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AND RUBY!**

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FIRST LOOK PHOTOS!**

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WONKA
A SWEET TREAT

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MOON**

ZACK SNYDER'S
SCI-FI EPIC
BEGINS

**IT'S A
WONDERFUL
KNIFE**

'TIS THE SEASON
TO SLAY!

**MONARCH:
LEGACY OF
MONSTERS**

GODZILLA RULES THE
MONSTERVERSE

DISCWORLD
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**A GHOST
STORY FOR
CHRISTMAS**
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PLUS! GODZILLA MINUS ONE | HELLBOY | THE BOY AND THE HERON | STAR WARS
X-MEN | INFERNO | MERRY LITTLE BATMAN | THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS



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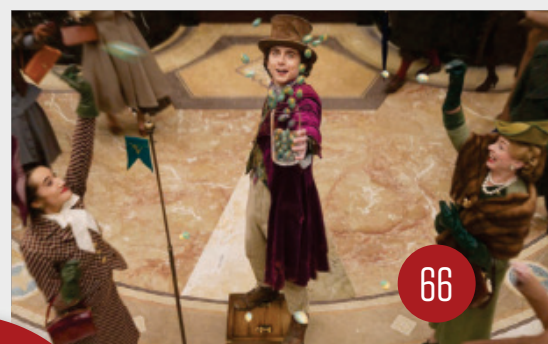
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We all want more *Bodies*, especially if they're in Hull.



BODY TALK

Rebecca Hannant, email I wasn't sure I would like *Bodies* but after the first episode I was hooked. The narrative was brilliant and I loved bingeing each episode trying to find all the hidden details.

The story reminded me somewhat of that great show *Life On Mars*, which managed to pull lots of different genres into one, but in a way that didn't feel convoluted or forced. Although the story arc wasn't fully formed until episodes five and six, there was enough to keep me wanting more.

As a sci-fi geek, I fully appreciated it. And from speaking to friends, even the non sci-fi fans seemed amazed by it, and that crowd is usually hard to win over.

Also, as a resident of Hull, where parts of it were filmed, it's hard to grasp just how well they dressed the set. I drive past the area every morning, and it continues to amaze me that one of the greatest modern sci-fi shows was made there. Although I am yet to find this secret passageway to central London – it would definitely save me a few pounds in train fares. The only downside is this drama is a limited series on Netflix. I want more!

RTD UK OK

Robert Dodd, email I find it interesting that Russell T Davies was approached to make a British superhero TV show for Marvel. He could still do a superhero TV show now, but without Marvel (or DC) and about a British superhero.

Maybe it could be like an *Island Of Dr Moreau* riff? Some of the animalistic mutants rebel and escape the island and the doc sets the "good guy" mutants to catch them and bring them back before they cause mayhem in the outside world? Or a British Flash?

SFX: Or how about *Crisis On Infinite Crossroads*, a multiverse-spanning sequel to *Nolly*...



Marvel have so much amazing IP to play with and they focus on Kang? Bizarre. Give us FF and Galactus and X-Men and Dark Phoenix.

Tarsem Singh-Khela



Always enjoy *SFX*. Especially when it's full of *Doctor Who*! @entrepenerd

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SFX

HOLIDAY SPECIAL 2023 | Issue 373

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Doctor Who © BBC/Brad Wolf.
Portrait by James Pardon.

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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future.

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4SH
marketforce.co.uk
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ISSN 1358-5959

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SFX (ISSN 1358-5959) Holiday Special 2023, Issue 373, is published monthly with an extra issue in December by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. The US annual subscription price is \$171.60. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11435, USA. Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SFX, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11435, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.

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"Now imagining Godzilla in the Queen Vic"



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR) www.futureplc.com

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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

- "The Star Beast" was like watching a feature film – a nostalgia rush but still forward-looking. Meep meep!
- Never played or engaged with *Five Nights At Freddy's* previously, but I thought the film was great fun.
- Really enjoyed *The Burning Girls*!

RANTS

- A shame *American Horror Stories* season three was cut in half – hopefully the remaining four will see the light of day.
- I have to wait how long for Halloween?



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

- Came back from a trip to Warsaw with some postcards of Polish film posters, and am particularly enjoying what they called *The Terminator: Elektryczny Morderca* (Electronic Murderer).
- Looking forward to new Faber & Faber biography Kubrick: An Odyssey (due out 18 January).
- The Whoniverse collection on iPlayer is immensely impressive...

RANTS

- ... though I'm simply *appalled* that the original version of "Day Of The Daleks", complete with the Ogron who mutters "No complications", is not on there. Sacrilege!
- The forthcoming sequel to *It Follows* really should have been called *It Followup*.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

- Enjoying *For All Mankind* season four.
- Isn't it about time we had a *Red Dwarf* Christmas special? Merry Cloist-mas everyone!



ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

- Really enjoying the YouTube series from visual effects artist Jonas Ussing (aka "The Movie Rabbit Hole"), about the current wave of films which proudly claim to use little or no CG. Using quotes and BTS footage, he very respectfully points out just how much CG clean-up and, in many cases, entire recreation is actually done in films like *Top Gun: Maverick*. bit.ly/jonasCG



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

- Hugely enjoying the new *Scarred For Life* podcast, with the likes of Reece Shearsmith prising open the haunted attics of childhood.
- Given how gorgeously it's shot, the money behind *007: Road To A Million* might have been better splashed on a proper documentary series about classic Bond locations.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

- Godzilla is having a moment! Finally, the *Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters* series makes you care equally about the human characters and the creature mythology. But Takashi Yamazaki's *Godzilla Minus One* bests it as one of the finest dramatic narratives featuring the monster. It's rousing, scary, and features one hell of a performance by Ryunosuke Kamiki.

Captain's Log



"Sometimes I have dreams about impossible things..."



Typical. You wait ages (well, a year) for a new Doctor and then two come along at once! All very exciting for the viewer at home, but it doesn't half play merry hell with deadlines and the overworked but wonderful *Doctor Who* publicity team! I think we're all in need of a holiday. But what a journey – you might even say the trip of a lifetime.

That first special! That new TARDIS! Fun fact – SFX were the first (non-licensed) publication on the new TARDIS set. But that, as they say, is a tale for another happy time and place... The joy of *Doctor Who* is so massive that we just *had* to do another special issue to celebrate the arrival of Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson – expect to be hearing a lot more from them in SFX as the new season approaches!

taps nose

But there's even *more* to come next issue. Honestly, we could write about it every day. Sometimes we do! The love for the show is infectious, as demonstrated by our last issue selling out and all the appreciation you showered on us via social media and emails. Thank you from all of us at the magazine.

I'd also like to express my thanks to Jason Marsden, Bill Munns and Zach Smothers for their use of imagery in our feature on *The Munsters Today* in issue 371. It's thanks to fandom like theirs that we get to enjoy archive material all these years later!

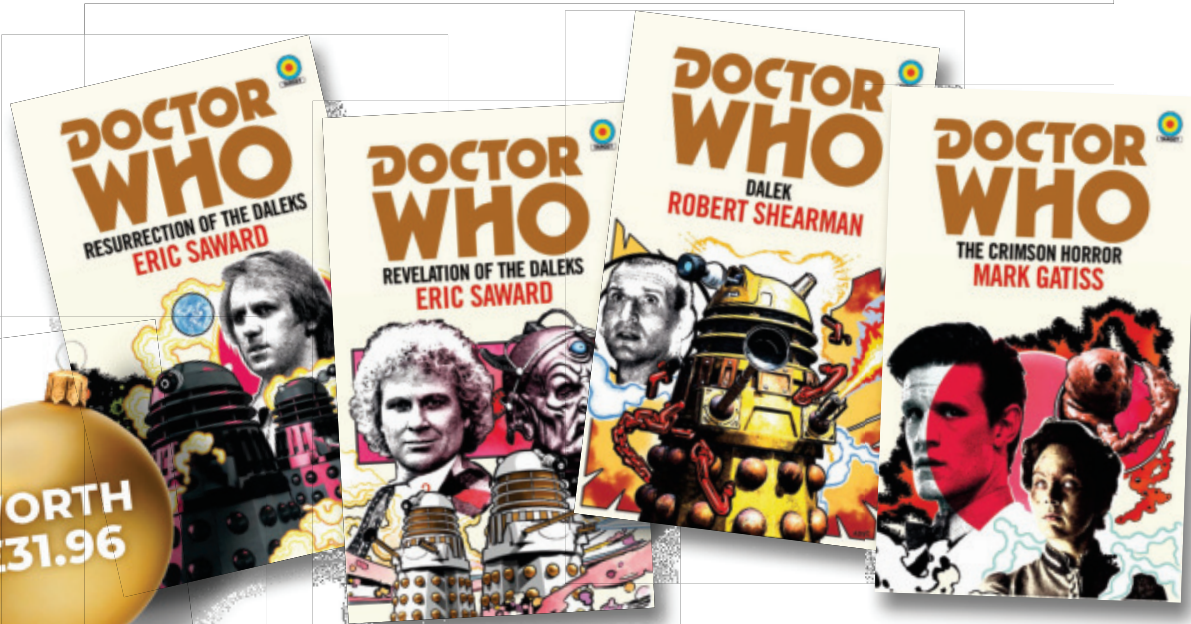
Happy holidays to all of you from everyone at SFX – see you in four weeks!

Darren
X

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Red Alert

HOLIDAY
SPECIAL
2023

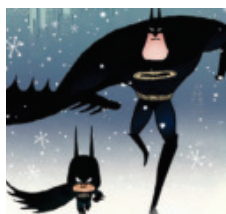
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MONSTER MASH

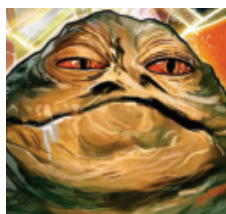
Could *Godzilla Minus One* be the creature's best movie yet?

Highlights



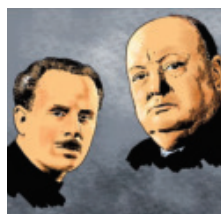
10 MERRY LITTLE BATMAN

→ Trouble comes to Gotham this Christmas, and it's snow joke.



12 STAR WARS

→ A look ahead to next year's Marvel Comic releases that really aren't that far, far away.



14 INFERNO

→ "And when I turned around, everyone in the comic strip was wearing an eyepatch!"



Which version of Godzilla is the coolest? FIGHT! FIGHT!


DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Return Of The King

Director Takashi Yamazaki explains why he took **Godzilla** back to basics WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD



Ryunosuke Kamiki as Kōichi Shikishima.

 GODZILLA HAS SMASHED skyscrapers, annihilated airports and kicked Kong, yet the monster's latest live-action outing is a surprisingly unique entry in the long-running series. *Godzilla Minus One*, as the name suggests, happens before the very first incarnation of Godzilla stomped across Tokyo. It primarily takes place in 1947, after the Second World War, when Japan's military had been disbanded. In other words, Japan is defenceless, making this period the perfect setting for a threatening new Godzilla attack.

"When you have a group of people with no means of easily fighting back, I thought it would make a more compelling story when people are using their intellect," director Takashi Yamazaki tells Red Alert. "Godzilla is not fighting a government entity with a military behind it, he's only fighting against civilians, which is really unique compared to all the other Godzillas."

Yamazaki – a renowned filmmaker in Japan thanks to a career spanning multiple award

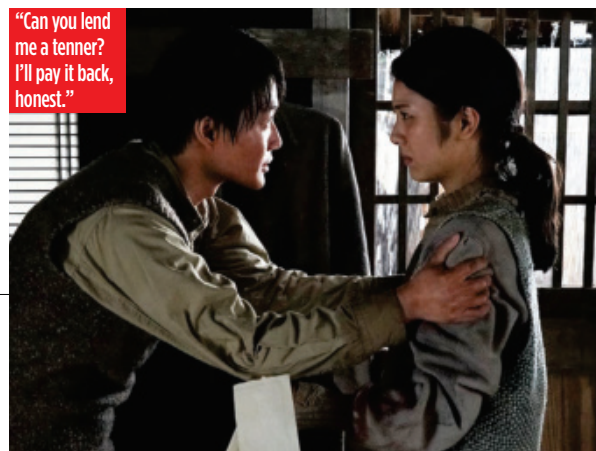
winners (*Always: Sunset On Third Street*) and blockbuster smashes (*Space Battleship Yamato*, *The Great War Of Archimedes*) – wanted his Godzilla film, the first domestic entry in the series since 2016's *Shin Godzilla*, to recall the Shōwa era (1954-1975). This was when the King of Monsters gradually turned from beastly destroyer to superhero saviour, vanquishing foes like King Ghidorah. In *Minus One*, though, Godzilla is very much at the beginning of that arc.

"Compared to all the other [recent films], this story really harkens back to the primary movies, where the relationship between humans and Godzilla is much more intertwined," Yamazaki explains.

That meant writing meaty roles for the humans tasked with protecting Japan, such as Kōichi Shikishima, a fighter pilot with survivor's guilt who previously encountered Godzilla during the war. Played by *Your Name* and *Spirited Away*'s Ryunosuke Kamiki, Kōichi comes up with a plan to defeat Godzilla after

the Japanese government refuses to help. "This role, for me, was very precious," Kamiki says. "Godzilla really represents Japan all over the world, so it was a lot of pressure for me. As an actor, I saw Godzilla representing hopelessness. My character has lost everything, he doesn't have anything to fight against this monster."

"For the humans in this film, it was a question of, 'How do all these people fight against such a monster?'" adds Yamazaki. "It's reflective of where the Japanese people were



"Can you lend me a tenner? I'll pay it back, honest."



emotionally at that point in history. It was a reflection of having gone through so many challenges and so much loss. What is their perseverance and how do these people get through this challenge?"

Unable to simply pelt the mutated menace with bombs and bazookas, Kōichi's battle against Godzilla is visceral and exciting. Meanwhile, the creature's new design is fitting for the occasion; Godzilla is an imposing, scary monster with sharp, terrifying dorsal fins and a mean snout, with Yamazaki previously describing his version of Godzilla as the embodiment of fear itself.

"Our Godzilla design has taken on different elements from Godzillas throughout all the movies," says Yamazaki. "I would say my Godzilla design is a little bit closer to the Heisei era [1984-1995], a little bit after the original Godzilla. But the main thing for me was, out of all the Godzillas that have existed, I wanted to

“I would like to say that I think our Godzilla is a little bit cooler than the US one”

make sure that mine was as cool as them.” That also included the American versions of Godzilla. In *Minus One*, there are shots of Godzilla that seem to pay homage to the MonsterVerse incarnation of the creature, with Godzilla charging his famous atomic breath in a very similar fashion to his American counterpart, his tail and spine lighting up.

“I definitely was influenced by what the US version of Godzilla did,” Yamazaki says. “Overall I was just affected by everything that has been done before. But I would like to say that I think our Godzilla is a little bit cooler than the US one, because as the spine lights up

it also expands and the tail does a little kick at the end. So I think ours is a little cooler.”

Kamiki also claims that, despite this being the first film in the Godzilla timeline, it's also the best instalment in the series in terms of visual effects, which emphasises the film's uniqueness in the pantheon of Godzillas. And what's more, like those *Godzillas* past, there's room for the monster to return in a sequel.

“For myself as a director, I have always wanted to direct a Godzilla film, and I have conquered that,” Yamazaki laughs. “I’m definitely experiencing those post-show blues right now. So if someone said, ‘Would you like to make another one?’ I would say ‘Definitely.’”

Sounds like Godzilla will be back. Tokyo's skyscrapers and airports (and King Kong) better beware. ●

Godzilla Minus One is in cinemas from 15 December.

SCI-FACT! *Godzilla Minus One* is the second live-action instalment of the Reiwa era, the 33rd Japanese Godzilla, and 37th in the franchise.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Holy Holiday!

Director Mike Roth on how festive special **Merry Little Batman** transforms the hero WORDS: TARA BENNETT



SAY THE WORDS

Batman and Christmas, and our mental jukeboxes immediately conjure “Jingle bells, Batman smells...” But come this December, Warner Bros Animation hopes to replace that ditty with their brand-new animated holiday special, *Merry Little Batman*. It takes the comic character Damian Wayne – son of Bruce and Talia al Ghul – reduces his age and puts him centre stage in his own Christmas adventure.

A long-time fan of Batman, director Mike Roth tells Red Alert that he teamed up with art director Guillaume Fesquet and assistant art director Daby Zainab Faidhi to create a holiday special inspired by the work of

famed British illustrator Ronald Searle. “We decided to attack it like it’s a moving Christmas children’s book,” Roth says of their approach to the special.

“It has that type of a vibe to it, so Ronald Searle worked really well because there is something a little bit *A Christmas Carol*-y about his art. We also wanted to infuse some humour into it and Searle’s drawings are very funny. They’re also very gritty and very raw.”

While the Christmas season has been woven into plenty of official Batman stories (such as in *Batman Returns*), Roth says this was a unique opportunity for the team to aim for a new holiday classic.

“There is something very magical about animation,” he says. “There’s something about animation and the way it can tell stories that live action just can’t quite do. Christmas themes were very important to us throughout,

so we wanted to make sure Christmas was present in as many shots as possible,” he continues. “Even the colour palette is trying to find greens and reds as we move through the project.

“It’s having a good heartfelt message too, where Damian is learning a lesson about what it means to be a superhero. That little bit of an emotional touch is important not just for a good story, but for a good Christmas story.”

In the special, young Damian is voiced by Yonas Kibreab (*Sweet Tooth*), while his dad Batman is voiced by Luke Wilson. Roth says they were excited to present a very different kind of Bruce Wayne to the world. “Instead of Batman being this brooding



Joker, the epitome of bosses the world over.

It's the only language that the Riddler understands.



"Excuse me, sir, is this your Batmobile?"
"Um... yes?"

crimefighter, he's taking all that time and energy and putting it into raising his son," the director teases. "He's completely cleaned up Gotham. There's no crime left. He did it in

preparation for his son, so [Damian] can grow up in a world where his parents don't get murdered. Now he's a father, and so instead of being debonair he has mussed-up flannel and dad sneakers," he laughs.

Of course, all Damian wants to do is be Batman, and that's a nightmare for Bruce. "As we

affectionately call him, he is like a Bat-copter parent keeping Damian super-safe," Roth says. "And that's where our movie begins, which we thought was a fun entry point."

The problems start when Damian gets his most coveted Christmas present, a utility belt. "Damian gets this gift that he's always wanted and finally thinks his wishes are coming true," Roth says. "He then goes out into Gotham, in this world where there's not supposed to be any crime, and the Joker's back. And he's not just back, but he's back with a rogues' gallery."

Joker has been redesigned by Guillaume Fesquet and is voiced

for the first time by actor David Hornsby (*Mythic Quest*). "If I can say this without the world hating me, it's personally my favourite Joker," Roth says – high praise indeed. "In constructing the character, we wanted him to feel a little bit petulant, with very quick turns and changes. He can be very happy and then pouting, whining and having a temper tantrum, all in the course of 30 seconds."

As for why he's back in Gotham, Roth will only say that it's a Christmas-themed goal. "It's kind of childish in a way, but villainous at the same time," he adds.

"Damian is this little, tiny kid in this really big world. We staged it that way so it's very much seen through a kid's perspective. And what's the counterpart to that? Well, there's something very childish to me about the Joker, so it's child versus child. It's little kid child versus this big adult child."

Finally, Roth tells hardcore Batman fans to look closely, because the team have loaded in Easter eggs that will appeal to appreciators of every era.

"We pulled references from different Batman [stories] along the way, like some '66 Batman references and many others," he says. "Taking a little bit of different eras of Batman and putting them together, there's something Christmas-themed about that." ●

Merry Little Batman is on Prime Video from 8 December.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Director David Robert Mitchell reuniting with Maika Monroe on **They Follow**, a sequel to 2014's *It Follows*.

→ Chiwetel Ejiofor and Karen Gillan joining Mike Flanagan's Stephen King adaptation **The Life Of Chuck**.
→ Cinematic dream team Vanilla Ice and Chuck Norris signing on for action-comedy **Zombie Plane**.

→ Veteran schlockmaster Charles Band producing **Barbenheimer**. Yes, it's going to be a real movie...

→ **The Hunger Games** set to be a stage show, opening in London's West End in autumn 2024.

→ Daisy Ridley joining reanimation thriller **We Bury The Dead**.

→ Sam Raimi returning to horror with castaway chiller **Send Help**.

→ **True Detective** creator Nic Pizzolatto writing/directing an "occult detective story" for Blumhouse.

→ Keira Knightley starring in dystopian SF tale **Conception**, directed by *Silent Night*'s Camille Griffin.

→ Amazon's MGM Studios developing sequel to 2022's Sylvester Stallone superhero flick **Samaritan**.



GETTY



► **SCI-FACT!** James Cromwell (*Star Trek: First Contact*) voices Bruce Wayne's trusted valet, Alfred Pennyworth.

EDITOR EXCLUSIVE

Future Force

From Thrawn to Mace Windu, **Star Wars: Revelations** previews the year ahead for Marvel's *Star Wars* comics

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

➔ AFTER 2022'S EDITION of anthology *Revelations* paved the way for the recent *Dark Droids* crossover, this year's issue lays the groundwork for what is to come in Marvel's *Star Wars* stable over the next 12 months.

"The main goal here is to seed upcoming storylines, drop some clues to bigger things ahead and introduce some new and exciting characters – and maybe a few you thought you wouldn't see again," editor Mark Paniccia tells Red Alert. "Last year, our goal was to show the interconnectivity among the original trilogy books and reveal the possible outcomes of *Dark Droids* – some of which are still playing out, so wait till you see what happens in January's *Bounty Hunters* issue 42!"

"This year we wanted to take a different approach, where instead of a story that was driving towards the huge impacts and conclusions of our big event, we are opening with a big bang that is the beginning of new directions."

With the core titles such as *Star Wars* and *Darth Vader* currently taking place between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*, the comics provide creators with the opportunity to fill in the gaps between the various films and television series.

"We collaborate directly with Lucasfilm to make sure everything is in continuity, and we've been fortunate to add to the rich

Don't worry, no dialogue spoilers for you.



Cover art for the 2023 *Revelations*, by Rod Reis.

tapestry of the *Star Wars* mythos with new characters, worlds and organisations, both good and evil," says Paniccia, who cites the example of how *Darth Vader* writer Greg Pak has fleshed out the character of Sith assassin Ochi of Bestoon.

"That's been a fun toy for Greg to play with. But the list goes on, as all of our writers, including Charles Soule, Ethan Sacks, Alyssa

Wong, Marc Guggenheim and more, have been able to make enormous contributions to the galaxy far, far away."

Contributors to *Revelations* include Charles Soule and Andrea Di Vito who, according to Paniccia, "introduce a new, important and very devious character in the flagship title, *Star Wars*", while Greg Pak and Salvador Larroca "deliver a haunting story that

► **SCI-FACT!** According to Icelandic folklore, the Yule Cat eats people who haven't received any new clothes for Yule. Bit harsh.



introduces you to new and creepy tools for Darth Vader in his quest for galactic order." Meanwhile, collaborating with artist Chriscross, Marc Bernardin pens "a high-octane opener" to February's *Mace Windu* miniseries, which he's scripting for Georges Jeanty to illustrate.

"Alyssa Wong and David Baldeon are introducing a new bounty hunter that is going to cause some massive headaches for a certain star-spanning archaeologist," continues Panicia, referring to Doctor Aphra. "Speaking of bounty hunters, Ethan Sacks and Will Sliney deliver an action-packed *Jango*

“We are opening with a big bang as the beginning of new directions”

Fett story with a fan-favourite showing up at the end. Cavan Scott and Marika Cresta tell a tale that really hits the heart, featuring Keeve Trennis.

"And we also have a hilarious story featuring Jabba the Hutt by Marc Guggenheim and Salva Espin, bringing a blast from the past into *Star Wars* continuity. We'll also be previewing the new *Thrawn: Alliances* comic book adaptation by Timothy Zahn, Jody Houser, Pat Oliffe and Andrea Di Vito. There's literally something for everyone." ●

Star Wars: Revelations is out on 20 December.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Feline Festive

Hellboy meets Iceland's Yule Cat in this year's **Winter Special** WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



Cover art for the *Winter Special*, by Matt Smith.

THIS YEAR'S *HELLBOY Winter Special* pits mythical Icelandic feline Yule Cat against Mike Mignola's demonic detective. The idea sprang out of some preparatory illustrations which writer/artist Matt Smith did before embarking on illustrating the 2021 one-shot *Long Night At Goloski Station*.

"My first move was to start sketching Hellboy to make sure I could actually pull it off," Smith tells Red Alert. "But instead of sketching Hellboy in various positions like a normal person, I started sketching out a short story. My logic was this would prompt me to draw Hellboy in various ways, such as small within an establishing shot, or expressions for reaction shots.

"So, without a script, I started sketching a half-dozen pages

based around a trip I had made to Iceland. These were of Hellboy walking around Reykjavik and meeting a local folklorist. Of course, there had to be something to try out action scenes – and so, enter the Yule Cat."

After Smith sent the sketches to Mignola, the latter suggested expanding it into what would eventually become the *Hellboy Winter Special: The Yule Cat* one-shot. "I hadn't really approached it from the angle of fitting a story to a seasonal Christmas theme," Smith continues.

"It went from choosing a setting, Iceland, to choosing a monster, the Yule Cat, and the season came from there, as the winter holiday season is classically rich territory for ghost and monster stories."



Before starting his script, Smith extensively researched the Jólakötturinn, aka the Yule Cat. "I wanted to have it tie into the existing folklore, but also present a different version for Hellboy's world," he explains.

"Art-wise, I imagined some different directions, such as a bulky Norwegian Forest cat type, which looked best for imposing standing shots. Ultimately though, in action I kept seeing it as more of a sleek but giant black cat, slipping around buildings and so on."

Smith also drew on his own experiences of visiting Iceland. "Reykjavik and particularly the Icelandic interior are like nowhere else," he says. "I took a lot of photos when I went there some years back and those were handy, although I had no idea at the time that I'd end up tapping into them for a *Hellboy* story down the line.

"Funnily enough, I met a guy there working in the country's only comic book shop, the fantastic Nexus, and one of the first things we bonded over was *Hellboy*. Now he's a good friend who has visited me here in Boston and he is in the story."

The Yule Cat takes place shortly after 2022 miniseries *The Bones Of Giants*, which was adapted from Christopher Golden's Sweden-set *Hellboy* novel of the same name.

"Without giving too much away, that's why Hellboy goes to Iceland in the first place," teases Smith. "There are some familiar faces, as Hellboy is still with the BPRD at this time in 1990. That was an unexpected fun part of it, looking at the timeline and figuring out when this story would fit, which in turn added some new ideas." ●

Hellboy Winter Special: The Yule Cat is out on 6 December.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE



COUNTING “INFERNO” AS HIS “favourite *Doctor Who* story of all time,” Gary Russell is now writing a spin-off series for Cutaway Comics. Illustrated by John Ridgway, *Inferno – The World Dies Screaming!* takes place in the alternate fascist Britain first seen in the 1970 Third Doctor seven-parter, which along with 1971’s “The Mind Of Evil” is one of two *Doctor Who* stories scripted by Don Houghton.

“We’ve ended up with access to both of Don Houghton’s stories, which makes the universe just that bit bigger,” Russell tells Red Alert. “I could immediately see how, if you have a planet that’s post-‘Inferno’’s holocaust, an alien mind parasite that feeds off powerful negative emotions might just look around and go ‘Woo-hoo, lunchtime!’”

“This meant the survivors not only had to contend with Primords and other nasties infected by ‘the green’, but also a hungry alien mind parasite for whom said lunchtime was becoming a banquet of international proportions. And don’t forget at the end of

Green Death

The heat is rising in Cutaway’s latest Doctor-less comic ***Inferno – The World Dies Screaming!***

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

‘Inferno’ on TV, we saw all that lava and Stahlmann’s gas blowing up into the atmosphere – so the old adage ‘what goes up, must come down’ plays heavily on the survivors, not least because England is rather famous for its rain. They’re also coping with not-just-rain every day, so it’s not a cheerful set of stories we’re weaving here!”

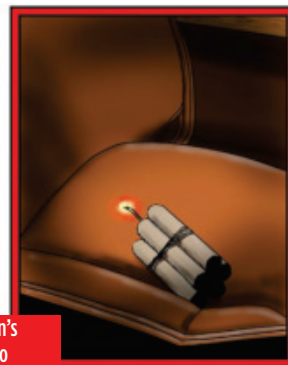
As with all of Cutaway’s ventures into the wider Whoniverse, the Doctor himself is otherwise engaged. “*Inferno* is really the

ultimate Doctor-less universe,” says Cutaway publisher Gareth Kavanagh. “The Doctor is absent, except for a brief visit during *Inferno*, and ultimately he was too late to change things. It’s a dark and unpredictable place with so much storytelling possibilities, peril and unhappy endings.”

While future issues will explore the impact the ecological catastrophe has in other regions such as China, America and Europe, first up is a prequel one-shot, chronicling how Baronet



Winston's about to smoke his last cigar.





Baronet
Oswald Ernald
Mosley, very
much real.

Mosley first came to power, beginning in the 1940s with the assassination of Winston Churchill. "It runs from the D-Day landings through to the night before the events we saw in 'Inferno'," continues Russell. "We see how and why this fascist English Republic came about and how (Project Inferno director) Professor Stahlmann was dragged into it all."

The World Die Screaming's Second World War location was the ideal backdrop for John Ridgway, whose very first comic book credits in the early 1970s included several issues of Fleetway's *Air Ace* and War Picture Libraries and DC Thomson's *Commando*. "I've drawn what seems like trillions of stories set in World War Two, so it was like going back to the start of my career, with the main difference that I have been drawing real people," he recalls.

"The story covers several decades in a world where there are vast political differences, which presented difficulties in deciding how society could develop – what is the same, what is different – while still keeping the feel of the original story, which was restrained by the budgets of the time."

With its earthbound milieu, *Inferno* is the polar opposite of Cutaway's current *Gods And Monsters* crossover, or indeed 2021's John Ridgway-illustrated *Omega* miniseries. "It's more a kind of post-apocalyptic dystopia where everything green is dangerous, so Terence Dicks would approve of that, I'm sure,"

“We’ve ended up with access to both of Don Houghton’s stories”



explains Russell, referring to the late author who wrote a Target novelisation of "Inferno" in 1984. "This allows John to use real-world imagery but dismantled, torn and burned down and left all gooey and yucky. It's a chance to show off the south coast of England at its doomiest, and by the way, the south coast is now Wales and Gloucestershire!"

"While posing as science fiction, *Omega* was, to me, more of a fantasy, where science verges on magic, while *Inferno* is very realistic as the only fantasy element is the green slime and its effects," adds Ridgway. "This gives more of an almost documentary feel to the story, and precludes any superhero-type posturing as the characters must act and react like normal human beings, so it's more like drawing a Jason Bourne story rather than *Star Wars*."

Detailing the devastating consequences of excavating the Earth's core, "Inferno's" environmental themes appear even more relevant today than they did when it first screened over 50 years ago.

"One thing we know now is that drilling for fossil fuels is not the answer, which those in power didn't believe in the early 1970s, so I guess they should have listened to Barry Letts!" says Russell, alluding to the long-time *Who* director and producer. "I researched when the term and whole concept of fracking first turned up and was unpleasantly surprised to learn that it's older than I expected. So Stahlmann and his supporters in the Republic can truthfully be said to have fracked things up!"

Inferno – The World Dies Screaming! is out in early 2024.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- Amazon MGM Studios and Amblin Television developing a **Poltergeist** series.
- **Futurama** renewed for two more 10-episode seasons.
- '90s toon **Gargoyles** set for live-action revival on Disney+.
- *The Punisher's* Dario Scardapane creatively overhauling Marvel's **Daredevil: Born Again**.
- The CW cancelling **Superman & Lois** after season four.
- Season two of **The Last of Us** looking to begin production next spring for 2025 release.
- *The Batman* spin-off series **The Penguin** now arriving autumn 2024.
- Live-action adaptation of videogame **Fallout** arriving 12 April 2024 on Prime Video.
- Jay Oliva directing 3D animated feature **The White Tower**, set in the world of *The Wheel Of Time*.
- Rebecca Yarros's fantasy book series **The Empyrean** set for TV adap.
- **House Of The Dragon** season two set to air summer 2024.
- DreamWorks' **Fright Krewe** renewed for a second season.



► **SCI-FACT!** Gary Russell's novelisation of Fourteenth Doctor special "The Star Beast" is available as an ebook now.

► **SCI-FACT!** Bendis was inspired to take the All-New X-Men out of their time zone by films like *Pleasantville* and *Peggy Sue Got Married*.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

New Old Mutants

Christos Gage is taking the **Original X-Men** on another trip in time

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

➔ JUST IN TIME FOR their 60th anniversary this year, the founding five members of the Merry Mutants are once again journeying in time. Christos Gage's new one-shot *Original X-Men* springs out of not only Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's seminal '60s issues of *Uncanny X-Men*, but also 2013's Brian Michael Bendis-scripted *All-New X-Men*, which saw Cyclops, Marvel Girl, Beast, Iceman and Angel travel to the present. But the writer insists that neither is essential reading.

"We're pulling the Original X-Men from a very specific time in the run, so everything that happened to them up to that point informs their actions," says Gage, who teams up with artist Greg Land. "It takes place after the Bendis storyline that brought them into their future and then returned them, so that informs their action as well, because they'll be regaining those memories."

Gage was recruited by Marvel editor Sarah Brunstad for his ability to draw on Marvel's complex history and integrate it seamlessly into his work.

"I loved the idea, since I'd never had a chance to write the *Original X-Men*," he says. "Aside from the opportunity to write these characters early in their careers, and to do a kind of 'what if?' story with the older versions, I love the concept of younger versions of characters meeting their older selves."

Issue one cover art by Ryan Stegman.



"When we're young, we dream of being older with the assumption that we'll have figured it all out. Now that I'm no longer a spring chicken myself, I know you never figure it all out, and I often wish I had the chance to go back and right mistakes I made in the past. So it's interesting to me to see those versions of the characters meet – especially the

way we have it, where the older versions have basically taken over the world. They think they've realised Professor Xavier's dream, whereas their younger selves see it as a nightmare."

The X-Men are pulled out of the time stream and sent on a mission across the multiverse by the Phoenix Force, who is actually an alternate-universe Jean Grey.

"She's older than the one we know as she's in her fifties," explains Gage. "Unlike the Phoenix of our world, this Jean merged with the Phoenix Force instead of being replaced by it."

"Together they have defeated most of the threats on their Earth and now they've summoned the Original X-Men to travel to another Earth whose Original X-Men – including its own Phoenix – grew up and brought peace to that world, but not in a way the quest-giver Phoenix approves of."

The 40-page special will lead into a new series next year. "If that book is coming out, things don't get fully resolved in this one-shot, which doesn't sound great for the Original X-Men!" ●

Original X-Men issue one is out on 20 December.



► **SCI-FACT!** As Lois, Coates wore the same hat, suit and earrings, as up to five episodes could be shot at the same time.



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THE FINAL FRONTIER

PHYLLIS COATES 1927-2023

TV's original Lois Lane

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD

➔ CAST AS LOIS LANE IN 1951'S *Superman And The Mole Men*, Phyllis Coates played the *Daily Planet's* tenacious hack "like a horse with a bit in my mouth, hard driving."

Born Gypsy Ann Everts Stell in Wichita Falls, Texas, Coates performed as a chorus girl and found a gift for comedy playing risqué skits with vaudevillian Ken Murray, who discovered her in a restaurant on Hollywood and Vine. At 17 she won a contract with 20th Century Fox and began a movie career.

Superman And The Mole Men was the first feature film to be based on a DC property, though the Man of Steel had already come to the screen in two cliffhanging serials, where Lois was portrayed by Noel Neill. It was essentially a test run for the TV series *Adventures Of Superman*, where Coates starred opposite George Reeves in the title role. Her tough, determined take on Lois suited the show's harder-edged inaugural season, given the pinch of film noir grit in those black-and-white episodes.

"We were nearly blown up, beaten up, exploded, exploited," Coates recalled. "I guess it was because we were young and dumb, but we put up with a lot of stuff." Bailing on a second season – replaced by Neill – she found steady work in cinema and TV, starring in such genre

fare as *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* (1957) and undersea adventure *The Incredible Petrified World* (1959). She was also a serial queen, fighting monster crayfish and sinister boffins in Republic's 1955 chapterplay *Panther Girl Of The Kongo*.

Though Coates was persuaded to play Lois's mother Ellen Lane in the season one finale of *Lois & Clark*, she was wary of being too closely associated with all things Kryptonian. "No one imagined the interest would last this long," she once said. "It's like a cult." ●



Phyllis Coates doing Lois Lane, '50s style.

ABC PHOTO ARCHIVES/DISNEY/GETTY

KEITH GIFFEN 1952-2023

American comic book writer and artist who created Lobo and Ambush Bug for DC.

MARK GODDARD 1936-2023

American actor best known for playing Major Don West in the original *Lost In Space*.



Nicola Coughlan is in the 2024 (!) special.



SPACE AND TIME

Celebrating 60 years of

DOCTOR WHO

◆ Filming for the 2025 series of *Doctor Who*, series two, starring Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson, commenced on Monday 23 October.

◆ An upcoming episode will be co-written by Kate Herron and Briony Redman. Herron was previously director and executive producer of *Loki* season one and a director on *Sex Education*. Redman is an actor, comedian and award-winning writer. Herron said: "Clearly I can't get enough of time travel. It is an absolute honour to write for Russell and Ncuti. We had so much fun and can't wait for you all to see it."

Redman said: "As a big fan of *Doctor Who* and Russell T Davies, it's been a dream to write on this show."

Davies said: "This is when I absolutely love my job. Working with the stellar talents of Kate and Briony makes my whole world bigger and brighter, and a lot more fun. I was a huge fan of *Loki* and reached out to Kate to say so – she then introduced me to Briony, and it was all systems go! They've written a wonderful script which created unique challenges for cast and crew alike. The end result is gorgeous and thrilling and scary, and not like any other episode of *Doctor Who*."

◆ The producer of block one of season two is Alison Sterling.

◆ Nicola Coughlan (*Derry Girls*) has been confirmed as having been cast in the 2024 Christmas special, which was filming in early November 2023.

◆ UNIT's Colonel Ibrahim, played by Alexander Dervient, also returns in the 2024 season.

◆ John Mackay reprises his role from Russell T Davies's *Crossroads* drama *Nolly* as John Logie Baird in "The Giggles". *Nolly*'s now canon...

◆ Titan Comics begin a new series of comic book adventures with the Fifteenth Doctor and

David Tennant in the 2023 Children In Need special.

Key art for the three 60th Anniversary Specials.



"The Daleks" in its new, recoloured version.

Ruby, starting in their *Free Comic Book Day Edition*, out on 4 May.

◆ Transmission dates for special number two "Wild Blue Yonder" and special three "The Giggle" have been set for 2 and 9 December respectively. *Doctor Who Unleashed* follows each show on BBC Three. All three specials are available in 4K on BBC iPlayer.

◆ The three anniversary specials will be released physically on 31 December. They're available on Blu-ray and DVD, and there is also a Steelbook edition. All formats come with additional bonus features.

◆ Covers for the Target novels of the anniversary specials have been revealed. They will be available in eBook format following transmission. "The Star Beast" is out now, "Wild Blue Yonder" is released on 7 December and "The Giggle" is out on 14 December. They will be released in paperback on 11 January, with audiobooks to follow.

◆ A new special *Doctor Who* scene – and exclusive episode of *Unleashed* – starring Mawaan Rizwan and the Daleks aired on 17 November to celebrate Children In Need. Both are available online. Written by Russell T Davies, *Destination: Skaro* is a five-minute scene, fully scored, with FX. Produced by Scott Handcock and directed by Jamie

Donoughue, it features music by Murray Gold.

◆ Disney+ announced that the festive special would air on Christmas Day and is called "The Church On Ruby Road".

◆ *The Official Doctor Who Podcast* is available from all usual providers, plus the *Doctor Who* YouTube channel, after each of the 2024 specials air.

◆ "The Daleks" was broadcast on BBC Four as a newly edited and coloured production, with plans underway for another for 2024. "The Daleks" is now on iPlayer. A Blu-ray, including the original version with a new 15-minute feature, is due for release in February. →

Eric Knowles
in a special
Who edition of
Bargain Hunt.



All eps of *Tales Of The TARDIS* are now on BBC iPlayer.



British Airways announces its dedicated Who channel.

◆ A new BBC documentary, *Imagine... Russell T Davies: The Doctor And Me* has been filmed for BBC One and iPlayer. It includes behind the scenes material filmed on set, and is set to air in December.

◆ *Doctor Who: Beyond The Screen* will take place on Twitch on 9 December, from 9.30pm.

◆ *Talking Doctor Who*, a documentary where David Tennant looks back at the classic era of the series, was broadcast on BBC Four on 1 November. It was followed by the Radio 2 concert, *Doctor Who @60: A Musical Celebration*. Both are now available on BBC iPlayer.

◆ Toby Hadoke's two-part documentary *Surviving Doctor Who* is now available on BBC Sounds.

◆ *Doctor Who: The Missing Episodes* has been added to BBC Sounds/BBC iPlayer – it features stars of the series narrating the missing instalments from the archives.

◆ A *Bargain Hunt Doctor Who* special aired on 23 November on BBC One. It's now available on BBC iPlayer.

◆ British Airways announced the launch of a dedicated *Doctor Who* inflight entertainment channel, with a Dalek appearing at Heathrow's Terminal 5. Available for all the airline's customers travelling on long-haul flights from

1 November, the new channel features 13 acclaimed episodes.

◆ Cubicle 7 has released the *Doctors And Daleks* role-playing game across three new physical editions; the Player's Guide, Keys Of Scaravore and Alien Archive are all available now. There's also a special Collector's Edition in a TARDIS slipcase – the only way fans will be able to acquire the Gamesmaster's Screen.

Further volumes are planned to follow soon, including two anniversary specials with an edition each for Classic and New *Who*. Visit cubicle7games.com for more information.

◆ Big Finish will give Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor the finale treatment with new 12-part audio drama "The Last Day", the first of

"The Last Day" wraps up the Seventh Doctor's story.



part which is released this month. Featuring all of his companions, the story leads directly into the TV movie from 1996, and includes the return of Edward Peel as Kane.

◆ A new book telling the story of the Eaglemoss figurine collection, *Flying Onto Shelves*, has been written by former range editor Neil Corry. More details at flyingontoshelves.co.uk.

◆ *Children Of The Circus*, a musical sequel to "The Greatest Show In The Galaxy" featuring returning cast, will be released by AUK Studios

on 14 December to mark the 35th anniversary of the story (see page 110 for our review). You can order it here: bit.ly/SFXcircus

◆ Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred, Janet Fielding, Katy Manning, Ruth Madeley, Bonnie Langford, Peter Davison, Nicholas Briggs and Segun Akinola all appear on "My Life In A Mixtape" episodes, available on BBC Sounds.

◆ Fan magazine *Vworp Vworp* returned in November with issue six, celebrating the origins of the series, and including a special DVD recreating scenes from the original Dalek novelisation. Details at vworpvworp.co.uk.

◆ Build-A-Bear has released a Fourteenth Doctor bear for eager young builders, with additional accessories. Visit buildabear.co.uk for more.

◆ Life-size cut-outs from the 60th anniversary specials are now available from Star Cutouts, including the Doctor, Donna and the TARDIS. Each one comes with a bonus tabletop cut-out. Visit starcutouts.com.

◆ New 2024 items have been released by Danilo, including a "classic edition" calendar with all the Doctors, 14th Doctor calendar and TARDIS pocket diary – see danilo.com. 📅

► **SCI-FACT!** For the colourised "The Daleks", original Dalek voice artist David Graham returned to voice new material by Russell T Davies.



ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS WHO

THE CHRISTMAS **DOCTOR WHO** SPECIAL IS BACK
AND RUSSELL T DAVIES IS IN FULL FESTIVE MODE

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**





IT'S THE

man of the moment – and that moment is Christmas, quite frankly. You've barely had time to catch your breath from three 60th anniversary specials but there's a new Doctor, a new companion and a new beginning to look forward to this Christmas Day. The new era has properly begun so without further ado – he's a busy man, and every (printable) word's a gem – we give you the showrunner of *Doctor Who*, Russell T Davies.

Tease the Christmas episode...

◆ It's completely a reinvention. Reinvention of the show, brand new, but not a reboot, it's the same old show, everything starts again, everything's seen through the eyes of Ruby Sunday and it's that lovely feeling of here we go, a new era beginning. Lovely. Kind of goes into territory we've never touched before. In many ways that's more... fresher than special

two. We've never done this before.

How important is the festive season and Christmas Day slot to you?

◆ It's always been my favourite time of year. It's always my favourite telly. Literally, I'm that kind of viewer round about June, I start thinking, "I wonder what Christmas specials we've got coming up? I wonder what baby will be born on *Call The Midwife* this year? I wonder who's in the *Strictly* special?" I am that fool, I'm a fool for it! I'm literally sitting here thinking, when shall I put my Christmas tree up? And we are talking on November the 10th. So I love it.

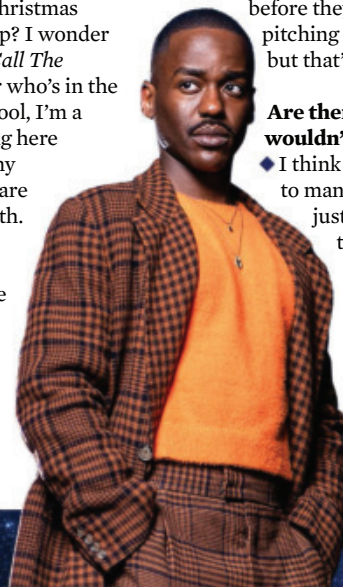
It's funny how *Doctor Who* just fits Christmas. The moment it came along and was a success in 2005, I mean, look, I put a Christmas special into the

very first season, before Christmas specials existed. I did the Dickens episode. I was so convinced! That never gets listed among Christmas specials. Probably because it went out in April. That's how intrinsic I think it is. That's how much I think the TARDIS suits snow and carols and celebrations that I did it before they even existed. It's like I was pitching for a Christmas special. I wasn't, but that's how it worked out. I'm a fan.

Are there storytelling rules that you wouldn't do during the year?

◆ I think there are. I don't pay attention to many rules particularly but you're just aware that it gets an audience that isn't watching the rest of the time. That happens with two things. *Children In Need*, which is usually the highest viewing figure of the year, I think, for *Doctor Who* – that's why we're keen to always contribute to

Cheer up, Doctor, it's Christmas! Or is it?





Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson pose it up.



Michelle Greenidge (*It's A Sin*) guest stars.

that. You will have seen that by now, and the attendant fuss that goes with it, that should be fun. [Laughs] The same for Christmas. There's just more people; it's a great scoop, it's a great chance to say look, if you enjoy this come and watch the rest of the show.

Have you ever considered doing a *Ghost Story For Christmas*-style festive episode?

◆ Like Mark Gatiss territory? Yeah of course, happily do that. I mean, never say no to

anything. I'm not quite sure that has the punch for the time slot. Those kinds of things suit nine o'clock slots. Or they suit BBC Three. They're more atmospheric, maybe they suit Boxing Day. Maybe one day we'll do a ghost story and say, let's put this out on Boxing Day. The only night you'd never want to be on is Christmas Eve, I think, because no one's paying attention to television then. So yes, I would.

In fact I've got plans for [a] Christmas story that we've never done before on *Doctor Who*. A

“It's completely a reinvention of the show, brand new, but not a reboot”

style of story, a genre of story we've still never done. Everyone burst out laughing and said, “What a great idea.” So we're always stretching it. [Whispers] It's *such* a good idea.

What's the process of writing Christmas? Do you have Mariah Carey playing?

◆ Like Mariah Carey's ever off the turntable in this house! Actually yes, I always choose a soundtrack that very much fits the episode. So this year, be prepared for an awful lot of “Carol Of The Bells”. Oh my god, I had that on a loop.

That song becomes very important this year. I think there's something fabulously sinister about it. It's quite a strange song. It sounds like there's a haunting quality, there's a kind of dread to it. So that fits this story – this is not remotely a spoiler – scene one, I think *moment* one you get to hear “Carol Of The Bells” and it will continue to haunt us.

Were you on set for the first day of filming?

◆ Oh, I'm sure I was busy elsewhere. I couldn't →

PORTRAITS BY YOSHITAKA KONO. UNIT PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES PARDON AND LARA CORNELL © BBC

even tell you what the first day was. It was probably the church. We did have to cover that church outside Cardiff with an awful lot of snow. There's new regulations on snow, by the way. Snow's a lot harder now! It is! You used to get the old paper machines and snow would look gorgeous, and they discovered that people's lungs were getting full of snow, so health and safety's banned it, so it's a lot harder to get convincing snow now.

I sit watching other productions with good snow thinking, "You're breaking the law! How did you do that? That snow's not legal any more!" Unless they shot it a while ago... So trust me to introduce a plot that depends on a lot of snow. That was tricky. It was genuinely tricky. We'd get the rushes back and go, "That's not convincing snow!" And they'd say, "We can't! We can't use the old paper!" There's a scoop: "snow has been banned".

How much of this episode feeds into what's to come?

◆ A lot, actually. More than usual. That is, it's completely freestanding and indeed when the series starts you can watch that from scratch and yet faithful viewers... It's unashamedly the story of Ruby, it's called "The Church On Ruby Road" because that's where the church is where Ruby is left as a baby in 2004. So she's named after that church. She's a foundling, so no one knows who her mother or father is. She was named after the

church on Ruby Road which does carry over into the series itself. Not every question is answered in the Christmas special and that continues all the way through to the most magnificent finale *ever* shot on planet Earth. No hype! I swear that's true.

This new era feels even more progressive. Yet people still talk about representation negatively, while often ignoring the fact that life is actually like this.

◆ Absolutely. And then I do think a lot of life isn't like that. Even the other day – this wasn't a work thing – I was having to explain to someone that you can't put a wheelchair user in any old wheelchair. That's like a life support system. It's a really complicated thing. It's part of your body, the wheelchair, so there's so much misunderstanding and prejudice about that. So I'm all for that.

The people who don't think that's a good thing should be ashamed of themselves, and just are missing out on so much joy and inclusivity and a much better, richer life. I cast [Shirley Anne Bingham in "The Star Beast"] Ruth Madeley [who was born with spina bifida] years ago in a series called *Years And*

Years. My life is literally richer and better and wiser for having known her and having seen the things she goes through, and not just the bad things, but the joy of the woman as well. It's like, you'll make your life better, if you close yourself off to that, then goodbye. →



Ncuti rocks the hipster-cowboy look. In a pub.

INTRODUCING THE FIFTEENTH DOCTOR

RTD on casting Ncuti Gatwa

◆ He stands out. It's the other way around with Ncuti – by some miracle, we were the people who got him. That's a man who was leaving *Sex Education*, had decided to do that and, frankly, could have walked into any job in the world, let's be honest. And he actually wanted to be Doctor Who. I don't want to put words in his mouth, but he genuinely said to his agent, "Oh, I fancy being the Doctor", not believing he'd ever get it.

He was the last person to audition – we had very long auditions, and he was the last. He never had a second audition. We just all went, "That's it!" No second audition, just everyone liked him... You don't tell someone on the spot they've got the job, the head of the BBC has to see it, the head of Disney has to see it, it goes everywhere and everyone just went, "Yes" immediately. Yes, yes, yes. Fastest yes in the world.

I hope one day they release the audition tapes because I got to play opposite him. I was the companion! I was Robin the companion. I thought it was a non-gender name for the companion – Robin with an I or a Y, because it could've been male or female. For the Doctor, we auditioned men and women and even one nonbinary person as well. But obviously Robin the companion was utterly marvellous and failed to get on screen somehow.

Let me tell you, I'm used to sitting in rooms acting with people – I was absolutely blasted away. I was literally... – Phil [Collinson, producer] was in the room, Andy Pryor [casting director] was in the room, and I was just saying the lines thinking "I hope they're getting this. I hope that camera's getting this. I hope they can realise what's happening. I hope they can see what's happening in his eyes and what's blazing out of him, because this is magic."

The moment he left the room we were like, "OH MY GOD YES!" That's so exciting. Brilliant. One of the great moments in my life.

Will we ever see Robin somewhere else?

I'm waiting. I'm waiting for the spin-off. What was in the Robin script...? I think it was killing people in an art gallery or something. It was all a bit odd. People disappearing into paintings or something. A bit of nonsense I made up.

Oh, wait a minute, did Robin turn out to be the villain? I think I did. So that was the big reveal. I ripped my face off and went, "It's me, Doctor!" I'd forgotten that! Anyway, it's not about me, it's about Ncuti! And it was phenomenal. It was amazing.





Anita Dobson
(ex-*EastEnders*)
also guests.

There's also wider representation in "The Star Beast".

◆ By the time [this goes out] people have seen "Star Beast", I think the reaction to Rose's role in that will be entirely positive with barely any online comment whatsoever I would imagine. [Laughs] Have I predicted it correctly?

Writers are trying to be progressive and to reflect more of society, though that's nothing new to you. Does it feel more important to you now? Is it just part of your make-up anyway?

◆ It is part of my make-up. I'm obviously aware that this stuff has been weaponized in a culture war and used by the right wing, so clumsily, but actually with a lot of power and strength, no matter how clumsy they are. It feels so ridiculous to be fighting over something that's so beautiful and heartfelt and for some people absolutely vital.

But I think in the end, it's a shame that, because we are deemed to be in a culture war which does exist, that therefore these things are framed as battles and fights and victories and losses, and it's surrounded by essentially violent language. When, if you simply meet any trans person anywhere, you will meet one of the gentlest, the most insightful, and open people you could possibly hope to meet, because they've been through so much just to live the life that they've lived. So it's a shame that it's a battleground.

As ever, this fear and anger is born out of ignorance. I think in many ways, whether it's transphobia or homophobia, it's born out of the simplest thing, which is the fact that most people at three months old, are in the arms of a mother and father. At the most basic level you see a mum and a dad, a lot of people see them

"I love cosplayers, I watch the joy they get out of playing every single variation"

as white, they see them as male, we see them as female. When that image in adult life is interfered with, the reaction is violent. It is *violent*. I think they don't even understand the cause of their violence. They can use God. They can use politics, they can use history, but actually it's a physical revolt that they need to examine. Because they're better than that. We are all better than that.

If you simply think about it, every instinctive reaction from when you were a child can be solved simply by knowledge and thought and kindness and wisdom. So that's the era we should be in. Hopefully wars lead to peace and somewhere at the end of this there is peace. And we will get there in the end.

You've got me just off the back of reading today's headlines saying, "Russell T Davies says *Doctor Who*'s not for children, *Doctor Who* is violent, *Doctor Who* is trans!" It's like, for fuck's sake, let's have a proper conversation. Thank you for a proper conversation. Thank you, print magazines, for a proper conversation. I love the fact that print sales are going down and everyone thinks everyone's online. Where is there a proper conversation like this? Nowhere.

Tease a little bit about Ruby and the Doctor's relationship...

◆ Actually, what is interesting, what I did discover in this, was that the Doctor now comes with such a massive backstory. I'd almost forgotten, having been away from the show, that when he arrives you have to say he's a Time Lord – but he's *not* a Time Lord. There's a TARDIS, how does he speak English, that it travels in time...

Actually an awful lot of this is dumped into



Coming on in leaps and bounds in the Christmas ep.

episode one of the new series. I found that the Christmas story is so strong that I found it was an impossible weight to carry the entire introduction of a companion to the Doctor.

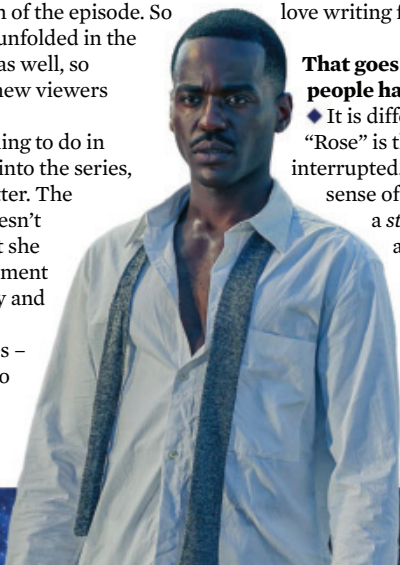
It was too much weight, it was kind of unbalancing the whole thing, so I took a very deep breath and, as you will see – this will make more sense when you see it – he remains a mystery to her for much of the episode. So there's much more to be unfolded in the series which is great fun as well, so hopefully that will keep new viewers watching.

That's quite a clever thing to do in terms of drawing people into the series, but equally it doesn't matter. The history of Time Lords doesn't matter for a second; what she reacts to is him in the moment and his energy and his joy and that's lovely to see. The whole opening 15 minutes – I mean, you've seen me do

this before, the Doctor and Donna in "Partners In Crime" – is kind of a dance between the two characters meeting but not meeting, kind of circling around each other. So you feel the gravity of them drawing them towards each other and the weight of the plot making that gravity happen. I love writing that stuff, it's a refreshing start every single time, so I love it. I love writing first episodes.

That goes back to "Rose": it was two people having an adventure.

◆ It is different this time because "Rose" is the story of an ordinary life interrupted. Ruby's different, it's the sense of a story interrupted. She has a story. Scene one, she's abandoned as a baby in the past, and enter a Time Lord. A Time Lord is obviously going to start winding himself into that story in the way that no one else



"I dunno... what does AccuWeather say?"

can. Plus Davina McCall researching the story on behalf of a television show – so it's a different kind of grafting together. What happens in the opening scenes – this is giving nothing away because it sounds good – Ruby keeps mysteriously experiencing bad luck.

She drops things, breaks things, things smash around her, things get lost. It's like she's oddly haunted by bad circumstances. So there's something beginning to revolve around her, there's something beginning to just stir around her very existence. And that becomes wrapped up in the story of her birth. So it's a good story. It's a *really* good story.

Let's talk about costumes: there's a change?

◆ Big change. That's something I decided long ago, frankly. I'd sit watching the show and when you're just a viewer you're thinking, "Why does he wear the same clothes every time?" Why? Why do we do that now?

Also I watch cosplayers. I love cosplayers, I watch the joy that cosplayers get out of playing every single variation. Cosplayers would dress up as the TARDIS console, they need no help in going wild with their ideas. So actually it was partly to open the world of the cosplayer, it means anyone can cosplay.

There's one episode where he steps out of the TARDIS door in a duffle coat and a pair of jeans. If you're an eight-year-old kid who can't afford to go buying that tartan fabric from a London costumier and getting it stitched into a coat that's an exact replica, if you're a kid with a duffle coat and a pair of jeans, you can think you're the Doctor – just put a spoon in your hand as a sonic screwdriver and you're there. So in part it was to break down the barriers, it was partly that process of making everyone →



INTRODUCING RUBY SUNDAY

RTD on casting
Millie Gibson

♦ I spotted her. I'm very proud of the fact that I spotted Millie - I'm the last person in the world still watching *Coronation Street*. It's me. So I watched Millie and I can tell when writers love writing for a character and love writing for an actor, when stories pile into them.

They were obviously so obsessed with Millie that at one point she was drug-dealing and holding her stepfather hostage, while winning Regional Hairdresser of the Year. I literally watched that episode thinking, "They really like this character because this is non-stop. This is the complete logjam of stories."

That's a sign. When she came in to audition, I think her last episode of *Coronation Street* had just transmitted on the Friday, and she came in on Saturday. We saw lots of other people as well - lots of great people. There was a second audition for her, because we wanted to do a chemistry test with Ncuti.

So we put them together and a few other people, and it was fantastic, just glorious, really glorious. She's lovely - it's a joy to do, it's one of those rare opportunities where she's 18 years old. She's 18 in her first scene, and people always cast 28-year-olds as 18, and she's properly 18. That's brilliant. I've never had a chance to do that before.

It's very rare to find someone who's got the stamina and experience to jump on board a great big show like *Doctor Who*. But she'd been in *Coronation Street* since she was 14. So that was wonderful. I've done it, I've cast older actors as teenagers myself plenty of times, and this genuinely has something new about it.



Millie was born one year before *Who* was rebooted.

think they could be the Doctor.

Also, I just think it's a natural thing. How mad that we're having a conversation about how many clothes the lead character can wear, it's like, shake it off! It's the same as when we put Christopher Eccleston in a leather jacket, and it's funny how the years revolve and the things around the Doctor and slowly but surely, it's a costume again.

So that was a decision that goes way back, little knowing that we'd end up casting one of the world's greatest clothes horses, because the man looks magnificent in *anything*. So those two factors come together *gloriously* and we all love it. We all *love* wondering what he's going to be in next.

That brown leather coat with a stripy top is becoming a bit of a default. But you know, in a few episodes there... [Laughs] Actually, I've seen costumes to come that are going to blow your mind! Oh my god. In series two there's going to be some spectacular stuff, so don't worry, we'll keep mixing it up.

And, of course, new titles...

◆ I love that vortex. Do you like that title sequence? Is that the first title sequence that has cuts in it? Have they always been one shot before? Even when it changed to clocks and things for Peter Capaldi, the TARDIS would always make it one continuous shot. This is four or five different shots. That's a fact for you! That hasn't been said anywhere else!

“If you saw us in the edit, we sit there cackling with laughter sometimes”

What was the thought process for that?

◆ Oh, that's just what they delivered. [Laughs] Someone in the pre-vis stage did that. I always wanted the sparks coming off the surface – one thing I demanded was sparks between the TARDIS and the time vortex. That becomes very important later on in the series, you will discover...

So I always knew that was going to be important later on, so I wanted to show that happening here. I love it! It's so beautiful. Still tuning it, there's a couple of shots that I think we can adjust and I think by the time we get to Ncuti's series it'll be slightly different again. You're getting all the scoops! All the scoops!

What do you hope people take from “The Church On Ruby Road”?

◆ I think it's joyous, actually. I think when you get to the ending I want you to simply watch *Doctor Who* with a great big smile. I really came back to *Doctor Who* saying, “This is *fun*.” I get fed up of interviews in *SFX* where all those producers line up to say, “It's darker this year. This year it's really dark! You know that darkness? We've darkened it!” Enough!

Of course we have really dark moments in it, but I think *Doctor Who* has a *fundamental* quality missing from other shows and it's *fun*. And we're always aware of how much fun it is. If you saw us in the edit, we sit there cackling with laughter sometimes, it is So. Much. Fun. And that is *unique* to *Doctor Who*!

What are the top three things you like about Christmas?

◆ Oh, mince pies. My sister's house, that's where I go for Christmas Day. Both sisters – we swap it for different houses every year. And Christmas telly. What I *really* love is that week between Christmas and New Year. First of all you can sit down at 10 o'clock in the morning and see a blockbuster film. That's almost an obscenity of riches!

Also you can turn to Channel 4 and find some sad little Polish cartoon about a penguin who's lost in the snow. Just nonsense you'd never watch normally. I love it. I love Christmas editions of *Tipping Point*, I love the Christmas *Chase*. I LOVE IT! I'm an absolute fool for Christmas television.

We've come full circle, why am I making Christmas episodes of *Doctor Who*? It's in my *blood*, I can't help it. Christmas soaps, oh my god... Bring it on! ●

Doctor Who: The Church On Ruby Road is on BBC One, iPlayer and Disney+ from Christmas Day onwards.

ONE OF THE NEW PRODUCERS on *Doctor Who*, Chris May is a very happy fellow. "I'm currently working on season two, and it's busy," he tells us from the studios in Cardiff. "Oh crikey, it's busy. But it's exciting. It's going to be a very exciting series, I'm not gonna lie. I feel like I've got the best job in the world. Oh! It's wild!" Like we weren't worked up enough already! But before any of that – Christmas Day marks a new beginning...

Did this feel like the start of something new for you?

◆ Absolutely. I've never worked on *Doctor Who* before. I joined the Whoniverse after they completed filming the first three specials, so I joined to do the Christmas Special, which is Ncuti's first full ep. Everyone said it felt bigger. As always, you're trying to outdo what's happened before. It felt incredibly exciting from the off. Ncuti is just going to be the most... well, he is just the most brilliant Doctor, we've all fallen in love with him. We're so excited that a whole new audience is gonna fall in love with him.

How is filming a Christmas special different to a normal episode?

◆ They're always a little bit bigger, they're always a little bit more ambitious. This certainly has been, but honestly, because it was the first episode that I produced, I didn't really know any other way. But certainly, in terms of the way we shoot the show, the Christmas Special, we always shoot them separately. Everything else is done in blocks – we do two episodes at a time, but the Christmas special we always tend to do on its own. Because it's always just a little bit more complicated, we only get the director to focus on that one episode. Normally we get directors to do two at a time. You always know you're in for some challenges that go beyond the normal times of the show. That certainly was the case for this one!

What's the biggest task you had to undertake in the special?

◆ I've had some ambitious stunt sequences, people on wires, all that kind of thing. There are creatures in this episode which have been a whole new challenge in how we've approached it in our prep, and how we've approached it in our shoot, and how we've taken that theory into post-production. That was probably the thing that took up the most of our brain space, working out how they worked, which started off at very early planning stages, a lot of concept work, creature design – which has been massive. Then taking that through into the practicalities of the shoot. Which was just insane, but brilliant. Then how we've worked with them, and what we've shot, in post

production and VFX to try and improve them as much as we possibly can to make them seem as lifelike as possible.

What's it like working with Millie and Ncuti?

◆ They're lovely. They're both completely incredible performers, they just have a brilliant charisma. There's a real spark, a real crackle of energy between the two of them when they're performing, it's electric. It's a really lovely environment to be in. Because it's hard, filming *Doctor Who* is hard. It's night shoots, the Doctor and their companion are often in most of the scenes. It's lots of stunts, it's physical, it's

demanding and they're always constantly professional, really good fun and bang up for it. It's been great. Really, really good.

What stand-out moments from Christmas can you talk about?

◆ We did some quite spectacular stunt work out in the snowed-up location, and that was great. It was tough. That was really, really, really good fun. We filmed on probably the most beautiful set I've ever seen. I can't tell you what it is! But it is one of the most beautiful sets I've ever, ever, ever had the pleasure of standing on and it was constructed over a period of 14 weeks. When you see it, you will

BOX OF DELIGHTS

NEW DOCTOR WHO PRODUCER
CHRIS MAY ON CHRISTMAS!

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

“We had probably the most beautiful set I’ve ever seen. I can’t tell you what it is!”

see why because it’s just beautiful. We filmed a sequence on it involving the Doctor and Ruby, and a number of characters who weren’t there when we filmed them...

We had to film everything in lots and lots of different pieces and it was extraordinarily complicated. We had to pre-vis everything, and there was a REDACTED component, but I

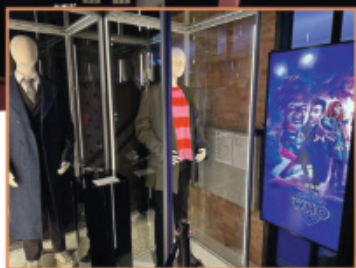
can’t tell you what it is. That’s a whole ‘nother thing! I will tell you this: [that set] hasn’t got a single right angle on it. That’s my spoiler, there you go.

It’s going to be an iconic sequence, I think. It’s just so, so brilliant and mad and funny, Russell at his mad and funniest and most brilliant best. It’s good to have that perfect integration of great performance, some stunts, some creatures, loads of special effects. It’s that classic *Doctor Who* – let’s just put it all together in the mixer and you’ve got this sequence which is absolute insanity. You’re gonna love it. It’s such a brilliant episode of television. Very special. ●

Ncuti and Millie: there’s real chemistry here.



DOCTOR WHO PREMIERE



Sylvester McCoy, RTD and Colin Baker.

WORLDWIDE PREMIERE!

SFX ATTENDS THE LAUNCH OF THE WHONIVERSE

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

FORGET YOUR CHOCOLATE FACTORY, *THIS* was the golden ticket everyone wanted – the world first screening of “The Star Beast”, held at London’s Battersea Power Station on 6 November. Albeit so secret that not even fandom were aware it was happening until it had begun...

The star-studded event also presented itself somewhat as the launch of the Whoniverse, with various cast and crew from the specials and *Tales Of The TARDIS* in attendance.

Introduced by lifelong *Who* fan Jo Whiley – who revealed that she joined a *Doctor Who* club while at university – the screening of the first special (no “Next Time” trailer, fact fans) was followed by a 40-minute Q&A session with showrunner Russell T Davies, hosted by Whiley (see opposite page).

Each seat had a TARDIS popcorn box, badge or keyring and a bag of jelly babies sealed with a diamond logo sticker. Once the main event was completed, guests were herded out by UNIT soldiers to attend the afterparty where they mingled with the *Who* crew and enjoyed cocktails and canapes as a pianist played the music of Murray Gold.

The walls were decorated with framed concept art from the specials by Greg Williams, and some stills photography. Costumes for the Fourteenth Doctor and Donna were on display, alongside the new sonic screwdriver and a selection of Rose’s stuffed toys, while the Meep was sectioned off and guarded by UNIT soldiers. Guests could also pose for a video alongside the TARDIS. ●



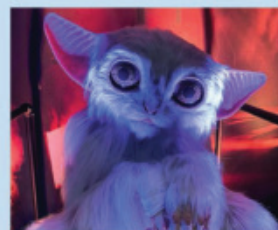
Companions from all eras laughed it up afterwards.



Sophie Aldred (Ace) cuts a dashing figure at her shoot.



The production team behind "Beast".



Will we be able to buy Meeps for Christmas?

◆ Well, do you know, I don't think anyone picked up on that. I think all the toymakers were like, "Yeah, we'll see how well you do in a year's time, I'll come back." So I don't think there is a Meep plushie at all. Someone knock one up in a month, you'll be rich.

Will Torchwood make an appearance?

◆ No it doesn't, yet. No, and no plans for that either. But I love it and, oh alright, let's have a think. That's not a promise, but...

Any familiar monsters or alien creatures over the next year?

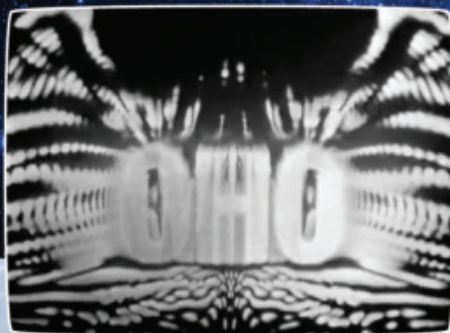
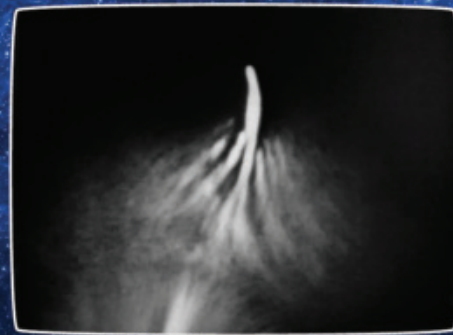
◆ There are - there's one or two little hark-backs. It's very new. Ncuti's new, Millie's new and it was new to us with Disney and the whole new era, as it were.

There are no Daleks, there are no Cybermen, I didn't want to look back too much. There will be, my god, keep me in the job, there will be, because I love the Daleks. I do think we've had a lot of Daleks lately, because lovely Chris Chibnall's Christmas specials have all been Daleks. So I think they've been done a lot, so people are expecting them every year now, so I think they need a good pause.

So not really - the eye's on the new stuff. We do some brilliant things with that, so hopefully there's some enemies and things that will become new classics, but it's always good to move on.



PHOTOS BY: JEFF SPICER, BBC STUDIOS, DARREN SCOTT, NICK CANNON, MATT EVENDEN



TUNNEL VISION

AN ORAL HISTORY OF *DOCTOR WHO*'S TITLE SEQUENCES ACROSS ITS ORIGINAL RUN

WORDS: **GRAHAM KIBBLE-WHITE**

DOCTOR WHO'S FIRST title sequence predated any conception of a mysterious time traveller and a telephone box. In 1960, Norman Taylor was working as an Operations Manager at the BBC's Lime Grove studios.

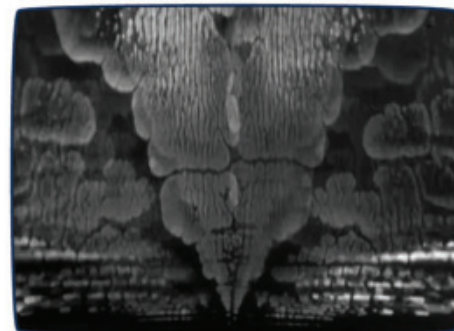
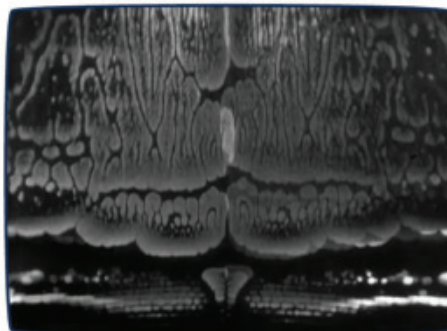
Norman Taylor: "Sometimes we were allocated to two minor programmes in the same studio on the same day. This often resulted in a gap of activity between the transmission of the first and the start of rehearsals of the second."

On one of these days, I used the gap to experiment with a camera looking at a monitor displaying its own picture. I got the usual effect of diminishing images of the monitor disappearing into limbo, when suddenly some stray light hit the screen and the whole picture went mobile with swirling patterns of black

and white. Later I repeated the experiment but fed a black and white caption mixed with the camera output to the monitor, and very soon got the 'Doctor Who effect'."

Taylor reported this finding – logged as a "Technical Suggestion" – to Ben Palmer, the BBC's Investigations Engineer at the time.

Ben Palmer: "I conducted several tests and discovered an astonishing range of feedback effects which were visually stunning. By deliberately moving the camera slightly and changing the operation of the camera tube – reversing line scan, reversing field scan, rotating the picture, phase-reversing the signal





– one achieved multiple patterns, all quite abstract in nature.”

Palmer spoke to the BBC’s Presentation department, and suggested the effect – called howlround – might be used to generate an image during one of their broadcasting intervals. But the idea was turned down. It did, however, make it onto the screen, airing over the opening and into the closing titles of a specially commissioned TV opera, *Tobias And The Angel*. That one-off was broadcast on 16 May 1960, and directed by Rudolph Cartier – famous for his collaboration with Nigel Kneale on the *Quatermass* series.

In the summer of 1963, pre-production was underway on a new teatime serial for BBC Television starring William Hartnell. John Griffiths, a film editor at Ealing Studios, was visited by the show’s producer, Verity Lambert, and first director, Waris Hussein.

John Griffiths: “They said, ‘We’re going to produce a new series of programmes, and they’re called *Doctor Who*.’ I said, ‘Oh no, you mean *Dr No*, don’t you?’ They said, ‘No, no, no – you’ll be talking about *Doctor Who* long after you’ve forgotten about *Dr No*!’ They handed me a can [containing the howlround footage

shot by Palmer for *Tobias*] and said, ‘This is the opening title in here. We want you to cut it’. I looked at the film and it was actually a television camera looking at its own monitor. I just cut it together, and that was that!”

Griffiths’s edit was initially considered the finished version of *Doctor Who*’s opening titles. But then Lambert asked the BBC’s graphics department to incorporate the title card...

Bernard Lodge: “Originally, it was given to Don Shaul, and he came to me and said, ‘Look, I’m very, very busy, do you think you could handle it?’ I said, ‘Alright, I’ll do it.’ Verity invited me over to Ealing to a cinema and showed me this stuff and I thought, ‘My god! It’s beautiful!’ Then I asked, ‘Could we not put the lettering *through* it?’ I heard afterwards that Verity had to go to the Head of Drama and ask for a lot of money, because it didn’t occur to me that to do it you needed to book a studio for a whole morning.”

Lodge’s suggestion of incorporating the show’s name into the howlround necessitated a special studio session, on Saturday 31 August 1963, overseen by Ben Palmer. In cutting together what was now the *actual* finished version of the *Doctor Who* opening, Lodge

favoured the new patterns they’d generated during this session.

Bernard Lodge: “When I showed it to Verity she said, ‘Well, you haven’t got my favourite bit – where that light goes up and splits’”. This was in fact the very opening section from *Tobias And The Angel*.

Bernard Lodge: “I realised she was right and actually, there was something about the *Doctor Who* theme that really makes that moment. So I re-edited it and that was it.”

Cognisant of where the howlround footage had originated, Lambert requested that Norman Taylor receive a special “electronic effects” credit in the show’s end titles. The reply came from the Head of Technical Operations, RW Bayliff:

“I have discussed the effects in question with Norman Taylor. Although they are ingenious, they do not appear to qualify as both artistic and substantial, or of significant interest to viewers.”

Norman Taylor: “I was eventually given a ‘Technical Suggestion’ award of £25, which in those days was worth having.”

In 1967, Lodge was asked to refresh the titles. Here, he was able to revisit an idea that had been abandoned first time around.

“Verity Lambert said, ‘No, no, no, we can’t do that, it’s going to be too horrific’”

Bernard Lodge: “In the original session, somebody was playing around. I think he was an assistant of Verity’s [actually vision mixer Jim Stephens]. He stood in front of a camera and they did this effect on his face. Verity said, ‘No, no, no, we can’t do that, it’s going to be too horrific.’ But I did think it would be good to use the face to generate the patterns in the sequence.

“So we got a flat light on Patrick Troughton [who was now playing the Doctor] and then I used a special film technique to dissolve away from it. I had a piece of polystyrene, which is crumpled up. You turn it into the light, and it →



DOCTOR WHO TITLES



becomes all white. And as you then turn it away, it starts to fall into shadow and then black. So you use that – the positive – on the face, and then the negative on the background.”

He also augmented the howlround, adding shapes into the feedback loop: “That gave it a definite design look.”

Lodge left the BBC in 1967, working for a short period with Streich-Fletcher-Perkins, who specialised in commercials. But the advent of colour TV lured him back in 1969, just in time to be commissioned to make a new title sequence for Jon Pertwee’s debut in *Who*.

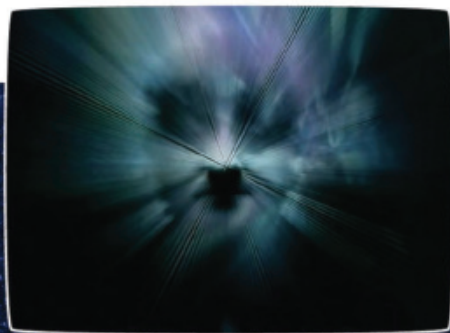
Bernard Lodge: “That was the last time we used howlround. And it’s one of my favourites, the way the face came in...”

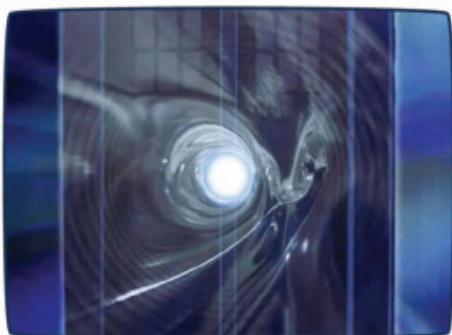
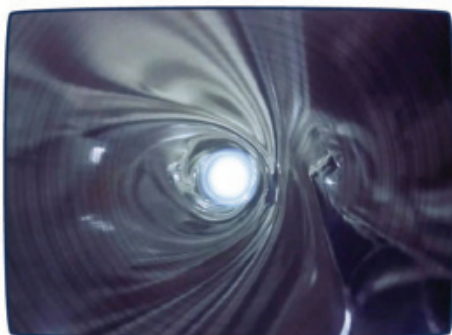
Although Lodge experimented in getting interesting feedback with colour video cameras, the results weren’t nearly as successful as black and white. He therefore generated the effects in monochrome, and colour was added afterwards by Peter Govey, who worked for General Screen Enterprises (GSE) in Uxbridge. He colourised the footage using a bi-pack method – where two reels of film are loaded into a camera so that they both

pass through its gate together.

Peter Govey: “We didn’t have back lights, it was all just ordinary rostrum cameras. So you put a sheet of white paper down and lit it to a certain level, like you were shooting animation or a cartoon. Then you would bi-pack the patterns in the camera, and add a different colour filter over it. I could then mix them with an optical printer.”

The two men worked together again on arguably the seminal *Doctor Who* opening – the time tunnel, which debuted on screen in December 1973. The inspiration came from the





famous “stargate” sequence created by special effects maestro Douglas Trumbull for Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Bernard Lodge: “We were all fascinated by that. We didn’t know what the technique was. But there was an article in the magazine *American Cinematographer* [October 1969] in which Trumbull talked about exactly what he did. We read it all... but it didn’t make sense. However, there was something about it. I read it again, and realised it was all based around one frame of film. He did this enormous track on *one frame*. And then he does another one,

but on the next frame – the thing’s moved, and the light source is somehow different. From that, you get this animation.”

Lacking the resources in-house at the BBC, Lodge returned to GSE and Govey. Together the two men tried out the process, known as slit-scan – which involved repeatedly shooting moving backlit patterns through a slit in black card, while the camera itself was also in motion. Each pass, on one frame of film.

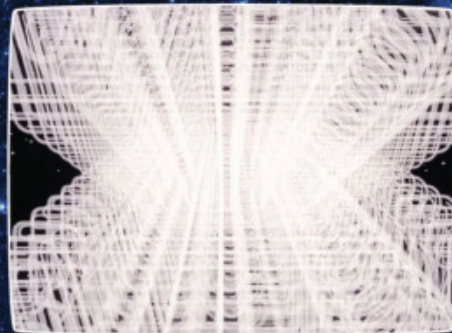
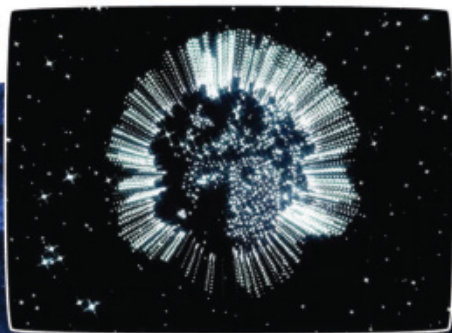
Bernard Lodge: “And it worked!”

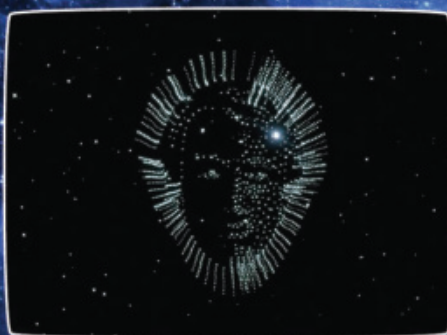
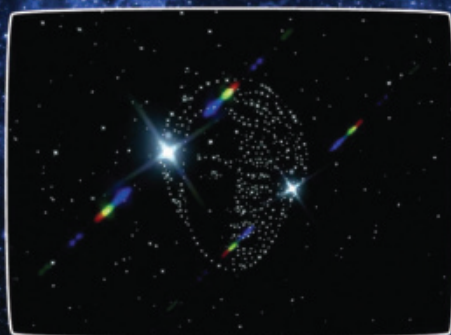
Peter Govey: “Bernard had made up this background, using Sellotape and coloured

paper and all sorts of gels. And, yes, I think it worked more or less straightaway. Probably the only thing we changed was the speed at which we moved everything.”

When Jon Pertwee was succeeded by Tom Baker the following year, the two reworked the footage, while also incorporating the new actor’s face into the sequence. But, as Govey reveals, a lot of what you see on screen isn’t one single image.

Peter Govey: “Bernard would say, ‘Well, can you do that in quarters?’ [composite four different takes into one image]. We did a lot →





of trials, a lot of tests on it. And then we married it all together."

Lodge and Govey's sequence was used up to 1980, at which point Sid Sutton – a graphic designer working in the BBC's Presentation department – was tasked with bringing the show into the '80s.

Sid Sutton: "One day, [BBC Head of Graphics] John Aston knocked on the door, and said, 'How do you fancy doing the *Doctor Who* titles?' Bernard's had become so iconic, and rightly so. It was a case of 'Follow that!' I started thinking about the character of *Doctor Who*. He had this feeling of being an Englishman, and he was called a lord – a Time Lord. But as I thought more, I realised, 'Actually, he's an alien and he comes from the stars... from out there.' This is when I came up with the idea of a starfield, and the stars building up into the head of the Doctor.

"I've always been very keen on photography and I was aware of various filters that were coming onto the market at the time, diffraction filters. They split white light into its constituent parts, which are all the colours of the rainbow. I thought on stills photography that looked very contrived, but I suspected

with moving footage it could be rather good. And that proved to be the case."

The show's leading man, of course, was a pivotal part of this sequence.

Sid Sutton: "We took a lot of photographs of Tom Baker, who was very helpful. Because he had a terrific head with marvellous hair, he created a super shape for us to start off with. I made tracings from the photographs – and then I had to create the starfield. All those little

“To this day, Doctor Who remains the title sequence I’m most known for. I don’t have a problem with that”

stars were made by putting a pin through a back-lit, black piece of card, and eventually I had several of these galaxy backgrounds. I also made the shape of Tom's head in stars, which had to match with a transparency I'd run off of his photo."

Shooting the sequence with him was rostrum camera operator Terry Handley.

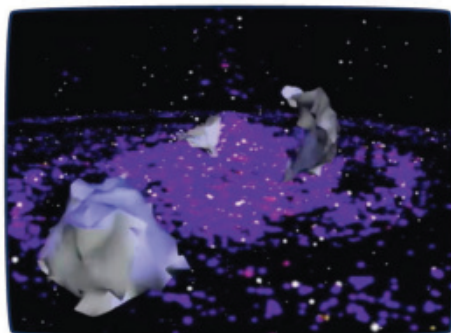
Sid Sutton: "We needed to get in between the stars as they came to camera, otherwise you'd have the screen going white all the time. So he took the lens off, taped a cardboard tube to it, and then taped the lens to the tube. That meant we could get down to within half-an-inch of the artwork on the bench, and travel right through the galaxy. But in order to do that, he'd also had to disengage the automatic focus, meaning that he needed to manually refocus on every single frame. We did that for seven days."

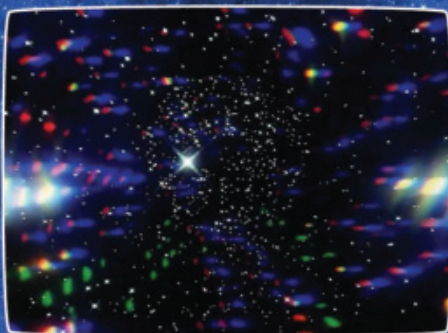
Further augmentations were made to the titles in 1981, switching Tom Baker's face for Peter Davison, and again in 1984, when Davison was succeeded by Colin Baker. At this point, Sutton included additional coloured filters over the starfield sequence.

Sid Sutton: "To this day, *Doctor Who* remains the title sequence I'm most known for. And I don't have a problem with that."

The final iteration of the original show's opening sequence was the most ambitious attempted. Designer Oliver Elmes's vision was bold...

Oliver Elmes: "It was a question of whether to use motion control and film 'live' action – proven technology – or to try something





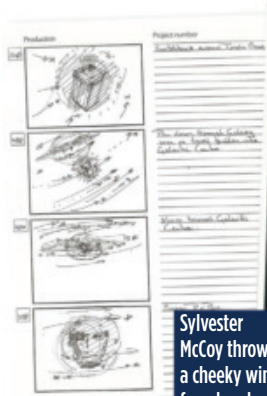
computer-generated, which was still very new and exciting, but has limitations. We tried to create a three-dimensional universe through which we could move."

His realisation that by now – 1986 – the technology existed to create such a sequence came from looking at a piece of work created by Gareth Edwards, a computer animator working for production company CAL Video Graphics.

Gareth Edwards: "In 1986, a very important thing happened in our night skies, which was [the reappearance of] Halley's Comet. I was asked to do a simulation and I decided to use fractals. [That] simulation was Oliver Elmes's inspiration. He saw [what I did] and went, 'I want one of those'."

In creating the programme's first ever fully computer-rendered titles, Edwards was provided with physical elements from the show for reference, including a model TARDIS, and an actual panel from the 1981 prop itself...

Gareth Edwards: "Which I still have!"



Sylvester McCoy throws a cheeky wink for a laugh.



Incredibly, he coded the animation without any means of visualising it as he went along... other than in his head.

Gareth Edwards: "When I'm in the zone, I am a number, and numbers am I. I don't differentiate. I've never felt that I am separate from numbers. I evolved from somebody who understood three dimensions from doing technical drawing in school.

"The next step was actually moving a virtual camera around my virtual technical drawings.

That's no big deal. And then – the next step and the next step – actually evolving from that, over a period of four or five years. It was just a thing I developed an ability to do, and I have a natural affinity for it. On top of all that, I like coding a lot – I love it!"

Oliver Elmes passed away in 2011, but his daughter recalls the impact of watching his design debut in 1987, as Sylvester McCoy became the Seventh Doctor.

Orianna Oz: "We used to watch *Doctor Who* as kids growing up, so it was really 'Wow' when he got to work on it. I think he might have mentioned it to my mother,

you know, just in conversation – he never boasted about what he'd done. But we were really proud of him." ●

This history is taken from a selection of longer features and interviews that appear in Adventures In Type And Space, a new publication celebrating Doctor Who's classic title sequences, and raising money for UNICEF. With a foreword by Mark Gatiss, it's available to order now from tenacrefilms.bigcartel.com.



REBEL MOON

NEW



RISING

REBEL MOON

AFTER GESTATING IN ZACK SNYDER'S BRAIN FOR OVER 20 YEARS, **REBEL MOON** IS FINALLY APPROACHING. THE DIRECTOR TALKS US THROUGH HIS NOT-STAR WARS SCI-FI

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD

“HEY'RE SWORDS!” DEBORAH Snyder, one of *Rebel Moon*'s producers, bellows affirmatively. *SFX* is rightly getting told off for calling the weapons Doona Bae's cyborg swordsman wields in the intergalactic epic a pair of lightsabers. “They're space swords, let's be honest,” the movie's director – and Snyder's husband – Zack adds with a laugh.

It's a fair mistake to make. *Rebel Moon* was, after all, at one point pitched to Lucasfilm as a potential new instalment in the *Star Wars* saga. The idea that eventually became *Rebel Moon*, however, had been kicking around in Zack's head for over 20 years, dating back to his time in college, when, as an assignment, he was tasked with pitching a movie.

STELLAR CONFLICTS

“I pitched *The Dirty Dozen* in space, *Seven Samurai* in space, an underdog story where you build a team to defend the underprivileged from galactic imperialists,” he says.

Wesley Collier, another of *Rebel Moon*'s producers who has been working with the Snyders for over 25 years, confirms that Zack had been talking about his aspirations to make a sci-fi adventure since the early 2000s. Yet only when Lucasfilm came along did it start taking shape, with the space samurai swapped out for wayward Jedi. Things didn't work out; negotiations were initially taking place pre-Disney merger and once the House of Mouse took over, Snyder's vision didn't fit.

“I read in the paper that *Star Wars* had sold to Disney and thought, ‘I think I'm out,’” Zack says now. “But I was completely swamped with *Man Of Steel*, and then *Batman v Superman* – it wasn't like I was available to do anything.” The idea was placed on the back burner once more, but Snyder couldn't let it go. “After *BvS*, I was →

Zack and Deborah Snyder: quite corny.



Daggs miners, presumably on lunchbreak.





Snyder with
Michiel
Huisman and
Sofia Boutella.



Sofia Boutella
gets some
firearms
training.





Kora (Sofia Boutella) practises a calendar pose.

chilling and just thought, 'Maybe I'll start working on this thing,'" he continues. "It was called *The Five* and we talked about making it a videogame."

"We also talked about making it television," Deborah interjects.

By the time *Rebel Moon* was being pitched as a TV show, *Justice League* had reached cinemas. Snyder left the project before its release and Joss Whedon took over reshoots, changing the plot and tone drastically. The situation was, by most accounts, unpleasant.

"Zack had come off the worst professional experience of his life," Eric Newman, who produced Snyder's *Dawn Of The Dead* remake and is a co-producer on *Rebel Moon*, says of *Justice League*. The result was the director feeling unsure whether he should re-enter the filmmaking space.

"I knew what I had made with *Justice League*, but no one had seen it – it didn't really exist," he says, referring to the once-mythological, now-real Snyder Cut. "*Justice*

League is four hours long, and so the idea of making an eight-hour TV show didn't seem like that big of a deal. I felt like I can direct all eight episodes and make a *House Of The Dragon* thing. I was pitching *Game Of Thrones* in space. That's a pretty easy pitch, everyone pitches that, but I meant it. Post-*Justice League*, it did appeal to me, the idea of this complete world-building exercise where we just go on a deep dive into this universe that has no canon, and we're answering only to ourselves."

In other words, *Rebel Moon* would be Zack Snyder unleashed – unbound by the expectations of fandom, able to build a universe out of nothing – but everyone involved knew it had to be, at least to kickstart this fresh franchise, a movie.

"We felt like it would be best for the quality of the project," Deborah says. "We can go and do TV once we've established it, but because it didn't exist, we had the best shot of getting the money we needed by making it a film." As for

Zack's feelings about filmmaking, something miraculous happened during the pandemic: the Snyder Cut saw the light of day. "In some ways, the Snyder Cut and his experience on *Army Of The Dead* with Netflix, they conspired to make him feel more comfortable in the movie space again," Newman says. The result wasn't just one movie, but two...

Through the years, each iteration of *Rebel Moon* has been faithful to Zack's original premise: a group of heroes gathering to save a planet. Instead of Palpatine's Empire, there's the Imperium, led by the tyrannical Regent Balisarius, a member of the Mother World, the galaxy's corrupt governing body.

Balisarius's minion, Admiral Atticus Noble, leads the Imperium army to the moon of Veldt where a treaty to trade produce turns sour. It's up to ex-Imperium soldier Kora, played by Sofia Boutella, to bring together a pack of rebels to fight back against the invaders.

There's a lot to unpack as the Snyders dive into the lore of *Rebel Moon*; they mention how



Ed Skrein as Atticus Noble spots a cockroach.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

A more mature Director's Cut is coming soon

When *Rebel Moon* reaches Netflix, the film will be PG-13 rated (12A in the UK). However, after both parts have streamed, another version will be released soon after, a Director's Cut. While developing the films, Zack created scenes specifically for an extended version, a decision made to give superfans a deeper insight into the movies' universe.

"I'm super-proud of the PG-13 version," Zack says. "I don't feel like it's a lesser version. That said, just for my personal aesthetic, the harder R [18]-rated version of the movie, the pokier version, it's a little bit more insane, and that maybe doesn't have as broad appeal. For me, it's funner. But I really am super-proud of what we did with the PG-13 version."



"I dunno, I just feel a bit overdressed, maybe."



Doona Bae as Nemesis: they're not lightsabers.



Djimon Hounsou as Titus, with Kora.



Kai (Charlie Hunnam) hangs out with Kora.

The Rings and how Tolkien created a Middle-earth that had depth beyond measure. *Rebel Moon's* structure is also like Tolkien. The story has been split into two parts, *A Child Of Fire* and *The Scargiver*; the first acts as a Fellowship-esque recruitment story, while the second is a war movie, akin to *The Two Towers*. And like Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptations of those books, *Rebel Moon* is not a simple children's fantasy story.

"Is *The Lord Of The Rings* for kids?" Snyder asks. "Kids can enjoy it, and it's definitely fun for kids to watch, but it's not necessarily geared toward kids. Even in the PG-13 incarnation of this film, it's much more adult fantasy; it has an adult aesthetic. It was born out of [sci-fi comics magazine] *Heavy Metal* in a lot of ways, its aesthetic origins. It differs in a lot of ways from the other sci-fi stuff that's out there."

"I was pitching Game Of Thrones in space. Everyone pitches that, but I meant it"

You just have to look at Zack's creatures to see how different *Rebel Moon* is from *Star Wars*, *Alien* and *Dune*; there are Minotaur-like monsters and giant eagles and huge spiders with women's bodies growing from them. The film serves as a melting pot of ideas thrown together, but, Deborah promises, the stakes always feel real because the characters are so real.

"They are very broken, all of them," she says of the team that Kora assembles to fight the Imperium. "Throughout the two films, and then hopefully later on, you see them grow and change. It's a redemptive story in so many ways, especially for Kora."

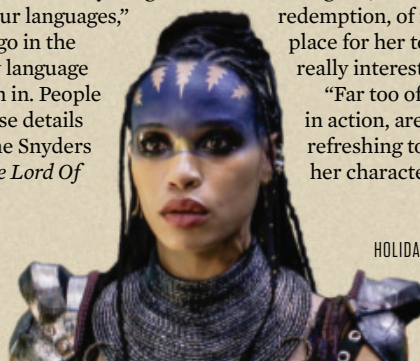
"I've been very lucky because Zack always has really strong women in his films, but to have this protagonist that is not just strong, but not black and white – she's done some things that she regrets, she's on this journey of redemption, of forgiveness, of finding a place for her to be – those themes are really interesting."

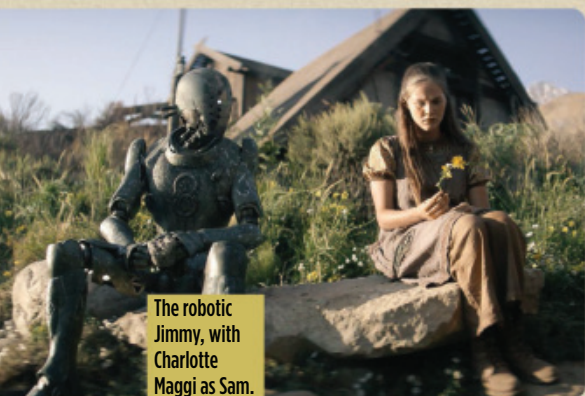
"Far too often women, especially in action, are paper-thin. It's refreshing to see how complex her character is." →

they built the Mother World culture to be founded on myths and legend, how "The Godhead" was created out of "The Void", and how a royal family who have ruled for a thousand generations use propaganda to maintain their reign.

Zack references Arthurian legend (one of his favourite films is John Boorman's *Excalibur*) as well as Joseph Campbell, the great chronicler of the hero's journey, when discussing the scope of the story, while Deborah adds off-hand that we can even expect to see some "evidence of magic" in *Rebel Moon*.

The astonishing depth of the worldbuilding – Zack wrote a 450-page book of lore – was, they explain, necessary to make everything feel believable. "We created four languages," Deborah says. "When we go in the noodle bar, we have a new language that the menus are written in. People won't even notice, but those details give it an authenticity." The Snyders compare their work to *The Lord Of*





The robotic Jimmy, with Charlotte Maggi as Sam.



Atticus Noble and Kora are into modern dance.



Not sure those ropes are going to hold for long...



Nemesis is a cyborg swordswoman.

Boutella, Newman says, is *Rebel Moon*'s stand-out – “She was so committed. I’ve never seen someone work as hard as she did” – yet he highlights how well the entire ensemble worked together. “Anytime I’ve put a cast together, there’s always the possibility that there’s going to be a weak link somewhere, but in our case there wasn’t,” he says.

For *Rebel Moon*'s other producer Wesley Coller, Michiel Huisman's Gunnar – a farmer on Veldt – was of particular interest due to “his belief that this journey is worth going on, despite the risk. He’s a simple farmer who we meet at a very relatable level: there’s no specific training, no background that makes him extremely capable in this space, but he’s ready to step up and do what he can to help.”

Coller adds that Jimmy, a robotic bodyguard (voiced by Anthony Hopkins) who loses his sense of purpose after his king dies, is another highlight. “Although it is a character with a mechanical foundational element, there’s a lot of humanity and a lot of self-reflection. I love the juxtaposition.”

Zack wanted each member of his dirty dozen to go through their own hero’s journey and embody distinct virtues. After the characters were decided upon, the team began creating each one’s history, and then, once casting began, their home planets were inspired by the actors’ heritage.

For instance, Bae Doona’s South Korean upbringing played a part in where her character Nemesis came from, while in *The Scargiver*, Djimon Hounsou’s Titus sings a song reminiscent of something the Beninese-born actor heard when he was a child.

“We used this concept that each of our actors and their international and diverse

qualities could represent an entire planet,” Zack says. “Their culture represents an entire world, as opposed to another country, like here.”

There are nine major planets in *Rebel Moon*, with various physical sets built to represent each world, the biggest being the construction of an entire farm for Veidt. It had to be “gigantic” as that’s where a “pretty big war” takes place. “The village had to be able to sustain all sorts of pyro and crazy stunts and exploding buildings,” Zack says.

Building the farm on a soundstage was not an option as it would limit the way the filmmaker worked, and having too many visual effects would increase the budget tenfold. “It also helped us and the actors and the reality of the world,” he says. “The textures became much more detailed and real.”

The biggest challenge, both Snyders stress, was maintaining the 10 football fields’ worth of wheat that they grew. “The wheat was the bane



Harmada (Jena Malone) is a... well, wait and see.

this genre begs for that, and they appreciate knowing that there's a larger history."

"We know where this story will go," Zack says. "We have to be careful, mythologically, not to paint ourselves into a corner, because if we don't track it to the end, we can set up a roadblock for ourselves.

"And as we go forward, it allows me to be the ultimate authority on what can and cannot happen in the universe.

"I have to have big story meetings with everyone and say, 'Okay, yes, no, yes, no, that can't happen,' because I know what's necessary for me to go forward in the universe."

"They can't do anything you don't like," Deborah laughs.

If that sounds like Zack's essentially the George Lucas of the *Rebel Moon* universe,

“It’s as big a movie as we’ve made. We shot two movies together and it was very efficient”

that's because he is. However, when *SFX* asks about the chances of another filmmaker potentially making new movies within their sandbox, the Snyders hesitate. "I don't know how much I would love that," Zack says. "I mean, it's happening with the comic books in some way, and it's happening with the animated film, though I'll probably direct that. It's happening with the podcast. These are stories that we pitch to each other and I have to hear them and say, 'That's cool, that works in the world.' So it's happening on a small scale right now."

Zack knocks on the wooden table in front of him and looks away thoughtfully. "A trilogy of sequels is cool," he says with a sly smile. Indeed, he's already planned out the series' ultimate ending. "I'm not exactly sure how long it would take to get there, but we do know where it goes."

A trilogy of sequels with an ending in sight? Sounds like the beginning of a new megafanchise. Just don't compare it to *Star Wars* in front of Snyder, though... ●

Rebel Moon – Part One: A Child Of Fire is on Netflix from 22 December, *Part Two: The Scargiver* from 19 April 2024.



Guess how Darrian Bloodaxe got his name?

of our existence," Deborah says. The harvesting process led to confrontations with deer, squirrels and rattlesnakes which required handlers to be brought in. The results, though, were worth it. "It's as big a movie as we've made," Zack – who has also previously helmed *300* and *Watchmen* – says. "We shot two movies together and it was very efficient."

That's not quite true – not the efficiency part, but the "two movies" part.

As for the future of *Rebel Moon*, beyond the first two parts and a director's cut [see boxout], there's a lot to come. So far, Netflix has confirmed that a videogame, a novelisation and

a four-issue prequel comic titled *House Of The Bloodaxe*, about Ray Fisher's warrior Darrian Bloodaxe, are coming. Zack has also teased a TV series. Plus, he says, there will be a podcast about the Jimmys, those robotic bodyguards.

"We also have a mythological creature that's going to hopefully appear in the next set of movies," Deborah says before... "It appears in the director's cut," Zack corrects.

"We're doing an animated short about how it got enslaved in the machines," she continues. "It's been really fun to go, 'What is that backstory? What is that history?' For people that want the lore, who want to know more,

A GHOST STORY FOR
CHRISTMAS: LOT NO 249

MUMMY

A GHOST STORY FOR
CHRISTMAS: LOT NO 249

**SPOILER
ALERT**
(EVEN THOUGH
THE STORY IS OVER
130 YEARS OLD)

DEAREST

MARK GATISS TACKLES ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE ONCE MORE IN
A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



CREEPING AROUND A SPOOKY old manor is all in a day's work for *SFX* – it's either that or a quarry – but there's something extra special when it's Halloween and you're on set for *A Ghost Story For Christmas* with Mark Gatiss.

It's Thursday 5 October, to be precise for future TV historians, and we're at Rothamsted Manor in Hertfordshire, a 900-acre estate that's been around since the 12th century. It's been the location for many film and TV productions – including *Midsomer Murders* and *Grantchester*, we're informed – but today evil lurks in the dark for filming of Arthur Conan Doyle's 1892 short story "Lot No 249".

"As always, every year we have no money," producer Isibéal Ballance laughs. "So every year, we start with, 'Right, what's the story? Where can we find the best location?'" When this location came up, she and writer/director Gatiss jumped in a car right away.

"We came here and were like, 'Oh my god, this is absolutely perfect.' It just enables us to put as much of our money into the other things that we need to make it, without having to build sets and pay. There's so much detail and the production value is just so high."

It's no exaggeration – it's like a labyrinth of beautiful wooden rooms, with tall ceilings, uneven floors, vintage furniture and paintings everywhere. But despite the wonderful authentic period setting, we're actually sitting in a linen cupboard, which is where we're watching filming in the next room via a monitor. Glamour and *ghosts*. Still, if we need to step in with a sheet...

BOYS' CLUB

Set in 1884, the story focuses on Abercrombie Smith (Kit Harington) and Edward Bellingham (Freddie Fox), both students at the University of Oxford. Bellingham studies Egyptology and keeps an auction-bought sarcophagus in his room. But there's something not quite right about the artefact Bellingham has christened Lot No 249, as Smith soon discovers...

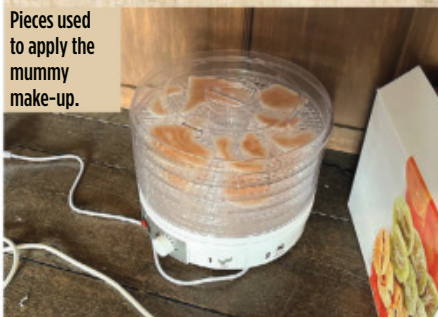
The cast, Gatiss says when he pops by our cupboard between takes, have been "brilliant" and "so game". "Freddie and Kit both said how much they loved it. Freddie was watching himself yesterday and he said, 'I know it's only four days, but I've never looked so good,'" he laughs. "Kit fell in love with his moustache.

"Also he said, 'I'm not just saying this, I think Abercrombie Smith is one of my favourite ever characters.' I said, 'I think you should do more in this vein,' because he really gets it, he gets how to play that kind of Victorian hero. I've got plans for Kit!" he laughs again.

The man himself is sitting at a desk in front of a journal and a skull, before someone hammers at the door with a worrying cry about Bellingham. "You must come!" "Am I writing in this scene?" Harington asks. There are

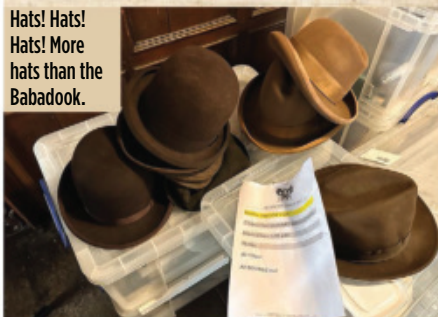


Pieces used to apply the mummy make-up.



Discarded bandages and a pair of mummy feet.

Hats! Hats! Hats! More hats than the Babadook.



resets. "You've dropped off and you catch yourself," someone in the wings guides the actor, who prepares for the scene by practising a slight start.

"Do you want me smoking?" Harington asks. Someone lights a cigarette and hands it to him. The smell of an obviously fake cigarette wafts into our linen cupboard. Won't someone think of the laundry!

Harington practices falling asleep with the cigarette in his mouth as a crewmember in a RoboCop T-shirt adjusts lighting. We watch as

“The worry was, how good was the mummy going to look? Is it gonna be toilet paper?”

they work through scene 75 takes 1-3 in quick turnover. There's a loud yell of "Cut!" and then someone says, "You're into bedclothes, sir."

While we don't get to see that particular transformation, we do venture into costume and make-up between scenes. There are rails and rails of period-style clothing, large tubs full of top hats and some boxes of anachronistic underpants.

Oh, and there's a half-human, half-mummy sitting in a make-up chair. Again, all in a day's work. There'll be more on the terrifying



Colin Ryan,
Kit Harington
and Freddie
Fox: mummy!

Edward
Bellingham
(Freddie Fox)
broods.



Mark Gatiss
(right) on
set during
filming.



creation of Lou and Dave Elsey from Igor Studios in our next issue...

"James Swanton is the mummy," Ballance says as we stop to watch part of the process. "He's done various other mummies or kinds of monsters." *Host*, *Dashcam* and *Frankenstein's Creature* are just a few of the horror appearances under his belt.

"He's got the most beautiful temperament. He's a very gentle, kind man and someone who's happy to sit in make-up for three and a half hours. He was eating a sandwich yesterday and he just looked so stupid. A cup of tea. Just that normality of something. It looked so odd..."

FESTIVE TRADITION

Everything is taking place on location. One perfectly plain corner of a room is pointed out as having recently been transformed into a Victorian cottage with a fireplace, where Kit Harington's character – after being chased by something – asks a friend to write down his story for fear of madness. Now it's just an unassuming wall and window; the finished effect that we see later in scenes on a monitor is, as Ballance had described, "absolutely fantastic".

"What helps us is that the writer/director can be quite adaptable," she laughs. She's a huge part of the *Ghost Story* legacy herself, having worked with Gatiss on the annual production for five years now.

"I think the worry was doing the story, and then the second worry was, how good was the mummy going to look? Is it gonna be toilet paper? The mummy looks amazing," she clarifies. "One of the actors said to Mark, 'It's amazing, because he's real the whole time.'" This, she reveals, was because it was actually cheaper than having to make both a fake and real version.

When Gatiss rejoins us among the sheets and towels, the obvious first question is, why this mummy story in particular?

"It's a change," he considers, "and I love Doyle. It's the first mummy story – the first *vengeful* mummy story. He sort of invented it, as he did with many things. I've always liked it, I had it in a collection as a kid. So it just leapt out, really. I love all that. It's a sort of ripping yarn, it's about empire, it's about masculinity and what the mummy represents lurking in the closet."

What exactly does the mummy represent?

"Lurking in the closet?" Gatiss grins. "You'll be able to draw your own inferences. But it's a really lovely story. It's the beginning of that idea of the vengeful mummy. It's all about Egyptomania and those gentleman collectors. They would have unwrapping parties, they'd buy a mummy and unwrap it over dinner for fun.

"In this, Freddie's character obviously has other intentions..." ➔

GHOST HOST

Would Gatiss
consider doing a
horror anthology
series?

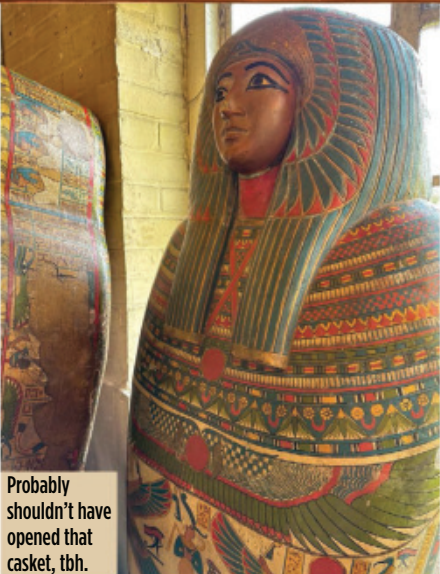
[Coughs loudly] YES! What I'm desperately trying to preserve is this tradition, because it's where it belongs, on BBC Two, Christmas. You can do a similar thing elsewhere, but it's not *that*. So even an anthology would be if you did six of them. It's a series, isn't it? I'm certainly not averse to that idea. It's just trying to keep this sticky wicket going. Because that's where it belongs. It's a very particular thing. It's a lovely thing to do, people really like them and it's a proper tradition. It's just difficult, that's always the truth of it.

A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS: LOT NO 249

The mummy's casket is returned to storage.



Probably shouldn't have opened that casket, tbh.



You'll have to wait to see the full thing... spoilers!

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

Gatiss on his slowly expanding prop collection

This will kill you, because it kills me. Very early on, I got the designer to make a scroll for the wall of Egyptian hieroglyphs, and I sent him the screengrabs from "City Of Death" [a 1979 *Doctor Who* with a scroll featuring an alien figure]. So then it has Scaroth at the end. He made it and you can't see it. It's on the wall, and you can't fucking see it! Also, Freddie is reading a book and it's *The Dynamics Of An Asteroid*, which is Moriarty's book [mentioned in "The Valley Of Fear"]. It's in the shot but whether you can see the title I don't know, because that's the problem with not having enough time. So I've got a collection of never-seen Easter eggs in my house!

Choosing the story each year is, he says, not entirely his decision. "I was going to do 'Man-size In Marble' last year, an E Nesbit ghost story, another one of my favourites." Practicality put paid to that. "It's just the size of cast, it's not something you can think of in an epic way. That rules out quite a lot. So with the longer stories, that's difficult. The channel certainly has an opinion about what it might be. But luckily, they mostly say yes."

"I think I say this every time: the problem is the half-hour slot is a '70s slot that no longer exists. Trying to find the money is incredibly difficult. BBC Arts have done the last two, and they've been absolutely brilliant, but it's really a diminishing pot, unfortunately, so it's trying to gather it from all kinds of sources."

"The lovely thing every year is the response. This familiarity and the sense that this is what we want at Christmas is always very strong. I'm thrilled. People keep saying it wouldn't be Christmas without a Mark Gatiss *Ghost Story*, and like all our traditions, it's quite new."

Gatiss says that he's "written a couple of longer ones", mentioning MR James's "Casting The Runes" as being an "epic story – you can't do that in half an hour."

"There's been a lot about what the channel wants, I guess they want tradition," he says. "With Doyle and MR James, there's brand recognition, which helps a great deal. So, as I said with the half-hour slot vanishing, it's like

saying, 'Do you want a new play? Or do you want something with brand recognition?'

"The fact that BBC Two was doing a big Doyle documentary with Lucy Worsley basically meant there was a willingness and some funds available. But it was an exciting decision. It was a change from doing MR James but also a nice change because it's a different set of toys to play with."

"I haven't told anyone else this, but I did toy with this idea of doing an original story about Doyle, because there is an amazing true story..."

“I just thought this is fun, it's like an English public school story with a monster in it”

Before he died he said he'd come back, because you know, he was a spiritualist. They had a massive public séance at the Albert Hall, in which, according to the medium, Doyle came back. I thought it was brilliant. I'd love to do that, because it's a great idea. We did actually talk to the Albert Hall but their hire charge was more than our entire budget!"

Adaptation, Gatiss says, is "an easier beast". "I always feel I can immediately see its visual possibilities. Also, maybe there's a different starting point for a story where you can come





That's half
the budget
blown on the
cameras.

in on a more exciting bit and then tell a story slightly backwards, all that sort of thing. I just thought this is fun, it's like an English public school story with a monster in it, which I'm not sure I've ever seen anywhere else before.

"It was quite a nice straightforward adaptation really. A lot of it is practical. I merged a couple of characters, but because it is set in a college in two or three students' rooms. I thought it felt doable, which, as you know, is a huge part of approaching it because of the budget limitation."

Even the seemingly perfect location caused changes, however. "Colin gets thrown in the river by the mummy," he says of one stage direction. "We didn't have a river. But what we did have was a bridge and a great big pool of water with broken mirror in it, which gives you the reflection, which looks like there's a body of water.

"I find I love all that stuff. The practical limitations of a small budget can actually make you think very hard in quite exciting ways. Sometimes you think the way that people did a long time ago because that's how they used to do it."

He agrees that "Lot No 249" is a slight deviation from a regular *Ghost Story For Christmas*. "I'm not gonna call it *A Horror Story For Christmas*, that would ruin the brand. Interestingly there's still quite a hefty spookiness. Obviously, because it's hopefully



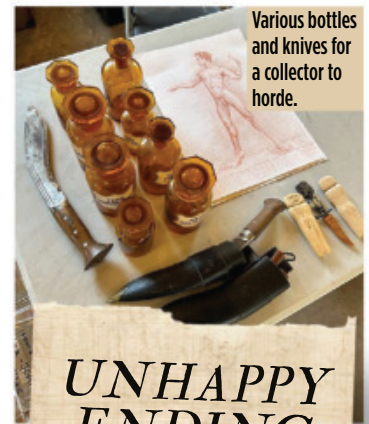
Some of the
many props
hired for the
filming.



No, we didn't
spot it – and
neither did
you.



Antiquated
paperwork
and scrolls for
dressing.



Various bottles
and knives for
a collector to
horde.

UNHAPPY ENDING

Gatiss on crafting
a final scare

There's definitely a pay-off. There's a strong streak of EC comics [in his versions] because often they don't have endings. Doyle was notorious for it. Steven [Moffat] and I are always joking about this: someone would knock on his door and say, "Do you want to play a game of cricket?" and he'd just go, "And then they all die". It happens all the time in *Sherlock Holmes* – and MR James as well. They faded out, and I think they need a bit of a punch. This one's got that!

scary, but it's about mysticism, it's about revenants, it's about the reanimation of the dead. It still feels very much in that area.

You've seen the mummy – there's something very Jamesian about it still, I think, about its fluttering wraith-like quality."

It's the mummy that he later reflects on for causing one of his stand-out moments during this year's filming.

"I always find, on my *Ghost Stories*, that there's a moment when something comes together in terms of spookiness or something which pleases my inner eight-year-old more than I can say!" he grins. "On this it was the mummy on the stairs. It's really, properly creepy. There was a shot, just almost casually, of James Swanton crossing the camera and I kind of shivered. I thought, 'Oh my god, that's how you'd imagine it if it was really happening.'"

As we depart both our cupboard and Rothamsted Manor, careful to try and avoid those creaking floorboards, we chance a glance back into the room behind us and see the mummy, fully transformed, staring back at us from the darkness. It is, indeed, really, properly creepy... ●

A Ghost Story for Christmas: Lot No 249 is on BBC Two and iPlayer in December. *Ghost Stories For Christmas Volume 2*, featuring classic '70s tales, is out now on Blu-ray.

IT'S A WONDERFUL KNIFE



ANGEL OF DEATH

WRITER MICHAEL KENNEDY
TEARS UP CHRISTMAS
IN SLASHER FLICK

**IT'S A
WONDERFUL
KNIFE**

WORDS:
DARREN
SCOTT

“ONE OF THE REASONS I wanted to make a Christmas horror movie was there’s not enough of them,” writer Michael Kennedy tells *SFX*. He’s not wrong. Of what there is, his

favourite is the 1974 *Black Christmas*, a film he watches “several times a year”; he gave the 4K Blu-ray to all his friends last December.

For his own entry into the (decked) halls of notoriety, he’s only gone and splattered gore over one of the most beloved festive films of all time. “I knew when I set out to do a Christmas slasher I wanted to riff on *It’s A Wonderful Life*,” Kennedy explains. “I jokingly put [the title] on an outline document when I started writing, as a gag to myself.

“Then once I had just smaller story beats figured out, I went and called Adam Hendricks, who’s a producer on the movie – he produced *Freaky* [scripted by Kennedy] – and was like, ‘Hey, I have an idea that you might want to do with me.’ I ran him through my quick thoughts, →

Aiden Howard, Joel McHale and Erin Boyes are excited.



Justin Long and Jane Widdop are worried.



then I just said, 'And right now I'm calling it *It's A Wonderful Knife*' and he guffawed and was like, 'Don't change the title.'"

Yellowjackets' Jane Widdop stars as Winnie, a teenager from Angel Falls, "The Christmas Capital Of The World". A year on from surviving being attacked by a killer – the Angel – on Christmas Eve, she wishes she'd never been born. Her wish is granted when she finds herself in a parallel universe where no one knows her and the Angel has caused more havoc than she thought possible.

When it comes to creating an instantly classic new slasher, Kennedy knew right from the start how he wanted the Angel to look – even down to their iconic weapon.

"I always envisioned an angel-like figure because I didn't want to do the Santa Claus thing. It's been done to death," he says. "They did a really good job of designing the knife based on my description, but the actual final

look at the angel was Tyler [MacIntyre, director] and Matea [Pasarić, our costume designer, and then her team going through different looks.

"I wanted it white because of the snow. I think there's something creepy about a person in all-white too, walking around killing people. When we were in Toronto, an audience member's question during the Q&A was, 'What was the dry cleaning bill for the villain?' I was like, 'Whatever, they've probably got a closet full of them.'"

"With the mask – which I think is a fun tidbit – Tyler describes it as he wanted the mask to look like a frosted lightbulb that you see at Christmas, then he also wanted it to reflect lights."

Christmas only comes once a year, but the Angel's been waiting in the wings for a while now, Kennedy reveals.

"I wrote the first draft of the script even before *Freaky* came out – I wrote it in lockdown. It took about two years to get the movie up and running. But once it got up, it was fucking fast," Kennedy laughs – but he's not joking, as the shoot took just 18 days. "We shot in March and April – we had to have the movie into the studio by the end of August. So we were on a sprint, essentially.

"With the help of people like Seth Caplan and Adam Hendricks, the other producers,

“When you think about Christmas deep enough, it's actually kind of a queer holiday”

I really willed this movie into existence, to be quite honest. I just wouldn't let it go."

How exactly do you film a Christmas movie in spring? Well, you go to Canada for a start, but then you befriend the local ice rink.

"We had a deal with this guy that he'd go and bring this giant truck and they would put all the ice shavings into the back of the truck, and that was our snow in the movie.

"We got a ton of free snow, it was awesome. So that snow you see in the movie is real. It's just our set designer and crew had to place it everywhere."

What's the appeal of a Christmas slasher to Kennedy? The answer, he says, is simple.

"I love the snow. I love the atmosphere that

The Angel: he/she ain't no Clarence, you know.





Christmas automatically brings to a movie, with the lights and the cosy sweaters. There's almost an isolation factor to it too. I grew up in Cleveland, so you barely went outside in the middle of winter.

"The vibe of a Christmas movie in a horror setting is just so cool to me. I love Christmas, but I also love when people upend Christmas, I think it's so funny and so cool. I love hearing about how *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night* went through like this huge anti [campaign], people called it the devil film. I think that's fucking hilarious. I was telling someone recently, 'I hope someone gets mad at our movie so it gets press,'" he laughs.

He didn't have to wait long – it's already been criticised by some people online. No, not for violence, but for depicting same-sex relationships. "It's never the violence or anything," Kennedy laughs. "It's always the fact that people might love somebody. We got some of that on *Freaky* too. It's just like, god, are you bored? Are you *that* bored?"

"I used to get upset with that kind of stuff but now I look at it almost as a badge of honour. Someone sent me a screengrab of someone's

review, calling [this] movie 'gay, anti-suicide propaganda'. Have we really gotten to the point on social media where someone's pro-suicide? What do you mean? It's a one star review. I'm like, this is a rave to me, we did something right. Grow up.

"The vitriol and that rage that comes from just something so simple and beautiful. And also something that totally does not affect them. It's just so bizarre to me. But it also reminds me that I am doing something right. This movie has got a lot of gay people [in it] just because I wanted it to have a lot of gay people. It's as simple as that.

"I also think Christmas is super-gay. When you think about Christmas deep enough, it's actually kind of a queer holiday. It's festive, it's colourful, it's sparkly, virgin birth, all those different things. So it's got this queer sensibility already

"I'm working on stuff with [*Freaky* director] Chris Landon right now and we talk about it and we're just like, 'No, this is our experience, and that's what we're going to write and we're not going to apologise for it'

"So I'm running with it. I love getting those reviews now, because I'm just like, I'm doing it right then if someone's getting mad because I put two people falling in love in a movie – great!"

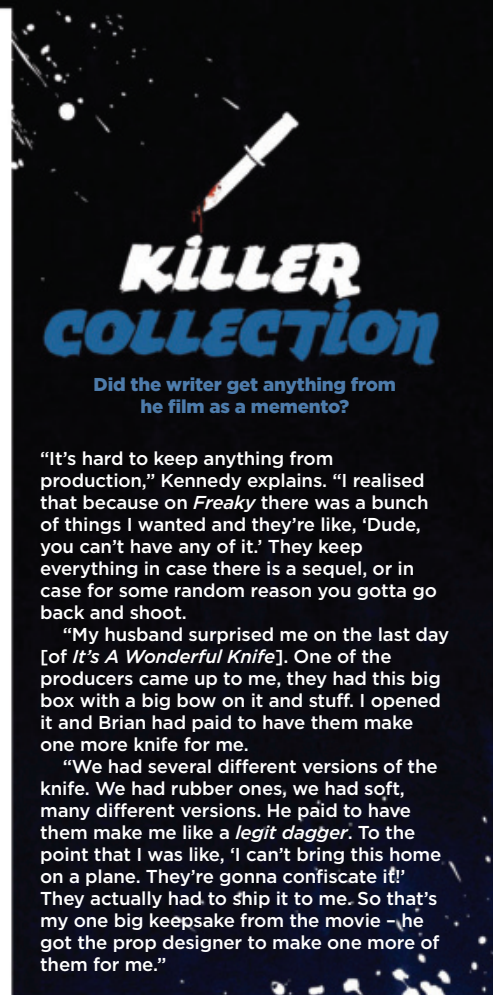
GETTING FREAKY?

Kennedy believes things have changed for the better when it comes to representation in horror movies – on both sides of the coin.

"*Evil Dead Rise* is a really great example," he explains. "I personally believe, and I know a lot of my queer friends believe the same thing, that the two older kids in that movie are queer, or they're queer-presenting in some way or another. I loved that they let them both be evil Deadites, it was used so effectively.

"I think we've turned a corner, I think we've got to remind ourselves that representation doesn't mean everything's perfect. Representation is: let us be flawed and villains, and sad but happy. We've got to be able to show all of it.

"You're gonna have people who are going to be like, 'Oh, let's not kill any gay characters.' A part of me is just like, I don't know. If we



really want it to be true and just have full [representation] let us be all the things instead of just the one pristine thing. Let us be the villain too! I love when there's a gay villain now, it makes me so happy."

We can't let the mention of once more collaborating with Christopher Landon – soon to direct *Scream VII* – pass without asking if this means a return to the *Freaky* universe.

"Right now, no," he says. "We would love there to be. What we're working on are a couple of original ideas. So unfortunately, nothing in the works. I would totally go back. I have soft ideas for *Freaky Death Day*. I have soft ideas for *Freaky 2*. I feel like we could get the gang back together pretty easily if someone will just give us the money to do so."

A return to Angel Falls could also be on the (Christmas) cards – if Kennedy gets his wish. "I would totally play in the sandbox again. I actually have an idea for how you'd go about continuing from the first movie," he reveals. "That would require more money and more time. I'd go much bigger. I would totally come back and play with the Angel and all these characters who are still alive." ●

It's A Wonderful Knife is on Shudder in December.



Cara (Hana Huggins) is scream. And bloody.

THE PATH OF BEAST RESISTANCE

RUN! HIDE! **MONARCH: LEGACY OF MONSTERS**
IS HERE TO TRAMPLE THE SMALL SCREEN UNDERFOOT

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**





WHEN IT COMES TO unleashing kaiju on the screen, it's all a matter of perspective. "You don't go to see a Godzilla movie because you want to see the people," argues Matt Fraction, executive producer of *Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters* – a series that brings cinema's celebrated city-smashing beast to television, along with an entire menagerie of supersized threats to property values.

"The movies are about people being stepped on. The show is about the people underfoot. In the film the cameras are up, looking down. In the show the cameras are down, looking up. It's all about the ant beholding God, rather than God beholding the ant.

"Films are spectacle, especially these kinds of films. They're things you leave your house for. In a perfect world you see them in a big auditorium with other people. TV is more intimate, it's longer, and it's something you invite into your home. We weren't even

interested in trying to compete with the films. It's a really different medium."

Launched in 2014 with Gareth Edwards's *Godzilla*, the MonsterVerse is one of the big screen's more successful stabs at franchise-building, breeding sequels, crossovers and now this live-action TV offshoot. 2017's *Kong: Skull Island* brought the great ape into the fold, setting up the blockbuster title bout of 2021's *Godzilla Vs Kong*, while 2019's *Godzilla: King Of The Monsters* put Toho Studios faves Ghidorah and Rodan in the frame.

All these rampaging alpha predators are classified as MUTOs or Titans by Monarch, the clandestine organisation tasked with tackling them and whose shadowy presence provides a thread of backstory through the movies.

"We knew the world was rich," says Fraction, an Eisner Award-winning comic book writer who developed the 10-part Apple TV+ series with TV veteran Chris Black. "We knew the mythology was rich. We had a lot of really incredible narrative waypoints that the MonsterVerse films had laid out but hadn't →

really explored. This was a chance to put people into this world that we love so much, and learn what it would be like to live in that world, as a daily concern.

"It's not a 9/11 show. It's a 9/12 show. It's not a show where anyone has to be convinced about the existence of monsters. It's about the first time you have to take your shoes off to get onto an aeroplane. It's about waking up in the MonsterVerse. How do you go on living your life when there's a siren that goes off that means 'A Titan's coming - we have to get to a bunker'?"

"So that's the backdrop," Fraction explains. "We then found a very evocative and compelling family drama that we wanted to follow and explore. We wanted to figure out a way to make it 10 hours of compelling serial storytelling that people wanted to make an appointment to spend time with."

MONARCH KEY

While *Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters* straddles no less than seven decades of story, the show's primary focus is the aftermath of the 2014 movie. Cate Randa (Anna Sawai), survivor of the G-Day attack on San Francisco, travels to Tokyo to take care of family affairs, only to discover a half-brother, Kentaro (Ren Watabe), also in search of their father's secrets.

Teaming with tech-head May (Kiersey Clemons), they come into possession of encrypted data that once belonged to monster expert Bill Randa, played by John Goodman in *Kong: Skull Island* - and cameoing in flashback here. As Fraction tells *SFX*, the word *Legacy* in the title is crucial.

"One of the most intriguing and exciting things for me, just as a fan, is that the MonsterVerse films have had these moments of canonical importance, but with years and decades between them, whether it's the nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll that you see in the opening of *Godzilla* or the entirety of *Kong: Skull Island*, which is set in 1973.



Has Cate (Anna Sawai) seen Richard Osman?



Oh no, turns out it's Godzilla, after all.



Anders Holm, Mari Yamamoto, Wyatt Russell.

"What happened in those 20 years? And what happens between *Kong: Skull Island* and *Godzilla*? The legacy of Monarch has been sketched with these dots on a line. And our family are tied in to John Goodman's character. There's a familial legacy.

"Something our characters really struggle with throughout this first season is 'Is the Randa name a legacy or a curse?' Cate and Kentaro unpack the legacy of their family, learning it really is intimately connected to the legacy of Monarch, and they struggle with it.

"We're following this family that are trying to unravel the mystery of who their father really was. 'My god,' they say, 'the whole world has changed and everything we thought we knew is upside down. *Godzilla* is real, Titans are real, and our dad was tied into it...' So they are chasing down the mystery of their father and these extraordinary Titan events are happening all around them."

It's a chance to poke a flashlight into the labyrinthine shadows of Monarch itself. They

"We're following this family that are trying to unravel the mystery of who their father was"

may be pledged to protect the planet, but are they always the white hats in this battle?

"We thought a lot about something like *Homeland Security*," says Fraction, "where overnight there were people in jackets and windbreakers at the airport. Suddenly there was this whole thing.

"There's something compelling about an organisation where we know they're the good guys – we've seen the movies – but the organisation itself would be learning. 'We can't be in the shadows any more,' they realise. 'We have to be front and centre. We have to be the public-facing voice of calm and reason in these catastrophic and uncertain times.' It was really cool to fill in the blanks – what are those turns →

"WE WANT THE MONSTERS IN THEIR FACE!"

Bringing the Titans to TV



VFX supervisor Sean Konrad comes to *Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters* with credits on *Godzilla* (2014) and *Godzilla: King Of The Monsters* (2019).

"One of the things that [showrunner] Chris Black said to me early on was 'We're going to the small screen, and we still want to have our giant monsters, but we want our people to be in the thick of the action with the creatures,'" he tells *SFX*. "'We don't want to be, okay, there's a couple of people on the side, looking at the action. We want the monsters to get into their face and share a frame with them.'

"The way you achieve that is you frame it tighter so that you still get the Gareth Edwards philosophy that the creatures are too big to contain in the frame, but you still make it plausible that they can be in the same physical space with the people."

The series had other challenges, Konrad reveals. "A lot of it was adaptive to the environments that we were shooting in. With the first scene on *Skull Island* in episode one, we had a whole idea of what we wanted to shoot for that. And we got to Hawaii and the locations that we were finding for the scene that Chris had written and [director] Matt Shakman had storyboarded and I'd pre-vized just didn't make sense. So we were like 'Alright, back to the drawing board...'

"We found this wonderful location – this volcanic rock finger of land that goes into the middle of the ocean. The perfect scene for a chase! We looked at that environment and we knew we wanted to have the Mother Longlegs spider from *Kong: Skull Island* chasing Bill Randa. We shrunk that down a little bit as well, just so we could have something that fit in the frame with him. And then Matt suggested 'Hey, why don't we have a giant crab here?'"

Everything's better with giant crabs, right?



and reversals, how did they go from being Men in Black to the people you look for when the bad things happen? You don't know who they are and suddenly they're the ones walking into the danger with their cameras and everything.

"So that was fun, to have Monarch figure out how to pivot from being super-secret, super-sketchy, super-dubious, where no one believes this is real, to, 'Oh no, these are the only people who understand what's going on!' Their methodology and their reasons are their own, and while they are for the greater good, the greater good isn't necessarily what's best for our characters at any given point. It was a chance to have them be antagonistic without having them be antagonists."

The history of the organisation unfolds across multiple timeframes, reaching back to the '50s.

“This show is huge. We went around the world. We went to every environment”

"It gave us the chance to backfill the story of Monarch and how they became what they became," says Fraction, "but it also set up what's happening in the present, why our characters have made some of these choices. You know the Titans are real – it's why you're watching a Godzilla show. You know Monarch is real.

"So how do we keep people wanting answers when they know the big answers? It's the small answers that are important, and doing this fractured timeline lets us ask and answer those questions. There's always a beginning, a middle and an end, just never in that order."

Uniting the timelines is the character of Lee Shaw, a US Army officer originally assigned to Monarch in 1954. Wyatt Russell plays the Eisenhower-era incarnation, while his real life

father – and bona fide genre icon – Kurt is the 21st century version, ageing remarkably well, it must be said ("What can I say, good genes," offers Shaw – but is that the whole story?).

"They worked together to build Lee Shaw," Fraction tells *SFX*. "They went through each other's lines, they rehearsed together. Not to speak for Kurt and Wyatt, but I think that was part of the appeal for them as actors. They've been approached about playing father and son before, but never the same guy.

"It got to the point where we referred to the fact that Wyatt played Lee but Kurt played Shaw. So we're watching Lee turn into Shaw and we're watching Shaw remember what it was like to be Lee. To see the two of them work to meet in the middle has been really fantastic.

"They've built this character together. They'd say 'Read this line – how would you do it?' and they'd hear how the other would say it. There are moments where you can sort of see Wyatt doing a Kurt, and vice versa. You see, especially towards the end, Shaw rediscovering

the Lee in himself. It's a legacy right there that we were able to take advantage of creatively. It was just one of the many things they brought to the project that elevated it so much more."

Monstrous eye-candy may be more sparingly deployed than in the multiplex-shaking movies, but Fraction argues audiences won't feel a shortfall in spectacle. "We talk a lot about *Jaws*, and the effectiveness of *Jaws*, which certainly doesn't spare on the big monster moments but it's what you don't see [that makes it].

"This show is huge. We went around the world. We went to every environment. We were up on a glacier, we were out in a desert, we were on water. We were in Japan, Hawaii. We were all over the place.

"There are giant moments in it, which would be just as much at home on the big screen as the small. Our challenge was how do we make that a feature and not a bug? The worst thing would be to do an incredibly scaled-down version of the films that didn't have the

Lee, Keiko and Bill go on an excellent adventure.



Kentaro (Ren Watabe) and May (Kiersey Clemons).





"THE PHAAAAANTOM OF THE OOOPERA!"

pedigree and the quality that those films have. Part of our challenge was telling a story that was just as much a spectacle as the visuals."

For Fraction, a lifelong lover of monster flicks – "It's always been a thing I've adored" – another legacy the show honours is that of the original Toho *Godzilla*. Birthed in the civilisation-changing aftermath of the A-bomb, it's an astonishing 70 years old next year.

"It looks great for its age!" he smiles. "Some of my favourite science fiction and horror uses the genre as metaphor and allegory, and that was really, really present in the 1954 film. It defined the ethos of what *Godzilla* was, and you see it redefined with every generation.

"You can use it as a metaphor for all kinds of different things. When our show starts the genie is out of the bottle, the toothpaste is out of the tube, the train has pulled out of the station and there's no going back. So how do you go forward? That was a powerful allegory.

"The definition of the sublime is that it's more than just something that's beautiful. It's also terrifying and that's really present in those films. For all the horror there are moments of wonder in what a spectacular thing this is to see, coming to step on you..."

"We wanted to find that. Not only are we talking about post-traumatic response to these global catastrophes but we're finding moments of beauty and wonder, which I think is a quality in those early films, something that they have deep in their core. There is something about

the joy of scientists discovering things. As Bill Randa says, the three most beautiful words in the English language are 'I don't know'. This is a show about characters learning."

As Fraction tells it, the monsters may just be profoundly misunderstood.

"These things are not just killing machines.

We may be underfoot but we start to realise that these aren't just hurricanes, these aren't just earthquakes, these aren't just things that are here to destroy.

"They make choices, they have thoughts, they have drive, they have purpose. They have wants and needs of their own that are beyond human understanding.

"How magnificent and alien that feels in our own home. You get a whiff of that in the movies but those are always about big monster fights – which are great, but there's something really special about that human understanding that we're on the bottom rung of a brand new ladder, which is where we find our characters repeatedly throughout the show.

"There's a sense of the sublime there, something wonderful and terrifying and awe-inspiring about their power. To be able to tap into that, to be able to experience wonder in the middle of all this horror and danger... There are magnificent question marks that we're going to spend our show trying to turn into exclamation marks." ●

Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters is on Apple TV+.



Older Lee is played by Wyatt's dad, Kurt.



DID I WATCH *WHAT, SORRY?*?" director and co-writer of *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* prequel movie *Wonka* Paul King asks. "I don't think I know what 'Statistics' is."

SFX is discussing music with King because his new leading man – not Paddington Bear this time – brings a bit of experience to his latest film.

"Ah, I have seen the rap video," he says of Timothée Chalamet's viral internet school musical offering. "He showed me the rap video, I think just to make fun of himself. It was entirely social. Maybe he just hopes that I was the person who was really going to help him break out into that world. He chose the wrong person!"

It was another of Chalamet's performances from LaGuardia's School of Music and Performing Arts in New York that brought the *Dune* star to King's attention.

"I saw his high school musical, which is on YouTube, which I think was *Company*. I watched that and went, 'Oh yeah, he can definitely sing and dance and he's very, very talented.' But there was no call for rapping in →



Where There's A Willy There's A way

A WORLD OF PURE
IMAGINATION AWAITS
IN PAUL KING'S
WONKA

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



the movie,” he deadpans. “I think he’s a truly extraordinary performer,” he says of Chalamet, having first seen him in *Homeland*, then later *Call Me By Your Name* – but not realising it was the same actor.

Of the latter King says “It completely blew me – me and the rest of the world – away. I thought he was completely mesmerising and completely his own thing and able to access extraordinary depths of emotion very, very delicately, and that does not come along too often. So when we started thinking about this, it wasn’t too much longer after that that I was like, ‘Well, he’s very young...’ But it takes a while for movies to come together and maybe he could be right.

“Then in everything I saw him in after that, I just thought he was so extraordinary. By the time we drafted the script together, it had really just become him in my head. He’s so funny in *Ladybird*. He’s also very good at being a stupid character as that sort of ridiculous fool. But he’s also completely emotionally present. He can really do it all.

“I really just watched his high school musical because somebody went, ‘Oh, there’s this thing online, he’s singing and dancing.’ I thought I should check that out before I get on the phone, but he was amazing and the best collaborator you could ever hope for. I think he’s brilliant.”

Gene Wilder’s performance in 1971’s *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory* is “deeply embedded in my memory,” King says.

“There’s definitely moments where we wanted to pay homage to that. There’s little moments where we want to go: this is like a companion piece. We can just about see how this person grows into an older Gene Wilder. But equally, I think Timmy is such an original thinker and an actor himself, in a way you have to let that go and build your own thing. And luckily, he’s a bit of a genius. So he built something rather special.”

ORANGE SQUASH

Alongside Chalamet as Wonka, King is reunited with *Paddington 2* star Hugh Grant, who plays an Oompa Loompa. Grant, he says, is “a genius”. King says that while he was re-reading Roald Dahl’s original book, the Oompa Loompas and Grant became one and the same.

“It’s the clearest voice really, in the whole of any character in the movie,” he explains. “I think they almost ring clearer than Willy Wonka. They feel very close to Dahl’s own

Tastemaker

There’s another character in *Wonka*: the chocolate

The film had weekly chocolate tastings, King tells us. “I never missed one of those, that was very, very important to attend,” he grins. “I liked the idea that this was almost a film of the seven first great chocolates that Willy Wonka made. Each chocolate has a different chapter of the story to itself, and a different mood of what he’s able to achieve with it.”

Timothée Chalamet with director Paul King.

Wonka meets an Oompa Loompa, aka Hugh Grant.





Big Bad

The villain will be familiar to fans of the 1971 movie

"I feel in a way that the villain in this film is cynicism, pragmatism and greed. I was interested in greed in all its dimensions and the idea of Willy as more of an innocent or naive soul, a bit like a Jeff Smith in *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, who believes in a meritocracy, and believes that all you have to do is make great candy and share it with the world and everything will be right and the world will be a brighter place. Really, it's about that discovery of going from childhood innocence to a more cynical understanding of how capitalism actually works."

personal outlook on life. I don't know if that's true or not, because I have never met him, but it feels like it.

"They're very funny. They're very sarcastic. They're biting and scornful and they seem to take enormous delight in the demise of all these ghastly children. They're mean and judgemental as well as incredibly funny. As I was reading these again, and trying to hear a voice for this character, Hugh's voice just started

popping into my head, and then the idea of shrinking him down to 18 inches high, and giving him a stupid green wig and bright orange skin, it was too good to resist. Luckily he agreed to come and look absolutely ridiculous again. So I feel honoured."

Aside from having Wonka and the Oompa Loompas in place, it's music that links this film and the original adaptation.

"When I started thinking about it, I wanted it to be a potential companion piece to the '71

"We can just about see how Timothée Chalamet grows into an older Gene Wilder"

movie, or at least I didn't want things that happened in this to sit at odds with that story, just because that was the archetype for me of the Willy Wonka movie. Obviously, that has these extraordinary songs in it. Some of them are very specific," he says of the "Oompa Loompa" song that, of course, sits with an Oompa Loompa scene.

"There's also 'Pure Imagination' that we used from that. It felt like part of the journey of our movie, how Willy becomes Wonka, and to see this character learning to access the depths of his imagination. So it felt like that sat in very nicely as well."

King says there are a few other new songs, written by Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy. "As well as being emotional, he can make you laugh and he can make you cry. That's very unusual, especially the laughing bit, in contemporary music.

"In the great days of the Cole Porter songbook, wit and humour was a bigger weapon in songwriting, whereas it feels less so nowadays. Neil's somebody who's still very much able to do that and recognise the power of that and it made him just a perfect collaborator for this."

BY THE BOOK

King says he "read everything Roald Dahl has written before embarking on the whole process" – including, of all things, a 1991 guide to railway safety.

"I tried to immerse myself in Roald Dahl as much as possible and figure out what he might have done had he done a Willy Wonka prequel.

The only book he wrote a sequel to was Willy Wonka. I didn't think *Charlie And The Great Glass Elevator* worked quite as brilliantly as it could have done. I don't think he thought that. But I know that beyond that he was interested in Willy Wonka and doing more with him.

"He wrote another short story, which I'm not sure was ever →



It's the fuzz, led by Keegan-Michael Key.



You've just missed the big musical number...



published, and he explored a few things. I was lucky enough to spend some time in the archive and it felt like there was a degree of licence from him to explore this character in other ways that I might not have been that comfortable about doing with a different property."

King says he had a "surprising amount" of free rein to explore and expand the mythology of Wonka, with the Dahl estate "very present".

"I think I'm right in saying this is the first thing they've sanctioned that was not an adaptation of one of the books. So it was kind of a 'explore the wider world'."

Fans worried about things deviating too far from the source material needn't worry. "I can't stand it when films do things that make the books not make sense," King says. "I wanted it absolutely to sit with the books and with the established facts of the book, as it were, and dig deeper."

King first read Dahl's 1964 novel *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* when he was seven or eight. "That might be me remembering myself as better at reading than I actually was," he laughs, recalling that he devoured the book so often that all the pages fell out. This became his gateway to the world of literature. "It has been very formative for my own personal attempts at making entertainment," he says.

"It's a funny old mixture, the novel, really isn't it? Because it's got elements of it that feel very Dickensian, these four grandparents sharing a bed in an absolute hovel on the side of town. Then it's also got kids being sucked up pipes and being stretched out to 12 feet high. It's amazing that he can do both these things at once.

"They're all areas that I find wildly entertaining. I love a deep emotional story, but I also love grotesque, larger than life characters and all kinds of crazy contraptions. So it was really about trying to honour that extraordinary mixture of things that Dahl put together and see if we could remix it in a way, and look at a slightly different part of Wonka but keep some of the extraordinary.

"I certainly didn't want a world without Oompa Loompas, or to make a film where an Oompa

Dive In

The director threw his leads in at the deep end – of a vat of chocolate

"That was the last scene we filmed with them. Even though I'd put on nice clothes for our last day, I gave them a big hug. And I regretted it because I got chocolate all over my very nice shoes. So it was an expensive choice. But I felt that the hug was worth it. But yes, the last shot was them swirling around in this chocolate – and very tasty it was, too."

What happens to people covered in chocolate when he yells "cut"? "I imagine they get hosed down. Do you know, I was not involved in the showering of any of our actors. I don't know why. I had other things to attend to. I'd have just turned a fire hose on them and got them out there. That's why I wasn't responsible."



Willy with Olivia Colman as Mrs Scrubbit.



Sally Hawkins barging ahead as Willy's mother.



"Hi, I'm Willy Wonka. Say, do you like chocolate?"



Fickelgruber, Prodnose and Slugworth get aggy.



Noodle (Calah Lane), about to get carried away.

Loompa felt out of place. This has to be a universe in which an Oompa Loompa is a possible thing, where a chocolate that can make you fly is a possible thing. We've got people sprouting ridiculous coloured hair and all sorts of things and you go well, yeah, because it has to be that world. It's got to be slightly storybook-y. But it also has to have this deep emotional story that makes sense and really takes you on a journey."

WHOLE NEW WORLD

Wonka's world also came to life practically, as Covid put paid to plans to film in Germany (as with the 1971 film, which used locations around Munich and elsewhere in Bavaria). "Thanks to the deep and generous pockets of Warner Bros, they went, 'Well, you'd better build the city,'" King laughs. "That was a good day in my life where you were, 'Oh yes please, I shall build a city!' It was great fun."

He says the sets for *Wonka* were "enormous", brought to life by production designer Nathan Crowley, who has previously worked with Christopher Nolan. "I think it actually enormously helped the sense of the movie, because obviously there are lots of storybook cities in Europe and around the world, but to actually make something that's so bespoke to us and our story was a real pleasure."

"Just to work with amazing set builders and craftspeople and CGI artists who can make all of this extraordinary landscape happen was a real privilege, and I think gives it its own aesthetic which was great fun to develop."

Wonka, he says is a "joyful experience", a Christmas movie inspired by the work of Frank Capra, a film with "lots of singing and dancing". It's set in the late '40s, and he says there's "definitely a hat-doff to the great MGM musicals of that era."

As for the future of *Wonka*, King seems keen to explore the universe further. "I think so. It's an incredibly rich environment," he says of Wonka's other adventures that are mentioned in the book. "I like his world of eccentricity in that Roald Dahl cinematic universe. The Willy Wonka Cinematic Universe, that's what they'll be calling it." He pauses and jokes. "And we've done 27 of these."

Bringing things back to viral internet moments, *Wonka's* already had its fair share. Online discourse has included Twink Wonka, Gonzo Wonka and a slightly alarming take on Oompa Loompas from *GQ*. What does King make of these particular statistics?

"I feel so old! I don't know any of those. I'm very old and not on social media. I'm afraid I'm in the Christopher Nolan camp. I did see Gonzo in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. But I wasn't aware of the others. They sound deeply inappropriate. Welcome to the internet." ●

Wonka is in cinemas from 8 December.

DESIGNING THE LAZARUS PROJECT

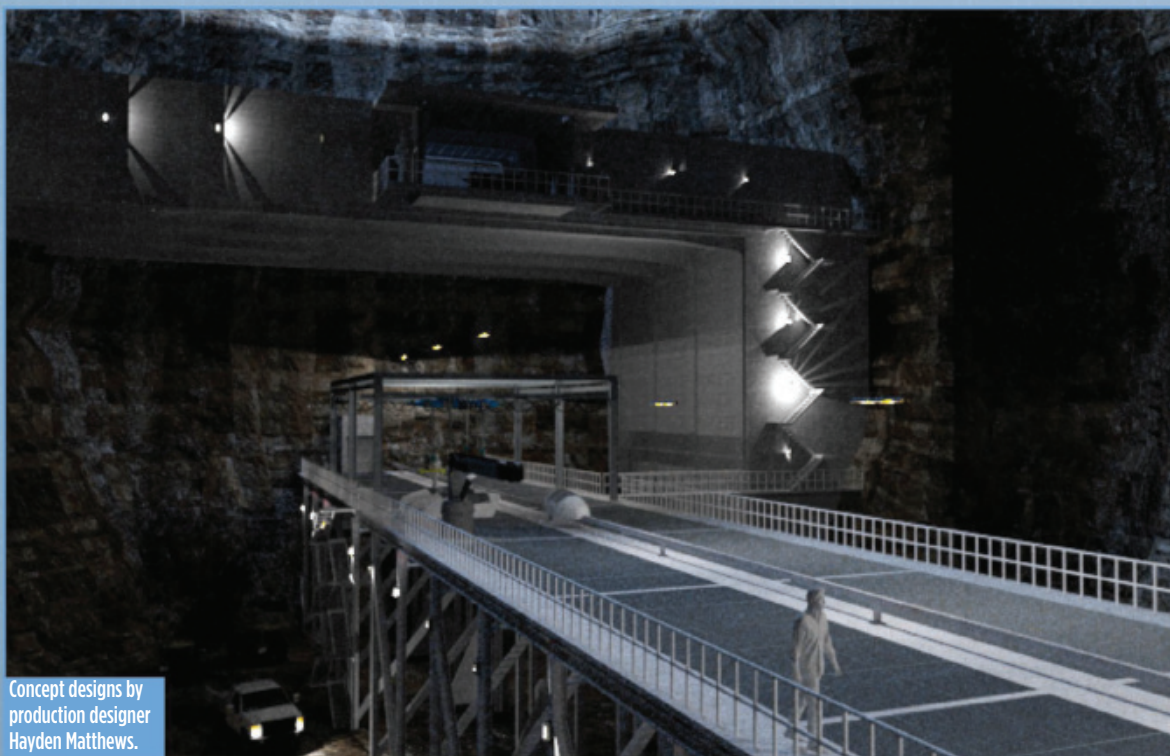
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JULIAN MURPHY TALKS ABOUT CREATING NEW FACTION
THE TIME BREAK INITIATIVE'S UNDERGROUND BASE FOR SERIES TWO

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN

CONCEIVING THE TBI

We had to create a time machine, and in one way that's a very exciting thing; in another, it's quite a scary thing because there've been some less than successful time machines in the past. The idea we focused on was the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland. So we thought of an underground tunnel which is incredibly long and allows objects to reach very high velocities. Joe [Barton, writer] had always set it in the Alps, and we liked the idea that it was in a vast cavern beneath the mountain.

Interestingly there is, in Texas, an abandoned collider [the Superconducting Super Collider], the beginning of which was built. They spent a lot of money on it, and didn't finish it - it's still there, still abandoned. The pictures from that were very inspirational, because they are extraordinary - the scale of it is amazing. I remember when we found it, Carl [Tibbetts, director] being really excited and saying, "That's what it looks like." So our Time Break Initiative building was modelled on a lot of the pictures from that abandoned collider in America.



Concept designs by
production designer
Hayden Matthews.



The unfinished
SSC complex in
Texas, a major
inspiration.

The budget
did not stretch
to excavating
a huge cavern.





TBI scientists observe from a viewing area.

THE INTERIOR SETS

Basically, it was three sets – two of which were heavily greenscreen. There was an interior, largely built, which was the lab complex where the scientists worked. That was built as a concrete-effect set in the conventional way. Then there was the huge cavern where the cylinders were loaded and operated from. That was a 90% greenscreen set – a green box with some real elements like the platform and the control room built, everything else green. Then there was the tunnel which the capsule races along – that was again a 90% greenscreen set. We've learned over the years that there's nothing easier to VFX than a tunnel, so we never build them!



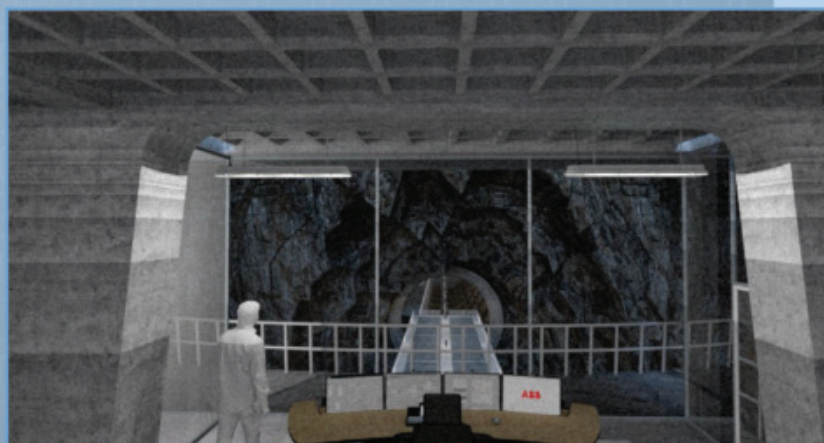
Working underground makes the TBI staff very pale.



Behind the scenes on the extraction point set.



We're definitely getting a Ken Adam vibe.



SURFACE ENTRANCE

With the exteriors, most of it was shot in the Alps – where Dr Samson's house was, and all his journeys to and from it. But the actual Time Break Initiative was an old quarry in Wales, up in Trefil, with the Alps put in around it, and a series of concrete blocks added. They're real buildings, but moved by CGI and doctored. Those buildings are in a different part, very nearby. And they're not the same, so you wouldn't quite recognise them.



TUNNEL TEXTURES

A Marvel film will feel very comfortable creating 3D tunnels in the computer that are literally built from nothing, and that can be done incredibly effectively. We tend not to do that, partly because it looks slightly more heightened and unreal, but partly because it involves complex CGI teams that we don't carry on a show like *Lazarus* - 3D specialist teams. In this case, we would build this section of tunnel, and then when we extend the tunnel we photo-scan our own textures, and replicate them, so it comes from a real base. We'll try to use 3D as little as possible.

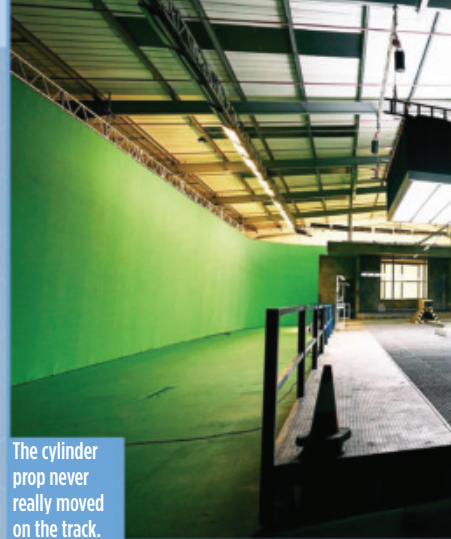
EXTRACTION POINT CHAMBER

JM: In our minds, the chamber was something like 250 metres deep. There's a shot where you see the lift coming down the lift shaft - none of which exists, by the way, that's a pure CG build - that's coming down the full 250 metres of the cavern. And it's probably the same width across.

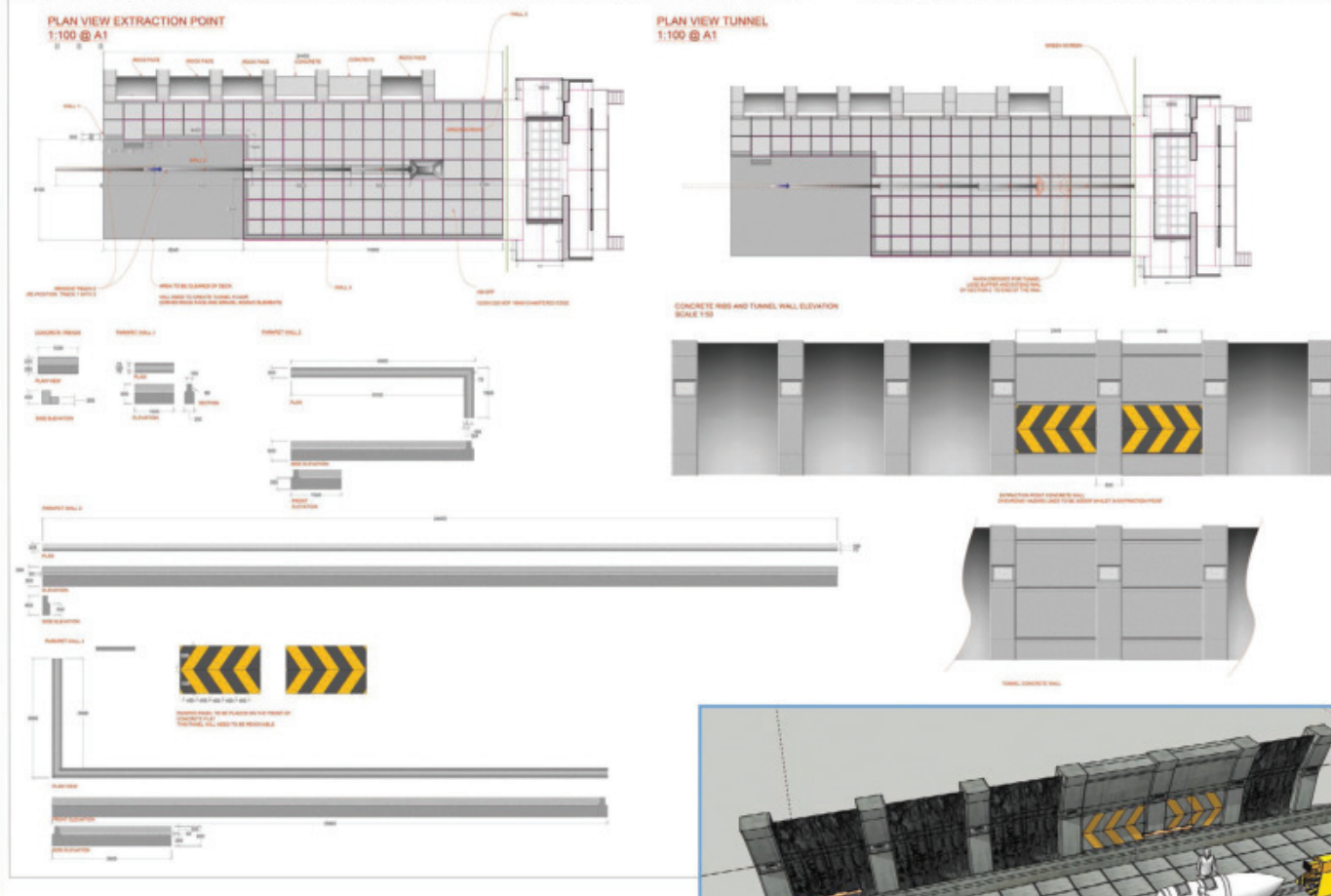
SFX: And what about the real, physical set?

JM: Oh, it wasn't even in a big stage - it was in quite a small stage. The platform was probably 30 metres long, and a bit of building [a control room] 10 metres across. Everything else is added.

The cylinder prop never really moved on the track.



THE LAZARUS PROJECT 2: STUDIO 3 : AMENDED TIME BREAK TUNNEL AND EXTRACTION POINT TURNAROUND : PLANS AND ELEVATIONS 1: 100 / 1:50 @ A1 DWG 0 74 (1 OF 3) | DATE ISSUED 31/10/2022 REVISED 28/11/2022

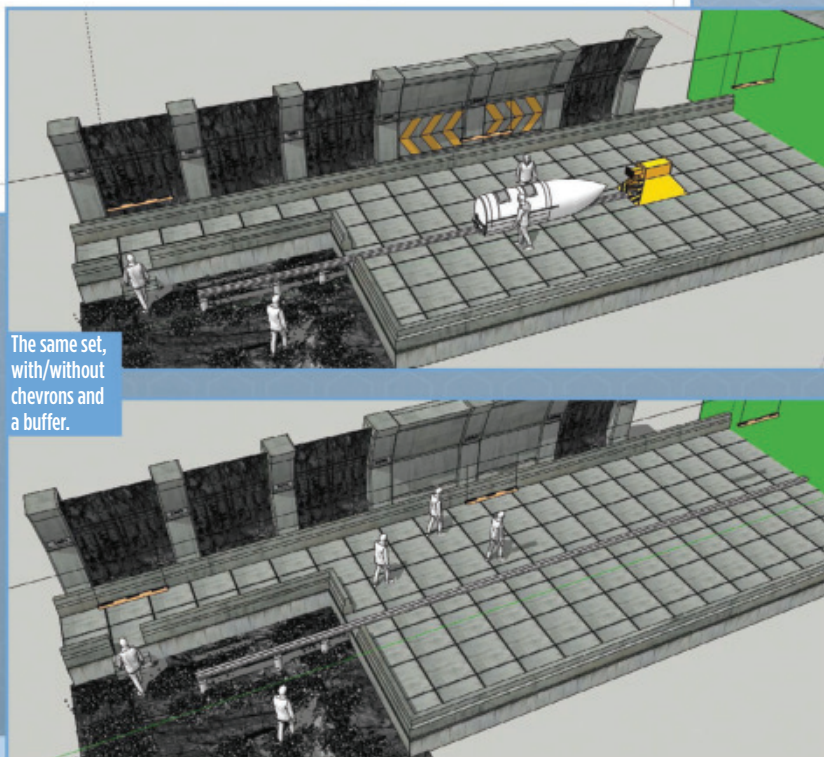


SET REDRESSING

JM: The same small piece of tunnel was three tunnels. It was the extraction point, which was where the time machine capsule went through. Then it was the point at which the capsule had stopped after it decelerated in another time. And in one sequence it was a second capsule - although it was actually exactly the same capsule. All that was done with one tiny piece of tunnel and a lot of VFX.

SFX: The schematic explains that when it's the extraction point it has a buffer stop - like on a train track - and chevrons that are on moveable panels...

JM: Yes, the buffer was moved, and the chevrons were added in or taken away, depending on which bit it was. It was all a big cheat!



The same set, with/without chevrons and a buffer.



THE CYLINDER

JM: It's meant to be one of those maglev things that reaches huge velocities.

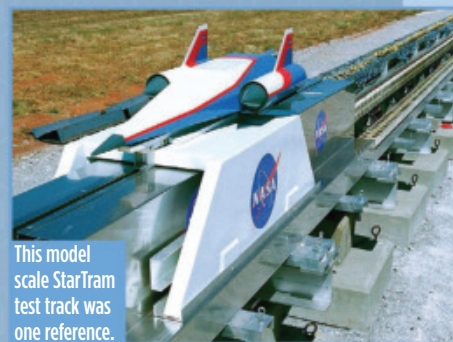
SFX: The schematic has a reference photo of a NASA launch system called StarTram...

JM: Yes - we're stealing from everywhere, as usual! There's only one iteration of the cylinder, which we used for all the static shots - a real cylinder, with some CG enhancements, but essentially a real cylinder. That was a specialist make [by Bristol modelmakers Mangostone]. All the moving cylinder shots are a photographic takeover. So in other words we scan it, we create it in 3D in the computer, and we put it in the picture.

SFX: So you never see a prop cylinder being pulled along?

JM: No, it's all fake, all CG.

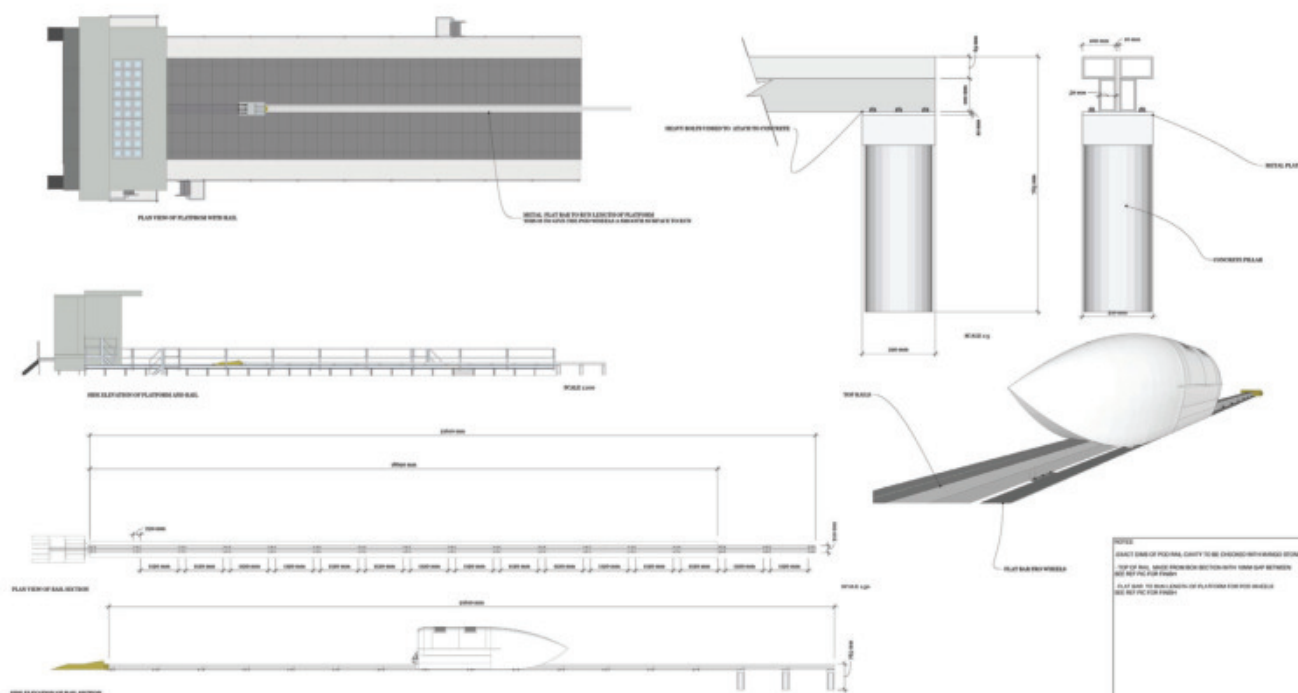
NASA IMAGE COLLECTION / ALAMY



This model scale StarTram test track was one reference.

LAZARUS S2- TIME BREAK INITIATIVE : PLATFORM RAIL PLANS AND ELEVATIONS

SCALE: 1:100/ 1:50/ 1:5 DWG 076



NOTES

1. EXACT END OF PLATFORM RAIL TO BE CHECKED BY HAND AT END
2. TOP OF RAIL, SHOWN IN SECTION WITH VIEW SHOWN BETWEEN
3. END AND TOP OF RAIL
4. PLAT SHOWN TO BE SHOWN ON PLATFORM RAIL SHOWN
5. END OF PLATFORM RAIL

THE LAZARUS PROJECT

DESIGNED BY: [Name]

DATE: [Date]

REVISION: [Revision]

BY: [Name]

DATE: [Date]

REVISION: [Revision]

BY: [Name]

DATE: [Date]

REVISION: [Revision]



Janet and her handler prepare to go back to 2012.

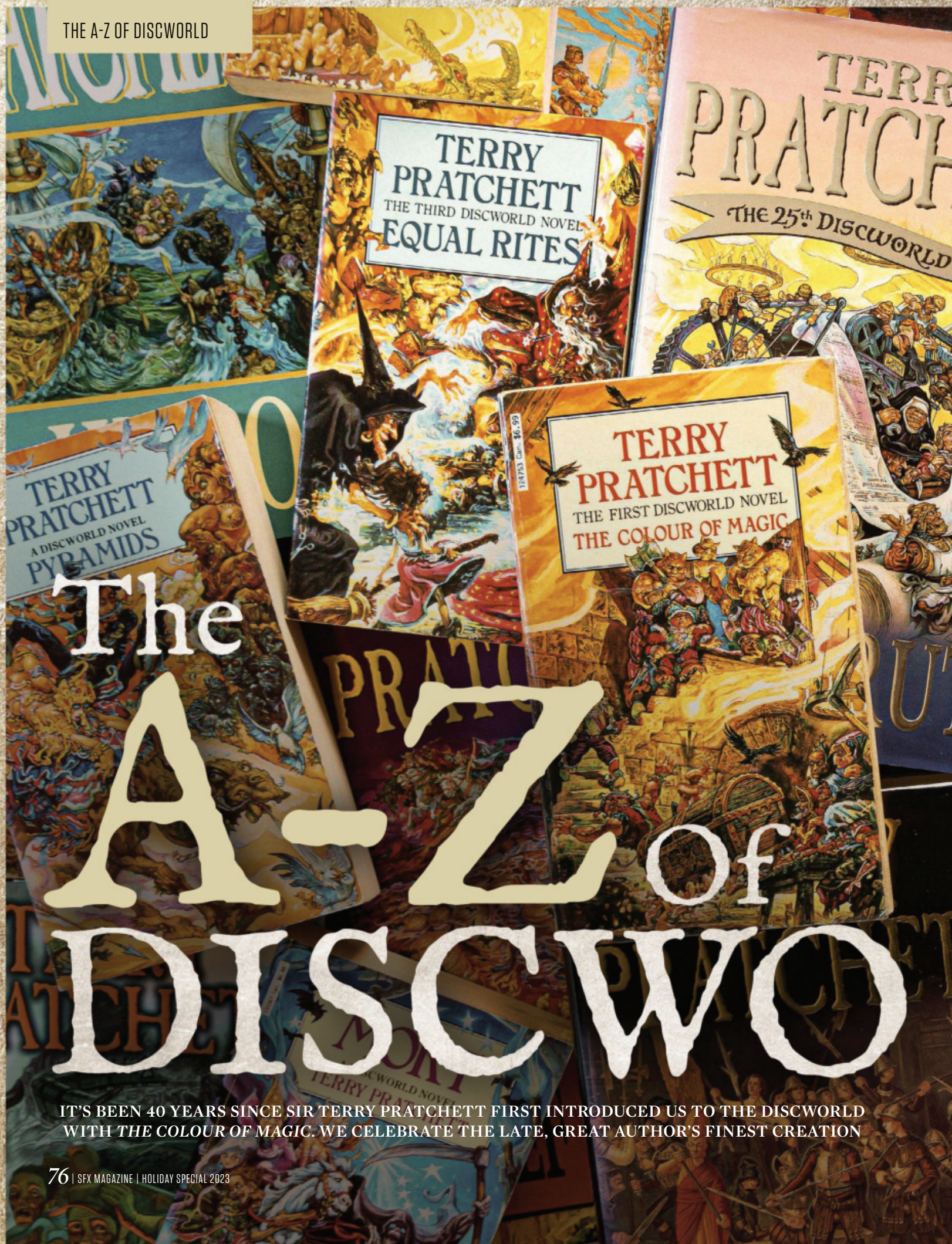
GREATEST CHALLENGES

There are two difficult things about shooting in very pure greenscreen sets. One is the interplay of light and shadow, and how you project that beyond the confines of your set. So you're working out how the whole space would feel when lit, in order to light a very small part of it. Where are the shadows falling on your part, and how do you project that onto the big CG builds? That needs very careful working out.

The other difficult thing is for the director and the actors to have a clear sense of what they're looking at. I know actors who absolutely hate it, and really struggle. When we were making *Merlin* we lived on greenscreen, and I remember saying to Colin Morgan, "Of all our actors, you are the best at this. How do you do it?" He said, "I just think I'm going on stage. I think I'm in the Olivier Theatre". Which I think is a brilliantly true statement. 🍷

All eight episodes of *The Lazarus Project* series two are available as a box set on streaming service NOW.

THE A-Z OF DISCWORLD



The A-Z of DISCWORLD

IT'S BEEN 40 YEARS SINCE SIR TERRY PRATCHETT FIRST INTRODUCED US TO THE DISCWORLD WITH *THE COLOUR OF MAGIC*. WE CELEBRATE THE LATE, GREAT AUTHOR'S FINEST CREATION

ERRY
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A DISCWORLD NOVEL

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WORDS:
WILL SALMON

TERRY
PRATCHETT
A DISCWORLD NOVEL
LORDS AND LADIES



COSGROVE HALL FILMS

A IS FOR ANIMATIONS

In 1994, beloved animation studio Cosgrove Hall embarked on creating the first ever screen adaptations of the Discworld novels. Two were made: 1998's seven-part *Soul Music* was the first into production, but it was beaten to the screen by the studio's six-part version of *Wyrd Sisters*, which aired in 1997. The animations included a pretty great cast for the time, with the likes of Christopher Lee (as Death, naturally), Jane Horrocks, Neil Morrissey and Eleanor Bron all lending their vocal talents.

B IS FOR BRIGGS, STEPHEN

Author and dramatist Stephen Briggs was one of Pratchett's close friends and collaborators for over 20 years. The pair met when Sir Terry attended Oxford's Studio Theatre Club's stage production of *Wyrd Sisters* in 1991. Having given the club the permission to also adapt *Mort*, the duo began collaborating on a map of Ankh-Morpork, the first of several officially authorised charts of Discworld locations. Briggs would continue to adapt the books into plays, penning 23 plays based on Pratchett's work, and raising more than £100,000 for charity in the process. Briggs tells us that a 24th – *Witches Abroad* – is in the works for around this time next year, to mark the Unicorn Theatre in Abingdon's closure for refurbishment.



SUPPLIED BY STEPHEN BRIGGS

C IS FOR THE CLACKS

The Clacks is the Discworld's first telecommunications technology. As the books progressed it started to seem more like a proto-internet, running on code which people sometimes hide messages in. In *Going Postal*, a story is told of a message – "GNU John Dearheart" – that goes up and down the lines in perpetuity. It's revealed to be a tribute to a dead lineman – as Grandad says in the book, "A man's not dead while his name is still spoken." After Sir Terry's passing, the words "GNU Terry Pratchett" started to be used as a way to memorialise the great man. It's sometimes hidden in the code of many websites. Keep track of them all at gnuterrypratchett.com. →

STEPHEN FROST/ALAMY

Death: turns out he's not all bad, you know.

F IS FOR FANS

Unsurprisingly for such a popular series, the Discworld attracted many fans – some famous faces. There's Neil Gaiman, of course, Pratchett's friend and occasional collaborator, who started off as a fan. Crime writer Val McDermid said that she was “scornful of fantasy until I read my first Terry Pratchett novel, *Mort*”. Sir Terry's passing also led to a flurry of tributes from notables including Margaret Atwood, who said, “I vastly enjoy his playful, smart Discworld books,” comedian Ricky Gervais, country-breaking former Prime Minister David Cameron, and *X Factor* contestant Rylan Clark.

G IS FOR GREAT A'TUIN

The concept of the world being carried on the back of a turtle was not a new one. It stems from the notion of the World Turtle, which occurs in several global mythologies, but particularly Hindu cosmology, where it's sometimes said that the world is held on the back of four elephants. There's an illustration (by an unknown artist) from 1876 that looks almost exactly like the Discworld's Great A'Tuin and its four elephants Tubul, Jerakeen, Berilia and Great T'Phon.

D IS FOR DEATH

The Discworld's most popular character looks like a stereotypical portrayal of the Grim Reaper. However, he's actually one of the most layered characters in the series. Death is inquisitive about humanity, whom he views with a degree of bafflement but also sympathy. There's a gentleness to the Death of Discworld that makes him not a frightening figure, but a comforting one. “Sometimes I get nice letters from people who know they're due to meet him soon, and hope I've got him right,” Pratchett said in *The Art Of Discworld*. “Those are the kind of letters that cause me to stare at the wall for some time.”

E IS FOR EDITOR

This magazine was once guest edited by Sir Terry. Former *SFX* boss Dave Bradley had this to say about working with him: “Terry was no stranger to the office, dropping by a few times to catch us up on his latest projects. But the guest editorship on issue 196 was a particular

delight. He spent all day in the conference room discussing his life, philosophies and inspirations. Amusingly, his stipulated ‘rider’ involved fresh, hot bacon butties. He was funny and self-deprecating throughout and generous with his time. He loved videogames, and was a fan of the game *Oblivion*, anonymously active on community forums. We turned it into a page in the mag about his passion for gaming.”





A scene from Sky's 2006 adaptation of *Hogfather*.

H IS FOR HOGFATHER

Although the feeling persists that there's yet to be a truly great Discworld screen adaptation, a trilogy of miniseries made for Sky One did a decent job. Scripted by Vadim Jean, 2006's *Terry Pratchett's Hogfather* was a two-part Christmas drama featuring Ian Richardson as the voice of Death, while British TV royalty David Jason played Albert. Jason was also in Jean's next adaptation, this time starring as Rincewind in a combined adaptation of *The Colour Of Magic* and *The Light Fantastic*. Finally, 2010's adaptation of *Going Postal* starred Richard Coyle as Moist von Lipwig, and was the best of the bunch.

I IS FOR INFLUENCES

Pratchett's work has inspired countless others, but like all writers he was also a product of his own influences. His early novel *Strata* was a good-natured "piss take" of Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, and the great SF writer's influence can also be felt in the conception of the Discworld. The wit, wisdom and wordplay of PG Wodehouse is echoed in Pratchett's work, as is the satirical intent of GK Chesterton. Then there's Tolkien, a writer whose work looms large over almost all modern fantasy, and who once responded to a fan letter from the young Terry.



J IS FOR JOURNALISM

In *The Truth*, writer William de Worde creates the Discworld's first newspaper and invents investigative journalism in the process. It's a

book that, in part, comes from Pratchett's own direct experience. He left school at the age of 17 to work on South Buckinghamshire's *Bucks Free Press*. The job meant long hours, and led to the young reporter seeing a corpse on his very first field trip, in a story that's too grim to recount here. But it was also here that Pratchett the author began, with the paper putting out some of his first short stories.

K IS FOR KIRBY AND KIDBY

Two very different artists define the look of the Discworld in the popular imagination. The early years belonged to the late Josh Kirby, whose gloriously OTT and instantly recognisable covers adorned the first 26 novels. When Kirby passed away at the age of 72, Paul Kidby became the series' go-to cover artist. Kidby had worked with Pratchett on various projects since 1993, and brought a more realistic style to the books. He continues to produce work inspired by the Discworld to this day.

L IS FOR LIBRARIAN

The Librarian of Ankh-Morpork's Unseen University was, famously, an orangutan. Writing about the fan-favourite character rubbed off on Pratchett, who became passionate about the species and their conservation – so much so that he made a pair of documentaries, *Terry Pratchett's Jungle Quest* and *Terry Pratchett: Facing Extinction*.



M IS FOR MUSIC

Soul Music sees rock 'n' roll hit the Discworld in a big way. A character named Imp Y Celyn (whose name means Bud of the Holly) forms The Band With Rocks In It alongside a troll named Cliff and – briefly – the Librarian, who quits before they make it big. The book pokes *This Is Spinal Tap*-style fun at rock clichés that Pratchett, music fanboy that he was (*They Might Be Giants* were a particular favourite) was intimately familiar with.

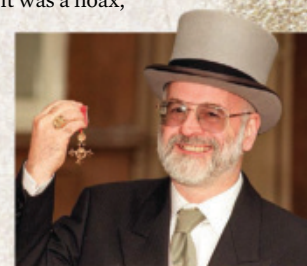


N IS FOR NUMBERS

There are an astonishing 41 Discworld novels in total, published over the course of 32 years. At the last count, Sir Terry Pratchett had sold more than 100 million books worldwide and his novels had been translated into 43 different languages. There have been six screen adaptations of Discworld stories (the three Sky One productions, two animations, and a short film based on the short story "Troll Bridge") and six BBC radio adaptations.

O IS FOR OBE

In 1998 Terry Pratchett was awarded the Order of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. According to the author's website, he initially suspected it was a hoax, but accepted it nevertheless. Another honour was bestowed in 2009 when he received a knighthood for his "services to literature" – stitch that, Tom Paulin! – becoming Sir Terry Pratchett in the process.



P IS FOR PLAYS

As we mentioned earlier, many of Pratchett's works have been adapted for the theatre. While most have been fairly small productions, an ambitious staging of *Guards! Guards!* toured the UK from 1998 to 1999. It featured *Blake's 7* star Paul Darrow in the role of Commander Sam Vimes, along with some well-realised – if rubbery – dragon puppets. *SFX* saw it at Hull New Theatre in April 1998 and can confirm that Darrow was prone to cracking up at some of his lines. ➔

Q IS FOR QUOTES

Open any Discworld book at random and you'll find a smart, witty or moving quote. Here are five of our favourites:

"Evil begins when you begin to treat people as things." – *I Shall Wear Midnight*

"Time is a drug. Too much of it kills you."

– *Small Gods*

"In the beginning there was nothing, which exploded." – *Lords And Ladies*

"Goodness is about what you do. Not who you pray to." – *Snuff*

"Give a man a fire and he's warm for a day, but set fire to him and he's warm for the rest of his life." – *Jingo*

R IS FOR RHIANNA PRATCHETT

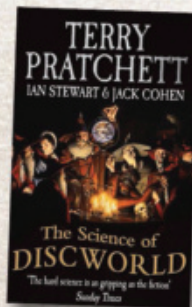
December 1976 saw the birth of Terry and his wife Lyn's daughter, Rhianna. Pratchett based the character of Esk from *Equal Rites* (and later *I Shall Wear Midnight*) on her. She's worked in videogames scriptwriting and narrative design for many years, and is nowadays the co-director of Narrativa, the production company that holds the multimedia rights to Discworld. Although she has previously said she will not write any Discworld novels herself, she did recently co-write (with Gabrielle Kent) the companion book *Tiffany Aching's Guide To Being A Witch*, illustrated by Paul Kidby.

ALEXANDER CAMINADA



S IS FOR THE SCIENCE OF DISCWORLD

The Discworld novels are, of course, works of fantasy. Pratchett himself, however, held a keen interest in science. This came in handy when he was approached by mathematician Ian Stewart and biologist Jack Cohen with the idea of working on a book that would use the Discworld as a framing device for a series of essays on popular science topics such as the origin of the universe, evolution and dinosaurs. *The Science Of Discworld* sold 200,000 copies in its first year alone, and a further three volumes followed.



T IS FOR THEFT

In the mid-'90s an urban legend emerged stating that Pratchett was the most shoplifted author in Britain. Terry, for his part, seemed a little sceptical. Speaking to broadcaster Mark Lawson in 2006, he pointed out, "They keep saying that and I'm sure it must be time for a recount, because that was 1996. I'm sure someone's overtaken me by now." Nevertheless, *The Times* conducted a top 10 survey in 2009, consulting various independent bookstores. The results tallied, with *The Colour Of Magic* coming in at number three, ahead of *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows* and *The Lord Of The Rings*. The only titles ahead of Pratchett were the *London Street Atlas* and various Ordnance Survey maps.



Samuel Vimes demonstrates his can-do attitude.

U IS FOR UNFINISHED WORKS

Pratchett was full of ideas for new books – and not all were completed. According to Rob Wilkins's afterword to *The Shepherd's Crown*, *Twilight Canyons* would have focused on a group of old folk who must "solve the mystery of a missing treasure and defeat the rise of a Dark Lord despite their failing memories". *The Dark Incontinent* would have featured a crystal cave and carnivorous plants. A whodunnit, a further Maurice book, and two more Moist von Lipwig novels (*Raising Taxes* and *Running Water*) were all at least considered at one point or another. We will never read these books. In 2017 Wilkins fulfilled one of Pratchett's final wishes by running over the hard drive containing his unfinished writing with a steamroller.

THE TERRY PRATCHETT ESTATE



Rob Wilkins and the hard drive: all gone now.



V IS FOR VIMES

Samuel Vimes embodies the spirit of Pratchett's writing perhaps more than any of his other characters. We first meet him as a drunken street cop and follow his accidental rise to becoming Commander of the City Watch and eventually an unwilling politician over the course of eight novels (plus a few guest appearances) that are some of the author's finest works. Vimes is full of street smarts, courage, common sense and – above all – empathy, and it's easy to see why he was the author's own favourite character... at least until young witch Tiffany Aching came along.

W IS FOR WINTERSMITH

British folk rockers Steeleye Span were such fans of Pratchett's work that they named their 22nd studio album after the third Tiffany Aching novel. You can see the inspiration in some of the track titles – “The Dark Morris



Song”, “The Wee Free Men” and “We Shall Wear Midnight” particularly. The album also features the input of Sir Terry himself. He wrote introductory liner notes for the CD version, and provides a narrated section on “The Good Witch”.

X IS FOR XXXX

XXXX (or Fourecks) is a continent and a country on the Discworld that, in Pratchett's own words, “happens to be, here and there, a bit... Australian”. It's the setting of the series' 22nd novel, *The Last Continent*, and allowed the author to have fun with all sorts of Australian clichés, from naming the country after a beer (Castlemaine XXXX) to the Latin motto of the local university for wizards – “Nullus Anxietas” – translating to “No worries”. Pratchett visited Australia many times, so it was only natural it would show up in the books eventually.



THE A-Z OF DISCWORD



Y IS FOR YOUNG ADULT

The odd allusion to sex and violence aside, the majority of Pratchett's work is suitable for kids and teens to read. Still, he found a potent new seam of creativity in his later years when he started writing Discworld novels explicitly aimed at younger readers. The second of these, *The Wee Free Men*, introduced young witch Tiffany Aching, who became a strong contender for the author's most well-realised character. He certainly seemed to think so, telling Cory Doctorow that, “The Tiffany Aching series is what I would most like to be remembered for.”

Z IS FOR ZX SPECTRUM

There have been several videogames based on Pratchett's work, including three point-and-click adventure titles (*Discworld*, *Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!?*, and *Discworld Noir*). But the first was this curious text adventure. Published by Piranha Games in 1986, *The Colour Of Magic* is to date the only game specifically based on one of the novels (rather than being a new story set in the Discworld). It's also borderline unplayable. ●

Tiffany Aching art from Tiffany Aching's Guide To Being A Witch (Penguin Random House). All other Paul Kidby art taken from Imaginarium and The Illustrated Guards! Guards! (Gollancz).



Brought



To Book

GEOFF RYMAN

Foundational stories: the double Clarke Award winner returns at last

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Peter Paredes

EVEN THE MOST ESTABLISHED AUTHORS encounter setbacks. One such moment occurred to Geoff Ryman when his Cambodia-set 2006 novel *The King's Last Stand* received a snippy review in *The Guardian*. "I knew I was in trouble," he remembers. "It was a book that was meant to be slightly bigger, slightly more mainstream." A novel that, he still thinks, might have done well had travellers to Asia been able to buy it in Heathrow, rather disappeared.

So, the casual reader could be forgiven for thinking, did Ryman. He's back now, with *Him*, a bold retelling of the story of Jesus that casts the messiah as transgender. But it's been 17 years between novels. In truth, Ryman has often been busy. He worked on an unpublished "bizarro novel". He taught creative writing. He published short stories. He is currently nursing his partner, who sadly is receiving palliative care. And importantly for the genesis of *Him*, he travelled in Africa.

"I got a grant from the Leverhulme Trust to go and study African science fiction," he says. He was initially supposed to travel to the continent in 2016, but his departure was delayed by cancer. He eventually gathered together 100 interviews with writers from, among other countries, Malawi, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya. You can find the interviews, which took two years to transcribe, on the *Strange Horizons* website (bit.ly/rymanafrika). A labour of love, they represent Ryman's commitment to encouraging new voices.

They also represent one of the moments when *Him* came into focus. That's because, for all that the interviews revealed the cultural differences across different African nations – which don't always map neatly onto nation states – he noticed a recurring theme: African novelists often dealt with what he calls "living beliefs", long-established faith systems that are a vibrant presence in day-to-day life. Not so unlike, in that respect, the Abrahamic religions.

THE AFRICAN SCENE

"It's extraordinarily rude and incredibly ethnocentric to take somebody's living, breathing belief system and call it a fantasy," says Ryman. Many African novelists emphasise how these beliefs speak to people, are useful to them.

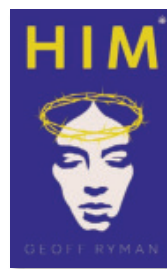
"African futurism from Nnedi Okorafor is very much in that strand, where it's going ahead into the future and there are all these ropey old computers that sort of work," Ryman adds, "but in this future, there are these very specific African belief systems that are validated and shown to be

BIODATA

From **Born in Guelph, Ontario; attended high school in LA.**

Greatest Hits ***The Child Garden* (1990) won the Arthur C Clarke Award and the Campbell Award, while 2005's *Air* won the Clarke, the BSFA Award and the James Tiptree, Jr Award.**

Random Fact **Something of a web pioneer, Ryman was the leader of the teams that designed the first official websites for the British monarchy and 10 Downing Street.**



very effective in the real world." Okorafor's work also interested Ryman in the way that, in a novel such as *Who Fears Death*, she was able to research African traditions from beyond her own Nigerian-Igbo heritage. "I thought, 'I think what I want to do' – and had been trying to do, I realised, by looking at my research shelf at the time – 'is to find a way to tell a story about Jesus.'"

In doing this, Ryman was in part reaching back into the living beliefs of his own childhood "in a tiny little Canadian village" in the '50s. "You went to Sunday school every Sunday, because that's what you did," he recalls. "I remember that every Sunday we got given a Bible stories comic book – very well drawn, much better than *Classics Illustrated* comics. They were really great stuff."

MARY'S GIRL CHILD

Him began to come together, a matter of "trying to thread a coherent narrative" through different Gospels. Ryman eventually settled on the Gospel of John, because it helped explain how Mary (or Maryam here), relatively high born and related to the priestly classes, might have come to be "well outside Judea" in Nazareth.

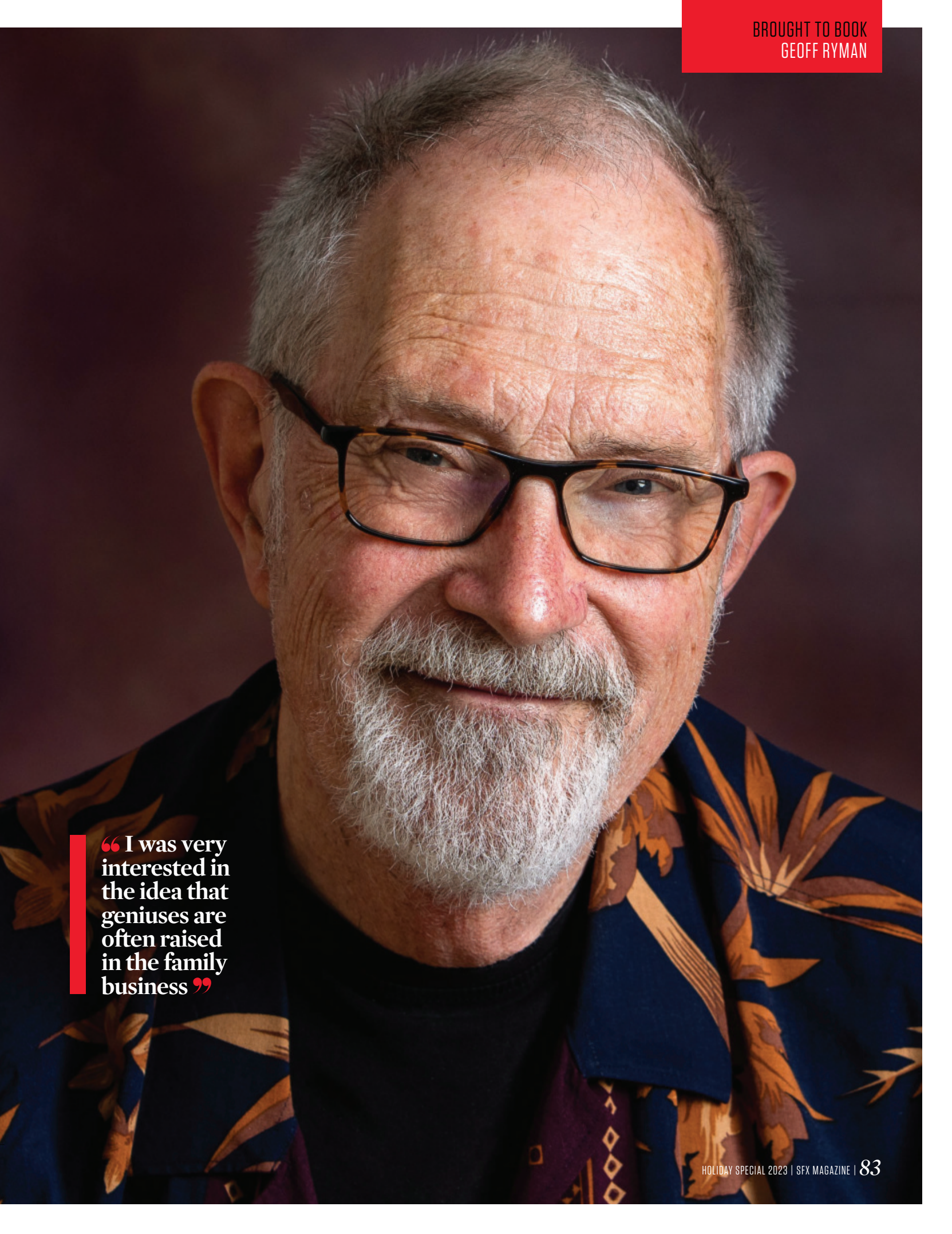
In Ryman's take, Joseph (Yosef) is an exile, an educated and religious man, who instructs his daughter Avigayil, later Yesu, in holy texts – perfect preparation for challenging the religious order.

"I was very interested in the idea that geniuses are often raised in the family business," says Ryman. Raphael's father was a painter, he points out, and Mozart was born into a musical household. "You achieve technical excellence at a very young age, and that leaves you young and energetic but with all the technical skills," he adds.

Another key moment was realising that Yesu would be born through parthenogenesis. "It's going to be like cloning, it's going to be a girl. The book didn't come together until she started insisting, 'No, I'm not a girl, I'm a boy.' And as soon as that happened, it was the touchpaper."

There are, of course, those who will see the idea of a transgender Jesus as blasphemous. Is he worried? Ryman replies by remembering the early days of Sussex Gay Liberation Front. "You were vermin, you were a danger," he says of being gay in the early '70s. In that context, you can understand that writing a novel which engages with the story of Jesus might not seem quite such a big deal. It's good to have Geoff Ryman, novelist, back with us. ●

Him is published by Angry Robot on 5 December.



“I was very interested in the idea that geniuses are often raised in the family business”

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edited by Ian Berriman

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THE MARVELS

Three, that's the magic number

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 105 minutes

► Director **Nia DaCosta**

► Cast **Brie Larson, Iman Vellani, Teyonah Parris, Samuel L. Jackson, Zawe Ashton**

➔ **A few days before *The Marvels*** opened in cinemas worldwide, Marvel Studios released a final trailer for the film. Front-loaded with footage of Iron Man, Captain America and Thanos – all men, none of whom feature in this movie – it had the desperate air of a last-ditch attempt in the wake of poor projected box office takings. “Remember when you liked this stuff?” the trailer seemed to scream. “Please come back, this one is like Marvel in the old days!”

The thing is, in a weird way, *The Marvels* does feel like an old-school MCU movie, one from somewhere in that Phase 2-3 sweet spot. Offering a merciful respite – mostly – from the inter-dimensional knots of the Multiverse Saga, this is a remarkably sprightly instalment with winning performances and some memorable set-pieces.

It's funny, inventive, stylishly shot and, despite being a sequel to the first *Captain Marvel* film and the *Ms Marvel*, *WandaVision* and,

to a lesser extent, *Secret Invasion* TV shows, it's more or less comprehensible to newbies.

Carol Danvers (Brie Larson) is chilling in space when a call from Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson, underused but amusing) pulls her back to work. The new Kree ruler, Dar-Benn (Zawe Ashton), is up to no good.

When Cap tries to use her powers, however, she finds herself swapping places with both Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris) and Kamala Khan/Ms Marvel (Iman Vellani). Their light-based powers have become entangled, and now they must figure out a way to work together and stop Dar-Benn from harvesting various worlds.

It's a slight plot, but that actually ends up working in the film's favour. Clocking in at well under two hours, Nia DaCosta's film is fast-paced (some would say frenetic, and certainly a few scenes could have done with a little more room to breathe), and doesn't linger long enough in one place for you to ever get bored.

A planetary rescue operation pivots into a narratively pointless but delightful musical sequence that surprisingly establishes Carol Danvers as a new Disney princess. That's followed by a space station escape that's a 50/50 mix of *Star Trek*'s “The Trouble With

Note to sub:
insert generic
Richard Osman
joke here.



“Fear the power of my shiny, shiny hand!”

Tribbles” and something out of HP Lovecraft. The film moves so quickly you don't really have time to worry about how slight the plot is, or that the entanglement subplot doesn't really amount to much after that initial fight.

Dar-Benn is the film's major weak link, but it's worth stressing that that has little to do with Zawe Ashton, who gives an engagingly conflicted performance as the traumatised ruler of Hala, the unwitting victim of one of Carol Danvers's mistakes.

That should make her a sympathetic villain, as the scale of disaster she is trying to prevent is vast. Instead, she becomes a one-note baddy who never feels

“The slight plot actually ends up working in the film's favour”

like a real threat, and who is visibly outmatched (and outnumbered) by the three superheroes pitted against her.

It's those three heroes, though, that make *The Marvels* work as well as it does. Whether you've seen the *Ms Marvel* show or not (and if you haven't, you really should, it's some of the MCU's best work) it's hard not to be immediately won over by Iman Vellani's joyful, hilarious Kamala



Khan. Smartly, DaCosta's film brings her family along for the ride, also briefly borrowing some of the inventive visual flourishes of the TV show. Teyonah Parris fleshes out Monica Rambeau, making her both the pragmatic brains of this trio and its emotional centre. And while a downside of the film's plot is that Captain Marvel comes across as a bit of a dick at times, Brie Larson does good work here colouring her hero – or is that Annihilator? – with shades of grey.

There are of course the mandatory teases for other Marvel projects, and you'll already know by now whether you find this sort of thing exciting or grating. The

MCU has become so vast that it could be years before any of these threads are picked up again but, for what it's worth, the post-credits stinger is intriguing.

Perhaps that, like the songs and the cats (sorry, *Flerkens*) and the stylishly choreographed fight scenes, is all just a grand distraction from the lashed-together-in-the-edit feel of the film, but if so, it's a hell of an entertaining one. After a string of misfires, *The Marvels* reminds you that these films are at their best when they cut loose and have fun.

Will Salmon

i In the comics, Monica gains the Captain Marvel title earlier than Carol: she's the second Cap after the original Mar-Vell.



THE HUNGER GAMES: THE BALLAD OF SONGBIRDS & SNAKES

Trodden upon Snow

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 157 minutes

▶ **Director Francis Lawrence**

▶ **Cast Tom Blyth, Rachel Zegler, Viola Davis, Hunter Schafer**

◆ **Shameless cash grabs aren't** all bad. There's plenty to love about Christmas sales, *Final Destination 5* and farewell tours from ageing rock icons. In the case of the *Hunger Games* franchise, the films aren't dire, but the attempt to squeeze every last penny out of the franchise is so brazen. The last time we visited Panem, the final book was, naturally, split into two films – and the next step was to create a villain origin story/prequel because, y'know, capitalism.

Here, we watch the villainous President Snow grow into his sociopathy as a young man, compellingly played by Tom Blyth. His previously wealthy family have lost all their money, and it's down to Snow to try and secure a cash prize awarded to the best

mentor at the 10th Hunger Games. Unfortunately, he gets given the perceived runt of the litter of 24 tributes, a girl from Mining District 12 called Lucy Gray (Rachel Zegler), who turns out to be quite the showman.

Zegler is no Jennifer Lawrence (to put it mildly), but hilariously unhinged performances from Viola Davis as head gamemaster and Jason Schwartzman as Hunger Games host compensate. The games have yet to evolve into the grand affair Katniss would endure in the 74th and 75th editions, but the action scenes are thrilling, despite being bloodless enough to guarantee a 12A rating.

What lets it all down is the bloated post-game hour of run time. Coriolanus Snow may understand the power of spectacle, but no one here seems to quite grasp the power of quitting when you are ahead.

Leila Latif

i Francis Lawrence was partly inspired to cast Viola Davis by a mock-up of a horror poster featuring the actor on Instagram.



Looks more like a film called *Guy Fawkes Night*.

THANKSGIVING

It's Turkey Time!



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 106 minutes

► Director **Eli Roth**

► Cast **Patrick Dempsey, Nell Verlaque, Addison Rae, Jalen Thomas Brooks**

◆ **The line between replicating and parodying genre classics is a subtle one.** Horror movies like *The Cabin In The Woods* and *Scream* have managed to walk that tightrope. But with his latest film *Thanksgiving*, Eli Roth – not a filmmaker known for nuance – spectacularly fails at both. It is neither a good old-fashioned slasher movie, nor a decent send-up of them.

Based on the mock trailer he created for 2007's *Grindhouse*, *Thanksgiving* exposes how some ideas shouldn't make it past development stage. The plot is bare-bones: a Black Friday riot

ends with a deadly stampede; a year later a killer with an axe hunts down some of the blandest teen clichés imaginable, as he deems them responsible. Some of the kills are pleasingly grisly, but they don't have much weight, thanks to the cartoonish CG. And the director buys into odious tropes and disproportionately tortures his female characters.

Roth is a devoted and knowledgeable horror aficionado who's created excellent television shows and podcasts looking at the history of horror. Yet he has such a shallow approach that he comes across instead as a director who's only seen *Halloween* and *Scream*, and didn't particularly like either. Thanks are only worth giving when it's finally over. **Leila Latif**

i Patrick Dempsey's Maine accent in the film is authentic: he grew up there, but had to lose it on becoming an actor in NYC.

GODZILLA MINUS ONE

The Roaring Forties



► **RELEASED 15 DECEMBER**

TBC | 125 minutes

► Director **Takashi Yamazaki**

► Cast **Ryunosuke Kamiki, Minami Hamabe, Hidetaka Yoshioka, Sakura Ando**

◆ **Produced to mark the 70th anniversary of the big fella's debut in 1954, *Godzilla Minus One* takes the King of the Monsters back to first principles.** In Ishiro Honda's original kaiju classic, *Godzilla* represented Japan's fear of atomic annihilation. Now, in the hands of writer and director Takashi Yamazaki, *Godzilla* becomes the embodiment of war itself.

The story begins in 1945 with Kōichi Shikishima (Ryunosuke Kamiki), a fighter pilot who fails to carry out his kamikaze mission, choosing life – and disgrace – instead. Post-war Tokyo is a

burned-out wreck, yet hope blossoms when Kōichi meets Noriko (Minami Hamabe). They've both lost their families in the conflict, but Noriko has taken in an orphaned baby, Akiko, and attaches herself to Kōichi. Despite his survivor's guilt, they start to build a life and home together, until *Godzilla* emerges from the ocean, threatening to shatter Tokyo's fragile recovery.

Where the recent American films have embraced a monster vs monster format, *Godzilla Minus One* builds its emotional drama around the human characters. Shikishima makes an unconventional hero; he's very nearly broken by his wartime experiences and displays signs of a death wish to atone for his failure to sacrifice himself for his country.

Noriko is drawn in broader strokes and lacks an equally



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compelling arc of her own, but Minami Hamabe brings charm and warmth to the role. Meanwhile the visual effects work is first rate, a noticeable improvement from 2016's *Shin Godzilla*. The monster oozes malice, the encounters with *Godzilla* at sea are thrilling, and the attack on Tokyo is superbly rendered and powerful.

In the age of self-aware, meta superhero movies, Yamazaki's serious approach might seem old-fashioned, but by playing it straight, he revitalises the franchise as it enters its seventh decade and restores long overdue gravitas to an icon. **David West**

i Takashi Yamazaki first explored the subject of kamikaze pilots in his 2013 film *The Eternal Zero*, aka *The Fighter Pilot*.



FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 109 minutes

► Director Emma Tammi

► Cast Josh Hutcherson, Matthew Lillard, Piper Rubio, Elizabeth Lail

➤ **In the golden age of** videogame movies, a point-and-click survival horror seems like it'd be the least adaptable of the bunch. *Five Nights At Freddy's*, however, has defied the odds.

As it turns out, terrifying Chuck E Cheese-esque animatronic mascots which come alive at night translate pretty well onto the big screen. The result is a fun, kid-friendly hack-and-slash horror that warms the heart more than it delivers the scares.

There's enough Easter eggs, fan-service and game-accurate plot points to appease the franchise's insanely dedicated fanbase, but not enough scary moments or strong characters to draw in a new audience.

The movie combines the game's extremely grim lore with an emotional throughline that doesn't fully succeed, but will have you rooting for Josh Hutcherson's mall security guard Mike regardless.

At the heart of the film is a grief-addled man suffering from PTSD. Director Emma Tammi approaches this with the kind of detail and care that won't be lost on adult viewers, but will go over the heads of the film's younger audience. That said, there's a little something for everyone here: from Matthew Lillard's delightfully creepy performance to the laugh-out-loud moments caused by Freddy Fazbear and co. **Lauren Milici**

Be careful what you wish for: it might be trippy.



WISH Star vehicle

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

U | 92 minutes

► Directors Chris Buck, Fawn Veerasunthorn

► Cast Ariana DeBose, Chris Pine, Alan Tudyk, Evan Peters

➤ **The best of Disney's animated** features (lovingly referenced over the credits of the studio's 62nd) have clear-cut, watertight premises that can be readily understood and appreciated by audiences of all ages.

It's a shame, then, that its latest has one sure to float as high above the heads of younger filmgoers as the wish-containing globes its villain keeps like baubles in the fairy-tale palace from which he presides over the fantastical realm of Rosas.

Outraged to learn that preening potentate Magnifico (Chris Pine) only selectively grants the wishes his subjects have entrusted to his care, would-be apprentice Asha (Ariana DeBose) decides to make a wish of her own. Her entreaty brings a small, emoji-like star down from the heavens: a mischief-making, Stitch-recalling agent of chaos whose willingness

to make any wish come true is immediately seen by the king as a threat to his authority.

With a lively ensemble that includes talking goat Valentino (Alan Tudyk), a selection of jaunty numbers with rather cumbersome titles ("Knowing What I Know Now", "This Is The Thanks I Get") and artful visuals that place 3D animated characters against 2D picture book backdrops, *Wish* is a

“At its core is a nebulous, insubstantial concept”

perfectly charming addition to the Disney oeuvre.

At its core, though, is a nebulous, insubstantial concept that's more wishy-washy than wish-fulfilling: one you suspect Uncle Walt would have sent back to the drawing board before spending a dime on inking it into a reality.

Neil Smith

i Jennifer Lee and Allison Moore's script contains callbacks to Disney classics like *Snow White*, *Mary Poppins* and *Peter Pan*.



DREAM SCENARIO

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 100 minutes

► Director Kristoffer Borgli

► Cast Nicolas Cage, Julianne Nicholson, Michael Cera, Lily Bird

➤ **The man of your dreams** becomes the stuff of nightmares in this ingenious fantasy satire, in which a beige college professor and clueless family man gets both celebrated and castigated for appearing uninvited in strangers' subconsciousnesses.

Paul Matthews (Nicolas Cage) has no idea why he's making cameos in other people's dreams, but enjoys the overnight fame it gifts him. When his nocturnal doppelgänger turns violent, though, he becomes a scapegoat in Kristoffer Borgli's pin-sharp skewering of cancel culture and insta-fame.

Cage's performances have been so diverse and prolific that it can sometimes be hard separating the accomplished from the merely average. Paul, though, gives him one of his best roles in years: a pathetic schlub with an unflattering chrome dome and a needy sense of insecurity that makes him tough to tolerate – even if, like Julianne Nicholson's Janet, you're married to him.

He is the last person, in other words, to be the centre of attention, a dichotomy Borgli milks for maximum comedy and awkwardness. Given Cage's ability to go batshit, however, he's just as credible in Freddy Krueger mode – a switch-flick pulled off more than once in a film whose various dream sequences are as eerily disconcerting as they are impressively realised. **Neil Smith**

THE LAZARUS PROJECT Series Two

Looping the loop



► UK Sky Max, Wednesdays/streaming on NOW

► Creator Joe Barton

► Cast Paapa Essiedu, Anjali Mohindra, Caroline Quentin, Charly Clive

EPISODES 2.01-2.08 Joe Barton's time travel show returns for a second run whose complexly folded narrative at times threatens to make your brain leak out of your ears – and which is *almost* as compelling as the first.

Perhaps the only thing that results in a slight dip is the nature of the overarching mission. Series one saw our POV character George (Paapa Essiedu) – new recruit to

an organisation who can reset time to a 1 July “checkpoint” – proving that, like Meatloaf, he will do anything for love, engineering the explosion of a nuke to bring girlfriend Sarah back from the dead. Series two's task: travel back in time (using a *proper* time machine) to before the world got stuck in a never-ending loop, and undo it. Save the world, not get the girl, then. The stakes are higher, but also less relatable.

On the plus side, there are some strong additions to the cast: Sam grandson-of-Patrick Troughton's cowardly cutlet time travel scientist Dr Samson is a particular joy, reacting to the sight of dead

bodies about as well as the average Joe would. There are fresh perspectives on existing characters too, with hardboiled types like Shiv (Rudi Dharmalingam) and Archie (Anjali Mohindra) evincing much greater vulnerability this year.

But it's Caroline Quentin who's best served, as we see just what level of iron-willed ruthlessness Lazarus Project head Wes is capable of in support of her personal morality. A tense confrontation between George and his boss in episode seven is the stand-out scene, Quentin attacking this meaty material with breathtaking intensity. (It's Colin Salmon's turn to be the functional cypher this time – a motivational void as the leader of competing faction The Time Break Initiative.)

Barton's dialogue is as whip-smart and joltingly demotic as ever – you don't get people dropping the C-bomb or cracking paedo gags in the Bond movies. And there are some gobsmacking twists, in particular twin reveals about the identity of newcomer Bryson (Royce Pierreson).

DRINKING GAME

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



George and Sarah have a discussion about fate.



Two different versions of the same person meet.



We see Dr Gray's book, *Tempus Edax Rerum*.



One of the main characters is shot dead (again).



Dr Samson is acting like Shaggy from *Scooby Doo*.



There's a major revelation about a character's identity.



A London football team is mentioned. (Two shots if it's Tottenham Hotspur.)



This is what the inside of your telly looks like.

It's a series that demands some hard swallows – and we're not talking about the sci-fi premise but, say, the continuing ease with which Lazarus HQ can be infiltrated. Seriously, this is a top secret base you can *drive a delivery van* right into? And don't get us started on the idea that you can appear out of nowhere, land your plane near a roundabout, leave someone tied up inside, and pop back hours later to fly off again.

Come the finale, you're also left with a nagging feeling that there are things that don't quite add up here – even if you accept the proposition that changing the past doesn't immediately wipe things out of existence (like Marty fading away in *Back To The Future*).

Enumerating them would probably require drawing a lot of flowcharts, though, and the series is so audacious, propulsive and most importantly *entertaining* that you're never tempted to get the flipchart and Sharpies out.

Ian Berriman

Anjali Mohindra missed out on a trip to Strasbourg for location filming, after she tripped up a step and broke her foot.

CURSES! Season One

A matter of artefacts



UK/US Apple TV+, streaming now

► Creators Jim Cooper, Jeff Dixon

► Cast Gabrielle Nevaeh, Andre Robinson, Lyric Lewis, Rhys Darby

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 As any fan of

Indiana Jones can tell you, ancient artefacts belong in a museum. Here lies the core concept of this DreamWorks animated series, which sends its cheerful young protagonists Pandora (Gabrielle Nevaeh) and Russ (Andre Robinson) around the globe to restore items pillaged from villages or temples by their thieving ancestor, Cornelius Vanderhouver (Robert Englund).

There are several reasons for this task: the family is cursed to turn to stone unless all these items are returned, plus many of the objects are cursed – a screeching

baboon head is especially memorable. The main motivation, however, is morality: returning these treasures to their cultures is the *right thing to do*. “Are you watching, British Museum?” yells the show’s subtext.

These 10 episodes are gorgeously animated, with witty dialogue and tongue-in-cheek nods to the *Indy* saga (red lines on maps as they fly across the globe; booby-trapped lairs). In a neat touch, Pandora and Russ’s badass mum Sky (Lyric Lewis) joins them

“These 10 episodes are gorgeously animated, with witty dialogue”

How does the skull move, you ask? Just ssssssh.



on their quest; a lesser show might have dumped her for being “too old” for younger viewers to identify with. The family are also given supernatural backup from Rhys Darby and James Marsters as a wooden spirit and a pirate skull, respectively. Fun fact: the skull has Marsters’s cheekbones.

Given all the creeping around in caves and bewitched artefacts, *Curses!* could be a tad too scary for

sensitive younger viewers – indeed, the Shelob-like spider in the finale is a challenge for arachnophobic adults, too – but with its likeable characters, ghoulish glee and episodic cliffhangers, it should otherwise delight every age group.

Jayne Nelson

i Princess Amen-Ra’s mummy at the British Museum is allegedly cursed: not only has it claimed lives, it sent a dog crazy.

WONDERLAND GOTHIC

Shedding light on darkness



UK Sky Arts, finished airing/available to stream on NOW

► Writer/director Adrian Munsey

EPISODES 1.01-1.04 There’s

something a bit “write the theme tune, sing the theme tune” about the credits of *Wonderland Gothic*, which is written, directed, produced and scored by Adrian Munsey – but everything he’s done here, he’s done very well.

It follows on from last year’s *Wonderland*, a documentary series examining children’s fantasy literature, and while it’s still rooted in books, it broadens the scope to examine the Gothic in art, architecture, theatre and film.

In terms of the texts covered, there aren’t a lot of surprises here: it focuses on the established canon, kicking off with *Frankenstein* and following a line through *Dracula*, MR James, Angela Carter and *Get Out*. Thankfully, though, it doesn’t fall into the trap so many arts and culture documentaries befall these days, of trying to cover too much and ending up feeling superficial.

Narration is minimal and instead the narrative is carried by a line-up of mostly academic talking heads, in a very creditable show of prioritising expertise over celebrity. While it discusses texts that are very familiar, there are perspectives here that rarely get



The Nightmare by Fuseli. We’ve all been there.

aired on TV. Professor David Punter, author of the definitive survey of the field *The Literature Of Terror*, provides much of the spine, while elsewhere Dr Maisha Wester talks about the impact of slavery on *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, and Dr Xavier Aldana Reyes discusses how Gothic aesthetics operate when divorced from fear. The visual approach is creative: it doesn’t

lean too heavily on film and TV adaptations of the books, instead offering archive footage that fits the mood, even if some of the choices seem quite oblique.

It’s very nicely pitched – not too dense, not too lightweight. The result is a thoughtful, enlightening watch. **Eddie Robson**

i Adrian Munsey also does landscape photography; in 2014 he published a book of “Britain’s Inspirational Landscapes”.

LOKI Season Two The Timelines They Are A-Changin'



UK/US Disney+, streaming now

► Head writer Eric Martin

► Cast Tom Hiddleston, Owen Wilson, Sophia Di Martino, Gugu Mbatha-Raw

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 With all its to-ing and fro-ing through time, the first season of *Loki* was often referred to as the MCU's answer to *Doctor Who*. Season two hones that comparison to a particular era: the Steven Moffat period. In what way? Let's just say there are more closed loops than a bowl of spaghetti hoops, and a montage sequence in the finale that would give Peter Capaldi a chronic case of déjà vu.

Season two kicks off with Loki (Tom Hiddleston) bouncing uncontrollably back and forth in time within the Time Variance Authority's HQ, trying to get

someone to listen to him about the threat of He Who Remains (Jonathan Majors), who's now He Who Doesn't Remains thanks to alt-Loki Sylvie (Sophia Di Martino) killing him – which was a bad idea, as that means he'll become He Who Becomes Evil Kang in multiple timelines.

So there's a hunt through time for Sylvie, rogue TVA boss Ravonna Renslayer (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), and a proto-Kang variant who's key to fixing the exponentially branching timelines. There's much philosophising about free will and godhood.

There's Short Round (Ke Huy Quan) from *Temple Of Doom* and *Everything Everywhere All At Once* as an adorable TVA IT guy. And there's some serious Loki/Mobius (Owen Wilson) shipping bait (seriously, if you want to, you

could interpret the whole season as an unrequited love story).

Sadly, it's less than the sum of its parts. Sure, there are fun moments and cool ideas in each episode, along with quirky production design and charismatic performance from Hiddleston, Wilson and Quan (even if his character's name – Ouroboros – is embarrassingly on-the-nose). There are also plenty of twists, fan-pleasing Easter eggs, and a really cool image at the climax that evokes Loki's Norse heritage.

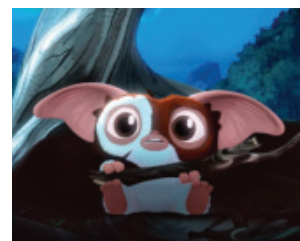
But the season often feels ponderous, directionless and laboured. Much of the plotting feels like padding as you go along, and the way the season wraps up reinforces that it probably was.

“There’s some serious Loki/Mobius shipping bait”

There are billions (perhaps an infinite number) of lives at stake, but you never feel any real jeopardy outside of the TVA. Too many concepts are frustratingly abstract or ill-defined, which is odd considering how many scenes there are of characters sitting round chewing the cud and psychoanalysing each other.

Whenever the pace threatens to pick up, you just know everyone's going to stop to have a chat about self-determination. It doesn't help that Sylvie spends this season looking like a wet weekend, or that the writers seem unsure what to do with Renslayer. Even Loki's less fun than he formerly was. Okay, he's having issues, but for great swathes of the season he seems to have forgotten that he even had powers. We blame the brown shirt. **Dave Golder**

Episode two includes a poster at the Leopold Theater for *Saraush Ke Putra*, a film that stars Kingo from *Eternals*.



GREMLINS: SECRETS OF THE MOGWAI Season One



UK BBC iPlayer, streaming now

US MAX, streaming now

► Head writer Tze Chun

► Cast Isaac Wang, Ming-Na Wen, Gabrielle Nevach Green, Matthew Rhys

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 Considering that the creature chaos in Joe Dante's two *Gremlins* films was heavily influenced by the cartoon carnage and child-friendly sadism of *Looney Tunes*, it's somewhat surprising that an animated spin-off has taken so long to arrive.

But 30 years late, here we are, with a CG prequel series. Set in 1920s China, it provides a whole new mythological background for the Mogwai in a whistle-stop tour of Chinese folklore. After a slow start with a couple of disappointingly bland episodes that feature few actual Gremlins, finally some Mogwai chow down after midnight and the real fun starts. It becomes so delightfully dark and icky in places that some parents might start wondering if it's really suitable (while the kids will be lapping it up).

It captures much of the films' unhinged energy, though the scenes of orchestrated mass anarchy feel a little restrained. And while the character design and background art are strong, the actual animation is disappointingly clunky at times.

But the stories are punchy fun, the characters are full of life, and the Chinese hoodoo gives the series a unique flavour. **Dave Golder**



QUENTIN BLAKE'S BOX OF TREASURES

Blake's Six

★★★★★

UK streaming on iPlayer from
1 December; on CBBC 5/6 December
► Series director Massimo Fenati
► Cast Adrian Lester, Simon Pegg,
Huw Huckstep, Grace Nettle

EPISODES 1.01-1.02 **Quentin Blake** is best known as the premier illustrator of Roald Dahl's work, but he's written dozens of his own magical picture books over the years. *Box Of Treasures* is a new animated series that brings some of his most celebrated stories to life. There will eventually be six in total; the Beeb is releasing the first two as a festive treat.

A satirical look at parenting, "Zagazoo" is the tale of a couple gifted a shapeshifting baby, while

in "Jack and Nancy" two adventurous children take an umbrella flight to a tropical island. Adrian Lester narrates both with a cheery self-awareness, while Simon Pegg helps out on vocal duties in "Zagazoo".

They're both delightfully odd with bags of charm, and Blake's deceptively sketchy illustrations work surprising well in animated form. The stories are bonkers, though, with meandering narratives seemingly powered by dream logic. If you have the kind of children who ask, "But why...?" a lot, be prepared to make stuff up on the fly. **Dave Golder**

i While Blake was illustrating *The BFG*, Roald Dahl posted him a pair of sandals that he thought the giant would wear.



Adrian has a black belt in Taekwondo! So, four stars.

SCOTT PILGRIM TAKES OFF

Fight Club

★★★★★

UK/US Netflix, streaming now
► Showrunners BenDavid Grabinski,
Bryan Lee O'Malley
► Cast Michael Cera, Mary Elizabeth
Winstead, Chris Evans,
Jason Schwartzman

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Making Scott** *Pilgrim* into an animated series is one of those stunningly obvious ideas that simply had to happen at some point. The original 2004-2010 comic series has such a distinct, manga-influenced visual style (especially in its OTT fight sequences) that the medium feels like a natural fit. Now we have an animated show that features voice work from the entire cast of the 2010 Edgar Wright movie.

It's a project where it's easy to go in expecting a less-compressed interpretation of the original six-volume series, and that's

certainly where the series begins. Episode one gives us a very faithful take on slacker indie-rocker Scott Pilgrim falling for mysterious delivery girl Ramona Flowers, and sets up the fight

against her Seven Evil Exes – but then the show throws in the first of an escalating series of narrative curveballs that range from bold to baffling. The result is best viewed spoiler-free for maximum effect,

and while it's an entirely new story after episode one, it's also emphatically *not* for Scott Pilgrim newcomers. Not only is it a bizarre remix of the original story, it also unleashes a tidal wave of winkingly meta in-jokes that eventually become grating.

This is all tied to an indulgently meandering central narrative that takes an eternity to get to the point, and which only occasionally reaches the emotional depth that made the original comic more than just a hip cartoon-y romp.

The show still manages to be entertaining, however, thanks to the chunky, expressive animation, the luridly imaginative fight sequences and predictably excellent work from the voice cast. While it doesn't entirely justify its existence beyond just "Hey, wouldn't it be fun to see these characters again?", *Takes Off* ultimately delivers a lively if uneven slice of action-packed animated weirdness. **Saxon Bullock**

i *Scott Pilgrim* creator Bryan Lee O'Malley named the character after the song "Scott Pilgrim", by Canadian indie band Plumtree.





This is what happens if you don't tip the barber.

THE CRIMINAL ACTS OF TOD SLAUGHTER

The Man Who Laughs

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1935-1940 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors George King, David MacDonald, Milton Rosmer

▶ Cast Tod Slaughter, George Curzon, Stella Rho, Marjorie Taylor, John Warwick

BLU-RAY DEBUT Talk about

nominative determinism... Tod Slaughter's surname couldn't have been more apt really, given that the actor made his name playing gleefully murderous villains.

This box set collects eight "barnstormers" – all British "quota quickies" clocking in under 72 minutes. They have a great deal in common. Slaughter – who recalls

the Child Catcher at times, Aubrey Morris at others – plays essentially the same figure in most of them: a leering, sociopathic blackguard delighted by his own wickedness. Even '80s Master Anthony Ainley spent less time evilly chuckling.

The stock Slaughter type is a man of status – perhaps a squire with an eye on exploiting a young beauty. He's the kind of cad who will beg for a kiss, then go in for tongues. His plots often involve framing an innocent.

The repetitive nature of his oeuvre soon becomes comforting. You start to expect, for example, that the handsome gypsy or poor farmer standing in his way will have a cut-glass RP accent.

Recurring cast in Dickensian supporting roles become old friends – as do unconvincing back-projection, obvious disguises, and declarations of "Gad!"

The more monstrous the villain's actions, the more entertaining the results. *Sweeney Todd* is a ghoulish treat. So too are *Maria Marten*, a fictionalised account of an infamous murder; *The Crimes Of Stephen Hawke*, which kicks off with Slaughter's "Spine-Breaker" killing a small boy; *The Face At The Window* – with its suggestions of the supernatural and *Frankenstein*-esque elements, a close cousin to Universal horror; and *Crimes At The Dark House*, a take on *The Woman In White* which gives Slaughter the glorious line "I'll feed your entrails to the pigs!"

It's tame fare by today's standards, the camera discreetly panning away from violence. We never see Slaughter's "demon barber" slitting throats, and the story's cannibalism is skirted around. Melodrama is generally a bigger slice of the suspicious meat pie than out-and-out horror.

The appeal palls a little on discs three and four: *It's Never Too Late To Mend*, based on a novel whose account of prison cruelty inspired reform, is rather dull. So is *The Ticket Of Leave Man*, a faintly Hitchcockian thriller in which Slaughter's villain forms a bogus charity for parolees. The cad!

The outlier is *Sexton Blake And The Hooded Terror*. Here, Slaughter is more urbane as "the Snake", behooded head of a global crime syndicate. It's deliciously pulpy *Boys' Own* fare, complete with poison darts and knockout cigars. Blake himself is amusingly hopeless – he may live on Baker Street, but given that he's stumped by a "secret message" that's *clearly* a latitude and longitude, the detective is certainly no Sherlock...

➤ **Extras** All eight films have commentaries from an array of horror mavens (yes, Kim Newman is one). Any fans of industrial/neofolk music will be intrigued to discover that Current 93's David Tibet is a Slaughter aficionado. He and his wife show off treasures from their collection (10 minutes); he also provides alternate scores for two delightfully camp 78rpm record versions of *Maria Marten* and *Sweeney Todd* (13/12 minutes).

Stephen Thrower provides a reliably astute, dryly amusing overview (59 minutes), referencing figures as various as de Sade, Vincent Price and Dick Dastardly. A 12-minute "visual essay" runs through Slaughter's repertory regulars, while another 11-minute piece interviews two relatives – his great-niece Imogen provides a peek at the panstick inside Tod's make-up box!

Seven-minute documentary short "London After Dark" (1926) has footage of the great man onstage; he also features in two newsreel clips (four minutes each); a 35-minute educational film on the history of shaving (!), and a puzzle programme (19 minutes). Plus: a script treatment; image galleries. The set also comes with a 120-page book; its contents include excerpts from the actor's memoirs. **Ian Berriman**

I When he appeared on *Desert Island Discs* in 1955, Tod Slaughter chose a harmonica as his luxury item. The monster!



BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1958 | U | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director **Richard Quine**

▶ Cast **James Stewart, Kim Novak, Elsa Lanchester, Jack Lemmon**

BLU-RAY DEBUT After their immortal pairing in *Vertigo*, James Stewart and Kim Novak reunited for this whimsical tale of romance and witchcraft in New York.

Adapted from a stage play, it's charming Technicolor froth with a coolly ironic late '50s vibe, playing out against a Greenwich Village backdrop of jazz joints and hip art stores. As the Manhattan sorceress, Novak is remarkable, giving a sultry, self-assured performance every bit as feline as her scene-stealing Siamese familiar, Pyewacket – in fact at times she verges on scary ("You know I can make you sorry..."). She's a perfect foil for Stewart, caught here between the stammering, befuddled screen persona of his youth and the silvery veteran of his later films.

There's brilliant support from the likes of Jack Lemmon as a bongo-playing warlock and Elsa Lanchester, decades on from *Bride Of Frankenstein* and magnetically quirky as Novak's aunt. It's slightly overlong, and the script could be cleverer with the use of magic, but there's bags of charm in these snowbound, spellbound New York streets.

➤ **Extras** An audio interview with Novak (nine minutes) delivers little insight into the making of the movie, though she talks movingly about her relationship with Stewart. Plus: trailer. **Nick Setchfield**



"There's something fishy here." "Shut up."

DOCTOR WHO: THE UNDERWATER MENACE

Licence to gill

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1969 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director **Julia Smith**

▶ Cast **Patrick Troughton, Anneke Wills, Michael Craze, Frazer Hines**

BLU-RAY DEBUT Dismissed by

Patrick Troughton as "a bit of a dog", this unloved, half-lost Second Doctor adventure now gets the animated treatment. Reimagined in full colour, it's not afraid to tweak the live-action original – the iconically ludicrous Fish People are given a '60s Marvel makeover that may irk the purists, while the villainous Zaroff has more than a touch of Vincent Price in his character design.

Playing out against one of *Doctor Who*'s multiple-choice versions of Atlantis, it's a breezy, bog-standard romp given a little more spectacle now, from an eerie fish god temple to a scene-stealing pet octopus. The basic but brightly appealing visuals enhance the pulpiness of it all, breathing welcome new life into a long neglected tale.

➤ **Extras** The two surviving episodes are accompanied by new and improved photo-reconstructions of episodes one and four, along with the opportunity to watch the entire animated serial in slightly more faithful monochrome.

Also included: "The Man From Miditz", an instalment of 1964 historical drama *The Midnight Men*, which teams a moustached and saturnine Troughton with future "Underwater Menace" co-star Joseph Furst (34 minutes); a 2011 BBC news report on episode two's rediscovery (three minutes); a 12-minute BBC Radio Solent interview with the collector who had it; Frazer Hines's intro from the 1998 VHS; galleries; PDF material (including camera script).

Extras from the 2015 DVD are carried over (minus a TV Centre documentary); they include cuts made by Australian censors, which offer tantalising glimpses of the lost episodes. **Nick Setchfield**

Long rumoured to be a *Doctor Who* fan, Kate Bush named her record label Fish People. Coincidence...?



GENIE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | PG | SVOD

▶ Director **Sam Boyd**

▶ Cast **Paapa Essiedu, Melissa McCarthy, Alan Cumming, Marc Maron**

SKY CINEMA In the canon of

Richard Curtis flicks, *Bernard And The Genie* is something of a forgotten gem. Broadcast in 1991, it had a fleeting life on DVD and has only recently popped up on BritBox, so it's long been harder to see than any of his more famous big screen outings.

However, the writer of *Four Weddings And A Funeral* and *Love Actually* is clearly proud of this little TV movie, hence this bigger-budgeted, American-set remake.

Paapa Essiedu is Bernard Bottle, an unassuming art buyer for a top New York auction house, with a faltering marriage due in no small part to his tyrannical boss (a fabulously wicked Alan Cumming, who played Bernard in the original). After Bottle unwittingly summons a genie (long story) and is granted unlimited wishes, he sets about trying to win his family back.

Sadly, by purging the story of much of its delicious silliness (there are no celebrity cameos this time round), it plays more like a festive Hallmark movie, with added witchcraft. Melissa McCarthy does her best in the genie role originated by Lenny Henry, but Sam Boyd's direction is so listless and lacking in magic that every performer here is fighting a losing battle.

We only wish it had been so much better...

Steve O'Brien

GHOST STORIES FOR CHRISTMAS Volume Two

Paranormal Festivity

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1974-1978 | 15 | Blu-ray

► Directors Lawrence Gordon Clark,

Derek Lister

► Cast Michael Bryant, Lalla Ward,

Denholm Elliott, Kate Binchy

BLU-RAY DEBUT It may have been a dependably chilling cornerstone of seasonal telly but, as this second box set proves, *A Ghost Story For Christmas* was a more shapeshifting presence than popular memory tells us.

The Treasure Of Abbot Thomas, first and best of the collection, is everything you might expect: a dread-steeped adaptation of an MR James tale, full of slime, greed

and spectral guardians of *That Which Must Not Be Disturbed*. *The Ash Tree* suffers by trying to wrest the scuttling horrors squeezed between the lines of James's prose into physical form, though the collision of cuteness and creepiness at the climax is certainly unforgettable.

The Signalman adapts a Charles Dickens story. Anchored by a compellingly haunted Denholm Elliott, it lacks the slithering unease of James but delivers some effectively ghoulish imagery. 1977's bleak *Stigma* abandons the traditional costume drama trimmings for raw, contemporary folk horror, while the equally modern *The Ice House* is a cryptic,



This is no place to hold a team-building exercise.

entirely spookless offering. Rooted in such '70s preoccupations as standing stones and smiling cults, these final entries now feel just as much period horror as their more elegantly unsettling predecessors.

► **Extras** There are enjoyable new audio commentaries for all five tales, including Mark Gatiss on *The Signalman*, while a sharp-minded video essay by Nic Wassell (17 minutes) explores the screen's departures from James's original

stories. Also included are *A View From A Hill* and *Number 13*, the faithful, often overlooked mid-noughties revivals. Extras previously seen on DVD (intros by director Lawrence Gordon Clark; a Christopher Lee reading of "Number 13") are accompanied by a booklet of archival essays.

Nick Setchfield

i The creatures in *The Ash Tree* were created by John Friedlander, best known for sculpting the mask of Davros.



FEED ME

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2023 | 18 | Download

► **This gruesome horror-comedy** is at its best when indulging its wilder impulses.

Jed (Christopher Mulvin) meets cannibal Lionel (Neal Ward) and agrees to be consensually eaten. Ward gives a bizarre but enjoyable performance – all OTT *Ted Lasso* accent and cheap wig – in a film that's never quite sure which tone to settle on, with seemingly sincere discussion of eating disorders and suicidal ideation one moment, gross-out comedy carnage the next. It feels ill-judged in places, but the gore is fun. **Will Salmon**



CANDY CANE LANE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 1 December**

2023 | PG | SVOD

PRIME VIDEO The imaginary

stars of the "12 Days Of Christmas" song (lords a-leaping, geese a-laying etc) come to life in this family flick starring an admirably reined-in Eddie Murphy. He plays a Christmas-loving suburban dad who's tricked into collecting the song's five gold rings for an evil elf (Jillian Bell).

The end result is predictably syrupy festive nonsense, which may divert the kiddies but is at least half an hour too long. Oh, and Nick Offerman's English accent is an assault on all the laws of nature. **Jayne Nelson**



EYE OF THE DEVIL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1966 | 15 | Blu-ray

BLU-RAY DEBUT *The Wicker Man*

fans will be intrigued by this horror, centred on another small community united in a sinister enterprise. They'll soon guess why a Marquis is glum to be recalled to his ancestral seat, where the crops are failing...

The Château main location is rendered very atmospheric – all Dutch angles and shadows – and the casting fascinatingly juxtaposes British cinema royalty (Deborah Kerr, David Niven) and swinging '60s faces (Sharon Tate; a supernaturally handsome David Hemmings).

► **Extras** Trailer. **Ian Berriman**



THE BLUE JEAN MONSTER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 4 December**

1991 | 15 | Blu-ray

BLU-RAY DEBUT In this Hong

Kong actioner, a dim-bulb cop takes on bank robbers after becoming a sort of bullet-proof, electricity-powered zombie. The fight sequences and car chases deliver, but the humour – which often revolves around bodily functions – is puerile, the performances awfully broad.

Nauseating homophobia further spoils things, with lines about the danger of "catching AIDS" from "perverts". Yuck.

► **Extras** Interview; trailer; gallery. **Ian Berriman**

DOCTOR X

Medical malpractice

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1932 | 12 | Blu-ray

► Director **Michael Curtiz**

► Cast **Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray, Lee Tracy, Preston Foster**

BLU-RAY DEBUT When someone says “30s horror”, Universal Studios spring to mind, but Warner Bros dabbled in the genre too – albeit somewhat reluctantly. Directed by Michael Curtiz, who later helmed *Casablanca*, *Doctor X* is a leading example.

It centres on a medical academy run by the titular Dr Xavier (Lionel Atwill), which has fallen under suspicion after a series of murders, all committed during a full moon. There’s no shortage of oddballs on staff, but which is the killer? Xavier convinces the police to let him investigate, using

waxworks, reconstructions and an apparatus of “high frequency coils” and “thermal tubes” that’s essentially a fancy-dan lie detector.

It’s a fabulously atmospheric affair, blending gothic gloom and hi-tech gleam – most strikingly when it comes to the laboratory at Xavier’s cliff-top estate. The use of early two-colour Technicolor further enhances the sense of a heightened reality, scenes awash with mouldy green and garish wound red.

It’s pretty strong meat: the killings involve cannibalism. And, rarely for a horror of this vintage, it has a light relief figure who won’t make you fast-forward – a likeably impertinent newspaper reporter. The final reveal is so unguessably out of leftfield that you’ll feel hoodwinked, but that’s all part of the fun.



The original version of *Blind Date* was quite odd.

► **Extras** The Technicolor version, meticulously restored, looks glorious. A black and white version, shot concurrently for export, is also included; it’s worth a watch, with some improvisatory variations. Curtiz biographer Alan K Rode and restoration expert Scott McQueen provide separate commentaries, both highly

instructive. The two also front a 28-minute featurette on all three of Curtiz’s horror gigs for Warner. A restoration reel (eight minutes) highlights the work that went into fixing scratches and crackle. Plus: trailer. **Ian Berriman**

Previously Mihály Kertész, Curtiz’s first foray into horror was co-writing ‘20s Austrian short “Drakula Halála”, now lost.

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INSIDE

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WORZEL GUMMIDGE DOWN UNDER

Putting on his Kiwi head

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1987-1989 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Creators Keith Waterhouse, Willis Hall

▶ Cast Jon Pertwee, Una Stubbs, Bruce

Phillips, Olivia Ihimaera-Smiller

BLU-RAY DEBUT For anyone used to the quaint British run of *Worzel Gummidge* from the '70s, the first series of *Down Under* is a bit of a shock. Less because of the location shift to New Zealand, and more because it's gone really dark, with zombie scarecrows, a recurring villain, knives, bonfire treats and even an arc plot of sorts.

None of which sits comfortably alongside Jon Pertwee and Una Stubbs's vaudevillean performances as Worzel and Aunt

Sally. The jarring nature of the tone is often weird and unsettling.

The second series feels more like the charmingly dippy Worzel of old, even while it's embracing the New Zealand setting more enthusiastically (series one feels more like it's set on Summerisle). It's still not as good as the original series, but at least it feels more like it used to, with some fine moments of physical comedy and bonkers wordplay, and by the end there's a huge cast of delightfully daft supporting scarecrows.

✚ **Extras** As with Fabulous Films' original series Blu-ray, the image and sound restoration is simply phenomenal. The extras are similarly impressive. There's both breadth (over three and a half



"Well I'll be bum-swizzled, we're in New Zealand."

hours of extras) and impressive depth here, with some brilliantly obscure interviews exhumed from archives worldwide.

These include the pilot for a claymation Worzel cartoon from 1982, and an interview with Pertwee in-costume for 1981's *Worzel Gummidge: The Musical*, plus a number of all-new features (including an interview with producer Grahame McLean).

Okay, the commentaries on three episodes – with Shane

Radford (make-up), Olivia Ihimaera-Smiller (one of the kids) and Bruce Phillips (the new Crowman) are more like interviews – they barely mention what's happening on-screen. And we could have done with an overarching documentary putting the series in context. But overall this is a great pick 'n' mix of Worzelly delights. **Dave Golder**

i *Down Under's* crew included Middle-earth masterminds Peter Jackson (on effects) and Fran Walsh (writer of six episodes).

THE GINGER SNAPS TRILOGY

Takes the biscuit

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2000-2004 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors John Fawcett, Brett Sullivan,

Grant Harvey

▶ Cast Emily Perkins, Katharine

Isabelle, Mimi Rogers, Kris Lemche

BLU-RAY DEBUT The thing about werewolf movies is that there just aren't that many great ones. You've got *An American Werewolf In London*, *Dog Soldiers* and, erm...

Then there's a good argument for *Ginger Snaps*. Using lycanthropy as a metaphor for adolescence, and swapping silver bullets and full moons in favour of a (pseudo)scientific explanation, this low-budget Canadian cult classic feels as fresh and smart as

it did in 2000. Teenage sisters Ginger and Brigitte exist in a world before iPhones and social media, but their desperation to escape a conventional suburban future still feels relevant. And the practical make-up effects used for Ginger's transformations feel as tangible and horrifying as ever.

Neither sequel would crack anyone's top 10 werewolf movies, but they each have something to recommend them. *Ginger Snaps Unleashed* sees Brigitte struggling with her own transformation in rehab; *Orphan Black's* Tatiana Maslany steals the show, and the final reel reveal is emotionally devastating. *Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning* abandons continuity, dropping another



"Has the back of my hand always looked like that?"

Ginger and another Brigitte into the Canadian wilderness of 1815; it's ambitious, but far too long and nowhere near as sure-footed as the first two. But there aren't many '00s franchises that get close to the overall quality of these three films.

✚ **Extras** This Second Sight release has a 112-page booklet full of essays and five art cards in a beautifully designed box. Sadly you're looking at quantity over quality when it comes to the extras, which include director's

commentaries, deleted scenes, and Making Of's for all three. Many come from the 2014 Shout! Factory release, while seven new writer/director/producer interviews (162 minutes total) are wildly repetitive, and a new commentary on the first film by podcasters *Scarred For Life* is enthusiastic but inessential. Nice box, though.

Sarah Dobbs

i Writer Karen Walton admits that the film's title was inspired by an actual packet of Ginger Snaps she had on her desk.

► **NOW ON DIGITAL FORMATS** *The Creator* • *The Exorcist: Believer* • *Transformers: Rise Of The Beast* (Paramount+, 8 December)

JEAN ROLLIN

Constant Craving

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

1975/1979 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

► Director Jean Rollin

► Cast Jean-Loup Philippe,

Annie Briand, Jean-Pierre Lemaire,

Brigitte Lahaie

➡ “Death sometimes take the form of seduction,” warns cult leader Hélène in *Fascination* ★★★★★. It’s a line that stakes the heart of director Jean Rollin’s body of work. On the surface another tale of the underclad undead, this sensual Euro-chiller delivers an elegant and intriguingly fresh twist on the vampire myth.

Set in 1905, it stars Brigitte Lahaie as part of a blood-craving sisterhood that lurks in a remote chateau, enticing and entrapping a fugitive thief. It’s a film built on striking imagery, whether it’s a

near-naked Lahaie wielding a scythe or the incongruity of a woman in an immaculate white dress framed among the dead flesh of an abattoir.

Sister release *Lips Of Blood* ★★★★★ unfolds as a melancholy, richly atmospheric exploration of childhood obsession: the strangest of love stories. Haunted by visions of a ruined castle and the face of a mysterious girl, Jean-Loup Philippe enters a sub-reality of menace and paranoia hidden among the decrepit nocturnal streets of Paris.

Sumptuously restored (with new 4K scans from the original negatives), both films entwine memory and dream, dread and desire to haunting effect.

➡ **Extras** *Lips Of Blood* ★★★★★ has audio commentary by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman, along

with commentary on selected scenes by Rollin himself. Seven candid archival interviews with cast and crew (totalling approximately 90 minutes) include Rollin reflecting on his lifelong obsession with the beach at Pourville-lès-Dieppe that features in so many of his movies. Film historian Virginie Sélavy discusses the film’s “mix of innocence and perversity” (nine minutes) in a critical appreciation.

Fascination ★★★★★ receives an equally academic-minded appraisal by Sélavy (seven minutes). Critic Jeremy Richey supplies the audio commentary here, while there’s a fascinating interview with Philippe d’Aram, responsible for the film’s eerie, pioneeringly electronic score (19 minutes). You also get a brief, interview-led retrospective (eight

“A melancholy, atmospheric exploration of childhood obsession”

minutes); a Rollin-focused episode of *Eurotika!*, Channel 4’s 1999 documentary series about European exploitation cinema (24 minutes), and two “alternate sequences” (eight and seven minutes apiece) – overlong sex scenes whose absence improves the film’s pacing.

Both films come with short introductions by Rollin, trailers, extensive galleries and 80-page books containing both new and archival content, including a previously untranslated interview with the director, and the short story which inspired the screenplay for *Fascination*.

Nick Setchfield

i Rollin makes a cameo in *Lips Of Blood*, as the cemetery caretaker who comes to a grisly end at the hands of the vampires.

(ROUND UP)



Harrison Ford bows out in INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY

(4K/Blu-ray/DVD, 4 December), which pits Indy against a rocket scientist set on changing history by erasing Hitler’s mistakes. We said: “Most of the connecting scenes feel a little drawn out...”

May not match the excitement of Indy’s early adventures, but it’s better than *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*. Bonuses: a five-chapter Making Of (57 minutes), and an isolated score. A mechanic’s son symbiotically fuses with a superpower-endowing alien scarab in **BLUE**

BEEBLE (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, out now), the last DCEU film made before James

Gunn and Peter Safran took the wheel. Bonuses (64 minutes): a four-part Making Of, a piece on veteran actor Adriana Barraza and a series of scene breakdowns. We said: “Seems set from the off on challenging prevailing orthodoxies... a surprisingly entertaining and engaging watch.”

Sketchbook cartoon stylings and a voice cast of authentic teens are key draws of **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT MAYHEM** (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, out now).

Extras: three featurettes (27 minutes) and a “learn to draw Leo” piece. We said: “Bursting with pop-culture references, movie in-jokes and knowing callbacks... fun for aficionados and newcomers alike.” Finally, the latest TV box sets:

THE SANDMAN Season One (Blu-ray/DVD, out now). **STAR TREK:**

PICARD Season Three (Blu-ray/DVD, out now) and **STAR TREK:**

STRANGE NEW WORLDS Season Two (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, 4 December).



“Alright, love? I’ve come about the lawn.”

First Read AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK House Of Open Wounds by Adrian Tchaikovsky

BEHIND THE FRONT LINES OF A CRUSADE TO SCOUR THE
WORLD OF MAGIC, THE CREW OF A FIELD HOSPITAL
CONFRONT THE HORRORS OF WAR.

Charged with saving the lives of the un-saveable, this motley crew of healers use methods that are by necessity unusual, unorthodox and utterly unsanctioned.

It is a vision of hell. The air is made of screaming. Like a picture where the gap between two objects is revealed, after a squint, to be just more of the same, here the gap between throat-stripping shrieks is just less-insistent sounds of men and women in agony. A hierarchy of torment so constant and yet so varied it becomes something close to a choir.

Here, then, is the choirmaster. A great weight of a man who nonetheless passes through the bloody clutter of the space with an appalling deftness. Like the thing in your dream, that cannot possibly follow you into the small spaces, and yet does so in defiance of reason. His bulk is gravity, demanding the attention of everything around him. It's a wonder the rivulets of spilled blood don't orbit him in a wheeling astronomy of gore.

Behind him his minions, his attendant devils, are hard at work. Time enough for them when you've escaped the pull of this man, this bloody-handed emperor, even now stomping to look over the new arrivals

thrown to his mercy.

His face is a thing of parts. It can clench like a fist, open like a flower. In other moments, with the rigour of his profession lifted from him, it's a good face. A friendly thing to see. A broad smile, such as might be used to persuade you to open your door to him at night. His moustache, which right now is crusted with red, can make him seem clownish and harmless. The mass of him, which can drive a cleaver through a limb or give bite to the teeth of a saw, becomes the ungainly comedy of a dancing bear. When he wants it to. Right now, though, he's working. The worst kind of torturer, who preys only on those already in agony.

No fit and healthy victims come to his dungeon to be broken. He takes the leavings, and his people make them squeal. Spilling into his tent now: a flurry of men and women, some in full uniform, others stripped to their shirtsleeves. They are whole as yet. They aren't his. And those that are his, well, their uniforms are already ragged, holed, sodden, scorched. The fit set down the stretchers of the infirm and retreat. Nobody wants to spend time in the Butcher's company when he's working. Most especially not the howling victims set at his feet.

One figure remains. Uniform

jacket open, slovenly, hanging improbably from her shoulders as though it'll slough off any moment, save it never does. She's been outside with the bearers, taking details, and she bends to the Butcher's ear.

"Taking the wall. Caught a bonecutter, then counterattack."

The words almost stripped of their regular meaning, a code between her and the Butcher to give him context.

He casts a look over the array of the agonised, a workman inspecting the damage; a clerk, today's agenda for the meeting. Nearest to him a man whimpers with his leg laid open. Swordstroke. Next, the woman without a hand, screaming at the stump. Then three silent ones. He sees where their uniforms are shredded, the ripped edges presented outwards where the shards of shattered bone erupted from within. Then the next, and the next. The pucker-and-scorch of baton-shot. The man whose head is laid open so that the jigsaw of his skull is present for any budding puzzlesmith to piece together. The woman – the loudest screamer in the place, whose leg was splinted by some cack-handed amateur who doesn't understand how bones go.

The Butcher works his first magic. The silent man whose ribs were shattered on one side can still be saved for future torments.

“The gap between throat-stripping shrieks is just less-insistent sounds of men and women in agony”

The Author



→ Adrian Tchaikovsky was born in Lincolnshire before heading off to Reading to study psychology and zoology. He subsequently ended up in law and has worked as a legal executive in Reading and Leeds, where he now lives. Married, he is a keen live role-player and occasional amateur actor, and has trained in stage-fighting. He's the author of the 30th Anniversary Arthur C Clarke Award winner *Children Of Time* and the *Sunday Times* bestseller *Shards Of Earth*.

Blunt-fingered hands signal and that stretcher is hauled deeper into hell where the devils can get to work with saw and tongs. The woman with the shattered arm, she can be saved. She goes to the foreigner with the shimmer skin, staring up with eyes pulled so taut it's a wonder her lids will ever close again. The gutshot man can be saved. He's placed in the far corner for a scouring and a working over, back where a weird old man plays a weird old pipe, skirling and squalling on it as though mocking the screams of the afflicted. It's all a part of the service. A necessary component of this precise and exacting hell the Butcher built.

Those are the highest priority, where a little delay means the difference between live victim and corpse. Now it's time for the Butcher's second magic. His apron is not that of a friendly family butcher. There are twenty pockets in the leather, each with a flap to keep the worst of the ambient weather out, though most have an inch of red at the bottom of them by now. He goes down the line of the brutalised, his blunt fingers finding phials and bottles by long habit, feeling for the nicks he cuts in the corks, to tell him concentrations and active ingredients. A personal lovelanguage of agony and alchemy. The woman without a hand has had the stump cauterised – not battlefield medicine but the side effects of a point-blank baton discharge. She'll keep. He forces the lip of a glass phial to her lips. She chokes, swallows. Her screams fall inwards until their scrabbling fingertips can't reach her lips any more and she's silent. He goes down the line, a bespoke service for each, this philtre or that, based on wound, on whim, on the individual predilections of his busy hands that seem to act on their own recognizance. Sometimes he salts the wounds with powder, stuff that burns and eats away necrotised flesh, undoes the work of energies and corruption or at least staves it off for long enough.

For a couple, the man whose skull is a puzzle with too few pieces, the woman whose innards are not only no longer in but entirely absent, he gives a double dose from the black flask. It's not to quiet them. Or it's not only to quiet them. And the noise doesn't get to the Butcher any more. He's been doing this for years.

The man whose spine and pelvis have shrapnelled out through his skin gets a triple dose. He doesn't need quieting. He's wide awake, obviously feeling every shard and chip and razor-edged piece of himself that cuts a little more with each breath, but the screaming has gone out of him. He's already passed into a silence so greedy that not even the gravity of the Butcher can pull a whimper from him.

Last he comes to the woman with the badly set leg. It's a mess. Someone thought they were helping, is the Butcher's guess. Some infantry regular with pretensions of erudition. It's not just that they clamped the leg straight with the jagged ends side by side, like they were trying to use the leg bones to splint each other. It's that the backwash of necromancy from the munition has already fused the broken stumps into a needle-spined fist of conjoined bone. Leave it like that, she'll need more than a cane.

The Butcher looks back along the line. It's under control, at least until the next consignment of stretchers comes in. Behind

him, in the bowels of hell, his devils are at work. Cutting, flaying, rending; stitching, severing, scouring; decanting, disenchanting, decontaminating. Practising each their own particular arts, a collection of miscreants and misfits not otherwise seen this side of the army paymaster's rolls. And they know what they're doing. He doesn't need to micromanage them, nor would he even know how in most cases. But this: this he knows.

One heavy hand comes up with a blade: what's a butcher without a knife, after all? He slits away the splint. Beneath it, the breeches are already a sopping ruin. He scowls, the fist of his face tightening further. A jagged gash up the inner thigh that he hadn't even seen, because the professional insult of the badly set leg had demanded his attention. She's been bleeding out all this time.

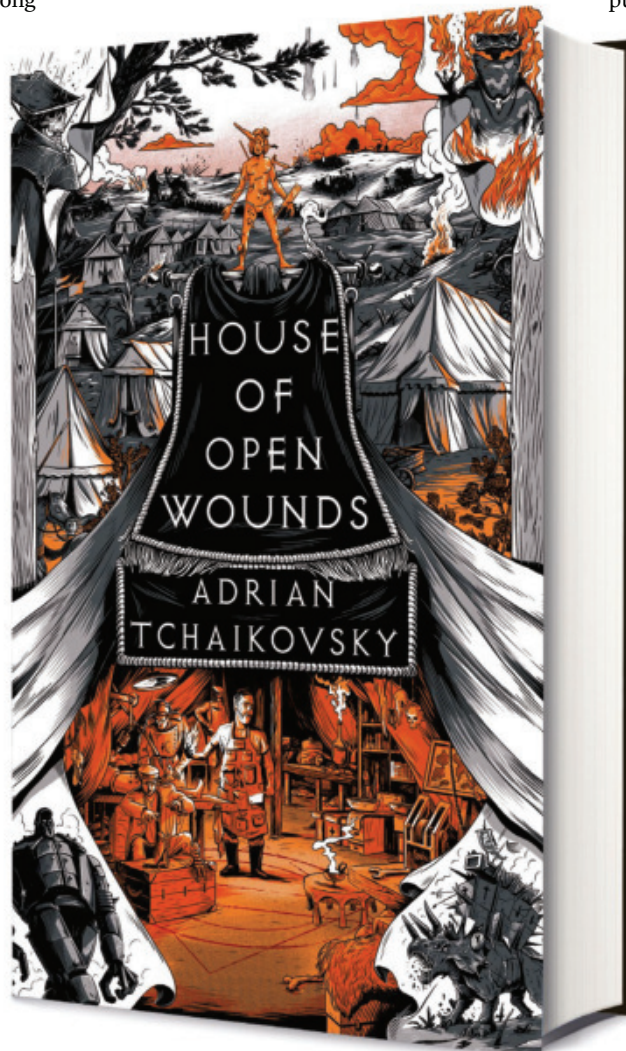
He looks around quickly. Somehow Alv always knows when he's after her. She's just finished up with someone. Her arm is a mangled mess. One of her assistants is putting it in a sling and her face goes

tight every time he jostles her. No screams from Alv. No loss of control, not now, not ever, not her. Just that tightness, like an ambassador who's been served the wrong kind of canapes but won't make a fuss. The ragged ends of her arm grind as the man fumbles the sling. Another tautening of Alv's glitter-skin features. The shout of her foreignness here in a room where most everyone is of one nation.

She comes over, trailing attendants. They're all bloodied. They've been in the wars, if not first-hand then vicariously. He shows her the woman's wound. Alv's tight face tightens a whole extra notch. She's not got much left to give. She nods. Alv is like a goddess personifying grudging adherence to duty. Although perhaps not that much like, given that there are at least two actual deities currently in the tent and assisting with proceedings.

The Butcher is a good Pallesean soldier. He has no religion. But he'll use it, if it works for him.

Read more in House Of Open Wounds, the epic new fantasy novel from Adrian Tchaikovsky, author of the BSFA award-winning City Of Last Chances – out 7 December.





HIM

The messiah reimagined

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 DECEMBER**

366 pages | Paperback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Geoff Ryman

► Publisher Angry Robot

➤ **Even those of us without faith** grow up surrounded by religion. In the UK, the language of the King James Bible permeates everyday conversation. We draw on the parables of Jesus, however we might interpret them, when making arguments. The sight of a church in the centre of a community is familiar, reassuring. For all that it's said that Christianity is in decline in Britain, this is a living, breathing and still evolving religion.

Importantly, for reasons Geoff Ryman discusses in this issue's interview (see page 82) in relation to African SFF novels, this isn't a fantastic belief system; when we look at Bible stories, we're not delving into a secondary world.

Rather, we need to recognise we're dealing with a shared cultural history that plays into the present and future, an ongoing process, as well as with the inherent mystery and mysticism of Bible stories. We mention all this

because Ryman's extraordinary new novel tackles the Greatest Story Ever Told, the life of Jesus. It does so not in the spirit of a musty sermon, but by taking us back to the stink and the dust of Nazareth at a time when religious debates are central to the intellectual culture – and can get the incautious killed.

It also offers us – and let's get this out of the way now – a transgender messiah. It says much about the potency of Ryman's writing that this never comes across as tricky or a provocation, but seems inherently natural, growing from Ryman picking his way carefully through Biblical texts and meeting a character asserting their true nature.

Maryam, the mother of Avigayil, later renamed Yeshu, finds this transgender identity difficult. Her husband, the exiled scholar Yosef – a man equal parts mystic and good-hearted but impractical pain in the arse – adapts to Yeshu the boy; Maryam battles with her eldest child.

While she seems remarkably relaxed about the notion of a baby who came into the world as the result of parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction), Maryam is in

mourning for her eldest daughter. Not that day-to-day life is filled up with much time for reflection, as the first half of *Him* shows us Maryam and Yosef as people laid low by circumstance, but finding a kind of salvation in the everyday, in family and community.

While they have little actual money, they have cultural capital, which Yosef passes to Yeshu, a rebellious scamp who leads the village boys and works with his brother as an apprentice carpenter, by sharing his learning.

It's knowledge Yeshu will draw on when he begins his ministry – the subject of the second half of the novel. Although perhaps that's a misleading way to think about how Ryman shows us the comparatively short period when Yeshu heads out on the road to preach and, reluctantly, perform miracles. While we often think of Yeshu as someone who proselytised, bringing the word of God to man, the Yeshu of *Him* is a

“Ryman makes us see the power of Christ's Passion anew”

figure who has to teach God about being human.

This is also a novel about the women who surround Yeshu. These include his sister Babatha, who as a young woman seems materialistic and shallow to the point of being almost a comic turn, yet through her own struggles, which have subtle echoes of those of her brother, learns empathy and compassion.

By the final pages, Ryman has done something remarkable: to make us see the power and the potency of Christ's Passion anew. The final pages are brilliant yet devastating, a reminder that, whatever our personal beliefs, our shared foundation stories have a potency that carries down into the present and, generation after generation, have the power to make us look at the world differently. **Jonathan Wright**

i The question of whether Jesus had siblings is debated, but some traditions suggest he grew up in a fairly large family.



THE GILDED CROWN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Marianne Gordon

► Publisher HarperVoyager

➤ **The well-worn phrase “No good deed goes unpunished”** proves most apposite for Hellevir, the heroine of Marianne Gordon's impressive debut novel. As a young girl, Hellevir discovers that she can visit Death and (at a cost) bring back those who have recently passed on. That's not a secret that's easy to keep, and Hellevir becomes entangled with the royal house of De Neid when she resurrects Sullivain, princess and heir to the crown, following an assassination.

Hellevir makes a compelling protagonist, someone who holds remarkable power yet feels utterly out of her depth trying to navigate court intrigues, plots of rebellion and threats against her family. Then there's the clash between Hellevir's rustic faith and the dominance of a powerful religious cult that regards her as a heretic, adding further depth to a story populated by vibrant characters.

The imagining of Hellevir's encounters with Death proves similarly immersive, conjuring a dark, bone-chilling void, a stark contrast to the bustle and colours of the living world. Gordon skillfully presents her heroine with intractable dilemmas to solve, including Hellevir's relationship with Sullivain, a tangled knot of desire and fear that's sure to pull readers back for the next volume. Terrific. **David West**



THE GHOSTS OF BEATRICE BIRD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Louisa Morgan

► Publisher Orbit Books

☞ “Ghost” is a word with many connotations – both the scary, chain-rattling, dead-but-still-here-and-not-happy-about-it kind, and the type we are all haunted by, the remnants of people both living and dead who stay with us every day.

Therapist Beatrice Bird, unfortunately, knows not just her own but those of everyone around her. After a childhood gift for empathy develops to a psychic extreme in adulthood, she is eventually unable to walk down a street without being assailed by the pain and trauma of everyone around her.

She retreats to a small island where she can be alone, but it's not long until the arrival of Annie Iredale, haunted by ghosts of both the traumatic and chain-rattling kinds, forces Beatrice to work with her gift again, however painful.

Set largely in 1977, this is an old-fashioned feminist book in which we're reminded just how recently it was that “Women's Lib” was a radical concept. Beatrice's independence contrasts with the beaten-down spark of Annie, raised to always see herself as inferior and unable to stand on her own.

Unfortunately large parts of the book feel like an overlong therapy session themselves, as the two women tell each other their life stories, but a tense build-up to a thrilling climax redeems it.

Rhian Drinkwater



THE LOST CAUSE

How to save the world

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

368 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Cory Doctorow

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

☞ **What will the world look like in 30 years' time?** In Cory Doctorow's latest take on the near future, the problems caused by global heating are an everyday fact of life. Refugees from blighted zones are on the move. Plutocrats, meanwhile, are living out on the high seas, safe from government interference, and hawking cryptocurrencies.

But in a novel offering a deeply political take on the future, there are grounds for optimism. People have acknowledged the sheer scale of the crisis and are taking action. Disaster relief has developed to the point where it's somewhere between an art and a science – and increasingly necessary in a time when rising sea levels are engulfing cities.

It may seem dystopian, but this is the world teenager Brooks Palazzo, who lives in the Californian city of Burbank, calls home. Upbeat to a degree that may irritate some readers – and you would guess this is deliberate, a way to confront older readers with our occasional exasperation at the

young – Brooks just wants to help other people.

As we see with our politics today, however, not everyone accepts the need for change. Brooks is an orphan, the child of idealists, but someone who's been raised by his deeply reactionary Gramps. Even as the crisis deepens, the MAGA faction in American politics is fighting a rearguard action. Out in the country, ageing white men who like guns are slowly morphing into terrorists.

As Burbank becomes central to a clash between two very different views of the world, Doctorow is also dramatising a clash between generations. Brooks and his friends are problem-solvers who instinctively try to build consensus and get teams working together. The old, by contrast, are atomised, victims in this way of a capitalist system they want to reinstate.

Is Doctorow being too utopian here? Perhaps, but as with the latter work of Kim Stanley Robinson, this is a novel that not only deftly asks how we can build a better world, but sketches out how we might do so.

Jonathan Wright

i You can listen to the prologue and first chapter of *The Lost Cause* via Doctorow's podcast: bit.ly/lostaudio.



WHAT THE RIVER KNOWS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Isabel Ibañez

► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

☞ **The final resting place of Cleopatra** is one of the biggest mysteries in Egyptology, and her tomb provides the MacGuffin at the centre of this enjoyable YA adventure.

In 19th century Buenos Aires, Inez Olivera is devastated to hear that her parents are missing, presumed dead, in the Egyptian desert. Breaking with societal convention, she sails to Egypt alone to learn the truth – but upon her arrival in Cairo, her uncle responds with anger and demands she return home. Unfazed, Inez must wrangle him and his annoying assistant Mr Hayes, while she investigates – led on by the magical echo of Cleopatra.

Despite its interesting historical themes – an Egypt basically being pilfered of all its relics – *What the River Knows* is largely a romance novel as, against her better judgement, Inez starts to fall for Mr Hayes.

Which brings us to a small issue: chapters written from his POV feel intrusive and flat. He works far better as a character when only seen through Inez's eyes; she's an excellent narrator. Elsewhere, occasional modern phrasing (“The man could hustle”, about someone walking quickly, for example) jerk you out of the story, but not enough to irritate. A few plot twists loom large before they happen too, but nevertheless this is a fun, pleasingly rich romantic romp. **Jayne Nelson**

THE ART OF THE CREATOR

What's it all about? *Alphie*

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

208 pages | Hardback

► Author **James Mottram**

► Publisher **Titan Books**

➔ **Director Gareth Edwards** admits in his foreword that Making Ofs were integral to his cinematic education, and it's easy to imagine this exploration of his latest film, *The Creator*, inspiring a new generation of talent. While books of movie art can often feel like they're going through the motions, James Mottram's in-depth tome (subtitled *Designs Of Futures Past*) has a genuine

story to tell, thanks to the unique nature of a visual effects-heavy blockbuster made with the guerrilla sensibilities of Edwards's 2010 debut *Monsters*.

Filming predominantly on location in Thailand, Edwards took a "shoot first, ask questions later" approach, as he and production designer James Clyne built their futuristic world around what was captured on camera. Appropriately, the two are the most prominent voices in the book, and their enthusiasm for finding new ways to make movies is infectious.

The book is also as beautiful to

look at as *The Creator* itself, loaded with pages of sci-fi hardware that wouldn't feel out of place in a James Cameron film. In fact, there's so much here that some topics – particularly the flawless CG artistry that turned human actors into Simulants like *Alphie* (brilliantly played by newcomer Madeleine Yuna Voyles) – can feel underexplored.

Nonetheless, this is a wonderful celebration of a movie that set out to break the Hollywood mould.

Richard Edwards

i Manga inspired the tank designs. "We kept thinking, 'One day, we want to have a Bandai model of this,'" says Edwards.



THE SECOND CHANCE YEAR

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 DECEMBER**

336 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Melissa Wiesner**

► Publisher **Headline Eternal**

➔ **It's hard to imagine wanting** to live through any of the last few years again – wasn't it bad enough the first time? But for pastry chef Sadie, it seems like a good idea.

During her last year, she was dumped by her boyfriend and fired from her posh restaurant job. Now she lives in a friend's spare room and spends her days eating ice cream on the sofa. Surely, knowing what she knows now, she could do things better? After a drunken encounter with a fortune teller on New Year's Eve, she gets her wish. But are second chances all they're cracked up to be?

Because Sadie relives an entire year, and only the once, this is an interesting twist on the usual *Groundhog Day* formula. She can remember some things that happened to her last time around, but not everything; and if she makes any mistakes on her second go, she's stuck with them.

The whole book has the gentle vibe of a Hallmark Christmas movie, only minus the vaguely religious underpinning and with a lot more feminist cred. Sadie's tendency to think in cake metaphors will either charm or infuriate you, but the romance is really very sweet – and perfectly tempered with millennial angst and a clear-eyed view of wider social issues. A feel-good treat.

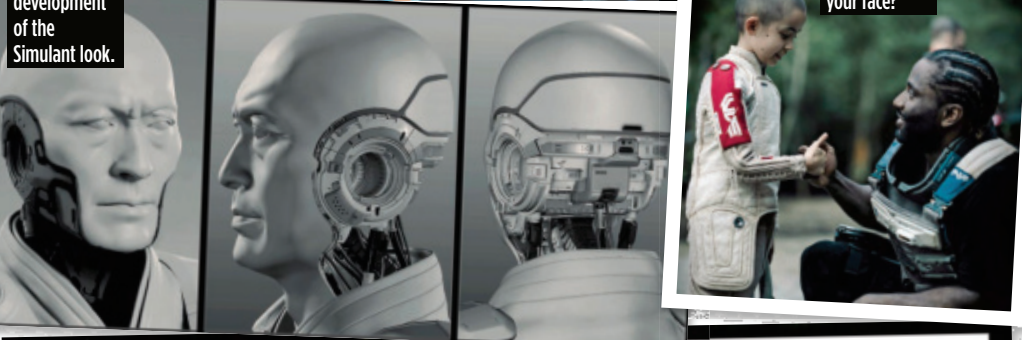
Sarah Dobbs



Stages in the development of the Simulant look.

Shooting for *Lilac City* took place in Bangkok.

"Hey, do you know you have stuff on your face?"



Joshua's Special Forces outfit concept designs.



WHOTOPIA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

324 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Writers Jonathan Morris,

Simon Guerrier, Una McCormack

► Publisher BBC Books

◉ **Subtitled *The Ultimate Guide To The Whoniverse***, this is an impressively comprehensive guide to the world of *Doctor Who* – though only the on-screen version. Everything here is written “in-universe”, so if it’s actors or anecdotes you’re interested in, this isn’t the book for you.

It’s divided into sections of Heroes, Villains, Monsters, Machines, Worlds and Technology, further split into subsections and past, present and future, with entries for everything from the First Doctor to the Eighth Master, as well as King Hydroflax (Villains Of Space>Megalomaniacs), Giant Maggots (Monsters of Earth>Present-day Threats) and many, many more.

Whotopia covers the whole of Classic and New *Who* (pre-60th anniversary specials), and clearly a huge amount of work has gone into it. Many of the entries are written in the voice of the person listed, and they’re generally very well done, capturing the tone so well you can hear the actor’s voice.

But who is this book for? Long-term fans will find little new here, while the in-universe style means many entries will be meaningless to anyone who hasn’t watched the relevant episode. We’ll admit that it’s fun reading a single entry for say, the Daleks, though, and realising just how convoluted a timeline different species and characters have been given over the decades. **Rhian Drinkwater**



DAVID WHITAKER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

456 pages | Paperback

► Author Simon Guerrier

► Publisher Ten Acre Films

◉ **David Whitaker was *Doctor Who***’s first story editor, commissioning and writing early scripts for William Hartnell (and penning further stories as a freelancer, including Patrick Troughton’s debut).

Beyond that, he’s long been an enigmatic blank. Simon Guerrier’s biography (subtitled *In An Exciting Adventure With Television*) goes to remarkable lengths to address that – 42 pages of citations bear witness to his exhaustive research. He’s clearly spent days at the BBC Written Archives; hunted through census records; scoured papers ranging from *The Times* to the *Bedfordshire Mercury*; read family memoirs.

On amassing such a pile of data, it’s tempting to include too much, and the results can get hard-going. Interesting tidbits are scattered here and here, but no bombshells – nothing that transforms your understanding of the series.

For most witnesses, Whitaker was an unobtrusive presence. And while his life had its problems – most notably, a career-blighting poison-pen campaign resulting from a trip to Moscow as a delegate for the Writers’ Guild – it’s not exactly the stuff of high drama.

As a work of scholarship, the book is deeply impressive. As an entertaining read, it falls short. Its value lies more in its status as a monument. David Whitaker’s contribution to *Who*’s success was vital; we can now say that has, finally, been fully recognised. **Calvin Baxter**



AND... ACTION! MY LIFE IN TELEVISION

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

233 pages | Hardback

► Author Andrew Morgan

► Publisher Telos Publishing

◉ **Andrew Morgan began** his career with the hope of becoming an actor, but ended up on the other side of the camera instead. As a director he steered an impressive number of British TV shows, including *Doctor Who* and *Blake’s 7*.

And... Action! begins by recounting Morgan’s school days (brutal, by the sounds of it) before swiftly moving into work. The bulk of the book is a show-by-show account of everything from big hitters like *Sherlock Holmes* to obscurities like *Who Pays The Ferryman?*

The parts of most interest to *SFX* readers concern Morgan’s involvement in *Doctor Who*. He was initially offered Fifth Doctor snoozeathon “Time Flight”, but turned it down. When showrunner John Nathan-Turner pitched him another serial a few years later, Morgan felt obliged to accept the gig. Unfortunately that story was the dreadful “Time And The Rani”...

Redemption was around the corner, however. The following year Morgan directed “Remembrance of the Daleks”, recently voted the show’s ninth best story ever. He was able to help the cash-strapped series achieve something impressive.

And... Action! is an always readable snapshot of a faded time in TV, even if it’s more notable for its straightforward depiction of life as a jobbing director than for any juicy gossip.

Will Salmon



ALIENS: BISHOP

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 DECEMBER**

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/

audiobook

► Author TR Napper

► Publisher Titan Books

◉ **A follow-up to the original** *Alien* trilogy, *Aliens: Bishop* arrives with a title that appears to be doing exactly what it says on the synthetic skin – resurrecting a fan-favourite character, before shoving them out onto the spin-off assembly line. But this book has more moving parts, with the title having three potential interpretations by the end.

There’s the obvious: it’s named after Lance Henriksen’s character in *Aliens*, introduced here ready to be shut down after all that he’s seen. There’s the twist, as the android’s dad, Michael Bishop, pops up to weaponise what’s inside Bishop’s brain. And there’s also a final reading, which we won’t spoil here.

Whatever the title means, *Aliens: Bishop* is a timely exploration of artificial intelligence and modern geopolitics, with added Colonial Marines (our POV character is Private Karri Lee, a sensitive Australian who’s signed up to save her family from poverty), pulse rifles and, yes, hissing xenomorphs.

Because as thoughtful as the book is, it doesn’t forget the first titular designation comes from the greatest sci-fi action movie in the universe. There are 86 short chapters and a sequel-tease epilogue, which gives you a sense of how fast-paced it is. If you’re a fan (and it’ll be impenetrable to anyone else), *Bishop* rewards your franchise faith. **Sam Ashurst**

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



STAR TREK: LOWER DECKS — CREW HANDBOOK

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

89 pages | Hardback

► Author Chris Farnell

► Publisher Titan Books

- Designed as a guidebook for new crew members. Don't expect a serious manual – as with the show, comedy is to the forefront.
- Includes a detailed guide to series lore and, as you might expect, it's very picture-led.
- There are brief character profiles, presented in the form of log entries.
- There's also a loose guide to the USS Cerritos' journeys to date – not including season four – alongside a pretty impressive schematic of the ship.
- The crew appear throughout via a series of annotations and corrections on the “unfinished” document. It's in keeping with the show, and works if you like your *Star Trek* wacky.



COMIC BOOK PUNKS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

485 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Karl Stock

► Publisher Rebellion

✚ **The Sex Pistols told us** there was “No future”. Ironical, then, that *2000 AD*, presented here as one of the key parallels between the punk revolution and an equally explosive shift in British comics, gave us the most thrilling future imaginable.

Karl Stock charts the history of the industry with a focus on the '70s to the '90s, showing how a generation of creators shook up the local newsagent before exporting their ferocious energy, black humour and sharp intelligence to the USA. While the likes of *Action*, *2000 AD* and *Battle* are acknowledged as the progenitors of everything from *Watchmen* to *Deadline*, Stock makes a case that the “opening salvo” was actually *Tammy*, a girls' weekly with gritty, working class heroines.

There's plenty of similar insight in these comprehensive, well-researched pages, along with fascinating first-hand accounts. Some essential voices are missing – there are no new quotes from Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman or Grant Morrison – but less celebrated names like Peter Milligan provide perspectives that feel every bit as valuable as the big guns.

Ultimately this long overdue retrospective tells a rise and fall story. Dave Gibbons strikes an optimistic note about the future of British comics, but there's a lingering feeling that a golden age is being filed away in the longbox. **Nick Setchfield**



GOOD GIRLS DON'T DIE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Paperback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Christina Henry

► Publisher Titan Books

✚ **Celia finds herself trapped** in a picture-perfect small town where there's been a murder. Allie gets dragged to a cabin in the woods with her friends where a man with a knife kills them one by one, and Maggie's being forced to run through an elaborate *Hunger Games*-style arena, with lethal obstacles lurking round every corner.

Each of them knows her way around her individual scenario scarily well – they've all been dropped into fictional worlds of their favourite kind – but now, someone wants them to prove it... About as high-concept as it gets, Christina Henry's mystery novel digs into the tropes of cosy crime, slashers and post-apocalyptic dystopia, and finds misogyny lurking just below the surface. Even her final girls aren't immune, with each of them falling prey to some pretty woman-hating thoughts at times.

Along the way, the ills of social media and tech bro culture also get yanked out into the light. The thing is, once all of that is established, it's impossible for the story to resolve itself satisfactorily. With subtext made text, all of these issues are too evidently deep-rooted for any solution to seem plausible; what we get instead just seems kind of silly. What began as a howl of rage fades away, leaving just a hopeless grimace of frustration.

Sarah Dobbs

ALSO OUT

As ever, there's plenty more titles we couldn't fit in. This week's “new spin on *Peter Pan*” (okay, slight exaggeration, but doesn't it feel like there have been loads?) is **NEVER** (5 December, Orion).

Jessa Hastings's fantasy romance sees Peter finally coming for Daphne Darling (granddaughter of Wendy) when she's 17. Expect a love triangle between the two of them and Jamison Hook, pirate son of Peter's nemesis.

Erika Johansen's **THE KINGDOM OF SWEETS** (out now, Bantam), meanwhile, reimagines another classic story: Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* (or, if you prefer, ETA Hoffmann's short story). A dark, creepy take, it's centred on the embittered relationship between twin sisters Clara and Natasha. The mysterious disappearance of 37 miners in a titanium mine is the focus of Justin Holley's sci-fi horror **HELLWEG'S KEEP** (out now, Flame Tree Press).

The investigating FBI agent discovers evidence of occult practices and manifestations of strange phenomena. Remember last year's illustrated edition of the first *Doctor Who* novel, *Doctor Who And The Daleks*? Russell T Davies's 2018 novelisation of the episode which revived the series,

DOCTOR WHO: ROSE (out now, BBC Books) has been given the same treatment. This large-format hardback (roughly 20cm by 25cm by 5cm) features new artwork by comic artist Robert Hack. Finally, “visual encyclopedia” **STRANGE AND UNSUNG ALL-STARS OF THE DC MULTIVERSE** (out now, Running Press)

focuses on some of the odder characters, such as Matter-Eater Lad and Arm-Fall-Off-Boy.





Patrick Rothfuss

The creator of *The Kingkiller Chronicle* loves a knitted beard...



JAMIE ROTHFUSS

Do you have any personal mementos on your desk?

► Right now I have some prototype coins from my world here. I'm a geek for currency, and I work with a place called Shire Post. They're a family business, and we're both the same sort of crazy. They're always willing to roll with whatever madness I throw at them, and have developed new technology and processes to make various coins. My readers enjoy them too, and I sell a lot of them for charity.

Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

► Absolutely not. That's a horrifying thought. I wouldn't play a game on my computer while rendering graphic files in the background, or running Photoshop. There's no way the game is going to run better with less processing power... No. I use my brain when I write, and I want all of it available. I don't want part of it off listening to music or thinking about lyrics instead.

Is there anything about one of your books which you wish you could travel back in time and "fix"?

► I used a piece of British slang I'd heard on *Red Dwarf*. I thought "bint" was just an odd, archaic piece of speech that meant "idiot". Turns out it's a racist slur...

Even though not a lot of folk know that, and I only used it once, I felt like a huge asshole. Luckily, the publisher was happy to change it in later editions.

Have you ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

► Oh god no. Nobody has. Ever. You know how excruciating it is when someone wants to tell you about their dream? That's because dreams don't make sense. They're not rational. The plot of a book needs to make sense to everyone. Dreams only make sense to you.

Recommend one book that you love, but that's not very well known.

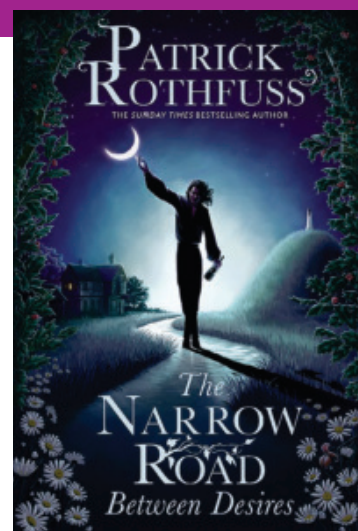
► I'm always surprised when people haven't heard of *The Last Unicorn* [by Peter S Beagle], or think it's only a movie. It's one of the great masterworks in the fantasy genre. The language is

amazing. The story is... It defies description. It's heartbreaking and beautiful and I love it.

What's the best gift you've ever received from a reader?

► Whoof. There have been a lot of these. There's no way I could pick a favourite, but there's one that I remember fondly. I was on a signing tour for *The Wise Man's Fear*. Hundreds of folks showed up. Long lines.

After a couple of hours, two college-aged women came to the front of the line wearing... well, they had knitted Viking helmets, but instead of chinstraps, they had big full beards underneath (also knitted). They looked ridiculous, and we all laughed like crazy people. Afterwards they took them

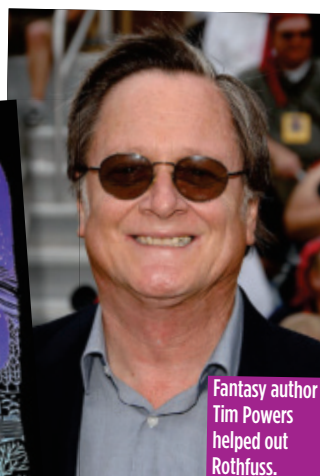


off and gave them to me to take home to my kids, so that when I got back we could all hang out and have beards together. It was a very sweet gift, and when I got home, that's exactly what I did.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?

► Back in the day, I was having a breakdown because I was going to miss my deadlines for the second book, and I was worried I was ruining my career. Tim Powers talked me down on the phone, saying, "It's late once, but it's bad forever." True words. ☹

Kingkiller Chronicle novella *The Narrow Road Between Desires* is out now, published by Gollancz.



Fantasy author Tim Powers helped out Rothfuss.

THE PENGUIN

Bird of prey

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Tom King**

► Artist **Rafael de Latorre**

ISSUES 1-3 In the extensive

Rogues' Gallery of *Batman* villains, the Penguin has always been a bit of an outlier – iconic enough to be well-known, but not as immediately cool as the Joker, Catwoman or the Riddler. However, in the wake of Colin Farrell's more grounded take on the character in *The Batman*, DC are now giving the character a reinvention and truly making him a force to be reckoned with.

This new ongoing series follows current *Batman* continuity, and picks up with gangster Oswald Cobblepot exiled to a quiet married life in Metropolis, having

lost his crime empire.

Unfortunately, a government agent decides to use the Penguin's new wife as leverage, taking her hostage and blackmailing him into wresting back control of Gotham's underworld on her behalf – a decision that's already looking like it's going to have *extremely* bad consequences...

While writer Tom King does heavily reference his entertaining recent *Batman* miniseries *Killing Time* (especially when the Penguin enlists the assistance of "the Help", a brilliantly intimidating butler), these first three issues show that this is a much darker narrative proposition, closer to King's pitch-black reinvention of the Riddler in the *One Bad Day* series.

The tone of the storytelling is deliberately restrained and

low-key, highlighting the Penguin's methodical scheming and (when necessary) his unflinching brutality. The decision to tell the story from multiple perspectives helps with this, with each scene narrated by a different character – but never by the Penguin himself.

Cobblepot thus remains an unknown quantity, which gives the comic a genuine sense of menace that's bolstered by the careful slow-burn pacing, and also makes the occasional moments of shocking violence even more impactful.

Rafael de Latorre's art gives us a take on the main character that's both realistic and unsettling. Not all comic artists can handle lengthy dialogue sequences, but de Latorre takes them in his stride, keeping the atmosphere grounded

“Much more of a noir-influenced crime thriller than a superhero story”

and restrained, while also adding cinematic touches and building tension throughout.

Aside from a brief appearance by *Batman* in issue one (in a doomy flash-forward), this is much more of a bleak, noir-influenced crime thriller than a superhero story, and the oppressive, hard-edged atmosphere isn't going to be for everyone.

But for those who like their Gotham-related comics to lean more towards dark psychology than two-fisted action, this new series is already shaping up to be a seriously intriguing experience.

Saxon Bullock

i King is currently acting as one of the "creative architects" for James Gunn's upcoming DC Universe movies.



PETE TOWNSHEND'S LIFEHOUSE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 19 DECEMBER**

► Publisher **Image Comics**

► Writers **James Harvey, David Hine**

► Artists **David Hine, Max Prentis**

GRAPHIC NOVEL In 1970, The

Who's Pete Townshend conceived an ambitious multimedia rock opera called *Lifehouse*, set in a polluted future where rock music no longer existed and human experience was administered intravenously. There was only one problem: no one except Townshend understood it.

Trying to communicate *Lifehouse* to others drove the guitarist to a nervous breakdown, and the best songs were diverted onto a conventional LP, 1971's *Who's Next*. To coincide with a lavish Super Deluxe edition reissue of *Who's Next*, his concepts have been rendered into this graphic novel – included in that box set, but also available separately.

James Harvey and David Hine have not just brought coherence to Townshend's ideas, they've weaved them into something lively, compelling and very enjoyable. The vision of a bleak, empty London, filled with dreams long since gone sour, feels of a piece with the moment Townshend came up with it, and the artwork by Hine and Max Prentis has a pop art richness.

Ultimately it's a fascists-vs-rebels dystopian trip with some smart and interesting spins, rather than the life-changing experience Townshend wanted it to be. But *Lifehouse* finally works. **Eddie Robson**



With a name like that, he should be Lancastrian.



PROJECT: CRYPTID

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Ahoy Comics**

► Writer/artists **Various**

ISSUES 1-3 Drawing on real-life reports of mythical creatures, this eclectic anthology title approaches the beasts from a sympathetic angle, often casting humans as the bad guys.

Mark Russell's opening tale in issue one stars one of the best-known cryptids in the Yeti, and comes to a predictable but still powerful ending, enhanced by Jordi Pérez's moody art. In contrast, the issue's second half, a Paul Cornell and PJ Holden tale about the Mongolian Death Worm, brims with screwball humour and ends on a poignant, sweet note.

This is echoed by the equally heart-warming conclusion of Alisa Kwitney and Mauricet's "Chupahuahua" in issue two. Solidly illustrated by Steve Bryant, Alex Segura's enthralling "Diana Montalvan And The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker" is the least fantastical offering to date, centred on the titular paranormal investigator.

Issue three benefits from having sumptuous art for both stories by Peter Krause, with Bryce Ingman's oddball "The Loveland Frogman Never Did Anything" standing out; Paul Constant's "Demon In The Pines", a historical tale about the bear-like Gumboro, also has a wry irony to it.

All three issues so far also include an instalment of round-robin prose story "Partially Naked Came The Corpse!" – although annoyingly, you'd have to buy other Ahoy Comics to enjoy it in its entirety.

Stephen Jewell



BIG GAME

Massive Millar mash-up

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Image Comics**

► Writer **Mark Millar**

► Artist **Pepe Larraz**

ISSUES 1-5 Bringing together over 20 of Millarworld's properties into a blockbuster crossover is an impressive achievement in itself, and on the whole this five-parter all works admirably as a typically bombastic, entertaining read – although there's nothing here as ingenious as the recent *Nemesis Reloaded*'s big reveal that the world is secretly controlled by a cabal of supervillains.

Harking back to 2004's first actual Millarworld title, *Big Game* builds on that revelation, as *Wanted*'s Wesley Gibson and the Fraternity, in cahoots with *Nemesis*, set out to exterminate the superpowered individuals that have started popping up all over the planet of late.

“Promising a high body count, Millar definitely delivers”

Nominating himself as the US representative of global super-team the Ambassadors, Dave Lizewski from *Kick-Ass* is very much the heart and soul of the story, while former partner Hit-Girl turns out to be one of the biggest threats to the sinister new world order. Significant roles are also played by the Chrononauts, *Kingsman*'s Eggsy and *Prodigy*'s Edison Crane, while others like Sharkey the Bounty Hunter are restricted to fleeting cameos.

Making a wry reference to *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, Millar provides some astute commentary about the nature of superhero comics. Promising a high body count, he definitely delivers: some major characters meet gruesome ends, although that is partially undermined by issue five's rather-too-neat dénouement.

Turning in some impressively detailed spreads, Pepe Larraz deftly handles the large cast, and proves adept at depicting the frequent carnage. It will be interesting to see where Millar goes from here. **Stephen Jewell**

i Mark Millar is intending to take time off from Millarworld next year to write a *Superman* series which he has an idea for.



NEMESIS THE WARLOCK Volume One

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 DECEMBER**

► Publisher **Rebellion**

► Writer **Pat Mills**

► Artists **Kevin O'Neill, Jesus Redondo**

COLLECTION One of 2000 AD's weirdest and most acclaimed sagas is finally coming back into print via a new series of remastered, larger-format Definitive Edition collections. *Nemesis The Warlock* displays the comic's punk-influenced spirit in full effect as the titular alien freedom-fighter fights back against a xenophobic human empire.

It's a fast-paced, bizarre adventure that blends sci-fi with dark fantasy, and this first of five volumes uses its oversized pages to showcase the turbo-charged madness of the late Kevin O'Neill's gorgeously grotesque art.

While Pat Mills's scripts feature his usual sharp blend of action, twisted concepts and pitch-black humour, it's O'Neill's jaw-dropping art that pushes *Nemesis* into the legendary category. From the bizarre, attention-grabbing design of *Nemesis* himself to the insane, undead antagonist Torquemada and the Gothic fantasia of Termight (a far-future Earth), O'Neill's pages are astonishing stuff.

While it's not all *Nemesis* at its best – book two, drawn by Jesus Redondo, lacks the startling weirdness of O'Neill's work – it's still a wild and compulsive start to a landmark in British comics storytelling.

Saxon Bullock

ALAN WAKE II

Pen: mightier than shotgun

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PS5

► Also available on Xbox Series S/X, PC

► Publisher Epic Games

VIDEOGAME Thirteen years have passed since the first part in this Stephen King-inspired action-horror series, and troubled writer Alan Wake has been trapped in the “Dark Place” that whole time. The malevolent presence within feeds off art, but Alan is able to twist his own fiction in order to write himself back into the real world, and hopefully write the Dark Presence out for good.

The catch? Alan’s reality-bending fiction must follow the genre conventions of what came before, and he’s trapped in horror. Using tropes from his past as a mass market crime fiction author, he follows the trail of Alex Casey,

the fictional detective who made him famous, investigating grisly murders through a nightmarish Dark Place vision of New York, rain-slick and neon-lit. Meanwhile, back in reality, FBI agents Saga Anderson and Alex Casey (who not only shares a name with Alan’s creation, but a face too) are investigating a series of inexplicable murders in Bright Falls, the Twin Peaks-esque sleepy town Alan disappeared from.

You play as both Alan and Saga (able to switch freely most of the time), with the game revelling in the connections between these two threads while leaving plenty to infer. Gameplay is consistent enough for this to avoid feeling jarring, but the differences between them make going back and forth fresh. Instead of neon streets and ghostly shadows shuffling towards Alan, Saga

worms through larger forested areas with more aggressive enemies and a larger arsenal.

Both areas are gorgeous yet creepy, with thick darkness throughout. That plays into combat too, where you have to shine a torch on enemies to make them vulnerable before unloading lead. The non-stop action of the original is ditched in favour of fewer yet tougher, tenser encounters, with more limited resources, for an experience that skews closer to survival horror. However, a somewhat twitchy camera can be just as deadly, and boss mechanics may leave you groaning in annoyance rather than dread.

Live-action sequences are cleverly blended with impressive almost photo-real graphics, creating a great sense of a layered and bizarre reality. And importantly there’s still a sense of humour throughout, from public access-style ads on TVs scattered around to an unforgettable musical number. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

i Hang around in the cinema on completing “Initiation 8: Zane’s Film” to watch Finnish-language horror short “Yötön Yö”.



CHILDREN OF THE CIRCUS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

129 minutes | CD

► Publisher AUK Studios

AUDIO DRAMA With its killer clowns and robotic bus conductor, “The Greatest Show In The Galaxy” is one of the more memorable stories from Sylvester McCoy’s time in the TARDIS. This audio drama, which reunites the surviving cast, is a sequel, although direct references to *Doctor Who* are noticeable by their absence.

Unlicensed by the BBC, it’s very much a continuation of Stephen Wyatt’s original story rather than the series that spawned it. McCoy and co-star Sophie Aldred do feature, but playing unrelated characters.

The Gods of Ragnarok still exist, and the survivors of the Psychic Circus, Bellboy (Christopher Guard) and Flowerchild (Dee Sadler), have decided to take them down once and for all. To do so involves drawing their attention, and to do that they must put on a show – a musical, in fact.

Yes, there’s quite a lot of singing here. It’s clearly inspired in part by the likes of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*’s musical episode, with the characters as initially perplexed as we are about why everyone keeps bursting into song.

The vocals and production quality are good, but while they move the plot along, none of the numbers are particularly memorable. The story, too, is oddly lacking in threat, with the evil Gods kept off the board until very late in the story.

Will Salmon



FBI jumpers are known for their stylishness.

THE BOX OF DELIGHTS

Playing the Masefield



► **RUNNING UNTIL** 7 January

► Venue **Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon**

► Director **Justin Audibert**

STAGE PLAY With its mix of Car-o-Planes, Herne the Hunter, Christmas carols and crime capers, John Masefield's 1935 festive fantasy is a curious melange of seemingly disparate elements, which impressively come together in this energetic adaptation.

First performed in the intimate surroundings of London's Wilton's Music Hall in 2017, it's now moved to the larger expanse of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre stage. Director Justin Audibert deftly balances *War Horse*-style puppetry and dazzling video projections with more basic theatrical effects.

While much older than his character, Callum Balmforth brings a youthful exuberance to orphan Kay Harker, who is on his way home for the holidays when

he befriends enigmatic Punch and Judy man, Cole Hawlings. Played with a Doctor-esque magnanimity by Stephen Boxer, the ancient magician entrusts Kay with a



Portable DVD players were once regarded as cool.

“The streamlined script improves on the novel's cop-out ending”

magical box, which imbues him with the ability to shrink very small or fly swiftly like a bird. With her penchant for machine guns, Kay's fellow ward Maria would be more at home in a Roald Dahl drama, but Mae Munuo instils her with vibrant good humour, while you can't help but warm to Jack Humphrey as her “plank” of a brother Peter.

Completely ditching the time travel elements, Piers Torday's streamlined script actually improves on the novel's cop-out ending. Crucially, he also maintains much of its distinctive language, so you're guaranteed a scrobbling good time. **Stephen Jewell**

i The book was first adapted for the BBC's Children's Hour in 1943. John Gilpin, later a leading ballet dancer, played Kay.

THE INVINCIBLE

Lem Trip



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Format **PS5**

► Also on **PC, Xbox Series S/X**

► Publisher **11 Bit Studios**

VIDEOGAME *The Invincible* not only draws on Polish author Stanisław Lem's 1964 novel of the same name, but fittingly evolves into a broader love letter to Golden Age science fiction. Thankfully it's style and substance, as chrome rocket ships and janky, domed robots become a gateway to stream-of-conscious musings on nature, evolution and humankind's relationship with technology.

Sounds a bit heavy? Don't fear, *The Invincible* is ultimately a game of exploration, both of ideas and the planet of Regis III, as astrobiologist Yasna wakes on this planet X with no idea why she's

there or what has become of her crew. What follows is a journey of discovery across and below Regis III. Every noted clue, audio log and teased message followed results in a moon-framed hazy vista or painterly, sculpted mountain range.

Yasna's commander, left in orbit, offers help via a comms link, and the pair's deadpan and earnest delivery of scientific theory is perfectly judged as a reference to those earnest but daft sci-fi B-movies of the '50s. Such a dispassionate approach could be off-putting. There's no traditional “action” either: *The Invincible* is bringing back the walking sim genre of games like *Firewatch*, where narrative and light-touch puzzling matter.

Occasional choices reframe and affect the story, but they can feel



The chances of anything coming from Mars...

narrow in their impact, even when lives are on the line. The decision-making process is organic, natural even, and without clear outcomes. The love of Lem and the era's approach to hard SF can also lead to some lengthy monologues, which can affect pacing. This all adds up to a game that could alienate as much as galvanise.

Assuming that's not a problem, *The Invincible* is everything you

could want in a game that's based on Lem's work and looks like *Thunderbirds*: it's smart, beautiful and referential; it celebrates the absurdity of flying saucers while pondering the existential threats to humankind; and you'll love every step Yasna makes.

Ian Dean

i One key inspiration was the art of Chris Foss, the *Alien* and *Dune* designer and all-round '70s sci-fi art legend.



FUTURE TECH

Switch off *Tomorrow's World* and ditch the *Innovations* catalogue.
Let's test your knowledge of sci-fi's top gadgets and gizmos

Quizmaster Dave Bradley, Freelance Writer

QUESTION 1

In *Her*, Samantha starts off as "the world's first artificially intelligent operating system". What is the product actually called?

QUESTION 2

An ansible is a communicator capable of broadcasting over vast distances instantaneously. The term's been used by many SF writers – but who coined it?

QUESTION 3

Which James Bond has a Rolex watch containing an electromagnet and a miniaturised circular saw?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

What is this device known as?

QUESTION 5

Which fictional agency uses Eye-5 (I5) contact lens cameras?

QUESTION 6

In *Fantastic Voyage*, scientists are miniaturised via nanotechnology to enter a human body. What condition are they trying to treat?

QUESTION 7

Name the pillar-shaped cubicle that functions as an instant sex machine in Woody Allen's *Sleeper*.

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

What sentence can you expect to hear when this figure appears?

QUESTION 9

In which book/TV series would you find an individual's personality backed up to a "cortical stack"?

QUESTION 10

In *Farscape*, what are our heroes given that enables them to understand alien languages?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 11

Who uses the Brain Impulse Galvanoscope Record And Transfer device to absorb skills and experiences?

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Name this device.

QUESTION 13

In *Back To The Future Part II*, what's the brand of the hoverboard which Marty McFly uses in a chase?

QUESTION 14

In Philip K Dick's *Ubik*, in what form is the titular miracle product most commonly found?

QUESTION 15

In *Strange Days*, people can wear a black-market VR recorder to capture memories and sensations. What is it called?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

In which movie would you find police deploying these devices?

QUESTION 17

In *Dune*, the discovery of which physical property enables long-range communication, personal shields and space travel?

QUESTION 18

In *Blade Runner*, Deckard calls Rachael from a bar. What does the 25-second videophone chat cost?

QUESTION 19

Name the young scientist who operates the mind-imprinting tech in *Dollhouse*.

QUESTION 20

The 1957 short story "The Fly" (on which the films are based) features a disintegrator-reintegrator device. Who wrote it?

Answers
1 OSI 2 Ursula K Le Guin 3 Roger Moore (in *Live And Let Die*) 4 A Tricorder 5 Torchwood 6 A blood clot on the brain 7 The Orgasmatron 8 "Please state the nature of the medical emergency." 9 *Altered Carbon* 10 They're injected with translator microbots 11 Joe "Joe 90" Matlane 12 The Neuralizer 13 Maitel 14 Aerosol spray 15 SQUID 16 *Minority Report* 17 The Holtzman Effect 18 \$1.25 19 Topher Brink 20 George Langelaan

How did you do?

Which consumer gadget are you?

0-5

Microsoft Zune

6-10

Betamax Video

11-15

Dyson Vacuum Cleaner

16-19

GoPro Camera

20

Apple iPhone

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Thanks to our friends at BBC Audiobooks, we have 16 audiobooks in digital download format to give away from the Doctor Who range, currently celebrating the diamond anniversary with a feast of new releases.



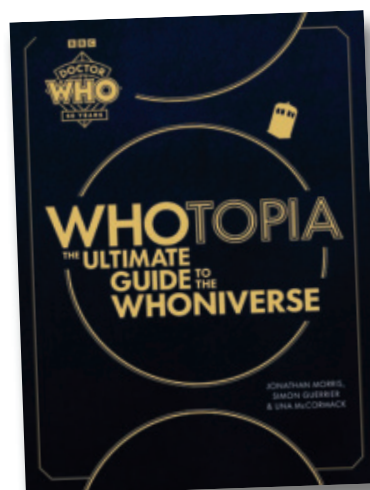
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BBC



We've also got five copies of Doctor Who: The Underwater Menace, the newly reanimated Patrick Troughton story, to give away on shiny disc from BBC Studios.

In addition, we've also got five copies of Doctor Who: Whotopia – The Ultimate Guide To The Whoniverse, the new reference publication from BBC Books.



To enter to win a disc and book bundle, scan the QR code and answer the question!

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Fool (Brandon Adams) meets Alice (AJ Langer).

The People Under The Stairs

Leila Latif, freelance writer



When Wes Craven made *The People Under the Stairs* in 1991, he flipped the popular view of what threatened America. The news was filled with reports on gangs of irredeemable black criminals with their eyes set on engulfing polite suburbia, but Craven's film depicts white participants of the "American Dream" as the true evil.

Cruel landlords "Mommy" and "Daddy" are a brother and sister pair played by *Twin Peaks* co-stars Everett McGill and Wendy Robie. They made their fortune selling overpriced coffins to grieving families. Not content with that depravity, they have brought the family of 13-year-old Poindexter "Fool" Williams (Brandon Adams) – and the wider community

– to its knees, evicting people en masse, and leaving Fool's mother too poor to have her cancerous tumour cut out.

Fool joins Leroy (Ving Rhames) in a burglary to reclaim some of the hoarded wealth from the couple's gargantuan home. However, beyond the evils of capitalism, they also discover a kidnapped girl whom the couple subject to sadistic abuse, as well as a plethora of unfortunate souls who have become grey-skinned, cannibalistic abominations.

As well as being Craven's most searing and subversive satire, it's also his most fun outing, with *Home Alone*-style slapstick and Robie scenery-chewing with unhinged aplomb. The wild tonal shifts – from Ving Rhames's bitter monologues on gentrification to the cartoonish ghoulies skittering in the walls, to abused

children plunged into boiling baths – all cohere thanks to a solid central premise.

George A Romero's *Night Of The Living Dead* and Bernard Rose's *Candyman* get more significant credit for casting black actors in iconic horror roles, but Craven's depiction of the black American experience was decades ahead of its time. He also has a whale of a time with the house itself; rooms and stairways appear and disappear whenever convenient.

This keeps us fixed in Fool's point of view: in a dangerous world, nothing makes sense to a child who just wants to survive. *The People Under the Stairs* may be a rollicking good time, but it also uncovers a horrifying truth. ●

Leila Latif has lived in London rentals that make the Robesons' basement seem luxurious.

Fact Attack!

→ Craven was inspired by a 1978 news report about black burglars breaking into the home of a couple who kept their children locked up.

→ He wrote 80 pages of a script, titled *The Puzzle*, but couldn't think of an ending. In 1990, he dreamed one, and wrote a finished screenplay.

→ Wes Craven was completely unaware that Everett McGill and Wendy Robie had played a husband and wife on *Twin Peaks* when they were cast.

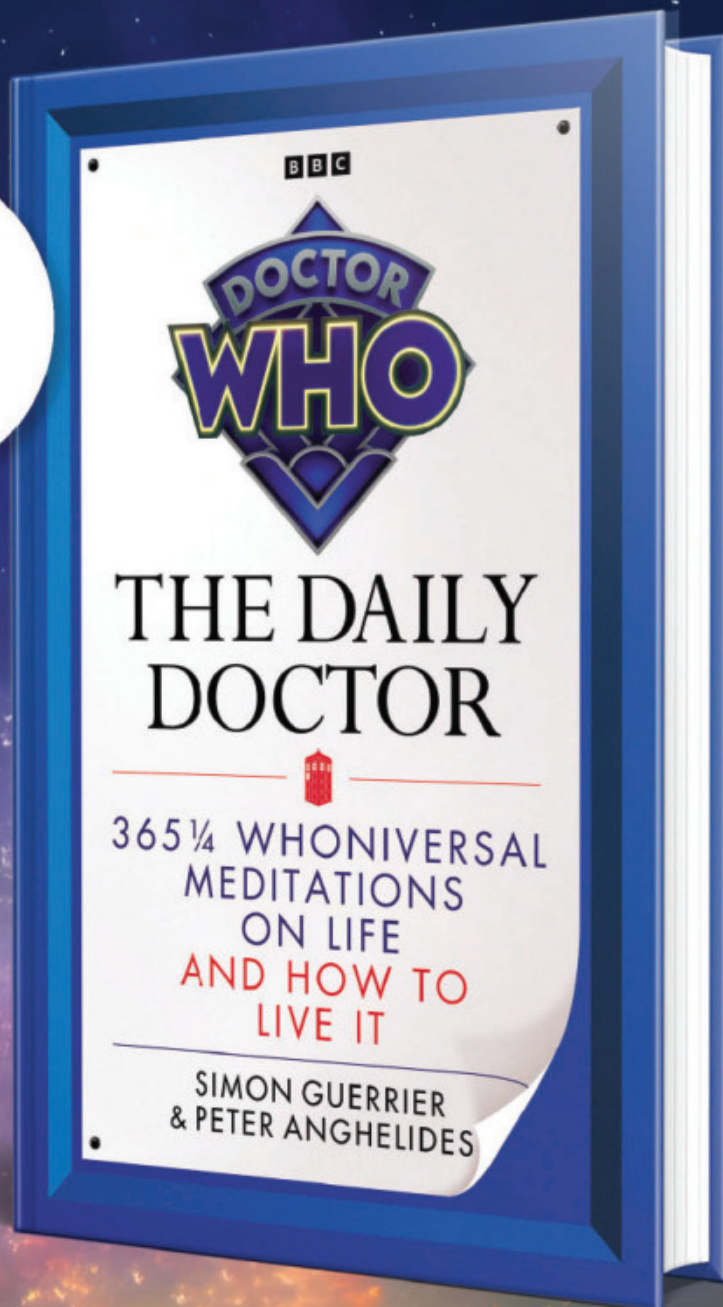
→ The house's exterior is 2215 South Harvard Boulevard. *Gone With The Wind*'s Butterfly McQueen once lived there, apparently.

→ AJ Langer, who plays the Robesons' daughter Alice, went on to become the Countess Of Devon, after marrying the 18th Earl.

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'I'm a Time Lord. I've been around, you know.
Two Hearts, respiratory bypass system.
I haven't lived seven hundred and fifty years
without learning something...'

THE DOCTOR

B B C



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