

BLACK PANTHER

RETURN TO
WAKANDA!

SEXY

359

TITANS
BROTHER BLOOD
HAS ARRIVED!

THE PERIPHERAL
WILLIAM GIBSON'S NOVEL REBORN!

WEDNESDAY
THE ADDAMS FAMILY RETURN

**WE ARE
NOT ALONE**
NEW SCI-FI COMEDY
FROM GHOSTS TEAM

**BONES
AND ALL**
TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET
SINKS HIS TEETH IN

EXCLUSIVE!

WILLOW

THE CLASSIC SAGA BEGINS ANEW

PLUS! STAR TREK: PRODIGY | LET THE RIGHT ONE IN | BATMAN | THE MENU | BRUCE CAMPBELL | SECRET INVASION
DISENCHANTED | INCREDIBLE BUT TRUE | ALAN MOORE | STAR WARS: ANDOR | STRANGE WORLD | TRANSFORMERS

BBC



DOCTOR WHO

AND THE DALEKS

DAVID WHITAKER

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The Black Hole's Maximilian scared us to death.



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GET IN TOUCH!

First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!



HATE TO SEE IT

Rob Graham, email Yes, *The Rings Of Power* is slow, and not as good as the classic movie trilogy, but it's still intriguing and very enjoyable and looks visually stunning. *House Of The Dragon*, meanwhile, is turning into a worthy successor to *Game Of Thrones* with an excellent performance from Matt Smith. Lenny Henry has suddenly reinvented himself as a serious dramatic actor in this, *The Sandman* and *Doctor Who*, and has been surprisingly good. Morfydd Clark is the stand-out for me as the young Galadriel, who I can easily see turning into Cate Blanchett in years to come.

But I'm dismayed and disgusted by reviews from racist fans. It's okay not to like a show, but review-bombing it is idiotic. See also *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*, which has been light, silly fun. Hate-watching just to review-bomb will just drive up viewing figures, which is all that streaming services care about.

DOCTOR OOOOH

Robert MacDonald, email If *Doctor Who* is to survive in this age of multi-streaming platforms it must appeal to those used to *Stranger Things*' big-budget storytelling. Whilst the relaunch's effects have been great, they need to be more than great. The stories need to be more like later-era Tom Baker: expansive. Whilst the effects were occasionally off, the scripts and execution were excellent... Jelly baby, anyone?

NOPE

Quintin Bynoe-Ogle, email Do you offer any prizes to the writers whose letters are chosen for the letters page?
SFX: What, isn't the awe and envy of your peers and the toasty glow of global fame enough?



I guarantee *Avatar: The Way Of Water* will be unlike anything you have ever seen and you will be plunking your money down. Cameron does not disappoint!

Lee Caropolo



After I watched *Werewolf By Night* my only question was "Is there more?"

@dreadnoughtfett

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SFX

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"I have more important things to worry about than *Doctor Who*"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the **SFX** hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

- Adored *Hocus Pocus 2*, what a joy. Quick, make another!
- Saw *Violent Night* at NYCC – and it's absolutely hilarious.
- Enjoyed *Halloween Ends*, but I'm not sure it's the movie fans wanted.

RANTS

- I take it back, I won't be watching season two of *Tierra Incógnita*...
- Was "The Power Of The Doctor" derailed by the Centenary "hook"?

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

- Thrilled that the next Trunk Records release (due out at the end of the month) will be Sidney Sager's eerie music from *Children Of The Stones*.
- Looking forward to Mark Jenkin's *Enys Men* in January – and also *The Cinematic DNA Of Enys Men*, a season of films/shorts/TV episodes he's programmed for BFI.

RANTS

- I often turn subtitles on when reviewing things to help catch muffled dialogue, and the general standard is laughably bad. Sort it out, Blu-ray labels! (Or pay me as a consultant.)

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

- Missed *The Galaxy Britain Built: The British Force Behind Star Wars* the first time around. Still on BBC iPlayer and well worth a watch.
- Pleased that *Outer Range* has been given a second season, still so much unresolved.

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

- Rob Savage's *Dashcam* is the most bonkers, surprising and gutsy horror flick I've seen in ages. Also loving the reviews which said "But the lead character is so unlikeable!" Yes, THAT'S THE POINT.

RANTS

- "Requel-ing" *The Exorcist*: absolutely sacrilege. "Requel-ing" it as the obligatory trilogy of films: absolutely unforgivable. Stop it, now.

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

- Loving *Rayguns & Rocketships* by Rian Hughes, a feast of vintage art and a celebration of a lost age of British sci-fi.

RANTS

- The 60th anniversary Bond concert was fabulous, but why cut the instrumentals, Prime? That music's the backbone of the movies. Kindly reinstate...

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

- *Andor* is the *Star Wars* storytelling I've wanted to see in a Disney+ series. Mature and thrilling, with great acting all around.

RANTS

- The continued retraction of studio support for animation by the likes of Netflix and WBDDiscovery is a depressing trend. That and the shuttering of Blue Sky Studios means less opportunity for some amazing creative voices.

I hate everything.

Captain's Log



Can I just hibernate in Laurie Strode's house until spooky season comes back around again? I say that, but here at *SFX* we're already looking ahead to the cover story for Christmas 2023 – and oh boy, what a long-awaited return *that* is! But I'm getting ahead of myself – such is life working on a magazine. It's no wonder I genuinely quite often forget what month it actually is.

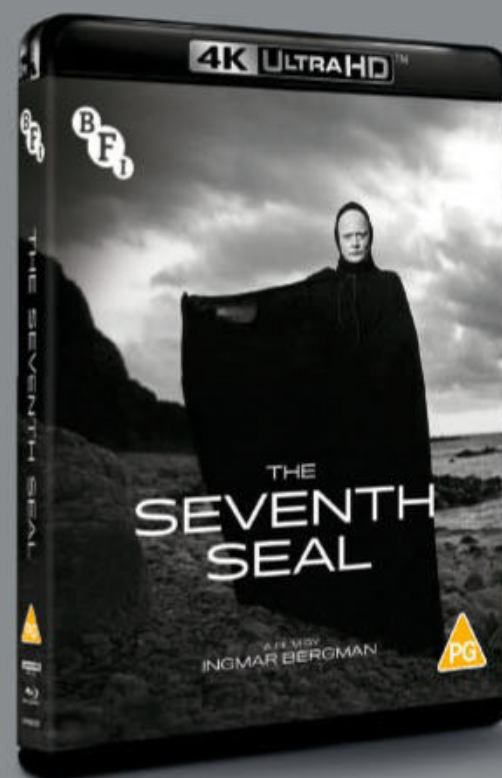
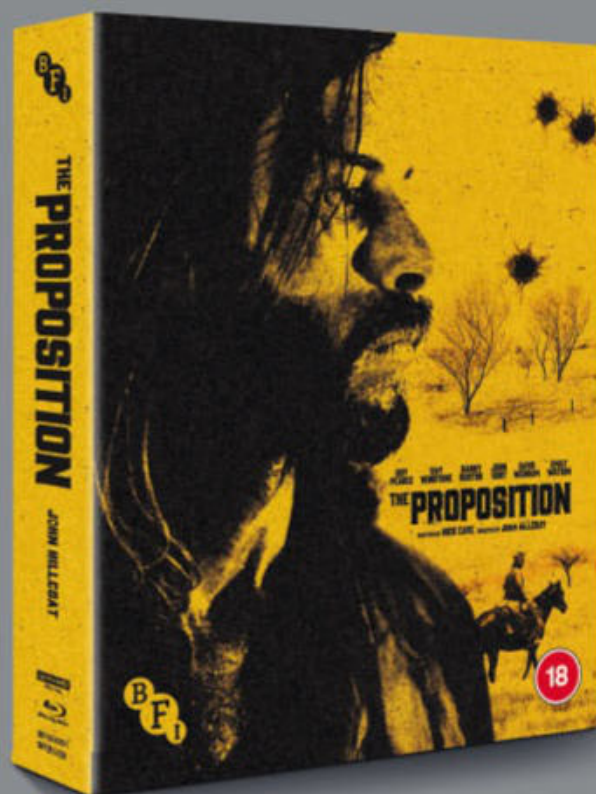
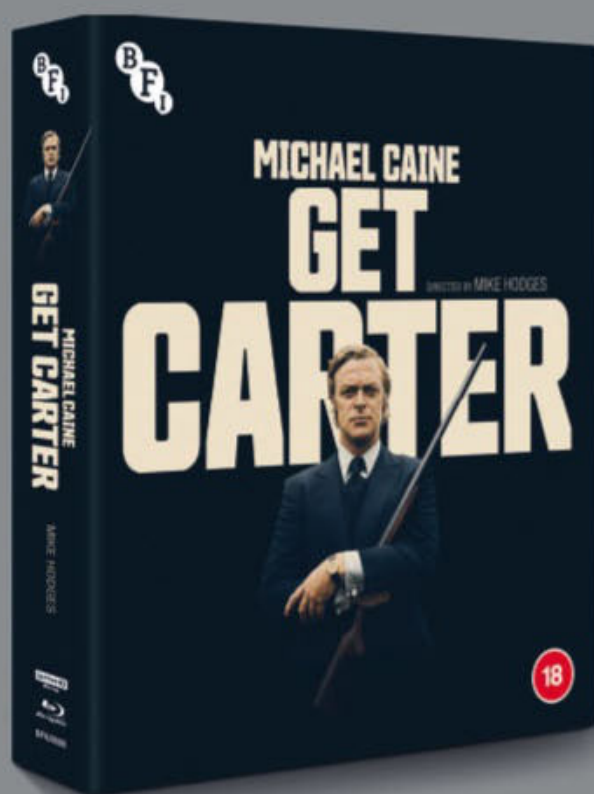
After last issue's horror extravaganza, it's *quite* the mixed bag this time around. The return of a classic '80s brand, a new Wakandan adventure, a major new sci-fi series for Prime Video, some cannibals, some comedy – and interviews from New York Comic Con, which I was lucky enough to attend during the making of this issue. There's something about being in a convention hall, filled with thousands of people who just love being *fans*. It's one of the happiest places for me, surrounded by all different kinds of fandom, discovering new things and hearing the latest announcements.

Despite my Grinchy demeanour, I was grinning the entire time. Boy, what a natural comedown afterwards though – along with the worry of how I was going to get all my newly acquired merchandise home! But let that hibernation begin – there's so many new books, comics and series coming our way that you'll really only need to leave the house if you're not savvy enough to already have an *SFX* subscription (ahem, page 28). Stay safe, keep warm and we'll see you in four weeks!

Darren
X



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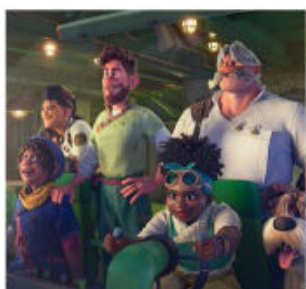


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HAPPILY NEVER AFTER

Return to a fairy tale land in *Disenchanted*

Highlights



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STRANGE WORLD

→ A new Disney animation seeks out new life and new civilisations.



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THE RIDDLER: YEAR ONE

→ Paul Dano pens a prequel comic series for his character in *The Batman*.



14

THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

→ It's been 30 years since the Man of Steel died. So let's celebrate!

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Out Of This World

Disney brings retro pulp power to animated yarn **Strange World**



The Clades have spotted you. They're not happy.



"WE KEEP MOVING INTO NEW directions because we're curious," says producer Roy Conli. "And I think curiosity should drive us well into the future."

He's talking about the restless creative ambitions of Disney but could also be sharing the mission statement behind *Strange World*, the latest animated movie from the House of Mouse. A multi-generational tale of interplanetary explorers, it channels the vintage essence of pulp adventure, where lost lands and strange beasts lurk just beyond the edges of tattered maps.

As much as it taps the DNA of everything from Tarzan to Indiana Jones, it also reinstates the horizon-chasing spirit that powered such Disney back-catalogue as *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea* and *The Island At The Top Of The World*.

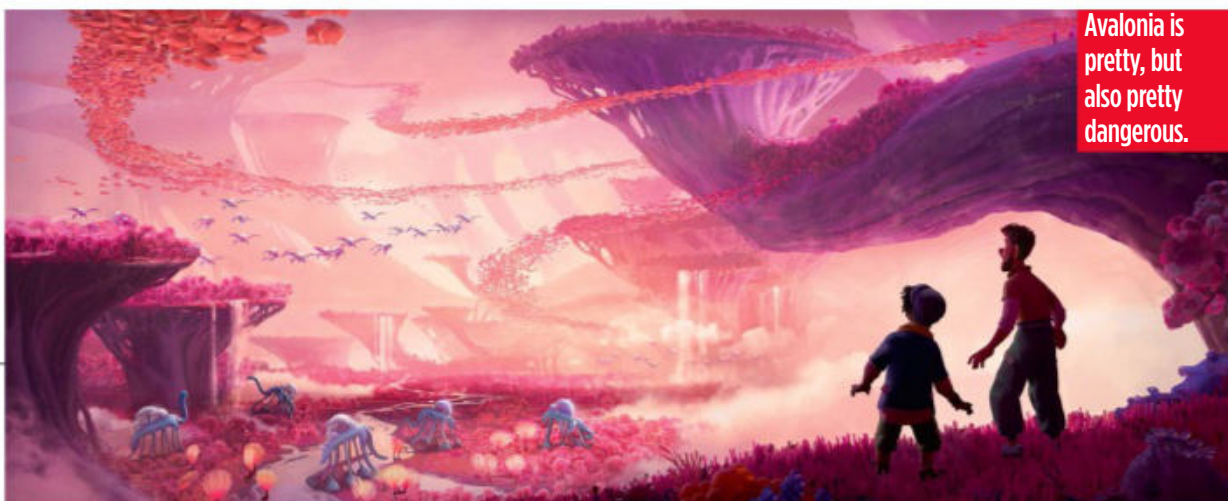
"Really the brain behind this entire concept is Don Hall, the director," Conli tells Red Alert, acknowledging the helmer of *Big Hero 6* and *Raya And The Last Dragon*. "Don very much loves this kind of pulp fiction: Jules Verne, HG

Wells, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He was just really into that idea. And the natural progression was looking at films that he loves, going back to *King Kong* and into *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. This genre is something that is very dear to him. The way that he used Marvel as an inspiration in *Big Hero 6*, he's using that kind of sci-fi lore of days ago [as inspiration] for this.

"This is science fiction, but almost in a retro kind of way. It's a reinvention of energy. We wanted to make that kind of Jules Vernian world come alive without going deep into steampunk."

Strange World introduces us to the Clades, a family with derring-do in their blood. Jake Gyllenhaal voices Searcher Clade, a farmer living in the shadow of his legendary father Jaeger (Dennis Quaid), who disappeared when Searcher was a boy. Married to Meridian (Gabrielle Union), his own son Ethan (Jaboukie Young-White) longs for adventure beyond the daily realities of farm chores. Skywalker syndrome, you might call it.

"That's what I love about Ethan," says Conli. "He's a marvellous young man. His parents love him. [But] he is having to deal with the idea of 'Do I want to follow the legacy that my dad is



Avalonia is pretty, but also pretty dangerous.



“This is science fiction, but almost in a retro kind of way. It’s a reinvention of energy”

setting out in terms of me being a farmer? Or do I want to follow the dream of my grandpa, the adventurer? And that’s kind of the story.”

Ethan has his wish granted as Callisto Mal (Lucy Liu), president of the land of Avalonia, enlists the Clades for an expedition into the uncharted realm that gives the film its title. It’s a mission that reunites them with the long-lost Jaeger, but hold that heartwarming reunion – this luminous, bizarrely beautiful subterranean world is, they quickly discover, absolutely deadly. As Meridian exclaims, “Everything down here is trying to kill us!”

“We left ourselves open to any inspiration from our visual development team,” shares Conli, remembering how the world came together in all its perilous glory. “One guy walked in with a sausage and said, ‘We

need to have a character like this!’ Someone else came in with imagery from a microscopic fungus – ‘Wouldn’t this be a great plant for *Strange World*?’ Someone came in with images from our own Earth, these plateaus that you’ll find in South America.

“It was just an accumulation. And then you get these world-class artists working together. We had structured the world so that Avalonia would be very vertical, that the farm would be kind of geometric, and that the strange world would be very organic. And so everything then got transformed into a unified, organic world.

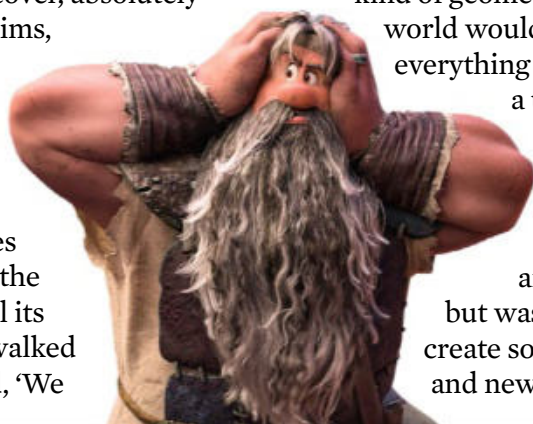
“I think that’s the wonder of this piece,” Conli continues. “We wanted to find something that was analogous to where we lived, but was its own place. We wanted to create something completely fresh and new in the underworld, but we

also wanted to create the myth above ground. So with Avalonia being a city that has been blessed with this new power source, we were able to create our own kind of retro, fantastic world. I often think that Avalonia travelled from 1880 into 1940.”

While the cliffs are alive and the water dissolves the flesh from your bones, Conli is confident that the youngest slice of the audience will cope well with the perils of planetary exploration.

“Children are actually pretty resilient,” he smiles. “I was watching *Frankenstein* when I was five years old. I mean, it didn’t scare me. People want to tell stories that relate to them not only as adults, but as children. I feel that as a producer, as a storyteller, I have the best job in the world, because I get to work in an environment where we’re just having fun telling stories.” **NS**

Strange World is in cinemas from 23 November.



► **SCI-FACT!** *Strange World* is truly a family reunion: Quaid and Gyllenhaal also played father and son in *The Day After Tomorrow*.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Puzzle Piece



Paul Dano goes from the big screen to the comic book page with **The Riddler: Year One**

WHENEVER HE TAKES ON A ROLE, PAUL Dano likes to chart out his character's prior experiences beforehand. After Dano signed up to play the Prince of Puzzles in *The Batman*, director Matt Reeves was so impressed with his work that he passed it on to DC Comics, who then paired him with Serbian artist Stevan Subic on new mini-series *The Riddler: Year One*.

"One of the main things I do as an actor is [ask], 'How do I get to page one?'" Dano tells Red Alert. "Building a backstory so I can take a life that's been lived with me onto the screen. It's the character, the body, the voice and all that... I usually tend to do a lot of backstory work and journaling, and because I had read so many comics in preparation for *The Batman*, it really made sense, because of its archetypal energy, to think of it as like choosing these key moments from his life as if they were an image or a panel. When I told Matt about some of the history I'd created, he was like, 'That should be a comic' and secretly I was, 'Yeah, I think it could be a comic, too.' So I spoke to DC and now it's turned into its own thing."

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Chronicling how downtrodden accountant Edward Nashton is gradually transformed into a murderous supervillain, the six-part series takes place in the Gotham City of *The Batman* rather than the DC Universe. "I didn't want it to be in service of the film, as it's got to be a story in its own right as well," Dano explains. "It's grown in the past two years, but it all started with the emotional essence of the backstory I worked with when I acted the part."

"It definitely starts with Matt Reeves's script, which was like a *Year Two* story for Batman and the Riddler, so the hope is that we're somehow in conversation with the character I play in the film while also creating our own art piece."

While claiming that "it's a different responsibility now because you're the storyteller of the overarching storyline," Dano drew extensively on his own performance. "Without question, it begins with

Bats makes an early appearance in issue one.



Portrait of the artist as a supervillain.



how I was preparing as an actor," he says. "Certainly, it's baked into this as I write, but I've also been able to exercise a different part of me that is not an actor and look at it from a bird's eye view as well as a subjective view. One of the opportunities with this series is with the subjective internal monologue of the caption, which you couldn't really do in the film. A voiceover only takes you so far as you don't want a whole film with voiceover, so this is a chance to have a more Dostoyevskian moment for Edward."

Dano was able to delve into Edward's extremely disturbed psychology. "For me, on a plot level, it's about corruption but it's also an emotional horror story about trauma," he explains. "A large part of that is there's nature versus nurture, as I don't think somebody ends up like this without that. He's dealt a really hard hand, as we'll explore



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Whoa... Keanu Reeves reuniting with director Francis Lawrence on sequel to 2005's **Constantine**.
 → Hugh Jackman brings Wolverine to the MCU in **Deadpool 3** with Shawn Levy directing.
 → *Loki*'s Michael Waldron writing **Avengers: Secret Wars**.
 → Paramount developing **Cloverfield 4** with Babak Anvari to helm.
 → Marvel's Don Cheadle-powered **Armour Wars** show now heading for the big screen.
 → *The Witcher*'s Freya Allan set to star in **Kingdom Of The Planet Of The Apes**.
 → Sam Raimi circling remake of 1978 ventriloquist doll horror **Magic**.
 → Taissa Farmiga returns as Sister Irene in **The Nun 2**.
 → Andrew Stanton directing epic SF tale **In The Blink Of An Eye**.
 → Stephen King's **Fairy Tale** set to be adapted by Paul Greengrass.
 → Bill Skarsgård vamps it up in Robert Eggers's version of **Nosferatu** alongside Lily-Rose Depp.
 → McKenna Grace back as Phoebe Spengler in as-yet-unnamed sequel to **Ghostbusters: Afterlife**.



JIN SPELLMAN/GETTY IMAGES



"Where am I? Who am I? What's GOING ON?"

in subsequent issues. Trauma is kind of the driving force towards Edward becoming the Riddler, and people can expect to see him break down and come alive."

Describing the Dark Knight himself as "integral, because I don't think Edward would have found the Riddler without him," Dano has Batman appear fleetingly in the first issue, while he also enjoyed exploring Gotham's dystopian environment. "Gotham has a place in our culture, and it means something to everyone, not just comic book fans," he says. "I grew up in New York City and it's hard to think that Gotham is not based on New York. It's just a powerful place and is like a Petri dish for this character to grow. Gotham is really important in this story, as it is in every Batman story,

and I really liked how Matt handled this world, which was a fully realised Gotham."

Suggesting that "one of the reasons why people love Batman so much is that he's got the best villains," Dano hopes that *The Riddler: Year One* – along with *The Batman* – will elevate the Riddler to the top tier of the Caped Crusader's nemeses. "It's up to fans to debate the pecking order of bad guys," he says. "But, for me, it's been a privilege to be a part of the film and the comic and the whole culture and history of Batman, and I'm really conscious to see how else we can interpret it as time moves on." **SJ**

The Riddler: Year One issue one is out now.

► SCI-FACT! The Riddler has been known as both Edward Nashton and Nigma in the comics.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Amy's Choice

Barry Josephson on Disney's belated sequel to 2007's **Enchanted**

➔ RELEASED IN 2007, *ENCHANTED* was both love letter to and spoof of the classic Disney fairy tale, in which Amy Adams's (animated) soon-to-be Princess Giselle is catapulted into the real world by the evil Queen Narissa (Susan Sarandon). With an impressive 93% Fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes and a box office take of \$340.5 million, it's not surprising that talk soon started of a sequel. It's only now, 15 years later, however, that it's materialising in the shape of *Disenchanted*. This is a Disney+ exclusive that sees the return of Adams, as well as James Marsden as Prince (now King) Edward and Patrick Dempsey as Giselle's real-world husband, Robert.

"Amy was the catalyst," producer Barry Josephson tells Red Alert. "No one knew that first movie better than her." Now on board as exec producer, the actor helped navigate the script through various writers, until they settled on Brigitte Hales, a veteran of *Once Upon A Time*, having written over 50 episodes of the fantasy drama.

"She was very, very encyclopaedic and astute and creative about fairy tales," enthuses Josephson. "She came up with some brilliant concepts along the way that led us to a screenplay that when the studio read it, they were very engaged with."

When we first met Giselle she was an almost total innocent, a fairy tale character propelled into modern-day New York City. At the end of the film – spoiler alert – she stays there and marries Robert, while former beau Prince Edward returns to the animated land of Andalasia with Robert's one-time fiancé, Nancy. The Giselle we meet this time, though, has been living a normal, Big Apple life for 15 years, so presumably is quite a changed person?

"We talked quite a bit about the reason behind Giselle's new journey," Josephson says. "She lives in New York City, but she's thinking about the life she had in Andalasia, the fairy

Amy Adams as Giselle with Maya Rudolph as Malvina.

tale life, and what that meant to her emotionally and spiritually. She's like, 'I don't want to go back to Andalasia, but I do want to change our life, so here's what we're going to do: we're going to move to suburbia, and I'm going to try to create a world that is magical and wonderful and uplifting, like the world I had in Andalasia.'"

The original *Enchanted* was a movie that played as satisfyingly to adults as it did to kids. But Josephson is aware that at least half the intended audience for *Disenchanted* are in a very different place to the children who lapped up that first film in 2007.

"We're living with a generation that probably 50% is on social media and prefer social media more than anything else," he says. "How do you bring a younger and teen and adult audience to an aspirational story like this? The thing that we engaged in with the development of the movie was that Giselle is going to make a wish, well-intended, but that wish potentially is going to have consequences. What are those



"Get your arses in here *right now!*"



Giselle, baby Sofia, Morgan and Robert.



“Amy was the catalyst... No one knew that first movie better than her”

consequences? How strong is the dilemma of that? How does it change things? We thought, ‘Would the audience be engaged with all of these manifestations?’ I feel we’ve succeeded with that.”

A big clue as to what the film is about is in its title. Josephson says they never seriously considered any variation on *Enchanted 2*, and that *Disenchanted* illustrates where its lead character is emotionally at the beginning of the film. “Giselle has become quite disenchanted with her life,” the producer explains, “and she wants to have a profound change. We kept trying this title out on each other until the time where we needed to declare it.

“We just couldn’t live any more with *Enchanted 2* or *Enchanted: The Other Story* or *Enchanted: The Wish...* I will say that Sean Bailey [Disney’s president] challenged us early on by saying, ‘If we’re going to make this movie, it needs to be a standalone story.’ And I think we succeeded in that by calling it *Disenchanted*, because it suggests immediately, there’s something else to do.”

Still, *Enchanted* was also intended as a standalone, and that film got a sequel. So, should audiences take to this follow-up, will we be getting an *Enchanted 3*? And what would it be called?

“In the brain of the producer, there’s always talk of a sequel,” Josephson laughs, “but I don’t have a title for it! I’ve not had any formal conversations with anybody. I think it’s always premature until you’ve had some level of success. But in my mind, the wheels are turning as they’ve always turned with this project. When you feel strongly about what you have, you always want to have a sequel.” **so**

Disenchanted is on Disney+ from 18 November.



Rosaleen, Malvina and Ruby: do we trust them?



Patrick Dempsey returns as Robert.

► SCI-FACT!

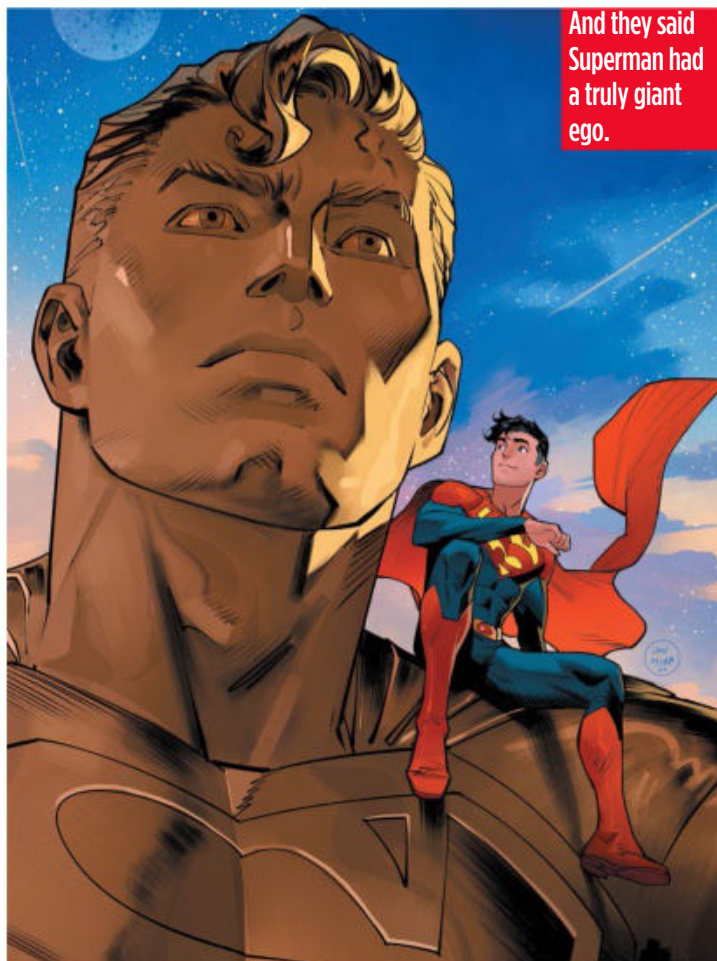
In 1997, when Barry Josephson joined Disney producing films, he brushed up on his SF knowledge by reading *SFX*.

➔ DAN JURGENS AND HIS FELLOW creators didn't envisage the Last Son of Krypton's dramatic death at the hands of Doomsday becoming a defining moment for superhero comics when they first embarked upon *The Death Of Superman*. Serialised in four core titles between November 1992 and October 1993, it would go on to sell millions of copies and even attract attention from major news outlets like *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*.

"Whenever we'd get together, we'd come up with a couple of stories that we thought would be extra special and a bit better than the issues around it," recalls the writer/artist, who was paired with inker Brett Breeding on *Superman*. "With this one, we thought we'd just get a nice bump out of it, so we never could have foreseen what actually happened."

Now, to commemorate the monumental storyline's thirtieth anniversary, DC is releasing a special 80-page one-shot, which revisits the devastating events from other points of view. "Part of it was getting as many people as possible who worked on the original story to take another look at it," explains Jurgens, whose main feature takes place on the anniversary of Superman's demise, as Clark and Lois talk to their young son Jon about what happened on that fateful day.

"For people who were there 30 years ago, there'll be a sense of familiarity and a reminder of what a rush it was back then as we brought it out," continues Jurgens. "For people who buy it now who were not there then, that's why I wanted to do a story with Jon, because he



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Doomsday Scenario

DC commemorates **The Death Of Superman** with a new 30th anniversary special



Spoiler alert:
this fight
doesn't end
well.

represents them as he finds out about it. I wanted the story to work on a couple of different levels, so when Jon asks Clark, 'Does that mean I can't die?' Clark has to tell him that isn't what it means. That's part of recognising a little bit what has happened in comics in the intervening 30 years. Superhero deaths are almost laughed at now in a way, as you know that anyone who dies is going to come back in a few months."

Jerry Ordway's poignant tale, which sees him reunited with his *Adventures Of Superman* artists Tom Grummett and Doug Hazlewood, is told from Ma and Pa Kent's distant perspective. "I've zeroed in on an area that didn't get a lot of attention in the first four issues of the original story, which were essentially the build-up to the battle between Superman and Doomsday," he says. "Ma and Pa Kent were only seen in a couple of panels in each of the issues, so I thought it would be an interesting emotional hook to have Superman's parents watch their son sacrifice all and not be there to comfort him. Our story is a little more intimate because of the subject matter."

While *Superman: The Man Of Steel*'s Louise Simonson and Jon Bogdanove focus on John Henry Irons (the genius engineer who sought to replace Superman), the erstwhile *Action Comics* team of Roger Stern and Butch Guice concentrate on Project Cadmus Head of Security, the Guardian. "When you look back at a huge story arc like this, you could always use a little extra room," reasons Stern. "This

character just showed up, but what was he doing before that and how did he get involved in this? With this story, we were able to show those scenes again and have Guardian be the chorus for the reader, to bring them in and let them know what's going on."

The Death Of Superman cemented the status of Doomsday, described by Jurgens as "on a level with Lex Luthor and Brainiac," as one of the Metropolis Marvel's most formidable villains. "A lot of that was not only because he killed Superman but because Doomsday was created to be the opposite of Superman," he

says. "Superman is a centre of reason and intent, while Doomsday is very much just chaos. We talked about him then as a force of nature, almost acting without reason, which means that you can't reason with him."

For the anniversary special, Jurgens created

Doombreaker, a new adversary who has a mysterious connection to Doomsday. "DC felt they wanted something new to come out of this, so we explored a couple of things and managed to find something that takes us back to that story, which is almost an Easter egg in itself," teases Jurgens. "It gets you into the story and gives you Doombreaker as something new, with different features to Doomsday. His origin goes right back to that fight outside the Daily Planet in *Superman 75*, something long-time readers will get a kick out of." **SJ**

Death Of Superman 30th Anniversary Special is out on 9 November.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Lisa Kudrow joining Taika Waititi's TV take on Terry Gilliam's 1981 film **Time Bandits**.

→ *Smallville*'s Tom Welling is Samuel Campbell in *Supernatural* prequel **The Winchesters**.

→ Marvel's **Moon Girl And Devil Dinosaur** greenlit for season two.

→ Emma Watson and Shirley Henderson are the leads in **Dune: The Sisterhood**.

→ **Blade Runner 2099** is go for a series on Prime Video, with Ridley Scott onboard as executive producer.

→ **Good Omens** season two set to arrive next summer on Prime Video.

→ Justin Long starring in Disney+'s adaptation of RL Stine's **Goosebumps**.

→ **Outer Range** renewed for a second season.

→ Paranormal videogame **The Medium** set to be adapted as live-action series.

→ Ronny Cox reprising Admiral Jellico from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in **Star Trek: Prodigy**.

→ Season two of **The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power** now filming in the UK.

→ Mindy Kaling leads HBO Max's adult animation *Scooby-Doo* spin-off **Velma**. Jinkies!



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Destination Federation

Two Janeways are better than one in **Star Trek: Prodigy**

→ WHEN THE HAGEMAN BROTHERS – Dan and Kevin – first pitched *Star Trek: Prodigy*, an animated canonical series aimed at a younger generation, they warned executives it wasn't going to be a traditional Nickelodeon programme.

What we got was, arguably, one of the best *Star Trek* series ever; grand in scale, epic in design and scary in all the right places. This wasn't "*Star Trek* for kids", this was *Star Trek* for everyone.

"If we wrote younger, it wouldn't really fit in the *Star Trek* canon. It would be like, 'Who are these characters? And why are the villains goofy?' or whatever," Dan says. "That's one thing we always wanted to do. Something that reaches all ages is to make sure that the villain has a real threat. A real three-dimensional character with real stakes. They're not going to slip on banana peels, they're really going to do their best to try to stop these kids. And it's up to the kids to live up to that moment."

"Super emotional, like *The Wrath Of Khan*" was also where they aimed. "We wanted to bring a lot of heart forward in our show, because that's just the type of storytellers that we are," adds Dan. "Especially when you see these next 10 episodes, you're going to see how I think we're the most emotionally driven *Star Trek* in that sense."

Before we find out what the future holds for the ragtag crew and Hologram Janeway, it needs to be made clear that this new batch of episodes isn't season two – that's coming next year. This is the second half of season one, with the team having just escaped the Diviner. The USS Protostar is heading towards Federation

“How do they do that? Kids who just learned to fly a starship? Going against Starfleet?”

space, manned by an eager crew of Starfleet-wannabes. What they don't know is there's a computer virus onboard, designed to destroy the Federation. What they *also* don't know is that the real Janeway is tracking their progress on the USS Dauntless.

With Federation space also comes the likelihood of further "legacy" characters, they explain. "We're bringing back Ronny Cox as Admiral Jellico," Dan says. "He's the perfect foil against Admiral Janeway. The Outrageous Okona is coming in for a couple of episodes."

"We're peppering in the Borg and the Klingons and Romulans," Kevin adds. "It's fun. We're diving deeper into the greater *Trek* universe."

"But also at the same time meeting new creatures, new species, new characters," Dan counters. "We're always trying to balance the old and the new. We can't say anything, we're working on season two right

Well, at least one of the gang is a bit happy.

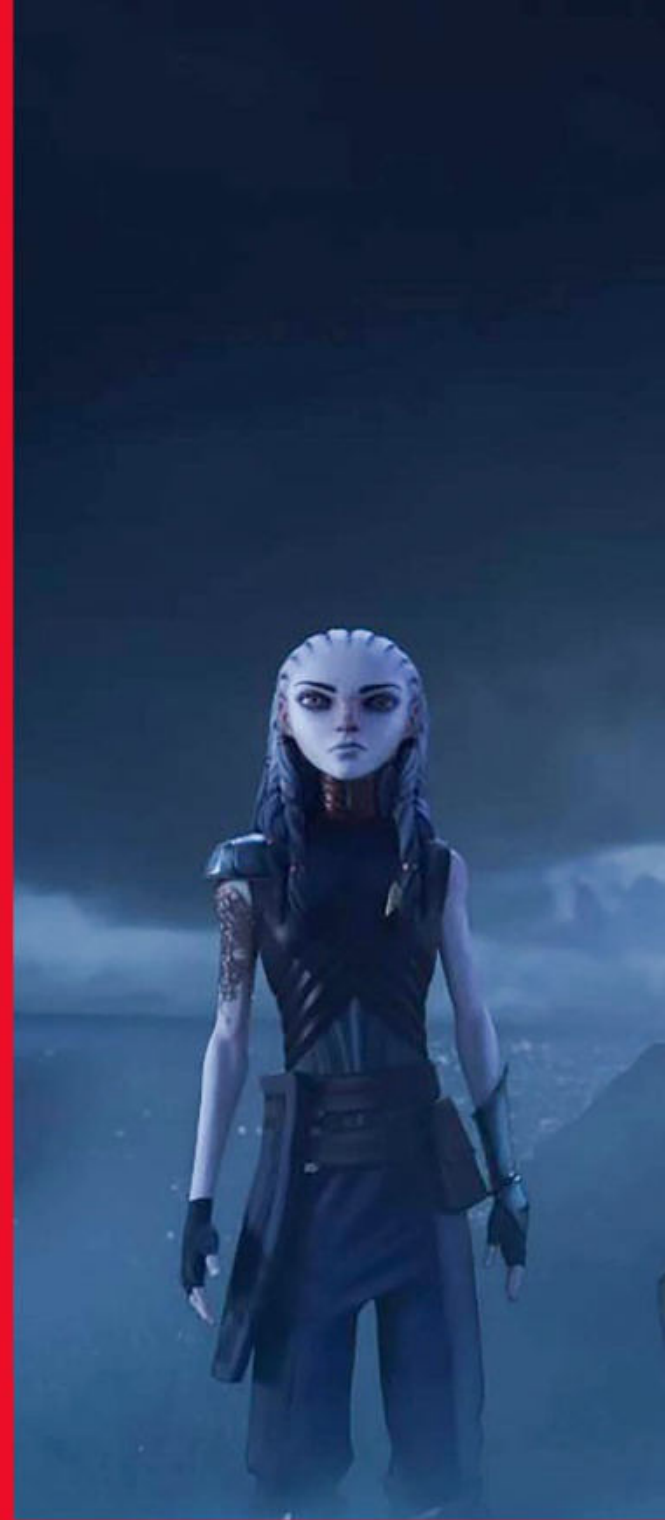
Hologram Janeway is keeping things in order.



Ensign Ascencia aboard the USS Dauntless.



The crew of the Protostar get briefed by Starfleet.



now and it's pretty awesome... There's even more legacy characters coming in."

How does it work putting children up against the Borg? "It doesn't go very well," they laugh. "But in this time period, they've kind of been broken. If you think about this time in history, the Borg aren't as powerful as they used to be."

We note that *Prodigy* takes place concurrently with *Star Trek: Picard*, in 2383. "We're very aware of that," they begin before quickly adding, "Can't really say anything. But we're very aware."





Admiral Jellico is back! And he's ready to kick arse.

With games, toys and YA books on the way, it seems that *Prodigy* has found that previously elusive younger *Star Trek* audience. “We always knew it’d be an uphill battle because *Star Trek* is hard to grab as a kid,” Dan says. “So that’s why we made it very shiny, very, very beautiful. We did everything we could to do that. And I think they’re coming.”

With introductions out of the way, it’s warp factor 10 for Captain Dal and his crew. “What I love is in the first 10 [episodes] you’re just

getting to know the characters, right?” Kevin says. “In these next 10 you’re going to fall in love with the characters. And it’s gonna make the ride even more compelling and dramatic.”

“Also, in the first 10 these kids have to figure out the ship first and all that, they have to figure out a rescue mission,” Dan adds. “What’s fantastic is what’s set up in episode 10 is Admiral Janeway is on the hunt. Now to see them escape Admiral Janeway – how do they do that? Kids who just learned how to fly a

starship? Going against Starfleet? The kids don’t know there’s a whole other story going on with *Voyager* and that Chakotay element. I don’t think we’re going to resolve that in these next 10.”

“That’s an ongoing story that’s going to keep getting deeper and deeper,” Kevin agrees. “But we have some amazing episodes – some of our favourites – with him.” **DS**

Star Trek: Prodigy is on Paramount+ now.

SCI-FACT! Thadiun Okona first appeared in episode four of *The Next Generation*’s second season, shown in 1988.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Are Friends Electric?

After the war,
**Transformers:
EarthSpark**
marks a new
beginning





BEFORE EVEN A SINGLE SCENE HAS HIT screens, new CGI animation *Transformers: EarthSpark* has already been renewed for a second season. This, executive producers Ant Ward and Dale Malinowski say, is no small spark. “We have a very big story planned,” Malinowski grins. “We’re very excited. Huge adventure, wild action, lots of humour and heart, and it’s not a short story...” Ward nods, promising “a big arc and big character growth for all of our core cast.”

The debut episode relocates the Malto family from Philadelphia to a sleepy small town, where youngsters Robby and Mo discover a strange cave containing an artefact that gives life to two new Transformers – but why are they not baffled by giant robots? Because this is Earth post-war, and Cybertronians are now commonplace.

“A lot of the *Transformers* franchise has been focused on this ongoing war between the Autobots and the Decepticons,” Ward explains. “We wanted to set a show that was post-war and centred on what would you do if you were a kid and, in essence, you had a Transformer as a best friend. How that relationship with Cybertronians and humans exists out of the general big constant conflict.”

“One of the big things we wanted to do on the show with regards to the Cybertronians and the Transformer robots is that they’ve almost become celebrities,” Ward continues. “Optimus Prime is somebody who might appear on *Jay Leno*, or a late night show. He’s become a larger than life personality. In this they have their own merchandise.”

“You don’t often get the opportunity to remake part of your childhood”

So much so that another tongue-in-cheek nod to fandom is the father of the Malto family being a Bumblebee fan – and ardent collector of merchandise.

The two lifelong fans say they were inspired by adventures like *ET*, *The Iron Giant* and *The Goonies*. “A found family coming together for a tremendous adventure that’s otherworldly and where the characters prove that they’re much more than meets the eye,” Malinowski smiles.

“There’s something about the concept of the perception of Transformers and Cybertronians, and aliens living among us,” Ward suggests. “It’s almost like Universal’s *Frankenstein*, where there’s a misunderstanding and there’s a mob mentality, without really looking deeper into the character, which I think we have to.”

Part of that rediscovery is the first Earth-born Transformers, Twitch and Thrash. “With our new characters, it’s been very organic to add a chapter to the franchise while maintaining the core pillars of what *Transformers* is, through the legacy Bot characters like Optimus Prime, Bumblebee and Megatron,” Malinowski says. “We always knew we intended and wanted to stay true to their core. But our new original characters give us the freedom to add a new tone and excitement to *Transformers: EarthSpark*.”

Speaking of staying true to their core – is Megatron friend or foe in this series? “We took a look at Megatron and had many meetings about how to treat this character in this chapter of their lives,” Malinowski says. “We returned to his core as an idealist and having a very specific mission and

goal in mind for not just himself, not just his faction, but for all Cybertronian-kind. Sometimes leaders have to make very difficult choices in the heat of battle, for example, and it felt very true to Megatron that he would not be afraid to reconsider his goals and his values and what the best strategy would be, moving forward, to achieve that goal. And not just stick to one side or the other because that’s where he started.”

We wouldn’t be fans of a certain age if we didn’t ask the question that will have every keyboard warrior bristling – what does *EarthSpark* mean for canon? [Spoiler: it actually doesn’t matter.]

“For a franchise that’s been running as long as *Transformers* has, every iteration has a slightly different origin story and slightly different canon, and we are doing our own unique one that definitely takes elements that we really, really liked from lots of the previous iterations,” Ward says. “So our reason for the Cybertronians coming to Earth is canonically different to the original G1.”

“But their personalities, the intent and the way these legacy Bots interact with each other has evolved from the standpoint of: if that happened in the mid ’80s, it’s been about 15 years since the wars ended. So how have personalities evolved and changed, and how have they adapted to living with humans?”

This is addressed by a jaw-dropping tribute to the original cartoon, which Malinowski describes as a “very intentional wink”. Featuring all-new material, at first you’ll think it’s lost ’80s footage. “That was a joy to make,” Ward beams. “You don’t often get the opportunity to basically remake part of your childhood.” **DS**

Transformers: EarthSpark is on Paramount+ and Nickelodeon in the UK from 14 November.

Dad’s a big fan of Bumblebee “action figures”.



Transformers: robots in (not very good) disguise.



SCI-FACT! The original “Generation One” *Transformers* cartoon ran for 98 episodes – and a feature film – from 1984 to 1987.

► **SCI-FACT!** The tipping point for the original *Secret Invasion* was 2007's *New Avengers* 32, which ended with Elektra being exposed as a Skrull.



It's him! No hang on, it's her! Oh, we don't know...

Second Coming

Marvel is bringing back **Secret Invasion** – but who can you trust?

► AHEAD OF NEXT year's TV show, the Marvel Universe is enduring a second *Secret Invasion* this month at the hands of writer Ryan North and artist Francesco Mobili – although the shape-changing Skrulls' latest incursion takes a very different form to their first subversive infiltration.

"I thought there was a lot of potential to take the baseline idea of 'What if there was an alien invasion, but invisible, and right under our noses' in a fun new twisty direction," North tells Red

Alert. "And I loved the idea of exploring the space of what a 'secret invasion' could be."

With 2008's original series still fresh in the memory, main protagonists Nick Fury and Maria Hill have learnt lessons from their previous experiences. "They know how poorly it went last time and have taken all the time since then to prepare," he says. "Maria Hill is competency personified, and she's had a lot of time to get ready."

The initial *Secret Invasion* pivoted on characters like Elektra being sensationally exposed as

having long been Skrulls, but don't expect any such shocking developments in this new five-parter. "We haven't put too much weight on the 'character X was a Skrull all along!' twist again, because people would see it coming," explains North. "It was great, but we've done that already! Unless me saying right now that we couldn't do it again is itself a misdirect, and secretly setting us up for doing it again? You'll have to read the book to find out, but seriously, while there may be some reveals of that nature, I can

promise they're not what you're expecting, as this is a very twisty story!"

While the 2008 *Secret Invasion*'s tagline was "Who can you trust?", the Brian Michael Bendis-scripted crossover was essentially about paranoia. This time around, North was more interested in the former than the latter. "For 2022, I wanted to tell a story that was less about paranoia and more about trust, which in some ways are two sides of the same coin, but still very different things and not quite the opposites

➤ **SCI-FACT!** Bichir was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role in 2011 film *A Better Life*.

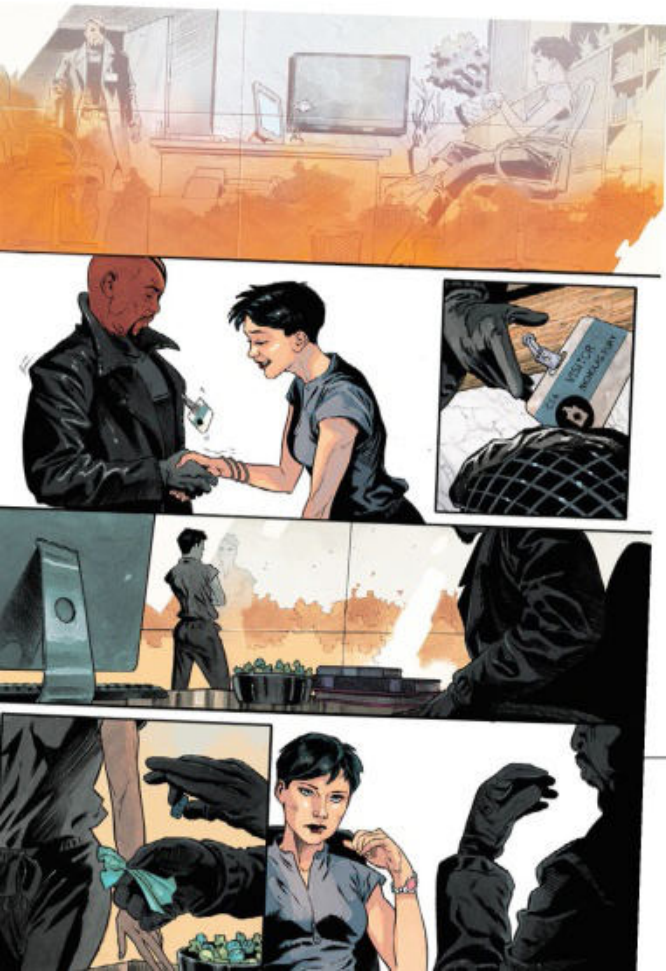


of each other," he reasons. "Distrust can slide into paranoia easily, but it's only paranoia if you're wrong about them, and otherwise it's just good planning. So we're meeting a Nick Fury and a Maria Hill who have been betrayed before, who have had to go through that and come out the other side, and now have to figure out not just who they trust, but why as well."

While Fury and Hill are the central protagonists, plenty of other heroes will also show up. "It starts with them investigating Skrull activity in Iowa that might be nothing but could be something very serious," says North. "I can say that over the course of our five issues, things get very big very fast, and we'll definitely see some familiar faces, including some personal favourites of mine, as you can't tell a *Secret Invasion* story without the Avengers!"

North is also taking over scripting Marvel's First Family in November, but don't expect any crossovers, as he completed *Secret Invasion* long before landing his new assignment. "That means that while *Secret Invasion* won't be referencing *Fantastic Four*, it does open the door to *Fantastic Four* picking up some of the threads that began there," he says. "When this miniseries concludes, you might just be seeing a little bit of Maria Hill and Nick Fury in *Fantastic Four*..." **SJ**

Secret Invasion issue one is out on 3 November.



ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

Making His Mark

Demián Bichir on the new version of *Let The Right One In*



➤ IN THE ORIGINAL *Let The Right One In* movie, the father of child vampire Eli – spoiler alert – kills himself halfway through the film, first by disfiguring himself with acid, then offering his neck to his bloodthirsty daughter and finally falling from a hospital window. We can only presume that won't be the fate of the dad in Showtime's newest reimagining of John Ajvide Lindqvist's cult novel, otherwise we're doubting that Oscar-nominated actor Demián Bichir would have signed up for it. This series is a very different beast to the Swedish original.

"If you adapt a novel into a film there will be lots of different things that will be new to people who read the book," Bichir, who plays Mark in the series, tells Red Alert from his home in Mexico City. "And if you adapt it into a series, the nature of the media demands different stories, different characters, new twists and new cliffhangers. This is a beautiful adaptation of the same story that many people know and love. I mean, some characters will probably die along the way, and then maybe some other new characters will come on board, as well. It's been

brilliantly made by Andrew Hinderaker, our showrunner. It's a love letter to the original story."

One of the strengths of the 2008 film is its grounded, realist tone. Eschewing the melodrama normally associated with vampire stories, *Let The Right One In* was an almost Ken Loach-like take on the genre. It's something that's carried over into the TV series – and that certainly appealed to Bichir.

"One of the great things about this series is it's so real," the actor enthuses. "It's so well written that it almost makes you forget that it's a fantastic type of genre. It makes you feel that you're watching Ingmar Bergman or Steven Soderbergh."

Of course, it's an intense series thematically speaking, and Bichir's co-lead (singer and actor Madison Taylor Baez) is just 11 years old. How was it filming this dark and disturbing story with someone so young?

"Oh, we have a lot of fun on set – we have to, because if we



go into the dark side of it, then that could be dangerous territory," he says. "I'm glad Madison has taken this very lightly and playfully. She's only 11 and she's very, very smart. Some people

were asking her the other day, 'What have you learned from Demián shooting this series?' and no one asks me what I've learned from working with her. I can tell you, you learn that this is a game we play for a living."

Whether Bichir survives the first 10 episodes we don't know for sure, and the actor is careful about giving away too much as regards plans beyond season one. "The beautiful thing about a series is that it's actually the audience who call the shots," he says. "If people love this series, which I'm sure they will, they will ask for another season, and then for another, and then for another. So this is a beautiful challenge for the creators or writers to keep up with." **so**

Let The Right One In is on Paramount+ now.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Down The Hatch

French filmmaker Quentin Dupieux talks about his latest oddball offering, **Incredible But True**



IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH Quentin Dupieux's filmography, you'll know that it's wildly idiosyncratic.

Recent UK releases include *Deerskin*, about a deerskin jacket obsessive out to dispose of every other jacket in the world, and *Mandibles*, in which two doofuses consider using a gigantic fly to rob banks. If you're not, then brace yourself before dipping in: these are wrong-footingly unpredictable films.

If Hollywood movies are structured like rock music, Dupieux's are more akin to jazz, we suggest. “I think I know what you mean,” he laughs. “Comparing what I do with Hollywood is almost a joke, because in Hollywood everything is over-written, over-planned. Everything feels the same – even the good movies are built on a structure you've seen 3,000 times. It feels too scripted, very artificial.”

The French writer/director's approach is different. “I trust my subconscious. Sometimes when I'm about to fall asleep something comes to my mind, and I know it's a brilliant idea because I wasn't looking for it.” Take *Rubber*, his 2010 film about a psychokinetic killer tyre. “I was trying to write a story about flying cubes

coming from space. One night, I was trying to figure out what to do with special effects. The tyre came to my mind, and I erased everything. The concept is usually something I find like this: ‘Snap! Oh, this I love!’ Then I never come back to it. Which gives my movies this weird feeling. Some people who don't get it say, ‘Why's he telling us this story? It's not even finished.’”

At one point in his latest, *Incredible But True*, Dupieux quotes an image from Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. Is the surrealist a filmmaker he admires? Bien sûr. “What I love about Buñuel is this freedom. Suddenly someone tells a dream, and you see the dream for 10 minutes. Useless! But that's moviemaking: you tell a story to people, and everything can't be logical

in a story. The world is absurd! Everything is not scripted perfectly.”

The film makes use of two absurd ideas. Firstly: a couple move into a house with a hatch in the cellar. Climb down it and you emerge three days younger, but 12 hours later. It's an idea Dupieux was “not looking for”, he explains. “I wanted to make a movie with Alain Chabat and Léa Drucker as the two main characters, so I started writing about them being a couple [Alain and Marie].

“After a few pages, I don't know why, I started writing this mysterious thing about a tunnel in the basement. This is what I'm trying to do every time I write a movie. I know when I'm thinking too much that I'm going to come up with pre-made ideas. I'm trying to find stuff

Benoît Magimel (right) toasts his new dick.





Alain (Alain Chabat) and his wife Marie (Léa Drucker).

“After a few pages, I started writing this mysterious thing about a tunnel”

that doesn't exist.” Absurd concept two concerns Alain's boss Gérard (Benoît Magimel), who announces over dinner that he now has an “electronic dick”. The effects of ageing are clearly bubbling in Dupieux's subconscious. So does he, like Marie (who grows obsessed with reclaiming her lost youth), find himself obsessively staring in the mirror? “I hate to look at my body in the mirror, but it's always been the case,” he laughs. “I must say: the electronic dick idea didn't come from my personal issue. I'm fine!”

Besides absurdist conceits, Dupieux's films also share short durations. *Deerskin*, *Mandibles* and *Incredible But True* all clock in under 80 minutes – something those of us who think 90

minutes is optimal can approve of. “I feel the same. Even when I'm enjoying a movie, when I see there's still 45 minutes to go it's like, ‘Too bad – I was enjoying it, but now I'm bored.’” Not that it's deliberate, mind. “When I'm cutting my movies I don't think about the clock. I'm just cutting, cutting, cutting, making it sharp. Then at the end, the producer asks me, ‘What's the timing?’ ‘Sorry, 75 minutes again.’ I don't know why!”

Incredible But True certainly could have been longer: it includes a 12-minute montage, covering three years of events. “Some critics thought I just destroyed the movie by editing,” says Dupieux, who relished the challenge of realising the sequence. “No, it was written like

this. Exactly as we were saying about movie length: movie *pace* we usually know, and you can anticipate what's going on – ‘Oh, I feel the end is coming.’ I was trying to write something different.

“It's not a time travel movie,” he adds, “but it has this flavour a little bit – I'm trying to talk about time. So to me it was the only way to finish. The movie just dies, basically.”

Next up: *Smoking Causes Coughing*, a comedy about a superhero team on a team-building seminar, out in France on 30 November. As we speak, he's editing a film shot in just nine days, which he says is “super realistic, very normal”. Bah. But after that he's planning something “absolutely fucked up and crazy” – typical Dupieux, in other words. “I'm not trying to make a ‘good movie’, I'm trying to make *my* best movie,” he tells us. Long may it continue. **IB**

Incredible But True is out on Blu-ray on 7 November, from Arrow Video.

BACH TO THE FUTURE

Move over Wendy Carlos...

The film's soundtrack is mostly taken from *Jon Santo Plays Bach*, an obscure 1976 LP of synthesiser takes on the composer's work. “I bought it because I liked the cover, and it's been in my collection for years,” Dupieux says. “Then when I started shooting I decided it was the perfect illustration of what I was trying to do, because it has this cosmic vibe. I was also listening to it when I was writing the script.

“A lot of people have *Switched-On Bach* in their collection, because it was a hit,” he adds, referring to the 1968 LP by Wendy Carlos, later to work on *A Clockwork Orange*. “This one, by a German musician, never saw the light. But it's a brilliant recording – almost, to me, better than *Switched-On Bach*. It was exciting to use an amazing LP that nobody knows. A lot of people will have a discovery.”





WRITER EXCLUSIVE



“I don’t actually know how to reanimate people”

Unquiet On The Western Front

Hitler meets zombies in Bruce Campbell’s **Sgt Rock vs The Army Of The Dead**

➔ BEST KNOWN FOR playing Ash in the *Evil Dead* films, Bruce Campbell wasn’t sure what hero to focus on when DC approached him about scripting what eventually became *Sgt Rock vs The Army Of The Dead*.

“It was something completely out of the box,” he admits. “DC contacted me as they were curious about if I’d like to bring any of their characters into a horror world, and they didn’t do that because I’m a comic writer, they did it because I’m a horror guy.”

Not an avid comic book fan like his close friend Sam Raimi, Campbell scoured through DC’s

Who’s Who of protagonists before settling on Second World War infantryman Sgt Rock, whose classic exploits in titles like *GI Combat* he remembered reading. “That was a whole new ball game, and it was really fun to take Rock and his Easy Company into a deep, dark horror world,” he reasons.

“He’s old school to the max as this guy can be killed at any minute by a stray bullet, as he has no superpowers. He and his merry men in Easy Company all have different skills and capabilities, and hopefully you’ll become familiar with these guys

as we roll on. I’ve acted the hero before, and I have a sense that they have to step up and be above-average human beings. There has to be something about them that makes you follow them and Rock’s a pretty ballsy guy.”

The story takes place in 1944 during the final months of the Second World War, with the Nazis increasingly desperate as the Allied forces close in.

“There was all sorts of crazy shit happening in Berlin,” says Campbell. “It was a crazy city that had been half-destroyed by bombing. It was a place

you didn’t really want to be, so that’s a perfect horror setting.”

Describing him as “a good nemesis”, Campbell’s depiction of the Führer himself is inspired by his actual, increasingly unstable state at the time. “Hitler had this personal doctor, who had about eight drugs in his system at various times,” he explains. “They would jack him up for rallies, just like Elvis, and had to put him down afterwards because he couldn’t sleep.”

“He had antidepressants and amphetamines, and I’ve added a few more elements like growth hormones and some electrodes at the back of his neck, so you zap



► **SCI-FACT!** One *Dungeons & Dragons* fan theory is that the children died on the theme park ride and are actually in Hell.



him and off he goes. But I don't get too much into the science of it because I don't actually know how to reanimate people."

Noting that "they're hard to kill because they're dead already", Campbell (who is producing but not starring in next year's *Evil Dead Rises*) says that the titular Army of the Dead is very different to *Evil Dead*'s more vicious creatures. "Rock would have a much harder time with them, as they're much more dangerous in *Evil Dead*. If you get possessed in an *Evil Dead* movie, you're just trying to do bad things to people."

The six-parter is illustrated by Argentinian artist Eduardo Risso. "I wanted the art to be as retro as the characters," says Campbell. "Rather than some contemporary look, it should feel like you've found an old *Sgt Rock* comic in an old trunk somewhere." **SJ**

Sgt Rock vs The Army Of The Dead issue one is out now.

Boldly Going Again ➡

Nostalgia overload – Playmates are back in the *Star Trek* business. The new figures update the '90s classics, but retain the iconic cardback design. The initial wave – featuring *Wrath Of Khan* and *The Next Generation* – also adds characters from *Discovery*. **From £13, thetoyshop.com**



Wow, Neat! ➡

Hey look, a *Dungeons & Dragons* toy! It's taken them 40 years, but action figures based on the Marvel cartoon series are finally on the way – just in time for the travellers appearing in the new live-action movie. The initial set includes Bobby with Uni, Hank, Diana and a Venger/Dungeon Master double pack. Be quick, that demon is selling out fast!

From £26.99, zavvi.co.uk.



Are You Pulling My Leg? ⬇

We're not sure where the need to pull at the appendages of much-loved characters originally came from, but it didn't seem to do the Stretch Armstrong generation any harm. Hmm. *Star Wars* gets the rubbery treatment this time, in mini and large formats – Jabba the Hutt, in particular, is a hefty beast to tug.

From £14.99, smythstoys.com





Someone's just asked for a cheeseburger and "fries".

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

A Matter Of Taste

May we recommend **The Menu**?

➔ BLENDING A RICH SWIRL OF social satire with the tooth-rattling bite of horror, black comedy *The Menu* promises to be a distinctive cinematic dish.

"There's obviously a symbiotic relationship between dramatic tension and comedic tension," director Mark Mylod tells Red Alert. "One of the lovely things about the script [by Seth Reiss and Will Tracy] when I first read it was that there was a really fun and quite unique tone to be found in trying to ratchet up that psychological thriller genre element, and then puncture it with comedy and then ratchet it straight back up again. I thought, 'Oh, that's a really lovely ride.'"

"One of the special things was that those two [elements] could co-exist in such a fun way. And once we got to the edit, we found ourselves toying with that, and there were places where we went dark and places where we went lighter."

Set in the fastidious, aspirational world of fine cuisine, *The Menu* finds a young couple – played by Anya Taylor-Joy and Nicholas Hoult – travelling to a remote island for the experience of dining at Hawthorne, a high-end restaurant run by celebrity chef Slowik (Ralph Fiennes).

Slowik is a master of molecular gastronomy, treating food as conceptual art, but his unique

perspective on cuisine holds some shocking surprises for his wealthy diners.

"You can genuinely see the film through different eyes with different emphasis," says Mylod, whose credits span *Ali G Indahouse* to *Game Of Thrones*. "Talking to people who've seen it, they come at it from different points of view: 'This is a story about a chef,' 'This is a story about Margot [Taylor-Joy],' 'This is a story about diners' or 'This is a story about the iniquities of society.' It's a multi-layered film. The lovely thing about it is it's completely unexpected, all the twists and turns of it. I don't want to guide the audience. I think it's much more fun for them to take the ride."

Mylod took inspiration from a key voice in American cinema. "One of my big heroes is Robert Altman, and particularly *Gosford Park*, which was a big touchstone for me with this film. We worked in this kind of Altmanesque way of having all the cast on set all the time, everybody miked, and the cameras finding whatever was going on in the room. Because I had this brilliant cast, they would improvise a storm. And that would take us in directions that we weren't expecting, that would evolve relationships and individual tables, where we get more of an insight into these characters and some great comedic beats."

And has making *The Menu* changed Mylod's relationship with food itself? "[I'm] just more respectful, really," he says. "Just knowing the level of sacrifice and dedication that goes into it. And the human cost in terms of relationships, sanity and health."

"It's an absolutely punishing industry. I never realised. I'd heard stories, of course, but just the level of all-encompassing obsession that is needed to get to that level. And not just to get to that level but to stay at that level. It's absolutely extraordinary. There's room for nothing else." **NS**

The Menu is in cinemas from 18 November.



Anya Taylor-Joy and Nicholas Hoult: in trouble.

► **SCI-FACT!** Estrin's mother Patricia appeared in *Freddy's Nightmares* and *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*.

NEW AUTHOR

DENISE CRITTENDON

MEET THE MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER BEHIND *WHERE IT RAINS IN COLOUR*



Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Lileala is a pampered beauty prepping to be the Rare Indigo; she can literally shimmer. Following strange and sudden changes to her body, she morphs into a telepathic healer who penetrates the minds and souls of her ancestors, and uses her new awareness to make changes that shock the galaxy.

Is the planet Swazembi based on a real place?

→ While it's fictitious, its inhabitants are descendants of a real African tribe, the Dogon, who live in huts on the cliffs of Mali. They developed an advanced understanding of the cosmos which predates western astronomers and baffles scientists; they claim it came from beings from space.



What sparked the idea?

→ A combination of things: a dream of a woman taunted by translucent beings. A lecture I attended on melanin. A *Star Trek* episode on a black planet disappointed me. I vowed to write a fantasy with the most spectacular

black world I could imagine.

Does the book have a message?

→ It flips beauty standards, challenging Eurocentric assessments of physical appearance. It attempts to counteract the harmful messages of a society that marginalises dark skin tones.

Any advice for budding authors?

→ Beg, borrow and steal time from wherever you can. I didn't have the time. I had to seize it. I had to juggle.

Where It Rains In Colour is out on 6 December, published by Angry Robot.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

ZACK ESTRIN 1971-2022

Remembering the writer and showrunner

➔ ONE OF THE POWERHOUSE creatives of American television, Zack Estrin helped shape many of the most memorable genre series of the 21st century.

Born in Woodland, California, he had the screen in his genes. His father was writer and producer Jonathan Estrin, while mother Patricia was an actress.

Estrin earned his writing stripes on '90s teen drama *Dawson's Creek* before assuming a co-producer role on season two of witchy fantasy *Charmed*, also scripting such acclaimed episodes as the quirky "Chick Flick" and time travel tale "Morality Bites".

As supervising producer he worked on 2003's *Miracles*, which starred Skeet Ulrich as a supernatural investigator, and *Tru Calling*, where Eliza Dushku played a morgue worker with the power to relive her days.

While a run on the award-winning *Prison Break* brought him mainstream success, Estrin always had a penchant for the fantastical. 2005's *Point Pleasant* focused on paranormal occurrences in a small New Jersey town while 2010's *No Ordinary Family*, created by Arrowverse tsar Greg Berlanti, fused superheroics with domestic drama. *The River*, meanwhile, explored high strangeness in the Amazon, while *Zero Hour* chased Dan Brown as it mixed holy relics with global conspiracies.

Estrin was co-creator of 2013's *Once Upon A Time In Wonderland*, a fantasy series that riffed on the works of Lewis Carroll.

2015's *The Whispers* took on demonic entities and child possession, and saw him work with Steven Spielberg, an experience he compared to "having Picasso or Monet tell you how to hold your brush". More recently he was showrunner on Netflix's reimagining of '60s SF classic *Lost In Space*, which turned the bright, brash whimsy of the original into something altogether grittier.

"He was funny, kind, and irrepressible in the best way," said Jane Espenson, paying tribute to her collaborator on *Tru Calling* and *Once Upon A Time In Wonderland*. **NS**



LOUISE FLETCHER 1934-2022

American actor who played Kai Winn in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

AUSTIN STOKER 1930-2022

Star of *Battle For The Planet Of The Apes* and voice of the '70s *Apes* cartoon.

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As Uffgood As It Gets

STAR WARWICK DAVIS
AND SHOWRUNNER
JONATHAN KASDAN REVEAL
HOW THEY BROUGHT CULT
'80S FANTASY **WILLOW**
BACK TO THE SCREEN – WITH
A LITTLE HELP FROM
HAN SOLO

WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**



I

IT WAS A TIME OF MAGIC, A TIME OF muscle-bound barbarians, of dragons named Vermithrax Pejorative, and of kinky demons who sound a lot like Dr Frank-N-Furter. But as the 1980s came to an end, Hollywood was starting to lose interest in swords, sorcery and high fantasy in general.

Then, in what would be one of screen fantasy's last gasps until Peter Jackson's *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, a film emerged from the mind of *Star Wars* godhead George Lucas, a film that wielded enough power to shape the imagination of one particular eight-year-old boy. In fact, the story of an unlikely hero playing protector to a magical baby would stay with that boy for the next three decades.

"*Willow* was one of the formative experiences I have of going to a movie theatre," admits Jonathan Kasdan, writer and showrunner on Disney+'s new *Willow* TV show. "In the ILM documentary *Light & Magic* [directed, coincidentally, by Jonathan's dad Lawrence, writer of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*] there's a great section where all these filmmakers talk about how formative seeing *Star Wars* for the first time was.

Willow and friends set out upon their quest.

"I always felt like I missed out on that a little, but for me *Willow* was that moment. So when the property was sitting there, possibly available to be worked with, I was pretty aggressive about trying to get hold of it."

But however much Kasdan Jr wanted to continue the adventures of Willow, his quest would have been destined to fail without the involvement of the character who gave the movie its name. Luckily – despite having spent the intervening years starring in some of the biggest film series in history *and* hosting his own ITV quiz show – playing aspiring magician Willow Ufgood again has long been on Warwick Davis's mind. He even named his talent agency after the character.

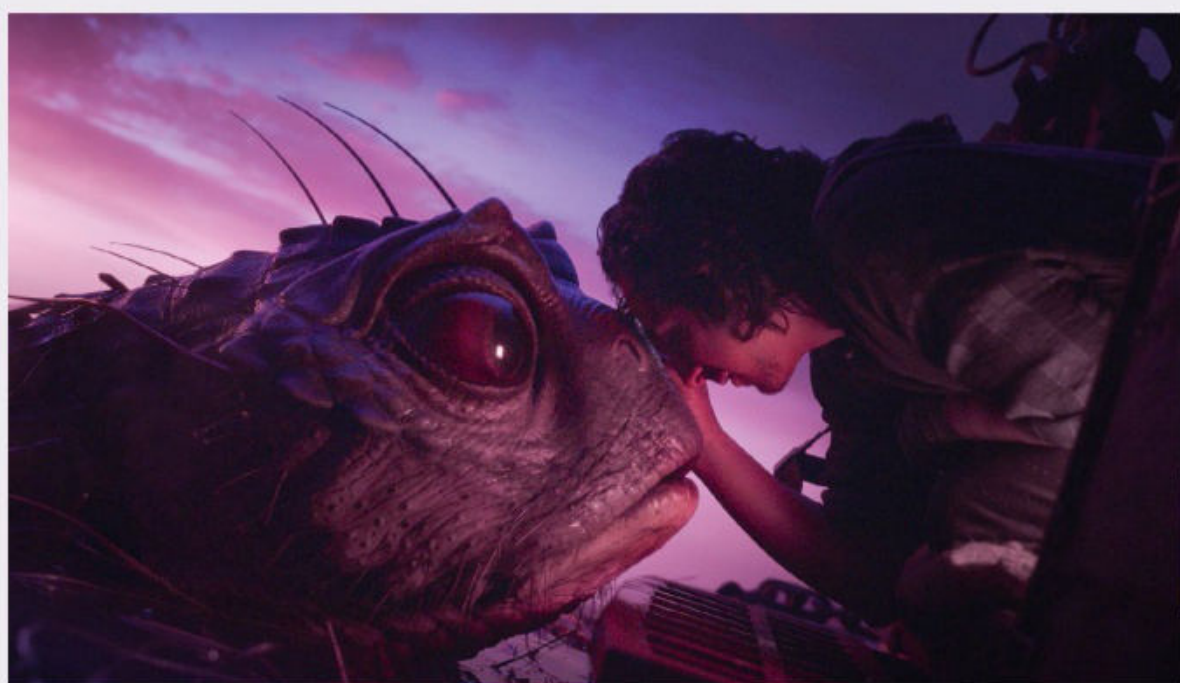
"*Willow* has always been with me," Davis tells *SFX*. "There isn't a day that goes by without someone saying, 'Hey, I love *Willow*!'

I grew up watching that,' or 'My mum and dad showed it to me,' or 'I've shown it to my kids'. *Willow* may have disappeared from cinemas and TV screens but on a daily basis, people are expressing their love for it. I've often mentioned that to Ron [Howard, the original movie's director] and, going back a few years now, we always talked about doing some more."

The return of *Willow* – an unspectacular performer at the box office back in 1988 – might have remained a pipe dream were it not for the fortuitous intervention of a certain Corellian smuggler. As well as introducing Han to Chewbacca, *Solo: A Star Wars Story*'s call sheet brought together writer Kasdan, actor Davis and – after the departure of original helmers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller – director Howard. It wasn't long before *Willow* came up in conversation.

Warwick Davis returns as Willow after 34 years.

The quest, as it turns out, is pretty exhausting.



Graydon (Tony Revolori) meets a mudmander.

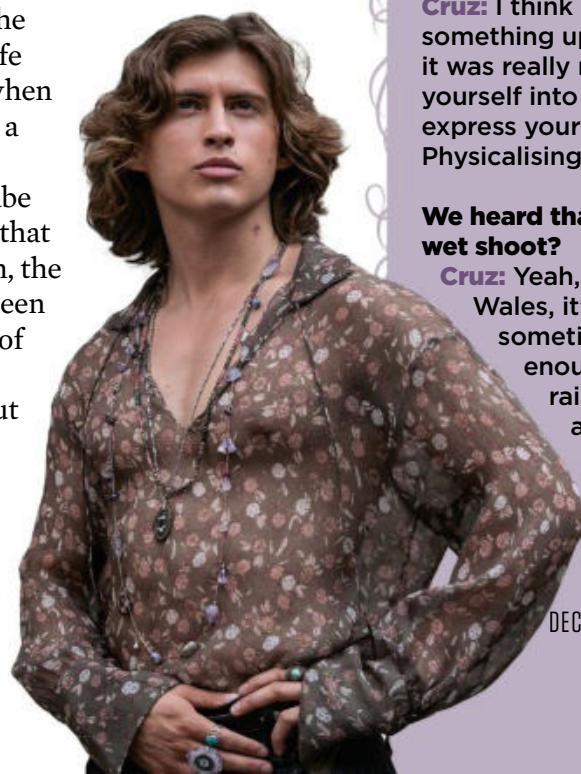
“Jon was really the catalyst behind it getting off the ground,” recalls Davis. “We would often talk on set about the film and how much of a fan he was. And it was really when Ron Howard came on to *Solo* that things started to pick up. It was like the stars aligned perfectly.”

“There would be no *Willow* [TV show] if that confluence of events had not occurred,” says Kasdan of the show’s *Sliding Doors* moment. “More than anything it was Ron and I pressuring Kathy [Kennedy, Lucasfilm president] to let us explore this property, making her believe that it had some potential.”

“To her it was just a movie that came out in the mid-’80s, when I’m sure she was working on several other much bigger movies. She was at first sceptical, but became the best partner anyone could dream of, because she really did

stand by us and let us make a show that I *think* is as weird and eccentric and original as the movie was.”

In the original *Willow*, the eponymous Mr Ufgood’s life was turned upside down when he found a baby floating in a nearby river. The young Nelwyn farmer and wannabe wizard eventually learned that the infant was Elora Danan, the magical princess of Tir Asleen who found herself the top of evil Queen Bavmorda’s hit list. He subsequently set out on a quest to take Elora to Fin Raziell, a sorceress trapped in the form of →



THE TWIN DILEMMA

Ruby Cruz is Kit and Dempsey Bryk is Airk



The big question... We know Kit and Airk are Sorsha’s kids. Is Madmartigan their dad?

Dempsey Bryk: I don’t know if we can say but we’re on the spot... I’ll tell you. It’s their kids.

What’s the relationship like between the two twins?

Bryk: I think that there’s always a sibling rivalry, but then also a profound closeness in a crazy world. Everybody wants something from them, so much is expected of them and the only person they can really connect with is each other.

Ruby Cruz: Aside from Kit’s best friend, Jade, he’s definitely the closest person she has, and has been her rock through a lot of growing up. Obviously they’re teenagers and that’s an interesting, difficult time for young people, but also, I think as royalty there are responsibilities. Kit sort of feels that responsibility heavy on her shoulders, whereas Eric is more of a loose cannon.

You were all put through a rigorous boot camp before shooting. What was that like?

Bryk: It was phenomenal and a dream come true. We were horseback riding and swordfighting in Wales – it was absolutely crazy. For as long as I can remember, I had a dream of doing my own stunts. I’m really proud of the action and so much of it was practical, which was in keeping with the original movie.

Cruz: I think it definitely woke something up in me, this idea that it was really rewarding to put all of yourself into something and just express yourself with your body. Physicalising like that was really cool.

We heard that it was also a very wet shoot?

Cruz: Yeah, confirmed. I mean, it’s Wales, it’s very rainy there, and sometimes it wouldn’t be rainy enough. They would bring in rain machines, so even on a sunny day, it was *too* sunny. It’s never going to be rainy enough for *Willow*.



Toth (Charlie Rawes): probably not friendly.



Scorpia (Adwoa Aboah) and Boorman.

JADE IN Erin Kellyman is Jade

What do we need to know about Jade?

Jade has a lot of feelings, but hates anything chaotic – it would just be a nightmare for her. She likes rules and she likes to be clear-headed, to know what the plan is. She's a very structured, cool woman.

How does Jade fit in with Kit, Ayrk and the royal family?

Kit and Jade have been best friends since they were babies. Jade doesn't know her birth family, and so she's grown up in the castle and Kit's her best friend. Also, Kit, Ayrk and Sorsha are the only family that she's ever known, so that's kind of her entire world, to be honest. Also, Jade has grown up hearing so much about Willow, and I think she's just very excited [to meet him] and has all of her trust in him.

a possum by Bavmorda's dark magic. Despite Elora's presence as the film's MacGuffin, however, she's been strangely absent from the promotion for the new series – a state of affairs Kasdan describes as “intentional”.

“There are a million unanswered questions from the movie,” he admits, “but for me there's only one, and it's the reason we did this show at all: what happened to that baby? I think, more than anything George Lucas has done, *Willow* was the one that said ‘sequel’ to me.

“With *Star Wars*, if you look at *A New Hope*, the Death Star is blown up, they've won the battle and there's no final shot of Darth Vader rubbing his fingertips together, saying, ‘I'll get even!’ – that story was over. But *Willow* ended with the most powerful person in the world as an eight-month-old infant, so it felt like there was story left to tell.”

MISSPELLED

Twenty years have passed since the events of the first film, and Willow isn't necessarily the master spellsmith we thought he'd become. “You'll find out more during the series, but initially he hasn't got very far at all in terms of that,” says Davis. “Willow still worries about absolutely everything, and things aren't good for him.

“But again, this kind of opportunity comes upon him as it did in the film, and he reluctantly takes it on because he feels it's his duty. It gave me a lot more scope performance-wise than the film, because I'm older and wiser now as a person. The character is also older and wiser, so you can bring all that to the performance. It makes Willow feel more well-rounded.”

Davis won't be the only familiar face returning to the story. Joanne Whalley reprises her role as Bavmorda's all-action Daikini daughter Sorsha, while Kevin Pollak is once again shrunk down to play (literally) pocket-sized Brownie Rool. There'll also be some kind of presence for Madmartigan, the clownish swordsman



Willow has a kind of flamethrower? Ace!

who served as Willow's protector, and – against all logic – ended up with Sorsha. Given star Val Kilmer's well-documented health issues, however – so sensitively accommodated in *Top Gun: Maverick* – it's not entirely clear how the character will be involved.

“Madmartigan plays a huge part in the show,” confirms Kasdan. “Our feeling was that there's only one Madmartigan, and that he is central to the magic of this thing. We also knew that it was going to be challenging to use Val in

“Willow still worries about absolutely everything, and things aren't good for him”

Wales during Covid – it was a really tough time to make anything – so we designed the entire show around the prospect of how we could keep that character alive and central to the story in a way that leaves the door wide open to more going forward.”

But, much as *The Force Awakens* did with Rey, Finn and Poe, the new incarnation of *Willow* is passing the baton on to a new generation of heroes. The plot will revolve around a mission to rescue Sorsha's son, Airk



(Dempsey Bryk), on which Willow will be joined by an unlikely band of rookie adventurers: Airk's sister Kit (Ruby Cruz), her best friend Jade (Erin Kellyman), Tir Asleen kitchen maid Dove (Ellie Bamber), swordsman Boorman (Amar Chadha-Patel) and the bookish Graydon (Tony Revolori). For Kasdan, whose first job was on the critically adored *Freaks And Geeks*, this felt like comfortingly familiar territory.

"There's a sort of 'high school outcasts' vibe to the posse that surrounds Warwick," he explains. "One of the things that was attractive about that was to put a sort of Breakfast Club

together, and put Warwick in the Paul Gleason role of the principal. I thought that would be a fun dynamic to play and it's one he does with real aplomb."

It's quite the contrast for Davis, who was just 17 when he made the original movie, but found himself as the elder statesman during the Wales-based shoot.

"I would look around at all the cast members and think, 'Gosh, I remember being that young and being that enthusiastic and having that much energy!'" says Davis. "It's about energy management because by the end of the day, they're still bouncing off the ceiling and I'm →



DOVE, ACTUALLY Ellie Bamber is Dove

What can you tell us about Dove?

She works in the castle as a kitchen maid and she loves to cook. She's a little naïve, but she's also very determined and won't ever be taken for a fool. She kind of convinces everyone to let her go on the quest, but nobody really wants her there, because they just think that she's a bit useless. She begins to prove, though, that maybe she's a bit more useful than they first thought.

Does the fact she's not royalty create tensions within the group?

Dove just thinks that she's a kitchen maid and that the prince would never truly love her back, so I think that there is a dynamic there. Kit in particular doesn't respond well to Dove and kind of shuns her. But as their relationship goes on, they fall in and out of a friendship. That was something I was so excited to portray, because I think that friendship isn't portrayed enough sometimes on screen.



Ganush
(Amalia Vitale)
and Rool
(Kevin Pollak).



Queen Arianna
(Talisa Garcia)
gives it all that.

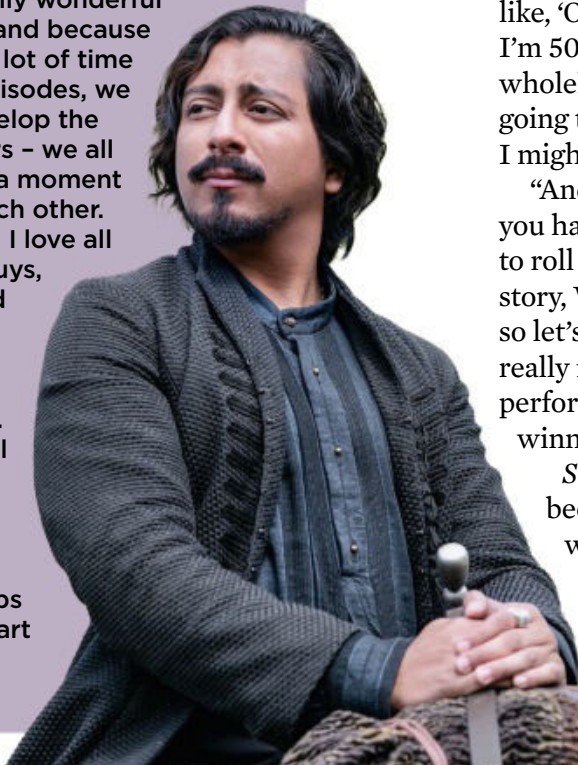
BOOKSMART

Tony Revolori
is GraydonHow would you sum up
Graydon?

Graydon is a very smart introvert, the guy who'd rather be in a library reading about an adventure than actually going on an adventure. He's fiercely loyal but a little socially awkward and naïve – even though he knows probably every book in the world, he does not know social currencies. But, being forced on this quest, he kind of learns to open himself up to friendship and love, and to figure out his place in the group.

Does each of the characters
bring something unique to the
quest?

It's a really wonderful dynamic, and because we have a lot of time in eight episodes, we can develop the characters – we all each get a moment with each other. Thankfully, I love all of these guys, and I had the best time shooting with them. Really, it all happened over Nando's. All friendships should start over Nando's.



like, 'Okay, when do we wrap?' But even now I'm 50, you have to throw yourself into this wholeheartedly – you can't just go, 'I'm not going to fall down in that river there because I might get wet.'

"And it does bring a certain sensibility that you have to embrace as a performer. I tended to roll with it and go, 'Okay, at this point in the story, Willow could be absolutely exhausted, so let's use it as my kind of motivation.' If I really feel knackered, just roll it in [to the performance]. It could," he laughs, "be award-winning stuff!"

Star Wars and *Indiana Jones* may have been the jewels in the Lucasfilm crown when Disney spent four billion dollars on the company in 2012, but it's easy to see why the less-celebrated *Willow* might be just as appealing for a writer. It has the unusual advantage of being both a recognisable brand

and relatively unladen with existing canon – beyond the movie, there's just a novelisation, a series of spin-off books by legendary *X-Men* writer Chris Claremont (stories Kasdan describes as "tangential"), a novelisation and the Sourcebook for a spin-off *Dungeons & Dragons*-style game.

As someone who's worked in both that famous galaxy far, far away and facilitated an owner of rare antiquities (he was attached to *Indy 5* as a writer), Kasdan is in a unique position to comment on the benefits of working in a relatively untouched fantasy realm.

"One of the challenges with *Star Wars* and *Indy* is that so many of the obvious ideas have been sort of done," he says. "There's a lot of great planets that George had already gotten to, and there's a lot of great MacGuffins that Steven [Spielberg] had done with *Indy*. But with *Willow*, we were able to say there are all these places that the film didn't yet take us to





– it didn't take us to deserts, it didn't take us to seas, it didn't show us all these creatures. What we hope with this season is that we're opening the door. It's really just the beginning of a much longer journey we'd like to take audiences on.

"Also, the original *Willow* novel and the Sourcebook were things I took incredibly seriously. There are many references to them in the show, like how Madmartigan got knocked out of the Knights of Galladoorn, or what the history was between Fin Raziel and Bavmorda. These are all things that I really tried to take as gospel from those early source materials."

While the original movie was arguably unlucky to arrive at a time when screen fantasy's popularity was on the wane, that won't be the case for *Willow*'s new incarnation. The TV series arrives in a world where the

likes of *Game Of Thrones*, *The Lord Of The Rings*, *The Witcher* and *The Wheel Of Time* are bringing epic tales of derring-do into people's living rooms on a regular basis. There's no question, then, that modern audiences are extremely fantasy-literate, but that could turn out to be a double-edged sword: how will Ufgood and his new band of adventurers cope in such a crowded environment?

"*Willow*'s very different from *Lord Of The Rings* and certainly from *House Of The Dragon*," Kasdan assures us. "This is more of a George Lucas take on fantasy, which has a looseness and a bounciness to it that almost, I feel, captures the spirit of the Errol Flynn *Robin Hood* or the Burt Lancaster *Crimson Pirate*. That joyfulness is one of our great virtues."



ROGUE ONE

Amar Chadha-Patel is Boorman

How does Boorman fit into the group?

He's just a sort of roguish pain in the ass. He's an agent of chaos and the guy who gets dragged on the quests because he's big and tall and he can fight. He masks everything with humour but beneath that, him's got feelings.

How do you think *Willow* compares with other fantasy shows on TV right now like *House Of The Dragon* and *The Rings Of Power*?

I would say it completes a spectrum of what fantasy is out there. It brings an element we haven't seen since the '80s and '90s, like the humour and the adventurousness and the joy. There are stakes, there's drama, there's heartache, there's all these things that you want from an adventure, but also not taking itself too seriously. There's that *Ghostbusters*, *Indiana Jones* or *Star Wars* energy. It's high stakes but with humour and life and soul.

"I think it's one of those things you can enjoy regardless of whether you've seen the film or not," adds Davis. "George Lucas was a huge fan of the weekly serials they used to have in cinemas. *Willow* just feels very much of that ilk, especially in this series format, with these bite-sized chunks of fantasy, adventure and action that, more often than not, leaves you on a cliffhanger.

"So I encourage the viewer to savour these episodes. They took many, many months to make and [we're pretty sure he's joking] I went through hell to do it!"

So it's true: a time of magic is once again upon us – and *Willow* is ready to cast its spell on TV. ●

Willow is on Disney+ from 30 November.

BLACK PANTHER:
WAKANDA FOREVER

WAKANDA FOREVER

MARVEL STUDIOS SHIFTS THE
BLACK PANTHER MYTHOLOGY
INTO A NEW CHAPTER WITH
**BLACK PANTHER:
WAKANDA FOREVER**

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

ETERNAL



AUGUST 28, 2020: THE DAY THE WORLD lost actor Chadwick Aaron Boseman when he succumbed to his private battle with cancer. His passing shocked not only his legion of fans and many of his peers, but Marvel Studios as well. For five years, Boseman was their Black Panther, their friend and active collaborator. His demise marked the first time in the studio's 12-year history that it had lost one of the beloved ensemble performers integral to the ongoing Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Across four separate films and the animated series *What If...?*, Boseman embodied T'Challa, the Black Panther and King of Wakanda, a character who changed the diversity of the studio's primary heroes and proved that black superheroes could be a box office juggernaut (with 2018's *Black Panther* grossing \$1.3 billion globally) if you just told their stories.

In 2020, the sequel was in pre-production when the stunning news about Boseman literally stopped everything for the studio, director Ryan Coogler and executive producer Nate Moore. "I would say that the loss was pretty shocking," Moore tells *SFX*, speaking from his office in Los Angeles.

As one of the executive producers who auditioned and hired Boseman for the role in *Captain America: Civil War*, Moore was with the actor every step, introducing him to their storytelling world and then working with him to shape the character across the MCU narrative. "The personal and the professional are hard to separate," Moore says, with what's clearly still heavy emotion two years later.



After stopping to give everyone time to mourn, Moore, Coogler and Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige sat down to figure out their next steps. "We wanted to be thoughtful and have all the conversations that we needed to have," he says of those early days. "We talked to Simone Boseman [Chadwick's wife] to make sure that what we thought was appropriate, she felt was appropriate and could take to the family. It was unprecedented, and all you can do is the best thing you can think to do as a person first, and figure out the business side of it after. It was not easy, and it was a lot of hard conversations." →

Moore says it was critical to everyone that their choices were honest and took into account Boseman's love of the character and the world of Wakanda, as well as the audiences who fell in love with T'Challa. Since Coogler had already written the sequel script of *Wakanda Forever*, they knew it would be easier, emotionally, to sit down and talk about it together. "I think that was helpful, because we just got on the same page really fast," Moore says. "Then it's just really talking about, if this is the direction we all agree upon, how do we get to that direction the fastest?"

Of course, the million-dollar question they had to address first was whether to recast T'Challa or install a new Black Panther according to the Wakandan process of succession established in *Black Panther*. "There's certainly been a lot of think pieces about it," Moore says, referring to the endless online debates on the topic. "We're very aware of the talk-back and I think everyone has a right to their opinion. I don't think any opinion is wrong."

"I can just tell you the opinion for us, as filmmakers, was based on trying to be true to ourselves as storytellers and to the guy that we knew. Ultimately, the movie is going to best represent how we feel and people are going to respond to it in kind. They're going to get to see the movie and decide whether or not they feel it did justice to the thing that they love, or if they feel like we left something out. We can only make the movie we know how to make and everything else becomes up to the audience to decide."

Moore says that they also wanted to honour the mythology they built in the first movie about how the mantle of the Black Panther is transferred. "The storytelling in this movie is honest to that mythology," he emphasises. "That mantle holds such a weight in the world of Wakanda, so I would argue that there's probably not a version where Wakanda as a nation says, 'I guess it's that person,'" he says with a faux shrug.

"The movie has to contend with that because, for all of us, it's less about 'We've got to get that character on [screen] real fast because audiences are gonna be bored' and more about 'We have to tell a story, and that story has to emotionally and intellectually make sense.' If that means that the character appears when that character appears, then cool. As long as it's good, that's probably appropriate. I think fans want to be challenged and they want us to at least show the love for the characters that they have. All we can do is look at it through that lens."

WAKANDAN WAVES

With all that taken into account, Moore says the start of *Wakanda Forever* will find the kingdom at a crossroads. "Regardless of, I would argue, the olive branch T'Challa extended at the end of *Panther*, the world wants more than what they're offering. Ramonda [Angela Bassett], now as the Queen of Wakanda, is having to navigate this new world order."

That new order includes the introduction of another ancient hidden society, the aquatic realm of Talocan, ruled by Namor (Tenoch Huerta). He's a character comic book

Danai Gurira as Okoye and Letitia Wright as Shuri.



“The story has to emotionally and intellectually make sense”



Angela Bassett as Ramonda, together with Shuri.

fans have long been clamouring for to join the MCU, and Ryan Coogler was just as enthusiastic. Going back to the first film, Moore remembers that Coogler even floated his dream of bringing Namor into a sequel. "Ryan is a huge fan of Marvel publishing and you see Black Panther and Wakanda and Namor and Atlantis on opposite sides many times. So Namor was always going to be in this movie and his world was always going to be in this movie. It's Wakanda's choices that actually cause Namor to come to their doorstep, because they've unintentionally woken a sleeping tiger."

In the comics, Namor rules Atlantis, but Moore explains that they've tweaked it for the MCU. "We've sort of rebranded Atlantis as Talocan because it's steeped in Mesoamerican culture and it shares so many similarities with Wakanda, thematically," he explains. "Much like with Wakanda, Namor is the king of an isolationist nation. But



Lupita Nyong'o returns as Nakia.



Okoye and Ramonda in a "friendly" chat.

WAKANDA FOREVER

comes and invades your world?" Moore teases. "I think it'll also help people contextualise that world in a way that you understand, because they've seen Wakanda and now they can see the mirror-but-different versions of them. And then there's so many stories you can tell moving forward."

Along with Namor, *Wakanda Forever* will also weave in the comic book character of teen tech genius Riri Williams (Dominique Thorne), who is getting her own Coogler-produced Disney+ series, *Ironheart*. Moore says her introduction was Coogler's idea, one which manifested in a way that was creatively similar to how T'Challa was birthed in *Civil War*. "In that film, there was a role that you felt like you needed and we asked, 'Who would fill that role the best?'" Moore remembers. "It was Panther, because that character carries so much gravity that you can stand him between Cap and Iron Man and he won't get lost."

"There was a very similar thing here where Ryan was like, 'I have this idea and it wants to be Wakanda and Talocan, but there's a thing missing.' He asked, 'Are you doing anything with [Riri]?' And we weren't, to be quite honest, at the time. It wasn't until we were down the road with this script and cast Dominique that we decided to do the series."

Although loathe to spill any more story details about *Wakanda Forever*, Moore is candid about how Coogler has pushed the studio in new directions with this sequel. "He's an ambitious storyteller and is game to try things that seem, to me, terrifying," the producer laughs. "But because he's such an honest storyteller, an incredible collaborator and leader, you go, 'Well, if someone is gonna pull it off, I bet Ryan can.'"

WAKANDAN REALNESS

In particular, Moore says Coogler was adamant about shooting as much of Talocan underwater as possible. "He really felt like it was going to make this feel more photographically real and thus a better experience," Moore says. "So you end up building a lot of water tanks in Atlanta and hire the crew and you bring people in early and try to figure it out."

"To be quite frank, as a producer, I go, 'Hey, I bet we could do dry for wet,'" Moore laughs, referring to the more typical way of faking underwater scenes. "But you go with it. And the truth is, he's right. It does feel real. And even with the stuff that is ultimately

impossible to photograph underwater, because everybody's had the days underwater, they can actually make that feel more real. And for Ryan, who I did have the benefit of going through this once before, there's even more trust. Would we have done that with a first-time filmmaker? I'm not sure. With Ryan, you go, 'Okay. Let's try it.'"

Moore and Marvel Studios now await the reaction to *Wakanda Forever*, while the producer preps *Captain America: New World Order*. "I'm very excited about getting to see Sam Wilson as Captain America in a big movie with some supporting characters you've met before, plus new characters and a big new threat that I think will be fun." ●

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever is in cinemas from 11 November.



Tenoch Huerta as Namor, the man from Talocan.



Winston Duke is M'Baku, leader of the Jabari tribe.

unlike Wakanda, they probably would prefer to stay hidden. Some of the choices Wakanda has made have actually exposed his nation and caused him to demand help. That's put Wakanda in an interesting position because politically, they do see themselves a bit as the stewards for the safety of the world. But they also know that the world is probably not happy with that as the status quo. Now they find themselves a bit between two stations and I think that's the tension the movie wants to explore."

The introduction of Namor also pushes the characters of Wakanda past their personal mourning and into their new future, whatever that might be. "The movie becomes about, how do you get past a loss when something big and scary



WEDNESDAY

DEAR DEAD DAYS

WEDNESDAY ADDAMS IS BACK, BUT
THIS TIME SHE'S DITCHING THE
FAMILY AND HEADING TO BOARDING
SCHOOL FOR NETFLIX'S NEW MURDER-
MYSTERY SERIES **WEDNESDAY**



WORDS: **STUART MANNING**



AFTER 50 YEARS ON-SCREEN, THE creepy, kooky Addams Family are off to conquer streaming. But rather than family-based farce and morbid puns, Netflix's *Wednesday* spins the deadpan Addams child off in her own series, grappling with life at boarding school amid a series of macabre murders.

"We were looking for a character to build a TV series around and thought of Wednesday Addams," explains showrunner Alfred Gough, who co-created *Wednesday* with longtime writing partner Miles Millar. The pair performed a similar trick on The CW's *Smallville*, which reimagined Superman for a teen audience. "*The Addams Family* has remained in the cultural consciousness for decades and Wednesday's become kind of a meme. She's the character in *The Addams Family* that we always liked the most. So our thought was, 'What if she was a teenager? And what if she stepped outside the family?'"

FAMILY VALUES

Gough and Millar developed *Wednesday*'s pilot script back in 2019, packing the character off to the ominous Nevermore Academy, following an unfortunate incident involving a high school water polo team and a bag of piranhas. Nevermore is a school for "outcast" children with special abilities... handily so, since Wednesday has begun to suffer from troubling psychic visions.

"We had choices... do we keep her in the real world at a regular high school?" recalls Gough. "We talked about that, but then we figured that we still wanted this to feel like an Addams Family show. It felt like we needed to create that gothic vibe in a new environment."

"You want to be true to the Addams Family," agrees Miles Millar. "They are an aspirational family. They're kooky and crazy but they love each other. Wednesday is defined by her family, and this series sees her breaking away from that and her mother Morticia. It's about stepping out of the shadows of your parents – how do you forge your own path?"

In the past, Wednesday has been a character of few words. Retooling her as the lead was a challenge. "Even in a school of outcasts, she's the ultimate fish out of water," says Gough. "She's always been the [one with the] zinger at the end of scenes with the family. How do you maintain that attitude but put her at the centre of a show? That's a challenge, because she doesn't approach the world like other people. That was something that we were always checking with the stories. Are we approaching this in a way that Wednesday would?" →

"She's unapologetic about being smart and weird," adds Millar. "She's not like a butterfly coming out of a cocoon. She's fully formed."

"A lot of times, these kinds of shows are a hero's journey," agrees Gough. "Somebody starts out timid. By the end, they've found their voice and they stand up to whatever evil is out there. But Wednesday knows exactly who she is."

Is it possible to develop a character who's essentially immutable? Gough thinks so. "Wednesday's a young woman who sees things in black and white and then has to learn that there are some greys in the world. That's part of her journey, but her arc is really *this*." He pinches his thumb and forefinger together to demonstrate.

GONE FOR A BURTON

In a major coup, Gough and Millar tempted cinema's go-to goth auteur Tim Burton away from the big screen to make his first proper foray into television (barring a couple of anthology show episodes). Burton directs *Wednesday's* first four episodes and was instrumental in developing the show's distinctive visuals. "Tim Burton was always at the top of our list," says Gough. "Tim's never done television, but we thought, 'If we don't ask...' Three or four days later, we got a text from our agents: 'You're not going to believe this. Tim read your script, loved it and wants to talk to you.'"

A meeting was set up on FaceTime where Burton quickly bought in. "He's in Oxford, where he's got this garden with life-size dinosaurs," says Millar. "So he was standing under a Triceratops. We had this amazing conversation about Wednesday and how he'd always identified with that character, ever

since he was a kid. He'd always been a big fan of Charles Addams's cartoons, but there's something about Wednesday, as an outsider, that had always spoken to him. So it was just a really great meeting of minds."

According to Millar, Burton was keen to give television a go: "Tim was very curious about long-form storytelling, which he'd never done before," Millar explains. "Because we've done a lot of TV, I think he felt he was in a safe pair of hands. We've been in lockstep, in terms of the tone and what the show is, since the beginning. It's been a fantastic partnership."

With a director on board, the most pressing decision was finding the lead. "In our first call with Tim, we said, 'This is all great, but if we don't find the right Wednesday, it isn't going to work,'" Gough remembers.

Casting calls went out worldwide before the producers found emerging star Jenna Ortega, fresh from Netflix's series *You*. "She's a really talented young actress, but she also had a lot of Wednesday's qualities," says Gough. "She has drive, and she's a little wiser than her years. We all just felt that when we met her."

Ortega quickly keyed into Wednesday's offbeat worldview. "When she would discuss the character, it was with specificity," says Gough approvingly. "She said, 'Normally, I kind of hunch over but with Wednesday, I want to make sure that my posture is a certain way.' And when you see her on the show, there are shots, especially in profile, where we were like, 'Oh my god, that is the straightest, most *perfect* silhouette.' You can't direct or manufacture that – the person either has it, or they don't."

A HELPING HAND

While the extended Addams family is restricted to cameos, their faithful disembodied hand Thing appears throughout, allowing Wednesday to show a softer side. "We wanted the audience to feel an emotional connection to Thing," suggests Gough. "It probably shouldn't work, but it does, and gives Wednesday a confidante. That was a huge risk, because it's taken so seriously, but when she talks to Thing and unloads, you begin to feel for him and he becomes real."

Tim Burton also took a keen interest in Thing, giving him a natty make-over with Frankenstein-style stitches. "Adding the stitching to Thing gives him a whole backstory," Gough explains. "It lets the audience in, wondering who he is and how he happened to be. Where's the rest of Thing? It's



Catherine Zeta-Jones and Luis Guzmán.



Gomez, Morticia and Pugsley say b'bye.

adding complexity. It sounds ridiculous, talking like this about a disembodied hand, but that was the aim. Thing's one of people's favourite characters in the whole show – they love him!"

Rounding out the cast is *Game Of Thrones* actor Gwendoline Christie as Principal Weems, the enigmatic head of Nevermore. "She is Wednesday's antagonistic foil for a lot of the series, but she's also someone who understands her," Gough says. "She was once Morticia's roommate and knows what it feels like to be overshadowed by her. Gwendoline brings a real gravitas and intensity, but there was also something about her that felt like an outcast. She had the authority, but we also felt there was a connection to Wednesday that you understood."

Tim Burton and his regular costume designer Colleen Atwood devised Weems's bright, glamorous look as a contrast to Wednesday. "She looks like a [Alfred] Hitchcock character," enthuses Millar.



Wednesday is clearly delighted to be an Addams.



Wedders with her faithful friend, Thing. Awww.



Welcome to Nevermore Academy! Good luck...



Yoko Tanaka (Naomi Ogawa): bad girl.



Pugsley (Isaac Ordonez) has a spot of trouble.

"She's like Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*, with the incredible blonde hairdo and the Chanel suits. Even though she's contemporary, she feels timeless, and that's true of the whole show. It's set in the real world, but heightened."

As a final flourish, '90s Wednesday Christina Ricci appears as Miss Thornhill, cast against type as Nevermore's only "normal" teacher, and a gentle mentor for Wednesday. "She felt like someone you wanted to include in the show," says Gough. "We did it in *Smallville* a lot, with people like Christopher Reeve. I think fans really appreciate that. Christina read the scripts and enjoyed them and very much wanted to be a part of it."

The show's ambition required considerable resources to realise what the producers describe as "an eight-hour movie". The shoot took place in Romania, which allowed Nevermore to

occupy six soundstages, with space for the neighbouring town of Jericho as a massive backlot set. "We studied Tim's movies and they're all built environments, rather than CG," Millar explains. "Romania gave us the scope to build whatever we wanted. It also just added a weirdness to it – a creepiness and moodiness which you wouldn't find in America."

For now, *Wednesday*'s eight episodes tell a complete story, but the producers are keen to make more. "Wednesday's a role model – she's incredibly strong, she's not dependent on boys.

In a world where everyone's afraid to say what they think, she is completely unafraid. I think that fearlessness, particularly in a teenage girl, is refreshing and important. That's something that we are very proud to put out into the world." ●

Wednesday is on Netflix from 27 November.

Gwendoline Christie as Larissa Weems.



FULL OF WOE

JENNA ORTEGA IS THE LATEST ACTOR TO DON WEDNESDAY'S PIGTAILS

What attracted you to this role?

Honestly, a big part of the reason why I did the show is because Wednesday is a Latina character, and that's never been represented. Anytime I have an opportunity to represent my community or give other girls that look like me some relatability or connection on screen, I think that's really important. So that's why I did this job, because I want that to be seen. Plus, I love Wednesday.

How did you arrive at Wednesday's look?

The team wanted to do something different for Wednesday, so they gave me a fringe when we were doing testing. Tim Burton would say, "Oh, that's too thick" or "That's too thin" or "It doesn't look natural enough". He got the hairdresser's comb and put my fringe in the exact placement that he wanted, and then had them spray it. For the rest of the week, my hair was in that exact position. That was a little stressful!

Was it easy to get into Wednesday's mindset?

She's somebody I've been compared to my entire life – I think because I tend to be very dry and monotone. My interpretation of Wednesday is that she's a bit more socially awkward. Typically, she's always the smartest in the room, and that's her constant goal. She's always a few steps ahead of anyone.

Does placing the spotlight on Wednesday change the character?

We've never seen her as a teenager before. Her snarky, snide remarks might not necessarily sound as charming when they're coming from somebody who should probably know better than a 10-year-old girl. That was a balancing act. We didn't want to make her sound like every other teenage girl, but we also didn't want to make her too ignorant.

THINGS ARE GETTING DISTINCTLY
DARK IN **TITANS** SEASON FOUR,
AS SHOWRUNNER GREG WALKER TELLS
SFX ABOUT A PSYCHO CULT LEADER AND
“MAGICK WITH A K”
WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**

THERE WILL BE

BE

BOOD

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HE TITANS ARE BACK IN ACTION, BUT THE fourth season of the superhero drama will explore new territory, namely the supernatural corner of this universe. The season three finale found the team claiming victory over Scarecrow and embarking on an RV road trip

back to San Francisco. In this year's premiere, the remaining members – Dick/Nightwing, Gar/Beast Boy, Kory/Starfire, Conner/Superboy, Rachel/Raven and Tim Drake – make an unscheduled pitstop in Metropolis. It's on Superman's home turf that they experience their first brush with malevolent forces... and they don't like it one bit.

"With the new villains Brother Blood and Mother Mayhem, we are dealing with the occult," showrunner Greg Walker tells *SFX*. "With the occult comes magic, dark magic, or magick with a 'k' as our writer Bryan Hill would say. We know that Superboy and Superman struggle with magic, that those dark forces are something the Titans have dealt with, but not a great deal.

"When that is thrown at them, it answers the question that we have every year," he continues. "If you have a bunch of people with superpowers – Kory, Superboy, Raven – you can't have bank heists going on. Those are not formidable villains. You need to have someone who has a power that is confusing to them, intimidating, takes a while longer to get your head around and evokes things in you that are troubling, scary and disturbing. Brother Blood and Mother Mayhem both have those powers."

FOUND FAMILY

Readers of the *Titans* comic book will know this season's Big Bad, Brother Blood, as the psychopathic cult leader who concealed a giant spider and a pit of blood below his chambers. This isn't that version of the character. On the TV show, he begins as Sebastian, a meek man seeking a family. The Titans initially provide a safe harbour for him, and had Sebastian remained with them, his rise to power might have unfolded differently. *The Originals* actor Joseph Morgan, who portrays Blood, tweeted that the character's journey is "Dark. Damaged. Emotional. Vulnerable. And Vengeful. So very vengeful."

"It's tricky because cult leaders have been done in TV," Walker says. "We've had a lot of them in the news lately. They are creepy and they cause people harm. I'm not super-interested in telling a story about the weird psychosexual dynamics of cults, which can be upsetting and triggering to a lot of people.

"What we thought would be interesting is to tell a story about ego, and people who feel that they are nothing for all the wrong reasons and can't find themselves," he continues. "It's about how a cult leader can be someone to attach to and how that cult leader can help you find validation.

"And, in the case of Brother Blood, how that cult leader can be one of those



Tim Drake, Dick Grayson/Nightwing, and Starfire.



Raven visits the Spooky Warehouse. Maybe.

people suffering from severe self-doubt and lack of self-worth. So, what happens when you get inflated with the idea that you are all-powerful? It's an Icarus story. Also, when you are endowed with supernatural energies that you didn't know you had, what does that mean?"

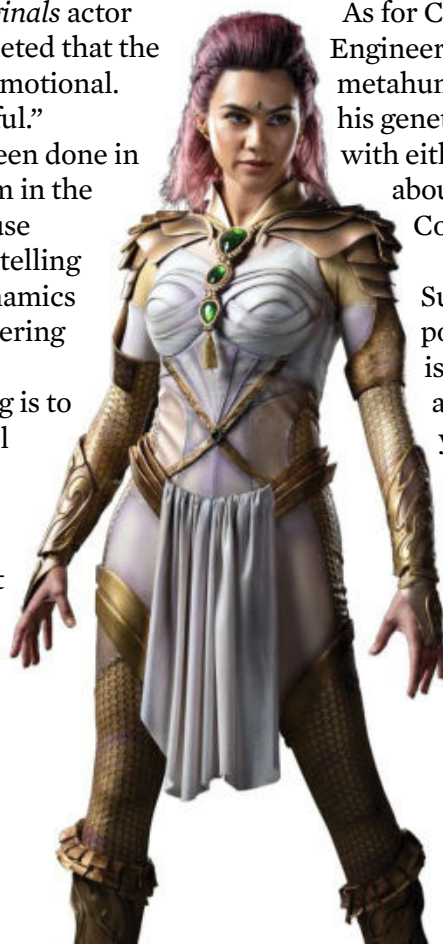
One of the strengths of *Titans* is that the group has always stood as a surrogate family, not bound by DNA. A main theme this season will revolve around these young heroes finding themselves, re-establishing that bond and bringing in new faces. In Nightwing's case, that means accepting his role as the team leader and what that entails.

"We've put Dick through the wringer," admits Walker. "He's been killed. He had moments of violent psychosis. He's struggled in relationships. Now, we find he's at peace as a leader. Then he's tested. He's tested when the family gets split apart. He's tested when larger problems come. He's tested when individuals inside the Titans want to explore their own issues or their own motivations. That might cause trouble for the Titans."

As for Conner, his arc is one of self-discovery. Engineered in the depths of Cadmus Labs, this metahuman clone calls Superman and Lex Luthor his genetic parents. However, he has never interacted with either of them. But as the trailer teases, that is about to change: Lex Luthor actively contacts Conner. That can't possibly end well.

"Conner Kent has taken on the persona of Superboy, but is that all who he is?" Walker poses. "What we'd like to do with that character is explore darkness and your shadow self. Who are you inside and can you recognise that? If you don't, do you do it at your own peril? And if you do, what happens when you give it the keys to the car and it starts driving the wrong way on the freeway at rush hour?"

Season four will also feature the first episode co-written by a cast member, namely Beast Boy actor Ryan Potter. Not much is known about the details, not even



CULT STATUS

Joseph Morgan is Brother Blood

The *Vampire Diaries* community labelled Sebastian/Brother Blood as Klaus 2.0. How conscious were you about making these two characters completely opposite?

☞ It sort of happens naturally, especially where he starts. I knew I wanted to play this guy as an outcast, a guy who has been cast aside by society. That sort of lent itself to someone who is timid, which is the opposite of Klaus.

There doesn't seem to be any escaping "blood", either. The irony surely can't be lost on you?

☞ When I got the call and they said, "Okay, they are really interested in you for *Titans*," I thought "Oh good, that's a great show." "And it's for one of the villains." I thought, "Okay, that's on-brand." They said, "His name's Brother Blood." "I'm seeing the dots." It's really become something else.

You receive a costume towards the end of the season. What were your thoughts on that?

☞ I love what they came up with. It's very different to anything in *Titans*. There's an ancient quality to it, where a lot of the super-suits are very modern and slick looking. I liken this more to a suit of armour. There is a feel to it that dates back centuries, which I guess is also a reference to the character. It was generational, where he would commit patricide to take on the powers and become the new Brother Blood. It's sort of a nod to that.

They came up with a whole language, which are letters that were designed like capillaries of blood. They came up with this thing that looks like Sanskrit, but it's this completely original language. Then, because this language is over my costume, they allowed me to decide on a couple of the phrases. So, there's a couple of Easter eggs in there with the costume.

You've got history with blood – how does this show take it to another level?

☞ There are a couple of sequences that are so crazy. *Titans* is, like, an R-rated superhero show. My history with blood, although it's sometimes been messy, it's often been quite beautiful and elegant in how it's done. This isn't that. This is terrifying at moments. And there's just so much of it.

You tweeted that a sequence against Nightwing required major stunt training. What can you tease about that brawl?

☞ It's not just him, first of all, although we do face off one-on-one. There's a section that involves other characters. *Titans* is a superhero team, so we want to see them come together to take out the villain. With Nightwing, it's extreme. He's certainly much more skilled, but by that point Brother Blood is in possession of these powers, which are seemingly undefeatable.

the script's title, except that it digs even more into the character's origins.

"Ryan is an extraordinary actor," says Walker. "He's a gifted athlete. I have so much fun watching him do his stunts. He can fly through the air. He's incredibly skilled at martial arts and does a lot of his own fight work. He also really understands film grammar. He is always someone who knows exactly what he should be doing at the moment."

"Ryan co-wrote this with Geoff Johns. It's an incredibly exciting pairing. They worked for months on it and it's going to introduce some characters that for DC fans..." He trails off, before teasing, "Keen eyeballs on that one. Stay awake. Drink a cup of coffee before, because you are going to see a lot of people from the books and from canon."

“We thought it would be interesting to tell a story about people who feel they are nothing”

When it comes to Starfire and Raven, Walker refers to their story as "a season of destiny". Kory initially ventured to Earth to prevent Trigon from taking over this dimension. That mission was accomplished way back in the season two premiere. Now that plot point is about to be revisited.

"That assignment

seemed to cease when Kory was able to turn Raven," Walker reflects. "She was supposed to kill Raven, but instead found a Titans way around it. That story turns out to have another chapter. That relationship gets complicated because it doesn't seem to be done. Once we get back into the occult, things happen and the past becomes present."

It's no secret that there's been a bit of a bloodbath at the show's home, HBO Max. The streaming service has recently axed and cancelled multiple series. So should audiences be concerned about *Titans*' immediate future? Walker says not. "HBO Max has been incredibly stable with us all the way," he continues. "It hasn't affected us at all. We have always thought that there is potential for another season. There is always potential this could be the last one. It's the world we live in right now. It would be great to have more seasons. I wish it could run forever." ●

Titans is on HBO Max from 3 November, UK details TBC.



Tim Drake and Dick Grayson, just hanging out.

FAREWELL THE

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE DIRECTOR LUCA Guadagnino's *Call Me By Your Name* shot Timothée Chalamet to fame, winning him an Oscar nomination for his role as a teenager experiencing his sexual awakening. No one could have predicted what might form their reunion: a coming-of-age cannibal road movie, featuring two young lovers whose lust for each other is only outweighed by their need to feast on human flesh. It's also, surprisingly, achingly romantic.

Adapted from Camille DeAngelis's 2015 novel, *Bones And All* follows the young Maren (*Lost In Space*'s Taylor Russell). Abandoned by her father (André Holland), who can't cope with her uncontrollable tendencies, she's left to wander the Reagan-era Midwest, where she meets Lee (Chalamet). Both sense the same thing in the other: the all-consuming desire to feed. The title refers to the ultimate cannibal act: eating everything, bones and all.

It's scripted by David Kajganich, with whom Guadagnino had worked with twice before. "I was immediately commanded by the beauty of the script, the way he unfolded the story, these amazingly endearing characters that were on this page," says the 51-year-old director. "The idea that we were not judging anybody in this movie... but we're following very complicated and almost unfollowable characters into something touching and universal. As always, Dave was able to find the universality in the very particular." →

***BONES AND ALL* IS A LOVE STORY WITH A BLOODY TWIST. DIRECTOR LUCA GUADAGNINO AND STAR TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET TALK TRANSGRESSION AND TRANSFORMATION**

WORDS: **JAMES MOTTRAM**



TO FLESH



When we meet at London's Corinthia Hotel, Guadagnino is reluctant to put an interpretation on what it all means. Is it a metaphor for addiction, perhaps? "If the movie plays as a canvas, it's a canvas of endearing love," he says, fidgeting in his seat. "[Whatever] your ideas about the nature of these characters, I think it's fine. I'm not going to be the one pointing the way. I think the audience should make up their own minds. I hope that this movie comes across as what I wanted it to be like – a fable. And in the fables that I loved, you can read them in every possible way."

If *Bones And All* is a dark fairy tale, then the Big Bad Wolf might be Sully, another member of this disparate cannibal tribe who has designs on Maren. Guadagnino cast Mark Rylance in this creepy role, the actor decorating his vivid outfit with carefully selected badges he purchased from a vintage clothes shop. "One day, he took the jacket and went someplace and came back to me, and he had all these pins. That made me feel like, 'Oh, it sounds like Mark is looking for Sully everywhere.'"

As grim as *Bones And All* is – the very first scene sees Maren chomp down on a female friend's finger at a sleepover party – Guadagnino was careful not to turn it into a gore-fest. More than one murder was pruned out of the film during the edit. "I hate the idea of going overboard. I will never go there. At the same time, I think you have to balance your movie. You have to see what's needed and what's not. I'm not sentimental with my material. I'm happy to throw a great scene if I need to."

Even with the bloody moments he did keep, Guadagnino always felt less is more. "You can see that in the movie: it's as restrained as possible. It's more about the behaviour than the actual shock value of it. And the consequences of it." Prosthetics work came from Jason Hamer's Hamer FX, the LA-based make-up outfit which recently worked on *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. "I knew [him] by fame," says the director, who approached him eagerly.

FOREVER YOUNG

Guadagnino is no stranger to horror. His last film, 2018's *Suspiria*, was a remake of Dario Argento's giallo classic, which had more than its fair share of body-mangling. While he's called that film "very aggressive", this is the opposite. "This is very tender," he says. Which, let's face it, is quite unusual in the cannibal subgenre. "That's the beauty of cinema. The narrative at stake, the visual languages at stake, can help you create contradictions and surprises that you will not see easily in your life."

If cannibal movies are generally about the ultimate transgression, Guadagnino sees this film in other terms. "It's about transformation.

Maren and Lee chow down in a conventional way.



Taylor Russell plays the abandoned Maren.



Love transforms you... youth is about transforming, because you are not a child any more and you are not yet an adult. So you're changing, your body changes. I love transformation." With this film, *Call Me By Your Name* and his 2020 HBO show *We Are Who We Are*, about kids on a US military base, he might be the best director working today at capturing these delicate years.

Chalamet's now 26, and Guadagnino feels their collaboration was "different" second time around. "Because Timothée has become a man. And he has been able, during these years, to learn how to empower himself even more so, and to bring his own ideas into the flesh of the conversation... I'm very proud of him. I love that he worked with two wonderful filmmakers like Denis Villeneuve and Paul King... he did [Villeneuve's] *Dune*, *Bones And All*, [King's forthcoming] *Wonka* and *Dune II*. It's a beautiful feeling to be in this very limited group of people."

The film also marks Guadagnino's first Stateside movie. Did he feel being an outsider gave him an interesting perspective on

America? "I think [there are] great movies from American directors that were very, very revelatory also, from an outsider standpoint," he shrugs.

"Arseni Khachaturan, the director of photography, Elliott Hostetter, the production designer and Giulia Piersanti, the costume designer, we all wanted to be at the height of these characters. We wanted to be able to immerse ourselves into their gaze and perspective. We weren't really looking to judge anybody or to make a comment on anybody."

Critically, the film has already surpassed expectations, winning two prizes in Venice: Best Director for Guadagnino and the Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best New Young Performer for Russell, a prize previously claimed by a young Jennifer Lawrence.

Guadagnino, who had seen Russell in *Waves*, immediately sensed just how good she would be. "I knew from day one. The focus, the concentration, the steel gaze that she projected outside and inside during the movie, told me that she was really going into an amazing place with her performance."



Director Luca Guadagnino works his magic.

“I’m not sentimental with my material. I’m happy to throw a great scene if I need to”



“Fancy popping out for a bite?”
“Oh, you.”

A further comparison to *Call Me By Your Name* comes with the casting of Michael Stuhlbarg (who played Chalamet’s father in that film), who features here alongside director David Gordon Green as one of two hicks Maren and Lee meet on the road. There’s also a shocking cameo by Chloë Sevigny (who featured in *We Are Who We Are*), though that’s too juicy to spoil. “I called her and said, ‘Hey, darling, can you do a scene with me?’” smiles Guadagnino. “She said, ‘Sure.’ I said, ‘You say a line... not even a line!’”

Chalamet’s fanbase will be sure to flock to the film – apt for a story about young love. Will people be surprised by what he’s doing in the movie? “I mean, I’ve seen a lot of young girls, young kids, watching the movie,” says Guadagnino. “And they’ve been surprised but also they’ve been feeling for the movie very strongly. Life for an adolescent is always a matter of life and death. And Lee is always on the cusp of life and death, so they can see that – they can see that anxiety.” ●

Bones And All is in cinemas from 25 November.



EAT IT!

Timothée Chalamet sinks his teeth into the role of Lee

How did you interpret Lee and Maren’s need to feed?

For me, it felt like the cannibalism was a metaphor for what your ancestors leave you with – your immediate parents, but also the trauma that you’ve lived with from generations past. You wrestle with that. Sometimes it’s something you can actually overcome and break the cycle. And sometimes a curse remains a curse and a blemish remains a blemish.

Was there anything else you felt as you were making it?

During, it felt like this quickly became a metaphor about addiction for me – especially young people who are addicted, are figuring out the most rudimentary things about themselves, what it means to be in love, what it means when you’re in a relationship, what it means to try to support someone in a relationship. You are wrestling with something so intense, so dangerous, as to affect other people’s mortality or your own... Without giving anything away, love can be something that rescues you out of it and lifts you up. But I also like the other interpretation – again, without giving too much away – that love can lift you, ultimately to sort of crush you too, because sometimes those demons remain.

Do you think the film has a feel of *Badlands* or *Bonnie And Clyde*?

Those are two huge inspirations for the movie. When I think about *Bonnie And Clyde* and *Badlands*, it was just

a style of acting in those movies that was more direct. It felt old-fashioned that way and felt inspiring. *Badlands* is a movie I hadn’t seen before I read the script. And then you watch it and you’re deeply invested in these characters.

Were you familiar with Taylor Russell?

I’d seen her in *Waves*, when it came out three, four years ago. She was somebody I had been dying to work with and there were other projects we had circled that didn’t come to fruition. This one happened to be the one that did.

What’s your view on how Luca interprets America?

To have an Italian point of view on the American Midwest in the ’80s, it felt freedom-inducing. Luca has a unique point of view. I’m not trying to blow smoke... he really feels like an auteur. He’s doing what he wants. I don’t even want to describe it as a negative phenomenon, but people are kind of increasingly boxed in – I’m thinking of directors – and Luca’s like [the opposite]. It’s just so thrilling to work with that.

Is it important for you to find directors like him?

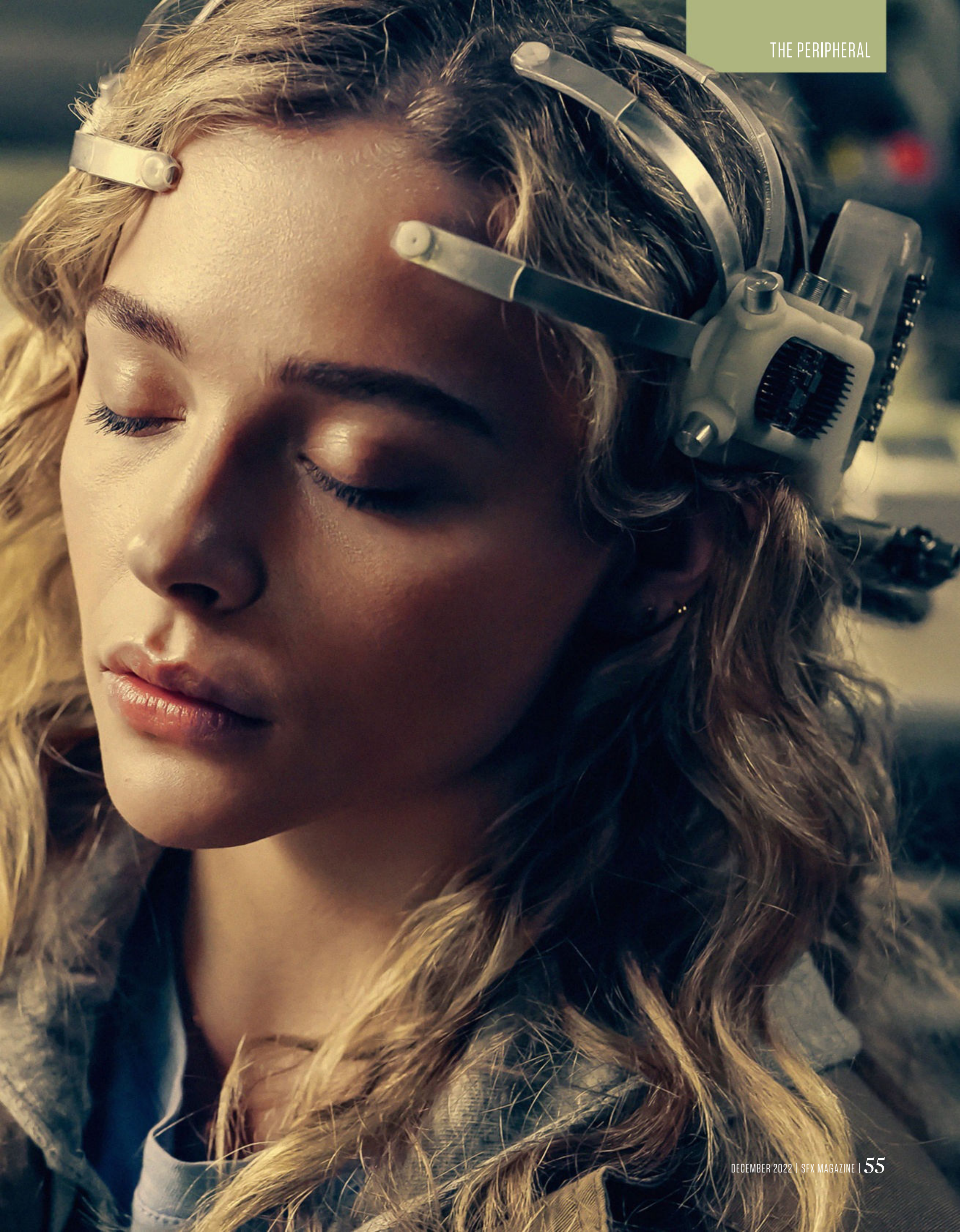
I hope I don’t sound pretentious rattling off the list of names, but I think of Denis Villeneuve and Greta Gerwig and Luca Guadagnino and Paul King, who I just worked with [on *Wonka*]... they have very strong visions. It’s not my experience, but you can kind of hear the horror stories from other sets where there’s a million opinions in the room.



on the edge of the map

WILLIAM GIBSON'S
SCI-FI NOVEL
THE PERIPHERAL
HAS BEEN ADAPTED INTO
A NEW PRIME VIDEO
SERIES FROM THE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
OF WESTWORLD

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**



FOR THE LAST DECADE, screenwriters Jonah Nolan and Lisa Joy have been telling stories that exist in the spaces where humans and technology intersect. *Person Of Interest*, *Westworld* and *Reminiscence* are all set in near futures where the delights and downfalls of reliance on tech inspire both awe and cautionary tales. And, of course, they're both deeply inspired by the works of science fiction author William Gibson, who is credited with pioneering cyberpunk.

All that being the case, it comes as no surprise that all three writers eventually met, via Vincenzo Natali, and together they agreed to adapt Gibson's 2014 novel *The Peripheral* into a new sci-fi series for Prime Video. Executive-produced by the Nolans, Natali, Athena Wickham (*Westworld*) and showrunner Scott B Smith (*A Simple Plan*), the series stars Chloë Grace Moretz and Jack Reynor as siblings Flynne and Burton Fisher. Together, they try their best to take care of their terminally ill mother, living lean (and without healthcare) in a depressed, rural American town just a step into the future.

Adhering closely to the structure of the book, the Fishers are adept gamers: Burton is former military and Flynne is practically a gaming savant. Their combined skills translate into them being able to do anything from beating levels for gamers to the occasional bit of beta-testing.

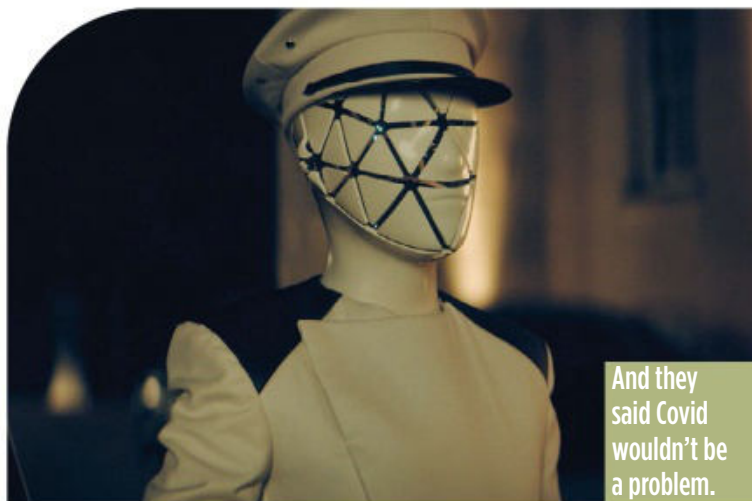
It's the latter that has Flynne using Burton's avatar to test a next-gen VR system. It places them in a futuristic London, where they follow the commands of an omniscient woman named Aelita (Charlotte Riley), who leads them on a mission involving a real murder and time-travelling to 70 years in the future.

DOING IT BY THE BOOK

Athena Wickham tells *SFX* that, having worked with the Nolans since *Person Of Interest*, what especially compelled them to tackle *The Peripheral* was how the story was grounded in the strength, and hope, of the Fisher family.

"It was about finding a writer like Scott, who can take that storytelling and bring out that family dynamic and still keep that big sci-fi philosophy that I know Jonah and Lisa love to dive right into," she says. "The different way in for us was Flynne and her family, and there was no one better than Scott to bring that to life and to take it out of the amazing book."

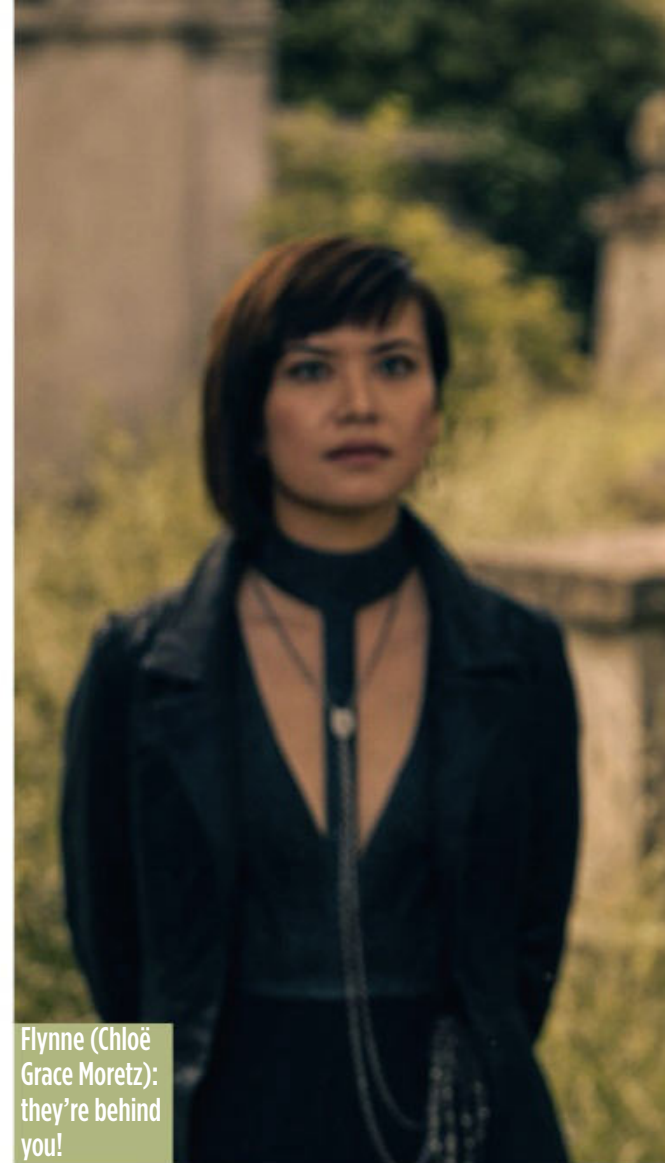
Smith says that on the page, Gibson renders the Fisher family with a level of warmth and love which is uncommon in the genre. "From what I understand, Gibson grew up in the southern part of Virginia, and he's tapping into the culture and the voices, so you can feel that



And they said Covid wouldn't be a problem.



Burton (Jack Reynor) has nearly finished the level.



Flynn (Chloë Grace Moretz): they're behind you!



with the intimacy he brings to it. It's there within the book and that was my entry point," he says.

As already evidenced in the first episodes aired, the series follows Gibson's penchant for dropping the audience into his worlds and letting them learn as they go along. Whether it's the Fishers' tech headsets, a retail 3D-print shop or the extreme look of futuristic London, with its epic sky-high sculptures, Smith says it's all in service of making the series feel real and grounded.

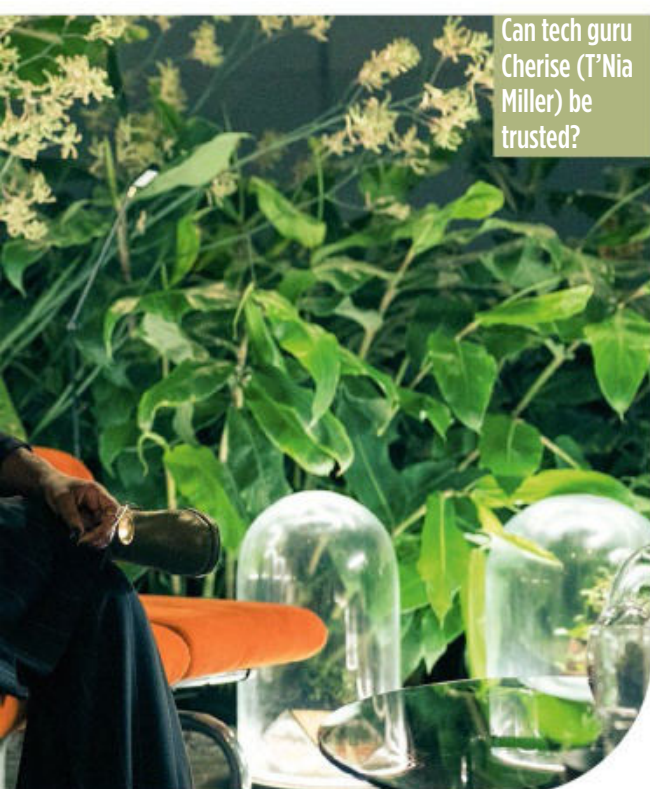
"The one-step-ahead tech stuff comes right out of the book," he explains. "And in terms of the family dynamic, that's also from the book. With Flynne and Burton, they give each other shit because they know each other better than anyone, and that's a way of expressing love. I think that comes through in the book and we definitely tried to use that. And then with Jack and Chloe, it was astonishing how they felt like siblings on set. They hadn't met before the show, but they just had an immediate chemistry and intimacy you feel from a brother and sister."

As we come to learn the dynamics of their small circle of friends, Wickham says the series stays with those human stories, making sure they remain central. "Usually in this kind of show, Flynne would go into future London and that would be the end of her home life. She'd be on to the bigger, better, crazy world of sci-fi," she explains. "But it feels more like 50/50 throughout this series because she never abandons her home life. It's as important that she's with her family and takes them with her."

Wickham says that also helps *The Peripheral's* narrative remain clear and focused, which she admits isn't always the case with complex tech-centric series. "We come from *Westworld*, which is not an easy story to follow. I work on the show and have had to take a moment to examine what's happening week to week," she shares.

"But this story, I think, is pretty clear and somewhat easy to follow. Obviously, there are some twists and turns that I'm sure will be head-scratching. But as long as you keep Flynne in the forefront with her family dynamic, and really ground it in her and her personal stakes, it works."

As the series unfolds, the other main narratives of the story take place in the Sim world, which is the playground of Aelita, and in London 2099, where society looks very



Can tech guru Cherise (T'Nia Miller) be trusted?



Flynn's been in the wars, but doesn't give up.

different due to environmental impacts on humanity. It's there that "fixer" Wilf Netherton (Gary Carr) and his boss Lev (JJ Feild) become aware of Flynn's prowess in the Sim and use a peripheral (an avatar) to try and conscript Flynn to help them track down Aelita. She says that if they help save her mother with expensive, life-saving drugs in 2032, she'll consider it.

The twisty, noir mystery of it all is something that Smith says he loved about Gibson's book and wanted to retain. "The set-up is that Flynn has gone into this world, where she's witnessed and taken part in this crime, and everything falls out of that." By the end of episode two, Flynn gets what she needs for her mother, but isn't any closer to knowing the

motivations of Wilf, Lev or his tech guru Cherise (T'Nia Miller).

"Can she trust these people, and how far can she trust them?" Smith says of her conundrum. "Flynn's gift is empathy, which we set up early on. It's almost her superpower. And it allows her to emotionally enter London and make connections with the people. We play with empathy, and if people across this divide of time are real to each other. Can any sort of intimacy develop across that divide of time and can care go in both directions?"

Aelita initially comes across as a digital Svengali, testing Flynn in the Sim to work out her value. Smith explains that the Aelita in Gibson's book is used very differently from how they use her in the series. "We really just took her," he admits. "Our Aelita is being drawn from the noir element as opposed to the Aelita character in the book."

Teasing a little more, Wickham adds, "From episode two onward, you understand that Lev and Wilf have a tie to Aelita, but you don't quite know what that mystery is. Aelita seems like she's in a game. We think

she's in a game because Flynn thinks she's in a game, but then there's more and more revealed later. Obviously, Aelita's mission is not what you might think it is. She starts as a very mysterious, perhaps creepy character who does really horrible things – until you realise how idealistic she might be, and how perhaps we were rooting for the wrong person, or we were scared of the wrong person.

"It definitely is eye-opening when it comes to our 'bad guys'," Wickham continues. "Scott built a world where the high personal stakes are not just in the future, but they're also at home for Flynn and her family. And that definitely becomes a big part of episode three onwards. You'll get a real taste of Lev and Cherise and how they behave, what they want, and how they interact within their own world and what they want from Flynn."

Wickham promises that by the season's end audiences will get plenty of answers that will follow Gibson's book and also branch out into some original threads. "There's mysteries that Scott reveals, like the why. But there's definitely a cliffhanger on the top of that that asks, 'What's to come now?' Everyone is on a

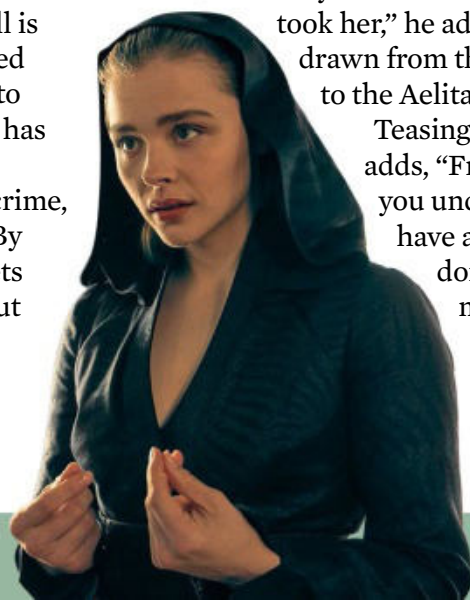
“Flynn's gift is empathy, which we set up early on. It's almost her superpower”

cliff at the end of the season and you don't know who's gonna jump off and who's gonna go the other way. The characters are taking a leap of faith and we don't know which way they're gonna go. It will lead us into an amazing second season because what Scott's been breaking [story-wise] has been great."

Readers of Gibson will know that *The Peripheral* is the start of what is known as the Jackpot trilogy, which is still awaiting the last book. Theoretically, that's a strong road map for a series already picked up and developing a second season. However, the second novel, *Agency*, tells a story featuring different characters, which prompts the question of whether the series will follow in that path. Wickham says, "We definitely want to keep it with Flynn and her family dynamic, and the characters who've been in future London. It's not an anthology."

She says that there are plenty of story elements in the first book that were not mined for season one due to not having enough time. Smith will be pulling from that material, and crafting original material, and (with the blessing of Gibson) crafting original material for season two. "I'll say it has to do with Aelita and her dynamic and her group and what she's doing," she teases. ●

The Peripheral is on Prime Video now.



WE ARE NOT ALONE

! L L E G A L

GHOSTS WRITERS LAURENCE RICKARD AND BEN WILLBOND MOVE INTO SF TERRITORY WITH

WE ARE NOT ALONE

A L I E N S

THEIR NEW COMEDY, WE ARE NOT ALONE, A UNIQUE MASH-UP OF *ALIEN NATION* AND *THE THICK OF IT*

WORDS: STEVE O'BRIEN



IT WAS ON A DISMAL, OVERCAST DAY a few years back that Ben Willbond found himself on a train bulleting through Peterborough when a thought struck him. What if aliens invaded planet Earth and ended up in Cambridgeshire? As a comedy writer he immediately recognised the rich comic promise of an alien invasion force setting up base in the middle of a quaint Cathedral city, 100 miles from London. When he got home, he shared the idea with his partner-in-laugh, Laurence Rickard.

“It just kept coming back to me,” Rickard tells *SFX*. “Then, about three months later, I pitched it back to Ben: ‘What about a series where we start it at the point where science fiction invasion movies usually stop?’ So instead of the invasion being attempted, and the humans won, it’s that we fought back, didn’t win, they took over and then went, ‘Ah, trying to run this place is really difficult. What do we do now?’”

Though Rickard and Willbond originally conceived *We Are Not Alone* as a series, it’s as a feature-length TV film that it has landed. Already well-schooled in sitcom, the pair had penned a half-hour pilot and shopped it round a few possible homes, until UKTV proposed making it a 90-minute special instead.

“Initially we were like, yeah, we’ll take that half hour and make it feature-length,” says Rickard. “But it never works out like that. So we ended up putting a lot of the story of our script in the drawer and largely starting again.”

CENTRE POINT

Lob *The Thick Of It* and *Alien Nation* into a blender, add a sprinkle of *V* and a dash of *The Office*, and you’ve got *We Are Not Alone*, a riotously funny reinvention of the alien invasion subgenre about a race of blue-haired aliens named the Goons who, having conquered Earth (now renamed Territory 78), are faced with the mundane reality of running the damn place.

What they need to know more about, they say, “is the common sense outlook of the man on the street.” Enter council worker Stewart (newcomer Declan Baxter), who’s tasked with giving these extraterrestrial aggressors a glowing PR make-over, while at the same time being pressured by a resistance group, the AAA (Anti-Alien Alliance), into stealing the plans to the mothership, and also putting up with a new housemate in the form of the adorably gormless Greggs (Joe Thomas).

In the film, though, it’s not Peterborough that our new overlords have decided to rule from, it’s the Lancashire market town of Clitheroe. “You can’t run the country from here,” an incredulous Stewart

Ben Willbond as Darrenth, Larry Rickard as Cirsh.



Amanda Abbington (left) stars as Greives.

tells them. “There’s no motorways, the internet’s crap, parking’s a nightmare...”

“There’s always that debate about how ridiculous it is that the country is run from this elite down in one corner and how detached we are from the north,” says Rickard. “We thought, if the aliens were looking at the planet from above they’d go, it’s just a series of landmasses and if you want to try and rule these people, the easiest place to do it is from the centre.

“We went down a real rabbit hole of the different ways in which mathematicians have worked out the geographical centre of the UK. There’s so many ways of looking at it, but we narrowed in on about three, and they were all around Clitheroe. It just felt perfect.”

Not that they’re ripping the piss out of Clitheroe, Willbond insists. “The *Sunday Times* voted it one of the nicest places to live in the UK,” he says. “I mean, we went there and it’s lovely.”

That mashing of the ordinary and the fantastic has been a hallmark of Willbond and Rickard’s work since the Gilliamesque *Yonderland* and later BBC One’s critically love-bombed *Ghosts*. *We Are Not Alone* is the writers’ first foray into SF

waters, though, and you feel like it’s been a long time coming. Willbond admits he’s a “secret sci-fi nerd” and both reference *V* and *Alien Nation* as inspirations for *We Are Not Alone*. But, outside of *Red Dwarf* and *Hitchhiker’s*, the SF sitcom is a rare and precious thing, especially in Blighty.

“It’s easy to fall into a trap of feeling like you’re not giving it due credit, to feel like you’re slightly taking the mickey out of the genre and of the fans,” suggests Rickard of the paucity of sci-fi comedy in this country. “And it’s easy to feel like it’s disingenuous and a little bit snarky. In *We Are Not Alone*, whilst a lot of it is incredibly silly, the thing that we’re laughing at is human behaviour, rather than the aliens.”

BLUE MOVIE

Of course the big question, when it came to filming, was what should these extraterrestrials look like? CG was off the table, as were any prosthetics that covered up too much of the actors’ faces (why cast Vicki Pepperdine, Mike Wozniak and Joe Thomas just to drown them in latex?).

In the film, the aliens’ ponytailed blue hair and chalk white faces have something of an inverse Andorian look about them. “Yeah, the design is a little nod to classic *Star Trek*,” says





Mike Wozniak
as the
human-hating
Gordan. Boo!

If you're going
to write it, you
may as well be
in it too...

Vicki
Pepperdine
giving it some
as Trater.

Rickard. “Also, *Alien Nation*,” adds Willbond. “You look at that, and it’s quite a simple design but really practical.”

Let’s talk about the actors under that make-up. One of the film’s stand-out performances comes from Mike Wozniak, who played the starchy Brian, buddy to Greg Davies’s Dan, in Channel 4’s *Man Down*. Here he plays Gordan. That’s his adopted Earth moniker; we’re told that if the aliens reveal their actual names, because of the resonant frequency of their native tongue combined with the atmospheric pressure of our planet, we’d literally “shit ourselves” on hearing them.

He’s a psychopathic Goon who simply wants to throw every human into his airlock. “We talked about types and we loved the idea of Mike,” says Rickard. “I remember reading about Douglas Adams talking about how long they spoke about needing someone with a Peter Jones-type voice before going, ‘What about Peter Jones?’”

“He’s such a lovely man,” adds Willbond. “His showreel is playing slightly harassed men in their forties, so making him that belligerent was really fun.”

Also worth spotlighting is Declan Baxter, who plays the lead role of Stewart. It’s not as showy a part as any of the aliens, but Stewart

anchors the piece emotionally. It’s a quietly starmaking turn from the twentysomething actor. “What we were trying to avoid was going, ‘Let’s get a really well-known face, and we’ll get them to do a northern accent and play seven years younger,’” says Rickard.

“Stewart’s meant to be a young northern guy, so [we thought] we should just look at a load of young northern actors. It’s such a tricky balance with a lead character. It requires a certain amount of acting chops, but also they’ve got to be funny and that’s a tall order. But when we saw Dec’s first tape, he seemed to have got both sides of it.”

There was never any question of Rickard and Willbond casting either of themselves in the role, despite their side job as performers. You’ll recognise both of them from their various roles in *Horrible Histories* (a series they also wrote for), and from *Ghosts*, where Rickard plays caveman Robin and Willbond is the sexually-repressed Second World War army officer. They do pop up in the film though, if only in the modest roles of Cirsh and Darrenth, two slow-witted Goon security grunts.

“Because we were exec-producing we knew it was going to be a lot of work,” says Rickard,

“The thing that we’re laughing at is human behaviour, rather than the aliens”

“so there was only so much we could take on. We were still shooting this while doing *Ghosts* so we thought, in terms of the performance side, we’d just do these little cameo characters.”

There’s clearly scope for more adventures at Clitheroe County Council, should UKTV desire it. And given that it was originally envisaged as an ongoing sitcom, more is definitely something its writers are interested in.

“That’s the hope,” smiles Rickard. “We’ve talked about it with the channel. Obviously, no decisions will be made until it’s gone out and we see whether or not it works, and whether people laugh at the jokes!”

Until then, there’s more *Ghosts* (its fourth series has just screened on BBC One, while season two of CBS’ US remake – which the pair exec-produce – started airing on 29 September), while they’re also working on “two or three things, a couple which will happen and one which we hope will happen.”

More *We Are Not Alone* doesn’t seem to be part of that roster... yet, though the pair assure us they have ideas. It’s been a long while since we’ve had a British SF comedy to rival *Red Dwarf* – with some luck, *We Are Not Alone* may be the heir apparent. ●

We Are Not Alone is on Dave on 20 November.

HEY JOE

Inbetweeners star Joe Thomas plays hapless Goon, Greggs



What appealed to you about *We Are Not Alone*?

- I thought the script had so much going for it, it had a real *Hot Fuzz*, *Shaun Of The Dead*-type energy. I mean, comedy writers who are actually funny are few and far between, and this is actually funny.

Are you much of a sci-fi fan?

- A little bit, yeah. I’ve just read Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* series, and I remember I had *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* when I was younger. I watched *Red Dwarf* too when I was little. I mean, it was a comedy but there was always a poignancy to it, the idea of this big ship drifting in space. It’s a nice trigger point for the imagination of the writers, being in a sci-fi world. With this, the idea of aliens visiting is a great way of recontextualising things.

This is your first time playing an alien. How much time did you have to spend in the make-up chair?

- Considering how much there was, they were quite quick. They got it down to an hour and a half each morning. I’d never done anything like this, so it was quite exciting at first. It got less exciting as time went on, as you’re getting up really early.

Would you be up for more *We Are Not Alone* if UKTV were up for it, and, if so, what kind of storylines would you want for Greggs?

- Oh, I think he needs to be challenged, because he’s kind of inept. He’s kind of the office underling, I guess, and quite incompetent. He’s somewhere between Gareth in *The Office* and someone more childlike. I’d just like to see him put through his paces a little bit. Maybe he could be put in charge of a small island somewhere?

BEN BAILEY SMITH

The *other* Doc Brown travels to a galaxy far, far away in *Andor*

Words by Richard Edwards /// Photography by Kenneth Lam

Ben Bailey Smith ducks away from our Zoom chat for a few seconds. He returns holding a photograph of his six-year-old self at Christmas 1983, dressed as Darth Vader with a toy AT-AT at his feet. “The Darth Vader outfit was like a bin bag,” he laughs, “but I was just over the moon. *Return Of The Jedi* was the first movie I ever saw in the cinema, and my relationship with *Star Wars* has been obsessive basically for as long as I can remember.”

It’s no exaggeration, then, to report that his role as Imperial officer Blevin in Disney+’s latest *Star Wars* TV show *Andor* is something of a dream come true for the actor, author, comedian and rapper who sometimes goes by the SFX-friendly pseudonym of Doc Brown. “Every day on set I wore the *Star Wars* socks that my wife bought me for Christmas,” Smith admits. “They’re black and on the ankles they’ve got an embroidered face of Vader or a little TIE Fighter. No one would ever know I was wearing them, but it meant a lot to me.”

When you started out in comedy, did you always aspire to more dramatic roles?

➡ No, I never had any expectations like that. I love doing comedy roles and I actually think comic acting is way tougher than dramatic acting. With dramatic acting you need to be still and feel the feelings, but with comedy it’s so hard to be real. It’s like there’s two types of comic acting: there’s Jim Carrey in *Dumb And Dumber* or *Ace Ventura*, and then there’s Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show* or *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*. He’s both a master of giving you hilarious, stupid, broad comedy, and just being really real yet still very funny. That is exceptionally hard to do, and most dramatic actors could not do it.

To a certain generation you’re best known as the creator and star of CBBC’s *4 O’Clock Club*, and the author of numerous kids’ books. Is that a challenging audience to work for?

➡ My relationship with kids is probably the most special thing that I’ve got out of being in this business. I spent 10 years working with children [as a youth worker] before I got into this, and they’re the toughest audience, because they don’t mince their words if they don’t like you – they don’t have any reason, like adults, to be polite about the fact that you’re rubbish, and I love that in them.

I go into a state school once a week, anywhere in the country, and talk to the kids and get them to do stand-up and share jokes, poems and stories. I mainly do it to keep myself connected, and to know how kids feel and what’s going on in their world. It’s a constant inspiration.

As a *Star Wars* fan, did you feel you were rediscovering your own inner child when you stepped on set?

➡ Absolutely. It began when I went in for a costume fitting, long before I was even shooting. *Andor* is very much set in that *Rogue One* period before *A New Hope*, so when I put on the uniform I felt like Peter Cushing, with that ’70s minimalist look, and lots of beige and grey. Then, when we started shooting and actually seeing the scale of the thing, the way they were building worlds without too much greenscreen... My first scene was on a gigantic spaceship and I was just like, “I can’t believe I’m here.”

You play Lieutenant Supervisor Blevin, an officer at the Imperial Security Bureau (ISB). Is he the same character as the Blevins mentioned in Chuck Wendig’s *Aftermath* novel?

➡ I’m going to be brutally honest and say I have no idea. The secrecy [on set] was just next-level, so I was told very, very little – it was hard for me even to investigate the backstory or who he’s connected to. I guess the main thing you need to know is that he’s a weasel and he’ll do anything to climb his way up a greasy pole. Power is the thing that drives him on, and he definitely doesn’t want to make any mistakes because in the Empire, when you make mistakes, you tend to get bumped off.

Is it true that you auditioned to play Lando Calrissian in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*?

➡ Yeah, I got pretty close and then bloody Childish Gambino stepped in! You’re not going to beat Donald Glover at anything! I never thought there would be another opportunity [to be in *Star Wars*] and it’s come, so it’s so special to me. You get some actors saying, “It’s just a job, this is just for kids so they can make some toys.” And I’m just like, “No! I’m in *Star Wars*!” When I was little, I wanted to be in *Star Wars*. Not, like, as an actor – I wanted to live in these worlds and go to Endor to hang with the Ewoks. I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say it sparked something in me that made me want to be a part of filmmaking. ●

*New episodes of *Andor* debut on Disney+ on Wednesdays.*

BIODATA

From
London

Greatest Hits
Steve the drug dealer in *The Inbetweeners*; teacher Nathan Carter in *4 O’Clock Club*; DS Joe Hawkins in *Law & Order: UK*; Durkas Cicero in *Doctor Who*’s “The Tsuranga Conundrum”.

Random Fact
Smith only made a brief appearance in *The Inbetweeners* but says “That scene is still one of the things I’m most stopped for in the street.”

“I go into a state school once a week, and talk to the kids and get them to do stand-up”

MAGICAL WORDS

LEGENDARY
WRITER, PERFORMER,
MAGICIAN AND
ANARCHIST

ALAN
MOORE

TALKS TO *SFX* ABOUT
HIS SUPERB NEW
ANTHOLOGY
ILLUMINATIONS

WORDS: **WILL SALMON**







SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOT TO CLOSE a door to open a window.

Alan Moore has retired from comics. It's no exaggeration to say that, as the author of *Watchmen*, *From Hell*, *V For Vendetta*, *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and many other all-time classics, Moore has defined, reinvented and pushed the comics medium into more strange places than any other writer over the last few decades. But, as anyone who has followed his work will know, his relationship with the industry itself has often been fraught. A couple of years back he decided it was time to finally step away.

Still, comics' loss is literature's gain. Moore has recently published *Illuminations*, a terrific collection of short stories that demonstrates the huge scope of his imagination. It's the start of a new phase of writing for Moore who, in the couple of hours *SFX* spends chatting to him down the line from his Northampton home, sounds thrilled by the creative possibilities in front of him.

You're not really known for short stories. Have you been secretly writing them all this time?

I'm afraid that my working life really doesn't allow for that. I'm kind of envious when I hear about writers who can just dash off a short story and put it in a trunk and get to a point where they've got hundreds to choose from. Pretty much everything I've ever written has been immediately published, which is a good thing, but it doesn't really leave me with a huge trove of unpublished fiction.

When we put all the short stories together there wasn't even enough for a collection and so I thought, "I should write four new stories, that should just about round it out". I used the last four stories [in the book] to do a lot of things that hadn't been done in the preceding

stories. I was kind of showing off a little bit. I wanted to show people that I have a bit of range.

It definitely does show range. You have everything from a ghost story to a satirical novella and "The Improbably Complex High Energy State", which starts off as hard SF before becoming almost a romantic comedy. Not something you'd probably see coming from Alan Moore...

I think that sometimes people have this picture of me as this dark, gritty, dystopian guy. I do actually live in a dystopia – I'm in Northampton, which is a bankrupt and collapsed Middle England town – but humour has always been at the forefront of my work. Even in my grimmest work there's usually a few good jokes.

That story was a bit of a gift. I just started thinking about what the implications of entropy were, that if everything's going to end in a completely disorganised low energy state of freezing blackness and ruin, then that kind of implies that it must have started in a very ordered and complex high energy state. We know it didn't – or at least not the way that I've imagined it – but once I'd got that idea and I'd remembered about Boltzmann brains, I got a pretty good story out of it.

I love science for a lot of very worthy and respectable reasons, but the thing that I *really* love about science is the ideas. It doesn't really matter whether they're true or not – just as ideas they are often beautiful and useful. It is a fountain of just extraordinary concepts.

What are the challenges of the short story medium to you as a writer?

Well, there's the challenge of coming up with something new and delivering it in a limited number of pages, and then coming up with something else for the next story.

A novel has a completely different character. You have to think, "Well, I'm probably going to be writing this for years". It's more of an edifice. But short stories have got a real energy to them, because you're not investing years of your time. That turned out to be the case with "Thunderman", which is a short story, because if I'd started that as a novel it would have been completely different. I'd have tried to make it much more serious. It happened so quickly, it was just pouring out of me. I think I say in the acknowledgments that it was like lancing a boil. So I got that story written within three months

and it's novel-length. So short stories can be all sorts of things – even novels in disguise.

"What We Can Know About Thunderman" is a satire of the comics industry. How much of it is true?

Some of the most grotesque scenes I've embellished and in some of them I've flat out lied, but I think that it captures the character of the comics industry, and a lot of the most physically appalling things in there are very close to actual reality.

That said, it isn't a *roman à clef*. Most of the people in it are composites or inventions. One of the things that I was most pleased with about it was all the names. I've no idea where they were coming from: Jerry Binkall. Brandon Chuff. Worsley Porlock. You know you're on a roll if you've got names like that cropping up.

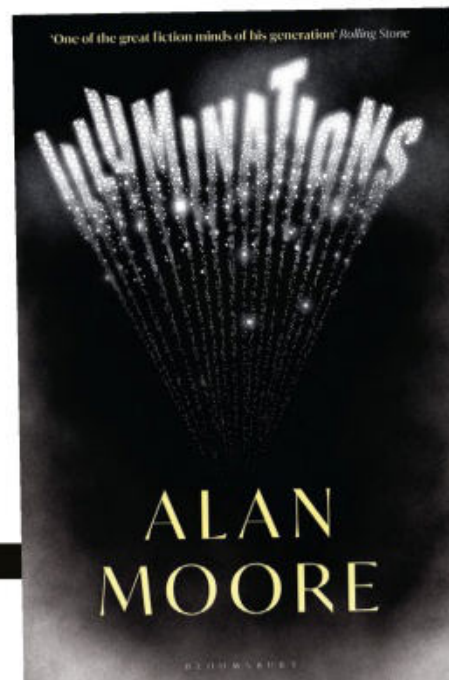
You've retired from comics and you've talked about your bad experiences with the industry. So why return to the subject now? Is this an exorcism?

That's exactly the word. I've disowned most of my comics work, including stuff like *Watchmen*, *V For Vendetta*, all of the ABC stuff, everything I don't own. Which was painful. I put an enormous amount of work and energy and a great deal of love into all of those projects and it felt like a bit of an amputation to disown them.

At the same time, that was the only way to cut out the poison. All I've got is memories of having my intellectual property rights stolen and then when I complained about that, being typified as a crazy angry guy: "Alan Moore says 'Get off my lawn.'" And yes, alright, I was quite cross, but I don't think without reason, and to suggest that I'm angry about everything is an evasion. It's a means of going, "Oh well, if he's angry about everything then we don't have to worry about what he says about the way that people are treated in the industry".

And once these things have been taken from my hands and made into franchises then they can be given to anybody to do what they want with and that will somehow still be associated with me.

The comics medium is sublime. The comics industry is a dysfunctional hellhole. So why did I want to return to it in this story? Like you say, it's exorcism. It's one thing to quit comics, but quitting comics is a different thing to being able to stop thinking about them. Writing this got an awful lot out of my system. It said a lot of the things that I'd always wanted to say but I'd



KEVIN NIXON

taking down at least a considerable part of the comics medium with it when superhero movies finally aren't interesting. When that happens, my worry is that a lot of the comic shops won't be able to continue and a lot of interesting independent comics would perhaps not have outlets.

Is literature where you're focused now, and do you feel happier with the way it's going?

Much happier. I think that those last four stories in *Illuminations* feel like I have a certain spring in my step and a lot of enthusiasm. I've got a freedom now, and all the work I'm doing is work that I own and I'm being legitimately rewarded for it. So yeah, this is delightful. It's a good way to end up and the work that I'm doing, I'm really, really pleased with.

“The comics medium is sublime. The comics industry is a dysfunctional hellhole”

Your next project is the Long London quintet. What can you tell us about that?

I'm about halfway through the first book, which is called *The Great When*. I'm really pleased with that. It's nothing at all like *Illuminations* or *Jerusalem*. This first one is set in 1949 so I'm trying to conjure the mindset of that period. It's got an 18-year-old protagonist who knows very little of the world and over the next three or four books, he will grow up and the time period will change. I'm anticipating that there will probably be a different style for each book.

Do you have the entire series mapped out?

I've got a functional plot that will take me through all five books. But a plot is the least of a book. The characters, the actual prose, the storytelling, these are all things that – at least to me – are much more important and interesting. If I know that the plot is going to work, that's great and then I can pile any sort of fabulous trappings on top of it.

With this first book, I knew that I'd have to set up things that are going to resonate through the whole series. But on the other hand, I'm trying to leave as much of it open to just immediate invention as I can, to keep it fresh. I've been coming up with really strange ideas and thinking, “Oh yeah, I've got to write that”, without having any clear idea as to how they fit into the plot, but confident that, yeah, they *will* fit in. So I'm slowly feeling my way into the territory of Long London and finding out about it, as I hope that the eventual readers will do. ●

Illuminations is out now.

Alan Moore:
“I do actually
live in a
dystopia”.

never really had the right context to say them in. But doing them in a Kafka-esque satire, that worked perfectly. And when I say a Kafka-esque satire, what I mean is that Franz Kafka, while he was reading his stories to his followers and appalled friends, he would be laughing almost too hard to get the lines out. It's horrible, hideous, appalling – but the author was probably giggling when he wrote it.

You called comics “sublime” just then and it really does feel like, despite everything, you still have a love for the medium. Is that fair?
Absolutely. I hope that my love of it comes

across; my love of Jack Kirby and many of the other artists and a couple of the writers of his generation. The descriptions of a six-year-old kid glimpsing a comic book rack could not have been written without being able to tap into my memories of what that was like, a first exposure to comics.

The medium can do anything. Its potential is still almost completely untapped. So it was attempting to express my love of the medium, some of the wonderful people who worked in it, and to also express my horror at the fact that this little offshoot, the superhero genre, has become a monoculture that's in danger of



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edited by Ian Berriman

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BLACK ADAM

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BLACK ADAM

Holding out for an antihero



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 125 minutes

▶ Director **Jaume Collet-Serra**

▶ Cast **Dwayne Johnson, Aldis Hodge, Noah Centineo, Sarah Shahi, Marwan Kenzari, Pierce Brosnan**

▶ **Black Adam** could be a watershed moment for the DCEU. Dwayne Johnson certainly *wants* it to be a watershed moment for the DCEU. He's been tweeting about how the movie is a launch pad for a new phase of the comic company's big-screen endeavours, apparently unaware (or maybe not) that using Marvel-associated jargon like "phase" is tantamount to trolling the DC faithful.

So when, at one point in the movie, Black Adam blasts a gaping hole through a Superman poster, you'd be forgiven for thinking this was Johnson and his co-conspirators saying, "Out with the old...". But actually, *Black Adam* is as much a product of the DCEU movies that have gone before it as it is an attempt to give the franchise a full-throttle new lease of life. And not just in the overt continuity nods it gives to *Shazam!* and the *Suicide Squad* movies; there's still plenty of Snyderverse DNA in here too. Yep, it's slo-mo-a-go-go!

The film has been a passion project for Johnson, who first expressed interest in playing the character a decade and a half ago. In the comics, Black Adam was originally created as a villain for Captain Marvel. Not Marvel's Captain Marvel but the other Captain Marvel, who was renamed *Shazam!* in the DC universe for legal reasons that would take up way too much of this review to explain. So when *Shazam!* was being prepped, there was some talk of Black Adam debuting in that movie. Instead, the DCEU

bosses decided that Johnson would be wasted in a villainous role, and that Black Adam should be given his own movie, in which he could be the morally dubious antihero he eventually became in the comics.

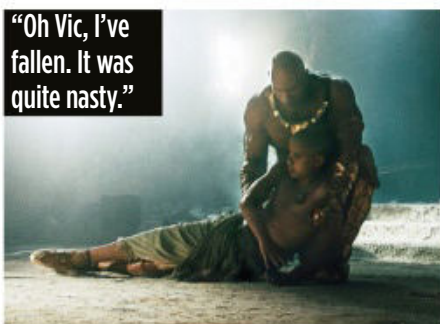
In a *Lord Of The Rings*-style prologue, we learn of the creation of a powerful champion, Teth-Adam, 5,000 years ago in the north African country of Kahndaq. After helping to free the nation's slaves from the tyranny of a dodgy Pharaoh (and much destruction) he mysteriously vanishes.

Fast-forward to the present (with the emphasis on fast – this movie is paced like the Flash with a bad case of the runs) and Kahndaq is now controlled by foreign military forces. A resistance fighter, Adrianna Tomaz, frees Teth-Adam from his tomb and, boy, he makes quite some entrance. In a refreshingly brutal action scene, Johnson's Teth-Adam is like a force of nature, turning soldiers into charred lumps.

Teth-Adam, y'see, has no heroic ambitions. Killing is no great moral no-go area for him and collateral damage is his calling card. That's why Amanda Waller (Viola Davis) sends the Justice Society – old hands Hawkman and Dr Fate, and newbies Cyclone and Atom Smasher – to eliminate the threat.

Tonally the film exists at a midpoint between the MCU and the Snyderverse. There is quippery

"Oh Vic, I've fallen. It was quite nasty."



"Anyone want some? You? YOU WANT SOME?"

but also a harder edge, with about as much designer violence as you can get with and still snag a 12A rating. There's certainly no shortage of action. Some of the deeper, more nuanced issues it tackles – such as the way US superheroes unilaterally appoint themselves as global arbiters of what's good and evil – may feel a little like hand-me-downs from Marvel's *Civil War*. Nevertheless, scenes of the Kahndaqis cheering on Adam for his guilt-free MO

“About as much violence as you can get with a 12A rating”

while booing the Justice Society's idealism remain powerful.

There's much to enjoy here, including some excellent performances, especially from Johnson – who looks like a man who's been desperate to play a



part for 15 years and is now loving every minute of it – and Pierce Brosnan, who brings effortless nobility and gravitas to Dr Fate. Sarah Shahi also impresses as the feisty Adrianna; you truly believe she would give lip to a demigod if he started getting too up himself.

However, the frenetic pacing and the sheer number of plot elements that the script's trying to balance leave everything feeling rather breathless and under-developed. Backstories and

character arcs are stripped back so much that the film rarely has a chance to properly capitalise on its strengths. Some of the action sequences are messily edited and difficult to follow, and the climactic villainous smackdown feels almost like an afterthought. Still, if this is a blueprint for the DCEU, we're happy to go Black to the future. **Jonathan Norton**

i Johnson already cameoed as Black Adam in *Shazam!* (as a hologram) and *DC League Of Super-Pets* (in animated form).

"Ah yeah, that's got it. Thanks, Michael!"



HALLOWEEN ENDS

Making the Michael



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 111 minutes

▶ Director David Gordon Green

▶ Cast Jamie Lee Curtis, Andi Matichak, Rohan Campbell, James Jude Courtney

Can you make a good

Halloween film without Michael Myers in it? And does anyone really want a mature, thoughtful take on this franchise?

Both questions float through your mind on watching David Gordon Green's caper to his Haddonfield trilogy. Like the first two entries, it tries to invest the ageing formula with at least a modicum of intellectual weight. A *Halloween* film can't just be a mechanism for delivering gnarly kills now, it has to be "about" something. *Halloween* was about trauma (or "trowma", as Jamie Lee Curtis would say). *Halloween Kills* was about the effects vigilantism has a population. *Halloween Ends*

“Tries to invest a modicum of intellectual weight”

is about the effects of scapegoating an individual.

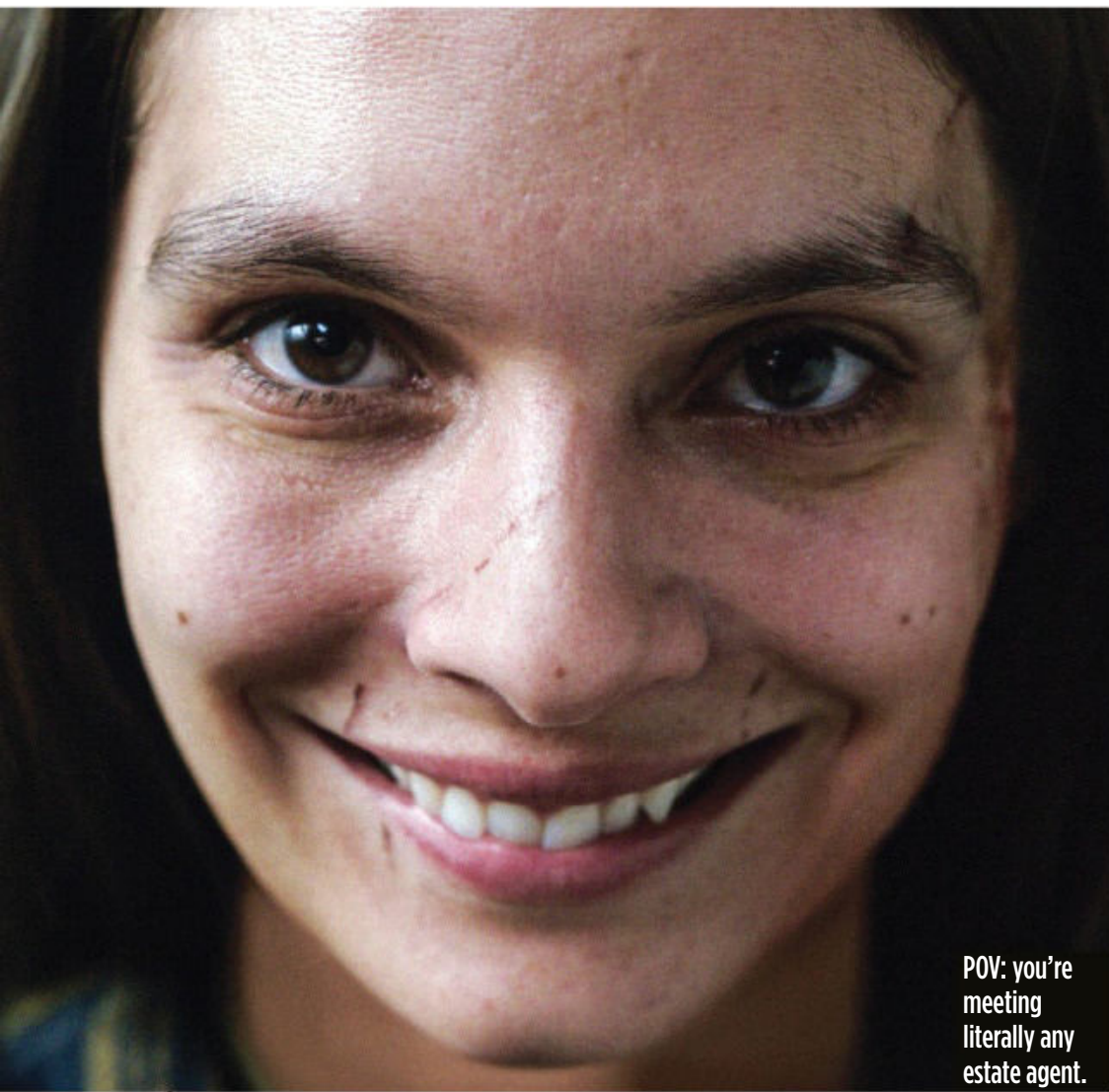
That first question's been answered before, of course – many would say, in the affirmative. *Ends* doesn't go anywhere near as far as 1982's *Season Of The Witch*; however, slasher scholars may initially suspect it's doing a *Friday The 13th: A New Beginning*, with ol' Shatner-mask somewhat sidelined. Fear not, though: Laurie Strode and Michael *do* get to cross kitchen knives. And despite his revival's fondness for philosophising, Green never forgets that he needs to cater to our bloodlust and splash the ketchup – although nothing here is quite as wince-inducing as, say, the strip-light stabbing in *Kills*.

The result is a film which strives to say something meaningful about how violence infects our society, but is also not averse to pounding someone's skull against a hard surface to the strains of The Cramps. And if that's not reason enough to tip your hat to Green, it should also guarantee a new variant action figure. **Ian Berriman**

i In the 1978 film, Laurie and Tommy Doyle watch *The Thing From Another World*. Here, a kid watches *The Thing*.

Reviews

CINEMA



SMILE Grin and scare it



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 115 minutes

► Director **Parker Finn**

► Cast **Sosie Bacon, Jessie T Usher, Kyle Gallner, Caitlin Stasey**

► **This highly effective scare machine** should appeal to fans of *It Follows* and *Ring*. Its greatest strength is a recurring uncanny image: a human face contorted into a sinisterly insincere smile.

Sosie Bacon is Rose, a psych-ward therapist who sees a new admission slit their throat in front of her, face fixed in a rictus grin. Turns out she's just the latest in a chain of suicides, each of whom previously saw someone else kill themselves. And now Rose is the next link...

If you're au fait with curse movies, *Smile's* structure will be familiar, but it's good enough to

feel like more than a mere knock-off. It has more chewy subtext – mostly around subjects like the lasting effects of trauma, and how we treat those with mental health issues – than you usually find in a popcorn horror. And Bacon makes a good fist of Rose's gradual unravelling.

Some of the plotting's a little muddy – it's unclear to what degree Rose has been latched onto due to her own past trauma. And it's a little too keen on cheap jump scares. It's almost as if the filmmakers had a lack of confidence in that shiver-inducing central image. They certainly needn't have: afterwards you might find yourself turning on all the lights on the way to the bathroom, just in case... **Ian Berriman**

i *Smile* was expanded from an 11-minute short, *Laura Hasn't Slept*. You can watch that online at bit.ly/shortsmile.

BONES AND ALL Love at first bite



► **RELEASED 23 NOVEMBER**

TBC | 130 minutes

► Director **Luca Guadagnino**

► Cast **Taylor Russell, Timothée Chalamet, Mark Rylance, André Holland**

► **At this point, Luca Guadagnino and Timothée Chalamet could reunite on absolutely any project that they want.** So the fact that their post-*Call Me By Your Name* pairing is an adaptation of a YA novel about two cannibals on a road trip seems a puzzling choice. However, any doubts quickly disappear as *Bones And All* is an absolute triumph, and arguably the highlight of both men's careers so far.

Taylor Russell takes centre stage as Maren, an "eater" who on her 18th birthday sets out to track down the mother she never knew,

but as her beleaguered father Frank (Andrew Holland) tells her, was cursed with the same appetite for human flesh. On the way she encounters fellow eaters, played with terrifying aplomb by Mark Rylance, Michael Stuhlbarg and David Gordon Green. But it's a chance encounter with the sensitive Lee (Chalamet) that sees a true allyship form.

It's not hard to be swept up in the central romance; Russell's performance is utterly enchanting, and Chalamet has never been more enticing, fully pulling off

“An exquisite feast that – between sobs – should be heartily devoured”



Lee's orange mullet, ripped jeans and pearl-buttoned twin-set. The two have a rare chemistry that is made all the more stunning by Guadagnino's exquisite eye, as he composes everything from mountain ranges to abattoirs with the care of an oil painting. Atticus Ross and Trent Raznor of Nine Inch Nails, meanwhile, create a gently haunting score.

For all its gore (and repeated appearances of an eight-foot rope of human hair), *Bones And All* is a film of extraordinary beauty. Guadagnino has delivered an exquisite feast that – between sobs – should be heartily devoured.

Leila Latif

i Author Camille DeAngelis is a vegan. She wrote the novel "to get readers thinking, 'Am I okay with being a predator?'"



SOMETHING IN THE DIRT

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 4 NOVEMBER**
(also download, 28 November)

15 | 115 minutes

▶ Directors **Justin Benson,**
Aaron Moorhead

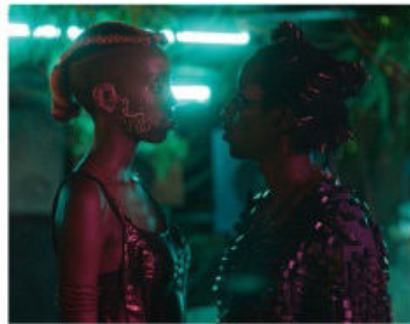
▶ Cast See above!

➤ **Indie darlings Benson** and Moorhead's latest is a throwback: a two-hander they also star in; one main location; no in-person crew. Covid was the catalyst, but it'll date better than most lockdown cinema.

It follows two neighbours in LA, one of whom's just moved into a long-empty apartment. Witnessing strange lights and a levitating ash tray, they decide to document the phenomenon – sending them plummeting down the rabbit hole...

What follows is increasingly like listening to two pot-fogged *Fortean Times* subscribers. Their scattershot theorising encompasses everything from Pythagoras and the music of the spheres to meteorite strikes and cat parasites. By the time they're seeing Morse code in the fruit of a cacti it's clear both have completely lost the plot.

Those who demand concrete answers will be frustrated: the investigation functions like a parodic mockery of the very idea that objective truth is attainable. Those who can just enjoy the ride should be entertained. It's a pleasingly dense film, whose visuals echo the inept duo's racing minds, spitting out stock photos or YouTube clips to illustrate every turn in a dialogue exchange. Going back to their DIY roots clearly re-energised the duo. That enthusiasm shines through. **Ian Berriman**



NEPTUNE FROST

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 4 NOVEMBER**

TBC | 109 minutes

▶ Directors **Anisia Uzeyman,**
Saul Williams

▶ Cast **Cheryl Isheja, Elvis Ngabo,**
Bertrand Ninteretse

➤ **While Afrofuturism can be** the most glorious celebration of tradition and can look to colourful utopias on the continent, occasionally it gets bogged down in style and doesn't speak to the pan-African spirit. What's so fun about *Neptune Frost* is how it thinks so far out of the box and really opens up the possibilities of what gender, music and technology could become.

The action takes place in a village in Rwanda, where buildings are made up of computer parts. Our protagonist Neptune, an intersex runaway (played first by Elvis Ngabo and then Cheryl Isheja for the rest of the film), falls in love with Matalusa (Bertrand Ninteretse) and together they become part of a collective of hackers.

To make matters even more wild and wonderful, *Neptune Frost* is also a musical that bursts into audacious choreography, set to co-director Saul Williams's alternative hip-hop beats. The songs are ambitious, bringing together spoken word poetry, rap, afro beats and protest chants to create something distinct.

This is a film brimming with ideas and creativity, and at points there are so many of them that it descends into chaos. But some messiness can be forgiven when a film grounds itself so well in Africa's present and paints such a vivid picture of its potential. **Leila Latif**



WHAT DO WE SEE WHEN WE LOOK AT THE SKY?

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 25 NOVEMBER**

U | 150 minutes

▶ Director **Alexandre Koberidze**

▶ Cast **Giorgi Bochorishvili,**
Ani Karseladze

➤ **This Georgian film reminds** us that cinema can reveal things other artforms can't, via both its narrative thrust and its method.

After two brief chance encounters, Giorgi and Lisa arrange a date. Then they're cursed by an evil eye, each waking up looking completely different. Neither can now recognise the other. But destiny will reunite them...

You can imagine how a Hollywood romantic fantasy would tackle such a premise, but this film consistently takes a different angle – literally. When the couple first meet, we just see their feet. Second time, they're viewed from a great distance. It's a film that's constantly withholding and digressing. Frequently we observe conversations we can't hear. The story could have easily been told in an hour less.

By rights it should all be too infuriating for words. Instead, it's utterly charming. Blessed with a gorgeous, harp-plucking score, it's full of the joys of people-watching; you feel like a flâneur on the streets of Kutaisi. Director Alexandre Koberidze has an eye for pleasing geometric forms, and a wry sense of humour. In closing, the film supplies its own critique: "No use to society whatsoever". That's true only if you don't value beauty, humanity or originality. **Ian Berriman**



MIA AND ME: THE HERO OF CENTOPIA

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

U | 84 minutes

➤ **If nothing else, this is the** perfect way to distract your kids by rolling them around in unicorn-filled pink candyfloss. An extension of a German TV series, it opens with an evil frog taking over a fairy tale realm – cue a teenage girl from our world hopping into his cartoon dimension to take him down. There are a couple of amusing one-liners among all the screeching, but mainly it's just twee moralising. **Jayne Nelson**

ALSO+OUT



Daniel Stamm's *The Last Exorcism* was inaccurately named, since he's at it again in **PREY FOR THE DEVIL** (out now) – no screenings for this one.

ONE PIECE FILM: RED (4 November) is the 15th in the piratical anime series. **BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER** arrives on 11 November. Ralph Fiennes is a celebrity chef in horror-comedy **THE MENU** (18 November). A family of explorers journey to a mysterious planet in Disney animation **STRANGE WORLD** (23 November). Finally, **MATILDA: THE MUSICAL** switches from stage to screen on 25 November.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER Season One

Meandering to bind them all



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

Showrunners JD Payne, Patrick McKay

Cast Morfydd Clark, Markella

Kavenagh, Robert Aramayo,

Daniel Weyman

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **The Rings Of**

Power is famously the most expensive TV show ever made. Whether there's a degree of marketing hyperbole to that claim or not, it certainly looks like you could make an entire season of *Doctor Who* on its prosthetic nose budget alone. Then again, with Peter Jackson's movie trilogy to live up to, it was never going to get away with doing things cheaply.

So was it worth it? After the first few episodes the jury was still out. Early on, this prehistory to *The Lord Of The Rings*, set in the Second Age of Middle-earth, certainly looks spectacular, but is slow, unfocused and sprawling, with far too many bland characters swamped by the lush, highly detailed production design. It seems to be a show about a bunch of different fantasy races wandering about doing stuff.

However, it turns out to be that rare beast: a TV show that actually improves. Confident enough to go for a slow-burn approach, it rewards loyal viewers with some hugely impressive set-pieces and

intriguing plot revelations in the latter half of the season. The characters live up too, especially the Elves (who start off like fey Vulcans). It even rewards a rewatch, as some of the sections that originally felt like padding actually turn out to be meticulous worldbuilding (although, admittedly, still somewhat indulgent and sluggish worldbuilding).

The series eventually hits its stride to become a worthy small-screen successor to Jackson's vision. Not just in terms of the huge action set-pieces, which are suitably epic and yet retain emotional impact, but in the way aspects of the lore that we're already familiar with start to surface in sometime surprising ways. Suddenly this feels less like a ringside seat to history and more like a proper origin story for the Third Age.

Plot-wise there are some intriguing decisions, especially regarding Sauron and Gandalf's apparently peripheral involvement. The dwarves are great, though sadly the women don't have beards (who cares about their skin colour? Facial furniture is more important). Your mileage may vary when it comes to the bucolic whimsy of the Harfoots – forerunners of the Hobbits – but they sing a good trekking song.

It's not 100% loyal to the lore it's based on, but the changes are less extreme than some Tolkien aficionados might have feared. So come for the spectacle, and stick around for the storytelling, which hopefully will continue to improve. **Dave Golder**

i Effects legend Douglas Trumbull (2001, *Blade Runner*) helped to create the title sequence, his final work before his death.



THE DEVIL'S HOUR



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

Creator Tom Moran

Cast Jessica Raine, Peter Capaldi, Nikesh Patel, Phil Dunster

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **This product**

of *Sherlock's* Hartwood Films stable shares something of the knottiness of executive producer Steven Moffat's *Doctor Who*, and has echoes of everything from *Medium* and *Dexter* to *Sliding Doors* and *The Sixth Sense*. But it's a highly original piece of work. Teasing the supernatural, it turns to be science fictional – or should that be metaphysical?

Jessica Raine is Lucy, a social worker with a pretty miserable life. She wakes every night at precisely 3.33am. She's plagued by possibly premonitory flashes. And her son is an emotionless blank, prone to creepily staring into space at figures no one else can see.

Peter Capaldi plays Gideon, a murderer with a mysterious interest in Lucy. His unique perspective on the universe means it's probably the closest the actor will ever come to playing another character like the Doctor. Capaldi is utterly captivating, but performances are strong all round, with Alex Ferns nearly stealing the show as a hothead Scottish detective.

It's a fascinating, cleverly structured series, firmly grounded by creator Tom Moran's knack for the rhythms of everyday speech. There are some troublingly dark, mind-bending concepts here, but they're embedded within a believable reality where people burn dinner and exchange banal chitchat. For an unknown writer, it's a pretty stunning breakthrough. **Ian Berriman**



DOCTOR WHO: THE POWER OF THE DOCTOR

The Wrong Goodbye

SPOILER WARNING!



UK BBC One, now on iPlayer

Showrunner Chris Chibnall

Cast Jodie Whittaker, Mandip Gill, Sophie Aldred, Janet Fielding

SPECIAL Where to begin with the way the Thirteen Doctor's time ends? It's a bit of a dog's dinner, cooked up from a recipe of the least palatable ingredients of this era – pointless globe-trotting, gabbled exposition, easy solutions – with a jug of curdled fanwank poured on top. Bon appetit!

The one person who emerges from the wreckage with their reputation enhanced is Sacha Dhawan. Chris Chibnall has the good judgement to give him room to play, and the actor makes the most of it with a Masterfully

mercurial performance, nailing the script's handful of genuine zingers. His cossack-dancing to Boney M is a particular delight, even if the scene is a shameless crib from "The Sound Of Drums". But even he's hobbled by ludicrous plot turns. If the Master really wants a question-mark tanktop that badly it'd be simpler to just put a bullet in the Doctor's skull and order one from Lovarzi.

You end up feeling rather sorry for the blameless Jodie Whittaker. This feature-length special really should have been all about her, but she's crowded out of the picture as the outgoing showrunner seemingly tries to pre-empt the 60th anniversary specials by making his own. It's a pleasure seeing Janet Fielding and Sophie



"I'll probably turn into David Burton in a minute."

Aldred trot out Tegan and Ace's old catchphrases. And the companion support group which provides gasp-inducing cameos by the likes of '60s veteran William Russell is a lovely idea, well executed. But that should have been it. Steven Moffat managed to find a moving way to bring back Tom Baker. Here, the parade of past Doctors feels faintly depressing – like seeing a

reformed '70s punk band still doing the pub circuit, rocking mohicans and leather trousers they can't really squeeze into.

Sometimes less is more. And always, *always*, an engaging story with some semblance of logic is essential.

Calvin Baxter

The line "the blossomiest blossom" nods to a 1994 interview where Dennis Potter discussed his awareness of mortality.

SHE-HULK: ATTORNEY AT LAW

Season One

Hulk smash fourth wall!



UK/US Disney+, streaming now

Showrunner Jessica Gao

Cast Tatiana Maslany, Jameela Jamil, Tim Roth, Mark Ruffalo

EPISODES 1.01-1.09 Marvel is taking the piss. Both out of itself and the kind of internet haters who were always going to loathe She-Hulk anyway. What better way to do that than with Marvel's premier fourth-wall breaker? Deadpool? Nah. Jennifer Walters was going meta when the Merc still had milk teeth.

She-Hulk: Attorney At Law is brilliantly bat's-arse. You want it to be a superhero show. It wants to be a legal comedy. It turns out to be neither and both in the most

spectacularly bonkers way, holding the MCU up to a mirror, and then smashing the mirror.

Tatiana Maslany is in sparky form as ambitious lawyer Jennifer Walters, cousin to Bruce Banner and reluctant recipient of his Hulk abilities. She has little interest in becoming a superhero, but her employers spot a niche to be exploited, appointing her head of a new division set up to serve superhero claims.

It's all very silly, and very meta, climaxing with an episode that makes *Community* look like a Mike Leigh film. Not all of the self-aware gags hit the bullseye, but that's only because they come so thick and fast. The way it Teflon-coats itself to deflect



"Wait until they find out who the real villain is!"

"male-bashing" criticism is ingenious – the bad guys turn out to be thinly disguised alt-right keyboard warriors. Even reducing Daredevil to the love interest role seems like a baiting exercise. There are loads of other cameos to enjoy, with Tim Roth's radical take on Emil Blonsky (also known as Abomination) propelling him into the top ranks of MCU supporting characters.

For all that wit and invention, the show veers dangerously close to cartoonish territory at times, and some plasticky CG doesn't help. It would benefit from a broader tonal spectrum and a few quieter moments so that the more serious points it has to make don't get lost in all the crazy. **Dave Golder**

Episode eight features a billboard for *Rogers: The Musical*, the theatrical extravaganza featured in *Hawkeye*.

THE BASTARD SON & THE DEVIL HIMSELF

Not Half Bad



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

Showrunner Joe Barton

Cast Jay Lycurgo, Nadia Parkes, Emilien Vekemans, Paul Ready

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Lumbered with** a clumsy name for its Netflix debut, this adaptation of *Half Bad* – Sally Green’s somewhat more daintily titled YA novel – is a bit of a revelation. Ostensibly it’s nothing more than a tale of witches fighting witches featuring all the classic genre tropes: teenagers about to come into their powers;

school bullies; young love; even a blood-soaked prophecy. But *The Bastard Son & The Devil Himself* is different, because by heck, it’s *violent*. One witch’s spell in particular, that debuts in episode three, is so unapologetically gory it turns the entire show on its head from then onwards.

In the middle of all the gore is Nathan (Jay Lycurgo, excellent), the abandoned son of a murderous Blood Witch, and possibly the only person who can take him down. When his fellow British witches cook up a plot to force him



towards murder, Nathan goes on the run to Europe, teaming up with Annalise (Nadia Parkes, also excellent) and French witch Gabriel (Emilien Vekemans, equally brilliant).

At times this feels like a chilly Scandi drama; then it’s grown-up *Harry Potter*; then it’s a monster flick (showrunner Joe Barton is currently working on a new *Cloverfield* movie). The only thing

that lets it down is Nathan’s wicked sister: despite a fine performance from Isobel Jesper Jones, she’s so clunkily one-note Evil that she’s a plot device, not a person. Otherwise, this is an unflinching, grue-filled delight with a rather adorable love triangle at its heart. **Jayne Nelson**

i The Fairborn witches’ name was inspired by the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife, which Green modelled a blade on.

THE MIDNIGHT CLUB

Do tell them Pike



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

Showrunners Mike Flanagan,

Leah Fong

Cast Iman Benson, Igby Rigney, Ruth Codd, Heather Langenkamp

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 **Mike Flanagan’s** latest (co-created with Leah Fong and based on the 1994 YA book by Christopher Pike) is a curious hybrid of teen drama, ghost story and horror anthology.

Ilonka (Iman Benson) is a young woman with seemingly everything ahead of her, until a diagnosis of thyroid cancer places her in Brightcliffe Hospice, a rural retreat for terminal teens. The building has a strange history which includes hauntings and at least one religious cult, but it also appears to have cured at least one former resident thanks to an

apparent “healing vortex”. While investigating all this, Ilonka makes friends with the other sickly teens and each night they gather to tell one another spooky stories.

Despite the heavy premise, *The Midnight Club* is more often warm and witty than it is bleak or depressing. The young cast are terrific, particularly Ruth Codd as the acerbic Anya, and the central mystery is engaging – though it’s often sidelined due to the series’ unusual format. Because while this is primarily an ongoing drama,

“A curious hybrid of teen drama, ghost story and horror anthology”



each episode also has to squeeze in one of the stories told by the *Midnight Club*. These meta-narratives adapt various other Pike stories and reflect different aspects of the characters. It’s a neat conceit, but one that has the habit of dragging the show to a halt just as things are getting interesting. That’s especially apparent in the finale, which offers plenty of tearful catharsis and

answers none of your questions about the bigger picture.

This is a show about storytelling and the way it can bring comfort and forge bonds in difficult times. That’s a beautiful message, but it never quite grips like the best of Flanagan’s previous work.

Will Salmon

i *The Midnight Club* has set a new Guinness world record for the most scripted jump scares in a single TV episode (21).

WRECK Death Ship



UK BBC Three, streaming on iPlayer

► Creator **Ryan J Brown**

► Cast **Oscar Kennedy, Thaddea Graham, Anthony Rickman, Peter Claffey**

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 For the first half of this cruise-ship horror-comedy's journey, you might feel like disembarking at the next port. But stick with it.

Initially, it presents as a juvenile blend of murder mystery and slasher horror. Oscar Kennedy plays Jamie, who assumes the identity of a lowly crew member on the *Sacramentum* to investigate the disappearance of sister Pippa. There's a killer on board, who's disguising themselves as Quacky, the ship's duck mascot.

For the first half, as writer Ryan J Brown assiduously lays a trail of red herrings, this is a horror-

comedy that's not that horrific, or especially funny – unless references to oral sex and farts or the sight of a used condom have you rolling on the floor. (To be fair, this may apply to much of BBC Three's audience). And having not one but three romantic subplots seems like overkill, regardless of how sweet the gay and lesbian ones are (nearly all of *Wreck*'s more fleshed out or amusing characters are LGBT).

The only things the show seems to have going for it are the Quacky mask, Warren Dunning's show-stealing as gum-chewing

“Having three romantic subplots seems like overkill”



Orville's not been coping well without Keith.

headcase Officer Beaker, and the horror-geek pleasures of spotting dialogue from *The Shining* and toilet-wall graffiti nods to *Carrie*.

However, in its murder-free fourth episode, the series starts to course-correct. Episode five turns everything on its head with a welcome (albeit it *very well-worn*) twist. Finally, the closer introduces a political subtext, delivering fist-pump moments

aplenty and (*at last*) buckets of fake blood.

It ends on a cliffhanger, with potential to broaden out this universe in a second season. Freed from the need to spend three episodes on misdirection, that could well prove more consistently entertaining. **Calvin Baxter**

i Filming locations included SS Nomadic, a museum ship moored in Belfast, and an old Michelin tyre factory in Ballymena.

CHAPELWAITE Season One From Dusk Till Yawn



UK Paramount+, streaming now

US Epix, finished

► Showrunners **Jason Filardi, Peter Filardi**

► Cast **Adrien Brody, Jennifer Ens, Emily Hampshire, Christopher Heyerdahl**

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 Based on the 1978 Stephen King short story “Jerusalem’s Lot”, a prequel to *Salem’s Lot*, *Chapelwaite* tells the tale of Charles Boone (Adrien Brody), a mid-19th century ship's captain from a cursed family. When his wife dies, he turns his back on a life at sea.

Conveniently, his estranged cousin dies around the same time, leaving Charles a mill in New England in his will. So Charles

moves in with his three mixed-raced children, but the reception from the locals is decidedly hostile, and not just because of the colour of the children's skin. Many blame the Boone family for all the ills visited upon the town, including multiple deaths from a mysterious illness, and a baby born with no eyes. Charles soon learns that what he thinks are rats in the mill's walls are actually razor-toothed vermin of a different kind.

In terms of production values, *Chapelwaite* exudes quality, from sumptuous cinematography to elegant production design and very effective gore effects. The acting is top rate, with a splendidly brooding Brody giving the series a solid core. There are moments of



Another great holiday in Scarborough.

exquisite tension and some disturbing images that'll lodge in your brain for quite some time.

But it's all so slow, and has nothing new or surprising to deliver to anyone vaguely literate in the vampire genre. It doesn't help that the Big Bad vampire sounds worryingly like Nandor the Relentless from *What We Do In The Shadows*. Sure, it's an exercise in slow burn, but sometimes the

endless scenes of people wandering about in the dark feel like a war of attrition with the viewer. When you play that game, the pay-off needs to be something mindblowing, and on that level, *Chapelwaite* doesn't deliver. Still, there is some magnificent wallpaper... **Dave Golder**

i The other Stephen King short story that showrunner Peter Filardi would like to adapt is “Sometimes They Come Back”.

GOTHIC FANTASTICO

Putting the Boot into horror

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1963-1966 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Massimo Pupillo, Alberto De Martino, Mino Guerrini, Damiano Damiani

▶ Cast Gordon Mitchell, Gérard Tichy, Franco Nero, Rosanna Schiaffino

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Grand residences**

are about the only persistent thread in this eclectic collection of obscure Italian horrors.

A victim of gaslighting and hypnotism gets her own back from beyond the grave in *Lady Morgan's Vengeance*. Featuring much febrile snogging, it has some ludicrous plot turns (ghosts that drink blood?), and in its shonkier moments – an obvious dummy thrown from a rooftop; claps of thunder, but no lightning flashes – may bring to mind Ed Wood.

Don't get us started on its "Scottish" castle, about which so much dry ice swirls that you start to worry it's on fire.

Geographical verisimilitude is also not a strong point of *The Blancheville Monster*, which places Scotland in England... A compendium of gothic tropes, it opens like a Hammer horror, then evolves into a morbid Poe cash-in, as a young woman is hypnotised into a death wish. A plodding, talky affair, whose misdirection makes the villain reveal hard to stomach, it's elevated by stunning location work at a ruined abbey.

The Third Eye is part tightly wound melodrama, part *Psycho* rip-off. *Django*'s Franco Nero plays a mummy's-boy count with a love of taxidermy (always a red flag) who, after his fiancée dies in a car crash, takes to strangling

strippers and prostitutes. Perverse and campy histrionic, it feels like an early effort by Jess Franco.

The Witch is the main selling point. Coolly contemporary in everything from its jazzy theme to its sexual attitudes, it sees a cocksure womaniser (*Zombie Flesh Eaters*' Richard Johnson) drawn into the orbit of an old woman and her beguiling, strangely-in-sync daughter – and ultimately crushed by female power. Brimming with psychosexual fencing and thinly veiled insinuations of indecency, it's a compelling, erotically charged puzzle.

▶ **Extras** Three of the films can be viewed in Italian or English versions. Across three interviews (60 minutes total), actors Erika Blanc and Paul Muller prove likeably mischievous, but can't

“Brimming with thinly veiled insinuations of indecency”

remember much – in Muller's case, just that *Lady Morgan's* title “rings a bell”. All four films come with: a new critical commentary; a concise, well-informed intro (21 minutes total); and a video essay (79 minutes total) – either movie-specific or discussing topics such as changing representations of the witch. *Blancheville* and *The Witch* also get talking heads by Italian writer Antonio Tentori (31 minutes total), which tend to cover the same ground. A 1993 radio chat with director Massimo Pupillo (20 minutes) has some amusing anecdotes about his other horror films, but not *Lady Morgan*. Plus: a photonovel of *Lady Morgan*; trailers; galleries; 80-page book; double-sided poster. **Ian Berriman**

i *Blancheville Monster* star Ombretta Colli went on to serve as president of Milan province, for Silvio Berlusconi's party.



INCREDIBLE BUT TRUE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 7 NOVEMBER**

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Quentin Dupieux

▶ Cast Alain Chabat, Léa Drucker, Benoît Magimel

▶ **Quentin Dupieux's films** are lost in translation for many – not so much from French to English, but from his brain to our logical reality. His scripts have the “then this happened, then this...” flow of a child's spontaneous yarn-spinning. His latest is typically eccentric, but a little more accessible, being in part a social comedy.

A couple move into a house with a “time duct” in the cellar. Pass through it, and you de-age three days, but move forward 12 hours. Lose three years to look 20 years younger – a deal many would take. It's a neat metaphor for obsessing over your looks.

Dupieux has said he's “not that interested in that plot device”, which checks out. The portal's properties aren't discovered, but described by the estate agent. Other filmmakers would more thoroughly explore its ins and outs. And the emotional fallout is really only glimpsed in an epic 12-minute montage, as the film self-destructs; its sheer magnitude is amusing, but does foster the suspicion that he's more interested in devising ideas than developing them.

▶ **Extras** In interviews (17 minutes), Dupieux explains his “super fast process”, and two actors shower him with praise. A career overview talking head by a French critic (29 minutes) has some useful context for English viewers. Plus: trailers; booklet. **Calvin Baxter**



“Hello? I was just looking for the loo, and...”



A CANDLE FOR THE DEVIL

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Eugenio Martin**

▶ Cast **Judy Geeson, Aurora Bautista, Esperanza Roy, Lone Fleming**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Horror can** exploit the unlikeliest of social currents. By the early '70s jet travel had been democratised, turning Europe into an affordable playground for sun-chasing Brits. As this Spanish-set thriller proves, the continent's shadows were also within reach.

A puritanical pair of sisters run a boarding house with a moral code so strict it demands blood. As the body count grows – each victim a “shameless hussy”, dealt “divine punishment” – the sisters' own hypocrisies are exposed, the tone shifting from pure Euroleaze to a commentary on the repressive nature of Franco's Spain.

Directed by Eugenio Martin, but a world away from the faux-Hammer pulp of his *Horror Express*, it's a film that flirts with Hitchcockian black comedy – body parts bob in wine vats – but feels richer and stranger. It's essentially a cautionary fairy tale for the age of swinging tourists.

▶ **Extras** A choice of audio commentaries from two punditry teams: Kim Newman and Sean Hogan plus Troy Howarth and Nathaniel Thompson. An interview with director Eugenio Martin (24 minutes) touches on his battles with the Spanish censors and finds him comparing the movie to puppet theatre. Plus: trailer; gallery. **Nick Setchfield**



“But all I did was put the heating on for 10 minutes!”

AUDREY ROSE

Who's That Girl?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 7 NOVEMBER**

1977 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Robert Wise**

▶ Cast **Marsha Mason, Anthony Hopkins, John Beck, Susan Swift**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **A '70s movie based** on a popular novel, which sees a well-to-do American family's life turned upside down by their daughter's inexplicable behaviour, forcing them to reconsider their views on the spiritual realm... Sound familiar?

Though similarities with *The Exorcist* can't have hurt the box office, and young Ivy Templeton – who may or may not be a reincarnation of the titular five-year-old, killed in a car crash 11 years ago – has some distressing freak-outs, there's no pea soup here, with the film leaning more towards tug-of-love drama than outright horror. Sinister gargoyles on the family's brownstone home are as diabolical as it gets.

In between the emotionally wrought close-ups, there's some clever staging by veteran Robert Wise – a sequence which plays out dialogue-free, observed through the window, is especially powerful.

Boasting strong performances from Marsha Mason (impressively convincing as the mother with a scepticism-to-belief character arc) and Anthony Hopkins (who, as Audrey Rose's father, employs the unblinking gaze later employed as Hannibal Lecter to transmit mesmeric sincerity), it's a film which takes its premise fairly seriously – until a final-reel hypnotic regression session sees credulity finally snap with a resounding twang.

▶ **Extras** A talking head by a magician seems fairly pointless (19 minutes). The late author Frank de Felitta (12 minutes) has more to say about *The Entity*. A rather awkwardly-phrased visual essay (17 minutes) details other reincarnation movies. A “then and now” featurette (four minutes) simply displays the locations in split-screen, without comment.

There's also a decent talking head on the score (17 minutes), and a Marsha Mason interview (18 minutes). A critical commentary focuses on the film's themes. Plus: gallery; trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i Author Frank de Felitta was inspired by hearing his six-year-old son inexplicably playing the piano like Fats Waller.



THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1923 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Wallace Worsley**

▶ Cast **Lon Chaney, Patsy Ruth Miller, Norman Kerry, Brandon Hurst**

▶ **No wonder Lon Chaney, the** most chameleonic star of early Hollywood, chased the role of Quasimodo. Billed as The Man of a Thousand Faces, he's nothing if not a riot in the make-up box in this silent adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic novel.

All broken teeth and wart-blinded eye, he scampers across the cathedral ramparts, swinging from gargoyles and stepping on the heads of saints like a putty-faced primate. But while Chaney's grotesque but soulful physicality is endlessly watchable, he's outmatched by the sheer scale of his star vehicle, which musters 2,500 extras against acres of staggering sets, including a replica of the cathedral itself.

Nora Kroll-Rosenbaum and Laura Karpman provide an elegiac score for this new restoration. It's a century-old epic that finds a timeless sense of cruelty and capricious fate among the spectacle.

▶ **Extras** Kim Newman (22 minutes) provides some fascinating historical context for Hugo's novel and its many adaptations – did you know that Esmerelda, not Quasimodo, was originally the break-out character? – while fellow critic Jonathan Rigby (33 minutes) is equally good on the production of the film itself. There's also a commentary by Newman and Stephen Jones, along with a booklet. **Nick Setchfield**



GHOSTWATCH

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1992 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Lesley Manning

▶ Cast Michael Parkinson, Sarah Greene, Craig Charles, Gillian Bevan

BLU-RAY DEBUT Marking its 30th anniversary, this Blu-ray offers a fresh chance to uncouple the BBC's faux-reality tale (which presented itself as a "live" investigation of a house plagued by poltergeist activity) from its own legend.

What strikes you is just how cleverly it weaponises the aesthetics of TV to generate its dread. The spectral Pipes lurks in the fuzz of a VHS freeze-frame, his malevolent presence half-glimpsed as a hand-held camera swings through a humdrum world of crisp packets, woodchip walls and Jason Donovan posters that could be the viewer's own.

It's clear how *Ghostwatch* anticipates everything from *The Blair Witch Project* to *[REC]*, making the medium itself a medium for its restless spirits. Meanwhile anchors Michael Parkinson and Sarah Greene remain heroically plausible as Stephen Volk's story edges into remarkably dark territory.

▶ **Extras** An excellent new documentary (48 minutes) provides insights from cast and crew. Director Lesley Manning also takes us through a selection of script pages, floorplans and more (seven minutes). There's a choice of commentaries – Manning, Volk and producer Ruth Baumgarten or film historians Shellie McMurdo and Stella Gaynor – and a booklet with a short story by Volk, plus six art cards and a repro of the script annotated by Manning. **Nick Setchfield**



COME BACK LUCY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1978 | PG | DVD

▶ Director Paul Harrison

▶ Cast Emma Bakhle, Bernadette Windsor, Phyllida Law, Royce Mills

▶ **Young fogeys will feel an affinity for the heroine of this Sunday afternoon children's serial.** Adapted from a 1973 book, it sees a girl shipped off to live with remote cousins after her aunt dies. There she's repeatedly lured back into the past by a ghostly Victorian girl.

Producer Shaun O'Riordan was prepping *Sapphire & Steel*, and certain, ahem, elements do (coincidentally?) feel of a piece with that series: the slipping in time occurs via reflections, and the titles feature a spookily faceless figure.

The story rather treads water in the middle, but Lucy's withdrawal from the present works well as a metaphor for grief. Even at her most po-faced, she's sympathetic. And the raucous energy of the household (the kids discuss Marxism, and use their parents' first names – how very "metropolitan liberal elite") contrasts effectively with the Vaseline-smear 1877 sections.

▶ **Extras** A retrospective tracks down the director, both writers and child actor Francois Evans. It lasts an impressive 68 minutes – although to be honest, half that would have been more than enough to learn that O'Riordan's own kids called him "Shaun", and that Evans wore a *Doctor Who* scarf knitted by his mum. A 53-minute chat by the makers of a podcast on the *Point Horror* books seems an odd fit for this demographic. Plus: German titles/end credits. **Ian Berriman**



HIGHLANDER

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1986 | 15 | 4K Blu-ray/download

▶ Director Russell Mulcahy

▶ Cast Christopher Lambert, Roxanne Hart, Clancy Brown, Sean Connery

▶ **Both an archetypal '80s action movie** (The hair! The ageing punks! The "I want it all" ethos!) and a film ahead of its time, *Highlander* transcends dodgy effects and bizarre casting to become a hugely entertaining cult classic.

With immortals battling across centuries to decapitate each other until only one's left, it's one of the few movies that has even people with little grasp of filmmaking techniques waxing lyrical about transition shots and non-linear storytelling. Plus it has bloody big swords and a fantastically deranged villain who gets all the best lines. While 4K is less than kind to some of the film's ropier effects, it's great to see director Russell Mulcahy's sumptuous, stylised visuals in UHD for the first time.

▶ **Extras** Sadly the new bonuses are a bland bunch. "A Kind Of Magic" (14 minutes) is an overly academic featurette on the film's music that doesn't feature any members of Queen. "Capturing Immortality" (13 minutes) looks at the work of the stills photographer (esoteric or what?). A Clancy Brown interview (14 minutes) livens things up, but the Making Of (56 minutes) is largely humdrum. There's little in the way of behind-the-scenes footage, and of three commentaries only one is new. Plus, physical goodies: a 64-page booklet, prequel comic, four badges, four art cards and a poster. **Dave Golder**



THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1932 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Irving Pichel

▶ Cast Joel McCrea, Fay Wray, Leslie Banks, Robert Armstrong

BLU-RAY DEBUT Remade, much imitated and flagrantly ripped off in everything from *Hart To Hart* to *Octopussy*, this original adaptation of Richard Connell's short story has the kind of killer premise studios crave: on a private island, a maniac maroons unwary travellers and hunts them as the ultimate blood sport.

In many ways it's a companion piece to *King Kong*: same producers, same composer, same stunning jungle sets and a shared damsel-in-distress in Fay Wray. But at just over an hour it's leaner and meaner, fusing a classic action-adventure menagerie (Sharks! Hounds! Alligators!) with such gothic touches as a trophy room filled with human heads. Lurid and punchy, stripped to the narrative bone, its long shadow across pulp entertainment is no surprise.

▶ **Extras** Audio commentary by Kim Newman and Stephen Jones. Newman also expands on the movie in-vision (19 minutes) – he's especially good on its many cinematic echoes. Film writer Stephen Thrower fronts an equally astute appraisal (20 minutes). Three creaky but evocative radio adaptations are included: 1943 (30 minutes), 1945 (29 minutes) and 1947 (30 minutes). Plus: audio reminiscences from producer Merian C Cooper (eight minutes); German trailer; booklet. **Nick Setchfield**



"This is the last time I come to Glasto."

VESPER

Seeds of change



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Download

(also in selected cinemas)

▶ Directors **Kristina Buožytė,**

Bruno Samper

▶ Cast **Raffiella Chapman, Eddie**

Marsan, Rosy McEwen, Richard Brake

➔ Detailed and imaginative

worldbuilding is the main draw of this Lithuanian/French/Belgian co-production, a long-time-coming second feature from the makers of *Vanishing Waves* (2012).

It's set in a "new Dark Ages" after engineered viruses and organisms escaped, wiping out various crops and animals. Humanity's now divided between the oligarchic Citadels and those eking out a living in barren wastelands. The tomboyish Vesper (Raffiella Chapman) is a carer for her father – who, though

paralysed, still communicates via a drone. The discovery of a woman from a crashed glider offers hope for a better life, but also puts the girl in mortal danger.

A big-budget version of the tale would lead us into a Citadel, but *Vesper* stays grounded in its gloomy woods dotted with weird flora and fauna: surrealist fungi that feed on corpses; bugs that fire out of bushes like bullets.

It's a handsomely crafted film, from the grotty, mouldy interiors of *Vesper*'s home to the anatomically patterned costuming, and Chapman exudes a brooding catwalk charisma. If some blockbuster producers with deep pockets took a chance on this creative team, the results could be really special. **Ian Berriman**

i Design and lighting inspirations included 1973's *Fantastic Planet*, Jim Henson, Hayao Miyazaki, Rembrandt and Vermeer.



V/H/S/99



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER You know the deal: five directors make unrelated horror shorts, slap a video grain filter over the top to hide the budgetary constraints, and we all pretend VHS was a format worth being nostalgic for.

Though some of the previous *V/H/S* films have been a bit grim, this one is quite fun, with guaranteed jump scares and ghost train-style monsters in each section. Actual '90s kids might pick holes in the period fashions, but you can't argue with the sheer variety of nightmarish creatures on display here. **Sarah Dobbs**



PENNYWISE: THE STORY OF IT



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

➔ **This documentary about** the 1990 Stephen King miniseries recalls an impressive number of players from both sides of the camera. They provide a wealth of previously unseen images, as well as anecdotes about cut material. There's also behind-the-scenes footage, and archive interviews crying out for a fuller release. Director Tommy Lee Wallace says he'd now re-edit the series – come on, Warner Bros!

➔ **Extras** Five short featurettes; poster. **Darren Scott**



DEATHSPORT



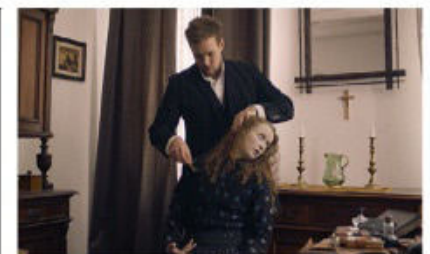
▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1978 | 18 | BLU-RAY

BLU-RAY DEBUT *Kung Fu*'s David Carradine stars in this cut-price post-apocalyptic actioner from schlock supremo Roger Corman. Set "a thousand years from tomorrow", it pits swords against motorbikes in gladiatorial duels – and throws in a spot of naked disco torture for good measure.

Bog-standard '70s hokum, in other words, but there's energy and imaginative framing along with some impressively staged pyro work.

➔ **Extras** Co-director/editor commentary; trailer; TV and radio spots; gallery. **Nick Setchfield**



POST MORTEM



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2021 | TBC | DOWNLOAD

➔ This well-executed

Hungarian ghost story mixes eerie thrills with a mordant sense of humour.

Tomás is a former soldier turned post mortem photographer. He takes pictures of the recently deceased with their living family members – a grisly, if lucrative job during the Spanish Flu pandemic, and one that leads him to a quite staggeringly haunted village.

Well shot and acted, there's a touch of class to Péter Bergendy's film that helps paper over some of its dafter moments. **Will Salmon**



TWO WITCHES

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Pierre Tsigaridis

▶ Cast Rebekah Kennedy, Tim Fox, Dina Silva, Belle Adams

➔ **For most people, rapid** backpedalling and bouquets would be called for after suggesting to your mum that she'd be just right for the role of a glowering, baby-eating hag. But *Two Witches* director Pierre Tsigaridis is still in the will...

A horror movie "made by fans, for fans" (especially of '70s Italian shockers) it's split into two interconnected chapters. In the first, an older witch (the aforementioned Marina Parodi) stalks a pregnant woman. The second sees Masha (Rebekah Kennedy), the granddaughter set to inherit her powers, gleefully cutting a swathe.

There are some vivid set-pieces here, and the bad taste extremity of a couple of them may prompt impressed gasps. However, the film's bombardment of thrashing heads, white pupils and sinister gurning is more often humorous than terrifying.

➔ **Extras** Tsigaridis and writer Maxime Rancon are all across the bonuses, providing separate commentaries and contributing to two promo pieces (12 minutes) and a Zoom Q&A for Grimmfest (30 minutes); Tsigaridis discusses the piano-led score too (11 minutes). There are also interviews with Parodi (eight minutes), co-star Dina Silva (16 minutes) and composer Gioacchino Marincola, who demonstrates some ingenious use of an oboe reed. Plus: camera/make-up tests; trailers; gallery; poster; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



"Lady Gaga? Never heard of her, my dear."

THE BALLAD OF TAM LIN

Away with the fairies

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1970 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Roddy McDowall

▶ Cast Ava Gardner, Ian McShane, Cyril Cusack, Richard Wattis

BLU-RAY DEBUT The latest BFI

Flipside rarity takes its name from a 16th century ballad about a man captured by the queen of the fairies, earning it a folk horror tag. But everything here is explicable by the power of money, not magic.

Ava Gardner, resplendent in an array of fabulous frocks, is Michaela Cazaret, reigning over a "coven" of hippy lotus-eaters in a Scottish country house. Ian McShane is the beguiled Tom Lynn. Stephanie Beacham's local innocent catches his eye, but can he escape Michaela's clutches?

Actor Roddy McDowall's one directorial credit, it's a visually ravishing affair, which luxuriates in both the natural grandeur of the Borders and the bone structure of its beautiful people. McShane is almost supernaturally handsome;

the camera lingers on long loving looks between him and Beacham.

Ultimately it's too arch a confection to induce genuine anxiety over Tom's fate. But it will still leave you rueing what could have been if only McDowall had continued down a directorial path.

➔ **Extras** Flipside's co-founders provide well-prepped commentary. Coven-kid Madeline Smith rambles adorably (and candidly) (32 minutes). Pentangle's singer discusses their evocative songs (27 minutes). Audio interviews record recollections by McShane and Beacham (21 minutes), plus Hans Zimmer on his mentor, composer Stanley Myers (20 minutes). McDowall's biographer talks through stills (12 minutes). There's also a grandiloquent 1998 intro by the director (18 minutes). Three archive shorts provide portraits of a hippy commune (34 minutes) and Borders life (26 minutes). Plus: trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i During the cast's stay at a Peebles hotel, Sean Connery (there playing golf) hit on Madeline Smith. She turned him down.



MANIAC

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1981 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director William Lustig

▶ Cast Joe Spinell, Caroline Munro, Gail Lawrence, Kelly Piper

BLU-RAY DEBUT A viscerally

repugnant protagonist and Tom Savini's effects wizardry helped propel *Maniac* to notoriety in the video nasty era. This 88 Films 4K restoration is the first to escape any BBFC cuts.

Joe Spinell plays Frank Zito, a serial killer who takes scalps as trophies, nailing them to the mannequins he keeps for company. Spinell's almost worrying level of commitment to (heavy-)breathing life into this pathetic, unhinged figure pays off; only Zito's ability to switch from a pot-bellied cry-baby to an urbane charmer capable of wooing Caroline Munro fails to convince.

The murder sequences – peaking with a shotgun attack which causes a victim's head to explode like a meat firework – are at times horribly tense, and with Zito's MO constantly changing, avoid repetition. A grubby, downbeat relic of a pre-Giuliani NYC, *Maniac* is so immersive that it may leave you feeling in need of a shower.

➔ **Extras** An impressive spread (mostly ported from the US Blue Underground release), ranging from vintage TV news reports to short interviews with the likes of Munro and Savini. A highlight is 2001 documentary "The Joe Spinell Story" (49 minutes), which provides some interesting insights into an unusual character. The one brand new addition is a commentary (one of three) by slasher podcast The Hysteria Continues. **Ian Berriman**

Reviews



YOU WON'T BE ALONE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Download

▶ Director Goran Stolevski

▶ Cast Sara Klimoska, Anamaria Marinca, Alice Englert

◉ **Goran Stolevski's debut** feature manages the difficult feat of investing a dark fairy tale with psychological realism.

Set around a village in 19th century Macedonia, it centres on Old Maid Maria (Anamaria Marinca), a Freddy Krueger-faced shapeshifting witch, and a baby who, after being marked by this blood-drinking "Wolf-Eateress", grows into a feral 16-year-old (Sara Klimoska). Nevena shares her "witch-mama's" abilities – and how gruesome they are, with transformations requiring the clawing of organs from dead bodies. (What seems like ancient folklore is mostly Stolevski's own invention.)

It's a coming of age tale told from the perspective of a mute outsider – keen to understand what being human means, and capable of assuming the body of a mother (Noomi Rapace, briefly), a young man or even a dog in her search for belonging.

Infused with a kind of gnomish poetry via the untutored Nevena's mouths-of-babes interior monologue, and blessed with a good deal of rugged natural beauty, it's a film which notes that life is full of cruelty and suffering, but also moments of tenderness which make it all worthwhile. No earth-shattering revelation, of course, but it's a truism convincingly restated here, with clear-eyed, syrup-free poignancy. **Ian Berriman**



HOCUS POCUS 2

★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | PG | SVOD

▶ Director Anne Fletcher

▶ Cast Bette Midler, Kathy Najimy, Sarah Jessica Parker, Doug Jones

DISNEY+ The Sanderson Sisters should have been renamed the Spineless Sisters for this eye-rollingly pointless sequel, which prioritises braindead declarations of girl power over thrills, frights or any semblance of an enjoyable plot.

Twenty-nine years after the original *Hocus Pocus* began its journey to becoming a home video hit with a generation of starry-eyed youngsters, Disney attempts to recreate the magic, but fails in the most boring way.

It's not even because the plot is paint-by-numbers stuff – the child-eating sister witches return to terrorise Salem once more – but down to how much their sharp edges have been filed down. They inflict no damage, fail to stalk or spook, and suck no souls out of nubile bodies. They don't even have any witty comebacks. What's the point?

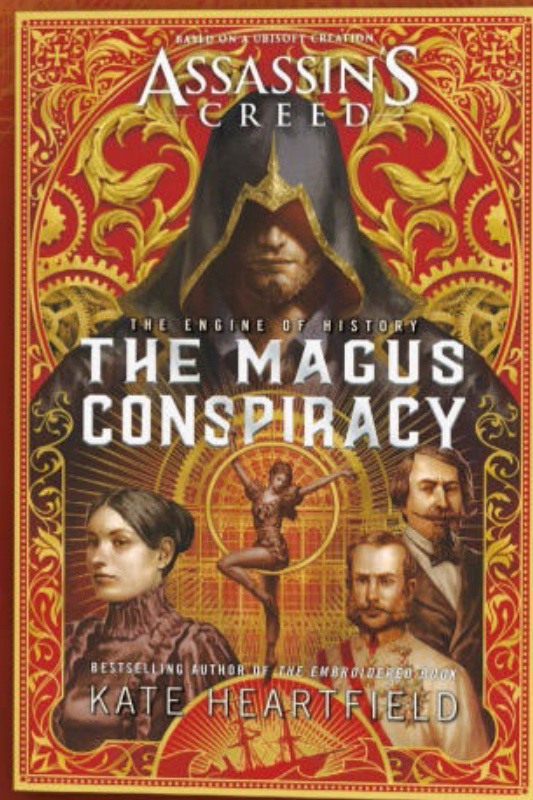
It's a dull film, unworthy of its three leads, but at least their chemistry provides some mildly funny moments. One sequence sees the sisters devouring skincare products from a range called Babyface, thinking it's made from babies. Later, while watching an apple-bobbing contest, they cry, "They're drowning a man? How delightful!"

If they make another return, hopefully these iconic witches will be hungry for the souls of studio execs who exploit people's childhood nostalgia in order to line their pockets.

Kimberley Ballard



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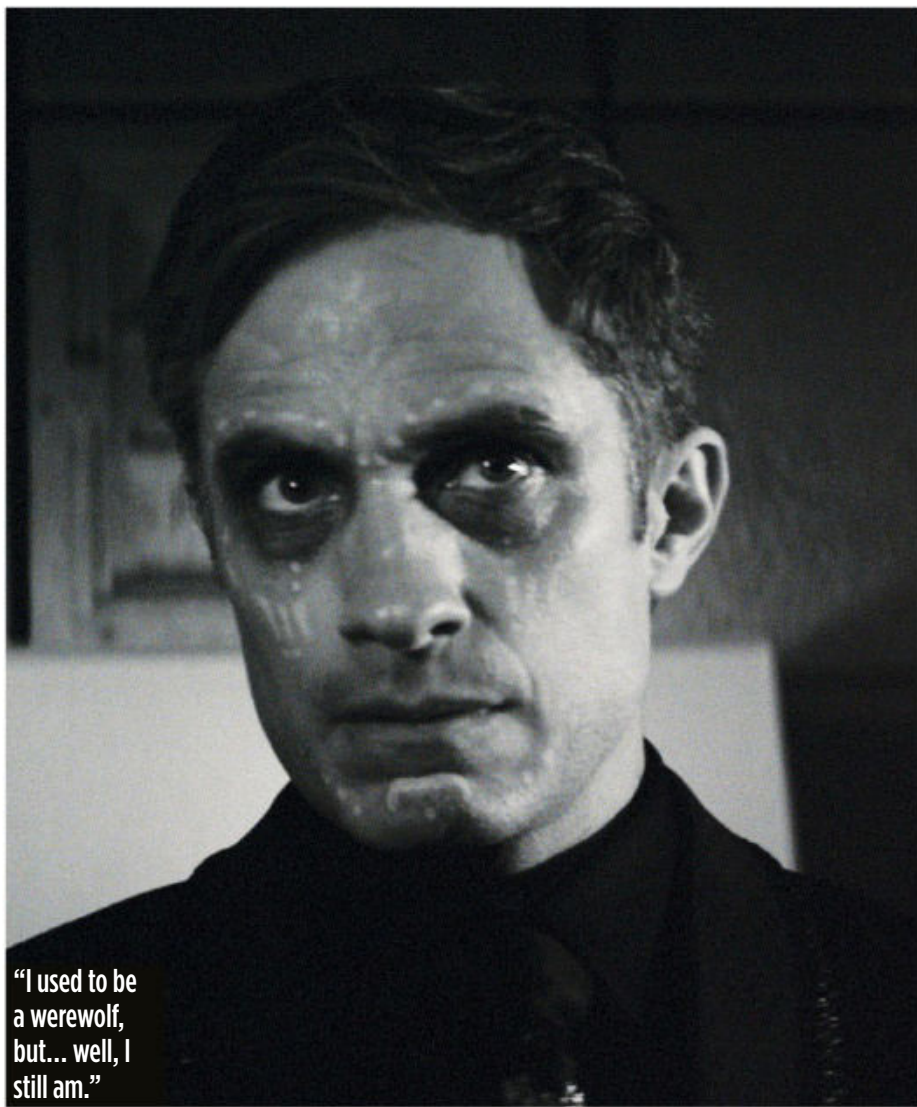


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"I used to be a werewolf, but... well, I still am."

WEREWOLF BY NIGHT

Where Monsters Dwell



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 16+ | Disney+

▶ Director Michael Giacchino

▶ Cast Gael Garcia Bernal, Laura Donnelly, Harriet Sansom Harris, Kirk R Thatcher

DISNEY+ Ostensibly a showcase for one of Marvel's more obscure players, this Halloween one-shot stakes a flag in a whole sub-universe of the comic books: the supernatural boom of the Bronze Age, when monsters, ghouls and other assorted night-stalkers slithered into the light.

But don't look for an authentically hairy '70s vibe here. Shot in crisp, scrumptious black and white, this is pure homage to pre-war horror, complete with lightning-blasted Marvel Studios ident and reel-break markers in the corner of the screen. There's

even a nod to *Famous Monsters*-style punnery: "I'll be rotting for you!" a corpse posthumously promises.

Thankfully it's just the right side of pastiche, and a safe distance from parody. Michael Giacchino proves as gifted a director as he is a soundtrack composer, keeping the monochrome action fluid and elegant. In a neat touch the climactic transformation is played as a stuttering shadow-show on a wall as the camera closes on a cowering Elsa Bloodstone. You sense a slight lack of confidence in the werewolf visuals but the sight of fan fave Man-Thing, brought to the screen in all his hulking vegetable glory, more than compensates. **Nick Setchfield**

i Man-Thing previously came to the screen in 2005, part of a doomed attempt to build an MCU with Artisan Entertainment.

NOBUHIKO OBAYASHI'S '80S KADOKAWA YEARS

Spirited Away



EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1981-1986 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Nobuhiko Obayashi

▶ Cast Hiroko Yakushimaru, Tomoyo Harada, Ryôichi Takayanagi, Riki Takeuchi

BLU-RAY DEBUT Early in his career, arthouse director Nobuhiko Obayashi (best known for cult '70s horror *House*) was out of time and out of fashion: too strange for mainstream audiences; too tender for a more radical one. This box set brings together four of his smaller films from the '80s.

The stand-out is *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, a beautifully dreamy version of the novel later adapted as an anime film. It's

joined by *School In The Crosshairs* (about a shy high-school student discovering telekinetic powers) and two less fantastical entries: coming-of-age movie *The Island Closest To Heaven* and black and white love story *His Motorbike, Her Island*.

Each feels like walking through a dream, with sepia-tinted footage that slowly blots into colour and strangely coordinated dance sequences. Even the most mundane images are imbued with poetry, like the curl of steam from a cup of hot tea. What really shines, though, is Obayashi's respect for the inner lives of young women. His heroines are shy but steely, perpetually curious, fanciful and romantic, but never stupid.



"Hey readers, Kadokawa is a big Japanese film studio."

This elevates the collection beyond being a curio, revealing a quiet intelligence and wistful disposition that brings pathos to Obayashi's eventual legacy as a surrealist filmmaker.

▶ **Extras** One highlight is an interview between a historian and Obayashi's daughter, where she shares anecdotes about working on her father's film sets (27 minutes). Another is video essay "Obayashi:

Femininity In Transition" (15 minutes). There are two archival interviews with the director (39 minutes). Three of the films come with new commentaries. Plus: audition footage of *Girl Who Leapt* actress Tomoyo Harada (seven minutes); music video; trailers; booklet. **Kimberley Ballard**

i In the late '70s, Obayashi was attached to a space-based *Godzilla* pitch. The story for it was published in *Starlog* in 1979.



A BOY AND HIS DOG

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1975 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director LQ Jones

▶ Cast Don Johnson, Susanne

Benton, Jason Robards, Alvy Moore

BLU-RAY DEBUT The title

suggests family-friendly Disney fare. Nope. Based on a 1969 Harlan Ellison novella, this is a hard-edged, low-budget post-apocalypse, quirky in its details, but cynical in outlook.

Don Johnson is the “boy”: Vic, a scavenger who subsists by stealing tinned goods. His dog sniffs things out, he shares the spoils; a symbiotic relationship, conducted telepathically.

“Broads” are a rarity in this mud-buried future, and Vic approaches them like cans of beets: as property. To spell it out: our “hero” is a serial rapist.

Feminists protested (Joanna Russ wrote, “Sending a woman to see [it] is like sending a Jew to a movie that glorifies Dachau”) but you can see why the film held appeal for the counterculture – travelling underground, Vic stumbles into a parody of smalltown USA, all marching bands, plaid and ruthlessly enforced conformity.

Whatever your view, that central partnership impresses, convincingly brought to life by Johnson, Tim McIntire (who supplies the condescending, huff-prone Blood’s voice) and a remarkably well-trained pooch.

➔ **Extras** As per Shout Factory’s 2013 US release. Harlan Ellison doesn’t hold back about what he didn’t like (“the misogynistic shit”) in a frank, funny, heartfelt discussion with director/old friend LQ Jones (51 minutes). You also get a very informative commentary by Jones, his DoP and a critic. **Ian Berriman**



TALES OF UNEASE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1970 | 15 | DVD

▶ Directors Various

▶ Cast Jeremy Clyde, Roy Dotrice,

Rachel Kempson, Terence Rigby

➔ **Unease is a rather mild** emotion. Not terror, not shock, just along the emotional register from experiencing the unexpected. Which makes this short-lived LWT anthology show well-named. Its seven episodes are unlikely to sear themselves into your psyche.

Taking its name from a series of horror anthologies (though only two stories are drawn from the books), it has some notable writers. James Leo Herlihy penned the novel *Midnight Cowboy*. Michael Hastings wrote TS Eliot play *Tom & Viv*.

Bouquet Of Barbed Wire’s Andrea Newman provides the stand-out: the tale of a neglected wife who locks her husband in his windowless study. An impressive showcase for Redgrave dynasty matriarch Rachel Kempson as the worm that turns, it surely articulates the resentment of a great swathe of ’70s womanhood.

The most overtly comical episode – “The Old Banger”, in which a car slowly returns to the couple who dumped it – is the next most memorable, for its jarringly bleak climax. The other five have little impact. And the title sequence’s revolving clay head is about as disquieting as the one in Lionel Richie’s “Hello” video.

➔ **Extras** Gallery; a booklet by TV historian Andrew Pixley. NB: expect drop-out lines and some muffled sound, with the subtitles (often comically off-beam) at times resorting to “indistinct”. **Ian Berriman**



THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD AND EVIL

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 12 | SVOD

▶ Director Paul Feig

▶ Cast Sophia Anne Caruso, Sofia Wylie, Charlize Theron, Laurence Fishburne

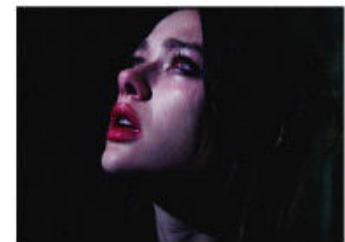
NETFLIX If you thought the Sorting Hat was a overly and obviously simplistic way of deciding if kids would grow up to be good or evil, you’re really going to roll your eyes at the beginning of *The School For Good And Evil*.

When BFFs Sophie and Agatha are selected to attend the magic school, there’s very little ceremony involved: they’re just dropped into their respective houses. Problem is, delicate blonde dreamer Sophie has been put into the scary School for Evil, while wild, witchy Agatha is thrust into the prim and proper School for Good. Surely some mistake? Maybe, but maybe not.

Paul Feig’s adaptation of Soman Chainani’s children’s novel is a smart, charming skewering of fairy tale tropes, where the Good school punishes students for substandard smiles and Evil students transform their desks into chocolate. The film manages to find new things to say about the way children’s stories, and thus culture more generally, construct false binaries and encourage black and white thinking.

And, well, it’s just really fun. The real star here is costume designer Renee Ehrlich Kalfus; if there’s one stereotype that *doesn’t* get deconstructed, it’s that the bad guys are always impeccably dressed. **Sarah Dobbs**

(ROUND UP)



A teenage girl stops eating in eerie, femalecentric British horror **A BANQUET** (out now, Blu-ray). As the months fly by, however, she never loses any weight. We said: “Beguilingly inexplicable. It’s difficult to pin down what the writer is up to... this leaves the film lingering in your mind.”

Second Sight’s generously stocked release includes a *Making Of*, four interviews and festival Q&A, plus essay book and art cards. Arrow Video updates its 2016 release with a new edition of **THE COUNT YORGA COLLECTION** (out now, Blu-ray). This vampiric double-bill comprises contemporary California-based horrors *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and *The Return Of Count Yorga* (1971). We said: “Hand-held camerawork gives the essentially creaky tale an edgy energy... The sequel adds a sense of gothic melancholy and some sly meta humour.” Additional bonuses include new expert commentaries, a podcast tribute to star Robert Quarry, and an interview with *Yorga* fan Frank Darabont. Also revived by Arrow:

VIDEODROME (out now, 4K Blu-ray), David Cronenberg’s classic 1983 sci-fi/horror about a cable TV CEO who stumbles upon underground broadcasts of torture scenes. We said: “With its unflinching gaze into the murky depths of human desire, it remains as potent and thought-provoking as ever.” UHD format aside, the only new bonus on the disc seems to be the option to choose the shorter US theatrical cut. You also get a double-sided poster and six art cards reproducing lobby cards.



LIBERATION DAY

Freedom and why it matters

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

256 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **George Saunders**

► Publisher **Bloomsbury Publishing**

► **All science fiction fans are** grimly familiar with the idea that readers of literary fiction can be rather snuffy about the field. What's less often acknowledged, at least from the science fiction side of this equation, is that some fans of the genre are just as guilty of snobbery.

Certainly, there are some good reasons to be sceptical of certain lit-fic writers' excursions into the future. There have, down the years, been plenty of examples of dilettante science fiction: books that take on a familiar trope, but don't do enough with it because the writer doesn't have the knowledge to realise that they're covering old ground.

But this kind of novel gets into print less often than in previous years. This is perhaps partly because editors are now more aware of the problem. More positively, it's because science fiction is far more central to mainstream culture than it was even 20 years ago. For a serious novelist such as Emily St John

Mandel – to name but one – science fiction is just one part of her toolkit.

We mention all this because there will be *SFX* readers who'll question whether we should be reviewing a book of short stories by George Saunders, a man best known for winning the Booker Prize for a historical novel, *Lincoln In The Bardo* (2017).

To understand why we believe we should, the opening story, which gives this collection of nine tales its name, is a good place to start. First of all, it's quite simply one of the best science fiction short stories to be published in the 21st century so far, concerning enslaved actors, who in crucial ways have lost their sense of self, reenacting Custer's Last Stand for the sake of a privileged audience.

It's a story where, as we noted when interviewing the author last issue, past, present and future play into each other in ways that constantly catch you by surprise. Rereading the story only makes it appear all the more remarkable, because Saunders is a storyteller whose prose is sparse, sometimes even ascetic.

Almost as remarkable is "Ghoul". Seemingly set in the Hell-themed area of an underground

amusement park, it plays out like a cult dystopian SF film from the '70s, one of those movies where, for all that you think you know what's going on, you're still left with a creeping sense of disquiet bordering on the screaming heebie-jeebies.

These stories set one of the main themes of the collection in the way that they talk about underdogs. If all storytellers are ultimately writing about the present, Saunders is livid at what he sees when he looks around. Yes, at a world of inequality, but perhaps more importantly at a world where too few people have agency. "Love Letter", written from an authoritarian near-future, tells you explicitly why this is so important.

It's not just internally that narratives in the stories resonate. The atmosphere of "Liberation Day" in particular seems to bleed into stories that aren't even overtly science fictional. "A Thing At

“Saunders is livid at what he sees when he looks around”

Work", for example, which deals with class and office politics, is somehow imbued with a sense that it's taking place in the same timeline that will one day bring us to a dystopian world.

There are parallels here with the later novels of JG Ballard or the recent fiction of William Gibson, in that they're both authors who revel(ed) in the sheer strangeness of now, so that whenever they set their stories they seem to be science fictional.

Saunders comes at fiction from a different angle to either of these writers, but he's covering some of the same fictional ground, and moreover doing so with style, humour and, in his ability to show us why even the most flawed characters act as they do, compassion.

An extraordinary book.

Jonathan Wright

i Among the many fiction prizes Saunders has won is the World Fantasy Award, for his 2006 short story "CommComm".



CELESTIAL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 3 NOVEMBER**

336 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author **MD Lachlan**

► Publisher **Gollancz**

► **This 1977-set lunar thriller** takes inspiration from an ambitious, Tarantino-esque range of sources, but they don't quite coalesce.

The novel starts off in *For All Mankind* territory, as NASA linguist Ziggy Da Luca is recruited for a top-secret mission to investigate a mysterious hatch discovered by Soviet cosmonauts on the Moon. Before long, however, Ziggy and her crew have more to worry about than the Cold War, as they find themselves in an unlikely mash-up of *Prometheus*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Annihilation* and – most bizarrely of all – *Ready Player One*.

MD Lachlan (who also writes as Mark Alder and Mark Barrowcliffe) keeps things pacy throughout and – thanks to Ziggy's questions about her faith and suitability for the mission – builds the story around an engaging central character. Unfortunately, other aspects of the book don't ring quite as true.

Too much of the plot hangs on the actions of a prejudiced, trigger-happy crewmate who seems way too volatile to be trusted on such a sensitive, world-changing mission. And while Lachlan fully embraces the chance to describe a bizarre alien world where the normal laws of physics are turned upside down and beyond, *Celestial's* sillier edges push the limits of plausibility – even by sci-fi standards.

Richard Edwards



THE DARK BETWEEN THE TREES



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Fiona Barnett

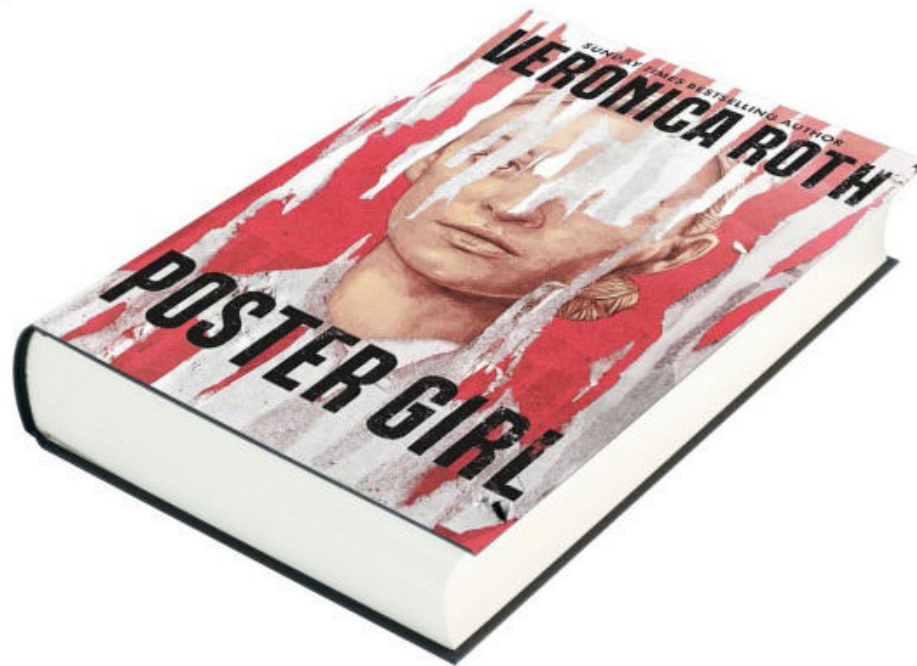
► Publisher Solaris

◉ **Woods are naturally** strange and liminal places, where it's all too easy to get lost. Fiona Barnett's debut novel alternates between two groups separated by almost 400 years, trapped in this horror setting with something inhuman.

In 1647, a group of Parliamentary soldiers are ambushed and flee into Moresby Woods. Most of them are never seen or heard from again, and the two that do make it out tell tales of evil lurking in the trees. In the present, five women led by Dr Alice Christopher set out to discover what happened to the lost men, not realising they're going into the same danger.

Barnett's prose is strong, effortlessly conjuring an atmosphere of creeping dread. *The Blair Witch Project* and Ben Wheatley's *A Field In England* feel like clear reference points, and the sense that something truly ancient and inexplicable is happening around these people is eerily conveyed – this isn't quite the straightforward monster hunt it first appears.

That said, there's an awful lot of trudging around, and only a few of the (many) characters feel fully fleshed-out. And while the climax has a powerful sense of inevitability, some may find it frustratingly open-ended. Still, an unsettling and compelling folk horror. **Will Salmon**



POSTER GIRL

The Golden Child



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

288 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Veronica Roth

► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

◉ **When you've made your name** as an author who likes to dabble in the odd dystopia – as Veronica Roth has done with her *Divergent* and *Carve The Mark* series – it must be hard to keep thinking up new evil regimes or totalitarian governments without things becoming stale. This novel certainly feels too familiar on first glance, set as it is in a world in which citizens receive points for good behaviour – much as *Black Mirror* explored in the episode “Nosedive”, which itself riffed on the real-life social credit system in China.

Poster Girl does throw one welcome spanner in the works, however: the evil points-awarding government (The Delegation) have already been overthrown by a nicer one (The Triumverate). Hurrah! But are they *really* nicer? For starters, they've locked away anyone who used to work for The Delegation – which includes teenager Sonya, who once appeared on a poster promoting the old regime.

And so, when she's given the chance to earn her freedom by

finding a missing child, she pursues it doggedly. A novel that begins with a fairly conventional Orwellian theme thereby morphs into an extremely satisfying and chewy detective noir, as Sonya's sprawling investigation leads her into the path of everyone from anti-technology terrorists to Alexander, the traitorous brother of the man she was once supposed to marry.

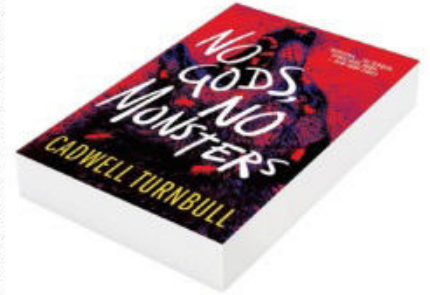
Roth is a master not only at solid world-building, but also at drip-feeding just enough information to hide the story's

“Morphs into an extremely satisfying detective noir”

end while still making the guesswork jolly good fun. And as an author who's already had her work adapted for the big screen, it's probably no coincidence that *Poster Girl* all but screams “Make me into a Netflix miniseries!”

On the page alone, *Poster Girl* is still a classy, pleasingly self-contained mystery that scores all the right points. **Jayne Nelson**

i To help her get into Sonya's head, Veronica Roth left social media for six months, from October 2020 to May 2021.



NO GODS, NO MONSTERS



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Cadwell Turnbull

► Publisher Titan Books

◉ **Somewhere in the** multiverse, another version of you *isn't* reading this magazine. You're busy running a marathon, or you're blind, or – well, multiverse plotlines have been everywhere lately, so you're probably already familiar with the concept.

Good thing, too, because Cadwell Turnbull's new urban fantasy shoves the reader in at the deep end and leaves them to flounder. There's a guy who can slide between universes to check in with other versions of his dead brother; there's a hand-eating dragon child; there are at least two different warring secret societies; and at one point the universe itself wanders across the page. Turnbull clearly isn't short of ideas.

The problem is, none of it ever resolves into anything you could call a plot. There are themes (Guilt! Trauma! Solidarity!) and there are metaphors, but in terms of an actual story? It's like trying to start watching a supernatural soap opera that's already been running for six seasons.

The lack of resolution (or sometimes even progress) suggests there are sequels planned, and the loveliness of the prose means reading more would be no hardship, but the next instalment might need a thorough “previously on” to make sure everyone's up to speed. **Sarah Dobbs**

THE MAGIC OF MINALIMA

A font of wizarding graphics



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

226 pages | Hardback

► Authors Miraphora Mina, Eduardo Lima

► Publisher Harper Design

◉ **MinaLima** is a design studio formed by Miraphora Mina and Eduardo Lima. They met during the first *Harry Potter* movie – Lima starting off doing work

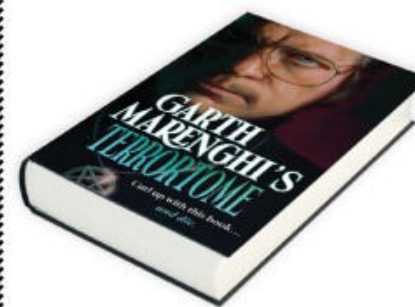
experience for Mina – and went on to provide thousands upon thousands of props with a graphic design element for all the subsequent *Potter* and *Wizarding World* films: posters, books, sweet packaging, newspapers, labels for potion bottles, tickets for the Quidditch World Cup and countless more items.

This elegantly-designed, image-packed book celebrates

their work, and not just hero pieces such as the Marauder's Map and the Black family tree. The vast majority of their props made blink-and-you'll miss it cameos – if you could see them at all – so it's a real eye-opener to see the attention to detail and thought that went into each design.

The pictures do the talking here (almost literally, as there's so much amusing text in the graphics), which is a good thing since the book's actual text is fairly banal, although it occasionally reveals some interesting nuggets. There's also an odd approach to captions, in that there aren't any – you have to keep flipping to the back of the book, where the image details are collated into a six-page compendium. But for browsability, this is unbeatable. **Dave Golder**

i The movies' Marauder's Map originally included the Room of Requirement, before it was covered up by a compass graphic.



GARTH MARENGHI'S TERRORTOME



► **RELEASED 3 NOVEMBER**

304 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Garth Marenghi**

► Publisher **Hodder Studio**

◉ **He's back, pilgrims.** *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* may have only run for a single season of six episodes back in 2004, but Matthew Holness's character left a huge mark on a generation of comedy and genre fans. An arrogant, insufferable paperback horror hack, the only thing Marenghi loves more than mangling a metaphor is himself – as this trio of tales proves.

In "Type-Face", a legendary horror writer (now who could Garth be basing this character on?) strikes an unwise deal with a demonic typewriter. In "Bride Of Bone" a skeletal serial killer is on the loose in the town of Stalkford. And in "The Dark Fractions" the protagonist must deal with a rampaging force of devilish doppelgangers.

Terrortome is a funny book in every sense. You could argue that it's basically the same gag throughout, but that's what we're here for and what makes it alternately excruciating and hilarious. Holness (who, of course, *actually* penned *Terrortome*) has such a precise command of language and a total understanding of his character's insecurities, passive aggression and venal desires that it's impossible not to hear Marenghi speaking while you're reading. The audiobook, narrated in character, will be an absolute treat. **Will Salmon**

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OUR SHARE OF NIGHT



★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

736 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Mariana Enriquez

► Publisher Granta Books

🔗 **This book is A Lot.** You may need to take palate-cleansing breaks with kitten videos on YouTube... if you can put it down, that is.

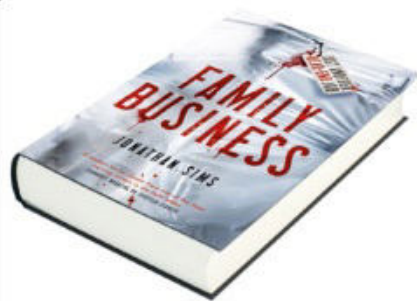
A hit on its original publication in Spanish in 2019, Mariana Enriquez's epic of occult rituals, family secrets, political oppression and grisly violence now arrives in English translation. Set during Argentina's decades of dictatorship, it's layered, lurid and smart, as well as gripping in a way that a tome of this size surely has no right to be.

Gaspar is a scion of a very old and very rich colonial family, which owns half the country and (not entirely coincidentally) has a penchant for human sacrifice. After Gaspar's mother dies in murky circumstances, his father Juan battles to protect Gaspar from the cult, at the cost of his own health and sanity.

This involves lying a whole bunch to Gaspar, who – fairly understandably – becomes less and less willing to trust dear old dad as he grows up. A showdown approaches; a country convulses in poverty and unrest; a reviewer struggles to summarise a giant plot without giving too much away.

Using fantasy and horror tropes to tackle difficult history isn't a new idea, but Enriquez makes it feel fresh and unsettling, and keeps the pages turning. Outstanding.

Nic Clarke



FAMILY BUSINESS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

336 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Jonathan Sims

► Publisher Gollancz

🔗 **What happens at a crime scene** after the police have been and gone? In her new job as a trauma cleaner, Diya finds out: usually, a team of specialists comes in to mop up.

Frank Slough and his family have been in the business for generations, but after the death of his son George, he needs an extra pair of hands. It's not exactly Diya's dream job, but it pays well, and she's good at it – at least until she starts having intense hallucinations. Turns out there's one particular client, the mysterious "Mr Bill", whose jobs are always a bit strange, and for Diya, there's more to the work than just cleaning up the physical messes left behind by the dead...

Although the supernatural threat is thrillingly rendered, it's not the most haunting part of this novel. Jonathan Sims writes so evocatively about people and places that the sad, dark, forgotten houses he's shining his metaphorical torch around here feel real, their desperately lonely inhabitants almost climbing right out of the page. Sims's London is hopelessly divided, a city where nobody knows their neighbours and everyone triple-locks their doors.

It's almost too persuasive, robbing the book's ending of any real sense of triumph – but this is horror, after all, and what better sign that it's done its job than an uneasy sense that you're no longer safe in your own home? **Sarah Dobbs**



A FRACTURED INFINITY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

368 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Nathan Tavares

► Publisher Titan Books

🔗 **If we accept multiverse theory** as fact, then how much can one person, in one reality, really matter? And before you answer: what if that one person was the love of your life?

Struggling documentary maker Hayes slams into that question over and over again in Nathan Tavares's science fiction love story. Turns out an alternate Hayes created a device that can calculate the future, and then drop-kicked it into this reality, where this Hayes was recruited by shadowy government types to help make it work. Along the way, he falls for sexy physicist Yusuf, so when the Envisioner tells him Yusuf is going to be killed, Hayes decides he'll do anything to save him. Even if that means letting billions of others die.

Having Hayes, with his filmmaker's sensibilities, narrating, makes everything extra cinematic. How does the Envisioner work? There's some science, but does it matter? All you need to know is it allows Hayes and Yusuf to jump between universes, running from their alternate selves and the chaos they've unleashed.

Tavares's prose is dense, chewy, packed with one idea after another as he deftly builds not just one possible future world but dozens, all without ever losing sight of the most important thread: Hayes's love for Yusuf. **Sarah Dobbs**

REISSUES

Pick of the paperbacks: **THE THIS** (★★★★★, 10 November, Gollancz) by Adam Roberts. In the near-future, a social media

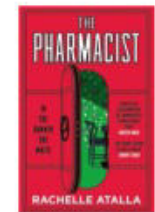


app allows people to post just by thinking, via an implant. Further in the future, the dimwitted

Adan just wants to play games and have sex with his smart-companion, but has to enlist in the US army to fight sentient robots. We said: "At first, with its disparate threads, it's a little frustrating. But the connections do start to emerge, and the novel goes from very interesting to extremely interesting... Could change the way you think." **Rachelle Atalla's**

THE PHARMACIST

(★★★★★, 10 November, Hodder & Stoughton) is



centred on the bunker-dwelling survivors of an apocalyptic incident.

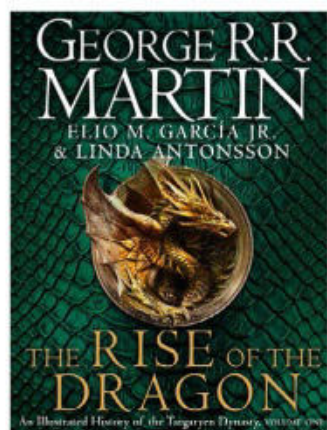
The titular pharmacist is initially a peripheral figure... then the increasingly paranoid community leader asks her to report on her patients. We said: "The keenly-observed details stick in the memory... It's remarkable how Atalla makes this bleak, limited world so vivid and engrossing." Finally, **Andrew Caldecott's** **MOMENTICON** (★★★★★, 10 November, Jo Fletcher Books) is set in a future where the atmosphere has



turned toxic, with survivors living in shielded domes. One's a Museum Dome, where protagonist

Fogg is the curator. He and a young woman end up on the run from the forces of darkness. We said: "Caldecott's world is very inventive. There's plenty of incident... Yet the novel doesn't quite have the forward drive this promises."

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



THE RISE OF THE DRAGON

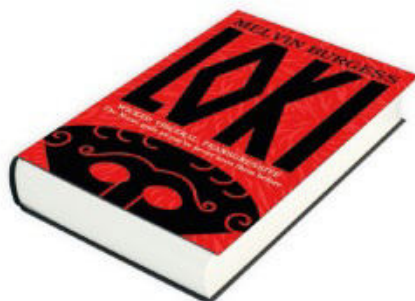
► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Authors George RR Martin, Elio M García Jr, Linda Antonsson

► Publisher HarperVoyager

- An entry-level version of George RR Martin's *Game Of Thrones* tome *Fire & Blood*. It's the same Targaryen-only history, but with simplified language/structure.
- The timeline runs from Aegon's Conquest to Aegon III Dragonbane.
- Loses some of George's style and wit, but is much easier to dip in and out of.
- A useful guide for *House Of The Dragon* newbies: all the spoilers for season one and beyond can be found here.
- Includes 180 epic and awesome new illustrations from 38 different artists.
- The art involves a lot of dragon stuff, but also kings, queens, knights and some glorious castles.



LOKI

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 17 NOVEMBER**

272 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Melvin Burgess

► Publisher Coronet

🔗 The *Twilight* saga led to a million stories about vampires. *The Hunger Games* sparked endless tales of teenage girls fighting against dystopian regimes. In much the same way, the MCU has been responsible for an upsurge of interest in the Norse gods, with Loki probably the most popular of them all (sorry about that, Thor). Which brings us to Melvin Burgess's *Loki*, the latest attempt to flog a dead (eight-legged) horse. Is it good? Yes. Is it necessary? Well, er...

An award-winning author of teen fiction, Burgess hasn't held back for his first adult work. Written from the Trickster god's perspective, *Loki* is bulging with violence, swearing and scatology (humans are referred to as "arse-borns" because Loki crafts our species out of a giant turd). Burgess recounts Loki's genius, perceived injustices and, most notably, his outrageous sex life with great gusto, pulling together many tales into one – sometimes beautifully lyrical – masterwork.

Ten to 15 years ago, this could have been a definitive stamp on the legend. By now, however, Loki's story is over-familiar: his adventures have been whittled away by too many modern adaptations for this book to feel relevant. Perhaps it's best read in another decade or two, when the long, storied history of this troublesome scamp has taken a recuperative break.

Jayne Nelson



THE STARS UNDYING

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 NOVEMBER**

516 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Emery Robin

► Publisher Orbit Books

🔗 "Shakespeare in space" isn't the most original of concepts, but this debut novel isn't quite as straightforward a swap as *Forbidden Planet*, though it does update Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra to a space opera setting. And though you'll most likely know the characters and betrayals from the Bard's works, it draws inspiration from history far beyond the famous plays.

Gracia is the deposed heir to the throne of Szayet, struggling to stay alive and ahead of her twin sister Arcelia, who has claimed the crown. Ceirran is the Commander of Ceiao, a powerful leader who's just won a bloody civil war and is currently the unwilling guest of Arcelia, along with his soldiers and second-in-command Ana. Around them is spun a story of sex, space and ambition that is certainly familiar but still wonderfully compelling.

The real-world foundations the book draws on help, but it's still notable how well-built the worlds it creates are. And Gracia and Ceirran, through whose words the story is told, are brilliantly drawn characters, sympathetic and yet near peerless in ego and ambition. Serving as a reminder that so many civilisation-sweeping changes come down to personality and personal relationships, beliefs and betrayals, it's a rivetingly good read. **Rhian Drinkwater**

ALSO OUT

Vaishnavi Patel's **KAIKEYI** (out now, Orbit)

reimagines the life of the queen from Indian epic the Ramayana. In Rebecca Mix's dark YA fantasy

THE ONES WE BURN

(8 November, Hodder & Stoughton), a blood-witch chosen as a treaty-bride must choose between the coven that raised her and a human princess who sees beyond the monster she was shaped to be.

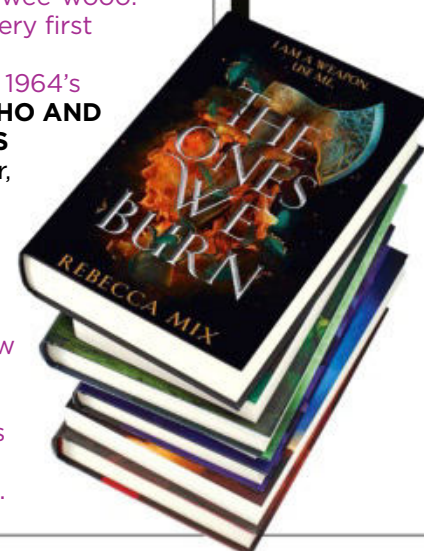
A popular toy with a connected smartphone app starts demanding flesh from its young owners in **IF THIS BOOK EXISTS, YOU'RE IN THE WRONG UNIVERSE** (out now, Titan), Jason Pargin's latest follow-up to *John Dies At The End*. Jane Barnett's **DEATH LINES** (out now, Strange Attractor Press) features eight walking guides exploring London's role in horror cinema, leading the reader on paths related to films like *Peeping Tom*, *Gorgo* and *The Sorcerers*.

Pop culture prof Sir Christopher Frayling is the author of **VAMPIRE CINEMA: THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS** (out now, Reel Art Press), a handsomely illustrated coffee table volume.

CREEPSHOW: FROM SCRIPT TO SCREAM (8 November, Titan) goes behind-the-scenes on the Shudder anthology show.

CLANGERS: THE COMPLETE SCRIPTS 1969-1974 (Unbound, 10 November) sounds like an elaborate gag, right? Their dialogue was written in English, though, so it's not just 288 pages of "Wee-wooo-wee-wooo!"

Finally, the very first *Doctor Who* novelisation, 1964's **DOCTOR WHO AND THE DALEKS** (3 November, BBC Books) has been reissued as a deluxe hardback featuring new full-colour artwork by Titan Comics cover artist Robert Hack.





Garth Marenghi

The legendary horror writer honours the pages of *SFX* with his presence



MATTHEW HOLNESS

Describe the room in which you typically write.

I use two rooms. One is an oubliette lined in unworked jet, lacking either doors or windows (I get in via the air conditioning vent). This is to prevent distraction and surround me entirely in black. The only issue is visibility, as generally I can't see the page in front of me, nor plug in a desk/lava lamp. The second room I use is an elevated eyrie I erected in my back garden last year in order to look out across distant cosmic vistas, but Barratt are extending the estate further and I can't get planning permission to go higher.

Do you have any personal mementos on your desk?

I keep a framed X-ray of my brain's interior close by in case I require inspiration (I never do) and alongside that, a painting of my family and I, skeletal and fully flayed, gorging on the disembowelled body of our dead dog, Tosser. I commissioned it when he died from wasp stings, and it really helped pull us all through a very difficult time.

Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

Music, no. Wailing, yes.

Which of your books are you the most proud of?

The one called "all of them".

Do you have any writing "bad habits" that you have to keep in check?

I tend to get quite hard when writing, but that goes with the territory when you're penning "balls to the wall" horror. I usually have the room locked and secured, so dignity is assured for all, but it's largely why I refuse to pen anything "off the cuff" at signings. Alan Titchmarsh does the exact opposite, of course. But then if you're hawking soft erotica alongside professional gardening advice, it's hard to prevent worlds (and rods) colliding.

Have you ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

I believe you mean nightmare. And yes, of course, fool.



Sexy gardener Alan Titchmarsh: prolific.

"I tend to get quite hard when writing, but that goes with the territory"

Were you a keen reader as a child? Which books were your favourites?

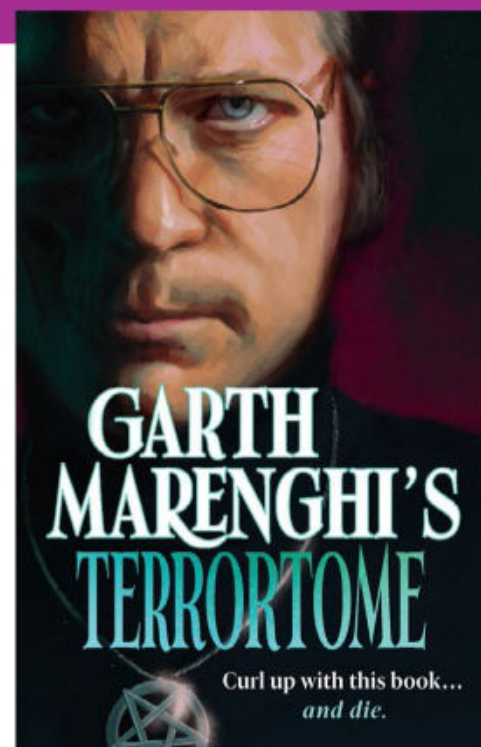
From my earliest days, I have always been an inveterate reader of my own work, from my first sentient scrawl, "Die, die, die..." to the darkest of my nursery-period doodles, "See Mummy Cry". Hands down my favourite work from the period is "Garth see dog. Car hit dog. Garth poke dog."

Is there any particular author whose writing ability makes you envious?

"Enviied" is a better word here, in which case your sentence will apply to any writer you care to name. "Enraged" is also a good substitute. In which case, Richard Osman.

Where's the oddest place you've seen one of your books?

Between the lower rear cheeks of a young fanatic at Fornicon '97 – I was there to promote my erotic occult detective thriller *Rectus Flagellum*. I told him that I would have happily signed it for him



pre-slottage, but refused to extract it personally post-clench.

By the time security were summoned, he'd set the thing alight, which negated further discussion.

What's the biggest misconception people have about professional authors?

That they plot, rewrite, finesse their work and listen to editors.

What's the most frustrating thing about being an author?

Editors. ●

Garth Marenghi's Terrortome is out on 3 November, published by Hodder Studio.

BLACK ADAM

Ringin' the changes



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Priest**

► Artist **Rafa Sandoval**

ISSUES 1-4 As the movie tagline

"The world needed a hero. It got Black Adam" indicates, launching a new monthly title featuring a morally questionable, seemingly immortal despot who's killed thousands of people over millennia is no easy task.

Priest – first name Christopher, and not to be confused with the British sci-fi author of the same name – gets around this cleverly by infecting Lord Theo Rameses Djoser Teth-Adam – to give him his full title – with an apparently fatal space virus, and passing on his magic ring to a new successor

in the shape of one of his many descendants, African-American medical student Malik White. Assuming the form of White Adam, Malik immediately shows where his true priorities lie by transporting the stricken Teth-Adam from Kahndaq to Washington DC, where he proceeds to stabilise his patient using modern medicine rather than ancient wisdom.

Perhaps best read in chunks, Priest's script is dense and nuanced and some effort is required to keep up with its numerous developments, as it constantly shifts between different time frames and locations, including an interstellar battle with a fake Darkseid and the assassination of one of Teth-Adam's political rivals.

Refreshingly optimistic and good-humoured, it sees Priest establishing a rich everyday life for Malik, who is "stuck in the friend zone" with his best pal Jasmin and also has to deal with his troubled sister, Nisha, and her endearing baby.

Most intriguingly, issue three introduces a new pantheon of gods based on Sumerian and Mesopotamian legend, who will hopefully play a part in future storylines. Projected as a 12-issue series, its opening three-part arc focuses on the passing of the Adam mantle between Teth-Adam and Malik, and while it sets up several mysteries, it doesn't resolve too many matters. With shades of Alan Moore's classic *Swamp Thing*, issue four finds Malik interacting with the wider

“Perhaps best read in chunks, Priest's script is dense and nuanced”

DC Universe as he goes it alone, first battling Etrigan the Demon before Sargon the Sorcerer makes a welcome appearance.

Published under DC's mature Black Label imprint, Priest's take on *Black Adam* is comparable to Alan Moore's radical reinvention of Marvel/Miracleman, who, of course, was first created as a British version of Captain Marvel/Shazam. Excellently supported by Rafa Sandoval's sinewy, fluid art and Matt Helm's vibrant colours, this is a much subtler and darker Black Adam than the one you can expect to see on the big screen – although it would be great to see The Rock duking it out with White Adam in a sequel. **Stephen Jewell**

i Created by Otto Binder and CC Beck, Black Adam debuted in *The Marvel Family* issue one in December 1945.



HARLEY QUINN

30TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Editors **Ben Abernathy, Kristy Quinn**

► Artist **Artists: Various**

SPECIAL ISSUE DC's latest addition

to their regular torrent of bumper-sized anthology celebrations sees them toasting three decades of candy-coloured criminal heroine Harley Quinn with a 100-page special, featuring a varied but not quite attention-grabbing selection of writers and artists.

Long-time Quinn overseers Jimmy Palmiotti and Amanda Conner deliver one of the most entertaining tales with "Uncommon Bonds", which once again teams Harley with Alfred Pennyworth for more oddball fun. Harley's co-creator Paul Dini and artist Guillem March also deliver a lively romp in "Siren Soiree", which sees flatmates Harley, Catwoman and Poison Ivy attempt to throw a party, with predictably chaotic consequences.

Other highlights can be found in "Submissive" from writer/artist Stjepan Sejic, which gleefully explores the kinkier side of Harley's psychology while also showcasing some gorgeous visuals, and "The Last Harley Story" by Rob Williams and John Timms, which laces the Harley-related humour with a much darker edge.

Elsewhere, an aimless prologue to Black Label series *Harley/Joker: Criminal Sanity* feels out of place, and most of the other 10 stories end up falling flat and lacking impact. A mixed bag that has some entertaining moments, but falls short of the rousing celebration Harley deserves. **Saxon Bullock**





MINDSET

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Vault Comics**

► Writer **Zach Kaplan**

► Artist **John Pearson**

ISSUES 1-3 The most disturbing thing about this high-tech thriller, in which individuals can be controlled through their phones, is just how real it feels.

Resembling *The Social Network* if it were written by William Gibson, it centres on a group of Stanford University students who soon find themselves in over their heads after inventing a meditation app that can somehow influence its users' behaviour.

Opening with the murder of a billionaire investor before flashing back, Zach Kaplan takes his time in establishing central character Ben Sharp and his three partners-in-crime, who are swiftly elevated from nobodies to major players after unleashing their brainwashing algorithm upon its unsuspecting victims.

Kaplan aptly depicts the inherent superficiality of the Silicon Valley setting, with an emphasis on lavish parties and fast cars. With its initially heavy use of exposition, this six-parter proves to be a slow burn for the first couple of issues before really drawing you in by the end of issue three, as the moral implications of their actions start to catch up with the core quartet.

Mindset's main strength is John Pearson's fantastically expressive, Bill Sienkiewicz-esque art, which combines inventive layouts with sumptuous full colour. It's a series you'll definitely be of a mind to keep buying.

Stephen Jewell



AQUAMAN: ANDROMEDA

Release the kraken!

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Black Label**

► Writer **Ram V**

► Artist **Christian Ward**

ISSUES 1-3 Cosmic Horror is not a genre you'd normally associate with DC's underwater superhero Aquaman, but this three-issue miniseries does a spirited job of exploring the weirder depths of the deep sea.

The story is centred on an experimental submarine that's sent into an isolated area of the Pacific Ocean called Point Nemo, in order to find a mysterious and potentially alien spacecraft. As the submarine's crew encounter strange terrors and monstrous kraken, aquatic hero Arthur Curry and his nemesis Black Manta also home in on the mysterious alien craft, but much of the resulting thriller feels like it could easily have functioned as a completely standalone tale.

Writer Ram V conjures up a powerful sense of foreboding, as

well as making the titular character feel genuinely strange and mysterious. There's strong suspense storytelling here, and the script delves into each of the characters in interesting and satisfying ways, although the story's influences are a little too obvious (especially the major debt owed to 1997 horror *Event Horizon*), and the first two issues' build-up ends up feeling stronger than issue three's pay-off.

Christian Ward's stunning art gives the series a sumptuous visual style. He's always had a wildly distinctive, borderline psychedelic approach to panel structures and colours, and here he pulls off some gorgeously lurid work, aided by the larger pages of Black Label's Prestige format. *Andromeda* is definitely a distinctive and unique take on DC's aquatic adventurer, but it's Ward's jaw-dropping visuals that push it into remarkable territory. **Saxon Bullock**

Andromeda's location, Point Nemo, is a real place in the Pacific used as a dumping ground for rockets and spacecraft.



KEPLER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 16 NOVEMBER**

► Publisher **Dark Horse Comics**

► Writer **David Duchovny,**

Phillip Sevy

► Artist **Phillip Sevy**

GRAPHIC NOVEL Set on a world that has been colonised by humanity, the spirit of *The X-Files* looms large over this graphic novel, which brings to mind Fox Mulder's extraterrestrial dreams writ large on an interstellar canvas.

Adapted by Philip Sevy from an unsuccessful TV pilot by David Duchovny, it takes place on a distant planet which has been remodelled to resemble Earth – or more precisely America – right down to its Presidential-style leader and areas like Hollywoodland. So it's quite disconcerting when characters start talking about alien species like the Thaal and the Bonobion.

Although it's always a drawback when you have to include a couple of pages of text detailing the intricacies of your fictional society, Duchovny and Sevy establish an interesting dynamic between the humans and the native hominid population, telling their tale through 16-year-old West, who, being mixed race, embodies both the hopes and burdens of all of her people. With the plot hinging on the arrival of a scientific mission from space, there are also shades of *Planet Of the Apes* and – at the finale – *The War Of the Worlds*.

There's a pleasing earthiness to Sevy's art, which evocatively captures the landscape. With Duchovny having outlined an entire small-screen season, a return visit to Kepler would be most welcome. **Stephen Jewell**

SCORN

Lots of gristle and little meat



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PC

► Also on Xbox Series X|S

► Publisher **Kepler Interactive**

VIDEOGAME When you replicate HR Giger's art almost exactly, you're going to get an incredible-looking game – and that's the case with *Scorn*, a fantastical fever dream where you navigate a strange biomechanical hellscape. Unfortunately, it doesn't guarantee a good game.

Scorn is basically a surreal first person shooter with some obtuse puzzles. All of its strength comes from that art design, which glistens with Giger's horrific sheen throughout its porny gristle and boney weirdness. Everything else about it is leaden, with slow, unenjoyable combat and puzzles

that are somehow basic and hard to fathom at the same time.

It feels like either all the effort went into the art design, or the creative vision was so inwardly focused that no one accounted for players that hadn't worked on the game for years. Possibly both. There's a core idea of "being thrown into the world", which sounds good, but the alienness of everything makes that world beautiful to look at but laborious, in practice, to explore. Puzzles often require you to work out what the puzzles actually are, as well as what around you is part of them.

“ Beautiful to look at but laborious to explore ”

In videogames, great worldbuilding involves a lot of subtle prompting using things like lighting and sightlines to guide the player. There's none of that here. Objectives are hard to parse, and levels can look wonderful but be monotonously uniform and hard to navigate.

Then there's the combat, which is sluggish and dull. Weapons are slow, ammo is sparse, enemies are ruthless, and you'll often be fighting in restrictive spaces. It makes for encounters you bludgeon your way through relying on luck and memory more than anything else.

It's a shame, because on the surface this is a beautiful experience. Saying it's "inspired by" HR Giger's work doesn't really pay enough dues to the Swiss artist. But slavish attention to visual detail is all *Scorn* has going for it. If you don't mind the flaws it's a visual feast, but one without matching substance.

Leon Hurley

i You could just buy a coffee table book full of concept art instead... *Scorn: The Art Of The Game* is out on 2 December.



MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO



► **RUNNING UNTIL 21 January**

► Venue **Barbican Theatre**

STAGE PLAY Studio Ghibli

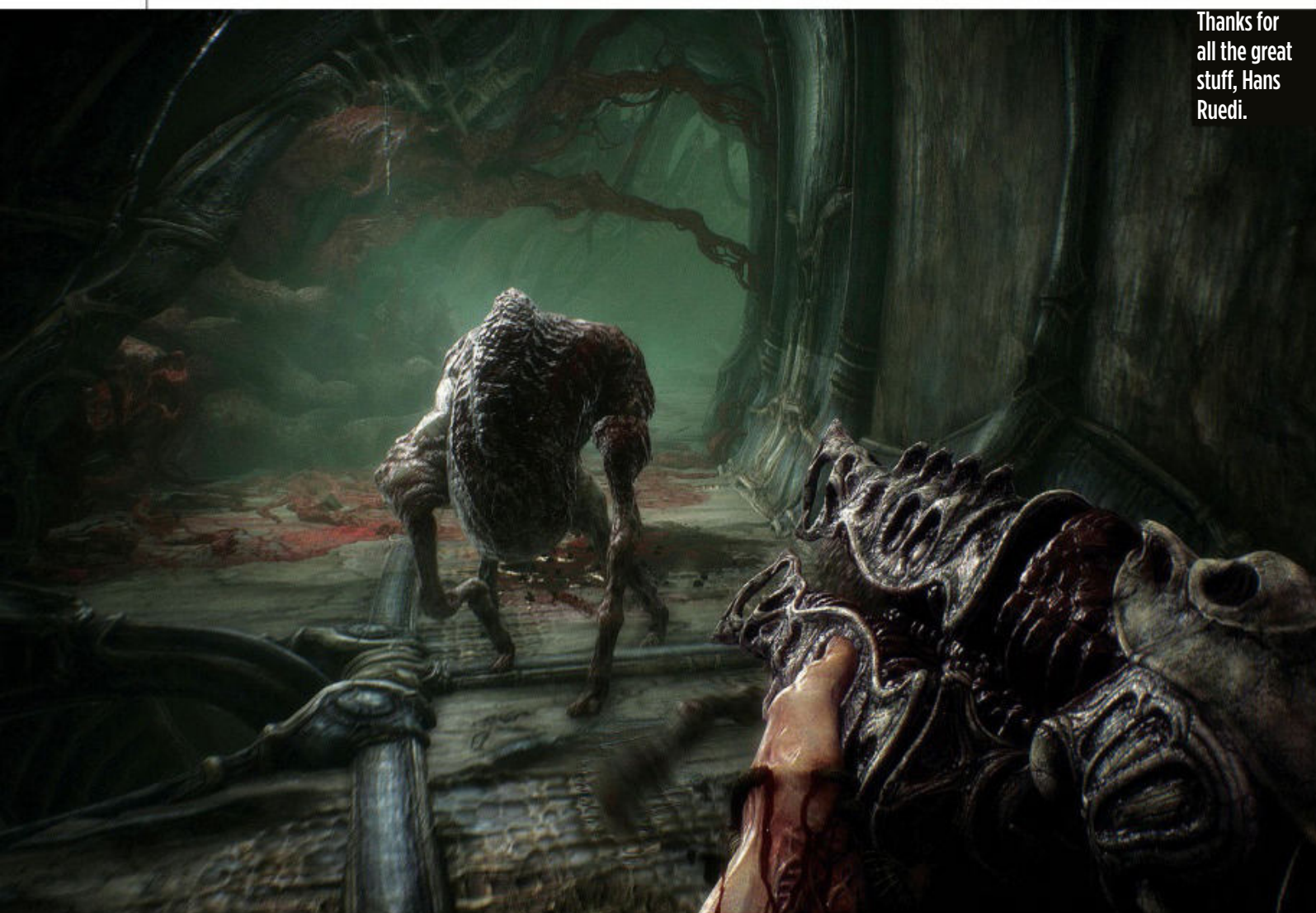
producer Toshio Suzuki once described *My Neighbour Totoro* as Hayao Miyazaki's "enemy" – the film he will never top. Even today, in a career defined by masterpieces, the story of two young girls who make friends with a furry woodland spirit is a feat of unparalleled wonder. Could a Royal Shakespeare Company adaptation, where beautiful hand-drawn animation is dragged into the cold light of live action, ever compete?

The answer develops gradually. The more expressionistic aspects of the anime, such as the loud, cartoonish performances of Satsuki (Ami Okumura Jones) and Mei (Mei Mac), are initially jarring, for example. It doesn't help that the actresses are playing characters aged 10 and four, but are clearly in their twenties. But then you hear the snores – and the curtain parts...

The Totoro puppet, a creation of The Jim Henson Company, is as enormous as it is breathtakingly sublime. Its arrival is the moment where all doubts melt away. The famous bus stop scene; the first sighting of the Catbus (operated by a team of puppeteers); the tree dance; the emotional search for Mei... Scene after scene is an imaginatively staged miracle.

Burnished by a live score (by composer Joe Hisaishi) that is tender and life-affirming, it's pure Studio Ghibli magic brought to life.

Stephen Kelly



Thanks for all the great stuff, Hans Ruedi.

SCIENCE FICTION: VOYAGE TO THE EDGE OF IMAGINATION

A muddled itinerary



► **OPEN UNTIL 4 MAY**

► Venue **Science Museum, London**

EXHIBITION **Befitting the venue,** this ambitious exhibition aims to keep the real science in SF. It's a worthy intent, but the exhibit strives to cover so many different bases that it's stretched thin. It has lots of film props and costumes, and many educational videos to watch, on subjects from ecological disaster to travelling faster than light. Everything is wrapped up in a theme park-style journey, where

a friendly alien AI popping up on video screens leads you through the areas of a spaceship, with a side trip to a new world for a lightshow first encounter.

The experience is colourful but disjointed, and the science and the fiction never quite meet comfortably, often getting in each other's way. Certainly there are items to enjoy, from Boris Karloff's Monster costume on a mannequin to a similarly outsized alien from *The Fifth Element*. Effort has clearly been made to go beyond just white creatives, with



representations of the fiction of Octavia E Butler and the work of singer/author Janelle Monae. In an especially poignant juxtaposition, an image of Mae Jemison, the first black astronaut, is placed beside a costume worn by one of her inspirations, *Star Trek*'s Nichelle Nichols.

Ultimately, however, the exhibit doesn't match the triumph of a previous SF exhibition at the

Barbican Centre in 2017, which was madly dense and more enjoyable. There's a lingering sense that the need to justify the exhibition's presence in an educational institution works against the fun – and, indeed, the education.

Andrew Osmond

i The exhibition was designed by the visual effects studio Framestore, which also creates theme park attractions worldwide.

DOCTOR WHO: HIDDEN DEPTHS

Some assembly required



► **RELEASED NOVEMBER**

161 minutes | CD/vinyl/download

► Broadcaster **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA **It must be difficult** finding a new spin on the Sea Devils. Like their cousins the Silurians, they really only have one story: they were here first and they want Earth back. The first tale in this latest *The Ninth Doctor Adventures* set, "The Seas Of Titan", gets around that by moving the action to Saturn's largest moon, just as an expedition encounters a colony of our string vest-wearing friends. It's a solid adventure with strong performances, which really takes

flight in a last act that offers some pleasing complexity to their conflict with the humans.

"Lay Down Your Arms" is a lively but muddled piece set in Germany, 1864. The Doctor is giving opera lessons to a young Bertha Kinzky – soon to be a celebrated novelist and outspoken pacifist – when aliens start transforming people into bloodthirsty warriors. Lisa McMullin's script is front-loaded

“Authentically creepy at times, with a clutch of smart ideas”



with some charming gags, but the gradual shift into heartfelt polemic is less successfully handled.

In "Flatpack", a mysterious furniture shop has taken London by storm and the Doctor suspects something sinister afoot. He runs into old pals Liv Chenka and Tania (from the *Stranded* audios) but they seem confused: has Flatpack only been here a few weeks, or forever? Sensing temporal

weirdness afoot, the Doctor throws himself into an investigation, not realising the trap he's walking into. Authentically creepy at times, with a clutch of smart ideas, it's a reminder that *Who* is often at its best when it mixes the mundane with the mysterious. **Will Salmon**

i Aside from her writing, Kinzky was the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (and the first Austrian laureate).



CHILDREN

We test your knowledge of creepy kids, child prodigies and more

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

In Gerry Anderson's *Joe 90*, what's the surname of the titular schoolboy?

QUESTION 2

On which significant date was Antichrist tale *The Omen* released in UK cinemas?

QUESTION 3

What notable role did William Hughes play in *Doctor Who* (though he didn't get any lines...)?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this little boy.

QUESTION 5

Which sitcom star played child genius Hieronymus Fox in *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century*?

QUESTION 6

In *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Rascals", what causes Picard, Guinan, Ro and Keiko O'Brien to be turned into children?

QUESTION 7

In *Lost In Space* (any version), what are the names of the three Robinson children?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

What are these girls called (just the surname will do), and which film would you find them in?

QUESTION 9

What remarkable ability does Cole Sear possess?

QUESTION 10

In *Poltergeist*, what's the name of the girl who gets sucked inside the Freeling family's television set?

QUESTION 11

Which comedian wrote the songs for the musical version of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Name this young lad, and his adoptive mother.

QUESTION 13

In *The Exorcist*, which adult actor provided the demonic voice of the possessed Regan?

QUESTION 14

Which 1985 science fiction novel centres on a Battle School where children are trained to fight the alien "buggers"?

QUESTION 15

In *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, what is the name of Captain Sisko's son?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Which *Doctor Who* story features this little girl?

QUESTION 17

Who played Claudia, the 10-year-old girl turned into a bloodsucker, in the movie version of *Interview With The Vampire*?

QUESTION 18

Name the four golden ticket holders who *don't* make it to the end in *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*.

QUESTION 19

A *Star Trek* episode centred on children was effectively banned by the BBC for many years, who left it out of repeat runs throughout the '70s and '80s. Name it.

QUESTION 20

What connects these characters: Isaac Chroner, Gage Creed and Charlie McGee?

Answers
1 McClaine 2 6/6/76 3 The Master as a boy 4 Michael Myers 5 Gary Coleman 6 A transporter accident 7 Judy, Penny and Will 8 The Grady Twins, *The Shining* 9 He can see dead people 10 Carol Anne 11 Tim Minchin 12 Luke Smith, Sarah Jane Smith 13 Mercedes McCambridge 14 *Ender's Game* 15 Jake 16 "Human Nature" 17 Kirsten Dunst 18 Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt, Violet Beauregarde, Mike Teavee 19 "Mir!" 20 They're all Stephen King creations

How did you do?

What kind of schoolkid are you?

0-5

Dunce's cap

6-10

Could do better

11-15

Satisfactory

16-19

Top set

20

Teacher's pet

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF SFX



WATER JOURNEY! **AVATAR 2**

James Cameron returns to the ocean in *The Way Of Water*

THE WITCHER: BLOOD ORIGIN

Journey back to where it all began

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The epic BBC series reaches its conclusion

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Our 60th anniversary celebrations begin

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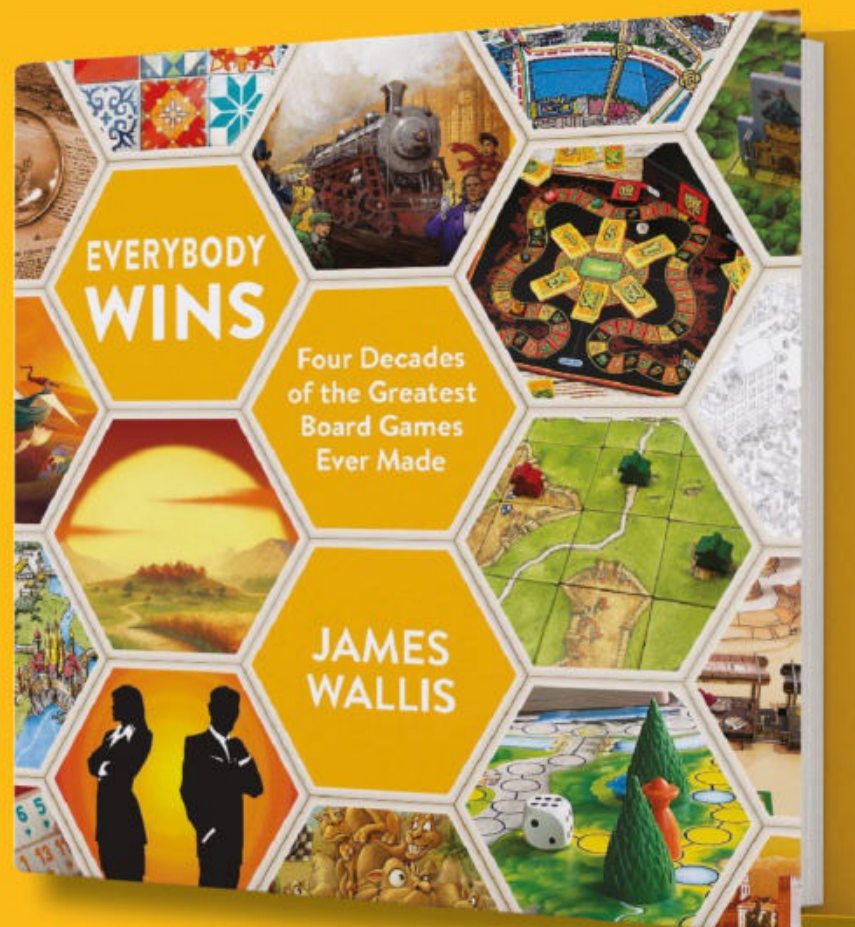
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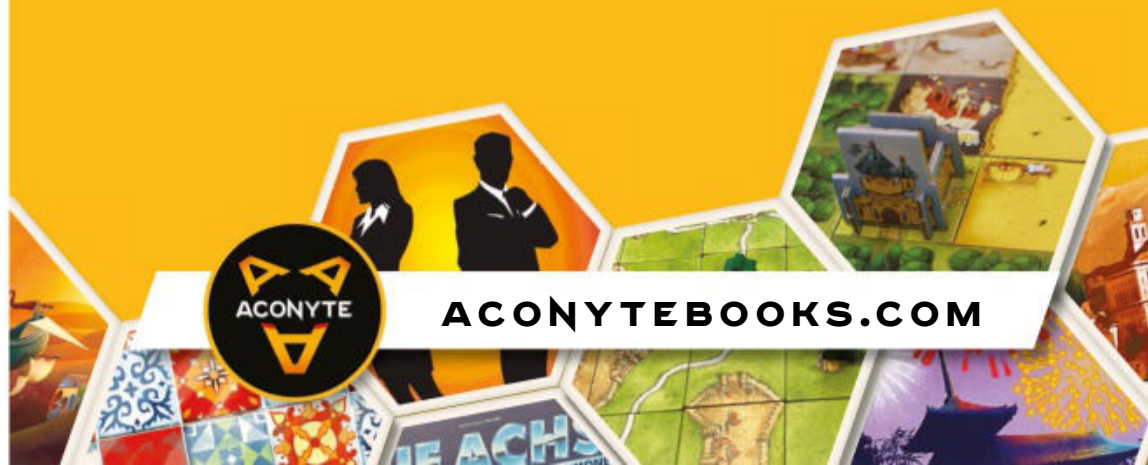


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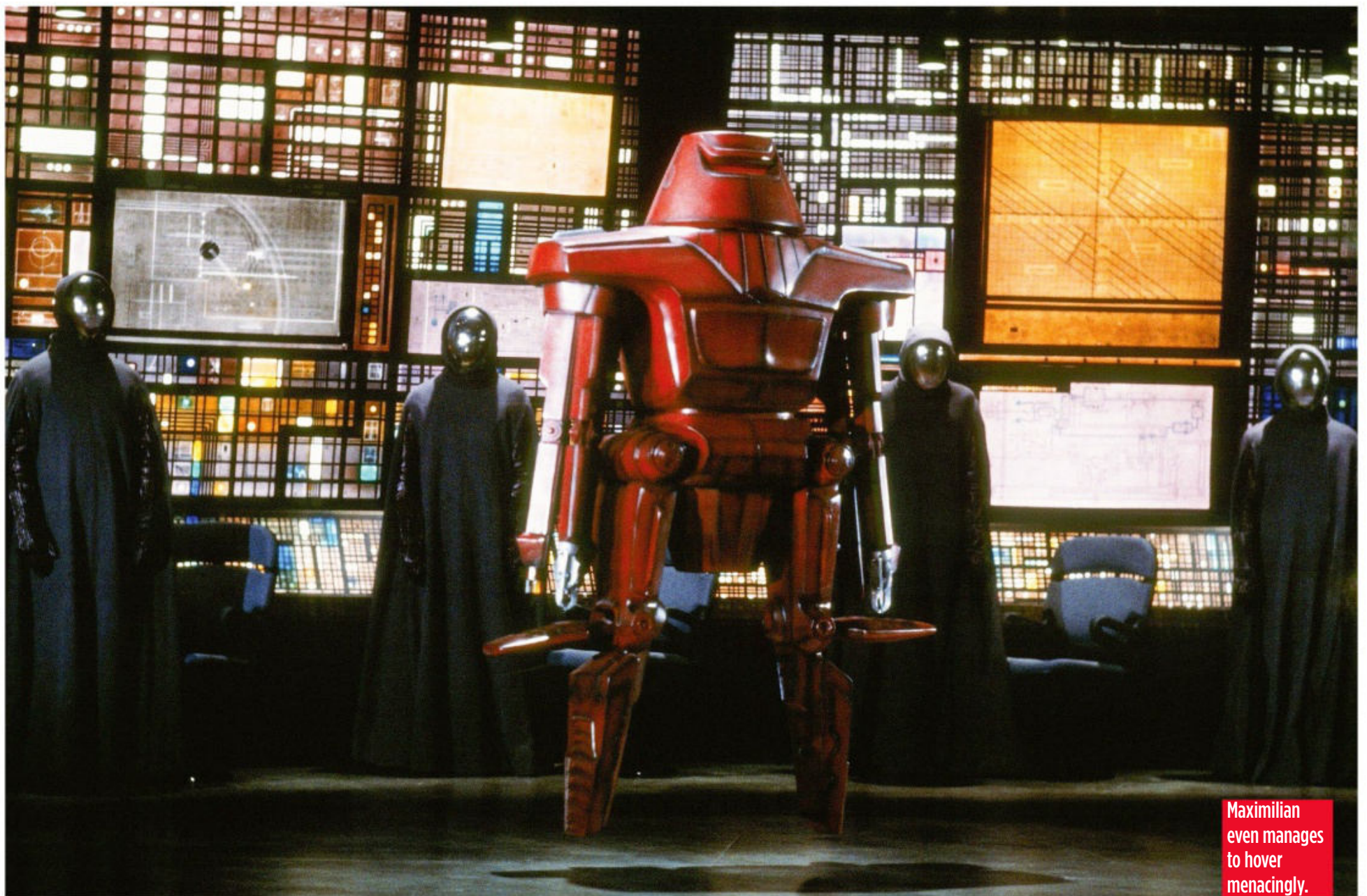


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Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Maximilian even manages to hover menacingly.

Maximilian from The Black Hole

Dave Bradley, Former Editor



Disney's flawed epic *The Black Hole* seems designed by committee to splice 20,000 *Leagues Under The Sea* with *Star Wars*, leaving out the charm of

both. Every time I spot it on the Disney+ menu, I wonder if this patchwork of science fiction, fantasy and horror will be better than I remember. Pure nostalgia takes me back to the London fleapit in 1979 where I watched it with my parents, and the action figures and comic books they bought me afterwards. And then I hit play, and my heart sinks again as one poorly paced scene after another drags us towards a baffling finale.

But one thing does stand out. I am still terrified of Maximilian.

Maximilian is a hovering robot, his face a smooth mask with a single malevolent slit for an eye. His red torso is tall and angular, like a plastic samurai. Despite never speaking, he is the de facto second-in-command to Dr Hans Reinhardt, the science officer and (apparent) sole human aboard the long-lost USS Cygnus.

The USS Palomino, crewed by Hollywood heavyweights including Anthony Perkins and Ernest Borgnine, encounters the Cygnus perilously close to a black hole. They learn that Reinhardt plans to pilot the Cygnus through it on a final mission of exploration. Maximilian's silent, menacing presence haunts our heroes as they explore the doomed hulk.

Then, about an hour into the film, his arms become rotating blades, whipping through the book Perkins's Dr Durant impotently holds up

in defence, killing him painfully. Wow. This is a *Disney* film. As a kid, that (in retrospect, bloodless) murder was one of the most horrific things I'd seen on screen.

The robot's mystique grows when Dr Reinhardt, until this point zealous and driven, suddenly begs, "Protect me from Maximilian!" Ploy? Genuine fear? A change of heart? The scene takes on extra nuance when you learn that this whispered plea was ad-libbed by actor Maximilian Schell. A 2001-inspired ending sees Reinhardt and the robot plunge through the black hole straight to hell, where they merge. Daft. But despite that, Maximilian remains one of the most intimidating villains of '70s sci-fi. ●

Dave is more of an Old B.O.B. than a V.I.N.CENT these days.

Fact Attack!

→ *The Black Hole* was first pitched as disaster movie *Space Station One*, chasing a trend for films like *The Poseidon Adventure*.

→ Maximilian was partly inspired by the dark demon Chernabog from the *Night On Bald Mountain* section of *Fantasia* (1940).

→ The robot's name was originally Maximillian (two Ls), but when, by coincidence, Maximilian Schell joined the cast, the name was changed.

→ The USS Cygnus is named after Cygnus X-1, the first true black hole detected from Earth, which was identified in 1964.

→ The 3D space-time animation at the beginning was the longest computer graphics sequence seen in a film at the time.

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