

# SFX

363



## SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS

World's Mightiest  
Mortal returns!

## STAR TREK: PICARD

THE TV EVENT OF THE  
YEAR CONTINUES

## SCREAM VI

GHOSTFACE TAKES MANHATTAN

## DOCTOR WHO

SHE'S A DOCTOR – BUT  
PROBABLY NOT THE ONE YOU  
WERE EXPECTING!

## COCAINE BEAR

THE LATEST GRIZZLY  
HORROR IS ALL WHITE

# THE MANDALORIAN

**STAR WARS EXCLUSIVE!**

Grogu and co are back in their biggest season yet!

## THE ARK

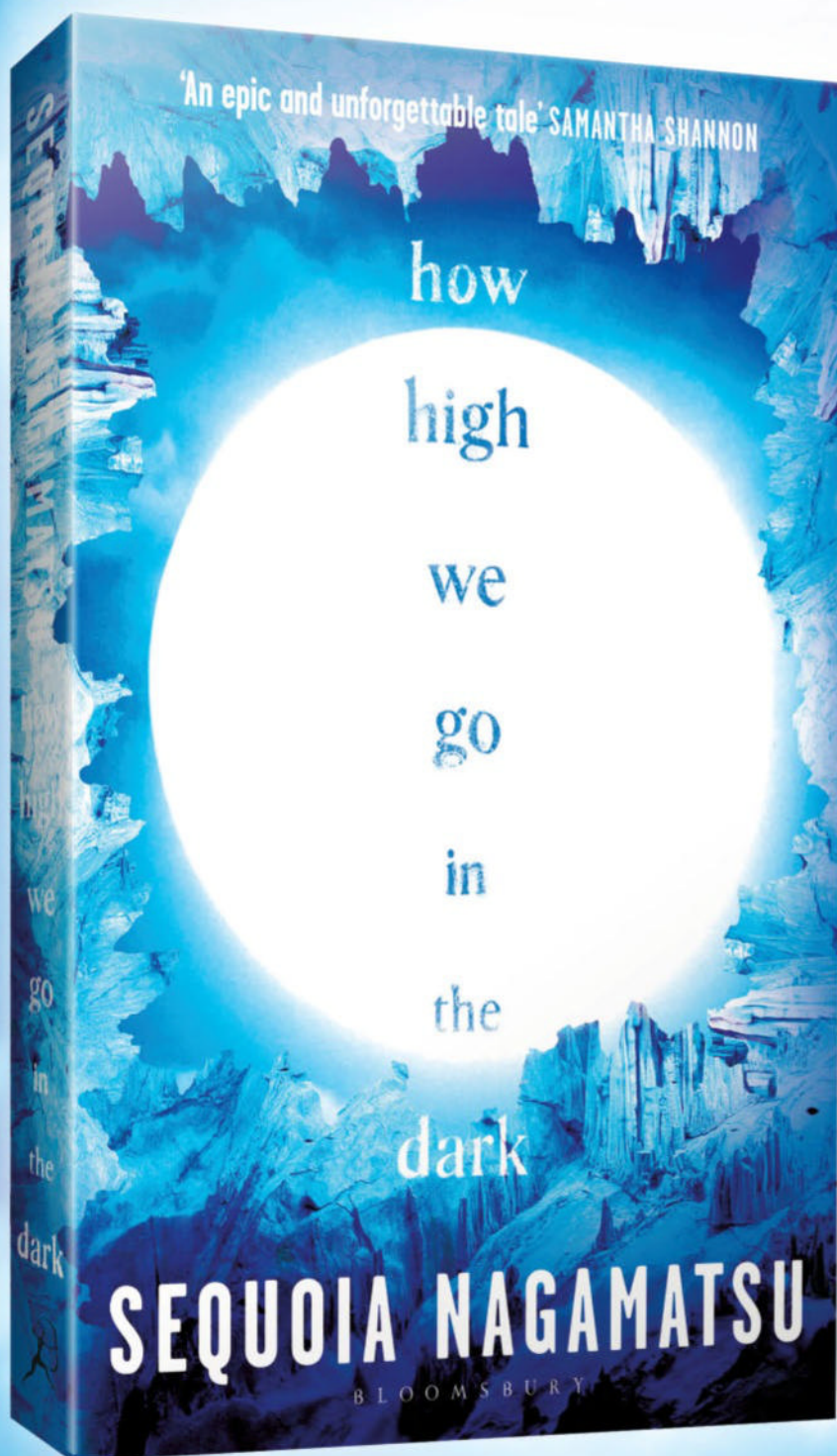
HUMANITY'S JOURNEY TO  
FIND A NEW HOME

**PLUS!** SHADOW & BONE | SUPERMAN & LOIS | DUNGEONS & DRAGONS | PEARL  
AVENGERS BEYOND | GOTHAM KNIGHTS | TEEN WOLF | HELLO TOMORROW!



# SIBERIA, 2031

HUMANITY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN AGAIN



**'Haunting  
and luminous...  
An astonishing  
debut'**

**ALAN MOORE,**  
creator of  
*Watchmen* and  
*V for Vendetta*

BLOOMSBURY







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With one cry of the magic word "Sequel!"

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*Elite* remembered. Anyone seen our BBC Micro?



# First Contact

## Hailing Frequencies Open!



### RESPECTRES TO THE US

**Rob Graham, email** I've been very pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed the American remake of *Ghosts* as I have grown very fond of the original BBC comedy series in the last few years. This has turned into one of the best American remakes of any British show. Like a lot of people I was very sceptical when they announced it. I think it helped having some of the original creators and producers involved with the remake. The pilot episode was a carbon copy of the British pilot but it has gone on to do its own thing – even though the ghosts are copies of the originals – and it's a light, warm, funny fantasy comedy series with likeable characters and a good cast. I'm surprised it's on BBC iPlayer.

**SFX:** Such a shame we never had the pleasure of an American remake of *Rentaghost*. *Pacino and De Niro as Dobbin the Horse* would have killed it.

### WITCHER YOU WATCHING?

**Ann Hodnett, email** I can't believe you gave *The Witcher: Blood Origin* four stars [SFX 361]. You must have seen a different programme because what I saw on Netflix was a mash-up of all the fantasy dramas ever. I wanted to like it because I love Michelle Yeoh but the terrible writing let all the actors down (I had to force myself to continue watching after the first kiss). Where is any of the lore from the books? I don't remember dragons being mentioned at all in any of the texts. It's a horrible mish-mash of everything. Such a shame. They could have made a good prequel but came out with this instead.

**SFX:** Luckily Michelle Yeoh and her hot dog fingers also exist in a parallel reality where you really dig this show.

**Really enjoyed Lockwood & Co. It felt like what the world would have been like if Gozer had defeated the Ghostbusters in 1984... but in Britain.**

**Mark Davies**

**I love The Boys! And now Jeffrey Dean Morgan is joining the cast too? Count me in for season four!**

**@LJWellerWrites**

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"I think I have a cream for that"



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## Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind

**DARREN SCOTT** EDITOR

### RAVES

→ *Star Trek: Picard* season three just keeps getting better and better.  
→ *Lockwood & Co* is such great fun, with lots of shades of *Doctor Who*.

### RANTS

→ How am I only just realising that most of *Thundercats* season one wasn't broadcast in the UK, never mind any of season two...?

**IAN BERRIMAN** DEPUTY EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Set visits are back! This month I got to explore The Lazarus Project's HQ (for season two) and Merlin's Tor (for Bernard Cornwell's *The Winter King*). Take that, Covid-19!  
→ Have become addicted to watching *Crown Court* on Talking Pictures, largely due to all the *Doctor Who* actors, from Harry Sullivan and Henry Gordon Jago to WOTAN's inventor and the MD of Auto Plastics...  
→ As a Jean Rollin fan, I'm pleased Indicator are releasing *Shiver Of The Vampires* and *Two Orphan Vampires* (24 April)... though I'd only just got round to buying the Black House edition Blu-rays. Bah.

**JONATHAN COATES** ART EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Blown away by *The Last Of Us* so far!  
→ Thoroughly enjoyed *Lockwood & Co*, although not being familiar with the books it took a while to understand what it was all about. The three leads are particularly great!

**ED RICKETTS** PRODUCTION EDITOR

### RAVES

→ I love films like *Skinamarink* which polarise opinion. Fair enough, it does make a Béla Tarr flick feel like Michael Bay, plus the faux analogue grunge is poorly done. But to me at least, it felt like a film made from the heart, and not just some arthouse tomfoolery for the sake of it.  
→ If you *do* like it, check out the five games in the PC series *I'm On Observation Duty*. Developed by a single person, they each manage to encapsulate a truly creepy experience with a very simple gameplay mechanic – and they're inexpensive!

**NICK SETCHFIELD** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

### RAVES

→ Michael Giacchino is remaking *Them!* Loved what he did with *Werewolf By Night* and I'm anyone's for giant mutant ants. Keep hoping Nolan's going to slip them into *Oppenheimer*...  
→ Helen Mirren kicked off our chat this issue with "I have a question for you. What is a Setch?"

**TARA BENNETT** US EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Visited Universal Studios Hollywood's new Super Nintendo World, and there's great pleasure in getting to punch blocks and gain points like you're inside a real-life videogame. (Mario jumps)

### RANTS

→ Loved the execution of, and acting in, *Knock On The Cabin*. But man, that's a downer of a movie. Be warned.

"I finally meet the right guy, and he's from another planet."



## Captain's Log



They say you can't turn back time, but we seem to do it over and over when we're fans of things. We dive deep into nostalgia, it's a comforting dip. Sometimes we get carried away...

Take the current excitement for the return of many familiar fantasy friends, including *Doctor Who*... Yes, I've played this scene before but it doesn't stop being a thrill. I remember the – largely pre-internet – excitement about the 1996 TV movie, the build up, the trailers, the *Radio Times* cover... It still holds such a dear place in my heart. I'm delighted that as part of our 60th anniversary celebrations I've been able to dig a previously unpublished interview with Daphne Ashbrook – aka Grace – from the archives.

It seems funny now that we waited with bated breath for that series to never materialise. But everything happens for a reason – we got to do that dance all over again in 2004/2005. I never thought these old legs would be out of retirement yet again for another bout of fan love in 2023. Embrace it! Enjoy it! Stay off the internet and don't let other people spoil your enjoyment. Or stay on the internet and don't spoil other people's enjoyment! Not everything's for me, not everything's for you! But we'll always have San Francisco, New Year's Eve, 1999...

Darren X





# SUPER HEROES AND SUPER VILLAINS IN EPIC ENCOUNTERS



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# Red Alert

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MARCH  
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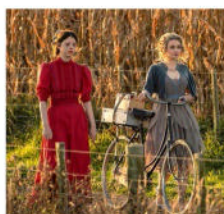
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## STAND BACK SUPERMAN...

*Superman & Lois* finds its Big  
Bad in season three



### Highlights



#### 10 PEARL

→ X-cellent news: she's back! The sequel that no one expected is now part of a trilogy...



#### 14 SHADOW AND BONE

→ Welcome part two of the Grishaverse into the Fold... There be Crows!



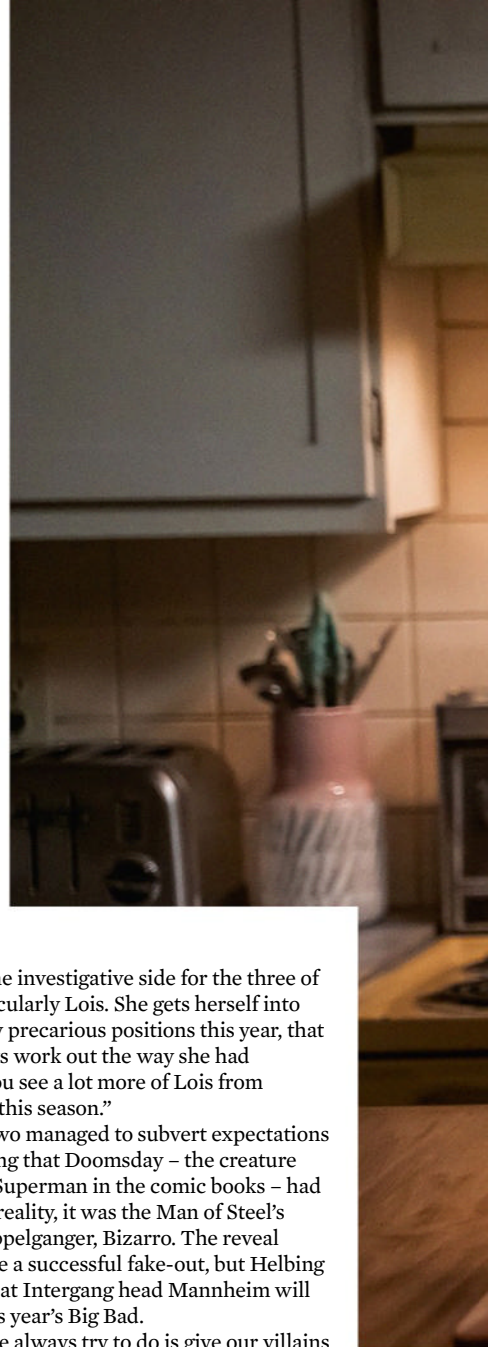
#### 18 GOTHAM KNIGHTS

→ The Bat is dead (yes, again) – time for Gotham's new heroes to step up.





Tyler Hoechlin and Elizabeth Tulloch: d'awww.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# Hero Initiative

There's trouble in store for **Superman & Lois**, and this season it starts at home

➔ LAST YEAR, *SUPERMAN & LOIS* delved deep into the show's mythology with Bizarro World and the merging of the Earths. When the superhero drama returns, it promises to pull back on the science fiction to focus more on emotional, family-orientated and character-driven storylines. To emphasise that point, the recent teaser trailer hinted that Lois might be pregnant.

"Coming out of season two, we were dealing with a lot of Covid issues still," showrunner Todd Helbing tells Red Alert. "There was some stuff we weren't able to do as far as relationships. We wanted to put Clark and Lois in a really good spot. You see them at the top of the premiere as healthy as they've been... Maybe as frisky as they have ever been. There are clearly some ripples that come out of that. Whenever the introduction of another child comes in – you saw in season two, where Natalie showed up – it alters the family dynamic. We wanted to play with that idea a little bit and see where it takes us."

Other complications also arise. An ace reporter, Lois begins to revisit a case and goes missing – or so it seems. Not wanting to

exhaust the trope of Lois constantly being the damsel in distress, this scenario puts her journalistic skills, resourcefulness and tenacity front and centre.

"We recognised that Lois hadn't been investigating as much as we had liked to see her doing," Helbing says. "So we wanted to pump up the Gazette with Chrissy and Lois. Bruno Mannheim has really opened up the

doors for the investigative side for the three of them, particularly Lois. She gets herself into some pretty precarious positions this year, that don't always work out the way she had planned. You see a lot more of Lois from the comics this season."

Season two managed to subvert expectations by suggesting that Doomsday – the creature that killed Superman in the comic books – had arrived. In reality, it was the Man of Steel's twisted doppelganger, Bizarro. The reveal proved to be a successful fake-out, but Helbing confirms that Intergang head Mannheim will serve as this year's Big Bad.

"What we always try to do is give our villains a point of view, so that they just don't feel like moustache-twirling villains," Helbing explains. "You should understand where they are coming from. Not that you necessarily agree with it, but you should at least understand it. Any time the villain is going through an emotional story that sort of parallels our

Jordan and Jonathan, a right couple of Kents.







heroes, it helps hammer that emotional beat home.

"The Bruno Mannheim you meet is not like the one in the comics," he continues. "There is a lot of history between Lois and Bruno. Bruno is sort of her white whale. He is the guy she has been chasing since she lived in Metropolis – and Intergang for years and years – but nothing

**“Lois hadn’t been investigating as much as we had liked to see”**

would stick with this guy. He always covers his tracks. When some of the clues emerge, when we get into the John Henry Irons story and how that factors in, it really puts the whole family on this interesting path.”

Meanwhile, Jordan and Jonathan refuse to sit on the sidelines. The Kent siblings will come

into their own more as they forge their own separate identities. For Jordan, that means honing his flourishing superpowers.

“Jon is really starting to figure out who he is, post-Metropolis,” says Helbing. “We team the kids up quite a bit – Jordan and Jon, Nat and Sarah; the four of them get into a lot of teenage problems. You see them work together as their own hero contingency. And Jordan has an interesting journey this season. He wants to get out there and be a hero. It puts Clark and Lois, particularly Clark, in a situation.

“When Clark was a kid, his mom and dad wanted to keep him from going out and being a hero all the time, too, because of exposing himself to the world,” he adds. “Doing that in today’s day and age makes it more difficult for Clark. We get into that as Jordan wants to go down this Superboy path.”

As for Superman, the Last Son of Krypton will keep busy with old and new foes. One

nefarious name recently announced was his arch-nemesis Lex Luthor, portrayed by Michael Cudlitz. But Helbing maintains that most of Clark’s challenges come courtesy of his family life.

“In one way, the Superman story is tied with Jordan,” Helbing concludes. “We go to the Fortress a lot. Jon is going to the Fortress. There is something that happens that drives Jon to have some conversations with Lara. I’ll just say as far as Superman around the world and saving the day, that is all the same. It’s the problems at home that affect him more intensely than they ever have. The reason for that will become apparent really soon.” **BC**

*Superman & Lois is on The CW from 14 March and BBC iPlayer later this year.*

**► SCI-FACT!** Michael Cudlitz is known for playing Abraham Ford in *The Walking Dead*; he also directed several episodes of it.



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# The Farmer's Daughter

All our Xs live in Texas! Ti West tells all about **Pearl**...

Things are about to get very weird for Pearl.

➔ “I DON’T THINK WE EVER ONCE considered Pearl as the villain,” says Ti West, director of one of the year’s most anticipated horror movies. It’s a slightly surprising admission given that Mia Goth’s titular character is, after all, an occasionally axe-wielding murderer in *X*. Still, anyone who caught that film on its US release last September will know exactly what he means.

*Pearl* is the second instalment in a trilogy that will conclude with the upcoming *MaXXXine*. It was shot at the same time as the first flick and is set on the same isolated Texas homestead, albeit some 61 years previously, and Pearl isn’t yet the monster we know she’ll become. Instead, she’s an aspiring dancer, with dreams of making it big in Hollywood.

“The whole goal of this is for you to be on her side, despite what she does,” says West. “When it was starting to come together in the edit, I’d show it to friends and they were all rooting for her. That’s such a testament to Mia. You’re like, ‘Well, I hope everything’s going to work out...’”

Prequels, of course, are rarely surprising. By their very nature, you know where a story is headed. *Pearl*, however, manages to upend expectations thanks to its wild shift in tone. Where *X* was a brutal slasher, in debt to the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Pearl* is a colourful melodrama, complete with a lush orchestral score. The result is a film that feels simultaneously both modern and delightfully old-fashioned.

## MOVIE MAGIC

“It’s full of old Hollywood magic and wonder,” West grins. “It’s almost what Pearl is kind of imagining. It’s fun to have that contrast. I mean, the brutal, nihilistic, life on the farm version of the movie is kind of a drag! But to stylise it in such a way, like you’re almost in a Disney movie, that just seemed interesting to me. I hadn’t seen that before.”

It also ties into the overriding theme of the series. “The trilogy is a love letter to cinema,” West explains. “*X* was about a bunch of people who want to change their lives by using the

movie business, in that case via pornography. That doesn’t apply to Pearl, but she is unhappy with her life and looking at the movies as an example of what life might be like instead.”

A large part of her unhappiness comes from her “complicated” family situation. Pearl lives on the farm with just her parents and livestock for company. “Her father has been sick and he’s not the person that he was, so they’re [Pearl and her mother, Ruth] caring for him. It’s hard to do that at any time, but especially alone during a war and a pandemic.”

Yes, the spectre of the 1918-1920 flu lingers in the background of the film, in masks and nervous conversations. West says that its inclusion was partly thematic and partly down

“The whole goal of this is for you to be on her side, despite what she does in *X*”

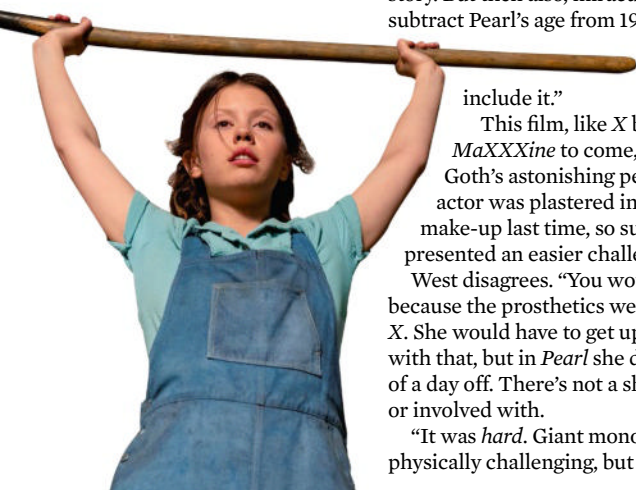




Mia Goth as Pearl, dreaming her life away.



Now what could possibly go wrong in this situation?



to serendipity. "[Covid] was happening and everyone was dealing with isolation in a way they hadn't before and that made sense for this story. But then also, miraculously, when you subtract Pearl's age from 1979, it lands on 1918.

So, yeah, it seemed remiss not to

include it."

This film, like *X* before it and like *MaXXXine* to come, hinges on Mia Goth's astonishing performance. The actor was plastered in layers of old age make-up last time, so surely the prequel presented an easier challenge?

West disagrees. "You would think that because the prosthetics were very draining on *X*. She would have to get up at 2 am to deal with that, but in *Pearl* she didn't have even part of a day off. There's not a shot that she's not in or involved with.

"It was *hard*. Giant monologues. *X* was physically challenging, but I think *Pearl* was

more demanding because the whole movie is on her shoulders."

## TRIPLE X

Next up is the trilogy's final chapter. West is understandably tight-lipped when it comes to that, however. "I'm not deliberately being cagey," he explains. "It's just, when we made *X*, no one knew we had also made *Pearl* and it was fun to reveal a trailer for something that no one knew existed. I can't do that again with *MaXXXine*, but I just think the more we can keep secret – from what it's about, to who is in it, to when it's coming out – it just makes for a better experience."

He does let slip one tantalising hint, however. "*MaXXXine* is as different from *X* as *Pearl* is from *X*. It's nothing at all like this film." Still, probably best not to get your hopes up for a screwball comedy... **WS**

*Pearl* is in cinemas from 17 March.



## NEWS WARP

### HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- Michael Giacchino helming remake of 1954 monster ant flick **Them!**
- Willem Dafoe in the frame for Robert Eggers's **Nosferatu**.
- Killer doll sequel **M3GAN 2.0** targeting a 17 January 2025 release.
- Channing Tatum developing a **Ghost** remake to star in.
- *The Bear*'s Ayo Edebiri boarding Marvel's **Thunderbolts**.
- George RR Martin's SF novel **Hunter's Run** set for big-screen adaptation.
- William H Macy joining **Kingdom Of The Planet Of The Apes**.
- Guillermo del Toro planning stop-motion adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's **The Buried Giant**.
- Julia Roberts and Jennifer Aniston set for untitled body-swap comedy from **Palm Springs**.
- Max Barbakow.
- Ed Brubaker's Image Comics series **Pulp** set for a movie version.
- He knows that we've been nice... **Violent Night 2** on its way.
- Giancarlo Esposito signing up for Francis Ford Coppola's **Megalopolis**.
- Joachim Rønning in talks to direct **TRON: Ares** with Jared Leto.



**SCI-FACT!** West shot the film with the crew of *Avatar: The Way Of Water* while they took a break.

GETTY



► **SCI-FACT!** Doreen Valiente (née Dominy) is rumoured to have worked at Bletchley Park during the war.



**AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE**

# Supernatural Soldiers

➔ DESCRIBED BY THE writer as “*Tinker Tailor Soldier Witch*,” Paul Cornell’s new TKO Studios graphic novel *The Witches Of World War II* blends fact with fiction, as a band of real-life mystics combat the Nazis using more preternatural means.

“I’ve been into the history of British witchcraft for decades,” Cornell tells Red Alert. “You know, one hears things like ‘Operation Cone of Power’, where the New Forest Coven defended Britain against the German air force, and it makes one want to learn more.”

Truth is stranger than fiction in Paul Cornell’s new graphic novel ***The Witches Of World War II***



Illustrated by Valeria Burzo – who, Cornell says, “loves the fashion of the 1940s, and has got a way of making this dark, emotional subject matter sing” – the 158-page begins more truthfully before veering off into more fantastical territory.

“Almost all of the biographical material about our five real British magicians is genuine, although very few of them actually met until after the war,” says Cornell. “But after that, I take them on an adventure into Nazi-occupied Europe, then it becomes purely historical fiction. We never settle

on how real magic actually is. I didn’t want them casting spells and zapping Nazis.”

While the infamous likes of Aleister Crowley also appear, the story is told from the perspective of the lesser-known Doreen Valiente. “Doreen is an amazing character, one of the founding figures of British witchcraft, who genuinely does have parts of her wartime history largely unknown, perhaps because she worked in intelligence,” explains Cornell. “She was a good focus for the book because she was young at the time and just starting a long career as a



► **SCI-FACT!** There were 27 episodes of *Dungeons & Dragons* broadcast between September 1983 and December 1985.

“Doreen is amazing, one of the founding figures of British witchcraft”

writer and magician. Crowley, everyone knows about. His command of human psychology was such that his power over people was, I'm sure, real, whether or not there is such a thing as magic. There's an element of the stage magician and the conman about him, and he may well have been an agent provocateur for British intelligence. He gets many theatrical moments during the book, as well as a surprising twist at the end.”

Others to feature include Dion Fortune, Gerald Gardner and Rollo Ahmed. “Dion Fortune was a magician who had a good war, working hard on the home front, in the midst of a journey towards establishing much of the basis on which the traditions of modern British witchcraft were founded,” continues Cornell.

“I've made her fierce and demanding, which I don't think is far from the truth. Gerald Gardner seems to have been a lovely, gentle man, who discovered and promoted the tradition then known as ‘wica’. If Dion is the mother of all that came after, he's the founding father. And Rollo Ahmed is an amazing conman/writer/exorcist, who varied his race and head gear depending on what he needed to be.”

Winston Churchill also crops up: “Our Churchill is rather more real, rather more complicated and offensive than he's portrayed in many modern war movies.” The quartet sets out to capture Hitler's second-in-command Rudolf Hess, who actually did flee to Scotland in 1941. “They're tasked with using the Nazis' belief in the occult against them,” teases Cornell. “That plays out in a spy game against British fascists that eventually baits a hook for Hess.” **SJ**

*The Witches Of World War II is out on 7 March.*

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

# The Voyage Home

**Dungeons & Dragons** returns in a new IDW comic

AFTER ITS appearance on *Stranger Things* and with a big-screen outing imminent, IDW is now bringing *Dungeons & Dragons* back to comics with a new miniseries called *Saturday Morning Adventures*, focusing on the much-loved Saturday morning cartoon, which is 40 years old this year.

It's a show that David M Booher, who has co-written the miniseries with Sam Maggs, knows all too well from his childhood. “My own experience with *D&D* goes directly back to the animated series, and my fondest memory as an '80s kid was sitting in front of the TV on Saturday morning, munching on cereal right from the box, and watching Hank, Eric, Diana and friends disappear into that tunnel of the *D&D* ride.”

Booher reckons *Saturday Morning Adventures* is a particularly exciting entry point given the current massive popularity of '80s nostalgia. “It's so accessible,” he says. “You don't have to worry about game mechanics, building a character or finding time to participate in a campaign. Bringing the animated series into comics is great because we're creating a new ‘lost episode’ over four issues, and you don't need to be familiar with anything about *D&D* or the show to enjoy the fantasy adventure we're conjuring up.”

Expect to see lots of familiar faces. “If you know the show at all, you'll recognise just about everybody,” promises Booher. “Hank, Eric, Sheila, Presto, Bobby and, of course, Uni. We'll also see Dungeon Master, and

there is one new character we meet. For the most part, we drop into the Forgotten Realms with the team as if no time has passed between 1985 and now.”

Artist George Kambadais has strived to remain faithful to the classic '80s designs. “I stayed as close to the original as possible,” he explains. “My style is based heavily on an animated style that suits these characters, even if I have more modern influences, so it wasn't super hard. Still, I tried to bring something new to the table without losing the original feel.”

Kambadais also didn't alter much when it came to his depiction of the Forgotten Realms. “The world of *D&D* is alive,” he says. “It's a whole world that changes practically every day, the same way that world does.”

“Our approach to the story wasn't so much about changing the Forgotten Realms as it was exploring the places and characters that maybe we haven't seen yet,” continues Booher. “Even after 40 years, there's so much to discover, and it's been a fun challenge to blend what we love about the show with the parts we've created specifically for the comic.”

Therefore, not much has been updated for the modern day. “We did our best to keep the story rooted in its fantastic '80s beginnings,” insists Booher. “We really wanted this to feel like the animated series has continued in the form of comics. Of course, we can never fully capture the past, but I like to think *Saturday Morning Adventures* rekindles the emotions fans felt when they watched the show.” **SJ**

*Dungeons & Dragons: Saturday Morning Adventures issue one is out on 29 March.*







**SHADOW AND BONE'S** FIRST season culminated on an ominous note. Sun Summoner Alina (Jessie Mei Li) and her childhood best friend, Mal (Archie Renaux), believed they had defeated the villainous General Kirigan (Ben Barnes) and left him for dead. The Darkling, however, survived and emerged from the Shadow Fold with the ability to generate his own shadow creatures. And, by the looks of it, he was really pissed off.

"What you saw at the end of the season is he's created new monsters called Nichevo'ya," co-showrunner Eric Heisserer tells Red Alert. "They are the way he survived the Volcra attack in the Fold. The Nichevo'ya are essentially unstoppable. They are the T-1000s of the Grishaverse and make him an incredibly formidable opponent. But they also come with a price.

"They are created from merzost, which is the forbidden magic that created the Fold in the first place," he continues. "He has once again dabbled in something that he shouldn't, and now he has to deal with the cost that it takes on his body, and his psyche. The others around him have to figure out how to deal with a toxic boss."

## FOLD CAREFULLY

Unaware of the looming threat, Alina and Mal set out on their own to seek more amplifiers. The objects will boost Alina's light powers, hopefully granting her the ability to protect her country.

"The longer that it takes Alina to come back strong enough to destroy the Fold, potentially the more people from her home country are killed," Heisserer says. "She is driven by that fear, and by that nagging guilt, that there is nobody else. Alina has to step up. But she is paired with a man that loves her deeply and wants to make sure that self-care is part of that path, and that she doesn't burn out and kill herself before she gets there."

"We will see some changes to her powers as she takes on new amplifiers," elaborates co-showrunner Daegan Fryklind. "We talked about them in the [writers'] room in terms of the stag is strength, the sea whip is anger and the firebird is an additional characteristic. In terms of the effect of it, too, it's how we are playing with these different elements and emotions that she is taking on as she is levelling up."

In addition, there's Malyen, Alina's long-time friend, companion and protector. To prevent them from becoming too codependent, the writers spent time fleshing him out. Mal's trajectory remains a secret, but Fryklind teases "that doesn't mean there isn't tension and drama between the two of them. Alina is getting a bit power-hungry. He is seeing this happen. That just makes a more interesting

Patrick Gibson as Sturhmond, with his fancy jacket.



## SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# Darkness Rising

The Grishaverse expands as **Shadow And Bone** returns

dynamic between the two of them." Then there's the Crows crew, including mastermind Kaz (Freddy Carter), gunslinger Jesper (Kit Young) and assassin Inej (Amita Suman). Typically busy pulling off some heist, these

criminals will be on a separate mission motivated by something other than money.

"In this case, it could be revenge," says Heisserer. "It could be survival. There are other aspects in play I can't speak to."

Building on the existing mythology required introducing some new blood: the Crows recruit Wylen (Jack Wolfe), who becomes the team's demolition expert. Wylen shares some history of the group, particularly Kaz.

"Wylen gets roped into the latest shenanigans the Crows find themselves in,"



Archie Renaux as Malyen and Jessie Mei Li as Alina.





The Crows, just hanging around on a rooftop.



Lewis Tan as Tolya, Anna Leong Brophy as Tamar.



Heisserer says. "He is put on a mission to help the Crows and that's how we get to see him interact with the rest of the team, including Jesper."

On the flip side, Alina encounters Nikolai (Patrick Gibson), the Prince of Ravka. Operating under the alias of dashing privateer Sturmthond, he commands his own armada of ships. Nikolai will also spice up the romance department as he vies for Alina's affections.

"That was a really beautiful dance that Patrick did, shifting between those two characters, because they are quite different," Fryklind says. "Sturmthond is charismatic and owns the room. Nikolai is somebody who had the role of responsibility thrust upon him at a certain point. He does a shift in accent between the two characters."

Among the other newcomers are twins Tamar (Anna Leong Brophy) and

Tolya (Lewis Tan). A former mercenary, Tolya masterfully wields a number of weapons and is deadly in combat. An asset in battle, Tamar is dedicated to safeguarding the Sun Summoner. Even scarier: both siblings are Heartrenders, beings capable of inflicting damage upon the internal organs of any person within their line of sight.

Tan's roles in *Mortal Kombat*, *Wu Assassins* and *Into the Badlands* tapped into his decades of martial arts training. *Shadow And Bone* will similarly play to those strengths.

"We have an incredible stunts department this season, who really put Lewis through the paces and created stunts for both Anna and Lewis, that worked complementary towards each other," Fryklind concludes. "Tamar's weapons are double axes. Tolya has a long sword. They are also Heartrenders, too, so they can use that. They just prefer to fight more than they like to heartrend." BC

*Shadow And Bone* is on Netflix from 16 March.



## NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Paramount+ turning **Dungeons & Dragons** into eight-episode series.

→ *The Walking Dead*'s Michael Cudlitz is Lex Luthor in season three of

**Superman & Lois**.

→ Phoebe Waller-Bridge to write and executive-produce a **Tomb Raider** series for Prime Video.

→ **The Last Of Us** and **Reginald The Vampire** both renewed for second seasons.

→ **Chucky** renewed for a third season.

→ Jeffrey Dean Morgan joining the voice cast of **Invincible**.

→ *The Expanse*'s Jason Ning producing a **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** series.

→ **Titans** and **Doom Patrol** axed by HBO Max after four seasons. Boo!

→ Matt Fraction's comic book **Sex Criminals** heading to Prime Video.

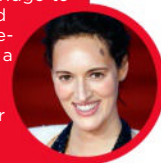
→ Stephen Colbert producing a TV take on Roger Zelazny's novel

**The Chronicles Of Amber**.

→ Lance Reddick joins **Percy Jackson And The Olympians** as Zeus while

Toby Stephens is Poseidon.

→ Prequel show **Outlander: Blood Of My Blood** greenlit by Starz.



► **SCI-FACT!** There are 10 books in total that form the Grishaverse, three of which are in the *Shadow And Bone* series.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Return To The Beyond

Derek Landy and Greg Land bring back the Beyonder as *All-Out Avengers* becomes **Avengers Beyond**

WITH THE FINAL ISSUE revelation that the cosmic baddie was, in the words of writer Derek Landy, “the entity behind all these shenanigans”, *All-Out Avengers* is now morphing into *Avengers Beyond*.

“It’s a way of refocusing and of setting out, in iron-clad terms, that there is an overarching story at work,” says Landy. “We keep the episodic nature – the idea that, each issue, we’re plunging into an adventure halfway through, with no flashbacks or in-depth explanations – but we’re playing that against a very orchestrated background.”

As with its previous incarnation, the five-parter will have a fluid line-up. “From the beginning, Tom [Brevoort, editor] allowed us to use anyone who has ever been an Avenger to tell this story,” says

Landy. “That’s been a particular joy, because it means I got to write Spidey.”

Known for his novels like the *Skulduggery Pleasant* series, the Dublin-born writer credits the wall-crawler with helping him learn to read at an early age. “*Judge Dredd* helped just as much, as did *Charley’s War*, *Johnny Red* and *Action Force*,” he recalls. “Getting my hands on actual Marvel comics wasn’t easy back in the early ’80s in Ireland, so Marvel UK was a godsend to someone like me. Comics shaped my writing, and their influence can be seen

**“There will be familiar faces and a whole lot more to come”**

throughout all of my books. To have this chance to write them is beyond a dream come true.”

Admitting that “I didn’t think I’d be allowed to use him, to be honest!” Landy says that the Beyonder was the perfect baddie for his nefarious plans. “It was Tom who came up with the concept – ‘I want a series where you’re dropped into the middle of a story every single issue’ – and gave it to me to develop,” he explains. “I figured it’d make things interesting if the Avengers were suddenly becoming aware of what was going on in the middle of the adventures – just like the reader – so I looked around and



Cover art for the first issue, by Greg Land. Ooh.

wondered what villain could be responsible. Really, the Beyonder was the only one with both the power to do this, and the playfulness required for something so elaborate. I was obsessed with *Secret Wars* as a kid, so I knew the Beyonder loves his little games.”

Explaining that “up until now, I’ve been too shy and respectful of the Marvel heritage, the characters and other creative

teams,” Landy promises to be bolder in his choice of guest stars. “I’ve ramped up my ambition with *Avengers Beyond*, but there are still some opportunities I haven’t seized,” he says. “Which is my very roundabout way of saying that there will be familiar faces and, if we survive the first five issues, a whole lot more to come.”

Landy is also enjoying working with artist Greg Land. “Greg just







draws the prettiest people," he says. "His jaws are the squarest, his smiles are the whitest, his limbs are the longest and his backgrounds are the most varied. He designs spaceships, costumes, aliens, impossible machinery and improbable interiors, and he does it on every page." **SJ**

*Avengers Beyond* issue one is out on 29 March.

## WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# International Rescue

Mark Millar goes global with **The Ambassadors**



**INTRODUCING** a sextet of new superheroes from across the globe and illustrated by some of the best artists around, Mark Millar's new miniseries *The Ambassadors* is his most ambitious yet – at least until mega-crossover *Big Game* arrives in the summer.

"Getting to do a project that's set in loads of countries that I haven't even been to, there was loads of research, as each one is set in a different territory such as Brazil, Mexico or Australia," Millar tells Red Alert. "Everyone's got their own individual story and it has to feel authentic, so I had to check in with the local people, such as, 'Is this how kids talk in India right now and do they have the Americanisms that are creeping into the big cities?' It was tons of work, and it



Frank Quitely illustrates the first issue.

actually took me four years, so I'm really glad it looks so good."

*The Ambassadors* grew out of what Millar saw as a gap in the market. "I always like to do what I'm not currently seeing," he explains. "It's like *Superman: Red Son* was very simple because it was the antithesis of Superman, and *Kick-Ass* was a superhero who had no superpowers. With this, I thought all the superheroes all come from America and they're actually all

in New York City, which is a bit odd. The rest of the world is completely unexplored."

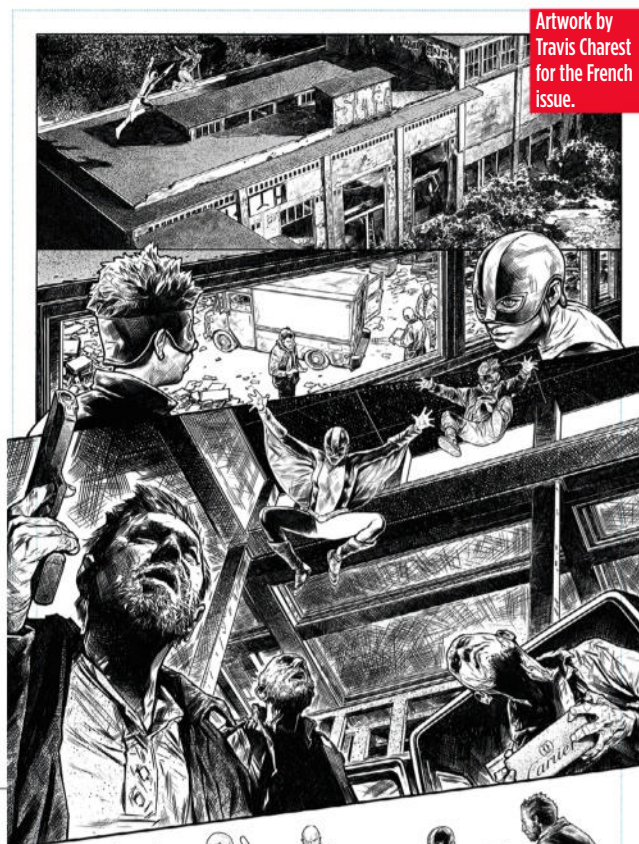
The series opens with an introductory issue set in South Korea and drawn by Frank Quitely. Millar recruited a host of top artists to work on the five remaining interconnected one-shots, including Karl Kerschl, Travis Charest, Olivier Coipel, Matteo Buffagni and Matteo Scalera. "I literally had my dream wish list and I never thought I'd get them all," he says. "I never thought I'd get Travis Charest, who is doing France – which is quite helpful as he has lived there, so he knows it. When he draws Paris, it's quite authentic, and a French train looks like a French train."

That first issue centres on Korean genius billionaire Dr Chung, who sets out to establish her own global super-team.

"I like the idea of bestowing superpowers on people," says Millar. "It's like the 21st century version of the [Willy Wonka] Chocolate Factory and the Golden Ticket. There's six people in the world who are going to be given superpowers and you have to work out who really deserves it, as there's all these people from around the world who just want to be famous, and one billion people apply in a week. You're going to be an ambassador to your country, so you've got to be a good person and have a clean track record."

"I also look at superheroes as like a fire and rescue service – an international rescue squad who are almost like *Thunderbirds*, so if there's a problem somewhere they basically put all these guys on a plane and drop them in. So if there's a Fukushima-type situation, they can sort it out." **SJ**

*The Ambassadors* issue one is out on 29 March.



Artwork by Travis Charest for the French issue.





SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# From Zeroes To Heroes

Batman is dead (again) – it's time for **Gotham Knights** to step up

➔ NOT A JOKE. NOT A HOAX. Batman's death and unmasking serve as the catalyst for the new superhero drama *Gotham Knights*. In the aftermath of Bruce Wayne's demise, his adopted son Turner gets blamed for the murder. To clear his name and figure out who framed him, Turner must ally himself with his BFF Stephanie Brown, Batman's sidekick Carrie Kelley and the children of some of the Caped Crusader's greatest enemies.

"Poor Turner," co-showrunner James Stoteriaux tells Red Alert. "His first big revelation is that his adopted father is Batman. Turner goes through that whiplash of realising that the person who took him in, loved him and cared for him had this whole other identity he never knew about. For Turner, that really opens up the question of, 'Why didn't he share that information with me? Why didn't he tell me?' One of the things we open the pilot with is this

admission that he always wondered why his father adopted him," he adds. "That is a question that will linger throughout the season, and he will ultimately discover the truth behind his adoption."

Characters will need to decide whether to follow in the footsteps of their parents or carve out their own paths. Turner, however, isn't the only individual grappling with his calling. The sins of Batman's rogues' gallery impact their offspring as well. Take Duela, who was raised in Arkham by the Joker.

"Everyone assumes Duela is going to turn out just like him, that she is going to become this terrible villain," co-showrunner Chad Fiveash says. "That has very much forged her identity. Because everyone assumes she is a bad person, she is going to live up to that and become the worst bad person ever. For her, it's, is she going to break out of that

Misha Collins as Harvey Dent, Oscar Morgan as Turner.





Olivia Rose Keegan as Duela: evil or not evil?



Cullen Row, Duela, Turner Hayes, Harper Row and Robin.

and become something different? Or is she going to become what everybody in Gotham expects her to be?"

Then there's Harvey Dent. As the current district attorney, he loves the city and believes it's worth fighting for. But long-time comic book readers and moviegoers will be fully expecting that he eventually transitions from upstanding citizen into the disfigured and maniacal menace Two-Face... and they wouldn't be wrong.

"We love having a rich landscape to tell his tragic downfall," says Stoteraux. "Casting Misha Collins was incredibly important. We wanted someone who could capture Harvey Dent's innate goodness and sense of justice and drive to make Gotham a better place. We know where this character is ultimately going, becoming this arch-villain Two-Face, so we

wanted somebody who really conveyed Harvey's goodness before we get there.

"In the wake of Batman's death, he is rising to the challenge of who is going to save the city. Harvey is going to do it through a sense of justice and not through being a vigilante, but by being a public official who is out there. What could go wrong?"

Turner and company will be hounded by everyone in Gotham. To further push the Knights to their limits, the first season will feature one of the most feared organisations from Batman lore as the main antagonist: the Court of Owls. This clandestine criminal society promises to provide the perfect foil to the young heroes.

"Our Knights are taken to their lowest levels," Fiveash says. "They are being hunted. They have the least amount of power, so for a

**“We wanted someone who could capture Harvey Dent's innate goodness”**

villain, we wanted the people who had the most amount of power and control everything. Throughout history, they have wielded this power, so they felt like the perfect villain for our Knights to go up against.”

As Robin, Carrie is the most experienced vigilante of the group – she arrives on the scene already sporting a supersuit. For the other characters, however, it will be a slow evolution.

“One of the things in the story that we are telling is how they go from being these wanted fugitives – who are just trying to clear their names – to finding themselves and being expected to be heroes,” Fiveash says. “It is going to be a bit of a journey before we see them fully embrace costumes.”

Something else audiences can expect to see are foundational characters and Easter eggs from the Batverse. For example, Joe Chill, the man who killed Bruce Wayne's parents, will be popping up. And there's much more to come.

“Joe Chill effectively created Batman,” Stoteraux concludes. “We are also going to see Stephanie Brown's father, Arthur. We will tell his origin, which will allow for him to progress to where you know it goes [supervillain Cluemaster]. A lot of the show is being able to take things back to the beginning.” **BC**

*Gotham Knights is on The CW from 14 March. UK details are TBC.*

**► SCI-FACT!** James Stoteraux previously worked on *Krypton*, *Gotham* and *Batwoman*.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# Fly Me To The Moon

Billy Crudup is a charismatic salesman selling homes on the Moon in Apple TV+'s retrofuturist comedy **Hello Tomorrow!**

➔ IN POST-WAR AMERICA, THERE was an enthusiasm for predicting the exciting potential that our future might hold. From Tex Avery cartoons like “The House Of Tomorrow” to Disneyland ride Carousel of Progress and the New York World’s Fair, we were touted lives full of hovercars, fully automated houses and rocket trips to the Moon, just for fun. Sadly, that’s not our reality. But new Apple TV+ series *Hello Tomorrow!* poses a world where it all came true.

Co-created by Amit Bhalla and Lucas Jansen, *Hello Tomorrow!* gives us that shiny, brave new world where robots do our laundry, walk our dogs and deliver our milk, while dad uses his jet-pack to fly off to work.

But even with those wonders, humanity is still looking for something more. In this alternate reality, the ultimate aspirational goal is relocating to the Moon, and salesman Jack Billings (Billy Crudup) is the guy who is all about making dreams come true... for a price.

The first three episodes premiered on 17 February and laid out the nomadic life of Jack and his small team of salespeople, including Eddie (Hank Azaria), Shirley (Haneefah Wood) and Herb (Dewshane Williams), tooting from town to town in their hovercars, selling the big dream to ordinary people. With its gorgeous production design and practical, everyday

robots assimilated into scenes, the series is a retrofuturism lover’s fantasy come to life. Jansen tells Red Alert that the series is the visual realisation of the notion that was once sold to humanity by popular culture, in huge part, by advertising.

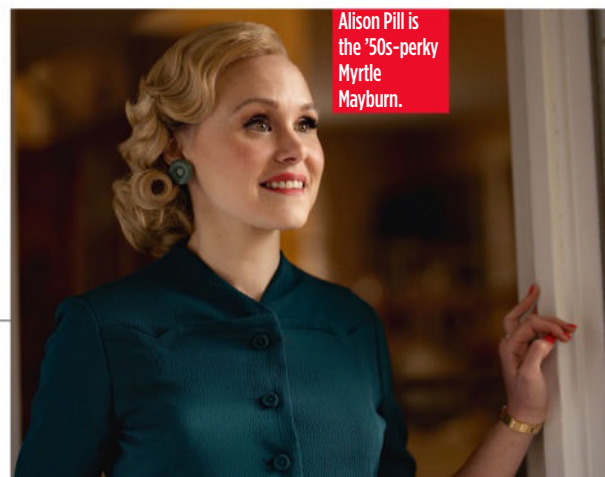
“The show is kind of set in a delusion that we all share,” he explains. “It’s part of our American 20th century capitalism that was created as much by advertising as anything. [The series] is a chance to test the premise of how does life shake out versus what we’ve been sold it would be? Jack tests that as a character, and so does everyone else in the show. I feel like that is a psychic circumstance which we’re all wrestling with now in what was supposed to be the pain-free, leisure-filled future.”

## BUY, BUY

Despite Jack’s compulsion to sell a better life to everyone he meets, he’s a mess personally. Estranged from his wife and his son Joey (Nicholas Podany) for two decades, Jack accidentally runs into his now grown-up son and takes the opportunity to hire him onto his team... without revealing who he is. It’s hard to say if Jack is so dead inside that Joey represents an opportunity to try again, or if he’s the ultimate sales challenge.



Dewshane Williams and Hank Azaria: sales chums.



Alison Pill is the '50s-perky Myrtle Mayburn.

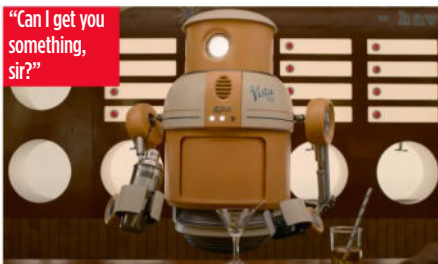




Billy Crudup as Jack, who's not all that he seems.



"Can I get you something, sir?"



Bhalla says the series explores how humans love to let things take over our lives. "The tenets of financial capitalism and 'bubbles' and Ponzi schemes, and [in-show terms] vega-dicers and perma-rolls and whatever, are fundamentally about distracting you," he explains. "And fundamentally are part of Jack's alienation from his real life."

"The ambition, the dreaming, the jackpot at the end of the story that keeps Jack from his family is very important for us to draw between the two worlds a psychic reality for Jack that makes him really interesting to watch."

Jansen continues, "Jack is a genuine believer in the idea of the American Dream and that consumer capitalism is the thing that's going to lead us all there. It's so joyous for him to try to

help people through what they're going through that the details often get left behind. It's a man who's as captured in the very delusions he's delivering to others. A figure that, to us, is sort of the tragic hero of our age."

"To what extent do our delusions shape us and inspire us and manipulate us and make us lose touch with ourselves, or destroy us? I think that's what we're all reckoning with in this moment, in our culture, to a large extent."

As the series has already alluded to, Jack's sales scheme seems pretty flimsy, prompting the question of whether the Moon is actually an end goal for the series, or more of an intangible ideal. "I would say big picture, if you write a show about the possibility of going to the Moon, at some point, we know your audience is gonna want to see the Moon," Jansen laughs.

"But the Moon to us, in the show, is like the New World for explorers. Nobody who showed up in the New World got what they were expecting. Sometimes it was much more and sometimes it was far less. And that's all ahead of us as a species, maybe, and it's all here for us on *Hello Tomorrow!*" **TB**

*Hello Tomorrow!* is on Apple TV+ now.

## WALKER WATCH

### NEWS FROM THE WALKING DEAD UNIVERSE

● *Fear The Walking Dead* will end with a final season released in two six-episode parts, beginning 14 May.

● *The Walking Dead: Dead City* - starring Lauren Cohan and Jeffrey Dean Morgan - will premiere in June. It's set two years after the main series finale, and viewers will see zombies walking across the Brooklyn Bridge as the former enemies work their way through the madhouse of post-apocalyptic Manhattan. Executive producer Scott Gimple promises "the most awesome, disgusting, terrifying Walkers that I've seen in the history of the show. It quite possibly will make you throw up."

● *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon* - starring Norman Reedus - will air later this year. Set in France, featuring scenes beneath the Eiffel Tower and inside the Louvre, the show sees Daryl as a loner who cannot move through this new dangerous world alone, facing vicious enemies and hitherto unseen threats of the undead.

● An untitled spin-off starring Andrew Lincoln and Danai Gurira as Rick Grimes and Michonne will go into production this year for a 2024 premiere. It's described as a romantic saga of the dangerous road to each other, and the road they must find *with* each other, cornered by a new civilisation and hordes of the dead.

● All spin-off series currently have a six-episode format.

● Tillie Walden's *Clementine Book Two* is set for October.

● The sequel to *The Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners, Chapter 2: Retribution* launches on SteamVR and PSVR 2 on 21 March.



GETTY

► **SCI-FACT!** The robots in the show are hand-built from materials from the era, and limited in capabilities so they're not overly complex.





Anita Dobson is playing... well, we don't know yet.



Jemma Redgrave back as Kate.



Aneurin Barnard as Roger.



Michelle Greenidge, and another door...



# Space And Time

Celebrating 60 years of **Doctor Who**

◆ Several cast announcements have been made since the last issue of *SFX*. *EastEnders* legend Anita Dobson joins the cast of series 14, in an as-yet undisclosed role. Starring alongside her is *It's A Sin*'s Michelle Greenidge.

Showrunner Russell T Davies posted on Instagram: “*DOCTOR WHO* NEWS! Anita Dobson joins us, oh the honour! *EastEnders*, *Strictly*, *Doctor Who*, Anita IS the BBC!” he said. “And Michelle Greenidge joins us too, my old mate from *It's A Sin*. What an amazing cast from @andypriorcasting. But what is the significance of the doors...?”

◆ UNIT have been confirmed to return in series 14, with Jemma Redgrave reprising her role as Kate Lethbridge-Stewart. Hopefully that new budget means she can get fancier sandwiches.

◆ Aneurin Barnard, who recently starred in *1899* and *Peaky Blinders*, has also joined

the series as the “mysterious” Roger ap Gwilliam.

◆ Jack Forsyth-Noble, who has previously appeared in *Coronation Street* and worked with Big Finish, has been cast as new character Will.

◆ Production has continued with filming in, obviously, Cardiff, Pembrokeshire and Bristol.

◆ In an interview with

*GQ*, Russell T Davies talked about the impact of another sci-fi series.

“I watch the *Star Trek* empire with vast envy: the way that's turned

itself from an old archive show into something fantastic.”

In the same interview he confirmed it was “time for the next stage for *Doctor Who*. I thought the streaming platforms are ready, the spin-offs are ready; I always believed in spin-offs when I was there.”

◆ On an Instagram post, Fifteenth Doctor Ncuti Gatwa posed by a painting of himself at Bad Wolf Studios, alongside the words: “The Home Of The Whoniverse.”

◆ The latest issue of *Who* comic fanzine *Vworp Vworp* is now available – with three different covers and an exclusive audio drama – from [vworpvworp.co.uk](http://vworpvworp.co.uk). Alongside the Cutaway Comics range, the VV team have big plans for the 60th anniversary.

*Doctor Who* is on BBC One and Disney+ from November.



► **SCI-FACT!** The first *Doctor Who* comic strip was published in *TV Comic* in November 1964.



► **SCI-FACT!** Piers Haggard was the great-great-nephew of Victorian adventure novelist H Rider Haggard.

NEW AUTHOR

## JINWOO CHONG

MEET THE EDITORIAL ASSISTANT BEHIND TIME-BENDING TECH THRILLER *FLUX*



ENUSHE KHAN

### Tell us about your protagonists.

→ I wrote *Flux* from the point of view of three characters: eight-year-old Bo, 28-year-old Brandon and 48-year-old Blue. Their respective ages and alliterative names should point to something interesting, given that time travel features greatly in this novel.

### Did the book have any particular inspiration?

→ I had the idea after the implosion of [health tech company] Theranos played out in the media. It was one of the first scam stories I remember that caught everybody's attention. I wanted to tell a story with the same mood.

### Does it have any particular political/social theme?

→ Race plays a big part, as does the experience of recognising yourself in media, cast either as hero or villain, and the repercussions of an experience like that on a person's psyche as they age.

### How long did it take to write?

→ About four months, after working out the story and development in an

outline over two years. I outline much faster than this, usually, but time travel requires a great deal of puzzle-making.

### Any advice for budding authors?

→ We'd all love to believe that traditional publishing is a meritocracy. Since it's not, it's up to an emerging writer to be their own advocate in the circles that matter. Some writers are lucky and don't need anything but their talent. But the vast majority of us succeed because we understand the business.

*Flux* is on sale 21 March, published by Melville House.



Piers Haggard (seated) with the *Satan's Claw* cast.

© SHUTTERSTOCK

# PIERS HAGGARD 1939-2023

Remembering the folk horror pioneer



"I WASN'T REALLY INTERESTED in *Dracula*," recalled Piers Haggard, director of *Blood On Satan's Claw*, a film that traded the traditional gothic chills of Hammer for a new and disquieting strain of folk horror, rooted in the British soil. "I was interested in the dark things that people feel, and the dark things that happen."

Born in London, he began his career in theatre, with a directing traineeship at the prestigious Royal Court. Television work followed, while a stint as an interpreter for Michelangelo Antonioni on elliptical 1966 thriller *Blow-Up* proved an entrée into the world of cinema.

Haggard's first film, *I Can't... I Can't* aka *Wedding Night* arrived in 1970. A commercial failure, it nevertheless saw him offered the chance to direct *Blood On Satan's Claw*, then known as *Satan's Skin*. "I had barely seen a horror film," he confessed. "I was frightfully serious." But the "dark poetry" of the Devil-

haunted landscape appealed to him: "the nooks and crannies of woodland, the edges of fields". One of the film's most unforgettable images sees an eyeball staring out of the earth from a newly disinterred skull.

Winning a BAFTA for 1978's *Pennies From Heaven*, Haggard made *Quatermass* the next year, resurrecting Nigel Kneale's boffin hero of the 1950s in an apocalyptic near-future Britain. 1980's *The Fiendish Plot Of Fu Manchu* saw Peter Sellers playing Sax Rohmer's master-villain – it was released two weeks after the star died – while 1981's *Venom* found Oliver Reed and Klaus Kinski embroiled in a killer snake yarn. Other genre credits included three episodes of Gerry Anderson's *Space Precinct* and *The Lifeforce Experiment*, a 1994 TV movie adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's afterlife tale "The Breakthrough".

An active campaigner for directors' rights, Haggard was awarded the OBE in the 2016 New Year Honours. **NS**

## ANNIE WERSCHING 1977-2023

American actress who played the Borg Queen in season two of *Star Trek: Picard*.

## LISA LORING 1958-2023

The original Wednesday Addams in 1960s TV series *The Addams Family*.



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SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS

# WORD



# UP



SAY MY NAME! THE  
WORLD'S MIGHTIEST  
MORTAL FACES MYTHIC  
VENGEANCE IN  
**SHAZAM! FURY  
OF THE GODS**

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



OR ONCE THE hoariest of Hollywood soundbites is absolutely true: it's all about family. That's the operative word

behind *Shazam! Fury Of The Gods*, a DC blockbuster that not only makes a compelling case for the superiority of exclamation marks over colons in movie titles but which also pits Billy Batson and his superpowered clan against a sisterhood of goddesses. And you thought Christmas was a crossfire of family dynamics...

"In a lot of movies the whole character journey is like, 'Oh, they're missing this thing in their life' and then at the end of the movie they get what they're missing," says director David F. Sandberg, returning to the realm of capes after 2019's *Shazam!*. "So then in a sequel you often have to take that away and start from scratch again."

"In this one it's pretty interesting because in the first film what Billy really wants in life is a family and he gets a family at the end. Now they're getting older, and they're getting older very quickly, so they're not going to be able to live in a foster home forever. So Billy is very concerned about losing this family that he's just found. He's trying to keep them all together."

Based on the true, original Captain Marvel, who burst into four-colour life in 1940, the first movie had the power of wish-fulfilment at its heart. When Asher Angel's teenage Billy utters the enchanted word "Shazam!" he's transformed into the World's Mightiest Mortal in the form of Zachary Levi. The sequel doubles down on this quintessential kid fantasy as Billy's equally supersized foster siblings – the Shazam Family of the comics – are presented in their full spandexy pomp.

"We got to see a little bit of the superhero family at the end of the first movie but now we



The kids are alright. Actually, they're great.

get to do more of that," Sandberg tells *SFX*, "how they work together – or try to work together as a team. And it doesn't always work because they're a bunch of kids! I think it worked out very nicely in that way. It doesn't feel like you have to do a complete reset for a sequel. You can build on what happened in the first one."

"For a superhero movie our budget on the first film was relatively low. It felt like, 'We can't really compete on spectacle, what we have to compete with is the characters and the humour and what makes them unique.' But now we can have both. We have those characters but we have a bit more money so we can have a bit more spectacle and scale. Now we get to go bigger and have bigger stakes and





Shazam  
(Zachary Levi)  
get as badass  
as he can be.

## “Now we have a bit more money so we can have a bit more spectacle and scale”

bring in gods and monsters.” Enter – with suitably mythic fanfare – the Daughters of Atlas. Embodied by A-listers Dame Helen Mirren, Lucy Liu and Rachel Zegler, the breakout star of Spielberg’s *West Side Story*, these sisters bring the fury of the title.

“Before we landed on them there were talks about old Shazam villains from the comic

books,” Sandberg reveals. “But then we got into this idea of, ‘Well, Shazam’s powers come from gods and mythology. What if they were actually stolen from the gods, and they want them back?’ That creates an interesting dilemma because Shazam didn’t steal them. It’s not his fault. But of course they want them back.

“The goddesses aren’t completely in the wrong, at least not in their motivation, but the way they go about it is very wrong, because they do some evil things. I thought that was very interesting and unique, to not go the usual comic book villain route. And mythological creatures and superpowers go very well together. They’re quite similar in many ways.” →

## “I’M A hardcore EXTROVERT, IF YOU HAVEN’T ALREADY NOTICED!”

**ZACHARY LEVI IS SHAZAM**

**How does it feel to be back in the world of Shazam?**

♥ So good. Quite frankly he’s one of the most interesting and entertaining characters in comicdom, because most heroes are adults and they’re mature and they’re brooding and all of these things. Very few of them get to balance that with the fact that they’re actually a kid and they’re still learning how to drive, let alone be a superhero. That paradox creates such a really fun, interesting, enjoyable sandbox to play in.

**It must be a physically demanding role, not just for the flying or punching people out but because you personally bring so much energy to the screen...**

♥ I almost wish I could say, “Yeah, man, it really takes a lot out of me, and I’ve got to decompress, you have no idea how much I’m giving of myself...” I wish I could say that because it would make me sound so much more sacrificial.

Bro, I am so pumped to be there every day. However God made me, he gave me an extra gear and I love to ride it. I’m a hardcore extrovert, if you haven’t already noticed, which ultimately boils down to, where do I get my energy? If I’m on set with a couple of hundred people, and we’re making a movie together, it’s the best. Those things don’t drain me. Those things make me more stoked on life.

**How much of a dive did you take into the comics?**

♥ A little bit. Listen, what we’ve been trying to do since the beginning is honour all of it. Honour the CC Beck of it all, honour all of the Fawcett comics all the way through to the New 52, but recognising that, if you go back far enough, those comics were very hokey. They’re not serious.

And also Captain Marvel was quite a different character. He was a Superman rip-off, that’s why they got sued and lost! I know there are some purists that hate it. I hear from them all the time on social media! But I think it was very smart to rejig the character in a way where Billy becomes adult-looking but is still the kid inside. It makes for a far more interesting character. It makes for a more entertaining character.

**How does Shazam fit into DC’s cinematic universe?**

♥ I love that we get to be the most subversive of all the DC characters, almost like the Deadpool of DC. Deadpool gets to sit outside of it and comment on it all and have fun with it all – obviously in a more R-rated, mature way. We do the same thing, just a little more family-friendly!



## "WE HAVE A MISSION"

LUCY LIU IS KALYPSO

**So what are the sisters furious about?**

♥ We basically come to this world to avenge our father. We come to reclaim what we think is rightfully ours. We have a mission, and that's something that keeps us together as sisters, and also keeps us very clear on what our focus is. You have to have that ultimately at the heart of any character, whether you're protagonist or antagonist.

**How physically demanding was this role?**

♥ For this it was understanding how rigorous it is to be a part of an action movie because of the hours. And for me the costume was not easy. It was heavy, and so that was something that we really needed to get used to, all of us. But that almost really kept you in shape before you had to do anything physical!

**Shazam is a giant wish-fulfillment fantasy. Is there a hero you would have loved changing places with as a kid?**

♥ For me there were limitations because I did not necessarily see the diversity in those characters that I read about. But when I did see the animated Wonder Twins I was like, "Oh, I look a little bit similar to that, I can sort of relate to that." The Wonder Twin powers activating - my brother and I used to play that together! And also seeing Wonder Woman, this powerful woman, with the truth lasso, with the invisible plane. There was something there that was so magical.

And that's some Olympian-level casting for sure. "We wanted to aim high. It was like, 'What would be the dream? The dream would be Helen Mirren. So let's try. We'll ask her first and when she says no we'll go down the line.' But she said yes!

"I think that emboldened us a bit, because then it was like, 'Ooh, can we get Lucy Liu to be the sister?' It probably helped that Helen had already said yes, because then we could say to Lucy, 'Do you want to play Helen Mirren's sister?'"

"And with Rachel, *West Side Story* hadn't come out yet so I didn't know anything about her. She was just one of the many girls who auditioned for the role. But she blew us away because she's amazing. She's such a star and that's why she's now in *Snow White* and *The Hunger Games* and everything else

she's doing. We got very, very lucky with the cast. They're such professionals. Helen Mirren is doing stunts in this movie. We put her on wires up in the air and she's on these rigs, flying around. She wanted to do everything. We had to stop her from doing certain things."

And the package deal of gods and monsters appears to include a nod to legendary effects maestro Ray Harryhausen and his cinematic bestiary. "Absolutely," says Sandberg, acknowledging the debt. "I love monsters,

so it was fun to get to do our versions of mythological creatures. The cyclops is very much an homage to

Kalypso (Lucy Liu) and her... er... friend? We hope so.



## "IT'S AN ESCAPE"

**RACHEL ZEGLER  
IS ANTHEA**

### So who's Anthea?

♥ She's the youngest of the three sisters. In true little sister vibe she keeps doing what her sisters tell her to do because she believes that it's for the greater good. She has this interesting coming of age plot in the midst of all of the action and craziness that's going on.

### Why is superhero cinema such a phenomenon right now?

♥ It's an escape, and it's a necessary escape, where we all just had this world-changing group traumatic event with the pandemic. But when we were kids and we felt misunderstood or we felt like the world was against us, imagining the Superman and the Wonder Women and the Batmen of the world was solace for us.

### Which hero would you have traded places with as a kid?

♥ I wanted to be Belle from *Beauty And The Beast*, which is probably heresy now that I'm Snow White! She was so headstrong and also a brunette with brown eyes, which was also really important for me growing up, because I'd only seen, like, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty and the blonde-haired, blue-eyed trope was something that was stuffed in all of our faces. But also as I grew up I really wanted to be Queen Amidala from *Star Wars*. If I could say "Shazam!" and be Natalie Portman in the *Star Wars* prequels I would do it in a heartbeat.

## "I WANTED TO DO BILLY JUSTICE"

**ASHER ANGEL  
IS BILLY BATSON**

### How has Billy changed?

♥ He's evolved a lot. He's finally settled into himself. Being with his family, being a superhero, using his powers has just been a blast for him, but adulthood's on the horizon and he doesn't really know what's going to happen when he's 18 - if he ages out of the foster care system and has to leave his family. That's a little worrisome for him, the unknown of what the future holds.

### Does the fact you're all older change the tone?

♥ There is more adult humour for sure. It's not as kid-friendly as the first film, but we're still keeping that component a little bit. The balance is what makes it really fun.

### Did you go back to the comics to find Billy Batson?

♥ I really wanted to do Billy justice. He's so different in the first film so I had to go back and backtrack a little bit with the comics and dig up anything I could find to figure out how Billy's going to be in this next film.

The 1940s comics are such a different world. I looked at them because they're iconic and I wanted to see if I could pick and choose some things that I could implement into our film. I just tried to pull that and maybe use some of those things that fit this generation.

What do you call a group of superheroes? A "cape".

Harryhausen but then we get to do our own version of the minotaur and the harpies and even unicorns, where rather than do the nice, cuddly rainbow unicorns we have, like, the badass unicorns!

"That was fun, to do something different with that, and to get to bring mythological creatures into our modern day world. I love that kind of stuff."

Rebranded as Shazam - you suspect the name Captain Marvel cannot be spoken lest it summon some darkly litigious sorcery from a certain rival studio - the hero created by CC Beck and Bill Parker outsold even Superman in his heyday. The movies have restored some glory to a character relegated for years to second-division status. "He's not as known as Batman but he certainly has his hardcore fans," →



**"I PRAY I WILL  
BE IN THAT SUIT  
ONE DAY!"**

**JACK DYLAN GRAZER  
IS FREDDY FREEMAN**

**How has Freddy changed?**

♥ Obviously he was 14 when we last saw him and now he's 18. So he's matured, definitely. He's learned a lot about himself and his capabilities as a boy, as a blossoming man. But also he's still pretty uncertain of what he's doing and who he is and his principles and morals and whatever. He's figuring it all out still and we're kind of catching him in that place of uncertainty and ambiguity.

**In *Fury Of The Gods* we see a lot more of your superhero alter-ego, played by Adam Brody. Do you ever trade notes on the character?**

♥ No, we've actually never done that once. There's a moment where I'll say "Shazam!" and I'll turn into Adam and they'll say, "Everybody stop, don't move!" and then Adam will fly in, I'll give him a high five and he'll hop in for me and we'll trade places, tag. And then I'll watch him do his thing and think, "Oh my god, he's nailing it, he's really getting all my mannerisms down!"

**Do you ever get cape envy?**

♥ Yeah, man! But I hope and I still pray that I will be in that suit one day. A spin-off movie? Yeah, but I'll have to be the one who makes it, because David [F. Sandberg]'s not going to do it. David will never put me in that suit! He never wants to satisfy me! That's his whole thing!



Helen Mirren gives it some welly as Hespera.



**“It’s quite a balance to strike, trying to make a Shazam that most people are happy with”**

Sandberg tells *SFX*, “which is always a bit of a challenge making these movies, because you can’t please everyone. Everyone has their own version. ‘Oh, Shazam has to be like this!’ But then the next guy is like, ‘No, Shazam has to be like *this*...’ It’s quite a balance to strike, trying to make a Shazam that most people are happy with – or at least okay with.

“There are some that want it to be more old-school Shazam and then there are those that want it to be a much darker Shazam, which I don’t think is quite right for the character. You can go dark in places and we do, in this movie, but overall it’s more of a fun, wish-fulfilment character, I think.” Did Sandberg research the original comics? “It was

mostly for the first one that I did the really deep dive, because I wasn’t familiar with the character,” he reveals. “So I read a lot of those old comic books. They can be very, very goofy! All kinds of stuff – talking pigs and dancing skeletons and whatnot.”

Not to say that this franchise would snub Tawky Tawny, a belovedly bonkers supporting



## "I CALLED US PUSSY POWER!"

**DAME HELEN MIRREN IS HESPERA**

**So what appealed to you about stepping into the world of Shazam?**

♥ I saw the first *Shazam!* and I was absolutely charmed by it. For me it was a superhero film that I could connect with and enjoy. It was witty and I loved the concept at the centre of it, these outcast kids who have their alter-egos as these superheroes. And being asked to play a goddess is pretty cool, you know, so I very happily signed up for it.

**It's a pretty physical role, we take it?**

♥ It is. I've got my *Shazam* finger... Can you see that? [shows SFX her hand]. That finger's all bent. I had to hit someone. They're brilliant stunt people, fantastic, but he said, "You must follow through, otherwise it doesn't look right." So I did follow through, straight into a concrete wall.

**What's the dynamic between you and Rachel and Lucy?**

♥ It's a brilliant piece of casting. We absolutely bonded as a little group. I called us Pussy Power! And we will be sisters for the rest of our lives. We're constantly emailing each other. We would go out shopping together, we'd go for dinner together. We had a grand time.

**So "Pussy Power" T-shirts for everyone?**

♥ I should have done that! The props department made a beautiful little hand-embroidered doily sort of thing, saying Pussy Power, with little flowers all around it! Maybe I should manufacture them and sell them on Etsy!

## "HE'S SO MUCH MORE INVOLVED"

**DJIMON HOUNSOU IS WIZARD**

**Were you surprised to find yourself back, given you turned to dust in the first movie?**

♥ I sure was delighted to be back. Frankly I thought I was quite limited on the first one, but the role of the wizard I did like a lot. I had no expectation of seeing him resurface in the second one. So I was pleasantly surprised, yeah. Our great writer did me justice, writing me back in this beautiful way.

**He was quite a mysterious character in that first movie. Do we get more of his backstory in this one?**

♥ We get a little more of a backstory in this one but it's all about the story moving forward. We get a hint but I don't know if we get any more understanding. But he definitely is so much more exciting this time around than the first one. And he's so much more involved.

**He has a pretty lonely existence in the first film. Was that a route into the character for you?**

♥ Yes, it gives you such a profound understanding of how this wizard might be, and how he must be feeling, being stranded in that world for some time, trying to find the right candidate. So that's part of building the backstory, to make it intense and profound enough for me to have an arc, a really redeeming arc within the story.

Shazam and Hespera try to sort things out amicably.

character in the comics. "It's a world of magic and mythological beings so why not have a talking tiger?" smiles Sandberg.

"This version of Shazam is the more modern Shazam in many ways. It's more the Geoff Johns version. He created some of the other characters like Darla and Pedro and Eugene. But I still want to have references to the old style. For this one we actually did do some things differently. In the first one I wanted the short cape, which is really a reference to CC Beck's version, but for this one I felt, well, we've done that, let's try something different here. I want to see what

he looks like with a longer cape. So the suit design is a little more modern in this one. I think that's the more fun way to do a sequel, rather than just doing the exact same thing again, because you've already done that. Now you get to experiment and try something different."

But for Sandberg one thing is constant: his star, Zachary Levi, the Big Red Cheese himself (hey, that's our hero's affectionate nickname in the comics - don't write in).

"He's a big kid! He really has that excited kid energy and vibe. So there's not much to be done with him. He's just automatically the character. And he brings so much to it.

"He loves to ad lib, which is fun for me as a director because you get surprised a lot. He'll come up with something that's hilarious and we're like, 'Yeah, we're putting that in the movie!' Sometimes you can't put it in the movie but at least I got to experience it on set! He's just the perfect person for this role." ●

*Shazam! Fury Of The Gods* is in cinemas from 17 March.



# FATHER AND SON

NOW THEY'RE BACK  
TOGETHER, MANDO AND  
BABY YODA WILL HAVE PLENTY  
TO KEEP THEM OCCUPIED IN  
SEASON THREE - AS  
**THE MANDALORIAN**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER RICK  
FAMUYIWA EXPLAINS

WORDS: RICHARD EDWARDS





GETTY



THE YEARS BETWEEN 1980 AND 1983 were a cruel time to be a *Star Wars* fan. *The Empire Strikes Back* left Han Solo on ice while Luke Skywalker pondered his parentage, and there wasn't even the dubious treat of a *Holiday Special* to tide everyone over until *Return Of The Jedi*.

Fast forward 40 years and *The Mandalorian*'s season two finale created a similar state of limbo, as Force-sensitive sprog Grogu (you know him as Baby Yoda) went off with Luke Skywalker (yes, *that* Luke Skywalker) to learn the ways of the Jedi. The eponymous Mando, Din Djarin (*The Last Of Us*'s Pedro Pascal), was left heartbroken, and the rest of us shared his pain, as *Star Wars*' most successful double-act since C-3PO and R2-D2 was tragically torn apart.

Even in an era when there's enough new *Star Wars* content to fill a space cruiser or two, the two-and-a-bit years since that fateful episode have felt like an eternity. But the *Star Wars* gods (otherwise known as series creator Jon Favreau and Lucasfilm's executive creative director Dave Filoni) were smiling upon us, and used their divine influence to ensure the wait wasn't quite so long.

The final three episodes of spin-off show *The Book Of Boba Fett* subsequently morphed into *The Mandalorian* 2.5, as Djarin learned some painful home truths from his Mandalorian brethren (more on that later) and Grogu decided that Jedi school probably wasn't for him after all. The duo were reunited and all felt well with the galaxy – an admission, perhaps, that *The Mandalorian*'s hotly anticipated third season could never really have functioned without the odd couple who form the series' core.

"I think that the heart of the show has always been that relationship," writer/director turned executive producer Rick Famuyiwa tells *SFX*. "Clearly Din Djarin's relationship with Grogu changed him, from a bounty hunter to the character he is now. I think it made sense that they would find each other, and I think it's hard to imagine their course in *Star Wars* without each other."

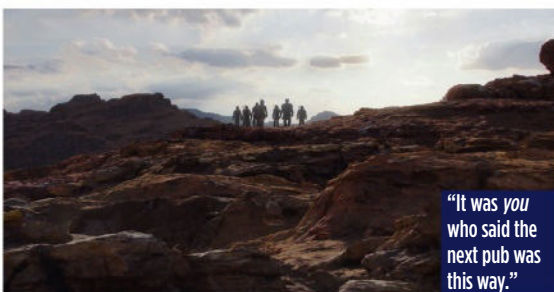
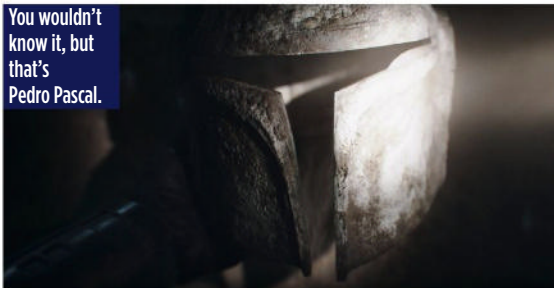
### A FAMILY AFFAIR

All of this feels several parsecs from the show that helped launch the then-new Disney+ streaming platform in November 2019. The first live-action *Star Wars* TV show was a return to the space Western vibe of George Lucas's original movie, with a soundtrack (by Ludwig Göransson) that owed more to Ennio Morricone than John Williams, and a Clint Eastwood-esque anti-hero given title billing.

Mandalorians assemble! They're off on a pub crawl.



You wouldn't know it, but that's Pedro Pascal.

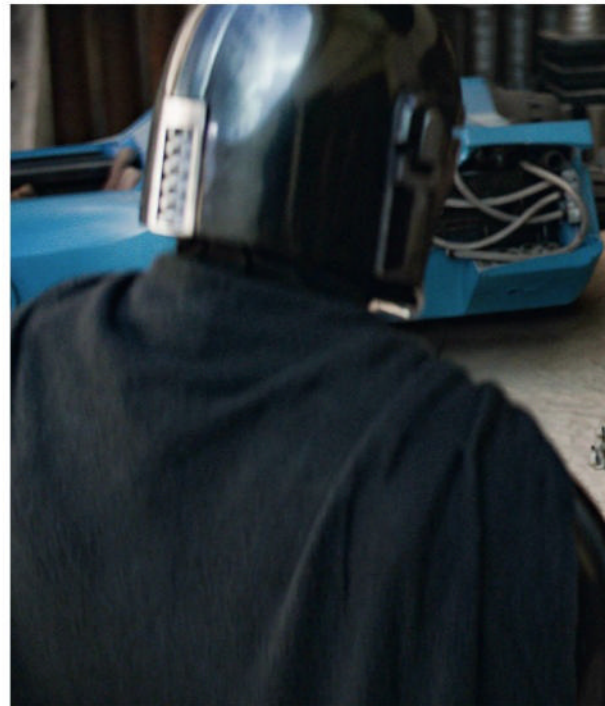


"It was you who said the next pub was this way."

This mysterious bounty hunting loner dressed like Boba Fett, and told his targets, "I can bring you in warm or I can bring you in cold". In other words, babysitting never seemed part of the plan.

That all changed at the end of the show's debut episode, when Mando (and planet Earth) were introduced to his lucrative bounty – an extremely cute green child who resembled a certain syntax-mangling Jedi Master, and became an instant internet sensation. *The Mandalorian* became a two-hander, whose two leads just happened to be a puppet and a guy who steadfastly refused to remove his helmet.

"That was the initial challenge of my first episode!" laughs Famuyiwa, who directed season one's "The Child", "but it was also liberating because I think it became a sort of pure expression of their relationship without



the cues, in the face or dialogue, that are sometimes not as true or accurate. Somehow it created a kind of engagement that we may not have had if it had been more traditional. It was definitely challenging, but in some ways it's also what defined the show."

These days the pair are so inseparable that Mando's refurbished Naboo starfighter – a replacement for the Razor Crest that was blown up by the Empire – even features a bespoke Baby Yoda-sized dome. They also share the latest in a long line of complex relationships between fathers and their children in that galaxy far, far away, even though Famuyiwa is unsure if Djarin considers





"Who's a cheeky wee fella then, eh?"



Amy Sedaris is back as mechanic Peli Motto.

himself Grogu's surrogate dad – at least not yet, anyway...

"Initially Mando's relationship with Grogu was just as a bounty, but that then continued to grow as he grew attached to this youngling," he explains. "I think that taking care of Grogu has become a part of what he is and what he sees as his purpose. Whether in his mind it's gone as far as [being the kid's dad] I'm not sure, but he feels a deep connection to this child – and obviously it's made him re-examine his own beliefs and what he would go through to protect this child."

It doesn't look like parenting is going to get any easier in season three, even though Mando

has assembled an assortment of allies who'd be happy to help with the childcare. They include his former boss Greef Karga (Carl Weathers) and mechanic Peli Motto (Amy Sedaris). Former Rebel shock trooper Cara Dune seemingly won't be returning, after controversial comments from Gina Carano led to her being fired from the role.

Ominously, another acquaintance, Anakin Skywalker's former apprentice Ahsoka Tano, warned Djarin that Grogu might struggle to control his Force powers without some specialist training. And now that the kid has decided he'd rather live the nomadic existence of a bounty hunter than play lightsabers with

Luke, some growing pains seem likely. "Well, as we've seen with Mando, his life is full of... interesting characters," Famuyiwa laughs, "and he's not from the steadiest of backgrounds! Jon [Favreau] talks about being influenced by ['70s samurai film series] *Lone Wolf And Cub*, and there was always an element of, 'How can you have a young child if you are living the kind of life that a Mandalorian does?' At least Grogu can't say he didn't know what to expect when he made that choice [to go with Mando]!"

Grogu isn't the full extent of Mando's family, however, though the other branch is arguably much more troublesome. As a child Djarin was adopted by "the Tribe," an ultra-strict clan of Mandalorians who adhere to the teachings of the so-called Children of the Watch. When Mando briefly removed his helmet to say

**“Initially Mando's relationship with Grogu was just as a bounty, but it continued to grow”**

goodbye to Grogu, he broke one of the group's most sacred rules, and is destined to remain on the naughty step until he visits the living waters under the mines of their home planet of Mandalore. Unfortunately, there's a massive obstacle standing in his way, after the Empire laid the planet to waste in the Great Purge and the so-called Night Of A Thousand Tears. This is the way...

"Din Djarin made a choice in season two to protect the child, which is obviously going to create complications with the Mandalorians who took him in," explains Famuyiwa. "Mandalore is going to be a part of that storyline for him. The idea of that home, a home that was ravaged in many ways, becomes very important to all Mandalorians, but I think →



Mando specifically hopes that there might be some sort of reconciliation or redemption for what he's done, and that somehow this is the beginning of it."

But, as tends to be the case in *Star Wars*, there are multiple points of view when it comes to Mandalore and its future. Bo-Katan Kryze (first introduced in animated *Star Wars* shows *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, and played by *Battlestar Galactica*'s Katee Sackhoff) has little time for the zealous ways of the Tribe, and sees herself as the planet's rightful ruler.

Annoyingly for her, the ceremonial Darksaber that traditionally conveys leadership is now in the hands of a reluctant Din Djarin, and he can't simply hand it over because the Mandalorian "constitution" states that it can only be won in combat. Looks like the bounty hunter might have the fate of an entire world in his hands...

"One of the themes of the show, particularly around Din Djarin, is about notions of our identity and dogma, and how much our beliefs define us," says Famuyiwa. "Before he met the Child, he was in a world that was very singular.

"That world has grown as he's been exposed to more ideas that he'd probably closed himself off to, because he was very firm about what he believed – or at least what he thought he believed. I think this season is just going to continue along those themes. What it means to be Mandalorian continues to be a question for him, and I think it's sort of a question around the entire show."

## EMPIRE BUILDING

Plugging holes in *Star Wars* canon has become an industry in itself, with books, comics, movies and even an entire TV series (*Obi-Wan Kenobi*) being greenlit as extremely expensive narrative Polyfilla. But while *The Mandalorian* has predominantly been the story of a simple man and his kid making their way in the universe, there's always a sense that they're playing a part in a much bigger story.

Grogu, for example, was present in the Jedi Temple during the Order 66 massacre, while cloner Dr Pershing (sighted in the season three trailer) seemingly has links with both *The Bad Batch* and Emperor Palpatine's return in *The Rise Of Skywalker*.

"What's exciting for me about *The Mandalorian* is that it's new storytelling, with new characters, in a world that's very familiar," says Famuyiwa. "There are certain things that seem very simple but will become very important parts of the larger storytelling. For fans who have been following *Star Wars* for a long time, I think it's always fun to try to pick out what those clues might be – they're certainly there!"

In *The Mandalorian*'s post-*Return Of The Jedi* timespace, the most important questions surround the status of Palpatine's ruthless military machine, and their connections to the



Bo-Katan Kryze (Katee Sackhoff): bare-headed.



Mando meets Greef Karga (Carl Weathers).

sequel trilogy's First Order. Despite the best efforts of the New Republic, remnants of the Empire are still out there, though few in power want to believe they pose a threat. In fact, it seems that only X-wing pilot Carson Teva (played by *Kim's Convenience*'s Paul Sun-Hyung Lee) has any idea that – even with the moustache-twirlingly evil Moff Gideon in custody – trouble is brewing on the Outer Rim. (SFX is hoping that Jib Dodger, the New Republic pilot Famuyiwa played in season one, will be able to lend a hand. "We might see him again," he laughs. "Keep a sharp eye!")

"There's certainly something that Teva has been having an ear to in terms of

what the Empire may be up to, so yeah, I think we'll certainly see some of that throughout the season," Famuyiwa reveals. "For now we know that Moff Gideon has been taken away, but the larger forces of what might be out there as the remnant Empire still exist.

"Something that hangs over some of this season is [the question of] what that element might be. There are things going on that our characters may not be aware of, but certainly Teva has some inkling about."

With Lucasfilm boss Kathleen Kennedy having announced back in 2020 that *The Mandalorian* and upcoming spin-offs in the same time period





## MANDA-LORE

The Mandalorian people will have a major role to play in season three – here's nine things you need to know

• The classic Mandalorian armour was originally designed for a group of supercommando Stormtroopers ahead of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Their iconic look was subsequently given a paint job and reassigned to bounty hunter Boba Fett.

• The Mandalorians were first mentioned in Donald F. Glut's novelisation of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

• Despite wearing the same clothes, Boba Fett isn't technically a Mandalorian, though his dad, Jango, was a Mandalorian founding from the world of Concord Dawn.



• The Mandalorians are famed as a warrior race, whose skill in battle is matched by the technical brilliance of the gadgets in their armour. The armour is constructed from beskar steel, which can repel a lightsaber.

• The Mandalorians fought a long war against the Jedi, which left most of their home planet a wasteland.

• The Darksaber, a unique lightsaber with a dark, sword-like blade, is historically brandished by the ruler of the Mandalorian people. It was crafted by Tarre Vizsla, a Mandalorian Jedi. His descendant Pre Vizsla led the militant Death Watch in *The Clone Wars*, where he was voiced by *The Mandalorian* creator Jon Favreau.

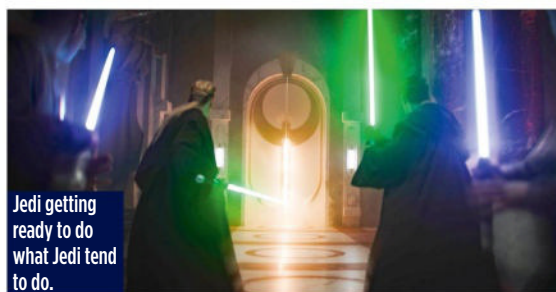


• Bo-Katan Kryze was also a member of Death Watch. Her older sister, Satine (an old flame of Obi-Wan Kenobi) was the pacifist ruler of Mandalore until she was killed by Darth Maul.

• Bo-Katan isn't fussed about removing her helmet and believes she is the rightful ruler of Mandalore. She wielded the Darksaber until she lost it to Moff Gideon, though the fact she was originally gifted it by Rebel Sabine Wren (rather than winning it in combat) may have contributed to her perceived fall from grace.



"I said, is it alright if we come a bit closer?"



Jedi getting ready to do what Jedi tend to do.



other stories to be told. Whether they are completely connected may or may not be the case. But it's clear there's a world of characters that are interacting with each other, and that eight episodes of *The Mandalorian* might not be enough to explore everything.

"I'm really excited about what Dave [Filoni]'s doing with *Ahsoka*," he adds. "He's his own storyteller and he's going to have his own point of view on things, and whether those connect neatly, we'll see."

An even bigger challenge for *The Mandalorian* will be topping a season finale that not only introduced spin-off show *The Book Of Boba Fett* by stealth, but also surprised

**“One of the themes of the show is about notions of our identity and dogma”**

everyone by bringing a young Luke Skywalker back into the fold. How do you top that?

"I think every season you try to tell a simple story that connects," says Famuyiwa. "I can say that this season has certainly been the biggest yet, the most ambitious yet – it was almost crazy to try to do everything we've tried to do this season – but I think that ambition is just driven by wanting to continue to make these stories great."

"For me the foundation has always been that simple relationship between Mando and Grogu. The adventures get bigger and the characters you meet might be as iconic as Luke Skywalker, but it's always in the service of that simple story. That's taken us to bigger and bigger places, and certainly this season is the biggest yet." •

*The Mandalorian* is on Disney+ from 1 March.

© LUCASFILM/Disney

(such as *Ahsoka*) will "culminate in a climactic story event", it appears that something of truly epic proportions may be lurking on the horizon. So, with those crucial episodes of *The Book Of Boba Fett* having been *The Mandalorian* in all-but name, have we already unknowingly witnessed the shape of things to come? Should we regard episodes of *The Mandalorian*, *The Book Of Boba Fett* and *Ahsoka* as part of one big *Star Wars* show? Famuyiwa plays a spectacularly straight bat...

"I don't know if it's a connected universe in the same way that Marvel is," he admits. "Because there's such a large galaxy of storytelling, Mando will be the touchstone for



SCREAM VI

# NEW CITY, NEW RULES

GHOSTFACE IS IN TOWN  
WITH A FEW DAYS TO  
KILL... THE DIRECTORS  
AND PRODUCER OF

## SCREAM VI

DISCUSS HOW THEY'RE  
CHANGING THE SLASHER  
GAME WORDS: **WILL SALMON**









**T**HERE ARE CERTAIN RULES THAT ONE must abide by in order to reboot a horror franchise. If your series has been away for a long time, or perhaps fallen out of favour, then you must begin again with a “requel” – a film that strips things back and returns to first principles.

This will look, in some ways, like a straight up remake of the first film – it may even use the same title, without a number or subtitle. It will reference iconic moments from the original and bring back key “legacy characters” (one of whom will die, to let audiences know that nobody is safe) while also introducing a new generation of young protagonists.

The purpose of the requel is to remind audiences why they loved a franchise in the first place, but if successful, it will also pave the way for a new series of adventures.

The sequel to the requel, now that’s where things get *really* interesting. Traditionally this will be bigger, bolder and take more risks. *The Force Awakens* was followed up by Rian Johnson’s brilliant but divisive *The Last Jedi*, while *Halloween* (2018) was succeeded by the brutal (and bone-headed) *Halloween Kills*. The sequel to the requel is risky, but if done well, it can also be highly rewarding.

### CITY OF DEATH

And so to *Scream VI*. Directors Tyler Gillet and Matt Bettinelli-Olpin resurrected Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson’s post-modern horror franchise in fine style last year with *Scream 5* (or rather *Scream*, as it was simply styled). The film followed (and made good fun of) the rules of the requel to a T, with a glowing critical response and box office success.

The duo are hoping to repeat the trick with a darker and more dangerous instalment this year, one which moves the action out of sleepy Woodsboro, California, onto the streets of New York City. The survivors of *Scream* are back (with the notable exception of original star Neve Campbell) but this film is, as Ghostface hisses at one point, “something different”.

Gillet has his own way of describing it when *SFX* catches up with him, Bettinelli-Olpin and executive producer Chad Vilella in early January. “How’s it looking? Like the sixth movie in this long-running franchise – big, loud and fucking awesome!”

*Scream VI* is set shortly after the end of the previous film and follows siblings Sam (Melissa Barrera) and Tara (Jenna Ortega), along with their friends Mindy (Jasmin Savoy Brown) and Chad (Mason Gooding), as they try to put their nightmare past behind them forever.

With some of the characters now being of college age, they’ve upped sticks and moved to New York. Unfortunately for them, a new Ghostface is in town and about to embark on a killing spree...

This isn’t the first time that the *Scream* movies have ventured away from Woodsboro, of course. *Scream 2* was set on campus at the fictional Windsor College, while 3 took place mostly in LA, but this is certainly the series’ most striking new location.

“I think it’s a nice jolt of energy for the franchise to move to a city that’s hustling and bustling and full of life,” says Vilella. “It came from wanting to go big, go bold and be aggressive with our approach this time.”

“The writers, Jamie [Vanderbilt] and Guy [Busick], delivered a script that utilised New York in a lived in kind of way. If you’re a New Yorker, these are the places you go and the things you do every day. It’s not the tourist version of New York. It feels real. And we wanted the stakes of being in that setting to feel really real as well.”

While you might think moving to a city filled with some 8.4 million people would make it easier for our protagonists to hide or get help, that is very much not the case. “Somehow, we still have that Woodsboro element where you sometimes still feel a little bit alone,” he says.

When we catch up with actor Mason Gooding a few days later, he agrees. “You have a more population-dense area, but less response from bystanders. I think that speaks to New York as an entity in real life too. Metropolitan living requires people to just kind of mind their business.”

“You spend so much time doing your own thing in an apartment, or in a high rise some 30 stories up, not knowing a single person in your building. But they could know so much about you, about your schedule, and where you go and how long you spend there. I think that element of isolation plays into the fear of who Ghostface is really well.”

New York is, of course, a city with a rich history on screen, particularly in the horror genre. Is that something the film references at all? “Yeah, we’re definitely scratching at that,” says Gillet. “It wouldn’t be *Scream* if we weren’t playing with the notion that it exists in a lineage of horror movies that take place in New York. We took pains to treat the city as a character, but not as a caricature.”

### GHOSTFACE KILLAH

This more grounded ethos factors into how the writers and directors approached their villain this time around. Ghostface is a uniquely malleable antagonist due to the fact that they are a different person (or persons) under the mask with each instalment. Despite this, all the different incarnations of the character have shared a few similar traits – namely, a fondness for knives and a tendency to get their asses kicked. This time around, though, things are a little bit different.

“There are a tonne of fun, wonderful, classic Ghostface moments, but it’s not the pratfalling →

The role of Ghostface is played by [REDACTED]

Hayden Panettiere is back as Kirby Reed.







Melissa Barrera (Sam) and Jenna Ortega (Tara).

## GILLET ON JOHNSON

The director explains *Scream's* Rian Johnson gag

One of the *Scream* franchise's most enduring elements is film-within-a-film franchise *Stab*. Asked whether we'll see more of the series in the new movie, Bettinelli-Olpin says yes, before joking, "Rian Johnson is shooting *Stab 9* and *10* simultaneously. We've heard that *Stab 9* is really good!"

He's referring to one of the funniest moments in *Scream*, a gag about how *The Last Jedi* and *Glass Onion* director was responsible for the controversial eighth *Stab* film. We wonder, did Johnson know that joke was coming? "Yeah, he knew," says Gillet. "We spoke with him just before production

[of *Scream*]. At one time he was going to cameo in the film as well. There was going to be a snippet of him on a press junket waxing poetic about how *Stab 8* is elevated horror."

Alas, clashing schedules meant that it wasn't to be. "We just couldn't sync up on schedules because he was off making a tiny little whodunnit called *Glass Onion*... He's a lovely guy and is a fan, just as we are obviously fans of his work. It was so fun to blur the lines between fiction and reality like that."



GETTY



Ghostface,” says Gillet. “We love that, but for this to be scary and to achieve a level of visceral tension, we wanted to put the character more in the real world. If Ghostface is trying to get through a door, it’s going to happen! There’s no giving up. When he’s in pursuit, the pursuit doesn’t end until he’s achieved his goals.”

That includes a more brazen streak than we’ve perhaps seen before, with the killer willing to strike in front of whole groups of people. “We have tried to turn the volume up on that. I think for this movie to work, and for it to work specifically in this setting, there had to be a level of relentlessness that we maybe haven’t seen before.”

That includes resorting to new weapons. We’ve seen guns in *Scream* before – the killers in the first two movies both resort to using pistols after they’ve been unmasked – but there’s something genuinely chilling about the scene in the trailer where we witness Ghostface remorselessly take a guy out with a shotgun at point blank range. It has, naturally, already stirred up debate among hardcore fans.

“The fans had a strong opinion, what are you talking about?” Bettinelli-Olpin chuckles. “A lot of the process of both these movies has been finding out what makes us kind of collectively go, ‘Fuck yeah!’ Y’know, what’s something that’s just bananas off the wall that we want to see in *Scream*?”

“We don’t want it to be safe. We don’t want it to be boring. We want it to be fun and to raise eyebrows. When we heard ‘Ghostface in New York and he has a shotgun’ it was like, ‘What?!’ The two feelings of ‘What are we doing?’ and ‘We have to do it!’ are often intrinsically tied and that was a perfect example of that.”

### FINAL FRIENDS

Facing off against this new and deadlier killer is a whole team of returning faces, a rare occurrence in a genre that usually tends to favour a single Final Girl (“they’re Final Friends”, Bettinelli-Olpin quips). Chief among those is Melissa Barrera’s Sam, still struggling with the revelation that she is the daughter of original Ghostface, Billy Loomis. How is she coming to terms with that now?

“I think while Sam recognises and sort of embraces that’s a part of her life in the previous movie, I think this one is an exploration of what that actually means,” says Gillet. “What do you do when you recognise that there’s some dark passenger on the ride with you? Where do you put that, especially when you have a fear that part of you is not something that you can necessarily control?”

“One of the thematic elements in this is, how do we reconcile ourselves with the darker parts of ourselves that we all carry around? How do you accept those things in yourself?”

“Or succumb to them...” Bettinelli-Olpin adds, ominously.

Also returning is Courtney Cox as Gale Weathers (“She just showed up, rolled her sleeves up and was like, ‘Let’s fucking go!’”, laughs Gillet) and for the first time since 2011’s *Scream 4*, Hayden Panettiere as Kirby Reed. In fact, the creative team originally intended to bring the character back in the previous film.

“We always knew we wanted to bring her back,” says Villella. “We talked about having her cameo in 5, but ultimately realised that it wouldn’t be satisfying enough to just have her drop in superficially.”

Instead, the writers and directors worked hard to figure out what Kirby has been doing in the intervening years.

“The off-screen story of where she’s been in the years before she drops into this story is just really fun. There’s a lot to work with and Hayden worked with it very well. It’s not just nostalgic, it’s not just servicing the idea of how great it feels to have Kirby back – she’s a real character with a consequential role and I think that it’s one of the things we’re most excited about.”

Of course, nostalgia is an element with the series and perhaps nothing exemplifies the film’s “looking back while moving forward” approach more than a scene, hinted at in the first trailer, where the characters discover a

“One of the thematic elements is, how do we reconcile ourselves with the darker parts of ourselves we carry?”

shrine to the various versions of Ghostface. Bettinelli-Olpin says that this is more than just an opportunity for them to include fan-pleasing references to be discussed on the internet at length.

“The shrine is looking back to the previous crimes for sure, but the way it’s worked into the script creates forward momentum. We had fun with the Easter eggs in the last film, but we didn’t want to repeat ourselves this time. There was something so great in this one about putting the Easter eggs literally on display and baking them into the plot.”

“There’s this mythologising of what Ghostface is and has been and that exists in this idea of the shrine,” adds Gillet. “For us, certainly as fans of the franchise, it felt like there was a fun opportunity to continue to build the mythology around this character in this movie, so that it’s this sort of omnipresent force. And of course in a city of millions of people on Halloween, anybody could put that mask on...”

*Scream VI* is in cinemas from 8 March.



A touching moment before the slashing.

Dermot Mulroney as Detective Bailey.





## MASON GOODING

The actor on reprising his role as Chad



**Chad made it out of the last film alive – how is he doing now?**

He's trying to acclimate back to normalcy as best he can. He's at university and trying to distance himself from what he experienced in the previous film. A lot of what you'll see in the movie deals with responses to immense trauma, especially at such a young age.

**How is his sister Mindy (Jasmin Savoy Brown) responding?**

Mindy, I think, has adopted a similar mentality, but despite her desire to move away from her past, she's still so knowledgeable about the Woodsboro incidents. I think Jasmin plays that dynamic so brilliantly, both in juxtaposing what she wants and what she knows is probably the safest and best option.

**The four characters, including Sam and Tara, were such a strong unit. Has that relationship become strained by the events of the last movie?**

That's a major element in the movie, especially as the characters interact with each other. I think the real challenge of the movie is Jasmin, Jenna [Ortega], Melissa [Barrera] and I are such good friends that, even if we did have a scene that was tumultuous and full of bickering, you'd probably be able to feel the love and respect that we have for each other. But I will say that the dynamic of what they've experienced certainly impacts how they interact with each other now.

**How is the tone of this film different?**

What I've always liked about *Scream* as a franchise is it's not a *mean* horror movie. It doesn't hate the audience. It's respectful to its fanbase, and each instalment pays tribute and homage to what came before it. I think this movie, as well as the darker elements, there's also maybe a heightened sense of levity. But that's only to bring the audience that much farther down when we get into the violence and the viscera! The highs are really high and the lows are really, really low.

**You're quite the fan of the franchise, right?**

Yeah. I wrote a paper in college about how *Scream*, as a franchise, was the one that was most ripe for revival in this day and age. I think that had at least some hand in me getting to work on this.

**That's amazing.**

Listen, man, stay in school. Write your essays! They benefit you in the long run.



Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox): don't do it!





# ***BATTLE STATIONS!***

AS **STAR TREK: PICARD** BEAMS DOWN TO SCREENS  
GLOBALLY, STARS MICHAEL DORN AND MICHELLE HURD  
DISCUSS THE EPIC NEW SEASON

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**







**T**HE FIRST PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS are in, and season three of *Star Trek: Picard* seems to be ticking all the right boxes. “I’m actually a little too close to it,” star Michael Dorn considers. “Also, I’m a little too critical of myself to really have an opinion about it in terms of what it is.” He pauses. “Saying that, I do know one thing – that the fans and people that watch it are gonna go ape, I really believe they’re going to enjoy it. Like, immensely.”

It’s no understatement – even for Dorn’s self-critical eye. The new season, which reunites the cast of *The Next Generation*, is an incredible piece of television which truly earns the much-used term “cinematic”.

“It’s a great show, they’ve done a really, really good job,” he agrees. “To the point that it really does look like a movie. Not just the special effects and that type of stuff. But I’m saying the way they crafted it is a movie – it should be a movie,” he laughs. “It should be, because it kind of deserves that platform.”

#### NOT A MERRY MAN

Dorn has played the role of Worf in seven seasons of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, four feature films and four seasons of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, totalling 282 on-screen appearances. How does this iteration of Worf differ for him?

“It was more collaboration than I’ve experienced in the past,” he considers. “They really took the producers and writers and my ideas about where Worf should be and put it together to create his world now, as it is, and that was different. Usually in the past they said, ‘Okay, Worf’s going to be doing this, here’s the script, we’ll see you on Tuesday.’ So this was quite different. It was quite an experience. I loved it.”

Like other returning cast members, Dorn spoke with the producers of *Picard* about where he felt his character would now be.

“Basically I said I wanted him to be on a journey,” he recalls. “My whole overarching theme with Worf is that he’s never staying in one place and he’s always learning. He’s always had very clear ideas at the very beginning, and those ideas were kind of dashed on the rocks. But he didn’t understand why that was.

“As he’s gotten older, and went from one ship to another, he realises that life is a journey. It’s not about, ‘Oh, here I am and I’ve reached the pinnacle and that’s it’. He believes that life is a journey, and he’s learning all the time. He’s taking the best from all the different races, and putting them all into his character, and he’s taken all the bad stuff and thrown it out.

“But even in this show, he’s still learning, he still is evolving. They really did a nice job of incorporating it, it doesn’t hit



Michael Dorn,  
Jonathan  
Frakes and  
Michelle Hurd.

you over the head. That’s one thing I didn’t want to do, to have five or six speeches about how he’s changed – that’s not Worf.”

Something else has changed about Worf, something that might be more instantly noticeable, as Dorn recalls.

“When they were talking to me about what he looks like now, they said, ‘We want Worf to have grey hair’. And I go, my little actor ego, ‘I don’t want to be old!’” he laughs. “I didn’t really voice any opposition at first. Then I remembered one of my favourite directors, and one of my favourite movies was *Kill Bill*.

“Tarantino had this character Pai Mei, who was this martial arts master who literally could kill anybody. He had this grey hair with a great beard and he looked as dangerous as anything. So I said, ‘You know what, let me embrace it’.

“At the time I was growing a beard, because I thought maybe I’d be doing the show, and my beard is white. In fact, it’s so white that I told the make-up people, ‘You’re gonna have to put a little colour in this because it just is stark’.

And they go, ‘No, no, we don’t have to do that’, and when they put on the make-up and everything, they said, ‘You know, Michael, I think we’re gonna darken your beard a little bit because it is bright white...’ I embraced that. I think it was a key to the character’s evolution.”

Another thing that was slightly toned down, at the request of Dorn, were the comedy elements of the Klingon.

“There’s a tendency to lighten up the mood. So I had to kind of tell them, ‘Look, this isn’t who Worf is. Comedy is about drama, and if Worf says it serious, then it’s even funnier’.”

Case in point, he says he laughed out loud at the transporter scene where he declares his new-found pacifism to Riker. “I’m the sort of straight man and everybody else, they just come up with these zingers that are hilarious.”

#### NEXT, NEXT GENERATION

Jokes and hair aside, the stakes are high. So high, in fact, that this series could just be heralded as one of the all-time greats, with an epic storyline shared by the entire ensemble.

“I’m a big fan of the original [series], like, a huge fan,” Dorn explains. “I know every episode, I know all the characters and all the actors. I’m one of those people that would be in a production trying to tell people who each character is.

“I always thought that *The Wrath Of Khan* was the best *Star Trek* movie, until *First Contact*. I thought *First Contact* was great for a lot of reasons, but one of the main reasons was that everybody contributed, everybody had a story. It was very complete, nobody was left out. I think that this is the same thing, that





Michelle Hurd gives it some sass as Raffi Musiker.



## “My whole theme with Worf is that he’s never staying in one place and he’s always learning”

everybody’s story is well written. It couldn’t have been easy writing for this many people,” he laughs, “but I think they did a very nice job.”

He says that the scale of the series didn’t necessarily come across during production. “Oh, you have to step away from it,” he explains. “As an actor you don’t see the total picture. You can read the script but you don’t get the scope until it’s all done. You just do the best you can and leave the rest up to the universe.”

Speaking of the universe, speculation is rife about the future for the cast and this iteration of *Star Trek*.

“I just hit on this recently,” Dorn smiles. “Because of this season, I think Worf should be a character like Jack Reacher or John Wick or the Equalizer. It just hit me that that’s kind of who he is. I always thought that Worf had a place in some show, maybe not even the lead, but just as a character where he’s prominent.”

“I’m going, ‘You know, Worf is like a Jack Reacher, the Tom Cruise movies, or John Wick, where he’s not out for revenge, but he basically goes around the universe making things right’. That’s where I think he’ll end up.”

There’s still life in the old warrigul yet – not bad for a character who first appeared in 1987. “I never thought it would be 35 years,” he admits. “I thought that after the last movie [2002’s *Nemesis*] that was it. In terms of us,

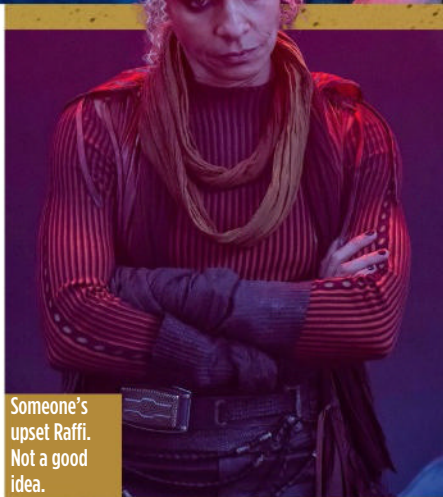
I always thought there was a place for *Star Trek* in this whole thing, but I thought that that was it. We always had the conventions that we attended, so that would be a part of my life, but the actual getting in make-up and doing Worf, I thought it was over back then. To see it 35 years later was awe-inspiring.

“Somebody asked me back when we first started, ‘What if you get typecast in this?’, and I said, ‘Look, if somebody said, Michael, you’re gonna play Worf for the rest of your career, I go great, that’s fine with me, because when do you get a chance to do that?’ When does any actor get a chance to do that? So that was pretty wild. I still haven’t fully grasped the concept yet. That’s a long time. I’m very fortunate, I like to think.”

On that 35-year journey, there’s been a lot of merchandise that’s had Dorn’s face emblazoned across it. He says the strangest was a lunchbox the licensing department asked him to approve. “It looked like you were carrying around a person’s chopped off head by the hair. I think that’s the only time that I went, ‘Guys, that is the worst idea I’ve ever seen.’”

There was, however, some merchandise that definitely got his seal of approval. “When I grew up, I had a GI Joe and so that was the moment when I kind of went, ‘Oh my god...’ Well, there’s two moments – when I got my first action figure, I thought it was really cool. When I knew that I’d arrived, we had Pez dispensers and there was a Worf Pez dispenser.” He laughs. “That to me was like, okay, I’m an icon now.”

*Star Trek: Picard* is on Prime Video in the UK and Paramount+ in the US.



Someone’s upset Raffi. Not a good idea.



The old gang is back together!





# "LET'S HAVE TWO POWERFUL FEMALE CHARACTERS LEAD A STAR TREK SHOW!"

MICHELLE HURD IS RAFFI

## What do you think has made Raffi stand out so prominently?

▲ Raffi is a really necessary character for the *Star Trek* universe. From the original, as they morphed into where we are today, we've often had characters who were not perfect, but strive to be perfect and have a set of guidelines and rules and they follow them.

In a way, because we know Picard doesn't really either, Raffi is the first truly, perfectly imperfect character who's flawed, who struggles, who's stumbled, who's fallen. She's a recovering addict. She has a really challenging relationship with her child, estranged from her husband, was kicked out of Starfleet. A lot of what people would think of as negatives have happened to her.

But she's continued to strive. She's continued to persevere. She's continued to fight for her voice to be heard. She has lasted and has progressed in the way that she has and it's important, because she is a voice of people who have felt like they have been voiceless.

## What did you think of Raffi's storyline in this season?

▲ When Terry [Matalas] pitched me the idea of what he had in mind for Raffi's third season, I was ecstatic. I mean, first of all, just the thought of working with Michael Dorn. I'm a woman of colour and growing up, Michael Dorn, just like Nichelle Nichols, played a very important part in developing my sense of worth, by seeing a person of colour on television represented in such a strong, powerful way.

So to come around full circle and to be able to share space and scenes and work with Michael Dorn... My father would be so happy. I know he's looking down and just smiling from ear to ear.

## Did the scale of this season come across during filming?

▲ The first season I was like, "Wow, the scale of this is amazing." Then when I saw it on screen with the special effects, I was like, "Wow, this is really impressive!" So going into [this], I had an idea of what the weight of this season would look like. It far surpassed my little imagination, I have to say. What we've been able to put out there is phenomenal. It's so huge.

But it could just be because I was honoured to be in the space with so many legacy people, iconic characters, phenomenal actors, that I could feel [laughs] the sort of weight or importance or the power that we were creating. You don't get to stand on a set with [this cast] and not know, "Something's happening here." Even if it's just them talking and playing in between shots, and watching how they interact and how they talk and support each other and critique each other and make each other laugh. It just felt like something *really* cool was happening.

## What was your best moment of filming on season three?

▲ Two things kind of come up... Myself, Michael, Brent and Jonathan had a scene together that took a few days to shoot. That whole time, it was just so fun. My cheeks are starting to hurt right now because I'm thinking back. It was a really fun, creative experience to be like this quote-unquote kid with these three amazing individuals, so talented and funny. So I love that moment. But as an actress, I gotta say, I have a fight scene, just me with five stunt guys and 38 moves and we did it in one shot with a Steadicam. That was pretty dang cool.

## What would you like to see become of Raffi in the future?

▲ Oh my goodness, there's so much that I'd like to see. I personally, as the actress, I *adore* bringing this character to life. I just love her. I love Raffi. I think she's so interesting. She's so yummy. I also think she's got such an important voice and it's really an important perspective. I love working with everybody, everybody's phenomenal.

But I do think that there's a lot of mileage that we haven't really been able to step into. We haven't yet stepped into Raffi and Seven's world. It'd be really awesome to see what adventures these two amazing independent powerful women could have, from very different perspectives, how they would navigate space. That would be just one of the coolest things and rich with storytelling. Also, let's have two powerful female characters lead a *Star Trek* show.

## At what point in your *Star Trek* journey did you realise that this character was going to be with you forever?

▲ Our first day at San Diego Comic-Con, I remember when Data [and] Seven showed up on screen and the audience lost their minds. The sound! I was like, "Oh my gosh, what just happened?" That's when I really was like, "Oh, this is a *family*."

So I think, really from the moment I stepped through the door and onto a starship, our La Sirena bridge, my life has changed. And it's changed to the better because of *Star Trek*, because of this amazing world that the Roddenberry family created. It's an amazing experience. Amazing. I adore this character and I think she has a voice that needs to be heard for a long time. ●













# THE WIDER AND THE GORRY

A BIZARRE TRUE STORY  
GETS TURNED INTO A PERFECTLY  
TITLED HORROR-COMEDY:  
**COCAINE BEAR**

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

THERE'S AN OLD ADAGE IN HOLLYWOOD that if you can just get a movie's title right, that's half the battle on the path to success. But what if your movie has a killer title, a stellar cast and features a bear hopped up on nose candy? Yes, that unicorn of cinema exists and its name is *Cocaine Bear*.

Its whacked premise is based on the wild true story of '80s narcotics officer turned drug smuggler Andrew C Thornton II. On his last cocaine run, Thornton dumped kilos out of their malfunctioning plane into the Tennessee wilderness below. Some of it was found and ingested by a 175-pound American black bear, leading to its death. Tragic and bizarre, but also one hell of a story.

Cut to screenwriter Jimmy Warden in 2018, procrastinating on the internet and stumbling upon an article about the legendary bear, now preserved in Kentucky and dubbed "Cocaine Bear". "I went down this rabbit hole and I just kept clicking and clicking," Warden tells *SFX*, discussing his obsession with the facts behind the case. "At the end, once I thought that I had a pretty solid foundation for what had actually happened, I was like, 'That is a great set-up.'"

Warden then took it upon himself to turn it into a spec (unpaid) black comedy/horror script where the bear is the hero. "Because the true story of what happened to the bear is kind of a downer, this is like my ode to, or my dark, twisted fantasy version of what I wish would have happened," the writer explains. "And that maybe is even darker because humans die in this version."

He passed the finished first draft to his friend, writer/director Brian Duffield (*Spontaneous*), who then sent it to Phil Lord and Chris Miller's Lord Miller Productions →



## COCAINE BEAR



Daveed (O'Shea Jackson Jr.): ouch.



Scott Seiss gets a helping hand from a crew member.



Ayoola Smart as Officer Reba: "Uh... suicide?"

who then sold it to Universal and got director Elizabeth Banks onboard to direct. Warden is still shocked that everyone got what he was trying to do without requiring any major changes. "The best horror movies and adventure movies are the ones that have these really solid characters at the foundation. They're distinct, they're funny, and they're weird," he laughs.

"The great thing about having Phil and Chris, Universal and Liz, to take it home is that they wanted to tell the stories of the actual humans in the movie, as well. It's not just like, 'Let's watch a bear kill people after doing cocaine!' It's more than that. They had the balls to just go for it."

### BEAR NECESSITIES

Director Elizabeth Banks tells *SFX* that as soon as she read the script, "I just thought it was super bold, really original, unique and an opportunity". It ticked off all her preferred creative boxes, including a script with multiple points of view for character actors, a tone that felt like a "tightrope walk", and a challenge in the form of making a horror film with CG.

"I loved making *Slither* and I've always wanted to make more of those kinds of movies," she says of the horror film she did with James Gunn in 2006. "And a part of me thought that this was a real opportunity to show that women, especially, are interested in this type of stuff."

"I think there's a mythology out there that women don't want to necessarily do a lot of CGI, or don't work in horror. I found *Candyland* and *Nanny*, and a couple of these really cool movies were breaking down those ideas, and this was a chance for me to do the

same thing. Plus I was like, 'Nobody will believe this is an Elizabeth Banks movie.'"

*Cocaine Bear* is unabashedly gory and purposefully ridiculous, and Banks says she studied up on some of her favourite directors for inspiration. "In terms of tone overall, I looked at Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*, the Coen Brothers and a lot of Tarantino, who takes blood and gore to an operatic, over the top nature."

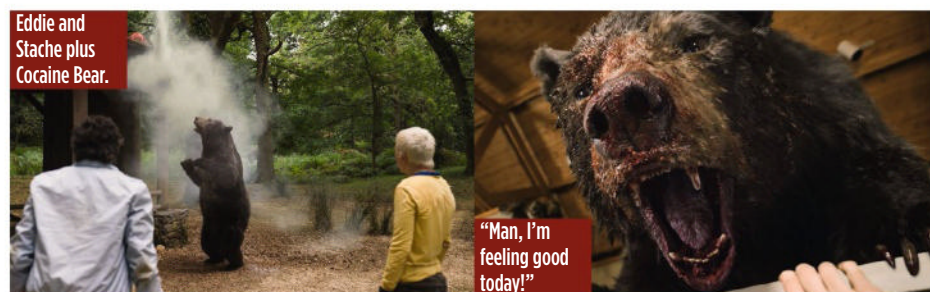
Banks then focused on casting the film with an array of actors who would keep it fun and interesting. In the end, she was able to get Ray Liotta (in his last role), Jesse Tyler Ferguson, O'Shea Jackson Jr, Margo Martindale, Keri Russell – who she says is the "grounding presence" – and Alden Ehrenreich as "the emotional anchor" of the movie. "I had a group of great characters, amazing actors to play them, and then an absolutely insane scenario with a bear that is high on cocaine," she laughs.

Speaking of that bear, Banks was of like mind to Warden about giving the real bear his

cinematic due. "Truly, I have a lot of sympathy for this poor bear that is the collateral damage of a ridiculous war on drugs that was not working at that time," she says. "Everything about it was just deeply sad. But I felt like this movie was the opportunity to sort of avenge – not revenge – that poor bear's death."

"What I loved about this script – which had it in there, but we definitely dialled this up – is the switch in the third act from the antagonist [being] a bear who is high on coke to the humans. I really wanted people to literally cheer for the bear at the end of the movie," she laughs. "My whole goal was make people love this bear killing and eating people... You feel like all the right people don't make it."

Her partners in making that happen ended up being Weta FX in New Zealand, experts in creating entirely CG characters for film. "They got it right away. And not everybody did," Banks says of their early pitches. "It's why they got chosen. They understood the ridiculous nature of a bear that's high on cocaine, but also



Eddie and Stache plus Cocaine Bear.

"Man, I'm feeling good today!"

GETTY





The great Ray Liotta as Syd (right) in his final role.



JB Moore as Vest: "Have I got something on me?"



Director Elizabeth Banks is loving it.



Sari (Keri Russell) plays hard to get: genius hiding.

COCAINE BEAR

# MAMA BEAR

Keri Russell goes into the bear's den as protective mama Colette Matthews

**What was your reaction when *Cocaine Bear* was offered to you?**

I was reading all the normal thoughtful, dramatic pieces and then this one came. Liz [Banks] and I were talking about something else, to be totally honest. Then she called me back and she was like, "Hey, so I'm directing this movie. Can I send it to you?" I was like, "What?" It was such a breath of fresh air. It was such a hard few years, in every possible way, and this felt like exactly the right release we all needed. Actually, I have a few girlfriends we were podding with and they were like, "If you don't do that movie, we will stop being friends with you."

**How was it playing the straight woman against Margo Martindale and Jesse Tyler Ferguson?**

I think for one of these things to play you have to have the amazing funny people who are gonna go for it, and that's why Jessie and Margo are so good at it. They're just doing something different and it's so fun. Then I needed to play the other note so that they're funny. I'm the watcher of all the craziness, but I was totally fine. It was us just walking through these forests and them going on these crazy, bizarre, hilarious tangents and improv. I'm just hanging along for the ride and trying not to pee my pants in that jumpsuit.

**You have many scenes with the bear, which means acting against nothing. How did Liz get you through those CG scenes?**

First of all, yes, the bear obviously is not there. It's literally Liz on a microphone yelling from the middle of the woods: "The bear is attacking. He's ripping his leg off! The leg is flying!" It's so heightened and stupid and crazy. You have no idea exactly where the tone is going to land. You've just got to get on board with Liz and go, "I trust Liz. I trust what she's going to do."

**What do you think of the outcome?**

It's just a total romp, a crazy, scary, ridiculous thing that is super fun. For me, it was even more fun because we shot it in this beautiful little seaside town in Ireland because the Covid numbers were good there. So it was Margo and Jesse and I just hanging out in an Irish pub every night and having the fucking time of our lives.

how important it was for the audience to not feel like they're watching an animated movie. It had to be like a National Geographic documentary of a bear doing crazy things. They made me laugh in the meetings, and I made them laugh. It was an exchange of energy that felt like we were going to create something unique and special together that was going to entertain people, not make them sad."

## “It had to be like a National Geographic documentary of a bear doing crazy things”

Warden says one of his favourite realisations from page to screen is an ambulance chase with the livid bear. He was initially unsure if that scene would even stay in the script, but says Banks kept it – and made it better.

"I remember specifically writing that in slo-mo, as the bear jumps into the back of the speeding vehicle," he laughs. "She was like, 'We have to do the ambulance chase and we're gonna shoot it like it's a car chase from *Fast*

*And Furious*.' Liz and John Guleserian, the DP, absolutely crushed it."

Although always confident about the potential of *Cocaine Bear* to chime with the zeitgeist, Banks says it wasn't until the trailer dropped at the end of November and made a big stir on the internet that her instincts were finally justified.

"I spent the morning that the trailer was coming out in a ball of nerves, under the covers, just holding my breath," she laughs.

"We worked really hard on that and I was really thrilled to put it out in the world and see the response." The reaction was more than she ever anticipated, which means "a lot of pressure for us" now. "But I'm really excited that it created interest and now we'll see if that translates to tickets."

And if it does, Warden says he's ready. "I have plenty of ideas for where the *Cocaine Bear* universe will go," he teases. "I hope that everybody loves the movie as much as we do. I think they will, which will probably foster future incarnations." 🐻

*Cocaine Bear* is in cinemas from 24 February.



Baloo would be rolling in his grave.



Not all tree-huggers are pacifists.





**F**OR EVERY CREATIVE PROJECT that finally finds its way to screens, there's almost *always* a story about its making that would blow the audience's minds. Take the case of new sci-fi series *The Ark*, whose creators – Dean Devlin and Jonathan Glassner – were for years technically persona non grata to one another because of *Stargate*.

If you aren't aware, Devlin co-created the whole *Stargate* universe with Roland Emmerich in 1994 for their *Stargate* movie starring Kurt Russell and James Spader. In 1997, Showtime had Brad Wright and Glassner create a spin-off series, *Stargate SG-1*, that continued the film's mythology without the involvement of the film's cast, or Devlin and Emmerich. It went on to be a global hit lasting 10 seasons and spawning two direct-to-video films, and that never sat well with Devlin.

"I was very resentful about that," Devlin tells *SFX*. "So for many years, I had separated myself from the *Stargate* TV series. But at some point, someone who I trust turned to me and said, 'You know, they must be doing something right if the show has gone on this many years.' And I had to admit that that was true."

Seeking to bridge that creative impasse, Devlin reached out to Glassner to have lunch together and from that a new partnership was forged. "We got together and it was really a love fest," Devlin enthuses. "He could not be more of a kindred spirit when it comes to how shows should be made and the content we wanted to say and what we did. And so that started us working together on *The Outpost*."

### STRANGE NEW WORLDS

A Syfy International series that lasted four seasons, *The Outpost* gave Devlin and Glassner their first opportunity to create and craft a rich mythology story together, and the experience made them want to do it again. This month, Syfy launched *The Ark*, which features some of their hallmarks, including disaster storytelling, a large ensemble cast and a space-based premise. The series is set 100 years in our future, as humanity's existence on Earth is in jeopardy. In a last-ditch plan to find a new, livable world, a global exploratory collaboration comes together to find, and then fly to, a distant planet that can sustain our ongoing survival.

The massive Ark One spacecraft is launched on a six-year journey staffed with a carefully curated manifest comprising the top minds in their field, and their mentees, who will be the new pioneers of the future. However, in the pilot episode, an external emergency in space creates a cataclysmic event that threatens the last year of their voyage. →



# ARK

STARGATE  
GODFATHERS  
DEAN DEVLIN  
AND JONATHAN  
GLASSNER  
TEAM UP FOR  
THE ORIGINAL  
SYFY SERIES  
**THE ARK**

WORDS: TARA BENNETT



# LIFE



As soon as Devlin finished writing the pilot, he shared it first with Glassner, who says he was immediately attracted to the setting and the twist that the “average survivors” are going to be the ones to save humanity’s bacon. Syfy was also interested in making a new series with the duo, but Devlin says that initially they were worried the show would be too dark in tone.

His immediate response to the network was to clarify that a gloomy tale was not the kind of story they wanted to spend (hopefully) several years telling. “What we want to do is find what’s uplifting about this dark situation and how humanity lifts that up,” Devlin says of their pitch. “The thing that we were most attracted to was this idea that it’s not the superexperts who are gonna solve everyone’s problem. It’s the people who were supposed to become experts many years in the future after a long period of mentoring, but now they have to do it today. For us, that’s where the hope and the humanity of this comes in, of people trying to become the best versions of themselves, incredibly quickly.”

### LOST IN SPACE

Framed as an ensemble piece, *The Ark* is essentially a ticking-clock survival story that utilises the crew members’ disparate skills to keep themselves alive on the crippled ship. Devlin introduces many of the primary characters in the first episode, including two characters whom he says really drove a lot of his creative storytelling: Lt Sharon Garnet (Christie Burke) and fast-talking Alicia Nevins (Stacey Read). In the aftermath of the dramatic events in the pilot, Garnet is one of only three surviving officers left to lead, while Alicia is assigned to waste management.

“To me, Alicia is a little bit the secret weapon,” Devlin teases about the character. “She’s very quirky and she almost comes off as a comic character. But there’s this nucleus of greatness inside her. To watch that journey, and to see where she’s gonna go and what she can become, was very exciting.

“With Garnet, when I started talking to Jonathan, he had some fantastic ideas of where to take her that weren’t in my original thoughts at all. I got very excited about where he wanted to take her and that kind of reshaped the pilot, so that we could set her up for where she’s gonna go.”

As is revealed in the first episodes via Garnet’s lethal fighting abilities and murky background, Glassner confirms, “She is not

Christie Burke  
as Lt Sharon  
Garnet. Not  
pictured: HAL.



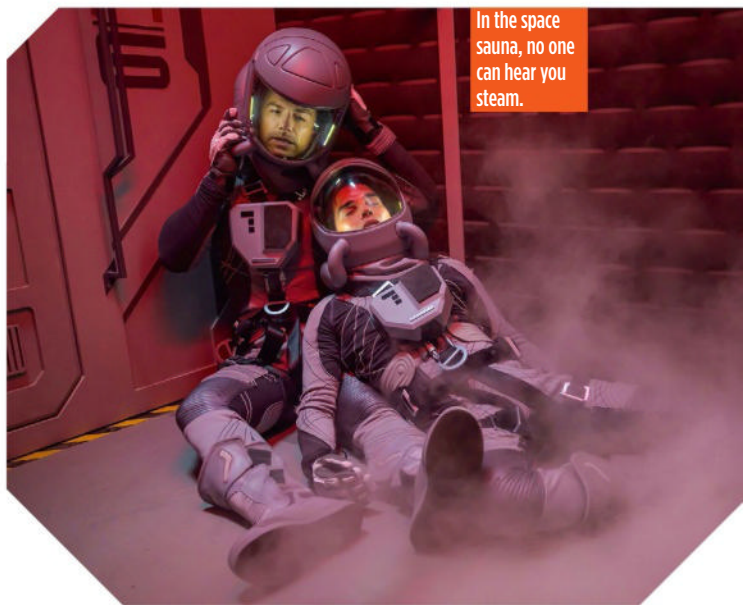
Richard  
Fleeshman as  
Lt James Brice:  
narky.

everything she appears to be.” Those two are part of an international cast of characters including clashing leaders Lt James Brice (Richard Fleeshman) and Lt Spencer Lane (Reece Ritchie); the murdered, but still appearing, shifty diagnostics expert Jasper Dades (Chris Leask); the self-esteem-battered candidate Baylor Trent (Miles Barrow); Serbian systems expert Eva Markovic (Tiana Upcheva) and the self-centred mental health liaison Cat Brandice (Christina Wolfe).

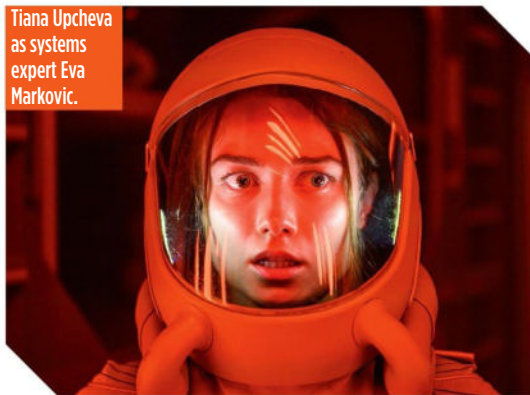
It’s a relatively fresh set of acting faces, and *The Ark* uses their unfamiliarity for audiences to help establish the unsettling stakes of the series. “This is a show where I don’t want to know who’s gonna live, who’s gonna die, who’s gonna succeed, and who’s gonna fail,” Devlin says of their casting approach. “With this cast, it’s not like, ‘Oh, you know that person’s gonna be in every episode, because they cost a million dollars an episode,’ he laughs. “It’s just a lot of great actors.”

That’s already been proven with Dades’s gruesome end in the pilot, which Devlin said was a deeply felt loss. “[Chris Leask] was one of our favourites on the show,” he laments. “We saw so much potential. John and I even said,

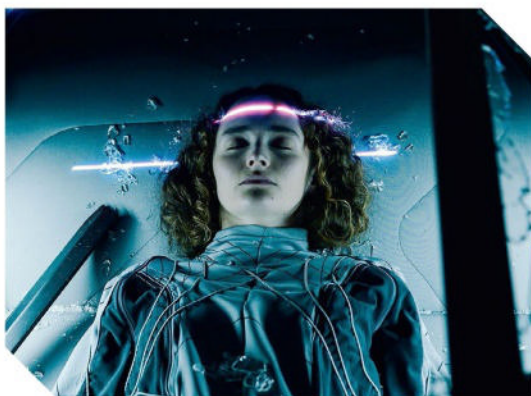
In the space  
sauna, no one  
can hear you  
steam.



Tiana Upcheva  
as systems  
expert Eva  
Markovic.







Lt Garnet has a bit of a well deserved lie-down.



"Something's been at my carrots again, you know."

'Does he really have to die?' And John was like, 'Yeah, he does.' Because that's the thing with the show, there has to be real stakes."

That concern with realness also extends to their approach to the science of the series, which they wanted to feel familiar and probable to audiences watching. "We've done a lot of research and we're trying to stick as close to real science and real technology – even some of it theoretical at this point – as we can," Glassner explains.

"But to tell a story, you have to break some rules. I'll give you an example: the gravity in the ship is partially based on real technology. But the truth is, the whole ship would have to be a giant wheel, spinning, to have gravity. So we just kind of made up a gravity technology because we had to, as we don't want people floating [all the time]."

"But everywhere we can stick to real technology, we have," he continues. "Even the engines are based on a

real theoretical technology that NASA is playing with. Dean was really careful in the pilot to deal with things like muscle atrophy and hibernation and all that, realistically."

"Their destination is a real planet that is four and a half light years away," Devlin continues. "We wanted there to be a basis of truth in everything, so you can go Google it and learn interesting stuff. But at the same time, we didn't want to be an overly grounded show where you couldn't have fun episodes. It feels lately that shows are either so grounded, often semi-documentary-like, or they're so fanciful as to be comical. We wanted to try to not be 10 feet off the ground, but also not incredibly grounded. We like to think of ourselves as, like, two to three inches off the ground," he jokes.

*The Ark* will be fully committed to telling its story on the ship, with this collection of characters, dealing with the day-to-day business of surviving for the immediate duration. It's not going to be about accidentally

finding other planets or species in their one year left to travel. "At least in the first season, we didn't want this to become a laser beam show, or a gunfight show, or a space alien show," Devlin explains. "We really wanted this to be a human drama within an extraordinary situation."

"For me, everything comes out of character," Glassner continues. "Dean created all these great characters, and what we did in the writers' room was sit there and say, 'How do we explore *this* about *this* character? What story could we do that would help us explore *that*?' Plus, we have two mysteries: the mystery of what hit the ship and the mystery of who kills Dades at the end [of the pilot], both of which gave us a lot of story."

"Then we have the space stories, the things that go wrong, the break on the ship and finding more food and water, and all of those types of things are really just there to be the arena to set the human stories. And then a lot of surprises happen along the way that you won't expect."

**“We wanted to try to not be 10 feet off the ground, but also not incredibly grounded”**

When it comes to the overall structure of the episodes in season one, there are references in the pilot to families left behind and messages sent to the Ark's passengers, which prompts the question of whether there will be flashbacks to fill in the character's past lives, or attempts to address what's going on with Earth five years into their journey. Glassner confirms: "We will do a few flashbacks, but they're mostly to explain things that you need to explain about the characters. It's not *Lost*."

Devlin confirms that a big component of their overarching story is finding out what's happening back on Earth. "We will answer that through flashbacks, but also through surprising developments."

*The Ark* seems structurally solid enough to tell ongoing stories for some time – season one will consist of 12 episodes, which Glassner and Devlin say will resolve some mysteries but leave many more unanswered.

Asked how long they feel the series could continue, Devlin cheekily replies, "Jonathan and I had a long conversation about this. There's always this fear that you can do a show for too long, and kind of burn out what's good about it. So we made a commitment that after 18 seasons, that's it! We're not gonna do any more." ●

*The Ark* is on Syfy in the US now. UK details are TBC.





## DYLAN SPRAYBERRY

Liam Dunbar returns to the pack in *Teen Wolf: The Movie*

Words by Bryan Cairns

**H**eroes come in all shapes, sizes and races... including human, supernatural and alien. Just ask Dylan Sprayberry. His first major break involved portraying a Kryptonian – a young Clark Kent – in the film *Man Of Steel*. But the Texas native is best known as the brooding werewolf Liam on MTV's *Teen Wolf*. The TV series concluded its six-season run in 2017, but Sprayberry recently reprised his role for *Teen Wolf: The Movie*. *SFX* caught up with him to chat about connecting with audiences, slasher films and superheroes.

**Liam proved to be a fan-favourite character. How did it feel to receive that kind of recognition and adoration from the audience?**

➔ It feels extra special. We obviously have things that aren't similar, but there is a lot of me in Liam that is very similar. In a small way, it's like I am being appreciated for being close to who I really am. A lot of the emotion and characteristics of Liam are personal to me because they come from me meshing with the character. It feels nice that a lot of people resonated with the arc of Liam's struggle and growth throughout the seasons.

**Liam shared a bromance with Theo, but Cody Christian's schedule for *All American* didn't allow him to participate in the movie. Did you miss that dynamic, as well as Cody himself?**

➔ There's two parts to it. There's how I personally feel about missing a friend and being able to enjoy doing that back and forth together. I also understand in a movie, we only have a certain amount of time to film a certain number of characters, and achieve a certain amount of storyline. Anyone that wasn't able to come back, I miss them all very much.

I think we have 20 main characters. There is only so much you can achieve in that hour and a half or two hours. I hope this will open doors to do other things. Who knows? There hasn't been any talk to me about it, but spin-offs... It would be fun to do something with me and Cody.

**What other projects do you have in the pipeline?**

➔ I worked on a movie called *Baby Blue*, directed by Adam Mason. We got together through my friend Aramis Knight, who is an actor on *Ms Marvel* and *Ender's Game*. He had

brought me on since he is one of the actors and co-producers. We got together and did this guerilla-style horror film. It was really fun.

I did a Covid slasher-film called *Sick* [out now in the US on Peacock – horror-loving Ed], that was written by Kevin Williamson, who wrote the original *Scream*. John Hyams directed it. That was really fun. I did that in Utah. In light of the way *Scream* was, there's no special effects. There are no monsters. It's just a serial killer dressed as a ghost. It had that classic slasher feel. It was fun to play with horror, but not have any supernatural aspect to it.

Then I'm working on a miniseries that is top secret. I can't say anything about that, but it will be coming out next year. That is something I am extremely proud of.

**How bloody do things get in either film?**

➔ The *Baby Blue* movie I was telling you about, we have a bunch of great effects. Blood spraying and spurting. It's cool to do that work. I applaud our effects teams on *Baby Blue* and *Teen Wolf*, on anything I have worked on, because they are always so great.

**One of your earliest roles was on *Man Of Steel*. How much thought have you given regarding stepping back into the superhero genre?**

➔ I have thought a lot about it. For me, I feel like I got to play one of the best superheroes in one of my favourite versions of a superhero movie ever. *Man Of Steel* was amazing. Henry Cavill, Zack Snyder and everyone involved did an amazing job. Michael Shannon was a great General Zod. I already got to work on what I consider to be the pinnacle of a superhero movie. If it made sense to step back into playing a young Superman or a teenage Superman it could be very fun. And because I already did it, it would be very cool to continue the storyline, with me playing the character, and see how that went. I feel like I could do an excellent job.

In terms of other roles, I always wanted to play Wolverine. That was one character that I always loved. If I had one of these characters that was my childhood fantasy to play, I would definitely do it. But I wouldn't just jump into a superhero movie off the bat because it's almost like I am holding out to play one of those really special characters that I love. ●

*Teen Wolf: The Movie* is on Paramount+ now.

### BIODATA

From  
**Houston, Texas**

Greatest Hits  
**Young Clark Kent in *Man Of Steel*, pack member Liam in *Teen Wolf*, potential victim DJ in *Sick*.**

Random Fact  
**Sprayberry plays guitar, bass and drums, and once rocked out in a band called The Dead Toms.**



“It feels  
nice that a  
lot of people  
resonated  
with the arc  
of Liam’s  
struggle”



DAPHNE ASHBROOK







# AMAZING GRACE

SHE KILLED THE DOCTOR AND SAVED THE UNIVERSE – THEN TURNED DOWN A TRIP IN THE TARDIS! **DAPHNE ASHBROOK** LOOKS BACK AT HER UNIQUE *DOCTOR WHO* EXPERIENCE

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

**A**S DR GRACE HOLLOWAY IN THE 1996 *Doctor Who* TV movie, Daphne Ashbrook was catapulted into a world she had no idea existed. Not only did this British sci-fi show have a 33-year history at the time, but the “backdoor pilot” movie for Fox in the United States had a massive weight of expectation resting on it – with it having been seven years since the programme had last been in production, hopes for a new series were at a high. In this previously unpublished archive interview, Ashbrook discusses her on-set experiences...

#### **Did you know much about *Doctor Who* before filming?**

◆ Not originally. There was an education going on on the set. The very first three days of shooting in Vancouver were the series in Grace’s apartment. The owner knew about *Doctor Who*, so he had his computer booted up while we were there to rehearse, he was pulling stuff off the internet and saying “See...” That’s when I started to get a little bit of information. Then on the set, Paul [McGann] and Sylv [McCoy] and Philip [Segal, executive producer], and Geoffrey [Sax, director], they all started to just tell me a bit about it.

I still didn’t understand. I still did *not* understand. I still don’t. I’m still kind of like, “Okay, groovy.” I had a lot of fun, it was a great show. I loved the script, the character and everything. So I’m alright with everything that’s continued on. I’m very fortunate, actually.

#### **Did production not tell you how big it was?**

◆ No! I was so out of the loop. I read the script, I auditioned for it, I had a callback and then I got the part and was very excited, “Oh, I get to go to Vancouver.” When I found out that Paul was in it, I knew about *Withnail And I*. So it was

like, “Oh, okay, this is cool.” That’s about all I knew walking in. I’d shot several times in Vancouver, so I was thrilled that I was gonna get to be up there for a month and a half. It’s very beautiful. I think that’s part of the reason why so many people go up there to shoot, you’ve got every facade you need, pretty much. You can make it look like a lot of places. I mean, hell, they made it look like San Francisco, that ain’t that easy to do. But they did it.

#### **Did you not question what it was all about?**

◆ I liked alien stuff, I had done some of those shows. I definitely have a propensity towards stretching the imagination. I don’t think I even really understood that when I read it, it’s like, “police box”. “That’s cute,” you know. The whole regeneration thing, I like stuff that makes you kind of scratch your head and wonder. Some people said maybe they should’ve just started it fresh with no regeneration, but I *loved* that part. I think that’s the coolest part.

People were really trying hard – I know Philip and the writer [Matthew Jacobs] and the BBC were trying so very hard – to honour the show and keep the core. So I’m assuming that’s why that was not something that they considered. I really think it’s a very strange little puzzle piece in the middle of these two huge living, breathing things. There’s this whole many, many, many decades and then there’s the new one. Then there’s this thing which kind of bridges, I think, in some way the two versions.

#### **You’re one of only a few actors to have been in both *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*...**

◆ My experience on the set of *Deep Space Nine*, that was some heavy work. That was heavy lifting, there was a lot of dialogue. And they did not allow you to miss a syllable. And I mean a *syllable*. →



I was also physically restricted the entire time. I was supposed to be handicapped, so I had these fake braces all over me, made of plastic, and I had to wear the jumper. So for the bathroom you had to take everything off and every time you took everything off and we go and break they would be duct-taping me. I was nothing but duct tape by the end of that show.

#### So Doctor Who was an easier experience?

◆ Doctor Who was freedom, man! Yeah, I was in a nice comfortable outfit. It was cold and it was nighttime, but once I acclimated to the sleeping thing it was actually no problem at all. And the shoes... I was wearing flats. I mean, that's unheard of! You're usually in some kind of hideous shoe and you're running through the streets in the dark.

I had a nice warm jacket that I got to wear the whole time. The one thing – there is a caveat – the dress, the big blue dress... I was busting out of that thing and it was hard. They built that thing for me. They did a beautiful job. But yeah, it was hard to breathe in that thing. I got into opera because of that too. And then Paul was really into it. So he was always going, "Here, listen to this..."

#### Were you aware there was a chance it might be optioned for a series?

◆ I think I knew, yes. I did know at the time that they were hoping it would be sort of a backdoor pilot, which I've done a lot of, so I know what that means. I don't think they were originally thinking that I would be part of it though. I really don't.

I think my understanding of it was that Yee Jee [Tso, as Chang Lee] was gonna possibly be the companion. Actually during the shooting of it, somebody from the BBC did come up and say, "Do you think you might be interested if this got picked up?" And I said, [shouts] "Yes!" Scared him to death. I think I hugged him and he gasped. But yeah, I would've loved that.

#### Isn't the character of Grace caught up in legal issues?

◆ It must be one of those weird "owned by Universal" [things]. Then I heard the writer owns this character. I don't even know that that writer has been asked, "Would you mind releasing this thing? So we could do some audiobooks?" In the end, somebody has to be interested enough to actually pick up the phone or whatever and figure it out.

#### Eric Roberts gave quite the performance as the Master...

◆ He went for it, man. He went all the way. We were shooting for three weeks, I think, before he ever came on the set. So we had a rhythm already, we were all on nights together. Any kind of length of time you become this little unit when the rest of the world is asleep. Then



Eric walks in three weeks into it and he was the outsider. Must've been really fun for him! He just was with a completely different energy, and he was also playing the bad guy. All of that, I'm sure, helped in some weird way for what we had to fulfil. So yeah, it was a little interesting. [Laughs]

#### With Sylvester as well, you got to work with two Doctors...

◆ He's the sweetest human being I've ever met. And I was aware. I even knew it then. Once they explained everything to me, I was aware that this man had a series and he was coming out here to give his series away. I watched him before I knew him, before I really got to know him, and I really was watching for anything that was like, "This is it" and there was nothing. He was having a good time. He was thrilled to be there.

#### You discovered far more about how big The Movie was after watching the documentary on the DVD many years later.

◆ Oh my god, I'm so glad I didn't know any of this because I would have had a heart attack. The mountains that were moved to make this thing happen. I just was impressed and humbled and amazed at the work, seven years of slogging away and almost no, yes, no, and all the different versions of things and trying to







Eric Roberts,  
Paul McGann  
and Daphne  
Ashbrook.



DAPHNE ASHBROOK

With Yee Jee  
Tso as Chang  
Lee.

find the right Doctor. Oh my god, it was just intense and it educated me. It really was probably the best education I've gotten as far as what I did [laughs], what I was involved with back in '96.

My auditions weren't on there. I was brilliant! That's all you need to know. And looked *fabulous*! [Laughs]

**Your memoirs are called *Dead Woman Laughing*. Is there a *Who*-related reason?**

◆ I think it's kind of funny and catchy, but honestly that title came up because I was laying on the cloister room floor and I'm dead.

They're shooting this thing and I start to get the giggles and I cannot stop. We were pros. We laughed a lot, but we were always there on action, cut, we were *pros* during that shoot, we did not screw around, Paul and me. So here I am now mucking up the shot. I'm laughing and

I'm supposed to be dead. So it's not good.

“I did know at the time that they were hoping it would be sort of a backdoor pilot”

We've been through a lot, this is towards the end of the shoot. It's like, “Don't screw around, get this thing done” and I'm laughing. I've been dead many times, and I have laughed many times while being dead. So I said something like, “Dead woman laughing, oh my god” and Paul said, “That's the name of your book,” and I never forgot that. So when the idea came up to do a book, *Dead*

*Woman Laughing* is perfect, because I've died so many times!

**What did you think of the finished film?**

◆ The first time I saw the film was at the Directors Guild [premiere]. I warned everyone around me, “I may not be able to stay in the room because I'm not going to watch it.” I got up as soon as I was about to kill Sylv, and I went out the room, drank wine, and waited for everyone to come out.

Then I watched it a couple of weeks later by myself, and I was like, “Oh my god,” I thought I suck and it's awful. A decade later, I watched it. And I was like, You know what? I did okay, I did alright. I was okay with that and it was much easier to go to conventions and go “I did what I could, Grace was kind of cool.” ●

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Brought



To Book

# SHANNON CHAKRABORTY

Ahoy there! Meet the writer launching a new nautical fantasy trilogy

Words by Jonathan Wright // Portrait by Melissa C Beckman

**W**HEN YOU'RE BUSY, SOMETIMES ALL you want to do is take some time for yourself. This was the situation facing Shannon Chakraborty a few years back. Trying to find a literary agent as an unpublished novelist at a point in her life when she was also a new mother, she would grab precious moments to work on her fiction.

"[I was] taking a couple of hours a week to go to write at a café," she remembers. "It felt like that was almost a selfish decision. So I started thinking a lot about parenthood, specifically motherhood and the roles we put on women when it comes to what is your duty to your family, or other things that you want in your life?"

However dimly seen, the star of Chakraborty's new novel, *Amina al-Sirafi* – a legendary pirate who's trying to leave her seafaring days behind her and focus on raising her child – had begun to sail into view. Of course, the call of the ocean is eternal, so when al-Sirafi is essentially blackmailed into returning to the fray, she's not as upset as she might be.

A second major inspiration for *The Adventures Of Amina al-Sirafi*, the first volume in a new trilogy, was Chakraborty's love of history. Specifically, she's fascinated by the societies that grew up around the Indian Ocean in the medieval era.

## A SINBAD MIXER

There was, she realised, an opportunity to "remix" stories associated with Sinbad, someone she doesn't see as the intrepid swashbuckler of Westernised tales. "He is this man who just has the worst case of fear of missing out you could ever have," Chakraborty says. "He goes on an adventure, it blows up in his face, and he tells God, 'I'm so sorry, I'm never going to do this again, just get me out of it.' He gets out of it, goes home, has a normal life and then wants to go for that *one more adventure*."

It's all too easy to assume she's writing about a time and place about which we know little. The truth is more complex, linked in part to a Eurocentric view of history that's often overlooked just how connected our forebears were. Researching the book, for instance, she came across a version of the *Rāmāyana*, a sacred Hindu text, associated with Yemen.

"We like to think that ours is the modern age of globalism," she says. "It's nonsense, there have always been travellers. The idea we were all living in isolated little villages and had never heard of other people, other religions

## BIODATA

From New Jersey, USA

Greatest Hits *City Of Brass* (2017) and its sequels *The Kingdom Of Copper* (2019) and *The Empire Of Gold* (2020) were hugely successful. A Netflix series is reportedly in development.

Random Fact Some Indian Ocean pirates were, says Chakraborty, so organised and well-equipped that "they could take on navies".



or other languages, that's just not what life was like for most of the past 2,000 years."

This idea of going back to the source as a way to give new energy to the fantasy novel also guide Chakraborty's first trilogy *The Daevabad*, which took readers to 18th century Cairo and a world of djinns far richer than the wish-granters of pantomimes. Finding an agent who wanted to sell the first volume *City Of Brass* was tough, because "nobody wanted to spend money on a 500-plus-page epic fantasy from a new author with weird Muslim terms".

## THE REST IS HISTORY

Faced with such difficulties, why did she persevere? Partly, it was simply down to the kind of person she is. An introvert who still doesn't much like the public part of being an author, she read SF voraciously as a child. Chakraborty was also fascinated by Greek mythology, Egyptian history and the Titanic. She was the first person in her family to go to university, a working-class kid who grew up in New Jersey and spent a lot of time in the library; she was, she says, "that kid". Unusually – and she specifically requests that SFX doesn't ask her about why – she converted to Islam at a relatively young age.

In 2008, she graduated into a world that, economically, had just hit the wall. While she wanted to be a historian, she wasn't sure how you went about that, and ended up working in a medical office. Writing was initially a way to relax, and she's in the past characterised her early work as "historical fan fiction", a description she now regrets. "I don't think I like the implications of that, because people were like, 'So do you write about, like, sexy Alexander?' 'No, I just write stories inspired by historical places!'"

Her husband and a Brooklyn writers' group were among those pushing her on. For which we should all be thankful, because it's helped to open up a space for fantastic stories that draw on different traditions.

Young readers from the Muslim community who found their way to *City Of Brass* and spread the word, were, she says, a big factor in its success. In the past, Islam has been misrepresented within speculative fiction, but Chakraborty – while she sees conversations about this as important – prefers to highlight new Muslim voices. "I want to focus on the 10 new authors who are doing wondrous things," she adds – modestly, not mentioning herself. ●

*The Adventures Of Amina al-Sirafi* is published by HarperVoyager on 2 March.





“Sinbad is this man who just has the worst case of fear of missing out you could have”



# VWORP VWORP!



## VWORP VWORP! 5

Script and production details revealed of the unmade Nelvana Doctor Who animated series (and similar projects!)

Brand new comic strips, including *The Iron Empire* by Lance Parkin

Legendary comics artist John Ridgway interviewed

*The Curse of the Daleks* stage play

*Abslom Daak – Dalek Killer*

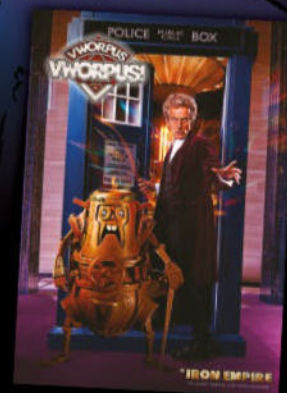
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MAR  
2023

edited by Ian Berriman

# Reviews

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## ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA

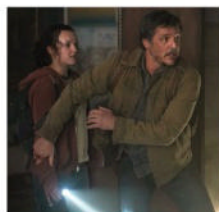
It's a small world

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→ The early-'60s space travel series that was a precursor to *Doctor Who* blasts off once more.



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#### THE ADVENTURES OF AMINA AL-SIRAFI

→ A retired pirate sets sail again in Shannon Chakraborty's latest.

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ SUPERB ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ AVERAGE ★★★★★ POOR ★★★★★ TERRIBLE



## ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA

Phase Five opener has its bugs



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 125 minutes

▶ Director Peyton Reed

▶ Cast Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Jonathan Majors, Michelle Pfeiffer, Michael Douglas, Bill Murray

“People felt like, ‘Oh, these [Ant-Man movies] are fun little palate cleansers after a gigantic Avengers movie,’” *Quantumania* director Peyton Reed told Entertainment Weekly last year. “For this third one, I said, ‘I don’t want to be the palate cleanser anymore. I want to be the big Avengers movie.’”

And with *Quantumania* also kicking off Phase Five of the MCU – and being described by MCU overlord Kevin Feige as “a direct line into” Phase Six’s *Avengers: The Kang Dynasty* (2025) – there’s a huge weight of expectation on the shoulders of Marvel’s littlest

hero. The film opens in familiar light and frothy *Ant-Man* mode, with Scott Lang (Paul Rudd) happy to live off his fame, and not showing much inclination to take up Avenging again – much to the disgust of his now-teenage daughter Cassie.

She’s become a social justice warrior jailbird, and in her spare time – behind dad’s back, but with the help of Hope (the Wasp) and Hank (Ant-Man Sr) – she’s built a subatomic Hubble telescope in the basement, to map the Quantum Realm. She’s got a costume now, too. Dad is not happy, but there are loads more family secrets to come – like just who Janet (Wasp Sr) was boffing in the Quantum Realm a while back.

Anyway, as quick as you can click your heels three times, the entire Team Ant is sucked en masse into the Quantum Realm, because Cassie’s mapping device



“Quick, all do the Tory Power Stance!”



(In unison)  
“Didn’t you use to be famous?”

has tipped off megapowerful evil dude Kang The Conqueror – who’s been exiled in the Realm – that there’s a possible way out. If you’ve seen *Loki* you’ll know we’ve kinda sorta met Kang before; he’s a bad ‘un who exists in many multiverses (a quick refresher on the TV show’s season one finale is advised).

And that’s about it as far as plot goes. Team Ant arrives in the Quantum Realm, meet loads of weird creatures – a broccoli man! A jelly man! Living, flying buildings! And loads more oddbods who failed the cut for

“It’s not a big Avengers movie, no matter how hard it tries”

*Guardians Of The Galaxy* and Taika Waititi’s *Thor* films – argue a bit, get caught and escape a lot. They then muster the locals into a rebellion against Kang.

It’s all so predictable. It’s not a big Avengers movie, no matter how hard it tries; it’s a bargain basement Avengers movie. It’s the MCU formula writ small, with





## PAUL RUDD

Scott Lang in  
*Quantumania*



**The trailer used Elton John's "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road". So is AMATWQ Marvel's *The Wizard Of Oz*?**

→ Well, there's certainly a desire to go home! There are some similarities, parallels... that makes sense, connecting those two films. It's not the same film by any means. But if I could click my heels three times and get out of the Quantum Realm, I would try. I don't know if I'm necessarily Dorothy, though!

**How did you feel about Jonathan Majors playing Kang?**

→ A terrific choice. I can't even imagine anyone else playing that part. He brought such intensity to the part and his approach to acting and to the set... the threat felt real. It was a nice injection of new, different energy to help facilitate that.

**How much will Ant-Man be involved in Phase Five?**

→ Well, I think that there's stuff that is going to really set a tone and there will be, in the future, things that you trace back to this movie. It's going to play a part in a lot of what's about to come. So it was nice knowing that the film would be important in that regard. What those things are remains to be seen. They're there. I can't talk about them, sadly!

**James Mottram**

nothing new to add. Goofy aliens? Tick. Teen girl prodigy? Tick. Quipping in the face of Big Bads? Tick. Parent/child issues? Tick. Cameo from an acting legend? Tick. Massively signposted foreshadowing? Tick. There's nothing here (with the exception of one of the extra scenes in the end credits) that builds on what we've seen before, and which hasn't been done better before.

There are other problems too. Evangeline Lilly's Wasp could pretty much be cut from the film without anyone noticing, while Bill Murray, who's clearly

intended to be this film's Collector, delivers a cameo of spectacular dullness. A montage revealing Kang's evil past is similarly underwhelming. And for a film that keeps championing the little guy, it's ironic how often it is that Scott's giant form comes to the rescue.

Of course, being a Marvel movie, it's also slick and funny in the places that matter. The performances – Murray aside – are charming. And there are some memorable, bonkers kaleidoscopic images. But there's little here that's going to appeal to anyone

outside the MCU's core loyal audience. It's also another worrying sign of the homogenisation of the MCU. Phase Four seemed like the perfect opportunity to start experimenting with different styles and different approaches; all that, however, was pretty much left to the TV shows.

Isn't Phase Five a chance to finally start surprising audiences? Let's hope this isn't a stylistic taste of things to come. **Dave Golder**

**i** Bill Murray's first Marvel role came back in 1975, voicing the Human Torch in a 13-part *Fantastic Four* radio series.





Full name: Mia Gypsy Mello da Silva Goth. FACT.

## PEARL Original sin

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 17 MARCH**

15 | 103 minutes

▶ Director **Ti West**

▶ Cast **Mia Goth, David Corenswet, Tandi Wright, Emma Jenkins Purro**

◆ **Ti West's '70s-set slasher *X*** ended with body parts strewn across Pearl's Texas farm, and her head squashed under the tyres of porn star Maxine's pick-up truck. Both Maxine and Pearl were played by the astonishing Mia Goth, and the credits assured audiences that this wouldn't be the last we'd see of her, since the prequel *Pearl* would be out soon.

West completed photography on Pearl's origin story immediately after *X*, and Mia Goth returns with a delightfully unhinged performance as the childish but dangerous eponymous heroine. The film follows Pearl living on

the same farm in 1918 with her oppressive German immigrant parents, waiting for her husband Howard to return from the First World War. But a combination of sexual repression, Hollywood ambition and a couple of loose screws mean that she's soon reaching for the hatchet.

Mia Goth proves herself to be a peerless contemporary scream queen, but Ti West's film doesn't quite reach the intriguing heights of the actor's performance. Its prequel status knocks out some of the tension, and Pearl's destiny is a fait accompli. However, even if the set-pieces are a little on the conventional side, the prospect of Goth returning for a potential third entry is an enticing one.

**Leila Latif**

**i** While the *Wizard Of Oz* references throughout *Pearl* are clear, Judy Garland certainly never did *that* to a scarecrow...

## UNWELCOME Gnome Alone

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 104 minutes

▶ Director **Jon Wright**

▶ Cast **Hannah John-Kamen, Douglas Booth, Colm Meaney, Kristian Nairn**

◆ **It's murder finding a good** tradesperson these days, as Maya (Hannah John-Kamen) and her partner Jamie (Douglas Booth) soon discover in this bizarre horror-comedy.

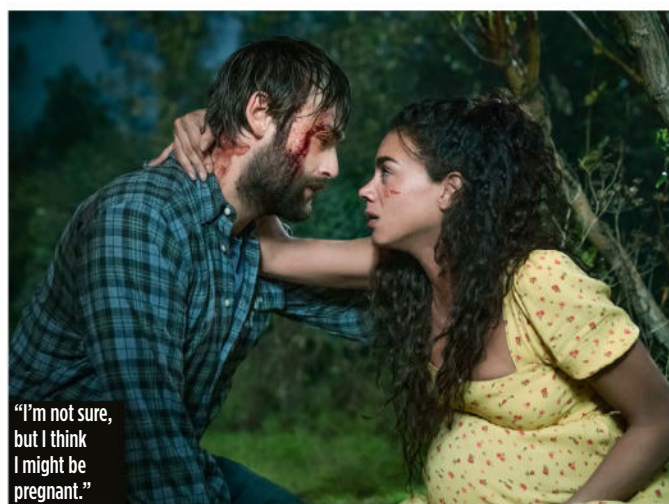
The couple are fleeing London in the wake of a home invasion. With grimly fortuitous timing Jamie's Aunt Maevie passes away, bequeathing him a run-down cottage in rural Ireland. Trouble comes when they hire the unsavoury Whelan family, headed up by patriarch Colm (*Star Trek*'s Colm Meaney), to fix the place up. Then there's the small matter of the redcaps – a folkloric race of

little people said to live in the woods, who prove to be more than just a myth...

*Grabbers* director Jon Wright's latest is equal parts *Straw Dogs* and *Gremlins*, with the couple forced to deal with both human and supernatural evil. Handsomely shot and highly stylised – it exists in a semi-permanent state of golden hour glow, while many of the exteriors appear to be sets – it has a storybook feel that contrasts quite weirdly with some of the more violent moments.

On the one hand this is a film with some fairly brutal acts of realistic violence towards a heavily pregnant woman, while on the other it features a bunch of literal goblins scampering around shrieking "No hitty, silly billy!"

Still, the redcaps are *great* when they finally show up in



force; genuinely creepy and funny, they're like an army of murderous Dobbies. The latter scenes between Hannah John-Kamen (excellent and committed throughout) and these horrible little critters feel like you've slipped into some demented reboot of *Labyrinth*. Meaney chews the scenery magnificently as "Daddy" Whelan, while *Game*

*Of Thrones*' Kristian Nairn – playing another strong, mostly silent type – imbues Eoin with a welcome touch of tragedy as well as menace.

It's a messy and uneven film for sure, but not, as it happens, an unwelcome one. **Will Salmon**

**i** The redcap effects were created using a combination of actors in masks on oversized sets, motion capture and CG.



## KNOCK AT THE CABIN

### Signs o' The Times



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 100 minutes

▶ Director M Night Shyamalan

▶ Cast Dave Bautista, Jonathan Groff, Ben Aldridge, Rupert Grint

◉ **Would you sacrifice a loved one to save the rest of humanity?** That's the question at the heart of M Night Shyamalan's latest, a so-so thriller based on Paul Tremblay's 2018 novel *The Cabin At The End Of The World*.

Couple Eric and Andrew are vacationing with their daughter Wen in rural Pennsylvania when four strangers walk out of the woods. Led by Leonard (Dave Bautista), they come bearing a terrible message: the world is about to end, and the only way to prevent the apocalypse is for the family to willingly choose to kill

one of their own. Eric and Andrew are unconvinced, but when they switch on the TV news their conviction starts to crumble...

*Knock At The Cabin* is equal parts home invasion flick, existential horror and a retreat of Shyamalan's own *Signs*. Like that film, it places the viewer amid a small group of people trying to grapple with an extraordinary situation from a distance, the television their only direct link to the outside world. Also like that film, it never quite figures out how to make its mass of intriguing ideas work.

The promising first half sticks closely to the book. Shyamalan can conjure a doomy atmosphere like few other directors working today, and there's a politeness to these invaders (with the exception of Rupert Grint's surly ex-con

Redmond, who's just a real asshole) that's unsettling. Dave Bautista is an inspired piece of casting, and he brings a lot of pathos to gentle giant Leonard. There's also genuine chemistry between Jonathan Groff's Eric, Ben Aldridge's Andrew and Kristen Cui as Wen. You feel for this family.

As the film progresses, however, Shyamalan steers the story in a new direction. That's not inherently a bad thing, but all of the choices made here are in the dubious service of making this story feel *safer*. There's a core of righteous fury and cosmic terror at the heart of Tremblay's book that *Knock* acknowledges, but ultimately abandons in favour of

**“Never quite figures out how to make its mass of ideas work”**

a neater and disappointingly far more palatable conclusion.

It's also weirdly timid. Old Testament brutality is integral to this tale – it's not a spoiler to say that the terrifying makeshift weapons the strangers arrive with are put to use before too long – and yet Shyamalan opts to shoot around most of the violence. This approach reaches an irritating peak with a capture/escape sequence where the camera looks away from much of the action.

Despite all of this, *Knock At The Cabin* is an effective enough B-movie, nowhere near the director's best work (*Unbreakable*, obviously), but some leagues better than his worst. It's just that with such thought-provoking and provocative source material to build on, we couldn't help but hope for more. **Will Salmon**

**i** Nikki Amuka-Bird appears in both this film and Shyamalan's *Old*; there's a fan theory that her two characters are sisters.



## EPIC TAILS



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

U | 94 minutes

▶ Director David Alaux

▶ Cast Giovanna Fletcher, Rob Beckett, Josh Widdicombe

◉ **Released in its native**

France as *Pattie And The Wrath Of Poseidon* and also known as *Argonauts*, *Epic Tails* – as it's titled in the UK – is a magpie's nest of an film, filled with shiny set-pieces pilfered from other (better) movies.

Ray Harryhausen gets more tributes than our late Queen. There's a whiff of *Howl's Moving Castle* here, a pinch of *Ratatouille* there. Thankfully none of these homages come across as cynical rip-offs, but you do wind up aching to revisit, say, the original *Clash Of The Titans* to remind yourself how the Greek myths should really be done.

It focuses on a mouse itching to go on a quest with the now-geriatric Jason (of *Argonauts* fame). All the right messages are blasted at the young audience: size doesn't matter, girls can be adventurers too, parents need to know when to let go and so on. There are wacky characters, from ninja rats to salty seabirds; the action never lets up, and there are even songs.

However, it's all hugely let down by an uneven English voice dub. The main performers work hard but there's a listlessness in certain others that doesn't match the energy seen on-screen – and the lip-syncing seems to have been an afterthought at best.

Ultimately it's less an epic tale and more of a *Bosh Of The Titans*.

**Jayne Nelson**



**“I also do light gardening work, if you're interested.”**





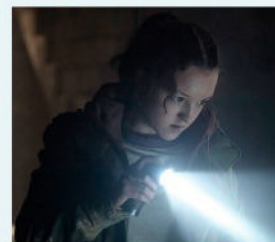
## DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

Fronds of fungus latch onto their latest victim.

Ellie whips out a pun so bad, it's good.

Someone investigates a dark room with a torch.



The two leads walk and talk along a lonely, desolate road.

A regular character gets bitten.

Characters that thought they were alone are rudely interrupted by the sound-sensitive Infected.

# THE LAST OF US Season One

## Fungus, the bogeyman



UK: Mondays, Sky Atlantic, Sky Go and NOW

US: Sundays, HBO and HBO Max

► Creators Craig Mazin, Neil Druckmann

► Cast Pedro Pascal, Bella Ramsey,

Merle Dandridge, Anna Torv,

Gabriel Luna, Nico Parker

**EPISODES 1.01-1.09** For PlayStation fans, no introduction is necessary. For everyone not fused at the palm with a DualShock controller, this is an adaptation of a post-apocalyptic shooter that already owed a huge debt to prestige telly.

Set in a world ravaged by a cordyceps brain infection (in other words, a fungus), it's a zombie show in everything but name. While the game's key narrative beats remain intact, the series

is not without its surprises. The runaway train of dramatic irony will hit fans where they live, with the first 20 minutes a case in point; this exercise in dread follows a young girl the day before all hell breaks loose, adding just enough new that existing fans will long for this prelude to end any other way than the one they know it must.

Jumping ahead 20 years, we pick up with hardened smuggler Joel. Recognisably the grump players inhabited in-game, he's given much needed depth and warmth thanks in large part to leading man Pedro Pascal.

Treading similar territory to *The Mandalorian*, this performance features much harsher edges to contain all of that obscured vulnerability.

Circumstance compels Joel to take on a risky job transporting a girl called Ellie (Bella Ramsey) out of the Boston quarantine zone, eventually undertaking a cross-country road trip from which almost no one gets out alive. It is, in a word, bleak, faithfully reproducing the game's devastating tone and divisive twists while keeping fans guessing.

The adaptation's additions make the trek worth it, expanding on threads previously left gasping for air. Early cold opens expand the temporal and geographic scope of

**“Faithfully reproduces the game’s tone”**

the pandemic, selling a believably narrow distance from disaster by elaborating on the horrifyingly grounded circumstances of the outbreak. The Infected also benefit from creepy flourishes that are all the series' own.

The game's tendency for pessimism remains intact, but expanded material attempts to redress the balance. Episode three makes the biggest strides, focusing on a gay relationship that otherwise happens off-screen. It's a surprisingly tender chapter – one that the series can't leave well enough alone.

While most of the changes are genuinely additive, certain survivors experience fresh tragedy heaped upon pre-existing tragedy to such a degree that one wishes the showrunners had shown some restraint. That said, seeing Joel's walls come crashing down in the series' second half makes it worth staying the course. **Jess Kinghorn**

**i** The leads were asked not to play the game. But Ramsey watched gameplay on YouTube, and Pascal his nephew playing.



## HELLO TOMORROW! Season One Mr Brightside



UK/US Apple TV+, Fridays

► Creators Amit Bhalla, Lucas Jansen

► Cast Billy Crudup, Hank Azaria, Alison Pill, Nicholas Podany

**EPISODES 1.01-1.10** Come the next Emmy season, *Hello Tomorrow!* demands to be nominated for Outstanding Production Design.

It takes place in some sort of alternate universe late-'50s/early-'60s where it's as if God's clicked their fingers and made ad men's visions of a push-button future a reality. Household robots are everywhere – delivering mail, waiting, gardening. Automobiles remain all sleek lines and gleaming chrome, but hover above the ground. There are transcribing typewriters and holograph tables.

Most importantly, finned rockets regularly blast off into space.

Enter Jack Billings (Billy Crudup), head of a team of salesmen pushing a new life on the Moon, courtesy of Brightside Lunar Residences. He radiates sincerity, but the property he's selling doesn't actually exist. And that lie is not the only plate he must keep spinning: eager new recruit Joey (Nicholas Podany) is unaware Jack is the father who walked out when he was a toddler.

Crudup excels in the leading role, selling the emotion as adeptly as Jack sells dreams. It's quite the

**“Sci-fi that never quite takes us into space”**



“... and those are all the great benefits of Brexit.”

challenge to maintain any degree of sympathy for a conman. It helps that Jack is also a victim of the web of deception he's spun, having clearly swallowed his own hype.

Haneefah Wood is equally good as straight-talking office manager Shirley – but we could do without Hank Azaria's Eddie, and his tussles with a debt collector. And immaculate though the mise-en-scène is, this story could arguably

just as fruitfully have unfolded in a true-life '50s milieu, and centred on, say, beachfront property in Hawaii. Ultimately, this is a sci-fi series about lunar travel that never quite takes us into space. It's hard to resist the feeling that, like Jack's customers, you've been a victim of mis-selling. **Ian Berriman**

**i** The slogan “Hello tomorrow” was used by both Adidas (in a 2005 TV ad) and the airline Emirates (in a 2012 campaign).

## CARNIVAL ROW Season Two In The Ghetto



UK/US Amazon Prime, streaming now

► Showrunner Erik Oleson

► Cast Cara Delevingne, Orlando Bloom, Simon McBurney, Karla Crome

**EPISODES 2.01-2.10** Season two of fantasy noir *Carnival Row* has been a long time coming – the first season premiered in 2019 – but at least it has the decency to declare itself the final season; you can embark on this 10-episode binge safe in the knowledge there are no unresolved plot threads. In fact, the 15-minute “many moons later” epilogue is one of the season's absolute highlights. But it's an uneven road getting there.

In case you've forgotten, it's set in a cod-Victorian fantasy world where mythical creatures and

humans uneasily coexist in a society that treats fae beings as second-class citizens – a somewhat heavy-handed metaphor for slavery, but an elegant-looking one. *Carnival Row* is a fae slum in the human-ruled Burgue. Orlando Bloom stars as Rycroft Philostrate, a human/fae half-breed copper, while Cara Delevingne plays Vignette, a militant faerie.

*The Man In The High Castle* showrunner Erik Oleson is now in charge, bringing a slightly grittier *Game Of Thrones* vibe to the show (cue a “Red Wedding”-style mid-season gamechanger). There's more action outside the Burgue, with a fae revolution in a neighbouring state, while human antagonists the Pact (who were



It was just an average Friday night in Bristol.

mostly off-screen in season one) are now centre-stage.

It's certainly ambitious, though it feels suspiciously like two seasons crammed into one, with neither the Pact nor the New Dawn revolutionaries developed beyond the broadest strokes. The politicking can come across as a little naive, with military and diplomatic strategies often coming down to “the least crap plan wins”.

There's also a truly silly-looking Big Bad monster. However, the season boasts plenty of quirky, enjoyable characters, some impressive steampunk-y action set-pieces, and a number of grisly twists to keep your interest piqued. The carnival is over, but it was fun while it lasted. **Dave Golder**

**i** Ragusa appears to be loosely based on the real-world Republic of Ragusa, which banned the slave trade in 1416.



## LOCKWOOD & CO Series One

### Problem children



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

Showrunner Joe Cornish

Cast Ruby Stokes, Cameron Chapman, Ali Hadji-Heshmati, Ivanno Jeremiah

**EPISODES 1.01-1.08** Imagine a world in which ghosts run riot, killing the living with just one touch. A universal curfew now prevents people from going outside at night, when the spooks are at their most dangerous. "The Problem", the name given to this immense haunting, has been ongoing for 50 long years, resulting in a Britain that looks like ours but has missed out on many technological advances (we can assume people were too busy trying *not to die* to invent, say, iPhones).

The only defence humanity has against the undead are children: some youngsters can sense ghostly

presences and, with training, can destroy or contain the spectres with rapiers, iron chains and silver blankets. Picture youthful Ghostbusters, but without the fancy gadgetry.

This is the premise Jonathan Stroud dreamed up for his *Lockwood & Co* book series, a mighty fine starting point for Joe Cornish to have developed into this perky and compelling show. Seemingly a hybrid of Florence Pugh and Jenna Coleman, Ruby Stokes excels as Lucy Carlyle, a psychic who teams up with the titular ghost-hunting agency and uncovers everything from conspiracies to outright murder.

Her companions are the Egon Spengler-esque George (Ali Hadji-Heshmati) and Cameron Chapman's Anthony Lockwood – who isn't quite as sparkling and

charismatic as the story wants him to be, but still capable of pulling off "cocky yet vulnerable". Together the trio investigate haunted houses, haunted graveyards and, er, even more haunted houses, fighting off gruesome ghosties with brawn, brains and lots of quipping.

Unsurprisingly given the premise, a good chunk of time is spent watching people waving torches around as they explore abandoned buildings in the middle of the night, which does get rather repetitive. But this is made up for by flashes of genius.

For example, riffing on *Blade's* iconic "blood sprinklers", we get a beautifully shot sequence involving a ghost-repelling salt sprinkler system. The soundtrack

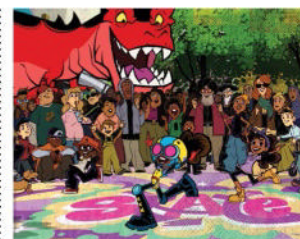
**“Picture young Ghostbusters, but without the fancy gadgetry”**

throws in suitably gothic songs by The Cure and Bauhaus to accentuate the fact that culture has been held back by The Problem; some things, such as music, are still stuck in the '80s. And the London on display here, its streets deserted after dark and dripping with ghostly threats, is utterly fascinating.

There are also pleasing guest star turns from *Sherlock's* Louise Brealey, the legend that is Nigel Planer, and (in a recurring role) Luke Treadaway, who rocks some killer eyeliner as a chap called The Golden Blade.

With only two of Stroud's five books covered so far, there's more delicious ghoulie-busting waiting to be unleashed. Fingers crossed that Netflix won't have a Problem with bringing us more. **Jayne Nelson**

The window of ghost-hunting agency supply store Satchell's is in reality the Piccadilly branch of Waterstones.



## MOON GIRL AND DEVIL DINOSAUR Season One



UK/US Disney+, streaming now

Showrunner Steve Loter

Cast Diamond White, Fred Tatasciore, Alfre Woodard, Libe Barer

**EPISODES 1.01-1.06** Here's something a little different from Marvel. *Moon Girl And Devil Dinosaur* – a frenetic, pop-rap-propelled teeny cartoon series – isn't *officially* part of the MCU, but in this multiverse of madness we're sure Marvel has a way of making it canon eventually.

Lunella is an African-American girl genius from New York's Lower East Side, with a hidden lab below her family's apartment and a dinosaur she accidentally dragged from the past as her crime-fighting partner. Although trying to win prizes at science fairs and learning to love her curly hair are more likely to ruin her day than supervillains.

Co-created by Laurence Fishburne (who also voices recurring baddie The Beyonder), the series' look is a striking blend of *Into The Spiderverse*, Shoujo and pop art, using word bubbles filled with emojis and other visual gimmicks aimed at the TikTok-literate. Things become even more kaleidoscopic and stylised during the songs that underscore the big fight scenes.

It's vibrantly diverse, proudly progressive and a whole load of fun. Your enjoyment may vary depending on your tolerance for screechy voices, but the target audience should love its anarchic energy. **Dave Golder**



They gasped as Richard Osman was illuminated.





# Mother's Day

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## PATHFINDERS

### Rockets From The Crypt

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1960-1961 | U | DVD

▶ Director Guy Verney, Reginald Collin

▶ Cast Gerald Flood, Peter Williams,

Harold Goldblatt, Georg Coulouris

● **It's tempting to assume that** *Doctor Who* emerged fully formed from the void in 1963, but this trilogy of ITV serials has a compelling claim to be the Gallifreyan equivalent of John the Baptist.

Itself a sequel to 1960's *Target Luna*, *Pathfinders In Space* was produced by Sydney Newman, a key figure in *Who*'s creation, and co-written by Malcolm Hulke, who would script many of the Time Lord's classic adventures. It shares the same original remit, balancing thrills with education, the same format – 25-minute

instalments of videotaped, studio-bound adventure – and, just like *Doctor Who*, a core gang of travellers to connect the teatime planet-hopping.

In truth it's more of a piece with the juvenile sci-fi novels of Hugh Walters. This is a post-Sputnik, pre-Telstar world, where rocket research stations carry the unmistakable whiff of pipe smoke and Brylcreem, and precocious children venture to the stars clutching pet guinea pigs.

There's certainly a naïve charm here – spacecraft come with periscopes and “take-off couches” – but that's balanced with a grounded, procedural quality, paying attention to technical detail, and a precious sense of pre-Apollo mystery: “Everyone says the Moon's dead, but we don't know for sure, do we?”

When lunar exploration commences, this sense of wonder not only deepens but turns authentically eerie. Our heroes find mysterious alien glyphs, discover a “dead spaceship” from an unknown race, and stumble upon the crystallised remains of a 400 million-year-old man (an awesomely haunting image). As the story evokes a genuine sense of cosmic deep time you almost expect Ridley Scott's “space jockey” to be lurking around the next corner...

The two sequel serials never quite recapture this hard SF shiver, though there's an ongoing concern with interplanetary anthropology, shining light on lost civilisations. *Pathfinders To Mars* reshuffles the cast but keeps Gerald Flood's puckish scientific journo Conway Henderson, nominally the central hero of the three adventures, and adds an infestation of Martian flora to the perils of space travel.

*Pathfinders To Venus*, meanwhile, maximises the pulpiness, throwing in dinosaurs – stop-motion effects footage borrowed from Czech movie *Journey To The Beginning Of Time* – and Venusian cave people. There's an early eco-message in there too, arguing against the colonisation of this lush world.

Occasionally creaky but made with sincerity and imagination, these black-and-white yarns offer a valuable glimpse of TV SF at the dawn of the real-life space age, a fleeting moment before our solar system was nailed down with hard facts. Time to fire up the cathode ray tubes!

● **Extras** *Target Luna* no longer exists in the archives, but this release includes PDFs of the original scripts. There's also a photo gallery and an excellent, comprehensively detailed booklet on the making of the series by trusted TV historian Andrew Pixley. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Gerald Flood went on to provide the voice of robot companion Kamelion in the Peter Davison era of *Doctor Who*.



## SCARY MOVIE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1991 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Daniel Erickson

▶ Cast John Hawkes, Suzanne

Aldrich, Ev Lunning, Mark Voges

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** **Though** unconnected to the 2000 Wayans Bros movie, this low-budget slice of regional filmmaking – shot in Austin, Texas – also puts a comedic spin on the slasher movie... with rather more quirky charm.

Like a certain John Carpenter film, it sees a psycho killer escaping on Halloween. The main draw is the way it depicts a “horror house” attraction built for the holiday – a phenomenon attractively exotic to British eyes. We spend half an hour queuing outside. Once inside, can nervous Nellie Warren (future Oscar nominee John Hawkes) fend off a masked figure with a scythe?

Director Daniel Erickson (then just 22) cleverly blurs the line between “real” gore and the fake variety, and there's some amusingly tart dialogue – we're squirrelling away “If I wanted to hear from an asshole, I'd fart” for future use. Though it could benefit from a little more zip, the film deserves the proper release it never received at the time. Hats off to the American Genre Film Archive.

● **Extras** A moderated director's commentary points out details you may have missed (Butch Patrick, who played Eddie Munster, has a small role), and unearths some good fact-nuggets – like certain props being recycled from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. You also get two Erickson shorts (18 minutes), thematically related. Plus: trailer; gallery. **Ian Berriman**



“This always happens after six Bacardi Breezers.”





## BONES AND ALL

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 18 | Blu-ray & DVD

(double-play – HMV exclusive)/  
download

▶ Director Luca Guadagnino

▶ Cast Taylor Russell, Timothée  
Chalamet, Michael Stuhlbarg

❖ **What would it be like to** find someone who saw you at your worst, but still loved you completely? It's not an uncommon question in cinema, but the people concerned aren't usually cannibals.

Taylor Russell is Maren, an 18-year-old coming to terms with her true nature. Traversing Reagan-era America to find a mother she never knew, she pairs up with fellow "Eater" Lee (Timothée Chalamet). Here, cannibalism is not some psychopathic lifestyle choice, but an irresistible hunger akin to vampirism.

Essentially an outsider road movie, it has much in common with the genre's *ne plus ultra*, Terrence Malick's *Badlands*: the hiding out in empty homes; the rising body count; the sense of a ticking clock. The strong-meat subject matter necessarily entails brutal violence, though director Luca Guadagnino never revels in gore. He also resists obvious sentimentality – when the couple reunite after a fall-out, it's discreetly viewed from a distance.

The cast are excellent, with Mark Rylance low-key creepy as an older Eater who becomes a thorn in Maren's side, while there's a sense of spontaneity to Chalamet's performance; he can make it feel like he's casually tossing the lines away.

❖ **Extras** Just five old online promo clips (nine minutes). A missed opportunity. **Ian Berriman**

Wakandan  
lollipop ladies  
are a vicious  
lot.



## BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER

A succession story

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Directors Ryan Coogler

▶ Cast Letitia Wright, Angela Bassett,  
Winston Duke, Danai Gurira

❖ **Faced with the unenviable** task of following a gigantic, zeitgeist-entering hit and soldiering on when lead Chadwick Boseman died while the film was still in development, Ryan Coogler managed to make something that, while it has some major issues, is watchable and a decent tribute to its departed key figure.

Still, it ends up feeling rather fragmented, trying to squeeze in the introduction of a new antagonist (Tenoch Huerta Mejía's sometimes compelling watery warrior Namor) while figuring out the future of Wakanda post-T'Challa, and not always able to service both stories effectively.

❖ **Extras** A couple of decent featurettes – "Envisioning Two Worlds" (11 minutes) and "Passing The Mantle" (six minutes) – offer

the usual Making Of material and a moving look at the team tackling, and talking about, the loss of Boseman. A 10-minute batch of deleted scenes swing between subplot connective tissue featuring Danai Gurira's Okoye, and a fun sequence boasting Martin Freeman's (naturally) convincing British accent and a very unconvincing beard as Agent Ross helps the Wakandans with a spy mission, within which lurks an Easter egg for a Marvel character.

The star of the show, however, is the commentary with Coogler, co-writer Joe Robert Cole and cinematographer Autumn Durald Arkapaw, which starts slowly but builds into an impressive mix of technical details, emotional recollections and revelations, such as the fact that the giant funeral procession was seemingly a late addition. The mind boggles to think of the crew scrambling to put that one together... **James White**

**i** Dominique Thorne (Riri Williams) originally auditioned to play Shuri in the first film, and stuck in Coogler's mind.



## THE CASSANDRA CAT

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1963 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Vojtěch Jasný

▶ Cast Jan Werich, Emília Vášáryová,  
Vlastimil Brodský, Jiří Sovák

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** In this playful

Czech fantasy, a tiny travelling circus disrupts the lives of the residents of a small town via Mourek, a magical cat.

Despite the title, this tabby can't foresee the future, only reveal people's true natures: once its little sunglasses (!) are removed, people are liable to turn grey, yellow, violet or red depending on whether they're thieves, adulterers, liars or in love. And the town's killjoy headteacher ("Imagination is unscientific!") has good reasons for staying out of its eyeline...

Whimsy, romance, slapstick, jazz and very cute kids are key ingredients. Though banned after 1968's Soviet invasion, its satire seems pretty mild: society isn't radically reshaped by the feline gaze, just temporarily rendered carnivalesque.

Barring some entertaining black light theatre, all the stand-out moments come when the moggy removes its shades, transforming locals via the use of brightly coloured costuming, hair and make-up, and setting them furiously cutting a rug. Be grateful if your puss only glares meaningfully for Dreamies.

❖ **Extras** The Projection Booth podcast team provide commentary. In "The Badly Painted Hen" (13 minutes), a charming 1963 animated short by a co-writer of *The Cassandra Cat*, a daydreaming schoolboy's art comes to life. Plus: trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



## MAGIC, MYTH AND MUTILATION

Murphy's allure

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**  
1967-2015 | 18 | 34 hours and 42 minutes  
► Director Michael J Murphy

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** "Britain's great unheralded DIY auteur!" declares the blurb for this 10-disc box set. He's "unheralded" alright – even cult movie connoisseurs may have never heard of Michael J Murphy.

The late director admitted to a "Ready Steady Cook approach", using whatever was available. This included papier-mâché, cardboard boxes and drapes; actors from the Portsmouth am dram scene; and locations like a scrapyard, a dry ski run, or – judging by the neat grass of the post-apocalypse – parks.

His '80s output holds the most appeal. "Invitation To Hell", a short about possession on a farm, achieved some cut-through, but is cringe-inducingly corny. In "The Last Night", Broadmoor escapees crash an am dram whodunit; think Michael Soavi's *Stagefright*, with a much higher moustache count; it's also faintly *Inside No 9*.

What you want from cinema's outsiders is a different point of view, but some of Murphy's oeuvre recalls New World Pictures fare. Take *Death Run*, in which waking cryo-sleepers find a post-apocalypse populated by bikers in torn T-shirts, girls in suspenders and, er, swans?! *Avalon* rehashes

Arthurian tropes as a champion, a virgin and a thief travel to the Island of the Dead. The bonkers *Atlantis* visits an underground kingdom of gladiatorial combat and *Soylent Green* cannibalism.

Expect faces bisected by the edge of frame, glacial sword fights where wooden blades slide under armpits, mannequin decapitations, countless perms and mullets, and recurring actors. The gimlet-eyed Patrick Olliver stands out, showing enough to suggest that he could have been Britain's Richard Lynch.

There are another 21 films here, but we're throwing in the towel. It is possible we've skipped a masterpiece... Regardless, claims of "great auteur" status seem inflated. What's admirable here is the director's tenacity, not the output; the fact that he just kept going, doing what he loved. His filmmaking family remember him with tremendous affection. That's Murphy's true legacy, one which transcends any critical assessment.

► **Extras** A three-part doc (67 minutes) has amusing anecdotes from Murphy and various collaborators. He also gives a tour of his house (11 minutes). Footage of friends delving into the attic after his death, digging out props (22 minutes), proves poignant.

There's also a horror festival interview (65 minutes), a tribute made after his death (19 minutes), Making Of's for six films, and commentaries on four of them. Plus: fragments from lost films, outtakes, behind-the-scenes stuff, scripts, bloopers, galleries and much more, including a 120-page book. NB: with some elements lost, eight films are presented in standard definition. **Ian Berriman**

On selling two films to the Czech Republic, Murphy's agent expressed surprise: "They usually only buy good films!"



## CITY BENEATH THE SEA/SECRET BENEATH THE SEA

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★  
► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**  
1962/1963 | PG | DVD  
► Director Kim Mills  
► Cast Gerald Flood, Stewart Guidotti, Aubrey Morris, Peter Williams

► **Two stars of *Pathfinders*** (see page 78) returned in new roles for these ATV serials written by John Lucarotti – later to pen three historical adventures for William Hartnell's Doctor. They share the educational urge of those, though *City Beneath the Sea* is more in the Bond mould, as the theft of a nuclear submarine leads to Aegira, an underwater base built by the Nazis.

You'd think that'd tip people off that its ruler, Professor Ziebrecken (Aubrey Morris), is a wrong 'un, but benefit of the doubt is liberally applied. He's likewise charitably reluctant to lock up the stowaways who interfere in his megalomaniac plans! Morris – later to employ his sinister leer in *A Clockwork Orange* – steals the show here.

Diminishing returns set in with the sequel. The stakes are much lower, as the discovery of a miraculous metal inspires a plot to secure the mining rights. Once we return to Aegira (now run by the UN), it devolves into a game of "guess the saboteur".

Both serials have an old-fashioned charm, and provide some chuckles via underwater sequences which require the poor cast to wave their arms about as if bobbing in the water – before emerging from airlocks dry as a bone...

► **Extras** Gallery; 28-page booklet. **Ian Berriman**



Someone's said "scones" the wrong way.





"Oh come on, it must be my turn for a lie-down now."

## NEXT EXIT Road To Nowhere

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | Download

▶ Director Mali Elfman

▶ Cast Katie Parker, Rahul Kohli, Rose McIver, Tongayi Chirisa

❖ **Conclusive proof of life after death** is transforming society in writer/director Mali Elfman's debut – though about the only evidence of that on display is the enthusiasm for assisted dying.

Karen Gillan plays the scientist behind the breakthrough, but she's seen only on TV screens (clearly a one-day shoot), and what her work involves is kept frustratingly vague. The focus is on Rose (Katie Parker) and Teddy (Rahul Kohli), two mismatched strangers sharing a car as they travel to the Life Beyond project to snuff it. Will they find a reason to go on living? Have a guess.

After various random encounters, the journey becomes a means to tackle unresolved issues, and the fact that the route allows for heartstrings-tugging encounters with both Teddy's absent father and Rose's estranged sister seems a mite contrived.

Strong performances from the leads make the duo decent company, though. Kohli, reverting to his native accent after *Midnight Mass*, has never been more British, his dialogue peppered with phrases like "Bollocks!" and "You 'eard!" There are also some clever transitions between scenes – and an effective depiction of what lies beyond. As road trip movies with fantastical motivation go, it certainly beats another recent effort, *Threshold*. **Ian Berriman**

**i** The cast includes two of Rahul Kohli's *iZombie* co-stars: Rose McIver (*Liv*), and Tongayi Chirisa (*Liv*'s ex, Justin Bell).



## SKINAMARINK

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Getting your photos back from Boots to find accidental snaps of carpet, taken without flash, may well have inspired this slice of anti-cinema. Most of the time, you're squinting at walls and skirting boards in darkness.

Somewhere in the gloom, further obscured by faux film dirt and dancing grain, are two kids, trapped in their home by the disappearance of doors and windows. Hauntological shivers are presumably the aim, but barring a giggle provided by a vanishing toilet, the results are relentlessly tedious. **Ian Berriman**



## PLAY DEAD

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | SVOD

**ICON** This dopey thriller sees a wannabe criminologist making one bad decision after another until she ends up running around a morgue hiding from an organ-harvesting psycho.

With a charismatic cast and sharper script, the escalating absurdity might've been fun to watch; Brea Grant's *12 Hour Shift* handles similar themes with more aplomb. But this is morose and dreary, with tin-eared dialogue and a runtime that'll make you consider faking your own death, just to make it stop.

**Sarah Dobbs**



## ATTACHMENT

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Fancy living in the same house as your in-laws? Following a freak accident, Maja moves in with her girlfriend and soon finds herself chafing at her mum Chana's elaborate system of religious rules and rituals. But Chana may not be as delusional as she seems...

Based on Jewish folklore, *Attachment* deviates from the usual possession formula just enough to feel original, but its real strength is the romance: Leah and Maja are a couple you'll root for.

**Sarah Dobbs**



## JETHICA

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Download/VOD

❖ **This deadpan indie's title is** typically offbeat: it sounds like a magical mineral, but is actually just "Jessica" said with a lisp.

Two women (old high school friends) are both haunted by men they've killed: a stabbed stalker; a suicidal man hit by a car. A pointless framing device pads things out beyond an hour.

A strong improvisatory vibe means it's no surprise to find four cast credited as writers. The results can prove tiresome or under-developed, but you're kept on your toes, and there's some attractive use of New Mexico landscapes. **Ian Berriman**



## THE JUNIPER TREE

It's Grimm up north

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1993 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Nietzchka Keene**

▶ Cast **Björk, Bryndis Petra Bragadóttir, Valdimar Örn Flygenring**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** If you need

someone to play a woman with mystical powers, Björk's an obvious fit. Robert Eggers clearly thought so when casting *The Northman* – but someone beat him to it by three decades.

Loosely adapted from a Brothers Grimm tale, the film transplants the action from Germany to medieval Iceland. It's a dark affair, featuring a shocking death and a dash of cannibalism. Björk (making her acting debut) is Margit, one of two sisters left destitute after their mother was burned as a witch. When Katla wins the heart of widower Jóhann,

they get a new home. But Jóhann's son won't accept his stepmother...

Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* is an obvious touchstone. Shot in black and white, against a forbidding landscape of volcanic rock, it's a film which combines naturalism with the mythic – and ambiguity. It's open to question if Katla seduces Jóhann by magical means, and whether Margit's sightings of their mum are authentic visions. A work of stillness and deliberate pacing, imbued with a bleak, chilly beauty.

➤ **Extras** The highlight is a 2019 interview with cinematographer Randy Sellars (29 minutes), who

“Combines naturalism with the mythic – and ambiguity”



The spectre of Richard Osman hovers into view.

talks about the challenges of shooting in Iceland. There's a 2002 interview with the director (15 minutes); she also talks over four minutes of off-cuts. You get three of her shorts: two (four minute/seven minutes) are experimental, while “Hinterland” (25 minutes), a period tale about a woman taking in her orphaned niece, makes *The Juniper Tree* look like a laugh riot.

Two archive rarities date from the '20s: “The Witch's Fiddle”, a short shot by the Cambridge University Film Society (seven minutes), and an educational piece on Iceland's geography/culture (22 minutes). Plus: commentary by an academic; trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i A shot showing a dead body underwater was achieved using a wax head in an aquarium, smeared with fish food.

## THE FINAL PROGRAMME

Moorcock-up

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Robert Fuest**

▶ Cast **Jon Finch, Jenny Runacre, Sterling Hayden, Graham Crowden**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Introduced in the pages of British science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, Michael Moorcock's multifaceted hero Jerry Cornelius was the closest the '60s counterculture came to its own James Bond: a dandy playboy adventurer, caught up in outlandish scrapes.

This big-screen adaptation failed to conjure 007-style business, despite the charisma of its lead Jon Finch, who enters looking like Jim Morrison and

swaggers through proceedings with a leather-gloved blend of loucheness and intensity.

Director Robert Fuest was a veteran of *The Avengers* and summons some of that irony here. He also brings a terrific eye for design, staging a scene inside a giant pinball machine and presenting a Ballardian pile of abandoned cars against the London skyline, illustrating a slow creep to apocalypse that feels unnervingly prescient.

But if the film succeeds as a '70s design catalogue it fails as a storytelling exercise. It takes strong, provocative ideas and has no idea how to thread them into a compelling whole. Listless and unengaging, it's for your eyes only.



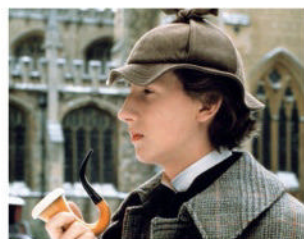
“You wouldn't happen to have any aspirin...?”

➤ **Extras** Film critic Kim Newman provides a retrospective on Robert Fuest (14 minutes), making a persuasive case that he could have been a rival to fellow Brit-film visionary Ken Russell. Co-star Jenny Runacre shares memories (11 minutes), revealing that Moorcock's dissatisfaction with the film may have scuppered plans to make a whole series of movies.

A glimpse of the Italian title sequence (two minutes) is barely a curio, while a selection of trailers (eight minutes) includes an amusing attempt to sell the film as a hard-edged apocalyptic thriller. The package also includes four art cards. **Nick Setchfield**

i Michael Moorcock wanted cult space-rock group Hawkwind (friends of his) to score the film, but was overruled by the director.





## YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1985 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Barry Levinson

▶ Cast Nicholas Rowe, Alan Cox, Sophie Ward, Anthony Higgins

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** *Sherlock Holmes*

is so bulletproof an icon he can be contorted in infinite ways: gender-swapped, flung into the 22nd century and reskinned as everything from a sleuthing gnome to a fox. As alternate title *Young Sherlock Holmes* and *The Pyramid Of Fear* makes plain, this Spielbergian prequel is out to make him Indiana Jones in a deerstalker.

Openly confessing that it's riding roughshod over Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's own canon, Barry Levinson's movie imagines Holmes (a dashing, sincere Nicholas Rowe) and Watson (a Bunter-ish Alan Cox) meeting for the first time at school. Investigating a series of peculiar, hallucinatory murders, the pre-legendary pair stumble upon nothing less than an Egyptian cult in the heart of London, complete with its own temple of doom.

This Amblin production is rightly celebrated for its groundbreaking use of CG as a stained glass knight comes to life. But the more trad effects – supervised by ILM's Dennis Muren – are equally inventive, including a gloriously surreal attack by malevolent pastries.

The full-blooded pulp tropes feel antithetical to Doyle but there's an undeniable energy here, along with a surprising darkness. It's a film that gives Holmes a heart, only to tear it straight back out of him.

▶ **Extras** None. **Nick Setchfield**



## LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Jeff Wamester

▶ Cast Meg Donnelly, Harry Shum Jr., Yuri Lowenthal, Jensen Ackles

▶ **The 31st century remains** an untapped frontier for DC on the big screen, but it's a familiar playground to comic fans and provides the backdrop for this new animated feature.

Supergirl's our way into this entertaining fusion of sci-fi and superheroics. Voiced by Meg Donnelly as a sparky, headstrong novice, she's sent to the far future to complete her training as part of the Legion – presented here as X-Men analogues.

The animation is limited but clean and appealing, showcasing fluid action with a hint of anime. Purists may object to one Legionnaire falling from the path of righteousness; elsewhere, one of Superman's classic foes gets an imaginatively grotesque revamp.

▶ **Extras** A set of featurettes focus on the making of the movie (five minutes), Supergirl (eight minutes), the Legionnaires (nine minutes) and Brainiac (eight minutes). Shame none of them touch on the rich comic book history of the characters.

There are also previews of upcoming projects *Justice League vs The Fatal Five* (nine minutes) and *Superman: Man Of Tomorrow* (eight minutes) along with "Little Girl Lost" parts one and two, Kara-centric episodes of excellent '90s toon *Superman: The Animated Series* (21 minutes each). **Nick Setchfield**



## TEEN WOLF: THE MOVIE

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 18+ | SVOD

▶ Director Russell Mulcahy

▶ Cast Tyler Posey, Crystal Reed, Tyler Hoechlin, Holland Roden

**PARAMOUNT+** *A Teen Wolf* movie directed by the man who gave us *Highlander*? Sounds cool, right? Don't get too excited. This isn't a movie. At a stretch it's a feature-length episode, a continuation of the *Teen Wolf* TV series that ran from 2011-2017.

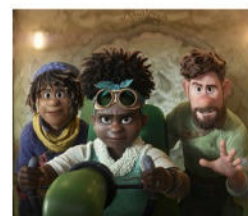
If anything, it seems even more cash-strapped than the series, with bargain basement production values and a storyline that seems mainly to have been dictated by actors' availability (which sadly, in the case of the series' one true break-out star – Dylan O'Brien – is "unavailable").

Set 15 years after the end of the series, it gets around the fact that none of its lead returning cast could charitably be called teens by introducing a new "cub" – Eli, the son of Derek Hale (Tyler Hoechlin), and you can't help thinking this is a backdoor pilot for a new series. The overwrought plot involves Allison Argent (Crystal Reed) being resurrected as an amnesiac werewolf hunter, a demon version of the Riddler, arson, Scott (Tyler Posey, the series' original teen wolf) nobly dying every other minute, and masked ninja cannon fodder.

The result is a disappointing, insipid cover version of the series, with a few fan-pleasing nostalgic highlights, but little to suggest that there's any juice left in this franchise.

**Jonathan Norton**

## (ROUND UP)



Jake Gyllenhaal's farmer journeys to a subterranean realm filled with weird creatures in Disney animation **STRANGE WORLD** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD). The film's streaming on Disney+, but buying bags you featurettes on the film's scientific inspirations, the creatures and Easter eggs, plus an "anatomy of a scene" piece. You also get four deleted scenes and recording booth out-takes. We said: "While the basic concept might not be the most original, the pulpy vibe boosts the entertainment value." In **NOCEBO** (27 February, DVD), a fashion designer suffering from a mysterious condition (Eva Green) falls under the influence of a Filipino carer who turns up out of the blue offering various folk remedies. As Diana's backstory is slowly revealed, we discover the connection between the two women. We said: "An unexpectedly political chiller, which makes a modest contribution to the debate about First World exploitation." Our reviewer wasn't terribly impressed by anime fantasy **THE DEER KING** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) – the directorial debut of Masashi Ando, who worked as an animator for the likes of Hayao Miyazaki. Its hero is a former soldier who rescues an infant girl when the salt mine where he's a slave is attacked by wolves carrying a deadly plague; he proves immune, which attracts the attention of a physician searching for a cure. We said: "There are so many ideas competing for space that there's no room for character depth... a cluttered mess."





## THE ADVENTURES OF AMINA AL-SIRAFI

Salt, sea and swashbuckling

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 2 MARCH**  
492 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook  
► Author **Shannon Chakraborty**  
► Publisher **HarperVoyager**

◉ **If you didn't know Shannon Chakraborty** once had thoughts of being a historian, you might well guess from the author's note at the end of this book. Over several pages, she details the research that informs the novel. The medieval era has, she says, fascinated her since she was an undergraduate.

So has the creator of the *Daevabad Trilogy*, a bestselling story of djinns, taken to more conventional historical fiction? Well, yes and no, because while this opening volume in a new trilogy delights in conjuring up the seafaring societies of the 12th-century Indian Ocean, it's also a fantasy adventure.

At the centre of the book lies Amina Al-Sirafi herself, whom we first meet as a mother and (at least in her own mind) ex-pirate. She's now a respectable figure, but not

enjoying an easy retirement. That's because finding the means to maintain a secluded home away from prying eyes is a struggle – although necessary, because she still has powerful enemies and a price on her head in the wake of her life of improbably daring deeds. Compounding matters, Al-Sirafi has a distinctive appearance, tall and strong.

After a single misstep that reveals her identity, Al-Sirafi is blackmailed into returning to sea after the daughter of one of her former crewmates is “kidnapped”. Or at least that's the story she's sold by the girl's grandmother, the powerful Lady Salima, a woman prepared to shower riches on Al-Sirafi if she can mount a successful rescue.

Complicating matters further is the identity of the kidnapper. He's a “Frank”, or European Christian, in an Islamicate milieu, who's on the hunt for arcane knowledge – in particular an eldritch artefact called the “Moon of Saba”. The world through which Al-Sirafi

moves is one where magic and the supernatural lie in wait to ambush the everyday world.

Returning to her old life, Al-Sirafi not only needs to reclaim her ship the *Marawarti*, but reassemble her core crew, to have people around her she trusts. As Chakraborty herself told *SFX* recently, this is a novel that takes many of its cues from heist stories. Hence, the early chapters find Al-Sirafi catching up with colleagues from back in the day – the poisoner, the stolid but skilled mariner who can execute her orders reliably, the cartographer, even a dodgy demon whose reappearance is really not welcome – as she leans on a team of misfits to get her out of trouble.

Naturally, this also involves sailing towards trouble. Partly, this is out of necessity. Al-Sirafi stands to be paid handsomely and nobody hands over cash *that* easily. But this is also about Al-Sirafi herself. Despite being asked by Lady Salima to be discreet, Al-Sirafi rampages around the Indian Ocean because, well, she can't help herself once she begins to channel her inner buccaneer. Suffice to say

“This is a novel that takes many of its cues from heist stories”

no heist story would be complete without a prison break, and no pirate story would be complete without a brave captain making the authorities look silly.

The plot here is fabulous, but getting to know Al-Sirafi through the way she interacts with those around her, and the way she thinks about her obligations to those she puts in harm's way, is arguably what really keeps you reading. While there are a few moments when Chakraborty's dolling out of backstory is mildly confusing, that hardly spoils the enjoyment. Al-Sirafi and her crew are fabulous new additions to fantasy fiction's pantheon of antiheroes. **Jonathan Wright**

**i** One of Chakraborty's hobbies is “recreating unnecessarily complicated historical dishes”. No chips for tea.



## THE FORCING

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

376 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Paul E Hardisty**

► Publisher **Orenda Books**

◉ **With global temperatures** rocketing, crops failing, seas rising and economies tanking, the youngsters of near-future North America stage a political coup, and send those they blame for the whole mess to concentration camps – namely, everyone over a certain age.

It's an attention-grabbing high concept, and one that doesn't make much sense on a practical level. But author Paul E Hardisty is markedly light on details throughout the book (“You must leave space for the reader” the narrator says at one point), and for a while this eco-apocalyptic tale operates more on a satirical level than a realistic one, albeit with plenty of grim violence and stomach-churning squalor.

But then the story – told in two parallel timelines by a former teacher – transforms into a disappointingly mundane thriller, as the narrator has the chance of escape, but his plans are hijacked by an odious, morally bankrupt former billionaire and they're forced to work together.

There are a lot of interesting elements, including some philosophising about the nature of time and ageing, vicious swipes at social media and an intriguing use of the unreliable narrator. But ultimately the book never explores any of its myriad of ideas in much depth, and relies on literary tricks that tease more than they deliver. It also suffers from a truly corny final revelation. **Dave Golder**





## THE WITCH IN THE WELL

★★★★★

► RELEASED 23 FEBRUARY

288 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Camilla Bruce

► Publisher Bantam Press

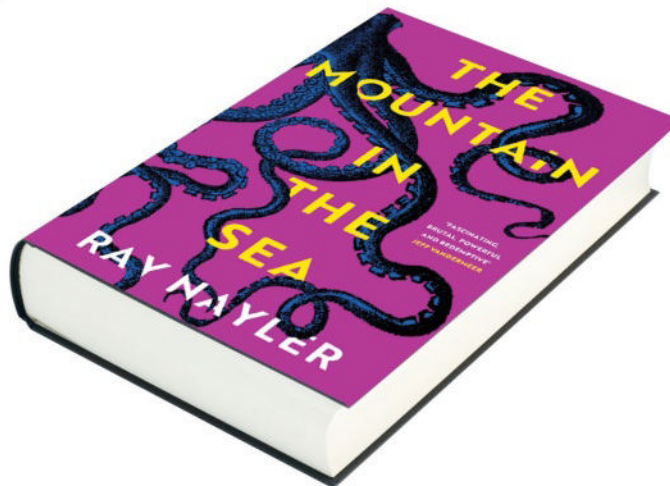
❗ **Don't look for a likeable** character in this novel – you won't find one. Instead, you'll need to look for the truth, because none of the narrators here is telling the whole story.

Cathy and Elena were childhood BFFs until a creepy encounter in the woods drove them apart. As adults, their lives have taken different courses: Cathy's divorced, with a teenage son and a fascination with local history; Elena's a successful self-help author who dabbles in folk magic.

But then the thing in the woods draws them back together, as both women become obsessed with the idea of writing a book about local legend Ilsbeth Clark. Two hundred years ago, she was accused of witchcraft and drowned in a well, and both women think they can reclaim her for their own purposes. Then Elena is killed, and Cathy becomes the prime suspect...

Told through diary entries, letters and blog posts, *The Witch In The Well* is a compellingly strange story. The rivalry between Cathy and Elena rings true, as they each stake a claim for the reader's sympathy (despite both being clearly terrible people). And then there's Ilsbeth – whose fate turns out to have been more horrifying than either suspects. A startlingly original she said/she said thriller.

Sarah Dobbs



## THE MOUNTAIN IN THE SEA

Tentacular spectacular

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Ray Nayler

► Publisher Weidenfeld & Nicholson

❗ **The nature of consciousness,** the potential of AI and the discovery of a new species of octopus are at the heart of this strikingly assured debut.

Dr Ha Nguyen is a marine biologist dispatched to live and work on the remote – and heavily fortified – Con Dao Archipelago. There are rumours in the area of a “monster” which Ha believes is in fact a previously undiscovered species of cephalopod, one that may match humanity in its intelligence. Working with one-of-a-kind android Evrim, the pair try to establish first contact. But do their aquatic neighbours want to know?

Two subplots orbit this narrative. Eiko is a young man

“For all its ideas, it reads like a particularly pacy thriller”

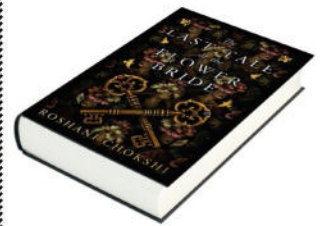
pressed into slavery on an AI-driven fishing vessel, while in Europe a hacker is forced into taking on a seemingly impossible mission. How these relate to Ha's story is only gradually revealed. For the longest time they are almost entirely separate, but it's to Nayler's credit that they're never distractions; by contrast, they expand our view of his fascinating, Gibson-ian fictional future.

This a world of monolithic corporations, identity-concealing “Abglanz” masks, suicide drones and digital companions for people who don't have the time for a human relationship. None of these ideas are radically new – many of them are cyberpunk cliché – but Nayler weaves them in so deftly with the novel's ecological and philosophical concerns that they feel fresh and plausible here.

It helps that, for all its ideas about language and non-human intelligence, *The Mountain In The Sea* reads like a particularly pacy thriller. Smart and often scary, this is a fearsomely entertaining novel.

Will Salmon

i Ray Nayler was recently appointed international advisor to the US's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Which is nice.



## THE LAST TALE OF THE FLOWER BRIDE

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

304 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Roshani Chokshi

► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

❗ **Reading this, you'll** probably have a similar experience to *Azure*, one of the three main characters and two narrators: overwhelmed by wealth, and in awe of the freedom it gives Indigo (around whom everything else pivots), while all the time longing for the magic Indigo believes in to be real.

The other narrator is Indigo's unnamed bridegroom, a poor scholar who has only one limit placed on him: he can't ask about Indigo's past. Said past is slowly revealed in flashbacks as *Azure*, also relatively poor, tells her tale, from when she first encounters Indigo as a child. During their high school years the two come to form a close attachment, creating their own fairy tale existence.

The combination of fabulous wealth, emotional excess and the constant unvoiced question “Where is *Azure*?” all feels fantastically gothic; while the story could be summed up easily, the narrative isn't as important as the feelings it evokes. The magic is sprinkled in like fairy dust, leaving you uncertain whether the characters – and you – are sharing a unique experience or merely a delusion. But sometimes the “real” feels too incredible and this makes it hard to suspend disbelief, with everything at points turning into a melodramatic mess.

Miriam McDonald



## HOUSE OF THE DRAGON INSIDE THE CREATION OF A TARGARYEN DYNASTY

Enter The Dragon



► **RELEASED 2 MARCH**

192 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Gina McIntyre**

► Publisher **HarperVoyager**

► **Much too heavy for any raven** to carry, this in-depth Making Of goes behind the scenes on *House Of The Dragon's* first season. Author Gina McIntyre assembles

cast, designers, writers and more to discuss the epic genesis of *Game Of Thrones'* "successor show", with able support from a suitably impressive selection of concept art, production blueprints and photos from the show's awe-inspiring sets.

Unsurprisingly, the book contains enough knowledge to keep a maester occupied for years,

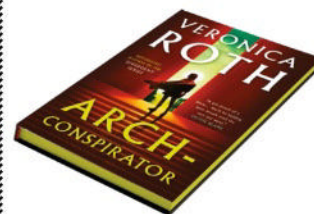
from the complex origins of a menagerie of dragons to the Brexit-related reasons for the show's move away from *Game Of Thrones'* Belfast base. It also reveals that Matt Smith's performance in *The Crown* helped him bag the role of wayward Prince Daemon.

Although the smorgasbord of imagery and trivia is fit for a king or queen, there's no denying that it's sometimes a little dry – more a book you'd use to revise a specialist subject on *Mastermind* than something you'd pick up for enjoyment.

It also sticks too closely to the HBO company line, when devoting more space to the potential spin-offs that didn't make the cut – or even acknowledging the pressure facing the show after the divisive *Game Of Thrones* finale – would have resulted in a more rounded book.

**Richard Edwards**

**i** *House Of The Dragon's* Iron Throne is two feet taller than *Game Of Thrones'*. It's also surrounded by about 2,000 swords.



## ARCH-CONSPIRATOR



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

128 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Veronica Roth**

► Publisher **Titan Books**

► **This standalone novella is a** reheating of the ancient story of Antigone, with a seasoning of *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

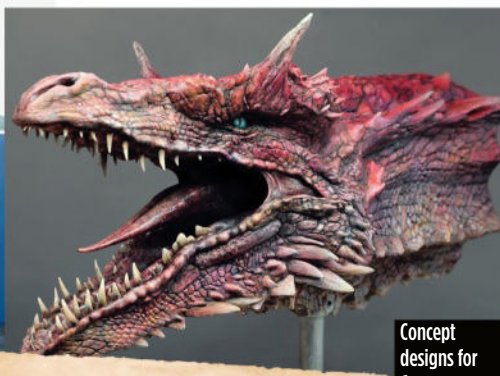
The plot follows Sophocles's play but transposes his tale of loyalty and rebellion from Thebes to a future dystopia. In a world devastated by a genetic virus and radiation, human DNA ("ichor") is extracted at death, edited and implanted into women to gestate. Antigone and her siblings were born the natural way, making them abominations. When Antigone's brother dies in a failed insurrection, the tyrant Kreon denies her the right to extract his ichor. Caught attempting to do so anyway, she's imprisoned on Earth's last spaceship.

The story is told from multiple viewpoints, shifting from our heroine to other characters, including Kreon. The prose is most comfortable when following Antigone's perspective, and sometimes you sense exciting things are happening "off-screen". But this is in keeping with the source material and also keeps the spotlight on the emotional core; this is about people's reactions and inner turmoil.

*Divergent* writer Veronica Roth is an accomplished wordsmith, and although the ending is a little rushed, she crams in a lot of detail. You'll devour *Arch-Conspirator* in one sitting. **Dave Bradley**



The Targaryen flagship set on the backlot.



Concept designs for Caraxes.



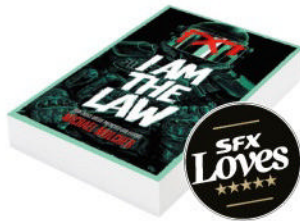
Some of these swords were just rubber.



Concept art for the Targaryen royal flagship.

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## I AM THE LAW

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 23 FEBRUARY**

369 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Michael Molcher

► Publisher Rebellion Publishing

❖ **Frequently feeling like a** four-colour version of Adam Curtis's *HyperNormalisation*, *I Am The Law* doesn't just place *Judge Dredd* into an intricate historical context, it argues that the real world is turning into a Mega-City, as paramilitary police hit the streets and Supreme Court Judges overreach their powers. Fact becoming fiction, becoming fact again.

This is a dense book, the product of intricate research and clear vision. Sources range from George Orwell to Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt to Achille Mbembe, and many more. Each chapter summarises a different key *Dredd* story, weaving in political theory around the past, present and future of policing. It's a serious work for serious times, with Rebellion PR man Michael Molcher as comfortable discussing events in Ferguson, Missouri as he is Fergee's characteristics.

Chapter four covers "The Day The Law Died", cleverly comparing Judge Cal (originally based on Caligula) to Donald Trump (who's always felt like a *Dredd* character). Chapter 12 analyses Necropolis' Judge Death, weaving in other cops who have acted as executioners.

So it continues, building a mega-thesis describing *Dredd*'s future past as our present. It also dispels some myths, refuting punk's influence on 2000 AD. An essential read for art historians and actual historians alike. **Sam Ashurst**



## CITY OF NIGHTMARES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 23 FEBRUARY**

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Rebecca Schaeffer

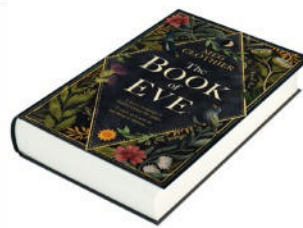
► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

❖ **With apologies to Frank Herbert**, fear isn't just the mind-killer in Rebecca Schaeffer's latest YA fantasy – it's a literal killer.

Thanks to a mysterious dream-dwelling demon, people's nightmares are coming true. When she was a kid, Ness's older sister fell asleep and turned into a giant man-eating spider, leaving her with trauma by the bucketload. Then she survives a horrifying boat-based accident, gets trapped with a lonely vampire, and things just get worse...

Ness is one of the genre's unlikeliest protagonists, what with her penchant for running away and hiding rather than facing off against the Nightmares. It's genuinely moving to watch how she grows and changes as the story unfolds and she slowly learns better coping mechanisms, while the range of horrifying scenarios people dream up make for fun chaos, in *Nightmare On Elm Street* style.

What spoils the fun somewhat is how didactic the authorial voice often sounds. The idea that anxiety is life-limiting won't be news to anyone who's ever dealt with it, and "Don't be afraid any more" usually isn't as easy as it sounds. Still, the intriguing premise and genuinely sweet relationships make revisiting this world in the inevitable sequel an appealing prospect. **Sarah Dobbs**



## THE BOOK OF EVE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 2 MARCH**

354 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Meg Clothier

► Publisher Wildfire

❖ **Like any good historical** puzzle, the Voynich Manuscript has attracted plenty of wacky "solutions". For over a century, linguists, cryptographers, scientists and even some actual historians have attempted to decipher the unknown language of this 15th century illustrated book, to no avail. Sensibly, Meg Clothier has decided to write a fantasy novel inspired by it instead.

In a version of Florence in the 1490s, a somewhat unorthodox and rather utopian convent is under threat from the wave of religious revivalism sweeping the city. Said convent is full of ladies reading books and having thoughts, much to the disgust of popular fire-and-brimstone preacher Brother Abramo (based on real-life fanatic Girolamo "Bonfire of the Vanities" Savonarola). Librarian Beatrice finds herself the unwitting custodian of one particularly explosive tract: the little red "Book of Eve", which comes complete with appearing and disappearing text, a chorus of whispering voices and some very handy empowerment for women in peril.

This is a clever, gripping and thoughtful genre reimagining of a turbulent but fascinating historical period. Abramo makes for a suitably chilling villain, and in Beatrice, Clothier gives us an outsider protagonist transformed by circumstances, and pulls us right into her community. **Nic Clarke**

## REISSUES

You may know Daniel Abraham as one half of James SA Corey, the two-person writing team behind the *Expanse* books. **AGE OF ASH**

(★★★★★, 23 February, Orbit) kicks off his latest solo fantasy series, the Kithamar Trilogy. It's set within the walls of Kithamar, a bustling,

London-like city. When her brother is murdered, petty thief Alys sets out to investigate. We said: "It's the characters who make it memorable. Kithamar's inhabitants are vividly drawn and likeable despite their flaws, and there's a powerful female energy throughout." Marlon James's **MOON WITCH**,

**SPIDER KING** (★★★★★, Penguin, 9 March) isn't your usual middle volume of a fantasy trilogy. It tells

essentially the same story as predecessor *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (the hunt for a missing

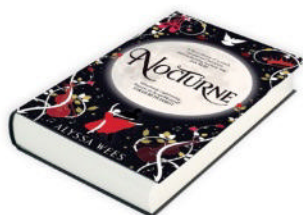
child), but from the perspective of the first novel's antagonist – a 177-year-old witch. We said: "A rich, strange, sometimes challenging book, shot through with the spirit of magical realism-influenced writers such as Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie." Finally, Saara El-Arifi's debut **THE FINAL STRIFE** (★★★★★, 2 March, Harper Voyager) centres on a three-strata

society: Embers at the top; Dusts below them; Ghostings at the bottom. Its duel

protagonists are Sylah, an Ember child snatched by Dusts as a baby, and Anoor, the Duster infant left in her place. We said: "El-Arifi's creative worldbuilding features traditional West African motifs, but Anoor and Sylah make for very contemporary heroines."







## NOCTURNE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

240 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Alyssa Wees

► Publisher Del Rey

❖ **This debut novel about** a ballerina caught in Death's clutches is as pretty as a confection. Sumptuously written, it starts as a coming of age tale about a young woman who becomes the new star of her prestigious ballet academy, despite a past that weighs her down and the eyes of other girls cutting her everywhere she steps. A third of the way in, the novel then sweeps into a gothic romance, as our ballerina meets the academy's latest patron: a mysterious man with claws and glowing eyes.

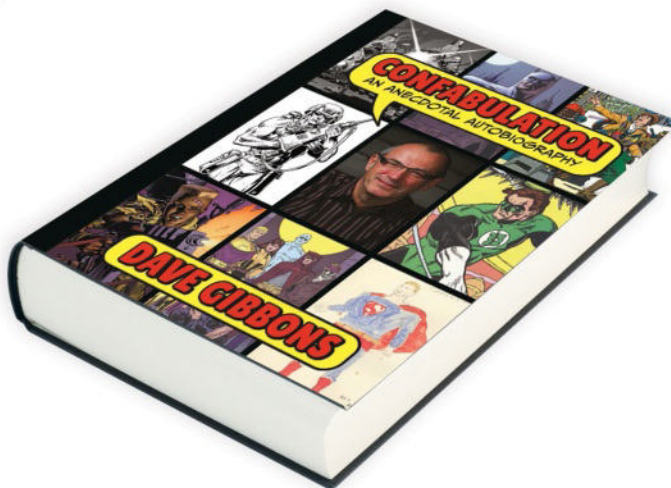
Yet everything remains rather milky and mild, ruining the book's potential. Grace, the main character, is as rigid as a doll; the world of '30s Chicago too glinting, like a toy city.

The novel never lets itself drip down into the murky twilight of the stories that obviously inspired it, from *Beauty And The Beast* to the myth of Hades and Persephone. Instead it's like a diet version of Angela Carter, fat and sinew removed.

Another recent novel, Megan Abbott's *The Turnout*, looked at the rough underbelly of ballet and how dancers routinely half-cripple themselves to achieve physical perfection.

By contrast, *Nocturne* feels too passive, like the stillness on the surface of a lake. It's too detached, never letting us taste the violence that underscores ballet or that lurks behind the curtain of fairytale romance.

Kimberley Ballard



## CONFABULATION

Dave culture

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

320 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Dave Gibbons

► Publisher Dark Horse

❖ **Like its towering blue** übermensch Doctor Manhattan, *Watchmen* casts an outsized shadow over the work of artist – and occasional writer – Dave Gibbons. We should all be so lucky to be defined by a seminal work in our chosen medium, but as this “Anecdotal Autobiography” (as the subtitle puts it) proves, Gibbons's talent has been something to treasure for over half a century.

Illustrated with classic pieces and rarities from his own archive, this is very much a career-focused memoir. Family details are relegated to a terse rundown of facts – frankly we learn more about Garth Ennis's stag weekend – but the throughline from childhood to fandom to professional is clear. This is the story of the kid who made his own Dan Dare helmet from a cardboard box then went on to draw his hero for *2000 AD*, the same kid who

“It's illustrated with classic pieces and rarities”

never missed an episode of *Doctor Who* then supersized the show in a Marvel comic strip.

There are fascinating glimpses of unmade projects, including a pitch for a 60th anniversary Superman story that would have returned the Man of Steel to his Depression Era roots. And there are equally insightful recollections of fellow pros encountered along the way. Stan Lee's innate storytelling chops are acknowledged from direct experience, while Batman co-creator Bob Kane “seemed much more the Joker than Bruce Wayne”.

Gibbons writes with self-deprecation, good humour and, where necessary, frankness. One of the most absorbing parts of the book charts his deteriorating relationship with *Watchmen* collaborator Alan Moore, recounted with a clear sense of sadness. *Confabulation's* A-Z format gives it a moreish, selection box appeal, and allows Gibbons to reframe his life outside of linear chronology: the final entry is his first professional job. Unbound by time? Doctor Manhattan would approve. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Gibbons designed the chest symbol that he wore while posing as Big E, editor of weekly comic *Tornado*.

## ALSO OUT

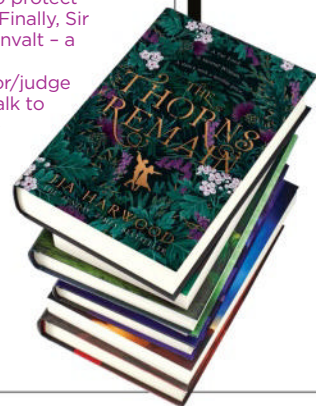
There's plenty more books that we couldn't fit in.

David Zindell's **THE REMEMBRANCER'S TALE** (out now, HarperVoyager) returns to the universe of his 1988 novel *Neverness*.

It concerns the Lord Remembrancer of the Order of Mystic Mathematicians, whose beloved died at the end of a stellar war... or did she survive, robbed of her identity by a memory virus? Expect weird Lovecraftian/Cronenbergian body horror from Lucy A. Snyder's **SISTER, MAIDEN, MONSTER** (out now, Titan). It follows three women with intertwining fates, in a world where humanity's being radically altered by a virus: some now have to eat brains to survive, for example. Your protagonists include a sex worker turned cannibal serial killer. Less likely to make you lose your lunch: JJA Harwood's **THE THORNS REMAIN** (out now, Magpie).

Set in a Highland village in 1919, it centres on a young woman who enters into a bargain with a Lord of the Fae after her friends are spirited away. Samantha Shannon returns to the world of 2019's *The Priory Of The Orange Tree* with **A DAY OF FALLEN NIGHT** (28 February, Bloomsbury).

This epic, 880-page prequel (set five centuries before the first book) charts the events of four years, through four narrators. When the Dreadmount volcano explodes with dragons, they must find the strength to protect humanity. Finally, Sir Konrad Vonvalt – a travelling investigator/judge who can talk to the dead – returns in Richard Swan's **THE TYRANNY OF FAITH** (out now, Orbit), the sequel to *Justice Of Kings*.







# Samantha Shannon

The author of the *Bone Season* books loves a French pastry



LOUISE HAYWOOD-SCHIEFER

## What is your daily writing routine like?

► I get up between 7.00 and 8.00, go for a walk, do my admin and set goals in the morning, then write from about noon onwards. Depending on where I am with my deadlines, I sometimes work very late.

## Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

► I do listen to music while I work, but it can't have lyrics if I'm drafting. Lyrics give the song a story, which interferes with the story in my head. For that reason, I like film scores a lot. They set the right tone.

## How do you deal with the urge to procrastinate?

► Coming off Twitter was the best decision I've ever made in terms of fighting the need to procrastinate. It makes me shudder to think of how much time I lost on there over 10 years.

## Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

► It's a toss-up between *The Song Rising* and *A Day Of Fallen Night*. *The Song Rising* was tricky from the beginning, as I didn't quite hit the mark with the first draft – I was rushing to get it to my readers – and I had to essentially rewrite it from scratch, which I found very demoralising. *A Day Of Fallen*

*Night* was a pleasure to draft, but the global paper shortage meant that my editorial schedule had to be compressed, and for an 800-page book, that was intense.

## Is there anything about one of your books which you wish you could travel back in time and "fix"?

► Funnily enough, I have just finished a complete line edit of my debut, which was such a rewarding experience. I wrote *The Bone Season* when I was 19, and I've wanted to go back and make changes for years, as I knew it could be so much stronger. Fortunately, my publisher has let me make these edits for a



Lavie Tidhar, inspirational author of *The Escapement*.

KEVIN NIXON

## “It makes me shudder to think of how much time I lost on Twitter over 10 years”

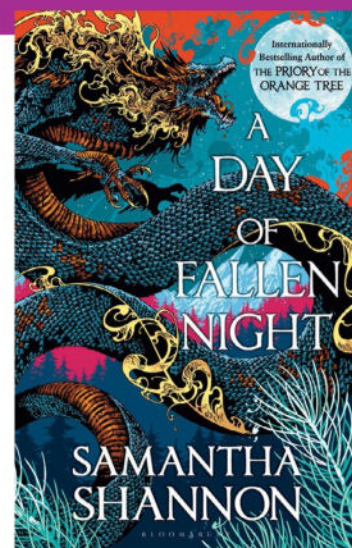
new edition to celebrate its tenth anniversary. It's a dream come true.

## Can you recommend one book that you love, but that's not very well known?

► *The Escapement* by Lavie Tidhar. Inspired by a Hebrew tale called “The Flower Of The Golden Heart” by Shlomo Zalman Ariel, it's a surreal Western about the Stranger, a man on a quest to the Mountains of Darkness. To reach them, he must navigate a dangerous and carnivalesque land called the Escapement, populated by aerialists, sharpshooters, persecuted clowns and other vibrant characters. It's both an astonishing feat of imagination and a tender examination of grief.

## What's the best gift you've ever received from a reader?

► I've had many lovely gifts over the years: character art, handmade jewellery, a toy



goat, all sorts. One reader gave me a Paris-Brest, my favourite dessert [made with Choux pastry], for my birthday in 2019.

## What's the best piece of writing advice you've either received or read?

► Neil Gaiman once told me to remember to enjoy myself, which I appreciated, especially when I was a nervous debut author. I think you can sometimes be so focused on deadlines and career goals that you forget to look up and savour the view. ☘

*A Day Of Fallen Night* by Samantha Shannon is published by Bloomsbury on 28 February.



# First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

# Quantum Radio by AG Riddle

AT CERN, A SCIENTIST HAS MADE AN INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY – A BREAKTHROUGH THAT MAY ANSWER THE DEEPEST QUESTIONS ABOUT HUMAN LIFE. BUT AT WHAT COST?

**There's been an explosion in Dr Tyson Klein's apartment. It's clear he was the target. Now he's on the run. But it looks like further betrayal awaits him...**

**T**he dark streets of Geneva were completely empty. The shops were all closed. Even the bars and clubs were deserted.

Ty's legs, arms, and back ached as he pumped the pedals, but he ignored the pain.

His discovery was clearly a threat to someone.

But who?  
And why?

He sensed that his life was about to change forever, that the blast was a sort of demarcation between his quiet, lonely life before and whatever was about to happen now.

He stood and leaned on the pedals as he crossed the bridge over the Rhône River, into Geneva's Old Town.

The coffee shop where he had first met Penny was a popular spot for locals, tourists, and students. It was a block away from the University of Geneva and had been packed that Saturday six months ago. Ty had arrived early, staked out a seat at a small table in the corner, and was reading a book, lost in thought, when Penny placed her hand on the empty chair opposite him.

"Hi."

"Hi," he had answered, his voice scratchy.

She smiled and glanced through the

## The Author



→ AG Riddle spent 10 years starting and running internet companies before retiring to focus on his true passion: writing fiction. He is now an Amazon and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author, with nearly five million copies sold worldwide in twenty languages. He lives in North Carolina. Visit [www.agriddle.com](http://www.agriddle.com).

plate glass window, out onto the street where it had begun raining in sheets. "Really sorry, but would you mind if I sat here for a minute?"

Dozens of patrons were standing now, watching the rain, sipping coffee and tea, waiting for a break to escape the crowded café.

As she stood there, staring at him, Ty felt them slipping into their own little world, as though the small table was an island of solitude in the midst of the crowd, the two of them existing outside of space and time.

"Sure," he said, motioning to the chair.

Penny set her bag down, drew out a well-worn paperback novel, and began reading. He expected her to say something, but she didn't. She merely turned the pages and sipped her tea.

Since childhood, Ty had been painfully shy. The very

idea of sitting with a stranger in a crowded coffee shop was enough to send waves of anxiety through him. But sitting with her, he felt perfectly at peace, as though it was a natural thing, as though they had done this a million times in a million lives.

"Are you a student?" she said finally, not looking up from the book.

"No. I work at CERN. Are you?" "I am."

"At the University of Geneva?" "That's the one."

"What are you studying?"

"International affairs."

"Sounds exciting."

She laughed. "Hardly. It's a lot of

reading. Even more talking." "Do you like it?"

"I do."

"What got you interested in it?"

Her gaze drifted out the window, to the rain still coming down and the people filing out of the coffee shop, to the bus that had stopped on the street. Ty thought she was considering catching it, but she took another sip of tea and said, "Circumstances."

His eyebrows bunched as he waited, watching her, but she didn't elaborate. "What sort of circumstances?"

"The unavoidable kind. Fate. Let's just call it fate. But I like the work I'm doing." "Which is?"

"Understanding the world and how it came to be the way it is. I think that's the key to bringing people from different worlds together." She set the book down. "What about you? What do you do at CERN?"

"Oh, you know, the usual – accelerating particles to near the speed of light and smashing them together to see what comes out in an effort to understand what the universe was like in the earliest fractions of a second of its existence."

She smiled. "Is that all?"

"Eh, we're just trying to unravel the major mysteries of space and time and reconcile the greatest unanswered questions in physics."

"And how's that going – the whole space-time particle-mystery thing?"

**“The words were like a dull knife carving into Ty's heart: not fast, not efficient, but a slow, aching cut”**



"We're making some pretty interesting discoveries, actually." He exhaled theatrically, teeing up the joke. "But I have to say: some days it just feels like we're going around in circles."

He stared out the window, trying to hold a straight face.

She set the book down. "Wait. Was that a particle physics joke?"

He smiled.

Penny cocked her head. "Because of... what's it called? The loop?"

"The collider. The Large Hadron Collider. It's a ring buried under France and Switzerland, twenty-seven kilometers long."

"I see what you did there – going around in circles."

"It's pretty bad."

"It's terrible. And I liked it."

And he liked her. More than he had liked anyone in a long time. There was only one other woman he had ever been that comfortable with, that happy with, and she had left his life a long time ago. There was still a deep wound there. Every second he spent with Penny seemed to heal it.

But tonight, when he arrived at that fateful coffee shop where he and Penny had met, it was dark and empty. He gently propped his bike against the wall, right beside the window at the table where they had sat.

The narrow street in Old Town was empty and quiet. The stores, restaurants, and cafés were dark. A few lights were on in the flats above the ground level, likely night owls studying or staying up for meetings with people in different time zones.

The alley beside the coffee shop was

barely big enough for three people to walk down shoulder to shoulder. With each step, the light from the antique streetlamp behind Ty grew dimmer. The only sound was his footfalls on the cobblestone.

As the light faded, he heard two people talking – a man and a woman. The woman was Penny, and the strain in her voice immediately put Ty on edge. She was scared. He knew that before he processed the words she was saying: "He'll be here. I promise you."

The man's voice was gruff, his accent German. "You should not

have interfered."

"You left me no choice."

"False. We have altered the data on the LHC grid. He was the only remaining threat."

"You're wrong. He has a copy of his research on a USB drive. It also holds notes that aren't on his work computer or the cloud."

"All that would have been destroyed in the detonation."

"You assume," Penny said with force.

"You assume. That's your problem:

assumptions. Those assumptions could compromise everything.

We need to know how far his work has progressed. The truth is, the drive might have survived the blast. Someone else could have gotten it when they arrived at the scene. I had to call him. We need those files."

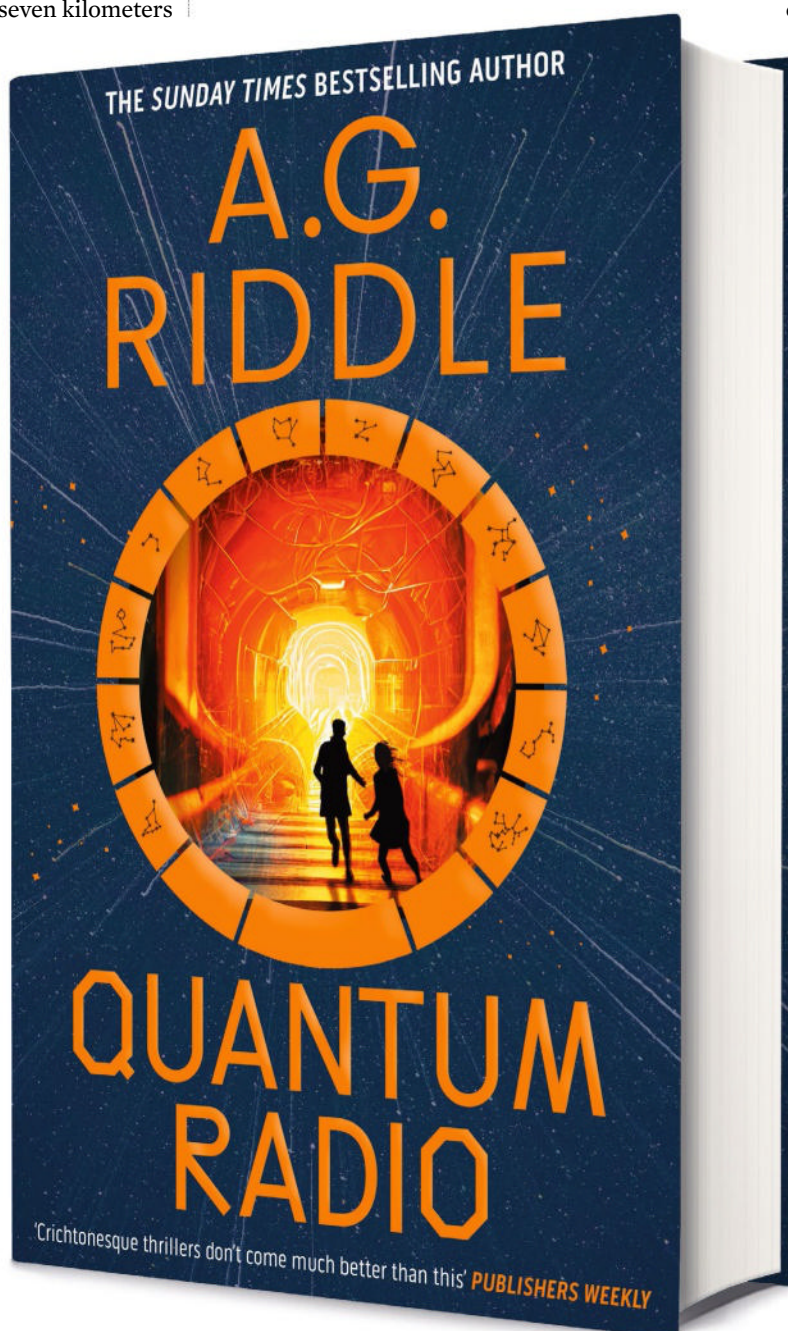
The words were like a dull knife carving into Ty's heart: not fast, not efficient, but a slow, aching cut that revealed the truth, what had lain below what he had seen the whole time.

Penny didn't care about him. Never had. It was all a ruse. For what? His research?

Ty knew he needed to turn and run, but he stood there, paralysed, scared, and angry. Behind him, the sound of a police siren grew louder. Within seconds, the car passed, its roof lights strobing through the alley like a spotlight searching it. And in that flash, Ty saw the German man – he had stepped from behind the building to cast a glance at the vehicle.

Their eyes locked on each other. And things happened quickly then.

*What's next? Find out in Quantum Radio, the new novel from AG Riddle, the Sunday Times bestselling author of Lost In Time. It's published by Head Of Zeus on 2 March.*





## MIRACLEMAN: THE SILVER AGE

A long-awaited miracle



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Neil Gaiman

► Artist Mark Buckingham

**ISSUES 1-3** **Free comic book**

stories have had as tortuous a journey to publication as *Miracleman: The Silver Age*. First scheduled in 1993 as the second part of Neil Gaiman's run on the postmodern superhero saga, only two issues of *The Silver Age* appeared, after which a publisher bankruptcy sent *Miracleman* into

a legal limbo that wasn't resolved until 2009.

Now, 30 years later, *The Silver Age* is finally being completed by Gaiman and artist Mark Buckingham, and these first three issues are intriguing, characterful and odd in equal measure. They're also emphatically *not* an ideal jumping-on point for new readers.

Following on from Gaiman and Buckingham's previous arc *The Golden Age*, the story is still exploring the utopian global society that *Miracleman* created at the end of Alan Moore's run on the

character. Here, the focus is on the resurrection of Young *Miracleman*, aka Richard "Dicky" Dauntless, a teenage superhero killed in the '60s, who finds himself reborn into a bewildering future world.

These first three instalments aren't simple reprints of the original material (issue three was also completed in 1993, but never published) – they've also been completely redrawn and reinterpreted by Mark Buckingham in his more modern art style. The results are genuinely gorgeous, with a real sense of grandeur.

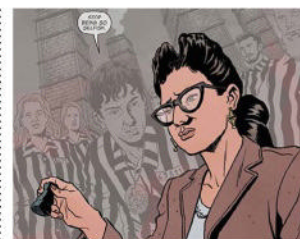
Gaiman's scripts have, so far, only featured the tiniest tweaks, as the series pitches Dicky's '60s innocence and repression against more modern ideas – especially a society where virtually all children are growing up with superpowers. This is all executed with the class and depth you'd expect from him, but in a meta turn, the series itself feels dislocated in time in the same way as Young *Miracleman*.

**“The level of craft on display here is truly impressive”**

One unavoidable theme of *The Silver Age* is the nature of comics storytelling in the early '90s, where a more adult approach was colliding with the innocence of the old-fashioned source material. There are even some notable (and unintentional) similarities between *The Silver Age* and DC's later 1996 miniseries *Kingdom Come*, and this leaves certain aspects of the story feeling beaten to the punch, as if their moment has passed.

Despite this, the level of craft on display here is truly impressive. It's going to be fascinating to see Gaiman and Buckingham finally complete this unfinished work – although considering how long it's taken, anyone waiting for the long-trailed final *Miracleman* arc *The Dark Age* probably shouldn't hold their breath... **Saxon Bullock**

**i** According to the 2021 *Timeless* one-shot, *Miracleman* is going to be joining the mainstream Marvel Comics universe.



## THE WITCHES OF WORLD WAR II



► **RELEASED 7 MARCH**

► Publisher TKO Studios

► Writer Paul Cornell

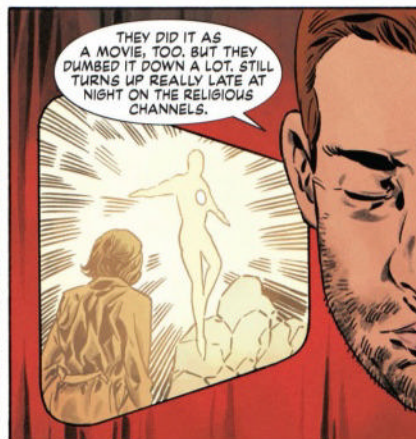
► Artist Valeria Burzo

**GRAPHIC NOVEL** **To quote lead** character Doreen Dominy, it's hard to know "what to believe" in Paul Cornell's excellent new graphic novel. Like *Operation Mincemeat* with magic, it deftly blends fact and fiction as it centres on a ragtag band of mystics, who launch a covert conspiracy to capture Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (who actually did travel to Britain in 1941).

As the most (in)famous of the quintet, the larger than life Aleister Crowley inevitably dominates proceedings. But it is Doreen Dominy, haunted by the memory of her dead husband, who is its steely fulcrum, while gentle wicca practitioner Gerald Gardner, formidable witch Dion Fortune and wily conman Rollo Ahmed make up the rest.

Aided by Jordie Bellaire's vibrant colours, Italian artist Valeria Burzo combines some fluid linework with authentic renditions of '40s London, evocatively depicting the fashions of the day.

Cornell amps up the tension as the story moves into its final leg, journeying to a German castle and chucking in a cursed baby heart and the Holy Grail for good measure. He keeps you guessing as to what is real or imagined, while the denouement provides a thrilling sucker punch. You don't want to mess with these witches. **Stephen Jewell**







## ONCE UPON A TIME AT THE END OF THE WORLD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **BOOM! Studios**

► Writer **Jason Aaron**

► Artists **Alexandre Tefenkgi,**

**Nick Dragotta**

**ISSUES 1-3** **The success of** *The Last of Us* proves that apocalypse-related stories are going nowhere, and this latest comic-book example of the subgenre gives us a bittersweet tale of life in the final days of an ecologically ravaged Earth.

A limited series from regular Marvel writer Jason Aaron, *Once Upon a Time...* is planned as a 15-issue story in three distinct arcs (each with a different artist). These first three issues follow tough runaway Ezmeralda as she meets innocent inventor Maceo on a journey across an ecologically devastated wasteland. The two characters form a touching bond, but we also get occasional flash-forwards to their eventual violent destinies in a tale that's never afraid to portray the bleak and cruel nature of the world around them.

Aaron's storytelling takes a couple of issues to find its feet, and main artist Alexandre Tefenkgi's visual style is sometimes a little too loose and cartoony, but the charm of the central characters and the darker themes eventually make this a compelling read.

Despite its initial flaws, there's enough promise here to suggest that this is an apocalyptic saga that's going to be worth following.

**Saxon Bullock**



## BATMAN AND THE JOKER: THE DEADLY DUO

Joking together

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Black Label**

► Writer/artist **Marc Silvestri**

**ISSUES 1-3** **If you want a comic-book artist whose work screams "90s excess",** Marc Silvestri is your man. The head of Image imprint Top Cow, and the artist behind comics like *Cyber Force* and *The Darkness*, Silvestri is very much in the slick, stylised mould of Todd McFarlane and Jim Lee, so it's not a huge surprise that he's netted himself a Batman-related Black Label miniseries.

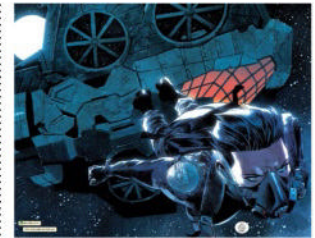
It's even less of a surprise that the resulting six-issue adventure feels like it's fallen through a timewarp from 1995, self-consciously over-the-top and edgy. *The Deadly Duo* wastes little time in setting up its high-concept criminal wreaks havoc in Gotham,

kidnapping both Commissioner Gordon and Harley Quinn.

Thanks to this, Batman and the Joker are forced into an unwilling partnership to battle an army of genetically-engineered Joker-enhanced monsters, leading to action-packed mayhem and some unexpectedly bloody violence.

How much entertainment you get from these first three issues will depend on your tolerance for Silvestri's muscular, amped-up art style. It's also not hard to imagine how stronger writers like Scott Snyder or Tom King could have handled a Batman/Joker team-up, and while Silvestri never lets the pace flag, his characterisation is mostly flat and his excesses get a bit much. There are so many more interesting and daring Batman comics out there. **Saxon Bullock**

**i** Silvestri was one of the seven artists who originally founded Image Comics in 1992, and is still a CEO of the company.



## SECRET INVASION

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Ryan North**

► Artist **Francesco Mobili**

**ISSUES 1-3** **Unlike the original** sprawling crossover of 2008, this sequel series is refreshingly self-contained, without even a measly one-shot spin-off to accompany it. And while it can't quite repeat its predecessor's shocking opening revelation that Elektra was actually a Skrull, it still boasts plenty of twists and turns.

Opening with Nick Fury visiting a family of the shapechanging aliens in remote Iowa before Maria Hill discovers that her former boss is not quite what he seems, Ryan North initially concentrates on the small scale. Keeping his script taut and fast-paced and working with a relatively small cast, he builds up an air of intense paranoia as the Skrulls develop ways of evading the detection procedures. The sense of dread is reflected by artist Francesco Mobili, who proves equally as adept at the quieter, creepier moments as he is at the (fairly infrequent) action scenes.

Three issues into this five-parter, the exact nature of the latest incursion is yet to be revealed, and issue three goes off in a truly unexpected direction as Tony Stark embarks upon another of his arrogant schemes. He also elicits some sympathy for the Skrulls' position, leaving you wondering who is actually friend or foe. With a storyline as intriguing as this, one of those pesky Omega issues wouldn't go amiss.

**Stephen Jewell**



## DEAD SPACE

Necromorphs reanimated



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also on Xbox Series X|S, PC

► Publisher Electronic Arts

**VIDEOGAME** Not many games

nailed the sci-fi-horror vibe of films like Ridley Scott's *Alien* and John Carpenter's *The Thing* as well as 2009's *Dead Space* did. Fifteen years later, this near peerless remake proves just how well the original got the source material it so wanted to ape – now rebuilt from the ground up, its oily metal corridors, relentless claustrophobia and body horror alien threat can still easily sit alongside the movies it shamelessly homages.

The set up is pure space horror: you're an engineer responding to a distress call from a planet-

cracking mining ship, USG Ishimura, only to find that it's been overrun by an alien intelligence that reanimates dead tissue to create "Necromorphs". These gibbering flesh puppets – looking like they've been badly assembled from human roadkill – scuttle through vents, ready to burst out at any moment and claw at your face with bone-shard arms. It's a perfect organism: Necromorphs kill people, the dead people become Necromorphs... see point one.

Making things even harder, all this reanimated tissue can only be "killed" by slicing it into enough parts. So fighting involves hacking off limbs and, despite the absolute screaming horror thrown in your face, survival requires trying to keep calm and taking careful aim as you fight back.

Where this really dials into that '80s movie vibe is that while space zombies are undoubtedly the star of the show, with some hideously fleshy configurations to literally unravel, the focus is just on getting the hell out of there alive.

With your shuttle destroyed and the mining ship slowly falling out of orbit, there's a very escaping-*Aliens*-Hadley's-Hope feel as objectives chase one problem after another: trying to get the engines online, activating asteroid defences, getting a distress call out and so on. The "not dying" to-do list is extensive, and the Necromorphs are rarely at the top of it as you flounder from one life-threatening systems failure to the next, cursing the ship's designers.

From its dank, industrial, claustrophobic weight to its gory, visceral fights for survival, few games have ever recreated their cinematic inspirations as well as this.

Leon Hurley

**i** The main character's name, Isaac Clarke, is a dual nod to sci-fi authors Arthur C Clarke and Isaac Asimov.



## HARLEY QUINN AND THE JOKER: SOUND MIND



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 147 minutes | Podcast

► Publisher Spotify

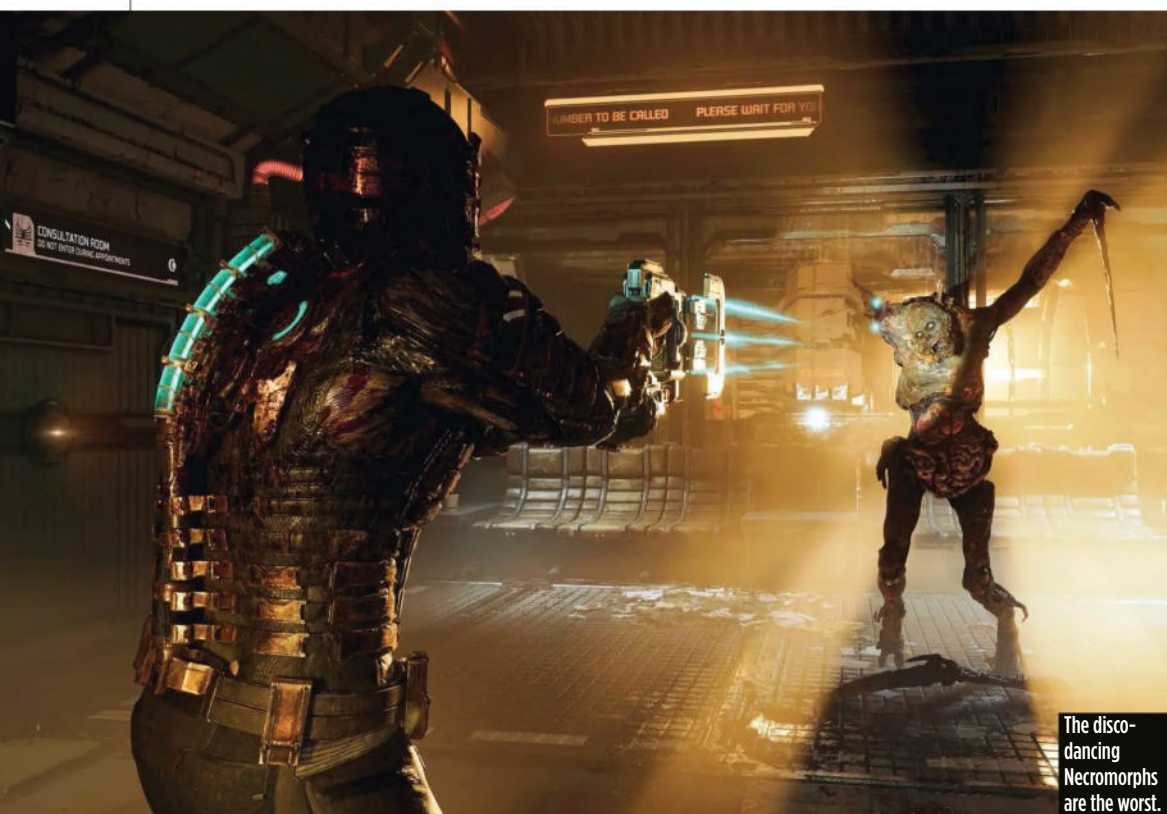
**AUDIO DRAMA** Casting Christina

Ricci as Gotham's queen of weird is a stroke of genius. It's a shame, then, that her performance feels so restrained.

In this seven-part retelling of Harley Quinn's origin story, Harleen Quinzel is a counsellor at Arkham Asylum, where she meets the mysterious "Patient J". Noticing his interest in her, Harley concocts a plan: break him out of prison in exchange for the money she needs for her father's life-saving operation.

There's a strange power shift here. Usually we see Joker as the manipulator and Harley as his simpering sidekick. It's understandable why some people would like to see this dynamic reversed, but it fundamentally undermines Harley's identity as a survivor of abuse and gaslighting. She's an important character because of the way she leaves the Joker, not because she was in control the entire time.

Billy Magnussen captures the Joker's manic comic timing with moments of brooding sexuality. If only Ricci had been given material of the same calibre. Instead, Harley is rendered as a stone-cold femme fatale who uses the Joker for her own benefit, never mirroring the desire he feels for her. It makes their dynamic feel reductive, as if women aren't allowed to feel attracted to dangerous men unless they have a motive. **Kimberley Ballard**



The disco-dancing Necromorphs are the worst.



## DOCTOR WHO: SHADES OF FEAR

Hearing red



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 156 minutes | CD/vinyl/download

► Publisher **Big Finish**

**AUDIO DRAMA** The second season of Ninth Doctor audio adventures comes to a close with this set which, going by the title, you might expect to focus on the scarier side of the series. In fact, only one of the stories here edges towards horror. Still, this is a strong collection with wider ramifications for the future of the range.

"The Colour Of Terror" fills the present-day Earth slot. All is not well in West Morebry's local charity shop. People are going

missing, and the Doctor thinks that it's all down to the colour red... Lizzie Hopley's script is a sharp mix of silliness and weird Lovecraftian ideas, but the story is most notable for continuing Frank Skinner's late-career association with the series. He plays Pete here, a likeably bluff fella not a million miles away from Perkins, the character he played in "Mummy On The Orient Express".

In historical tale "The Blooming Menace", the wealthy bachelors of the Fellows Club are falling one-by-one for a race of moving flowers. This is *Who* with the whimsy dial turned all the way up – for better and worse. The story is certainly original and Christopher



Eccleston is clearly enjoying the witty script. Still, the reliance on OTT "posh" voices quickly grows tiresome, while a hackneyed gender-swap subplot comes off more panto than *Blackadder*.

Finally, "Red Darkness" brings the terror with a well-judged village-under-siege story. Tennant-era monsters the Vashta Nerada may be a headline-grabbing villain, but it's the likeable duo of Callen

(Adam Martyn) and enhanced talking dog Doyle (Hark! Bhambra) who steal the episode. There's a genuine sense of peril here, and while the "twist" will be obvious to anyone who's been paying attention, it continues this range's tradition of saving the best story till last. **Will Salmon**

**i** Hark! Bhambra previously appeared in Peter Capaldi-era story "The Magician's Apprentice", as UNIT scientist Mike.

## FORSPOKEN

Into the Frey



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on **PlayStation 5**

► Also on **PC**

► Publisher **Square Enix**

**VIDEOGAME** *Forspoken* is brimming with spells and fantastical enemies corrupted by the encroaching Break, a mysterious malady that warps whatever it touches. Underneath that, however, is a rather mundane first offering from developer Luminous Productions (formed in 2018 out of the development team working on *Final Fantasy XV*), that mechanically and narratively never really reaches the lofty heights of its marketing.

The game's plot is full of bog-standard tropes. Protagonist Frey Holland is mysteriously teleported from New York City to

the world of Athia after discovering a sentient bracelet, Cuff. In order to get home she must reluctantly go about investigating the mystery at the centre of Athia's calamity. Her feelings about being suckered into this are hard to miss as she, Cuff, and basically every NPC remind players that she's only in it for herself at every opportunity, with tediously irritating sub-Whedonesque quips.

While the narrative can be a bit frustrating due to its repetitiveness

**“Mechanically and narratively never reaches the lofty heights of its marketing”**



At least the graphics are extremely pretty.

and clashing tones, *Forspoken*'s big selling point is its magical parkour. Being able to tumble across the landscape of Athia – which admittedly can blur together into a formless abstract while zipping along – is its most significant highlight. Quickly shifting from one end of an area to another without (thanks to a combination of different movement abilities) having to even stop to take care of

enemies is extremely satisfying. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the rest of *Forspoken*'s spells. While there are dozens that can be combined in different ways, it quickly becomes clear that focusing on a select few is more efficient than any careful juggling.

**Rollin Bishop**

**i** Actor Ella Balinska, who voices and was 3D-scanned for Frey, is the daughter of TV cook Lorraine Pascale.





# THE RAINBOW

It may help to remember what the acronym ROYGBIV stands for to answer this issue's colourful quiz

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

## QUESTION 1

In the TV series of the same name, which company commissioned the freighter Red Dwarf?

## QUESTION 2

What's the name of the Russian-influenced argot spoken by the Droogs in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*?

## QUESTION 3

Which British sci-fi publisher was, for several decades, well known for having books with yellow dust-jackets?

## QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Identify the movie by looking at the still.

## QUESTION 5

Name the alien species (mentioned in *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*) who are a super-intelligent shade of the colour blue.

## QUESTION 6

In the '60s television series, who played the Green Hornet's sidekick Kato?

## QUESTION 7

Who was the first person to adopt the mantle of the Green Lantern?

## QUESTION 8 Picture Question

What's the name of this blue-skinned alien race?

## QUESTION 9

In *Doctor Who* (new series), what was the name of UNIT's experimental teleportation technology, reverse-engineered from Sontaran technology?

## QUESTION 10

Which television series revolves around the crash of Flight 2525?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

## QUESTION 11

Who was the cinematographer on Roger Corman's version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque Of The Red Death"?

## QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Identify this '90s television series.

## QUESTION 13

What do John Clive, Geoffrey Hughes, Peter Batten and Paul Angelis have in common?

## QUESTION 14

The 1966 Harry Harrison novel *Make Room! Make Room!* was later adapted into a film. What was its title?

## QUESTION 15

What colour is Romulan ale generally depicted as being?

## QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Supply the title that's been removed from this movie poster.

## QUESTION 17

In *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*, what unfortunate fate does Violet Beauregarde meet?

## QUESTION 18

Who directed the 2013 French fantasy film *Mood Indigo*?

## QUESTION 19

Which Elseworlds comic imagines an alternate timeline where Kal-el landed in the USSR rather than the USA?

## QUESTION 20

What type of New Paradigm Dalek has an orange casing: strategist, scientist or drone?

Answers  
1 Jupiter Mining Corporation  
2 Nadsat 3 Gollancz 4 The Green Knight 5 The Hoolovoo 6 Bruce Lee 7 Alan Scott 8 Andorians 9 Project Rigel 10 Yellowjackets 11 Nicolas Roeg 12 Ultraviolet 13 They voiced the Beatles in *Yellow Submarine* 14 Soyent Green 15 Blue 16 The Angry Red Planet 17 She's turned into a blueberry 18 Michel Gondry 19 Superman: Red Son 20 Scientist

## How did you do?

What Pantone colour are you?

0-5  
DEAA88 Tumbleweed

6-10  
8E4585 Plum

11-15  
FD7C6E Bittersweet

16-19  
EF98AA Mauvelous

20  
9D81BA Purple Mountains' Majesty



# IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## YELLOWJACKETS

Don't go down to  
the woods today  
(again)

## RENFIELD

You think *your*  
boss is bad?

## DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Back on the  
big screen

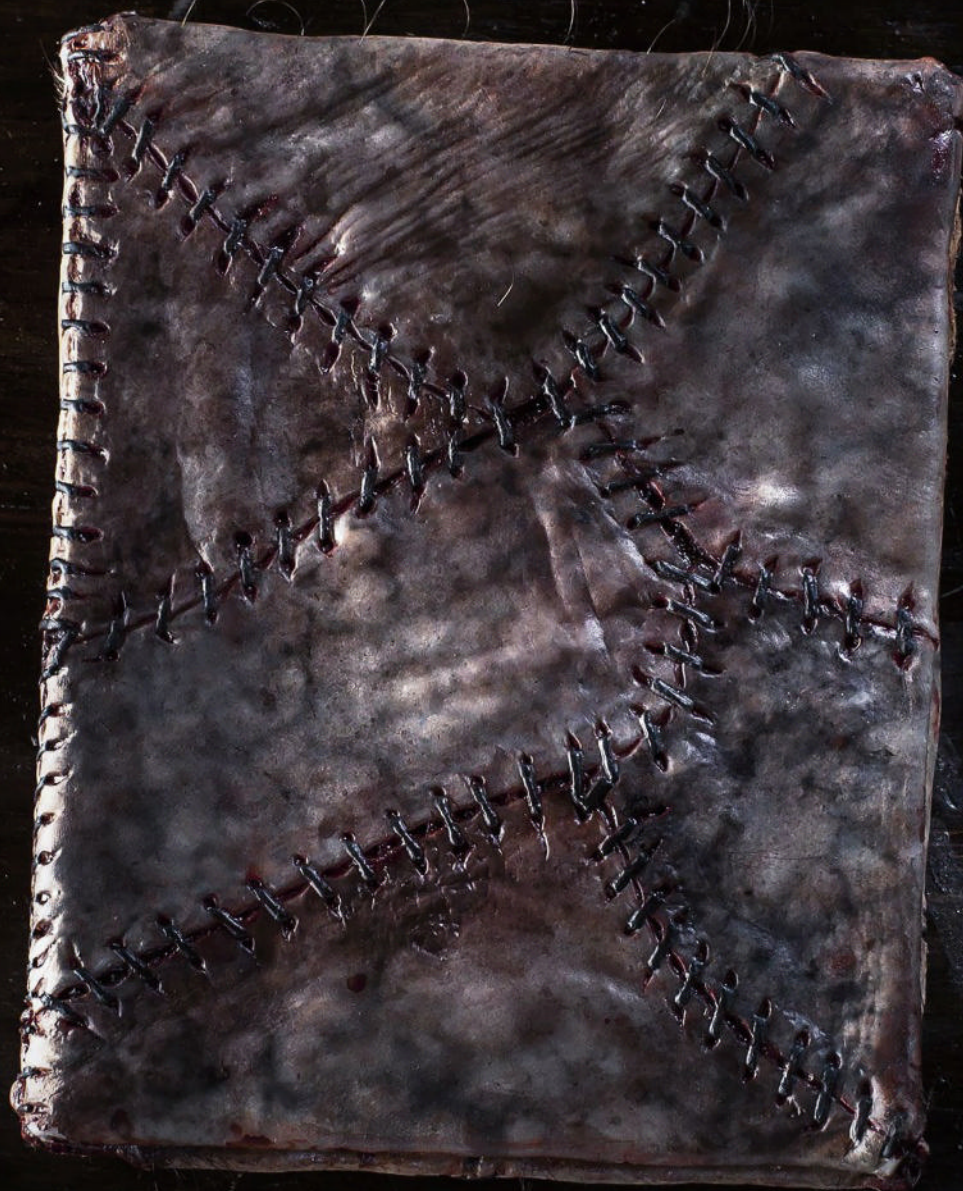
65

Time travel +  
dinosaurs = win

## PLUS!

Star Trek: Picard!  
Doctor Who!  
Super Mario Bros!

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# ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE EVIL DEAD RISE

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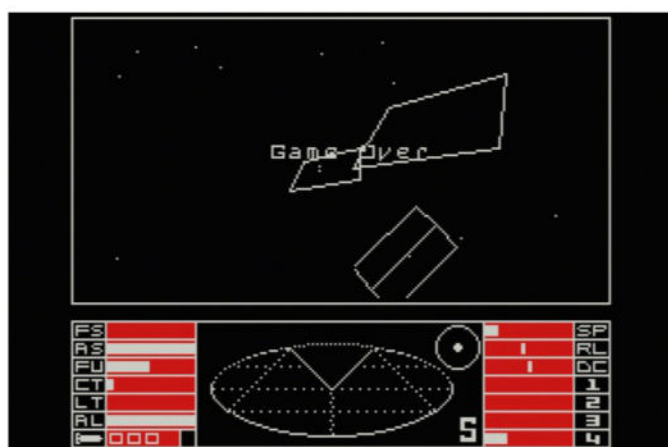
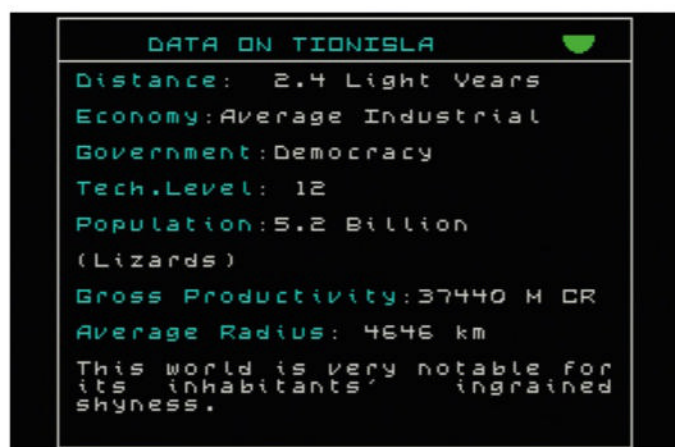
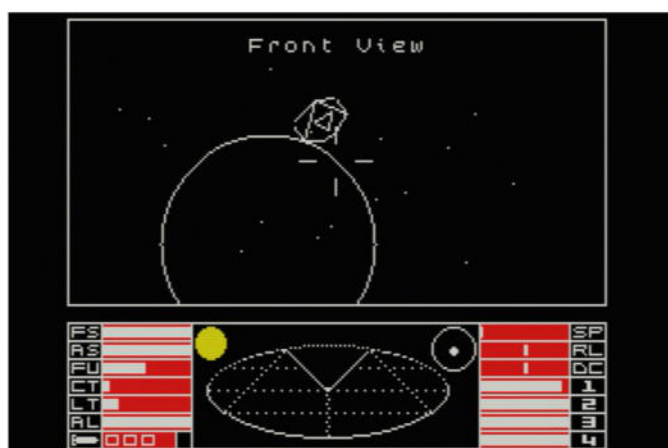


All contents are subject to change, like you after meeting a Deadline



# Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



## Elite

### Dave Bradley, freelance writer



Back in 1985, I had to lie on the carpet to play computer games because my ZX Spectrum was hooked up to the family TV. My gaming addiction was already established. But my first passion was sci-fi, and even as I bounced around in *Jet Set Willy* or *Horace Goes Skiing*, I dreamed of exploring the galaxy like a smuggler in *Star Wars*. Could such a thing be possible in just 48KB of memory?

Then for Christmas, I got a box that changed everything. Shiny black cardboard, the size of a book, with *Elite* emblazoned on it in gold. Games loaded from tape then, and I extracted the cassette from its nest of pamphlets and posters. After an eternity of whistles and chirrups, a spinning 3D spaceship appeared on

the fat 4:3 screen. I was in a hyperspace system called Lave, I had seven light-years worth of fuel, and my rating was Harmless. I had never been more thrilled.

Developed by David Braben and Ian Bell, *Elite* was first released for the BBC Micro before being ported to almost every other computer platform. It's a trading and combat simulation where you can explore a vast, procedurally generated universe filled with suns and space stations. There are missions to complete, goods to haul, and upgrades you can purchase for your ship.

The game is open-ended: you can pretty much do what you want and play forever, with the only goal, really, being to improve your personal rating. The free-form nature means there's a moral ambiguity to it: you can trade

slaves or drugs if you want. *Elite* combined the strategic economics of early games like *Star Trader* with fast 3D wireframe graphics, which, while antique now, were incredible compared to the 2D jumping games of the time. The scanner at the bottom of the page is a revelation – during dogfighting, it reveals where enemies are in space around you.

*Elite* indicated what was possible on the smallest of computers, ushering in an era where inventive coders would squeeze creativity out of something about as powerful as a pocket calculator. It was the vanguard of immersive, open-world simulations: without it, we wouldn't have *Eve Online*, *No Man's Sky* or even *Grand Theft Auto*. ●

*Dave is still only harmless. Well, mostly.*

### Fact Attack!

→ Braben and Bell met at Cambridge University in 1982. Braben studied electrical science and Bell studied mathematics.

→ The game was packaged with an exclusive 48-page novella by Robert Holdstock called *Elite: The Dark Wheel*, about young pilot Alex Ryder.

→ In 1993, Braben released a sequel called *Frontier*. It featured genuine planets in our solar system, and realistic physics which made it harder.

→ Ian Bell's brother Aidan is a musician and in 1989 composed (with lyricist Brian Phillips) *Elite: The Musical*. Hear it at [bit.ly/musicaelite](http://bit.ly/musicaelite).

→ *Elite: Dangerous* is the latest incarnation. Released by Braben's company in 2014, it has modern features, including multiplayer.



EPIC AUDIO NOVELS FROM BIG FINISH



BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

## THE DEAD STAR

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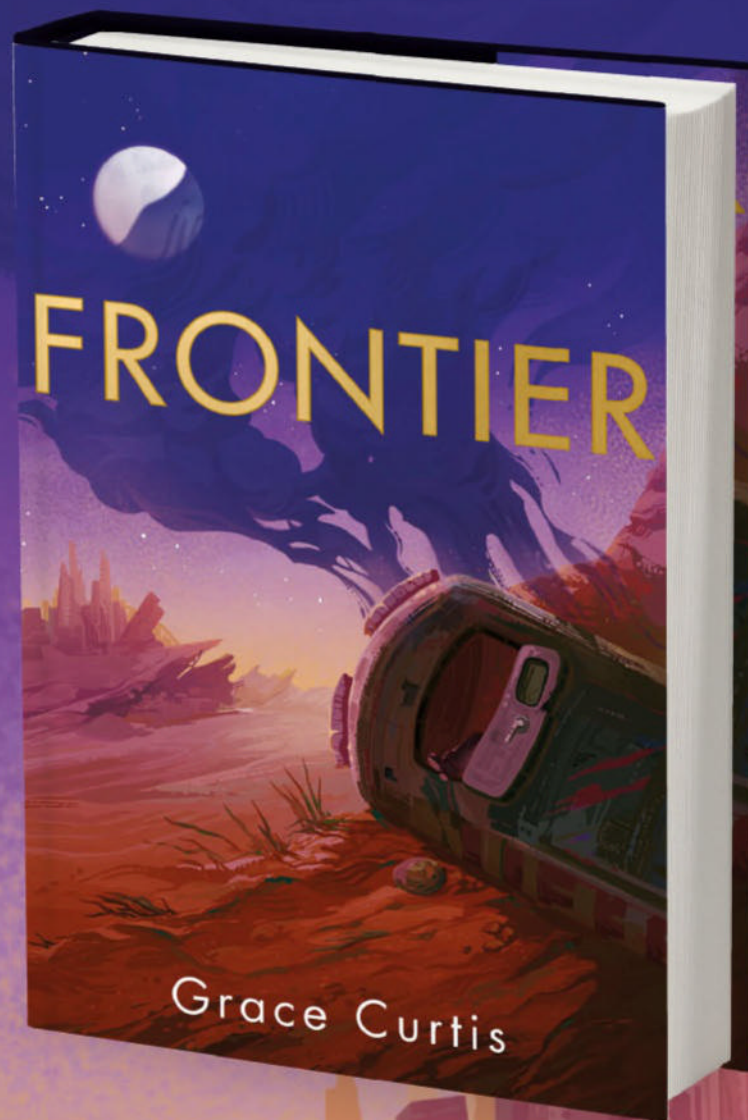


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