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SFX



**FIVE NIGHTS
AT FREDDY'S**
THE VIDEOGAME GOES
LIVE ACTION

**PET SEMATARY:
BLOODLINES**
SOMETIMES THEY COME
BACK, AGAIN

**THE BURNING
GIRLS**
SINISTER SUPERNATURAL
SERIES SECRETS

CHUCKY
THE KILLER DOLL IS
RUNNING FOR OFFICE

**THE
BOOGEYMAN**
BRINGING YOUR WORST
FEARS TO LIFE

**THE
MUNSTERS
TODAY**
THE REAL BEHIND
THE SCENES STORY

EXCLUSIVE!

THE

EXORCIST: BELIEVER

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PLUS! STRANGER THINGS | THE LAZARUS PROJECT | FEAR THE WALKING DEAD
SHINING VALE | TOTALLY KILLER | FRIGHT KREWE | SURREALESTATE



Science Fiction legend and writer of the *Doctor Who* stories *Warriors' Gate* and *Terminus*, STEPHEN GALLAGHER returns to the worlds of *Doctor Who* with this new story expanding his creation of the Tharils, the time-sensitive race of leoline creatures.

This double-length story features stunning new art from comics maestro MARTIN GERAGHTY, and is available in August from

www.cutawaycomics.co.uk



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GET IN TOUCH!

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Hailing Frequencies Open!



Ivanna Sakhno: if looks could kill...



AHSOKA PUNCH

Keith Tudor, email I am loving *Ahsoka*. The show has got off to a brilliant start and the casting for the live action versions of *Clone Wars* and *Rebels* characters has been very good. It moves at a good pace and keeps the viewer engaged. I love the cinematography for the show too; it looks stunning. It's also touching to see Ray Stevenson again after his passing, a performer who will be missed and who was always a great presence in his varied roles.

SFX: And a shout-out to Ivanna Sakhno, whose *Shin glare* can freeze people in carbonite at 10 paces.

SOLACE IN QUANTUM

Rob Graham, email Have to admit to being very pleasantly surprised by the new *Quantum Leap* reboot. A huge fan of the classic original series, I was sceptical when this was announced as seemingly a remake but very pleased to see it's actually a continuation, with references to Sam Beckett and the original series. Raymond Lee is a likeable new lead and Ernie Hudson is part of a decent larger new cast. It'd be nice to eventually see an appearance from Scott Bakula in future seasons as Sam Beckett finally making the leap home.

ALL HAIL ADRIC

Philip Dalton, email In *SFX* 369 Roland Robinson mentions the tragic and heroic death of Adric, a companion in *Doctor Who*. If it hadn't been for Adric's death we'd be sharing the Earth with dinosaurs today, according to the series, as it was the freighter carrying him which collided with Earth 65 million years ago, resulting in their extinction. Ironically, in the same issue (*Exoprimal*, page 110), a game is reviewed in which thousands of hungry dinosaurs pour from the sky. **SFX:** Probably more agreeable than thousands of pieces of Adric pouring from the sky...



Is it just me or does Thrawn look like he's played by Guy Siner (Lt Gruber from *'Allo 'Allo*)?

Steve Shimmer



On an *X-Files* reboot: It was the first TV series that broke my heart by slowly fizzling away into incoherent nonsense. Let it die already.

@SuccinctReview

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"Anybody got any jokes about Sorry or Joint Account?"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

- Obviously *loved* Halloween Horror Nights. Counting down to next year already!
- *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* is brilliant, if harrowing in parts.
- The new season of *Chucky* goes in *dark* – it's very exciting.

RANTS

- Toxic fandom. You just don't need to do it. Step away from the internet.
- Great to see physical media returning to certain big studios – but steelbook only? Ew.



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

- Horror fans! If you didn't get round to seeing it in cinemas, the surprisingly good *Evil Dead Rise* is now streaming on Netflix.
- Really looking forward to Criterion's Tod Browning box set, *Sideshow Shockers* (out on 23 October). Especially keen to see *The Unknown*, which was a big influence on a favourite of mine, *Santa Sangre*.
- There's some interesting stuff screening at London Film Festival (4-15 October) – not that I'll be going, living in Bristol... Looking forward to seeing *The Beast*, *Fingernails*, *Late Night With The Devil*, *Starve Acre* and *Vincent Must Die* eventually, though.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

- Looking forward to joining Captain Birdseye, erm, I mean Ed Baldwin, on Mars in *For All Mankind* season four.
- Pleasant surprise of the month: *One Piece* is actually really entertaining



ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

- *Starfield* turned out to be more like Bethesda's previous games than I imagined it would. Which is a good thing, in my mind. The devs get a lot of stick for buggy releases and so on, but the truth is no other games match the sheer scope and detail, not to mention longevity, of their RPGs.



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

- What a treat to catch *2001: A Space Odyssey* on the big screen for the first time. Felt like a whole new film for me at that scale and Trumbull's effects were jaw-dropping.
- Check out concept artist brockbankadam on Instagram for some amazing glimpses of the *Indiana Jones 5* we never saw.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

- You dangle a *Godzilla* TV series all about the nerdy Monarch origin story, with visual effects that look that good, and then give me Wyatt Russell playing a younger version of Kurt Russell's character, and I'm *there*!

RANTS

- Studios, pay your actors and writers!

Captain's Log



The most wonderful time of year is finally here – Halloween! I don't want to get all Phoebe Cates in *Gremlins* on you, but you can keep Christmas... Spooky season is where it's at. As everything turns towards autumn and winter, things start to go bump in the night and we're blessed with loads more horror content. More than we can actually fit in the magazine, as it happens! (The quiz returns next month!) But it's an honour to welcome the return of a true piece of cinematic history to *SFX*, with the first in a new trilogy of *Exorcist* movies. Pea soup, anyone?

If horror isn't your thing (gasp!) then normal service is very much resumed next month, with the return of a certain Time Lord in a very special issue...

If you're a subscriber – thank you very much for your continued support by the way – you may have noticed that we're just doing one standard cover now, due to rising costs caused by (waves hands) everything that's happened. Sorry about that, but we'd rather not have to save money by losing pages. If you've been put off from subscribing because you prefer "regular" covers, well now's the time to jump on board – check out the offer on page 22. You definitely don't want to miss what's coming up over the next few issues... ♥♥+■

Darren X



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NOVEMBER
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OH BOY

The *Quantum Leap* reboot jumps into a second season

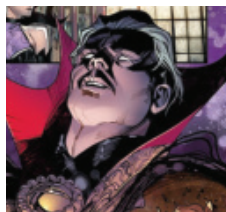
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TRANSFORMERS

→ The robots in disguise return for a brand new comic book universe brought to you by Skybound.



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GODS

→ Marvel's latest revolutionary acronym-titled series is a mystery just waiting to be solved.



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SKULL ISLAND: RISE OF KONG

→ One tropical getaway destination you should probably get away from – far, far away.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Time After Time

Executive producer Chris Grismer promises a season two full of changes for **Quantum Leap** WORDS: TARA BENNETT



WHEN *QUANTUM LEAP* WAS revived last year, it placed physicist Dr Benjamin Song (Raymond Lee) in the quantum accelerator, following in the footsteps of Dr Sam Beckett (Scott Bakula) 30 years earlier. And in the first season finale – much like Sam – Ben ended up not leaping back to his own time, as hoped. In “Judgment Day”, Ben’s fiancée Addison (Caitlin Bassett) and his Leap team are seen anticipating his return with deep concern, and then there’s a cut to black.

Series executive producer and finale director Chris Grismer tells Red Alert that he was just as shocked and surprised as anyone when he was handed the script with that ending. “The finale was so huge and I was so excited to figure out how to actually tell that story,” he remembers.

QUANTUM CHANGES

Featuring multiple leaps in time, including repeat leaps and a future leap, the finale also had Ben duking it out once and for all with Richard Martinez/Leeper X, who was sent to kill Addison and end the Quantum Leap programme forever. With so much to squash into one episode, Grismer says that all of the departments needed to come together to pull it off. “We used all the resources we had at Universal [Studios] and everywhere else to tell the story of the future, and leaping into it and giving audiences a really satisfying ending.”

Okay, maybe not satisfying for those who wanted to see Ben and Addison fully reunited, which Grismer concedes. “We know he’s saved Addison, but he’s not coming home just yet,” he confirms. “So we’re gonna have to wait for them to reunite.”

Ben’s leaps through time will continue, with Grismer teasing that the overriding theme of the season is one of change. “There’s a lot of change, so it’s about learning how to deal with change,” he says. “It’s learning that you can sit in the change and you can learn to adapt to it, but it’s going to change again. [Ben] learns that with each leap.

“He’s starting to suspect that there’s a bigger goal going on with these leaps,” Grismer



“He’s starting to suspect that there’s a bigger goal going on with these leaps”

Raymond Lee as Ben, Melissa Roxburgh as Lt Ellen Grier.



Ernie Hudson is back as “Magic” Williams.

continues. “He’s starting to get more curious with what exactly is going on. What are the plans here?”

With a first season of leaps that had the series recreating 18 different time periods, as well as the present-day story HQ and even a future leap, Grismer says that he and series showrunner Martin Gero learned a lot about what propelled their show’s version of leaping.

“Someone put together stills from each episode last year, done really small, in line so you can see all the episodes together in this array,” Grismer says. “It was just such a cool thing to see, because we created such a unique palette. It wasn’t a consistent palette, as you looked through it. It was all different and really beautiful to see it that way.

“I think we realised in the first season that certain episodes that didn’t really embrace a style or take the chances that we were hoping for, or were playing it a little safer, they didn’t stand out,” he continues. “They were always good episodes, but they didn’t quite make it to the level that we wanted. I think that pushing directors and pushing cinematographers to really capture each script in a unique way is something we learned, and we tried to really harness that in the new season.”

Though reluctant to give away any of the big reveals which he says will come in the first episode “This Took Too Long!”, Grismer does share that there will be a very serialised narrative that will carry through the season as Ben continues to do his self-contained leaps. “However, [the arc] is not as thick in each episode, so we have more time in this new season to explore the leaps with Ben. We’ll watch him explore the emotion inside the leaps a little bit more.”

LEAPING WITH THE ENEMY

There are also two new additions to the cast: genre veterans Eliza Taylor (*The 100*) and Peter Gadiot (*Yellowjackets*). The latter plays Tom Westfall, a US Army Officer who is welcomed into the Quantum Leap team, while the former plays Hannah Carson, who’s introduced in the third episode “Closure Encounters” – which is also the first episode Grismer directs in season two.

Confirming that both characters are big players in the narrative this year, Grismer adds “There’s a real jumpstart for the new season, and a real twist, so these characters feel like a natural part of that twist. The whole story got a kick in the pants, and then these actors came along and really, *really* added a lot.”

Quantum Leap is on NBC in the US and Paramount+ in the UK.

► **SCI-FACT!** Season two episode “Closure Encounters” is all about Project Sign, the official US government/Air Force study of UFOs.

EDITOR EXCLUSIVE

Robot Wars

There's more than meets the eye to Skybound's new Energon Universe as **Transformers** return

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

 AFTER TAKING OVER the rights to Transformers and GI Joe from IDW, Skybound Entertainment secretly launched the Energon Universe in June, when Robert Kirkman and Lorenzo De Felici's *Void Rivals* was revealed to be part of a new line of books. That range will be augmented this month by the debut of Daniel Warren Johnson's *Transformers*, and then by the Josh Williamson-scripted miniseries *Duke* and *Cobra Commander* in December and January respectively.

"Robert shared with me the idea of what is now *Void Rivals* years before we formally pitched to Hasbro," editor Sean Mackiewicz tells Red Alert. "He wanted to create a new entry point for readers to explore the *Transformers* universe, which included creating new characters and civilisations and hiding a huge surprise in the centre of it all in the form of Jetfire. That idea grew

to unite Transformers and GI Joe and merge them with this entirely new franchise." With

Transformers and GI Joe having first been turned into comics by Marvel US – and UK – in the early '80s, Skybound are building on a legacy

that stretches back several decades. "I was a huge fan of Transformers and GI Joe growing up and they were superheroes to me before I discovered superhero comics," recalls Mackiewicz. "*GI Joe: A Real American Hero* was the first single-issue comic I ever owned, so it's been great to return to the original incarnations and also catch up on everything I've missed since then – and maybe restart a toy collection in my office!

"Everyone in the world knows who Optimus Prime is," he continues, "which allows us to speak to a huge audience – fans who have read every *Transformers* comic, lapsed fans and folks who have never picked up one until now. We're using some of the earliest *Transformers* and *GI Joe* stories to reintroduce these amazing characters such as Optimus and Starscream, Duke and Cobra Commander, who should all feel very recognisable,

but we're also going to push them into surprising new directions."

Having worked with him on past Skybound publications, Mackiewicz thought Daniel Warren Johnson was a natural choice to script and illustrate *Transformers*. "He was the first person I thought of to draw the comic," he says. "But it's his writing that I knew would stick with readers – that blend of epic action and palpable emotion – and allow us to tell a multi-year story



The cover for *Transformers* issue one, by Mike Spicer.





NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ *The Machinist's* Brad Anderson directing
Twilight Of The Dead, seventh and final entry in the George Romeroverse.
 → **The Boy And The Heron** won't be Hayao Miyazaki's last film after all - Studio Ghibli reveals he's currently developing a new project.
 → **The Warrior Nun** franchise is set to expand into a trilogy of movies.
 → *The Last Of Us* writer Craig Mazin teaming with Ted Elliot on a sixth
Pirates Of The Caribbean movie.
 → Josh Hartnett rumoured to be in the frame for **Fantastic Four's** Doctor Doom.
 → Hammer Films to rise from the dead under British theatrical producer John Gore. Tony Blood and Keith Entrails unavailable for comment.
 → **Dune: Part Two** bumped to 15 March 2024 while Denis Villeneuve reveals he's already started writing *Dune Messiah*.
 → Animated *Lord Of The Rings* film **The War Of The Rohirrim** pushed to 13 December 2024.
 → Lucasfilm claims the Force is still with Taika Waititi's **Star Wars** movie. We'll see...



GETTY



(Above) More variant covers for the first issue.

and give fans something to remember."

Tying in to how the Autobots and Decepticons lay dormant on Earth for millions of years, *Void Rivals* issue one concluded with Jetfire departing as he attempts to find a way back to their home planet, Cybertron, whose fate is currently unknown.

"Transformers issue one picks up on that thread," teases Mackiewicz. "Without spoiling anything, the Transformers' reawakening on Earth kicks off a chain of events that leads to the formation of GI Joe and Cobra, which will fully play out in *Duke* issue one and *Cobra Commander* issue one."

With Optimus Prime, Ratchet, Cliffjumper, Arcee and Wheeljack making up the ranks of the Autobots and Starscream, Rumble, Skywarp, Laserbeak and Soundwave representing the Decepticons, the numbers of both teams will initially be restricted to a select few.

"It's a mix of iconic heroes and villains, as well as personal favourites... meaning Dan wrote in the characters he wanted to draw," explains Mackiewicz. "We wanted to start with small line-ups to really shine a spotlight on who these characters are - their personalities, their interpersonal conflicts. Both line-ups are also defined by who actually isn't included - especially the Decepticons... and what happens

when Starscream is allowed to go unchecked."

As with previous incarnations, some flesh-and-blood protagonists will also appear. "The Transformers have delivered their war from Cybertron to Earth, and that will have disastrous consequences for everything on Earth," continues Mackiewicz. "It was important for us to get a human perspective on this, so we're introducing some humans very early in *Transformers* issue one that will be caught up in the renewed battle between Autobots and Decepticons."

Known for scripting DC series like *Superman* and *Dark Crisis*, Josh Williamson is joined on *Duke* by artist Tom Reilly and on *Cobra Commander* by Andrea Milana. "Josh has got a great brain for action-packed comics that get readers to pay attention, and he just happens to love *GI Joe* as much as Robert and Dan love *Transformers*," says Mackiewicz.

"I've always wanted to work with Tom Reilly, who illustrates incredible action and gives his characters so much personality, while Andrea is able to capture Cobra Commander's nature and establish the dark underbelly of the Energon Universe." ●

Transformers issue one is out on 4 October, Duke issue one is out in December and Cobra Commander issue one in January.

➤ **SCI-FACT!** Originally intended as a four-issue miniseries, Marvel's *Transformers* actually ran for 80 issues.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Got My Mind Set On You

Writer/director Daniel Benmayor on his new Spanish-language SF thriller **Awareness** WORDS: STEVE O'BRIEN

“DID IT SURPRISE YOU, A SPANISH language sci-fi film?” Daniel Benmayor asks *SFX*. “This is a rare species.” Off the top of our heads, we can only name a few SF movies from the country (*Autómata*, *The Antares Paradox*, anyone?), so Benmayor is right: a meaty science fiction thriller in Español is indeed an uncommon offering.

“Usually, when we do it,” he goes on, “it’s a small science fiction concept, it’s never action and adventure.” Certainly, nobody will be able to accuse Benmayor of thinking small with his first SF movie (his previous pictures, including 2021’s *Xtreme* and 2015’s *Tracers*, were more grounded actioners). It’s a full-blooded, action-speckled drama about a rebellious teen (*Toy Boy*’s Carlos Scholz) who has the power to manipulate minds, and who finds himself hunted by two rival organisations.

Set against a detailed socio-political backdrop, this isn’t a Spanish take on *The New Mutants* or some MCU wannabe, instead taking its cues from contemporary real-life fears. If we can be made to see whatever a politician or dictator or tech magnate wants us to see, then our very perception of reality is in their hands. That’s power, 21st century style.

“Every day, you’re constantly fed with these things,” Benmayor says about the genesis of the idea. “It’s all about how the media tries to trick you. I think that nowadays, when you see the news, how can it be that one single event has so many points of view?”

“The film is all about the manipulation that we’re exposed to through the media constantly. You only have to switch from one channel to the other and you see different versions of the same thing. How can that be? So that’s why I



You don't get many heroes called Ian (Carlos Scholz).



“The film is about the manipulation that we’re exposed to through the media”

thought it would be interesting to integrate into the film the concept of manipulation through mental powers. True strength is to convince people of a lie. This is why the organisation headed by Adriana [Lela Loren] is trying to get hold of the kid because they can use him as a tool, weaponise him.”

Though *Awareness* isn’t blessed with the skyscraping budget of a *Winter Soldier* or an *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, it’s certainly a handsome looking film, with a groundedness that gives it a thrilling verisimilitude.

“We were very aware of the restrictions that we have when we do a film like this in Spain,” Benmayor says. “I mean, this cannot be a super-big sky dream, it has to be kind of contained into a realistic and affordable story. It’s an intimate film about a kid who has these powers and he’s been hidden from the world by someone trying to protect him, and he wants to find out what his true nature is.”

PRIME NUMBERS

Awareness’ acute sense of realism is helped by a general avoidance of CG. Though the film has plenty of special effects, there’s a refreshing lack of digital mayhem on screen.

“It’s all very practical,” the director tells us. “Because of the scale and nature of it we didn’t want to step into that superhero Marvel-ish world, we wanted to stay away from it. We’re a different thing. We can’t step into that world, because it’s a lost battle, you know?”

Benmayor made the movie for Prime Video, who he said were helpful in helping him tailor the film to “certain targets”. “When Prime stepped in, obviously, they had their thoughts,” he explains. “Eventually one of the characters, Esther, grew a bit more – that’s the love story between the two youngsters.”

“That was basically it, as well as clarifying a lot of the concepts that are seen in the movie. This is the kind of film which is easier seen than written. When you read it on paper, the concepts which are visually driven are very complicated to swallow, but once you see them on screen, it needs no words. So that’s something that went back and forth.”

Although it’s a complete story in itself, should *Awareness* do well for Prime there’s certainly scope for more films, something Benmayor is clearly hopeful about.

“There are a lot of things planted in this story as possible follow-up,” he teases, “the origins of the agency, the origins of the perceivers [the name for those with superpowers]. It was originally conceived as a trilogy, but it all depends on how this one performs. The storyline of what happens next is already outlined and has been spoken about. Hopefully if this movie performs nicely, we’ll get to see a second part.”

Awareness is on Prime Video from 11 October.

The film’s stars do a pretty good album cover.

SCI-FACT!

As well as his work in films, Benmayor has also directed six episodes of Netflix’s Spanish-language thriller *Welcome To Eden*.



DESCRIBED BY EDITOR Tom Brevoort as “What if Sandman and Saga had a baby in the Marvel Universe?”, Jonathan Hickman’s new ongoing series *GODS* is even more complex than *House Of X* and *Powers Of X*, his game-changing interweaving *X-Men* miniseries from 2019, or this year’s *Ultimate Invasion*.

“*GODS* is just as ambitious a project as *House Of X* and *Powers Of X* was, but in a completely different way and along different axes,” Brevoort tells Red Alert. “For *GODS*, while there are plenty of familiar faces along the way, all of the principal characters are brand new, so a lot of work has to be done to bring them on stage and to define the world they live in and move through.

“In a lot of ways, *GODS* is bigger and more ambitious than either *House Of X/Powers Of X* or *Ultimate Invasion*, but it’s also a lot more intimate and personal too, and a lot funnier than you’d think as well.”

YE GODS

While, as Brevoort explains, “a whole big chunk of *GODS* issue one takes place 10 years ago, so some of our players have been around and doing stuff for a long while,” integrating a host of new protagonists into the Marvel Universe is no easy task. “There’s a lot of new invoked here, even as such familiar concepts and entities as Eternity, Infinity, Lord Order, Master Chaos, the In-Betweeners and the Living Tribunal are



Cover art for the first issue, by Mateus Manhlini.

EDITOR EXCLUSIVE

Cosmic Disorder

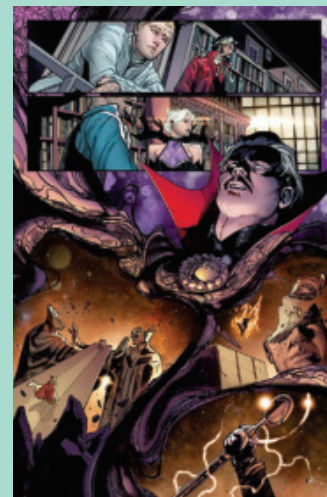
Science and magic aren’t poles apart in new Marvel series **GODS**

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

invoked,” he says. “And, frankly, the Marvel Universe can always use new characters and new ideas, to keep it from becoming stale.”

Illustrated by Valerio Schiti, *GODS* happens in the cracks that exist at the intersection between science and magic. “It’s really

difficult to sum this up before anybody has seen issue one,” admits Brevoort. “Jonathan has developed a ‘universal field theory’ of the Marvel Universe in which magic and science are two aspects of the same thing, where if you follow the path of magic far



enough you wind up at science, and vice versa. As such, our series restructures the manner in which the principles of the Marvel Universe are organised – but all in the background.”

While *GODS*’ cast of characters includes Wyn, Aiko Maki, Dmitri the Science Boy, Mia the Magic Girl and Cubisk Core, they aren’t necessarily the major players. “They aren’t a team or anything, this isn’t quite so simplistic a structure,” says Brevoort. “In essence, each of our main principles are working in the service of one of the abstract entities of the cosmos, operating as an agent within the human world. Some of those operatives share similar goals when their benefactors are aligned, and others are in opposition or at war.”

With Doctor and Clea Strange, Wong, Amadeus Cho, Doctor Voodoo, Reed Richards, Doctor Doom, the Black Panther and AIM set to guest-star, we can expect to see some well-known faces.

“There’s no question that we’re within the Marvel Universe,” says Brevoort, who teases some of the “conflicts” that arise in issue one.

“Somebody gets a job offer, somebody goes about their duties half-heartedly, someone gets shot in the face, a world-threatening Babylon Event isn’t interesting enough to bother with, somebody finds a penny on the ground, and a climax is reached when somebody reads a book.” ●

GODS is out on 4 October.

FESTIVAL ROUND-UP

Best Of The Fest

If you're quick you might catch some of these at the **London Film Festival**

WORDS: **LUKE SMITH**



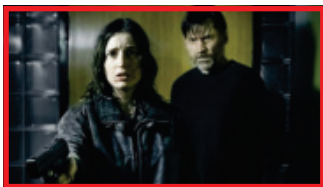
THE BEAST

Léa Seydoux wanders through a maze of past, present and uncertain future in Bertrand Bonello's blend of period drama and conceptual crystal-gazing, which unfolds over three time periods: 1910, 2014 and 2044.



FINGERNAILS

Jessie Buckley, Jeremy Allen White and Riz Ahmed star in this sci-fi romance (due for release on Apple TV+ on 3 November), which we're told is "sure to set tongues wagging".



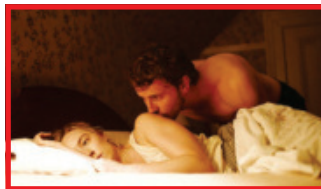
NIGHTWATCH: DEMONS ARE FOREVER

Danish director Ole Bornedal's followup to his 1994 horror thriller about strange goings-on at a Forensic Medicine Institute promises to appeal to both newcomers and fans.



STARVE ACRE

Daniel Kokotajlo follows his award-winning debut *Apostasy* with a haunting adaptation of Andrew Michael Hurley's 2019 folk horror novel, starring a young chap called Matt Smith.



FOE

Saoirse Ronan and internet favourite Paul Mescal shine as a couple who receive an unexpected guest in this sci-fi thriller from Garth Davis. (You can read our review over on page 94.)



POOR THINGS

Based on the 1992 novel by Alasdair Gray, this period sci-fi from Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Lobster*, *The Killing Of A Sacred Deer*) is everything we have come to expect from this singular filmmaker.



STOPMOTION

This eerie British horror centres on an animator who spirals into a nightmare of delusions after the death of her domineering mother – characters in her latest film taking on a life of their own.



LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL

Ghostwatch reimagined as a cheesy 1970s chat show? We're in! David Dastmalchian stars as the host in this "deviously clever found-footage horror" that promises many scares.



RED ROOMS

The allure of the serial killer is the subject of Canadian director Pascal Plante's exploration of the impact of extreme violence, centred on a woman who becomes fascinated by the trial of a murderer.



TIGER STRIPES

Nothing is quite as scary as puberty in this exuberant feminist pre-teen body horror from first time director Amanda Nell Eu, which follows an 11-year-old girl in rural Malaysia.



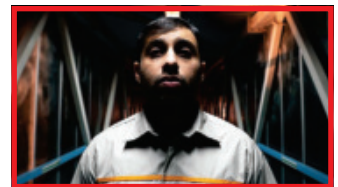
BIRTH/REBIRTH

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* gets a new lease of life in this morality tale from first time director Laura Moss, about a hospital pathologist who steals the body of a dead girl and brings her back to life.



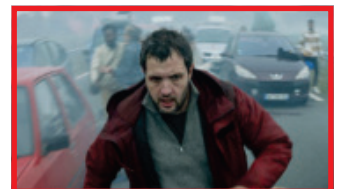
MOLLI AND MAX IN THE FUTURE

After a half-fish-man (!) collides with a crystal harvester's spaceship, their on-off relationship spans multiple years, dimensions and planets, in this lo-fi sci-fi romcom.



SKY PEALS

A night shift worker at a service station becomes convinced he's descended from aliens in Moin Hussain's feature debut, which blends realist drama with a playful suggestion of otherworldly science fiction.



VINCENT MUST DIE

Stéphan Castang's darkly paranoid comedy shades into an apocalyptic nightmare, as a man suddenly finds himself a universal victim, attacked by strangers everywhere he goes.

London Film Festival runs from 4-15 October. Visit whatson.bfi.org.uk.

SCI-FACT! David Dastmalchian based his performance in *Late Night With The Devil* on YouTube clips of Australian talk show host Don Lane.

CREATORS EXCLUSIVE

Long Live The King

The beast is unleashed in **Skull Island: Rise Of Kong**

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD

Kong's woken up in a particularly bad mood.



KING KONG ISN'T simply an apex predator.

He's an apex icon, the ultimate survivor, still towering over 90 years of pop culture. But is our species too busy screaming in his hairy fist or tickling him with fighter planes to truly know what makes this great ape tick?

"We felt that a game where you play as Kong, to experience him as the main character, was needed," says Daniel Winkler, creative director of *Skull Island: Rise Of Kong*, a new PC and console game that gives players total command of those mighty paws. "We wanted to be Kong, this emotionally deep and empathetic character, and allow fans to directly participate in his journey."

The game was developed in collaboration with Joe DeVito,

author and artist behind the *Skull Island* series of books, which take their inspiration from the man behind the immortal primate's skyscraper-scaling debut in 1933. "This is the first game that expands the history of the original King Kong created by Merian C Cooper," says Winkler.

"In videogames, the stories usually revolve around the people that encounter the King of the Island, and we felt it was necessary to introduce gamers to his own story as told through Joe DeVito's novels. DeVito's lore is incredibly comprehensive and there was a lot to pull from and adapt that has never been showcased in a videogame before." The graphics bring

a classic arcade game vibe. "The aesthetic was decided very early in development," says art director Andrés Levineri. "We wanted to distance ourselves from the gritty and almost monochromatic style of other Kong games and movies, through a simpler, cel-shaded style that pays homage to DeVito's novels."

"We were taking up a much older Kong story than the one that is in the current cultural zeitgeist, so we had full liberty to create a world of our own. We had a lot of fun reimagining the franchise in the full spectrum of colour."

As Levineri tells Red Alert, the look of Kong himself was crucial to the game's

development. "He is an innocent, empathetic creature, so when designing him we wanted to feel his sheer power while also being able to communicate his inner thoughts effectively."

"His scale and strength are seen and felt during gameplay as Kong smashes creatures all over Skull Island, but demonstrating the emotional range of Kong also became a challenge as well, so we had to make his feelings clear through expressions and body language. In the end, his physical design was able to emote more than power, bringing Kong closer to revealing the uniqueness of his nature – not human, but far more than just an overgrown gorilla. Kong is his own species."

The game keeps Kong on his home turf, a kingdom – Kongdom?





Are these critters friend or foe? The latter, we bet.



Hey, hang on, this island looks like a skull...



Whompin' giant crab things is always fun.



The graphics have a cel-shaded quality.

– that proves every bit as lethal and unpredictable as its future monarch. “The environment was treated almost like a character in itself, accompanying Kong from childhood to kingdom,” says

Levineri. “Skull Island contains an aura of mystery and a variety of wonders to be discovered.

“DeVito has created a variety of exotic creatures that inhabit this island by blending, nuancing and revealing previously unknown species to populate the mythos that he has created on the island. This is one of the critical pieces we wanted to bring to life in the creation of the game, this sense of blending science and biology with fantastical elements that make the creatures feel based in reality and lend credibility for greater immersion into the gameplay itself.”

At heart it's an old-fashioned if infinitely furrer tale of revenge, pitting an orphaned Kong against

a suitably ferocious opponent. “Gaw is the main antagonist of our story,” reveals lead game designer Guillermo Gómez, “the gigantic queen of the Deathrunners, a fictional species of dromaeosaurid dinosaurs created by DeVito.

“Gaw is the ruler of her species and is the largest, most powerful and intimidating creature on Skull Island. Gaw takes on a real significance in this story because she is the one who kills Kong's parents and triggers the journey of King Kong.

“This will lead players to follow Kong's path of revenge as he seeks to survive long enough, become big and powerful enough, to defeat Gaw and become the new king of the island.”

For Gómez, it's the King's indomitable soul that's seen him survive in the wild for 90 years now. “Kong has endured into our modern era because everyone can relate and empathise with him. He was just seeking to survive against impossible odds. Despite his size, power and ferocity, he was an innocent creature – never bad, just misunderstood. He is so similar to ourselves.” ●

Skull Island: Rise Of Kong is released on 17 October.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Marvel's **Echo** pushed to January '24 while *Agatha: Coven Of Chaos* moves to the autumn, now retitled *Agatha: Darkhold Diaries*.

→ **Daredevil: Born Again**, **Ironheart** and **Wonder Man** indefinitely delayed.

→ *The 100*'s Eliza Taylor and *One Piece*'s Peter Gadiot joining season two of the rebooted **Quantum Leap**.

→ Animated show **X-Men 97** now set to debut early '24.

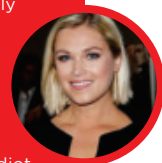
→ Kirill Serebrennikov developing new six-part adaptation of **The Phantom Of The Opera**.

→ Prime Video considering a sequel to megashark movie **The Black Demon**.

→ *Shadow And Bone*'s Kit Young joining Noah Hawley's **Alien** prequel series at FX, playing a character called Tootles.

→ File under joys of late-stage capitalism: to cut costs Disney is dropping **The Spiderwick Chronicles** and **Nautilus** before they've even aired. Both shows now looking for new homes.

→ John Carpenter releasing **Anthology II (Movie Themes 1976-1988)**.



► **SCI-FACT!** Joe DeVito's 2018 illustrated novel *King Kong Of Skull Island* expands on the history of the Kongs.

GETTY

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Tangled Web

IPC's greatest heroes unite against the Spider in new miniseries **Smash!**

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

➔ AFTER PAYING TRIBUTE TO IPC'S CLASSIC CHARACTERS in his creator-owned series *Jack Staff*, Paul Grist is bringing together iconic heroes and villains like Janus Stark, Jane Bond, the Steel Claw and the Spider in Rebellion's new miniseries *Smash!*

"*Jack Staff* was basically me having a romp through comic history using 'variations on a theme' characters at a time when the characters hadn't been seen in British comics for over 25 years," he tells Red Alert. "So I figured I was one of the few people who remembered, let alone cared about, these black and white British comic heroes of childhood. I thought it might be difficult to write stories about the 'real versions' of the characters, but the truth is the two versions are really quite different, so I never found myself doing something that would have sat better in *Jack Staff*."

Explaining that "the basic idea was to have a series of Spider stories where he comes up against various comic characters from the UK comic library," Grist reveals that the three-parter spans several decades, beginning in the '60s. "The Steel Claw is very much a '60s secret agent/adventurer-type character, while Jane Bond was an editorial suggestion to try and bring a few female characters into the storyline, given that there weren't too many of them kicking around in the boys' comics of the '60s," explains Grist. "She was fun to write, so much so that I actually brought her back for issue three."

THROWBACK TO THE FUTURE

However, issue one begins in Victorian times, with renowned contortionist and escapologist Janus Stark confronting a malevolent demon. "He doesn't actually get to come up against the Spider, as the time frame wouldn't really make that work," says Grist. "But his actions kind of kick off the loose link that binds the story together as the Spider cartwheels through the '60s to the present day."

"Since this portion of the story is set 60 years before the rest of the series, it made sense to have a bit of a throwback art style, and 'throwback art style' is my middle name," laughs Tom Foster, who illustrates the five-page prologue, while Anna Morozova draws the remainder of issue one.

"I couldn't be more excited about it as I absolutely love much of the art that originates from the '60s, especially when it comes to comics," Morozova says, admitting that she sometimes referred to a more recent publication rather than *The Treasury Of British Comics* reprints. "I got hold of a copy of *Jack Staff* and was fascinated by its homage to some of the classic characters that appear in the new *Smash!* I haven't read it fully, but I kept it by my table whilst working on the pages as it is a brilliant visual reference."

Drawn by Jimmy Broxton, issue two fast-forwards to the '80s. "It features a wounded Spider fighting Robot Archie while trapped in Maxwell Towers," teases Grist, hinting that the tower block's psychopathic computer Max might make an appearance. "Readers of *Scream!* and *Eagle* will probably have a good idea of who else might be popping into that story..." ●

Smash! issue one is out on 25 October.



The Spider catches up on his own latest exploits.





Miriam Margolyes is the Meep!



The podcast is back for six episodes...

...and here are some of the cast.



◆ Miriam Margolyes has been confirmed as voicing the Meep in the first of the anniversary specials, "The Star Beast". She said: "I'm relieved I got to work on *Doctor Who* before I died. With sci-fi you never know. Thank you for making an old woman very happy."

◆ Gemma Arrowsmith and Mary Malone have been announced as cast members for the 2023 festive special. Looking ahead to the 2024 series, Billy Brayshaw and Majid Mehdizadeh-Valoujerdy (aka Luke Jerdy) have been announced to appear in two separate episodes.

◆ Podcast *Doctor*

Who: Redacted has returned for a second series of six episodes, all available now. The cast includes Anjali Mohindra as Rani Chandra and Alexander Armstrong as Mr Smith.

◆ New *Doctor Who* figures are now available in B&M stores across the UK. In addition to a new set of Daleks from "Revelation Of The Daleks", there's also a Richard Hurndall figure from "The Five Doctors"

See Roy Knipe's cover art in Weston.



SPACE AND TIME

Celebrating 60 years of

DOCTOR WHO

and a TARDIS with Colin Baker in his costume from the 1989 stage play "The Ultimate Adventure".

◆ Returning companion Catherine Tate will star in a tour and West End production of *The Enfield Haunting*, based on paranormal events that took place in 1977.

◆ The official *Doctor Who* social media channels confirmed that Yasmin Finney (*Heartstopper*) will be playing Rose Noble, the daughter of Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) and Shaun Temple (Karl Collins).

◆ Penguin Books have released the new *Doctor Who Annual 2024*, featuring new photos, behind-the-scenes information and brand new stories featuring Fourteen.

Red A

Senza una Donna? Not any more.



◆ Weston Museum will be home to a new exhibition, *Adventures In Time And Space: 60 Years Of Doctor Who Art*, from 21 October. Promising the largest collection of original and digital art from and about the programme ever shown in one location, it will feature all six decades of the series. It runs until 27 January 2024. Visit westonmuseum.org for details.

◆ Cover art for the Ninth Doctor chapter in Big Finish's anniversary series *Once And Future* has been released. "Time Lord Immemorial", which also stars the late David Warner, is released this month. Final instalment "The Union" follows in November, and features Paul McGann, Tom Baker, Carole Ann Ford and Alex Kingston. ●

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



► **SCI-FACT!** There's one more instalment of *Once And Future* to come: "Coda - The Final Act" will be released in November 2024.



AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

Reality Bytes

Zack Kaplan takes the red pill in his mind-bending Vault Comics series **Beyond Real**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

➔ AFTER DELVING INTO how apps can be used to control people in 2022's *Mindset*, Zack Kaplan is again focusing on the increasing impact that digital devices have on all our lives in his new Vault Comics series *Beyond Real*, which questions the very meaning of existence itself.

"In many ways, the two series are companion pieces in that they look at our relationship with technology or ideas about technology," Kaplan tells Red Alert. "But the similarities end there – *Mindset* is a cautionary tale about a flawed hero, while *Beyond Real* is a fantasy adventure about an idealist heroine. *Mindset* suggests we might have reason to fear technology, while *Beyond Real*

asks if the world itself could be, not technological, but positive and beautiful. *Beyond Real* certainly takes readers on a thrilling and nerve-racking journey, but it's a positive message about the value of creativity and artists in our world."

With Kaplan summing up simulation theory as "this idea that we all might be living in some sort of computer simulation like in *The Matrix*, but because it's so real, we don't even know it," *Beyond Real* echoes the Wachowskis' cinematic

quartet, although the five-parter hints there might be life beyond the constructed artifice.

"I can't help wonder, if we are in a simulation, what's on the outside and how is our simulation built. Is it just code, or does it mirror our own messy, artistic and beautiful creative process? Because if life is built as a reflection of humanity, then wouldn't the structure, the methodology, even the spirit of our simulation, be human and creative?" asks Kaplan.

After being severely injured in a car crash which leaves her boyfriend comatose, main character June Ward gains the ability to see and manipulate the code that makes up life's simulation, sending the struggling artist on a journey to understand her new abilities and to save her stricken lover. "The only way to explore this idea truly is to use the art and narrative together, so it's

Cover art for issue one, by Fabiana Mascolo.



an idea perfectly suited to comics, which can show a variety of beautiful art styles and techniques," Kaplan says.

Explaining that "it was intrinsic to the concept and I'm not even sure I would have pursued this idea with only one artist", he is collaborating with several different illustrators, including Jorge Corona, Dennis Menheere, Vincenzo Riccardi, Toni Fejzula, Liana Kangas and Fabiana Mascolo. "The premise was, what if we could travel the layers of the simulation, and each layer was artistically different?" he says. "I had very specific ideas about what each layer would look like, and along with Vault Comics we found some incredible artists to represent these worlds."

"June experiences a lot of fantastical environments, some I've hinted at, all that challenge her perspective and her willpower, but I don't want to say too much about what lies beyond," teases Kaplan. "There is not just a question of whether this experience is real or not, but is she on an automated journey or does she have control in this programmed world? *Beyond Real* looks to explore the very existential nature of creation." ●

Beyond Real issue one is out on 4 October.



► **SCI-FACT!** Arleen Sorkin had an uncredited role as the voice of Ms Bambi in *Batman: Mask Of The Phantasm*.

NEW AUTHOR

BETHANY JACOBS

MEET THE EDUCATION TECH CONSULTANT BEHIND SCI-FI THESE BURNING STARS



Tell us about your protagonists.

→ My story weaves together three very different ones. Esek Nightfoot is a deliciously sociopathic cleric, while her mentee, Chono, is stoic and righteous. They've been ordered to track down a smartass hacker named Jun Ironway, who holds a secret that affects them all – not to mention the universe!

Does the book have any particular social theme?

→ It definitely contends with the aftereffects of genocide. It's interested in questions of revenge and reparation, as well as the struggle to negotiate one's complicity in a corrupt world. As an academic I've researched and written a lot about histories of oppression and social justice. That work absolutely influenced this book.

How long did it take to write?

→ I wrote the first lines in mid-2018 and submitted my final copy edits in

2023. So, this was a long process with a lot of drafts!

Are any authors a particular inspiration to you?

→ Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin are my sci-fi gods. Recently I've been influenced by Arkady Martine, NK Jemisin, Neil Gaiman and Nghi Vo.

Any advice for readers who are budding authors?

→ Remember that every writer's journey is different and there's no wrong way to do this. It also means there's no right way! I do advise reading voraciously – in your own genre, but also outside of it.

These Burning Stars is out on 19 October, published by Orbit.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

ARLEEN SORKIN 1955-2023

The screwball spirit of Harley Quinn

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



"I WAS BORN TO PLAY HER," believed Arleen Sorkin, not only the voice of mallet-swinging, Joker-besotted hench-sprite Harley Quinn but also her literal inspiration.

Raised in Washington DC, Sorkin moved to New York to pursue a cabaret career as part of female comedy troupe the High-Heeled Women. In 1984 her live wire talent won her the starmaking role of quirky fashion designer Calliope Jones in US daytime soap *Days Of Our Lives*. "I imagine women doing housework while they watch our show, things like ironing," said Sorkin. "It's my job to make them scorch something."

A dream sequence in one episode put her in a jester's costume, inspiring old college friend Paul Dini, who was working on *Batman: The Animated Series*. "I was like, 'Well, there she is,'" Dini recalled. "She should run around with the Joker dressed like that."

The character of Harley was created for season one episode "Joker's Favor" and was an immediate hit. "She came in with that off-the-wall Judy Holliday delivery and we all just adored her," said Mark Hamill, voice of the Joker, Harley's beloved Puddin'. "We just all fell in love with her." Sorkin found her own inspiration in "the molls in old James Cagney movies and *Guys & Dolls*' Adelaide."

A beguiling mix of sass and vulnerability, Harley

became a recurring character in the DC animated universe, appearing in everything from *Superman: The Animated Series* to *Static Shock*, *Justice League* to *Gotham Girls*. Sorkin also voiced her in videogame *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, unfazed by an edgier reimagining: "She seemed very much like the Harley that I know." Her final Harley appearance was in videogame *DC Universe Online* in 2011.

Sorkin was also a screenwriter, with credits on *Tiny Toon Adventures* as well as 1997 Jennifer Aniston comedy *Picture Perfect*. Her business card simply said "What's her name... from that show?"



Arleen Sorkin as *Days Of Our Lives*' Calliope Jones, 1984.

GAYLE HUNNICUTT 1943-2023

American actress whose genre credits included *Voices* and *The Legend Of Hell House*.

RON CEPHAS JONES 1957-2023

American actor who played Bobby Fish in *Luke Cage* and Jack in *Venom*.

HERB RALL/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL/GETTY

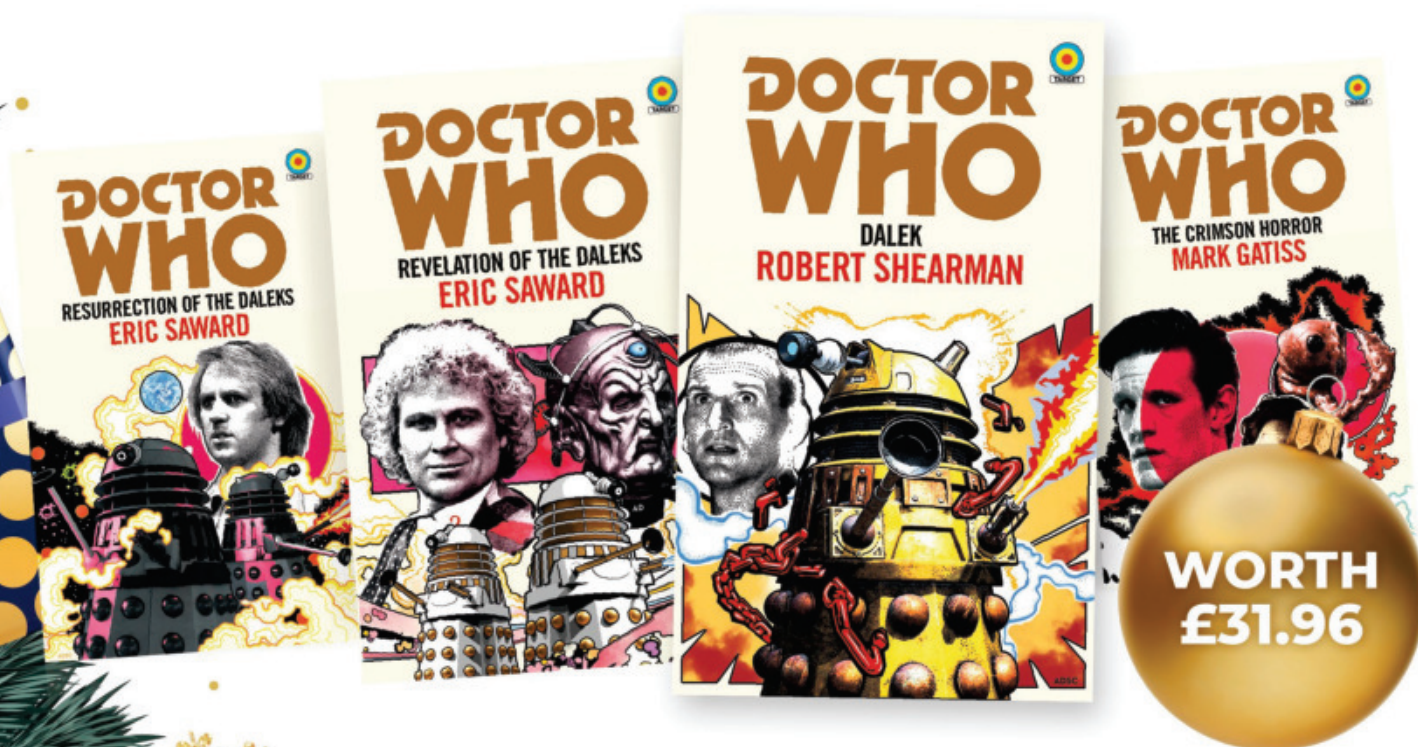
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THE EXORCIST: BELIEVER



BETTER THE DE

DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE
DID, YOUR HALLOWEEN
DIRECTOR? DAVID
GORDON GREEN'S ONLY
GONE AND BROUGHT BACK
AN ANCIENT EVIL IN
THE EXORCIST: BELIEVER

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

ALL YOU KNOW

Angela Fielding and Katherine: oh hell.



Jennifer Nettles plays Katherine's mum.



WHEN *SFX* COMPELS DIRECTOR David Gordon Green to leave the sound mixing stage while completing work on *The Exorcist: Believer* ("I'm in the basement hiding out from all the screams and sounds!"), he's being faced with one of the toughest decisions in movie horror history – where to drop his *Tubular Bells*.

"The iconic theme! We're just at that point where we've got to figure out when and how to use something that's that powerful. It's a psychology, you don't just slap it on the whole movie, you've got to use it for its muscle, right? So my brain is a little bit spinning with some of those decisions today."

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

At least it's just his brain and not his entire head. This is, after all, a new chapter of one of the greatest movies of all time.

"It's a specific type of subgenre of horror, not just your blanket horror film," Green explains. "For me, it's a great canvas to be able to explore spirituality and parenthood and this day and age. Of how we're able to take things like demonic possession and relate them to mental illness or addiction, or some of the things that I see in my world very prominently, and trying to explore some of

those themes through something that I think is an entertaining vessel for conversation, if that makes sense.

"You don't want to make something that's so heavy and academic that people aren't interested in going to see it," he adds. "So you have to disguise it, in a way. This is a movie that's about different types of faith, not just Catholicism. For me at this point in my life, where I'm talking to my kids about things like God, and they're asking questions that are curious, the age that these girls are in this movie, it just felt very active with my creative life.

"A title like this gives me access to a tremendous amount of eyeballs and the interest on that, the energy that title can activate, is significant. I could go make my conversational creative art project somewhere, but if I want to try to reach out to as big a mass audience as I can access, I call it *The Exorcist* and I go to work."

The journey to a new first chapter in *The Exorcist* was born through Green's experiences of working with Universal, Blumhouse and Trancas Films. David Robinson, a producer at Morgan Creek – who held the rights to *The Exorcist* – happened to move to Green's neighbourhood and conversation turned to the iconic franchise.

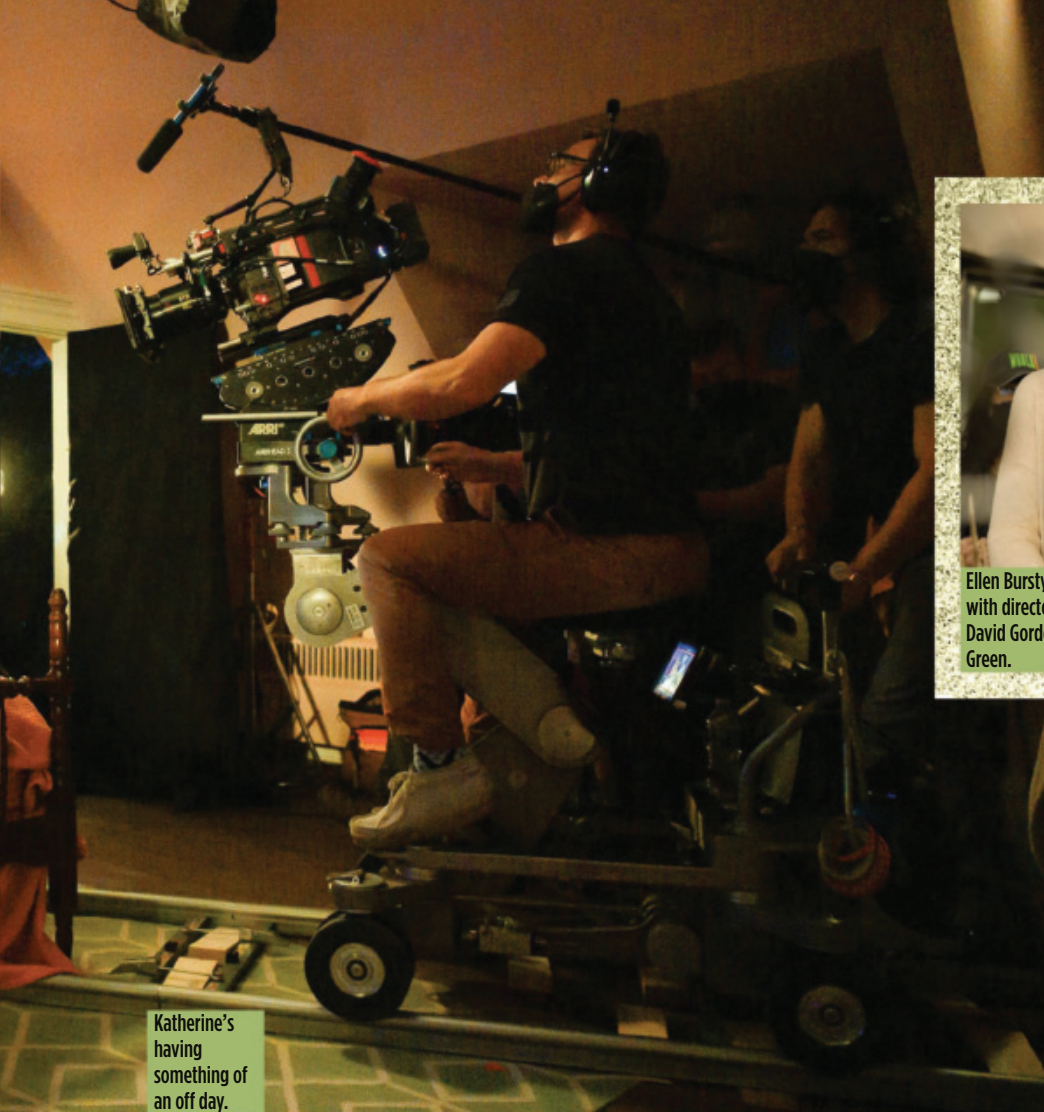
"I was like, 'Yeah, well, shit, there's a lot of opportunity there'. I was at a point where I'd done three horror movies, I was gonna go do a musical or a documentary or something different. Before I knew it, we'd committed to writing this. It took on a very organic social life, which then accessed a creative energy that I hadn't had in a while."

These conversations and collaborations also took the process from a reboot to an all-new chapter. It seems there are some movies you just don't touch...

"I don't know that you could recreate the conversation that happened in 1973, when the majority of people didn't even know what an exorcism was," Green considers. "The content that [director William] Friedkin and [writer] William Peter Blatty created, it was so shocking and revolutionary, I don't know that

"Put your hand up if you're a bit frightened."





Katherine's having something of an off day.

you could trigger the type of religious curiosity and fear and uncertainty that they had at that time.

"We're now 50 years later, with a different flavour of fear and curiosity and interest in spirituality. If you're going to evolve the conversation, a remake didn't really seem appropriate. Certainly not for me, because you're always going to be in the shadows of that masterpiece.

"Feel however you feel about the sequels, *Exorcist II* and *III* and beyond," he continues, "but they're all bold swings. Nobody's trying to emulate the DNA of the original film, they're all going in with their own vision, their own voice, and they're not shy, they're not timid. I kind of thought that's a fun path to step into.

"With *Halloween*, it was a little bit more trying to recreate some of the spirit. Some of that's through lighting, some of that's through Easter eggs and legacy characters and things like that. But here we were pretty restrained in a lot of that.

"Not that there's not that," he considers. "We're pretty restrained in our approach here, to try to do something different and to make it feel contemporary, but also timeless. To be able to take a character like Chris MacNeil and see what her life would possibly

have evolved into 50 years later. Then you get to say, 'Okay, well, if Ellen [Burstyn, who played the possessed Regan's mother] is in, I'm in, let's go party.' Let's literally try to understand what a character like this could have lived with after the events of Georgetown."

BORN AGAIN

Speaking of the previous instalments in the *Exorcist* series, Green says that "not really any of them" are acknowledged in this trilogy. "Honestly I'm not that familiar with them. I've seen them all but I couldn't have a very enlightened conversation about them. I'm not doing anything to kind of circumvent them.

"I actually really like the TV series. With *Halloween I* had to say out loud to the press, 'Hey, ignore the other ones, start over, there was no *Halloween II*.' It's something that we felt we needed to do to clean the slate. I don't think I need to have that conversation on this franchise."

Famously the original production was supposedly plagued by bad luck. Naturally – or supernaturally – we have to ask if Green's set had anything similar...

"I can't say it wasn't," he laughs. "Because when you get that type of spiritual intensity in a room – and →



Ellen Burstyn with director David Gordon Green.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Ellen Burstyn returns as Chris MacNeil – but for how long?



"It depends if she dies or not, in terms of the character," Green says on whether Ellen Burstyn will return in 2025's *The Exorcist: Deceiver*. "You have those kinds of conversations too. Creatively you're thinking, 'Okay, well, I've got her attention.' She's one of my idols, she's an absolute dream to work with. She's inspiring. There's versions of the script – I'm not saying which ones we ended up with – where radical things would happen to her. Then you're like, 'Well, but if it goes really well, what do we do?'"

"It's a really personal, epic part of her life. So it was getting into the DNA of who this character is and why she'd want to return to it and how she could help me evolve my ideas into greater inspiration. What began as a very suspect concept of collaboration ended up in a great friendship. Regardless of where this franchise goes, I know I'm going to be working with her in many capacities."



Victor Fielding (Leslie Odom Jr) with school principal.



Do we spot a masked Linda Blair helping the kids...?



REGAN'S RETURN

Linda Blair's back – but not as you might have expected



"She's amazing," Green says of original *Exorcist* star Linda Blair. "I never thought she would do this, but when we were writing, we had young characters, two young girls that are about the same age as her [in the original movie]. She has her own stories – I'm not sure how much of that is public – of the experience that affected her life from the movie. So I reached out to her, I connected with her and she's taken a very different path in life now and her foundation for animals is extraordinary."

"She agreed to come on as a consultant and came out to set, and was there as a value counsellor and a wonderful voice for all of us to kind of curate. We had her, we had a child psychologist, and teachers and parents on set to be able to do what I felt was the healthiest, strongest approach for asking these young performers to embrace and verbalise and experience some extremely difficult things. So having Linda's experience, both good and bad, and her humanity, was really valuable."

As for whether she appears in the film? "She was an advisor on the movie, so she was there. Who knows what's down the line?"

I'm not just talking about the actors, and the characters or the subject matter, but the dolly grip, the boom operator, everybody's bringing an energy. I don't care what you believe in. When you get into a room with people with intensity, there's shit that happens.

"It wasn't in terms of the stuff you hear from the original film – Ellen tells those stories, some very passionately, some very humorously, some tragically – but there was undoubtedly weird energy. I tried to, in my process, embrace that, utilise that. I mean,

“To me, this is not a movie about how provocative or shocking you can be”

there's moments that we're using in the film where it was kind of a suspended moment of, 'What's happening here, what are we going through? What are we doing?' A lot of it is you're trying to use your imagination for certain things, visually, that aren't there.

"So you're kind of stimulated in other ways. There are not literal exciting stories to tell. It's not like an entity came out of the floors and visited us, but it was undeniable electricity happening."

Another thing the 1973 classic was famous for was some of the most shocking cinematic

moments seen at that point. That's something Green says he hasn't chased for *Believer*.


"If you were to show an audience a young girl saying, 'Your mother sucks cocks in Hell', everyone would laugh now. At the time, that's an extremely disturbing, totally fucked-up thing for a young performer to say. But now we've desensitised that. We've done that, and then 10 times that."

"So the shock value isn't as relevant or necessary, I don't think. To me, this is not a movie about how provocative or shocking you can be. It's about the unnerving uncertainty of childhood illness for a concerned parent that has no answers."

What then, does a modern interpretation of *The Exorcist* bring that hasn't been done before? "For me, it's an interdenominational conversation of the balance of modern medicine, where that meets traditional beliefs, where that meets historical religion and

Katherine (Olivia Marcum) turns heads.





Nothing like a good old-fashioned sing-song.

spiritual interpretations of texts," Green explains. "One of our devices is two girls are kind of connected by one entity. So it's trying to, in the narrative around the film, dissect the problem. But the beauty of that is, it's two families, different viewpoints, outside voices, friends and neighbours, churches, non-believers, coming to try to figure out something with a backdrop of today's cynicism, I guess I'll say.

"There's certainly the devout, there's the non-believers, there's the atheists and agnostics – you get them all in a room and you try to solve a problem. And you've got a next door neighbour who's a nurse that is both religious but also educated in traditional medicine, and down the street you've got someone that was, once upon a time, an oncologist and is now a rootwork doctor dealing with traditional healing practices."

That "one entity" does have a name, but Green is remaining tight-lipped as to whether it's another returning character.

"It's not like the original film talks about Pazuzu," he says. "When I got really serious about this, and you go back into the original film, you see the extraordinary ambiguity

throughout it, which is awesome. But today's audience wants definition. They want to know who, what, why, how. That's a really interesting evolution. But can't we be ambiguous?

"I'm so tempted to tell you the name of our demon, but we don't say it in the movie," he laughs. "So part of me just wants you to figure it out. Or if you're a demonologist, then you know, and then if you have a friend that's a demonologist, that's a great dinner. I'm sorry, I'll probably say at some point, but I'm holding back as long as I can." Bets, anyone?

"I hope everyone takes something different in terms of how they relate to these characters' conversations," he adds. "How it relates or frustrates their own spirituality. It is a platform for conversation. That's what I feel like movies are missing. So much of the joy of going to the cinema for me is those experiences on the way out the door and not just changing the channels on a TV set, but walking out into the light thinking 'I just experienced something'".

A sequel, *The Exorcist: Deceiver*, is due to be released on 18 April 2025.

He says the two films "are connected – that's the idea, very different but connected. Part of it



Possession is no excuse for nail-biting, young lady.

is seeing how this movie is received and not just saying 'let's replay the hits,' because that's boring," he shrugs. "If you know anything about my career, I don't replay the hits. So if I've done it, got it, moving on.

"I have a framework of where I want to go, but I'll respond really with creative energy. That's not to say success means I'm going to dive in and do the same thing. Success means let's put our balls on the table and really make something different."

PASSION PROJECT

Possessions aside, there's only one other horror project – though he says it's not really horror – he'd be interested in tackling: *Bad Ronald*, the 1974 TV movie about a house with a disturbed young man living in the walls.

"*Bad Ronald The Musical!* I think that could exhaust everything I've got. Maybe that's 10 years from now. That's the icing on the cake. It's my grand finale. It checks a lot of boxes for me, including something that I love: the undiscovered. It's not every day you meet a *Bad Ronald* fan, but it's always meant something to me, since it disturbed me as a child. It could be a fun career move. I'd have to turn it into a musical, which would be the hard part. But we'll see..." ●

The Exorcist: Believer is in cinemas from 6 October.

THE EXORCIST III

THE DEVIL M E D O



MADE IT

HOW WILLIAM
PETER BLATTY
DIRECTED
THE EXORCIST III,
BASED ON HIS
NOVEL *LEGION*

WORDS: **OLIVER PFEIFFER**

ALAMY

HOW DO YOU FOLLOW UP ONE OF the scariest (and arguably also one of the greatest) horror movies of all time? In the case of 1990's *The Exorcist III*, it was a matter of eradicating an earlier sequel to William Friedkin's 1973 seminal classic, one which had provoked more giggles than jitters.

"This was the blessing of *Exorcist II: The Heretic*. It was so bad that it made William Peter Blatty decide to turn his book *Legion* into *The Exorcist III* and direct it himself," Steve Jaffe, Blatty's former press agent and the associate producer of *Exorcist III*, tells *SFX*. "He said, 'I will put my heart and soul into it to erase the memory of the sequel.'"

A NEW BODY

While Blatty had initially been approached to pen a follow-up to *The Exorcist*, the studio became disinterested when the Oscar-winning writer revealed his story would disassociate itself from the possessed child Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair). Ultimately, his idea was for a psychological detective story – a spiritual, non-supernatural sequel that notably didn't include an exorcism. Blatty turned that screenplay into his 1983 novel *Legion*.

Despite the critical and commercial failure of John Boorman's *Exorcist II*, which did indeed feature (a now teenage) Regan, it wasn't an easy ride to the director's chair for Blatty. With only one directorial credit to his name and a temperamental reputation that got him banned from the set of *The Exorcist*, Blatty was seen as somewhat of a liability.

"Blatty had this devilish, razor-sharp intelligence and piercing eyes," recalls Jaffe. "He also had a strange impression on people. It was like a rainbow of colours – different types of impressions. It didn't make you feel secure or make A-list actors feel like, 'I want to hang out with this guy from six in the morning until midnight.'" Nevertheless, Jaffe, who had worked on publicity for the original film, was instrumental in helping secure Blatty as the director of *The Exorcist III*.

"They won't let me make it!" he told me when I ran into him, looking very glum at The Palm [restaurant] in LA. I said, 'What?'. He said, 'Legion'. I said, 'Well, why won't they let you make it?' 'Oh, they don't think I can handle it.' I said, 'Handle it? You wrote one of the greatest movies of all time!' He said, 'No, I mean as a director'.

"I have a sarcastic humour," admits Jaffe. "And I replied, 'But Bill, you know you're crazy. People are probably not lining up to put millions of dollars in your hands and see what you do with it.' He didn't have a great sense of humour, but I think I may have seen a crack.



A scene from the studio-mandated climax.

Then he said, 'Well, I want to direct this because if I don't, I'm afraid they'll turn it into another Boorman sequel!'"

While, at that point, Warner Bros held the rights to *The Exorcist* property, they declined to fund *Legion*. Fortunately, Jaffe secured interest from producer Carter DeHaven, who financed a package under Morgan Creek Productions. "We had the discussion about how difficult it was going to be to enable Blatty to direct it – if he would agree to work within a certain budget, then it could be done," continues Jaffe. "Reluctantly, they agreed to let him direct the picture, and Blatty was understandably over the moon!"

FATHER FIGURE

Set 15 years after the events of *The Exorcist*, *III* is a serial killer psychological whodunnit horror that sees returning character Lieutenant Kinderman investigate a slew of gruesome murders in Georgetown that bear the same modus operandi as the deceased Gemini Killer. Blatty based the Gemini on the enigmatic Zodiac Killer, who had claimed in a letter to a newspaper that *The Exorcist* was "the best satirical comedy he had ever seen".

While a relatively minor role in the original film (albeit a major one in Blatty's novel), Kinderman becomes the lead character in *Exorcist III*. However, due to the death of actor Lee J Cobb in 1976, the role had to be recast; 62-year-old George C Scott, famed for

Patton, brought his characteristic gruff demeanour to the part.

Another returning character was Father Damien Karras (Jason Miller), who met a horrific demise after exorcising Regan and hurling himself down the infamous steps during the climax of *The Exorcist*. His body was now thought to have been possessed by the notorious Gemini Killer. Brad Dourif (later to voice *Child's Play's* Chucky) portrayed a deceased Karras in an ultimately discarded pre-titles prologue sequence, and also the now-incarcerated serial killer.

However, due to studio insistence that the film be more organically linked to the original, Jason Miller was brought back. When it became apparent that the ailing actor (who was struggling with alcoholism) could not perform the lengthy monologue scenes, Dourif was persuaded to return to refilm his already masterfully executed sequences and share the now dual part with Miller.

"We had a serious problem with Jason Miller, who was almost indispensable, as we needed him to fall back into that role," recalls Jaffe. "So it was an artistic and creative way to solve that problem."

Rounding out the supporting cast was an ensemble of character actors, many of whom had played instrumental roles in Blatty's *The Ninth Configuration*. This included Ed Flanders as Kinderman's old friend, Father Joseph Dyer (previously portrayed by Father William O'Malley) and Scott Wilson as the chain-smoking head of the psychiatric ward, Dr Temple.

FINAL CUT

While Morgan Creek agreed to let Blatty shoot an expensive and highly artistic dream sequence that featured cameos by male model Fabio and basketball legend Patrick Ewing as angels, and which represented the midway point between this world and the next, there were other matters which they wouldn't compromise on. For instance, they insisted that *Legion* be retitled as *The Exorcist III*.

"There were things that Blatty tried to control that he couldn't. He wanted the title to be *Legion*," explains Jaffe. "You can Google and see the different posters and one-sheets that we drew up, designed for both sides to be happy. But he was never going to be able to overcome the studio heads who wanted the name *Exorcist* on it, because if you put *Exorcist* and Blatty's name on the movie, people know what to expect."

Further drama ensued following a lukewarm preview screening, after which Morgan Creek demanded reshooting Blatty's purposefully bleak and anticlimactic ending to better align with the film's new title and thus



Damien Karras (Jason Miller) – or is it the Gemini Killer?



Lt Kinderman (George C Scott) has medical woes.



The dream sequence goes all-out for weirdness.



What's under the sheet? You really don't want to know.

“We had the discussion about how difficult it was going to be to let Blatty direct it”

appease audience expectations. “Blatty didn’t want that at all. They just said it wouldn’t be the same without [an exorcism], and they were holding all the cards,” Jaffe recalls. “The studio was holding the purse strings and just played the game with Blatty because they could see that it needed that. And they could even do it without him if he refused, and his ego wouldn’t let him.”

At one point, *Halloween* filmmaker John Carpenter was considered to direct the alternative climax; however, Blatty eventually relented. Veteran British actor Nicol Williamson was quickly drafted as new character Father Morning for the hastily shot, effects-laden exorcism denouement, featuring everything from deadly cobras to MTV-inspired thunder and lightning bolts. George C Scott hilariously reflected that “the studio would only be satisfied if Madonna came out and sang a song at the end!”

While the Material Girl thankfully didn’t cameo, critics were on the whole kind to the moody horror sequel when it was released on

17 August 1990. “When I first saw *Exorcist III* in the theatre, it was great. It was amazing. I was sitting with Carter DeHaven, [Warner president] Frank Wells and Blatty, and they were delighted,” says Jaffe. “David Sheehan, the film critic for CBS Network News, came right out and said, ‘Watch me on the air tonight. You’re going to like this review!’”

The Exorcist III is moody and masterful in its slow-building suspense, where violence is cleverly implied rather than depicted – leading to an increasingly unnerving experience. This includes one of the most memorable jump scares ever put on film, following an elongated, Hitchcockian sequence that is all the more impactful for its lack of on-screen gore.

Yet earlier moments recall Blatty’s gift as a comedy writer (he notably co-wrote Blake Edwards’s *Pink Panther* sequel *A Shot In The Dark*) and help ground the film before the terror sets in. This includes the bantering between Kinderman and Father Dyer with amusing intertextual cinematic references, making the subsequent descent into spiritual desolation more unsettling.

In 2016 (a year before Blatty’s death), US label Scream Factory released a special two-disc Blu-ray collector’s edition of *The Exorcist III* that included the “Director’s Cut” which was re-titled *Legion*. As most of the

“YOU’RE GONNA DIE UP THERE!”

The Real *Exorcist II*?



The Ninth Configuration is a 1980 theological comedy thriller that takes place in a gothic castle where combat veterans are sent and tested to see whether they are faking their mental disorders. Based on William Peter Blatty’s 1978 novel, it was his directorial debut and the middle chapter of his so-called “Faith Trilogy” – bookended by *The Exorcist* and *Legion*.

This fascinating film features Scott Wilson as the supposedly mentally unhinged Billy Cutshaw, the astronaut character who Regan warns “You’re gonna die up there” before urinating on the living room floor in *The Exorcist*. The cast includes *Exorcist* alumnus Jason Miller, and Stacy Keach as Colonel Kane.

Like *Legion*, it debates the existence of God and the problem of people, and mixes horror with humour. The first two-thirds of the film play like a farcical comedy that surprisingly descends into a dark and compelling drama.



original 35mm film couldn’t be salvaged, VHS footage of the film’s dailies was interwoven with theatrical footage to reassemble something as close as it was possible to get to the director’s intended vision.

It offers a fascinating alternative insight, including extended exchanges between Kinderman and Dyer, Brad Dourif’s arguably superior solo performance as The Gemini Killer (aka “Patient X”) and perhaps, most significantly, the restored low-key non-exorcism ending.

Whether *Legion* would’ve been as warmly received is up for debate. However, *The Exorcist III* remains a triumphant sequel that continues to fascinate and frighten over 30 years on, thanks largely to the mind behind one of the seminal horror films of all time. ●

The Exorcist III is available on Blu-ray.



June (Jenna Elfman) gets ready to sign off for good.



Danay Garcia as Luciana: see you later, chum.

WALKER AWAY

THE CAST AND CREW OF
FEAR THE WALKING DEAD
TAKE THEIR LAST
APOCALYPTIC STEPS
TOGETHER IN THE
SERIES FINALE

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

IN THE 13-YEAR HISTORY OF AMC'S *The Walking Dead* universe, there have been many in the cast and crew who joined the franchise and then made it their career home. One of them is Michael E. Satrazemis, who started in season one of *The Walking Dead* as a camera operator, then graduated to director of photography and director. Now he's an executive producer and series director who worked closely with showrunners Andrew Chambliss and Ian B. Goldberg on *Fear The Walking Dead*.

Satrazemis directed the season eight mid-season finale "All I See Is Red", which featured Morgan (Lennie James) and his daughter, Mo/Wren (Zoey Merchant), exiting to seek Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) in Alexandria. "We saw Morgan and Mo leave the show, and it's very complete," Satrazemis confirms. "And in the same scene almost,

there's the handover to Madison (Kim Dickens). What's beautiful about the last season is it's full circle. It feels very karmically correct."

The last time he worked with Dickens was season four, and Satrazemis says the final six episodes are very much about giving Madison a new path in the wake of dismantling PADRE. "She was partially responsible for doing that, so knowing that she can try to put some of these children back with their parents is a big thing," he says of her new mission. "There's also the fact that Madison hasn't really had enough time to process the death of her children. She's just learned that they were dead, so some of her biggest struggles will be within."

However, Madison won't have a lot of time to grieve in peace because a psychopathic blast from the past is back: Troy Otto (Daniel

"We only have six episodes, but they move fast. It'll feel like it reached the end quick"

Sharman). She rammed a hammer in the militiaman's head in the finale of season three, but obviously didn't finish the job. "He's got a plan," Satrazemis teases of Otto. "He's another [great idea] of Ian and Andrew, that instead of trying to bring in a new character they bring in somebody with so much history right at the point we go back into the OG characters."

He promises closure for major characters like Victor Strand (Colman Domingo), Daniel (Rubén Blades), Luciana (Danay García), June (Jenna Elfman) and more. Asked if any of the "old-timers" had input in their final stories,



"What is it? Is there something on my face?"



Goodbye, Madison (Kim Dickens) – it's been a blast.



Rubén Blades as Daniel Salazar: off you pop.

Satrazemis says there were open conversations all season long, but nobody wanted to dictate anything outside of having a proper ending they could feel good about.

"There's a lot of surprises, almost straight away," he says of what audiences can expect. "There's still a lot of character development on the way to the end. We only have six episodes, but they move fast. It'll feel like it reached the end quick, but there's a lot of travel and a lot of story left."

On the subject of whether we'll see Alicia (Alycia Debnam-Carey), who was last seen heading to the tower to help more survivors at the end of season seven, and possibly at the very end of "All I See Is Red", Satrazemis is less circumspect.

"The arm in the bag in the coda is Alicia's arm," he

confirms. "That keeps that character as part of the storyline alive as there is a story about that arm that's going to come with Troy. But I don't think you can expect to see her character."

As for the series finale, Satrazemis confirms he directed it. "I wanted to bring it home," he says with pride. "Wrapping up a season is difficult. But wrapping up a series is *really* difficult. Our main objective for the end – and we did talk about it *a lot* at points – was having a real ending and then honouring the beginning, the OGs and their stories.

"We also wanted to track the apocalypse," he continues. "We won't see [people] hands-in-hands, walking off into the sunset, because the

apocalypse doesn't allow for that sort of thing. But I really think Ian and Andrew crafted quite the last episode."

Remembering their last days of production together, Satrazemis says that he had all of the cast and crew huddle together and repeat their mantra: "Let's stay present." He says it was his job to help remind the team: "We're family. Let's create. Let's stay in it, and ride it out all the way through. We have to honour the show the way we deserve from one another. We spoke about it a lot and I'm very proud that we did.

"I'm so proud of [the episode]," he adds. "It's very satisfying and it feels very complete. It is an ending and it is over. I'm really, really happy about what we were able to do." ●

Fear The Walking Dead is on AMC/AMC+ from 22 October.

Later, later:
Colman
Domingo as
Victor Strand.

FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

SLICE AND DICE

THE ICONIC VIDEOGAME
FRANCHISE
FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S
FINALLY HITS THE
BIG SCREEN

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



DIRECTOR EMMA TAMMI WASN'T all that familiar with the *Five Nights At Freddy's* videogame series at first, but when you get a call from Jason Blumhouse asking you to acquaint yourself with a pop culture juggernaut, you get hands-on. Literally.

"It's very addictive," Tammi laughs, stepping out of the edit room to talk with *SFX*. "Once I started playing it, I didn't want to stop – just the time pressure of the clock running out and the power getting low and trying to survive the night is very adrenaline-fuelling."

"But I think my bigger impression was that this is such a cool atmospheric world that is just prime to be adapted into a feature film. So I was going in with that lens of, what would this space and place and journey feel like in a film format, and I just got so excited about that."

As with many Americans, there's something else that resonates culturally with *FNAF* for Tammi. "As soon as I started playing it and doing research into the world, it felt immediately familiar because as a kid, I had remembered going to Chuck E Cheese's Pizzerias," she explains. "That whole sensibility of Freddy's universe felt super-familiar and nostalgic and very, very exciting to dive deeper into."

NIGHT PEOPLE

In the film, Josh Hutcherson plays a security guard who, like those in the game, has to watch over run-down restaurant Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, where dishevelled animatronics roam at night. This format has now spanned several games, novels and much merchandise, but the film homes in on the original edition. →



Freddy Fazbear with Mike (Josh Hutcherson).

"The idea was that this film would be linked mostly with the first *FNAF*," Tammi says. "However, there are elements that certainly go beyond the game there. There's so much lore and so many ancillary materials outside of the games themselves, so there were story components that Scott Cawthon, the creator of the game, was including – but with his guidance we were trying to mostly link this film to the first game."

Cawthon has been involved with the entire production, fans will be pleased to hear. "We were so lucky to have Scott involved in this project," Tammi says. "I don't think anyone felt like this would be a successful movie adaptation without his creative input."

"That is directly linked to being able to anticipate what is going to resonate with the fanbase. We all certainly hope that this resonates with the general audience as well, but first and foremost, this needs to be a movie for the fanbase. So we really leaned on Scott to help guide that."

ALWAYS ONLINE

Tammi says she "tried to focus on making the best film that I thought we could make". As such, she let Cawthon and the producers monitor online fan reactions more than she did, "trusting in Scott, that if we made a misstep in terms of what would resonate with the fans, he would let us know."

"Obviously the franchise has a huge arena, but we also needed to go off and make our little movie, and really focus on the story that we all felt passionate about telling and how we were crafting it. It would be so easy to be consumed by the chatter online. What we all really needed to be consumed with was making the best possible movie."

Director Emma Tammi gives Freddy a few notes.



Yellow Rabbit. He's really very friendly... ulp.



Vanessa Shelly (Elizabeth Lai) is a little sceptical.



She says that Cawthon is absolutely happy with the end product. “If this were something he wasn’t happy with we would be changing it until it was the thing that felt exactly right. Everyone is feeling very excited about it.”

Tammi says she’s always been a fan of the genre, but didn’t necessarily imagine herself making horror movies. Directing 2018’s *The Wind* – a Western horror/supernatural thriller – was her “gateway for falling in love with the genre as a filmmaker.” Now she says she’s “pretty hooked”.

CREATURE FEATURE

“Working with the animatronics that were designed by Jim Henson’s Creature Shop was a whole other component, an element that felt new and exciting for me,” she adds. “Freddy’s also has a little bit of kid’s wonderment and magic that to me tapped into the feeling of the films that I grew up with, specifically Spielberg films, and tapped into a family heart element within the drama within the film as well.”

The animatronics, obviously, play a large role in the movie – and had strange effects on the cast and crew. “I had seen the design

“The franchise has a huge arena, but we needed to go off and make our little movie”

process, and then the build process, every step of the way,” Tammi explains. “So I had been gradually getting more and more excited and more and more invested into how these creatures were coming to life. But then when we actually got them up and running on their own for the first time, it was so exhilarating, and unexpectedly emotional. I was floored.

“I couldn’t have been happier with how they turned out, and once they were walking and moving around you could really feel a soul of these characters come to life, which is incredible considering that they’re inanimate objects.

“That, of course, is the magic of Jim Henson’s Creature Shop. Growing up on Jim Henson movies, I have felt the soul coming through the puppets they’ve created all my life. So to have that element in our film was incredibly special.”

For one cast member in particular, it was to be a life-changing experience.

“We have one 10-year-



Mike gets a look at the “magic” of Freddy’s.

old actress, Piper Rubio, and she was so in love with these animatronics that she would hug them every day when she got to set and hug them every day when she left set," Tammi laughs. "To this day, she misses them. She absolutely created a bond with them that is beyond anything I could have expected or wished for, and was so deeply authentic. That was incredible to see.

"Then for the rest of our cast, I think we all just were totally overwhelmed by them in the best sense. It was so exciting to be able to do scenes with our cast and our animatronics practically, and not have our actors interacting with someone in a green suit and really respond in real time to the

“I think we would all feel so fortunate to continue making movies in this universe”

animatronics. That was really important to us. It really added a whole dimension to the chemistry between our actors and the animatronics.”

Another thing adding new dimensions to *FNAF* are the inevitable Easter eggs waiting to be found by true fans – but you’ll just have to keep your eyes peeled for those, as Tammi’s revealing nothing.

“Well, I can’t give any of those away,” she laughs. “I’ll say this: I think some will be immediately obvious. Then I think others will be found on a second or third watch. We’ve got some things that are buried in there a little bit more that you might not notice on the first watch.”

“Welcome to Freddy’s!
You’ll never leave...”

There’s scope for more, with a *Five Nights At Freddy’s* trilogy being mooted as a possibility. “I think we would all feel so fortunate to be able to continue making movies in this universe and with these characters,” Tammi says. “It’ll all depend on how things go with this first one, but should

we be lucky enough to make more I would absolutely want to be involved and would feel lucky to be included in those sequels, should they happen.” ●

Five Nights At Freddy’s is in cinemas from 27 October.



Bonnie,
Freddy and
Chica terrorise
young minds.



MONSTER MAKER

Lead designer Robert Bennett talks bringing Freddy's crew to life

How did you immerse yourself in this world?

For about seven years, I did all the animatronics for Rainforest Cafe, all the international ones, so I was already in that themed restaurant animatronic world. So it wasn't really a big jump for me to immerse myself in it. Once we finally got the job, and I started researching it, it actually pulled me in fairly quickly – there's a lot of lore to it. The designs of all the characters are really fun. So it was fun to delve into it. And the fanbase is kind of crazy. Like, they're obsessed with it. I think that was more interesting to me than the actual game itself.

Was it always your intention to replicate the design of the originals?

I approached it just as a fan of movies. There are certain IPs that I love and when a movie is made, it's either they nail it or it so misses the mark that you don't even want to watch it. But as a fan, you want it to be the thing that drew you in to begin with, you don't want a variation of it. So I wanted to stay as true to these characters as I could.

We received digital files straight from Scott [Cawthon] and that's what we've worked off. But it really was my intention to nail them as game-accurate as we possibly could. It was gonna be a challenge to create them regardless, and there was no reason to deviate from these designs because they're so good to begin with. I think that is more of a challenge to create a one-to-one replica of the thing than to deviate, because once you deviate then you can make excuses of why you did it that way. But when you do it as accurately as you can, I think that's the most fun.

What was the biggest challenge?

My biggest concern was getting humans in these costumes. When you go to Chuck E Cheese, the animatronics are big. So with these animatronics, in order to have a presence on set and with the actors, they had to be fairly big. The real trick is finding the right materials that can last the entire length of the shoot, but are also light and durable. Then just the logistics of getting them dressed and suited up and turned on and working every day. Those were the biggest challenges.

How did fans react online?

Everything I've seen has been super-positive. I know there was a big to-do about the red eyes in the poster, but once again, that's one of the fan lore things that I didn't even know about. I watched a couple of YouTube reaction videos to the trailer. This one guy was like, "It looks great, but I just wish they'd show the actual animatronics, it's all CG." Well, no, it was all our costumes. Everything in that trailer is our costumes

and nothing was touched up with digital. So it's fun that the fans appreciate how accurate they are.

Talk us through the main four...

Foxy was the most difficult, I guess, if we're going to talk about humans being in the costumes. Freddy, Bonnie and Chica all were suit-performed. But Foxy has holes in his chest; if it has holes all over it and damage scars, there's no way that we'd ever get a person in there. Even if we did it with greenscreen, it would be so expensive to fix it and put everything back in.

So because of his design we made Foxy as a full animatronic. His torso all the way up, his arms, torso, head, neck is all animatronic, and then his legs and feet were rod-puppeteered. We got a big boom arm and attached him to the end of that. So when he's walking through set, or down the hallway, we would position the boom arm where you couldn't see it – they would have to paint out a little bit of it.

Then there would be a performer on the head and face and on the arms. I think it took seven people to perform him when he was all up and going. But he was, in my opinion, the most impressive on set because he is an actual animatronic. So when we got him set up and it was all lit and everything, it was very impressive.

Chica...

Chica's my favourite, personally, just because it's Chica and Cupcake, it's a little tag team duo. Chica was fun because I got to use different textures – her beak is fibreglass, her skin is fleece. Her top feathers are more of a plastic. Then you have her fabric bib. Texturally, I think she was really fun to work on. Then Cupcake is a full animatronic as well.

Bonnie...

Same as Chica, we had to figure out what the textures and colours were. Bonnie's interesting, because in all of the media that I was looking at when I was researching it, he's purple. When I did the original designs, I made Bonnie purple. Well, I didn't realise that Bonnie is blue. It had something to do with the lighting in the first game. When you look at the plushies, and all the toys, Bonnie's usually purple. But Scott was the one that was like, "No, he's blue." So that was a lot of back and forth to get that nailed down correctly.

Freddy...

Freddy, he's the star of the show. So we really spent a lot of time with every aspect of his design from the hat, the fabric school tie, even down to what material we use for his little whisker spots. When you look at them all together as a group, they really read. They look like they're from the game. I think our team did an amazing job bringing these things to life.

What did people think of them?

Everyone loved them. Our little workshop was right outside the main door of the set and we'd always have the actors, and anyone who was new, come in. Almost every other day we'd have to do a little show-and-tell for whoever was visiting. Josh Hutcherson came in a couple of times and looked at everything. Scott Cawthon, when he came down, he was there about a week before we started filming, and he was so grateful: "This is exactly what I wanted them to look like. This is what I imagined they would look like". It's Scott that you want to make happy, and I think the fact that he was so impressed with everything made the work worthwhile.



No CG here – everything's done practically.

In real life, Piper Rubio loved the animatronics.

AT FIRST GLANCE, ELI ROTH AND children's television existing in the same sentence reads like a hoax. But then you're reminded that the splatter horror guy also directed 2018's *The House With A Clock In Its Walls*, which to date remains his biggest box office success. Happy to be a conduit to horror for audiences of any age, Roth united with writer James Frey (*I Am Number Four*) to come up with an intentionally scary series meant for older children. The fruit of their labours is the new DreamWorks animation *Fright Krewe*.

The 2D animated series is set in New Orleans, where graveyards are just as much a tourist attraction as the riverboat rides. The Creole culture permeates every frame and is personified by local teen Soleil Le Claire (Sydney Mikayla). She weaves horror into her everyday life, and ends up accidentally dragging four of her fellow classmates into fighting a two-centuries-old demonic threat.

KIDS CREOLE

Fright Krewe showrunners and writing partners Joanna Lewis and Kristine Songco (*Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous*) were pitched the series premise by DreamWorks not long after the duo finished work on the award-winning series *Kipo And The Age Of Wonderbeasts*.

"We were a little bit like, 'Us? You want us to do this?'" Joanna Lewis tells *SFX* of their initial reaction. "We are giant wusses and big scaredy cats, yet we both really love supernatural things. So once we saw that it was set in New Orleans with a backdrop of Voodoo, we were very interested."

Not to mention that Lewis had recently returned from a holiday in New Orleans where she participated in a Voodoo tour and became even more enamoured with the city. "I learned how many misconceptions about the faith I had, so it felt like this was a kismet situation where the universe pushed me to do that thing, and then *this* falls into our laps."

Building on the original premise, Lewis and Songco aged up the story and developed the series away from the initial "monster of the week" format. "Our love for YA had us coming up with deeper mythologies for everything," Songco explains. "Like, what is our version of a vampire? Or our version of a werewolf, which turned into a rougarou [a monster from Cajun folklore]. We made it more New Orleans-centric."

The Big Easy and its mélange of cultures and religions is a primary character in *Fright Krewe*, not just a pretty backdrop. Lewis says the spirit world mythology of Voodoo is integral to the story, and is the source of the



VOODOO

HORROR DIRECTOR ELI ROTH REVISITS THE JOY OF SCARING YOUNG AUDIENCES WITH NEW SERIES **FRIGHT KREWE**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

powers bestowed upon its teen ensemble. "Once we decided we were going to go into this deeper, darker, but also heavily Creole story, it changed a lot about what was initially there," Lewis says. "It was important to us if we're going to tell a story set in New Orleans based in Voodoo that our characters belong in that world."

Intent on portraying Voodoo in a more authentic and accurate way, Lewis says they hired writers and consultants who could steer

scripts in that direction. "We wanted to make sure that we were being as respectful as possible and that we were being as accurate as possible, while allowing ourselves to be fantastical because, obviously, there's a fantasy element to this show," Lewis explains.

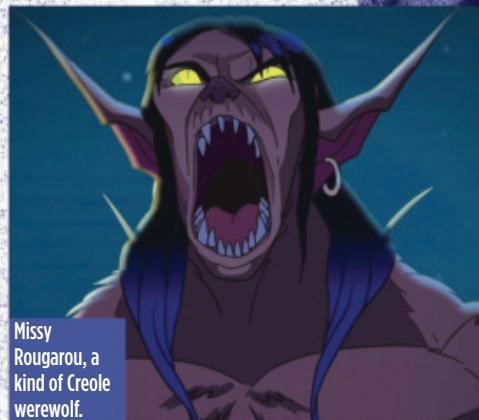
"James and Eli were very supportive throughout the whole process. They really supported us in whatever we were looking to do. They had our backs and they would help us formulate things too."



An ethereal Marie Laveau gives Soleil some help.



Missy Rougarou, a kind of Creole werewolf.



Soleil Le Claire (centre) and the gang, ready to go.

CHILD

In the series, the supernatural world manifests most dramatically in the way the teens – Soleil, Missy (Grace Lu), Pat (Terrence Little Gardenhigh), Stanley (Chester Rushing) and Maybe (Tim Johnson Jr) – are bestowed with individual loa (or Voodoo spirits) so they can fight the recently reborn demon spirit Belial (Jacques Colimon).

When it comes to their group dynamic, Songco says they wanted more realistic teen relationships. “Our kids aren’t perfect. They don’t have great chemistry in the beginning and they have a lot to learn throughout the series,” she says. “We have this mix of people who knew each other and have past issues or perceptions about who each other are, and people who are new and bring a fresh perspective to all that. Everyone also comes from different backgrounds.”

Ironically, these two “scaredy cats” have brought to life a genuinely chilling story which they hope will introduce new audiences to the genre. “Being able to share what we’ve worked on for the past four years is very exciting for us,” Lewis adds. ●

Fright Krewe is on Peacock and Hulu in the US. UK details are TBC.



Each kid has a spiritual “loa” to help guide them.

THE FIRST STEPHEN KING BOOK that Lindsey Anderson Beer read – at the age of nine – was *Pet Sematary*. Now she has directed her debut movie based on the novel which, despite reading much of his work since, remains her favourite King book.

“It’s such a surprising combination of things,” she says of the 1983 horror. “You hear the title *Pet Sematary*, it sounds somewhere between silly and absurdist, right? But it’s really just a backdoor entry into what is actually a very poignant meditation on grief and loss and parenthood and what we would do, really, to save or protect or spend one more day with the people that we love.

“There’s such a deeply human aspect of it. The horror really is secondary. But there’s this incredible dread and tension that runs throughout the entire book.

“There’s also this almost absurdist inner monologue of [protagonist] Lewis’s that runs throughout the book that I thought was so funny when I read it. Even as a kid and then revisiting it as an adult when I was preparing to make this film, I was struck by how funny the book really is, in a very subtle way.

“I’m always really drawn to stories that feel more true to life in that way, where life isn’t just a horror movie, or a comedy or a drama. It’s everything. That’s why *Pet Sematary* feels the most real to me, because it’s such a combination of different genres.”

So no pressure, then, to be directing her first movie and for it to be an adaptation of one of her favourite pieces of work – by a legend in the field...

“When I finally got the call, I was just absolutely elated and thrilled because Stephen King obviously is just such a giant in the genre, his work is staggering. To be able to adapt my favourite King book as my directorial debut, that’s important to me. It’s meaningful.”

EVIL BEGINNINGS

Beer has previous credits as a writer, but directing, she says, has always been the goal ever since she was a little kid.

“This was the first thing that really felt like this could be ‘the one’, for a variety of reasons. One because of my passion for *Pet Sematary*, but also because I had had a very good experience working with the producers on *Transformers [The Last Knight]*, and one of the producers, Mark Vahradian, had said that as soon as I wanted to direct that he really wanted to be the producer →



UNHALLOWED GROUND

DIRECTOR LINDSEY ANDERSON BEER ON
WHY HER FEATURE DEBUT **PET SEMATARY:
BLOODLINES** IS PERSONAL

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**





Jackson White as a young Jud Crandall from the novel.

on that project. It just felt like it was the right mix of people and project.”

Thankfully the reception following the announcement of *Pet Sematary: Bloodlines* seemed resoundingly positive. “So positive!” the director beams. “Honestly, shockingly positive. I thought there would be a lot of jaded, normal, typical commentary about, ‘Oh, we don’t need another sequel or a prequel...’ People tend to slam IP without even knowing what something is about.

“But people seem very excited to learn more about the backstory, and to know that this isn’t just some random chapter in the story that tells basically the same thing we’ve seen before. No, you haven’t seen this before. This helps explain more about the mythology and about the origin of the character that’s so iconic, and people were really excited and it surprised me, but it delighted me.”

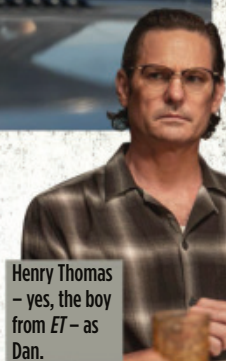
AMERICAN PSYCHO

The decision to have this instalment be a prequel to the 2019 remake predated Beer’s involvement in the project. She says that the producers felt that the story of Timmy Bateman – who appeared extensively in the novel but less so in the 1989 film – was the best place to land a prequel, because it hadn’t been properly explored before.

“It’s such an interesting piece of the lore, because the book basically implies that it was because Jud had this interaction with the evil and Timmy earlier in his life that the evil was now targeting him as an adult, but that’s not something we ever learn in the film. So it seems like such an important missing piece in the mythology that I’m really glad that’s what they chose to focus in on.”

The film also gives the viewer further reason to consider the actual origins of the evil presence – something that Beer has also given thought to.

“You could do so many movies within the *Pet Sematary* universe that peel back the onion more and show more and more of what this evil really is, and really comes from, but I



Henry Thomas – yes, the boy from *ET* – as Dan.

certainly have lots of versions of a very extensive origin story in my head.” She says additional films in this world “would be something that I would be further interested in exploring.

“It was definitely a tightrope to balance because I didn’t want to give it all away. I also feel like if you explain too much, it almost becomes more confusing, but I was trying to just explain enough that it felt intriguing and satisfying in and of itself, but would beg more questions.”

That’s not to say that Beer didn’t give herself much to work with on *Bloodlines* – quite the opposite, in fact. “The biggest challenge of directing the movie was we had the scenes and the scope of a movie that would take about three to four times as long to film. It’s not like the 2019 film where it’s mostly contained to a couple locations; there are a lot of locations, a lot of characters, a lot of different sequences that all needed equal love and to be pulled off with equal precision.

“But we had the same amount of days to shoot as something that was super-contained, with only a couple of characters. So it was intense. Every day people would tell me they had never shot this many scenes in a day.

“But everybody was also really, really enthusiastic to come to set every day and pull it off and it became a really fun challenge. It was like our own little personal war we were fighting and we felt like we were winning it, which was really exciting.”

It’s little wonder the shoot was intense – with the prequel already being a period piece, it later features a flashback incorporating a further period piece within it.



Isabella LaBlanc and Forrest Goodluck.

Just a normal Friday night at the *SFX* editor’s place.



“If you’re barraging people with gore over and over again, you just get numb to it”

“Did *not* make it easy for myself,” Beer laughs. “But I wanted to make sure that it continually surprised you and wasn’t hitting the same beat over and over again and that the movie felt like an experience.

“Everything about the film was obviously very ambitious and especially to do as a first time director, but I believe in big swings.”

Beer grins broadly when we tell her that she managed to elicit scares out of even *SFX*’s hardened horror hack, by sometimes alluding to situations and then at other times outright depicting violence.

“It’s hard these days, because there’s so much horror stuff out there, there’s so much content, and there’s so much stuff that just has the shock value,” she considers. “Personally, I think to be effective still and to elicit emotion, when people are kind of numb to all this

The legendary Pam Grier still kicking ass as Majorie.





Natalie Alyn Lind plays a mysterious character.

imagery, is to just find that right combination of what you show and what you don't. Because if you're just barraging people with gore over and over again, you just get numb to it. So I wanted to pick and choose those moments where you really get to see things, and in other instances leave it to the imagination. What you can't see is sometimes scarier than what you can see."

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Animal devotees need not worry – despite the title of the film, the focus is very much on humans this time round. "Particularly as an animal lover, I wanted to make sure there weren't any horrific shots of animal deaths, I don't think that that resonates with a whole bunch of people, including myself"

That's something, we suggest, that all at *SFX* would agree with. "As somebody whose dog was the love of her life, I totally understand what you're saying."

Everyone else was fair game though, and after writing about blood and guts previously, this was her first time dealing with those elements on a practical level.

"I love it," she says. "It's so fun. Not to spoil anything but there's a scene with some guts and even just designing what the guts look like and putting the right blood prints on

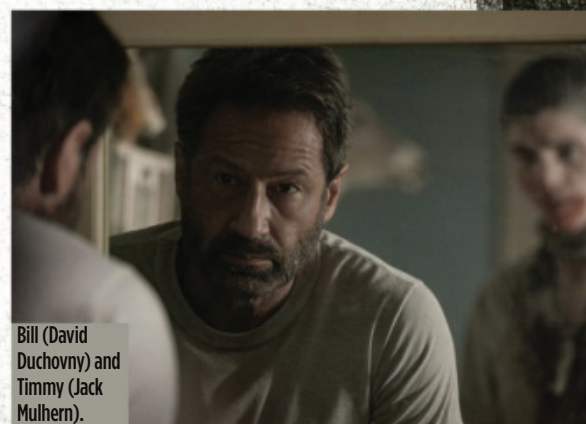
something, I felt like I was a kid doing finger paint. I had my hands all up in there.

"As a viewer, it's so hard because you're caught up in the reality of it, you're enraptured by the film, and so it affects you more, but when you're behind the scenes doing it obviously it's demystified. It's not scary or gross to be a part of it. It's 'Oh, this blood is cherry-flavoured'.

"People made fun of me because I wanted to get a shot of the blood dripping off of Timmy's hand that was backlit by the sun that was out and I was like, 'Oh, it's just gonna be gorgeous.' They're like, 'Oh sure, gorgeous, what are you talking about?' It's a different version of gorgeous but I just find that stuff so fun."

Next up, when situations allow, is a theatrical release based on another much-loved franchise. "I'm directing a *Sleepy Hollow* reboot for Paramount. I am directing, producing and one day will be writing it again. I turned in the first draft a week before the strike started. So I'm really, really eager to get back to it.

"It's so hard to immerse yourself so heavily in a world and then just have to stop completely and put it down, which is what I did. So I can't wait to get back to it. But I'm really excited about that. It definitely has



Bill (David Duchovny) and Timmy (Jack Mulhern).

more of a horror element to it, I love it so much. So much fun."

Until then, she feels there's a message in *Bloodlines* for viewers to take away.

"It's a movie about parents and children and friends and just the bond of love and what we'll do for the people that we love, and the lengths we will go to protect them. I hope that they come away from it feeling like that's enough in life, and that helps save the day." ●

Pet Sematary: Bloodlines is on Paramount+ from 6 October.

LUKE ROMAN IS BACK TO
SELL HAUNTED HOUSES IN
SURREALESTATE, BUT WILL
HIS MISSING POWERS EQUATE
TO TERRIFYING RETURNS?

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

EVEN IN THE BEST OF MARKETS, it's been said that the process of buying or selling a house is one of the most stressful things you can do. Whether it's the horror show of impromptu showings, the bidding wars or the demons in the basement... Okay, that last one is definitely *not* a common issue unless you're watching Syfy's *SurrealEstate*.

The horror dramedy series amps up that "real estate as nightmare" metaphor by making it literal due to supernatural hauntings. In the series, the Roman Agency, led by Luke Roman (Tim Rozon), specialises in properties possessing the stink of paranormal issues which prevents the owners from selling their homes.

UNDES RES

Luke and his small agency take on these "special cases" with the intention of purging them of their pesky spectres. In season one, that was all well and good until Luke's powers of necromancy disappeared and his newest agent, Susan Ireland (Sarah Levy), had to use her pyrokinesis powers to save everyone in the season finale.

According to executive producer/series director Danishka Esterhazy, season two opens with a much-changed dynamic inside the Roman Agency.

"A lot of the beginning of the season is about Susan coming into her own power because she's been running the agency while Luke has been MIA," Esterhazy tells *SFX*. Still powerless and a bit adrift, Luke will return and perhaps be less than gracious in taking back the reins of power he so unceremoniously dropped. "We actually have a little bit of conflict between Luke and Susan at the beginning of the season when he comes back," the director teases.

Susan (Sarah Levy) and Luke (Tim Rozon).



The quirky series deftly balances its unique tone of horror comedy with a "monster of the week" format that Esterhazy says they worked hard to get just right. "In season one, George Olson, our showrunner, had a bit of a mantra: make it scary, make it funny and make us care," she explains. "We've brought that through to season two, but we've just amped up all three.

"We've leaned into our scary scenes. We've brought more comedy, but we've never lost

SCARER'S



Susan is a twisted firestarter. Handy.

"Uh, yes, I think he does come with the house."

the fact that these are stories that are supposed to touch people. When we talk about haunted houses, you're talking about things that can be very tragic, like the loss of a loved one, or a relationship ending before it could be healed.

"These are things that are very universal, that we all understand, and can be very powerful. So we always want to balance those episodes to make sure that we also bring the heart."

Esterhazy says their gifted ensemble is another big reason why audiences bonded so quickly with the series, and that Olson and his writers spent more time this year focusing on the agency's individual employees. "All of our ensemble gets an opportunity in different episodes to step forward and to reveal more of their backstory," the director says. "Zooley (Savannah Basley) gets to do a lot more this season. Susan has won Zooley over and now there's a true bond between them. We also

learn more about Father Phil (Adam Korson) and his history. He and his husband are trying to adopt. And Auggie (Maurice Dean Wint) has a lot of depth that we haven't had a chance to fully flesh out, so some of that gets to come out to play in season two."

What about the show's scares, which are often surprisingly intense? Esterhazy says she and Olsen spent a lot of time talking about finding fresh ways to depict familiar haunting concepts this season. "When I come in, it becomes a collaboration between me and the writers trying to find ways to execute [the

"The ghosts that inhabit those houses are pretty hardcore. There's high stakes"

script] in ways that are original and have impact," she explains. "There's only so many kinds of ghosts, so you don't want to be a cliché and you don't want to lean into a tired trope. You want to find new ways to surprise people with ghosts that still feel familiar."

Esterhazy promises that they come through on that front with plenty of chills, which will be parcelled out across many new locations in Newfoundland, where they shoot the series.

"In the first half of the season, what's really great is that the houses we meet in season two really have teeth," she asserts. "The ghosts that inhabit those houses are pretty hardcore. There's high stakes. They're very dangerous, so the team is really challenged with those houses."

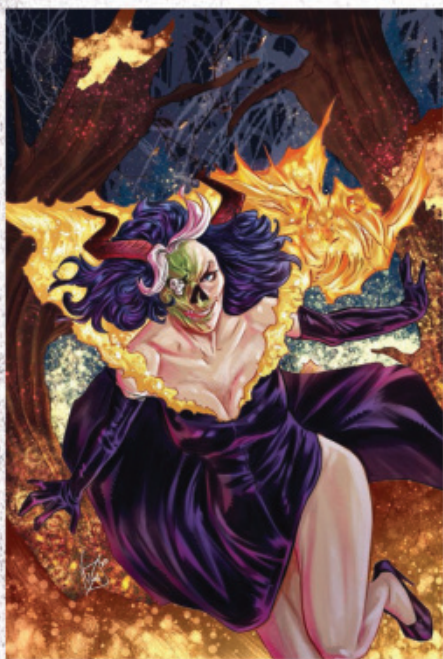
But something even bigger will be waiting for them to arrive at its door. "As the season progresses, we'll meet our major house that replaces the Donovan House," she says, referring to their main haunted property in season one. "It's really going to come down a lot in this season to Susan solving that."

SurrealEstate is on Syfy in the US and Sky/Now in the UK.

MARKET



TERROR TALES



FROM DRACULA TO MARVEL ZOMBIES, THIS HALLOWEEN OFFERS A BUMPER CROP OF SCARY COMICS

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

The story centres on the grown up version of Ginger Snapp. “She’s the perfect person for us to welcome to Riverdale, as hailing from Hilldale she’s technically an outsider, who has only ever read about how fantastic Riverdale is, which is exactly what I wanted to riff on for the readers, as well,” explains Chase. “The fact that Ginger feels singled out and on the back foot is key to her experience in Riverdale. Especially as fabulous friends Nancy Woods and Veronica Lodge tour her around – they know all the nicest kids and best places to hang out. Ginger really gets the VIP treatment, and it both excites and intimidates her.”

In *Madam Satan: Hell On Earth*, writer Eliot Rahal and artist Vincenzo Federici reveal a secret link between the Queen of Hell and Jinx. “They’re unlikely allies; kindred spirits who meet as survivors of the apocalypse. And Jinx’s role and her lineage play a pivotal part in the story that binds her and Madam Satan together,” says Rahal, who promises a literal Hell on Earth. “In this story, Madam Satan must navigate a world in which Lucifer has won, as all the magic in the world is now gone and has liberated humanity from all its bonds and burdens. It gets super crazy and is like *The Purge* set in Riverdale!”

Inspired by *M3GAN*, anthology *Fear The Funhouse Presents... Toybox Of Terror* comprises three stories that highlight the sinister side of children’s playthings. “I’m honoured to give Evelyn Evernever her introduction to the world of Archie Horror,” says Timmy Heague, who is partnered on framing story “Love Evernever” with artist Ryan Caskey. “To prepare, I read her every appearance. From her first panel, she’s always been seen carrying her doll, Minerva. So she was perfect to be the driving force in our story where killer dolls run rampant.”



“Timmy provided such a perfect frame, as the idea of a toymaker granting Archie Comics characters’ deepest desires gave us all the perfect sandbox and tied all of the stories together,” adds Danielle Paige, whose story is drawn by Tango. “It’s the classic horror trope – be careful what you wish for. I had the honour of writing Midge Klump, whose wish is to have a BFF. The toymaker grants her wish and gives her a CH3RYL doll, which, in the mode of *M3GAN*, is tailored specifically for her owner and to be her best friend literally forever.”

“My story features Mad Doctor Doom and his assistant,” continues Michael Northrop, who teams up on “The Gift That Keeps Killing” with artist Ryan Jampole. “These are deep cut characters who are always ready for a little mayhem. I just turn the dial up to 11 by adding a menacing little doll called Plucky, a pair of conspicuously large scissors and one big, fatal misunderstanding.”

Madam Satan: Hell On Earth is out now, *Chilling Adventures Presents... Welcome To Riverdale* is out 11 October, *Fear The Funhouse Presents Toybox Of Terror* is out 18 October.

ARGHIE COMICS

Archie is back for a second Month Of Mayhem

AFTER LAST YEAR’S INAUGURAL Month Of Mayhem, Archie Horror is unleashing a trio of spine-chilling new titles, including *Welcome To Riverdale*, which exposes the previously hidden shadowy side of Archie’s hometown.

“People have certain expectations of what Riverdale is, but as we’ve seen throughout the Horror publishing line, the town is anything but predictable,” says writer Amy Chase, who is joined on the title by artist Liana Kangas. “We definitely hit some iconic touchstones like [diner] Pop’s Chock’lit Shoppe, but there’s also a mysterious new business that no one seems to notice...”

“Amy and I really wanted to reshape the concept of what we know of the town, and bleed the visuals from *Pleasantville* into the eerie palette of *Stepford Wives*.”





BLOODY MARVEL

Marvel marks Halloween with *Marvel Zombies: Black, White And Blood* and *Crypt Of Shadows*

COMPRISING THE SECOND *Crypt Of Shadows* one-shot and the four-issue *Marvel Zombies: Black, White And Blood*, Marvel's offerings this spooky season are anthologies, which display the darker side of heroes like Spider-Man, who at the hands of writer Alex Segura and artist Javi Fernandez is forced to fight undead versions of his loved ones. "When I was asked to contribute to *Marvel Zombies: Black, White And Blood*, I knew I wanted to focus on Spider-Man," says Segura. "His entire saga is so fraught with tragedy and pathos that it felt like a perfect fit. I can confirm you'll be seeing a lot of familiar faces – and some terrifying surprises! I'm really proud of the twist we came up with."

Daredevil features in both Declan Shalvey and Alex Lins's

Crypt Of Shadows outing, where he faces off against Man-Thing, and Garth Ennis and Rachael Stott's *Marvel Zombies: Black, White And Blood* strip, in which he commits unforgivable sins. "I read the Frank Miller *Daredevil* in the '80s and really liked it, and that's probably what's inspired his appearance in the story," admits Ennis. "But the Catholic thing never occurred to me. If I was going to feature it in that context, I'd probably have Matt hunting down zombie paedophile priests, and delivering unto them in undeath what they so richly deserved in life."

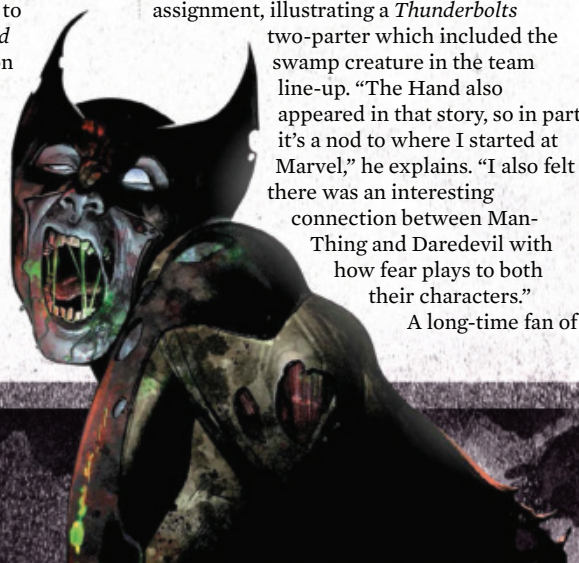
For Hornhead's meeting with Man-Thing, Declan Shalvey harks back to his first Marvel assignment, illustrating a *Thunderbolts* two-partner which included the swamp creature in the team line-up. "The Hand also appeared in that story, so in part it's a nod to where I started at Marvel," he explains. "I also felt there was an interesting connection between Man-Thing and Daredevil with how fear plays to both their characters."

A long-time fan of

Marvel's horror stable, Cavan Scott pits the Living Mummy against the Merc with the Mouth. "I went for Deadpool because I wanted the title 'Living And The Dead', and also for the fact that they were an odd couple appealed," says Scott, who is partnered with artist Devmalya Pramanik. "Editor Mark Basso wanted to tease a new mission for the Mummy as well, which was icing on the bandaged cake."

Teamed with artist Paul Davidson, Al Ewing focuses on the Sorcerer Supreme's bloodsucking sibling. "There are two things I especially like about Victor Strange – one is that he's Dr Strange's evil vampire brother," says Ewing. "That's only for certain values of 'evil', admittedly, since he never asked for it and tried to stake himself, but having Doc responsible for his existence adds some fun nuance. The other thing is that he makes a great horror host in the classic style, so a framing sequence is really the perfect place for him... at least until he re-enters Strange's life as an antagonist."

Crypt Of Shadows issue one is out 18 October. *Marvel Zombies: Black, White And Blood* issue one is out 25 October.



FRIGHT FEST

From Dark Horse, two comics to lose your head over!

DESCRIBING IT AS “POPCORN HORROR,” CULLEN BUNN says that *Midnite Show*, his latest project with *The Sixth Gun* collaborator Brian Hurtt, is ideal for Halloween. “This book is full of terror, bloodshed and menace, but also full of fun. You’ll have the time of your life getting scared with this one!”

As Bunn admits, “there’s a bit of a meta element here”, with the story exploring what happened to filmmaker Basil Saxon, who disappeared on the set of what would have been his masterpiece, as chaos breaks out at a film festival 50 years later after a screening of footage from the cursed movie. “It’s about the creation of stories, about the lives these tales take, and how they change the longer they linger about,” explains Bunn, who has worked out an elaborate backstory for Saxon and his company Midnite Studios. “We could have left that a mystery, but Brian and I can’t help but dig deeper into the stories we’re working on. We created a massive back catalogue of Midnite Studio films, so we know what they were about and how the monsters changed from movie to movie.”

The pair based the supernatural creatures that menace the cinema audience on the classic Universal monsters. “The most fun was the Dweller of the Deep – our amphibious monster in the mould of the Creature from the Black Lagoon,” says Hurtt. “Bringing him to life was a blast because, along with the Necro-Wolf, he ended up being the most feral and terrifying of the monsters.”

Dark Horse are also publishing the first *Headless Horseman Halloween Annual*; modelled on vintage magazines like *Creepy* and *Eerie*, it’s composed of five scary short stories that take varying degrees of inspiration from Washington Irving’s classic ghost story.

“I love haunted house stories and have always felt drawn to them like a moth to the light of a jack-o-lantern,” says *Oppenheimer* actor David Dastmalchian, who’s paired with co-writer Leah Kilpatrick and artist Tyler Crook. “Leah and I wanted to tackle something that terrified us from the perspective of monsters in a haunted house. The tradition of Washington Irving’s unexpected twists was an inspiration.”

“The question that David and I asked ourselves was, ‘What strikes fear into the unbeating hearts of monsters?’” continues Kilpatrick. “And, of course, a pumpkin-headed figure has to make an appearance to pay tribute to the Headless Horseman.”

However, there’s no sign of Washington Irving’s scary rider in Angela Slatter and Valerio Burzo’s “Some Wander”. “It’s about Halloween and mothers and children and what happens when, well, some wander,” explains Slatter. “I’m Australian and we don’t have a Halloween tradition, but I’ve seen enough horror films to know what can go wrong and what scares folk. I liked the idea of mixing a European sensibility with that typical American holiday, just to make things extra creepy!”

Midnite Show issue one is out 4 October, *The Headless Horseman Halloween Annual* issue one is out 18 October.





TALKING DEAD

Skybound's the limit for *Universal Monsters: Dracula* and *Creepshow Vol 2*

AFTER DELVING INTO THE unexplained in *The Department Of Truth*, James Tynion IV and Martin Simmonds are embracing classic horror in *Dracula* – the first offering from Skybound Entertainment's new Universal Monsters line.

"I wanted to do something appealing with the visuals of our story, but didn't want to create a straight recreation of the Universal movie," explains Simmonds. "The aim was to push the visuals in a more abstract and nightmarish direction, whilst retaining elements that would keep the book grounded in the aesthetics of the movie."

While the comic is set in the early 1900s, the 1931 film was a reference point. "We had to steer clear of any likeness of Bela Lugosi, but followed

Dracula's costumes used in the movie," explains Simmonds, who combined traditional and digital artistic methods. "A common theme is the contrast between the scientific world of Dr Seward, and insects and spiders overlayed on Renfield's panels. *Dracula's* supernatural powers are depicted using bold colours, mostly red, and often we see those colours creeping into panels as if his powers are overpowering his victims."

Halloween also brings the second volume of Skybound's *Creepshow* anthology, with creators again taking their lead equally from the Shudder TV show and the 1982 film.

"As long as the Creep shows up and does his schtick, and what follows has a nice streak of black humour running through it, you're probably in business," says Garth Ennis, who teams up with artist Becky Cloonan in issue one. "Our story features perhaps the lighter side of a very serious social issue."

Partnering in issue two with artist Abigail Larsen, "who turned a grim tale into a very grim fairy tale," Dan Watters enjoyed

Creepshow's no-holds-barred approach. "I'm accustomed to being asked to tone down the more audacious horror elements," he laughs. "This is the first time I was asked to tone it up!" Influenced by Harlan Ellison's short story "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream", Zoe Thorogood's "Eternity, Eternity, Eternity" in issue three adopts a more personal angle. "The story follows an immortal woman over the span of billions of years," she explains. "I spend a weird amount of time thinking about death, and my biggest fear is the idea of an afterlife. Having to spend eternity with your own self and all your regrets sounds like hell."

Described by the writer as "a terrifying tale inspired by my experiences of staying up past bedtime and watching scary TV shows I wasn't supposed to see", Michael Walsh's "The Man With No Eyes" in issue two sees a boy encounter a strange magician who speaks through the TV. "It feels very like a classic *Creepshow* adventure," he says. "It's a tight story with a small cast that reinforces a lesson learned the hard way."

Universal Monsters: Dracula issue one is out 25 October, *Creepshow* Volume 2 issue one is out now.





TREK OR TREAT

It's the season for scary stories
in *Star Trek: Holo-ween*

CENTRED ON *NEXT GEN*'S FABLED HOLODECK, weekly series *Star Trek: Holo-ween* sees IDW celebrating All Hallow's Eve in style. "That was my starting point," says writer Christopher Sequeira, who scripted the five-parter for artist Joe Eisma. "Maximise the Holodeck's always enjoyable ability to create a world within a world, but lean the whole idea into the macabre genre. The other point about Halloween is that it's a wide cultural phenomenon; you don't need a Holodeck for it because people dress up for Halloween without Holodecks every year. It was almost a case of bringing the world of Halloween into the already plastic and changeable dominions of the Holodeck, and then finding a way to amp the possibilities and the stakes up even more."

Explaining that "there are multiple classic horror stories wrapped up in this one adventure", Sequeira says that the Holodeck setting evokes the long-standing trope of telling tales around a campfire. "I was conscious of making sure the famous characters all had their own moments," says Sequeira, who was influenced by Robert Bloch's 1943 short story "Yours Truly, Jack The Ripper" – which in turn inspired the late author's 1967 *Star Trek* episode "Wolf In The Fold", which first introduced *Holo-ween*'s main villain, Redjac. "Since the Enterprise crew members would be intertwined with the greatest monsters of literature, they needed an adversary that counterpointed them on multiple levels, including thematic, visual and intellectual, and Redjac was it."

Sequeira also promises appearances from Frankenstein's Monster, a Werewolf, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, a Mummy, and "a Klingon twist" on HP Lovecraft's Deep Ones. "I knew if we played with this idea we had to make that aspect the centrepiece, visually and thematically," he adds. "But it's also *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, so we had to

have a rock solid reason why these monsters were appearing.

"All I can say is that there's a classic *Next Gen*-styled scene where Picard's crew meet and discuss the significance of such horror iconographies, because that's what Jean-Luc and team would do!" ●

Star Trek: Holo-Ween issue one is out 4 October.



IN SEASON ONE OF *SHINING VALE*, series creators Sharon Horgan (*Bad Sisters*) and Jeff Astrof (*Friends*) expertly connected the swirling chaos of female ageing and mental illness to that of a horror show. Mediocre writer, mother and wife Pat Phelps (Courteney Cox) is their deeply flawed “heroine”, who attempts to salvage her messed-up family with a reboot in the suburbs.

There, she hoped to tackle menopause, writer’s block, her broken marriage to Terry (Greg Kinnear) due to her affair, and reconnect to her checked out teens. Instead, she got a house haunted by the spirit of Rosemary, a murderous ’50s housewife (Mira Sorvino), a prescription drug addiction which incited more infidelity and a *very* bad moment with an axe.

In season two, the Phelps family is even more haunted, literally and figuratively. It picks up four months after the season finale. Pat is just exiting a mental institute, Terry has amnesia from an axe-hit to the head, and kids Gaynor (Gus Birney) and Jake (Dylan Gage) have been left to fend for themselves in their even more decrepit home.

Director Liz Friedlander, whose episodes ended season one and open season two, tells *SFX* that the Phelps’s reunion is going to severely test Pat and her fragile stability. As her mentally ill mother, Joan (Judith Light), puts it so succinctly in the first episode: “You can’t get rid of mental illness. That shit’s like glitter.”

RUTH BOMBS

With the family dynamic firmly established in the first season, Friedlander says Astrof and the writers got more ambitious with story, visual storytelling and the overall insanity. “You have more leeway as you know these people a little bit more, so you can take a bigger leap,” the director explains.

It’s certainly a leap to see Sorvino back as the Phelps’s very much alive neighbour, Ruth. “Without giving away where it’s gonna go, Rosemary/Ruth is back,” Friedlander confirms. This very sweet incarnation has ingratiated herself with Terry and the kids, which creates a bit of a mental crisis for Pat.

Friedlander says Ruth’s presence makes Pat question if she’s better at all. “Can she learn to live with her mental illness in the embodiment of this new character? Or must she take an adversarial relationship with it?” the director asks. “Pat vacillates, asking, ‘Do I embrace this, or do I push this away?’ So that starts that progression at the beginning of the season.”

Asked if either pose a threat to Pat, Friedlander says, “I think what’s interesting



FAMILY TIES

DIRECTOR LIZ FRIEDLANDER
TEASES THE NEXT-STAGE HORRORS
AWAITING THE PHELPS FAMILY IN
SEASON TWO OF *SHINING VALE*

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

There’s
modesty, and
there’s taking
things too far.





The Phelps family are back, as happy as ever.



Gus Birney as Gaynor: not a popular kid, apparently.



Pat's had a little trip away to a special hospital.



Greg Kinnear and Courteney Cox as Terry and Pat.



with Rosemary, and with Ruth, is that you have these women in pain, who were silenced and who felt limited. How much of them are Pat, and how much of them are not Pat? What's so interesting is Pat and these women have so much in common. And yet there's also this adversarial relationship going on."

What about the house itself, which conjured up Rosemary in season one and seems to have kicked Pat's issues into overdrive the minute she entered it? Friedlander says, "So many times, I'll work on a project and we'll say that the setting is a character, but we mean that metaphorically. Here we mean it literally," she clarifies.

"The house is a character. So in the same way that we get to know the characters in our show, the house reveals itself more throughout this season too. You go to more places in the house that you didn't know existed. The house physically, emotionally and kind of horrifyingly reveals itself even further. You think you've seen everything, like the secret basement, but that just keeps

opening up. Like any character in any scene, this house is influencing the family.

"When Pat comes home, she and we, as the audience, are able to experience it from her point of view, hearing noises and sounds and the pipes that we didn't the first time," she continues. "It's a voyeuristic point of view, like Pat is always being watched."

Friedlander adds that Astrof and the writers make sure they create a duality, so viewers can also credibly believe that the weirdness is all in Pat's head. "Any time there's something spooky that happens, it's really shown from a subjective point of view because if everybody's seeing the same ghosts, there's no story," the director explains.

Where exactly Pat and her brood will end up this season, she won't say. But Astrof isn't done telling his story yet: "He deeply loves these characters, and would be happy continuing to write for them." ●

Shining Vale is on Starz from 13 October and Lionsgate+ in the UK.



Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the USA.

PREVIOUSLY ON FUCKING CHUCKY – the gang thought they’d got rid of the pint-sized killer once and for all, but one last doll remained, hiding in drag before attacking Tiffany/Jennifer Tilly. But why is Chucky now taking refuge in the White House?

Producer Alex Hedlund says it’s definitely not a political statement, but rather a “really creepy chamber piece.” He tells *SFX* that series creator Don Mancini pitched season three as “*House Of Cards* meets *The Shining* with Chucky dropped in the centre of it.”

The Overlook Hotel angle is the focus, he says, describing the White House as another “creepy old house that’s full of secrets.” It’s there that Chucky is exploiting a family dealing with grief, with Devon Sawa as President. “It’s a great family drama that then has awesome Chucky mischief at the centre of it, some great iconic kills and just *fun*,” Hedlund stresses. “Truly, Don really wanted to make this the scariest season yet, and I think he succeeded.”

The season opener sees something of a “resetting the clock”, allowing new viewers to

Henry (Callum Vinson) and Grant (Jackson Kelly).



AMERICAN DOLL

easily jump on board yet still playing to what’s gone before, including legacy characters and cameo appearances. Lexy’s searching for her sister – kidnapped by Tiffany/Tilly – while Jake and Devon are still finding time to take their relationship to the next level.

“They’re late teens, and they’ve been together for a while and they are deeply in love,” Hedlund explains. “So that will naturally trend into taking things to the next level physically. Don crafted a way with the writers to handle that storyline very

delicately, and make it feel very emotional and not exploitative at all.”

That’s not to say that love still conquers all; Hedlund says there’s a “running theme where anybody could get killed at any moment”. Despite all that, the friendship group still has to focus on getting their hands on the elusive Good Guys doll, whatever the cost.

“You’ve got this amazing backdrop of the White House, which is one of the most secure places on earth – this idea that it’s meant to keep people out and be very secretive and all

about the sort of claustrophobia of that. That’s just perfect for an icon like Chucky to really exploit and do his bidding.”

Despite the location, Hedlund says they’re trying to make it “feel as grounded as possible.” He explains further: “It’s not going to feel like *The West Wing* where we’re going off on subplots about global politics, you want to keep it rooted within the family dynamics.”

But what exactly is Chucky’s masterplan now? Why does it involve America’s First Family? Come on now, we’re not going to fuck



Henry gins up on the history of the White House.

with the Chuck by giving away spoilers... "It's very unexpected," Hedlund teases. "It is unlike anything that we've seen in the previous seasons or the films. It may be, dare I say, the darkest agenda yet. There's also a personal interest for Chucky that is very unique for this season."

Storyline aside, Chucky's very much up to his usual tricks in real life too, Hedlund says. "He's very much a diva. It really takes a village to create that performance. Because it's not fully CGI, it is such an endeavour to make sure that his head unit is making the right gestures with his hands, or that his eyes are blinking or his mouth is in sync."

"It's a constant recalibration and certainly the more active or intricate the things happen, in terms of the kills, then that always takes a little bit longer. But it's certainly something that is painstaking and hopefully it comes through when everything is fully rendered and the puppeteers are painted out. We have several dolls, everything is practical and VFX is really just an enhancement."

CHUCKY EGGS

Hedlund says that there will be meta moments and "great Easter eggs" but that they may be slightly more subtle or fewer than you'd expect, so as to not be "at the expense of turning off new fans."

One thing that's definitely returning is now established as a spooky staple. "True to form in the last two seasons – because we're kind of a Halloween show – there is a Halloween party in episode four that I think tops what we've seen previously. Hopefully, we'll put everybody in the right kind of Halloween spirit. It certainly has a high body count..."

It's been announced that the second half of season three will follow in 2024, with scripts completed before the ongoing writers' strike. As for the future of Chucky past season three? "It's a labour of love, I'm happy to do it. There's no shortage of creative kills and character storylines, certainly." ●

Chucky is on Syfy and Peacock now.

POSSE

LIFE IN PLASTIC
ISN'T QUITE
FANTASTIC FOR
CHUCKY

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



Devon, Jake and Lexy being teenagers.

CLIMATE CHANGE, ECONOMIC austerity, the housing crisis – just a few of the fun realities facing millennials these days. Trying to slog through all that as a young filmmaker in her late twenties, writer/director Anna Zlokovic tells *SFX* that anxiety and self-doubt crept in, and eventually sent her to therapy.

“I was in a place in my career where I was really anxious, and Covid just was so difficult. I didn’t know what was gonna happen,” the director explains. Creatively, it got her thinking about her favourite film, *The Fly*. “I was dying to do something in that vein, and this concept of anxiety made me think there’s something here, metaphorically. I can turn it into a *Fly*-esque kind of movie, where this creature just grows and grows in stages, until it just takes over everything.”

The idea turned into the short film “Appendage”, which premiered in 2021 as part of 20th Digital’s *Bite Size Halloween* series. “Once we started shooting the short, the producers were really impressed,” Zlokovic remembers. “They actually came on set and asked to see a pitch for the feature.”

“I didn’t have the feature script, at all,” she laughs. “I put it together very, very quickly. It was genuinely, ‘Erm, like *this!*’ It was almost like a Dadaist blurb.” Luckily, 20th Digital Studio and Hulu Originals loved it and now *Appendage* is a feature film.

It explores the near-debilitating anxiety and depression issues swirling around nervous, aspiring New York fashion designer Hannah (Hadley Robinson). Navigating job pressures, her mother’s lack of empathy and a boyfriend (Brandon Mychal Smith) she’s worried might be cheating on her, Hannah’s inner turmoil literally manifests from within, and comes out of her body in the form of a creepy, sentient appendage.

“[Hannah’s] career struggle and anxiety, I’ve never really seen that for millennials,” Zlokovic says. “I just wanted to express that.”

A LITTLE EXTRA

Zlokovic expanded the short into a more fleshed-out script in the course of three months. The appendage creature from the short had to be recreated into a more complicated physical entity for the movie.

“It was practical effects or nothing,” Zlokovic says. “That’s just my aesthetic as a filmmaker, in general. I’m always going to try to do that. But with this film, it felt especially important. The creature is representing anxiety, depression and all these things, so it needs to feel like a visceral, real presence. It’s not gonna hit if it’s not actually real and the actors aren’t actually interacting with it.”

Hannah
(Hadley
Robinson)
gets a shock.

GROWTH SIDES NOW

DIRECTOR ANNA ZLOKOVIC EXPLORES INNER
DEMONS THAT BECOME CORPOREAL IN MILLENNIAL
HORROR FILM **APPENDAGE**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

“Part of what I learned about dealing with anxiety is you have to have humour”



Emily Hampshire as Hannah's friend Claudia.

She turned to special effects make-up and creature designers Amber Mari and Jim Ojala, with whom she'd collaborated for a decade on other creative projects. They were able to look at the creature in the short as the test run for the movie version. “The little short creature was a bit more comedic,” Zlokovic explains. “But in a feature-length movie, where our lead character truly has a mental breakdown, I wanted the creature to have some comedy but have a foot in a scarier and more gross space.”

The appendage becomes the bane of Hannah's existence, vocalising every terrible thought she's had about herself. It's soul-crushing but kind of funny too. Zlokovic says that was always her goal with the film, which features some well-known comedy actors like Michael Smith and Desmin Borges (both featured in the series *You're The Worst*), and Emily Hampshire (*Schitt's Creek*, *12 Monkeys*).

“Part of what I learned about dealing with anxiety is you have to have humour to get through it,” Zlokovic says. “It actually was a point that I made to hire comedic actors. You want transformative actors who have a comedy background, because what Hannah is going through is really harrowing. I want [audiences] to remain on board and have a good time. And to juxtapose Hannah.”

Hampshire does double duty as Hannah's support group friend Claudia as well as the voice of the appendage. Though that was a late-stage surprise: “After we locked picture, we started getting audition tapes [for the creature],” the director says.

Queuing up files, one stood out. “I said, ‘Wait, it says Emily Hampshire on here?’ She didn't want to tell me because she wanted it to be totally pure. I listened to it and I was like, ‘Oh, wow. This is it.’ She brought such a unique cadence to it, something really vulnerable and humanistic.”

Now, Zlokovic hopes audiences of all ages will come along for the ride that is *Appendage*. “It's a pure expression of me as an artist. I don't know if that'll ever happen again, so I'm really grateful for that.”

Appendage is on Hulu and Disney+ now.

“Hey, could you give me a hand for a sec?”



MIND GAMES

SFX STOPS BY THE CREEL HOUSE AT HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

RETURN TO HAWKINS AT Halloween Horror Nights, as *Stranger Things* gets the haunted house treatment once more for America's number one spooky event.

As usual, the 10 houses and five scare zones at Universal Orlando are more than just your average fright fare; this is the closest you'll get to walking through screen-accurate film sets, complete with actors, sounds and even smells... *SFX* took a trip behind the scenes in the Upside Down.

● The house is based on season four of *Stranger Things* – specifically, Vecna's curse. So no trips to Russia, but expect some surprise guests...

● There are nine scenes in total throughout the house, including visits to the Creel House, the Upside Down (remember to look all around you!), Eddie's trailer and Hawkins National Laboratory. These take guests from around the mid-point of the season through to the finale.

● Fans see the first time One kills, and also Eleven's attack on One in the Rainbow Room, where she blasts through his chest. They'll also see Max being cursed.

● "Running Up That Hill" by Kate Bush plays at least twice during the experience, but you'll have to listen carefully to catch it! Somewhat less obviously, "Master Of Puppets" by Metallica is also present.

● The characters look almost identical to their on-screen counterparts – something that the costume character designers at Universal work closely on with Netflix.

● The Vecna costumes are screen-accurate because make-up designers working on the haunted house also worked on the TV show.

● Guests can expect to run into Vecna at least 10 times throughout the house.

● Because HHN takes place in both Orlando and Hollywood, expect to see variations of the set in both locations. Hollywood visits the exterior and first floor interior of the Creel House, whereas Orlando focuses on the attic.

● Vecna's Mind Lair is a huge, abstract set featuring victims (poor Chrissy features twice in the house), a flying clock, a grand staircase and the stained glass red rose door.

● The trailer-top battle with Eddie and Dustin against the demobats is realised using a large screen and several full-scale props.

● One of the finale scenes features an animated life-size Vecna that includes LED technology alongside projection elements and smoke, to create the illusion of Eleven defeating him in real time. ●

For more details and to book tickets, visit halloweenhorrornights.com. For full package deals visit virginholidays.co.uk.

One of the grand finale scenes with Vecna.



Harnessing the power of Eleven – or will they?



Chrissy, you come down from there right now!



Another of Vecna's victims hung out to dry.



Chrissy, being in Vecna's Mind Lair isn't good for you.



Is that a demobat hanging off you or... etc.



Party on top of the trailer! Bring your own bat.



Max won't be running up any hills with that leg.



Look, it's *his* Mind Lair you're trespassing in.



THE LEGACY OF HAMMER FILMS IS undeniable. The legendary studio was a dark force of nature throughout the 20th century, opening its doors with 1939's *The Public Life Of Henry The Ninth* – a comedy, sadly now lost to the mists of time – but really finding its identity in the mid-'50s when it pivoted to horror.

For the next couple of decades it became the face of British fright flicks, releasing one classic after another: *Dracula*, *Quatermass And The Pit*, *Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter* and so many more. Although the studio closed its doors in 1979 after a remake of Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*, its place in history was already assured.

The studio was revived in 2008 and has put out a trickle of new films since then – 2010's *Let Me In* was terrific, as was 2012's Daniel Radcliffe-starring *The Woman In Black*, but the Hammer brand has been quiet these last few years. Well, no longer! *Doctor Jekyll*, by director Joe Stephenson, marks the return of the studio, now under the control of the appropriately named mogul John Gore.

Shot largely in a stately home in Rugby, Warwickshire, the new film stars beloved actor, comedian and politician Eddie Izzard in the split role of Nina Jekyll and Rachel Hyde. Izzard was initially unsure how the change between the two sides of her character would be realised on screen, especially as the film did not have the benefit of a huge special effects budget.

"If you read the novella, the character actually changes size," she says. "But it's the essence of the character changing which is



YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HYDE

EDDIE IZZARD LEADS HAMMER'S
TRIUMPHANT RETURN IN **DOCTOR JEKYLL**

WORDS: WILL SALMON

the most important thing." The film makes a feature of this by blurring the lines between the two personas. Nina Jekyll is warm if melancholy, Rachel Hyde a psychotic monster, but as Izzard notes, "You can't quite tell who's talking, the characters overlap. I thought that was quite an interesting angle."

Most of Izzard's scenes are played opposite actor Scott Chambers, who brings a sense of humour and a youthful uncertainty to his

character Rob, a former offender desperately trying to get his life back on track for the sake of his daughter. "As an actor he was channelling coming from this more real existence, because Nina's world is kind of unreal," says Izzard. "She has so much money. We gradually got to this place where I was just sort of unloading on Scott. It was great working with him and with Lindsay Duncan, who I've worked with before."



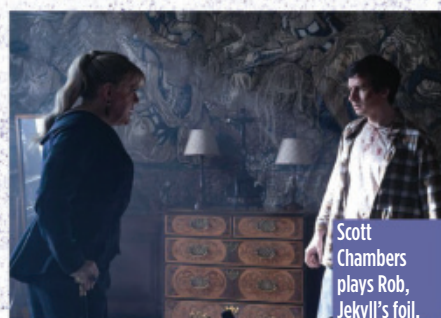
Eddie Izzard
as the rather
relaxed Nina
Jekyll.

That “unloading” comes in a suitably maniacal final act where – and this is only a spoiler if you’re unaware of the premise of a world-famous 137-year-old story – the Hyde persona comes dramatically to the fore. “I had to go somewhere at the end and I honestly wasn’t sure what was going to come out,” Izzard says. “When I do stand-up, and when that’s flying, I don’t quite know what’s coming out of me. And I knew if I could get to that

place in the drama, that would be interesting, where the person you’re acting against is thinking, ‘Where’s this coming from?’”

Working like this, and against the clock, was challenging. “I enjoyed it, but yeah, it was tough. Really tough. A lot of retakes. I was just trying to be open and channel the character. It was intense, but it’s great. And it’s a Hammer film now and that’s just a beautiful place to be.”

The venerable
Lindsay
Duncan also
appears.



Scott
Chambers
plays Rob,
Jekyll’s foil.

Of course *The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* has been told and retold many times over on screen. Izzard says that she resisted the temptation to look at how other actors had played the parts. “I think you have to be fresh. You don’t want to say, ‘Oh, I can’t do it like this.’” She did, however, return to the original novella. “The odd thing with it is that Stevenson wrote a lot of it as reported speech. When Hyde goes off and does things, they’re described as ‘unspeakable’ and you’re left going, ‘What the hell did he do?’ He kind of leaves it to your imagination. He doesn’t even nudge you in a certain direction, and I found that unusual.”

“I was just trying to be open and channel the character. It was intense, but it’s great”

Although she has previously appeared in the blood-soaked *Hannibal* TV show, Izzard says that she isn’t much of a horror viewer herself. “I like the early Hammers. I found them scary, but only to a certain extent. Later horror films – everything post the ’70s-’80s really – I go, ‘Woah, jeez!’ They’re a bit too much for me. I think I lean more towards action films, good dramas, some comedies. So I’m not really a horror partaker. But it’s great to do them because, as an actor, you can really let rip!” ●

Doctor Jekyll is released on 27 October.

CREEPING BACK

CREEPSHOW VETERAN JOHN HARRISON
 TALKS DIRECTING SEASON FOUR

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

DIRECTOR JOHN HARRISON worked with George Romero on the first *Creepshow* movie – and numerous iconic properties since – and over 40 years later that bond is still going strong.

“I love doing this show because of my relationship going way back to the original [movie],” he says of the Shudder anthology series. “I also love working with the team that Greg [Nicotero, showrunner] has assembled, which is really superior.

“I love the anthology format, because every show is different. It’s like directing a little mini-movie. As a director, I can come in and really make a short movie from top to bottom. I’m not jumping in on a series that has already established characters and storylines that I have to adhere to, which is fine. I can tell an individual story and bring whatever skill sets I have, whatever creative imagination I have, to that particular story. I know that I’m gonna

get a chance to do something different from anything I’ve done before, or anything that I might do again.”

Harrison has two stories in season four: “Smile” in the season opener and “Baby Teeth” in the finale. “Both of them offered me really different challenges,” he says. “‘Smile’, in particular, wasn’t a monster-driven episode, it was more of a psychological thriller. It let me do a couple of things cinematically that I thought were a lot of fun.

“‘Baby Teeth’ was a particularly difficult show, because it involved gruesome effects and a puppet. We made a decision, we were not going to do a digital puppet, it was going to be live action.

“I got to the last day and it was very intense, it was 12 hours non-stop. When there’s a lot of blood flying around, you have to be careful because you have continuity issues and everything else. So it was a particularly tough day. But challenging is also exciting.

“We have limited time and budget, so you really have to know what you’re doing”

“But again, since we’re working with Greg Nicotero, his expertise for years and years before he became a director and producer has been in that realm, so I’m never really worried about the quality. I’m more worried about the time,” he laughs. “These are television episodes. We have limited time and budget, so you really have to know what you’re doing and what you want to do. You have to plan very carefully.”

The effects side of things, he says, has never been a worry for him. “Greg loves practical effects, which is great for me too, because I can see them, I can be there, as opposed to just turning over greenscreen shots that have



Ryan Beil as Jay in "The Hat": grabby grabby!

to be then enhanced with digital effects. When you have the kinds of artists that Greg put together as a team, you know that even with a limited budget and time you can really do very compelling shows."

It's not just effects or monsters though – sometimes it's the most classic of locations... "In 'Smile', when they go into the graveyard, that graveyard is just part of a little park in the woods right across the street from the studio. The street opposite had restaurants and shops and so forth. We actually built a

graveyard in that park and had to shoot around because there was still traffic going by, there were lights on in the buildings across the way. It was *Creepshow* after all, so we wanted it to be creepy and spooky. We use smoke, there are a lot of tricks, long lenses, so that the background goes blurry."

Some people believe that horror is "big right now", but in truth it's never gone away. "It's never not been good or popular," Harrison agrees. "But I will tell you, there was a period of time in the '90s and early '00s when George Romero and I



Greg Nicotero discusses lines with Ruth Codd.



Matthew James Dowden in "Smile".

were walking around town trying to sell anthologies like *Creepshow* or other horror things and we couldn't get arrested. The studios didn't want to hear from it. The whole change in the media landscape was streaming and cable – it offered an opportunity for it to be a little bit broader. I think it's always been kind of a bastard stepchild for some producers and executives. But for those of us that love it, it's really great."

But despite his extensive career in the genre, Harrison says he's not ready to write his autobiography. "I don't know whether my ego is big enough to say, 'Yeah, man, I'm gonna go out and sell my memoir,'" he laughs. "I guess if I decided I wanted to write a memoir it would be kind of like, 'Well, I guess I'm done', and I'm not ready to be done." ●

Creepshow is on Shudder from 13 October. Seasons one to three are now available on Blu-ray and DVD.



Rachel Drance as April in "Grieving Process".

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

CJ TUDOR'S TALE OF MURDER AND MARTYRDOM
COMES TO TV IN **THE BURNING GIRLS**

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

IF SATNAV HAD A STORYTELLING equivalent it might just struggle to pin down Chapel Croft. This seemingly idyllic village with a harrowingly dark past is the setting for *The Burning Girls*, a series committed to taking your bearings away.

"Everything's a puzzle," says executive producer Tony Wood. "Nothing is quite what it seems. To paraphrase *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, 'You don't believe in ghost stories. Well, you're in one!' You think you're in a thriller and then you realise you're in something supernatural. And then you question whether it's really supernatural. There are things that you don't see coming. There are 90 degree turns in it that keep you strapped in throughout."

The six-part Paramount+ drama adapts the 2021 novel by CJ Tudor. "As a read it doesn't let you go," Wood tells *SFX*. "It was a bold take on a thriller, and that allowed us to make something that sat outside of the more normal crime genre. I think she's a brilliant writer."

"She'll fly off the shelves in WH Smith at the airports and simultaneously she'll be very, very well reviewed in the broadsheets. Looked at from a broadcast point of view, that's excellent for us!"

Samantha Morton is the Reverend Jack Brooks, relocating from Nottingham to Sussex with teenage daughter Flo (*Lockwood & Co*'s Ruby Stokes). Looking to put their own traumatic past behind them, the pair discover Chapel Croft's alarming history – not only the horrific execution of two local girls, burned at the stake during Queen Mary's purge of the Protestants in 1556, but the disappearance of another two girls in the early 1990s.

"The story's driven by Jack's curiosity throughout. She's absolutely convinced that

if there are restless spirits then it's her job to quieten them. And then the village reveals its true character and she becomes aware of the mystery of the disappearance of the girls, and her curiosity then drives that. So she is part detective, part spiritual guide, part anxious mother.

"Sam is such a brilliant performer. She created this performance that was not really what we had seen on the page, in which she's alive to everything around her. Every activity she's seeing, she's weighing up. That kind of combined the vicar and the detective in a way that galvanised the whole show."

As Wood reveals, Morton's performance delivers a subtly different protagonist to the

“The whole of the first episode really majors on the sense of being watched”

one in the novel. "She took some of the lightness out of Jack. In the book Jack seemingly skates through life and has a smile on her face all of the time. Sam wasn't going to do that. She played her with a curiosity and an intensity, and in filming we quickly worked out that the key was to keep on her eyes, all the time.

"So we always made sure we had a relatively big close-up in every scene, because what she was doing with her eyes meant that the audience were never ahead of her. The narrative of her eyes was always questioning, always weighing someone up. You begin to think 'How is she judging that person? Is she really revealing everything that she thinks?'"



Flo and Jack
(Ruby Stokes
and Samantha
Morton).

Adapted by Swedish screenwriter Hans Rosenfeldt, creator of acclaimed Scandi noir *The Bridge*, *The Burning Girls* balances supernatural tropes with the human potential for horror. Was that hard to achieve?

"The simple truth is that it was a question we decided never to ask ourselves," says Wood. "We felt that the proposition, the title, gave us the licence to tell people it was a ghost story. The whole of the first episode really majors on the sense of being watched, the sense of something lurking in the shadows, because of the whole way it's shot. You're encouraged to look towards the back of shots."

"The church is an unusual design for an English church. It looks more as though it should be in Salem than East Sussex – although interestingly it's modelled on one that CJ Tudor can see from her house! So the iconography of it suggests the supernatural or dark magic, and it's only when we begin to learn more about the '92 story that really the thriller takes over, and we bring the real world, the natural world, back into it."

Whether real or otherworldly, Wood admits it's dark, intense material, but insists it won't turn off a mainstream audience. "The story has to be told emotionally. You have to take the audience by the hand. Once you begin to care about the character story then you're in too deep to be put off by any malevolent acts that are committed within that."

The Wicker Man, *The Exorcist* and *Midsommar* were inspirations – and there's another nod to classic horror. "We made the girls twins. They're not twins in the book. So there's a real homage to *The Shining* there!"

The Burning Girls is on Paramount+ from 19 October.



"Don't worry,
these nighties
are flame-
retardant."

THOROUGHLY MODERN MUNSTERS

IT'S ONE OF FANTASY TV'S MOST MALIGNED REVIVALS... 35 YEARS ON, DOES **THE MUNSTERS TODAY** DESERVE A LITTLE MORE LOVE?

WORDS: **STUART MANNING**

MUNSTERS NEVER TRULY DIE, and neither do Munsters. The original '60s TV show reworked Universal's horror IP into a family-friendly sitcom starring loveable Frankenstein's monster Herman, his undead wife Lily and her cranky Dracula-esque father Grandpa, lasting for two seasons of wholesome cobwebbed hijinks.

In 1981, the original cast reunited for a so-so TV movie, *The Munsters' Revenge*, intended as a try-out for a new series. The special flopped, but as the '80s ushered in a '60s nostalgia boom, Universal's TV arm MCA remained keen to scratch that Munsters itch.

In 1984, Universal spun off one of its other classic sitcoms, *Leave It To Beaver*, from a reunion special to a new weekly cable series, which eventually landed on Ted Turner's cable network TBS. As part of the deal, Turner planned to colourise both the original black and white *Beaver* episodes along with *The Munsters*, and expressed interest in a new Munsters series too.

For a time, there were two proposals under consideration – *The Munsters Rise Again* and *The New Munsters*, developed by the Arthur

Company (named after its founder Arthur L. Annecharico). "They specialised in cheap production values, fast turnarounds, and their product showed it," says Alan Moskowitz, who wrote for the rival project after his *Rise Again* concept ran aground. "*The Munsters Today* looked tacky and cheaply made."

Lloyd J Schwartz was the first *Munsters Today* showrunner, hired to develop the format. The son of *The Brady Bunch* and *Gilligan's Island* creator Sherwood Schwartz, he'd cut his teeth working on his father's shows. "They called me up and asked would I like to do a revival of *The Munsters*, and I said no," Schwartz recalls. "It was a classic and I couldn't see what I would add to it."

"But there was an idea I'd always wanted to do, which was if people suddenly came back 20 years after they passed on... how would they react to society? I thought it would be interesting to do that through the Munsters, as they were characters that people liked. They wanted to call it *The New Munsters*. I said, 'No, let's call it *The Munsters Today*,' which represented what I wanted to do."

There had been a thought to try and tempt the original cast back, but Schwartz favoured a clean break. "They were too old and I didn't want people who knew more about it than →





Lee Meriwether (Lily) does costume tests.



I did," he says. However, he contacted the actors as a courtesy: "I wrote to them all, saying what we were going to be doing and how much I appreciated their performances. I only got one response – and it was really hostile. Grandpa [Al Lewis] was *not* happy."

Schwartz set about assembling a new troupe. Herman would be played by John Schuck, best known for Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H* and playing Rock Hudson's sidekick on the detective show *Macmillan & Wife*. The '60s *Batman* movie Catwoman and star of *The Time Tunnel* Lee Meriwether was chosen for Lily, with jobbing sitcom actor Howard Morton as Grandpa.

"John Schuck was a good friend of mine – our kids were in pre-school together," remembers Schwartz. "I always admired him as an actor. I said, 'It's a steady pay cheque, you'll be able to live at home and you'll be green.' Lee Meriwether was also a friend. I liked the idea that I could turn Miss America [1955] into Mrs Munster."

All three actors had an unusual common link. "I watched a gameshow called *The \$25,000 Pyramid* – it's now *The \$100,000 Pyramid* because that's how things grow," Schwartz explains. "Lee was on it, John had been on it... I love the show because

everyone's real personalities come out; you have to play so fast, you can't hide who you are. I really loved Howard Morton on that. I'd never met him but I thought he'd be exactly right for Grandpa."

The pilot script began in 1966 in black and white, with one of Grandpa's experiments going awry, sending the Munsters to sleep for 22 years before waking up in a colourful modern world. Schwartz took a leaf from his dad's book, adding words to the theme tune, explaining the new premise: "We went to sleep many years ago, and we woke up with a brand-new show," sang Herman, bopping to a soft-rock soundtrack.

"I wrote lyrics to it and I thought they were really clever," says Schwartz, pre-empting any cynical suggestion that it was done to net a regular royalty fee. "I said, 'Listen, I'm not looking for any money. Keep giving it to the other people.'"

Universal was delighted with Schwartz's take on the show: "They had no notes – as a writer, you *never* hear this. Arthur [Annecharico] told them, 'If you think this is good, wait till you see the second draft!' I said, 'Arthur, let me see the script.'"



John Schuck with his Herman make-up...



...and Jason Marsden with his Eddie get-up.

"I took it, crossed out 'first draft', wrote in 'second' and went home."

By now, TBS was out of the picture and the show was being made for the first-run syndication market, sold directly to local stations across the US. From the outset, *The Munsters Today* was planned as a low-budget videotaped multi-camera studio sitcom, unlike the original, which was shot on film without an audience. "This always should have been a one-camera show," Schwartz admits. "That would have let you do effects and things, but this was the way the company could do it."

COLOUR ME GREEN

The pilot was taped in June 1987 at Hollywood Center Studios. The Munster home was simplified to a proscenium arch configuration for a studio audience, decorated with a number of salvaged props from the original show; John Schuck was kitted out in Fred Gwynne's suit from *The Munsters' Revenge* and Lee Meriwether wore one of Yvonne De Carlo's original bat necklaces.



A full cast shot, complete with motion blur...

Child actor Jason Marsden was cast as youngster Eddie, auditioning in a Little Lord Fauntleroy costume made by his mother. He'd worked on a soap opera and done some cartoon voice work, but this was his first lead role. "It was like trick or treating every day," he says. "I've always loved playing dress-up, I've always loved Halloween. There weren't many 12-year-olds wearing black nail polish and lipstick. I embraced it."

Mary Ellen Dunbar, then in her late twenties, played the Munsters' "ugly" niece Marilyn for the pilot, styled in the same Sandra Dee mould as the '60s character. Universal wasn't happy and wanted a younger,

more on-trend Marilyn. Seventeen-year-old Hilary Van Dyke (no relation to Dick) took over for the series, playing the character as a frizzy-permed valley girl.

The pilot went unaired, although a few shots made it into the show's opening titles. Regular tapings began in early 1988 with the episode "Eau De Munster", which was a rough ride for all concerned. With a replacement Marilyn not yet cast, the character was absent and not mentioned, while the decision to bring in a studio audience added to the pressure.

"The pilot episode was filmed over three or four days," explains make-up artist Bill Munns. "The first episode of the series, before a live audience, was a four-camera live filming. My crew and I were a bit stressed by

the maintenance and touch-ups needed during brief pauses between segments." Tempers flared and he decided to not return the following week.

A new make-up crew handled the next taping, headed by Larry Abbott, with David Abbott and Gil Mosko taking over full-time; both later worked on the '90s *Star Trek* spin-offs. They didn't inherit the previous prosthetics or wigs, so started again from scratch, resulting in the characters looking

"There weren't many 12-year-olds wearing black nail polish and lipstick. I embraced it"

markedly different between episodes. "Me and my crew spent an additional hour each day after filming, cleaning up the actors completely, so they could go home fresh and relaxed," says Munns. "I was told when Larry took over, he and his team simply removed the prosthetics and hairpieces and walked away. It was a rather rude shock for the talent!"

There were other teething troubles. With an eye on the deal to colourise the '60s episodes, to better blend the two shows a dubious decision was made to add heavy fog →



Mary Ellen Dunbar played Marilyn in the pilot only.



Sitcom actor Howard Morton as Grandpa.





Hilary Van Dyke was Marilyn in the series itself.



Herman's looking oddly blue in this series shot.

filters to the video cameras, with 20% of the colour then removed in post-production; the producers named this innovation "Munster Color". But then the colourisation contract fell through, which left the new episodes with smeary, washed-out images that looked bad, particularly when converted for overseas broadcast formats.

The Arthur Company's cost-cutting also led to some odd situations. An episode was written where Grandpa accidentally conjured up a Russian peasant girl, to burn off a contract Arthur had with a Serbian actress who barely spoke English. And, for a time, the show shared a soundstage with another sitcom, only using the studio two days a week. "That was the Arthur Company, trying to save a buck," says Marsden.

STRIKING OUT

The 1988 writers' strike hit midway through the first year, halting production for three months. Universal used the break to shake things up, with Lloyd Schwartz not returning. "They went another way and I was cut off from the show," he says. "I got calls from John and from Lee. They wanted to know why I wasn't there. I didn't say anything bad about it all, mostly because I'm not that kind of

person, but also I knew that they were going to stay there. I didn't want them to be acting under this cloud. It was a depressing time in my life."

With story consultant Bryan Joseph promoted to producer, many of Schwartz's episodes were pushed back to later in the run, with the awkward first go "Eau De Munster" buried as the final show of the season. The Rip Van Winkle concept was downplayed and a soft reboot began, aiming the show more towards teenagers. "The storylines were



basically similar to the original but only played for laughs without any subtext," says writer Alan Moskowitz. "We knew what we were creating wasn't gonna win an Emmy, much less a second season, but they were good times."

Despite a certain resignation about the show's limitations, the cast and crew persevered. "Everybody really tried their best," says Lloyd J Schwartz firmly. Jason Marsden says the senior cast members held

"We knew what we were creating wasn't gonna win an Emmy, but they were good times"

him to high standards, despite his age and inexperience: "I remember doing a scene with Howard, rehearsing. I must have been fucking around or something, because he said to me, 'That was the worst performance I've ever seen you do.' I know he was being constructive, but my little mind was like, 'This hurts my feelings!'"

"I walked onto the living room set, where John was sitting. I sat down and said, 'Well,

Season three
went all-in
for the sci-fi
elements.



The cast do
Christmas
in their own
style.



US TV star
Jonathan
Winters visits
the set.

I guess it wasn't good at that other scene.' John's like, 'Oh. Are you fishing for a compliment?' No one was coddling me on that set. Howard was always quick to tell me if I was full of shit, put me in my place – and quick to give me praise. I miss the fuck out of him."

John Schuck had misgivings about the show's approach and playing Herman from the outset, which the new direction only cemented. "I was fairly miserable," he told *The AV Club* in 2012. "The writing was not up to snuff, the costume was very uncomfortable, and the idea of doing it in front of a live audience as a sitcom really didn't work. *The Munsters Today* is the only job I've taken for money... and I'll never do that again."

"I don't think I'm speaking out of turn by saying he wasn't a big fan of doing the show," agrees Marsden. "His make-up was uncomfortable, the shoes were uncomfortable. During the pilot, I remember he twisted his ankle. There were a lot of creative conflicts. John took no bullshit, but considering that he didn't enjoy it, he always gave 110%."

COOL GHOULS

The second season saw sweeping changes. Gone were the theme lyrics, along with any mention of the 22-year nap. The "Munster Color" fug was also ditched, to better appeal to an MTV demographic. The results were a little garish, but at least it now looked in

focus. Herman was greener than ever and got a yuppified wardrobe of smart-casuals. Lily upgraded her shrouds in eye-popping aqua and cerise. Crusty old Grandpa was the only hold-out, remaining resolutely unaltered.

Likewise, the story focus was shifted to Marilyn and Eddie, with the wolf-boy becoming a rebellious teen and ditching his purple velvet suit in favour of leather jackets and ripped jeans; a label called Surf Fetish supplied Eddie's right-on fashions.

"It was very exciting and flattering," says Marsden. "Eddie was going through puberty, I was going through puberty, so that all meshed quite nicely. I remember they specifically asked me to go to an acting class and, I guess, not be so 'theatre'... I felt a little cooler, a little more confident. It levelled me up."

The changes were a culture shock for fans, but a sign of changing times, as a new era of grungy family sitcoms led by *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons* had left *The Munsters Today* looking like yesterday's ghouls. "We are extremely excited about our season two plays to contemporise the Munsters," said executive producer Arthur Annecharico, talking up the season premiere. "The old Munsters were not really aware of how society reacted to their physical looks. However, that era has passed. This season, the Munsters explore their differences rather than ignore them."

In practice, this made for a less sentimental, more antagonistic family dynamic that →





Eddie and Marilyn met their future selves.



John Schuck: not a fan of his make-up and costume.

sometimes edged towards *Married With Children* performed in greenface. “They had to keep up with what was trending at the time and it seemed like the natural progression,” says Marsden. “In one of the first episodes of the second season, they were definitely parroting *The Wonder Years*, with Eddie having an inner monologue.”

By now, the show’s production had settled into a comfortable routine. “You’d table-read on Monday, a little bit of rehearsal,” Marsden recalls. “Rehearsal on Tuesday, Wednesday. Thursday, we’d get in the costumes and record any special effect that we couldn’t nail in front of the audience. Then Friday, we’d rehearse some more and then do the show. Having an audience there was fun. It fed my little actor ego.”

The production had relocated across town to the Munsters’ old home at Universal Studios. To cement the move, in one episode the family made a rare excursion outdoors to take the studio tour. “Universal Studios was my playground,” says Marsden. “I lived across

“With the way the show evolved, I’m not sure that there was still reason enough to do it”

the street, so I would go over to the lot. This is before security was a big deal, and the guards knew who I was, so I could just ride my bike and go all the places I probably shouldn’t have. They were shooting *Back To The Future Part II* on the backlot, *Dick Tracy* – and because I was wearing the make-up, it gave me carte blanche to crash sets. So I got to see all these things being filmed.”

The show began its third and final season in 1990. The snark of the second year was toned down and the stories branched out into

A black and white shot in the style of the original.



science fiction. The family acquired a time machine, leading to Herman and Grandpa regressing in age, with child actors stepping in under rubber and greasepaint; in another episode, Eddie and Marilyn met their future selves – jaded, bald and overweight.

Character development remained thin on the ground. A press release towards the end of the second year teased that Lily would begin pursuing a career, trying to juggle work and household duties; Herman was to “begin to question himself... as the man of the family,

including his responsibilities as husband, father, son-in-law and member of the community.” Neither strand happened.

“The business was that you make three seasons of a show, then you sell it into distribution and syndication,” remembers Marsden. “In California, the first season aired in primetime at 7:30pm on KTLA, which was a newish network showing original primetime stuff. Then the second and third seasons were on Sunday mornings. To me, it felt like no one’s really nurturing this.”

MUNSTER V MUNSTER

Why *The Munsters Rise Again...*
erm... didn't



So what of that other '80s Munsters concept? Anne Beatts had been a trailblazing writer on *Saturday Night Live* and created the Sarah Jessica Parker sitcom *Square Pegs*. Beatts's proposal, *The Munsters Rise Again*, was pitched as a single-camera filmed sitcom with an adult Eddie Munster as its lead, giving the character a wife and adding some sex appeal, making him a leather-clad rock star.

Speaking to *LA Weekly* in late 1987, Beatts described her project as a "punk/new wave" version of *The Munsters*: "We had casting done and everything. I'd still like to do a show about people who wear black and skull earrings - to bring Melrose Avenue to television."

The idea of rock star Eddie had done the rounds for a while. A teenage version of the character formed a band in the 1973 cartoon pilot *The Mini-Munsters*, and original actor Butch Patrick donned the pointy ears again and cashed in with his group Eddie & The Monsters, releasing the 1983 single "Whatever Happened To Eddie?"

"Anne's take was like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*," says Alan Moskowitz, who co-created the format and wrote the pilot script. "She wanted the show to be more hip with a sexy werewolf and vampire - it was the '80s! Herman and Lily didn't fit her vision and were backstoried to retiring overseas. Poor Marilyn was still normal and lonely. The pilot involved Grandpa creating Butch - a mini-Herman."

Eddie's bride on the new show, Thursday Munster, was a seemingly litigation-courting riff on the *Addams Family* character Wednesday. Their seven-year-old daughter Chastity was afflicted with the same blonde-haired blue-eyed "ugliness" as Marilyn. Original Grandpa actor Al Lewis was hosting horror movies on cable in character at the time (as parodied in *Gremlins II*), but the producers weren't keen on him returning. "Anne was not a fan of Al Lewis and had no plans to use him," says Moskowitz.

In the end, the *Rise Again* concept was a crypt too far for the Universal bosses. "[MCA president] Al Rush allegedly read the pilot and screamed, 'Where are the Munsters?'" Moskowitz remembers. "We were dead."



By the end, things were getting a bit... desperate.

The Munsters Today lasted three seasons and 72 episodes, ironically one year and two instalments more than the original. It faded from the airwaves fast, but for a generation of '80s kids, it was their first exposure to the ghoulish characters. Marsden continued to act, appearing in short-lived weirdsville show *Eerie, Indiana* the following year and voicing Binx the cat in *Hocus Pocus*. He's still in demand as a voice actor.

"I don't know what else they would have done with [the character of] Eddie," he adds. "I was 16 at the time we finished. I had learned so much. I had a little more heat on me, more auditions were coming in. I was sad to go but confident I would move on and find other things."

"In a world where we so often do retreads of things, there has to be a reason to do them," suggests Schwartz. "With the way the show evolved, I'm not sure that there was still reason enough to do it. I'm sorry I didn't stay with *The Munsters Today*. Maybe I could have kept making it grow in a way that I liked."

"I can look back and say it doesn't compare to the original at all," adds Marsden. "The brilliance of 1960s comedic television is so hard to recapture - that synergy between Al Lewis and Fred Gwynne and Yvonne DeCarlo is incomparable. I don't want to knock the show too hard, because it gave me my start and I had a blast. If you're a Munsters fan, you'll still dig it." ●



The Sweet Sixteen Killer: just wants to say hello.



Olivia Holt (second left) plays the teenage Pam.

REMEMBER WHEN WE LAUGHED along with Marty McFly at how parochial and naïve 1955 looked, and felt, when he time-travelled there in *Back To The Future*? Well, the joke's on Gen X now, because that's exactly how Gen Z views the '80s: like a horror show, just with bad clothes, bad hair and too much blue eyeshadow.

But it sure was a great era for horror, high-concept sci-fi movies and the rise of female heroines. Director Nahnatchka Khan (*Young Rock*) is a fan of all of those things, so along with writers David Matalon, Sasha Perl-Raver and Jen D'Angelo, they've mashed them together in Blumhouse's horror-comedy *Totally Killer*.

Call it an intergenerational, time-travelling slasher flick. It stars Kiernan Shipka as Jamie Hughes, an average teen who lives in a small town that is still rattled 35 years after a trio of unsolved murders committed by the masked Sweet Sixteen Killer. The victims were all close friends of Jamie's now overprotective

TIMESLASH

DIRECTOR NAHNATCHKA KHAN BLENDS ALL THE GENRES IN THE GEN Z MEETS GEN X HORROR-COMEDY **TOTALLY KILLER**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

mum Pam (Julie Bowen), who ends up suffering the same fate minutes into the movie. Despondent, Jamie decides to travel back in time to 1987 via her friend's science fair time machine to take out the killer and thereby right the present.

That's about as high-concept a premise as you can imagine, which is what Khan tells *SFX* first grabbed her on reading Matalon and

Perl-Raver's script. Looking for a very different theatrical directing project after her hit romcom *Always Be My Maybe* (2020), *Totally Killer* appealed to Khan's comedic sensibilities and her love of genre. "It's not just horror-comedy, or slasher-comedy, but there's also the time travel element," she says. "There's so many balls to keep in the air and that, to me, was a real fun challenge."



Kiernan Shipka as Jamie is ready for trouble.

Khan also loved the acerbic Jamie, who is a typical teen at odds with her mum, who then undertakes to do the impossible and get her back. “The beginning of the movie is really important, because Jamie doesn’t know the worst night of her life is about to happen,” Khan says. “But as a character, it gives her an arc for the movie. She’s a little bit unlikeable at the beginning, and then suddenly she’s on a mission and she’s got to make all these things happen, get in there and survive.”

“There” being 1987, where Jamie meets teenage Pam and her circle of friends which turns out to be the ultimate culture clash of aesthetics and sensibilities. Plus, there’s a legit murderer in a “hot guy” mask who doesn’t care what time Jamie is from.

“It’s like [Jamie] is going into a John Hughes movie, which to us was a very funny dichotomy,” Khan says of the conflicts that ensue. “We’re not commenting on who’s right or who’s wrong, or who’s better or

who’s worse. It’s just that in ‘87, nobody knows what the fuck Jamie is talking about!” the director laughs.

Khan says that Jamie is a very modern heroine – the next-gen evolution of horror scream queens in the mould of *Scream*’s Sidney Prescott.

“This girl is an unassuming main character that has surprising depth and drive that you don’t normally see at the centre of movies like this any more,” Khan adds.

“That was really important to me. For this movie, the idea of taking somebody like Jamie and having her be victimised, but also then drive the story momentum and be the one who refuses to stop, is notoriously something that’s been ascribed to male characters in film. It’s done like a Trojan horse. You have a lot of fun and a lot of elements that are at play so you don’t necessarily realise that this woman will *not* be stopped.”

Good job, because she’s up against a pretty

relentless adversary in the Sweet Sixteen Killer. He slinks around town in a Max Headroom meets *The Lost Boys*’ David Powers mask, which was created by horror legend Tony Gardner and his special effects company Alterian. “We went through a bunch of iterations, but really wanted to pull from handsome men of the era,” Khan says of the ultimate design.

“There’s something about that smile that they created, with the perfect white teeth, that just feels so menacing. I’ve never seen a handsome terrifying mask before. It feels very modern, like the men that you see that feel like they’re getting away with *everything*.”

He’ll have to get through Jamie first this time around, though. “I love flawed people having heroic moments,” Khan teases of her heroine’s arc. “It’s something that I like to make and to watch, which is such a testament to Kiernan and the kind of story we wanted to tell, frankly.” ●

Totally Killer is on Prime Video from 6 October.





THE MAIN THING WAS COMING UP with a creature that would suitably fuck people up, even when you saw it. Part of my concern was making sure that it was scary and nightmarish enough and planted these horrific seeds in the audience's head that they take home with them because it's the Boogeyman.

"I felt like if you saw the Boogeyman and he was too silly, or he was too cartoonish, or he just wasn't scary enough, then that would be a real disservice to be the people who made the Boogeyman not scary any more.

"Part of the design was trying to come up with a concept that could slowly reveal itself. There's something that happens in the third act where you reveal that a part of his face that you assumed is one thing is actually another thing and he reveals a weird Lovecraftian dimension to his design – which I'm kind of amazed, still, that we managed to get away with in a PG-13 movie. One made by Disney, no less.

"The three things that I said to every designer who worked on this is, you've got to imagine that this creature isn't something that's a pantomime version of our fears. It's not Pennywise the clown, it's not something that's manifesting what we're afraid of – this is the origin of fear. You've got to imagine that this thing existed back when cavemen were huddling around their campfire, this was out in the darkness existing, it's primordial.

"The second thing was, this creature is and represents everything we don't want to speak about in terms of death and grief and loss.

DESIGNING THE BOOG

This creature can be any shape you want, it can be any colour, but you've got to be able to make this shape by taking a human form and breaking it, burning it, snapping it, putting it back together in whatever way you want.

"But it's got to look like its origin is in a human body, because it's got to feel like the spectre of death hanging around the corner of this grieving family's house. Then the third thing is, after you've done all that, I want you

to give me the 3D-perfect concept art version, but we've also got to be able to draw it in crayon, like a kid would draw it, and for it to make sense. You'd be able to spot it and go, okay, I get that. It needed that stark simplicity to really resonate, I think, as the boogeyman.

"Rob Stanley was one of the first people that I thought of, because I've always been a fan of his work and he's got that ability to make these grotesque, but very simple, stark,



CONCEPT ART: ROB STANLEY



finger reveal at the end. You can tell that Rob's been following those tenets of design. They all feel vaguely humanoid, but broken and snapped and burned and scorched into this new fucked-up shape.

"The final design is mostly authored by the amazing Keith Thompson, who's an incredible designer. The final collaboration was between him and the guys at Folks who did the VFX for the movie. They would go to the texturing 3D phase and they built a 3D model. From there, you lock down on it and that's

the basis of all the effects.

"There never was [a physical element on set] because we only locked the creature design about a week before we started shooting, because it went through so many iterations. I got them to print a 3D head of the creature that was coloured and we smeared that with K-Y Jelly and made it all shiny and glistening. Eli Born, our amazing cinematographer, was able to light it. So we had that as a shot to send to VFX and say, 'That's what a real head looks like in the space, it needs to look at least as good as this.' That's why I think a lot of our VFX looks very rooted in the space.

"We've got a *Boogeyman* sequel that I think is going to be an all-time horror follow-up, which I'd love to be able to shoot. It's unlike any horror sequel that's ever been conceived and I'm hoping very much that the numbers make sense for that to be a reality. Let's see."

The Boogeyman is on digital now, and Blu-ray/DVD in the US from 10 October.

EYMAN

DIRECTOR ROB SAVAGE DISCUSSES BRINGING YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE TO LIFE

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

almost childlike creature concepts that stick with you because of their nightmarish simplicity, which is really what I was after. One of the things that I remember talking about with Rob was this idea of the creature being able to be a thing of darkness, a thing that blends and bleeds into the darkness, because I wanted to not show this thing very much, but to suggest a lot of this thing. It had to have glistening, Giger-like skin, so they

could pick up the specular highlights rippling in the darkness, but not get a sense of the full shape of the creature until right at the end. So there's a couple of these concept arts which really speak to that – the one of the creature almost bleeding into the dark corner.

"There are some of these other designs where you can see we were playing with different ideas for the mouth, which obviously plays in a big way in the final film, with our

THE LAZARUS PROJECT

KEPT

IN THE

PREPARE TO BE
BAMBOOZLED BY
**THE LAZARUS
PROJECT**
SERIES TWO,
WHICH SPLICES THE
SHOW'S TEMPORAL
RESET PREMISE WITH
PROPER TIME TRAVEL

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN

LOOP

EVER FOUND A PLACE terribly familiar, but can't put your finger on why? It's a feeling that haunts your *SFX* hack all day as we visit the Newport studio that's home to *The Lazarus Project*. Eventually the penny drops: last time we were here, we saw David Tennant and Billie Piper menaced by Ood, as they filmed "The Impossible Planet" – and stepped onto the Tenth Doctor's TARDIS. The memory feels apt given what we discover today: that the Sky drama will henceforth be conducting more "traditional" time travel.

Series one introduced the titular organisation, capable (thanks to a singularity on Earth's doorstep) of undoing disastrous events by resetting the clock to a "checkpoint" of last 1 July. Our POV figure: hapless Lazarus newbie George (Paapa Essiedu), who has a natural ability to recall unpicked timelines. After his girlfriend Sarah (Charly Clive) was killed by a truck, he engineered the detonation of a stolen nuke to prompt his colleagues to turn back time. Naughty George.

READY SET GO

Series two introduces a rival group. Being on set gives us the chance to explore their subterranean facility, starting with a slick Swiss laboratory – all glass-topped desks and microscopes. Other new sets we stroll through include an Alpine cottage (so expect to see a stunt sequence set in the Alps), and George's parents' home.

The most impressive build, however, is a huge chamber which feels like an homage to Ken Adam's designs for the Bond movies. Although the walls are mostly greenscreen, there's an intriguing physical component: a raised platform with a track running down the middle, on which sits a small metallic capsule resembling the offspring of a bobsled and a '50s sci-fi B-movie rocket. There are two seats inside for those about to shoot off at high velocity (with, health and safety officers will be pleased to hear, seatbelts). Referred to as "the cylinder", this is a time machine – the sort which can transport you to *any* period.

It became clear such tech must exist in series one's finale, which saw the Lazarus team trapped in *Groundhog Day* hell, repeating a seemingly inescapable three-week time loop caused by the creation of a second singularity (possibly by the Chinese government), and revealed that



Salóme Gunnarsdóttir (Pennyworth) plays Greta.

Filming some greenscreen work with a taxi.



former colleague Janet has been transported to 2012. Series two's overarching mission: rescue Janet, escape the time loop, and save the world. Piece of cake.

"I didn't have a lot mapped out," confesses *Lazarus* creator Joe Barton, who sadly failed to secure a recommission for his Netflix series *The Bastard Son & The Devil Himself*. "I'd never had a second series, and was slightly expecting never to get one, so I hadn't put a lot of thought into it."

He mentions an article he read which claimed there are two types of writers: planners and pantsers – no, not typing in your Y-fronts, but "flying by the seat of your pants".

Barton, it seems, is a pantsier. "I definitely wrote myself into an interesting corner, so my main reaction to getting a second series was..." He pauses. "I don't want to say *mild panic*, but

definitely a feeling

Archie (Anjali Mohindra) gets her motor running.



of, 'Okay, we have to actually work out how to get out of this impossible situation.'

Step one: clarify who is responsible. "The Time Break Initiative turn out to be the ones who unwittingly caused [the time loop], through their meddling in time travel experiments," Barton explains. "They were a breakaway rival for the Lazarus Project."

So it's kind of an Adidas/Puma schism deal – but for time travel, not trainers? Barton laughs. "Yes, basically! Puma and Adidas, or Spurs and Arsenal, Mario & Wario... They do the same thing, but they don't get on."

He adds that the notion of Chinese government involvement (floated in the finale) has been dialled down. "They have links to other governments, but we wanted to make it a more science fiction entity. We also get into the origins of the Time Break Initiative, and explore the history of the Lazarus Project and to what extent the two groups overlap." Expect to see a physical Lazarus time machine this series – several versions, in fact.

While the Time Break Initiative sound like antagonists, Barton prefers to say that they and the Lazarus Project are both "morally grey organisations" with "different moral stances". Head of Lazarus, Wes (Caroline Quentin), would see it differently. She considers true time travel "total chaos". "Her point of view is that it'd be a disaster to create a real time machine. It's the equivalent of creating a nuclear bomb – I think we even reference Oppenheimer. She and the Lazarus Project are very much against this technology, and a lot of the series is about how it might be a better idea to undo it existing."

The advent of this competing outfit takes the series down new avenues. "The second series is a very, very different beast to the first," Barton emphasises. "It's a time travel show, whereas the first one was a *time loop* show: the rules, the stakes, everything is different." →

“I’d never had a second series, and was slightly expecting never to get one”

"HE CARRIES THE BLOOD ON HIS FACE"

Paapa Essiedu is George

How does Sarah having taken the serum affect their relationship?

In a huge way. We pick up moments after where we left off. George gets immediately fired, and she gets hired. Then there's a parallel journey: trying to deal with this three-week loop they're stuck in, as well as trying to figure out how their relationship can exist now she remembers everything. She remembers all the times that they didn't get together, and once you've got that, how can you see the person you love in the same light? Over the course of the series that gets pushed and pulled, until what happens at the end of episode eight, which hopefully is quite unexpected... What the writer does really well is push this question of what's meant to be and what's not. When you have this butterfly effect of many different eventualities playing out, and that's all locked in your head, is there still room for the romantic ideal of The One – or even love?

We've seen George do terrible things. Is it difficult keeping the character likeable?

Well, you can't really *make* someone like you, right? You can only play the truth of what would you do if you're in that situation. I tried to make him not sociopathic, not too tunnel-visioned. He's clear on what motivates him, and he's got a sense of humour about it – I think that's really important. Hopefully that lends itself to people being like, "I might not have done the same thing you did, but I can see why you did it." And George feels it. George is a sensitive man – a romantic. That's why he's gone to the end of the Earth to save his relationship. So he carries the blood on his face, y'know.

Days where you shoot scenes like killing Shiv over and over must be challenging.

Yeah, Joe [Barton] is definitely not interested in making it easy for the actor! You've got to have a sense of humour about it. I think it's a really bold conceit, and for it to work, you've got to go for it – you can't do it by halves. I find it really satisfying, actually, the ambition of it. Even if the mechanics of making it happen can have a sense of repetition, that's kind of a metaphor for what's being played with in the story anyway. So it's a workout, but in a good way.

Does working on a show like this give you strange dreams?

It does actually! I learn my lines just before I go to sleep – that's the best way for them to get into my brain. There's a cyclical thing I have: being on those travelators in airports and never being able to get to the end. I have really vivid dreams, and it's hard not to when you're imaginatively in the world. There's a point in the first episode where we're 52 three-week loops in, and trying to get into the psychology of what it's like, it's hard not for that to affect your subconscious. That's the way I work.

"WE, AS A CAST, ARE SORT OF A SECT"

Charly Clive and Caroline Quentin play Sarah and Wes

Having taken the serum, Sarah must be remembering other timelines.

CC: Yes, she's going through that sort of time puberty George goes through in the first series.

How does she react to that?

CC: Sarah looks at things from an ethical standpoint. She's looked at the morality of manipulating time to change the future: is it the right thing, and how far could this go in the wrong direction? Her journey throughout series two is grappling with firstly, a life that she didn't choose for herself – she chose the serum, but not knowing entirely what it was going to do to her. Then secondly, with the info she now has – not just the George of it all, but how does she feel about that generally, taking herself out of the equation? So she's got a bit of a mindfuck!

Lazarus bring her into the fold?

CC: That happens very quickly in the first episode.

CQ: Wes is taken with Sarah. She recognises a fantastically clever, astute woman when she meets one. And that accelerates her journey into the Lazarus Project.

We didn't learn much about Wes's backstory in series one...

CQ: I certainly didn't! And I still don't know a huge amount. But we do find out a lot more about her domestic life, her romantic life, and also her political stance – her approach to the morality of time travel. We have a much clearer picture of who Elisabeth Wesley is in this series, and what Lazarus means to her.

This series takes place in 2024, 2018 and 2012, with loops within that. Is it hard keeping track?

CC: 100%. Every day starts with 4000 people saying, "What's happening? What loop are we in?"

CQ: Wardrobe start, then make-up – everyone going, "Where are we? What sort of hair have you got?" It's very taxing.

CC: We have a fantastic script supervisor, Chiara Carbonara. She's the guru. Everybody's running around like headless chickens going, "Where's Sarah just come from? Why is Wes in the office?" Then everyone will simultaneously look over at Chiara and she'll calmly go, "Well, you've just come from here, in this episode this happened..." She

hands out sweets when things get stressful.

CQ: Real sweets, as in chocolate, but also verbal sweets, as in telling us what the fuck we're all doing every day!

CC: Because we've been doing it a long time, there's now a shared language. I think if people were walking through the studio they'd be like, "Is everybody in here mad?"

CQ: It becomes a weird sort of normality. In the way that Lazarus is sort of a sect, we, as a cast, are sort of a sect. It's become a cult!


Does working on a show like this affect your dreams?

CC: There's that classic thing actors have where they're going to forget their lines. This one is, "I'm going to not know what year I'm in."

CQ: Or "I'll have the wrong hair" – I'm grey sometimes, then I'm black.

CC: Somebody will come in and say, "I had weird dreams last night." Then Caroline or Anjli will be like, "Yeah, me too!" We're all weirdly on this very similar sleep pattern. There's definitely a funny little hive mind going on.

“We have a much clearer picture of who Elisabeth Wesley is in this series”



George gets a dose of what's good for him. Maybe.



Janet in the cylinder. Spot the greenscreen.

That must open the door to conundrums like the Grandfather Paradox. “Yes, that idea of characters meeting themselves, going back and changing events. All that butterfly effect stuff – what happens if you change a little thing? It’s a much more complex and plotty version. But we still have the checkpoints. So it’s both concepts crashing into one another.”

So it’s possible to travel back to a different year *and* then reset to 1 July? This could make a writer’s brain leak from their ears. “The flowcharts were numerous and very complex,” Barton says. “*The It’s Always Sunny In Philadelphia* meme gif – the guy at the whiteboard going insane – that was me every day! You could time-travel back to a year where there were multiple time loops, so then your time traveller’s in a time loop situation. As you change something, do you still go in the loop? It all smashed into one another. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do.”


On series one, the production had to contend with Covid protocols. Does being freed from such restrictions mean series two can go bigger, scale-wise? “Actually, I think the *ideas* are bigger,” says Barton. “In terms of action, it may even have slightly less. The first one was more of a thriller, whereas this one has, at its heart, a more complex idea. I feel it’s more like it’s on a philosophically different scale, rather than, y’know, more car chases.”

During our visit, we grab the chance to observe a scene being shot in Wes’s office in Lazarus HQ. Set in 2012, it features Wes, George and Sarah. Two seated characters – actually the same person at different ages,

we’re told – are unfamiliar (*The Witcher*’s Istredd, Royce Pierreson, plays the older version). Watching the monitors from a space directly below, we hear a crew member simulating gunshots by shouting “BANG BANG BANG BANG!”, and George saying, “I just need five minutes – I can undo this!” Sarah passes George a handgun, ushering him towards the door and urging him to “Buy us some time.” As he exits, Essiedu’s footsteps clatter on the metal walkway above our head.

Close-ups are next, revealing George’s blood-splattered shirt, thousand yard stare and heavy breathing. Between takes, the actor stays in the zone with the aid of press-ups, jogging on the spot, and some slightly unnerving animalistic growling... Down, boy.

Series one concluded with George in disgrace, colleague Archie (Anjali Mohindra)



Behind the scenes at the Time Break Initiative.

now aware of his betrayal, and Sarah – given a syringe of the serum that enables Lazarus Project operatives to retain memories of resets by George – walking into their base, having injected it. Looks like Sarah becomes a Lazarus agent herself, and George eventually returns to the fold – well, he is the lead character...

We ask Barton to unpack the character dynamics. How does awareness of the resets affect Sarah? “One of the exciting things about getting a second series was the chance to bring in this character who’d been a supporting character and make her a main player,” he says. “We have a lot of fun with that.”

“Part of it was using her as a way of exploring the mental headspace of being in this mad situation. I was really interested in what being stuck in this three-week loop would do to a normal person and how, living in a world that’s essentially free of consequences, your morality might bend and warp.”

NEW FACES

As for George: his main concern, initially, is finding redemption by proving himself to the colleagues he let down.

“There’s no way they can properly punish him, because they’re in a three-week loop,” Barton points out. “They can’t put him in prison, because it all gets undone. It’s about him wanting them to understand why he did what he did, and trust him again.”

New characters include a Time Break Initiative scientist called Dr Samson, played by Sam Troughton (grandson of Second Doctor Patrick). “He’s brought into the fold as well,” notes


Barton. Genre veteran Colin

Salmon is on-board as Robin Lerner, the leader of the Time Break Initiative. Archie’s late partner Ross (Brian Gleeson) will be returning, and so will “a couple of different versions” of Rebrov and Janet’s daughter Becky.

Speaking to some of the leads earlier, we were amused to discover that they’ve taken to checking in with one another on Checkpoint Day – 1 July. And when it comes to the end of that three-week time loop, Barton can’t help but remember the date...

“The world ends on 21 July and then jumps back to 1 July, and 21 July is my son’s birthday,” he explains. “He’s 12, and we had a sleepover, with about nine 12-year-olds sleeping over in my house. And I did think, ‘This *feels* like the end of the world.’ It felt authentic!” ●

The Lazarus Project is on Sky Max and NOW this November.



Richard Osman pays a friendly visit to Lazarus HQ.

ALIX E HARROW

Due south: the American writer tells us about her latest novel

Words by Jonathan Wright // Portrait by Elora Overbey

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH SOUTHERN Gothic? Especially if, as in the case of Alix E Harrow, the very term takes makes you think of Toni Morrison, the Nobel-winning novelist whose *Beloved* drew on one of America's richest literary traditions to explore the psychological effects of slavery, to devastating effect.

"What are you even doing?" Harrow asks rhetorically down the line from her home. "How can you play in that sandbox?" Perhaps you do so because it's time and you suddenly have no choice. Two years ago, Harrow and her family left Kentucky for Charlottesville, Virginia. "We'd sold our house and we were moving, and I was finally like, 'Oh, I have to write my Kentucky book now,'" she says.

The result is *Starling House*, a haunted home mystery that's as rich and strange as any novel you'll read this year. The setting is important because Harrow wasn't just engaging with a literary tradition, but with history too. "The best Southern Gothic, I think, is rooted not just in the American South broadly, but with a specific farm or place, or a piece of land," she says, adding that she thinks of the book as "Kentucky Gothic".

The novel draws on the state's coal-mining history, and the story of a town called Paradise in Muhlenberg County, subject of a well-known song by country-folk singer John Prine. This is an area synonymous with open-pit strip-mining, which scars the landscape, and with a vast coal-fired power plant built in 1963. Such was the environmental degradation that in 1967 the last few residents of Paradise had to be relocated "because the air and water were so incredibly toxic".

But what if the town had survived? *Starling House* is set in Eden, a place where the ghosts of the past intrude on the present and haunt, among others, Harrow's economically challenged heroine, Opal.

RAKING OVER OLD COALS

The novel also reflects Harrow's family history, but here, mindful of "maintaining relations", she refuses to go into detail. This much she does offer: "My grandfather was hit and killed by a coal train when my mom was young, my great grandfather was killed by a coal truck before that, many of them worked in mines." At the risk of seeming tasteless, it sounds like they were auditioning to be the subjects of country songs. "Absolutely!"

Harrow's own upbringing was unconventional; her childhood was one of "shifting identities" and moving

BIODATA

From *Born in Idaho; grew up in Colorado and Kentucky.*

Greatest Hits
The Ten Thousand Doors Of January (2019) was nominated for multiple awards, while *The Once And Future Witches* (2020) took the Robert Holdstock Award for Best Fantasy Novel.

Random Fact
Harrow's mum sounds pretty cool: she's a falconer (she caught, trained and hunted with a red-tailed hawk). She also trains horses and practices Mongolian archery.



around. "[My parents] were just always interested in anti-institutional stuff," Harrow says. "They were interested in the concept of unschooling in particular, instead of homeschooling. They were never at any point going to sit us down and be like, 'Here's your curriculum, you need to study to pass these tests.' They were just like, 'Follow your heart.'"

Which is why, instead of going to high school, Harrow wrote a "terrible, horrible fantasy novel" at home. "After realising that I was not, at 14, a great writer, I was like, 'Well, I better figure out something else to do,'" she says.

THE REST IS HISTORY

She returned to education and became a historian. Was her subject choice down to needing to make a living? "Can you hear how horrible a plan that is?" she laughs. "Did you do history because you wanted to make a living?" A horrible choice. Rather, she was insecure about her interest in writing fantasy and "wanted to be taken seriously". In 2009 – "a fantastic time economically..." – she graduated. "I lived in a van for about a year and did migrant farm-work," she says, at which point she went back to do a master's degree and began "adjuncting", teaching without being a full-time staff member.

It wasn't a stable career, but then in truth Harrow wasn't much interested in academia. Rereading, among others, Ursula K Le Guin from an adult's perspective, she realised that "You can write about power and empire and gender and race and class and still be riding with dragons." It was a revelation. She decided to review genre books, and later to write short stories. She was preparing for life as a novelist.

This began in earnest with the publication of *The Ten Thousand Doors Of January* (2019), a debut that set out to subvert classic children's portal fantasies, books that can be read as "artefacts of an imperial age". The novel was a bestseller, but even when she received her first advance, Harrow knew it was time to quit academia. "My agent was like, 'I don't know if this is quit-your-job money, just to be clear.' And it was like, 'I think you overestimate how much money I need to live and how much money my job earns!'"

Pregnant with her second child, and with the support of her husband, she began writing full-time. Sometimes, personal history – an unconventional life, an awareness of how you can survive hard times – plays into the present in positive ways. ●

Starling House is published by Tor on 31 October.

“You can write
about power
and empire, race
and class, and
still be riding
with dragons”



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edited by Ian Berriman

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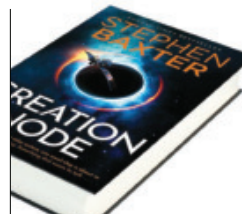
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→ The Hitchcock classic is bundled with three newly remastered sequels.



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→ A planet-cum-portal is found on the edge of the Solar System in Stephen Baxter's latest novel.

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED

★★★★★ SUPERB

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★★★ AVERAGE

★★★ POOR

★ TERRIBLE

THE CREATOR

Machines Against The Rage

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 133 minutes

► Director Gareth Edwards

► Cast John David Washington,

Gemma Chan, Madeleine Yuna Voyles,

Ken Watanabe, Sturgill Simpson

► **Since breaking through in a big way with 2010's *Monsters*, which mixed a compelling relationship story with giant creatures and an indie sensibility with some impressive effects, writer/director Gareth Edwards has, it's fair to say, had something of a rough go of it. He saw box office success with both 2014's *Godzilla* and 2016's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, but was beset by talk of behind-the-scenes drama.**

Also on a difficult journey is Joshua (John David Washington), a man living in the world of Edwards's latest, *The Creator*. After advanced AI is developed and starts causing trouble for humanity – including a nuclear weapon levelling Los Angeles – mankind has gone to war with the synthetics.

Yet while the Western world wants to wipe them off the face of the planet, New Asia, as it is known in 2070, has fully embraced the artificial lifeforms and is engaged in a campaign to save them. To combat the terrifying,

missile-launching hovering platform named NOMAD which humans are using to turn the tide of the war against the machines, a mysterious individual named Nirmata ("the creator" in Sanskrit) has devised a new weapon. But when Joshua is assigned to track it down, he discovers an AI child named Alpha and Omega (Madeleine Yuna Voyles). Complications ahoy!

The Creator sees Edwards getting back to his roots in mostly successful fashion. Yes, he has a big studio funding his vision this time, leading to a bigger scope, but he's once more using sci-fi to explore a story of humanity and ethics. He and his small crew collected beautiful footage in Thailand and elsewhere, and the visuals are sumptuous.

Collaborating once again with *Rogue One* cinematographer Greig Fraser (who departed midway to work on *Dune: Part Two*, but left more than capable prodigy Oren Soffer in his stead), Edwards has come up with striking and evocative backdrops for his latest, whether these are mountainsides, fields, beaches or grubby industrial milieus. There are some compelling concepts too, including people "donating" their likeness to next-level AI who look more human than the metal-headed



It was the best way to take out the attack dwarfs.



"Dad, can we have one of these? Dad? Dad?"

earlier models, a haunting method of transferring dying/dead humans' brain patterns onto AI circuitry, and a squat robo-weapon that has Dusty Bin-meets-suicide-bomber energy.

Where the film falls down to some degree is with the story. The director/co-writer (he worked on the script with Chris Weitz) doesn't so much as wear his inspirations on his sleeve here as sport one of those name-line T-shirts reading, "Cameron, Wachowski, Cuarón, Coppola". Because there are clear intersections with the likes of *The*

“Advanced AI is developed and starts causing trouble for humanity”

Terminator/*Aliens*, *The Matrix*, *Children Of Men* and *Apocalypse Now*. It's hard to make a film such as this and not draw from the classics, but there are times when *The Creator* feels more like a remix than something truly fresh. There are also tropes to be found littering



the plotline, including the young AI's questions about heaven and existence, and Joshua's search for the wife (Gemma Chan) he thought he'd lost.

And that's even before you encounter some plot holes big enough to fly the NOMAD station through, including how Joshua and his charge are able to make it through a technologically sophisticated city brimming with complex artificial life without popping up on a single facial recognition camera system.

Yet there is still enough of Edwards's invention here to make

the film work on its own terms. The cast certainly helps with that. Washington is suitably soulful and thoughtful as Joshua, bonding with the AI sprog he nicknames "Alphie" as he realises that a lot of what he's been told might not be correct. Voyles, for her part, is wide-eyed and emotional without being precocious or annoying.

Allison Janney, following her tough-nut turn in Netflix action thriller *Lou*, goes full Sarah Connor as the ruthless Colonel Howell, who'll stop at nothing to find Joshua and Alphie. Edwards has also filled the supporting roles

with the interesting, memorable likes of Ralph Ineson, Amar Chadha-Patel, Sturgill Simpson and Ken Watanabe. The latter, impressive as always, is Harun, an AI with a connection to Joshua, and he brings extra layers of feeling to a basic role.

Ultimately, Edwards's attempt at breaking away from the restrictions of other peoples' fictional universes is a welcome, if not perfect, example of a director reclaiming his path. **James White**

i In the first draft of the script, Joshua was being pursued by one side. After Edwards "got a note", it became both sides.

THE KIDS ARE ALL BYTE

Four more robotic children

ASTRO BOY

In Osamu Tezuka's manga (later a TV series) a scientist creates an android child after his son dies in a car crash. Capable of jet flight, and fitted with a retractable machine gun, Astro's adventures see him battling robots and aliens.



VICI

In '80s sitcom *Small Wonder*, a robotics engineer took VICI (Voice Input Child Identificant), a robot aimed to help handicapped children, home to live with his family. Tiffany Brissette played the atomic-powered lass with a serial port under her left armpit, who could change size and jump-start a car.



SIMON

In the 1995 *The Outer Limits* episode "Simon Says", an engineer transfers "engrams" preserved from his dead son into a body built using parts pinched from the robotics company where he works. When his boss finds out, it doesn't end well...



DAVID

Adapted from Brian Aldiss's story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long", Steven Spielberg's 2001 film *AI: Artificial Intelligence* starred Haley Joel Osment as a prototype android, created with the capacity to love, who like Pinocchio yearns to be human. It's overrated, kid.



ALAMY



"I really hope that the AI doesn't snore."

FOE Three's a crowd

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 20 OCTOBER**

15 | 110 minutes

► Director **Garth Davis**

► Cast **Saoirse Ronan, Paul Mescal, Aaron Pierre**

🔗 **The year is 2065. Earth is** borderline uninhabitable due to extreme weather, and the government has launched Outermore, an initiative to start a human colony in space. When Junior (Paul Mescal) is enlisted into the programme, Outermore rep Terrance (Aaron Pierre) promises Henrietta (Saoirse Ronan) that she won't be alone in her husband's absence – she'll be joined by an AI that looks, sounds and acts just like him. Terrance then sticks around to carry out ambiguous "tests" on the pair.

The young couple's relationship is fraught, heightened by the

introduction of this quietly hostile stranger into their otherwise isolated home. As Junior's departure draws nearer, their marriage begins to heal and their passion reignites, but Terrance continues to be an unsettling presence in their home. His unapologetic invasion of privacy feels visceral, and the way the trio dance around each other in a space made suddenly claustrophobic is hypnotic.

Foe confronts issues like the climate crisis and the ethics of AI, but Junior and Hen's marriage is its beating heart. Ronan and Mescal's performances keep a somewhat predictable third act twist feeling fresh, paving the way for a surprising, satisfying ending.

Emily Garbutt

i Though set in the American Midwest, the movie was shot in a flood-ravaged area of Wangaratta in southeast Australia.

A HAUNTING IN VENICE Medium level Poirot

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 103 minutes

► Director **Kenneth Branagh**

► Cast **Kenneth Branagh, Kelly Reilly, Michelle Yeoh, Tina Fey**

🔗 **In their previous Agatha Christie adaptations** – 2017's *Murder On The Orient Express* and its lesser follow-up, 2022's *Death On The Nile* – director/star Kenneth Branagh and writer Michael Green largely stuck closely to the text of the stories they are bringing to the screen. But with *A Haunting In Venice*, they're taking Christie's 1969 novel *Hallowe'en Party* and essentially stripping it for parts.

A spooky theme (it's set at Halloween), children in key roles, apple bobbing and the name Joyce Reynolds comprise most of what made the transition. The latter

role is handed to Oscar-winner Michelle Yeoh, who plays a medium offering her services to grieving mother/fading opera star Rowena Drake (Kelly Reilly), whose daughter died a year before, falling from the balcony of her mother's crumbling Venetian palazzo. Before long someone else is slaughtered, and a sceptical Poirot must wade through a seemingly supernatural mystery.

Branagh is, as ever, a serviceable Hercule, fortunately free of moustache origin-story burdens this time, and surrounds himself with a cast that runs the typical gamut from game performers to those who let the melodrama flow. Tina Fey makes for a sparky, funny

“Before long someone else is slaughtered”



"My 'tache it is, 'ow you say... very silly."

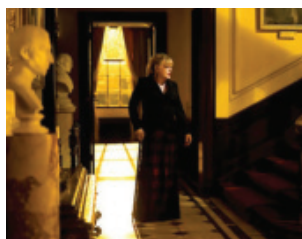
old friend type as writer Ariadne Oliver, who sees the case as a chance to bring Poirot out of pastry-guzzling retirement.

Jude Hill, meanwhile, proves *Belfast* wasn't a fluke with an understated and thorough turn. He's also a serious contender for anyone looking to make a live-action update of *Joe 90*. Otherwise, it's mostly thespians

throwing themselves into lines such as "I saw evil... Death follows". The occasional diversion into schlocky horror jump-scares aside, it's better than *Nile* at least, with some superior sound design and cinematography.

James White

i This is the first cinematic take on *Hallowe'en Party*, though it was brought to TV with David Suchet as Poirot.



DOCTOR JEKYLL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** 27 OCTOBER

15 | 88 minutes

► Director Joe Stephenson

► Cast Eddie Izzard, Scott Chambers, Lindsay Duncan, Robyn Cara

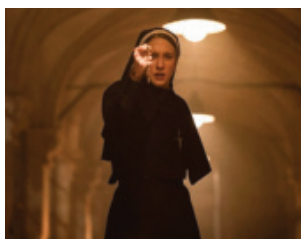
➔ **This Hammer horror film** is a refreshing throwback to the studio's glory days – although it's worth noting that Joe Stephenson's feature only officially became a Hammer title after filming was already done and dusted.

Eddie Izzard takes the title role of Dr Nina Jekyll, a brilliant but ailing scientist looking for someone to help out around her sprawling mansion – a classic Hammer setting. Enter Rob (Scott Chambers), a troubled former offender who is looking for a chance to help his young family. But Rob's past isn't easily shaken off, and nor is Jekyll's dark side, the sinister Rachel Hyde.

Stephenson takes the slow burn approach, making the transformation between Jekyll's two personas internal, rather than relying on special effects. This adds a note of paranoia throughout – you're never entirely sure whether Jekyll or Hyde is in control.

Izzard's performance is strong throughout, a compelling portrait of a woman who knows the best of life is behind her. The final emergence of Hyde, however, requires a gear switch to histrionics. That's fine, but it comes at the same time as a baffling last-minute development that has little to do with the story being told. Still, it wouldn't be a real Hammer film without a slightly ropey ending, now, would it?

Will Salmon



THE NUN II

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

15 | 110 minutes

► Director Michael Chaves

► Cast Taissa Farmiga, Jonas Bloquet, Storm Reid, Bonnie Aarons

➔ **The demonic nun** who popped up in *The Conjuring 2* and went on to have her own standalone feature in 2018 is back to scare up more souls, in a serviceable sequel that finds her terrorising the unwary in a gloomy girls' boarding school in '50s France.

The nun who dispatched her last time (Taissa Farmiga) is duly sent to investigate, eventually reuniting with Maurice (Jonas Bloquet), the guide who saved her in the first film, only for him to end up possessed. Demián Bichir's Father Burke is nowhere to be seen, though, having turned down the off... sorry, died of cholera in the interim.

With two previous *Conjuring* Universe instalments under his belt, director Michael Chaves knows how to evoke a sinister atmosphere and make an audience jump. Yet the limitations of his villain are beginning to show, her now-predictable habit of emerging from shadows with golden eyes a-gleaming requiring additional ghouls (a diabolical goat among them) to do the heavy lifting.

Farmiga's Irene spends much of the story either sidelined or playing nursemaid to Reid's faith-challenged postulant. A mid-credits appearance from a pair of familiar faces, meanwhile, merely invites a weary acceptance that this 10-year-old franchise may only just be getting started.

Mark Samuels

TOTAL FILM



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GAMERA: REBIRTH Season One Shell shock

★★★★★

UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Director Hiroyuki Seshita

► Cast Hisako Kanemoto,
Yoshitsugu Matsuoka, Saori Hayami,
Mamoru Miyano

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 The Japanese monster Gamera is a gigantic turtle which flies, shoots fireballs, becomes a spinning blade and protects children. This Netflix-produced anime reboot (the first animated Gamera series) focuses on the kids, though it's definitely not a kids' show.

Set in an alternate '90s, it starts with three grade-schoolers on summer vacation. They see an attack on Tokyo by man-eating avian giants, as well as Gamera's appearance to save the day.

However, it's just the first in a series of monster attacks, and one of the kids may be the target...

It's really enjoyable, if you can get past one major hurdle. It's a CG series, which will cause anime fans to be put off on principle, and the CG's issues are quickly obvious. The humans can look very awkward and unappealing, with unnatural expressions and low frame-rates, and a slice of the audience will deem the show unwatchable. But the look is forgivable, given the engaging

“It's really enjoyable, if you can get past one major hurdle”



“Trust me... the Gamera never lies, you know.”

characters with interesting arcs, and a well-paced story with deftly timed twists. Moreover, the big monsters look far better than the humans, with well-staged fights – the best adversary being the somersaulting, saw-headed Guiron. The full-blooded music and sound effects make this feel like a true monster epic.

It's still a show where characters talk out their issues at

risibly dangerous moments, and the profanity comes as a shock – even if it's not a kids' toon, f-bombs feel misplaced in a Gamera adventure. But beneath that ugly surface, *Rebirth* is a solid adventure that deals with its monsters properly.

Andrew Osmond

i A genus of extinct freshwater turtle from the Cretaceous period is named after Gamera: *Gameraabaena sonsalla*.

ONE PIECE Season One Hats Entertainment

★★★★★

UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Showrunners Matt Owens,

Steven Maeda

► Cast Iñaki Godoy, Emily Rudd,
Mackenyu, Jacob Romero Gibson

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 When it was announced, Netflix's live-action take on *One Piece* was deemed the Worst Idea Ever among anime fandom. Now it's arrived to tons of plaudits – rather too many given the quality of the series, although it's likeable enough and often entertaining.

Its world is recognisably that of Eiichiro Oda's epic-length manga. So are its cast of characters, even if they (wisely) bear only the slightest visual resemblance to Oda's cartoon figures.

Like many live-action manga adaptations, the show can feel rather like a stage pantomime. Yet

it convinces you more than most do that it's playing for real. Its hero Luffy (Iñaki Godoy) is joyous, guileless and good-hearted. In a world with oceans of sea serpents, fish-men and berserk buccaneers, Luffy dreams of becoming the Pirate King. He seeks the legendary One Piece treasure, somewhere out there in the world.

Luffy starts with just a wacky superpower: his body is massively stretchy, thanks to him eating the wrong fruit as a kid. Then he starts collecting bewildered allies for his crew of “Straw Hats”, protecting innocents and taking on baddies.

Not many shows could get away with having a clown-faced pirate heavy (Jeff Ward) who's blatantly close to Heath Ledger's Joker, yet *One Piece* not just gets away with it but turns that episode into an early high.

A slump follows, though, with



Luffy wears vest by George (£6). Hat: model's own.

a very protracted “mansion with sinister servants” story that's not nearly atmospheric enough, and saddled with poorly placed flashbacks. A later story tries to give its monstrous villains depth through a slavery backstory. Next to this, *Black Panther's* Killmonger was the model of sensitivity.

Yet Luffy's gaiety shines through. So do some lovely little bits of whimsy, like the snails that

serve as communication devices. The show's swings in tone are impressively reckless, as mad as manga, from farce to despair to moving redemption.

It's still very rough sailing, but it's stirring to see both the show and Luffy improving together.

Andrew Osmond

i Kaya's mansion has some topiary shaped like a panda's head – a nod to Pandaman, a recurring gag in the manga.

A TIME CALLED YOU Season One Quantum (Leap) Of Solace

★★★★★

UK Netflix, streaming now

► Director Kim Jin-won

► Cast Jeon Yeo-been, Ahn Hyo-Seop, Kang Hoon, Hyuk-kwon Park

EPISODES 1.01-1.12 Adapted from a hugely successful 2019 Taiwanese series called *Someday Or One Day*, at first glance this South Korean drama is a wishy-washy romance in which two doomed lovers stare tearfully at each other for hours on end. In actuality, it's a time travel headfuck that constantly undermines itself, *Lost*-style, until you either go with the flow or give up.

In 2023, a year after a plane crash claimed the life of Gu Yeon-jun (Ahn Hyo-seop), his still-grieving girlfriend, Han Jun-hee

(Jeon Yeo-been), inexplicably finds herself flung back to 1998. The confused Jun-hee is now inhabiting the body of schoolgirl Kwon Min-ju, who looks just like her. Bizarrely, Min-ju is friends with the younger version of the dead Yeon-jun... except that his name here is Nam Si-heon, and even as a teenager, he's too old to be the guy Jun-hee knows in the future. Confused? You ain't seen nothin' yet.

With constant time-jumps and the same actors playing various versions of themselves from 1998 to 2023, a lot depends on the viewer knowing who's on screen in what time period and which name they're using at the time. The fact the script works at all is testament to how well the show



"Do I know you?" "That's what I was going to say."

has been cast: Jeon Yeo-been in particular is utterly convincing as both the timid, wouldn't-say-boo-to-a-goose Min-ju and the worldly, takes-no-shit Jun-hee.

Throw in a love triangle (or love hexagon, depending on who you count), a hideous pop song with magical powers, and a murderer on the loose and, well, there's a lot going on in these 12 episodes. There's still time to breathe,

however, with the script taking pains to explore exactly how everybody falls in love in their individual time periods.

And rest assured that, after a bewildering maze of time-hops and quantum leaps into strangers, it all makes sense in the end. Sort of... **Jayne Nelson**

i Actor Kang Hoon is actually 32, so to seem more authentic as a high school student he lost about eight kilograms.

FUTURAMA Season 11, Part One Express redelivery

★★★★★

UK Disney+, streaming now

US Hulu, streaming now

► Showrunner David X Cohen

► Cast John DiMaggio, Katey Sagal, Billy West, Lauren Tom

EPISODES 11.01-11.10 There are few certainties in life, but *Futurama* finding a way back from cancellation is probably one of them. Ten years on from the show's (supposedly) final farewell, this latest resurrection picks up the story where its predecessor left off, and the writers are clearly keen to make up for lost time.

The "Bad news, everyone" is that episodes riffing on Covid, cancel culture, Bitcoin and the dominance of Amazon feel very late to the party. That wouldn't

matter if season 11 (don't write in – that's how Disney+ are counting it) had something fresh or clever to say about the major talking points of the last decade, but all the show's principal targets have already been satirised in more sophisticated – and funnier – ways elsewhere.

It's ironic, too, that a show set in the 31st century should feel so anchored to the past. US streamer Hulu was always likely to play the nostalgia card when it relaunched *Planet Express*, but with so many familiar guest stars back in action – Zapp Brannigan, Nixon, Nibbler, Robot Santa, the residents of Omicron Persei 8 – new ideas struggle to get a look in.

There are, thankfully, a few echoes of the glory days. The



Dr Zoidberg struggles to make ends meet.

universes within universes of "All The Way Down" prove that *Futurama* hasn't forgotten how to put a comedic spin on big sci-fi ideas, while "Children Of A Lesser Bog" is a touching 20-years-later sequel to season four's "Kif Gets Knocked Up A Notch".

But, in a turn of events worthy of a *Futurama* storyline, the show feels like it's spent the last decade trapped in a stasis field while the

best sci-fi comedy has marched on to new frontiers. Too often, season 11 plays out like a poor facsimile of the show's brilliant former self. Maybe the next time *Futurama* faces the axe, TV's robot overlords should break with tradition and allow a classic to rest in peace.

Richard Edwards

i Look out for a blink-and-you'll miss it cameo from *Disenchantment*'s Princess Bean, Elfo and Luci in episode six.



"Oh god, I think I've left the oven on. Again."

THE PSYCHO COLLECTION

Shall I be mother?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1960-1990 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

► Directors Alfred Hitchcock, Richard Franklin, Anthony Perkins, Mick Garris
► Cast Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles, Meg Tilly, Diana Scarwid, Olivia Hussey

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Where to begin** with *Psycho*, the film which invented modern horror? There's the audaciousness of killing off apparent protagonist Marion Crane 47 minutes in; Bernard Herrmann's violin-stab strings; Alfred Hitchcock's mastery of montage; *that* twist. But what really makes it work is Norman Bates: a middle-aged de Sade fan in Robert Bloch's novel; a sympathetic boy-next-door type in the hands of Anthony Perkins.

Thankfully, that focus on character is retained in the sequels. *Psycho II* could so easily have been a generic slasher. While there are hints of that (with two

canoodling teens attacked by Mother in *Friday The 13th* style), *Fright Night* writer Tom Holland's script is suitably respectful. Releasing Norman back into the community, it leaves us guessing whether new murders are his work, or if someone's gaslighting him, with much bait and switch. The pay-off is maybe a twist too far, but it's great fun, and the central relationship between Norman and young waitress Mary is touchingly sweet.

You can only play "Is he or isn't he?" once, which leaves *Psycho III* (directed by its star) to play the hits, as the arrival of a blonde with the initials MC gets Norman twitchy. Crammed with references to familiar situations (for shower cubicle, substitute phone booth), lines of dialogue ("We all go a little mad sometimes") and specific shots (*that* smile), this basket of Easter eggs avoids being just a pointless retread via its winking

self-awareness: having Woody Woodpecker's laugh blare out after a killing is particularly neat.

The one turkey is Mick Garris's prequel, *Psycho IV: The Beginning*. There are three major problems. Firstly, the framing device (which sees Norman phoning a radio show to confess his past) sidelines Perkins, mostly stuck in a kitchen as Henry Thomas (*ET*'s Elliot) plays young Master Bates.

Secondly, we know all we *need* to know about Norman's backstory already. And while if anyone has the right to retcon it's original screenwriter Joseph Stefano, it's impossible to square the croaky, puritanical Mother of Norman's mind's eye with the voluptuous, libidinous figure presented here (*Black Christmas*' Olivia Hussey).

► **Extras** Already own *Psycho* on Blu-ray? Then you have the bonuses, which include feature-length 1997 doc *The Making Of Psycho*, "In The Master's Shadow"

(a 2008 featurette on Hitchcock's influence); commentary by *Psycho* know-all Stephen Rebello, and excerpts from Hitch's discussions with Francois Truffaut.

Arrow Video have remastered the sequels. Nearly all the *Psycho II* extras were on their standalone 2017 Blu-ray. The standout is a lively chat with Tom Holland and Mick Garris (43 minutes); the two bond over Anthony Perkins's eccentricity and need to "talk things through endlessly". Holland also supplies commentary.

The author of a spin-off novel pays tribute to Robert Bloch (nine minutes). A fruit cellar-full of scraps includes a Q&A with director Richard Franklin (20 minutes), old TV interviews and nearly two hours of a press kit record. The one brand new bonus: commentary by writers Michael Brooke and Johnny Mains.

The duo do likewise on *Psycho III*, supplementing a writer track. A visual essay (11 minutes) tackles the film's "postmodern

“The one turkey is the prequel, *Psycho IV: The Beginning*”

playfulness". Composer Carter Burwell (15 minutes) supplies anecdotes about a music video. Four more interviews (actors Jeff Fahey and Kat Shea; make-up artist Michael Westmore; a body double – 42 minutes) are ported from the US Shout! Factory release. You also get four scenes from the TV cut.

Psycho IV has commentary by Garris, Thomas and Hussey, a visual essay on the scores (18 minutes), and a waffly piece on making Mother's corpse (28 minutes), plus raw BTS footage (19 minutes). A fifth disc contains a 4:3 TV presentation. Plus: shower scene storyboards; a newsreel aimed at distributors of *Psycho*; a demo of *II*'s theme; EPK material; trailers; TV spots; galleries; a 120-page book; four double-sided posters; nine art cards. **Ian Berriman**

i Keep 'em peeled during *Psycho II* for a cameo by director Richard Franklin, playing the arcade machine in the diner.

ALAMY



THE LEGEND OF THE 7 GOLDEN VAMPIRES

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 16 OCTOBER**

1974 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Roy Ward Baker

▶ Cast Peter Cushing, David Chiang, Julie Ege, Robin Stewart

BLU-RAY DEBUT The product of a short-lived team-up with Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers, this curio saw Hammer Films trying to surf the wave of the martial arts boom.

Christopher Lee had by now thrown in the towel, but Peter Cushing is on-board as Van Helsing, who teams up with seven warrior brothers to take on the titular vamps (now down to six) who periodically swoop on their ancestral village, carrying off nubile to snack on.

Swapping gothic castle for rural temple, it brings together the Western vampire (Dracula bookends the movie, having – for sketchy reasons – assumed Asiatic form) with Chinese mythology's hop-along undead. As much time is spent en route, it feels more like an adventure tale, while the final battle uses the *Seven Samurai* template.

Cushing brings his usual gaunt sincerity, though in the absence of a Buddha figure to wield like a crucifix he's often reduced to "concerned face" as Shaw regulars clash swords. Although mute, the Golden Vampires are striking figures – with their ravaged skin, gold masks and gigantic bat medallions, they'd make for a great Halloween costume.

➔ **Extras** The US Shout Factory edition had interviews and commentary. We just get a trailer and gallery. **Ian Berriman**



"Oh bloody hell, I've left the keys in my other jeans."

AWARENESS

He's got the look

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 11 OCTOBER**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Daniel Benmayor

▶ Cast Carlos Scholz, Pedro Alonso, María Pedraza, Óscar Jaenada

PRIME VIDEO This Spanish

language sci-fi thriller sets out to show that anything Hollywood can do, they can do. While that does prove to be the case, perhaps it'd be better to prove that you can do something wholly original. It's not shy about trading in clichés, from bullet casings spitting from a machine-gun in slow-mo to a character actually saying, "Come with me if you want to live."

Indeed, the most unorthodox thing about it might be the name of its hero: Ian, an 18-year-old Joe Cornish type seemingly as unassuming as his moniker – and trust us, it's even stranger hearing that name ring out amid sci-fi action when it's *your* name...

Gifted with the ability to make people see what he wants (cue much constipated-face staring), Ian has grown up off the grid with his father. But when some petty theft goes pear-shaped this "Perceiver" gets caught in the

conflict between two secretive organisations – the Agency and the Awareness. Soon he's unpeeling the layers of his own backstory.

Featuring a string of rug-pulls, seamlessly edited transitions between illusion and reality, and some impressive interiors (is there an Oscar for location scouting?), it's slickly produced nonsense, with just enough human emotion at its core. Fans of *The Matrix* – which inescapably springs to mind when, say, Ian projects multiple gun-toting versions of himself – should be entertained.

The *A-Team* approach to violence (everyone's a lousy shot; there isn't so much as a smear of blood) proves tiresome though – once you're onto the fourth wave of effortlessly dispatched goons (the balaclava budget must have been five figures) it starts to lose any impact. And it can be disconcerting when it's the hero wielding extreme force: in reality, braining a puppeteered civilian with a wine bottle would likely maim them for life.

Ian Berriman

Other sci-fi lams include *Doctor Who* companion Ian Chesterton, *Jurassic Park*'s Ian Malcolm, and Joe 90's dad.



PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 6 OCTOBER**

2023 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Director Lindsey Anderson Beer

▶ Cast Jackson White, David Duchovny, Henry Thomas, Isabelle LaBlanc

PARAMOUNT+ This painfully unnecessary prequel to *Pet Sematary* (the 2019 one) feels like the result of online "plot hole" discourse. If the horror of a family torn apart by grief and dark magic doesn't work for you unless you know exactly how and why everything is happening, this film is for you.

Set mostly in 1969 (with a brief visit to 1674), *Bloodlines* sees a young Jud Crandall (Jackson White) discovering the horrors out beyond the titular graveyard. Why is there a pet cemetery out in the woods? Why were there kids in creepy masks traipsing through the forest? Where did the curse begin, and what do the Native Americans know about it? You'll find out! At great length!

Poor old David Duchovny does his best as the father of a resurrected young soldier, but even he can't wring any real emotion out of the horrifying storyline he's been dropped into. The acting, direction and visuals are all competent – though nowhere near enough effort was put into making the past feel like, well, the past – but the overall vibe is that of an unenthusiastic editor piecing together all the scenes from Stephen King's novel that didn't make it into the previous film.

Still, at least now we know what a "deadfall" is and who built it, eh? Phew.

Sarah Dobbs



"Look out, it's Richard Osman – and he's furious!"

HOUSEBOUND

Arrested developments

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2014 | 15 | Download/VOD

▶ Director Gerard Johnstone

▶ Cast Morgana O'Reilly, Rima Te Waita, Glen-Paul Waru, Cameron Rhodes

🔗 Kiwi filmmaker Gerard

Johnstone's debut feature snagged him the gig directing *M3GAN*, convincing producer James Wan that he had the chops necessary to balance both horror and comedy. Off the back of that, it's now been revived for digital.

Written, directed and edited by Johnstone, it follows Kylie (Morgana O'Reilly), a malcontent with drug issues who, after a disastrous attempt to rob a cashpoint, ends up sentenced to eight months' house arrest in her childhood home, monitored by an ankle tag. Plagued by strange noises, the building (previously a

halfway house for troubled youth) could be haunted – a girl was brutally murdered there. Kylie may be the sort of protagonist who blithely takes a door off its hinges when it starts eerily creaking, but eventually even she's unnerved.

Red herrings ensure that the full explanation behind what's going on should remain unguessable. And while belly laughs are thin on the ground, plenty of humour is mined from Kylie's relentlessly antagonistic attitude and her mother's gasbag waffling. There's also some inventive use of improvised weaponry – including, fans of *Evil Dead Rise* will be pleased to hear, a cheese grater. So while not quite the slamdunk *M3GAN* was, it's certainly worth staying in for. **Ian Berriman**

i Johnstone came up with the idea after being amused by a woman discussing a supernatural experience on *Ghost Hunters*.



HAUNTING OF THE QUEEN MARY

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 OCTOBER**

2023 | 18 | Download

🔗 *Star Trek Into Darkness'*

Alice Eve steers this maritime chiller, uncovering the grisly history of storied ocean liner the Queen Mary.

Entwining modern-day hauntings with handsome flashbacks to the '30s, it's clearly indebted to *The Shining* and there's an intriguing kernel of nautical folklore beneath the axe sprees. But while some of the imagery has a nightmarish quality, choppy storytelling and overripe direction ultimately capsize this ship. **Nick Setchfield**



JURASSIC PUNK

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Download

🔗 **By rights, Steve Williams's** name should be better known, having been behind some of the most game-changing visual effects (the water creature in the *Abyss*; the T-1000 in *T2*; everything in *Jurassic Park*).

Scott Leberecht's documentary couldn't ask for a more compelling subject than this beer-swilling, tell-it-like-it-is maverick who finds himself now, through a mixture of arrogance and his own demons, an outcast from the very Hollywood he helped transform. It's a fascinating story, well told. **Steve O'Brien**



FEAR THE NIGHT

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | Download

🔗 **Has anyone ever really** thought it'd be fun to go out to the middle of nowhere to party with a bunch of people they hate? Neil LaBute's battle-of-the-sexes home invasion thriller isn't fun even before the bad guys show up; once they do, it's all lowest common denominator rape threats and emotionless killing before a grimly depressing epilogue.

Maggie Q does her best as a US army vet who fights back, but she might as well be doing a one-woman show for all the support she gets from the rest of the film. **Sarah Dobbs**



DARK ASSET

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 15 | Download

🔗 **An elite soldier (*Street Fighter's* Byron Mann)** gets superpowers from a prototype microchip, prompting him to seek revenge on the scientists (led by Robert Patrick) who created him.

Alas, *Dark Asset's* sci-fi isn't as groundbreaking as its tech: the over-familiar story is just padding between by-the-book fight scenes. The film makes a valiant effort to play with narrative structure, but with its bland, warehouse-like sets and some hilariously lumpen dialogue, this is far from state of the art. **Richard Edwards**



ZOMBI HOLOCAUST

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1980 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

▶ Director Marino Girolami

▶ Cast Ian McCulloch, Sherry Buchanan, Alexandra Delli Colli

➤ *Zombi Holocaust* was also released under the name *Doctor Butcher, MD* – a livelier title than this sleepily-paced film really deserves. Following gruesome incidents in the local morgue, Dr Chandler (Ian McCulloch) leads an expedition to a remote island to discover the truth and runs into a flesh-eating tribe, the living dead and a depraved villain.

Clearly inspired by the success of Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (also starring McCulloch), this takes a different approach, focusing on the cannibal aspect more than the undead. Some of the gore effects are excellent (a hand chopping is properly wince-inducing), but it's never as exciting as something featuring both cannibals and zombies should be.

➤ **Extras** Critics David Flint and Adrian Smith offer a spirited defence of the film in their commentary. Also new are three interviews: editor Alberto Moriani and director Marino Girolami's son, Enzo G Castellari (19 minutes); composer Giacomo Dell'Orso and singer Edda Dell'Orso (42 minutes); and horror director Marcello Avellone (16 minutes).

A 2009 McCulloch Q&A finds the actor in talkative form, but the highlight is 2015 doc *Eaten Alive!* (85 minutes), Calum Waddell's comprehensive guide to the Italian cannibal genre. Plus: restoration reel; trailer; A3 poster; booklet. **Will Salmon**



GOTHIC Undead Poets Society

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1986 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Ken Russell

▶ Cast Julian Sands, Gabriel Byrne, Natasha Richardson, Timothy Spall

➤ **Dramatising the fabled** weekend at a Swiss villa that sowed the seeds of *Frankenstein*, *Gothic* aims for a full-blooded homage to the Technicolor glories of classic Hammer.

It's a Ken Russell movie, so the sauce and grotesquerie are cranked up to 11. And he certainly brings a fever dream energy to it all, with some unarguably brilliant imagery amid the ripe tone and frantic pacing.

But while there's an imaginatively lateral approach to the straight historical facts, the finer nuances of Stephen Volk's literate script are ultimately undone by the very blood and thunder the film celebrates.

“Aims for a full-blooded homage to classic Hammer”

➤ **Extras** 1958 short “Amelia And The Angel” (27 minutes) displays an unexpectedly sweet side to the enfant terrible of British cinema, while also providing a transportative glimpse of postwar England. 2002's *The Fall Of The Louse Of Usher* (82 minutes) finds Russell reduced to larking about with a camcorder, but shows his taste for wilful provocation intact.

In interviews carried over from Vestron's 2018 Blu-ray, screenwriter Stephen Volk provides an honest retrospective of his experience (35 minutes), amusingly recalling his first reaction to the news of Russell's appointment – “If you'd written a film, who's the director you'd least like to direct it?” – while there's inevitable poignancy to a *Gothic*-focused chat with the late Julian Sands (18 minutes).

A commentary pairs film historian Matthew J Melia with Russell's wife Lisi. Russell's own words, taken from a 1987 on-stage interview, provide a new, alternative soundtrack option. Plus: trailer; booklet. **Nick Setchfield**

i The soundtrack single “The Devil Is An Englishman”, credited to Screamin' Lord Byron, really featured Timothy Spall.

(4K X FOUR)

OLD MOVIES NOW AVAILABLE ON UHD



Set in a dusty post-apocalyptic world, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's debut feature **DELICATESSEN**

(16 October) follows the misadventures of a former circus clown as he falls in love with the daughter of the local butcher – who has an unconventional way of obtaining fresh meat... We said: “Its ornate design, absurd characters and doomy set-up strongly recall Terry Gilliam's masterpiece *Brazil*.” We probably don't need to synthesise **THE EXORCIST** (9 October) so we'll stick to noting that this 50th anniversary release includes new restorations of both the theatrical cut and 2000's Extended Director's Cut (essentially 2010's spider-walk-restoring *The Version You've Never Seen*, with a few tweaks). We said: “One of the most important horror films of all time.” Based on a Ray Bradbury treatment, Jack Arnold's **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** (out now) is a '50s b-movie with a touch of class. A scientist is dismissed when he tries to convince people that a falling “meteor” was really a spacecraft. Soon shapeshifting aliens are taking the form of the locals... We said: “Ominously atmospheric... Sometimes blessed with a strange lyricism.” Finally, one of the better entries in the slasher franchise, 1998's **HALLOWEEN H20** (out now) brought Jamie Lee Curtis back after a 17-year absence, with Laurie Strode working at a boarding school after faking her own death. Cue Michael... We said: “A genuinely worthy sequel... a terrifically entertaining, genuinely scary horror movie.”

THE FLASH

It's Miller times two

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/DVD

► Director Andy Muschietti

► Cast Ezra Miller, Michael Keaton, Sasha Calle, Michael Shannon

➔ **The Flash feels dead on arrival:** a film celebrating the multiversal possibilities of the DCU just as that particular toybox is set for a hard reset. But forget the big picture. On its own, admittedly cosmic terms, this is an unexpected blast, propelled by a two-for-one deal by Ezra Miller as a pair of mismatched Barry Allens. Navigating the technical challenge of playing off themselves, Miller proves that for all the wreckage of their personal life they're gifted with funny bones.

As a Dark Knight in twilight Michael Keaton provides wry, nostalgic support, while Sasha

Calle's sullenly appealing new Supergirl makes up for Michael Shannon's underwhelming return as Zod, rehashing his world-conquering moves.

Outrageous moments of fan service collide with slapstick *Looney Tunes* set-pieces, but there's genuine heart at the core of Barry's story. This may prove a dead end for DC but the ride there is furiously entertaining.

➔ **Extras** A breezy but refreshingly substantial Making Of (37 minutes) follows production from day one; there's little insight into the storytelling choices, but stacks of lovely behind-the-scenes

“This may prove a dead end but the ride there is entertaining”



The Flash: available in a choice of two colours.

footage, including a look at the glorious Batcave set.

A companion featurette focuses on Keaton's return – alas, without the man himself – while a decent little doc on Supergirl (15 minutes) covers the character's wider history, including interviews with past incarnations like Helen Slater. You also get all six episodes of 2023 podcast drama *The Flash: Escape The Midnight Circus*, which comes with its own bonuses. The UHD edition adds

four scene-specific featurettes and one on the Multiverse (totalling 32 minutes). More significantly, you also get 10 deleted scenes (14 minutes) – though not the original ending or cut cameos, disappointingly – and an excellent history of the Flash in comics and on screen, with insights from creators (38 minutes).

Nick Setchfield

i Ezra Miller's acting body double Ed Wade – an unsung hero – actually makes a cameo in the movie, playing a reporter.

THE WICKER MAN

Slayed In Flame

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | 15 | 4K Blu-ray

► Directors Robin Hardy

► Cast Edward Woodward, Britt Ekland, Christopher Lee, Diane Cilento

➔ **This foundational folk horror** (though perhaps a term director Robin Hardy used is more fitting: “fantastique”) has many admirable qualities: its playful mystery, its earthy eroticism, its surrealist touches, its ravishing score. One which should be discussed more often is how *beautiful* it is. It's a fecund film, replete with the promise of seasonal renewal – miraculous really, given that its May Day revels were actually shot in November.

This aspect comes to the fore in this new transfer, meticulously scrubbed of blemishes; the colours really pop. It's one of many reasons

why *The Wicker Man* rewards repeated viewings. Also key are outstanding performances from Edward Woodward as the pious copper led a merry dance as he searches a Scottish island for a missing girl, and Christopher Lee, as the urbane, amused lord of its pagan community – as Lee often said, this is his finest role.

Come the blood-freezing finale you *should* feel utterly shattered – but you don't. The residents of Summerisle take such joy from their beliefs that some small part of you exults in their triumph. It's rare that a film can make you feel so complicit.

➔ **Extras** Robin Hardy's sons, Justin and Dominic – whose forthcoming doc *Wickermania!* sounds fascinating – directed three of the four new bonuses, and appear in two. “The Lost Ending” (11 minutes) is guilty of over-



The title kind of blew the surprise, really...

selling: what's discussed is merely unnecessary exposition trimmed from Lee's final speech. A locations trip (12 minutes) benefits from drone footage. A Britt Ekland interview (10 minutes) is frank and amusing. Some critical talking heads (11 minutes) are redundant.

As well as UHD and Blu-ray discs for the theatrical release, *The Director's Cut* and *The Final Cut*, this 50th Anniversary Collector's Edition includes a seven-track CD of songs from the score (30

minutes), sensitively interpreted by Katy J Pearson.

Also carried over: Hardy/Lee/Woodward commentary; 2001 docs “Burnt Offering” and “The Wicker Man Enigma”; a 1979 TV chat with Hardy and Lee; three 2013 featurettes. Plus: trailers; gallery; 64-page booklet; three postcards; two posters.

Ian Berriman

i The “lost ending” tidies up one detail: Lord Summerisle explains to Howie that they will sink the seaplane he arrived in.



HOLLYWOOD DREAMS & NIGHTMARES

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Directors Christopher Griffiths, Gary Smart

▶ Cast Robert Englund, Tony Todd, Heather Langenkamp, Eli Roth

ICON Robert Englund's dream started at age 12, when a theatre camp summer taught him the best way to spend time with teenage girls was to act. His nightmare began when he realised, as an adult, that he actually hated his youthful co-stars, channelling that feeling into the character he was playing and turning Freddy Krueger into an icon.

Perfectly titled, *Dreams & Nightmares* spends its first half giving us England's chronological path to stardom, with the second dedicated to the *Elm Street* franchise. Therein lies the challenge. You'll need to already be a fan to watch that excellent opening hour, which is full of fresh information and interesting revelations (Englund gave Mark Hamill stolen script pages to convince him to audition for *Star Wars*!). But Freddy-heads have heard all the *Elm Street* tales before – mostly in *Never Sleep Again*, the *Elm Street*-dedicated doc that's twice the length of this one.

So you might be ready for Freddy, but this is Englund – with Krueger the most disappointing slice of the runtime. However, if *Hatchet* gets your blood pumping, you wish for *Wishmaster*, or you're on first-name terms with Leslie Vernon, there's plenty to keep you entertained. **Sam Ashurst**



The local hairdresser was a bit rudimentary.

THE ANGRY BLACK GIRL AND HER MONSTER

Vicarious thrills

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Bomani J Story

▶ Cast Laya DeLeon Hayes, Denzel Whitaker, Chad L Coleman

SHUDDER This indie horror isn't the first Arican-American take on Mary Shelley's most famous work, but it deserves to be treated more seriously than 1973's *Blackenstein*...

Set in a black neighbourhood plagued by gang violence, it follows Vicaria, a science-loving teen with an obsession with defeating death, following her brother's untimely end. Somehow, despite a lack of basics like refrigeration, she manages to stitch together a creature from stolen corpses – dreadlocks veiling its face like Cthulhian tentacles.

It's a promising switch of scene, offering thematic depth, but the plot logic can be troubling. Vicaria

gets into bother with the local dealers with baffling speed – and given that we see her stitching Chris's face onto a body, is he really her brother at all? Exactly what writer/director Bomani J Story is trying to say via this metaphor is muddy. And while Story effectively dramatises the micro-aggressions Vicaria faces, at other times the film falls into clunky soapboxing.

On the plus side, the more social realist elements are affecting, and Laya DeLeon Hayes impresses in the lead role, bringing urgency and conviction – plus the ramshackle laboratory Vicaria's built in a condemned building (with her creation zapped into life on an old door, not a gleaming gurney) is a smart bit of design.

Ian Berriman

i Vicaria's mantra "death is a disease" is a nod to a line in *The Fountain* – Bomani J Story is a big Darren Aronofsky fan.

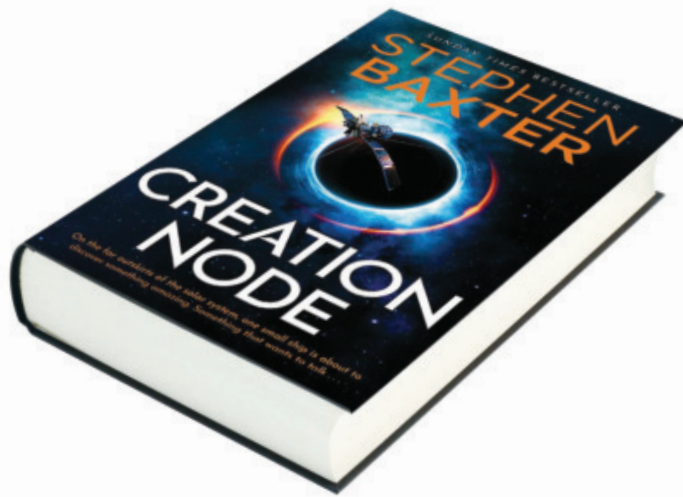
(ROUND UP)



More blockbusters hitting shiny disc include **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 3** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD), which sends the Guardians on a mission to save Raccoon's life. A physical purchase will secure ownership of commentary by James Gunn, eight deleted scenes, a featurette on Rocket and more. We said: "The most entertaining MCU film since *Spider-Man: No Way Home*." In

TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, 9 October), the Maximals (who transform into animal forms) team up with the Autobots as the Terrorcons plot to bring the planet-eating Unicron to Earth. Bonuses include nine featurettes on subjects like the '90s setting and shooting in Peru, plus an alternate opening and ending. We said: "The Maximals are a damp squib, and neither the timeline nor the logic holds up." Hans Christian Andersen's story of a maiden who trades fins for pins goes live-action in

THE LITTLE MERMAID (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, out now). Extras include a five-part Making Of, "song breakdowns" of four musical numbers, and a sing-along version. We said: "Doesn't want for Hollywood wattage. Charm, unfortunately, is in distinctly shorter supply." Finally, the latest TV box sets include **CREEPSHOW SEASONS ONE-THREE** (Blu-ray/DVD, out now), **FOR ALL MANKIND SEASON THREE** (Blu-ray/DVD, 9 October), **QUANTUM LEAP SEASON ONE** (DVD, out now) and **SURREALESTATE SEASON ONE** (Blu-ray/DVD, 9 October).



CREATION NODE

Planet 9 From Outer Space

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

448 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Stephen Baxter**

► Publisher **Gollancz**

☉ **In recent years, it has**

sometimes seemed as if Stephen Baxter would happily lose his reputation as the British Hard Science Fiction Guy. You can understand why. Being so often compared to Arthur C Clarke might become a little wearing, for all that Baxter often collaborated with the co-creator of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Whatever the artistic reasons behind his choices, Baxter has turned his hand to alternate history, steampunk and, via his collaboration with the late Terry Pratchett, humour, in the Long Earth sequence. Indeed, you could argue he's our most versatile SF novelist. And if he's not the most distinctive stylist, that's no bad thing. Read a Baxter novel and the prose always serves the story – and Baxter is phenomenal at creating memorable plots.

All that said, SF is, as the cliché goes, a literature of ideas, and Baxter is a man hugely interested not just in science and space

exploration but in the philosophy of science and also in how societies, especially those facing crises, function and adapt. If you have the time, you can spend intellectually rewarding hours learning about the leading-edge ideas in the reading lists he supplies with his fiction.

Sometimes, the sheer cosmic vastness of these ideas demands that Baxter engages what you might call his serious science fiction novelist mode. *Creation Node*, perhaps his most ambitious novel for years, is a case in point. Much of the action takes place on the edge of the Solar System, where a young spacefarer called Salma encounters an object dubbed “Planet Nine”, a kind of “primordial black hole” that seems to be sending a message via Hawking radiation.

What would happen if you played some of the message back to its source? The answer changes not just Salma's life but the course of humanity's history – although this is a book where history is a slippery concept in that temporal cause-and-effect matters often get muddled, at least from a human perspective – as the nature of Planet Nine changes abruptly, and

it becomes a kind of planet-cum-portal. One immediate result of this change is that Salma's new best friend is a birdlike alien (soon nicknamed Feathers), discovered on Planet Nine. But why has Feathers suddenly materialised, and from where?

The great and the good of humanity's competing factions – including the ascetic Conservators, latter-day Greens, and Moon dwellers still putting in a good word for expansive capitalism despite Earth having gone through climate catastrophes – race to get to Planet Nine. The fact that Earth has suddenly become threatened by a quasar that puts the planet's viability in doubt only adds to the urgency.

As to what's driving these events, it has much to do with an intelligence – and is there a nod to *Foundation* here? – called Terminus. You would say Terminus was god-like, except that Baxter's concern here isn't

“In this reading of the multiverse, life is rare and precious”

with deities but with the way intelligence arises in the multiverse. At times, frankly, this all gets a bit much, a bit *Star Trek V*-ish for atheists even, although thankfully without the clunky dialogue and misplaced jokiness.

That this most powerful of characters doesn't overwhelm the novel ultimately has much to do with the way Baxter puts humanity – and Feathers – at the centre of the novel. In this reading of the multiverse, life is rare and so people, apelike or avian, are precious. Even as the final pages of the book veer between tragedy rooted in human weakness and hope, Baxter's heartening message appears to be that our most petty squabbles may actually be just as cosmically important as the unfathomable machinations of intelligences beyond comprehension. **Jonathan Wright**

i *Creation Node* relies partly on the idea that a consciousness, a Boltzmann brain, could spontaneously assemble in space.



A STROKE OF THE PEN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 OCTOBER**

240 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Terry Pratchett**

► Publisher **Doubleday**

☉ **It was *The Colour Of***

Magic, first published four decades ago in November 1983, that made a literary star of Terry Pratchett. But as any Discworld fan will tell you, it took more than a decade for Pterry to hit his stride, years when he wrote novels such as *The Dark Side Of The Sun* (1976) and short stories such as those collected in 2014 for *Dragons At Crumbling Castle*.

Yet despite the work that has made its way into the public domain, fans have long had a nagging suspicion there should be *more* material out there. Pratchett, after all, was always productive. Turns out fans were right, as this collection of 20 stories written under the pseudonym Patrick Kearns for the *Western Daily Press* in the '70s and '80s proves.

As the dates suggest, this isn't mature Pratchett work. Rather, the stories, often whimsical and so short that ideas are left tantalisingly undeveloped, are the work of a man finding his way. Not yet a satirist, as Neil Gaiman points out in his warm foreword, nor even a comic fantasy writer, but a man who still saw himself primarily as an SF novelist.

One for completists then, but no less fascinating for all that – especially “The Quest For The Keys”, which, with its episodic chase structure, seems to anticipate the adventures of Rincewind. **Jonathan Wright**



A STUDY IN DROWNING

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

378 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **Ava Reid**

► Publisher **Del Rey**

☛ **There's a delicious joy** in figuring out the details of a mystery before the characters you're following. It's not your doing, really – we know the author has carefully placed the clues – but it's still satisfying. Unless, of course, you get the feeling that maybe you weren't supposed to work it out so soon.

Effy is an architecture scholar who desperately wishes she was studying literature – but girls aren't allowed, considered too frivolous for the highest art. When a competition is announced to redesign the estate where the author of her favourite novel lived, she jumps at the chance.

Soon she's working in a decaying manor alongside a literature student who's out to prove that the author, Emrys Myrddin, was a fraud, and that someone else wrote the classic work. There's greater peril at hand as well: *Angharad* was a tale of myth, magic and the Fairy King, and that king may not be quite so fictional.

The central mystery would be compelling, but the answer is obvious from the very first clue. Yet poor Effy and Preston don't cotton on until it's literally standing in front of them. The characters themselves are well drawn, each dealing with trauma, but they can't make up for an exasperating story that takes far too long to reach its conclusion.

Rhian Drinkwater



SWORD CATCHER

Out of the shadows

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 OCTOBER**

480 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Cassandra Clare**

► Publisher **Tor**

☛ **Whoever came up with the** job title "Sword Catcher" definitely had a talent for marketing. Because while it sounds pretty cool, all it actually means is "the guy whose job it is to get between the prince and anyone trying to kill him". Like a bodyguard, then, but more likely to get stabbed.

Billed as the first adult fantasy novel by Mortal Instruments author Cassandra Clare, *Sword Catcher* is an elaborately constructed tale of fading magic, royal family politics and, inevitably, star-crossed love, set in the city-state of Castellane.

Orphan Kel is recruited to work as Prince Conor's sword catcher when he's too young to really know what he's getting himself into, but soon learns to navigate the mannered world of the nobility; healer Lin wants to become a doctor, but has to fight against the sexist restrictions of her community, plus the racist restrictions of the wider world.

Clare does a great job of balancing both narratives, even as the two inevitably get drawn into

the machinations of the criminal underworld trying to bring down the monarchy. It's heady stuff, a novel with all the drama and yearning of Clare's Shadowhunters stories but set in a whole new world, and with the YA stabilisers taken off. Her prose, too, has matured. Characters feel three-dimensional, the plot's mysteries unfold in a satisfying way, and even the social politics feel well-handled, if transparent. (No prizes for figuring out the

“All the drama and yearning of Shadowhunters stories”

real-world analogue of the ostracised orthodox Ashkar community Lin belongs to.) The whole thing delivers a real dopamine rush.

Despite its heft, this really isn't a challenging book, but then you wouldn't want it to be. Fans of Clare's other works who've aged out of the original demographic will devour this, while new readers risk becoming instantly addicted. **Sarah Dobbs**

i Castellane was inspired by the medieval Venetian Republic, with its thriving economy and tangled social structure.



ONCE A MONSTER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

512 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **Robert Dinsdale**

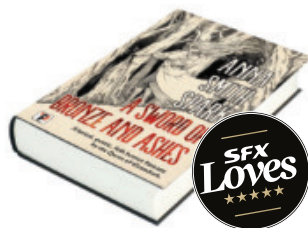
► Publisher **Macmillan**

☛ **A Victorian mudlarker** dreams of unearthing the discovery that will change her life in the boggy banks of the Thames. And she does. But she never expects that discovery to take the form of the Minotaur, who apparently Theseus failed to kill off properly.

Robert Dinsdale's rich and atmospheric tale is an ingenious "sequel" to that Greek myth, which cleverly relocates the half-man, half-bull Minotaur – or Minos (he's taken his father's name) – to subterranean London at the time when the capital's revolutionary sewage system is being constructed by engineer Joseph Bazalgette. The amnesiac Minos's existential crisis over whether he's man or beast is woven into the tale of a "river rat" who dreams of becoming a dancer.

It's a novel about the choices we make, heavily steeped in metaphor (both the Thames and the hidden rivers beneath London mirror Minos's voyage of self-discovery), visual motifs and repeated dialogue riffs. All of which may sound heavy, but the spritely prose and vivid characters keep it barrelling along like a penny dreadful with noble literary pretensions.

The plotting's a tad mechanical and repetitive in places, and some subplots feel underdeveloped (especially a dance teacher who only seems to appear when she's useful for the story), but the book's charm and quirkiness ultimately win out. **Dave Golder**



A SWORD OF BRONZE AND ASHES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

336 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Anna Smith Spark

► Publisher Flame Tree Press

☛ Anna Smith Spark's prose is remarkable. Her novels possess a distinctive, lyrical timbre, and that's especially apparent in this first in a new series, which leans heavily on rural myth and focuses on emotion rather than logic. It reads like the translation of some soaring medieval allegory.

It's the tale of Kanda, who lives on a farm with her husband and three spirited daughters. She was once the mightiest warrior of Roven, a storied past she's kept secret for years. When ancient foes come to spoil her valley, she drags her family to the mountain of Mal Anwen to reclaim her sword and armour.

This is a world of cow dung, chores and kids who squabble over burnt food, and also a world of legend, with feast halls and dragonslayers. It's eerie and violent, a woman-centred epic with few characters and locations, nonetheless filled with wonder and humanity.

Haunting imagery permeates every page – they're pursued by a "hodden", a horse made from rotting wood; dead children linger in the old copper mines; Kanda's daughter marries and instantly grows old. Inspired by Celtic mythology and influenced by classics like *The Dark Is Rising*, it has the energy of *The Green Knight*, with overtones of folk horror and magic realism. **Dave Bradley**



OUT THERE SCREAMING

An a-Peele-ing anthology

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Editor Jordan Peele

► Publisher Picador

☛ In the current realm of horror, few things are a higher seal of approval than having Jordan Peele's name attached. Outside of the modern classics *Get Out*, *Us* and *Nope*, which he wrote and directed, his production company Monkey Paw has collaborated with some of the most exciting names in the business, including Nia DaCosta, Henry Selick and Nikyatu Jusu. Now he adds another string to his bow, presenting this *Anthology of New Black Horror* which he edited and wrote an introduction for.

Featuring the work of 19 writers, the book has significantly more hits than misses, beginning with arguably the best piece, and the one most crying out for a film adaptation. NK Jemisin spins a spooky yarn about a sadistic black police officer who begins to see eyes in the headlights of those who have committed crimes, enabling him to enact skin-

crawling police brutality, including knocking out the teeth of an elderly woman when he suggestively forces his baton into her mouth.

At the other end of the spectrum are some decent but markedly less vivid sci-fi tales, including Justin C Key's "The Aesthete", told from the perspective of an artificial intelligence with the desire to procreate, and LD Lewis's "Flicker", in which a group of friends confront the fact that they might be in a simulation. Both are elegantly written and satisfyingly concluded, but in some of the more conceptually complex tales, the limits of the word count work against world-building.

It's still clear, however, why Peele put his name alongside these writers' works; he's compiled a series of fresh and gloriously violent imaginings here. *Out There Screaming* is an impressive showcase of underrepresented perspectives' ability to breathe new life into the genre. **Leila Latif**

i Other authors featured include Maurice Broaddus, P Djèlí Clark, Nnedi Okorafor, Tochi Onyebuchi and Rebecca Roanhorse.



SUN OF BLOOD AND RUIN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

368 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Mariely Lares

► Publisher HarperVoyager

☛ The Spanish colonisation of the Americas forms the backdrop to Mariely Lares's tale of uprisings and apocalypse. Lares's heroine is Leonora, a lady of the court who adopts the guise of Pantera, a masked vigilante and sorceress. Like her *nom de guerre*, Leonora can assume the form of a panther using her "tonalli", which seems analogous to Chi in Chinese culture.

Lares weaves a complicated tale that spans court intrigue, rebellions, intertribal conflicts, magical worlds and the end of days. The author presumes that the reader has a working knowledge of the history of New Spain, and a foreword providing more context would have been welcome.

However, the main weakness is the character of Leonora herself. She's positioned as the champion of the oppressed Mexica population, but that's never convincingly established. She prevaricates between the Spanish and the Mexicas, and her rashness makes every situation worse, escalating the internecine conflict.

The apocalypse angle feels rushed and squeezed in amongst competing plotlines, and the story lacks a compelling antagonist, while Leonora's ability to shapeshift proves almost irrelevant. The result is a mix of magic and politics where the two elements refuse to meld. **David West**



AN INHERITANCE OF MAGIC

★★★★★

► RELEASED 5 OCTOBER

358 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Benedict Jacka

► Publisher Orbit

➤ **Best known for his Alex Verus** urban fantasy novels, Benedict Jacka is no doubt hoping to replicate their success with this first in a new series of, um, urban fantasy novels. It's an entirely new magical world, though.

Stephen Oakwood lives on his own after the disappearance of his father, and spends most of his time working in a dead-end temp job, worrying about money and practising drucraft, a system of magic which his dad taught him.

He's struggled for years to find out more, when suddenly members of a nearby Noble House take an interest in him, and he learns that he may be more talented than he thought. In a system rigged against the poor, he needs to find a way to defend himself against the House, search for his dad and hopefully keep up with his rent.

In a novel that overdoes the exposition at times – there are far too many helpful infodumps – it's this that helps to ground the story. Alone in the world, Stephen's constant worry about where his next income may be coming from makes him feel real and alive even as he works on ways to make himself (literally) invisible.

It's a captivating, compelling story, too. Shame that we're going to have to wait for the next instalment; thankfully there's no frustrating cliffhanger here. **Rhian Drinkwater**



IF I HAVE TO BE HAUNTED

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

368 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Miranda Sun

► Publisher Magpie Publishing

➤ **This fantasy debut about a plucky teenage girl and her plight to resurrect her former nemesis** has promise. Cara is a 16-year-old from a Chinese-American family, who's trying to juggle school and honouring her heritage with her psychic abilities as a ghost speaker.

This creates potential for a fun supernatural adventure in the style of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* or *Sabrina The Teenage Witch*. Unfortunately the writing style is flat and uninspiring, and the story is much more suited to younger readers than the teenagers it's targeting: the ghosts aren't frightening enough; there's no sexual tension between Cara and the recently deceased jock heartthrob Zach; and the hyper-witty dialogue soon becomes grating.

One of the book's strongest elements is Cara's Chinese background. Author Miranda Sun seemingly pulls from her own experiences, exploring the casual use of racial stereotypes in Western culture, the pressure Cara's traditional mother puts on her, and the discrimination her mother faces because of her features and accent. It also touches upon Chinese culture and its history of ghost stories in a way that feels genuinely fresh. But the book is let down by a predictable romance and a rather rote storyline.

Kimberley Ballard



UPON A FROSTED STAR

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

371 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author MA Kuzniar

► Publisher HQ

➤ **MA Kuzniar's *Midnight In Everwood*** was inspired by *The Nutcracker*. *Upon A Frosted Star* draws on similar balletic inspiration, this time from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

In London in the aftermath of the Great War, artist Forster struggles to find his way in the world, until one night he discovers the annual parties at an otherwise empty manor house – parties brimming with glamour and champagne, and overseen by a mysterious and talented dancer. Unable to forget her – and finding in her new inspiration for his painting – Forster works to track the dancer down, but discovers that Odette has been cursed, and time may be running out to save her from a future being trapped in swan form.

It's a charming, tragic story whose main flaw may be that it relies too much on the romance of ballet and fairy tale. Forster, once properly inspired, is an incredible, talented artist, and his and Odette's love is pure and true from the moment they meet. And – until a tabloid exposé – no one seems interested in investigating the origin of these magical parties, or is all that captivated by the dancer who stars in them. The ending also feels rather rushed.

However, Forster's friendships in particular are well drawn, and as a magical dance, it's certainly a success.

Rhian Drinkwater

REISSUES

Pick of the paperbacks: RF Kuang's **BABEL** (★★★★★, out now, HarperVoyager). Set in an alternate Oxford in 1836, it centres on the Royal Institute of



Translation, where scholars learn how to work enchanted silver bars to produce magical

effects, whose use underpins the growing power of the British Empire. We said: "A novel that lulls you with the rhythms of Victorian fiction, but ultimately leaves you feeling punched in the face by the injustices of the world." Paul McAuley's **BEYOND THE BURN LINE** (★★★★★, out now, Gollancz) is set

hundreds of thousands of years after mankind's extinction, when Earth has recovered and its primary



species are in the early stages of creating an industrial civilisation. It follows a scholar

researching sightings of so-called visitors and their sky craft. We said: "The essential decency of McAuley's future Earth inhabitants is a quiet rebuke to us... A story that unfolds beautifully and in unexpected ways." Finally, we also heartily recommend Heather Fawcett's book **EMILY WILDE'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF FAERIES** (★★★★★, 5 October, Orbit). Set in



the early 19th century, it's comprised of diary entries written in a calm, academic style by the

titular scientist, who's spending the winter in a remote Scandinavian town, researching the local faerie folk. We said: "Despite the analytical tone, the book still drips with wonder and magic... Whimsical, charming and delightful."



A MASTERPIECE IN DISARRAY

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

560 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Max Evry

► Publisher 1984 Publishing

David Lynch's *Dune* has been an easy punchline for decades – an infamous misfire that the director himself would rather forget. Despite this, it remains a fascinating work, and one that has had a long afterlife.

This hefty volume (subtitled *David Lynch's Dune: An Oral History*) looks at the film in granular detail, to the point where author Max Evry suggests three different ways of approaching the text, depending on just how deep you want to go. The bulk of the book – which covers casting, pre-production, filming, release and the movie's complicated legacy – is assembled from well-researched information and quotes from the period.

It's also packed with new material, with Evry speaking to as many surviving members of the cast and crew as possible (Lynch rarely speaks of *Dune* and remains understandably absent here). This includes the likes of star Kyle MacLachlan and several other potential Paul Atreides (including Zach Galligan and, surprisingly, Kenneth Branagh), along with artists and designers who helped bring Arrakis to life.

Some of the stories are familiar – the movie's butchered run-time is well known, as are Lynch's personal eccentricities – but much here is new and fascinating. It's hard to imagine a more definitive examination of such a singular and strange film. **Will Salmon**



THE BOOK OF BEASTS

★★★★★

► RELEASED 5 OCTOBER

415 pages | Paperback

► Author Andrew Screen

► Publisher Headpress

Quatermass has had the spotlight lately, but Nigel Kneale's 1976 anthology show *Beasts* also warrants scrutiny – though maybe not *this* much.

"How do you write 415 pages about six episodes?" is your first thought. For starters, Kneale's dry run "Murrain" is included. Each write-up also delves into folklore and history, and draws connections to other fiction.

Sometimes this proves truly fascinating: for supermarket telekinesis tale "Special Offer", writer Andrew Screen digs up cuttings on similar cases, while the chapter on "Buddyboy" enlightens us on a Paul Raymond Revue production featuring dolphins trained to undo bikinis! A fascinating chapter on unmade storylines summarises three treatments and presents a tantalisingly mysterious list of further titles.

At other times, an editor's scissors could have performed judicious snips. Script to screen sections are the most taxing. Drawing on the Kneale archive, they compare TX versions with drafts and camera scripts, annotating practically every last line. Buried amidst all this are witty character thumbnails and the like, but even hardcore Knealeophiles may glaze over.

Sometimes less is more. Do we really need a 100-word summary of rabies, or details of dressing room arrangements? There's a superb 300-page book in here. As things stand, this is a good 415-page one. **Ian Berriman**



THE FANZINE BOOK

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

288 pages | Hardback

► Author Alistair McGown

► Publisher Telos Books

You may think every atom of the *Doctor Who* universe was subjected to microscopic analysis long ago, but Alistair McGown treads unexplored territory in this glossy, lavishly illustrated volume: the Letraset-heavy pre-internet world of the amateur magazine.

It's an affectionate overview of the medium, from the birth of *Who* fandom to the waning of the "glory days" of zines as the sun set on the show itself. He documents significant firsts, and highlights now-familiar names. (Sadly, Peter Capaldi's Silurian art is not reproduced.)

While a few zines achieved distribution in stores like Forbidden Planet, most were lucky to shift 100 copies. It's a wonder any survive, really. But McGown seems to have tracked down and read every one.

Such scholarship *can* get a tad dry. The human brain can only process "... and an Anthony Ainley questionnaire" so many times before shutting down. Other times, it's a hoot: there's some impressive art, but plenty of melt-faced Pertwees too. Also a source of amusement: the internecine fan squabbles, storms in a transcendently-dimensional teacup. They took it all so seriously!

Take chapters 16 and 17, in which the 15-year-old editor of *Cybermag* rails against the upscale glossy zines as if he's a punk upstart taking on the prog rock dinosaurs. Ian Berriman would surely cringe if he read that now. Wonder what happened to him. **Ian Berriman**

ALSO OUT

We could have filled this section three times over! More interesting titles include **EDENVILLE** (10 October, Titan). Described as "Chuck Palahniuk mixed with Clive Barker", Sam Rebelein's debut sees a horror writer taking a teaching job at a college with a blood-soaked history, and discovering that his newest story idea isn't so much an idea as a vision of another world... Josiah Bancroft's **THE HEXOLOGISTS** (out now, Orbit) introduces a duo who take on weird cases. The King is pleading to be baked into a cake; the resulting investigation sees them encountering avaricious ghouls, alchemists who draw power from a Hell-like dimension, and a bookish dragon. In Jo Nesbo's **THE NIGHT HOUSE** (out now, Harvill Secker), an outcast 14-year-old sees a classmate sucked into the receiver of a telephone booth. Of course, no one believes him. Anthology **NORDIC VISIONS** (12 October, Solaris) brings together 16 fantasy, sci-fi and horror stories from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and The Faroe Islands. Contributors include John Ajvide Lindqvist and Hannu Rajaniemi. Tom Huddleston's **THE WORLDS OF DUNE** (3 October, Quarto) goes planet by planet, delving into the inspirations for Frank Herbert's creation, from cutting-edge science to Shakespeare's tragedies. Finally, **THE SCREEN TRAVELER'S GUIDE** (5 October, DK) documents the real-life locations used in TV shows and films like *Stranger Things*, *Game Of Thrones*, *Interstellar* and *Captain America*, providing location maps, road trip routes, oodles of related trivia and more.





Cassandra Clare

The creator of *The Mortal Instruments* has written her first “adult” novel



SHARONA JACOBS

What is your daily writing routine like?

► I tend to be a night owl. I'll often do administrative tasks during the day. Then I take a break to switch over. I'll write in the afternoons and evenings. I like to write in the company of other people, usually my friends Holly Black and Kelly Link. I feel like it helps to have other people around to check in with and to keep you honest and make sure you're working! I'll take a break for dinner and usually work late into the night.

Describe the room in which you typically write.

► When my husband and I bought our house, it had a falling-down barn as part of the property. We renovated it into a combination library and workspace. It has bookshelves from floor to ceiling with moveable ladders, and the designer we worked with added all sorts of touches that are reminiscent of my books, like light fixtures that resemble crossed swords, or quotes from the books worked into the countertop in the kitchen area.

Ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

► Never. I have silly dreams sometimes about my characters, where we're all in a grocery store and they're ahead of me in line and have too many items in their

carts. And sometimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night and think I had an amazing idea, so I'll jot it down. But nine times out of 10 when I look at it in the morning, it's just nonsense.

Were you a keen reader when you were a child?

► I was. I travelled a lot with my parents. We were often in countries where I didn't speak the language, or there would be long periods where I'd be without other kids for company, so books were really my friends. My favourites included *The Dark Is Rising* by Susan Cooper, *The Changeover* by Margaret Mahy and *The Chronicles Of Prydain* by Lloyd Alexander. It was always fantasy – I didn't start reading books without magic of some kind until my teens!

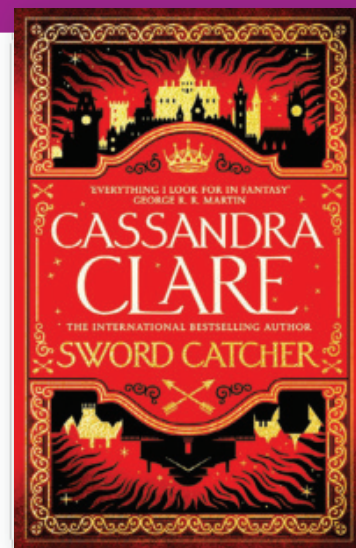
Recommend a book that you love, but which is not very well known.

► *The Wandering Unicorn* by

Argentinean writer Manuel Mujica Lainez (1965). It's a gorgeously told mixture of folklore, history and adventure, which follows the fairy Melusine after she's placed under a curse, and must invisibly follow the human boy she loves through the landscape of medieval Europe and finally to the Crusades.

What's the biggest misconception people have about being a professional author?

► I think people imagine that you sit down and sort of channel the story as it flows through you. Certainly that's how it's depicted in movies. When it's going really well there's a real pleasure to transferring that story in your head onto the page. But it's also a lot of really difficult careful work,

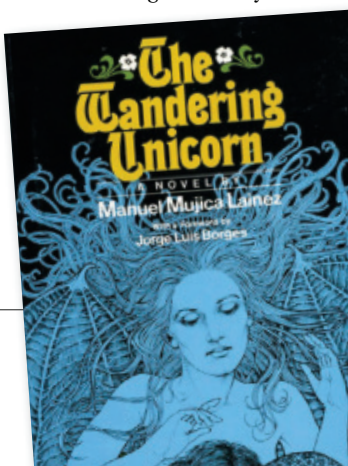


especially where it comes to revising and editing.

What's the best writing advice you've received or read?

► I think it was something Neil Gaiman said. I believe it was that when someone tells you there's something wrong with your book, they're almost certainly right, but when they tell you how to fix it, they're almost certainly wrong. No one else can fix your story for you, but if someone tells you there's something broken in it, they're almost always correctly sensing that a problem exists. ●

Sword Catcher is out on 10 October, published by Tor.



The Wandering Unicorn and Neil Gaiman.

KNIGHT TERRORS

The Big Sleep



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC Comics

► Writers Various

► Artists Various

EVENT Horror is always a tricky proposition when it comes to superhero comics. If the mix of tones is successful, you've got an entertaining fusion of dark subtexts, chilling concepts and pulpy action. If it isn't, the result can feel like two genres have been messily welded together.

Such is the case with DC's latest event comic *Knight Terrors*, and

while this sprawling event isn't a total misfire, it largely fails to pull off the mix of horror thrills and full-tilt action it's aiming for.

Published across two months, *Knight Terrors* consists of a core six-issue miniseries and 20 connective two-part spin-off adventures. It has an initially promising set-up, as new villain *Insomnia* plunges the whole world into enforced sleep, making every superhero confront their worst nightmare.

The core miniseries ★★☆☆★ sees Batman forming an alliance with ghostly hero *Deadman*, but

writer Joshua Williamson rarely finds the energy and weirdness the story clearly needs. Instead, we get weak dialogue and flat plotting in a tale that tries to wring thematic weight out of the central concept, but ends up as a limp collection of horror-comic clichés punctuated by fitfully entertaining action set-pieces.

The artwork varies from average to occasionally impressive (mainly thanks to the issues drawn by Howard Porter), but the core plot is too over-the-top to be properly scary, mostly thanks to *Insomnia* being a tiresome one-note maniac with a paper-thin backstory.

There are a few highlights to be found in *Knight Terrors*, however, among the mixed bag of spin-off stories. The weaker examples of these are either incoherent or misconceived (the biggest offenders being the Joker ★★☆☆★ and Catwoman ★★☆☆★ stories), but there are genuinely entertaining tales too, like an engaging and visually impressive

“Largely fails to pull off the mix of horror thrills and full-tilt action”

Wonder Woman adventure ★★☆☆★ which features the Justice League Dark team. We also get a lively two-parter in which the Titans tackle nightmares from an unexpected source ★★☆☆★, a Flash story that's one of the few points where *Knight Terrors* feels genuinely horrifying ★★☆☆★, and – most memorably – a beautifully bonkers and deliriously meta Harley Quinn romp ★★☆☆★.

These aren't enough to make *Knight Terrors* a success, but they do at least show that DC is still capable of pulling off enjoyable creative moments in its event comics. Whether any lessons will be learned from this in time for the next DC event – *Beast World*, coming in November – remains to be seen. **Saxon Bullock**

Williamson's biggest influence for *Insomnia* was Freddy Krueger; his original story pitch was “Nightmare On DC Street”.



STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE – ECHOES



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher IDW

► Writer Marc Guggenheim

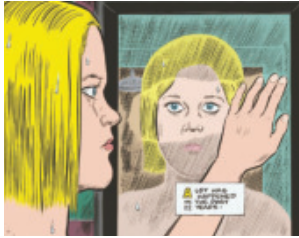
► Artist Oleg Chudakov

ISSUES 1-5 The aftermath of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* remains one of the lesser-charted quadrants of the final frontier. This series picks up soon after the Enterprise's encounter with V'ger, sending the ship on a refit shakedown cruise. But while it recreates the visual aesthetic – the crew are back in their blue and beige uniforms, archly dismissed as pyjamas by one character – it trades the film's 2001-style awe and wonder for straightforward phaser-packin' thrills.

The story, by *Arrow*'s Marc Guggenheim, brings us yet another parallel universe, one where Chekov's counterpart is a fugitive war criminal. Jumping realities, he embroils the Enterprise in a clash with the Romulans, forcing Spock to grapple with the old “needs of the many/needs of the few” interface, long before *The Wrath Of Khan*.

Oleg Chudakov's art is slickly appealing, though likenesses can be variable, while the alternate universe of the doppelgangers feels frustratingly underdeveloped. But there's a genuine sense of propulsion to the storytelling and Guggenheim displays a great ear for the cadences of the *Trek* icons. Spock in particular is spot on, so sly and deadpan that you can hear the ghost of Leonard Nimoy speaking every word. **Nick Setchfield**





MONICA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** 12 October

► Publisher **Jonathan Cape**

► Writer/artist **Daniel Clowes**

GRAPHIC NOVEL "Subject:

Literary & Memoirs, War & Combat Fiction, Crime & Mystery, Horror & Ghost Stories, Romance" declares the press release for the latest by the creator of *Ghost World*, suggestive of an opus encompassing the medium in all its forms. In truth, only three pages are spent on a pair of soldiers talking, for example.

Split into eight parts, it's a meandering affair – you get the sense that, as with one of *Eightball*'s other stand-out serials "Like A Velvet Glove Cast In Iron", Clowes had no idea where he was headed as he drew page one. It shares much of that strip's ominous strangeness – particularly when featuring a bizarre sacrificial ritual, or a dead relative communicating via a radio.

At other points, it takes a realist approach, following the titular Monica in middle age as she seeks out the mother who abandoned her. The backwards-looking perspective seems characteristic of an older writer, (Clowes is 62) as does the voice of the narrator: a woman aware of becoming invisible, who no longer "puts up with shit".

Calling this a "mature work" would suggest something dryly sober, though. Clowes's panels still ooze with human ugliness, and he delights in confounding expectations. Monica's quest ultimately proves anticlimactic – not something you can say of the ending, which (as if to pay off a perceived debt to the reader) abruptly unleashes total insanity. **Ian Berriman**

We didn't dare give him 3 stars.



THE INCREDIBLE HULK

The green Hyde monster

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Phillip Kennedy Johnson**

► Artist **Nic Klein**

ISSUES 1-3 If there's one aspect

of the Hulk that his MCU appearances have mostly steered clear of, it's that the Green Goliath is genuinely frightening when done right. Comics are much happier to explore the Hulk's more monstrous side, and this new run is following up on the horror-centric style of Al Ewing's acclaimed "Immortal Hulk" saga with a similarly intense portrayal of the character.

The opening three issues start with Bruce Banner's recent attempts to control his alter-ego having backfired spectacularly. He's now on the run, with the Hulk aiming to sever the connection with Banner and take full control, but things get stranger

“Already delivering eye-opening set-pieces”

when sinister eldritch entities start taking him on, determined to use the Jade Giant's power to unleash the mysterious "Mother of Horrors".

Philip Kennedy Johnson's script pulls us straight into the darker, monster-centric side of the Marvel Universe with a thrilling, deeply weird approach that's already delivering eye-opening set-pieces. There's a genuine sense of danger to the story, helped by the focus on the nightmarish Jekyll-and-Hyde conflict between Banner and the Hulk, and this already feels like one of Marvel's most interesting character relaunchees in years.

It's also got a huge advantage in the presence of artist Nic Klein, who delivers lush and twisted visuals while capturing the right kind of dynamic visual energy, especially in the third issue's epic combat sequence. Klein and Johnson are taking their story in a genuinely interesting direction, and it's going to be fascinating to see where this distinctive take on the Hulk goes next.

Saxon Bullock

i Alongside writing comics, Johnson is a soldier and musician – he plays the trumpet in the the US Army Field Band.



CONAN THE BARBARIAN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Titan Comics**

► Writer **Jim Zub**

► Artist **Robert De La Torre**

ISSUES 1-3 After Marvel's most

recent run, which saw him traversing the timestream and joining up with the Avengers, there's a welcome "back to basics" quality about this latest comic book iteration of Robert E Howard's warrior.

With shades of *Game Of Thrones*, these first three issues see Conan coming up against a zombified undead army. As with that Westeros-set saga, Jim Zub makes use of the full expanse of the Hyborean continent, starting in Aquilonia before moving onto Conan's homeland of Cimmeria.

Much of the story unfolds through sometimes dense captions, the pace can sometimes seem slow, and the third-person narration means there's a remote, unknowable quality to Conan himself.

He soon forms a partnership – and relationship – of convenience with Pictish scout Brissa, the only supporting character of note. But we're never too many pages away from a fist fight or sword battle, which are vigorously depicted by Robert De La Torre – particularly when he gets to cut loose on the occasional double or single-page spread. His sinewy linework and dynamic layouts are enhanced by José Villarrubia's moody colours.

With issue three dropping hints that a classic villain is behind the malevolent invasion, this could be a *Conan* for the ages. **Stephen Jewell**

STARFIELD

Space is big – *really* big



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on Xbox Series X

► Also available on Xbox Series S, PC

► Publisher Xbox Game Studios

VIDEOGAME With *Starfield*, the old Bethesda magic gets a little lost in space. Perhaps that's to be expected – the new open-world RPG from the creators of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and *Fallout 4* isn't giving you a province to wander this time, but an entire galaxy. It's an interstellar adventure across 1,000 planets and 100 star systems, with near-endless opportunities for quiet exploration and expressive character definition.

“A beast that can swallow entire evenings whole”

Where *Starfield* struggles is in providing focus. There are pockets of authored storytelling throughout the Settled Systems: a core narrative thread that'll ignite the imagination of any sci-fi fanatic, along with countless other questlines that help direct you around the galaxy and into interesting conflicts with the various factions and NPCs out in the wilds.

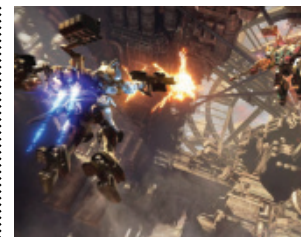
But with so much space to fill, Bethesda has had to use a lot of procedural generation, ensuring that you're frequently stumbling across the same repurposed bandit camps to shoot through or resources to gather on otherwise barren landscapes. As a result, a sense of the discovery that always made Bethesda games so special is diluted. There's cool stuff out there, but it can sometimes be a struggle to find it.

Nevertheless, *Starfield* does create cycles of play that make it practically untouchable. It can transform from a mundane mess of navigating perplexing menus to a beast of an RPG that can swallow entire evenings whole. Robust ship-building and character development systems will delight anybody willing to get into the groove of properly role-playing. Solid outpost-building and crafting mechanics help ease the mundanity of scanning planets and resource collection, and there are plenty of opportunities to battle through awesomely detailed analogue-style science fiction sets.

Starfield isn't quite *Skyrim* or *Fallout* in space, but as with those games there is a quality to it that makes it difficult to ignore. While the game certainly has its issues, many are easy to overlook if you've ever dreamed of travelling the stars as a starship captain, with a robotic best friend to one side of you and a group of interstellar pirates to fight on the other.

Josh West

i Bad news: according to the description of one food item, Labrador retrievers are extinct by the year 2330. RIP.



ARMORED CORE VI: FIRES OF RUBICON



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also available on PlayStation 4, PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X

► Publisher Bandai Namco Ent

VIDEOGAME When traces of an immensely powerful but volatile fuel are found on Rubicon 3 (a planet once set ablaze by the substance), megacorps scramble merc squads to secure it in the hopes of a big payday, no matter the cost. While, like those soldiers, you pilot a mech of your own, your agenda is different: as a freelancer, you've been illegally smuggled in to play both sides. And who comes out on top is in your robo-hands.

Your personal mech is fully customisable, and switching weapons (two in the hands, two on the shoulders), body parts and internals, it's surprising how quickly you'll feel like an ace merc. From lightweight builds which make use of stop-start thrusters to dodge around enemies, to heavier ones that negate the recoil on a bevy of large missile launchers, it's always responsive.

The power fantasy of outgunning legions of small machines feels great, and is punctuated by much tougher clashes with rival pilots and skyscraper-sized behemoths. The latter are sometimes a bit too gruelling to battle, but it's always satisfying to finally blast them to pieces. With generous checkpointing, it's the most approachable, thrilling game the *Dark Souls* devs have tuned up to date. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



The Tinder date turned out to be a let-down.

DOOM'S DAY: DYING HOURS

Up against the clock



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 202 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA **Remember Time**
Lord Victorious? The multimedia *Doctor Who* event told a sprawling story over books, comics, games and Big Finish audio dramas. *Doom's Day* is another go at the same idea, this time with a simpler structure (it takes place over a single day) and a central character in assassin Doom (Sooz Kempner), who's searching for the Doctor.

This set takes place between hours 20:00 and 23:00. The four stories comprise goofy sci-fi with silly voices and an unsettling twist

("Dawn Of Everlasting Peace"); a melancholy reunion with Camille Corduri's Jackie Tyler ("A Date With Destiny"); a gritty war story featuring the Silence ("The Howling Wolves Of Xan-Phear") and an actual *Doctor Who* adventure as Doom catches up with the Time Lord ("The Crowd") – albeit the wrong incarnation.

That last story is the pick of the bunch, largely because the Doctor – Paul McGann in righteous fury

“These cross-platform sagas don't work”



mode – voices some of our own frustrations. Simply put, why should we care about Doom, a glib, unrepentant murderer? The character feels misconceived, neither capricious enough to be compelling or layered and funny enough to forgive.

It doesn't help that, by the nature of the event, we're coming into her story partway through

here and leaving before the end. Even if you've experienced the earlier episodes (and this reviewer has), it feels incomplete and dissatisfying. Perhaps it's time to admit that these grand cross-platform sagas don't really work.

Will Salmon

1 Sooz Kempner's childhood cat, Boris, was a genuine sci-fi icon: he played Ripley's ginger mog Jonesy in *Aliens*!

100 YEARS OF AUDIO DRAMA

Centenary sounds

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 43 minutes/44 minutes/44 minutes

► Publisher Radio 4 (now available on bbc.co.uk)

AUDIO DRAMA **This year marks the**
centenary of audio drama on the BBC. Radio 4 marked the occasion with a series of programmes – three of particular interest to us.

Set in 2065, *Radio Waves* ★★★★★ centres on a solo mission into space, searching for signs of alien intelligence. We listen to two of the Earth signals its captain (Natalie Simpson) picks up, giving this an anthology feel.

The premise makes little sense – what benefit would travelling into space for a year have to such a

project? Isn't sifting the signals a job for AI? We're also not sure any ETs out there would be interested in the audio we listen in on, half of which is decidedly soapy.

Slow Air ★★★★★ posits the existence of a Sicilian cave with an echo lasting 32 years. Academic Paul (Forbes Masson) visited on his honeymoon, in 1991. Will he screw up the courage to return and listen to whatever message his long-since dead wife committed to it? An interesting concept.

Dan Rebellato's script is well-characterised, with the central relationship between Paul and his daughter convincingly fractious, but ultimately it's an anticlimactic affair.



You Must Listen ★★★★★ is a new version of a lost 1952 production penned by Nigel Kneale. When a solicitor's has a phone line connected, a woman can be heard night and day, wooing and pleading with a lover.

Early on it's a case of *You Must Listen With Headphones*, with the mystery voice frustratingly indistinct. Kneale fans will quickly

cotton on that it's a haunting, and likely guess the final reveal, but it remains an interesting example of the Manx writer exploring themes which would recur in his later work, with a solid performance by Toby Jones as the investigating telephone engineer. **Ian Berriman**

1 On 16 February 1923, the BBC broadcast a scene from *Julius Caesar*. A full-length take on *Twelfth Night* followed in May.

You don't get this sort of problem with WhatsApp.

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Pinky And The Brain

Richard Edwards, Former Editor



As a latecomer to *The Simpsons*, having grown up without Sky, my first exposure to Springfield came when BBC Two brought the show to terrestrial TV in 1996. Ahead of that life-changing moment, the “cool” teenage me probably regarded cartoons as kids’ stuff – especially when they aired after school on Children’s ITV. But that didn’t stop me raving about the adventures of two cartoon mice with world domination on their minds.

As their theme song eloquently explained, the diminutive duo were “laboratory mice” whose “genes have been spliced”. These experiments (at the aptly named Acme Labs) created the genius intellect of the Brain (voiced by Maurice LaMarche in a fine pastiche of

Orson Welles), and the unhinged but sensitive Pinky (Rob Paulsen).

Every story followed a similar formula of catchphrases and attempts to conquer Earth. But, like *The Fast Show*, *Pinky And The Brain* turned repetition into an artform, as the Brain’s overly complex schemes – we’re talking ’60s Batman levels of villainy – were thwarted again and again, most often by his own ineptitude.

US network The WB were so taken with the double act that they briefly touted them as a primetime rival to Homer and co. The stories revelled in *Looney Tunes* slapstick and Wallace and Gromit-style inventiveness, as Brain walked around in mechanical human suits, and drove cars with complex systems of pulleys. But the humour was also surprisingly sophisticated, packed with references to

current affairs, classic films and history – in one Shakespeare-themed episode, the Brain even tried to take over the Globe (theatre).

But most important was the relationship between the leads. Despite the Brain’s contempt for his companion, it was clear taking over the world wouldn’t be worth the effort unless Pinky was by his side. Never was this more true than in the Emmy-winning “A Pinky And The Brain Christmas”, in which Pinky’s letter to Santa – literally asking for the world – turned the Brain into a blubbing wreck at the moment planetary domination was within his grasp. Hopefully, Pinky’s thoughtful gift – an Earth-shaped keyring – softened the blow. ●

Richard is planning to do the same thing he does every night – try to take over the world!

Fact Attack!

→ *Pinky And The Brain* first appeared as a regular segment in *Animaniacs*. They were so popular they got their own primetime spin-off.

→ Creator Tom Ruegger based the characters on the contrasting personalities of animator/writer Tom Minton and writer Eddie Fitzgerald.

→ Products from the Acme Corporation featured in *Road Runner*. Roger Rabbit was framed for the murder of its founder, Marvin Acme.

→ The Brain’s hamster nemesis, Snowball, was voiced by Roddy McDowall, best known for playing Cornelius in *Planet Of The Apes*.

→ The duo were joined by *Tiny Toons Adventures’* Elmyra in the final season. They later returned in the 2020 *Animaniacs* reboot.

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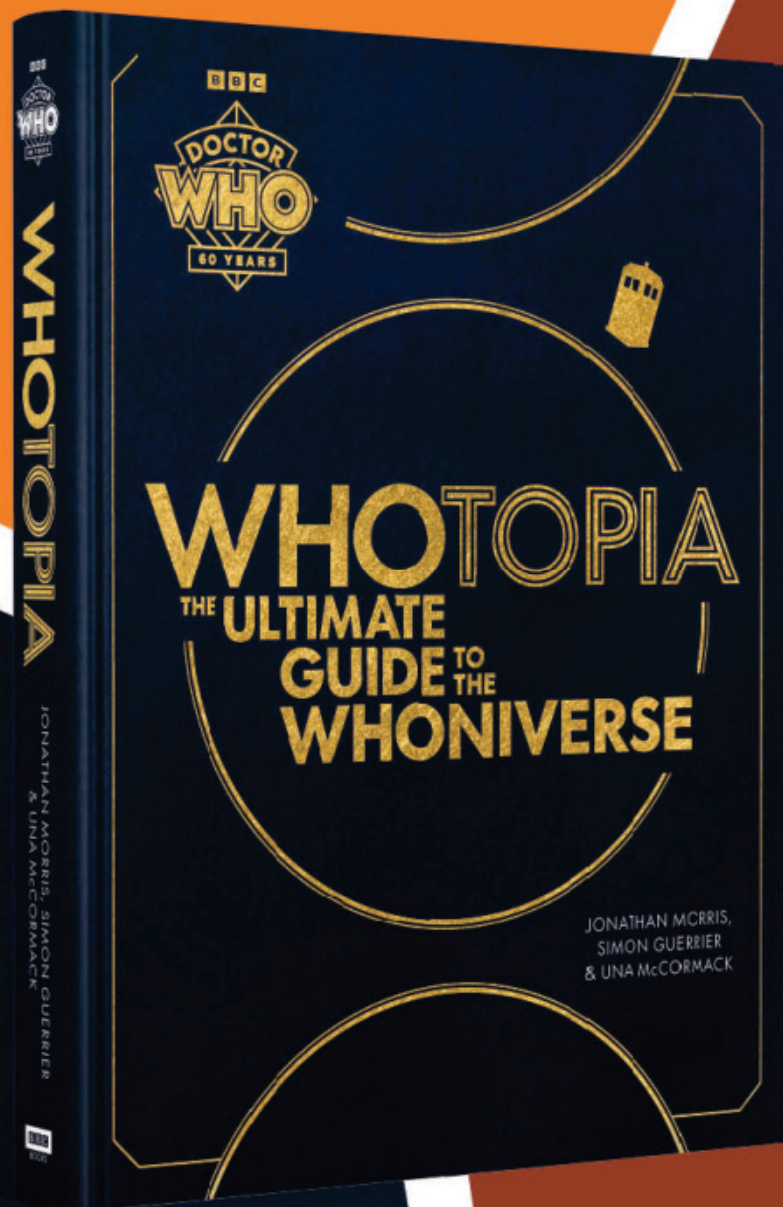
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