2017 PREVIEW 64 MUST-SEE MOVIES

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SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

EXCLUSIVE!

JOHN WICK 2

Keanu Reeves fronts our...

HUGE 2017 PREVIEW

2016 RATED
THE 20 BEST...
& THE REST

JAMES MCAVOY
On poshos, privacy and pay

62 NEW RELEASES REVIEWED

STAR WARS EP VIII

GHOST IN THE SHELL

VALERIAN

JUSTICE LEAGUE

+ GUARDIANS 2 **LOGAN** THE MUMMY
WONDER WOMAN THOR: RAGNAROK

Future

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What are looking forward to in 2017? Tell us yours @totalfilm #2017

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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future
Distributed by Marketforce, 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

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WELCOME TO TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

It's nearly over. The horror show of 2016 is almost behind us and we can look optimistically towards next year, when *surely* there are better superhero films, more challenging Oscar contenders, greater sequels and more sheer joy. Come on, gods of cinema, entertain us! To that end, we've put together all of the glories coming your way in 2017, kicked off by Keanu's *John Wick: Chapter 2*. There's so much good stuff coming down the line we're almost wishing Christmas away. But if you do fancy wallowing in 2016, we've rated and slated the sublime and the sub-par cinematic offerings of this year – do we match up with your score sheet? Plus we had a sweary chat with James McAvoy and I abused my position and went total fangirl on the equally sweary Jonathan Rhys Myers during an interview and got him to sign my VHS copy (yes) of *Velvet Goldmine* (which he scrawled from both himself *and* Brian Slade, OMG). OK, turns out it wasn't such a bad year then…

ENJOY THE ISSUE!

Jane Crowther, Editor-in-Chief

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

MATT MAYTUM
FEATURES EDITOR
Michael Keaton briefly paused our (election day) interview for a chuckle when seeing the meme of Donald Trump suspiciously eyeing Melania's ballot.

JORDAN FARLEY
NEWS EDITOR
Thrilled to interview Keanu Reeves for this month's cover feature, albeit in the "worst room in the world" (his words). Was pretty garish, to be fair.

JAMIE GRAHAM
EDITOR-AT-LARGE
Holed up in a random hotel in the middle of Georgia for a feature this month I went down to breakfast only to find myself sitting opposite Olivia Coleman.

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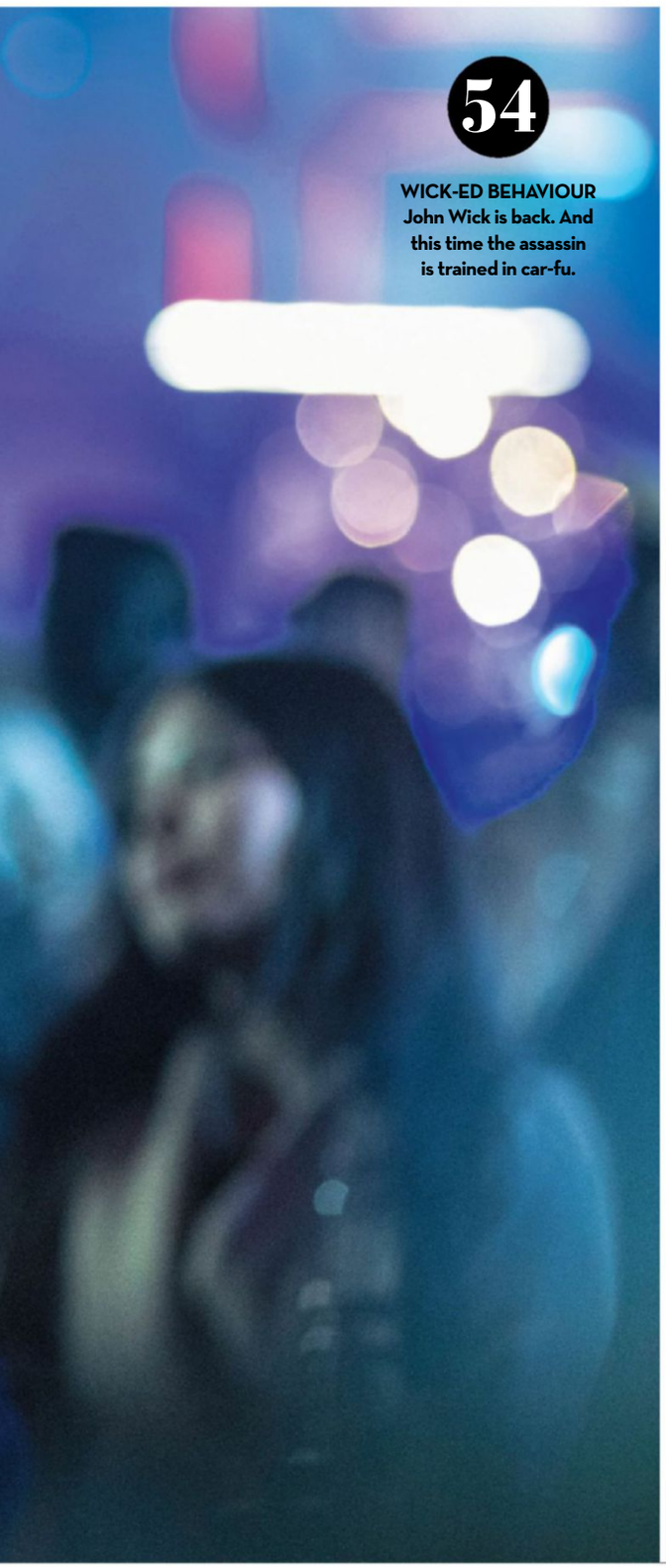

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Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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TOTAL FILM WINGMAN

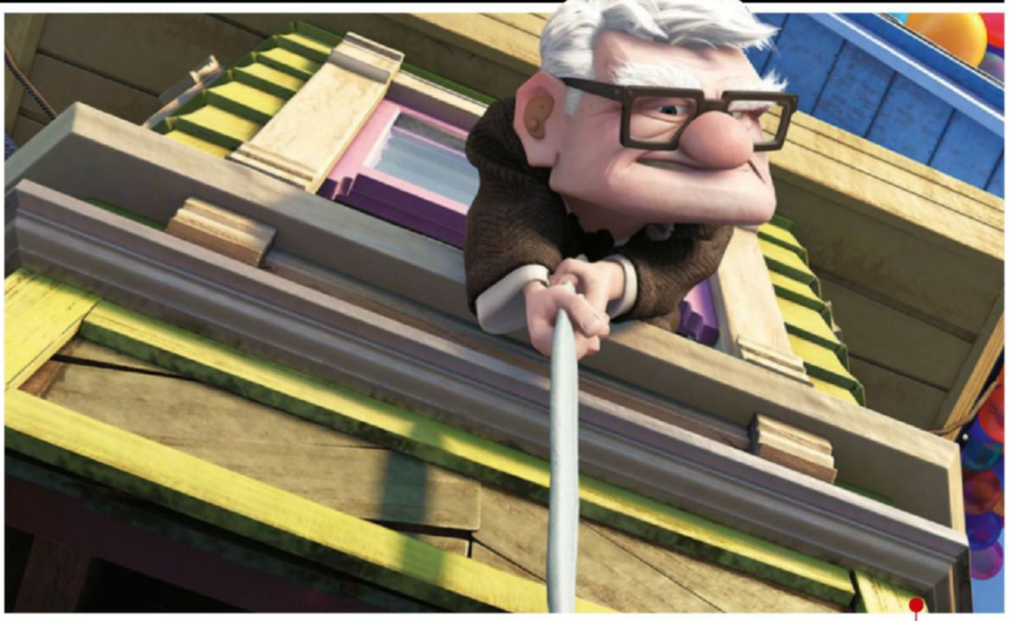
TF'S CINEMATIC AGONY UNCLE HAS YOUR BACK.

DEAR WINGMAN

I don't normally write, but this time I'm irked enough. The reason? *Ghostbusters* revamp: four stars??? [*TF253*] Are you kidding me? The script was dire, the acting formulaic, the plot predictable; the whole thing was a mess. Two stars at best. As for the cameos? Even Bill Murray didn't make me smile. Laughable, no. Lamentable? Yes. Stop it immediately – next time it becomes a messy divorce.
MARTIN MCGREGOR, VIA EMAIL

WINGMAN SAYS...

Sadly, Martin, you're barking up the wrong Wingman in terms of the film's quality. However, he does know the pain of violently disputing a star rating; he's still reeling from *Nine Lives*' one star (a low two, surely). Let's agree to disagree and make plans for a peacemaking hate-watch of *Gods Of Egypt*. Question for WM? Email me!



UP, UP AND AWAY
Pixar's emotion stirrer *Up* has a habit of causing leaky eyes.

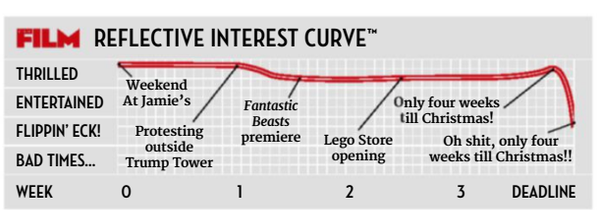
STAR LETTER

In response to Jamie Graham's article about films that make him cry [*TF252*], here are the top films that brought tears to my eyes (in order of how many tissues were used): 1) *Dead Man Walking* 2) *A Monster Calls* (saw a preview at the Zurich Film Festival) 3) *Dear Frankie* 4) *Finding Neverland* 5) *Up*. While Jamie seems moved by movies including animals (especially dogs), apparently dying people and/or sad children work for me. I'd be interested to see what movies other people come up with.
CHRISTOPH, SWITZERLAND

Excellent idea – let us know the films that broke you and next issue we'll have a January blues festival. Bonus points for letters written on tear-stained notepaper or tales of ugly crying on mortified ushers' shoulders. Christoph and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a movie from *Total Film*'s 2016 Lucky Dip (OK, Lucky Shelf). And don't worry, it'll be something decent – our review copy of *Norm Of The North* was successfully lost. Didn't send an address? Email it! And have yourself a merry Christmas.

SUM OF ALL YEARS

Having recently hit 40, your request regarding the worst/best film years got me thinking. My worst would be 1983, when much-anticipated trilogy-closers like *Return Of The Jedi* and *Jaws 3D* were released. Even as a child, I remember the special effects



Great Scott, 1985 was a good year for movies. It brought us *Back To The Future*, among others.

were just awful, so poorly executed that even a child's imagination could barely plug the gaps. *Star Wars* just misused the vast resources at its disposal with more ewoks than C-3PO knew what to gibberishly command to. My best year has to be 2014: films written and produced to the standard of *Interstellar* and *X-Men: Days Of Future Past* are a tribute to the modern film industry.
CRAIG ANDERSON, CHAPELHALL

I feel very proud to have been born in a great year of movies: 1985, the year of *Back To The Future*, *The Goonies*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Pale Rider*, *The Colour Purple*… It was also a year for great debuts: Josh Brolin, Don Cheadle, Ethan Hawke, River Phoenix… Sadly, it was the same year Roger Moore stepped down as James Bond and we were given Timothy Dalton, but we can let that slide. Bad years? 1977 – a handful of excellent movies (*Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Annie Hall*) but the rest underwhelmed.
HANNAH, FAREHAM

VOCAL HEROES

In regards to distinctive voices [*Dialogue*, *TF253*], you forgot Jeremy Irons, Alec Baldwin, Samuel L. Jackson and Will Arnett. Actually, anyone that ever played Batman… except George Clooney.
ELLIE GARTSIDE, BRECHIN

In response to Kevin Stanley's letter regarding powerfully voiced actors, I have to say I disagree. I feel more highly pitched vocals are needed in our films. I think celebs like Joe Pasquale and David Beckham could become overnight successes given the right role. We could even give some more already established movie stars helium to help them reach the pitch levels needed to make my dream a reality. I'd love to hear your readers' thoughts.
THOMAS ELLIS, VIA EMAIL

LAND'S TREND

Rather than this turning into *Hunt For The Wilderpeople*, the only way to find the best movie of 2016 is to use the *TF* sat nav system. The following

OFFICE SPACED

Chatter 'gems' overheard in the Total Film office this month…

* "Shameful to admit but I did get teary at *The Secret Life Of Pets*." * **"Best thing about making a wedding speech, it's the one time people actually listen to you."** * "Doughnuts and a bloke in a costume. That's all you need."

TOTALFILMONLINE

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PUMPKIN PIE OF THE MONTH
http://bit.ly/2gOVxBd
Thanks was given through great mouthfuls of scrumptiousness when this *American Dad*-themed pumpkin pie arrived to mark a certain US public holiday. Our faces looked as full as ol' Dad himself…

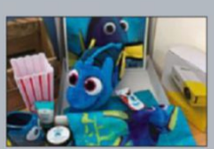
ALIEN: COVENANT POSTER…
http://bit.ly/2gOK9VN
The poster for the new *Prometheus* (Promequel?) was met with this @thepikefish quip: "Sorry about the last one. Here's a xenomorph to keep you happy."

HAN SOLO 'HEIST MOVIE': DISCUSS
http://bit.ly/2gORCEn
"Like Solo's Eleven?" @ScottFreeRJH; "Didn't they make the Han Solo movie starring Nathan Fillion? #Serenity @matterose; "It could be like a '90s romcom and still make a billion" @kingholio

FAB FOUR ARVO @TF TOWERS
http://bit.ly/2fIL3BB
For the release of *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week – The Touring Years* we had a scream-along to the *Live At The Hollywood Bowl* LP – on vinyl, no less. Finally, a chance to use our *Everybody Wants Some!!* record player!

INFLATABLE VISITOR OF THE MONTH
http://bit.ly/2gC2jar
Not since Chappie popped in have we been so excited by a guest, in town to celebrate *Ghostbusters* on Blu-ray. Watching Mr. Puft deflate was cool too. If a bit disturbing.

BIG FRIENDLY GOODIES
http://bit.ly/2fEG1Tz
Courtesy of Edible Cinema, we watched *The BFG* in taste-o-vision; included were 'Frobscottle' (grape juice) and 'Snozzcumbers' (cucumbers). Luckily, none of it caused too much whizzpopping…



BIG SLEEVE OF THE MONTH
http://bit.ly/2fEH19V
One of the best Mondays in ages: a big bag containing a big plush Dory plus a 12-inch, vinyl-style Big Sleeve edition of her movie. No, we didn't put the disc on the *Everybody Wants Some!!* record player…

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TICKLED PINK *The Greasy Strangler*: ideal watching for when the wife's out.

directions take the most picturesque route: at the end of *Sing Street* turn right, continue past *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children*, and at the roundabout take the second exit for *La La Land* and bear right past *High-Rise*. At the end of the road turn left, turn left now… no GPS signal… now approaching *Grimsby*, please turn around when possible, u-turn if there is *Room*. At the second right, turn left into *Zootropolis*. In 200 metres you will have *Arrival*-ed at your destination. You are here: *10 Cloverfield Lane*. My fave movie of 2016! P.S. This was the quickest route avoiding motorways, though *The Girl On A Train* may've been quicker.
RUBY ROO, VIA EMAIL

I would like to draw readers' attention to the maxim that plenty of water is good for you. I know, pardon? It's just that all of 2016's best movies affirmed that point, as they were in some way water-based: *Deadpool*, *Hell Or High Water*, *A Bigger Splash*, *Finding Dory* and *The Shallows*. Clearly H_2O is the way to go, and the Aquaman movie should be a slam dunk! P.S. I forgot to mention Suicide Squid (tee hee).
TONY W, VIA EMAIL

Between a rock and a hard place in *The Shallows*.

HAVE YOUR SAY
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Is that a follow-on from Prawn Of Justice? Excellent trend-spotting, readers; for more of the year's big themes (not including Brexit, Hillar-exit, Brangel-exit and *Pokémon Go*) see page 98.

RULE OF HUM

After reading Daw's letter in *TF253* about trailers ruining movies, I couldn't agree more. But rather than join the trailer-bashing bandwagon, I'd like to point out some of the best film marketing I've seen in many a year, for the upcoming *La La Land*. The 10-second clips at the start/end of ad breaks succeed for two key reasons; firstly I've no idea what the film is about but the imagery is impressive; secondly, and most importantly, I can't stop whistling/humming the tunes. Whether the film's good or bad, I'm utterly intrigued to see it, surely the point of a trailer.
ROD MARSLAND, RADCLIFFE

The good news is, *La La Land*'s great – see review, p38. The bad news is, your letter has undone several weeks of intensive earworm therapy caused by Ryan Gosling's 'City Of Stars'.

GREASE IS THE WORD

So with my wife out one Saturday I thought I would tick off *The Greasy Strangler* on my ever-expanding must-watch list. What I didn't expect to be doing was crying with laughter and two days later organising a showing for a group of mates! It's the most inventive, hilarious and downright dirtiest film in years and easily one of 2016's best! Many thanks *TF*!
PAUL ROCHFORT, WALSALL

Gah! Just when we'd de-wormed ourselves of 'City Of Stars', along you come, triggering a spontaneous chant of "Hootie Tootie Disco Cutie!" Next year we'll stick to more traditional Christmas carols.

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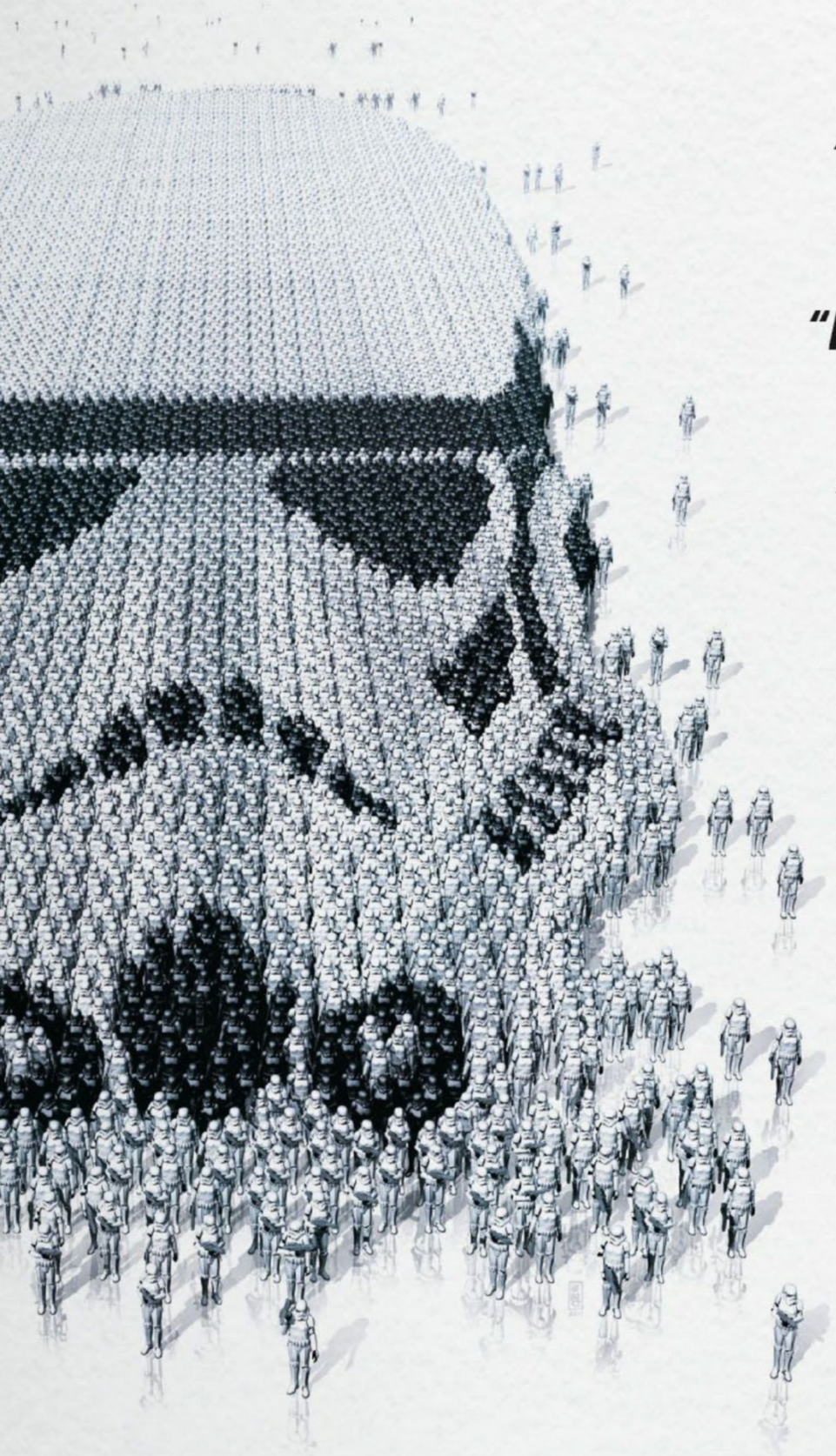

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TEASERS

COMING ATTRACTIONS

* Meet the new **Lando Calrissian** p14
* Alice Lowe's **killer pregnancy** p19
* A must-see **German comedy** p25
* Scorsese's 30-year **passion project** p30

EDITED BY JORDAN FARLEY

EXCLUSIVE

CALL OF DUTY

HACKSAW RIDGE | Mel Gibson returns to directing with the remarkable true story of pacifist hero Desmond T. Doss...

What a great story to tell – in the worst place on Earth," says Mel Gibson, talking about *Hacksaw Ridge*, his much-anticipated return to the director's chair. The "worst place on Earth" is the Japanese island of Okinawa, circa 1945, as American troops attempted to gain a foothold in one of World War 2's most brutal and bloody arenas. In particular, scaling Hacksaw Ridge – the jagged escarpment where Japanese forces repelled US soldiers.

Yet *Hacksaw Ridge* is no ordinary blood 'n' guts war movie. It's the true story of inspirational pacifist Desmond T. Doss, a Seventh-day Adventist who refused to bear arms but remained desperate to serve his country as a medic in the US military. Going into battle without a weapon, he saved 75 lives from Hacksaw Ridge, pulling injured men across the fire-strewn terrain and lowering them, one by one, to safety.

The first-ever conscientious objector in America to win the Medal of Honor, "What Desmond did was totally super-human," says Andrew Garfield, who plays Doss (and knows a thing or two about superheroes, post Spider-Man). "The closest thing I can compare it to is when you see mothers lifting trucks off a trapped child. He was filled with something that gave him the necessary strength."

Gibson similarly marvels at the bravery of Doss, who died in 2006 aged 87. "I look at a guy like Desmond and it

UNDER FIRE
Andrew Garfield plays a WW2 army medic who refused to carry a weapon.

boggles my mind that someone can have such a strong faith to walk into the gunfire and put his life on the line, and to do it for his fellow man – it's a perfect act of love. I'm inspired by that. Who isn't inspired by that?"

Casting *The Social Network* star Garfield, says Gibson, was essential to capturing the spirit of Doss. "Andrew sneaks up on you. He's very invested in what he does. He inhabited the character beautifully. And he's not some brawny guy. Desmond was tall, but he's not like Schwarzenegger, dragging everyone off the hill. He's just an ordinary man and a sensitive guy."

Such is Doss' humility, for years he had no desire to see his life story put on screen. Hal B. Wallis, the famed producer of *Casablanca*, "tried to twist his arm", notes Gibson, with the studios even sending war hero-turned-actor Audie Murphy to talk him into it. "He was like, 'No, sorry, I'm just going to pray and grow vegetables.' He eventually gave his rights to his church. They talked him into it – [*saying*] this story might be inspirational to other people."

Certainly, the film throbs with a strong Christian message – to sacrifice and do unto others. "One of the things I love about the movie is that it leaves you a little inspired, to elevate, to do a little better yourself," says Vince Vaughn, who plays Sgt. Howell, Doss' superior – initially angered at the private's intentions of going into battle without a weapon but gradually gaining a grudging respect for him.

With the film shot entirely in Australia, the main focal point was in New South Wales, where the crew cleared 500 hectares to recreate Hacksaw Ridge. "They built a football-field sized battlefield, and we just got stuck in!" laughs *Point Break* star Luke Bracey, who plays Desmond's fellow soldier Smitty Ryker. "You're obviously working with Mel who is no stranger to conflict in movies."

True enough. Gibson's ability to direct action helped steer him to a double Oscar-win for 1995's *Braveheart*, and it clearly hasn't deserted him. The battle scenes, as mortars explode and shots ring out, are harrowing to watch – just as they were to film.

"It was brutal," says Garfield. "It was. It's pathetic… but there was one point when I texted Vince and said, 'Fake war is hard!' Such an actor!"

With the cast rounded out by Aussie stars Sam Worthington, Teresa Palmer (as Doss' wife) and Rachel Griffiths and Hugo Weaving (as his parents), Gibson notes how the budget ($40 million) and the shooting days (59) were roughly half of what he had for *Braveheart*. None the less, the collective spirit was evident. "Everyone was on the team," says Bracey. "Everyone got on board and wanted to do the best they could."

If anything, *Hacksaw Ridge* isn't just a period war movie – but one that deals with issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, partly through the character of Doss' father, who had already served in World War 1. "I think what's unique about this movie – the Hugh character is like the Ghost of Christmas Future," says Vaughn. "You see the psychological effects of someone who has really been in those circumstances."

> 'IT'S A PERFECT ACT OF LOVE. WHO ISN'T INSPIRED BY THAT?'
> ANDREW GARFIELD

Calling his film a tribute to war veterans, Gibson believes it's essential we care for those who have fought in conflicts, rather than leaving them to suffer alone. "I've talked to a lot of veterans lately and these people are under-served," he argues. "You know the official figure is there are 22 guys a day in the US dropping the hammer on themselves after the experience. That's unacceptable. They're under-served. That needs to be looked at."

The film even casts Damien Thomlinson, who lost both legs to a Taliban bomb in 2009 while serving with Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan – playing a soldier maimed and carried to safety by Doss. "Obviously Mel doesn't shy away from the realities of the horror of war and rightfully so," says Garfield, "to honour the courage, the bravery and the trauma that human beings go through in order to serve an ideal." ***JM***

ETA | 27 JANUARY / HACKSAW RIDGE OPENS NEXT MONTH.

RIGHT
The Japanese war zone was recreated in a 500-hectare area of New South Wales, Australia.

BELOW LEFT
Garfield with Luke Bracey, as fellow soldier Smitty Ryker.

BELOW RIGHT
Desmond T. Doss' wife Dorothy is played by Teresa Palmer.

HOT RIGHT NOW

DONALD GLOVER

GETTING THE LAY OF THE LANDO...

I guess it could have happened faster, if I wasn't doing so many other things," ponders Donald Glover, the soon-to-be Lando Calrissian whose career has firmly hit hyperdrive. "But I like taking my time. I don't like to be rushed."

He's referring to his new hip-hop themed TV comedy *Atlanta*, which he writes, produces and stars in, plus jokingly calls "*Twin Peaks* for rappers". It's just premiered in the US to rave reviews, and has been renewed for a second season, after taking more than three years to develop. But the 33-year-old – also an established director, stand-up and rapper – certainly can't be accused of slacking. While his CV's already bulging, it seems he's still just warming up.

First hired by Tina Fey to join the *30 Rock* writing team in 2006, Glover then starred in five seasons of *Community* before last year playing key roles in *The Martian* and *Magic Mike XXL*, while also collecting a Grammy nomination for his album *Because The Internet* (as Childish Gambino).

And then, in October, he was confirmed as the man to play a young Calrissian in the stand-alone Han Solo *Star Wars* film, which will "depict Lando in his formative years as a scoundrel on the rise in the galaxy's underworld", according to Lucasfilm. It will be directed by *Jump Street*'s Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, who said, "These are big shoes to fill, and an even bigger cape, and this one fits him perfectly." Glover is just as eager, gushing, "I grew up on [Star Wars]. I had all the toys."

But before crossing that galaxy, Glover – once the subject of a campaign to become the first black Spider-Man – will next year officially join the MCU, albeit not as the web slinger, courtesy of a still-top-secret-role in Tom Holland's Spidey reboot *Homecoming*. Plus there's that second season of *Atlanta* to write, produce and star in. And all this when he's supposedly taking his time... *AW*

ETA | 25 MAY 2018 / THE UNTITLED HAN SOLO MOVIE OPENS IN TWO YEARS. ATLANTA AIRS ON FOX UK.

BROOKE NIPAR / AUGUST

EXCLUSIVE

GUN CRAZY

MISSLOANE | Jessica Chastain gets political in this murky Washington drama...

Sometimes movies arrive in a circumstance you can't completely predict," says British director John Madden. Heading to cinemas in the wake of the most shocking US presidential election in years, his latest film, *Miss Sloane*, is tapping into the "horrified fascination" that many are sharing with the current machinations of Washington DC. "I do think the film," he adds, "is quite an exhilarating ride through that process."

Scripted by first-timer Jonathan Perera, *Miss Sloane* is not an election drama, it should be stressed. Rather, it exposes the shady world of political lobbyists – those whose job it is to influence decision-makers. "They're sewn very deeply into the fabric of Washington," explains Madden, who casts Jessica Chastain, his star from *The Debt*, as Elizabeth Sloane, a ruthless lobbyist who becomes embroiled in a bill regarding firearms registration.

"She's a compartmentaliser, and has created a hierarchy of things that are important to her – and what's important to her is winning," says Madden. "She's cut herself off from things that might impinge on that simple fact, whether she's engaged morally with the issue she's fighting for or the collateral damage that might be created on the way to that goal."

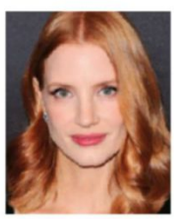
Admitting that Tony Gilroy's legal drama *Michael Clayton* was an inspiration – "It's within the Gilroy world, this film, for sure" – Madden calls *Miss Sloane* an unabashed thriller. But it's more than that, he says, with the story touching on the thorny issue of gun control. "The paradox is, 'How is it that the majority of the American public are in favour of increased background checks but this never ever gets through in legislation, even after the most horrendous massacres?'"

Emphasising that the story isn't based on any true-life event, Madden concedes his anti-heroine lobbyist is "a very extraordinary example of that breed, who is pushing the envelope as far as it can go and works at the boundary of ethical and unethical behaviour". Nevertheless, after the dirty laundry aired in the 2016 presidential race, he feels vindicated. "In the aftermath of this election, it doesn't feel far-fetched." *JM*

ETA | 17 FEBRUARY / MISS SLOANE OPENS NEXT YEAR.

REX

PITCH BATTLE
Chastain plays ruthless lobbyist Elizabeth Sloane, who values winning above all else.



Q&A JESSICA CHASTAIN

How did you find playing the ethically questionable Elizabeth Sloane?
I had trouble with Elizabeth. Even when we were shooting, I kept saying to John, 'I can't wait to stop playing this character. She's so terrible!' For her, she just sees people as commodities. It's like anyone with any kind of addiction... if you're going after the win, there's collateral damage. She doesn't really have that much empathy.

Did you know much about lobbyists before taking on the role?
I didn't know anything about it except what I read in the script. I just started researching lobbyists. I'm a Google expert! I love to Google! No-one really says, 'I want to be a lobbyist when I grow up.' You never really hear of that profession. So I went to DC and met with 11 female lobbyists there. And I met with congressmen and senators.

The film uses the gun control issue as its central jumping-off point. But what's the story really about?
That a politician can't properly serve the people they represent because their focus and their priority is keeping their seat and office. When I went to Washington DC, I saw this first-hand. They go to three fundraisers every single day: a breakfast, lunch and a cocktail/dinner fundraiser. Just to get money to maintain their spot. *JM*

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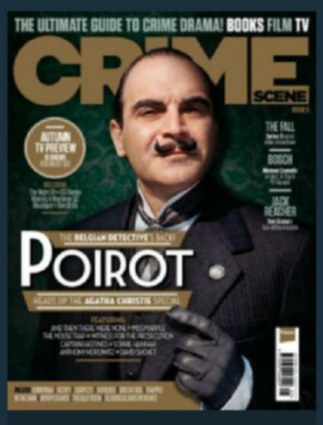

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EXCLUSIVE

DEAD END

RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER

Director Paul W.S. Anderson and star Milla Jovovich tool up for Alice's final adventure in zombieland.

When *Resident Evil* was released in the summer of 2002, few would have predicted that, 15 years later, six films and a billion dollars in the bank would be the final result – least of all writer/director Paul W.S. Anderson. "I had no idea we were going to get to six films, even in my wildest dreams." But Anderson was sowing the seeds of the series' ultimate bloodbath from day one. "There were ideas I had in the first film that I thought, 'If we get the chance, this is the way I'd end the franchise.'"

Previous instalment *Resident Evil: Retribution* ended with psychotic hologram the Red Queen launching a monster-filled assault on humanity. *The Final Chapter* sees Alice (Milla Jovovich), series regular Claire Redfield (Ali Larter) and a fresh band of zombie fodder return to where it all began. "I always thought the final movie would be a return to the Hive," Anderson explains. "So you could discover the truth about the Umbrella Corporation and Alice. I liked the idea of bringing it full circle, like a Möbius strip."

Describing the film as having a "*Dirty Dozen*-style narrative", *The Final Chapter* is taking a different tack from recent entries, which were filmed largely on soundstages with diminishing results. "We shot in South Africa and made it primarily as a location picture. It's got a really fresh, big, exciting look to it." Anderson also wanted to course correct a series that had lost sight of its original trajectory with a sequence involving a giant, suspiciously dormant, fan. "As the franchise has progressed, it's become more associated with action than horror and intensity," Anderson reflects. "That was something I wanted to address, in part with scary traps that just want to kill you!"

And Anderson believes *The Final Chapter* will offer new series insights. "You can rewatch the other movies and see them with a fresh perspective with the secrets revealed in the final movie. My idea was always that if this movie works, it makes you reassess the whole franchise." ***JF***

ETA | 3 FEBRUARY / RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER OPENS EARLY NEXT YEAR.

SIX-SHOOTER Milla Jovovich again leads the action as Alice, alongside William Levy as fellow zombie hunter Christian (below).

REX

Q&A

MILLA JOVOVICH

After 15 years in the role, does Alice feel like a part of you now?
Alice is definitely someone that is very close to me. I've learned a lot from her. You get more and more comfortable every time. It's like that favourite pair of shoes that fit perfectly and are super-comfortable. Now, it's just really easy to slip on that character.

Were there things you learnt about Alice in *The Final Chapter*?
Definitely. In this film, Alice really understands who she is and where she comes from. In the first movie, she woke up with no memory of who she was, and now we find out what happened in that time.

What does *Resident Evil* mean to you?
It's one of the most important pieces of work I've ever done. I've been very lucky in my career to have played some very strong leads. Whether the movies were successful wasn't as much the point; it felt like fans really loved the characters, and remembered them. This is definitely one of those movies. Beyond that, I met my husband through it; I had two kids; the life that I have today is purely based on *Resident Evil*. And it goes to show that when you do things for the right reasons, great things happen. ***JF***

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

Film quotes pose as questions. Film stars try to cope.

IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH: NEIL PATRICK HARRIS

You talkin' to me?
I would certainly hope so, given where we're sitting in the room right now. It would be a bit odd if it was a doppelgänger of some sort. Or I could be virtual – hologram-ish. I'd get more sleep that way.

Do you feel lucky, punk?
I am one of the luckier people around – and for the love of God stop calling me a punk! I don't know if it's luck or I'm fortunate but I've gotten to hop professionally from one interesting gig to the next and I've managed to work on jobs with people that I actually enjoy for long periods of time. And now I'm married to a dude I love and have two kids that make me laugh. So I'm a good person to go to Vegas with.

You talk the talk. Do you walk the walk?
I believe I do, both personally and professionally. I took Alexander technique, which teaches an ac-tor how to 'walk' with purpose. And my elocution is remarkable.

You either surf or fight…
I try to avoid both of those. I've never been in a fight – a physical altercation – in my life. And the few times that I've surfed, it's just been a disaster. Once I'm out there, sitting on the board, I'm alright. You have to learn when the waves are coming and swim in between the waves, in order to get out there. I'll catch a single wave, stand-up-ish, fall, and then for 45 fucking minutes, I'm paddling trying to get back out there again, and I'm exhausted.

What's the last thing that you do remember?
Working with Barry Sonnenfeld on *A Series Of Unfortunate Events*. There's a lot of lethargy normally on set – crew waiting for lunch or cast texting all the time. That's pretty much the two factions, so when you get everyone focused on making and creating content, it gets to be really fun. This was that way because we had these giant massive sets, prosthetic make-up and dialogue which was very melodic and dark, and everyone was working hard for Barry. It was very all-consuming.

'I DON'T LIKE TO DANCE. WE CAN'T ALL BE TIMBERLAKE, AS MUCH AS WE MIGHT TRY'

Have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight?
I don't really like to dance much, truth be told. I feel like I'm a 6ft-tall skinny white dude. I have decent rhythm and if someone teaches me moves, I can dance well. But the improvisational gyrations of Justin Timberlake songs on a dance floor filled with people just staring at each other breeds insecurity. We all can't be Justin Timberlake, as much as we might try – which I think was a quote from *Apocalypse Now*.

What's in California?
The Oscars! It was a lot of work presenting – you're answering to a lot of different factions. What I did learn at the end of the day, you put a lot of energy and effort into creating something that is very disposable. People talk about the Oscars – and they talk about them a lot – and you watch them, go to sleep, then carry on with your life. But it was super-fun to do. A masochistic gig!

What's your favourite scary movie?
The Shining. I love scary by way of dark-and-twisted, as opposed to scary man in mask jumping out at you. So *The Shining* is just a masterpiece in its symmetry and in its length and it has a labyrinth in it, and I've always really loved those!

What would you do if you knew you had less than one minute to live?
I'd call my family, tell them how much I love them and [*give them*] the first clue to the combination of the safe. I was going to say "and masturbate", but I think putting those two ideas next to each other sounds really gross.

Your wife is missing and you came all this way to tell me this?
Gone Girl! Honestly, I'm just a big David Fincher fan… I'd do anything for him. [*Spoiler alert!*] He made me watch a lot of footage of people bleeding out. He wanted to make it look as if my death was real. That's such a rush visually. But it's a weird thing to die in that way. From all the research we did, if you get your throat slit, it takes you a long time – you don't feel pain. ***JM***

ONE-WAY SNICKET Neil Patrick Harris as creepy Count Olaf in *A Series Of Unfortunate Events*.

ETA | 13 JANUARY / LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS PREMIERES ON NETFLIX NEXT MONTH.

CHRISTOPHER POLK/NBC / GETTY IMAGES

Taxi Driver, Dirty Harry, Full Metal Jacket, Apocalypse Now, Memento, Batman, Borat, Scream, Source Code, Gone Girl (obviously)

EXCLUSIVE

CHILD'S SLAY

PREVENGE | Alice Lowe births her directorial career with a WTF revenge story...

I'm interested in outsiders," says Alice Lowe, sipping at a large mug of redbush tea while sitting opposite *Teasers* in a Soho bar. "I like to see people who make decisions that are suspect. I really like deviant characters." It has always been thus. "I was very nerdy at school," she explains. "I watched loads of horror films. I was a weirdo."

Forewarned is forearmed, so they say, but the premise of Lowe's directorial debut, *Prevenge*, still comes as a shock. Seven months pregnant, Ruth is instructed by her unborn baby to go on a vengeful killing spree. And if that sounds crazy, consider this: Lowe, who also wrote and stars, was herself seven-and-a-half months pregnant during the 11-day shoot in Cardiff.

"I just put all of the stuff that I was finding weird about being pregnant into the film," explains the writer-star of *Sightseers*, with which *Prevenge* shares DNA. "As a freelancer, you feel outside of society because you have your own rules and you don't have a boss. Then suddenly you have a baby and re-enter this social contract with the rest of the world, which has rules, and you have to be part of this club again, which is humanity." She grins. "I put all of my fears into the film and it exorcised them. People watch it and say, 'God, you must have had such a horrible pregnancy.' And I say, 'No, I had a great pregnancy and the baby's really nice. She's not evil at all!'"

Given Ruth's first two victims are sleazeball men, it initially seems that Ruth's waddling rampage of revenge is motivated by feminist principles in extremis. But as truth and backstory emerge, events veer in a different direction, with Lowe nodding, "It's not necessarily a feminist film; I don't want to exclude anyone."

More fantasy than reality, *Prevenge* operates in a world where Ruth's violent actions don't result in the police hunting her down, while "psychedelic editing choices" add to the heightened atmosphere. "They reflect the hormonal state of being pregnant – the madness, the emotions, the vividness," she says.

But let's fast-forward – isn't it going to be weird to watch *Prevenge* with her daughter? "I probably won't show it to her until she's 18," she laughs. "But it depends how mature she is. She might be like me, and really like watching horror. There was actually a point when the midwife came round our house and looked at the poster of Dario Argento's *Opera* on the wall and said, 'Oooh, that's a scary picture.' I thought they were going to call social services..." ***JG***

BABY BRAIN
Writer-director Lowe also stars as a mum-to-be getting some surprising pregnancy cravings.

ETA | 10 FEBRUARY / PREVENGE OPENS EARLY NEXT YEAR.

EXCLUSIVE

PICTURE PERFECT

SING | Director Garth Jennings guides Teasers behind the curtain of his all-singing, all-dancing family animation...

Have you heard the one about the pig, the mouse, the porcupine, the Indian elephant and the mountain gorilla who compete in a singing competition to save a koala's theatre? More importantly, have you *seen* it? When Garth Jennings (*Son Of Rambow*) signed on to write and direct *Sing*, his first animation, he had help. Most notably from character artist Eric Guillon (the "genius behind all the design", according to Jennings) as this previously unseen concept art attests...

GOING BANANAS

Taron Egerton plays juvenile mountain gorilla Johnny, whose Cockney gangster father wants his son to follow in his footsteps. "It's a very traditional story in many ways. I don't want to belittle what we've done, but I always knew it would have these archetypes." Egerton was the only cast member to audition, to ensure he could handle Johnny's goosebump-inducing a capella performance. "He stood in front of a mic on Skype from France, sang two songs and it was ridiculous. I just said, 'Stop! That's it! You've got the part!'"

WASH OUT

When disaster befalls cuddly koala Buster's theatre, he turns to the only other job he knows – covering himself with soapy water and using his body to wash cars. Er, say what? "I phoned Eric before I showed those pages of the script to anyone," explains Jennings. "I said, 'Can you send a drawing first? Because it's going to sound really weird if I just pitch this.' I knew Eric would be able to clarify why that could work character-wise. It was the saddest – and funniest – thing I could think to do."

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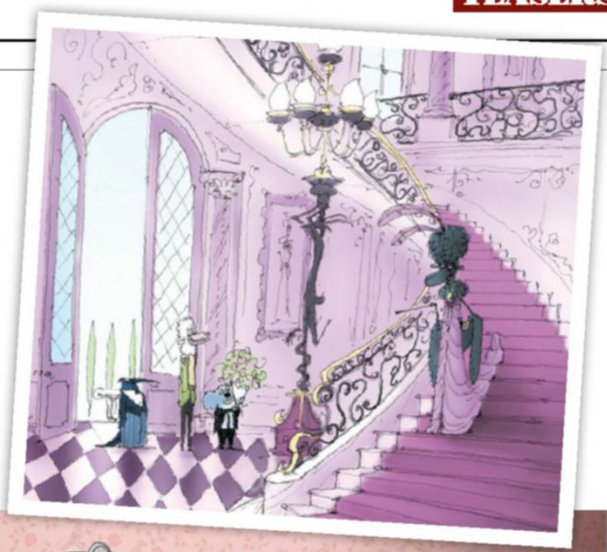
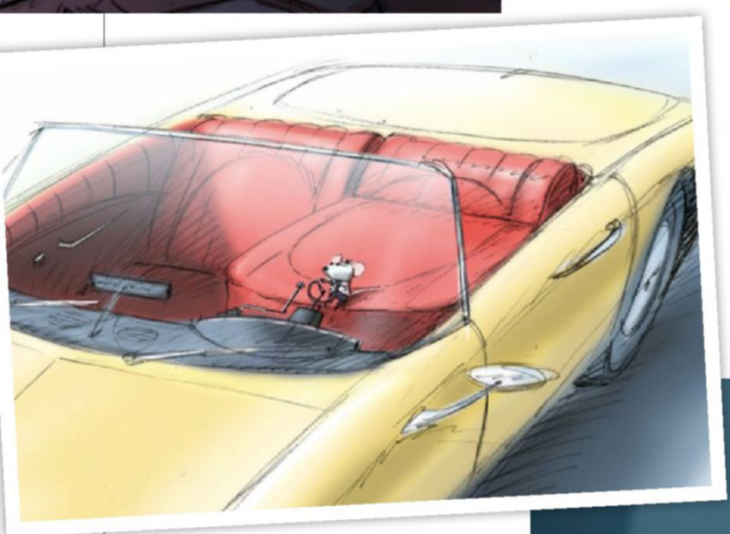
CENTRE STAGE

The Moon Theatre is the film's most intricate set, but it's seen better days. "This drawing was a big jump in terms of what it would feel like to be working there. Eric was great in building an environment that felt like it was from another era." The theatre also doubles as Buster's home. "He sleeps in his desk but that, for him, is no hardship. He sees it as cosy. For the rest of us, it's a way of saying: he hasn't got a home to go to."

NANA MIA

Short of funds, Buster turns to wealthy stage icon Nana Noodleman (Jennifer Saunders) who lives in an opulent mansion. "The idea was that this was Norma Desmond, if Norma Desmond was a sheep and had been a theatre diva. Eric wanted to make sure that every character had a unique colour palette. It's like a visual locator. She was these pink and purple colours. And there had to be a staircase she could come down and be the most imposing figure ever."





TOP TRUNKS

The only pro singer (besides Seth MacFarlane) is Tori Kelly, who plays supremely talented elephant Meena. "It's really weird watching her sing. It's like when you see some amazing athlete and you're like, 'How can a person do that?'" But try as he might, Guillon couldn't shake the spectre of another cartoon elephant. "You literally cannot put an elephant in a suit without it somehow touching upon Babar. Babar runs the elephant-in-suits look."

THE PIG SHOW

It's not a spoiler to reveal that *Sing* ends with a series of dazzling performances – one of the highlights being pig Rosita (Reese Witherspoon) going full Gaga. "The trick with that was to lower expectations. So we made a rinky-dink set of her kitchen life, and then burst out. It was just a case of getting the right songs. I'm very pleased with it." ***JF***

ETA | 27 JANUARY / SING OPENS NEXT MONTH.

SING STREETS

Rather than go the *Zootropolis* route and design an environment built for hundreds of animal species, Jennings opted to put animals in a world almost identical to our own, with a few tweaks. "I realised really early on that I didn't want to make a film about a quirky world with multiple-sized transportation. I just wanted the audience to focus on characters that were relatable. For instance, Mike is driving a full-sized sports car, it's just been fitted with a small steering wheel and tiny pedals."

ON SET

WORLD CHANGER

THE WHITE KING | Emotions run high in a dystopian drama that doesn't pull any punches...

I was in tears by page three," director Alex Helfrecht tells *Teasers* of reading *The White King*, György Dragomán's brittle, award-winning 2005 novel set in a totalitarian society. "What he's concerned with in the book, which I thought would be fascinating on film, is the behaviour of people living in a dictatorship. It's about how violence trickles down and affects you as a child."

There's a heatwave in Hungary the day *Teasers* goes on location with Helfrecht and husband/co-director Jörg Tittel in Dömös, an hour outside Budapest. It's July 2015 and we're at the country house of Colonel Fitz (Jonathan Pryce), whose grandson, 12-year-old Djata (Lorenzo Allchurch) – whose dad has been imprisoned for fighting the oppressive regime of 'Homeland' – has arrived for his annual birthday visit.

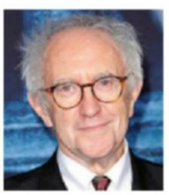
"Fucking cat!" barks Fitz, shooing away a stray as he leads Djata through a garden. "I have a surprise for you," says Fitz, handing Djata a gun, then offering him red wine, which Djata sips with a grimace. "Cut!" Helfrecht and Tittel both call. "Cat's getting fed up," Helfrecht quips as Allchurch stops by.

"It was grape juice," the young actor assures *Teasers*. "Let's just say my reaction isn't fully acted." Cast by his directors after they were wowed by his audition tape ("He was so smart and so intense," says Tittel), Allchurch is 12, but *The White King* isn't a kid's film; it dabbles in oppression, Iron Curtain subtext and Nazi-like imagery, Tittel noting *Deliverance*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* as tonal touchstones.

"It's not a war film," says Helfrecht, "but it is about fighting and struggling. The boy has to choose." With a real android used, an impressive cast and two directors coming into their own after working in videogames and theatre, *The White King* promises to be provocative and heartstring-twanging. "There are high stakes," says Tittel. "It's not a message movie. It's an emotional journey." ***JW***

ETA | 27 JANUARY / THE WHITE KING OPENS NEXT MONTH AND IS RELEASED ON DVD ON 30 JANUARY.

YOUNG GUN Lorenzo Allchurch plays Djata, the torn 12-year-old growing up under a dictatorship.



Q&A

JONATHAN PRYCE

What's the relationship like between the Colonel and Djata?
We're estranged from him because our son, his father, is one of the Disappeared. Djata's been brought up by his mother [*Agyness Deyn*], who doesn't agree with the government, so we see him once a year on his birthday.

How is it working with young Lorenzo?
It's day one and I haven't wanted to kill him yet! He's delightful, very bright. I've got three kids of my own; I think this is my first grandfather role. It's not bad! I'm looking forward to being a grandfather one day if the kids get on with it.

How is it coming onto an independent film after *Game Of Thrones*?
It's like going from huge musicals to classical theatre and then doing a *G.I. Joe*... In the second *G.I. Joe* I hadn't a clue, I'd never played *Angry Birds*, I didn't know what they were talking about. I do now – I was playing it on set, they couldn't stop me! But the contrast is great.

What are your memories of *Thrones*?
I was pleasantly surprised about how good everyone was at their job. After five years, the lack of cynicism was impressive. I was invited to sit in the throne but I didn't. That's not what my character's about. ***JW***

REX

THE NEXT BIG THING

SONOYA MIZUNO

IS DANCING ON THE CEILING...

Born in Tokyo but raised in the West Country, Sonoya Mizuno worked as a ballerina and model before landing the role of Oscar Isaac's mute assistant and impromptu dance partner Kyoko in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*. The fruits of that eye-catching film debut arrive in 2017, with appearances in *Beauty And The Beast*, *Annihilation* and the feel-good Oscar-frontrunner *La La Land*. "It's so great to be working on films I find interesting with interesting people," she enthuses.

What was it like performing the dance numbers in *La La Land*?
We spent a long time in the studio working it out. When it came to filming, we would shoot the whole thing in one take, over and over again. That was hard because there were four of us and the guy on Steadicam – he became one of us. So essentially there were five dancers in this apartment, running up and down corridors.

Disco dancing with Oscar Isaac looked fun…
It was so fun. I remember it all so clearly. Obviously everyone's seen how brilliant he is at it. It's really cool how that moment, and that film, has been so well-received. You know on these updated iPhones you can send these little gifs? My sister sent one of me and Oscar dancing and I said, "I'm a gif now, I've made it!"

How did *Beauty And The Beast* compare to your previous experiences?
Beauty... was a different thing for me. I'm in one scene, before the Prince turns into the Beast, a huge ballroom scene. I've never been on a film of that scale before, where it takes an hour-and-a-half to turn the camera around. The sets were beautiful. The ballroom was just unbelievable.

What's next?
I'm going to New Orleans tomorrow to start *The Domestics*. It's a new young filmmaker. I think it's going to be quite exciting, like *Mad Max* or *The Warriors*. I get to shoot lots of guns. It feels ironic, going to Louisiana to shoot guns in this political climate. But what the hell, I think it's going to be fun. *JF*

ETA | 13 JANUARY / LA LA LAND OPENS NEXT MONTH. BEAUTY AND THE BEAST OPENS 17 MARCH.

FRANCISCO SORIANO

CAN WE TALK ABOUT...?

SPOILER ALERT!

JOHNNY DEPP IN FANTASTIC BEASTS

Might Depp's flamboyant appearance as Grindelwald unbalance the Potter prequels?

For the most part, *Fantastic Beasts And Where to Find Them* is a triumphant return to the *Harry Potter* universe. J.K. Rowling's wizarding world only grows in complexity when relocated to America, while the new characters feel like they've been around forever. The beasts are, yes, fantastic, and the war between Grindelwald and Dumbledore that the series is working towards feels genuinely terrifying.

And then Johnny Depp appears on screen. It's never a good sign when the introduction of the most evil wizard of all time is greeted by the audience laughing, but that's the reaction he was met with at the press screening *Teasers* attended. Maybe it's the fact that his Grindelwald looked like Mortdecai after a few weeks sleeping rough. Even considering the broad blockbuster tone of the film, Depp hams things up horribly in his brief moments of screen time, sneering through his platinum blond moustache like a rejected Bond villain.

His introduction itself is genius. Concealed beneath the alias of Percival Graves (Colin Farrell), the director of security at the Magical Congress of the United States of America, Depp/Grindelwald is exposed as he attempts to flee. The reveal is a genuine shock, with Graves resembling more of a rogue cop than an evil mastermind.

What's most disappointing is that Farrell is actually far more convincing in the role. He feels complex and human, with a believable philosophy behind his desire to stop the magical community living in secret.

It might feel a little harsh to judge Depp on such a brief appearance, but his last great performance was nearly a decade ago in 2007's *Sweeney Todd*, and on first impressions his time as Grindelwald will be defined by the ridiculous make-up, costumes and over-acting for which he's become infamous. Let's hope he doesn't go full pantomime in the sequels and undercut an otherwise promising new series. ***TBo***

'DEPP HAMS THINGS UP, SNEERING LIKE A REJECTED BOND VILLAIN'

ALFILM.COM/SUBS

EXCLUSIVE

IMPRACTICAL JOKER

TONI ERDMANN | Is this German epic the funniest tearjerker ever made?

Winner of the International Critics' Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, *Toni Erdmann* – or "the three-hour German comedy" as it became affectionately known – reduced hardened hacks to tears of laughter between sobs of sorrow. A serio-comic masterpiece, it sees lonely father Winfried (Peter Simonischek) trying to reconnect with his middle-aged daughter Ines (Sandra Hüller) with a surprise visit to Romania, where she works. Finding her too busy to accommodate him, he dons a fright wig and buck teeth to show up at her work functions as "life coach" Toni Erdmann.

"I never thought of it as pure comedy or pure drama," muses writer/director Maren Ade. "While I was shooting, I thought it would be a super-sad film and there was nothing I could do about it – the characters are very desperate. But in the end it was funny, and I was glad. It's my own humour, so you never know if someone else will find it funny."

Toni Erdmann deals with familial estrangement, grief and depression, yet contains increasingly broad set-pieces involving sex scenes with food stuffs, uproarious karaoke and a naked work party that takes cringe-com to new levels.

Ade grins. "The rule for everything in my films is it has to be realistic, or naturalistic," she explains. "Maybe not likely, but still possible. I don't like it when it gets to the point that the actor is too aware and *wants* to be funny. In life, everybody has their own need to do something, and then they are clashing. If the characters are serving each other and the audience, then you lose it."

Naturally, there is talk of a Hollywood remake, and Ade is clear-eyed about the prospect. "Money is important, and things are remade and it doesn't affect the original," she says. "I know all the things I didn't do, which they would, but…" She tails off, shrugs. "You can make a shorter, pure comedy out of it. But *I* would not be the one to remake it. I'm so happy I've finished this film. It took five-and-a-half years to write and make it!" ***JG***

ETA | 3 FEBRUARY / TONI ERDMANN OPENS EARLY NEXT YEAR.

TOUGH CROWD Peter Simonischek plays a dad trying to rebuild his relationship with his daughter (Sandra Hüller) through a series of oddball pranks.

Q&A

SANDRA HÜLLER

What was the main appeal?
Because I was scared. But I definitely wanted to work with Maren. It was so complex. I had no idea how we would do this and we found out step by step. It was important to get to really know the dynamics. And with Toni – how far we can go, or how little it takes.

How was it to shoot naked for a day?
You mean three days. [*laughs*] I read the script, saw it coming, and knew there was no way round it. I found it interesting, actually, because normally when you're naked, like in the sauna, then you're presenting your body. But she's not. So how do I act really normal? It's like a nightmare where you're walking around naked but you don't even know it.

It's empowering, in a way…
I'm raising my status. But we were so busy with technical things, timings. How far can you go with your language when naked? How offensive can you be? By the third day, we were almost used to being naked.

Many critics tipped you for Best Actress at Cannes Film Festival. Were you disappointed?
[*shakes head*] You don't take awards to the grave. ***JG***

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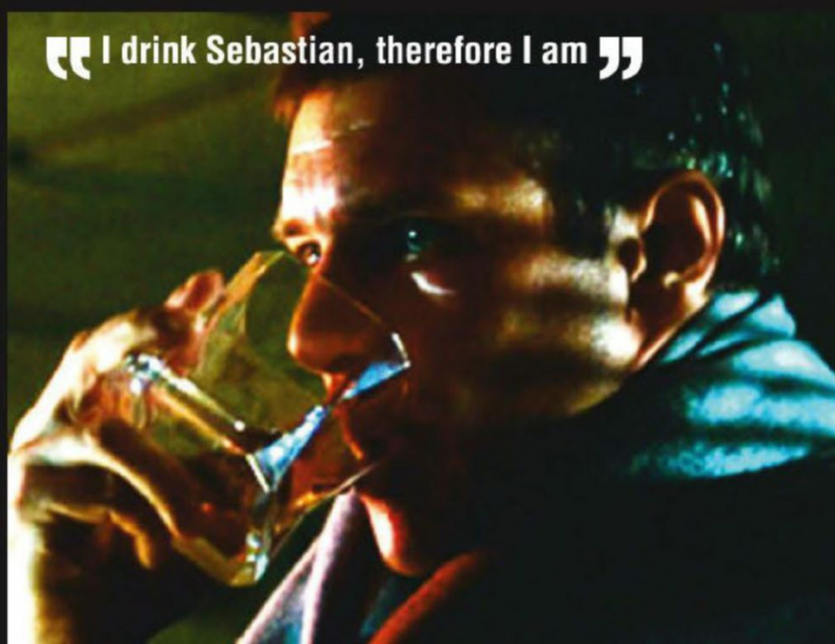


IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Editor-at-Large **JAMIE GRAHAM** lifts the lid on film journalism.

THIS MONTH MEETING STARS IN UNUSUAL PLACES

When it comes to interviewing film folk, the meet happens, nearly always, in a sterile, hermetic environment. A hotel suite is the favourite, sitting in plush armchairs, sipping coffee in china cups. Outside the door, or sometimes in the room itself, hovers the PR. Alternatively, an interview might happen between takes on set, or occasionally in a restaurant, trying to politely devour your food as they answer questions, watching them do the same as you phrase the next query.

So manufactured are these environments – and so ritualised is the interview format, however relaxed and chatty you try to make it – that it comes as a real shock when you meet the 'talent' in any other space. With the trammels removed, you're left to interact (or not, as the case might be) as normal human beings (a term that can't often be applied to movie stars or, indeed, film journalists). The result is akin to lifting the glass off two insects and watching them tentatively explore the expanded terrain.

GOING DOWN

The lift is one such space that is liable to spring a surprise. After interviewing Arnold Schwarzenegger at the *Sabotage* junket in LA, I pressed the 'down' button only for Arnie to burst through the closing doors followed by two equally broad-chested minders. Together we rode south for seven floors, Arnie favouring me with a sidelong smirk as his two buddies playfully jostled each other in a show of alpha-male one-upmanship. Arnie waited until the doors opened then pushed them hard in their backs to catapult them into the lobby. No doubt who ruled the roost here.

Another time I was horrified to see the elevator doors slide open on Viggo Mortensen just minutes after I'd riled him in an interview by focusing too much on *The Lord Of The Rings*. Thankfully, he immediately apologised for getting annoyed and asked me to email him with any other enquiries I might have – including those regarding *Rings*.

You never know who you'll meet in the lift...

'IF I WENT IN THE CUBICLE FIRST, GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE MIGHT THINK THE STINK WAS MINE...'

Mind you, 30 seconds in a lift is nothing compared to bumping into famouses in the bathroom. This has happened to me only once, during a Metallica after-party, and all I can really recall is finding myself in the bathroom with drummer Lars Ulrich and lead guitarist Kirk Hammett, discussing giraffes. But a female colleague of mine has several times found herself queuing alongside A-listers for a cubicle at awards bashes, or trading small talk while washing hands. The same colleague was once given a post-interview lift back to her hotel by Michelle Rodriguez (the nearest I can come is walking back to Highgate Tube with Tom Hiddleston), who delightfully slalomed through traffic like she was in the *Fast And Furious* franchise – which, of course, she is – and the two discussed astral planes while an audio book mumbled in the background.

PLANE TALKING

Perhaps my most surreal meet was queuing for the loo at 36,000ft in front of Gwendoline Christie. It was on the way back from Comic-Con and I was in the bedtime onesie provided and she was in her Captain Phasma outfit (OK, she wasn't, but it wouldn't have been any more odd than seeing her in pyjamas). The person in the cubicle was taking an age, making it all the more awkward. Should I say hello? Should I let her go first? But what if the person left a stink? Then again, if I went first, she might think the stink was mine. Thankfully the situation was resolved when she wandered off to talk to her *Game Of Thrones* co-star Sophie Turner. My God, maybe the mind-numbing repetition of all those hotel-set junkets isn't so bad after all...

Jamie will return next issue... For more misadventures, follow: @jamie_graham9 on Twitter.

FACT-FINDER
Weisz plays Deborah Lipstadt in the historic court case proving the Holocaust did in fact happen.

ON SET

COURTING CONTROVERSY

DENIAL | Rachel Weisz battles an academic Holocaust denier in a powerhouse legal drama based on a real-life case.

Rachel Weisz, Andrew Scott and Tom Wilkinson sit side by side behind a long desk on the upstairs level of Surrey County Hall in Kingston upon Thames. Before them stands a swarm of press, the babbling voices and click of cameras finally subsiding as Weisz, in a perfect east coast American accent, addresses the room, speaking with gusto and eloquence on the importance of protecting the truth.

Such a speech, such a message and such a film as *Denial* feels more vital than ever in these dark days of politicians spouting nonsense. Director Mick Jackson (*The Bodyguard*) stresses as much to *Teasers*, saying, "This is about protecting the truth from a guy who, like Donald Trump, says the most outrageous, deeply offensive things – and gets away with it."

Set in 2000, *Denial* is the true story of US academic Deborah E. Lipstadt (Weisz), who was sued for libel by historian David Irving (Timothy Spall) after labelling him a Holocaust denier. With the burden of proof falling not on the accuser of libel but the accused, Lipstadt must then prove the Holocaust did indeed take place.

REX

"Deborah is articulate, strong, media-savvy, but her legal team don't want her 'messy' passion, they just want to make the trial about Irving," says Jackson. "If she gets involved, Irving will destroy her. If she brings survivors in, he'll destroy them because they can't remember every little thing." Being silenced is, naturally, incredibly frustrating for Lipstadt, who's all too aware there's also the court of public opinion, in which she is losing as the trial unfolds. Today's scene, explains Jackson, occurs right after the verdict, when solicitor Anthony Julius (Andrew Scott) says "'*Now* you can talk'," and Deborah gives voice to everything she's been holding in."

"They called him 'The Cleverest Man In England' – he represented Diana in her divorce," says a smartly suited Scott when he wanders over. "He's Jewish, so this case is very important to him, but he doesn't express that passion in anything but the brilliance and precision with which he goes about his work."

Hoping that *Denial* catches the true-crime zeitgeist à la *Making A Murderer*, Jackson attests that the material, as scripted by David Hare, is just too strong to ignore. He certainly couldn't: "I'd been nearly 50 years in the business and decided to retire," he smiles. "Then my agent sent me this and I couldn't say no." ***JG***

ETA | 27 JANUARY / DENIAL OPENS EARLY NEXT YEAR.

SHORT CUTS

What's stopping, what's starting in movieland...

GALAXY QUEST

Emilia Clarke will be trading Westeros for a galaxy far, far and away. Starwars.com announced, "Clarke, known for her stirring portrayal of Daenerys Targaryen in *Game Of Thrones*, will be join the upcoming untitled Han Solo *Star Wars* movie." She's teaming up with Alden Ehrenreich (Han) and Donald Glover (Lando Calrissian) for the much-anticipated prequel, though her character has not yet been specified.

ACTING ROYALTY

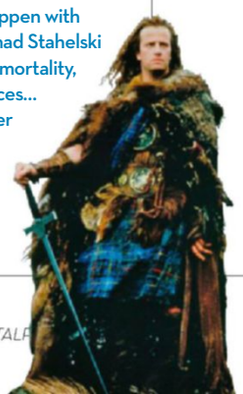
Marvel's *Black Panther* promises to open a can of whoop ass – more so now Ryan Coogler has cast the mighty Angela Bassett as Ramonda, the mum of Chadwick Boseman's heroic T'Challa, aka the titular hero who defends his kingdom of Wakanda against enemies from without and within. Bassett joins a cast that includes Michael B. Jordan, Forest Whitaker and Lupita Nyong'o.

PEEP BLOW

Sam Mendes' first post-Bond movie, *The Voyeur's Motel*, has been scrapped. A zoom-in on lifelong voyeur Gerald Foos, who opened a hotel so he could spy on his guests, it was to be produced by Steven Spielberg. But the emergence of a Foos documentary has brought new facts to light, scuppering the film. "Nobody told us about the documentary," winced Mendes.

HEAD'S UP

There can be only one director, and after the likes of Juan Carlos Fresnadillo and Justin Lin have been and gone, that *Highlander* reboot finally looks set to happen with *John Wick* helmer Chad Stahelski riding into battle. "Immortality, love, identity, set-pieces... I can't think of a better property," muses Stahelski. Here's hoping that no-one dares kill Connor MacLeod's dog...



BETWEEN TAKES

JONATHAN RHYS MEYERS

THE LONDON TOWN STAR TALKS LIFE ON SET...

What's the first thing you do on set?
Introduce myself to the DoP and make sure I make friends. He's the fucker that lights you!

What do you always take with you?
God, I have to say a pack of fucking cigarettes. I have no good luck charms. I don't keep a rabbit's foot or anything.

Hot or cold lunch?
I don't really eat while I work. I'm shooting *Vikings* right now, so I'm in battle scenes the whole time. I only eat a piece of fish at lunchtime, or a bowl of soup. I have to keep myself light and empty – it keeps you hungry, so you work harder.

Sleep or don't sleep?
I used to try to get some sleep, but now I don't. I try to save it, so I sleep at night – and I'm not up at 2am watching 15 episodes of *House Of Cards*.

Best on-set experience?
I remember sitting on the corner of the Eiffel Tower [*on* From Paris With Love]. John Travolta and I are right on the edge, our legs hanging over at 5.30 in the morning. He had these beautiful coffees brought over and they're serving us with a silver tray as we watch the sun coming up.

Have you ever stolen anything from a film set?
Just some chains, some bangles on some film where I thought, "That's kind of cute. Can I give you a fiver for those?" Yes, some people keep iconic things from their roles but those are the same people who have posters of themselves in their house. I once went to an actor's house and there was this big, long corridor of poster after poster of the actor. I just have my memories.

Most embarrassing moment on set?
It was for *The Governess*. I had to come out of the North Sea in Scotland, balls naked. It doesn't matter who you are as a man – the North Sea certainly fucking sorts you out. And there was this girl I really fancied on set. She was right there. I'm like, "I've no cock!" ***JC***

ETA | 26 DECEMBER / LONDON TOWN IS AVAILABLE DIGITALLY NOW AND RELEASES ON DVD NEXT MONTH. THE FIFTH SEASON OF VIKINGS AIRS NEXT YEAR.

FIRST WORD

PRAY, TELL

SILENCE | Martin Scorsese and Andrew Garfield confess all about their startling religious thriller...

The subject matter is very close to my heart," Martin Scorsese says, those famously bushy eyebrows knitting together as he cranes forward in his seat. "I've been working on it since I first read the book [*Shūsaku Endō's 1966 masterpiece of the same name*] in 1989."

That's a 27-year journey from page to screen, a path strewn with legal and financial obstacles. At one point, in 2009, *Silence* almost made it into production starring Daniel Day-Lewis, Benicio Del Toro and Gael García Bernal – a cast that morphed into Liam Neeson, Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver by the time it finally shot, in Taiwan, from January to May of 2015. A film of wide landscapes and deep themes, it's set in the 17th Century, as two Portuguese Jesuit priests (Garfield, Driver) travel to Japan to propagate Christianity and locate their missing mentor (Neeson). What they find is violence and persecution, their very notions of faith tested under terrible duress.

For Scorsese, whose Catholicism informs each of his movies and who directly dealt with issues of faith in *The Last Temptation Of Christ* and *Kundun*, *Silence* is a personal film. "It goes back to growing up in New York, living in an area that was tough, and also the Church at the same time," he says. "It's similar to *Mean Streets*, in a way – it deals with spiritual matters in a concrete, physical world where invariably the worst of human nature is revealed."

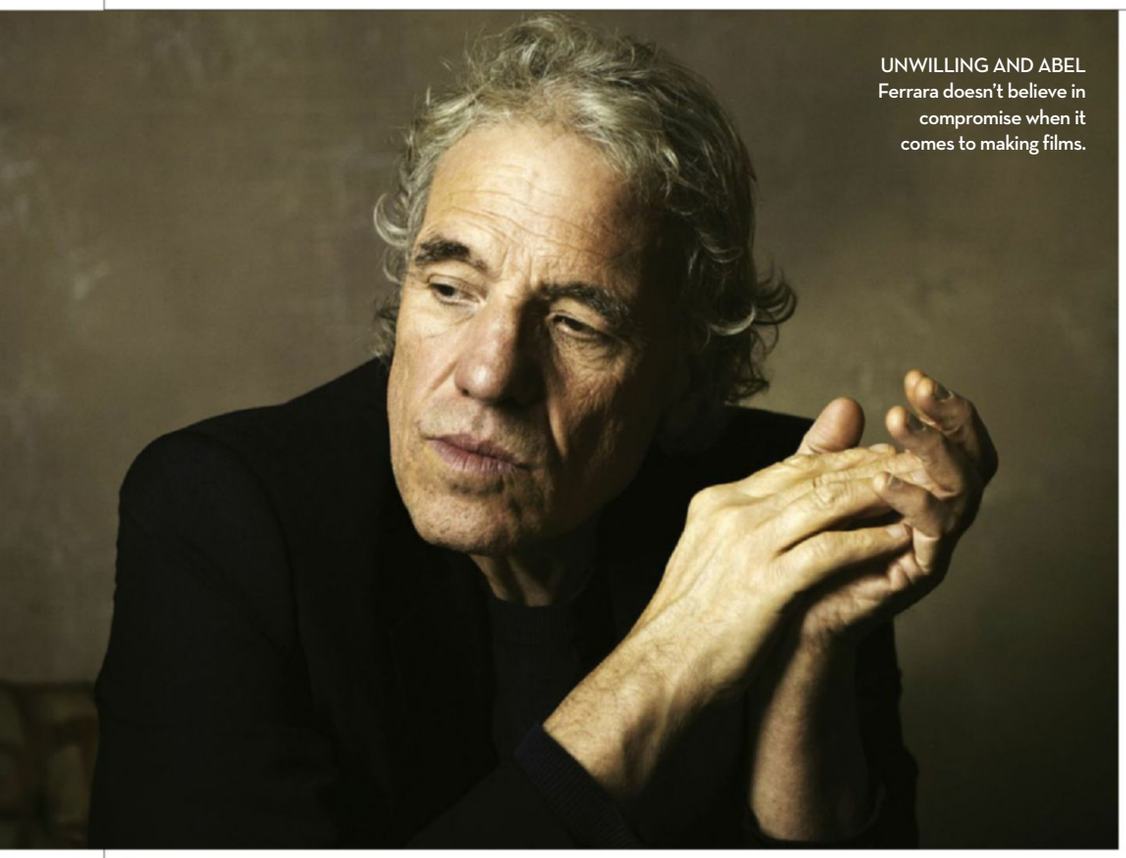
'IT'S WHERE THE WORST OF HUMAN NATURE IS REVEALED'
MARTIN SCORSESE

To play Father Sebastião Rodrigues, Garfield prepared for a year, wading through "boxes of DVDs and books". And that was just the start. "My life became very simple," he says. "I became vegan and lost 40 pounds, which created clarity. I was living off three or four hours of sleep. And I worked with a Jesuit priest who taught me spiritual exercises, which is a 30-day retreat where you meditate and imaginatively walk with Jesus, from his conception to his resurrection."

Such commitment is admirable, but will audiences connect with *Silence* in these secular, thrill-seeking times? "It's an escapist film, in that it transports you to a totally different time and place," says Garfield, while Scorsese points out, "It's suspenseful, with elements of a thriller."

Temptation, it turns out, can be a good thing – not that *Teasers* needs any persuading to view what may be a late-career masterpiece from the greatest living director. ***JG***

ETA | 1 JANUARY / SILENCE OPENS NEXT MONTH.



UNWILLING AND ABEL Ferrara doesn't believe in compromise when it comes to making films.

THE HERO

ABEL FERRARA

The controversial director on the mob, Madonna and mayhem.

Often referred to as the 'skid-row Scorsese', New York filmmaker Abel Ferrara makes uncompromising films depicting destructive characters battling for their souls. The likes of *King Of New York*, *Bad Lieutenant* and debut *The Driller Killer* just keep tearing through flesh and bone to lodge deep inside your brain.

Did you think *Driller Killer* would still be talked about 37 years on?
I thought the film would; I didn't know if I would. This was an exploitation film made for a very specific audience that Hollywood wasn't catering for. This was before *Friday The 13th* and all that bullshit. If *Texas Chain Saw* could make 50 million bucks, why couldn't we?

How aware were you of it being a banned 'video nasty' in the UK?
It was hysterical. I couldn't believe it. I'm not saying these should be watched by five-year-olds, but I have the right to express whatever vision I want to express. You don't have to watch it.

Your characters often have a devil on one shoulder, an angel on the other…
We're all fighting our own battle, man. God is inside you. The righteous way is inside you. You need to find it and express it under duress; and duress is the modern world. It's being human.

Is it harder to get stars to take the risks you demand?
They're taking *me* to darker places. [*sniggers*] Harvey Keitel and Christopher Walken were a little older than me, more experienced. I learned from them. They were my guides, my spiritual teachers. So you can blame it on them.

Is *Bad Lieutenant* the most personal film you've made so far?
It's not any more or less personal than the other films. They all reflect my life. That film was a little bit about my father, who was a degenerate gambler.

CULT CLASSICS (Top to bottom) Ferrara helmed and starred in *The Driller Killer*, before directing Walken in *King Of New York* and Keitel in *Bad Lieutenant*.

'KEITEL AND WALKEN WERE MY SPIRITUAL TEACHERS. SO YOU CAN BLAME THEM'

Did you or Harvey Keitel ever worry that you were going too far?
Harvey doesn't think like that. He's working his art, bro. For me, maybe when we were spraying 'Fuck you' on the altar of the church. [*laughs*] When you walk into a *real* church in the morning and see that, you think, 'Oh shit.'

You've done studio movies, such as *Body Snatchers* and *Dangerous Game*. Did you have clashes?
I wanted done with those guys. They didn't like us and I realised we couldn't do our thing. It was like, "Why are we torturing each other?" They see films economically. We can't be thinking about business when we make a film.

Did Madonna support your vision on *Dangerous Game*?
Her character was a TV star who the director thought he could turn into the lead of his movie… There was a [*real-life*] parallel. But she did fine, she really did. There was drama but there's always drama. With Kelly [*McGillis, on* Cat Chaser], all that… I feel bad. I'm sorry to those women that I was maybe not as sensitive, or empathetic… I wasn't the man I should've been to them. But Madonna's performance is cool, man.

Your mob movie *The Funeral* wasn't a smooth ride either, was it?
The Funeral was done with a lot of money, a lot of stars. There was all sorts of fucking drama. But I don't compromise. The director doesn't do a lot but he better have final cut. Usually he doesn't write the music or shoot the movie or act in it – what the fuck *does* he do? Sit in a chair and look intelligent. Only later will you know if he knows what the fuck he's doing.

You became a Buddhist 10 years ago. Has it changed your movies?
Until I got sober, I couldn't be a Buddhist. You can't meditate on heroin. You think you can, but you can't. [*ponders question*] The camera picks up every fucking slight variation in the atmosphere, so… yeah. ***JG***

ETA | OUT NOW / THE DRILLER KILLER IS AVAILABLE NOW ON SPECIAL EDITION DVD AND BLU-RAY.

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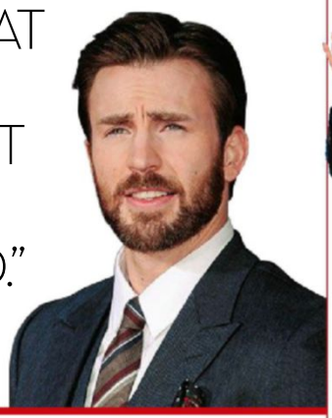
SOUND BYTES

Quotable dialogue from this month's movies – and their stars

"THIS IS AN EMBARRASSING NIGHT FOR AMERICA. WE'VE LET A HATEMONGER LEAD OUR GREAT NATION. WE'VE LET A BULLY SET OUR COURSE. I'M DEVASTATED."



Chris Evans is literally Captain America.

"DROP THE MIC. BOOM. TELL EVERYBODY, 'MATCH THAT SHIT.'"

Quentin Tarantino plans to retire on a high.

HAYAO SILVER
Despite retiring in 2013, Studio Ghibli legend Hayao Miyazaki is returning for one last film: CG animation *Boro The Caterpillar*.

GOOD THING

BAD THING

FUTURE HOWLER
Max Landis will write and direct a remake of his father's horror comedy classic *An American Werewolf In London*. Must. Keep. An. Open. Mind.

"THROUGHOUT MY CAREER THERE HAVE BEEN MOMENTS WHEN I HAVE BEEN INSULTED, SIDELINED, PAID LESS, CREATIVELY IGNORED AND OTHERWISE DIMINISHED BASED ON MY GENDER."

Mila Kunis pens a powerful essay on gender discrimination.

27

The (record) number of animated films submitted for Oscar consideration this year.

500 MILLION

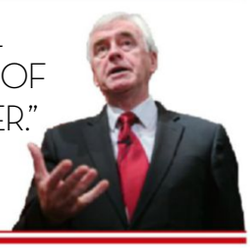
Approximate dollar drop in box-office takings between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Inferno*.

"YOU'RE THREATENING ME WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU. SO WHAT AM I TALKING TO YOU FOR?"

Joe Coughlin (**Ben Affleck**) has no time for middlemen in *Live By Night*.

"WE'RE LIVING IN AN *I, DANIEL BLAKE* SOCIETY AS A RESULT OF HAVING THE TORIES IN POWER."

Shadow chancellor **John McDonnell** *invokes Ken Loach in Parliament.*



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Gosling and Stone make sweet music...

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Almost Christmas	★★	p47
The Ardennes	★★★	p47
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ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Assassin's Creed	1 January
The Bye Bye Man	13 January
Live By Night	13 January
Monster Trucks	26 December
Rogue One: A Star Wars Story	Out now
Silence	1 January
Underworld: Blood Wars	13 January
Why Him?	26 December

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

CERTIFICATE 12A **DIRECTOR** Damien Chazelle **STARRING** Emma Stone, Ryan Gosling, Callie Hernandez, Rosemarie DeWitt, J.K. Simmons **SCREENPLAY** Damien Chazelle **DISTRIBUTOR** Lionsgate **RUNNING TIME** 128 mins

LA LA LAND

Now that's entertainment...

★★★★★ OUT 13 JANUARY

Long regarded as quaint at best, obsolete at worst, the musical nonetheless refuses to curl up its twinkle toes and die. The likes of *Evita*, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Chicago*, the *Pitch Perfect* movies and TV's *Glee* have all hitched sudden breaths to interrupt the decades-long death rattle. And now, wunderkind Damien Chazelle follows up his breakout hit *Whiplash* with the vivacious *La La Land*.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

SINGIN' IN THE RAIN *(1952)*
People remember the splish-sploshing in puddles but there's anguish here, too.

FAME *(1980)*
La La Land's opener is a let's-put-on-the-show-right-here flashmob moment.

ONCE *2007*
Two musicians provide soul-shiver tunes and a romance for the ages.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

Set in contemporary Los Angeles, this glorious throwback to both the MGM musicals of the '40s and '50s (such as *Singin' In The Rain* and *An American In Paris*) plus Jacques Demy's sublime, bittersweet French fancies of the '60s (such as *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg* and *The Young Girls Of Rochefort*) kicks off with cinema's most memorable traffic jam since Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend*. It's captured in a freewheeling tracking shot to rival the opening gambits of Orson Welles' *Touch Of Evil* and Robert Altman's *The Player*.

La La Land is that kind of movie – in love with other movies. Swooping, pirouetting, the camera picks out drivers on a gridlocked flyover as they spring from their vehicles for a synchronised song-and-dance number that grows ever more elaborate and elated until viewers' hearts can't help but join in with all this cartwheeling.

STONE ROSE

What follows never demonstrates quite the same jazz-hands pizazz, but that's no bad thing. Instead we're treated to something altogether more tender and melancholy. The journey begins as we follow wannabe actress Mia (Emma Stone) to a party and later, all alone, into a bar, lured by sad, sweet piano music. It would make for a gorgeous meet-cute if the pianist didn't barge past her as she approaches, and if they hadn't crossed paths already, their cars jammed end to end on that clogged freeway, where they flipped each other the bird.

The pianist is Seb (Ryan Gosling), and Chazelle rewinds from the moment he bursts past Mia to show us just how he got from the flyover to this point, making us privy to his dream of one day opening his own jazz club. Fate determines that Seb and Mia will meet again, and tumble into love. But that's the easy part...

No lesser talents than Francis Ford Coppola (*One From The Heart*) and Scorsese (*New York, New York*) have been here before, freighting Golden Era-style musicals with anguish, resentment and failure. But for all their joys (and sorrows), those films didn't have Justin Hurwitz's numbers, by turns buoyant, bombastic, flirtatious, nostalgic and mournful.

They also didn't have a career-best Stone, with eyes bigger than a Studio Ghibli heroine. Or an A-game Gosling, summoning all of his chronic cool, sardonic smirks and heart-melting charm, then tossing in the goofball humour he found on *The Nice Guys* for good measure. In *Crazy,*

'LA LA LAND HAS A CAREER-BEST STONE AND AN A-GAME GOSLING'

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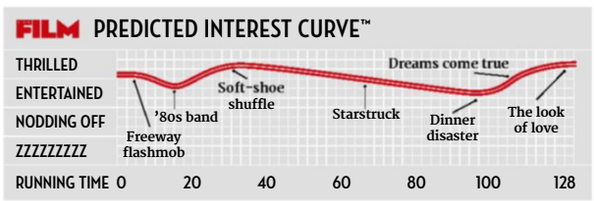
He thought the noise came from the trumpet on stage, but he couldn't be sure...



Stupid, Love these stars' chemistry was palpable; here it damn near knocks your socks off.

VAULT IN OUR STARS

Both Stone and Gosling can carry a tune (rather sickeningly, given all their other gifts), with any splinters in their voices only adding to the ardour and fragility. They also dance beautifully, making up in style and elegance what their choreographed routines lack in complexity. Like Woody Allen's *Everyone Says I Love You*, this is a musical about feeling, not finish, and a magic-hour soft-shoe shuffle backdropped by the glimmering lights of LA is impossibly romantic.

With its vivid lensing, colour-coded costumes and striking production design that glides from pepped-up naturalism to Technicolor soundstage spectacle, *La La Land* brims with such indelible moments. Like his protagonists, Chazelle shoots for the stars, at one point even allowing Mia and Seb to shake off gravity as they visit Griffith Observatory so they can dance amid dazzling constellations. And yet this is also a movie that serves up slanging matches, heartache and, for Mia, a soul-baring audition to match Naomi Watts' unforgettable showcase in *Mulholland Drive*. It also never loses sight of the sacrifices that go into attaining a dream. In this sense, *La La Land* complements *Whiplash*. While the intensity is dialled back from that movie's incessant verbal volleys and occasional physical abuse, there is real emotional punishment on display.

Already the darling of the Venice, Toronto and London Film Festivals, it remains to be seen if *La La Land* can similarly dazzle multiplex audiences and make good on its early favourite status at the 2017 Oscars. Let's hope so – it's a sophisticated, fervent movie, at once old and new, joyous and heartbreaking, personal and universal. Sing it from the rooftops. ***Jamie Graham***

THE VERDICT

Could have been a grand folly but instead it's just grand. Will make audiences break into grins like its characters break into song.

CERTIFICATE 12A **DIRECTOR** Morten Tyldum **STARRING** Jennifer Lawrence, Chris Pratt, Michael Sheen **SCREENPLAY** Jon Spaihts **DISTRIBUTOR** Sony **RUNNING TIME** 120 mins

PASSENGERS

Star-crossing lovers...

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

Passengers arrives with a cargo hold laden with expectation. The script – by _Prometheus_' Jon Spaihts – had been knocking around on the Black List of the best unproduced screenplays for the best part of a decade, and after flirting with different star/director combos over the years (Reese Witherspoon and Keanu Reeves were once attached as the leads), the film arrives with the names of two of today's biggest stars above the title: Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt, whose eight-figure salaries have been well documented. So was the destination worth the journey? Well, like the corkscrewing spaceship at its centre, _Passengers_ is slick, hi-tech and easy on the eye. But there's not a whole lot happening on board.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

THE SHINING *1980*
Bartender Arthur (Michael Sheen) evokes the Overlook Hotel's Lloyd, with his red jacket and knowing glare.

WALL·E *2008*
Passengers shares a great deal of DNA with Pixar's sci-fi classic.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY *2014*
Chris Pratt of TV's *Parks & Rec* first proved his movie star (and dancing) chops here.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

The story kicks off on the starship Avalon, 30 years into its 120-year voyage to Homestead II, a colony planet that the ship's 5,000 passengers will soon be calling home. But a piece of meteorite gets through the ship's shield and fries something in the engine room, shorting out the suspended-animation pod occupied by Jim Preston (Pratt), a mechanic en route to a fresh start. As the ship's AI systems try to acclimatise him to his new living situation, he soon becomes distraught when he learns he's the only person awake, and he's got approximately 90 years to kill before he arrives at his destination.

LUST IN SPACE

Jim rattles around the empty luxury liner, exhausting the entertainment and dining options and growing a Robinson Crusoe-esque beard, before he starts to become suicidally lonely.

It's at this point – through a plot contrivance that's been kept hidden from the trailers, which we won't spoil here – he acquires a fellow pod-person companion, writer Aurora Lane (Lawrence), a sleeping beauty who's similarly freaked out when she wakes in her busted pod. The two hang out, shoot the breeze and make plans for survival. And, naturally, start to fall in love a bit. All the while, various parts of the ship are glitching out.

It's an intriguing premise, and the not-too-distant-future tech is brought to life via some sharp CGI. As near futures go, it feels somewhat familiar – all screens are semi-transparent, virtual reality assistants are oppressively chirpy, synthetic food is served by vending machine – but it's impressively realised. Throughout the first half, interesting ideas abound. What kind of person relocates to a place that takes generations to get to? Who exactly is getting rich from the colonisation of Homestead II? And most importantly, how long will it be until we can have android bar staff like Michael Sheen's duteous Arthur?

While many questions are posed, *Passengers*' mysteries don't lead to satisfying reveals. Director Morten Tyldum (*The Imitation Game*) puts the romance up front, and while he's happy to liberally scatter cine-literate references throughout – can anyone see a revolving spaceship corridor and not think of *2001*? Likewise for hypersleep pods and *Alien*? – *Passengers* lacks the

'MICHAEL SHEEN LENDS TERRIFIC SUPPORT AS A MANNEQUIN BARMAN'

"So, can we mess with the 4,998 sleeping people now please?"

richness and complexities of the genre's strongest offerings. Appearing so soon on the heels of the superior *Arrival*, and even the latest thought-provoking/skewering series of *Black Mirror*, it feels slight.

SURVIVAL OF THE HOTTEST

Lawrence and Pratt are among the most charismatic performers working today, and their natural likeability lends a boost to what are underwritten roles. Pratt, in particular, has his work cut out to ensure that Jim doesn't seem totally creepy in light of some questionable behaviour. The couple's chemistry might not quite have the Stone/Gosling crackle, but they make a pleasing pairing on screen; the idea of spending 90 years with either of them isn't an objectionable one. There's a humour and lightness to much of their interaction, even if the characters don't rank alongside either actor's most memorable: Jim lacks the roguish charm of Peter Quill, and Lawrence's glassy turn isn't up there with her most engaging. Michael Sheen, meanwhile, lends terrific support, nailing his mannequin bartender's ersatz humanity.

With the actors doing enough to keep you invested, and a steady supply of visually impressive set-pieces (space walks, zero-G swims) maintaining the pace, *Passengers* offers plenty of in-flight entertainment for its two-hour running time, even if it can't match the tension of the similarly themed lost-in-space survival saga, *The Martian*. Its main problem, in fact, is that while it's perfectly enjoyable in itself, it's always reminding you of slightly better films that it doesn't quite live up to. As sci-fi, it feels like a professionally produced hybrid that lacks its own identity. As a romance, it never fully earns your investment. For those reasons, it seems destined to pass smoothly by without making a lasting impact. ***Matt Maytum***

THE VERDICT

***Passengers* never quite delivers on its concept, or the prospect of its Lawrence/Pratt team-up. Still, entertaining enough while it lasts.**

Hair sorted, only the pedi remained in Maui's makeover.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED..

POCAHONTAS *1995*
Disney's singalong eco-romance, painted in the colours of the wind.

WHALE RIDER *2002*
A Maori teen fights to claim her chieftain birthright in a tough, uplifting drama.

HERCULES *2014*
Dwayne Johnson's other heroic demigod outing is a monster-punching riot.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

MOANA

Demigods and monsters...

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

Out go princes and primping on this Disney princess voyage. And in comes seafaring and world-saving, in a visually dazzling, big-hearted crowd-catcher. Moana, Disney's first Polynesian princess, is a feisty chieftain's daughter, determined to save her dying island by finding exiled trickster demigod Maui and forcing him to replace the heart-jewel he stole from the island goddess Te Fiti.

Cheekily self-aware and culturally sensitive, the film insists she's not royalty but the ocean's Chosen One, its Pacific waters parting Moses-style around her to create a shimmering aquarium. Although, as Dwayne Johnson's Maui observes, "If you wear a dress and have an animal sidekick – you're a princess."

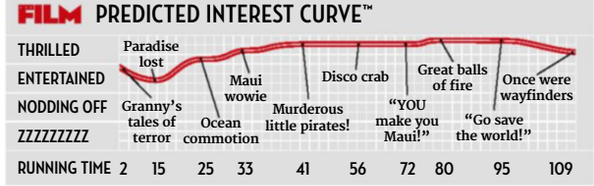
Using meaty South Sea myths to craft a strong but simple story, the film initially resembles a pretty patchwork of past Disney hits (like many a Mouse House protagonist, the island-trapped Moana yearns for freedom). That's perhaps unsurprising, given directors Ron Clements and John Musker are veterans of the '90s Disney renaissance (they crafted *Aladdin*, *Hercules* and *The Little Mermaid*). But that era's girl-power animation also feels nimbly rebooted here. Moana's character exhibits both Pocahontas-style leadership and Mulan pluck.

The energy soars, however, when Johnson's selfish, boastful but amiable Maui shows up to give her the run-around, hell-bent on regaining his lost powers without her pesky quest. In another Disney princess first, theirs is an odd-couple adventure rather than a love story, more *True Grit* than true romance. Spoofing his he-man persona, Johnson's feckless Maui sparks great buddy chemistry with newcomer Auli'i Cravalho's engagingly stubborn Moana. As they power their raft across the ocean into some exhilarating action sequences, taking on marauding coconut-clad mini-pirates or battling a sky-filling lava monster, the adrenaline levels surge way past animated fairytale norms.

But while it's a more than worthy successor, *Moana* substitutes adventure and empowerment for *Frozen*'s emotional heft. With an eco-conscious story favouring redemption over outright villainy, there's just a bit less tugging on your heartstrings. As Disney baddies go, Jemaine Clement's giant treasure-crazed crab Tamatoa is a ball of fun ('Shiny', his Bowie-ish disco celebration of all things bling, is a highlight). But he's no Ursula the Sea Witch. Still, the tunes in this 'toon are tip-top, partly crafted by *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda. The standout earworm? 'You're Welcome', a sly world-building boast that proves Johnson has pipes as well as pecs. Coupled with the extraordinary lush visuals and fluid camerawork – moulding the ocean's many moods and textures 'til it's practically a character – *Moana* essays a rich, vivid feel. It might not be a whole new world, but it's a fantastic voyage. ***Kate Stables***

CERTIFICATE PG **DIRECTORS** Ron Clements, John Musker **STARRING** Auli'i Cravalho, Dwayne Johnson, Jemaine Clement **SCREENPLAY** Jared Bush **DISTRIBUTOR** Disney **RUNNING TIME** 113 mins

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



THE VERDICT

Despite Dwayne Johnson's solid scene-stealing, the wave-taming Moana gets a true hero's journey in this South Seas stunner.

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Casey Affleck and Michelle Williams deliver awards-worthy performances.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED..

THE SWEET HEREAFTER *1997*
A bus crash in a small Canadian town shrouds a community in grief.

THE SON'S ROOM *2001*
A couple lose their son in a diving accident in this Palme d'Or winner.

BLUE VALENTINE *2010*
More Michelle Williams in another indie drama that emotionally devastates.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

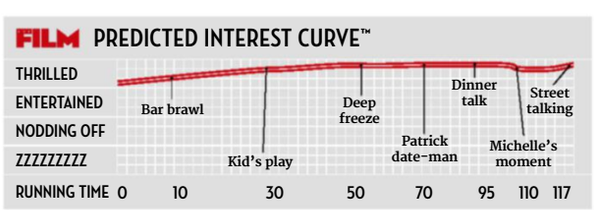
MANCHESTER BY THE SEA

Home truths...

★★★★★ OUT 13 JANUARY

Kenneth Lonergan's third film in a 16-year career offers further proof of his ear for dialogue and eye for the messiness of life. Like 2000's *You Can Count On Me* and, especially, 2011's *Margaret*, *Manchester By The Sea* refuses to sugarcoat or simplify, instead letting the drama sprawl and overspill until a 360-degree portrait of a man, a family and a community drifts into focus.

Boston janitor Lee (Casey Affleck) returns to the titular town in Massachusetts when his older brother Joe (Kyle Chandler) dies of a heart attack. A morose, taciturn loner given to communicating with his fists after too many beers, Lee is horrified to find that he has been named legal guardian of his teenage nephew Patrick (Lucas Hedges), whose ties to Manchester-by-the-Sea – hockey team, rock band, two girlfriends – mean Lee will need to stick around his hometown for a good while to come.



CERTIFICATE 15 **DIRECTOR** Kenneth Lonergan **STARRING** Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Kyle Chandler **SCREENPLAY** Kenneth Lonergan **DISTRIBUTOR** Studiocanal **RUNNING TIME** 137 mins

Under grey skies clogged with pellets of snow, the drama inches along, with flashbacks revealing that Lee was once married to Randi (Michelle Williams), who still lives in the area. True, withholding the source of Lee's emotional shutdown for a late reveal is something you expect from a thriller rather than a sombre character study. But such is the authenticity on display elsewhere, it doesn't feel schematic. Viewed another way, holding it back could even be seen as an act of courage on Lonergan's part, denying viewers an easy means to empathise with such a closed-mouthed, locked-up character. One thing's for sure though: the flashback hits you like a freight train when it finally arrives.

Manchester By The Sea is not an easy film to watch. Not everyone will get on with its loose (but still controlled) storytelling, comprising baggy conversations and non-events that other movies would deem unnecessary. Meanwhile, its hard-packed, wintry setting is enough to make viewers' joints throb. Even sharper is the pain to the heart: Affleck's committed turn as a man calcified by grief is harrowing to watch. Williams, meanwhile, haunts the periphery of the picture before stepping front and centre to inhabit a scene so raw and uncompromising it stings like a slap to the face on an ice-cold day.

If it's thrills or cheer you're after, you're in the wrong place. Lonergan doesn't do zip and zest, though he does still appreciate the importance of humour in the direst of circumstances. Yet *Manchester By The Sea* offers its own particular joys, going places that few movies dare to consider these days. The film also favours truth over trite resolutions, a courageous choice that will likely deflate its chances with the uplift-seeking Academy. No matter. It's a triumph. And Lonergan cements his reputation as one of the most vital voices in US cinema. ***Jamie Graham***

THE VERDICT

If ever there was a film that epitomised the saying 'no pain, no gain', this is it. Packs a real wallop.

The teacher was never going to believe that the tree ate his homework...

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED..

GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES *1988*
Ghibli animation about young siblings in WW2 Japan.

PAN'S LABYRINTH *2006*
Del Toro's dark fairytale blends fascist horrors and magical worlds.

BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD *2012*
Magical realism and another star turn from a youngster.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

A MONSTER CALLS

A matter of leaf and death...

★★★★☆ OUT 1 JANUARY

CERTIFICATE 12A **DIRECTOR** J.A. Bayona **STARRING** Lewis MacDougall, Liam Neeson, Felicity Jones, Sigourney Weaver, Toby Kebbell, James Melville **SCREENPLAY** Patrick Ness **DISTRIBUTOR** eOne **RUNNING TIME** 108 mins

It's a cruel quirk of scheduling that *A Monster Calls* is releasing in cinemas on New Year's Day. Thought the January blues were bad? An entire month of misery ain't got nothing on the infinite sadness of J.A. Bayona's fantastical tearjerker.

Having coaxed moments of startling distress out of a young cast in 2012's *The Impossible*, Bayona pulls a similar trick here, lowering the intensity but doubling down on understated heartbreak. Near-newcomer Lewis MacDougall plays Conor O'Malley, a 12-year-old boy whose mother (Felicity Jones) is stricken with cancer. One night the ancient yew tree visible from Conor's bedroom window uproots itself in order to relay the first of three allegorical stories. After which, the Monster (Liam Neeson) claims, Conor will offer his own yarn – one that will "reveal his truth".

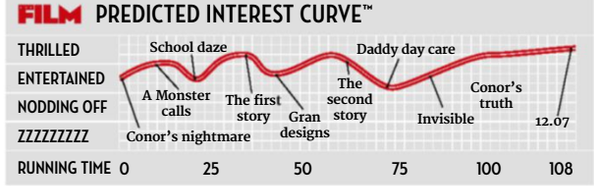
The film's blend of the everyday and the unreal raises questions: is Conor retreating into these dreams as a coping mechanism? Or is Neeson's demonic ent genuinely some ancient wonder answering a desperate cry? Told from Conor's perspective – all low angles and half-heard conversations through doors – there's human tragedy underpinning every utterance and action. It's a supremely affecting and sensitive depiction of internal turmoil.

The bulk of the film's emotional burden is placed on the capable shoulders of MacDougall who impresses, even acting opposite pixels. Crucially, Conor isn't a two-dimensional misery magnet. There are profoundly authentic observations about the unspoken traumas that a situation such as Conor's can inflict. Felicity Jones is inspired casting as Conor's mother, her youth and natural warmth rendering her terminal illness all the more tragic. Toby Kebbell pops up as Conor's estranged father, whose failings are masked behind a brave face. Sigourney Weaver, meanwhile, goes British as Conor's icy grandmother, a wobbly accent distracting from an otherwise measured performance.

Patrick Ness, adapting his own novel, manages a masterful tone. It's dour, but never oppressively so, punctuated by humour and cathartic injections of hope. Such a contained tale could run the risk of feeling small, but is effortlessly cinematic under Bayona, who provides visual flair – most notably in two gorgeous, fully animated storybook sequences that take their inspiration from Jim Kay's evocative novel illustrations. As for the mo-cap Monster, it's a memorable creation – gnarled branches, fiery eyes and Neeson's sonorous cadence lending a sinister ambiguity to the beast's motivation. Seamless VFX and performance work in unison to realise one of the most effective CG characters in recent memory.

If there's a problem, it's that the music can feel manipulative, and it's not immediately clear how suitable this 'family' film is for its target audience – it may be a 12A, but drag adolescents along and back-to-school-blues will feel like a pick-me-up. ***Jordan Farley***

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



THE VERDICT

If this isn't the biggest tearjerker of 2017 we're in for a distressing year. A truly, ahem, tree-mendous fantasy.

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His glory days in the distant past, the years of hard living had caught up with Bugs.

CERTIFICATE 15 **DIRECTOR** Richard Kelly **STARRING** Jake Gyllenhaal, Jena Malone, Drew Barrymore **SCREENPLAY** Richard Kelly **DISTRIBUTOR** Arrow **RUNNING TIME** 118 mins

DONNIE DARKO

It's kind of a bunny story...

★★★★★ OUT 23 DECEMBER

Not even the director's cut, 'sequel' *S. Darko* or Richard Kelly's variable career can dent his debut – 15 years on, *Donnie Darko* remains one of the century's most singular and daring cinematic visions.

None more cult, it went from US box-office failure (its plane-crash plot opening just after 9/11) to the film-you-had-to-see, sparking crazed theories and an unlikely Christmas number one for Gary Jules. Kelly's 2004 director's cut tended towards the literal, but this restored theatrical version still works like a lucid dream from the moment Donnie (Jake Gyllenhaal) wakes up in the hills.

Donnie's journey down the rabbit-hole mixes high school romance, political satire, '80s-cinema pastiche, creepy atmospherics and head-spinning sci-fi. Gothic in look but psychedelic in feel, its ambition is bracing. Yet what resonates is the emotional core. Gyllenhaal's breakthrough performance is simultaneously heartfelt, melancholy and mischievous. While Kelly has struggled to recapture his form, *Donnie* marks Gyllenhaal's ascension to becoming the A-list's most adventurous actor. ***Simon Kinnear***

THE VERDICT

Don't doubt your commitment to Sparkle Motion! Still a masterpiece, bursting with images, ideas and emotions.

OPERATION CHROMITE

★★☆☆☆ 26 DECEMBER

Before the US invasion of Inchon, the turning point of the Korean War, General MacArthur sent in South Korean spies to lay the groundwork. This fictionalised account features Liam Neeson as a cartoonish MacArthur. The rest of the film is equally hammy, from melodramatic score to cheesy slo-mo deaths. Entertaining in its own way, though probably not in the way intended. ***Stephen Kelly***

THE SON OF JOSEPH

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

Troubled teen Vincent (Victor Ezenfis) tracks down his dad (Mathieu Amalric), only to find a self-centred publisher in this meditation on fatherhood. Eugène Green's (*The Portuguese Nun*) direction favours symmetry over emotion, while the impassive performance style recalls French auteur Robert Bresson. It lacks the profundity to fully merit that comparison, but earns its uplifting ending. ***Stephen Puddicombe***

MOLLY MOON AND THE INCREDIBLE BOOK OF HYPNOTISM

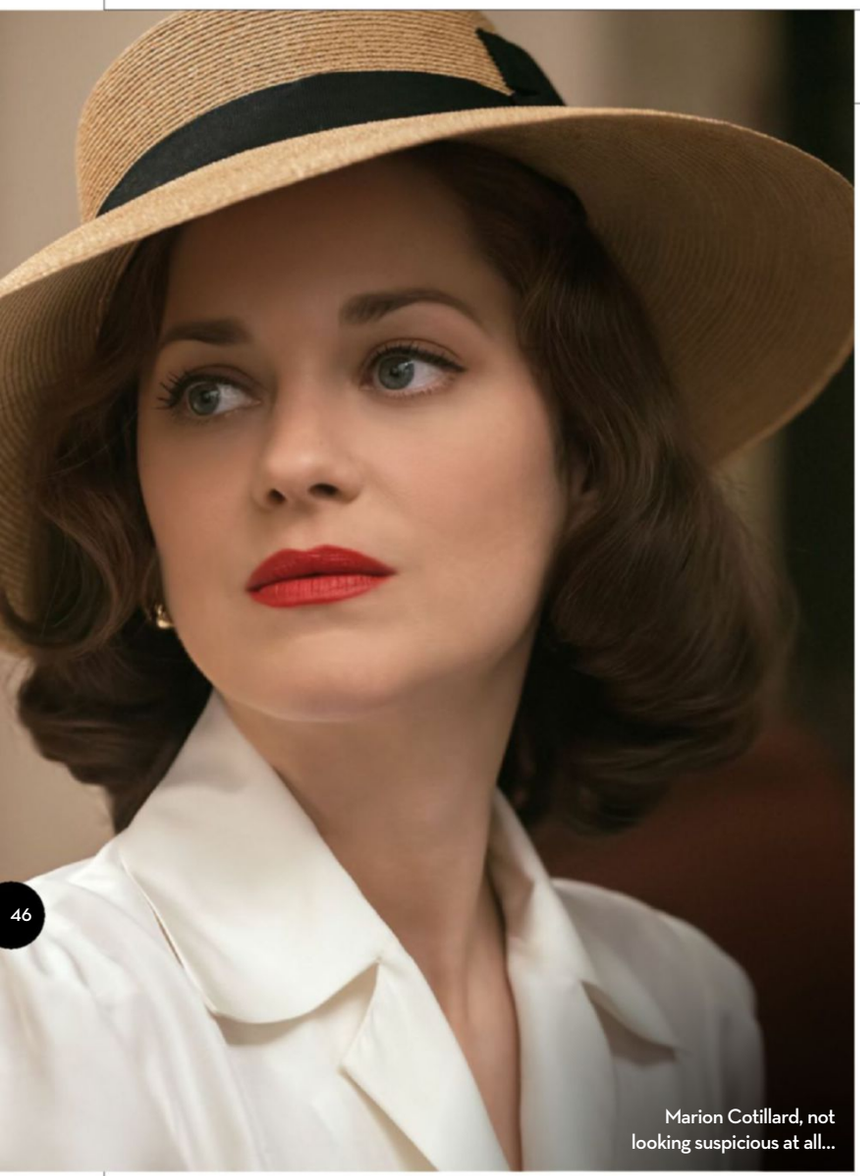
★★☆☆☆ OUT NOW

Playing like supernatural *Tracy Beaker* fanfic, this is the kind of cheesy kids' film that gives parents nightmares. Molly (Raffey Cassidy) is an orphan who uses her powers of hypnotism for fame and freedom. Celia Imrie and Emily Watson are a breath of fresh air, but it's not enough to save this dreary caper. ***Tom Bond***

THROUGH THE WALL

★★☆☆☆ OUT NOW

After arranged-marriage drama *Fill The Void*, Israeli writer/director Rama Burshtein heads into romcom territory. Despite being jilted, Michal (Noa Kooler) goes ahead with her wedding; she's sorted the dress, venue and guests so, she reasons, "God should not have too much trouble finding me a groom." Kooler convinces, but it feels like TV sketches, with not enough laughs. ***Tom Dawson***



Marion Cotillard, not looking suspicious at all...

CERTIFICATE 15 **DIRECTOR** Robert Zemeckis **STARRING** Brad Pitt, Marion Cotillard, Jared Harris, Simon McBurney **SCREENPLAY** Steven Knight **DISTRIBUTOR** Paramount **RUNNING TIME** 124 mins

ALLIED

Spies wide shut...

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

Two hot spies meet in an exotic locale, trade cocky banter and end up having hot sex. If it sounds similar to one of Brad Pitt's previous roles, it pretty much is (initially, at least). Like a WW2 *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, Robert Zemeckis' film trades on the beauty and chemistry of its leads (considerable in both cases) before switching into a sub-le Carré mole drama.

That much is obvious from the it's-all-in-there trailer, as Canadian airman-spy Max (Pitt) reevaluates his entire existence when his French Resistance wife Marianne (Cotillard) is accused of being a Nazi spy. Could the woman he loves, who's literally pushed his baby out amid a London air raid, be working a deep, *deep* cover?

Steven Knight's (*Locke*, *Peaky Blinders*) script competently explores chewy themes: matrimonial and state loyalties, the breaking point of love. All perfectly diverting when it's Pitt and Cotillard turning on the charm. Beautifully shot, immaculately costumed and seemingly CG-ed to their most perfect selves, their luminosity and star power lift potentially cheap moments (lustful looks in mirrors, *English Patient*-style car sex) to classy, if glassy, levels. ***Jane Crowther***

THE VERDICT

Polished period entertainment in the traditional matinee sense. Ravishing but not riveting. *Casablanca* it ain't.

HOLY COW

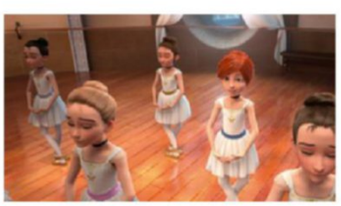
★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

Low-key doc about an Azerbaijani man who dreams of providing for his family by owning a European cow, much to the chagrin of his conservative village elders. Debut director Imam Hasanov allows his moo-er to symbolise hope and possible escape from the grinding privation of the post-Soviet state. A refreshing concept, but it's a shame the heft of these themes is undercut by scenes that feel overly staged. ***Tim Coleman***

THE WEEKEND

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

This light-hearted, occasionally broad comedy sees student Derrick (a likeable Joivan Wade) and his two pals come across a rucksack stuffed with £50 notes. The jokes frequently land and Wade and his co-stars (Percelle Ascott, Dee Kaate) are amusingly hyperactive. But character development takes a backseat to the more generic business of the trio dodging dosh-hunting gangsters. ***Stephen Puddicombe***



BALLERINA

★★☆☆☆ OUT NOW

Félicie (voiced by Elle Fanning; shamelessly modelled on *Frozen*'s Anna) escapes an orphanage to study ballet in Paris. There she's taught by a hobbled housekeeper (Carly Rae Jepsen), bonds with an inventor (Dane DeHaan) and falls foul of a fellow hoofer whose mother could out-de Vil Cruella. The animation earns brownie points for its digital recreation of 1880s Paree. The rest, alas, is pretty pointe-less. ***Neil Smith***

RESET

★★★☆☆ OUT 26 DECEMBER

This beautiful-looking doc follows *Black Swan* choreographer Benjamin Millepied's 2015 quest to stage his first show as the Paris Opera Ballet's new dance director (a post he recently quit). There's plenty of style and grace on offer, but not much drama – even a crew strike fizzles into nothing. Still, for dance fans this is a fascinating study of the time, effort and logistics that go into a big production. ***Stephen Kelly***

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THE ARDENNES

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

Belgium's selection for the Oscars' Foreign Language category is a bleak crime drama. Shooting in dull, wintry colours, the mood is set for a story that can only end badly. There's something grimly comic about dour-faced Dave's (Jeroen Perceval) attempts to hide his relationship with his volatile ex-con brother's (Kevin Janssens) girlfriend (Veerle Baetens), until things spiral towards a cheerless conclusion. ***Stephen Puddicombe***

STARLESS DREAMS

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

Mehrdad Oskouei's piercing documentary about teenage girls inside an Iranian Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre is both controlled and tender. Using minimal narration, it lets the girls tell their stories: as addicts, thieves and survivors of male abuse. It sounds unremittingly bleak, but there are enough grace notes of sisterly affection, humour and humanity to hint at a happier tomorrow. ***Tim Coleman***

HALF WAY

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

"How many council people does it take to change a lightbulb?" asks director Daisy-May Hudson's mum. Adding, "This is not a joke – this is deadly serious," referring to the Kafka-esque process of getting a duff bulb replaced in a homeless hostel. Hudson's excellent fly-on-the-wall documentary, filmed while she, her mum and sister were between homes, is urgent, powerful, eye-opening stuff. ***Ali Catterall***

ALMOST CHRISTMAS

★★☆☆☆ OUT NOW

Recently bereaved Walter (Danny Glover) invites his four adult offspring and their families to spend Christmas under the same roof. Cue sibling rivalries, dramatic revelations and slapstick mishaps, leaving Glover to mutter his *Lethal Weapon* catchphrase (you know the one). Plot predictability is offset by lively performances, with Mo'Nique shining brightest. ***Tom Dawson***

CERTIFICATE 15 **DIRECTOR** Mark Waters **STARRING** Billy Bob Thornton, Kathy Bates, Tony Cox **SCREENPLAY** Johnny Rosenthal, Shauna Cross **DISTRIBUTOR** eOne **RUNNING TIME** 92 mins

BAD SANTA 2

The churl with all the gifts...

★★☆☆☆ OUT NOW

Thirteen years on from *Bad Santa*, Billy Bob Thornton's foul-mouthed low-life Willie returns, as pee-and-puke stained as ever. Not to mention politically incorrect, misanthropic and just nasty. When we meet him again, Willie's at such a low ebb he tries to stick his head in the (electric!) oven.

Paid a visit by his old partner-in-crime Marcus (Tony Cox), he gets sucked into a mission to rob $2 million for a homeless charity run by Christina Hendricks' recovering alcoholic. Joining them is Willie's white-trash mother Sunny (Kathy Bates), who – naturally – Willie despises.

The big mistake this Mark Waters-directed sequel makes is sacrificing the 2003 original's underlying heart, which was rooted in the uneasy bond between Willie and the gormless snot-nosed kid Thurman. The character returns (again played by Brett Kelly), now all grown up and working in a sandwich store, but he feels shoehorned in.

True, Hendricks has fun with her role as a good girl with a bad streak, while Shauna Cross and Johnny Rosenthal's script fires off a few zingers. But with Thornton surprisingly disengaged and the robbery plot formulaic, it's a limp dick of a sequel. ***James Mottram***

THE VERDICT

The intent is there, but *Bad Santa 2* is a tired sequel that lacks the first film's festive freshness.

There's nothing worse than when some other chump turns up wearing your exact outfit...

Turns out they were on his hand all along...

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED..

KING KONG *2005*
Peter Jackson's '30s-set blockbuster goes ape in New York.

HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 1 *2010*
The movie that took the Potter franchise out of Hogwarts and on the road.

JUPITER ASCENDING *2015*
A more beastly Redmayne in another fantastical epic.

FOR MORE REVIEWS VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM/TOTALFILM

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

Rogue wand...

★★★☆☆ OUT NOW

CERTIFICATE 12A **DIRECTOR** David Yates **STARRING** Eddie Redmayne, Katherine Waterston, Colin Farrell, Samantha Morton **SCREENPLAY** J.K. Rowling **DISTRIBUTOR** Warner Bros **RUNNING TIME** 133 mins

As Potter-heads already know, *Fantastic Beasts...* is the first of a planned five-film prequel series, with this instalment set in 1926 New York – a bewitching locale that looks like *Once Upon A Time In America* sprinkled in fairy dust.

Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne, overdoing the nervous tics), the author of the titular textbook Harry studies in *The Philosopher's Stone*, arrives in the Big Apple on the home leg of a global excursion dedicated to cataloguing exotic creatures. Such beasts are banned in NY, where the magical community is keeping a low profile, and for good reason: dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald (Johnny Depp) has disappeared after wreaking havoc in Europe; a mysterious force is attacking New York; and No-Maj (American for Muggle) bigotry is being stoked by the fanatical Second Salemers, led by Mary Lou (Samantha Morton).

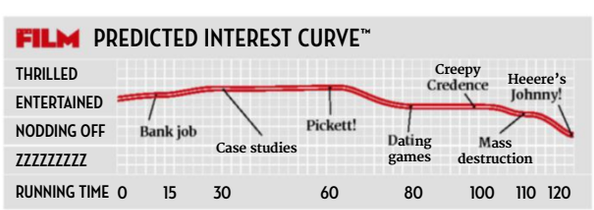
Unfortunately for Newt, some funny business involving likeable Muggle Jacob Kowalski (scene-stealer Dan Fogler) and a suitcase switcheroo leads to some of Newt's creatures escaping...

What follows is a succession of chases, slapstick set-pieces and reveals. A couple of the twists are predictable, and the creatures often disappoint, sounding better on paper – an eagle-dragon! Bird-snakes! – than they look in pixels. Only a mischievous penguin-hedgehog and Newt's best bud Pickett prove truly spellbinding.

Still, what *Fantastic Beasts* lacks in wonderment it almost makes up for in scares and subtext. Scripted by Rowling herself and directed by Potter veteran David Yates, this is squarely aimed at the kids who grew up reading/watching *Harry Potter* – which is to say, adults. Its potent themes include prejudice, intolerance and repression, and come the closing credits, it's Mary Lou's burning eyes and the cowering body of her tormented acolyte Credence (Ezra Miller) that are the takeaways, not the destruction-porn finale.

If not fantastic, this is a solid franchise-opener with enough bridges to the established Potterverse to keep the devoted happy. Part two, we're promised, will travel to the UK and Paris with Grindelwald and a young Dumbledore coming to the fore. We can also expect, at some point, to visit America's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Ilvermorny, while the spectre of WW2 looms large.

And to think people initially wondered how Harry's slim textbook could be stretched into one feature, let alone five. Turns out it's like Newt's suitcase – bewitched with an Extension Charm, and promising extraordinary sights. This first instalment showcases just enough of them to make you sign up for the full expedition. ***Jamie Graham***



THE VERDICT

Doesn't quite enchant like the best *Potter* movies but there are enough thrills and genuine chills to satisfy.

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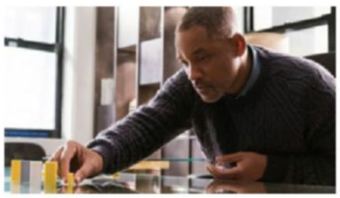
THE BLACK HEN

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

A young friendship is tested by political turmoil and poultry-based trials in Nepalese filmmaker Min Bahadur Bham's deeply felt, richly artful debut. Drawing on personal experiences of a youthful bond broken by class divisions, Bham teases touching performances from Sukra Raj Rokaya and Khadka Raj Nepali as lads trying to hang onto a hen (they need the eggs) during a Maoist insurgency. Bham's snapshots of life in wartime bristle with rugged, work-a-day conviction. Yet he's equally potent on more intense episodes: a dream sequence brims with feeling and a climactic conflict steams with dreadful tension. ***Kevin Harley***



COLLATERAL BEAUTY

★☆☆☆☆ OUT 30 DECEMBER

For a wrenching portrait of grief, see *Manchester By The Sea* (p43). For a facile, glossily uninvolving treatment, witness this mawkish stab at magical realism from David Frankel (*The Devil Wears Prada*). Will Smith plays an advertising exec who, devastated by his daughter's passing, pens letters to Love, Time and Death. This prompts his colleagues to hire actors – among them Helen Mirren and Keira Knightley – to embody these abstractions in a bid to help him heal. A-list sad-faces abound in a film where absurd concept is rivalled only by banal execution. ***Neil Smith***

JET TRASH

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

Scottish director Charles Henri Belleville returns with this stylish Goa-set tale of friendship and betrayal. Based on Simon Lewis' novel *Go*, it centres on Lee (Robert Sheehan) and Sol (Osy Ikhile), backpack drifters chilling in the Indian beach paradise until their past catches up with them. Craig Parkinson brings menace as the nightclub owner with an axe to grind, while *Kingsman*'s Sofia Boutella evolves her role far beyond mere love interest. But alongside Sheehan's charms, it's Belleville's intoxicating visuals that truly fire the imagination. India has rarely seemed so seductive. ***James Mottram***

THE EAGLE HUNTRESS

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

As uplifting as it is stunning, this doc follows smiley, scene-stealing 13-year-old Aisholpan's quest to become the first eagle huntress on the Mongolian steppes. Part nature doco, part fly-on-the-wall look at local traditions (including elders who believe a girl's place is in the yurt), it's an empowering piece. First-time director Otto Bell captures the region's majesty, while Daisy Ridley's no-nonsense narration transmits the toughness of Aisholpan's challenge. Watching an eagle swoop onto her fist from a mountain that looks like the roof of the world, you can't help but marvel at her guts and tenacity. ***Kate Stables***

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

Both Tim Burton and Henry Selick have strived to out-spook their 1993 collaboration in the two decades since, the former with *Corpse Bride* and *Frankenweenie*, the latter with *Coraline*. None though, improved upon the ratio of shivers to titters achieved by this Halloween/Yuletide crossover, a stop-motion charmer whose 3D makeover only enhances the grisly array of ghouls, ghosts and ogres that attend its story of a Pumpkin King's takeover of Christmas. Danny Elfman's perky score offers another reason to have this *Nightmare* on the big screen once more. ***Neil Smith***

KRISHA

★★★★☆ OUT NOW

A family Thanksgiving reunion starts with a flurry of "so good to see yous" and ends in expletive-laden recriminations in this brilliantly feel-bad debut from name-to-remember Trey Edward Shults. It's home for the hell-idays as estranged sister/aunt/mother and recovering alcoholic Krisha (Shults' own aunt Krisha Fairchild, superb) arrives, re-awakening old resentments. The drama gets overwrought but Shults stages the fallout artfully, stressing choppy montages and a nerve-rattling sound mix as tensions erupt, Bill Wise's Doyle yelling at Krisha, "You are disaster incarnate!" Shults' next film is a horror: be afraid. ***Kevin Harley***

IRREPLACEABLE

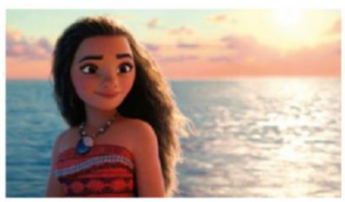
★★★★☆ OUT 13 JANUARY

Doctor-turned-director Thomas Lilti was César-nominated for his last film, hospital drama *Hippocrates*, so it's no surprise he's stuck with what he knows for his third feature. Set in rural France, *Irreplaceable* sees Dr. Jean-Pierre Werner (François Cluzet, a dead ringer for Dustin Hoffman) discovering he has a serious illness that threatens to rob him of his job as a small town's revered carer. With the arrival of big-city doctor Nathalie Delezia (Marianne Denicourt), Lilti's drama skirts away from romcom clichés to deliver an affectionate and deeply moving portrait of two people attempting to do right in very different ways. ***Josh Winning***

BOX OFFICE CHARTS 31.10.16 – 27.11.16

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

In the interest of streamlining titles, the sequel's got to be called 'Fantastic Beasts And Where 2 Find Them'. Or how about 'Harry Not-ter'?



MOANA

Is it just us, or does anyone else want to see Hei Hei the bug-eyed rooster and *Finding Dory*'s pop-eyed loon Becky in the world's most unsettling staring contest? Judge Doom can referee.

A STREET CAT NAMED BOB

Not that box-office success has gone to his head or anything, but our feline hero now prefers to be called a penthouse-dwelling, caviar-bingeing, silk-cushion-lounging cat named Bob.

UK TOP 10

Pos	FILM	THIS MONTH	SINCE RELEASE	WEEKS OUT
1	**Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find...** ★★★	£30M	£30M	2
2	**Doctor Strange** ★★★★	£13.1M	£22.3M	5
3	**Trolls** ★★★★	£7.8M	£21.8M	6
4	**Arrival** ★★★★★	£7.3M	£7.3M	3
5	**The Accountant** ★★★	£5M	£5M	4
6	**A Street Cat Named Bob** ★★★	£3.9M	£3.9M	4
7	**The Girl On The Train** ★★★	£3.2M	£23.6M	8
8	**Nocturnal Animals** ★★★★	£2.7M	£2.7M	4
9	**Jack Reacher: Never Go Back** ★★★★	£2.3M	£7.9M	6
10	**I, Daniel Blake** ★★★★	£1.7M	£3M	6

US TOP 10

Pos	FILM	THIS MONTH	SINCE RELEASE	WEEKS OUT
1	**Doctor Strange** ★★★★	$205.1M	$205.1M	4
2	**Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find...** ★★★	$156.2M	$156.2M	2
3	**Trolls** ★★★★	$135.1M	$135.1M	4
4	**Moana** ★★★★	$81.1M	$81.1M	1
5	**Arrival** ★★★★★	$62.4M	$62.4M	3
6	**Hacksaw Ridge** N/A	$52.2M	$52.2M	4
7	**Almost Christmas** ★★	$36.7M	$36.7M	3
8	**The Accountant** ★★★	$21.9M	$83.2M	7
9	**Boo! A Madea Halloween** N/A	$20.9M	$72.9M	6
10	**Inferno** ★★★	$18.9M	$33.8M	4

ARRIVAL

Can we finally talk about the big reveal that it's an adap of the Abba album of the same name? You haven't seen aliens invade 'til you've seen them invade wearing crisp white bell-bottoms.

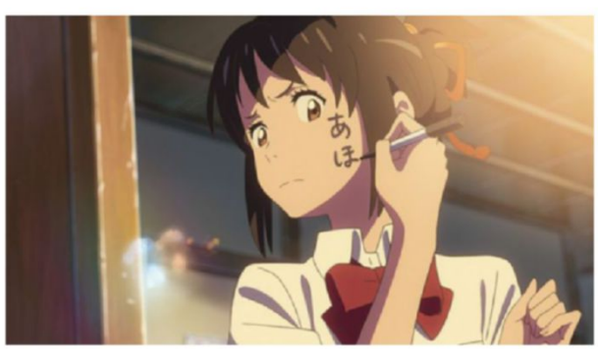
ALMOST CHRISTMAS

Could this festive comedy's modest numbers be down to that not-fully-committed title? Sort of like calling a film 'Very Nearly Home Alone', 'Doctor Bit-Quirky' or 'The Phantom Menace'.

HACKSAW RIDGE

With Mel Gibson's film gaining awards traction, time for the big question: what'll feature at the 2017 Razzies? *Ben-Hur*? *BVS*? A Special Non-Achievement Award for the whole of summer?

STILL OUT, STILL GOOD... OUR PICK OF THE MOVIES OUT NOW



YOUR NAME ★★★★★

"A time-travelling, body-swapping, gender-twisting, disaster-based teen romance, Makoto Shinkai's animation resembles little else around. Prepare to be spirited away."

THE BIRTH OF A NATION ★★★★☆

"This biopic of Virginia slave Nat Turner marks an impressive directorial debut – and acting turn – from Nate Parker. A stirring and astute piece of filmmaking."

PATERSON ★★★★☆

"One of Jim Jarmusch's best, with beguiling turns from Adam Driver and Golshifteh Farahani. Plus the best canine performance since *The Artist*'s Uggie. Mesmeric."

CHI-RAQ ★★★★☆

"Spike Lee's most purposeful and provocative film in years. The urgency rarely wanes as the director juggles fireworks, firearms and feminism."

COMING SOON THE BIG HITTERS ON THE CARDS FOR NEXT MONTH...

T2 TRAINSPOTTING

OUT 27 JANUARY

What a terrible idea, rehashing one of 1996's most iconic hits two decades on. But enough about *Independence Day: Resurgence*! At long last, the whole *Trainspotting* gang is back. Apart from the one who died in the first film, obviously – though who knows, given Danny Boyle's penchant for swimming-down-the-loo surrealism. We're still a bit bemused by the title's seeming nod to Arnie – will the under-wraps plot see a reformed cyborg becoming a surrogate robo-dad? – but the trailer thrums with promise, deftly playing the nostalgia card: this could be *The Force Awakens* with intravenous drugs. For an exclusive chat with producer Andrew Macdonald, turn to page 96 (spooky!).

XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE

OUT 20 JANUARY

The last time Vin Diesel returned to a franchise, it was reboot gold. Best to manage expectations here, but as you'll see from p70, there's plenty to look forward to, not least Samuel L. Jackson as Augustus Gibbons, the most Hogwartian name in modern action cinema.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER

OUT 3 FEBRUARY

The most disingenuous-sounding title since *Freddy's Dead*, but credit to Paul W.S. Anderson for crafting the most successful ever based-on-a-videogame sextology. Will the Umbrella Corporation finally fold? Will Raccoon City elect a mayor named Rocket? See p17.

SING

OUT 27 JANUARY

The first animated biggie of 2017 is effectively *Zootropolis' Got Talent*, centring on a singing competition for animals – albeit voiced not by wannabes but some mega-famous actors: Scarlett Johansson, Reese Witherspoon, Matthew McConaughey... For more, trot/gallop/waddle to p20.

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2017 HIT LIST

We've got our sights trained on more films than ever before this year, from returning franchises to awards contenders, and from grisly thrillers to superhero smackdowns.

JOHN WICK 2
heads up the 2017 movies we're targeting, including:

GHOST IN THE SHELL
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2
THE MUMMY
JUSTICE LEAGUE
FAST & FURIOUS 8
THOR: RAGNAROK
TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT
WONDER WOMAN
T2 TRAINSPOTTING
THE SNOWMAN
FIFTY SHADES DARKER
XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE
THE GREAT WALL
DESPICABLE ME 3

AND A WHOLE LOT MORE BESIDES.

WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW, JANE CROWTHER, JORDAN FARLEY, JAMIE GRAHAM, KEVIN HARLEY, MATT LOOKER, MATT MAYTUM, JOSEPH MCCABE, JAMES MOTTRAM, JOSH WINNING

WHEN

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IN ROME

They stole his car, they killed his dog, but now cinema's deadliest assassin is fighting for something even more important: his life. Keanu Reeves, director Chad Stahelski and the cast of **JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2** join Total Film to discuss the ballistic sequel redefining Hollywood action. WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

Buried amidst the hard-boiled dialogue that characterised *John Wick*, Keanu Reeves' revenge-fuelled career comeback, was a prophetic warning from Winston – the charismatic owner of hotel for hired killers, the Continental: "You dip so much as a pinky back into this pond, you may well find something reaches out, and drags you back into its depths." Well, by head-shotting his way through New York's Russian crime syndicate, making a restaurant full of "dinner reservations" in the process, the man you send to kill the fuckin' Boogeyman didn't so much dip his pinky into the pond as lob an entire grenade belt in. So yeah, we're thinking he's back. And no one is happier about it than Keanu Reeves.

"I was really excited about getting to play the role again. *So* excited," Reeves grins. Sitting opposite *Total Film* in a lavish LA hotel, the star is decked in a black suit, black t-shirt and a pair of white-soled running shoes.

WHAT THE FU?

Following gun-fu and car-fu, here's five things for John Wick to 'fu' up in *Chapter 3*...

DOG-FU

A no-brainer. Wick already has a close bond with his pup, so it's about time John's canine companion got in on the action. Signature move: after disarming a perp, the pooch disables his target by clamping down on the crown jewels, opening them up for a quick headshot.

SUIT-FU

John Wick's 'tactical' tailoring is already the discerning assassin's uniform of choice, but why stop with Kevlar lining and weapon holsters up the wazoo? How about a button concealing a carbon fibre wire, for sneaky garotting? Or a secret sandwich pocket? Because you never will know when you might need an energy boost.

STAPLER-FU

Jason Bourne dropped the ball when it came to offensive uses of household objects, but Wick could pick up the slack. The obvious candidate: the humble stapler, which could be used to deliver death by 1,000 cuts, a swift swipe to the jugular and everything in-between. Bonus: can be dual-wielded with a pistol.

GOOGLE-FU

John Wick is a man of action, but at some point the old dog has to step into the digital age. After all, a few minutes with Google can throw up valuable information that's useful for taking down an indiscreet target. Alternatively, co-ordinate a Twitter witch hunt and watch the irate masses do Wick's work for him.

I-PITY-THE-FU

In the immortal words of Frost from *Aliens*, "What the hell are we supposed to use, man, harsh language?" Well, yes! Armed with a vocabulary that can kill at 30 paces, Wick literally talks his targets to death with a lethal combination of syllables. Wick the merciless. ***JF***

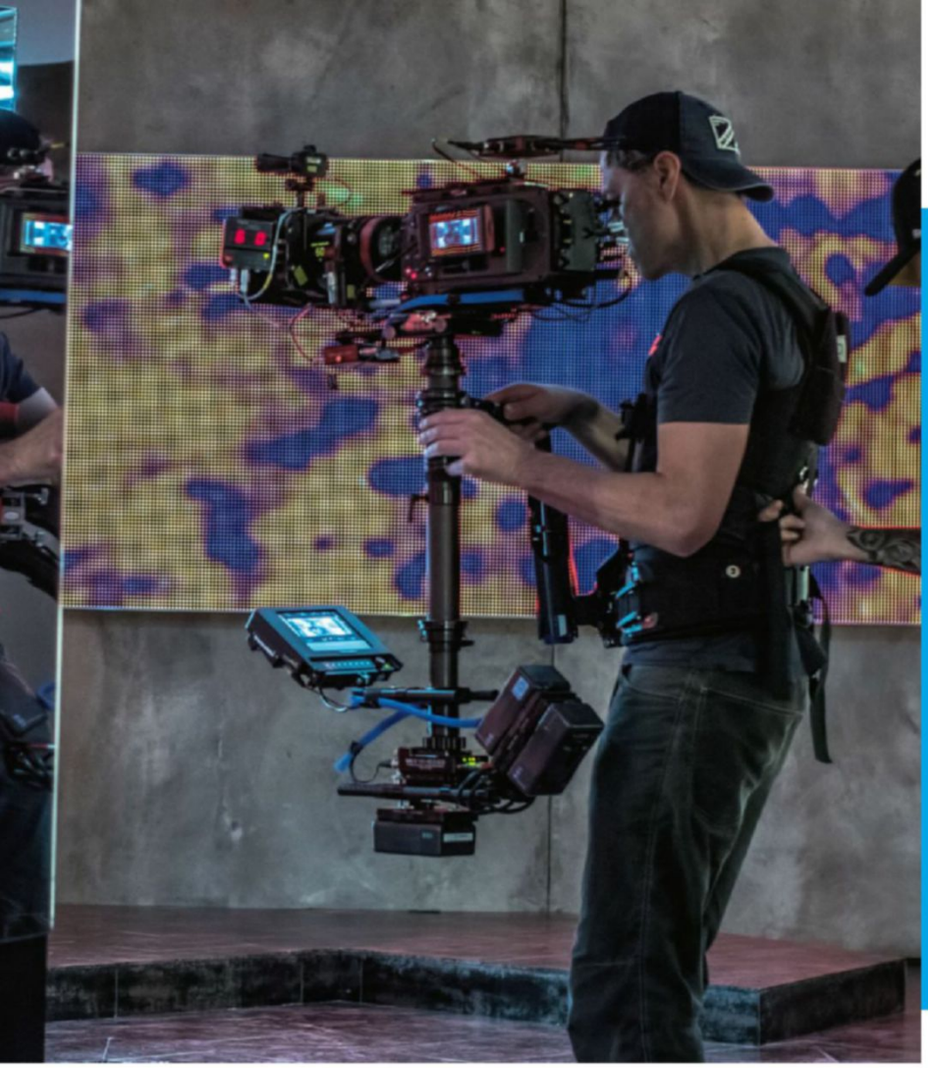
His hair wild and face covered in stubble that has sprouted in recognisable contours, he looks positively Wick-ian. That is, if world-class assassins had dress down Friday. "Creatively, we tried to do something very organic. The first one was about the consequence of your actions, right? Now it's: what are the consequences of John Wick's actions?"

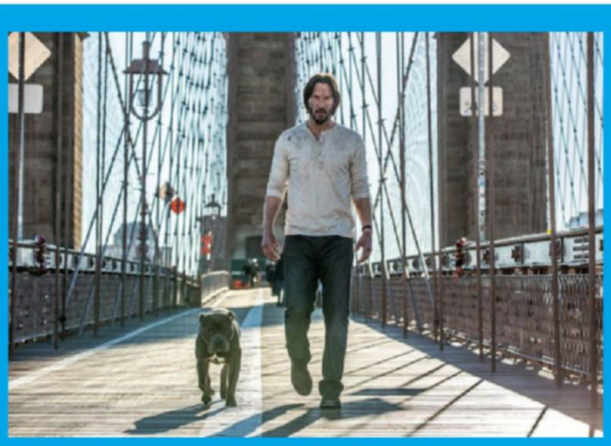
Action and consequences are at the heart of John Wick's story, on and off the screen. Filmed independently with money from foreign sales, *Wick* was an extraordinary risk. Reeves hadn't headlined a hit in a decade, and was coming off the back of the biggest flop of his career in *47 Ronin*; while Chad Stahelski and David Leitch, though acclaimed second-unit directors, had never helmed a feature film. The result, improbably, was the most distinctive Hollywood action movie in years. But it could have been very different.

"Originally it was more of a standard action movie: one car chase, two fight scenes and a gun fight," says Stahelski, who flew solo for *Chapter 2* while Leitch directed Charlize Theron actioner *The Coldest City*. Working with writer Derek Kolstad, the group developed a hyper-real assassin underworld – all crypto currencies, code words and honour among thieves – that acted as a foundation for the series' stylised action, and helped *Wick* stand out. "I was big into Greek mythology in college, so we wanted to do a modern-day myth. Something Akira Kurosawa or Sergio Leone would make," Stahelski continues. "But because of budget and time we didn't have enough resources to show everything we had to show. For number two we want to show a different kind of world."

Different and a whole lot bigger. Picking up "really soon after" the first film's triumphant ending, which saw a battered and bloody 'Baba Yaga' walk off into the sunset, new puppy by his side, Wick's re-emergence has unexpected repercussions as a former acquaintance seizes the opportunity to cash in a 'Marker', a blood oath that sends Wick to Rome and puts a new target in his crosshairs. Standing in his way: a small army of highly trained assassins. "Rome fit *perfectly*," Reeves says, raving about the series' shift in location. "There's so many underworlds

SEEING DOUBLE
An *Enter The Dragon*-style house of mirrors hosts one dazzling shootout.





in Rome. Chad was fascinated by the Church and the 'assassini' and the layers that could bring to it."

"Hopefully it makes the movie feel larger," adds Stahelski, who also saw Rome's civility as a perfect fit for his film's panache. "Every city has a Continental [*hotel*]. It shows you there's a bigger picture than John's little world – but still, he's made a dent in it." Ian McShane's Winston once again serves as the face of the Continental, this time across two continents. "What you find out is he's more on top of it all," McShane says in his distinctly authoritative drawl. "You can't fuck about in his hotel. You're welcome to stay and spend your gold coin – but don't upset the rules. Well, of course, the rules are going to be upset. There's a pretty spectacular ending, which was a lot of fun to be part of."

Spectacle sat comfortably alongside disarmingly potent emotion in the first film, which reduced hardened cynics to blubbering infants in minutes as Wick buried his wife and puppy. Stahelski was keen for the sequel to retain a compelling emotional hook, though mercifully, he's quick to reassure that "no puppies were harmed in the making of the movie." Instead, *Chapter 2* sees John Wick fighting for the life of the good man he once was.

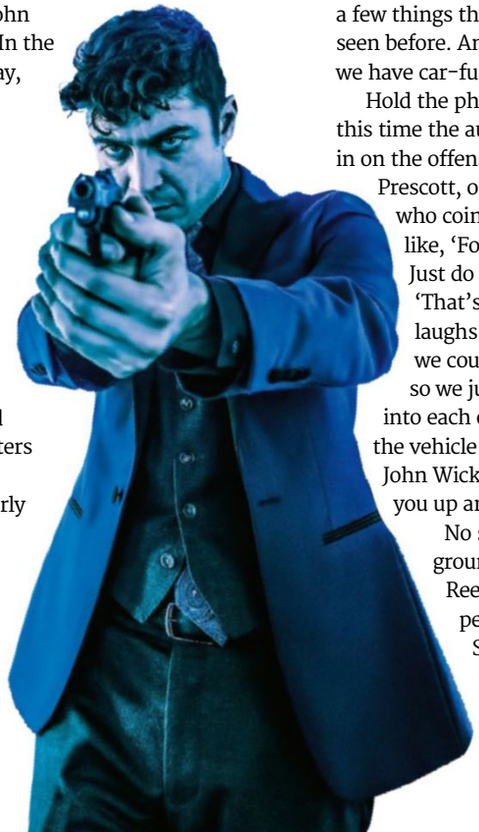
"The second film explores that dichotomy some more," says Reeves, who was drawn to the duality of the title character. "There's John the husband, the man who wants to stop being a hitman. And there's John Wick, the legendary assassin. In the second film John Wick, in a way, fights for John."

'WE SHOW A FEW THINGS YOU HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE... AND WE HAVE CAR-FU' CHAD STAHELSKI

And if there's one thing John Wick knows, it's fighting. More specifically, gun-fu. Stahelski and Leitch developed the über-cool blend of martial arts and close-quarters gunplay after 25 years in the industry (one of Stahelski's early gigs: Reeves' stunt double on *The Matrix*). The results were electric, with punch ups superior to anything this side of *The Raid*. Stahelski, naturally, is upping his game for the sequel with standout sequences set in the catacombs beneath Rome and a dazzling mirrored room that homages *Enter The Dragon*. But what makes *John Wick*'s fights special? "It's Keanu Reeves doing the action," Stahelski reasons. "We took him to a different level with the firearm training. We took him to one of the best jujutsu coaches in the world, to two of the best judo people in the world. We show you a few things that hopefully you haven't seen before. And instead of car chases, we have car-fu."

Hold the phone, car-fu? That's right, this time the automobiles are getting in on the offensive. "It was Darrin Prescott, our second-unit director, who coined the term. He was like, 'Forget all that karate stuff. Just do car-fu.' And I thought, 'That's a good idea!'" Stahelski laughs. "On the first movie we could only afford four cars, so we just had them bumping into each other. Here we're using the vehicle as an offensive weapon. John Wick never runs, he sets you up and smashes into you."

No stranger to groundbreaking action, Reeves has a different perspective on what makes Stahelski's style stand out. "With me it's never second unit, so their



KILLER QUEEN
Ruby Rose plays the sign language-using Ares, one of Wick's deadly competitors.

imprint is always there," Reeves explains. "The way they shoot action, the way it's edited, the way you have longer takes and know the space – it's like you're right there with the guy. It's not generic." Also not generic: Wick gets the stuffing kicked out of him. "Chad Stahelski takes great pleasure in beating the crap out of John Wick!" laughs Reeves, who got hit by a car three times and thrown through two windows for the sequel. "But when he puts the suit on he's possessed by this indomitable will. He keeps fighting for his life."

Dishing out the punishment are some "crazy" new characters, including rival assassins Ares (Ruby Rose), who communicates using sign language, and Cassian – played by rapper-turned-actor Common. "He's surely one of the great assassins," claims Common, who previously worked with Reeves on 2008's *Street Kings*. "But he's not the enemy of John Wick. It's that thing where somebody crosses your path, so you have to take care of business."

Most of the first film's colourful supporting cast return, including John Leguizamo's mechanic Aurelio and Lance Reddick's concierge Charon, but there's an even more enticing new addition: Laurence Fishburne – Morpheus and Neo reunited. Operating outside the code, Fishburne's Bowery King lives rough on the streets of New York, the perfect disguise for an expert killer.

"We are those who are seldom seen. We are omnipresent. We are always there, but you just don't notice us," Fishburne says, talking to *TF* during a break from filming Richard Linklater's *Last Flag Flying*. "The Bowery King and Wick had an adversarial relationship at one point, so you're not really sure whether they've buried the hatchet when they meet."

CUT SCENES
Reeves gets thrown through two windows and hit by three cars during the shoot.

'CHAD STAHELSKI TAKES GREAT PLEASURE IN BEATING THE CRAP OUT OF JOHN WICK!' KEANU REEVES

Fishburne remained close friends with Reeves after *The Matrix*, but watched the first film as a punter. "I enjoyed it so much that the next time I saw Keanu, I was like, 'Hey man, if you guys are getting ready to do another one, I'd really love to come play with you.'" Fishburne won't be drawn on whether his kung-fu chops came in handy for his brief appearance, but teases, "They gave me something that matches my abilities and my size, and it absolutely makes sense in terms of our characters' relationship."

Fishburne and the rest of the cast have nothing but praise for Reeves' dedication to the physically gruelling role, a dedication matched only by Stahelski. And though Stahelski's going alone on *Chapter 2*, the first film's co-director, David Leitch (recently announced as Tim Miller's replacement on *Deadpool 2*), has been heavily involved in the sequel. "I've seen *The Coldest City*, I've helped him out with notes. And he's seen this and helped me out with notes," Stahelski says. "We run a whole company [*87Eleven Action Design*] together. We see each other way too much as it is. I swear to God, he's like my wife."

Just like his work wife, Stahelski has a high profile follow-up gig in development: the *Highlander* reboot. But he's far from finished with *Wick*. Before committing to a sequel, Stahelski considered a prequel. "We have an idea," the director reveals. "We just didn't think it was the time. And it may not be right for a film, maybe it's another medium like TV." There's also the small matter of *John Wick: Chapter 3*. "Number two is, generally speaking, a cliffhanger," Stahelski offers. "So we'd very much like to continue. We've got a really good story to tell." Familiar with long-delayed threequels thanks to *Bill And Ted*, Reeves is conservative on *Chapter 3*, but again it all comes down to consequences. "Where we leave off in *Chapter 2* I found satisfying," Reeves pauses. "John is fucked. The consequences of John Wick fighting for John, he's properly, you know, *fucked*. So I'd like to see how he could fight for his life again."

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 OPENS ON 17 FEBRUARY.

Q&A

ROSE & THORN

TOTAL FILM MEETS MODEL-TURNED-ACTOR RUBY ROSE

Who is Ares?
Ares is the female John Wick in many ways. She is highly trained in hand-to-hand combat, guns, the whole gamut of what it takes to be ahead in the assassin world. I loved the first film so much. The stunts were unbelievable, and the long one-shot takes. I just thought, 'My goodness – who's behind all of this?'

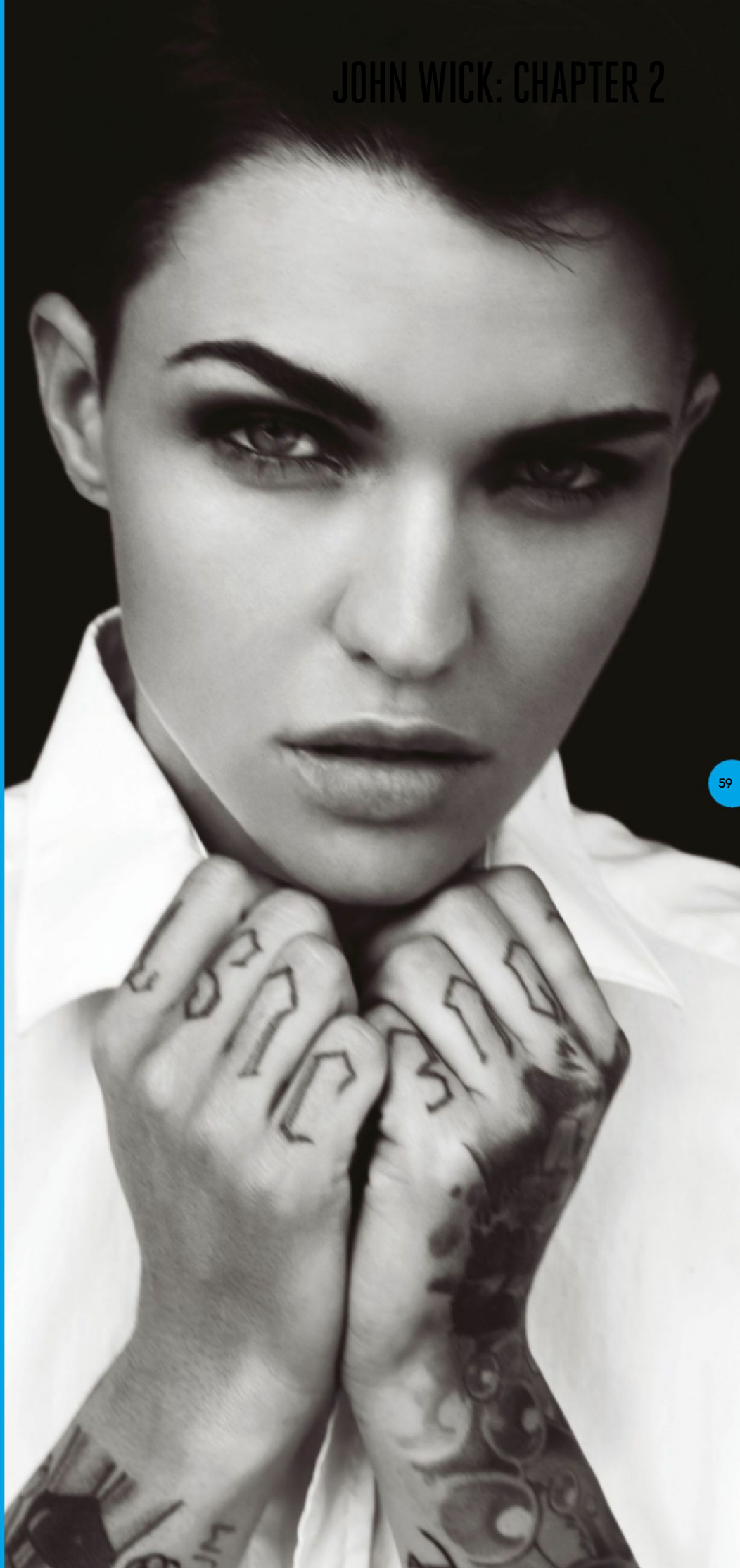
How much training was involved?
When they asked me to be a part of it, I was like, "Thank God I've got a history in martial arts and boxing." Because of the way they shoot the film, it's really integral the actors are the ones behind the stunts. We had some training to get an idea of what we would be doing and then it was straight into it.

How did you react when Chad explained your character would speak using sign language?
I reacted horribly. [*laughs*] But I love that about Chad, he just does not care. It's really important to me to acknowledge that Ares is not deaf. It's a way to communicate to her team, so if we are in close proximity to John Wick there's no trouble speaking. I get to say some very… interesting things in sign language!

Did you enjoy wearing a suit?
I loved the fact she didn't need to wear make-up or have sexy outfits. She's very confident in her training, very focused and deadly. She probably doesn't even know how to use her sexuality. There's more male energy because of that. And she's working in suits because they're tactical with a lot of benefits for an assassin.

What was it like to film the sequence in the mirror room?
Those scenes between Keanu and I were so fun to shoot, but I don't think they were very fun for the camera operator or the director! Trying to hide the camera in a mirrored room is impossible. But it's great because you can't put a stunt person in either.

You've got *John Wick*, *xXx* and *Resident Evil* releasing weeks apart, does it feel like an exciting time for you?
Oh my God, yeah. It's beyond exciting. It's absolutely more than I could have dreamed of achieving. Each of the roles are very strong women, but they're all very different. I try to live in the moment and remember how lucky I am to be doing what I'm doing right now – which is filming my fourth film [Meg]. It's great to work with such amazing people. ***JF***



GUY LOWNDES/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

DEMO MACHINE

Going live(action) to the war on terror with **GHOST IN THE SHELL**... WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM

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DIRECTOR Rupert Sanders **STARRING** Scarlett Johansson, Takeshi Kitano, Michael Pitt, Juliette Binoche **ETA** 31 March

"Ostensibly, it's a superhero movie. But I wanted to do something that was more thought-provoking, more provocative. We didn't have anywhere near the Marvel budget, but we had something going for us, which was this outsider thing: 'We're going to be the aggressor; a bit cooler, smarter, more leftfield'."

For Brit director Rupert Sanders (*Snow White And The Huntsman*), making a live-action version of *Ghost In The Shell* was a dream come true. A "big fan" of Mamoru Oshii's revered 1995 anime (who isn't?), he wasn't about to blow the opportunity when Steven Spielberg, who had owned the rights since 2009, invited him to pitch. Adamant that a straight remake was not the way to go – "The original is mind-blowing, but as broader, global cinema, it doesn't have enough narrative" – he rummaged through the entire *Ghost In The Shell* universe to cherry-pick the best bits.

"I did a 100-page graphic novel based on stuff from [*sequel*] *Innocence*, stuff from [*TV series*] *Stand Alone Complex*," he says. "It was like cutting a hip-hop track and going to find samples." That said, the central narrative cleaves to the original, as the Major, a human brain in a machinate body, heads up anti-terror network Section 9 as it hunts for a violent cyber-terrorist, while the core themes are also present and correct. "It's kind of a noir-ish detective story in its main plotline," Sanders explains, "but the subplot is about her quest for humanity, what it is to be human… which becomes 'Who am I?' *Ghost In The Shell* is very philosophical material, and it was important for me not just to lift the action but to bask in the philosophy."

Standing front and centre of this live-action take is Scarlett Johansson. She should, of course, have been granted a Black Widow movie by now, but as that debate rumbles ever on, she's got on with the business of gracefully cracking heads, first in Luc Besson's sci-fi actioner *Lucy*, and now by planting her feet firmly into the boots of the iconic Major. It feels like a snug fit, though there is a legitimate argument that this is again a case of Hollywood 'whitewashing'.

"You have to understand the business side of any venture," says Sanders on the importance of casting a global star. "If I was going to do your autobiography and was going to give you a hundred million dollars advance before I read it, it would be a foolhardy decision. But if you were Barack Obama…" He pauses, changes track. "The economics is something I concerned myself with to a degree, but I also looked around as to who are the actors who can really personify that part. Ultimately I felt Scarlett was the most skilled actor with the most cyberpunk aesthetic – provocative and aggressive, yet emotional. Look at *Lucy*, *Under the Skin*, *Lost In Translation*. When you look at her in this role, you think, 'Fuck, that's Major.' We had huge support from Oshii and [*the original's animation house*] Production I.G. They were super-excited."

'VIEWERS SHOULD FEEL EVERY PUNCH, KICK AND BULLET… EVERY FLUTTERING HEARTBEAT'

With the production based in Wellington, New Zealand – home of Weta, which worked on the FX – and exteriors shot in Hong Kong, *Ghost In The Shell* promises built sets, real environments, and that every CG effect has "some practical basis to it". Sanders insists that too many pixels "lowers the stakes", and is adamant viewers should feel every punch, kick and bullet… and every fluttering heartbeat.

He laughs. "We can hopefully leave people with more than just popcorn stuck to their trousers. The part is strong and violent but also very emotional and tender. Scarlett's gone out balls to the wall to stand at the front and say, 'I'm a woman, I want to get paid as much as men, if not more, because I deserve it, and I'm going to be as kickass as any man but a more emotional and intelligent version of that character." We're Major-ly excited.

GHOST IN THE SHELL OPENS ON 31 MARCH.

GOD PARTICLE

DIRECTOR Julius Onah **STARRING** Daniel Brühl, Elizabeth Debicki, Chris O'Dowd, Gugu Mbatha-Raw **ETA** 24 February

Personally selected by J.J. Abrams to helm this sci-fi, director Julius Onah is hitting the big league after making his feature debut last year with little-seen crime flick *The Girl Is In Trouble*. In *God Particle*, written by Oren Uziel (*22 Jump Street*), a crew of astronauts fight to survive when they're abandoned in the vacuum of space. Rumours suggest it could be the next secret *Cloverfield* sequel...

LIFE

DIRECTOR Daniel Espinosa **STARRING** Jake Gyllenhaal, Rebecca Ferguson, Ryan Reynolds, Olga Dihovichnaya **ETA** 12 May

Deadpool screenwriters Paul Wernick and Rhett Reese penned this sci-fi thriller in which, according to Ryan Reynolds, a crew stationed on the International Space Station "discover a form of extraterrestrial life". Jake Gyllenhaal and Rebecca Ferguson are his astro-buddies.

JUMANJI

DIRECTOR Jake Kasdan **STARRING** Dwayne Johnson, Kevin Hart, Jack Black, Karen Gillan, Nick Jonas **ETA** 29 December 2017

Take one creaky-but-beloved '90s fantasy flick and add the Rock, promising to "not screw the whole damn thing up", and this A-list reboot could be *the* fun flick to catch in Christmas 2017. This time out, four teens get sucked into a videogame, with Johnson, Hart, Black and Gillan playing their avatars...

THE HITMAN'S BODYGUARD

DIRECTOR Patrick Hughes **STARRING** Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson, Gary Oldman, Élodie Yung, Salma Hayek **ETA** 18 August

Where do you go after directing a cadre of action gods in *The Expendables 3*? If you're Patrick Hughes, you buddy Ryan Reynolds (as a bodyguard) with Samuel L. Jackson (as a hitman) then pit them against Gary Oldman's insidious dictator and watch the sparks fly. Aces.

GEOSTORM

DIRECTOR Dean Devlin **STARRING** Gerard Butler, Abbie Cornish, Katheryn Winnick, Jim Sturgess, Ed Harris **ETA** 20 October

Dean Devlin makes his directorial debut with this climate control colossus, in which a satellite designer attempts to save Earth, while his brother must stop an attempt to kill the President. No rest for the wicked...

ROCKET FUEL

From duck-bill rumours to Bechdel test victories, the a-holes aim higher in **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2...** WORDS KEVIN HARLEY

DIRECTOR James Gunn **STARRING** Chris Pratt, Zoë Saldana, Dave Bautista, Bradley Cooper, Karen Gillan **ETA** 28 April

"As long as there's a James Gunn directing the film, there's a possibility of a Howard the Duck." So said Dave Bautista, aka Drax, he of the strong throat-hold and weak grasp of metaphor in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. Whether or not Bautista jests, the suggestion is clear: the success of the MCU's space-operatic feat of pop-culture references, high-pulp excess and pelvic sorcery has only encouraged Gunn to take more risks with *Vol. 2*.

Breaking with MCU-building convention to build a super-team from a tree, a psychotic raccoon, a scallywag, a wrestler and a humour-starved assassin, *Guardians* was 2014's break-out hit, only bested box office-wise by (Michael) Bay-bots and Hobbits. More crucially still, fans took Rocket, Star-Lord, Groot, Drax, Gamora and "ooga chaka" to heart. And they should again with a confidently heightened sequel mix of feeling, fantasy and narrative, says Kurt Russell, who debuts in *Vol. 2* as a sentient planet in human form, penis and all. Because of course.

"It's a very complex story," Russell told *Collider*. "It's more connected to human issues, family issues, parental issues, and issues that sons and daughters have with their moms and dads and their family tree, where they come from."

This time, the a-holes struggle to stay tight while exploring the provenance of Chris Pratt's Peter Quill, whose mum died as the original opened and whose dad has turned cosmic. Where this leads them is uncertain, though the images and footage seen so far promise tentacular space beasts, raccoon rage, wicked soundtrack work and warm man-hugs between Drax and Star-Lord.

Other qualities Gunn promises include strong platforms for the women. Returning leads Karen Gillan (Nebula) and Zoë Saldana (Gamora) will be joined by Pom Klementieff's alien Mantis and Elizabeth Debicki's Ayesha, a super-powered alien who hires the Guardians for a job that goes south. "We not only pass the Bechdel test," claims Gunn, "but run over it and back up over it again and again in an 18-wheeler truck."

> **'WE RUN OVER THE BECHDEL TEST IN AN 18-WHEELER'** JAMES GUNN

And if that sounds pleasingly excessive, more good news keeps coming. Baby Groot is cuter than ever, claims tree-voice Vin Diesel; and Drax, reckons Gunn, is dafter than ever. "He's the funniest character in *Vol. 2*. Bradley Cooper just saw the movie and talked about how he's like Zach Galifianakis in *The Hangover* (in that he kills every line he has)." Duck or no duck, sounds like *Vol. 2* will fit the bill nicely.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2 OPENS ON 28 APRIL.

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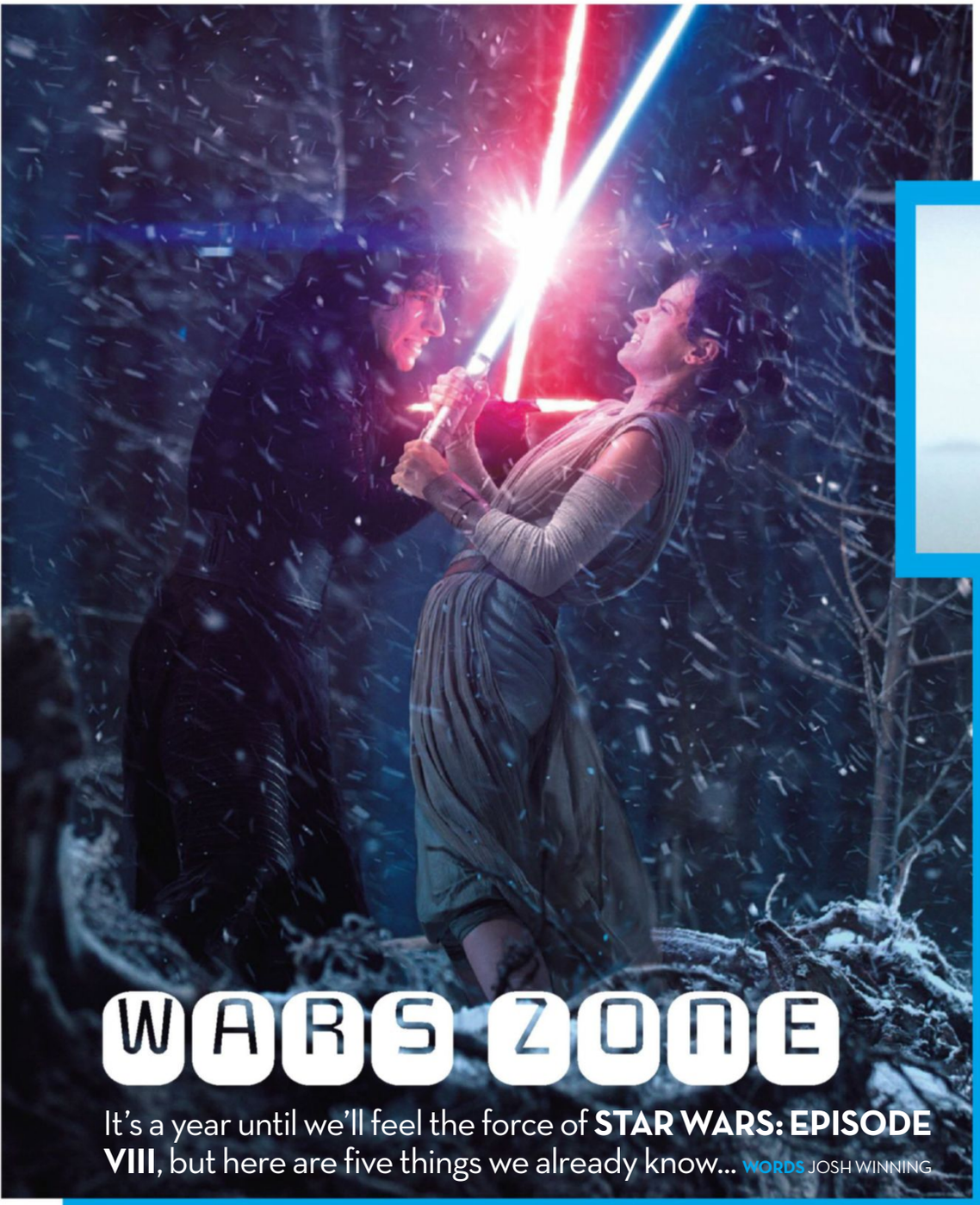


WARS ZONE

It's a year until we'll feel the force of **STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII**, but here are five things we already know... **WORDS** JOSH WINNING

DIRECTOR Rian Johnson **STARRING** Mark Hamill, Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Carrie Fisher **ETA** 15 December

LUKE'S BACK

There's still no agreed title (though Space Bear was used to flummox fans during filming) and good luck wrestling the plot out of Lucasfilm's hands. But if writer-director Rian Johnson's influences are anything to go by (*Twelve O'Clock High*, *The Bridge On The River Kwai*), *Episode VIII* should be a gritty war film/training movie, as Rey (Daisy Ridley) interrupts Luke Skywalker's (Mark Hamill) exile on Ahch-To. "For the first time, this movie is going to start where the last one left off," Johnson has revealed. Along with rumours of Luke training Rey, there could be a funeral for a certain Corellian.

LIGHT AND DARK

Though *The Force Awakens* contained echoes of *A New Hope*, *Episode VIII* won't necessarily dive as dark as *The Empire Strikes Back* did. "It's just different in tone in a way that I think is great and necessary," says Adam Driver, who's returning as emo bad boy Kylo Ren (now, presumably, with a gnarly face scar). "Rian trusts his audience is ready for nuance and ambiguity. He's not dumbing anything down... and that's really fun to play."

GATHERING FORCES

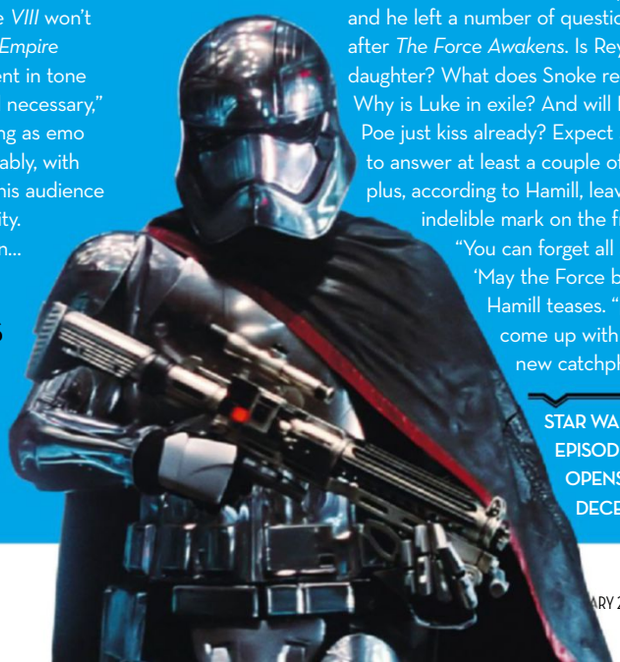
Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis) will be making a comeback (actual size still TBC), and though we're sure he's got some dastardly plans for Kylo Ren, Snoke could have his eye on another meanie in the form of Benicio Del Toro's currently unnamed villain. It's a coup for Del Toro – he was originally meant to play Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace* before the character's lines were dramatically chopped. Expect more from Kylo, too. "Rian's writing is so clear," Driver says. "I learned a lot of things about my character through his writing."

ROLE CALL

There are returnees across the board. Captain Phasma (Gwendoline Christie) will escape her trash compactor prison, while Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac), Maz (Lupita Nyong'o), General Hux (Domhnall Gleeson) and C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) are all back. Behind the scenes, John Williams is scoring (this, his eighth *Wars*), but on the flipside, could this possibly be Luke's swansong? Hamill worried fans in June when he commented he'd be "out of work" soon, clarifying on Twitter: "I meant 'out of work' because #Ep8 is wrapping soon, OK?" Hmm...

QUESTION TIME

J.J. Abrams is still on board as producer, and he left a number of questions dangling after *The Force Awakens*. Is Rey Luke's daughter? What does Snoke really want? Why is Luke in exile? And will Finn and Poe just kiss already? Expect Johnson to answer at least a couple of those, plus, according to Hamill, leave his own indelible mark on the franchise. "You can forget all about, 'May the Force be with you,'" Hamill teases. "[*Rian's*] come up with so many new catchphrases."



STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII OPENS ON 15 DECEMBER.

CASKET CASE

Universal's most famous movie monster is reborn in **THE MUMMY**... WORDS MATT MAYTUM

DIRECTOR Alex Kurtzman **STARRING** Tom Cruise, Sofia Boutella, Russell Crowe, Jake Johnson, Annabelle Wallis **ETA** 9 June

When *Total Film* catches up with Alex Kurtzman, he's just putting the finishing touches on his director's cut of *The Mummy*, the 2017 tentpole looking to revive Universal's back catalogue of classic monsters. "The studio has been interested in revitalising their monsters for some time – the Mummy in particular," Kurtzman confers. He grew up with the monsters, watching them on a TV show in the '80s. "Seeing them for real was so terrifying for me. It began a lifelong fascination with them."

It's fitting then that Kurtzman is making his blockbuster debut on *The Mummy*. Having previously directed family drama *People Like Us*, Kurtzman is most famous for having written scripts for a staggering number of franchises, from *Mission: Impossible* to *Transformers*, and *Star Trek* to *Spider-Man*. He'll be using that nous to develop a cinematic universe of Universal monsters, which starts right here with a present-day reimagining of the bandaged bad 'un.

The updated time period is the first break from tradition that'll separate it from the 1932 Boris Karloff classic *and* the Brendan Fraser-led '90s revival, both of which were set in the roaring '20s. "It felt, to me, there was this amazing opportunity to bring it into a modern context while being very true to what I think the first movie gave us, in the form of a horror-action-romance," explains Kurtzman.

The *other* major break from tradition has been casting the Mummy as a woman. The gender swap, says Kurtzman, revitalised the story "in a way that it felt suddenly fresh and very relevant", after earlier drafts included a male villain. Sofia Boutella (*Star Trek Beyond*'s Jaylah, *Kingsman*'s razor-legged Gazelle) plays the back-from-the-dead queen out to wreak havoc. "I was sure that if I didn't get Sofia, the movie wouldn't work," says Kurtzman.

'TOM CRUISE HAD AN AFFINITY FOR THE MONSTERS' ALEX KURTZMAN

The Algerian-French actress was initially reluctant to once again consign herself to the make-up chair for hours every morning after only recently completing *Beyond*. "When she finally said yes, we worked together to bring a huge amount of humanity to that character," he says. "I think one of the great elements of the classic Universal monster movies is that you both feared the monster and you feared *for* the monster... It was very important to me to make sure that the audience has an extremely complicated relationship with that character."

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Another way to shake up your film? Cast a megastar. "When the studio said, 'What about Tom Cruise?', my first thought was, 'There's no way on Earth we're ever going to get Tom Cruise to do this movie,'" admits the director, who previously worked with him on *M:I3*. "I sort of paused, and then I thought, 'Tom is, in his heart of hearts, a deep lover of film history.' I knew he had an affinity for the Universal monsters."

Kurtzman praises Cruise for his storytelling understanding and audience-intuition, and knew the casting was another way to rattle expectations. "We knew we wanted to forge new ground, while not betraying what audiences were going to expect when they bought their tickets to see a movie called *The Mummy*. As unexpected as it was to make the Mummy a woman, it would be even more unexpected to say, 'Oh, and *The Mummy* is going to star Tom Cruise.'"

Casting Cruise also means a commitment to stunts – something the actor encouraged cast members Jake Johnson and Annabelle Wallis to get involved in. "There was not a single stunt, not one inch of film, that didn't involve him doing his own stunts," beams Kurtzman. That practicality extended to the VFX, with Kurtzman citing his admiration for "directors like [*Christopher Nolan*], who are 100 per cent dedicated to as little CG as possible… It just brings a reality to the experience that you can't fake".

With Russell Crowe rounding out the cast as Dr. Henry Jekyll, the ambitions for a 'UMCU' are clear. But, Kurtzman is adamant that *The Mummy* must stand alone before the world-building truly begins. "I certainly know as an audience member that I feel if I'm being force-fed a franchise at the expense of a great single film and a great story, I get resentful," he asserts. "First and foremost, we needed to make a great Mummy movie. And if the audience likes the movie, then whatever comes next will come from that…"

THE MUMMY OPENS ON 9 JUNE.

COCO

DIRECTOR Lee Unkrich **STARRING** Benjamin Bratt **ETA** 8 December

"The more I learn about Dia de los Muertos, the more it affects me deeply," says director Lee Unkrich, of researching his first film since *Toy Story 3*. "I thought, what if I could meet [*my past relatives*], what would I ask them?" That's exactly what happens to the 12-year-old hero of this Pixar film when he enters the realm of the dead…

IT

DIRECTOR Andrés Muschietti **STARRING** Bill Skarsgård, Jeremy Ray Taylor, Sophia Lillis, Finn Wolfhard, Wyatt Oleff **ETA** 8 September

After a series of false starts (ditched TV two-parter, the departure of director Cary Fukunaga), the Stephen King adap finally crawls out of a storm drain with director Andrés Muschietti (*Mama*). As per, Bill Skarsgård's Pennywise the Clown terrorises the Losers Club (including *Stranger Things* star Finn Wolfhard) in small-town USA.

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

DIRECTOR Kenneth Branagh **STARRING** Kenneth Branagh, Johnny Depp, Daisy Ridley, Michelle Pfeiffer, Lucy Boynton, Michael Peña **ETA** 24 November

Agatha Christie's classic mystery gets a star-studded redo as Kenneth Branagh dons Hercule Poirot's 'tache and Belgian twang, poking around in the titular locomotive to figure out who murdered poor Ratchett (Johnny Depp). Among the suspects: Mrs Hubbard (Michelle Pfeiffer), Countess Andrenyi (Lucy Boynton) and Princess Dragomiroff (Judi Dench).

SAW: LEGACY

DIRECTORS The Spierig brothers **STARRING** Tobin Bell, Jon Cor **ETA** 20 October

The last *Saw* film (2010's 3D outing) made a healthy $136m at the box office. Enter directors Michael and Peter Spierig (*Daybreakers*) to resurrect John Kramer (Tobin Bell) for this eighth entry. It'll introduce a "new storyline and new characters that can carry the saga into the future", reckons composer Charlie Clouser.

RAW

DIRECTOR Julia Ducournau **STARRING** Garance Marillier, Ella Rumpf, Rabah Naït Oufella **ETA** TBC

"My parents are doctors, so I am obsessed with bodies," reveals director Julia Ducournau, whose directorial debut explores matters of the flesh as vegetarian student Justine (Garance Marillier) is roped into a horrific hazing ritual that ignites a craving for human flesh. Horror fans should gobble this up no problem.

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

From the Round Table to the Third Reich, Optimus Prime rewrites history in **TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT**... **WORDS** JOSH WINNING

DIRECTOR Michael Bay **STARRING** Mark Wahlberg, Anthony Hopkins, Stanley Tucci, Josh Duhamel, John Turturro **ETA** 23 June

Having ushered in a new era for the Autobots with 2014's franchise remodel *Transformers: Age Of Extinction* (the series' second most successful entry with $1.1bn worldwide), Michael Bay's back at the wheel with this fifth instalment, and things are taking a bit of a U-turn into seriously weird terrain. With a plot involving Churchill, Nazis and King Arthur, *Transformers: The Last Knight* is (Optimus) primed to be an epic time-warper that sees the return of Cade Yeager (Mark Wahlberg) and William Lennox (Josh Duhamel) while Anthony Hopkins makes his franchise debut.

"They did a really good job of going back in time and connecting things in history and how it relates [*to our world*]," Bay says of writing team Art Marcum, Matt Holloway and Ken Nolan. While there's no sign of the Dinobots this time around (yet), we will get new Autobots Hot Rod (Bumblebee's brother-in-arms) and Vespa Sqweeks in a franchise that's showing no sign of, uh, tyre-ing.

Bay reveals there is plenty of "clever ideas" being thrown around in the writers' room, and Paramount is clearly keen to expand its Transformers Cinematic Universe – as well as *Transformers 6* (already being scheduled for 2019), a Bumblebee spin-off is due in 2018.

TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT OPENS ON 23 JUNE.

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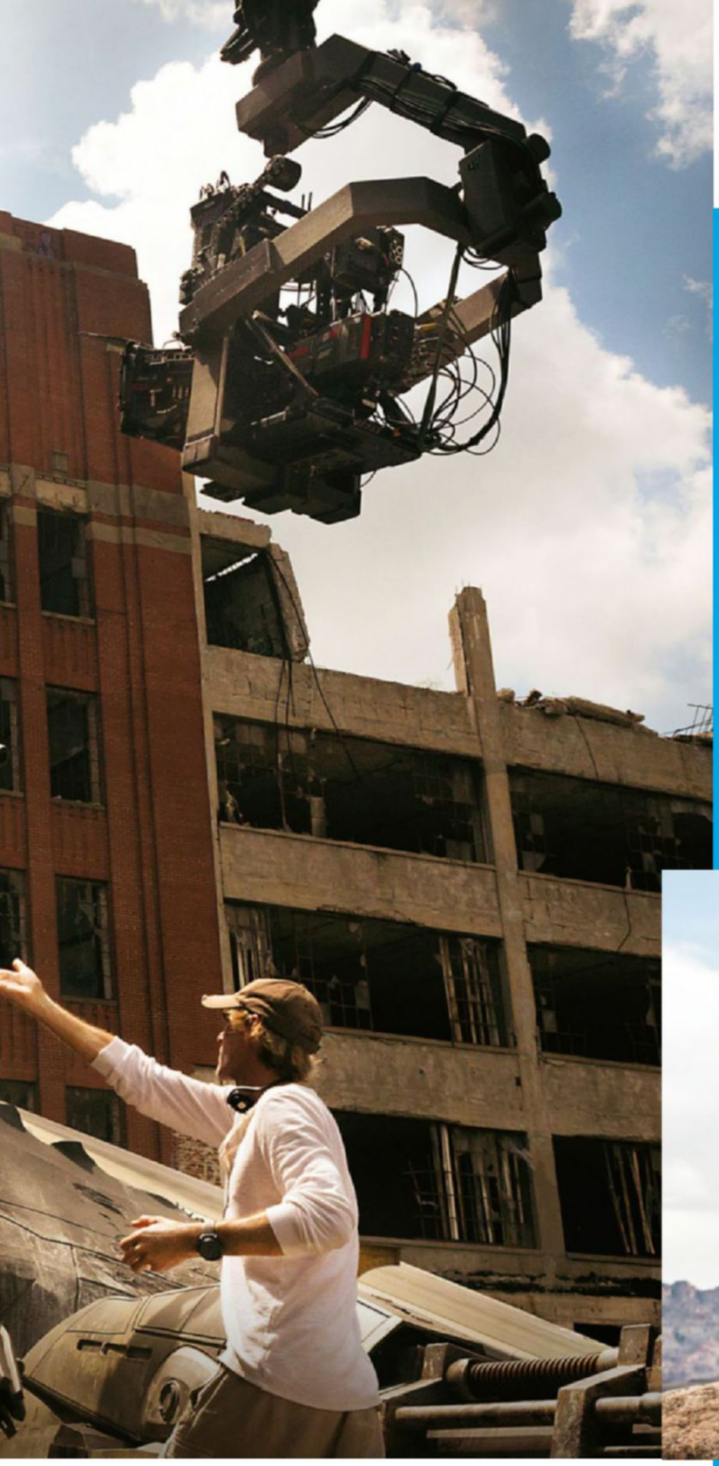

THE DARK TOWER

All rise for the King.

DIRECTOR Nikolaj Arcel **STARRING** Idris Elba, Matthew McConaughey, Jackie Earle Haley, Fran Kranz, Katheryn Winnick **ETA** 28 July

How do you adapt a colossus such as Stephen King's eight-tome *Dark Tower* series for the big screen? Well, you don't. In a radical move, director Nikolaj Arcel's *The Dark Tower* is actually a sequel to the final book in King's magnum opus that (quick) draws inspiration from King's story. It centres on the relationship between knight Roland Deschain (Idris Elba) and sorcerer the Man In Black (Matthew McConaughey) as they compete to find the titular edifice, which has the power to save their world.

"We wanted to restructure the novels to be [*their*] most cinematic," reveals producer Ron Howard, who assembled a team of *Dark Tower* experts to help pull apart and then reconfigure the books' many cogs and wheels. "Stephen King agreed completely and understood the journey we were on."

King's blessing is the first hurdle – there's a lot riding on Arcel's film. It's planned as the first in a franchise that'll include a TV series (based on *The Dark Tower IV: Wizard And Glass*) that follows a younger Roland, with Elba and McConaughey potentially guest starring. Elba's feeling the pressure, too. "It's an iconic character," he says. "I want to get it right." If he does, this could end up being as big as anything from Marvel. ***JW***

BLADE RUNNER 2049

Back to the not-too-distant future...

DIRECTOR Denis Villeneuve **STARRING** Harrison Ford, Ryan Gosling, Robin Wright, Jared Leto, Dave Bautista **ETA** 6 October

"It's a bit berserk that we're taking this risk," admits director Denis Villeneuve. "It feels like you are flirting with disaster every morning." Given he's responsible for crafting a follow-up to a bonafide classic, you can understand his trepidation. With its haunting central mystery and pulp-noir visuals, *Blade Runner* is a titan of the sci-fi/fantasy genre – and though Ridley Scott's film hinted at a larger world, in the 30-something years since its release, nobody's dared venture back for fear of sullying its legacy.

If anybody's the man for the job, though, it's Villeneuve. Having proven his sci-fi mettle with 2016's masterful *Arrival*, he's already delivered a series of tight-wound thrillers (*Incendies*, *Prisoners*, *Sicario*) powered by mood and character. He's made all the right moves with *Blade Runner 2049* so far, too. Harrison Ford's on board as Deckard ("We will take care of that mystery," Villeneuve has promised of the 'Is he a Replicant?' puzzler), while Ryan Gosling heads up an impressive cast of newcomers including Robin Wright, Jared Leto and Dave Bautista. All we know for certain is that the sequel's set in a time when, Villeneuve says, "The ocean, the rain, the snow is all toxic." And while its plot remains a mystery, we're sort of used to that by now. ***JW***

WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES

Hail, Caesar! Again.

DIRECTOR Matt Reeves **STARRING** Andy Serkis, Woody Harrelson, Steve Zahn, Judy Greer **ETA** 14 July

After a mighty dust-up shattered a fragile peace at the climax to *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes*, you might think you know where the simian saga's prequel threequel is headed: towards battle, a beach, a statue... The title and first preview pic (a beach, a horse...) implied as much. As does the snow-feathered, *Dark Knight Rises*-ish motion poster, in which Andy Serkis' mo-capped Caesar reiterates *Dawn*'s warning: "War has begun."

Fur will fly as Caesar's posse faces an army fronted by the colonel, played by Woody Harrelson. But a deeper tussle takes place beneath the ape leader's furrowed brow, following his killing of Toby Kebbell's war-mongering Koba in *Dawn* – a violation of Caesar's own "Ape must not kill ape" tenet that pushes him to "his greatest test yet", says returning helmer Matt Reeves. "[*He's*] wondering, 'Maybe if I could've understood what was going on inside Koba's heart, I could've averted all this...' He comes to understand *exactly* what Koba feels. And the story becomes a battle for Caesar's soul."

Serkis says it's "an incredibly dark journey" for Caesar. It should also look incredibly epic. The shoot went to the mountains, where Serkis and ape troopers Steve Zahn and Terry Notary felt the chill. "We wanted to move into the realm of the mythic," says Reeves, promising a "great, grand war movie in the snow". That mythic trajectory continues, as Caesar becomes a Moses-like figure in ape history. Only cooler, says Reeves: "He's becoming like Clint Eastwood – a real bad-ass." And nobody's sidekick. ***KH***

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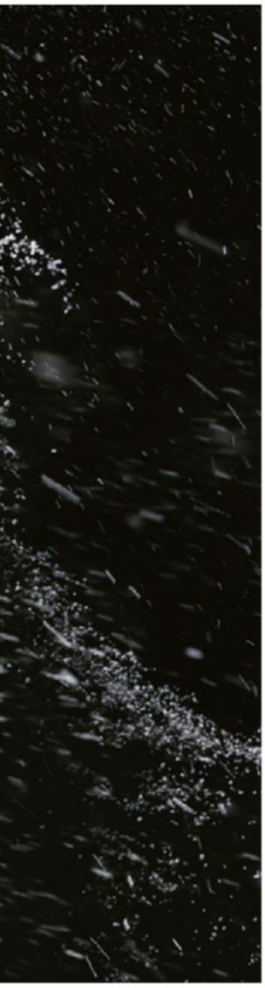

ALIEN: COVENANT

An express elevator to hell? Hope so...

DIRECTOR Ridley Scott **STARRING** Michael Fassbender, Katherine Waterston, Danny McBride, Noomi Rapace **ETA** 19 May

After facing an Occamy and a wasted Joaquin Phoenix in, respectively, *Fantastic Beasts* and *Inherent Vice*, Katherine Waterston confronts even scarier prospects in Ridley Scott's return to *Alien* worlds. And her director was no comfort. "Ridley is a little sadistic," Waterston told *The One Show*. "He likes it to feel pretty scary on set."

Besides Noomi Rapace's return in, apparently, a small capacity, *Covenant*'s insiders have observed basic quarantine laws for the *Prometheus* sequel's secrets. We know a colony ship's crew takes a detour to an uncharted paradise. We suspect running, screaming and new Giger-esque fright-mares follow. More temptingly still, we're told one thing: this time, it's scarier.

Returning as Prometheus-bot David and new "synthetic" Walter, Michael Fassbender says it's "super scary". Covenant pilot Danny McBride says so too: "It is a straight horror movie," he promises. "I've never been on something that intense before."

And if "more intense than *Aloha*" isn't saying much, take heart from Callie Hernandez, who crawled from *Blair Witch*'s mulch to *Covenant*. Asked if seeing aliens on set dampened the dread, Hernandez replied, "No, it was just as terrifying as you would ever imagine it to be." If Scott can sustain *The Martian*'s outer-space form, let's rock. ***KH***

Jack's back in **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: SALAZAR'S REVENGE...** **WORDS** JAMES MOTTRAM

DIRECTORS Joachim Rønning, Espen Sandberg **STARRING** Johnny Depp, Javier Bardem, Kaya Scodelario, Brenton Thwaites, Orlando Bloom **ETA** 26 May

A new villain, two new directors and a scorching young cast, not to mention the return of Johnny Depp. No wonder producer Jerry Bruckheimer is feeling confident. "This is the highest-rated *Pirates* movies we've had," he says, referring to a recent "rough" preview held. "People say it goes back to the first one – it has a lot of the flavour [*of 2003's* The Curse Of The Black Pearl] with the supernatural and the love story that's in there."

Directed by Norwegian duo Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg (who normally work together; *Kon-Tiki, Bandidas*), this latest outing in the high-seas franchise sees Depp's Captain Jack Sparrow pursued by a vengeful, ghoulish plunderer, the "truly horrific" Captain Salazar (Javier Bardem), who's been trapped in the Devil's Triangle and is on a mission to find the Trident of Poseidon. "He's kind of the undead," says Bruckheimer. "You're not quite sure what he is."

With Bardem on board, the producer is particularly pleased to secure a second Academy Award-winner – after Geoffrey Rush, who also returns as Barbossa – to play at pirates. "He is quite something. You saw the characters he developed in Bond and [No Country For Old Men]... you can see what he's capable of."

So how does Salazar stack up against *Skyfall*'s Raoul Silva and Anton Chigurh? "He's right up there," says Bruckheimer. We added the supernatural element so he's got another leg-up on those characters."

It's not just Johnny versus Javier though, with British *Skins* star Kaya Scodelario cast as astronomer Carina Smyth and Aussie actor Brenton Thwaites as Henry – son to Orlando Bloom's Will Turner. Back after missing 2011's *On Stranger Tides*, Bloom's "the heartbeat", promises Bruckheimer, of a franchise that's grossed $3.72 billion. Then of course there's the return of Depp himself. "Watching Jack put those boots back on is always a thrill."

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: SALAZAR'S REVENGE OPENS ON 26 MAY.

GONE xXx

Fourteen years on, Vin Diesel is back as the spy game's most extreme agent in **xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE**. Can he best Bourne, Bond and Ethan Hunt? Total Film goes on set in Canada to find out.

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

DIRECTOR D.J. Caruso **STARRING** Vin Diesel, Ruby Rose, Samuel L. Jackson, Donnie Yen, Toni Collette **ETA** 20 January

April 2016. *Total Film* is huddling beneath a busy overpass outside Hamilton, an industrial Canadian city an hour from Toronto. Above, a segment of the flyover has been shut – as director D.J. Caruso orchestrates one of the major set-pieces for *xXx: Return Of Xander Cage*. Thirty-odd cars – Nissans, Civics, Jeeps, all with Michigan plates – are in place as a chase ensues. "The scene is a traffic jam," explains Tony Jaa, the Thai action star today sporting a blond Mohican. "We try to fight!"

Well, we certainly hope so. After a self-imposed exile – and, let's face it, a poorly received 2005 Xander-free sequel that saw Ice Cube take over – Vin Diesel's extreme sports-adept secret agent is back. "Xander Cage turned his back on the world," says producer Jeff Kirschenbaum. "He thought he was protecting the man, in the first movie, until he realised he was working for the man. When he felt the sense of futility, he went into retirement. This movie, we pull him back."

Only this time, he's not alone. Two rival xXx teams – headed by Diesel and Hong Kong's own *Ip Man*, Donnie Yen – are in play. Thought dead but lured back by Augustus Gibbons, a returning Samuel L. Jackson, Cage initially doesn't realise his M-like mentor is hedging his bets, also establishing an off-the-books Black Ops xXx team led by Yen's Xiang, amid an almighty scramble to land Pandora's Box, a gizmo that controls military satellites.

In the Cage corner – Tennyson Torch (*Game Of Thrones*' Rory McCann), Adele Wolff (*Orange Is The New Black* star Ruby Rose) and Harvard (Chinese actor-singer Kris Wu). While fighting for Xiang? Talon (*Ong-Bak* sensation Jaa); Hawk (British-born MMA fighter Michael Bisping);

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RATION

and the mysterious Serena Unger (Bollywood siren Deepika Padukone). "This is our Avengers," says Kirschenbaum. Or as Yen puts it: "Better looking than the *Ocean's 13* and younger than *The Expendables*!"

It's now day 44 of a complex 68-day shoot that's already taken the cast and crew to the Dominican Republic (which partly doubles for the Philippines). Today's scene sees the teams racing across the city to reach the Pandora's Box, with Diesel and Yen both leaping off the freeway. "Yeah, I just jumped off a bridge," says Yen nonchalantly, when he swings by wearing black jeans and a quilted jacket. "He's chasing me. I'm teasing him – catch me if you can."

'ONE ACTION SEQUENCE HAS A JAW-DROPPING BIKE CHASE ACROSS – BELIEVE IT OR NOT – WATER'

You might say the same for the elusive Diesel, who won't be glimpsed on set until the next day – a scene where he's hurtling along a zip-line stretched across a green-screen mounted Stage 4 at Pinewood Toronto. "Can I talk to you now?" Diesel mock-asks, walking over. "Let's hope I don't get hurt." Unlikely. Dressed in a grey fleece, Cage's familiar 'xXx' neck tattoo just visible above the collar, the 49-year-old is in terrific shape – physically and mentally.

"I feel great coming back," he admits. It's been 14 years since he bitch-slapped the Bond franchise with the original Rob Cohen-directed *xXx* – and even now he regrets not making the 2005 sequel, *xXx: State Of The Union*, something that came home to him on a Eurostar trip. "I was on that train and I saw billboards for the second attempt at this movie, and I remember feeling really bad… as though a lot of the fans of the first *xXx* were let down that I didn't return for the second one."

Yet for Diesel, this was never just about reprising Cage; it was about dealing with the demons of *Furious 7* – the torturous shoot that went on hiatus after the untimely death of co-star Paul Walker. "If it wasn't for a darker period of my life or the experience of finishing *Furious 7*, I might not have fought so hard to play a character so fun," reveals Diesel. "I needed to play Xander, now more than ever in my life… it was something truly therapeutic and something I really needed to do."

It's something D.J. Caruso (*Eagle Eye*, *Disturbia*) confirms when *TF* catches up with him in November, with the director in the final throes of post-production. "We were about halfway through," he recalls, "and Vin said, 'I haven't had this much fun in a movie in a long time and I haven't laughed this much since we lost Paul.' [*It was a way for him*] to return to Xander and just understand, enjoy and appreciate life – and how precious it is."

WORLD IN ACTION Thailand's Tony Jaa, Britain's Michael Bisping and Hong Kong's Donnie Yen form part of the truly international cast.

For Caruso, taking on the *xXx* franchise presented a major challenge. If the original was the "blue-collar adrenaline answer" to Bond – then floundering with 2002's *Die Another Day* – this third instalment arrives not only with *Jason Bourne* and *Mission: Impossible*'s Ethan Hunt on the rise but with the 007 franchise in better shape, thanks to Craig and Sam Mendes. But? "The last few Bond movies, as good as they were, they weren't having fun," argues Caruso. "They just weren't having the fun that I remembered the great, great Bond movies having."

Short of putting Diesel in a safari suit and arching his eyebrow Roger Moore-style, *xXx: Return Of Xander Cage* promises a not-entirely serious espionage adventure, "winking at the audience in a way the old Bonds used to". It's maybe why you'll see Gibbons recruiting Brazilian football star Neymar for a cameo. "I was obsessed with getting Neymar in this movie," admits Caruso. "Neymar is an active xXx recruit because of his special skills!" Dribbling and long-range free-kicks? The mind boggles…

As silly as it sounds, you can't deny this latest adventure hasn't got all bases covered. Inspired by his own actions on the *Fast* franchise, bringing what he calls "a new form of multiculturalism to the Hollywood blockbuster", Diesel wanted to take things further: "I thought what would be wonderful for *xXx* to do would be to cast the movie on an international scale; beyond the borders of Hollywood. Literally going into other film markets." He pauses. "The idea was to create a cast that knew no boundaries."

Currently thrilling audiences in *Star Wars* spin-off *Rogue One*, Yen believes it's essential in today's climate. "The world is getting smaller and smaller,"

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XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE

he says. "You can't just do well in one country now. You've got to have an international hit." Yet if this all sounds like marketing, Caruso promises that each actor brings their own skill-set. "When you get Tony Jaa and Donnie Yen in the same movie as a filmmaker, it's a dream come true… we really embraced the style of the individual."

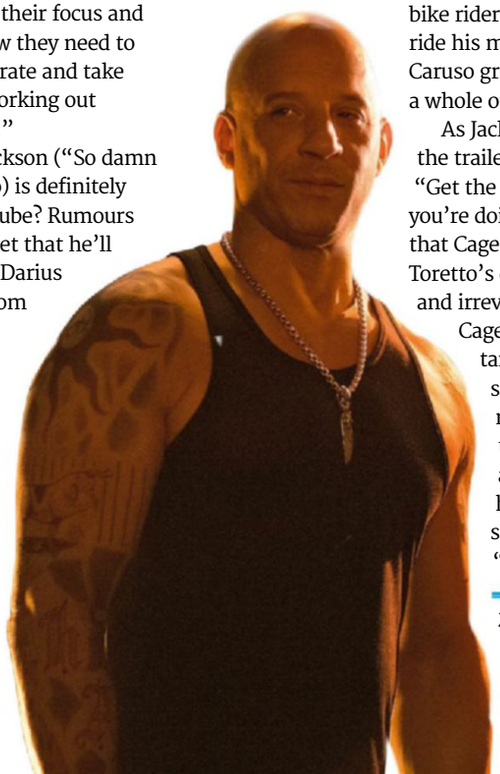
Nor is this *xXx* simply 'boys' own', with several cast-iron female roles – including Toni Collette as intelligence operative Jane Marke and Bulgarian star of *The Vampire Diaries* Nina Dobrev as tech nerd Becky. Then there's the glamorous Deepika Padukone as Serena. "In a big way [*it's*] a reflection of how women are today," she says. "She's someone who is independent, who can make her own decisions and a lot of times decides for the team what needs to be done."

On the flip side is Ruby Rose – the Australian rising star who, when we meet below the Hamilton overpass, arrives with tattoo-clad hands and turquoise hair. Playing Adele, a former BMX rider who became a crack sniper in the military, Rose's character is called upon by Cage as he's assembling his xXx team. "Anything Xander wants, I'm there to do," she says. "I'm sort of like his road dog, his best friend, his sister – I'm always there, for whatever he needs." And just in case you were thinking… "It's not a love-interest relationship," she confirms.

Caruso was particularly impressed with Rose's dedication to the role, specifically Adele's adeptness with a rifle. "She became obsessed with becoming really good," he says. Spending time on shooting ranges in LA and Toronto, "it's all about doing everything you would as an actual sniper," Rose says. "So you're not just pulling the trigger; but knowing how snipers are about their focus and their precision and how they need to slow down their heart rate and take a deep breath… and working out what was right for me."

While Samuel L. Jackson ("So damn good", mutters Caruso) is definitely back, what about Ice Cube? Rumours are flying around the set that he'll be making a cameo as Darius Stone, his character from *State Of The Union*. So – will Darius be handing the *xXx* baton back to Cage? Caruso ums and ahs, mumbling something about "connective tissue" between the movies. "That's a good question," he says, finally. "I'm going to have to plead the fifth!" As Kirschenbaum puts it, "We're not ignoring that movie took place."

CAGE FIGHTER
Back in the franchise after skipping the sequel, Diesel's joined by Ruby Rose and Nina Dobrev.



Either way, while the cast is strong, the stunts still need to match it. Kirschenbaum promises "three seminal action sequences that you've never seen before in cinema" – the freeway chase, a zero-gravity fight aboard a C170 plane and the opening, a jaw-dropping motorbike chase across – believe it or not – water. Employing the services of Robbie Maddison, the legendary dirt bike rider who became the first man to ride his machine on the waves of Tahiti, Caruso grins: "We take motorcycles to a whole other level."

As Jackson's Gibbons says in the trailer, one thing is paramount: "Get the girl and try to look dope while you're doing it." Diesel smiles, aware that Cage is the light to *Fast* hero Dom Toretto's dark. "Aside from the humour and irreverence and sexiness of the Cage character, there's something tangible and underground, something that speaks of this millennium," he says. "He is truly this millennium's secret agent. On the first poster we had: 'He ain't your daddy's secret agent'" He winks. "That said it all."

XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE OPENS ON 20 JANUARY.

GEAR SHIFT

Theron puts Vin in a spin in **FAST & FURIOUS 8**. Or is it Fast & Furiosa?

WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW

DIRECTOR F. Gary Gray **STARRING** Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson, Charlize Theron, Helen Mirren, Jason Statham **ETA** 14 April

What's the toughest thing about making a *Fast & Furious* movie? The other seven, obviously. With a blockbuster series that's already seen cars jumping onto boats, into trains, out of planes and through skyscrapers, how can anyone *possibly* top what's already been done? According to director F. Gary Gray, the answer, as ever, is to make it bigger, better, smarter, faster… and more furious.

Adding ground-breaking locations, Oscar-winning actors, a handful of franchise-shaking plot twists and even more outrageous set-pieces, *Fast 8* is a kitchen sink on wheels.

"There's a little bit of everything in this movie… in a good way," laughs Gray, speaking to *TF*, appropriately, from a moving car. "We challenged ourselves to top all those other set-pieces and I'll humbly say I think we did a pretty good job – and we had an *insane* time doing it. We built so many different types of cars. We were the first Hollywood movie to shoot in Cuba. We had cars racing hundreds of miles an hour in Manhattan and we wrote a story so amazing it even attracted Helen Mirren!"

The details of that Mirren-scooping story are still fairly thin, but we do know that *Fast 8* takes Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson and the rest of the gang away from the heist formula of *Fast*s 5-7 and edges them towards the spy genre – with Charlize Theron's new baddie doing "something" so emotionally devastating to Diesel's Dom that everyone can't stop talking about how incredible his performance is.

"People will see a very different side to Vin, that's for sure," teases Gray. "He does things we've never seen him do before and his chemistry with Charlize is really something special. There are some *major* twists that I don't think anyone will expect – especially if you're a fan of the franchise."

Gray, who practised his car chases in 2003's *The Italian Job* and his ensembles in 2015's *Straight Outta Compton*, couldn't be a better man for the job. Speaking to *TF* en route to the edit suite, he even has a run in with a police car mid-interview.

"I love the whole world," he laughs. "It's like being a kid again. I used to play with Hot Wheels when I was younger and I used to build BMX bikes – it feels like my whole childhood is culminating in making this movie!"

Gray was already part of the extended *Fast* family, having previously worked with pretty much everyone in the AAA cast. The bigger issue wasn't welcoming new friends, it was learning to cope without old ones – with *Fast 8* marking the first film in the saga since Paul Walker's tragic death in 2013.

"The love for Paul on set was so strong that it was almost like he was a part of the process," says Gray. "We didn't make *any* big decisions without considering him. In a way, this movie is for Paul."

FAST & FURIOUS 8 OPENS ON 14 APRIL.

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THE COMMUTER

Liam Neeson has a very particular train to catch...

DIRECTOR Jaume Collet-Serra **STARRING** Liam Neeson, Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson, Sam Neill **ETA** 20 October

Jaume Collet-Serra likes a challenge. Staging 2014's *Non-Stop* entirely on a plane, 2015's *Run All Night* entirely in one evening and 2016's *The Shallows* on a little rock in the middle of the sea, it's no surprise this thriller is similarly confined – this time to a train.

It's also no surprise that he's using Liam Neeson again – reuniting with his favourite leading man for a fourth film to tell the story of an insurance salesman on his way to work who finds himself embroiled in a deadly conspiracy involving one of the passengers.

"We've got Liam in a metal tube again, but it's a very different movie!" laughs Collet-Serra, keeping quiet about the plot's big mysteries but dropping references to Hitchcock's *A Lady Vanishes* and *Strangers On A Train*. "I like doing concept movies. I like having a space to play in – a space where we can follow a character's decisions, where the audience feels they're making the same decisions."

The biggest difference here is the sheer size of that space – with Collet-Serra having to build an entire 140ft moving train carriage inside a Pinewood soundstage. "Every time I had a character move from one carriage to another, I had to reuse the whole set and change everything around," he says, "Another big difference is that, in *Non-Stop*, I was able to close the windows. On a train you've got these huge panoramic views so I needed visual effects to show what's going on outside. Then you've got the stations. We couldn't ask a real station to stop its trains for us – so we had to construct them inside the studio too. We ended up building the whole thing on rails in the biggest soundstage we could find."

Filling his train with the likes of Vera Farmiga, Sam Neill, Elizabeth McGovern, Jonathan Banks and Patrick Wilson, Collet-Serra assembled a strong, contrary cast of characters to play his passengers – but there was never a question about who was going to be the lead.

"On my fourth movie with Liam, I'm not even picking him anymore – we're just making the movie together," laughs Collet-Serra. "It's not like, 'Hey, Liam would be great for this,' it's just, 'Hey, let's do another one!' I think there's an understanding that we're going to keep working together for as long as the audience will let us." ***PB***

JAY MAIDMENT

FIST FIGHT

Ice Cube comes out swinging...

DIRECTOR Richie Keen **STARRING** Ice Cube, Charlie Day, Jillian Bell, Dean Norris **ETA** 3 March

Fresh off producing *Straight Outta Compton*, Ice Cube's heading back to school – and back to comedy. *Fist Fight* pitches the idea we all wanted to see when we were kids: two teachers hit the playground to hit each other. Cube plays Ron Strickland, a short-fuse history teacher who loses it after his colleague Andy Campbell (Charlie Day) accidentally gets him fired.

With Ron threatening his mild-mannered fellow teacher to an after-school fight, so begins a nightmarish day for the weedy Campbell, who desperately tries to duck out of it. As Day told *USA Today*, "I get to be a little bit more of a straight man in a sea of crazy people" – ranging from Tracy Morgan's grumpy gym coach to Christina Hendricks' saucy French mistress.

Directed by Richie Keen, if you're expecting this studio comedy to soft-soap the violence, think again. These bad teachers really go at it. "What is surprising is how hard he can punch," Day says of Cube, who had a masseuse on set to ease aches and pains. ***JM***

DEAD COLD

Michael Fassbender braves the Nordic noir chill in **THE SNOWMAN.** WORDS MATT MAYTUM

DIRECTOR Tomas Alfredson **STARRING** Michael Fassbender, Rebecca Ferguson, Val Kilmer, J.K. Simmons, Charlotte Gainsbourg **ETA** 13 October

Before Lisbeth Salander returns to the big screen in *The Girl In The Spider's Web*, another Nordic noir is set to put good, old-fashioned chills back on the big screen. Michael Fassbender is starring in *The Snowman*, adapted from the 2007 novel by Norwegian crime-fic phenomenon Jo Nesbø, whose writing has been translated into more than 40 languages, selling 23 million copies worldwide.

"I'm pretty bad at reading books to be honest," Fassbender tells *TF*. "I end up reading scripts most of the time. It's terrible." He hadn't caught the Nordic noir bug before signing on to *The Snowman*, which casts him as detective Harry Hole, protagonist of 10 Nesbø novels to date (an 11th is published in 2017). *The Snowman* is actually the seventh in the series. "As soon as I got involved, I got stuck into them. I read all of them except for *The Snowman* itself and two of the last books. Other than that, I sort of consumed them."

With director Tomas Alfredson (*Let The Right One In, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) bringing his own edge to the script, Fassbender didn't want to be too hung up on the events of the book. "I didn't want to be going, 'But in the book, this happened!'" he laughs. "So I thought I'd stick with what we had [*in the script*]."

Pronounced 'HO-leh' according to Norwegian Nesbø, the character is a detective with the Oslo Crime Squad. As you might have guessed, you don't get a 10-book series without some maverick methods and personal demons. "He's definitely a human being," asserts Fassbender. "You know, some of these characters can seem like superhuman beings. He's vulnerable." Part of that derives from his on-off relationship with alcohol. "He's somebody that falls off the wagon and turns to drinking."

'IT'LL HAVE PEOPLE ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEATS'
MICHAEL FASSBENDER

What causes Hole to slip from the wagon could well be down to the murders he's investigating, in which the perpetrator leaves snowmen as a calling card (and let's just say they're not of the Raymond Briggs variety). "It's basically about a serial killer," says Fassbender, trying to avoid spoilers for anyone unfamiliar with the book. "[*Hole*]'s not somebody that works very well with a lot of people, but he's got a great relationship with his boss, who lets him get away with stuff that other people wouldn't get away with because he's a bit of a genius when it comes to investigating in his own unorthodox way."

On his side in the investigation is Swedish actress Rebecca Ferguson as Katrine Bratt ("They sort of get pulled together into the investigation"), with the cast rounded out with the eclectic likes of Val Kilmer, Chloë Sevigny, J.K. Simmons and Charlotte Gainsbourg. One thing that didn't faze Fassbender:

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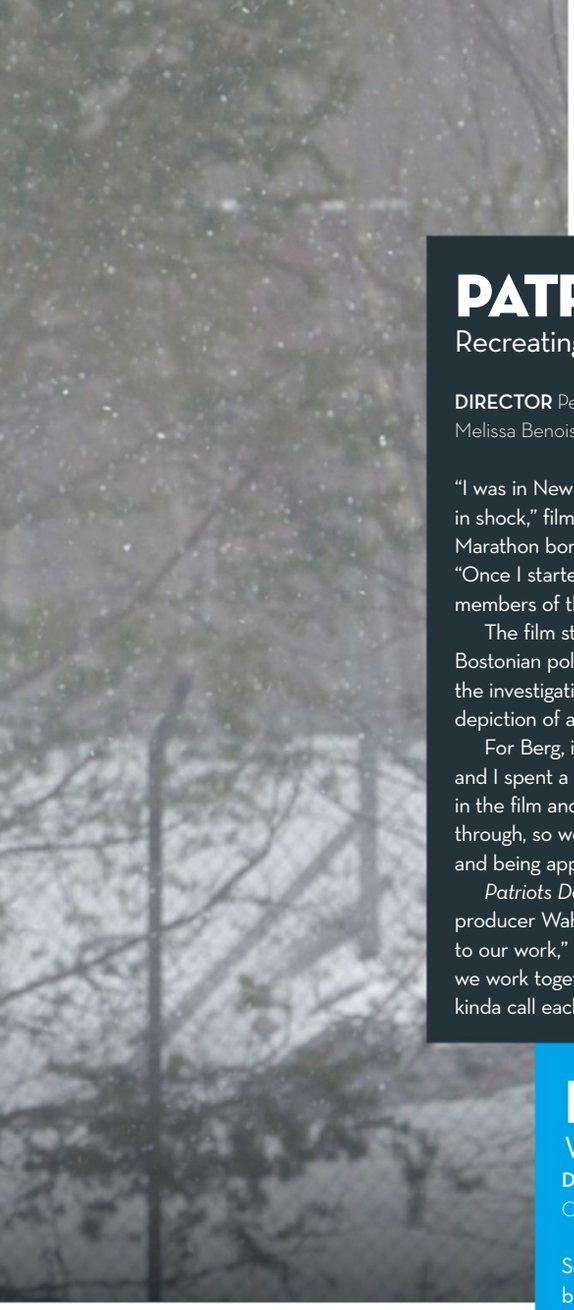

the bitter Oslo weather. "I don't mind it so much," he shrugs. "Sometimes it's really damp and it's cold and it's windy. It gets to your bones. But I found it quite pleasant… and I learned how to ski!"

With the grisly crime scenes promising some uncomfortable viewing – "It's going to have people sitting on the edge of their seats," promises Fassbender, "it's horrific and scary in the right doses" – *The Snowman* is shaping up to be one of the year's grimmest thrillers. Except for the fact that, according to the star, Harry Hole has an unexpectedly humorous streak. "I think there's a lot of comedy to him, and hopefully we've found some of those beats," he smiles, of the character who gets into scrapes that see him coming off worse for wear in each book. "There's something comical I've always found about him."

It's a good thing Fassbender's enjoying himself: this could well be the start of an 11-film franchise.

THE SNOWMAN OPENS ON 13 OCTOBER.

PATRIOTS DAY

Recreating the Boston terrorist attack…

DIRECTOR Peter Berg **STARRING** Mark Wahlberg, John Goodman, Melissa Benoist, Michelle Monaghan **ETA** 24 February

"I was in New York and it came up on television. I just stared in shock," filmmaker Peter Berg recalls about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the focus of his new movie, *Patriots Day*. "Once I started going up to Boston and meeting with different members of that community, I felt compelled to make this story."

The film stars Mark Wahlberg as Tommy Saunders, the real-life Bostonian police sergeant on duty at the marathon who aided in the investigation to find the bombers responsible. It's a tense depiction of a tragedy that, for many, is still very raw.

For Berg, it was important to approach the film tactfully: "Mark and I spent a lot of time meeting with the people that we represent in the film and we have a good understanding of what they went through, so we followed our instinct with regards to being tasteful and being appropriate."

Patriots Day also marks Berg's third film in a row with star and producer Wahlberg. "We have similar taste and similar approaches to our work," Berg explains. "The more we work together, the better we work together. It's a mutually beneficial relationship – we can kinda call each other out on our bullshit." ***MLo***

FREE FIRE

Wheatley brings out the big guns…

DIRECTOR Ben Wheatley **STARRING** Armie Hammer, Cillian Murphy, Brie Larson, Sharlto Copley **ETA** 31 March

Set in the late-'70s in a dilapidated, soon-to-be bullet-shredded Boston warehouse, Wheatley's latest sees a gun deal go rapidly south as male egos get in the way of business. Verbal jousting quickly escalates into deafening gunfire, for *Free Fire*'s USP is that it's essentially a climactic shootout spread over an entire movie. Think *Reservoir Dogs* reworked as a live-action *Looney Tunes* for these End Times and you're in the right vicinity. One thing's for damn sure: there will be blood, and lots of it.

With *Free Fire*'s profile raised by the presence of executive producer Martin Scorsese (whose '70s work is a key influence), and its kamikaze clashing of a starry cast, riotous action and lethal humour, it promises to be the cult Brit director's biggest hit to date. And that's before you consider having Oscar-winner Larson jostling with the boys. "I want my films to find as big an audience as possible," Wheatley told *Total Film* just last month. And good job too, because *Free Fire* slayed audiences at the Toronto and London Film Festivals, with the glowing reactions convincing Warner Bros he's the man to direct Frank Miller/Geof Darrow adap *Hard Boiled* – his first studio movie. ***JG***

SECOND COMING

Christian and Anastasia do it again, in **FIFTY SHADES DARKER**. WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

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DIRECTOR James Foley **STARRING** Dakota Johnson, Jamie Dornan, Hugh Dancy, Kim Basinger **ETA** 10 February

When director Sam Taylor-Johnson announced her departure from the *Fifty Shades* franchise, after reports of creative differences with author E.L. James, you could be forgiven for being surprised by her replacement. James Foley, the 62-year-old veteran director of films such as *At Close Range* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*, hadn't made a movie in nearly 10 years, largely toiling away on TV shows such as *House Of Cards* and *Billions*.

Even he was initially reluctant to take on the James-penned follow-ups to her *Fifty Shades Of Grey* phenomenon, which continue the relationship between kink-loving billionaire Christian Grey and his intended 'submissive' Anastasia Steele. "At first I thought, 'I don't think so,'" he admits. "But then I read the books and I found this great psychological twisted darkness. I got hooked on it."

Shooting both *Fifty Shades Darker*, and final chapter *Fifty Shades Freed*, Foley was more than happy to hook up with Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson, returning as the leads. But otherwise? "There was a lot of things I wanted to 'correct' from the first movie," he says, citing aspects such as the design of Christian's apartment to the "black helmet" of Rita Ora's hair.

"I think the look of the film is quite different: it's much warmer tones, it's a much more fluid camera, it's a bit more cinematic." Then there's the sex play. "For my money, it's definitely a lot sexier. It's not as chilly as some of the scenes in the first one seemed to be. There's much more emotional involvement and connection that evolves over the course of the movie. And the chemistry between the two of them is dramatically better in this movie."

Foley further put his stamp on the film, casting Bella Heathcote as Christian's former submissive Leila and Kim Basinger as Elena Lincoln, the woman who introduced him to BDSM. A deliberate nod to Basinger's role in '80s classic *9½ Weeks* (in which Mickey Rourke played another wealthy dominant, John Gray)? Just a "welcome" coincidence, says Foley.

As for E.L. James – whose husband Niall Leonard scripted both *Darker* and *Freed*, taking over from Kelly Marcel – Foley calls his relationship with the author "one of the great success stories of the adventure". Regularly on set, James was "impeccably respectful", Foley reports. "There was no friction in the camp, so to speak." Hopefully, all the friction has been saved for Christian's Red Room of Pain.

FIFTY SHADES DARKER OPENS ON 10 FEBRUARY.

SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING

The re-education of Peter Parker...

DIRECTOR Jon Watts **STARRING** Tom Holland, Marisa Tomei, Robert Downey Jr., Michael Keaton, Donald Glover **ETA** 7 July

In the pecking order of Marvel coups, securing the film rights to Spider-Man is up there with making a monosyllabic tree loveable. Having struck a deal with rights-holders Sony, Marvel has already introduced its quippy new webslinger in Tom Holland (*The Impossible*), who hit the ground running with his appearance in *Captain America: Civil War*. And with director Jon Watts (*Cop Car*) reuniting Spidey with Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) for *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, we should finally see something different after Marc Webb's dutiful if déjà vu-inducing 2012 reboot.

Holland promises his Spider-Man is "a kid dealing with [*the*] everyday problems that a 15-year-old deals with, as well as trying to save the city", and Marvel boss Kevin Feige has cited John Hughes as an influence, hinting Peter could have his *Pretty In Pink* moment at the prom. That's when he's not fighting a feathered fiend played by Michael Keaton.

While the *Birdman* Oscar-winner admits he "didn't even know there was a character named Vulture" before he signed on, he reveals it was his director's vision for the character that snared his interest. "He's just a working-class guy who built up a business," Keaton tells *TF* of Vulture, "and he feels like he's been cheated in the world." A bit like Spidey, you might say. Until now... ***JW***

KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

Live and let spy...

DIRECTOR Matthew Vaughn **STARRING** Taron Egerton, Julianne Moore, Halle Berry, Mark Strong, Channing Tatum, Jeff Bridges **ETA** 6 October

"Matthew's outrageousness, and the way he likes to subvert people's expectations, is very, very much alive," says Colin Firth of this sequel to *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, somewhat proving his own point because (spoiler klaxon) Colin Firth shouldn't really be in *The Golden Circle*. Despite the calamitous events of the first film, though, director Matthew Vaughn has found a way to include him anyway – and something tells us that won't be the craziest thing about the follow-up to the 007-style hit.

Speaking of spies, if the first rule of sequels is to 'go bigger', *The Golden Circle* is primed to do just that as newly qualified secret agent Eggsy (Taron Egerton) jetpacks off to the USA, where he confronts criminal mastermind Poppy (Julianne Moore). With the Kingsman HQ destroyed (that'll be a set-piece to remember), Eggsy's backed up by returning trainer Merlin (Mark Strong), plus American agents played by Halle Berry, Channing Tatum and team leader Jeff Bridges.

"It's more crazy than the first one, if such a thing is possible," explains returning co-writer Jane Goldman (*X-Men: First Class*), who reveals that the sequel doesn't necessarily set out to do anything "more shocking" than the first film's church scene. But adds: "We're very fortunate to have Julianne Moore playing the villain. She's incredible." ***JW***

CYBORG

Stage actor Ray Fisher loved the Cyborg-starring *Teen Titans* 'toon in high school and lapped up a "library of stuff" as research for his breakthrough screen role.

THE FLASH

Barry Allen's fresh-faced enthusiasm will offset Wayne's more weathered stance. Ezra Miller pitches him as an "amateur-hour speedster", who still finds being a superhero "exciting and very fun".

SUPERMAN

Spoiler! He returns, somehow, bantering more playfully with Bats over the League. "There's pretty much an argument between him and Batman as to who is the leader," hints Cavill.

WONDER WOMAN

The appointment of Wonder Woman as honorary ambassador to the UN stoked controversy, but Gadot received praise from her co-stars. "What an incredible force of nature," gushed Miller.

A NEW DAWN

Make room, Marvel. DC gets a **JUSTICE LEAGUE** of its own... WORDS KEVIN HARLEY

DIRECTOR Zack Snyder **STARRING** Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Gal Gadot, Jason Momoa, Ray Fisher, Ezra Miller **ETA** 17 November

If *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* harshed your mellow, take heart: silly walks might be 'a thing' in *Justice League*. A recent rumour doing the internet rounds chalked John Cleese up for a cameo. And why not? Everyone else seems to be on *League* duty...

Long after George Miller's canned *League* film, a lot of heavy lifting will be involved in fulfilling Zack Snyder's stated mission to "unite the seven". But if Snyder's playful end-of-shoot sizzle reel and interview comments are any indication, the emphasis will be on lightening DC's tonal load. For starters, *League* seems to have been halved. Warner's release schedule once hinted at a two-film epic, but DC Films co-head Geoff Johns stressed the singular on Twitter: "Clearing up any misconceptions – the *Justice League* movie is called '*Justice League*'."

Second, the seven seem to have become a more manageable six, though rumours rumble on regarding a certain Green Lantern Corps cameo. Third, J.K. Simmons has beefed up so much to play Commissioner Gordon he looks like he could make light work of bench-pressing Wayne Tower. Snyder, meanwhile, contrasts *Dawn*'s death-shadowed climax with the goofier stuff of team-building: "I think it's in all the characters inherently, this larger-than-life, big, fun stuff, especially when you're dealing with the *Justice League*."

On firmer footing, this much we do know about the DCEU's bid to unite audiences split by *Suicide Squad* and *BVS*. His faith in heroism restored by

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AQUAMAN

While Jason Momoa's Atlantean brings fish to villages, the actor brought friskiness to the set. "Just in his Jason-ness, the contrast to Ben and Gal is really fun," reckons Snyder.

BATMAN

Bat's back with an augmented tactical Batsuit – and augmented quips. Affleck promises a more "wry, ironic, gallows humour" after *DOJ*'s perma-frowning bone-breaker.

Superman, Ben Affleck's Batman lassos himself to Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman to fight Steppenwolf – not the 'Born To Be Wild' rockers (though he rides a cool hover bike in the comics), but a supervillain played by a mo-capped Ciarán Hinds. So, they get a band together: Jason Momoa's Aquaman, Ezra Miller's Flash and Ray Fisher's Cyborg form the backline.

How Henry Cavill's Superman, supervillain Darkseid, Joe Manganiello's Deathstroke, Amber Heard's aqua-queen Mera, Jeremy Irons' Alfred, Willem Dafoe's Atlantean Vulko and Basil Fawlty play into it remains to be seen. But play into it they will (well, mostly), along with what Snyder calls the "kinda crazy" sci-fi DC MacGuffins of "Mother Boxes", New Gods and planets called things like Apokolips.

In brief, don't expect grit, expect a grand-scale good time. Simmons thinks as much, having praised a "fun set" and described team Snyder as people "you don't mind spending a 12-hour day with". Here's hoping they'll be a blast to spend a super-sized film with, too.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OPENS ON 17 NOVEMBER.

WONDER WOMAN

All the world is waiting for you...

DIRECTOR Patty Jenkins **STARRING** Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen **ETA** 2 June

DC has trailed behind Marvel in the comic-book wars, but the Bat-base is inching ahead on a crucial front. Arriving long before Marvel's first solo female headliner, Captain Marvel, Wonder Woman upends Superman's *Dawn Of Justice* query, "Is she with you?" She's not with anybody: he's with her.

The "he" is Chris Pine's Steve Trevor, a WW1 pilot whose plane crashes on Amazonian island Themyscira. Gal Gadot's Amazon princess Diana joins him to try and stop WW1 – and Gadot tackled the job vigorously. "I've been training almost every day, very intensively, doing stunts and martial arts as well... I learned how to ride a horse, how to use swords, how to fight, and how to be very, very strong – which is fantastic, for me. Now I'm not afraid to walk alone at night. Seriously."

Who Diana might fear villain-wise is less certain. Elena Anaya's masked woman? An ominous-looking Danny Huston? Either way, a mix of intensity/levity is promised to buck DC's dour reputation. As Trevor's secretary Etta Candy, Lucy Davis (*The Office*'s Dawn) is a comic treat in the trailer. And director Patty Jenkins (*Monster*), who called rumours of behind-the-scenes problems "made-up BS", teases the right balance.

"It's funny, it's romantic, it's exciting. It's simple and classic, yet we approach a lot of things in a modern way. A lot of the fighting stuff is on-edge modern. But I don't think we're particularly dark. Nor are we particularly tongue-in-cheek. We're right smack in the middle."

With any justice, the result should issue a ringing riposte to superheroes' sausage party. "I think there's no better time to show her story than now," says Gadot. "It's about time that we show a story of a female superhero. The more strong, successful, loving women that we have, then the more empowered women will be." Your go, Marvel. ***KH***

DROPPING THE HAMMER

The Asgardian hero hits the road with the Hulk in **THOR: RAGNAROK**... WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

DIRECTOR Taika Waititi **STARRING** Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston, Mark Ruffalo, Cate Blanchett, Tessa Thompson, Karl Urban, Jeff Goldblum **ETA** 27 October

Wondering why Chris Hemsworth's Thor didn't pick a side in *Civil War*? Apart from hanging out with new roommate Daryl, the god of thunder had more important things on his mind. For one, Odin is missing – a mystery Doctor Strange will assist in solving – and there's a new realm-ending threat in Cate Blanchett's Hela, the Asgardian goddess of death.

It may sound heavy already, but with Taika Waititi (*What We Do In The Shadows, Hunt For The Wilderpeople*) behind the camera, if it isn't the funniest Marvel movie yet, it'll at least be the craziest. "I was talking with the guys at Marvel, even before Taika came on. It was about: 'How can we show something of this world that people haven't seen?' Chris Hemsworth tells *Total Film*. The answer? A trip to a planet that's all kinds of weird.

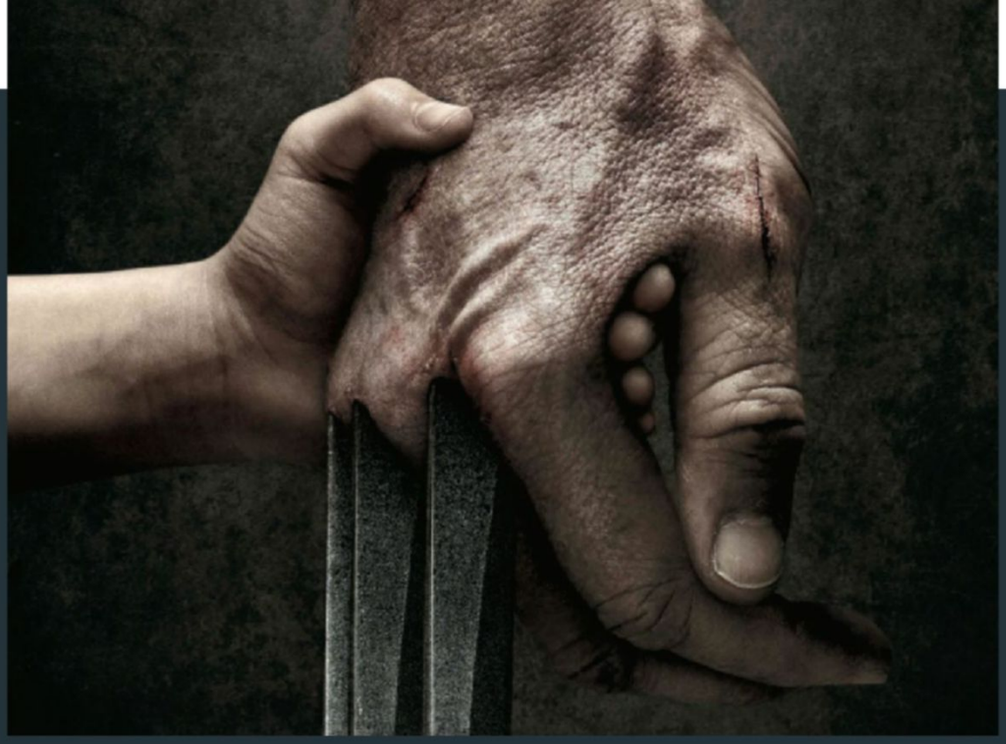
'THE IDEA WAS TO TRY TO MAKE SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT' TAIKA WAITITI

"Sakaar was just an insane, far-off, futuristic place which was the biggest shift for the film and these characters."

Sakaar is where Thor will reunite with Mark Ruffalo's Hulk, who has made a name for himself as a gladiator in a plot arc mirroring acclaimed comic series *Planet Hulk*. Waititi's major visual inspiration also came from the comics – more specifically artist Jack Kirby. "I was really excited when Kevin and the rest of Marvel jumped on board with the idea to use [*Jack*] Kirby as a big influence in the design of the film," Waititi says. "What's really hard is staying authentic."

Describing it as the most adventurous and "out there" Marvel movie to date, Waititi has made some exciting additions to an already impressive ensemble including Tessa Thompson, Jeff Goldblum and Karl Urban. Add in what could be the final appearance of Tom Hiddleston's scene-stealer Loki and *Ragnarok* shows every sign of living up to its billing as *The Winter Soldier* of *Thor* movies. "The idea was always to take those first two movies and look at what they had to offer," Waititi explains. "But also, try not to make another episode. Try to make something very different."

THOR: RAGNAROK OPENS ON 27 OCTOBER.



LOGAN

One last time on the claw patrol for Hugh Jackman...

DIRECTOR James Mangold **STARRING** Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart, Boyd Holbrook, Dafne Keen, Stephen Merchant **ETA** 3 March

Have the X-Men lost their screen clout? Not if the trailer for *Logan*, Hugh Jackman's farewell to ol' muttonchops, is any indication. The *Apocalypse* movie muddled the series' focus, but *The Wolverine* director James Mangold's spin on Mark Millar's *Old Man Logan* comics arc looks to be a fierce and fully felt surrender of the claws from Jackman.

Without giving much away for newcomers to Millar's story, Wolvie's down in the dumps in the trailer. This scarred, shaking, unshaven and suspiciously greying Logan roams a dystopian future, tragedy-stricken and powers diminished. And his bathroom sink's in a right state. With him are – sayeth Patrick Stewart – "a very different Charles Xavier" and youngster-with-secrets Laura (Dafne Keen), all but certainly comics favourite Laura Kinney. But Logan faces heat from Boyd Holbrook's well-armed (Donald, surely) Pierce and his cyborg Reavers, genocidal mutant-killers all.

Sound full-on? Perhaps, but the decision to aim for a US R-rating was not taken lightly. "We've got to have an incredible reason to deliberately exclude them," said Jackman regarding Wolverine's younger fans. Producer Simon Kinberg reckons they've got one with Mangold's "radical, bold, different Wolverine". It's a "violent" variation, Kinberg states, and "kind of like a western in its tone". And he surely isn't just referring to Stephen Merchant's poncho-chic get-up as mutant tracker Caliban, given the echoes of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* here.

Just as Eastwood's ex-killer took up arms, so Logan reassumes vest 'n' claws attack mode: to paraphrase Johnny Cash's Nine Inch Nails cover on the trailer, he will make you hurt. Question is, will he be dishing the pain alone? Clearly not, given Laura's leaps into action, the *Léon*-esque suggestion of Logan nurturing Laura, and the hand-over-hand promo images of Logan and Laura. This farewell might just be the start of a new mutant gene... ***KH***

BAYWATCH

DIRECTOR Seth Gordon **STARRING** Dwayne Johnson, Zac Efron, David Hasselhoff, Pamela Anderson, Alexandra Daddario **ETA** 12 May

Red bikinis at the ready! *Horrible Bosses* helmer Seth Gordon is breathing new life into the cult '90s lifeguard series, with new sun-kissed beauties lining up to run slo-mo in the sand for a reboot that has the support of the show's original players. "There ain't no *Bay* without the Hoff," says the Rock. "Get ready world."

PITCH PERFECT 3

DIRECTOR Trish Sie **STARRING** Anna Kendrick, Rebel Wilson, Hailee Steinfeld, Anna Camp, Elizabeth Banks **ETA** 22 December 2017

Their second outing earned a trilling $287m at the box office, so it's not surprising the Bellas are back for an encore performance. *Step Up All In* director Trish Sie is taking the reigns from Elizabeth Banks, with all the main cast returning – so expect Fat Amy hijinks aplenty.

PADDINGTON 2

DIRECTOR Paul King **STARRING** Ben Whishaw, Hugh Grant, Brendan Gleeson, Sally Hawkins **ETA** 10 November

After the 2014 hit's welcome anti-UKIP pitch, our favourite ursine marmalade maven returns, warming up Brexit Britain under loving director Paul King's continued watch. Cast additions include Brendan Gleeson, helping our bear retrieve a stolen book intended for Aunt Lucy's birthday. Hugh Grant's (kinky-booted?) villain fills the Nicole Kidman-shaped vacancy.

MOTHER/DAUGHTER

DIRECTOR Jonathan Levine **STARRING** Amy Schumer, Goldie Hawn, Tom Bateman, Ike Barinholtz **ETA** 12 May

Filth may well fly as *Trainwreck*-er Amy Schumer and Goldie Hawn unite in writer Katie Dippold (*Ghostbusters*) and director Jonathan Levine's (*50/50*) action-comedy about a mother/daughter holiday. Will comic catastrophe/family bonding follow? Either way: "It's going to be a blast," promises Hawn of her first film since 2002.

GOING IN STYLE

DIRECTOR Zach Braff **STARRING** Morgan Freeman, Michael Caine, Alan Arkin, Matt Dillon **ETA** 7 April

After the youth-to-adulthood curve of *Garden State*/*Wish I Was Here*, Zach Braff embraces old age. Three screen icons plot a bank heist after losing their pensions in his (delayed) remake of the 1979 caper. "These actors have been extraordinarily supportive," says Braff of his leads: here's hoping he banks them a hit.

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

Chip off the old block...

DIRECTOR Chris McKay **STARRING** Will Arnett, Zach Galifianakis, Michael Cera, Rosario Dawson, Ralph Fiennes **ETA** 10 February

"What happens when Batman goes home and opens his mail?" muses director Chris McKay. From Tim Burton's *Batman* through to Chris Nolan's Bat trilogy, very little time has been devoted to the Dark Knight's life outside of saving Gotham. *The Lego Batman Movie* will change that. "You have this crazy, big heist scene [*where*] Batman saves the day," McKay continues, "and then what happens when he goes home and he's just doing normal stuff?"

The answer? Swimming with dolphins, watching movies alone in his private cinema, avoiding Alfred... All of that changes when Bats adopts orphan Dick Grayson, aka Robin (voiced by Michael Cera) and he's forced to think about somebody other than himself. Drawing on *Arthur, About A Boy* and *Jerry Maguire*, McKay reveals that this relationship is central to Lego Batman's first solo film. "Those movies are about these guys who see themselves as remote from the rest of the world," he says.

Clearly, Bats has some growing to do. "Is he Batman the orphan whose parents died when he was a kid?" asks Will Arnett, again voicing the brooding loner after *The Lego Movie*. "Or is he now the guy who's going to pitch in for the greater good?" ***JW***

VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS

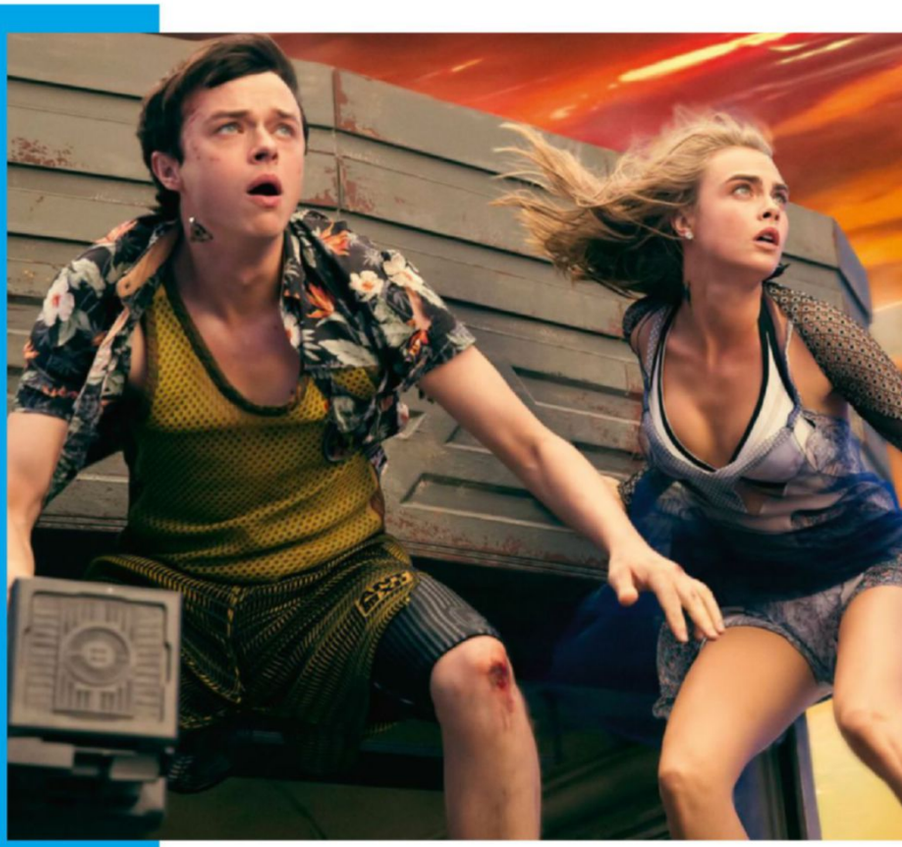
Spaced out...

DIRECTOR Luc Besson **STARRING** Dane DeHaan, Cara Delevingne, Clive Owen, Rihanna, John Goodman **ETA** 21 July

In 1967, comic writer Pierre Christin unveiled a dazzling new world of interstellar misadventure in the pages of *Valérian And Laureline*. It was, in the words of Dane DeHaan, "the original space opera," and the one-time *Amazing Spider-Man* baddie is donning a space-suit to play heroic agent Valerian in Luc Besson's movie adaptation.

By the director's own admission, adapting such a vivid, sprawling story was a big undertaking. "It took almost three years to really create everything," he says. "I worked with a bunch of creators and would say, 'How can a guy think up a creature like this?'"

Tasked with taking on a small planet's worth of aliens are Valerian and his co-worker Laureline (Cara Delevingne), despatched to an immense expanding planet where something dodgy's afoot. "It's really a story of the two teaming together and trying to resolve problems," says Besson, "except in the 28th Century, the problems are bigger – and the chases are also bigger." Adds DeHaan: "Luc still has this retro future style thing going on, and he allows his imagination to go even further because now he can do anything. There's really no boundaries." ***JG***



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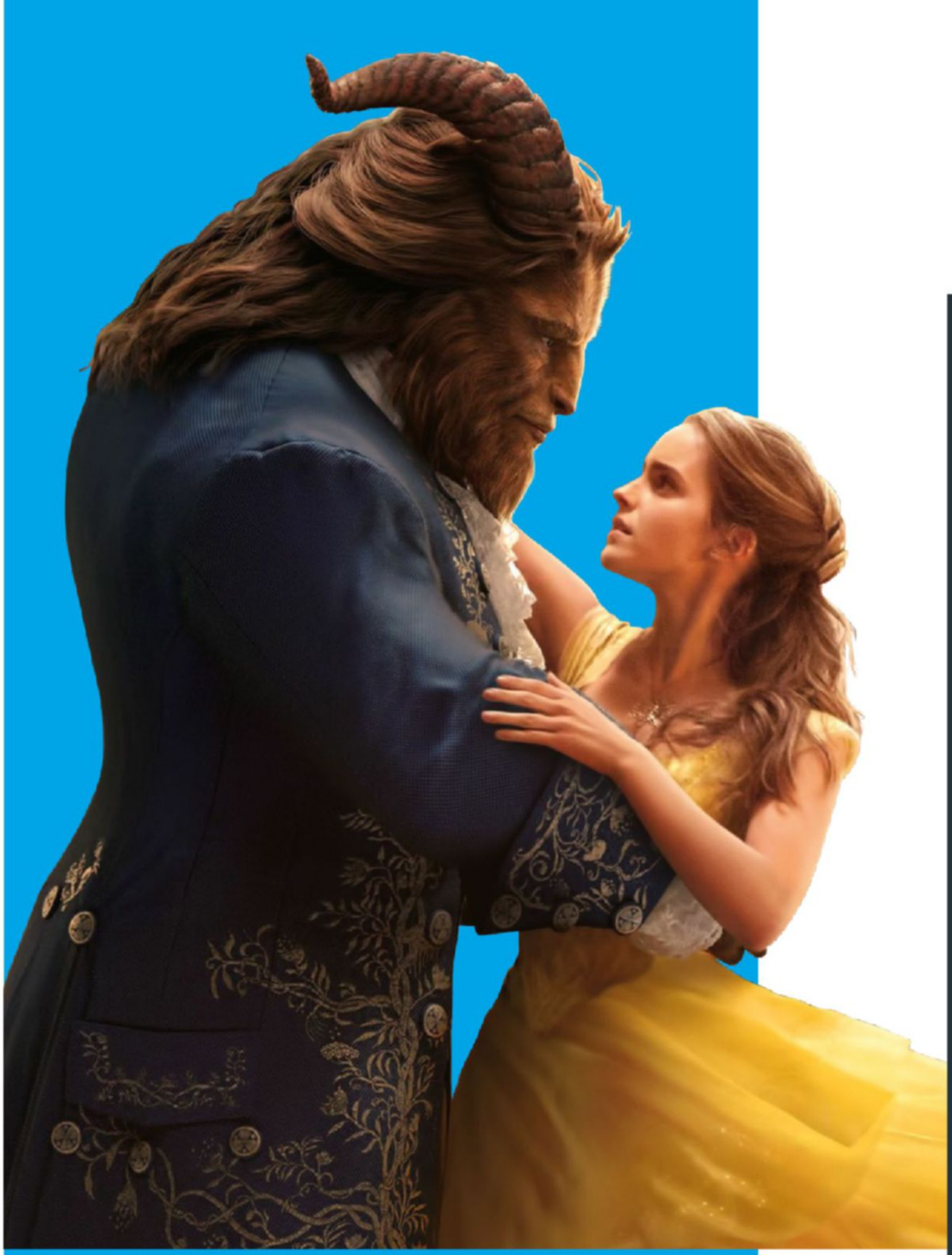

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Sound as a Belle...

DIRECTOR Bill Condon **STARRING** Emma Watson, Dan Stevens, Luke Evans, Josh Gad **ETA** 17 March

It's been 25 years since Disney's game-changer (first animation to get a Best Picture Oscar nod) hit cinemas, its catchy soundtrack since spawning a Broadway musical and earworming generations of fans. So it's some surprise that when *Chicago* and *Dreamgirls* director Bill Condon came onboard the live-action remake, the plan was originally to ditch the ditties.

Condon persuaded the studio to rethink the strategy, plus brought back original composer Alan Menken to tweak family favourites ('Gaston' now has alternative lyrics) as well as create three new songs: a castle-wide big tune, 'Days In The Sun', a Beast solo 'For Evermore' and a ballad for Belle and her dad, 'Our Song Lives On'.

Eek. But should Condon be messing with the winning formula of our childhood? The result, promises Condon, is as reverential as it is revolutionary and those songs are going to be every bit as epic as the originals. "It's been over 20 years since [*Menken*] last worked on this, and it's just so in his DNA. If you put an eight-year-old in front of this movie who doesn't know the cartoon, and asked them what was new and what was old, I'd be shocked if they could pick it out. It all feels of a piece."

Don't be thinking it's all soppy ballads and Disney princesses, either. "The Beast's design and the wolf battles..." says Condon, hinting at darkness and peril. "It's a guy movie as much as a girl movie." ***JC***

KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD

A massive mythbuster...

DIRECTOR Guy Ritchie **STARRING** Charlie Hunnam, Jude Law, Àstrid Bergès-Frisbey, Djimon Hounsou, Eric Bana **ETA** 24 March

"People have been telling this story for 1,500 years," says Charlie Hunnam, "but the Guy Ritchie version is going to be such a departure from anything we've seen already." Not half. Tackling the Arthurian legend with the same grit as any of his street flicks, Ritchie's origins story mixes in armoured elephants, cocker-nee banter and giant snakes, as young Arthur (Hunnam) drags a sword from a stone and promptly jumps to the head of the king queue.

Revealing it's a "lifelong dream" to play the part, Hunnam's heading up a planned six-film series that takes the beardy one from being "somewhat selfish, somewhat rough around the edges", all the way up to being the daddy of English mythology, first tackling Jude Law's villainous Vortigern. "It's *Lord Of The Rings* meets *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*, which is an unlikely concept, and like a marriage of two films," admits Hunnam. "But I actually think it's really worked." ***JW***

BALLS TO THE WALL

THE LADIES ARE

KATE BECKINSALE IS SELENE

What led you to don Selene's catsuit once again?
Why does the world need a fifth *Underworld*? Why do I need a fifth one? There are so many emotional themes in all of the *Underworld* movies, but she's very often not super expressive. In this movie she's much more outwardly emotional and vulnerable, and so many things are happening. I was really interested to try one with a female director [*Anna Foerster*] as well. That seemed a pretty good reason to give it a go. I think it's my favourite of the movies actually.

Did you ever think you'd be making this many *Underworld* films?
No. It was such a shocker to be even given the opportunity to do one! I remember getting feedback from my agent, who was saying, "People think you're very fragile and English and classical." I thought, "I want to play a cop. I want roles that have a little bit of an edge." Then I got asked to do this, which seemed like such a terrible idea – and it took off far more than I thought it would! But I spent the first week on the movie expecting to get fired, thinking, "You should go and do some Chekhov now. This isn't for you."

What makes Selene's partnership with Theo James' David work?
It's a kind of mutual respect, and not at all romantic between them. That's really cool. Especially because he's so outrageously cute. She doesn't have to be in love with him. [*laughs*]

What was the most demanding fight scene this time around?
The ice fight was the one that we really wanted to get right. Because it was such an ambitious idea. I really like how it came out. It was very slippy! Prague in December was absolutely freezing. Those castles aren't toasty. I was very best friends with my hot water bottle. [*laughs*] ***JMc***

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Zhang Yimou and Matt Damon form an east-west alliance for **THE GREAT WALL**, the year's maddest monster movie... **WORDS** JAMES MOTTRAM

DIRECTOR Zhang Yimou **STARRING** Matt Damon, Jing Tian, Pedro Pascal, Willem Dafoe, Andy Lau **ETA** 17 February

King Kong climbed the Empire State Building and the Daleks trundled across Westminster Bridge. So it was only a matter of time before China's own iconic structure took a monstrous movie battering. "The way the film is put together is based on so many Hollywood monster movies," explains director Zhang Yimou (*Hero*, *House Of Flying Daggers*) of his blockbuster *The Great Wall*. "But what makes this film special is it has many Chinese elements."

Adds producer Charles Roven (*The Dark Knight* trilogy, *Justice League*), "Zhang wanted to make a film that had an east meets west quality. Also an east meets west mash-up from a production and technical point of view." Roven compares it to an NBA All-Star game, "trying to make a cohesive unit out of different individual superstars from different teams".

Starring Matt Damon as William Garin, a gunpowder-seeking merc entangled in China's fight against hordes of monsters storming its ancient barrier, *The Great Wall* is the biggest production ever to come out of the Far East. An American-Chinese co-production with a reputed $135 million budget, the merchandise is already flowing fast – tea sets, chopsticks, cellphone cases and more – as China sets out to emulate what Hollywood does best: make money.

With the dialogue largely in English, it's certainly experienced the same sort of pre-release speculation that American studio movies endure. Already, based on two trailers, *The Great Wall* has been accused of whitewashing and more, with some on social media claiming Damon's role should've gone to an Asian actor, while also lambasting the "racist myth that [*only a*] white man can save the world", as actor Constance Wu wrote on Twitter.

"I feel this is a great misunderstanding," argues Zhang, 65. Noting that Damon's Garin is one of many heroes in the film. His character was always meant to be a white foreigner – and so would not be cast with an Asian actor. "This negative information has got spread out, so far and wide, all across the globe. I feel it's really unfair to Matt Damon – it hurts him because this is not what the movie's about."

"He has great star quality but still preserves that 'everyman' essence." adds Roven. "Will is an ambiguous character... Matt can pull that off and make it believable." Controversy aside, Zhang's delighted by the experience of making the movie, from working with Damon (whom he'd originally wanted to cast in his last film *The Flowers Of War* until schedules clashed) to collaborating with New Zealand-based digital pioneers Weta. The creatures went through "thousands of iterations", he adds. "It got crazy but ultimately we found something that everybody's happy with!"

The monsters come directly from Chinese mythology, inspired by the Taotie – the national symbol China used before the dragon. "It's the oldest totem symbol of China," explains Zhang. "It's known for being ravenous and it symbolises greed. So the legend goes it ate its own body!" It's why the design had to be Earth-bound: "It's not an alien life-form from outer space."

THE GREAT WALL OPENS ON 17 FEBRUARY.

VAMPS

Say hello to the fanged hero and villain of **UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS...**

DIRECTOR Anna Foerster **STARRING** Kate Beckinsale, Lara Pulver, Theo James **ETA** 13 January

LARA PULVER IS SEMIRA

Tell us a bit about Semira.
Semira is one of the leaders of the Eastern Coven. Her nose is slightly out of joint because Selene has always taken precedent, so she's a bit wounded. She's a chameleon, she's a master manipulator and she is *ruthless*.

Is it fun playing a baddie?
Always! There's this bit where you can see Semira is starting to get her way and there's this evil gleam in her eye... It's totally my 'mwahaha' moment.

You've certainly got an interesting look in the film...
Anna [*Foerster*] was keen to sculpt my character's silhouette so I had all these amazing walnut whip hairdos. I think I was in a different costume for every scene. Then you've got the fangs – softer fangs for talking and "battle fangs" for biting – and the electric blue contact lenses. Oh, and six-inch heels.

The stunts can't have been easy...
I was black and blue by the end of the shoot. It's always good to walk away with a few wounds though!

Do you enjoy doing the physical stuff?
Oh god yeah, I'm such a thrill seeker! I did 99 per cent of my fight work. I spent whole mornings just practising my hitch kicks, trying to catch two swords at the same time. There was one moment when I was on a wire, horizontal, like Superman, preparing to fly through a door to try and kill Theo James. I remember hearing myself say, "No, I need one more take because I'm making dodgy faces." You forget just how surreal it is sometimes.

Are you ready for the fan circuit?
I had a taste of it with *Sherlock*. People coming up at Comic-Con and asking if I can sign the back of their paddle. I'd *love* to do a Marvel movie or something huge – but I'd also love to do some kind of unglamorous working-class BBC drama. I just love mixing it up. ***PB***

BAD COMPANY

Gru returns with some surprising new co-stars in **DESPICABLE ME 3**. WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW

DIRECTOR Kyle Balda, Pierre Coffin
STARRING Steve Carell, Kristen Wiig, Trey Parker, Russell Brand **ETA** 30 June

The last time we met the world's best/worst supervillain, he'd just got married. Comfortably settled with his wife, adopted kids and army of farting minions, what could possibly lure Gru back into the business of being bad? How about Trey Parker?

Voicing evil ex-child star Balthazar Bratt, the controversial and decidedly grown-up *South Park* creator joins the cast list of *Despicable Me 3* as the worst influence the series has ever seen.

"We like to try and find some edginess to our all films, some stuff that the adults in the audience can relate to," laughs co-director Kyle Balda, "and Trey *definitely* brings that!"

Still stuck in the '80s and still bitter about his lost career, Bratt upsets Gru's new groove by dragging him back into the world of villainy – giving Parker plenty of scope to mix things up in the sound booth.

"He's an animator at heart, so he's coming from the same sort of background," says Balda. "But he hadn't been on this side of the process before and he had a lot of fun with it. We got him singing, adlibbing and doing all kinds of crazy stuff."

And he's not the only one. Now voicing two characters at once, Steve Carell returns as Gru *and* his long-lost, better-looking twin brother Dru.

"Dru is the opposite of Gru in every possible way," says Balda. "Gru's quite cynical and curmudgeonly and Dru is very extroverted and charming. Steve really created a whole new persona – working off the script pages and doing the lines as they've been written, but then really riffing with them too and giving the animators so much more to work with".

Talking about how the team is aiming for a "Jason Bourne movie with a wacky edge" and staying secretive about the film's hugely ambitious new special effects, Balda pitches *Despicable Me 3* as the "biggest, funniest, zaniest" of the series so far. It's good to be bad. Again.

DESPICABLE ME 3 OPENS ON 30 JUNE.

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MINDHORN

Private dicking around with Boosh star Julian Barratt.

DIRECTOR Sean Foley **STARRING** Julian Barratt, Andrea Riseborough, Simon Farnaby **ETA** Spring

Brainstorming for ideas one night, actor-writer Simon Farnaby (*The Mighty Boosh*) was listening to a song. "I heard the name Mindhorn and I wrote it down," he recalls. "It sounded like an '80s detective." From this, Mindhorn was born – a TV detective with a bionic eye that allows him to scan criminal minds. "It was an excuse to watch loads of episodes of *The Saint*, *Bergerac* and *Knight Rider*," says Julian Barratt, Farnaby's co-writer and fellow *Boosh* star.

Rather than simply spoof those shows, Farnaby and Barratt developed an idea about has-been actor Richard Thorncroft (Barratt) who had slipped into obscurity since enjoying success as Mindhorn back in the '80s. "It was his high point, but it was also his curse," explains Farnaby. The twisted plot sees Thorncroft forced to reprise his erstwhile role after a psychotic Isle of Man killer refuses to speak to anyone but Mindhorn.

Directed by first-timer Sean Foley, *Mindhorn* emerges as one of the smartest, funniest British comedies in years, albeit one seasoned with Hollywood influences. "It's like *Galaxy Quest* or *Tropic Thunder* or *Three Amigos*," says Barratt. "It's a whole world of nostalgia, a washed-up actor and redemption." Certainly any thesp pigeonholed by one long-ago success, "feeling your best days are behind you" as Farnaby puts it, will shudder with recognition.

Co-starring alongside Steve Coogan (as Thorncroft's rival, whose own character Windjammer from the *Mindhorn* show scored a hit spin-off), Farnaby also appears as the Dutch exhibitionist Clive, Thorncroft's former stuntman who hooked up with his old flame/co-star Patricia (Essie Davis). With Clive frequently seen top-off, next to the tubbier Thorncroft, it meant some physical prep was needed. "I knew I had to look different to Julian," smiles Farnaby. "I didn't have as many curries as him." ***JM***

THE BOSS BABY

DIRECTOR Tom McGrath **STARRING** Alec Baldwin, Steve Buscemi, Lisa Kudrow **ETA** 7 April

Narrated by Tobey Maguire, this DreamWorks animation sees a family's dynamic completely change with the arrival of a new baby boy, as the lives of mum, dad and the tot's seven-year-old brother are now dedicated to looking after this oddly mature bundle of annoy who wears a suit and carries a briefcase. But that's just the start of the weirdness. It turns out this baby can talk like Alec Baldwin and is whispering on the phone at night, scheming big. "I'd kill for some sushi," he says when rumbled, one of many Baldwin quips we can expect: think Jack Donaghy in a diaper. ***JG***

THE HOUSE

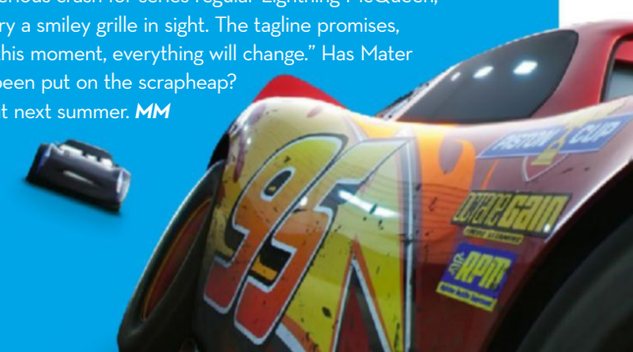
DIRECTOR Andrew Jay Cohen **STARRING** Will Ferrell, Amy Poehler **ETA** 30 June

What do you do if you've blown your daughter's teenage college fund? Why, convince your mates to help out in opening an illegal casino in the basement to claw it all back, of course. Produced by Adam McKay (*Anchorman*, *Step Brothers*) and written and directed by Andrew Jay Cohen, the man behind *Bad Neighbours 2* and, er, *Mike And Dave Need Wedding Dates*, *The House* doubles down by casting Ferrell and Poehler as the husband and wife who need to raise some cash and fast. Could this be the comedy counterpart to McKay's financial crisis pic *The Big Short*? ***JG***

CARS 3

DIRECTOR Brian Fee **STARRING** Owen Wilson **ETA** 14 July

Could *Cars* be the latest franchise to grow up with its audience? Given that the first film came out more than a decade ago, maybe its core moppet fanbase is ready for something a little... darker. The teaser trailer offered a grim colour palette, realistic racing, and a serious crash for series regular Lightning McQueen, with nary a smiley grille in sight. The tagline promises, "From this moment, everything will change." Has Mater finally been put on the scrapheap? Find out next summer. ***MM***



KONG: SKULL ISLAND Going full pelt in the monster reboot...

DIRECTOR Jordan Vogt-Roberts
STARRING Brie Larson, Tom Hiddleston, John Goodman, Samuel L. Jackson, Toby Kebbell **ETA** 10 March

"Monsters exist," growls shady government type Bill Randa (John Goodman) at one point in *Kong: Skull Island*, delivering the mother of all understatements in a film that boasts, arguably, the only big-screen monster you need to worry about in 2017. "This isn't just a big gorilla or a big monkey," warns director Jordan Vogt-Roberts (*Kings Of Summer*). "This is something that is its own species."

Tipping its hat to both the 1933 original and Peter Jackson's 2005 remake, *Kong: Skull Island* winds the clock back to the 1970s and finds a group of explorers landing on the titular rock in search of adventure.

They get that – and then some – when the eponymous fuzzy lopes into view. Kong, however, is only one of the creatures snapping his jaws at Captain James Conrad (Tom Hiddleston), photojournalist Weaver (Brie Larson) and Lieutenant Colonel Packard (Samuel L. Jackson). With 'skull crushers' and super-spiders also fighting for their corner of Pacific paradise, Vogt-Roberts' Vietnam-era prequel-sequel-reboot looks set to deliver a bone-smashing good time.

"I think that Kong represents a certain part of our primal humanity... It's a more primal version of ourselves," the director reveals. "We wanted to tell a new story within this mythology." And this is just the beginning – in 2020, Kong will go up against Godzilla. Talk about monstrous... ***JW***

GOLD
McConaughey strikes it rich...

DIRECTOR Stephen Gaghan **STARRING** Matthew McConaughey, Edgar Ramírez, Bryce Dallas Howard, Toby Kebbell **ETA** 3 February

"We had a landslide," begins director Stephen Gaghan, best known for *Traffic* (writer) and *Syriana* (writer/director). "We were in this little hut below these giant limestone edifices that went straight up, 600 feet. Trees and boulders had broken loose. It was like a giant dropping VW vans 15ft from where you're standing. Hundreds of people started fleeing. Edgar [*Ramírez*] got knocked out of the way and landed on a goat. My leg got cut up and later turned black..."

Welcome to *Gold*, an old-fashioned adventure story shot in real jungle locations (Thailand standing in for Indonesia) and based on true-life '90s events, as desperate businessman Kenny Wells (Matthew McConaughey) and geologist Michael Acosta (Ramírez) strike billions of dollars-worth of gold. Its crazed shoot has Gaghan name-checking *The African Queen* and *Apocalypse Now*, while its themes elicit a shout out for *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre* and *There Will Be Blood*.

Initially a Michael Mann project with Christian Bale attached, *Gold* has cascaded through Hollywood's fingers for some years, scaring off financiers and filmmakers with its wild demands. But Gaghan took one look and said, "That's fucking real, that's what it means to be a filmmaker."

He sucks in a breath, whistles. "Matthew gives a great performance, on a level to anything Daniel Day-Lewis has ever done," he continues. "It's a total transformation, in his psyche, in his body. We had a fat suit made but he turned up having gained 20 to 25 pounds. He tried on the suit – a $20,000 prosthetic – and it ripped. I said, 'If you can gain another 20, you'll be there.' He was having milkshakes and beer for breakfast – he added a cheeseburger." Gaghan throws back his head and laughs. "I sent my mother a photograph and she said, 'Oh honey, what have you done to that beautiful man?'" ***JG***

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PLAY ACTING

Denzel Washington returns to directing for powerhouse drama **FENCES.** WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW

DIRECTOR Denzel Washington **STARRING** Denzel Washington, Viola Davis, Stephen Henderson, Russell Hornsby **ETA** 3 February

Winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1987, August Wilson's *Fences* is considered one of the American stage's greatest tragedies. Denzel Washington disagrees.

"It's about life," he argues. "It's not about tragedy. Life is not all good and life is not all bad. *Fences* is about the love one family has and the bad choices that the head of the family makes that cause that love to get damaged or betrayed."

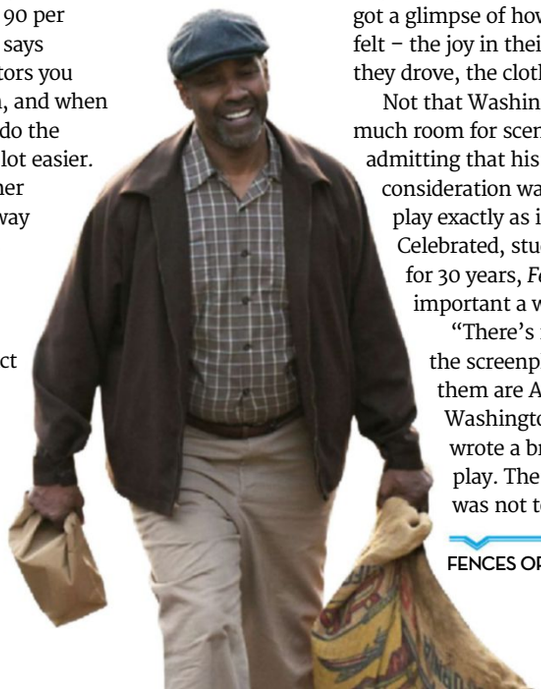
What it's also about, of course, is racism, poverty and crushed dreams – with Wilson's hard-hitting social drama tackling the African-American experience via one struggling family in 1950s Pittsburgh.

Washington was in the stalls for the play's first Broadway run and in the footlights for its award-winning revival in 2010, taking the lead as anti-hero baseball player turned dustman, Troy Maxson – a strong, proud, broken man who turns his wife and children against him with every stupid decision he makes.

Deciding to adapt the production into his third film as director (after *Antwone Fisher* and *The Great Debators*), Washington lifted the entire Broadway company for his cast – including Viola Davis as Troy's wounded wife, Rose.

"It's clichéd but it's true, 90 per cent of directing is casting," says Washington. "With great actors you really don't have to do much, and when Viola decided she wanted to do the film it made my job a whole lot easier. Viola won a Tony award for her performance back on Broadway and she *will* be up for just as many awards again for this. She's just remarkable."

Filming on location in the working-class Hill District of Pittsburgh, Washington wanted to make sure *Fences* remained as authentic as possible – barbecuing with the neighbours, hearing local anecdotes and poring through vintage photographs to get the look and feel just right.

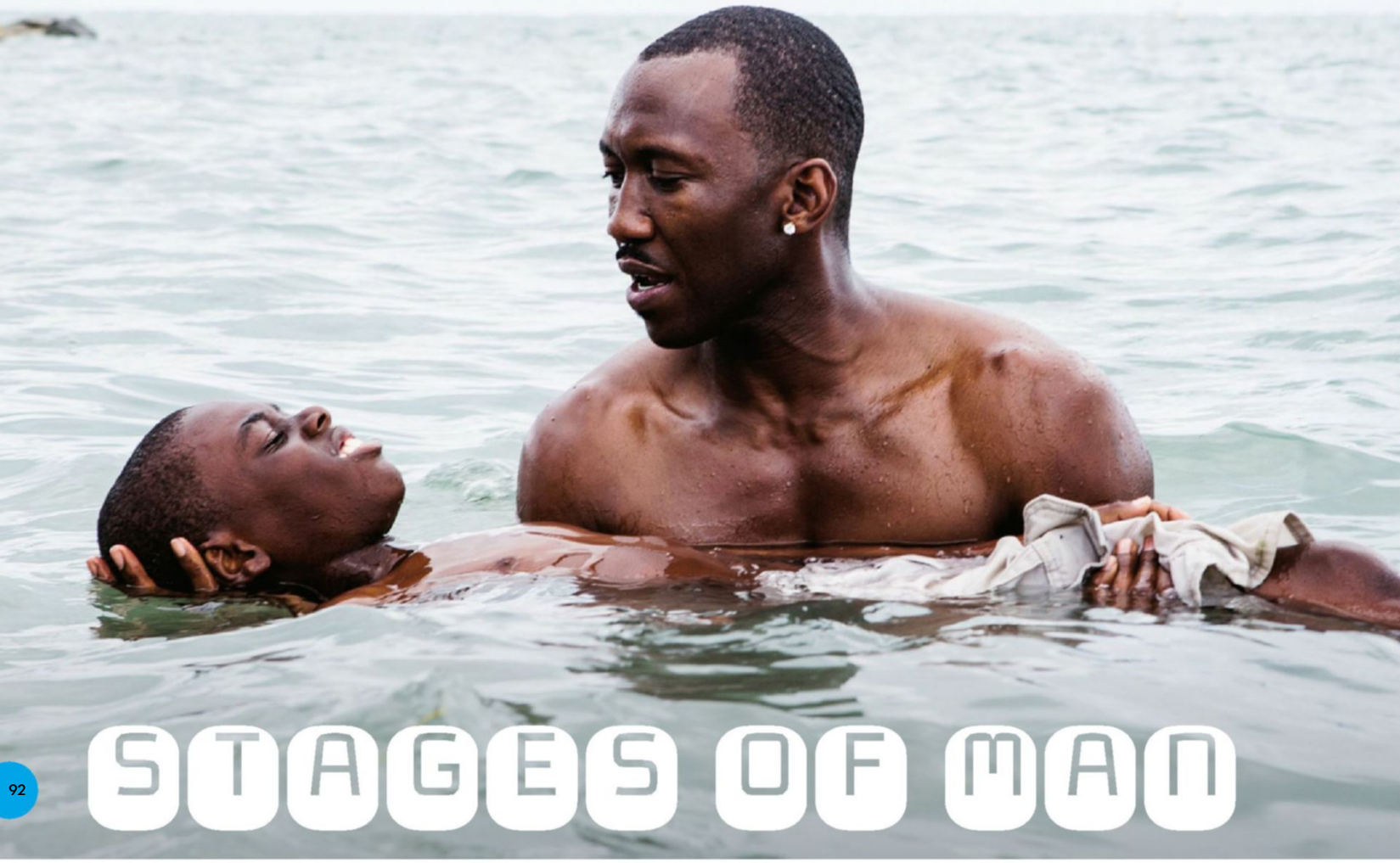


"There was a great photographer named Teenie Harris who worked for the black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, at the time. He really chronicled life on the Hill – and in a myriad of ways it helped me tell the story. You got a glimpse of how those characters felt – the joy in their lives, the cars they drove, the clothes they wore."

Not that Washington gave himself much room for scene-setting, admitting that his only real consideration was directing the play exactly as it was written. Celebrated, studied and loved for 30 years, *Fences* is too important a work to get wrong.

"There's 25,000 words in the screenplay and 24,900 of them are August Wilson's," Washington laughs. "He wrote a brilliant, *brilliant* play. The only real pressure was not to screw it up!"

FENCES OPENS 3 FEBRUARY.



STAGES OF MAN

Academy Awards favourite **MOONLIGHT** grapples with race, masculinity and sexuality over three acts of a life. **WORDS** MATT MAYTUM

DIRECTOR Barry Jenkins **STARRING** Alex R. Hibbert, Ashton Sanders, Trevante Rhodes, Naomie Harris, Mahershala Ali **ETA** 17 February

Every awards season, there's at least one underdog. A bolt from the blue that shoots from unheard of to outside favourite in the space of a single festival screening. This year, it's *Moonlight*. A searingly powerful story of a young, gay black man's formative years, it counters cliché and dismantles stereotypes. Exploring the adolescence and early life of Chiron (played in turn by Alex R. Hibbert, Ashton Sanders and Trevante Rhodes) in three distinct, time-specific acts, it almost plays like a companion piece to *Boyhood*. Only in this case the boy in question doesn't grow gradually over the years – the sudden change in actors and time periods making the shifts all the more remarkable.

"We shot it in sequence," explains writer/director Barry Jenkins. "It was interesting because it was like working with different theatre troupes."

Adapting from Tarell Alvin McCraney's play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, Jenkins found the story resonated with him personally. "It was like Tarell had captured a memory of my memories, and put it into this dreamlike state." Filming in Miami, where he grew up, Jenkins stripped away the play's day-in-the-life structure ("I was like, 'Man, this is way too complex. We've gotta simplify it and streamline it'"), pared back the dialogue to make room for silences.

"He's [*a director*] that really challenges you to articulate aspects of the story through silence," explains Mahershala Ali, who plays a drug dealer who takes the young Chiron under his wing. The one constant throughout the three acts is Chiron's mother, Paula, played by a barely recognisable Naomie Harris in a tour-de-force performance. Harris was initially reluctant to accept the role. "I'm always very careful about my choices," she says, "because I've always said I want to present women – and black women, in particular – in a positive light. I just drew the line at crack addiction."

Crack dealers and addicts might often veer into stereotype territory, but Jenkins undercuts assumptions at every turn. "These were people we either don't see very often, or when we do see them, it's only in one way, in one light," says the writer/director. "The film starts and you believe a character is one thing, and you see a character as another thing. I think those things are very, very grey. Like real life."

The extinguishing of stereotypes leapt out at Harris when she read the script, and her reaction sums up the film's particular power for making the ultra-specific seem universal. "The biggest stereotype, for me, is what it means to be a man, and the breaking down of that," she says. "To realise we are all – underneath our shells – just beating hearts."

MOONLIGHT OPENS ON 24 FEBRUARY.

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JACKIE

JFK's First Lady takes centre stage

DIRECTOR Pablo Larraín **STARRING**
Natalie Portman, Billy Crudup, Peter Sarsgaard
ETA 20 January

It's been a giddy 12 months for Chilean director Pablo Larraín. First, his literary-political film *Neruda* wowed Cannes audiences. Then, three months later, his English-language debut *Jackie* hit the festival circuit. The Oscar buzz began immediately for this unconventional character study of iconic First Lady and '60s style icon, Jacqueline Kennedy (née Bouvier).

With Natalie Portman in the title role, *Jackie* is a fascinating psychological portrait of a grief-torn widow, shattered in the wake of terrible tragedy. While the Dallas 1963 assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, has been covered in films ranging from *JFK* to *Parkland*, his better half has frequently been sidelined. "It's interesting because she ultimately became a queen without a throne," says Larraín, "and a queen without a king."

With the script by Noah Oppenheim first pitched to Larraín by Darren Aronofsky – the director's company Protozoa Pictures is behind the project – the Chilean immediately focused on casting Portman in the lead. "Natalie can be as elegant, sophisticated, beautiful and educated as Jackie was," he says, adding that the *Black Swan* star has the same "mystery" that the fiercely private Kennedy had.

"There are articles, interviews, movies and books, whatever, and we know very little about her," argues Larraín, who became "obsessed" by Kennedy the more he delved. But her image was another matter. "It definitely felt like the most dangerous [*role of my career*]," Portman stated during the Venice Film Festival. "Because everyone knows what she looked like and sounded like and walked like and had an idea of her. I'd never played a character like that before."

If Portman's award-worthy performance anchors the film, Larraín marshals an impressive roster of talent around her, both in front and behind the camera, from performances by Peter Sarsgaard (as Bobby Kennedy) and Greta Gerwig (as White House aide Nancy Tuckerman) to the score by British composer Mica Levi (*Under The Skin*) and the cinematography of Stéphane Fontaine (*A Prophet*).

Boldly, he also refuses to shy away from the brutality of JFK's death. "Nobody told me not to do it or to do it differently," he argues. "Why would you go away when that moment happens? We wanted the audience to understand, share and feel what she went through. It didn't need to be violent because we wanted it to be violent. We were violent because that violence belongs to that moment and to her experience – and we wanted to share that." ***JM***

THE BURGER

Michael Keaton tells the origin story of McDonald's in **THE FOUNDER**. WORDS MATT MAYTUM

DIRECTOR John Lee Hancock **STARRING** Michael Keaton, Laura Dern, Nick Offerman, John Carroll Lynch, Linda Cardellini
ETA 17 February

"You think you know the story, and then you realise you know nothing about the story of McDonald's and how it started," Michael Keaton tells *Total Film*. "It's a really interesting story."

A biopic of Ray Kroc, the nominal 'founder' of the fast-food giant, the film isn't a straightforward life story. Screenwriter Robert D. Siegel (*The Wrestler*) describes his Black List-ed script as "akin to *The Social Network* and *There Will Be Blood*". All three films as much about a particular moment in US history as they are about a protagonist. And all examine the buckling of morals under the pressure of huge profits.

"It's not really a biopic," says director John Lee Hancock. "It's 1954 to 1961, largely. It's a very specific piece of time." The project started with Jeremy Renner's production company, with Hancock initially reticent to sign up having recently helmed two biopics of sorts, *The Blind Side* and *Saving Mr. Banks*. Recounting the events that led struggling milkshake-machine salesman Kroc into the path of fast-food pioneers the McDonald brothers ("I didn't even know there were McDonald brothers," says Keaton. "Did you?"), *The Founder* had an even loftier touchpoint for Hancock than it did for Siegel. "The first thing that came to me was that it was like [*Arthur Miller's*] *Death Of A Salesman*, only with a different last act: Willy Loman takes over the world."

Marvelling at the way the McDonald brothers, Mac and Dick (John Carroll Lynch and Nick Offerman), have planned their burger joint so they can turn out meals in moments, Kroc smells an idea that can go national, or even global. But the brothers aren't interested in a massive expansion. "I thought it was an interesting script," says Hancock, "in that the first half of it, I was actively pulling for Ray Kroc because he's such a hardworking guy and you want this to work… When he latches onto the dream in the second half, you start to look at it and go, 'Well, I'm not sure I like *that*. Would I have done that?' So by the end, I felt kind of complicit in his rise to power."

Ruthlessly ambitious Kroc gives Keaton another meaty character to sink his teeth into (following *Birdman* and

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Spotlight), which could once again see him in the awards conversation. "I saw one documentary and I thought that gave me everything I wanted to know," says Keaton of his research into Kroc. "Then when you tell everybody you're doing the movie, people start to share stories with you. You just pick up information as you go along."

Keaton didn't mimic Kroc as closely as he did *Spotlight*'s (still living) Robby Robinson. He did get hands-on in the kitchen though, as the production recreated a fully functioning 'Golden Arches' restaurant to film in. Watching burger after burger on screen, you might be tempted to stop in at the drive-through on the way home, but it wasn't the case for Keaton. "It's the opposite – you don't want to be anywhere near it," he says of the famous fast food. "You get sick of looking at it. But that restaurant, they built it from scratch. A beautiful piece of work. It looks so cool in the movie."

After having its release date delayed so it's open for awards consideration, *The Founder*'s story of a charismatic, power-hungry businessman takes on added resonance in light of the recent US election (*TF* spoke to Hancock and Keaton days before Donald Trump was voted president-elect). "It's two very different philosophies about capitalist America and about the American dream," says Hancock of the film. "It relates to America, to the film business [*and*] the elections here as well." Expect the movie to open with a side order of food for thought.

THE FOUNDER OPENS ON 17 FEBRUARY.

LOVING

Love in a hopeless place.

DIRECTOR Jeff Nichols **STARRING** Ruth Negga, Joel Edgerton, Terry Abney, Will Dalton **ETA** 3 February

The true story of Richard and Mildred Loving, an interracial couple who were sentenced to prison in Virginia for getting married in 1958, *Loving* carries an important message for now. "We can look at it and shed a tear, thinking, 'Wow, 50 years ago the government told two people they couldn't love each other,'" says star Joel Edgerton. "But we're still doing it today. And you get these random acts of violence, or shameful videos of mad people on buses yelling at people because of the colour of their skin."

Starring alongside Edgerton is Ruth Negga as Mildred, an initially quiet woman who comes to the fore as the Loving's case is taken up by the Supreme Court. Negga stresses that verisimilitude is key, and explains that she studied documentary footage to ensure every little detail is correct. "People's body language was different then," she says. "And they were from the country. They were much more restrained and polite."

Restraint is the keyword for the entire project. Director Jeff Nichols (*Midnight Special, Mud*) refused to play to the gallery – to say nothing of the Academy – and instead chose to stick closely to the facts. "The narrative of this film is strange," he shrugs. "It's built on very small moments. I didn't really have many overt moments of people screaming racist things or throwing bricks through their windows. There is no real climax." He smiles ruefully. "I wanted conflict. I was like, 'When did they yell at each other?' But that's not how they dealt with each other. So I decided to focus on the tension – the psychological torture of knowing that at any moment you could be lynched."

Don't expect grandstanding, then, but do expect a sensitive, affecting drama that seeks to immaculately recreate an era as it tells a tale of great importance. ***JG***

2017 HIT LIST

TRESPASS AGAINST US

DIRECTOR Adam Smith **STARRING** Michael Fassbender, Brendan Gleeson, Sean Harris, Lyndsey Marshal **ETA** 3 March

"The script was like a slap in the face," Michael Fassbender tells *Total Film* of first reading *Trespass Against Us*, a hard-hitting drama in which his one-time thief attempts to escape the life of crime his father (Brendan Gleeson) has brought him into. "I fell in love with the characters," Fassbender adds.

ROCK THAT BODY

DIRECTOR Lucia Aniello **STARRING** Scarlett Johansson, Zoë Kravitz, Kate McKinnon, Ilana Glazer **ETA** 23 June

Fresh from kicking ass in *Ghostbusters*, Kate McKinnon teams up with ScarJo and *Broad City*'s Ilana Glazer in this comedy where their bachelorette party goes south when a male stripper winds up dead. "I just like playing unique characters that I love," says McKinnon. We're sure this will be no different.

THE COLDEST CITY

DIRECTOR David Leitch **STARRING** Charlize Theron, James McAvoy, John Goodman, Sofia Boutella **ETA** 11 August

John Wick director David Leitch ducked out of that film's sequel to make this graphic novel adaptation. Charlize Theron plays an MI6 spy who tackles an espionage ring in Berlin and, given Leitch is reportedly next making *Deadpool 2*, all eyes will be on this to deliver full-throttle action.

BABY DRIVER

DIRECTOR Edgar Wright **STARRING** Lily James, Jon Bernthal, Ansel Elgort, Kevin Spacey, Jamie Foxx **ETA** 18 August

Producer Tom Rothman describes Edgar Wright's new action-thriller as "the ultimate rock-and-roll car chase film", so we're expecting this to be a seriously fun ride. Ansel Elgort plays Baby, a getaway driver who's dating Lily James' Deborah when he gets caught up in a doomed heist that may involve Kevin Spacey's ferocious crime boss.

AMERICAN MADE

DIRECTOR Doug Liman **STARRING** Tom Cruise, Domhnall Gleeson, Jesse Plemons, Sarah Wright **ETA** 25 August

Previously titled *Mena*, this '80s-set true-life crime drama reunites Tom Cruise with his *Edge Of Tomorrow* director Doug Liman. Written by Gary Spinelli (whose script appeared on the 2014 Black List of the best unproduced screenplays in Hollywood), it sees TWA pilot Barry Seal (Cruise) brought in by the CIA to help tackle communism in the USA.

After 20 years, the 1996 crew ring in the new for **T2 TRAINSPOTTING**. Producer Andrew Macdonald tells Total Film about the reunion...

WORDS KEVIN HARLEY

DIRECTOR Danny Boyle **STARRING** Ewan McGregor, Jonny Lee Miller, Robert Carlyle, Ewen Bremner **ETA** 27 January

Four blokes wait on a train platform, two miscreants scarper down a street, old flames return and Mr. Angry explodes. The hero's family home furnishings, meanwhile, remain unchanged and Underworld's 'Born Slippy .NUXX' still roars…

Seem familiar? It should, but you don't have to look too hard at the trailer for *T2 Trainspotting*, director Danny Boyle's sequel to his 'rail-blazing 1996 adaptation of Irvine Welsh's skag-fic classic *Trainspotting*, to spot changes between then and now. A street-runner of old now looks on befuddled, Mr. Angry's 'tache looks grimmer than ever and Mum's not at the kitchen table. And as one character takes a fall, the old song segues to a newer, yearning melody.

Speaking from *T2*'s edit, producer Andrew Macdonald guards its secrets but reveals this much: the tracks of time will register. Wistful echoes of past highs linger, as you'd expect from a reunion of friends/foes Begbie (Robert Carlyle), Spud (Ewen Bremner), Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller), Diane (Kelly Macdonald) and Mark 'Rent Boy' Renton (Ewan McGregor). But this is no hit-repeat cash-in, promises Macdonald. Over two decades, life chooses change.

"It's hard not to [*be nostalgic*] when you're making something about characters 20 years on,

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but it can't be the same. No matter how much everybody wants it to be, it's got to be its own, all-in thing – otherwise, it'll fail."

Change was on the mind of Boyle, who wanted to wait until his well-moisturised cast showed ageing signs before making a sequel. But some concerns, Macdonald confirms, went deeper than skin-care. "I think everybody was worried about making something shit. A lot of sequels are shit, so that was the worry."

Writer John Hodge set about assuaging concerns with a script about eight years ago, though no one involved felt the timing was right. As years passed, cracking the story proved tough. "The biggest challenge was trying to imagine where the characters would be 20 years later," says Macdonald. "Even though Irvine's written more in *The Blade Artist*, *Porno*, *Skagboys* and *Glue* about that world, most of it isn't set 20 years in the future."

The – not shit, hopefully – end result combines fragments of Welsh's writing with Hodge's own imaginings, beginning with Begbie in jail and Sick Boy running a pub. "Which is shit," says Macdonald of said boozer. "Some of them have children, some of them don't have parents anymore, some of them have children they don't see. And the return of Renton brings everybody back together, loosely." (Spud? "Well, Spud's still Spud…")

More than drugs, the reunion stresses another theme central to the 1996 original. "It's about men together in ways that are, hopefully, surprising to people," says Macdonald. "Drugs, sex and violence are involved. But drugs are more in the background, as they would be in most people's lives." As for the foreground, expect something deeper than a quick fix: "It's a different feeling, this film. It's funny, rude and difficult to understand at times, as you'd expect, but it's much more emotional. You get a sense these people have known each other for 30 or 40 years, which means it's richer. You *feel* more."

The all-important soundtrack is being cooked up as we speak, though the trailer presence of hot-right-now indie-rockers Wolf Alice's emotive 'Silk' offers one clue to a film that is, teases Macdonald, "very much meant to be set now". And if that energised trailer helped massage any jitters we might have about a sequel, so should Macdonald's parting words. "I think you have to trust in the talent. John, Danny, the actors. At the same time, you've got to know it's a different film." With not long to wait now, choose faith.

T2 TRAINSPOTTING OPENS ON 27 JANUARY.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2016

In the real world, 2016 might be set to go down as the worst year since records began. But on the big screen, it was a different story. With family favourites sitting alongside R-rated renegades at the box office, there has been something for everyone. Total Film reflects on 12 months of memorable movies...

WORDS PAUL BRADSHAW, JAMIE GRAHAM, KEVIN HARLEY, SIMON KINNEAR, MATT MAYTUM, NEIL SMITH, ANDREW WESTBROOK, JOSH WINNING

TRENDS

MEDIOCRE SUMMER BLOCKBUSTERS

If there was one inescapable downside of 2016 in movies, it's that summer was a bit of a washout. With *Captain America: Civil War* bolting early, the slew of half-baked follow-ups seemed even more disappointing. *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, *Warcraft*, *Independence Day: Resurgence*, *The Legend Of Tarzan*, *Star Trek Beyond*, *Jason Bourne*, *Suicide Squad*, even *Ghostbusters* – there was a ton of potential squandered, and an abundance of hype unfulfilled.

DISNEY DOMINATES

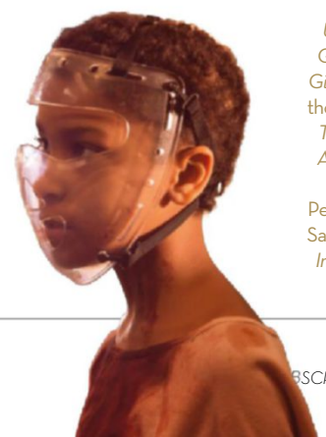
With Disney's empire growing ever vaster, taking in the likes of Pixar, Lucasfilm, Marvel and the Muppets, 2016 saw it annihilate the opposition. The top four earners of the year came from the House of Mouse, with three of them crossing the $1bn mark. *Civil War*, *Finding Dory* and *Zootropolis* just pipped *The Jungle Book* in a record-breaking year. With *Beauty And The Beast*, *Guardians Of The Galaxy 2* and *Star Wars: Episode VIII* arriving in 2017, the studio is showing no signs of letting up.

SURPRISE SEQUELS

Sequels are big business, but a couple of horror follow-ups snuck in under the radar. The trailer for *10 Cloverfield Lane* dropped out of nowhere a couple of months before the film opened, giving us scant notice that a (sorta) sequel to 2008's viral hit was imminent. And Adam Wingard's *The Woods* was revealed at Comic-Con to be a clandestine sequel to *The Blair Witch Project*, though a disappointing box-office turnout suggests audiences weren't ready for it, or maybe that the moment has passed for found footage.

GIRLS ALOUD

This year saw the release of *The Danish Girl*, *The Girl On The Train*, *The Girl With All The Gifts*, *The Unknown Girl*, *The Girl King* and *Girls Lost*. Plus the fifth season of *Girls* on telly. It's hardly a new trend though, after 2015's *The Diary Of A Teenage Girl*, *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*, *Girlhood*, and *Me And Earl And The Dying Girl*. Perhaps the blame lies with Lisbeth Salander, who's returning in *The Girl In The Spider's Web*, with director Fede Alvarez now attached.



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MAN OF THE YEAR
RYAN REYNOLDS
***Deadpool*, reborn...**

I'd bet the movie's going to do pretty well..." When Ryan Reynolds spoke to *TF* ahead of the release of *Deadpool* earlier this year, he was feeling confident. No one would have bet quite how well the movie was going to do though, scooping a bigger chunk of the US box office than two of the world's most famous superheroes combined in *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*.

It's quite the comeback for Reynolds, who'd been attached to the character for some 11 years, first playing him in a poorly received interpretation in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. After the equally disastrous *Green Lantern*, Reynolds was in need of a hit, and clung tenaciously to the character, working with writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick as they crafted the script over five years before leaked test footage earned the film a surprise green light.

There hasn't been another 2016 movie where success has seemed so inextricably linked to the star. Reynolds openly admits (somewhat disturbingly) how much he has in common with the Merc with a Mouth ("Yeah, I definitely relate to him"), and as a producer he ensured that Wade Wilson finally got a fair shake, without any of the compromises that scuppered his earlier outing. That 'maximum effort' resulted in the invigoration of actor, character and genre, all in one.

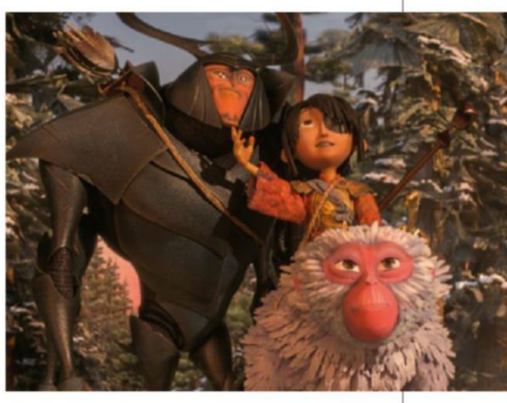
TOTAL FILM TOP 20

20 ZOOTROPOLIS

The us and them prejudices that dominated both the Brexit referendum and the US election were magnificently skewered in this sophisticated animation, set in a marvellously realised animal kingdom where predator and prey must peacefully co-exist. Into this mix are thrown an overachieving bunny detective (Ginnifer Goodwin) and a con-artist fox (Jason Bateman): a crime-solving double act to treasure in what was surely Disney's most verbally playful, visually inventive offering since *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

19 HAIL, CAESAR!

The Coens' 17th feature is one of their more lightweight confections, but don't let that fool you – far from being a cinch to make, it takes immense artistry to turn out something this consistently joyous. Set in '50s Hollywood as Josh Brolin's studio fixer is faced with the disappearance of George Clooney's star during the shoot of the titular sword-'n'-sandals epic, it's a love letter to Hollywood, albeit screwed up and tossed in its face.



18 KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS

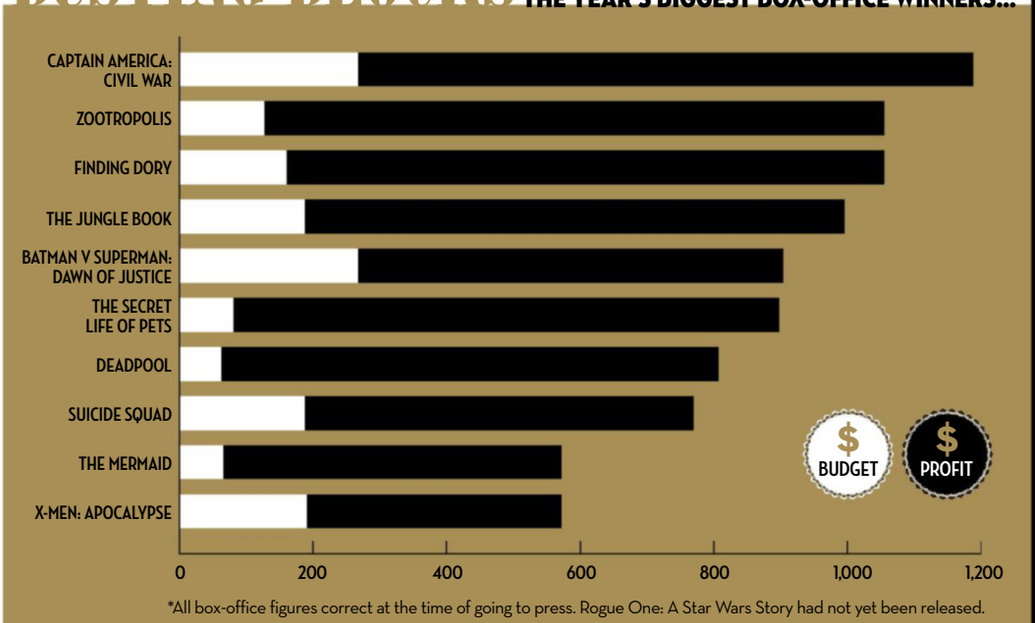
Emboldened by *Coraline*, *ParaNorman* and *The Boxtrolls*, animation outfit Laika swung for the fences with an exquisitely rendered fantasy that proved as richly exotic as its previous output had been ghoulishly gothic. Set in ancient Japan, its story of a shamisen-playing, one-eyed boy on a quest to reclaim his destiny merged Kurosawan visuals, Harryhausen monsters and J-horror creepiness into one captivating whole.

THE NICE GUYS

17 Seedy, smart-talking and at times surreal, Shane Black's '70s-set buddy caper happily breezed its way into the void left by a summer of failing franchise blockbusters. At its paisley-shirted centre is unlikely double-act Russell Crowe and Ryan Gosling – a pair of private investigators searching for a missing porn star – who both, but especially Gosling, handle the comedy with style. Old-fashioned yet original, relatable while irreverent, and with a loony plot to boot, it's this year's *Big Lebowski*.

BUSTING BLOCKS

THE YEAR'S BIGGEST BOX-OFFICE WINNERS...



*All box-office figures correct at the time of going to press. Rogue One: A Star Wars Story had not yet been released.

CREED

16 Forty years after an underdog movie called *Rocky* went the distance for Oscar glory, this reboot/sixth sequel both honoured the legacy and set out in directions new. It is to the *Rocky* franchise what *The Force Awakens* is to *Star Wars*, guaranteed to swell viewers' hearts at will as Apollo Creed's son (Michael B. Jordan) is trained in life, and boxing, by the aged Balboa (Sylvester Stallone). The performances are heavyweight, and Ryan Coogler's direction packs punch.

I, DANIEL BLAKE

15 Perfectly timed given the state of global politics this year, Ken Loach's trembling tirade against the UK's benefits system is hard to beat in terms of emotional heft. At its heart, comedian Dave Jones delivers a devastating dramatic performance as the titular council estate dweller, who fights tooth and nail to survive in a biased society. So outrageous that if they were wearing capes, we'd call it sci-fi, but the very real horror of *I, Daniel Blake* is what makes it so powerful.

TOP FIVES

DANCE SCENES

Check out Shia LaBeouf
American Honey

Ralph Fiennes' Emotional Rescue
A Bigger Splash

'No Dames'
Hail, Caesar!

Hiddleston and hostesses
High-Rise

Audacious arty opener
Nocturnal Animals

FIGHTS

Team Cap vs Team Iron Man
Captain America: Civil War

Leo vs Bear
The Revenant

Skeleton scuffle
Kubo And The Two Strings

Wade vs Francis vs flames
Deadpool

Daniel Blake vs the DWP
I, Daniel Blake

LAUGHS

Tiny hand
Deadpool

"Would that it were so simple"
Hail, Caesar!

Toilet trouble
The Nice Guys

Funeral funnies
Hunt For The Wilderpeople

Po-ta-to
The Greasy Strangler

SET-PIECES

Stephen's first trip
Doctor Strange

Bike chase
Jason Bourne

High-stakes heist
Triple 9

Enterprise destroyed
Star Trek Beyond

Compound escape
The Girl With All The Gifts

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HELL OR HIGH WATER

14 David Mackenzie's up-and-down career (*Perfect Sense*, anyone?) got triumphantly back on track with this dusty western-noir about two Texan siblings (Chris Pine and Ben Foster) who rob banks to save the family ranch. Jeff Bridges excelled – again – as the ranger on their trail in a film that muddied the moral waters by having its latter-day Butch and Sundance prey on the very institution out to boot them off their land. A provocative, socially conscious thriller, blessed with a whip-smart script.

UNDER THE SHADOW

13 Babak Anvari's fusion of Farsi and fear aptly emerged from nowhere to join art-horror classics such as *Pan's Labyrinth* and *The Babadook*. Set during the '80s Iran/Iraq war, Tehran mother Shideh (Narges Rashidi, outstanding) is as stressed out by censorious authorities and falling bombs as by the ancient djinn terrorising her daughter. Audiences, too, must figure out what's scariest: the brooding melancholy of Anvari's attack on PTSD and societal repression, or his fluency with menacing soundscapes.

SING STREET

12 When we caught this (alright, *wept through* this) at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2016, ahead of its UK release in May, we knew we'd found something seriously special. With its loveable cast of youngsters (Lucy Boynton's one to keep an eye on), emotional but unsentimental storytelling and a soundtrack that couldn't help but have you kicking your heels in the aisles, John Carney's '80s-set coming-of-ager had head and heart to spare. Altogether now: "The riddle of the model…"

THE WITCH

11 A clear victor emerged from 2016's witchy war. If the shock-dropped *Blair Witch* often seemed more remake than sequel, Robert Eggers' slow-dread debut felt unique. Rejecting modern horror trends (no cyber-fears, found footage or irony), Eggers brought style and historical conviction to his 17th Century New England folk tale, in which a puritanical family endure woods-y terrors. With committed leads (Anya Taylor-Joy rises…), resonant themes (fear, fundamentalism) and avant-scoring (from Mark Korven), Eggers delivered rare meat: horror so serious, even the bunny rattles the nerves.

BEST DIALOGUE

"IF YOU MUST BLINK, DO IT NOW."
Kubo, *Kubo And The Two Strings*

"Please don't make the super-suit green. Or animated."
Wade Wilson, *Deadpool*

"DID YE MAKE SOME UNHOLY BOND WITH THAT GOAT?"
William, *The Witch*

"A bastard's work is never done."
Joe Gage, *The Hateful Eight*

"LET'S ADDRESS THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM, FRANCINE. HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"
Chief Bogo, *Zootropolis*

"IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT GET YOU WHACKED."
Robert Mazur, *The Infiltrator*

"Never tell a soldier he does not know the cost of war."
Lieutenant General Frank Benson, *Eye In The Sky*

"BULLSHIT ARTIST!"
Big Ronnie, *The Greasy Strangler*

DIRE-LOGUE

"IF WE BELIEVE THERE'S EVEN A ONE PER CENT CHANCE THAT HE IS OUR ENEMY, WE HAVE TO TAKE IT AS AN ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY."
Bruce Wayne, *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*

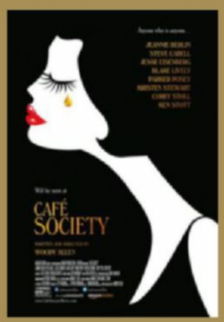
"Is it true you heal all wounds?"
Mad Hatter to Time, *Alice Through The Looking Glass*

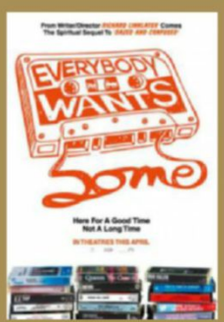
"THERE'S A LOT OF SITUATIONAL EBB AND FLOW IN MY WORK."
Harry Sims, *Inferno*

"Release the final hashtag!"
Victor Gamieux, *Bastille Day*

"THAT STORY MUST HAVE WET THE EYES OF MANY YOUNG LASSES. MAYBE MORE THAN THEIR EYES."
Sara, *The Huntsman: Winter's War*

BEST POSTERS





MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

10 Like *Stranger Things*, Jeff (*Mud*) Nichols' fourth film inspired deep feels for all things '80s this year. Channelling Spielberg (*Close Encounters*), Stephen King (*Firestarter*) and John Carpenter (*Starman*), Nichols nails the balance of grit, emotion and effects in his slow-burn sci-fi mystery about a dad (Michael Shannon, reining it in) and his empowered lad (Jaeden Lieberher) fleeing the FBI/NSA. Come the resolution, Nichols' restraint pays off in substance and style: the father/son fable moves no less than the CGI dazzles.

SPOTLIGHT

09 Depicting the true-life tale of a team of *Boston Globe* journalists revealing a grim cover-up of child abuse within the Catholic Church in 2002, writer-director Tom McCarthy's Best Picture Oscar winner is unshowy in its outrage, and is all the more effective for it. Mark Ruffalo and Rachel McAdams were both Oscar nommed for their roles, but the ensemble cast, including Michael Keaton, Liev Schreiber and Stanley Tucci, are all superb. A powerful procedural story almost, *almost*, up there with *All The President's Men*.

THE REVENANT

08 Punishing to make, gruelling to watch, impossible to forget – Alejandro González Iñárritu's survival horror opened 2016 with a roar of sound and fury. Pitched for realism in every aspect of its production, *The Revenant* drags its actors and its audience through a painfully beautiful vision of America's rough-hewn frontier – with Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Hardy and a CG bear somehow managing to outshine the scenery. Iñárritu picked up a much deserved back-to-back Oscar for the film following 2014's *Birdman*, cementing his place as *the* director of the decade.

TOP FIVES

SCENE-STEALERS

Viola Davis
Suicide Squad

Emma Thompson
Bridget Jones's Baby

Dan Fogler
Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them

Aaron Eckhart
Bleed For This

Keanu Reeves
The Neon Demon

DEATHS

Sliced down the middle
Bone Tomahawk

Canned spaghetti guts
Sausage Party

The gambler's final hand
The Magnificent Seven

Sudden death
Chronic

The big guy goes down
Train To Busan

SCARES

Window shocking
Under The Shadow

Baby, pestle, mortar. Brrrr.
The Witch

Underground tunnel
Blair Witch

"Heads down. Stay down!"
Sully

Dog attack
Green Room

COMEBACKS

Renée Zellweger
Bridget Jones's Baby

Spider-Man
Captain America: Civil War

Ryan Reynolds
Deadpool

Kate Beckinsale
Love & Friendship

Sylvester Stallone
Creed

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EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!

07 Having observed life from *Boyhood* to adulthood, college was the obvious next step for Richard Linklater. Yet this time it wouldn't be Mason's freshman days but Linklater's own. Cue this joyous 1980-set 'spiritual sequel' to *Dazed And Confused*. Woozily narcotic in its addition to music, fraternity, fashion and slow zooms, it's so immersive you might just forget you're watching a film, until the older, wiser Linklater gives it such a wistful, elegiac kick it becomes unforgettable.

AMERICAN HONEY

06 Sprawling over 164 minutes like a bored teenager on a park bench, *American Honey* is a road movie that doesn't really want to go anywhere – but it feels more vital and exhilarating than anything else in years. British *Fish Tank* director Andrea Arnold drives a bus through the social divide and finds the displaced youth that no one else bothers to notice – crafting a hip-hop *Grapes Of Wrath* for Generation Trump and using it to unpick the seams on the tapestry of middle America.

DEADPOOL

05 "From the studio that inexplicably sewed his fucking mouth shut…" Arriving ahead of both *Captain America: Civil War* (oooh!) and *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* (hmm…), the Merc with a Mouth set the bar ridiculously high for 2016 superheroes. Every bit as sarky, slick and sickly as we'd hoped, Ryan Reynolds' fourth-wall-breaking antihero flick went back to basics – simple plot, memorable set-pieces, a character you loved – and proved there's juice in the super-market yet. The sequel can't come quickly enough.

WOMAN OF THE YEAR

BRIE LARSON

Nothing short of a Marvel…

Few thesps combine naturalism and magnetism like Brie Larson. A character actor par excellence also blessed with star wattage, she's been making eagle-eyed filmgoers sit up for three or four years now: dumping Miles Teller in superior teen drama *The Spectacular Now*; quietly commanding attention as Amy Schumer's sister in *Trainwreck*; bringing heart, resilience and not one drop of mawkishness to her foster centre staffer for at-risk teens in *Short Term 12*.

The latter should have bagged her an Oscar – criminally, she wasn't even nominated. Then, at the start of 2016, came *Room*, with Larson playing a sexually abused woman kept in captivity with her five-year-old son. Grim, but Larson elevated the material with a display of fierce love, her indomitable spirit winning her the Best Actress Oscar and attracting a slew of enticing projects: Ben Wheatley's shoot-'em-up *Free Fire*; opposite Tom Hiddleston in *Kong: Skull Island*; and headlining Marvel's first female-led superhero movie *Captain Marvel*.

Also great value on social media, she frequently speaks out, be it against Trump or everyday sexism. After winning her Oscar, she said, "There were many times that I would go into auditions and casting directors would say, 'It's really great… but we'd love for you to come back in a jean mini-skirt and high-heels. It always made me feel terrible." Thankfully, those days are over.

MAARTEN DE BOER / CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

SON OF SAUL

04 Debut director László Nemes often describes his devastating Holocaust drama as "immersive", but that barely conveys its harrowing force. With tight framing and focus, Nemes brings a wrenching immediacy to the hell endured by Saul (Géza Röhrig, riveting), a Hungarian Jew in Auschwitz intent on giving a dead boy a Jewish burial. Saul's mission seems to take place in a pure present, without past or future. There is no catharsis: just an unyielding, in-the-moment intensity, handled with moral authority and control. A deserving winner of the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar.

ROOM

03 From *What Richard Did* to *Frank* to *Room*, director Lenny Abrahamson's recent string of hits couldn't have been more varied. Ditto Brie Larson, who went straight from *Trainwreck* to her Oscar-winning lead in Abrahamson's claustrophobic masterpiece. But it's the unexpected, contrary nature of *Room* that makes everything about it work so well; a textbook thriller that looks utterly original; a harrowing family tragedy that still feels sweetly uplifting; and a delicate third act that abandons the whole genre and makes up its own rules.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

02 Remember when we questioned whether Marvel could marshal multiple superheroes? The best example yet of boxset movie-making, this sees the studio's squad of galácticos in sublime form: Evans and RDJ up front, Paul Rudd as super-sub, plus warm ups for future stars Boseman and Holland. It's a mind-boggling feat of logistics, a treasure trove of crowd-pleasing moments and – remarkably – a thematically dense morality play that pays off long-term emotional investment. In a year of variable blockbusting, its heft and precision sparkled.

TOP FIVES

SEX SCENES

Puppet love
Anomalisa

Calendar montage
Deadpool

Ethan unbuttons
Maggie's Plan

Christening reunion
Bridget Jones's Baby

Food orgy
Sausage Party

TAGLINES

'Saving the world takes a little Hart and a big Johnson'
Central Intelligence

'Coming down your chimney'
Bad Santa 2

'Witness the beginning of a happy ending'
Deadpool

'This is a true story'
The Big Short

'An unforgettable journey she probably won't remember'
Finding Dory

TRAILERS

Rogue One
Suicide Squad
10 Cloverfield Lane
Deadpool
Kubo And The Two Strings

SOUNDTRACKS

The Neon Demon
Arrival
Swiss Army Man
High-Rise
Everybody Wants Some!!

WORST TITLES

The Other Side Of The Door
Couple In A Hole
A Poem Is A Naked Person
Men And Chicken
The Accountant

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ARRIVAL

01 With all eyes fixed on the horizon in an effort to catch glimpses of Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, the director's *other* science-fiction movie arrived in cinemas much like its 12 gigantic spaceships descend on Earth: stealthily, to inspire awe.

Here was the kind of movie we're told Hollywood doesn't make any more, a cinema of ideas and characters and emotional payoff as much as thrills and spectacle, and all achieved on a $50m budget. Sure, the shadow of an entire fleet of alien-invasion movies hangs over that grandiose opening, but instead of running and screaming, Villeneuve introduces professor of comparative linguistics Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams) and mathematician Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner). Together they are repeatedly airlifted into an antechamber of the ship over Montana – its mysterious inhabitants grant access every 12 hours – and the effort to communicate begins.

Dry? Not on your life, with each foray into the antechamber a mini-marvel of suspense, surprise and heart-swelling hope, while the swarming military outside and the constant din of news programmes reporting on the other vessels (and escalating global terror) adds a slick of ice-cold sweat. Imagine '50s sci-fi classic *The Day The Earth Stood Still* evolved into a sleek, spectrally lit thing of abstract beauty and equipped with linguistic theories that tilt your very understanding of the way existence works on its spinning head, and you're kind of there. Throw in a deserved comparison to Spielberg's *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, with its wonder and optimism, and you're closer still.

Arrival isn't just the film that Hollywood needs right now, it's the film the world needs, favouring as it does mindfulness and tolerance over hatred and blowing shit up.

**Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* and *Assassin's Creed* had not been screened at the time of going to press. Tweet us @totalfilm to tell us how high they should rank in our Top 20 of 2016.

A YEAR IN GONGS

BEST FILM WINNERS AROUND THE GLOBE...

Sundance Film Festival
The Birth Of A Nation

Golden Globe (drama)
The Revenant

Bafta
The Revenant

Oscar
Spotlight

Cannes Film Festival
I, Daniel Blake

Venice Film Festival
The Woman Who Left

London Film Festival
Certain Women

TURKEYS OF THE YEAR

10 INFERNO
9 NOW YOU SEE ME 2
8 DIRTY GRANDPA
7 ZOOLANDER 2
6 CRIMINAL
5 LONDON HAS FALLEN
4 THE FOREST
3 NORM OF THE NORTH
2 BEN-HUR
1 GODS OF EGYPT

WORDS MATT MAYTUM PORTRAITS FRANK OCKENFELS

> IT'S ALWAYS ME. THERE IS NO 'BECOMING SOMEBODY ELSE', REALLY. IT'S ALWAYS ME.

JAMES MCAVOY

In a career that's seen him play everything from a cuddly fawn to a filthy cop, James McAvoy has never shied away from a challenge, and his latest film, Split, sees him tackling 23 characters in one. Total Film meets the sweary, straight-talking Scotsman to talk multiple personalities and all-encompassing roles.

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I'm not really strategic. I never try to engineer my career. I haven't done from the beginning, and I've not really started it now." *Total Film* is sharing a corner sofa with James McAvoy at The London hotel, West Hollywood. It's September 2016, and the chatty 37-year-old actor is in town to talk *Split*, M. Night Shyamalan's latest low-budget thriller, which has recently premiered to raves at Austin's Fantastic Fest. In it, McAvoy gives a tour-de-force performance as Kevin, a sufferer of dissociative identity disorder who has 22 other personalities, most notably well-rounded Barry, nine-year-old Hedwig and prissy Patricia. It's exactly the sort of role that an actor could use to confound expectations, if McAvoy hadn't already spent his whole career doing just that.

Right from his early days on telly, with those mandatory bit parts in the likes of *The Bill* and *Band Of Brothers* leading to breakout turns in *State Of Play* and the Bafta-winning council estate comedy-drama *Shameless*, there's never been a standard template for a James McAvoy role. In person, he definitely has the air of the roguish bloke next door that he's essayed more than once, and a few greys in his short, quiffed side-parting don't detract from the boyish looks that have charmed audiences since he donned hooves as Mr. Tumnus in *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* and played the everyman in *Starter For 10* and *The Last King Of Scotland*. A handful of romantic leads followed (*Becoming Jane*, *Atonement*) before he became a franchise stalwart as the young Charles Xavier in *X-Men: First Class*, and dressed today in a fitted burgundy t-shirt there's evidence of the lean, action-star physique that he first developed for *Wanted*.

"All I do is read a script," he explains, unclasping his watch and twisting it around his wrist. "And if I like it, and I feel like it's going to be a challenge, or it's going to be exciting, or if it's going to push an audience around and it'll be a slightly strange experience for the audience, I'll respond to it." His role(s) in *Split* will certainly throw audiences for a loop, but fleshing out multiple individual characters sounds like no big deal when you hear about it from McAvoy. "I got to play the shifts 20 times more than you usually do in any film. It actually kept me really busy, really focused."

The past 15 years have also been peppered with stints on stage (including heavyweight leading roles in *Macbeth* and *The Ruling Class*); perhaps it's this work ethic that's seen his performances more closely scrutinised than his private life. And when he talks about megastar mates such as Michael Fassbender, Benedict Cumberbatch and Nicholas Hoult, he manages to make it all sound distinctly low-key. "I see Michael every now and again," he nods. "I don't see much of Ben. I see Nick quite a bit. I play footie with Nick. And yeah, I hope we get to make more *X-Men* just so that I can hang out with my pals…" Time to meet the man who's making this movie-star business look very easy indeed.

ROLE-PLAYER
In *Split*, McAvoy's character Kevin has 23 different personalities.

How do you even begin to approach *Split*, where you have so many different characters to bring to life?
I think your instinct guides you, to begin with. Sometimes you come up with a pretty much fully formed character, just instinctually. But then other characters don't come so easily. You've got a little bit on instinct, but you've got quite a lot sometimes – like 70 per cent of the character – to fill in by design, and that can be harder. I really started to try to figure out what exact stimulus or moment or event in Kevin's life caused each and every 'alter' to become necessary.

Was there ever a risk of the characters merging into one another?
Not really. Dennis and Kevin were quite similar. Dennis was the first personality that I think arose when his mind fractured a little bit when he was three years old. So I find them quite similar. I kind of felt like, 'I'm not being Dennis right now. I'm being Kevin right now.'

Was it ever James?
It's always James. It's always me. There is no 'becoming somebody else', really. It's always me.

At the time, you said that playing Bruce in *Filth* was going to be tough to follow because of where it allowed you to go as an actor. *Split* must have come close…
Yeah, totally. I had a few in a row, really. I had *Macbeth* on stage, and I had Bruce pretty close together. After I'd done those two things, I was just like, "What the fuck? Nothing's ever going to touch that." Especially on stage. I just felt like… there's no point going back on stage after I've done that. With film, it felt different, because you just don't have to give as much of yourself on film as you do in the theatre. I felt I could still carry on. But getting to go to those places, not just of emotional depth or despair, but to be able to do all that, but at the same time making a relatively entertaining and vibrant and

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dynamic and colourful film, felt like, for me, the perfect professional experience and the kind of films I want to see that are really fun and entertaining.

Was there a time you first realised that you could make a profession out of acting, rather than it being a hobby?
Yeah. Maybe when I was about 25, 26 – something like that. After I'd done *The Last King Of Scotland* and *Narnia*, maybe *Starter For 10*. Maybe even later than that. Maybe after *Wanted* I felt like, "I've got some money in the bank now." Before that, I'd earned a bit and I'd done alright, but I didn't have enough money to go, "I could buy a house." *The Last King Of Scotland* didn't pay fuck all, and neither did *Starter For 10*. Everything else I'd done had paid relatively nothing. I remember getting paid less on *Narnia* than I did for *Shameless*, and *Shameless* wasn't much.

I think they were looking at two other actors who were older for *Narnia* who were way more established than me. At the last minute, they were like, "We can't do this. We can't hire either of these two actors, because Mr. Tumnus has to effectively kidnap Lucy and take her home to his flat and give her fish and make her fall asleep and then hand her over." He's basically trafficking fucking children. It was like, as soon as they had an actor who was fucking over 25, they were like, "This is fucking crazy territory." My agent knew what those two other actors had been offered, it was about 10 times what I got offered. So she went in and said, "We'll have that." They went, "No, you're not having that. Who's your client again? What's he done?"

> **I THOUGHT FASSBENDER WAS AMERICAN FOR ABOUT FIVE DAYS**

So I got very little for anything until *Wanted*. And weirdly, the safety came from the fact that I went, "Even if I never get another job, I might be able to buy a house." [*laughs*] And that took all the pressure off, and I could concentrate on enjoying it a bit more.

***Band Of Brothers* was a crucible for young talent. Did it feel like that at the time?**
[*laughs*] Not really. The thing I remember most about *Band Of Brothers* is not being aware of who was not American. I thought so many people in *Band Of Brothers* were American that weren't. They were actually just fucking English or Irish or Scottish or Northern Irish or Welsh. That's the thing I remember most about it. And then meeting actors years later, they're like, "Alright, mate? How ya doing?" I'm like, "You're fucking English? Jesus Christ." I thought Fassbender was American for about five days.

It was one of those gigs where I was only in it for a month. Everybody else had been there for about six months, and they had another six months to go. They were all going stir crazy by that point. There were too many dicks, and not enough chicks. There was testosterone raging everywhere. There were fights breaking out everywhere. People were being pricks all the time. I loved it, because I was only there for a month. It was pretty intense, actually, but I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it.

When you look back, what do you see as the big turning points in your career?
I've gone through a couple of changes in my career. I've gone through the first one, which was getting lots of parts when I came out of drama school. I got lots of small parts. I've been very lucky. I got a lot

of work really quick, playing a million different types of people. I got to play this wide variety of small roles, and quite daring roles at times – for a brand new actor, anyway. And then the next stage of my career happened where it was sort of a young and bright thing – a rising talent, whatever. And then it went to the point where it seemed like I could have gone a bit further as well and gone into more of a movie star thing. And I slowed down a wee bit at that point, and pulled back from that.

Don't get me wrong; I'm still playing nice big leads in movies and stuff. I'm in fucking *X-Men* for Christ's sake. But I feel like I'm much more of a character actor still because I did that, rather than being a movie star. That's something I'm really proud to have pulled off. Because I just get to play so many different types of parts. Because I don't think any audience member expects me to do one thing or feels affronted if I don't do the thing that they expect me to do. So I feel really lucky in that way.

A lot of successful British actors are privately educated, 'posh' types. Do you think it's harder to break into the industry from a more working class background?

I don't know. There's a few things. I don't think it's difficult to break in. I just think that with the way the government do things, art in education isn't prioritised, and therefore, unless you go to private school, you don't really have the facilities to experience drama or music or art or any of those things. Or maybe even fucking sport at times. So it's no great surprise our supply of actors is increasingly coming from posher schools.

Also, I don't think there's a barrier of posh folk that we can't break through. Look at the market that we sell our material to. It's America. America's not interested in kitchen sink dramas set on council estates. America wants to see *Downton* fucking *Abbey*.

So it's like, yeah, we're going to fill that up with posh actors because it's what sells. And so, all I'd say is, to working class actors that want to make it, "Brush up on your posh." Because honest to Christ, I'm from a council estate where people get stabbed all the time. I made my career out of pretending to be posh English – and it worked for me. Get good at pretending to be posh. [*laughs*] Because it doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter what your background is. As long as you can play that archetype, then you're in. Maybe.

There's a certain amount of entitlement and confidence that comes from going to those schools, I think, which also helps as an actor. Because if you've been taught all your life that you deserve this, you walk onto a stage going, "Yeah, I fucking deserve to be here. Watch me." And the audience do, because they go, "Who is that magnetic person that has all the confidence in the world?"

Is there any truth in the rumour that Forest Whitaker recommended you for *The Last King Of Scotland*?

I don't know that he did. No, actually, because I was on it before Forest. I came on it when it was meant to be Samuel L. Jackson, but he wanted too much money, I think. [*laughs*] He was like, "No worries. If you can't pay my wages, I'm not coming."

And then Forest came on. But after Forest came on, I then got a call from the director. I'd been attached to the film for seven months or something like that. After Forest came on – it wasn't because of Forest, but it's slightly contradictory – they were like, "Hey, we need to screen test you, James." I was like, "What? I've already been attached to this for seven months, you fuckers." They were like, "No, we need to screen test you." I was like, "Is this because Forest says he doesn't want to work with me?" They went, "No, it's just the studio." I was like, "Alright! The studio doesn't want to work with me. Brilliant." So I went and screen tested, and I was really annoyed about it. I gave a rubbish screen test. Like, kind of on purpose, going, "Fuck you, guys." And I still got the part. So I was like, "Yes!"

> I MADE MY CAREER OUT OF PRETENDING TO BE POSH ENGLISH

One of the most talked-about shots in recent years is the *Atonement* beach scene. What are your memories of filming that day?

It's exactly where you want to be as an actor, or where I want to be, where you are at the very centre of a massive fucking organised thunderstorm, and you need to make it work. But if you put a foot wrong, it just won't work, and you'll destroy the film. And in fact, we did three-and-a-half takes of that, and only one of them worked. It was just exactly where you want

FIVE STAR TURNS

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE 2005
Despite being lumbered with "nipples that would put your eyes out", McAvoy put his own stamp on timorous faun Mr. Tumnus.

STARTER FOR 10 2006
In the year he joined Oscar-winning Forest Whitaker in *The Last King Of Scotland*, McAvoy also showed leading man chops in this *University Challenge*-inspired romcom.

ATONEMENT 2007
Playing wronged hero Robbie Turner in Joe Wright's drama didn't come naturally to McAvoy, who admits he found it "difficult to get a handle" on his "Christ-like" character.

X-MEN: FIRST CLASS 2011
"Charles Xavier wasn't always a monk," says McAvoy of the *X-Men* sage to whom he brought a roguish, rakish flair in this Matthew Vaughn-directed prequel.

FILTH 2013
McAvoy says he had "a right old laugh" playing Bruce Robertson, the corrupt, racist, drug-addicted copper whose mental breakdown motors Jon S. Baird's darkly scabrous adap of Irvine Welsh's novel. ***NS***

ALLSTAR

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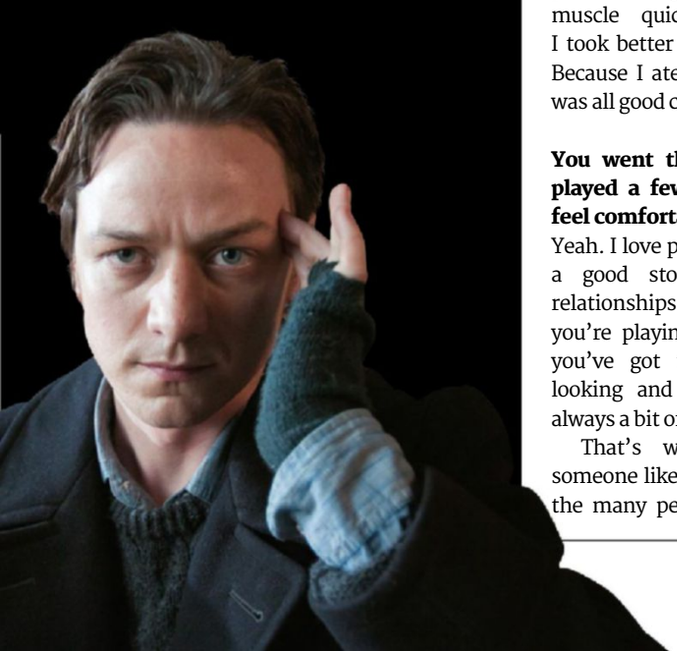

to be as an actor – to be so immersed, but also so engaged and technically aware that you're telling the story in the right way. I loved it. I absolutely loved it. And it's something I'll never forget.

Was it like working on stage?
On stage, it's different, because you just get a chance to put it in your bones more. Also, you're completely in control on stage. There's very little that's out of your control on stage. There's variables, but by and large, it's you and the script, really, and the connection between you and the other actors, and the connection between you and the audience. It's a much easier, purer form of storytelling which I enjoy more because of that.

But with film, it's a symbiotic complicity of up to 200, 300 people – maybe as little as 40 people worked here [*on* Split], but 300, 400, 500 people on some productions, even up to like a thousand people – all not fucking up at the same time to make maybe 10 seconds of something interesting. So it's such a different process. But I love them both. I'd rather do a bad film than a bad play. If the audience isn't there, they don't boo you while you're doing bad filmmaking.

You got into action-hero shape for *Wanted*. Did you enjoy that?
Yeah. I feel like I got into better shape for fucking *Split*, and yet they never really showed it off. I'm a bit gutted by that. Did I enjoy doing that? I didn't enjoy doing it for *Wanted*, because *Wanted* was so physical and it was a four or five-month shoot. It meant that I was working out like a demon, and actually working out all day long, doing all the stunts and jumping off buildings. That was tough. *Split*, I did a different type of working out, and I enjoyed it much more actually. I just did power-lifting for that. I found I put on the muscle quicker. Also, I ate better. I took better care of myself nutritionally. Because I ate like a fucking horse, but it was all good clean eating.

You went through a spell where you played a few romantic leads. Did you feel comfortable in that role?
Yeah. I love playing those characters if it's a good story. I love playing those relationships. But you are aware when you're playing those types of parts that you've got to be attractive and good looking and all that stuff. And that's always a bit of a worry.

That's why when you're playing someone like Bruce [*in* Filth] or Kevin and the many personalities that make Kevin

JAMES MCAVOY IN NUMBERS

$2.66bn
James McAvoy's total box-office gross to date.

3
Number of consecutive Bafta awards McAvoy was nominated for between 2006 and 2008.

5½
Length in minutes of *Atonement*'s famous beach scene.

10
Years between McAvoy and Michael Fassbender appearing together in *Band Of Brothers* and *X-Men: First Class*.

30
McAvoy's age when he passed his driving test.

up [*in* Split], you're just… I just get to be me, and I get to be whatever. It's easier. It doesn't matter whether you're attractive or charismatic or not.

But with those romantic lead parts, you're a bit like, "Oh God, I hope people buy me being with this bird. She's gorgeous." I hope they're not like, "Jesus, he's punching above his weight." But I do love playing those relationships. And I love telling the story of falling in love. It's beautiful.

What was the appeal of the *X-Men* franchise? Was it the chance to play the young Patrick Stewart?

Partly. I've always loved Patrick, and I'm a big *Star Trek* fan. Outside of Shatner, he's the best captain the Enterprise ever had. Also, I was a fan of the original [X-Men *films*], and I was a fan of the cartoon when I was a kid as well. So it was a big deal. I was a fan of Professor X. And so, it just felt like a great thing.

Also, I just not long ago had had a kid. I hadn't worked in about six months because I'd had a kid, and my bank account was empty. I didn't owe anybody anything, but I had nothing in the bank. And then this job came along saying, "*X-Men* filming 40 minutes from your front door, and it'll be really good money." I was like, "And I get to play Professor X? I'm in."

And I also thought that Matthew Vaughn was a really exciting, interesting director. He did something really different with *First Class*. He made it really fun and vibrant. He changed the tone of the franchise massively. He injected a bit of camp humour into it, which I thought it needed a little bit.

And then with *Days Of Future Past*, we went back to a more classical telling of the world, and I was a bit disappointed with that, when I read the script. But then I watched the film, and it's one of the best *X-Mens* ever. It was brilliant. So I feel like I've been really, really lucky to be involved in it. Even though the next two movies weren't in Pinewood 40 minutes from the front door – they were in Montréal – they've been really good to me. And I've made some of the best friends in my life. So it's an incredible thing to be part of.

Does it affect you at all if a film you're in doesn't do as well as you'd hope, such as 2015's *Victor Frankenstein*?

Mate, I was like… do you know what? I usually don't really care, but *Frankenstein* got so fucking battered. I was like, "Argh. I've been in worse films than this that did better critically." Yeah, you just hope.

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For me, I'm not bothered about the critical response as much as I'm bothered about, you know, bums on seats. You want to find an audience, and you want people to enjoy it and have a good time – or have an interesting time, or a frightening time, whatever it is the film is trying to do. [*laughs*] But yeah, I was really upset with *Frankenstein*, because I was like, "Come on!" Everybody went like, "Yeah, we're going to fucking nail this one." I was like, "Ah, shit…" It was quite funny, really.

I felt bad for Paul [*McGuigan*] because I think he's a really good director. But I remember me, him and Daniel [*Radcliffe*] saying to each other, "I thought it was alright." You win some, you lose some. They can't all be good, even if you go out with the best of intentions.

McAvoy was disappointed by the reception *Victor Frankenstein* received.

You've managed to keep your private life very private. Is that something that you strived to achieve?

I did when I was younger, definitely. I don't really have to strive to do it anymore that much, because I feel like, by and large, apart from the odd flare-up now and then, the media's not that bothered about me. But it was something that I did strive to do. I don't know why particularly.

I think it was just the way I was brought up, to be quite a private person. But I just didn't want to be embarrassing. I didn't want to embarrass myself or embarrass anyone else when I was younger. But sometimes I did take it too far and not enjoy myself as much as I could have. But I'm a bit freer than that now.

Is that part of the reason why you've stayed clear of social media?

Yeah. When I went and did the publicity tour for *X-Men* last time, I started an Instagram account. Whoa! Check it out! So I do have that now. But yeah, it's why I stay off of that. Also, just because I don't want to be fucking told by complete strangers what a nob I am or how shit I am or, "You're a fucking dick!" [*laughs*] I don't want that.

Some actors get all that, and they're like, "Oh yeah, just swipe past that – yeah, I get it all the time." I'm like, "I don't even want to know that." So yeah, that's why I stay away from that, more than anything, really.

> **I DON'T WANT TO BE TOLD WHAT A NOB I AM BY STRANGERS**

To wrap things up, what can you say about your roles coming up in *Submergence* and *The Coldest City*?

The three films that I've got coming out next year are so different from each other. *The Coldest City* is like the most punk rock, sex-and-drugs-fuelled version of the fall of the Berlin Wall. [*laughs*] It's brilliant. It's a proper good laugh. The action in it is exceptional because [*director*] David Leitch is a genius with this stuff, man. I think it's even better than the stuff that he did in *John Wick* – and that's saying something, because the fighting in *John Wick* was amazing.

I've not seen *Submergence*, because [*director Wim Wenders*] is only a month-and-a-half into editing it. But that's an epic, epic love story. And I've not made one of those in a long time. So yeah, that was a romantic lead. And that is an epic love story that I think could be really beautiful and special. But like nearly everything I've done recently, it's very ambitious, and artistically very ambitious.

It's just about how well it all falls together, how good a job Wim does editing it all, and whether people will be able to stick with it – because it's so ambitious. But I think it's got it. It's beautiful, and Alicia [*Vikander*]'s amazing in it. I think it'll work.

SPLIT OPENS ON 20 JANUARY.

JAMES MCAVOY FAN CLUB

"He was top of my list. When we talked about who could play Professor X, McAvoy was perfect. He's a fucking good actor."
Matthew Vaughn

"He's extraordinary. I've never seen a screen test like [*his* Atonement *test*]. He just morphed. We were completely silent for about 10 minutes afterwards."
Keira Knightley

"For me, personally, I think James' performance [*in* Split] is off the charts… I'm not sure anybody could have [*done that*]."
M. Night Shyamalan

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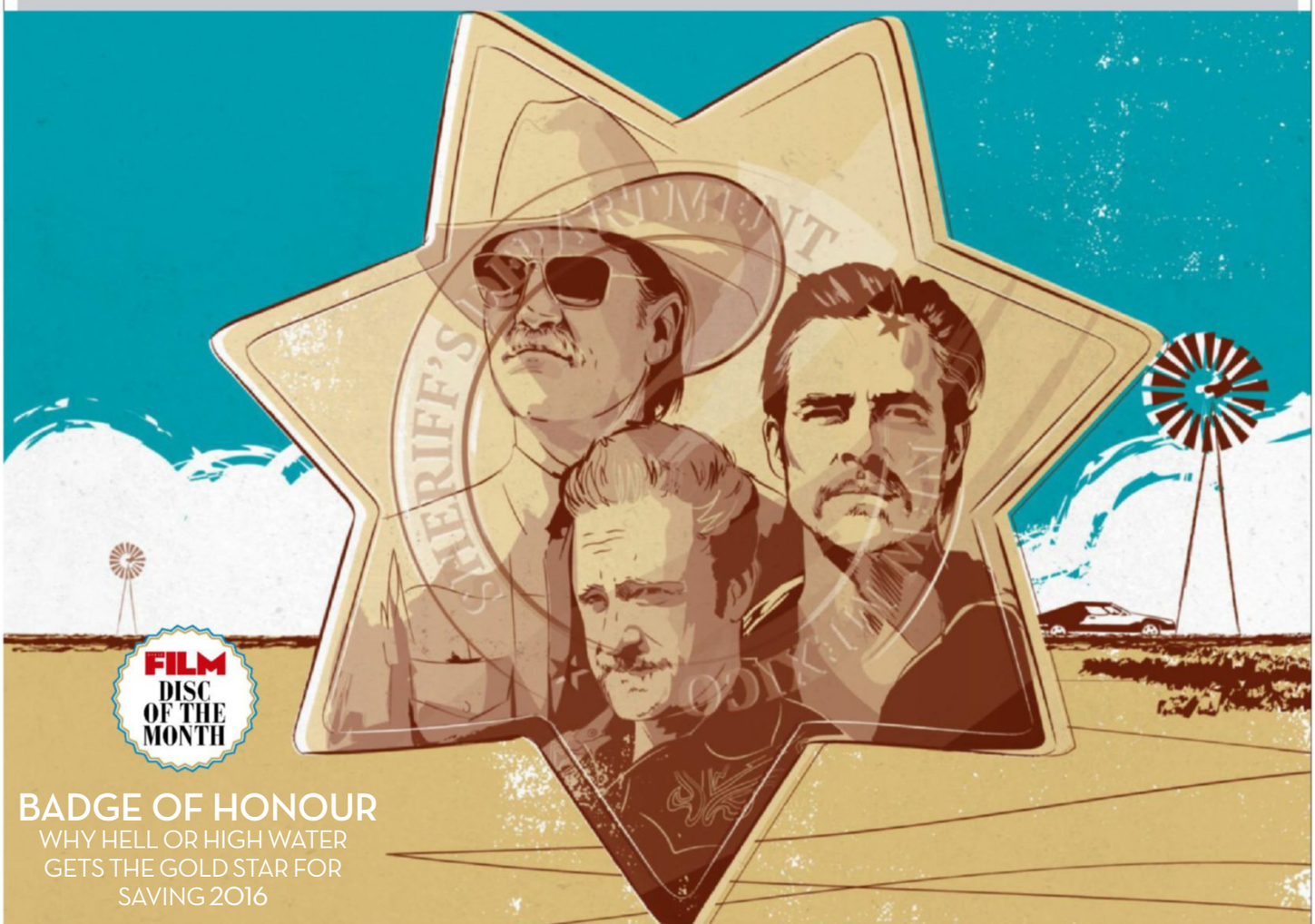

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HELL OR HIGH WATER *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

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2015
Hardship and sticking it to the banks.

On its theatrical release, David Mackenzie's flavoursome heist movie with contemporary western stylings was hailed as some sort of saviour of cinema. No doubt worn down by a summer of mostly disappointing blockbusters, critics made for this tale of two cowboy brothers taking down a series of banks in west Texas like it was the only waterhole in the desertscapes they'd just been transported to. This, they exclaimed, is what American cinema did so well in the '90s, when independent film thrived and studios had their own boutique outlets (such as Fox Searchlight Pictures and Paramount Vantage).

And sure enough, in this age of $250m spectacles, cheap-as-chips indies and not nearly enough in between, *Hell Or High Water* offers stars immersed in character roles, taut-but-textured storytelling, wildcat thrills, dialogue to be chewed on like tobacco leaves ("He wouldn't know God if he crawled up his pant leg and bit him on the pecker"), crackerjack violence, lopsided levity, and a wide streak of sorrow. All for $12m. What's more, goddammit, it has *something to say*, with the brothers only hitting branches of the Texas Midland Bank, which is about to foreclose on their late mother's ranch. Here, our desperadoes are born of real desperation.

HOWARDS' WAY

But should *Hell Or High Water* really be anointed the poster child of a rare US cinema aimed at adults? Probably not. The truth, of course, is that today's cinema is far from dead, as some would have you believe. Despite the funding vacuum, a clutch of excellent films somehow emerge each year (try *American Honey*, *Arrival* and the upcoming *Manchester By The Sea* and *La La Land* on for size), while not all tentpole movies are bad. Far from it – in 20 years' time, the carefully constructed MCU will surely be regarded as a golden era for blockbuster filmmaking.

So best view *Hell Or High Water* not as representative, but rather as it was

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Always a barrel of laughs, those Howard brothers...

TOP
Chris Pine stars as Toby Howard, who embarks on a crime spree in a bid to save the family farm.

MIDDLE
Drinking, gambling and looking mean. Yep, Ben Foster plays the bad boy brother, Tanner.

intended, which is to say a smart genre film comprising brain and brawn.

The brothers, Toby and Tanner Howard, are respectively played by Chris Pine (channelling Robert Ryan) and Ben Foster. The former is smart and measured, the latter a career criminal with a crazed glint in his eye, so it comes as a surprise that it's Toby who's railroaded his bro into this spree of heists. When we first meet them, they're clad in ski-masks, conducting a frenzied hold-up. Plodding in their wake is Marcus Hamilton (Jeff Bridges), a grizzled Texas Ranger dressed in Stetson and sunglasses. This, naturally, is his last job before retirement, and there's an elegiac ache to his every deduction and decision, his mind taking snapshots for posterity even as he ribs his Native American-Mexican partner Alberto (Gil Birmingham) with 'affectionate' racial slurs.

As with the Howard boys, their long-time relationship feels lived-in, authentic; and screenwriter Taylor Sheridan (*Sicario*) is happy to hitch the narrative to railings outside diners as these good ol' boys pause to chew the cud. One such pit stop allows for a delicious exchange with a cranky, craggy waitress. "I've been working here for 44 years," she states. "Ain't nobody ever ordered nothing but a T-bone steak and baked potato. Except one time, this asshole from New York ordered a trout, back in 1987. We ain't got no goddamned trout."

Such dialogue could have been scribbled by Ethan Coen, and the actress who aces the scene, Margaret Bowman, played a motel clerk in *No Country For Old Men*, a movie that *Hell Or High Water* evokes (along with John Sayles' superb neo-western *Lone Star*). But with its theme of land, oil and rampant capitalism, it also conjures the film that *No Country* beat to Best Picture in 2008, *There Will Be Blood*, albeit in more user-friendly genre packaging.

OUTSIDER ART

For a film so determined to inhabit its hardscrabble world of flyblown ghost towns haunted by debt-relief billboards, to smear the line between right and wrong, and to communicate its anti-heroes' palpable resentment and anger while honouring genre tropes and mythology, *Hell Or High Water* deserves to score a wad of disc extras. Instead it's somewhat short-changed: a trio of featurettes take a quick count of the rich characters, layered performances and parched visuals. Thrown in as loose change is footage of the red carpet premiere.

Of most value is a filmmaker Q&A that took place at the ArcLight Cinema in Hollywood, with the principal cast joined by Brit director John Mackenzie (*Young Adam*, *Starred Up*) for a half-hour chinwag. In the absence of any commentary tracks or a Making Of, this is your best bet to glean any real insight into how an outsider so perfectly captured a specific time and place while working within the framework of this most American of genres. For that, if not being the saviour of cinema, he should be celebrated. ***Jamie Graham***

'IT OFFERS WILDCAT THRILLS AND DIALOGUE TO BE CHEWED ON LIKE TOBACCO LEAVES'

sugar baddies

THE JOKER'S MILD...

The Joker's gone AWOL again...

SUICIDE SQUAD: EXTENDED CUT *15*

FILM ★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, 3D BD, 4K, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Featurettes, Gag reel

"Needless to say, the whole thing was a bad idea," says Joel Kinnaman's Colonel Rick Flag in David Ayer's DC super-villain shebang *Suicide Squad* – a rather unfortunate choice of words given the end result. Critically slammed on release – though that didn't stop it racing to a $745 million global box-office tally – *Suicide Squad* fares no better on second viewing. And this extended cut (not available on DVD), with 13 extra minutes, barely papers over the cracks.

Ayer (*Fury*) seemed like a perfect choice to direct, but he's hamstrung here – caught between making a Will Smith drama and a day-glo Zack Snyder blockbuster. Smith's hitman Deadshot takes centre stage; his single-handed take-down of some blackberry-headed goons is the movie's stand-out scene, but the look-at-me emotional arc involving his daughter unwisely tries to humanise the killer.

With the plot starting post-*Batman V Superman*, Snyder's fingerprints are all over this, leaving Ayer little room to create his own world. It doesn't help that the plot logic is skewed: Viola Davis' intelligence operative Amanda Waller forms this criminal squad ("the worst of the worst") to guard against the next wave of meta-villains... only to trigger Dr. June Moone/Enchantress (Cara Delevingne) to go rogue. Talk about creating your own mess.

Admittedly, some of it works. Margot Robbie rules as the crazed Harley Quinn and Jay Hernandez finds some soul in flame-throwing ex-gangbanger Diablo. But others – Killer Croc, Katana, Captain Boomerang and especially Slipknot – struggle for screen time. It doesn't help that the supernatural Enchantress is a tedious CGI-laden non-entity or that the soundtrack ('Sympathy For The Devil', 'The House Of The Rising Sun' etc.) reeks of unoriginality.

Still, the film's biggest crime is reserved for Jared Leto's green-haired, tattoo-clad, metal-mouthed Joker. Leto pours his heart into the role, and he and Robbie do generate some chemistry, particularly in the Arkham Asylum scenes. But he's a secondary character (scenes were cut, judging by the trailers) whose impact is negligible. Why reprise one of the great screen psychos of all time only to sideline him?

The additional footage in this extended edition should've restored parity, but the opportunity's wasted. Bar a few lines when the Joker tortures Harley, there's little on offer. Instead, we get character snippets: Killer Croc being fed a skinned goat (and later vomiting in the helicopter), Captain Boomerang plotting a mutiny, more Flag/Deadshot soul-searching and a cameo from Ayer as a prison guard. The wait for a decent post-Nolan DC movie goes on. ***James Mottram***

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

DESPICABLE ME *2010*
If you like villains fronting movies, you can't beat Gru.

FURY *2014*
David Ayer assembles another gritty ensemble.

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE *2016*
One of the above turns Easter egg for *Suicide Squad*.

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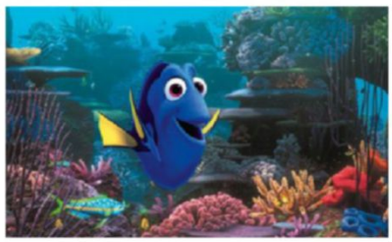


FINDING DORY *U*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS TBC

OUT NOW DVD, BD, 3D BD, Digital HD
EXTRAS Commentary, Short film, Featurettes (BD), Deleted scenes (BD)

It's usually a good idea to approach Pixar sequels with caution – but 13 years have passed since Nemo got found, and the studio's undersea opus was never its most untouchable property anyway. What's more, the studio has clearly learned plenty in the intervening years; *Dory* rarely feels like a *Nemo* rehash. It might not have the same stripped-back simplicity, but offers a more exciting lost/found adventure, even more astounding animation and, most importantly, a cranky octopus (Ed O'Neill) who steals the whole franchise. ***Paul Bradshaw***

LIGHTS OUT *15*

FILM ★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, Digital HD
EXTRAS Deleted scenes

David F. Sandberg's nocturnal chiller has a killer premise: what if the shapes in the shadows are really there? Teresa Palmer stars as Rebecca, the daughter in an emotionally ravaged family, tormented since childhood by a razor-fingered spectre. Sandberg conjures wildly effective shocks thanks to some inventive visual trickery and careful lighting, while Palmer proves a likeable scream queen. But even at 81 minutes, it feels stretched, with an egregious backstory blowout mid-movie and fumbled attempts at emotional resonance that highlight the script's shallowness. ***Jordan Farley***

JULIETA *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

OUT NOW Digital HD **9 JANUARY** DVD, BD
EXTRAS Featurette

One of the director's best, Pedro Almodóvar's 20th film offers a whistle-stop tour of his career. The sad story of Julieta, played by Adriana Ugarte (carefree) and Emma Suárez (catatonic) in an outstanding dual performance, moves from the frolics of youth to the regrets of middle age. Almodóvar's elegant adap of three Alice Munro stories mines deep-grained emotion while proving his visual powers remain undimmed. The colours alone are a swatch of Julieta's emotions, and the transition that sees Ugarte become Suárez is a match cut made in heaven. ***Simon Kinnear***

KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS *PG*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT 2 JANUARY Digital HD
16 JANUARY DVD, BD, BD 3D
EXTRAS Commentary (BD), Featurettes

There is an audacity and exoticism to the latest animation from *Coraline* creator Laika that could normally only be dreamt of by stop-motion champion Aardman. The story of a Japanese tyke on a quest to reclaim his late father's armour, it's finely crafted, if at times heavier-going than it ought to be. Charlize Theron and Matthew McConaughey bring star power as a maternal monkey and giant beetle respectively, while the visuals are eye-popping throughout. ***Neil Smith***

DESIERTO *18*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, Digital HD
EXTRAS None

If you think Negan is bad, wait until you see the racist redneck Jeffrey Dean Morgan plays in *Gravity* scripter Jonás Cuarón's taut thriller: a flag-waving, gun-toting SOB whose determination to single-handedly police the porous southern border makes him a virtual poster boy for Donald Trump's America. Gael García Bernal is one of the Rio Grande-crossing illegals he has in his literal sights, cueing up a brutal game of cat and mouse that unapologetically puts the viewer in the shoes of the latter. A none-more-timely drama. ***Neil Smith***

PETE'S DRAGON *PG*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, Digital HD
EXTRAS Commentary, Featurettes, Gag reel, Deleted scenes, Music video

Of all the Disney films lining up for a refresh, *Pete's Dragon* was surely at the back of the queue. In the hands of director David Lowery (*Ain't Them Bodies Saints*), though, that goofy '70s musical finds new life in this heartfelt drama, in which the fact that forest-dwelling Pete's buddy is a dragon is almost a non-issue – Lowery's film is, touchingly, all about family and friendship. Robert Redford's retired forest ranger brings a twinkly eyed charm, while newcomer Oakes Fegley is magical as Pete. ***Josh Winning***

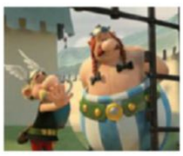
the round-up

Asterix, Amazons and Anna Kendrick...

The latest obnoxious comedy starring Zac Efron, *Mike And Dave Need Wedding Dates* (★★, out now, DVD, BD, Digital) has few laughs, despite Anna Kendrick's efforts.

Arcadia (★★, out now, DVD, Digital) gives us a British dystopia on a budget. Playing out in two London flats, it's a stodgy sci-fi with few original ideas.

The Romans play the gentrification card in *Asterix: The Mansion Of The Gods* (★★★, out now, DVD, BD, Digital), threatening the Gauls with real estate, not violence. Nick Frost and Jack Whitehall lead the dub of a French 'toon packed with oddball charm.



The Kickboxer Collection (★★★, out now, BD) gives us Jean-Claude Van Damme's 1989 breakout (silly but fun) and the recent *Kickboxer: Vengeance* (not as enjoyably naff, but every bit as unpretentious).

Arthur Ransome's classic children's story is lovingly retold in *Swallows And Amazons* (★★★★, out now, DVD, BD, Digital), with added intrigue from Rafe Spall's suspected spy.

Centred on a hi-tech game of Truth Or Dare, *Nerve* (★★★, out now, DVD, BD, Digital) strings its set-pieces together with enough slickness to disguise gaping plot-holes.

There's no snack stops on a trench run...

behind the masks

RUNNING INTO SOME OLD FRIENDS...

ELSTREE 1976 *12*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, VOD **EXTRAS** Commentary, Featurette, Poem, Extended interviews

"I had no interest in making a fan film," says Jon Spira on the jovial commentary to his genial doc. Instead, Spira made something rare: an original film about *Star Wars*. In gathering interviews with 10 (mostly) bit-part cast members whose faces were hidden by masks, helmets or make-up, Spira has uncovered a fringe history not unlike – apologies to *Clerks* – the Death Star's tale told by "independent contractors".

Spira considered not mentioning *Star Wars* as his doc opens, so that viewers would only gradually catch on. He changed his mind, happily, resulting in an illustrative contrast between today's Force awareness and the initially non-plussed, then awestruck, extras arriving on set in 1976.

We meet the 'trooper who bumps his head, the first bloke shot by Han and a woman from the cantina. Most famous are David Prowse (Vader) and Jeremy Bulloch (Boba), though even Dark Side heavyweights can feel small in a *Star Wars*-sized universe. Prowse discusses being banned from fan conventions; Bulloch recounts scary signing accidents. Yes, even Mr. Fett has leaky pen issues…

Vivid frontline anecdotes mount like Bothans delivering info. Greedo (Paul Blake) and Prowse dish witty anecdotes; others reflect warmly, wryly or sadly; one chap is Ricky Gervais in *Extras* writ large. It's a rich portrait of lives touched by a passing behemoth, with a startling take-home: for better or worse, life goes on after *Star Wars*. ***Kevin Harley***

THE SHALLOWS *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, Steelbook, 4K, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Featurettes, Deleted scenes

Featuring Blake Lively stranded in a bikini with a great white on her tail, this adreno-horror somehow succeeds as both feminist battle cry and exploitative froth flick. Like *Deep Blue Sea* and *Lake Placid*, emphasis is on dread over depth, with director Jaume Collet-Serra (*Unknown*, *Non-Stop*) bleeding every minute for sun-addled tension. Lively's Nancy is likeable, resourceful and shares great chemistry with her seagull 'co-star', while the final showdown is a bombastic B-movie treat. And it clocks in at a highly digestible 86 mins, too. ***Josh Winning***

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE *12*

FILM ★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, 3D BD, 4K, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Commentary, Making Of, Featurettes, Deleted scenes, Gag reel

Whatever some millennials would have you believe, *Independence Day* is not a '90s masterpiece. But it is a fine example of simple, witty storytelling. Again directed by Roland Emmerich, this belated sequel doubles the spectacle but halves the fun. There are bigger alien ships and more disaster porn than ever, but barely a joke that lands, or a plot point that makes sense. Even Jeff Goldblum, a man crackling with charisma, can't elevate the script above flat, and that's before you get to Liam Hemsworth. ***Stephen Kelly***

DAVID BRENT: LIFE ON THE ROAD *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

OUT NOW DVD, BD, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Commentary, Making Of, Deleted scenes, Live tracks/Viral videos

Thirteen years on from *The Office*, Ricky Gervais digs out David Brent for a movie-length catch-up. Now desperate to make it in the music biz, Brent goes on a self-funded world tour (well, Berkshire) with rapper friend Dom (Doc Brown) and band Foregone Conclusion. Enduring Brent for 90-odd minutes is a big ask, but after a flat first act, the film picks up: the songs are spot-on, the comedy excruciating and there's even a note of poignancy. Painfully funny. ***James Mottram***

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Laurie Zimmer on the defensive with Austin Stoker.

action station

CARPENTER'S SIEGE CLASSIC JUST GETS BETTER WITH AGE...

ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13 *15*

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

1976 **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Commentaries, Documentary, Short film, Interviews

Talking at LA's The Egyptian Theatre in 2002, John Carpenter recalled just how tough he found his first proper shoot (1974 debut *Dark Star* was a student film that he later padded, filming in dribs and drabs as money came through). "Man, this is hard work," Carpenter joked of *Assault On Precinct 13*'s 20-day schedule, with interiors shot at the Producers Studios and exteriors at the old Venice police station.

Armed with just a $100,000 budget, a rapidly scribbled script that riffed on Howard Hawks' *Rio Bravo*, and a cast comprising obscure genre actors, hungry newbies and some of the writer/director's ex-film school buddies, Carpenter nonetheless insisted on shooting 35mm Panavision to ensure his "Scotch tape and chewing gum" production belonged on the big screen.

Boy, was it worth it. Now turning 40 but taut and muscular as ever, *Assault On Precinct 13* is one of the best American thrillers of the '70s – and it was a decade packed with 'em – plus has only twice been surpassed by Carpenter in his subsequent career: horror masterpieces *Halloween* and *The Thing*. Like those movies, it's a masterclass in suspense. All silences, squibs and racial tension, while the classical filmmaking is enhanced by moody night-time lighting and Carpenter's ominous earworm of a synth score. Death Row convict Napoleon Wilson (Darwin Joston), meanwhile, is an anti-hero to match *Escape From New York*'s Snake Plissken.

This anniversary disc marks *Assault On Precinct 13*'s UK debut on Blu, its visual clarity and pin-drop sound quality making it a must. Some of the extensive extras, including Carpenter's hugely engaging (as ever) commentary track, and another from art director/childhood buddy Tommy Lee Wallace, are imported from previous DVD and overseas BD editions, but the new material is choice.

Made in 1969 and rediscovered in 2011, black-and-white student film *Captain Voyeur* watches a mask-wearing Peeping Tom stalk the neighbourhood like Michael Myers' horny sibling, while 2003 featurette *Do You Remember Laurie Zimmer?* sees French filmmaker Charlotte Szlovak head to LA to try and locate the actress who so impressed in *Assault* as Hawksian secretary Leigh. Zimmer, who also went by the surname Fanning, vanished in the late '70s, and Szlovak's quest pierces the illusory sheen and shimmer of LA to offer a haunting portrait akin to Carol Morley's *Dreams Of A Life*. ***Jamie Graham***

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

RIO BRAVO *1959*
Sheriff John Wayne is under siege in one of Carpenter's all-time favourites.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD *1968*
A ragtag ensemble batten down the hatches against a zombie plague.

ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13 *2005*
Jean-François Richet's remake way outclasses *The Fog* rehash, also 2005.

Eighties cops took their frisking responsibilities seriously...

california scheming

WILLIAM FRIEDKIN GIVES IT BOTH BARRELS...

TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA *18*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

1985 **OUT NOW** Dual Format **EXTRAS** Commentary, Interviews, Featurette, Alternative ending, Deleted scene

I don't believe in self-censorship," growls William Friedkin on his talk-track, stating the obvious. The evidence is vigorously showcased in the sun-seared cynicism and extravagant violence of his 1985 thriller, where an impatience with restraint is clear from the opening titles.

Subtlety croaks the minute a cop starts talking about his retirement, practically issuing himself a death warrant. But Friedkin brings a forensic focus to the details of money forging, his intensity matched by Willem Dafoe's louche monster in polo-necks.

Cops William Petersen and John Pankow aren't much better in their willingness to bend any rule, whether it means duffing up John Turturro or driving recklessly in a thrillingly gratuitous car chase. Friedkin's lurid vision is lavishly captured by DoP Robby Müller, who shoots the shit out of LA until it looks queasy. The '*Miami Vice* gone bad' sheen extends to Wang Chung's brashly synthetic score, which suits the sickly lustre of a film in which everyone is fake or on the make.

Friedkin never knowingly understates anything; some of the dialogue howls with pretension. But his determination to hold fast to his instincts compels you, right up to the last bullet in the head. ***Kevin Harley***

TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

1977 **OUT NOW** Dual Format **EXTRAS** Documentary, Essay

When Burt Lancaster's rogue general seizes a nuclear base, he holds Charles Durning's US president to ransom: reveal dark secrets about Vietnam, or face Armageddon. Robert Aldrich's thriller mixes old-school machismo with post-Watergate paranoia to fascinating effect, the tension maintained with superbly edited split-screen techniques, while the arguments fall just the right side of farce. With themes that include the pressures facing an untested president, it's still pertinent. ***Simon Kinnear***

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS *15*

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

2001 **OUT NOW** BD Extras: Commentary, Interviews, Deleted scenes, Image galleries

Buffing the vivid colour palette and eclectic soundtrack of Wes Anderson's dysfunctional family saga, this Blu-ray upgrade is a covetable package. Detail-heavy extras highlight the director's painstaking commitment to every particular. Only Gene Hackman admits to ploughing his own furrow. His roguish performance remains one of the film's great joys. Pinging around him, the awkward love triangle – melancholy Margo (Gwyneth Paltrow), love-crushed Richie (Luke Wilson) and mescaline-crazed Eli (Owen Wilson) – is even more poignant than you remember. ***Kate Stables***

KES *PG*

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

1969 **OUT NOW** BD **EXTRAS** Interviews, Trailer, Booklet

Nearly 50 years on, Ken Loach's gritty adap of the late Barry Hines' *A Kestrel For A Knave* remains the veteran director's best-known and most accessible film, its portrait of a Yorkshire lad finding solace and self-worth in the training of a falcon striking deep emotional chords. There's no missing the political subtext either, Loach taking clear aim at Britain's class system and its habit of crushing those who look beyond their station. Yet this quiet tragedy is not without humour, most of it emanating from Brian Glover's PE teacher. ***Neil Smith***

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JAMAICA INN *PG*

FILM ★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

1939 **OUT NOW** Dual Format **EXTRAS** Commentary, Intro

Killing time before departing for Hollywood, Hitchcock took on this rip-roaring melodrama set in 1820s Cornwall. An innocent young orphan (19-year-old Maureen O'Hara) arrives at her uncle's inn to find it a den of smugglers keen on gross overacting. They're all out-hammed, though, by Charles Laughton at his most self-indulgent. Since Laughton was also the co-producer, Hitch couldn't do much to rein him in. "You can't direct a Laughton picture," remarked Hitchcock resignedly. "The best you can hope for is to referee." Still, it trundles along divertingly enough. ***Philip Kemp***

THE SQUID AND THE WHALE *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

2005 **OUT NOW** BD **EXTRAS** Making Of, Interviews, Auditions

Noah Baumbach's directing breakout dissects divorce's messy ironies, as New Yorkers Jeff Daniels and Laura Linney turn to gladiatorial combat using their kids (including a young Jesse Eisenberg) as ammo. The result is a tantalising marriage between a taut screenplay and rangy direction. This isn't a feel-good Sundance flick but a 'no hugs', pitch-black comedy that Baumbach describes as "revenge" in a disc-exclusive interview. And yet, it's remarkably non-judgemental, achieving a Truffaut-esque serenity about life's miseries. ***Simon Kinnear***

ROXANNE *PG*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

1987 **OUT NOW** Dual Format **EXTRAS** None

Steve Martin's reworking of the Cyrano de Bergerac story (he's scripter and star) sees him play a fire chief smitten with astronomer Roxanne (Daryl Hannah). Only one problem: yep, that nose. Martin's on top form, bringing off the verbal and physical comedy with dexterity. Two scenes stand out: one where he vanquishes two skiers with a squash racket, and one where he reels off 20 put-downs more creative than "big nose". The scene's fluently adapted from Edmond Rostand's play, with Martin's writing doing his source material full justice. Unusually for a Eureka release, no extras bar trailer. ***Philip Kemp***

THE LION IN WINTER *12*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

1968 **OUT NOW** BD **EXTRAS** Commentary, Interviews

Peter O'Toole had two cracks at Henry II and was Oscar-nommed both times. Yet it was Katharine Hepburn whom the Academy honoured for this elegant period piece, an adap of James Goldman's history play that sees the king and Eleanor of Aquitaine come to verbal blows over which of their sons should inherit the kingdom. Early work from Anthony Hopkins, Timothy Dalton and the late Nigel Terry enlivens the intrigue, but stagey direction from Anthony Harvey does little to conceal the piece's theatrical roots. ***Neil Smith***

SPACE JAM *PG*

FILM ★☆☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

1996 **OUT NOW** BD **EXTRAS** Music videos, Making Of, Commentary

Viewed without nostalgia goggles, *Space Jam* has aged very badly. The combination of live action, animation and rudimentary CGI looks ropey, but that'd be forgivable if the film wasn't so cynical. Filling in the blanks in Michael Jordan's bizarre real-life decision to briefly quit basketball for baseball, here he's recruited by Bugs Bunny and pals to take part in an intergalactic basketball match. It lacks the joyful slapstick of the best Looney Tunes and the heart of any good sports movie, feeling like a creaky relic best left in the '90s. ***Matt Maytum***

PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE *15*

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

2002 **OUT NOW** BD **EXTRAS** Deleted scenes, Featurettes, Interviews

Who else but P.T. Anderson could follow colossal dramas *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia* with an Adam Sandler romcom and make it his most inventive work? Mixing swooning romance with social phobia, blinding white space with saturated colour, and lush orchestral swells with dissonant percussion, it burrows into the headspace of gentle, furious Barry Egan (Sandler) as he dates sweet-natured Lena (Emily Watson). Ace extras are imported, plus a terrific interview with composer Jon Brion. ***Jamie Graham***

the round-up

Sophia, Shakespeare and some super-surreal 'toons...

Few stars have owned the screen like Sophia Loren. Want proof? Watch *Two Women* (★★★★★, 1960, out now, DVD, BD), Vittorio De Sica's savage masterpiece. Then compare with her subtle turn in Ettore Scola's parlour piece *A Special Day* (★★★★, 1977, out now, DVD, BD).

Haunted-house horror *Burnt Offerings* (★★★★, 1976, out now, Dual Format) offers a slow, sickly unpleasantness that gets under your skin.

Al Pacino's directorial debut *Looking For Richard* (★★★★, 1996, out now, DVD) is an ace doc exploring the Bard's *Richard III*.

Following a ship's crew on shore leave, *Pool Of London* (★★★, 1951, out now, DVD, BD) is notable for being the first British film to show sexual attraction between a black man and white woman.

Inner Sanctums – Quay Brothers: The Collected Animation Films 1979-2013 (★★★★, out now, BD) leads us through an abstract world that's often imitated but rarely influenced. Top bonus: a doc directed by Christopher Nolan.

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM-INSPIRED CLOTHING

APPAREL **OUT NOW**

Effective cosplay can be rough for the creatively challenged. Luckily, retailers such as Hot Topic are making it easier for all of us. If you dug *Potter* prequel *Fantastic Beasts*, then you too can look like a swanky big screen Scamander in real life, courtesy of the shirts, coats and other apparel that come right from the cossie designer's sketches.

OUTLANDER WINE

BEVERAGES **OUT NOW**

Fans of the *Outlander* telly series will have to wait a few months for more adventures of Claire and Jamie Fraser, but they can keep the warm feelings going with the official *Outlander* wine blends. There are four vintages celebrating either Claire Randall, Frank Randall, Claire Fraser or Jamie Fraser. Only 2,500 bottles of each will be sold from lot18.com. So stock up, there's some cold winter nights to get through!

SUBSCRIBE AT WWW.TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

SUPERHERO CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS

DECORATIONS **OUT NOW**

Oh super tree, oh super tree, how lovely are your branches? We say pretty awesome if you bypass the traditional and theme out your holiday tree with Captain America's shield, the Bat-sign or the Wonder Woman logo in blown-glass-ornament style. Each sparkly piece comes with a hanging ribbon and is crafted to gorgeously reflect the lights that hang around them. Check 'em out at thinkgeek.com.

DEATH STAR TREE TOPPER

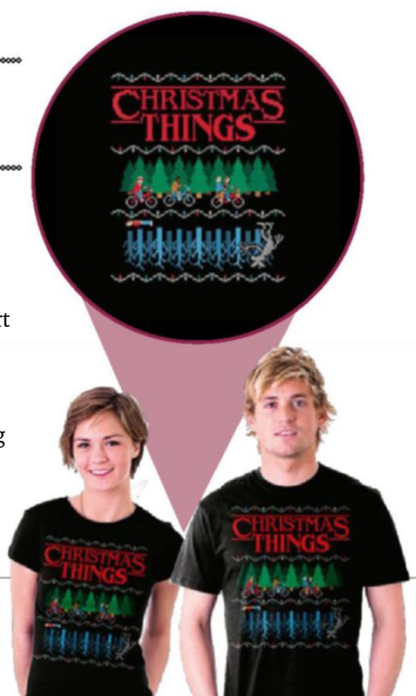
DECORATION **OUT NOW**

With *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* now in cinemas, the Death Star's bagged an unexpected bonus 15 minutes of fame. Celebrate the, um, ultimate WMD by giving it pride of place on your Christmas tree.
The remote-controlled topper lights up red or blue and can play either the 'Star Wars Theme' or (when you've got the relatives round) 'The Imperial March'. Buy the battle station from thinkgeek.com.

STRANGER THINGS CHRISTMAS T-SHIRT

APPAREL **OUT NOW**

Ugly sweaters are all the holiday rage, so why not mix that new, modern tradition with your geekiness and don a *Stranger Things*-inspired Chrimbo tee? Designed by M.J. for teefury.com, the shirt mixes a homespun stitching motif with a classic '80s 8-bit videogame look that celebrates characters from the hit TV series. It's even got Joyce-approved string lights. Perfect for parties here or in the Upside Down.



WONDER WOMAN 75TH ANNIVERSARY T-SHIRT

APPAREL **OUT NOW**

Seems appropriate to end the year that marked the 75th anniversary of Wonder Woman with an official shirt that dazzlingly depicts the Amazonian warrior's evolution. Featuring seven representations of WW from her long comic-book history, this grey cotton shirt honours a pop-culture icon who's got another big year ahead (go, Gal Gadot!). Available from wbshop.com. ***TB***

holmes truths

CUMBERBATCH OFFERS CLUES TO SHERLOCK: SERIES 4...

Has Moriarty really returned? And if he has, then how? Sherlock's greatest nemesis, after all, was last seen shooting himself in the head on a rooftop. How could he have possibly survived? After two years of questions, all will finally be revealed. And according to Mark Gatiss, he and co-creator Steven Moffat have been planning the answers since Series 2 finale 'The Reichenbach Fall' in 2012. So it's hardly a surprise that all involved tread very, *very* carefully when talking (or not) about *Sherlock* Series 4.

Benedict Cumberbatch, for example, goes for the blunt approach. "I can say *very* little without spoiling it for people who want to see it on the day," he says, firmly. "I think Sherlock's got a fair idea of what's coming — that's *if* there is something coming..." Gatiss, meanwhile, prefers to tease. "You'll just have to wait and see," he grins. "This series is life-changing in so many ways that I cannot possibly tell you." The clues are there, though. Series 4 is the big one; the series of consequences, the series of — as Moffat has said — "chickens coming home to roost".

"I *can* tell you that," laughs Gatiss. "A lot of things we've been teasing through the years come to their conclusion. Obviously it's still the adventure show it always was, there's a lot of humour, but the things we're dealing with are very dark. I think this is the most we've ever put the characters through the emotional wringer this year."

GRUDGE THATCH

"It's asking things of the characters that have never been asked before," agrees Cumberbatch. "And that's been cool for me as an actor. You build an icon unwittingly and the first thing you want to do is smash it to pieces."

The first episode of Series 4, 'The Six Thatchers', will pick up directly after last year's Christmas special 'The Abominable Bride', which ended with Sherlock declaring, "Moriarty is dead, there is no question of it. More importantly, I know what he's going to do next." It's loosely based on Arthur Conan Doyle's 1904 story 'The Adventure Of The Six Napoleons', in which Sherlock Holmes investigates an unusual case involving smashed plaster busts of Napoleon Bonaparte. Except, of course, in this story they are busts of '80s prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

"It's always been one of our favourites," explains Gatiss. "It's an emblematic Sherlock Holmes story, because it's eccentric. It looks like some lunatic has been smashing busts of Napoleon because he's got a hatred of the old French emperor, but it turns out to be something more sinister. I've always loved that about Sherlock Holmes. Someone will say there's been an attempt to assassinate the Queen and he's not interested, but he'll be interested in the fact that a

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

SHERLOCK S1-3 (2010-14)
Doyle's iconic detective gets a modern-day refresh.

DOCTOR WHO (2005 – PRESENT)
Thanks to Steven Moffat, the sci-fi show shares more than a touch of tonal DNA.

ELEMENTARY (2012 – PRESENT)
Doyle's detective gets a modern-day refresh, in New York.

SUBSCRIBE AT WWW.TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

The mysterious past of Amanda Abbington's character Mary Watson might finally be revealed.

Sherlock starts interviewing for Watson's paternity leave cover.

ABOVE
Martin Freeman, Amanda Abbington and Benedict Cumberbatch on the *Sherlock* set.

'IT IS A CLIMAX, AND LOTS OF THREADS COME TOGETHER'
MARK GATISS

client with no money is wearing odd shoes or something."

Series 4, though, is about more than Moriarty. The second episode, 'The Lying Detective', will introduce a new foe: Toby Jones' Culverton Smith, who Arthur Conan Doyle fans may recognise as the master of poison from 'The Adventure Of The Dying Detective', published in 1913.

"It's not really the Smith of the Doyle story," explains Gatiss. "It's a very different take — really creepy stuff. He's a very 21st Century villain. We shape the classic villain into someone we can relate to, the way we made [*Series 3 villain*] Magnussen into a sort of Rupert Murdoch figure. It's the very notion of organised crime: Someone's approaching this like a business and what Toby's character does is a very particular, personal take on that." Cumberbatch adds: "It was a phenomenal thing watching that character come to life. You're in for a treat when he appears."

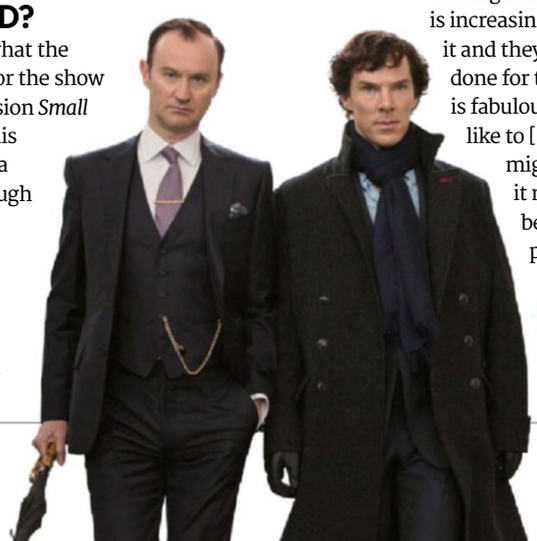
As for the third and final episode… well, that's so secretive that not even its title has been revealed yet. A safe bet, though, would be on it involving the murky assassin past of John Watson's (Martin Freeman) wife Mary (Amanda Abbington), who is set to become a mother. "It becomes a family business for a while," says Cumberbatch, "and then stuff happens…"

CASE CLOSED?

More intriguing is what the episode will mean for the show overall. The impression *Small Screen* gets is that this series is building to a point that will be tough to continue from – a grand finale, of sorts. Does this mean, as per press speculation, that *Sherlock* Series 4 will be the show's last?

"We leave it in a place where we could absolutely come back," says Gatiss. "It is a climax, and lots of threads come together. But that doesn't mean you can't come back to it. It was genuinely very difficult to get everyone's diaries together. We were going to do Series 4 when we did the Christmas special, but we couldn't make the schedules work, so we ended up making the special because there was a small gap. Getting Benedict and Martin together is increasingly hard. They're very up for it and they know what the show has done for them and for all of us, which is fabulous. I think everyone would like to [*make another series*], but it might be another two years, it might be three, or this might be it. The will is there, the public love it, but I just don't know." ***Stephen Kelly***

SHERLOCK SERIES 4 BEGINS ON NEW YEAR'S DAY ON BBC ONE.



the doc knight returns

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE DOCTOR WHO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL...

1 IT'S AN (OLD-SCHOOL) SUPERHERO TALE

Tired of glum superheroes? Sick of *Doctor Who* not being on TV this year? Good news awaits. In 'The Return Of Doctor Mysterio' (*Doctor Who*'s Mexican title), showrunner Steven Moffat is tackling today's biggest genre: superheroes. But think *Superman* 1978, not *Batman V Superman*. "We've had a lot of dark, tormented superheroes," says Moffat, also declaring a liking for Tobey Maguire's first Spider-Man stint. "This is the comic-book version. That's not to say it doesn't have scary bits, but it's more Christopher Reeve than Christopher Nolan."

2 THE GUEST STARS SMASH IT

The special finds Peter Capaldi's Doctor involved in the double life of New York-based Grant (*Orphan Black*'s Justin Chatwin), a secret superhero in a relationship with *Wolf Hall* star Charity Wakefield's reporter. "It's hard to be a part-time god," teases Moffat of the ensuing tensions. The co-stars get every chance to shine and, reckons Moffat, they grab them. "I think it's safe to say [*Justin and Charity are*] among the best guest performances we've had. It's hard to draw the attention from Peter, but they come close."

3 AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE RETURNS...

The Doc lost companion Clara and (after a 24-year vacation together) innuendo-firing adventurer River Song in 2015's episodes, but this won't be a blue Christmas, says Moffat: "We don't ignore that he's been through a lot, but it's not allowed to dominate." Besides, Capaldi has a new/old pal. After debuting in 2015's seasonal romp, Matt Lucas' Nardole returns, revamped. "He's not the rent-a-duffer he was last time," says Moffat. "He's quite sardonic but under the bumbling he's got a quick brain. He's very funny and at times he's surprisingly moving." And he's no longer headless, after losing his bonce to a big robot last year.

4 ...AS DOES AN OLD MONSTER

So much for fun, but what would Christmas be without the clanging chimes of doom? "Oh, there's a monster," says Moffat, before adding a teaser. "It's something we've encountered before but not in much detail – a supporting monster from the past in a more central role." In terms of other fan-pleasing winks, Moffat drew the line at referencing the Karkus, the obscure superhero from 1968 *Who* story 'The Mind Robber'. But one Easter egg awaits: a nod to the Doc's last NYC trip, in 2012's 'The Angels Take Manhattan'. "I challenge you to spot it. It's quite slight, but it's tying up something we need to tie up." Super-vision on.

ABOVE
Peter Capaldi's back on Time Lord duty this Christmas.

BELOW
Justin Chatwin plays a superhero that the Doc encounters in New York.

5 IT'S NOT OVER-CHRISTMASSY

As ever with Moffat's *Doctor Who* tenure though, the emphasis is on reinvention more than reflection and repetition. The special doesn't skimp on emotion (the script made sometime *Who* writer Mark Gatiss cry) but it does, reckons Moffat, go easy on the sherry and weaponised trees. "We're slightly moving away from being so Christmassy because I suppose everyone does it now," he muses. "This is more like a film you'd like to see at Christmas, as opposed to a Christmassy episode. Christmas appears briefly but for the most part it's got nothing to do with it – it's just got a 'big blockbuster for Christmas Day' feel." ***Kevin Harley***

'THE RETURN OF DOCTOR MYSTERIO' AIRS ON CHRISTMAS DAY ON BBC ONE.

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command performance

THOU SHALT NOT MISS THIS MASTERPIECE...

DEKALOG AND OTHER TELEVISION WORKS *15*

SHOW ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

1989 **OUT NOW** Dual Format **EXTRAS** Documentary, Featurettes, Booklet

An interesting house," notes Elżbieta in *Dekalog 8*. "No more than any other," shrugs the ageing Zofia. Referring to the Warsaw housing block setting for Krzysztof Kieslowski's (the *Three Colours* trilogy) TV masterwork, it's a casually deceptive remark. Watch these 10 one-hour stand-alone films (here given a 4K restoration) and you'll find that life, in all its murky complexity, lurks in these run-down Polish flats.

Nominally dealing with the Ten Commandments (without ever spelling it out), *Dekalog* sways from the bleakness of *5* (released in cinemas as the extended *A Short Film About Killing*), about the motiveless murder of a taxi driver, to the black comedy of *10*, where two brothers deal with their priceless inheritance. Suicide, infidelity, impotence, paternity, adultery, abortion… there's scarcely a big issue Kieslowski doesn't touch upon.

But for all its formal rigour and spiritual mystery, *Dekalog* remains surprisingly digestible. Expertly cast – Olaf Lubaszenko as the lovelorn postal worker in *6* is unforgettable – it's also strikingly shot and scored, an aesthetic as well as an intellectual triumph. Also included are five '70s TV works, two critical evaluations and *Still Alive*, a doc by a former Kieslowski student. All in all, a sumptuous package, one its director fully deserves. ***James Mottram***

SEEING THE LIGHT
Kieslowski's sublime TV 10-parter can now be enjoyed in HD.

129

CLASS: SEASON 1 *15 TBC*

SHOW ★★★☆☆ EXTRAS *TBC*

2016 **OUT 2 JANUARY** DVD, BD, Digital HD **EXTRAS** TBC

Think *Buffy*. Think *Misfits*. Think *Doctor Who*-esque monsters and gags about wanking. That's *Who* spin-off *Class*, a Young Adult series in which adolescent angst meets the threat of alien annihilation. It's a tone that jars at first — especially the gore, which clashes with the Whovian aesthetic — but things settle thanks to the ensemble, plus creator (and YA author) Patrick Ness, who has a sharp ear for teen dialogue. ***Stephen Kelly***

FEAR THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON 2 *18*

SHOW ★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

2016 **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Commentaries, Making Of, Featurettes, Webisodes, Deleted scenes

While *The Walking Dead* continues to break new ground (and heads) in its seventh season, its fledgling sister show is still struggling to come to life. Focusing on a fractured family at the onset of a zombie uprising, this sophomore outing sees an exodus to the ocean in a bid to avoid the carnage on land. There are a few good ideas, particularly involving religious cults who cherish the dead, but overall, *Fear The Walking Dead* feels insubstantial and underdeveloped, with characters so given to eye-rolling stupidity that you'll be cheering on the flesh-eaters. Apocalypse-lite. ***Tim Coleman***

AGENT CARTER: SEASON 2 *12*

SHOW ★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

2016 **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, Digital HD **EXTRAS** Gag reel

This MCU spin-off didn't deserve to be cancelled, but its second season doesn't exactly make the best case for renewal. S2 swaps high-stakes Cold War action for a dull story about Hollywood actress turned supervillain Whitney Frost (Wynn Everett). Its saving grace is Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell) being so watchable, especially with Jarvis (James D'Arcy). It's disappointing, but you want to see more of these characters. ***Stephen Kelly***

fresh spins

TF scores the latest soundtracks...

DOCTOR STRANGE

Adding to a vast work rate, Michael Giacchino conjures the MCU's best score yet. The Jerry Goldsmith-ian main theme proves richly flexible, ushered through piano, brass and choral permutations. Electronics, sitars, harpsichords, guitars and backwards processing max the trippy magic elsewhere, before the credits music glows and undulates like a lava lamp in a '60s love-in.

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

The Potterverse's fifth composer wears the scoring hat well. Mixing steam-train thrusts and jitter-bugging jazz flurries with the eerie hymns, dancing horns, emotive melodies and Hedwig flutters of old, James Newton Howard's score flips open a deep suitcase of delights. 'Inside The Case' ushers in a new era rousingly.

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK

donnie darko

VARIOUS / EVERLOVING RECORDS

If necessity is often invention's mother, so is limitation. When Richard Kelly hired near-rookie Michael Andrews to score his debut feature, he set rules: no guitars, no drums. Just as well, because a skin-tight budget meant Andrews couldn't afford more than what he already had. Session musos? Production values? That stuff belonged to other universes.

"I was down with that," said Andrews, whose scoring CV included TV's *Freaks And Geeks* – good practice for *Darko*'s teen outcasts. Besides drafting singers Sam Shelton and Tory Haberman to provide misty chorales, Andrews played everything, crafting mini-symphonies of wounded, anxious and enigmatic ambience ("The full spectrum of human emotion") from piano, Mellotron, mini marimba, xylophone, ukulele and organ.

Composed in collaboration with Kelly, the result combines zero-gravity mystique with bubble-universe cohesion. 'Middlesex Times' is all haunting notes and pizzicato strings; 'Liquid Spear Waltz' is bewitched and bothered. As synths throb ominously and pianos tinkle tenderly, a decisive sense of distinction emerges from a lack of easy melodies or propulsion. Andrews' score is ethereal, but it's never vague.

The peak cut is a model of clipped clarity. Intent on capturing the "self-absorbed adolescent angst" of Tears For Fears' debut album, *The Hurting*, Andrews sang 'Mad World' over the phone to producer Nancy Juvonen; she loved it. When Andrews' old friend and singer Gary Jules visited him, they nailed a cover in 90 minutes flat, peeling away TFF's bombast in favour of a lost-lamb vocal and a poignant piano. The song was 2003's UK Christmas number one, striking blessed notes of understated relief in seasonal charts then dominated by over-produced talent-show and novelty fluff.

Kelly's pop song choices further reflected the value of a skimpy budget. The best revived soundtrack cuts are often the ones time forgot: here, Tears For Fears' 'Head Over Heels' and The Church's minor-key anthem 'Under The Milky Way' developed new lives. As for Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart', some songs bear repetition.

Yet one change between the original release and Kelly's Director's Cut proved divisive. When *Darko* became a cult hit, Kelly had enough funds for a song he couldn't previously afford for the opening. So, the Director's Cut replaces the doomy gothic romanticism ("Fate/ Up against your will...") of Echo & The Bunnymen's 'The Killing Moon' with INXS's billowy 'Never Tear Us Apart'. Pity: when fate kept Kelly's budget tight for his first release, it dealt him the right hand. ***Kevin Harley***

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FAMILY MAN
Neil Patrick Harris reprises the Count Olaf role last played by Jim Carrey.

A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

STREAMING ★★★★☆

2017 **AVAILABLE 13 JANUARY** | NETFLIX

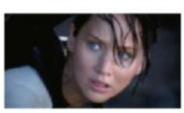
The last stab at bringing Daniel Handler's dark-tinged tales to the screen was hijacked by Jim Carrey's slap-schtick and faltered after one instalment. Netflix's eight-episode take on the same Lemony Snicket material mirrors its predecessor in having another outsized comic performance at its core and similar Burton-esque shadings. But overall, it cleaves far closer to its inspiration in both narrative and tone, and the results are more satisfying.

Where the 2004 version greedily consumed three entries in Handler's 13-book series, his prose is this time given room to breathe, with two episodes devoted to each novel. (At this rate the show will be into its fourth season before it has to go it alone.) 'The Bad Beginning' is anything but, its two-hour duration enabling appreciation of both the dire plight of its protagonists – an orphaned trio of siblings – and the pantomime villainy of their new guardian: the ghastly Count Olaf, played with lip-smacking relish by a chrome-domed Neil Patrick Harris.

Snicket himself, meanwhile, is pleasingly represented by Patrick Warburton as an on-screen narrator whose dry interventions bring an amusingly meta spin to proceedings. It all adds up to a seriously watchable attention-grabber with a refreshingly sour sensibility, not to mention a devilishly catchy theme tune that Harris sings himself. ***Neil Smith***

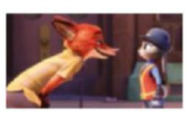
RIO BRAVO *PG*
★★★★★★
22 DEC | AMAZON
Character drives Howard Hawks' 1959 siege western, beloved of everyone from John Carpenter to Quentin Tarantino. The action's great but the joy's in the details: Dean Martin rolling ciggies, say, or Angie Dickinson making flirty mincemeat of John Wayne.

MOONRISE KINGDOM *12*
★★★★☆
30 DEC | AMAZON
Wes Anderson's delicious comedy puts two 12-year-old sweethearts on the lam in 1965. A warm embrace of flawed humanity shines through the plush imagery – a wine-wielding, topless Bill Murray says it all.



THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE *12*
★★★★☆
22 DEC | NETFLIX
Get past the dull romances and this deadlier sequel perks up as the games re-begin. Repeating the original's plot, J-Law faces fresh terrors: baboons, heavy rain, Amanda Plummer muttering nursery rhymes...

IRON MAN 3 *12*
★★★★☆
25 DEC | NETFLIX
Rebecca Hall's skimpy screen time stings even more now we know her role got trimmed, but Shane Black's threequel still rocks. The weaponised snark keeps even the scenes with the nipper lively – and Ben Kingsley's cameo is a hoot. "Ness-ieee!"



ZOOTROPOLIS *PG*
★★★★☆
24 DEC | SKY
Utopian dreams succumb to hellish intolerance... but enough about Trump. Disney's breezy buddy-cop comedy blends fluffy critters with *Godfather* gags, while Idris Elba proves he can do anything with one of his 85 animal voice roles for 2016.

DEADPOOL *15*
★★★★☆
26 DEC | SKY
True, 'The 'Pool Effect' didn't, in the end, lead to every movie becoming R-rated this year. But Ryan Reynolds' merc movie packs enough filth for 10 films anyway; everyone involved gets a good punchline. Except Gina Carano, who just punches people.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR *12*
★★★★★
30 DEC | SKY
Even with a crowded stage, downer twists and heavy guilt themes, the Cap's threequel stays frisky. The airport quip-off is a blast, Ant-Man sizes up nicely and we now know what Sony's Spidey reboots lacked: onesie gags.

virtual reality check

WITH VR SYSTEMS NOW AN AFFORDABLE REALITY, SMALL SCREEN GETS ITS HEAD AROUND HEADSETS...

GAMES

OCULUS RIFT
VR SYSTEMS ★★★★½

OUT NOW | £550 (accessories extra)

If you've only heard of one VR system, it's probably this one. The groundbreaking Oculus Rift, bought by Facebook for billions, has become the mid-range option: more accomplished and expensive than PlayStation VR, but not as fully featured as HTC Vive. You'll need a powerful PC to get it working (though minimum specs have just been lowered) and be ready to fiddle with drivers and updates basically forever. It currently comes with an Xbox One controller, but there are new motion controllers available to fall in line with the other systems.
VERDICT Comfortable headset, great performance.

SAMSUNG GEAR
VR SYSTEMS ★★★½☆

OUT NOW | £60 (accessories extra)

Samsung Gear takes advantage of the fact that much of the tracking technology used by VR headsets already exists in your phone to deliver a truly accessible, VR-lite experience – simply slot your phone into the headset and it becomes the VR screen. If you already have a compatible phone – Gear VR is designed to work with all of Samsung's flagship releases – this is a cheap way to try a few games and experiences (Netflix has released a virtual cinema version of its app, for example), though it's more proof of concept than fully fledged VR.
VERDICT Performance depends on phone used, but it's fun and cheap.

HTC VIVE
VR SYSTEMS ★★★★★

OUT NOW | £750 (accessories included)

Vive is the second and more expensive of the PC-based options. Developed in part by Valve, the publisher behind *Half-Life* and the ubiquitous Steam gaming platform, Vive offers similar visual performance to Oculus, but with the added advantage of room-scale VR, a holodeck-style feature enabled by the system's two tracking boxes. Along with the HTC's motion controllers – which, like everything else, come in the box – this delivers the best VR experience currently on the market, though it also comes at a high price and with the potential complications of PC hardware.
VERDICT Full, holodeck-style VR at a top-line price.

SONY PLAYSTATION VR
VR SYSTEMS ★★★★½

OUT NOW | £350 (accessories extra)

PlayStation VR is the cheapest of the three serious headsets and, as it works with PlayStation 4, is the easiest to set up and use. If you're worried about firmware updates and driver compatibility, there's a good chance this is the VR for you – it's easy to plug in and get games and apps working through the console. PS VR has a slightly lower resolution than both the PC-based VR systems, but performance is still good. If you don't already own a PS camera, you'll need to buy one and, to get the most from the system, a pair of motion controllers as well, increasing the overall cost.
VERDICT Decent performance, good games line-up and the best price. ***Nathan Ditum***

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two more

Recent releases we can't stop playing...

EAGLE FLIGHT

★★★★☆

Soaring above a Paris reclaimed by nature proves exhilarating rather than stomach-churning in Ubisoft's VR debut. Whether you're swooping to catch fish or gliding through crumbling buildings, the head-tilting controls are wonderfully responsive. Three-on-three airborne skirmishes, meanwhile, offer a refreshing new kind of multiplayer action.

CALL OF DUTY: INFINITE WARFARE

★★★★☆

Though its audience has depleted in recent years, the first-person shooter juggernaut rattles on. Zombies mode remains a gaudily entertaining sideshow, but a *Battlestar Galactica*-inspired campaign offers the most convincing reason to invest this year, with best-in-class presentation bolstering missions featuring zero-g shootouts.

hacker's delight

SUPERIOR SEQUEL TECHS NO PRISONERS...

WATCH DOGS 2

GAME ★★★★☆

OUT NOW | PS4, Xbox One, PC

For once, all the onscreen clutter is justified. Any good open-world game should always have a swarm of icons vying for the player's attention, but in *Watch Dogs* 2, they're competing with chat windows, newsflashes, app pop-ups and text messages. It sounds positively dystopian, but it's entirely apposite for a game about the consequences of an interconnected world. And for hacker Marcus Holloway, each visible line linking his phone to just about every electronic object within a 50-foot radius is the first thread of a spider's intricate web of opportunities. No wonder he's got a smile on his face.

It's a double-edged sword, of course. *Watch Dogs* 2 opens with Holloway tapping into San Francisco's new city-wide operating system to find he's been given a criminal record that shouldn't exist. Quickly erasing it, he joins up with hacktivist group DedSec, steadily upping their profile from being a small band of 'script kiddies' until the FBI is forced to sit up and take notice. Neatly tapping into contemporary obsessions with social-media reach, the game ties upgrades to follower-count milestones, encouraging you to boost engagement – whether that's taking selfies by Frisco landmarks or publicly humiliating a sleazy CEO at the gym by speeding up his treadmill until he faceplants.

The first *Watch Dogs* captured the idea of technology becoming increasingly frictionless, the hacking process often simplified to a single button press. Here, it has the same immediacy, but you're given more room to experiment. Cars can be hacked to veer off the road, or rear-end the vehicle in front when parked, while security can be distracted by a phone alert, a shriek of earpiece feedback or a sparking junction box, which can be made to dispense shocks when anyone wanders within range. You'll bypass circuits with a modified RC car, and fly drones over fortified areas to gauge patrol routes. This is one sandbox where guns are an absolute last resort, not least because toying with your pursuers is much more fun.

It's a pity Ubisoft Montréal steers clear of political commentary, preferring a trite corporate-voyeurism-is-bad message that feels hypocritical in light of DedSec's sometimes questionable methods. It does, however, leave enough space to invite reflection on whether the end justifies the means: when that end involves defrauding a Martin Shkreli-alike and watching his horrified reaction as millions are siphoned from his account, the cathartic frisson is hard to deny. ***Chris Schilling***

BOOKS

two more

Wizards and whizzers...

J.K. ROWLING'S WIZARDING WORLD: MOVIE MAGIC VOL. 1

The Chamber of Secrets has nothing on this treat-packed *Potter* tome, a whistle-stop guide to Rowling's cinematic universe, including *Fantastic Beasts* and the preceeding eight films, that comes with a wealth of detachable stickers, posters, flyers and postcards, plus two Death Eater masks. Younger fans will have hours of fun exploring its inserts, flaps and fold-outs.

THE ART AND MAKING OF THE FLASH

DC's scarlet speedster has been a runaway success on the small screen, but this stumbles out of the starting blocks. Author Abbie Bernstein covers a lot of ground – sections on heroes, villains, locations and gadgets – and access is extensive, but it reads like a bargain-basket book. Particularly egregious is the abundance of lo-res imagery – apt for a character once nicknamed the Blur.

BATMAN: A CELEBRATION OF THE CLASSIC SERIES

BOOK

BOB GARCIA AND JOE DESRIS | TITAN BOOKS

It's either going to be the greatest hit in the world or the greatest disaster." So said *Batman*'s associate producer William D'Angelo in 1965, after viewing the pilot for ABC's new Pop Art-goes-primetime gamble.

He needn't have worried. As made clear by this lavish coffee-table affair (the only thing missing is pop-up batwings), the Adam West-starring camp classic has endured probably beyond the wildest dreams of its creators. And this glossy, playful tribute – bound with a bright yellow utility belt – is a labour of love, with its luxurious full-page photos, rare production stills and beautiful concept paintings that accompany a detailed history of the show. *Batman* may have been kitsch, yet it was as meticulously thought-through and crafted as a Lichtenstein or Warhol painting. In fact, one of the very few happy accidents was the casting of real-estate salesman Burt Ward, who literally walked in off the street to nab the role of Robin after hundreds of actors had auditioned. Holy serendipity! (Yes, a complete list of 'Holys' is included – *Small Screen*'s favourite being "Holy priceless collection of Etruscan snoods!").

A rogues' gallery, Batmobile specs and interviews also feature: "He was a quiet napper," West says of Cesar Romero (the Joker), between takes, "but his moustache would quiver through his white-painted face as he breathed." It's delightful asides like this that illuminate life in the Batcave. Wholly unmissable. ***Ali Catterall***

STEVEN SPIELBERG: A LIFE IN FILMS

BOOK

MOLLY HASKELL | YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Viewing the 'Berg's work through the prism of his Jewishness reaps only moderate returns in this scholarly tome, which foregrounds films relevant to his faith (*Schindler's List*, *Munich*) at the expense of those that aren't. There's also too much cod-psychology (was *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*'s darkness prompted by the *Twilight Zone* set deaths?). Haskell's film critiques are the saving grace – shame there aren't more. ***Neil Smith***

STAR WARS PROPAGANDA

BOOK

PABLO HIDALGO | HARPER DESIGN

Janyor of Bith examines the art illustrating the years of political conflict throughout *Star Wars*' timeline, doing so in such expert detail that it's easy to forget everything discussed is fictional, curated by a make-believe alien academic. While the commentary often seems impenetrable to all but die-hards, the original propaganda posters are fun, often beautiful and eerily familiar, resonating with real-life historical context. "Loose lips bring down starships" indeed. ***Matt Looker***

THE ART OF MOANA

BOOK

JESSICA JULIUS AND MAGGIE MALONE | CHRONICLE BOOKS

One of Disney's most visually ravishing 'toons gets a suitably lavish accompaniment in a lushly illustrated companion that at least partially answers the charges of cultural misappropriation that have dogged this Polynesian tale. Highlights include detailing the genesis of the *Mad Max*-inspired Kakamora and the various iterations of Pua the pig. We also learn how one animator nailed the look of one isle's contours by covering his wife with a sheet. ***Neil Smith***

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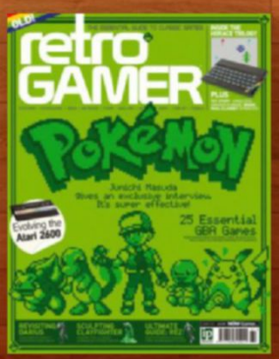
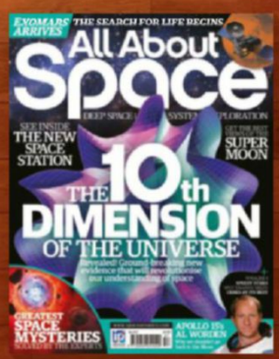
How It Works

Packed with facts and features, stunning photography, cutaways and infographics, How It Works is essential reading for anyone interested in finding out more about the world around them.





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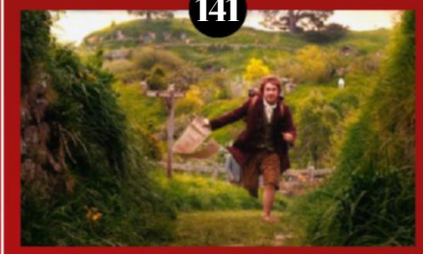
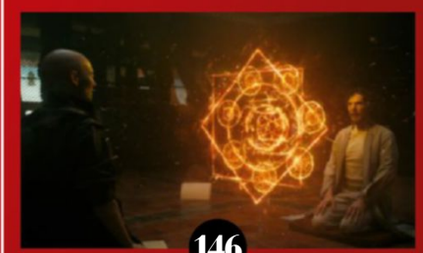
EDITED BY JANE CROWTHER

TOTAL FILM BUFF

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...





this issue

TRACTION MAN
FLASH MOB!
YOUNG GUNS
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN WHAT?!
HOBBIT HIGH
THE LIFE OF ANG
HOT KNOB
IT'S ONLY EASY IF YOU KNOW
STRANGER THINGS

INVESTIGATION

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH **BATMAN'S BROKEN BACK IN THE DARK KNIGHT RISES**

Q In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman's back is snapped by Bane. This is healed by an inmate punching a vertebrate back into his spine, plus dangling from ropes in DIY traction. Possible?

A

BOB CHATTERJEE
CONSULTANT SPINAL SURGEON AT HARLEY STREET SPINE

Bane breaks Batman's back over his knee. That would normally cause a hyper-extension of the spine, which usually results in a fractured vertebrate and would almost certainly damage the spinal cord. So, although you can dislocate a spine and theoretically punch it back in, Batman would be paralysed. We do put vertebrate back in because you still need to relocate the spine so the patient can be rehabilitated properly, but you do it very delicately. It's not really possible to break the spine and not suffer a significant spinal cord injury – in the neck you can dislocate one of the facet joints, but not where Batman was injured. Hanging from ropes is a form of traction, but wouldn't help him if he'd injured his spinal cord. If he hadn't, the bony part of an injury would heal in two months and the ligaments would take a little longer, so his 80-day healing period is about right, but his muscles would be weak and he'd need a lot of rehabilitation. He certainly wouldn't be able to do heavy lifting or bash Bane up straight away.

VERDICT BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE **BOX OFFICE**

THE BIGGEST BLOCKBUSTER MOVIES... **SET AT CHRISTMAS**

1	Iron Man 3 (2013)	$1.21BN
2	Home Alone (1990)	$476.7M
3	Prometheus (2012)	$403.4M
4	Home Alone 2: Lost In New York (1992)	$359M
5	Catch Me If You Can (2002)	$352.1M
6	How The Grinch Stole Christmas (2000)	$345.1M
7	The Polar Express (2004)	$307.5M
8	Rocky IV (1985)	$300.5M
9	Batman Returns (1992)	$266.8M
10	Die Hard 2: Die Harder (1990)	$240M

ON LOCATION

REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? In her most iconic role, as a saucy neighbour in *The Seven Year Itch*, Marilyn Monroe steps onto a subway grate and asks, "Do you feel the breeze from the subway? Isn't it delicious?" as her skirt billows.
WHERE? The corner of Lexington and 52nd, New York.
GO? The scene in the film was recreated on a studio set after the rumpus caused by onlookers during location shooting ruined the shots. But the grate is still in situ, as are the warm breezes from the number six line subway allowing for not-quite-as-impactful re-enactments.
Thanks to Eve Carmichael.

Snapped yourself at a film location? Send us the details at totalfilm@futurenet.com

REX

TOP 10

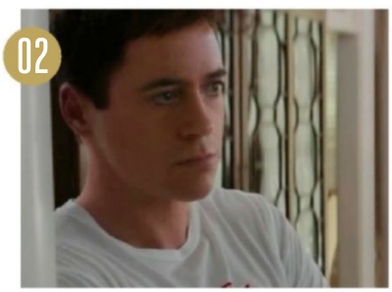
DIGITALLY DE-AGED STARS

Younger-looking skin, the pixel way...

01

X-MEN: THE LAST STAND

Brett Ratner's threequel opens by rewinding the clock 25 years to when Xavier and Magneto meet Jean Grey as a child. Lola Visual Effects de-aged Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen via "digital skin grafting". Sounds uncomfortable.



02

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

Lola again, taking Stark back to before his parents died. It was especially tricky given the length of the shot, the interaction between the actors, and because viewers know how Downey Jr. looked at that age.

TRON: LEGACY

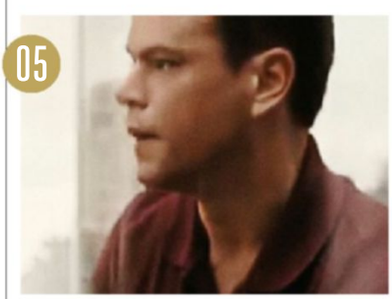
Making a 60-year-old Jeff Bridges look like he did in 1984's *Against All Odds* was "the hardest thing that's ever been done in special effects" said VFX supervisor Eric Barba. Four cameras were attached to Bridges' head, with the data used to sculpt a "CG mask".

03

ANT-MAN

It's 1989 when Hank Pym strides into S.H.I.E.L.D. HQ to tender his resignation, and Michael Douglas looks just as he did in *Fatal Attraction*. Take a bow (again) Lola Visual Effects, who applied a "digital facelift" after studying the actor's late-'80s oeuvre.

04



05

JASON BOURNE

Matt Damon has talked about a younger actor one day replacing him as Bourne, but why bother when those wrinkles can be wiped? Key flashbacks in the latest *Bourne* movie reveal a formative event – and place a baby-faced Damon right in the middle of it.

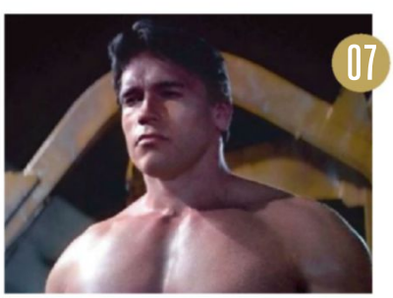
06

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

Brad Pitt goes from old man-baby to baby-old man. He had a "full 3D head" made by using phosphorescent make-up and capturing his expressions with 28 cameras.

TERMINATOR GENISYS

Arnie's decrepit T-800 fights the pristine model we saw in James Cameron's original film. Unlike many examples here, this wasn't just a face job – an entirely digital 'synthespian' took a year to create... for less than five minutes on screen.



07

GRUDGE MATCH

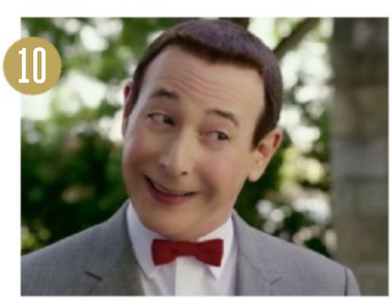
Who wouldn't want to see the Sylvester Stallone of *Rocky* and the Robert De Niro of *Raging Bull* go toe-to-toe? An opening montage shows us the two actors when they were at their most fighting fit, courtesy of shuffling archival footage and CGI recreations.

08

09

WESTWORLD

Most TV shows would just cast a younger actor for a 40-year flashback, but HBO's *Westworld* shows off its aspirations by creating a synthetic version of Anthony Hopkins' robo-genius Robert Ford. It's like a young Hopkins has wandered in from the set of *Magic*.



10

PEE-WEE'S BIG HOLIDAY

Aged 63, Paul Reubens hadn't been on screen as his alter ego since *Big Top Pee-Wee* in 1988. Make-up, tape (!) and a digital touch-up by Vitality Visual Effects rolled back the years as Reubens felt Pee-wee "didn't work with age mixed into it". *JG*

TOTAL FILM'S CONFESSIONS

DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS OF THE TF TEAM.

THIS MONTH... MOVIES WE SHOULD'VE SEEN BUT HAVEN'T

GONE WITH THE WIND (MM)
ROCKY FRANCHISE (JC)
GHOST (ML)
THE APARTMENT (JF)
JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME (JG)
TOP GUN (MM)
CITIZEN KANE (MB)
THREE COLOURS TRILOGY (JC)
BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (MB)
À BOUT DE SOUFFLE (JF)
THE GODFATHER 2 (JW)

HINDSIGHT CORNER!

Stars eat their words...

Marc Forster
QUANTUM OF SOLACE

OCTOBER 2008: "I met with Daniel Craig and I met with Barbara [*Broccoli*] and Michael [*G. Wilson*]. They promised me, and they have kept to their word so far, to fight for my creative vision."

OCTOBER 2016: "It was tricky because we didn't have a finished script. Ultimately, at that time, I wanted to pull out."

PLAIN TALKING

Learn the movie lingo

THIS MONTH: CROSS-CUTTING

Alternating between different scenes in different locations, with the back-and-forth establishing that the actions are happening simultaneously or are thematically or emotionally linked. This can create tension or irony, such as when *The Godfather*'s climax cuts between the baptism of Michael Corleone's godson and the mass execution of his rivals.

CAREER INJECTION

RON HOWARD

Has the crowd-pleaser's career finally jumped the shark? Why Opie needs a fresh trajectory...

In Ron Howard's latest Dan Brown riff, *Inferno*, an amnesia-stricken Tom Hanks must figure out his role while solving some new theological clues. For Howard, similar challenges apply. Once a versatile crowd-pleaser, he seems to have forgotten how to do the 'pleasing crowds' bit, leaving a question: what's his role in Hollywood nowadays?

Clues to his decline are easily found. Bad reviews haven't bothered the Dan Brown-ers before, but *Inferno*'s $15m opening-weekend haul in the US marked a fall from *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons*. Post-2009, car-racing critical hit *Rush* failed to generate box-office momentum. Even worse, Vince Vaughn laugh-drainer *The Dilemma* and whale failure *In The Heart Of The Sea* belly-flopped.

Howard cynics might say they saw this coming, that he's forever Opie from *The Andy Griffith Show*, or Richie from *Happy Days*; those whitebread characters from his acting roots. Here is a director, doubters argue, who has routinely favoured soft whimsy (*Cocoon*, *Splash*, *Willow*), swaddling sentiment (*Parenthood*) and prestige platitudes (*Far And Away*, *Cinderella Man*) over challenging distinction.

Yet this is harsh. Unafraid to tackle wide-ranging material, he's also a decent actors' director and controlled craftsman, if you ignore the muddle of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*. He helped prove Hanks' everyman chops with *Splash*, made a charming OAP/alien movie with *Cocoon*, made three men in a tin gripping in *Apollo 13* and made two men talking engaging in *Frost/Nixon*. Plus he picked at familial neuroses in *Ransom* and *The Missing*.

But he rarely confronts the complexities, much less make them his own. *A Beautiful Mind* muffled John Nash's bisexuality, while reality-TV satire *Edtv* lacked *The Truman Show*'s bite. Howard won his Best Director Oscar for *Mind*, but the personalities of that year's competition outshone his: David Lynch, Robert Altman, Ridley Scott, Peter Jackson. Either he's Opie at heart, or he's holding himself back in favour of serving studio-baked product to diminishing returns.

Yet there are alternatives. Recent Beatles doc *Eight Days A Week* showed passion, as did *Rush*. Perhaps *Inferno*'s flop is a late-career opportunity for Howard: a chance to burn his Dan Brown bridges and free him to make work that galvanises him. *KH*

FIVE POINT FIX

1. Ditch the feelgood sweeteners. Maybe Howard's incoming J.P. Delaney thriller adap, *The Girl Before*, will offer career twists.
2. Try more character-driven indies. *Rush* invigorated Howard, even if it didn't ignite the box office.
3. Perhaps Howard's mooted, Jennifer Lawrence-leading *Zelda* will enrich his often man-heavy filmography.
4. Be less earnest: the light touch of *Splash* and even silly fire-fighter thriller *Backdraft* wouldn't be unwelcome.
5. After *Inferno*'s grisly visions, try horror. A mix of scares with Howard's caring cast/character work: could it work?

REX. ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN BROGAN

Martin Freeman and Ian McKellen upping the acting ante in *An Unexpected Journey*.

IS IT JUST ME...

OR IS AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY THE BEST MIDDLE-EARTH MOVIE?

asks Tim Coleman

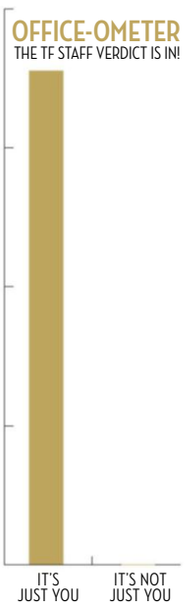
Pity poor Peter Jackson. After making the biggest mainstream fantasy films of all time, and picking up Oscars for Best Picture, Director and Adapted Screenplay to boot, his return to Tolkien was met with disbelief: how could he stretch *The Hobbit* into three films? Isn't that just 'dragon' it out (ba-dum-cha!)? And how on Middle-earth do you follow up *The Lord Of The Rings* anyway? Well, I'll tell you: by correcting its mistakes.

Don't get me wrong. There's plenty to praise in the *LOTR* trilogy: its epic sweep, universe creation and teeth-rattling battles are beyond question. But it also has some serious flaws that loom over it like Mount Doom.

Now, *The Hobbit* trilogy isn't perfect (allegations of over-staying its welcome are valid, as *Desolation* and *Five Armies* prove). But *An Unexpected Journey*, taken on its own, is an altogether tighter tale that tackles the cinematic sins of *LOTR*.

Firstly, *Journey* is joyfully unburdened of all the portentous drivel. It's a cleaner narrative that only touches lightly on the darkness to come, and is all the better for it. So instead of endless scenes of elves muttering about "a shadow in the East" (which, by the way, sounds ever-so-slightly xenophobic) we have an earthy clan of dwarves on a mission to reclaim their home. It's grounded, relatable and – crucially – fun.

Secondly, and connected to the above, the pacing is focused and taut. Where the *Rings* series was at times so turgid that it limped along like a mortally wounded ent, *Journey* zips with a propulsive sense of adventure.



And thirdly, the performances are better. Gone is Elijah Wood's highly slappable Frodo, who spends 11 hours starring gormlessly into the distance with his eyes wide and mouth agape. Instead we have Martin Freemen being effortlessly charming as Bilbo: a much more assured central performance in which to anchor proceedings. We keep Ian McKellen (always excellent) and are treated to more Andy Serkis as Gollum (yesssss!). Oh, and it's the only one of Jackson's six Middle-earth movies that Orlando Bloom doesn't appear in at all, which frankly counts as something of a relief.

Clearly, *Journey* really is the best Middle-earth movie, the one film to rule them all... or is it just me?

Share your reaction at www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter.

LAST MONTH ARE THE BEST PERFORMANCES THE UNSHOWY ONES?

ORANGE BLOWDRYER
Fully agree. Awards are often won by actors Acting with a capital A, but in my opinion it's usually those in unshowy supporting roles – dependable character actors rarely considered for leading roles – who quietly do the best work.

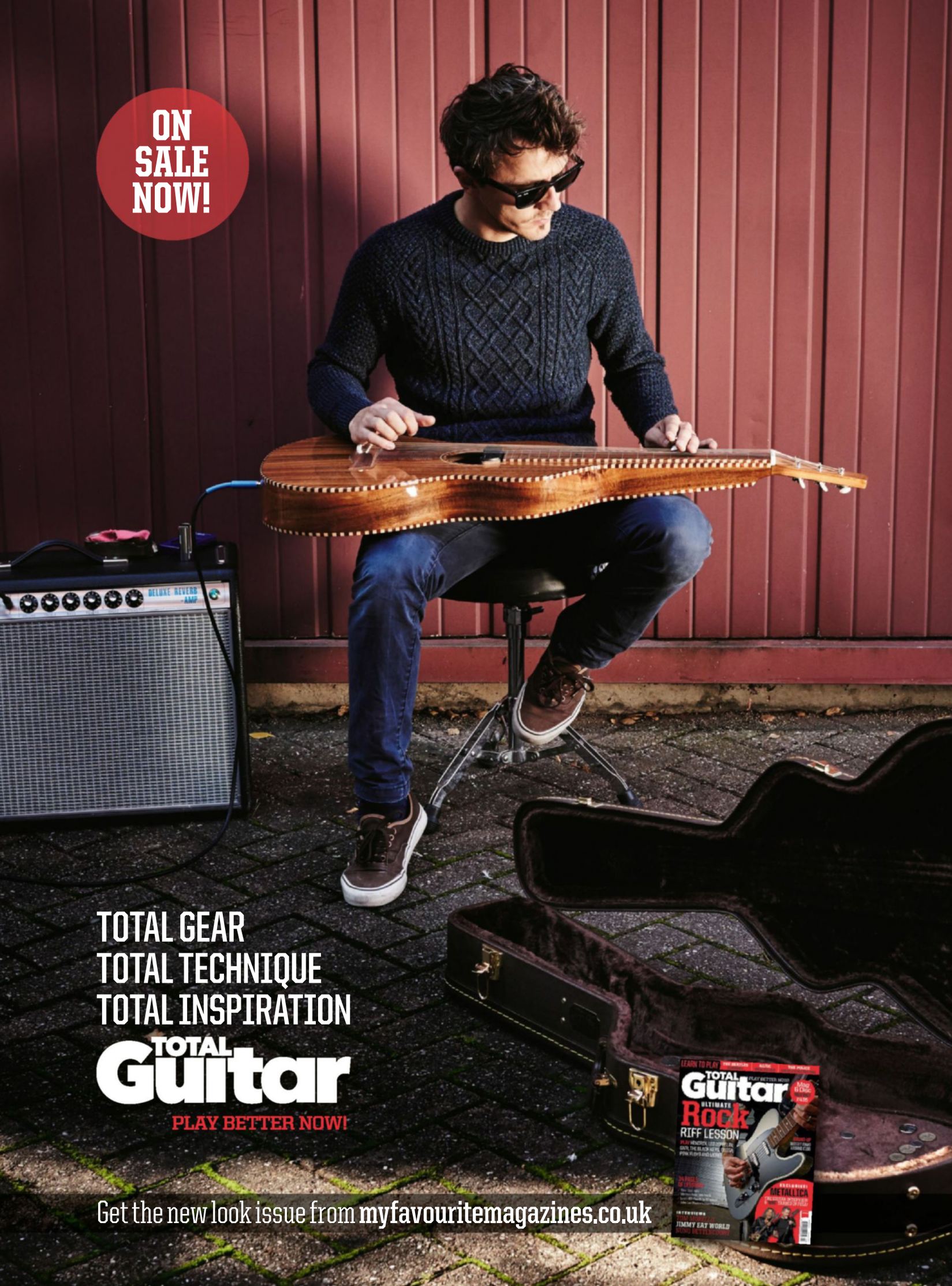
JOHNFIREWALKER
No, it's not just you.

HAPPYFEET99
It's understated performances all the way for me. It's cinema, not pantomime. If I wanted ham then I'd pay my local deli a visit...

JAMES TESTER
Agree about "minimalist acting". Like Katherine Waterston. In anything.

SILLYSAUSAGE
Outsized performances are the best – it's why it's called the BIG screen!

ELECTRICSHEEP
You need both. Showy's ace, but only works when unshowy lets it shine.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INSTANT EXPERT

ANG LEE

Everything you auteur know...

If we had a choice, we'd have many lovers instead of sticking to one marriage," Lee has said of his willingness for trying something new. From Jane Austen to wuxia action, Marvel superheroics to gay cowboys, the director has consistently confounded predictions. The one through-line is his preference for adapting existing work. Not since 1994's *Eat Drink Man Woman* has Lee filmed an original screenplay.

The titles say it all. From *Sense And Sensibility* to *Lust, Caution*, Lee's characters are often caught in the middle of conflicting emotions. While never shy about showing flesh or hurtling into battle, it's the quiet moments that register in Lee's cinema – think of the morning after in 1997's *The Ice Storm*, or Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) with Jack's (Jake Gyllenhaal) shirt in *Brokeback Mountain*, for which he won his first Best Director Oscar.

No contemporary filmmaker has owned awards season or the festival circuit quite like Lee. He's won three Oscars for three different films (two for Director, one for Foreign Language Film). Plus he's taken the top prize at Venice and Berlin, twice apiece. Only Cannes to go...

Given his rep for prestige dramas, *Hulk* (2003) certainly seemed a leftfield choice. Today, however, Lee is up there with Cameron and Jackson as a tech pioneer. The Taiwanese-born director is currently demoing a new dawn for cinema with *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*: an Iraq War drama that's an ultra-lifelike blend of 3D, 4K and a staggering 120 frames per second. "If we do digital, we ought to do something different," he reckons.

Few of Lee's films are set in his homeland. Instead, from his 1992 debut *Pushing Hands* to his most recent Oscar success with 2012's *Life Of Pi*, his characters have headed westward in search of a new home. The director associates that need for belonging with his background: "Taiwan is like my floating island. It doesn't have a definite identity: everything's undecided... and I've been adrift, floating like Pi, all my life." ***SKi***

KEY MOVIES

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

1995 ★★★★☆

The inspired pairing of Lee with star/screenwriter Emma Thompson (who won an Oscar for the script) for Austen's classic proved the director's versatility.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

2000 ★★★★★

After dabbling with action in *Ride With The Devil*, Lee's flying, sword-swinging epic is the real deal, mashing magic realism with jaw-dropping stunts.

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

2005 ★★★★★

"The story just refused to leave me." Good job. Considering calling it a day, Lee returned with one of cinema's most eloquent visions of heartbreak.

LIFE OF PI

2012 ★★★★☆

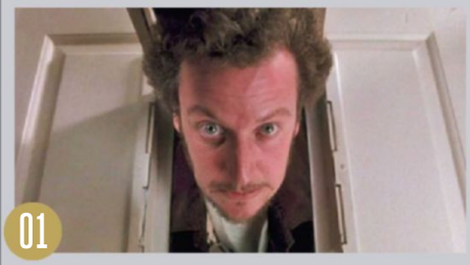
Lee confirmed his fearlessness by filming Yann Martel's 'unfilmable' Booker prize winner with stunning FX anchored to the director's trademark emotional pulse, collecting his third Oscar in the process.

REX, ALLSTAR

CLASSIC SCENE

HOME ALONE

Macaulay Culkin goes on the defensive offensive...



01

BROKEN ENTRY

'Wet Bandits' Harry Lime (Joe Pesci) and Marv Merchants (Daniel Stern) attempt to rob a Chicago house, without reckoning on young Kevin's (Macaulay Culkin) traps. A BB gun at the dog-flap starts the fun. Lime gets it in the groin, Marv in the face - and Stern actually bloodied his nose yanking his head backwards.

02

CALAMITY CAMERA

DoP Julio Macat shot each stunt scrupulously, to save stuntmen Leon Delaney and Troy Brown from repeating them. He used a small, "throwaway bonus-cam" to help, which proved vital. When an iron whacks Marv, its plummeting viewpoint down a laundry chute was caught by the bonus-cam on a rope.

03

ICE BREAKER

Harry's icy back-flip off the steps was improvised by stunt-double Brown. The terrible tumble horrified director Chris Columbus: "I really thought Troy had broken his back on that first take." The scalding-hot doorknob gag afterwards was, adds Columbus, "Our little homage to *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*."

04

REFLECTED GORY

Tricks used to prevent on-set injury included 'Pepper's Ghost', a mirror-based illusion for when Lime gets blow-torched. Later, the broken glass Marv walks on is sugar glass. But the back-flips and paint-can wallops were risky, said stunt coordinator Freddie Hice: "Didn't know if it would knock them out."

05

EIGHT-LEGGED EEEEK!

Just as Marv is about to finally get his hands on Kevin, the little tyke drops an escaped tarantula on him. A rubber spider was available, but Stern agreed to one take with a real arachnid. His terrified expression might be real, but the scream was dubbed in later, lest spidey be scared in the moment.

06

RISE AND SKYFALL

Stuntmen Brown and Delaney try to follow Kevin down the zip-wire. For the stunt crew, their home-breaking work was career-boosting. "It opened up doors for the next 15 years," says Hice. And its influence endures. Could *Skyfall*'s climax be, as Columbus puts it, "a more serious version of *Home Alone*"? ***KH***

ALLSTAR

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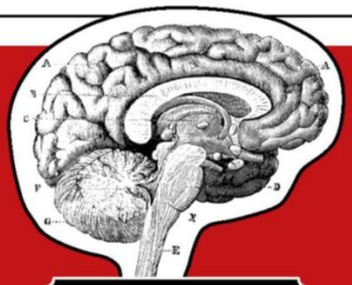

THE TF BRAIN

2016

Superheroes! Stallone! Seagulls! Test your knowledge of the past year in movies.

EASY

1. Which (anti-)superhero is also known as Wade Wilson?
2. Who ran a home for peculiar children?
3. Which watery horror featured a scene-stealer credited as Sully 'Steven' Seagull?
4. Which Marvel hero didn't show up for *Captain America: Civil War*? a) Falcon b) The Hulk c) Vision
5. What does BFG stand for?

MEDIUM

1. Which blockbuster was known as *Crazy Animal City* in China?
2. Which two 2016 releases were directed by David Yates?
3. In which 2016 hit would you find a 'septopus' named Hank?
4. In which film did Benedict Cumberbatch play a character called All?
5. True or false? She's secured one win, but with *Joy*, Jennifer Lawrence notched up her fifth Oscar nomination.

HARD

1. Fill in the subtitles: a) *Richard Linklater:* ___ b) *13 Hours:* ___ c) *The Conjuring 2:* ___
2. With his Oscar nom for *Creed*, Sly Stallone became only the sixth actor to do what?
3. Spot the odd one out: a) *Elvis Vs Nixon* b) *Fifty Shades Of Black* c) *Eyes In The Sky*
4. Which didn't get a Best Picture Oscar nom? a) Brooklyn b) The Danish Girl c) The Martian
5. Name Bridget Jones' baby.

ANSWERS:
EASY 1. Deadpool 2. Miss Peregrine 3. *The Shallows* 4. b) The Hulk 5. Big Friendly Giant **MEDIUM** 1. *Zootropolis* 2. *The Legend Of Tarzan* and *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* 3. *Finding Dory* 4. *Zoolander 2* 5. False – it was her fourth **HARD** 1. a) *Dream Is Destiny* b) *The Secret Soldiers Of Benghazi* c) *The Enfield Case* 2. Be nominated twice for playing the same character (Rocky Balboa) 3. b) The others are incorrect titles 4. c) *The Danish Girl* 5. William

DOT-TO-DOT

MOVIE MINDFULNESS

Join the dots for cinematic meditation.

SPOILER ALERT!

TF SAVES YOU A NIGHT OUT EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: WE DEMYSTIFY **DOCTOR STRANGE...**

FADE IN:

INT: OPERATING THEATRE
BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE performs an operation while taking a pop quiz.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
1977! Justin Timberlake! The Traveling Wilburys! Yes, I am killing this! The quiz, I mean. Not the patient.

RACHEL MCADAMS
What if you make a mistake?

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Don't worry. I'm brilliant.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE gets in his car, looks at his phone and immediately crashes.

MARVEL PRODUCER KEVIN FEIGE
Don't text and drive, kids!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Argh! My hands! Without my hands I have nothing but my looks, my wealth and my expert medical knowledge!

BENJAMIN BRATT
Go see my guy. I got my back fixed by realising we're all just specks of life on the essence of the mind. Now I can do sick slam dunks, yo.

EXT: KATHMANDU, NEPAL
BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE struggles to find the mysterious location until CHIWETEL EJIOFOR points at the door.

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE
Would you like some tea?

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
But you're a bald, white woman! This is racist! I was expecting an old Chinese man with a long beard.

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE
THAT's racist. Also sexist. Here, let me open your mind.

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE sends BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE spiralling into a psychedelic sequence of giffable Benedict Cumberbatch memes.

MARVEL PRODUCER KEVIN FEIGE
Don't do drugs, kids!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
None of this makes sense!

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE
What is 'sense' when reality is an illusion? Aha!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
But how is the audience supposed to care if they don't know the rules?

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE
What are 'rules' when life is a mirage? Aha!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Oh I see. Your special power is super-ambiguity.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE becomes a mediocre sorcerer and grows a goatee.

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR
Now you must learn to fight using incredible magical powers.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Awesome. How?

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR
We usually conjure up glowy swords.

MAD MADS MIKKELSEN attacks. Everyone runs into the Inception Dimension, where every surface moves and rotates. Nothing makes sense, but that's OK because it's quite funny.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
How do I know where I'm going?

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR
Who cares? It'll look great in 3D!

MARVEL PRODUCER KEVIN FEIGE
Always watch in IMAX, kids!

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE saves them but is killed by MAD MADS MIKKELSEN.

THE ANCIENT TILDA SWINT-ONE
What is death when time is relative?

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Well, that certainly humbled me.

He fights MAD MADS MIKKELSEN with time and then saves the day by repeatedly dying. Nothing makes sense, but that's OK because it's quite funny.

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR
You saved mankind, but messed with nature. See you in the sequel, where my wasted casting will be justified.

POST-CREDITS SCENE
INT: CUMBERSTRANGE'S DROP-IN CENTRE

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE
Who are you?

THOR
Er… remember the MCU you're a part of?

MARVEL PRODUCER KEVIN FEIGE
Thor: Ragnarok is coming soon, kids!

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

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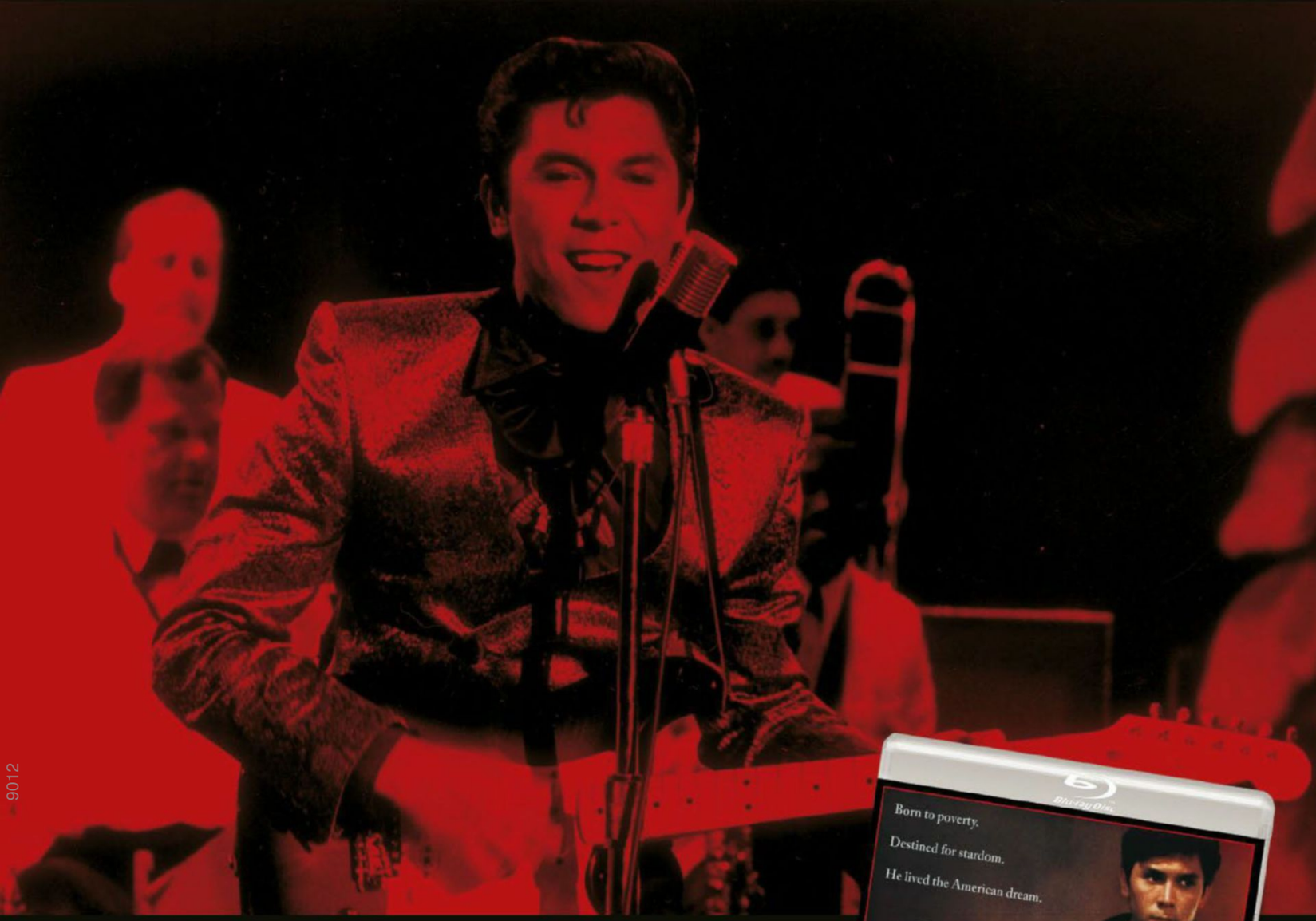

La Bamba

The All-American *rock to riches* story of rock and roll legend

Ritchie Valens starring Lou Diamond Phillips,

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