Big Bad quota.

And what of those main characters? Sent on various missions in a cranky, less-than-ideal “lifeboat” version of the time machine that Flynn pinched (originally intended solely for rescuing travellers stuck in the past) are Matt Lanter’s straight-arrow military type Wyatt, Malcolm Barrett’s nerdy, nervy Rufus (one of the few people in the world who can pilot the time machine(s)), and Abigail Spencer’s overawed historian Lucy, along to help with the various details and navigating the situations they find.

## ZOOM IN



### BEST EPISODE ▲

→ “The Assassination Of Abraham Lincoln” (1.02) sees the elements click into place pretty quickly and offers a clever look at the event.

### EXCELLENT TRIVIA!

→ The main characters all have names homaging *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure*: Lucy (Bill S) Preston, Wyatt (Ted “Theodore”) Logan and Rufus Carlin.

### IT’S WOSSIPNAME!

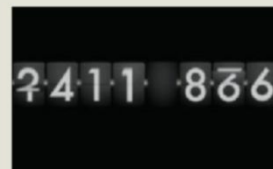
→ Matt Frewer plays kidnapped scientist Anthony Bruhl. You might recall his turn on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as a man who stole... a time machine.

### BEST MOMENT

→ In the pilot, Rufus hopes a racist guard lives to see “Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson or Mike Tyson,” because “Time is not on your side.”

### DID YOU SPOT? ▼

→ The flip clock that becomes the title every episode displays the year the team visit in that week’s adventure.







A strange sort of threesome, four if you include the gun.

So, of course they jaunt to some of history's biggest events (the Hindenburg disaster, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the Alamo), while also dropping in on some lesser-known moments in time. They're a likeable trio, and the show smartly takes the route of seeing their lives impacted (Wyatt is on his own mission to learn who murdered his wife, while Lucy sees existence changing around her as she loses a sister, regains a mother and must deal with the baffling situation of being engaged to a man she has never met). Add to that the likes of Paterson Joseph (as the billionaire genius who funded and created the project, who has his own ties to the Rittenhouse gang), who with his brusque, driven but not unkind performance, is essentially offering a good argument for why he should one day play the Doctor, even if he doesn't get to jump around in time. Effects-wise, it might not have the budget of shows such as *Westworld*, but it passably recreates the likes of 1960s Vegas or World War II.

“If sometimes less than ambitious, it's rarely dull”

For all its fun, *Timeless* doesn't always work, trying harder with some of the events than others and occasionally getting lost within its own conspiracy theory, which could end up becoming annoying. It is content to be an enjoyable adventure series that rarely attempts to make big pronouncements about legacy or how history affects us, preferring to focus on the core characters. If it sometimes seems less than ambitious, it's rarely dull (Wyatt has his moments) and has already carved itself a place among the series you might consider if you're after some undemanding sci-fi adventure with enough self-effacing comedy to keep it from being too pompous. **James White**

You are correct – this isn't from the Abraham Lincoln episode.



★ BEST IN SHOW ★  
The characters who make TV great

## JOE MILLER

The *Expanses*' hard-boiled Belter cop

► UK Broadcast Netflix, TBC ► US Broadcast Syfy, Wednesdays

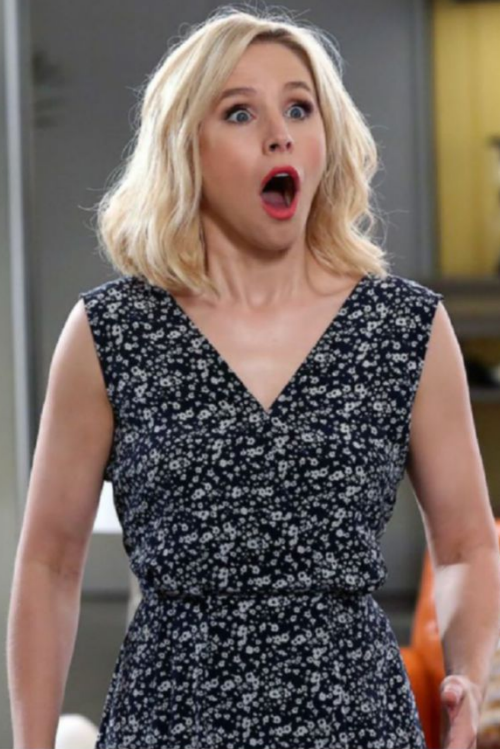
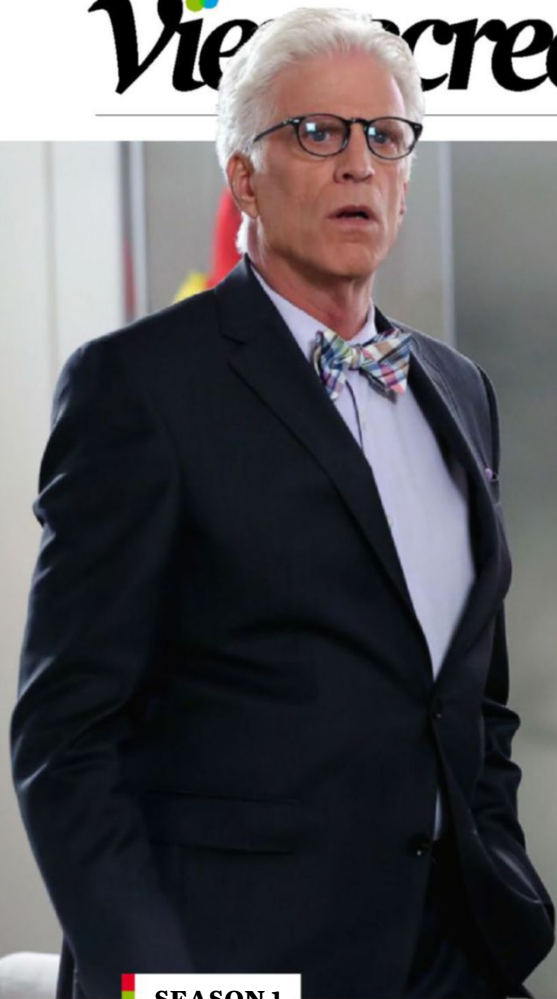
⊕ *The Expanses* offers both an exciting and a slightly worrying vision of the future. You've got the Martians, who are a military force to be reckoned with; the poverty gap on Earth seems to have only gotten bigger over 200 years; and the Belters are basically the solar system's dogsbodies. But the most fascinating character has to be Detective Joe Miller (Thomas Jane). Born and raised in the asteroid belt, he manages to straddle both sides of an interplanetary squabble without being accepted by either. He's a "well wala" – a Belter who's "obsessed" with the inner planets, a traitor to his people.

At first glance he's no different to a lot of TV detectives. A little rough around the edges, he's not afraid to work outside the law, and has a serious alcohol problem, but as season one progresses the depth of his character begins to emerge. Miller might pretend to be

indifferent to the plight of the Belters, but he is one of them and despite his selfish attitude he struggles to ignore their suffering. When he's given a case to find a missing Belter activist he refuses to give up, even when it leads him right into the middle of a political conflict he never wanted to be a part of.

But it's his almost childlike wonder regarding Earth which really makes this character one of a kind. While all hell is breaking loose around him in the season finale, he pauses to ask an Earther what rain tastes like. You can see it's something he's always pondered, while it's something no one on Earth ever really thinks about. This shows how out of sync he is with the rest of the world he lives in. The Belter who dreams about Earth. A police officer born in the slums. A truly unpredictable character, he doesn't fit anywhere. **Lauren O'Callaghan**





Has she just seen the twist in the final episode?

SEASON 1

# THE GOOD PLACE

## We Need To Talk About Heaven

- ▶ UK Broadcast TBC
- ▶ US Broadcast NBC, finished
- ▶ Episodes Reviewed 1.01-1.13

◉ **Eleanor Shellstrop was a wonderful person.** Caring, thoughtful and kind, she worked tirelessly for charity during her life, and so – upon her death – it seemed only fitting that she should head to the Good Place rather than, well, the alternative. But there's one small snag: the Eleanor Shellstrop who arrives in this happy, colourful afterlife isn't actually the correct Eleanor. There's been a mix-up. *This* Eleanor (Kristen Bell) is a moody, bitchy, thoughtless nightmare of a person who, upon realising a gigantic mistake has been made, sets about doing everything she can to stay – whatever the cost...

It's a phenomenal concept for a half-hour sitcom, isn't it? And the show lives up to its premise, too. Some of the imaginative riffs are extraordinary; for example, the Good Place reacts to a "bad" soul's presence by materialising flying shrimp and giant ladybirds. Nobody can swear, so Eleanor says "fork" and "shirt" a lot. And to get into the Good Place, you can't have a personalised number plate or have ever taken your socks off on a plane. It's the kind of silly yet clued-up humour you'd expect from Michael Schur, one of the co-creators of *Parks And Recreation*, and it rarely misfires.

It helps that the cast are perfect, most notably Bell's unlikeable-yet-likeable Eleanor (that's a tough thing to pull off) and Ted Danson's fussy afterlife architect, Michael.

There's posh Brit resident Tahani (Jameela Jamil), who annoys at first but grows on you; Eleanor's alleged soulmate Chidi (William Jackson Harper), who sets about teaching her to be a nicer person; and the mysterious silent monk, Jianyu (Manny Jacinto), who may have secrets of his own.

What makes *The Good Place* work so well is that it's about friendship: it tells us that we can all become better people thanks to those around us. With the help of her new friends, could Eleanor be allowed to stay if she becomes nicer *after* death? Every episode is a lesson in ethics – literally, in some cases, as Chidi lectures Eleanor using Plato and Socrates as examples – but never has learning been this fun. Forging brilliant. **Jayne Nelson**

## ZOOM IN



**BEST EPISODE ▲**  
→ "Most Improved Player" (1.08) introduces the guy running the Bad Place, Trevor, played by *Parks And Recreation's* Adam Scott in "gleefully smug" mode, and it really does sound like hell.

**TRIVIA**  
→ Tiya Sircar, who plays The Real Eleanor, also provides the voice for Sabine Wren in *Star Wars Rebels*.

**DID YOU SPOT?**  
→ One of Eleanor's crimes on Earth is listed as "showing a nine-year-old child *The Shining*". Others include sneezing on salad bars and ruining movie endings.

**BEST MOMENT**  
→ The discovery of the Medium Place is brilliant. Everything there is middling, so beer is always warm, you can only watch *Cannonball Run II*, and the *Twilight* books are all you can read.

**TRIVIA 2 ▼**  
→ Jameela Jamil (Tahani) used to be a presenter on Channel 4's *T4*.





## LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

AGENT

"Who are you?"

SAM

"We're the guys who saved the world."

*Supernatural*,  
Episode 12.09



KARA

"I'm going to get Botox for that. If you can figure out a way to get the needle in my skin..."

*Supergirl*,  
Episode 2.09



BARBARA  
[TO PENGUIN]

"Get up, have a shower and do that 'disco vampire' thing with your hair."

*Gotham*,  
Episode 3.13



IRIS WEST

"How dangerous could it be? I don't die until May."

*The Flash*,  
Episode 3.11



THE KNIGHT  
OF CROWNS

"I am the Knight of Crowns, and my apologies – I seem to have died waiting for you aspirants to come."

*The Magicians*,  
Episode 2.01



## SCRIPT EASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 1

# EMERALD CITY

Oz you like it?



▶ UK Broadcast 5Star, Wednesdays  
▶ US Broadcast NBC  
▶ Episodes Reviewed 1.01-1.04

DOROTHY

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

TOTO

No, I think we're in Westeros. Look! Snow!

DOROTHY

I thought we agreed not to mention *that show*.

TOTO

What, even though one of the witches here runs a brothel and the other one runs a training camp for Septa Unellas? Shame. Shame.

DOROTHY

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! This is our version of Oz. We have a wizard and everything.

TOTO

Yeah, he's more Uther from *Merlin* with all that "magic is outlawed" shtick.

DOROTHY

Look, there's the Yellow Brick Road.

TOTO

More kinda Dulux white-with-a-hint-of-jaundice, really.

DOROTHY

Well, yeah. This isn't the old Technicolor Oz.

TOTO

You're right there. Less "over the rainbow" and more "under the weather".

DOROTHY

Yeah this place is a bit washed out, isn't it? The steampunk flying monkeys are cool, though.

TOTO

Will you please stop waving that gun around!

[BANG!]

DOROTHY

Shit, I've shot a witch!

TOTO

What have you got a gun for anyway?

DOROTHY

I'm an edgy, streetwise Dorothy and I was in a police car when we came here via in the magic tornado.

TOTO

Hang on – some tall guys from the Braveheart Re-enactment Society are coming.

DOROTHY

Don't be silly. They're Munchkins.

TOTO

But they're huge and... oh I get it. That's what the blue make-up is about.

DOROTHY

They're here to infodump.

MUNCHKIN

Yeah, the wizard acts like a real Kingpin (that's an Easter egg, guys – didjageddit?) but actually he can't control giants to fight

the beast who... blah, blah, blah.

DOROTHY

God, this is convoluted. You carry on while I hook up with this hunky guy who looks nothing like a scarecrow and has amnesia which is kinda, sorta like not having a brain.

HUNKY

SCARECROW  
Check out my impressive sword.

TOTO

Steady on mate.

MUNCHKIN

Oh yeah, and there's a boy who becomes a girl, and another boy who gets a clockwork heart and lots of silly hats...

TOTO

You know what?

DOROTHY

What?

TOTO

Cancellation is coming.

Dave Golder





## SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



### EASTER EGG OF THE MONTH

This guy's eating "Thanagarian Snare Beast" in a *Supergirl* episode directed by Kevin Smith, who once wrote an unfilmed Superman script featuring a "Thanagarian Snare Beast".



### CLASSICALLY TRAINED ACTORS OF THE MONTH

Laughter *and* tears! Cisco Ramone and Caitlin Snow do their best impression of classical theatre's Comedy/Tragedy masks in *The Flash*.



### NOVELTY FRUIT OF THE MONTH

Miniature Death Star discovered in fruit bowl in *The Magicians*.



### SURPRISE VILLAINS OF THE MONTH

*Doctor Who*'s Autons unexpectedly turn up in *Falling Water* and prove to be less plastic than the rest of the cast.



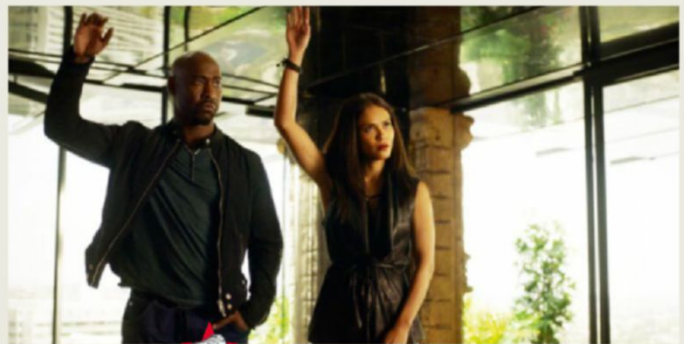
### PUSHY SALESMAN OF THE MONTH

Damien Darhk seems oddly reluctant to buy John Barrowman's Greatest Hits CD in *Legends Of Tomorrow*.



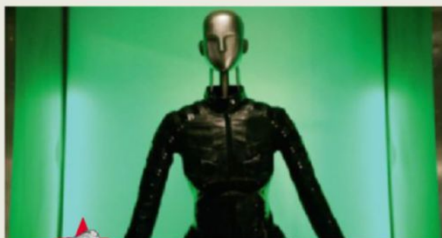
### 50 SHADES SEQUEL OF THE MONTH

Christian Grey bends over backwards in his gimp suit to impress Clary when she visits his new dungeon in *Shadowhunters*.



### DANCE CRAZE OF THE MONTH

Maze and Amenadiel prove less than enthusiastic when asked to dance Gangnam style in *Lucifer*. Or maybe they can't spell YMCA?



### DODGY DOUBLE OF THE MONTH

Oliver suspects apparently-back-from-the-dead Black Canary may be a robot double in *Arrow*.



### SPICY FOOD OF THE MONTH

Man regrets ordering the flaming fajitas in *The Vampire Diaries*.



### PRACTICAL FASHION OF THE MONTH

Sheila and Joel prepare for a visit from Walder Frey and his family in *Santa Clarita Diet* (they can eat the leftovers).



# TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

LOGAN KONG: SKULL ISLAND JUSTICE LEAGUE



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BLADE RUNNER 2049  
CAPTAIN MARVEL

THE NEXT-GEN MATRIX

“IT’S BRUTAL... IT’S ICONIC”  
Scarlett Johansson

GEMMA ARTERTON  
“I wasn’t showing who I was”

SUPERMAN GOES TO WAR

CHARLIE HUNNAM  
Meet King Arthur



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# HORRORVILLE

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THE LAST BATTLE...

## RESIDENT EVIL

Inside The Final Chapter, with director Paul WS Anderson

DARIO ARGENTO  
THE HORROR LEGEND  
TALKS ABOUT HIS  
CAREER IN FEAR!

PREVENGE  
Director and star Alice Lowe tells us about the year's best Brit horror

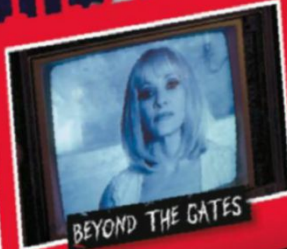
PLUS! GHOSTWATCH  
CREATOR AND  
NOVELIST STEPHEN VOLK



ALSO MANIFESTING



A CURE FOR WELLNESS



BEYOND THE GATES



HORROR ART



GEORGE ROMERO

# HORRORVILLE

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HORRORVILLE ISSUE 3  
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# APES

You're one yourself, but how will you fare in our simian-themed quiz?

Quizmaster Russell Lewin, Production Editor

## QUESTION 1

What apey movie was the first film to which Ray Harryhausen contributed stop-motion animation effects?

## QUESTION 2

How many of the original *Planet Of The Apes* films were there (1968 to 1973)?

## QUESTION 3 PICTURE QUESTION

What film is this ape appearing in?



QUESTION 3

## QUESTION 4

Who will Kong go up against in 2020 when he has done with Skull Island?

## QUESTION 5

What was the title of the direct sequel to 1933's *King Kong* called?

## QUESTION 6

Which famous horror star did *A Brooklyn Gorilla* meet in a 1952 film of that name?

## QUESTION 7 PICTURE QUESTION

Identify this Marvel villain and his cohorts.



QUESTION 7

## QUESTION 8

In 1940's *The Ape*, mad scientist Boris Karloff disguises himself by slipping into the skin of a dead circus ape and goes on missions to extract what from townspeople's bodies, to cure polio victims?

## QUESTION 9 PICTURE QUESTION

Name this actor, seen here in a *Planet Of The Apes* movie?



QUESTION 9

## QUESTION 10

Michael Gough got to grips with which hirsute primate in a 1961 British horror film?



QUESTION 16

## QUESTION 11

What exactly is 1981's *Farewell To The Planet Of The Apes*?

## QUESTION 12

The 1995 film *Congo*, which concerns a gorilla in the African Congo who can talk, was based on a novel by which famous sci-fi author?

## QUESTION 13

In which film did King Kong appear on the big screen in colour for the first time?

## QUESTION 14

In minutes, how long is it before the crew get to Skull Island in Peter Jackson's 2005 *King Kong* remake? (Within 10 minutes scores a point.)



## QUESTION 15

1998 ape adventure *Mighty Joe Young* lost which word from its title on its journey from the US to the UK?

## QUESTION 16 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the film from the poster.

## QUESTION 17

There was a Tarzan film of this title made in 1932, 1959, 1981 and 1999. What is it? (Clue: the name of this quiz should help you here.)

## QUESTION 18

*Towering Inferno* director John Guillermin ventured into the crazy world of a certain hairy beast in 1976 and 1986. Name both the films.

## QUESTION 19

Robin Askwith stars as Ray Fay and Rula Lenska is Luce Habit, but can you name the 1976 spoof that wasn't allowed a UK release for legal reasons?

## QUESTION 20

What 1969 Mexican video nasty, with the word "Apes" in the title, has real footage of heart surgery?

- Answers**
- 1 *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) 2 Five
  - 3 *2001: A Space Odyssey* 4 *Godzilla*
  - 5 *The Son Of Kong* 6 *Bela Lugosi*
  - 7 *Red Ghost* and his Super-Apes
  - 8 *Spinal Fluid* 9 *Roddy McDowall*
  - 10 *Konga* 11 *A TV movie made up of*
  - 11 *Planet Of The Apes* television series
  - 12 *Michael Crichton* 13 *King Kong Vs*
  - 14 *Godzilla* (1962) 14 70 minutes
  - 15 "Young" 16 *Dawn Of The Planet*
  - 17 *Of The Apes* 17 *Tarzan The Ape Man*
  - 18 *King Kong and King Kong Lives*
  - 19 *Queen Kong* 20 *Night Of The*
  - 20 *Bloody Apes*

## How did you do?

Are you an ape of distinction?



→ 0-5  
Dunston



→ 6-10  
Donkey Kong



→ 11-15  
Clyde



→ 16-19  
Cheeta



→ 20  
King Louie





## APEMANIA!

Nick Setchfield, Features Editor

**“W**e’re not having apes at Christmas!”

1978, and my gran has spoken. The TV fades to black – or was it *Larry Grayson’s Generation Game?* – denying me the sweet taste of *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes*, ITV’s Christmas Day blockbuster.

Given it climaxes with radiation-ravaged mutants detonating a doomsday bomb that blows our planet to smithereens, she may have had a point. If we’d been a clan of apocalyptic cultists it would have been welcomed like *Mary Poppins*.

Apemania was inescapable in the ’70s. *Star Wars* came along and eclipsed it, of course, but the merchandising onslaught of *Planet Of The Apes* now feels like a dry run for George Lucas’s all-conquering space opera. From jigsaws of horseback gorillas to moulded plastic chimp masks, action figures to bubble gum cards (“HUMAN ON A LEASH!”), the primates subjugated the playgrounds of Britain.

There was even a *Planet Of The Apes* rodeo that toured cigarette butt-littered circus pitches from Sussex to Stourbridge. Some cowboy act had no doubt given themselves a crafty monkey makeover, like a bluesy old pub band hitching their star to the glitter of glam rock.



I was just too young to see the movies but Apemania found me anyway. We all knew the big twist by now: the toppled Statue of Liberty wasn’t a spoiler but a prophecy, a glimpse of a nightmarish future Earth. In Britain Marvel published a dedicated weekly comic, each cover declaring, “Where man once stood supreme, now rule the apes!”, words that still pack a delicious post-apocalyptic shudder.

There was also, briefly, a TV show. Yes, it was Apes-lite, a more family-friendly take, but I loved it, especially Roddy McDowall’s twitchy chimp, Galen. For a while he was even my invisible friend, usurping Danno from *Hawaii Five-0*. I kept the coolest invisible company as a kid.

The apes are back on the big screen now. But while the new movies are intelligent and beautifully made, for me there’s something missing: the mythic weirdness and freaky worldbuilding that first fired my imagination. The rebooted franchise feels too tame, too sensible, too afraid to go fully ape.

Galen agrees with me, by the way. I just asked him. ●

*Nick wishes those damn dirty apes would take their stinking paws off him.*

### Fact Attack!

→ The first issue of British Marvel’s *Planet Of The Apes* comic was published in October 1974. It ran for 123 issues, until 1977.

→ In Christmas 1975 the apes in the rodeo show went on strike before a performance in Newcastle, claiming they hadn’t been paid.

→ The theme music to the *Planet Of The Apes* TV show was composed by Lalo Schifrin, who also gave us the immortal *Mission: Impossible*.

→ For an authentic glimpse of ape madness in 1970s Britain – and Leominster in particular – check out <http://bit.ly/SFXapes>.

MIRRORPIX (3)





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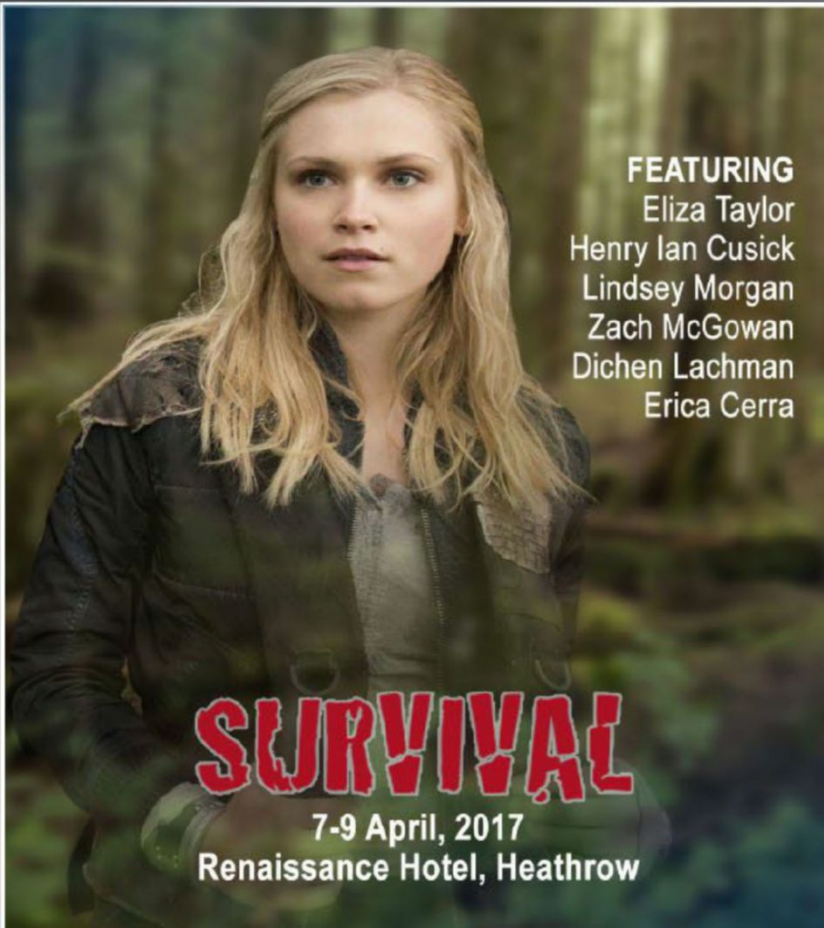
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