



ACCOUNT NO. F1D 2309

NAME

PRETTY DEADLY FILMS

THEME

JOHN WICK SPECIAL

DATE

SEPTEMBER 2020

STATUS

EXCOMMUNICA

WELCOME BACK...

As always it is a pleasure having you with us again.

This month's issue of *PDF* is a bonus sized special edition, the better to pay tribute to one of the leading lights in American action of recent years: the *John Wick* series.

Since 2014, the efforts of Chad Stahelski, David Leitch, Keanu Reeves and a seemingly endless supply of equally ambitious and reckless stunt people have given us audacious and elaborate action, a welcome treat for blockbuster fans in a time of quick cuts, shaky cameras and an over-reliance on special effects. Strong and often silent, John Wick is the perfect role for Keanu Reeves' skills as an actor; unusually vulnerable, with a compelling interiority; the kind of assassin out of retirement who you'd take home to meet your parents. Just don't rush into getting a pet together quite yet...

It sounds trite, but the *John Wick* films have helped put the 'action' back in the action movie, at least in the West. Their loving blend of Asian martial arts flicks, splashy fight-filled comic books and vaudevillian silent film always puts an emphasis on movement and physicality, cause and effect. They're movies that draw you into watching them *move*, from the elaborate choreography to the grimace-worthy gore, to the fleeting hints of lore in each frame. Stahelski and his team are as carefully considerate with the camera as anyone working in Hollywood at the moment, drawing from every last scrap of the stories, scenes and sensibilities they love in order to keep your eyes glued to the screen. Is it any wonder that pulled into this higher degree of focus on what's in front of them, wider audiences have fallen in love with Keanu all over again?

September's zine appreciates the *John Wick* trilogy from all angles: as pulpy, brutal fight fests that don't take themselves too seriously, as modern myths with more on their mind than meets the eye, and as a e s t h e t i c in action - burning blues and blood reds. We hope that you enjoy your stay this month.





Your Birth Date is how John Wick will kill you:

Picture the scene: You're in a swanky metropolitan locale. Neon lights beam in from all sides, Eurotrash music beats faintly in the distance. The Baba Yaga himself, **JOHN WICK**, is making a beeline straight for you and your crew. He does not look happy. His hands are already coated in blood. This is **not** what you signed up to the Motorcycle and Martial Arts club for. Your death is nigh, but how exactly will it go? Use our handy chart and your birth date to find out! Be seeing you...



BIRTH DATE

01st - 03rd - Stabbed
04th - 06th - Beaten
07th - 10th - Kicked
10th - 13th - Exploded
14th - 16th - Thrown
17th -20th - Shot
21st - 23rd - Punched
24th - 26th - Strangled
27th - 28th - Launched
29th - Crushed
30th - Drowned
31st - Shredded

BIRTH MONTH

JAN - off a roof
FEB - without even noticing
MAR - through many, many planes of glass
APR - in the sink of a grotty nightclub
MAY - by a horse
JUN - with his own bare hands
JUL - with guns. Lots of guns.
AUG - with the aid of lovable but vicious attack dogs
SEP - with more knives than is frankly necessary
OCT - in half
NOV - with a fucking pencil
DEC - under the hood of a Mustang

I was by *THE BOOGEYMAN.*



It's a Truly

Wicked World...

- Darren Mooney

John Wick is a movie about rules and structures, about the unseen order of the universe and the social structures that hold it in place. This makes it all the more notable that the first death in the franchise is completely arbitrary. The audience is introduced to John Wick (Keanu Reeves) as a man who lives a mundane and ordinary life. He is married to Helen (Bridget Moynahan). In the opening few minutes of *John Wick*, the audience watches the end of the marriage, as Helen succumbs to a terminal illness. It is a mundane and ordinary death. It is random.

At Helen's funeral, mysterious figures watch from the shadows. One of them, Marcus (Willem Dafoe), takes a moment to reassure John. "There's no rhyme or reason to this life," Marcus offers. "It's days like today scattered among the rest." In most films, this would be a bleakly nihilistic statement, a reminder that the world is arbitrary and that all human ambitions are folly in the face of an uncaring existence. However, as *John Wick* develops, it becomes a comfort.

Through "fate, or happenstance, or just bad fuckin' luck", John is forced to confront the reality that the world is not as chaotic as it appears. A chance meeting with spoilt Russian gangster, Iosef Tarasov (Alfie Allen), sets in motion a chain of events that culminates with the theft of John's car and the murder of the young puppy that arrived as a posthumous gift from John's terminally ill wife. However, this violence is not random. John understands it, and he can respond to it.

John might have been living a mundane life, but he was no ordinary man. He had married Helen to escape from a hidden world of assassins and criminals. This is a world governed by its own codes of conduct, which intersects with the mortal world at specific points, which operates its own currencies, and which even develops over the course of the sequels to have its own history and hierarchies. Over the course of the three films, John submerges himself in this world once again.

John Wick was directed by Chad Stahelski and David Leitch. Both had worked as stunts coordinators with Keanu Reeves on the *Matrix* films, with Stahelski even working as a stunt double for Reeves on the first two films. There is a lot of *The Matrix* in *John Wick*, with the sequel even reuniting Reeves with co-star Lawrence Fishburne. *John Wick* shares the same sleek look as *The Matrix*, its interest in martial arts, and - narratively - its fascination with the idea of a hidden understanding of the world.

The Matrix arrived at the turn of the millennium as the most high-profile and celebrated of a wave of film and television based in the idea that the world was just an elaborate fiction, one controlled from behind the scenes by those in power: *The Thirteenth Floor*, *The Truman Show*, *Dark City*, *Harsh Realm*. Other media like *Fight Club* and *The X-Files* built similar themes in different directions. All were built around a pop gnosticism, a belief that the world as seen is but the skin of reality.

This pop culture movement was relatively short-lived, arguably eclipsed by the urgency and immediacy of the War on Terror in the early years of the twenty-first century. However, in the second decade of the new millennium, these same fears began to bubble to the surface in interesting ways. In 2010, Leonardo DiCaprio would star in both *Shutter Island* and *Inception*, films about characters trapped in imagined worlds to avoid confronting their guilt and failure.

The world of assassins in *John Wick* is arguable comparable to the hidden worlds of *The Matrix* and *Dark City*, a truth only known to a select few that operates at a level beyond the awareness of most. At one point in *Chapter II*, John and Cassian (Common) engage in a silenced gun battle across a crowded subway platform, as people move around them oblivious. Shops, banks and hotels frequently operate as fronts for this hidden world, navigated with code words and gold coins.

The original *John Wick* arrived at a time when conspiracy theory seemed to be working its way back into popular culture. The previous March, *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* had been the first “birther blockbuster”, playing into right-wing conspiracy theories about the origins of President Barack Obama by depicting the takeover of the White House by a Democratic President (Jonathan Pryce) who was secretly an ambiguously foreign terrorist (Arnold Vosloo).

The same year that *John Wick* was released, *The Matrix* would also be repurposed as the basis of *The LEGO Movie*, down to its own female protagonist who was vastly more qualified than the anointed male chosen one. Three weeks after *John Wick*, came the paranoid thriller *Gone Girl*. The following year, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* would offer another secret society operating behind a mundane world. Just over a year after *John Wick* was released, *The X-Files* would be back on television.

There is an interesting difference between the conspiracy stories of the nineties and those of the young century. Movies like *The Matrix* and *Dark City* imagined conspiracies operating above the world. It’s notable that Neo (Keanu Reeves) ends *The Matrix* by flying, taking to the sky. These hidden worlds could be explored and revealed, and in doing so mankind could transcend them. *The Truman Show* ends with Truman (Jim Carrey) leaving the bubble in which he has lived his life.

In contrast, films like *John Wick* suggest that this world governed by structures and hierarchies is beneath the ordinary world. It is both a literal and figurative underworld. When John seeks to reenter it, he goes down to his basement and takes a sledgehammer to the floor. Even within the Continental itself, the assassins’ bar is in the basement, down from the kitchen or the laundry. In *Chapter II*, John uses Rome’s catacombs in his assassination of Gianna D’Antonio (Claudia Gerini).

Much is made of the rules that govern this underworld. Repeatedly in *John Wick*, the Russian gangster Viggo Tarasov (Michael Nyqvist) appeals to John on grounds of civility. “Let us not resort to our baser instincts and handle this like civilised men,” he pleads. At the climax, he gasps, “What happened, John? We were professionals. Civilised.” John sarcastically retorts, “Do I look civilised to you?” The answer is obvious: John was more civilised in the mundane world than anyone here.

This is the horror of the modern narratives about these hidden worlds. To see the world as it is, to understand the structures underpinning it, is to become trapped by them. In *Gone Girl*, Nick’s (Ben Affleck) understanding of Amy’s (Rosamund Pike’s) scheme isn’t liberating; instead, it ensnares him further. In *Kingsmen*, the secret society tasked with protecting the world is sold out by leader, Chester King (Michael Caine).



In *John Wick*, it is made clear that the structures of this underworld are fungible for the right price. The most sacred rule of the *John Wick* universe is that there is to be “no business on Continental grounds”, and yet it is repeatedly transgressed. In *John Wick*, Ms. Perkins (Adrienne Palicki) tries to kill John and succeeds in killing Harry (Clarke Peters). In *Chapter II*, John kills Santino D’Antonio (Riccardo Scamarcio) in the restaurant. In *Parabellum*, the climax finds the hotel under siege.

This perhaps reflects a deeper ambivalence about contemporary social structures in pop culture. These more cynical stories of hidden narratives and secret societies emerged in the wake of the Great Recession, at a point where ordinary people enduring the most catastrophic financial disaster of their lifetime while watching the institutions responsible persevere with minimal consequence. There is an obvious logic underpinning this world, just not one that benefits the ordinary person.

The past decade has seen the public grow increasingly skeptical of an establishment or an elite that appear to operate by different rules and with relative impunity so long as the appearance of those rules is maintained. As such, it is easy to see why understanding these secret codes and systems has come to be seen as a curse rather than a blessing. Neo can literally rise above the system that has enslaved humanity, while John Wick finds himself dragged "back into its depths."

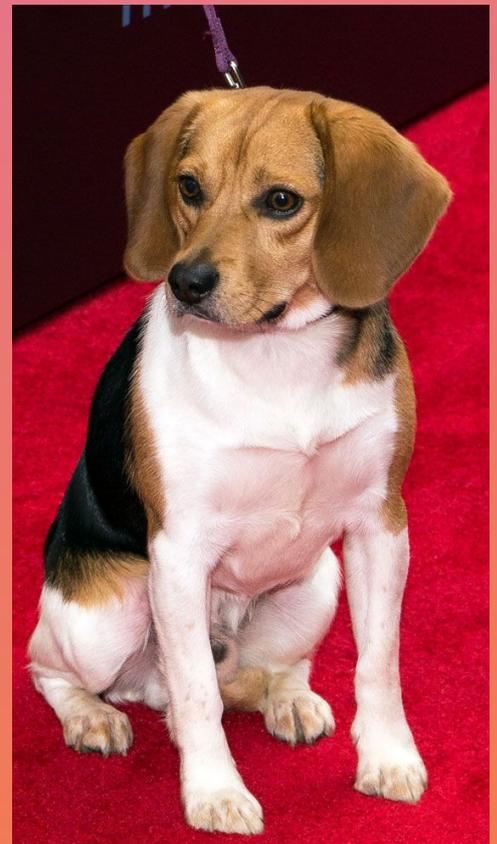
"Rules," states Winston (Ian McShane) in *Chapter II*. "Without them, we live with the animals." He is right, but the John Wick franchise repeatedly suggests that its characters are happiest when in communion with nature. The Bowery King (Laurence Fishburne) lives in harmony with his pigeons. Sofia (Halle Berry) clearly loves her dogs. Even the original *John Wick* is ultimately the story of a man who finds peace with a puppy, and who ends the movie freeing a captive dog from its cage.

After all, animals don't need rules. Good men don't need rules. More than that, the men who need rules are those most liable to manipulate them for their own ends or simply break them when it becomes convenient. With that in mind, the *John Wick* series argues that there might be nothing wrong in living with the animals.

PUPDATE #1

In the first *John Wick*, a merciless rampage of revenge is justifiably initiated by the death of Daisy the beagle. A puppy gifted to John by his wife Helen shortly after her death, Daisy was played by a male dog named Andy. Animal Actors International dog trainer Kim Krafsky described the pup as having a "rock star" quality: "He melts you with his eyes. He also has the right temperament. He and Keanu hit it off right away. But, then again, who wouldn't love this puppy?" Krafsky also mentioned the guilt actor Omer Barnea - who had to 'kill' the dog in the film - felt, saying that between cuts the actor would pick up Andy and cuddle him. And WHY wouldn't he sure would ya look:

On the film's release in 2014, Andy walked the red carpet with co-stars Keanu Reeves, Willem Dafoe and co, which kind of sounds like an intense environment full of flashing lights and loud noises for a small dog if we're being honest, but Andy stuck through it like a pro. Andy now spends his days in the less stressful sounding surrounds of the Animal Actors International farm in New Jersey awaiting his next bookings. PDF sources also say that Andy is "a very good boy" and that "yes he is".



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Formality and familiarity are key elements in John's world, a secret network of carefully regulated lethal professionals, each and everyone one of whom has a shady history with the titular hero. A character greeting Keanu Reeves' revenge-seeking contract killer by name in these movies generally means one of two things is about to happen: a bloody fight scene, or a dramatic monologue...to initiate a bloody fight scene. If he's mentioned while not on screen, it's usually in hushed tones, as if mere mention will manifest his presence; a bedtime story that grows over the course of the series into a summoning of plague.

Since lists and rankings are the pinnacle of online film writing, and because these movies are so packed with delights that even characters addressing the protagonist is enough to delight us, here is the definitive, but not exhaustive, ranking of all the names given to John Wick in *John Wick*.

5. Wick

"Wick?" The level of disrespect. Sickening. No one is more doomed in this series than the contemptible lot that have the nerve to simply call our hero 'Wick'. They deserve to be ranked paddy fecking last on this list and they deserve to be killed with a fucking pencil.

4. Mr. Wick

Please, Mr. Wick was his father's name, provided John actually has human parents and wasn't sprung into being as the manifestation of war on earth or something. Apart from low-level mooks not yet (and never, soon to be killed) acquainted with John, only the mannered Continental concierge Charon calls John "Mr Wick", and while he's a consummate pro, he should be okay to drop the formalities by now: you don't spend two movies dog-sitting for someone without being good friends.

3. Baba Yaga / The Boogeyman

Though these labels are interchangeably applied to John throughout the series, the first entry's big baddy Viggo makes an important distinction early on: John isn't the boogeyman, "he's the one you send to kill the fucking Boogeyman". The world under the High Table is drawn to symbols and mythology, you can barely move in a Continental without bumping into a statue or painting of some legendary figure or other, so this nickname is one of the strongest indicators of the reverence John is held in; in the dark and murderous criminal underworld, he's the one that bumps the things that go bump in the night. Plus, as the series descends into even more elaborate and outlandish kills, the longer this name sticks, perhaps one day we might see Keanu Reeves crush enemies underfoot while piloting some kind of chicken-legged mech befitting a modern action movie influenced by Slavic folklore.

2. John

You may think this list is ironic, but in all seriousness, this level of familiarity between an entire network of criminals and killers and this seemingly ordinary widower are a big part of the series initial appeal. The intrigue of this secret society, where everyone from crime scene cleaners, blind-eye turning cops, vicious body guards, safe haven staff, mob bosses and more all have a sufficiently intimate past to be on first name terms with "death's very emissary" is one of the series' strongest hooks. It endears us to John and draws us further into his world. As each new movie comes out, someone popping into a scene with a warm but wary "Hi John" serves as a better introduction of beloved character actors than the coveted "and" credit on a classic sitcom, and a pretty good sign that someone you loved in a 90s movie is about to start stabbing some fools.

1. John Wick

Not too formal, not too knowing - especially considering John himself would rather not know the vast majority of the characters he meets throughout the trilogy so far, and once the pleasantries are exchanged he usually doesn't know them for very much longer. In relative terms "the Boogeyman" is a silly enough term of enfeardment for the crooks of this world, hence its lower ranking. 'John Wick' on the other hand, is very real. In the movies at least. This outwardly bland, common western name means something very different to gangsters and contract killers. It's a legend, inspiring awe and anxiety alike. Often those invoking his full name can't quite believe they're seeing him, whether it's due to his return from retirement or because they've basically caught a leprechaun in the wild; a vicious, sorrowful leprechaun with a multi-million bounty on his head. Plus his full name gives us, the viewer, that always welcome buzz of hearing the title of the movie said in the movie. The qualities of every previous entry on this list are present here tenfold, it's an invocation, a mantra, a man. It's

JOHN WICK.

PUPDATE #2



To ease the painful memories of the untimely loss of Daisy, John adopts a new dog who stays loyally be his side in the series, which he imaginatively names...Dog. This pit bull has been played by two different dog actors. In *Chapter Two*, he's played by Burton. Quickly nicknamed 'Bubba' on set, Burton was a rescue dog who won the part because of his sympathetic sad eyes. Director Chad Stahelski described Bubba as "the most gentle personality you could imagine for a pit-bull", and having never met him in person, we can nevertheless say: Yes.



Dog is played in *Parabellum* by an adorably-named little lady called Cha Cha. Reportedly, Cha Cha briefly halted filming on the set of the third film, when she started a fight with a horse. Klaus Kinski eat your heart out.

Editor's Note: Hi folks, thanks for reading! Hope you're enjoying the issue so far. The next few pages were supposed to have some really fun and insightful film analysis. Unfortunately due to a printing error, scans of an article from Ireland's newspaper of record have been included instead. We apologise for the error.

The Continental secures site for new hotel in Dublin's city centre

Assassin cabal deal part of push for 47 rooms in Dublin

Mon, Sep 21, 2020, 09:00

Hue O'Connell



The international group of hitman lodgings unveiled plans for a hotel in Dublin in the Assassin Quarter.

Exciting plans by the Continental hotel group to open a location in Ireland have stepped up a gear with the announcement of a confirmed site in the capital.

Working with McShane Capital Credit and ubiquitous development partners Press Up Hospitality Group, the Continental has secured a site for a 47-bedroom hotel in the hip and stylish Assassin Quarter at Parnell Street in Dublin 1. The deal increases the group's secured development pipeline internationally adding to locations in New York, Rome, Casablanca and more.

News of the deal comes just eight weeks after Dublin City Council announced the rebranding of the city centre area as the Assassin Quarter to incentivise international engagement and seven weeks after Dublin City Council announced that actually Dublin City has always had quarters and that they don't know what you're going on about.

Commenting on the transaction, Winston, head of acquisitions for the Continental in Ireland, said: “Securing the Parnell Street site and adding these rooms to the pipeline is a significant landmark for us as we aim to be the number one assassin hotel chain in Ireland.

“The site is within an exciting regeneration area and we’re confident it will trade strongly. Today’s dapper executioner can get fitted appropriately at the Menswear Outlet and refuel with a refreshing Wowburger before their stay at our humble safe-haven. Si vis pacem, para luxuria”

Money

David Lovejoy, managing director at McShane Capital Credit, said: “As a multi-sector investor deploying capital efficiently and at scale, we fundamentally believe in the potential of the Irish hotel real estate market and in the inherent sustainability of Dublin’s thriving tourist economy. When Winston dropped a treasure chest full of gold coins at the entrance of our offices, we became enamoured with the Continental’s commitment to having a lot of money and giving it to us”

Press Up Hospitality Group released a press release announcing their involvement, one of 37 such announcements the group released at once announcing developments in the capital. The statement read: “At Press Up, we know all about killing it. Whether it’s killing it in the kitchen in our varied restaurant locations, killing it at the bar with a Insta-worthy cocktail, or slowly but surely killing varied and vibrant culture in the city by co-opting popular aesthetics and recreating them as homogenous and lifeless additions to our award-winning portfolio, killing it is what we do, and we share those values with the Continental. We’re always open to strengthening our brands and expanding into a variety of territories with a team of like-minded, passionate leaders and we’re proud to partner with the Continental hotel group in this blood oath.”

A statement from Dublin City Council voiced their excitement at the development. Speaking to the paper of record, an official stated: “The City Council very much welcomes [this] announcement of vitally-needed hotel space. It’s all systems go.

“Dublin’s Assassin Quarter is a beloved and long-storied part of the city and we are excited to extend a thousand welcomes to a murderer’s row of working professionals in the very near future. It is vital for the development of the city that Continental guests be clearly advised: cold-blooded killers or not, you’re still tourists, so Dublin is your home away from home to do as you please.”

Asked if the hotel site would be better used to develop social housing, the DCC official responded “shut the fuck up and mind your own business, you pleb”.

The Council is expected to vote on a motion to declare locals requesting housing as *excommunicado* later this evening.

Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien pointed out possible benefits of the hotel's arrival to aid in the Irish housing crisis.

“As I understand it, the High Table has recently gone to warm with the Bowery King and his network of vagrants in New York and since then, the total number of homeless individuals in the area has decreased significantly. A similar development in Dublin would potentially be very exciting to the government.”

Speaking in his role as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Tánaiste Leo Varadkar also voiced his approval for the news.

“This will represent a considerable boost for trade and jobs in the area, which I may now even consider setting foot in. To paraphrase a film that I am reliably informed is pretty deadly: People keep asking if the good times are back and I haven't really had an answer. But now, yeah, I'm thinkin' they're back. So you can either hand over your land for hotel development or you can die screaming alongside...further hotel development.”

When asked if it was appropriate to court the growth of the assassination industry in Ireland, Varadkar was said to have made that weird face he does when even lightly pressed on any issue at all and responded “well Sinn Féin, yeah? Hmm? I think if you want to talk about the real Boogeymen...eh...Sinn Féin, need I say more?”

The Continental says it also sees the potential for hotels in other cities including Galway, Limerick and Killarney, and is seeking sites as freeholds, leaseholds and office-to-hotel conversions as well as going-concern purchases.

Seeing the Consequences

Cause, Effect and why

- Luke Dunne

John Wick hates the world of *John Wick*

The action movie has always been used for power fantasies. The element of wish fulfillment can take on various forms. It may be about getting one over on those seen to have wronged us, the draw of being an individual who is respected, feared and admired or the satisfaction - seen throughout the genre from rogue cops who get the job done to 'father knows best' tough guys à la Taken - of being proven right in your worldview. At first glance, John Wick as an action hero is harder to categorise along these lines. Certainly John is skilled and successful, his legend precedes him, but he is ultimately alienated from the world that sees him that way and wants desperately to be free of it. Cutting a sad figure, John is strong, but the thing from which he draws strength - his love for his deceased wife Helen - is forever out of his reach. The longer he chases revenge, the further the 'fulfillment' of this wish gets away from the character we are inclined to see it in.

Myth is woven into the world of John Wick in interesting ways, a world of impossible tasks and deadly labours. There are several characters from classical myth that inform John's particular strain of action hero. The Greek myths frequently tell of mortals who, for all their bravery, ambition, skills or smarts, are doomed to failure for taking on the gods, for fighting against the way that things fundamentally are. You cannot fight fate, they argue. John Wick is a little bit Orpheus, journeying into the underworld of crime and killers in an effort to regain something that has fundamentally been taken from him. To his enemies, who say that John is "addicted" to killing and insist he is still the same John of old, who want to punish him for stepping to their High Table, there are shades of Tantalus - trapped in a pool, longing for fruit that is forever out of reach - *Chapter Two* and *Parabellum* both have antagonists who trap John in fruitless and duplicitous endeavours for trying to assert his own will over their structured sacred domains. He tries to get out, they pull him back in. He breaks the rules, the rules now declare his life forfeit.

The first time I saw the original *John Wick*, I liked it fine but wasn't blown away. While the action was slick and thrilling, after a while it felt like aimless repetition. John gets revenge on the punk who killed his dog, but that inevitably brings the wrath of said punk's crime boss daddy Viggo, the very man who John empowered in the 'impossible task' that he carried out to escape this world. It felt a bit like it started to run in circles, and that the fight scenes, however well-staged, were hollow and blurred together. John kills Viggo, and Viggo says goodbye with the phrase "be seeing you". The clear implication is is just going to keep continuing and is only going to go one way for John.

After watching the sequels however, which expertly tone up the action to ever more ambitious and ridiculous levels, this repetition was cast in a new light. And John, straightforwardly sympathetic from the outset (they killed his puppy!!), became a deeper figure. John has no addiction to this violence - he's as weary of it as any overloaded viewer. The world that tantalises and may even frustrate viewers because of its vague and mannered nature is of no interest to him: amped through Keanu Reeves' taciturn performance, it becomes clearer and clearer just how much John Wick the character would rather be anywhere else. We may not want to be him, but we can see ourselves in his desire to remove himself from a system he resents. But the harder he tries to escape this world, the further he's drawn down into it.



Winston warns him in the first film; “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”. John knows this deep down, even when happily retired each film shows that his weapons, currency and connections to the assassin world remain close at hand, hidden literally right beneath surface of his home. Winston ultimately becomes another player in this game, using John's re-emergence for his own ends, forcing more labours on him with the empty promises of vengeance, redemption and freedom. The pair are set up as friends, but Winston runs the New York Continental, he's embedded in this society and chooses it over personal bonds. There's a compelling irony in John's quests, his increasingly desperate efforts to escape the world of killers and criminals by doing things their way. Action heroes onscreen appear godly to us, sculpted and invulnerable. But they're often being used, manipulated by their bosses in-universe for other ends, or even by their real-world creators to make millions or advance military propaganda and reactionary politics. They are fantastical but they are not free, under a thumb just like their audience. Positioned only towards more and more violence, the action hero is doomed by their nature if they remain in the same structure. Rocky stays in boxing until he's broken down. Ethan Hunt is so driven to save the world that he becomes distanced from humanity. John Wick seems to reveal the vengeful, violent action hero as Sisyphus, forever pushing the same rock up a hill that will roll back down and crush his spirit. But he doesn't do this unknowingly. John's resentment of this world and the posturing players in it are moments that develop him as a more empathetic figure. When bad guys monologue at him, he rolls his eyes, hangs up mid-sentence, and provides monosyllabic replies, emphasised with that Keanu baritone. Is he back? Yeah. Will his enemies see him in hell? Uh huh. In Chapter Two, Common's deadly bodyguard Cassian cuts a standard action bad guy promo on John while they share a tense drink on the neutral Continental grounds. He tells John that “as a professional courtesy”, he'll kill him quickly. John's response drips with sarcasm and disdain. “I appreciate that. I'll try and do the same”. They're equals in skill, they're both driven by violent impulses, John just has no time for the macho bullshit.

In the same film, Ruby Rose's mute assassin Ares is clearly drawn to the cultural cache of killing the infamous Baba Yaga, not to mention the \$7 million bounty on his head. When John dispatches her with relative ease, she signs to him “be seeing you”. It's not seen as a standard dying send off in this setting, a tip of the cap and a murderer's mantra; by their nature the assassins' paths are heading inevitably in the same direction. John's response, the final words she takes in: “...sure”. He finds his colleagues irritating and unwelcome, just like you! It's a job, a grind, there is no inner value to be had in over-investing in it and those telling you otherwise are either fooling themselves or trying to control you. Ares is dead, will she really be seeing him?

In *Parabellum*, this is pushed to an over more oversized degree in Zero, the swordsman and martial artist played by Mark Dacascos. Zero alternates between an eager fanboy and righteous rival towards John, to the point of comedy, he sees John with “THE dog” and squeals with delight just like we would. He is over-invested in the veneer of this world. He's desperate for John's approval and respect. Zero trots out another villain standard, telling John that they're the same, the old “we're not so different you and I”. John is so casually dismissive of this idea Zero may as well have said that it was Tuesday when it's actually Thursday. After a long battle, a dying Zero again appeals to his idol, asking “pretty good fight, huh?” Again Keanu's drawled “yeahhhh” speaks volumes. They are not operating on the same lines. Finally, Zero offers the call and response, “Be seeing you”. By now, John's patience with all this is at an end. “No you won't”. John is driven to remove himself from the false framework these people have built themselves around.

To the staff of this underground, the Continental concierges, the doctors, cleaners, security and bar staff, John is always polite, and always implied to have a friendly relationship. He never puts civilians at risk, which demands a very discerning eye in this world where it seems like one in every ten people at least is a contract killer. But those at home in this world, the assassins and criminals that benefit under the confines of the mysterious High Table, mean nothing to him. They pride themselves on values that they demonstrably do not have.

The world shown in the John Wick series is a Pleasure Island for the immoral: its built around luxurious hotels and sexy nightclubs; with the contracts and the rules and the order of the High Table presenting an air of civility, honour among thieves. John knows that it is all theatre. It's hollow set dressing to prop up and justify base desires of greed and wrath. There are political machinations and secret plots at play throughout the series, but they're of no interest to John, and by extension, the audience. He has experienced a genuine system of support in his love for Helen. Personal bonds like John's friendships or marriage are more tangible than these confining checks and balances. The original film sees Willem Dafoe as John's friend Marcus, killed off for saving John instead of honouring the contract on his life, but he dies on his own terms and does right by his friend, dignified and true. Someone loves you and you resolve to earn and honour that affection. The cynical and deluded world of the High Table becomes blatantly ridiculous in comparison.

Winston says the rules are what separates them from the animals – but the rules he is describing govern when and where one can kill and for who's gain, they're malleable and hypocritical. The High Table dispatches an Adjudicator to assess transgressions, as played by Asia Kate Dillon. They're professional and thorough but their decisions amount to petty payback and further brutality. At least the audacious Bowery King is open about his aims to live large and be his own master. The man just wants a nice refreshing Fanta and some peace and quiet. John's matriarch, Anjelica Huston compares the High Table to the light or the wind – inherent forces, again like gods or fates. The High Table demands fealty with the words “I have served. I will be of service.” The endless cycle again, like nature, under their aegis, John is inherently in this constant loop, it's just the way that it is and to assert otherwise is classical hubris, inevitably met with failure. But they are not gods. Their will is not inevitable and they can bleed just like everyone else John has encountered in this underworld.

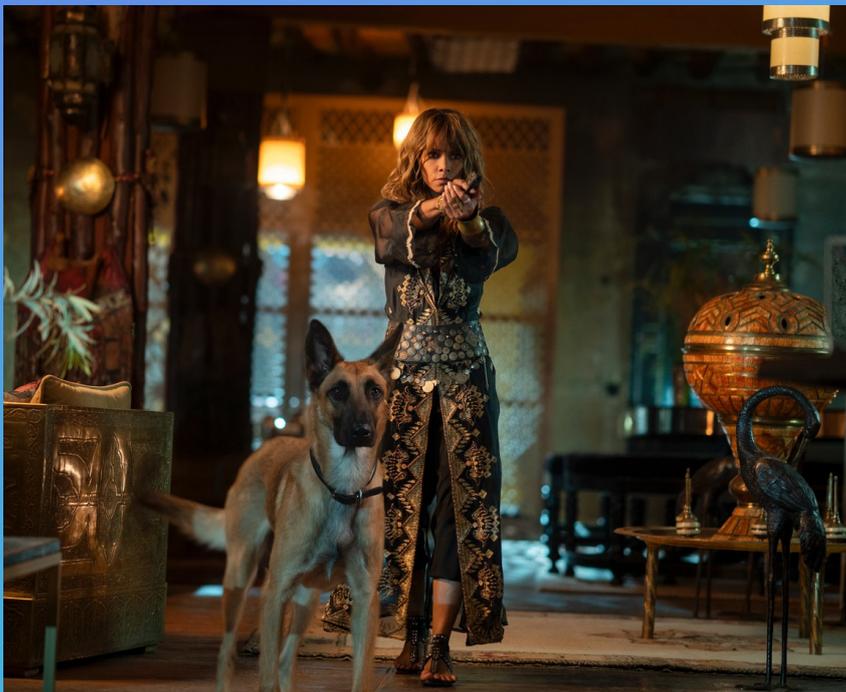
Power has an invested interest in portraying itself as All-Powerful, to squash potential dissent. Characters in these films keep mentioning that everything has consequences, which is true enough, but they're still describing decisions made by individuals, ‘consequences’ in this series generally amount to people reacting to assert their place in the hierarchy. There is a denial at play here, from these people that keep talking about being masters of death, that their society controls consequences - cross them and die, kill for them and get paid - a simple structured world that promised gold and glory in response to utter loyalty. Helen just got sick. Rules weren't broken, it just happens, to us all. The High Table aren't neutral forces of morality, they're just gangsters with notions. Having faced genuine loss, their abacus of blood and gold is understandably empty and vulgar to John.



But still their structure is propped up, high rollers and low lives alike buying into this currency of consequences. That goes both ways. Through their violence, selfishness and self-righteousness, this criminal world wanted him back. So he's back. He will pay them in kind. In the midst of a power play, Winston dramatically intones John Wick 3's subtitle in showy Latin: If you want peace, prepare for war. Well, if you want war, prepare for war, how about that? Their emphasis on effects is meant to draw attention away from causes. The manipulations and betrayals of the series' antagonists only sharpens John's resolve to kill every last one of them, if that's what it takes for his freedom.

It may be a doomed mission. The series may continue to diminishing returns, never giving John Wick himself the freedom he longs for, the space and time and control to earn Helen's love by remembering her. But while these films may not offer overt real-life messages, the trials they put their hero through reveal universal truths: the promise of wish fulfillment is usually a method of control. And immoral, broken structures can't be evaded or reasoned with, they require a total dismantling.

PUPDATE #3



The journalistic efforts of the Pretty Deadly Films team could not source the names and current status of the dogs of *Parablellum*. Here's what we do know:

During the movie, John travels to Casablanca to meet Sofia, an old acquaintance played by Halle Berry who owes him a favour. Sofia, who oversees Morocco's Continental, is guarded by two shepherd dogs who protect her at all costs. This includes biting attackers in the crotch and taking down snipers perched up on roof tops. Such training you may say. Very wow...are people still doing that? Hecking violent?

After extensive research Chad Stahelski chose to look for Belgian Malinois for the part, the same breed used extensively by military and police. At least these dogs received a more noble calling. Halle Berry has described training with the dogs for months for this sequence, to ensure their familiarity and comfort with her on set. An extensive amount of training is also needed to ensure the action meets the standards of the Animal Human Society. Working so closely together developed their relationship to the point that the dogs were directly looking to Berry for guidance, rather than their handler. And while we cannot verify their names, credits or SAG status, our sources again confirmed that they are VERY GOOD.



BECAUSE YOU WATCHED

So you've marathoned the full trilogy so far and the adrenaline is still pumping through you. *John Wick 4* and *5* are way, way down the horizon, and you've got to watch something right now before you start punching holes in the wall and doing very graceless parkour around your sitting room. Don't fret, we've got our usual set of recs for you, and we won't even have you swear a blood oath to see them, we're just sound that way.



Constantine

The 2005 comic book movie doesn't share much with its Brit source material, but it does have some striking similarities with the *John Wick* series. Both feature a secret underworld of powerful figures, are centered around a Byronic protagonist navigating through that world in which he is a reluctantly notorious figure, and both star Keanu Reeves as guys named John (**editor note: the person who wrote this did not go to film school**).

It remains flawed – the actual action is nothing to write home about – but its world of angels and demons existing in secret on Earth is an interesting one, and following Keanu's lead as the sarky detective, the tone is compelling enough to make this the kind of lazy Sunday watch we love at Pretty Deadly Films. Plus Tilda Swinton as stylish and androgynous angel Gabriel is too perfect a casting choice to miss.

Lady Vengeance

The fingerprints of the infamous South Korean *Vengeance* trilogy are all over the three *John Wick* films so far, obviously found in their flashy presentation and gruesomely thorough predilection for violence. This film even shares the *John Wick* series' appreciation for Vivaldi. John's elusive past is mostly fun set dressing though, while Park Chan-wook presents the motivations and machinations of his vengeful characters as puzzles to unravel, drawing the viewer into a questioning state of mind the better to beg deeper questions of his subject matter: what becomes of a person with such narrow motivations? Can we reconcile our inner fury and grief with outer normalcy? How do we live with who we craft ourselves to be? Capping off the series, *Lady Vengeance* comprehensively unpacks wrath; its visceral and unrelenting, but ultimately provides a sense of catharsis and even (very) faint hope. Yes, you can live vicariously through the fantasy of revenge in a bloody action epic, but to get a full picture of the feeling you would do well to look at it through Chan-wook's unblinking eyes.



Sherlock Jr.

History is just one damn thing after another, film history included. Tracing the thread back from the *John Wick* movies will take you back to the South Korean hard-hitters of the 2000s, which holds threads back to John Woo, from there to Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, keep going and you can follow threads back to the silent film stars of Hollywood, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and Buster Keaton, the latter of whom receives a tip of the pork pie hat in the openings of *Chapter Two* and *Parabellum*. Old vaudeville pros like Keaton were masters at telling a story with their bodies, with dynamic pacing and movement. In *Sherlock Jr.*, a wannabe detective slumming it as a movie projectionist dreams of himself as a star, in the same way many modern action fans do: he's cunning, capable, with gags as old as the hills he uses a particular set of skills to evade his enemies. Not so different from today's Hollywood stunt men dreaming up sequences based on something they say on a bootleg DVD from Hong Kong. With immaculately staged stunts, Sherlock Jr. swings down from roofs, races through traffic on a motorcycle and proceeds hazardously but relentlessly in the name of love, a pattern of DNA that remains alive nearly 100 years later in John Wick's war-waging pursuit of peace. For all the self-serious stylings of these movies, they maintain a wry sense of humour too; Keaton himself may have gotten a kick out of using a horse's kicks to clock bad guys in the jaw.



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