

370



THE CREATOR

AI VERSUS MANKIND



**STAR TREK:
LOWER DECKS**
THE USS CERRITOS CREW ARE BACK

GEN V
CLASS IS IN SESSION FOR
THE BOYS SPIN-OFF



DOCTOR WHO
THE EVIL OF THE DALEKS REBORN!
THE WINTER KING
ON SET FOR THE NEW ARTHURIAN FANTASY

THE LAST OF US
DESIGNING SEASON ONE

ULTRAVIOLET
CODE FIVE - WE'VE GOT LEECHES

SAW X
JIGSAW'S BACK FOR
ANOTHER GAME



EXCLUSIVE!

THE WALKING DEAD: DARYL DIXON

THE UNDEAD GO GLOBAL WITH WALKERS IN FRANCE

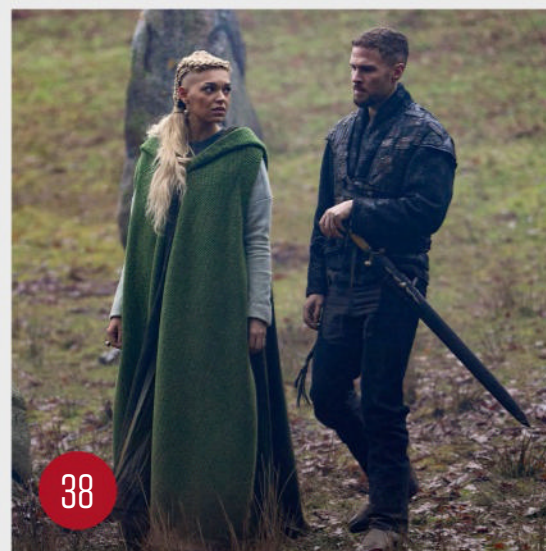
PLUS! STRANGE NEW WORLDS | THE X-FILES | HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS | NO ONE WILL SAVE YOU

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THE ORANGE TREE*

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The last page is out there.



GET IN TOUCH!

First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!



Kingsley Ben-Adir: not beyond our Ken.



STRANGE INVADERS

The Llama God, email I think the biggest indictment of Marvel's *Secret Invasion* is the fact that somehow it manages to make Kingsley Ben-Adir appear much less convincing as a reactionary anarchist revolutionary as Gravik than he does as one of the Kens in Barbie. Which is in no way a slight on the actor, but entirely down to the production team.

Also damning is the much more interesting story that's told in the "state of the world now" postscript montage, which should've been the story that was told by the series, instead of the suspense thriller that they went with instead – mostly on account of the fact that it was completely lacking in any suspense or thrills.

Now, having made my opinion known, I'm off to crouch by the front door, with a blood-test kit in hand...

SFX: Looking a little green around the gills there, Llama God. Are you sure you're feeling quite yourself?

NEW WORLD ORDER

Rob Graham, email *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* season two has been excellent. The *Lower Decks* crossover episode was the highlight and has now got me wanting a live-action *Lower Decks* series.

Robert MacDonald, email It's very rare for a TV series to capture the imagination of this somewhat world-weary viewer – so much streaming content, too little time – but *Strange New Worlds* has managed a rare feat and managed to outshine more than one of its predecessors.

Special mention must be given to Mr Mount's hair, which is Golden Globe-worthy for its ability to stay in place whatever the circumstances. Perhaps Wella et al should launch a new product range in its honour!

SFX: Pike For Men: where no mousse has gone before, perhaps?



The Meg 2 is a top notch Z-film, just with an A-film budget. It's crazy. Dumb fun. Also a distinct similarity to *Tremors 2*.

Michael Mamike Garner



All we need now is the *Blake's 7* reboot, with Michael Sheen as Blake and David Tennant as Avon.

@bigmitch7

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"Give us a moment, just mourning the loss of Chat"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ Loved *Cobweb* – thought it was an instant Halloween classic!

RANTS

→ Why was Halloween movie *Haunted Mansion* released in the height of summer?

→ Not many scares in *Insidious: The Red Door*.

Thank goodness for Dalton's enviable hair!

→ What on consecrated earth is happening with *The Last Voyage Of The Demeter* in the UK? Yes, you'd think we'd know. See also: *Salem's Lot*.



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ After nine years, I finally hired a handyman to put up some shelves so I can display my crate full of 40-odd Daleks. Now, which other variants can I buy...?

→ *Strange New Worlds* is The Nurse Chapel Show as far as I'm concerned. Jess Bush can communicate so much with just a look.

→ Congratulations to Ned Beauman, winner of this year's Clarke Award – and, back in the day, author of *SFX* reviews for things like *Inception*, *Hancock* and *Amazing Stories*!

→ Have become a bit obsessed with Polish film posters of old genre films. Google *Zemsta Kosmosu* and *Nie Oglądaj Się Teraz*.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ Gorgeous new artwork created for the 50th anniversary re-release of *The Wicker Man* by artist Richey Beckett.



ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RANTY RAVE

→ While I enjoyed *Baldur's Gate 3* for a while (shelving it for now until performance problems are fixed), I didn't think it was that much more groundbreaking than Larian's excellent previous games. If anything, the strictures of official *D&D* rules make it much fussier than, say, *Divinity: Original Sin II*. Still, great to see a proper old-school singleplayer RPG being so well received among the tons of multiplayer shooter dross.



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

→ Hugely enjoying Alistair McGown's *The Fanzine Book*, a brilliant celebration of early *Doctor Who* fandom – and yes, I'm in there among the cave paintings. An absolute Tipp-Ex high of nostalgia for anyone who lived their lives in A5.

→ Check out Paul Giamatti's Chinwag podcast. Monsters, mummies, UFOs and other goodness.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ *Strange New Worlds* season two was so much fun. Every character was elevated and all of the creative swings were worth doing.

RANTS

→ *The Last Voyage Of The Demeter* is a reverent, old-school retelling of an underexplored chapter of the Dracula story. It got unfairly dog-piled and is worth a watch.

Captain's Log



"Who was that terrible woman?"



The irony isn't lost on me when I say that I don't understand fans who moan about fandom. I'm doing it now! But if I had a glass of oaky Chardonnay for every time some joker said "Is *The Walking Dead*/insert other show name still going?" you wouldn't be able to make sense of what you're reading just now.

I'm so glad that the creative teams have found new and exciting ways to move the *Walking Dead* Universe out into the wider world and explore new stories. Similarly all the other genre shows we're lucky to have right now. Yes, even if I'm not personally a fan of all of them! Let people have their joy – not everything is made for you (or me).

At the same time that we have classic franchises like *Star Trek*, *The Walking Dead* and *Saw* moving into different territories, we've also got new adventures in the form of *The Creator*, *The Winter King* and *Gen V*. And that's just in the issue you're reading now, never mind the genre sphere in general. I wish we could make the magazine twice as big...

That said, we're heading into autumn/Fall/Q4 (depending on how you look at it) and there's even bigger things ahead – starting with our legendary Halloween horror issue next month! See you in four weeks, if you dare!

Darren X

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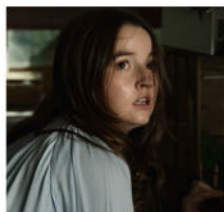


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MASTER OF HORROR

Go behind the scenes on “The Puppet Asylum” in *Otto Baxter: Not A F***ing Horror Story*

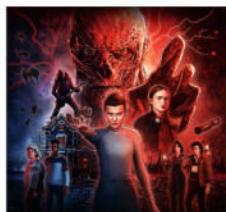
Highlights



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NO ONE WILL SAVE YOU

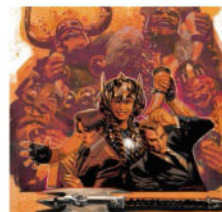
→ Home invasion, but with aliens. But who was really here first? Grey rights!



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HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS

→ Get the scoop on Universal's haunted houses for 2023.



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AVENGERS INC.

→ “Miss Van Dyne, we’re needed!” The Avengers are here, but probably not the ones you were expecting.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Little Grey Men

Director Brian Duffield puts actress Kaitlyn Dever through her paces in sci-fi thriller **No One Will Save You**

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

LOOK AT SCREENWRITER Brian Duffield's last decade of work and you'll see that he's carved out a particular niche writing witty, emotional sci-fi and horror screenplays. *The Babysitter* (2017), the underrated *Underwater* (2020) and most recently Netflix's animated *Skull Island* all reflect his signature style of snark with smarts. In 2020, his directing aspirations were finally realised with the black comedy horror *Spontaneous*, and now he's following it up with the 20th Century Studios' sci-fi thriller *No One Will Save You*.

What's it about? "It's if *Close Encounters* interrupted *Far From Heaven*," he laughs when describing it to Red Alert. "I'm still kind of working out why there's that fusion in my mind between the two, and maybe that's something only I would feel like is a movie that would be really fun. But it was like two separate things that I kind of rudely mashed together."

GREYS ANATOMY

No One Will Save You stars BAFTA-nominated actor Kaitlyn Dever (*Booksmart*, *Dopesick*) as Brynn Adams, a character Duffield describes as a "recluse" with a tough backstory. "She lives in her mom's house, who passed away before the events of the movie," he says. "She's alone and has a small online business making dresses. She seems happy. But there's definitely some elements there of wishing she had more of a community. So her house is really kind of her whole world."

And then "they" arrive; "they" being aliens. "It's not too much of a spoiler because 10 minutes in you realise what's going on and there's a lot of aliens," he explains. "The movie starts off when she hears something go bump in the night, and it's playing coy as you get little glimpses. Then soon enough, you stop getting glimpses and you just get the full show. The story and the hook of the movie is what happens from there."

Duffield says the idea had been percolating in his brain, in different iterations, since 2019. But he formally pitched the premise as it is now to Dever in early 2021. A big fan of the actor, the director also asked her to come aboard as an executive producer, because she *is* the movie.

"She's the only human on screen for at least 80% of it," he says. "She's in every single shot, and if she's not in the shot, it's because it's her point of view. A big part of the hook of the movie is that her character is the last kind that usually gets to be in this kind of movie. She's extremely unequipped and out of her element."

"Beyond being a powerhouse of an actor, you haven't really seen Kaitlyn have to be physical," Duffield says, explaining why he cast her. "I really wanted someone that wasn't in the Marvel superhero world yet."

The movie is also an opportunity for the *X-Files*-loving Duffield to go all in with a story about Grey aliens (or Greys), whom he says are "weirdly underserved" in the films and TV shows that feature them. "There's not a ton of movies about Greys," he points out. "We would talk to people and they were like, 'Oh, it's another Greys movie.' But as soon as you go, 'What's another one?', it would take them a really long time to figure out."

"I wanted to go straight down the middle and build a culture of these fuckers," he laughs. "So, it's the Greys in that you're getting glimpses of something that you are pretty familiar with. Then as the movie takes its turns and reveals, pretty early on in the movie you [realise] this is usually where most movies end. The third act showdown of *Signs* is kind of our 15-minute mark."

Duffield promises a taut cat and mouse game between Dever's Brynn and the CG Greys. "She feels a little bit of injustice about these guys just walking in the front door and starting to fuck with her," he says of Brynn's point of view. "On the flip side, the Greys are very curious about her until they get frustrated with her. There's something about her that interests them."

"I can't think of another movie like it. It feels very lopsided and strange, but hopefully in a unique way." ●

No One Will Save You is on Disney+ in the UK and Hulu in the US from 22 September.

Writer/director Brian Duffield, with Kaitlyn Dever.



“I really wanted someone that wasn't in the Marvel superhero world yet”

► **SCI-FACT!** The first modern description of Grey aliens came with the UFO abduction story of Barney and Betty Hill in 1961.



CREATOR INTERVIEW

Otto Baxter on set with actor Adeel Akhtar (*Utopia*).

Puppet Mastery

Otto Baxter: Not A F*ing Horror Story** brings a unique new voice to the screen

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



“WHENEVER I TELL people I have been working with my friend who’s got Down Syndrome, helping him write and direct a film about his life, they all give me this sort of sad, condescending look,” says Peter Beard. “But when I say it’s a horror/comedy/musical set in Victorian London their faces light up because they weren’t expecting it!”

“We were keen to embrace that because it’s so typical of Otto – what you think you’re getting isn’t what you’re getting at all. He’s not asking for sympathy, he just wants to make his own film, and it will be funny and scary and everything else in-between.”

Made for Sky Documentaries, *Otto Baxter: Not A F***ing Horror Story* follows the 35-year-old movie lover as he writes and directs “The Puppet Asylum”, a short film – released alongside the documentary – that retells his life in macabre, allegorical fashion,

from birth in a bloody morgue to imprisonment in the bizarre asylum that gives the story its title.

“I like lots of different types of film but I love horror,” says Baxter, an advocate for disability rights as well as an actor and performer.

“My favourite films are the *Nightmare On Elm Street* series. Horror films always have the best characters in them – the best baddies – and as I was going to appear in the film, I knew I wanted to play someone ‘evil’ as they had the most fun.

“I got to use other actors who have Down Syndrome too, like Ruben [Reuter] who plays me as a teenager in the film and is brilliant and we became good friends. I hope more people with Down Syndrome get to do this.

“Making this film has been totally

mind-blowing. Everyone made me feel welcome and listened to.”

It’s the first time a major British broadcaster has commissioned a project of this scope from a filmmaker with Down Syndrome. And, crucially, it’s one that gives Baxter an unmediated voice, bringing his anarchic imagination to the screen intact.

“It was a real lesson for us,” says Beard, a producer on “The Puppet Asylum” and co-director with fellow BAFTA winner Bruce Fletcher of *Otto Baxter: Not A*

*F***ing Horror Story*. “If you say you want to hear from people that have different perspectives on life, who quite literally think differently, then you’ve got to back them and listen to them and not try to make it fit into ‘our’ world.

“I think the film is important because, while more and more actors with Down Syndrome are appearing on TV – which is great, because visibility is important – often their words are written by others. But this put Otto front and centre.

“All the best bits are Otto’s!” Beard reveals. “We had this really basic rule, which was if it’s Otto’s idea we would go with it. If he was going to be the writer and director,



Paul Kaye as the Master (not that one, but not far off).





“Making this film has been totally mind-blowing”

The Producers' written on the back of his director's chair – that's not something you see very often! He says what he feels, which is very refreshing.

“He is way, way more anarchic than I could ever be!” says Kaye – and for TV's former snotty prank merchant Dennis Pennis, that's quite an admission. “I'm a bit of a people-pleaser at the end of the day but he lives and breathes it.

“That punk energy was something that inspired me as a youngster – and this feels like a truly punk film. It feels like a [Derek] Jarman film. It has that sensibility about it. It's basically a ‘Fuck you, this is who I am’ from Otto. He is exorcising his demons to create something positive.”

“Also Otto has no filter. He's this very anarchic character and I loved his energy. It was extraordinary. I've never experienced anything like that on set before. I mean, he had ‘F**k

we had to support him no matter how strange it sounded. We needed to ensure we weren't imposing our neurotypical views on his idea. That took us to some interesting places.”

In “The Puppet Asylum”, Paul Kaye plays the Master, the villain of the piece. “He's this grotesque, fearsome character who embodies the trauma, fear, rejection and past discrimination in the life of Otto,” says Kaye. “The one consistent note Otto gave me was he wanted the Master to be as extreme as possible – he was very vocal about that. The viler and more brutal I made him, the more Otto loved it!

Every time I wanted to hold back a little, or be a bit more restrained, he wasn't having any of it.”

Kaye is quick to champion Baxter's talents as a filmmaker. “I think he's a brilliant storyteller, and so brave. He is essentially writing about himself – and that's completely exposing, and it's done without any self-pity. Not many people would have the courage to do that.

“Also Otto has no filter. He's this very anarchic character and I loved his energy. It was extraordinary. I've never experienced anything like that on set before. I mean, he had ‘F**k

*Otto Baxter: Not A F***ing Horror Story is in select cinemas from 1 September and on Sky Documentaries/NOW from 23 September.*



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Warner Bros chasing directors for big-screen version of Mattel's **Hot Wheels**, produced by JJ Abrams.

→ *Euphoria*'s Sydney Sweeney confirmed to play Julia Carpenter, aka Spider-Woman, in Sony's **Madame Web**.

→ Aussie horror **Talk To Me** gets a sequel, directed again by Danny and Michael Philippou.

→ Florence Pugh in the frame for Disney's live-action **Tangled**.

→ Maggie Gyllenhaal rumoured to be directing a remake of **The Bride of Frankenstein** with Christian Bale.

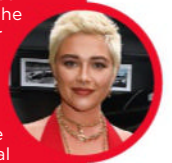
→ *Mission: Impossible's* White Widow Vanessa Kirby tipped to play Sue Storm in **Fantastic Four**.

→ *Happy Death Day* helmer Christopher Landon taking on **Scream 7** for Paramount.

→ Producer Charles Roven says **Uncharted 2** a possibility.

→ **Spider-Man: Beyond The Spider-Verse** bumped from 29 March 2024 release, with no new date announced.

→ Sony's **Kraven The Hunter** moving from 6 October 2023 to 30 August 2024.



➤ **SCI-FACT!** “The Puppet Asylum” has an original score by Sophie Ellis-Bextor collaborator Ed Harcourt.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Ghoul Power

Transport yourself into films, shows and videogames at **Halloween Horror Nights** WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

→ SHE STARTED HER CAREER AT Universal's theme park performing as the Bride of Frankenstein – except she had to watch her first horror film for research, as she wasn't a fan of the genre at the time. Now Lora Sauls is the queen of Halloween, working as one of the creative team at America's number one spooky season attraction, Halloween Horror Nights, which returns this month for its longest ever run of 48 nights at Universal Orlando.

During its 32 years of building after-hours screen-replica haunted houses, the event has often had first looks, but a house based on *The Exorcist: Believer* this year marks a first, Sauls

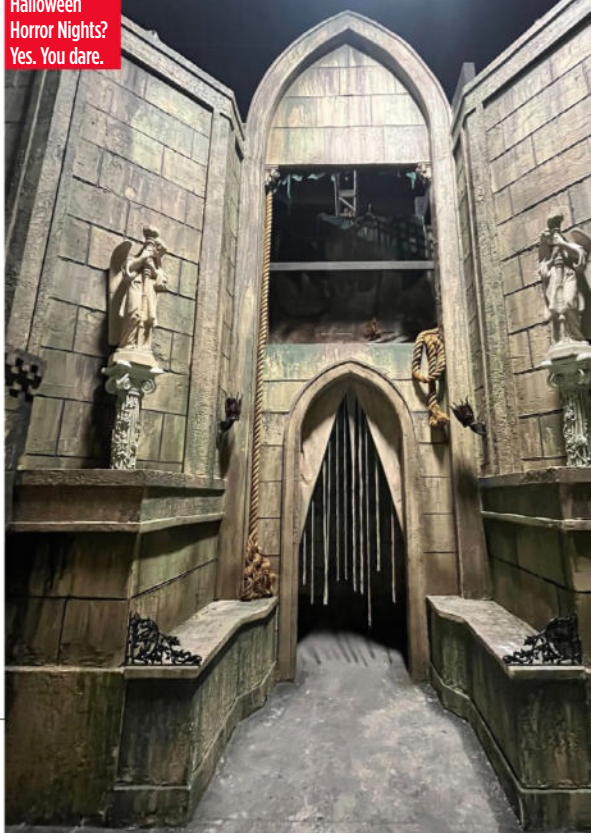
tells Red Alert: "Never in our history have we been seven weeks before the film opens. That's a huge distance."

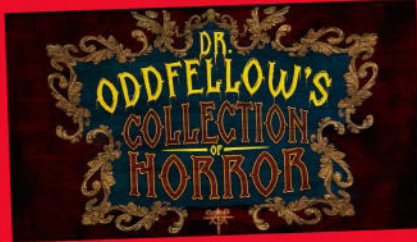
Everything was kept confidential to a select team, with a "back and forth" between Blumhouse about what could be given away. The result, she says, is "like a living trailer," but with an exorcism included.

"We couldn't do the demon they're doing, so they allowed us to explore a demon that was 'inspired by' – we got to do a couple of different looks," she adds.

Another house pits the Invisible Man, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, the Phantom of the Opera and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde against each

Dare you enter
Halloween
Horror Nights?
Yes. You dare.





other, as guests break curfew and explore the sewers below the Paris Opera House. Hyde, in particular, will be larger than life, at 7ft tall.

"We call them 'maniacal men'," Sauls says of them not all traditionally being killers. "But we're twisting that story too and putting a new horror layer to them. The Phantom is not just trying to find a mask to cover up his grossness, he's trying to find the perfect face to skin, to make a skin mask to cover up. It's much more elevated. There's a moment in this house where all of them are attacking you."

Chuck: Ultimate Kill Count is based on the Syfy series, but the team also got approval from *Child's Play* creator Don Mancini to acknowledge some of the famous kills from throughout the franchise.

Sauls says this house is "very unique" and plays on the meta side of Chuck. Simply put, the premise is that he's not happy that Universal aren't actually killing people in his house, so he possesses all the dolls inside. That would be 250 of them – oh, and an 8ft Chuck mascot with a chainsaw. You might be wondering how they're bringing them to life...

"Multiple ways," Sauls laughs. "We do have a fully realised puppeteer that will be the first

Chuck you see – his mouth moves, his eyes move, he's fully articulated. Then we have articulation in very unique and different ways..."

And for those canon purists, it's the real deal. "Brad Dourif did all of the voices for us. So he's saying exactly what we want him to say. It's amazing. It's incredible." Guests staying at Universal hotels will also be able to visit a special pop-up experience, Chuck's Twisted Playground, at Cabana Bay Hotel.

For *The Last Of Us* – based on *Part One* of the videogame series – Sauls says they worked "very closely" with Neil Druckmann and game developer Naughty Dog.

"He really wanted us to lean into the Pittsburgh part of the game – so you could be attacked by any of the infected, the runners, the clickers, the stalkers, the bloaters and hunters as you go.

"What they did with the TV show matches the videogame almost beat to beat, so we got a win out of that."

Again, authenticity is key, with the original game actors returning to the roles especially for the event. "Troy Baker and Ashley Johnson voiced all of our voiceovers for us, and they did new dialogue throughout the house."

A huge success – if ever there was an understatement – in previous years, *Stranger Things* returns with a house based on season four. Expect to see "almost all the kids, plus you have Vecna around every corner," Sauls says, noting that the villain will appear more than 10 times – including the moment where he's suspended and surrounded by vines.

"We leaned into Vecna's curse, and the Duffer brothers were really happy that we leaned into that side of the story. They wrote back, 'This is perfect. Thank you for understanding what we did.'"

"The cool thing about Vecna is our Universal Orlando's special effects make-up designers actually were on the Emmy-award-winning team that did Vecna for this series. So we were able to phone a friend and go, 'How'd you do this?' and they gave us some cool tips on how to realise him with a full mask and full body suit."

Will fans get to hear a certain Kate Bush song, though? "It's the question of the day!" Sauls laughs. "We hope to give the fans everything they want to see and hear..." ●


Halloween Horror Nights is at Universal Orlando until 4 November. Visit halloweenhorrornights.com.

SCI-FACT! Guests will also get to see Eddie and Dustin fighting off Demobats, as well as visit the Upside Down.

DIRECTOR INTERVIEW

Resistance Is Futile

Humanity pokes the hornet's nest as **Invasion** returns WORDS: TARA BENNETT

 HAVING SPENT TWO decades of his career writing and producing genre films around other people's characters, from the X-Men to Sherlock Holmes, Simon Kinberg made a monumental shift in 2021. With Apple TV+, Kinberg and David Weil (*Citadel*) created their own original episodic sci-fi epic in the shape of *Invasion*.

Featuring an international cast, including Golshifteh Farahani, Shamier Anderson, Shioli Kutsuna and, fleetingly, Sam Neill, season one of *Invasion* laid out the complicated, interconnected impact of a global alien invasion on Earth. Individual personal stories unfolded in Japan, Afghanistan, New York and London, then coalesced in a season finale that had humanity

gaining a desperately needed win by nuking the alien mothership.

Season two, which launched on 23 August, places the ensemble of characters four months post-invasion. But the aliens did not disappear. A battered humanity has come together to form the World Defense Coalition (WDC) to stop the aliens from terraforming the Earth's atmosphere for global takeover.

Joining the series as one of season two's primary directors and executive producers, Emmy-winner Alik Sakharov (*Game of Thrones*, *Ozark*) tells Red Alert that he was attracted by Kinberg's ability to make the high-concept, sci-fi series feel so universal.

"Everyone can relate and everyone can understand when a mother is on the run, and she's



India Brown (centre) returns as Jamila Huston.

trying to save her kids," Sakharov says. "That's a universal thing across all the cultures, across all the countries, across all the different groups. Or if the soldier is trying to fight the good fight, like Trevante Cole [Anderson]. Or if

the scientist is trying to find a solution, or a way to overwhelm our common enemy – universally you understand what that is. The only difference with *Invasion* is rather than us having some sort of terrestrial enemy, we have an



"Fire! They hate fire! Oh hang on... no they don't."



Shioli Kutsuna
as scientist
Mitsuki
Yamato.



And you
thought
pigeon crap
was bad.

“As the aliens continue their invasion, pockets of resistance across the world are emerging”

alive on the road, protecting their mysterious alien object from the military. Trevante is back in the US, wrestling with what to do with the alien knowledge he's gained. And Caspar's (Billy Barratt) connection to the aliens awakens.

As humanity rises up, Sakharov explains, a new player is the French Resistance-style Movement led by Chuck (Enver Gjokaj), a potential ally and mentor for the Malik. “As the aliens continue their invasion ‘acquiring’ territories, pockets of resistance across the world are emerging,” he says.

“The WDC is a structured way to unify whatever's left of the structured world to destroy the enemy. But then there is the Movement which is grassroots, vigilante, alien hunters. I don't know if they trust the WDC. I don't know if they trust the military. Yet, you feel like they have the right sentiment and idea in mind for what they want to do. The Movement is going to influence [the Malik] in a very particular way.”

Meanwhile, under the crashed mothership, Mitsuki must navigate

the demands of Dr Kapur (Shane Zaza), a mercurial disruptor funding study of the wreck. She proves to be the only human who can survive a powerful *Annihilation*-meets-*The Abyss* connection with a new alien, an Entity, made of light.

Sakharov says that the stunning on-screen realisation of the Entity was Kinberg's idea. “I left the input on the design largely in Simon's hands. I didn't want to contaminate that at all,” he says. “But what I wanted to do is to understand what it is that he's seeing. How does he want it to be projected?”

With the help of a storyboard artist, they plotted out how the Entity moves and what it wants. From there, production designer Simon Rogers and visual effects supervisor Erik Henry made it come to life. “They were key for me to understand that the aliens are evolving.”

By episode three, the knowledge Mitsuki has gained allows the WDC to hack cloaked alien transmissions, which gives humanity another major win. However, Sakharov teases that Mitsuki and Earth may suffer for their betrayal. “Aliens don't like losing!” he reiterates. “For every success that we have, be prepared to meet some challenges.”

Invasion is on Apple TV+.

extraterrestrial enemy. And that enemy forces us to unite for a purpose against them.”

Responsible for the first three episodes of season two, Sakharov says he worked closely with Kinberg to establish a new look and “more propulsive energy” for the series. He says episode one establishes a whole new tone by reintroducing scientist Mitsuki Yamato (Kutsuna) as a guerilla fighter on the ground in Osaka, battling deadly Hunter Killer aliens before she's scooped up by the WDC to use her alien signal knowledge to communicate with the downed mothership in Brazil. Meanwhile, Aneesha Malik (Farahani) and her two kids are now hardened survivors staying

Red Alert



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ *Solo's* Donald Glover and brother Stephen writing **Star Wars: Lando** series.

→ Fantasy-flavoured Bruce Lee anime **House Of Lee** in development, produced by daughter Shannon Lee.

→ Ryan Reynolds's Maximum Effort company rebooting classic '90s 'toon **Biker Mice From Mars**.

→ James Gunn reveals that season one of DC show **Creature Commandos** will be seven episodes.

→ New 2D animated series **Tales Of The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** set for Paramount+.

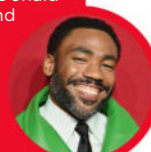
→ DC developing new animated movies of **Watchmen** and **Crisis On Infinite Earths**.

→ **Invincible** season two premieres 3 November on Prime Video, with the second half to follow in early '24.

→ Alex Lawther is the male lead in Noah Hawley's **Alien** series for FX.

→ Netflix reportedly scrapping plans for a live-action **He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe** movie.

→ *Cowboy Bebop's* Shinichirō Watanabe creating Toonami series **Lazarus** for Adult Swim.



SCI-FACT! Kinberg co-created *Star Wars Rebels* with Dave Filoni, and *The Twilight Zone* revival with Jordan Peele.



One of the variant covers, by Leinil Francis Yu.



Interior art from the first issue, by Leonard Kirk.



AFTER SCRIPTING THE *Wasp* miniseries earlier this year, Al Ewing is now spinning Janet Van Dyne out into her own ensemble title, although with the rest of its ranks being made up solely by the mysterious Victor Shade, *Avengers Inc.* could have the most compact of any Earth's Mightiest Heroes line-up.

"The team is a very small one, and is pretty much a duo, in fact, though I do plan to have a 'guest Avenger' every issue," says Ewing, who has taken a lead from the small-screen sleuths of shows like *Moonlighting* and *Elementary*.

"That's part of the idea behind the book – to do something that functions like a murder mystery TV show, with Jan and Vic in the protagonist roles, slowly building on their own plotlines, but also with a 'mystery of the week' element complete with celebrity guest stars. So if anything it's a showcase of Jan's ability to work with, and lead, just about anybody we can think of."

With Victor Shade being a former alias of the Vision, there's also much mystery surrounding Janet's partner-in-fighting-crime. "We're devoting the second issue

to shining a light on the possible connections between Vic Shade and the Vision – but time will tell how deep we will go," teases Ewing. "Vision is definitely connected – but we'll be dropping other hints as we go that maybe lead in a different direction."

Janet and Vic will also have a constant flow of suspicious deaths to solve. "It's really fun thinking of a new one every issue!" laughs Ewing. "The first issue is a kind of an outlier, in that it sets up the big

mystery that we're going to spend at least the first arc of the series unravelling, but after that every issue has a complete murder mystery in and of itself, and hopefully the readers will have fun following the clues and seeing if they can work it out."

"The model is definitely TV shows. My original pitch for this was 'What if the Avengers was *The Avengers*?' and while we ended up with something much more in the American TV model, the ghost of

the Steed and Mrs Peel dynamic does linger a little."

Ewing refuses to be drawn on the identity of any guest stars. "There's definitely going to be a familiar face joining the cast every issue," he says. "Part of the charm of this whole series – and I do want it to be very charming – is treating the Avengers who join us for an episode like celebrity guests, and really having fun with bringing in a new one every month to help solve the mystery. And Avengers history does play a big part in the central mystery at the core of the book."

Like Jan and Vic, Ewing has also struck up a partnership with artist Leonard Kirk. "Leonard's a brilliant storyteller and the more I let him loose to do his thing, the more I love what I see," he says. "He really captures the charm I was after, and he's also great at getting across the chemistry between Jan and Victor, as one thing Victor isn't is a cold, emotionless robot man. Which might give you some clues about who he really is... or not." ●

Avengers Inc. issue one is out on 13 September.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Sting In Her Tale

Murder is afoot as the Wasp and Vision join forces for **Avengers Inc.**

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

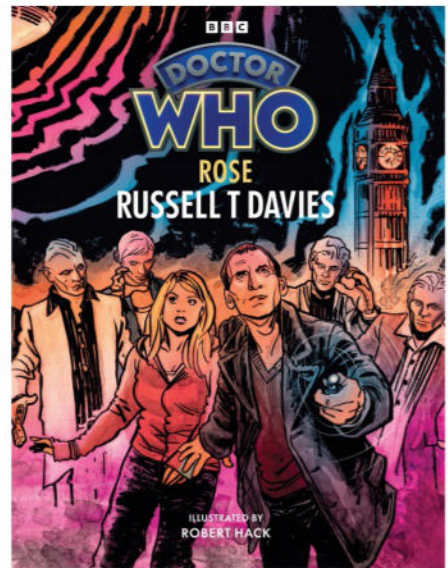


SPACE AND TIME

Celebrating 60 years of DOCTOR WHO



Fancy a sonic screwdriver? You'd best get saving.



Doctor Who @ 60: A Musical Celebration will be a special concert from BBC Hoddinott Hall in the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC Singers conducted by Alastair King. It will explore music from throughout the series and include special guests Russell T Davies (who must now have cloned himself) and Murray Gold.

◆ A special deluxe edition of Russell T Davies's *Rose* novelisation will be published by Penguin Books on 23 November. The hardback will be illustrated by Robert Hack.

◆ Second Doctor story "The Underwater Menace" is to be released on Blu-ray and DVD in November. The double-disc set will contain a completely new animation (in both colour and black and white) as well as existing episodes, a reconstruction, and archive material with new and previously released bonus features. ●

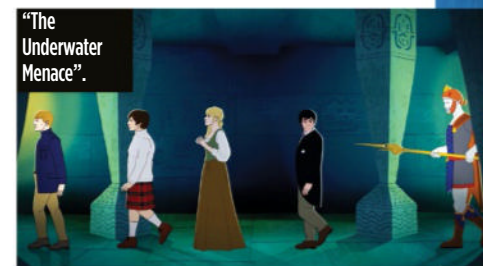
Doctor Who is on BBC One and Disney+ from November.



◆ Because one sonic screwdriver just isn't enough, Rubbertoe Replicas is releasing a limited edition version of the recently revealed Fourteenth Doctor's device. Made from over 60 parts, including a hand-stitched leather sleeve, the prop comes with a display base, a laser-etched plaque and a signed and numbered Certificate of Authenticity. No more than 500 pieces will be made available, at £1,198 plus shipping.

◆ Big Finish released the cover for the latest chapter in the *Doom's Day* multimedia event, an Eighth Doctor story called "Dying Hours" in which Jackie Tyler and the Silence appear. *Lost In Time*, the online *Doctor Who* game, also released art featuring the Doom character appearing on their platform.

◆ The music of *Doctor Who* will be the focus of a new BBC Radio 2 show due to air in the autumn.



► **SCI-FACT!** Designer Phil Sims and his team created 67 design sketches and concepts for the Fourteenth Doctor's sonic screwdriver.


CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Monster Fun

Ahoy Comics uncovers rare beasts in new anthology **Project: Cryptid**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**



 COINCIDING WITH Ahoy Comics' fifth anniversary, six-issue anthology *Project: Cryptid* highlights the mythical creatures that lurk in the shadows, beginning with issue one's "Wormy And Me" by Paul Cornell and PJ Holden, and "Ballroom Of Death" from Mark Russell and Jordi Pérez.

“The attraction to cryptids, for me, is that when you’re talking about cryptids, you’re talking about survivors – the few remaining members of a species who’ve managed to hold on despite the fact that we’ve managed to cover the rest of the world with 7-11s and parking lots,” says Russell.

"I see them as inspirational figures. My story is about a cryptid who's survived because they've chosen the most remote habitat imaginable, and yet people have somehow found a way to mess even that place up."

Paul Cornell explains that “I’ve been steeped in cryptozoology knowledge all my life. How many primary school children know about the Skunk Ape or the Beast of Bodmin Moor?” He adds that he was immediately drawn to “that most spectacularly-named of cryptids”, the Mongolian Death Worm. “I instantly wanted to turn that into a heart-warming ‘one cop and his pet’ story.”

“‘Wormy And Me’ is a sort of direct-to-camera spoof,” adds artist PJ Holden, “which suggested a naturalistic style – nothing too over-the-top, as the cryptids are a mostly friendly bunch. It’s less outright horror and more slightly goofy *Thor* and more slightly goofy *The Office*-style shenanigans.”

Another Cornell contribution to the series (drawn by classic British cartoonist Lew Stringer) is "The Adventure Of The Ambiguous Fairies", which features both Sherlock Holmes and his creator.

"I knew the ins and outs of the Cottingley Fairies backwards and tend to enjoy putting Holmes in a story where his death-trap rationalism will reveal something about the numinous nature of the matter at hand," he explains. "And Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took an interest in the Fairies case in real

life, so I got to have him in it too." Cornell was also instrumental in recruiting novelist Melissa F Olson to pen her first comic script for artist Lane Lloyd, centring around the little-known Hodag.

"Most people haven't heard of a Hodag, but it's mildly famous in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, which I grew up in," she says. "When I first pitched a Hodag story, I just thought it'd be a fun contrast with the big-ticket crvptids being featured."

"Once I started my research, however, I realised that you could discuss the entire timeline of European settlers in Wisconsin through the lens of Paul Bunyan and the Hodag. It really changed the way I look at cryptids in general, and the value of cryptid stories. That's how I ended up writing a comic about a modern-day family on a Hodag tour in Rhinelander, Wisconsin."

Illustrated by Steve Bryant, Alex Segura's contribution takes place in Miami. "It was specific to the area," he says. "My story focuses on sort-of-paranormal investigator Diana Montalvan, who is pulled into a case involving a rare bird [the ivory-billed woodpecker]," he says. "But things are often more complicated than that, and I wanted to explore the grey area between legend and fact, and how tricky that can be..." 🍷

Project: Cryptid issue one is out on 6 September.



► **SCI-FACT!** The first joint issue of *Battle Action* was published in July 1977, five months after the debut issue of *2000 AD*.



Judge Dredd
Magazine 460
cover art by
Henry Flint.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

War Games

Worlds collide as **2000 AD** and **Battle Action** unite

WORDS:
STEPHEN JEWELL

THIS YEAR'S landmark prog of *2000 AD* follows a "What if?" theme, conceived by writer Kenneth Niemand as follows: "What if an ailing *Battle Action* merged with *2000 AD* in the early '80s, and its strips that survived had to be *2000 AD*'ed-up to match the futuristic/otherworldly vibe?" With the 48-pager accompanied by a similarly themed issue of the *Judge Dredd Magazine*, expect to see Thrill-powered versions of *Battle Action* stalwarts like "Rat Pack" and "Dredger".

"It would mean that the war stories would get something of a sci-fi/fantasy makeover, so they fit in the prog," *2000 AD* editor Matt Smith tells Red Alert. "Major Eazy is repositioned as more of an Indiana Jones character, while 'Hellman Of Hammer Force' becomes 'Hellman Of Hell Force' – World War II tanks in Hell!"

Niemand has written the lead Judge Dredd strips in both the

prog and the *Megazine*, illustrated respectively by Simon Coleby and Nick Percival. "Juvies Rule OK!" in *2000 AD* is a riff on the controversial *Action* classic 'Kids Rule OK', where a virus kills just about all the adults, and the country becomes a battleground for warring gangs of teen survivors," he explains. "In our story, Mega-City One has been decimated by the same virus, and there's only Judge Cadets left to try and stop the rampaging juve gang armies."

Set in the block occupied by the Dark Judges in 1981's "Judge Death Lives!", the *Megazine*'s "Return To Billy Carter" guest-stars a vintage character that possibly predates both *2000 AD* and *Battle*. "A mystic defender returns to help the Judges in the aftermath of the first Dark Judges story," teases Niemand. "It's a Dark Judges story without the Dark Judges in it. We decided this alternative universe *Megazine*

launches in 1984, so none of the subsequent continuity about the Dark Judges and Deadworld has been established, leaving us absolutely free to do something else with what little was known about them in those first two Brian Bolland-drawn stories."

Rollerball-inspired strip "Death Game 1999" was the easiest to accommodate. "What I did was remove the *Battle Action* elements of the strip, where it had morphed into 'The Spinball Wars' once *Action* had merged with *Battle*," says writer Geoffrey D Wessel, who is joined on the renamed "Battle Game 2049" by artist Nick Dyer. "I set it 50 years forward from the original strip, a time when the Spinball Wars had ended, and now Spinball is back to being 'just' a future blood sport."

"I also updated not only some of the tech, where the bikes are hoverbikes as opposed to regular motorcycles, but also who plays the game and the whys and

wherefores of the prison set-up, to get back to the roots of the strip."

"El Mestizo" was initially about a slave-turned-mercenary during the American Civil War; Chris Weston's take on it grew out of a tribute pin-up to original artist Carlos Ezquerro. "I tried to squeeze in as many of King Carlos's characters as possible into the picture, and eventually placed the Starborn Thing around El Mestizo's neck," he explains, referring to the extraterrestrial entity which infected Dredd.

"For some reason, the combination of these two characters stuck with me, and I loved the idea of this Leone-esque gunslinger wandering the Wild West with a disgusting alien parasite coiled around him. The tale is open-ended, so hopefully I can write and draw more. I think I was born to draw Westerns – especially weird ones!" ●

2000 AD Prog 2,350 and Judge Dredd Magazine 460 are both out on 20 September.

AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

Body Snatchers

First comics, then TV, and now **Secret Invasion** comes to prose fiction with Paul Cornell's new novel

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

➔ AFTER RECENTLY being adapted for TV by Disney+, 2008 comics storyline *Secret Invasion* has now been turned into a novel by Paul Cornell. Stating that “I loved the original event, and I was delighted to say yes” after he was approached by Titan Books, Cornell hasn’t restricted himself to Brian Michael Bendis and Leinil Francis Yu’s core eight-parter, but has also taken into account many of its numerous spin-offs and tie-ins.

“I referred to the comics, specifically the central maxi-series and several of the associated miniseries including *Incredible Hercules*, *Thor*, *Black Panther* and *X-Men*,” he tells Red Alert. “I chose for the larger detours from the central series anything that actively informed the main narrative, and tried to at least pop in on just about everything.”

Intriguingly, Cornell has also delved into his own series *Captain Britain And MI13*. “It was a great pleasure to write new dialogue for Pete Wisdom, Faiza Hussain and Brian Braddock,” he continues, referring to the mutant British Secret Service agent and the two now-former Captain Britains. “That was one of the reasons why I took the gig, that I immediately realised I’d get to do that.”

With the unfolding plotline crossing over into titles such as *The New Avengers*, *Captain Marvel*, *Deadpool*, *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and *New Warriors*, Cornell has occasionally made slight changes. “I’ve put things in a slightly different order at some points but made sure that every big emotional reaction gets registered, when the comic sometimes doesn’t have time to see the impact on everyone,” he explains. “I’ve also, with the

excited help of editor and fellow Marvel geek Daniel Carpenter, thrown in so many Easter eggs for fans that if you know what happens next, or what’s happening elsewhere, you’ll find some added meaning in some places. But never

so someone who doesn’t know would feel like it’s a bump in the road.”

While books might not be their natural medium, Cornell has plenty of experience of crafting superhero short stories, having

contributed to a number of George RR Martin and Melinda M Snodgrass’s *Wild Cards* anthologies. “It’s about creating an interesting atmosphere that brings to mind the art, and using what prose brings in terms of point of view and mental processes to add something to the experience,” he says.

“Action works just as well in prose as it does in comics. I also had to decide upon a start and end point, which is considerably after the end of the maxi-series, in order to make one complete story. But it was all there waiting for me, because *Secret Invasion* is one of

the best events Marvel has ever constructed.”

Although it was first published in 2008, *Secret Invasion*’s themes are just as relevant today as they were 15 years ago. “One of my favourite chapters is the one where we ask, as in the comics, ‘What if the Skrulls are right about them being better custodians of the Earth?’” teases Cornell. “I give a sceptic about superheroes the point of view for that, and I hope I make the readers ponder just how difficult it is for a civilian in the Marvel Universe!” ●

Secret Invasion is out on 12 September.



Paul Cornell and the cover to *Secret Invasion*.



► **SCI-FACT!** Friedkin refused to cast studio suggestion Marlon Brando as Father Merrin in *The Exorcist*.

NEW AUTHOR

MARIELY LARES

MEET THE FORMER SYSTEMS ENGINEER BEHIND FANTASY *SUN OF BLOOD AND RUIN*



When is the book set?

→ 16th century New Spain, present-day Mexico. It's 30 years of colonisation following the Spanish invasion of Hernán Cortés and his men.

Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Leonora doubles as the masked vigilante Pantera, a sorceress fighting against the tyranny of Spain. Her real battle, though, is within. Her father is Spanish and her mother Indigenous. She's caught between two very different worlds, keeping her true self hidden.

How does magic work in this world?

→ Tonalli is the life force found in everything. Strong tonalli is associated with heat, weak tonalli with coldness.

Tonalli-manipulating sorcerers can shift into animal doubles, called naguals. Leonora can wield it and shapeshift into her nagual, as her namesake suggests.

How long did the book take to write?

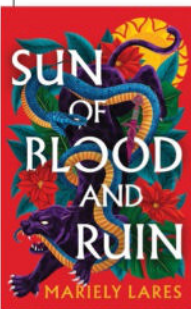
→ The bones started to take shape in 2017, but they didn't firmly set until after

years of investigation on Mesoamerican mythology and Mexican history, exploring my personal past and heritage, and getting to know the characters.

Did you learn anything interesting doing your research?

→ One thing I've found fascinating is the power of language. I've become acquainted with Nahuatl enough to empathise with Nahua reality. It's a linguistic theory which says the language you speak determines how you think. Beginning to understand Nahuatl has rewired my brain.

Sun Of Blood And Ruin is out on 28 September, published by HarperVoyager.



THE FINAL FRONTIER



WILLIAM FRIEDKIN 1935-2023

The power of cinema compelled him

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



William Friedkin with Linda Blair on set.



AT THE FOREFRONT OF

Hollywood's incendiary 1970s, William Friedkin believed "All of filmmaking is a kind of a game between the filmmaker and the audience." As his provocative and revolutionary horror film *The Exorcist* proved, it was a game he quickly mastered.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, the son of Jewish emigrants from Ukraine, Friedkin claimed *Citizen Kane* turned him into a cineaste. But Hitchcock's *Psycho* was also a lodestone, teaching him the craft of suspense; beginning his career in TV documentaries, he went on to direct one of the final episodes of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* in 1965. Edgy, propulsive cop thriller *The French Connection* (1971) demonstrated his gift for orchestrating a set-piece – in this case a show-stopping car chase – and won him an Oscar.

Unleashing an ancient Assyrian demon in contemporary America, 1973's *The Exorcist* redefined the horror genre. William Peter

Blatty, author of the original book, called Friedkin "a director who can bring the look of documentary realism to this incredible story and... is never going to lie to me." So persuasive was Friedkin's direction that the film became a genuine socio-cultural event, with tales of audiences physically upset by the traumatic possession scenes. He was, by all accounts, a challenging presence on set, firing and rehiring crew members at will.

1977's *Sorcerer* – despite its title, a muscular adventure yarn – suffered by being released the week after *Star Wars*. Friedkin's reputation was commercially and critically bruised but he continued directing, straying into genre with episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and *Tales From The Crypt* as well as 1990's *The Guardian*. He resisted any attempt to classify 2007's hallucinatory *Bug* as a horror film. 2017's *The Devil And Father Amorth* saw him return to his documentarian roots – and the subject of exorcism. ●

PETER VAUGHAN-CLARKE 1957-2023

British actor who played Stephen in the first four seasons of *The Tomorrow People*.

PAUL REUBENS 1952-2023

American actor and comedian best known for creating and performing as Pee-wee Herman.

ALAN BAND/KEystone/GETTY IMAGES

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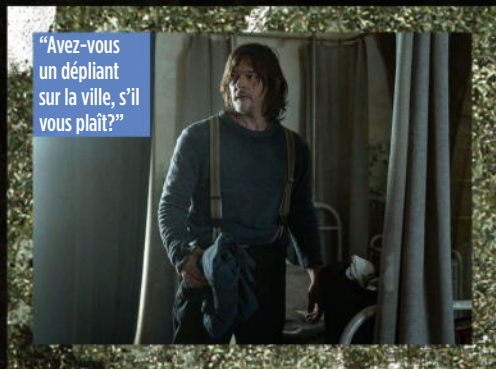
NORMAN REEDUS
SWAPS CONTINENTS
AND REVERTS BACK
TO LONER MODE IN
HIS SPIN-OFF SERIES,
**THE WALKING DEAD:
DARYL DIXON**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

FRANCE

FOR 11 YEARS, ACROSS 177 episodes, AMC's TV adaptation of Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard's *The Walking Dead* comic books told just about every kind of post-apocalyptic story you could imagine, while showing the progression of its eclectic set of characters. The survival of sheriff's deputy Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) and those closest to him was the show's central focus, but it took almost no time for many viewers to zero in on the character of Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus) as their favourite.

Daryl Dixon
(Norman
Reedus) goes
all Gallic.



An original character created for the show, Daryl was introduced in the first season episode “Tell It To The Frogs”, as a tracker and the younger brother of loudmouth bully Merle Dixon (Michael Rooker). A loner, initially loyal to Merle, Daryl mellows by season two and becomes a valued member of Rick Grimes’s found family.

Reedus also nailed playing the Southern redneck version of the Byronic hero. With his signature long locks and soulful (yet chaste) relationships with Carol (Melissa McBride) and Beth (Emily Kinney), Daryl became the show’s sex symbol, a merch-selling machine and the rare season one character to make it all the way to the end of the series alive.

In fact, plans for the future of AMC’s *The Walking Dead* universe began with the development of a Daryl Dixon spin-off series. The continuation of the show’s mythology was always the goal of the franchise’s chief content officer, Scott M Gimple. However, that clarity of intention wasn’t necessarily shared by all of the old-timers at *The Walking Dead*, including executive producer/director Greg Nicotero.

ON THE ROAD

“Having been a part of *The Walking Dead* from the beginning, when everybody said, ‘Hey, we’re gonna do spin-offs!’ my first reaction was like, ‘Okay...’” Nicotero deadpans to *SFX*. “I was a little sceptical initially because being in the end run of *The Walking Dead*, seeing that cemetery on the horizon, it was always, for me, a little bit like ‘How is this going to work?’”

Despite being a directing, storytelling and make-up effects innovator for the series, Nicotero admits that by the end of *The Walking*

Dead, he didn’t have a clear sense of what future shows might be, or how they might offer up something that the audience hadn’t seen already. “If it’s just more of the same, then why end the show?” he remembers asking his collaborators. “Just keep going.”

However, Nicotero says that going back to the sixth season, Norman Reedus had specific ideas about future Daryl stories, which they discussed over time. “A lot of the credit has to go to Norman,” he says. “I remember him standing in my kitchen in Georgia talking about, ‘Wouldn’t it be great if Daryl had a *Then Came Bronson* sort of vibe?’”

“Norman loved the idea of Daryl exploring and coming across different people”

That single-season American drama debuted in 1969 and starred Michael Parks as a disillusioned young man who rides his Harley-Davidson motorcycle across the country looking for connection. “The [character] comes in contact with these different groups of people, and at the end of the episode, he’s a changed person and they’re changed,” Nicotero says, explaining what sparked Reedus’s imagination.

“[We discussed] it probably right around when he started doing [travel series] *Ride With Norman Reedus*. He just loved the idea of Daryl exploring the world and coming across a lot of different groups of people. He held onto that idea for a long time.” ➔

“Know what they call Walkers in France?”



It was that seedling of a premise that Gimple agreed to develop in 2020, attaching Reedus as an executive producer and hiring screenwriter David Zabel (*ER*) to write and eventually executive-produce what became *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon*, a six-episode spin-off series.

“Norman really rolled up his sleeves as a producer,” Nicotero says of his friend. “He had very, very specific input on everything, including that he loved David Zabel. Norman wanted to collaborate with him, and he and I really felt that it was important to have a showrunner who was outside of *The Walking Dead* universe.”

Why? Because it was clear to the long-time series actors and creatives that breaking the mould of *Walking Dead* storytelling that had been honed for 11 seasons was integral to ensuring its future.

“Obviously, all of us wanted it to be different,” Nicotero reiterates. “And knowing the zombie genre like I know it, I do believe that you can tell different stories in the world that are still appealing, that are still moving and emotional in the same backdrop. Look... *The Last Of Us* proved me right.”

Having worked closely with zombie film legend George Romero, Nicotero knew the

“The Last Of Us is basically a ‘Greatest Hits’ of the first three or four seasons of Dead”

vitality of the genre even when *The Walking Dead*’s ratings started to fall year-by-year. Despite that slide, the series remained a worldwide hit, retaining dedicated audiences loyal to the show’s cast of characters. Then HBO’s *The Last Of Us* aired earlier this year, and those criticisms of Walkers being passé suddenly vanished as everything post-apocalyptic undead was hot once more.

Nicotero says the global success of *The Last Of Us* cemented their gut feeling that *The Walking Dead* was far from, well, dead.

“*The Last Of Us* is basically a ‘Greatest Hits’ of the first three or four seasons of *The Walking Dead*,” Nicotero believes. “The creators of the game even said that they took a lot of inspiration from *The Walking Dead*.”

“So the fact that people responded so positively to *The Last Of Us* sort of proves my point. If you have great characters and a great story that people can respond to, the genre has a lot more life in it than what everybody wants to believe.”

Nicotero says that there was a big push from the beginning to do as much as possible to make the spin-offs feel different. For a start, *Daryl Dixon* would lean into that Robert A Heinlein, *Stranger In A Strange Land* vibe.



Romain Levi as Codron is the new Big Bad.



Things are getting a bit *Hunger Games*.



Clémence Poésy plays Isabelle (front).





No wonder they're called the Hungry Ones.



"This looks like a lovely place for a picnic."

"When I was talking to David initially about the show, I kept referring to it very much like *The Road Warrior*, where you come upon Mad Max in the desert and he connects with this group of people. I said, 'This feels like our version of *Mad Max*,'" he remembers.

But instead of the Australian Outback, Zabel placed *Daryl Dixon* in post-apocalyptic France, with the intention of actually shooting the series in Europe to truly distinguish it from any other *Walking Dead* series. "We're all grateful that it's set there," Nicotero says. "I can't imagine us having shot anywhere else. It's a road show when Daryl shows up in Marseille, and then has his trek through post-apocalyptic France."

Even with all their enthusiasm for change, Nicotero admits that reading Zabel's first outlines and scripts elicited some surprising thoughts. "Initially, both Norman and I had a gut reaction like: 'Ooh, that doesn't feel like *The Walking Dead*,'" he laughs. "And then after about 20 seconds, it was like: 'Wait a minute, that's what we want!'"

BEACH BODY

The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon picks up some time after its parent series' finale, "Rest In Peace", where Daryl rides his motorcycle into what's left of America with the intention of finding Rick and Michonne (Danai Gurira). This six-episode arc revolves around the mystery of how it is that Dixon wakes up alone on the beaches of Normandy with no idea of how he got there.

"The story flows with regards to where we meet Daryl, the people that Daryl meets, and the job that he is tasked with," Nicotero says of its structure. "Elements of it build in a very meaningful way. The pieces click together. It doesn't feel rushed. It doesn't feel like it's a movie that's stretched into six episodes. It has a really distinct pace to it."

Along his voyage of discovery, Daryl meets a new cast of characters: Sister Isabelle (Clémence Poésy), young Laurent (Louis Puech Scigliuzzi), Sylvie (Laika Blanc Francard) and antagonist Codron (Romain Levi) – all survivors in a different land, coping with the aftermath of the end of civilisation.

"One of the things that we always talked about on *The Walking Dead* was that any time a new character showed up, you pretty much knew they were goners because there were so many people in the cast," Nicotero jokes. "But here we were able to clean the slate and have a situation where it's Daryl who comes across different people."

"And you don't need necessarily those people to be series regulars, or characters that you're gonna see all the time. He might come across a couple of people that we see once or twice, and we never see them again because it's a road movie." →



“LA BEAUTÉ EST PARTOUT AUTOUR DE NOUS”

Nicotero on the European aesthetics that infuse every frame of *The Walking Dead*:
Daryl Dixon

“There is something romantic about the European flair. We had alternating directors of photography: Tommaso Fiorilli was our first, and then Michel Amathieu in the second block. There was a lot of candlelight. There was a lot of soft focus. There was a lot of ethereal feeling with the way that things were shot with a lot of depth of field. The camera moves a lot. I don't think they ever set up a dolly track once – it was always Steadicam. There is a fluidity and a graceful element to it that makes the show feel distinctly unlike something we've seen before.”



Laika Blanc-Francard as nun Sylvie (left).

Considering his ongoing consultation on the spin-off, some might be surprised to find out that Nicotero wasn't formally asked to be a part of *Daryl Dixon* until about two months into pre-production. But he is adamant that that was fine with him. After directing *The Walking Dead*'s series finale – with its many, many moving parts – Nicotero says he was ready for new horizons.

However, Reedus wasn't having any of that. Nicotero smiles, remembering: “Norman kept saying, ‘You can't do the show without Greg! You guys have got to make a deal. He's got to be here!’” Then David called me and said, ‘How would you feel about not directing this season?’”

He was genuinely more than happy to pass that particular baton. “Honestly, I felt that it was best for the show that we have someone else come in,” he explains. “Then I could help establish the visual palette, but have someone else realise it. In retrospect, I am really glad that I didn't [direct] because it allowed me to

roll up my sleeves with the directors and really hone in on exactly what we needed to do.”

Production began in France in October 2022, with Nicotero executive-producing and mentoring series directors Daniel Percival and Tim Southam.

“Stepping into this role as an EP, my job when I landed in Paris was to make sure that there was some continuity in the two worlds,” he says. “But not enough that it would make the show feel like we've seen it before. I felt really passionate, along with Norman, that we wanted the show to have a different feel.”

“My style of directing is kind of the style of *The Walking Dead*, because I directed almost 40 episodes. I thought it was important that the show have a different visual flavour to it. So I was very glad because I didn't need to be behind the camera,” he continues.

“I needed to be next to the director, and next to the showrunner, and next to Norman. I spent most of my time split up between those three; being in Norman's trailer, being with



"Come to France, they said. Have fun, they said."



Daryl's found some pals... at least for a while.

David Zabel, or being with the directors." Slipping into an advisor role was also a full-circle moment for Nicotero, who honed his own skills under the directing mentorship of Steven Spielberg, Frank Darabont, Quentin Tarantino, John Carpenter and George Romero.

He says he was quite moved when, while shooting the first two episodes, Percival pulled him aside and said: "Stand right here next to me because I want to make sure that I honour the spirit of the show. And nobody knows the show better than you."

"I was blown away by that," Nicotero says. "I was blown away by the fact that his idea was to embrace the 12 years of knowledge that I had, and allow me to do my best to make the show better. And that felt great."

Nicotero admits he did end up taking on second unit duties to help lighten the load of production. "For the first two episodes, I directed 20 days of second unit," he laughs. "A lot of the footage in the teaser of Daryl walking across the bridges, that was all stuff that I went off with a little group and shot."

He also set up the international wing of his famous Zombie School to teach the French actors how to move like a Walker – or "The

“This show is so different from anything else that I’ve produced and worked on”

Hungry Ones”, as they are referred to in this series. “The first time we came to set with zombies, the crew applauded,” he says. “I looked at Lucas and Jason, who I brought from the States with me, and asked, ‘Why are they clapping?’ And it occurred to me that they haven’t seen zombies every day for the last 12 years. This is the first time.”

“They were so enthralled. It was kind of like when the show first started, and we were doing zombies in Atlanta. We’d walk on set and people would say: ‘Wow, that’s amazing!’ And then they just got used to it. So I really do feel like we got a unique injection of adrenaline, just with the goodwill of the crew and France and the performers and doing what we wanted to do.”

With post-production winding down, Nicotero is delighted to have had the chance to help reinvent the universe of *The Walking Dead* once more.

“This show is so different from anything else that I’ve produced and that I’ve worked on. And I’m really, really proud to say that it’s different.” ●

The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon is on AMC in the US from 10 September. UK details are TBC.

THE CREATOR

DIRECTOR
GARETH EDWARDS
RETURNS WITH
THE CREATOR,
AN ORIGINAL
SCI-FI STORY THAT
CONFRONTS ALL
OUR AI ANGST

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

MANVS

THE CREATOR

MAACHINE





The shoot:
very much a
hands-on
approach...

IN 2010, GARETH EDWARDS entered the feature filmmaking arena with *Monsters* – one hell of a mic-drop debut. It was an original sci-fi film that he wrote, directed, lit as the cinematographer, production-designed and created the visual effects for, on a shoestring budget of half a million US dollars.

His reward? The Hollywood studios handed unto him a *Godzilla* movie (2014) and a *Star Wars* movie, *Rogue One* (2016). Both of those amply funded studio films were well-received and made money. And then Edwards just left the chaos of Hollywood... on purpose.

"I needed to get off the merry-go-round, do you know what I mean?" Edwards tells *SFX* about his decision to put the proverbial breaks on his directorial career for a few years. "In Hollywood, you can get stuck on the hamster wheel, or whatever analogy you want to use. I just wanted to get off and have a break to take some time thinking about the next thing."

His successes meant there was no industry-imposed "director's jail" for Edwards to grapple with. Rather, it was an existential one. "I got to make a very low-budget science fiction film with *Monsters*, and I realised there were some serious advantages to having no money," he says. "It was kind of a shock to have all the money you could ever want, and still be



Madeleine
Yuna Voyles as
Alfie, with
a chum.

limited. I felt like if I could somehow get that big bag of cash and send it back in time to me when I was making *Monsters*, the possibilities would have been infinite. And so, in a weird way, I was trying to find that kind of scenario again. I was as much interested in the process of how to make the film as I was the idea."

So Edwards went in search of inspiration. For fun, he had a cameo on Crait in Rian Johnson's *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. Then he travelled to the Vietnam set of *Kong: Skull Island* to visit his friend and fellow filmmaker, Jordan Vogt-Roberts.

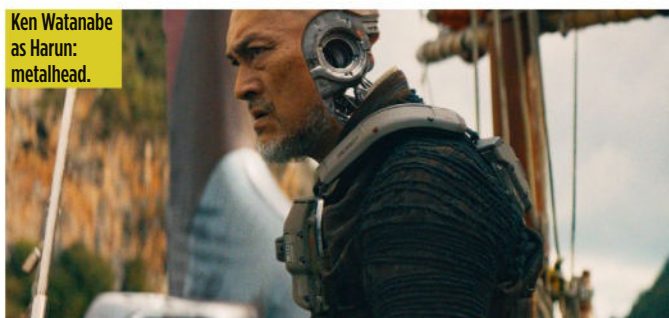
"I spent the whole time there picturing everybody as a robot, from the monks in

temples to the farmers on paddy fields," he laughs. That odd mash-up coalesced into the thought of "*Blade Runner* meets *Apocalypse Now*", which was an intriguing fragment he stashed away for later.

At another time, Edwards says, he pondered what his take on director Kenji Misumi's 1972 film *Lone Wolf And Cub: Sword of Vengeance* – about a warrior and a young child – might look like. He also revisited one of the seminal sources of science fiction storytelling, Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*. Edwards reveals that his iPhone lock screen is an image from his favourite episode, "The Lonely". It stars Jack Warden as a criminal remanded to a distant



A gunman with the head of a... gun?



Ken Watanabe as Harun: metalhead.



Alphie's having a laugh.

asteroid to serve out his lifelong punishment, until a jailer takes pity and sends him a female robot (Jean Marsh) to keep him company.

"He initially rejects this thing as a lie, and then starts to think differently," Edwards says of the man's attitude towards the synthetic woman. "What I love about what science fiction allows you to do is by just changing one thing, it cranks reality up to 11 and suddenly allows you to see something more clearly than you normally would if it was not science fiction." The validity of that human/robot connection was another concept he pinned for the future.

"Then I was driving across America to my girlfriend's house and looked out at this vast

"I was as much interested in the process of how to make the film as I was the idea"

field of tall grass. I was like, 'I wonder what they're building in the middle of nowhere there?' My brain went to robots, as it does, and I thought, 'Imagine being in that factory, and that's all you ever know. Then you somehow end up outside in this field. What would you think the world is?' Very quickly, all these ideas suddenly became the same film.

"When that happens, it's a very exciting moment," he adds. "It's happened only a few times and when it does you go, 'Oh, I think that's my next movie.' By the time I actually arrived at my girlfriend's parents' house, I had roughly the whole movie laid out in my head."

In 2019, Edwards teamed up with New Regency to produce *The Creator* (at that point titled *True Love*), which placed him back on the Hollywood hamster wheel, by choice. Set in 2070, Edwards and Chris Weitz's screenplay distills those previously disparate ideas into the worst-case scenario of artificial intelligence besting humanity. When a nuke is set off in Los Angeles, humans are suddenly on the back foot, forced into a war for survival. Their only

chance at salvation is to find, and destroy, what's been floated as AI's next-stage tech weapon, meant to replace humanity for good. John David Washington (*Tenet*) is Joshua, an ex-special forces soldier assigned to find the thing, which turns out to be a six-year-old AI child, codenamed Alpha Omega (Madeleine Yuna Voyles).

"The basic premise of the movie is that half the world has banned AI and wants it eradicated. The other half accepts it and thinks they're equal to us," Edwards explains. "When I was first pitching this, the first reaction was 'Why would people ban it?'"

He remembers trying to explain the idea of AI going wrong, but the consistent pushback was that surely it wouldn't be banned because there are so many advantages. "It's so strange to see that the default setting of people [now] is to reject AI," Edwards muses. "It's not like we've just discovered the internet, or electricity is coming. It feels like we're letting in this thing that might replace us, through the front door."

"What's interesting is that people will go into this film now – and I think it's a good thing for the movie – even more wary of AI. Even more like, 'I don't think this is right.' I think that is a better place for the film to begin."

JUST FOR FLICKS

When Edwards got the greenlight for *The Creator*, he had two non-negotiables. One was making the film for theatrical release. "Zero disrespect to any streamer out there, I just didn't want to do that," he says. "I grew up loving cinema, and going into a theatre. That's why I'm doing this. The idea of working for two or three years, putting in blood, sweat and tears, and everything you've got at it, and then it just disappears on a menu system? There's nothing worse than that situation for me."

Secondly, he entered into pre-production with an intention to marry his creatively satisfying *Monsters* experience with the positives of his studio experience. "The initial trick was for this to not be a big-budget movie. If it's big-budget, crazy money, I think we would have scared everyone off," he says.

"This is very naive now, looking back, but I initially designed it to be something I could do very cheaply and still have scope and scale. I was like, 'If I never get the money to do this, I'm just gonna go do it myself somehow. I'll figure it out.' The reality is, I don't know how I would have pulled off like 1,000 VFX shots of robots. Maybe AI tools would have helped!"

With those two issues squared, Edwards turned his attention to the aesthetic →



Alphie has a moment with Joshua.



Filming out in the wilds. No greenscreen!



John David Washington as Joshua, with Gemma Chan.

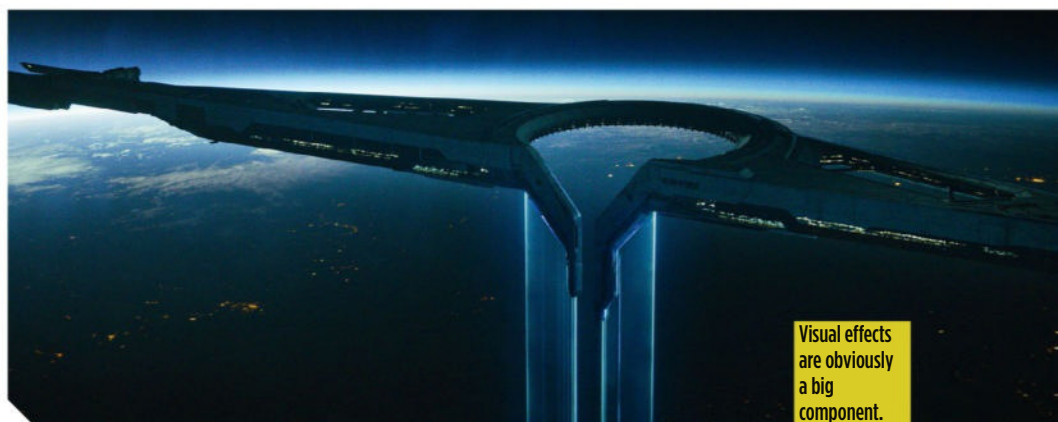


conundrum of how you make a sci-fi film stand out from what's come before. "It's *hard* to do a sci-fi film and come up with unique-looking stuff, because there's been so many great designs before you," he says. "When I worked on *Godzilla*, a designer once said, 'It's like trying to find the last car park space in Disneyland. You know it's there somewhere because they let you in.' So, you drive round around going, 'Where is that new idea? It must be here somewhere!'"

During pre-production, Edwards brought on-board cinematographer Greig Fraser (*Dune*), with Fraser then recommending award-winning DP Oren Soffer for the actual shoot (as Fraser was attached to *Dune: Part Two*). Edwards also committed to shooting the film on a '70s anamorphic lens, which he felt was best for capturing a visual scale that harkens back to the early films of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg.

He then looked to the time he made *Monsters*, choosing to invert the production design process by shooting first, then designing later on top of what they captured out in the wild. "Normally what you do is you [concept] design the movie, and then you show it to the studio, which becomes this sort of visual contract. They go, 'Oh my god, that's amazing! Go make *that*.' Then you look at all these images, and you think, 'Well, none of this exists. We can't possibly do *this*. We're gonna have to build it all in studio against greenscreen.'"

"Before you know it, nothing feels



Visual effects are obviously a big component.

that real and it doesn't feel or look like any of the movies I grew up loving, which is why I got into filmmaking. So, I was like, 'I'm not going to do that.' It was really important that we said up front that we're going to go shoot in real locations with real people, and then afterwards we're going to design the movie based on what we find."

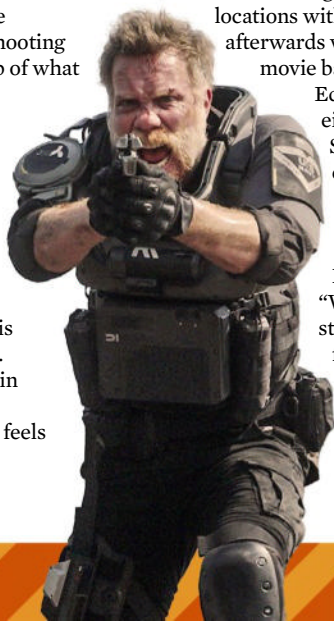
Edwards and his team shot in eight different countries in Southeast Asia and 80 different locations, travelling over 10,000 miles. "We were at the top of the Himalayas and on active volcanoes in Indonesia," Edwards says.

"When we were finished and started editing the movie, as we felt certain sections or shots were safe, I would then sit with James Clyne, our production designer. He

would paint over the frame of the shot and add all the science fiction. We would try lots of different things very quickly. Then what would always happen is someone would go, 'That looks really interesting. What is that?' And we'd go, 'I don't fucking know. It's the future! Don't ask me. You need to ask people who live in 2070!'"

"We did stuff where we didn't understand what it was, on purpose, because if everything's really obvious, then it's not the future," he continues. "Imagine if someone from 1930 came to today... they'd see these things, even a laptop, and they wouldn't understand it. So it was important that we infected and flooded the movie with stuff where you don't really know what it is. It just feels right."

The Creator's distinctive look derived in part from a very specific inflection point in modern tech design. "Imagine Apple Mac didn't win the technology war and that the Sony Walkman did," Edwards says. "For the design in the





“We said up front that we’re going to go shoot in real locations with real people”

Allison Janney as Colonel Howell gets tense.

movie, we looked at Sony product design. All that stuff that we loved when we were kids. Those designs, what I love about them – which I miss today, as everything’s gotten very clinical and character-less – is that you could look at an object and understand what it is. Sony were very good at merging two different shapes that are combined and intersect.” From that brief, Clyne created buildings and structures, while Weta Workshop created all of the props seen within the world.

MAD: ABOUT THE GIRL

While Edwards is very proud of how *The Creator*’s visuals translated from his brain to the frame, he reiterates that Joshua’s moral quandary about what to do with Alphie (as he calls her) is the beating heart of the film – it works because of the performances of Washington and Madeleine Yuna Voyles.

“We all felt like if we can’t find this kid, we can’t make this movie. I knew the movie was hanging on this,” Edwards says. They ended up auditioning 300 children from around the world, staying open to any gender. “I felt like the best kid is going to be who Alphie is in the movie. We were keeping an open mind because the chances of finding a great kid, the odds were against us.”

But Yuna Voyles came in and Edwards says she owned the role. “It was phenomenal what

she could do,” he praises. “She’s a super-smart, very cautious kid. Something I’m 100% sure of with this film is that we got so lucky with Madeleine. She’s incredible.”

Which is integral to the film, because Alphie being accepted as a sympathetic character properly muddies the moral waters regarding the value of human-created, synthetic life (or simulants) versus traditionally born humans. That is arguably the most distant sci-fi concept *The Creator* presents. The rest is now right at our door.

“The questions that are coming up in the news cycles and stuff, it’s just very surreal because they’re all the questions that are in the movie,” he says of the current debate

surrounding AI. “There’s a billboard advertisement in the film where it’s asking [humans] to donate their likeness to AI. It’s like, ‘Get scanned today. Support AI!’ You basically get copy-and-pasted to make money, like a blood donor or a sperm donor,” Edwards says with a raised eyebrow. “We just threw these ideas in there because they were where our science fiction story went. But now, it’s front and centre.”

Edwards isn’t too hopeful about AI’s impending impact on our lives. “The genie is out of the bottle and it’s not going back in, so we’ve just got to be careful now, if we can, with how it gets used,” he says.

But one thing he does know is that *The Creator* has made his career path more certain. “We tried really hard on this movie to marry both the pros of a small independent film and the pros of a big blockbuster. We got closer than we’ve ever got before and I’m very proud of how everyone pulled that off.

“I want to push this even more, and if I can’t, I don’t want to do it. I would prefer to just stop and do something else with my life. Personally, if I don’t have an idea, or a way of making a film that I think is going to be my best movie, then I wouldn’t go ahead with it, and I’ll just wait until that happens.” ●

The Creator is in cinemas from 28 September.



Alphie’s future is sadly uncertain.

Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots? (No.)

THE WINTER KING

TRUE BRIT

ARTHURIAN LEGEND COMBINES WITH *THE WEST WING*-STYLE POLITICKING AS BERNARD CORNWELL'S NOVEL *THE WINTER KING* COMES TO THE SMALL SCREEN

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN





Arthur rescues the young Derfel from a death pit.



"If this bloody horse blows off one more time..."

VISITING AN OLD warehouse might not sound like a fun day out... but what if it transports you to fifth century Britain, to hang out chez Merlin, hold Excalibur, and chat with Arthur (son of Uther) about, er, coprophagic horses?

All three are on the schedule when *SFX* visits a Bristol trading estate which is home to new Arthurian TV series *The Winter King*. It's a title fans of *Sharpe* creator Bernard Cornwell should recognise, being the first entry in his '90s trilogy *The Warlord Chronicles*.

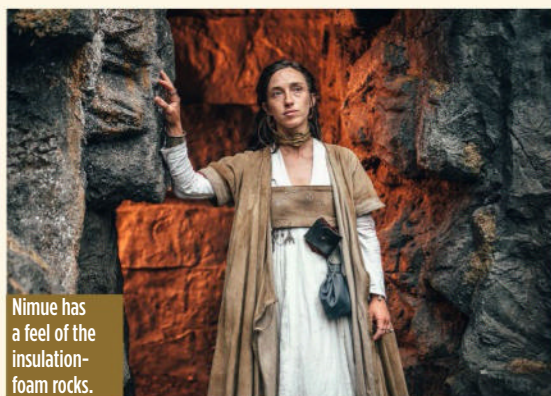
FOAM HOME

Sets don't usually start *outside* the studio. This one does though, with a wall of "rock" – actually blocks of polyurethane insulation foam – built onto an external wall. As we visit, during the final days of a 27-week shoot, this area's been repurposed as a stony shoreline, but previously it served as the entrance to Caer Cadarn, capital of Dumnonia, the territory ruled by High King Uther Pendragon.

Curiously, it's noticeably colder inside the building than outside, to the point where on entering, your *SFX* hack is immediately prompted to zip up their hoodie. Could it be haunted by the ghosts of fallen warriors? Or maybe it's a legacy of its previous use as a refrigeration depot. Probably that.

Breath visibly misting, we tour Uther's gloomy, brutalist seat of power: a cave network inside a mountain. On-screen, as characters make their arrivals, location work in a quarry near Merthyr Tydfil will be seamlessly stitched together with the transition from the backlot into the interior sets – for which, executive producer Lachlan MacKinnon tells *SFX*, there was an unexpected reference point.

"The one thing Otto [Bathurst, lead director] was always talking about was, 'This should feel like Churchill's War Rooms – where those big decisions of state are made. We loved the idea



Nimue has a feel of the insulation-foam rocks.



Merlin's tor was built in Bristol's Blaise Castle Estate.

of their strategic hub being built in a mountain, rather than just something that sits on top."

We peek into Uther's bedchamber, taking in decorative copper strips and grooved textures on the walls, and explore a map room heaped with "tally sticks" – lengths of wood, notched to record payments to the King. Another key location, deep in the countryside, is Avalon, home to a 30-foot-high tor which Merlin calls home. We wander the circular interior set – not your average pad. Well, unless having three menhirs in your living room has become à la mode since we last redecorated...

If we could magically walk out into the Bristol park where the tor's exterior was erected, we'd find a community with a thriving industry. "The way they earn money is through dyeing wool," says MacKinnon. It's just one small way in which pains have been taken to anchor the story in authenticity.

"Whenever you've got a world happening in the background, if you don't give the extras something tangible to do they can feel like they're just passing through," the producer explains. "Whereas we've got all these big vats, and bales of wool, and people working dyeing."



Behind the scenes as Arthur woos Guinevere.



“It’s a beautiful world and at the same time a violent world, and that is exciting”



Bad Wolf, the production company behind *A Discovery Of Witches*, *His Dark Materials*, and now Russell T Davies’s return to *Doctor Who*, is responsible for bringing *The Winter King* to our screens. As writers Kate Brooke and Ed Whitmore tell *SFX*, it’s been a long road – they first met to discuss the project back in 2015. Both relished the opportunity, appreciating the qualities of Cornwell’s novel.

“I’d say Bernard’s great gift is that he’s able to deliver all the big, mythic, famous aspects of the Arthurian legend,” Whitmore says. “But then, to use a cinematography metaphor, he

changes the lens and gives you an up-close and personal view of all of these characters. That alone makes the source material, for a screenwriter, incredibly exciting.”

“And there is as well the fact that he sets it in the Dark Ages,” Brooke picks up, “in a period we actually don’t know very much about, but makes it so grounded. He’s sort of taken the frills off. It’s a pre-Malory [Thomas, writer of *Le Morte d’Arthur*] take on Arthur. It’s a beautiful world and at the same time a violent world, and that combination is really exciting. It also links into a period of British history that we all feel emotionally engaged with.”

Adapting the novel for the 10-episode first season – which wraps up around two-thirds of the way through the book – presented several challenges. The major one was that Arthur (played by *Agents Of SHIELD*’s Iain De Caestecker) isn’t its protagonist. That’s a Cornwell creation: Derfel, a Saxon enslaved as a boy who, having had his life saved by Arthur, looks up to him, and eventually becomes his right-hand man.

“Bernard Cornwell loves to do his characters who are to one side of the main myth,” Brooke notes. “We’ve obviously had to put Arthur at the forefront. In the books I think he doesn’t appear until page 180. And Merlin doesn’t appear until page 450!”

“He definitely has a ‘less is more’ ethos,” says Whitmore. “We stayed more faithful to that use of Merlin. But with Arthur there was no doubt he had to be front and centre. Within the book, because Derfel is the protagonist, Arthur gets benched for periods. We didn’t really want to replicate that.”

So while the young Arthur is banished from Dumnonia in episode one, by the close of episode two he’s back in the mix. The two also →



THE MAGIC KINGDOM

Portraying pagan powers



When it comes to the fantastical aspects of Arthurian lore, the series doesn’t go as far as 2004’s *King Arthur*, which removed magic altogether. But no one’s hurling balls of blue flame about, either.

“It’s grounded magic,” Whitmore says. “We always wanted to weld it to something psychological and personal and real. So Nimue’s ability to commune with the gods is something that she feels very personally and acutely. And it’s almost like any gift – like the ability to sing, or play tennis or something.”

“I think there is something extraordinary about that pagan sense that there is magic everywhere, because nature is magic,” Brooke adds. “And that is what we’ve tried to do. It’s like, *Britain* is magic, this lost world. That’s something I love about the book: the sense of looking back and saying, ‘What is it that we have lost?’ It’s a love story to that very Celtic, beautiful, mythic England.”

And while not one of the central triumvirate, Merlin (Nathaniel Martello-White) is still a player. “If our three other characters are dealing with the politics, Merlin sort of floats above them,” Brooke says. “And Merlin does have fantasy moments.”

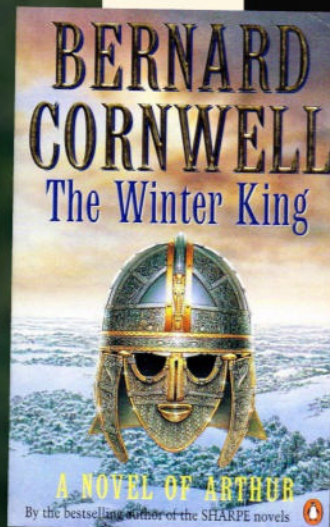
“We have a storyline about him going to look for the 13 Treasures of Britain,” she continues. These artefacts, detailed in 15th century texts, include a sharpening stone that can render a sword deadly, a hamper that can produce food for a hundred, and a chess board that plays itself. A mediaeval Innovations catalogue, basically.

“All the druids were sent off to an island and basically massacred by the Romans,” Brooke explains, “and there’s this desperate desire to bring back the druid knowledge, and the sense that if Britain can regain its knowledge of the gods we’ll be able to get rid of the Saxons.”

“So Arthur’s dealing with politics, and Merlin’s going, ‘Well, if I could just get The Horn of Bran...’”



Undercuts were all the rage in the fifth century.



had to contend with the barrelling pace of Cornwell's prose. "We have really followed the narrative," says Brooke, "but to give you an example, episodes three and four are 12 pages of the book! Bernard is brilliant at piling through story incredibly fast – he can do a paragraph and six months pass, and huge battles happen.

"That narrative force is so compelling that you get swept up in it. It took us a while to realise that actually we're only really going to get engaged if we slow it down. So that was another challenge in terms of us putting a different kind of lens onto the narrative. But we haven't changed where it goes."

"My analogy would be that it's Bernard's house, and we've redecorated the rooms, and maybe moved some walls around," Whitmore chips in.

While Arthur is not the novel's protagonist, Whitmore stresses that it still provided "a huge amount of building blocks" for the character. It's a version which may confound audience expectations. While TH White dubbed Arthur *The Once And Future King*, promo for *The Winter King* refers to him as *The King That Never Was*, reflecting the character's status and ambitions.

De Caestecker's Arthur is the bastard son of Uther Pendragon (Eddie Marsan) – who treats him with scorn, ultimately disowning him. When Uther dies it leaves a baby, Mordred, on the throne: a difficult situation, given the looming threat of the Saxons. Can unity between Britain's squabbling tribes (of whom Dumnonia's people are just the pre-eminent one) be maintained?

"Cornwell's Arthur is just so different," says Whitmore. "This idea of Arthur the bastard son, who doesn't set much store by things like titles. Even with religion, he's fundamentally a kind of modernist: he wants peace, and he sees that tribes warring is futile – all it ends in is poverty and misery. We got so excited by that character, this young guy who doesn't have any

reason to love his kingdom, because he's been banished, but knows he's got it in him to unite the tribes and bring this fragmented isle together. When you do an Arthurian story, the first question people ask is, 'What makes your Arthur different?' And I haven't seen that Arthur before. A huge amount of that is in Bernard's book. We just had to distil it."

"It's not a Macbeth story about ambition," Brooke stresses. "It's sort of the opposite. Arthur comes back as essentially a protector, and he's very clear that he is never going to take the throne. In some ways, he's a reluctant leader. There's a wonderful bit in the book when he says, 'I really want to be a farmer. I just want to go and till my fields.'"

"He has a gift that he'd rather not have, at times," adds Whitmore. "That's what makes him exciting to write, because there's that tension between the personal and the public. And the big moment that comes into focus is when he meets Guinevere..."

THE HEROIC TRIO

Arthur is one of three characters who are the main focus of the narrative, Brooke explains: "We've always really seen it as a triumvirate."

"It's a bit like two lines that appear to be parallel, but they're not quite," adds Whitmore. "Forward-wind 10 years, and those lines are wide apart. That's how the three characters fan out as the show goes on."

Derfel (Stuart Campbell) is the second of them. Whitmore labels Cornwell's invention of Arthur's disciple "a stroke of genius", comparing it to the use of rival composer Antonio Salieri in Mozart biopic *Amadeus*. "If you have a very famous, iconic character, having the POV of somebody close to them, through which we experience them, is a really clever move.

"Bernard does that so well with Derfel. Initially Derfel just sees all the good things in Arthur, and then – alongside us as the →

“Even with religion, Arthur is fundamentally a kind of modernist: he wants peace”



Eddie Marsan (briefly) plays Uther Pendragon.

"HE WANTS TO GET RID OF OLD, TIRED, ARCHAIC TRADITIONS"

Iain De Caestecker is Arthur Pendragon

What's distinctive about this version of the story?

I guess you could say this is a more grounded version of the famous Arthurian legends. You've got a lot of the familiar, well-known characters, but with a new slant on them. You know when you see soldiers, and then you see Navy SEALs and you're like, "Oh, there's something different about those guys..."? There's a feeling with Arthur and his men that they're kind of like the Navy Seals or the SAS of their time. They do things a little bit differently.

It sounds like he's a bit of a politician too.

There's a lot of that. He has to try and unite the different tribes, which is a lot easier said than done - there's a lot of power struggles. He wants to get rid of old, tired, archaic traditions, and do something new. But immediately when you do that you come up against people that aren't quite accepting of change.

Also, there's this encroaching Saxon presence, which runs through the season and comes to a head towards the end. The thing that really attracted me to this story is I think you can see the mental and physical toll it has on someone, being a leader of a country in this way: the sacrifices you have to make, the impossible choices. That's a really cool side to it.

Tell us about his relationship with Guinevere.

One thing with Arthur is that he doesn't like himself or any of his men to be attached, because he feels that might hold them up in battle. About halfway through he comes across Guinevere in a chance meeting, and she has this effect on him that is wholly unexpected. He's never been in love before - he's not met many women. He's a bit juvenile in that sense.

So when he meets her his whole world is tossed upside down, and it's impossible to be as calm and make the measured decisions that he's accustomed to. He's got a very well-mastered veneer of confidence, and that's probably one of the first points when we'll see a chink in his armour. He has a very strong conviction in his methods, and there's the potential when he meets Guinevere that he'll lose sight of that and be led by his heart rather than his head.

What training did you do for the role?

I've never done horse riding before. When they were finalising things, I thought, "I'd better pretend I've at least ridden one horse in my life." So I went to a place nearby me, and was on this stumpy little horse who liked to eat the shit of other horses! He was constantly following other horses around waiting for it, which was weird... Then I came here and we're riding with some of the best trainers, and some of the best horses around. My mate was asking about it and I said, "It's kind of like driving a sports car that's alive!"

Are the horses used in the series better behaved?

They tend to let one go during a very emotional scene. It's like they know!



"You'll never get a girlfriend with that hair, Derfel."

audience – comes to know him better. He sees him do great things, but also sees him make mistakes, and becomes disillusioned with him at times. So I think the invention of Derfel only enhances and complicates our relationship with Arthur. That was something we were very keen to maintain in the scripts."

Finally, there's Nimue (Ellie James). In some versions of Arthurian lore she's the same figure as the Lady of the Lake. Cornwell's Nimue is a pagan druidess, whose journey reflects the growing influence of Christianity at the time.

"It builds through the season, this sort of battle between Christianity and paganism," says Brooke, "and she is the voice of paganism. Her long-term series arc is one in which she becomes gradually more fundamentalist as she feels more constrained by the rise of Christianity. And Derfel and Nimue are in love. But because she's a pagan druidess, she has to live her life in solitude."

ISLAND OF LOST SOULS

We manage to grab a brief glimpse of two-thirds of that triumvirate in action, squinting at the monitors as a sequence from episode 10 is shot. It dramatises a section of the book where (spoilers!) Derfel goes to rescue Nimue from the so-called Isle of the Dead (actually a peninsula), to which those deemed insane are exiled.

It features some unhealthy-looking extras wearing loincloths, whose pallid complexions would suit a zombie movie. All straggly hair, blotchy skin and leprous lumps, they close in on the escaping couple, trying to pull them back... In the ensuing struggle, Nimue takes a big swing and clocks one right in the kisser.

Violence is an unavoidable aspect of depicting life in the Dark Ages, and it gets far worse than a punch in the head. A particularly shocking event in episode two sets the standard. ("It'll make you put your hand up to your mouth", Iain De Caestecker tells us.) And those who've read the book will know that one

character experiences sexual violence. "It's definitely a post-watershed show," says MacKinnon, "because we do have deaths, and we do have rape. Going back to authenticity: it's important to understand the gender politics of that world. It was as brutal as: if someone wanted to really cause damage to a kingdom, they would rape the women. So it's something that we wanted to not shy away from. It felt appropriate to be authentic."

Game Of Thrones has, of course, upped the ante in terms of how explicit people can now expect a fantasy TV show to get. And the shadow of that series loomed large generally during pre-production.

"When we were designing the show, we were thinking about how we differentiate ourselves from *Game Of Thrones*," MacKinnon admits. "It's something we focused a lot on when it came to the choice of locations, and also the storylines – making sure that it doesn't feel derivative. But I think what Bernard has written is so strong, and the subject matter of Arthurian legend and the points of view that we see it from make it feel suitably distinctive."

And should all this talk of Dark Ages brutality and political manoeuvring make *The Winter King* sound rather heavy going, Kate Brooke would like to make something crystal clear. "We've got lots of jeopardy," she says, switching into sales mode. "We've got great antagonists, and characters you care about having terrible things happen to them."

"We've got lovers who are separated, we've got friends dying, we've got the works! We're talking about soap opera at the highest scale here. And we are unashamedly happy that it is that – mythological soap opera!"

The Winter King is on MGM+ now and on ITVX in December.



Jordan Alexandra is Arthur's love Guinevere.

"THEY HAVE THIS SPECIAL CONNECTION THAT GOES BEYOND LOVE"

Stuart Campbell and Ellie James play Derfel and Nimue

Can you introduce your characters?

EJ: Nimue is one of Merlin's orphans. She's found as a young girl, washed up onto the shore, and he saves her. She's very connected with the gods, and he appoints her as a priestess. She goes through quite a journey on this show – she's been through pretty much anything you could think of. And Derfel is very important to Nimue.

SC: We meet very early on, when we're much younger. Derfel is saved from this death pit by Arthur, when he's only a boy. He's a Saxon orphan – he loses his mother, doesn't know his father. Arthur takes him to Merlin in Avalon, and says to Nimue, "Look after him." Nimue heals him and takes him under her wing, and they have this special connection that goes beyond love – it's soulmates.

How does this series approach the use of magic?

EJ: We've sort of played it where it's nothing you couldn't believe in. It's all quite real, and it's more of a connection to nature. It's like, "Did I see that?" and "What does that mean?" – taking signs and symbols from nature. In a modern setting, I'd compare it to having clairvoyancy and psychic abilities, or a medium healer – that's where I've tried to root it, in things that have a realness to them.

SC: And we're existing in a world where we want to believe in it, and we're trying to find truth in something. Derfel is so closely connected to Nimue that he can see these interactions with gods and powers. There's lots of

moments where it's like, "Could it be? Could it not be?". Playing on those borders is quite cool.

How does the part of Nimue reflect the status of women at the time?

EJ: What's nice about Nimue is that she's got quite a powerful role in society. Paganism is very much what people believe in. She's quite a unique female in that time, in that she was given quite a lot of status. I think that's why she very much holds on to her role, because without that she'd be worth very little. I remember reading the books and thinking, "She's incredibly ahead of her time – she's like a modern-day feminist." But within that, the reality was that it was very tough for women. There are moments where she's out of her safety zone of Avalon, and that's when the real fear of being a woman in this society gets played upon.

How does this version of the Arthurian story compare to other renditions?

EJ: I think there's a rawness to it that I haven't seen before, and that's partly to do with the handheld cameras – it's got a very raw, visceral feeling.

SC: The way that it's been shot, it seems a lot more close. It's a lot of very normal people doing very not-normal things. There's just something very human and honest about everything.

EJ: Also, I don't know if there's many shows where you meet Arthur quite young, before he becomes the legend. So it's the Making Of. That's quite nice – to see the journey, and the mistakes.

“We’ve got lovers who are separated, we’ve got friends dying, we’ve got the works”



"Do you think you could love a man with a mullet?"

GEN V

BACK TO

THE BOYS
GETS A
SUPERHERO
SCHOOL
SPIN-OFF—
MEET THE
GEN V
STUDENTS

WORDS **LUKE SMITH**

THIS INTERVIEW
WAS CONDUCTED
PRIOR TO SAG-AFTRA
STRIKE ACTION

SCHOOL



Jaz Sinclair as Marie Moreau, bending her blood.



“In the Gen V world, the kids are still idealistic... they’re not fully formed”



Chance Perdomo plays Andre Anderson.

Lizze Broadway as Emma Shaw: bloody hell.

WELCOME TO Godolkin University! Pay attention, students – class is in session...

The shared universe of *The Boys* continues, following the animated spin-off *Diabolical*, with a second live-action series based on the Dynamite comic books. This time viewers will go back to school as they see the training process for the first generation of superheroes to be aware of Compound V – an injected drug – rather than believing that receiving powers is an act of God.

As with all good teens-at-school dramas, there’s a mystery at the heart of the institution that our upcoming supes find themselves having to unravel, as well as competing to become the top-ranking students and, as in all coming-of-age stories, learning that what they think is right isn’t always necessarily the case.

The eight-part weekly Prime Video series also features appearances from Jessie T Usher (A-Train), Colby Minifie (Ashley Barrett), Claudia Doumit (Nadia) and PJ Byrne

(Adam Bourke), reprising their roles from *The Boys*. Jaz Sinclair (*Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina*) plays Marie Moreau, an 18-year-old superhero with a gruesome power that may have some people covering their eyes. As an incoming freshman at Vought-run Godolkin University, she is eager to prove she has what it takes to become the first black woman in the Seven, but is sidetracked by a mystery at the school.

Marie is, somewhat horribly on-the-nose, known as a “blood bender”. What does that mean, exactly? Well, it means she can wield blood – but at the beginning of the series she thinks it’s only her own blood that she can control, so as a result she cuts her hands in order to be able to use her powers. But before all that, she’s got lessons to deal with.

“Godolkin is *the* college for superheroes,” Sinclair explains. “If you want to be a successful superhero, if you want to

represent a city, if you want to ever make it to the Seven, you kinda have to go through Godolkin, because that’s how you get your spot, that’s how you get your training, that’s how you get your acclaim. So it’s sort of like superhero starter school.”

BLANK SLATES

In this series, however, the wannabe supes have yet to be corrupted, something that Sinclair says appealed to her as an actor.

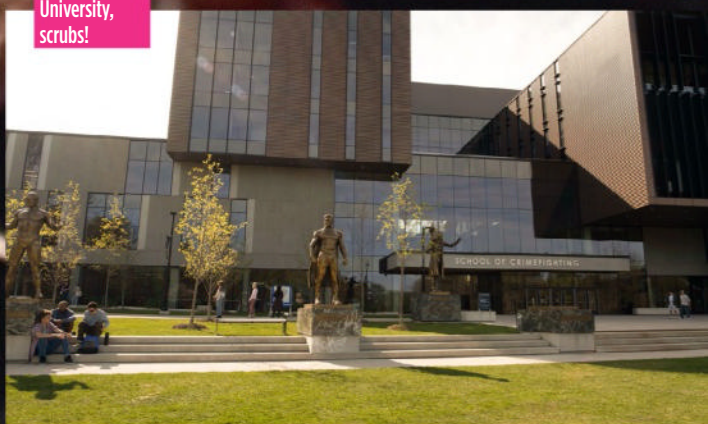
“In the *Gen V* world, the kids are still idealistic,” she explains. “They’re not fully formed into either a hero or a villain. For me, that was a really interesting topic and a really interesting time in all of their lives, because I feel like it gives us a chance to know where everybody came from and to watch the unfolding of them becoming the kind of hero that they’re going to become.

“I find it fascinating because it humanises everybody. It humanises the people making the good choices, and it humanises the people





Welcome
to Godolkin
University,
scrubs!



making the bad choices, and I just find that interesting. It leaves a lot of room for potential heartbreak, friendships and stuff that wouldn't be possible if we were all fully-fledged adults."

Vought and previous supes do, obviously, have a looming presence at Godolkin though, something that affects Marie as a new student.

"I think when Marie comes to the school and sees all the ideology, even the posters and the statues of Homelander and A-Train and

everybody, for Marie, it just makes her feel spunky," Sinclair says. "It just makes her feel like, 'That's me, and I can do that.' It's a reminder of why she's here and where she wants to go, more than it is a looming presence."

Sinclair says that she's pleased with how her character grows throughout the first season of *Gen V*, revealing that she discovers her full blood abilities along the way.

"I love Marie's arc. I love that she comes into this school in survival mode, in solo mode, in, like, 'goal' mode, and then is just surprised and surprised and surprised along the way. Surprised in her relationships and her friendships, and the horrors of the school and the crumbling of this system that she was taught to trust. And most of all, her coming into her power."

Sinclair also reveals that she got some advice from one of the cast of *The Boys* along the way... "Oh yeah, Jack Quaid!" she says. "He was just like, 'Stay a family, stay a team. This is where it's at. If you guys have each other, you'll get through this. So, don't lose sight of that.' This is the real family, you know, talking about the cast and, like, really being unified. And I value that because you can feel that when they're together."

With that in mind, does she think it's important that viewers have watched the previous three seasons of *The Boys* before setting off for Godolkin? →

We'd explain,
but you'd best
just watch,
frankly.



"I think you should watch *The Boys*, because *The Boys* is great and it will definitely give more information about the heroes and about the presence of Vought in general. But I feel like *Gen V* can also stand alone as its own thing.

"I'm just really excited for people to see this show. I feel like we've all poured our hearts and souls into this. You know, blood, sweat and tears, lack of sleep, intense scenes, crazy action. It's been such a labour of love. I really hope that people love it, 'cos we loved making it."

DADDY ISSUES

Chance Perdomo (reunited with fellow *Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina* star Sinclair) plays Andre Anderson, a junior at Godolkin University with magnetic powers. He's the best friend of Luke Riordan (aka Golden Boy, played by Patrick Schwarzenegger) and the son of famous supe Polarity (aka Mister Anderson, played by Sean Patrick Thomas). When Andre

"I feel like we've all poured our hearts and souls into this... blood, sweat and tears"

realises that something is afoot at the school, he takes it into his own hands to try and figure out the mystery. But it's daddy issues that Andre struggles with most – he's got big shoes to fill as he's set to take over the Polarity name once his dad retires...

"Andre Anderson is very much in his father's shadow," Perdomo explains. "His father is Polarity, a big-time superhero who didn't quite make it in the Seven but he's up there with some of the greats. And so there's a lot that's expected of Andre, and Andre's not sure if he can live up to it or whether he wants to live up to it, and it's this back and forth that he has with his dad."

As well as having to contend with conflict with his father, Andre also has to deal with two different divisions within Godolkin University. "So, we've got the Lamplighter Crime Fighting Academy, and we've got Crimson Countess Theatre School, essentially. Those are the two



Marie takes inspiration from one of her idols.

tracks that you can take, and your powers and your personality and your marketability determines which path you take," he says. "Now, you may want to go to crime-fighting, but the school might feel that you are better suited to the theatrical arts, in which case you don't have much say in it."

These options play into what Perdomo personally loves about the premise of *Gen V*.

"I love that it is a social commentary without it being inherently philosophical commentary," he says, "that it speaks to our society as a whole but doesn't kind of penalise or chastise anybody for the answers that they come to, right? So, some people might not want to be a hero. They might just want to make money. Some people might want to actually only be a hero, but then within that there's, what is a hero to you? It maintains the human quality that I think is going to make this show really relate to every person that watches it."

HEY, TEACHER!

Of course, you can't have teens investigating strange goings-on at a school without some kind of authority figure overseeing everything. Shelley Conn (*Bridgerton*, *Good Omens*) plays Indira Shetty, the Dean of Godolkin University. Her goal is to transform the facility into the most elite school for supes, and she takes a special interest in Marie due to her unconventional admission into the school.

Guess how the Red River Institute got its name.





ROLL CALL!

Meet the cast of *Gen V*

● **Lizze Broadway plays Emma Meyer**, also known as Little Cricket due to her ability to get super-small. Though insecure and naïve – which often leaves her in compromising positions – she becomes close friends with her freshman roommate Marie, and together they navigate the mysterious dangers at Godolkin University.

● **Maddie Phillips plays Cate Dunlap**, a junior at Godolkin University and Luke's girlfriend. Cate is able to push people to do anything she commands using the touch of her hands.

● **London Thor and Derek Luh play Jordan Li**, a competitive student at Godolkin University who will do anything to get to the top. They have a unique ability of changing between male and female forms, through which their distinct sets of powers make them a standout TA at Brink's School of Crime Fighting.

● **Asa Germann plays Sam**, a troubled supe who is desperately trying to escape his unfortunate circumstances. He's extremely powerful, with super strength and invulnerability.

● **Sean Patrick Thomas plays Polarity**, Andre's father and largely celebrated Godolkin University alumnus. Polarity believes Andre is destined for The Seven and will push him as hard as he can so his dream becomes reality.

● **Ciancy Brown plays Professor Rich "Brink" Brinkerhoff**, a renowned professor of crime-fighting at Godolkin University who taught superheroes such as A-Train, Queen Maeve and The Deep. He is dedicated to finding the top new talent at Godolkin University to join The Seven.

● **Marco Pigossi plays Dr Edison Cardoso**, a gifted doctor with ties to Godolkin University.

● **Patrick Schwarzenegger plays Luke Riordan**, who is also known by his superhero name Golden Boy, because of his ability to light his body on fire. He is the senior at Godolkin University with the brightest prospects of joining The Seven.



Marie on the receiving end of a nasty sneeze.



Lunchtimes were particularly brutal.



Turn around, bright eyes... no, really, do turn around.

"My character runs the school," Conn says. "She knows where they're coming from and what they're going through, and she knows how to talk to them. And with these young people, she becomes kind of like a surrogate mother to them. So they trust her. They rely on her. She reaches out to them and they take the hand. It's a nice relationship."

MEDIA TRAINING

Conn expands further on the two divisions at the school and how that impacts the students. "Godolkin University is the backdrop of the entire show. It's an elite Ivy League type of facility, a school that deals with two main factions of what it would be to become an adult superhero. One of them is the kind of celebrity, entertainer, influencer kind of world. And the other is the serious crime fighter – this is you saving the world, if that's the route you want to go."

As you might expect, the influencer/celebrity side of modern life plays into *Gen V*

just as it does in *The Boys* – so much so that the school has a special way of measuring their progress. "The ranking system for the students at Godolkin University is, as you can imagine, a bit like with the Seven, where it's based on social media success on a points system," Conn explains.

"So if a student has a great day where they happen to score a home run in some kind of way, whether it's through their superpower or even if it's just through something very benign that makes them popular that day, great, up go your points and therefore up goes your ranking in the system. So it's purely based on perception. It's all about likeability. It's all about popularity."

Likeability and popularity certainly played a part in the downfall of the Seven, and with a top-secret mystery unfolding in the school, it doesn't look like the students at Godolkin are in for an easy term... ●

Gen V is on Prime Video from 29 September.

ENSIGN OF THE TIMES



AS *STAR TREK: LOWER DECKS* WARPS INTO ITS FOURTH SEASON, SUPERVISING DIRECTOR BARRY J KELLY REVEALS HOW THE CARTOON SITCOM IS EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS

WORDS: RICHARD EDWARDS



THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO RUNNING a starship than simply making it so on the bridge. Like its namesake *The Next Generation* episode, *Lower Decks* shifts the focus away from the Picards, Siskos and Janeways of this world to concentrate on the junior officers who are more traditionally background players – or even phaser fodder – in other branches of the *Star Trek* universe. It also adheres to a prime directive to seek out the funny side of the franchise Gene Roddenberry created, while still showing the utmost respect to Starfleet and its (usually) courageous officers.

Fresh off a crossover episode with live-action *Trek* stablemate *Strange New Worlds*, the crew of the USS Cerritos are ready to complete their fourth tour of duty. So, with the upcoming season in the can and season five already in production, *SFX* caught up with *Lower Decks* supervising director Barry J Kelly to find out what's in store for Ensigns Mariner, Boimler, Tendi and Rutherford when they ship out of Spacedock.

Are there any season four episodes you're particularly excited about? Apparently there's going to be a wedding...

▲ Ha ha! There is a wedding, how'd you know? But on what planet, for what species, and for whom... you shall see soon enough!

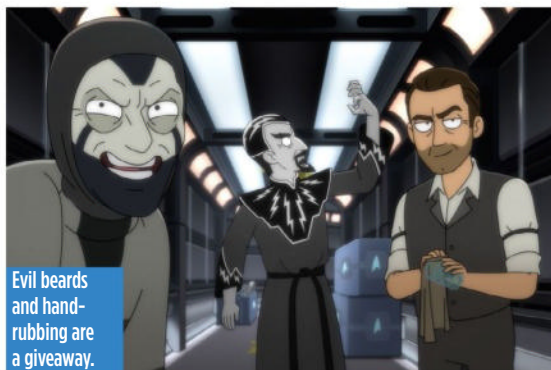
I love that our season two episode "wej Duj" gave us a glimpse of the lower decks of other [Vulcan, Klingon and even Borg] ships. This season we're getting a little taste of other species' lower deckers, with new ships and fun attitudes from the crews serving under their superiors. Some lower deckers have big aspirations, and for others it's just a day job in space.

Did the popularity of that episode encourage you to experiment with new storytelling styles?

▲ "wej Duj" is definitely an inspiration for this season, starting from the first episode. Viewers will pick up that something bigger is going on in the background of the show. I can't wait for viewers to see what we did – it really changed up the season in a fun way.

And we'll be seeing more of the hot-headed (by Vulcan standards, at least) T'Lyn from "wej Duj"...

▲ T'Lyn has proven to be a wonderful addition to the cast. She's a wonderful contrast and it's immediately clear how a serious and logical Vulcan adds to the comedy. Every time I see her deadpan expression next to the bubbly personalities of Tendi and Rutherford, I'm like, "No wonder every *Star Trek* has



their Spock! Duh!" Having a Vulcan in any scene adds a great texture that also feels very *Trek*.

We also know that the Cerritos is paying a visit to the Orion homeland. Does that mean we'll be learning more about Tendi's backstory, as we did with Rutherford in season three?

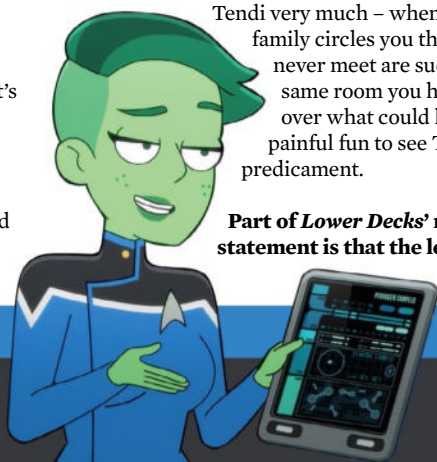
▲ We have a few fun set-pieces on Orion where we learn more about Tendi's family. I relate to Tendi very much – when friends and family circles you thought would never meet are suddenly in the same room you have no control over what could happen. It's good, painful fun to see Tendi in that predicament.

Part of *Lower Decks*' mission statement is that the lead characters are stuck in a



perpetual state of Harry Kim-style Ensign-dom, yet they've also evolved over the show's run. How do you strike that particular balance?

▲ What I love about the show is that the characters are so eager to be the best they can be, the stories can't hold them back. That's a good bit of *Star Trek* that Mike [McMahan, showrunner] and the writers really get: being your best self is in the blood of *Trek* storytelling, and you only get that by allowing the characters to change a little. We've seen Tendi enter Senior Science Officer training,





Noël Wells is Tendi, Dawnn Lewis is Carol Freeman.



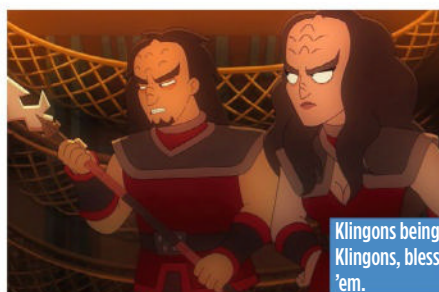
we've had Boimler promoted to the Titan (before returning to the Cerritos), and last season we saw Mariner learn to be more at peace with being a good officer. When you get more responsibility in life or at your job, a lot more weight is on your shoulders – hopefully our lower deckers can handle the pressure!

Do you consciously restrict the time we spend with the senior bridge crew? In any other *Star Trek* show they'd be the ones in the spotlight.

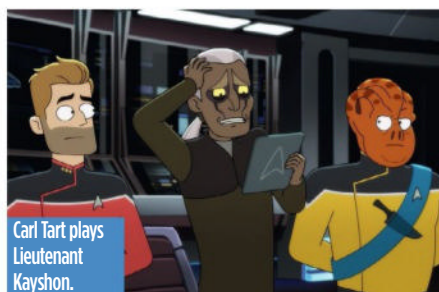
▲ The time constraint is honestly the real



Eugene Cordero is Ensign Rutherford.



Klingons being Klingons, bless 'em.



Carl Tart plays Lieutenant Kayshon.

challenge – I feel like we are always cramming a 44-minute *Star Trek* show into a 22-minute episode. I've always looked at certain shows as a "film-school-in-a-can", where if you broke down the script, acting, shots and editing they practically teach you how to make a compelling episode of television. *The Twilight Zone*, *The Simpsons* and *Star Trek* teach me about how to fit 10 people into a shot and make it clear.

The actors are so good that you want all of them in the show all the time, but we can't have 20 characters crammed into every shot or the animators would kill us! Freeman, Ransom, T'Ana and Shaxs are in their own *Star Trek* show up on the bridge, and we just happen to be watching *Lower Decks* a few floors below.

What do you think makes the ideal *Lower Decks* story?

▲ To me, it's a combination of emotional and personal conflict, all wrapped up in the fun, sci-fi elements of *Star Trek* – whether it's

“We're always trying to make sure we don't compromise the integrity of characters”

Tendi having to confront the Orion pirate roots she's been desperate to hide, Boimler trying not to sabotage himself, or Mariner struggling to be a “normal” girlfriend. If it was just one or the other, it wouldn't be *Lower Decks*.

I think Mike and the team have managed to come up with a nice variety of stories that are unique to every season. They've proved you can make a compelling spaceship rescue mission more exciting than just having a big bad villain of the week out to get our leads.

Has anything surprised you about the way *Lower Decks* has evolved since season one?

▲ I think it's the way we've woven ourselves within the lines of existing canon while still preserving it. We do that more and more, especially in season four. Back in season three, I felt the *Deep Space Nine* episode was successful because we went back and paid respects to the *DS9* characters while simultaneously using our own cast to tell a great story on the station.

Even when we're visiting worlds Picard went to, or encountering powerful beings from other eras of *Trek*, we're always trying to make sure we don't compromise the integrity of either the legacy characters or our own. You saw this balance recently when Mariner and Boimler punctured the bubble of *Strange New Worlds* – they really seemed like our versions of the characters, yet it still felt like we were watching what makes *Strange New Worlds* so good.

Speaking of *Strange New Worlds*, have Jack Quaid (Boimler) and Tawny Newsome's (Mariner) live-action performances in crossover episode “Those Old Scientists” →

influenced how you animate their characters from now on?

▲ Now that we've seen Jack and Tawny as their live action counterparts, it seems we've influenced each other. Our animators have been inspired by their amazing voice performances for almost five years now, and in an interview I heard Jack say he had been referencing our animation for his performance on *Strange New Worlds*. He's got that Boimler power walk down pat!

Did you approach the closing scene of "Those Old Scientists", featuring cartoon versions of Pike and his crew, any differently to an episode of *Lower Decks*?

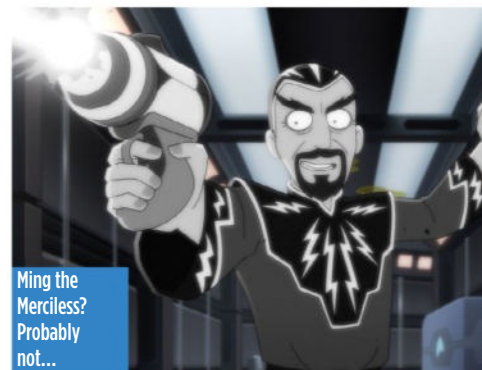
▲ The *Strange New Worlds* team were wonderful. They inspired us to just do what we would do on *Lower Decks*, because they're as much fans of our show as we are of theirs. They had been farther along in planning when we started on the episode, and they provided beautiful concept art and set builds for us to reference. The script was super-funny and we rolled into it like it was a segment from *Lower Decks*. The same crew members from *Lower Decks* produced the animation for the *Strange New Worlds* episode, and I'm really proud of the team for doing such a good job on it.

Do you think there could be an opportunity to explore other eras of *Trek* in animation beyond the *Next Generation* time period of *Lower Decks*?

▲ The *Original Series* films and *The Next Generation* were what I grew up with, so those are my ideal era of *Trek*. That's my personal foundation for the sensibilities of what makes *Star Trek* iconic. That said, what I love about animation is that you can take audiences to fully crafted worlds of imagination that other media can't. I feel like the more flexible the medium, the more strange and deep you can get.

What's great about *Lower Decks* is that we can go across the spectrum of comedy, horror, action, drama – you name it – and it all feels right at home in our animated world. I don't think the live-action shows would want to do a whole episode of nine-foot-tall bird people [season three's "A Mathematically Perfect Solution"] if they could avoid it. And you probably wouldn't find a cartoony murderer like Badgley smashing into a room with a butcher knife [season one's "Terminal Provocations"] in a live-action show. Those are the laws we can break and get away with in animation.

What's harder: creating entirely new alien races and worlds, or reimagining iconic characters, species and spaceships?



▲ It's very liberating when we get to make something new and add to the *Trek* lexicon, where we design to our own standards with a *Star Trek* aesthetic in mind. Reimagining classic characters is the same process but with a heavy amount of pressure. As fans we have an ideal version of these characters and places in our heads, but it takes an army of us to narrow these down to their pure *Lower Decks* essence. We had lot of variations of Riker's beard: "No... that's too Tony Stark, that one's too Dracula, oooh that one's just right!"

Lower Decks is very clever in the way it has fun in the *Star Trek* universe without mocking the franchise. Four seasons in, do you instinctively know where the line between the two lies?

▲ Mike seems to see that line just well enough to dance circles around it. You can

totally stretch the canon, and with it being so broad there's definitely unexplored sectors of this space where iconic characters could have crossed paths, or just been passing ships in the night – literally.

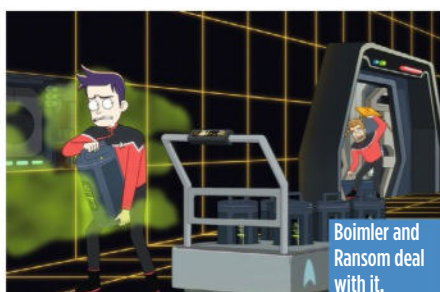
You can definitely wear canon thin, but we all pick up on that when it's happening, and try to avoid it. It can be slow to move this big ship of a franchise, but when you sense you've worn out your welcome on a subject, you pivot and make something new and refreshing. We like making new *Star Trek* as much as exploring the past.

Do you stay in contact with the teams on *Discovery*, *Strange New Worlds* and *Picard* to find out what they're up to?

▲ Totally. Mike and the other show creators have to check in with each other, to ask "What are you doing?" "Who are you using?" "You're pulling the Gorn into your show?" We definitely want to keep a variety of stories and



Gillian Vigman voices Doctor T'Ana (left).



Boimler and Ransom deal with it.



Ransom and Kayshon, not really dealing with it.

elements apart from each other, and we don't want to step on each other's ideas. If we know another show is doing a similar idea, we'll go in a different direction. We all want to provide something new and different with each episode. That's how you navigate long-form storytelling.

There was a time when *Red Dwarf*, *Galaxy Quest* and *Futurama* were considered anomalies for successfully combining sci-fi and comedy. These days, however, crossing the streams is much more commonplace. What do you think has changed?

▲ If sci-fi concepts were seen as a barrier to entry in the past, nowadays I feel like it's not an obstacle for audiences to understand because sci-fi is so present in movies, videogames, anime and comics. The concepts aren't much of a leap for anyone to understand and the

comedy is a therapeutic addition to sci-fi. I actually think *The Next Generation* has great comedic timing because the actors are so good. Episodes get funnier with multiple viewings, and when you really know the characters you laugh harder *with* them. I think that we love characters with aspirations who are at the mercy of the chaotic universe around them, just like we are – and who says that scenario can't be funny?

That spoonful of comedy can balance out the drama, making drama feel more serious, or vice versa: the more seriously we take the story the funnier the comedy becomes. A story should be any genre, tone, medium you need to make it compelling, and science fiction-comedy can be a beautiful thing. ●

Star Trek: Lower Decks is on Paramount+ from 8 September.

USS EGG-TERPRISE

Trek-themed Easter eggs are a major part of *Lower Decks* – and they can evolve at any stage of the production process



"At every stage of the show we find new ideas for Easter eggs," *Lower Decks* director Barry J Kelly tells *SFX*. "The script plants the ideas for characters, locations and gags, and a description like 'a room of space anomalies and items we've seen in *Star Trek*' keeps it open to ideas. Storyboard artists come up with the staging, where they might pitch some ideas. Then we enter the design phase where our designers get inspired and pitch details on the characters, props and backgrounds. Even in the animation and editing phase, we find spots to add fun stuff – if we need a rewrite on a line, we might add a funny reference late in the game.

"For example, in the script for [season three episode] 'Grounded' we visit the historical Bozeman theme park [commemorating the first warp flight from *First Contact*]. The slide and swings on the Vulcan ship, the Zefram Cochrane hats, the churros... those were all in the script. But in the episode 'Crisis Point II' it wasn't until we were deep in post-production that we thought it would be funny to superimpose a computer overlay straight from *The Wrath Of Khan* onto our graphics. Our editor had to comp it together to make a pitch for it, and it ended up being funnier than we anticipated. It was a win!"

SAW X



SAW THAT COMING

JOHN KRAMER'S
ALIVE – AGAIN!
SAW X
DIRECTOR KEVIN
GREUTERT TELLS
SFX WHY THE
ICON'S LATEST
KILLING SPREE IS
SURPRISINGLY
EMOTIONAL

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD

WHEN *Saw 3D*, the seventh *Saw*, released in cinemas, the tagline promised “The Final Chapter” in the ongoing saga. But the game was far from over. Despite having died in *Saw III*, John Kramer aka Jigsaw returns in *Saw X*, and his comeback shouldn't surprise: he's been in every *Saw* since his demise (barring the Chris Rock-led ninth instalment, *Spiral*). However this time, rather than appearing through flashbacks or pre-recorded tapes, John Kramer's back for real.

Saw X takes place between the events of the first two *Saw* films and sees Kramer and his protégé, the former trap victim Amanda, wreak havoc on a group of scientists in Mexico who promised Kramer an experimental cure for his cancer but actually swindled him. As a result, the scientists soon find themselves unwittingly playing a game of survival, and, well, you probably know the rest; traps, blood, gore and creepy ventriloquist dolls fill the runtime, which also happens to make this the longest *Saw* yet.

JIGSAW PUZZLE

“It was always the intention to go back to basics,” Kevin Greutert, the director of *Saw X*, *Saw VI* and *Saw 3D*, tells SFX. The key to unlocking the film, he explains, was understanding how to optimise everything audiences love about the series. By setting the film between the first two *Saw* films, Greutert could tell a story less beholden to convoluted lore and instead focus on having Jigsaw do what he does best: exacting (twisted) justice on those (mostly) deserving.

“We've learned, one way or another, that John Kramer as played by Tobin Bell is what it's all about,” Greutert says. “This was an opportunity to really focus on him and his story and a really key incident that happens in his life. So it led us to a story that is, surprisingly, pretty emotional compared to the other *Saw* movies.

“Not that there isn't emotion in the other ones, but it's mostly the emotion of fear. There's other stuff in this one. There's hope and there's hope destroyed. People will really →

“Want to play a game?” Nah, we're alright, ta.



be surprised because, as good as the trailer is, it doesn't convey a lot of what the actual film is."

Greutert has previously said the film has an "epic" quality to it, which aligns with the extended runtime but not necessarily the subject matter – after all, the word epic evokes *The Lord Of The Rings*, *Dune* and *Blade Runner*, not Jigsaw's killing sprees. "It has to do with tone, more than length," Greutert explains. "The arc John goes through is more grandiose in a way, and emotionally deeper, than what we're used to. There are extended sequences that are not the normal kind of thing you see in a *Saw* movie. Really, it's more of an emotion-driven epic than anything else."

Saw X is, at times, so unlike a normal *Saw* film that upon reading the script, members of the production crew who were not previously part of the *Saw* family kept saying they didn't realise the series was this emotional. "And I'm like, 'Well, normally, it's not!'" says Greutert. "It really is a good story. And Tobin's character, John, is more empathetic. It sounds crazy because he does some pretty horrendous things, but that's the magic of *Saw*, that we can have a protagonist that's that out there."

SETTING TRAPS

That doesn't mean John Kramer's not as terrifying as ever. After all, *Saw X* takes place just months after the original bathroom game seen in the first *Saw*, in which Cary Elwes's Dr Lawrence Gordon was forced to remove his own leg to escape. "A lot of really, really bad, dark shit goes down in this story," Greutert says. Much of that "dark shit" comes by the way of traps.

The trailer alone features fingers being bent out of place, large mechanical collars, a man trying to remove his own brain's cerebral tissue, rats seemingly running down tubes towards someone's eyes and much, much more. Perhaps unsurprisingly, coming up with new twisted ways to torture victims remains a difficult task for the filmmakers.

"It's really, really hard," Greutert says. "Every year when I've been told we're doing another shoot I'm like, 'How do we do it?' Because a lot of it starts with the script, but sometimes the traps and cells are very shorthand. In the script, sometimes they are just as they appear, but usually, there are a lot of long meetings between assorted people – the writers, the production designer, the actors – where you just sit and hash through it.

"I have lots of books on medieval torture machines and other dark stuff, and sometimes we just pore through it and shoot ideas off each other. Some of the traps have evolved quite a lot from how



Shawnee Smith as Amanda Young.

"I have lots of books on medieval torture machines and other dark stuff"



Joshua Okamoto is Diego/Dr Cortez.

they started. And then you have to think about how to actually pull it off. I was very nervous about some of the things that we did; nervous on a safety level and nervous thinking it was just going to look ridiculous.

"Far more so than on the other *Saw* movies, we had to do a lot of testing. Mostly in pre-production, but we wound up having to split the shoot into two parts – three weeks in November and three weeks in January – because it was so complicated. We had to make so many prosthetics and machines, and over Christmas, we spent the entirety of it figuring this stuff out."

The time off led to more testing as the crew, including the stunt coordinators and those in charge of fire and explosions, gathered together to figure out how the deadliest traps would work. "Frankly, if we hadn't done every single one of those tests, we probably wouldn't have a movie because it just gets harder and harder as you get deeper into the story," Greutert says. "By the last week, when we were shooting the climactic

scenes, stuff went wrong even despite the tests. Halfway through every day, I was in a state of near panic thinking, 'Wow, this is the day we fail.' There's so much coordination where you're shouting out cues and there are lights and blood machines. It's just really hard."

The results speak for themselves: the majority of the work was done practically, and the result is a visceral killing experience. CG was used for touch-ups, with Greutert emphasising the brilliant work done by the CG artists, but for the film's blood and guts, the majority was done on set, helping *Saw X* feel like an early *Saw* film.

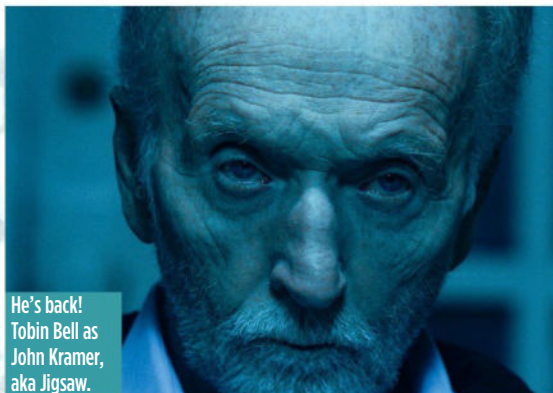
Of course, what really grounds *Saw X* in that world is the presence of Tobin Bell. "His commitment to the character is the reason for our success," Greutert says. "Because he makes sure that we're not messing with his mythology or psychology. He's an extremely creative and serious person when it comes to this role. His performance in this film is an extension of everything that he's done before. He had a really big role in the development of the script and even brought a lot of that into the film after it was shot, adding some additional lines [through ADR] that were really helpful to us.



Gabriela and Mateo (Renata Vaca, Octavio Hinojosa).



He's back! Tobin Bell as John Kramer, aka Jigsaw.



Ultimately, he's the gatekeeper that makes sure we're doing things right when it comes to Kramer. He's the centre of the franchise, there's no doubt."

Kramer's not the only returning face; his accomplice, Amanda, played by Shawnee Smith, is very much alive during this time period. We know very little about Amanda between *Saw* and *Saw II*, only really that she quickly turns from being a diehard Kramer follower to, by *Saw III*, being jaded by the John Kramer experience.

For Greutert, *Saw X* explores the question of: how did she go from this person who would do anything for John, who would jump off a cliff for him, to turning against him as much as she does? "That's, dramatically, the material we were working with," he says.

UP TO ELEVEN

The director won't go into whether other characters from the series will appear, though he teases "surprises" to come. It's also clear that *Saw X* is something of a storytelling cul-de-sac, building "more on what's in the past," as Greutert puts it, than planting seeds for the future. "There's no obvious new direction to go after this film," he continues, "but I think there probably will be more *Saw* movies, particularly if this one is successful."

One possibility is a sequel to *Spiral* which ended with a Jigsaw copycat, played by Max Minghella, getting away with murder. The film was not as successful as the producers had hoped. "I wasn't really part of that decision [to not make a *Spiral* sequel next]," Greutert says.

"All I know is that they wish that they had included Tobin in *Spiral*. They had this script [for *Saw X*] before *Spiral*, but a lot of development happened on the script between the first time they read it and then post-*Spiral*. They said, 'We need to go back to our roots.' It was the right decision. They may still do another *Spiral*, too, but this is what they did this year."

How the franchise continues depends on the reception to *Saw X*. And if you're on the fence about seeing this one, Greutert wants to make clear that you don't have to be a Jigsaw disciple to enjoy his latest killing spree.

"I truly believe that this is the most standalone *Saw* film since the first one," he says. "It's not about knowing or remembering anything about the previous films. It's a richer experience if you know about *Saw* because otherwise you won't necessarily know who Amanda is when she appears, but it's very clear from the beginning what's happening."

Indeed, one of the producers summed up *Saw X* quite nicely: "He watched a cut and said, 'I can't believe we've made our first grown-up movie.' I guess that's an endorsement." ●

Saw X is in cinemas on 29 September.



Synnøve Macody Lund plays Cecilia Pederson.



ULTRAVIOLET

UNDEAD

WE HAVE A CODE FIVE!
ON THE 25TH
ANNIVERSARY OF
ULTRAVIOLET,
CREATOR JOE AHEARNE
LOOKS BACK AT THE
VAMPIRE-SLAYING TV
CLASSIC

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

ULTRAVIOLET

RECKONING

“WAS TOLD VERY CLEARLY, ‘Don’t talk about vampires!’” says Joe Ahearne, creator of *Ultraviolet*, a series that drove a sleek modern stake through the heart of the undead. “They said, ‘You’re not going to get this show off the ground if you talk about it like it’s an update of Hammer horror. They’re just not going to make that.’”

Tearing away the velvet and blood-spattered crinoline, *Ultraviolet* had no time for the classic gothic trappings of a vampire tale. Here was an edgy, metropolitan thriller, set against the bloodshot skies of London, where a government-sanctioned black ops team battled an immortal conspiracy against mankind. Broadcast by Channel 4 in late 1998, it felt perfectly timed for a country bristling with pre-millennial anxiety in the afterglow of Cool Britannia, on the countdown to Y2K.

“That was one of the selling points of the show,” reveals Ahearne, who wrote and directed all six episodes. “I had to pretend that it was a show about exactly that kind of angst. So in the storylines I bumped up certain things that Channel 4 could glom onto and say, ‘Oh yes, I see what you’re doing...’ I have to say it wasn’t my primary interest!

“We had a rejection before it was taken up by Channel 4, where the boss of the channel

VAMPIR SQUAD

written by Joe Ahearne

said, ‘I just don’t believe the audience will accept that there’s a conspiracy of vampires out there.’ You can’t argue with that, you can’t fight with it, because that’s just the sensibility of a lot of people in television. Certainly at Channel 4 there was a big embarrassment that they were doing a show about vampires at all.

“People would hear the word vampire and immediately assume it’s going to be a horror thing. And I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to do more of a thriller thing with vampires, an investigative thing. I’m more interested in where you confuse genre.”

Originally titled *Vampyr Squad*, then filmed as *Crossing The Line*, *Ultraviolet* – in the show’s lore, only UV light can expose the telltale bite-marks – followed an abortive idea for a series about an undead private eye. “I realised there was no way of filming that because you’d have to film it all at night,” Ahearne tells *SFX*, acknowledging the practical realities of a daylight-dodging hero. “Back then there just wasn’t the budget to do five months of night shoots. It’d be insane.”

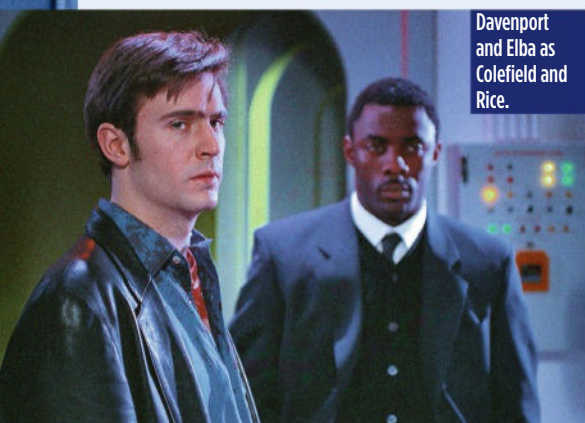
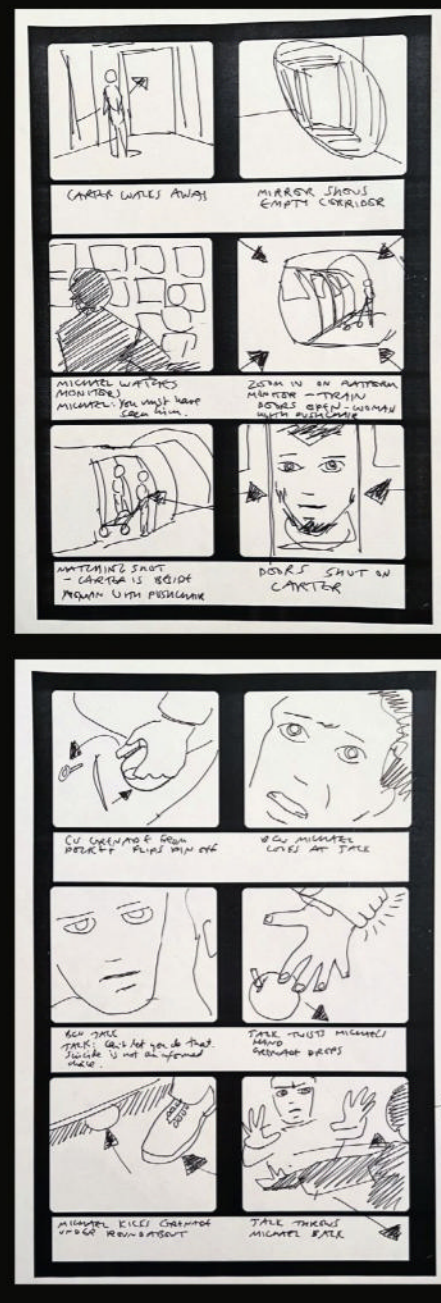
THIS AFTERLIFE

Ahearne credits producer Sophie Balhetchet at World Productions for championing *Ultraviolet*, as well as his own creative potential. “I’d done absolutely fuck all,” he laughs. “I only realised some years later that it wasn’t my brilliance or charisma that got the show off the ground, it was her, and the fact that World’s previous show *This Life* had been a huge hit.”

Launched in 1996, *This Life* was a zeitgeisty drama about law graduates in South London. “Sophie read the treatment for *Ultraviolet* and loved it, and she was the one who really pushed it through. She got me on to writing and then directing *This Life*. I don’t want to say it was a try-out, because it was an amazing show in itself, and I was incredibly lucky to get on it, but I couldn’t have gone from doing absolutely nothing to doing a six-part series on Channel 4. And that’s where I met Jack Davenport, and thought, ‘Hey, he’d be perfect for this...’

“Really what Channel 4 wanted was World Productions’ next show after *This Life*, starring Jack Davenport. It was a bit of an inconvenience, I think, that it happened to be about vampires!”

Ultraviolet scrupulously avoids the V word. The enemy is only ever referred to as Code Five – a sly play on the equivalent Roman numeral – or, more dismissively, leeches. And the show’s reinvention of vampiric lore is just as refreshingly grounded.



Davenport and Elba as Colefield and Rice.



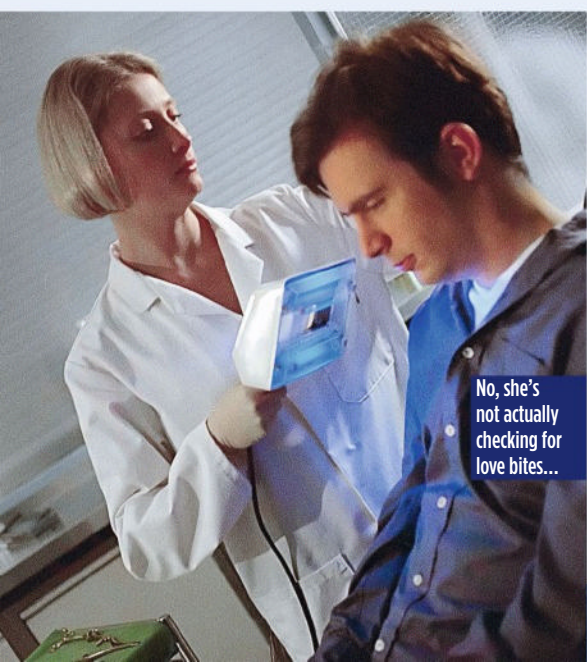
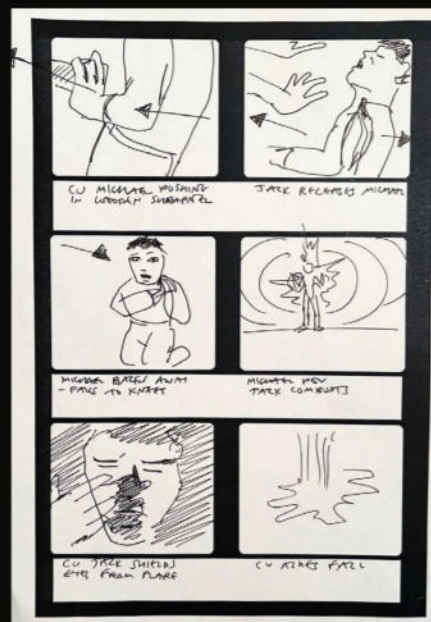
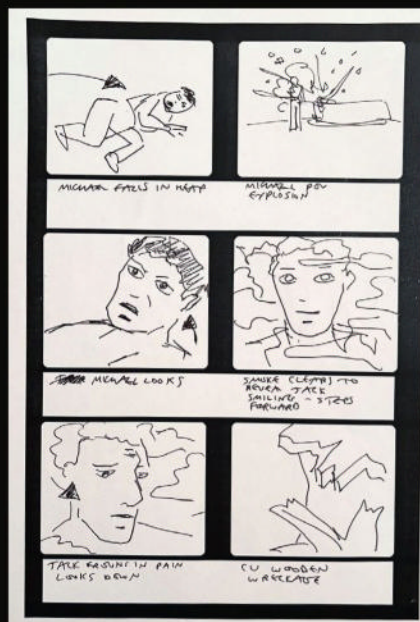
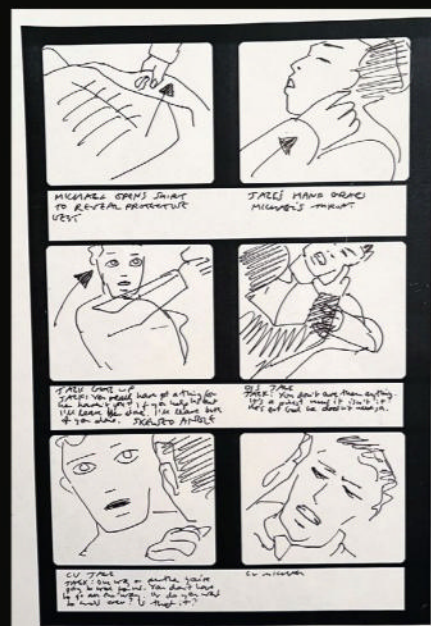
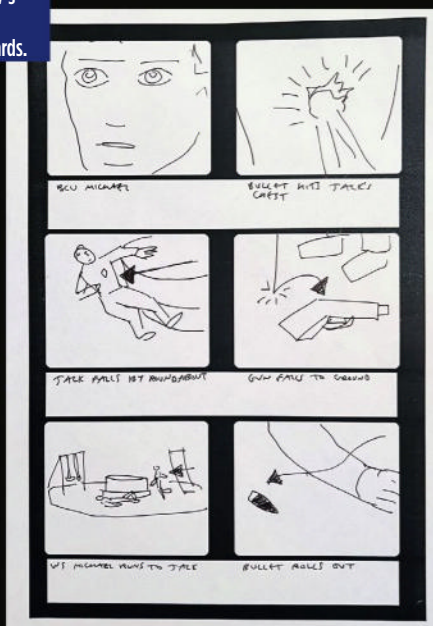
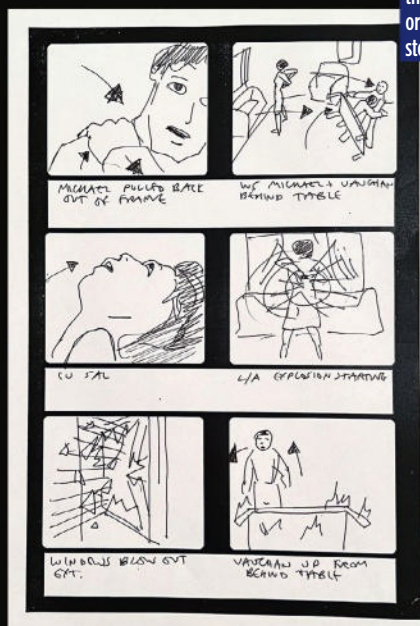
Susannah Harker as Section 5's Dr Angela Marsh.

“I didn’t do English or drama or anything arty at university,” says Ahearne. “I did physics, so that’s my background. With the vampire stuff it was all about ‘If they exist now, how would that work?’ As far as I was aware, no one had really done that.

“Even the modern vampire stuff in the ’70s and ’80s still tended to be spooky houses and whatever. I just thought, if they did exist, and the government knew about them, what would they do about it? They wouldn’t be running around with stakes and holy water. They’d be updating the technology.

“So I took some of the vampire lore that’s traditional, like not appearing in mirrors, and interrogated that, and thought, ‘Well, what does that mean?’ And what I decided it meant was that the only machine that could detect a

A peek at
the show's
original
storyboards.



No, she's
not actually
checking for
love bites...

vampire was a human being. You could only see them with the naked eye. They don't show up in mirrors, they don't show up on photographs, they don't show up on CCTV. You can't record them. And that gives you stories."

As Ahearne tells *SFX*, he was also keen to explore the metaphorical possibilities of the show's antagonists. "I was interested in the terrorist paradigm. Rather than thinking of them as monsters I thought of them more as how they see themselves, which is a repressed minority. And then it becomes interesting."

"Vampirism has always been a stand-in for a lot of stuff but historically it was more to do with adolescent sexuality, more about a 15-year-old boy's fear of sex – she might eat me, whatever. I was trying to do something which was a bit counter-intuitive. We really didn't

“People would hear the word vampire and immediately assume it's going to be horror”

have the sex angle at all in *Ultraviolet*. It's quite a cold, clinical show. They're a public health threat, really.

"Because the Good Friday Agreement was about to come in, I was interested in the parallel with the IRA. There's a period in the '90s where, rather like vampires, you weren't allowed to record their voices. It was the IRA then, now it might be Al-Qaeda or whoever, but when terrorists talk they do so in a very passionate way and have very logical reasons →

HITCH CRAFT

The art of suspense

An unforgettable set-piece in episode five, "Terra Incognita", finds Idris Elba trapped in a warehouse with four high-tech coffins, set to unleash their vampiric cargo as the clocks tick down to sunset...

"You really think he's going to die because he's the third lead," says Ahearne. "He wasn't a star back then, so traditionally he's absolutely for the chop."

For the young director it was a chance to channel cinema's grandmaster of thrills. "You know the hoary old Hitchcock definition of the difference between suspense and surprise? Instead of the bomb going off you show the bomb under the table. One of my friends saw that scene and he just laughed out loud. 'It's like four bombs! Wouldn't one bomb be enough?'"

"It's the Hitchcock definition of suspense. How do you stop the bomb from going off? And how does a character react to the fact that they're going to die in five minutes? It's an action scene, but because he thinks he's going to die he calls up the person he's in love with."

"He hasn't told her he's in love with her and he can't bring himself to say it, so there's emotional character stuff going on in that as well. I think that's why people remember it."

"And it's Idris's performance that carries you through that. You really do not want to say goodbye to that character. That's not me, that's him."



Elba larks about in a continuity Polaroid.

for doing unspeakable and terrible things, and that seemed a very interesting area to be in. It was more like a paramilitary take on vampires."

While Section 5 hunted its quarry with a state-of-the-art arsenal, including carbon bullets and garlic-derived gas grenades, the series also found some sympathy for the Devil. In fact the vampires are seen to be on the right side of history when it came to global warming.

"Once you posit an antagonist that is functionally immortal then their concerns are on a different timescale to ours," says Ahearne. "So that's what gives you their concerns. They're not thinking in a timescale of a year or five years. They're thinking, 'Fuck, what are we going to be drinking in a hundred years' time if these stupid arseholes keep doing what they're doing?' That's where a lot of the energy of the show came from. Like terrorists they have reasonable grievances. It's just how they go about demonstrating that can be a problem."

STAR QUALITY

Jack Davenport played Detective Sergeant Michael Colefield, a regular cop recruited to the vampire-slaying cause. "He was completely right for the part and also very hot off *This Life*," says Ahearne. "So that was a no-brainer."

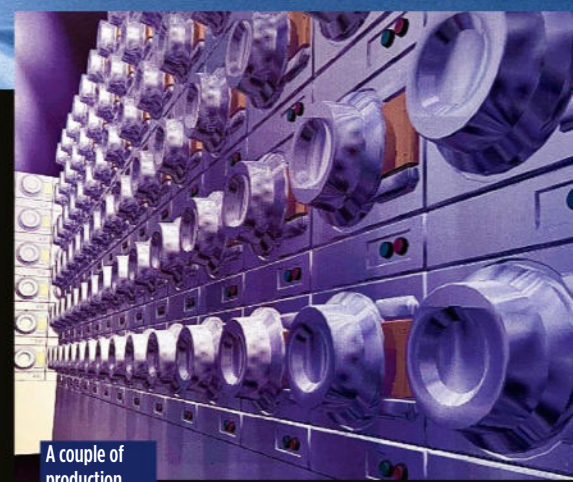
"I remember Jack doing a scene where he's in a club and he's worried that the woman he loves has turned into a vampire. He goes into the toilet to smash a mirror, so he can find out whether she's got a reflection or not. It's quite a complicated scene of him with a piece of broken glass in his hand, trying to find the non-reflection of the woman he loves."

"In the middle of filming this Jack starts laughing and says, 'This is the most surreal, the most mad thing I've ever heard of!' Okay, fair enough, he was only 25 at the time. I'm sure he's done a lot of mad things..."

As Dr Angela Marsh, a cancer specialist who lost her husband and her daughter to vampirism, Ahearne cast Susannah Harker, known for 1990's *House Of Cards*. "I had worked with her before and had been writing this character pretty much with her in mind. I'm a big Hitchcock fan and she has got that Hitchcock blonde thing. She's reserved, but you sense there's a lot churning underneath. Of all the characters I think she had the best backstory."

With Philip Quast as Harman, priest and leader of the clandestine team, the ensemble was completed by rising star Idris Elba, all edge and smoulder as Gulf War veteran Vaughan Rice. "I didn't know Idris," says Ahearne. "I had no idea he was going to be a huge star but he had that terrible thing they call star quality. When he comes in a room you pay attention."

"I did have the exec producer and the casting director, both with guns pointed at my head, saying, 'You will cast this person or we will shoot you!' I didn't need much persuading."



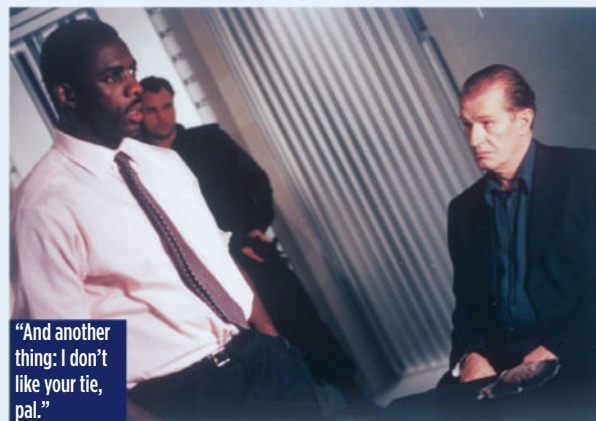
A couple of production design images.



He obviously has incredible charisma. He was arguably one of the more successful characters. I've learned since that people really like watching characters who enjoy what they do, and are committed to what they do.

"Idris was running around with guns, being very experienced, very good at his job. He hated leeches and was killing them with a passion. Whereas the Jack Davenport character, and this is my fault as a writer, was

"I had no idea Idris was going to be a huge star but he had that thing they call star quality"



"And another thing: I don't like your tie, pal."

Original
episode
synopsis and
a script page.

EPISODE III

IN VITRO

An unborn child fails to show up properly on ultrasound. When the woman goes missing, Vaughan tracks down her boyfriend who turns out to be human - and infertile. The trail leads to vampyr infiltration at a Harley Street fertility clinic. The foetus she's carrying is a hybrid - half-human, half-vampyr, part of their continuing research strategy. The offspring will have all the powers of the vampyr with none of its weaknesses. Chances are, it will be immune to daylight, garlic and silver.

Pearse's health is failing and he suspects that his leukaemia is no longer in remission. He agrees to tests by Angie on the understanding that his diagnosis will be kept from the rest of the squad. As founder of the squad, his first concern is morale but Angie is also shaken at the thought of losing the first person who gave her life purpose after her husband and daughter were taken by vampyrs.

Kirsty makes contact with Jacob, a journalist who has heard rumours of the squad's activities. He promises to help her find out what happened to Jack. Michael meets Kirsty to tell her it's best they stop seeing each other for a while. Like forever, she thinks. She's convinced he's part of the conspiracy - it he's not hiding anything why is he running away? He can't tell her it's to protect her and it's killing him to do it.

Frances turns up to apologise to Michael for her harsh words the last time they met. If he's got secrets, so be it. She still wants to be friends. Michael explains that in his current job, it's dangerous for him to get close to people. Frances reassures him that she's used to taking care of herself and she'll take that decision, thank you very much. Michael is tremendously relieved. Frances steals herself - friends is better than nothing. She's missed him since they split up.

Having traced the pregnant woman, the squad members are faced with an unpleasant duty. Their license to exterminate vampyrs has taken them into the womb. Priest Pearse finds himself sanctioning an abortion, albeit half a human life.

Michael meets Angie's surviving daughter, Rose. Vaughan's doing his best to bond with her as a way of impressing Angie. Michael sees a different side of Angie - apart from the grim business of exterminating vampyrs, Rose seems to be her sole reason for carrying on. But Angie doesn't realise that her obsession with Rose's safety is actually pushing her away.

Vaughan tracks the vampyr father and reduces him to ashes and it's Michael who catches up with the pregnant woman. But Nature has got him off the hook - the woman has miscarried. This time the vampyrs' genetic experiment has failed. Angie's evasive on the subject of whether she really would have performed an abortion against the mother's wishes. Michael wonders just how far his new comrades will go to protect humanity.

A stoic Angie gives Pearse the results of his tests. He has six months to live - perhaps longer with chemotherapy. The news concentrates Pearse's mind more than ever on his work. He's determined to accomplish as much as possible in the time he has left.

MICHAEL hears a scream from directly below him. He looks down through a gap in the boards to see CARLOS lying on the floor below, eyes blazing red from the gas, coughing and choking, in agony. He's bleeding from a chest wound.

CARLOS tries weakly to get up but one of the attackers puts a heavy boot on his chin and forces him back, pinning him to the floor by his neck. Still there's urgent shouts from the others.

The man aims his weapon point blank at CARLOS, writhing on the floor. He fires a long burst directly into his chest, yelling - with a familiar voice.

VAUGHAN
YOU FUCKING LEECH!!

When he's finished, CARLOS is very dead. There's a crackle of radio static from one of the team's walkie-talkies.

RADIO VOICE
Code Five neutralised. Send in the cleaners.

MICHAEL takes a step back, wide-eyed. The floorboards snap. VAUGHAN looks up, his black skin clearly visible through the eyeholes of his mask.

VAUGHAN
We lost Bill. VAUGHAN
Get up there!

MICHAEL runs directly at the window and explodes through it.

He lands heavily in bushes, ignores the pain and is up and running by the time VAUGHAN and several of his companions are at the upstairs window, looking out. They glimpse MICHAEL between the bushes. One of VAUGHAN's men aims his gun but VAUGHAN pushes his arm away before he can fire.

CUT TO:

MICHAEL running for his life, bleeding superficially from glass cuts on his face and arms. He looks back. They don't seem to be pursuing him.

INT DERELICT BUILDING NIGHT

The burnt-out living room looks like an abattoir. Three of VAUGHAN's men are lying on the floor, dead. A fourth is nursing a bleeding arm. The survivors are collecting their spent shell casings. VAUGHAN pulls off his mask and casts his eyes over the carnage. He looks with pure hatred to the place where CARLOS fell.

complaining quite a lot of the time and worrying about the morals. He was more equivocal. He was there to supply the moral centre of the show. But you want to see people kill vampires! So Idris went down really well."

Ultraviolet was a one-off for cast and creator alike. "I thought of it almost as one big movie," says Ahearne. "Six hours, you tell the whole story, done and dusted, gone. It was never designed to go on longer than that. They made a pilot for an American version [also starring Idris Elba] a couple of years later and it didn't go anywhere.

"The showrunner described it as a sexy vampire soap! The polar opposite of what I was doing, but you have to do that in America, because you burn up so much story. Back then they were doing 22-episode seasons. Six parts is a great length of story because you don't have to tread water.

"And I don't think Channel 4 were particularly interested in making any more. It was sold to a previous regime, and then a new team came in and it really wasn't their thing. If you look at the stuff Channel 4 were making at the time it was much more emotional and zingy and sarcastic and bright. On some levels *Ultraviolet*'s a pretty miserable show. No one was very happy!

"The audience figures were fine, it did really well critically, but there was no development done on a second series and I don't think there was any particular appetite at the channel any more."



Cutting edge
vampire-
busting tech,
'90s style.

Just like the undead, however, *Ultraviolet* never feels entirely consigned to the grave. "When episode five was going out I was flown to New York and I met Bob Weinstein," Ahearne reveals, "and there was talk about a movie but nothing happened with that. And then Fox did their remake, which I haven't seen, but apparently did not work very well and was never aired. Every few years or so someone comes round and we have a bit of a

chat and there's a bit of a nibble but nothing's come of that, either."

Where might the show have gone past that one, indelible series? "Part of the problem was I'd burnt up a lot of my story ideas in those six episodes," Ahearne admits. "Once you find out that the vampires want to create a nuclear winter and replace us with synthetic blood, well, can you go on for another four seasons exploring that? You've been told what the deal is. I think if I'd been doing a second series 25 years ago I would have jumped in time. I would have had something apocalyptic happen, in order to change it up."

And what if he was bringing back *Ultraviolet* now, a whole quarter of a century on from the new millennium?

"The great thing about a vampire series is the time element. You could do something potentially exciting now where the characters are so much older but the vampires haven't aged at all. Whether or not the actors would come back I've no idea, but the age thing is really interesting.

"Those characters are now in their fifties or whatever. If you do that you've got to do it head-on. There's a line in the show: 'Mid-thirties are the prime hunting ground for vampires because that's when people realise they're going to die, however hard they hit the gym.'" Ahearne laughs. "I was about 34 when I wrote that!"

Ultraviolet is available to stream on Channel 4.

“IF I WAS GOING TO DO A PERIOD PIECE, I would accumulate a lot of reference and then I would sit with the showrunner and the director and we would say, ‘This is really great, let’s do something like this,’” production designer of *The Last Of Us* John Paino tells *SFX*.

“So I asked [original game creators] Naughty Dog for their concept art and some of the things they looked at. I absorbed everything, like anyone else would do. Even before I got on the show, I loved the concept art for the game, so I was very familiar with it. I used that reference as a springboard. Some things we... I wouldn’t say copied, but we got as close as we could to them in the real world.

“Then also taking into account all the things that a game doesn’t have to take into account, like actually making it, using the locations, camera angles, actors, all of that. In the game they have control over everything.

“When you make a film, you’re working with the locations, you build your sets and things to take other considerations in, so things altered. Also, the showrunner, maybe they want to emphasise this, emphasise that and some of the episodes like Bill’s town were from scratch, so I used the games, which already created an amazing world, as a springboard.

“Nothing was wildly different, but just augmented and giving it as many layers as if people had over a period of 20 years – which is the gap between infection time and the current year that we see the action taking place – and just making sure all those layers and all that realism was there.”

DESIGNING THE LAST OF US

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
JOHN PAINO TALKS *SFX*
THROUGH CONCEPT ART,
RENDERS AND BEHIND-
THE-SCENES IMAGES FROM
THE MAKING OF *THE LAST
OF US* SEASON ONE

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



BOSTON

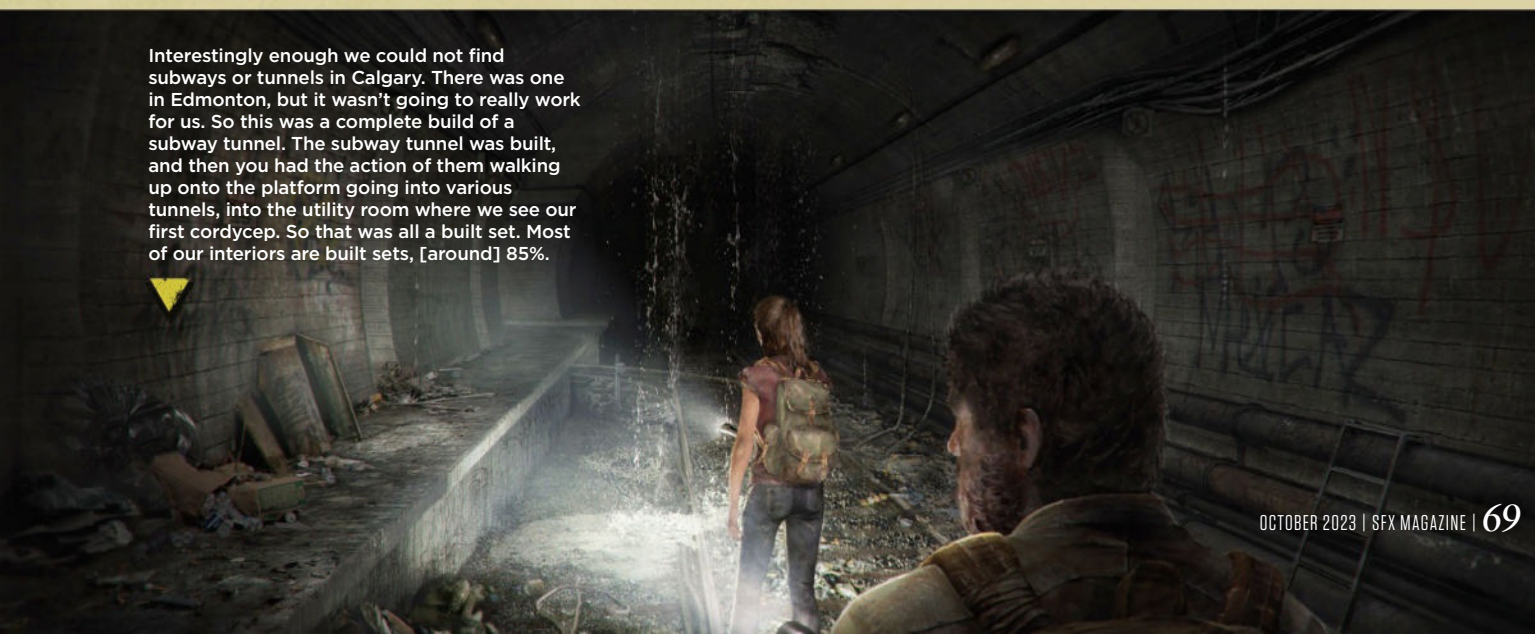
“We had a really good idea when we created our QZ set. We found a place that we could build the wall, and that had some pre-existing structures that we could build onto, that encompassed or expressed the claustrophobia of the South Boston neighbourhoods.

We built up fairly high. The wall was actually at height, which I believe was probably close to somewhere between 25 and 30 feet tall, but the building facades went up maybe about two storeys in some cases, usually no less than 20 feet I would say. The rest would be put in with VFX.



The art department did a lot of concept art. Obviously, you need to do a lot of concept art. If you look at the show, the final shots are here. It flew pretty close to this concept art. So in here, we built the rooftop from the Bostonian Museum and a walkway to another rooftop. And then Alex [Wang, VFX Supervisor] and company did a set extension below them and above, and the background. The set was about maybe eight to 10 feet off the ground. So that's a rooftop that Ellie's walking from.

Interestingly enough we could not find subways or tunnels in Calgary. There was one in Edmonton, but it wasn't going to really work for us. So this was a complete build of a subway tunnel. The subway tunnel was built, and then you had the action of them walking up onto the platform going into various tunnels, into the utility room where we see our first cordyceps. So that was all a built set. Most of our interiors are built sets, [around] 85%.



BOSTON CONTINUED...

We used downtown Edmonton for the bombed streets, the suburbs of Boston, redressed a lot of the street again. We went up about 12 or 20 feet on all the buildings. We made a lot of scenery that looked blistered, and pockmarks that we added to the streets, and our greens department went to town. So obviously VFX: buildings tilted, and deep backgrounds were created. But again, if they're walking on something, or we see a building in the background, we are dressing it up to at least 12 feet.



This is a built set. This was based on a Marriott [hotel] in downtown Boston. We had a flooded set, which was fun to make. I think we did have some waterfall effects in there. So this is pretty much, again, a render of what we did.

Now this was an exterior building that I felt would work. And the team came in and applied to the front. This is showing the building, which was in a part of Calgary. This was one of those rare instances where we actually found a building that could pass for Federalist architecture of the States, at least the first floor. So what we have here is a render doing the quarter steps on the ground floor, and again, we would dress in the front.





BILL'S TOWN

Bill's house was built on stage. The first floor at the location was built for the scene where they're being attacked and they could run out of their bedroom or run down through the first floor to go outside and deal with the marauders. The bunker, this was a two-storey set actually, because he goes from his bunker to the basement and then to the ground floor of his house. But this was on set and this render is a very accurate depiction of what we did.

Bill's town is entirely built. We found an abandoned residential area with nothing there but some sidewalks and a street. We did a LIDAR [3D] scan of it and that informed our concept art of putting in his house, the church and all of these things. So all these facades were built; some of the buildings had four facades, some of them had three. Parts of the roofs were not built, just because of time. So some of those were put in – the uppers.

The steeple of the church was not built, but everything up to it was and then the roof was partially built. Again, it was just really for time and getting it all done. What was great was we actually did get a chance to build the monument full size... Our fantastic sculptors were able to get it done in the time needed. This first concept art is it when it's in a good state before the infection and before it gets run down. That's what the second render shows, the state of it run down. We did ageing and overgrowth where we see them walking, but everything again above 12 feet was put in in VFX. They also moved/added some trees here and there because Calgary doesn't have a lot of oaks and things like that, deciduous trees.



SUBURBS

This was an early render; we did a lot of renders, just trying to figure things out. It was very complicated to do all these stunts and do as much of it as stunts and practical effects. Obviously there was VFX work in making the truck tilt and sink and for the ground to open up, but we did actually dig the pit. First we had the pit covered and then we dug it out and the infected came out of it. So this is a render of what that might look like.

This was all built – all these buildings and this cul-de-sac – for this stunt because our show desiccated things to such a degree that we couldn't really do this to existing houses or things, it's not possible. So we actually built this in a roughly two-acre parking lot right next to one of our stages. This shows it during the day – it was shot at night.



UNDERGROUND SETTLEMENT

This is a render of the underground settlement in Kansas City. Early on in our scouting, we found this great underground area that was actually quite large, a cellar underneath a beer brewery. We really wanted to use it for something and it actually turned out it worked. Parts of it worked really well for the settlement. In the basement, we had to create some tunnels, and some doors here and there, because again, we're following the scripts and how it's fortified and all of that. This and the hospital in the last episode were the two locations that we actually used the interiors of.



JACKSON

This is a render of how we realised the log gate the people would have built to protect the town, which is supposed to be Jackson but that we actually built at Canmore.

You could see the Canadian Rockies and when you're in Jackson, Wyoming, you can see - I'll call it the American Rockies, down Main Street. So Canmore was a really good fit because you can see the Canadian Rockies and it resembled it a little bit. Jackson's pretty touristy, but we added a few things and we built some facades to help it along.

The bar was in Calgary and we pretty much redid it. We painted and did a lot of work. It already had a pretty good frontier feel to it, so we just augmented it.





BOSTON MALL

This was the set for how they sneak into the mall. We built a set based on the electrical room in the deserted mall that we ended up shooting in. So this is, again, where we are making sure it conforms to what we need for the action of the actors and the stunt and all of that.

The mall was a location, but it was completely stripped. So we had to build back; we built all the facades of all the stores, dressed them and added debris. It was a huge dress and build of this space, but it was stripped completely, so there's nothing there except for the structure. In this shot there's no second floor. We built a mezzanine there for the actors to walk out onto. Then here we have the art department conceptualise it for when the lights get turned on: boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. So VFX created the background.

The actual structure of the mall was high enough to imply that there could have been a second-floor mezzanine with shops. So we used the dressed mall as a partial background and then did a set extension and VFX added the mezzanine and the second-floor stores, and we created the first-floor stores. This is a big, big deal because we are creating signs and figuring out what was in the stores, and building the facades from 20 years ago, because that's when life ended.

The carousel we were able to rent and bring in. We actually brought that into the mall. But this shows the extent of work that we did with puddles and greens and debris. We added all the lighting to it because again it had been stripped.





EXTERIOR LOCATIONS

This was fun because this was a build on location. I looked at that fabulous railway station in the Sergio Leone movie *Once Upon A Time In The West* that's all skeletal and rotted. I have always loved it and I used it as a little bit of a reference for this abandoned sawmill. The openness of it and all the boards and the structure. I don't think you'd ever find something like this that would be safe to work in. We could create a fire.



Actually, I fibbed! I forgot this was a construction site that our locations department convinced these people to let us run around in. It was pretty empty, so we added debris again. They had these great parts of it that had these great drops that act as these beautiful light diffusers in there. So those things were there and we would just replicate them and put a lot more of them here and there.

This is the scene that leads up to the giraffe in the opening. So what we had them do in the location was kind of go up the stairs twice, and then we cut to them going up the stairs on a set that replicates the giraffe looking through the front window.

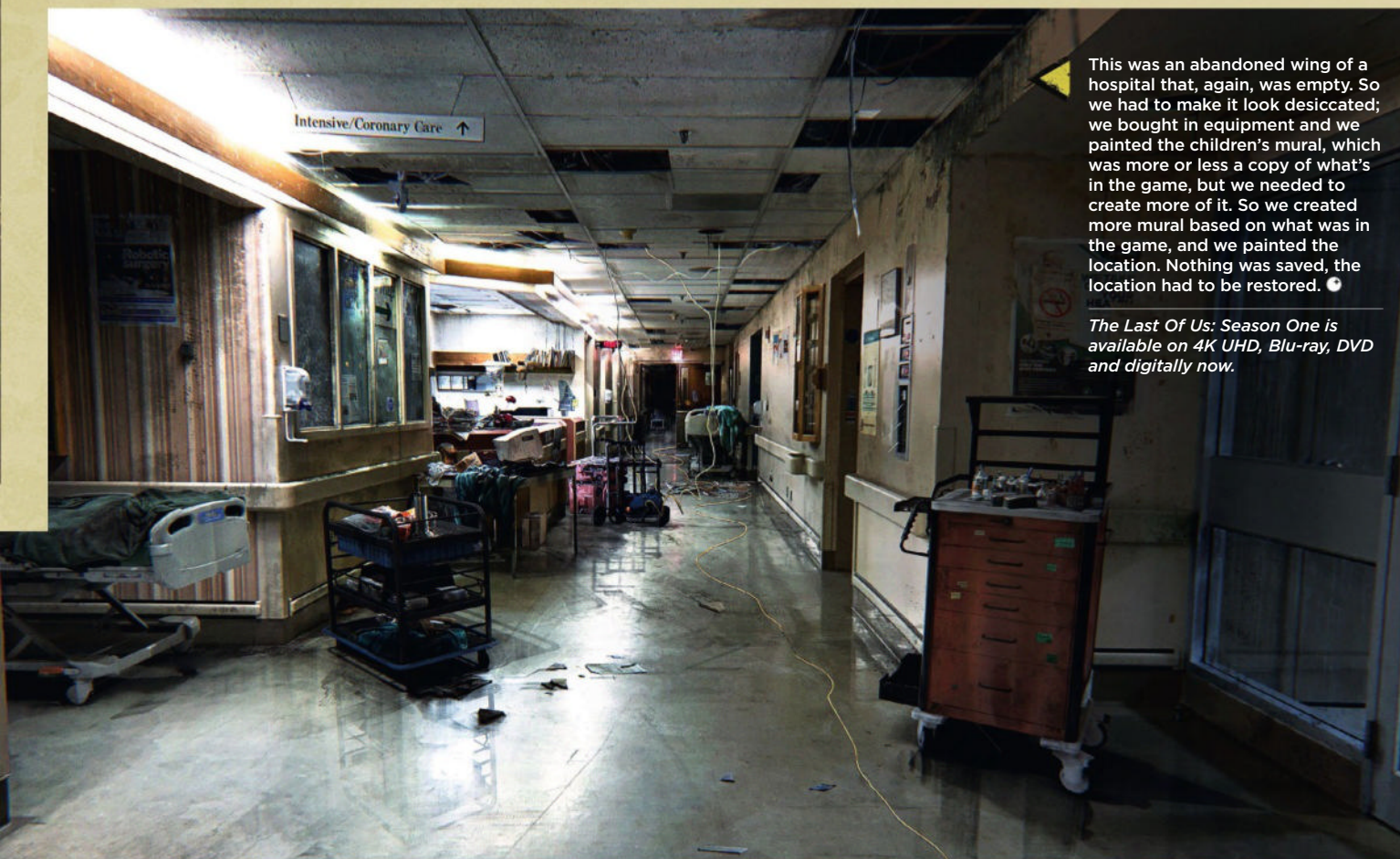




Calgary has a zoo with giraffes and we slowly introduced scenery and greenscreen into their enclosure over a period of a month, so that we could shoot plates and shoot Ellie feeding them in the zoo enclosure. That was again a mix of VFX and some scenery to replicate the scene of her feeding the giraffes.

Then she runs up another flight of stairs, which was a set, and we built what you see on the rooftop. We built a rooftop for them to peer out onto, and then VFX created the pastoral scene of the other giraffes there.

There was one giraffe on set when she's feeding and the others are created. I do believe they had to do a couple of passes on the giraffe that we actually shot, which got acclimated enough to let us/let Ellie feed it over a period of time.



This was an abandoned wing of a hospital that, again, was empty. So we had to make it look desiccated; we bought in equipment and we painted the children's mural, which was more or less a copy of what's in the game, but we needed to create more of it. So we created more mural based on what was in the game, and we painted the location. Nothing was saved, the location had to be restored.

The Last of Us: Season One is available on 4K UHD, Blu-ray, DVD and digitally now.

THE SOUNDS

COMPOSER GARY CARPENTER REFLECTS ON
THE WICKER MAN'S ICONIC SOUNDTRACK

WORDS: WILL SALMON

THE *WICKER MAN* TURNED 50 this year. The greatest folk horror film of all time is remarkable for many reasons. Edward Woodward and Christopher Lee gave career-best performances as hardline cop Sergeant Howie and the mercurial Lord Summerisle. It has a wonderful sense of place thanks to its beautiful Highlands location filming, and the atmosphere conjured by its soundtrack – composed by songwriter Paul Giovanni and folk band Magnet – is as sensual and seductive as it is eerie and uncanny.

Just as Robin Hardy's film has been an influence on everything from *The Witch* and *Midsommar* to *The League Of Gentlemen* and *Kill List*, the soundtrack has become a touchstone for generations of musicians who have fallen under its pagan spell. *SFX* spoke to Gary Carpenter, the film's Associate Music Director, to find out how it all came together.

"I had just left the Royal College of Music and was trying to scrape together a living," recalls Carpenter, now a celebrated composer. "Paul Giovanni had approached the college about using students [as his band], but they were busy doing student stuff, so my teacher, John Lambert, suggested me."

MAGNETIC PERSONALITIES

With only a few weeks to record the soundtrack, Carpenter assembled Magnet largely from members of his existing band Hocket. "The most frequent personnel were Ian Cutler, who came on board to play the violin," he explains. "Our guitarist was Andy Tompkins and we had a drummer, Bernard Murray, plus a couple of friends, Peter Brewis and Michael Cole. We used session musicians for things like the processional march, but the rest of it was basically all us."

The band was required to appear on screen, with much of the music supposedly being performed by the inhabitants of Summerisle. "Generally speaking, all the instruments had to be portable so that the musicians could be seen as sitting on walls or playing in the pub."



Woodward and Lee with director Robin Hardy.

Influences came from contemporary folk and psychedelic bands such as Comus and Pentangle, as well as more traditional Scottish and Irish songs, though Carpenter points out that very little traditional music is actually present in the film.

"Because the film is set on an island that doesn't exist, and it draws on all sorts of *Golden Bough* mythology, we decided that the music would follow a similar path," he says. "That was the point. To be folk, but not Scottish, but not."

Carpenter remembers the late Paul Giovanni as being a "patient and laid-back" figure with a clear vision for the sound that he wanted to capture. "He knew exactly what he wanted and he taught us a lot about recording technique."

"For example, all of the vocals had to be sung very close to the mic with a soft voice, which actually was not the practice at that time. The other thing was that he quite liked the peripheral sounds that you get from a guitar. When the hand moves along the fretboard, you often get a little slide noise and he loved all that."

That intimate sound is at the heart of the soundtrack's enduring appeal. Where most

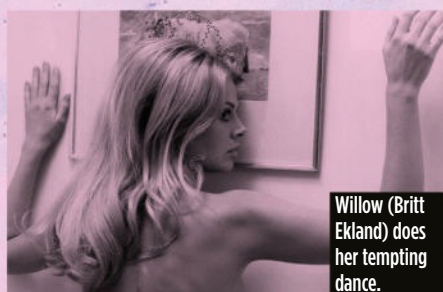
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OF SUMMERISLE



Paul Giovanni
in the
background
at the climax.



Willow (Britt
Ekland) does
her tempting
dance.

horror soundtracks are either atonal and dissonant, or try to make you leap out of your seat in terror, *The Wicker Man* is seductive – nowhere more so than on “Willow’s Song”, which accompanies Britt Ekland’s famous nude dance (or her stand-in, at least). Giovanni and Magnēt’s music makes Summerisle feel like a place you want to visit, even if you don’t

understand the locals’ customs. It’s been hugely impactful on generations of indie, folk and electronic musicians.

“Will Gregory from Goldfrapp told me that they use it as their pre-concert music,” Carpenter chuckles. “And I know that Jarvis Cocker sampled some of it. I hear about various cover versions cropping up. I’ve kind of picked up on some of its influence over the years, but I’m more aware of the cultural influences of the film, funnily enough.”

The Wicker Man had a famously troubled birth. Hardy was an inexperienced director, and although it ended up as a masterpiece, the shoot was far from easy. Did the band experience any of that first hand? “No, we had a great time!” Carpenter laughs. “It was quite homely really. Edward Woodward was very happy to sing a song or two. He was very good at imitating trumpets, if I remember rightly!”

The Wicker Man 50th Anniversary Collector’s Edition is released on 4K Blu-ray on 25 September.



MELISSA NAVIA

She's a fly girl – writing the book on piloting an iconic starship

Words by Darren Scott /// Pari Dukovic/Paramount+

Playing a new *Star Trek* character in an established timeline, as well as piloting possibly the most iconic ship in sci-fi, Melissa Navia has her work cut out for her. “As a storyteller, I keep saying that Erica Ortega is a dream role,” she says. “It’s the embodiment of every cool role that I’ve ever played in one. I played an astronaut once that wanted to go to Mars – she didn’t get to go to Mars either,” she jokes of Ortega almost always missing out on away missions. “Fast forward a few years, and here I am at the helm of a starship. So I’m like, ha ha, forget Mars...”

What have been your “pinch me” moments?

➡ Season one, going to our costume department and getting to put on the Starfleet uniform. Getting pinned up and seeing yourself in it. I definitely didn’t have one moment where I was like, “Oh my god, this is happening.” Getting to *Star Trek*, even though I was really excited about it, I was also like, “Now there’s hard work ahead of me.” Especially because I’m playing someone that isn’t a legacy character, nobody’s met before. I don’t think it’s ever going to fully sink in, and I think that’s a good thing because it’ll always keep me grounded.

Is how to pilot a starship written into the script?

➡ Definitely nothing was written into the script, to the point where I felt like maybe there had been a class I’d missed because I was like, “Does everyone just assume that I know what I’m doing here?” I was asking questions of our crew and graphics team and [brand manager] John Van Citters, who has been with *Star Trek* for such a long time. He was a wonderful resource. Very much I had to create the manual for myself. Sometimes I would ask the graphics team to create something for me that would come up if I was going into a manoeuvre. Even though you would never see that on screen, I would and so it would feel real to me.

What was it like going into season two?

➡ I knew that we were going to get to see more of Ortega’s backstory, because that was always in the works. When we started shooting season one, our showrunners told me, “This is what we envision for Ortega”: her background, the war that she was in, that she’s a soldier, her family. Then they would ask me too, “What do you envision for her?”

Which is a really beautiful thing that our entire team did. They allowed all of us as actors and individuals to infuse our characters a bit with pieces of ourselves, which I think helps enrich the characters even more. “What are skills that you have?” So when I first started, I was like, “I have a weapons background and I did kung fu for a number of years.” So I got to play a knight that gets to sword fight in space – that’s a thing that I’ve checked off my bucket list.

What’s your experience of fandom been like?

➡ I say that fandom is half the story, right? We create the stories that you see every week. But then the fans give it an entirely new life. They create stories out of our stories. They tell us what they want more of, they tell us what they love. Hearing from fans who have been watching all the iterations, and then saying that there’s just something so, so special, and so *Trek* about what we’re doing here, to me it means that we’re doing something right.

What other franchise would you like the show to cross over with?

➡ Oh my goodness. I’m into period pieces and fantasy. I would love to go back in time. A *Doctor Who* crossover would be crazy because fans would go wild, and I know *Doctor Who* fans are super serious and they would go crazy for that. Anything time travel, anything that puts us in a different setting. I know *The Next Generation* did it, but if we had a Robin Hood crossover where we get to be the merry men? That’s the thing about *Star Trek*, there’s no end to what is possible.

Where would you like season three to take you?

➡ I’m so happy with what has already been done with Ortega. I know the ideas that we have coming up for season three, because I’ve spoken with the writers and showrunners. Fans at conventions are always like, “seven seasons and a movie”. I’m down for movies, I’m down for seasons, I’m down for whatever the writers see happening. I really want Erica to continue to be a character unlike we’ve ever seen before on television and to continue to push those boundaries. I’m as curious as everybody else is to see where she goes, and why we don’t see her in the original series. ●

Star Trek: Strange New Worlds is on Paramount+.

BIODATA

From
New York, USA

Greatest Hits
Dawn in indie sci-fi movie *The Paragon Cortex*, astronaut candidate Elena Gabriel in *Billions*, pilot Erica Ortega in *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*.

Random Fact
Navia is also a writer and a stand-up comedian, is trained in martial arts and can play the banjo. Presumably not all at the same time.

THIS INTERVIEW
WAS CONDUCTED
PRIOR TO SAG-AFTRA
STRIKE ACTION

“I’m down
for movies,
I’m down for
whatever the
writers see
happening”

FRAZER HINES





EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT JAMIE

SIX OF THE SEVEN EPISODES of the 1967 *Doctor Who* adventure “The Evil Of The Daleks” were destroyed during the television archive purge of the ’70s. Despite that, the story has enjoyed a remarkably healthy afterlife, boasting a plethora of releases including vinyl and CD soundtracks and a full-colour animation.

In October, with the publication of a novel by Frazer Hines, the Doctor’s explosive confrontation with his greatest enemies will be told from the perspective of his companion Jamie McCrimmon. Nobody knows Jamie better than Hines, who was able to provide a unique insight into the character that brings the story to life in an entirely new way.

BROUGHT TO BOOK

BBC Books’ initial approach was, however, met with some hesitation from the actor. “I said, ‘I can’t write a book’,” Hines tells *SFX*. “I’m normally used to *saying* lines, not writing them.” But the offer of a hands-on editor was the encouragement he needed.

“There was a lot of stuff that I had to include,” he says. “When you’re watching the show on TV, there’s two men looking around, and a car draws up, and one gets out, nods to the other man and they get in. Then Jamie and the Doctor run after them. I had to write all that. ‘So and so looks awkwardly. He jumps out, knocks him on the head...’”

Hines’s novel is a faithful adaptation of the story. “I had somebody, not exactly looking over my shoulder, but making sure that I stayed on track,” he says. “The script wasn’t

IT’S JAMIE VS THE EVIL DALEKS FOR *DOCTOR WHO* STAR AND FIRST-TIME NOVELIST FRAZER HINES

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

considered to be written in stone, so I had some flexibility.” In saying that, “I couldn’t add a monster, or another character.”

Fans may spot a number of in-jokes. However, some of Hines’s more outlandish input is missing, believed wiped. “It was like when I wrote my autobiography *Hines Sight*,” he says. “There was an editor who cut stuff out. I said, ‘But it’s my book!’ and they’d say, ‘Yes but you can’t say this, and you can’t put that.’ So, I was under a jurisdiction so to speak – somebody keeping an eye on me!”

Four months of writing was a fun, albeit “lonely” experience for the “gregarious” Hines. “I’m used to making people laugh, bouncing off them and joking. Being on your own is very disciplined. I’m also quite a lazy person. You can’t just think, ‘Oh, I’ll do the book next week.’ You do get sort of spaced out, banging your head against a brick wall.”

“The Evil Of The Daleks” follows directly from the “The Faceless Ones”, an adventure set at Gatwick Airport. In that story, Jamie is startled by the sight of a “flying beastie”.

The Highlander’s endless confusion and wonderment over innovations from both the ’60s and Victorian England could easily have impeded the novel’s flow. So Hines came up

with a crafty workaround. “Someone once said to me, ‘I noticed Jamie had a watch on. Surely in 1746 he wouldn’t have had a watch?’ And I said, ‘Do you know this show goes out on a Saturday night? Well, on the Sunday, what do you think happens in the TARDIS? That’s when the Doctor teaches Jamie how to tell the time.’ That’s how you get around it.”

In similar fashion, the novel’s Jamie will be aware of the Daleks despite encountering them for the first time in the television serial. We must assume that the Doctor gave him the lowdown on his greatest foe during a Sunday night getting-to-know-you session.

“I couldn’t wait to meet the Daleks,” Hines says about the television production. Indeed, he was unable to resist a close-up examination of one of his co-stars during a break in rehearsal. “I went off to the studio and opened up a Dalek, jumped inside, and pulled the lid down. I walked around saying ‘I am a Dalek!’ But then I heard somebody coming.

“I thought it could be the prop man, so I stayed put. There’s an unwritten law that you mustn’t touch the props. But it was two of the actors. They actually leant on me, because they couldn’t see me – you can see out of a Dalek, but nobody can see in. They started slugging the show off: ‘The script’s crap’ and everything.

“After two minutes I said, ‘I heard that!’ and scooted away. They fell over because they were leaning on me!” Hines was persuaded to keep his mouth shut. “I got free beer for the week,” he laughs.

These days, “The Evil Of The Daleks” is widely regarded as a *Doctor Who* classic. Back in 1967, the script was enough of a draw to attract high-profile actors including John →



Frazer Hines
as Jamie
McCrimmon:
a serious man.

Bailey and Brigit Forsyth. “I knew that it would be a fantastic show with that cast,” Hines says.

Respected actor Marius Goring, who played scientist Theodore Maxtible, “immediately fell into all the pranks and jokes,” Hines recalls. “In rehearsals he kept saying, ‘I’m going to insert into the Dalek this suppositronic brain’. He kept saying it. In the end Derek [Martinus, the director] said, ‘Isn’t it *positronic* brain, not suppositronic?’ He said, ‘Yes, you saw my deliberate mistake.’”

AUNTIE’S BLOOMERS

On the trail of the stolen TARDIS, the Doctor and Jamie find themselves in the trendy Tricolour café. Was Hines part of the swinging ’60s scene? “Oh definitely,” he nods. “When we finished on a Friday or a Saturday night in studio, I’d go down to Hatchetts nightclub, or The Scotch of St James. A pal of mine was drummer of the Marmalade, Alan Whitehead. And Mike Wade, the pop singer. We’d just hang around and go to nightclubs, dance the night away – and chat the girls up!”

Grim’s Dyke House in Harrow Weald, near London, provided suitably Victorian interiors for Maxtible’s house. “I’m not a great lover of sets,” Hines admits. “On location you feel proper heavy doors and dustiness.” He has translated these experiences into evocative descriptions in the novel.

Victoria Waterfield, the Doctor’s soon-to-be travelling companion, is imprisoned in the house by the Daleks. “I fancied her like mad because she was beautiful,” Hines smiles of the late Deborah Watling. “We’d seen her in a TV show called ‘Calf Love’ [part of the series *The Wednesday Play*], where she played someone very similar to Victoria, funnily enough. She was just lovely.



“I fancied Deborah Watling like mad because she was beautiful”

“This little doll – you just wanted to sort of look after her. And we did. My first line to Debbie was ‘Quick, Miss Waterfield, up your passageway’,” Hines continues. “We all had dirty minds in those days. We couldn’t say it. Derek said, ‘Why can’t you say it?’ And Debbie was going, ‘You can’t say that to me, it’s so funny!’ She had a great sense of humour, Debs, she really did.”

In a key scene, the Daleks set a trap for Jamie by placing a handkerchief inscribed with the initials VW – “Victoria Waterfield, not Volkswagen” – on the floor for him to find and pick up. Hines couldn’t resist an opportunity to play a joke on Watling.

“I’d got a pair of knickers,” he says. “I picked them up saying, ‘These are Miss Waterfield’s, I’d recognise them anywhere!’ And of course, Debbie said, ‘They’re not mine!’” Playing on the original gag, the knickers would later emerge

from Goring’s top pocket. “Yes, it’s a very hot day...!” Marius said, and he mopped his brow with the knickers. ‘These are Miss Waterfield’s. I’d recognise them anywhere!’

“The encore was the Dalek coming onto set with the knickers on the end of its plunger.” Hines imitates a Dalek: “‘These are Miss Waterfield’s. I’d recognise them anywhere!’ How we ever got the show done I don’t know!”

HISTORY REPEATING

With the Daleks destroyed in an explosive battle, the Doctor proclaimed it to be the “final end” for his deadliest foes. Spoilers: it wasn’t.

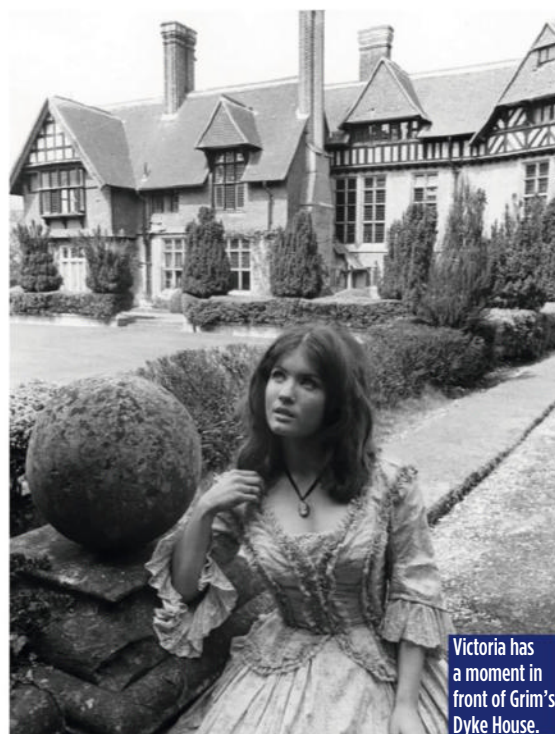
Eleven months later, at the end of 1968 adventure “The Wheel In Space”, astrophysicist Zoe Herriot joined the TARDIS crew. But this was after attempts by the Doctor to dissuade the stowaway by beaming the entirety of “The Evil Of The Daleks” onto the



Jamie with
Victoria
(Deborah
Watling).



You don't
want to be
facing a Dalek
in a kilt.



Victoria has
a moment in
front of Grim's
Dyke House.

TARDIS scanner via a telepathic headpiece. In real life, it was a clever ploy by BBC1 (as it was then called) controller Paul Fox to schedule a repeat that would keep the show on the air while the regulars went on holiday. "We spent our holiday saying 'Cheers Paul!'," laughs Hines. "We got paid for being away. Wonderful!"

The story is quite categorically based on this repeat broadcast, making "The Evil Of The Daleks" a *Doctor Who* novelisation first. Much of the action will be told in third person from the Doctor's point of view, as he recounts events to an enthralled Zoe – who has a significant role to play herself.

Then, between each episode, we'll go back to the TARDIS to witness Jamie's first-hand account of the ongoing adventure. If neither Jamie nor the Doctor were present for the televised action, the TARDIS will step in.

How? We won't give that one away. "I had to use a lot of poetic licence," Hines laughs. "Otherwise, I'd have had to leave so much of the story out because Jamie and the Doctor weren't there."

Hines recorded an audiobook of the novel, which he admits took a bit of a toll. "I said, 'Never again,'" he laughs. "It's two days on your own. If you do a Big Finish [audio play], you've got actors to play against and bounce off, but it's just you and the director in another little cubicle, and you read from page one all the way through, stopping when you make a mistake. It's a very lonely life."

"It was quite hard because it's 70,000 words," he continues. "Originally, they wanted me to record it in one day. I said there's no way. I could read a book in a day to myself, but the minute you start to read something out loud, it's tricky."

"I made a lot of mistakes. The guy said, 'But you wrote this!' Just because I've written it, doesn't mean I've *learnt* 70,000 words. It's difficult."

With a little twisting of his arm, Hines might be convinced to write another book. A strong contender would be his very first, and favourite, story "The Highlanders", which holds a place dear to him.

"If I hadn't done that I wouldn't have gone to Australia, New Zealand, America... Milton Keynes," he deadpans.

In the meantime, a follow-up to *Hines Sight* is in the offing. "I'd started it, and then 'Evil' came in so that took up the time."

The "final End"? For "The Evil Of The Daleks", it's only the beginning. ●

The Evil Of The Daleks is published on 26 October.

JOHN CONNOLLY

Worlds collide: the Irish writer talks genre and literature as therapy

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Iván Gimenez

ONCE UPON A TIME, JOHN CONNOLLY SAID he would never write a sequel to *The Book Of Lost Things*. He thought he had nothing to add to his 2006 novel filled with dark takes on fairy tales, which has sold 250,000 copies since. But sometimes things change, which is why this month brings *The Land Of Lost Things*.

The first novel was written after his wife, fellow writer Jennifer Ridyard, had moved to Ireland from South Africa, bringing her two children with her. Their presence made Connolly reflect “with an adult sense of regret and remembrance” on his own early years. “If the first book was about childhood and adolescence,” he says, “this is very much a book about being a parent.”

At its centre lies Ceres, whose daughter Phoebe ends up in a coma after being knocked down by a car. Ceres then “retreats literally into the world of a book” and “regresses to an age where she has agency without responsibility”.

While Ceres is younger than the 50-something author, this is in part a scenario borne of where Connolly now finds himself in life. The kids have left home. His mother is 90. He has a sense of responsibility towards both generations. “I seem to spend a lot of time worrying,” he says. “We reach that certain point of middle age where what we do is worry. I have my phone by my bed, and it’s always there. Because if something goes wrong, I’m the point of contact for all these people.”

Literature helps Connolly deal with such anxieties. “[Ceres] uses books and stories to kind of understand what she’s going through,” he says, “and I’ve always used books in the same way. In that sense, writing the book is almost an effort to establish what I’m going through.”

CHIP WITH EVERYTHING

Speaking down the line from his home in Ireland, Connolly is affable company, but conveys a steeliness too. Quite rightly, he takes his work seriously. “I have writer friends who say that if they weren’t published, they wouldn’t write any more,” he says. “They became writers by default. Maybe they wanted to be musicians or comedians or actors or something else, and it didn’t work out. But if someone said to them tomorrow, ‘Listen, you can be a musician instead,’ they would leave writing behind without a second glance. But I always wanted to write.”

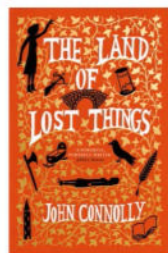
Initially, that meant a career in journalism, where he learnt the knack of delivering copy to deadline and length, yet had misgivings. “There were people in journalism who

BIODATA

From **Dublin, Ireland**

Greatest Hits
Connolly’s Charlie Parker books, PI protagonist named after the jazz great, have become international bestsellers. Connolly’s cross-genre success is such that he has won the Bram Stoker Award and the crime fiction-honouring Edgar Award.

Random Fact
Connolly has a house in Maine, Charlie Parker’s stamping ground. “In a weird way, I thought it was important I paid tax there rather than just be a tourist.”



were much better than I was,” he says. “That’s not false modesty, they just were better journalists. I got frustrated, and sat down and began writing a novel.”

Connolly had OCD as a child, which helped a lot with writing because he’s even now “very reluctant to leave things undone”. Then there was the power of the “chip on the shoulder”, the idea of proving he could finish a novel.

So where did the chip come from? Childhood? Partly. “My father was of a generation that had had a lot of the optimism knocked out of them,” Connolly says. “They’d have thought of themselves as realists, where you get a job – he worked for the council here in Dublin – where short of burning down the building, they can’t fire you. And there’s a union to protect you even if you do that, so they’ll just have to move you to somewhere where there are no matches.”

MAN WITH A VENN

Connolly’s bestselling Charlie Parker novels triumphantly disproved the idea that he couldn’t make his living as a creative. The books reside in the crime section, but feature a strong supernatural element. It’s no coincidence that American crime writer James Lee Burke, in whose work the ghosts of the past haunt the present, is a big influence.

Perhaps, suggests SFX, this is linked to Catholicism. Connolly doesn’t disagree. “I still wear a cross, so I still have that sense of the ineffable, I suppose, and that has fed into my books,” he says. His stories take place in a “liminal space” he likens to the “shaded part of a Venn diagram” where worlds mingle. This has sometimes caused him problems with those “who want to see mystery fiction frozen somewhere between the birth of Sherlock Holmes and the death of Poirot”.

Still, he’s now in the happy situation of being able to challenge other people’s ideas about writing in print. Connolly’s *Shadow Voices* (2021) was a history of Irish genre fiction that asserted the place of the fantastic in Ireland’s literary tradition. He effectively “indemnified” its costs for his publisher, such was his determination to see it in print.

“As [wife] Jenny said to me, ‘It was a lot of trouble to go to to prove a point,’” he says. “And I said, ‘That was a lot of trouble to go to to prove a couple of points. Let’s not underestimate what I’m doing!’” The kid with OCD and the middle-aged man who uses literature to help him through life collide. Both of them are laughing, blessing their luck. ●

The Land Of Lost Things is published by Hodder & Stoughton on 7 September.

“We reach that
certain point of
middle age
where what we
do is worry”



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edited by Ian Berriman

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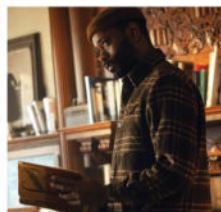
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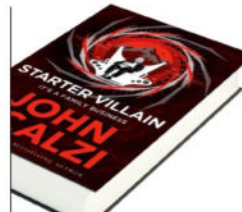
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BLUE BEETLE

Scarab Spring



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 127 minutes

► Director Angel Manuel Soto

► Cast Xolo Maridueña, Bruna

Marquezine, Susan Sarandon, George

Lopez, Elpidia Carrillo, Harvey Guillén

► **It's been a troubling decade** for the DCEU, a painful combination of global pandemic, audience apathy and poisonous word of mouth knocking down all its cinema releases since 2019's *Shazam!* like so many costly ninepins. The ignominious failures of *Black Adam*, *Fury Of The Gods* and *The Flash* only demonstrated how urgently a course-correct was required, though it remains to be seen whether James Gunn and Peter Safran will be able to steady the listing ship.

The fact that Gunn has insisted *Blue Beetle* is part of his plans going forward is a welcome vote of confidence for Angel Manuel Soto's film, tasked as it is with the unenviable responsibility of introducing a new superhero with an unknown lead just at the point when the DC Universe is undergoing a creative rethink.

Given how toxic Ezra Miller's involvement proved to *The Flash*'s box office prospects, though, there is surely something to be said for having a star who is both

appealingly fresh-faced and unencumbered with tabloid baggage, qualities *Cobra Kai*'s Xolo Maridueña possesses in abundance. The relative obscurity of the property, meanwhile, works in the film's favour, there being few expectations for it to disappoint or previous incarnations to match up to.

Having made his first comic book appearance in 1939, it's perhaps surprising the DC bugman has had so little screen life outside of animation. Yet the advantage this gives Soto and Maridueña is the freedom to put their own imprint on the character, one that takes full advantage of their Latino heritage and background.

The latter's Jaime Reyes is no tycoon's scion or billionaire industrialist but a humble mechanic's son who has grafted his way to a pre-law degree at Gotham University. No sooner have he and his mortar board returned to the fictional Palmyra City, however, than he discovers his family have been keeping the failure of the Reyes's garage business, their impending eviction and his dad's heart attack from him: a chasm apart from Stark Tower and Wayne Manor.

A fleeting encounter with Jenny Kord (Bruna Marquezine) offers

the chance of a job at the all-powerful biotech giant her aunt Victoria (Susan Sarandon) took over when Jenny's dad Ted went mysteriously missing. When Jaime turns up at Kord HQ, however, he gets given not employment but an insect-like doohickey Jenny has stolen from its lab: an alien scarab that fuses symbiotically with a chosen host and endows them with superhuman abilities.

A reluctant Jaime becomes that host, much to his bewilderment and that of his loved ones. Like Iron Man's metal suit and Eddie Brock's Venom, though, Jaime's

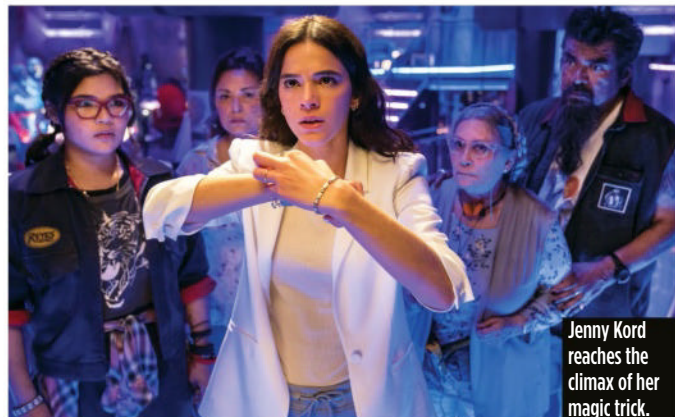
“It's unusual and refreshing for a DC caper to be so pointedly political”

cobalt-blue exoskeleton takes a while to get accustomed to, as does its tendency to leave its wearer as naked after use as David Naughton found himself in *An American Werewolf In London*.

Evil Victoria, of course, wants her bug back and sends her



“Fear me, for I have the power of all blue!”

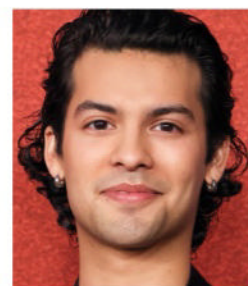


Jenny Kord reaches the climax of her magic trick.



XOLO MARIDUEÑA

The Blue Beetle
himself



This is DC's first major Latino superhero. Does it feel like a big moment?

→ I hope that it is momentous. We set out to make this movie because, as kids, the director and the writer and myself would have loved to have seen a family like this kicking butt, and not having it be about trauma. Latino isn't a genre – it's the genre of superheroes, and the characters are whoever the heck they happen to be.

What was the biggest challenge of this shoot?

→ This was my first time stepping into a leadership role. I have to give my thanks to *Cobra Kai*, because those six years practising, looking, watching these two great leads really helped me figure out what I wanted to do now that it's my turn. I realised that being number one doesn't mean "the best", because Susan Sarandon is in the movie!

Who would you like to see Blue Beetle fight?

→ I don't know if he's considered a villain, but I really like the Spawn character. My brain is going to Batman's rogues' gallery too. Scarecrow would be really cool, but that's because I'm a dark guy – I just like dark stuff.
Jack Shepherd

half-robot muscle man Carapax (Raoul Max Trujillo) to get it. To scriptwriter Gareth Dunnet-Alcocer's credit, this character is no lumbering heavy but a traumatised veteran of the School of the Americas who has borne witness to decades of Washington meddling in South American affairs. It's both unusual and refreshing for a DC caper to be so pointedly political and critical.

Yet it's in keeping with a film that seems set from the off on challenging prevailing orthodoxies, be it through keeping some dialogue in subtitled Spanish

or by putting an ethnicity we are used to seeing in the margins proudly front and centre.

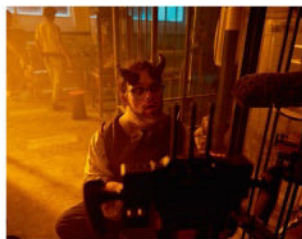
Like many sci-fi spectacles with hopes of spawning a franchise, *Blue Beetle* is more set-up than pay-off, and frustratingly ends just as Jaime is getting the hang of his Green Lantern-y power to magic any weapon he can imagine out of the ether. A visit to Ted's underground lair won't mean much to non-aficionados either, even if it does give Jaime's rambunctious uncle Rudy (George Lopez) the keys to a flying bug-craft that sprouts legs to the

sound of a Mötley Crüe needle drop. And Sarandon is hardly stretched as a one-note villain whom Jamie's wise-cracking sister (Belissa Escobedo) admiringly deems "sexy in a Cruella-Kardashian kind of way."

Overall, however, Soto's film proves to be a surprisingly entertaining and engaging watch that works perfectly well as the lively one-off one suspects it will end up being.

Mark Samuels

i The Reyes family live on El Paso Street, a nod to the real-life Texan city Jaime hails from in the comics.



OTTO BAXTER: NOT A F***ING HORROR STORY

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

(Also on Sky Documentaries/NOW from 23 September)

15 | 84 minutes

▶ Directors **Bruce Fletcher, Peter Beard**

❖ If your sense of wellbeing has taken a beating after a torrent of scary headlines about AI, climate change and the rise of the right, then you'll be ripe for a tonic. This documentary follows 35-year-old Otto Baxter as he embarks on making his first movie, a grisly horror titled "The Puppet Asylum".

So far, so unremarkable, except for the fact that Otto has Down's Syndrome. Filmmakers Bruce Fletcher and Peter Beard have been part of his life since 2009, after making a BBC Three documentary about his attempts to lose his virginity, and their friendship and support for the puckish and movie-mad Baxter underpin this sweet-natured film.

It doesn't shirk from laying bare the prejudice and challenges Otto has faced, but the footage of him on set, shouting "Action!" and "Cut!" with relish, is a heart-swelling sight. His autobiographically inspired film (accompanying the doc in cinemas) is just 34 minutes long, but an assured calling card, anchored by a gloriously hammy turn from Paul Kaye as a Victorian freak show ringmaster.

Baxter may paint himself in the short as a monster, feared and reviled by society, yet this documentary is full of warmth and understanding. **Steve O'Brien**



"I knew I shouldn't have bought this boot scraper."

MEG 2: THE TRENCH

Consider this shark jumped

★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 116 minutes

▶ Director **Ben Wheatley**

▶ Cast **Jason Statham, Jing Wu, Cliff Curtis, Sienna Guillory**

❖ **Big-screen sharks have come** in all shapes and sizes since Steven Spielberg's original *Jaws*, from the brainiac (*Deep Blue Sea*) to the airborne (*Sharknado*) to the Sylvester Stallone-voiced sentient (*The Suicide Squad*). In 2018, *The Meg* brought prehistoric colossalism to the mix by pitting Jason Statham against a hungry 75-foot-long megalodon accidentally released from the sub-aquatic depths.

In the sequel, director Ben Wheatley tries to go bigger and bitier but ends up merely blander and bittier, bringing none of the unease and subversive wit he brought to such films as *Kill List*, *High-Rise* and *Sightseers*.

Less of a deep-sea rescuer now than a freelance ass-kicking eco-warrior, Statham's Jonas Taylor is persuaded to return to the Mariana Trench by an international research outfit led by wealthy meg-whisperer Jiuming

(Jing Wu). He soon discovers, though, that nefarious forces have designs on a valuable ocean-floor mineral, and will happily abandon him at the bottom of the Pacific if he swims in their way.

Statham's attempts to get his team back to the surface exert a moderate grip in a murky first half which serviceably emulates James Cameron's *The Abyss*. The chaotic second half, however, goes full kaiju by letting three megs and a

“Goes full kaiju by letting three megs and a giant squid loose”

giant squid loose on a resort, along with snappy amphibian beasts who've apparently got lost on their way to *Jurassic Park*.

The action is relentless but also incoherent, while the script's stabs at self-mocking humour get stuck in the shallows. The 12A rating, meanwhile, inevitably equates to a dearth of gory carnage.

Mark Samuels

i Ben Wheatley has a soft spot for British *Godzilla* rip-off *Gorgo* (1961), which he saw on TV as a kid: "It blew my mind".



THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 89 minutes

▶ Directors **Kim Burdon,**

Robert Chandler

▶ Cast **Stephen Fry, Emily Carey,**

David Harewood, Freddie Highmore

❖ **Having haunted endless** film, TV and radio productions since Oscar Wilde's 1887 short story, is another outing for this spook really necessary? Wilde's signature wit is certainly diluted in this animated version, with most of the laughs emanating from slapstick pranks. What it does have, however, is Stephen Fry; who better to voice Wilde's immortal Sir Simon de Canterville than the man who played the author himself in 1997's biopic?

With the period setting kept intact, we meet the Otis family as they arrive from the US and move into an English mansion. Its grumpy spectral resident tries to get them to leave, but is defeated by solid American pragmatism. Teenager Virginia (Emily Carey) befriends the ghost, but after the arrival of the Duke of Cheshire (Freddie Highmore), whose family are Sir Simon's mortal enemies, trouble ensues.

The voice cast have fun, with Miranda Hart in particular on fine form as a buffoonish ghost expert, and Hugh Laurie, as the Grim Reaper, re-teaming with comedy pal Fry. Occasional inventive 2D sequences add some glamour, while an unexpected monster livens up the ending. It's just a shame that this isn't *quite* as funny as Wilde would demand...

Jayne Nelson



IT LIVES INSIDE



▶ **RELEASED** 22 SEPTEMBER

15 | 99 minutes

▶ Director Bishal Dutta

▶ Cast Megan Suri, Mohana

Krishnan, Neeru Bajwa,

Betty Gabriel

▶ **Micro-aggressions become** extremely macro in this Indian-American teen scream horror. Samidha (*Never Have I Ever*'s Megan Suri) is one of only two Indian girls in her high school, and fitting in with her culturally clueless classmates is already tricky enough. (Even her best friend stumbles over the difference between "Hindu" and "Hindi".) But when the other Indian girl, Tamira (Mohana Krishnan), turns into a spooky weirdo with a gross pet jar and everyone expects Sam to understand why...? Well, that makes things *really* awkward.

Much of *It Lives Inside* feels pretty familiar, as our teen heroine finds herself drawn into a supernatural mystery that no one around her believes in. The scares (and kills) are mostly pretty mid-level: there's a heavy reliance on CG effects, and while they're slick enough not to look goofy, they're not original enough to really raise anyone's heart rate.

What does work, however, is Sam's angst about her identity struggles. Suri sells the emotional stakes hard, while the dynamics between Sam and her parents feel authentic and well-written.

The highlight is the final act reveal that she'll only be able to beat the baddie with help from her mum, something which feels both refreshing and genuinely moving.

Sarah Dobbs



MERCY FALLS



▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

15 | 104 minutes

▶ Director Ryan Hendrick

▶ Cast Lauren Lyle, Nicolette

McKeown, James Watterson,

Layla Kirk

▶ **Grief can make people do** stupid things, but even so at times it's hard to empathise with Rhona, the protagonist of this Scottish survival horror. In an attempt to find her late father's cabin, she ignores so many red flags that the wilderness may as well be painted bright crimson.

Rhona and her gaggle of equally unobservant pals throw caution to the wind and recruit a sinister local woman with military credentials to help them find the home she's inherited from her "estranged fuckwit" dad, ostensibly to have some fun in nature and find a little catharsis in the wake of his passing. Still, the group seems to barely like one another even before things go terribly wrong in the woods.

It's a handsomely made film, and the Scottish landscape is breathtakingly captured. The richness of the images transforms some of the most pedestrian plot beats, lending them the feeling of a twisted but stunningly illustrated fairy tale.

Beyond the cinematography, the passive-aggressive dysfunction within the party proves the film's most intriguing element. The acting ensemble has a strangely compelling anti-chemistry, and their toxicity feels lived-in and authentic. Nothing proves quite as horrifying as the prospect of spending a weekend trapped with friends like these. **Leila Latif**

FILM

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

PODCAST

IT'S YOUR LAST TIME AT THE CINEMA

WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

JOIN OUR CELEBRITY PROJECTIONISTS...



Noomi Rapace



Joe Cornish



Baz Luhrmann



Aimee Lou Wood

Reviews

TV

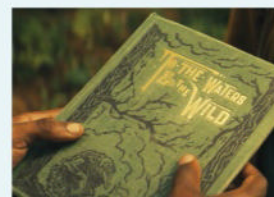


DRINKING GAME

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

🍷 Apollo says, "I am the God Apollo!"

🍷 You see a copy of (fictional book) *To The Waters And The Wild*.



🍷 Somebody quotes from *To The Waters And The Wild*.

🍷 You see some footage you've seen previously.

🍷 Somebody says, "It's not a baby!"

🍷 Somebody is fully or partly submerged in water. This may be an amniotic fluid/rebirth metaphor... or, y'know, it may not be.

THE CHANGELING Season One

Born To Be Reviled



UK/US Apple+, Fridays from 8 September

► Creator Kelly Marcel

► Cast LaKeith Stanfield, Clark Backo, Adina Porter, Alexis Louder, Samuel T Herring, Malcolm Barrett

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 If anyone ever gets around to updating *The Meaning Of Liff* for the 21st century, one concept that definitely needs a name attached to it is, "That moment in a drama when a character goes, 'What the hell is going on?' and the viewer wryly notes, 'Not a Scooby.'" This happens a number of times in *The Changeling*.

It helps if you've read the source material, an acclaimed 2017 novel by Victor LaValle which combines

supernatural paranoia, Scandinavian folklore and the sociopsychological anxieties of modern parenting into a kind of *Rosemary's Baby Blues*. But the series adds a lot to LaValle's storyline – not just plot, but themes, motifs, locations, explosions – and it's somewhere in among all this extra baggage that things lose focus.

The story proper begins – after a preamble that's a couple of pages in the book but almost the whole of the first episode here – with bookstore owner Apollo's wife Emma (Clark Backo) giving birth to a child that she swiftly finds difficult bonding with. Emma also starts receiving text messages and photos from someone who seems to be stalking the baby. She

soon becomes convinced that the child is not hers, and makes contact with an online group of other mothers who've gone through similar experiences. They urge her to do the unthinkable, which she carries out with a pot of boiling water before vanishing into the night. The grieving Apollo (LaKeith Stanfield) is left behind, trying to discover what sent his wife over the edge. And then things get *really* strange...

There's a lot to admire in this adaptation, including some outstanding performances, a compelling central mystery and a number of tense, edgy set-pieces that ooze unsettling atmosphere. The dialogue – when it's about character-building rather than info-dumping – is snappy,

relatable and peppered with fun cultural references. Sadly, it's also flabby, pretentious and hampered by whiplash mood changes. One later episode is practically a one-woman show for *True Blood*'s Adina Porter, and on one level it's phenomenally brave and experimental, but in terms of the ongoing series it's unnecessary and indulgent.

It doesn't help that exposition is invariably delivered by characters – and an increasingly meta narrator – who eat cryptic crosswords for breakfast, while the plot is a morass of fevered, fractured timelines, with some scenes revisited multiple times. And all these self-consciously arthouse adornments really do is throw the story's more melodramatic elements into stark contrast, so they feel even more cheesy. Still, it's an ambitious and intriguing kaleidoscope of misfiring ideas. **Dave Golder**

i Writer Kelly Marcel's first screen credit was as a child actor in 1977 British SF horror *Prey*, which was produced by her dad.

STRANGE PLANET

Season One

Feeling blue



UK/US Apple TV+, Wednesdays

► Creators Nathan W Pyle, Dan Harmon

► Cast Hannah Einbinder, Danny Pudi, Lori Tan Chinn, Tunde Adebimpe

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 There's a lot to love about this quirky animated series about a planet that feels similar to Earth but is populated by little blue beings with bean-shaped heads.

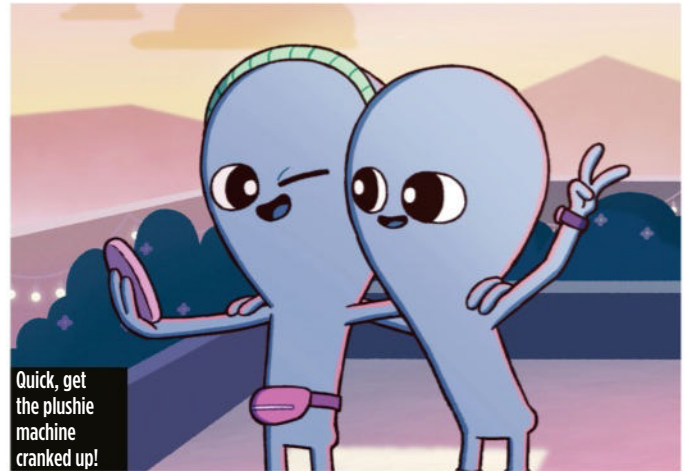
Based on the hit web-comic from showrunner Nathan W Pyle (who here collaborates with *Rick And Morty*'s Dan Harmon), its style feels perfect for breezy episodes intended for quick laughs. Instead it's deceptively touching, weaving stories about dating, loneliness, the ephemeral nature of friendships and finding

connection in an overcrowded yet disconnected world.

It's funny too. This is a world where language is hyper-literal (teeth are "mouth stones", socks are "foot fabric tubes" and coffee is "jitter liquid") and the wry way that characters talk to one another is constantly amusing. It's easy to watch and see situations that mirror our own.

This is the crux of the show's appeal: the characters might be blue, but they feel just like us. As the series goes on, its charms do

“The wry way characters talk to one another is amusing”



wane a little. It's hard to shake the feeling that it's just too long; episodes that stretch to 25 minutes, when a bite-sized 15 would have felt punchier. In typical anthology style, each episode is designed as a slice of life, introducing new storylines and different characters, and the series would have benefitted from having an overarching narrative to tie everything together.

But *Strange Planet* is so hard to dislike: it's cute, funny and genuinely heartwarming. It's refreshing to watch a modern comedy series that isn't mired in cynicism, and instead feels whimsical, in an age where sincerity has fallen out of fashion.

Kimberley Ballard

i Danny Pudi (*Abed in Community*) is one of the voice cast. In episode 6.13, *Abed* wore a T-shirt with a Nathan E Pyle design.

THE CHOSEN ONE

Season One

Christ alive!



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Showrunners Everardo Gout, Leopoldo Gout

► Cast Bobby Luhnnow, Dianna Agron, Lilith Curiel, Juanito Anguamea

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 This Mexican adaptation of Mark Millar and Peter Gross's *Chosen* miniseries (the first instalment of their *American Jesus* trilogy for Image Comics) sneaked onto Netflix with little fanfare, but is hands down the best Millar project since the first *Kingsman* movie.

Jodie (Bobby Luhnnow) is a 12-year-old boy living in Baja California Sur, Mexico, who seems to develop supernatural abilities in the wake of an accident that should have killed him. More

powers manifest, and when he brings a man back from the dead the truth becomes clear to everyone around him: Jodie is the new messiah, the return of Christ. But does that mean the end of the world is coming?

The Chosen One has two things in particular working in its favour: the location and its cast. This is a beautiful-looking show, making the most of the Mexican landscape and capturing images of genuinely cinematic splendour. It's an evocative and convincingly realised backdrop for the cast to play out what, in its best moments, feels like a supernaturally-tinged *Stand By Me*.

The young cast are also all excellent, with Luhnnow especially bringing both serenity and a touch



of disquiet to his performance. There's a real sense of both the joy and pain that comes with youthful friendships and budding romances, and a growing panic as the townsfolk he's grown up with react with increasing hysteria.

Where it might lose some is with a sluggish first episode and the ongoing plot, gradually teased out throughout the six episodes. It resolves in a slightly goofy final

scene that promises a very different second season. This is accurate to the comics and necessary to the story being told, but will leave some uncertain if this story has been at all worthwhile. We've read the original and it is, but you'll have to take that on faith. **Will Salmon**

i Aged four, Millar's 18-year-old brother said he'd get superpowers on turning seven. Millar then kept this secret for three years.

STAR TREK: STRANGE NEW WORLDS Season Two

All Kinds Of Everything

★★★★★

► UK/US Paramount+, streaming now
► Showrunners Akiva Goldsman, Henry Alonso Myers
► Cast Anson Mount, Ethan Peck, Jess Bush, Christina Chong

EPISODES 2.01-2.10 If there's one thing the latest live-action *Trek* show has in spades, it's variety, to the point where the tonal shifts from episode to episode can almost give you whiplash.

The final four instalments of this consistently entertaining second run exemplify this. One moment the show is pulling off goofy comedy in a crossover with sister show *Lower Decks*. The next

it's doing flashbacks to the Federation-Klingon War in an episode which feels like a *Deep Space Nine* tribute, presenting the Enterprise's resident hoarse whisperer Dr Mbenga with the sort of moral quandary usually found on Benjamin Sisko's plate.

The following week, they attempt the now seemingly compulsory musical episode (with only partial success – Uhura may end up with an earworm, but the audience doesn't). Then it's a tense, high stakes face-off with the Gorn. Elsewhere, the show tries its hand at courtroom drama, time travel thriller and comedy of manners, making a decent fist of

all of them. It feels like there's no genre which cannot be hammered into a *Strange New Worlds* shape. While some of the episodes are less memorable than others, there isn't a single turkey.

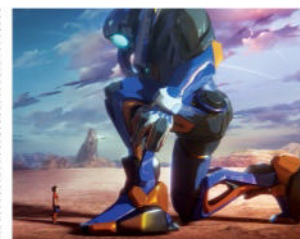
Perhaps because we've grown so used to lengthy arcs, *SNW* can sometimes dispense with ongoing elements with what feels like indecent haste. Security officer La'an fares worst in this regard, with her budding feelings for James T Kirk pruned before they can bloom. And the degree to which the producers are cramming the gaps in canon rather stretches credulity.

If you go back and watch "The Naked Time", the '60s episode where Nurse Chapel confesses her feelings for Spock, there's zero sense that the two previously had a full-blown relationship. And how many encounters with the Gorn does it take before the rapacious lizard-people count as "known"? When Kirk battled one in "Arena", the very word "Gorn" was new to him. Still, it seems churlish to nitpick when the results are so effective. And who knows, maybe Section 31 will eventually neurallyse the entire crew and redact the logs.

No, if this season has a weak spot, it is instead Carol Kane's turn as Pelia: the writers seem unsure how best to deploy her trademark kookiness, so the new chief engineer never makes an impact in the way that her predecessor Hemmer did. This is thrown into relief in the finale by Martin Quinn's effortlessly authentic turn as Montgomery Scott, which has us praying for a personnel transfer.

Ian Berriman

i A second version of the "singing Klingons" moment in "Subspace Rhapsody" was also shot, with them performing opera.



MECH CADETS Season One

★★★☆☆

► UK/US Netflix, streaming now
► Creator Aaron Lam
► Cast Brandon Soo Hoo, Anairis Quiñones, Daniel Dae Kim, Victoria Grace

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 This is a junior "big robot" CG animated series, where youngsters pilot giant bipedal machines to defend Earth. This time, though, the giants aren't just robots but mysterious alien entities (called Robos), who are helping humanity against invading crustacean giants called Shargs.

The alien names may underwhelm, but the series starts promisingly. The lead character is Stanford, a boy who longs to pilot a Robo but failed to qualify. By sheer luck, he encounters a Robo in the desert and bonds with it. That puts him at odds with the furiously ambitious daughter of a General, especially as Stanford already mucked up the girl's chance to pilot a Robo...

That's an interesting conflict, but it dies away quickly; a later "shock" revelation is similarly underpowered. Despite sparks of life, this is a dull show, as anonymous as the Shargs. The CG style will deter many viewers, with awkward action and inconsistent frame rates, though the colours, robot designs and voices are all pleasing enough.

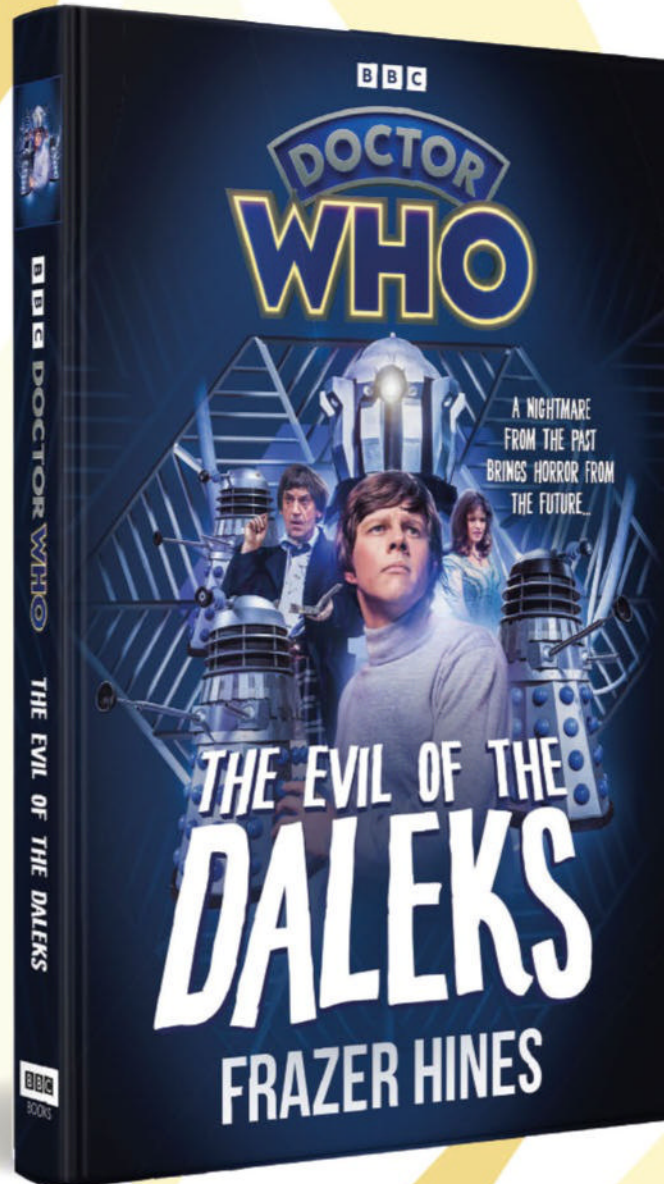
Other Netflix cartoons combine YA stories with anime-style edge, but *Mech Cadets* sets the threat level too low. The later space battles get incredibly silly, and a question-mark ending is unlikely to have viewers begging for more.

Andrew Osmond



"Did I leave the oven on? I should use a replicator."

A NIGHTMARE FROM
THE PAST BRINGS HORROR
FROM THE FUTURE...



THE EVIL OF THE DALEKS

A NOVEL BY
FRAZER HINES





DRINKING GAME

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



A returning villain/monster makes an appearance.



Peter Davison's sideburns get aggressively pointy.



Turlough cradles a glowing piece of Perspex.



Tegan's wearing inappropriate clothing for what's clearly a bone-rattlingly cold location shoot.



The horn of Rassilon mournfully parps in the score to "The Five Doctors".



In the studio footage a flustered floor manager cries "Settle down! We are still recording!"

DOCTOR WHO Season 20

Many happy returns

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED 18 SEPTEMBER**

1983 | PG | Blu-ray

► Producer John Nathan-Turner

► Cast Peter Davison, Janet Fielding, Sarah Sutton, Mark Strickson

BLU-RAY DEBUT For a series

realising the power of its past and increasingly playing to a canon-minded fandom, *Doctor Who*'s 20th anniversary season feels surprisingly fresh. Yes, there are rematches with a handful of old enemies, including an unrecognisable Omega and cosmic wrong 'un the Black Guardian, but the beloved Brigadier's brought back for a Moffat-worthy time-warp tale that refuses to freeze him as a childhood icon, exploring midlife mental

breakdown instead. Meanwhile duplicitous new companion Turlough shakes up the format in a genuinely intriguing way, even if the stories never quite capitalise on his slippery potential.

Celebratory special "The Five Doctors" – also presented here in a new anniversary edition, with sympathetically updated effects – delivers all the nostalgia rush you require, for the show's own history and now, a surely impossible 40 years later, itself.

► **Extras** Davison, Fielding and Sutton reunite for an overlong but entertainingly fractious European road trip (67 minutes); the freewheeling dashcam banter reminds you these are old friends as well as castmates. Joined by Strickson, the TARDIS team

demonstrates the same watchably snarky chemistry on a jaunt to Amsterdam, location for "Arc Of Infinity" (76 minutes). Davison, Fielding and Strickson also contribute a new commentary for the 40th anniversary edition of "The Five Doctors".

Interviewed by Matthew Sweet, Fielding and Sutton are commendably honest about the more disquieting sides to their time on *Who* (66 minutes). "The King's Demons" gets an equally candid dedicated doc, touching on dodgy French accents and the on-set tensions of working with robot companion Kamelion (35 minutes). Janet Fielding catches up with "Snakedance" co-star Martin Clunes (24 minutes), and joins Sutton at Jodrell Bank for a

chat about "Logopolis", made to promote the season 18 Blu-ray in the US (21 minutes).

Hours of studio footage from "Arc Of Infinity", "Snakedance" and "The Five Doctors" prove numbing and fascinating in equal measure – First Doctor surrogate Richard Hurndall is twinklier than you might expect. There's also a wealth of rare footage from contemporary and more recent conventions, including the 20th anniversary blow-out at Longleat.

Box set teaser "The Passenger" gets a behind-the-scenes featurette. Other treats include location rushes from "The Five Doctors", 1983 US doc "Once Upon A Time Lord" (24 minutes), updated effects on select stories, and seven instalments of the *Gogglebox*-aping *Behind The Sofa*. Plus: galleries, 8,849 pages (!) of PDFs and more – including hours of old special features from the DVD range. **Nick Setchfield**

i The initial plan for the anniversary was a Robert Holmes storyline in which the Cybermen plot to become Cyber Lords.



THE KNOCKING

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | VOD

▶ Directors Max Seeck, Joonas

Pajunen

▶ Cast Inka Kallén, Saana Koivisto,

Pekka Strang, Janina Berman

♣ **Buried family secrets come** to the surface in this gloomy Finnish chiller, in which three siblings must deal with the childhood home recently inherited from their mother, plus its surrounding woodland. The fact that the youngest, Matilda, was found locked in a cage after mum killed dad with an axe makes this more fraught than would usually be the case.

While not averse to falling back on some of the modern clichés of the genre – the plink-plonk piano score, the drone’s-eye-view of a forest – *The Knocking* does have one neat central idea: the way it plays with the concept of the growth rings inside trees (a recurring image).

It soon becomes clear that this is a tale pitting man against nature, and while the manner in which the forces of the latter are corporealised looks a tad ropery, the film’s soundscape, with its creaking wood and birdsong, is effective at ensuring that you always feel immersed in the natural world – at times oppressively so.

The most memorable aspect is the final gut-punch reveal, which explains the titular tapping noise, suggestive of a woodpecker at work. What a shame that it’s witlessly undermined, as an inappropriately positioned rap track blasts out over the end credits. Can we not be allowed even a couple of seconds’ silent pause for reflection? **Ian Berriman**



“Yes, I’m even taller than Russell T Davies.”

SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN

A Farewell To Arms

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1970 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Gordon Hessler

▶ Cast Vincent Price, Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Alfred Marks

BLU-RAY DEBUT It’s a measure of this British sci-fi-horror’s success that while the chief selling point – a team-up of Vincent Price, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee – disappoints (Cushing is in just one scene; Lee not much more), you probably won’t give a fig.

Aptly for a tale of beings called “Composites”, it’s a patchwork of disparate scenarios. In one strand a jogger ends up in a hospital bed; each time he wakes, he finds he’s lost another limb. Another sees a vampiric killer preying on women at a groovy nightclub. A third follows political machinations in an Eastern European fascist regime. All three are compelling; the mystery of how they are connected provides a strong hook.

Director Gordon Hessler makes good use of handheld camera for

roving long takes, and a car chase set to a symphony of screeching tyres is surely one of the best shot in the UK. The wrap-up is nonsensical, but there’s much to enjoy about this oddball gem.

♣ **Extras** Choose between UK and US cuts; three “deleted scenes” are intact in the former. Jonathan Rigby provides well-informed, seamlessly flowing commentary – his colleague’s main contribution is repeating, “That’s right!”

Interview snippets with five cast/crew (35 minutes) boil down to “Vincent Price was *really tall*”. Co-star Uta Levka (nine minutes) at least supplies gossip: Lee was “smug”, Price “unpretentious”. Horror author Ramsey Campbell (11 minutes) discusses writer Christopher Wicking. A solid 2015 featurette covers all of Hessler’s films for AIP (23 minutes). Plus: Super 8 version; “Trailers From Hell” clip; trailer; gallery; three postcards; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i One of the Eastern European scenes has a photo of its dictator in the background – actually producer Max Rosenberg.

(4K X FOUR)

OLD MOVIES NOW AVAILABLE ON UHD



A young boy travels through history with a band of pilfering dwarves in Terry Gilliam’s **TIME BANDITS** (OUT NOW).

We said: “Dollops of fever-dream surrealism and more executions than you might expect... Proof that the ‘80s were the decade for big screen fantasy.” The extras match Arrow’s 2013 Blu-ray. Call it *Ring* or **RINGU** (25 September), Hideo Nakata’s J-horror still stands up, despite the analogue tech driving its high-concept – watch a cursed videotape and you die a week later – having gone to landfill. We said: “It’s the understated stillness of Nakata’s handling that makes it a triumph.” Extras from the 2019 Blu-ray are carried over – though 1998 sequel *Spiral* has gone AWOL. Mark Millar’s ordinary teen turned superhero returns in 2013’s **KICK-ASS 2** (11 September), with the son of the gangster he killed out for revenge. We said: “Jane Goldman broadened the appeal beyond a 14-year-old-boy mentality. Writer/director Jeff Wadlow seems to have been determined to do the opposite, adding projectile vomit, wanking gags and toilet sex scenes.” Finally, Tim Burton’s **SLEEPY HOLLOW** (11 September), riffs on Washington Irving’s tale of a spectral Headless Horseman. We said: “Nobody but Burton could have made this film... a uniquely atmospheric vision of cruelty and horror.” Bonus-wise it’s slim pickings: a commentary and two featurettes. Still, you do get Irving’s 1820 story in booklet form, a boon for anyone incapable of googling.

ANDRZEJ ŻUŁAWSKI

Whatever possessed him?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1971-1989 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Cast Małgorzata Braunek, Leszek Teleszyński, Andrzej Seweryn, Jerzy Trela

BLU-RAY DEBUT Polish filmmaker

Andrzej Żuławski is best known for 1981's *Possession*, whose tentacle-sex weirdness earned it both a Palme d'Or nomination and "video nasty" status. This box set collects three equally idiosyncratic films – increasingly fantastical, and all united by a hysterical tone.

Set in occupied Poland, *The Third Part Of The Night* sees a resistance member meet a woman who's his dead wife's double. His dead son also makes appearances, though the most bizarre element – the hero's occupation, which involves strapping boxes of lice to

his leg – is entirely factual. An off-kilter view of the Nazis' genocidal brutality, its highlight is a heart-in-mouth sequence where Michal is chased by gunmen.

The Devil is set in 1793, during the Prussian invasion of Poland. A conspirator against the King is sprung from jail by a black-cloaked figure, who later presses a razor into his hand and encourages him to "purify"... In constant motion, it offers a helter-skelter odyssey through a nation convulsed in paroxysms of disorder. Heavy use of handheld camera and subjective POV thrust you into the chaos; Andrzej Korzyński's remarkable score, full of reverberating clatter and electronic burbling, then boxes you about the ears. Exhausting but exhilarating.

On The Silver Globe is a gloomy, nihilist sci-fi based on a trilogy of

novels written by Żuławski's great-uncle. Those visited the Moon; here the setting is an unnamed planet. After astronauts crash, the survivors' offspring develop a primitive society. Later another Earthman lands, and is treated like a messiah. After 473 working days, the production was shut down by Poland's Deputy Minister of Culture, in a display of dominance. A decade later, Żuławski plugged the gaps with narration.

Featuring location work in the Gobi desert and a Polish salt mine, its world-building is frequently breathtaking – the tribal costume design is a triumph. However, the interminable philosophical monologues grow tiresome; actor Andrzej Seweryn theorises that the love-lorn Żuławski was dramatising his diary. Therapy might have been a better option.

▶ **Extras** First-rate 2021 doc *Escape To The Silver Globe* (96 minutes) provides an introduction to Żuławski, then relates the fate of his "lost" film, drawing on home movies, newsreels and on-set footage (seeing the director bellow "Stronger!", the performances makes sense...) Interviews with crew are supplemented by candid remarks from Żuławski's son, who frames his father as an egomaniac.

Contextualising talking heads prove useful: a film historian tackles the first two entries (15 minutes/18 minutes), while *Globe's* source novels (21 minutes) are discussed by the author's grandson. *The Devil* actor Lukasz Żuławski (19 minutes) has some amusing anecdotes. Żuławski expert Daniel Bird (producer of *Globe's* reconstruction) provides commentary on that, and a piece on its varying shooting styles (11 minutes). Plus: a visit to *Globe's* salt mine (11 minutes); production sketches; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i For a crucifixion close-up in *Silver Globe*, the production hammered a nail through a real hand, sourced from a mortuary.



THE ANTICHRIST

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 11 SEPTEMBER**

1974 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Alberto De Martino

▶ Cast Carla Gravina, Mel Ferrer, Arthur Kennedy, George Coulouris

BLU-RAY DEBUT This shameless

Exorcist cash-in (director Alberto De Martino was flown to New York to watch it, with a screenwriter in tow) lacks the thematic depth of William Friedkin's film, but arguably outdoes it for spectacle.

Rosemary's Baby is also stirred into the mix – hence, presumably, Carla Gravina's Mia Farrow-esque crop. She gives her all as Ippolita, an aristocrat's daughter who, stricken by a paralysis with a psychological basis, undergoes hypnotic regression. Turns out that in a past life she was burned as a witch. A ritual sequence showing her ancestor fornicating with Satan (and doing unspeakable things to a goat...) is breathtaking.

De Martino dips into the usual bag of tricks – green vomit, levitation, potty talk – but with Ippolita's sexual frustration driving events, the film has a much more febrile atmosphere than its inspiration. Think of it as *The Sexiercist*.

It also looks ravishing, with painterly compositions, ornate, opulent interiors, and some impressive location work – a climax at the Colosseum makes you wonder if officials actually read the script...

▶ **Extras** De Martino discusses the film in audio from 2012 (11 minutes) and a 2002 featurette (10 minutes). Two Aussie critics provide a chatty commentary. Plus: US titles; a TV spot. The Blu-ray comes with four art cards. **Ian Berriman**



Having your film cancelled would make you blue too.

BABYLON 5: THE ROAD HOME

A Shadow of its former self?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★
▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!
 2023 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/
 download
 ▶ Director Matt Peters
 ▶ Cast Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia
 Christian, Peter Jurasik, Patricia Tallman

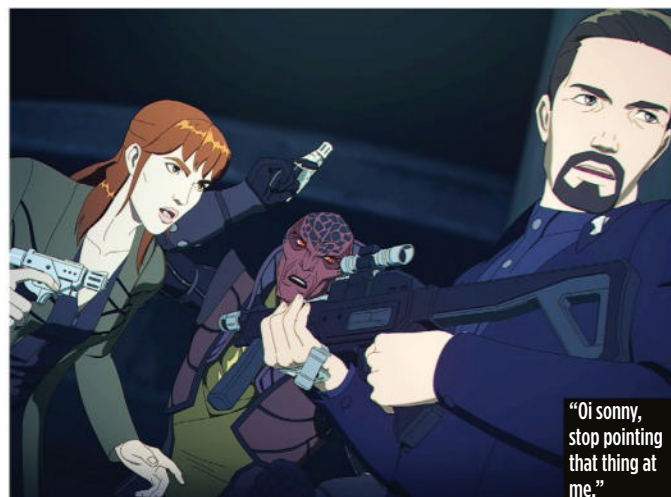
➤ **With many of the original** cast having sadly left us and new actors now voicing their beloved characters, *Babylon 5: The Road Home* could have felt disrespectful. Instead, it's a delight. "I felt like we were honouring our fallen friends," says Bruce Boxleitner in his commentary, and he's right.

We open two years after the end of the *Shadow War*. John Sheridan suddenly finds himself being flung

through time and space – even landing in alternate realities. Only Zathras (Paul Guyet) can help him get home... but, as we all know, nobody listens to Zathras.

The animation's an attractive mixture of 2D and 3D, at times a little unsophisticated but, in its own sweet way, in keeping with the TV show's now-dated CG. The replacement actors do a respectable job, although sometimes a voice doesn't quite sit right – particularly Delenn, which is more a testament to Mira Furlan's one-of-a-kind performance than any fault on voice artist Rebecca Riedy's part.

Mostly, this functions as a glorious rush of nostalgia. Warm-hearted, funny and



surprisingly philosophical, it really does feel like coming home.

➤ **Extras** A 17-minute featurette, "Babylon 5 Forever", is mostly fluff, although it's interesting to see actors recording their voiceovers. The commentary features Boxleitner, *B5* creator J Michael Straczynski and producer Rick Morales discussing everything from Starfury thrusters

to how you can figure out the show's timeline by looking at Garibaldi's hair (or lack of it). There's not much time spent chinwagging on the technical ins and outs of animation, and their joy at seeing *Babylon 5* return is palpable. **Jayne Nelson**

i The Shadow ship designs have been revamped and look more like living creatures, with gently writhing tentacles.



GOOD BOY

★★★★★
▶ RELEASED 11 SEPTEMBER
 2023 | TBC | Download

➤ **What are your dating red** lines? This Norwegian thriller's heroine swipes left on finding that her Tinder hook-up lives with a man who identifies as a dog 24/7 – then reconsiders on discovering he's minted. It's not the furry Frank she should be worried about, though...

It's an amusing idea, but overall *Good Boy* feels rather underpowered: the settings are sterile, and Gard Løkke fails to make an impact as the pretty boy villain. A final, shocking image is memorably bleak, but you may still feel like you've been sold a pup. **Ian Berriman**



ZOM 100

★★★★★
▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!
 2023 | 15 | SVOD

NETFLIX Subtitled *Bucket List Of The Dead*, this live-action manga adaptation sees miserably burned-out office worker Akira using the end of the world as an opportunity to do everything he's ever wanted to do. After all, there's no one left alive to stop him.

Initially charming, *Zom 100*'s episodic structure soon becomes frustrating; somehow, it feels both overlong (at 129 minutes!) and unfinished. Still, we guarantee you've never seen anything like the monster that shows up in the final reel.

Sarah Dobbs



OUTPOST

★★★★★
▶ RELEASED 11 SEPTEMBER
 2022 | 15 | Download/VOD

➤ **Escaping a traumatic past**, a woman heads to the Idaho wilderness, taking up a job as a fire watcher on a lonely mountaintop outpost. Soon the hallucinations start, and a darker truth is revealed...

For the most part this is an effective psychological suspense, riddled with horror imagery – insect swarms, maggots, animal entrails – and anchored by Beth Dover's engagingly vulnerable lead. A final act swerve into bloody hokum brings a lurid energy but also undercuts a more interesting film. **Nick Setchfield**



BAD THINGS

★★★★★
▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!
 2023 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER If Jack Torrance had brought a chainsaw to the Overlook, things might have ended very differently for him and his family, as *Bad Things* demonstrates.

When Ruthie inherits a rundown '80s hotel, she and her girlfriend decide to spend a fun weekend there with some pals – but, well, there's that chainsaw right in the first scene, so you know it won't end well. Unfortunately, there's none of Kubrick's artistry here, just mumbly Gen Z introspection and dull, sludgy colour grading. **Sarah Dobbs**

BLACK MAGIC RITES

Castle Maim XXXX

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 18 SEPTEMBER

1973 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Renato Polselli

▶ Cast Mickey Hargitay, Rita Calderoni, Raoul Lovecchio, Krysta Barrymore

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Thick with non**

sequiturs, sinister glaring and groovy threads, light on narrative cohesion or dialogue that human beings might actually speak, this hallucinatory Italian horror comes across like a mash-up of Jess Franco-style Euro-sleaze with a hippy “happening”.

The shrivelled nub of a plot sees a young woman's friends killed off in a cursed castle, to revive a dead witch, but director Renato Polselli clearly has contempt for the norms of cinematic storytelling. Assuming it's intentional, that is – the film also feels like something pieced together in the edit room

after running out of money. Possibly while on acid.

Titillation is paramount, with the camera lingering on virginal beauties chained to a stone altar or groped by a possible vampire. One unfortunate sacrifice gets tied to a knackered old stepladder rather than the traditional stake.

Faces are bathed in psychedelic colours. Characters are clothed one second, naked the next. We move from candle-lit interiors to exteriors bathed in sunshine. Rapid-fire cuts juxtapose the present-day with a 14th century witch burning. Some of the cast are present in both time periods. This goes unexplained until some late-in-the-day exposition. “Don't try to understand it!”, the character voicing it adds.

It's good advice: relax and approach the film as simply a cavalcade of deranged imagery,

Simon Cowell's face assumes its final form.



and it's strangely fascinating. And the appropriately named Gianfranco Reverberi's score (he must have worn out his effects pedal) is far out, mixing psych guitar, backwards noises and mournful organ with wolf calls and wind howl.

▶ **Extras** A bit on the director (34 minutes) includes old clips of him and star Mickey Hargita. Writer Stephen Thrower adds an astute overview of Polselli's career (39 minutes), usefully detailing more

realist early credits. A featurette on Reverberi (25 minutes) highlights his work as a rock producer. The composer is also interviewed (19 minutes); though charmingly twinkly, he doesn't remember much. David Flint and Kim Newman's extraneous commentary consists mostly of bemused observations. Plus: trailer; gallery. **Ian Berriman**

▶ Polselli's directorial pseudonym, Ralph Brown, came about after a friend called him Charlie Brown for having a large head.

IT FOLLOWS

Panic In Detroit

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 11 SEPTEMBER

2014 | 15 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

▶ Director David Robert Mitchell

▶ Cast Maika Monroe, Keir Gilchrist, Olivia Luccardi, Lili Sepe

▶ **David Robert Mitchell's** supernatural stalker horror remains potent and enigmatic almost a decade later. Jay (Maika Monroe) sleeps with new boyfriend Hugh and immediately becomes the target of a malicious shapeshifting entity. Wherever she goes, it follows, and it can look like anyone. The only way to shake the creature is to pass it on by sleeping with someone else. Will Jay make that choice?

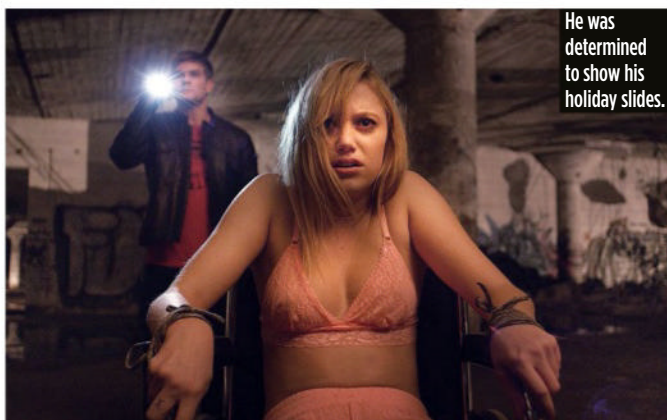
It *Follows'* combination of visceral B-movie thrills and dense layers of oblique symbology make for a tantalising and deliberately frustrating watch. What's with all

the water and the TVs and that weird clamshell e-reader? We may never know, but Mitchell seeds enough clues to help you piece together what it might all mean.

Crucially, however, this isn't just an exercise in cerebral scares – a couple of scenes remain viscerally frightening. Meanwhile the ominous backdrop of crumbling Detroit housing feels more haunting than any demonic being.

▶ **Extras** The new 4K transfer is the main draw here, with the special features slightly underwhelming. The core are a series of interviews with actors Keir Gilchrist (19 minutes) and

“A couple of scenes remain viscerally frightening”



He was determined to show his holiday slides.

Olivia Luccardi (12 minutes), producer David Kaplan (23 minutes), composer Rich Vreeland (13 minutes) and – most interestingly – production designer Michael Perry (24 minutes), who highlights the many intentional odd choices he and Mitchell made to bolster the film's state of dreamlike strangeness.

This is also explored in “The Architecture Of Loneliness” (11 minutes), a video essay by Joseph Wallace. Two

commentaries approach the film from different angles. Lecturer Joshua Grimm's track is lively and full of behind-the-scenes information, while writer Danny Leigh and lecturer Mark Jancovich take a rather more analytical approach. The Limited Edition UHD set also comes with a 150-page book of essays and six art cards. **Will Salmon**

▶ The cinema featured in the film is the Redford Theatre in Detroit, where *The Evil Dead* held its premiere 33 years earlier.

► **NOW ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS** Asteroid City (from 11/9) • The Boogeyman • Indiana Jones And The Dial Of Destiny • Insidious: The Red Door

JEAN ROLLIN

French undressing

► **RELEASED 18 SEPTEMBER**

1968/1980 | 18 | Blu-ray

► Director **Jean Rollin**

► Cast Solange Pradel, Bernard Letrou, Brigitte Lahaie, Vincent Gardère

❖ **“It will soon be dark,”** declares one of the undead in Jean Rollin’s debut feature, her words dripping with the kind of existential ennui only perfected by the truly French.

Now strikingly restored from the original negative, *The Rape Of The Vampire* ★★★★★ remains an odd and provocative piece of Euro horror. Regarded by Rollin as “a kind of amateur film”, its eerie monochrome images of decaying houses and disquietingly witchy countryside are matched by some non-sequitur storytelling that ultimately achieves its own, haunting dream logic.

Also vibrantly restored, 1980’s

The Night Of The Hunted ★★★★★ shows a different side to an auteur who had since moved into mainstream adult fare. Still working on a shoestring budget, Rollin mixes softcore interludes with a genuinely unsettling premise, allowing porn star Brigitte Lahaie to shine in a straight acting role as one of a group of people whose mysteriously impaired memories mean they can literally only live in the moment. Abandoning the gothic for a cold, numbing sci-fi aesthetic, the film makes the modernist architecture of Paris’s La Défense district look like a future that will never have the chance to become the past.

❖ **Extras** Both *Rape Of The Vampire* ★★★★★ and *The Night Of The Hunted* ★★★★★ have intros by Rollin (two minutes

apiece), who also appears on a full 2007 audio commentary for *Rape*; paired with Brigitte Lahaie, he also comments on select scenes for *Night*, while critic Tim Lucas provides commentaries for both.

A retrospective on *Rape* delivers some fascinating cultural context, including Rollin’s disdain for the French New Wave and the original negative reception for a movie lobbed like “a Molotov cocktail” into the midst of the 1968 Paris riots (32 minutes).

This is supplemented by cast and crew interviews (84 minutes in total), an appraisal by film scholar Virginie Selavy (eight minutes) and an alternate take (two minutes). Also included: a Super 8 version (16 minutes) whose grainy texture manages to make Rollin’s imagery even more eerie; elliptical 1965 short “The

“Mixes softcore interludes with an unsettling premise”

Far Countries” (16 minutes), complete with Rollin commentary; a featurette on lost film *L’itinéraire Marin* (seven minutes); and an attempt to reconstruct the latter via photomontage (27 minutes).

Night also gets a dedicated Making Of (20 minutes), along with a featurette on the film’s memorable viaduct location (four minutes) and a collection of cast and crew interviews (48 minutes in total), led by an insightful Lahaie. Critic Stephen Thrower incisively champions *Night*’s appeal (20 minutes), and there are three bonus sex scenes (17 minutes in total). Both movies come with extensive galleries, trailers and 80-page books with new and archival content. **Nick Setchfield**

i Jean Rollin himself pops up as one of the villagers attacking the chateau in *The Rape Of The Vampire*.

(ROUND UP)



SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

(11 September) [see](#) Miles Morales sucked into multi-world shenanigans again when Gwen Stacey returns to his reality, pursuing a villain called The Spot. Blu-ray bonuses weren’t made available for review but include 10 featurettes, a commentary and deleted scenes. We said: “Sometimes feels like a bold reinvention of cinematic storytelling and sometimes feels like a hot mess.” Surgery becomes spectacle in David Cronenberg’s **CRIMES OF THE FUTURE**

(11 September, 4K Blu-ray), as a performance artist grows new organs. January’s DVD had just the film and a trailer.

Second Sight’s new release has eight interviews, a video essay and critical commentary, plus production designs, a Making Of and a one-minute short. The Limited Edition adds a 120-page book and six art cards. We said: “Queasy, unsettling and darkly comic... It’s also short on new tricks.” Assembled over seven years by director Takehide Hori, stop-motion feature **JUNK HEAD** (18 September, Blu-ray) follows a cyborg explorer in a subterranean realm, home to a bestiary of grotesque creatures. We said: “While it reeks of filth and decay, Hori imbues this world with immense charm... The story itself is slim, but technically it’s a marvel.” Finally, the latest TV box sets include **THE FLASH SEASON NINE** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD), **LA BREA SEASON ONE** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD), and **RESIDENT ALIEN SEASON TWO** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD).



“L’enfer, c’est les autres.”
“Ah oui, c’est vrai.”



STARTER VILLAIN

Time to get lair-y

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 21 SEPTEMBER**
272 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
► Author John Scalzi
► Publisher Tor

❗ **Comic novelists don't often** get treated with that much respect. After all, how can you be taken seriously if you're busy telling gags? The rejoinder is that it's actually more difficult both to make people laugh *and* to tackle big themes.

Yet that's precisely what John Scalzi does with *Starter Villain*, a book that revolves around what happens when Charlie, a business journalist turned supply teacher who's struggling just to pay his bills, discovers that his late uncle Jake was a billionaire supervillain. Does Charlie have the smarts to take on the family business?

It's a question Charlie has to answer with some urgency after it turns out his uncle – whose career involved supplying the kinds of specialist services that even governments will shell out for, provided the payments can be hidden from the wider public – was not exactly popular with his contemporaries. These people wanted Jake dead, if only because

he was so good at his job that he kept hoovering up all the supervillain contracts. They're by and large a nasty crew, representatives of whom we first meet at Jake's funeral. Here, someone stabs Jake's corpse, just to be sure the old trickster hasn't faked his death to gain a competitive advantage.

Whether Jake's contemporaries are as clever as they like to think they are is another matter. As he did with last year's Godzilla-riffing *The Kaiju Preservation Society*, Scalzi is here drawing on popular fiction tropes as a way to poke fun at corporate idiocy, creating a world as exaggerated in its way as a Roger Moore-era Bond film, *The Incredibles* or *Despicable Me* in order to lampoon those who inherit money and see themselves as brilliant entrepreneurs.

In truth, the members of the ominously named Lombardy Convocation are inept rentiers without any originality – think *Glass Onion* too – who are busy greedily frittering away the family silver. Lest that sounds even mildly serious, it's worth reiterating that Scalzi is having huge fun throughout *Starter Villain*. Much of the action takes

place on a volcanic island that doubles as a supervillain base because, well, where else would it take place? Then there are the cats because, as every wannabe Blofeld knows, you can't be a criminal mastermind if you don't have a moggy on your lap who's happy to purr while you monologue. Except the cats, at least those who worked for Jake, turn out to be in management, communicating their ideas via typing.

Immersed in this new world, Charlie, who remains remarkably unfazed by everything that's going on, has to make a series of decisions that will affect what happens to his uncle's supervillain business empire. Moreover, he has to do this even as his own life comes under threat when he heads off to a meeting of Jake's disgruntled competitors.

Or at least that's what he's told is happening. Without giving too much away, Scalzi delights here in authorial sleight of hand, and in

“Laugh-out-loud funny, intricately plotted and big-hearted”

undercutting what the plot initially suggests is going on. That's perhaps because, when it comes right down to it, Scalzi isn't much interested in how supervillains and corporate types alike see themselves.

No, he's far more interested in what's really important in life: helping other people, the warmth of a much-loved neighbourhood bar and (because it's that kind of novel) the unionisation of cetaceans. Laugh-out-loud funny, intricately plotted and big-hearted enough to touch even the grumpiest cynic, *Starter Villain* establishes Scalzi as SF's leading humorist.

Granted, there's not a lot of competition, but maybe that's because comic novelists with genuine talent are far rarer than their ten-a-penny serious scribbler counterparts. **Jonathan Wright**

i You really can buy speech button boards so your cat can “talk” to you – in a more limited way than Scalzi's fictional moggies.



DESERT CREATURES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

288 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Kay Chronister

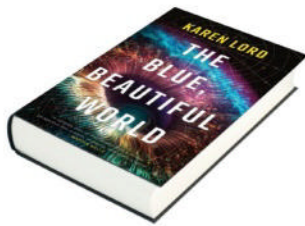
► Publisher Titan Books

❗ **In the wake of a deadly** plague, things get... weird. (As most of us can attest.) When poison rain renders most of the United States uninhabitable, a handful of survivors attempt to build a new life in the desert, but that's where the plague really takes hold.

In the dry, brutal expanse of the Mojave desert, the flora has become as lethal as the fauna: plants are pushing themselves inside people, driving tendrils through their flesh, sending them mad before taking root permanently. Beset by horrors on all sides, Magdala and her father set off on a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Las Vegas, where modern-day saints work miracles – for a price.

Much of Magdala's journey will seem familiar to anyone who's ever read any post-apocalyptic fiction, what with all the bandits roaming the wilderness and the ever-present threat of sexual violence. What sets this book apart, though, is how strange its landscapes are.

Desert cultists sit atop cacti and horses sprout leaves in a world that ends up looking like a cross between *The Girl With All The Gifts*, *Annihilation* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Every step of Magdala's journey brings her closer to uncovering a miracle, and when she finally finds it, it's tear-jerkingly beautiful. Short and sweet, this book is ultimately a lesson in the power of faith. **Sarah Dobbs**



THE BLUE, BEAUTIFUL WORLD

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

235 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Karen Lord

► Publisher Gollancz

❖ **What will it be like if and** when alien entities make contact with humanity? The *Independence Day* strand of SF portrays this scenario in apocalyptic terms: we either fight back or get our asses whupped. But what if first contact is eerie, confusing, contradictory?

That's the scenario Karen Lord imagines in her latest Cygnus Beta book, which can be read as a standalone. In part, the eeriness is down to the state of the denuded Earth that Lord shows us, but there's also often a sense of eavesdropping on moments when history could go one of two ways. To simplify greatly: either humanity makes it through to become something new and extraordinary, or it doesn't.

Dramatising this, Lord switches viewpoints to show events from different perspectives. Those looking for a linear story might be better advised to choose another book, and there are moments when you find yourself wanting more help as a reader.

Nonetheless, it's fascinating. Whether showing us a mesmeric rock star, Owen, who is more than he first appears, or exploring how Earth has been infiltrated by extraterrestrial bad actors, Lord gradually reveals a far bigger story. Rich, strange and accomplished enough that comparisons with Ursula Le Guin really don't seem so fanciful. **Jonathan Wright**



EDGE OF HERE

Blackened Mirror

★★★★★

► RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER

256 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Kelechi Okafor

► Publisher Trapeze

❖ **A future impacted in** unpredictable ways by what seem to be innocuous technological advantages is familiar sci-fi terrain. But Kelechi Okafor's short story collection (subtitle: *Stories From Near To Now*) breathes new life into the genre by centring it around the black experience and making it profoundly and wonderfully romantic.

Her stories involve everything from microchips called "Ally-chips" inserted into the brains of white people to make them empathise more with racism, to technology that allows you to view snippets of distant family members' lives, and a cautionary tale of far-reaching surveillance. All of these are strikingly and devastatingly realised. But the feeling the author evokes best is one of falling deeply and hopelessly in love, in a way that seems to change a character's core more than any brain microchip ever could.

At times, this does border a little on saccharine. Some of her descriptors border on bathos, as do sporadic insertions of nebulous

spirituality, but her skill for dialogue proves bewitching and delightfully funny. Her work continually captures the rare magic of genuine connection, and how the bonds people form prove stronger than government agencies, colonial invaders or patriarchal societies could ever think possible.

As the book continues, the connections between each story emerge. This culminates in Okafor's final and finest piece, "Councilwoman", where 92-year-old "Simi" spends her last day alive reflecting on all the changes that have happened in her lifetime, agonises over the role she played in creating the dystopia she inhabits, and pines for her greatest love, "Huda". The gentle melancholy of her memories, where regret is intermingled with gratitude for having got to experience such an intense love affair, is heartbreakingly lovely.

As science fiction goes, there may not be anything conceptually revolutionary in these pages. Still, Okafor's gift is showing that black romance has always been able to blossom in the most brutal of circumstances.

Lella Latif

i As well as being a writer, podcaster and actor, Okafor also teaches pole dancing and twerking at her studio.



A SECOND CHANCE FOR YESTERDAY

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

250 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author RA Sinn

► Publisher Solaris

❖ **At first, hotshot** programmer Nev Bourne thinks she's hit Groundhog Day when she wakes up one morning and relives the day she's just been through. But it's way more complicated than that. When she next wakes up, it's not the same day again, but the day before. And it keeps happening – Nev's travelling back through time a day at a time.

She thinks it may have something to do with the code she's working on for a high-tech company that provides technology allowing people to make mini-jumps back in time (to quickly rectify embarrassing gaffes, or have a sneaky second go at a pool shot). As Nev tries to put her life back on course without causing untold damage to the timeline, she learns much more about herself and her fractured relationships with the people in her life.

It's an enticing central concept, which RA Sinn mines for a lot of fun while cheekily acknowledging and dismissing the inherent bootstrap paradoxes involved. Nev is an endearingly flawed protagonist, and there are a host of colourful supporting characters.

But be aware: this is a character-led piece rather than hard SF, reliant on magical science, which sidesteps a lot of the practical time travel questions some readers might want answered (even if the author doesn't). **Dave Golder**

STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN THE MAKING OF THE CLASSIC FILM

The Book of Genesis



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

192 pages | Hardback

► Authors John Tenuto, Maria Jose Tenuto

► Publisher Titan Books

► **Forty-one years on, *The Wrath Of Khan* remains the *Trek* movie franchise's high point. This**

coffee-table book does it justice. Though authors John and Maria Jose Tenuto conducted a few new interviews (including one with director Nicholas Meyer), they mostly draw on existing quotes. But they clearly made an effort to dig deep, trawling fan club newsletters and semi-pro mags like *Enterprise Incidents*, not just

the usual well-thumbed biographies, so you don't come away feeling short-changed.

After an informative discussion of the script's evolution, every department of production is covered; you get a strong sense just how much recycling was going on to save money. Break-out pages keep things fun and accessible, covering topics such as a baby trimmed from the film, and a sign full of in-joke names. Visually it's a feast, crammed with candid on-set photography, some of it pleasingly sequenced to show, for example, the construction of the Ceti Alpha V planet surface set.

Nitpicks? The number of "personnel files" achieves overkill, and it's curious to find only one brief quote from William Shatner. Admittedly, anyone who owns *Star Trek Movie Memories* may feel they've heard his take, but it seems odd not to have the Captain's voice logged. **Ian Berriman**

In an early version of the screenplay, Khan wielded a "Romulan Medusa whip" which had live snakes at the end!



Costumes for Khan and his navigator.

Fancy one of these in your earhole?



Meyer, Nimoy and the script supervisor.



Starfleet uniform sketches by Robert Fletcher.



42

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

298 pages | Hardback

► Editor Kevin Jon Davies

► Publisher Unbound

► **What will be left of us after we shuffle off this mortal coil?** For most of us, a skipload for landfill. When you're someone of Douglas Adams's stature, however, you end up with your papers stored in the library of St John's College, Cambridge.

Formatted like a more scrapbook-y take on the *Letters Of Note* books, this handsome collection (subtitled *The Implausible Ideas Of Douglas Adams*) mixes reproductions of selected original documents with "letters to Douglas" from old pals, plus the odd relic sourced outside the archive.

Sifting through the storage boxes, Kevin Jon Davies has wisely concentrated on unseen material. You can quibble with a few choices – even hardcore fans are unlikely to plough through an undergraduate essay on an 18th century poet. But there are some real treasures here: a school report in which Adams's art teacher calls him a "dilettante"; a scene breakdown for *Doctor Who* story "The Pirate Planet"; observations of passengers on a Concorde flight.

It really brings Adams to life in your imagination. Reading a drafted apology to a girlfriend for being "bloody stupid", or a page of typescript in which the author talks to himself ("It may interest you to know that you are writing garbage..."), you get a strong sense of the man – the fully-rounded individual, with all his frustrations and quirks, not just the towering wit of repute. **Ian Berriman**



THE DEATH I GAVE HIM

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 12 SEPTEMBER**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Em X Liu

► Publisher Solaris

❖ **Can *The Death I Gave Him* do for *Hamlet* what *Forbidden Planet* did for *The Tempest*?** This is a sci-fi retelling of Shakespeare's play about murder, betrayal, existential angst and monumental prevarication, which really should have been titled *The Rest Is Science*.

It starts off promisingly like a high-tech whodunnit, with a murder in a science facility called Elsinore. When Hayden Lichfield discovers the body of his father in the lab where they've been developing a formula for immortality, the facility goes into shutdown.

Hayden suspects his Uncle Charles is the murderer, and his first response – for reasons that are never entirely clear (it just seems to be an excuse to do something he's been contemplating for a while) – is to bond his consciousness with the facility's AI system, Horatio, whom he's been close to since he was a child.

Pretty soon, though, the book becomes a rather repetitive slog, with little plot, a lot of navel-gazing and some bizarre AI/human sex all wrapped up in some oddly mannered prose (which attempts to make the phrase "breaking capillaries" sound sensual). There are a few evocative passages and intriguing ideas, but the novel never quite overcomes the feeling that it's an academic exercise. **Dave Golder**



ASSISTANT TO THE VILLAIN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER**

352 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Hannah Nicole Maehrer

► Publisher Penguin Books

❖ **Evie is a great office assistant.** She makes sure the filing is alphabetised, keeps an eye on the interns, and makes sure her boss always gets his morning coffee exactly the way he likes it.

Trouble is, her boss is The Villain – yep, that's literally his job title – in a fairy tale kingdom, and he's prone to chopping people's heads off.

Developed from a series of TikTok videos that dig into the inherent silliness of the central idea, this YA novel does a decent job of satirising corporate culture, but the story isn't quite there. Most of the book is told from Evie's perspective as she swoons over her hot boss and ignores his murderous tendencies, with a handful of chapters from his perspective as he pines right back at her.

All this is initially cute but quickly gets grating. It also makes you wonder how horny you have to get to be admiring someone's muscles when there's a venom-breathing dragon about to get right in your face.

In the final act, things start to click into place as it becomes clear where the author is going with all of this – in future sequels, it seems like there'll be some brilliantly chewy moral quandaries popping up. It's ultimately rather frustrating, then, that this first entry feels like an overlong prologue.

Sarah Dobbs



FORGED BY BLOOD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Ehigbor Okosun

► Publisher HarperVoyager

❖ **Ehigbor Okosun's debut is** positioned as an epic fantasy novel, but reads like a Young Adult book. The story touches on themes of colonialism, being set in a land where the magic-wielding Olosu are oppressed by the non-magical Aje, ruled by King Sorenson. Dèmi is a young Olosu woman recruited for a scheme to kidnap a prince to force the king to respect the rights of the magic users.

Dèmi is pulled between two love interests, Colin and Jonas. She fits the stereotype of the YA heroine who's blind to her own beauty despite her besotted suitors, and in fairy tale fashion everyone seems to be a secret royal or noble.

Okosun clumsily introduces new lore to facilitate the story. Magic works unless the plot demands it doesn't. Despite the convoluted abduction plan, it all comes down to challenging the king to single combat – an idea introduced ad hoc – and Sorenson's decision to blithely accept the duel is not even remotely convincing.

Dèmi's emotions are forever overwrought, but she's passive in plot terms. All difficult decisions are out of her hands, including which admirer she ends up with and the fate of the evil Sorenson.

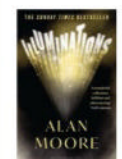
To make things worse, action scenes are confusing and difficult to follow. The overall result is a thundering disappointment.

David West

REISSUES

Pick of the paperbacks this month: Alan Moore's first collection

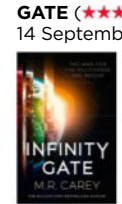
ILLUMINATIONS (★★★★★, 14 September, Bloomsbury), which brings



together eight short stories (dating back as far as 1987) and a new short novel centred on

the comics industry – a world the writer of *Watchmen* knows all too well... We said: "One of the delightful surprises about *Illuminations* is just how much fun it is..."

Fearsomely smart, wickedly funny and utterly unique." A new sci-fi duology from MR Carey kicks off with **INFINITY GATE** (★★★★★, 14 September, Orbit).



A multiverse tale, it centres on a trading alliance comprising a million different versions of

Earth. When a scientist accidentally discovers inter-dimensional travel, she stumbles into the middle of a war between the Pandominion and an AI which threatens its very existence. We said:

"There's a lot going on... The way the novel imagines how evolution might take different paths on different Earths is impressive." Finally, we were very impressed by Hiron Ennes's debut

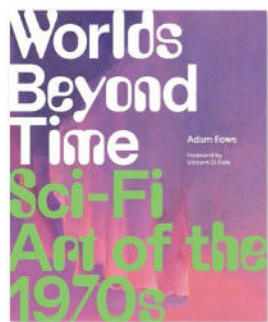
LEECH (★★★★★, 14 September, Tor). It sees a physician sent to



a baron's isolated château to replace his deceased doctor. Investigating the cause of

death, they discover that a parasite was responsible – and it's spreading. We said: "A dense, knotty read that requires patience... Juxtaposes cosily old-fashioned gothic imagery with genuinely shocking bouts of body horror."

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS

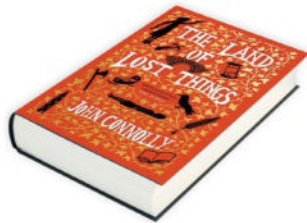


WORLDS BEYOND TIME

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
224 pages | Hardback

► Author Adam Rowe
► Publisher Abrams

- Subtitle: *Sci-Fi Art Of The '70s*. Though a fair amount of it dates from the '80s, and there's even some from the '90s.
- Basic thesis: '70s sci-fi art was "the peak of artistic achievement". That's told you, Leonardo.
- Draws on not just paperback novels, but also mags like *Analog* and *Omni*, movie concept art, LP covers and more.
- Easy to dip into, being split into eight chapters, further subdivided into bite-size sections.
- These might focus on a particular artist (34 individuals/duos are profiled), subject (UFOs, cryosleep, domed cities) or well-worn visual tropes (such as skeletons in spacesuits, giant eyes, and cloaked figures).
- There appear to be no new interviews, but author Adam Rowe has clearly swotted up on old ones.
- Rowe's commentary has a pleasingly wry sense of humour.



THE LAND OF LOST THINGS

★★★★★
► **RELEASED 7 SEPTEMBER**

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author John Connolly
► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

❖ **As a parent, it's one of your** greatest fears: that your child will become lost to this world, unreachable. Which is what happens to Ceres when a car hits her daughter, eight-year-old Phoebe, who now lies comatose. Will Phoebe ever return? Whisper it, but might it not be easier for Ceres were Phoebe quietly to slip away?

Maintaining vigil at her daughter's bedside, Ceres reads fairy tales, hoping the stories will bring Phoebe back. Instead, it's Ceres who is called from one world into another as she enters the Land of Lost Things, a magical place, and takes on the guise of her 16-year-old self – a physical manifestation of the way Ceres is struggling with her adult responsibilities.

Because books gain life in great part through being read, the presence of Ceres shapes this fairy tale world in key ways. But she's by no means the only one with power. The Crooked Man, a twisted embodiment of evil, and children-snatching Fae walk the Land.

At moments early on in the book, a sequel to Connolly's *The Book Of Lost Things* (2006), it can be frustrating trying to work out where the plot is headed. But gradually – especially after the introduction of the Woodsman – it becomes clear where Connolly is leading us. A wise and bittersweet reflection on what's really important in life. **Jonathan Wright**



PULL TO OPEN

★★★★★
► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

424 pages | Paperback

► Author Paul Hayes
► Publisher Ten Acre Films

❖ **Few television shows – few** things in *life* – have had their histories dissected in as forensic a level of detail as *Doctor Who*. As Toby Hadoke mischievously asks in his introduction to this latest addition to a crowded shelf, "There's nothing more that can be written about the early years of *Doctor Who*, surely?"

Paul Hayes, whose *The Long Game* charted the show's 21st century resurrection, clearly relishes a challenge. And, armed with access to the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham, a cultural historian's eye for context and a detailed knowledge of all things *Who*, succeeds in turning the facts of a TV legend's birth into a freshly engaging narrative.

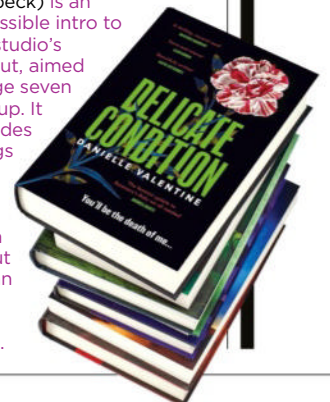
Alongside portraits of key and frequently overlooked creative players, there are truly fascinating glimpses of how a premise emerged from the typewritten ether of internal memos and reports: foundational concepts ("time travelling"), soon discarded dead-ends ("scientific troubleshooters") and tantalisingly abandoned backstory ("Lord of the House of Dooclare"). It feels like we're witnessing mythology in protozoic form.

Hayes is also good on the nuts and bolts of how this whole "crazy enterprise" was actually made, in the shadow of the Kennedy assassination. *Pull To Open* indeed – there's more inside than you might imagine.

Nick Setchfield

ALSO OUT

There's plenty more titles that we couldn't quite fit in. Fans of *American Horror Story* might want to pick up **DELICATE CONDITION** (out now, Profile), as it provided the inspiration for the forthcoming season 12. An actress undergoing IVF is told that she's lost her baby, but can still feel it moving... Admirers of *Neverwhere* and *The Night Circus* are the target market for Trip Galey's debut **A MARKET OF DREAMS AND DESTINY** (12 September, Titan). It centres on a goblin market below an alternate Victorian London, and an indentured servant who plans to buy himself out of his contract using the bottled destiny of a princess. Meanwhile, a young woman escapes from a life of confinement and searches for clues about her magical gifts in **HEART OF NIGHT AND FIRE** (15 September, Second Sky), an enemies-to-lovers fantasy romance which draws on Indian mythology. Naturally, her dreams are haunted by a mysterious, arrogant stranger... (swoons). Sadly, author Christopher Fowler passed away in March, but not before completing **WORD MONKEY** (out now, Doubleday). This memoir about writing is described as "a treasure trove of sage advice", and also sees him coming to terms with his terminal cancer diagnosis. Produced by the makers of podcast Ghibliotheque, **AN UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF STUDIO GHIBLI** (out now, Welbeck) is an accessible intro to the studio's output, aimed at age seven and up. It includes things that kids can learn about Japan from the films.





Rick Riordan

The creator of Percy Jackson can't seem to escape *Dungeons & Dragons*...



What is your daily writing routine like?

It varies widely depending on what part of the writing process I am in. When I'm initially brainstorming, it might be a few hours a day. First drafts are slow, drip-percolating line by line. In revision mode, I can write for five to 10 hours a day because the focus is different.

Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

I can't listen to music with lyrics while I write because I find it distracting and I start typing the words of the songs. Instrumental music can be good – jazz or classical – but it depends on my mood.

How do you deal with writers' block?

I don't think in terms of writers' block. It's more a matter of understanding my own process and working with it, not against it. I am a morning person, for instance. If I try to write in the afternoon, it doesn't go well. I write in a "hit and run" fashion – a bit here and a bit there. I cannot sit in a chair and stare at a screen for five hours at a time. Everyone is different. If you are experiencing "writers' block", I would say you simply haven't figured out how to work most efficiently within your own process. Give it time.

Ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

Not once! Sometimes I will wake up thinking I dreamed of a good idea, but after a few hours I realise it's actually rubbish. The dream state is very helpful for working out problems and emotions, but coming up with fresh ideas? Not so much.

Were you a keen reader as a child?

I was a very reluctant reader, which is why I have sympathy for reluctant readers and try to write with them in mind. The turning point for me was *The Lord Of The Rings*. That opened the worlds of fantasy and mythology, and taught me that reading can be fun, not just a school assignment.

Does any particular author's writing ability make you envious?

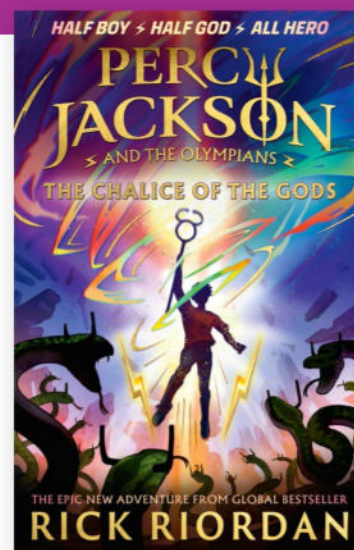
Ursula Le Guin for sheer imagination, Ernest Hemingway for spare muscular prose, Dante for metaphor and simile in poetry, Chaucer for voice. I could go on and on.

What's the strangest gift you've received from a reader?

One time I sold my old *Dungeons & Dragons* rulebooks to a second-hand bookstore. I didn't really think that my name was written inside. A fan found them, bought them, and gave them back to me at an event. He said, "I thought you might want these." I took that as a sign that I should keep them.

What's the biggest misconception people have about being an author?

Probably that writers are hugely successful. As with all professions,

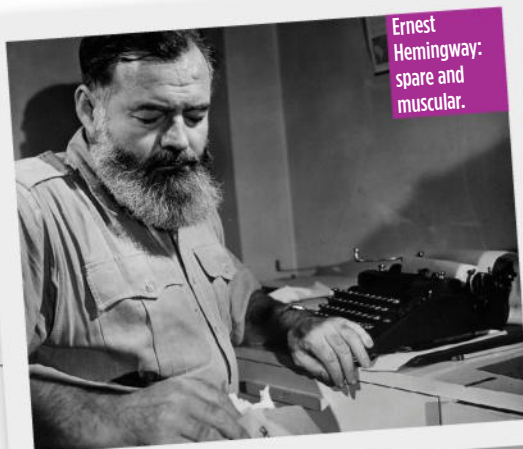


we tend to see only the tip of the iceberg – the most famous, glamorous exceptions to the rule. Very few make a living at it, and even fewer are wildly successful. You have to love writing to do it.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've received?

Don't give up! All published writers have one thing in common: they didn't give up. They persisted and improved and kept querying until they got a positive response. You have not failed until you stop trying. ●

The sixth Percy Jackson book, *The Chalice Of The Gods*, is out on 26 September, published by Puffin.



Ernest Hemingway: spare and muscular.

THE AVENGERS

Trials and tribulations



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Jed MacKay**

► Artist **CF Villa**

ISSUES 1-4 **There's an art to** making big superhero team-up stories work, and tackling a group of characters like the Avengers has its own set of intimidating issues on top of this. Sometimes the result is a classic, sometimes it's a mess – and sometimes, like Marvel's latest *Avengers* relaunch here, it's stuck somewhere in the middle.

This new iteration of the super-team sees Captain Marvel in charge of a fairly traditional line-up of heavy-hitters (including Thor, Iron Man and Black

Panther), but just as they're tackling a world-threatening disaster, they get an unexpected visit from a badly wounded Kang the Conqueror.

The ailing supervillain has a warning about upcoming "Tribulation Events" – mysterious, planetary-scale threats that are soon going to be hitting Earth, and which are also the prelude to something much worse. These opening four issues build to the Avengers facing the first Tribulation Event, while also delivering the big-scale action and spectacle that *Avengers* tales demand.

Writer Jed MacKay tackles the story with energy and confidence in issues one and two, keeping the set-pieces coming while capturing

the correct tone and character of each Avenger (especially when it comes to team members like Scarlet Witch and Vision).

He also makes things relatively accessible for new readers by not lingering too much on the unavoidable continuity references, throwing in some potentially interesting ideas and delivering nicely played moments of character among the blockbuster spectacle action.

It's a pity, then, that issues three and four don't sustain this, running into some bizarre pacing problems. As the Avengers face off against the Impossible City and its servants the Ashen Combine, the narrative becomes bloated, slowing the momentum to focus on over-familiar fight sequences and showy splash-pages.

There's also a lack of freshness in the storytelling, with major echoes of Jonathan Hickman's epic *Avengers* run (especially the similarities between the Ashen Combine and Hickman's team of Thanos subordinates, the Black

“Delivers nicely played moments of character among the blockbuster spectacle”

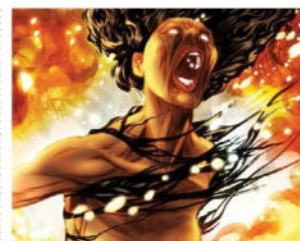
Order, which are hard to ignore if you're familiar with them).

The story is still entertaining, but both issues three and four feel surprisingly thin and overstretched, and while CF Villa's art packs in plenty of visual creativity and style, it isn't quite enough to counterbalance the flaws.

If MacKay can iron out the problems and get the series back on track, this has the potential to be a fun superhero saga – but at the moment, this new iteration of *The Avengers* is a little too inconsistent to qualify as a must-read.

Saxon Bullock

i MacKay technically started this new *Avengers* saga with the Kang-centric one-shot special *Timeless* in late 2022.



ORDER & OUTRAGE



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Dark Horse Comics**

► Writer **Jim Starlin**

► Artist **Rags Morales**

ISSUES 1-4 **Jim Starlin may be** the creator of Thanos and Gamora, but the evil galactic empire at the heart of his latest series owes more to *Star Wars* than it does to Marvel's cosmic stories – although there is something of Jack Kirby about the first issue's space station, which is depicted so magnificently by Rags Morales.

With her intentions described as “a mystery enshrouded within an enigma”, this four-parter is essentially the origin story of orphan Alexis, who takes on several identities, including Order security officer Megan Tisi Sharp and the titular Outrage.

Cutting between several different timelines, Starlin intricately constructs his tale, although he perhaps holds too much in reserve. Beyond the opening scene, the Darth Vader-ish Order doesn't appear until issue four, which also introduces Boba Fett-esque assassin Agent Scarlet and features a cameo from a venal alien president who bears a resemblance to a certain orange-skinned POTUS...

It's a shame that Starlin doesn't also illustrate the title, but his nuanced script is impressively brought to life by Morales, whose sinewy linework is enhanced by Hailey R Brown's colours. With the final issue concluding with “END CHAPTER ONE”, let's hope we don't have to wait too long for the next. **Stephen Jewell**





TIMEQUAKE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** Late September

► Publisher Hibernia Books

► Writers Chris Lowder, Ian Mennell

► Artists Ian Kennedy, John Cooper, Magallanes Salinas

COLLECTION While best known for *Strontium Dog* and *Ro-Busters*, 2000 AD's short-lived sister title *Starlord* also boasted a few other interesting stories, including this pulper time travel series, which makes an excellent addition to Hibernia's *Fleetway Files* reprint initiative.

It centres on a band of Time Control agents who fix anomalous "timequakes", and actions and dialogue of its lead character – tramp steamer captain turned time-trooper James Blocker – are about as subtle as his on-the-nose moniker.

Credited as Jack Adrian, Chris Lowder incorporates plenty of smart references into his boisterous scripts, naming Time Control's method of traversing the centuries after sci-fi writer L Sprague de Camp, and dropping some then-timely *Star Wars* jokes.

After the opening battle against malevolent aliens the Droon, Lowder puts an engaging spin on the well-worn Nazis winning the Second World War trope, before Ian Mennell takes over for the closer about an intergalactic Aztec Empire.

Lowder later resurrected the strip for a four-issue run in 2000 AD, also included here. Hibernia are due to publish *Starlord Archives*; in the meantime, this collection is the perfect way to celebrate *Starlord*'s 45th anniversary.

Stephen Jewell



WORLDTR33

Caught in the web

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Image Comics

► Writer James Tynion IV

► Artist Fernando Blanco

ISSUES 1-4 The internet connects

us all, for better and for worse. *Worldtr33* probes at the anxieties that underpin our always-on age.

The series opens when 15-year-old Gibson Lane goes on an unexplained killing spree, showing his victims something strange on his phone before broadcasting their deaths online. He's arrested, but quickly murdered by a naked and glassy-eyed assassin.

Elsewhere, shadowy tech guru Gabriel Winter is reuniting some old friends: a group of hackers and coders with knowledge of the Undernet – a secret "sub-basement" of the internet that is

“The characters are all memorably written, even if there are a few too many”

somehow responsible for this act of violence, and which Winter believes could bring about the end of the world.

WOrl33 is frank with its violence and nudity. At first that can be a little off-putting, but any fears that this is merely cheap button-pushing are quickly allayed. Although the central storyline seems to revolve around some kind of demonic technological possession (the truth of which is still being gradually pieced out), the fear that it conjures is one that will be familiar to any internet user: that one accidental wrong click could expose you to something truly terrible.

The characters are all memorably written, even if there are a few too many (a subplot with a pair of FBI agents appears to go nowhere) and the art from Fernando Blanco and colourist Jordie Bellaire is outstanding. There's some stiff competition, but this is shaping up to be the year's best horror comic.

Will Salmon

i Visit worldtr33.net to try and decipher the puzzling ARG that's taking place online now and related to the comic book.



THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Chinbeard Books

► Writers Angus Allan, Roger Price

► Artist John M Burns

► **COLLECTION** Through the '70s and '80s, "Junior TV Times" *Look-In* featured interviews, pin-ups and also comic strips – including their take on ITV's show about "Homo Superior" kids with telepathic powers and teleportation belts.

The opening five tales in this first collection of *The Complete Look-In Comics* are based on creator Roger Price's series pitch; thereafter, *Look-In*'s Angus Allan took the wheel. You can easily imagine some stories on TV, like one about a rock group whose music inspires hooliganism. Others make use of the medium to depict, say, 18 foot-high robot gorillas. The most far-out sees our heroes investigate a Satanic cult, then "jaunt" to a realm of acid lakes and demonic beings to confront a goat-headed alien.

The scripts are not that sophisticated, often ending abruptly – John even references this at one point! However, John M Burns's art is genuinely impressive, especially when the strips are afforded full colour. Here his work blossoms into psychedelia, with faces cast in pink and blue or shades of green, bringing to mind Richard Avedon's photos of the Beatles.

Handsomely presented, the book includes four pages never published due to strike action, plus *Look-In* covers, two annual strips, an introduction by Price and a feature. Ian Berriman

BALDUR'S GATE 3

Rolls a natural 20



★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PC

► Also available on PlayStation 5

► Publisher Larian Studios

VIDEOGAME In its 50-year history, *Dungeons & Dragons* has arguably never shone as brightly as it does in the current moment. Yet for all the success of hugely popular “at-table” podcasts and Hollywood movies, *Baldur's Gate 3* has firmly fixed itself as the brightest jewel in the D&D crown. This new adaptation of the quintessential pen-and-paper game takes the ruleset from its tabletop origins – but handles the entire roleplaying experience with real authenticity.

When your character is infected with a parasite which means an inevitable, painful death, *Baldur's Gate 3* tasks you with finding a

cure. But the means by which you achieve that end are yours to determine, and it's in that freedom that this game achieves what feels like the impossible. So deep is its narrative, so broad its understanding of the player, so dense its world that you can almost feel the hand of a seasoned Dungeon Master guiding your every step.

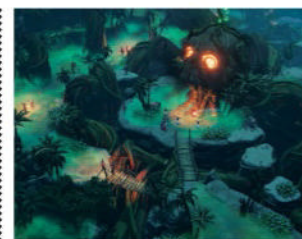
Combine that with the inventiveness that *Baldur's Gate 3* allows in its players, and it truly feels like a tabletop game come to life. A thief can sell a merchant an enchanted knife and then pickpocket it straight back; a mage

“This game achieves what feels like the impossible”

can freeze a puddle of water to create an icy trap for their opponents; an archer can carry around a candle, place it at their feet in a fight, and dip an arrow into the flame to inflict extra fire damage on their target. The scale of possibility offered to the player is simply unprecedented.

That micro-level detail is matched by the narrative. Hundreds of thousands of lines of dialogue matched up with intricately crafted cutscenes mean that your story is your own. The result is a sense of freedom so absolute that *Baldur's Gate 3* is not only quite possibly the best realisation of *Dungeons & Dragons* there has ever been, but a new benchmark by which an entire genre will be measured. **Ali Jones**

i *Baldur's Gate 3* has an estimated 17,000 story permutations, the result of hundreds of choices made throughout the game.



SHADOW GAMBIT: THE CURSED CREW

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also available on Xbox Series X|S,

PC

► Publisher Mimimi Games

VIDEOGAME **Pirates! Magic!**

A monkey that understands spoken English! A game can't go far wrong with all three of those things. And if the devil's in the detail, then we have a spicy demon on our hands here. As your undead crew slowly increases in number as you progress, you'll be sneaking around and slaying foes from the shadows in ways that are very much up to you.

The promise of a mysterious treasure leads you across a variety of islands, and it's unlikely that any two players will complete any given mission in exactly the same way. Not only are there always a variety of routes to your objective, but each crewmember also has unique abilities.

One can summon cover to help evade enemies (or hide bodies), another can kill or temporarily blind them from a great distance, yet another can possess the living... each opens up new opportunities unavailable to the others. Your choice of landing party has a huge effect on play.

Each time you load up the game, you know the adventure is very much *yours*, which makes each failed manoeuvre painful – and each carefully planned success so very sweet. And quicksaves soften the blow of any misstep, ensuring that you'll struggle to tear yourself away from this treasure.

Luke Kemp



No harm ever came from fiddling with a puzzle box.

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

Will you be hooked?



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PC

► Also available on PlayStation 5,

PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S

► Publisher Gun Media

VIDEOGAME This asymmetrical multiplayer horror game excels in recreating the sunset-hued atmosphere and feeling of dread the original 1974 movie crafts so expertly. The love the developers at Sumo Digital have for the franchise is tangible as you wander through faithfully recreated versions of iconic locations from the movie, only to be shaken by the sound of Leatherface's chainsaw.

The 3v4 matches work brilliantly. Conflicts between killers and victims will vary greatly based on which characters are involved; slower killers like the Cook can be evaded with relative ease, while conflicts with more nimble family members must be approached with greater care. But generally, it's impressive how balanced matches feel when you have a full party.

Unfortunately, finding a full party is a near-constant struggle. Private matches will go forward with a minimum of four players, but quick matches require a full seven-person party, and persistent server issues – not to mention a lack of bots – all but ensure you'll



"You like head cheese? My brother makes it real good."

often wait several minutes for a lobby to fill up, only for it to dump you back to the main menu.

The three maps can be needlessly confusing to navigate thanks to dark, labyrinthine designs and a lack of quest markers. Some of this can be remedied by perks and abilities that highlight certain items and locations, but the amount of

aimless wandering necessary to familiarise yourself can be tedious.

The *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* deserves to be commended for its atmosphere and for reinvigorating the genre with a few innovations, but it very much feels like a game in its infancy. **Jordan Gerblich**

i The first TCSM game was a 1983 cartridge for the Atari 2600. Players controlled Leatherface, scoring 1,000 points per kill.

SPACE MARINE: THE BOARD GAME

One man army



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Number of players Two

► Publisher Games Workshop

BOARD GAME Games Workshop recently released *Warhammer 40,000's* 10th edition. As well as the huge Leviathan box there are three starter sets available. There's also this odd little board game which nominally ties into the forthcoming *Space Marine 2* videogame, but feels more like a simplified 40K.

Players choose either a brood of Tyranids (you get 20 Termagant models and two Ripper Swarms in the box) or a lone Space Marine, Lieutenant Titus – for now an

exclusive miniature. You also get a durable game board made from thick card (a big improvement over the flimsy poster paper one that comes with the introductory 40K set), some dice, tokens and a plastic ruler.

The rulebook features two basic training scenarios and then two missions proper: Objective Secured and Hold The Line, which introduce unique concepts like special Deathwatch Supplies, which make Titus' mission *slightly* more manageable. You see, while the Space Marine is more heavily armed and armoured than the Tyranids, the game skews heavily in their favour. It accurately conveys the feeling of being



swarmed by the enemy, but it also means that playing as Titus is often a frustrating and not hugely fun experience – many games end with him dead in the first turn.

As a way into the wider *Warhammer* ecosystem this isn't bad – you get a good batch of

models and a stripped-down look at the basic rules. As a functioning board game, however, it's limited and, for whoever is controlling Titus, a bit of a slog. **Will Salmon**

i Titus was a captain, but was demoted following a run-in with the Inquisition during the first *Space Marine* videogame.



FLOWERS

Quick, call Alan Titchmarsh! Some of this issue's brain-teasers are blooming difficult...

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

In the musical version of *Little Shop Of Horrors*, what's the name of the singing killer plant?

QUESTION 2

Which flower (well, a plastic version...) was used as a deadly weapon in the *Doctor Who* story "Terror Of The Autons"?

QUESTION 3

Which sci-fi author wrote the short story "The Flowering Of The Strange Orchid"?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Identify this TV title sequence.

QUESTION 5

In *The Wizard Of Oz*, what kind of enchanted flowers does the Wicked Witch of the West use to put Dorothy to sleep?

QUESTION 6

Which flower-themed song recurs several times throughout the *Insidious* movie franchise?

QUESTION 7

In which *Star Trek* episode do spores emitted by strange flowers cause Spock to experience love?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

In which film would you find this flower?

QUESTION 9

Who wrote the classic 1966 sci-fi novel *Flowers For Algernon*?

QUESTION 10

In *Batman Begins*, the Scarecrow's fear toxin is made out of a type of flower found in Bhutan. What colour are they?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 11

Supply the missing word: "Even a man who is pure of heart, and says his prayers by night, may become a wolf when the _____ blooms."

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Identify this flower-themed film.

QUESTION 13

In which Dario Argento film is "three irises" a key clue?

QUESTION 14

In *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, which flowers does the Infinity Improbability Drive cause to come into existence above the planet Magrathea?

QUESTION 15

Which creature-feature franchise has an entry called *The Hunt For The Blood Orchid*?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Identify this TV title sequence.

QUESTION 17

Which science fiction TV series has an episode titled "White Tulip"?

QUESTION 18

Which flora-loving Batman villain has henchmen with names such as Acacia, Azalea and Petunia?

QUESTION 19

In which 1970 sci-fi novel would you find sunflowers which can focus sunlight to burn insects and animals to death?

QUESTION 20

Which classic series *Doctor Who* story features a rather unusual bloom, which was "found on the Orinoco"?

Answers: 1 Audrey II 2 Daffodil 3 HG Wells 4 The Tomorrow People 5 Poppies 6 "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" 7 "This Side Of Paradise" 8 Enys Men 9 Daniel Keyes 10 Blue 11 Wolfsbane 12 Little Joe 13 *Suspense* 14 A bowl of petunias 15 *Anaconda* 16 The Avengers 17 *Fringe* 18 Louise the Lillie 19 *Ringworld* 20 "Black Orchid"

Answers

How did you do?

What type of flower are you?

0-5
Failed to germinate

6-10
Blighted

11-15
Budding

16-19
In full bloom

20
Chelsea Flower Show winner

IN THE NEXT ISSUE



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Mulder and Scully get a taste of their own meds.

The X-Files: “X-Cops”

Nick Setchfield, Editor-at-large



From the black and white film noir tribute of *Moonlighting*’s “The Dream Sequence Always Rings Twice” to *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*’s all-singing,

all-dancing “Once More, With Feeling”, format-busting episodes of popular shows have made for some legendary TV.

By its seventh season *The X-Files* needed a shot of invention. No longer the zeitgeist-defining darling of its mid-’90s heyday, it felt like a series running on fumes, strangled by its own impenetrable conspiracies as star David Duchovny eyed an exit strategy.

“X-Cops” made it all seem new again. Written by Vince Gilligan, future creator of *Breaking Bad*, it mashed Mulder and Scully

with *Cops*, the Fox series that followed true-life police investigations in vérité style. For one week only, reality TV collided with unreality TV.

From the opening moments, as the LA Sheriff’s Department respond to a report of a monster prowling the neighbourhood, it’s clear this is a very different episode. It’s on brash videotape for a start, which gives it an immediacy beyond the show’s usual slick film aesthetic. All of *Cops*’ stylistic tics are slyly recreated, from the use of ambient sound – the brittle chatter of police radio, the background wail of sirens – to hovering boom mics, bleeped-out swears and sudden cuts to static.

Pity poor Maria Celedonio, playing doomed streetwalker Chantara Gomez: a gig in *The X-Files* and they pixellate your face.

Together with the handheld camerawork it’s thrillingly immersive, so much so that when the truth-chasing Feds appear it’s genuinely jolting: our heroes have never seemed so real, so flesh and blood. Mulder’s up for some screen time but Scully is, naturally, a sceptic. Gillian Anderson’s irked looks to the lens are gold.

It’s a monster-of-the-week story, but we never so much as glimpse the monster. At first Mulder insists it’s a clear case of lycanthropy, but other suspects include a childhood terror called the Wasp Man, the hantavirus and even Freddy Krueger. In an episode that shatters convention it’s the essential *X-Files* bogeyman – everything that waits for us in the dark. ●

Nick has a code 10-13 in the Carter residence, please respond.

Fact Attack!

→ *Cops* began airing in 1989, commissioned as a result of the writers’ strike of 1988. Amazingly enough, it’s still running today.

→ Vince Gilligan originally pitched a crossover during the show’s fourth season, but Chris Carter wasn’t sure that it would work.

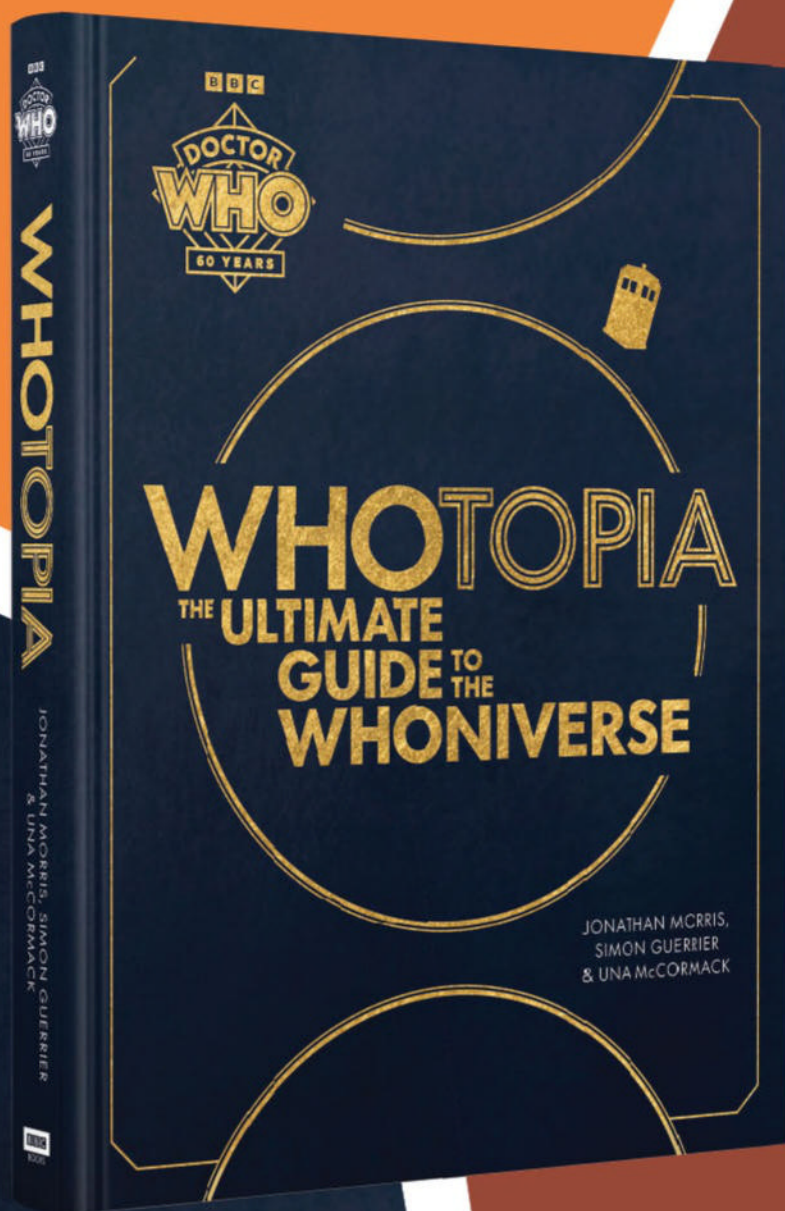
→ Director Michael Watkins employed one of *Cops*’ cameramen, Bertram van Munster, to give the episode an authentic look.

→ Driving around, actor Judson Mills found people assuming he was a real cop: “I had other cops waving and giving their signals.”

→ Certain moments, like a cat turning up in the opening scene, were unplanned events which the actors just had to deal with.

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