

# SFX

366



**SPIDER-MAN**  
ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

**THE WALKING DEAD**  
WELCOME TO DEAD CITY

**TRANSFORMERS**  
RISE OF THE BEASTS

**THE LITTLE MERMAID**  
POOR UNFORTUNATE SOULS!

**GREMLINS**  
SECRETS OF THE MOGWAI

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE!**

# STAR TREK

# STRANGE NEW WORLDS

**SET PHASERS TO STUN!**

**PLUS!** THE BOOGEYMAN | THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN | ALIENS | LOKI | SHADOW AND BONE | WILD'S END  
ELEMENTAL | VAMPIRELLA | MARVEL PRIDE | COUNT ABDULLA | BEAU IS AFRAID | MIGHTY MOUSE!







BBC

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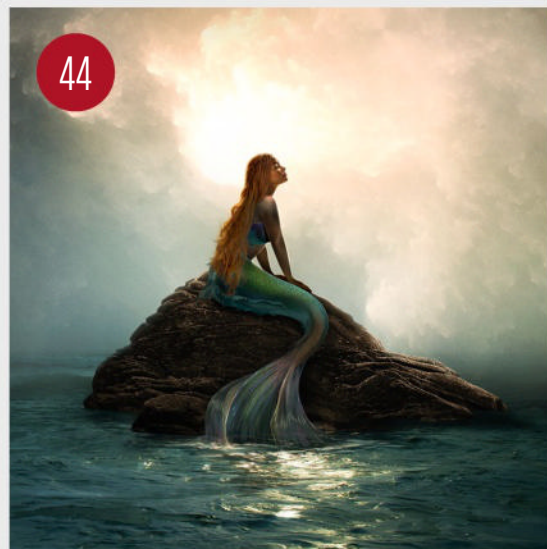
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# First Contact

## Hailing Frequencies Open!



### JEAN-LUC WHO'S TALKING

**Liam Lionheart, email** I loved the third season of *Picard* and am looking forward to what Terry Matalas will do next. This is what fans wanted all along.

**Sean Alexander, email** Much as I'm the party pooper, *Picard* series three has been an exercise in nostalgia over storytelling, Easter eggs over characterisation. New additions like Captain Shaw and Vadic aside, this was a slow build to two episodes of fan-pleasing button-pushing. Television as Comic-Con gathering: made by the fans, for the fans and only for the fans. Which is fine, but should have been earned by a better plot and less reliance on brand familiarity. Like *Star Wars*, *Trek* is now an exercise in nostalgia and reformatting for the next generation. There's little new but everything is shiny. I didn't get hooked back in the '70s on an Apple product manifesto. Hailing frequencies closed.

**SFX:** *This is the only negative take we received on Picard season three – but hey, just like Spock we believe in infinite diversity in infinite combinations.*

**Rob Graham, email** *Star Trek: Picard* season three has been absolutely incredible. One of the best *Star Trek* shows – perhaps the best since *The Next Generation*.

We don't need any more prequels to the original series though I wouldn't say no to a *Star Trek: Archer* series with Scott Bakula back as the captain or perhaps now promoted to Admiral Archer, bringing back the *Enterprise* cast. Perhaps all the captains could now get *Picard*-like series: *Star Trek: Sisko* bringing back Avery Brooks, or *Star Trek: Janeway* with Kate Mulgrew, bringing back characters from *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*.

**SFX:** *Or indeed Star Trek: Kirk, the continuing non-adventures of what was scraped from the surface of Veridian III. It's what they call slow television.*



The mystique of the Mandalorians used to be their scarcity. Loads of them just feels clunky.

**John Roche**



Was there ever a *Voyager* episode called "A Stitch In Time Saves Seven Of Nine"? And if not, why not?

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# SFX

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"Time to check for acrostics?"



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## Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind

**DARREN SCOTT** EDITOR

### RAVES

- *Yellowjackets* continues to be great. Anyone else hungry?
- *Gremlins: Secrets Of The Mogwai* is brilliant – far scarier than I expected.
- Enjoyed *Renfield* – more proof that not every movie needs to be a drawn-out franchise.
- Jinkx Monsoon in *Doctor Who* is *genius* casting, I absolutely adore them.

### RANTS

- That's a lot of *Star Wars*. Can the franchise sustain that output?



**IAN BERRIMAN** DEPUTY EDITOR

### RAVES

- Digging the Doctor and Ruby's '60s-era outfits. Is it just me, or does what we're seeing of the costume design look increasingly heightened, in a comic-book style?
- Current listening: Hannah Peel's score for Sky's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (out on vinyl on 26 May): [bit.ly/midwichpeel](https://bit.ly/midwichpeel).
- Bombshell discovery of the month: Mark "Zaphod Beeblebrox" Wing-Davey is the son of Anna "Lou Beale" Wing. File with Stephen "Marvin" Moore being the half-brother of S-Express's Mark Moore.

### RANTS

- I *hate* that Zoom restrict skinflints to 40 minutes! When you talk to someone as chatty as *In The Flesh* creator Dominic Mitchell, it means setting up three consecutive calls...



**JONATHAN COATES** ART EDITOR

### RAVES

- Excellent to have *Inside No 9* back on our screens.
- Excited at the possibility of a *Galaxy Quest* series, but sad Alan Rickman won't be part of it.



**ED RICKETTS** PRODUCTION EDITOR

### RANTS/RAVES

- I'm in two minds about the new *Alien* film. As a massive, *massive* fan of the original I've been disappointed by Ridley Scott's prequels, so having someone else (Fede Álvarez) on board is a plus. On the other hand... can't we just leave it alone now?



**NICK SETCHFIELD** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

### RAVES

- Season three of *Picard* nailed the landing, thank the Great Bird of the Galaxy. I've been hugely enjoying the soundtrack album, which delivers proper *Trek* tingles, Goldsmith and Horner style.
- Check out *Doctor Who In The Radio Times*, a lovingly assembled, gloriously nostalgic new website full of covers and cuttings. Visit [doctorwhointheradiotimes.com](https://doctorwhointheradiotimes.com)



**TARA BENNETT** US EDITOR

### RAVES

- Genndy Tartakovsky's *Unicorn: Warriors Eternal* is gorgeous, traditionally animated fun. Great characters, world-building and overarching mystery.
- *Sweet Tooth* season two is fantastic. Love how it honours the comic book but is going its own way with expanded stories and characters. Where's my Bobby merch, already?



## Captain's Log



I'm a very busy woman and I haven't got all day!



Wait, what, *Star Trek* again? Well, that's what happens when something is just going so *right*. I've often said it's a great time for us nerds – we're being spoiled with genre offerings across the board. But remember when, almost 30 years ago, we used to have *Buffy* on the cover all the time? Or *The X-Files*? Oh those great, geeky days. And it feels like that again now.

It's absolutely no secret that I love *Star Trek*. But I also love *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars* and *The Walking Dead* and we're so lucky, as fans, to have these worlds – and many others – expanding by them constantly being in production. Who could have imagined that 30 years ago!

We're also extremely lucky here at *SFX* to be able to work with Paramount, CBS and the *Star Trek* crew of the various *Star Trek* series, because they *get* it. They're fans, like us. They love what they do and they want others to love it too – so it's a bit of a dream collaboration to have them be so helpful in bringing these first looks to the readers of *SFX*. And while spring may belong to Starfleet, I suspect winter will look decidedly Gallifreyan... What a time to be alive. The trip of a lifetime indeed!

Darren X



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HANS ZIMMER

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# Red Alert

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JUNE  
2023



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## HIGH STAKES

New ITV vampire series *Count Abdulla* has bite

### Highlights



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#### ELEMENTAL

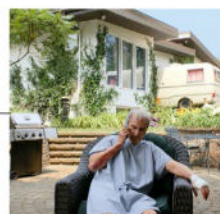
→ Disney's animated tale of how love wins through, no matter who you are. Straight love, obviously!



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#### MARVEL VOICES: PRIDE

→ Time for people to get angry again about superheroes being queer...



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#### BEAU IS AFRAID

→ Joaquin Phoenix stars in this surrealist black comedy horror from *Midsommar* creator Ari Aster.





Ember and Wade: a steamy romance?



Element City is a happening place to be, it seems.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

## Light My Fire

**Elemental's** Peter Sohn on making his most personal Pixar movie

Concept art for the two characters and the city.



"FIRST OF ALL, NOTHING ABOUT this movie was easy," Peter Sohn, the longtime Pixar creative, tells an audience. Someone has just asked about how *The Good Dinosaur's* director incorporated political themes into *Elemental*, his new animation about Ember – a shopkeeper's daughter made of fire – falling in love with a city inspector, Wade, who's made of water. The two live in the wonderfully colourful Elemental City, but because of their clashing elemental natures they do not normally mix.

"The themes of the film are very personal for me," Sohn continues. "My experiences of growing up in New York and some of the xenophobia that my parents and I faced were all issues that were personal, all things that I, to this day, struggle with. But that's on the darker side. This movie is meant to be a very hopeful one."

For Sohn, whose parents moved from Korea to New York City before he was born, almost everything about *Elemental* is based on some personal truth. He likens the overly emotional Wade to himself and the fiery spirit of Ember to his Italian-American wife. At one point in the movie, Ember's grandmother tells her that

she must "marry fire", which is lifted directly from Sohn's own grandmother telling him to "marry Korean". Yet this story of romance and family is told in perhaps the most abstract way possible – through a funny, technically ambitious animated romance that features zero humans.

"I don't have any experience of pulling a personal story in any other way," he tells Red Alert later. "It's not an autobiography, but there is this general feeling I was trying to chase. And once I talked to a team about that, everyone found their hook into the concepts in their own lives. And all of a sudden, we're building something that is its own thing."







Leah Lewis and Mamoudou Athie voice the characters.

Even among Pixar's large filmography, *Elemental* stands on its own. Sohn points out how some people have drawn comparisons to *Inside Out*, though that's not entirely accurate. He lists a few inspirations: for the love story, there was *Moonstruck*; for an immigration scene, there was *The Godfather Part II*; and for aspects of Elemental City, there was the way Paris is presented in *Amelie*.

"The Venn diagram that I can see [between *Elemental* and *Inside Out*] is that it's just not humans, you're anthropomorphising something," he says. "As a minority, I've always loved those types of movies because it wasn't about race in that way. It was always about something that you could universally connect to. This idea of trying to make something that's truthful and authentic, and trying to find something that's worthy of animating and pushing the technology, is Pixar."

Visual effects supervisor Sanjay Bakshi says that when *Elemental* was initially pitched, it "seemed impossible" to actually make. One of the central problems was how Sohn wanted the elements to just *be* – for instance, there's no

**“I was naive... I didn't realise how difficult it would be”**

wood or coal source for Ember's flame, she just *is* fire. The same goes for characters made of water, air, and earth.

"Pixar people are crazy nerds," Sohn says. "They are perfectionists and they get excited about challenges. I was excited about this for those same reasons, but I was naive, I didn't realise how difficult it would be."

One aspect that was particularly tricky to figure out was the way the water characters inwardly reflect light. In some tests, they were constantly changing colour depending on their surroundings. The animators also tried putting realistic eyes on their creations; Sohn says that test footage "could make a good horror movie".

The challenges of *Elemental* were so tough that the pipeline of work that Pixar normally goes through had to fundamentally change. "Pause on a frame and any of these characters

look weird, the characters look wonky," Sohn says. "They look better in motion. You can't say that about Buzz [Lightyear] or [Cars character] Mater. They're just perfect-looking because they're hard materials. These are simulated things that are constantly moving."

## BAD ELEMENTS

Because of these abstract characters, some of the narrative ideas went too far. For instance, at one stage, the elements were going to travel through the ground and under the core of the Earth. "People did not know what was going on... it became this science fiction thing," Sohn says. Those aspects were eventually toned down. "There's still some narrative risk, but at the same time, everyone at Pixar was so supportive – they were all trying to discover what the film needed to be."

In the end, with the help of a team of Pixar's finest creatives, Sohn managed to make a personal film that stays grounded instead of going up in flames. **JS**

*Elemental is in cinemas from 16 June.*

**► SCI-FACT!** You may recognise the voice of Wade: Mamoudou Athie played Ian Malcolm's ally Ramsay Cole in *Jurassic World Dominion*.





THERE'S NO SHORTAGE of vampires in pop culture.

They've come in the form of a pompous Tom Cruise, a sexy, snake-enchanted Salma Hayek and a sparkly Robert Pattinson. They've been good, evil, gay, straight and occasionally puppets, but ITV's six-part horror-comedy *Count Abdulla* asks the question: what if they were Muslim?

For series director Asim Abbasi, "I think it enhances the vampire myth, as it's always been about the one that didn't have a reflection and couldn't see themselves in society. I gravitated towards the story so much as a chance to use this metaphor of othering that's been used in other scenarios but never been applied to South Asians and Muslims."

Beyond the potential metaphors around Islam and the vampire myth, there are also practical considerations because, as Abbasi points out, "Blood is not halal!"

## KATHY'S CLOWN

The series' eponymous vampire (Arian Nik) is a young British-Pakistani doctor caught between pleasing his conservative family and cutting loose with his friends. But things get more complicated when Kathy, a part-time dominatrix and full-time vampire, turns him into one of her own.

For Nik, the show is a chance "to rethink everything we know about vampires. Churches and holy water don't mean anything to Abdulla as they do to white vampires or the folklore that we're all familiar with. The show does a brilliant job of exploring and deconstructing all those things. A Muslim vampire is a very disruptive idea". But he's quick to point out, "It's also just really, really funny, as well as scary and politically sharp."

Horror-comedy runs the gamut from *Evil Dead 2* to *Scary Movie*. For Abbasi, "It's mostly comedy, but the horror aspect, the slightly moodier aspect, comes through from the visuals." Though it's not a show likely to keep anyone up at night, there is gore aplenty and some deeply disturbing moments, like when Abdulla lies, devastated, in bed, with blood pouring down his face like cursed tears. It's a moment that Abbasi is particularly

Nina Wadia, Sia Alipour and Arian Nik: happy family?



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# A Bat Out Of Halal

The team behind **Count Abdulla** bring Muslim vampires to ITV





Jaime Winstone as the ever-subtle Kathy.

“The comedy’s all on paper and my drama instincts could flesh out the relationships”



Abdulla is about to have a bit of a shock.



The stakes are high, but will they do anything?

proud of, calling it his “favourite shot. I questioned whether it was too dark for a horror-comedy, but in the end, it was quite magical.”

Although Abbasi is an experienced television director, he was breaking new ground in multiple ways. *Count Abdulla* is his first UK-based project (“It was great – in Pakistan overtime only begins after 14 hours,” he jokes) and his first time working in horror or comedy, having been best known for creating “dramatic thrillers”. But having received Kaamil Shah’s scripts, he was confident that he could explore the emotional potential of the tale

without losing the laughs: “The comedy’s all on paper and my drama instincts could flesh out the relationships.”

Kathy, played by Jaime Winstone, was fully formed on the page, according to both Abbasi and Winstone’s accounts. She kicks off the series in its opening scene, sauntering in as part Kate Beckinsale in *Underworld*, part Lily Savage on a bender, topped off with a bleached blonde mullet. “I fought for that mullet,” remembers Winstone. “I loved the idea of having, amongst all this beautiful brown skin/brown hair, this being-David-Bowie-in-

*Labyrinth* punk haircut.” Beyond looking cool, it spoke to how “she’s been around for 150 years, and the height of her life probably was where she was in the ’80s. But she’s an outsider like Abdulla, and looked at as an addict.”

Kathy is not any ordinary vampire either: “She’s a halal-hunting vampire who’s outrageous and alluring.” Winstone was a bit nervous bringing a character with no filter to the screen, one who describes herself as “having the same taste in men as Princess Diana.”

Winstone explains: “I really don’t wanna be offending people, but Kathy was born offensive and you can’t say those lines half-hearted. It is going to raise some eyebrows, but Kathy opens up these questions to understand this beautiful British Islam community that we don’t see celebrated enough on TV.”

While Nik is keen to see his community celebrated, he seems just as enthusiastic about them getting to see the “weird, love/hate, oedipal friendship” between Kathy and Abdulla, and still seems to be slightly disbelieving that this story has made it to the screen. “It’s taken real bravery, gall and gumption from Asim and Kaamil to create this world. If I can take a spoonful of that and pour it into my work, the possibilities become endless.”

And Abbasi sees further possibilities within this tale after the first season. “We’ve not even started!” he laughs. **LL**

*Count Abdulla is on ITVX in June.*



## NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Ryan Reynolds and Jason Momoa starring in live-action/animated road trip adventure **Animal Friends**.

→ **Godzilla X Kong: The New Empire** arrives 15 March 2024.

→ Mia Goth joins Mahershala Ali in Marvel’s **Blade**.

→ **Hulk’s** Liv Tyler returns as Betty Ross in **Captain America: New World Order**.

→ Amazon mining MGM library with multimedia reboots for **Stargate**, **RoboCop** and **Poltergeist**.

→ Morena Baccarin and Stefan Kapicic returning as Vanessa and Colossus in **Deadpool 3**.

→ Melissa Barrera making Universal monster movie with **Scream** directors Radio Silence.

→ Ashley Avis remaking **City of Angels**, 1998’s remake of Wim Wenders’s *Wings Of Desire*.

→ **Evil Dead** saga to continue with new movies based around the Books of the Dead.

→ **Ted Lasso’s** Juno Temple onboard for **Venom 3**.

→ **Lovecraft Country’s** Courtney B Vance joining live-action **Lilo & Stitch**.

→ James McAvoy reuniting with Blumhouse for **Speak No Evil**.



► **SCI-FACT!** Asim Abbasi’s last show, about a female detective agency in Karachi, was banned in Pakistan.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

# Hero Ingredients

This year's **Marvel Voices: Pride** introduces more new mutants, symbiotes and heroes



A variant cover by Jan Bazaldua: fabulous!



The main cover for the issue, by Amy Reeder.

**AFTER** 2021'S inaugural *Marvel Voices: Pride*, described by editor Sarah Brunstad as "pure celebration and joy", and a 2022 edition dedicated to debuting new gay heroes, next month's third annual one-shot is aimed at solidifying the anthology's status as "an essential read", bringing in even more new characters and tying into other recent storylines,

including the likes of *Love Unlimited: Gwenpool*.

"I really try to represent a range of queer identities, both with the casting and the character choices," Brunstad tells Red Alert. "And importantly, I want folks who love comics, who actively want to be in this space in particular."

Brunstad has also hired several creators better known outside comics, such as author Sarah

Gailey (Hugo nominated for 2017's *River Of Teeth*), who with artist Bailie Rosenlund sends the Black Cat to New Orleans; *The Sandman* showrunner Shadi Petosky, who takes on Wiccan and Hulkling; and *The Witch King* novelist HE Edgmon. "HE's story is mad fun," says Brunstad. "It features a new symbiote character, who is forced into slightly unsavory deeds with good intentions."

Stephanie Williams's contribution, set in Chicago, introduces a new hero to the mantle of Nightshade. "Nightshade is a legacy name being handed down to a young black woman seeking justice for herself and her community," continues Brunstad. "And it's not just the justice of physical safety, but also scientific prowess. Black girl genius, if you will. Lucie



► **SCI-FACT!** Created by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber and Jack Kirby, Loki first appeared in *Journey into Mystery* 85 in 1962.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Weapons Of Choice

Loki's past catches up with him in a new miniseries



AHEAD OF THE second season of his television show, Loki is returning in a new miniseries. Writer Dan Watters has described Thor's half-sibling as "one of the most interesting characters, not only in comics, but also mythology", and the four-parter explores their ambiguous nature as both the God of Stories and the God of Lies.

"I love tricksters, deceivers, uprooters and devils, and Loki has a little bit of all that in them," says Watters, who is paired with artist Germán Peralta. "The fact that we never quite know what Loki is thinking, and that they have this tangle of deep murky history and myth to pull on in any situation, is a gift for a storyteller. Loki can be puppetmaster or puppet in any given situation, and even they're not certain which of the two they're currently managing to pull off."

Indeed, Loki can be either a villain or hero – or at least anti-hero – who can act for good or bad. "Loki always acts to Loki's ends, and that's definitely a part of our story," he says. "I think the reason the character appeals so much to people is that Loki is as mercurial as we are. They can be cruel or kind, affectionate or cold, depending on their mood, but then can't we all?"

The series sees Loki forced to track

down some ancient, powerful weapons they previously hid among the Ten Realms before they bring about Ragnarok, and Watters says he will be delving into some of Loki's weirder characteristics.

"We're drawing on Norse myth and all its delightful oddness for inspiration here," he explains. "This is the Loki who, if the tales are to be believed, gave birth to an eight-legged horse, started building a ship out of dead men's fingernails at the beginning of time to prepare for the apocalypse, and once started a war by turning the goddess of youth into a nut. At least one of those things is coming back to bite Loki on the backside."

While he doesn't specify any names, expect to see a few familiar faces, while Loki will also journey to Nidavellir and Kree space. "Loki is the god of stories, and so they touch every corner of this universe," says Watters, "in much the same way a bull touches every cup and saucer in a display the china-shop staff worked so hard on."

"I really wanted to take advantage of that, so Loki's taking us to other realms and planets and all the way back to Midgard again, while making new enemies and meeting old friends along the way – all of whom have been touched by the aforementioned weapons they've let loose on reality."

With their new series

debuting during Pride Month, Loki is being highlighted as one of several Marvel titles to feature LGBTQ+ protagonists, although, Watters says, that aspect of their personality doesn't have much bearing on what unfolds.

"It's not necessarily central to the plot, in the same way that a character's straightness wouldn't have to be either," adds Watters. "I love that Loki can be witch, warlock, lover or enemy to anyone given their mood and situation, and that's something to be celebrated in my book." **SJ**

Loki issue one is out on 7 June.

Main cover art for issue one, by Dustin Nguyen.



Lorraine is a loud, large, joyful trans-woman who happens to be immortal and indestructible."

Meanwhile, a Gimmick 15-pager by scripter Steve Foxe (paired with artist Rosi Kampe) sets the scene for August's *Dark X-Men*. "As a gay comics creator – and as a gay comics reader – it's been really heartening to see publishers celebrate their queer characters and queer talent," says Foxe. "I've been a fan of the medium for long enough to remember when we just got crumbs here and there, and we clung to those as desperately as we could."

"Particularly as legislatures across the US move to restrict what kind of literature is available to the masses, having publishers like Marvel willing to commit to this level of visibility is an encouraging statement. It's also a chance for us to slow down and tell different types of stories using these queer characters, highlighting different aspects of their lives that might not otherwise take centre stage in high-flying action comics."

Having made her debut in 2021's *Children Of The Atom*,

## “Nightshade is a legacy name handed down”

Carmen Cruz has since become one of the X-Men's most prominent younger members. "With things reaching a crescendo during the *Fall Of X* initiative this summer, it felt right to position someone emblematic of this newest era into the sort of role we've seen Jubilee or Kitty Pryde in the past – the team newbie among a more seasoned bunch of heroes – or 'heroes' in the case of *Dark X-Men*," says Foxe.

"What I find most interesting about Gimmick is that she's a lifelong mutant fangirl who turned out to actually be a mutant, although her girlfriend and best friends aren't. She got her dream right as the mutant dream reached a new zenith, and now she's going to experience the fall." **SJ**

Marvel Voices: Pride issue one is out on 14 June.





“If you ever stop experimenting with the form, then where are you, right?”

Beau (Joaquin Phoenix) should've stayed in bed.

➔ IF YOU READ ANY OF the reviews of Ari Aster's third feature *Beau Is Afraid*, you'll likely encounter the word “departure”. In *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*, Aster gave us a pair of instant-classic horror movies; *Beau* is a three-hour comedy (of sorts) which its writer/director has flippantly referred to as “a Jewish *Lord Of The Rings*”.

But is it really such a hairpin turn? Like his first two films, *Beau* is obsessed with the themes of guilt and family, as Joaquin Phoenix's eponymous “hero” –

a man so crippled by anxiety, he struggles to leave the house – must travel cross-country to the funeral of his mum (Patti LuPone), the woman largely responsible for his splintered psyche. And while it's certainly Aster's funniest film, it's also, arguably, his most discomfiting.

Aster can see the throughlines. “Yeah, certainly,” he says, his words faltering, for Beau's anxiety and awkwardness were born of his own. “In some ways I saw this as... I mean, it's too reductive, but this functions almost as a parody of the last two, while also, I think, going

**DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE**

# A Life Less Ordinary

It's the end of the world and, quite rightly, **Beau Is Afraid**





Phoenix plans the chaos with director Ari Aster.

deeper, in a way. If anything, I've always seen these as an unofficial trilogy, and the things I'm planning to do next are much more divorced from those three, which are obsessed with the question of family and the burden of being a parent, or an offspring. Really just the burden of being in relationships with anybody else!"

The similarities don't end there. Aren't horror and comedy, after all, flip sides of the same coin? *Hereditary* was darkly amusing in places, and Aster has, in the past, referred to *Midsommar* as one big joke leading to a punchline.

"I think both modes really come down to set-up and punchline," he agrees. "[With horror] you're being set up by a scenario that is troubling or worrisome and could go wrong in any number of ways, and then what does that reveal that is meant to upset you or horrify you or disturb you? I think about HP Lovecraft and so many of his stories are like, 'And then the next thing I saw was so horrible, so ghastly, so absolutely bone-

chilling...' And of course, the more you do that, the more difficult it is to satisfy whatever is building up in the mind of the reader, or the viewer. But still, there's a punchline in there – what is the answer to the thing that you've built up? Which is how a joke works, right?"

Unfurling like a Freudian nightmare, *Beau Is Afraid* begins with its eponymous "hero" quaking in his apartment as chaos reigns in the street outside, from kids with firearms to a naked man strutting up and down, stabbing people. From there, for Beau, it's all downhill. En route to his mom's house, he's all but kidnapped by an uptight couple played by Nathan Lane and Amy Ryan, finds himself watching an all-too-personal play performed by a forest-dwelling theatre troupe, and fights a decidedly odd monster.

There's more, and plenty of it, with the discombobulating vignettes slaloming between fantasy and reality, Kafka and Kaufman. Reviews, meanwhile, have swerved between seeing *Beau* as an invigoratingly idiosyncratic masterpiece and the masturbatory musings of an auteur who's given too much freedom.

"It was very liberating," shrugs Aster. "To make a comedy, and to place it in this invented world where really I could do anything that I wanted to. I could follow lots of different impulses

that wouldn't fit in a more grounded world – as long as those things were cohesive and in harmony. And hopefully they are. I think the film is about an unlive life. That is what I was thinking about."

And while the epic nature of the \$35 million film caused Aster headaches, he has zero regrets. "It's larger, so there's more to build, more to design, there's a larger cast," he says. "And except for Joaquin, nobody's there all the way through. So you build a rapport with actors and you're on a roll with them, and then they leave, and all of a sudden you're in a new location with new actors.

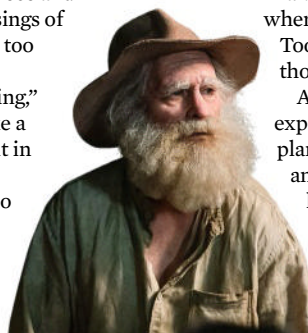
"My last two films, I was mostly in one location. The benefit of that is you get used to the environment and a confidence comes with that. But whenever you're thrown into a new setting, you have to feel your way round again."

A long pause. "But... I don't know. I mean, if you ever stop experimenting with the form, then where are you, right? It's so boring to do the conventional narrative structure. I'm bored watching movies that are shaped in a way that is totally familiar, where I can anticipate every turn.

Too many people have read those screenwriting books."

Aster will continue to experiment, not least because he plans to leave the themes of guilt and family behind: "I don't know what else I could wring from that towel!" **JG**

*Beau Is Afraid* is in cinemas from 19 May.



## NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ The truth is out there... *Black Panther*'s Ryan Coogler developing a new version of **The X-Files**.  
→ Michelle Yeoh returning as Giorgiou in **Section 31** movie for Paramount+. Starfleet Academy-based series also greenlit.  
→ *Game Of Thrones* gets another prequel series in **A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms: The Hedge Knight**.  
→ Nicki Minaj stars in animated show **Lady Danger**, based on the Dark Horse comics by Alex de Campi.  
→ Max (formerly HBO Max) adapting the **Harry Potter** books in a new series executive-produced by JK Rowling.  
→ **The Conjuring** is set for TV spin-off.  
→ **The Twilight** saga also heading to TV.  
→ Benedict Cumberbatch in six-part adaptation of Matt Haig's **How To Stop Time**.  
→ Anne Rice universe expanding with new series based on secret organisation the Talamasca.  
→ **The Ark** renewed for a second season.  
→ By Grabthar's hammer! Paramount+ developing **Galaxy Quest** TV show.

DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY

**SCI-FACT!** Patti LuPone will perform musical numbers when she stars in Marvel series *Agatha: Coven Of Chaos*.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

## Lady Of The Ring

**Victory** escapes from Vampirella's shadow in her own comic book



**FIRST INTRODUCED** as Vampirella's lover before falling under the influence of her mother Lilith, Victoria "Victory" Harris is about to come into her own in a new solo series, written by David F Walker and illustrated by Brett Weldele.

"I got an email from editor Matt Idelson asking if I knew the character of Victory, and if I'd be interested in writing her," Walker tells Red Alert. "As it turned out, I'd been reading [comics writer] Christopher Priest's *Vampirella*, so I did know the character. And then Priest emailed me and gave me a bit of a nudge. I liked the idea of taking a flawed character on a journey of self-discovery, and as I talked things over with

Matt, and as Priest continued to encourage me, I decided to give it a shot."

Walker will delve into the disturbing events of both the character's past and present. "In addition to being chased by demons, Victory is dealing with a lot of personal issues," he says. "We're talking issues that go all the way back to her childhood and are still having an effect on her as an adult. Part of the story is about her dealing with the trauma and abuse of her childhood, and learning how to kick demonic ass."

Despite her connections to both Vampirella and Lilith, don't expect to see too many familiar faces. "There will be a really brief cameo by Vampirella, but as I was putting the story together it really felt like guest appearances by recognisable characters would pull focus too much," explains Walker. "Part of what drew me to the project was the opportunity to tell a story that was just Victory. Everything we've seen of her so far has been in

the context of her being a supporting character, and I wanted to avoid that feeling as much as possible in this miniseries."

The plot centres on the demonic Belial ring, which was given to Victory by Lilith. "The ring is not something that Victory wants, but she can't get rid of it, no matter how hard she tries," explains Walker. "As if that's not bad enough, a group of demons want the ring, and they're making Victory's life ridiculously difficult."

**“Part of the story is about her dealing with trauma and abuse”**

With Victory sporting a distinctive white variation of Vampirella's classic costume, Walker is happy to be teaming up with artist Brett Weldele. "Brett is an old friend and I'm a fan of his work," says Walker, who previously partnered Weldele on pro-

wrestling title *One Fall*. "We'd been looking for something new to collaborate on, and the timing happened to work out. I wanted to work with an artist who could handle the action and had a great way of bringing a character to life."

"But I wanted to avoid anything that was overly sexualised, without it being prudish. Knowing Brett and his work, I knew he could bring the thunder and the lightning." **sj**

*Victory issue one is out on 21 June.*



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# The Killing Moon

Terror is on ice as Declan Shalvey and Andrea Broccardo relaunch Marvel's **Alien**

**➔** GROWING UP, DECLAN SHALVEY COULDN'T bring himself to watch the *Alien* films. But now several decades later, the Irish writer and artist is scripting Marvel's relaunched *Alien* series.

"All my friends were huge fans, but I was way too scared to watch them," he laughs. "It wasn't until years later that I finally built up the nerve to watch the original classic, and soon afterwards the also-classic sequel, and I very much came to appreciate the mastery of those first two films especially."

Consequently, Shalvey's vision for the book is predicated on Ridley Scott's seminal 1979 *Alien* and James Cameron's equally-impressive 1986 *Aliens*. "I'm very much leaning into the aesthetic of those first two films, aiming to build tension in the same way they both did so expertly," he explains. "They're the core DNA of the franchise to me, so I wanted to use them as a launching point. There's also a little sprinkling of *The Thing* as regards the setting but also the sense of tension, horror and further classic '80s feel."

With Shalvey describing it as "a fresh start," the new series is set in the same universe as Phillip Kennedy Johnson's run. "It takes place a little earlier," he says. "I ultimately wanted to tell a different story outside of all the previously established framework."

Set on remote icy moon LV-69, it opens with chief scientist Batya Zahn struggling to balance her personal interests with those of her employers, Talbot Engineering. "For any *Alien* story, you really need a cast of humans to pull you into the world, and in this arc we're introducing the Zahns," says Shalvey. "They're led by Batya, who is very much the strong matriarch with secrets of her own. Her daughter Zasha is coming of age and, as a result, has a tense relationship with her father, the dutiful Dayton Zahn."

Unfortunately, something ominous is discovered buried in LV-69. "Significant water deposits are suspected to be contained on the moon, which could be very profitable for future human colonisation," teases Shalvey. "As long as Batya can confirm their value, that is. But there's more than just water under the ice, though."

**"I'm leaning into the aesthetic of those first two films"**



The moon's claustrophobic confines are an ideal location for the terror that subsequently follows. "Small, enclosed environments are where *Alien* is most terrifying, when escape is impossible," says Shalvey. "But that's not the only way they can be scary, as the environment is very important with these stories, in a visual sense of course, but also further proving how adaptable – and unstoppable – xenomorphs truly are."

Shalvey is enjoying working with artist Andrea Broccardo. "He knows what the jackets should look like, the corridors, the tables, and really nails that futuristic yet slightly retro sense," he says. "Andrea is such an *Alien* fan; he knows how to make an empty room look like it belongs in the world of *Alien*. And his xenomorph is so sleek and ruthless." **SJ**

*Alien issue one is out now.*

**➤ SCI-FACT!** Written by Mark Verheiden and drawn by Mark A Nelson, the first standalone *Alien* series was published by Dark Horse in 1989.



## SFX SPACE AND TIME Celebrating 60 years of DOCTOR WHO

◆ The BBC has announced new cast for Ncuti Gatwa's upcoming debut season, including Bhav Joshi (*Tetris*), Millie Kent (*The Split*), Eilidh Loan (*England's Forgotten Queen*), Pete MacHale (*Gangs Of London*), Sophie Ablett (*A Brixton Tale*), Miles Yekinni (*Doctors*) and Hemi Yeroham (*The Amelia Project*).

◆ An undisclosed guest star from 2005 is also scheduled to return.

◆ The second part of the Big Finish 60th anniversary audio adventure has been announced as *Once And Future: The Artist At The End Of Time*. Released in June, it will star Peter Davison as the Fifth Doctor, Georgia Tennant as Jenny and Colin Baker as the Curator.

◆ The world's longest-running children's programme, *Blue Peter*, partnered with *Doctor Who* for a 60th anniversary competition. Viewers between the ages of five and 15 – sadly just ruling us out – were encouraged to submit fan art for a chance to win an exclusive behind the scenes set tour. The top 500 entries also received a rare, exclusive *Doctor Who* 60th *Blue Peter* competition winner's badge.

◆ As part of the *Blue Peter* competition, it was announced that there would be a special takeover on CBBC and BBC iPlayer later on this year.

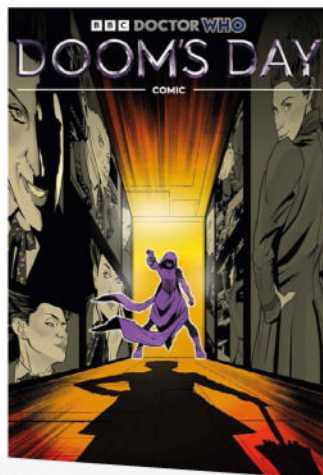
◆ First-look photos of the Doctor (Ncuti Gatwa) and Ruby (Millie Gibson) were released from a forthcoming episode set in the 1960s. The stars later shared further variations of the images on their personal Instagram accounts.

◆ Titan Comics announced a two-issue series as part of the previously announced multi-platform story *Doom's Day*. Released on

Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson looking fab.







5 July, the comic will feature Missy on the trail of Doom. The story is written by Jody Houser and illustrated by Roberta Ingranata, with two different cover versions.

◆ Murray Gold – responsible for the music of *Doctor Who* for 12 years from the revival in 2005 – is returning to the series. The award-winning composer will score the 2023 specials, as well as music for Ncuti Gatwa's debut season. Also returning to the series alongside Gold is the BBC National Orchestra Of Wales.

◆ Award-winning actor, singer, two-time *RuPaul's Drag Race* winner and all-round icon Jinkx Monsoon is to appear in a "major role" in the 2024 series.

◆ Officially released first-look images of Monsoon in character bore the bold claim that they are "the Doctor's most powerful enemy yet!" Russell T Davies said: "In a galaxy of comets and supernovas, here comes the biggest star of all. Jinkx Monsoon is on a collision course with the TARDIS, and *Doctor Who* will never be the same again!"

◆ A new advertising campaign for the 60th anniversary began on 29 April with a 10-second teaser aired on BBC One. When played in reverse the Fourteenth Doctor can be heard saying: "Cryptic. I hate that." Donna can also be heard saying: "Why did this face come back?"

◆ Fans worked out that the binary code in the trailer spelled out "The Star Beast" – the title of the comic the first episode is based on – and that a further trailer would likely air before the Eurovision Song Contest. 🌟

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



Jinkx Monsoon will appear in the 2024 series.

## SCI-FACT!

Jinkx Monsoon has said their favourite TV series is *Futurama*. "That show's probably had the most impact on my human life."



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

## All At Sea

There's something fishy ahoy as Dan Abnett and INJ Culbard return to **Wild's End**

➔ FIVE YEARS AFTER its previous instalment concluded, writer Dan Abnett and artist INJ Culbard are returning to *Wild's End*. This Boom Studios series is set in Lower Crowchurch, an alternate 1930s English village occupied by extraterrestrials, whose inhabitants are all depicted as animals. Featuring a whole new range of anthropomorphic characters, the six-parter acts as a perfect jumping-on point, they say.

"With the first three volumes, we felt we'd very much told the story of the original cast and brought them to a relatively happy ending and a nice point of closure," Abnett tells Red Alert. "It made sense to us to start 'somewhere else' with a new group and find out what happened to other people during the invasion. So it very much serves the 'new start' requirement, but also makes creative and dramatic sense to us."

Taking place further down the coast, the story centres on the crew of a small fishing boat. "This takes place during the run of the original three volumes, so this is happening at the same time," explains Abnett. "They go out to sea for a few weeks, on a fishing trip, and the invasion begins while they're at sea. They come back and everything has changed and everything is eerie, and so the mystery begins..."

According to Abnett, the crew boast great dynamics. "There's the old Skipper to the cocky first mate Roddy and dependable Flo, Skipper's daughter-in-law, who has worked on the boat since her husband was lost in the last war, and the 'twins' Howie and Stevie, who start and finish each other's sentences," he continues.

"When they set off, there's a new crew member, the local tearaway Eddie, who has no desire to join the crew, and his presence will cause a lot of drama before

they return to dry land. As to the original cast, we'll have to see..."

When it comes to the various animal species, "inspiration tends to spring from when we're breaking down the story," Culbard says, with he and Abnett working them out during the development

process. "All of the designs were first passes. Flo had very clear vibes with her polkadot bandanna," he explains, referring to the archetypal American female factory workers of the Second World War. "Bernie comes from her being a reporter, and thinking



Covers by Ariel Olivetti (top) and INJ Culbard.



A variant of issue one cover art, by InHyuk Lee.

'cub reporter', so it seemed obvious she was a bear, and I immediately saw her wearing '30s/'40s motorbike attire. For the 'twins', I was thinking about heterochromatic cats and how they look like two cats in one, so I figured if the 'twins' would be the reverse of the other, they might look like three cats stood close together."

Upon reaching dry land, the crew discovers that much has changed in their seaside hometown. "It's very much an uncanny mystery with a deep sense of tension and foreboding," teases Abnett. "Like in the original book, the fact that there's been an alien invasion slowly sneaks up on them as they discover weird and odd details. As ever, it's driven by the characters and their interactions." **SJ**

*Wild's End* issue one is out 21 June.



► **SCI-FACT!** Reynolds based the fertility idol in *Raiders* on a souvenir bought in a Mexican airport giftshop.

NEW AUTHOR

## AY CHAO

MEET THE FORMER LAWYER  
BEHIND JAZZ AGE FANTASY  
SHANGHAI IMMORTAL

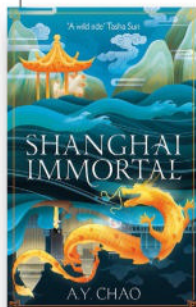


### Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Lady Jing is an outcast noble – half vampire, half hulijing fox spirit and all sasshole. Her grandma thinks she's an abomination. Her mom pawned her to the King of Hell to fund a diamond habit. Now Jing is stuck as his ward.

### How does the book draw on Chinese mythology?

→ I took familiar characters and tales and gave them a twist. *Shanghai Immortal's* netherworld is a very bureaucratic one, where most deities and demons have ministerial duties. The moon goddess, the weaver and the cowherd (the story behind Chinese Valentine's Day), and even Piggy from *Journey To The West* make an appearance.



### How long did it take to write?

→ Twelve weeks for the first draft, then four rounds of revision. The heart of the story hasn't changed much, though it's definitely much more nuanced and layered after my agent and editor input!

### Did you have to do much research?

→ So much research! From advancing technology to when songs and sweets like the Tootsie Roll first came out. My favourite was finding fun idioms and honorific Chinese phrases, which are sprinkled liberally throughout the text.

### Any advice for would-be writers?

→ Plug yourself into the writing community. A solid writing crew is like getting extra doses of pixie dust on all the ups and a caring haven to help weather the downs. Screaming is way more fun with friends!

*Shanghai Immortal* is out on 1 June, published by Hodderscape.

## THE FINAL FRONTIER

# NORMAN REYNOLDS 1934-2023

Remembering the man who got the ball rolling...



STEEPED IN WHAT PRODUCER Kathleen Kennedy called “old style craftsmanship”, art director and production designer Norman Reynolds was a key creative influence in some of the most cherished and acclaimed fantasy blockbusters.

Born in Willesden, London, he had a lifelong interest in art and architecture. A chance visit to Shepperton Studios while working for a company supplying illuminated signs convinced him the movies were his calling. “I was totally gobsmacked by the whole concept of filming on a stage,” he recalled. “I felt that I’d found what I wanted to do.”

Two years on TV’s *The Saint* served as an apprenticeship while 1965’s *Thunderball* saw him transfer to the big screen. He also earned a

credit as assistant art director on 1974’s apocalyptic ant chiller *Phase IV*. As art director on *Star Wars* Reynolds helped bring reality to

George Lucas’s revolutionary “used universe” aesthetic. On location in Tunisia, seeing the camera frame R2-D2 and C-3PO among the blinding dunes of Tatooine, he glimpsed the film’s potential: “The light began to dawn, this could be something extraordinary.”

It was as production designer that Reynolds returned to that galaxy for *The Empire Strikes Back* – among his designs were the carbonite freezing chamber, praised by director Irvin Kershner as “the best set in the movie” – and *Return Of The Jedi*.

Lucas recommended him to Steven Spielberg for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, for which his Oscar-winning work included everything from the Raven bar to the unforgettable giant boulder that almost crushes Indy in the opening setpiece. “I’d shown it to Steven – who got very excited and immediately asked me to make it bigger!”

Reynolds was also art director on *Superman* and *Superman II* and production designer on *Return To Oz*, *Young Sherlock Holmes* and *Alien 3*. “The better the make-believe the more people who believe it,” he reflected in 2016. **NS**



Reynolds's carbonite freezing chamber.

LUCASFILM LTD/ALAMY, SHUTTERSTOCK

## AL JAFFEE 1921-2023

American cartoonist and comic book artist, best known for *Mad* magazine.

## STEVE SKEATES 1943-2023

American comic book writer, co-creator of Hawk and Dove with Steve Ditko.



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# ENTERPRISING SITUATION

AS THE STAR TREK RENAISSANCE CONTINUES, *STRANGE NEW WORLDS* RETURNS...

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



**T**HERE'S SOME SURPRISES IN THERE..." TEASES *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* showrunner Akiva Goldsman of the show's second season. Luckily for all the spoilerphobes among us, he's not giving up anything too major. "Yeah, there are more Gorn in season two," he's happy to reveal.

"I think one of the big swings is out there, right?" he laughs when *SFX* tries to push for more hints and teases. "We do a crossover with *Lower Decks* and that's fun. We had a really good time doing that and got to work with our extended family from the other show, both on camera and off. And of course Jonathan Frakes directed it. So in many ways it's a *Star Trek* melting pot, that episode. And there are more, but far be it for me to spoil..."

#### FUTURE CROSSOVERS

Frakes, we tell Goldsman, did reveal details of the animation and live-action episode in *SFX* earlier this year.

"Here's the thing: Jonathan should never ever, ever have a state secret. There's not a thing Jonathan won't tell you. I would say it's because you could ply him with drink, but really, no plying required. I will say to you that there are full-on animated pieces of the episode. But the hero portion of the episode is on Enterprise, in the *Strange New Worlds* universe."

Not only are they faced with the challenge of blending animation with live action, they're also mixing two different styles of show. Is it difficult to integrate drama with comedy?

"Yes!" Goldsman laughs. "It is! It's also difficult to integrate anime with non-anime because tonally they're different. Really, it's a credit to Tawny [Newsome, as Mariner] and Jack [Quaid, as Boimler], because the way you play a character in animation and the way you play a character in live action requires a different level, a different sort of modulation of performance. You have different tools at your disposal – the number of muscles in a human face, compared to the absolute lack of detail in a drawn face, especially the way we do it on *Lower Decks*. Think how that changes the demonstration of emotion."

"And that's just an example of how wildly different the kind of acting you do in a voice booth is from the kind of acting you do on-screen. It's really translation, more than I think any of us do. We discovered it in the script phase because our writers, we're all an arm's throw from each other on the *Star Trek* shows, right?"

"So Mike McMahan was right there with us on this, and we would work with their animation people and their animation studio. We have some writers who have been on *Lower Decks*, we would write these *Strange New Worlds* sections and try to put them together and you couldn't

exactly. It had to find the tone of the episode that was sort of both things, rather than let it be exactly *Lower Decks* in tone or exactly *Strange New Worlds*. It was easier with *Strange New Worlds* in a weird way, because we jump around town so much. It was fun, but sort of more challenging, I think, than we thought setting out."

Despite such challenges, Goldsman isn't ruling out future crossovers. "I am as promiscuous as it comes when we discuss the crossing over into other series timelines. I delight in that," he chuckles. "I think our rule is always it can't just be fanservice – which is not to say that we don't love servicing fans, but there also has to be a real storytelling get. Of which I think there are many."

"Honestly, *Strange New Worlds* is the only show I've ever been on where I've yearned for double the episodes. When we're in the writers' room breaking the season, we have 10 more good ones. We discard 10 that are as good as the 10 we keep because we just don't have the space for it. You sort of wish it was back to the old 24-episodes-a-season with this show, because there's so much you can do."

Fortunately for Goldsman and his team, a third season has already been commissioned and announced. "You carry a couple over," he says of the scripts, "The ones you always wanted to do that you couldn't quite get in the previous season. But then you sort of start again, because the world has shifted. Our 10 for season three are also delightful. They're in the not-made stage, but we know what they are and it continues to be exciting."

#### CROSSING TIMELINES

But before we get too far ahead, there's 10 new episodes beaming down from June. "The pitch that came for season two was a lot of, 'We're going to do what we did last year, but more' and that's what we did!" he grins. "We took to heart the fact that the audience seemed to like what we liked, which was genre-jumping, closed-ended narratives with some character serialisation."

"It was a real harkening back to the original series, when it came to the occasional O Henry-esque or *Twilight Zone*-like turn, and at the same time you're in there shining →



Babs  
Olusanmokun  
as Joseph  
M'Benga.



Christina  
Chong as La'an  
Noonien-  
Singh.





Celia Gooding  
as Uhura.  
Frequencies  
open!





Rebecca Romijn  
as Una Chin-  
Riley (Number  
One).





Carol Kane  
joins the  
crew as Chief  
Engineer Pelia.

a light into the nooks and crannies of canon. So we just did it again, basically. It was very reinforcing. If the fans hadn't liked it, we certainly would have ended up doing something more traditional. So we were really happy to get to keep doing it."

Describing the show as an ensemble piece, he says they "don't try to service everybody all the time", with good reason. "We will kind of let people almost not be in an episode in order to dig deep into whoever is the centrepiece of the episode."

He says this allows for a "deeper intimacy with the characters. We're always looking to make sure everybody gets equal time, and I think it comes out in the wash over multiple seasons. But I'm glad we had the second season to sort of pull up some folks that might not have gotten as much screen time in season one."

The timeframe of this series means that, largely, they're bound by canon. "Is it complicated? It is. I think it's fun, if you like it, right? I think if you don't like it, it's probably horrific. Part of what's interesting is we're interpolating history. There's pieces that are dark that we're filling in.

"Having said that, we will body-check canon when we need to, and we have. We've moved some folks around in terms of timelines, we put some folks together who aren't necessarily canonically together at the same time, we pull some things forward because ultimately story wins. But trying to stay within canon is an awfully fun exercise, and leads to solutions that you might not come up with if you didn't have those boundaries."

The *Original Series* era is still "far enough away" to not loom large in their plans for *Strange New Worlds*, Goldsman

says, noting that "at a certain point we have to hit 'The Cage' and 'Where No Man Has Gone Before'", allowing them to have Spock move up and down the emotional scale before becoming fully logical.

"We don't really worry about it," he says of the implications of hitting *TOS*, "but we're thoughtful in the same way that we're thoughtful of Pike's journey and where he has to go and how that works. I don't mean his death, because god knows we've talked about that until we're blue in the face, just where he is canonically in terms of location, who is or isn't on the Enterprise.

"But you can see that's the stuff where we're a little bit already in violation. We've already pulled some folks onto the ship that probably weren't really there – at least we certainly have never heard of Uhura being on Pike's Enterprise. And yet here she is. We are thoughtful, but not slavish."

### FAMILIAR FACES

Someone you'll be seeing more of, ahead of his "established" time, is a certain future captain... "What we're dealing with is Lieutenant Kirk, First Officer Kirk. We're not dealing with Captain Kirk, and there's opportunity there," Goldsman explains. "Paul Wesley is really this wonderful – to me – hybrid of Shatner's Kirk and his own. That is, of course, serviced by this moment in the Kirk timeline where he's dating Carol Marcus. So you'll see..."

Would he ever consider using digital technology to recreate beloved characters, as recently embraced in the *Star Wars* universe? "I would consider it. My friend Terry Matalas [*Picard* showrunner] is not alone in feeling →



frustrated with Kirk's death in canon. It's why he put his body at Daystrom Station, right? It's a really hard thing to figure out how to do, but none of me opposes it. We just don't have plans for it.

"There are a few things that I would retcon if I could, and digital performers could help that. I think in theory, yes. Sadly, just practically speaking, we have no plans for it."

Refreshed old faces aside, there's also a new character onboard the Enterprise: Chief Engineer Pelia, played by Carol Kane, star of *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and the musical *Wicked*.

"I can tell you that just having her on a television show is kind of everybody's dream come true," Goldsman says. "She's extraordinary. I don't want to give away much about her character because I think it's sort of fun. It all comes out pretty quickly. There's nothing I could say about Carol Kane that hasn't been said. She can shift from drama to comedy on a dime. The timing that is legendary is true. She can just give another actor a look, and you burst into hysterics."

As for returning characters, Goldsman says they'd like to see more of Jesse James Keitel as Angel. "There are a couple of characters that we really want to bring back – Jesse is one of them. We keep imagining a pie-in-the-sky Angel/Harry Mudd team-up. We haven't done it, but we like it. And so the answer is yes. To come. We hope."

But what of the fate of existing characters – namely Rebecca Romijn's Number One, last seen arrested for being a genetically-altered Illyrian. Well, until she was seen in promotional materials for the new season.

"Well, here's the truth. We all know that Number One is on Pike's Enterprise for 'The Cage', right?"

So yes, thankfully, Rebecca remains on our show. So you can be sure that at a certain point, either in the first episode, or in the third season or whatever, she would be returned to her rank and role, because we know that's where she ends up. So when that happens, and how that happens, I will not say, but yes, Number One remains Number One, in job as well as title."

As for her roots and character background, Goldsman says, "For me, one of the episodes that I'm most proud of is an exploration of that in this season."

**“You just keep trying to make the thing, with people who love the thing”**

## PUSHING THE BARRIER

Before Pike meets his pre-written fate, there's much more adventure to be had. With some of *The Original Series* having been written by established science fiction authors, could that be done in today's TV world?

"I'm friends with Michael Chabon, who's a great fiction writer, and who writes *Star Trek*," Goldsman says. "And every year for the show, I'm like, 'God, Michael, you should just write an episode.' But the truth is, television doesn't really work that way as easily as it would when we fantasize, because we do work these episodes in the room."

"So to write an episode, unless it's a real one-off, requires not just the writing time, but the sitting in story room time. And that's different today. So I'd say it's possible, and there are a couple of real wild hairs we have discussed and continue to discuss. So not never, but not so far."

As for the immediate future of *Strange New Worlds* – and *Star Trek* in general – Goldsman has a simple philosophy. "You just keep trying to make the thing, with people who love the thing, and figure that if you like it, and you're a fan, there are folks out there who will like it too," he explains. "The thing about *Star Trek* is that the infinite diversity in infinite combinations is also true of *Star Trek* itself."

"It has lived in many genres, right? That's the really interesting thing about *Star Trek*. Almost like science fiction itself, *Star Trek* allows you to be in space adventures, or at home adventures or on planet adventures. And then amongst them, there can be dramas and westerns and comedies."

"So *Star Trek* has wide arms when it comes to the kind of entertainment it can accommodate, as long as it's *Star Trek*. I think that is what we will always be discovering: how much does it bend before it breaks? Weirdly, that's our job, to keep trying to put it out there, bend it a little bit and not break it."

Presumably applying that slight pressure must be the best possible day job a group of fans could have...

"The truth is, we're nerds, right?" Goldsman laughs. "We have to be. We're sitting here discussing whether the collector on the nacelle is going to open or not. You have to like that. There's no version of anybody who's not *really, really* a fan being able to tolerate the stuff that we talk about. But for us, it's delightful."

"I still have the blueprints of the old Enterprise," he says of being a childhood fan. "So now to be able to actually make the toy move in CG, where's the rec deck – we do that *all the time*."

"And it makes us happy. I think it would have to make you happy to make people watching it happy. Anything that's made cynically, you can feel."

"I always say *The Love Boat* was somebody's best work. Somebody had to love typing *The Love Boat* for it to be entertaining. We love *Star Trek*, so we love all the back and forth that I think would drive a normal person mad!" ●

*Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* is on Paramount+ from 15 June.



Jess Bush  
as Nurse  
Christine  
Chapel.



Melissa Navia  
as Ilia,  
braving the  
red shirt...





Ethan Peck as  
Dr Spock. (We  
joke – don't  
write in.)



TRANSFORMERS:  
RISE OF THE BEASTS

# BEAST







# WARS

THE MAMMOTH  
MACHINES ROLL OUT  
ONCE MORE IN  
***TRANSFORMERS:  
RISE OF THE BEASTS***

WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**





Noah subtly tries to ignore Mirage. And fails.

HERE'S MORE TO *TRANSFORMERS: Rise Of The Beast*s than meets the eye. Based on the '80s cartoons, the seventh instalment in the movie franchise promises to deliver all the explosions, bombastic action and giant robots that audiences have come to expect. But, despite its epic scope and scale, *Rise Of The Beast*s also provides more character-driven arcs for not only the humans, but the leader of the Autobots himself, Optimus Prime.

"Something I really wanted to bring into this was a lot of heart, with a lot of culture and a lot of us," director Steven Caple Jr tells *SFX*. "I felt like the Transformers, especially the Autobots and these new factions, they emote like they never have before in any other movie. I wanted to dive deeper into Optimus Prime and the layers behind him. We know Prime is

this very noble character. He is for all mankind. In this film, he doesn't start out that way. We see the growth of him."

"Getting under the skin of one of the Transformers was so satisfying," elaborates executive producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura. "That was another thing we were trying to figure out how to do. We had many conversations about the Beasts over the years. Hasbro, in particular, was pushing for us to do the Beasts. We were not resistant to it, but how do you do the Beasts? What's great about the Autobots is they can turn into cars, so how does a gorilla hide in the city?"

*Rise Of The Beast*s unfolds in 1994, following the events of 2018's *Bumblebee*. For several years, Optimus Prime and the Autobots have marshalled their strength, awaiting the perfect moment to reclaim their home world from the

invading Decepticons. The problem? The robots-in-disguise are stuck on Earth.

"Optimus comes across something that may help him, but he starts to butt heads with other people who want the same object," Caple says. "Everyone has a different motive and agenda. But ultimately, his main goal is to get back home and save his planet. Then we all realise that there's a bigger threat at large. Will he help save the Earth? You get to see Optimus become the Prime that we always knew."

"Then he meets other people along the way," he continues. "We have Optimus Primal, who is a very new character, who is also a leader. You see him clash with Optimus Prime a bit. We play him as someone who is wiser, for the time being. For the fans who do know the lore, there are some small nuggets in there in terms of Optimus Primal and who he is exactly and

STOCK ART: GETTY





Shooting at Machu Picchu: careful now.



Director Steven Caple Jr larks about.



Caple meets a Peruvian extra.

how he has heard about Optimus Prime. Without going into too much detail, they eventually run into each other and there is a lot of learning to be had and there is an arc between the two."

*Rise Of The Beasts* introduces a breed of Transformers known as Maximals, first seen on-screen in '90s animated series *Beast Wars*, to the movie franchise. These newcomers include Cheetor (alternate form a cheetah) Airazor (a bird of prey), Rhinox (a rhinoceros, natch) and the gorilla-shaped Optimus Primal. The movie opens with a crash course on the origins of these animalistic descendants of the



Optimus Prime's gun is bigger than yours.



Noah and Elena have a Bill and Ted moment.

Autobots, where they came from and what they're doing on Earth. Eventually, the two groups will join forces to battle common enemies: the Decepticons, the Terrorcons and the planet-consuming Unicron, a force that has placed Earth on its menu. But like most families, they butt heads at first.

"That's what is fun about it," notes di Bonaventura. "The Maximals are like, 'Wait a second.' Their reactions to each other are very similar to humans when they first see the Autobots. They're like, 'Whoa. What the hell is that? Friend or foe?' There is a lot of tension in that meeting. We don't make it easy on purpose. They drop the hostility fairly quickly, but the unity takes time to develop. You get to see them build trust and then it's put to the test in the movie."

Fans also get to geek out over Autobots such as Optimus Prime, Wheelback and Stratosphere. Bumblebee continues to serve as

Prime's right-hand man. New addition Arcee comes across as a loyal soldier. But Caple strived to include a robot that bounced off those personalities. Enter Mirage, who takes centre stage in the narrative.

"The Autobots were very obedient and followed in line when it came to their commander," Caple reflects. "Mirage is spicier and edgier. He is going to test and challenge Optimus Prime. In a place where everyone is dying to get home and save Cybertron, Mirage is having fun. 'I like Earth. I like the human beings.' He brings a different flair to each scene. He's very showboat-y. He's a Porsche, in terms of the car. You can see what kind of character he is. He's fun and loves fast things." ➔





# HUMAN NATURE

## ANTHONY RAMOS IS NOAH

**Introduce us to your character Noah. Who is he and how does he become aligned with the Transformers?**

■ Noah is ex-military and was dishonourably discharged. He goes back home and deals with the reality of living with his brother and mother, and finding a job. Noah is a hustler, so he's like "I am good at fixing things. I can fix cable boxes. I can fix cars. I can fix things." He gets offered to go on a bigger job, where Noah meets our other main character, Mirage. The story goes from there. All he cares about is protecting his family and doing right for them.

**Noah gets partnered with Mirage. What does that dynamic look like?**

■ At first, it's apprehensive. Noah doesn't trust him: "You're a talking robot, bro. I'm human. How did this happen? How did I get here?" These guys meet and he's like, "Why should I trust you? How will I be able to trust you? I didn't even know you things existed." But like any relationship, you see those guards go down. You see the relationship blossom. It also helps that Mirage is super-charismatic and voiced by a brilliant actor in Pete Davidson.

**Rise Of The Beasts contains plenty of action, destruction, explosions and CG. What was the craziest day on set?**

■ The craziest day on set was I almost got burned by one of the fireworks that went off. In one of the scenes, there's a big battle on this lawn at a museum. You can see some of it in the trailer. My windbreaker starts to catch fire a little bit. You can see a spark go into my windbreaker. It's the actual take that they used. Another crazy day was standing on a cliff in Machu Picchu and having a deep conversation with Optimus Prime, which was nobody



Dominique Fishback and Anthony Ramos: aww.

at the time. That was a moment in my life I never thought would happen.

**Assuming Noah returns in the next Transformers sequel, what would you like them to explore with the character?**

■ It's hard for me to answer without giving away nuggets and things we are already going to explore in the movie. I can say this: we are already exploring something in our film that I would have never guessed in the world. And when I read it, I jumped out of my seat. I cursed at my director. "Get the fuck out of here. That is crazy, bro. That is insane that you just did that."

I am super-excited for what is already there. I would like to explore Noah's leadership, this newfound [quality] within himself, after going on this journey with the Autobots and the Maximals. The Noah you see in this first movie, you won't see in the second movie. You'll see a new side of him. It's almost like Rocky in the first movie as opposed to Rocky in the third one.

familiarity, even though they don't know one another. They are a dynamic duo and it's not exactly what we expect. They come to care about each other on a different level.

**Apparently, you gave director Steven Caple Jr pages of notes and questions. What were some of your suggestions? What did you advocate for?**

■ Steven was very adamant that he wanted Elena to be her own individual person, so it was important to me that the script reflected what we talked about. I love to communicate. I love to talk about things. For me, it doesn't matter if it's science fiction with robots or it's *Judas And The Black Messiah*. I approach every character the same way because they are all people with their own traumas and triggers.

So, Steven was like, "You can give me notes at 2.00am." I was like, "Okay." I really did give notes. I sat with the writers two or three times, just to make sure we were sharing Elena's true voice. I advocated for us to make sure we know her relationship with the Autobots. In order for us to relate to the Autobots a little bit more you need humanity. The humanity comes from the humans because you can see them emote. You can see them feel and be delicate towards the love of these robots. For me, if we are going to have humans, let us feel her emotions. Separate from what Noah is doing, I wanted her to have her own relationships.

**Was there a sequence that stood out for you?**

■ Honestly, I think Elena's introduction to the robots is a traumatising experience. We see in the trailer that Noah is hijacked in a car. He's like, "What is happening? I don't know what is going on." That was more delicate. However, Elena's introduction to the world of the Autobots is really explosive. That was pretty epic.

## DOMINIQUE FISHBACK IS ELENA

**How would you describe Elena and how she gets sucked into all the chaos?**

■ She works at a museum. Elena is an artefact researcher. She is super-smart, but she never gets her due because her boss constantly takes credit for her work. When we meet Elena, she is not too sure about herself. I don't think she is adventuresome. As she gets sucked into the world of the Autobots and with Noah, it requires more of her.


**What's the relationship between Elena and Noah?**

■ They get thrust into the world together. They don't share a history. Anthony Ramos and I were friends before *Transformers*. It was cool for us to always talk about doing something epic together. We never imagined it would be something like this.

**How do the two get along?**

■ They are both from Brooklyn, so there is a shorthand and





Optimus  
Primal is the  
leader of the  
Maximals.

There's no denying that the *Transformers* movies excel when 30-foot robots battle, well, other ginormous robots. As a result, the human factor often gets lost in the pandemonium. But *Beasts* slows down enough to thrust two ordinary people into the fray. Anthony Ramos portrays Noah, an ex-military electronics expert, who lives with his family in Brooklyn and supports them. In addition, Dominique Fishback plays Elena, an artefact researcher at a museum where she's underappreciated.

"With the humans, we are meeting two characters where life has not provided the easiest route to success, who have these aspirations and are frustrated with society and the world around them," says di Bonaventura. "Their aspirations are not being fulfilled, and this becomes the fulfilment of it. They get to go on this great journey, which they never imagined they could do."

A fan of the *Transformers*, Cagle cites working alongside Canadian actor Peter Cullen, voice of Optimus Prime in both the original animated series and the live-action feature films, as a pinch-me moment. Another highlight came during a gruelling sequence shot on top of Machu Picchu, the 15th-century Inca

city in Peru. Cagle remembers getting "very emotional at one point. It was tough to shoot because you're very high in altitude, so it's hard for everyone just to breathe," he explains. "I had this genius idea of not only having walking [sequences], but creating a whole action sequence up there, so there's a lot of running involved. And every five to 10 minutes, clouds would interrupt the set."

"I remember we were all tired and exhausted," he continues. "Anthony had to run across the field with someone holding a 30-foot-high stick, which would be Optimus Prime. This was the same day that they opened up Machu Picchu again for visitors and tourists. The tourists were there on the top part of the ruins and we were on the bottom part and running."

"We shot the scene and were exhausted. As Anthony was running and giving it his all, we took the tennis ball [on a pole] out, so it was just Anthony. But this younger kid on the top yelled, 'Run Optimus, run.' You heard his accent. He must have been from Peru. He was genuinely yelling as if Optimus was there next to Noah."

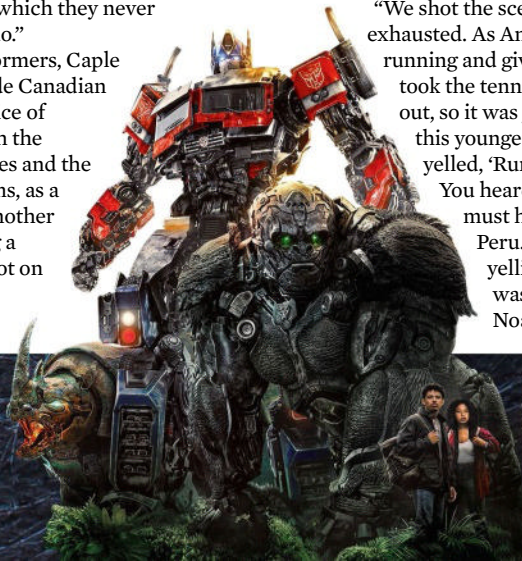
"The kid was so excited," he adds. "It was a reminder for us, and a huge motivator, because Machu Picchu was the first place we shot in Peru. We were looking at each other like, 'Dude, this is special. People are really connected to these characters. And we get to bring it to this specific place.' Just to hear that young kid cheer Optimus Prime reminds you how global and big he is."

Franchises tend to run out of gas at the box office the longer they persist. *John Wick: Chapter 4* and *Scream VI*, however, bucked that trend in 2023, with those sequels grabbing their highest grosses to date. So how would di Bonaventura sum up the current state of the *Transformers* universe and its future?

"I am hoping it's really big," he says. "You never know is the answer. The teaser has gotten such great reactions and made us feel confident that the desire to see another *Transformers* movie is alive and well. How big it is... hard to say."

"It's really hard to think we are going to beat a billion dollars. That would be arrogant of us, to presume something like that. On the other hand, you need pretty big grosses to do this kind of scale of movie-making. We are cautiously optimistic." ●

*Transformers: Rise Of The Beasts* is in cinemas from 8 June.





SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS  
THE SPIDER-VERSE

# TAN

MILES MORALES RETURNS – AND WITH MORE  
SPIDER-FRIENDS THAN EVER. THE DIRECTORS OF  
**SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS  
THE SPIDER-VERSE**  
GUIDE US THROUGH THEIR WEBBY MULTIVERSE.  
TRY NOT TO GET TANGLED

WORDS: **JACK SHEPHERD**

# W

# EB



# CLEO







**S**PIDER-MAN: INTO THE Spider-Verse was a revelation; a cinematic masterpiece that pushed the boundaries of animation. “It just

opened up what is possible, what is acceptable, what the audience is willing to take in,” says animator Joaquim Dos Santos. “I came in at the tail end and there were still some screenings where executives were going, ‘I don’t understand, why does it look blurry? I don’t know why these dots are all over the place.’ And it’s like, ‘I promise you, when it’s all together, you will understand.’”

#### CRAWL TOGETHER NOW

The world certainly understood what was going on. *Into The Spider-Verse* brought the multiverse into the mainstream, paving the way for the Marvel Cinematic Universe to introduce multiple versions of the same character. Not only that, but many of the animated movies that have followed – *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish*, *The Mitchells vs*

*The Machines* and Seth Rogen’s upcoming *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem* – have emulated its form-pushing style.

“Establishing a new cinematic language is not something that people are usually open to,” explains Kemp Powers, who co-wrote Pixar’s *Soul*. “It really just gave everybody permission to go crazy,” adds Dos Santos.

Of course, with great box office success comes a great desire for more, and even before *Into The Spider-Verse* reached cinemas, a sequel entered development. In 2018, writers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller (previously best known for directing *21 Jump Street* and *The Lego Movie*) began working on a screenplay with David Callaham, while Powers, Dos Santos and Justin K Thompson came aboard to co-direct.

With their great responsibilities divided out, they forged ahead with creating a second film about the newly appointed Spider-Man, Miles Morales (voiced by Shameik Moore), one that takes our hero deeper into the multiverse than ever before.

If *Into The Spider-Verse* was about Miles learning that anyone could wear

the mask, then the sequel, *Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse*, is about him learning *how* to wear the mask. “It’s speaking to this idea of, there’s more than one way to be a hero,” Powers tells *SFX*. “As it pertains to Spider-Man, it’s speaking to this idea: what are the rules of being Spider-Man? What are the rules of being a hero? And do we always have to stick so rigidly to those rules?”

“Spider-Man, historically, is a character who has to suffer, who can never have everything that he wants. Miles is very different from Peter Parker. Parker often lives with his Aunt May, so the secrecy of his dual life is different to Miles, who has both his parents, and is incredibly close with his parents, and that involves not really having any secrets.

“Miles’s background, his upbringing, puts him at odds with what being Spider-Man is supposed to be, other than

Miles Morales  
(Shameik  
Moore) as  
Spider-Man.





Miles and  
Gwen Stacy  
take on The  
Spot.



and the directors keep hush on the specifics, but they do tease how the events of the first film tie into the sequel.

"When you think about the collider," Dos Santos says, referring to the machine built by Wilson Fisk in the hope of bringing back his family from another dimension in *Into The Spider-Verse*, "and you think about how destructive a force that is, a lot ties back to that moment. There's an inception moment there that took place again. That's not a chapter that's been closed. The fact that that happened created a bit of a mess that we're in currently."

### FUTURE SHOCK

Perhaps surprisingly, the first two trailers for *Across The Spider-Verse* put less emphasis on rivalry between The Spot and Miles, and more on the tension and fighting between Miles and the leader of the Spider-Society, Miguel O'Hara (Oscar Isaac).

He's also known as Spider-Man 2099, a futuristic version of Spider-Man who was not bitten by a radioactive spider but built a super-suit himself. He doesn't stick to walls but climbs them using claws that can rip through metal; he doesn't have a Spider-Sense but he does

have fangs and a toxin that he injects into people. He's a different proposition to Peter Parker altogether.

"Miguel definitely becomes an antagonist to Miles, but his goals are very understandable," says Powers. "Some people might side with Miles's perspective, but some people might side with Miguel's."

"You know, Miguel is the leader of this Spider-Force for a reason. He bears this incredible sense of responsibility. Spider-Man has always been your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man, and Miguel is very different in that his responsibilities go way beyond any one neighbourhood. He's just a fascinating character, but he's not a villain. He's a good guy." →

being a hero who takes care of the downtrodden and protects the city."

Miles, therefore, must come to understand what he stands for, and a guiding light on that journey is Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld). In fact, *Across The Spider-Verse* starts in Gwen's dimension, immediately after the events of *Into The Spider-Verse*. The art style of her world is inspired by Gwen's comic books, with watercolour washes that constantly change colour to suit her mood; when she gets angry, everything turns red.

"It looks strikingly different from the first film," says Dos Santos. "It was really important to do that visually, to establish that there's going to be new visual language in this film."

"The Gwen opening is really about world-building and establishing the rules before we return to Miles, because we do a jump of over a year," adds Powers.

Gwen soon properly introduces Miles to other worlds outside his own universe, and to a group of Spider-Protectors known as the Spider-Society, who guard the multiverse against potential threats. One of those threats is The Spot (Jason Schwartzman), a supervillain with multiverse portals all over his body. It's not yet clear how the Dalmatian-esque nemesis will become a universe-ending foe,

Spider-Man  
2099 (Oscar  
Isaac) has beef  
with Miles.



Jessica Drew  
(Issa Rae) as  
Spider-  
Woman.







Miles: older  
and... wiser?  
Maybe just  
a bit.



## A MILLION MILES AN HOUR

Shameik Moore, the voice of Miles Morales, teases what's in store for his Spider-Man in *Across The Spider-Verse*

### Can you explain the emotional journey Miles goes through?

Miles has comfortably taken on the role of Spider-Man in his own universe. It's been a year and a half since the last movie and I think he's looking for that challenge now. The biggest challenge is staying in school and being a good son to his mom and dad, but as Spider-Man, he's looking for [a challenge].

His first real task was saving the multiverse and he did – he successfully got his friends home and beat Kingpin and stopped the collider. So he's like, "Alright, what's my next big thing?" There's a lot of emotion in that process.

And there's heartbreak in this film; we've seen [in the trailers] Miguel O'Hara chasing Miles. That is pretty heartbreaking because there's a whole Spider-Society, a whole group of Spiders that fight on the same side, and Miles just wants to be accepted, but they have a difference in opinion. That leads them to be on opposite sides of the fence, even though they're on the same field.

It's like looking up to somebody and then when you meet them they're not the person you thought they were. I can personally say that is one of the most heartbreaking things ever.

### Miguel and Miles's antagonistic relationship seems surprising...

Miles is heartbroken by Miguel. He's like, "Dude, I just wanted to be a part of your society, I'm the coolest Spider there is. But, if you want to be like that, then be like that, you're not gonna stop me."

### How did your approach to voicing Miles change for the sequel?

They wanted Miles to be a lot more confident. From day one, it was like "Miles knows what he wants." In the first movie, Miles didn't really get it until the very end of the movie. The interior of the work is more confident and Miles is more sure of himself.

### Lord and Miller wrote this movie, and many cast members have said they did improv that was used in the final cut. What was that like?

I didn't do much improv – I feel like I did more on the first one. The other cast members do, but with me, I feel as though they really want it by the book. Everything Miles says is very intricate, because certain lines lead into other moments. It's different with the other Spiders, but it's Miles's movie.

### Was there anything that you read on the page that, now you've seen it animated, surpassed what you could have imagined at the time?

They definitely levelled up. The animation was already so beautiful, but this time around, they really stepped it up. Can't take any credit for that, but they truly know what they're doing in that animation department. I'm honoured to be the voice of Miles with that animation team. It's like 007's Q giving him gadgets – they really finish the character.

### Are you voicing any other character in this one?

I am Miles Morales... And they're... I will say I am Miles Morales. I guess we'll see if there are any more... I guess we'll see what that means!

### There's another sequel on the way too. Have you recorded lines for that one?

That's incoming. We're still on this film right now.

### The trailers also feature a mention of events in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It must be cool to be linked to that?

I feel like I know where you're going with this, and I absolutely would [like that]! It would be an amazing opportunity. And if we can, if they decide to play with that, I'm ready.

Jessica and  
Spider-Man  
2099, aka  
Miguel O'Hara.



Miguel also happens to be the Spider-Man who, in the second trailer, mentions "Doctor Strange and that little nerd back on Earth-199999," a clear reference to the live-action movies. "The world of Miles Morales and Spider-Verse, it's not tied into the Marvel Cinematic Universe or anything like that," Powers explains.


"But this is a Lord and Miller film. We like to have a little bit of fun, we like to be a little bit meta and to acknowledge the world in which we are creating these stories. That's the best way to explain it.

"This isn't something where we did anything in conjunction with Marvel. Miles's universe, trust me, there's plenty to work with. That gag is one of many, and my favourite gag is one that people don't know about yet. But I think when they see it, they're going to be pretty stunned. It's a serious film, but it's also a film with a lot of fun in it."


Despite some probing from *SFX*, Powers won't confirm or deny reports that the sequel includes a







Gwen and Miles, just hanging out together.



through the late '70s and early '80s, and the printing techniques "weren't super precise," Dos Santos explains. "You're like, 'Okay, that's a crowd of people', but look up close, and what was actually on the page was some squiggles.

"I remember we walked into a screening room [for an animation test], there were squiggles on the screen, and we were like, 'Yep, those are the squiggles.' Then they started moving like people. And we were like, 'Wow, what just happened here? This is madness.'"

Equally challenging was having dozens of Spider-Men on screen at once. There's a point where there are over 50 on screen, and each has their own unique animation style. "Movement is an indication of character," Dos Santos says, "and that gets applied even to those massive scenes."

The problem was accentuating certain heroes while trying to avoid having the background characters become one singular, non-distinguishable horde, "like a *World War Z*-style army crawling at you." The animators therefore had to consider how every character was animated compared to Miles, Miguel and Gwen.

"A lot of design work went into characters that, let's be honest, show up for a few seconds," Powers says.

The directorial team went on various deep dives into Spider-Man lore to find characters to inhabit their movie, finding some "absolutely bonkers" and "obscure" superheroes. "Legally we couldn't use half of them," says Dos Santos.

Scarlet Spider is one addition he's particularly proud of. The character's

appearance will play with his anatomy, similar to how some of the '90s comics saw Spider-Man pull off some extreme, physically impossible poses.

Powers, meanwhile, points to Web-Slinger, the cowboy Spider-Man on a horse, as a particular favourite.

"There's also a few from videogames, and from some old cartoons, and there's something really funny about seeing their style done," he says. "It was surreal," Dos Santos adds. "I worked as a story artist on [2008-2009 animated show] *The Spectacular Spider-Man*, and then seeing Josh Keaton, who did the original voice, come back was just crazy."


And this is just the beginning of the follow-ups. The directors say you should be just as excited for the sequel, *Beyond The Spider-Verse*, scheduled for release in March 2024.

"*Across The Spider-Verse* is a movie on its own, but it definitely ends on a bit of a cliffhanger," says Powers. "I think it's a good cliffhanger. We hope that it's a satisfying tee-up for what's coming in the third film, because you want people to be excited about what's coming next."

"And it helps that we knew going in that this was part two of a three-part story. Since you already know that that third story is guaranteed, you can tackle it a bit differently. That being said, there's a lot of key characters in this film, and there's a story in this film that has an arc of its own that we needed to complete."

"I was very satisfied after *The Empire Strikes Back*," adds Dos Santos. "And hopefully, this is our *Empire*." ●

*Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse* is in cinemas from 2 June.



live-action segment featuring Tom Holland's Peter Parker or either of the other incarnations of the character, instead reiterating that Miles has more than enough alternate, animated universes to explore. Indeed, there are five distinctly styled dimensions in which Miles gets entangled during *Across The Spider-Verse*, each with its own distinctive look.

"The first film, we're in Miles's world and other characters are entering into his world," Dos Santos says. "This is about Miles going out across the multiverse and being in these different worlds. We're not just getting snippets of these worlds – we need to create entire worlds, essentially five or six films in one. That was a scary prospect."

### HISTORY REPEATING

One world that was a particularly tricky proposition was the home of Pavitr Prabhakar, called Mumbattan. The animation style was inspired by comic books from India that were distributed



Gwen (Hailee Steinfeld) welcomes Miles.





# UNDER

SFX DEEP-DIVES WITH DIRECTOR ROB MARSHALL ON HOW HE REMADE (AND CHANGED) THE DISNEY

**F**OR ROB MARSHALL, DIRECTING a live-action version of *The Little Mermaid* felt something like destiny. “In 1989, when [the animated movie] came out, it really was the return of the movie musical,” he tells *SFX*. “When I did [directorial debut] *Chicago*, I felt a deep connection with *Mermaid*, because they had kicked the door open for movie musicals, and we then pushed the door even further with a live-action musical. Audiences

were ready to accept actors actually moving from scene into song. So when they came and asked me to do this, it felt like fate.”

The original *Little Mermaid* was, at the time, a bold move for Disney, the company putting its weight behind an untested female-led animated picture. The result kickstarted a decade-long period known as the Disney Renaissance, which saw *Beauty And The Beast*, *Aladdin* and *The Lion King* all being produced. Of course, more recently, those three movies

have all been remade in live-action, and now *The Little Mermaid*’s making the jump. This one, however, is different.

On a narrative level, *The Little Mermaid* is one of the more controversial Renaissance-era products. Ariel, the eponymous protagonist, seeks to live among the humans on the surface world and makes a deal with the evil sea witch Ursula to give up her voice and family to be with Eric, a Prince Charming-like character. Actress Keira Knightley made headlines a few





# THE CGI

ANIMATED CLASSIC **THE LITTLE MERMAID** WORDS: **JACK SHEPHERD**

years ago when she revealed that she had banned her children from watching *The Little Mermaid*. “The songs are great,” she said, “but do not give your voice up for a man!”

Marshall – who previously directed *Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (the one not starring Knightley), *Mary Poppins Returns* and *Into the Woods* – promises that his version will address those concerns. “We felt the same way,” he says. “What makes it a very modern story is that [Ariel]’s not giving up her voice for

a man, that’s not what’s happening here.” He explains that the narrative has been changed so that, while Ariel does give up her voice, she’s doing so because she believes that the inhabitants of the sea – ruled over by her father, Triton (Javier Bardem) – are shutting out the surface world for unfair reasons; she believes that the humans are not barbarians.

“That idea was very modern, to not be afraid of the ‘other’,” Marshall continues. “When we were making this, walls were being put up and

divisions were being created, and people were getting more insular. This is a character who’s reaching through fear. They are building a bridge as opposed to a wall. It was an antidote to what was happening in the world and to the divisions that were and are happening in the world. It is a reminder that we’re all one.”

The love story between Ariel (brought to life by Halle Bailey) and Eric (Jonah Hauer-King, rather than the previously rumoured Harry Styles) now plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, →



Ariel (Halle Bailey) belts out her big number.

Javier Bardem as King Triton: fish out of water.

Ariel and Prince Eric (Jonah Hauer-King).

Noma Dumezweni plays Queen Selina.

Marshall says. "This young, naive, headstrong girl finds this kindred spirit, because Eric has a different trajectory. He is not afraid of the 'other'. They find each other from these different worlds, not being afraid to be with each other against all odds, and they build that bridge. She's not just falling for the cute guy."

It sounds like a fair amount has been changed, then. "This really is a reimagining of *Little Mermaid* more than a remake," Marshall stresses. "There are things in animated musicals that you just accept that you just wouldn't accept in live-action – you have to make sure that you've earned a song, as an example, and it can't feel pasted on."

"With a song like 'Part Of Your World' in the animated film, there's a lot of time spent on [the crab character] Sebastian doing these pratfalls, falling over cups, big gags. But that song is the motor for the entire piece. It's our 'Somewhere Over The Rainbow' and it needed to be treated like that."

"So Sebastian is not around when Ariel's singing 'Part Of Your World' because we're supposed to believe this real person and you want to be with her and understand what she's

feeling. And these are things you can do, and you can fix, and make work for live-action."

One character who's been categorically left on the chopping board is Chef Louis, the infamous French chef who races around a kitchen trying to cook Sebastian.

"That's when you realise we're not an animated movie," Marshall says. "The animated movie stays forever, and people can go and watch that. This needs to work in a realistic way. You have to be brave enough to make the tough choices."

## AERIAL ANTICS

When Marshall refers to *The Little Mermaid* – which takes place in an underwater world where animals talk – as realistic, he's not being facetious; he wants audiences to be able to invest in this fantastical story and not have over-the-top gags or strange chefs distract from the movie's emotional core.

To achieve the immersion that Marshall was after, the filmmaking team needed to utilise cutting-edge visual effects. Coincidentally, at the same time as they worked on *The Little Mermaid*, another director was forging forward with his

deep-diving epic, *Avatar: The Way of Water*, which was filmed primarily in large water tanks. Despite both being produced by Disney, Marshall says there was no communication between himself and James Cameron. "We were creating something very different because it's a musical," he says. "It's a different kind of world you're looking for and we had more real people underwater."

However, not much of *The Little Mermaid* was filmed underwater, the actors instead primarily being lifted up by rigs that allowed them to, as explained by Bailey during a Q&A, "swim in the air".


"I started all the scene work on our feet, because we had to understand what the scenes are about," Marshall says. "Let's say there's a scene between Triton and Ariel. We would play that scene on their feet so the actors could understand what it's about, and then we put them in rigs and started to work out how they would be moving."

"I could only sometimes film a line or two and then I'd have to cut, because they would have to be on a different rig and moving in a different way for the next line. So I explained to them, 'Let's know the scenes deeply, let's understand them so that when we're breaking them apart like a mosaic, we don't lose the






Daveed Diggs voices Sebastian the crab.



"You know, this almost makes me want to sing."



"This looks like a delightful picnic spot."



Melissa McCarthy as Ursula: boo, hiss!

scene for the technical part of it.' I did not want the technical part to lead the film at all. We needed the scene work to really lead."

The trickiest thing to get right was the movie's biggest musical number (and arguably the most catchy Disney song ever released), "Under the Sea". Marshall brought the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater troupe from New York to London, where the movie was filming, to help create the huge production, the dancers acting out moves that would later be painted over by animators. "I took this idea from Walt Disney himself, because he worked with Ballet Russe when he was creating *Fantasia's* 'Nutcracker Suite,'" he says.

The challenge was working out which creatures would be covering which dancers. "We had to find photoreal creatures that we thought already looked like they were dancing," Marshall says. "Like a ribbon eel, or a mimic octopus, or a starfish that looks like it's doing cartwheels and spinning. We had to find fish that had a natural sensibility towards dance. Then we worked with the dancers to create this huge, massive number which has one live person in it. The rest is all CG."

After the filming was completed, the work on creating a CG world began. Marshall brought in artists and creators who had previously worked on the live-action version of *The Lion King*, which likewise dealt with talking animals.

"One thing that's very helpful is that we meet all of these characters underwater," the director says. "Above water, it's a very real world. But underwater, that's where you have merpeople, mermaids and people who sing and creatures that talk because it's its own hidden world, and it's a fantastical world."

#### WATERWORLD

Putting an emphasis on the underwater setting meant two more big changes from the animated movie. Firstly, Scuttle the seagull has been turned into a diving bird. Secondly, and more fundamental to the story, Ariel's never previously been to the surface.

"She comes to the surface for the first time in our film and she breaks all the rules to do that," Marshall says. "It's how deeply passionate she feels about wanting to see that humans aren't what people say they are."

Marshall adds that, when creating his live-action story, he saw the original animation

as a "wonderful jumping off point" more than anything else. "There are things that are iconic about it. In those few places, you try and honour that. But live-action films are longer than shorter animated films. Ariel had one song in the original. One song! The lead character in a musical! That's kind of crazy. So we found more musical material that Alan Menken and Lin Manuel Miranda wrote the lyrics for.

"Lin Manuel's such a huge fan and so good at integrating himself into what was already there. We were able to then give Eric a song and Ariel another song and another reprise, and then give Scuttle a song. We took the bones [of the original] and fleshed it out into a deeper, more emotional, more fully realised piece. A full live-action film."

#### WATCH AND YOU'LL SEE

In the end, Marshall just hopes that, after all these years, *The Little Mermaid* will have people feeling emotional in cinemas. "I know this sounds crazy, but when we released that little tiny teaser of Ariel singing 'Part Of Your World', people were crying. They were moved. They were like, 'Why am I crying?'"

"And I'm like, I know why you were crying – because she feels it deeply." Even under all the CG, at its heart *The Little Mermaid* just wants to move you. ●

*The Little Mermaid* is in cinemas from 26 May.



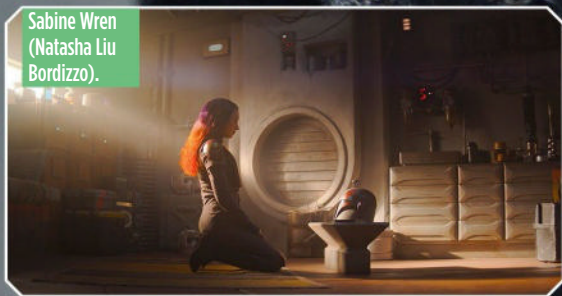
# THE FORCE

IGNITE LIGHTSABERS!  
HERE'S EVERYTHING  
WE LEARNED ABOUT  
THE FUTURE OF STAR  
WARS AT THIS YEAR'S  
CELEBRATION

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



Sabine Wren  
(Natasha Liu  
Bordizzo).



The Senators  
have a quick  
Zoom call.



Baylan  
Skoll (Ray  
Stevenson).

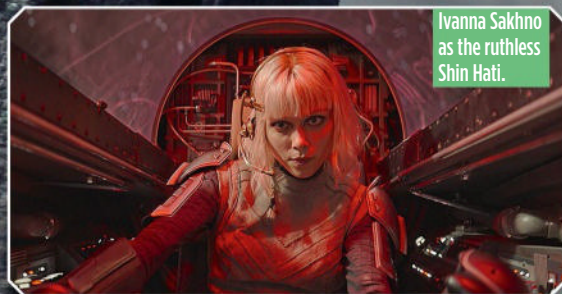




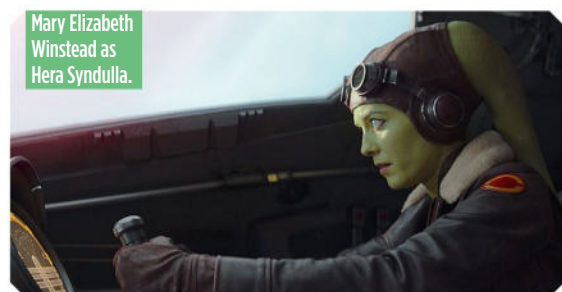
# REAWAKENS



Rosario Dawson as Ahsoka Tano: real-life fan.



Ivanna Sakho as the ruthless Shin Hati.



Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Hera Syndulla.

## STAR WARS: AHSOKA

The Padawan strikes back

**W**e've already met the live-action incarnation of animated icon Ahsoka Tano in *The Mandalorian* and *The Book Of Boba Fett*. Now Rosario Dawson rocks the montras in her own show as the former Padawan and rebel spy confronts a deadly new threat to a galaxy that's just witnessed the fall of the Empire.

"I felt really blessed to have such volumes of history to actually reflect back on," Dawson told the crowd at Celebration. "Ashley Eckstein [voice of the cartoon Ahsoka] bringing this character from a teenager up until the present did such a remarkable job in developing her. She was hot-headed – she's still stubborn now – but the complexity that she brought to it and the nuances were something to build from. When I think of this show and I think of this journey for Ahsoka, it feels like I have actual visual memories to reflect upon. It's incredible.

"And I have Dave [Filoni] on set every day to ask many, many questions to. It's really such a remarkable space and as a fan it's been really incredible to be part of *Mandalorian* and *Boba*, obviously, but to have this show be a continuation of that journey, that adventure, that we've seen her on has just been exceptional, and I'm so excited for all of you to see where she is now."

Joining the lightsaber-twirling Togrutan are Natasha Liu Bordizzo as ex-bounty hunter Sabine Wren, and Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Hera Syndulla, Twi'lek captain of freighter the *Ghost* – two key players in animated series *Star Wars Rebels* now also brought to the screen in living, breathing form. "There's a pretty rich history that we've seen in *Rebels*, and what happens at the end has had a great effect on her,"

said Winstead. "I had to try to be all that she is, which includes being a leader and a maternal figure, leading an army and being everyone's mom. Those are such different personality traits but somehow she encompasses them all."

"Unlike *The Mandalorian*, where you're starting from scratch, there's a relationship that the audience has with these characters," said executive producer Jon Favreau, who aims to "honour the people who've been there from the beginning and also invite new people in."

Look out for other familiar faces from *Star Wars* lore, including irascible droid Chopper and Diana Lee Inosanto as *The Mandalorian's* Magistrate Morgan Elseth. From *The Clone Wars*, David Tennant returns to voice ancient droid Professor Huyang.

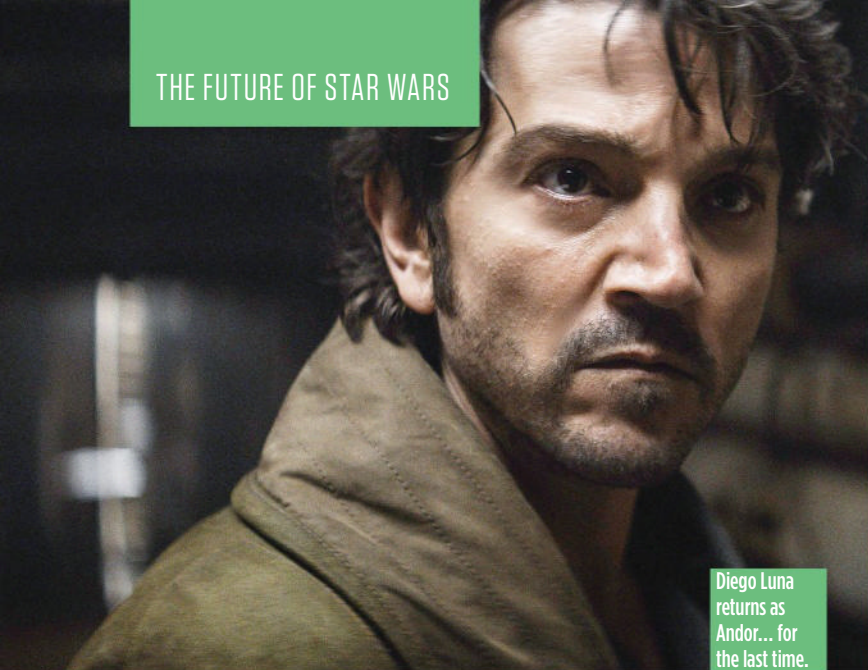
*Ahsoka* will mark the live-action debut of arch Imperial villain Grand Admiral Thrawn, introduced in Timothy Zahn's 1991 novel *Heir To The Empire*. *Star Wars Rebels'* Lars Mikkelsen returns to play the big blue bad.

"One of the things we talk about a lot is though she is not a Jedi, she definitely has so much of that at heart for her," said Dawson. "She really is driven by trying to do good, and I think she recognises a threat that other people aren't necessarily seeing, and she's just keeping her eye on the ball."

"She just really knows that [Thrawn] is formidable, and not someone to take lightly... She knows that these foes are not so easily dismissed."

The eight-episode series launches on Disney+ this August. "We don't pull any punches," Dawson teased. "I'm just letting you guys know. It's full on. Be prepared..."





Diego Luna returns as Andor... for the last time.

## STAR WARS: ANDOR

### The end is in sight

Season one of *Andor* delivered a refreshingly gritty, ground-level take on the universe, pitting Diego Luna's lowlife chancer turned rebel hero against a chillingly bureaucratic Empire that seemed to owe as much to George Lucas's *THX 1138* as *Star Wars*.

At Celebration, returning showrunner Tony Gilroy promised that season two is on course to deliver a fitting encore as Andor and Mon Mothma continue their struggle to build a resistance movement against the Imperial forces. "We're going as quickly as we can to come back with the second half of this and finish it off proudly, and make you proud of us," he said.

"We're on the exact schedule we were on the previous time... We will finish in August, we will spend another year on the post-production and the music and the colour and the visual effects and getting it ready, and

I suppose we'll come out the following August, I think that's the plan. We are motoring ahead."

With locations including Valencia in Spain, the 12-episode season will encompass no less than four years of storytelling, placing its title character in position for the events of 2016's *Rogue One*, which introduced him. Each batch of three episodes will chart a year of Andor's life, ready for that fateful rendezvous with the Death Star plans.

It's also deliberately engineered to be the final season of *Andor*. "If you know your ending, it really helps," said Gilroy. "There's a lot of shows, and shows that I love, that are out there, and they're trying to figure out where they're going. We know exactly where we're going. It means that we can go out full-force. It's like the escape from the prison. It's one way out and you know where you're going."

Yeah, we would have killed for Tony Gilroy's *Lost*...



## ANIMATION

### Mission accomplished

Created by Dave Filoni, *The Bad Batch* launched in 2021, showcasing the exploits of Clone Force 99 in the aftermath of Order 66 and the dark dawn of the Empire. Now a third season is confirmed to be on the way for 2024. It'll be the final mission for this elite squad of troopers as they deal with the death of comrade-in-arms Tech and the capture of Omega – along with the discovery that she has a sister... Ming-Na Wen returns to voice bounty hunter Fennec Shand.

We're also promised a second season of animated prequel anthology series *Tales Of The Jedi* – "[It] was so fun the first time, I decided to do some more," said Filoni – while characters from new toon show *Young Jedi Adventures* are set to visit Batuu, setting of Galaxy's Edge. Bet they won't have to queue, the little blighters.



The Bad Batch. Seems a bit harsh.

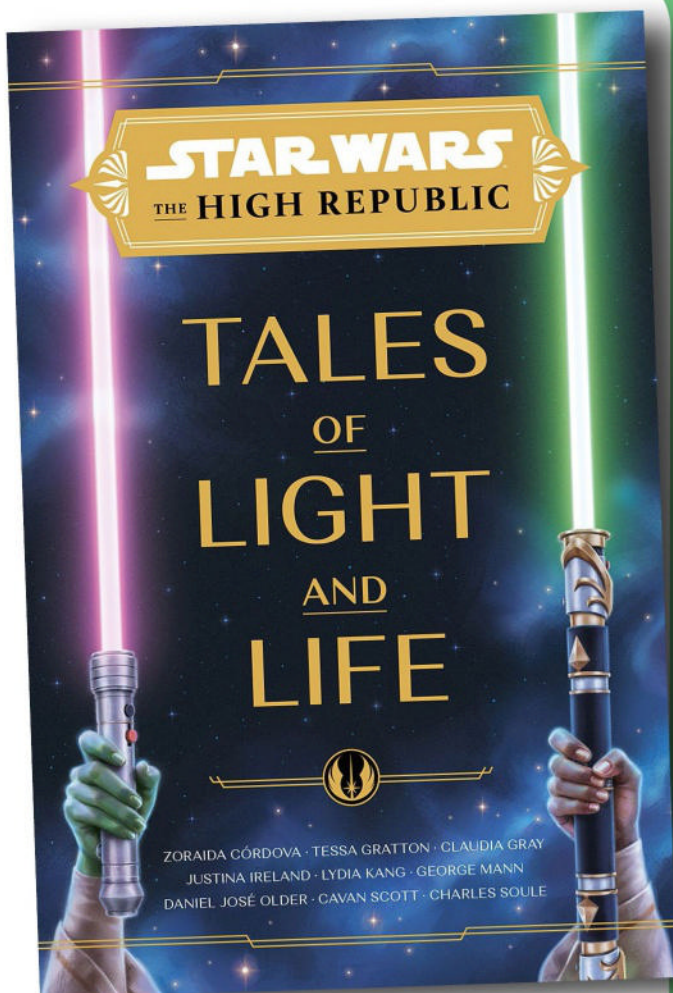


Tales Of The Jedi. Two of them, in fact.



The gang in Young Jedi Adventures.



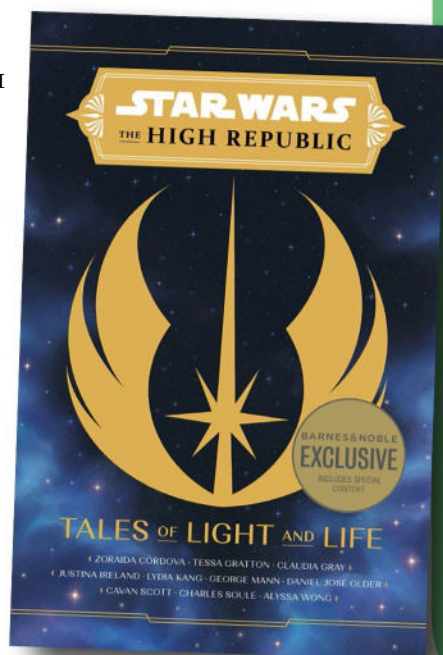


## BOOKS

### High Republican party

**T**he High Republic continues to be where the action's at on the printed page. On 5 September, YA anthology *Star Wars: The High Republic: Tales of Light and Life* will showcase short stories by a variety of authors.

In November George Mann launches Phase III with *The Eye of Darkness*, the first adult novel of the new saga. It's set a year after the fall of Starlight Beacon and marks the return of the Nihil. *Temptation of The Force* by Tessa Gratton arrives summer 2024, while *Trials of The Jedi* by Charles Soule completes the trilogy in spring 2025.



## STAR WARS: SKELETON CREW

### Star Wars 'R' Good Enough

**G**iven the success of *Stranger Things* it's no surprise there's a pinch of vintage Amblin in the DNA of this new live-action *Star Wars* series.

Executive producer Jon Favreau recalled the pitch from creators Jon Watts and Christopher Ford, who previously collaborated on *Spider-Man: Homecoming*: "An Amblin movie that starts off from the perspective of what it's like for ordinary people in the suburbs in the *Star Wars* galaxy and launches them into an adventure."

Yes, the *Goonies* vibe is strong with this one, though as Favreau added, "There's an entryway for younger viewers but you have to create a world that still feels like *Star Wars*, and feels dangerous, and can sit alongside all the other shows."

With episodes helmed by Watts, Jake Schreier, David Lowery and recent Oscar-snafflers the Daniels, it's the story of four kids who make a mysterious discovery on their own planet,

then find themselves flung into a strange and hostile galaxy. Searching for a way home, they encounter unlikely enemies and allies, including a seemingly Force-empowered Jude Law.

"By the time *Return Of The Jedi* came out I must have been about 11 or 12, and that's about the same age as my wonderful fellow cast members," said Law, who's delighted to relive his youth. "One of the highlights was working with the incredible talented people behind the scenes. When you see the droids and the animals and the aliens... it was a true dream come true."

Of course, if anyone's qualified to comment on the pop-culture bloodline of this new series it's Kathleen Kennedy, who co-founded Amblin Entertainment itself. "What we used to do with all the Amblin movies is even though kids were in those movies, they weren't necessarily just kids' films," she said, "and that's

very much the mind of how we approached this show."







## STAR WARS: THE ACOLYTE

Episode Minus One

There's a lot of people in the forthcoming *The Acolyte*.

**A**lready explored in books and comics, the age of the High Republic comes to the screen in *The Acolyte*, a new live-action series pitched as a shadowy mystery-thriller with a distinctly dark side perspective on the last days of the Jedi.

"What I love about the High Republic is that it's in the grand tradition of what *Star Wars* was for the fans for a really long time," said creator and showrunner Leslye Headland, "which is both these kind of high-concept, beautifully rendered stories, but at the same time pulpy action."

On the *Star Wars* timescale we're on the cusp of *Episode One*. "I really loved the challenge of marrying the aesthetics of what has already been designed for the High Republic, and what the Jedi look like in the High Republic, and bridging that gap between who they are then and who they are when we meet them in *The Phantom Menace*," said Headland,

who also wanted to chart the decline of the legendary knights.

"How do you reconcile the Jedi at the height of their power, the galaxy at the height of this age of enlightenment and peace, and who George says they become at the top of *The Phantom Menace*? To me that meant, why don't you tell a story about *Star Wars* from the perspective of the villains? What I pitched to Kathy [Kennedy] was *Frozen meets Kill Bill*."

Starring Amandla Stenberg, Lee Jung-jae, Dafne Keen and Carrie Moss, *The Acolyte* also sees *Russian Doll*'s Rebecca Henderson playing High Republic fave Vernestra Rwoh, the Mirialan prodigy who was the youngest Jedi Knight in a generation.

And look out for a Wookiee Jedi, no less, in the form of Kelnacca, played by Joonas Suotamo – himself no stranger to walking-carpet duty after performing as Chewie in recent *Star Wars* movies.



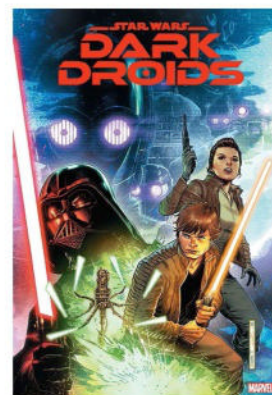
## COMICS

The dark is rising

**L**aunching in August, Marvel's *Star Wars: Dark Droids*

crossover promises to bring a shiver of tech-horror to the galaxy as a mysterious new threat known only as the Scourge corrupts droids, cyborgs and everything in-between (bad news if you're more machine than man...). Charles Soule is writing the main limited series alongside artist Luke Ross, and the fearsome epic will spin-off into one-shots and other continuing series, including *Darth Vader*, *Doctor Aphra* and *Bounty Hunters*.

Elsewhere *Star Wars: The High Republic* continues through Phase III with the first issue arriving in December, once again written by Cavan Scott.



## STAR TOURS

Buckle up for hyperspace!



**T**here are more destinations coming," said Scott Trowbridge of Walt Disney Imagineering, teasing the expansion of the beloved Star Tours ride in Disney parks worldwide. "2024 is going to be a great year for travelling on Star Tours. Because our storytelling is so integrated, we're actually going to be going to some places that haven't been seen [on screen] yet."

"There's a lot of *Star Wars* storytelling that we announced this weekend, a lot of new destinations, and so you can assume that Threepio and our StarSpeeder is going to get caught up right in the middle of a lot of that action."





James Mangold (left) and Dave Filoni.

## THE MOVIES

Three new hopes

**S**tar Wars may have been born on the big screen, but while the franchise has exploded on TV it's been in carbonite suspension cinematically since 2019's divisive *The Rise Of Skywalker*. Now Lucasfilm is looking to rectify that, announcing three new films that span the entire chronology of that galaxy far, far away.

"This really spawns from what George Lucas said years ago, that he created *Star Wars* to move forward and backward along a mythological timeline," said Kathleen Kennedy. "Now we're looking to broaden that timeline, building a rich future, expanding upon the present, going deep into the past to tell our stories, and we're thrilled to be working with some of the best and most passionate filmmakers on projects that will span the past, the present and the future."

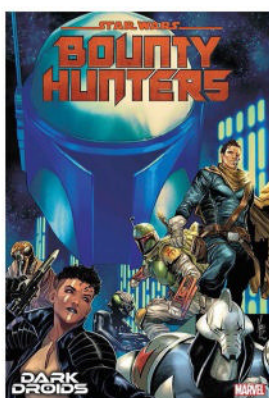
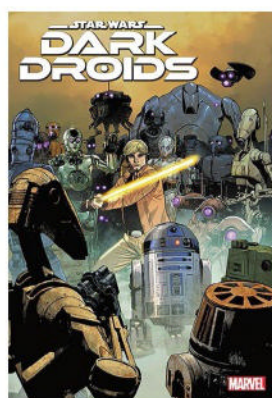
Recently entrusted with resurrecting Indiana Jones, James Mangold will tell the story of the first Jedi to wield the power of the Force. Set 25,000 years before *A New Hope*, in an age of chaos and oppression – nothing changes, eh? – it's inspired by old school

Biblical epics like *The Ten Commandments*. "Where did the Force come from?" said Mangold, recalling the questions that triggered the plot. "When did we discover it? When did we know how to use it? A story just started developing."

Dave Filoni is set to direct a movie set in the Mandalorian era, detailing the escalating conflict between the emergent New Republic and the last remnants of the Empire. It's a tale that will unite key characters from the streaming series for a big-screen crossover, making this the *Star Wars* equivalent of *Avengers Assemble*. "We're drawing on lots of things," revealed Filoni, "and bringing them all together." Are you ready for your close-up, Baby Yoda?

And Daisy Ridley returns in a new adventure set 15 years after *The Rise Of Skywalker*, with Rey building the New Jedi Order and battling the threats that inevitably rise to tear it down. It's set to be directed by *Ms Marvel's* Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, who won an Oscar for 2012 documentary *Saving Face*.

"I've spent the better part of my life meeting real heroes who are overcoming oppressive regimes and battling impossible odds, and I think that's the heart of *Star Wars*," she told Celebration. "And that's why I'm attracted to the promise of a new Jedi Order." The story continues. Just look what you started, Mr Lucas... ●



Rey (Daisy Ridley, left) is back 'n all!



# UNLEASHING THE BEASTS



TYPE GETTY



**A**SIDE FROM A FEW COMPUTER game attempts, some cartoon cameos and a 2021 Mountain Dew advert, *Gremlins* has survived – both as malevolent creatures and a franchise – relatively untouched since sequel *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* in 1990. One might almost say the mythos of the creatures has been something of a secret.

Executive Producers Tze Chun and Brendan Hay will finally change all that with new animated prequel series *Gremlins: Secrets Of The Mogwai*. This origin story shows how the 10-year-old version of Sam Wing – who grows up to become owner of the antiques shop where we first meet the Mogwai in 1984 – meets Gizmo, and begins a series of adventures for the pair.

Hay says that they “just tried to find ways to translate that into an untold tale that was still connected to the *Gremlins* movies. Tze landed on something that I found incredibly useful

AFTER 33 YEARS, THE  
**GREMLINS**  
FRANCHISE IS REBORN AS  
PREQUEL ANIMATION *SECRETS  
OF THE MOGWAI*

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

and have repeated all the time since then – telling a kids’ story with real-world stakes.”

The tale is set in the early 1900s, against the backdrop of China and the associated mythology that Chun was brought up on.

“One of the things that we talked about was how the spirits and creatures from Chinese mythology that are swirling around our main characters as they go on this epic journey tonally are close to Mogwai, meaning that they’re weird and scary and funny. But also they all have their own unique personalities.”

“Amblin, as a partner, gave us the keys to the *Gremlins* franchise and actually really encouraged us to create a mythology around the Mogwai,” Chun explains. “Obviously, in the original movies there’s not a lot of explanation of how they got there.

“We saw [this] as having the ability to travel back to a time when people really knew where the Mogwai came from and excavating that mythology. So there’s a lot that we’re doing in the first season that talks about maybe some things you didn’t know about the Mogwai, and also the origin of the Mogwai themselves.”

“We did also check with Joe Dante,” Hay casually namedrops, “because he’s been consulting on the project throughout. We did ask him, ‘Did you have an origin for the Mogwai? Is there anything you ever want to do with the Mogwai that you didn’t get to in the films?’ Joe has been wonderful, super-supportive, and also shared with us that anything that he had ever wanted to do, or could do, with *Gremlins* was in the two movies. ➔





Ten-year-old  
Sam Wing  
discovers  
that box...

He's like, 'We left nothing on the table, we used everything we could.' The only things that they didn't do were because the puppets wouldn't enable them to. So he, over time, gave us some gag pitches and stuff like that, for jokes to do with the Gremlins."

Hay says that of the questions the original movies posed, "this is kind of our chance to dive into those and try to answer or expand on them." Chun adds that the series is "gonna go way back" – which means not just seeing the "ancestral homeland of the Mogwai", the Valley of Jade, but also looking at how they came to be there.

"What other stories can we tell in this world?" is what he pondered at the series' inception. "There's just so much to mine. We definitely tried to tell the story within the specific backdrop and cultural mythology of China. But there's a lot of years between 10-year-old Sam Wing and the Mr Wing that you see in the movies..." Hay expands slightly. "There's plenty of stories in all directions. We

definitely hint at some of the ones that take place before and show little bits of things. But there's a lot left for us to dive into if we can."

Speaking of other direct connections to the movies – of which there are, as you'd expect, many – they're not all just visual, with Billy actor Zach Galligan returning.

"We also have another cast member from the original *Gremlins* movies who pops up in season one," Hays teases. "But then also, it's [connected] design-wise, like our design team bringing in Gizmo's box from the original film,

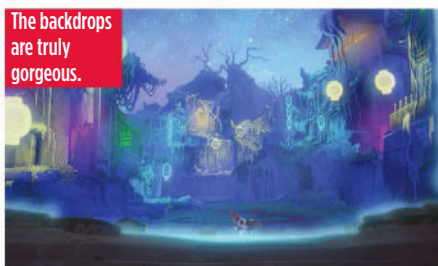
so we get to see what that actually means to Sam Wing and Gizmo and how that became Gizmo's home away from home.

"There's a lot of more subtle Easter eggs," he adds, "like using some of Jerry Goldsmith's original score, or new recordings of it from our composer and her orchestra, and then my favourite one..." he trails off. "I'll let it be a surprise!"

#### GIZ MORE GIZMO

When the show was announced, it was revealed that it was a two-season order from the off, meaning more adventures are in store for Gizmo.

"Season two will bring them to a new place," Chun says. "But there's a lot of backdrops to explore and a lot of places for our main characters to go on adventures. So even as we're writing season one, even in the very first pitch of season one, we talked about what a season two could look like. We were really glad that our partners at Warner Bros and Amblin



The backdrops  
are truly  
gorgeous.



BRIGHT  
LIGHT

AJ LoCascio voices Gizmo

Oh dear...  
what were  
those rules  
again?

**What was your own journey to *Secrets Of The Mogwai*?**

■ It was just a regular audition where they were looking for someone who sounded like Gizmo. The weird thing is, I thought, "Well, anyone can do this." So when I got the callback to do an animation test, I kind of freaked out because I thought, "Why did they choose me?"

**How did you find Gizmo's voice?**

■ It's a voice that I used to do when I was a kid with my dad, because we used to imitate *Bobby's World*, the show that [original Gizmo voice actor] Howie Mandel did. My dad and I used to do the Bobby voice, which is the same as Gizmo, essentially. So it's just a noise or a voice I've done since I was very young.

**What does Gizmo's script read like?**

■ It's the same as the scripts for the show where it's kind of like, "Here's roughly what's going on in English", and then interpreting that through Mogwai. Essentially just translating English into Mogwai has been the entire process - kind of like Chewbacca, where you see his English language in the behind the scenes and then they had reinterpreted. Except I have to do the interpretation.

**Have you always been a *Gremlins* fan?**

■ Oh totally. I'm an '80s kid through and through. My prominent memory of *Gremlins* is being absolutely terrified of the evil Mogwai. I was always afraid they were going to come out of my air vents, I was terrified that the evil Gremlins somehow lived in my house.

**What's it like tackling an iconic character?**

■ It's a lot of pressure because it's something that lives in so many people's minds and hearts that you don't want to sound off. But so far the very few people that have heard the voice - like at Comic-Con - have been very supportive. Zach Galligan said I sounded decent in an interview, so that's good. I guess that's really all the approval I need!

**What can you tell us about the adventure?**

■ I don't know if people really know yet, because not too much has been released, but it's a *big* adventure. It's a big exciting hero's journey for Gizmo and it's pretty wild. I'm such a big fan of *Star Wars* and *The Lord Of The Rings* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and this is, in many ways, a similar story, where they're going off on a big epic journey. It's pretty cool to see Gizmo leave the suburbs and go on an actual adventure. It's pretty wild. It's incredibly vast, they're always moving. There's always something new going on, there's always a new threat.



Yeah, Baby  
Yoda, eat your  
heart out -  
Gizmo's here.



Fun!  
Adventure!  
Excitement!  
Lanterns!

and Max were excited to see what adventures they go on next. We all hope that this is just the beginning for our crew."

Hay laughs. "We've talked about ideas that take us definitely decades further and further ahead to kind of eventually sync up into the film. It'd be, like, 10-plus seasons to hit the '80s from where we are, but we definitely have ideas for other places we want to go with Sam and Gizmo and Gremlins in general."

As for progressing beyond the original movies, the pair agree that a continuation of the Gremlins mythos is not their path.

"I would love to see *Gremlins 3*," Hay says, "[but] I would not want to actually be the person who has to make it. As a fan, I would absolutely love it."

"Joe has a great quote that he did his best to make *Gremlins 2* sequel-proof, that you couldn't make another movie after *Gremlins 2*. That movie is just such a perfect cap to everything. Yeah, that's a challenge for someone else!"

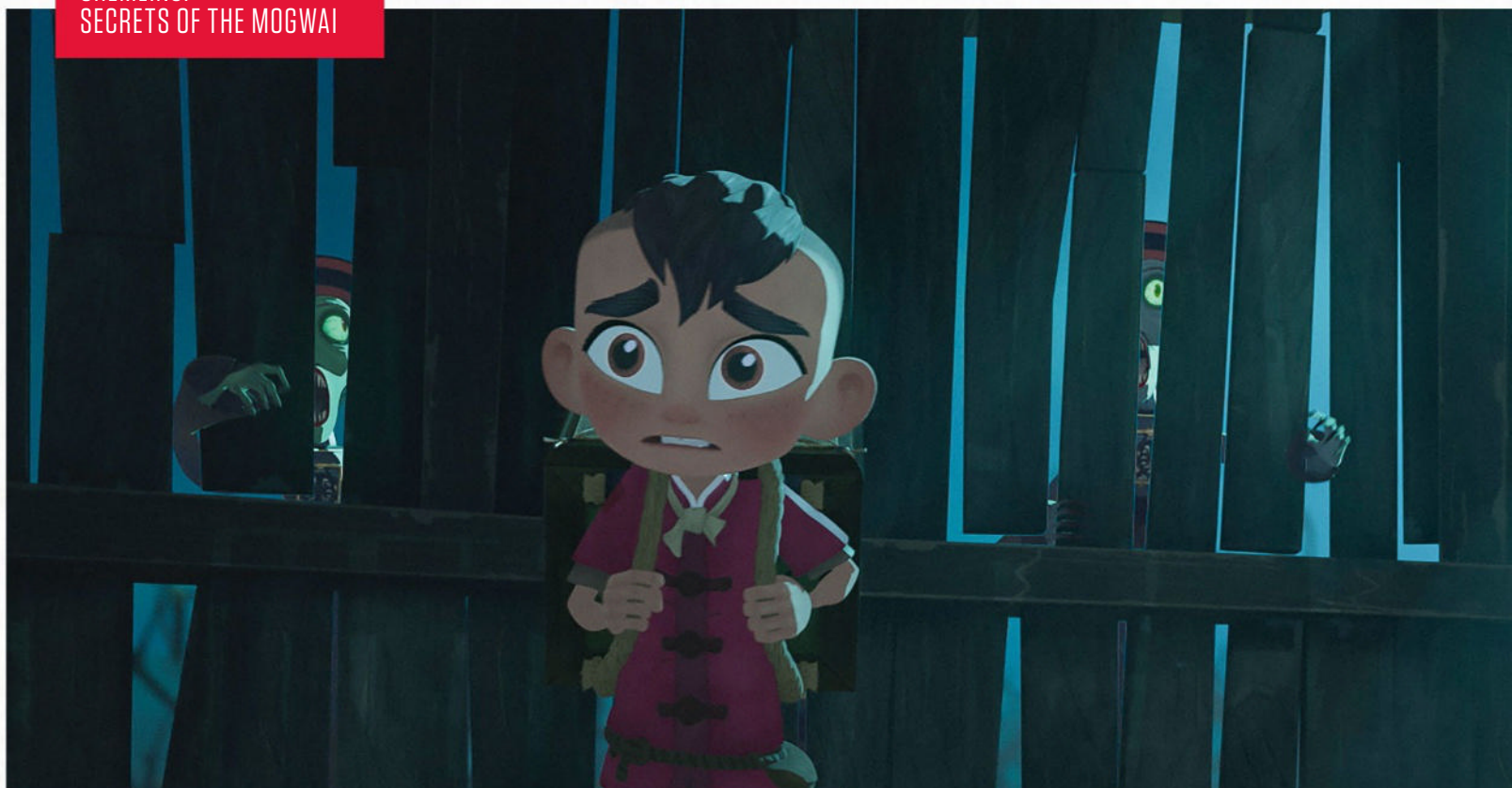
On the challenges of working on a globally-loved brand, the pair say having the support of Amblin from the beginning was key.

"That definitely gave us confidence to tell a story that was also within that vein of not just epic action adventure, with some scares and real-life stakes, but really within the Amblin tone of the movies that we grew up with," Chun explains. "Things that we referenced a lot were *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *The Goonies* - that feeling of excitement, of adventure and wonderment. This show really has a lot of the DNA of those movies that Brendan and I grew up with."

Hay agrees. "Diving into anything you love and getting to play with something that you care about, there's some pressure, there is hesitation, but it's also just so →







much fun. To play with all the Amblin films that we love in the sense of tone – not that we’re taking things from them – but just getting to play with things you love... It’s hard not to find joy in that.”

Another thing the Amblin ’80s adventures have in common is the scares – something that this series doesn’t shy away from. Often in quite surprising ways...

“One of the things we talked about a lot from the very beginning was making sure that it was a co-viewing show, and that kids could watch it, but parents could watch it with their kids,” Chun says.

“We wanted to create something in the show that was for everyone so that the whole family can watch it together, even teens, and that meant pushing some of the scares.

“One of the things we found with *Gremlins* was – as two people who were also traumatised by *Gremlins* while we were at the age that our viewership might be – one of the things that’s really helpful in the *Gremlins* tone is that it can be really scary because after you’re done being scared, it’s also cut with some laughter. So



you’re actually able to make it a little scarier because there’s the safety net of, okay, you’re scared about it, but it’s also weird and hilarious at the same time.”

There’s one scene in particular, which we won’t spoil, that Chun jokes was “definitely worth the six months of back and forth with [the network’s] Standards and Practices”.

Hay explains further. “If you rewatch the original films, with the exception of maybe mom in the kitchen with the *Gremlins*, which is wonderfully gory, it’s more implied violence than graphic violence.

“That actually became something – we can honour the original films this way by playing by those rules. It’s horrible what happens, but also not shown. It’s more implied. Get a good reaction shot, get a good aftermath shot, things like that. So that became our way to make sure we’re still traumatising children today without being super-graphic.”

“When we were writing this, we wanted to make sure that every season felt as big and epic





Expect plenty of scares as well as cuteness.

as a blockbuster movie, and for that the stakes at the end have to be really big," Chun says. "It's not just China, but it's also the world."

Hay adds: "As we get towards the end of this season, we definitely had an episode that made everybody involved just go, 'Oh my god, that's shattering. I can't believe you guys did that.' So that's cool."

Hay cites the *Spider-Verse* and *Puss In Boots* movies as examples of similar "different styles and advanced storytelling" which "tackle weighty themes and have real stakes and consequences." He smiles. "We hope to be a part of this growing movement of animation that's truly for everyone, not solely kids or gross-out adult stuff, and give it to everyone."

Finally, how does it feel to be the ones to resurrect a criminally overlooked franchise? Chun chuckles. "Hopefully we can make up for some lost time." ●

*Gremlins: Secrets Of The Mogwai* is on Max from 23 May. UK details are TBC.

# DANTE'S PEAK

*Gremlins* director Joe Dante talks about the new series and why his original sequel was designed as a satirical send-up



WARNER BROS.-AMBLIN, ALAMY

## What can you say about the premise of *Secrets Of The Mogwai*?

It's a very clever way of getting into the *Gremlins* issue. People kept saying, "Well, when is *Gremlins 3* coming out?" And then [you] look at *Gremlins 2*, and it's sort of designed not to have a number three - it's like, this is making fun of the first movie and now what are you going to do with the third one? And so they said, "Forget about all of that! Just go back to the beginning, and we'll start when the Keye Luke character was a child and how he meets the Mogwai." I thought that was really, really clever.

## How are you involved in the series?

I didn't initiate the show by any means, but when I found out it was being done, I said, "You know, if there's anything I can help you

guys with, let me know." And they said that they would love to have me involved, so I guess I'm a "consulting producer", which means I look at stuff and make comments and I see the designs and all that kind of thing. I'm very proud of it and I think [they] did a great job.

## Why was the decision made to go with animation over live action?

When you see the show, you'll realise that the things that we're doing would cost immense money to do live. It's just wildly impractical to do it live. Also, animation is just such a great medium. I don't know if you've seen *Pinocchio*, Guillermo del Toro's new picture - it's amazing. I mean, it's the greatest stop-motion movie ever made, and it couldn't be done any other way.



BLAME  
IT ON  
THE  
BOOGE





# THE BOOGEYMAN

DIRECTOR ROB SAVAGE  
RETURNS WITH A  
TERRIFYING  
ADAPTATION OF  
STEPHEN KING'S  
**THE BOOGEYMAN**  
– PROMISING VISCERAL  
SCARES, *HEREDITARY*  
-LEVEL PERFORMANCES  
AND A HORRIFYING  
CREATURE

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD

**T**HE *SHINING* IS OBVIOUSLY THE scariest Stephen King adaptation,” Rob Savage tells *SFX* over a call, “but I don’t think there’s been a King adaptation that’s as viscerally scary as this movie.”

It’s a bold claim from the filmmaker behind pandemic breakouts *Host* and *Dashcam*, and whose next project – his first for a major studio – is an adaptation of King’s short story “The Boogeyman”.

“This movie attacks the source material in a way that’s different from any other King adaptation,” he continues. “We wanted this to feel true to his writing. Me and [co-screenwriter] Mark [Heyman] were always going back to the warmth of character that you feel in King’s novels. Even when the subject matter is dark, there’s that glimmer of hope. He’s not a cynical writer.”

“The Boogeyman” is arguably one of King’s most twisted tales. It sees Lester Billings attend a therapy session after the murders of his three children. Though two of the deaths were entirely mysterious, there was a common factor between them: the bodies were found in their bedrooms where the wardrobe doors were slightly ajar, despite Lester being sure they were closed. The children also both shouted “Boogeyman!” before their demise...

## ICONIC HORROR

Savage first discovered King at a young age, reading his 1978 collection of short stories *Night Shift*, which included “The Boogeyman”.

“I was raised in a very strict ‘no scary movies, no sugar, no salt,’ household,” he says.

“Sneaking King’s short story books in under my bed and reading them after dark was my way of pushing back. ‘The Boogeyman’ set my mind on fire for the next week after reading it. I remember the feeling of there being a darkness underneath everything that perhaps you don’t want to stare into.”

Taking on the project was something of a no-brainer, then. Savage’s approach was not to simply retell the story (which had already been the basis for little-seen short films in 1982 and 2010). “We take the short story and recontextualise it slightly,” he explains. “The short story exists within the movie almost wholesale. It’s our inciting incident.”

In this version, Lester Billings (*The Suicide Squad*’s David Dastmalchian) visits therapist Will (*The Mindy Project*’s Chris Messina) at his practice within his family home. By doing so, he unknowingly invites an ancient evil into the →





Sophie Thatcher and Vivien Lyra Blair.

Sadie, love, that's just a recipe for trouble.



house, and that creature haunts Will's daughters Sadie (*Yellowjackets*' Sophie Thatcher) and Sawyer (*Obi-Wan Kenobi*'s Vivien Lyra Blair). "The way that we expand out the mythology is in keeping with what's in the short story," Savage says, "but we take it to its logical conclusion while leaving that dark ambiguity the short story does so beautifully."

### THE OLD DARK HOUSE

"When I first pitched this movie," he continues, "I said 'It's going to be *Poltergeist* meets [1980's] *Ordinary People*'. I wanted it to be scary and fun and playful in its horror, but also have a real weight and meatiness to the drama. Our family is grieving a loss when we meet them; I wanted that to not feel flippant and easy."

"Once we started making the movie, I was looking at haunted house movies, even though it's ultimately a creepy creature feature. *The Changeling* and [1961's] *The Innocents*, which is my favourite movie of all time, and Robert Wise's *The Haunting* – the way that they use implication, light and shadow, composition and sound, to have your mind sketch in the blanks and leave you feeling like you've seen more than you actually have."

"Not that this is a movie where you don't get the goods at the end. But it's really about playing in that same space we did with *Host* where your eyes are constantly looking around the frame into every dark corner and open doorway to see if you're going to catch a glimpse of something. It's a very nervy, paranoid movie."

To centre the story, Savage searched for actors who had the intensity required to play within his terrifying haunted house. He points

**"We take it to its logical conclusion while leaving that dark ambiguity the story has"**

first to Thatcher: "She's fantastic in every single thing that she does, but people aren't ready for the level of her performance here. She's in almost every single frame and she's operating on a Toni Collette in *Hereditary* level. It's an incredible, commanding performance, and the whole film really rests on her shoulders."

Next, Savage talks about Sadie's younger sister Sawyer, played by Blair, who previously won hearts as a young Princess Leia. "She was nine when we shot this movie, but she's the most professional, smart, intuitive actor that I've ever worked with. She's so incredibly in control of her craft."

"Vivien is so funny and so spontaneous that many of my favourite moments in the movie were things that she improvised. Same thing with Chris. He has this ability to take what could be a very familiar moment and make it feel real and grounded and truthful."

Then there was Dastmalchian as Lester. "He had a take on the character that was a very different direction from the short story, but it was beautiful and nuanced and surprising and terrifying," Savage says.

When filming the book's therapy scene, in which Lester describes his devastating past, Savage saw the potential for it to become an iconic horror moment. "The first time we ran

through the lines in rehearsal, you could just see how everyone stopped what they were doing. A silence took over. David really brought something world-class to the part."

Beyond the cast, there was another pressing matter for the filmmaking team to deal with: the Boogeyman itself. There have been hundreds of incarnations of such a creature in books, movies, games and TV shows. How do you make a version that borrows from the mythos while also doing something unique?

"It was a massive challenge," replies Savage. "We went down a lot of dead ends to end up with our creature." The starting point was the idea that the Boogeyman is an eternal, haunting, ancient element that every child is afraid of.

"We have this idea of the Boogeyman being the first evil thing that existed, the thing cavemen would gather around their fire and see lurking in the darkness, and it's the same thing that exists in your closet as you're calling out for your mother."

Savage enlisted Keith Thompson, who created the creature in 2017's *The Ritual*, to help make the Boogeyman feel "fundamental".



Thatcher was also in *The Book Of Boba Fett*.





Sadie discovers an ancient artifact.



David Dastmalchian as Lester Billings.



"There's an aspect to the creature," he says, "that you start to understand throughout the movie which raises more questions than it answers, and hopefully makes the creature even more terrifying and not just a monster that can be defeated, but something that's more unknowable."

At every step of designing and producing the movie, Savage kept King's short story in mind and occasionally had the opportunity to speak to the author. Though King allows filmmakers to imprint their own vision on the material, he offered his thoughts on *The Boogeyman* screenplay's first draft.

Luckily the comments were "encouraging and thoughtful" and, from there, King continued to be "brilliant and supportive throughout the whole process" of making

the movie. "He wasn't watching dailies as we were shooting, but he knew that we were off on this arduous shoot," Savage says. "He did the loveliest thing, which is that he would shout out our movie during interviews for his book. He knows what his praise means to people like me and everyone making the movie."

"There were times when we were on particularly hard days of the shoot and an interview with King would pop up on my phone and he had mentioned how much he had loved the script. I would read it to the cast and crew and it really gave us the strength to tackle whatever bullshit was going on that day and make us feel that we were doing something potentially worthwhile."

Then, of course, came the moment when Savage had to show King the movie. "It was the most terrifying experience of my life," the director says. "We previewed the movie once and it tested extremely well. It was one of those undeniable screenings where you could just feel the whole room was going with the movie and everything was landing pretty much as we wanted."

"We decided that was the time to show it to King, so we rented his favourite local cinema in Maine, and he went to watch the movie with a bucket of popcorn and he loved it. He sent an essay back about all the things that he admired."

The "most lovely" moment came the next day, when Savage awoke to another essay from King telling him that he was still thinking about the movie. The two continued to email each other and King ended up being "instrumental" in getting the movie moved from a streaming release to theatrical, as the original plan had been for *The Boogeyman* to debut on Hulu in the US and Disney+ in the UK. "That was his number one comment to the studios: 'This is a big screen movie and needs to be seen with a crowd'," Savage says.

Despite the studio initially having online intentions for the movie, *The Boogeyman* was not made with the small screen in mind. "It would be incredibly depressing if you made a movie thinking about people watching on their TV," he says. "The only time that I've ever done that was making *Host*, when we knew everyone was going to be under lockdown and they would be watching on their laptops – but that's a very specific case."

"This was my first studio movie and I was collaborating with [*Hellraiser* 2022 cinematographer] Eli Born, who's a complete genius and was shooting these incredibly beautiful images that would be tragic to watch on an iPad or a TV. Every decision was made with theatres in mind, even before we got the go-ahead."

Savage's enthusiasm and confidence are infectious. "I really love this movie," he says with an almost blushing smile. "I'm the biggest critic of my own stuff, but I'm really, really proud of this. And not just what I did. I was surrounded by so many genius minds that not even I could fuck it up!"

*The Boogeyman* is in cinemas from 2 June.



Director Rob Savage surveys the scene.



THE WALKING DEAD:  
DEAD CITY



# MANHATTAN TRANSFER



NEW YORK! NEW YORK!  
IT'S LITERALLY A HELL OF  
A TOWN AS MAGGIE AND  
NEGAN ARRIVE IN NEW  
SPIN-OFF SERIES  
**THE WALKING DEAD:  
DEAD CITY**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**





Will Maggie finally have her revenge on Negan?

they've both suffered through. I told them, 'If you ever have anything with the two of them, give me a call.'"

And the producers did in season 11 as they started formally developing spin-off series for Daryl Dixon, Rick Grimes and Michonne, as well as Maggie and Negan. Excited about getting to build the next chapter for Maggie and Negan from the ground up, Jorné says he spent a lot of time researching real stories of forgiveness. In particular, the story of a mother who wrote to the teenage murderer of her 17-year-old son stuck with him as a way into Maggie and Negan's story.

"Over time, they formed this relationship, and for her that relationship with her son's murderer became the only path out," he explains. "For these people, each other is the only person who – in the whole world – is as connected to that event as they are. Whether they are conscious of it or not, on some level they know that the other person is the only way out."

"That young man who murdered the woman's son, when he really was faced with what he had done, he had his own struggle of realising what he'd done. For Negan, that's so much of why he is a character we want to watch, because there's so much feeling in him."

"On Maggie's side, there's obviously the loss itself and the grief and what to do with that," he continues. "And I'm so into telling their story because of everything that came before. →

**A**SK A LONG-TIME *THE Walking Dead* fan for a specific scene that broke them and the season seven premiere, "The Day Will Come When You Won't Be," is likely to be cited.

Not only did it usher in the brutality of villainous Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) and the Saviours, but it also featured the horrific exit of fan favourites Abraham Ford (Michael Cudlitz) and Glenn Rhee (Steven Yeun).

The comic book readers knew that the seminal moment of Negan putting his baseball bat, Lucille, through Glenn's head was coming, and would be the pivotal catalyst in Maggie's (Lauren Cohan) arc as a leader and single mum. But watching it play out with the actors so viscerally remains an all-time darkest entry in 11 years of storytelling.

So much so that, seven years later, the impending spin-off series *The Walking Dead: Dead City* – featuring Maggie and Negan on a mission to New York City together – has left plenty of fans aghast at the very notion of the two co-starring in a series.

## PRIME BEEF

That's not to say the characters haven't existed near one another in the wake of Glenn's death. But it's always been an uneasy coexistence, dictated by necessity, without there being any real closure between the two.

Negan certainly saw the error of his ways, moving towards a path of contrition by the end of season nine. But Maggie has never bestowed her forgiveness upon him. That's why *The Walking Dead* writer and *Dead City* creator Eli Jorné figured it was high time the two finally confronted the elephant in the room.

"[Their history] is not something that I was scared

of, or that I felt like I was saddled with," Jorné tells *SFX*. "In fact, I was like, 'This is the show!' When Glenn was killed, that was hard, obviously, when it's a beloved character who dies. But to me, the flip side of that was that this universe is going to tell the story of what happens when you lose someone that way. Not just for the person who lost him, but the person who did it."

However, *The Walking Dead* never really got there when it comes to the pair having it out, so it remained fertile, unexplored ground that Jorné was always itching to tackle. Signing a development deal with AMC, Jorné exited *Dead* in season 10, but shared his interest in the two characters with franchise executive producers Scott M Gimple and Brian Bockrath.

"I am always really attracted to people who are kind of broken and flawed," Jorné explains. "Deep down, good people but just struggling to make their way through the world with whatever they've been handed. So I really connected to Maggie and Negan, and all that

Lauren Cohan as Maggie Rhee: knifey knifey.





MAGGIE  
RHEE

Lauren Cohan

**Considering Negan's sins, do you ever see Maggie forgiving him?**

I wouldn't even use the word forgiveness. It's way too impossible. But what I think was really exciting, definitely for me to do, was just to say, "Have we ever really talked about this?" And at the end of the day, it's been 15 years into the end of the world. There have been other generations trying to rebuild lives. But when you try to rebuild a life and you're so defined by such traumatic things, who are you? What are you? How do you behave? How do you interact with anybody, let alone somebody who you have a lot of beef with?

**Was doing a short season a big factor in saying yes to this?**

When I joined the show in season two, I got the first eight episodes when I booked the job, and I was like, "Okay, cool. I know what I'm doing." When we started *Dead City*, Eli handed us six episodes, and said, "This is what we're doing." It was the best feeling. But we're still having fun, and if we weren't having fun and if we didn't think there was something to tell, then we wouldn't be here. Eli's taken the time to really honour where they both are so that something so dynamic and special can be done. Hopefully, we get to continue that and do that in a second season.

**As long-term veterans of Walker storytelling, is the New York locale enough to make this feel fresh for you?**

There's not a familiarity for us, because there was so much energy put into avoiding each other in the previous show that everything is now foreign. We're having to interact and then be in a place that neither of us know. Neither of us have been here, and this unwilling connection that we have, that we realise early on, that's a big part of the story, emotionally.

**How does the urban location impact the horror?**

It's within the ways that people live in the city. It's also that [Negan] was the Big Bad in our world, but there are Bigger Bads, one of whom is central: The Croat, played by Željko Ivanek. Sometimes in scenes, I have to close my fish mouth just watching him. We're in awe.

**How's it been working with a new cast?**

The characters that Eli wrote are just so captivating and so compelling. It's encouraging and exciting to have a new place, and have people that come from a story that has never been conceived like this in a previous show.





# NEGAN

Jeffrey Dean Morgan

**What made you both decide to return to these characters?**

It was either gonna be something that we really liked and we would move forward with – and we would both have to really like it – or we would be sailing off into the sunset and doing something else. I think this idea was so compelling for both of us, for a couple of different reasons. The story was there to tell.

**When we pick up with Negan, is he continuing to be a better man?**

I think he came a long way in the original show. But I think there's a problem that occurs when we find him in *Dead City*, and that is, he's not been part of the group now for a couple of years. A lot of bad shit has happened to him, and he's reverted a little bit in some of his ways because he's a survivor. More than anything else, he's a survivor.

And then Maggie shows up at his doorstep; you can tell that he's gone backwards a little bit, just in the way he acts and the way he talks to her. I also think there's some frustration that he has, like, "I've tried to apologise. I have tried to do the best I can for the last 10 years, and we've gotten nowhere. And I still think if I close my eyes, you're gonna put a shank through my head." And that never goes away.

**Does that mean Negan's going to ruin any goodwill that he may have gained with Maggie?**

I think he's a little bit frustrated, which doesn't add a lot of niceness to him. He's gonna have to take a step back before he can go forward again. I think Maggie showing up in his life when she does, with the information she's given him, it's gonna be hard. He's gonna go back a little bit, unfortunately.

**How does this series shake up his existing dynamic with Maggie?**

We finally get to explore, and to dig deep into these characters that we're playing. We're dealing with each other for the first time, which I think was fascinating because you've got two characters that really have never talked. And they've got this chasm between them. Then throw in the New York City of it all, which adds dangers and surprises that neither of them have ever experienced before. And yet you have two characters that we have both been very intimate with for a very fucking long time, so there is a familiarity with that.

**What kind of a challenge is the Croat to Negan?**

I think Negan made the Croat who he is. He kind of tutored him and showed him the way. So he needs to end it. I think Negan's at a point in his life where he actually does take on some responsibility and understands what he's done.





An uneasy alliance that could explode at any point.



And knowing that when you shine a light on these two characters, the audience and they are going to, little by little, have to realise that the only path out of this is through each other. Then you put them on an island, where they really can't get away from it," he jokes.

The island in question is Manhattan, where the six-episode season takes place. Maggie's son Hershel is kidnapped and taken there by people Negan knows from his nefarious past. She exploits his guilt to get him to help her retrieve her son alive. Jörnê admits that it took several iterations of his spin-off idea before finally landing on New York City, mostly because it represented a fresh pressure cooker environment to test Maggie and Negan.

"It's like the capital of the world, where you've got giant skyscrapers and iconic locations," he says. "But then it's an island, which really separates it from a lot of cities. When you think about a bunch of people stuck on that island as Walkers, you immediately can imagine the possibilities.

"On top of that, you take two characters like Maggie and Negan, who have so much beef between them. When they're in a rural environment like Georgia or Virginia, there's a lot of space there to keep distance from each other. The idea of them being forced to have to go on this mission together and go to a place that's so claustrophobic, where they don't have that space where they can stay separated, and stay apart [appealed]. They're forced to have to deal with each other and confront each other

"Come to New York City, they said. See the sights..."

## "I am always really attracted to people who are kind of broken and flawed"

in so many ways. So that was part of the excitement for me on all fronts."

While Jörnê was developing *Dead City*, he also returned to help the writers' room on *The Walking Dead* finish the series. There he worked with Angela Kang on deciding where the main series would leave the duo for him to continue in *Dead City*.

The series picks up their stories two years post-finale. In New York City they'll meet new communities of survivors, fresh Walker perils and an ally in Perlle Armstrong (Gaius Charles). And Negan will reunite with a shadowy figure from his past known as the Croat (Željko Ivanek).

Jörnê says he loved brainstorming this urban nightmare landscape for Maggie and Negan, but he made sure that any idea had to pass the test of "How does it connect to Maggie and Negan's story?" He teases that all the people they meet will be dealing with their own form of trauma and grief, which will be relatable for Maggie, Negan and the audience.

"Every character was built in that way, thinking about how to paint the world when all you've got inside is pain and hurt and loss. The show lives in that space and everything builds on top of that."

As for the threat that the Croat represents to Maggie, Negan and Hershel, Jörnê will only share that he is someone from Negan's past who will try pulling him back there. "Negan even has a line to the effect that [he's] like a song that he doesn't want to hear any more," Jörnê says.

What exactly he wants from Negan, and why, will be revealed in the series, but Jörnê says that audiences should expect another complex antagonist. "Most people are just human, and they might be flawed and broken. But that doesn't make them evil."

Jörnê calls *Dead City* an "emotional" journey that is going to elicit a lot of feelings. "I'm not gonna lie, I think that's a good thing. But it is also really fun and there's a lot of adventure and excitement. There's a lot of world-building, so we get to see the interesting ways that people have managed to survive." ●

*The Walking Dead: Dead City* is on AMC/AMC+ in the US from 18 June.



Gaius Charles plays new character Armstrong.



"Shake?"  
"Nah, I don't think so somehow."





# DALEK HUNTER

HANDS OFF! THESE **DOCTOR WHO TOYS** ARE NOT FOR PLAYING WITH...

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

**I**N HIS DAY JOB, CHRIS HILL IS A DIRECTOR AT a scientific research organisation that supports the US government. By night, he hunts Daleks. Toy Daleks.

It's not unusual for fans of *Doctor Who* to collect the tie-in merchandise. But there are few who go to such extremes as Hill, a devotee of the show since the mid-'60s. "I'm told that I was one of those kids who was watching from behind the sofa, peeking my head out," he tells *SFX*. "I had a plastic Dalek by a company called Herts Plastic Moulders, and a Dalek shooting game.

"But I wasn't a collector then. I became one in February 1971 when my dad brought home the first issue of a comic called *Countdown*. There was a *Doctor Who* strip in it with Jon Pertwee. I remember looking at that and thinking, 'I'm going to start collecting these.'"

Today, Hill – a leading *Doctor Who* memorabilia expert – boasts a record-breaking 12,500 individual items, from "cast cards" signed by the series' stars dating back to 1963, to the latest anniversary T-shirt, coaster and badge collections. This vast number is of little surprise when you consider there have been steady releases

of official *Doctor Who* tie-in products from early on.

"There's been a constant stream of *Doctor Who* merchandise since almost the very beginning," Hill says. "The first boom was 1965's 'Dalekmania'. The Daleks were everywhere. On the telly, in the newspapers and comics, on the cinema screen, and so, of course, the toy shops and sweet shops were packed with licensed items.

"There were plenty of toys and games, but almost anything you can think of was available with a Dalek on it. You could buy Dalek soap and Dalek storage jars for the kitchen. There was a Dalek painting book, birthday cards and pencils."

Among his prized possessions he counts a vintage Dalek playsuit, a coin-operated Dalek ride and an extremely fragile Dalek papier-mâché mask. But for Hill, a major part of the allure of '60s merchandise is the highly illustrated packaging. "The effort that went into the design for even the most basic of products back then was phenomenal," he enthuses. "It's so colourful; so evocative of that time."

Hill's Dalek money box was truly plundered when he had the opportunity to buy the cardboard packaging from a pair of 1965 Dalek slippers. "I'd already →



The very rare Scorpion Automotives Dalek playsuit.







bought the slippers from another collector, then the box came up for sale – and I missed it,” he says. “The person who bought it agreed to sell it to me for a very substantial price.”

Fortunately, he considers his greatest outlay to date to have been balanced by the bargains he has picked up over the years, including a piece of tinfoil wrapping from a 1965 chocolate Dalek – the only one of its type, he believes, that still exists.

“Someone had carefully peeled it off, stuck it in their scrapbook along with the card that would have been in the sweet shop, and 50-odd years later posted a picture of it on Facebook. I contacted them and said, ‘Would you be interested in parting with it?’ The guy said he would. It wasn’t cheap, but it wasn’t outrageously expensive either. And you have to ask, how on earth did this survive? It shouldn’t exist any more.”

## TOYS ‘R’ USA

In 1986, Hill moved from England to Washington DC. He kept up to date with the latest releases via mail order catalogues. But then, in the mid-’90s, eBay came along, “and suddenly the world changed”. The chance to buy items that he’d once only dreamed of owning came, however, at a price. “There were a handful of really serious collectors who were competing heavily for the ’60s stuff,” he says, “so we were paying way over the odds for things back then.”

Now, Hill spends an hour or two a day trawling eBay for *Doctor Who* memorabilia. If something unusual appears, he acts fast. Many serious collectors will contact sellers and try to negotiate a deal. Case in point: a toy Dalek gun from 1965.

“I was sitting in an airport in Minneapolis when I saw it and I thought, ‘By the time I get home, it will have gone.’ So I was frantically contacting the lady who was selling it, trying to do a deal – or at least talk to her. Ultimately, she sold it to me. She later said the reason I got it was because I was very polite, while other people were very aggressive in their approach!”

When the limited-edition Robert Harrop figurines of classic *Doctor Who* characters go on sale, it’s 3.00am in Hill’s time zone. Sleep? What’s sleep when you’re a dedicated collector? “I’ll set my alarm, get up and log online,” he says. “There’s always a risk they’ll sell out quickly. But they’re so well designed and manufactured. They’re definitely my favourite range of current merchandise.”

The figurines are proudly displayed in Hill’s *Doctor Who* Room. But latter-day merchandise goes straight into plastic bins and storage – after it has been catalogued.



Can we live in your basement please, Chris?



Woolworths sold these 7-inch Daleks.



A “marble maze” game, from 1965.

“I’ve always felt like a sophisticated collector,” Hill explains. “I’m someone who does a lot of research. I know what’s available, I know a lot about the product, and I put a lot of effort into trying to find the different variants of items, as well as any related promotional and advertising material.”

“Many collectors keep a spreadsheet, so they know what they’ve got and don’t duplicate items. I use professional museum software so I can enter all the information that I can find about a product. I’m extremely disciplined. It’s almost as if I’ve set myself up as having this duty to the world of *Doctor Who* merchandise; not only as a collector, but to record everything I can as an archivist.”

Not a weekend goes by without Hill adding items from his collection to his database. At least it keeps him out of his wife’s hair for several hours. “She’s very tolerant,” Hill smiles. “We have a few ground rules. It all has to stay in the →





DOCTOR WHO TOYS

1965's Furness Footwear Dalek slippers.

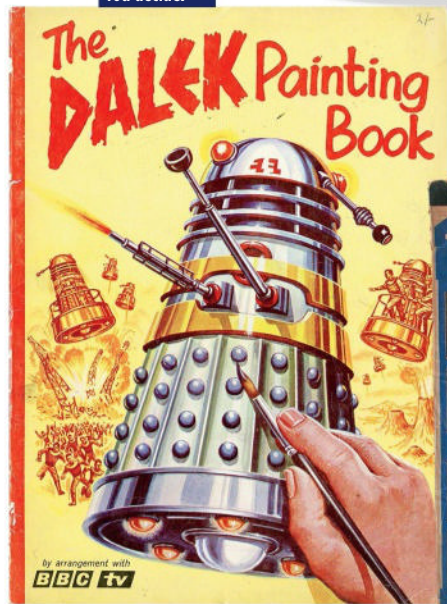


Daleks hate having corks shot at them.



Tartan Daleks? Pink Daleks? You decide!

This "sonic" gun fired plastic darts.



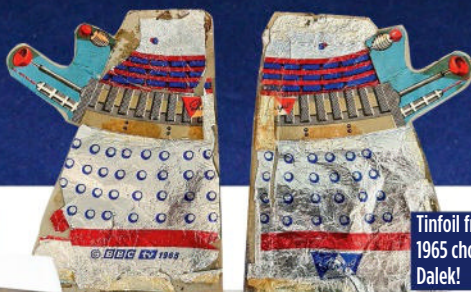
Chris Hill (left) and a Skarosian pal.





You'll need a bigger money box to buy it.

Dalek soap: "Exfoliate! EXFOLIATE!"



Tinfoil from a 1965 chocolate Dalek!



The fake Cyber Controller's car from China.



Don't touch. Don't even look at them.



"Immense play value". A bendy Dalek.





Heroes and  
villains living  
in harmony.

basement – it doesn't creep into the upstairs part of the house. But I think she appreciates that I have a passion for doing this, and she's always very supportive. She rolls her eyes, but that's to be expected."

## SHELF LIFE

It would be another four decades before a boom in merchandise overtook "Dalekmania". In 2007, with David Tennant's Doctor at the height of his popularity, there was another big explosion.

"It was huge," says Hill. "You could get anything, whether it was something to use in the kitchen, something to play with, or something to wear. Everywhere from Primark to Next to Sainsbury's had their own clothing ranges. I tried to collect everything – there was an unbelievable amount."

"I had a network of people who would shop for me. My mother would go to all the clothes shops to get me the different sets of pyjamas and T-shirts." Does he have a size preference? "I always try to get the smallest because it takes up the least space," Hill laughs.

With toys flying off the shelves at an unprecedented rate, some less-than-reputable companies sought to cash in on *Doctor Who*'s rekindled success... "There was an infamous fake Cyber Controller's car and helicopter," says Hill. "They were basically cheap toys from China that had been repackaged in a box covered with pictures of a Cyberman and David Tennant's face."

"Those two I bought because they were interesting novelties. The BBC came down heavily. By then they had a very sophisticated brand management and licensing organisation."

Today, it's Character Options which manufactures some of the most popular *Doctor Who* action figures. Many purchasers play with them; some display them. Hill's remain sealed in their packaging. "I have no reason to take them out," he explains. "I don't have the same affinity for these toys. I collect the new series stuff because I'm a completist."

"The classic series items I take out; it's much easier to remove '60s and '70s toys from their boxes because they weren't packaged in the way things are today. The new series toys are held in with plastic ties, sometimes vacuum-sealed, and there's little chance of opening them without destroying the packaging. And honestly, I don't have the space to display much of the recent stuff anyway."



Yet Hill buys these toys in each of their repackaged variants. "For the figures, it's really a bit of a drag. Oh gosh, I've got to have the Weeping Angel with both the angry face and the serene face! It's where I tend to feel I cross the line from sympathetic collector to obsessive, by feeling that there's a responsibility to have all the variants or I'm not doing my job."

Hill's collection may be unparalleled, but even he has a few gaps. "Nobody's ever managed to find a pair of 1966 Dalek pyjamas," he laments. Not that he hasn't tried. He managed to track down the sons of the owner of the factory that manufactured them. "One remembers, when he was a kid, seeing the pyjamas produced. So they were definitely made, but nobody's found them."

"There's also a toy that was advertised in the trade press in 1965 and was offered as a competition prize in a comic at the time: the Dalek Pencil Craft set. I'd sell an organ to get one of those!"

But for Hill, the thrill of the hunt is all part of the fun. "That's much more enjoyable than the subsequent owning of something. I like having things missing from my collection"

**“My mother would go to the clothes shops to get the different sets of pyjamas and T-shirts”**

because it motivates me to keep looking. If you want to collect *Doctor Who*, the nice thing is, there is so much you can collect. It's a very accessible hobby. You can decide – and a lot of people do – to collect the Target books. That's a realisable collection.

You can decide to collect all the Big Finish CDs. There's a lot of them, but you could do it. If you set out to, say, own all the '60s Dalek merchandise, well that's going to be a bit of a stretch. You've got to have some pretty deep pockets and you've got to be willing to invest a heck of a lot of time into doing it."

So just how much money has Hill spent on *Doctor Who* in total? "I have no idea," he laughs. "And if I did, I probably wouldn't say!" Sorry, Mrs Hill... ●

Chris Hill appears in the *Doctor Who: The Collection* Blu-ray documentary series *The Collectors*. Visit [thespacemuseum.net](http://thespacemuseum.net).



All you need  
to dress to  
impress.



## BEN BARNES

The actor talks darkness, music and wanting to be a superhero

Words by Bryan Cairns // Portrait by Gergő Pejko/Netflix

**B**en Barnes may be on top of the world these days, but the same can't be said for his *Shadow And Bone* character General Kirigan. Sun Summoner Alina defeated the power-hungry Darkling, leaving him for dead in the Shadow Fold. But the fantasy show's season one finale saw Kirigan emerge from the strip of darkness with a new ability: to create and control shadow creatures known as the Nichevo'ya. And, oh yeah, he's really pissed off...

**You've been on a roll with *Shadow And Bone*, *Cabinet Of Curiosities*, *Westworld*, *The Punisher* and your own music. How satisfied are you with how things are going right now?**

➔ I often think about that. It's difficult to judge success outside of your own barometer of very tight perspective. So I feel like it's a moving bar, but I have learned to be much better over the last five years... drowning out that perspective and realising just how fortunate I am to be doing something that I love so much.

**Last time we saw Kirigan, he was defeated but not down for the count. How pissed off is he when viewers catch up with him?**

➔ He is pissed. Kirigan is entering his revenge era. In the books, he is representative of something to Alina. He appears in her dreams as a visualisation of evil temptation. We worked quite hard to massage what's in the books into something that, for me, was playable.

It was important to make him a human being with vulnerabilities and mortality, to make him someone who, even if you don't care about him, you can understand. Everyone he's cared about has abandoned him or tried to kill him. He has cut ties with people who have tried to kill him. He finds himself very alone.

It would be very easy to sit alone, twirl your moustache and plot the demise of the hero. But sitting in that loneliness can send you to different places. Certainly, when I have felt alone in my life, you feel angry for a minute. Then you feel sad and then motivated to go and meet people. Then you feel embarrassed that you felt lonely in the first place. And then you feel angry again. It pinballs you around a bit. I was interested in exploring that space in the second season. That's what I asked the showrunners to help me get to.

**Kirigan seems to have harnessed some new abilities. He can create shadow creatures and control the Fold a bit more. What kind of toll does that take on him physically and mentally?**

➔ He can create the Nichevo'ya now, who are essentially the shadow monsters created of the Fold, but they live within him. Usually in fantasy stories like this, if you have darkness that lives within you, it does take its toll. We worked quite hard on that. Even through this season, there was a lot of discussion charting the effect it takes on him. It was the most important thing to me. I can't tell you why now, but it was important to me that was part of the story. I think his own power begins to scare him a bit.

**Looking at other career highlights, you've released five songs. What is it about music that's so special to you?**

➔ When I talk about acting and characters, I get excited about the fact that anyone has the capacity to be anything. Every emotion that has ever existed in man exists inside all of us. Depending on what happens to us in our lives, depending what we put ourselves through and how people treat us, you may never experience some of those things.

We can all feel rage. We can all feel deep desire. We can all feel shame. We can feel heartache or pure ecstasy. When I listen to music, I can be transported anywhere. I am so interested in other people and what they have to say for themselves. Music has the power to take you somewhere instantly.

**The Marvel TV Universe is getting a second lease of life. Are you hoping to be part of the MCU again?**

➔ Oh my god. I saw pictures the other day of one of my best friends, Will Poulter, in *Guardians Of The Galaxy* [Vol 3]. Man, he looks good. I want someone to put me in a superhero suit before I age out. There's definitely been some chats about a couple of superheroes over the years, which didn't pan out.

I read a lot of fantasy, so I love being in it. I love watching romcoms too, so I would like to do one. I've watched all the Marvel movies. DC is going to start becoming an interesting space again. Batman feels taken, but I love that style of alter-ego/hero. I loved playing Jigsaw. I'd love to reframe him and really mess his face up this time. ●

*Shadow And Bone is on Netflix now.*

### BIODATA

From  
London

Greatest Hits  
**Prince Caspian in *The Chronicles Of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, spellcaster Tom Ward in *The Seventh Son*, scoundrel Logan in *Westworld*, the disfigured Jigsaw in *The Punisher*.**

Random Fact  
**Barnes made his feature film debut as young Dunstan Thorn in 2007's *Stardust*.**



“I am so interested  
in other people and  
what they have to  
say for themselves”







# THE STUFF OF DREAMS

TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS ON FROM THE RELEASE OF  
*The City Of Lost Children*, MARC CARO AND  
JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET LOOK BACK AT THEIR  
SECOND CO-DIRECTED FEATURE

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN



**F**EW FANTASY FILMS MADE IN THE last 30 years present a world as richly realised as that of 1995's *The City Of Lost Children* (*La Cité Des Enfants Perdus*), which unfolds in a retro-styled harbour town where local kids are going missing.

The malevolent Krank (Daniel Emilfork) is responsible; unable to dream himself, he's struck a deal with a cyborg cult known as the Cyclops to abduct the children, whose dreams he then extracts.

Keeping Krank company out at sea in his abandoned oil platform lair are various simple-minded clones (Dominique Pinon); a dwarf named Martha (Mireille Mossé); and Irvin, a disembodied brain in a bubbling fish tank (voiced by French cinema great Jean-Louis Trintignant). After his three-year-old "little brother" is kidnapped, strongman One (Ron Perlman) teams up with urchin Miette (Judith Vittet) to find him.

Completing the oddball character line-up are an amnesiac diver (the original creator of the clones); a former freakshow barker who has trained fleas to inject people with a poison that induces aggression; and the Octopus, Fagin-esque conjoined twins who use Miette and her fellow orphans to steal for them.

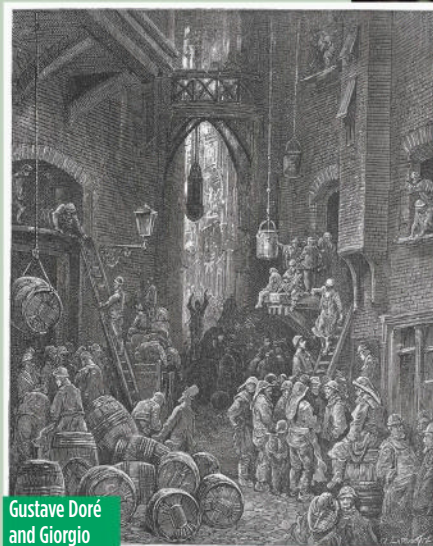
## VINTAGE PORT

There was a two-headed fusion behind the camera too, although thankfully Marc Caro (credited for "direction artistique") and Jean-Pierre Jeunet ("mise-en-scène") didn't have to squeeze into one extra-wide director's chair... While *City* ended up as the duo's second feature collaboration, following 1991's *Delicatessen* (their post-apocalyptic black comedy set in an apartment building whose butcher landlord murders people to sell as meat), it was actually conceived long before that film was made – in 1982.

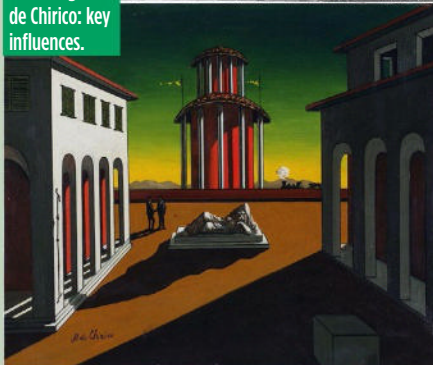
"It was the first picture we wrote after our short film 'The Bunker Of The Last Gunshots' [1981]," Jeunet tells *SFX*. "We were totally crazy, because it was very expensive. And of course, we couldn't find the money. So we had to make a cheaper movie

– *Delicatessen* was in one building, it was more limited. Because of the success of *Delicatessen* we had the opportunity to make *City*, and we rewrote it and made a different version."

The starting point for the 1982 draft was its port setting. "We had the feeling to make a film in a harbour, with the fog, the sea, and the boats," Jeunet explains. "There are a lot of old French movies we love, like *Le Quai Des*



Gustave Doré and Giorgio de Chirico: key influences.



*Brumes* [1938] from Marcel Carné and *Remorques* [1941] by Jean Grémillon. At the same time, I think it was an idea from Marc to make a film with a big guy and a little girl, a strange couple."

As originally conceived, the plot was quite different. "All of the dreams were not present in the first version," Caro says, explaining that the idea that a "Nosferatu-like dream vampire" would be behind the abductions only came later.

"It was more like *Moby-Dick* in the first version – they used children to go hunting sea monsters. And some characters like the Octopus were not in the first draft."

When it came to the look of the film, two artists were key inspirations. "A very big reference for us was a French illustrator, Gustave Doré," Caro says.

"He made, a long time ago, illustrations of London, with the little streets and the smog." A collaboration with English journalist William Blanchard Jerrold, 1872's *London: A Pilgrimage* included engravings of squalid slums and bustling riverside streets.

A surrealist painter, meanwhile, inspired the film's distinctive colour scheme – which, scorning the maxim "red and green should never be seen", made heavy use of these



## GULL AFRAID

Seabirds are not natural actors

The film features a variety of animals, from a key-stealing mouse to rafting rats and humping dogs. But which was the most stressful to wrangle?

"The seagulls were a nightmare, because they don't like to be inside the studio," Jeunet says, referring to an absurdist "execution" sequence where, by gulping down a basket-load of fish, the birds cause One and Miette to be tipped into the sea. "Now it would be easier to make it CGI, but at this time we hired four birds, and they didn't want to eat because they were stressed. I love animals, so I was a little bit ashamed to do that. A few weeks after the shooting, we still had some birds on the ceiling of the studio after they were lost!"

"It's very, very difficult to work with fleas," a deadpan Caro adds, "because they are very complicated actors. They're really *Actors Studio*, you know? They want to know the motivation." He's joking, of course – the fleas were actually CG creations. Besides, *real* flea thespians are "Just say the lines and don't trip over the furniture" types...







This is just a small section of the incredible set.

"I remember the first meeting when we made a brief about the visual effects," continues Jeunet. "We thought, 'Oh my god, it's impossible to do – too many things.' When you write 'the ship destroys the platform', it's just a line. But when you have to do that it's the beginning of the nightmare!"

The port set, a gigantic affair constructed on the 4,000 square-metre soundstage at Les Studios d'Arpajon near Paris, was, with its dockside, archways, staircases and high walkways (plus a bar you could really walk into from the street) so immersive that people were taken aback. "I remember Ron Perlman, when he discovered the set, went, 'Uh!'", Jeunet says, simulating an amazed gasp. Its scale could prove disorientating. "We got lost sometimes, at the beginning." "It was really crazy," adds Caro. "You are so little in this very big city."

It also presented technical difficulties. "It was very difficult to shoot because the set was huge, and it took so much time for the lighting," Jeunet recalls. "We were able to make eight shots per day, and we should make 12 a day."

### GAME OF CLONES

On the special effects side, sequences where different versions of Dominique Pinon's clone interact – for example, when three sit around a table playing a boardgame – were a particular headache.

"Now it's so easy to make this kind of stuff, but at the time it was very difficult," says Jeunet, "especially when he touched himself – when he slapped the other guy. We did a lot of rehearsals with Pitof, the visual effects supervisor. And we had some sound [a playback tape] with 'One two three, turn, two three four...'"

"Each time we'd have to make it in one shot," Caro adds, "so if there was some problem, we'd have to redo the shot. We were very lucky to have Dominique Pinon, he was very precise." Jeunet concurs: "Dominique was very patient – he loves it when he has to do something difficult."

Also requiring meticulous rehearsal – though not visual effects trickery – were scenes featuring the Octopus, played by real-life twins Geneviève Brunet and Odile Mallet. In one bravura sequence we see them cooking at a hob, casually passing kitchen implements back and forth. "It's funny to work with twins, →



Miette (Judith Vittet) and One (Ron Perlman).



Jean-Louis Trintignant voiced this brain in a vat.

clashing tones (rendering the sea a rich emerald, for example). "We work like painters," Caro explains. "I think when you create a world you have to be really logical, and you have to have constraints – to, like a painter, have a palette of colours."

"The reference for these colours was a Giorgio de Chirico painting where you have a brick wall, very red, and it's not water that's green but the sky – I inverted it." "Piazza d'Italia", one of a series of de Chirico paintings depicting an otherworldly Italian square, matches the description.

Filming proved to be challenging in numerous ways. "We love difficulties," says Caro, "and we put in this movie everything that's difficult to do – children, animals, special effects."

**“We had the feeling to make a film in a harbour, with the fog, the sea, and the boats”**

Fleas: as keen on *The Method* as Brando, apparently...





because one of them starts a line and the other one finishes the line," Jeunet says. The Octopus scene he remembers most fondly is one where, having been bitten by one of those rage-inducing fleas, the twins turn on one another. "It was weird, because the day of the rehearsals [the actors] said everything they had at the bottom of their hearts, you know? 'Our mother always loved you much more than me!' I was, 'Oh my god!' It was a kind of secret therapy."

## BIG RON

For the key role of strongman One, the duo made the unusual decision to cast an actor who didn't speak French – future *Hellboy* Ron Perlman. "It was my idea," says Caro. "I saw him in Guillermo del Toro's first movie, *Cronos*" – though Caro had previously seen the actor in Jean-Jacques Annaud's prehistoric fantasy *Quest For Fire*, playing a caveman. "There was a lot of prosthetics on his face. Here, without anything, I see, 'Oh, it's the guy.'"

Receiving the cold shoulder from the actor's representative, Jeunet recalls, "We reached Jean-Jacques Annaud to help us, and Ron Perlman said, 'No, my agent never spoke about that.' And he fired his agent!"

Perlman was assisted by an interpreter and vocal coach, and as Caro says, it helped that One was the strong, silent type – "He didn't have a lot of speech". The directors rationalised their choice by deciding that the strongman was, as Caro puts it, "a Russian guy, or from the East, and had some accent". However, such notions later fell apart. "At the beginning of the editing my editor, when he saw him, was singing 'Born In The USA!'" Jeunet laughs. "I go, 'Okay, he's not from Russia...'"

Perlman's rough-hewn Easter Island statue looks are, we remark, not those of your conventional Hollywood lead – and the ensemble is full of actors with similarly fascinating features.

"We came from a tradition of all the French movies," Caro explains. "Michel Simon, Raimu, Louis Jouvet, Jean Gabin – they all have a very special face, and we love this kind of character, as we love people like Lee Marvin in the USA. So we chose people because they are very good actors, and also because they have this very visual face."

"Marc used to say there are two kinds of beauties," Jeunet adds, "the Greek statues and the African statues. And we prefer African statues."

Finding the right Miette was both a lengthy process and a swift one. "Strangely, she was the



Dominique Pinon (right) doubles up as the clones.

first one we saw," says Jeunet, who thought of Judith Vittet after seeing her in 1994's *Personne Ne M'aime*. "Afterwards you think, 'Maybe we will find a better girl.' So you see hundreds and hundreds of girls, and at the end you come back to the first one. She was perfect."

Jeunet has remained friends with Vittet, who now works as a textile artist (anyone who is curious can check out her work at [judithvittet.com](http://judithvittet.com)). Indeed, a few years ago, when an exhibition about Caro and Jeunet's films was in Paris, the two visited together.

"There was a costume of Miette in the exhibition, and she put her hand under the skirt," Jeunet recalls.

"Because she was a little girl she was a bit shy, so she asked [costume designer] Jean Paul Gaultier to make a slip, for protection. She checked, and it was there! It was funny... I didn't know this story."

Gaultier was an old friend of Caro's – his 1987 short "Le Défilé" documented one of the designer's collaborations with a contemporary dance choreographer. "I invited him to the first screening of *Delicatessen*, and at the end he



## TRIVIA

The 14-metre-high ship which crashed into the pier was pulled about by tractor.

The splashing sounds made by the wave machines caused the crew to keep needing the loo!

At one point, to get the right astonished expressions from the younger child actors, Jeunet and an assistant dressed up as vegetables and pulled faces.

To make Vittet more comfortable with a scene where One slaps Miette, Jeunet turned it into a game by receiving a slap as well. This then led to the two exchanging slaps before any emotional scene.

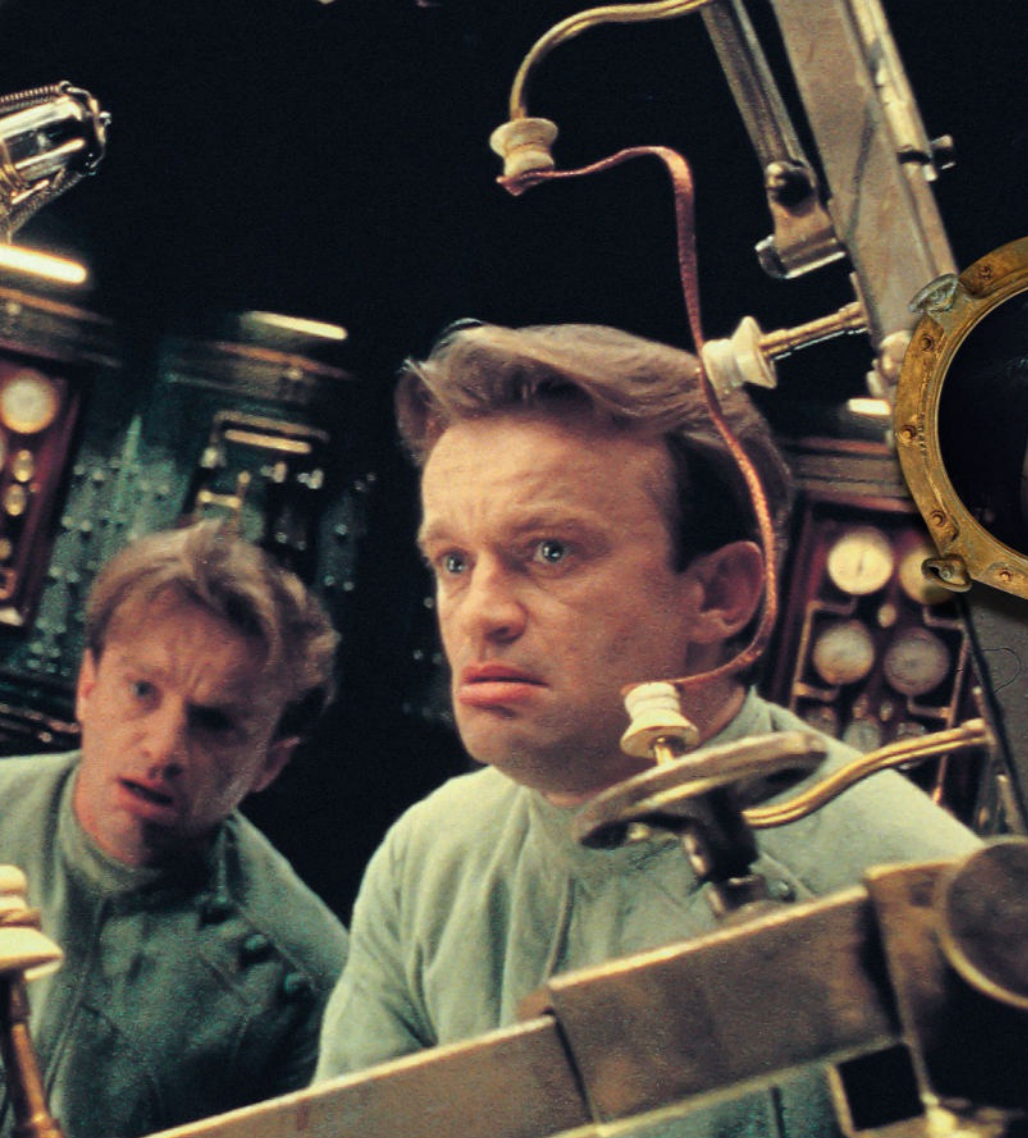
Two of the clone doubles (seen on-screen when they're viewed from behind) later had roles in Jeunet's *Amélie* – Marc Amyot was the photo booth repairman, while Philippe Beautier played a postman.



"Little brother"'s various burps were actually supplied by Mireille Mossé!

Keep your eyes peeled during the scene where One does his strongman act for the male lead in *Amélie* (and director of *La Haine*) – one of the extras is Mathieu Kassovitz, who was visiting the set.





film, both directors seem loath to critique it. "Of course, we have some regrets," says Jeunet, "But what is done is done."

In part, this seems to stem from realising how blessed they were to have the opportunity to build an imaginary world of such vast scale

and intricate detail. "It was a sweet moment," Caro says. "Now, if we had to do a movie like that everything would be in CG, and it's not the same. Three hundred people worked on the set decoration. Everything was a bit artisanal. It was the last time we could do that in France. It was really a wonderful experience."

And Caro is "very, very happy" with the new 4K restoration featured on the UHD release. "Especially with the matte paintings, you have so many details we never saw before," adds Jeunet, noting that at the time Caro felt

**“Now, if we had to do a movie like that everything would be CG, and it's not the same”**



Pinon also played the creator of the clones.



Krank (Daniel Emilfork) plays a sinister Santa.

said, 'I love your movie, why didn't you call me for the costumes?' So when we did *La Cité Des Enfants Perdus* I called him.

"In 1982, I made some little drawings of the characters, and it was great to see what Jean-Paul made of them after reading the script. It was really close, but he pushed the outer limits."

Another creative genius with whom the two collaborated was composer Angelo Badalamenti. Neither director seriously thought he'd be interested in scoring the film, but as Jeunet recalls, "We said, 'Let's take the chance – we don't have anything to lose.' So we met him in New York, and he said, 'Okay, why not?' We would never have believed it."

"He played some melodies he had in his head on this synthesiser – a Korg, I think," Caro remembers. "Really rapidly we were charmed by what he did."

"One day we received the whole music, and it was perfect – almost finished," Jeunet continues. "During mixing he was here, and we were missing a piece of music. He made an improvisation on the piano. Two takes, that's it – it was perfect."

In the decades since *City's* 1995 release, Jeunet has expressed some frustration that concepts which seemed clear on paper did not come across on-screen in an understandable way. But today, asked how they feel about the

frustrated because the reds and greens weren't sufficiently contrasting – "It was more brown." Now, he says, they finally have "the colour we wished for from the beginning".

Fans will be pleased to learn that the pair have also completed a restoration of *Delicatessen* – which hopefully won't take too long to make its way to the UK. "It will be released in a few months," Jeunet says.

The two haven't co-directed a feature together since Jeunet's decision to accept the offer to make *Alien Resurrection* led to a professional parting of the ways. So has revisiting their past work sparked any second thoughts on that front?

"No way!" Jeunet cries, in mock horror. "Never again! And Marc thinks the same thing." "I don't know," says Caro. "I think to work together again, somebody would have to propose to us a project we could work on together. For the moment we have very separate paths."

And really, as Jeunet points out, it's pretty remarkable that they co-directed *any* films. "Usually director couples are brothers, and we're not." "With age, we have more and more precise tastes," Caro adds, "and, y'know, it's difficult to share!" ●

*The City Of Lost Children* is available to buy on 4K UHD, Blu-ray, DVD and digital now.



Brought



To Book

# TEMI OH

Inner space explorer: meet one of SF's most exciting new voices

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Iwan Price-Evans

**A**S A MILLENNIAL, TEMI OH CAN HARDLY remember a time when the internet wasn't part of day to day life. However, she got a reminder last year when she and her husband went on holiday in Egypt, and the hotel Wi-Fi was at best limited. "I felt like every day time just moved unbearably slowly," she says, "I felt like everyone I loved would forget about me."

She's exaggerating a little of course, but the joy of getting a slew of notifications when she went to the one spot in the lobby where she could get connectivity was real. "I felt this rush of delight. Then, five minutes later, I'd just be scrolling through Instagram and bored again." No wonder she characterises her relationship with the digital world as "really strange".

The underlying love-the-internet-hate-it anxiety inherent in these words runs through Oh's second novel *More Perfect*, a nouveau cyberpunk tale of Britain's near future in which people are connected via an implant in their heads to the Panopticon, "a social network of memories and dreams".

Would this be a good idea? On the upside, Oh jokes about how her mother has talked of life in the '80s, when "we knew we were missing something". That something, it turned out, was digital technology. "She told me about having to go to the library to do research," she says, "and my sister and I were like, 'Wow, and you did a whole PhD?' Then again, there's the idea that we're all connected via social media "and yet somehow everyone is lonely".

The events of *More Perfect* play out over a summer in which the government is holding a referendum over whether everyone should be compelled to have an implant. At its centre are orphaned Moremi, a dancer who thinks the Panopticon will save her from feelings of loneliness and depression, and Orpheus, raised off-grid by a father who rejects the idea of people being connected this way.

## JAR HEAD

As the two meet and then fall in love – and *More Perfect* is an achingly romantic novel – their attitudes towards the Panopticon shift. This gives Oh the room to explore her own contradictory thoughts about digital technologies. "A good space to write a book is when you have strong feelings on either side, and you feel like you can argue either side really passionately," she says. As well as calling to mind classic cyberpunk novels like William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, there's something of the '60s New Wave here

## BIODATA

From **South London**

Greatest Hits  
Her debut novel *Do You Dream of Terra-Two?* (2019) won the American Library Association's Alex Award in 2020 and was an NPR Best Book of the year in 2019.

Random Fact  
Oh's debut screenplay was for a short film, "Murmur" – directed by Simon Smith, who won both a BAFTA and an Emmy for his work editing *Chernobyl*.



– in particular, in Oh's seeming fascination with "inner space", the internal lives of her characters and the way strange and disturbing experiences in particular shape how they see their worlds. Perhaps not coincidentally, her undergraduate degree from King's College London was in neuroscience.

"I was really sure we'd find out things like, 'Here's the molecule for loneliness, this is what it looks like in a jar,'" she says. "Then, in my second year, we did philosophy of mind, which I realised is basically like sci-fi. It's things like: if you could put your brain in a jar and your body was looking at your brain, is your brain looking at you or is your body looking at you? It's just the kind of question that you would ask in a science fiction novel."

## SHADES OF RAY

So why not become an SF novelist? Having been raised by a biochemist mother and studied science throughout her education, she headed off to the University of Edinburgh to take an MA in creative writing. Time in adolescence reading dystopian fiction – whether that was YA books such as *The Hunger Games* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, which her mother introduced her to – certainly wasn't wasted. "I always wonder if, if she'd given me a different book, I'd have been like, 'I'm only ever gonna write romance,'" she jokes.

She liked Edinburgh. The drinks were cheaper than in London, for one thing... She also liked "the style, the dark buildings and spires". There, having written in her spare time while she did her first degree, she worked on the book that would become her debut, *Do You Dream of Terra-Two?* A story of teenagers on a two-decades-plus journey to another world, it focused on how having (because they can't turn back) "one destiny" would affect the young astronauts.

It received glowing reviews, and Oh was on her way. She's since also begun building a career as a screenwriter – for example, on Netflix anime *Castlevania: Nocturne*. And, because you can never be too busy, she's recently become a mother too. That means that in contrast to the pandemic years, when work and life blurred, she has to focus during her writing time. "That's kind of refreshing to me," she says. "I have until four o'clock to write, and then I have to stop."

Our call concluding, Temi Oh heads off to get on with another day that will almost certainly involve thinking about why we think and feel the things we think and feel. ●

*More Perfect* is published by Simon & Schuster on 25 May.



“At uni we did  
philosophy of  
mind, which I  
realised is  
basically like  
sci-fi”



# BOW DOWN, MORTALS!



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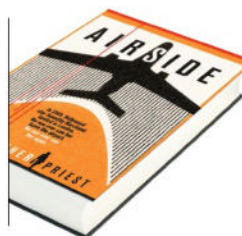
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## GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 3

Breaking up the band



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 150 minutes

► Director James Gunn

► Cast Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana,

Dave Bautista, Karen Gillan,

Pom Klementieff, Bradley Cooper

◆ **Endings are very rarely simply** happy or sad. James Gunn knows this. While the trailers for the belated final film in the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* trilogy have primed us for tragedy (and indeed the film opens with an acoustic rendition of Radiohead's "Creep", rather than one of the breezy '70s and '80s pop hits that have previously defined this series), it's a relief to be able to say that *Guardians 3* is not, in fact, a massive downer.

Yes, this threequel is tinged with sorrow and a palpable sense of closure, but it doesn't forget that part of the appeal of this series is its sense of humour. Impressively, this is somehow simultaneously the darkest and the funniest instalment of the trilogy.

Things seem to be going well on Knowhere, the Guardians' flying skull HQ – for everyone except Star-Lord (Chris Pratt), that is. He may have received a Kevin Bacon-shaped dose of Christmas cheer in last year's *Holiday Special*, but that hasn't cured his heartbreak at losing Gamora (Zoe Saldana). In fact, he's become an angry drunk, wallowing in his misery and unsure how to move forward in life.

Rocket is struggling too. Haunted by memories of his childhood, he's lonely and wondering about his place in the universe. And then Adam Warlock (Will Poulter) comes crashing into everyone's lives, like a glam rock fireball. Created and despatched by the Sovereign (the gold-skinned folk the Guardians royally pissed off in the last movie) his first scuffle with the gang leaves Rocket comatose and fighting for his life.

Rocket occupies a strange space in the film, spending the vast majority of it comatose. This



Cosmo: definitely no relation to Laika.

allows for a succession of flashbacks to his early life, where we learn that he was painfully experimented on by genius scientist and monstrous a-hole the High Evolutionary (Chukwudi Iwuji, brilliantly hateful). In the present, the Guardians must travel to the grotesque Orgoscope and the strange world of Counter-Earth before they are drawn into a final confrontation with Rocket's creator and tormentor.

The initially small stakes of this mission – to save the life of one bad-mouthed raccoon – are at the heart of the film's success. While

there's certainly plenty of action, Gunn is laser-focused on the core group. We've been with these characters a long time now, and *Vol 3* manages to find a way to give all of the leads a moment in the sun – particularly Mantis (Pom Klementieff), here given stronger material than some of the original team. Peter and Gamora's relationship is also put under the spotlight in a way that doesn't erase the impact of what she went through in *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*.

Where the film stumbles is with Rocket's story. We meet Lylla,



# Reviews



Teefs and Floor, the genetically enhanced critters that Rocket grew up with in captivity, in a series of scenes that start off as aggressively cute and slide into mawkishness the longer they go on.

For some, these flashbacks will be the highlight of *Vol 3*. Others will roll their eyes at Gunn's sledgehammer attempts to make you cry – especially when, at the same time, the equally unfortunate folk of Counter-Earth are treated with casual disregard.

Still, this is a small gripe and the challenge of finishing this trilogy

in a satisfying fashion shouldn't be underestimated. *Vol 3* finds an ending for this team that both nods towards what has come before while leaving the door open for a different line-up of Guardians.

It also features an absolutely delightful performance by Will Poulter, whose take on Adam Warlock – simultaneously both a devastating war machine and a put-upon mummy's boy – is a major highlight of the film.

Marvel Studios needed this. It would be a stretch to say that the MCU is in danger of sinking any

time soon, but it's certainly felt a little adrift these last few years, mired in a murky post-*Endgame* arc, troubled productions and a couple of downright stinkers. *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 3* isn't just the most entertaining Marvel film since *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, it also reminds you of why you loved these characters and these actors in the first place. As one character points out early on, it really is good to have friends.

**Will Salmon**

**i** The alien High Evolutionary's backstory is entirely different to the comics, where he was originally a human scientist.

## UPGRADED ANIMALS

More critters raised up like Rocket Raccoon

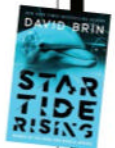
### The Beast Folk The Island Of Dr Moreau

• The wellspring of the concept, HG Wells's 1896 novel centres on a vivisector who's spent years surgically altering animals like a leopard, a sloth and a St Bernard's, giving them speech and humanoid appearance. But these hybrids keep reverting to bestial behaviour...



### Neo-Fins/Neo-Chimpanzees The Uplift Series

• David Brin's *Uplift* books are set in a future where species reach sentience by being genetically modified by a "patron" race, which then owns them for 100,000 years – with both chimps and dolphins uplifted by humanity.



### Bandit, Tinker And Pirate We3

• In Grand Morrison's 2004 comic, a US government project has turned a dog, a cat and a rabbit into living weapons via skull implants. Encased in armour with built-in weapons, they carry out assassinations. Until they escape...



### Space Pig Doctor Who, "Aliens Of London"

• As part of a plan to wipe out alien experts, the Slitheen take an ordinary pig and "stick bits on" its brain, using it to pilot a spaceship that smashes through Big Ben. Poor porker.



© BBC



# Reviews

CINEMA

## BEAU IS AFRAID

Coming, Mother!



▶ **RELEASED** 19 MAY

15 | 178 minutes

▶ Director Ari Aster

▶ Cast Joaquin Phoenix, Parker Posey, Patti LuPone, Zoe Lister-Jones

☛ **“Divisive” is a word thrown** around a lot, particularly with the work of certain filmmakers. Until now, Ari Aster’s horror-focused output has skirted the edges of it – both *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* were widely embraced, even if their more gratuitous gory moments provoked widespread reactions. But with *Beau Is Afraid*, he’s more likely to be polarising, and the reaction will no doubt be strong. We’d expect very few people to walk out of this one saying, “Meh, it was okay.”

Ostensibly the story of Beau Wasserman (Joaquin Phoenix,

folding himself down into the most humbled, self-pitying shape he’s been in years), a mumbling mummy’s boy with scraggly grey hair and possibly the worst luck in the world, this is an odyssey of self-doubt, fear, surprise, murder and mayhem that also has its roots in the parental spectres of ancient Greek tragedy.

Split into distinct chapters, it follows Beau as he tries to visit his wildly successful and wealthy mother Mona (Patti LuPone, dominating the small amount of screen time she receives). Beau is nebbishly surviving life in a cruddy apartment squatting on a city block that’s more war zone than skid row, but when he tries to leave, a series of misfortunes land him in some wildly different situations. These include a seemingly friendly suburban home

with twisted occupants, a freaky forest-dwelling theatre company, and finally... Well, that part we’ll leave you to discover for yourself.

Punctuating it all are flashbacks to Beau’s life as a young teenager (Armen Nahapetian), with his demanding, overprotective mother there played by Zoe Lister-Jones. It’s not hard to see where his development was arrested; one sparkling, snuffed out chance at happiness with a teenage girl named Elaine (Julia Antonelli).

Drilling into him the shocking way in which his father apparently died, Beau’s mother constantly berates him, even as she claims to be saving him from the terrors of the world.

It’s a long story (clocking in just shy of three hours) and awfully episodic in places (at least a couple of chapters end in almost exactly the same fashion, with Beau pelting away from a horrific situation), and there are certainly

“This is an odyssey of self-doubt, fear, surprise, murder and mayhem”

chunks of it that you could write off as Aster doing weird for weirdness’ sake. But let it seep into your brain for a few hours afterwards and the points he’s making about the chaos of the modern world and toxic parent/child relationships start to reveal themselves.

At times you’ll need a strong stomach, at others a readiness to accept metaphor, some seriously grotesque Freudian imagery, and what you could call an abrupt finale. *Beau Is Afraid* is strange, sad, funny and ultimately rewarding if you give into its flow, which pinballs between gonzo and reflective. Let the debates begin!

James White

**i** For one scene, Joaquin Phoenix spent most of a day tussling naked with a stunt performer in a full bathtub.



## THE OLD MAN MOVIE: LACTOPALYPSE



▶ **RELEASED** 2 JUNE

15 | 88 minutes

▶ Directors Peeter Ritso, Mikk Mägi

▶ Cast Mikk Mägi, Oskar Lehemaa, Märt Avandi, Jan Uuspõld

☛ **If your only experience of** stop-motion animation is Aardman’s works of gentle brilliance, then this Estonian comedy should prove quite the eye-opener. Based on a web series by Peeter Ritso and Mikk Mägi, it’s an adults-only affair that aims to elicit grossed-out groans from its audience.

Three kids have gone to stay with their grandad in the countryside. Everyone in the village is obsessed with milk, and the old man appears to own the only local cow. However, a psychopath with a grudge against all things bovine is on the loose and determined to slaughter the animal before its backed-up udders explode and cause milky devastation. Cue lots of running around, shrieking and swearing.

*Lactapocalypse* aims to outrage, but it’s hard to be genuinely offended by anything here. This is a pretty well made, visually inventive animation that’s also not quite as funny as it could be. The gags only occasionally land (one, involving a horny tree, is tortuously protracted) and there’s a retrograde tone to some of the humour that feels blokey and old-fashioned.

Fans of *Freddy Got Fingered* and *The Greasy Strangler* will be in heaven. Everyone else will roll their eyes, but also consider adding oat milk to their coffee from now on. Will Salmon



Cutlery-Free Tuesdays were exciting, if a bit messy.



# Reviews



## THE POPE'S EXORCIST

Clerical terror



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 103 minutes

▶ Director **Julius Avery**

▶ Cast **Russell Crowe, Daniel Zovatto, Alex Essoe, Peter DeSousa-Feighoney**

🔗 **Looking to answer the** question “What if *The Exorcist* was dialled up to really, really ridiculous levels?”, *The Pope's Exorcist* throws every demonic trick at the screen, but very few of them stick.

Russell Crowe, clearly still on an accent acting tour following his turn as Zeus in *Thor: Love & Thunder*, skews dangerously close to ‘Allo ‘Allo! territory here as real-life exorcist Father Gabriel Amorth, author of memoirs such as *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, and previously the subject of a documentary by William Friedkin. Given the fascinating true history of the man, it's almost a shame that his legacy is being used for

“A see-sawing tone and kitchen-sink approach to the story”

such a cheapo shocker – one where a family moving into a mysterious, spooky abbey is the spark for demonic doings and growling by poor young Henry (Peter DeSousa-Feighoney).

A see-sawing tone and kitchen-sink approach to the story don't much help matters: at times, this plays like a cop movie, with Amorth grumpily sassing a snooty Vatican council that seems like it wants to take his badge (crucifix) away, or kicking down a door to help a girl under threat from evil forces. At others, it dives straight into *The Da Vinci Code* territory, sending our hero down a well into cavernous chambers, unearthing historical wrongs (and looking to hand-wave one of the worst crimes of the Church as the work of the Devil).

Still, Crowe clearly relishes bringing Amorth to life, puttering around on a comically small scooter and showing no fear in the face of danger. Like a biopic possessed by a '80s horror thriller, *The Pope's Exorcist* is silly but not entirely unwatchable. **James White**

**i** Because Amorth came from Modena, home of Ferrari, Crowe decided that the character should wear Ferrari socks.

**FILM**

## THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

PODCAST

## IT'S YOUR LAST TIME AT THE CINEMA

WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

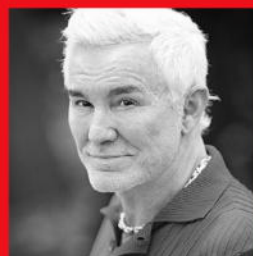
JOIN OUR CELEBRITY PROJECTIONISTS...



Noomi Rapace



Joe Cornish



Baz Luhrmann



Aimee Lou Wood



# Reviews




TV



"I am *not* going up those stairs again today."

## DRINKING GAME

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

-  Someone recites, "We do not know why we are here..."
-  A character's hand shakes due to "The Syndrome".
-  A new relic from the before times is introduced.



-  A porter with a basket on their back dashes past.
-  Someone runs a tap to avoid being listened to.
-  The number 18 mysteriously crops up again.
-  Juliette drops a long way, but miraculously doesn't break a bone...

## SILO Season One

The land down under



UK/US Apple TV+, Fridays

Showrunner Graham Yost

Cast Rebecca Ferguson, Common, Tim Robbins, Chinaza Uche

**EPISODES 1.01-1.10** Though a series

of books provided the template, anyone who gets a wistful feeling on hearing mention of the DHARMA Initiative should be hooked by this show. That said, it has a much more epic (though equally mysterious) project lurking beneath its hatch: an underground society with a population of 10,000, housed in a mile-deep silo containing everything needed for survival. How long it has existed, who built it and why is unknown. What the inhabitants do know is that the

surface is a barren, toxic wasteland, as is confirmed every time some unfortunate is sent out to clean the camera that transmits to screens in every canteen.

It's a great hook – a giant question mark, one orbited by a number of smaller mysteries. Why, for example, does The Pact, the Bible-like manual for silo life, prohibit magnifying devices? Why are there no lifts, rendering a trip from up-top to the deep-down a time-consuming tramp? And why are relics from the before times (like an old Pez dispenser) subject to confiscation and destruction?

Author Hugh Howey's vision made for a difficult brief, but it's a challenge the series' designers have risen to. This is an impressively fully realised

environment, with every surface lovingly distressed, and everything from the costumes (all very practical, in autumnal shades) to the interiors (vaguely Scandi) and the signage feeling of a piece.

The cultural world-building is equally impressive, from the funeral rituals to events such a bottom-to-top foot race and the concept of "Forgiveness Days". This is literally a stratified society, and there are echoes of the *Battlestar Galactica* reboot in episodes such as the one dedicated to showing the grease-monkeys at the bottom fixing the generator on which everything depends.

The hidden politics of this world are navigated with dogged persistence by one of those engineers, Juliette (Rebecca

Ferguson), who after a couple of cunning feints becomes our point of view character. Ferguson does a great job of depicting a character whom we know, from flashbacks, is capable of happiness, but due to loss is now pugnacious, tightly wound and walled off.

Appointed Sheriff after the previous incumbent's death, Juliette grasps the opportunity to investigate her lover's death (supposedly by suicide). It's a bone she will not let go of, even once it becomes clear how ruthless the forces who *really* run this supposed democracy are...

Given its depiction of the ultimate lockdown community, one under constant surveillance, where the reality you're shown on the screens is in question, the makers of *Silo* may discover that their dystopia appeals to Covid deniers and believers in the Deep State. But you don't have to own a tinfoil hat to enjoy it. **Ian Berriman**

**i** A TV adaptation of Hugh Howey's sci-fi novel *Beacon 23* is in the can, with a second season already confirmed.

**“This is an impressively fully realised environment”**



## THE MANDALORIAN Season Three This isn't the way



UK/US Disney+, streaming now

► Showrunners Jon Favreau, Dave Filoni

► Cast Pedro Pascal, Katee Sackhoff,

Emily Swallow, Carl Weathers

**EPISODES 1.01-1.08** Where do you go next when you've already brought back Luke bleedin' Skywalker? *The Mandalorian's* tepid third season never quite figures out an answer to that. As if aware that Grogu's story had reached if not its end then a natural pause, season three seems utterly baffled about what to do with its two leads.

Instead, the focus this year is largely on Bo-Katan (Katee Sackhoff) and the Mandalorians as a whole. That's unfortunate, for while Sackhoff is fine, the

explorations of Manda-lore are painfully tedious. They've never been the most interesting aspect of this show, and trying to add weight to a cult that makes it a sin to ever take off their helmets and who appear to train for battle by standing in a line and shooting at a lake only highlights quite how silly they are.

Elsewhere we get an episode dedicated to Dr Pershing which, although it offers a tantalising glimpse of post-war Coruscant,

**“Even the grand finale feels like a retread of past glories”**

“What’s that? Billy’s fallen down the well?”



draws unflattering comparisons with the terrific *Andor*. A comedy episode with cameos from Lizzo, Jack Black and Christopher Lloyd falls largely flat. Even the grand finale, which sees the return of Moff Gideon in his full pomp, feels like a retread of past glories.

Season three has its moments, notably episode five's legitimately thrilling sky battle, but whereas the first two years were driven by

the genuine chemistry between Pedro Pascal, his stand-ins and a rubber gremlin, season three is characterised by a sense of wheel-spinning and hubristic place-setting for future spin-offs and Dave Filoni's recently announced feature film.

**Will Salmon**

**i** Jar Jar Binks actor Ahmed Best cameos in “The Foundling”, playing a heroic Jedi in a flashback to the prequel era.

## THE ARK Season One It's got a lot of bottle



UK Sky Sci-Fi, Thursdays from 25 May

US Syfy, finished airing

► Showrunners Dean Devlin,

Jonathan Glassner

► Cast Christie Burke, Reece Ritchie,

Richard Fleeshman,

Stacey Michelle Read

**EPISODES 1.01-1.12** This isn't actually a new series, right? It's some lost '90s space opera that someone discovered in a time capsule? Or, at least, a note-perfect pastiche of '90s space opera, down to the *Babylon 5*-style CG effects and dog-eared sci-fi concepts?

Apparently not. But *The Ark*, created by Roland Emmerich's old writing partner Dean Devlin and *Stargate SG-1* veteran Jonathan Glassner, has precious little new to offer, other than evidence that you can produce a series of TV entirely

from bottle episodes. Honestly, the show comes across as so cash-strapped that even the theme song sounds like it was composed on a ZX Spectrum.

The cost-saving scenario has the crew of a colony ship, Ark One, awakened from suspended animation early after a mysterious impact kills off the officers in the first class section. This leaves the three remaining highest-ranking crewmembers – Lieutenants Garnet, Lane and Brice – in charge and bickering over who should be captain. The rest of the series is set almost entirely on Ark One, and even when a new location does materialise, it's just the same sets with different dressing.

There is an arc plot concerning the nature of the emergency that woke them, a secret secondary mission and the fall-out of the



Someone forgot to close an Incognito window.

global disaster that forced mankind into space. But the show is also reliant on an emergency-of-the-week format to give the characters something interesting to do. There's lots of bickering and backstabbing, some cheesy character-building (the geeks wear big glasses; the Serbian technician wears a headscarf; the dodgy corporate boss wears a black polo-neck) and plenty of spurious

science, all of it mostly taking place in corridors.

Some of the characters start to show signs of life and there are a couple of almost-interesting plot twists. But it's painfully obvious that the main reason this show got the green light is because it cost peanuts. **Dave Golder**

**i** Klampkin's disease is named after scriptwriter Kendall Lampkin, whose name would show up as “K.Lampkin” in Zoom.



# Reviews

TV

## STAR TREK: PICARD Season Three

Old dogs, new tricks

★★★★★

UK/US Paramount+, streaming now

► Showrunner Terry Matalas

► Cast Sir Patrick Stewart, Jeri Ryan, Michelle Hurd, Ed Speleers

EPISODES 3.01-3.10 **When *Picard***

season three concluded, Russell T Davies took to Instagram to shower it with bouquets (“How good? I’d say perfect”), leaving showrunner Terry Matalas blushing in the comments (“You set the standard, sir. We’re just following you”). A sweet interaction, and one which left us thinking how Matalas’s crowd-pleasing run has parallels with what Davies did with *Doctor Who*.

Consider, firstly (SPOILERS!) the bombardment of blasts from the past. Reuniting Jean-Luc with Riker, Troi, Crusher, Data, LaForge and Worf is just the tip of the

iceberg. There’s also the return of the Changelings, the Borg, Lore, Ro Laren, Shelby, Tuvok, the holographic Moriarty, and even Spot! At times – as with the rapid-fire glimpses of a Tribble, the Genesis device and the remains of James T Kirk – you can’t help but laugh, but it’s joyful laughter. We’re reminded of how fannish some of Davies’s past ideas seemed: pitting Daleks against Cybermen, for example. A Changelings/Borg team-up (in a plot echoing *TNG* season one’s “Conspiracy”) is on the same level. Fanfic can be thrilling when it’s written by a skilled professional.

Then there’s Davies’s disregard for signposting plot turns – something which led to fan critics lambasting him for “deus ex machina”. Matalas is clearly of the

SPOILER WARNING!

same school – pulling teleporting phaser tech from thin air, for example.

In *The Writer’s Tale*, Davies discussed the abrupt appearance of UNIT’s flying base the Valiant – a characteristic snook-cock at Chekhov’s Gun. Matalas trumps that, pulling the Enterprise-D out of a hat! The idea Geordi’s been tinkering away in his garage for 20 years (with no one querying the receipts) doesn’t hold a thimbleful of water. But then it’s hard to harrumph with a lump in your throat.

That brings us to the series’ emotionality. Here again, Matalas is in lock step with Davies. Not for him Gene Roddenberry’s tiresome edict that the people of the future would have transcended petty discord. *Picard* is brimming with conflict, with practically every

“The *TNG* cast have rarely been handed such good material”

episode featuring a emotionally raw two-hander – all captivating, all glorious. The *TNG* cast have rarely been handed such good material. They’re so well served here, with Jean-Luc experiencing fatherhood, Riker grief, and Data instincts, while Beverly becomes a badass, and Worf *actively* funny.

It’s not that Matalas’s *Picard* copies Davies’s *Who*. But in key respects they share the same ethos, prioritising heartfelt emotion and delivering audacious surprises, never afraid to metaphorically throw an asteroid at the audience. The result is a final bow for this adored ensemble that’s so completely satisfying it washes away the lingering bitter taste of *Nemesis*. **Ian Berriman**

**I**n case you hadn’t twigged: Walter Koenig supplies the voice of Federation President Anton Chekov in the final episode.



## STAR WARS: VISIONS Volume Two

★★★★★

UK/US Disney+, streaming now

► Showrunners Various

► Cast Daveed Diggs, Maxine Peake, Cynthia Erivo, Anjelica Huston

EPISODES 2.01-2.09 **Having given**

Japanese anime studios the run of the galaxy first time out, this second batch of *Visions* broadens its scope by bringing in animation houses from all over the world. To Lucasfilm’s credit, they’ve granted the filmmakers even more creative freedom than before, resulting in an eclectic – and adventurous – anthology of *Star Wars*-themed shorts.

Whereas Volume One got a tad preoccupied with Jedi-on-Sith action, these episodes remember that there’s much more to *Star Wars*. “The Spy Dancer” (from France’s Studio La Cachette) plays out like a wartime resistance drama, for example, while the unmistakably Aardman “I Am Your Mother” focuses on a race at a Rebel pilot school – Denis Lawson even gets to reprise his movie role as X-wing ace Wedge Antilles.

The animation is also frequently stunning, from the spooky, abstract 2D of “Screecher’s Reach” (by Ireland’s Cartoon Solution) to the glorious stop-motion model work on “In The Stars” (from Chile’s PunkRobot).

With its compelling mix of comedy, real-world allegory and inventive riffs on *Star Wars* lore, this second volume suggests that the *Visions* format has the potential to run and run. **Richard Edwards**





## DEAD RINGERS

Cronenberg reborn



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

► Showrunner Alice Birch

► Cast Rachel Weisz, Britne Oldford, Poppy Liu, Jennifer Ehle

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **David**

Cronenberg's 1988 psychological thriller *Dead Ringers* concerns identical twins Elliot and Beverly Mantle – both gynaecologists, both played by Jeremy Irons – and the mental unravelling that follows after Elliot becomes romantically involved with someone.

As well as gender-swapping the characters, this talky, often cuttily sardonic TV take makes other significant subtractions and additions. Gone is Cronenberg's most memorable creation: a bizarre set of "gynaecological devices for operating on mutant women" devised by Elliot. But then there's no place for them.

In the original, the Mantles only work in fertility, and their patients are peripheral figures. Here, with the twins opening a high-end birthing centre, childbirth is front and centre – graphically so in an opening episode full of caesarean incisions and babies being yanked from vaginas. It's also the scabrous Beverly who falls apart, unable to cope with her sister's relationship with actor Genevieve (Britne Oldford); in the original, it's the anxious Elliot.

The series also introduces a vaguely SFnal thread of (in one character's words) "*Frankenstein* shit", with Elliot illegally growing embryos in her lab – though this subplot rather goes nowhere. Indeed, there's a fair amount that feels extraneous here, including a baffling subplot about the twins' tampon-thieving maid, and a visit from the Mantles' English parents.



Anything to escape the Daz Doorstep Challenge.

Rachel Weisz excels in the central dual role, and the series' female focus is thought-provokingly righteous: Elliot says "Pregnancy isn't a disease" so often that it becomes her catchphrase, and a dream sequence provides a powerful denunciation of her profession's dark history. But while the final episode impresses with clever use of almost subliminal flashes and

the insistent vibration of a smartphone, the series' provocation tactics – constant f-bombs, regular displays of Elliot's voracious sexual appetite, repeated dinner conversations which turn from awkward to explosive – come to feel like a list of stock tricks. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Two of the characters – Genevieve Cotard and Tom Capgras – share their surnames with psychological syndromes.

## THE POWER Season One

Who run the world? Girls!



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

► Director Raelle Tucker

► Cast Toni Collette, Auli'i Cravalho, Zrinka Cvitešić, Toheeb Jimoh

EPISODES 1.01-1.09 **It's often been**

said that men are afraid of women laughing at them, but women are worried about men killing them. Based on Naomi Alderman's searing 2016 bestseller, this series imagines a world in which those tables are turned.

It's a world transformed by a global event which sees teenagers and young women develop the power to create a sort of electricity from within, able to shock people at will, debilitating or even killing them. Slowly it spreads until women find themselves with society's upper hand.

Much like the novel, the show takes on a global outlook, as we see

"the power" impacting society across the world. The far-spread ensemble includes Toni Collette as the mayor of Seattle; Ria Zmitrowicz as Roxy, the ambitious daughter of a misogynistic gangster; Zrinka Cvitešić as Tatiana, the trophy wife of a ruthless Eastern European dictator; *Ted Lasso*'s always charming Toheeb Jimoh as Tunde, a Nigerian journalist who is documenting the power's revolutionary impact; and Halle Bush as Allie, who turns the tables on her abusive foster father before embarking on reimagining religion itself in light of this phenomenon.

**“Really captures the sense of a worldwide seismic shift”**



"Bloody hell, isn't your phone charged yet?"

This broader outlook works in the show's favour, really capturing the sense of a worldwide seismic shift, and while each storyline has its highs and its lows, each episode cumulatively keeps the pace up, making the series captivating enough for a gleeful binge.

While some of the satire can get a little didactic, *The Power* succeeds by remembering that getting powers would be really

good fun! A banging soundtrack, sharp zippy editing and plenty of withering one-liners all work in its favour. The series clearly intends to extend to multiple seasons, and those who read the book may know where it's heading; the joy contained in the first act translates brilliantly to the screen. **Leila Latif**

**i** Showrunner Raelle Tucker only joined the project after the show had been shot, and was tasked with retooling it.



## REPULSION

She's Lost Control



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 22 MAY**

1965 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Roman Polanski

▶ Cast Catherine Deneuve, Ian Hendry, John Fraser, Patrick Wymark

❖ **Made in London for the paltry** sum of £65,000 – finance supplied by Compton Films, a company with a sideline screening soft porn in Soho – Roman Polanski's English-language debut centres on Carol (Catherine Deneuve).

This painfully shy young French beautician is forever fending off the unwanted attentions of men, from a would-be beau whose attempts at a kiss leave her frantically brushing her teeth, to a lascivious roadworks labourer ("How about a bit of the other then?") and a landlord whose solicitousness ("I could be a very

good friend to you...") is a prelude to sexual assault. She shares a flat with her older sister; the latter's departure on holiday results in a catastrophic and ultimately murderous mental unravelling.

Very much a psychological thriller rather than a traditional horror, it's presented from the point of view of a disordered mind, with the result that its imagery often has a supernatural or surreal aspect: sinister figures suddenly reflected in a wardrobe mirror; limbs reaching out to grab Carol as she passes along a corridor; rooms swelling in size, or the ceiling closing in.

A thematic focus on erotophobia, plus a plethora of suggestive symbolism – cracks suddenly opening up in the walls; mouldering potatoes sprouting eyes; a skinned rabbit slowly

putrefying; said bunny's decapitated head carried about in a handbag – mean that for a Freudian it's like hitting the jackpot on the one-armed bandit. Elsewhere, a distorted reflection in a kettle, the lined wallpaper in Carol's room and a "one way street" sign all seem to foreshadow an inescapable derangement.

Pushed by Polanski to avoid the usual clichés, Deneuve's performance is disconcertingly offbeat – much of the time, she's so impassive that it's as if she's suffered a short circuit. Cinematographer Gilbert Taylor (picked by Polanski due to his work on *Dr Strangelove*) manages to invest the studio set with fascinating shadows, and jazz musician Chico Hamilton's score, with its manic bursts of machine-gun drums, is sublime.

❖ **Extras** The highlight of this Criterion Collection edition is a 1964 film (23 minutes) shot for French TV series *Grand Écran* (*Big*

**“Deneuve's performance is disconcertingly offbeat”**

*Screen*). As well as interviewing Polanski about his approach, it has a great deal of fascinating behind-the-scenes footage, capturing the director meticulously acting out how he wants scenes to be played during rehearsals, and debating the blocking with a clearly long-suffering Deneuve.

Carried from over previous releases are "A British Horror Film" (24 minutes), a decent 2003 retrospective, and a 1994 commentary which pieces together contributions from Polanski and Deneuve. This is well worth a listen, as the director supplies a stream of interesting nuggets – such as the presence of the film's production manager in Carol's family photo, and the fact that filming for her beautician's took place in Vidal Sassoon's first salon. Plus: trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

**i** One shot of arms coming out from the wall used a sheet of rubber bought from a Durex factory, stretched over a frame.



## MORGIANA

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1972 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Juraj Herz

▶ Cast Iva Janžurová, Josef Abrahám, Nina Divišková, Petr Depek

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** **Juraj Herz,**

director of Czechoslovak New Wave classic *The Cremator*, tried his hand at 19th century Gothic with this darkly ironic adaptation of a novel by Russian author Aleksandr Grin.

It's a tale of two sisters, one of whom decides to poison the other for her share of an inheritance. Both are played by the same actress, though Iva Janžurová does such a fine job of distinguishing the naive Klára and the pantomimically wicked Viktoria that you'd be forgiven for not realising. With their preposterous wigs, heavy eye make-up and extravagant dresses, the two almost seem like drag creations.

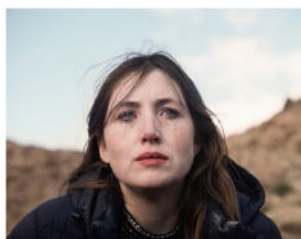
Featuring acid-tinged sequences, it's a film which toys with the supernatural: the poisoned Klára suffers visions of a woman in red, while Viktoria is haunted by a blackmailer she previously pushed off a cliff. The highlight is a score by Lubo Fier (best known for *Valerie And Her Week Of Wonders*), combining lush, romantic strings and ominous kettle drums with jarring laser blast effects.

❖ **Extras** In an interesting 2010 interview (15 minutes), Herz discusses a love of the Brothers Grimm and drawing inspiration from Gustav Klimt, and remarks that he made the film to keep his hand in, and didn't take it all that seriously. There's also a new commentary by the team from podcast *The Projection Booth*. Plus: booklet. **Ian Berriman**



"I 'ave, 'ow you say, gone right off ze rails."





## SHE DIES TOMORROW

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Amy Seimetz

▶ Cast Kate Lyn Sheil, Jane Adams, Kentucker Audley, Tunde Adebimpe

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** This profoundly anxious film isn't about Covid-19, but it's hard not to view it through that lens, and especially the fear that contact with others – no matter how fleeting – brought at the height of the pandemic. The fact that the movie's 2020 release was delayed precisely because of it feels weirdly apt.

Jane (Jane Adams) visits her friend Amy (Kate Lyn Sheil), but finds her in a strange mood, morbidly convinced that she only has hours left to live. Disturbed, Jane leaves and goes to a party, but by the time she arrives, she too has become infected with the conviction that she is soon to die – and so spreads a strange contagion.

Are the characters really dying? The film is ambiguous on that. This is about people being suddenly forced to acknowledge their own mortality, and how they feel about the lives they've lived. Stylishly shot, it's potent and deeply unsettling art horror that lingers in the imagination.

▶ **Extras** Critic Anna Bogutskaya provides a commentary. The Making Of (23 minutes) is an interesting Zoom discussion between the director and cinematographer Jay Keitel. There's also an interview with leads Sheil and Adams (13 minutes) and a visual essay by critic Anton Bitel (15 minutes). Plus: trailer; booklet.

Will Salmon



## ENYS MEN

### Frighten Rock



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Blu-ray & DVD

▶ Director Mark Jenkin

▶ Cast Mary Woodvine, Edward Rowe, Flo Crowe, John Woodvine

▶ **Enys Men** is a film that you feel rather than understand. Shot on gloriously grainy 16mm, with its soundtrack entirely overdubbed, it has the hyperreal quality of a dream.

Mary Woodvine's Volunteer roams an island following the same ritual day after day. She observes the growth of flowers, drops rocks down a mine shaft and reports her findings in a log book. And, for the first hour or so of the film, that's kind of it.

As it progresses, however, you get the sense that time has shifted out of joint. Certainly there are ghosts here – though whether they are phantoms of the mind, literal spirits or aspects of the Volunteer herself remains unclear.

Jenkin has no intention of revealing what *Enys Men* is "about", but regardless of its meaning, this is visceral, tactile filmmaking that leaves the tang of sea salt on your tongue.

▶ **Extras** A commentary by Jenkin and Mark Kermode delves into the practicalities of how the film was made. Kermode also hosts an interview with Jenkin and Woodvine (29 minutes). There's a superb discussion on film sound (86 minutes) between Jenkin and *Berberian Sound Studio* director Peter Strickland, as well as behind the scenes footage of the score being recorded (six minutes). Jenkin's audio diaries accompany

**“You get the sense that time has shifted out of joint”**

the movie as a bonus commentary. “The Duchy Of Cornwall” (15 minutes) is a charming travelogue from 1938, but the real highlight is 1984's *Haunters Of The Deep* (61 minutes), a Children's Film Foundation classic that looks and feels like an accidental prequel to *Enys Men*. Plus: trailer; gallery; booklet.

Will Salmon

**i** The hand we see writing in the journal is not Mary Woodvine's, as her handwriting wasn't clear enough!



## 5-25-77

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | Download

▶ Director Patrick Read Johnson

▶ Cast John Francis Daley, Austin

Pendleton, Colleen Camp, Neil Flynn

▶ **Patrick Read Johnson's**

*5-25-77* is certainly a passion project. Not only did it take a staggering 18 years to produce – filming began in 2004, which surely qualifies as a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away – but it's powered by an unmistakable love for SF cinema itself.

Introduced as a mostly true story, this is a coming of age tale set in '70s Illinois. Pat is a nascent movie maker, staging a Super 8 *Jaws* sequel in the family swimming pool. Chasing such *Starlog*-hymned heroes as Spielberg and Trumbull, this intense, nerdy dream-head wangles his way to LA and catches a rough cut of *Star Wars* – which is enough to blow his mind like an exploding Death Star. Sensing that George Lucas is about to unleash a gamechanger, he vows to catch the film's opening night in his rural backwater, only for teenage life to complicate his plans.

Johnson has a sharp, nostalgic eye for the flares and feather-cuts of his youth, but it's his undying adoration for a geek golden age that gives *5-25-77* its real appeal (look out for a spine-tingling recreation of a vintage ILM model stage, for example).

Like Spielberg's own *The Fabelmans*, the story never entirely persuades you it was begging to be told, but it's undeniably from the heart. Feel the Force.

Nick Setchfield



## ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA

Back to minuscule

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 22 MAY (download/Disney+ OUT NOW)

2023 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K, standard)/DVD/download/SVOD

▶ Director Peyton Reed

▶ Cast Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Jonathan Majors, Kathryn Newton

❖ **Ant-Man and the Wasp** may be the ones with their names in the title, but they're relegated to supporting players in this curtain-raiser for the MCU's fifth phase. *Quantumania*'s real priority is introducing Marvel's multiverse-hopping Big Bad Kang the Conqueror (Jonathan Majors), and his presence eclipses everything else on screen.

With the action shifted to the Quantum Realm, the movie

sacrifices its predecessors' endearing connection with the real world – especially as this CG-heavy subatomic environment is too self-consciously freaky to ever truly convince. Along with Kathryn Newton (as Scott Lang's now grown-up daughter Cassie), returning stars Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Michael Douglas and Michelle Pfeiffer do their best with the Marvel-by-numbers script. But beyond Kang and his henchman MODOK, it's a case of rapidly diminishing returns.

❖ **Extras** Although "Formidable Foes" (12 minutes) explains the backstory of the villains and "All In The Family" (seven minutes) does its best to suggest there may be some emotional depth to the movie, the two featurettes are



Visit Hull and its many beautiful sights.

most memorable for the glimpses of what *Quantumania* looked like before the CG wizards did their work. You need to concentrate hard to work out how the deleted scenes differ from the final versions. Meanwhile, a two-minute blooper reel showcases moments of on-set "hilarity".

Most worthwhile is the commentary from director Peyton

Reed and screenwriter Jeff Loveness. It's slightly self-congratulatory, but they're brilliant at highlighting the many influences on the film, whether it's classic SF book covers, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* or electron microscopy. **Richard Edwards**

**i** Eels frontman E has a brief cameo. His dad, Hugh Everett, came up with the many worlds interpretation of quantum physics.

## FULL CIRCLE

Strange Little Girl

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

1978 | 15 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/download

▶ Director Richard Loncraine

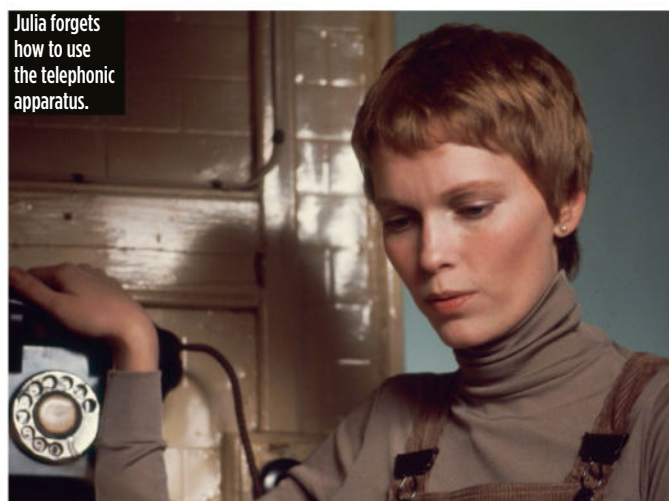
▶ Cast Mia Farrow, Keir Dullea, Tom Conti, Robin Gammell

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** The latest obscurity dusted off for the BFI's Flipside range is this restrained British chiller. Adapted from Peter Straub's 1975 novel *Julia*, it saw Mia Farrow's return to horror a decade on from *Rosemary's Baby*. She plays Julia, who separates from her husband after their daughter Kate's death.

Moving into an opulent Kensington residence, she's haunted by glimpses of a blonde-haired girl. Could it be Kate? Her investigations uncover an alternative explanation, related to a historic murder.

Firmly situated in an upper-middle-class milieu, it's a classy, old-fashioned ghost story, the sort that spares the tomato sauce and sends its heroine rifling through old newspapers in the British Library. Peter Hannan's cinematography is moody and stylish, Colin Towns's pretty score redolent of the Radiophonic Workshop. It also features a parade of familiar character actors, such as *EastEnders*' Anna Wing, *Sherlock Holmes*' Edward Hardwicke and *Last Of The Summer Wine*'s Peter Sallis.

However, as director Richard Loncraine notes, the film is difficult to make sense of. A sprinkling of calamitous deaths, no doubt added to ride the coattails of *The Omen*, muddy the waters, contradicting the novel's explanation of what is going on. In Loncraine's words, "nearly good".



Julia forgets how to use the telephonic apparatus.

❖ **Extras** On the commentary, *Full Circle* uberfan Simon Fitzjohn helpfully prompts the director's memories of a shoot so stressful he recalls waking up some days and crying. He also fronts a locations tour (15 minutes), and talks through his lobby cards collection (13 minutes). A Kim Newman talking head (25 minutes) is instructive on changes from the

book. Of five cast/crew interviews (totalling 78 minutes), Loncraine's is worthwhile, but composer Colin Towns rambles, while child actor Samantha Gates and producer Hugh Harlow add little of value. Plus: stills and ephemera gallery; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Director Richard Loncraine's other big claim to fame is designing an iconic executive toy: the Newton's Cradle.





## PETER PAN & WENDY

The Darling buds of today



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 6+ | SVOD

▶ Director David Lowery

▶ Cast Ever Anderson, Jude Law, Alexander Moloney, Yara Shahidi

**DISNEY+** The story of the boy who never grew up is well over a century old now, and has been told in a myriad of different ways. Taking inspiration from both the original novel (*Peter And Wendy*) and the classic 1953 Disney movie, this new version corrects the racism of the latter while also restoring Wendy to (co-)title character status.

You know the basics: boy who never grows up entices the three Darling siblings away to Neverland, where he fights the evil Captain Hook with the help of the Lost Boys, accompanied by devoted fairy Tinkerbell.

There's plenty of potential here, but the film never quite fulfils it. From lines of dialogue to musical motifs there are echoes of other, better films, and the joy and colour that should be entwined with an eternal childhood is missing; the palette is dull and drab. Peter himself, though well acted by Alexander Moloney, is entirely too solemn and lacking in fun.

Wendy (*Black Widow*'s Ever Anderson) is at the story's heart, and her struggles with growing up, and the possible joys of a future as yet unknown, are the source of the most magical moments. But these aren't enough to rescue a film that continually shies away from the "big adventure" of its most famous line.

**Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** Ever Anderson might remind you of her mother – she's the daughter of Milla Jovovich and director Paul WS Anderson.



### THE ARTIFICE GIRL

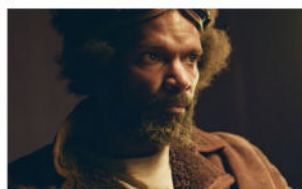


▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Download

◉ **Writer/director/star** Franklin Ritch's thoughtful, relentlessly talky meditation on AI probably belongs on the stage. Over three chapters, it reveals the existence of Cherry, an AI child created as bait for online predators, then time-jumps to explore how (and if) she feels about it.

Its largely basement-bound physical limitations get faintly comical, but good performances keep you engaged: Ritch rattles off reams of technical dialogue, and Lance Henriksen is, for once, handed material worthy of his gravitas. **Ian Berriman**



### FUTURE SOLDIER



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | Download

◉ **Supersoldier turned** bounty hunter Captain Mo Harrington comes out of retirement to help save Supercity Europe from being overrun by crime, only to discover his shifty employers are part of the problem...

With its cheesy title, enhanced beefcake hero, synth score and "future" setting of 2002, this micro-budget British sci-fi noir is clearly intended as a homage to futuristic '80s action flicks. Sadly, the film is low on the kind of wit that could have overcome its financial constraints. **Dave Golder**



### LITTLE BONE LODGE



▶ **RELEASED 22 MAY**

2023 | 15 | Download

◉ **This sort-of-home-invasion** thriller is impressively taut and twisty, with a terrific cast. A family on an isolated Scottish homestead encounter two strangers desperate for help, and grudgingly let them inside. Something is going to go wrong, but the film does a decent job of keeping you on your toes about what, how, why and who.

The second half trades tension for reveals and is less gripping, but a couple of set-pieces are impressively nasty. **Will Salmon**



### RESTART THE EARTH



▶ **RELEASED 22 MAY**

2021 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/Download

◉ **Giant sentient plants have** taken over in this ecological-minded Chinese action movie. When a widowed dad and his daughter join forces with a bunch of soldiers to save what's left of humanity, the result is a mess of barely passable CG flora, unnecessary slow-mo and lots of noble sacrifice.

The English subtitles are functional to the point of hilarity, while the plotting is so ridiculous it makes *The Core* and *Geostorm* seem plausible.

◉ **Extras** None. **Richard Edwards**



## KNOCK AT THE CABIN

Sacrificial fam

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/DVD/download

▶ Director **M Night Shyamalan**

▶ Cast **Dave Bautista, Jonathan Groff, Ben Aldridge, Nikki Amuka-Bird**

Home invasion thriller and apocalyptic horror merge in M Night Shyamalan's adaptation of Paul Tremblay's novel *The Cabin at The End Of The World*.

A girl and her two dads are holidaying in the titular cabin when four strangers wielding outlandish home-made weapons arrive. Smashing their way in, they present the parents with a *Sophie's Choice*-style decision, and inform them that each time they fail to act, they will "unleash a plague". Are the visions driving these everyman Four Horsemen delusions, or divinely inspired?

It's a captivating high concept, embodied through committed performances – though Dave Bautista's hulking physicality makes it a bit tricky to see him as a kindly teacher. Sadly, by taking a different tack in its second half, Shyamalan's take on the material rather flattens out the novel's ambiguity, while also denying audiences an ending of *The Mist*-level bleakness.

The movie is also badly let down by its TV news sequences, whose failure to grasp basic concepts such as how long it takes before an incident can be declared over, and how willing cameramen

**“The film's take rather flattens out the novel's ambiguity”**



Nothing good ever happens in a cabin in the woods.

are to keep filming in the face of certain death, render them hoot-inducingly ham-fisted.

▶ **Extras** A 24-minute Making Of, mostly focused on characterisation, is your usual smoke-blowing exercise. A short piece on child actor Kristen Cui (four minutes), sees her declaring the director “funny and smart” – she's got the hang of it already. The highlights

are featurettes on the weapons (five minutes) and Shyamalan's rigorous storyboarding (four minutes). Four deleted scenes (five minutes) include a couple more flashbacks about the dads. Plus: the full infomercial featuring the director's cameo. **Ian Berriman**

i Listen out for seven knocks before the first sacrifice – the composer's nod to the seven angels in the Book of Revelations.

## PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

Gone Girls



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1975 | PG | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

▶ Director **Peter Weir**

▶ Cast **Anne-Louise Lambert, Rachel Roberts, Dominic Guard, Helen Morse**

Peter Weir's lush, oblique masterpiece of Australian New Wave cinema is upfront from the start. A title card frames what we are about to see as historical fact: the tale of a party of schoolgirls who “disappeared without trace...”

Preserving and deepening the ambiguities of Joan Lindsay's novel, the screen version rejects the traditional puzzle-box structure of a mystery tale to deliver something more elusive and intriguing. You can see it as

an exercise in exquisitely photographed Antipodean folk horror – Weir finds dread in the land itself, sun-beaten and ancient as time – but such genre-boxing diminishes this remarkable hymn to the queasy beauty of mystery.

▶ **Extras** An intelligent and thorough 2004 documentary (118 minutes) contains insights from cast and crew. There are new interviews with director of photography Russell Boyd (11 minutes), actress Karen Robson (11 minutes) and camera operator John Seale (seven minutes), while Australian film critic Thomas Caldwell illuminates *Picnic's* historical context and cultural impact, particularly on the work of David Lynch (23 minutes).



“Hey, let's form an alt-rock trio.”  
“Yeah. Cool.”

A 1975 interview with Joan Lindsay (15 minutes) reveals a characterful, fascinating individual, while an archive documentary includes precious behind-the-scenes footage. Also included is an audio commentary by film critics Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Josh Nelson, eerily silent outtakes of an ending we never saw, an extended trailer, and

a restoration of the original, theatrical cut; Weir's Director's Cut, presented as the main feature, also stunningly restored, actually shortens the movie. The Limited Edition 4K set comes with six art cards, a book of essays and the original novel. **Nick Setchfield**

i Joan Lindsay claimed she had the entirely involuntary ability to stop people's watches just by being next to them.





## THE RESURRECTION OF CHARLES MANSON

★☆☆☆☆

▶ **RELEASED** 29 MAY

2023 | 15 | Download

▶ Director Remy Grillo

▶ Cast Katherine Hughes,

Josh Plasse, Vince Hill-Bedford, Frank Grillo

❖ **The thing with 78-minute** horror movies is they never feel 78 minutes long, because they're almost always meandering and confused.

*The Resurrection Of Charles Manson* is a prime example: if anyone involved knew how to tell a story, it'd probably have landed at around 90 minutes. Instead, it's an unbaked mess; a premise in search of a story, some characters and probably some basic human empathy into the bargain.

Here's the premise: a grieving wannabe actress drags her new boyfriend out to the middle of nowhere so she can film an audition tape. She wants to play one of Manson's murderous acolytes, and needs to get in the zone. Problem is, it's a dangerous zone to get into, not least for her hapless beau.

If you squint you can just about see the script straining towards some sort of idea. Something about the way cults prey on the vulnerable, maybe.

Whatever the point might've been, it got lost somewhere beneath the unconvincing performances and baffling editing. What we're left with is so screamingly misjudged that even a glorified cameo from Frank Grillo can't elevate it. And yes, director Remy Grillo is his son; draw your own conclusions. **Sarah Dobbs**



The existential angst of forgetting to buy toothpaste.

## HUESERA: THE BONE WOMAN

The mother load

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Michelle Garza Cervera

▶ Cast Natalia Solián, Alfonso Dosal, Mayra Batalla, Mercedes Hernández

**SHUDDER** **Though it's set in**

Mexico City and makes use of a figure from Mexican folklore, Michelle Garza Cervera's directorial debut also taps into J-horror, featuring as it does uncannily jerky, bone-cracking, crawling female figures in the lineage of *Ring's* Sadako. (At one point the manga *Uzumaki* can be glimpsed on a bookshelf, which seems a bit of a giveaway.)

Natalia Solián plays Valeria, a young woman with a pleasant aspirational lifestyle (hand-makes furniture, husband in advertising, chic apartment). Her happiness at discovering she's pregnant is soon interrupted by apparent hallucinations – a neighbour leaping from their window, a figure under the bed grabbing her foot. So far, so generic.

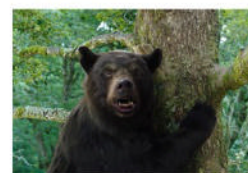
The story grows more distinctive once we delve into Valeria's past as a punk with a bleached-blond crop (returning to the subject of books: kudos to whoever placed Alice Bag's memoir in her closet).

Normally you'd expect such a scenario to wrap up with the exorcism of a demonic spirit and a happy ever after. In this case, however, what must be expelled for Valeria to be her authentic self is what all the with-it kids nowadays call heteronormativity.

This certainly makes for a novel spin on old tropes. But while *Huesera* productively explores the expectations placed upon women (especially in a Catholic country like Mexico), positing the "maternal instinct" as socially constructed, it is – barring that suicidal leap and the striking image of a pile of squirming, naked female bodies – not particularly bone-chilling. **Calvin Baxter**

**i** During a babysitting scene, René Cardona's 1960 horror *La Llorona* (about another Mexican legend) is on TV.

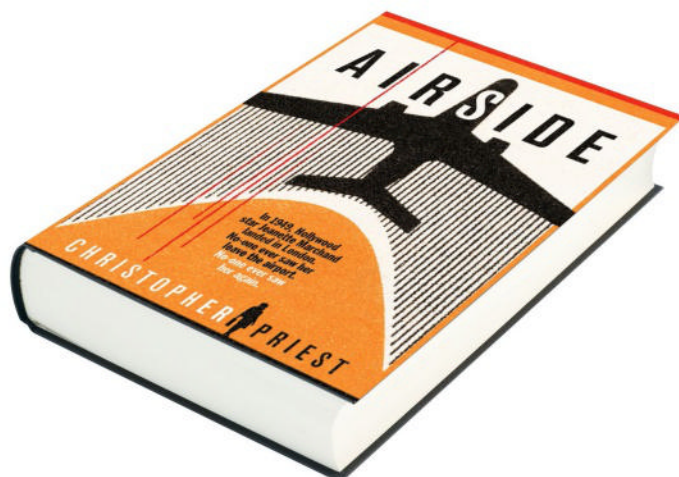
## (ROUND UP)



Hot on the heels of the cinematic release of **COCAINE BEAR** (29 May, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD),

Elizabeth Banks's gory horror-comedy romp about a nose candy-fuelled killer bear is coming home. Bonuses on the "Maximum Rampage Edition" include a director's commentary, alternate ending, deleted scenes, a Making Of and a featurette on the kill scenes. We said: "It's not quite as funny as you might have hoped for, but still has memorable moments." Antonio Banderas's swashbuckling feline quests for a magic star in *Shrek* spin-off **PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD/download). New four-minute Puss short "The Trident" leads a decent spread of extras, which include a director's commentary, deleted scenes and child-friendly features on how to draw the main characters. We said: "A lightweight, kiddie-friendly adventure... Largely inconsequential, but diverting enough." The likes of Hugh Laurie and David Thewlis provide voices for **THE AMAZING MAURICE** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD), an adaptation of Terry Pratchett's *Pied Piper*-esque children's book about a talking cat who stages rat invasions to collect cash from the local townsfolk. We said: "A fun, family-friendly film that's clever enough to keep adults happy, with just enough *Discworld* nods for fans." Finally, there's good news for the intelligent, discerning and fragrant people who still buy TV box sets, with the release of **CHUCKY SEASON TWO** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) and **FOR ALL MANKIND SEASONS ONE AND TWO** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD).





## AIRSIDE

Terminal case



★★★★★

► **RELEASED 25 MAY**  
304 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook  
► Author **Christopher Priest**  
► Publisher **Gollancz**

✪ **Airports, it's sometimes** said, are liminal spaces. They lie between home and a resort, a business hotel and the next conference or appointment. Then there are the corridors and stairways through which we have to move to reach a departure gate, a border official's booth or a luggage carousel. In an airport, we seem always to find ourselves in a non-place between places.

Except what if that's the wrong way to look at airports? What if we should rather see airports as concrete-and-glass actualisations of what the academic David Pascoe has dubbed airspace, a distinct if discrete place in itself that extends from terminal to terminal, crisscrossing time zones?

"The airport is a locale of anxiety and chance where, in order to expedite air traffic, authority is absolute, time is relative and liberties are always taken," notes the University of Chicago Press in its promotional text for Pascoe's 2001 book *Airspaces*.

We mention this because it is clearly an idea that appeals to Christopher Priest, who namechecks the book in his afterword to *Airside*, an intricate, clever, mysterious and moving slipstream novel that plays out in great part within airspace. For longtime Priest readers, this will hardly be a surprise, as both aeroplanes and the idea of time getting woozy recur in his fiction.

Confounding events are also a recurring feature in Priest's fiction, and *Airside* is no different. It begins on 13 April 1949, with a Hollywood movie star, Jeanette Marchand, boarding a flight from Los Angeles to New York. It's the prelude to another journey across the Atlantic to England "to take a short vacation and to explore the possibility of making some films over there". She arrives in London but then, seemingly without ever leaving the airport, disappears.

It's an incident that fascinates Justin Farmer, a list maker, habitual notetaker and movie obsessive who, in part it seems because of an incident in childhood, is fascinated too by aeroplanes and airports. The novel follows the trajectory of his professional progress from freelance reviewer to esteemed

critical voice and globetrotting film festival judge. We look on as Farmer researches Marchand's life and career, ever ready to speak with someone who might have encountered her, however brief the meeting might have been.

The novel is written in crisp prose, as pared back and devoid of extraneous detail as you'll find in any noir. It's a style not so far removed in key respects from the later writing of one of Priest's contemporaries, M John Harrison. But where Harrison now so often seems to eschew conventional structures by deliberately looking off to one side of big events, Priest displays an airport thriller-writer's love of pushing the plot forward. Even chapters given over to reproducing Farmer's criticism – of films, of course, where air travel and airports feature prominently – never slow the book down.

Farmer is an initially unsympathetic character, nerdy and fussy, but the novel also draws you in by showing his slow emotional development, notably through his relationship with fellow writer Matilda "Matty"

**“As pared back and devoid of extraneous detail as any noir”**

Linden. By the time you reach the final 70 or so decidedly eerie pages, which follow Farmer on an extended series of travels that seemingly leave him suffering fugue states, you're genuinely rooting for him. Allied to this, there's a sense of jeopardy akin to the creeping sense of edginess you get when you let yourself imagine that, for all that so few planes crash, the flight you're about to take might just be the exception.

Christopher Priest turns 80 this year, and it shows. After a lifetime of writing, he's a master at what he does, able not just to pilot his way through the strangeness of airspace but to map its abstract contours. **Jonathan Wright**

**i** It's now 40 years since Priest was one of 20 authors included in *Granta's* inaugural Best of Young British Novelists list.



## PERILOUS TIMES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 23 MAY**  
544 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook  
► Author **Thomas D Lee**  
► Publisher **Orbit**

✪ **Ancient myths and very** modern problems collide in Thomas D Lee's *Perilous Times*. In the near future, the world teeters on the brink of ecological collapse. In northern England, an eco-warrior called Mariam blows up a fracking site, accidentally unleashing a dragon in the process. Simultaneously Kay, a former Knight of the Round Table, is awakened from magical slumber to answer the call to protect the realm – but realises it's hard to protect a kingdom from rising temperatures, division and greed.

Lee's adventure could easily read like a *Guardian* article about the evils of late-stage capitalism; fortunately, a sharp, cynical sense of humour (not to mention river goddesses and scheming wizards), prevents any such pitfalls.

Similarly, there's no shortage of reinterpretations of the Arthurian mythos, yet Lee's spin on the characters and their distinctly dysfunctional relationships feels fresh and inspired. These legends are all too human in their foibles, grounding all the magic and adventuring in emotions and motivations that ring true.

The prose is excellent, evoking the oppressive heat and decay of a country falling into ruin as effectively as it captures the chaos and even absurdity of facing a dragon attack. At once entertaining and alarming, *Perilous Times* is an ambitious, imaginative debut. **David West**





## SCARLET

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

306 pages | Hardback/audiobook/  
ebook

► Author Genevieve Cogman

► Publisher Tor

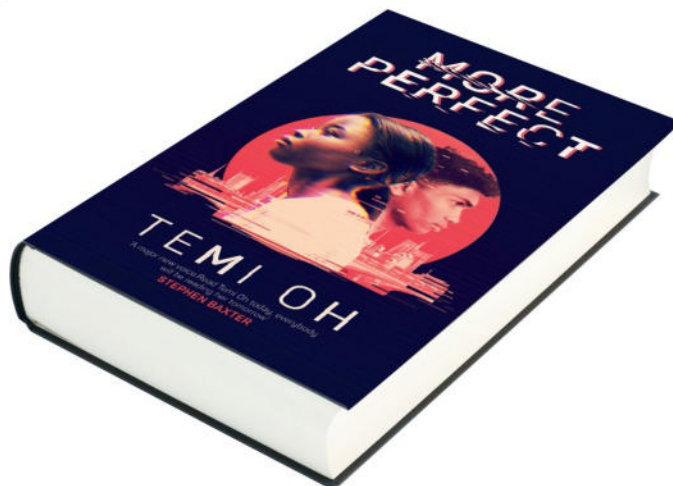
◆ **The Scarlet Pimpernel** with vampires is the pitch for Genevieve Cogman's new French Revolution-era trilogy. Cogman's adventure features many characters from Baroness Orczy's classic story, including the aristocratic spy Sir Percy Blakeney and his nemesis Citizen Chauvelin. However, Scarlet's protagonist is an original character: Eleanor, a maid recruited by Sir Percy for a perilous mission to save the deposed French royal family from the guillotine.

Cogman has a lively narrative voice and writes engaging prose; however, the novel struggles to blend the fantastic with the historical. The worldbuilding casts the vampires as parasitic nobles, but they play a surprisingly small role in the plot.

The most compelling encounter with a vampire comes when Eleanor is trapped with a particularly hungry specimen in a remote country manor. That sequence is suspenseful and exciting, but the same story could be told without the vampires while changing very little.

Eleanor occasionally bristles against the restrictions of the British class system, but despite her longing for more from life than servitude, both heroine and author remain indecisive, prevaricating on the merits of the revolution. *Scarlet* needed to have sharper teeth to leave a lasting mark.

David West



## MORE PERFECT

### Connect Law

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 25 MAY**

592 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Temi Oh

► Publisher Simon & Schuster

◆ **Opposites attract. Or at least,** within the conventions of romantic fiction, people from very different backgrounds often make the deepest of connections. We mention this because Temi Oh's second novel is a big-hearted cyberpunk romance.

Its protagonists are Moremi, a young dancer who longs to connect to the Panopticon – a supercharged digital social network where you can see inside other people's mind and dreams – and Orpheus, an only son raised by a renegade neo-Luddite father. *Of course* they fall in love.

It's a relationship that plays out at a time when the authorities are trying to legislate for everyone to be connected to the Panopticon – the idea being that when the whole population is linked up, able to see the world through the eyes of others, human suffering can be ended, a way to usher in a More Perfect world.

This utopian vision is far removed from the near-future Britain Oh conjures up, a country where global heating is biting and temperatures are soaring. When

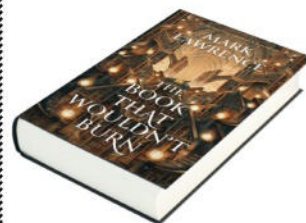
terrorists target the Thames Barrier, the capital is catastrophically flooded. The exploitative gig economy is still with us. There's rioting. People are scared. It's difficult to imagine a more dangerous point at which to introduce a technology that lends itself to being exploited by those with their own interests at heart rather than the greater good.

With the action playing out over a summer that has something of the atmosphere of 2019, when the Brexiteer-Remainer wars were at

“A sense of unease underpins the plot”

their height, a skittering sense of unease underpins the plot. The book sometimes flags in its middle section, perhaps because Oh lingers just a little too long on Moremi and Orpheus falling for each other. The final section, though, is a bravura mix of action, Greek mythology and discourse on the nature of consciousness and the idea of free will. As for the denouement, it's a punch in the gut. A novel that confirms Oh as a major talent. **Jonathan Wright**

i The panopticon, a prison where one guard could watch multiple inmates, was an idea of social theorist Jeremy Bentham.



## THE BOOK THAT WOULDN'T BURN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

576 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Mark Lawrence

► Publisher HarperVoyager

◆ **The scale of Mark** Lawrence's vision in this first volume of *The Library Trilogy* is positively daunting. The story is built around a library that reaches across time and space, holding uncounted secrets within its cavernous chambers, while the plot begins in two separate strands.

A ferociously intelligent young girl called Livira comes to Crath City, which houses the entrance to the library, as a refugee. She becomes an apprentice librarian as her insatiable hunger for knowledge drives her to break every rule in trying to divine the library's mysteries. Meanwhile, Evar has been trapped within one chamber of the library since childhood, alongside his brothers and sister, searching for a way out.

This is a work of prodigious imagination. Lawrence crafts a highly complex world, juggles multiple timelines, and tackles big ideas about history, identity, war and the rise and fall of civilisations. However, there's so much that remains outside of the reader's view that the ending in particular feels like a case of *deus ex machina*, with one character emerging from nowhere to facilitate events in the plot.

It will be fascinating to see where Lawrence takes these characters in the next volume, this first entry is both thrilling and frustrating. **David West**





## ON THE NATURE OF MAGIC

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED 23 MAY**

416 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author **Marian Womack**

► Publisher **Titan Books**

❖ **On the surface there's a lot** to like about this novel set in London at the turn of the 20th century: illusionists, seances, occult rituals, women detectives. But it can't hide how rudimentary the writing feels, or how lacklustre the plot.

It doesn't help that the characters are ciphers. Helena and Eliza are colleagues running their own detective agency, aided by Helena's innate psychic talents. While such a duo sounds like it would be thrilling to follow, the ways these girl bosses take charge of their lives feel annoyingly fanciful. Helena carries a knife disguised as an umbrella, quarrels with policemen, saves little girls from their pimps and helps women in need like an avenging angel.

While there are some effective moments sprinkled throughout, such as a spooky interlude set in the Parisian catacombs, the book feels shallow, never truly exploring what it was like being a woman in the early 1900s who was trying to be taken seriously in academic or scientific circles – or, in the case of Helena, being a woman and mixed-race.

It also features some truly awkward turns of phrase, such as when Helena lights a cigarette and thinks about how she can feel the smoke “impregnating her insides” – a line so wince-inducing it's hard to recover from.

**Kimberley Ballard**



## 19 CLAWS AND A BLACK BIRD

Strong meat

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

191 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author **Agustina Bazterrica**

► Publisher **Pushkin Press**

❖ **Given the nature of her 2017** novel *Tender Is The Flesh*, in which, when a virus renders animal meat unfit for consumption cannibalism is industrialised, it comes as no surprise that Argentinian author Agustina Bazterrica's short story collection is a bleakly morbid affair.

Its 20 slices of Lit Fic horror generally end in a death, and self-annihilation is a common theme. A sense of revulsion at humanity – for its vacuity, vulgarity or physical repulsiveness – also recurs. They're brief affairs, with sometimes only the most embryonic characterisation or narrative development. A few might better be described as prose poems.

There aren't any supernatural entities here – with the possible exception of “The Solitary Ones”, an eerie tale concerning a woman whose subway train stops in a tunnel. Instead the horror stems

principally from humanity (and as one character puts it, “the traces of monstrosity in everyday life”).

Two tales stand out. In “Unamuno's Boxes”, a woman taking a taxi ride notices the driver's well-tended nails, and extrapolates from this that he must be a serial killer. Most impressive is “The Continuous Equality Of The Circumference”, in which a woman who admires the perfection of the circle decides to “embody it in flesh and bone” by growing obese and removing her limbs... One suspects Bazterrica has a notebook where she jots down intrusive thoughts.

Her style won't be to all tastes. “Why use one simile when you can string together three?” seems to be Bazterrica's motto, and she's similarly liberal with adjectives. This can lend her prose an incantatory rhythm, but – combined with a penchant for relaying rambling interior monologues in almost Joycean detail – also feel frustratingly undisciplined. **Ian Berriman**

**i** In one story, a man commits suicide, landing on a neighbour's patio. A college classmate of Bazterrica experienced this.



## FABLEHOUSE

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED 8 JUNE**

352 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **EL Norry**

► Publisher **Bloomsbury**

❖ **Who fancies a children's** book that'll make you nostalgic for post-Second World War, *Famous Five*-style adventuring? There's also a dash of Arthurian legend and characters who aren't all a) posh or b) white. No complaints here.

The titular Fablehouse is an orphanage in a small British village which mostly houses the children of African-American GIs who dallied with local ladies during the war. Rejected by their parents and stigmatised by society, Heather, Lloyd, Arlene and Nat find a family in each other instead.

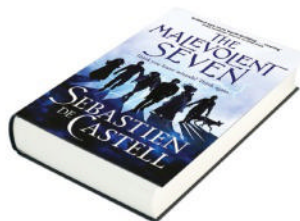
Then they stumble across a mysterious injured man beside a magical clifftop cairn. Being kids, they decide to keep him secret, hiding him away in a barn (*Whistle Down The Wind* is, fittingly, namechecked as an influence on this book). However, evil fae magic is afoot...

It's hard not to imagine Enid Blyton creating this world – ginger beer even gets a mention. The plot rattles along briskly with a few creepy moments to spook younger readers and the odd reference to racism, very deftly handled.

Debut author EL Norry does rather struggle to define all of Heather's friends (they have backstories, yet it's easy to forget who's who), but it doesn't really matter as they're still great company. A pleasing throwback to a bygone age of children's literature.

**Jayne Nelson**





## THE MALEVOLENT SEVEN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

376 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Sebastien de Castell  
► Publisher Jo Fletcher Books

☛ **Déjà vu? No glitch in the Matrix** here: you're thinking of 2021's *The Maleficent Seven*, by Cameron Johnston. This unrelated book features a fantastical team-up too. Its distinctiveness lies in its arch tone and meticulously-crafted magic system.

It's a first-person account by spellcaster Cade, a mercenary "wonderist" paid to fight battles for unscrupulous lords. Fleeing from his past and manipulated into joining a quest north to defend Mage's Grave, Cade makes unlikely allies, dodges zealous inquisitors, and unravels a conspiracy on a celestial scale.

Knowing winks at the reader and earthy language make for a tone somewhere between Terry Pratchett and *Deadpool*. If it occasionally feels forced, there's a playfulness to it that keeps the pages turning, even during expository chapters.

And there's a lot of exposition. The author enjoys explaining how magic works and describing the planes of existence it's pulled from; one neat invention is messages transmitted via animal bites. To balance this, sometimes the plot romps along like it's being made up on the fly.

This feels like a pitch for an episodic TV show about Cade and his band. But it has chaotic energy, clever ideas and characters that stay with you after the final page. **Dave Bradley**



## SEAHURST

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

320 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author SA Harris  
► Publisher Salt Publishing

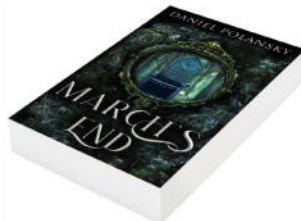
☛ **You know that old cliché** about how the heroine in horror movies always falls over at a crucial moment? Evie, the narrator of *Seahurst*, really seems to have taken it to heart. If there's a trip hazard anywhere in the vicinity, she'll go flying.

Clumsiness is the primary source of tension in this uninspiring supernatural horror. Some years earlier, Evie's father fell to his death from the cliffs beyond their spooky old house; now, her brother has gone missing, likely having met a similar fate. Both of them had been researching a local legend about a witch, without much luck. Now it's down to Evie to figure it out, before she or her son take a fatal trip of their own.

Despite being narrated in the present tense, there's not much urgency to anything here. The overly descriptive, overwrought style serves to slow down the action rather than drawing the reader in – but also, nothing much ever happens. Evie is fleeing domestic violence when she arrives at Seahurst, so the supernatural shenanigans should serve some kind of allegorical purpose, but none of it ever quite coalesces.

What this story really needed was at least one moment of pure nightmare-inducing horror to pay off the endless wheel-spinning, but it never arrives. Instead, it's basically a book about a woman who needs a new pair of walking boots.

**Sarah Dobbs**



## MARCH'S END

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Daniel Polansky  
► Publisher Angry Robot

☛ **For many readers of** fantasy, our first encounter with the genre was a portal fantasy – the sort of story in which characters from our world travel, through magical means, to another world.

While many of these stories centre on children – think *Narnia*, or *His Dark Materials* – Daniel Polansky's is multi-generational. The Harrow family have ruled as monarchs of the March since time immemorial, holding together its various peoples against the dread forces of the End.

The March is a dazzling array of fairy courts, sentient machines and insect hives. The steady, creeping invasion of the End is brilliantly unsettling in the way that it corrupts this fantasy; the End-poisoned Toytown, in particular, is the stuff of nightmares.

The Harrow family themselves, though, are deeply mundane: not just ordinary, but positively bland. The personalities of squabbling siblings Constance, Mary Ann and John largely consist of them being annoyed with each other and their parents, so as you can imagine, time spent in their company gets tedious pretty quickly.

The narrative jumping back and forth in time can't disguise the fact that the central story is very simple – fight evil in the March, angst and bicker back home, fight some more – and the characters just aren't interesting enough to sustain it.

**Nic Clarke**

## REISSUES

Our paperback picks for May include Kiersten White's horror thriller

**HIDE** (★★★★★, out now, Penguin). It centres on a high-stakes hide-and-seek competition – seven days, 14 contestants, big cash prize – in an abandoned amusement park. Of course, something far more sinister is afoot. We

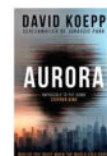
said: "Tense and often affecting... There's real horror at the heart of the novel and a core of genuine anger beneath the surface of the genre thrills." The first in a trilogy, Juno Dawson's **HER MAJESTY'S ROYAL COVEN** (★★★★★, out now, HarperVoyager) centres on a covert government department who protect crown and country from otherworldly evil. Four old friends who've worked for

it reunite after the discovery of a young warlock whose abilities seem to threaten the covenant's existence. We said: "Can be read as a withering critique of those who reject the idea that trans women are women... Genuinely funny and life-affirming without ever being sentimental." Finally, *Jurassic Park* screenwriter David Koepp's latest is

**AURORA** (★★★★★, 25 May), a survivalist fable in which electrical power is knocked out across the planet due to a coronal

mass ejection. With the rule of law collapsing, estranged siblings Audrey (a small-town

working mum) and Thom (a super-rich tech guru who's planned for just such an eventuality) are forced into a dramatic reunion. We said: "Never less than entertaining, but also a tad meandering and light on world-building detail."





# Reviews

BOOKS



## THE BLIGHTED STARS

★★★★★

► RELEASED 25 MAY

512 pages | Paperback/ebook/  
audiobook

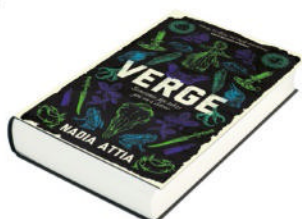
► Author Megan E O'Keefe  
► Publisher Orbit

◉ **Humanity's attempts to** conquer death are going a lot better than its efforts to exploit exoplanets in this first book of trilogy *The Devoured Worlds*.

In a future that's *Altered Carbon* meets 3D printing, humans – those with enough dosh, anyway – can repeatedly download their “map” (or memories) into newly printed bodies. But the technology – along with other costly body mods – is dependent on a particular element, the mining of which is controlled by one ruling family, the Mercators.

The trouble is, the worlds they mine keep ending up as dead planets, consumed by a relentless lichen called shroud. Eco-terrorists blame the Mercators, and they cop the blame when a Mercator ship blows up, stranding one of the Mercators' children on a shroud-ridden planet.

A fast-paced, conspiracy thriller-fuelled space opera – and also a bizarre love story – *The Blighted Stars* feels like a melting pot of familiar SF ingredients vigorously mixed into a pulpy new broth. Lively, colourful characterisation and some clever narrative conceits keep things entertaining. But while the book doffs its hat to themes of memory, mortality and identity, it's way too plot-, exposition- and coincidence-heavy to really get to grips with them. Mostly, though, it's the blight stuff. **Dave Golder**



## VERGE

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

272 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Nadia Attia  
► Publisher Serpent's Tail

◉ **While we're starting to feel** the effects of Brexit, from economic upheavals to missing tomatoes, Nadia Attia's debut novel imagines a future a little further down the line. In *Verge*, the country has fully reverted to superstition and intolerance.

Rowena is cursed, or so she believes, following the deaths of her father and boyfriend. The only way to cure her, it seems, is to visit her mystic grandmother, who lives far up north. Accompanying her on a perilous road trip through the many disunited counties of the Kingdom is Halim, a young Egyptian farmhand who faces racism (of both the physical and verbal kind) wherever he goes.

The relationship between Rowena and Halim is at the core of this novel, which, while not marketed as YA, has hints of it. Rowena is “different”, wise in ritual and folklore – less so in everyday matters than Halim, though he is naive in other ways. The pair bicker and squabble, but quickly form an unshakeable bond.

While these character arcs are a little predictable, Attia's world is tough and well-realised. This is a future where people have reverted to protecting their homes with magical wards, while also still using email and smartphones – when the Wi-Fi is working, that is. It's an evocative setting, and the book is peppered with hints of grisly folk horror that linger in the imagination.

**Will Salmon**



## FANS

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

256 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Michael Bond  
► Publisher Picador

◉ **If you're looking for a** comprehensive examination of genre fandom, this book (subtitled *A Journey Into The Psychology Of Belonging*) is not it. While followers of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* get their moment in the spotlight – along with conventions, fan fiction and other popular ways of expressing your devotion – science writer Michael Bond's scope is much broader, taking in everything from pop music to sport, political movements and beyond.

There's an impressively academic rigour to much of the book, particularly when Bond explores the history and psychology of fandom – most notably how it ties into humans' instinctive desire to belong. He's also admirably non-judgemental – not always the case when mainstream media covers such topics – and finds positives in most of the fandoms covered, even those built around figures such as mass murderers. *Fans* is generally so even-handed, in fact, that the rare occasions when Bond expresses his own opinions feel slightly jarring.

The book has a tendency to get caught in rabbit holes, covering certain areas – Jane Austen fandom, for example – in massive depth, while leaving others on the sidelines. *Fans* is undeniably an education – and impeccably researched – but you can't help feeling it just scratches the surface of a vast topic. **Richard Edwards**

## ALSO OUT

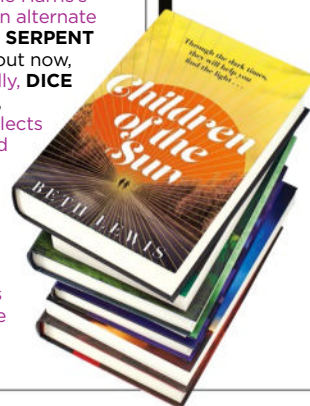
There's plenty more books that we couldn't fit in. Centred on a Heaven's Gate-esque '80s cult who believe that their final ceremony will open a portal to another dimension, Beth Lewis's psychological thriller

**CHILDREN OF THE SUN** (25 May, Hodder) has, so we're promised, “an epic climax” – so hopefully you won't get to the end without any inter-dimensional weirdness actually occurring... Alice Thompson's **CHIMERA**

(out now, Salt) follows a scientist/dream investigator sent to a distant moon to look for organisms that will help assuage global warming, and “explores our relationship with AI and the role of emotion in forming consciousness”. Ageing indie kids take note: Alice was previously the keyboard player in The Woodentops! In Aubrey Wood's odd-couple cyberpunk **BANG BANG BODHISATTVA**

(out now, Solaris), a fast-talking trans hacker-for-hire teams up with a Luddite PI after being framed for two murders. Turning to continuing series, there's a follow-up to *The Final Strife*, Saara El-Arifi's epic fantasy set in an African and Arabian-inspired world: **THE BATTLE DRUM**

(25 May, HarperVoyager). Charlie Jane Anders' Unstoppable trilogy concludes with **PROMISES STRONGER THAN DARKNESS** (out now, Titan). And there's a new adventure for Gunnie Rose, Charlaune Harris's hired gun in an alternate America: **THE SERPENT IN HEAVEN** (out now, Piatkus). Finally, **DICE MAN** (23 May, Rebellion) collects the short-lived 2000 AD comic from the mid-'80s gamebook boom, whose strips allowed you to play as characters like Judge Dredd and Slaine.







# Christopher Priest

**But what does the award-winning author's cat do at night?**



ROB MONK

## What is your daily writing routine like?

► Mornings: my cat sits on me and sleeps while I read and answer emails, look at the internet, pay bills, etc. Afternoons: my cat sleeps on my comfy reading chair while I start work. Evenings: my cat sleeps on the sofa in the next room while I work.

## Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

► Music is a distraction, so none while working. At other times I like American jazz, German or Austrian or Russian classical music.

## Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

► *The Prestige* was a struggle. *The Separation* required weeks of research. None has been easy, except the very first, when I didn't know what I was doing.

## Were you a keen reader as a child? Which books were your favourites?

► I read endlessly but at the time books were in short supply. I read whatever was available, so unselective.

## What would be your desert island book?

► The seven-volume set of Spike Milligan's war memoirs. Literally the funniest books ever written.

## If you could recommend one book that you love, but that's not very well known, what would it be?

► *Song Of The Sky* by Guy Murchie.

## Where's the oddest place you've seen one of your books?

► I saw three unsold copies of *The Affirmation* in a bookstore in Houston, Texas. They looked lonely. A year later I was in the same bookstore and the same three copies were still there. They had been marked down to 10 cents, and were still unsold.

## What's the strangest feedback you have ever received?

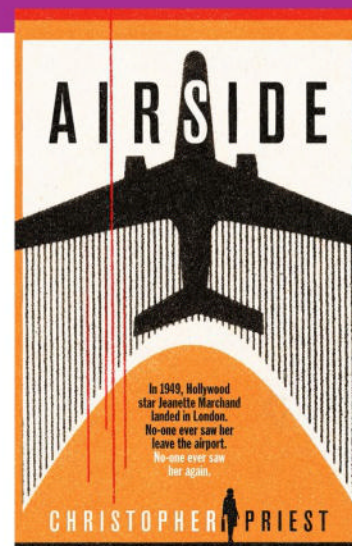
► Someone in France wrote a review of my then-new book. It

## “None has been easy, except the very first, when I didn't know what I was doing”

was in the form of a comic strip. The first frame showed someone lying in an operating theatre. The anaesthetist was about to put a mask on him. A surgeon stood by with a scalpel.

The dialogue balloon said (in French): “Ooof... I have just read the new novel by Christopher Priest.”

Things went downhill from there, page after page of it...



## What is the biggest misconception that people have about being a professional author?

► That we are rich, happy, respected, important, satisfied etc. Sometimes things go well, sometimes they don't. There's no mystique to what writers do. Life goes on.

## What's the best piece of writing advice you've received?

► A friend said to me in 1970: “Read [John Fowles's novel] *The Magus* – it will change the way you write.” ●

*Airside* is out on 25 May, published by Gollancz.



Spike Milligan, keeping Christopher Priest amused.



## THE AVENGERS: WAR ACROSS TIME

The Big Kang Theory

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Paul Levitz**

► Artist **Alan Davis**

**ISSUES 1-5** Superhero comics rarely seem to leave nostalgia alone, but Marvel's latest miniseries is at least upfront about embracing the past. *The Avengers: War Across Time* is an all-out homage to the original '60s era of Marvel superheroics, aiming to capture the giddy energy and bonkers storytelling of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in their prime.

This five-issue miniseries goes out of its way to fit into

established Marvel continuity, essentially taking place between issues 11 and 12 of the original *Avengers* series in 1964. Picking up the action with the classic line-up of Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Ant Man and the Wasp, the story begins when temporal tyrant Kang the Conqueror decides he fancies a rematch against the Avengers, but aims to fatally weaken them first.

This results in multiple battles against an evil robot Hulk, dwarf king Sindri and the Lava Men, before the final showdown with Kang arrives (along with a few glimpses of Marvel's future). All of this is pitched with as much

unashamed melodrama and cheesy humour as a classic Silver Age comic, just without the densely packed storytelling you'd normally find in a '60s issue.

It's a lovingly accurate tribute from two comics veterans – writer Paul Levitz, who spent most of his decades-long career working for DC, and artist Alan Davis, who's been doing memorable and distinctive superhero work since the '80s.

Levitz embraces Stan Lee's wonderfully excessive dialogue style, and does well at landing plenty of small charming moments among the non-stop action. He's aided in this by Davis, who delivers traditional superhero spectacle with plenty of impact, along with some gorgeously crafted background details in his portrayal of '60s New York.

It's unfortunate, though, that there's not an awful lot going on here beyond some well-executed nostalgic fun. The series ends up playing like a single '60s issue overstretched to five parts, while the commitment to classic Marvel storytelling also means inheriting some of that style's distinct flaws, like thin characterisation and occasionally random plotting.

Levitz and Davis have done an impressive job on this homage, and they've crafted a far superior tribute to Marvel's early years than many recent series that have tried the same trick.

It's just hard not to wish that *War Across Time* also had a bit more freshness or depth to offer, beyond its old-school action and a metric ton of continuity references.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** Alan Davis created the Clandestines, the characters who appeared as antagonists in Disney+'s *Ms Marvel* show.



## SERGEANT STRONG

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Hibernia Books**

► Writer **M Scott Goodall**

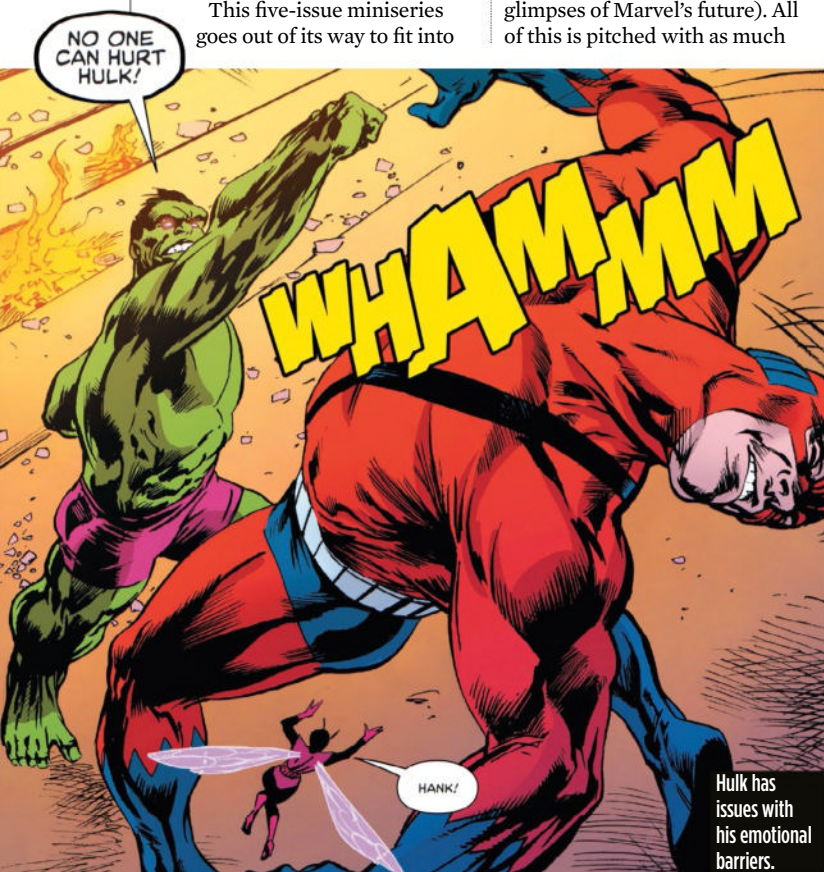
► Artist **Eric Bradbury**

**COLLECTION** As his name indicates, there's nothing subtle about Simon Strong, the astronaut-turned-spy hero of this fourth volume of *The Fleetway Files*, who's gifted with super-strength after being caught in a radioactive galactic nebula. The uncredited scripter – most probably M Scott Goodall – cleverly blends elements of James Bond and *The Six Million Dollar Man* with *Get Smart*-style humour in the form of Strong's air-jet shoes, which prevent him from crashing through the floor due to his tremendous weight.

With Strong's first three adventures originally serialised in two-page instalments when they first appeared in *Valiant* in 1975, Goodall packs in a lot of plot, although he tends to over-explain in captions what we can already see happening in Eric Bradbury's striking black and white artwork.

His storytelling remaining clear despite having to fit up to 10 panels to a page, Bradbury is at his gritty best here, mixing exhilarating action scenes with more light-hearted moments, such as the moment in the opening episode when our ham-fisted hero clumsily demolishes a phone box. His art is given room to breathe in the longer, final two stories, where he doesn't have to cram so much onto a page.

With *Starlord's Timequake* also arriving in the next few months, this is looking like a banner year for Hibernia Books' reprint collection. **Stephen Jewell**



Hulk has issues with his emotional barriers.





## THE 10,000 DISASTERS OF DORT

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Rebellion

► Writer Mike Butterworth

► Artist José Ortiz, Luis Bermejo

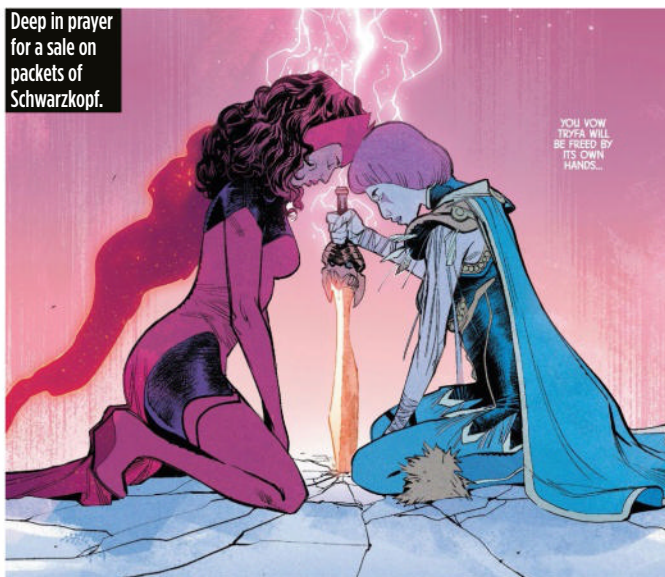
**COLLECTION** Set in the then fashionably futuristic year 2000, this obscure *Lion* strip from the late '60s makes the plagues of the Old Testament look like a cakewalk.

Earth is being targeted by Ratta, lizardly ruler of Dort, a world doomed to collide with its sun. Seeking a new home, Ratta threatens that 10,000 catastrophes will befall our planet, wiping out humanity and freeing up some real estate. Only lantern-jawed boffin Mike Dauntless stands in his way.

The cavalcade of widescreen-worthy disasters gives the strip a propulsive appeal. The Manhattan skyline is smashed on the first page, while subsequent instalments see a malevolent weed take down the Eiffel Tower and a giant rhesus monkey on the rampage. Most fiendishly of all, deadly cups of tea unleash mob violence on the streets of Britain. Will these Dort dastards stop at nothing?

Mike Butterworth also wrote the faux-classical *Rise And Fall Of The Trigan Empire* for *Look And Learn*, but this is pulpier, more breathless fare. A woefully abrupt ending wraps the story with only 0.1% of the promised 10,000 disasters thwarted – such an anticlimax that when *Lion* reprinted the strip it substituted a new conclusion (included here). It's arguably even more of a damp squib. **Nick Setchfield**

Deep in prayer for a sale on packets of Schwarzkopf.



## SCARLET WITCH

Trouble in store

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Steve Orlando

► Artist Sara Pichelli

**ISSUES 1-4** For the longest time, Wanda Maximoff has been defined by her past. It's understandable – a tragic villain is often a more interesting archetype than a straightforward hero – but there's something wonderfully hopeful about this ongoing comic from Steve Orlando and Sara Pichelli.

A redeemed Wanda has (literally) set up shop in New York. She now runs an occult store with her friend Darcy Lewis (yep, that Darcy, from the *Thor* films and *WandaVision*). She's also installed a unique spell, the Last Door, which instantly transports anyone who is desperately in need of help to the Emporium. This simple

premise allows the book to be appealingly episodic, with new characters regularly popping through the door. Meanwhile, there's an ongoing mystery surrounding Darcy and the sinister forces that have brought her and Wanda together.

Although Wanda's dark past hasn't gone away – and indeed plays an important role in issue two – it's genuinely refreshing to read a largely angst-free take on the character. This is the first solo Scarlet Witch comic in the best part of a decade, and Orlando's script really allows the character to shine, foregrounding her best aspects, while cameos from her brother Pietro add a dash of humour. The dialogue throughout is pithy without being obnoxious, and Pichelli's art has a lovely naturalistic feel to it.

It's also very accessible – a big-name Marvel character in a book that doesn't come with a lengthy required reading list. Good stuff, and the ideal comic to give to new fans.

**Will Salmon**

**i** Unusually, Darcy originated in the MCU films; this series marks her first appearance in the Marvel comics.



## BLOODLINE: DAUGHTER OF BLADE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Danny Lore

► Artist Karen S Darboe

**ISSUES 1-3** Though there's more than a shade of Buffy about Brielle Caulder, Blade's previously hidden daughter also boasts enough individuality to make her stand out from other teenage vampire hunters.

A dhampir, like her father – offspring of a vampire and a human – Brielle is not actually referred to by her titular codename in these first three issues. Danny Lore's script wisely dials back on the superheroics, instead focusing on her relationships with her mother and schoolfriends, interspersed with encounters with some feral bloodsuckers.

Harking back to Brielle's appearance in last year's *Crypt Of Shadows*, issue one's pace is hindered by some expository dialogue detailing her past exploits. The emergence of her nascent powers is linked to the recent *Death Of Doctor Strange*, although no knowledge of that event is required.

Blade's entrance is held back until the end of issue two, while links to the Daywalker's history are only revealed in issue three's thrilling climax. Aided by Cris Peter's evocative colours, there's a kinetic energy about Karen S Darboe's vibrant cartooning which suits the script's mix of adolescent life and ferocious battles. Brielle definitely adds some intriguing new blood to Marvel's vampire contingent. **Stephen Jewell**



## STAR WARS JEDI: SURVIVOR

Outwit, outplay, outlast



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also available on PC, Xbox Series X|S

► Publisher Electronic Arts

**VIDEOGAME** Disney is increasingly turning its attention towards the years between the fall of the Jedi Order and the rise of the Rebel Alliance, but there's already a hero of the galaxy's darkest hour. As the iron fist of the Empire closes ever tighter, *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* marks the return of forgotten knight Cal Kestis.

A former Padawan who survived the Empire's purge of the Jedi, Cal returns 10 years after the events of *Revenge Of The Sith*, a

confident, powerful freedom fighter taking the fight to his oppressors. But with the crew of his first adventure – 2019's *Fallen Order* – scattered across the galaxy, there's a hollowness to his constant scraps with the Empire that's indicative of the distinctly personal *Star Wars* story that *Survivor* aims to tell.

It's a huge expansion on its predecessor in almost every way. The planets that Cal explores are larger than anything *Star Wars* games have offered in the past. Fights are more playful, sandboxes in which to flex a growing affinity with the Force and a collection of lightsaber stances that let you swap from persistent, harrying

bites at your foes to great cleaving blows capable of blasting a trooper aside in a single swing. The narrative swells to reflect the growth that the rest of the game has seen, with an outstanding array of performances from the core cast – particularly Merrin actress Tina Ivlev.

While the extra scope provides a welcome opportunity to see *Survivor*'s developers bring their galaxy to life, there are some growing pains. A story that feels like it's designed as the starting block for a bold new era of *Star Wars* struggles with its pacing, and doesn't do justice to a unique antagonist.

Combat can feel like a case of fighting off everything the game can throw at you, rather than something more structured and balanced. But these flaws exist within a confident, heartfelt follow-up that lives up to its lofty ambitions, while remaining an almost seamless progression from what's come before.

**Ali Jones**

**i** *Survivor* gives Cal a powerful crossguard lightsaber in the style of Kylo Ren's weapon – though his is blue, not red.



## DOCTOR WHO: DALEKS! GENESIS OF TERROR



► **RELEASED 25 MAY**

73 minutes | CD/DOWNLOAD

► Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** 1975's "Genesis Of The Daleks" is a bulletproof classic in the *Doctor Who* canon. Here's a chance to discover its own genesis as Big Finish mount a full cast version of Terry Nation's original script for episode one, accompanied by readings of his plot synopses for the other five instalments.

It proves a fascinating exercise in creative archaeology. The bones of the story are essentially the same, but some deviations are striking. The TV opening put the Doctor directly on war-torn Skaro; here he receives his mission from the Time Lords in a tranquil, garden-like limbo, anticipating a similar summons from the White Guardian in 1978's "The Ribos Operation".

Nation's stage directions – read by Nicholas Briggs – ram home the World War parallels and a brilliantly realised soundscape immerses you in the hell of combat, dodging machine gun fire and hurtling shells alongside our heroes. Paired with Tom Baker, Sadie Miller's Sarah uncannily echoes her late mother Elisabeth Sladen.

Also included is an excellent 78-minute interview with producer Philip Hinchcliffe by *Front Row's* Samira Ahmed. "We thought it was throwaway television," he confesses – something the existence of this intriguing curio more than disputes. **Nick Setchfield**



Cameron Monaghan provides both voice and face.





## DEAD ISLAND 2

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewd on PlayStation 5

► Also on PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox

One, Xbox Series X/S

► Publisher Deep Silver, Plaiön

**VIDEOGAME** Few games have nailed the sloppy practical-effects gore of a good zombie movie in the way *Dead Island 2* manages it. The undead here shatter and tear in a way that's as funny as it is disgusting, under a battery of blows from whatever axe, stick, hammer or machete you happen to be swinging. You'll laugh. You'll hurl. You'll try again with a bigger stick.

This first-person, semi-open-world horror adventure is a cavalcade of splintered bones, missing jaws and eyeballs hanging out of eyes. As you fight to escape an LA overrun by corpses you can also unlock elemental effects like fire, electricity and acid, which only add to the spectacle.

If you ever wanted to watch an animated cadaver melt in front of you in real time because you whacked 'em with an acid-infused baseball bat, this is the game for you. All the bloody details are as gorgeously rendered as they are horrific.

If it was just that gloriously excessive viscera smeared across your screen it would probably be enough, but under all the bloody bits there's a decent story as well.

It's a simple one, as you try to survive, but the characters are engaging, and like all good zomcoms, it knows when to be serious and when to be fun. It's probably the closest a game has ever got to capturing the pure essence of a schlocky old zombie movies. **Leon Hurley**



## DARK SEASON: LEGACY RISING

The Four Seasons

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 286 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** For a certain generation, *Dark Season* is legendary. Today, the series is notable as both an early set of Russell T Davies scripts and for marking Kate Winslet's first appearance on TV.

In 1991, however, it simply felt thrilling to have a kids' TV show that didn't talk down to its audience. *Dark Season* was *Buffy* before *Buffy* and it perfectly filled the gap left by the then recently deceased *Doctor Who*.

What a delight, then, to return to this world all these years later. This quartet of seasonally themed audio plays introduces us to a new set of young characters, while also bringing back the original adventuresome three in supporting roles.

Evil has returned to Bishop Grave School. Opening story "Spring" deals with a malevolent

AI that has one of the teachers under its control. In "Summer", a reality TV show sets its sights on the school and students start going missing. In "Autumn" everybody falls under the spell of the obnoxiously talented student Chance. "Winter", meanwhile (written by Davies himself), wraps things up with a direct sequel to the original series.

It evokes the atmosphere of the TV show uncannily well, while still smartly updating it for the present day. The new core trio of Taylor (Aitch Wylie), Nina (Bethany Antonia) and Jack (Jacob Dudman) are all appealing characters, and it's joyful to hear Victoria Lambert as Marcie and Grant Parsons as Mr Eldritch facing off once more, both sounding miraculously unchanged by the passage of time.

Wonderful stuff, and hopefully the start of a long-running range.

**Will Salmon**

**i** "Winter" makes reference to an adventure in an arcade. This was a story planned for the sadly never made second TV season.



## DOCTOR WHO: PIONEERS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 200 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** Three very different types of pioneer are explored in the latest Ninth Doctor set, which marks a solid start to the range's third season.

In "The Green Gift", the TARDIS lands on a starship covered in trees. The Doctor is searching for a home for Callen and Doyle, but instead finds a lot of suspiciously familiar grubs – yes, this is a sequel to "The Green Death". Louise Jameson is good value, not as Leela, but as a cynical captain with a secret, in a pacy and exciting opening story.

"Northern Lights" is terrifically atmospheric. The Doctor arrives in the Arctic in the late 1880s and quickly stumbles across explorers Fridtjof Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen. He's there to resolve an alien threat but, refreshingly, the story isn't dominated by that aspect. Instead, it lingers on the Doctor's enforced proximity to these two men and the trials they've been through on their adventure. Really good and distinctive stuff.

Finally, "The Beautiful Game" takes the Doctor back to the beginnings of football – lifelong fan Eccleston must have been delighted! Katharine Armitage's script delves into the history behind the formation of the Football League sensitively. The threat – effectively a high-pitched alien super-fan – is very annoying, though. It's fun enough, but the weakest of the three stories here. **Will Salmon**





## NEW YORK CITY

Start spreading the news, we're quizzing today! As *The Walking Dead's* Maggie and Negan visit the Big Apple, we test your knowledge of all things NYC

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

### QUESTION 1

At which location does the 1984 version of *Ghostbusters* begin?

### QUESTION 2

Which *Star Trek* episode is set mostly in the 21st Street Mission in the year 1930?

### QUESTION 3

Who might you find living at 20 Ingram Street, Queens?

### QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this NYC-set movie.

### QUESTION 5

What calamity occurs to the Empire State Building in *Superman II*?

### QUESTION 6

In *Escape From New York*, where is the hideout of Isaac Hayes's crime boss, the Duke of New York?

### QUESTION 7

Name the famous superhero HQ located at 42nd Street and Madison Avenue.

### QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode.

### QUESTION 9

What is the subtitle of *Friday The 13th Part VIII*?

### QUESTION 10

Which author wrote the novel *New York 2140*, set in an NYC that's flooded as a result of climate change?

### QUESTION 11

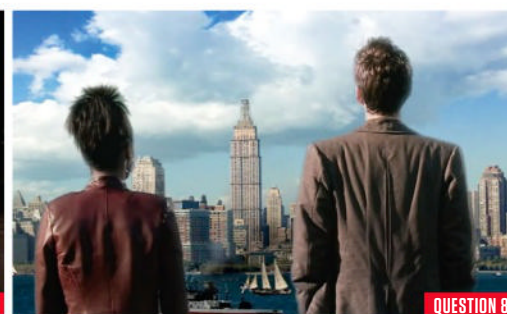
In the 1998 movie, at which famous sporting venue does Godzilla lay hundreds of eggs?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 16

### QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Supply the title missing from this movie poster.

### QUESTION 13

In *The Avengers* (aka *Avengers Assemble*), which alien invaders do the superheroes battle in midtown Manhattan?

### QUESTION 14

Which 1979 film closes with shots of zombies shambling across the Brooklyn Bridge?

### QUESTION 15

In which comic is a 100-foot-tall, squid-like creature teleported to New York, resulting in millions of deaths?

### QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode.

### QUESTION 17

In which Manhattan neighbourhood (also known as Clinton) did Matt Murdock grow up?

### QUESTION 18

*Buffy The Vampire Slayer's* Spike acquired his long leather jacket in New York City – but whereabouts, exactly?

### QUESTION 19

The pilot episode of which TV series centred on a plot to destroy the World Trade Center by flying an aircraft into it?

### QUESTION 20

Name the 1958 film in which a cyborg with death-ray eyes goes on a rampage at the United Nations building.

Answers  
1 The New York City Public Library  
2 "The City On The Edge Of Forever"  
3 Peter Parker  
4 Cloverfield  
5 Its spire falls off  
6 Grand Central Station  
7 The Baxter Building  
8 "Daleks In Manhattan"  
9 Jason Robinson  
10 Madison Square Garden  
11 The Bronx  
12 The Chitauri  
13 Zombieland  
14 The Avengers  
15 Watchmen  
16 "The Angels Take Manhattan"  
17 Hell's Kitchen  
18 On a subway train  
19 The Lone Gunmen  
20 The Colossus Of New York

### How did you do?

What NYC neighbourhood are you?

0-5

Dumbo

6-10

Plum Beach

11-15

Midtown

16-19

University Heights

20

Crown Heights



NEXT ISSUE

# IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**STRANGE  
NEW WORLDS**  
We're Team Enterprise

**INDIANA  
JONES**  
Whip it real good!

**INSIDIOUS**  
Further than  
we've ever been

**GOOD OMENS**  
The angel and the  
demon return

**THE WITCHER**  
Geralt gets ready  
for a face-off

**PLUS!**  
*Doctor Who!* Giant  
sharks! Sweaty savages!

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All contents are subject to change, de-a-ging or being a Skrull



# Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Absolutely nothing to see here, DC legal department.

## Mighty Mouse

**David West, freelance writer**



Why is it that of all the great moments in *Stand By Me*, Rob Reiner's adaptation of Stephen King's "The Body", the line that's stuck with me ever since seeing the film has always been "You think Mighty Mouse could beat up Superman?" When Vern poses this deep thought to Teddy, perhaps it resonated so strongly with me because that was precisely the sort of question that filled my head as a kid. The Thing vs the Hulk, Thor vs Hercules, Mighty Mouse vs Superman – who was the strongest?

What Mighty Mouse had going for him that none of the others possessed was that beautiful singing voice. "Here I come to save the day!" was catchier than "Avengers assemble!" or "To

the Batmobile, Robin!" I was glued to the TV every Saturday morning for the double-bill of *Mighty Mouse* and *The Mighty Heroes*. Even to a child's eyes, the Mighty Mouse toons looked older than *The Mighty Heroes*; they had the same painted colours and animation style as classic Disney cartoons, and the operetta singing reinforced that sense of something from before my time. But it never dampened my enthusiasm for watching a tiny mouse overpower much larger opponents.

In the early '90s, Mighty Mouse came to Marvel for a 10-issue run that reignited my love for the character. Written by Michael Gallagher and edited by Fabian Nicieza, the series spoofed the most popular comics of the time, from Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* to Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* and John Byrne's

*Namor, The Sub-Mariner*. The comics included characters from *The Mighty Heroes* and from Ralph Bakshi's '80s *Mighty Mouse* cartoon, including the excellent Bat-Bat, a bat that wears a bat costume to fight crime.

My favourite story arc was "Mices On Infinite Earths", a surprisingly sharp parody of Marv Wolfman's continuity-busting *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, complete with a recreation of the death of Super-Girl played with Mighty Mousette in her place. Re-reading it now, it makes me long for the days when Marvel Comics allowed their creators to be deeply, gloriously silly. After all, comic strips were called the Funny Pages for a reason... ●

David would like to save the day, but he's very tired.

### Fact Attack!

→ In his first seven adventures, as Super Mouse, the diminutive hero even had a blue and red costume like a certain Kryptonian.

→ *Mighty Mouse's* theme tune was the work of Marshall Barer, who also wrote songs for Louis Prima, Harry Belafonte and Nat King Cole.

→ 1945 short "Gypsy Life" earned Mighty Mouse an Oscar nomination, although the award went to Tom and Jerry's "Quiet Please!"

→ Paul Terry's Terrytoons animation studio also created Heckle And Jeckle, Deputy Dawg and the judo-expert mouse Hashimoto-san.

→ In 2019, Jon and Erich Hoeber, writers of *My Spy* and *The Meg*, announced that they were developing a *Mighty Mouse* feature film.

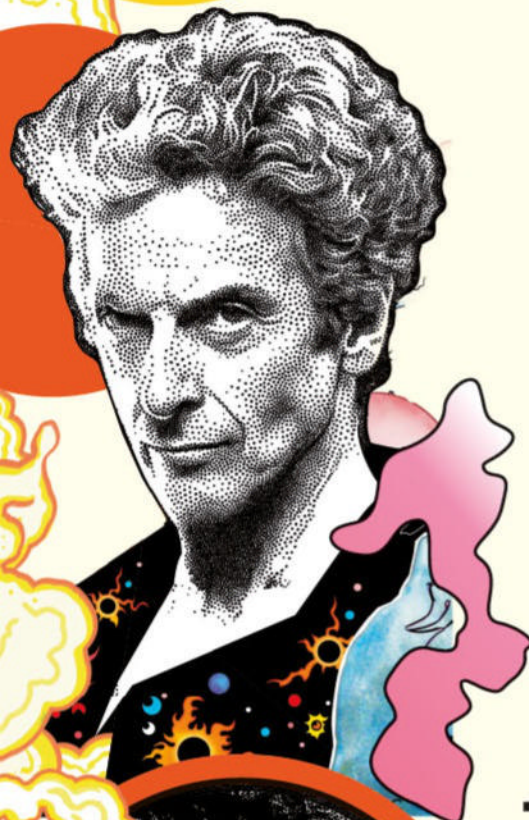
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BBC



OUT  
JULY



**KERBLAM!**  
**PETE MCTIGHE**

**PLANET OF THE OOD**  
**KEITH TEMPLE**

**THE ZYGON INVASION**  
**PETER HARNESS**

**THE WATERS OF MARS**  
**PHIL FORD**

**WARRIORS' GATE**  
**STEPHEN GALLAGHER**



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