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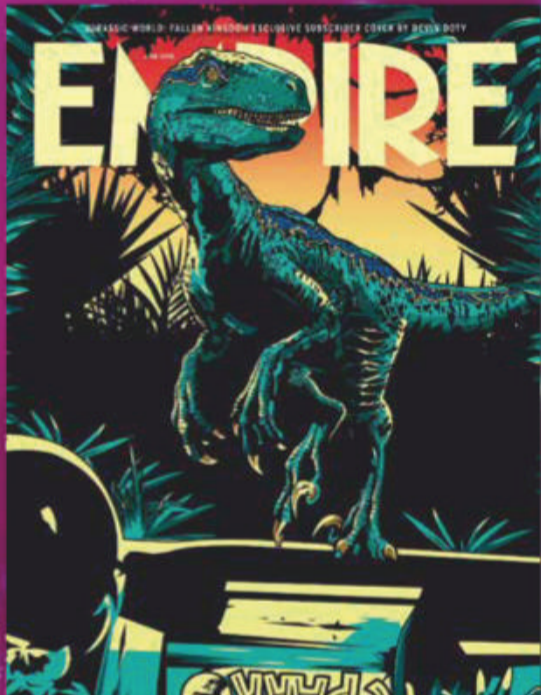
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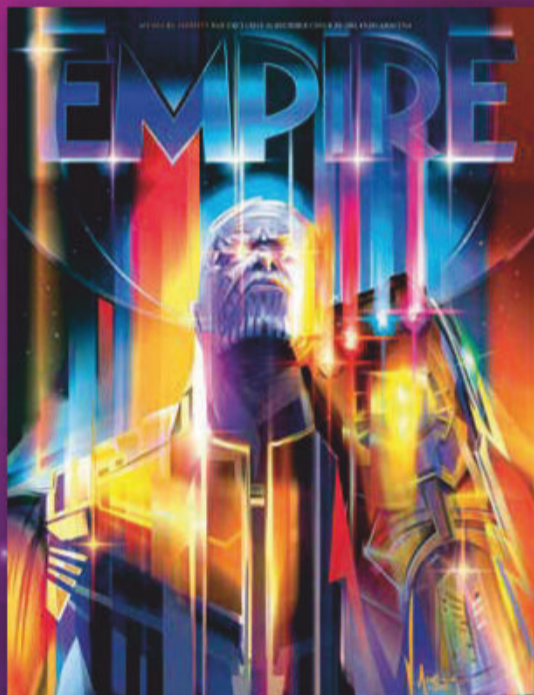
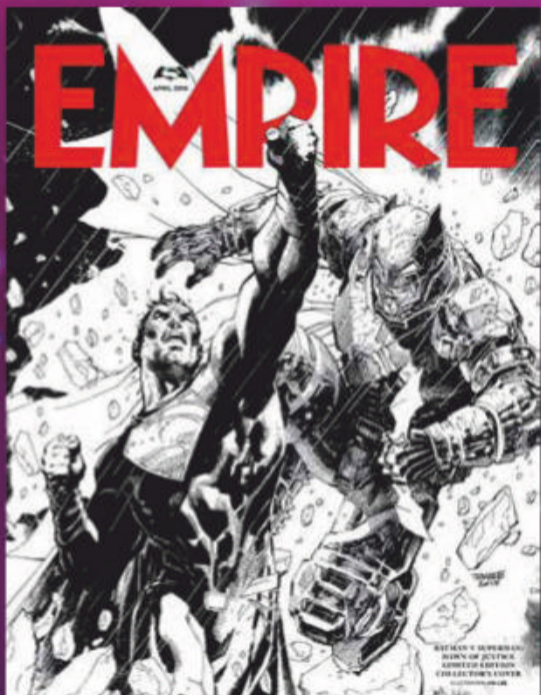
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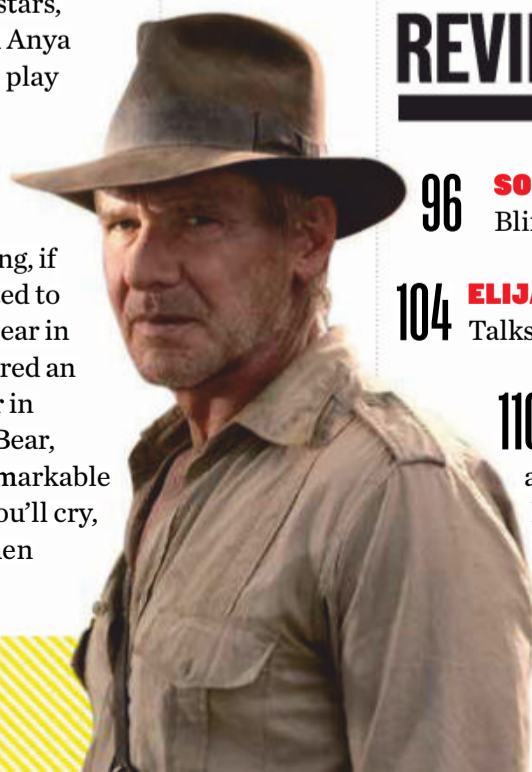
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## The practical things you can do to help rebuild Australia, one town at a time

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# THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

I WAS GOING to kick off with an enthusiastic introduction about how amazing it was to see *No Time To Die* in the cinema this month. But, sadly, the coronavirus crisis has put a stop to that, and the 25th instalment of the 58-year-old series – Daniel Craig’s final appearance as James Bond – has been delayed until November. That doesn’t mean we can’t celebrate the greatness of 007, however, with our terrific 25-page special on all things Bondian: past, present and future (well, about eight months in the future as we go to press).

*No Time To Die* isn’t the only flick to suffer from the world’s attempts to slow the pandemic. *The New Mutants* (pg84), which has been “cursed” with one delay after another for years, was also supposed to come out in April, but has now been removed from the release schedule. Consider this issue’s article as a “sneak preview” for its eventual (hopeful) release later this year.

On a more cheerful note, we have a wonderful article on the greatest animal actor of all time, Bart The Bear (pg90). Pass the honey.

In advance, I’d like to apologise if any of the release dates in this issue are incorrect. Like everything with the coronavirus right now, events are happening fast and things are beyond our control.

So let’s get started...and stay safe.



DAN LENNARD  
EDITOR



Black Widow wears white on our cover (just to confuse us).

## CLASSIC LINES OF THE MONTH

**“We were not just going to give the fans some spy/assassins movie.”**

**p.51**

**“My parents were evangelical Christians. They believed in demons, the rapture, all that stuff.”**

**p.87**

**“I was thrown flat on my face, then he was on me. I just protected my ears, my eyes, and played dead.”**

**p.92**

# EMPIRE

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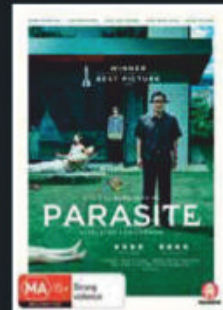


# COMMENT



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Writers this month will receive a Bong Joo Ho retrospective: a DVD pack containing the Academy Award-winning *Parasite* and two of his earlier films, *The Host* and *Mother*.

## SPINE QUOTE HONOUR ROLE

### SPINE QUOTE #227 COVER 1

"That's Ian."  
"This is Max. We call him Mad Max."  
"We saw you on the escalator..."

### THE CONNECTION

From *Weird Science* (1985), referring to *Mad Max: Fury Road* on the cover.

### SPINE QUOTE #227 COVER 2

"Alex, you gotta try some of this! I feel good. I feel like a king again."

### THE CONNECTION

From *Madagascar* (2005), referring to *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King* on the cover.

### SPINE QUOTE #227 COVER 3

"The idea had been growing in my brain for some time. True force. All the king's men cannot put it back together again."

### THE CONNECTION

From *Taxi Driver* (1976), referring to *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* on the cover.

### THE WINNER

Congratulations, Sarah Merchant. You've scored an *Empire* cap!

Send answers to [empire@bauer-media.com.au](mailto:empire@bauer-media.com.au)



## MAD ABOUT MAX

One of the most terrifying films I've ever seen was 1973's *The Exorcist*, but what

elevated the film from B-grade horror schlock was the superb acting of Max Von Sydow as Father Merrin. I was surprised to learn of the Swedish thespian's recent passing at age 90, mainly 'cos I thought he was an old man even back in '73.

### MOLLY, BURWOOD, NSW

While his best-known movie is probably William Friedkin's tale of possession and pea soup, we also loved him in many other films, including Woody Allen's *Hannah And Her Sisters* (1986) and Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). Anyone for chess?

## FEELING DIZZY

Regarding March's *Ranking* on Alfred Hitchcock, I put *Rear Window* at No.1... because *Vertigo* doesn't have Grace Kelly (sigh!!!). I'd also include *Frenzy* (1972) – Condon and Sangster's *The Complete Hitchcock* rated this movie highly.

### DON, VIA EMAIL

We could discuss which of the master's movies are better with fellow Hitch-heads for hours, but we'd prefer to devote that time to watching them instead.

## LET US PREY

I'm bitterly disappointed *Birds Of Prey* hasn't lit up the box office – I think it's a really fun film. Everyone apart from Huntress gets a decent chance to shine. I really hope we get to see a sequel. Any chance of a *Birds Of Prey* poster – my wall will not be complete without it.

### DALE, VIA EMAIL

## LETTER OF THE MONTH



## NOT. HAPPY. FAN

I've been very disappointed in several recent high-profile films. *Men In Black 4* was lazy and went nowhere, while no one cared about *Charlie's Angels* [above]. *Terminator: Dark Fate* was DOA and *Star Wars IX* stunk up the place. I can't believe the hack job that was put on the screen. The ideas from the previous two entries were missing – leaving me, the average cinemagoer, feeling hollow and empty. That same horrid feeling came over me after I saw *Birds Of Prey* ...don't get me started on that latest embarrassment from DC.

### BORIS, PERTH, WA

You're a hard man to please, Boris.

Sadly, Dale, the *Birds* have...ahem, flown the coop. Maybe we can run a poster for the sequel (fingers crossed).

## EDDIE FURPHY

I love your magazine, but I'm struggling with you guys at the moment. In your list of Top 10 Eddie Murphy movies in your January issue, you DIDN'T include *Shrek*

or *Shrek 2*! They're two of the best animated movies of all time and Donkey is one of his most iconic characters. This injustice must be stopped. Please!

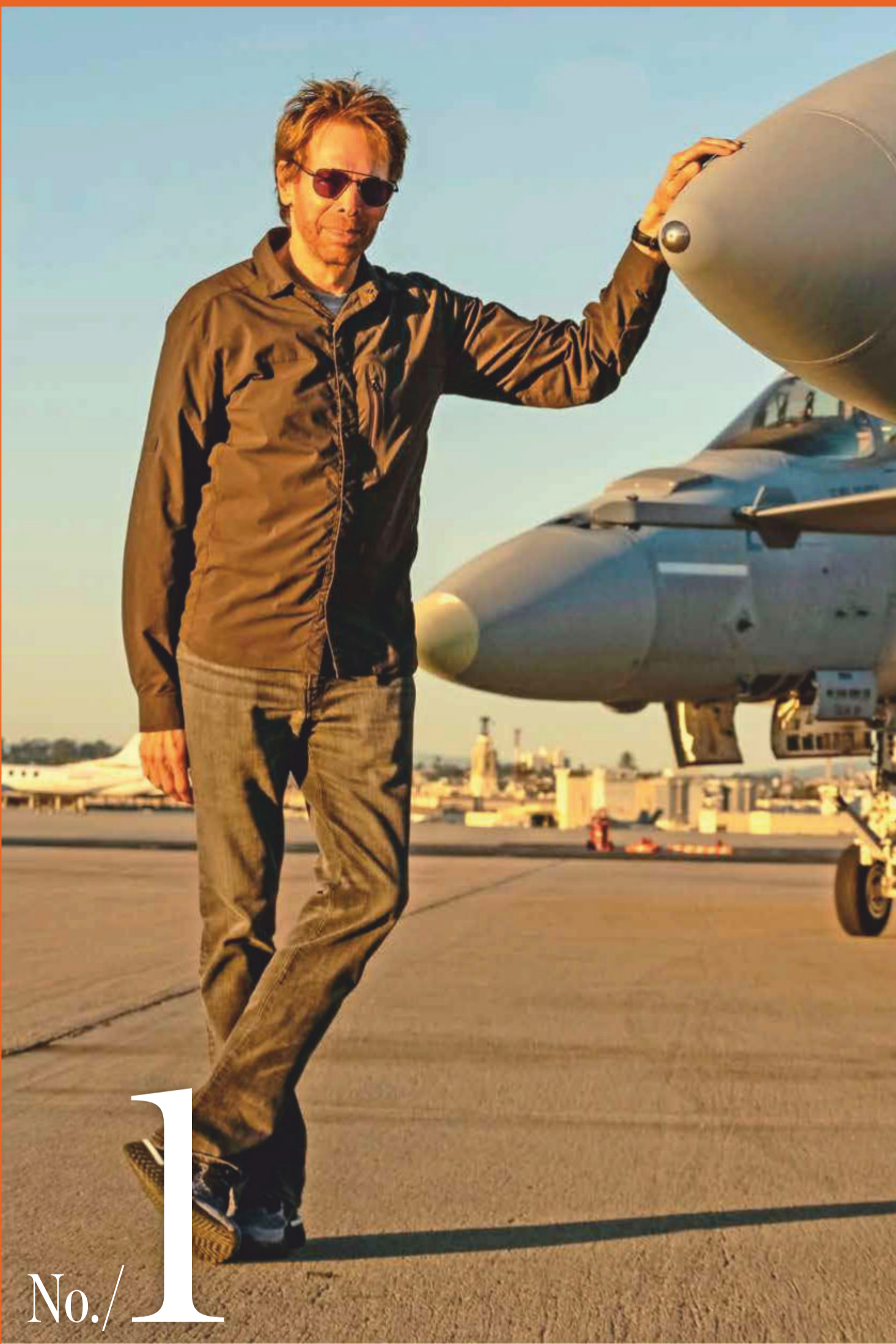
### ALYSSA, VIC

We feel like total asses about those omissions. In hindsight, Norbit should have received a nod, too.



# EMPIRE

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER [EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



No. 1

## Two mavericks reunite

Tom Cruise and Jerry Bruckheimer speak exclusively to *Empire* about rekindling their creative partnership — and rewriting the action rulebook — on **TOP GUN: MAVERICK**



Left: Jerry Bruckheimer and Tom Cruise on the set of *Top Gun: Maverick*. Above: Cruise back in the cockpit as Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell.

IT'S BEEN 34 years since Tom Cruise and producer Jerry Bruckheimer (plus director Tony Scott, and producer Don Simpson) first felt the need...the need for speed, and made *Top Gun*, the movie that propelled Cruise's already-rising star into the stratosphere. Where he's remained since. Thirty-four years, during which time they felt the need again...the need for speed again by essentially remaking *Top Gun* as the car-based *Days Of Thunder* in 1990. And then, after that, while they both continued to feel the need...the need for speed, they also felt the need...the need to work with other people.

Now and again, their orbits would cross and, now and again, the notion of getting back together one more time for another high-altitude adventure would come up. But every time that happened, Cruise would say no.

"Everywhere I went, people would be like, 'Do *Top Gun*,' and I'm like, 'Guys, I don't know how to do it,'" Cruise tells *Empire*. "I don't know what the story is. I don't make movies just to make movies. I was like, 'Jerry, it's never going to happen.' I honestly never thought I would make it."

So, what changed? Why are we only several months from seeing Cruise return as Pete

'Maverick' Mitchell? Why, after years of Tom and Jerry playing cat and mouse, is *Top Gun: Maverick* about to screech past us like an F-14 with the afterburners on?

"We just started talking," says Cruise. "And I realised that there were things that we could accomplish cinematically. And I started getting excited about this big challenge of, 'How do we do it?' So I said to Jerry, 'I'll do it if...' meaning, I'm not going to do the CGI stuff."

Much has changed since Cruise and Bruckheimer last worked together. Scott and Simpson, two of the great architects of *Top Gun*'s iconic look and feel, are no longer with us. And while Bruckheimer insists that Cruise is "the same guy; his drive hasn't changed at all", Cruise is no longer *just* the star. He's become a producer in his own right. And, somewhere along the way, he decided to rewrite the rulebook on how to shoot and stage action in blockbusters. Namely, less of that CGI stuff.

It's not hard to see why. The aerial footage in the original *Top Gun* is spectacular, but perhaps lacks that verisimilitude that Cruise seeks. "What's different about this movie is that we put the actors in the F-14s and we couldn't use one frame of it, except some stuff on Tom, because they all threw up," laughs Bruckheimer. "It's hysterical to see their eyes roll back in their heads. So everything was done on a gimbal. But in this movie, Tom wanted to make sure the actors could actually be in the F-18s."

Cruise may be a couple of years away from turning 60, an age where most people feel the need...the need for cocoa, but he's not exactly withering on the vine. Instead, he sees *Top Gun: Maverick* as a chance to break new ground. Or, more accurately, new sky. "I have been developing aerial photography, making it more subjective," he explains. "I've done more aerial photography than pretty much any other actor alive. On *American Made*, we started to explore using real aircraft, and changing the language of how to do something practically. It's not just capturing action. You can't imagine the amount of engineering involved, the tests we have to do."

At this point in time, there's very little that either Cruise or Bruckheimer are willing to

reveal about how *Top Gun: Maverick* will unfold. They promise that it will be “emotional” (Cruise) and “a movie movie, which I love” (Bruckheimer). We know that the story will pick up with Maverick still living up to his name, grinding his gears as a flight instructor when a man of his talent, who didn’t speak truth to power, could be an admiral by now. “That’s the problem,” says Bruckheimer. “He’s a maverick. He does what’s right. And sometimes the brass don’t like that. And that’s what happens to people who buck the system.” We also know that he’ll teach a group of young hotshots, including Miles Teller as the son of his former wingman ‘Goose’. But that’s pretty much it.

They’re remaining tight-lipped perhaps because they know that, while the story of *Top Gun: Maverick*, co-written by Cruise’s professional BFF Christopher McQuarrie, will be important, people are going to see this thing because of the visuals. Because of aerial sequences that will blow your mind, thanks to Cruise’s new system, which allowed director Joseph Kosinski to place IMAX cameras in the cockpit of a fighter jet. Sick bags are entirely optional. “I said to the studio, ‘You don’t know how hard this movie’s going to be. No-one’s ever done this before,’” laughs Cruise. “There’s never been an aerial sequence shot this way. I don’t know if there ever will again, to be honest.”

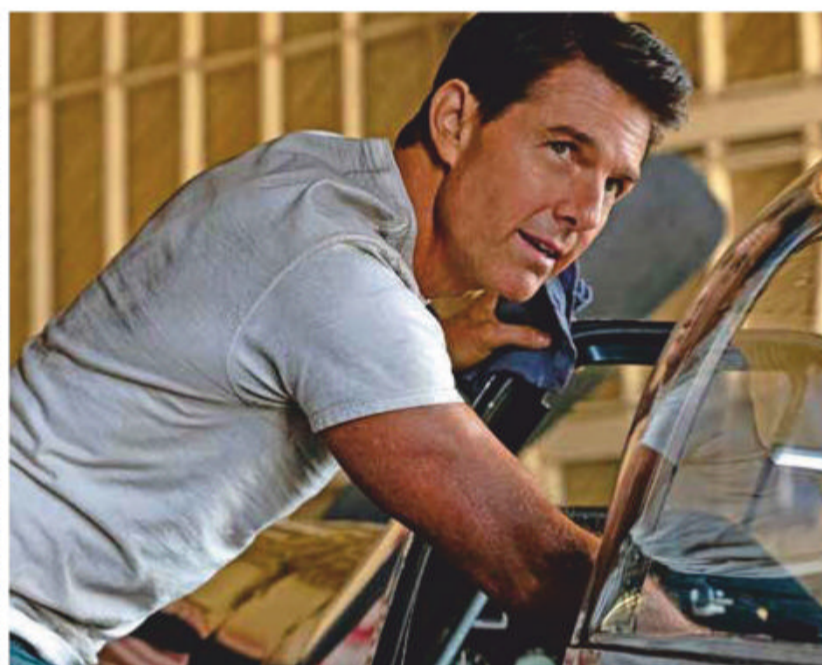
They may never be done again because they were done for real. Now, let’s get one thing straight — Cruise does a lot of his own flying in this movie, but even the most heavily-insured man on Earth has his limits. “The Navy wouldn’t let him fly an F-18,” admits Bruckheimer, “but he flies a P-51 in the movie, and he flies helicopters. He can do just about anything in an airplane.” But Cruise, and his co-stars, including Teller and Glen Powell, who were put through a gruelling aerial boot camp designed by Cruise himself, were actually in those planes, being flown by some of the best pilots on the



Above: Cruise and Monica Barbaro on set. Right: Hiding the keys is the only way to keep him on the ground.

planet, whizzing past mountains and whipping along the ground at low altitude, pulling turns inducing G-forces that would cause lesser mortals to pass out. “When you’re pulling heavy Gs, it compresses your spine, your skull, it makes some people delirious. Some people can’t handle it,” says Cruise. “So I had to get them up to being able to sustain high Gs, because they have to act in the plane. I can’t have them sick the whole time.”

The results, according to Bruckheimer, are spectacular. “You will experience what it’s like to be in an F-18, in that cockpit with those pilots,” he says. Looks like that long absence



has made Cruise and Bruckheimer feel the need...the need to take our breath away one last time. CHRIS HEWITT

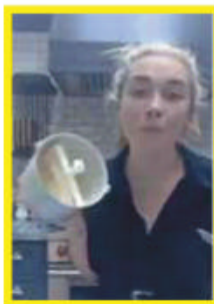
TOP GUN: MAVERICK IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 JUNE

No./2

## HOW FLORENCE PUGH WON INSTAGRAM

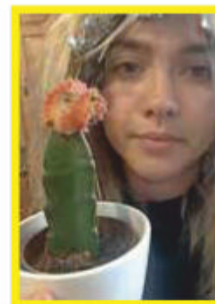
The **Black Widow** star on what made her recent Instagram Stories essential viewing

WORDS HELEN O’HARA



### THE ICE-CREAM

“I got given an ice-cream maker for my birthday,” Pugh tells *Empire*. Her one million Instagram followers have witnessed the entire process. “I ended up being quite good at it. I made peanut butter, banana and rum, raspberry, orange and lemon ice-cream. And they’re massive! You get so many scoops.”



### THE CACTUS

Pugh’s cactus, which she named Barry, is a regular guest. “Last week, I noticed that there was one whole half that was, like, black and rotting,” she recalls. She made a video, asking her followers for advice. “Everybody was telling me that I need to chop the rot out. The red bit kills the plant.”



### THE MARMALADE

“We have a Seville orange tree in the garden,” Pugh explains. “I promised my gran that I’d make her marmalade.” The process is therapeutic for her and her followers. “There’s so much crap on Instagram. But if watching a marmalade video at the end of the night is gonna help you sleep, then great!”

No./3

# Inside the McQuarrie method

As filming begins on **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 7** (and 8), director Christopher McQuarrie explains his unorthodox approach to action films

CHRISTOPHER McQUARRIE ONCE told *Empire* that making a *Mission: Impossible* movie was like throwing yourself off a cliff, then trying to build a plane around you before you hit the ground. As he puts it: “You do what *Mission* wants.” Still, given that the director of the last two Missions, *Rogue Nation* and *Fallout*, is returning with parts 7 and 8, filmed back to back, he’s clearly at peace with it. “Peace is not the word,” he tells *Empire*. “It’s denial. There are days where, if you think about it, you will have the most outrageous panic attack imaginable.” Here’s his unconventional process for making massive *Mission* mega-blockbusters.

## BREAK IT INTO CHUNKS

“We learned that every movement of a *Mission: Impossible* movie is 20 minutes long,” McQuarrie explains. “The Burj Khalifa [in *Ghost Protocol*] is; the opera sequence [in *Rogue Nation*] is; the CIA sequence in Langley [in the 1996 original] is. So this time I said, ‘We’re going to make six 20-minute movies.’ Everything becomes much more manageable when you’re making a 20-minute movie!”



## CAST FIRST, WRITE LATER

McQuarrie has added Hayley Atwell and Nicholas Hoult to the sequels, in roles he can’t confirm yet. “An article online said, ‘Hayley Atwell’s character revealed!’” McQuarrie says. “I was laughing because I don’t know what she’s doing in the movie!” But he caused a stir by casting Henry Czerny — Ethan’s IMF nemesis, Kittridge, in the original. Calling Kittridge a “meddler”, McQuarrie said that the character only fully came into his thoughts recently. “I realised Kittridge had to be right in a scene, and it was transformed.” Maybe this time he will get to see Ethan Hunt upset.

Portrait: Marco Vittur. Getty Images



## START WITH LOCATIONS

McQuarrie doesn’t start a *Mission* movie with a script. He starts with a place. Everything else is a moveable feast. So, even though he signed on to write and direct 7 and 8 a year or so ago, he’s spent that time scouting locations around the world. As for the plot, well... “I figured out the story about four weeks ago,” he laughs.

“I moved one essential piece of the puzzle and suddenly was able to outline the entire movie in about eight minutes.”



## LET YOUR STAR OFF THE LEASH

Speaking of Ethan Hunt, Cruise will be 60 by the time ‘Mission 8’ is released in 2022. But he’s not slowing down any. “We’ve figured out three obscene things that he’s doing that I’m terrified of,” laughs McQuarrie. “He’s training, and he calls me and describes what he’s doing, and I laugh and I cheer and I hang up and puke into a bucket.” But if you think that the escalation of Ethan’s derring-do can mean only one thing, McQuarrie has bad news for you. “He’s not going to space,” he says. “Nor does he need to go to space. What’s beyond that? Plenty.” We’ll find out for sure starting from next year. **CHRIS HEWITT**

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 7 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 22 JULY 2021

# No. 4 Return of a horror icon



Top to bottom:  
Anthony McCoy  
(Yahya Abdul-  
Mateen II) in a  
mess; Creepiest  
gallery ever; Nia  
DaCosta and  
Abdul-Mateen II  
on set; Your  
mirror's broken.

## Director Nia DaCosta explains how she's remade groundbreaking '90s horror **CANDYMAN** for modern times

NIA DaCOSTA GREW up loving horror. She counts *Alien* and *Jaws* among her favourite-ever movies, while *The Fly* and *The Thing* are “hugely important” to the Harlem-raised director. Yet they were all, for the most part, missing something: people like *her*. In 1992, that changed with *Candyman*, Bernard Rose's adaptation of a Clive Barker short story, relocated to the Chicago projects and featuring the first Black horror icon: the hook-handed, bee-wrangling phantom played by Tony Todd. “It was awesome to see Black people in horror that didn't all die immediately,” says DaCosta. “And Candyman lived in the projects. I lived near the projects my entire childhood, so it felt really close to home.”

Rose's film received some flak for its portrayal of racial stereotypes and DaCosta recognises that “when you look at it through a modern lens, some of the politics don't really land the way we'd like them to today”. Having been picked to update the movie by producer Jordan Peele, who was impressed by her gritty contemporary-Western debut *Little Woods*, DaCosta says there is “definitely a sense of taking ownership” of *Candyman*, of “telling a Black story about Black people, and casting Black people as the leads”. She and Peele co-wrote a script that also deals with more modern concerns, such as the gentrification of areas like the original film's Cabrini-Green projects.

Much of that is embodied in the titular character, played by *Watchmen*'s Yahya Abdul-Mateen II. “He's an artist who lives in the neighbourhood,” says DaCosta, “and part of the movie is him figuring out his place there as



a Black gentrifier. His identity is a really cool part of this film.” She is circumspect about the precise involvement of Tony Todd himself, who has been confirmed as part of the cast but is notably lacking from the trailer. “Obviously, he's the lightning rod of this whole thing,” she says, “but also something we are protecting at the same time.”

At the very least, he'll be there in spirit (so to speak), if not in person, whenever the name “Candyman” is intoned five times in front of a mirror — that ingenious urban-legend device retained for DaCosta's version, which she promises is a full-on, bloody horror first and foremost. She will confirm one thing, though: she has never — and will never — say that name while looking at her reflection. “You can't risk it,” she laughs. “I mean, I've literally made a movie on it, so I know it's all fake, but I'm still like, ‘Nope. Not me. Not today.’” Sometimes, we guess, a horror film can be *too* relatable. **DAN JOLIN**

CANDYMAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 JUNE



SMALL  
TALK

## JESSE EISENBERG

Hi, Jesse.

Hi. Is that an Irish accent?

**It is. Do you know Ireland?**

I only know Enniskillen. I stayed there in a castle. Or a house that would have belonged to somebody who worked at a castle. I didn't stay at the actual castle.

**What was your Irish experience like?**

Oh my God. It's the most beautiful country.

**How about your London experiences? You've done a play there, shot films there and you've just been to a restaurant [Ducksoup] I've never heard of.**

I know that place like a local. I went in and said, "I haven't been here for five years and suddenly there's so many people there."

**Can you travel on the [train] there?**

Yeah. I do everything I would do if I wasn't in movies, and then, occasionally, get sidetracked. It doesn't affect my life in any way.

**What do you get recognised for most?**

Depends where I am. If I'm in downtown New York, people like to prove their street cred by quoting something obscure.

But I was in this movie, *Zombieland*, and I've never seen a reaction to a movie like this. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VIVARIUM IS IN CINEMAS FROM

21 MAY

Getty Images. Ian Shaw: Nick Driftwood



# You're gonna need a bigger stage...

**How the behind-the-scenes story of *Jaws* came to the theatre – courtesy of Robert Shaw's son**

IAN SHAW WAS around seven years old when he first watched his dad play salty fisherman Quint in *Jaws*. "I remember being very scared," he recalls. "There were a couple of times when I had dreams I had sharks circling my bed...I would call out and my dad would actually come and save me. I somehow managed to separate the fact that he wasn't Quint."

Fast-dolly-zoom-forward and Shaw has co-written and stars in *The Shark Is Broken*, a play examining *Jaws*' tempestuous shoot, that was a hit at last year's Edinburgh festival. Born from a literal moment of self-reflection ("I looked in the mirror and thought I looked like Quint because I had a moustache"), Shaw identified the behind-the-camera story's potential for compelling conflict. "You had three actors, all at different stages of their career," he says. "It was ripe for drama." Yet before he put pen to paper, he had reservations.

"I thought, 'What am I doing?' I have always avoided association with my father in my own humble acting career. And then I spoke to my family. I thought the last thing I wanted to do is embarrass everybody by playing my father in something that wasn't any good."

His family members proved supportive, even unearthing the late actor's "drinking diary" that documented his alcohol abuse. The resulting play takes place on board the set of the *Orca* fishing boat with Robert Shaw (Shaw), Roy Scheider (Demetri Goritsas) and Richard Dreyfuss (Liam Murray Scott) locking horns. For Shaw, it's the



relationship between his father and rising star Dreyfuss that provides the engine for the story.

"We're not quite sure how much my father was winding Richard up to get a better performance out of him and how much he was genuinely irritated by this young, brash Dreyfuss. I thought that Robert was playing a father figure who was quite hard on Richard. He was also drinking. So that adds to the fire."

Shaw is in awe of his father's handiwork ("I think it's a brave performance because it's a big performance") and the experience has "made me feel very proud of him". But if an actor portraying a father is a potentially strange proposition from the outside, Shaw doesn't see it as a stretch.

"When you are doing it, it feels quite natural," he observes. "It feels like he's my blood." **IAN FREER**

THE SHARK IS BROKEN IS PLAYING AT THE AMBASSADORS THEATRE, LONDON, FROM 11 MAY-18 JULY

Above: Ian Shaw in costume as his father, Robert.  
Below: A scene from the play, unfolding on the *Orca* set.

# No. 6 Bong's next move

## After his stunning Oscar sweep, how does director **BONG JOON-HO** follow up *Parasite*? He has a few plans

WHAT DO YOU do after winning four Oscars in one of the biggest shocks in Academy Awards history? "I will drink until next morning," Bong Joon-ho said while accepting his Best Director gong (he also picked up Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay and Best International Film) for *Parasite* at the ceremony in LA earlier this year. But Bong has post-Oscar plans beyond boozing. As he revealed to *Empire*, the filmmaker has a string of movies already in development.

"It's confidential, but what I can tell you is that it's half-located in London," the auteur told us before his Oscars win, discussing one of these next projects: an English-language drama based on a news story that circulated in 2016. Bong wasn't willing to be drawn on story details, but did reveal that he's working on it at the same time as a Korean-language movie. "I'll have to come over for a cup of coffee while I'm in London," he laughed. (The UK office stocked up on Nescafé, just in case.)

Ever the genre-bender, the director is also pondering a surreal-sounding foray into an area he hasn't tackled yet. "I would love to make a musical," he continued. "Characters would begin singing, then think, 'Oh my God, fuck this, this is too cheesy,' and stop suddenly," he laughed, miming someone snapping abruptly out of a spell. "There are amazing musical films, like *Singing In The Rain*. But when I watch them, I feel very embarrassed and start blushing. So it would have to be...different."

You'd expect nothing less from Bong, whose MO has always been to find the unexpected. One thing is for sure: it's unlikely that Oscar success will change his plans too much.

Having roared to the unlikely of victories in February, Bong can now count himself a household name, with Hollywood his oyster. Yet throughout the awards season, he gave the impression of a modest, unshowy man, gently bemused by the endless pageantry and schmoozing.

It was not his first experience with Tinseltown, of course. He had already flirted with the American film industry earlier in his career, and decided he was better off operating on its fringes.

His tussles with Harvey Weinstein on his 2013 feature *Snowpiercer*, leading to a botched release, are well-documented. Try Googling "Bong's fisherman dad" for one such tale. Would you come back for more after an experience like that? Probably not.

He does love American cinema, of course: he beamed while recounting hearing the news his childhood hero Steven Spielberg had attended a screening of his 2017 eco-drama *Okja*, and praised Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino as heroes from the Oscar stage.

And he'll still have one foot in Hollywood: he is executive-producing the TV remake of *Snowpiercer* ("I visited the set in Vancouver," he said. "Which was great. But I'm not really involved"), and is also producing a TV spin-off of *Parasite* for HBO, with *The Big Short* director Adam McKay producing, and Mark Ruffalo circling a role.

However, Bong sounded most elated while teasing projects that sound in a similar vein to *Parasite*: raw, groundbreaking and genreless. Expect more of the same, in the very best way.

AL HORNER



Top to bottom: Bong Joon-ho directs on the set of *Parasite*; Choi Woo-sik and Park So-dam in the award-winning film; Bong celebrates his big night at the Oscars.

# No./7 Is this the surprise superhero hit of 2020?

Meet **The Old Guard** — a new comic-book-movie adaptation that Netflix is hoping will be its answer to Marvel

NETFLIX MAY HAVE lost the rights to produce Marvel TV shows, but that hasn't quashed the streaming giant's interest in comic-book properties. Among the slew of adaptations on their slate is *The Old Guard*, an original movie set to arrive later this year.

### WHAT IS THE OLD GUARD?

It was originally published by Image Comics in 2017 as a five-issue miniseries by writer Greg Rucka and artist Leandro Fernández. A second series, *The Old Guard: Force Multiplied*, began at the end of 2019. Rucka is no stranger to screen adaptations: he's the co-creator of *Stumptown* (now an ABC show starring Cobie Smulders) and is also known for his extensive work with DC Comics, which included the co-creation of the current Kate Kane/*Batwoman* CW series.

### WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

The series focuses on a group of private mercenaries who have one thing in common: they're all immortal. Led by 6,000-year-old



Andromache of Scythia (known as 'Andy'), the group comes under threat when a psychotic billionaire discovers their secret and tries to find a way to replicate their power for himself.

### WHO'S INVOLVED?

The movie adaptation began development after only two issues of the comic had been published, with Rucka himself hired to write the script. In 2018, Gina Prince-Bythewood — previously attached to Sony's *Spider-Man* spin-off *Silver & Black* — signed on to direct. Netflix picked up distribution rights in 2019, and announced that Charlize Theron would play the lead role of Andy, as well as co-producing. KiKi Layne (*If Beale Street Could Talk*) has been cast as Nile Freeman, a soldier in Afghanistan who suddenly discovers



she can't die and is recruited by the team. Chiwetel Ejiofor has also joined the cast, in a still unspecified role.

### COULD IT BE HUGE?

The idea of a team of mercenaries fighting wars throughout the ages is an irresistible high-concept, but beyond that, the series is filled with depth and pathos, as the characters see their immortality as a curse as much as a blessing. Andy is a complex (anti)hero; there are twists and turns and betrayals along the way; plus the characters' ability to survive pretty much anything makes for some inventive and entertaining action. It amounts to a premise that should work well on screen — we'll find out just how well soon. **SEB PATRICK**

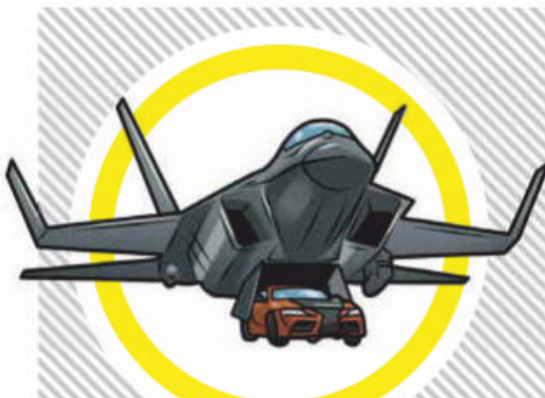
THE OLD GUARD IS COMING SOON TO NETFLIX

## [TREND REPORT]

# No./8 STRANGE PLANES

Brace, brace, brace: this year's blockbusters are unlikely to meet civil aviation regulations

WORDS JOHN NUGENT  
ILLUSTRATIONS BILL MCCONKEY

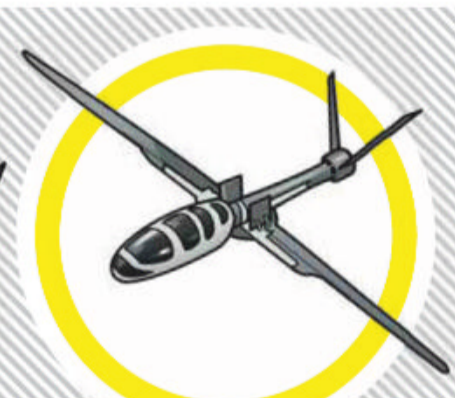


### MAGNET PLANE

FAST & FURIOUS 9

Oh, to be a fly on the wall of the *Fast & Furious* brainstorming sessions.

Somewhere in Vin Diesel's HQ, with the smell of petrol heavy in the air, there is a whiteboard with the words scribbled: "What if planes, but also magnets?"



### PLANE-WITHIN-A-PLANE

NO TIME TO DIE

James Bond has manned helicopters, jetpacks, even spaceships throughout the years. But never a plane *within* a plane. Here's hoping he won't be attempting re-entry this time.



### HEDGEHOG-POWERED PLANE

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Dr Robotnik (Jim Carrey) uses one of Sonic's magic blue quills to power his floating Egg Jet. Is he a supervillain or, in fact, an environmentalist who's found a renewable alternative to jet fuel?



No./9

# “I spent the shoot bouncing on a trampoline in my dressing room”

[THE Q&A] The eternally versatile **AMY ADAMS** has done it all – but with new Hitchcockian thriller *The Woman In The Window*, she’s still looking to surprise us

Amy Adams has been a beauty pageant contestant (*Drop Dead Gorgeous*), a real-life Disney princess (*Enchanted*) and an alien linguist (*Arrival*). Now, she’s playing an agoraphobic doctor in an adaptation of literary thriller *The Woman In The Window*. But Adams never has just one thing on her mind. Here, she talks about working with Gary Oldman, trampolines and superheroes, past, present and future.

**What was it about your character, Dr Anna Fox, that interested you?**

There was something I found so compelling about the idea of being trapped with your own anxiety, and that feeling that got created in conversation with Joe [Wright, director] and this idea of not trusting yourself. That was something I very much understood. I think we all do. It’s the feeling of being trapped inside of your own brain and being physically trapped, as Anna is, as well.

***The Woman In The Window* has shades of *Rear Window*. Was Alfred Hitchcock a conscious influence?**

I actually watched a ton of Hitchcock films in preparation. We shot in this beautiful location in Brooklyn, and I was in a dressing room watching these thrillers.

**Which one was your favourite?**

I mean, I’m a *Vertigo* person.

**What was your favourite day on set?**

I remember really almost crying when I did a scene with Gary [Oldman, who plays Anna’s mysterious neighbour Alistair Russell] because I have admired him for so many years. And to get to be spat on by him,



because we were doing a scene where we were so close – it was thrilling! I was beyond having fun. I floated home.

**You’ve said that you pick up a new hobby on every job. What did you pick up this time?**

Oh my goodness, it makes me

laugh. My husband bought me a rebounder, which is like a small trampoline, to put in my dressing room. We had really long days [on set], so I would bounce in my dressing room. It makes me laugh thinking about it. When you’re having really long days and you don’t have a normal exercise routine, you can... y’know, bounce.

**You’re next starring opposite Glenn Close in Ron Howard’s *Hillbilly Elegy*. How was working with her?**

Glenn is somebody who I wanted to work with forever, and have loved forever. She was so amazing. I thought I was

being *Punk’d*. She really is too good to be true, and yet she’s true.

***Enchanted* becomes a teenager this year – it came out 13 years ago. Your co-star James Marsden has spoken about a possible sequel recently. How would you feel about that?**

I absolutely loved playing Giselle, and I recently watched it again. I hadn’t watched it in years. I don’t typically watch the films that I’m in very often, so it was nice to get to revisit it with some perspective. I’d be thrilled to do a sequel. If it were the right time and the right story, it would be a lot of fun. I could use that levity right now.

**You recently launched your production company, Bond Group Entertainment. What kind of projects are you hoping to champion?**

I want to create very diverse content. I’m currently developing a young adult novel, and we’re developing tons of different stuff across the board. It’s been very exciting. It’s really lovely to meet emerging talent, people who are so brilliant.

**Would you ever consider playing Lois Lane again? Are you still in touch with your DC family?**

I would totally be open to playing Lois but I think [the studio is] moving in a different direction, from my understanding. But I absolutely had a great time working on it, and Gal Gadot is one of my favourite women. She is a Wonder Woman. Sorry, I’m a bit of a dork.

ELLA KEMP

THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW IS COMING SOON TO CINEMAS

Top: The multifaceted Amy Adams. Above: As the severely agoraphobic Dr Anna Fox in *The Woman In The Window*.



No./10

## FOLLOWING THE WHITE RABBIT

**Cameras are rolling on the mysterious *Matrix 4*. Here are the big clues they've dropped so far**

### 1. NEW NEO, NEW LOOK

He's back (somehow), though he's not the slick, smooth noir-decked superhero of the original trilogy. The revived Neo's bearded, shaggy and very much dressed down. Could he be back to his old Thomas A. Anderson self, de-powered and unaware of his world-saving past life?

### 2. TRINITY IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Her reboot is just as mysterious, but Trinity seems tougher than ever. Carrie-Anne Moss and Keanu Reeves were spotted during filming sharing a ride on a motorcycle, with the former at the handlebars. All part of a 'bring back The One' rescue-and-reawaken mission?

### 3. THE ONE MIGHT NOT BE THE ONLY ONE

News of the casting of Jessica Henwick (*Game Of Thrones*, *Iron Fist*) brought with it rumour rumbblings that she blew director Lana Wachowski away during auditions, and has bagged the key role of a "Neo-like" character. Could be there's a new One in town...

### 4. THEY'RE KEEPING IT REAL (ISH)

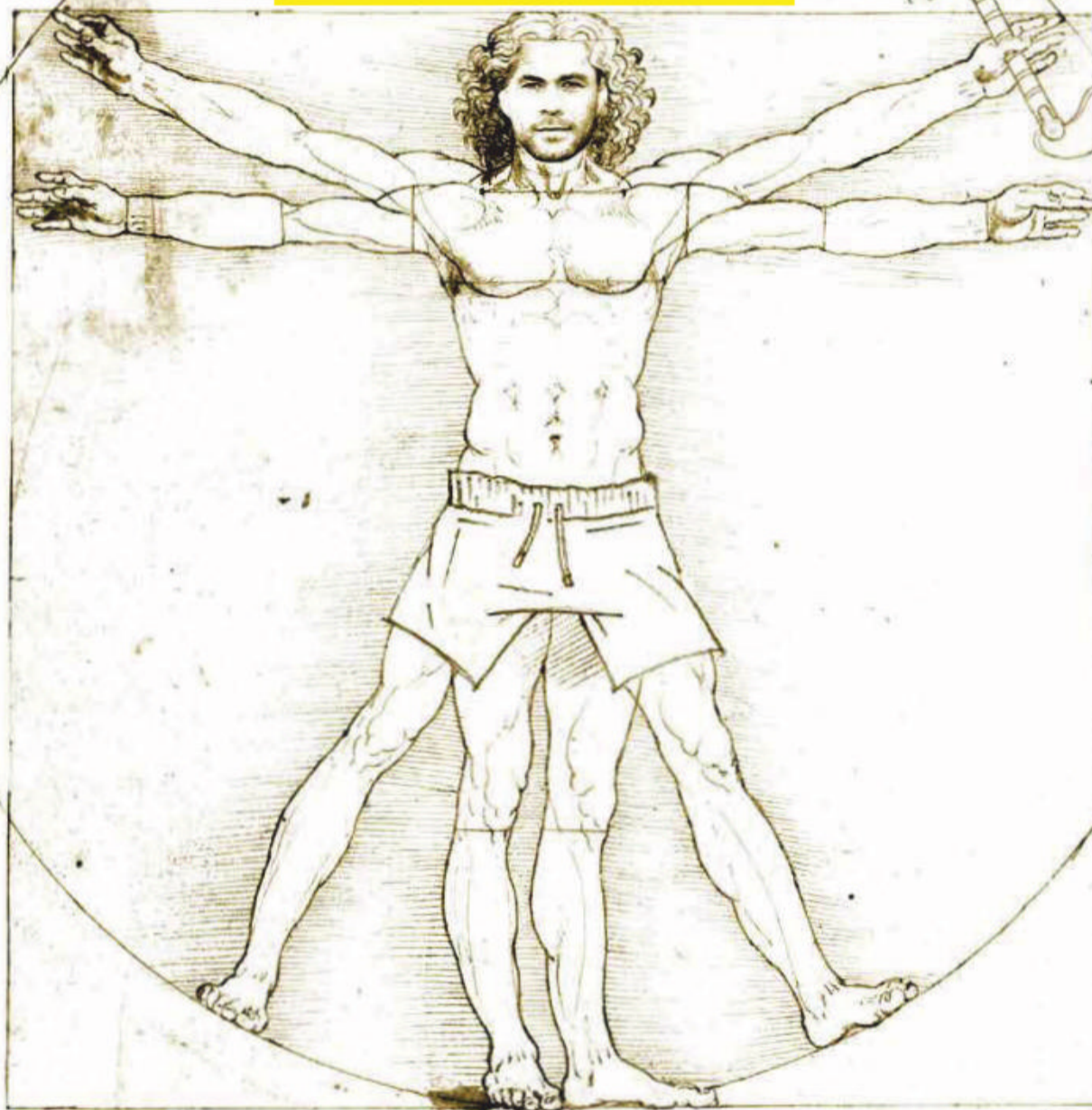
With reports of helicopters, fireballs and people jumping off skyscrapers during the San Francisco shoot, it's clear director Lana Wachowski isn't giving up on good ol'-fashioned wirework and pyrotechnics, even after two decades' worth of CGI progress. **DAN JOLIN**

THE MATRIX 4 IS IN CINEMAS FROM

20 MAY 2021

No./11

# Building a better Hemsworth



**For a new documentary show, Darren Aronofsky will be making Chris Hemsworth better, faster, stronger...and possibly immortal**

"WE JUST STARTED a new documentary series on longevity with Chris Hemsworth," says director Darren Aronofsky, matter-of-factly, as if a Darren Aronofsky documentary series on longevity with Chris Hemsworth is a totally normal occurrence. And yet here we are.

Coming later in the year on the National Geographic channel on Disney+, *Limitless* is produced by Aronofsky and Jane Root, who previously worked together on the same channel's Earth exploration *One Strange Rock*, hosted by Will Smith. *Limitless* will throw six immense mental and physical challenges at Hemsworth to examine how we — or at least the God Of Thunder, which seems like a bit of an unfair advantage — can live healthier, smarter and longer. Indeed, battling age is a big theme of the series, which will investigate how humans can regenerate damage, build resilience, supercharge memory and, according to the official press line, will introduce Hemsworth to

scientists who can root out and reverse "the ravages of time before they take hold".

Aronofsky has previous here: immortality formed the core of his passion project, 2006's *The Fountain*, in which Hugh Jackman's scientist was hell-bent on triumphing over death. We're yet to see if Hemsworth manages the same, but he's going to damn well try. "It's been kind of funny, making science exciting and cool," Aronofsky tells *Empire*. "Chris is the guinea pig of the whole thing. We're introducing him to all these different ideas of how to live better and longer. He's using his body and mind to try it out."

He looks like he's already mastered much of it — the man is hardly a slouch. "He's definitely in great shape," laughs Aronofsky. "But you know — there's always room for improvement." That's right. Try harder, Hemsworth! **ALEX GODFREY**

LIMITLESS IS COMING SOON TO DISNEY+

# No. 12

## The VFX tech that's changing everything

### How the **UNREAL ENGINE** used for *The Mandalorian* is transforming storytelling

AT THE LA PREMIERE of *The Mandalorian*, Werner Herzog went rogue. Director Jon Favreau was on stage with the cast of his Disney+ *Star Wars* TV show when the maverick filmmaker suddenly grabbed a microphone and started excitedly shouting about the revolutionary new technology used during the series' shoot. "He was telling the audience, 'You have to understand, this is something incredible! You see this world around you, you forget where you are!' He couldn't contain himself," laughs David Morin, one of the people responsible for getting Herzog so worked up.

Morin is head of the Los Angeles Lab of Epic Games, makers of the Unreal Engine. You might have heard of it: since 1998, it's been the software behind more than 500 blockbuster video games, including current hit *Fortnite*. Recently, though, it's been making waves in the world of cinema. *Ad Astra*, *Ford v Ferrari* and *John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum* all employed the engine to help realise their visual effects. *The Mandalorian*, however, showed its full potential.

Rather than using green screens and letting actors imagine the galaxy far, far away around them, Favreau surrounded his stars with giant screens onto which real-time, hyper-convincing Unreal Engine graphics were projected. The result was an immersive environment for actors to interact with and a more realistic look on screen: much of what you see in *The Mandalorian* was captured in-camera, with far less post-production CGI wizardry.





Clockwise from left: Unreal Engine graphics being used to create an immersive environment on the set of *The Mandalorian*; Beats working with a tennis ball on a stick; *The Mandalorian*'s Kuiil in front of the giant graphics screen.



"It's also about adaptability," says Morin, who points out that the technology lets directors move mountains or add more hunk-of-junk spaceships to the back of a shot on the fly. "Through the history of VFX, there's been a longing from filmmakers to see their visual effects right there in front of them, the same way they would see a live-action set. It's a technical revolution, but also just a case of bringing filmmakers the tools they want to use."

"It's kind of the next step, technologically, from front-projection, like *2001: A Space Odyssey* used," Favreau tells *Empire*. "Just behind the practical effects is actually a very, very robust digital element where we're experimenting with innovative new technologies that have never been used before."

Nearly 100 films and shows have used the technology, most of which are still to be released, says Morin. Matt Reeves' *The Batman* is

rumoured to be among them. "There's lots coming out that I can't talk about but, well, it's a very exciting time, this transition of filmmakers discovering a new process," teases Morin. What he will say is that the possibilities are endless for uses of the technology: it's already pioneering ways for fans to step inside the worlds of their favourite films themselves, at interactive experiences like Disneyland's *Star Wars* area, Galaxy's Edge. "What's happening now is a real frontier being crossed."

There was a time when making a VFX-heavy blockbuster meant endless days in front of green screens, staring at tennis balls and guessing at what the environment behind you might eventually look like. This, to paraphrase the Mandalorian himself, was the way. Maybe not anymore. **AL HORNER**

THE MANDALORIAN IS ON DISNEY+ NOW



INTRODUCING...

## Amir Wilson

THE TALENTED BRITISH ACTOR STARS IN NEW FANTASY SERIES *THE LETTER FOR THE KING*

### ON HIS CHARACTER IN *THE LETTER FOR THE KING*

"Tiuri is an underdog. He's a failed knight, an outcast in Dagonaut. He doesn't fit in as he's not originally from there. At the trials you can see how much he doesn't suit all the attributes of a stereotypical knight, but I guess he does have this bravery and courage you need to become a knight; that sends him on his mission."

### ON WIELDING A SWORD

"Sword-fight training was the death of me, but also the best part of filming. We had a lot of rehearsals with the stunt team and we'd go over our fights so many times. When it came to filming, it was so fun that a couple of times I had to be told to stop laughing because I was just enjoying myself too much whilst fighting!"

### ON THE PEOPLE WHO LEFT HIM THE MOST STARSTRUCK

"Andy Serkis or Colin Firth. I love *Kingsman*, so I was so excited to meet him. I played it really cool in my mind, but I think I probably didn't show that. I hope what was actually going through my mind didn't come out."

### ON THE ONE CHARACTER HE'D WANT TO PLAY ONE DAY

"Maybe James Bond? I love him so much. I know I'm still young but that would be a dream come true. I need to bulk up a little..."

ELLA KEMP

THE LETTER FOR THE KING

IS ON NETFLIX NOW

# No./13

## How I got into the mindset of a cult

Eighteen-year-old rising star Raffey Cassidy on getting under the skin of a religious sect in **THE OTHER LAMB**

Here: Raffey Cassidy as cult member Selah. Right: The women of the sect are all wives or daughters of leader Shepherd (Michiel Huisman).



A CHILLING METAPHOR for the patriarchy, *The Other Lamb* depicts a remote cult of women who follow a bearded, Jesus-like leader, played by *Game Of Thrones*' Michiel Huisman; for British actor Raffey Cassidy, who plays cult member Selah, it meant getting a deeper understanding of the reality of religious sects. "There are so many documentaries out there that I watched and researched," Cassidy says. "Because this is a real-life story, in a way. Catherine [McMullen, the film's screenwriter] sent me the documentary *The End Of The World Cult*, where they follow this one man who was very abusive to the young girls and women."

Cassidy's research helped kindle a respect for Selah and the women in the camp. "[Selah] has so many dimensions," she says. "It's easy from an outside perspective to go, 'Oh my God, this is crazy, why can't they see what this leader is doing to them?' But when you're in it, you have this whole family, which you might not have at home. It's such a vicious cycle — once you're in, you're psychologically trapped."

Shot in under a month in rural Ireland, the cast had no choice but to be exposed to the elements, as the cult have escaped the outside world in their hunt to find 'Eden'. Beautiful though it was, Ireland in February offered

# No./14

## Just one thing after another

The *Thing* is rearing its head again. We track the shapeshifting alien's movements across the years



1938

1951

### WHO GOES THERE?

First published in *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine, the original tale by John W. Campbell Jr establishes the hallmarks: a shapeshifting alien, a research station in Antarctica and the hero McReady (later renamed MacReady). This *Thing*, unlike later versions, is also telepathic.

### THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD

The first movie adaptation flips the location to the North Pole, and the limited special effects of the time mean this alien is mostly humanoid. But it's no less chilling in James Arness's seemingly invincible iteration.



less-than-heavenly working conditions. "It was absolutely freezing," says Cassidy. "The conditions were so tough." Her toils included being dunked in a freezing lake for a baptism scene ("The water was so cold that you couldn't catch your breath back") and facing off with some surly sheep.

"I was really scared of them," she admits. "The sheep wrangler found it so funny." In one particularly gruelling scene, she had to come face-to-face with a horned ram named Jeffrey. "[The wrangler] was holding it by a chain," Cassidy recalls. "I thought I might lose my forehead." As tough as it was, she admits it all "added to the performance".

As Selah grows more sceptical of the cult, she connects with a pariah, played by Denise Gough; on set, Cassidy bonded with the largely all-female cast, just as her character did. "There was a massive camaraderie," she says. "I mean, we didn't really have a choice because we were spending every day huddled together trying to keep warm. But we all got on so well." It's not hard to pretend to be part of a family when you're already in one, it seems. **JOHN NUGENT**

THE OTHER LAMB IS IN CINEMAS LATER THIS YEAR

# No./15 Rian Johnson's next case



**A sequel to *Knives Out* is afoot. Director Rian Johnson speaks exclusively to *Empire* about the potential routes it will take**

#### A NEW TWISTED WEB?

After the success of the first film, master detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) will return. But, in true *Poirot* style, expect a new setting for the sequel, and a fresh set of supporting characters. "I'll write the script, show it to Daniel and we'll see what we see," he tells *Empire*. "It's a genre that has so many possibilities. If you think about the amount of books that [Agatha] Christie wrote, and how she didn't repeat herself in terms of locale and theme, there are so many variables."

#### A NEW PROTAGONIST?

Just as Marta (Ana de Armas) was the protagonist of the first film, so the sequel will be told from the perspective of a character wrapped up in the murder, not the detective himself. "I'm not sure what one of these films would look like if it was told through the point of view of the detective," says Johnson. "Part of what makes him work is that you're not inside his head. You're inside somebody else's head, wondering what's inside his head. Blanc is in orbit around that person."

#### A NEW ACCENT?

As news of the sequel emerged, somebody on Twitter suggested the following: "Each sequel to *Knives Out* should have Daniel Craig doing a totally different accent, which is never explained." To which Johnson replied: "OK, I'm going to be very honest right now — I've had that thought." But the filmmaker tells *Empire* that Craig is unlikely to lose his Southern drawl. "I don't think so," he says. "I guess never say never. But I think that would be too precious."

#### A NEW TITLE?

The first film's title referred specifically to that case, so given the entirely new plot, the sequel's title remains wide open. Johnson has as yet eliminated no suspects for his title choice, but gamely considers *Empire*'s suggestion: 'Stop! Or My Blanc Will Shoot'. "Oh my God," he says. "Get Sylvester Stallone in there — it writes itself." This doughnut hole, it seems, has a doughnut hole. **JOHN NUGENT**



### THE THING

It was a complete flop at the time, but John Carpenter's nail-biter is now rightly considered one of the greatest sci-fi horrors of all time, and without doubt the definitive *Thing*. Contains the most tense petri dish scene in cinema history.

### THE THING

This ultimately misjudged prequel to Carpenter's film has a few redeeming features, but never manages to escape the shadow of its bigger brother; like the shapeshifting alien, it's really only a pale imitation.

### THE THING

Horror specialists Blumhouse are developing a new version of *The Thing* with Universal. It will incorporate *Frozen Hell*, a previously unpublished novella by John W. Campbell Jr that expands the original story. Could this be the best *Thing* since sliced blood? **JOHN NUGENT**

Alamy, Getty Images

# CARTON OF MILK

## GREG KINNEAR

### What is the worst smell in the world?

My ten-year-old has some sort of squishy toy that I believe was given to her as a birthday gift, and she will come up and unexpectedly squeeze it in my face, because she knows the smell causes me to dry heave. It's horrible. It's toxic. Man, it's hard to top children's toys for bad smells.

### Which movie have you seen the most?

*Groundhog Day*. There's some irony in that. But honestly, I flip around a lot and that movie more than any other movie I'll let play — I just can't turn the channel. It's like a screensaver. Because it's the same gag over and over again, it doesn't matter whether you jump in halfway through, three-quarters of the way...

### How much is a carton of milk?

Organic in Southern California's gonna run you close to four dollars.

### Have you ever written fan mail to anyone?

I did a talk show at NBC years ago and Johnny Carson was just finishing his run at NBC at the time. I wrote him a note to say how much I respected him and how excited I was to go over to NBC. But it wasn't really fan mail per se... I do remember my first *exchange* as a fan. I'm originally from Indiana and there was this actor named Johnny Whitaker, who was in *Sigmund And The Sea Monsters* — a huge star by all standards. He came to the local mall and was pitching, I think, J.C. Penney's sports coats. Me and my friend lined up to get a signed picture, and he said, "What's your name?" I said, "Greg." He goes, "One G or two?" I remember thinking, "Okay, actors are not very smart because it's obviously two: one at the beginning and one at the end." Then of course when I got home, that was when I realised that a silent G existed in 'Gregg'. It was traumatising.

### Do you have a favourite joke?

Not one that I can tell for print. It would get me in big trouble [*laughs*]. I'm gonna take the Fifth on this.



ILLUSTRATION ARNO

### Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

I'm a terrific jaywalker. Never been caught for it. Never busted. They're pretty strict about it in some cities and I'm very under the radar: surreptitious and move quick... But that's not a great crime story. I'm a little disappointed in my crime story. I've got to think about that.

### What's your earliest memory?

I remember taking a nap in kindergarten. My kindergarten teacher had the kids roll out a mat and take a nap in the afternoon, and I remember thinking: "I *like* this nap business." It's stayed with me.

### What's in your pocket right now?

Let me see. I have one dollar, which I found on the counter on my way out. And then I have a very thin, lovely wallet that I got in England. I shot this movie with Keira Knightley called *Misbehaviour* last year, and I lost my wallet. I went into this Smythson place in London and they were having a wallet sale! Who knew? And the guy who only has one dollar in his pocket is always looking for a sale, as you can expect. I have it loaded up with credit cards, and I have a little note from my daughter left over from Father's Day two years ago. It says, "I have to do one thing, Dad. Love you." Basically, if I need the car washed or whatever, she has to do it. I'm waiting for her to come home with the wrong boy some day, and I'm gonna pull it out and say, "Get rid of him."

### What would you call your autobiography?

'Pressure Is A Privilege'. I stole it from an NBA coach who said that to me, and I always think about it. When you're in situations where you're under a little pressure — like having to play Bob Hope in front of people, for example — it's not anything to be scared of, but you're lucky. It's a privilege.

### When were you most starstruck?

It was probably meeting Jack Nicholson for *As Good As It Gets*. The director [James L. Brooks] had me come over to Jack's house to audition. Just the nice, relaxing environment of Jack's living room! I'd only done, like, two movies at the time, and Jack is one of the all-time greats. So it stuck with me. That and, of course, meeting Johnny Whitaker. **DAN JOLIN**

## COMING SOON

### DREAMLAND (2020)

Kinnear joins a huge ensemble cast (including Armie Hammer and Gary Oldman) in this Nicholas Jarecki-directed drug thriller.

### THE STAND (2020)

In this much-anticipated TV adaptation of the dystopian Stephen King novel, Kinnear will play widowed professor Glen Bateman.

### PIANO LESSONS (TBC)

Kinnear is attached to this drama about a man who learns to play Schumann on the piano in order to save his marriage.

MISBEHAVIOUR IS IN CINEMAS FROM 23 APRIL

# No./16 Indiana Jones And The Lost Director

**Steven Spielberg has stepped down from *Indiana Jones 5*. James Mangold is reportedly taking his place. Two *Empire* writers process the shock news**



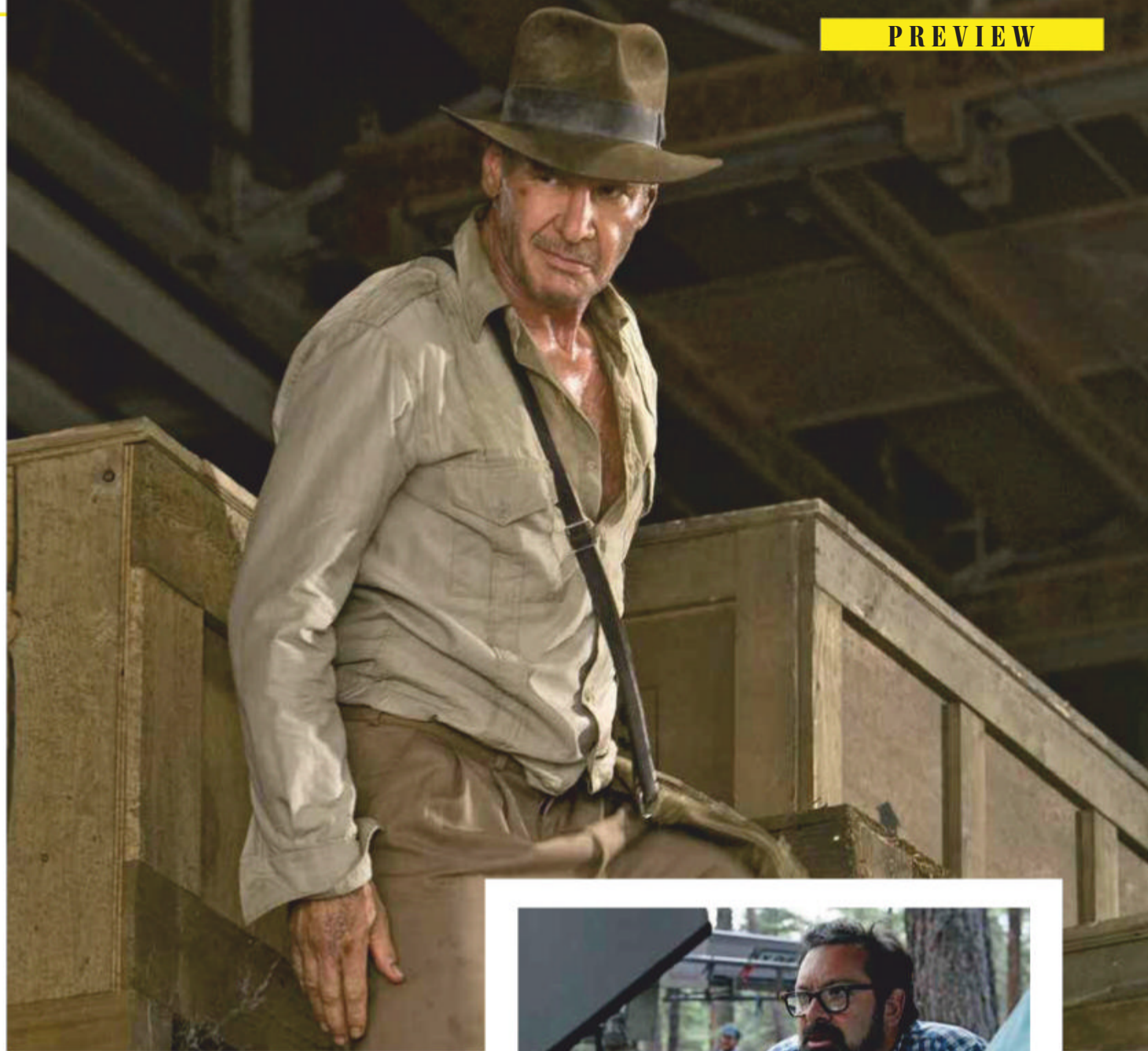
## STEVEN SPIELBERG IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF INDY

IAN FREER

STEVEN SPIELBERG HAS walked away from projects before. The filmmaker spent five months developing the screenplay for 1988's *Rain Man*, working closely with Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise before exiting to make *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* instead. In 2012, he was all set to shoot *Robopocalypse*, actors cast, location locked — when scripting issues halted things. From *Jaws* onwards, he has always been the most mercurial filmmaker, letting his heart choose his art.

While there could be any number of factors that caused Spielberg to hang up the fedora — perhaps he was dissatisfied with a script that's bounced around different writers; maybe he didn't fancy the year-away-from-home commitment it takes to make a blockbuster — there is something sad, and somehow wrong, about Indy without Spielberg. No-one working today can bring the briskness, invention, wit and humanity Spielberg can bring to adventure movies in general and Dr Jones in particular. His chemistry and rapport with Harrison Ford is an important element in the movies' success.

Conceived at Hawaii's Mauna Kea Beach hotel, Indy is also a product of the alchemy between Spielberg and George Lucas. It thrums with the 'giddy as a schoolboy' effervescence from two old friends having fun. Key players like editor Michael Kahn and composer John Williams provide the pulse and soul of the archaeologist's adventures. Without these titans, will the magic still be there? It's tough to see it. If there's an upside to Spielberg's departure,



perhaps it will give him a chance to realise long-cherished ideas (DC adaptation *Blackhawk*; passion project *The Kidnapping Of Edgardo Mortara*). But whoever takes the Indy reins, it just won't be the same. Perhaps it's time to recast/reboot, and let Spielberg, Lucas, Ford and Williams ride into that sunset together. At least the years and the mileage have been spectacular.



## JAMES MANGOLD HAS THE VERSATILITY INDY NEEDS

PRISCILLA PAGE

IF ANYONE HAS to take over from Steven Spielberg for *Indiana Jones 5*, James Mangold seems like a smart move. The news has been met with some surprise, and certainly the director's eclectic filmography offers no obvious link to the dashing archaeologist. But there's plenty of evidence that he's the right guy to take on the icon.

If, as widely expected, the fifth *Indiana Jones* will be a send-off to an ageing, beloved character, Mangold has shown he can handle such material in *Logan*, his 2017 superhero swansong. And though Indy's world isn't as dark as *Logan*'s, Mangold has proved, from action-comedy *Knight And Day* to last year's buddy movie *Ford v Ferrari*, that he can use a lighter touch.

He's a filmmaker who prioritises characters and their stories above all else, as shown by a varied output that includes Johnny Cash biopic *Walk The Line*, Western remake *3:10 To Yuma*, psychological thriller *Identity* and time-travelling romcom *Kate & Leopold*. He's a multifaceted director who can comfortably inhabit any genre to tell a story. And Mangold has demonstrated in many films that action is



Top to bottom: Ford in his most recent outing as Indy; Mangold on the set of *Logan*; Spielberg on *Crystal Skull*.

one of his strengths. *The Wolverine*'s bullet-train fight ranks among the best set pieces of the decade, and though there are some digital effects to bring *Ford v Ferrari*'s world to life, Mangold eschewed green screen for real stunts, and the result is visceral, raw and fun — exactly the right tone for *Indiana Jones*.

Spielberg and Indy seem inextricable. But a pair of fresh eyes could revive the franchise. And Spielberg hasn't abandoned us completely — he's sticking around to produce, meaning this has the potential to be a fruitful and symbiotic collaboration. Perhaps James Mangold is just what Indy needs to bring back his edge.



# No. 17

## Is the world ready for a live-action Bambi?



### REMAKE BELIEVE

THREE OTHER LIVE-ACTION REMAKES COMING FROM DISNEY

#### THE LITTLE MERMAID

The 1989 classic is getting a live-action update with Halle Bailey in the title role.

#### SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

Disney's first-ever animated feature is getting a new spin from director Marc Webb.

#### PINOCCHIO

Director Robert Zemeckis is behind an updated take on the puppet-turned-real-boy.

**The adorable deer is the latest Disney property to get a CGI tune-up. Will it traumatise a new generation all over again?**

ON 28 JANUARY, the Walt Disney Company announced an updated version of deer-comes-of-age classic *Bambi*. What we know so far is this: produced by, among others, the Weitz brothers (*About A Boy*), the reimagining is being penned by screenwriters Geneva Robertson-Dworet (*Tomb Raider*, *Captain Marvel*) and Lindsey Beer (*Chaos Walking*) as a photo-real version of the 1942 classic — a companion piece to similar remakes of *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King*. There's no word whether this is heading to the big screen or Disney+, but *Bambi* poses perhaps the biggest stretch yet in the Mouse House's series of live-action versions of its back-catalogue.

The challenges are manifold. While the animated versions of *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King* both clocked in at 78 and 88 minutes respectively, the cartoon *Bambi* barely scrapes 70 minutes, meaning the filmmakers will have their work cut out bolstering what is already an episodic if ridiculously charming narrative. Furthermore, unlike the set pieces of, say, *The Lion King* — the presentation of Simba, the stampede, 'Hakuna Matata' — *Bambi*'s big scenes are even further entrenched in animation for their power to delight and disarm. A rain storm that "drip-drip drops little April showers" might be feasible, but the sight of besties Bambi (deer) and Thumper (rabbit) comedically flailing about on ice in 'live action' would alert the RSPCA. And then there's the moment Bambi, Thumper and Flower (skunk) get 'twitterpated' (or fall in love) — a moment of pure animation that would be

like a prosaic Attenborough documentary of animals rubbing their noses together if writ real. Sure, you can write these scenes out, but what are you left with?

And then, of course, there is the murder of Bambi's mother at the hands of a hunter. It's a sequence so powerful (remember the key moment is off screen) that Paul McCartney cites it as inspiring his passion for animal rights. In December 2018, David Berry Jr, a Missouri poacher, was ordered to watch it once a month as part of a yearlong sentence for planning to illegally kill hundreds of deer. If that's the effect of the scene in stylised animation, what would it be on a generation of kids watching photo-real animals on an IMAX screen? It'd be like the intensity of *1917*, *Uncut Gems* and Takeshi Miike all in one hit. You'd need a life raft to escape the tears. **IAN FREER**

### AN ACQUIRED TASTE

#### KOKO-DI KOKO-DA

SWEDISH DIRECTOR JOHANNES NYHOLM ON HIS SERIOUSLY STRANGE FAIRY-TALE FANTASY



#### IT COMES FROM A NURSERY RHYME

The film shares its title with a popular French lullaby. "I sang it a lot as a kid," says director Johannes Nyholm. "It's funny but also a bit scary. [The rhyme] is about a dead rooster which is still alive in a way, living in a limbo land between death and life."

#### IT'S BASED ON A NIGHTMARE

The film depicts a grieving couple trapped in a hellish loop, repeatedly assaulted by a giggling Dutchman in a white suit. The *Groundhog Day*-esque structure borrows, Nyholm says, from his dreams. "I mean, it's the way my nightmares work, at least," he says. "You get stuck in a situation, you try to escape, then end up in the same spot again."

#### IT HAS SOME OCCASIONAL SHADOW PUPPETRY

Between the horrors we also witness the story in shadow-play form — which, Nyholm explains, helped soften the film's sharp edges. "The film was extremely cruel without it," he says. "I felt it has to have some light at the end of the tunnel. This shadow play makes it bearable."

**IT'S NOT REALLY A HORROR** Too surreal to be defined by one genre, Nyholm calls it "more of a relationship drama. I mean, you could call it horror, but it's definitely not the traditional horror movie. It's really a sinister fairy tale."

**JOHN NUGENT**

KOKO-DI KOKO-DA WILL BE IN CINEMAS

AT A LATER DATE


**TRAILER  
TALK**

# The French Dispatch

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team **EMPIRE**

**Chris Hewitt (ReView Editor):** I see Wes Anderson's made his film again.

**John Nugent (News Editor):** Ah, now, people always say that, as if it's an insult. But I like his film! He makes a good film.

**Chris:** I liked his film when it was *The Royal Tenenbaums*. I've liked it less and less since. It's been Wes Anderson's Diminishing Returns.

**John:** It's Increasing Returns, if you ask me. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* was a masterpiece.

**Chris:** In fairness, I did like that.

**Ben Travis (Online Staff Writer):** I think he's been on a real streak.

**James Dyer (Digital Editor-In-Chief):** I am not here for his whimsy. I find him twee and irritating.

**John:** Great. Glad to have you on board.

**Alex Godfrey (Acting Features Editor):** I like his aesthetic.

**John:** My understanding is this is a kind of anthology film. Three short stories centred around this fictional news, *New Yorker*-esque magazine, based in Paris.

**Nick de Semlyen (Acting Editor):** This office looks a bit nicer than ours. No exposed wiring.

**John:** So symmetrical!

**Jamie Inglis (Deputy Art Director):** It feels like this is going to be like a film version of a magazine. There's going to be sidebars.

**Chris:** Is this exterior a set, or has he found the perfect Wes Anderson-y location somewhere in France?

**John:** I think maybe a mix? He likes to use miniatures a lot. Most of the exteriors for *The Grand Budapest Hotel* were miniatures.

**Alex:** He does treat his worlds like a doll house.

**Ben:** "Just try to make it sound like you wrote it on purpose." Do you aspire to be like Bill Murray as an editor, Nick?

**Nick:** Absolutely. Specifically, Bill Murray as *Garfield*.

**Ben:** The first story is about an artist, but also a political revolt or something?

**John:** Which story is in black-and-white?

**Chris:** I think the stories that are recounted by the journalists are retold in black-and-white.

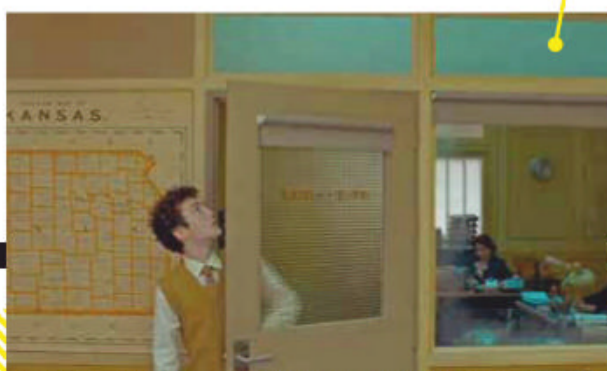
**Ben:** Timothée Chalamet in the bath is giving all the Chalamet fans exactly what they want.

**Chris:** What fresh fruit is he getting fruity with this time?

**John:** He's got a whole fruit bowl in there.

**Jamie:** Do you reckon Timothée Chalamet might be a young Bill Murray?

**Joanna Moran (Photography Director):** He looks like a young Bob Dylan in this film.



**John:** He's supposed to be actually starring as Bob Dylan in something. James Mangold is apparently directing it. But he somehow looks more Dylan-esque in this.

**Ben:** The cast list is crazy. It's basically 'Cameos: The Movie'.

**Alex:** It's a credit to Wes Anderson that everyone is lining up to work with him.

**Joanna:** Are any of them playing real people?

**Ben:** I'd guess they might be inspired by real people, in the same way *The Life Aquatic* was inspired by Jacques Cousteau.

**John:** There are a lot of images that don't really make sense out of context. They're not giving a lot away. Which I quite like. No idea what's going on here, for example.

**Ben:** That's why it's hard not to look at these trailers and say, "He's made his film again," because you don't really get a sense of the story. It's just the visual style that comes through.

**Chris:** It's not going to convert anyone. If you're a Wes Anderson agnostic, you're not going to rush out and see this immediately.

**Alex:** Wasn't *Grand Budapest* his biggest hit ever?

**John:** I think he's been slowly accumulating an audience over the years. He's pretty mainstream, as far as arty indie directors go.

**Joanna:** He's not pandering to anyone.

**John:** Jeffrey Wright seems to be on some sort of late-night talk show. Still no idea.

**Ben:** It took me so long to realise that Tony Revolori is both the *Grand Budapest* guy and Flash from the *Spider-Man* film. That is range!

**Nick:** We should get a 'No crying' sign in the office.

**Ben:** Are you also going to get an 'Issue-In-Progress' corkboard?

**Nick:** Yes. And everything in the office will be symmetrical.

**Alex:** Wait, is that the full title? 'The French Dispatch Of The Liberty Kansas Evening Sun'?

**Nick:** It's gone full *Fantabulous Emancipation Of Harley Quinn!*

**Alex:** Even though I haven't emotionally engaged with his last few films, I really love him. I love his worlds and his aesthetic. I'm always excited to watch his films. Every shot is brilliant. I love that he exists.

**Joanna:** That's it. I'm so excited to see this. I didn't understand at all what this film is about. But I will go see it. I love the look of it.

**Alex:** It does look a bit like a parody of a Wes Anderson film. But at the same time, he's the only person in the world making these films.

THE FRENCH DISPATCH IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 AUGUST

# ONSCREEN

1 APR –  
30 APR

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★ OKAY

★★ POOR

★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY IAN FREER]

[FILM]

## HEARTS AND BONES



OUT 30 APRIL  
CERT M / 110 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Ben Lawrence

**CAST** Hugo Weaving, Andrew Luri, Hayley McElhinney, Bolude Watson

**PLOT** Dan Fisher (Weaving), a war photographer suffering from PTSD, meets Sudanese refugee Sebastian Ahmed (Luri), who's struggling with his own war-related loss and pain. A friendship is born through their shared experiences, but it's sorely tested when both men are confronted by shocking revelations about their past.



THE CLICHÉ GOES that a single photograph is worth a thousand words — there is tremendous power in a photo that mere words cannot come close to touching. In Ben Lawrence's masterful feature film debut, a single photograph wields immense power — to destroy a friendship, a marriage, a life.

A photo can also reveal the truth — which is what Dan Fisher does every day in his career as a highly respected war photographer. He's also paid a heavy price — post-traumatic stress disorder that's left him a nervous wreck suffering from insomnia.

After a heartbreaking prelude in war-torn Iraq that reveals what led Dan to his current mental and emotional state, we see him back in his hometown of Sydney, preparing for both an exhibition of his work and another overseas assignment. He has a supportive partner in Josie (Hayley McElhinney), but even she is not fully aware of how fragile Dan has become.



We're next introduced to South Sudanese refugee Sebastian Ahmed (Andrew Luri), who works multiple jobs and dreams of buying a house where he can finally make a home with his pregnant wife Anishka (Bolude Watson) and baby. Life is hard for Sebastian and about to get harder when he learns Dan's exhibition will include images taken during a massacre in his village 15 years earlier. Dark memories are brought to the surface and he makes a decision that will dramatically change both their lives.

He tracks down the photographer to ask him to exclude the offending pictures from the exhibition and they meet just as Dan receives startling news from Josie. It's something that would make any man reel; in Dan's case it sends him straight to hospital...in the back of Sebastian's taxi.

From there, the pair form an unlikely bond — in many ways, they are kindred spirits: both have suffered the loss of family members, both

have strong loving relationships, yet choose to keep secrets from their partners, and both suffer mental anguish from traumatic experiences.

Sebastian also wants Dan to take photos of the choir he's a part of. He's hesitant — peacetime photography isn't his bag — but he attends several rehearsals and is drawn towards this disparate group of male refugees, who are united by their suffering. They are all damaged, but learning to cope through the healing power of music, singing and companionship.

Weaving calls the choir "the musical heart of the film. There's something about it that Dan's drawn to...it's the thing that allows them both to heal. Sebastian has set up this choir as a way of healing himself and creating a community

**Top:** Dan (Hugo Weaving) and Sebastian (Andrew Luri) bond over music. **Above:** Everybody loves cake.

outside the community that he's lost. He wants Dan to come to photograph this choir but there are other reasons he wants him to be a part of. Dan instinctively feels there's something about community, about family and about creating a new life for himself that somehow is going to be signposted by his experience with the choir."

Dan becomes more convinced — at Sebastian's urging — to drop the massacre photos from the exhibition...until he makes two discoveries that rock their friendship and threatens to destroy everything Sebastian has built since coming here, including his relationship with Anishka. >



Weaving is great as Dan — it is impossible for him to be anything less in his performances — a man struggling to cope with the past, and afraid to embrace the future. His scenes with McElhinney are incredibly powerful.

Luri — a former truck driver who was discovered in a casting call — is a revelation as the seemingly genial Sebastian, who is not necessarily all that he pretends to be. It is a confident performance that Luri attributes to Ben Lawrence's assured guidance. "I did not act before," he says, "but the way he was doing things gave me a lot of confidence. It built me up. Even things that were a bit difficult, he made it easy for me."

And Lawrence was thrilled with the onscreen chemistry between Luri and Weaving: "Finding Andrew was something I dreamt about for a long time. I really wanted that character to be a non-actor...it was an experiment for me, but I thought it was going to pay off in a particularly authentic relationship between those two people."

Luri is well-matched by Watson as Anishka — she exudes strength, compassion and, when finally confronted by her husband's devastating secrets, pain and outrage. She shines particularly in the intimate, quiet moments that the couple share in their tiny flat: a highlight sees her gently mocking her husband as she lovingly cuts his hair in the kitchen.

"One minute I was laughing and the next minute I was breaking down," Watson says. "There are parts of [the script] that broke my heart and I feel like the heartbreak is beautiful, too. It's because of the authentic voice of the script. It doesn't lie. It doesn't try and be what



Top: An overseas assignment turns sour for Dan. Above: Josie (Hayley McElhinney) hits Dan with life-changing news.

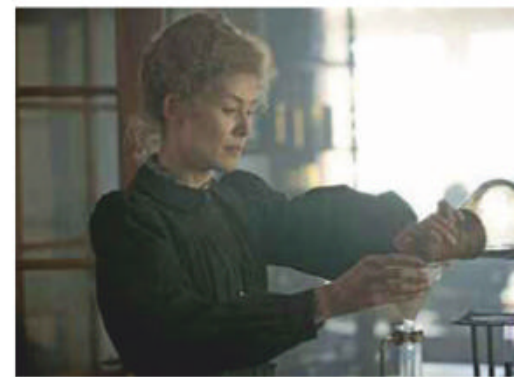
it's not. Again, that's so rare. It's rare for a script to do this so wonderfully."

The plight of refugees is ever-present in the film, but not in an overt fashion until the very final scene when viewers are shown a series of sobering photos revealing the very human tragedy of people forced to flee their homelands through war, famine or natural disaster — accompanied by the jaunty-yet-weirdly-appropriate *Road To Nowhere* by Talking Heads.

It's a grim — some might say *too* grim — ending to what is otherwise a subtle, nuanced, at-times uplifting look at the concepts of forgiveness and redemption for past sins. But it's powerful nonetheless.

Watson says that *Hearts And Bones* is about "humanity...heartache and loss and life...tragedy. It's also a movie about regrowth and rebuilding. At its core, and I think that's the final message, we rebuild. After a tragic situation, you rebuild. You don't give up. You create something new and you acknowledge your past." **DAN LENNARD**

**VERDICT** Weaving is extraordinary in this moving story of family, friendship, loss and second chances, although he's upstaged at times by the assured performances of newcomer Luri and Watson.



## RADIOACTIVE

★★

OUT 11 JUNE / CERT M / 109 MINS

DIRECTOR Marjane Satrapi

CAST Rosamund Pike, Sam Riley, Aneurin Barnard

Marie Curie lived her life amid radioactive fumes, which led to both her historic achievements as a scientist, and her ultimate demise, as the chemicals infected her. Rosamund Pike plays Marie Curie with spirited, stubborn authority, but feels like a struggling anchor in a film plagued by too many unstable elements; visually, the high frame rate, evoking nature documentaries, goes to war against animated montages, bringing director Marjane Satrapi's previous experience with graphic novels to the fore. Extreme emotion distracts and distances instead of offering immersion — leaving the scientist's achievements as incredible and impenetrable as they were before the film began. **EK**



## VIVARIUM

★★★

OUT 21 MAY / CERT TBC / 98 MINS

DIRECTOR Lorcan Finnegan

CAST Jesse Eisenberg, Imogen Poots, Jonathan Aris

Director Lorcan Finnegan's second feature is a bizarre and often grotesque parody of human ritual that leans into artificiality. The focus of the horror lies in the domestic space, as central couple Gemma (a fierce Poots) and Tom (Eisenberg, subverting his usual nerviness) are given no discernible way out of a creepy maze of starter homes. The film doesn't do quite enough to move beyond its simple skewering of the ideal of the nuclear family. The point is mostly made about halfway through the film, and the dialogue handed to Eisenberg and Poots is often superfluous, but *Vivarium* at least partly makes up for that with a string of unpredictable set pieces. **KC**



Julia Garner as Jane, discovering the dark side of the workplace.

## [FILM]

## THE ASSISTANT



OUT 23 JULY  
CERT TBC / 87 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Kitty Green

**CAST** Julia Garner, Matthew Macfadyen, Kristine Froseth, Makenzie Leigh, Jon Orsini

**PLOT** Jane (Garner) is a young graduate who has starting working at a film production company with the goal of ultimately becoming a producer. For now, she is an assistant — and on one crucial day she slowly realises just how much shady behaviour is running through the higher ranks.

THE SKY IS dark and quiet both when Jane (Julia Garner) first walks into the office, and when she leaves. “First one in, last one out, right?” she’s reminded. Jane does everything, for everyone; taking calls, booking cars, cleaning floors, stacking bottles, washing dishes. Green spends the first 20 minutes or so showing this in real time — mundanities are afforded much more than a montage. We are never told her job title, but it never feels necessary. We know she is a film production company assistant, and that means

she must be able to do anything. For who? All we get is a “he”. Jane works for a very important man that everyone knows, everyone wants to impress and everyone talks about. We don’t get his name or his face, but that doesn’t matter. Kitty Green’s debut dramatic feature (following documentaries *Ukraine is Not A Brothel* and *Casting JonBenet*) is strongest in its silences, entirely in control of a subtext that screams without making a sound.

The film is in part inspired by stories of Harvey Weinstein’s years of criminal behaviour with women in the film industry, ranging from harassment to rape. In its execution, *The Assistant* makes rare references to this, or in fact to any names that might seem too familiar. The most specific namedrops are a film festival (Cannes) and a crime scene (Beverly Hills’ Peninsula hotel).

This approach works brilliantly, as it treats the viewer as intelligent enough to read between the lines and shout back at the screen with every micro-aggression thrown at Julia, even when she won’t let herself say anything. The most propulsive scene sees her come close to breaking, as she sits across the desk of HR manager Wilcock (Matthew Macfadyen, clearly cast off the back of his role as the seedy Tom Wambsgans from *Succession*, rather than his legacy as Mr Darcy). She doesn’t know where else to turn, when a day of threatening phone calls, one-sided conversations and crucial disappearances becomes too much for one person to shoulder.

There are two words that Macfadyen delivers with contempt that feel white-hot. He asks, “And?” and then tosses away a “jealous” to Jane. The decisions he has made — to question and to judge — are the ones that force Jane to carry more than any one individual should ever have to. Literally? Mugs, coats, children. Emotionally? Dismissals, underestimations, lies.

Garner is captivating and elevates the film into emotionally shaking art with rigidly chilly body language. Her silences are always meticulously deployed, her eyes seem to remain dry through arduous effort. When they glisten, only for a moment, you know she’ll rein it back in a blink.

This is a frustrating film not in its delivery, which is sophisticated and sharp, but because of how easy it is to draw parallels with so many real-life stories of distrusted women staying silent in unfair situations for too long. Let us listen to *The Assistant*: the time of keeping other people’s secrets in the dark must come to an end. **ELLA KEMP**

**VERDICT** A stirring, sober examination of an ongoing injustice, *The Assistant* speaks to women whose discomfort is ignored, and bravely says that they matter, their feelings have been noticed. Now is the time for us to act on them.



[FILM]

## ONWARD

OUT NOW  
CERT PG / 107 MINS

DIRECTOR Dan Scanlon

CAST (VOICES) Tom Holland, Chris Pratt, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Octavia Spencer

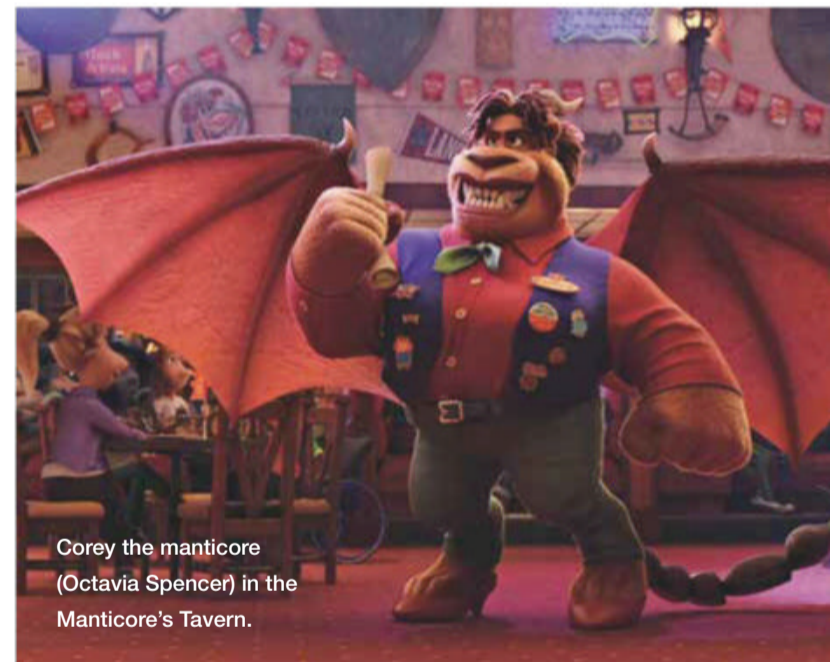
**PLOT** On his 16th birthday, elf Ian Lightfoot (Holland) is gifted a magical artefact from his mother (Louis-Dreyfus) that will allow him and older sibling Barley (Pratt) to spend one day with the late father he never got to meet. When the spell goes wrong, the brothers set off on a fantasy quest to try it again.

CERTAIN PIXAR FILMS — your *WALL•E*s and *Inside Outs* — change the game. *Onward*, the animation studio's 22nd film, doesn't do anything so lofty as pay homage to silent cinema, or forever change the way we think about our emotions. It's not even as tear-jerking as *Toy Story 3* or *Coco*. But in every way, it's pure, perfect Pixar — a film with such warmth, whip-smart humour and creative energy that it's a sheer joy to spend a few hours in its presence.

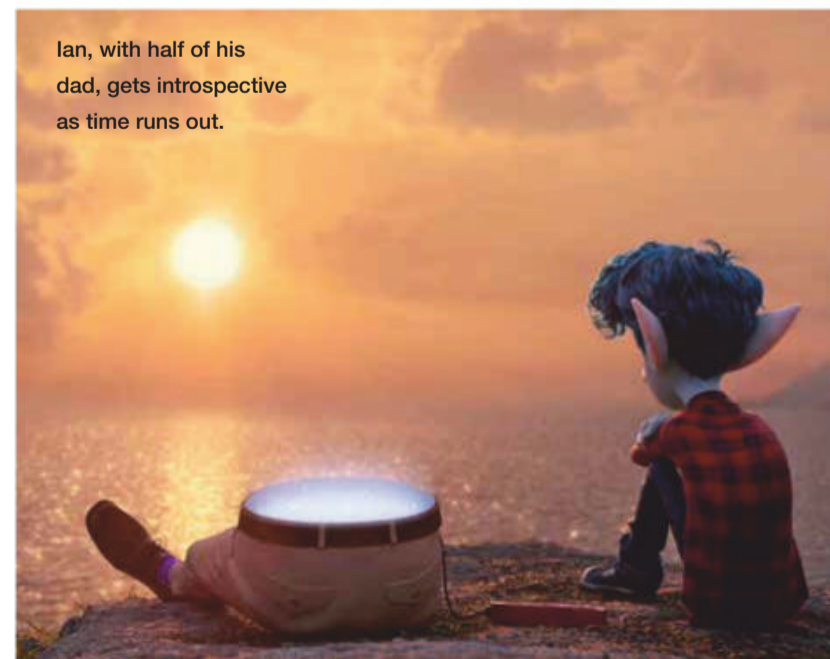
Continuing the studio's tradition of crafting fanciful, fantastical worlds — from Monstropolis to the Land Of The Dead — *Onward* gives us New Mushroomton: a former high-fantasy kingdom of magic and mythical creatures that has since become a contemporary, commercialised town where the inhabitants — centaurs, fauns, merpeople and more — have left their mystical heritage behind. Fairies don't need to fly anymore. Unicorns have become bin-raiding rodents. It's Middle-earth gone McDonald's, delivered with the usual Pixar panache and stuffed with background gags (look out for dessert parlour 'Master Froyo').

Living among it all are elf brothers Ian and Barley Lightfoot — the former (Tom Holland, here every bit the pointy-eared Peter Parker), a gawky high-school inbetweenner racked with adolescent anxiety, and the latter (Chris Pratt, in Star-Lord-meets-Jack Black mode), a loud, brash, fantasy-loving slacker with a penchant for prog rock and a pegasus-painted van named Guinevere. They're complete opposites, Ian desperate to fit in with his classmates and Barley longing for the world to reconnect with its long-forgotten magic.

Neither sibling really remembers their father, who died before Ian was born and when Barley was young — but the pair are offered the possibility of a brief reunion with him thanks to a magic staff and crystal that will grant them one full day together. Of course, the spell doesn't go



Corey the manticore (Octavia Spencer) in the Manticore's Tavern.



Ian, with half of his dad, gets introspective as time runs out.

Here: Elf siblings Ian (Tom Holland) and Barley (Chris Pratt) fire up Guinevere to begin their quest. Right: Attempting the 'visitation spell' for the first time. Below right: "We have a problem, bro..."



as planned, leaving the brothers with an all-new problem and only 24 hours to re-attempt the incantation, lest they never get to see their dad again. Cue a thoroughly modern mythical mission — inspired by Barley's beloved *D&D*-alike tabletop RPG 'Quests Of Yore' — that bags a ritual-dependent MacGuffin, a crowd-pleasing mix of odd-couple buddy comedy, ye olde road movie and coming-of-age milestones (the film accurately depicts the sheer terror of merging onto a dual carriageway for the first time, for example).

If the beats are familiar, it's a strong framework for some of Pixar's most elegant storytelling of recent years — the occasionally clanking narrative gears of *Toy Story 4* and even *Coco* replaced with a satisfying hum of adventure plotting, emotional arcs and comedy that all remain perfectly in sync. It's pacier and more energetic than its near-two-hour runtime suggests, dovetailing into a wholly satisfying, beautifully handled finale that puts everything in its right place.

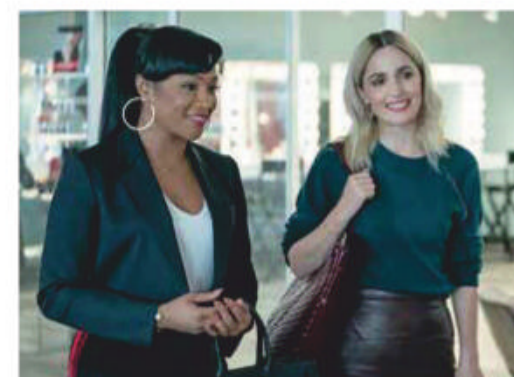
It's also one of Pixar's outright funniest films — once the second act kicks in, the exact nature of Ian and Barley's failed spell delivers a string of giddy sight gags, a none-more-Pixar combination of the slapstick and the surreal. Add in the easy charm and charismatic riffing of Holland and Pratt, with top-tier visual comedy right through to the curse-battling climax, and it might be the studio's wittiest movie since *Monsters, Inc.* or *The Incredibles*. For all the lightness, it's remarkably tender, too — pausing

to take in the quiet power of one foot gently touching another, or pulling off a bizarre dance scene that starts silly and ends up sweetly poignant. Even the 'death' of an inanimate object in the second half has an unexpected pathos underneath the humour.

The result is a ripping yarn, heartfelt and wholly entertaining as it zips from frenetic, fairy-fighting freeway chase, to a tomb-raiding set piece that pays tribute to the *Indiana Jones* franchise (*Last Crusade*, in particular, comes to mind here with the father-and-son theme). And it's not just the boys who get to go questing — their mother Laurel (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) teaming up with Octavia Spencer's formerly ferocious manticore (a winged lion-scorpion creature who has since settled down to run a family restaurant) as she tries to track down her sons, going full sword-swinging action hero in the final reel. With an admittedly brief but welcome bit of LGBTQ+ representation, there's something for everyone here. It's a major step up for director Dan Scanlon, who last delivered the middling *Monsters University*.

Pixar's take on the tale-as-old-as-time fantasy genre is, in many ways, traditional — a magic-fuelled (deceased) father-and-son story that eventually becomes a tribute to brotherly love. While it doesn't break new ground for the studio, it's a joyous reminder of just how brilliant Pixar is when working at full capacity. Like the greatest heroes of legends past, *Onward* is pure of heart, stalwart, and true. **BEN TRAVIS**

**VERDICT** Pixar returns with a great big power-chord of a movie — heart-pumping, resonant and positively harmonious.



## LIKE A BOSS

★★

OUT 6 MAY (DVD/BR) / CERT M / 83 MINS

DIRECTOR Miguel Arteta

CAST Tiffany Haddish, Rose Byrne, Billy Porter, Salma Hayek, Jennifer Coolidge

Tiffany Haddish and Rose Byrne play BFFs and business partners in this female-focused comedy that tries hard to cash in on the commercial success of its groundbreaking peers. Homing in on the leads' abilities to blend bawdy humour with sentiment, the script lands Mia (Tiffany Haddish) and Mel (Rose Byrne) in a series of overused predicaments (food-based sabotage, weaponised karaoke), and pits them against Salma Hayek's cosmetics titan in an outdated case of female rivalry. An established cast is here at director Miguel Arteta's disposal but *Like A Boss* falls foul of formulaic writing and a mistrust of the genre's full potential. It's no longer enough to simply market a film as feminist and funny. **BW**



## DEVS

★★★

OUT NOW (FOX SHOWCASE)

EPISODES VIEWED 2 OF 8

CREATOR ALEX GARLAND

CAST SONOYA MIZUNO, NICK OFFERMAN, JIN HA

*Devs* takes a while to find its feet, but Garland's slow-burning tale of a quasi-religious science cult, a sinister high-tech project and industrial espionage will have you hooked by the end of ep two. Sergei (Karl Glusman) and Lily (Mizuno) are lovers employed by mysterious company Amaya. Sergei is personally headhunted by owner Forest (Offerman) to work on a top-secret project. But when he vanishes on his first day, Lily suspects the worst; her concerns grow after she uncovers Sergei's shocking double-life. Lily's search for the truth faces opposition from Forest — who looks disconcertingly like Zach Galifianakis and talks like a cross between a self-help guru and a kindly uncle — and his thuggish right-hand man Kenton (Zach Grenier). **DL**



[TV]

# THE MANDALORIAN: SEASON 1



OUT NOW (DISNEY+)  
EPISODES VIEWED 8 OF 8

**SHOWRUNNER** Jon Favreau

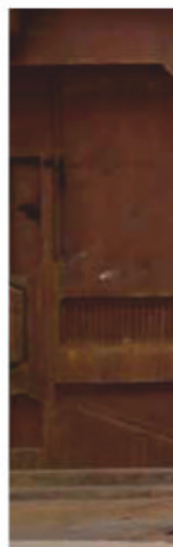
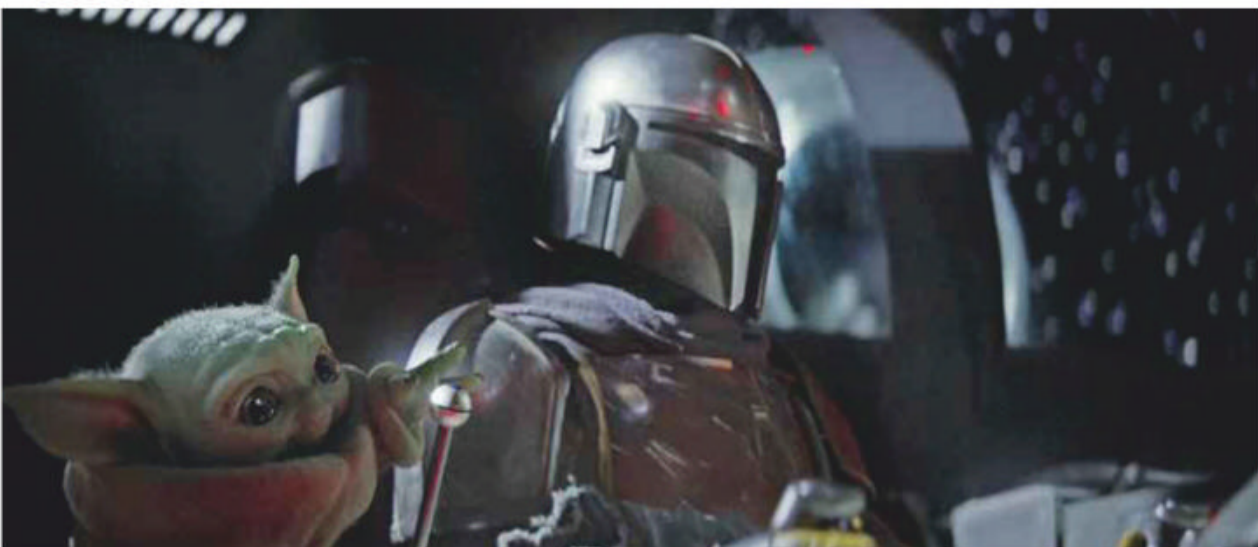
**CAST** Pedro Pascal, Gina Carano, Carl Weathers, Werner Herzog, Nick Nolte

**PLOT** Five years after the fall of the Empire, a Mandalorian gun-for-hire (Pascal) scrapes out a living tracking down strays for the bounty hunter's guild. After accepting an off-the-books job from a former Imperial (Herzog), he finds himself custodian of a small green child, and in the middle of a whole lot of trouble.

IT'S BEEN A full four months since Disney+ and its flagship show, *The Mandalorian*, launched in this country. Four months during which Baby Yoda grew into an internet phenomenon, and the Mandalorian mantra — “This is the way” — became the mic drop at the end of every third Twitter exchange. If you haven't got in on the action yet, then you really should...although coming off the operatic battles and galaxy-ending stakes of *The Rise Of Skywalker*, *Star Wars'* first live-action series might at first feel underwhelming.

We're introduced to 'Mando' (Pascal) at a seedy watering hole at the arse-end of space. After confronting his target (“I can take you in warm or I can take you in cold”), he picks up his bounty and goes on his way. It's the beginning of a small story, intimately told, and a radical gear-shift from the propulsive events of the movies. But the change in tone and scale is a welcome one. Showrunner Jon Favreau allows us to wallow in the texture of George Lucas' galaxy as never before: the grit and grime of his 'used universe' placed front and centre in a way it hasn't been since Luke and Ben first stepped into Mos Eisley's cantina.

It's to Sergio Leone rather than Lucas that *The Mandalorian* owes much of its debt. With a nameless gunman (Mando's moniker is revealed in a later episode but still goes unused) and dusty, desert frontier towns, the show deliberately riffs on the *Dollars* trilogy; its laconic anti-hero walking into town — weapons clanking off armour like the jink of spurs — and leaving a trail of bodies in his wake. The climax of the first episode in particular could be lifted from any one of a dozen Spaghetti Westerns, as gunmen on rooftops fall to Mando's quickdraw — plummeting from perches to a strangled Wilhelm scream. Ludwig Göransson's Morricone-inspired score — with distinctive flute motif — only serves to enhance this effect.



Mando (Pedro Pascal) and Kuiil (Nick Nolte): stars of next season's *The Masked Singer*.



rather than deprive the show of momentum, the pacing serves to ground us in the lawless, frontier mentality of the world in which Mando exists. It also allows us to get to know the show's laconic star. Like Boba Fett, he's striking in his distinctive armour, but unlike the cipher of Lucas' original films (a character whose popularity stems entirely from a badass aesthetic), the substance of Mando's character is gradually pieced together by his actions, as well as shadows of the past that return to haunt him.

All we know early on is that he never removes his helmet, dislikes droids, and has a reputation that precedes him — like an intergalactic John Wick, clad in Beskar steel.

Mando is a man of action and, despite remaining encased in armour, Pascal gifts the character a distinctive physicality that more than compensates for the scarcity of dialogue.

Fittingly, given its Western roots, the show's supporting characters are similar variations on broad archetypes, from Carl Weathers' grizzled bounty hunter boss to Gina Carano's veteran Rebel shocktrooper. Precious few are even introduced by name, but each has a distinct flavour, Nick Nolte's gruff Ugnaught dropping pearls of wisdom ("I have spoken") and Taika Waititi's homicidal droid bringing light comic relief. It's Herzog's glorious turn as The Client that proves the standout early on, though, the *Grizzly Man* director chewing up scenery like a Death Star trash compactor.

And then there's Baby Yoda — or The Child, to give him his official title — the first episode's big reveal and arguably the secret to the show's success. As Mando's ward, The Child not only provides the show with an iconic mascot and figurehead, but lends an urgency and emotional core to the storytelling, offsetting the pervasive nihilism and morally dubious protagonist to give *The Mandalorian* real heart. That and being almost unbearably cute. The mystery of The Child's origins and the quest to keep him safe establish themselves as the backbone of the series, and it's this masterstroke by Favreau that has ensured the show a life well beyond the *Star Wars* diehards.

With its more personal, low-key feel, *The Mandalorian* may not have the epic scope of its cinematic counterparts, but this is a sumptuously produced, painstakingly crafted show that successfully demonstrates *Star Wars*' potential beyond the silver screen. As Lucasfilm reassesses the franchise's future post *Episode IX*, they'd do well to stop, listen and learn what *The Mandalorian* has to teach. This is the way.

JAMES DYER

**VERDICT** A tough-talking, gun-slinging, varmint-blasting space Western, this is a grubby and more intimate saga than the movies and brings a welcome sense of fun back to the *Star Wars* universe.

Far left: Phantom menace: Baby Yoda effortlessly steals Mando's thunder. Left: The Iron Man convention was in full swing.

For the bulk of the show's eight-episode run, the Western formula sets *The Mandalorian's* agenda: bounties are served, heists staged and battles fought, allowing for beautifully crafted single episodes (ranging from 30 to 50 minutes each), from the defence of a village from bandits, to a standout, almost dialogue-free instalment in which Mando has to deal with a gaggle of troublesome Jawas. The main arc simmers in the background, only coming to the fore as the season draws towards its eventual close, but



Car trouble: Betty Gilpin's Crystal fights back.



[ FILM ]

## THE HUNT

★★

OUT 9 APRIL  
CERT MA15+ / 90 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Craig Zobel

**CAST** Betty Gilpin, Emma Roberts, Hilary Swank

**PLOT** Awakening as prey in a deadly game of class warfare turned real, a dozen confused Americans find themselves stalked by vicious, self-styled "godless elites" who seek release for their political rage. Crystal (Gilpin), a resourceful survivor with hidden skills, has a different endgame in mind.

IN THE SPIRIT of John Waters, we'll say that no film deserves to be banned, least of all by a disgruntled Twitter critic (or American President) who hasn't even seen the darn thing. In the case of Blumhouse's *The Hunt*, shelved by distributor Universal last August in the wake of the Dayton and El Paso mass shootings, the controversy turns out to be more sizzle than steak. A *Most Dangerous Game*-style thriller that puts red-state "deplorables" — yep, that's what they're actually called — in the crosshairs of trigger-happy liberals, the film is head-splatteringly violent. But if any on-screen crime is committed, it's one of being both glib and boring, weighing down a perfectly trashy concept with half-smart, self-satisfied zingers. Do you enjoy being lectured by a 12-year-old? Your poundingly obvious political satire is here.

These particular 12-year-olds ought to know better. Co-writers Damon Lindelof and Nick Cuse (TV's *Watchmen*, *The Leftovers*) are renowned for their spooky, silent moods, while director Craig Zobel once transformed down-market desperation into pure poetry with 2012's *Compliance*. Here, the vibe is slicker. En route to a secret woodsy playground, jet-travelling snobs scarf caviar and

champagne while one of their groggy targets — why isn't he still in his drugged stupor in the back? — wanders into first class, only to be stabbed in the neck. Problem solved. Don't get too familiar with these denim-clad unfortunates; *The Hunt* brings on its exploding blood mists and spike pits suddenly, like a latter-day *Rambo* sequel.

The movie goes just as broad with its caricatured class divide. Lefty hunters bicker incessantly about political correctness in between kills or spout cringe-inducing comebacks: "For the record, climate change is real!" shrieks one oldster after issuing a bit of brutality. Meanwhile, bare midriffs, cigarettes and military trucker hats indicate the hunted. As it happens, cool-headed Crystal (*GLOW*'s Betty Gilpin, physically precise and commanding) turns out to be some kind of Mississippi-born superwarrior, final-girling her way into a kitchen showdown with Hilary Swank's spoiled human-safari organiser, who has the gall to make a grilled cheese sandwich with gruyère.

Their extended clash, gorgeously coordinated by Marvel veteran Heidi Money maker, sends them through shattering plates of glass, and features multiple impalements with expensive utensils and even a slo-mo body hurl over a lit central fireplace. In shouting range of *Kill Bill*'s close-quarter combat scenes, it's the one sequence worth sticking around for. Elsewhere, you'll pick up whiffs of George A. Romero's tawdry class warfare and any number of *Purge* instalments, but *The Hunt* falls short of them. (Brazil's *Bacurau* takes an almost-identical scenario and pulls it off with John Carpenter-worthy panache.) In the future, we'll have more movies about today's divide — they may even be dark comedies like this one. Hopefully, though, they'll cut much deeper. **JOSHUA ROTHKOPF**

**VERDICT** A political football that arrives punctured and sputtering, this toothless class satire — an equal-opportunity offender — shouldn't have pre-enraged anyone. It's hardly the Hollywood takedown the MAGA crowd feared.



## MISBEHAVIOUR

★★★

OUT 23 APRIL / CERT TBC / 106 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Philippa Lowthorpe

**CAST** Keira Knightley, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Keeley Hawes, Jessie Buckley

Keira Knightley and Gugu Mbatha-Raw headline this patriarchy-bashing would-be crowd-pleaser. Knightley plays Sally, a member of the new Women's Liberation Movement, set on protesting Miss World 1970. Inside the contest, Jennifer (Mbatha-Raw) hopes to be the first black winner and become a broadcaster. Through her, we see a far richer narrative that sadly plays second fiddle to the feminist-by-numbers journey of the Movement. The trophy-like treatment of the women in Miss World 1970 is shocking by today's standards, but too much time is spent spelling out what an audience could readily piece together for themselves. There's a great story within *Misbehaviour* — we just don't get to see enough of it. **BW**



## HOPE GAP

★★★

OUT LATER THIS YEAR / CERT M / 100 MINS

**DIRECTOR** WILLIAM NICHOLSON

**CAST** BILL NIGHY, ANNETTE BENING

This wordy film is based on Nicholson's play *The Retreat From Moscow* and it shows — despite the beautiful scenery filmed in Sussex, much of the story takes place indoors, usually over a cup of tea. *Hope Gap* explores the fallout of the decision by schoolteacher Edward (Nighy) to end his 30-year marriage to Grace (Bening). She's blindsided by his decision and the rest of the movie focuses on her journey through bewilderment, grief, anger and, finally, resignation. While the viewer's sympathy is supposed to be with Grace, she's such a manipulative (even physically abusive) woman — particularly towards son Jamie (Josh O'Connor) — that you may find yourself feeling sorry for mousy Edward and wondering why he didn't leave her years earlier. **DAN LENNARD**



It was a startling new look for Gordon Gekko.

[FILM]

# GREED

★★★

OUT 23 APRIL  
CERT TBC / 104 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Michael Winterbottom  
**CAST** Steve Coogan, Isla Fisher, David Mitchell

**PLOT** Retail-fashion tycoon Sir Richard 'Greedy' McCreadie (Coogan) is preparing for his 60th birthday party, a gaudy debauch on a Greek island that's designed to show off his wealth and power. But potential problems keep arising, from a recalcitrant lion to a band of immigrants ruining the view. And there might even be some more serious trouble before the night is through.

STEVE COOGAN AND Michael Winterbottom are no strangers to scenic views and fancy canapés — on their long-running show *The Trip* the comedian and director, along with Rob Brydon, have mooched from one sun-drenched luxury location to the next, including, in this year's fourth series, Greece. But while the central location in *Greed* — a beachside hotel on the Greek island of Mykonos — may inspire thoughts of Coogan impersonating Roger Moore while nibbling on lamb chops, the prevailing mood here is not whimsy, but anger. The film is designed as an assault on the carelessness, cruelty and — yes — greed of the mega-rich. It is, though, only partly successful in that aim, too tangled with subplots and didactic in its tone to really land a devastating punch.

It's a shame, because high-street fashion magnate Sir Richard McCreadie, aka 'Rich', aka 'Greedy', is a solid new Coogan creation, with blinding-white gnashers, an irritating haircut that probably cost McCreadie £500, and a nice line in colourful put-downs; at one point, surveying one of his stores that's been given a coat of pink paint,

he complains about feeling "trapped in a vagina full of discount clothes". He's just believable enough to be credible as a real-world billionaire (the character was largely based on Topshop's Sir Philip Green, who has faced a flurry of complaints from employees about his conduct), and just ludicrous enough to be consistently entertaining.

McCreadie's favourite movie is, rather wonderfully, *Gladiator*. So his 60th birthday bash, around which the story revolves, is a charmless affair based on the Russell Crowe epic, complete with fake Colosseum, enforced togas and sedated lion (the beast is largely, and sometimes noticeably, computer-generated). The action which unfolds on Mykonos in the run-up to the party is the film's strongest element, boasting some decent cameos and an excellent George Michael joke, as well as small but well-developed performances from Isla Fisher (as McCreadie's candid first wife) and Asa Butterfield (as his decidedly peculiar son). Under the Greek sun, *Greed* makes its satirical points with a light hand, even if the party's denouement does pack a serious punch.

Unfortunately, though, there's quite a bit of heavy-handedness, too, as Winterbottom regularly cuts away from the party-planning with flashbacks that delve into McCreadie's unscrupulous early life, as well as scenes with a tagalong biographer, played by David Mitchell, who never feels like more than a device to extract exposition. The film begins with a quote from E.M. Forster, and concludes with a lengthy series of title cards providing facts and figures on such varied issues as immigration, the global wealth gap and gender inequality. The breadth and intensity of the film's ambition is clear, but it's hard not to feel that a more focused approach would have resulted in a superior story. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

**VERDICT** Like *Maximus*, the hero who inspires the theme of its pivotal party, *Greed* will keep you entertained. But patchiness and occasional preachiness mar a clearly heartfelt message movie.

# SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view to this month's reviews



## OUT NOW

- DEVS ★★★ P31
- THE MANDALORIAN ★★★★★ P32
- ONWARD ★★★★★ P30

## 9 APRIL

- THE HUNT ★★ P34

## 23 APRIL

- GREED ★★★ P35
- MISBEHAVIOUR ★★★ P34

## 30 APRIL

- HEARTS AND BONES (BELOW) ★★★★★ P26

## 6 MAY

- LIKE A BOSS ★★ P31

## 21 MAY

- VIVARIUM ★★★ P28

## 11 JUNE

- RADIOACTIVE ★★ P28

## LATER THIS YEAR

- THE ASSISTANT ★★★★★ P29
- HOPE GAP (ABOVE) ★★★ P34



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**ON SCREEN**

**WARNING!**  
**SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS!**

# EMPIRE SPOILER SPECIAL

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THAT MATTERS THIS MONTH**



**THIS IS YOUR MASSIVE SPOILER WARNING! (DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU)**

**THIS MONTH: BIRDS OF PREY P38 UNCUT GEMS P40  
QUEEN & SLIM P42**

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## THIS MONTH'S SPOILER TEAM



**LENA WAITHE**  
Writer,  
*Queen & Slim*



**CATHY YAN**  
Director,  
*Birds Of Prey*



**ALEX GODFREY**  
Acting Features Editor,  
*Empire*



**CHRISTINA NEWLAND**  
Contributor,  
*Empire*

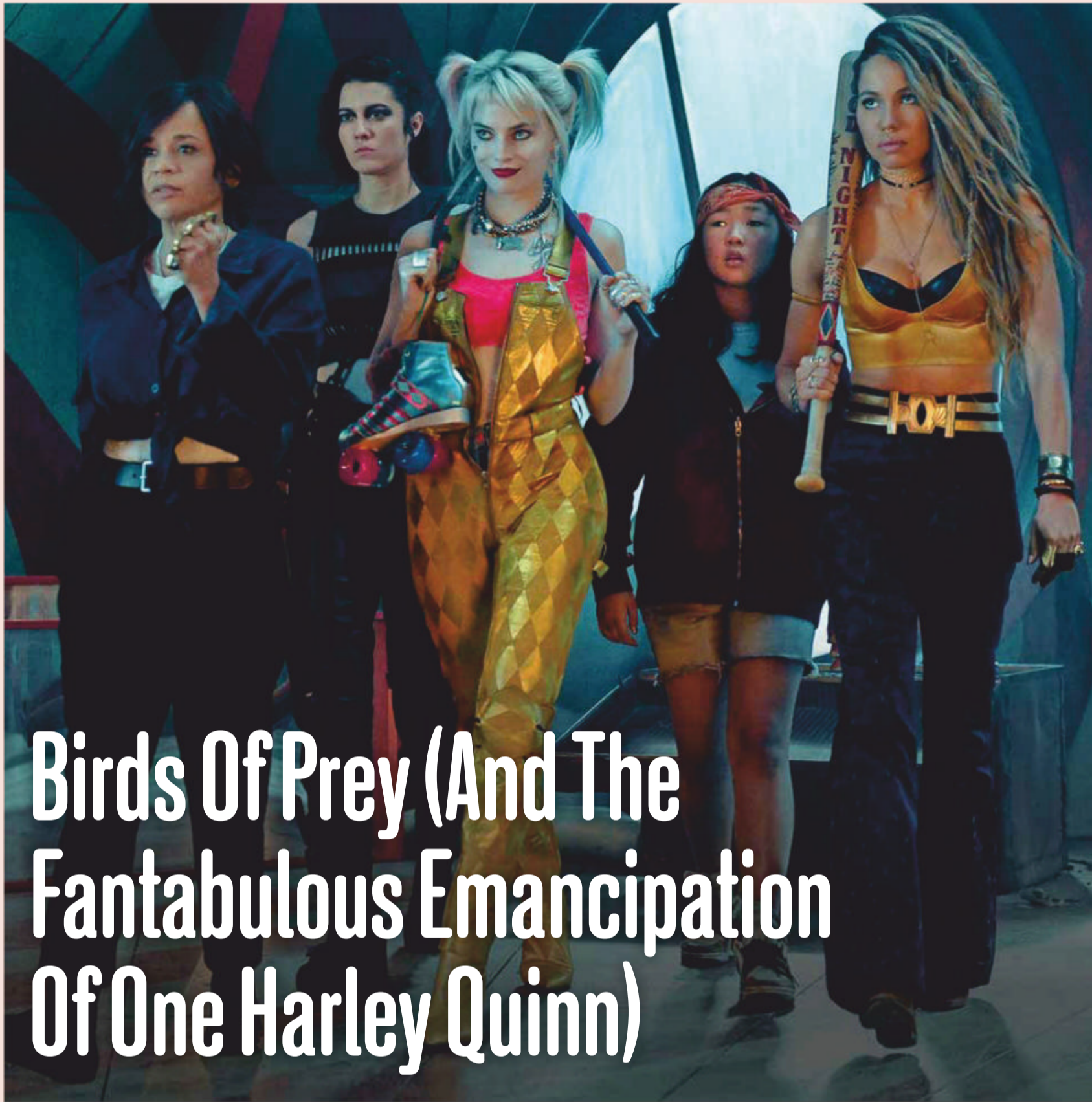


**BEN TRAVIS**  
Online Writer,  
*Empire*



**AMON WARMANN**  
Contributor,  
*Empire*

**ADDITIONAL SPOILING:**  
**NICK DE SEMLYEN**



# Birds Of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation Of One Harley Quinn)

## I ONE HARLEY QUINN

**Cathy Yan:** There has been a long cinematic history of male anti-heroes or pure villains — *Scarface*, *Taxi Driver*... They are compelling characters, not because you like them but because you like watching them. There has not been a long history of women doing that. Maybe it's the feeling of responsibility to portray women in a certain light. I actually loved how fucked up Harley [Margot Robbie] is and how fucked up a lot of situations are because, frankly, women are like that, too. I think they can be equally compelling characters even if they are not always being good.

**Christina Newland:** Harley Quinn began in *Suicide Squad* as little more than a sexy, clownish girl sidekick to the Joker, but through the full-pelt movie-star charisma of Margot Robbie, she became an immediate fan favourite. *Birds Of Prey* sees her character more fully realised, channelling her chaotic energy both into mischief



**Top:** Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) and the *Birds Of Prey*. **Above:** Grabbing a deluxe egg sandwich after a night of mayhem.

and mayhem and into everyday pursuits. Harley gets to cry, get drunk, vomit and sulk on the sofa like any other person going through a difficult break-up. And while she keeps her baby voice and her comically short attention span, there's something novel about seeing a woman on screen who is simultaneously a hot mess and utterly capable in any situation.

## 2 BREAKING UP WITH JOKER

**Ben Travis:** Like the DCEU itself, *Birds Of Prey* is all about leaving Jared Leto's Joker firmly in the rear view. And if Harley Quinn takes her break-up with Mr J hard, it's a more than

welcome rebirth. While *Birds Of Prey* nods to *Suicide Squad*'s Joker-enthralled Quinn (that 'Daddy's Lil Monster' tee appears briefly), Harley 2.0 is a freer, funnier, more fashionable

upgrade. The blowing-up of the Ace Chemicals lab that played host to Quinn's back story in *Suicide Squad* feels truly cathartic. The old Harley Quinn is dead. Long live Harley Quinn.



Boom! Laying waste to the Ace Chemicals factory.



Here: Storming the Gotham City PD. Right: Harley and Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco), plus sarnies, hit the road.

## 3 THE POLICE STATION SMACKDOWN

**Ben Travis:** If any image best defines the spirit of *Birds Of Prey*, it's Harley Quinn blasting a cop with a confetti-filled round from a shotgun-meets-blunderbuss — colourful, cartoonish and irreverently violent. In fact, the entire bust-up in the Gotham City PD might be the film's most entertaining sequence — from Harley's entrance dressed up as a Golden Age starlet, to her blasting pellets and paint bombs at the cops, to the cocaine-powered smackdown in the evidence room.

**Cathy Yan:** When you set an action sequence in an evidence room, it's really fun and you can come up with so much stuff. We had so many different ideas. At one point [screenwriter] Christina Hodson wanted a giant double-ended dildo that [Harley] had to fend off. I wanted her to have a big fluffy bear stuffed with drugs that she used as a pillow to fight with. We had to show some sort of restraint. It's a cheeky movie — unapologetically so.



## 4 CAPTAIN BOOMERANG

**Ben Travis:** Jai Courtney's grizzled Aussie mercenary from *Suicide Squad* appears in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it nod on a wanted poster in Gotham City PD (Harley even stops to note, "Hey, I know that guy!"). True to his name, he is coming back for James Gunn's *The Suicide Squad*.

## 5 SMASHING THE MALE GAZE

**Christina Newland:** There is a startling difference to the camerawork in *Birds Of Prey* in comparison to most male-directed comic book movies. In *Suicide Squad*, particularly, the camera lingers on Harley Quinn, slowly climbing her bare legs, keen to show her short shorts from numerous angles. In the *Avengers* movies, women tend to wear extremely tight bodysuits, geared toward the voyeur's gaze. But in *Birds Of Prey*, none of the women stay still long enough for casual lechery, concerned as they are with wreaking havoc and breaking the femurs of the men who have wronged them. Harley's multi-colour make-up and crazy, magpie style help disguise some of Robbie's fulsome beauty, but mainly it's just that she's too busy beating the shit out of male predators and bullies for us to notice it.

## 6 THE HAIR-TIE MOMENT

**Christina Newland:** In the fight sequence toward the film's conclusion, Harley Quinn bands together with GCPD officer Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), mysterious assassin Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and songstress-with-superpowers Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell) to protect a young girl from an evil Gotham baddie (Ewan McGregor). As the women fight off an army of thugs, Black Canary finds that her long locks are flicking into her face. Any of us with long hair can identify; it can get in your way, and there's nothing more annoying than not having a hair tie. In a moment of solidarity, Harley stops mid-punch to pass one to her friend. It sounds silly, perhaps, but women have rejoiced at it because it's so clearly something that would only go acknowledged by a female director.



## 7 HARLEY & CASSANDRA CAIN

**Cathy Yan:** I think it's a movie about Harley saving her soul — or at least a bit of her soul. That's why she has these moments with Cass, after she sells [her] out, where she goes, "You make me want to be a slightly better person." It was important for all of us to have an emotional connection between Harley and Cass at the end of the movie.

**Ben Travis:** *Birds Of Prey* gives us several origin threads — the first team-up of the titular trio, and the rebirth of Harley Quinn. But did it also give us the DCEU's Batgirl? That alter-ego is most often associated with Barbara Gordon, but the moniker has also been held by Cassandra Cain — who at the end of *Birds Of Prey* heads off into a fashion-forward future with her new guardian and business partner, Harley Quinn. It's a completely different Cassandra Cain origin story to the comics, but considering Quinn's weird fascination with Batman, it would be fun to see the emancipated Quinn train up her own mentee — one who, lest we forget, has already exploded one of Gotham's most notable gangsters with a grenade. Christina Hodson is currently working away at a *Batgirl* movie — and while it's rumoured to be about Barbara Gordon, can't we stick Ella Jay Basco in the costume instead?

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# Uncut Gems

Here: New York jeweller/gambler Howard Ratner (Adam Sandler) gets down to business.

## 1 THE OPAL

**Alex Godfrey:** The key gem in *Uncut Gems* is more than a MacGuffin. It's a divine trick. A test. Howard Ratner, played by Adam Sandler, who's done all the legwork to get hold of the Ethiopian black opal, hopes it will change his life. It definitely does that. As writer-directors the Safdie brothers were wondering which stone to feature while writing the film, Ethiopia began talking up their black opals, which were said to bring good luck — naturally this made sense for Howard's story, on top of the fact that the vibrant colours were so visible in the stones. In the film, the Safdies bless the opal with magic realism — perfect for a man who attracts a beautiful, swirling chaos.



Above: NBA star Kevin Garnett bids for the opal. Left: Howard marvels at the precious stone.



## 2 THE BASKETBALL

**Nick de Semlyen:** There's a good reason why this movie is set in 2012 rather than the present day — the two pivotal basketball games actually happened, and went down exactly like they do on screen. The first was Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Semi-finals, won by the Boston Celtics (and in the film almost, but not quite, netting Howard a huge payday). The climactic NBA showdown, meanwhile, did indeed see Kevin Garnett propel the Celtics to victory, even if the post-game interview we see wasn't recorded at the time. Josh and Benny Safdie shrewdly intertwine their story developments

with things that happened eight years ago; as meta-plotting goes, it's a slam dunk.

**Alex Godfrey:** You don't have to be au fait with US basketball players to enjoy Kevin Garnett's performance. The former NBA champion is not just a supporting character but one of the film's major antagonists (to be fair, practically everyone in *Uncut Gems* is an antagonist), and he is superb, obsessed with the opal, determined to have it as soon as he's laid eyes on it. As a genuine basketball legend, though, he brings even more authenticity to a film dripping with the stuff.

### 3 HOWARD GETS STRIPPED

**Alex Godfrey:** Having already disgraced himself by ditching his daughter's school play to confront the heavies waiting for him, Howard goes for a classic arm bite, then legs it out of the place, only to be accosted and bundled into a car. As Howard's unscrupulous and menacing loan shark brother-in-law Arno (Eric Bogosian) shows his true colours, Howard is forced to admit he's made a bet with the cash he owes. Howard is stripped to his boxer shorts for his fuck-up and, dispatched into his own car boot, he is humiliated into phoning his already dismayed wife to come and rescue him. A mere 48 minutes into the film, things seem to have reached a low. Alas, though, for Howard, this is as good as it gets.



Left: Howard feels the heat from loan shark brother-in-law Arno (Eric Bogosian) and assorted heavies.



### 4 JOHN AMOS

**Nick de Semlyen:** One random scene reveals that Howard's sneaky second pad is adjacent to the home of *Coming To America* star John Amos. It's a nice touch for two reasons. One: that film is, like *Uncut Gems*, the tale of a love-struck fool in New York. Two: Amos was meant to work with Sandler 24 years ago, on *Happy Gilmore*. They now get their moment.

### 5 THE AUCTION DISASTER

**Alex Godfrey:** As unconventional as *Uncut Gems* might be, it is classical storytelling, and this, the act two climax, is where all seems lost. Howard is his own worst enemy at the best of times but here he outdoes himself, persuading his father-in-law Gooley (Judd Hirsch) to keep jacking up the bids on the opal until Garnett goes for \$250,000 ("KG's gonna buy it, it's not a problem"). Naturally, it backfires, Gooley and Howard getting lumbered with \$190,000, and

witnessing Howard's world crumble around him verges on the unwatchable — the Safdies shoot it like an action scene, picking the angles that would make it feel most catastrophic. When the hammer comes down, Howard visibly gulps as his downward spiral plummets yet further into disaster, and you feel that particular brand of dread that occurs when something truly awful happens in your life. That is what the Safdies create for us. The sadistic bastards.



### 6 HOWARD'S FATE

**Alex Godfrey:** *Uncut Gems*' climactic sequence — in which Howard, having seemingly got himself into a good situation at last, takes his craziest risk yet — is a masterclass in tension. As much as you're at your wits' end with Howard, you do want him to win, and what happens next is a devastating gut-punch: somehow, over the preceding two hours we've fallen in love with this scoundrel. With Garnett winning the game, even Arno looks happy as

Howard snatches victory from the jaws of defeat — and is instantly murdered for being a bit of a prick. Shot in the face by the incensed heavy (Keith Williams Richards) who Howard's had locked in his store's mantrap throughout the game, it's one of the biggest movie shocks in years. Poor Howard — the loveable idiot. *Uncut Gems* is a two-hour panic attack, but this moment at the end of it all is a heart attack. For all of us.



Getty Images

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# Queen & Slim

## 1 BAD DATE

**Amon Warmann:** While Queen and Slim are at one point called “the Black Bonnie and Clyde”, that label feels reductive. The couple don’t start the movie as lovers, and by the end of the opening scene it’s hard to even see them becoming friends. Their first date is freighted with zingers (“Did you pick this place because it’s all you could afford?” asks Jodie Turner-Smith’s Queen. “It’s Black-owned,” is the fast reply from Daniel Kaluuya’s Slim), and the less-than-subtle shading doesn’t end there. Indeed, Queen’s harsh put-down of having only agreed to the Tinder date because Slim

“had a sad look” on his face and she “felt sorry” for him is not exactly the kind of repartee that will lead to the post-date activity Slim is hoping for. Add that to the early hints at how seemingly incompatible Queen’s desire for Black excellence is with Slim’s contentedness, a theme that the movie consistently returns to, and it’s more than likely that they would never see each other again once the date is through. It’s an unexpected way to start a (Black) love story, but it makes it all the more affecting to watch our protagonists get on the same page as the movie progresses.

**Top:** Fugitives Slim (Daniel Kaluuya) and Queen (Jodie Turner-Smith) take a breather.

**Left:** An awkward first Tinder date.

**Above:** Slim is pulled over by a racist cop.



## 2 THE SHOOTING

**Amon Warmann:** *Queen & Slim*’s inciting incident is both familiar and new. After our leads are pulled over by a racist cop on their way home for failing to use a signal, things quickly escalate from a contraband search to a scuffle that sees Queen take a bullet in the leg. But this time it’s the cop who ends up dead after Slim fatally shoots him in self-defence, and in the blink of an eye our titular characters are on the run.

**Lena Waithe:** I had written that scene a million different ways. But ultimately what we landed

on was that it absolutely feels like self-defence. I love that [Slim] is respectable and not confrontational — you can see how he deals with the cop. His instinct is just to protect this Black woman. I think there is something beautiful about this Black man just instinctively going after this person that injured this Black woman who he has just met. I feel like a Black man should try and help a Black woman even if he doesn’t know her. It’s our community, we should help each other out. I think that moment represented him standing up for her.



### 3 THE TRANSFORMATION

**Amon Warmann:** Queen debuts a striking new short-haired, natural look as a disguise once she's on the run with Slim. In addition to highlighting the beauty of Black hair, it also evokes Queen's power and confidence. It can also be seen as a riff on The Carters' *Everything Is Love* album cover.



### 5 THE COP LETTING THEM GO

**Amon Warmann:** One of the many takeaways from *Queen & Slim* is that Black people are not a monolith. Our lead characters are met with a variety of responses to their actions from the Black community ranging from support to disapproval, a gambit that helps keeps the audience on edge as they try to make their escape. One such

moment that could've gone either way occurs in the final act, when a Black cop corners Queen and Slim in a getaway car. Electing to let them go, he tells his racist white partner that it was "a couple of deer, caught in some branches... I set 'em free". It turns out to be one of the last moments of good fortune in the movie.

### 6 THE PHOTO

**Amon Warmann:** One of the major themes in *Queen & Slim* is legacy, in particular how sometimes Black people are more celebrated in death than in life. Indeed, our images can become one of the more powerful things that we leave behind, and the picture of our titular couple taken at a garage showing Queen gazing admirably at a defiant Slim while perched on a Pontiac Catalina is instantly iconic while exuding effortless cool. It also proves to be the ideal way to end the movie, the



final shot seeing Queen and Slim being immortalised on a mural, much like Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, and other real-life Black Americans whose lives were taken.



### 4 THE BAR

**Lena Waithe:** I wanted it to feel like a throwback, even the setting, to a juke joint from back in the day. I wanted it to feel like a safe space. The further back you go, the more difficult it was for Black people, but before integration, one of the joys of segregation was that we had strong communities because there were no other communities that we could just go into. Black people were almost more

bonded during that time. It's a very interesting thing to think about. We need integration but we don't want to lose ourselves in that. So I wanted that [scene] to feel like a throwback to when everything was all mixed up. I wanted it to feel old, moody and blues-y. Melina [Matsoukas, director] brings a style, a grace, a dignity and a musicality — I couldn't have imagined that when I wrote it.

**Above:** The couple slow-dance at a Mississippi juke joint while on the run.  
**Left:** A Black cop brings some good fortune.



**Above right:** Queen and Slim's escape is thwarted.  
**Left:** Slim and Queen's emphatic, iconic pose.

### 7 THE ENDING

**Amon Warmann:** By the end, it's hard not to be rooting for our fugitives to make it to Cuba, sip on some mojitos and live out the rest of their lives in peace. Instead, the arrival of the police just before they can escape on a plane is a devastating gut-punch and we, like our central couple, quickly cycle from hope to dread. Take a step back, and it's clear that the film couldn't have ended any other way.

**Lena Waithe:** The whole statement I was trying to make

with the film is that Black people are being killed by police officers in what I believe are alarming numbers. I get the idea of wanting us to win but it really is the job of the artist to reflect the times. It would have been irresponsible of me to write the fairy tale about what it means to be Black in 2020 or what it means to be Black in our generation. I think it's important we acknowledge that, in our country, somebody could be killed simply because they were born Black.

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A group of women in black tactical suits standing in a line on a set. The suits are form-fitting and feature various straps, buckles, and utility pouches. The women are looking forward with serious expressions. The background shows a set with wooden paneling and a television set.

# AGAINST THE ODDS

IT'S TAKEN SO LONG TO GET MADE ITS HERO BIT THE DUST, BUT NOT EVEN DEATH COULD STOP **BLACK WIDOW**. ON SET AND BEYOND, *EMPIRE* DISCOVERS HOW MARVEL'S PHASE FOUR IS KICKING OFF WITH A BANG

WORDS HELEN O'HARA





THE MARVEL CINEMATIC Universe is like a shark: always moving forward. As Phase Four begins, the next few films that Marvel has planned — the cosmic shenanigans of *The Eternals*, the mysticism of *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings*, the reportedly horror-skewed *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness* and *Thor's*, er, full-body Jane Foster makeover in *Love And Thunder* — all seem designed to push the envelope and drive the already-sprawling universe in new directions

But sometimes, to go forwards, you have to go backwards. *Black Widow*, kicking off this new era, is reversing. Set between the Wars *Civil* and *Infinity*, Natasha Romanoff's much-anticipated solo outing is an outlier: Marvel is turning back the clock after a major character's death. This is not business as usual. This film shouldn't exist.

For that reason, "backwards" might be the perfect choice of direction for the first film in Phase Four. Here, we're going to get into the mind of a character who has always kept herself carefully hidden. To finally learn about the dark forces that shaped Natasha into the hero she became. And it does get dark.

Had this film been with us sooner, it most likely would not have gone there. "I think we could have done some other version of this movie [years ago]," Johansson tells *Empire* in late February, near the tail-end of post-production on the film. "It would have been something much more genre-oriented."

Indeed, efforts to make a *Black Widow* film pre-date the MCU — *X-Men* screenwriter David Hayter was in talks to make one in 2004 before the deeply disappointing double-whammy of *Elektra* and *Catwoman* temporarily ended the opportunities for super-women on the big screen. It has taken 16 years, and ten since Johansson's first appearance in the role in *Iron Man 2*, for this to come together. Now, Marvel is rolling the dice on a risky proposition, hoping that the time has not passed just because the character has.

The delay, though, is something for which Johansson is grateful. An earlier take would have been "something much more circus-y, you know?" she says. "I don't know that we would've been able to stay with the character and hold her in these emotional places like we do this time."

Years ago, this would have been a movie about a girl kicking ass. Now it's going to be something rather different.



**G**iven the long campaign by fans for a solo outing, and Natasha's apparently definitive conclusion in *Avengers: Endgame*, Johansson wanted to be sure that there was a good reason to return to the catsuit, coming back not for a cash-in but an elegy.

For the one person who still hasn't seen *Endgame*, that was when the ex-assassin-turned-Avenger fought to the death with her best buddy to save his life, and half the universe with him, securing the Soul Stone by flinging herself into the void. When she landed she seemed to have a half-smile on her face. Who has so much guilt that they actively fight to give up their own life for someone else's?

A *Black Widow* film needed to answer questions, but it also had to add something to Natasha's story. For Johansson it had to have a sense that she was continuing to deepen the person she had played seven times already.

If a strong enough idea for a solo film had not presented itself, she would have been at peace leaving Natasha at the bottom of that Vormir cliff. "I would have been happy with the work that I did up until the point of *Endgame*," she says, "and felt like, 'Okay, I can let this go.' Like, 'I've really lived it.'"

Then, though, director Cate Shortland entered the picture. "It wasn't until Cate came on board, and Ned Benson [writer of *The Disappearance Of Eleanor Rigby*] wrote a draft that laid it all out for us, that you could see what the potential could be," says Johansson.

Shortland was crucial in bringing about the movie that Johansson wanted to make. An Australian who broke through with the thoughtful, low-key drama *Somersault* in 2004, Shortland has blazed her own independent trail ever since, via the complex World War II family tale of *Lore* and the sexually charged thriller *The Berlin*



*Syndrome*. Her protagonists are usually female, often haunted by guilt, and always deeply complicated — just right for Natasha. Besides, Johansson is a long-time fan. “Everything she’s made is really good and visceral and messy and vulnerable and frank,” enthuses the actor. “I needed someone who was also kind of uncertain of what this was going to be, because I was, too. I wanted to question stuff.”

There was just one problem: Shortland is not what you’d call a director for hire. “People call me with projects and I always say no,” laughs Shortland. “When Marvel called me and asked me whether I would like to talk to them, I thought they were really crazy. Why would you want to talk to me about a Marvel film?”

But once she met MCU top brass to discuss the film’s themes, Shortland was intrigued. A phone call with Johansson amped up her enthusiasm. “We spoke about the character, and that was what got me,” says Shortland. “[She] is a character who has a great heart but a huge amount of shame; she’s committed crimes that she feels are unforgiveable, and how do you, in your life, make up for that? I think a lot of people relate to her story because she’s not a perfect person. That was what got me hooked.”

Finally, *Black Widow* was ready to go.

**W**ith structure and director in place, *Thor: Ragnarok*’s Eric Pearson started carving out the script while Shortland looked for her cast. The first key was making this a self-contained story, but not the usual prequel origin, or a side mission with little emotional weight to it. Instead it’s a sort of inter-quel, but one that delves deep into how Natasha was made. We know she went through hell in her training by the ‘Red Room’ program that creates the highly lethal Widows, and that the fearsome skills she picked up were hard-won. We know she has “red in her ledger” from her past crimes, and sense that there was enough scarlet that it wasn’t entirely wiped out until she helped save half the actual universe, though we don’t know quite what she did.

“We really never figured out exactly who she was,” says producer Brian Chapek. “This movie’s an opportunity. What is the darkest red in her ledger? Maybe it’s things that we weren’t exactly expecting.”

“Things we weren’t exactly expecting” could be Marvel’s slogan, 23 films in. “[Marvel boss] Kevin Feige always says, ‘Never underestimate that element of surprise,’” says Johansson. “He lives by that motto and he immediately glommed onto this idea of making a kind of family film.” Shortland compares Feige to someone on a higher plane: “Kevin’s kind of this Yoda character and just goes on instinct. So the script is always evolving.”

Johansson herself consulted on multiple drafts of the script, until everything was razor-sharp. “It was an interesting — at times very maddening — process.” she says. >



Top: Natasha Romanoff/*Black Widow* (Scarlett Johansson) and ‘sister’ character Yelena Belova (Florence Pugh). Left: Director Cate Shortland with David Harbour, who plays Alexei Shostakov/*Red Guardian*, on set.



The result was something that added new layers to an already complex character.

*Black Widow*, as well as revealing the considerable vulnerability beneath Natasha's wise-cracking facade, introduces us to her former tribe. After cutting herself off from half the Avengers in *Civil War* and going on the run from the authorities — William Hurt's Secretary Ross is leading the hunt for Natasha — our Black Widow is adrift, no longer defined by who she works for. Circumstances force her to get in touch with what is, more-or-less, her estranged family.

They are, well, not your traditional nuclear clan. No-one's willing to reveal exactly how they came to be tied together, but there's at the very least a quasi-family relationship between Natasha and the group: Rachel Weisz's Melina Vostokoff, David Harbour's Alexei Shostakov and Florence Pugh's Yelena Belova. It's a formidable cast. "I mean, we're all from the theatre and from indie, very kind of arty movies," says Harbour. "They all have fucking Oscar nominations. I do not, thank you very much. I am the weak link." Harbour is in awe all round. "I'm just madly in love with Rachel Weisz," he says. "It's like a problem. It's taken over my life."

As well as introducing us to Natasha's extended family, the film will investigate Natasha's past. We saw a glimpse, in *Age Of Ultron*, of ballet lessons with Madame B, Natasha's mentor (Julie Delpy), and shooting lessons and graduation by assassination — but what about the stuff that wasn't carried out in relatively pleasant-looking, wood-panelled rooms? What about the stuff below ground? Now, in a way that might not have been possible ten years ago, Marvel can explore what it takes to make little girls into ruthless killers and what Johansson calls the "horror" of what happens to those girls.

Weisz's Melina and Pugh's Yelena are Widows like Natasha, cycled through the Red Room training system. "There's a huge price to pay for becoming a Black Widow," says Weisz. "Multiple cycles of the Red Room training has certainly affected Melina's personality [and] state of mind." Pugh's Yelena is also trying — like Natasha — to deal with "those dark places in her mind". But sisterly bonding proves the answer, as she and Natasha realise they have basically the same scars. "They start to heal when they start to talk to one another," says Pugh, "so it's quite a nice little superhero family there."

With two other trained Widows — and more in the background — Natasha is no longer alone or unique in her abilities. She's almost fighting against herself, or at least fighting someone with the same skillset, which becomes a neat metaphor: Natasha battling her own demons. "We play a lot with that idea of the mirror image and mimicry," says Johansson — an idea that also recurs in one of the film's villains, the Taskmaster, whose superpower is an uncanny ability to pick up any opponent's fighting technique and use it against them. There is one more member of the family unit and, unlike the



three female leads, he has some honest-to-goodness superpowers. Alexei, aka the Red Guardian, was Soviet Russia's slightly budget answer to Captain America, gone pretty much to seed since the end of the Cold War. "What's great is Alexei takes himself completely seriously," says Shortland. "He's a really fragile ego."

Shortland wanted David Harbour for Alexei. After *Stranger Things* and *Hellboy*, the actor was itching to get back to some straight drama, maybe do some Shakespeare on stage, but he met Shortland for lunch anyway.

"She pitched me the story and it was really surprising," he says. "It was like, 'Alexei's a badass, he's in prison, he's angry, he's mean and he's also really needy. He wants his kids to like him.' We talked about Ricky Gervais in *The Office* a little bit. We talked about Phil Hoffman in *The Savages*, this comedy that comes out of real domestic need, and I thought that was really special. So almost immediately I was like, 'I'd love to do it.'"

Family: assembled.

**A**side from jaunts to Norway, Budapest, Morocco and Marvel's Atlanta home base, HQ for the shoot was Pinewood Studios outside London. There, Shortland's team built the '60s-inspired offices of Ray Winstone's Dreykov, head of the Red Room, and the almost *Star Trek*-like glass-fronted prison cells that lie beneath it, where Alexei will be spending some time in the movie.

When *Empire* visits the set in September 2019, Harbour's Alexei is attempting (unsuccessfully) to punch his way out. *Empire* watches as Harbour hammers on the glass before crumpling up in a heap of self-pity on the floor. Pinewood is also where the crew built a jet on a massive gimbal, one that Weisz's Melina pilots into a desperate climb later on the same day. Elsewhere, we see Johansson's Natasha engaged in some top-grade infiltration.

If some of this sounds like we're withholding information: well, in keeping



**Clockwise from main:** "A nice little superhero family..." — Natasha, Alexei and Yelena discuss some tactics; Taskmaster (the actor as yet to be revealed) has the ability to mimic an opponent's fighting technique; Melina Vostokoff (Rachel Weisz) raises a glass.

with its characters, secrecy is paramount, and breaching confidentiality is not worth our lives. Elsewhere we're kept in the dark anyway, especially regarding the identity of the actor playing the mostly masked Taskmaster. All that Shortland will say of him is that he's like "every woman's nightmare come to haunt her".

*Black Widow* may be a psychological-family-chase drama, but it's also a Marvel movie, so we're promised fantastical action scenes in the skies as well as the hand-to-hand tussling: a Widow's speciality. Without superpowers, without an Iron Man suit, the violence is going to hurt. "We have to make every action sequence have peril at its heart, make them really emotional but also story-driven," says Shortland.

"Then we were [referencing] things like *How To Train Your Dragon*. Things where I go, 'Wow, how beautiful. Let's do that with her! We've been on this beautiful journey, let's take the audience along rather than just punch people.'" That's not to say that there won't >

be punching: “Sometimes you have to punch your way through,” shrugs Johansson wryly on the set. In fact, the fight training also helped Pugh pinpoint an aspect of Yelena’s character, and establish her relationship with Natasha. “She spends so much time taking the piss out of Natasha for posing when she fights,” Pugh laughs in her trailer, making *Empire* a cup of tea.

“We realised that some of my best qualities were kicks and power thrusts or anything that would get the job done quick. Yelena, she gets the job done. She doesn’t land in a superhero pose. I had never met Scarlett, and literally after I just shook her hand we went on set for one of the most aggressive fights in the entire film. I remember having to slam her head into the wall.”

**A**ll speak highly of Shortland’s commitment to character. “She would say every single day, ‘Where’s the heart?’” explains Pugh six months on. “It would be so easy to just slightly touch upon the fact that these superheroes have had a childhood of abuse, but she really hammered it home. Cate was never scared of showing the harsh truth of it, and that’s something I’ve never seen in big films like this before.” Shortland threw herself into the action and visual effects. Throughout, though, her eye remained on the deeply damaged woman who no longer has a mission.

If *Black Widow* is about damage, Shortland wasn’t going to soft-pedal the hurt or sugar-coat it beneath a false veneer of thoughtless empowerment. “It’s interesting making a film where a woman’s getting hit in an age where we’re talking about violence against women,” she says. “Because she takes some terrible punches and she gives as good as she gets. She keeps telling herself that she can’t be vulnerable, that she can’t be emotional, that she has to just keep going. I think that’s why a lot of women identify with her, because she thinks if she’s showing any emotion, it’s weak. I think that’s what will be beautiful about this film: you go fight with her and it’s not weak — it’s incredibly strong to be vulnerable.”

That message, about embracing imperfection and injury and taking down bullies anyway, feels important in the #MeToo era. And Johansson enthuses about the work she and Shortland have done with Natasha Romanoff. “I never could have anticipated how much more there was to explore,” she says, “and be able to do that with Cate, who’s so curious about it, always just digging deeper. Searching for the truth.”

Meanwhile, Johansson is still sizing up what this film means to her. Over ten years since her *Black Widow* work began, it’s a lot to consider. “I don’t really have the perspective on it yet,” she says. “I think it will take some time for it to sink in. It’s been such a constant in my life for a decade of time. Every 18 months,



Clockwise from main: Red Guardian looks on; Melina walks the walk; Natasha prepares for action; Yelena and Natasha get acquainted.



# SPY GAMES

## DEFINING MOMENTS IN NATASHA ROMANOFF'S COMIC-BOOK HISTORY

coming back to this family and continuing the journey with everyone...I think we all probably have mixed feelings about it, at least in specific scenes, but I really had a sense of accomplishment [after shooting finished on *Black Widow*]. I feel like I tried it all this time around. I really got to go to all those uncomfortable places and explore certain recesses of her.”

Meanwhile, Johansson has progressed alongside Natasha. As an actor, she says, she “didn’t have the same tools” that she has now when she did *Iron Man 2*. “And then also having my life experience, having succeeded and failed in different ways, and feeling like a grounded woman who takes responsibility for their actions...it’s all informed the character as we find her now.”

If this is Johansson’s goodbye to Natasha, as it appears to be, she’s happy with the story they’ve told. “Natasha’s almost forced to come to terms with her past,” she says. “It’s ultimately about healing those deep wounds.

We were definitely not just going to give the fans some, like, spy/assassins movie.”

Not a spy/assassins movie, just a movie that happens to feature spies and assassins — and if all goes to plan, the timing of this film, after the character’s death, will actually be an advantage. Rather than undermining Natasha’s sacrifice in *Endgame*, this will add context.

“[The timing] was really liberating,” says Shortland. “I wanted to give her justice. It gave us this feeling like, ‘I’ve got one chance and I really want people to understand her and to feel empathy for her,’ because often what you see is a very fetishised construct. We wanted to get under her skin.”

A movie about going under the skin with *Under The Skin* star Scarlett Johansson: this sounds less like a risk all the time. If death can’t stop her, who else is going to stand in her way? **E**

**BLACK WIDOW IS COMING SOON TO CINEMAS**



**TALES OF SUSPENSE #52**  
**‘THE CRIMSON DYNAMO STRIKES AGAIN!’** (1964)

Premier Nikita Khrushchev sends redhead Madame Natasha (codenamed Black Widow) to spy on industrialist Tony Stark. In her first appearance, the Widow dresses formally in a green gown, fur stole and veil.



**TALES OF SUSPENSE #64**  
**‘HAWKEYE AND THE NEW BLACK WIDOW STRIKE AGAIN!’** (1965)

Having seduced would-be hero Hawkeye into betraying America, the now-black-haired Natasha keeps up with her boyfriend by finally getting a costume (with mask and spiderweb tights) and gadgets like ‘the Widow’s sting’.



**THE AVENGERS #43**  
**‘COLOR HIM ...THE RED GUARDIAN!’** (1967)

When Hawkeye reformed and joined The Avengers, the Widow (full name Natasha Romanoff) defected to the US and moped around until a story arc took her back to Russia. Here, it is revealed that a) she actually is a widow, but b) her husband — Alexei Shostakov, the Red Guardian — isn’t really dead (though he was by the end of *The Avengers* #44).



**AMAZING ADVENTURES #1**  
**‘THEN CAME THE BLACK WIDOW!’** (1970)

In her first solo series, Natasha wore a new black leotard and revived the red hair, spending her retirement from espionage fighting street-level New York crime. This issue introduced Ivan, her long-time sidekick/mentor/gadgetmaker/nemesis (it’s complicated).

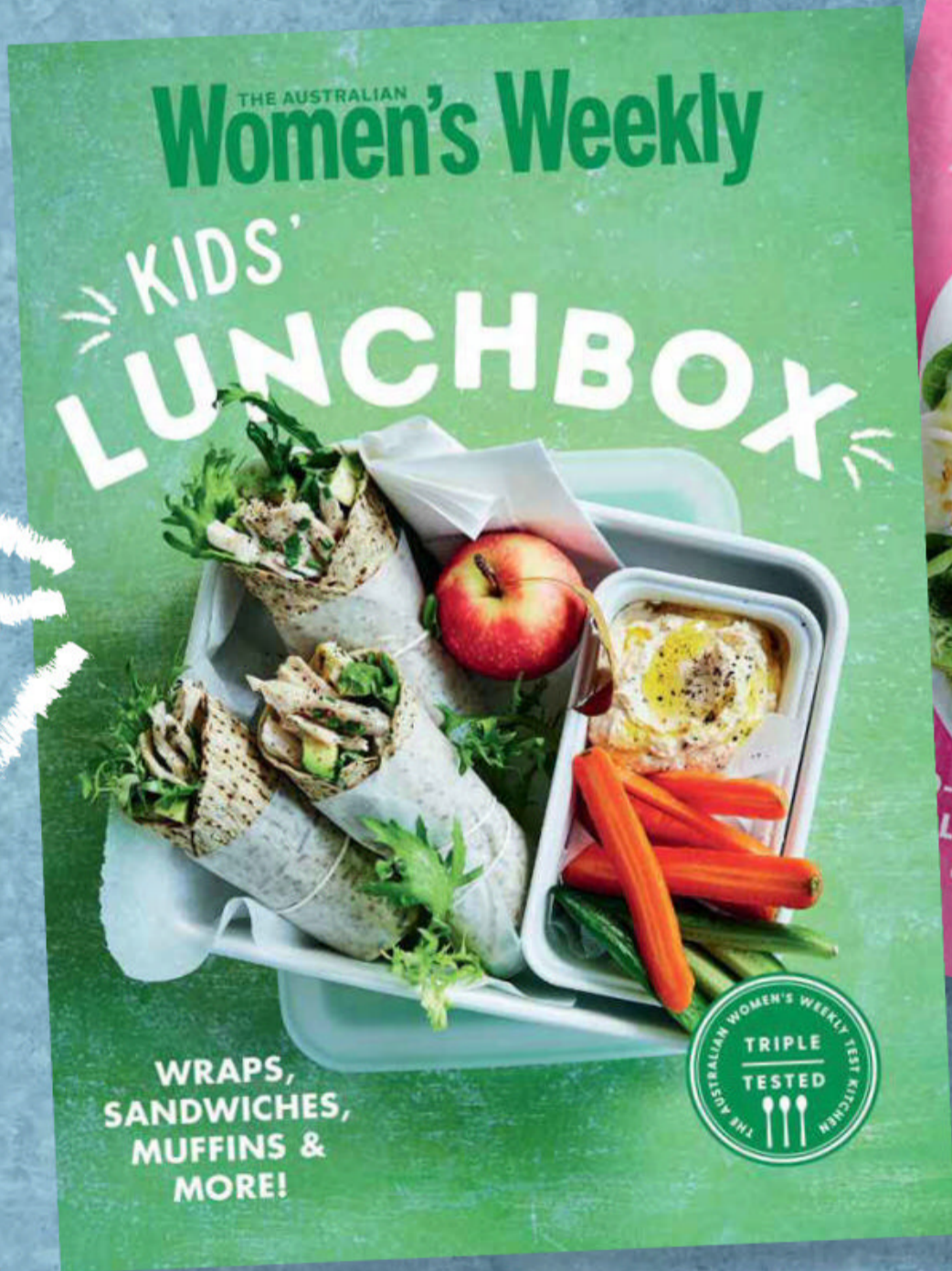


**BLACK WIDOW #1**  
**‘THE ITSY-BITSY SPIDER: UNINVITED!’** (1999)

Think it’s been a long wait for a *Black Widow* movie? It took Marvel 35 years to give Natasha her own comic. The Widow (now Natalia Romanova) is challenged by Yelena Belova, whom the post-Soviet regime has given her old codename. This run gave the heroine a past as an ex-ballerina trained at the Soviet Red Room spy school. **KIM NEWMAN**

THE AUSTRALIAN  
**Women's Weekly**

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**007**

THE  
OPENING  
SEQUENCE



# MEXICANS TAN

How Sam Mendes and the *Spectre* team created the ultimate 007-movie kick-off



Main: The breathtaking Day Of The Dead-inspired pre-title sequence of *Spectre* (2015), shot in Mexico City. Below: Director Sam Mendes and Daniel Craig discuss tactics.

# DOT

●●● WORDS NEIL ALCOCK







Left: "One of the biggest tracks the crew had ever done..." Bond saunters into position to take aim at Sciarra. Right, top to bottom: A set at Pinewood Studios, doubling as a Mexico City apartment block, is blown up; Bond strides towards the Sciarra-transporting 'copter.



*SPECTRE*, SAM MENDES' second 007 film following *Skyfall*, sets out its stall with a ballsy, bravura pre-credits sequence taking place during Mexico's Day Of The Dead festival, a celebration honouring the journey from life to death. As well as providing the kind of window on an exotic world Bond films are famous for, it plays into the heart of the film's story: Bond being haunted by a figure from his past — Franz Oberhauser/Blofeld (Christoph Waltz) — he long thought dead. The sequence takes in a collapsing building and a helicopter dust-up, but begins, like a dry run for *1917*, with one continuous shot following Bond (Daniel Craig) tracking an assassin through the Mexico City streets.

### THE LONG WALK

After a title card announces "The dead are alive", *Spectre* opens with Bond (Daniel Craig) moving through the crowds, into a hotel, up in a lift, into a bedroom, out onto a balcony and across rooftops — all seemingly in one take.

**Sam Mendes (director):** The one-shot opening was something I had in my mind very early on. It partly came from feeling that one of the things in *Skyfall* I could have done better were the first ten minutes. I'm very proud of the movie, but I did feel the opening didn't have any shifts of rhythm — it was just a frenetic chase. In Mexico I wanted it to be ten minutes of real time, and I wanted audiences to feel like they were in Bond's shoes.

**Lee Smith (editor):** I think the initial conversation was that this was going to be the

greatest opening to a Bond film ever.

**Steve Begg (visual effects supervisor):** The opening sequence is made up of six shots. When you want to join all these shots together, you've got to make sure that the end of the outgoing shot, near as dammit, has to match the incoming shot so you can dovetail the two together.

**Mendes:** I thought a lot about *Touch Of Evil*, and I thought about the inevitable *GoodFellas* moment. The journey of the Steadicam in that is so spectacular.

**Begg:** What was tricky [about the first part of the sequence] was the fact that it was calm. It wasn't like an action sequence with stuff crashing through frame and stuff like that. Everything had to be gently blended together.

**Smith:** It has to be fluid perfection. The camera can be slightly off, the horizon could shift, the light could change. There's a billion ways you could fuck this up.

**Dennis Gassner (production designer):** It was about where we make the blend points. For instance, we designed the poster for the festival as they enter the hotel to catch the eye — and that became the blend point into the next shot.

**Begg:** We were really lucky that Daniel was wearing that skeleton suit, because you could see if it misaligned from shot to shot.

**Jany Temime (costume designer):** I made two different costumes for Daniel. The first one, based on Mexican folklore, was a poncho with some death elements in it, but I think Bond should always look like a gentleman. So we tried a coat and top hat and immediately that was better. That was a 007 silhouette.

**Begg:** You go into the hotel room with him, which was a Pinewood set. His girlfriend [Stephanie Sigman] jumps onto the bed and the camera whip-pans around onto him. There's another wipe within the pan and he's in his regular James Bond suit.

**Temime:** I chose a blue Tom Ford suit because I wanted a contrast with the black; a very light fabric because he had to run and jump. The usual story.

### THE EXPLOSION

The one-shot ends as Bond takes aim at assassin Marco Sciarra (Alessandro Cremona) in a building opposite, shooting Sciarra's briefcase, which causes an explosion that destroys the hotel and the roof 007 is standing on.

**Mendes:** I remember thinking, "Wouldn't it be cool if we could do the opening sequence of a Bond movie with no cuts?" But it got to the point where it got self-serving stylistically and I needed to cut. I wanted the energy of editing.

**Begg:** Bond starts to head to the balcony window and as he walks through it we have another wipe into the Mexican location — a wide shot where we are tracking with him along this rooftop. Originally, he was meant to run along, but Daniel hurt his knee and said, "What if I saunter along?" It was actually better.

**Gassner:** [We used] a Supertechno crane, about 300 feet long. We had the key to the city and we were able to negotiate five rooftops. It was one of the biggest tracks the camera crew had ever done.



Right, top to bottom: Bond and assassin Marco Sciarra come to blows high above Zócalo Square in Mexico City; The helicopter shots were primarily filmed over an airfield 150 miles south of Mexico City.

**Chris Corbould (special effects supervisor):** We built the building we actually blew up in Pinewood Studios. Obviously, we were matching a building in Mexico. The collapsing rig was complicated because he came down through the whole building and out the bottom. The CGI guys took over the bit where he is running across the roof and it collapses.

**THE PARADE**

Emerging from the rubble, Bond gives chase to Sciarra through the throng of Day Of The Dead celebrations. Giant marionettes, 1,500 extras, musicians, dancers and acrobats form the backdrop to a thrilling foot-pursuit.

**Temime:** It was a party. I don't know if it could happen anywhere other than Mexico.  
**Begg:** I think we had three or four blocks filled with all these extras. They had the music playing live as well so the extras would get into the rhythm. Me and the guys working with me just looked at each other and went, "FUCK!" It really felt like what I imagined movie-making would feel like when I was a kid.  
**Gassner:** It was such a big job to shut down the centre of the city. I don't know if it had happened before.  
**Temime:** Just before the shooting, I had Alfonso Cuarón on the telephone. He said, "You realise all the centre of the town is blocked?" And I said, "Yes, we are having the best Day Of The Dead you will ever imagine." He said, "You better do!"  
**Gassner:** The Day Of The Dead is more than a party — it's a respectful celebration to honour

the dead. There is a heightened quality to it, so metaphorically there was a surreal aspect.  
**Naomi Donne (make-up supervisor):** I pulled a huge amount of reference from real celebrations in Mexico to fashion Day Of The Dead make-ups that people had done themselves in the streets. I wanted to use artists, street artists, people from all walks of life that weren't necessarily make-up artists.  
**Temime:** People are poor in Mexico but they still want to express their creativity and imagination, so they made these incredible paper costumes with lace napkins and paper plates. I showed that to Sam and he loved it.  
**Smith:** I remember the shock of all the footage coming in. At one point, they had 17 cameras rolling. Never in my career had I had [material from] that many cameras coming in.  
**Temime:** We had 1,500 masks to do. We built 300 and for the rest we had a team of art students from the Mexican Academy. It was fantastic. They are so enthusiastic, so creative, so crazy, and have an artistic background that is completely different from ours.  
**Begg:** When you have loads of extras in these big scenes, you always get two or three or more people staring at the camera. We were lucky with the Day Of The Dead costumes, because we would just stick CGI masks on them.  
**Donne:** We had 150 make-up artists and 150 hairdressers. We made up 1,500 people in two hours. Pulling that off was one of the great moments of my life. It's a feeling of everyone working together and the excitement of creating something different. It was incredible.

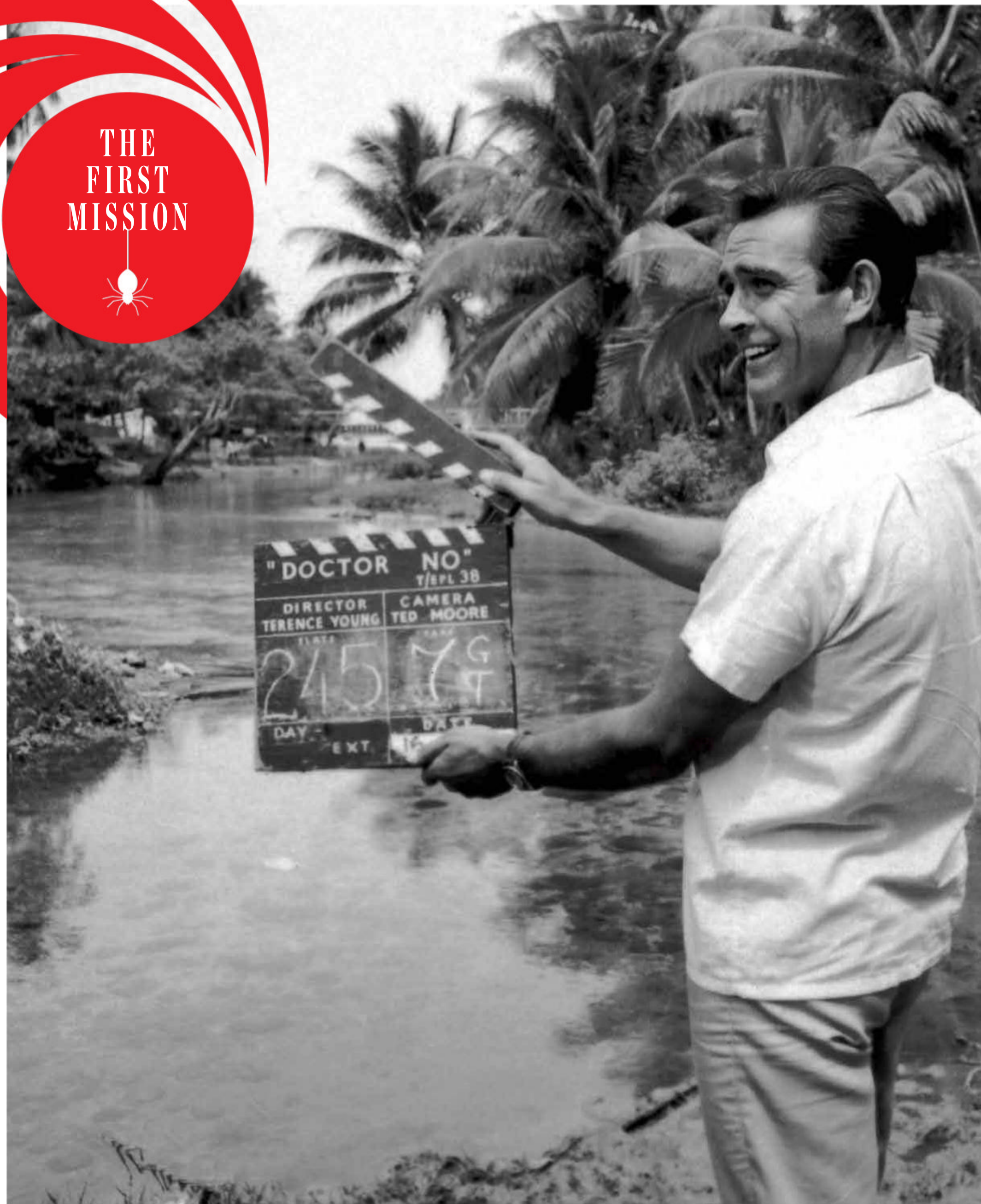
**THE HELICOPTER**

Sciarra and Bond board a helicopter and a chaotic punch-up begins high above a packed Zócalo Square.

**Begg:** The actual approach to the helicopter and Bond getting on board was done on location. They did do a couple of shots where they got it to dive-bomb the square but there was no-one there. We ended up putting people in afterwards. Health and safety and all that.  
**Smith:** Every frame of that is live and real, even when it does the vertical stall and backflips. It's a purpose-built helicopter. You can't do that in a regular helicopter.  
**Begg:** The aerial stuff was over an airfield some 150 miles south of Mexico City. And then we added a CG Mexico City underneath. Sam was really anal about not wanting any CG 'copters. He was like, "I can always spot them." We didn't have any miniatures. This was the first Bond I'd worked on with no miniatures whatsoever.  
**Corbould:** For the fight, we mounted a helicopter on what we called a spit-roast rig so we could do a complete 360-degree barrel roll with Daniel against green screen. It's a pretty savage fight. Daniel's great at those fights.  
**Smith:** There wasn't a Day Of The Dead celebration in Mexico City, only in smaller towns. There is now, and that's down to *Spectre*.  
**Mendes:** If I look back at *Spectre*, the thing I am proudest of is the first ten minutes. Not just the one shot, which is six or seven minutes long, but everything else. I think, "Yeah, that was what I meant." **E**

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THE  
FIRST  
MISSION





# BOND

**With 1962's *Dr. No*, James Bond's arrival on the big screen changed the spy genre – and cinema – forever. Bringing 007 to life, though, would require a team of visionaries and a little luck**

●●● WORDS JOHN RAIN

# BEGINS

'COMMANDER JAMAICA' SOUNDS, maybe, like a problematic fish-out-of-water sitcom from the 1970s. It certainly would have been an inauspicious title for the first James Bond film, but was, in fact, the proposed name of a TV series that Ian Fleming had planned in the mid-1950s, focusing on a sexy secret agent named James Gunn. It was inspired by a memorable holiday the author had taken in the Bahamas, where he'd wandered through dense mangrove swamps, sparse salt flats and encountered fat Land Rovers that roared through the night (a sight that inspired *Dr. No's* legendary 'dragon' tank). However, the project collapsed, and Fleming popped it in a drawer to recycle elsewhere at another time. Ultimately, the story — about a spy in the West Indies exploring a secret, dangerous, forbidden island ruled by a mysterious villain — became the basis for the sixth James Bond novel *Dr. No* and, later, the character's explosive movie debut.

Until 1962, the world of movie espionage was starched, cold and still hungover from World War II. There were black-and-white shadows, whispered codes and pulled-down trilby hats. Then, though, James Bond arrived on screens, fully formed, and where once was darkness, there was now bright Technicolor light and effortless glamour. The genre had changed forever, and the movie's impact rippled throughout the entire movie industry.



"WE HAVE THE rights to James Bond," an excited Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli and his new partner Harry Saltzman informed an even more excited David Picker, president of United Artists, as they sat in his office. Picker had been very keen on optioning the books, but had long given up as he couldn't secure the rights; Saltzman had picked them up some time earlier. Broccoli had formed a hurried partnership with Saltzman, who had no interest in selling his rights to him, but was interested in teaming up.

They formed Danjaq (a combination of Broccoli and Saltzman's wife's names, Dana and Jacqueline), and after securing the deal with United Artists, were ready to bring 007 to the big screen, away from the 2D comic strips and tiny TV sets (namely a 1954 US television movie starring Barry Nelson) where he had previously dwelt. Picker pushed for *Dr. No* to be the first film, as he felt it was the easiest story to make in terms of style, content and, importantly, budget: production-wise, it would be one of the cheaper Bond stories to adapt. And so the search began for a man who could truly humanise the superspy.

Director (and former tank commander) Terence Young was smooth, debonair and well-versed in the sensual ways of the upper-class gentleman. He knew where men like Bond would go to eat, what they'd wear, how they spoke, how they walked, how they loved. He had worked for Broccoli on many films (including the 1958 war movie *No Time To Die*), and was almost

certainly the man best-placed to find the right chap for the part. The production team had a few actors in mind, from Cary Grant (who would only commit to one film) to Roger Moore (committed to his TV series *The Saint*) and Richard Johnson (*The Haunting*). But a producer friend of Young's recommended a young Scottish lead with whom he'd recently worked on a film called *On The Fiddle*, a World War II comedy about a pair of spiv con-men avoiding service. His name was Sean Connery, he was 31 years old, an ex-milkman and a former contestant in the Mr Universe contest.

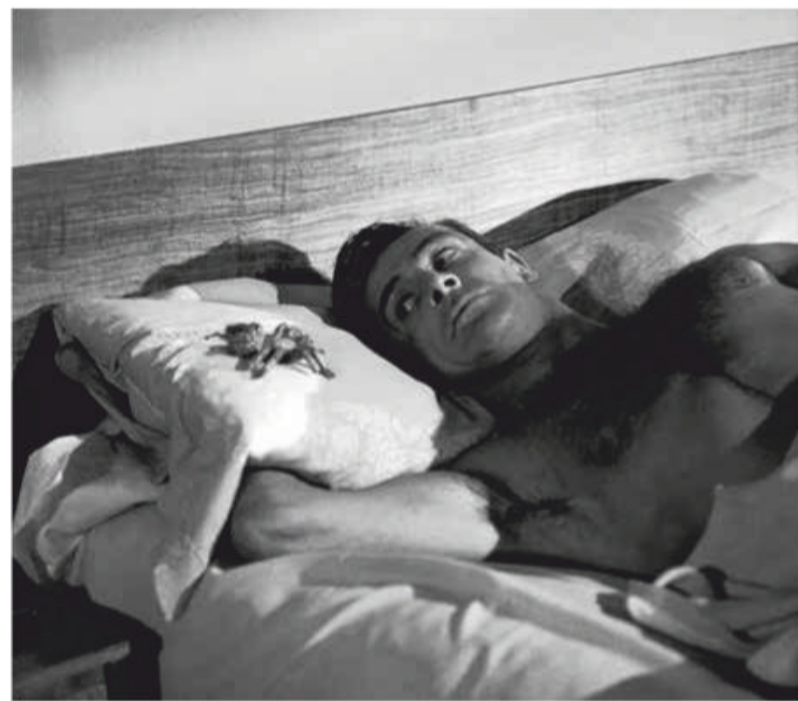
"I liked the way he moved," Saltzman later said, presumably not having seen him on a milk float. Dana Broccoli, meanwhile, said that Connery walked like a panther. While United Artists took some convincing, their fears were swiftly allayed when they saw Connery pad seductively before the cameras. Terence Young took Connery, a "rough diamond", as legendary production designer Ken Adam later described him, under his wing and gave him a crash course in how to be a proper British gentleman, coaching him on the lifestyle, taking him to the best tailors, barbers and restaurants. Connery later described the process as "knocking me into shape", although Young himself would never take the credit for it: asked years later about the process he said, "If you ask me the three ingredients that make James Bond: Sean Connery, Sean Connery, Sean Connery." By the time cameras were ready to roll, Connery was steam-cleaned, varnished, hard-pressed and ready to break hearts, minds and box offices. With Bond in place, it was time to populate the rest of Fleming's world.

Fleming's close friend and neighbour Noel Coward was, bizarrely, Fleming's first choice to play the metal-clawed Dr. No, who was of both German and Chinese lineage. Even the playwright himself clearly thought this odd, responding with a telegram that read, "Dr. No? No! No! No!" Fleming then chose Christopher Lee, his step-cousin, but producers had already found their man in noted New York actor Joseph Wiseman. The search for an actress to play the glamorous, shell-obsessed, home-schooled Honey Ryder ended when the producers saw a photograph of Ursula Andress in a skimpy T-shirt (photographed by her then-husband, John Derek), though her prominent Swedish accent was dubbed by Nikki van der Zyl (with *Bless This House's* Diana Coupland lending her pipes to the sung *Underneath The Mango Tree*).

With steady hands such as Bernard Lee coming in as Bond's father figure M, Lois Maxwell as Miss Money Penny and Jack Lord as Felix Leiter, the *Dr. No* cast was assembled and readied for Jamaica.

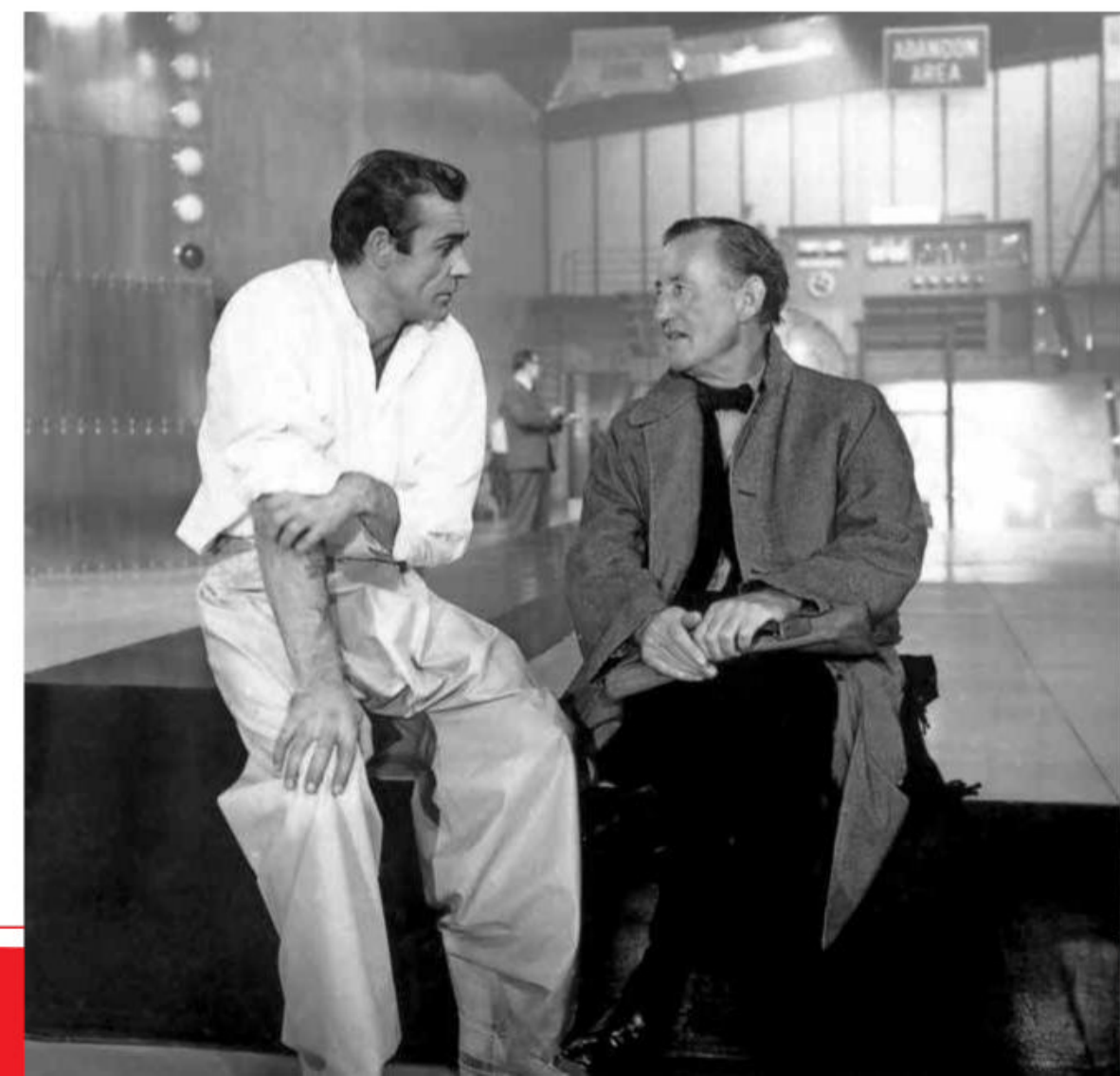


FILMING COMMENCED IN January 1962, yards from Fleming's Goldeneye estate in Oracabessa, which meant the author would occasionally pop in with friends to cast an eye

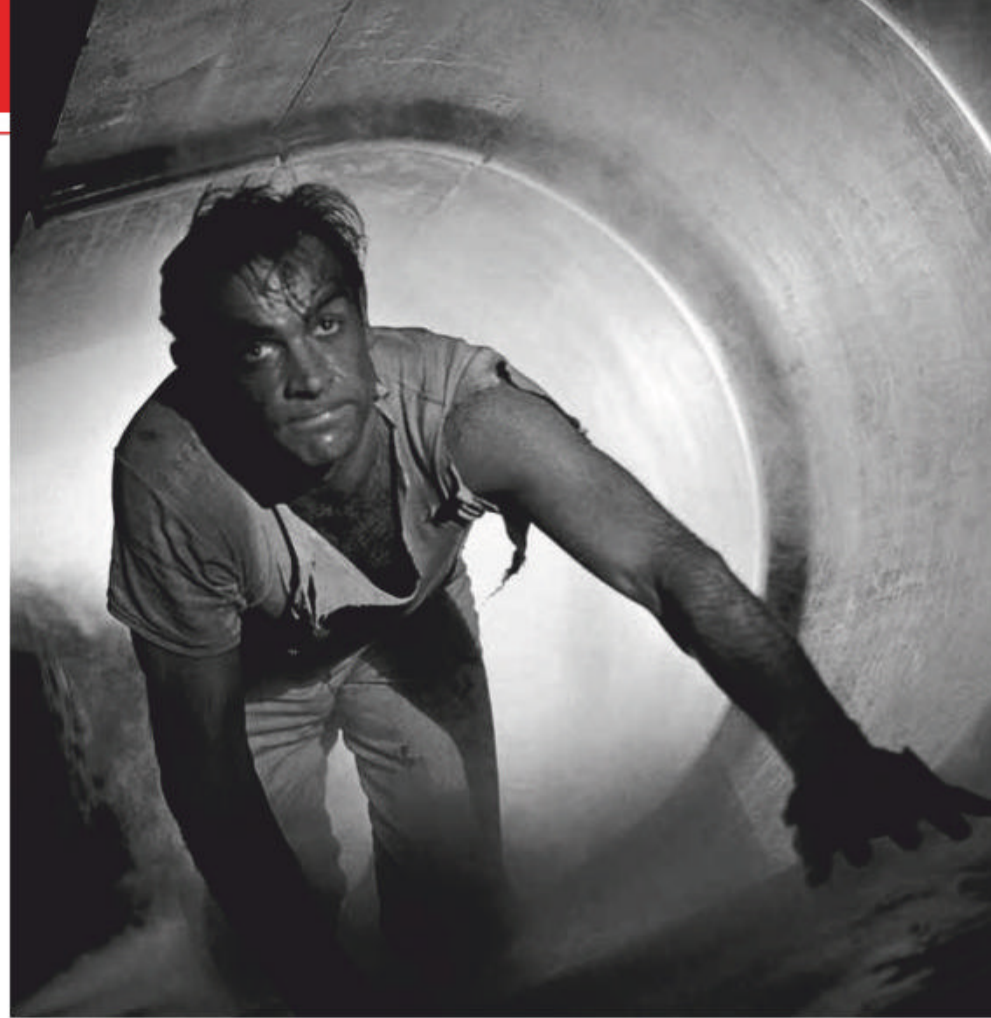


Above: James Bond (Sean Connery) encounters an unwanted guest in his hotel room in *Dr. No* (1962). Right: Bond chauffeur Mr Jones, a No henchman, is relieved of his duties.





Clockwise from above: Bond faces Sylvia Trench (Eunice Gayson) at the 'Le Cercle' casino in his first scene on film; With shell diver Honey Ryder (Ursula Andress) on Dr. No's Crab Key island; Connery in conversation with Bond author Ian Fleming on set in Jamaica.



over what was happening with his beloved creation, provide locals to help with location scouting and offer advice from behind his very busy cigarette holder. He was suitably impressed with what he saw in Connery to meddle with the ancestral lineage of Bond in his next book, *You Only Live Twice*, noting that Bond's father was from Glencoe. Also, *Dr. No* is one of a select handful of film adaptations of Fleming works that stick relatively close to the source material, with only minor changes implemented: Bond's fight with a squid was removed, and a spider, rather than a centipede, crawled over him in his bed.

As a thanks for putting Broccoli and Saltzman together to make the deal, their mutual friend, screenwriter Wolf Mankowitz

(*The Millionaire*, *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*), had been tasked, along with Richard Maibaum, with adapting the book into a screenplay. After a few false starts (for instance, writing the eponymous villain Dr. No as a monkey god worshipped by the island natives — Broccoli told him to change it immediately), Mankowitz would later ask for his name to be removed from the script. Having seen the initial rushes, he was convinced it was to be a disaster.

Irish screenwriter Johanna Harwood and thriller writer Berkely Mather were hired to stitch together all of the elements of Maibaum's script and inject the appropriate degree of Britishness, laying the foundations for the future franchise as they did so. Harwood later worked on *From Russia With Love* — these would be the

only times a female screenwriter wrote for Bond until Phoebe Waller-Bridge was hired in 2019 for *No Time To Die*.

Connery made Bond sexy, but a slinky, virile theme tune would help further, adding an extra layer of cool and devil-may-care. Bond and music, it would transpire, were like flowers and rain, Wint and Kidd; essential together, and nowhere near as effective alone. Singer and composer Monty Norman, the hot property of the London theatre scene, was immediately hired by the producers to give Bond some more *je ne sais quoi*. At first he was hesitant, but when he realised it came with a free holiday to Jamaica for inspiration, became keen, digging up a theme entitled *Bad Sign, Good Sign* that he'd had sitting around in a drawer, from an unproduced musical



Clockwise from top left: Bond gets flirty with Miss Moneypenny (Lois Maxwell); Escaping from Dr. No's compound; Terence Young directs John Kitzmiller (who played local guide Quarrel), Ursula Andress and Sean Connery on location in Jamaica; Bond is captured — note Dr. No's fire-breathing 'dragon tank' at the rear; Bond, CIA agent Felix Leiter (Jack Lord) and Quarrel; Bond waits for Professor Dent at Miss Taro's house.



version of the novel *A House For Mr Biswas*. With some delicate fine tuning, and lush, brassy orchestration from John Barry, Norman's theme flew out of the traps, running with Bond every step of the way as he laid waste to Jamaica and Dr. No's forbidden Crab Key island.

For the film's opening shot, title designer Maurice Binder had an idea. He was after something simple yet effective, and following a burst of inspiration he used a pinhole camera to take a photograph of the inside of a gun-barrel, asking stuntman Bob Simmons to double for Connery.

On screen, as Bond turned and fired down the barrel, blood dripped down, and a legend was born. In the last interview recorded before his death in 1991, Binder said: "That was something

I did in a hurry, because I had to get to a meeting with the producers in 20 minutes. I just happened to have little white price-tag stickers and I thought I'd use them as gun shots across the screen. That was a 20-minute storyboard I did, and they said, 'This looks great!'" This throwaway idea became immediately iconic, even becoming the franchise's logo. And with that, nine years after Fleming's first 007 novel was published, the first James Bond motion picture was done.



*DR. NO* MAY well be a patchwork demo tape of what Bond would later become (at times it feels more akin to the pleasingly odd 1960s espionage TV series *The Avengers* than Ian Fleming), and

may have the stumbles that most newborns suffer from when taking their first steps, but its hero's introduction is nothing short of sublime. Sylvia Trench, Bond's soon-to-be-girlfriend (who also briefly appears in *From Russia With Love* — proving that even the Connery Bond believed in monogamy, once), sits across from a nosey, fellow Chemin De Fer player in the Les Ambassadeurs club. For a full minute, we see Bond only from behind. Then we see his hands opening a cigarette case, and hear his voice admiring Sylvia's moxie at the cards table. He asks for her name; she asks for his in return. And then, finally, as he brings a cigarette up to his lips, we finally see his face, as he murmurs, "Bond. James Bond," through the side of his mouth.

As introductions to popular characters go, you'd be hard-pressed to find one as classic or as memorable. Terence Young's inspired decision to have a staggered reveal of Bond, saving the killer face for last, ensured that within that shot, a legacy was immediately, urgently born, a moment so outrageously perfect that it's often voted as the top Bond moment in history. It has been riffed on in all of 007's films up to *Spectre*.

*Dr. No* was released on 5 October 1962 to some pretty grumpy reviews. *Time* magazine referred to Bond as "a great big hairy marshmallow" who seemed to be "slightly silly", while numerous other publications gave the film a mild kicking. More positive was *The Guardian*, describing it as "a neat and gripping thriller". The Vatican called it "a dangerous mixture of violence, vulgarity, sadism and sex". But despite middling reviews, commercially it fared rather well, ending up as the fifth-highest-grossing movie of 1962, making, from a \$1 million budget, \$16 million in the US alone — a healthy return which ensured that James Bond would return for another adventure.

James Bond had arrived on the big screen, and he wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. Nearly 60 years on he's still with us, continuing a wildly successful cinematic journey that would never have been possible without that first film, and without that perfect star, the right director and a team of passionate, hungry creatives, who took James Bond from the pages of a book, and shot him out of the barrel, into the stars. **E**

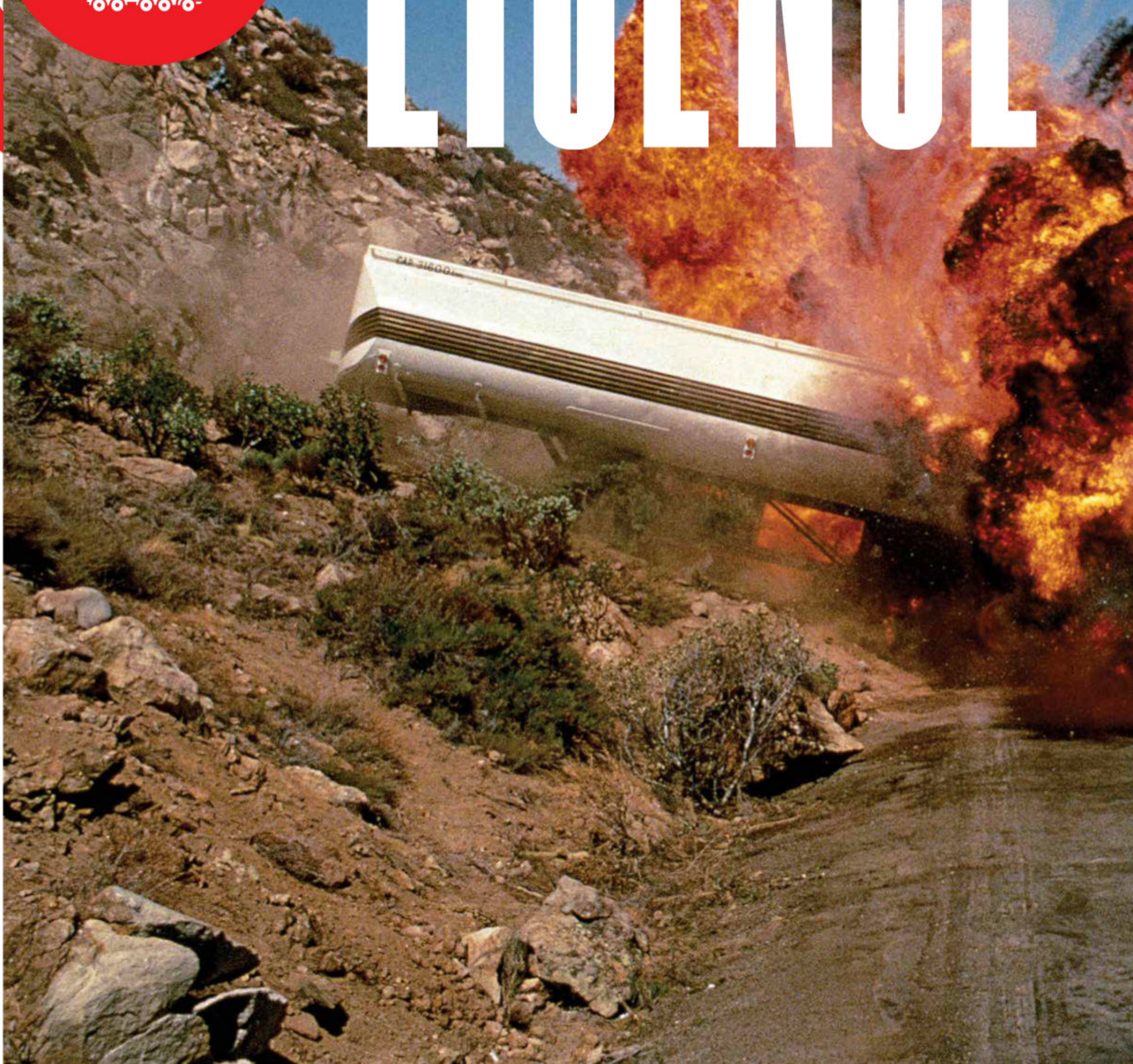
JOHN RAIN IS THE AUTHOR OF BOND MOVIE GUIDE THUNDERBOOK, AVAILABLE NOW IN HARDBACK AND AS AN E-BOOK



THE  
ACTION  
SEQUENCE



# LIGENGE



# TO DRIVE

***Licence To Kill's* iconic tanker chase features some of the most dangerous stunts in Bond history. Here's how they pulled it off**

●●● WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

FOR MUCH OF its running time, *Licence To Kill* — aka Timothy Dalton's second and final outing as 007 — does something interesting for a Bond film. It forgets to be a Bond film. Instead, it turns into a very '80s rip-roaring rampage of revenge, as Bond — miffed because Latin American drug baron Franz Sanchez (Robert Davi) has unsurgically removed the legs of Bond's BFF Felix Leiter, via sharks without frickin' laser beams attached to their heads — infiltrates Sanchez's organisation, waiting for his moment to strike. So it's not about saving the world. It doesn't trot the globe, instead largely staying put in the fictional Isthmus City. Yes, Bond sleeps with two women, but his heart's not really in it. And the action is determinedly low-scale. Certainly there's nothing in the way of the large-scale lavish stuntwork with which the Bond franchise made its name.

Until, that is, the climax, when Bond remembers he's Bond, and everything goes bonkers. There are gunshots. There are explosions. And, more pertinently, there is a full-on, foot-on-the-throat, ten-minute chase sequence involving Bond, who's in a plane with Carey Lowell's Pam Bouvier, hunting down Sanchez, who's in a tanker filled with drugs and fuel, along a vertiginous mountain road, that culminates in one of the greatest practical stunts in Bond history. No, in *movie* history.

"The tanker chase was a bit daunting," says special-effects legend Chris Corbould, who was charged with supervising all the big bangs on the film's second unit. "It was really my sole job on the whole film for the nine months I was in Mexico."

As with most Bond films, the sequence — bar the odd insert shot of actors acting — was handled entirely by the second unit, under the auspices of Arthur Wooster. It was, as the old cliché goes, like a military operation, involving around a dozen tankers that Corbould had to source and then make film-ready. And the location — Mexicali, on the Mexican border — didn't help, either. "From where our hotel was to the location was a two-hour drive each day," recalls Corbould. "It was a pretty gruelling shoot. That put four hours onto our day before we'd even shot a frame."

You can do a lot in a two-hour drive to work. In 1988, your options were perhaps more limited. There was no Candy Crush. No Netflix. No internet to browse idly. But you could read a book (if you weren't the driver). You could listen to music on a newfangled CD player. Or, if you were Simon Crane, the British stuntman doubling for Timothy Dalton on *Licence To*

"It was a bit daunting..."  
The infamous tanker chase sequence, shot on the Mexican border, in *Licence To Kill* (1989).

## THE PETROL TANKER SEQUENCE.



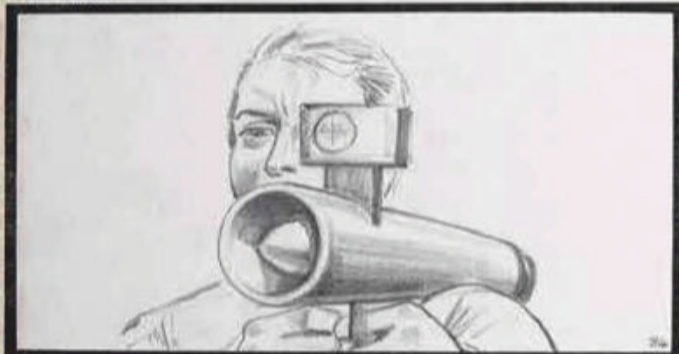
21. SMO. OVERCAST —



22. FEZZ. LAST AND LAST OF MISSILE LAUNCHER — FEZZ IN SMO



23. BOND APPEARS BEHIND A BOND — CREEP TIGHTER OFF TO THE LEFT —



24. FEZZ. TAKE AIM —



25. RIDING DEVICE — FEZZ. FOCUS ON RED TANKER —



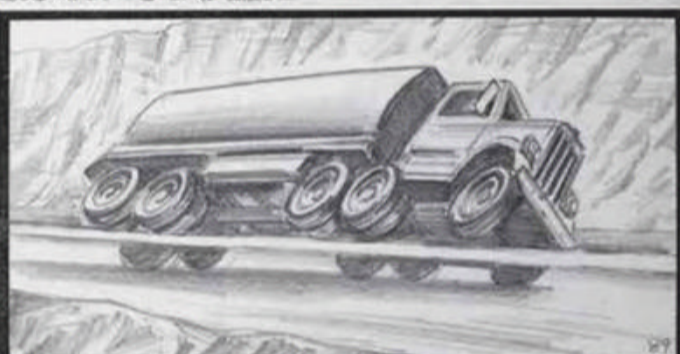
26. BOND. FEZZES AND BOND'S OVER —



27. BOND SENDS HIS VEHICLE UP ROCKY INCLINE —



28. FEZZ. FEZZ. FEZZ. —



29. MISSILE PASSES UNDER TRUCK —

**SECRET**  
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REVISED 4<sup>TH</sup> JULY '88.

SHEET 10.

Kill, you could psyche yourself up for what could well be the last stunt you ever do. And maybe, just maybe, the last *thing* you ever do.



THE SCRIPT CALLED for Bond to clamber onto the wheels of the crop duster and, as Bouvier manoeuvres the plane into position, leap out onto the top of the tanker below. But scripts call for so many things. Jumping from a plane onto a moving truck is a cinch on the page. The reality is much harder. So Crane and the second-unit team threw themselves into rehearsals, where two things happened. During one rehearsal, the engine packed up on the plane, forcing stunt pilot 'Corkey' Fornof to make an emergency landing. "Bear in mind, Corkey was doubling a girl, and he was wearing a dress, and I was doubling Bond, so wearing a suit," laughs Crane. "We land in the middle of the mountains in Mexicali and, suddenly out of nowhere, all these Mexican DEA agents came running at us with guns. They thought we were dropping drugs. So there was a bit of explanation needed."

Once underpants had been changed, and the prospect of appearing in a prequel to *Sicario* had diminished, the second thing that happened is that they realised the stunt was hard. Very hard. Harder than they'd anticipated.

"The plane's doing 70 miles an hour, and the truck's doing 70 miles an hour," explains Crane. "And it was extremely hot there. So, because of the thermals, the plane actually didn't get anywhere near the petrol tanker in most of the rehearsals." Oh, and Crane wasn't tethered to the plane. He was free-jumping a fairly short distance, but still one that could end with him being squished, or bouncing off the tanker and over the edge of the mountainside. Still, stuntmen aren't like the rest of us. They are not like other mortals. Crane wasn't allowed to eat anything for breakfast, in case he had an accident and then had another accident. But if he had been, he would have chomped down on a bowl of pressure, with some pressure on toast. Because, during that long drive up to the location on the day of the actual stunt, when he and Corbould and the rest of the crew had to get up at 3.30am because they had to shoot the stunt before it got too hot, he didn't spend it thinking about anything and everything that could go wrong. "I fell asleep," he admits. "You just get pissed off, and you just want it done. And then, when it is done, there's the big sense of relief."

And, also, a sense of slight discontentment. For, after all that hard work, after pulling off a stunt so dangerous it should be in the Bond Stunts Hall Of Fame, you can barely see it in the finished film.

There's a brief, blink-and-you'll-miss-it shot of Crane-as-Bond hitting the top of the tanker, but that's it. Crane is still not happy about it, more than 30 years on. "It should be the big show-stopping moment, really," he muses of the stunt. "But it's so quick... We could have just hung a crane over the plane, wiggled it about a bit, and I could have jumped safely onto the truck from there." It's hard to argue. Still, it had one unexpected benefit: Crane's disappointment over the stunt pushed him to become a second-unit director in his own right, working on the likes of *Hobbs & Shaw*, *Rogue One* and *Edge Of Tomorrow*. "You're more in charge of the action," he says. "And hopefully I'm filming it in a unique way. Never do the same thing twice."



CRANE'S BIG MOMENT in the tanker chase may have been botched, but nobody can say that about *Licence To Kill's* real show-stopping stunt: when Bond, now at the wheel of the tanker, is shot at with a surface-to-air missile. His only recourse is to bump the truck onto a handily placed mound of mud, and tilt it up onto its side, deftly avoiding the missile, which flies semi-harmlessly into another truck behind, sending a very Bondian comedy extra running for his life. Again, that's the sort of thing that's easy for

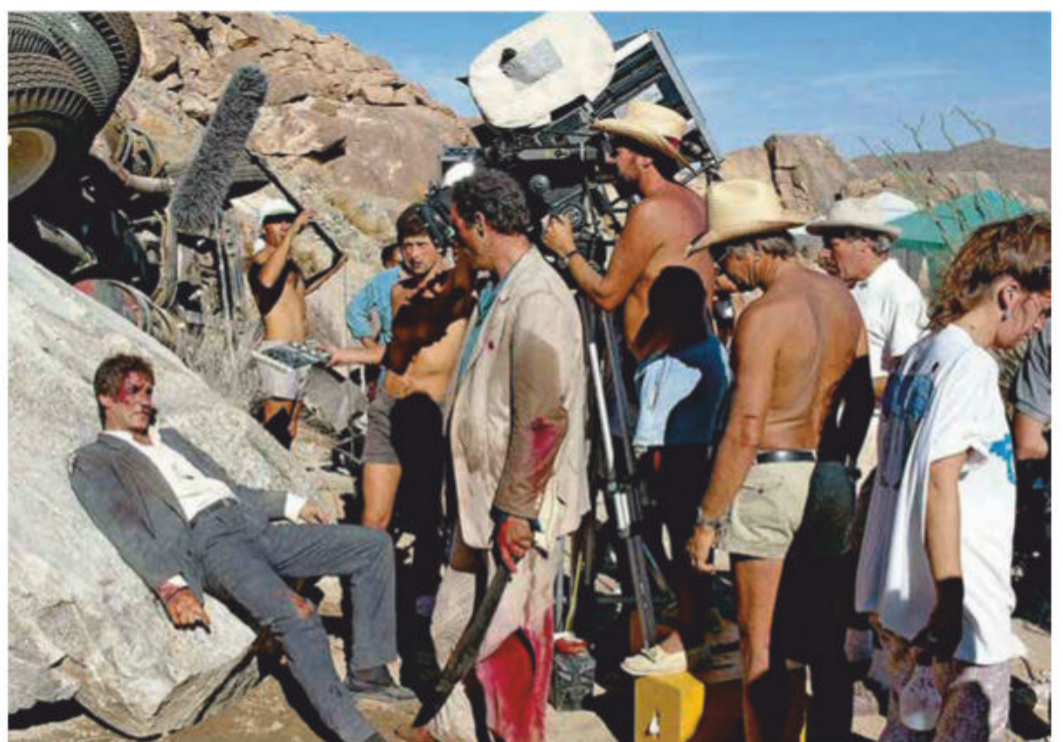


co-writers Michael G. Wilson and Richard Maibaum to scribble down: “Bond flips the truck onto its side, NBD.” The execution, however, takes some serious executing.

Flipping a car onto two wheels is the sort of thing they teach you on day two of stuntman school. But a massive truck, with tanker still attached, is a different kettle of petrol. “We built all sorts of rigs, like little stabilising arms that came out,” says Corbould. “But to be perfectly honest, most of the time it was a little French stunt driver who did this for a living.”

That was Rémy Julienne, a motocross champion turned stunt driver, for whom no job was too dangerous, no angle too obtuse. Artfully hidden behind tinted glass, and shot from a distance far enough to ensure that audience members wouldn’t be able to spot that Dalton had dramatically changed his appearance, Julienne had no real difficulty in getting the truck all diagonal. “He had a ramp, we would line

Opposite page: One of artist Roger Deer’s original tanker sequence storyboards. This page, clockwise from top left: Bond double Simon Crane performs his blink-and-you’ll-miss-it stunt; Franz Sanchez (Robert Davi) feels the heat; Shooting the 007 (Timothy Dalton)/ Sanchez (Robert Davi) climax; Stunt driver Rémy Julienne shows The Stig how it’s done; Stunt pilot ‘Corkey’ Fornof zooms off after the drop.



it up, off he would go, put it up the ramp and up on its side,” explains Corbould.

The difficulty lay in keeping the truck on its wheels. “He put it over quite a few times,” admits Corbould, “but we had a crane standing by so we just picked it up, dusted it down, and did it again.” And they had to allow for the rocket as well. Yes, the actual rocket. Nowadays, even though Bond still values practical effects over all others, the rocket would be added in post. Not on *Licence To Kill*. “The rocket was on a wire that went past the ramp,” says Corbould. “Once the tractor unit was on its side, myself and a colleague pulled the wire so it was taut and then I chose the right moment to fire the rocket along the wire. And then we got out the way!” Not out of the way of the rocket — as a mere stunt-rocket, it wasn’t primed to explode — but of the ginormous tanker heading straight at them. “It’s quite daunting when you see a 40-foot-long long tanker on its side wheels coming straight towards you,” laughs Corbould.



SO, WHAT OF Dalton in all of this? If Crane was jumping onto planes (but not from a crane), and Rémy Julienne was making driving on five wheels look as easy as slicing vegetables, what was the star up to? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Crane

remembers having to show him several stunts first before stepping out to allow Dalton his close-up, while Corbould recalls that he was “very game. We had him on the front of tankers, the backs of tankers. He was very hands on.”

Dalton may not have been allowed anywhere near the really dangerous stuff in the tanker chase, but there are still plenty of shots of him clinging onto the tanker, and being dragged around. “I had to jump from one moving tanker to another,” he told *Empire* back in 2011. “I leap across, climb this ladder while all these bullet hits are going off...” At this point, Dalton did his impression of bullet hits going off, which basically meant yelling, “BAM! BAM! BAM!” in *Empire*’s face. “And then the klaxon that means ‘Cut!’ goes off. I’m thrilled. I know I’ve done a good job, but when I look around, everyone’s pissing themselves. I look down and I’m in my underpants. My trousers are hanging down off my ankles. My very beautiful suit was in shreds!”

Unsurprisingly, that shot didn’t make the final cut. *Licence To Kill* may not have been your typical Bond movie, but the world just wasn’t ready for 007 fighting for his life in his tighty whiteys. ●

FOR MANY MORE IMAGES FROM THE SETS OF BOND MOVIES, GET TASCHEN’S *THE JAMES BOND ARCHIVES*, NOW UPDATED WITH A CHAPTER ON *NO TIME TO DIE*

THE  
KILLER  
SHOTS



THE

007 DOSSIER

Bond producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson talk us through our pick of rare behind-the-scenes images from deep within the archives ●●● WORDS IAN FREER

### OFFICE POLITICS

(GOLDFINGER, 1964)

**Barbara Broccoli:** “The wonderful Bernard Lee here, such a phenomenal actor. He had such presence. M is always so important to Bond because M represents everything; authority, government, Queen, country. He is the one person Bond has to answer to. It’s a very important relationship. These scenes are about setting up the plot — giving Bond his mission — or telling Bond off because he did not do what he was supposed to do on the mission. You have to feel there is a mutual respect between them, even though it may get challenged at times. M is always going to back Bond. He may not say it to his face, but he is always going to have Bond’s back in the field.”



### TEERING OFF

(DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER, 1971)

**Michael G. Wilson:** “Sean didn’t play golf before *Goldfinger* and he became obsessed by it. He still plays, I imagine. Seeing this picture, it reminds me that the moon rover in the Science Museum was taken off this set and given to them. It was on display as if it was the real vehicle. It just shows the wonderful attention to detail brought by Ken Adam and the props people.” >

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KODAK TRI-X PAN FILM

KODAK TRI-X PAN FILM

**A VIEW TO A KILT**

(ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE, 1969)

**Broccoli:** "Bond's Scottish heritage is very important. We try to emphasise that as much as we can in the films, as we did in this film and *Skyfall*. It's a magnificent film. It's very tough to follow Sean Connery, who originated the role and had been so celebrated. George [Lazenby] had a tough time. But the film really holds up. It's incredible and his performance is very good — that last scene in the film is very moving. He delivers those lines wonderfully."



**ROAD WARRIOR**

(LIVE AND LET DIE, 1973)

**Wilson:** "This is the car and boat chase with Sheriff Pepper [Clifton James]. At the time people were concerned it was such a long chase, so involved."

I remember the studio wanting us to cut it down to some degree. But Harry [Saltzman] and Cubby [Broccoli, Barbara's father] decided to stick with it. It became a hallmark of the Bond series."

**Broccoli:** "That film had an

interracial relationship between Bond [Roger Moore] and Rosie [Gloria Hendry], which was very ahead of its time. The film was banned in certain states in the South. Gloria Hendry was wonderful — she's a real trailblazer."

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**LICENCE TO CHARM**

(THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN, 1974)

**Broccoli:** "Charm was Roger's middle name. He was such a gentleman. I'd known him since I was a kid. I remember we were night-shooting at about 3 o'clock in the morning and some people came over. He had just sat down to eat something. He didn't take a beat. He got straight up: 'Where are you from? Nice to meet you.' I was just like, 'Wow.' It was very unusual. These films were so impactful to him. He travelled all over the world and obviously saw both sides of life. Audrey Hepburn was sick and asked him to take over as a UNICEF ambassador and he did. He was an incredible man." >





## FINDING AN EDGE

(THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS, 1987)

**Wilson:** “This was the opening scene in Gibraltar for Tim’s first movie. Tim really took it on and went for it full-bore.”

**Broccoli:** “He was very interested in going back to the books and to Bond as Fleming had written it, a much harder-edged character. He was phenomenal with the action. A well-trained actor, a great company leader. He gave it his all and did a great job. We’re still very close to him.”

## THE END OF AN ERA

(DIE ANOTHER DAY, 2002)

**Wilson:** “Pierce was charming as Bond but also had a tough side to him. I remember this ice dragster. We were dealing with a lot of CGI on this sequence for the first time. It was highly experimental for us, but it turned out pretty well.”

**Broccoli:** “We were sitting at this very table and someone said, ‘A plane has just crashed into the Twin Towers.’ We were in prep on *Die Another Day* and we had become quite fantastical in the design of the film. But when we came to the end of it, we felt it was wrong. Given the way the world was, we had to become darker, more realistic, grittier. We felt we needed to make a big change.”





**WET WORK**  
(CASINO ROYALE, 2006)

**Wilson:** “Weren’t we lucky with Eva Green? To get her for the first movie with Daniel.”  
**Broccoli:** “We had to convince her because she wasn’t interested at all. So there was a long process of trying to get her to read the script. But there is no-one else who could play that role. She looks like Vesper. She *is* Vesper! Once she read the script, she wanted to come in.”  
**Wilson:** “For this shot we were in a tank on the 007 stage. We had a set that went up and down so they had been worried about putting an actress down there. She’d be in the water acting and at a certain point they’d drop this little oxygen pipe down and she’d suck on it. And she’d go back and do it again. She was unbelievable. When you look at that scene, the acting she does while she is drowning is amazing. She is gulping for air to try and drown herself. That is terrifying to do in real life. I don’t know how many actresses could have done that.”



**OIL FIELDS**  
(QUANTUM OF SOLACE, 2008)

**Wilson:** “This was obviously a *Goldfinger* reference but in oil. We like to reference our earlier films when we can. The Bond fans love it. It’s a tongue-in-cheek reference.”  
**Broccoli:** “We loved Gemma [Arterton]. She had just finished drama school and she was the first person we met for Strawberry Fields and we cast her on the spot. She is a remarkable actress. She threw herself into this role and did everything.”

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## DIAL M FOR MAGIC

(SKYFALL, 2012)

**Wilson:** “Judi Dench was fantastic in her action-hero role. Seeing her here writing reminds me she would do the *Times* crossword every morning on the set but she would do it in ink. I couldn’t begin to do them but the idea of doing them in ink was unbelievable. But she’d finish it in under an hour.”

**Broccoli:** “After his heart was broken by Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*, Bond shuts down emotionally. *Quantum Of Solace* was all about revenge. So when it came to *Skyfall*, we wanted to impact him emotionally. How could we do that? The most significant thing we could think of was to kill M. It was really difficult coming to the decision. Sam, Michael and I took Judi for lunch and broke it to her. She was wonderful about it. She had a long history with Sam — she had done *The Cherry Orchard* with him — and suggested him. She was very instrumental in Sam’s career. She knew the people who were killing her off were people who loved her. Shooting that sequence we were all in floods.”

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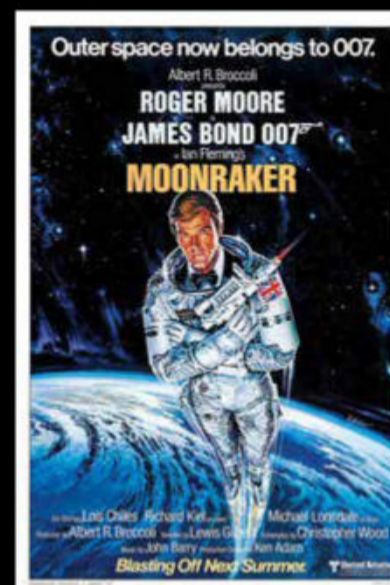
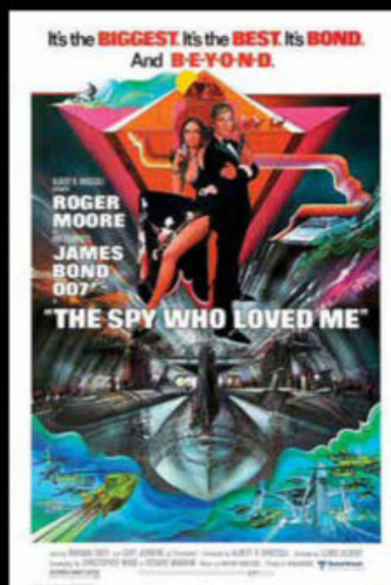
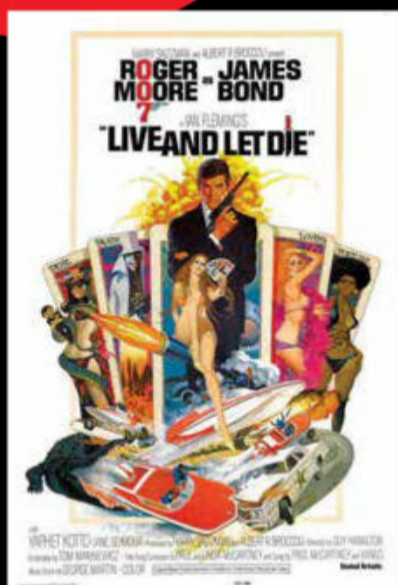
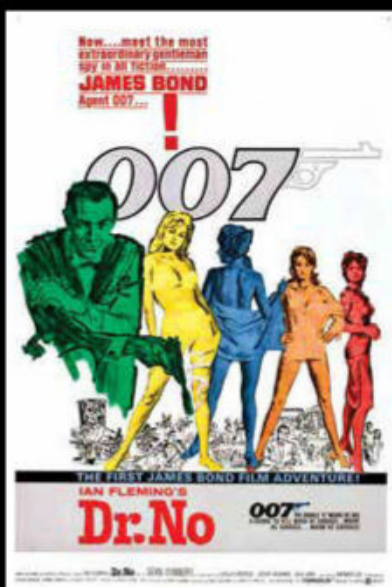
**FIRST CLASS**

(SKYFALL, 2012)

**Broccoli:** “This picture just makes me think how great Daniel is. He is extremely involved in these action sequences, in the development as well as the execution. There’s this whole action sequence and when he jumps down into the carriage at the end, he straightens his cuffs — it’s so quintessential Bond. He is able to do the tough stuff but with that wonderful flair.”

**Wilson:** “This was in Turkey. I remember the pod cars going alongside the train. This fight sequence was very good, I think. Turkey was a great place to go.” 🍷

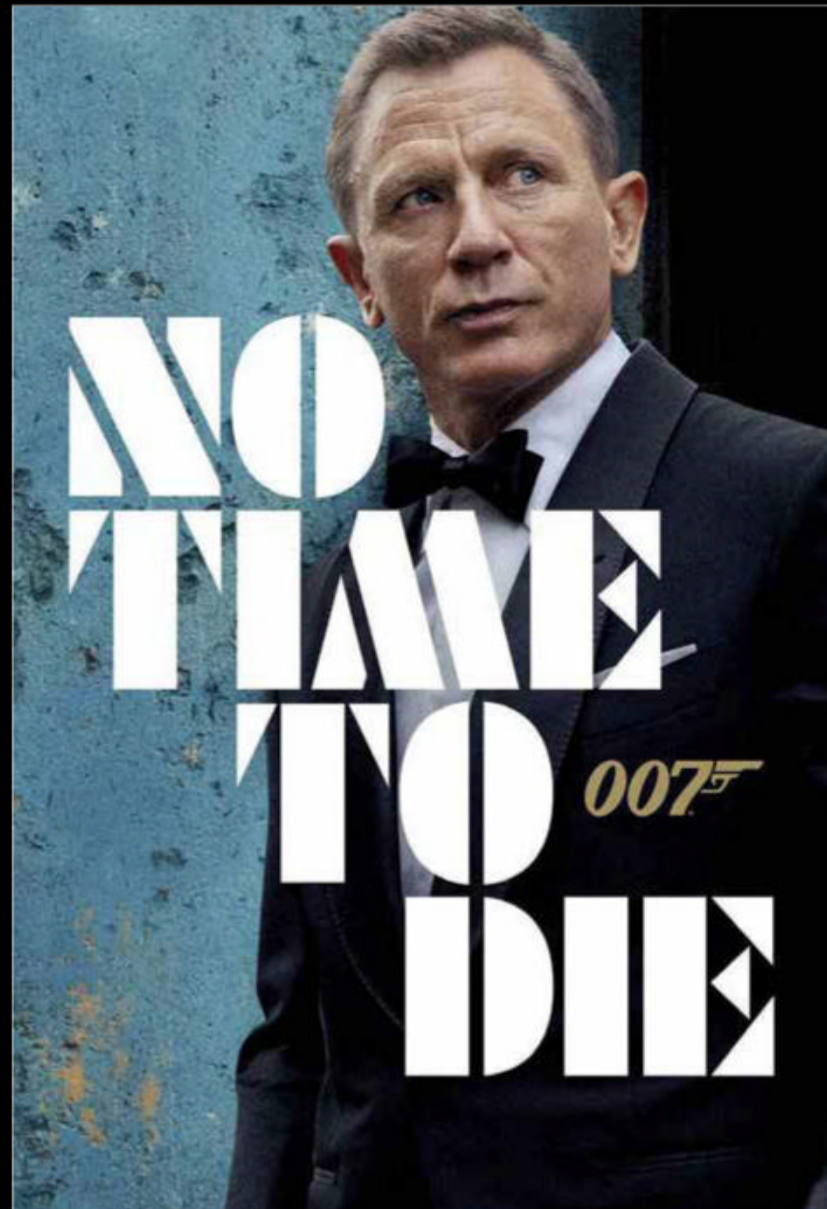
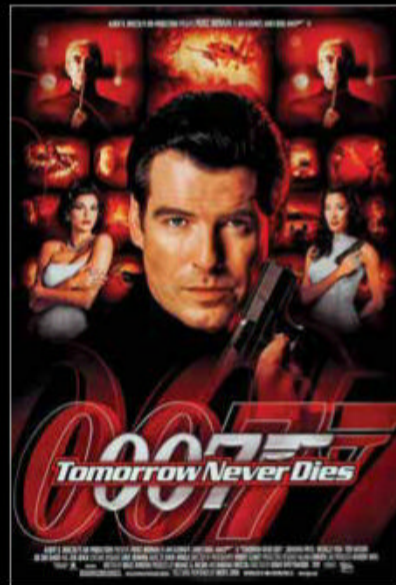
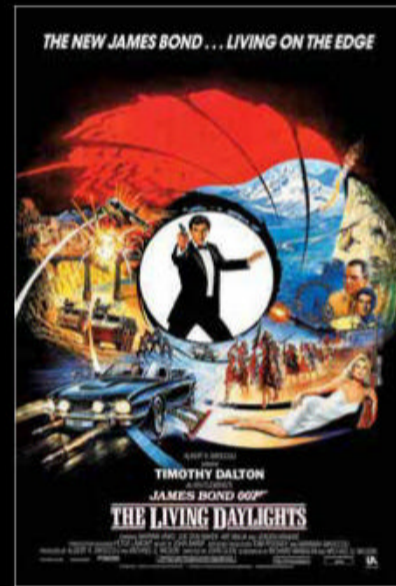
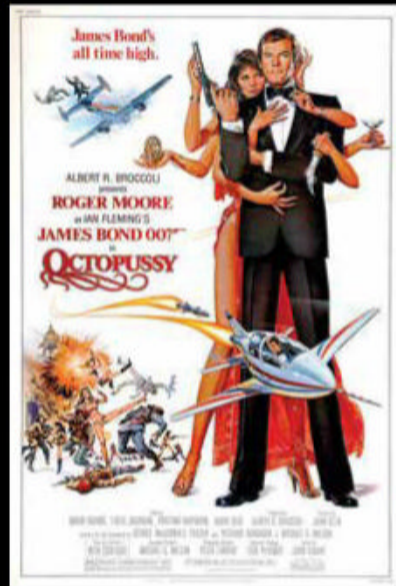
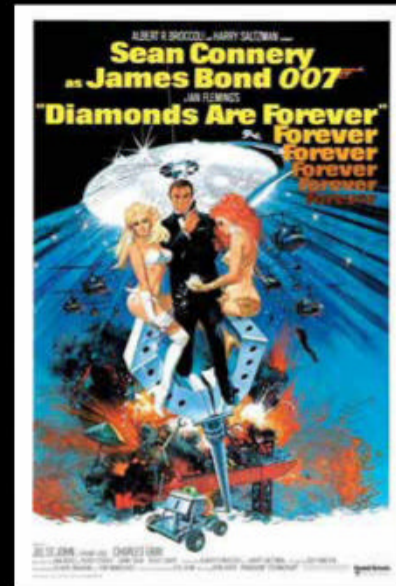
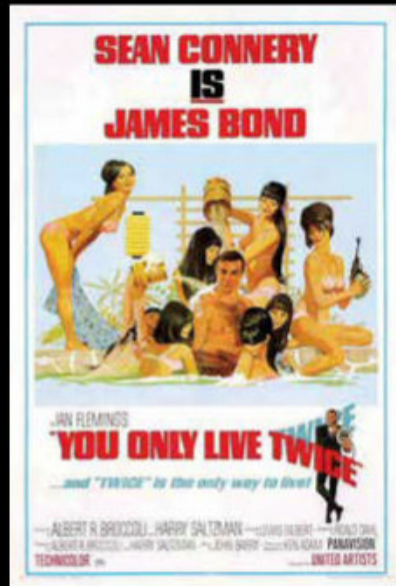
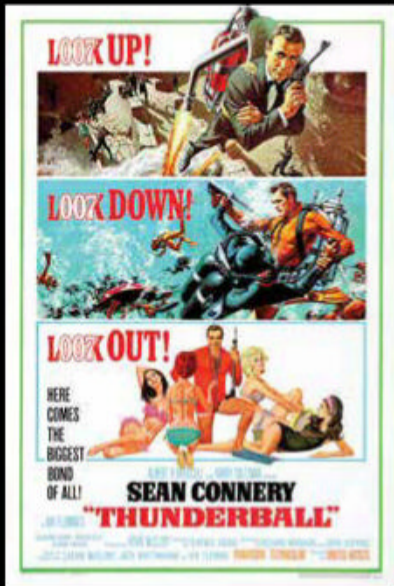
# THE LEGACY



# SHOOTING GALLERY

For every classic Bond film, there's a classic poster. As this picture-perfect wall of fame proves







# SHREDDER

IN **THE ASSISTANT**, DIRECTOR KITTY GREEN DEPICTS A  
SHE TELLS *EMPIRE* HOW SHE MADE SUCH A



# DINNERWELLS

FILM PRODUCTION COMPANY SWAMPED WITH MISCONDUCT.  
TIMELY AND AUTHENTIC PORTRAYAL OF ABUSE

WORDS SARAH HUGHES

NO





KITTY GREEN IS MOVED the most by the audience responses.

At film festival Q&As and after screenings they queue to tell her what her debut fiction film *The Assistant* has meant to them. How they were, like the film's protagonist Jane, stuck in a toxic work environment, carrying out banal tasks, shouted at, belittled, overlooked and ignored.

"A lot of people respond strongly," Green says. She's in Berlin, where *The Assistant* has just been screened to rave reviews, an experience she has found almost overwhelming. "People really seem to get what we're trying to say. I've had people grab my arm and want to touch me, which is very emotional, and others who have stood there quietly and then started talking about what it meant to them. I've had male assistants say they had a female boss and a similar environment to that depicted in the film, and people who weren't in the film industry, people in cosmetic companies, even the yacht industry, tell me about their experiences."

Sometimes those experiences cross generations. "I even had a mother and son where he was saying to her, 'When I was calling you and saying that everything was fine and you were telling me it was a good job opportunity — this is what it was really like.' It's kind of shocking to learn how many people identify with it. It makes you sad. But at the same time, people keep saying that they're grateful to be seen."

Just an hour before Green speaks to *Empire*, Harvey Weinstein has been found guilty of third degree rape and committing a criminal sexual act in the first degree. His shadow looms large throughout our interview, not least because *The Assistant* has been repeatedly described as 'the first great movie of the #MeToo era', a phrase the 35-year-old Green is not entirely comfortable with.



"It's not that I have a problem with the label, but it is weird when people say it's a #MeToo movie because I don't think I'd ever call it that," she says. #MeToo coverage, believes Green, often focuses on getting rid of abusive men, whereas her film focuses on someone with little power. The Australian writer and director's interest lay in really drilling down into what makes a workplace environment toxic and asking why we continue to find bullying behaviour acceptable. The result is a film that forces the audience to consider their own behaviour, and to ask: "Have I ever been guilty of looking the other way for an easier life?"

**C**OMPLICIT BEHAVIOUR IS everywhere in *The Assistant*. The story focuses on Jane (Julia Garner), the newest assistant at a New York-based film company, following her as she realises not only that the head of the company (referred to in credits as 'The Boss') is

a predatory monster, but that almost everyone else working there is aware of it. Green allows silences to spin out, while dialogue is sparse, the camera largely focused on Jane's face or capturing the mundane tasks that fill her days.

As we watch her struggle through the latest of these days, a routine that begins before sunrise and ends long after sunset, we see her slowly decide that she is unable to simply ignore her increasing unease with The Boss's behaviour.

Jane is the smallest cog in a soul-crushing machine. She is also the only person to act. Yet that decision, while central to Green's story, is not the only reason why *The Assistant* lingers so long in the mind. The film's real power comes from the way in which Green's camera captures every terrible moment of Jane's awful day.

We watch as she is largely ignored by her male counterparts; see her stand at an executive's desk, silently willing him to look up and notice her; follow the male assistants into



Jane (Julia Garner) has an uncomfortable conversation with her office's head of HR (Matthew Macfadyen).

meetings while Jane instead fetches coffee; and, in one particularly memorable scene, looks after The Boss's children after they're unexpectedly dumped in the office. It's a day made up of countless small humiliations, and one based as much on Green's own experiences as from those of other people.

"I've been on the film festival circuit for ten years and I've had my fair share of people kind of ignoring me or turning away or not listening to what I'm saying, or making weird gestures and glances when I'm talking," she explains. "Those things really hurt me and dented my self-confidence. I'd tell my friends about them and they'd say: 'Oh, ignore it — it's nothing — forget it.' But really it was the accumulation of those things that would get to me. I wanted to demonstrate what that's like, how those little gestures and micro-aggressions can really affect a person's self-confidence and even their career trajectory."

The small details stand out, too. The brightly coloured bowl of Froot Loops that Jane quickly gulps down during a rare moment to herself; the boxes of bottled water she has to repeatedly open; the scripts she photocopies constantly; the delicate bracelet she finds by the sofa in The Boss's office. Cumulative power comes from the way in which these moments help us to understand how deadening Jane's job is, how much she relies on routine to get through the day and, most of all, how a small act such as finding the bracelet is another step in pushing her towards her decision to speak up.

Green, who started out in documentaries, knew those seemingly insignificant details held the key to her film. "It's that idea that things keep coming at her and she's doing them one by one. Things feel off and a little disconcerting but she doesn't have enough information to join the dots. Trying to make that clear by showing her going task by task through her routine was important."

The result is a film that both looks and feels remarkably authentic, a fact that's not entirely surprising given Green's commitment to digging down into her story's truth.

**D**ESPITE DESCRIBING THE film industry as "very competitive and cut-throat and a little dehumanising", Green herself never considered walking away. She was raised in a creative family in Melbourne, where artistic expression was encouraged: Green bought her video camera at 11 thanks to a small inheritance from her grandmother, spent her adolescence making short films, and studied film at the Victorian College of the Arts.

She made her first feature film, *Ukraine Is Not A Brothel*, about Ukrainian feminist group Femen in 2013, having read about them in a newspaper. "The themes were the same as those I was exploring in my short films: women's bodies and their exploitation in the media. >

So I moved to Ukraine, started studying Ukrainian and then asked, in my bad Ukrainian, if I could make a film about the movement and, incredibly, they said yes. Parts of that time were really terrible — our neighbour's throat was slit, the water kept running out — but it was also the best year of my life. It was wild.”

*Ukraine Is Not A Brothel* was followed in 2015 by a short film about ice skater Oksana Baiul, *The Face Of Ukraine: Casting Oksana Baiul*. Then in 2017 she made *Casting JonBenet*, a documentary focusing on the continued fascination with the case of murdered child beauty queen JonBenét Ramsey. It was a small film, she says, but it was picked up by Netflix and got much attention, an experience she calls surreal.

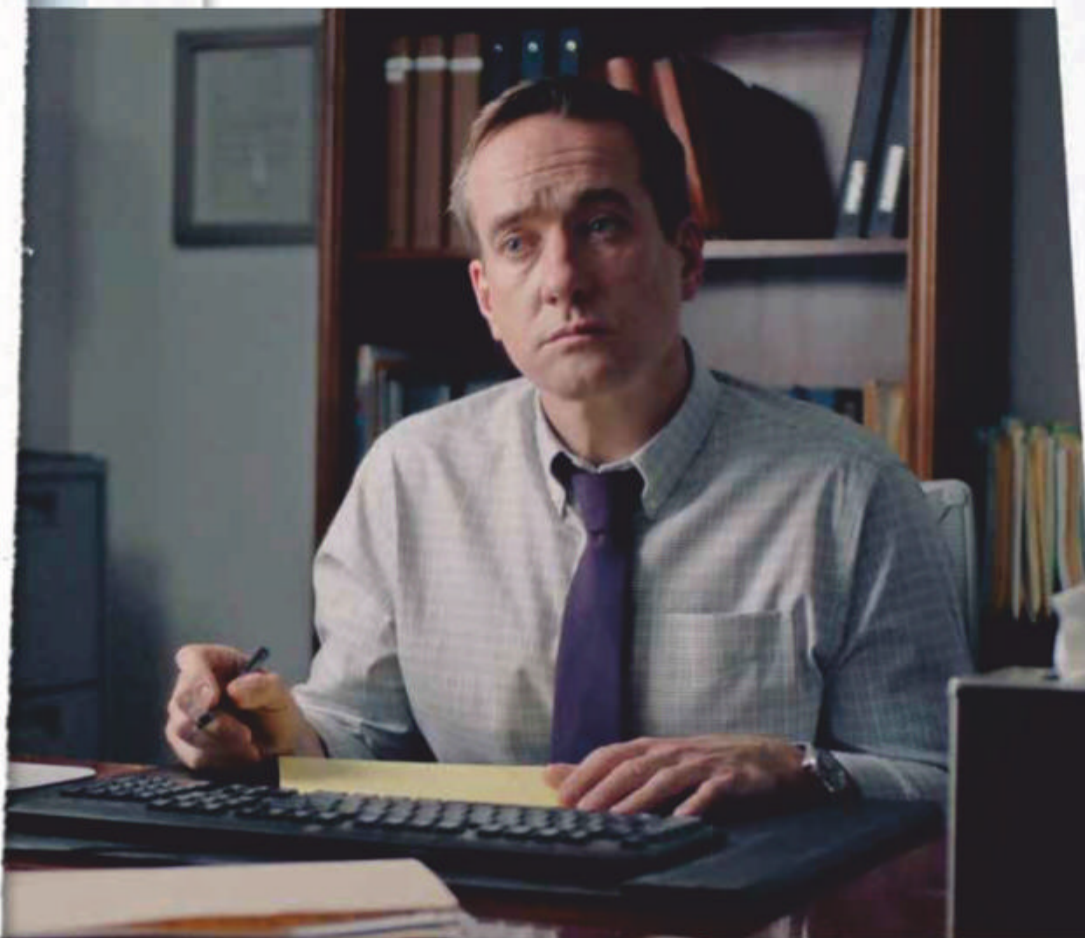
Her time in documentaries clearly fed into the preparation for her first fiction feature, in particular the months of research and determination to ensure that even the smallest details felt right, but she also drew inspiration from films as diverse as 1980 feminist revenge comedy *9 To 5* and Stanley Kubrick's tense war classic *Full Metal Jacket*. “It's the idea of a dehumanising system — once you start looking you find them everywhere.” And the observational style she learned working in documentaries clearly benefits *The Assistant*, making it feel almost as though you are watching real lives play out on screen.

It also nods to one of Green's favourite films, Chantal Akerman's 1970s feminist classic *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels*, which follows a lonely housewife (Delphine Seyrig) as she goes about her daily chores, and to two films that make powerful use of silence, Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* and Steve McQueen's *Hunger*. “I was drawn to the 17-minute shot in *Hunger* in particular,” she says, adding that the single shot of two men talking allowed her to make bolder choices with regard to *The Assistant*, to hold silences and keep her camera focused tightly on Garner's face. This, in particular, stays with you.

**B**EFORE FILMING, GREEN conducted around 100 interviews across a number of industries. “I started by phoning all my friends who worked in film companies,” she remembers. “First those who worked at Miramax and The Weinstein Company. Then I spoke to people who worked at studios, agencies and other production companies, but I also spoke to people who worked elsewhere. I didn't want it to be too industry-specific.”

Did her friends at The Weinstein Company and Miramax ever raise concerns about Weinstein's behaviour? She pauses. “I'd heard rumours at Sundance and elsewhere about him and his behaviour but, yeah, I do wonder what people knew. I'm not sure people were always sure how consensual or not it was. I think a lot of assumptions were made.”

She admits she was told “lots of crazy stories”, tales of out-of-hour demands, of parties and film festivals and excess. But you won't find those sorts of details in the film. “For me it was about the ordinary. The gendered division of



**Top to bottom:**  
A patronising look from Macfadyen's HR manager; Director Kitty Green behind the scenes; Jane with new hire Sienna (Kristine Froseth).



Jane out in the cold.

labour, the idea that women were stuck getting coffee while the boys went to meetings and got to do things that seemed more career-enhancing. I wanted to hear experiences that any woman could relate to, so that it was transferable to any workplace.”

At times, the repetitive nature of those experiences made her feel sick. “So many people had similar stories and it was terrifying, that notion that so many women were forced into these positions where they felt really uncomfortable.” Worse was the sense that many of these women had their careers cut short thanks to endemic sexism. “A lot of them stayed at assistant level forever because there was no path up for them. A lot were never promoted. A lot ended up quitting that particular company. Many of them left the film industry entirely because they just didn’t see how they could find a way through. It was really sad and, honestly, pretty hard to hear.”

In the film’s central scene, Jane makes an appointment with the company’s oleaginous head of HR (Matthew Macfadyen, channelling his *Succession* sleaze to great effect) to express her concerns, only for him to browbeat and gaslight her before delivering a devastating putdown as she heads out of the door. “When I was developing the film I kept asking my friends: is this just any day at the company or is it the day in which she goes to HR? Because they’re two different movies,” says Green. “In the end I decided it was the day she went to HR because I really wanted her to take a step, to speak up for what she was witnessing. Going to HR was a very important part of that, because when you’re looking at the kind of machinery and systems that surround predators, the HR department is right there protecting them.”

For Garner, the scene underlines how feeling shame can destroy you. “I think the reason the HR scene is so effective and heartbreaking is because shame is one of the worst feelings that you can have, and what [Macfadyen’s character] does is make her feel ashamed of coming to him,” she says. “He suggests that she’s ungrateful and replaceable and that makes her feel worse and worse. Then just as she’s leaving he makes her wonder if she only came here because she was jealous of the other girl. If that’s the real reason why she’s reported what’s going on. He makes her doubt everything.”

Garner, an expressive actor who made her name with eye-catching performances in *The Americans* and *Ozark*, was thrilled to be offered the role. “I’m never sent scripts like this, that deal with these sorts of important subjects,” she explains. “From the moment I met Kitty I knew that we were on the same page.”

She was fascinated by the sparse screenplay. “It felt almost like a silent film in a lot of ways. It was pretty hard making it, because there’s so much focus on your eyes and face. Also I was constantly trying to separate from both the other actors and also from the audience watching. Jane feels so isolated throughout the experience and I really wanted that to come through.” Jane might be largely ignored but Garner’s performance is compelling, her face registering every abrupt word and careless slight.

**G**REEN DOES NOT want the shadow cast by Weinstein and his crimes to overwhelm her wider message, which she describes as “taking the opportunity to ask, well, how did this go so wrong and for so long, and what can we do to make it better?” Things are progressing though, she believes. “I do hope that the conversation is shifting. It feels as

though a lot more people are comfortable about speaking out about things. But there are still changes to be made and we need to unpick some of the wider cultural and systemic problems that get ignored when we focus on people like Weinstein. It becomes a case of, ‘Oh, we’ve fixed that problem, so we can stop talking about it.’”

He becomes a convenient monster and allows us to ignore our own complicity? “Exactly. I think it’s so reductive to say that it’s a Harvey Weinstein problem when it’s so much bigger than that. The more conversations we can have about getting women into positions of power in any industry, the better it will be.”

As to all those emotional responses to the film, Green says they give her hope that things are finally starting to change. “I do feel like younger generations really don’t want to put up with this sort of thing anymore. There’s an amazing movement right now among assistants in Hollywood who are organising for better wages and hours. People are seizing their chances and standing up for themselves.”

She is encouraged by the pace with which that change is occurring. “One of the oddest things about *The Assistant* is that in some ways it’s already a period piece, because it’s technically set before the rise of the #MeToo movement, where there wasn’t even the language to talk about this kind of conduct.”

There’s a pause, then she adds: “I wonder... if it was set today, and Jane had those concerns – would she have an avenue for her discomfort? Would it be easier for her to speak out?”

On this particular evening, an hour after watching a notorious predator face long-delayed justice, the answer, if there is to be any hope, must surely be yes. ●

THE ASSISTANT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 23 JULY





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AFTER YEARS OF DELAYS,  
MYSTERIOUS SUPERHERO HORROR  
**THE NEW MUTANTS**  
IS FINALLY HERE (SORTA). ON SET  
FROM THE START, *EMPIRE* UNCOVERS  
THE SECRETS OF THIS DARK  
ODE TO OUTCASTS

WORDS TOM ELLEN



Blu Hunt's Danielle Moonstar, aka Mirage, whose power is creating illusions.

## SCROLL THROUGH THE YOUTUBE

comments on your average Marvel movie trailer and you'll find a mixture of gushing excitement and nerdish pedantry. The October 2017 teaser for *X-Men* spin-off *The New Mutants*, however, is a different story. This page appears to have become a training ground for stand-up comedians.

"Can't wait to watch this...in 2030," chuckles one wag. "I quit smoking to live longer so I can see this movie in 2060," snickers another. A few lines down, the conceit is stretched to breaking point: "2079: Spider-Man retired, Snyder Cut released, Keith Richards still alive... *New Mutants* pushed back to 2080."

Yes, if you've been following the trajectory of *The New Mutants* — the 13th and final instalment of the *X-Men* film series, concerning a group of troubled teens struggling to control their powers — you'll know that its unique-sounding premise (the first Marvel horror movie) has long been overshadowed by its tumultuous journey to the big screen. It's blown straight past three slated release dates (April 2018, February and August 2019).

**[EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was written before *The New Mutants* was removed from the April release schedule last month due to the coronavirus crisis. Disney hopes to release it later this year.]**

In a rain-battered New York City hotel in January 2020, the film's director and co-writer, Josh Boone, laughs wearily when *Empire* brings up the protracted delay.

"We were in limbo for a long, long time," he sighs. "We didn't know if the movie would ever come out. I was reading stuff online about how we were reshooting half of it, or it was going straight onto Disney+... I'd be calling my agent, like: 'What the fuck?!'"

The past few years have seen the internet frothing with speculation about the reasons for the film's postponement, citing everything from drastic reshoots to the last-minute shoe-horning of Antonio Banderas into a post-credits sequence (more on which later). The truth, as is usually the case, is rather less colourful. But we'll get to that. Right now, for Boone, the overwhelming sensation is *relief* that his film will be seen. "Honestly," the 40-year-old says, sounding more than a little emotional, "when I got the call last summer telling me our movie was coming out [in 2020], the way we wanted it...it was one of the happiest days of my life."

## AN HOUR OUTSIDE BOSTON, IN

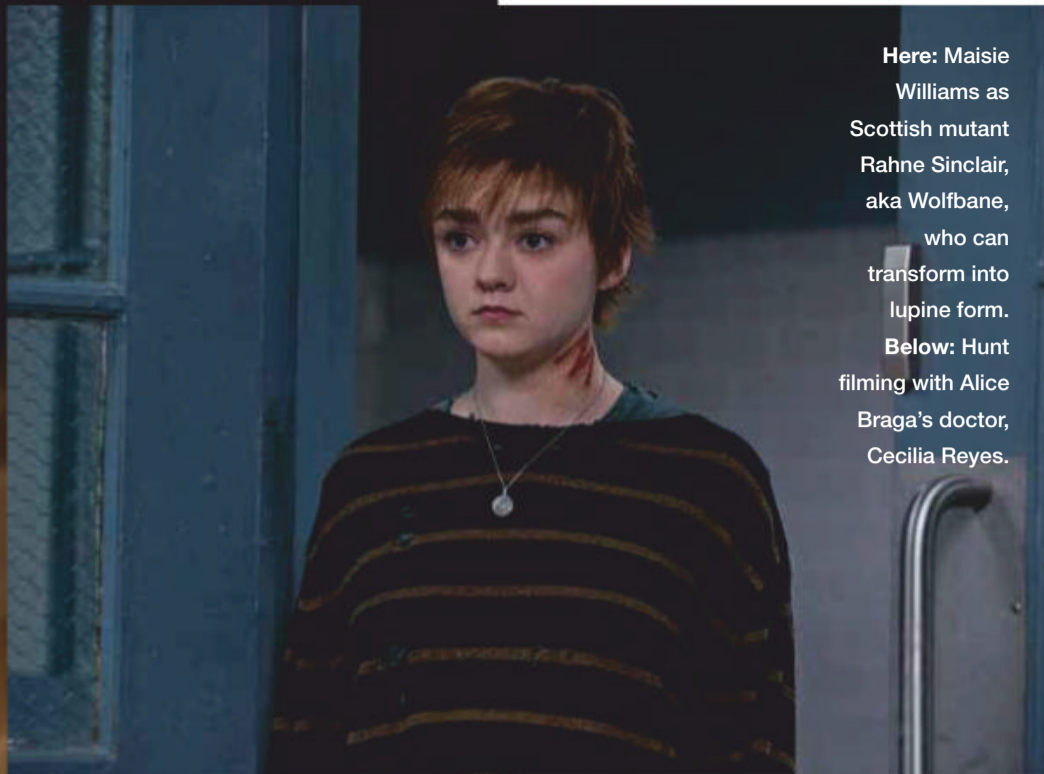
August 2017, and Josh Boone is enjoying another uncommonly happy day. On the other side of America, conversations are beginning between

Disney and Fox that will soon launch a thousand YouTube zingers but, for the moment, the director is blissfully unaware of that as he shows *Empire* around Medfield State Hospital.

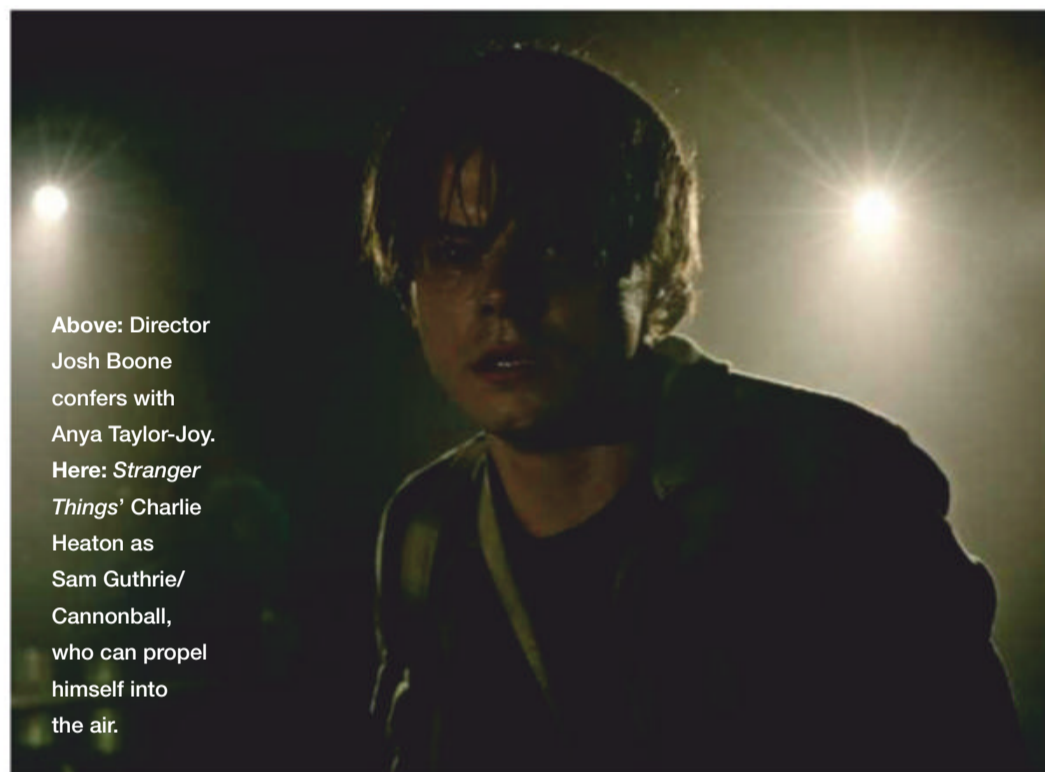
A sprawling former psychiatric hospital in rural Massachusetts, Medfield is currently doubling as *The New Mutants*' primary location: a sinister institute to house — in Boone's words — "kids that are too dangerous for Professor X's school". These are the New Mutants.

"They're misfits, outcasts and rebels," says Boone. "They don't want to be X-Men: they're just scared, fucked-up kids. They're all guilty of murder — whether intentionally or unintentionally. They've been sent here to learn to control their powers."

Opened in 1896 to treat mentally ill patients, Medfield is 360 hectares of crumbling brick, flaking paint and rusting window grates. It's been derelict for decades, and whispers about the spooky goings-on here down the years rumble throughout cast and crew. "Whitey Bulger was here for a while," says Boone. "And the caretaker told us about a kid called Jimmy who was brought here after killing his parents. It's a genuinely creepy place..." Some of the unsettling graffiti ("The Youth Are Sick And There Is No Cure") is the work of the art department, but we're assured that other examples — the "666" and hangman's noose carved into the attic ceiling — are very much *not*.



Here: Maisie Williams as Scottish mutant Rahne Sinclair, aka Wolfbane, who can transform into lupine form. Below: Hunt filming with Alice Braga's doctor, Cecilia Reyes.



Above: Director Josh Boone confers with Anya Taylor-Joy. Here: *Stranger Things*' Charlie Heaton as Sam Guthrie/Cannonball, who can propel himself into the air.

As sets go, then, it's one of the more striking *Empire* has ever set foot on. It certainly makes a change from the traditional superhero movie location: an airless hangar decked out with mountains of green screen. "We didn't want a CGI paint job," Boone says. "*Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Shining*, *Girl*, *Interrupted*: these are the references we're going for. Fox wanted something as different to your typical *X-Men* movie as *Deadpool* and *Logan*, but I think we've pushed it further. Honestly, I can't believe what they've let us do."

Boone is an energetic presence on set: a proudly geeky fanboy (decked out in a Douglas Adams T-shirt adorned with Stephen King badges), who's so comics-obsessed that he refers to his own childhood as his "origin story". With good reason.

"My parents were evangelical Christians," he reveals. "They believed in demons, the rapture, all that stuff." As a teenager, he would stash Marvel comics and horror novels under his mattress to avoid his mum and dad tossing them in the furnace. "They burned my copy of Stephen King's *The Stand*," he laughs. "But they're much less fervent now. They're visiting the set today, actually..." With comedically perfect timing, they pass and give us a cheery wave. They certainly don't look like book-burners.

Boone's "origin story" seeps naturally into *The New Mutants*, since the film is, at its core, about troubled adolescence. His co-writer, and childhood friend, Knate Lee tells us: "So much of our youth was spent watching movies because we were grounded and couldn't go out. So, these kids are like we were: trapped somewhere they don't want to be, butting heads, bumping up against authority."

Boone and Lee's journey on *New Mutants* officially began six years ago, but its roots go back much further. The pair grew up as Marvel fanatics in suburban Virginia, spending their rare non-grounded hours acting out their favourite comics into a boombox. So when, in 2014, Boone completed work on young adult romance *The Fault In Our Stars*, he and Lee decided to pitch Fox their real passion project: an *X-Men* spin-off featuring an exciting young cast (Maisie Williams, Anya Taylor-Joy), based around Bill Sienkiewicz's superbly creepy mid-'80s *New Mutants* comics. They were intent on creating a superhero film that wasn't *really* a superhero film at all, more a coming-of-age horror. Female-driven, with a gay love story at its heart, it would be unlike anything else that had come before it. "No capes, no costumes," says Boone. "It's *The Breakfast Club* meets *The Shining*."


## IF THE INFLUENCE OF KUBRICK'S

horror is apparent in the location, the ghost of John Hughes comes through clearly in the scene *Empire* is watching here.

In the institute's grimy 'day room', the air is thick with teen angst. Sam, aka Cannonball (Charlie Heaton), is sporting black eyes and a bandaged arm, due to not *quite* having nailed his flying skills yet ("I can take off, but I have trouble landing," laughs Heaton later). At the foosball table, he trades insults with solar-harnessing Roberto, aka Sunspot (Henry Zaga), while new arrival Dani Moonstar (Blu Hunt) is cruelly taunted by Anya Taylor-Joy's Russian-accented Illyana, aka Magik. "You don't even know what your powers are," Illyana sneers before pouncing on the newbie. Behind them, Roberto punches the air with glee: "Catfight!"

"I've played crazy before," Taylor-Joy tells *Empire* between takes, "but not like this. Illyana's like a stray cat backed into a corner. She doesn't give a rat's ass about anybody." The idea of these kids being frightened — rather than excited by — their superpowers intrigued her. "We're treating these characters like real people, and it would be really terrifying to have your body develop powers that could potentially injure someone. All these kids are damaged. They're cooped up in this cage, trying to come to terms with themselves." >



A photograph of Taylor-Joy as Illyana Rasputin. She is sitting on a bed, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. She has long, light-colored hair styled in two buns. She is wearing a dark jacket and jeans. The background is a wall with graffiti, including a large, stylized figure in blue and black. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

Taylor-Joy as Russian mutant sorceress Illyana Rasputin, aka Magik. Her brother is Colossus, of X-Men fame.

The disparate group must put their differences aside, though, to battle the villain of the piece — the CGI-rendered ‘Demon Bear’, a Freddy Krueger-esque presence that has long haunted Dani’s nightmares.

For 21-year-old (at time of filming) Blu Hunt, in her first ever screen role, playing Dani has been “an honour” — largely because, as an actor of Native American origin, she’s in uncharted territory as a comic-book film protagonist. “I’m an indigenous superhero,” she grins. “I’m not just in the background, to please people. I’m carrying the movie.”

It’s not the only way *The New Mutants* is breaking boundaries. Firstly, in a middle finger to traditionally male-driven superhero tropes, the female characters take centre stage here. “The boys are the eye candy!” Taylor-Joy jokes. “But seriously, it’s amazing to be in a film that puts women first. We were meant to do this shot of me walking away from behind, but Josh was like: ‘No, that’s not your role here: let’s make it Henry instead!’”

More significantly on the envelope-pushing front, we have Dani’s burgeoning romance with the fifth member of the mutant gang: shape-shifting Rahne, aka Wolfsbane, played by *Game Of Thrones*’ Maisie Williams.

“In the comics, Dani and Rahne are telepathic,” Williams says. “Which is basically what love is, anyway, right? Being able to read

another person’s thoughts? So, it felt like a natural extension of that. Plus, Blu and I are both 5’1”, and that is just *too goddamn cute*.”

In the furore surrounding the film’s delay, this romantic subplot has been overlooked slightly, but there’s no denying what a big deal it is. We’re not talking about Joe Russo’s ten-second *Endgame* cameo or Valkyrie’s hinted-at bisexuality in *Thor: Ragnarok*; this is a major superhero film with a lesbian love story running right through it. Hunt cackles merrily at the waves she knows it will make: “I love it when I see people online, like, ‘Nah, no way there’s a gay love story in this.’ I’m thinking, ‘Wait ‘til you see us making out!’”

Boone is adamant that the plotline is “historic, in that it’s never been done before in a movie like this. But we don’t make a big deal of them being gay: the movie’s not about that. This is an effort to normalise it.” Hunt agrees: “There’s a moment when Rahne says, ‘I’ve never done this before.’ I say, ‘With a girl?’ and she says, ‘With anyone.’ It’s a coming-of-age love story like any other.”

For Williams, the film is more romantic drama than comic-book blockbuster: “It’s not a ‘coming out’ tale — they never even discuss coming out — but their journey together is integral to the whole story arc.” While she’s confident that audiences will relate, she remains adamant that, “watching me hit on anyone is *so cringe*. But I feel honoured to make this movie

in support of LGBT people. It’s weird that [a gay relationship] in this kind of film is such a big deal. It’s actually strange it’s taken so long.”

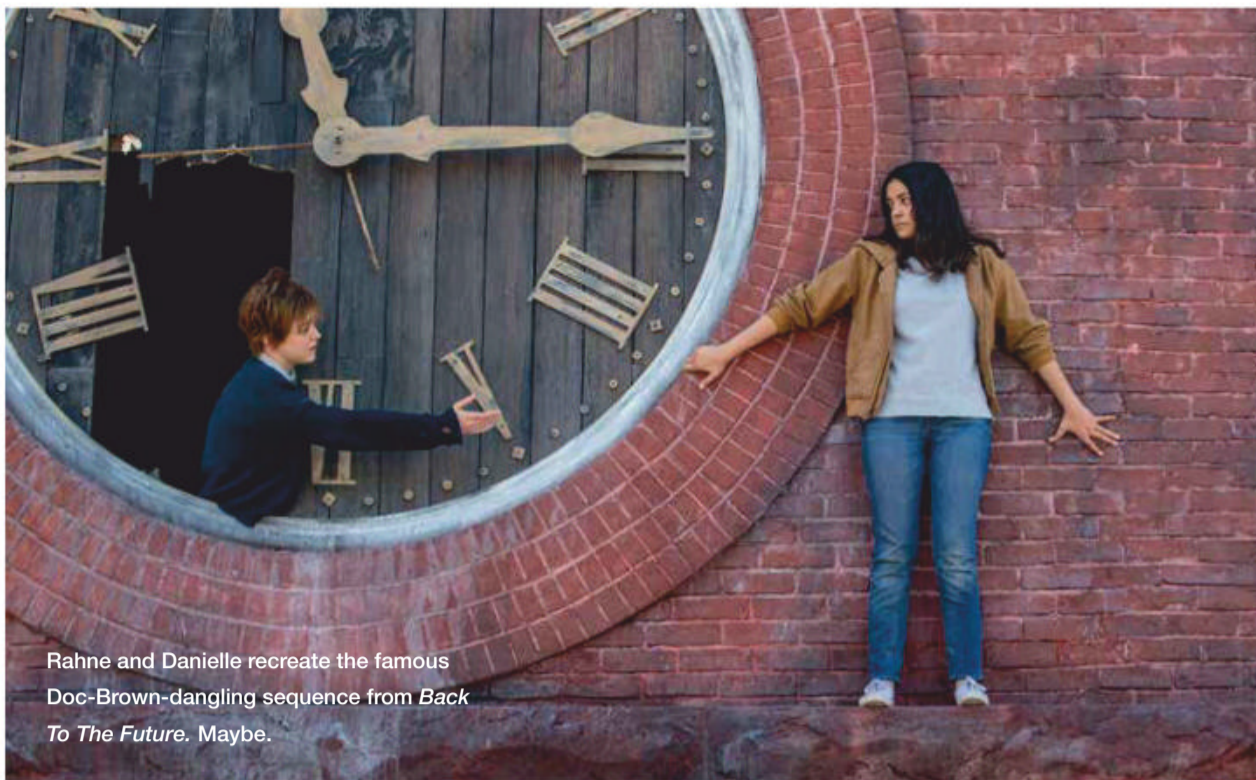
## “I KNOW, I KNOW: YOU HAVE TO

ask,” Boone laughs, as *Empire* brings up the film’s lengthy delay when we reconvene in January 2020.

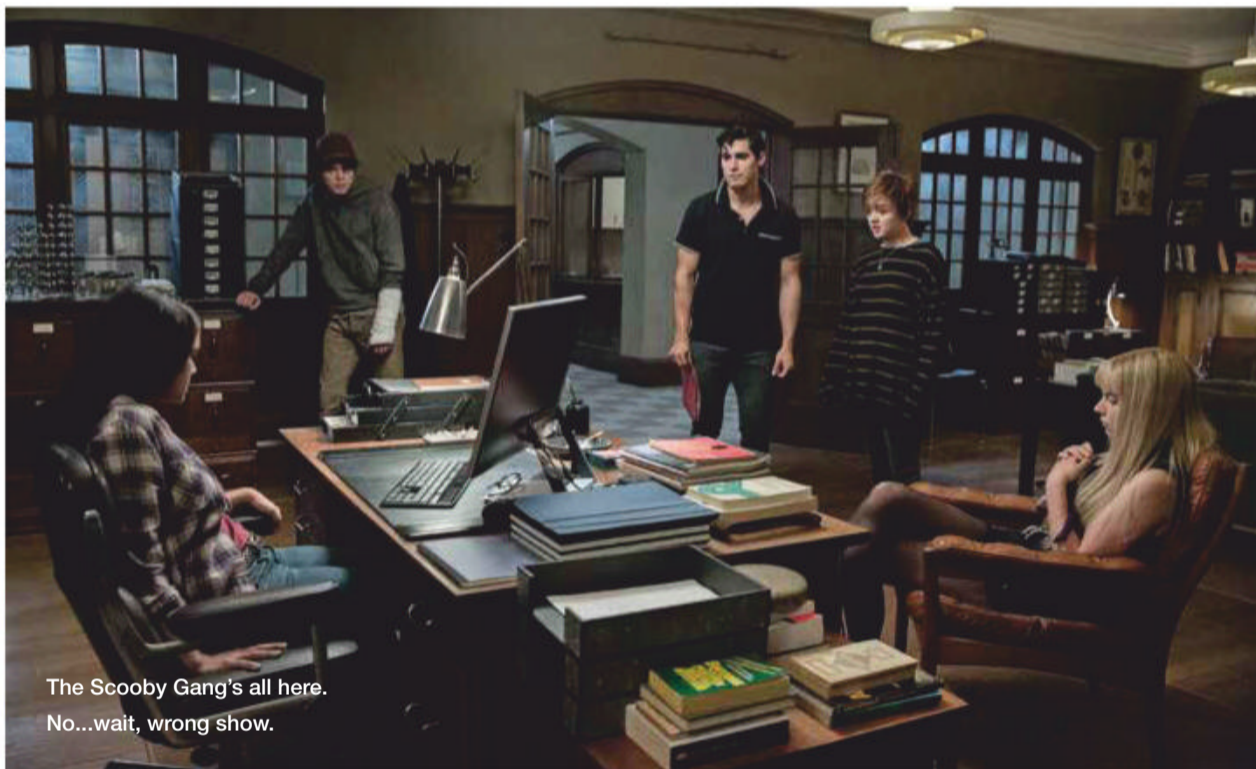
What was the story, though? Unhappy execs? Frantic reshoots? Parental script-burnings? “If there were any of those, I didn’t hear about them,” Boone chuckles. “The real reason is simple: when the merger happened, our movie was frozen.”

He’s referring to the \$71.3 billion acquisition of 21st Century Fox (home of the X-Men) by the Walt Disney Company (home of the Marvel Cinematic Universe): a deal that was officially announced in March 2019, but began taking shape in late 2017, just weeks after *The New Mutants* wrapped. “Disney were fully behind our vision,” Boone says. “They just didn’t know what to do with it. They wanted to make their own *X-Men* movies: that’s why they absorbed Fox. So, we were in this strange position where we had to wait, not knowing what was happening. Then once the merger was finalised, [the studio] put all their efforts into *Dark Phoenix*. That’s a \$200 million movie with big stars, so it took priority over ours, which had a similar budget to the first *Deadpool* [\$58 million].”

So it was all due to politics and scheduling? The



Rahne and Danielle recreate the famous Doc-Brown-dangling sequence from *Back To The Future*. Maybe.



The Scooby Gang's all here. No...wait, wrong show.

director nods. "There were no reshoots. The film you'll see is the same one we cut two years back."

When the team reassembles for press duties in New York in early 2020, that sentiment is very much echoed by the cast. They spent the previous night together, watching the finished product, and spirits are soaring. "It's the film Josh set out to make," says Taylor-Joy. "It felt so nice to all be reunited for it. We were whooping and hollering every time someone did something cool."

"It was overwhelming," adds Hunt. "I never thought I'd see myself in a movie, and the *first* shot is of my face! I was shaking in the theatre, but Maisie grabbed me, like, 'You're good! It's good!'" Henry Zaga is similarly enthusiastic: "It's a beautiful film. Honestly, this whole 'delay' thing was just a marketing stunt to build hype..."

He's joking, obviously, but there's a glimmer of truth here. After such a long wait, expectations are high. Plus, in the wake of the merger, *The New Mutants* will be the final film in the current *X-Men* series. Is there extra pressure to perform? After all, the most recent X-outing, 2019's *Dark Phoenix*, was, erm...how can we put this politely?

"One of the worst-reviewed movies of last year?" Boone suggests, helpfully. Well...yes. He shrugs. "Look, you can only go up after *Dark Phoenix*. That's not to say anything bad about the people involved, but it was what it was. Honestly, I feel less pressure now than I did ahead of [the

first slated release date]. Because we've tested our movie so many times, and audiences have loved it."

Regardless of any studio politics, if *The New Mutants* scores big at the box office, there will, of course, be a sequel. "We'd love to make another," Boone admits. "We know it'd be set in Brazil, and it'll introduce Sunspot's dad, Emmanuel, as a villain. We had Antonio Banderas ready to play him, and we were planning a tag at the end of this movie to set it up. But then the merger happened, and everything was up in the air, so we never shot it."

Sitting alongside him, Knate Lee chips in. "In a weird way, I think the delay's been good for us. Last year, I saw the most epic, grand-scale superhero movie ever [*Avengers: Endgame*]. You can't go bigger than that. So, it feels like the perfect time for a superhero movie that's more intimate and claustrophobic. And we still have so many 'firsts': we're the first Marvel horror, we're the first to feature a gay relationship. Even though we're late...we still beat everybody."

Where the X-Men go next, and how they'll slot into the MCU, remains to be seen. But Boone's film sounds like a fitting end to the franchise's first chapter. After all, Marvel's whole concept of 'mutants' was always a metaphor for "misfits, outcasts and rebels".

Anyone who was different. 🍎

**THE NEW MUTANTS WILL BE IN CINEMAS LATER THIS YEAR**

# SORRY FOR THE DELAY

## Five other films that took their sweet time



### THREE YEARS *THE CABIN IN THE WOODS*

Drew Goddard shot his meta-horror in spring 2009 before plans for 3D post-conversion delayed a release; later, financial trouble at distributor MGM saw it fall away even further. Picked up by Lionsgate in 2011, it eventually hit screens in April 2012.



### FIVE YEARS *HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER*

Having filmed his 16mm murder-fest in 1985, director John McNaughton got *Henry* into festivals and sent it to critics to spread the word. After further delays thanks to its X (later NC-17) rating, it was finally released in January 1990.



### SEVEN YEARS *MARGARET*

Filed in 2005, Kenneth Lonergan's drama got mired in editing tussles, the director favouring a three-hour cut, the studio wanting it under two-and-a-half. After multiple lawsuits it was released as the latter in September 2011; Lonergan's (excellent) cut finally hit DVD in July 2012.



### SEVEN YEARS *ACCIDENTAL LOVE*

David O. Russell began shooting his drama 'Nailed' for Capitol Films in 2008, but financial problems kept halting the production. In 2010, with filming incomplete, Capitol assembled a cut to entice O. Russell back for reshoots; he watched it and quit. In 2014, Millennium Entertainment bought the film and recut it. Russell had his name removed from the film, retitled for a 2015 release as *Accidental Love*.



### 13 YEARS AND COUNTING *HIPPIE HIPPIE SHAKE*

This comic take on '60s counterculture magazine *Oz* was filmed with Cillian Murphy and Sienna Miller in September 2007. In 2009, director Beeban Kidron and writer Lee Hall left during post-production, citing creative differences. A release was scheduled for 2010, but didn't happen. Rumour has it the negatives have been intentionally destroyed. ALEX GODFREY

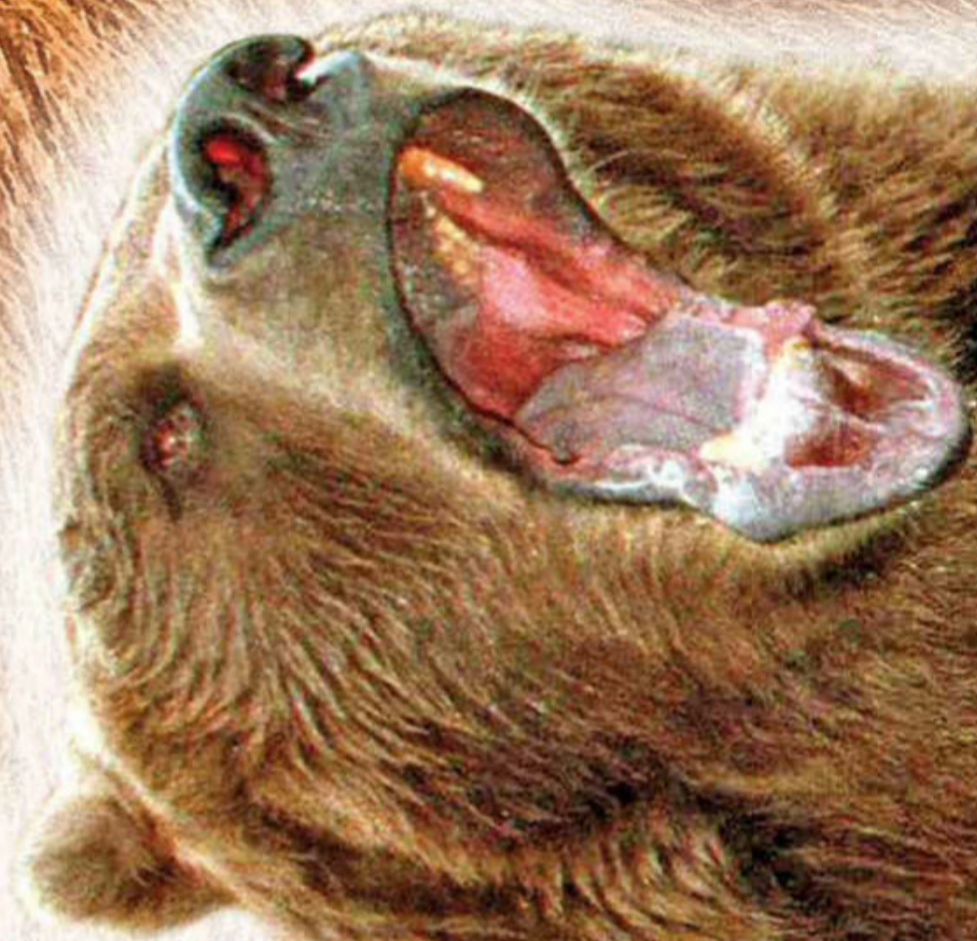
**THE**

HE STARRED  
IN MOVIES  
WITH BRAD PITT,  
ANTHONY HOPKINS  
AND JOHN CANDY...

PRESENTED  
AN AWARD AT  
THE OSCARS...

**BEAR FAT**

EARNED  
\$10,000  
A DAY...



AND ATE  
48 CHICKENS  
A WEEK.

# BART BEEBEE

**INSIDE THE WEIRD, WILD WORLD OF BART:  
THE GREATEST ANIMAL ACTOR OF ALL TIME.**

WORDS DAN JOLIN



# M

OVIE DIRECTORS, once in a while, can come to blows with their stars. Just ask Werner Herzog or David O. Russell. But when Jean-Jacques Annaud got on the wrong side of his top-billed actor while making 1988 wilderness adventure *The Bear*, he risked far more than a cut lip or bruised ego. His lead performer was nearly three metres tall, weighed more than 635kg, and was strong enough to snap him in half like a stale baguette.

During one lunchbreak while shooting in the Italian Dolomites, Annaud's on-set photographer pointed out that they didn't have any good photos of the director with Bart The Bear, a raised-in-captivity Kodiak grizzly (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) cast by Annaud as a wild brown bear stalked by human hunters. The French filmmaker agreed and, reasoning that "this bear is my star and my friend", entered Bart's compound under the close supervision of animal trainer Doug Seus. As the photographer started snapping, Annaud thought it would look cool if he turned and pointed his viewfinder at Bart. In so doing, he either momentarily forgot or wilfully ignored Seus' oft-repeated instructions to never project himself forward at the creature.

"He struck me a strong blow with his right paw," Annaud later told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I was thrown flat on my face. Then he was on me. I just protected my ears, my eyes, and played dead as best I could. For a few seconds, I had the impression that I was living the climax of my own movie." It took Seus three seconds to call Bart off the possum-playing auteur. To Annaud it felt like an hour, during which he claims to have suffered a minor puncture wound in his lower back.

Still, he didn't hold it against Bart. "I blame myself for being too confident and making that sudden move," he said. The director had auditioned around 50 bears for the role, but only Bart possessed all the qualities he sought. "Bears are like men," Annaud believed. "Some are the Peter O'Toole style, some are the Sean Connery style, some are the Mickey Rooney style. I wanted the John Wayne type." A bear whose rugged individualist swagger and fiery glare belied a big, warm heart.

During his 21-year performing life, Bart The Bear fought Brad Pitt, Steven Seagal and Sir Anthony Hopkins in *Legends Of The Fall*, *On Deadly Ground* and *The Edge*, respectively (all actors doubled by his trainer, Doug). He squared off against Daryl Hannah in *The Clan Of The Cave Bear*. And he memorably terrorised John Candy and Dan Aykroyd as 'The Bald-Headed Bear' in 1988 comedy *The Great Outdoors*, complete with a bare-skin prosthetic headpiece and, after an 'amusing' incident with an exploding lightbulb, a bare-skin prosthetic butt-piece, too.

Bart was one of the last of his kind. Just as John Wayne stood tall as one of Hollywood's last classic Western heroes while the genre



**Above:** Bart The Bear takes on Anthony Hopkins and a nasty-looking spear in 1996's *The Edge*. They also co-starred in *Legends Of The Fall* two years earlier. **Right:** Watch your back! Bart looms ominously behind Ethan Hawke in *White Fang* (1991).



declined, the Kodiak's career climaxed as CGI made its photo-real impact on the industry. If *The Revenant* had been made in the mid-'90s, Bart would have been a no-brainer for the bear role. Today, however, he would have faced fierce competition from the sophisticated creations of visual-effects artists. Despite being, as Annaud can certainly attest, Mother Nature's real deal, and a versatile performer to boot.



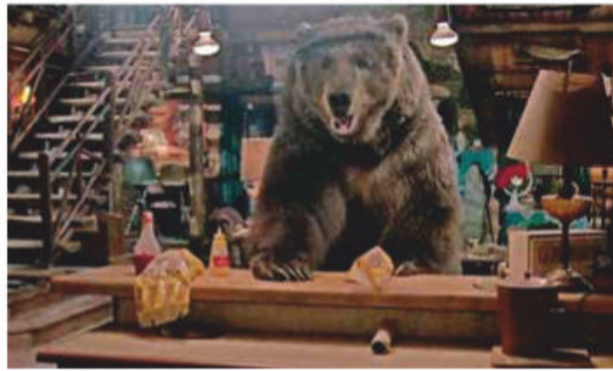
BART THE BEAR'S remarkable career began, in a sense, before he was even born. During the mid-'70s, Doug Seus and his wife Lynne resolved to make a living out of training North American animals for film and television. Based on a three-hectare plot in Heber City, Utah, the couple consider themselves born naturalists. "I was always trouncing around the deciduous forests and waterways of my young life, catching frogs

and butterflies," says Doug, who was raised in Pennsylvania, before the urge took him to go west. Lynne, meanwhile, says she spent her Nebraskan childhood "in the prairie catching chipmunks". She and the former special-forces recruit met in April 1970. For their first date, Doug took Lynne to the herpetarium at Brigham Young University to feed his rhino viper, a huge, deadly venomous snake. So when they decided to get a wolf instead of a dog, Lynne says, "It made perfect sense to me."

At the time, wilderness-themed entertainments seemed to be all the rage. This was the era of *The Life And Times Of Grizzly Adams*, the beloved 1974 film and NBC TV series about the friendship between a hirsute frontiersman (Dan Haggerty) and a bear (Bozo). Having observed an animal trainer on a film set while working as a script supervisor, Lynne realised there was no reason why she and Doug couldn't do it themselves, and they started



Clockwise from main: Bart (right) has a roaring good time with his cub pal Youk, played by Douce and alternates in *The Bear* (1988); Getting those lungs out again in *12 Monkeys* (1995); Chilling out in 1988 comedy *The Great Outdoors*.



training their animals — bobcats, cougars, wolves, raccoons, coyotes — for “bits and pieces” on *Grizzly Adams*. However, they knew if they were really going to compete, they’d need a bear. A big one. “I just tend toward bears,” says Doug. “I started out hiking in the wild and watching them, for relaxation. They have ape intelligence, you know. And they can’t be dishonest. No pretenses. No bullshit. Everything is upfront.”

In January 1977, they bought Bart for \$50 from Baltimore Zoo in Maryland. Weighing 6lb, he was the result of an unplanned pregnancy. The Seuses were smitten. “Naturally, we just loved him as a parent loves a child,” Lynne says. A child who, within nine months, tipped the scale at 900lbs and scoffed whole roasted chickens. For his feature-film debut, in 1981 *Western Windwalker*, Bart performed his first

combat scene, in which he was stabbed and speared by Cheyenne braves. “Bart thought it was the best game, because it tickled and he could break the spears like matchsticks,” Lynne reveals. “The scenes looked for all the world like he was being stabbed, but really he was just having a fun playtime.”

During the next two decades, Bart became Hollywood’s go-to grizzly, typically cast as fearsome, ill-fated aggressors. But his — and Doug and Lynne’s — finest work remains enshrined in two pictures, both must-sees if you’re a filmgoing arctophile: *The Bear* and *The Edge*.



IN THE WILD, the most common killer of grizzly cubs is the adult male grizzly. Yet the central conceit of Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *The Bear* was that a cute, orphaned cub (played by bears not owned by the Seuses) and a surly adult male Kodiak (Bart) would team up to beat the hazards of humankind and nature. To avoid any of his young stars being cannibalised, Annaud hired Jim Henson’s Creature Shop to craft animatronic bears. But Doug felt that combining them with real animals would only emphasise the artificiality of the puppets, no matter how ingenious Henson’s creations. He took aside associate producer Pierre Grunstein and said to him, “This can be a masterpiece or a Muppet show.”

In two weeks, Doug promised, he would train Bart and the cubs to share the screen. He started by swapping the bears’ hay, to accustom them to each other’s scent. Then he gradually introduced the bears, at first letting them see each other from a distance, then carefully bringing them closer. “Finally, we had them doing absolutely amazing things,” says Lynne,

“like crawling on their bellies together and standing up together.” Such behaviour astonished biologists, who, Doug recalls, wrote him letters saying they thought such behaviour “couldn’t be achieved”. Bart, though, was not without his limits.

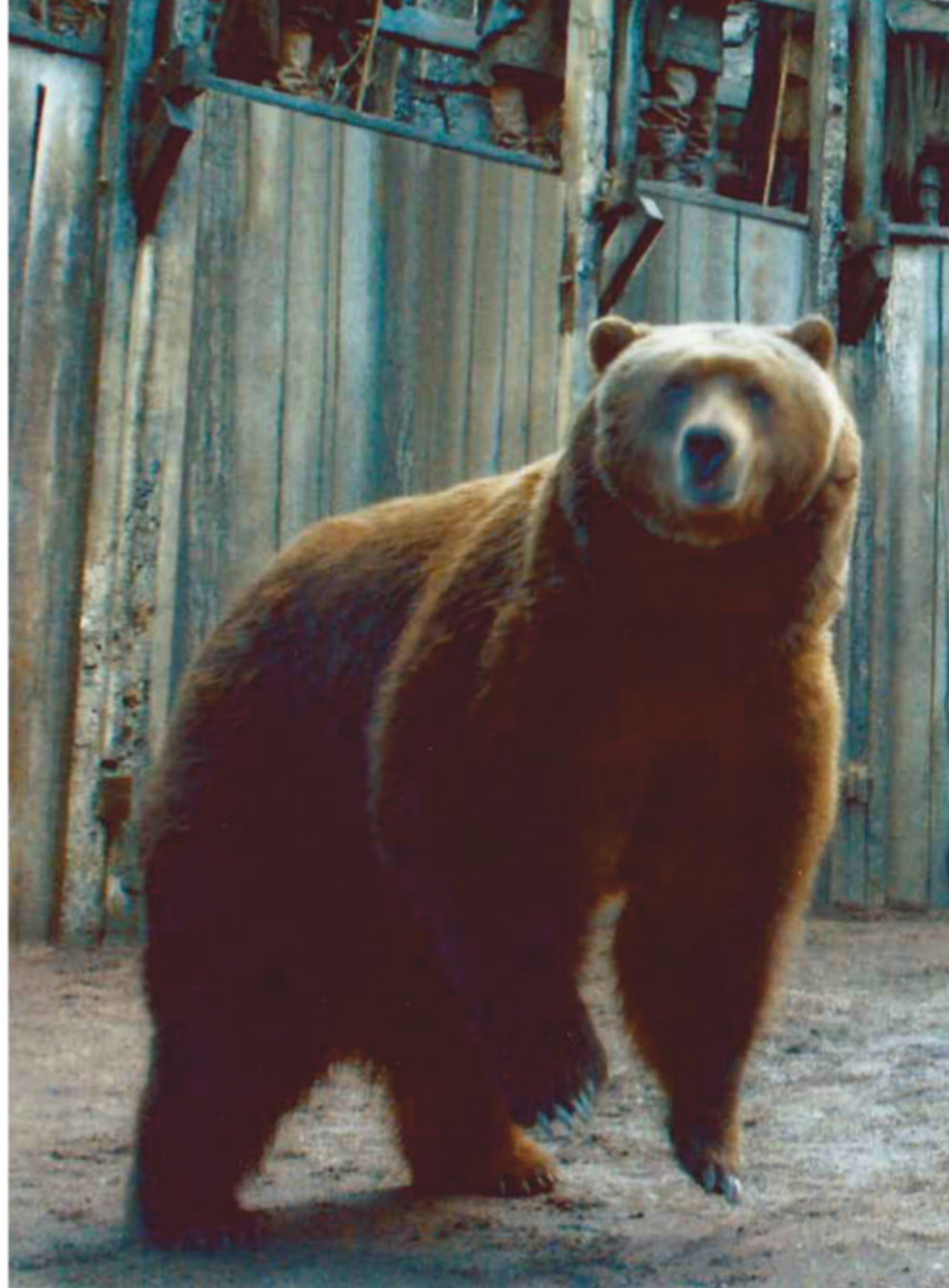
Lee Tamahori’s *The Edge* was shot in the Canadian Rockies in 1996. In the role of a man-eating grizzly, Bart had to attack the camp of plane-crash survivors Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin and Harold Perrineau, before dragging off Perrineau (doubled by Doug) by the leg. “It was a night-for-night shoot,” Seus says. “Full moon. Storm. Legitimate front coming in. The rain made the ground so sloppy you couldn’t even stand up. The bear would slip and slide. He was in hyperphagia, the annual period in a bear’s life when they are accelerated emotionally and physically to prepare for winter. We were ready to go. The juices going, the adrenaline going. Then the lights go bust. Shatter. Now you’ve got a volatile situation. Do you realise what might have happened if I hadn’t had a relationship with Bart?” He lets the question hang.

*Empire* wonders if Doug was ever hurt by his star bear. He laughs. “Are you kidding me? Are you out of your mind? Sure! That’s part of the OJT — on-the-job training! Come on. If you’re gonna work with a big, robust, top-of-the-food-chain [creature], you’re gonna go through your licks! But that’s also part of building trust and a relationship. To have camaraderie, you gotta go through thick and thin.”

Tamahori himself insists he never felt endangered by Bart. He innately trusted Doug and Lynne, while the ground rules were always clear: “No-one’s to approach the bear. Don’t look the bear in the eye. Camera crews look away.” Bart also came with a long list of production requirements. “Forty-eight cooked chickens every week. Twenty-seven pizzas. Fourteen >



**Right:** Bear hug: Bart and trainer Doug Seus enjoy a cuddle. **Below right:** The pair take to the stage at the 1998 Oscars.



cases of lemonade spritzer..." Tamahori laughs. He recalls pizzas being a particular favourite of Bart's. In one scene, the bear had to chase Anthony Hopkins across a field. "Well, that was Doug Seus doing the running and Bart's chasing Doug," the director says. "But the reason he's chasing Doug is 'cause Doug's towing a pizza along behind him!"

Whether batting at fake spears or pursuing Italian pies, Bart loved his work, Doug and Lynne assure *Empire*, thanks mainly to the fact that their training process is based entirely on positive reinforcement. "He was a bit of a glory hog, kind of a rock star," says Lynne. If he started flagging towards the end of a day, she and Doug would encourage the crew to cheer for Bart. "When he felt that applause he stood a little taller, his shoulders got broader and he got a sparkle in his eye. He was like an actor on Broadway." According to both Lynne and Tamahori, Bart's *The Edge* and *Legends Of The Fall* co-star Anthony Hopkins had particular respect for him as a fellow thespian.

"You have an enormous admiration for a prehistoric creature which can be calm and sit around looking at us as if we're all idiots, then get up and do his job, and go back and sit around again," says Tamahori. "I think that's why Tony liked him so much. Because he was like a proper, professional actor."

Indeed, Bart received the best reviews of any actor involved in *The Edge*. "They don't give Oscars for Best Supporting Bear," wrote the *Los Angeles Times'* Kenneth Turan, "but [Bart's] performance here, the capstone of an illustrious career, is a milestone in ursine acting." Tamahori



**Above:** Bart The Bear II picked up Bart's mantle after the latter died in 2000. Here he is in *Game Of Thrones* in 2013. **Right:** Seus and Brad Pitt hang out with Bart II in *Growing Up Grizzly* in 2001. Bart I and Pitt were co-stars in 1994's *Legends Of The Fall*.

couldn't agree more. "He was a marvellous creature," he tells *Empire*. "Probably the best actor I ever worked with!"

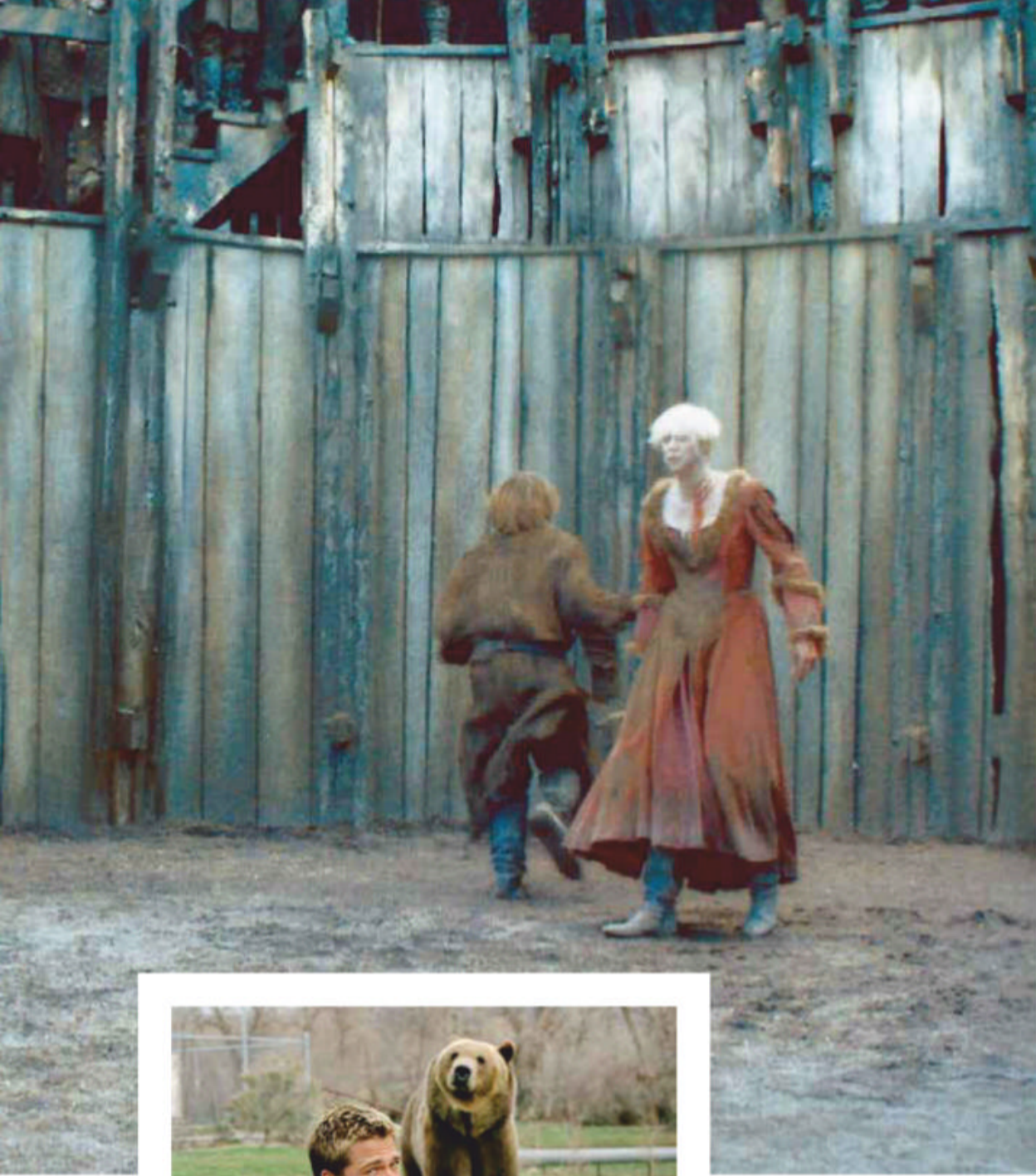


SADLY, BART NEVER had the chance to top his achievements in *The Bear* and *The Edge*. After appearing in the 1998 Paul Walker surf-dude comedy *Meet The Deedles* and on stage during the '98 Academy Awards (introduced by a nervous-looking Mike Myers), he was diagnosed with cancer of the paw and given a few months to live. Thanks to the care and treatment of his owners he actually survived until 10 May 2000, when Doug and Lynne realised the pain was too much for Bart and had him euthanised. Bart died peacefully in Doug's arms, so close he felt the bear's last breath on his face. To Lynne, "It was

as close as you could come to losing a child."

But their grief was salvaged by "a miracle", as Lynne describes it. Moments after she called Bart's vet to arrange the euthanasia, the phone rang. It was the Alaska Department Of Fish And Game. "We have two orphan grizzly bears here," they said. "Is there any way you can take them?" The Seuses had the cubs, a brother and sister, flown down immediately. The female they named Honey Bump. The male? Bart The Bear II.

Alongside Honey Bump and a third Seus bear named Tank, Bart's successor has continued his namesake's work. He starred alongside Eddie Murphy in *Dr. Dolittle 2*, worked with Sean Penn in *Into The Wild*, and made a memorable appearance in a fighting pit opposite Gwendoline Christie for 2013 *Game Of Thrones* episode 'The Bear And The Maiden Fair'. It also seems



Bart II inherited his predecessor's taste for applause. "At the end of the *Game Of Thrones* shoot it sounded like the Super Bowl," Lynne says. "He loved it. He understands it and he eats it up."

Bart I's greatest legacy is not his acting work, the Seuses say, nor even Bart II. Around the time they were making *The Great Outdoors*, the couple decided to use their retirement account to buy a 100-hectare parcel of land in Montana and devote it to grizzlies. Since then, much of what Bart earned (including \$1 million for *The Edge* alone, says Tamahori) went towards buying more land to create living space for North America's increasingly threatened bears, through Doug and Lynne's Vital Ground Foundation. "Without a doubt that was Bart's greatest role," Lynne says. One which Bart II has also continued as the foundation's foremost "spokesbear".

However, his film work is becoming less regular. The most impactful bear scene of recent times involved no bear at all, and doesn't Doug know it. He was approached by the producers of

*The Revenant*, he says, and is adamant he could have achieved that film's intense bear-attack sequence using Bart II. But, keen on long takes and close-ups of star Leonardo DiCaprio, director Alejandro G. Iñárritu took the digital-effects route. When he finally saw the film, Doug was unconvinced by its digi-grizzly. "I had that thing nailed," he growls.

Of course, there are those who believe there's no reason for any animal to perform for the entertainment of humans. "Well, isn't that sad?" sighs Doug. He wholeheartedly believes Bart and his successors love what they do (the American Humane association has never had any issues with the Seuses' treatment of their animals), and thinks something is lost when an audience is presented with pixels rather than the real thing. "You become removed from the magic," he says. "If you do it right, and with passion and love, then why should it not be able to happen?" It was not as if Bart even presented a danger to the humans he worked with. When we mention Annaud's mishap to Lynne, she dismisses it instantly. "Let me tell you, that was no big deal. They like to make out it was, but if it had been a big deal, Jean-Jacques wouldn't have been in the lunch tent perfectly fine a half-hour later!"

How Bart himself really felt about his stellar career, we'll never know. But one thing is certain — he was greatly loved, by his surrogate parents, by his co-stars and directors, and by the audiences to whom he gave a vicarious, VFX-free taste of the wild side. ●

# HOW TO TRAIN AN ICON

MORE ANIMAL MEGASTARS (AND THEIR HANDLERS)

## CHEETA

Tarzan's ride-or-die ape was played by Jiggs in *Tarzan The Ape Man* and *Tarzan And His Mate*, trained by Tony and Jacqueline Gentry. Following Jiggs' death from pneumonia in 1938 aged nine, the Gentrys trained other chimps to play the character.



## LASSIE

Rudd Weatherwax (real name) trained Rough Collie Pal to play Lassie for 1943's *Lassie Come Home*. Pal's big break came when the dog earmarked to play Lassie was not sufficiently trained for the shots MGM wanted of Lassie in a flood. Pal, a canine Cliff Booth, stepped in, and the rest is history.



## MISTER ED

Mister Ed, TV's talking horse, was played by the brilliantly named Bamboo Harvester, a part-Arabian American Saddlebred, and trained by Les Hilton. Initially, the horse talked via a thread to his mouth, but eventually learned how to move his mouth when Hilton touched his hoof, reacting when his co-stars stopped talking.



## ORANGEY

Frank Inn trained male marmalade tabby cat Orangey, best known for playing opposite Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast At Tiffany's*. Hepburn said throwing the cat out into the rain was the "most distasteful thing she ever had to do on film". Still, Orangey bagged his second PATSY (Picture Animal Top Star of the Year), the animal equivalent of the Oscar.



## BABE

Karl Lewis Miller handled the dogs in *Cujo* and *Beethoven*, and the hamsters in *The Nutty Professor*. His masterpiece, though, is *Babe*, training 970 animals for the film, including 48 Babe piglets who kept outgrowing the character over the three years of filming. Miller also cameos as the man who buys three puppies. IAN FREER





# PREVIEW

! SPOILER WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT [EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]



Here: '60s icon Terence Stamp brings it as vengeful father Wilson, looking into daughter Jenny's death. Below: Director Steven Soderbergh making *The Limey* in 1999.

# Tell 'em I'm coming back

**STEVEN SODERBERGH** looks back in bemusement at *The Limey*, the crime movie that very nearly scuppered his second big breakthrough

ON THE SURFACE at least, *The Limey* made sense. Having turned out a slick crime caper with 1998's *Out Of Sight* and belatedly delivered on the debut-movie promise of 1989's *sex, lies, and videotape*, Steven Soderbergh encored with a taut, irreverent, culture-clash revenge thriller starring '60s icon Terence Stamp. To the delight of critics, the film took a "cubist" (his word) editorial approach that filtered its events through the emotion-racked memory of its main character, Wilson (Stamp), a cockney criminal seeking revenge in LA for the death of his daughter. However, audiences stayed away, and the film earned a paltry \$3.2 million off a budget of three times that.

Yet *The Limey* is pure Soderbergh, strikingly inventive and intriguingly playful, and remains his greatest overlooked movie. Albeit one which, he admits to *Empire* during an hour-long deep dive into the 21-year-old lost classic, scared the willies out of him while he was making it...

**It's been just over 20 years since *The Limey* came out. How do you feel about where it sits in the Soderbergh firmament?**

It's a film that generates very positive feelings for me in terms of the result. That's tempered by the fact that it was a very fraught post-production. It was a very intensive process editing the film, because it wasn't shot to be put together the way it ended up being put together. I was very concerned at the time, not knowing if I was gonna be able to get it to some sort of coherent shape, whether my career was gonna stall just as it had gotten restarted. I had to count to ten and take a deep breath to stay focused. Because I was terrified.

**The fragmented, 'memory-vision' approach really distinguishes it from previous revenge thrillers, like *Point Blank* and *Get Carter*. Is that why you took it?**

The film came together very quickly. *Out Of Sight* came out in the summer of '98. [Screenwriter] Lem Dobbs and I visited the folks at Artisan within a month or two of that to pitch them the idea and we delivered the movie nine months later. But when I screened the first cut for some friends and family, it was clear I had a serious problem on my hands. So serious that nobody offered



any ideas to fix it. It was kind of a quiet evening [laughs]. Sarah Flack, the editor, and I were at a loss. Then [composer] Cliff Martinez delivered a piece of music, one of the recurrent themes in the movie. It sounded to me like memory, a piece of music that lent itself to abstraction. It turned out to be a perfect launching point for Sarah and I to rebuild the movie in a very different way. I started looking at the film as a kind of cubist piece of work in which you're continually deconstructing and fragmenting, yet coming up with patterns of repetition and juxtaposition so the meaning continued to evolve. I turned it into a memory film.

**Didn't you go back and shoot some more footage at this point? What did you shoot?**

It consisted mostly of Terence staring off into space [laughs]. And the plane material, which turns out to be a critical part of the framing device.

**Isn't it arguable that nothing in the film actually happens? That Wilson [Stamp] is playing out possible events in his mind while he's on the plane to LA...?**

That is a defensible argument. But that's not the way I was thinking of it. In my mind the misdirect was: you think all that plane footage is him on his way there, and it's actually him on his way home. But the other thing we were hoping — at least Lem, Terence and I — was that if the film was successful enough, we would do another film. Which was Terence going back to the UK and dealing with the group of friends that betrayed him and put him in prison. But not enough people went to see it.

**Lem Dobbs doesn't seem happy with how *The Limey* turned out, if the audio commentary you recorded with him is anything to go by. He laid into you for the cuts you made to his script, and called the film "painful" to watch.**

Ah, well, that commentary may have been worth the entire project. Lem...has very strong opinions and isn't shy about expressing himself. I don't take it personally. When things aren't the way Lem wants them to be, he's in *pain* [laughs]. He and I both felt that most commentaries were really sleep-inducing in their lack of spark, and the arguments we'd had were still very fresh, so we just crashed right in, turned on the recorder and started arguing right away. I remember looking over and seeing the technicians in the booth looking at each other, like, "Is this what we're doing? Should we stop?" I thought, "This is awesome!"

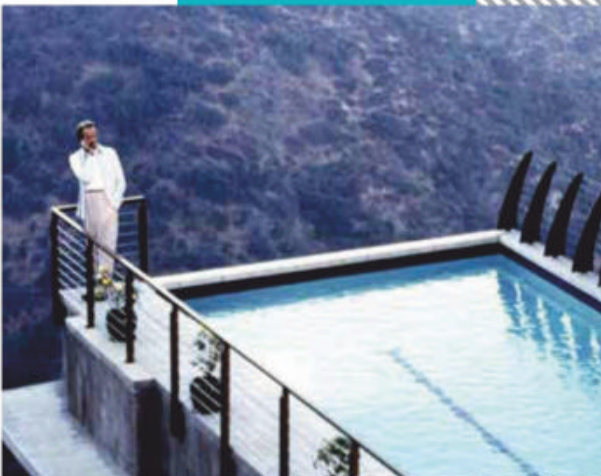
**How quickly did you settle on '60s icons Terence Stamp and Peter Fonda for the lead roles of Wilson and Terry Valentine?**

Lem and I settled on Terence immediately. When Lem informed me about [1967 Ken Loach film] *Poor Cow* — which I'd never seen — and the possibility that we could use that footage to show the young Wilson, there was no question in our minds that Terence was the person to build the movie around. Now, the list of American actors with enough of that iconic weight and similar baggage to Terence was pretty small, and Peter was on it and we went to him first. Luckily, he

Below: Peter Fonda as record producer Terry Valentine, Jenny's boyfriend when she died; Right: Wilson comes to blows with Valentine. Below, far right: Soderbergh and Stamp on set.



Left, top to bottom: Lesley Ann Warren as Jenny's friend Elaine; Valentine and new girlfriend Adhara (Amelia Heinle), who's roughly Jenny's age...; Valentine at his sumptuous Hollywood Hills home.



was interested. But it seems so obvious in retrospect that it should be the two of them. They are the perfect foil for each other.

**What happened when they first met on set?**

I watched them meet again for the first time since 1968. We were breaking for lunch, it was the first time Peter had been on set, and he crossed over to Terence. He stood up, they embraced and Terence said, "Do you remember the last time we saw each other?" Peter said, "Taormina" — the film festival in Taormina. Then Peter goes, "I wonder whatever happened to her..." And they just sort of smiled. Later, I got both of them to explain that comment. They were like, "Oh, there was a woman at the festival who both of us were fascinated by that neither of us ended up connecting with." I thought it was kind of amazing that 30 years on they'd retain that memory.

**Did you discuss using that footage of Terence in *Poor Cow* with Ken Loach?**

The first thing we had to do was track down who owned the rights, then once we'd gotten the okay



I felt there was a moral obligation to reach out to Ken and make sure he was okay with his material being used like that. And he gave us the go sign. He visited the set of *Erin Brockovich* when he was in California shooting *Bread & Roses*, so we got to talk a bit there. But we haven't spoken in a long time. He's continued to do what he does better than anybody. I loved *I, Daniel Blake*.

**Stamp has some amazing scenes. The first to spring to mind is the warehouse shooting, including the movie's signature line, "Tell 'em I'm fuckin' coming!" But what really stands out is the way the camera hangs back on the street as the action happens unseen within.**

That was born out of a desire not to cover what went on in there in any sort of traditional way. Also, knowing I was setting up the sequence at Peter Fonda's house where Terence imagines shooting Peter, I wanted to — for lack of a better term — holster my ideas for that sequence. In addition to the fact that it just seemed funnier to do it this way.

Alamy



**It's almost like Wilson saying to the audience, "Hold my pint. I'll be back in a minute."**

Yeah, exactly. It's a more active way for the audience to participate in that event than going inside and shooting all that coverage.

**A similarly violent but humorous scene is the one where Wilson throws the guy off the balcony, which plays out in the background just over Valentine's shoulder.**

Same thing there. It seemed to me if we were gonna get maximum attention from the audience for that gag, the way to do it was to almost throw

it away and have it be out of focus over Peter's shoulder. Plus, it's one shot and the stunt's done and we can move onto the next shot. I'm always looking for the simple way to do something. I'm not somebody that likes shooting stunts. They make me anxious. I worry about people getting hurt.

**There's also that awesome cameo from Bill Duke as the DEA boss, where he and Stamp trade monologues.**

Sarah and I had finally worked our way through the cut to that scene, which was covered in a reasonably traditional fashion, in that I gave myself four different angles to choose from. But as soon as she started putting it together, cutting back and forth between Bill and Terence, we looked at each other and went, "Well, *that* sucks." Like, "We have licence to do whatever we want. So what's the fun way to do this?" And she said, "Let's just cut all the angles from one side together and then cut all the angles from the other side together." I thought, "That's kind of amusing. Let's do that." It wasn't just a stunt, because it actually in my mind lent a more fable-like quality to the story that's being told on each side. Whereas if you've just been cutting between someone talking and somebody listening, it wouldn't have the same kind of weird performance aspect that I wanted it to have. You know what I mean?

**Yes. It's like Wilson is putting on a big show, isn't he?**

Yeah, he is. And then Bill takes that thread and goes, "Well, if you can do it, I can do it." It's a weird idea as an editorial concept, but we felt like, "It's not any weirder than some of the other stuff we're doing."

**Sadly, as critically acclaimed as it was, *The Limey* didn't do that well. Was that because of all the weird stuff?**

It's hard to unpack the reasons why something doesn't work commercially. But I have to say, when I looked at it again for the first time while we were remastering it, I just laughed and thought, "Why did I think anybody would sit through this?" It's so aggressively non-linear! It has this revenge-caper spine, but it's a pretty abstract piece. Still, the good news is, a

film finding a sizeable audience ends up not being relevant. People think now that *Out Of Sight* was a hit, and it was absolutely not. It didn't perform at the level that any of us hoped, but was viewed as a creative success and a critical moment in my career and in George's [Clooney]. I mean, I shouldn't say this out loud, because there are people paying me to go make things as we speak, but I'd rather have people speaking well of something 20 years later than it be a huge commercial success that people never thought about again. **DAN JOLIN**

THE LIMEY IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

Robert De Niro  
makes his mark  
as hoodlum  
Johnny Boy.

## THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest  
films of all time, one  
film at a time

# Mean Streets

TWENTY-NINE YEARS old, long hair lank around a still somewhat adolescent face, Martin Scorsese fidgets in John Cassavetes' office on the Universal backlot. It's 1972. Cassavetes has proved a powerful screen presence in *The Dirty Dozen* and *Rosemary's Baby*, as well as more-or-less invented the American independent film. *Faces*, his heart-rending depiction of

a disintegrating marriage, was self-financed and took three years to make. It earned an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay in 1969, but he's still swimming outside the mainstream, writing and directing movies only on his own terms.

In contrast, young Marty has made one student feature, *Who's That Knocking At My Door*, been fired from planned Hollywood debut *The Honeymoon Killers*, and just finished *Boxcar Bertha*, an exploitation picture for one-man film factory Roger Corman. Brows heavy over nervous eyes, it's this he's here to show his filmmaking hero. "Marty, come here!" says Cassavetes, emerging from the screening and embracing him, before looking into his eyes. "You just spent a year of your life making shit."

This might be the most important instance in Hollywood history of being cruel in order to be kind. Scorsese was surprised, but accepted the criticism, because he felt it was delivered with love, especially when it was followed by Cassavetes' encouragement to go back to the personal filmmaking of his first feature. It was the shove Scorsese needed to return to a script

he'd been working on, sporadically, since 1965 — a story of bickering friends, small-time hoods and life in a Sicilian-American neighbourhood of New York. He called Mardik Martin, the film-school friend who was his occasional co-writer, and once again they set about trying to make 'Season Of The Witch'. We would come to know the film by another name, lifted from a phrase in Raymond Chandler's essay 'The Simple Art Of Murder': "In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption. It may be pure tragedy, if it is high tragedy, and it may be pity and irony, and it may be the raucous laughter of the strong man. But down these *mean streets* a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid."

Charlie — the hero of *Mean Streets* — is, it transpires, rather tarnished *and* afraid. As played by Harvey Keitel and modelled somewhat after Scorsese himself — who provides some of his voiceover's internal monologue and prayers — he is a young man torn between desire and duty, ambition and obligation. He wants to escape and open a restaurant uptown, perhaps with his



Above: Johnny Boy, his cousin Teresa (Amy Robinson) and mobster Charlie (Harvey Keitel) come to blows. Left: Charlie is a man torn several ways.

illicit lover, Teresa (Amy Robinson), though he is scared — of her epilepsy, her body, her disregard for the neighbourhood they grew up in. And he is scared of God, of judgment, brought up in a faith that focuses on guilt over grace. “The pain in hell has two sides,” he muses. “The kind you can touch with your hand. The kind you can feel in your heart. Your soul, the spiritual side. And ya know...the worst of the two...is the spiritual.”

Charlie is paralysed by his beliefs, rather than empowered by them, and anchored to the area by his friendship with Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro), an anarchic gadabout who owes money to everyone and loyalty to no-one. Charlie makes the mistake so many do when they're young: thinking that by trying to save other people you can save yourself (instead of accepting that redemption is between the individual and themselves — or God). All of which sounds pretty heavy, but *Mean Streets* is also hilarious, finding humour in the petty familiarity of lifelong friendships, and the details of desperation and violence. In the opening, Tony (David Proval) throws a junkie out of his bar toilet, before remembering to do up his fly. In a poolhall, a debt collection gets out of hand through an insult no-one understands: “mook” (which derives from “muk”, meaning mouse, courtesy of Mardik Martin, an Armenian who was raised in Baghdad). Or there's Charlie's street summation of a Catholic saint: “Francis of Assisi had it all down.” And his interaction with De Niro — influenced by the rat-tat-tat bickering of Abbott and Costello — and the young star's explosive energy. “Bob was an incredibly quiet person, soft-spoken, gentle, self-deprecating,” recalls Mardik Martin on the superb DVD commentary. “But just put the camera on him and he was like

an atomic bomb.” (Francis Coppola, who lent Scorsese money to pay the San Gennaro Society in order to shoot during their festival, would cast De Niro in *The Godfather: Part II* the following year, more than earning his money back.)

Other films had been as artful or as truthful, from *Point Blank* to Cassavetes' *Husbands* (posters for which can both be seen tacked to a wall in *Mean Streets*), but perhaps no American film had been so real and accessibly entertaining. There's a documentary quality combined with the joy of genre filmmaking, powered by a needle-drop soundtrack (quite literally; Scorsese used his own records, from The Rolling Stones to The Ronettes). Though it's the essential New York movie, only six of its 27-day schedule was shot there — the rest in Los Angeles. But it got to the core of the Big Apple, fuelled by Scorsese's own upbringing and brushes with Mob life. (“I was always told by my father...be respectful, don't get involved, don't ever let them do a favour for you.”) Now, we can see *Mean Streets* everywhere, from *The Sopranos*, with its prosaic depiction of organised crime (and *Mean Streets* alumnus Proval), to *If Beale Street Could Talk*, in its rich portrayal of struggling New York lives. There's no overstating, though, how fresh the film felt back then. The credits close with the words “A Martin Scorsese Movie”, and it still feels like the encapsulation of a career obsessed with sin, Jesus and the possibility of redemption. As Bong Joon-ho said in his Oscar acceptance speech for *Parasite*, paying tribute to Scorsese by quoting him: “The most personal is the most creative.” Amen to that. **NEV PIERCE**

**MEAN STREETS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**

## SCORSESE BY NUMBERS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN LEGEND



# 17/11/42

MARTIN CHARLES SCORSESE IS BORN IN QUEENS, NEW YORK CITY

**1967** THE YEAR HE DIRECTED HIS FIRST FILM, *WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY DOOR*

**5'7"** HIS HEIGHT

**14** THE NUMBER OF OSCAR NOMINATIONS

**1** THE AMOUNT HE'S WON (BEST DIRECTOR, *THE DEPARTED*)

**569** NUMBER OF TIMES THE WORD “FUCK” OR DERIVATIONS THEREOF, IS SAID IN *THE WOLF OF WALL STREET*; A RECORD

**\$392,000,694** THE AMOUNT OF MONEY IT GROSSED

NUMBER OF MOVIES HE'S MADE WITH ROBERT DE NIRO

**9**

MEAN STREETS  
TAXI DRIVER  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
RAGING BULL

THE KING OF COMEDY  
GOODFELLAS  
CAPE FEAR  
CASINO  
THE IRISHMAN

NUMBER OF MOVIES HE'S MADE WITH LEONARDO DICAPRIO

**5**

GANGS OF NEW YORK  
THE AVIATOR  
THE DEPARTED

SHUTTER ISLAND  
THE WOLF OF WALL STREET

**6801** HOLLYWOOD BLVD THE LOCATION OF HIS STAR ON THE WALK OF FAME



# THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic  
images came  
to life

## The Graduate

IT'S ONE OF the most famous shots in movie history. One of the most famous lines, too. "Mrs Robinson," squeals Dustin Hoffman to Anne Bancroft's older lady, "you're trying to seduce me." Then that agonising beat. "Aren't you?" "Do you want me to seduce you?" she asks.

In Mike Nichols' film, the scene takes place in the bar area of the Robinsons' modernist Californian home. A bar feels natural — filled with jungle motifs, this is Mrs Robinson's lair. Bancroft will reveal a leopard-skin wrap beneath her dress. QED: she is the hunter, Benjamin her prey.

The talismanic shot is framed through an exposed leg propped on a bar stool, looking onto a squirming Hoffman. "We would do whatever we could think of to express the mood, the emotion of the scene," remembered cinematographer Robert Surtees. Nichols pushed his leading man, needling out Benjamin's neuroses from Hoffman's psyche. "Imagine you are 12 and she is 20," he told his star.

The image to the left, however, isn't that shot. It may be the shot you picture when you think of *The Graduate*, but it is not in the film. Instead, perhaps recognising its importance and appeal, the scene was recreated for a poster shoot, relocating the arched knee to the bedroom, distorting our memory. It's not even Bancroft's leg, but future *Dallas* star Linda Gray's. But then again, that's apt for a film whose production was full of surprises.

Author Charles Webb, 180cm tall, sleek as an antelope, was writing about his own species in the novel, and the producers had a list of potential

Benjamin Braddocks. Screenwriter Buck Henry recalled they were all "tall and blond". Everyone knew it should be Robert Redford, but Nichols looked into his blue eyes and knew he could never play a loser. He was going to shape Benjamin out of brown-eyed Broadway misfit Hoffman. "He had to be the dark, ungainly artist," said Nichols. Otherwise, why is he having trouble in the country of the blond, blue-eyed people? Suddenly, the whole movie made sense.

Nichols had pictured clean-cut Doris Day as Mrs Robinson, curdling as booze-numbed, sexless middle age gathered her in. That was until Anne Bancroft fell into his thoughts. She was too young at 35, but seductive and kind of brittle, having been cast aside by Hollywood. She was also an ex. He remembered her cynicism.

*The Graduate* is set up as a symphony of embarrassments, and none came more awkward than the sexual proposal made by Mrs Robinson. During rehearsal, Bancroft had been at a loss. Her line readings were too nice. Nichols couldn't explain what was wrong; instead he showed her, delivering the pivotal line ("Benjamin, will you drive me home?") in an ice-encrusted deadpan. Bancroft got it in an instant. "I know what that is," she said. "That's anger."

Here is the lightness of farce anchored with despair. The more times you return to the film, the more sympathetic Bancroft's performance becomes. *The Graduate* is Benjamin's comedy, but Mrs Robinson's tragedy. **IAN NATHAN**

THE GRADUATE IS OUT NOW ON DVD,  
BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

"You're trying to seduce me...aren't you?" Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) in Mrs Robinson's "lair".

### INSTANT TRIVIA



1

For *The Graduate*, Mike Nichols was the first director to be paid a million dollars.

2

In 2007, "Mrs Robinson, you're trying to seduce me... aren't you?" was voted among the Top 100 movie quotes of all time by the American Film Institute.

3

Although Mrs Robinson is meant to be much older than Benjamin, Anne Bancroft and Dustin Hoffman were just under six years apart in age.

4

Hoffman reprised a version of this scene in *The Simpsons*, saying, "Mrs Krabappel, you're trying to seduce me!"



# Elijah Wood's strange second act

The actor-producer on how he's gone from hobbits to horror

ELIJAH WOOD. HE'S a nice boy, right? He was that lovely Frodo Baggins, after all. Wouldn't hurt a fly. Yet that only tells half the tale. For the past few years, Wood — now shorn of any of the baggage of the *Lord Of The Rings* movies — has been involved in making some of the most original and intense genre movies around, whether as actor or producer via his company, Spectrevisions. "There's certainly no strategy," he laughs. "I'm just reactive, and have really been reactive most of my life." Strategy or not, the latest slab of deranged barminess is *Come To Daddy*. He talks to us about that and his other strange standouts...

## MANIAC (2012)

What started Wood down the dark path — playing a serial killer in Franck Khalfoun's disturbing slasher remake. "Initially, I was not receptive to it. I was so tired, especially with horror, of people remaking films that should not be

remade. But I read the script and realised the approach was so different. The idea was that for the most part it would be seen in POV. The fact I would only be seen in reflections and the occasional third person perspective was exciting. It was also the opportunity to play a villain. The idea was that I would only work for a week, but after I met them I said, 'I think I need to be around the whole time.' And that was super-fun, figuring out how to get my arms or hands into the frame."

## COOTIES (2014)

Wood has only starred in one film he's produced — this wild and wacky comedy-horror, in which he plays a teacher battling a group of infected kids. "The intention with Spectrevisions was to never work on any of the films as an actor, and create a strong dividing line, so it didn't appear that I was creating a company to provide work for myself. But



that was one of those scenarios where I loved the script and character, and I was like, 'Ah fuck. It's not going to harm the company.' And the opportunity to work on something whose primary driving force was comedy was super-exciting."

## THE GREASY STRANGLER (2016)

Wood executive-produced Jim Hosking's truly bizarre comedy, which features prosthetic penises, people yelling, "BULLSHIT ARTIST!" at each other and, yes, greasy stranglings. "Ant Timpson emailed me and said, 'A bunch of us want to make this thing called *Greasy Strangler*. I think you're going to love it.' An hour-and-a-half later, I texted him, 'BULLSHIT ARTIST!' I was quoting the movie already. I emailed my partners at Spectrevisions and said, 'Guys, this is one of the

Above: The weird and wonderful world of Woods' production company, Spectrevisions. Left: Not your average family film: *Come To Daddy*.

rare occasions where we're just going to do this. I want you to read it, but we're making this movie.' I was only on set for a couple of days. With Jim, I feel like our job was to get out of his way."

## THE TRUST (2016)

A dark, twisting thriller in which Wood teams up with fellow cop Nicolas Cage to pull off a dangerous heist. "It was the first time I'd ever had an out-of-body experience while working with somebody. I've worked with some extraordinary actors, but working with Nic was bizarre in the best way. I would be in the middle of a scene with him and be slightly out of myself going, 'Holy fucking shit, that's Nicolas Cage! And the way he said that was so Nicolas Cage!' There was a real vitality to him."



## MANDY (2018)

Another producing-only gig for Wood, who dug into his contacts book and went straight to 'Cage, Nicolas' for Panos Cosmatos' dark, demented fantasy.

"Mandy would have been made, but without doing *The Trust* beforehand, would it have been made with Nic? I don't think so. But *Mandy* was one of those things where we saw *Beyond The Black Rainbow* and then sought Panos out. He pitched us the loose idea of *Mandy* at that lunch and then months later sent us the script. We had that for about four or five years before it all came together. On *The Trust*, I recommended that [Cage] see *Beyond The Black Rainbow*, and it totally freaked him out. The initial conversation was for the Jeremiah Sand role, not the Red role, but he said he didn't feel he had the kind of life experience to give us what we needed for Jeremiah. There was a moment when Panos said, 'Wait! Are we idiots? He's gotta be Red!'"

## COME TO DADDY (2019)

A blackly comedic thriller, in which Wood plays a hipster who travels to a remote cabin to reconnect with his estranged father, only to get a lot more than he bargained for.

"It was a taut, windy script that constantly surprised me every few pages. I never knew quite where it was going. In one respect, it's a son reuniting with his father after 30 years and also an intense, weird genre exercise. And I loved the character, who starts off as a bit of a pompous asshole, and as things get out of his control, it was gleeful what we could do with him. He gets put through the wringer, but the hope is that the emotional resonance still can connect. It's a genre film, and within genre there's a little bit of freedom creatively that allows you to stretch a little bit." CHRIS HEWITT

COME TO DADDY IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

Alamy, Capital Pictures

# THE FIRST TAKE CLUB

Classic movies, seen for the very first time



THIS MONTH

GARTH MARENGHI CREATOR AND POSSUM DIRECTOR MATTHEW HOLNESS DELVES INTO SERGIO LEONE'S *ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA* FOR THE FIRST TIME



AS A LIFELONG fan of his Westerns, I can't explain why it took me until my mid-forties to watch Leone's final film. Perhaps it was a distant memory of the film's initial reviews; perhaps the intimidating (229 minutes!) running time. If I'm honest, these days I balk at anything past the 90-minute mark, and if *Empire* hadn't come knocking, my decidedly elderly copy would have remained in cellophane for at least another decade.

What did I expect, going in? Nothing less than Leone's unique, revisionist take on the classic Hollywood gangster film. Initial impressions were strong. The director's trademark style was evident from the start, if muted in comparison to his earlier films; the aspect-ratio smaller, slow zooms on the close-ups looking a little dated for a movie made in the '80s. Yet Leone's framing of the Syndicate hoods; the deliberate, measured pace and manipulation of sound elements;

his heightened depiction of violence, and the film's stunning production design all had me thinking I'd foolishly neglected a bone-fide classic.

Then my excitement waned. Flashbacks and flash-forwards disorientated me. Morricone's emotionally direct score, present from the outset, felt increasingly at odds with the film's seemingly trite storyline, which appeared to be little more than a pulp gangster yarn about a suitcase of missing money, using that well-worn device of an unidentifiable corpse. Aware, then, that James Woods would be turning up later as a failed plot twist, I started to feel I was maybe too

old for this sort of thing. Disillusionment descended into borderline loathing as the film's 'childhood' sequences kicked in, interminable scenes of weak comedy playing uncomfortably against overtly sexual content. At times, it felt like I was watching a queasy hybrid of *Bugsy Malone* and *Skins*.

Relief came with the return of De Niro's Noodles, though his scenes of extreme sexual violence grew increasingly tough to stomach, and I speak as someone who's watched a lot of *poliziotteschi* films. A second, grim rape scene was the nadir for me. Perhaps it was the tonal clash of that ubiquitous Morricone score before and after, and Leone's crass use of back projection, but the scene made me question the entire production: the narrative, its soundtrack, the lead character himself.

Then what happened? I can't really say how or when exactly, but at some stage during the second half I fell in love with it. Deeply in love. As the film slowly shifts focus to themes of betrayal, regret and the passage of time, a transformation takes place and I found myself increasingly moved by Noodles' plight. His self-knowledge of irredeemable sin — his personal failings, failures and all-consuming guilt — finally opened the film up for me. De Niro's silent reaction to seeing Deborah's son — and all that represents — brought tears to my eyes, the dawning awareness of lost years, dreams and a wasted life.

That slow wave of sorrow flows through the final scenes, feeling almost Dickensian in its scope. A brief flashback to Noodles as a boy, panicking as Max vanishes under the water, abandoning him, had me empathising with those youthful characters I had previously felt little for. The film was evoking genuine feelings of sadness at revisiting the past, replicating the passage of life and time beautifully.

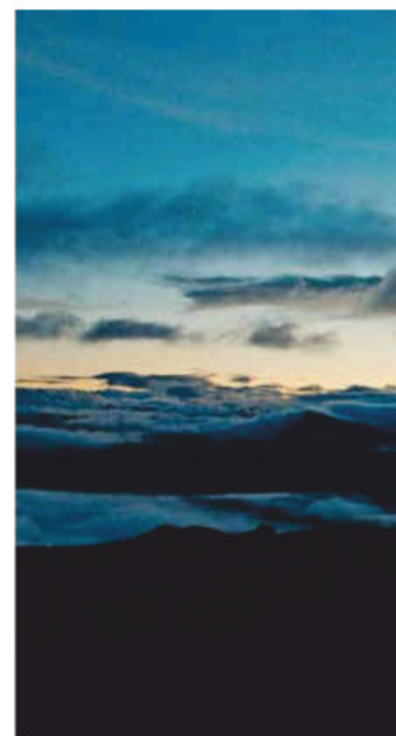
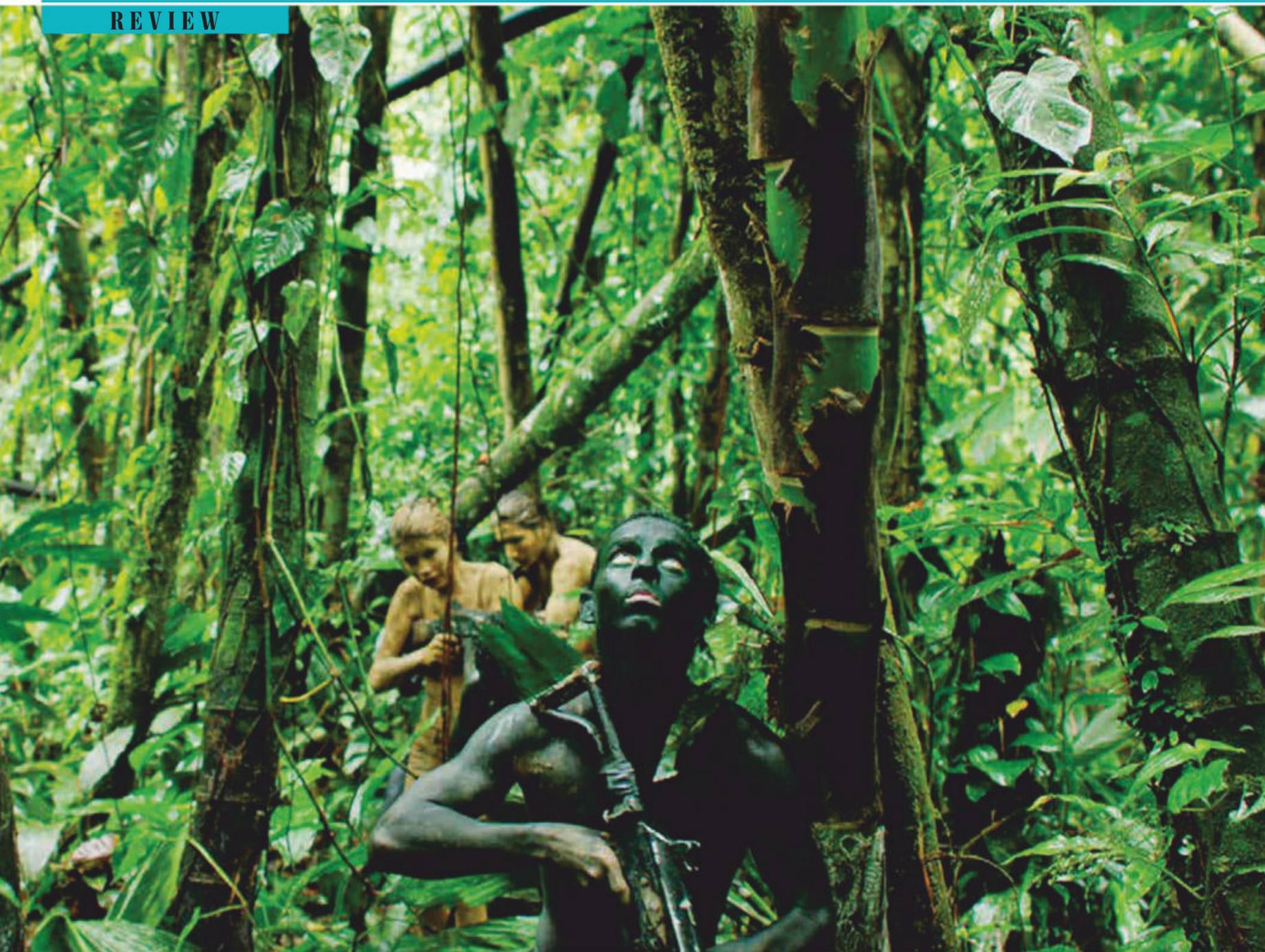
And then — the most breathtaking moment of the film: a return to Noodles' opium haze, suggesting that what I'd been watching was perhaps only a dream-vision from a guilt-ridden and — crucially — unreliable narrator. Meaning everything I'd seen might be Noodles' fantasised

version of events. Which would justify the hokey lines and the Hollywood clichés; perhaps even Noodles' worst crimes, if perceived through the veil of his own self-loathing.

I finally felt for him; Morricone's elegiac score the perfect expression of Noodles' tragic, self-revelatory odyssey of the soul. Ultimately, Leone's film touched me deeply in a way I hadn't thought remotely possible at the start. And it's stayed with me ever since. Time and memory. It was worth the wait.



ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA AND POSSUM ARE OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



# Jungle fever

How **MONOS** director Alejandro Landes took on the jungle — and won

*MONOS*, ALEJANDRO LANDES' beautiful, brutal dreamscape about a group of teen soldiers in Latin America, is the real deal. Inspired by Colombia's interminable civil war, Landes short-listed a gang of mostly non-actors, stuck them in a boot camp, whittled them down to the toughest of the tough, then shot the film at first up a mountain, and then in a remote and unforgiving jungle. That jungle was rough. That jungle was tough. Landes tells us how he pulled it off.

## FINDING INTEL

For expert guidance, Landes hired Wilson Salazar, a former child soldier. "He had risen to the top of one of the most feared combat units and he had deserted," says Landes. "So he had a price on his head. I asked him to come on as

a consultant. At first he was training the kids, just like he'd trained other kids — he himself had entered the guerrilla army when he was 11 years old. So he was training them on how to move without making a sound, barefoot formations. How to carry a weapon." Impressed, Landes then hired him to act in the film, too, as 'The Messenger', who gives the kids their orders. Here, Salazar's real-life experience really came into play. "When he was shooting the proof-of-life video, he was physically moved and he had to step back. He said, 'You know, this isn't the first time I've done this.' Because he had held a camera for real proof-of-life videos with a kidnapped person in front of him."

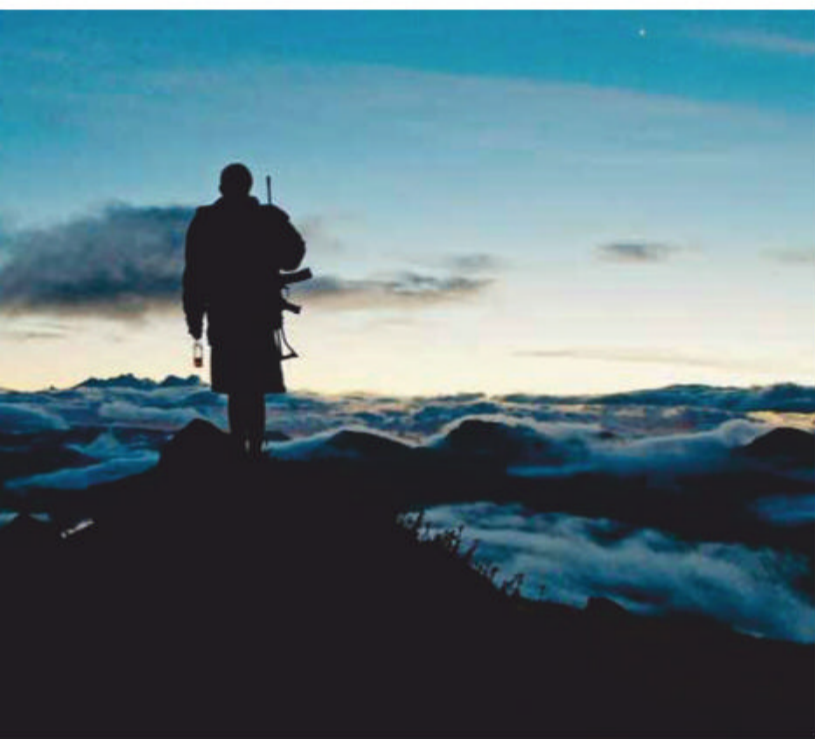
## HANDLING THE ELEMENTS

The jungle really brings the atmosphere to *Monos* — it's a terrifying paradise that practically wafts off the screen. And there were no shortcuts. "For the ambition we had, a very stylised mise-en-scène, I knew it was going to be very hard to pull off, and certainly we were at the limit of what we could do," says Landes. "We had one satellite phone that worked every so often.



Top left: The teen guerrillas of Colombia fight their way through the dense forest. Above: Director Alejandro Landes running on almost empty. Above right: Moises Arias cuts a stark figure as camouflaged leader Bigfoot. Right: Bigfoot takes the combat underwater.





Top left: Paul Cubides as Dog, who faces solitary confinement after an incident with a cow. Left: Landes' "beautiful, brutal dreamscape". Above: The Monos are put through their paces by The Messenger, played by Wilson Salazar, a real-life former child soldier who eventually deserted.

That was it. It was tough, because the power that we did have was being used for the cameras and for the batteries for the very little light that we used. We didn't have a refrigerator so we were just eating lentils and chickpeas, things we didn't have to ration. There was no escape, everyone was sharing tents, it was very close quarters. Very intense. We brought things in that you can't control — fog, rain, mud, water, flies — put it all into the texture of the film, to stop asking, 'Why me?' and start asking, 'Why not?'"

### TOUGHING IT OUT

Trickier than the already tricky circumstances was the fact that almost all of the leads were under 18. "Having them go through the boot-camp exercise at the beginning really made a difference, because the people that wanted to stay had really shined," says Landes. "It was very challenging but I think that that was very energising and exciting for them, because they had each other. They lived together, they were all there together, there was a group spirit. At no point did they let go. At first we were all concerned that they'd need a nanny and a psychologist and a teacher, but if we treated them with kid gloves, they hated it. To them it was an absolutely crazy summer camp. The shoot was daunting, it was hard and rough, but the kids were really acting, they were remarkable. Even going down the rapids they were doing different takes. They weren't just enduring hardships, they were building performances. They were selling it!"

### SURVIVING DEATH

Working in such unpredictable conditions, it's a surprise that nothing went wrong. Except it did. "I was about to shoot a scene in a ravine and

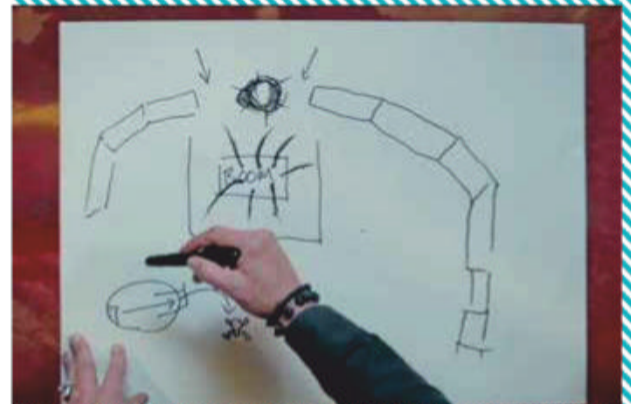
I went early to prep it up," says Landes. "The night before it had rained really hard, and just as the underwater photographer and the kids were unloading, a noise was heard at the top of the canyon, and a 40-foot tree came hurtling down the canyon and landed at [actor] Sofia Buenaventura's feet. People were absolutely shaking, the assistant director and production designer started crying — that tree could have killed everyone. So we didn't shoot that morning, it was very intense. But by the end of the afternoon we had to go back at it, because everything had happened, but at the same time nothing had happened."

### HOLDING IT TOGETHER

Landes had the weight of responsibility on his shoulders, and on location he worked 46 days straight, not eating often, not sleeping much. Eventually he broke, collapsing. "I couldn't get up, I had a shooting pain in my abdomen," he remembers. "We had a helicopter on call for emergencies but it was pouring rain and the helicopter wasn't able to come down. So the gold miners who lived there, who we'd hired to help us, generously said, 'We'll take him out.' It takes four hours to walk up that canyon, and they put me on a stretcher and five of them carried me out of there. They took me to a local hospital and I was there for a day on an ID [intravenous drip]. I think it was because I'd just been not stopping, and eating sporadically." Otherwise, he got through it. "I just entered a sort of tunnel," he explains of his commitment. "Nothing else existed for me but *Monos*. I was at the limit of what I could do, both physically and mentally, which was scary — but also very exhilarating." **ALEX GODFREY**

MONOS IS OUT NOW ON BLU-RAY, DVD AND DOWNLOAD





! SPOILER WARNING

# THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the must-see moments from the month's big release

## Zombieland: Double Tap

WRITER-PRODUCERS RHETT REESE and Paul Wernick on the best bits of their zany zombie sequel.

### LOGO A-GO-GO

Ten years may have elapsed since the original *Zombieland* took a devil-may-care approach to the zombie genre, but the sequel very quickly establishes that nothing has changed by having the Columbia logo lady use that torch of hers to best some undead assailants. "That was the idea of our visual-effects supervisor, Paul Linden," admits Reese. "We actually wrote it even crazier

than it turned out. We had the woman setting a zombie on fire with her torch and wrapping it up in her sash. Discretion was the better part of valour." The duo, and director Ruben Fleischer, were unsure whether Sony would give them permission at first. "Sony is pretty protective of that logo," says Wernick. "Fortunately, they let the inmates run the asylum."

### NEW THREATS

The movie begins with Jesse Eisenberg's Columbus, via voiceover, introducing us to three new strains of zombie that have emerged-slash-mutated over the decade-long hiatus: the dumb Homer, the smart Hawking, and the silent and deadly Ninja. "It allowed us to have some fun with the idea that not all zombies are created equal, which led us in the direction of the Homer," explains Reese. "We wanted to give the zombies a little more personality." Interestingly, you might wonder why the Ninja is given such a big build-up, only to never appear again, but Reese says it does. "There's one Ninja under the RV that grabs Madison's ankle," he says. Maybe the Ninja

will get its moment in the spotlight in the next sequel. Just ten years or so before we find out.

### PISA PISS

"We always try to ground our stuff in reality," says Wernick, the man who co-wrote *Deadpool* and *6 Underground*. "This one pushed it a little bit, but I think it's fun." He's talking of the sequence which upgrades the original's fun Zombie Kill Of The Week to Zombie Kill Of The Year, with a hilarious moment in which a not-at-all-stereotyped hotheaded Italian gent dispatches a bunch of zombies by, well, toppling the Leaning Tower of Pisa onto them. "There was a Dave Callaham draft where the Washington Monument fell over," says Reese. "We were looking to give it a little more international flair. And the Leaning Tower of Pisa is already leaning."

### DOUBLE TROUBLE

Halfway through the movie, our heroes take refuge at an Elvis-themed hotel run by Rosario Dawson's Nevada, where they encounter Albuquerque and Flagstaff, a pair of zombie



killers who are basically mirror images of Columbus and Woody Harrelson's Tallahassee. "It stretches believability a little bit," admits Reese, "particularly the resemblance between Thomas Middleditch [Albuquerque] and Jesse Eisenberg. We did approach Michael Cera first because he and Jesse are often confused for the same person." Luke Wilson plays Tallahassee's 'twin', Flagstaff, but that role was originally earmarked for someone Reese and Wernick have worked with before. "He [Ryan Reynolds] read the script and loved it," says Wernick. "But he was off shooting *Free Guy*. We were bummed out to not have him, but Luke was amazing."

**KILLING THE ZOMBIE KILLERS**

If you were expecting these new special guest stars to stick around, bond and bicker with Eisenberg, Harrelson and Emma Stone, you thought wrong. In the film's standout sequence, Albuquerque and Flagstaff are bitten, try to cover up their bites, and then transform into drooling mega-zombies before being dispatched. "It was a little bit of the Bill Murray pattern," says Wernick,

referring to Murray's legendary cameo in the first movie, which ended with him biting the bullet. "We wanted to inject a little bit of fun and new characters into the world, then kill them off. This was a fun pit stop on the way. It worked for us last time!"

**GORE BY GORE**

It's hard to top squashing zombies with one of the world's major landmarks, but Reese and Wernick still come up with an unorthodox ghoulish machine for the film's finale: a giant monster truck which Dawson drives with an abandon that would win the approval of Clarkson and Hammond (but perhaps not May). "I think in our first version it was construction vehicles," recalls Reese. "*Zombieland* is basically wish fulfillment," adds Wernick. "So we thought, 'What cars would we drive?' We all pushed around our Tonka trucks as little kids. What better way to spend life with zombies than behind four wheels of absolute awesomeness?"

**MURRAY MINT**

You could make the argument that Murray's droll appearance as himself in *Zombieland* is one of

the greatest cameos of all time. Maybe even the greatest. But it gave the *Double Tap* creative team something of a headache: how do you top it? Do you even bother? "Our feeling is that there is no *Zombieland* without Bill Murray," says Wernick. "When we approached the second one, we thought, 'Is he a zombie now?'" Instead, they decided to end the movie with a sequence in which we see Murray at a 'Garfield 3' junket on the day of the zombie outbreak, killing various film journalists (*Empire* is not included; hopefully we make it) as they try to snack on him. "At one point that was in the middle of the movie, but it felt better at the end. And Bill was a much easier get the second time. We weren't hanging by the thread at the last minute waiting for him to show up!" Truth be told, it doesn't hit the heights of the first movie's cameo, but if you've ever wanted to see Bill Murray beating seven shades of shit out of entertainment journalists, this is the scene for you. **CHRIS HEWITT**

ZOMBIELAND: DOUBLE TAP IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



## THE RANKING

Five *Empire* writers.  
Ten movies.  
Ordered definitively.

# Quentin Tarantino movies

**Chris:** When you absolutely, positively have to rank every motherfucking Quentin Tarantino movie in the room, accept no substitutes. Now, we could wait for him to do his official tenth film, which could take years, or we acknowledge that *Kill Bill* is two films.

**Terri:** Which it is. I know he insists that it's still one film, but they were released separately.

**John:** Also, one of the films is better than the other one.

**Terri:** Only marginally. Depends if you have a heart and soul.

**Nick:** I've flipped. I've changed my mind on it. For ages, I always said the second was my favourite and then I changed my mind.

**Ben:** Did you think she shouldn't have killed Bill?

**Nick:** She should have killed him, but not talked about Superman for 20 minutes.

**Chris:** I am one of those dickheads who does prefer

*Volume 2* to *Volume 1*. *Volume 1* doesn't feel like a Quentin Tarantino movie to me. Whereas *Volume 2* is more reflective and sombre and allows you to sink into the characters a bit more.

**Terri:** It humanises the Bride. I love the end because it's romantic. She literally breaks his heart. That's how she kills him.

**Chris:** With the Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique.

**Terri:** I understand it's quite extreme, but I find that utterly romantic.

**Chris:** In a very Tarantino move, we seem to have started in the middle. Let's move back to the beginning. When did we first become acquainted with his work? I first read about him in *Empire*, reading about this wunderkind of American cinema, then going to see *Reservoir Dogs* and being blown away. It was like a light

bulb turned on in my head.

**Nick:** Same here. *Pulp Fiction* blew my mind. I had the Bruce Willis poster up in my room and I bought the Faber scripts for *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, memorised as much as I could. I was obsessed when I was 15, 16. Still am.

**Ben:** I was 12 when *Kill Bill Volume 1* came out. That and *Volume 2* were the DVDs that got passed around. That feeling of, this is what a filmmaker is, and it opens your mind to what an auteur is, and how they can have a distinctive voice. I went back and caught up on the early stuff.

**John:** I had a similar thing. I was reading *Empire* magazine and remember that *Kill Bill* was my introduction. *Empire* had always been quite big on Tarantino. They were early supporters in the '90s when a lot of critics were put off by the violence.

## OUR CRITICS



### NICK DE SEMLYEN

Once played Mr Orange in a drama class. We need to see any footage.



### CHRIS HEWITT

Grew up on a reservoir. Had a dog. Is thinking of suing Tarantino.



### JOHN NUGENT

He shot Nice Guy Eddie. So much for Nice Guy John.



### BEN TRAVIS

Thinks Tarantino's Australian accent in *Django Unchained* is "fair dinkum".



### TERRI WHITE

Such a big QT fan that her favourite Mike Myers film is *Inglourious Basterds*.



Illustration: Jacey

**Nick:** Maybe my favourite Tarantino musical moment is the last shot of *Death Proof*. *Chick Habit* by April March – that’s the one bit of *Death Proof* I love.

**Terri:** The one bit?

**Chris:** I think *Death Proof* is minor Tarantino.

**Terri:** It’s trashy, nasty, pulpy, sleazy. He claims that this is his worst film, but I love it. It’s a complete subversion of the genre. Stuntman Mike is a brilliant bad guy, and what a role for Kurt Russell.

**Ben:** It might be his footiest film until *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*. There are feet on dashboards, feet on bars... There are legs being ripped off, but we’re focusing on the foot.

**Nick:** *Kill Bill* is quite footy.

**Terri:** The second half [of *Death Proof*] flips the narrative. It’s the rise of these amazing women. The stuntwork in the second half is extraordinary. Zoë Bell is the greatest stuntwoman working in the world.

**Chris:** This is true. She does need an acting double, though.

**Terri:** That may be correct.

**Nick:** I love the action, but do we think that, the Bride and Jackie Brown aside, Tarantino is as good at writing female characters as male characters?

**Chris:** I couldn’t quote a single line from *Death Proof*.

**Nick:** Compare that to the opening of *Reservoir Dogs* where they’re sitting around a table and it just pops.

**Terri:** Broadly speaking he is better at writing men, for sure. He understands the dynamics between men and the way men speak to each other. He’s not so good at the way women speak to each other.

**Chris:** I think it’s very difficult to talk about Quentin Tarantino without talking about violence and screen violence.

**John:** I was reading some original reviews of *Reservoir Dogs* and it’s amazing how puritanical critics were. It was seen as incredibly controversial. If you view it in his whole filmography, it’s one of the tamer ones. The famous scene where Mr Blonde chops the cop’s ear off, the camera pans away.

**Nick:** It’s funny comparing the whole *Reservoir Dogs* brouhaha

in the early ’90s to the end of *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*. There was no controversy around it at all, but it’s five times worse.

I think for good or bad, he’s responsible in large part in making it mainstream to have ultra-violence in films.

**Terri:** I don’t think the statement that Tarantino has a massive problem with women and always enacts horrible violence against them is an argument that really holds up. They are often women who take their revenge, who enact brutality on other people.

Everyone gets brutalised in a way.

**Chris:** He’s an equal-opportunities brutalist.

**Terri:** Everybody gets fucked up. But there is a specific use of his violence around women that I still find quite knotty.

**Chris:** There’s such a punch to the violence. The violence in a Tarantino film feels more real than it does in many other films.

**Nick:** He’s managed to keep his films feeling dangerous. I think they’ve got less nihilistic, but even in *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* you didn’t know if DiCaprio or Brad Pitt were going to die. And they’re big stars.

**Chris:** I was on tenterhooks the last half-hour. He sees many characters as expendable.

**Nick:** You go into his films knowing he can do anything to any character.

**Chris:** At any time.

**Terri:** That’s really interesting. Vincent Vega is coming out from having a shit.

**Nick:** You’re killing the star of your film on the toilet.

**John:** He’s always been very good at that tension and suspense. The opening scene of *Inglourious Basterds* is one of the most tense scenes I’ve ever seen.

**Chris:** Right from the off, there are unbearably suspenseful scenes in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*. He tightens the screws so well at times. He’s brilliant at that.

**Nick:** I got to interview The Gimp once. He was lovely.

**Chris:** Right, enough squabbling. Let’s vote!

# THE TOP TEN



## RESERVOIR DOGS (1992)

**John:** “The original, and still the best. Taut, surprising, savagely violent and darkly funny, Tarantino’s debut remains iconic to its core, and is quite simply as close to perfect as it’s possible for a film to get.”

1



## PULP FICTION (1994)

**Nick:** “A film of burger-loving hitmen and mesmerising molls, if it were a milkshake it would be worth \$5.”

2



## KILL BILL: VOLUME 1 (2003)

**Ben:** “QT at his most colourful, with fountains of blood, anime bits and a samurai showdown dialled up to 88.”

3



## INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS (2009)

**John:** “Tarantino took a baseball bat to the war film rulebook, and has insane fun doing so. That’s a bingo!”

4



## ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD (2019)

**Nick:** “Horror, comedy and flame-throwers: Tarantino’s latest has it all.”

5



## THE HATEFUL EIGHT (2015)

**Terri:** “Unfairly much-maligned. A small, stagy story in 70mm, and that tension makes the film so interesting.”

6



## JACKIE BROWN (1997)

**Chris:** “It’s perhaps the least Tarantino of Tarantino movies. Tarantino on a leash.”

7



## KILL BILL: VOLUME 2 (2004)

**Terri:** “More reflective than *Volume 1*. I understand this is quite extreme, but I find it utterly romantic.”

8



## DEATH PROOF (2007)

**Ben:** “QT’s slightest movie, but still a blast – with talking, gore and feet galore. Plus its final car chase rocks.”

9



## DJANGO UNCHAINED (2012)

**Chris:** “Won two Oscars, but perhaps his least fondly remembered film. Placing after *Death Proof*? Yikes!”

10

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT:  
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# 5 OF THE BEST

Team Empire on the month's essential viewing



## FROZEN II

OUT NOW (DOWNLOAD, DVD, BLU-RAY)

CERT PG / 103 MINS

DVD BR

The first film took the world by storm in 2013, so the stakes had to be astronomically higher for *Frozen II* to even try to compare. Thankfully, co-directors Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee build on the smart values established by their world-shaking wintry universe by giving princesses Elsa and Anna much more to learn beyond their own little kingdom. One of the main challenges was, of course, the songs — can you really top something like *Let It Go*? Luckily for the dulcet tones of all ages, the answer was a resounding yes. *Enter Into The Unknown*, *Show Yourself* and *Lost In The Woods* — showstopping bangers all. The ambitious plot — decrying colonialism, hive-mind mentality and a society denying the past — occasionally gets knotty, but with such showmanship and another hit of generation-defining music, it's still pretty unforgettable.

ELLA KEMP



## CASINO ROYALE

OUT NOW / CERT M / 145 MINS

DVD BR

Doing what is essentially a James Bond: Origins story 20 films into the franchise was a ballsy move, but Martin Campbell's *Casino Royale* distils everything we know and love about the prolific British spy into a fresh, slickly entertaining package. The intense set pieces would be high up on any franchise's 'Best Of' lists, the classic lines are altered in delightfully unexpected ways ("Shaken or stirred?" "Do I look like I give a damn?" is one such highlight), and Eva Green's Vesper is arguably the smartest and most complex of all Bond girls. It helps that her chemistry with Daniel Craig is sizzling from the superbly written train introduction onwards, while Craig himself proves all the pre-release doubters wrong with a raw, edgy performance that's as close to Ian Fleming's Bond as this series has come. Here's hoping *No Time To Die* ends his 007 tenure as thrillingly as it began. AMON WARMANN



## THE BIGGEST LITTLE FARM

OUT NOW / CERT PG / 92 MINS

DVD

Filmmaker John and chef Molly Chester left their small Los Angeles apartment to turn a dried-up, 80-hectare tract of land into an organic farm, charting their eight-year progress in this likeable documentary. Directed by John, this doesn't offer much objective distance from its subject, but it does get up close and personal with their efforts to transform biologically dead earth into something approaching a paradise. Although Chester doesn't undersell the effort involved, the results will make you want to chuck it all in and buy some ducks — and a pig — as the couple bring the farm to life, and find a balance for its inhabitants between rampaging gophers and invading snails. At the very least, it should give you hope that we can turn more than just farming around by restoring live eco-systems; we could even change the world. We just need enough worms, and a very good dog, to inspire us. HELEN O'HARA



## KNIVES OUT

OUT NOW (DOWNLOAD, DVD, BLU-RAY)

CERT M / 131 MINS

DVD BR

Rian Johnson brings a Bond to a knife fight for his lovingly crafted modern murder mystery. Daniel Craig plays Benoit Blanc, a clean-cut detective-for-hire with a rhythmic Southern drawl. His task: to investigate the death of author Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer), an event his family believes to be suspect. Through the Thrombeys, Johnson presents a cross-section of contemporary America with all its trolling Republicans, glossy influencers and weed-smoking millennials, and conjures up a glorious cast for his prickly ensemble, from Jamie Lee Curtis to Chris Evans — here playing an arrogant scion who wears knitwear like he's doing it a favour. The film's secret weapon, however, is star-on-the-rise Ana de Armas. Through her, we witness a whodunit whirlwind that's occasionally dastardly, often delicious, and with a vomit scene guaranteed to make you reach for a bucket. Consider this fair warning. BETH WEBB



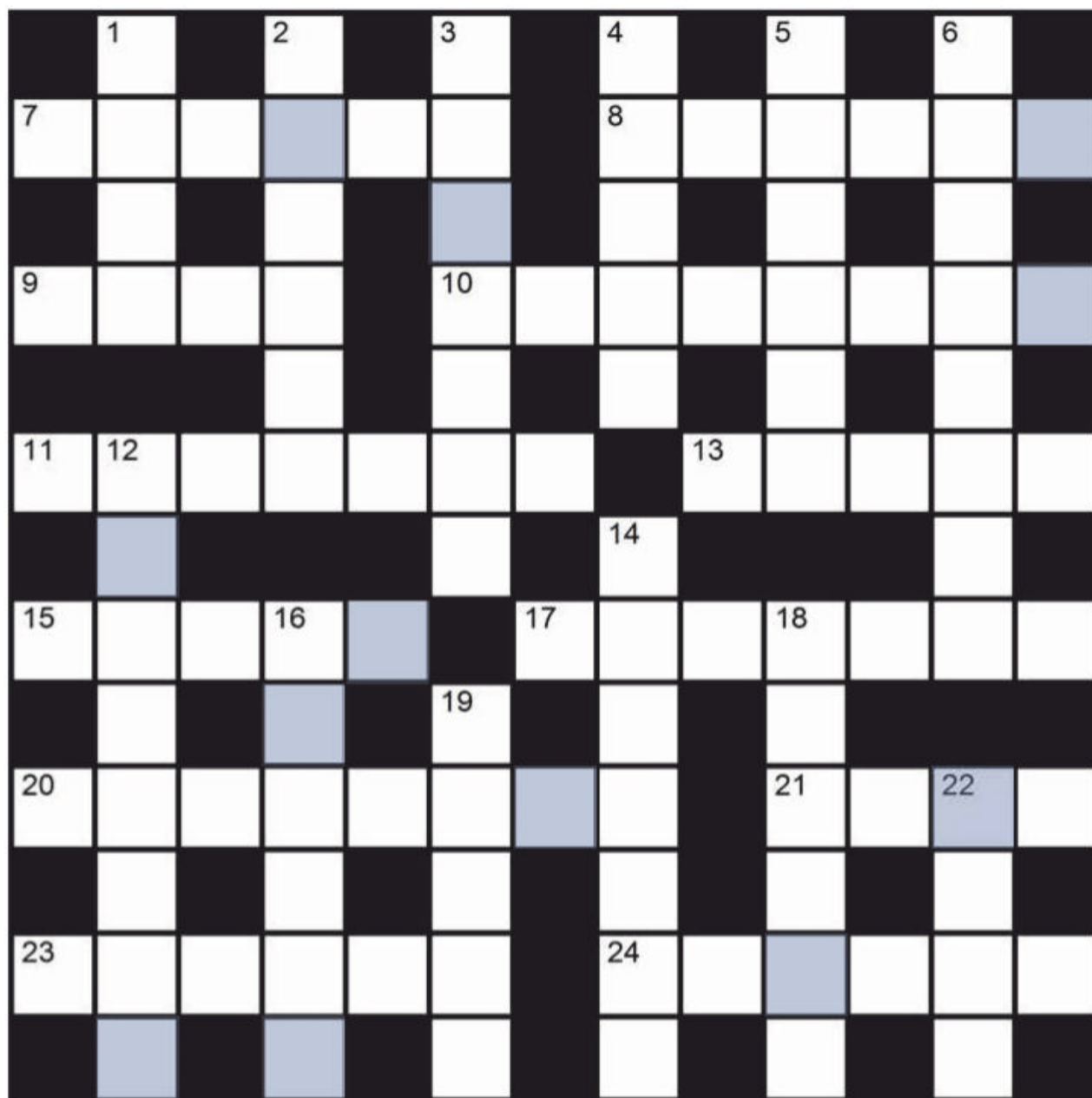
## DOCTOR SLEEP

OUT NOW / CERT MA15+ / 152 MINS

DVD BR

Is Mike Flanagan's *Doctor Sleep* a *Shining* sequel? Technically, yes. But it's also decidedly not — more a character-driven fantasy-horror about PTSD that asks, what if your trauma was being the kid in the Overlook Hotel? It's a firm fit for Flanagan, whose filmography has centred on the horrors of familial grief and cross-generational tragedy (*Oculus*, *The Haunting Of Hill House*). His take on the *Shining*-verse is slow-building but engrossing, a fascinating left turn — with astral projection, mind control, and a gang of psychic vampires, the True Knot, led by Rebecca Ferguson's magnetic, should-be-iconic immortal Rose The Hat. Reconciling Kubrick and King (who famously hated Kubrick's adaptation), *Doctor Sleep* becomes its own thrilling beast — and when Flanagan finally gets to unlock the Overlook doors he handles it just right, respectful and playful in equal measure as he revives the ultimate haunted house. Bring on the three-hour Director's Cut. BEN TRAVIS

# CROSSWORD AND GIVEAWAYS



## ACROSS

- 7 Anna who's Frank Sheeran's daughter in *The Irishman* (6)  
 8 Sly Stallone's 1989 prison movie (4,2)  
 9/23 **Across** Director Taika Waititi's World War II satire (4,6)  
 10 DiCaprio, 2020 Best Actor Oscar nominee (8)  
 11 1968 biographical movie that starred Vanessa Redgrave (7)  
 13 Stand-up comedian Bruce portrayed by Dustin Hoffman (5)  
 15 *The Silence Of The Lambs* and *Philadelphia* director Jonathan (5)  
 17 *Railway Children* star Jenny (7)  
 20 He's best known for his portrayal of Dr Frank-N-Furter (3,5)  
 21 Fanning, or an Isabelle Huppert movie (4)  
 23 See 9 **Across**  
 24 — *Space* (Jennifer Aniston) (6)

## DOWN

- 1 Paul who was Dwayne in *Little Miss Sunshine* (4)  
 2 Genevieve, a Golden Globe winner as Anne Boleyn (6)  
 3 Australian-born actress Alice (7)  
 4 Sounds gory, this 2012 Paul Bettany starrer (5)  
 5 In which Sid the sloth met Manny the mammoth (3,3)  
 6 It was parental for Billy Crystal and Bette Midler (8)  
 12 The Smith (not Maggie) seen in *Quartet* (2012) (8)  
 14 Rock star who's a zombie in *The Dead Don't Die* (4,3)  
 16 — & *Mrs Miller* (Warren Beatty) (6)  
 18 Spielberg directed this adaptation of a Roald Dahl story (3,1,1,1)  
 19 No lie — this docudrama involved Cate Blanchett and Robert Redford (5)  
 22 In which Scarlett Johansson was a drug mule (4)

**MARCH ANSWERS ACROSS:** 7/15 Little Women, 8 Amelie, 9 Vice, 10 Eastwood, 11 Rampage, 13 Le Cop, 17 Madigan, 20 Ed Harris, 21 Mojo, 23 Camera, 24 Trance.

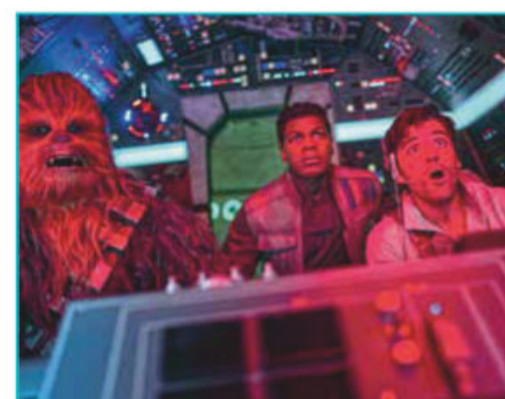
**DOWN:** 1 Mimi, 2 Streep, 3 Revenge, 4 Salsa, 5 Pee Wee, 6 Nino Rota, 12 A Good Day, 14 Bassett, 16 Eraser, 18 I Am Sam, 19 Dream, 22 Jack. **ANAGRAM PEDRO PASCAL**

## WIN! 'STAR WARS: EPISODE IX – THE RISE OF SKYWALKER' PRIZE PACKS



THE sci-fi movie series that has been 43 years in the making reaches a cataclysmic climax...and the ninth instalment is finally available to own yourself. A stellar cast – led by Daisy Ridley (Rey) and Adam Driver (Kylo Ren) – reveal what happens when the Jedi and the Sith face off for the last time. But will Emperor Palpatine and the dark side have the last laugh against our heroes? *Star Wars IX: The Rise Of Skywalker* is non-stop intergalactic thrills and features all your old favourites, including C-3PO, Chewbacca and Princess Leia. It's out now on DVD, Blu-Ray and 4K, and to celebrate we have TEN DVDs on offer.

**TO ENTER, TELL US YOUR FAVE STAR WARS CHARACTER AND WHY.**



## WIN! 'KNIVES OUT' ON DVD



007 himself Daniel Craig stars alongside Chris Evans, Jamie Lee Curtis, Toni Collette and Christopher Plummer in this devilishly delightful Agatha Christie-style mystery. Craig plays quirky Detective Benoit Blanc, who's called in to investigate the suspicious death of crime novelist Harlan Thrombey (Plummer) at his manor. Nothing is as it seems as Blanc works his way through a bunch of lies and red herrings to uncover the truth. *Knives Out* is out now on BluRay, DVD and digital, and to celebrate we have TEN DVDs to give away.

**TO ENTER THIS CONTEST, TELL US ABOUT THE WORST FAMILY GATHERING YOU'VE EVER EXPERIENCED.**

## COMPETITIONS END

30 APRIL

**FOR A CHANCE** to win these prizes, email us at [empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au](mailto:empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au), write the prize in the subject line, your preferred format if there are both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander *Empire* readers. For conditions of entry visit [www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms](http://www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms).



**CLASSIC  
SCENE**  
Standout sequences  
from the  
great movies

# It's A Wonderful Life

Chosen by **GURINDER CHADHA**

**GURINDER CHADHA:** "I know it's cheesy, but I'd have to choose *It's A Wonderful Life*, when George Bailey [Jimmy Stewart], after all the pain he's gone through, has got his little girl in his arms and the whole town comes and gives him money. I'm welling up even talking about it. I think it's that sense of community. It's hope, isn't it? That sense that people will do the right thing. Someone once said about my work, 'It's quite Capra-esque.' I'm never going to be as great as Frank Capra, but I do understand where that reference came from. He would always talk about the darkness in characters, but then bring them out the other end. It's beautiful."

**INT. BAILEY HOUSE — NIGHT**

*What seems like all of Bedford Falls (minus one Mr Potter, of course) has turned up at George Bailey's house on Christmas Eve, showering him with money to bail him out after accusations of fraud. George is by the Christmas tree, daughter Zuzu (Karolyn Grimes) in his arms. There is a hubbub.*

**ERNIE:** Just a minute, just a minute!

*We see that Ernie (Frank Faylen) has made his way to the front.*

**ERNIE:** Quiet, everybody! Quiet! Quiet! Now, get this. It's from London.

*He reads a telegram.*

**ERNIE:** "Mr Gower cabled you need cash. Stop. My office instructed to advance you up to \$25,000. Stop. Hee-haw and Merry Christmas, Sam Wainwright."

*The crowd cheers. George, stunned, looks at his wife, Mary (Donna Reed), who laughs.*

**MARY:** Mr Martini? How about some wine?

*The piano starts up. The assembled throng starts singing Hark The Herald Angels Sing. Mary joins George and Zuzu.*

*Carter, the bank examiner who was about to prosecute George, appears. He holds up some money, looks at George, places it on the pile, and joins in with the singing. The sheriff reaches into his pocket, takes out the arrest warrant he was saving for George,*

*and rips it in half, breaking into a beaming smile as he does so.*

*We see Uncle Billy, whose absent-mindedness caused the whole mess in the first place, merrily counting up the money.*

*Then, a commotion at the door. Two men enter wearing uniforms. Someone yells, "HARRY! HARRY!" It's Harry (Todd Karns), George's brother. He shakes George's hand. Behind is cop Bert (Ward Bond).*

**HARRY:** George, you old son of a gun!

**GEORGE:** Harry! Harry!

**HARRY:** I thought I got here too late.

**BERT:** I got him here from the airport just as quick as I could. The fool flew all the way up here in a blizzard.

*Mrs Bailey (Beulah Bondi) is now at Harry's side.*

**MRS BAILEY:** Harry, how about your banquet in New York?

**HARRY:** Oh, I left right in the middle of it, soon as I got Mary's telegram. *[He is handed a drink]* Good idea, Ernie. A toast! To my big brother, George. The richest man in town.

*Everyone starts singing Auld Lyne Sang. George picks up a book lying on top of the pile. It's The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer. An inscription inside reads: "Dear George — remember no man is a failure who has friends. Thanks for the wings! Love, Clarence."*

**MARY:** What's that?

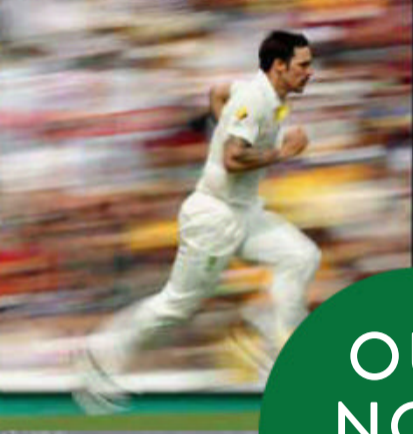
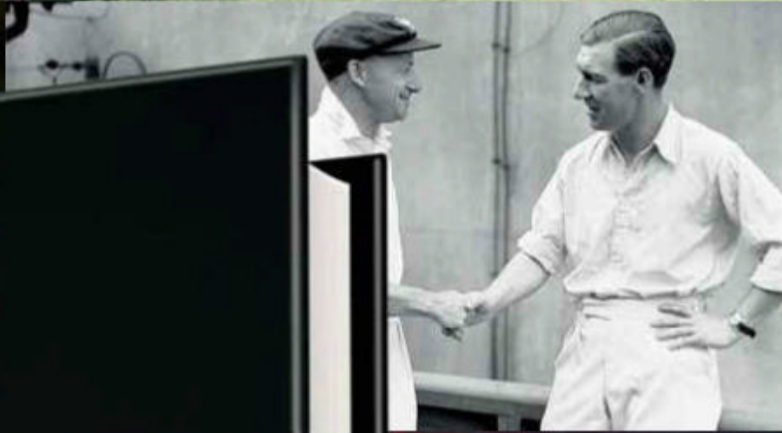
**GEORGE:** That's a Christmas present from a very dear friend of mine.

*At that, the bell on the tree rings.*

**ZUZU:** Look, daddy! Teacher says, "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings."

**GEORGE:** That's right. That's right. *[He looks up and winks]* Attaboy, Clarence.

*The singing swells as the film ends.*



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