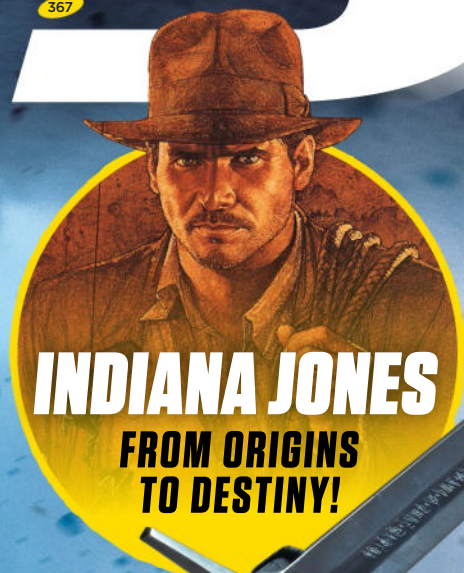


SFX

367



INDIANA JONES

**FROM ORIGINS
TO DESTINY!**

**BLACK
MIRROR**
BEHIND THE
SCENES!

THE WITCHER

CHANGING TIMES FOR GERALT



STAR TREK
STRANGE NEW WORLDS



DOCTOR WHO
DOOM'S DAY IS COMING!



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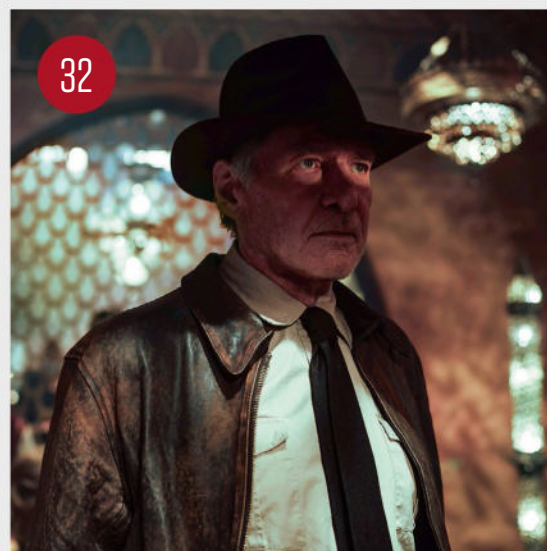


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The Wheel of Fortune was already trademarked.

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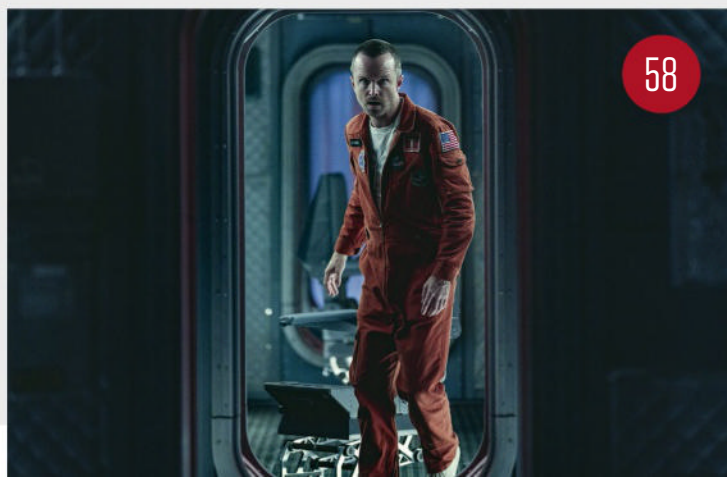
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A is for aardvark. C is for Cerebus.

First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!



Seven of Nine gets a 10 out of 10 from you folks.



PEAK PICARD

Robert MacDonald, email *Picard* did that rare thing of servicing old fans whilst not alienating the casual viewer and in the process it succeeded on so many levels – the main one being *Seven of Nine*. Jeri Ryan managed the rare feat of bringing her humanity to the role that she first played way too long ago and also succeeded in adding several different layers to her portrayal. It would have been very easy for the script to have had *Seven* use her Borg implants to save the day, connecting to the ship's computer and so on, but they chose the more difficult route and she fought her battles as a human.

Mark Howe, email Flippin' heck, a whopping five stars for *Picard* season three! Those are some very rose-tinted specs your reviewer was sporting (along with about 95% of the fanbase). Admittedly, it was hugely entertaining, but five stars says perfect, and it wasn't.

One of the major flaws from the outset is *Starfleet* seems to be run by people who are either idiots, dicks or a combination of both. Surely someone in *Starfleet* would question the wisdom of linking the entire fleet up to one central "hive" control system? Doesn't this present a huge tactical loophole dying to be exploited by an enemy? Especially one with a history of assimilating. Far from the idealistic organisation of *Next Gen*, it's now somewhere where you'd probably quit your job in the first week.

SFX: Forget Lower Decks. We want to see Star Trek: Upper Management.

Robert Dodd, email Do you know why they could make 26 episodes per series of *Voyager* in the 1990s yet only make 10 episodes per series of *Discovery* in the 2020s – despite it being easier and cheaper to do special effects now?

SFX: Seems to be the same pattern for most shows these days, irrespective of budgets. Still, slimmer box sets...



Who'd have thought a talking raccoon would end up being one of Marvel's best characters? Voiceover performance should get recognised with its own category at the Oscars.

Robert William Graham



SFX remains my favourite magazine. I literally move other mags and always stick it at the front of the WH Smith shelves...

@mrmarkmillar

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"Must have been in Top Of The Pops mode"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the **SFX** hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ *Silo* is one of the best new television shows I've seen in years – absolutely gripped.
→ *Yellowjackets* has, once again, been brilliant. Roll on season three!
→ So good to have *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* back – can't wait to see the *Lower Decks* cast in live action.

RANTS

→ Sad to see *Titans* go – it was one of the best, if not the best superhero shows. (The final season hits Netflix on 25 June, by the way)
→ Think I've become too thick-skinned. I didn't find *The Boogeyman* particularly scary at all.
→ Gutted that *Lockwood & Co* has been cancelled, it was absolutely wonderful. But hey, more cheap reality shows I guess.



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ Very excited that 1971 cult classic *Messiah Of Evil* – a surreal, dreamlike zombie movie from the writers of *Temple Of Doom* – is getting a Blu-ray release (from the Radiance label) in October. Long overdue.
→ Looking forward to *The Book Of Beasts* – an in-depth look at the Nigel Kneale TV series. That's also due in October, from Headpress.
→ Belatedly discovered that '80s anthology show *The Ray Bradbury Theater* is on Prime Video. Great guest stars: Shatner! Jeff Goldblum! Patrick Macnee! Donald Pleasence!



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ Delighted for whichever kids manage to get their hands on one of the *Doctor Who* Blue Peter badges, they are a thing of beauty!

RANTS

→ Such a shame for the brilliant cast of *Lockwood & Co* – what a wasted opportunity. Still wondering what was behind THAT door!



ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RANTS/RAVES

→ Many series get axed with a collective response of "Meh... fair enough" (cough *Willow* cough). But the outpouring of passion and outrage at *Lockwood & Co*'s cancellation should really give Netflix pause, or give a heads-up to other services.



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

→ Enjoyed Charlie Higson's latest novel, *On His Majesty's Secret Service*. Breezy, witty and a very modern Bond.

RIP

→ Sad to hear of the passing of film historian Alan Frank. His SF and horror guides were essential reading, and he also worked on *Clapperboard*, the kids' show that instilled movie history in a generation.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ Seeing live-action *Lower Decks* Boimler and Mariner in that *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* trailer gave me the biggest smile. Truly an epic crossover idea in every way.

RANTS

→ Hollywood, pay your writers!



Captain's Log

Padam?



How exciting was that *Doctor Who* trailer before *Eurovision*? I did a little scream. I must have a lifesize Beep the Meep toy by Christmas!

I have a friend who doesn't watch trailers, but the exception to his rule seems to be *Doctor Who*. I've never thought of trailers as spoilers, really – they've only ever fuelled my enthusiasm. Again, I screamed at SDCC when *Seven of Nine* was revealed to be in *Picard*. (This seems to be a theme, but please don't picture me as being like Mel Bush – I'm not that fabulous).

I don't go digging for spoilers, though – I think that really does ruin things. Sometimes in this job we're made aware of things before they're "out there". With just two episodes to go, I spoke with the showrunner of *Picard* for our issue that came out the same day as the finale. Whole thing ruined! Imagine if I'd seen those reveals without knowing. Gasp!

We won't be repeating hearsay. No rumours, no gossip, only official information as intended, at the right time. Anything we think people may not have had time to watch – like our *Black Mirror* exclusive this issue – will be clearly flagged. If you haven't watched that *Doctor Who* trailer yet, well skip past pages 26 and 27...

Darren X

IF THE DARKNESS DOESN'T
DEVOUR YOU ...
DESIRE WILL.



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GREAT SCOT!

More time-travelling adventures from a Highland warrior – no, not the latest *Doctor Who* novel from Frazer Hines

Highlights



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RUBY GILLMAN

→ Who? Only a ruddy great Teenage Kraken! Under the sea doesn't seem so magical now...



18

**ALIENS:
DARK DESCENT**

→ Prepare for sleepless nights thanks to this new videogame.



24

DOCTOR WHO

→ The first adventure for Doom arrives, plus all the latest new series information. Hurry up, November...



Grace Byers as Allison looks to be in a spot of trouble.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Black Death

Tim Story mines laughs and screams from the African-American experience in **The Blackening**



IN ONE OF EDDIE MURPHY'S most famous stand-up moments, from 1983's *Delirious*, he makes fun of the idea of black people in horror films, joking, "Why don't the people just get the hell out of the house? You can't make a horror movie with black people in it cause the movie would just stop." Murphy's voice changes to a disembodied voice growling "Get out!" and mimics a black protagonist making an immediate sharp exit.

Jordan Peele has said this line was the inspiration behind his horror masterpiece of that name, but the satirical horror comedy *The Blackening* further expands on the theme, with a group of black friends trapped in a sinister racist boardgame and a deranged crossbow-wielding killer determined to kill them in order of "blackness".

Director Tim Story, best known for the *Ride Along* and *Fantastic Four* films, is thrilled by *SFX*'s enthusiasm for the film and how genuinely scary it is ("We get that a lot!"), as



The gang have a Jigsaw-like moment with the killer.

he was determined not to skimp on terror to facilitate the laughs. "We wanted to really walk this tightrope and scare you sometimes, but then let you laugh and then as soon as you feel like you can relax, hit you with surprising." Noticing the enthusiastic nods from our side, he laughs, "It looks like we might have hit that with you!"

The blackness of the film is inherent to every moment, as friends from college reunite at a cabin in the woods to celebrate Juneteenth (the US holiday commemorating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans). The group is made up of glamorous lawyer Lisa (Antoinette Robertson), her buff

ex Nnamdi (Sinqwa Walls), her fast-witted gay best friend Dewayne (Dewayne Perkins), lovable hot mess Shanika (X Mayo), chilled-out stoner King (Melvin Gregg), neurotic Allison (Grace Byers) and awkward outcast Clifton (Jermaine Fowler). They resemble typical scary movie archetypes, but each is imbued with a specificity that feels true to the black experience. For Story, "it is based in this culture

This is why boardgames are never much fun.





Yvonne Orji as Morgan and Jay Pharoah as Shawn.



Antoinette Robertson and Sinqua Walls get hands-on.

where when my friends, my black people, when we watch scary stuff, we are constantly talking to the screen. There's a whole dialogue that's going on that I was trying to capture."

Each of the ensemble brings a distinct sensibility that he's quick to highlight. "Black people are not a monolith. Inside our culture there are so many, for lack of a better word, types of us." From Dewayne's outfit changes to struggling to name characters on *Friends* to dealing with an offensive park ranger and deciding whether splitting up is a good idea, Story says he was "trying to create an authentic representation of all the ways we might respond in a really intense situation."

Having directed a distinctly white superhero franchise (remember Latina Jessica Alba with blonde hair and blue contacts?), the director is now in a place to consider what potential blackness could bring to that world, were he given the freedom. "I think about it all the

“Inside our culture there are so many, for lack of a better word, types of us”

time," he admits. "My default switch is always about representing black culture, and you have to know how this is going to resonate to everybody in the culture. And that's not easy to do when you're making material for a broader audience." Bringing authentic African American culture to the multiplex is not necessarily something Story thinks would be different today, were he doing so with superheroes or sci-fi. "There were always landmines – in some ways, there's even more today."

One of the funniest scenes in the film involves a debate where they are deciding who

is the "blackest", with the rest of the characters united in disgust as Clifton admits he voted for Trump... twice. For Story, that detail is among his favourite moments as it has become shorthand for being irredeemable. "It was written as just 'I voted for Trump' and then on set one of us threw out 'twice!'. The little things like that that take it over the top."

Rather than leave audiences feeling like they've been lectured about Trump or learned a lesson, *The Blackening* is all about audiences just having a "fun ride" and leaving the film "feeling better than they did when they walked in. I want them to laugh," Story says, "and then after that, it would be really fun if people could have a spirited and humorous debate about all the things they did. I hope people come out of this and have a conversation." He pauses. "But that doesn't have to be super-deep..." **LL**

The Blackening is in cinemas from 18 August.

▶ SCI-FACT! Tim Story is the first black director to gross over \$1 billion at the box office.



TIME TRAVEL IS woven into the very fabric of Diana Gabaldon's

Outlander book series, as well as the hit Starz television adaptation, which returns this month. The epic narrative spans 200 years, telling the love story of Claire (Caitriona Balfe), a time traveller from 1945, and her Scottish Highlander soul mate from 1743, Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan).

Since season four, the pair have been married and settled with their family in pre-Revolutionary War North Carolina. But season seven brings with it an actual war – as well as a big return to time travel storytelling.

Primarily based on Gabaldon's seventh book *An Echo In The Bone*, it features 16 new episodes (broken into two blocks of eight). An eighth season will then close the series. With that in mind, showrunner Matthew B Roberts tells Red Alert that they planned for this season to close some dangling story threads from the last season, but start fresh with its narratives.

"The war has finally arrived, so how is that going to affect our characters?" Roberts says of the central threat this season. With the Frasers pulled into the melee – Jamie as a soldier and Claire as a surgeon – their adult daughter Bree (Sophie Skelton) and her husband Roger MacKenzie (Richard Rankin) contemplate time travelling back to the safety of the 1970s with their babies.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Sam Heughan and Caitriona Balfe: yes, it's war!

Revolutionary Times

The time-travelling Frasers of **Outlander** are back for a decade-crossing seventh season

"One of the main things that we always try to do is not tell the story of the event, but tell the story of our characters going through the event," Roberts says. "That's the most important thing, because you want to hang with Jamie and Claire, Roger and Bree, or Lord John Grey [David Berry]. Let the moment affect them, and then let our audience join them in the

choices that they're going to make."

Roberts teases that those choices will result in some split-time storytelling similar to that of season three. Not wanting to spoil those who haven't read the books, Roberts says just that some dire circumstances will push the Frasers and the MacKenzies to their eventual decisions.

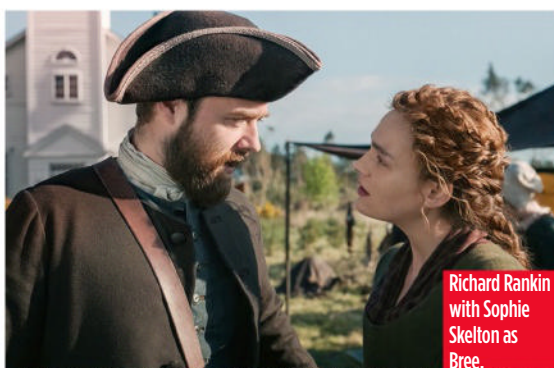
"I actually find when we separate characters, that's when the storytelling comes alive, in the books and on the show," Roberts says. "When the one group has to travel, and we see them apart from another group or another person, it only makes the audience yearn for what's going to happen. How are they going to get back? Are they ever going to get back? Are

they going to stay in this time? It adds to the stakes and the emotion of almost every scene. I think that's good storytelling when that happens."

The time jumps also mean a return for some favourite actors from previous seasons, including Graham McTavish, and Lotte Verbeek as Geillis Duncan. "The way we've always told story is we



David Berry and Charles Vandervaat are right posh.



Richard Rankin with Sophie Skelton as Bree.



John Bell plays Young Ian. Well, y'know, young-ish.

move around a lot so we can do flashbacks and flash-forwards," Roberts explains. "The fun aspect of that is when we're in the [writers'] room talking about something and go, 'Hey, wait a minute! Can we bring so-and-so back?'"

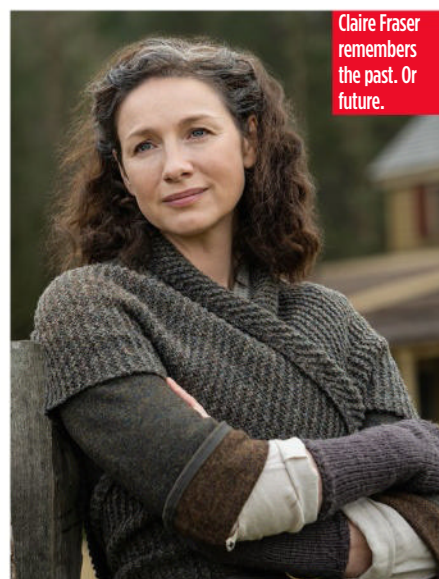
"We throw out these tendrils to see if we can get these people back if they're not busy – because everybody's busy now that they've been on *Outlander*," he jokes. "And now we can tell some of their stories. Plus,



there's a couple other folks that you'll see too."

In terms of the bigger picture of the televisual world of *Outlander*, Roberts says that *Blood Of My Blood*, the prequel series about Jamie's parents is being written, as well as *Outlander* season eight.

For the fans nervous about how the series will close, he promises that there will be no repeat of the *Game Of Thrones* situation, where he and his writers make up an original ending that Gabaldon has yet to write in her (still in the works) tenth book.



Claire Fraser remembers the past. Or future.

"We'll never be in competition with that," Roberts assures. "She has earned the right to end the Jamie and Claire story on her own. We are writing in that wake and will never attempt to walk on it. I have an idea of how I want to end the series. I'll share that with her when the time comes to see how she feels about it."

"We all want the satisfaction of having that really great goodbye, where you can hold onto those memories of what got you there. I think that's very important. But season eight is going to be a fantastic season of television that's just going to end."

"That doesn't mean it's over," he says of the entire *Outlander* mythology. "It just means that season is going to end." **TB**

Outlander is on Starz from 16 June.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Karl Urban in talks to play Johnny Cage in **Mortal Kombat 2**.

→ Tom Hiddleston and Mark Hamill joining **The Life Of Chuck**, the latest Stephen King adaptation by Mike Flanagan.

→ David Gordon Green's **The Exorcist: Believer** opens 13 October.

→ Jackie Chan starring in **A Legend**, sequel to 2005's *The Myth*.

→ Eddie Murphy in talks to play Inspector Clouseau in live-action/CG **Pink Panther**.

→ Brianna Hildebrand and Shioli Kutsuna reprising Negasonic Teenage Warhead and Yukio in **Deadpool 3**.

→ Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis in the frame for a sequel to 2003's **Freaky Friday**.

→ *Wednesday*'s Jenna Ortega starring in Tim Burton's **Beetlejuice 2**.

→ Chiwetel Ejiofor joining the cast of **Venom 3**.

→ *Deep Blue Sea* helmer Renny Harlin chumming the water once more with shark survival tale **Deep Water**.

→ Elizabeth Banks and John C Reilly starring in near-future AI tale **Dreamquill**.

→ Pedro Pascal joining horror epic **Weapons**.



SCI-FACT!

Sinéad O'Connor performs the *Outlander* main theme, "The Skye Boat Song", for season seven.

GETTY



Greatest Hitch

The Ultimate Universe is relaunched with **Ultimate Invasion**

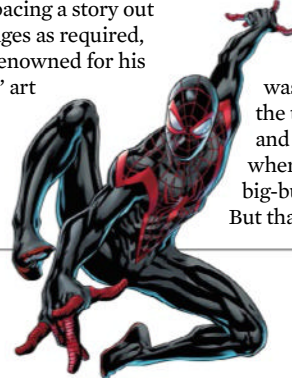
➔ TWO DECADES AFTER he and Mark Millar revolutionised comic book storytelling with *The Ultimates* in ways that would also later have a major impact on the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Bryan Hitch is returning to Marvel's Ultimate imprint. Teaming up with writer Jonathan Hickman on *Ultimate Invasion*, he promises that he won't simply retread old ground.

"You can't repeat what you have done before," Hitch tells Red Alert. "Back then, it was a chance to fully rethink and represent those classic characters in the Ultimate Universe and much of that thinking and visual approach was certainly highly influential on the MCU later. But now after both that run 20 years ago and the MCU having a huge influence on comics and the Marvel comics that

came afterwards, you have to think about what you can do next, not what you did before."

Essentially spacing a story out over as many pages as required, Hitch became renowned for his "decompressed" art style on *The Ultimates*, although he has moved on significantly

since then. "That's been part of my approach since I did *The Authority* 25 years ago, so it's in my DNA and adapts to whatever story I work on," he explains. "It was a unique chance to let the thing breathe visually, and I still take that approach where possible, to be big-budget and widescreen. But that level of



► **SCI-FACT!** Created due to an edict to introduce more children to the team, Kitty Pryde debuted in January 1980's *Uncanny X-Men* #129.

'decompression' is mostly unavailable in a standard comic." Hitch describes the four-parter as very different to what has gone before. "In *Ultimates*, I was trying to create the first real Marvel Comics movie, and that's where it proved highly influential in its approach. Here, we come to the material 20 years later with that having influenced an approach in comic book movies, and the movies having influenced the comics by return. So where do you go after that?"

"The choice to go back to what makes a comic a great comic rather than a great movie is an important one. I draw the way I draw, but the story is very much a comic book story and not a Marvel movie, which is an important distinction. In the end, though, I respond to what's written in my own way, and that's still a somewhat cinematic approach as that's really just how I think."

Hickman previously penned both *Ultimate Thor* and *Hawkeye*, as well as 2015's *Secret Wars*, which among other things brought

“It's very much a comic book story and not a Marvel movie”

about the demise of the Ultimate Universe – at least until now – and Hitch is enjoying their collaboration. "What's been additional fun about this is that Marvel have given me extra pages to play with, so issue one is 40 pages, two and three have 30 and four is 50 pages," he says. "The scripts that Jonathan gives me are much less than those numbers, so there's room to be widescreen and a bit more decompressed here, more so than pretty much than anything since *Ultimates* originally."

"But this isn't *Ultimates* volume three from me; it's very much its own story and builds on what Jonathan did in his own *Ultimates* run. Ultimately, it gives Marvel a new sandpit to play in, and that's always fun." **SJ**

Ultimate Invasion issue one is out on 21 June.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Back To The Future

Marc Guggenheim is taking X-Men to **Doomsday**



WITH *UNCANNY X-MEN* 141 and 142 ranking among the first ever Merry Mutants comics he read, Chris Claremont, John Byrne and Terry Austin's original X-Men tale "Days Of Future Past" had a big impact on the young Marc Guggenheim. Now, in time for its 40th anniversary, the *Legends Of Tomorrow* showrunner is penning *Doomsday*, a new four-issue prequel series that leads into the classic storyline.

"I still have a vivid recollection of picking up *Uncanny X-Men* 141 from the spinner rack – a rack that I later bought, and which remains in my office to this day," recalls Guggenheim, who is teamed with artists Manuel Garcia and Cam Smith.

"From its iconic cover to the pages collected beneath it, I had never read such a raw, visceral story. Even the concepts of time travel and alternate futures were new to me and it's hard to imagine a better execution of those now-familiar ideas."

Set over a three-decade period, *Doomsday* will chronicle the dire occurrences that ultimately culminate in "Days Of Future Past"'s grim dystopia. "If you look back at *Uncanny X-Men* 141, the story of those 30 years is told in only four panels on a seven-panel page, so there's a huge amount of story that's available to be filled in," reasons

Guggenheim. "In the years since, Chris Claremont and other writers have told some of those stories, but there's still quite a bit of blank canvas to work with, and I tried to keep re-enactments of previously dramatised situations to a minimum."

Like "Days Of Future Past", *Doomsday* is narrated by Kate Pryde, the older, more adult incarnation of Kitty Pryde, allowing Guggenheim – subconsciously at least – to emulate the tone of Claremont's scripting. "To my ear, Kitty's voice is indistinguishable from Chris's," he says. "So, I guess I'm writing in Chris's voice, but not intentionally."

Along with Kate Pryde, we can expect to see a range of

familiar characters, both mutant and not. "One of the more fun aspects of breaking out this story was figuring out who the cast would be," says Guggenheim, who's given significant roles to the original story's main players, including Colossus, Storm, Wolverine, Rachel Summers, Franklin Richards and Magneto.

"They run through the core of the four issues, but there was also plenty of opportunity for unexpected guest stars and cameos. In particular, I was interested in putting some non-mutants into the story. For example, we'll meet the humans who thought they could work alongside the Sentinels and pull the strings from the shadows. We'll also see some heroes like

Spider-Man, Daredevil and the Fantastic Four, or at least what remains of the Fantastic Four."

While "Days Of Future Past" isn't required reading, *Doomsday* will inevitably lead up to the two-parter. "The fourth issue has the most amount of overlap with the original story because that's the point in the 30-year timespan where we catch up with the events of *Uncanny X-Men* 141 and 142," says Guggenheim. "So we'll certainly reference things like Kate's consciousness travelling to the Earth-616 past." **SJ**



One of several variant covers for issue two of *Doomsday*.

X-Men: Days Of Future Past - Doomsday issue one is out on 12 July.

Venus Ariel and Jorge A. Jimenez: just a flesh wound.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Fin-tastic Voyage

Adrian Grünberg on what makes his shark movie **The Black Demon** different to the rest

➔ ANY DIRECTOR attempting a shark movie is going up against some truly great films (*Jaws*, *The Shallows*, *Kon-Tiki*, *Open Water*) and some exceptionally bad ones (*Sharknado*). But how to make your shark flick unique?

"There's a social message in this film about what we're doing to our planet," director Adrian Grünberg tells Red Alert, explaining what marks out *The Black Demon* from other elasmobranch-themed movies. "Then there's the whole mythology behind the creature..."

That mythology is the legend of "El Demonio Negro". In the film, "the Black Demon", as the shark (or more precisely, megalodon) becomes known, is summoned after the construction of an oil rig off the coast of Baja California. A killer it may be, but the question *The Black Demon* poses is what is worse: the flesh-eating megalodon or corporate greed?

"I've got to admit, the first script I read [by *Blackwater* writer Boise Esquerre] was a little campier," says Grünberg. "It was more on the comedic side, which I thought

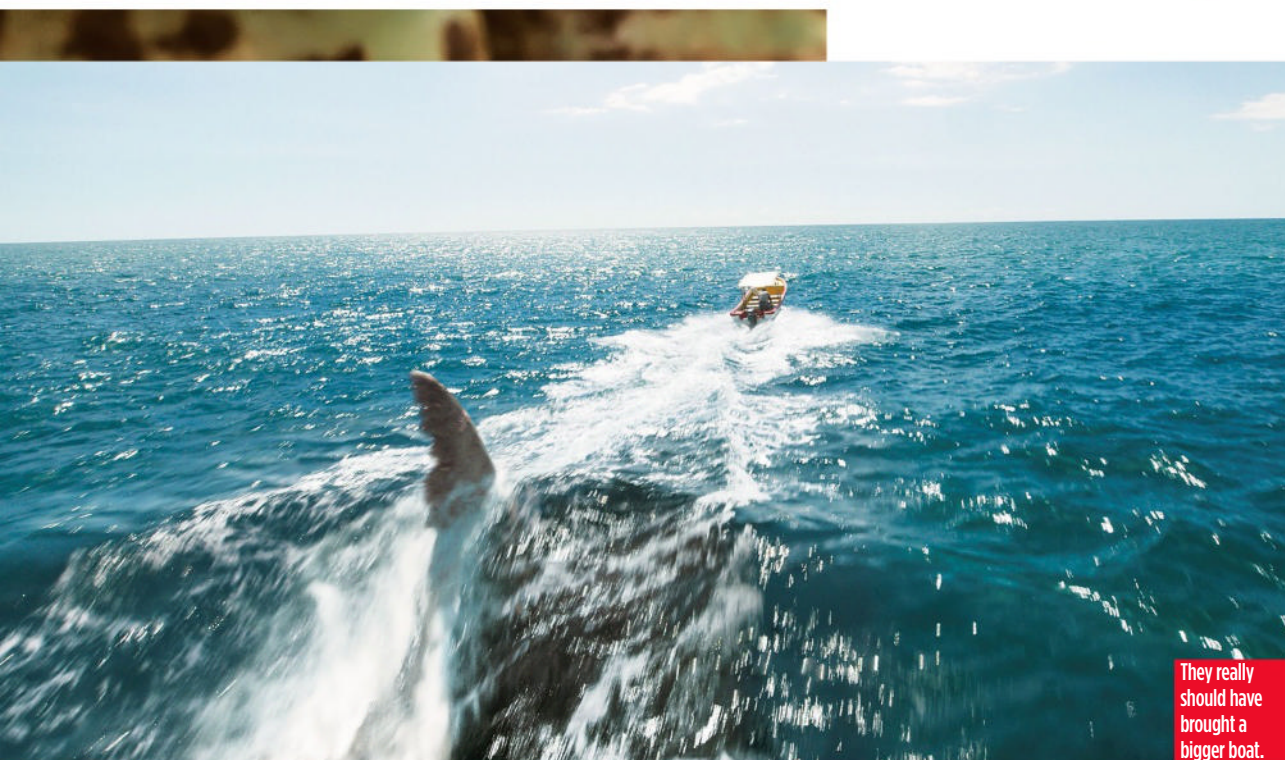
was more typical and more what you're used to seeing. I liked the idea of trying to make this slightly more serious, trying to make the action and dramatic elements blend in together."

Grünberg's previous movie was *Rambo: Last Blood* and before that,

the 2012 Mel Gibson actioner *Get The Gringo*. A supernatural eco-aquatic-thriller, he says, is not something he was ever expecting to be offered.

"It's not particularly the genre I would have thought to jump on," he says, "but I read the script and

Junior realises he's wearing the wrong shoes.



They really should have brought a bigger boat.

it had so many elements that attracted me, like the fact that it was a Latin-inspired shark movie. I don't look or sound the part, but I am Hispanic, so the idea of jumping into a genre that is traditionally very Hollywood was very appealing. It was basically the Hispanic and blowing up our own planet elements that brought me closer to it."

Unlike other shark movies, which tend to put their creature front and centre, Grünberg says he approached the film with a "less is more" approach. Until the film's final reel, "the Black Demon" is only seen in flashes.

"Nothing that we present to an audience is scarier than what the audience themselves can make up in their heads," Grünberg says. "So the idea of giving them a sense of this is what's out there, this is its size, and then letting people fill in those gaps is definitely a conscious choice. To me, it's more a character movie than a shark movie. The shark to me isn't a meat-eating machine, it's not a bad animal, it's not seeking revenge, it's seeking a higher purpose for all of us."

Heading up the cast as Paul Sturges, the inspector for the Nixon Oil Company who's sent to check on the rig, is *Yellowstone's* Josh Lucas. "I've known Josh for a

Audrey just never got on with any seafood.



"The first script I read was a little campier, it was more on the comedic side"

long time and I think he's a terrific actor," enthuses Grünberg. "There was something in the original script that we sent him that touched him. I think he got right away what my intentions were and he added so much to it. He would come in every morning and say, 'I've had a thought...' and sometimes these thoughts included giving away things from his character to other characters. He's a very sharing actor."

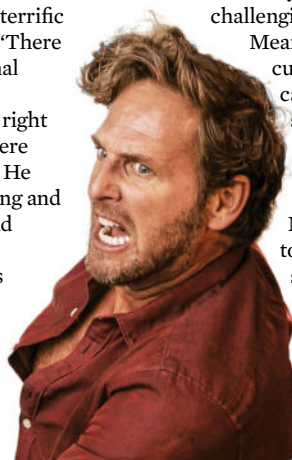
"There's a subtlety about him," the director continues. "He starts off

and there's certain mannerisms about him that make him look a little wimpy that he loses as he goes along, navigating these decisions and these things that he's done. He becomes this much bigger figure, sturdier and more focused."

The Black Demon was filmed in the Dominican Republic under strict Covid protections. But, Grünberg reveals, in between shooting dates he came down with the virus. "We shot part December and part January and during the hiatus a lot of us, including the actors, got Covid," he recalls. "I had to come in and direct the first week in a tent with that mind fog that you get. I did feel in a haze for a few days, so that was very challenging."

Meanwhile, Grünberg is currently in Mérida, the capital of the Mexican state of Yucatán, shooting what he teases as "a big Latin-American, *Indiana Jones*-type show" for Netflix. "It's coming together very nicely," he smiles, "so hopefully we can put it out there very soon." **so**

The Black Demon is out on Blu-ray and DVD on 10 July.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Animated *Babylon 5* reunion movie **The Road Home** to be voiced by original stars Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian, Peter Jurasik, Bill Mumy, Tracy Scoggins and Patricia Tallman.
→ *Pistol's* Sydney Chandler to star in Noah Hawley's **Alien** series.
→ Marvel's **Loki** scheduled to return on 6 October, while **Echo** drops 29 November.
→ **Lockwood & Co** and **The Winchesters** axed after their debut seasons.
→ Tim Burton to feature in a new four-part doc.
→ Big screen Evil-Lyn Meg Foster voicing Motherboard in Kevin Smith's **Masters Of The Universe: Revolution**.
→ **Archer** wrapping after upcoming fourteenth season.
→ *The Wire's* Clark Johnson joining **Daredevil: Born Again**.
→ Rosario Dawson and Tony Revolori voicing animated dystopia series **Ghosts Of Ruin**.
→ Production of **Stranger Things'** final season pushed back by writers' strike.
→ Netflix's reality competition **Squid Game: The Challenge** launches in Nov.
→ Spy show **Citadel** renewed for season two.



SCI-FACT! Before he became a director, Grünberg worked as a First AD on films such as *Apocalypse*.

GETTY

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Release The Kraken!

Dreamworks Animation plunges into an underwater fantasy with **Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken**



PREPARE FOR A SERIOUS smackdown beneath the Seven Seas with Dreamworks Animation's new family-friendly animated feature *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken*.

This '90s-style coming-of-age fable centres on the gangly teenager of the title (Lana Condor) who discovers that she is descended from generations of mythical sea krakens and that her true destiny lies in a fantastic oceanic kingdom. An ancient feud pits krakens against mermaids in an underwater clash of epic proportions, as we learn that appearances are deceptive and mermaids might not be the alluring enchantresses of maritime folklore...

Directed by *The Croods*' Kirk DeMicco from an original screenplay by DeMicco and Pam Brady, *Ruby Gillman* is poised to be parent company Universal Pictures' third animation sensation, after the box office bonanzas of Dreamworks' *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish* and Illumination's blockbuster *The Super Mario Bros Movie*.

The Oscar-nominated director took a break from post-production mixing at Skywalker Sound to chat to Red Alert about *Ruby Gillman*'s vivid visual style and crafting the original krakens versus mermaids concept. He explains that the movie had huge appeal to him and his creative sensibilities as a "*The Croods* underwater" project, believing that it could interest a broad swathe of moviegoers.

FEMALE TREBLE

"I was brought in by Dreamworks where I'd done *The Croods* and had just finished up *Vivo*," he explains. "They knew I had always had a story interest, after the father/daughter story in *The Croods*, of doing a mother/daughter story. So the core of this film is a mother/daughter story, but then it's really a three-generation story with a grandmother, all sharing a very special magical lineage. And that appealed to me from a storytelling

standpoint. I have a 10-year-old daughter, so I was really interested in telling that tale and see what we could do with casting."

The movie is the first Dreamworks film with a titular female lead. *Hereditary*'s Toni Collette provides the voice for Ruby's mother, while her grandmother – aka The Warrior Queen of the Seven Seas – is performed by Hollywood veteran Jane Fonda.

"The film's family dynamics is so important, because that's where Ruby comes from. And the *Teenage Kraken* part of the title is a little play on the *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* thing. It feels like a Saturday movie to me. Or maybe even like a *Teen Wolf*."

"It also kind of flipped the boxes on almost every trope in my mind, which I thought was really fun," he adds. "It's got a female protagonist, there's the unlikely hero, the non-human hero, and most of all, you've got a retelling of a





Ruby Gillman and Connor shoot the (sea) breeze.



Don't try this at home, kids. Or at work, come to that.



Grandmamah is voiced by the legendary Jane Fonda.

“It’s really a three-generation story with a grandmother, all sharing a very special magical lineage”

historical villain being turned on its head as a protagonist. I have young kids, and they know so much that you have to throw them a really fun curveball. It was exciting to play with the expectations of what a kraken was.”

When it came to the distinctive visual styling, DeMicco had the assistance of production designer Pierre-Olivier Vincent (aka POV) and Carlos Puertolas (*The Boss Baby*, *Trolls 2*) as the head of animation. “POV and Dave Walvoord, who is our VFX supervisor, they’d both done all the *How To*

Train Your Dragon films,” says DeMicco. “So I knew that there was an opportunity to do a brand new, underwater world build. It’s a world you’ve never seen before because it’s below the ocean, and to create a kingdom and adventure set-pieces was incredible.

DEEP DIVE

“The giant squids that might be in the ocean?” he continues. “Well, these kraken are below there. [It’s like] if the Mariana Trench [the deepest point on Earth] had a Mariana Trench inside a Mariana Trench!”

“There’s a freshness to it and a bit of a licence, because these are creatures without bones, to enjoy that curvy animation style that’s very appealing. In the world of anthropomorphic boned animals or humans you usually don’t get that opportunity, and the animators really leaned into it.”

DeMicco’s entry point into that exotic realm

was through the familiar template of a ’80s/’90s-style teenage high school comedy. “We all used to joke about, ‘What’s more dangerous? The halls of high school or the aeons-long battle between giant krakens and evil mermaids?’ And the answer is the halls of high school!”

“To take it from a story that starts out in high school and at the end it’s a massive animated kaiju battle was a great opportunity – one that was going to be beautiful and distinct, in the sense that it’s between this matriarchy of mythical krakens and one evil mermaid titan.

“And having this balletic, hardcore clash, these queens of the seas battling it out to save the town of Oceanside, was truly unique.”

He smiles. “I just thought, ‘Yeah, we’ve got to do this!’” **JSP**

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken is in cinemas from 30 June.

► **SCI-FACT!** Lana Condor, who voices Ruby, made her acting debut as Jubilee in *X-Men: Apocalypse*.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Game Over, Man!

Face a xenomorph horde in **Aliens: Dark Descent**

➔ JUST AS YOU'VE OVERCOME YEARS OF sleepless nights after shuddering in sterile space station corridors avoiding a xenomorph in 2014's survival horror game *Alien: Isolation*, here comes more sci-fi fright fuel in the shape of *Aliens: Dark Descent*.

The game steers clear of the stealthy evasive format of *Isolation*. Developer Tindalos Interactive has instead designed its tactical-style gameplay to feature aggressive order-based team deployments, time-displacement functions and action-orientated story missions – plus plenty of biomechanical beasts.

The game's storyline sees players leading a crew of Colonial Marines to ambush a savage alien invasion on the hostile moon of Lethe. Gamers command a crack unit of gung-ho soldiers in real-time combat against acid-spewing monsters, rogue infiltrators from the heartless Weyland-Yutani Corporation, and a menagerie of never-seen creatures making their debut in the *Alien* universe.

For game director Romain Clavier, evoking certain atmospheric elements from the *Alien* franchise was his first and foremost concern. "The *Alien* universe has a very distinct feel to it: the lighting, the retro-futuristic tech of the '70s and '80s, the spaceships, the lore and so on," he tells Red Alert. "After watching the films numerous times, this was essential to us. With our gameplay choice, it was crucial to have the player truly be engrossed in the weight the setting adds to the *Alien* experience, much like what fans may have encountered watching the films themselves.

"Another piece of the puzzle was how the horror element was to be treated. Jump scares were not an option for us. *Aliens: Dark Descent* is heavily inspired by the second movie, in which we felt that the true fear and horror came when the Marines realised that their weapons wouldn't be enough to beat the xenomorphs, a world where they seemed to endlessly multiply and grow smarter over time because they were learning from them."

Aliens: Dark Descent's gameplay revolves around the anticipation of potentially being overrun by a ferocious

entity that seems unkillable, and its style is a departure from first-person shooters.

"The most evident aspect of *Aliens: Dark Descent* is that this game isn't a FPS, but a strategic, squad-based tactical action game with an isometric view of the environment and gameplay experience," Clavier adds. "For better or worse in relation to survival, players have a constant overview of their squads. The distress doesn't come from what might be behind the Marines, but rather what might be hidden in the vent, the next corridor or the upcoming room.

"Another element our team chose to highlight was the player's ability to choose their gameplay style. *Alien: Isolation* is a pure stealth horror game, where your only means of defence is your capacity to hide and remain silent, as you have few weapons. In *Aliens: Dark Descent*, players have options: choose between stealth or drastic action, with both having their own pros and cons."

LOVING THE ALIEN

Seeing James Cameron's *Aliens* in 1986 was Clavier's induction into the world of *Alien*, and that frightful first encounter has remained an enduring basis for his entire career direction.

"For a teenager like me, it was mind-blowing," he recalls. "So much so that I created a boardgame about it when I was 13, and it eventually served as a base for *Aliens: Dark Descent*. The Marines, the action, the music, the atmosphere, it really stuck with me.

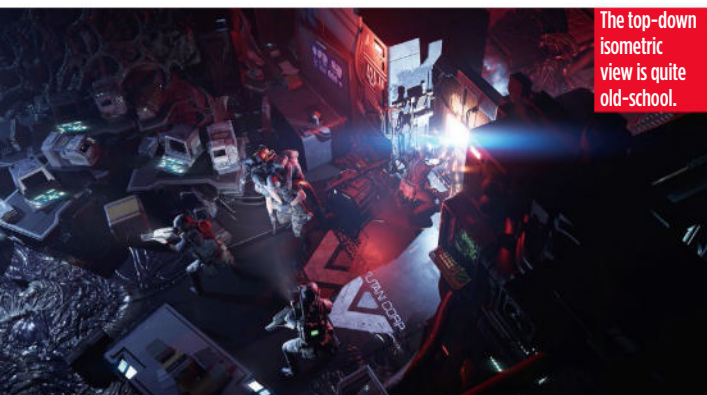
"As to why the *Alien* universe endures, I'd say it might have to do with how unique and varied it is. It has a rich lore, and yet there are a lot of unsolved mysteries in it. The xenomorph is such a strange creature that it can encapsulate a lot thanks to its design, but also its conceptualisation.

"Horror fans can enjoy the flat-out terrifying way xenomorphs reproduce. Action fans can enjoy the Marines and their futuristic weaponry. Sci-fi fans can enjoy the political intrigues and beautiful spaceship designs. The concept is always the same: somewhere, lurking in this dark, foreign environment, there is a creature that wants to kill you, or worse."

Clavier and his Tindalos team were thrilled by the opportunity to tell an original story set in this iconic universe, and are looking forward to finally sharing its wild bestiary with legions of *Alien* fans desperate for a decent new videogame.

"We can't wait for players to plunge into all the maps we've created," he notes. "They'll be able to create their own squads, and get a feel for themselves how it truly feels to be a bunch of Marines, surrounded by xenomorphs, through the real-time strategy gameplay we came up with. We hope everyone enjoys it!" **JSP**

Aliens: Dark Descent is out 20 June.



The top-down isometric view is quite old-school.

Mmm, lovely lovely biotech. Thanks for that, Giger.



“Lurking in this dark, foreign environment, there is a creature that wants to kill you”



“They’re coming outta the goddamn walls!”

► **SCI-FACT!** Since the first *Alien* game for the Atari 2600 in 1982, there have been almost 50 videogames to feature the xenomorphs.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Young Guns

The denizens of Dreddworld return to their younger days in **Mega-City Max**

➔ JUST AS *2000 AD* *Regened* showcases the wider worlds of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic for a younger audience, new one-shot *Mega-City Max* acts as a Judge Dredd Magazine for teenagers – but don't expect to see Ol' Stoney Face himself.

"*Mega-City Max* is all about the people who live, survive and thrive in the bustling metropolis of Mega-City One," says editor Oliver Pickles. "This is all about those side characters and new favourites starring in epic stories of their own, which means that Judge Dredd – and even Cadet Dredd – are out, as they're off having adventures of their own."

The one-shot is described by Pickles as "closer in tone to *2000 AD* than to *Regened*". Writer/artist Hannah Templer's contribution explores how former Judge-turned-private eye Galen DeMarco is now accepted in her community. "Hannah also weaves in the backstory of DeMarco, and how she is able to maintain a friendship with some of the other Judges such as Hershey and Anderson," continues Pickles.

Oliver Gerlach and VV Glass's youthful take on Devlin Waugh will really surprise readers, he suggests. "Devlin has been de-aged from his *2000 AD* / *Megazine* appearances, as it's set

before he was afflicted with vampirism," he says. "Oliver Gerlach has written a story about a young gay man who has had a fall from grace but is determined to get back to living the high life. With this being a Devlin Waugh story, those familiar with the older version of the character will know that the occult and demons are, of course, involved!"

Light relief is provided by *Walter the Wobot*, although writer/artist Roger Langridge admits he was more interested in co-star Max Normal. "Max was enormous fun – I added him in as an afterthought, but he kind of took the story over," says Langridge. "I brought him in because I've always liked the character and his style of speech gave me an opportunity for some fun alliterative wordplay."

"Don't Be Cwuel" is about the comedic notion of 'punching up' vs 'punching down', which is where the title comes from. Walter tries his hand at stand-up comedy and gets himself in a pickle. Max tries to help Walter out, using his shady network of shady connections, and then things go haywire..."

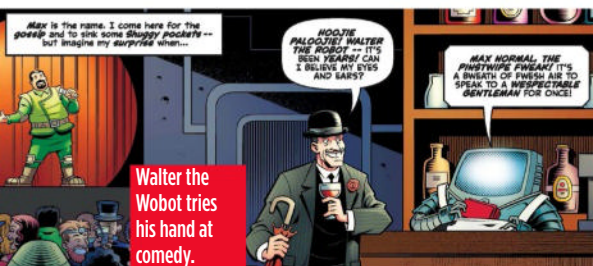
Writer Ramzee and artist Korinna Mei Veropoulou were really able to cut loose on *Harlem Heroes*, who previously appeared in the *Regened* collections. "The *Regened* stories were still fun, but we were aware that an eight-year-old could read it," explains Ramzee. "*Mega-City Max* is for a YA audience, so we felt we could lean into the *Hunger Games*-esque brutality of Aeroball, and the success of



Heartstopper allowed me to be more confident in being explicit about things like gender identity, which was only hinted at in the *Regened* stories."

Ramzee also included some callbacks to the future sport strip's inaugural run, which began in Prog 1 itself, with lead character Gem Giant being the great grandchild of first Harlem Heroes captain John "Giant" Clay. "If I get to write more *Harlem Heroes*, I would like to sprinkle in a few more references to the classic Tom Tully and Dave Gibbons series, and especially one fan-favourite villain!" **SJ**

Mega-City Max is out on 19 July.



Walter the Wobot tries his hand at comedy.

► **SCI-FACT!** The Great Old One first appeared in short story "The Call Of Cthulhu", published in *Weird Tales* in 1928.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Cosmic Chaos

Keanu Reeves's *BRZRKR* faces off against HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu in Steve Skroce's **Poetry Of Madness**

➔ KEANU REEVES'S *BRZRKR* has a live-action film and two-series anime adaptation in the pipeline. But before then, Reeves's creation is heading in a different direction. After the comic's initial 12-issue run, co-written by Matt Kindt – which achieved record first issue sales, breaking the 2015 figures set by *Star Wars* – it's returning in a new one-shot written and drawn by Steve Skroce.

Skroce is known for his storyboarding on films like *The Matrix*, *Speed Racer* and *V For Vendetta*, in addition to his comics output such as the Clive Barker-created *Ectokid* and the Thing-starring Marvel miniseries *Clobberin' Time*. Now the Canadian illustrator is taking the immortal warrior B into more fantastical horror territory, as he defends Atlantis against HP Lovecraft's ominous cosmic entity Cthulhu – with plenty of B's trademark ultraviolence chucked in for good measure.

"I was a fan of the original *BRZRKR* series, which was right up my alley with its demi-gods and hyper-violence," Skroce tells Red

Alert. He was first approached by Boom! Studios editor Jon Moisan about drawing some covers. "I said I'd love to do a *BRZRKR* cover, and from there I tricked them into giving me the gig."

Having worked on all four *Matrix* instalments to date, Skroce already had a passing acquaintance with his co-author. "I have met Mr Reeves a few times over the years, and he was always very gracious," he recalls. "What I like most about him is his habit of popping up in my life with some amazing project."

According to Skroce, *BRZRKR* is perfectly suited to Lovecraftian-style horror.

"B's character arc spans the whole of human civilisation, and I like to think that all our heroic myths were born from his adventures," he reasons. "The Berzerker is built to fit into all action genres, and high fantasy seemed like a natural fit. I also wanted a foe that would be a physical match for B, and who else but the MacDaddy of Kajius, Cthulhu could fit the bill?"

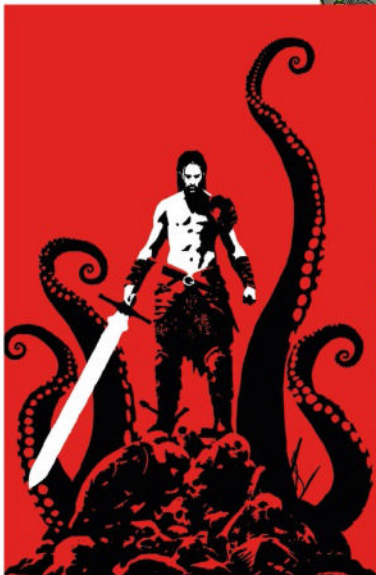
For inspiration, Skroce delved deep into all his favourite stories from down the decades. "The design process is a love letter to all the fantasy books and films I've absorbed over the years," he says. "I try to think about things that have resonated with me as a viewer, and I drew upon those influences to hopefully come up with something that works."

Renowned for his highly detailed artwork, Skroce was really able to cut loose when it came to depicting the sea of gore and mayhem that awaits B. "*Poetry Of Madness* is for comic book and Keanu Reeves fans that like mythology and relentless, blood-soaked fantasy adventure," he says. "I'm pretty sure this book may cause a worldwide shortage of red ink!" **sj**

BRZRKR: Poetry Of Madness 1 is out on 26 July.



Main cover art for issue one, by Steve Skroce.



One of many variant issue covers, by David Aja.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Todd Couple

Sweeney Todd is adapted into Prime Video's very black comedy **The Horror Of Dolores Roach**



IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT A STORY idea gets to make the adaptation rounds in multiple media, but that speaks to the delightfully twisted premise of *The Horror Of Dolores Roach*. Aaron Mark originally developed it as a one-woman show that gender-inverts the 19th century melodrama *Sweeney Todd*. It became a stage hit with Daphne Rubin-Vega playing ex-con Dolores Roach – who stayed in the title role when it was turned into a Spotify podcast drama of the same name.

Now *The Horror Of Dolores Roach* is an eight-episode Prime Video horror-comedy series starring Justina Machado (*Jane The Virgin*) as Dolores, a young woman who takes the fall for her drug-dealer boyfriend and does 16 years in prison. When she gets out, that boyfriend has vanished, and she has no money and no family.

She has to rely on the kindness of Luis (Alejandro Hernandez), the quirky empanada store owner in her old hood, and her skills as a jailhouse-trained masseuse. With Dolores now a fish out of water and livid at her lot in life, she and Luis end up creating a “delicious” way to deal with her momentary bouts of violence.

“It goes into the question of what makes a horrible person?” director America Young tells Red Alert. “Is a horrible person the one who is actively murdering other people? Or is a

horrible person the one with all the microaggressions that constantly beats you down, day after day after day, and makes you a non-entity of a person?”

Framed as a story within a story, the series opens with Dolores telling her sordid life story to a young actress who is playing a fictional Dolores in a stage play based on the killer's life. It's a meta set-up that, as the logline puts it, explores “the macabre urban legend of love, betrayal, weed, gentrification, cannibalism and survival of the fittest”.

In order to convey Dolores's churning thoughts, her internal dialogue is expressed through a blunt and very funny voiceover. “One of the interesting things about the character is that she's just out of prison. She's uncomfortable. She doesn't know what it's like to be out here in the real world, as there's been so many different changes,” the director says.

“So her internal dialogue and her external dialogue are always at odds. She's never actually saying what she's thinking, except when she is massaging someone or murdering someone. And then all of a sudden, what she's thinking is in perfect alignment with her body and her mouth.”

Because the series is literally told in Dolores's voice, Young says that she and showrunners Aaron Mark, Dara Resnik and their director of photography went on a

Alejandro Hernandez and Justina Machado.



Louis Theroux? No, it's comedian Marc Maron.



Dolores and Luis might be in a bit of trouble.



“We only shoot what Dolores would have seen or heard, which was really fun”

journey to figure out “What is the perception of what we’re filming?” The result was a mandate for the series’ directors to only shoot from Dolores’s perspective. “The rule was: the only thing we shoot is what Dolores would have seen or heard, which was really fun and a cool experiment,” she says. “It’s exhausting for poor Justina because she’s in every single shot and every single scene. But I think it gives it a really singular perspective and vision for a show which is really exciting.”

Speaking of Machado, her Dolores walks the tightrope of being a sympathetic character, while also doing some monstrous things when pushed too far. “She can take anything and

make it likeable, first of all,” Young says of their star. “She’s still the hero of the story and everything she’s doing, she’s doing it purely for survival. She’s not doing it to get ahead in the world. She’s not doing it out of revenge or spite. She is in pure survival mode, which we can all relate to at one point or another in our lives. And sometimes with some of the situations that she’s been in, she’s put into a situation in which she feels she has no other choice.”

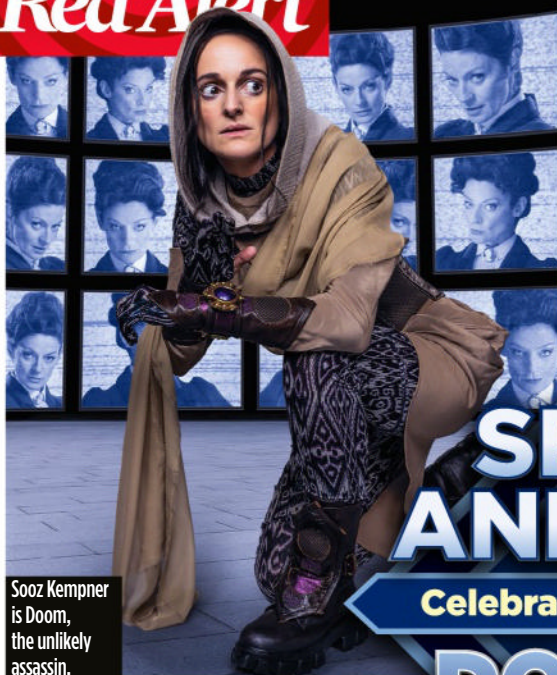
Young continues, “I love that she fought to defend this character. She would say, ‘I don’t understand that, please explain why I need to do that?’ And then we would have that conversation. This character meant so much to

her, and she was so invested in it, that we were able to get to some really phenomenal places.”

Young says that as a creative team they found the right tone, one with a certain level of gore and horror – and hopes audiences will appreciate how surprisingly everything escalates. “There were all these different types of things that they were looking at stylistically that had a good feeling of horror and a good feeling of comedy and a good feeling of drama. And there was always the conversation of keeping it real, and keeping her real.” **TB**

The Horror Of Dolores Roach is on Prime Video from 7 July.

► **SCI-FACT!** America Young is not only a director, but has been the official voice of the animated Barbie since 2018.



Sooz Kempner is Doom, the unlikely assassin.

SPACE AND TIME

Celebrating 60 years of

DOCTOR WHO

Day Of Reckoning

Details for the multi-platform *Doctor Who* adventure **Doom's Day** have been released

◆ Doom is the finest time-travelling assassin in the cosmos. But Death – as in literal Death – is on her tail and she's only got 24 hours and a vortex manipulator to find the Doctor and save herself. But a lot can happen in 24 hours...
◆ Spread across games, comics, audio dramas and more, Doom – played by Sooz Kempner – will meet a host of familiar faces on her journey, which begins this month.

BOOK

◆ *Extraction Point*, a novel by MG Harris featuring the Second and Ninth Doctors and the Slitheen will be released on 10 August. It also promises an appearance from a Kraal and a visit to Satellite Five.

AUDIO DRAMAS

◆ *Four From Doom's Day* – a collection of, you've guessed it, four different stories from *Doom's Day* – will see the return of Ian and Barbara, the Ice Warriors and Brian the Ood.
◆ The four stories – “The Steel Cascade”, “The Martian

Dilemma”, “An Ood Halloween” and “Dark Space” – will be released by BBC Audio on 24 August. There's a very swish vinyl version available from Demon Records.

◆ Big Finish also has a set of stories due for release in September. The work of writers Jacqueline Rayner, Robert Valentine, Simon Clark and Lizzie Hopley, the titles are *Dawn of Everlasting Peace*, *A Date with*

Destiny, *The Howling Wolves Of Xan-Phear* and *The Crowd*. Further details are TBC.

GAMES

◆ There are two *Doom's Day* tie-in

elements from East Side Games under the *Doctor Who: Lost In Time* umbrella.

◆ *I Am The Doctor* sees Doom unexpectedly cross paths with the Doctor and K-9 on a space station besieged by marauding pirates.

◆ In *Wrong Place At The Right Time*, Doom becomes the guardian of a civilian from an alien world.

COMICS

◆ The *Doom's Day* saga kicks off in a 16-page comic strip that comes with the issue of *Doctor Who Magazine* out on 22 June. In the four instalments – “Target Selected”, “The Plastic Population”, “High Noon In Hollywood” and “The Horn Of A Dilemma” – Doom encounters familiar faces, Autons and the (wrong) Doctor.



Anyone fancy some swishy vinyl? Of course you do.



Doctor Doom

Missy meets Doom in Titan Comics' contribution to **Doom's Day**, set at 06.00-07.00/08.00-09.00

Part of multi-platform extravaganza *Doom's Day*, Titan Comics' latest *Doctor Who* offering features Doom, a mysterious professional killer from the 51st Century, who is on a desperate mission to locate the Doctor.

"Doom is interesting because she appears very non-threatening, until she doesn't," says Titan's regular *Doctor Who* scribe Jody Houser, who once again is partnered by artist Roberta Ingranata. "She is, after all, an assassin, and she's exceptionally good at her job. At the same time, at least in our comic, she's taking jobs to eliminate threats to possibly billions of beings. So at least in her eyes, she's the hero of the story."

With the prospect of her imminent death looming large on the horizon, Doom has only 24 hours to live unless she can track down the Doctor, although she instead ends up crossing paths with Missy. "Missy is just so much fun," laughs Houser. "And that's really been her main motivation in our stories. She's morally flexible and unpredictable because, at the end of the day, she does whatever catches her fancy the most. Some days it's conquering the universe and some days it's saving the universe with more panache than the Doctor, although she is actually working to be a better person at this point in her story."

Houser and Ingranata already have form with Missy, having spun her out into her own four-issue series in 2022, which guest-starred the Third and Twelfth Doctors. "This series

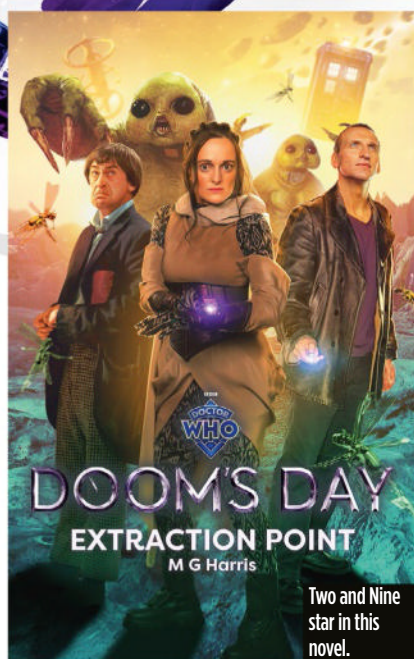
serves as something of a sequel to our previous Missy mini-series," teases Houser. "You don't have to read that one to enjoy *Doom's Day*, but it definitely enriches it. And as in our previous series, Missy is doing her very best 'Doctor Who' impression."

Having penned the Thirteenth Doctor's flagship title before turning her hand to Missy, the Eighth and the Eleventh Doctors in *Empire Of The Wolf* and the Fugitive Doctor in *Doctor Who: Origins*, Houser has enjoyed the sheer variety of the renegade Time Lord's adventures. "We were able to have continuing character threads in the ongoing series, although we've done our best to continue that in the various miniseries," she says. "I definitely do love playing with many different toys from the toybox, though."

Houser has also formed an instinctive creative rapport with Ingranata, whom she believes is at her understated best on the two-issue "A Doctor In The House?" "One of the things that Roberta is so good at is subtle expressions that say a lot, so expect to see some tension on the page between Doom and Missy," says Houser, who also praises the work of colourist Warnia K Sahadewa and letterer Richard Starkings.

"I always know I can throw something weird and fantastical at Roberta, and she'll knock it out of the park, whether it's a strange new world, bizarre aliens or even silly costumes." **SJ**

Doctor Who: Doom's Day issue one is out 5 July.

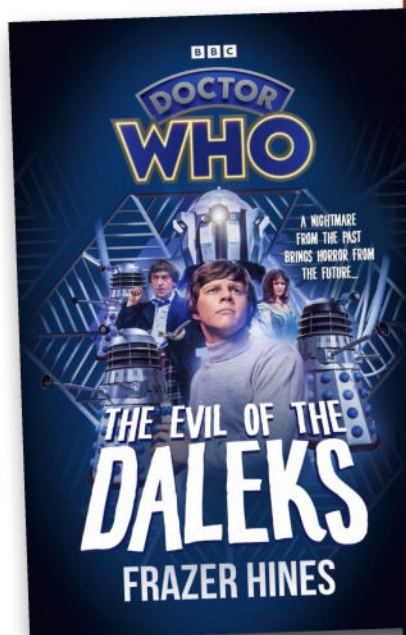


◆ Titan's comic adventure has Doom partnering with Missy in two issues out on 5 and 25 July.

Further parts of the *Doom's Day* storyline will be announced and released later in the year.

You can find out more – and discover the hour-by-hour story details – at doctorwho.tv/dooms-day.

SCI-FACT! Jody Houser has previously written for *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *Stranger Things* comic spin-offs.



◆ Further casting for the 2024 season of *Doctor Who* has been announced. Joining Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson in their first series of adventures will be award-winning star of stage and screen Jonathan Groff.

Described as a key, mysterious and exciting guest role, Groff said: "I am so thrilled to jump into the extraordinary mind of Russell T Davies and watch the incredible Ncuti Gatwa soar in this iconic role!"

Showrunner, Russell T Davies said: "This is an incredible coup, and a great honour, to get such a huge star striding on to our set. So strap on your space boots, this is going to be a blast!"

Official space boots merchandise by Christmas 2024 please.

◆ Also joining Gatwa and Gibson for series 14 is Whoniverse star Indira Varma. She joins the cast playing a character called the Duchess.

Known to *Torchwood* fans as Suzie Costello, Varma has also appeared in *Game Of Thrones* and *Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi*.

"I'm overjoyed to be reunited with Indira after our *Torchwood* days, and this part is truly spectacular," said Russell T Davies. "A whole new audience will be hiding behind the settee when the Duchess unleashes her terror."

Varma said: "I'm thrilled to be in *Doctor Who* and particularly excited to be crossing cosmic paths with Ncuti, as the Doctor, and look forward to creating interplanetary mischief with him.



I loved playing Suzie Costello for Russell T Davies in *Torchwood* so am thrilled to be entering this world again."

◆ "Dress to impress and beware the Duchess" was the tagline accompanying two new images of Ncuti Gatwa, Millie Gibson and Jonathan Groff in period costume from filming on the 2024 series.

◆ A mysterious tease from production of season 14 states that Jinkx Monsoon's first day on set

teamed the star with "an unexpected name from the Tom Baker era."

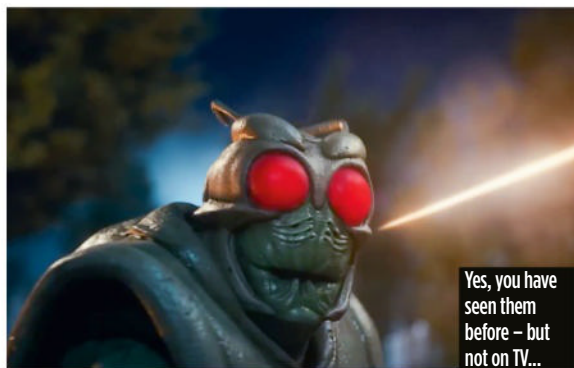
◆ Following mysterious coded teaser trailers that were scattered throughout BBC One's programming schedule, a full new trailer for the 60th anniversary specials aired on 13 May ahead of *The Eurovision Song Contest*.

◆ Special One was revealed to be called "The Star Beast". Directed by Rachel Talalay, it's based on a

Marvel comic strip from 1980.

Russell T Davies has stated that original writers/creators Pat Mills and Dave Gibbons were "both fully consulted professionally and on-board with the production right from the start".

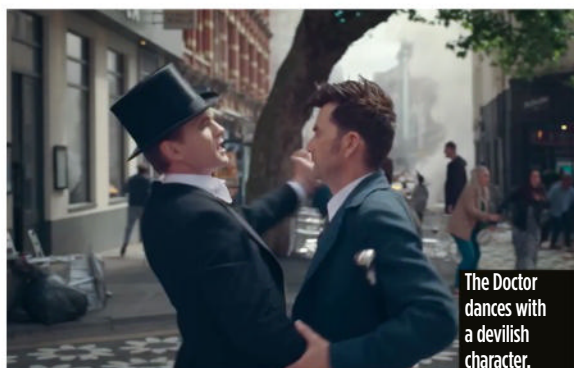
Scenes shown include the crashing of a spaceship, witnessed by the Fourteenth Doctor (David Tennant) and Rose (Yasmin Finney), the Wrarth Warriors attacking and Donna (Catherine



Yes, you have seen them before – but not on TV...



Just what is going on in the second special episode?



The Doctor dances with a devilish character.



Grown men will be known to weep for this badge.



The Doctor and Jo have a new classic adventure.

the adventure to new TARDIS traveller Zoe. So yes, that's effectively a novel of the 1968 repeat.

◆ There's also a new novel featuring the Third Doctor and Jo, "Josephine And The Argonauts", written by Paul Magrs. It's part of the series where the Doctor meets legendary characters and is released on 24 August.

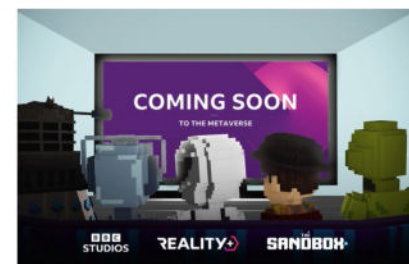
◆ BBC Studios has teamed up with Reality+ for immersive experiences in the metaverse, which will include *Doctor Who*.

The Sandbox is described as "part virtual real estate, part amusement park".

Reality+ previously worked with the BBC on digital trading card game *Doctor Who: Worlds Apart*. Pandak, anyone?

◆ Big Finish revealed cover art for the next chapter of their 60th anniversary series, "Once And Future". Starring Sylvester McCoy, "A Genius For War" by Jonathan Morris is released in July.

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



Tate) having a close encounter with Beep The Meep.

Again, Beep merch by Christmas please.

◆ Special Two is called "Wild Blue Yonder" and is directed by Tom Kingsley.

Little is known about this special, other than a song being involved and that a longer five word title "would give the game away right from the start."

It appears so secretive that the scenes are brief and feature the word "Redacted". Surprises in store?

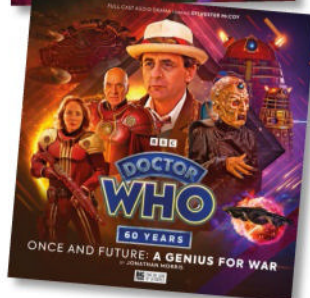
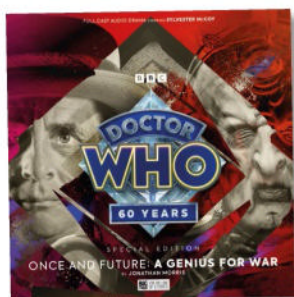
◆ Special Three, directed by Chanya Button, is called "The Giggle". Again, details are sparse but the villain portrayed by Neil Patrick Harris seems prominent. As you might expect, fan theories

are rife online...

All three episodes are written by Russell T Davies. He said: "The titles are just the beginning of the Doctor's biggest adventure yet. Autumn is coming, with three hours of danger, Donna and disaster about to be unleashed!"

◆ The *Blue Peter* anniversary competition badge was recently revealed – presumably to the horror of *Doctor Who* collectors too old to enter the competition. The winners will be announced later this year.

◆ A new novelisation of "The Evil Of The Daleks" has been announced for release on 26 October. This version – the debut book by former companion Frazer Hines – is told from the perspective of Jamie as he relays



► **SCI-FACT!** Jonathan Groff is known for his appearances in *The Matrix Resurrections*, *Knock At The Cabin* and the *Frozen* movies.



Boxing Clever ⬆

The 30th anniversary may have been and gone, but that's no reason to stop celebrating the best Batman film of all time. That's *Batman Returns*, in case anyone's not clear. Lego is helping keep Burton's gothic Christmas on your mind all year round with a new Shadow Box set – which opens up to reveal the Batcave and lots of special features. As you might expect, it comes with minifigures of Catwoman, Penguin and Max Shreck.

Available now, £344.99, lego.com/batman



Rocket Man ⬆

A special staged reading of the 1953 serial *The Quatermass Experiment* will be held in London later this year.

Mark Gatiss will star as Professor Bernard Quatermass in this unique event to mark the 70th anniversary of the largely missing six-part broadcast.

The first manned flight by British Experimental Rocket Group returns to Earth with two crew members missing – but what exactly is happening to the sole survivor? What Quatermass discovers will have horrific consequences for everyone on the planet...

The Quatermass Experiment is at Alexandra Palace on 9 September. For tickets visit alexandrapalace.com

Cottage Under Siege

Yes, this should probably have been on the previous page but you can never have enough *Doctor Who*, can you? *Serpent Crest* – the third and final series of Fourth Doctor Nest Cottage audio adventures – has been released on a limited edition 10 LP vinyl set. Each copy includes a 16-page booklet and hand-signed portrait of Tom Baker. Be quick, it's limited to only 1,200 copies!

£149.99, hmv.com ⬇



► **SCI-FACT!** Austin directed 1983's *The Return Of The Man From UNCLE*, which had a cheeky cameo by George Lazenby as "JB".

NEW AUTHOR

VERITY M HOLLOWAY

MEET THE WRITER BEHIND HISTORICAL HORROR *THE OTHERS OF EDENWELL*



Tell us about your protagonists.

→ It's 1917, and Freddie is the caretaker's son at Edenwell hydropathic resort. He prefers rooks to people – the world outside the gates is of little interest to him. Eustace is eager to kill some Germans, but his mother is trying to keep him out of the war.

How long did the book take to write?

→ Four years, but I'd been thinking about these two young men and their secret interior world for about seven. I had to pause in the middle for open heart surgery, so that slowed me down, but the morphine nightmares turned out to be useful!

Did you learn anything interesting from your research?

→ The fact about the First World War home front that stayed with me is that when civilians saw German Zeppelins drifting over the horizon, they couldn't bring themselves to run away. There are eyewitness

accounts where people say, "I could see it dropping bombs, but could only stare in awe".

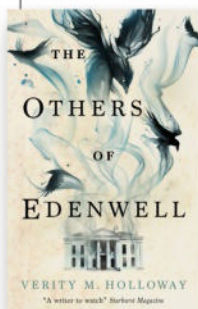
Got any advice for readers who are budding authors?

→ Go outside your genre. Visit a charity shop and buy something obscure. Ask yourself, "What is this book doing?"

What are you working on next?

→ I have a hankering to write about a cult. I have five new characters in my head and I'm just getting a sense of what they want.

The Others Of Edenwell is out on 4 July, published by Titan Books.



THE FINAL FRONTIER

RAY AUSTIN 1932-2023

The man who taught Mrs Peel how to fight



"AT ONE TIME I WAS GOING from one studio to another," remembered Ray Austin of the remarkable career path that took him from stunt arranger to prolific TV director. "A fight here, a fall there. At night I would turn a car over, then go home, book two more stunt men, and we would be jumping off a building the next day."

It was a CV launched with a single, hard-knuckled punch. Just out of the army, where he had served as a physical training instructor, Austin was acting as chauffeur to Cary Grant. One night in 1953 he stepped in to protect the star from three louts in a London coffee bar. Impressed, Grant invited him to Hollywood to act as full-time bodyguard – a move that resulted in Austin stunt-doubling for Martin Landau in *North By Northwest*'s iconic Mount Rushmore climax.

Returning to Britain, he became stunt co-ordinator on *The Avengers*, bringing martial arts expertise to the outlandish espionage capers. Promoted to second unit director on *The Champions*, he graduated to helming episodes of *The Saint*, *Department S* and *The Avengers*, including memorable Tara King episode "All Done With Mirrors". A writing credit on *Randall And Hopkirk (Deceased)* added another professional skill-set.

Over the next 30 years Austin directed a staggering 350 hours of prime-time television, from *The Professionals* to *Wonder*

Woman, Space: 1999 to *Hawaii Five-O*.

Big-screen credits included 1972's lascivious occult chiller *Virgin Witch* and 1974's *House Of The Living Dead*, whose cash-in title belied a strictly zombie-free horror.

"I will always remember my stops at Patrick [Macnee]'s dressing room," Austin recalled in 2010. "The champagne was always being poured freely and plentifully after the day's shoot, and always of the best vintage." **NS**



Ray Austin with Diana Rigg as Emma Peel.

TERRENCE HARDIMAN 1937-2023

British actor best known for the title role in '90s kids' TV show *The Demon Headmaster*.

RAY STEVENSON 1964-2023

Northern Irish actor with credits on *Thor*, *The Punisher: War Zone* and *Star Wars: Rebels*.

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WHIP- CRACK AWAY

THE MAN IN THE HAT IS BACK IN **INDIANA JONES AND THE
DIAL OF DESTINY**. IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME...



WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



UMMER, 1981. BRITAIN IS ALL pageantry and petrol bombs as a royal wedding and inner-city riots dominate the news cycle. Harrison Ford has just flown in, obliged to promote a film with the tantalising title *Raiders Of*

The Lost Ark. Interviewed by a national newspaper, he's pictured looking characteristically wry beneath a headline that may seem insane to 21st century eyes: "Hollywood Calls Him The New Bogart. London Says Harrison Who?"

Raiders will propel Ford from irresistibly watchable ensemble player in the likes of *Star Wars* and *Force 10 From Navarone* to bona fide leading man, capable of balancing a blockbuster on his rangy shoulders. And in Indiana Jones he will find the role that defines his entire screen persona: laconic but heroic, an A-list everyman who can land a smirk as powerfully as a punch.

Now, 42 years on, Ford's finally saying farewell to his signature character, coiling the whip and hanging the hat. This time, we're told, it really is the last crusade. "This is the full stop," insists veteran producer Frank Marshall of *Indiana Jones And The Dial Of Destiny*, a suitably breakneck swansong for the daredevil archaeologist. "We've done it. We've made, I think, a wonderful movie."

MOONAGE DAYDREAM

It's been an intrepid quest to return Indy to the screen after 2008's divisive *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*. Franchise creator George Lucas relinquished Lucasfilm to Disney in 2012. Steven Spielberg stepped down as director in 2020, following years of development hell. A succession of writers have come and gone, searching for that perfect take as if scouring trackless desert for the Well of Souls.

"You're always optimistic that you're going to find the story for the next one," Marshall tells *SFX* just ahead of the film's release. "In this case we had a lot of hurdles to jump, beginning with 'What is that story going to be?' It has to be the right story. It has to be the right story for Indy. It has to be the right story for all of us. And those things take time."

Spielberg, he says, is still a crucial part of this new adventure, even if *Logan's* James Mangold is now behind the camera. "Steven was with us the whole time, functioning as an executive producer. Jim was able to talk to him and he was very, very supportive. But they're very big shoes to fill. Jim realised that and did a great job of taking the reins and creating another *Indiana Jones* movie."

Why Mangold? "For me it's Jim's passion and love of movies," says Marshall, one of the last surviving links to the team that made *Raiders*. "It's where we all came from when we

Harrison Ford as (checks notes) Indiana Jones.



Phoebe Waller-Bridge is Indy's goddaughter.



Boyd Holbrook as evil henchman Klaber. Boo!



Agent Mason (Shaunette Renée Wilson): cool.

started this journey – a love of movies and serials of the old days. If you look at all the movies he's done they're about characters. And this movie is about Indiana Jones, and what it's like to be an ageing hero.

"Jim is a stickler for detail. He loves to get it right. And I think his relationship with Harrison was important [Mangold produced 2020 Ford vehicle *The Call Of The Wild*]. As a filmmaker he creates these wonderful stories about characters and he can also handle action.

"He's a wonderful craftsman, just like Steven. They know how to make a movie. They know where to put the camera. They know how to block a scene. Not only was he taking what Steven had already created, he was bringing his own fresh look at Indiana Jones."

The Dial Of Destiny deposits Indy in a whole new milieu, far from his swashbuckling heyday. It may be 42 years since *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* but 33 years have passed on the Jones clock. Long enough to find our bullwhip-lashing hero in a dizzying world of Free Love and moonshots, a man out of time.

"Modern technology is coming in," says Marshall. "We've gone to the Moon. Indy's retiring. Things were changing. That's the thing that Jim, and Jez and John-Henry Butterworth, brought to the script.

"This is Indy in a different time. How does he handle that? How can he reflect on that as a character? We're seeing him in this modern world. The movie's about time. That's kind of the theme. So now you have to see Indy deal with time.



"We played it for the period. Certainly the music is a nod to the '60s. Jim is very much a student of music and he had the best time working with John Williams as well as weaving in the songs of the '60s that give you the sense of that time period. Music is very important in these movies and Jim was well aware of that."

For all its Beatles-era trappings, the movie also takes us to parts of the globe where shadows of the ancient past fall on unchanging, sun-beaten landscapes: classic Indiana Jones territory. "Once we have left New York and we're on the road to Sicily and Morocco then it feels timeless. Like so many other sequences in the other movies it's not time-specific, it's *Indy*. When you're in the tuk tuk chase it's just like we were in the truck chase or the tank chase or the boat chase. We've had these classic chases in all of the movies. I think that's one of the things that people look forward to."

As Marshall reveals, *The Dial Of Destiny* acknowledges the ageing process more than the '50s-set *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*.

“Harrison wanted to do every stunt. We had to say ‘No, no, you can do them up to a point’”



Colonel Weber and Doctor Jürgen Voller plot.

"Much more. Harrison plays it like it is. We're not trying to hide the fact that he's in his late seventies." A 79-year-old star certainly redefines the outer limits of action movies, *SFX* suggests. "Well, it's kind of good for all of us in our seventies now!" Marshall laughs. "It was encouraging and exciting for us to say, 'Look, we might not be as fast as we were 40 years ago but we can still do it.'"

"Really it's your outlook on things. Indy still has that kind of wry, dry sense of humour about himself. When he says 'I've been shot and broken, what am I doing up here?' – well, that's a good question we all have as we get older. It's been really fun for us to accept the fact that Indy got older."

Not that Ford entirely accepted it. "Harrison wanted to do every stunt. We had to say 'No, no, you can do them up to a point but then we have to be safe and we have to realise that we are 79 years old!' But he was very enthusiastic and certainly did a lot. We resisted the urge to drag him under a truck again!"

So what did Ford want from a final chance to play a character he's lived with for over four decades? "I think he wanted to show that you can age gracefully and that you can continue, as the character, to teach and learn. Harrison wanted to play that older archaeologist professor, but still with that spirit of adventure →



"I can almost remember how to use this, y'know!"

he's had in all the other movies. He wanted to have one last adventure. Still cracking the whip!"

From the Ark of the Covenant to the sacred skulls of Akator, choosing the perfect MacGuffin for an Indiana Jones adventure is always half the battle. The Dial of Destiny itself is inspired by the Antikythera device, a mysterious object of Ancient Greek provenance recovered from the wreck of a Roman cargo ship in 1901.

Reputedly the creation of Archimedes, the mechanism has been called the oldest known example of an analogue computer, built to predict astronomical phenomena. Naturally the version in Indy's world is even more astounding: "A dial that could change the course of history", no less.

"The Dial of Destiny is perfect for us because it's about time," Marshall tells *SFX*. "It's math and time. We always try and have some sort of archaeological connection and there was certainly that – there's a mythology to the Dial of Destiny that exists. It turned out to be the perfect thing for this movie."

Playing with time, we venture, feels even more of a departure for Indy than the interdimensional beings of *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* – and they were controversial enough. Is this film pushing the parameters of what an Indiana Jones story can be, genre-wise? Are we going full sci-fi here?

"Well, yes and no," smiles Marshall. "It works in the plot because it is scientific." He catches himself. "Well, I guess it's scientific! It really works for what we are doing and it sets up a whole lot of great plot points. The question is, if you can control time, like in *Back*



Mads Mikkelsen (centre) is our nasty Nazi.

To The Future, would you change things? And what would that mean? That's a big question for everybody, and certainly is in the movie."

Out to twist history is Mads Mikkelsen as Voller, a deeply sinister mathematician with a Nazi past. Inspired by real-life scientist Werner von Braun, the German rocket specialist recruited by America as part of the secret Operation Paperclip intelligence program after the war, Voller aims to reverse the past in the name of the Third Reich.

"It's a plot point that drives the story," says Marshall of the return of Indiana Jones's goose-stepping natural enemy. "The character wants to go back and change time, change what happened, and obviously it turns out to be in Nazi Germany. The Nazis are kind of a thread we've had through all of the movies. I think it definitely works this time."

Voller's assisted by flat-topped hench Klaber, played by Boyd Holbrook. Also in the rich mix

of characters are *Black Panther*'s Shaunette Renée Wilson as government agent Mason, complete with era-appropriate 'fro, Antonio Banderas as sea dog Renaldo and John Rhys-Davies, reprising the faithful Sallah, equally faithful fez intact.

The movie also gives us Phoebe Waller-Bridge as Indy's sparky, mercurial goddaughter Helena Shaw, whose arrival kickstarts the entire quest.

YESTERDAY'S HERO

Turning back the clock in *Indy 5*

🍌 "It's astonishing to see," promises Frank Marshall of the dazzling sequence in *The Dial Of Destiny* that showcases Indy in his Nazi-punching prime, reborn onscreen. "I like to feel we shot it back when we were doing *The Last Crusade*. We did a little sequence with Harrison that we saved until now!"

In fact cutting-edge digital sorcery was used to de-age Ford, who played the wartime flashback scenes in his late seventies. "The technology was improving almost daily. It made a big leap from what ILM had done on the *Star Wars* movies. We were able to see our dailies with a younger Harrison. That was new. It used to take all this time to make someone younger but now we could see a young Harrison right away.

"The key is it was Harrison acting," Marshall continues. "It's just that he was a little older when he was acting. Jim was able to guide him in body movement. We all move a certain way and that's what I think threw people in *The Irishman* [Martin Scorsese's 2019 film pioneered the tech]. They didn't quite have it down yet. But

now you cannot tell, because there's so much information we have on Harrison at that age that the AI is able to make it perfect."

What are the wider implications for filmmaking here? Have ILM opened Pandora's Box?

"It's a tool," stresses Marshall. "I think you have to be very careful. People ask us, is there

going to be a young Indiana Jones [movie] with Harrison? No. It has to be used in the right ways. And this is an example of how to use it in the right way. It's not the whole movie. I prefer to find new stories, new characters and new actors, but if it works within the story then yes, let's use it. Certainly the actors are going to need some new kind of language in their contracts for their likenesses."

Given Marshall was there at the beginning of Indy's big-screen legend, how spooky was it to see him resurrected in his glory years? "Oh, it wasn't spooky at all," he smiles. "I think it might have been a little spooky for Harrison! But even he accepted it, because it's so good that it just makes you feel like we did it back then.

"It's a movie! It's a magic trick!"

A de-aged Indy: great for Tinder profiles.





“Phoebe brings this joy,” says Marshall of the *Fleabag* star. “Just such a delightful character and she brings such a naturalness and a fun and excitement to the part. Being opposite of Harrison is just what we needed. They are fantastic together. The banter between them is great. She brings that freshness to the story as well, a fresh new character who becomes one of Indy’s foils.”

“The juxtaposition of their ages is good because they give each other a lot of flak. He knew her father [Basil Shaw, played in the film by Toby Jones]. He knew her when she was young. There’s a lot of opportunity there for humour. She just brings this genuine brightness to the movie for me.”

Like Marshall says, it’s about time. A quick calculation – without the aid of an Ancient Greek wonder – reveals that we’re now as far from *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* as *Raiders* was from *Daredevils Of The Red Circle*, *Zorro’s Fighting Legion* and all the other breathless cliffhanger serials that inspired its intoxicating old-school thrills. London no longer says

“He’s so likeable, he’s so charismatic. He’s fallible. He’s not a superhero”



Harrison Who? Hollywood wants the new Ford, not the new Bogart. And audiences still crave Indiana Jones. Why?

“Because he’s human,” says Marshall, simply. “Because he’s so likeable, he’s so charismatic. He’s fallible. He’s not a superhero. He gets hurt. He’s like us. And we all want to be Indiana Jones. When you look at what’s been created over the last 40 plus years with this character, people want to be Indy! There are thousands of people who dress up like him, because he’s this character they so want to be. And 90% of it is due to who Harrison is.”

Does Harrison want to be Indy too? Is that the essential truth of this four-decade bond between actor and character? Marshall laughs at the suggestion. “I don’t think so. He certainly loves being Indy. He loves wearing that hat! And he loves the qualities that Indy has. But I think Harrison wants to be Harrison.”

And does the character belong so much to Ford now that it can never be recast? Is that why it has to be the last hurrah for one of cinema’s most enduring heroes? “Yes,” says Marshall, unequivocally. “Absolutely. There will only be one Indiana Jones, and it’s Harrison.” ●

Indiana Jones And The Dial Of Destiny is in cinemas from 30 June.



Doctor Jürgen Voller: a callback to *Raiders*’ Toht?



Antonio Banderas as the moody Renaldo.

Indy and Teddy (Ethann Isidore) shoot the breeze.



Helena and Indy head into the unknown once more.

THE ORIGINS OF
INDIANA JONES

THE ARK KNIGHT RISES

MEET INDIANA SMITH, GHOSTBUSTING KUNG
FU PLAYBOY... WAIT, WHAT? AS THE MAN IN
THE HAT HEADS BACK TO THE BIG SCREEN,
SFX UNEARTHS THE BIRTH OF A HERO



WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



U

P ON THE SCREEN, A horse gallops in pursuit of a speeding truck. Its rider wears a hat and is armed with a coiled whip. As beast and vehicle draw level the man in the hat leaps from the saddle of his mount. We're witnessing an electric piece of stunt work – the smallest error in timing could be fatal. One heart-stopping second later he clings to the side of the truck as the wheels race and rattle beneath him. Our daredevil hero has dazzled us again.

Familiar? Of course. But this isn't a celebrated action beat from *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. We're watching Chapter 11 of *Zorro Rides Again*, the 1937 Republic Pictures serial that promised "12 punch packed episodes" for the Saturday matinee crowd. George Lucas knew this sequence well. Immortalised on a lobby card, it provided direct inspiration for *Raiders*, a movie crafted as tribute to all those plucky, breakneck adventures that thrilled him as a kid.

"What inspired me to make *Raiders* was a desire to see this kind of movie," Lucas stated in 1981. "You sit back and say, 'Why don't they make this kind of movie any more?' And I'm in a position to do it. So I'm really doing it more than anything else so that I can enjoy it. I just want to see this movie."

SMITH AND JONES

If distraction has a name, it's Indiana Jones. Or should that be Indiana Smith, Lucas's original choice of moniker for his tomb-plundering hero? Perhaps, at first, there was no name, simply an itch – an urge to escape the pain of scripting a sprawling interplanetary saga the world would ultimately know as *Star Wars*.

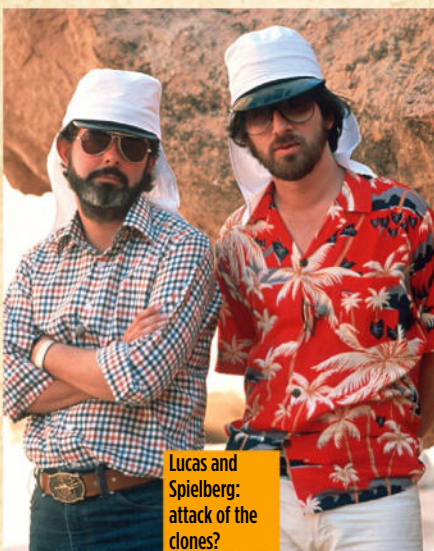
Lucas was already attuned to the pulpy serial aesthetic. *Star Wars*, after all, had its genesis in an abortive attempt to remake *Flash Gordon*. Now, sequestered in an alcove of his Marin County home, struggling to shape his unwieldy universe of Jedi Bendu and Kiber Crystals, this new idea held an immediate appeal. A more grounded character, operating in an exotic but realistic arena that required infinitely less in the way of world-building.

"Whenever I sit at a desk for eight hours a day, I can't help but think about things other than what I'm supposed to be thinking about," Lucas admitted of his restless attention span. "Around April or May of 1973 I started researching, looking at serials... And I began thinking it'd be a good idea to have an archaeologist in a 1930s-style setting."

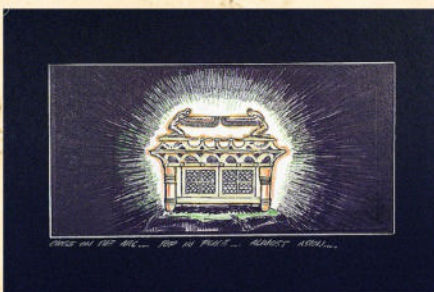
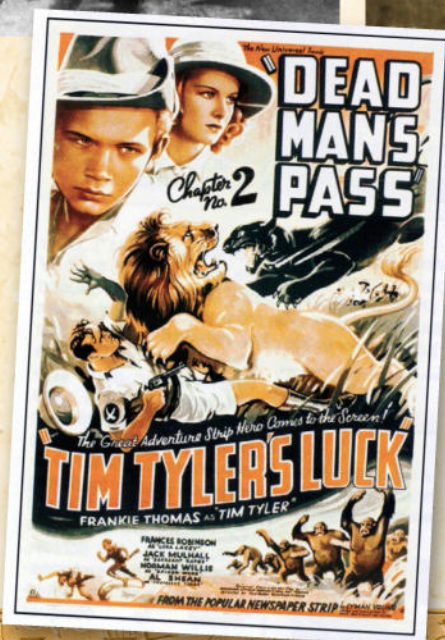
"The big shift would be that he was a grave robber who actually finds supernatural artifacts. I thought it would be a commercial idea, and I was in dire straits financially."

Lucas namechecked *Tim Tyler's Luck* as one key influence. Created by Lyman Young, this

Zorro Rides Again from 1937: looks familiar.



Lucas and Spielberg: attack of the clones?



newspaper strip – later a movie serial – debuted in 1928 and it's not hard to trace Indy's adventurous bloodline to its globe-hopping kid hero. "He was always looking for the lost graveyard of the elephants or the golden eye of some idol," Lucas remembered. "I thought well, gee, what if you actually made it realistic? I was interested in updating the genre so that it made sense, but so it still had all the fun and adventure, which I was also trying to do with *The Star Wars*."

Lucas had the bones of a character and a premise with inexhaustible potential for further adventures: danger-laced treasure hunts played out against far-flung backdrops. One crucial problem: he was drawing a blank when it came to the treasure itself. Just what MacGuffin were they meant to be raiding?

Enter Philip Kaufman, the writer and director who had made 1974's Arctic survival tale *The White Dawn* (he would later be involved with *Planet Of The Titans*, a failed attempt to revive *Star Trek* for the big screen).



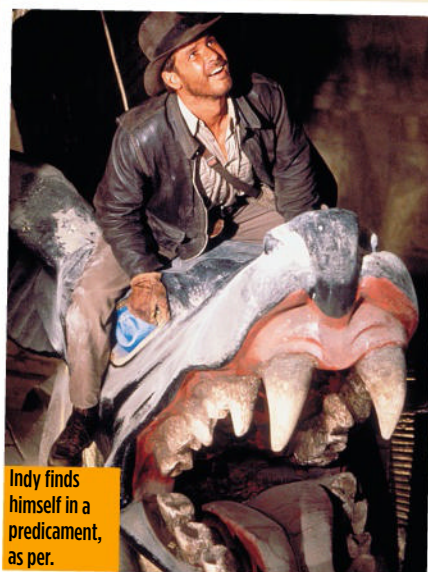
The pair with impressively made-up tribespeople.



Mr Ford is always ready for his close-up.



"Can you knock me up a bedside table?"



Indy finds himself in a predicament, as per.



Marion (Karen Allen) wrangles some snakes.

Collaborating with Lucas on the story, Kaufman remembered a doctor he had known in college, a blood specialist with a certain Old Testament obsession.

"He had written – with another doctor – an article on the Ark of the Covenant," said Kaufman, "and how he felt it provided a means of communication with some other extra-terrestrial or God-like [being] or whatever."

Those who feel that the presence of aliens – sorry, "interdimensional beings" – in *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* betrayed something fundamental in the franchise should look away now. As Lucas told it, off-Earth possibilities were part of Indy's storyscape from the very beginning.

"Our idea was that there must actually be some kind of super high-powered radio from one of Erich von Däniken's flying saucers," said Lucas, referencing the Swiss writer whose pop-science books on ancient astronaut theory were a phenomenon throughout the '70s. "The fact that it's electrical charges makes it vaguely



believable." Intriguingly, a trace of this survives into the final film – Belloq describes the Ark as "a transmitter... a radio for speaking to God" – but there's nothing to suggest the Almighty is an ET.

Kaufman supplied the plot device – and the title of Indiana Smith's initial adventure. But while originally earmarked to direct *Raiders* he quickly left the project, lured by the chance to work with Clint Eastwood on *The Outlaw Josey Wales* instead.

In 1977 Lucas recruited his friend and fellow movie brat Steven Spielberg to helm the picture, promising something "better than Bond." Spielberg shared the passion and the reference points for this cliffhanging homage, as did new screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan.

"We share a lot of likes about movies, a certain love for the kinds of things that can only happen in movies," observed Kasdan of bonding with Lucas and Spielberg. "And *Raiders* is very much about things that can only happen in movies." →



"And you'll stay there till you learn your lines."



Yes, the snakes were all too real back then.



Lining up a trolley shot for the idol scene.



Some extras had been hanging round too long.



Spielberg and Karen Allen work out a shot.

The three held an intensive brainstorming session in January 1978, their conversations taped and transcribed to aid Kasdan as he set about writing the screenplay. It's here, as ideas flew like killer darts in a Peruvian temple, that we glimpse the original essence of Indy, tantalisingly different to the icon embodied by Harrison Ford.

While *Raiders* presented two sides to Indiana Jones – tweedy academic and rugged Nazi-puncher in the field – Lucas originally envisaged a third self, “a bachelor playboy, with a fondness for the good life; fancy night clubs, champagne, and especially beautiful women.” This Indy is a player. When colleague Marcus Brody visits him at home he discovers “a beautiful, silk-gowned [Jean] Harlow type lounging on the sofa.”

In some stories, said Lucas, Indiana Smith would be seen in top hat and tails, indulging his “Cary Grant side.” There's a vestigial remnant of this in the movies: *Temple Of Doom* begins with Ford in Bond cosplay, rocking a white

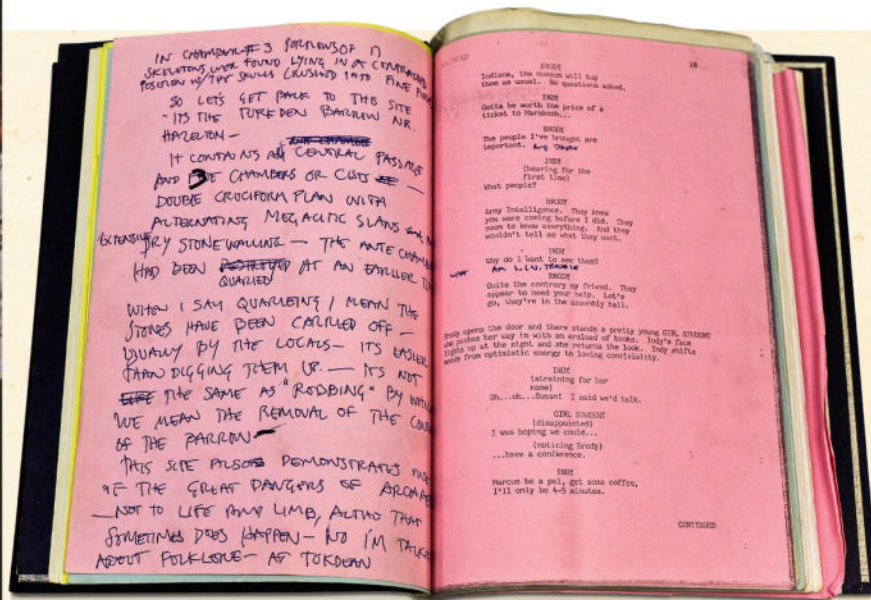


dinner jacket and red carnation, but playboy mode feels like an aberration for someone whose boyishly awful chat-up lines fail to impress Elsa in *The Last Crusade*.

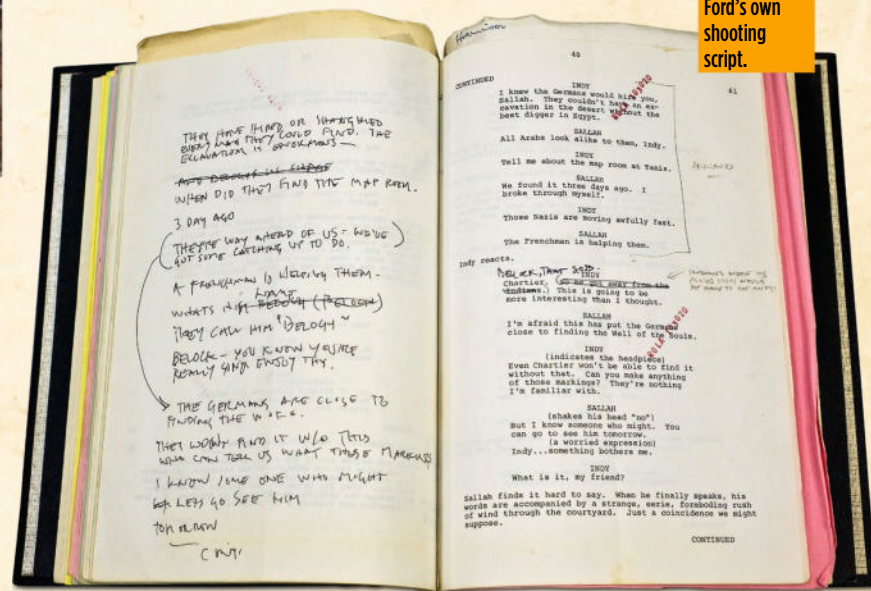
Lucas saw this suave persona as key to Indiana Smith. It's the whole reason he operates as a “bounty hunter of antiquities”, in fact – “He did it because he had a lavish lifestyle to support. He was addicted to being a playboy.” This Indy has a state-of-the-art '30s bachelor pad, all Art Deco and gleaming marble, “well beyond the reach of an honest college professor.”

Yes, Indy's morality is a lot fuzzier at this point. Lucas pitches him to the others as “an outlaw archaeologist... a grave robber for hire... the museums would hire him to steal things out of tombs and stuff.” But Lucas insists “he still has to have some moral scruples. He has to be a person we can look up to. We're doing a role model for little kids, so we have to be careful. We need someone who's honest, trusting and true.”

LUCASFILM LTD. ALAMY. GETTY. SHUTTERSTOCK



Harrison Ford's own shooting script.



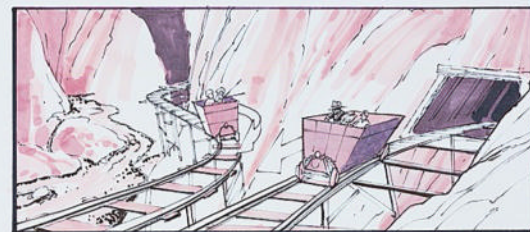
CAMEL HAVE A GO!

Raiders of the lost drafts

Indy wasn't the only part of *Raiders* that evolved on its way to the screen. Originally Marion was a Marlene Dietrich figure, a German tavern singer operating as a double agent. Sallah's son, a motormouthed pickpocket named Abu, would have provided extra comic relief.

Villains in early drafts included Belzig, a jackbooted Nazi cyborg with a mechanical gun arm and a radio antenna embedded in his head. He ultimately mutated into the black-clad Toht, minus the comic strip trimmings. There was also Tengtu Hok, a samurai warlord Indy would have tangled with in Shanghai while raiding a museum for the headpiece to the staff of Ra.

Ditched set-pieces included a mine car chase after the opening of the Ark - recycled for *Temple Of Doom* - and a sequence where Indy pursues a car on a camel, wrapped in clothes from a washing line. "I love it," enthused Spielberg. "There's never been a camel chase before." Still waiting for that one, eh, Steve?



INDY'S CAR COMES OUT OF TUNNEL, GUARDS CAN COME AROUND BEHIND.

ALL MINATURE

28

Spielberg saw Indy in the mould of Clark Gable in 1955's *Soldier Of Fortune* (first choice for the role Tom Selleck - burly, moustachioed and charming in old school Hollywood style - clearly fitted the original conception of the character).

In *Raiders* Indy unequivocally declares, "I don't believe in magic, a lot of superstitious hocus pocus." But Lucas initially saw him as an expert in the occult, "a sort of archaeological exorcist... a ghost chaser in his own way"; "When somebody has a haunted house, or a haunted temple, and nobody will go near it, he is the one who will go in there and do it." *Raiders*, with its emphasis on action, would actually be an outlier in the hoped-for franchise: "the others should deal more with the occult."

But maybe this ghostbusting angle was too much, fretted Lucas, just like the mastery of kung fu and karate he considered adding to Indy's skill-set. As he openly acknowledged, Indiana Smith was already "like a lot of

different '30s heroes put together," along with clear debts to James Bond and Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name. There were so many inspirations, so many sides and aspects, his protagonist was in danger of exploding into countless pop-culture pieces. "We might be stacking too much into his character that is not necessary," Lucas reflected, wisely.

By the time Harrison Ford had his first, grime-streaked close-up in *Raiders*, looming out of the jungle shadows, Indy was both true to the spirit of Lucas's original vision and a different man entirely.

The name had changed, for one thing. Spielberg hated Indiana Smith. Lucas shrugged. Fine, we'll change it to Jones. Indiana, you suspect, was sacrosanct. Lucas had named his hero after his dog, the same beloved Alaskan Malamute who inspired Chewbacca in *Star Wars*. ●

Raiders Of The Lost Ark is available on Blu-ray and streaming on multiple services.

DESTINY'S

THE CAST OF **THE WITCHER** DISCUSS WHAT LIES IN
STORE FOR THEIR CHARACTERS IN SEASON THREE

WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**

CHILD





THE TITULAR WARRIOR IN *THE WITCHER* – GERALT OF RIVIA (Henry Cavill), dubbed the White Wolf due to his pale complexion and hair colour – was created to hunt and kill monsters. His priorities, however, shifted after he unknowingly invoked the Law of Surprise and, consequently, became bound to the unborn child Ciri (Freya Allan) and her destiny. Only recently reuniting with Ciri, Geralt has served as her mentor, father figure and friend. But Ciri's future remains complicated.

Although she's trained to be a Witcher, she has emerged as one of the most powerful beings on the Continent, putting a target on her back. Going into *The Witcher's* third season, warring factions will stop at nothing to control the supernatural forces she possesses. "Ciri wants to be able to harness her magic," Allan tells *SFX*. "She wants to be able to use it for good in the future rather than use it to destroy things. Also, she's scared of it, so she doesn't want to be afraid of it any more. Ciri wants to do well, but she's beginning to get frustrated. She feels like she hasn't made the progress she wants to have made."

YENNEFER

Season three – which tackles Andrzej Sapkowski's novel *Time Of Contempt* – opens a year after season two's finale as Geralt, Ciri and Yennefer (Anya Chalotra) shuffle from place to place, attempting to establish a home and remain under everyone's radar.

This family unit, however, still feels the sting of Yennefer's betrayal. Tapping into forbidden fire magic during the Battle of Sodden Hill left Yennefer powerless. As a result, the desperate sorceress almost sold Ciri to the demon Voleth Meir in exchange for restoring her magic.

Yennefer couldn't go through with





Geralt, the Butcher of Blaviken (Henry Cavill).

the Faustian bargain, but Chalotra is relieved that her character's sorcery somehow returned regardless.

"What is a mage in such a threatening world without their powers?" Chalotra says. "Especially because magic has defined her power. She has never found that truly from within because, God knows, her personality is not steady. She can manipulate people to get what she wants. She might be confident in her skin, but she's not comfortable all the time.

"With all my relationships, it was very difficult to know where I stood without magic," she adds. "It didn't feel normal. It wasn't right. I definitely like that I have more direction now."



Anya Chalotra as Yennefer of Vengerberg: witchy.

Nevertheless, bonds were broken. Geralt insisted he could never trust Yennefer again. She has a lot to make up for and according to Chalotra, she comes into the season "with her tail between her legs."

"Having lost everything – and this woman has never lost everything in the 100-plus years she's been on the Continent – for the first time, Yennefer's quite clear about what she wants," says Chalotra. "That points to Geralt and Ciri. We begin with Yennefer trying to make it up to them in the best way she can.

"Organically, that turns into a real family. Through her efforts, it becomes effortless for her to love these people in the way that she never thought she would. She didn't think she would have a family. None of them thought that, but they need each other."

Geralt's heart obviously belongs to Yennefer, but their romance can best be described as complicated. And because Ciri means so much to the Butcher of Blaviken, Yennefer's treachery cut deep. That courtship becomes rockier than ever. In the beginning, Geralt won't even allow her to step into the same abode as them.

"Yennefer's betrayal doesn't put them in a good place for their relationship," Chalotra explains. "But things need to come crashing down sometimes for you to realise what you really want. With them, it's always been a thin line of 'do we don't we, are we aren't we?'"

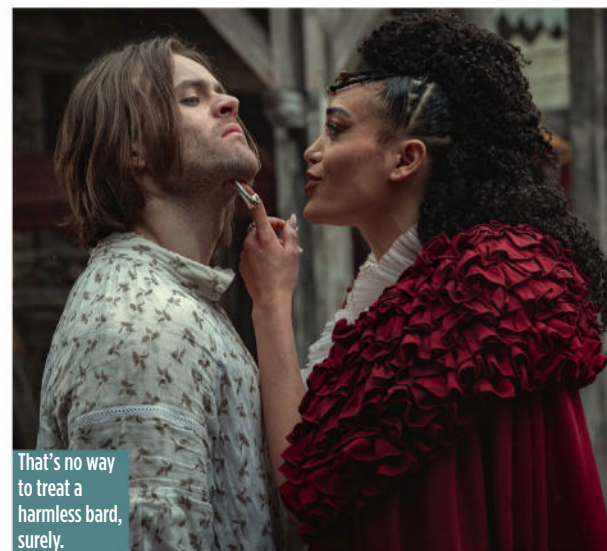
"Through that betrayal, what they both question is whether this is actually going to work and do we want to put the work in? Ultimately, it's all for Ciri. And doing it for all Ciri, they learn to trust each other because they have a bigger purpose."

JASKIER

Keeping Ciri safe requires Geralt and Yennefer to temporarily go their separate ways. Along for the Witcher's adventure is his close friend and ally Jaskier (Joey Batey). The bard could have simply served as the show's comic relief. Instead, Batey has been pleased with how the writers have actually explored the many facets of his character.

"In season one, we did try to fight against that stereotypical bard archetype a little," Batey says. "Of course, he's singing songs and telling jokes and wooing people. We did start to explore a more philosophical side to him, a scholarly side. The man did go to Oxenfurt [Academy] and master the seven liberal arts and all that. By the time we get to season two, he's setting out on a bit more of a morally good path. He is putting his own life on the line for the welfare and safety of the Elves.

"By the time we reach the third season, this dynamic between Jaskier and Geralt has really settled," he continues. "It has become so much →



That's no way to treat a harmless bard, surely.

closer and more of a representation of the characters in the books, the fireside chats and sharing a drink together. There is a kind of parity that I think Henry and I have been exploring for the past few seasons. We are happy we have gotten to a place where we get to see a man who is thinking on his feet. Jaskier is, perhaps, reluctantly getting involved in the political machinations of the Continent. He's also exploring a different kind of poetry and song in his artistry, as well."

The book version of Jaskier comes off a little more independent. He pops in and out, often off on his own escapades. What remains fundamental to both iterations of the character is his devotion and allegiance to Geralt.

"What is very key in season three is that loyalty now extends to not only Yennefer, but to this lion cub, this little princess, Ciri, who everyone has been talking about," explains Batey. "Everyone has been chasing and hunting her."

"Jaskier finally gets to develop a relationship with this incredibly important, deeply complicated and insightful human being. That for me was just as rewarding to explore as Jaskier's friendship with Geralt. Where does he fit in this family dynamic?"

On another note, Jaskier's romantic side has been alluded to throughout the show. Now, the bard will finally get a love interest, after a paramour flirts with him in a tavern.

"Showrunner Lauren Schmidt Hissrich came to me long before we even saw some scripts and said, 'This is the direction we'd like to take Jaskier,'" Batey recalls. "It's a more modern interpretation of the books. My priority was ensuring it was done in a sensitive, caring way that avoided all kinds of stereotypes. I was heavily involved in some of the script revisions in order to ensure a very safe, sexual, romantic connection with this person."

"I don't think Jaskier really sees gender," he continues. "He just sees people and falls in love with them. We see a little bit of that in the show. We see Radovid arriving. For the first time in a while, Jaskier can't work him out. That to him is the most intriguing prospect. 'You wear just as much of a mask as I do. I want to see who is going to lower their mask first.'"

CIRI

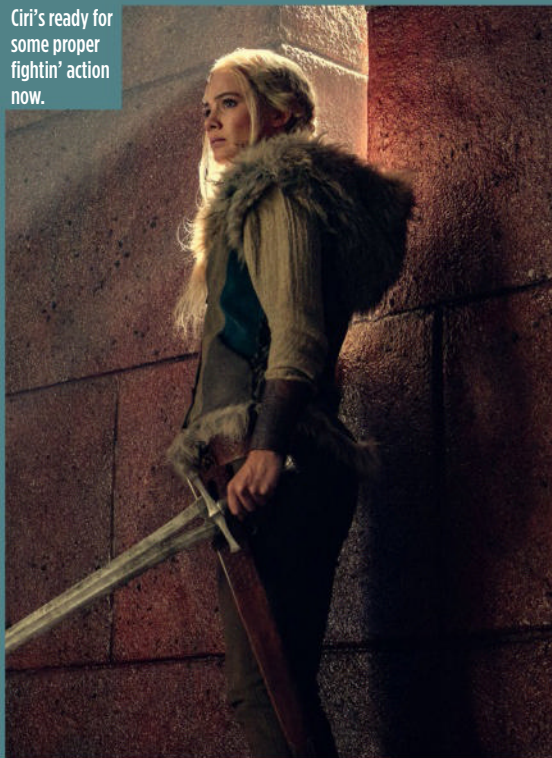
Meanwhile, Ciri's powers keep growing. To keep her from harm, Yennefer whisks her off to the magical academy, Aretuza. Once a student there, Yennefer takes it upon herself to teach Ciri how to channel her mystic gifts.

"I don't think Ciri feels empowered by her magic because she hasn't ever felt like she has control over it," says Allan. "It's only felt like a scary thing. Yennefer, to a certain extent, has



Joey Batey (Jaskier) and Freya Allan (Ciri).

Ciri's ready for some proper fightin' action now.



heavily involved in the show's stunt work. One sequence that stands out in this year's premiere revolves around Geralt, Ciri and Yennefer repelling an Elven attack.

"In the original script, I didn't have as much action," Allan recalls. "There was a lot of me standing around, waiting to get saved by Geralt and Yennefer. I just thought at this point, two seasons in and she spent the last season training, that could still be there."

"But if we are not seeing her do anything yet, and then in season four she is going and joining a gang of killing Rats, it's not really going to add up. I wanted it to feel like she started to use that training and put that into real life, although she's not killing anyone yet, or shouldn't be. I had one fight without swords and that was really fun."

"You do all these things in one take of the whole thing. Sometimes bits are broken up, but most of the time you just do

it as a sequence. You get that adrenaline before. I get most nervous for doing the fights because it's like a dance routine."

As the Continent's political landscape changes, Geralt must wrestle with his resolve to remain neutral. The true bombshell involving his character, however, came courtesy of the announcement that Cavill would be exiting the fantasy series after the third season, and that Liam Hemsworth would be replacing him. Both Chalotra and Allan admit they were shocked by the news.

"I was really sad," concludes Chalotra. "I may have shed a tear. It's a journey we have been on together for a long time, all of us. Especially in my career, *The Witcher* has been the biggest thing I have done. It's the project that started me off. Henry was a huge part of that. He's a crucial member of the show and I will miss him dearly."

Yennefer might be older and wiser, but Chalotra points out that she doesn't even know what she is doing.

"The only mother figure Yennefer has ever had is Tissaia," Chalotra says. "That's hard love. Harsh love. It's hard to decipher what Ciri is to Yennefer, but she means so much. So Yennefer is learning to become a teacher and a mother in the ways she has learned."

Ciri may be a novice at magic, but she embraced the treacherous trials and tribulations required to become a Witcher. That development allowed Allan to be more



KEEPER OF THE WITCHER

**Showrunner
Lauren Schmidt
Hissrich on the
third season**

Where do we find Geralt in season three?

✦ From the very beginning, Geralt has talked a lot about being neutral. He is very clear that he doesn't want to get into politics. He exists for one reason – to kill monsters. This season, with all the parties that are after Ciri, his neutrality really comes into question. When Geralt loses the two people he loves so deeply, it causes him to give up on his neutrality because he will do anything to get them back. From this point on, he actually has an agenda. He is not reacting to the world. He is proactively seeking to change something.

What about Yennefer?

✦ When she realises there is no escaping the forces that are closing in on Ciri, Yennefer decides to take her back to Aretuza. It is the best and, perhaps, only way to protect her. This is a big shift for Yen because it means, after what she did in season two, she is willing to step forward and apologise, and actually ask forgiveness. Not just because she wants something, but because she has fundamentally changed. For the last two seasons, Yen has been about Yen. Now she is thinking about someone else. One of the most impactful moments this season is when Tissaia points out that Yennefer has actually learned to be a mother. Ciri has changed everything for Yennefer.

How does Ciri's story arc develop?

✦ Ciri has trained to be a Witcher, so she has her physical education, but she also has an immense power that she doesn't understand and can't control yet. She needs her magical training now and that falls to Yennefer. Meanwhile, Ciri has started to think about how she could lead in a different way to those that have been on the throne before her. Had the world been different she would have been Queen of Cintra. Now she is out on the run, trying to escape danger, but all she can think about is how she could change the world, and bring more humanity and empathy to the Continent. Ciri begins to have a self-actualisation, where she realises everything that makes her feel crazy and out of control is actually her power. It's her secret weapon to change the world.

Where do we find Jaskier, bard and best friend to Geralt of Rivia, in season three?

✦ When we started in the writers' room this season, we had a question about Jaskier that was really fun to explore: who is Jaskier when he is on his own,

away from Geralt, Yen and Ciri? What that brought us to is Jaskier's first really serious relationship. We introduced a character from the books, Vespula – Jaskier's on-again-off-again lover, but then we used that dynamic to provide a contrast to what happens when Jaskier actually starts to have deeper feelings toward someone.

What is your main take-away from filming this year?

✦ We got to travel this season, so we have shot in so many fun locations; Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Wales, Morocco and all around England. After a year of Covid, it was so wonderful to get back out into the world. There is such a specialness to this season because we're visiting new places on the Continent. We actually got to go to those environments and see the snow and experience the arid desert. It just makes the world that much bigger and more beautiful. ●

*The Witcher is on
Netflix from 29 June.*



STAR TREK:
STRANGE NEW WORLDS

IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF CAST
INTERVIEWS, ANSON MOUNT AND
ETHAN PECK DISCUSS SEASON TWO OF

STAR TREK: STRANGE NEW WORLDS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

RETURN TO



TOMORROW

WIDELY CONSIDERED ONE of the best new *Star Trek* series – we won't pick, you can't make us – the second season of *Strange New Worlds* is much anticipated. Blending established pre-*Original Series* canon with a much-loved “story of the week”

format, the adventures of the Enterprise crew before Kirk sat in the captain's chair return this month with 10 new weekly episodes.

SFX beams onto the view screen for an audience with Pike and Spock.

How does season two up the ante for *Strange New Worlds*?

Anson Mount: In several ways. Starting a TV show has a lot of tripwires because you are trying to lay down footprints that you have to tread for a while. You really can get off to the races after that – the style of the show, the themes of the show, the tempo is all laid down when that track is laid down. That's one way.

But then also, I feel that it is pretty palpable that we took some risks in season one that the powers above us weren't so sure about. But those episodes tended to pop for us. So we've been given a lot more leeway to take a lot more risks and I think that you're going to see that very clearly in the material and the execution of the material.

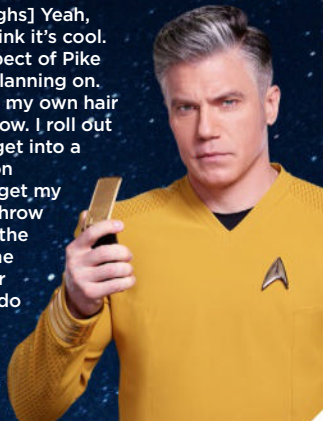
Ethan Peck: There are some very big surprises that I think we're all very excited about. I think each of us in the main cast have just upped our game. We're more familiar with our characters, the writers are more familiar with us. So I think everything is just more rich, from the

HAIR-RAISING EXPERIENCE

Pedro Pascal's not the only leading man the internet loves

Were you surprised at the online appreciation for Pike's hair?

AM: [Laughs] Yeah, I was. I think it's cool. It's an aspect of Pike I wasn't planning on. I don't do my own hair for the show. I roll out of bed, I get into a production vehicle, I get my coffee, I throw myself in the chair in the hair trailer and they do their thing.



Celia Rose Gooding as Ilia: all ears.



Tawny Newsome and Jack Quaid bring the lols.

performances to the direction to the writing. So I'm very excited. I hope that fans take a sense of wonder, and curiosity, and that they see something that they were previously afraid of as something more approachable, that they discover new parts in themselves. I mean, I hope that that's an effect we can have with every season of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*.

How different did you feel the process was this time round?

AM: The machine was pretty well cooking when we got there for season one, because *Discovery* had really carved the way not just in terms of this generation of *Star Trek*, but in really laying down the track in Toronto, just practically. We share a lot of crew that have gotten used to working together, the communication was all there, it was the same local production company. The network built us a brand new lot with amazing stages.

But in terms of just being able to go out and hang out with each other outside of work [post-pandemic], being able to not feel like it's

just the stage and then home, it really felt like we could breathe more. And then towards the end of the shoot, we were able to get rid of our masks, which was great.

EP: It was much more relaxed. I had never played a version of Spock whose inner life was explored in such detail. I would say that on *Discovery*, the Spock that I played was more of a tertiary character. Season one of *Strange New Worlds* was quite nerve-wracking for me, and very challenging. Season two continued to be challenging, but I felt much more secure in my work, and in my, I guess, pursuit of it and in my process.

Can you talk about the journey of your character this season, and what excited you about that journey as an actor?

AM: I think charting the course of a continued realisation of the meaning of Pike's existence, set against the backdrop of knowing his future. Is the journey the destination? Is there a difference? Or am I just following the footsteps that have been laid down for me? And then



Spock (Ethan Peck) tries his new vibrating chair.



Spock keeps an eye on Una (Rebecca Romijn).

really seeing that question played out in the relationship to his crew members, but particularly in his relationship with Captain Patel, a woman who he loves, and who's in love with him, but does not know that part of the story. And when does that start to become an issue for him?

EP: I might argue that my Spock is the most human of the three that have been. We're really exploring his humanity, which has been set off by Spock's time with Michael Burnham, who really begins to teach him to own that part of himself, because he's been raised in this culture in which being human is something shameful. He's mixed, and it's not celebrated on Vulcan, in his world.

In Starfleet, he gets to really integrate that half of himself, that human half of himself, and I think he starts to discover that it's really quite useful and something that makes him special. It's like a superpower, which is a really, really wonderful model for viewers, because I think we can always use more humanism in our lives and he is such a humanist. It's been really →

TAKING RISKS

Anson Mount on the episode that caused the higher-ups to question *Strange New Worlds*

Episode five of season one, the shore leave episode ["Spock Amok"], was just so on the face comedy, that they [the network] were like, "Whoa, what is this? We're supposed to be dour and deliberate." [Laughs] Henry [Alonso Myers] and Akiva [Goldsman, executive producers] were just very, very consistently, patiently saying, "Trust us, trust us, trust us."

Of course, we're all behind the scenes, biting our nails, hoping that they're right. People reacted very strongly to that episode, and also to the fantasy episode.



wonderful to explore that part of him and to reconcile that with his Vulcan side, which is so logical and unemotional, as people sort of expect of Vulcans. So smashing those two halves of him together has been really exciting, interesting and fun.

Do you feel more ownership of the character now that you've been playing him for a few seasons?

AM: Absolutely. After doing a show for a couple of seasons, you, as an actor, start to be able to just slip on the boots and you're there, once you put in that many hours, and that much time with the character. What's really lovely about it is that when you're working with smart writers like we are, they really start to sort of grill *you* about your character.

Because the relationship shifts in the sense that originally they're telling you about your character, so that you can interpret their material correctly. Then eventually they're trying to mine *your* imagination, in terms of where to take the character further. It's a very interesting segue there.

EP: I speak a lot about how wonderful the writers are, and I give them so much credit for things that people want to give *me* credit for, because they write to my strengths. They notice what kind of Spock I'm best at and they write to that version of him.

I guess I do feel more ownership of him. It's still so crazy to me that I'm playing Spock on *Star Trek*. I hope that never becomes a normal thing because he's so extraordinary and strange and other than me. I'm constantly challenged



Chapel and M'Benga swap their vape flavours.



Carol Kane joins season two as Chief Engineer Pelia.



“It’s still so crazy to me that I’m playing Spock on Star Trek”

to be him or experience him and new situations. There’s no day at work where I’m like, “This is easy. I’m going to phone this in!” I hope that never happens. Because the challenges are new every time. It’s something I’m still grasping for, and I think will always be grasping for.

It sounds crazy, but I still hear [Leonard Nimoy’s] voice in my head. When I’m preparing for a scene I definitely check in with the voice of Leonard’s Spock in my head and ask myself, does this sound like Spock, is this Spock? But I don’t necessarily think about how Leonard would play Spock. It’s more like I sort of internalised Leonard’s version of Spock, or I’ve done my best to internalise Leonard’s version of Spock, and it’s something I check in with very frequently when I’m working.

How does Carol Kane change the dynamic of the ensemble?


AM: She’s *exactly* who you think she is. She is so lovely. And just a walking piece of film history, right? But combined with this beautiful

youthfulness that she maintains, almost a really beautiful naivete, that I’m almost jealous of. I don’t say that glibly. I don’t say that as an insult, because she doesn’t pretend that she knows how the process works, even to this day. She is constantly surprised by what it is that we’re doing.

So that her performance always has a freshness to it from take to take to take. It makes working with her all the more pleasurable. She has a phenomenal sense of humour. And I like flirting with her.

EP: [Laughs] She’s amazing. That’s hard to put into words, because she’s just so spectacular, as an actor, as a human being, as a presence on set. She is so exciting to watch.

There’s this one scene – I can’t say what it is – but she’s off camera, and I’m doing my thing on my side of the camera, and she was just so wonderful. And her performance is not even on camera! She’s just constantly exploring possibilities of each moment, moment to moment, and it’s just very inspiring to be around. And she’s a lovely person.



Melissa Navia as Ortega, still braving the red shirt.

What was it like working with the *Lower Decks* cast? Did you get to play things more comedically?

AM: That was great! We knew that it’d be a pleasure to have them [Tawny Newsome and Jack Quaid] on the set. But really, I was knocked out by the ownership. They came in and took over their roles, roles that they’ve been playing for a while in different mediums.

It’s hard to come on to a show that’s been around for a little bit and be a guest and make solid clear choices sometimes, because you don’t know how the machine works, you don’t know necessarily what it is that they’re looking for. You’re not as familiar with the tone.

But they really came in just guns ablaze and it was a pleasure to watch them work. When you’re doing comedy, there’s more of a looseness with the material, you’re sort of discovering the mental landscape of the scene and the joke. It’s so dependent upon what’s going on with the energy of the performers on that day. So they were very, very bold in terms of experimenting and I loved having them.

EP: They were so wonderful. They’re so much fun. On *Strange New Worlds*, we really allow ourselves a wink here and there and allow ourselves to sparkle, but they really brought heavy humour. We all had a lot of fun interacting with them. It was just a very new energy and a very new style of working that I think we were all really excited to play with and interact with.

With no limitations in the *Star Trek* universe, what else would you like to see *Strange New Worlds* crossover with?

AM: I’ve known Patrick Stewart since I was about 22 years old. I met him when I was a very young man in graduate school and we had a mutual friend, who’s sort of my godmother in my higher education experience and an old friend of his from his RSC days. That friend →

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE PHASER

On whether there's even
more *Trek* in them

Have you ever considered
writing an episode or
perhaps a book?

AM: I would love
it. I do write,
I've written
several plays,
I would love
to write an
episode. But I
also kind of
like being
surprised as
an actor.

EP: Oh my
gosh. What
am I going to
call it? *I Am Also Spock!*



has now passed and every time Patrick and I see each other we marvel at how it's just so sad that she's not here to see it, because she really would have loved to see us as part of the same franchise. And if we could actually be on the same show or movie or something, that would really be the icing on the cake.

EP: I'd have to say *The Next Generation*, just because I've gotten now to work with Jonathan Frakes and I've gotten to know some of the cast. They're so fun and wonderful and I've become a fan of the show. Furthermore, I think Data is my all-time favourite character. It would be a dream come true to have a scene between Spock and Data. Played by Brent Spiner, of course.

What about a crossover in any other genre or universe?

AM: Man, I don't know... I've been watching a lot of Hal Ashby films? [Laughs]

EP: I'm always joking with the cast about how we could take, in a brawl, any other cast. So I think it'd be really funny if the Enterprise entered the Marvel Universe, and just whooped on Thanos. I just think it'd be so funny. But that's an impossible dream.

Season three of *Strange New Worlds* has been confirmed. Where would you like it to take things?

AM: I really love this experiment that we've been doing with genre... I don't know if it's an experiment, or it's just a way in for the writers and us as cast members to talk about what would be fun. Akiva [Goldsmann] and Henry [Alonso Myers, executive producers] really have a very good sense of when you're doing a long-running TV show, that is a very important



Christina Chong
as La'an and
Paul Wesley
as Kirk.



Pike (Anson Mount) isn't so keen on his chair settings.



“I think Data is my all-time favourite character”



aspect in what is going to motivate your performers and cause them to have joy in what they're doing when they're putting in that many hours. We have an episode that we shot towards the end of last season. I can't tell you anything about it. But it was so fun for us that we were in it.

It required a lot of extra work on our part. So we were rehearsing on the weekends, and we would be showing up for Sunday rehearsals, and people were *excited* to be there. And this is toward the end of the shoot. I've *never* seen that before. So really, it's a way to make it enjoyable for us. I've got a lot of different genre ideas. Actually, I didn't even tell Akiva and Henry what some of the ideas were and they came to me with some of the same ideas.

EP: I'd love to keep on the trajectory that I'm on with Spock, which is to continue exploring his human side. There's so much life there in him that I think we've not seen, so I'd like to keep doing that, and for him to keep meeting and interacting with characters that bring different things out of him.

How long would you like the *Strange New Worlds* journey to be, if you were able to choose yourself?

AM: It's hard for me to say right now because we're only two seasons in. I grew up a *Star Trek* fan. I am a Trekkie. So I would like our contribution to be significant.

Now, whatever that means, balanced against the joy of doing it... I don't want to do it to the point where it's a drag, because then that's probably going to be a drag to watch and the material is gonna go south. But I would like our body of work to be a significant contribution to *Trek* canon.

EP: I would go for as long as it went. I mean, five years would be amazing. If it went more than that, I think that would just be a dream come true. 10 years? I have no idea.

I guess it starts 10 years before the original series. So it'd be cool to take it all the way there. Who knows! ●

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



**SPOILER
ALERT!**

SPACE SETTING

BLACK MIRROR GOES TO SPACE – AGAIN!
“BEYOND THE SEA” PRODUCTION DESIGNER
UDO KRAMER TALKS *SFX* THROUGH MAKING
A RETRO-FUTURISTIC SPACESHIP **WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD**

B *LACK MIRROR* HAS DONE SPACE BEFORE, BUT not like this. Set in the '60s, “Beyond The Sea” tells the story of two astronauts, played by Aaron Paul and Josh Hartnett, who embark on a long space voyage. Their mission? We never find out. However, the pair have access to onboard technology that allows them to control mechanical bodies back home on Earth.

Their second selves interact with their families and feel the breeze on their faces – and, as you would expect from a show as twisted as *Black Mirror*, it's all too good to be true. With the episode's spaceship making such a prominent appearance, *SFX* has exclusive behind-the-scenes imagery showcasing the vessel's creation, while production designer Udo Kramer talks us through creating a structure that fits writer Charlie Brooker's vision for the “retro-futuristic past”.

LOST IN SPACE

"Beyond The Sea" not only has the visual aesthetic of the '60s but uses many of the filmmaking techniques directors used at the time. "The goal was to really get into the heads of the filmmakers from back then," Kramer says. "We didn't want it to be a period movie from today's perspective looking back, but more like an undiscovered movie that somebody shot at that time. Stanley Kubrick is, of course, the master, but they were trying to craft a version of the future from their knowledge. This should look like it's from 1969."

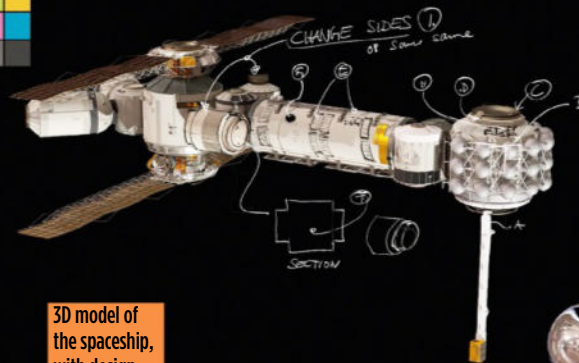
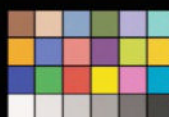
Kramer points out that the first Moon landing was the same year and that filmmakers of the time would have very little concept of what a real space station looked like. "The flying structure that was in our minds was Skylab, which launched in 1973, four years later," he continues. "There was also *You Only Live Twice* [and its SPECTRE spaceship Bird 1], which was where people got the idea of what a rocket looked like, because it wasn't in the media. But then we wanted a ship that was believable if space travel happened at the time."

ON THE WIRE

On a few occasions in the episode, we see the entire spaceship from the outside. Kramer says they were, at one stage, going to use models, and even asked a miniature maker to make mock-ups of the design. However, they found that modern filmmaking technology was superior and that using models would look out of place and require the audience to understand the history of sci-fi moviemaking.

"We wanted to not overdo it," he says. "For me, the result feels very organic. [The CG] doesn't get too fancy on the outside otherwise the set would look poorly assembled. If the outside was state of the art, it's not what the audience expects."

A "super minimal" amount of the exterior was constructed in a studio, the main part being a decompression chamber and the longer antenna that Aaron Paul, who leaves the ship in an astronaut's suit, climbs and then welds back together. The actor was on wires to capture the moment and the result is, once again, not entirely realistic but befitting the period in filmmaking terms. "It doesn't feel low budget in a way, but it feels more like very detailed attention to the way of moviemaking back then," Kramer adds.



3D model of the spaceship, with design notes.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The episode's twist revolves around a futuristic device that transports the astronauts' consciousnesses into robotic bodies. The trick for Kramer was making sure that the other technology, both on board the ship and the robots themselves, stuck to the episode's '60s look and feel.

"They called this grounded sci-fi, or believable sci-fi, which meant not having cool things just for the sake of having cool things," he says. "For example, we discussed how the robots would charge on Earth without wires. We came up with this idea that was a mix of a magnetic charge system, like you would have nowadays on your iPhone, and low-tech (high-tech at the time) from a hospital background, so we looked at the iron lung.

"It looks cruel to our eyes, but at the same time, it was a mechanical achievement. [The final device] should not look appealing to us as something new and modern, like you could buy it on Amazon. It looks more like a lab structure that people were happy that it works at all. And we had to make it not look stupid because then you undermine the seriousness of it. I like to try to base it on facts and then tweak and play with respect to the period."

Aaron Paul tries out his fancy new digs.



Robot Josh Hartnett recharges itself.



It actually looks pretty cosy, quite frankly.

BREATH-taking

Kramer's philosophy of designing low-tech solutions that may have been thought of as high-tech solutions back in the '60s can be seen on the ship, which contains plants that help the astronauts breathe. "It feels kind of obvious to take oxygen with you on a long journey and you would probably think first of having plants," he says. "If you were wanting to live on a planet like Mars, you would think the same. From our knowledge now, it's completely different - you wouldn't travel with something like Noah's Ark."

GRAVITY'S PULL

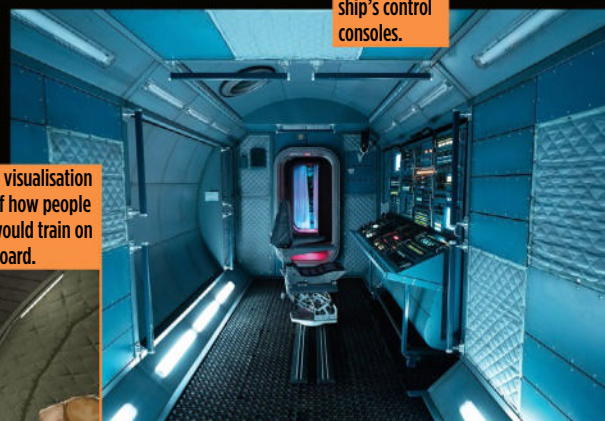
Perhaps surprisingly, there's gravity on the spaceship. "A moviemaker in the '60s wouldn't think of how to do anti-gravity," Kramer explains. "The whole [inside of the ship] was built, which was a challenge." He describes how they had to make sure the set allowed for the shots they were trying to accomplish.

"Back then, you didn't have the chance to jump into fancy VFX to get these kinds of crane shots. If you remember *Das Boot*, the legendary movie about a submarine, they found a way to jump through this boat with the camera. They developed special gear, like a Steadicam-ish thing, and we did similar things. For example, the doors that lead from segment to segment, you could take the lower part out so that you could lay tracks [for a camera]. It's still not a typical door unit - we made them small enough that you need to climb through so that it's not a comfy place for the characters."

Kramer adds that, in the end, the physical set made for a much better experience for the actors. "With actors, they love to see this thing," he says. "You can see that when they do the workouts and when they are physically interacting with this whole scenario. So there was no VFX on the stage. Just the moonwalk was done combining elements."



Various views of the ship's control consoles.



A visualisation of how people would train on board.



Oxygen-producing plants are a sci-fi staple.

Josh Hartnett as David: a clear nod to 2001.

SPACESHIPPING

The actual look of the vessel is considerably down to earth when compared to the ships in *Star Wars* or even *Black Mirror's* own *Star Trek* homage "USS Callister".

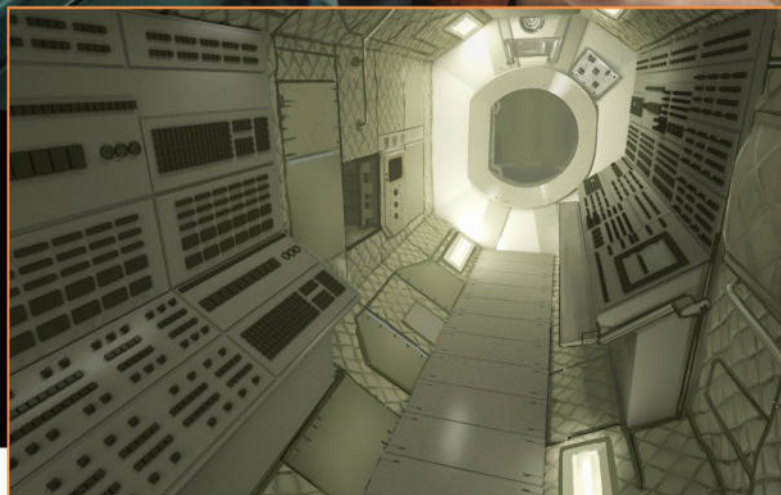
The idea was to have a ship where the form followed the function. "The spaceship is not round because people decided that round things are cool; it is round because it fits into the rocket and that is the only way to get it into space," Kramer says. "The ship does not start in space but starts on Earth."

"A lot of sci-fi starts in space, but I connected it with our planet because otherwise the story on Earth wouldn't work. There's this connection in the form and the tech they use in space to what you have on Earth."

DON'T YOU RECOGNISE ME?

Despite having a Netflix budget to play with, Kramer ended up using a few cheaper options to get his desired effects. For instance, for parts of the longer antenna, they used aluminium from a first-aid kit they found in the set decorator's car.

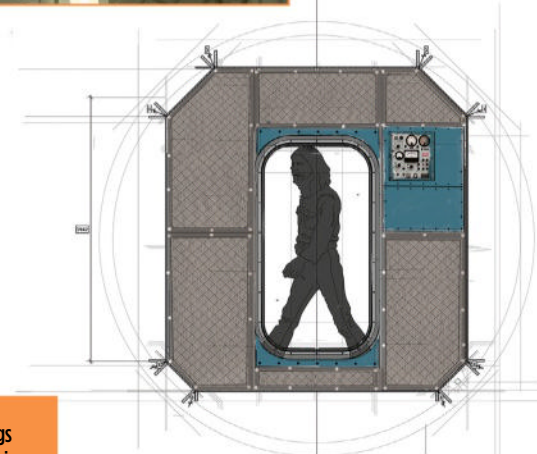
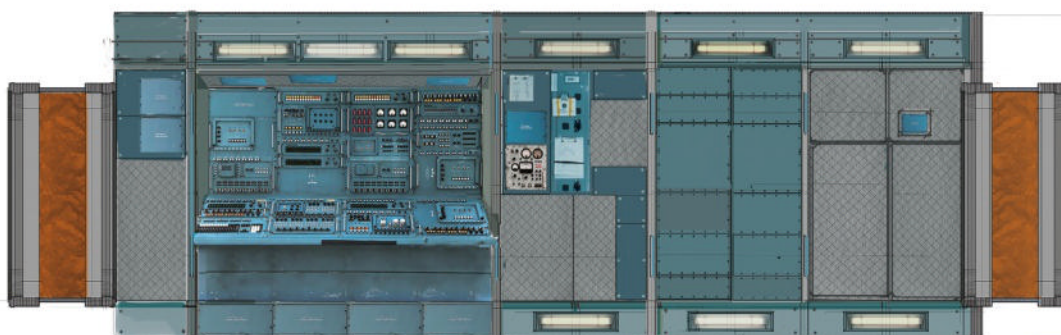
"If you do it with the perspective of doing it the best you could, it has this loveable charm to it," he says. "For space movie addicts, a lot of the fun comes from the fact that you recognise things that you normally have - that something turns out to be the new master control to kill humankind, or the flux capacitor from *Back To The Future*, which everybody had in their kitchen."



CG visualisation of the ship's corridors.

BEYOND THE SEA

INT. SPACESHIP • COLORCONCEPT • 3.0.22



Design drawings for interior dimensions.



WATCH OUT

One of the other prominent sci-fi gizmos is a watch that both characters wear. Kramer took a practical approach to the device, basing it on a classic pilot's watch in the tradition of Omega, as well as other deep-sea diving watches.

"I thought it should look like a watch and not a fancy gadget, not like a 'Beam me up, Scotty' interface," he says. "So I started with the watch and added tech to it and thought about how they would do it. We wanted it to look fancy and readable at the same time. We found out how pixels worked during that time period and what was the smallest display you could have for an LED display."

Part of the base was an old Russian watch. The wrist strap was aluminium because, practically, the astronauts would need a watch that would last their entire journey. "If you're in space, you don't want to have something that goes off, as it is your life," Kramer adds. "We built the thing so that the whole watch works practically."

Apple could probably shift a ton of these things.



Aaron Paul as Cliff: sorry to disturb you, mate.

TEAM EFFORT

Constructing something as huge as the ship in "Beyond The Sea" took a small army to make a reality. "We were late in assembling it, because it was an ambitious build," Kramer says. "We had a lot of different companies involved to bring it all together. We worked all the way through the night with the whole team to finish it."

"I had a very intense group feeling which you only have late at night when everybody's on set - no matter if you're from the office or whatever, you were putting in the screws. It was my first time in London and there was this feeling that nobody would let anybody down. We wanted to make it the best it could possibly be."

"In the morning, the rest of the team came and it was an emotional place. It still gives me goosebumps. It's easy to turn your head away and say, 'It's not my problem.' But the gang who made it were cooler than that. And now we have a great, great set." ●

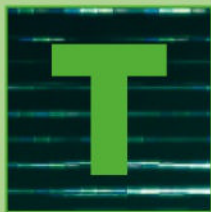
Black Mirror is on Netflix from 15 June.

S E C R E T

MARVEL PUTS
THE SPOTLIGHT
ON NICK FURY IN
**SECRET
INVASION**.
DIRECTOR ALI
SELIM TELLS SFX
WHY THE AVENGERS
ASSEMBLER CAN'T
TRUST ANYONE

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD

S O C I E T Y



THINK YOU KNOW Nick Fury? Think again. The character has been a consistent presence in the Marvel Cinematic Universe ever since sneaking into Iron Man's home and discussing a certain initiative.

Yet despite his screen time across 11 movies, Fury remains an enigma, an international man of mystery with no known home. That's about to change. *Secret Invasion*, Marvel's six-part espionage series, puts the spotlight firmly on Samuel L. Jackson's tough-talking leader, offering a look at Fury's world beyond the superheroes with which he normally surrounds himself.

"Sam Jackson would say we knew the working part of Nick Fury, but we never knew anything about his personal life," Ali Selim, the series' director, tells *SFX*. "We never knew what his demons were. We never knew what his home life secrets were. He was never vulnerable or broken in any way.

"[In this show] you find out things about Nick at home. You find out his fallibility. He goes so far as to apologise, cap in hand, and say 'I'm sorry.' It's very much not Nick Fury. Sam was pretty amazing taking a character that he knew so intimately, and pivoting down deep into that character's chest and heart."

RUMOUR CONTROL

Fury (he prefers being called by his last name, that we *do* know) certainly has his hands full in *Secret Invasion*. After literally coming back down to Earth, Fury discovers a conspiracy being hatched by a wayward pack of Skrulls, the shapeshifting aliens first introduced in *Captain Marvel*. Led by Kingsley Ben-Adir's Gravik, the rebellious group attempt to infiltrate various high-profile political positions after becoming angered by Fury, who has yet to find them somewhere to call home after their own planet was destroyed.

Unfortunately, as a result of the enemy's ability to change face, there's not a single character we can trust in the series. Well, except maybe one. "The audience can always trust Nick Fury, even though there's a twist in the show," Selim teases. "And you can always trust his friend [Ben Mendelsohn's good-guy Skrull] Talos.

"Those guys, when you peel back layers of the onion, you find more security and more comfort with them. Even if you're surprised, you don't lose trust in them. But every character in the show, you should always be on the lookout."

The Skrulls' shape-shifting nature has given rise to a wild internet rumour that Chris Evans could return as not-Captain America (Evans, for his part, has neither confirmed nor denied



Maria (Cobie Smulders) and Fury (Samuel L. Jackson).



G'iah (Emilia Clarke) and Talos (Ben Mendelsohn).

the reports). Selim, too, won't go into specifics (no surprise there) but he will put to rest one story that's been doing the rounds online. "Those things on the internet are quite funny," he says. "[Contessa Valentina actress] Julia Louis-Dreyfus is not in the show... I'm not sure how that ended up there!"

Selim would rather the surprises stay surprises, explaining how that's core to the show's storytelling. "It's all about surprise, intention and reveal, and repeat," he says. "I hope there's a lot of that in there. But in terms of cameos, that's less interesting to me than the heart of the story, which I think we really found, and the heart of that story is: 'Who can you trust?'"

With few friends, Fury spends *Secret Invasion*'s runtime without calling the Avengers for help – a substantial change for a

man with a pager to Carol Danvers. That, however, doesn't stop him from assembling what's essentially the non-Avengers Avengers, a group including Mendelsohn's Talos, Cobie Smulders's Maria Hill, Don Cheadle's Rhodey/War Machine, and Martin Freeman's Everett K. Ross. There are also newcomers in the form of Olivia Colman's Sonya Falsworth, an MI6 agent and one of Fury's long-term associates, and Emilia Clarke's G'iah, Talos's daughter. It's an exciting line-up.

"They are among our best living actors, all in one room at the same time," Selim says. "And they are all very dedicated, committed to their journey, to their part of the story." He adds that each of his stars required a different way of working to achieve the best results. "The best training that I had for this job was coaching Little League Baseball with 12 different kids;



Martin Freeman returns as Everett Ross.



Olivia Colman as Special Agent Sonya Falsworth.

they all have different needs, they all want to hit the ball, but in very different ways. And you have to learn how to deal with each of them in their own special way. Not that any of these actors are impetuous 12-year-olds."

With such an impressive group of heroes, there had to be an equally impressive villain to contend with. Enter Ben-Adir's Gravik, a Skrull with a very specific bone to pick with Nick Fury. "It's very personal," Selim says. "In a lot of stories, they make it personal – in the first reel, the daughter is kidnapped, the wife is killed, and now it's personal. This story was personal 30 years ago, 30 years before the show starts, and it's been simmering, and we watch the moment where that simmering becomes a boil, and [Gravik] can't take it any more."

"Terrorists like Gravik are born out of an environment, and we all help contribute to that

environment. That environment is what gives them their anger, it gives them their [desire for] revenge. And we never acknowledge our contribution to that environment. If we did, we would have a much different world. It's not just about fighting, it's about understanding. And that's what the story is about, as Nick Fury not only made a contribution to Gravik's environment, he created it single-handedly, and he comes to terms with that fact."

Ah, Nick Fury, it always comes back to Nick Fury. *Secret Invasion* is his battle, a series that turns from an espionage thriller in the vein of Carol Reed's classic noir *The Third Man* into a lone cowboy adventure that pays homage to John Wayne's *The Searchers*. By the third and fourth episodes, Fury is forced to confront his past, and his transgressions, and he stands on his own.

"It started to feel more like the gunslinger on Main Street, with his moral code in his back pocket, facing the enemy on his own," Selim says. "We talked about shifting the show at the midpoint from your traditional dark noir into your *High Noon* shoot-out."

Yet, as alone as Fury may be, there remains kinship with two others: Talos and G'iah. Mendelsohn previously called *Secret Invasion* a "dystopian buddy cop" show between Talos and Fury, and although Selim agrees with that analysis, he adds that the real heart of the series is the relationship between Mendelsohn and Clarke's father and daughter.

"That relationship carries on between Emilia Clarke and Sam Jackson," he adds. "There's also something really powerful in Fury's relationship with Gravik, because they have such a deep history, almost a father/son history that's been completely damaged."

FIXED FUTURE

It's worth noting that we already know how *Secret Invasion* ends. The series takes place after *Spider-Man: Far From Home*'s post-credits scene, which revealed Fury was in space, and before *The Marvels*, which sees Fury return to space. However, the show's creators – including showrunner Kyle Bradstreet, previously best known for his work on *Mr. Robot* – did not find the idea of knowing exactly where Fury would end up creatively stifling.

"First of all, you know what you're getting into," Selim says. "The nice thing about stepping into the Marvel Cinematic Universe – and I knew it had rabid fans who might hunt me down if I took a wrong step – was there were no constraints

“Marvel is very good about understanding the moment we live in and finding an allegory”

from Marvel, there was just: 'Explore. The story comes first, be devoted to the story.' So, yes, this is about Nick Fury, and you can't turn him into whoever you want, but you can explore, because people are complicated and complex, they don't always reveal themselves. And this was a chance for Nick to reveal himself."

The result is a series that Selim hopes stands out from the other Marvel projects, even when set against the like-minded *Captain America: Winter Soldier*. "We have embraced and shepherded the brand, because the brand is held very dear to its fans," he says. "It's such a beloved brand, and yet we can be curious and explore new facets of it, maybe deeper facets of it, maybe more complicated facets of it. And I hope for the audience it opens up a door to a more complicated MCU, which could be a lot of fun."

On a number of occasions, Selim brings up how the series has real-world parallels, describing *Secret Invasion* as somewhat of an analogue to the "post-truth era" ushered in by Donald Trump. Selim says *Secret Invasion* "meets the moment" because that's simply what Marvel's many projects do.

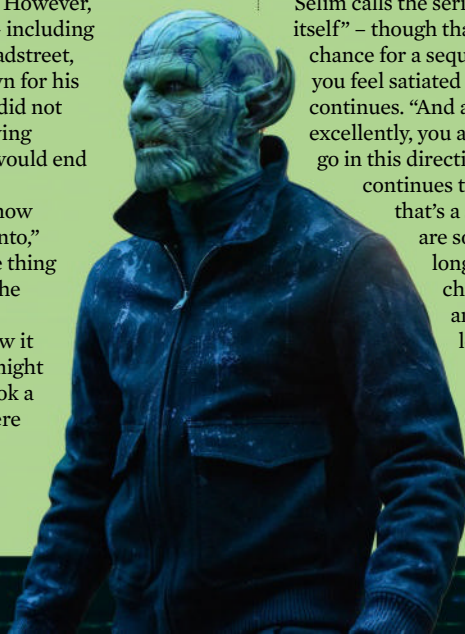
"Marvel is very good about understanding the moment that we live in and finding an allegory in all their stories," he says. "No matter how obvious or articulate or clear, part of the success of the Marvel Universe is that they're always touching something truthful in our hearts or minds."

"Before I was even reading the scripts, we were talking about how this relates to the times that we're living in. Kudos to them for taking on these challenges and continuing to deepen their message."

Selim calls the series "a six-hour movie unto itself" – though that doesn't mean there's no chance for a sequel. "When it ends, I hope you feel satiated and complete," he continues. "And as Marvel does so excellently, you also feel like 'Oh, it could go in this direction.' Nick Fury is alive and

continues to battle, I don't think that's a spoiler alert. And there are some characters that are no longer with us and some characters that live to see another challenge. I would love to see that challenge become season two." ●

Secret Invasion is on Disney+ from 21 June.





BATTLE

A WAR BETWEEN EMPIRE
AND TERMINUS DRAWS
CLOSER IN THE SECOND
SEASON OF APPLE TV+'S
ASIMOV ADAPTATION
FOUNDATION

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

ROYALE

IF YOU LIKE YOUR SCIENCE FICTION TV to feature dense world-building, heady themes and massive scale, then *Foundation*, the Apple TV+ adaptation of Isaac Asimov's book series of the same name, surely ticked every box. Developed and showrun by David Goyer, *Foundation* was the veteran sci-fi screenwriter's attempt to translate Asimov's "unfilmable" world into the one medium where it felt possible to undertake it: television.

Season one did a lot of work in terms of setting up the core details about a 1,000-year battle of wills to prevent the imminent collapse of the Empire. Two key characters are Hari Seldon (Jared Harris), the creator of the branch of mathematic study called psychohistory, and his brilliant new protégé Gaal Dornick (Lou Llobell).

The pair can predict the Empire's fall because of four centuries of poor rule by an uninterrupted cycle of regenerating genetic clones made from Emperor Cleon I, known as Brother Dawn (Cooper Carter), Brother Day (Lee Pace) and Brother Dusk (Terrence Mann).

Told in a non-linear format, with complex storylines and brand new material (like the Clones) for the series, season one was well-received by both Asimov fans and general sci-fi fans, even if it wasn't a literal translation of the books. Season two, Goyer tells *SFX*, will continue to be a mixture of the original texts and their own creations.

"In terms of [Asimov] source material for season two, roughly speaking we are adapting the material that involves Hober Mallow and the first novella of book two [*Foundation And Empire*] called 'The General', with Bel Riose," Goyer details, going on to explain that the narratives meticulously introduced will now converge, allowing the disparate characters to meet and connect.

"In season one, Gaal, after episode two, was almost completely siloed," Goyer says of her independent storyline. In season two, he says the series will pick right up with Gaal meeting her genetic daughter, Salvor Hardin (Leah Harvey) – the hero of the *Foundation*'s first crisis – and their discovery of the next crisis they will have to overcome together. "That means the Gaal/Salvor story isn't as completely siloed from Terminus as it was last season," he explains. "And this season is very much about war between Empire and Terminus."

EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Goyer says that he and his writers – including veteran Jane Espenson (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*) – came into this season with four "big, emotional" goals. "The first one was to tell this Gaal/Salvor story, where the analogue of that would be if a woman had a child and thought the child had died after childbirth," he explains. "And suddenly, the child showed up



Ella-Rae Smith plays new character Queen Sareth.



Jared Harris as Hari Seldon: the weight of psychohistory.



What's that coming over the hill? Is it a monster?

on her doorstep 20 years later and said, 'Hey, I'm alive and I want to hang out.' That conflict is interesting, and it's heartbreaking, so the reunion doesn't go the way you expect. Then there's also the weirdness that you can do in science fiction, because the daughter is – in terms of biology – older, so that's really interesting."

The next objective was to portray new sides of Hari Seldon, who was the omnipotent voice of science in the first season. "In season two, we wanted to show Hari the man, and not the myth," Goyer explains. "Not just the maker of psychohistory, but get you to know him as a human being, with all the foibles and feet of clay that that entails. We introduce in the first episode [back] that he had a wife and an interior life. Asimov himself did that in the prequels, and we thought that was really interesting."

Goyer continues, "We presented the Empire largely in season one as this kind of monolithic thing with the Day/Dusk demi-cell. In season two, we thought, 'Let's set them against each other.' So we introduce some friction between the brothers. In

the first episode, there's an assassination attempt on Day's life and we don't know who the suspects are, but the most likely suspects are Dawn and Dusk. We're going to get into some really meaty, Shakespearean palace intrigue."

Last but not least, Goyer says this season will echo some of the lighter beats introduced by the clone rulers in the first season. "I'm not saying we've gone full comedy," Goyer qualifies. "But as we got to know the actors, there are more darkly comedic moments in season two than there were in season one. In particular with Lee [Pace, Brother Day], who had that amazing scene in season one where he's screaming at the statisticians and the woman has a heart attack and dies."

"He was so good in that," he laughs.

"From that, we realised that the show is broader than we thought. Yes, it's a serious show and it's a philosophical show. But there's room for humour, and there's room for romance too."

In particular, Goyer shares that Brother Day will be thinking more with his heart this season because of a new character introduced in the premiere,



Queen Sareth of Cloud Dominion (Ella-Rae Smith), and a new dynamic with the android majordomo to the Emperors, Eto Demerzel (Laura Birn). “Sareth’s an interesting character,” Goyer says, “as she’s definitely a chaos agent for Empire.” With regards to Demerzel, he adds, “By the end of the season, the audience will never think about Demerzel the same way again.”

BY THE BOOK

Readers of the books can also look forward to the introduction of Asimov characters master trader Hober Mallow (Dimitri Leonidas) and noble general Bel Riose (Ben Daniels). Goyer says he became a fan of both in the process of reading Asimov’s prose.

“Hober Mallow was a vivid character so he was fun to paint with,” he says. “And my sense is that as Asimov continued to write the subsequent stories and got into it more, he started falling in love with the characters more. By the time he gets to the second book with ‘The General’ and ‘The Mule’ he’s writing full-on novellas and not just short stories.

“He’s evolving as a writer and getting more into character as well. The fact that Asimov himself, I think, was writing more characters which were more diegetic, I think that made it easier to [fold] them in.”

With such an ever-expanding cast of characters, Goyer says that fans of other complex fantasy TV adaptations will see more similarities with how *Foundation* continues to unfold its chess-playing between the Empire and its perceived enemies. “There’s a lot of structural challenges that I think we have in common with *Game Of Thrones*, just in terms of lots of characters and when are these various strands going to start to weave together.”

That means a season of epic storytelling that will move towards another combustible season -ending climax. “I think there’s a very satisfying conclusion to the end of season two,” Goyer promises. “With a gigantic tease that would tip us off into season three, that is more akin to something they would do at the end of a Marvel movie or something like that. It’s definitely a big one!”

Foundation is on Apple TV+ from 14 July.



MOTHER OF INVENTION

Lou Llobell teases Gaal Dornick's new path with Hari and Salvor

At the end of season one, Gaal arrives on Synnax and meets Salvor Hardin, the daughter she never knew. How does that open up Gaal's story in season two?

● I always laugh about the fact that in season one I did it as pretty much just me acting by myself, opposite Hari/Jared Harris. I was so excited that I was getting not only to add someone else to act opposite but to explore this storyline, which is such an intimate, personal thing. It's almost a little glimmer of hope. But then it's also understanding the complexity of what that means: finding someone that has your DNA, your blood, but you don't know them. You don't seem to have anything in common with them, and you're stumbling, when you're meant to be this mother figure.

Gaal has been a mostly reserved character, so this scenario is asking a lot from her...

● Yeah, and she's still mourning the death of Raych. She's still mad at Hari. It's kind of everything at once and I think it's so interesting to play that and to explore that because I think Gaal wants to support Salvor and build a relationship, but she also is trying to save the galaxy. How does she manage to do everything? It's really fun how David and the writers wrote little bits throughout season two where you can see her really trying, but it's hard. Salvor is expecting more from Gaal, and Gaal not knowing how to give it.

Tell us about Gaal's anger with Hari.

● She's mad and she doesn't want to

face him because she knows she's gonna have to deal with it. And obviously, he's just as angry. It's funny, because I feel like their relationship is no longer mentor/mentee, or father/daughter. It's very much like they're on par, and it's a power struggle of whose plan they are going to follow through with. Is Hari still in control or is Gaal in control? Who's manipulating who? They both want the same thing in the end. They just disagree with how to get there.

The prospect of saving the whole universe is overwhelming, yet Gaal tries.

● I don't think Gaal ever thinks she can do it. She just hopes she can, and hopes that her belief in this math and science is enough. And now she's got this new ability where she can see that something really, really horrible is coming. That is scary. She doesn't know how to deal with it, but she's gonna throw everything she can at it to try her best to save them.

What makes her fight?

● She's got somebody else she could lose again, so the stakes are a lot higher for her. It's not just her saving humanity but wanting to save her daughter and explore that relationship and be able to live in a world where the threats are no longer there, or they are less.

Is there a new character who particularly impacts upon Gaal this season?

● Rachel House as Tellem Bond. She is an incredible force and an incredible actor. Her character is one of the most impactful to the Hari, Gaal and Salvor timeline.



ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD

Hollywood's hunkiest Skarsgård talks wearing nothing but a dog lead

Words by Jack Shepherd /// Photography by Christine Olsson

Alexander Skarsgård is excited. His latest movie *Infinity Pool* is about to play at the Berlin Film Festival. "We will have a little break tonight," he says. "And then the premiere tomorrow night. And then we're gonna tear it up."

Having become a mainstay of Hollywood blockbusters like *Battleship*, *The Legend Of Tarzan* and *Godzilla Vs Kong*, Skarsgård's more recent projects have been more diverse. He led Vikings into battle in *The Northman*, danced in just leopard print pants in *Atlanta*, and was a comedic foil in *Documentary Now!*. His latest role, playing multiple versions of the gullible James in *Infinity Pool*, the body horror from *Possessor*'s Brandon Cronenberg, might just be his wildest yet.

***Infinity Pool* is a unique proposition. There's one scene where you're naked and on a lead. Is it tricky giving yourself over to a character like that?**

➔ I find it quite cathartic. It's really fun. Sometimes, but not too often, I run around naked with a leather collar and a leash on, so it's just a great opportunity to do a bit more of that! And also to explore some darker sides of my personality. It was a very pleasant experience.

There are wild scenes throughout. Was there anything that was particularly tricky to accomplish?

➔ Not really in terms of shooting. In terms of mapping out my character James's journey, it was a little challenging, but that was also part of the excitement. When I first read the script, understanding where he comes from, and his journey, and all the different versions of him... You ask, "Who is James, really? What's it like being confronted with your own mortality?"

I felt like most of the heavy lifting was done in pre-production, where we were basically just trying to figure out his journey. Once I had a grasp of that, and we started shooting, it was all about not getting out of my own head and not overthinking it; to just dive in and to trust that I'd done the homework, and then go for it. And then it felt like we were just flying for two months when we shot it.

You've done thrillers before, but horror is something of a new territory for you. What's attractive about the genre? Why do you think horror is so big right now?

➔ It's maybe a reaction to a certain level of conformity in the industry. I feel like a lot of projects and a lot of scripts I get sent are basically written by focus groups. It's all about blunting the sharp edges, staying very middle of the road, playing it very safe. Movies have to be palatable for everyone. So projects that are a bit more anarchistic excite me because they have a bit more of a unique tone.

Horror's also where you feel like the filmmaker gets to tell his or her story, and do that without too many compromises. I mean, filmmaking is all about compromises, but the vision is still there. *Infinity Pool*, hopefully, will feel like that crazy fever dream that Brandon Cronenberg had, without too much input from people who have anxiety or are nervous about how other people will react. Maybe we're in an era now where people are excited about stuff that is a bit weird or uncomfortable or provocative, or that has a very unique tone.

You've previously been best known for franchises like *Tarzan* and *Godzilla*, but the projects you're picking now feel different. Has the way you go about picking movies and TV shows changed?

➔ Not necessarily. Maybe I'm more drawn to projects that are, to what we were talking about, not written by a focus group. There's something exciting about projects that are more anarchistic and have a unique tone. But it's a big commitment to commit to a franchise. So I feel – not to go categorically against it – but in order to carve out a year for a movie, it has to be something really special and a world that I'm excited to spend that much time in – it has to be a world and a role that is really fascinating to me in order to make that commitment.

Because a movie like *Infinity Pool* is just two, three months of pure joy and excitement, and if I can keep doing that kind of stuff, of course I will. So a franchise has got to be something really special to make me want to take a long break away from all that. ●

Infinity Pool is on Blu-ray from 26 June.

BIODATA

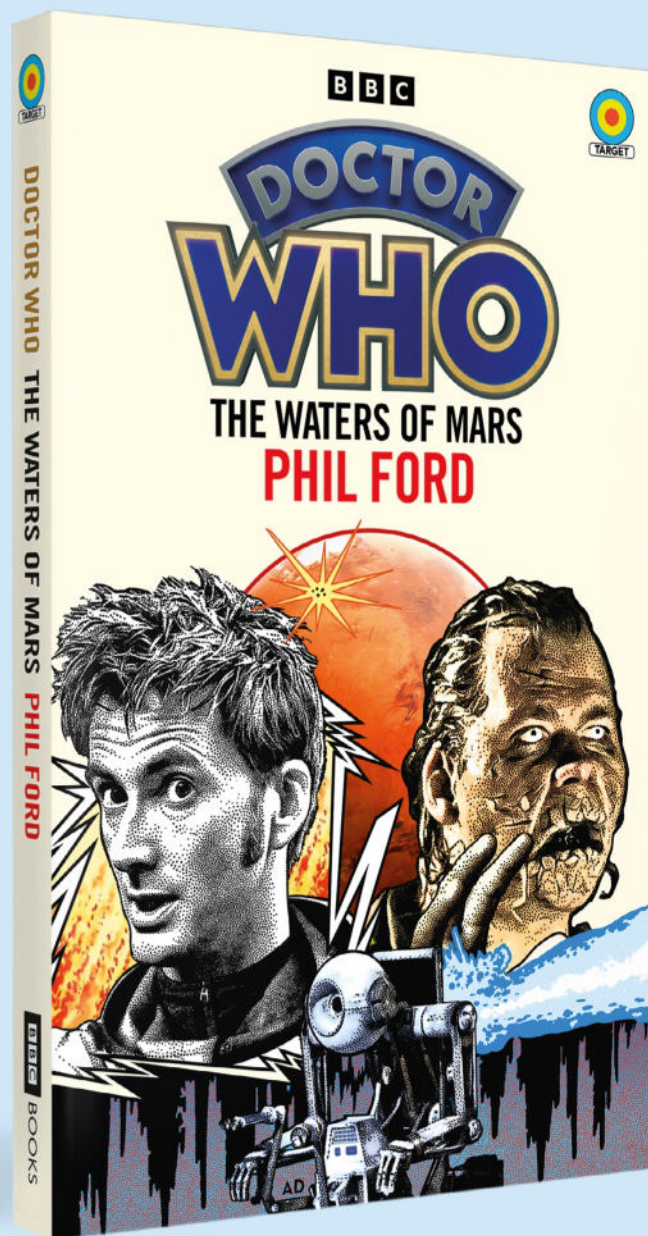
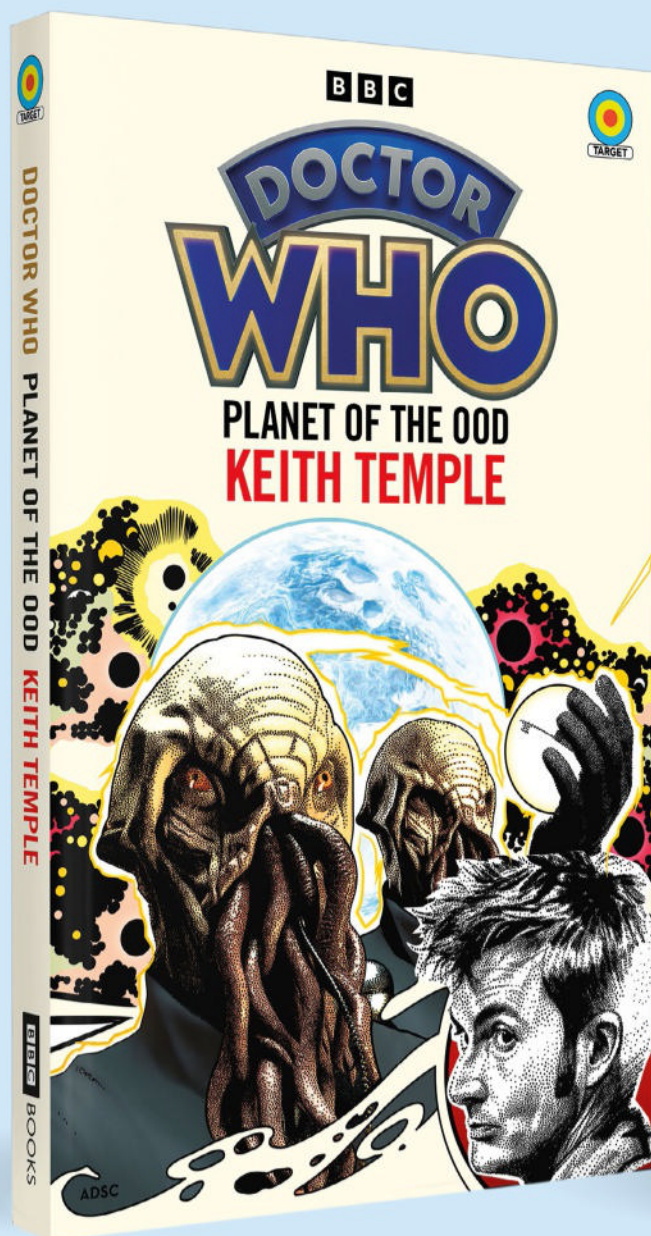
From
Stockholm,
Sweden

Greatest Hits
King of the Apes
in *The Legend of
Tarzan*; Hollow
Earth theorist
Nathan in
Godzilla vs Kong;
vengeful Viking
Amleth in *The
Northman*.

Random Fact
In 1996,
Skarsgård
studied in Leeds
for six months,
before dropping
out – living in a
basement with
no heating. He
still supports
Leeds United
today.

“I feel like a lot of projects and scripts I get sent are basically written by focus groups”





NOVEL APPRO



NEXT MONTH SEES THE RELEASE OF another batch of titles in the Target range, the classic *Doctor Who* novelisations revived in recent years by BBC Books. They hold a special place in the hearts of generations of fans – some of whom also happen to be writers of 21st century *Who*.

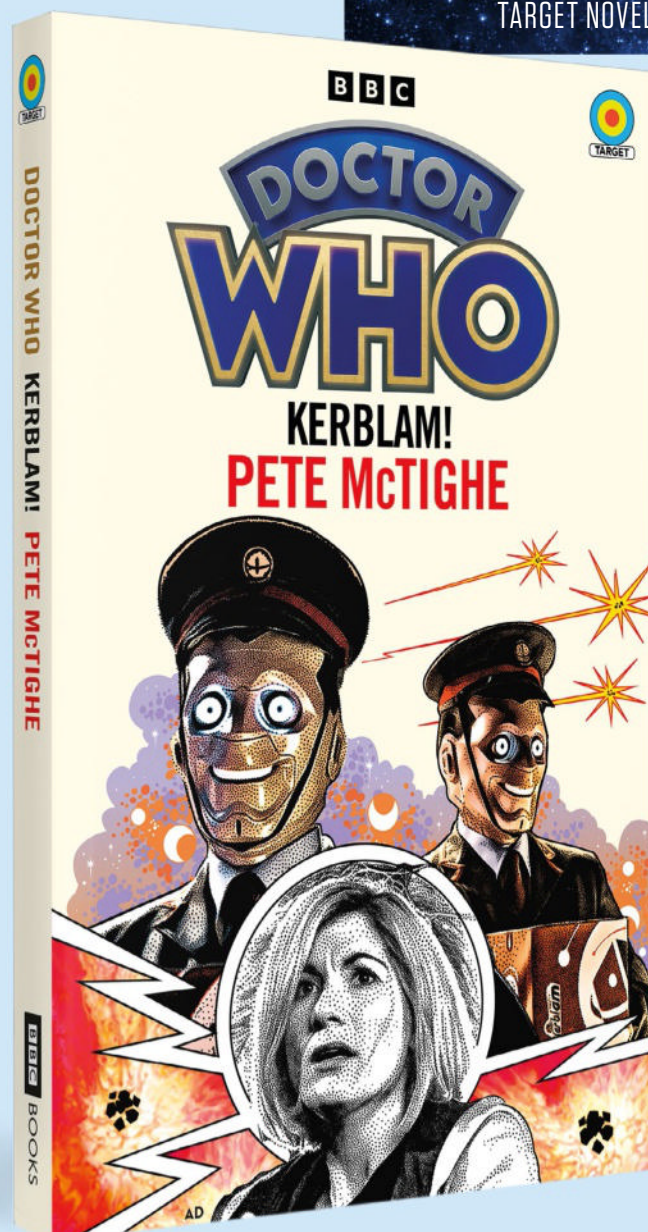
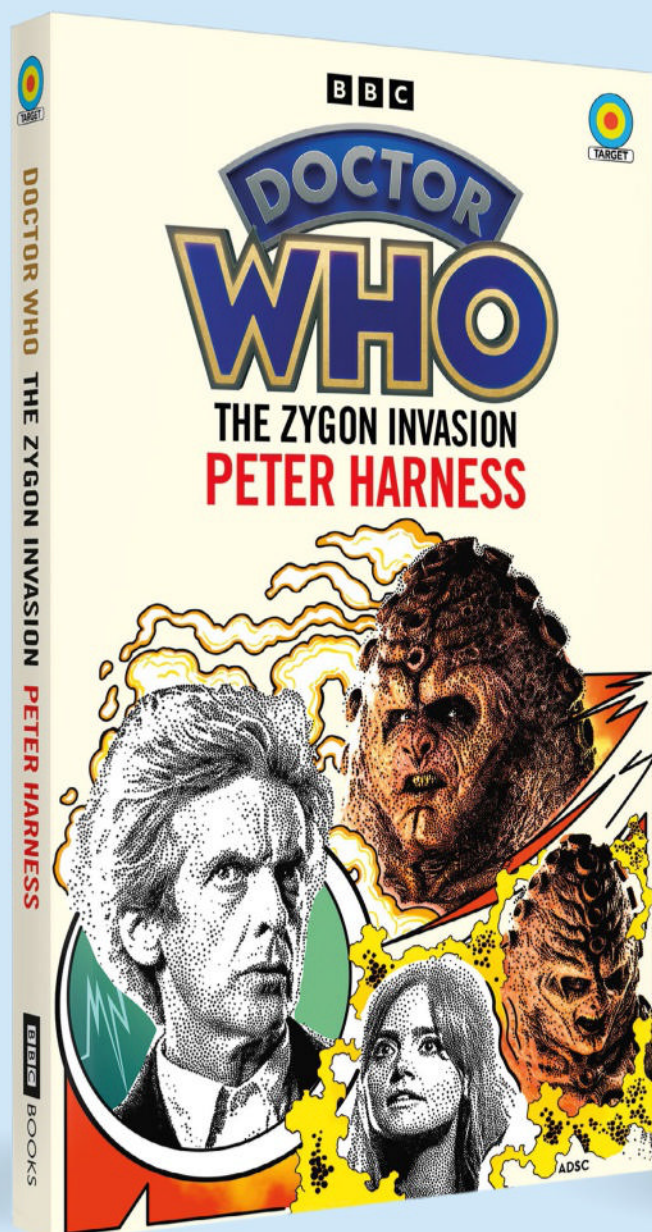
“The Target books defined my childhood really,” says Pete McTighe (“Kerblam!”). “My memories of them actually predate my memories of watching the show, weirdly. I think I was four when I got my first, bought for me by my grandmother – *The Abominable Snowmen*.”

“I loved it when the writer added a little extra that wasn’t in the TV show,” says Keith Temple (“Planet Of The Ood”). “One of my favourites is *The Cave Monsters* by Malcolm Hulke. There’s a passage in the book where a Silurian that Dr Quinn has imprisoned in his cottage breaks free and kills

him. As I was six or seven when that was on, I only remembered bits and pieces. So when it first came out on video, I thought that they must have cut that scene out! In my mind’s eye, that was part of the TV show.”

A Third Doctor adventure also springs to mind for Phil Ford (“The Waters Of Mars”). “The biggest memory I have is of *The Daemons*, because of the massive revelation about the incantation the Master makes at one point, when masquerading as this evil magician. I remember sitting there reading it and suddenly thinking, ‘Hang on... that’s ‘Mary Had A Little Lamb’ backwards!’”

As Ford says, one of the joys of physical books is that they can trigger memories. “You look at your shelf and it’s like slices of your life queued up. I can remember what I was reading when I bought my first house – *The Magic Cottage* by James Herbert.”



ACHES

FOUR DOCTOR WHO WRITERS TELL US HOW THEY WENT ABOUT TURNING THEIR TV EPISODES INTO TARGET NOVELISATIONS

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN

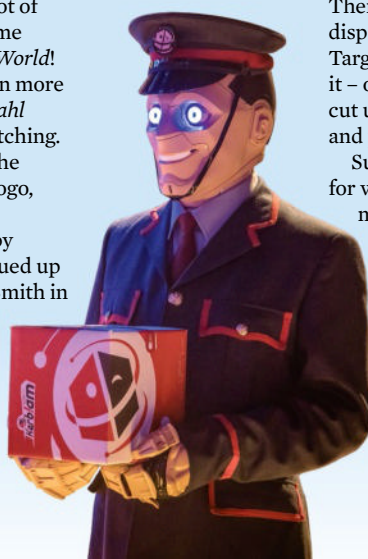
This is very much the case for Peter Harness (“The Zygon Invasion”) when it comes to the Targets. “I’ve got a lot of memories of making my grandparents read them to me – and them being really bored by *The Enemy Of The World!*”

“All the ones that I have mean something, and I can more or less remember how I got them. *Image Of the Fendahl* was a present for surviving chickenpox without scratching. I remember because Tom Baker looks kind of ill on the cover – it’s a nauseous-looking cover, with a yellow logo, and it just reminds me of sickness.”

Both Ford and Temple once owned books signed by Baker himself – sadly since mislaid. Ford’s sister queued up for his, while Temple did so himself in 1976, at WH Smith in Newcastle. “He autographed my copy of *The Ice Warriors*. I was so amazed that he was standing in front of me looking exactly like he did on screen

that when he said, ‘What’s your name?’ I kind of froze. Then I managed to spit it out.” *Who* fans of a sensitive disposition, look away now, as little Keith’s treatment of his Targets may shake you to the core. “I don’t know why I did it – obviously deep psychological problems – but I used to cut up all my *Doctor Who* memorabilia. I cut the covers off and put them in a scrapbook.”

Such behaviour would have been sacrilege to McTighe, for whom the novelisations “flicked the collector switch in my brain”, and who is now the proud owner of *three* sets – which may well have set him back the price of a car in eBay purchases... “I’ve got them all in paperback, and all the blue spine reprints [published by Virgin in the ’90s], and I’ve got them all in hardback, which was no small task. It took me about 15 years of trying, because I’m very fussy about the condition!” →



KEITH TEMPLE ON PLANET OF THE OOD



This 2008 story saw the Doctor and Donna visiting the homeworld of the spaghetti-faced aliens from 2006's "The Impossible Planet".

Supposedly born to serve, the Ood here turn out to have been forcibly enslaved by humankind.

A chance encounter with Russell T Davies decades earlier preceded Keith Temple being handed a "shopping list" for his commission of Ood, ice planet and gigantic brain. "I'd just bought the [1998] VHS of 'The Ice Warriors', and was on my way to an ITV writers' party.

"We sat down and chatted, and he said, 'What have you got there... are you a fan of *Doctor Who*?' He remembered that, and when he commissioned me he said, 'I've created an ice planet for you!'"

The writer recalls the main difficulty early on in the process being that it hadn't yet been confirmed that the returning Donna would be the companion. "I based it on my sister, really," he says, "because my sister was that sort of out-there woman."

A fan of *Who* in horror mode, Temple's early drafts leant a little more in that direction. "I showed the Ood conversion business, where the Ood are having their forebrains ripped out and translator balls put in, on a factory conveyor belt. [Executive producer] Julie Gardner said that was a bit too horrific – cut it." Temple has now reinstated this sequence for the novel.

On revisiting the story, he also spotted the odd logic hole in need of fixing – like a moment where Ood Operations CEO Halpen sends Friends of the Ood activist Dr Ryder tumbling into a giant Ood brain. "I thought, 'Hang on,

The Doctor and Donna find a "red eye" Ood.



he can't have done, because if there was a gap in the barrier the Ood's voice could get out." Now Ryder dies in a "more logical" way – electrocuted.

The fact that the Doctor and Donna were mostly observers of events also came in for some criticism, Temple notes. "And I

think probably that's true. They didn't really *do* that much for the Ood to say, 'We'll think about you forever!'

"So I had to have a rethink about that, so they had a bigger part to play in freeing them." See, whingeing *Who* fans – sometimes people *do* listen.

PHIL FORD ON THE WATERS OF MARS



A water-borne lifeform possesses a Mars base crew in this 2009 special – which also sees the Tenth Doctor playing god by meddling with

a fixed point in time. After he saves commander Adelaide Brooke, she "corrects" the timeline by shooting herself.

The story was always planned as a co-write with Russell T Davies. "I remember sitting outside the Starbucks in Mermaid Quay [Cardiff Bay]," Phil Ford says, "and Russell said he wanted to do something near-future, so that kids watching it would feel like they could be there. That week, NASA had announced that they'd found evidence of water on Mars. So it kind of wrote itself."

Initially, it was meant to air at Christmas. "In an earlier draft,

when Gadget the robot does its heroic trip across Mars to get to the TARDIS, all of that operated on a carrier signal embedded in Slade's 'Merry Christmas Everybody!'"

Davies removed the festive touches in the fifth draft, and added the idea of the Doctor becoming the arrogant "Time Lord Victorious" – along with Adelaide's suicide. "In my versions, he got Adelaide to Earth and she survived," Ford explains.

Revisiting the episode, Ford found such elements very moving. "I'd been watching the scene where the Doctor is in the airlock, talking to Adelaide, and I'd forgotten how powerful it was. I texted Russell to say, 'I'm just watching this, and I've cried!'"

In adapting it, Ford has expanded upon a brief flashback where a Dalek fails to exterminate the young Adelaide. "There's an entire adventure for Adelaide

The Doctor, about to get drunk with power.



before, that leads up to her seeing that Dalek when she's a young girl. It's probably my favourite part of the novel."

Ford also "contextualised the adventure" – partly by referring back to "Planet Of The Dead", where the Doctor's told "He will knock four times". "When we

wrote the show, he just rocked up on Mars. In the novel, the reason he goes to Mars is to prepare for the end.

"In my head, that's what's weighing on him when he completely loses it. He knows that his song is ending, and becomes utterly bloody-minded about it."

PETER HARNESS ON THE ZYGON INVASION



In Twelfth Doctor two-parter “The Zygon Invasion”/“The Zygon Inversion” (2015), a “ceasefire”

between humans and millions of shapeshifting alien Zygons living on Earth breaks down, due to a splinter cell led by a Zygon calling herself Bonnie. The story was a co-write by Steven Moffat and Peter Harness, who recalls going into “a darkened side room” with the showrunner at a screening of Peter Capaldi’s debut episode. “He pitched it as Zygons, urban thriller, and ‘Osgood didn’t die.’”

Harness describes his usual process as “putting a lot of ideas in, and they gradually get whittled down and shaped – so there were probably a lot more crazy ideas originally.” Of the ones that made a finished draft, two in particular

dropped out. “There was a hatchery of Zygons, with them hatching out and crawling over [UNIT’s] Kate Stewart as the cliffhanger to episode one. And there was more backstory about how Bonnie became Bonnie.”

Reinstating the former would have required major restructuring, he explains, “So that didn’t make its way back in. But Bonnie’s backstory did, and how she arrived in America, and became convinced of the need to turn everybody into Zygons.”

His general approach was not to add too many “bells and whistles”. “I remember how pissed off people were with the novelisations of ‘The Mythmakers’ and ‘The Gunfighters’,” the lifelong fan laughs, “because it wasn’t what was on telly, and they were told from this ridiculous point of view.”

And while he did make a few “nips and tweaks”, he tried not to get bogged down in that. “There



Just Stop Oil even disrupt Doctor Who stories now.

are a couple of things that didn’t necessarily make sense originally, and still don’t. And I thought, ‘I could go round the houses trying to correct this, but it wouldn’t necessarily make it any better.’”

“I mean, [Patrick Troughton adventure] ‘The Web Of Fear’ is a ridiculous idea for a story,” he

points out. “Robotic Yeti take over the London Underground by firing cobwebs... nothing about that joins together, but it’s very effective. So I think there can be a danger of looking at things which work on an atmospheric level, or are a fun idea, and trying to logic them to death.”

PETE MCTIGHE ON KERBLAM!



In 2018’s “Kerblam!”, the Thirteenth Doctor investigates disappearances at an intergalactic retailer’s warehouse, uncovering a plot to discredit the company by killing customers with explosive bubble wrap. The pitch came about after a conversation with showrunner Chris Chibnall. “We were talking about doing a show that had something to say about consumer culture,” Pete McTighe says, “and the idea of doing a ‘space Amazon’ came pretty quickly.”

“The first few drafts were slightly different,” he continues, “in that I had a different monster operating behind the scenes. Then I suddenly realised at about draft three, ‘Oh god – why do we not have robot postmen?’ I was like, ‘Of course it’s that’, because that

lends a slight [Tom Baker classic] ‘The Robots Of Death’-ness to the whole thing.”

In novelising the story, McTighe was guided by the most prolific (and economical) writer for the original range. “For me, Target novels are Terrance Dicks, end of,” he says, “so I’ve really taken the Terrance Dicks approach. As I was writing it, I was thinking, ‘What would Terrance do?’”

The main thing he’s expanded is a sequence where Yaz, Ryan and Kerblam! worker Charlie slide down a parcel chute and ride a conveyor belt. “On telly, I think they achieved what they could with the limited time and money they had, but for me it could have gone on a lot longer. So I went back to the original version of the sequence, and then even expanded that – probably tripled the amount of time we spent on it.”

He’s also added backstory for Kerblam! HR woman Judy



Yaz meets one of the creepy robot postmen.

Maddox, and sprinkled “lots of Easter eggs for classic Who fans”.

“It was really good fun,” he says. “I’d love to write [his second story] ‘Praxeus’. That was hit by time, scheduling, money and a storm on location. It’d be very different to the TV version, because there’s a lot of stuff we lost.” ●

Kerblam!, Planet Of The Ood, The Waters Of Mars and The Zygon Invasion are all published by BBC Books on 13 July (£9.99 each) – as is Warriors’ Gate by Stephen Gallagher, which includes an expanded novelisation of his 1981 story, previously released as an audiobook.

IT'S SHOWTIME!

DIRECTOR JOE DANTE DISCUSSES **MATINEE**, HIS AFFECTIONATE LOVE LETTER TO MOVIE-GOING, ATOMIC MONSTERS AND B-MOVIE KING WILLIAM CASTLE

WORDS: OLIVER PFEIFFER

WHEN I WAS A KID, IT was very common to have a Saturday matinee – the purpose of which was to indoctrinate children into the act of going to the movies so they would grow up and become moviegoers,” Joe Dante tells *SFX*. It’s a pastime he celebrated in his nostalgic 1993 fantasy satire *Matinee*.

“On Saturdays, they would run 10 cartoons, a serial chapter and two features. They would run Tarzan movies, Westerns, old horror pictures – anything that was suitable for kids. It was a wonderful tradition, and I think my generation really became movie fans because of the Saturday matinee.”

After directing the self-aware sequel to his original classic *Gremlins*, Dante, along with his regular writing partner Michael Finnell, shopped around the story. Set in 1962, it went through an interesting gestation period.

“[It started out] more of a kind of fantasy about a bunch of people who are grown up and all assemble at this movie theatre they used to go to all the time, which is going under the wrecking ball,” he reveals. “They reminisce

about how they thought the theatre was haunted and that the projectionist was a vampire – it was a very far-afield version of this story. The only thing that was true to both versions was the presence of *Mant!*”

The “ant-man” movie featured within the world of *Matinee* was Dante’s take on a ’50s creature feature about atomically mutated monsters, in the tradition of films like *Tarantula* and *The Deadly Mantis*. “We cheated a little on *Mant!* because by 1962 they really weren’t making that kind of movie any more, but it seemed the perfect vehicle for what we were trying to say,” the director continues.

“We could have made it into a terribly cheesy movie with bad special effects. However, I didn’t want to do that because our memories of those movies, and the reason we liked them as kids, was we believed there was a giant spider walking down the street! So we made allowances and were painstaking about trying to make it look like a pretty good studio picture.”

To add authenticity, Dante not only cast

veteran character actors famed for those kinds of movies back in the day, but borrowed the music and dialogue from them too. “Luckily, because we were connected with Universal, we were able to use the soundtracks from ’50s science fiction pictures, and that lent a lot of verisimilitude,” he says. “A lot of the dialogue in *Mant!* is actually word for word taken from other movies. One of the movies we stole from was called *The Giant Claw*.”

BLAST FROM THE PAST

As well as homaging atomic monster movies, *Matinee* celebrates the concept of the director as showman, with John Goodman portraying fictional B-movie producer Lawrence Woolsey – a composite of real filmmakers, including master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock and the cigar-chomping William Castle. The latter was known for immersing audiences into films like *House On Haunted Hill* and *The Tingler* with in-theatre gimmicks – sending skeletons over audiences on a wire and vibrating their seats during key moments.

In *Matinee*, Woolsey happens upon a small Key West, Florida →





community to promote his latest gimmicky creature feature *Mant!* — presented in “Atomo Vision” using the power of “Rumble-Rama” (a riff on Universal’s theatre-trembling technique of Sensurround). He also intends to cash-in on local hysteria surrounding the impending Cuban missile crisis.

“The idea that he’s going to use this world event to sell his new movie is kind of cynical, and that character could be played in an extremely sleazy way,” considers Dante. “But John is so likeable in the part that you sympathise with him, and you want his movie to be successful. I put together a whole reel of William Castle trailers to acquaint him with the character, but he said, ‘I’ve already seen all that stuff – I know who this guy is!’”

Told from a teen geek’s perspective, much of *Matinee* appears to mirror Dante’s own film-obsessed childhood. This includes the lead character’s shared love of monster movies (Dante’s personal collection of monster magazines and hand-drawn artwork litters his bedroom) to the “duck and cover” drills performed at elementary school in anticipation of a nuclear missile strike. Could it be said that *Matinee* is Dante’s equivalent of Steven Spielberg’s *The Fabelmans*?

“John is so likeable in the part that you sympathise with him”

“I hesitate to call it my testament as there’s a lot of me in other movies that I’ve made as well,” he says. “But in this case, it happens that I was the same age as the protagonist in 1962, and I had a little brother approximately the same age. But we didn’t live in Florida or have any filmmakers coming to our local theatre to try out their new horror picture.

“However, it was during the Cuban missile crisis, and that was the weekend that all us kids thought there would be no school on Monday, or ever! It’s sometimes difficult to explain to current generations how paranoid we were during that period and how much the constant repetition of the Cold War tropes were drilled into our little heads.”

British child actor Simon Fenton plays Gene Loomis, the nerdy lead character with a persuasive American accent. “During this period, there was a plethora of Disney-trained cute child actors that were not very believable and annoyed audiences after 10 minutes,” laughs Dante. “Our casting director found Simon, who has an impeccable American accent in the movie – which I know is something that is very common with British actors, they can do much better American accents than American actors can do British accents!”



John Goodman as Lawrence Woolsey.



“This picture’s gonna be huge, I tell ya!”



Woolsey does his spiel to a hapless cinemagoer.



Mant! finally gets its premiere for the kids.



Cathy Moriarty plays Woolsey’s sarcastic yet loyal girlfriend Ruth, who also plays the shrieking leading lady in *Mant!* “She’s also a linchpin of this thing – she has just the right brassy kind of vulnerability that I’d always liked about her, and I thought she brought a lot to this part.”

Rounding out the supporting cast are Dante regulars Omri Katz (star of early ’90s TV series *Eerie, Indiana*), Robert Picardo, Belinda Balaski, Kevin McCarthy, Dick Miller and *The Howling* writer John Sayles – the latter two amusingly portraying a couple of supposedly outraged citizens protesting against a sneak preview screening of *Mant!* In fact, they are paid actors hired by Woolsey as part of the advertising campaign to stir up curiosity for the movie.

Veteran actors Robert Cornthwaite (*The Thing From Another World*, *The War Of The Worlds*) and William Schallert (*The Man From Planet X*, *The Incredible Shrinking*





"I just don't know what my motivation is."



And not a mobile phone in sight. Kids today, eh?

THE GIANT FLAW



Joe Dante on the movie he stole dialogue from

"The thing about *The Giant Claw* was when the actors made the picture, they didn't see what the special effects were going to look like, and it happens to have one of the stupidest, goofiest looking monsters in movie history," laughs Dante.

Released in 1957 and starring Jeff Morrow and Mara Corday, *The Giant Claw* concerns a mammoth supersonic bird, initially mistaken for a UFO, that proceeds to wreak havoc on the world's population.

"The movie itself is just a regular B science fiction movie, but the monster is so laughable that it just changes everything," continues Dante. "Here are these characters being really earnest and giving this dialogue as if they believe it. It's legendary that when the actors saw the picture in a preview, they snuck out before it was over as they didn't want anyone to see them because they were so embarrassed!"

Man) also feature in the film within a film. "One of the great things about working with these people is that when you go back and look at their old movies that you had seen before, you see them somewhat differently, and you gain new respect for how good they were and why they lasted so long in this business," Dante reflects.

GOLDEN DAYS

Blessed with impeccable period detail, *Matinee* is an often hilarious, marvellously nostalgic celebration of not just the movie-going tradition, but also the horror film experience as a theme park ride and how we watch films to confront our fears.

The climax sees the local community attend Woolsey's preview screening of *Mant!*, a lively affair thanks to electrified seats, smoke machines, "Rumble-Rama" and the titular creature seemingly breaking the fourth wall thanks to a man in an ant suit parading the auditorium. It all culminates with the audience

fleeing the theatre in fright when the screen appears to explode due to a nuclear blast. However, it's eventually revealed to be another of Woolsey's cunning campaign tricks to stir up publicity for the film.

Sadly, there was no such ingenuity when it came to promoting *Matinee*, which was released in early 1993 with little fanfare. "The first thing that the studio president said after he saw the movie is, 'I saw the movie, but how am I going to sell it?'" Dante says.

"It had no publicity; nobody knew what the title meant, and they said that John Goodman would sell it. And [back then] people could see John Goodman for free on television [in *Roseanne*]. So, needless to say, it didn't make any money, and it's an odd film to try to get a mass audience to see. But it did actually very well on VHS, which is the salvation of every box office failure."



Thirty years after its release, *Matinee* can now be seen as an affectionate time capsule of a bygone era – a film that celebrates how we used to collectively gather to watch new movies back when the big screen was the only place to see them. It's an irony that isn't lost on

Joe Dante given recent events affecting the industry.

"I think the Covid issue has really done a deep wound to theatrical exhibition, certainly here [in the US]," he laments. "When you had Covid, people were saying, 'I'm not going to leave my house', and now you have streaming, they say, 'Well, now I don't have to leave my house. I can see new movies on my TV.' People got used to it.

"As Dr Flankon says in *Mant!*: 'It's a different world now from what we knew just a few short years ago!'"

Matinee is on Prime Video and Blu-ray.

NICK HARKAWAY

The writer talks politics, his new novel and his late father John Le Carré

Words by Jonathan Wright // Portrait by Nadav Kander

DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS, A NOVELIST must walk – even if he doesn’t necessarily understand ahead of time why he had to go gumshoeing. At least that’s how Nick Harkaway explains the genesis of *Titanium Noir*, a novel that fuses elements of cyberpunk and the classic American detective novel as it follows wisecracking Cal Souder, a specialist in the most sensitive cases, through a murder investigation that would try the ingenuity of even Philip Marlowe.

“I think unconsciously it’s possible that I decided fatigue was the primary attribute of our lives,” he says – laconically, as it would feel remiss not to add at this point. Harkaway is referencing not just the terrible tiredness that engulfed so many of us during the pandemic, but the “existential horror” of living through interesting times, the world of fighting over Brexit, Donald Trump, the Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine and the threat of climate change.

More recently, the advent of AI in day-to-day life has made the top of the news agenda, but Harkaway isn’t so worried about this – at least not directly. “It’s on the one hand miraculous, it’s extraordinary what it can do, but it’s also sort of slightly terrible [at what it does],” he says.

“But I think it facilitates a whole bunch of other changes – not the ChatGPT stuff at all, but the use of AI in medical research and drug research, those kind of usages that you don’t see but which have massive effect as an accelerator. I honestly believe it’s biotechnology that will surprise us consistently over the next couple of decades.”

This plays into an idea in *Titanium Noir*, as Souder’s investigation follows the murder of a “Titan”, one of a few thousand people who have had expensive genetic therapy that de-ages the body and makes people physically bigger.

SLIGHTLY STARTLED

As to how this all works, beyond showing what happens as “almost like a mechanical engineering process”, Harkaway isn’t too bothered with giving details. He’s more interested in “the crime and the society”. In part, this is probably because writing 2017’s *Gnomon*, a dystopian novel of AI and mass surveillance, Harkaway constantly found reality catching up with his more outlandish ideas. In addition, he says he’s drawn to the idea of writing sequential books where the world-building doesn’t have to be front-loaded.

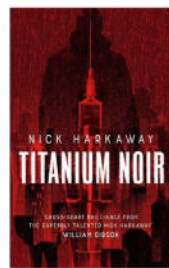
“I’m very happy with it,” he says, “and in a contented, slightly startled way, to have written a book that’s a manageable length, has a twisty-turny plot but is quite

BIODATA

From **Truro, Cornwall**

Greatest Hits
Angelmaker won Best Novel in the 2013 Kitschies. **Tigerman** (2014) and **Gnomon** (2017) were both well received, while Harkaway has also written thrillers **The Price You Pay** (2018) and **Seven Demons** (2021), under the name **Aidan Truhen**.

Random Fact
The Succession-level super-rich, says Harkaway, can in his experience be dull because “they’re presented with wonders all the time” and lose a sense of how remarkable this is.



linear – there’s not a lot of flashbacks – and that deals with things that I care about, but doesn’t overwhelm you with kind of *manic obscura*.”

If the book is successful, there is “lots of unexplored space” to map in the near-future world he’s created. He’s also intrigued by the notion that in book six of a sequence he might suddenly discover he can take a story somewhere “extraordinary” that he hadn’t anticipated.

Back in the present, Harkaway has been in the public eye not just because of his own writing, but because of the 2020 death of his father, the spy novelist John Le Carré. The outpouring of warmth for him was both “remarkable” and “very comforting”, he adds.

FATHER AND SON

It was Harkaway who prepared Le Carré’s final novel *Silverview* for posthumous publication after his father had written “a deliverable draft” but not a publishable manuscript. “You have this romantic idea that somewhere in the middle of that process, as I sit at my desk, a shaft of light will come through the window and I’ll look up and turn, and he’ll be sitting there in the chair in the corner, which obviously never happens,” he says.

Working on *Silverview* nonetheless offered Harkaway insights into both his father’s work and his own writing. “That had to be about delivering that book as close to his version as possible,” says Harkaway. “I found myself sitting there struggling with it and going, ‘You know, what I would do here is...’” Except it wasn’t his job to rewrite Le Carré. “It makes you conscious of how you work,” adds Harkaway, “so when you come back to your own stuff, you’re aware that there’s another perspective about how you might tackle that sequence or that problem within a story.”

Maybe Harkaway has learnt from his father in another way too. Despite Le Carré’s implacable opposition to the UK leaving the EU – so staunch that he became an Irish citizen – his opposition to Brexit came across as measured. In contrast, until 2020, Harkaway often fought the Remain cause in fractious social media debates. Today, he doesn’t have the energy to be “the angry guy”, and acknowledges his own relative privilege when he talks of having “too much in my favour” for this to be an entirely convincing persona. “You can go looking for opportunities to do the right thing,” he says, “but I have no tolerance for myself in itchy combat mode any more!” ●

Titanium Noir is available now, published by Corsair.

“I honestly
believe it’s
biotechnology
that will surprise
us over the next
decades”

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INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY

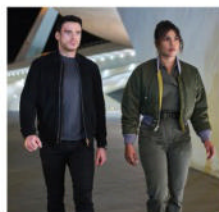
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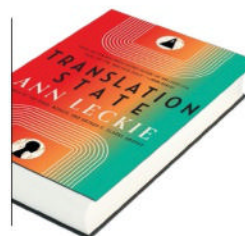
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INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY

Definitely The Last Crusade



► **RELEASED 28 JUNE**

12A | 142 minutes

► Director **James Mangold**

► Cast **Harrison Ford, Phoebe**

Waller-Bridge, Mads Mikkelsen, Antonio Banderas, John Rhys-Davies, Shaunette Renée Wilson, Thomas Kretschmann

► **Eighty-year-old Harrison Ford** proves here that you're never too old to star in a sequel to a billion-dollar franchise. But he also brings heart and humour to this affectionate update on the adventures of archaeologist Indiana Jones, ably assisted by Phoebe Waller-Bridge as his goddaughter, Helena.

The opening scene takes us back to previously unseen events in 1944, when a digitally youthened Indy attempts a daring escape from Nazis with his pal (Toby Jones) – who is exactly what you'd expect from a professor character named Basil. Cut to 1969, and Professor Jones is creaking around his New York flat,

moaning about the neighbours' parties and preparing to retire from teaching archaeology. But goddaughter Helena – who is Basil's daughter, if you can believe that – has other ideas, and the pair end up on a globe-trotting hunt for a relic called the Dial of Destiny. They're pursued by a mixture of spies and criminals, with the boundaries often blurring between the two.

One thing you should know about this fifth in the *Indiana Jones* series is that it is very long – too long. At two hours and 24 minutes, it moves through the plot at a leisurely pace – not exactly a Zimmer-frame shuffle, but only occasionally breaking into a gentle jog. There are stand-out action set-pieces, but most of the connecting scenes feel a little drawn out.

And yet there's so much going on here that it's hard to be bored. The New York scenes take place on the day of the first Moon landing, complete with celebratory



"I really am getting too old for this sh- er, stuff."

parades that get tangled up with car chases – and a horse chase! There's a terrific supporting cast, including Antonio Banderas, Boyd Holbrook and a star-making turn for Shaunette Renée Wilson (previously best known for TV's *The Resident*). John Rhys-Davies also makes a welcome return as Sallah, and Mads Mikkelsen is on great bad guy form as Jürgen Voller, a former Nazi working in rocket science who's still committed to Hitler's ideal of racial purity.

Phoebe Waller-Bridge brightens every scene she's in, which is a

“At two hours and 24 minutes, it moves through the plot at a leisurely pace”

considerable amount. Her sparky, morally ambiguous character has even caused speculation that she could be the new star of the franchise. It's refreshing to see Indy knocking about with a younger woman whom he's *not* trying to get into bed. She is his



Harrison sneakily tries to "do a *Fleabag*".

goddaughter, after all, and she also has an eye for age-appropriate men. The *Fleabag* star proves she's got the chops for the big screen, and makes the most of every one-liner she's given – even if there aren't enough of them.

It makes you wonder why they didn't let her loose on the script, as the Bond folks did with *No Time To Die*. But this one delivers just enough in-jokes for fans, from references to past battles to Indy's phobia of snakes.

As for the *Dial of Destiny* itself, the nature of its identity is purposefully kept mysterious. It

might be magical; its connection to the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes becomes a key theme – yes, this *Indy* outing is about maths. But it's also about adventure, and emotion: Indy is experiencing a sense of loss, and Ford's performance strikes a moving note more than once.

It's clear that this movie means a lot to the actor. When promoting *The Dial Of Destiny* for its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, he often welled up with tears, explaining how moved he was to revisit such a beloved character. When asked why this

would likely be the last *Indiana Jones* in the series, he joked: "Is it not evident?"

The octogenarian Ford may be ready to hang up Indy's hat, but audiences now have five films to watch him in, over and over again. This one may not match the excitement of Indy's early adventures, but it's arguably better than 2008's *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* – and it delivers a ripple of nostalgia every time *that* music kicks in. **Anna Smith**

i The script originally had jokes about Indy's age, but they were taken out for being what Ford calls "talking about the story".

THE REICH STAFF

More Nazis who, like Jürgen Voller, continued scheming

Father Trasker

In *The New Avengers*' "The Eagle's Nest", Steed and co investigate a remote island whose monks turn out to be Nazis who fled Germany at the end of the war, with Adolf Hitler's body in suspended animation. Now, of course, they plan to defrost him...



Dr Heinrich Von Klemper

Wonder Woman's "Anschluss '77" centres on a scientist who's worked on cloning since 1945 – and now successfully recreates Hitler. Thankfully, further stabilisation treatments are required; *Wonder Woman* reverses the process, and the Fuehrer fades away.



Dr Josef Mengele

Ira Levin's *The Boys From Brazil* centres on a scheme by the notorious Auschwitz doctor, who's created 94 clones using Hitler's DNA, then had them adopted by civil servants in different countries, hoping that one of them will turn out like the original.



Hans De Flores

The Nazi antagonist in *Doctor Who*'s 25th anniversary tale "Silver Nemesis" plans to use Nemesis (a statue made from living metal) to usher in the Fourth Reich. Ambitious, considering that his forces only fill one Transit van...





SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

Worlds Wide Web

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 140 minutes

▶ Directors **Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers, Justin K Thompson**

▶ Cast **Shameik Moore, Hailee Steinfeld, Jason Schwartzman, Daniel Kaluuya**

🗨️ **“Every time I hear ‘The fate of the multiverse’ my mind melts,”** moans one of the seemingly several trillion Spider-Men in *Across The Spider-Verse*. If you are also suffering multiverse burn-out, this supercharged sequel will either fry your brain completely or reignite your passion for pan-dimensional madness.

Across The Spider-Verse explodes with a breathtaking visual and narrative anarchy that sometimes feels like a bold reinvention of cinematic storytelling and sometimes feels like a hot mess. But it never fails to be exciting, at least.

This time Miles Morales (Earth-1610’s Spider-Man) is sucked into multi-world shenanigans again when Gwen Stacey (Earth-65’s Spider-Woman) unexpectedly returns to his reality. She’s now part of The Spider-Society, a universe-hopping crack squad of Spider-Peeps dedicated to protecting the multiverse.

Not that she’s supposed to tell Miles this, or make contact with him. She’s tracking a villain called The Spot, who has the power to create spacial portals. But (among about a zillion other things) this film is a love story, so Gwen can’t resist contacting her old mate. And when Miles finds out about the Spider-Society, he wants in.

Sadly, that’s something the guy in charge will never let happen; he knows something crucial about Miles that could affect everything, everywhere. Possibly all at once.

Indeed, there are strong

parallels between *Across The Spider-Verse* and this year’s surprise Best Picture Oscar winner; a shared manic energy and enthusiasm for experimenting with visual storytelling, and a story with heart. The big stylistic innovation here is the use of different art styles to represent different worlds.

The results are often dazzling, sometimes clashing in the most exciting ways. The choice of an impressionistic approach for Gwen’s world is inspired, beautifully heightening key emotional moments. The comic-style captions and split-screen framing from the first film are back with a vengeance. And yes, there is some live-action, but it’s almost certainly not what you’re expecting.

With its fast-talking dialogue, MOBO-heavy soundtrack, sassy wit and near fetishisation of Air Jordans, this is one for the cool kids as well as the geeks. The Spot

is a truly excellent villain, starting out as a joke, but ballooning into a credible existential threat. And so many of the new Spider-dudes are huge fun, especially Daniel Kaluuya’s Spider-Punk. The cliffhanger will have you thanking the gods of cinema that part three is less than a year away.

Sure it’s noisy, occasionally overamped and – on a narrative front – not as slick or satisfying as its predecessor. Single lines shouted in the midst of frantic action do a lot of expositional heavy lifting. Huge swathes of plot logic don’t bear much thinking about. But even if the plot derails here and there, it somehow leaps to another track and keeps hurtling on like that cart in *Temple Of Doom*, propelled by a crazed creative ingenuity that more than makes up for any script shortcomings. **Dave Golder**

i On 20 May – just 13 days before *Spider-Verse*’s release date – co-director Justin K Thompson tweeted, “It. Is. Done.”

ELEMENTAL

Things could get steamy...



▶ **RELEASED 7 JULY**

PG | 101 minutes

▶ Director **Peter Sohn**

▶ Cast **Leah Lewis, Mamoudou Athie, Ronnie del Carmen, Shila Ommi**

Disney and Pixar's latest animation is a charming story of star-crossed lovers, set in a city where everyone is an element: fire, water or air. They're also named accordingly, so our fiery heroine is known as Ember (Leah Lewis).

Ember's parents are immigrants who have set up a successful business. When it's threatened with shutdown by city inspector Wade (Mamoudou Athie), Ember is furious, but she and Wade gradually grow closer – despite him being “water”.

Given that these two opposites would be flouting the laws of physics by getting together, the

stakes are high, and a bit complicated. The script sometimes struggles to explain the logic of this alternative world; for example, whenever a “fire” character gets wet, they have to munch on some kindling to be revived. But the central duo are adorable: Wade is a kind, empathetic hero who encourages Ember to live out her dreams, and there's also a poignant message about cultural acceptance and racial harmony.

This isn't up there with the Pixar greats, but it's a perfectly enjoyable family-friendly romance, with the occasional chuckle for the adults as well as the kids. And of course it looks fantastic throughout.

Anna Smith

i The language spoken by Ember's family was created by *Game Of Thrones* linguist David J Peterson, using fireplace sounds.



She's a bright spark, but he's a real wet blanket.

ASTEROID CITY

It Came From Outer Space



▶ **RELEASED 23 JUNE**

12A | 105 minutes

▶ Director **Wes Anderson**

▶ Cast **Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Margot Robbie**

Wes Anderson boldly goes where he's never gone before. A nod to *The Twilight Zone* (among other things), the '50s-set *Asteroid City* is all centred around an extraterrestrial encounter in the titular American desert town, where various families gather for a Junior Stargazing contest.

Among them is father-of-four Augie (Jason Schwartzman), who is reeling from the death of his wife and readying for the arrival of his father-in-law (Tom Hanks). Also in town is glamour-puss actress and mother-of-one Midge Campbell (Scarlett Johansson), while teacher June Douglas (Maya

Hawke) marshals a posse of kids and makes eyes at cowboy Montana (Rupert Friend).

Then comes an out-of-this-world experience that sees the town locked down by the military (headed by Jeffrey Wright's General). “I reckon that alien don't mean no harm,” says Montana, and it's clear Anderson and regular co-writer Roman Coppola are exploring themes of xenophobia and otherness.

Adding to the layers, *Asteroid City* is actually a play within a movie. Intercut are black and white segments, featuring Bryan Cranston as a narrator and Edward Norton as the playwright Conrad Earp. Some performers from the colour scenes, including Johansson, cross over, playing the actors who will inhabit the characters in Earp's drama. The cast is vast, with Anderson



“What is this word ‘hipster’ you use?”

expanding his usual rep of actors – Matt Dillon, Hope Davis, Margot Robbie, Hong Chau and Steve Carell all feature. It also sees the director return to stop-motion animation, the form he used on *Fantastic Mr Fox* and *Isle Of Dogs*, for a witty and wonderful moment. With its alien theme, it might just be the closest Anderson ever gets to making a full-on sci-fi

movie, and mixed in with his usual sprinkle of charm and humour is a sense of wonder about the universe. Created with typical craftsmanship and care, it's ravishing to look at and, for all its arch qualities, deeply heartfelt.

James Mottram

i Shot entirely in the Spanish town of Chinchón, the black and white segments were filmed in a giant garlic warehouse.



"Got any film for a Polaroid SX-70?"

HYPNOTIC

Brain freeze



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 94 minutes

▶ Director Robert Rodriguez

▶ Cast Ben Affleck, Alice Braga, William Fichtner, JD Pardo

♦ **Following the family-friendlier likes of *Alita: Battle Angel*, *We Can Be Heroes* and his contributions to the *Star Wars* TV galaxy, Robert Rodriguez dug out an unmade script he first wrote in 2002, handed it to *Godzilla's* Max Borenstein to rewrite, and convinced Ben Affleck to star in something for the older crowd.**

We're guessing there was some mind-trickery involved along the way there, because *Hypnotic* is a bland, moderately entertaining thriller that has pretensions of brainy Christopher Nolan-style filmmaking – although the concept predates the likes of *Inception*.

Affleck scowls and growls his way through the role of detective Danny Rourke, who is haunted by his young daughter's abduction even as he investigates crimes pulled off by the mysterious Dellrayne (William Fichtner), who can apparently make people do anything he wants them to with the merest suggestion.

While the film has a relatively compelling hook, it quickly devolves into the sort of tropey, clunky thriller that will have your mind drifting rather than engaged, and ends up feeling like the cinematic equivalent of someone in a movie trailer saying, "Forget what you think you know..." And it's really not that difficult to forget this one.

James White

i Rodriguez had the idea after wondering what other one-word titles Alfred Hitchcock might have come up with.

THE BOOGEYMAN

Bumpy in the night



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 99 minutes

▶ Director Rob Savage

▶ Cast Sophie Thatcher, Vivien Lyra Blair, Chris Messina, David Dastmalchian

♦ **The prospect of combining the compelling scares found in Stephen King's work with the knack for screen horror shown by *Host* and *Dashcam* director Rob Savage was certainly appealing. Sadly, the result is far less than the sum of its parts.**

Taking King's short story (first published in 1973 by *Cavalier* magazine before being collected in 1978's *Night Shift*) as its seed, the film naturally grows beyond the idea of a horrified man spilling his tale to a therapist. In this case, Lester (David Dastmalchian) – far more haunted than the unreconstructed misogynist in the

original text – has lost his entire family to what his children described as a "shadow monster". He ends up appearing to commit suicide in the home of psychoanalyst Will Harper (Chris Messina), who is dealing with his own tragedy: his wife recently died in a car accident, and daughters Sadie (Sophie Thatcher) and Sawyer (Vivien Lyra Blair) are deep in grief alongside him. Soon they're the target of a mysterious creature that hides in the shadows and toys with its victims... But is it all in young Sawyer's head?

Savage throws plenty of artistry at the film, with tilting camera

“Sadly, the result is far less than the sum of its parts”

"Is that a wig? It looks like a wig."



shots and carefully curated lighting, but all the dressing in the world can't make up for a faulty, generic script and a concept that has been tackled far better even in the recent past (*Lights Out*, to offer just one example). It's hard to believe this was cooked up by Scott Beck and Bryan Woods (the duo who originated *A Quiet Place*) and *Black Swan's* Mark Heyman.

Logic problems (a child who has been terrified of the dark is suddenly fine sitting alone with just the flickering light of a PlayStation game screen for company?), cheap effects and a laughably ridiculous finale don't help matters. **James White**

i In the script, Sawyer (Vivien Lyra Blair – also Leia in *Obi-Wan Kenobi*) originally had a toy lightsaber, but Disney nixed that.



THE LITTLE MERMAID

Fish out of water



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 135 minutes

▶ Director Rob Marshall

▶ Cast Halle Bailey, Jonah Hauer-King, Melissa McCarthy, Javier Bardem

❖ **Recreating its animated** classics in live-action form has become so key to Disney's balance sheet that quality barely matters, as 2022's woeful *Pinocchio* demonstrated. The fact that *The Little Mermaid* is a sturdier vessel than most is something to celebrate, though not enough to wish for another shoal of do-overs to follow in its wake.

Clocking in 52 minutes longer than its 1989 inspiration, Rob Marshall's film is in dire need of some filleting. And while its CG visuals do as good a job at depicting the subterranean realm as *Avatar: The Way Of Water* did,

they are not up to the task of investing fussy crab Sebastian (Daveed Diggs) and fretful fish Flounder (Jacob Tremblay) with the winning personality of their cartoon forebears.

Thank goodness, then, for Halle Bailey as headstrong heroine Ariel, who enthral us anew in Hans Christian Andersen's story of a sea-sick maiden who trades her fins for pins. Bringing both youthful exuberance and a dash of diversity into the Disney canon, the one-time Beyoncé protégé also boasts a cracking set of pipes.

With Javier Bardem sternly disapproving as Ariel's dad Triton, this *Mermaid* certainly doesn't want for Hollywood wattage. Charm, unfortunately, is in distinctly shorter supply. **Neil Smith**

i Musical collaborator Lin-Manuel Miranda is such a fan of the original *Little Mermaid* that he named his first son Sebastian.

"Let it go, let it gooo! That fish, I mean, obviously."

SMOKING CAUSES COUGHING

Nicotine Titans



▶ **RELEASED 7 JULY**

15 | 77 minutes

▶ Director Quentin Dupieux

▶ Cast Gilles Lellouche, Vincent Lacoste, Anaïs Demoustier, Jean-Pascal Zadi

❖ **The fourth sub-80 minute film** by French director Quentin Dupieux to get a UK release in the last two years, *Smoking Causes Coughing* has the flightiest attention span of them all.

It centres on a Power Rangers-esque team of heroes, Tobacco Force (their schtick: blasting the chemical components of cigarettes at opponents like a rubbery man-in-a-suit tortoise), who go on a lakeside retreat to bond.

As stories are told around the campfire, it becomes more of an anthology movie. There's a strong vein of deadpan black comedy: a wince-inducing tale about a young

man trapped in the jaws of an industrial shredder may make you feel slightly faint, while the fact that the squad's chief – a puppet rat forever drooling green goo – is irresistible to women brings to mind the likes of *Meet The Feebles*.

There are a decent number of laughs, but with the film petering out in the fashion of a Monty

Python or Q skit, you're left wondering if cinema is really Dupieux's natural environment. Perhaps a Netflix sketch show (à la *I Think You Should Leave*) might be a better fit for his quicksilver imagination. **Ian Berriman**

i Next up for Dupieux: *Daaaaaail!*, about a journalist who meets Salvador Dalí several times for a documentary project.



The SFX team's annual summer BBQ is always fun.

ALSO+OUT






There were no review screenings for **TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS** (out now) before we went to press, so we can't tell you if adding robots that can turn into leopards and stuff revolutionises the whole concept. Frustratingly, we've seen nearly all of **THE FLASH** (16 June), but because any post-credits material was missing from that print, reviewing from it is strictly forbidden. Also imminent: Dreamworks animation **RUBY GILLMAN, TEENAGE KRAKEN** (30 June) – see page 16 for lots more on that.







"If you ever touch my hair product again..."

DRINKING GAME

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

-  A face appears in flickering flashback as a suppressed memory breaks through.
-  Everything stops for a fight – and someone ends up being stabbed.
-  The camera tilts 180 degrees, suggesting the disorientating nature of the spy biz.



-  Lesley Manville drops a quite spectacular F-bomb.
-  The camera lingers on a character's wounds.
-  A deep-cut AOR track plays, sending you to Shazam.
-  A whole new McGuffin is suddenly introduced.

CITADEL Season One

Quantum Of Homage



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

Showrunner David Weil

Cast Richard Madden, Priyanka

Chopra Jonas, Lesley Manville,

Stanley Tucci

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **A frisson of**

future shock enlivens this globe-hopping spy drama from Amazon Studios. Agents of the eponymous intelligence network have their memories implanted, deleted and uploaded to a central server. It's a smart, intriguing conceit, one that promises *Mission: Impossible* by way of Philip K Dick. A shame, then, that the series feels like a data cloud of audience memories, every espionage tale we've ever thrilled to, all flung into the neural blender

and whisked into so much secondhand mulch.

The inspirations are blatant. An amnesiac hero, just like the *Bourne* saga. Duelling spy agencies, echoing *UNCLE vs THRUSH* or *SHIELD vs HYDRA*. Gadgets straight out of Q branch, 24-style moral dilemmas, even set-pieces and iconography that walk the fine line between homage and outright swipe: a brutal scrap in a toilet nods to *Casino Royale*; a shot of hero Mason Kane suspended underwater cribs a familiar image from *Skyfall*.

Reputedly the second priciest show in TV history after Amazon's own *The Lord Of The Rings*, *Citadel* certainly doesn't lack for ambition. Vaulting from Paris to Spain to Morocco and beyond, it has the

glossy aesthetic of classic spy thrillers. Sometimes this works in the show's favour. Mason's infiltration of a tech laboratory in episode two deploys a real world location to splendid effect, distorting our hero's reflection in gleaming glass to subliminally hint at fractured identities. Here the action feels sleek and cool and modern, playing out against a landscape that matches the twisty narrative.

Elsewhere the series is undone by its own hyperreality. Episode three's assault on an impregnable fortress in Iran has the weightless digital sheen of a videogame. A fiery, well-played dramatic exchange in episode five is shot like an upmarket tourist ad.

Navigating the tangle of flashbacks, betrayals, suspected moles and unsuspected offspring

“Feels like a data cloud of audience memories”

are Richard Madden and Priyanka Chopra Jonas. They're a self-possessed, suitably photogenic pair of protagonists, though their interplay lacks the crucial spark the story insists is there.

Eminently more watchable are Stanley Tucci as a louche, slippery tech-lord, the ultimate Guy in the Chair, and Lesley Manville, playing the sinister Dahlia with the snooty chill of a weaponised Margo Leadbetter (“Roses can be needy little wankers!”). Relishing their supporting player status, bringing electric levels of irony and wit to roles that never have to carry the show, these veteran thespians are clearly having a ball.

There's a lot riding on *Citadel*; it's expressly engineered as a potential international franchise. There's a glint of promise here, but on the strength of intel gathered so far, a thorough debrief is essential. **Nick Setchfield**

The *Citadel* “spyverse” is set to continue with 2024's *Citadel: Diana*, an Italian production starring Matilda De Angelis.

MULLIGAN Season One

Needs a do-over



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Creators Robert Carlock, Sam Means

► Cast Nat Faxon, Chrissy Teigen, Tina Fey, Phil LaMarr

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 What happens after the credits roll on an apocalyptic alien invasion movie? The few plucky survivors brush themselves off, look at the wreckage of the world around them, and then... what?

That's the question this animated series from the writers of *30 Rock* sets out to explore. The show's ragtag crew of survivors includes a scientist, a politician, a historian, a cyborg, a billionaire, Miss America... and the titular Matty Mulligan. An idiotic everyman who becomes President after saving the world with a lucky grenade throw, Mulligan

represents humanity's one big chance to wipe the slate clean and build a better world.

It's a decent premise, and the voice cast – which includes Tina Fey, Chrissy Teigen, Daniel Radcliffe and Dana Carvey, plus cameos from *Weird Al* and Questlove – is bursting with big-name comedy talent. Thing is, unlike *30 Rock*, it's just not very funny.

The show's main joke is that, even post-apocalypse, people are too petty and self-interested to actually change anything. So super scientist Dr Braun is still

“There's a pessimism to it that's draining to watch”



hampered by childcare woes; ageing politician Senator LaMarr still schemes to hoard wealth and power; and Mulligan is more interested in wooing beauty queen Lucy than, you know, actually being President.

There's a pessimism to the whole endeavour that's draining to watch, while the slightly out-of-date pop culture references, ironically, bring to

mind *30 Rock*'s endlessly referenced Steve Buscemi “fellow kids” meme.

It's all just kind of ugly and charmless, to the point where viewers might ultimately end up rooting for the aliens to come back and finish the job.

Sarah Dobbs

i Co-creator Sam Means cites *Speed*'s Jack and Annie as the inspiration for Mulligan's awkwardly mismatched Matty and Lucy.

COUNT ABDULLA Series One

Faith, fangs and tons of fun



UK ITV X, streaming now

► Creator Kaamil Shah

► Cast Arian Nik, Jaime Winstone, Nina Wadia, Manpreet Bamba

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 There was a time around 2009 where you could barely turn on the TV, open a magazine or walk into a cinema without seeing a vampire. We had sparkly chaste vampires in *Twilight*, horny ones in *True Blood* and smouldering teens in *The Vampire Diaries*.

There were ill-fated attempts to make Abraham Lincoln a vampire hunter, and Park Chan-wook won prizes at Cannes for a sexy priest turned bloodsucker. They were funny, they were sexy and they

were scary. Now, in 2023, with *Count Abdulla*, ITV has made them all of the above, but Muslims as well!

The show follows Abdulla (Arian Nik), a British Pakistani doctor, who is set upon by Kathy (a hilariously outrageous Jaime Winstone), a vampiric dominatrix who likes her blood halal and purrs that her taste in men is akin to Princess Diana's. The two are both perpetual outsiders, and while they start as predator and prey, their relationship evolves into something more complex and empowering for them both.

The show is definitely on the comedy side of horror-comedy, and the cast sells the dry wit and absurdity of the premise



with campy aplomb. But witty back-and-forths are frequently punctuated by some genuine scares and gross-out moments, and Asim Abbasi's carefully crafted direction elevates even the silliest of set-ups.

The show is at its best when it's at its most outrageous – stretches of dialogue just beg to be lip-synced to by a drag queen. But it never goes for empty shock value

or the needlessly puerile, and dives into the cultural specificity of just what it would mean to be a Muslim and a vampire – something so closely tied to Christian symbolism. Even in such a crowded genre, *Count Abdulla* genuinely has something funny, fresh and exciting to say. **Leila Latif**

i As well as pushing the boundaries of vampires, the show innovates in terms of substances dildos can be made from...

YELLOWJACKETS

Season Two

A dish best served cold



US Showtime, streaming now

UK Paramount+, streaming now

Showrunners Ashley Lyle, Bart

Nickerson

Cast Melanie Lynskey, Tawny

Cypress, Christina Ricci, Juliette Lewis

EPISODES 2.01-2.09 The first year

of *Yellowjackets* was a darkly delicious treat, but like a cook following the same recipe and not quite getting the seasoning right, season two tastes just that little bit off.

As before, the series takes place across two time periods. In the '90s, winter is setting in and the lack of food among the plane crash survivors is becoming the most pressing issue, leading the group to take drastic measures. In the

present, meanwhile, Taissa's sinister split personality is coming more to the fore, while Natalie finds herself embroiled with Lottie's cult.

The show's combination of horror, absurdist melodrama and heartfelt character study remains as addictive and unpredictable as before. At the same time, there's a sense of wheel-spinning to season two, particularly in the present-day scenes. Natalie spends more than half a season bumbling around Lottie's compound before

“Combination of horror, absurdist melodrama and character study”



Neither of them could bear to look at the hair.

the others arrive, while Shauna's storyline grows ever more farcical.

The wilderness scenes are better. There's a real sense of delirium as the cannibalism hinted at in the pilot finally occurs in all its terrible glory. It's here, too, that the show's quasi-supernatural elements are at their most compelling, with the group starting to buy into Lottie's old religion with consequences.

Yellowjackets is still a brilliant and genuinely original show. The final two episodes, particularly, pack a visceral emotional punch and set the stage for a potentially different third year. Hopefully that will find a way to make the split settings and multitude of clashing tones better cohere. **Will Salmon**

i Alanis Morissette recorded a cover of the show's opening theme. Her version appears at the start of episode four.

BLACK KNIGHT

Season One

Postman-apocalyptic



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

Writer/director Cho Ui-seok

Cast Kim Woo-bin, Kang You-seok,

Esom, Song Seung-heon

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 There are times

when this dystopian South Korean series comes close to being a small screen version of *Mad Max*-style carnageddon. There are others when it feels like a million low-budget bleak near futures you've seen before. And there's one point where it just comes across like an anti-vax propaganda campaign (Korea is notably vax-sceptical).

After a comet strikes Earth, it causes catastrophic air pollution, making an oxygen a rare resource. Korea – now pretty much a desert

– has been divided into segregated districts based on social status. Being rich makes you oxygen-rich, while the poorer classes – including the refugees who don't live in any sector – have to wear respirators almost constantly, while scrimping and saving to pay Deliverymen to bring them fresh supplies of O2.

That's Deliverymen with a capital D because these guys are way more than just Amazon van drivers. They're the tough heroes of this wasteland, the best of them – such as 5-8 – being near legendary figures. 5-8 is also the head of a vigilante group challenging society's corrupt, corporate hierarchy.

The series looks impressive, in a kind of impressionistic way;



“Say it's ‘just the flu’ one more time – I dare you.”

there's something not-quite realistic about the CG, but it works in an unsettling, stylised way. There are some very impressive action scenes and – among all the usual dystopian grimness – some surprising moments of fun and joy along the way. Every cliffhanger is a banger, and the characters, while all drawn unashamedly from obvious archetypes, are fun to watch on a comic-booky level.

Sadly the world-building is as vague and murky as the character motivations, most of the plot twists are easily guessable and the resolution is a disappointingly bland shoot-out. In other words, *Black Knight* delivers, but some of the goods have been damaged in transit. **Dave Golder**

i The show's effects team travelled to Mongolia and shot a sandstorm to help visualise the dystopian Seoul cityscapes.



STAR WARS: YOUNG JEDI ADVENTURES

Season One

The Apprentices



▶ UK/US Disney+, streaming now
 ▶ Showrunner Michael Olson
 ▶ Cast Jamaal Avery Jr, Emma Berman, Juliet Donenfeld, Dee Bradley Baker

EPISODES 1.01-1.07 Lucasfilm and Disney make a bid to entice younglings to a galaxy far, far away with an animated series targeted squarely at pre-schoolers.

With its far-flung worlds, aliens, bounty hunters and even a recurring role for a (relatively) youthful Yoda, *Young Jedi Adventures* features everything you've come to expect from *Star Wars* – albeit in a cuted-up, peril-free form.

In this sugar-rush of brightly coloured CG visuals, three young Padawans are relocated to a remote Jedi temple for the next

“A series of mildly diverting standalone adventures”

stage of their training. Alongside their pilot chum, they end up on a series of mildly diverting standalone adventures, where the stakes are rarely higher than helping a few animals or thwarting a *Dennis The Menace*-level bad guy in a very *Star Wars* helmet.

As well-meaning as the show is, however, the constant barrage of inspirational messaging – help other people, work as a team, face up to your fears and so on – starts to feel hectoring and trite. And with little effort made to achieve *Bluey*-style cross-generational appeal, even the most hardcore *Star Wars* completists will struggle to sit through every episode with their kids.

That said, the show is notable as the first Disney+ release based in the pre-*Phantom Menace* High Republic era, which will also be the setting of live-action series *The Acolyte* next year.

Richard Edwards

i The name of droid RJ-83, friend to the three initiates, is presumably a nod to *Return Of The Jedi* (released in 1983).

FILM

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

PODCAST

IT'S YOUR LAST TIME AT THE CINEMA

WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

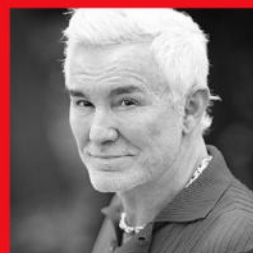
JOIN OUR CELEBRITY PROJECTIONISTS...



Noomi Rapace



Joe Cornish



Baz Luhrmann



Aimee Lou Wood

ENTER THE VIDEO STORE: EMPIRE OF SCREAMS

Band together

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 26 JUNE**

1984-1990 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors David Allen, Charles Band, John Carl Buechler, Stuart Gordon, Peter Manoogian et al

▶ Cast Ooh, loads of people

BLU-RAY DEBUT Charles Band's

name is not a hallmark of quality; as head of Empire International Pictures and Full Moon Features, he's churned out scores of risible low-budget genre flicks. But this box set collecting some of Empire's '80s output has the odd low-carat gem.

Robot Jox is the stand-out. This post-apocalyptic tale concerns a future where the two power blocs settle disputes via punch-ups between giant robots controlled

by human pilots. It was, somewhat surprisingly, scripted by Joe Haldeman, Hugo-winning author of *The Forever War* – though he compared the final film to “a child who sustained brain damage”.

Essentially *Pacific Rim* meets *Rocky IV*, it's rife with cheesy clichés, but its spy and romance subplots remain effective. And the robotic rumbles are beautifully done using modelwork, wire-control and stop-motion – anyone with a soft spot for the likes of *Thunderbirds* or *Star Fleet* should appreciate the craft.

One for fans of the '70s iterations of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers* (and any *Star Trek* where Kirk's shirt is ripped), *Arena* is another pulpy guilty pleasure. Reviving the hoary sci-fi

cliché of interspecies gladiatorial combat, it's set on a Vegas-style space station, features a Cantina Bar-worthy array of weird aliens and, due to some huge sets, has an impressive sense of scale. If the plot didn't run on rails this could have been a cult classic.

Less expansive are two studio-bound horrors – both with lightning flashes for the duration, but never a drop of rain... Uncaring parents and thieving punks get their comeuppance in *Dolls*, a sub-80 minute *Old Dark House*/*Hansel And Gretel* mash-up where people take refuge in the home of a dollmaker and his wife. The creepy dolls' attacks are satisfyingly nasty, but don't expect a satisfactory wrap-up. Equally hit and miss is *Cellar Dweller* (penned

by *Child's Play*'s Don Mancini), which begins with a '50s horror comic artist's creativity materialising a hulking monster. Thirty years later it's revived as one of his fans joins the artists' colony in his former home. Quite why a PI type is in residence is just one head-scratching aspect of a tale marred by some hammy acting and a weedy score.

The weakest link is *The Beastmaster*, aka *Ragewar*. The work of eight directors, it's often pegged as an anthology, but that implies a much better developed story. It's more a series of thin action set-pieces, as a computer geek abducted by sorcerer Mestema is forced to take seven samey challenges (expect dwarves and caves). Still, the sheer Eightiesness of it all (including a very *Electric Dreams* approach to home computers) should induce a nostalgic glow in anyone who ever owned a pair of flecked trousers.

▶ **Extras** *The Dungeonmaster* has three cuts. Swerve the US theatrical – it drops a surreal prologue that's the highlight. *Arena* also gets a 4:3 version.

An appreciation of *Robot Jox*'s stop-motion animator David Allen (27 minutes), with tributes from colleagues, behind-the-scenes VHS, concept art and glimpses of surviving props, is quite touching.

All five films get new interviews with cast or crew (totalling 100 minutes). *Robot Jox* star Gary Graham has some amusing anecdotes, and *Arena* co-writer Danny Bilson is scathing about what was done to his script.

All five get new commentaries too; three are moderated by the folk behind website The Schlock Pit, who have a bit of a frustrating tendency to ask general questions, not address what's on-screen. They also provide a video essay tribute to John Carl Buechler (16 minutes), *Cellar Dweller*'s director.

Plus: old commentaries for *Dolls* and *Robot Jox*; an archival Making Of for *Toys*; a 2015 chat with *Robot Jox*'s bad guy; trailers; galleries; sales sheets; production notes; five posters; 15 art cards; an 80-page book. **Ian Berriman**

i *Robot Jox* star Gary Graham was shocked to find the Italian crew making smoke by burning paraffin-soaked rags and plastic.



"I can just bite your entire head off, you know."



It's all good fun till the axe-swinging starts.

PEARL

So I Married An Axe Murderer

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 19 JUNE

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director **Ti West**

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

◆ **The prequel to Ti West's** surprise horror hit *X* is both entirely different and a perfect complement to the original.

Mia Goth once again fully inhabits the role of killer Pearl, albeit this time playing her as a young woman in Texas, 1918, trapped on her American gothic farm with only her angry mother and ailing father for company.

“**Mia Goth once again fully inhabits the role of killer Pearl**”

Hope seems to arrive in the form of a handsome young projectionist (David Corenswet) – but he's not quite as clean-cut as her first appears. More a tragic cine-literate melodrama than a slasher, it's both hilarious and heartbreaking. She may be a killer, but you're always on Pearl's side as she tries in vain to be good, but inevitably reverts to brutal, axe-wielding violence.

◆ **Extras** A disappointingly slim selection. “Coming Out Of Her Shell: The Creation Of Pearl” (12 minutes) is an insightful mini-doc on the organic way both the film and the character of Pearl came about. “Time After Time” (four minutes) is a short piece on how the filmmakers evoked the period setting. Plus: trailers. **Will Salmon**

i Though the colourful visuals are a huge part of the film's appeal, West originally envisaged shooting in black and white.

THE CHANGELING

Spiritual home

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

1980 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Peter Medak**

▶ Cast **George C Scott, Trish Van Devere, Melvyn Douglas, John Colicos**

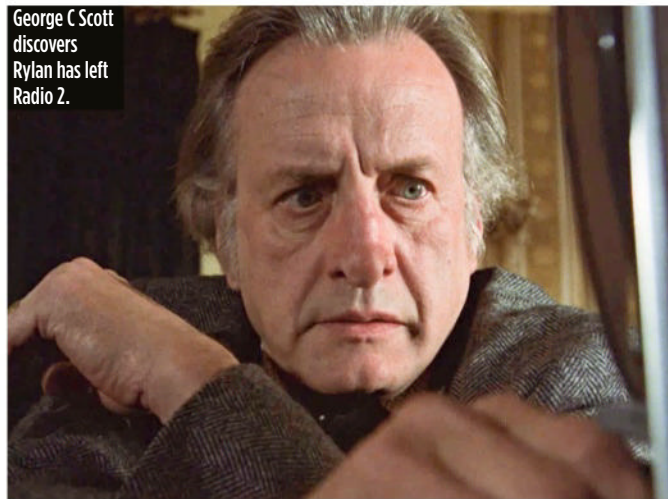
◆ **Released in the long, lurid** shadow of *The Amityville Horror*, Peter Medak's *The Changeling* makes for a chillier, altogether more intriguing take on the spirit-infested house genre.

At first it's haunting tropes afloat as George C Scott confronts a restless presence in the sprawling Seattle mansion that's now his home. But as the formative tragedy is revealed the film nimbly shifts genre, bringing in elements of murder mystery and even in-vogue '70s conspiracy theory – never trust an elected official! – while preserving an innate sense of unease.

Prowling camerawork, impeccably creepy production design and a nerve-jangling soundscape persuade you something nasty waits at the top of the stairs. But it's Scott's sensitive portrait of a mourning man, alone in a house as overwhelming as his grief, that underpins the horror with genuine emotion.

◆ **Extras** An illuminating commentary by Peter Medak and producer Joel B Michaels provides an invaluable first-hand account. Medak proves an equally eloquent presence on-camera as he reflects on his life and work (74 minutes); a separate chat focuses on his experiences of '60s London, taking in Hammer and a sweat-inducing brush with the Kray twins (20 minutes). The movie's music arranger Kenneth Wannberg reflects on the score (nine minutes), while art director

George C Scott discovers Rylan has left Radio 2.



Reuben Freud offers fascinating insights into the unforgettable iconography of the mansion itself (11 minutes).

Elsewhere, characterful local historian Phil Goldstein delves into the macabre true-life mystery that inspired the story (17 minutes), horror filmmaker/aficionado Mick Garris shares his love for the film (five minutes), and there's a

whistle-stop tour of the locations (16 minutes). Plus: original trailer; TV spot.

The limited edition release comes with a 108-page book with new essays and an archive Medak interview, a soundtrack CD and five art cards. **Nick Setchfield**

i 1988 Italian horror *Until Death* was marketed in some countries as *The Changeling 2*, but has no connection to it.

MEXICO MACABRE

All made by Alameda

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1959-1963 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Rafael Baledón, Chano

Urueta, Fernando Méndez

▶ Cast Rosita Arenas, Gastón Santos,

Abel Salazar

BLU-RAY DEBUT If you think

Mexican cinema means wrestling movies, prepare to have your horizons expanded by this fascinating box set of peculiar *película* – four handsomely restored black and white horrors from production company Alameda Films.

The most classically gothic entry, Rafael Baledón's *The Curse Of The Crying Woman*, is also the best. Mario Bava's *Mask Of Satan* was clearly one inspiration for his morbid tale of a young woman who visits her aunt, only to learn

she's a descendant of the titular folk legend, fated to revive her desiccated corpse. Throwing in elements like a scar-faced servant and a madman in the attic, it's a gripping affair with visually striking sequences, clever camera tricks, sadistic violence and a captivating performance by Rita Macedo as the scheming aunt.

Both of director Chano Urueta's ghoulish entries display a positively mischievous delight in wrongfooting the audience. *The Witch's Mirror* starts off as the gothic tale of a poisoned wife enacting spectral vengeance – all creaky doors and unearthly wind – then gear-shifts into an *Eyes Without A Face*-cribbing surgical horror, complete with skin grafts and hand transplants. "Never have human eyes witnessed anything like it," declares a cop, aptly.

Gothic horror/sci-fi hybrid *The Brainiac* also starts conventionally, as a dissolute aristocrat executed by judges of the Inquisition vows to exterminate their bloodline. But when he returns it's via a comet – and he keeps turning into a brain-sucking monster resembling something the Nazis would have put in antisemitic children's books. Abel Salazar is suitably saturnine as the hypnotic Baron – *Doctor Who* fans may be reminded of OG Master Roger Delgado. The constant use of obvious back-projection lets things down, but the results are deliciously potty.

Finally, Boris Karloff could have slotted neatly into *Black Pit Of Dr M*, Fernando Méndez's doomy tale of predestination. After making a deal with a dying colleague to help him visit "the realm beyond", a scientist accepts the "horrible price" without asking "Er, what exactly?" – then awaits a chain of events leading to a door closing. Clearly something grimly ironic is on the way, and the unguessable conclusion doesn't disappoint...

▶ **Extras** The grandson of Alameda Films' founder discusses their relationship, and preserving the catalogue (19 minutes). *Crying Woman* star Rita Macedo emerges as an overbearing figure in a fascinating piece interviewing her daughters (26 minutes); one is very candid, recounting stealing bones from her mother's crypt to make souvenirs for admirers!

Academic Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro supplies helpfully detailed biographies of the three directors (totalling 70 minutes). All four films have critical commentaries.

Plus: a Mexican instalment of Channel 4 series *Mondo Macabro* (25 minutes); a screening Q&A with *Mirror*'s lead (13 minutes); a fotonovel of *The Brainiac*; galleries; trailer; 100-page book; five art cards. **Ian Berriman**

▶ Chano Urueta also acted in a couple of Sam Peckinpah movies, most notably as village elder Don José in *The Wild Bunch*.



STEPHEN KING ON SCREEN

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 26 JUNE**

2023 | 15 | Download

▶ Director Daphné Baiwir

▶ **Does anyone consider** themselves a fan of Stephen King adaptations in the way they might the author himself? The field is so sprawling, and so variable in quality. Still, if you're scowling at the impudence of the question, this documentary should keep you entertained.

It features an impressive line-up of directors (27 in all), including the likes of Tom Holland (*Thinner*, *The Langoliers*), Lewis Teague (*Cujo*, *Cat's Eye*) and Greg Nicotero (*Creepshow*). Mike Flanagan (*Gerard's Game*, *Doctor Sleep*) has insightful observations about how King's writing operates, Frank Darabont (*The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile*, *The Mist*) a treasure trove of production anecdotes.

It feels like director Daphné Baiwir struggled to organise the material. Chronologically speaking we hop back and forth, as the focus switches between attributes of King's work and specific films or shows. The segues are not always smooth; sometimes you can hear the gears grinding.

A dramatic opening crammed with Easter eggs (and familiar actors) also seems rather superfluous. It can feel a little unbalanced too: 14 minutes are lavished on *The Green Mile*; *The Dead Zone* gets a meagre one. But hey, what are you going to do when Darabont is an enthusiastic contributor and David Cronenberg was busy washing his hair? **Ian Berriman**



His Tinder profile was not an accurate account.



"What do you call a dinosaur with no —"
"Don't."

65 Earth shock

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Directors Scott Beck, Bryan Woods

▶ Cast Adam Driver, Arianna Greenblatt, Chloe Coleman, Nika King

▶ Resisting the urge to pull

a Rod Serling, 65 is absolutely upfront that "It was Earth all along!". Crashing into our primordial world, starship pilot Adam Driver must navigate an escalating series of Cretaceous-era hazards in the company of fellow survivor Ariana Greenblatt, whose self-possessed performance has a touch of the young Dafne Keen.

It's a sharp, appealing premise, abetted by a lean running time, but while there's heart and atmosphere, the prehistoric perils feel short on genuine bite. The imminent arrival of a certain epoch-ending asteroid feels like a

ticking clock too far, given the jeopardy already baked into the film's premise.

▶ **Extras** A profile of filmmakers (and childhood friends) Beck and Woods is frustratingly brief (four minutes), while an equally skimpy look at the production design offers no real insights into the star attraction of the prehistoric beasts (five minutes).

A mock documentary-style piece on prehistoric Earth comes complete with faux-Attenborough voiceover (two minutes), while a dissection of the film's climax intercuts animated storyboards with final footage – the most satisfying extra for hardcore geeks. Five deleted scenes (eight minutes) prove to have been eminently trimmable. **Nick Setchfield**

i The mass extinction event is now believed to have occurred 66 million years ago – what's a million years between friends?



SIGHT EXTENDED

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | Download

▶ **A life-changing app** promises to get agoraphobic Patrick's life back on track by turning everyday tasks into a game. As the AI starts to impact on more than housework, however, it becomes increasingly clear he should have read the small print...

The futuristic augmented reality tech is smartly realised, while directors Daniel Lazo and Eran May-Raz (expanding on their short "Sight") never lose, er, sight of the humanity. If only the final act delivered the smart, *Black Mirror*-esque punch it needed. **Richard Edwards**



BREAKING INFINITY

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 3 JULY**

2023 | 12 | Download

▶ **"What the hell is going on here?"** demands the hero of Marianna Dean's wilfully elliptical debut feature. You'll share his bewilderment: waking in hospital with a glitchy memory, he's beset by visions, fragmented in time and seemingly implicated in nothing less than the end of the world itself.

Clearly made with limited resources, *Breaking Infinity's* conceptual ambition is admirable. There are hard SF ideas here and enough intrigue to keep you hungry for the answers. **Nick Setchfield**



BROOKLYN 45

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER In this real-time chamber piece, set a few months after VE Day, a bunch of veterans carry out a seance. While a spirit is materialised, it's more about dealing with metaphorical demons. Through the figure of a German neighbour, the film also explores how difficult it can be to let go of hate.

Some superb performances crank up the tension, and the twists keep coming – though the final one seems strangely at odds with the message of tolerance put forward previously. **Ian Berriman**



CEREBRUM

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 3 JULY**

2023 | 15 | Download

▶ **The scariest thing in** this low-budget take on *Frankenstein* is its opening sequence. Deep in the woods, a young man is tied to a chair by his mother and set in the path of an oncoming car. Turns out it's a nightmare, but here's the scary bit: he's been having it for a long time, unable to wake up from a coma for a year following a car accident.

The rest is disappointing, the ever-reliable Steve Oram gives good creepy dad, but it's all a bit too clinical and obvious to deliver any real chills.

Sarah Dobbs

HOPPING MAD

The Nonwalking Dead

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW**

1986-1989 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Ricky Lau, Lam Ching-ying

▶ Cast Lam Ching-ying, Yuen Biao,

Wu Ma, Richard Ng

BLU-RAY DEBUT **How to make**

multiple sequels to a hit without repeating yourself? Well, you could always make movies that are almost totally unrelated.

This was, it seems, Hong Kong distributor Golden Harvest's strategy when it came to their 1985 horror-comedy *Mr Vampire* – the film that introduced most Western viewers to jiāngshǐ, the hopping corpses of Chinese folklore which are their nearest equivalent to Dracula and his ilk. The four follow-ups in this box set share similar themes, and some of the same cast (Lam Ching-ying, a

taoist priest in the original, plays similar characters in three films), but otherwise go their own way.

Sometimes frustratingly so – especially in the case of *Mr Vampire II*, which targets a broader audience by having an archaeologist dig up a family of three jiāngshǐ. When the boy escapes, he's befriended by a little girl, in *ET* fashion. There are some well-choreographed scenes, which walk the line between martial arts and slapstick (including one where the actors have to fake slo-mo), but have a sickbag handy for the more syrupy stretches.

Mr Vampire III is the best of the bunch, thanks to the presence of a female sorceress whose tricks include hurling cockroaches at people and generating bunches of bats under her cloak. One suspects animals may have been harmed.

A sequence featuring a gooey ghost that's been half-fried is also memorably freaky.

Mr Vampire IV expends a frustrating amount of time on the feuding between two neighbours – a Taoist priest and a Buddhist monk. Once a jiāngshǐ is finally released, forcing the two to team up, there are some amusing touches in the action set-pieces, with the Taoist “Hulking out” only to deflate when he stands on broken crockery, and a fight complicated by all concerned getting stuck to the floor.

Vampire vs Vampire has a neat idea: why not introduce a Dracula type to this milieu? Sadly the title is a terrible cheat – different vampire traditions only briefly converge five minutes from the end, when another cute little lad jiāngshǐ lobs explosives at the

“A sequence features a gooey ghost that's been half-fried”

film's cloaked garlic-shunner. There's an awful lot going here, including a seductive banana tree ghost (!) and a subplot about a prostitute murdered by her pimps. The results are barely coherent.

▶ **Extras** Two featurettes. In the first (11 minutes) a Taoist priest discusses the origins of jiāngshǐ folklore and the tools used for combating the supernatural, like talismans and peach wood swords. A second (17 minutes) focuses on the ritual burning of paper effigies, and the use of jiāngshǐ in collectible toys and streetwear.

All four films have critical commentaries. *Mr Vampire II* comes with an English dub option; the rest are Cantonese only. Plus: trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i The fifth and final *Mr Vampire* film, Ricky Lau's *Mr Vampire 1992*, is missing from this set. That one is a direct sequel.



THE NUTTY PROFESSOR

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1963 | PG | 4K Blu-ray

▶ Director Jerry Lewis

▶ Cast Jerry Lewis, Stella Stevens, Del Moore, Kathleen Freeman

▶ **Jerry Lewis first saw Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde** as a teen and was, he says in one of the extras here, “enthralled by the tennis match, the good and the evil.” It's not hard to see why he was drawn to the idea of a comic version of Robert Louis Stevenson's horror classic.

As the buck-toothed scientist whose serum transforms him into a ladies' man, not only does he get to essay his usual prat-falling, goofy-faced schtick, he also gets to be the well-tailored Don Juan sophisticate, playing – in effect – both Martin and Lewis.

The Nutty Professor is certainly overlong at 107 minutes, but there are enough moments here to remind you why Lewis was one of comedy's biggest guns in his day.

▶ **Extras** You'd think that having a wealth of footage and co-operation from the movie's writer, star and director would be a blessing, but Lewis's legendary crabbiness give many of these extras something of a sour flavour.

Carried over from Blu-ray are a commentary by Lewis and Steve Lawrence, screen tests, deleted scenes, bloopers et al. This 4K release adds an audio conversation between Lewis and his directorial mentor Frank Tashlin (48 minutes); a 43-minute career retrospective from 2012; and an eight-minute video essay on Lewis by Leonard Maltin. **Steve O'Brien**



“It's Nike!”
“Nope, label says Marks & Spencer.”



CRATER

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 9+ | SVOD

▶ Director Kyle Patrick Alvarez

▶ Cast Isaiah Russell-Bailey,

Mckenna Grace, Billy Barratt,

Orson Hong

DISNEY+ Caleb is a teenager in a dystopian lunar mining colony where the miners dream of meeting ever-moving targets so they can earn passage to a near-mythical new Earth known as Omega. When his father dies, he and his mates steal a lunar rover and set out for a mysterious crater where dad once told him he'd discover something his mother had always wanted him to see. On the way the kids argue, bond, face peril and reveal poignant backstories.

Yes, this is *Stand By Me* on the Moon, but without Ben E King and with considerably less charm. It's a low-budget YA adventure with adequate but far from impressive effects, less than exciting action sequences and a liberal dose of corny sentimentality. The young actors do a creditable job of trying to inject some charisma into the off-the-peg teens, but all the relationship dynamics, character tropes and revelations feel like the product of a Film Screenwriter 101 correspondence course.

It does, however, have one major saving grace – an unexpected, though thoroughly logical, coda that's refreshingly bittersweet and almost makes the previous 90 minutes slowly, poignantly evaporate like River Phoenix at the end of the Rob Reiner movie. You may even actually feel something approaching real emotion.

Dave Golder



Shazam trembles before Richard Osman.

SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS

Super geeks vs ancient Greeks

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/DVD/download

▶ Director David F Sandberg

▶ Cast Zachary Levi, Helen Mirren, Jack Dylan Grazer, Lucy Liu

▶ **The first Shazam! was a** good-natured, goofball delight about a teenager transformed into a grown-up superhero (Zachary Levi) who's still a kid at heart; by the end all his adopted siblings are superheroes too. This follow-up struggles to capture lightning twice, despite some wonderfully silly moments and heaps of charm.

The problem is the villains; Lucy Liu and Helen Mirren are wasted as vengeful Greek gods in a dreary plot that only belatedly kicks into gear. But the juvenile superheroes are huge fun, as are some quirky action sequences, and a sentient pen called Steve. While other "family" fantasy films are injecting street cred into the mix, however, *Fury Of The Gods* feels a tad old-fashioned and uncool.

▶ **Extras** The Blu-ray boasts a long list of extras: "Rock Of Eternity Decked Out" (six minutes); "Shazamily Reunion" (five minutes), "The Zac Effect" (four minutes), "Sisterhood Of Villains" (eight minutes) and "The Mythology Of Shazam" (five minutes) are all fluffy, formulaic featurettes with plenty of behind-the-scenes footage.

In "Scene Deconstruction" (10 minutes), director David F Sandberg talks you through five key scenes. "Shazam! Let's Make A Sequel" (25 minutes) is a longer Making Of, with some repetition from the other features.

There's also a hefty 30 minutes of deleted scenes, including a different opening, a number of grisly deaths, and another Avengers jibe. But all are available on YouTube, so what's the point? Only the 4K release has a properly unique extra: an enthusiastic director's commentary. **Dave Golder**

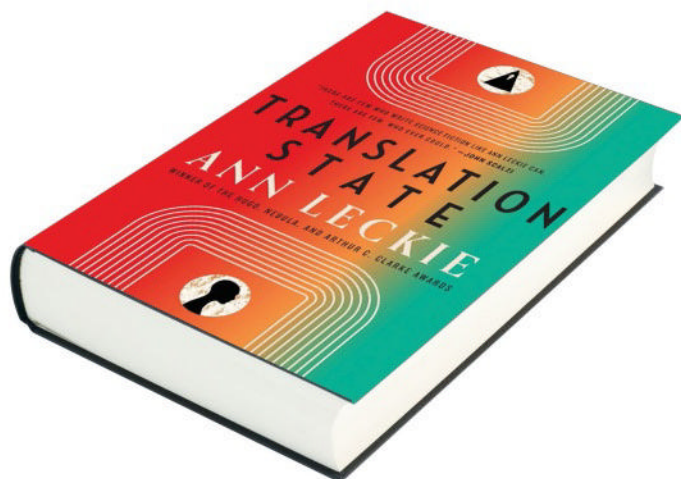
i This marks the third cameo by Annabelle – the scary doll from the *Conjuring* films – in the DCEU, after *Aquaman* and *Shazam!*

(ROUND UP)



The works of JG Ballard were an inspiration for Brandon Cronenberg's **INFINITY POOL** (26 June, Blu-ray/DVD), which sees a novelist and his heiress wife holidaying at a luxury resort. When James kills a man, he's given the option of having a clone executed in his place... We said: "Has all the hallucinatory flair and gnarly gore of *Possessor* and *Antiviral*... The characters' descent into hell takes compelling twists and turns." Disappointingly, there are zero bonuses. Boo! The gloomy tale of two children who wake in the night to find the windows and doors in their house have disappeared.

SKINAMARINK (3 July, Blu-ray/DVD) received rave reviews in some quarters, but "Emperor's New Clothes" was our verdict. We said: "Getting photos back from the chemists to find accidental snaps of carpet may have inspired this slice of anti-cinema... Unremittingly tedious." Finally, Arrow Video has released a swanky new edition of Robert Eggers's **THE LIGHTHOUSE** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray). Set in the 1890s, it sees Robert Pattinson and Willem Defoe's bickering "wickies", isolated on an island, slowly succumbing to their inner demons. We said: "Uncompromising art horror, rich with ambiguity and disturbing subtext." The new on-disc bonuses are a documentary and a visual essay; it also comes with a double-sided poster, six postcards and a 60-page booklet. Finally, the latest TV box sets include **THE HANDMAID'S TALE** Season Five (out now, DVD) and **THE WALKING DEAD** Season 11 (3 July, Blu-ray/DVD). Long live physical media!



TRANSLATION STATE

When cultures collide

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Ann Leckie**

► Publisher **Orbit Books**

❖ **There are a few rare novelists** who, despite clearly being the smartest person in most of the rooms they enter, spend time quietly getting on with things. They don't avoid the limelight, but they don't much seek it out, preferring to let their work be front and centre and treating promotion as a kind of professional duty.

Ann Leckie is one such understated novelist, a writer whose 2013 debut *Ancillary Justice* is the only novel to have won the Hugo, Nebula and Clarke awards. In the years since, she's turned out a series of fine books, all of which twist SF and/or fantasy tropes and reward close reading. It's therefore no surprise to find that *Translation State*, Leckie's first novel in four years, follows the same pattern.

It's set in the same universe as *Ancillary Justice* and its two sequels. However, as with the heist story *Provenance*, it functions as a standalone novel. It's divided into distinct parts, a literary triptych. In the opening section, we meet Enae, whose life when we meet hir (Enae doesn't use conventional pronouns) has largely consisted of looking after a monstrous relative – Grandmaman, a bankrupt who has mortgaged the family future to save face in the present, but whose financial issues become clear in the wake of her death.

Enae's inheritance, it turns out, consists entirely of a diplomatic assignment to hunt down someone missing for 200 years. Nobody seriously expects Enae to fulfil the assignment, but it's one that will enable hir to travel in comfort, a reward for years of servitude.

Except Enae is a natural diplomat. Which is how sie comes to encounter the other two characters who have chapters showing their perspectives: Reet,

a space station worker and adopted foundling, and Qven, a Presger translator.

During a high-level meeting of different species and groupings that occupies the second part of the novel, it becomes clear that the future of Reed and Qven will have wider implications. If, that is, all concerned can escape the distortions and weirdnesses that follow the violent attack that keys off the novel's final chapters – an act that could end the long-standing treaty between humanity and the Presger, dangerous aliens first introduced in the Ancillary books, who are exotically different from humanity.

There's a lot going on here, but a linking theme is the idea of identity. What makes someone human? Can they self-define? What's gender all about? Can people (using the word in the widest sense) escape the past and change, even if they've been raised in, from a human perspective, the Hobbesian nightmare of a Presger upbringing?

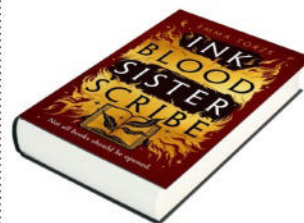
In the middle of the novel, Leckie arguably spends too long tackling these questions, but then again this is a book about diplomacy, about the careful weighing of words and actions, about understanding and misunderstandings. It's also a book that arrives in a world where gender and, more widely, what used to be called personal politics have made their way to the centre of the culture.

It's worth noting that Ann Leckie was writing about these themes before woke became a term of abuse used by the right, and doing so with a humanity and curiosity that gives her work a rare combination of authority and heart. In this, her work recalls another novelist who was routinely the smartest person in the room and largely let his work do the talking: Iain M Banks.

It's a wise, ambitious and darkly funny novel. On this showing, we may come to value Leckie's Ancillary stories every bit as much as we do Banks's Culture books.

Jonathan Wright

i Gender recurs in Leckie's work: "We say there are two categories, that's our culture. Other cultures have different answers."



INK BLOOD SISTER SCRIBE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 6 JULY**

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Emma Törzs**

► Publisher **Century**

❖ **If you're reading this, you** probably like books. Maybe you enjoy nothing more of an evening than curling up with your Kindle. Maybe you're constantly pushing your favourites onto long-suffering friends. Maybe you spent the past decade buying books faster than you can read them, and your TBR pile has now taken over your house. (Ahem.) Even so, you probably aren't as obsessed as the characters in Emma Törzs's debut novel. As in murder-level obsessed.

But then, these books are literally magical. Hand-written with ink made from the blood of individuals known as Scribes, their spells take effect when read aloud (and fed more blood). Those who produce and collect them are cut-throat and paranoid; the uber-rich pay vast sums to commission their own bespoke texts.

The story Törzs spins from this is an intricate web of intergenerational secrets and lies, and though it takes a little while to get into gear – early on there's too much explanation of basic activities – it turns into the sort of properly gripping, just-one-more-chapter thriller that keeps you reading late into the night. The characters are complicated messes of fear and ambition and loss, the plotting is clever to the point of being devious, and the pay-off is impressively emotionally satisfying. **Nic Clarke**



THE FIRST BRIGHT THING

★★★★★

► RELEASED 22 JUNE

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author JR Dawson

► Publisher Tor Books

❖ Ever felt like the world is dark and scary in a way that's only ever going to get worse? Of course you have – have you seen the news lately? – which is why *The First Bright Thing* is exactly the novel we need now.

In the aftermath of the First World War, circus master Rin has created a safe haven for misfits: her Circus of Fantasticals is a spectacle created by performers who've all mysteriously developed superpowers. Dubbed "Sparks", these powers run the full gamut of X-Men abilities; Rin's own power is teleportation, which she uses to keep her troupe safe from the persecution that always seems to come along with being different.

But someone from her past wants to destroy Rin's happy place, and with another war brewing on the horizon, all the sequins and showmanship in the world might not be enough to save her...

Any time a story involves time travel, it has to grapple with the "should we kill baby Hitler?" dilemma. JR Dawson runs full tilt into the problem here, coming up with a solution that's both elegant and optimistic. Beautifully and sensually written, as deeply sad as it is hopeful, this book is an ode to the power of art and joy in the face of unimaginable horror – and might also offer a blueprint for building a better future. **Sarah Dobbs**



GODS OF THE WYRDWOOD

Branching out

★★★★★

► RELEASED 29 JUNE

640 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author RJ Barker

► Publisher Orbit

❖ This tremendous story is fresh from the desk of RJ Barker, writer of trilogies *The Wounded Kingdom* and *The Tide Child*. Both of those are excellent; this is even better. A triple-threat of world-building, character and plot, *Gods Of The Wyrdwood* represents the work of an experienced novelist at the top of his game.

It introduces an innovative, organic landscape where bloated gaspaw creatures pull airships between crumbling spires. By the time you've read a few chapters, inventions like crownheads, bluevein weeds and rootlings become old friends.

The realm of Crua is surrounded by trees so big that one fall can provide resources for generations. Factions vie for power, *Game Of Thrones*-style. A warrior caste, the cruel Rai, possess a fungal parasite beneath their skin, their "cowl", giving them superhuman powers. It's

a creepy and well-executed concept. The Rai gather under the banner of a new religion, the god Tarl-an-Gig, but perhaps the true "god" is the forest itself, which seems to have a consciousness. Few are brave enough to explore the woods, but our hero, clanless outcast Cahan Du-Nahere, is. Haunted by his past, he shuns others but is persuaded to locate a lost child. This ultimately plunges him and some new friends into a battle against the Rai.

There's an ecological message here, plus a general distrust of politics and theology – plenty of religious BS is challenged by the heroes' gentle trust in nature. And Barker weaves in a theme of personal sacrifice, contrasting with the forced sacrifices the authorities demand. The trope of "troubled soldier with a heart of gold finding redemption on the ramparts" is well-worn, and the book will please fans of David Gemmell. But with its folk-horror vibe, it offers something distinct. This is *Avatar* meets *Dune* – on shrooms. **Dave Bradley**

i Barker also writes crime novels under the name RJ Dark, featuring Yorkshire investigators Mal and Jackie.



THE SURVIVING SKY

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

528 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Kritika H Rao

► Publisher Titan Books

❖ Massive moving cities – as distinct from city-sized spaceships – are one of the great SF high concepts. From the space-faring spindizzies of James Blish's *Cities In Flight* to the earthly, town-eat-town steampunk of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, they offer a brilliant jolt of wonder and estrangement.

In Kritika Rao's debut, flying cities have been humanity's last refuge from a hostile planet for a thousand years. Teams of architects pilot plant-based settlements above the surface's deadly earthrages, all the while communing with the flora to shape and reshape the contours of the urban landscape to citizens' needs. As a piece of worldbuilding imagination, it's breathtaking; add in the Hindu philosophy driving it all, and you're left with something truly fascinating.

The vehicle for our exploration of this world is a couple whose marriage is very much on the rocks, and that's where this flight founders. Ahilya and Iravan, you see, are A Lot. Barely a chapter goes by without them either breaking up or making up (sometimes both); their emotions are continually dialled up to 11. We're fully on-board with fantasies that centre on romances, but here all the yelling gets rather wearying. It would have been great to spend a little more quiet time in this dazzling world. **Nic Clarke**



YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DIE TONIGHT

★★★★★

► RELEASED 20 JUNE

240 pages | Paperback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Kalynn Bayron

► Publisher Bloomsbury YA

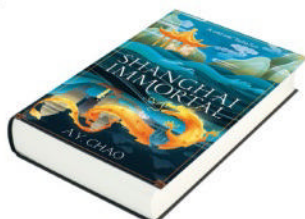
✦ **Just when you thought** you'd read (or seen) every possible spin on the postmodern meta-slasher, along comes a new one to bring the genre bang up-to-date.

This YA book centres on seventeen-year-old Charity Curtis, who works as the Final Girl at Camp Mirror Lake, an immersive terror attraction where guests pay to be menaced by a masked man with a knife. Thanks to her absentee manager, it's her job not just to play the lead role in the nightly horror LARP but also to make sure the whole production runs smoothly. She's good at her job, so it mostly does... until the night a stranger shows up with a dire warning about the camp's dark history, and Charity's friends start getting killed.

Some of the characters are the stock *Scream* types you'd expect, including the obligatory horror nerd who's constantly reminding everyone of the "rules", and a couple who make everyone uncomfortable with their all-too-public horniness. The rest of the crew is diverse and interesting, though, and it feels like a genuine loss whenever one of them gets picked off.

It's the final coda that makes it genuinely chilling; Kalynn Bayron clearly knows her horror really, really well.

Sarah Dobbs



SHANGHAI IMMORTAL

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author AY Chao

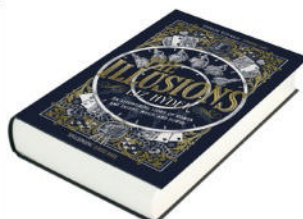
► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

✦ **If prickly narrators aren't** your thing, give this period fantasy a wide berth. Lady Jing, the half-goddess/half-vampire protagonist of *Shanghai Immortal*, is annoyed by *everything*, and her constant snarking will infuriate as many readers as it amuses.

Adopted by the king of Hell as a child, Jing inhabits an alternate version of '30s Shanghai full of *yaojing* – legendary creatures – and she's expected to take up a place in the royal court when she comes of age. But she chafes against the restrictions of her position: the formal clothing, the flowery language, the respectful hierarchies... all of it. Then she overhears a plot to steal a priceless dragon pearl, and is forced to finally figure out her place in Hell.

The ambitious world-building and meticulously slow-burn character development going on here come at the expense of plot. The book's climax isn't the big reveal of the villain's identity; it's the moment Jing recovers a repressed childhood memory.

There's something of *The Mortal Instruments* about it, in that it feels like the real story is happening elsewhere, with other, more interesting characters. Still, the vivid descriptions just about make up for these shortcomings, so the next book in the series might be worth a look. Sarah Dobbs



THE ILLUSIONS

★★★★★

► RELEASED 22 JUNE

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Liz Hyder

► Publisher Manilla Press

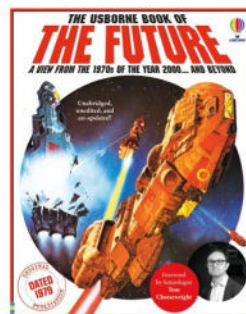
✦ **Stage magic and early** moving pictures share many attributes, particularly the appearance to an audience of something impossible – whether that's a disappearing assistant or reappearing dove, or the image of a moving train projected within a building. Set in 1896, *The Illusions* combines magic and movie-making with a charismatic array of characters struggling to make their mark in the world.

Photographer and filmmaking pioneer Eadie Carleton enthralled talented magician George Perris with her creations, sparking ideas and possibilities of a combined stage act. Meanwhile, young Cec Marsden struggles to break free of a more sinister magician and medium, while also beginning to understand and accept her more otherworldly magical talents.

This is an engaging tale with a likeable cast you'll definitely root for; unfortunately, that's also its biggest flaw. There's no moral ambiguity here, with characters clearly divided into heroes and villains, and any questionable decision-making so obviously pained that you can never blame the individual.

This need for delight above all else also spoils the novel's resolution, which goes too far in tying up ends to bring out more happy endings than you desired. Even the "real" magic is barely needed in a story in which good-heartedness wins out above all. Rhian Drinkwater

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



THE USBORNE BOOK OF THE FUTURE

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

99 pages | Hardback

► Authors Kenneth Gatland,
David Jefferis

► Publisher Usborne

- Usborne's latest nostalgic reprint: a 1979 collection of three titles: *Robots*, *Future Cities* and *Star Travel*.
- History, then-fresh theories and speculative futurology are all imparted without patronising the young reader.
- Some predictions are on the nose: big TVs, electric cars, 3D printing.
- Others, not so much: underwater farmers with dolphin helpers; a 2020 lunar Olympics with 14-metre high jump...
- And where are our maglev supertubes and battlefield lasers?
- Most glaring omission: the internet. Instead of smartphones, there are quaint-looking "ristos" (wristwatch radios).
- Handsomely illustrated. We love the more out-there artwork: weird aliens receiving our signals; a battlecruiser with ESP-sensitive crew.





THE MAGIC HOUR

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

416 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author David Wolstencroft

► Publisher Scholastic

❖ **We can all agree that** squeezing an extra hour into our day would come in pretty handy. It's certainly the case for Scottish schoolgirl Ailsa Craig, who accidentally wanders into a magical world offering a bonus 60 minutes each evening.

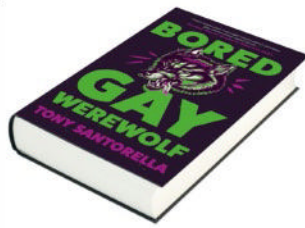
Soon she's smashing her homework, getting ahead on projects and having a jolly time with her new pal, snooty rich type Credenza. But Credenza's powerful dad might be up to something nefarious, a monster may be about to escape its cage... and are the realm's magical fae really as friendly as they seem?

David Wolstencroft knows how to spin a good yarn – he created *Spooks* and *Versailles* for the telly, after all – and has a lot of fun breaking the fourth wall in the book's cheerful sprinkling of footnotes. There's a cat cheekily named Sydekyck, characters with *Harry Potter*-esque names (Moiria Bogbean, for example) and one chap is described as having “the charm and good humour of a vending machine”.

The Magic Hour is brimming with good humour, then, but it does lose cohesion towards the end as the plot twists pile up and it's hard to keep track of the bigger picture. The mechanics of the magical hour itself are also, irritatingly, absolute nonsense to anyone past puberty.

Kids, however, won't give a damn – they'll be too busy giggling away.

Jayne Nelson



BORED GAY WEREWOLF

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

272 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Tony Santorella

► Publisher Atlantic Books

❖ **Turns out becoming a** werewolf can really derail your life plan. Poor Brian dropped out of college after getting cursed, abandoning his former ambitions to do the bare minimum in a restaurant job and turning to Grindr hook-ups instead of trying for anything more committed. After all, when you wolf out once a month, what's the point?

Then he meets Tyler. Rich, good-looking and supremely confident, Tyler's everything Brian wants to be – and he promises to change Brian's life. He's starting a werewolf-only members club, offering personal training sessions, life-coaching, and a little build-your-own-werewolf-dungeon support. In exchange, Brian will handle the admin... and recruitment.

Inevitably, things go a bit Jordan Peterson slash *Fight Club*. It's a really smart take on toxic masculinity – or, in this case, toxic lycanthropy. Author Tony Santorella makes sure to demonstrate how seductive these kinds of cults can be; how they might even seem to help people, at least to begin with. Brian is also incredibly relatable. His struggle to come out as a werewolf would be too obvious a metaphor if it weren't for the fact that he absolutely knows that, too. This is an intelligent, big-hearted novel that perfectly captures both the horror and ennui of existing in

2023. Sarah Dobbs



RELENTLESS MELT

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

256 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Jeremy P Bushnell

► Publisher Melville House Publishing

❖ **Jeremy P Bushnell's third** novel looks, at first glance, like a slightly generic, Lovecraft-tinged urban fantasy. Like its protagonist, however, there's more to *Relentless Melt* than meets the eye.

By day Artie Quick works in department store Filene's. By night she puts on her missing brother Zeb's clothes and attends a class in criminal investigation. She gets the chance to put her new skills to practical use when girls start going missing in the area, and soon Artie and her occultist friend Theodore find themselves entangled in a sinister supernatural mystery.

Bushnell reimagines early 20th century Boston as a fundamentally romantic city, all magic colleges and detective night classes. Still, there's a real darkness here that stops the book from sliding too far into whimsy. His protagonists are compelling and likeable, and there's some potent stuff about Artie discovering her true gender identity.

That feels like the heart of the novel and it comes to a satisfying – if sequel-baiting – conclusion, but also occasionally gets a little lost amid the rambling central plot, which takes a good while to kick into gear. The book could be tighter, then, but you get the sense that the author is enjoying hanging out with these people. And, to be fair, you'll probably like spending time with them too. Will Salmon

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks is historical fantasy **ORDINARY MONSTERS** (★★★★★,

22 June, Bloomsbury);

written by JM Miro (real name Steven Price), it's the first entry in his series *The Talents*. Spanning

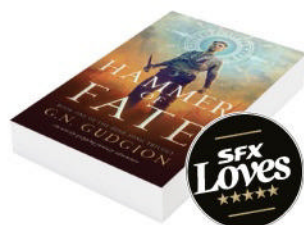
Victorian London, Edinburgh, the American South and Japan, it revolves around an institute where children with unusual abilities (from healing and invisibility to a boy who's accompanied by a golem made of decaying flesh) have been collected. We said: “Miro's storytelling exudes confidence and assurance... a thrilling blend of fantasy and horror, richly imagined and masterfully executed.” Stephen Baxter's latest, **THE THOUSAND EARTHS** (★★★★★ 22 June,

Gollancz), interweaves two story threads: one centres on a 22nd century astronaut whose interstellar round-trip will

(thanks to time-dilation) send him five million years into the future; the other an inhabitant of one of the “Thousand Earths”, a land facing inescapable destruction thanks to erosion. We said: “Science fiction on a gigantic scale... a worthwhile and satisfying portrait of humanity's potential future.” Finally, our reviewer wasn't that impressed by Stephen King's **FAIRY TALE** (★★★★★, out now,

Hodder), the tale of a 17-year-old boy who inherits the keys to a parallel world where good

and evil are at war. We said: “It's the earlier stages, in the real world, that contain the real King magic... The fantasy sections feel laboured.”



HAMMER OF FATE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

463 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author GN Gudgion

▶ Publisher Second Sky

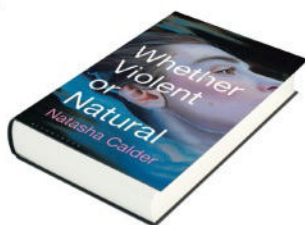
❖ **GN Gudgion's Rune Song** Trilogy kicks off in thrilling style with *Hammer Of Fate*. The story is set in a world modelled on medieval Europe, where power-hungry priests hunt heretics and an order of knights called the Guardians faces persecution from an avaricious king who is coveting their wealth.

In this world ruled by men, Adelais is a novice sister in the Ischyrian faith, which secretly worships the old pagan gods. Seeking to escape to her distant northern homeland, she becomes entangled in the struggle for possession of a sacred relic that the Guardians hope to protect from the sadistic inquisitors issued by the church.

Adelais is a terrific lead – passionate, intelligent and far more independent than her patriarchal society allows. The pace is fast, the prose bright and colourful, and the plot heavy with suspense. Despite the Guardians' lofty ideals about chivalry, battles are bloodily violent.

Gudgion doesn't allow for sentimentality and there is a strong streak of tragedy in this world where life is fragile. In the face of oppression, Adelais emerges as a figure of hope, seizing joy where she can and refusing to break in the face of danger. Tackling big ideas about corruption, religion and faith, wrapped up in a rollicking adventure, this is first-class epic fantasy.

David West



WHETHER VIOLENT OR NATURAL

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

224 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

▶ Author Natasha Calder

▶ Publisher Bloomsbury Publishing

❖ **The near future. Kit lives** on an island, hunkered down in a prepper's well-stocked bunker beneath a tumbledown castle. Back on the mainland, Kit tells us, society has broken down. Antibiotics no longer work. Plastic-eating bacteria is rampant. Kit's one companion is Crevan, both father figure and someone, disturbingly, to whom Kit appears to be sexually attracted.

In broadest outline, Natasha Calder's solo debut – she previously co-wrote *The Offset* as one half of “Calder Szewczak”, with Emma Szewczak – could easily be mistaken for a generic exercise in dystopian fiction. Until, that is, a half-dead woman appears in waters off the island and the sense that Kit is an unreliable narrator begins to intrude. While Crevan's first instinct is to try to save her, Kit is deeply suspicious, even paranoid. As we eventually learn, he has reason to be worried.

Not that this is primarily a plot-driven novel. Rather, *Whether Violent Or Natural* is in great part an exercise in sustaining the single voice of someone who's deeply troubled. Perhaps inevitably, this means the book often flirts with a kind of gothic-tinged melodrama, but it's nonetheless hugely impressive, not least in the idea that infection and contagion can afflict both body and mind.

Jonathan Wright



CORMAN/POE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

143 pages | Paperback/ebook

▶ Author Chris Alexander

▶ Publisher Headpress Books

❖ **A rather late-arriving** product of the pandemic, this slim volume on Roger Corman's so-called Poe Cycle – a series of eight '60s films which either adapted Edgar Allan Poe stories, embodied his recurring themes, or were just cheekily marketed under his name – makes use of interviews with the director that were conducted during lockdown.

Each movie receives a synopsis – often a tad long-winded – around eight pages of Q&A, and an accessible two-page critique. They are already pretty well-documented, so there are no major revelations. The urbane Corman – who studied at Oxford and discusses his admiration for the likes of Ingmar Bergman and Luis Buñuel – is also too much of a gentleman for petty gripes.

Still, those who don't know the films inside out will find interesting tidbits, like a discussion of how the director worked around Boris Karloff's mobility issues, or an explanation of why he dubbed over Barbara Steele's voice (too “working class”, apparently).

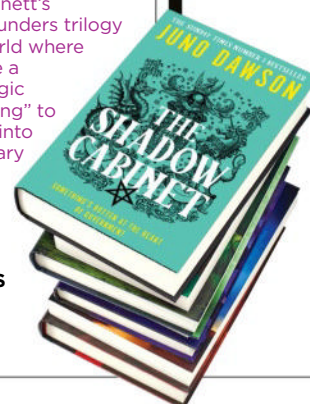
Appendices include a gallery of lurid posters, and scans of documents regarding the censorship of *Masque Of The Red Death*. Given the meagre page count and a lack of other voices, you couldn't call it comprehensive, and the asking price (£22.99) is pretty steep. Still, as contributions to culture go, it certainly beats batches of banana bread... Calvin Baxter

ALSO OUT

Originally self-published, Alexander Darwin's **THE COMBAT CODES** (out now, Orbit) is set in a world where the fate of empires is determined by warriors trained to compete in brutal single combat. (Funnily enough, we decide who's writing the next quiz page in similar fashion.) A rescue mission leaves a team of US soldiers, rescued hostages and a prisoner trapped in a suborbital craft in John Shirley's near-future thriller **SUBORBITAL 7** (out now, Titan), which we're told should appeal to fans of Tom Clancy and his ilk.

A siren assassin's investigations into a blackmailer threatening her sister lead her to become personal bodyguard to the Crown Prince in Gabi Burton's YA fantasy **SING ME TO SLEEP** (Hodder, 27 June).

The latest *Doctor Who*/Puffin Classics crossover (after stories featuring King Arthur, Oz and Robin Hood) is **REBELLION ON TREASURE ISLAND** (22 June, BBC Children's Books). Bali Rai's adventure sees the Eleventh Doctor and Clara investigating a theft from the Crown of King George. Long John Silver and River Song are both along for the ride... Turning to continuing series: there's a follow-up to *Her Majesty's Royal Coven*, Juno Dawson's book about a covert government department: **THE SHADOW CABINET** (HarperVoyager, out now). Insert political joke here. Finally, Robert Jackson Bennett's inventive Founders trilogy – set in a world where criminals use a sciencey magic called “scrying” to fool objects into acting contrary to the usual rules of physics – ends with third volume **LOCKLANDS** (out now, Jo Fletcher Books).





Ann Leckie

Sounds like the Hugo winner nearly wore out her library tickets...



What is your daily writing routine like?

► I try to write 1,000 words every morning, right after I walk the dog. This is more of an ideal than a reality – often the work I need to be doing is reading or thinking, and sometimes the writing is very slow. But that's how writing is, sometimes. I think it's good to have a routine, but not so helpful to hold yourself to it too strictly.

Do you listen to music?

► I do. Sometimes a project will have its own "soundtrack". Often the music is instrumental – something classical, or a movie soundtrack, or something ambient. When there are voices, I find that if I can understand the lyrics I have trouble actually writing.

How do you deal with writers' block or procrastinating?

► I generally assume that writer's block or an overwhelming need to put off writing has an underlying cause that needs to be addressed. Sometimes I'm just not ready to write a thing – the back of my mind hasn't done all the necessary work. Sometimes I find I need some sort of information or detail. So I usually deal with it by reading. I'll poke around library shelves

and pull down whatever seems appealing, and I nearly always find something helpful.

Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

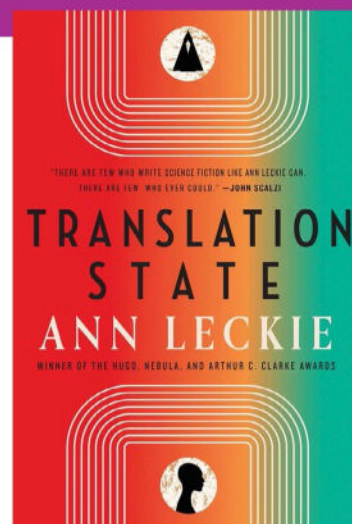
► Every book has something about it that makes it difficult to write. That said, the uncertainty surrounding my first novel *Ancillary Justice* was its own kind of difficult. I was doing so much work, very intensely, very seriously, and I had no confidence that anyone else would ever read it. It was entirely possible that all the work I was doing would be pointless. Looking back I can say that even if I'd never sold it, the work wouldn't have been pointless. But the uncertainty at the time was very stressful.

Were you a keen reader as a child?

► Oh, I read so much! I was at

“I was doing so much work, very intensely, very seriously”

the local library every single weekend, and I was intimately familiar with the science fiction shelf. Eventually I took to sneaking over to the adult section and browsing the shelves there, where I ran into any number of books that were probably too grown-up for me at the time. It's the library that introduced me to Andre Norton, who is definitely part of my writer-DNA. I also adored Lloyd Alexander's Prydain books, and Susan Cooper. The adult side introduced me to Patricia McKillip, and Mary Stewart's Merlin books.



What's the most frustrating thing about being an author?

► Probably the irregularity of income. Most things in life – bills, rent, whatever – are set up assuming that you get paid a fixed amount each month, but a writer gets (if they're lucky and their book earns royalties) a lump sum twice a year, and there's no predicting how much that will be. Otherwise it's advances, which these days are split into as many separate payments as a publisher feels they can get away with, so it can be spread over years. ●

Translation State is out now, published by Orbit.



Mary Stewart's tales of Merlin inspired young Leckie.

SUPERMAN: LOST

The Voyage Home



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Christopher Priest**

► Artist **Carlo Pagulayan**

ISSUES 1-3 It's 85 years since

Siegel and Shuster's pioneering superhero first appeared, and DC has plenty of celebratory Superman-related shenanigans heading our way – including this new 10-issue miniseries, which also accidentally proves that it's hard to go nearly nine decades without repeating yourself.

Separating Superman from Earth and sending him on an intergalactic adventure is an excellent idea, and one that was previously explored in the epic 1989 story "Exile". However,

while *Superman: Lost* may be a bit of a retread of older material, it also finds new territory to explore in Kal-El's latest space odyssey.

The basic concept is that a typical Justice League-related incident turns out to be anything but, and the Superman who returns to Lois Lane seemingly only minutes later has actually been away for two decades. Stranded alone in deep space, it's taken him years to get home, and these first three issues largely focus on the early stages of Kal-El's journey across the stars.

Writer Christopher Priest does a good job of balancing action and spectacle with quieter emotional moments, as well as exploring exactly how *massive* space is. After the opening issue, each chapter

showcases a different encounter Superman has on his journey home, using the episodic structure effectively while also featuring fun pulp sci-fi concepts such as space dolphins.

The lurid, energetic art from Carlo Pagulayan really helps give the story an engaging sense of scale and impact, and there are some impressive visuals, along with an eye-catching redesign of the classic Superman suit.

The series' most interesting aspect is also, frustratingly, one that currently feels a little under-explored. With the journey being told in flashbacks, Priest gets to deal with the journey's aftermath, and here we see a Superman who's been genuinely traumatised by years of solitude

“Does a good job of balancing action with quieter emotional moments”

and is now emotionally disconnected from his life.

The scene in issue one where a dazed, almost catatonic Superman returns to Lois's apartment is surprisingly affecting, and there's definite promise in Priest's approach to grounding such a big sci-fi concept. Issues two and three barely touch on this beyond a couple of pages, though, leaving the slight risk that the series might not give this plotline the attention it deserves.

However, there are still seven issues to go, and there's enough here to suggest that *Superman: Lost* will eventually sort this problem and find its way to a properly satisfying conclusion.

Saxon Bullock

i Priest had some success in the early '80s as a funk/soul musician, recording multiple albums under the name Hollis Stone.



MORIARTY: CLOCKWORK EMPIRE



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Titan Comics**

► Writers **Fred Duval,**

Jean-Pierre Pecau

► Artist **Stevan Subic**

ISSUES 1-4 While his name

heads up the title, Sherlock Holmes's archenemy doesn't actually turn up until around halfway through this four-parter. And despite its steampunk trappings including some sinister automatons, Fred Duval and Jean-Pierre Pecau's story is very much a traditional Holmesian tale.

With shades of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, the sleuths are pitted against Dr Jekyll and a fearsome, Hulk-like Mr Hyde, who present them with an intriguing locked room-esque scenario. There are also appearances from or allusions to a young Winston Churchill, Queen Victoria, Alfred Nobel, Nikola Tesla and John Merrick.

Considering Holmes's penchant for explaining his deductions, you can forgive the occasional bit of exposition, while there are also plenty of near-wordless action sequences for Stevan Subic to illustrate. He brings a visceral grittiness to the Victorian milieu, which is further enhanced by Scarlett's moody colours.

Clockwork Empire was initially published by Delcourt, and it's a shame that the original French album format has been replaced by US-style floppies, but there's always the collected edition to look forward to. **Stephen Jewell**





FURY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Al Ewing

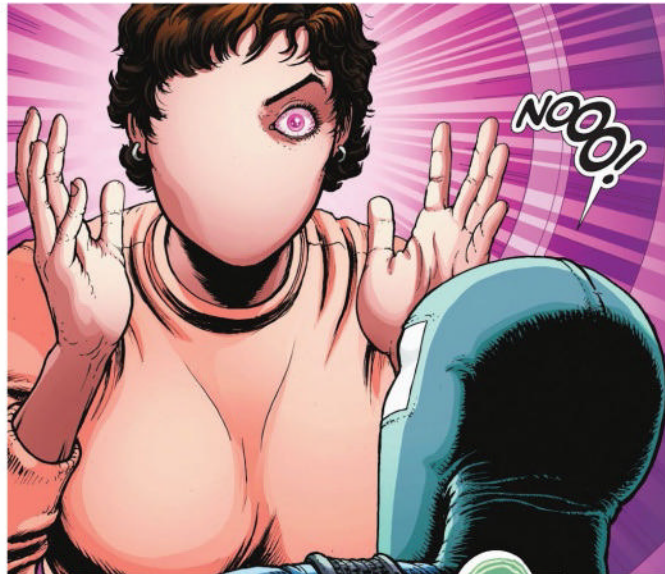
► Artists Scott Eaton, Tom Reilly, Adam Kubert, Ramon Rosanas

ONE-SHOT It's 60 years since everybody's favourite tough-talking, eyepatch-wearing superspy made his first comic book appearance, and Marvel is toasting six decades of Nick Fury with a new one-off special.

Unlike virtually every other recent anniversary one-off, this doesn't go the anthology route. Instead, writer Al Ewing serves up a largely self-contained tale that hops between the modern day, the Second World War and the swinging '60s, while also reuniting the original Nick Fury and the current Samuel L Jackson-inspired Nick Fury Jr for some properly old-school Marvel intrigue.

The plot sees Fury Jr facing off against the mysterious Scorpio, and the special is at its most fun when embracing the melodramatic excesses of previous Nick Fury comics. Star of the show is the full-on homage to Jim Steranko's groundbreaking '60s Fury tales, with a gleeful amount of wild action and even wilder visuals, while we also get an effective WW2 adventure with strong art from Adam Kubert.

Much of this 40-page special is an entertaining ride, but it's less effective when trying to resolve the weirder elements of the character's recent history (like his lengthy stay on the Moon). A fumbled, slightly anticlimactic conclusion leaves this as a character tribute that's great fun, but doesn't quite hang together as well as it could. **Saxon Bullock**



It was a particularly easy game of Guess Who?

UNSTOPPABLE DOOM PATROL

Strange Crew

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC Comics

► Writer Dennis Culver

► Artist Chris Burnham

ISSUES 1-3 Their TV incarnation may have concluded, but the endearingly freakish Doom Patrol show no signs of going anywhere, and they've now acquired a higher-profile role in the DC universe with this new seven-issue miniseries.

The set-up is that the Doom Patrol are acting as metahuman "first responders" to assist the unusual superheroes created during the recent Lazarus Planet event. This pitches them against heroes like Batman and the Green Lantern Corps, while a government conspiracy is planning to bring down the Patrol from within.

Writer Dennis Culver throws in fun set-pieces and lively action across these first three issues, as well as a ton of DC continuity references. As an offbeat

superhero title, this is fairly entertaining, but as a *Doom Patrol* comic – especially one that opens with the line "Things are about to get weird" – it just isn't anywhere near strange or inventive enough.

The frequent callbacks to Grant Morrison's classic (and utterly bonkers) run on the series make this even more glaring. *Unstoppable Doom Patrol* doesn't ever feel surprising, instead relying on standard superhero comic plotting and a handful of mildly kooky ideas.

There's magnificent art from regular Morrison collaborator Chris Burnham, who brings a level of gorgeous invention and mood to the story. It's just hard not to wish he was being let loose on a comic that properly lived up to Doom Patrol's bizarre history, rather than an adventure romp that seems genuinely nervous about the idea of getting too weird.

Saxon Bullock

i *Doom Patrol* creator Arnold Drake was convinced for decades that *X-Men* was a rip-off of his comic's central concept.



BETSY BRADDOCK: CAPTAIN BRITAIN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Tini Howard

► Artist Vasco Georgiev

ISSUES 1-3 While her name's in the title, Betsy Braddock's first solo book is actually more of a group effort, with the supporting cast including not only her brothers Brian – now calling himself Captain Avalon – and Jamie, and her partner Rachel "Askani" Summers, but yet another Captain Britain in Faiza Hussain. With the series spinning out of last year's *Knights Of X*, it's advisable to read the numerous text pages to catch up on the often convoluted past occurrences.

With Betsy having controversially refused to make the Union Jack part of her costume, Tini Howard gets in some wry political satire, opening issue one as she is grilled by a GB News-style channel about her right to be Captain Britain.

Harking back to Alan Moore and Alan Davis's classic '80s run, Betsy is pitted against the Furies, while Mad Jim Jaspers and Saturnyne are unseen but significant presences. Howard also resurrects the multiverse-spanning Captain Britain Corps, bringing back the bizarre Britannica Rex.

With Captain Peggy Carter appearing in issue two, the first three issues feel quite episodic, although with both Doctor Doom and Iron Man waiting in the wings, it seems that main villain Morgan Le Fey's scheme is coming together. This is a Captain Britain you'll be happy to call your own. **Stephen Jewell**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: GOLLUM

Save your precious time



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also on PlayStation 4, Xbox Series

X|S, Xbox One, PC, Nintendo Switch

► Publisher Daedalic Entertainment

VIDEOGAME Tolkien's Middle-earth stories are of course timeless fantasy classics, which unfortunately makes playing this dated licensed game from indie German studio Daedalic all the more painful to grind through.

Set just before *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, *The Lord Of The Rings: Gollum* fills in the gaps of its title character's backstory, answering the question of what he was up to while being held captive at Barad-Dur and Mirkwood respectively.

This was a question no one was really asking in the first place, and for good reason, as it turns out the answer boils down to a lot of

manual prison labour (manifested here in the form of laughably trite minigames), alongside awkward stealth sequences in which Gollum tries to make his escape as well as infuriating platforming.

The result is two dozen hours of lethargic, low-stakes storytelling that struggles to justify its existence in the tapestry of Tolkien's universe, even when fleshing out the source material's ancillary lore with original characters and locations.

There are some interesting ideas here, particularly in the way the game explores some of the nuances of Gollum's duality with a degree of empathy for his plight, but much of that writing suffers from production values that continually fall short of modern expectations.

Gollum's voice actor also struggles to bring his own take to the character without making

overt homages to Andy Serkis's legendary performance.

All these problems might be more forgivable if *Gollum* was fun to play and easy on the eye, but it's neither, being bogged down by flat and blurry visuals, derivative and frustrating gameplay and a substantial list of bugs, which range from merely distracting to completely game-breaking.

Daedalic's clear love for the source material just isn't enough to keep this unexpected journey from floundering at every step of the turn. There's an interesting game somewhere in here, one rooted in a rich character study of a tragic figure tortured by his own psyche, but it never emerges to form an experience worth playing for anyone but the most zealous Tolkien fans. **Alex Avard**

i The first Middle-earth videogame was 1982's *The Hobbit*, a text adventure for the ZX Spectrum.



DOCTOR WHO: THE ARK



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

133 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA Big Finish's latest archaeological exploration of Tom Baker's debut season sees them dramatising the John Lucarotti scripts reworked as 1975 classic "The Ark In Space".

Script editor Robert Holmes stripped them for parts, taking the central idea of an ark ship full of humans in cryogenic suspension, plus elements like bodily transformation, a subsidiary ship and Sarah Jane squeezing through a ventilation duct. The rest was binned.

You can understand why – light years from Lucarotti's historical adventures for William Hartnell, it's deeply odd. For one thing, the writer seems to have had balls on the brain, giving the episodes titles like "Golffball" and "Puffball". The latter – a mushroom the Doctor happens to have been growing – plays an improbably major role in saving the day. And the alien menace – a floating head whose voice brings to mind Roy Hattersley's *Spitting Image* puppet – is bizarre. Tom Baker responds by trying to outdo the script's eccentricity; at times you wonder if he's on the gin.

It's an interesting curiosity, with the odd striking moment, like a human duplicating by parthenogenesis. But it can't hold a candle to the televised story, lacking its initial mystery, disturbing body horror and weird insectoid aliens. Fans' main takeaway will be renewed appreciation for Robert Holmes's genius. **Ian Berriman**



"Yesss my preciousss, I – I can't be bothered."

STAR TREK: RESURGENCE

Taking Resolute action



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also on PlayStation 4, PC, Xbox Series X|S

► Publisher Bruner House

VIDEOGAME *Star Trek* fans know

it's never *just* a mining dispute. Mourning fresh loss, the USS Resolute is roped into mediating between the Hotari and the Alydians, only for a certain crystalline combatant to emerge at the heart of the conflict with body-snatching designs on, well, everything in sight.

Faithful touches are peppered throughout, from gameplay that sees you scanning the environment with your tricorder and whipping out your phaser to chapter headings presented in a show-accurate font. The crew

staring down this existential threat is all new, with familiar faces later joining the fray. The playable protagonists navigating this sticky situation are Jara Rydek, a first officer fresh aboard, and capable but cocky engineer Carter Diaz, looking in from the lower decks.

Both characters must choose their words carefully, making tough calls through dialogue choices, and juggling relationships amid rapidly escalating stakes. Drop the ball with this supporting cast one too many times and there's no guarantee they'll have your back when it counts.

This focus on relationships offers a reliable well of tension as the situation deteriorates, and the chain of command strains. Body-snatching baddies are well-trodden territory, but the



"Join Starfleet, they said. Have fun, they said."

majority of choices you can make as Rydek and Diaz avoid offering too many easy answers, thanks in part to how crewmates react to your decisions.

It's all a little rough around the edges, though. For a start, character models and animations are as stiff as a freshly-starched Starfleet dress uniform. There are missing and inaccurate subtitles,

and graphical glitches that can obscure key button prompts. But despite these gripes, gameplay remains welcoming to both seasoned gamers and newbies, making this arguably one of the best *Star Trek* stories currently available to play. **Jess Kinghorn**

i Also available: *Star Trek: Resurgence*, a five-part comics miniseries from IDW which serves as a prequel to the game.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

DIY Hero



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Format Nintendo Switch

► Publisher Nintendo



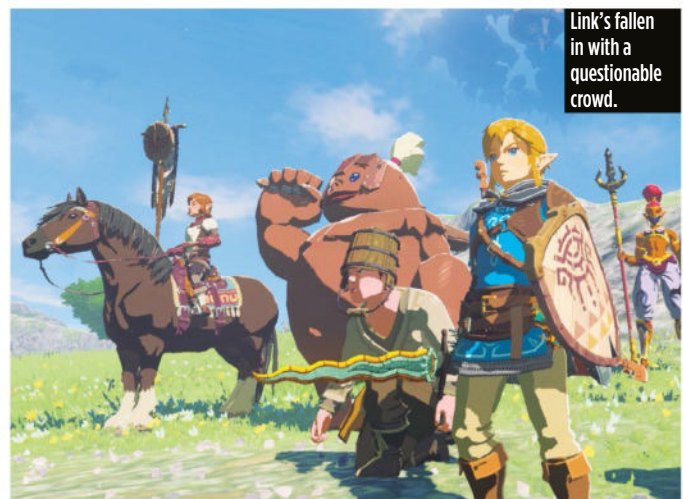
Tears Of The Kingdom returns players to *Breath Of The Wild*'s massively open fantasy world, Hyrule.

With a new evil corruption having spread (and the titular Princess once again missing), the land has changed, with both sky and underground parts of the map now opened up. Your tools to master this world have also transformed.

Creativity extends to gluing together your own gear, whether that's putting floor spikes on a long stick to make a deadly rake, or the more bizarre addition of enemy eyeballs to arrows for homing shots. Your curiosity is always rewarded.

VIDEOGAME *You've set your sights*

on reaching a tower surrounded by fortified spikes. You could rummage through your backpack to assemble a hot air balloon. Or make do with a fan and a steering knob. A series of springs to launch yourself high, then sail across with your handheld glider? A rocket attached to your shield! Or just cut down trees for a very, very long bridge. Even if your masterplan to conquer this or many other enticing challenges fails, it's a joy to tinker.



Link's fallen in with a questionable crowd.

The message is clear: get out there and have fun. Even the main quests only point you in a direction. Ignoring those and just exploring wherever takes your fancy yields results. On a whim, entirely unprompted, we explore a gloom-riddled tree and stumble on a major side boss. Open worlds may seem rote in gaming these days, but nobody else truly makes

one feel as brilliantly, genuinely open for your own adventure. Make no mistake, this is *your* adventure, from the hard-won battles with swords attached to bigger swords, to the moments of genius gone hilariously wrong.

Oscar Taylor-Kent

i This is only the second time an incarnation of Link has returned for a home console sequel (the last was *Majora's Mask*).



MOTORCYCLES

Get your motor running and head out on the highway as we test your knowledge of bikers and their hogs

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

Which TV series was centred on a former motorcycle cop called Jesse Mach?

QUESTION 2

In which *Star Trek* movies do we see James T Kirk riding a motorcycle?

QUESTION 3

Which horror movie features an all-female motorcycle gang called the Cycle Sluts?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this movie.

QUESTION 5

What brand of motorcycle does Arnold Schwarzenegger's T-800 ride in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*?

QUESTION 6

Which film features a biker gang with members called Toecutter, The Nightrider, Mudguts and Cundalini?

QUESTION 7

What's so unusual about the Colonial motorcycles seen in *Galactica 1980*?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode.

QUESTION 9

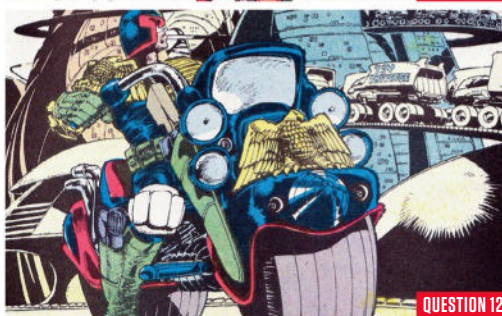
Which British horror film was released under the title *The Death Wheelers* in the USA?

QUESTION 10

In the motorbike chase in *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, what does Indy use to take out the Nazis pursuing him?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 11

Name the stunt motorcyclist who was the original Ghost Rider.

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

What's the name of this character's motorbike?

QUESTION 13

What's out of the ordinary about the bikers in *The Twilight Zone* episode "Black Leather Jackets"?

QUESTION 14

Name the Roger Corman-produced post-apocalyptic movie which features laser-packing dirt bikes called Death Machines.

QUESTION 15

In *The Matrix Reloaded*, which character rides a Ducati 996 during the motorway chase scene?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Supply the title missing from this movie poster.

QUESTION 17

Which 1971 biker horror had this tagline? "This gang thought it was tough... 'til it found a new type of hell... THE BRIDE OF SATAN!"

QUESTION 18

Which was the first film to show Batman riding a motorbike?

QUESTION 19

In *Batman & Robin*, who rides a motorcycle known as the Batblade?

QUESTION 20

Sylvester McCoy's Doctor rode a motorbike in two different *Doctor Who* stories. Name both.

Answers
1 Street Hawk 2 Star Trek and Star Trek Beyond 3 Chopper Chicks in Zombietown 4 Akira 5 Harley-Davidson 6 Mad Max 7 They can fly 8 "The Bells Of Saint John" 9 Psychomania 10 A flagpole 11 Johnny Blaze 12 The Lawmaster 13 They're really aliens 14 Deathsport 15 Trinity 16 I Bought A Vampire Motorcycle 17 Werewolves On Wheels 18 Batman (1966) 19 Batgirl 20 "Delta And The Bannermen" and "Survival"

How did you do?

How powerful is your mental engine?

0-5
50cc

6-10
125cc

11-15
300cc

16-19
600cc

20
1,000cc

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

WELCOME, FOOLISH MORTALS!

HAUNTED MANSION

There's always room
for one more...



MEG 2: THE TRENCH
Shark just got real

BLUE BEETLE
Not actually a beetle, probably not technically blue

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE DEMETER
More water-based mayhem

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
Heroes in a half-shell

STAR TREK
Pretty much a given, isn't it?

PLUS!
Doctor Who! Dysfunctional families! Doom!

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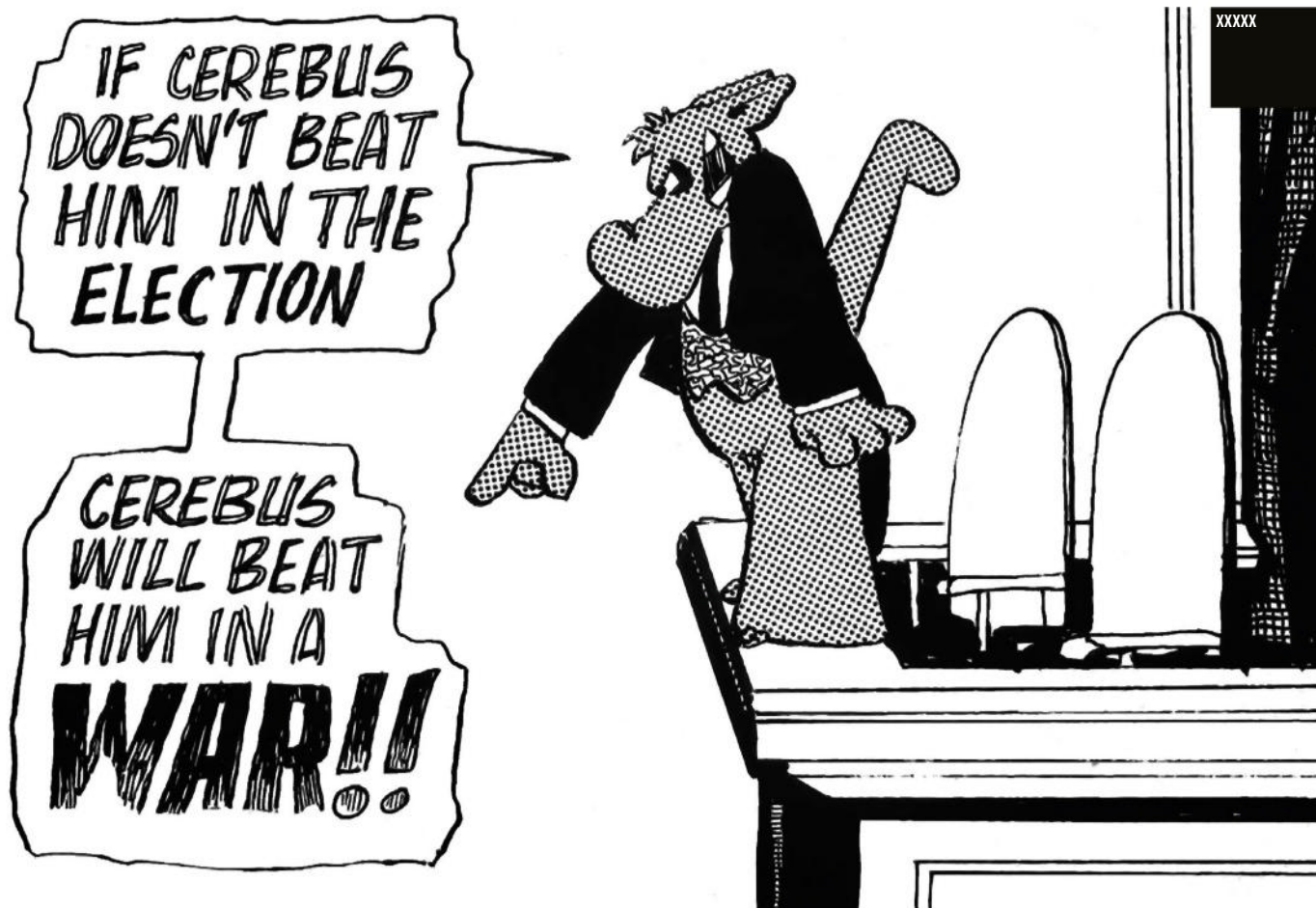


Sign up to our monthly newsletter to receive a sneak preview! bit.ly/SFXnewsletter

All contents are subject to change, like if we go to France it'll suddenly be *Phantom Manor*.

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Cerebus: High Society

Saxon Bullock, freelance writer



It was the cover that grabbed my interest. The first time I saw a copy of “High Society” – volume two of the indie comics epic *Cerebus* – I was in a comic shop in 1989, and I didn’t know what I was looking at. Most comics scream for your attention, but “High Society” was enigmatic: a chunky, 500-page black-and-white collection with no blurb on the back, just a wraparound cover showing a weird-looking animal (wait, was that an armadillo?) arriving at a massive building.

Going the mystery route is understandable, since *Cerebus* is almost impossible to classify. A 300-issue story self-published by writer/artist Dave Sim between 1977 and 2004, it started as a *Howard The Duck*-influenced

fantasy spoof (the basic pitch: what if Conan the Barbarian was a talking armadillo?) but soon evolved into something infinitely stranger and more challenging.

Cerebus is both wildly experimental and – in its later years – frequently controversial... but it’s also hysterically funny when it wants to be, and it’s never funnier than in “High Society”. This 25-issue arc, published from 1981 to 1983, follows the titular armadillo as he arrives at the high-class Regency Hotel and gets swept up in a political comedy of errors.

It’s also where the comic moves beyond the simple spoofery of its first volume (which it really helps to have read). Instead of just aiming at pulp fantasy or superhero clichés, “High Society” explores the dark absurdities of the political process, while cranking up the

slapstick and delivering some surprisingly emotional moments.

The result plays like a subversive cross between a Terry Pratchett novel, *The West Wing* and the 1933 Marx Brothers movie *Duck Soup* (especially since supporting character Lord Julius is Groucho Marx in all but name). Few comic artists can match Sim for his ability to perfectly pace a gag, and these 25 issues are a jaw-dropping achievement in comic-book comedy storytelling.

The rest of *Cerebus* may be a wild rollercoaster (with incredible highs and deeply frustrating lows), but “High Society” is the one volume I keep coming back to. ●

Saxon voted for the Palnan Goat, and he’s not proud of it.

Fact Attack!

→ Due to a medical condition, Dave Sim is unable to draw any more, but still produces *Cerebus*-related comics using older artwork.

→ *Cerebus* appeared in the original *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* comic series in 1986 (and was both drawn and lettered by Sim).

→ *Cerebus* also crossed over with Image Comics superhero *Spawn* in 1993, in a fourth wall-breaking issue that was guest-written by Sim.

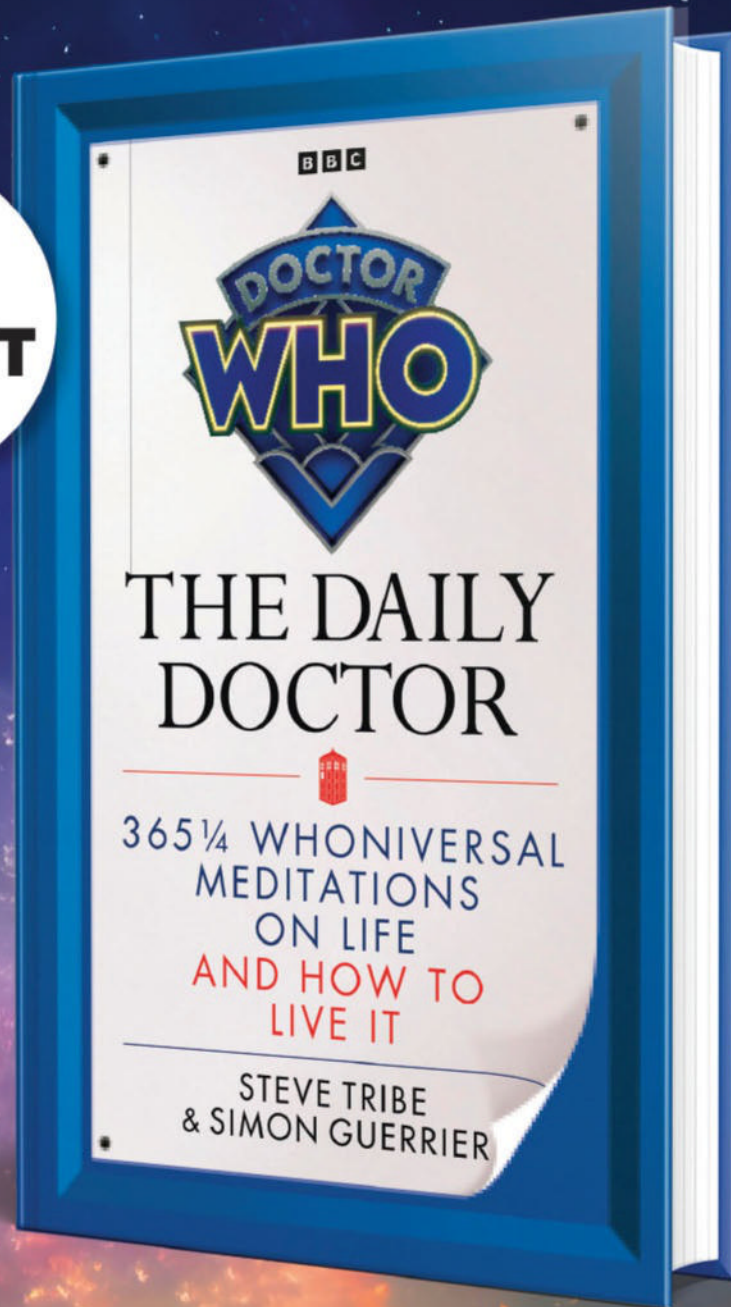
→ During the mid-’80s, DC was in serious negotiations with Sim to buy the rights to *Cerebus*, but the deal eventually fell apart.

→ People who have appeared as *Cerebus* characters include Oscar Wilde, Margaret Thatcher, Woody Allen and Mick Jagger.

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**OUT
AUGUST**



'I'm a Time Lord. I've been around, you know.
Two Hearts, respiratory bypass system.
I haven't lived seven hundred and fifty years
without learning something...'

THE DOCTOR

WELCOME

to the dark side of

HAPPILY EVER AFTER



'VINTAGE,
TIMELESS
KING'

Guardian

'One of the
great storytellers
of our time'
Guardian

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