

LAST NIGHT IN SOHO THE PSYCHO-THRILLER NO-ONE SAW COMING

# EMPIRE

OCTOBER  
2021

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return of  
Tony Soprano*



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# EDGAR WRIGHT

30-PAGE SPECIAL FEATURING GEORGE MILLER,  
SIMON PEGG, KRYSKY WILSON-CAIRNS,  
MICHAEL CERA AND MANY MORE!

**+ ETERNALS** A FIRST LOOK AT MARVEL'S RISKY LEFT-TURN

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# THIS MONTH

SO, THIS IS IT: my final letter to you, in my final issue as Editor-In-Chief. I've been thinking a lot during these last months, as I prepared for this moment, about what makes Empire what it is. But I've realised I was asking the wrong question. Because it's not what; it's who. And the answer to that question might begin with us, but it ends with you.

So, let's start at the beginning: with the Empire team, that I've been so proud to lead for the last six years. Who put their considerable brains and even bigger hearts into everything they do. Chris, Nick, James, Chris, Lizzie, Joanna, Ben, Mike, Ian, John, Helen and Aliyah. We might not always agree on Star Wars or Scorsese, but we are of one mind in the unassailable fact that there's, quite honestly, nowhere else we'd rather be. Than here, with each other, with all of you.

Which brings me to the end, to you. Empire is so much more than the words and pictures printed on these pages and bound together. A great magazine, it's said, is always a gang. But even this isn't right; isn't quite enough. For we're a community. One that challenges and criticises when needed, but also laughs and supports; shares, influences, inspires, needles, argues and, yes — you can't stop me, I'm going to say it! — loves. And boy, do we love.

My vision for Empire when I nervously stepped across the threshold on 14 September 2015 was quite simple. That we would, with welcoming, open arms (and eyes and ears), be a home for everyone, anyone with a passion for the moving image. From filmmakers to fans and everything (and everyone) in-between. The only thing that would unite us, truly, would be our deep, abiding, full-throated love of movies (and telly). That no-one would be excluded.

Whether you've been with us for two months or 32 years, it's truly been an honour to write to you every month, to talk to you in the days and weeks in-between. Because, to answer the question I began with, it's you who make Empire what it is, will continue to do so long after my face is no longer on this page; when that of the person after me isn't either. We're simply lucky guardians, who do our utmost to evolve when evolution is needed, while protecting the wonderful legacy built by those who came before.

Empire is you. And me. And them. It's us. See you at the pictures sometime.  
(Empire Forever.)



*Terri*  
**TERRI WHITE**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
@terri\_white



**EMPIRE**

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TURN TO PAGE 51 FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

## EMPIRE

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH

### ON SET WITH KRISTY WILSON-CAIRNS



Scottish screenwriter Krysty Wilson-Cairns is on a roll. Oscar-nominated for writing 1917 with Sam Mendes, she's now collaborated with Edgar Wright on *Last Night in Soho*. Photographer Ophelia Wynne shot her in — where else? — Soho on 4 August.

### IN THE STUDIO WITH STANLEY CHOW



For this special Edgar Wright issue, we wanted a special subscribers' cover. Naturally, we called up illustrator Stanley Chow, seen here putting the finishing touches to a collection of Wright's iconic heroes and villains. A slice of fried gold, indeed.

### THE EMPIRE PODCAST LIVE



For a celebratory 450th episode of the Empire Podcast, on 28 July an actual audience was joined by Edgar Wright and the subjects of his ace documentary *The Sparks Brothers*, in King's Place, London. This town was big enough for lots of us.

Above: Collins; Marco Vitar; Newsstand cover; Paul Shipper

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# REDISCOVER ENDLESS



'10/10 THE PICK AND MIX WAS SUPERB'

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AS HANDSOME AS ME'

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# TAKE 20

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



No./

1

## Marvel's most risky movie yet

**ETERNALS** isn't your average MCU adventure, says Marvel Studios producer Nate Moore — he explains why it's no safe bet (but exciting as all hell)

AFTER MAKING THE second-biggest film of all time, you can afford to take some risks. Still, *Eternals* seemed like a dangerous move for Marvel. Which, says Nate Moore — the film's producer and a longtime member of the Marvel Studios 'brains trust', having previously produced *The Winter Soldier*, *Civil War* and *Black Panther* — was exactly why they opted to make it. "That's what got us excited about the movie," he explains. "It feels risky. We don't want to just give people more of the same."

This could be the superhero studio's most ambitious outing so far: a story set across centuries, directed by arthouse auteur Chloé Zhao (fresh from her Oscars success with *Nomadland*), full of enormous existential questions and even bigger cosmic spectacle. Marvel has never had a movie with so much pedigree attached, says Moore, "This is definitely a new one for all of us," he says. "From the Academy Award-winning director of..." isn't a phrase you've used to hearing before



Here: Behold, the Eternals.  
Below: From left, Kago (Kunai Nanjani), Makkari (Lauren Ridloff), Gilgamesh (Don Lee), Thena (Angelina Jolie), Ikaris (Richard Madden), Ajak (Gemma Chan), Sersi (Gemma Chan), Sprite (Lia McHugh), Phaos (Brian Tyree Henry) and Druig (Barry Keoghan).



Marvel movies."

It's arguably also risky for Zhao: the furthest thing on paper from the arthouse intimacy of the auteur's previous movies. After all, at no point in *Nomadland* does Frances McDormand don a cape and start flying around an Amazon fulfillment centre. But Moore says these films have more in common than you might think. "Chloe's interested in telling stories about outsiders who find themselves adrift in new worlds. *Nomadland* and *Eternals* both share that DNA," he explains. "*Nomadland* doesn't have the same bells and whistles as *Eternals*, but it has the same thematic resonance."

It's a different scope, too. "*Captain America*

was a story that we got to expand as we spent more time with Steve Rogers," Moore says. "Black Panther was a character who we got to introduce in *Civil War*, then smash open his world in [his solo] film. *Eternals* is starting from a dead stop. We're creating a different type of mythology that has never been explored before with Marvel, by introducing ten new characters, all of whom are completely new to audiences. That's a big thing to break off and chew."

Moore points to the formidable task the film faces: introducing heroes who "came to Earth 7,000 years ago, and have been fostering the growth of humanity. Along the way, they've witnessed the pluses and minuses — the things

that are valuable, and also some of our missteps."

Which is not to say these more mature themes will get in the way of the wider universe narrative. *Eternals* picks up with the new visitors post-*Endgame*, "right around the same time as *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, with the world recovering from the attack of Thanos and the return of half the world population." If you're wondering where these heroes were during that cataclysmic world event, well, so were the Marvel creatives tasked with establishing the movie's story. "That was the first question," admits Moore. "The script is built to deal with that issue. We have a very specific reason why the Eternals didn't participate in the conflict with Thanos." The answer they concocted, Moore says, connects with a wider philosophical question in this movie: "Is human nature good, evil, or somewhere in-between?"

With considerations like that, *Eternals* seems to be leaning more toward "prestige" territory. Could Zhao even repeat her Best Picture-winning trick? "We're just concentrating on telling the best story we can possibly tell," is all Moore will say on the matter. It's yet another attempt by Marvel to try something fresh and innovative — and if *Eternals* succeeds, *Avatar* might feel the box-office heat from Marvel again. **AL HORNBER**

**ETERNALS IS IN CINEMAS FROM 5 NOVEMBER**

## No. 2

# The Game Of Thrones guy goes sci-fi

He shot GOT's biggest episodes — now Miguel Sapochnik is swapping dragons for robots (and Tom Hanks) in **FINCH**

AROUND HALFWAY THROUGH shooting *Finch* — an original sci-fi film, previously titled 'Bios' — the cast and crew gathered together to watch the *Game Of Thrones* episode 'The Long Night' (aka 'The One With The Absolutely Massive Hour-Long Battle'), the handiwork of their director, Miguel Sapochnik. It left star Tom Hanks, frankly, in awe. "He's an absolute genius," Hanks recalls, "I would never, ever question anything that he told me to do after that."

The Brit filmmaker, who started his career drawing storyboards for *Trainspotting*, landed in Westeros for Season 5's 'The Gift' ('The One Where Sam And Gilly Get It On'). Yet perhaps his crowning glory is Season 6's 'Battle Of The Bastards' ('The One With The Pissed Off Giant'), an epic episode that nabbed him an Emmy for Outstanding Direction. If telling stories on a huge scale like *Game Of Thrones*

made him a shoo-in for feature films (he directed *Repo Men* in 2010), Sapochnik had to adapt for the demands of *Finch*.

"When the dragon or the giant shows up in *Thrones*, it changes the way you shoot something," he says. "Here we've just tried to approach it like a drama where the blocking is edgy. That's what makes it feel real and organic. So that's been our M.O."

A post-apocalyptic drama with a distinctively '80s, Amblin-y vibe, *Finch* sees Hanks' robotics engineer, holed up in a bunker after a cataclysmic solar event has rendered Earth a wasteland, build a robot Jeff (Caleb Landry Jones) to look after Finch's dog Goodyear (Seamus) after he passes. The focus is intimate but no less challenging than any Stark-related spectacle.

"This is deceptively complicated," says Sapochnik. "There's always a dog. There's always

a CG character. There's always an environment that you're trying to work around. There's always a puppet. So, there's always some complicated element that you're trying to deal with. Usually, you encounter fewer problems when you're working with two good actors."

One of the "good actors", Hanks, has been impressed by Sapochnik's attention to detail. "I think during the first three weeks, we were having quite the most intense script meetings I've ever had on a movie, just because of the way Miguel thinks. Usually, directors are just already enmeshed in, 'How do you shoot it?' And Miguel kept testing moments that I thought had already been tested."

As well as intellectual rigour, *Finch* needed Sapochnik to find his sensitive side, perhaps buried after orchestrating so much blood and guts. "I'm not a very sentimental person," he admits, "but it was surprisingly touching as a movie in script form. If you feel it once and then the next time you break it down, you think, 'I was just being manipulated.' That's one thing. But when you feel it multiple times, you've got something."

Clockwise from left: Tom Hanks as robotics engineer/autobiography survivor Finch; Director Miguel Sapochnik with Hanks and canine star Seamus on set, left; the robot (Cash Landry Jones) with Finch and director (Sapochnik); Man and beast, making the most of their final days together. **DAVE**



Sapochnik will have to harden up next up for him is a return to Westeros, as showrunner on *Game Of Thrones* spin-off *House Of The Dragon*, which is set for an early 2022 release. It's unlikely his winged firebreathers will be as versatile as Finch's canine co-star Seamus, though. "I was very lucky with Seamus, because he didn't need much direction. He just did what he wants, whenever he wanted to do it," laughs Sapochnik. "And you just made sure you filmed it." Dogs, dragons and huge movie stars — they all fall under Sapochnik's spell. **IAN FREER**

FINCH IS ON APPLE TV; FINCH IS RECORDED



# BLACK IN FOCUS

**AMON WARMANN** chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month

## MARVEL'S WHAT IF...? IS A FITTING TRIBUTE TO CHADWICK BOSEMAN'S T'CHALLA

IT'S BEEN A year since Chadwick Boseman passed away, at the age of 43. It still feels unfair that we can no longer look forward to countless more performances from an actor who was very much at the top of his game, and yet felt like he was just getting started. Thankfully, he left us with a couple of gifts. His tear-de-force performance in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* — for which he scored a posthumous Oscar nod — showcased him at his finest. But with Marvel's new *What If...?* series, we get to hear Boseman at his most fun.

The clever conceit of the Disney+ show takes what we've come to know and love in the MCU and twists crucial elements in the story, creating new ripples that yield fresh outcomes. Boseman recorded lines for four different versions of T'Challa before his untimely death, but it's the second episode that may resonate the most. Instead of Peter Quill, it sees T'Challa become Star-Lord after being taken from Wakanda as a boy. He grows up to become an intergalactic hero who inspires others to be the best version of themselves, even taming the Mad Titan Thanos and convincing the former villain to join his team. This speaks to T'Challa's inherent leadership skills, a quality that the MCU would no doubt have exploited in Phase Four and beyond with a new generation of heroes.



Gone but never forgotten: the late Chadwick Boseman voices four different versions of T'Challa, his Black Panther alter-ego, in Disney+ series *What If...?*

Freed from the burden of royal responsibility, it's a version of the character that gives Boseman the licence to be lighter, looser and funnier, while still maintaining the inner goodness, dignity and earnest heroism that made

T'Challa so beloved by so many. It's emotional to hear Boseman hit all these beats and more in a performance that underlines why he was the perfect, and only, choice to play Wakanda's King.

But by the very nature of the title, this is only a look at what might have been, and not what will be. Though it's not yet clear how they will deal with his absence in the highly anticipated sequel *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, Marvel have no intention of recasting T'Challa. What is clear is that Boseman's portrayal of Wakanda's

King will continue to reverberate in the MCU and beyond for years to come, and *What If...?* is a fitting and poignant tribute to the huge talent that we lost.

## CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

### COOL RUNNINGS (1993)

Four Jamaican athletes decide to become a bobsleigh team and compete in the Winter Olympics — despite never having experienced cold weather — in this classic comedy. The sports-movie tropes are present and accounted for, but consistent laugh-out-loud moments, winning performances, and Sarkis's catchy song make this an all-timer.





No./ 3

# The Electrical Life Of Louis Wain

[ON-SET REPORT] **BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH** stars as the Victorian oddball artist with a penchant for pussycats in Will Sharpe's off-kilter biopic

**WHERE:** Freemasons' Hall, Covent Garden, London

**WHEN:** 7 October 2019

**WHY:** Because *Flowers* creator Will Sharpe is shooting his feature debut, *The Electrical Life Of Louis Wain*, a biopic all about the ABCs — by which we mean: art, Benedict Cumberbatch, and cats.

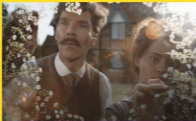
**LOUIS WHO?** Wain — the Victorian artist famous for his psychedelic pussycat portraits, anthropomorphising his favourite animal with big, bulging eyes. He suffered from mental health issues that may have been schizophrenia — potentially exacerbated by exposure to parasites found in, er, cat shit.

**SO THERE ARE CATS ON**

**SET, RIGHT?** Sadly not today. ("There are lots of cats tomorrow," Sharpe tells a slightly disappointed Empire.) But around the corner are massive clay-moulded cat heads in the style of Wain's paintings, with matching paws — there's a ginger cat with a monocle, a tabby with big sad eyes, one smoking a pipe. They'll be used for an upcoming dream-slash-hallucination sequence.

**WHAT ABOUT THE HUMANS?**

Benedict Cumberbatch is here in full Victorian gent regalia. He's shooting a dinner scene in a grand, marble hall made up to look like a fancy New York restaurant. Waiting incense fills the air. Performing opposite Cumberbatch is Taika Waititi,



**Clockwise from above:** 'Tache-tastic' #1 — Benedict Cumberbatch as troubled artist Louis Wain in the upcoming biopic; With Claire Foy, who plays his wife Emily, and feline friend; The couple at work; Creating another mogg-inspired masterpiece.

in a secret cameo, cranking it up to 11 (see story opposite). "This is the first time Louis' been in America," Cumberbatch explains. "It's overstimulation and noise, an overabundance of everything, which sets his fragile nerves on edge. He's still deep in his grief, he's surrounded and burdened by debt, and there are hungry mouths at home who are desperate to be saved by his worth being re-evaluated in America, so it's a lot of pressure on him."

**HOW'S CUMBERBATCH LOOKING?** Dapper. His hair is parted in the centre, he's got a big tizzly moustache — and a killer black-and-white wool suit. "It's a bobby dazler," he agrees. "This is sort of the 'electric' suit; it's got these

Morse-code blip, tick-a-tick-a-tick-a patterns there. Electricity is taking over his headspace at the moment. He's wearing his state of mind."

**IS IT COMFY?** Apparently so — though the shoes are proving a problem. "I've got weird-shaped feet," Cumberbatch admits. "These are pointy Italian-looking numbers, which I have to dance in quite soon. I'm slightly dreading it." What sort of dancing are we talking here? "I can't reveal that. It's Louis Wain dancing. There's not really a category. I don't know where he'd fit on *Strictly* — it's his own thing." Let's call it the "feline freestyle!" **BEN TRAVIS**

THE ELECTRICAL LIFE OF LOUIS WAIN IS IN CINEMAS IN EARLY 2022



**Left:** Tache-tastic #2 — writer/director Taika Waititi comes as a newspaper editor in *Louis Wain*.

## Revealed: Taika's surprise cameo

**Empire exclusively reveals Taika Waititi's secret role in *Louis Wain***

TAIKA WAITITI IS quickly becoming the cameo king. From his brief role in *The Suicide Squad* to Marvel's scene-stealing Korg, the Kiwi writer-director-actor has a knack for injecting a little chaotic energy into a film. The latest to add to that list is *The Electrical Life Of Louis Wain*. Yes, Taika Waititi appears in the off-kilter art biopic — popping up as New York newspaper editor Max Kase, whose brash demeanour clashes against Benedict Cumberbatch's eccentric British artist.

When *Empire* witnessed the dinner sequence being filmed in late 2019, we found Waititi guzzling a small trawler's worth of shellfish with every take as he improvised ludicrous lines about Wain's trademark cat art. ("It's a ring-a-ding humdingel!" came one variation; "He's Louis Wain by day, Cat-Man at night!" he roared next.) In one take, the oyster he'd gulped even made a sudden reappearance, Waititi just making it to the end of the scene before running to the gents, spluttering.

Not that Waititi considers this hard work. The famously busy actor/writer/director is in high demand at the moment, with at least five films as director in various stages of development; when he filmed the *Louis Wain* cameo, he was in London for *Jojo Rabbit*'s LFF screening, and had just one spare day before the Hawaii shoot for *Next Goal Wins* beckoned. "This is actually like a little break for me, it's quite nice," he tells *Empire*. His literal spit-take, less so. "I know better than to swallow the food in every take," he explains. "I spat that oyster out, but it was dribbling down my chin and I was also choking on a sardine bone. There was all this stuff going on in my mouth, and I saw the stills photographer look at me, and that set me off."

Still, his time on set means that director Will Sharpe has a coveted Taika cameo — and, if the unit photographer was quick enough, one hell of a promo shot, too: an Oscar-winning filmmaker dribbling oyster goo. "That's the main picture on the poster," Waititi jokes. Bottoms up. **BEN TRAVIS**

# No./5 Inside the year's most unlikely spin-off

How a minor character became the star of surprise *Army Of The Dead* prequel **ARMY OF THIEVES**

WHEN ZACK SNYDER first pitched *Army Of The Dead* to Netflix, he didn't just pitch one movie. He didn't just pitch a franchise. He pitched a *cinematic universe*, with sequels and animated spin-offs and prequels galore, filling in the blanks of his zombie apocalypse. Of course, for every Marvel Cinematic Universe, there's a Dark Universe, the Universal attempt to revive their iconic monsters which was staked through the heart before it could even get off the slah.

But nobody expected *Army Of Thieves*, an origin story about *Army Of The Dead*'s German safecracker, Ludwig Dieter. It's December 2020 when *Empire* is magically transported to Prague (via a mobile phone being carted around by producer Misha Bukowski), a full five months before *Army Of The Dead* will even hit Netflix, and such is Netflix's confidence in the property that they greenlit a spin-off centered around a character that audiences had not even seen. And, just to double down on the boldness of this move, Matthias Schweighöfer, the actor who plays Dieter, isn't just on set today to deliver lines and hit his marks; he's directing the thing.

"It was such a fantastic surprise," says Schweighöfer, who has



directed a number of German movies, such as *What A Man* and *The Manxy*. "I was super, super honoured. To have my own prequel for that character was really surprising. And then here we are, shooting day 41."

There's not a lot of shooting, of the boomstick variety, going on today. Instead, Schweighöfer is marshalling a multi-character dialogue scene in the back of a van. But that's also symptomatic of the approach to *Army Of Thieves*, which won't try to replicate the bombastic, over-the-top zombie slaughterfest of its parent movie. "I'm constantly talking to Zack," says Schweighöfer. (As well as co-writing the story, Snyder serves as a producer.) "Okay, what could be different to *Army*? What is the same? It is part of the universe, but a totally different movie. It's an adventurous heist movie."

It will, once again, see Dieter recruited for his ability to prise open a particularly tricky safe, but it's going to be a much more conventional heist movie, based in Europe, and set in the years before Dieter winds up in America. So, somewhat unconventionally for a zombie movie spin-off, don't expect ghouls. "There's not really any zombies," says Nathalie Emmanuel, who

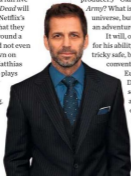
Clockwise from top: Gwendoline (Nathalie Emmanuel) and Dieter (Matthias Schweighöfer) on the run; Peak heist business; Producer Zack Snyder; (Right) *Army of Thieves*.

plays Gwendoline, the leader of the motley crew with whom Dieter finds himself aligned. "We see that it's happening somewhere else, but it's relevant because it's this impending potential danger for the whole world."

Eagle-eyed viewers will have spotted that, when we meet Dieter in *Army Of The Dead* (which has since hit Netflix's all-time top ten), he's working at a company called Gwendoline. So *Army Of Thieves* adds another layer of complexity into the mix, as the sweet-natured safecracker might just find that Gwendoline is able to make off with his heart, mid-heist. "Of course, he sees her and is head over heels," laughs Bukowski. "They bond over cracking these specific safes, which each have a certain mythology wrapped around them. He's never met anyone who has had a passion for safecracking, until he met her."

Netflix is hoping that audiences share that passion. Time will tell if its big cinematic universe gamble pays off. But as the film's own poster tagline acknowledges... nothing is a safe bet. **CHRIS HEWITT**

**ARMY OF THE DEAD IS COMING SOON TO NETFLIX**





TRAILER  
TALK

# House of Gucci

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

**John Nugent (News Editor):** This is one of two Ridley Scott films out this year. Anyone excited?

**Joanna Moran (Photography Director):** I am. James, this is my *Dune*.

**Nick de Semlyen (Deputy Editor):** Is anyone currently wearing Gucci in honour of this trailer?

**Joanna:** I don't even think I have Gucci make-up.

**Chris Lupton (Creative Director):** I'm House Of H&M today.

**John:** So here's Gaga, serving up some looks like Kat Slater on her holidays.

**John:** Quite like how gaudy and trashy Ridley Scott is going with this one. He's going all out with a big, brash melodrama.

**Chris Lupton:** This is Ridley Scott does Ryan Murphy.

**Joanna:** Exactly — the glamour and the gorgeous people and the murder.

**Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor):** Visually, it looks a lot like *All The Money In The World* — very shadowy; whereas if it was Ryan Murphy, there'd be neon everywhere.

**John:** Alright. Let's get into it. Accents. What do we think? How's Adam Driver's attempt at Italian?

**Nick:** I'm... not sure.

**James Dyer (Digital Editor-In-Chief):** They have gone a bit 'BBC's *Dracula*' with this.

**Chris Hewitt (Re.View Editor):** The last time I heard a driver with an Italian accent this bad, I was playing *Mario Kart!*

**Nick:** He does have a bit of a Waluigi vibe.

**John:** Adam Driver is a very, very good actor, but I don't know that he quite nails the accent.

**Joanna:** Jared Leto... the transformation is quite extraordinary. He looks like the Penguin.

**Nick:** He does look like he's about to deploy exploding penguins at a moment's notice.

**Ben:** I think he looks more like Danny DeVito in *Matilda*.

**Chris Hewitt:** He looks like he's Leto himself go!

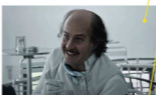
**Mike Cathro (Deputy Art Director):** I keep thinking of Jeffrey Tambor.

**Chris Lupton:** He reminds me of Carrie Bradshaw's gay mate in *Sex And The City*.

**John:** Why is Jared Leto in this role, though? Why didn't they cast someone who actually looked like the character?

**Nick:** Apparently the real-life gay he's playing has condemned it. Called it "horrible".

**Chris Lupton:** He's going to get Oscar-nominated.



**Nick:** How many of the cast are actually Italian? Pacino and Lady Gaga are Italian-American.

**John:** I wouldn't say her accent is the best, though, either.

**Nick:** We don't hear Jeremy Irons' accent. Joanna: He's just doing the Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* thing.

**Nick:** Is he, like, the King of Gucci? I don't really know the hierarchy.

**John:** He's the head of the family, yep — I think his scenes will be flashbacks.

**Ben:** He's one of the OG Guccis, and it's his death that sparks the grapple for power.

**John:** There's a lot of this — lots of high Italian culture.

**Chris Lupton:** A lot of looking locations.

**John:** More of Gaga looking fierce, with big hair.

**Chris Lupton:** She looks like Joan Collins in *Dynasty*. For those old people who get that reference. I want a T-shirt that says, "It's time to take out the trash."

**Nick:** Do we reckon she's going to win an Oscar for this?

**Ben:** It would be the total opposite of Frances McDormand's win for *Nocturnal*, which was really understated.

**Joanna:** She was shitting in a bucket.

**Chris Lupton:** The Academy do love a biopic.

**Mike:** "You picked a real firecracker." Jared's really rolling his 'r's, there.

**Ben:** There are about ten 'r's there.

**John:** He's almost a bit Geordie. You picked a real firecracker, pet.

**Mike:** Big *Spy Who Loved Me* vibes here.

**John:** The first teaser image we saw from this was Driver and Gaga in 'ski-chic'.

**Nick:** Oscar-worthy spoon-stirring, there. Joanna: "Father, son, House of Gucci." That's my new catchphrase.

**Liz Beardsworth (Production Editor):** It's amazing.

**Nick:** I have no idea what's going on in this trailer, but I want to see it.

**Chris Lupton:** It looks really pulpy.

**Liz:** But in a good way.

**Chris Lupton:** Yeah. Do you think Adam Driver is going to sing into Gaga's noo-moo? [*Laughs*]

**John:** For those who have not watched *Annette*, that was a spoiler.

**John:** Liz, can I ask a sub-editing question: is 'noo-moo' acceptable for print?

**Liz:** Weirdly, yes it is. The other day, we had 'foo-foo', and I wasn't sure about that.

**Nick:** Did you have to check with legal?

**Liz:** No. But I nearly changed it to 'muff'.

HOUSE OF GUCCI IS IN CINEMAS FROM 15 NOVEMBER

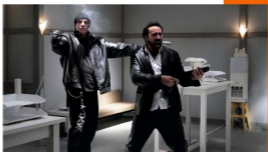
# No./6 Swords, ghosts — and an exploding body part

With **PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND**, Nicolas Cage finds an equally wild spirit in subversive Japanese director Sion Sono

THESE DAYS, EVERY new Nicolas Cage film comes with a certain weight of expectation: he's going to do something crazy! Again! Even so, Cage himself insisted — speaking at the Macao International Film Festival in 2018 — that *Prisoners Of The Ghostland* ups the ante. “It might be the wildest movie I’ve ever made,” he explained. “And that’s saying something. I wear a skintight black leather jumpsuit with grenades attached to different body parts, and if I don’t rescue the governor’s daughter from this state line where they’re all ghosts... they’re gonna blow me up. It’s way out there.”

How did Nicolas Cage’s infamously singular mind find something way out there, even for him? The answer: a similarly singular mind in Sion Sono. Having made his name in Japan with provocative ultraviolent fare like *Suicide Club* (a gruesome horror about a wave of mass suicides) and *Love Exposure* (a four-hour epic featuring full erections, perverted Catholics, and genital gore), the subversive Japanese director makes his English-language debut here. Clearly, with Cage, it was a meeting of minds.

“We immediately clicked,” Sono says, through interpreter and producer Kô Mori. “It didn’t take much explanation for Nicolas Cage to understand what kind of role we were talking about here. We had the same vision together. So that was easy.”



Top to bottom:  
Nic Cage as  
Hero — dead  
bodies a-go-go;  
Nick Cassavetes,  
left, plays  
Psycho — here  
living up to his  
name; Director  
Sion Sono with  
Cage and Sofia  
Boutella on set

That vision — of steampunk ghosts, nuclear explosions, and a best friend called ‘Psycho’ — started with a shared love of Westerns. “Nic really loves *Once Upon A Time In The West*,” Sono explains. “And especially Charles Bronson’s role. That’s what I wanted anyway.” It’s Bronson’s steely gaze that Cage is channeling, even as his left testicle gets blown up by the skintight leather suit he’s wearing.

Cage was also able to adapt when Sono suffered a heart attack during pre-production, and the shoot switched from Mexico to Sono’s native Japan. The move ushered in script rewrites and a bizarre mash-up of eastern and western influences: cowboy hats and katanas, side-by-side. “Nic immediately made that adjustment himself,” Sono says. “We started doing samurai action, instead of Spaghetti Western action. His Charles Bronson character now became more like a Yoshiro Miifume character,” referring to the prolific Japanese actor famous for his roles in Akira Kurosawa films like *Seven Samurai*.

The result is a baffling fever dream of a film, a truly distinct collaboration. And it is really Cage’s “wildest” film ever? Sono is unsure what to make of that declaration. “I felt a little pressure when I heard that,” he says. “The whole thing stuck in my head and made me a little nervous.” But for the Japanese auteur, who has



nearly 60 directing credits to his name, it’s a mere drop in the crazy ocean. “I’m not sure if this is my craziest film,” he says. “It is my Hollywood debut and I feel great about it. Eventually you will see my craziest movie — soon enough.” With Sono confirming that he and Cage will work together again (“That might be his very next film,” he teases), the bar for “wildest movie ever” could be raised yet. **JOHN NUGENT**

**PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND IS IN CINEMAS AND ON DIGITAL FROM 11 SEPTEMBER**

Clockwise from left: Scenes from *The Staircase*, a 2004 true-crime documentary dramatised in a new HBO Max series.

# No. 7 From Fear Street—to real horror

**Why the director behind the Netflix smash is taking on a real-life scare story**

WITH NETFLIX'S *FEAR Street* trilogy, director Leigh Janiak brought serious scares to our summer; next up, she's turning her attention to a real-life horror story. Janiak is directing two episodes of HBO Max's *The Staircase*, the miniseries based on the acclaimed true-crime documentary of the same name.

The doc — originally a French production from 2004, which Netflix picked up and expanded in 2018 — centred on the mysterious death of Kathleen Peterson in her Forest Hills home in late 2001. Her novelist husband Michael claims he found her body at the bottom of the stairs after an apparent drunken fall — but the police pegged him as a killer, building a case that he bludgeoned her to death.

The dramatised version is being created by *The Devil All the Time* director Antonio Campos ("He's been developing it for years," says Janiak), with the *Fear Street* filmmaker on board to helm the episodes that Campos

Below: Colin Firth and Toni Collette star in the upcoming drama.



isn't directing himself. "It jumps back and forth in time," she tells *Empire* of the series' approach. "The documentary focuses on the trial and the process of what the American justice system did to Michael Peterson. The show is interested in all facets around that, of the people involved, his family, of the documentary film crew."

Campos and Janiak have assembled one hell of a cast for the show, with Colin Firth as Michael Peterson and Toni Collette as Kathleen — while Sophie Turner, Juliette Binoche, Parker Posey, Dane DeHaan and Michael Stuhlbarg are also set to star. But for Janiak, the focus will be on not forgetting the real people behind the story. "It's daunting, because I want to be true and respectful of all of the people involved," she says.

It sounds as if we could be in for a true-crime drama about the true-crime phenomenon. "It's looking at how this event played out beyond [the trial]," she says. "That is what's interesting to me — what the nature of truth is and how we form narratives." Consider us already hooked. **BEN TRAVIS**

THE STAIRCASE IS COMING SOON

## IAN ACQUIRED TASTE |

# No. 8 MEMORIA

TILDA SWINTON HEADS TO THE JUNGLE FOR A FEVER DREAM OF AN ART FILM

IT'S THE LATEST FILM FROM A THAI MASTER

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is arguably Thailand's most acclaimed living filmmaker; he most famously won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2010 for his mysterious ghost story *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. *Memoria*, his ninth feature, is his first in the English language — but is typically enigmatic and inscrutable.

IT HAS TILDA SWINTON IN THE LEADING ROLE

The British actor, a long-professed fan of the filmmaker, stars as an English flower-seller living in Colombia who starts hearing loud, explosive rumbles, seemingly out of nowhere — sending her on a hypnotic, surreal journey of discovery.

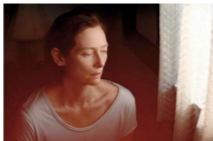
IT WILL REQUIRE A FAIR BIT OF PATIENCE

Weerasethakul is a filmmaker who likes to take his time, and *Memoria* is no exception: expect long, static shots of nothing in particular, including one shot of Swinton just watching a bit of jazz.

IT HAS A SCI-FI EDGE

Despite being shot in an earthy, realist style, the film has an audacious science-fiction climax that is sure to confound audiences as much as astound them; if you want to get on board, you'll have to surrender to Weerasethakul's psychedelic logic first. **JOHN NUGENT**

*MEMORIA* DOES NOT CURRENTLY HAVE A UK RELEASE DATE



# No./9 Yep! It's Nope

Six clues from the **NOPE** poster that hint at the mystery behind Jordan Peele's next horror

## 1 THE TAGLINE

"A new terror" is reminiscent of the tagline from the legendary poster for *The Thing* ("The ultimate in alien terror"). But it's telling that the only descriptor for this film is "terror", not "horror". Jordan Peele has previously chosen to describe his earlier films as "social thrillers"; expect *Nope*'s scares to come with a point to make.

## 3 THE TOWN

Pictured in the distance are the lights of a small mountain-valley town — a classic horror setting, from *Halloween* to *It*. Peele has regularly cited sci-fi series *The Twilight Zone* as inspiration (and even hosted a recent revival series), with *Us* partly inspired by the episode "Mirror Image". Could *Nope* be Peele's riff on "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street", which satirised small-town paranoia?

## 5 THE TITLE

That punchy monosyllabic title, revealed for the first time on this teaser poster, follows a trend for Jordan Peele's artfully pithy titles. It could be that it's derived from horror-inflected dialogue, as *Get Out* was. Or it could have a slyly satirical double meaning, as *Us* did. Either way, it's an instantly memorable name: "Two tickets for *Nope*," has a nice ring to it.

## 2 THE CLOUD

The centerpiece of the poster is this curious image of a cloud, with a string of flags trailing underneath. Theories abounded online, with some noting a similarity to the DeLorean in *Back To The Future Part II* (time travel?); others thought they spotted faces in the clouds (...God?); while someone is convinced that's Thomas The Tank Engine you can see there. Peele is keeping schtum, obviously.

## 4 THE CAST

Earning top billing in the cast is Daniel Kaluuya, now newly minted with an Oscar — and making a long-awaited reunion with Peele after his breakthrough role in *Get Out*. Also listed is actor/pop star/renaissance woman Keke Palmer (who has horror chops from her role in the Screen TV adaptation) and Steven Yeun, riding high after his historic Oscar nod for *Minari*. Hard to think of a buzzier cast, really.

## 6 THE SCALE

One small detail on the poster hints at an intriguingly large prospect: parts of the film have been shot in the IMAX format, a first for Peele. While his first two films were relatively low-budget and claustrophobic, the use of the world's biggest film stock here suggests a grander scale. Is this a bombastic, big-budget Jordan Peele blockbuster? For *Nope*, we can but hope.

JOHN NUGENT



NOPE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 22 JULY 2022



INTRODUCING...

## Jaden Michael

MEET THE TEENAGE ACTOR HAND-PICKED BY AVA DUVERNAY TO STAR IN HER NEW MINISERIES

**ON PLAYING AMERICAN FOOTBALL HERO AND ACTIVIST COLIN KAEFERPICK IN *COLIN IN BLACK AND WHITE***

"I met him and he was like the coolest person ever — someone who I've looked up to my whole life. It was an eye-opener playing Colin. I learned a lot about myself and it helped me to think more cognitively about what it means to be Black in America. It was scary at times having to play such a living legend, but it was also really rewarding to learn so much about myself and my country's history."

**ON HAVING DIRECTOR JIM JARMUSCH AS MENTOR**

"I worked with Jim on the film *Paperman*; he took me under his wing after that. We've bonded over film, over New York, over how life impacts art — we're very close friends. I'm very fortunate to call him a mentor."

**ON GETTING THE ACTING BUG EARLY**

"I started doing Nickelodeon promos aged just three. By my eighth birthday, I knew I really wanted to do this, to learn more. That's when I started taking classes and just watching more movies and becoming absorbed in the industry."

**ON BEING A TECH HERO**

"I love technology. I'm the super nerdy guy who can tell you all the latest phones on the market, all the specs and the difference between a Qualcomm Snapdragon 888 and the new 898 chip."

ELIZABETH AUBREY

COLIN IN BLACK AND WHITE IS ON NETFLIX

FROM 20 OCTOBER



Raging against the machine: Controversial release strategies and lobbying to conflict between the talent and the studios. Below: Disney's Bob Chapek

# When civil war breaks out in Hollywood

**Unprecedented lawsuits and a public war of words — why are A-list stars and studios going head-to-head?**

IT'S A HOLLYWOOD case which, regardless of outcome, is guaranteed to go down in history. In July, Scarlett Johansson filed a lawsuit against Disney for breach of contract over the studio's decision to release *Black Widow* on Disney+ and in cinemas concurrently. Johansson claimed in the suit that her agreement guaranteed an exclusive theatrical release for *Black Widow* and her salary was based, in large part, on the box-office takings. Emails included in the lawsuit show her representatives had looked to renegotiate her contract after learning about the hybrid release. Disney, it is claimed, did not respond.

In an uncharacteristically public response, Disney said the lawsuit was "especially sad and distressing in its callous disregard for the horrific and prolonged global effects of the Covid-19 pandemic". They also claimed they had fully complied with her contract. Women's organisations such as Time's Up criticised Disney for what they called "a gendered character attack". Johansson's agent, Bryan Lour, said the response was "beneath the company".

Two weeks later, another Disney star — *Shang-Chi*'s Simu Liu — spoke out on a public platform. The film, which now has a 45-day exclusive theatrical window, was described by Disney's CEO Bob Chapek as an "interesting experiment" that could inform how they approach future films. Liu responded on social media: "We are not an experiment. We are the underdog; the underestimated."

At a sensitive time between studios and their talent, these cases are about more than money, say

some insiders. "I don't think Johansson is counting her pennies," a leading talent agent, who spoke on condition of anonymity, tells *Empire*. "It's about her expectation of being at the front of a big summer blockbuster. This is for her career, and for women in cinema."

More fallout could follow, says John Sloss, an entertainment lawyer and founder of talent management company Cinetic. "What happened earlier this year with Warner Bros. was, to me, much more egregious," he says of the studio's call to release its upcoming slate, including *Dune* and *The Matrix 4*, on HBO Max simultaneously for no fee to subscribers. Directors such as Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve criticised the studio, Nolan even describing HBO Max as "the worst streaming service".

Streamers such as Netflix are difficult to appeal to talent, says Sloss: while studios often offer stars a profit share based on box office, Netflix offers stars a buyout upfront. "People go into working with Netflix with their eyes open, whereas the people who have entered into these other agreements went in with a certain set of assumptions," he says, noting that in his opinion, "Netflix are probably now paying people more than what they get for regular studio gigs."

At a tough time financially, the question for studios is how you juggle relationships with stars and protecting revenue. Some are attempting olive branches; *Variety* reported that Warner Bros. paid hefty bonuses to Gal Gadot and Patty Jenkins for *Wonder Woman 1984*, calculating their profit participation as if the film had earned \$1 billion. And Marvel boss Kevin Feige has called for "amicable solutions" to Johansson's lawsuit. Here's hoping they're found — for everyone's sake. **BETH WOOD**





No./ 11

## “I wanted it to make people angry”

The three filmmaking methods that ensure Covid care-home drama **HELP** will pack an emotional punch

**HELP**, A NEW feature-length television film about the care-home crisis during the first coronavirus lockdown, sees Stephen Graham as a care-home resident with young-onset dementia, and Jodie Comer as a care worker who befriends him. Working from a script by Jack Thorne, director Marc Munden found a number of different ways to tell a powerful, timely story.

### 1. SOCIAL REALISM

After hearing “the testimony of people in the care sector”, Munden felt that this story called for a more documentary-style approach than his earlier heightened, stylised dramas such as *Utopia* and *The Third Day*. “I wanted people to be immersed in the real world,” he explains. “I suppose I got a little bit tired of people talking about the colours in *Utopia!*” Munden was inspired by *Play For Today*, the classic 1970s-to-early 1980s anthology series which tackled contemporary issues in a single serving. “I wanted it to be in that tradition — where it’s fast, it’s immediate, and the issue is still very much alive. I wanted it to make people angry.”

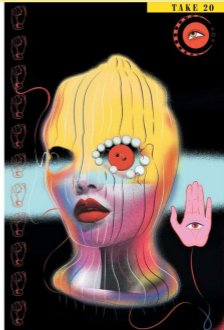
### 2. HORROR

Despite a very realistic and authentic approach, Munden found himself leaning on certain genre tropes. “Everything I make has a genre element,” he says. “I’m obsessed with film grammar. And what struck me about the script was it’s a bit like a home-invasion movie — a woman who’s alone in a home with a silent, invisible invader.” This was not to exploit a serious subject matter — rather, reflect a genuine horror. “I don’t want to cheapen it, but it felt right to draw on those tropes. The truth is, carers did find themselves in real-life horror situations.”

### 3. SLOW CINEMA

The film’s most powerful sequence comes with

# No./12 Emilia Clarke's comics career change



**The Game Of Thrones actor on writing *M.O.M.: Mother Of Madness*, her first comic book, about a superpowered single mum**

WHEN LOCKDOWN HIT last year, many actors were forced to twiddle their thumbs and wait for film shoots to crank into gear again. Not Emilia Clarke. "I've been busy," she says. "Using a different part of my brain."

By the time the pandemic hit, Clarke was already hard at work on her debut comic, *M.O.M.: Mother Of Madness*, a wild three-issue superhero story co-written with Marguerite Bennett and illustrator Leila Leitz. The comic imagines a single mother as an ass-kicking superhero who takes on human traffickers in New Jersey; Clarke, who spent a number of years attending Comic-Con with the *Game Of Thrones* cast and dreamed of adding to the convention's cosplay parade, describes her creation as "new and different and wild". The gear shift took a bit of mental recalibration, though.

"It's a brand spanking new experience," Clarke says, who insisted that it had to be in this medium. "I came up with the idea very much as a comic. The two came hand-in-hand." She laughs: "The fact that I didn't know the first fucking thing about making comics didn't really factor in until I started to realise. 'Oh my God, I've got to learn a whole new skillset!'"

With Bennett's help, Clarke learned the

Top to bottom: Emilia Clarke's "different and wild" creation; the new comic book's colourful cover

sometimes painful creative process of being a writer. It is, she says, a wholly different experience from her regular day job. "As an actor, you're joining the journey really late in the day. Your 'day one' is the writer's 'year nine', sometimes." The writing process, she has found, can be more brutal. "Being an author — that's in essence what this is — you start with this really big

idea and as you make it you have to start taking things away, and morphing it into something that fits the form."

Work is complete on the comics and Clarke now must do what all creators learn to do: let it go. "Christ, a year-and-a-half ago I was full to the brim of comic-book stuff, and now it's like, 'Oh, baby's taking her first steps!' I've just got to stand back and kind of hope for the best. I'm now fascinated to see how people absorb this. If anyone wants to absorb this!" Clarke is now back at the day job, currently filming MCU show *Secret Invasion* — but if *M.O.M.* proves a hit, her own superhero could earn its own adaptation soon enough. **JOHN NUGENT**



*M.O.M.: MOTHER OF MADNESS* IS ON SALE FROM 14 DECEMBER



Clockwise from main: Stephen Graham and Jodie Comer in *Help*; On location, Graham's character has young-onset dementia; Masked up, ready to go.

a 26-minute unbroken single take, in which Comer's character is left alone in her care home, with no ambulance coming for a patient struggling to breathe. "I didn't really want it to be a sort of wanky film-school thing," Munden explains. "I wanted the audience to be immersed." Munden was buoyed by the success of *The Third Day*'s live event, "where you were watching Jude Law dig his own grave for an hour" — and proved audiences had the patience for that pacing. "I'm a big fan of slow cinema. When you're watching something like that, the way you interpret the story works in a very different way." With a single take, there's nowhere else to look — and this is a story that shouldn't be ignored. **JOHN NUGENT**

HELP IS ON CHANNEL 4 AND ALL 8 LATER THIS MONTH

# No. 13 Dealing with a fan- favourite horse god



Clockwise from left: Missandri Pike as Missandri, on Aes Sedai of the Blue Ajah; Missandri and sister Las Mandragoran (Daniel Henney); Showrunner Plate Judkins on location.

## And four other challenges facing the showrunner of new fantasy series **THE WHEEL OF TIME**

TEN THOUSAND-PLUS PAGES. Over 4.4 million words. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel Of Time* novels could swallow seven *The Lord Of The Rings* and still have room for *The Hobbit*. How do you adapt this story, a wildly entertaining high-fantasy epic about five farm kids who might just save the world, without losing steam? We asked the showrunner of the TV adaptation, Rafe Judkins (*Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Chuck*) — already on set of Season 2 — to talk us through the hurdles in his path.

### 1. KEEP IT DIFFERENT FROM *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

As a fantasy show on Amazon, this needs to establish its niche quickly or be flattened by a \$500 million Tolkien juggernaut — the upcoming *Rings* prequel. “The way I approached it was by thinking of [Season 1] as an adaptation of the entire series,” Judkins explains. “I tried to take the spine of the first book, and then infuse it with all the elements that make *The Wheel Of Time* so unique.” That meant, for example, a much bigger role for the magic-wielding Aes Sedai sisterhood up front, immediately establishing that we’re not in Middle-earth here.

### 2. AVOID FANTASY CLICHÉS

To keep the viewer grounded alongside our country bawker heroes, Judkins took one key stylistic decision. “Right from the beginning, I was like, ‘I don’t want those big hawk-flying-over-the-CGI-city shots. I want to see the world

from the eyes of our characters.’” He’s also worked hard to create all the differing — and frequently warring — cultures of this reality. “The books created a realistic geopolitical world, and defined a lot of fantasy literature that followed. So we make sure that a person looks like they come from somewhere real.”

### 3. MAKE THE METAPHYSICS VISIBLE

The Aes Sedai “weave” different magical elements together to work their wonders, threads that are visible to other magic users. But is there a way to make that look as intricate on screen as it does in our heads? “Yeah, you will see it. The magic system in *The Wheel Of Time* is so special; we had to show that to the audience.” That’s not to say that this will be a mad CG-fest: the non-human characters will be based on prosthetics with only CG-enhancement — like the super-creaky, eyeless Myrddraal. “Those are unbelievably horrifying. I think we’ve done our job with them.”

### 4. TACKLE A POSSIBLY DIVINE HORSE

There’s a long-running fan theory that a horse called Bela might be the Creator — this universe’s God. Judkins was determined to honour the fans. “You don’t even understand the number of meetings I had about Bela,” Judkins says. “Guys, you need to know that this horse is important. This horse is important and the fans care about her.”



### 5. KEEP IN MIND 10,000 PAGES

Judkins isn’t counting on getting six or seven seasons, but he’s planning so that can happen, if the desire is there. “Coming into something like this, there are certain decisions you have to make in the first and second season to set up for long-term success. We’re always thinking about that, right from the beginning.” Will they make it to the end? It’s only a matter of time. **HELEN O’HARA**

THE WHEEL OF TIME IS ON AMAZON PRIME VIDEO FROM NOVEMBER

# No./14 NEXT IN THE SERIES

You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Not despair — **Boyd Hilton** recommends the sibling shows to watch next

## IF YOU LOVED... THIS WAY UP



### GAMEFACE

(ALL 4)

This *Way Up* creator Aisling Bea's real-life best friend Roisin Conaty created and

starred in her own E4/Channel 4 comedy which, across two beautifully judged series, deals with similar issues of loneliness and depression, but with a disarmingly light touch. Conaty plays Marcella, an actor whose work mainly consists of wearing absurd costumes to entertain at children's parties, and who always seems to make the worst life decisions imaginable. Her performance grounds a show never far away from a spectacularly funny set-piece, excruciating social awkwardness, or heartfelt romance.



### DEAD BOSS

(AMAZON PRIME VIDEO/  
ITUNES)

Seven years before they collaborated on *This Way Up*, Aisling Bea and Sharon Horgan first met on this BBC3 comedy. Co-created by Horgan and Holly Walsh, the one-series wonder is set in a women's prison where Horgan's character Helen is starting a 12-year sentence, having been wrongly convicted for the murder of her boss. It's part prison-drama pastiche, part spoof mystery with a formidable cast including Jennifer Saunders and Miranda Richardson. But Bea steals the show as Helen's deeply selfish sister who couldn't be happier that her sibling is in jail.



### THE OTHER ONE

(BBC IPLAYER)

The fraught yet essentially loving relationship between sisters is at the heart of *This Way Up* and similarly, an intense sisterly situation is explored in BBC Two comedy *The*

*Other One*. The series stars Ellie White (*Stath Lets Flats*) and Lauren Socha (*MightyB*) as sisters who have no idea of each other's existence until their father's sudden death. The unexpected delight of the show is that the siblings, whose personalities could not be more different, are both really into the idea of having a long-lost half-sister.



### THE FALL

(NETFLIX)

As well as being a first-rate stand-up, a comedy-panel-show regular and creating her own sitcom, Aisling Bea is also an accomplished 'straight' actor, appearing in Mike Bartlett's ITV drama *The Town and Lether* creator Neil Cross' apocalyptic thriller *Hard Sun*, among others. But perhaps her most surprising role is when she pops up in the third series of *The Fall* as a creepy nurse looking after Jamie Dornan's incapacitated psychopath Paul Spector. Is she up to something? Maybe. Maybe not. Bea keeps us guessing.

THE MORE YOU KNOW STREAMS ON ALL 4

[TREND REPORT]

## No./15 INANIMATE OBJECT ROMANCES

The course of true love never did run smooth — especially for these weird cinematic love stories

WORDS JOHN NUGENT  
ILLUSTRATIONS BILL MCCONKEY



### A THEME-PARK RIDE

JUMBO

Zoe Witlock's directorial debut is a fairly conventional love story, were it not for the giant tit-a-what that makes one half of the happy couple. The sex scene with actor Nolene Marland gives a whole new meaning to the term 'amusement park.'



### A JACKET DEERSKIN

The latest film from inanimate object specialist Quentin Dupieux (he also made a movie about a murderous car tyre) sees Jean Dujardin fall obsessively, dangerously in love with a designer deerskin jacket.

Suits you, sir!



### A CAR TITANE

This year's Cannes Palme D'Or winner from gore queen Julia Ducournau sees a car-crash survivor (Galatze Rousselet) become so obsessed with cars that she eventually has sex with them — like a body horror version of Top Gear.



## Finding new shades to Jamie Dornan

With Kenneth Branagh's **BELFAST** (after that scene-stealing turn in *Barb & Star Go To Vista Del Mar*), the Northern Irish actor is finding different dimensions to his career

IN JAMIE DORNAN'S childhood home, deep in the suburbs of Belfast, you would always see one photo prominently displayed: a picture of Kenneth Branagh. "My father was a doctor at the Royal Victoria Hospital in West Belfast for his whole career," the actor explains. "There was a picture that was always up in our house of Ken, my dad, and five or six other doctors, cutting a ribbon from when Ken had come to open a wing of the hospital. It reinforced this idea that this guy, who has gone on to do such unbelievable things, was from Belfast. It was inspiring."

Few people are aware that Kenneth Branagh — he of that crisp, Shakespeare-refined English accent — is actually Northern Irish, born and raised. But they soon will be thanks to *Belfast*, Branagh's upcoming semi-autobiographical drama, which depicts a typical working-class family in 1969, as *The Troubles* escalate. Branagh, who moved to England aged nine, has called it his "most personal film." In a poetic twist, Dornan — whose father idolized Branagh — is now playing a proxy for Branagh's own father.

Having previously auditioned for Branagh's *Thor* ("Not for Thor himself — one of Thor's other lads," he says), Dornan describes his character, named 'Pa', as "a very honest, humble man who is just trying to do the right thing for



Top: Jamie Dornan plays Pa, a character based on director Kenneth Branagh's father, in the upcoming *Belfast*.

Above: Pa hits the dancefloor with Caitriona Balfe on *M.S.*

his family." Like Branagh's real father was, Pa is a carpenter, who uses his connections in England to help the family escape the conflict.

While *The Troubles* inevitably cast a shadow over the story, the family leads a "quite glamorous lifestyle for a working-class North Belfast family," Dornan says. "Often characters portrayed in that part of the world, there's this sort of bleakness. It gets a bit 'poverty porn.' Going forward, with the stories I want to tell coming out of that part of the

country, I want to get away from that idea that everything's doom and gloom at home. That's not how I remember home to be."

There are other perspectives he's interested in exploring. During lockdown, Dornan co-wrote a screenplay with fellow Belfast-born actor Conor MacNeill, set in their hometown. "It's a coming-of-age story about a 17-year-old girl," he explains. Though not strictly autobiographical, "It's that thing of trying to elevate stories from the north of Ireland through a slightly different lens. Tell stories that people aren't expecting from that part of the world." He hopes to film it next year.

Dornan seems more confident than ever to tell only the stories he wants to tell. Even if — as was the case in last year's *Barb & Star Go To Vista Del Mar* — those stories involve singing love songs to a seagull. "It's a banger, isn't it?" Dornan says of "Edgar's Prayer," which became a hit among comedy fans. "My dream is someone drops a gnarly remixed version of that song. But that was the intention — it was fun to show a different side of me that maybe people wouldn't have expected." Six years after becoming a household name with *Fifty Shades Of Grey*, Jamie Dornan is revealing more of himself than ever. **JOHN NUGENT**

BEARFIGHT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 NOVEMBER



Left: Stars Ryan Reynolds, Dwayne Johnson, and Gal Gadot before director Rawson Marshall Thurber (with Reynolds) on set.

No./17

## “Big stars, big action... big budget!”

With a near \$200 million budget, **Red Notice** is one of Netflix's biggest blockbusters yet. What did they splash the cash on?

### THE MEGASTARS!

As heist movies go, *Red Notice* is about as A-list as they come: Ryan Reynolds, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson and Gal Gadot share lead billing. “I mean, talk about charisma,” marvels the film’s director, Rawson Marshall Thurber. “I feel very, very fortunate. It’s a little bit like

directorial cheating, having all three of them together in the same frame. Chemistry is just not a function of writing or even directing — it’s a function of casting.” Their salaries alone could probably fund a small country — but Thurber is certain that the actors are worth it. “You either have it or you don’t. And those guys have something special.” Dwayne Johnson, he explains, plays an “FBI profiler who specializes in art crime. He is on the hunt for Ryan Reynolds, who plays the most wanted art thief in the world. Gal Gadot plays this mysterious figure in the art world. As they say... high-jinks ensue.”

### THE ACTION!

Described as an action comedy, Thurber is keen to “keep both of those dishes spinning”, but given the price tag, won’t be skipping on the former. “I think in terms of old-school throwback big action,” he says. By way of example, one sequence — an “escape from a maximum-security Russian prison perched atop this icy mountain in the Ural Mountains” — features a “*Temple Of Doom* bridge that may or may not explode,” plus a “heavy duty Russian helicopter, with a very big gun on it.”



### THE OPENING FIVE MINUTES!

Though Thurber “doesn’t really make a distinction” between streaming or theatrical audiences, this is a film designed and made for Netflix — and in order to hold viewers’ attention (and viewing figures, given Netflix defines anyone watched for at least two minutes as a “view”), the film needs to be front-loaded. “The only thing to consider when you’re talking about streaming versus theatrical is making sure that the first five minutes grab the audience by the lapels,” he explains. *Red Notice*, by that token, opens with “fireworks.” Thurber hopes that the streaming audiences will have the same reaction he has: “I have a big dumb grin on my face every time I watch it,” he says. “Y’know... big stars, big action, big laughs, big budget!” **JOHN NUGENT**

RED NOTICE IS ON NETFLIX FROM 11 NOVEMBER



No./18

## THE NEW PREDATOR FILM AIN'T GOT TIME TO BLEED

Four ways that prequel *Skull* will be a fresh start for the franchise

WORDS JOHN NUGENT

### 1 IT'S AN ORIGIN STORY

Of the four *Predator* films released to date, none have dealt with how the trophy-hunting extra-terrestrials made it to Earth in the first place. *Skull*, as the new movie is reportedly titled, will be a prequel about “the Predator’s first journey to this planet,” according to co-producer, John Davis.

### 2 IT HAS A FEMALE LEAD

*Skull* is looking to inject a different type of energy into a famously testosterone-dominated series. Twenty-four-year-old Legion actor Amber Middleunder will reportedly play a warrior who takes on the alien, though exact casting details are being kept under wraps for now.

### 3 IT HAS A NATIVE AMERICAN CAST

As spotted in some of the early casting notices, the film’s cast will be predominantly Native American, with the film set during the American Civil War. Middleunder — who is a member of the Fort Peck Sioux Tribe — is reportedly part of a Comanche tribe in the movie.

### 4 IT HAS A BUZZY DIRECTOR

This will be only the second film from director Dan Trachtenberg, who wowed us in 2016 with his directorial debut *10 Cloverfield Lane*. If *Skull* is as bold, surprising and terrifying as that, we should be in for something interesting.

**SKULL DOES NOT YET HAVE A RELEASE DATE**



No./19

## A new master of British brutality

**BULL**, which screens at this year's BFI London Film Festival, sees filmmaker Paul Andrew Williams on savage form

PAUL ANDREW WILLIAMS first burst onto the scene in 2006 with *London To Brighton*: a gritty, low-budget crime thriller that won a BIFA. In the years since, he's made comedy-drama *Song For Marion*, worked on TV shows including *Broadchurch*, and won a BAFTA for BBC Three's *Murdered For Being Different*. His third feature film, the revenge thriller *Bull*, sees the filmmaker return to his bread-and-butter: a gritty study of brutality and criminality, made on a shoestring.

"We shot it in three weeks," Williams says. Filmed largely on location in the unglamorous Dartford region of Kent, Williams felt a microbudget was appropriate for a story of this kind. "When you've got no money, you get what you find, and you make it work. Sometimes it really works in your favour."

The grounded approach was perfect for *Bull*'s brutal tone. Inspired by observing "guys who have got their claws into everything" while he was working in a small-town pub, Williams was keen to depict a criminal world where "things look a bit grimy, a bit horrible. They're not driving flash cars." Out of this grim comes Neil Maskell's Bull, a ruthless hard man not seen in his community for a decade, seeking bloody vengeance. Expect claret to be spilled.

"The violence is not very nice," Williams acknowledges. But that savage edge and down-to-earth filming style has generated huge early buzz from critics, for brutality that comes from a place of character, rather than just

gratuitousness. "The violence is kind of simplistic. It's instinctual. There's nothing pre-planned about it." Naturally, it won't be palatable for everyone. Including those closest to Williams. "My wife hasn't watched it," he says with a laugh. "She started watching a bit of it, and went, 'Why would I watch this?'"

Key to *Bull*'s vicious effectiveness is an extraordinary lead performance from Maskell. "I've always wanted to work with Neil," admits Williams, who says his imposing presence was ideal. "Some people have the ability to look very scary. There were times where I'd give him a note and he looked like he wanted to murder me. He'd say, 'Sorry, that's just my face,'" says Williams. "He can be volatile in his performances, but there's also a real innocence there." He pauses. "I sound like a wanker saying that."

Maskell's casting has inevitably led to comparisons with director Ben Wheatley, who regularly works with the actor — a comparison Williams doesn't mind, even if it was not a conscious influence. "I know Ben, I've met Ben. He's friends with Neil," Williams says. "Personally, Ben Wheatley's films absolutely terrify me. I can't watch *Kill List!* Anything that's really psychological, I'm not very good at watching. But, y'know, at least it's getting compared to someone who's good." JOHN NUGENT

**BULL IS AT THE BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL IN OCTOBER AND IN CINEMAS FROM NOVEMBER**

Clockwise from top: Neil Maskell as the titular Bull; former *EastEnders* Samson Duffinello also stars; "You don't want to mess with this guy, David"; Hayman as local crime boss Norm.



SMALL  
TALKCHRISTOPHER  
WALKEN

**Hello, Mr. Walken. How are you? And where are you?** Right now, I'm in quarantine in my room for a few days, working on a project. I've already worked on projects that we filmed during Covid and they had to be stopped because people tested positive. So I get tested three times a week. Everyone does. You get used to it.

**Is it true you don't have a mobile phone?**

That's right. Sometimes on movies they give me a phone so they can keep in touch with me, and make sure they know where I am and that I haven't fallen off a bridge or something. In fact I have an iPhone with me at the moment that I've been given for this purpose. And this morning it rang and in trying to answer it, I not only cut it off, I seem to have wiped everything on it.

**Oh dear.**

So, yeah, I don't have a phone of my own and I'm still getting the hang of it when they give me one.

**You seem to be working harder than ever. Do you have a method for keeping fit and healthy?**

Be careful of the catering on set. There's always too much food around. You have to watch yourself. You have to stick to salads and sushi.

BOVD HILTON

THE OFFENDERS IS COMING SOON  
TO BBC ONE

Top to bottom: Mad for it: Liam Gallagher leads the sing-along; Noel Gallagher unlooshes another mighty riff; The Knebworth crowd; Director Jake Scott.

oasis  
No./20

# Jake Scott goes back to his roots

**The filmmaker (and son of Ridley) revisits the band who kickstarted his career with Oasis Knebworth 1996**

ON 10 AND 11 August 1996, 250,000 people descended on a Hertfordshire country house to watch Oasis. One person who *almost* went: Jake Scott. "I had a ticket!" Scott says now. "I was a fan. But I couldn't go. I was in Prague."

Scott's connection with the Britpop icons runs deep; he directed the 1995 music video for the band's hit "Morning Glory," and nearly three decades on, he has now directed *Oasis Knebworth 1996*, a documentary that weaves their legendary stage performance with personal accounts from fans who were there. Inspired by films such as *Woodstock*, Scott's approach was to centre the film around the fans rather than the band. "I liked the idea of a mythology that you create around something like Knebworth," he says. "What we didn't want to do was make a film just for dads."

It's the latest twist in an eclectic career that saw Scott initially start in music videos, founding a production company with his father, fellow director Ridley Scott, in 1991. A move into feature film directing, however, did not go smoothly. "The '90s, for me, didn't go as well as I wanted," he says. "I made a film called *Plunkett & Macleane*, which was really poorly received. I think even *Empire* gave me a proper fucking kicking."



Scott spent the next decade "trying to atone for the sin of making a poorly received film," which led him to "character-based stories" such as 2010's *Welcome To The Rileys* and 2018's *American Woman*, the latter featuring an acclaimed performance from Sienna Miller. "It's a pity that film didn't get marketed correctly," Scott says, "because I thought Sienna's performance was really up there. She's as good as it gets."

It was Miller, in fact, that may have indirectly led to the Oasis film. "Sienna's a good friend of Noel [Gallagher]," Scott says. "That may have helped. Sienna put in a good word!"

Next for Scott is something different still: a horror/thriller called *First Ascent*, inspired by another passion. "I've been climbing all my life. I grew up climbing with my uncle Tony," he says — referring of course to the late Tony Scott, of *Top Gun* fame. And the next generation is already in the family business: Scott's oldest daughter has joined Grande Ridley on his last two films. "I'm getting photos from my dad of my daughter, taking stills of Lady Gaga." JOHN NUGENT

OASIS KNEBWORTH 1996 IS IN CINEMAS  
FROM 23 SEPTEMBER



# PINT OF MILK

## KAREN GILLAN

### When were you most starstruck?

Well, being on the set of *Avengers*, you're getting it from all angles. They're all in character, too, so it's not just the actors walking around, it's the *superheroes*. But I think meeting Quentin Tarantino was when I was most like, "Oh my God, I've gone peculiar and I don't know how to behave like a normal person anymore." I was trying very hard to seem cool, because I feel like his films are the epitome of cool. He's made so many of my favourites. I tend to be more starstruck by directors than actors. It's like: "All these films have come from your mind!" I find that fascinating.

### What is your favourite animal?

My dog, Turtle. She's a Bull Terrier-Poodle mix, but when I got her I was told she was a Schnauzer. I spent all this time looking up the traits of the Schnauzer, being like, "Oh yeah, that is so Turtle." But then I did a DNA test — because, yes, that's how far I went — and she's actually no parts Schnauzer. Couldn't believe it.

### Have you ever written fan mail?

As a kid I created a scrapbook called the 'Spice Book', but I never thought to reach out to a *Spice Girls* directly. Which is a shame because a lot of love went into it. I loved Geri, obviously, as I'm ginger. Have I ever met a *Spice Girl*? No. Actually, I said I was most starstruck by directors, but I think the most starstruck I could ever be is if I met the *Spice Girls*. Or Britney Spears. I would genuinely not be able to speak.

### How much is a pint of milk?

Oh my God. Erm... A pint is the small one, right? I'm gonna say 60p. I don't like the way dairy farms treat the animals, so I've boycotted dairy. Out milk's where it's at, because cats are Scottish.

### Do you have a nickname?

I've got Kaz, which originated with my father. And now I've got K-Gill, which started as a joke — like a J-Lo thing — but it's stuck. It's just my friends that use that. I can't imagine my dad calling me

K-Gill. But because J-Lo's a real celebrity, she got given that name, whereas I gave K-Gill to myself. "It's K-Gill now, guys. I'm at that level!" [*laughs*].

### Do you have a favourite joke?

Okay, this is hard because it's audio-based. Two whales are in a bar, and one says to the other: [*Whales dole eight seconds of eerily impressive 'whale song' noises*]. And the other whale says: "Bob... you are wasted!" [*snatch laughter*].

### Which movie have you seen most?

Either *The Princess Diaries* or *Scream*. *Scream* is my all-time favourite. I even had a 'Scream shop'

as a child, where I'd sell *Scream* merchandise I'd made. I remember taking a picture of Sarah Michelle Gellar — who had a cameo in *Scream 2* — and putting it onto a piece of cardboard with fake blood-splatters around it. God, I hope Sarah Michelle Gellar doesn't read this [*laughs*]. I also once watched *Scream* with a friend who got up to get a sandwich halfway through and came back in full [*Scream*] mask and outfit. It was terrifying.

### Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

You know, I don't think I have. Maybe a B&C Breezer when I was underage, but that's about it.

### What one thing do you do better than anyone else?

Watching *Love Island*. I'm in the States right now, and they *love* the UK version here. It's got such a following. They enjoy trying to wrap their heads around the different regional accents. I have to translate all the Geordie, Scottish and Essex.

### What character were you in your first school play?

I played an angel with a broken wing in a Nativity play, but in terms of actual performance, when I was in primary school I wrote a monologue for an old Southern American granny. I would go from class to class doing it: [*Adopts elderly Southern American accent*] "I was sittin' in the house, and I heard my darlin' grandson playin' his music, and I said, 'Turn that darn thing down'"... That sort of thing. Honestly, it was social suicide. TOM ELLEN

ILLUSTRATION ARNO

## COMING SOON

**DUAL** (2021)  
Gillan plays a woman with a terminal diagnosis

who commissions a clone of herself — only to fight it to the death — in this satirical sci-fi.

**THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER** (2022)  
Gillan reprises her MCU role as Nebula, the semi-cyborg anti-hero, in the next Thor film, ahead of *Guardians 3*.

**THE BUBBLE** (TBC)  
Judd Apatow's next film is a meta-comedy set during the pandemic. The cast includes Gillan, Pedro Pascal and Leslie Mann.

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PS5

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS  
PRESENTS



# "DEATHLOOP"

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OUT 14/09/21



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# ONSCREEN

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

3-24  
SEPT

★★★★★ EXCELLENT

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★ OKAY

★★ POOR

★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY IAN FREER]

[FILM]

## ANNETTE



OUT 3 SEPTEMBER  
CERT TBC / 130 MINS

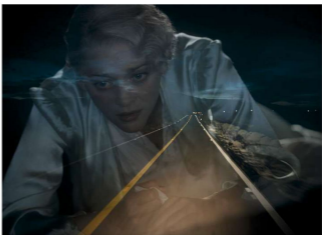
**DIRECTOR** Leos Carax  
**CAST** Adam Driver, Marion Cotillard, Simon Helberg

**PLOT** Incidental stand-up comedian Henry McHenry (Driver) and opera star Ann DeFranoux (Cotillard) are in love, but their bond is tested when his career starts to dip and hers starts to rise. Perhaps their new-born baby girl, Annette, can rekindle their passion. Except she's made of wood.



IF YOU KNOW one thing about Annette, it's probably that Adam Driver sings a tender, gorgeous love song ("We Love Each Other So Much") to Marion Cotillard's foo-foo. It happens twice, but still doesn't break the top five moments of weird shit that happen in Leos Carax's wild-at-heart, batshit-on-top phantasmagoric opera. *Annette* is unlike any other film in 2021 or any other year. Driven by Ron and Russell Mael's, aka Sparks', demented rhythms and lit up by Driver's unhinged energy, it sails on the melding of its idiosyncratic talents to blow up an oft-told tale of showbiz people undone by professional jealousy, spun with wit, oversized emotions and lashings of cinematic bric.

From Denis Lavant sprinting and cartwheeling down a Parisian street to David Bowie's "Modern Love" in *Modern Love* — a moment gloriously homaged by Greta Gerwig in *Frances Ha* — to a pixie hair-cutted Kylie Minogue's torch song "Who We Were" in *Holy*



**Clockwise from left:** An impassioned Henry (Adam Driver) and Ann (Marion Cotillard); Driver on electric form; Ann's (operatic star is rising) Simon Holberg as Ann's accompanist.

*Motors*, Carax's films have showcasing songs in their DNA. *Annette* sees the filmmaker finally scratch a musical itch that has been there all along. It starts with an absolute banger. Building on *Holy Motors'* barnstorming procession of ascending players, "So May We Start," a typically propulsive Mael composition, sees an on-screen Carax assemble Sparks and his cast to march in a virtuoso oneer out of the studio and into Santa Monica, singing a delirious, self-reflexive ear-worm ("The budget is large, but, still it's not enough") so good you fear the film will never recover. It does.

Driver is Henry McHenry, a stand-up comedian-performance artist who prowls the stage in a boxer's robe. He's a raging bullshitter, a provocateur (Driver special-thanks Bill Burr

and Chris Rock in the end credits), making jokes about gas chambers and self-immolation, initially with the audience eating out of the palm of his hand. He is one half of an unlikely power couple, with Ann Defrasnoux (Marion Cotillard), an on-the-up opera star with a penchant for red wigs and wind machines. Soon the giving head and late-night motorbike-rides give way to professional jealousy, drunken rages, violent outbursts and #MeToo accusations, all garlanded by TMZ-style news reports played out as a Greek chorus.

Given it has the contours of a backstage musical — one star shines, the other dims — plot-wise things start to feel more conventional than the nutso *Holy Motors* (which incidentally features Sparks' song "How Are You Getting Home?"). It's here Carax plays his joker. Ann gives birth to Annette, a literal Chucky-esque puppet blessed with the singing voice of an angel. After the wooden star is born, both



Annette and Annette blast off into another zone of madness altogether (yes, that is a morose gorilla).

Although it keys into the ill-fated romanticism of early works like *Boy Meets Girl* and *Les Amants Du Pont-Neuf*—few filmmakers have embraced the pain of lost love as a theme as fulsomely as Carax—*Annette* is really a film about how true love can come undone by (male) egotism run rampant. The effects of Henry's self-absorption, both as the fuel for his art and the Achilles heel in his relationships, run deep. It's easy to see Henry as a portrait of the artist, and for all the bonkers frippery on show, there's a force of feeling to *Annette* suggesting a filmmaker duelling with his demons.

This passion means Carax is cinematically on fire, creating a style that is at once lyrical and loony. Working with regular cinematographer Caroline Champetier, Carax creates a hermetically sealed world in impressive set-piece after impressive set-piece, roaming from a theatrical stage opening up to become an enchanted forest to a boat caught in a raging, rear-projected tempest, to a stadium populated by tens of thousands for Baby Annette's first performance. Carax also seemingly throws out virtuoso imagery at will: a moment where Ann's accompanist (Simon Helberg) sports expository dialogue while conducting an orchestra as the close-up camera does extravagant circles around him out-Scorsese's Scorsese. There is cheekiness in the edit too. During Henry and Ann's second sesh of cunnilingus, Carax employs an audacious match cut that segues from the full-throated moans of oral sex to the full-throated groans of childbirth, all as a chorus of doctors and nurses chime, "Breathe in! Breathe out! Breathe in!"

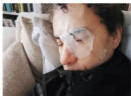
It's this sense of playfulness, plus a zeal for mashing up highbrow (an opera star) and trash (a comic), that make Carax and Sparks such fruitful bedfellows. Save Henry's comic stylings, there is no spoken word in the film, and the score

The idiosyncratic lovers before jealousy, anger and a wooden baby show up.

is sung-through (think *Les Misérables*), thriving on simple rhymes and a heavy use of repetition, often cycling through variations on the same phrase ("Six People Have Come Forward", a staccato hymn to calling out toxic male behaviour) that become anthemic. It helps that both the film's stars have musical chops, demonstrated by Driver in *Inside Lévygn Davis* and his rendition of "Being Alive" in *Marriage Story*, Cotillard in musical *Nine* and her own recording career. Lyrically, the songs flit between the brazenly sincere, the tongue-in-cheek and the darkly sardonic. Musically, the score runs the gamut from dark classicism to beautiful arias, from minimalism to belligerent rock opera. And when it's time for the film to deliver its big emotional payload, the brothers strip away the irony to deliver something truly heart-rending.

If the film has a fault, it lies in Carax's complete disinterest in Ann, giving the immense Cotillard very little to do outside of her operatic scenes, the screenplay lending little insight into her inner life. In the second half, the excellent Helberg comes more to the fore as Ann's wannabe lover with suspicions about Henry but, performance-wise, the film belongs to Driver. Arguably the most distinctive actor working today, he gives Henry McHenry such disarming vigour and shattering intensity, it's like watching *Magnolia*'s Frank T.J. Mackey if he could carry a tune. A perfect Carax doomed lover, watching him stare into the abyss, you can't take your eyes off him. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** The most original film of 2021, *Annette* is a ride like no other, a spellbinding walk in a storm. See it for truly hypnotic filmmaking, a clutch of great songs and Adam Driver at his most magnetic.



## THE STORY OF LOOKING

★★★★

17 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 90 MINS

DIRECTOR Mark Cousins

CAST Mark Cousins

As well as one of our most important film thinkers, Mark Cousins is emerging as an original, innovative non-fiction filmmaker. Set on the day before he is due to have a cataract operation, Cousins lies in bed tweeting about and ruminating on his (and our) relationship with looking. He traces the "journey of our visual lives" from cradle to grave, examining movies, selfies and the world around us, quoting everything from Glézanne (his idea of "the optical experience that develops within us") to Grease. Not all his bold conceits work (Cousins reimagining himself as an old man living in Sweden) but it's fascinating, thought-provoking stuff, told in Cousins' engaging, typically implicit way. **W**



## GAGARINE

★★★★

OUT 24 SEPTEMBER / CERT 12A / 96 MINS

DIRECTORS Fanny Liatard, Jérémy Trouhin

CAST Alseni Bathily, Lynda Khoudri, Jami

McCraven, Denis Lavant

Set almost entirely in the grounds of a decrepit housing project, *Gagarine*'s monolithic setting doesn't immediately suggest far-flung interstellar voyages, but its tight confines are a launchpad for a thrilling creative engine and a moving emotional odyssey. This wonderful debut feature, from Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouhin, sees Youri (Alseni Bathily) — a kind engineering wunderkind with a passion for aerospace — try to restore his community's housing estate, a relic of '60s communism in France. Youri's galactic imagination (and DIY skills) allow for some beautifully saturated magical-realist moments, elevating this tale beyond standard kitchen-sink fare and landing a giant leap of cinematic ambition. **JC**



## [FILM]

# GUNPOWDER MILKSHAKE



OUT '17 SEPTEMBER  
[IN CINEMAS/SKY CINEMA]  
CERT 15 / 114 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Navot Papushado

**CAST** Karen Gillan, Lena Headey, Michelle Yeoh, Angela Bassett, Paul Giamatti, Carla Gugino, Chloe Coleman

**PLOT** Assassin Sam (Gillan) finds herself royally stitched up by the crime consortium she works for. To get revenge on those who've wronged her, she'll need the assistance of an eight-year-old kid (Coleman); three librarians-cum-weapons dealers (Yeoh, Bassett, Gugino) and her estranged also-an-assassin mother (Headey).

MUCH OF *GUNPOWDER MILKSHAKE*'s runtime is spent hearing a bell ring. *Bad Times At The El Royale*. Ding! *Kill Bill: Volume 1*. Ding! *Kill Bill: Volume 2*. Ding! *Leon*. Ding! *John Wick*. Ding ding ding... Jackpot? Unfortunately, not. Just the empty echo of a clang marking familiar ground.

Karen Gillan is assassin's-daughter Sam, who followed in her mother's footsteps after being left 25 years prior in the care of Nathan (Paul Giamatti), a middle-manager with crime cabal The Firm. When a job goes wrong, The Firm throw Sam to the wolves; she responds by going all out for revenge with Emily (Chloe Coleman), an eight-year-old girl she's helping; the Librarians — her 'aunts' who deal in weapons and tough love; and her reappeared mother (Lena Headey).

Sam is basically Beatrice Kiddo, but without the speech, the steel or the style. Chloe Coleman (who does well with the material) is Léon's Mathilda without the deep, compelling fracture of vulnerability. There's a neon-drenched retro diner. An establishment of crims — headed up by men — that you really can't trust. Slow-mo, blood-soaked action set-pieces. A spaghetti-Western inspired score. Kitsch Japanese kittens. There's even an approximation of The Crazy 88, which is simply a truckload of blokes in badly fitting suits.

What there isn't — even if one or two set-pieces do land, especially one with all the women tool-ed-up — is truly fluid, literate action; writing that can be judged alongside any of the aforementioned films (director Navot Papushado co-wrote with Ehud Lavski). It's hugely disappointing for a film that boasts such a powerhouse gang of female actors. There is absolutely no world in which Angela Bassett should be given the line, "Fudge you!" (Hey, there were kids around!)

There is an easy, believable intimacy between Gillan and Headey, but it's Gillan who sits uneasily as the hitwoman. Sam is awkward and odd (there are definite touches of *Doctor Who*'s Amy Pond and *Goosebumps*' Nebula). This is perhaps intentional — with the comic tone the film strains for — but it ultimately undercuts her position as one of the best killers in the world. She's goofy, not gifted with a gun.

But the film really ties itself in knots when it comes to feminism; like a boiling-hot crumpet tossed from hand-to-hand. Women, it says, are the ones who sit with the consequences of men's violence ("There's a group of men called The Firm," says Sam in the opening narration. "They've been running things for a long, long time and when they need someone to clean up their mess, they send me.") But then the women kill with equal vengeance and violence, pushing the Thatcher-brand of equality that says to be equal to a man, you should become him. There's even — God help us — a woman who shakes her hair out seductively just before going into battle. It's feminism, and representation of women, that rings as hollow as the bell that you can't help but bear through the film's 114 minutes. **TERRI WHITE**

**VERDICT** Occasionally dynamic action and an incredible cast can't ultimately save this muddled, derivative film. And please don't call it 'Jane Wick'.



## [FILM]

## CANDYMAN

★★★

OUT NOW  
CERT TBC / 91 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Nia DaCosta  
**CAST** Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Tayariyah Parris, Nathan Stewart-Jarrett, Colman Domingo

**PLOT** Artist Anthony (Abdul-Mateen II) and his partner Brianna (Parris) move into a new apartment in the now gentrified Cabrini Green. After learning the true story behind the local urban legend of Candyman and displaying it as a new art piece, Anthony unknowingly opens a door through which the horrors of the past return.

THE LATEST IN a number of horror franchises that have received the 'legacy-quel' treatment — soft reboots that sweep aside what is viewed as messy and disposable canon (think David Gordon Green's *Halloween*) — Nia DaCosta's new take on *Candyman* directly continues the story of the original and most beloved entry in the series. The film revives Bernard Rose's 1992 cult horror, continuing its mythologising of buried, collective historical trauma in the form of its eponymous vengeful spirit, but also attempts to self-reflexively engage with the missteps of its predecessor. And where the original used gentrification and academia as a route into discussions of government-enforced social barriers, DaCosta builds upon how this has continued into the present day.

The film returns to a now-gentrified Cabrini Green, the location of the first film. Through a new art project, Anthony (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) unwittingly unleashes the Candyman, who kills anyone who summons him by saying his name

five times in a mirror. With her 2018 debut feature *Little Woods*, DaCosta has experience in navigating socio-economic boundaries and broken governmental systems with nuance. *Candyman* would seem a perfect continuation of her interests. It's an interesting expansion on the character's mythos, taking the stronger elements from its derided sequels — though anyone looking forward to seeing Tony Todd back in the role again might be disappointed. Where the first film used the spectre as a commentary on the demoralisation of projects and council housing, DaCosta's film is recalibrated as a response to the aftermath of such negligence, a reminder of who lived here before the fancy glass flats appeared. Farther still, DaCosta, *Get Out* director Jordan Peele and Win Rosenfeld's screenplay is also interesting in the ways in which it acts as a corrective to the messier parts of the '92 *Candyman* that muddled its overall thesis, working to point the spirit's vengeance and



Clockwise from main: Michael Hargrove as the hook-handed Sherman Fields; Art lover Brianna (Teyonah Parris) and Anthony (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II); Anthony's obsession grows.



violence back towards his original oppressors. The original Candyman protagonist Helen's role in the story is intentionally told through unreliable narrators, itself an urban legend in the context of this new film.

This attempt to neaten up the meaning of its predecessor for a new audience is solid, but it then overcorrects, as every subsequent scene seems as though it contains a conversation detailing the revisionism. DaCosta's film seems to pre-empt such critiques (amusingly, an obnoxious white art critic demeans Anthony's work as didactic), but it doesn't prevent the transformation of subtext into big, bold text that feels like a studio demanding some hand-holding. It feels like a similarly pre-emptive shield against misinterpretation, and it becomes stifling, not letting its performances do the work. Abdul-Mateen II and Colman Domingo, as a Cabrini Green resident still preaching the Candyman urban legend, are particularly magnetic,

channelling deep sadness and rage like a spiritual possession, one that quite literally eats away at Anthony as his art and his engagement with historical traumas becomes an obsession. Teyonah Parris' Brianna adds an intimate and personal connection to the film's collective grieving, and its transformation into anger. Despite its lack of subtlety the scripting is frequently funny too, one highlight being a character wondering who would be fool enough to enact the catopromancy that summons Candyman, before cutting to a group of white mean girls in a school bathroom.

It's also visually compelling when it becomes less concerned with explaining itself. Cinematographer John Guleserian conjures discomfort from the sight of the shiny luxury apartments that have papered over the grime of the first film — the opening an unsettling mirror to the original Candyman's ominous overhead shots of high rises, turning them into

otherworldly presences by shooting them from below and inverting the image. One of DaCosta's finest touches is the intermittent shadow-plays recounting various urban myths, a nod to an oral tradition of storytelling that preserves the repeatedly decimated history of African Americans. While doing this, it reaches the existentially terrifying fatalism of its predecessor, in how it emphasises inevitable, continuing cycles of white supremacy and continuing inter-generational pain. Most presciently, for every story about Candyman, there's one equally violent one about the Chicago PD that shortly follows it, their actions more unambiguously evil.

DaCosta visually places the horror amongst the invasive architecture of gentrification, the looming glass towers feeling as much of a threat as anything else in the film. One of the more memorable kills is portrayed in a long zoom out, dwarfing the victim in the window of their expensive apartment in a mixed-budget complex, the kind that Cabrini Green was replaced with. If the early stages of the film are too concerned with explaining the meaning of the Candyman himself, at least the consequences of his summoning are appropriately messy, both in the wine-inducing bloodshed and whom specifically it's targeting, a collective vengeful anger unleashed on anyone who dares mention it in jest. It's fun to see the spirit change from something stumbled upon to something summoned with purpose, in the genuinely pointed and provocative moments that conclude the film. It's a shame, then, that just as it establishes a new identity, it's done. Its time cut short by its various stolid lectures. **KAMBLE CAMPBELL**

**VERDICT** Though it delivers some entertaining comedy and bloodshed, *Candyman* is clunky and overly instructive in its metaphorical purpose — killing subtext as often as it does anyone foolish enough to summon the eponymous spirit.



## BOSS LEVEL

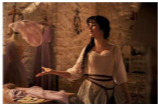
★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Joe Carnahan

CAST Frank Grillo, Mel Gibson, Naomi Watts

Joe Carnahan's *Boss Level*, a passion project in gestation since 2010, takes the time-loop subgenre and applies it to a video game-styled actioner that is fun if occasionally frustrating. Frank Grillo carries the film as Roy Pulver, who's trapped in a cycle of being killed by oddball assassins that he can't break until he solves the mystery of his estranged wife's death, becomes a better dad, and takes down Mel Gibson's nefarious Colonel. In its best moments, *Boss Level* boasts slick, quick-cut fight sequences and eye-popping bursts of cartoonish violence that set the pulse racing; in its worst, we labour through mawkish father-son bonding scenes and tenuous Egyptology 101 shenanigans. Thankfully, Grillo's charisma and Carnahan's balls-to-the-wall set-pieces keep things rocking. **SC**



## CINDERELLA

★★

OUT 3 SEPTEMBER (AMAZON PRIME VIDEO) /

CERT TBC / 113 MINS

DIRECTOR Kay Cannon

CAST Camila Cabello, Idina Menzel, Minnie Driver

"Have courage and be kind," *Cinderella* once told us in Disney's 1950 animation. It's simple and pure, and thus powerful — something the latest all-singing, all-dancing musical remake could have learned from. Popstar Camila Cabello makes her acting debut with a shrill performance in an über-progressive, painfully self-aware take, in which a bland Prince Charming (Nicholas Galitzine) wears a tiny earring and Idina Menzel as the wicked stepmother belts out Madonna's 'Material Girl' for some reason. It's a grating cacophony, in which the story's earnest magic spell is broken with every wink in the shallow, performatively wry script. *Cinderella* has given more independence (a business plan but also a fringe) in this version — but at what cost? **EK**



## COPILLOT

★★★★

OUT 10 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 110 MINS

DIRECTOR Anne Zohra Berrached

CAST Canan Kir, Roger Azar, Jana Julia Roth

Twenty years on from the 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, and the events of that fateful day still cast a shadow across the globe. Yet *Copilot* takes a more intimate approach in its fictionalised narrative, focusing on five years in the life of one of the terrorists, here named Saeed (Roger Azar), yet clearly based on United 93 hijacker Ziad Jarrah. More specifically, it's a story told through the experiences of Saeed's Turkish-born girlfriend (later wife) Asli (based on Ziad's partner, Aysel Sengün). Played with charm and poise by Canan Kir, Asli is so enamoured with Saeed that she overlooks his increasingly fundamentalist tendencies. As such, this is not so much an exploration of the impact of radicalism — which all takes place off screen — as a sensitive study of the overwhelming, destabilising influence of love. **MB**



## MISHA AND THE WOLVES

★★★★

OUT 3 SEPTEMBER / CERT TBC / 89 MINS

DIRECTOR Sam Hobkinson

PARTICIPANTS Jane Daniel, Pat Cunningham, Evelynne Haendel

If an elderly survivor of the Holocaust told you, in granular detail, the circumstances of her childhood journey across Nazi-occupied Europe, would you ask for proof? That's the ethical conflict at the centre of Sam Hobkinson's riveting documentary, which reexamines the shocking events that led to the truth behind Misha Defonseca and her bestselling 1997 memoir being exposed. A mix of talking heads, reconstructions and archive footage help to paint a riveting portrait of this infamous literary hoax, a yarn first spun in small-town America and unravelled in a jaw-dropping investigation that leads back to Belgium with the help of some intriguing and empathetic players. Even with a few gaps in the narrative, this unbelievable tale is not to be missed. **MF**



## PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND

★★★

OUT 17 SEPTEMBER / CERT TBC / 102 MINS

DIRECTOR Sion Sono

CAST Nicolas Cage, Sofia Boutella, Bill Moseley

It's perhaps not surprising that this collaboration between Japanese iconoclast Sion Sono and Coppola-spawned maverick Nicolas Cage is stone-cold nuts, a post-apocalyptic, samurai-Western, man-on-a-mission movie. Cage is The Hero — perhaps a cousin to *Teneri's* Protagonist — who is hired by The Governor (Bill Moseley) to retrieve his kidnapped daughter Bernice (Sofia Boutella) from *Mad Max*-styled wasteland *The Ghostland*. The catch is The Hero is dressed in a leather suit with explosives wired to blow off his 'nads if he thinks impure thoughts about Bernice. By turns brilliant and terrible, Cage is in his element. It has visual invention to spare, and the fight scenes are fun, but it's a shame such imagination is tethered to all-over-the-place storytelling. **IF**



## SHORTA

★★★★

OUT 3 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 100 MINS

DIRECTORS Anders Ølholm, Frederik Louis Hviid

CAST Jacob Lohmann, Simon Sears, Tarek Zayat

A kind of Danish *Les Misérables* meets *Training Day*, *Shorta* — Arabic for "police" — throws good cop Jens Hoyer (Simon Sears) and racist cop Mike Andersen (Jacob Lohmann) into Copenhagen's Svalegården ghetto, at boiling point following the death of an Arab teenager in custody. In exciting, tense, well-staged set-pieces, Hoyer and Andersen are pursued through estates, high-rises and grocery stores, their journey becoming more challenging after they arrest Amos Al-Shami (Tarek Zayat) in a pointless stop and search. Filmmakers Anders Ølholm and Frederik Louis Hviid intersperse the action with quieter moments, giving Sears and especially Lohmann space to enrich potentially one-note Lehmans. The film covers familiar ground, but does it with an élan and urgency that is absorbing. **IF**



Soul sisters: Jennifer Hudson as Aretha Franklin with Marlon Wayans as Dr. King Washington

## [FILM]

## RESPECT



OUT 10 SEPTEMBER  
CERT TBC / 145 MINS

DIRECTOR *Liesl Tommy*

CAST Jennifer Hudson, Forest Whitaker, Marlon Wayans, Audra McDonald, Marc Maron, Tituss Burgess

**PLT** Daughter of an influential preacher, Clarence Franklin (Whitaker), Aretha Franklin (Hudson) has extraordinary musical talent. But her career is slow to start as she struggles to control and define her own sound, under the influence of her father and her sometimes domineering husband Ted White (Wayans).

ARETHA FRANKLIN LIVED a long life, and never followed the simple rags-to-riches-to-drug-addiction-to-rebirth narrative of so many of her contemporaries. Franklin was born into relative comfort and driven by a complicated mix of ruthless ambition and filial piety rather than desperate poverty. Yet from this complexity, theatre director Liesl Tommy crafts a fairly basic, if largely effective, narrative, focusing on Franklin's efforts first to find her own sound and then to overcome the demons that threaten to overwhelm her.

After childhood scenes with Skye Dakota Turner as a likeable and seriously talented young 'Ree', Jennifer Hudson takes over as Aretha for the decade-and-a-half where she went from church soloist to global superstar. The young singer earned her stripes singing at her father's (Forest Whitaker) church and on tours around the country, but her secular career is a series of flops until she starts working with producer Jerry Wexler (Marc Maron) — despite the jealous distrust of her husband Ted (Marlon Wayans).

Lurking behind Franklin's professional struggles are darker, personal secrets: the fact that she first became pregnant at 12, and that she struggled with depressive episodes. The film touches on her connection to Martin Luther King Jr (Gilbert Glenn Brown) and her considerable civil-rights campaigning, but doesn't quite delve into how risky or how pioneering she was. Often the film's focus is on the outward meekness and deeply inculcated reserve of a reverend's daughter, so that we sometimes lose sight of the iron will underneath. It's the formidable and prickly older Ms Franklin, the singer who in 2008 called out actual Beyoncé for seemingly deeming Tina Turner the queen of soul while introducing her at the Grammys, who would make a more radical subject — and unfortunately this film doesn't go nearly that far.

Franklin's family was involved in this, and perhaps that explains some flattening of the messier bits of her life. Still, it's hard to entirely make sense of her devotion to and frustration with her charismatic father without knowing

how they navigated her two early pregnancies. Hudson gives Franklin some edge — her facial reactions as her blustering husband grandstands are priceless — but it's hard to fit much personality into a script that's racing through world-changing events as well as half of Franklin's back catalogue, and while Tommy mounts the story handsomely, she isn't nearly as innovative as her subject, with handsomely staged but static shots and a largely linear approach. There's dramatic meat left on the bone in her close, loving and fiercely dominant attitude to her sisters, and in her strained romances.

The real elephant in the room is that Jennifer Hudson is immensely talented, but no-one is Aretha Franklin. Hudson can belt out the big numbers but — as a mid-credit clip shows — Franklin herself had extraordinary richness and depth of tone that no-one can match (Cynthia Erivo, in a TV bio serial, came a little closer, but even she isn't Aretha). It's a problem that the whole film shares: try as it might to touch on her struggles with family, alcohol, structural racism and sexism and groundbreaking musical innovation, it can't capture the full breadth of Franklin's extraordinary success. There's only one Queen Of Soul, and we're just lucky to have heard her. **HELEN O'HARA**

**VERDICT** A perfectly serviceable biopic with good performances, which goes some way to explaining Franklin's genius as a musician and a star, but one that isn't nearly as transcendent as its subject deserves.

The wood flats come from Guy's (Ryan Reynolds) eyes.



[ FILM ]

## FREE GUY



OUT NOW  
CERT 12A / 115 MINS

DIRECTOR Shawn Levy

CAST Ryan Reynolds, Jodie Comer, Taika Waititi, Joe Keery

**PLOT** Bank-teller Guy (Reynolds) has an everyday routine: wake up, talk to goldfish, drink coffee, go to work. But he's about to be shaken out of it when he falls for a mysterious stranger in sunglasses (Comer), then starts to become aware that he is, in fact, a video-game character in a world that doesn't exist.

THERE'S A MOMENT in *Free Guy* where the hero, Guy, locked in battle with a 'roided-up clone of himself, does something unexpected. Something which, in fact, could only have happened after Disney's takeover of 20th Century Fox in 2019. It's a fun, *Ready Player One*-esque moment, which will very likely please crowds. But when you stop and think about it for five seconds, that something actually makes scant sense within the logic of the narrative. It's emblematic of a movie that is eager to please, throwing all manner of eye-sizzling VFX at the screen, but that doesn't really hang together, even as you're watching it.

Think a *Truman Show* riff, with gibleness instead of heart. Rather than the man trapped in a TV show played by Jim Carrey, we have Guy, played by fellow Canadian Ryan Reynolds, a non-playable character stuck in an open-world video game. Parallels between the two films include a destiny-fulfilling trip across a body of water, and oft-repeated "good morning" catchphrases. And while Carrey's character got an impactful arc, Guy is less easy to care about.

Although he's meant to be a bland, generic everyman slowly breaking out of his loop, he's actually a wise-cracking anark-machine from the start, dispensing such Deadpoolian zingers as, "It's like my tongue had a baby with a sunrise." Reynolds' schtick sits uneasily with the material, not least as the plot progresses and the comedy starts to jostle for space with existential angst.

The world of the game, 'Free City', is fun and buzzy enough — a jacked-up *Grand Theft Auto*-style free-for-all where the players, wearing sunglasses, terrorise the NPCs going around their daily circuits. Director Shawn Levy, veteran of *Real Steel* and the *Night At The Museum* films, knows how to marshal VFX and make Jodie Comer, as hacker Molotov Girl, look cool as she leaps around with two Glock blazings. But whenever the story requires cutting across to the real world, as it frequently does, *à la Ready Player One*, momentum starts to stall. Frankly, the story's big question — will the programmers played by Comer and Joe Keery find the evidence to prove *Free City*'s overlord has stolen their zeroes and ones? — isn't massively compelling. And even Taika Waititi, as said overlord, clad in an outfit that's half Napoleon Bonaparte, half Hoxton poseur, struggles to muster up laughs as he struts around bellowing at people, let down by thin material.

Comer, at least, impresses in her big Hollywood debut, toggling between British and American accents and looking at ease no matter how bananas things get around her. Her badass nerd gives the movie some sparks. Alas, that's something in short supply elsewhere, with plentiful eye-candy but little to care about beneath the pixelated surface.

NICK DE SEMLVEN

**VERDICT** Not quite 'Ready Player One Star', but this is an odd duck: a *Black Mirror*-ish concept played for laughs, which ends up getting tangled up in its own code.

## LOCAL HERO

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Screen Content Manager Sophie Doherty on central London's quirkiest independent  
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We did a screening of *Jaws* on 16mm in the auditorium, taking advantage of its vast space and haunting acoustics. The shared experience — the gasp of an audience, the laughter of a crowd — was unrivalled. We're hoping to run more events in the future, creating more magical cinema moments. ELIZABETH AUBREY

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## WILDFIRE

★★★★

OUT 3 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Cathy Brady

CAST Nika McGuigan, Nora-Jane Noone

Returning home to her hometown on the Northern Ireland border after years in the wilderness, Kelly McGulgan, who sadly died from cancer in 2019) reconnects with her settled sister Laura (Noone), a couple joined in grief by the mysterious death of their mother. Debutante writer-director Cathy Brady tangibly creates a portrait of a complex intense sisterly bond — perfectly exemplified in a terrific feral dance scene — as the pair try to come to terms with their past. Sometimes it bites off more than it can chew — parallels between the disunity of the sisters and the divisions in Ireland feel forced — but the central performances are ferocious and Brady's filmmaking is unshowy but vital, including cinema's most vibrant red coat since *Don't Look Now*. **B+**



## PEOPLE JUST DO NOTHING: BIG IN JAPAN

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 97 MINS

DIRECTOR Jack Clough

CAST Hugo Chegwin, Allan Mustafa, Asim Chaudhry

West London underdogs Kurupt FM return in this sweet if formulaic feature, based on the BAFTA-winning show that ended in 2018. After one of their songs becomes a hit in Japan, Grindah (Allan Mustafa), Beats (Hugo Chegwin) and the crew head to Tokyo. When there, though, they find their success could put their bond and themselves in jeopardy. Mustafa and co-writer Steve Stamp repurpose the show's strengths to carry the film: humour that's rooted in the characters' clumsiness, one-liners dealt at breakneck speed and, at its core, a tender friendship. As such, it can feel predictable and a tad uninspired; as a reliable and rich dose of fan service, however, it succeeds. **B+**

Rose-traited Julie (Ann Skelly)



## [FILM]

# ROSE PLAYS JULIE

★★★★

OUT 17 SEPTEMBER

CERT 15 / 100 MINS

DIRECTORS Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor

CAST Ann Skelly, Orla Brady, Aidan Gillen

**PLOT** Rose (Skelly), a veterinarian in training, has recently found out she was adopted and has discovered the identity of her birth mother Ellen (Brady), a successful TV actor. Rose tracks her down, and begins to demand the story of her past.

THE OPENING OF *Rose Plays Julie* implies something a little bit more wistful than what its sombre subject matter ultimately delivers. "I think about you all the time, when we'll first meet," its eponymous protagonist Rose (Ann Skelly) muses. But the stark imagery immediately suggests something obsessive rather than longing. Writer-directors Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy's deliberate obfuscations are clear from the start, as a lecture Rose sits in on is interrupted by flashes of what seems to be a dream, before revealing it's actually imagery from a TV show Rose has been watching. It soon becomes clear 'Ellen Wise', an actor in that work, is Rose's biological mother, who Rose begins to cyber-stalk. Learning that Ellen is selling her house, Rose poses as a buyer (breaking a no-contact clause in her adoption papers), before revealing her identity.

Rose's name on her birth certificate was 'Julie', and Rose treats 'Julie' as a sort of parallel life, wondering about the road not taken in a narration addressed to her biological mother. Rose isn't neglected by her adoptive family; perhaps just curious about what and who 'Julie' could have been, tying her sense of loneliness to a need to discover the story of her past. Rose

begins to try to resolve her existential crisis by uncovering the hidden life of her biological parents, and dredges up horrible trauma that Ellen tried to leave behind. But finding out this even worse truth about the nature of her conception only makes Rose more obsessive.

That fixation is unsettling, a feeling compounded by the film's lingering, glacially patient camerawork, moving so slowly to the point of near-stillness, with a chilly colour-palette occasionally disrupted by sudden flashes of red, whether that's the blood of a dissected animal or the broken nose of a college age-creep.

That unnerving, sometimes uncanny tone translates to its excellent sound design, with evocative howling winds and rumbling white noise. The tone later becomes uncomfortably suspenseful as Rose then tracks down her biological father (Aidan Gillen, creepy and pathetic), a renowned celebrity archaeologist, and begins her own excavation of the past. Distinction between memory and fiction is left subjective and blurry, with frequently transgressive and disturbing imagery. Even so, to their credit, Lawlor and Molloy portray its increasingly traumatic subject matter with great sensitivity.

It's a character drama thoroughly concerned with performance — Ellen having become an actor following her trauma, first seen in the film playing roles with authority, using it to maintain a sense of control. Rose also gives the sense that 'Rose' and 'Julie' are equally ephemeral roles to play, and leverages this to deceive her father. Rose is no stranger to performance, frequently burying her turmoil, but Ann Skelly frequently shows cracks in that facade — her emotions are usually clear, her intentions less so. It's a subdued but complicated performance, to match the equally thorny and subversive film.

KAMBOLE CAMPBELL

**VERDICT** *Rose Plays Julie* is impactful and unsettling, heightened by slippery performances and enigmatic visual construction.



Paul McKenna would have to watch his back.

[ FILM ]

## REMINISCENCE

★★★

OUT NOW  
CERT 12A / 116 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Lisa Joy  
**CAST** Hugh Jackman, Rebecca Ferguson, Thandie Newton

**PLOT** In a war-ravaged, dystopian future, Nick (Jackman) has created a special machine that lets people escape reality and relive memories from happier times. A mysterious woman, Mae (Ferguson), comes into Nick's life, steals his heart, then disappears. He refuses to forget her and risks everything to find her.

AS CO-CREATOR of the TV show *Westworld*, Lisa Joy is well-versed in crafting handsome, twisty, high-concept sci-fi. *Reminiscence* has a lot of the same qualities as that show, both good and bad. It has moments of creative brilliance, and just as many of frustratingly loose storytelling.

Like *Westworld*, *Reminiscence* has a beautifully considered setting. The story takes place at some point in the future, in Miami. Climate change has put the city largely underwater and sent the daytime temperatures rocketing so high that people live their lives at night. It's a very clever idea for a film noir. Everyone lives in the shadows and the city is artfully crumbling. The stage is set for sin. In this world lives Nick (Hugh Jackman). Nick runs a service that allows people to relive happy memories, from times before the world was awful. His customers are sedated, lie in a techy bath and Nick whispers gently to them while he watches a visual of their memories on a big, fancy projector. If you can remember it, Nick can access it. Assisting him is a warmly cantankerous

old friend, Watts (Thandie Newton).

One night, in walks Mae (Rebecca Ferguson), a lounge singer, and Jessica Rabbit dress and no backstory. Nick falls for her, she disappears; Nick determines to find out what happened to her, with only a few memories as clues. It's a hoary old noir plot — the grizzled man's hunt for the dame with secrets — and the addition of the memory gimmick isn't quite enough to make it feel fresh. It needs more twists on the road to the solution, or for the memory idea to be mined further (it effectively becomes a shortcut interrogation technique). A mystery is made better with a few red herrings to throw us off. Joy gives us just the clues to the solution, so it becomes too easy to piece most of it together before she's ready to reveal all.

It might have worked better if it took itself a little less seriously. A lot of the dialogue is severely overbilled, but it's never clear if Joy knows. The film opens with the lines, "The past can haunt a man, that's what they say. The past is a series of moments, each of them perfect. A bead on the necklace of time." Now, you can get away with that if it's presented with a hint of a wink, a suggestion that you're having fun with the genre, but Joy plays it earnestly. In that context, it just sounds like tin-eared writing.

There's plenty that's good here. It's exceptionally well cast. Few can play a heroic anger like Jackman, and Ferguson has such serious charisma that she gives Mae, more of a concept than a character, needed weight. The world feels like it has many stories wanting to be discovered. There is so much potential, yet it doesn't come together. A little more attention on the plotting over the sci-fi bells and whistles and this could have been something to remember. **OLLY RICHARDS**

**VERDICT** For all its lovely looks, flashes of inspiration and splendid cast, *Reminiscence* mostly serves to remind you of other films — *Minority Report*, *Blade Runner* — that did similar future-noir much, much better.



## SNAKE EYES: G.I. JOE ORIGINS

★★  
OUT NOW / CERT 12A / 121 MINS  
**DIRECTOR** Robert Schwentke  
**CAST** Henry Golding, Andrew Koji, Ursula Corberd

Despite tons of potential, the *G.I. Joe* franchise has never been able to sustain much momentum on screen. Much like 2018's *Bumblebee*, *Snake Eyes* takes the most popular character of its franchise — who is traditionally mute in the series — and gives him a voice along with an origin story. Sadly, the results aren't nearly as successful, the main culprit being action scenes that are well choreographed but too shaky and frenetic to follow. It's a shame, because Henry Golding shows flashes of charisma as Snake Eyes, and Andrew Koji gives a compelling performance as the heir of a powerful Japanese clan. In the unlikely event a follow-up does come to pass, it will have to build on a rocky foundation. **AW**



## OASIS KNEBWORTH 1996

★★★  
OUT 23 SEPTEMBER / CERT TBC / 106 MINS  
**DIRECTOR** Jake Scott  
**PARTICIPANTS** Noel Gallagher, Liam Gallagher, Paul Arhurst

It was the "live music event of the decade" and one that's been rehashed extensively since. So what could there possibly be left to say? Director Jake Scott thinks the answer to recreating the traditional concert film lies in the fandom. Alongside song-by-song live footage of the two nights at Knebworth, fans relive it in granular detail through voiceover narration and reconstructions (ringing up for tickets, getting on the minibus). Which yes, sounds like a pretty terrible idea, and yet, somehow works. There's not much in it for Oasis naysayers and die-hard fans will have heard much of it before, but there's something — especially now — powerful, even beautiful, in the collective experience that's eulogised on screen. **TW**

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Here: Jason Momoa groups up as warrior Baba Voss.



Top to bottom: Dave Bautista as Baba's kid brother, Edo; Aïhe Woodard as wise elder Partu; Baba prepares for battle.

[TV]  
**SEE: SEASON 2**



OUT NOW (APPLE TV+) EPISODES VIEWED 3 OF 8

**SHOWRUNNER** Jonathan Tropper  
**CAST** Jason Momoa, Sylvia Hoeks, Aïhe Woodard, Dave Bautista, Nesta Cooper, Archie Madekwe

**PLOT** As Queen Kane (Hoeks) tries to salvage the wreckage of her shattered monarchy, warrior Baba Voss (Momoa) sets out to recover Haniwa (Cooper), recently abducted by his brother, Edo Voss (Bautista). But Haniwa is simply a pawn in Edo's all-consuming search for vengeance.

**DESPITE FEATURING** A sightless Jason Momoa beating up a bear, 2019's *See* got off to a bumpy start. Arriving in the vanguard of Apple's assault on streaming, creator Steven Knight's chimera of high fantasy, post-apocalyptic sci-fi and sensory exploration married the highest of concepts — a virus ravages the Earth, leaving survivors and all subsequent generations blind — with a quirky sensibility that bordered on the absurd. With only three episodes available to critics, reactions were harsh: the show's slow

start leaving viewers cold and bamboozled by its odd nomenclature (Baba Voss, Tamacti Jun, Bow Lion) and gonzo mythology (masturbating to commune with God being one sure way to boost church attendance).

But for those who persevered, *See* proved richly rewarding, Knight painting a vivid picture of a society completely recalibrated for four senses instead of five. But in the world of the blind, it transpired, the sighted aren't so much kings as hunted down and killed for a sightless and the re-emergence of sight to a sightless world formed the spine of a first season narrative that picked up speed as it went.

This second-year builds on that foundation, passing showrunner duties to Jonathan Tropper, whose credentials for bone-crunching action were well-established by *Banshee* and *Warrior*. With laborious exposition out of the way, Tropper focuses on expanding *See*'s world, introducing the aggressive, martial society of Trivantes. Here we discover what a thriving city for the sightless might resemble: streets lined with guide wires to aid navigation, scent-artists painting pictures with smell, and citizens distinguished through a tactile combination of knotted IDs and scarification. Not to mention baskers warbling mournful Rolling Stones covers for tips.

In the heart of Trivantes, we meet a growling Dave Bautista as Baba's estranged younger brother, Edo. Making the conflict more personal than that against last year's witchfinders,

Tropper zeroes in on character, building out Baba's shady backstory through his hulking, rage-fueled sibling. Baba's children are also given more to do, Haniwa striking up a relationship with Edo's (secretly) sighted Lieutenant, while son Kufun (Madekwe) forms an unlikely alliance with a sympathetic witchfinder, played by Hoon Lee. Meanwhile, Queen Kane's penchant for wank-praying is alive and well, the psychotic ruler having installed herself in a new capital, pushing the Big Lie that it was the Trivantian army, rather than her own hand, that brought her former seat to ruin.

Bold and batshit in equal measure, *See* might not be the most accessible of shows, and its penchant for the bizarre is occasionally goofy, but the series boasts a rich tapestry of world-building and an expanding story with real emotional punch. All of which is framed by innovatively choreographed action that showcases *See*'s 'blindfighting' to spectacular effect. Already renewed for a third season, Knight's unorthodox series has grown into one of the most interesting and original works of speculative fiction on television, one that deserves to be 'seen' by a good deal more people than it has. **JAMES DYER**

**VERDICT** Awash with bloody, brutal violence, set against a meticulously crafted world, this is a storming continuation of one of TV's most underappreciated shows.

"Super-soldier serum? Don't mind if I do!"  
Agent Peggy Carter becomes superhero  
Captain Carter in *What If...?*



## [TV] WHAT IF...?



OUT NOW (DISNEY+)  
EPISODES VIEWED 3 OF 9

**DIRECTOR** Bryan Andrews  
**CAST (VOICES)** Jeffrey Wright, Chadwick Boseman, Hayley Atwell, Michael Rooker, Jeremy Renner

**PLOT** A celestial being known as The Watcher (Wright) observes infinite variations of familiar MCU stories as they play out across the Multiverse — each one centred around a different “What if...?” question, twisting characters and events from previous Marvel movies in new ways.

LIKE THANOS, IT was inevitable. Just as *Star Wars* spun off several canonical animated series, the Marvel Cinematic Universe now follows. In true MCU style, *What If...?* takes a lesser-known comic-book property (which began in 1977 with “What If Spider-Man Joined The Fantastic Four?”) and brings it to wider mainstream attention.

Essentially, it's the screen equivalent of a remix album — drawing on 13 years of Infinity Saga storytelling, and imagining major narrative-altering twists in episodes that play out as

interpolations, reworkings, and samplings of well-known hits. Some are more straightforward (Episode 1 asks, “What If Agent Peggy Carter got the super-soldier serum instead of Steve Rogers?”), while others are less succinct, but all offer the chance to run with plotlines that would never play out in the live-action films or Disney+ shows, delivered with stylish animation and a voice cast roster that most animated superhero cartoons would die for — several Marvel cast members (but notably not all of them) reprise their roles here.

In its animated form, the MCU skews slightly younger than the cinematic offerings — *What If...?* has a Saturday-morning serial feel. If the cel-shaded visual style is an acquired taste — character models are rendered with beautiful pastel colours and thick black outlines — the worlds of Marvel are recreated with beautiful pastel palettes and bathed in cinematic lighting. The action is slick and kinetic, and the scripts are pacy too, whizzing through concentrated re-run of movie highlights with unexpected pay-offs.

It's this sense of surprise that will be most satisfying to existing fans. While each episode revolves around one central change, the resulting ripple effects in every instalment feel well-considered. Peggy (Hayley Atwell) becoming Captain Carter means markedly different fates for Steve Rogers (Josh Keaton) and Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan). And a world in which Yondu (Michael Rooker) pilfered

T'Challa (the late, great Chadwick Boseman) from Earth instead of Peter Quill results in significant shifts in the cosmic power structure. To say any more would spoil the fun — and the fun, really, is the whole point.

It's also the one thing holding *What If...?* back. By its very nature, the alternate-universe storytelling makes it hard to care too much about the outcome of each episode. The series is designed as a playful, imaginative flight of fancy, a bar which it meets but never transcends. Jeffrey Wright's The Watcher gives a nice Rod Serling-style introduction to each episode, but his arrival adds little to the overall Marvel lore. And if you're not already a Marvel die-hard, this is anything but an entry-way — those without an MCU PhD will find *What If...?* more of a WTF.

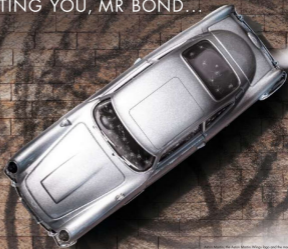
Not that the series is entirely inconsequential — the recent cracking open of the Multiverse means that all of this can be considered somewhat canonical. If the MCU does continue to follow the *Star Wars* playbook, it's easy to pinpoint who should get the Ahsoka treatment and receive their own live-action spin-off: we'll take more Captain Carter, please. **BEN TRAVIS**

**VERDICT** Marvel Studios' first animated series is a stylish narrative experiment with fun twists and surprises — nothing new, nothing less. For the uninitiated, it's impenetrable.

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007



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[TV]

## THE NORTH WATER

★★★★

OUT 10 SEPTEMBER (BBC TWO)  
EPISODES VIEWED 5 OF 5

**DIRECTOR** Andrew Haigh

**CAST** Jack O'Connell, Colin Farrell, Stephen Graham, Sam Spruell

**PLOT** *Hull 1850*. Disgraced military surgeon Patrick Sumner (O'Connell) joins whaling ship *The Volunteer* on a voyage to the Arctic. He's soon butting heads with brutish, amoral harpooner Drax (Farrell), but both men are unaware of the ulterior motive underpinning the dangerous expedition.

FOR ALL THE snowy white on show in *The North Water*, Andrew Haigh's five-part adaptation of Ian McGuire's novel has a black heart. Filmed within the Arctic Circle, reputedly further north than any other production, it details the exploits of an 1850s whaling ship with a mixture of high-end spectacle, powerful performances and beautiful filmmaking craft. But this isn't 'boy's own' adventure stuff. Instead, it's a piercing look at the darkness inside men.

At the heart of *The North Water* is a battle of opposites, a thinker versus a doer. The thinker is Patrick Sumner (Jack O'Connell), an educated ex-army surgeon running away from a traumatic past in India. The doer is Henry Drax (Colin Farrell), a feral master harpooner who lives in the moment — the show opens with him rutting in a barn — and shares something of the hulking evil of *Great Expectations'* Magwitch. The pair find themselves on board Yorkshire whaling ship *The Volunteer*, bound for the icy waters between Greenland and Canada in search of seal pelts and whale blubber. But the bottom has fallen out of the arctic mammal market and skullduggery is afoot. *The Volunteer's* Captain Brownlee (Stephen Graham, excellent as ever), in cahoots with the ship's owner Baxter (Tom Courtenay,

excellent as ever) has a devious plan: to sink the ship and cash in the insurance.

Working in a completely different register to *Woveand*, *45 Years* and *Lean On Pete*, Haigh mounts stunning set-pieces, drone shots perfectly conveying the fragilities of man against the unforgiving landscape. Episode 1 ends with a brilliantly orchestrated seal hunt (warning: the show doesn't stint on depicting animal cruelty) as the greenhorn Sumner joins the experienced hunters shooting and clubbing seals; Episode 2's whale-chase is far more exciting than anything in Ron Howard's much bigger-budgeted *In The Heart Of The Sea*, ending when Drax mauls the whale and stabs it, blood spurting out of the blowhole. But Haigh's filmmaking is debatably more interesting inside the ship, going for broke in dark-lit interiors, using tight close-ups at odd angles to disorientate. This, along with numerous C-bombs, puts clear water between Haigh's handiwork and standard BBC period-drama fare.

Beyond the seafaring narrative, the story smuggles in other genres, too. The first half is an investigation into who sodomised the cabin boy (Stephen McMillan), with Sumner refusing to believe the obvious culprit — a scene where he examines Drax's foreskin is tense in the extreme. But as the story evolves, it develops into a survivalist drama, with the whalers bartering with Inuits, the harsh elements and a bear who must have taken notes watching *The Revenant*. If the final two episodes don't match the intensity of previous ones, the uniformly strong cast keep you engaged, particularly a bulked-up, sparingly used Farrell burning a hole in the screen as a man with no concept of morality, and O'Connell, who gives Sumner, potentially a bland surrogate for the audience, depths and complexity. Together, they help this sea shanty to lost souls land. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** If it slightly runs out of steam towards the end, *The North Water* is mostly gripping, exquisitely made, cinematic TV, consolidating writer-director Andrew Haigh as a major talent. Watch wearing your thickest jumper.

# ON SCREEN CHECKLIST

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



## FILM OUT NOW

BOSS LEVEL	★★★★	PG-13
CANDYMAN	★★★★	PG-13
FREE GUY	★★★★	PG-13
PEOPLE'S JUST DO NOTHING: BE IN JAPAN	★★★★	PG-13
REMINISCENCE	★★★★	PG-13
SNAKE EYES: G.I. JOE ORIGINS	★★★	PG-13

## 3 SEPTEMBER

ANNETTE	★★★★★	PG-13
CINDERELLA	★★★	PG-13
MISHA AND THE WOLVES	★★★★★	PG-13
SHORTA	★★★★★	PG-13
WILDFIRE	★★★★	PG-13

## 10 SEPTEMBER

COPILOT	★★★★	PG-13
RESPECT	★★★★	PG-13

## 17 SEPTEMBER

GRANPOWDER MILKSHAKE (MOVIE)	★★★	PG-13
PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND	★★★★	PG-13
RISSE PLAYS JULIE	★★★★★	PG-13
THE STORY OF LOOKING	★★★★★	PG-13

## 23 SEPTEMBER

OASIS KNEEDWORTH 1990	★★★★	PG-13
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## 24 SEPTEMBER

GAGARINE	★★★★	PG-13
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## TV OUT NOW

SEE: SEASON 2	★★★★	TV-14
WHAT IF...?	★★★★	PG-13

## 10 SEPTEMBER

THE NORTH WATER	★★★★	PG-13
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# FARO





EDGAR WRIGHT IS BACK WITH INTENSE THRILLER **LAST NIGHT IN SOHO**. SO WE TOOK THIS CHANCE TO LOOK INSIDE HIS LATEST (AND MOST SURPRISING) FILM, PLUS ALSO CELEBRATE HIS ECLECTIC, ELECTRIC CAREER



WORDS: CHRIS HEWITT / BEHIND THE SCENES PHOTOGRAPHY: GREG WILLIAMS



# W

WHEN IT COMES time for Edgar Wright to choose the project that will become The Next Edgar Wright Film, the director is never short of options. And in 2017, after *Baby Driver* became his biggest hit, that was no exception. There was a *Baby Driver* sequel here, an adaptation of the '70s TV show *The Night Stalker* there, to name but two. But something was nagging away at him. Had been nagging away at him for a while, in fact. A perception of his career to date that he wanted to address. "In an *Empire* [readers' questions] interview I did [in March 2019], one of the questions was, 'Will you ever make a movie that passes the Bechdel Test?'" he recalls. "And I said, 'I have, twice!' *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Scott Pilgrim* pass, but just. And only just. I wanted to make a film that would pass the Bechdel Test within the first two minutes."

The Bechdel Test, which was conceived in the '80s and has been increasingly used as a measure of films over the past decade or so, is a simple metric. If your movie features dialogue between at least two women and they talk about something that isn't a man, then you pass. If they only talk about a man, then you don't. There are, of course, countless classic movies that don't pass Bechdel. But it's undoubtedly important as a way of assessing the strength and depth of female representation in film, while reminding writers and directors that there's a lot of work to be done.

By and large, Wright's films have been adept sketches of men and masculinity — while *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* narrowly squeak by, the likes of *Hot Fuzz*, *The World's End* and *Baby Driver* do not. There are memorable female characters in his movies — think Ramona Flowers, or Darling in *Baby Driver* — but for the most part his comfort zone has been stuffed with sausage. This is something that Wright was all too aware of; what's more, he knew that others had noticed it too. One day, even before *Empire* reader Leah Goddard asked him about the Bechdel Test, Wright got a text from Abbi Jacobson, the star of *Broad City*. She'd been

to a screening of *Baby Driver* and, the following day, enthusiastically texted a response to Wright. It read, "I really love your movies. And I have one suggestion: I'd love you to do the same thing, but with a female lead!" Wright laughs as he recalls his reply. "It's funny you should say that," he texted back. "I'm working on it."

And he was. He was finally ready to pick The Next Edgar Wright Film. And he chose *Last Night In Soho*, a movie that would take him — and audiences — somewhere new. "You want to be able to tell stories outside your comfort area," he adds. "In a perfect world, every project should push you in areas you've never tackled. You have to move into areas that are challenging, or that make you feel uncomfortable. And I thought there was a way of changing the perspective of some of the movies that I loved growing up, and finding a way to make a movie in a psychological thriller genre, where you could tell it through a female perspective."

The result of this desire is a genre-defying, time-travelling, disturbing thriller that dispenses with the comedy of his earlier work in favour of a jolting, unsettling nightmare. There's a nary a Pegg or a punchline in sight, and not one, but two female leads. Needless to say, Bechdel is passed within the first two minutes. With flying colours.

Like *Baby Driver*, which took years to get to the starting grid, *Last Night In Soho* was an idea that had been noodling around in that non-stop noggin of his for quite some time. In 2007, he first started putting together a playlist of songs for something he initially called "The Soho Project" (and, later, borrowing from that playlist, "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes", before settling on the title of a Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich song). It was a deeply personal idea derived from his own experiences living and working in Soho, that insalubrious slab of real estate that runs



roughly through London's West End. Forget New York — London is the city that never sleeps. And Wright felt that there was a story to be mined from that moment when the workaday hustle and bustle recedes and the darker, seamier, seedier side emerges.

"I moved to London in 1994," he says. "But it's only in the last four years that I've actually lived in central London. It's a very strange place. The heart of show business and the media district is hand in hand with a much darker world in plain sight. I'm always struck by the fact that, as fun as that area is, after midnight, things start to change. You feel the energy change immediately."

So, like an inverse *Hot Fuzz*, which saw a big-city cop head to the countryside, *Last*



**Clockwise from  
main:** Anya  
Taylor-Joy preps  
for a performance;  
Eloise (Thomasin  
McKenzie) tries to  
unravel a mystery  
from the past; Director  
Edgar Wright talks  
tactics with  
Tavense Stump  
on the streets  
of Soho.



*Night In Soho* follows Eloïse (Thomasin McKenzie), a young fashion student with stars in her eyes and dreams in her head, who swaps life in a sleepy Cornish town for the bright lights of London. There, while struggling to fit in at fashion school, she finds that her unique gift — she has a sixth sense, and can see spirits — somehow forms a bridge to the Swinging Sixties, and an unshakable bond with Sandy (Anya Taylor-Joy), a young girl who arrives in the city with similar dreams of stardom (albeit as a singer).

In a way, it's an echo of the journey Wright himself undertook when he left the tiny city of Wells in Somerset and headed for *The Big Smoke*. What happens next to Eloïse, though, is very different from Wright's experiences, and is a dark, dangerous and — this being an Edgar Wright film — deeply stylish descent into madness, as the '60s and the modern day begin to overlap with terrifying consequences. "If I have some recurring fantasy, it's always about time travel," says Wright. "It's a bit of a cautionary tale of nostalgia. It's about the dangers of romanticising the past. *Last Night In Soho* is really about that idea of, 'Be careful what you wish for.'"

That's a theme that runs all the way through the movie. The night that Wright was introduced to co-writer Krysty Wilson-Cairns, following a

recommendation from her 2017 writing partner Sam Mendes, seems significant in that regard. It was 24 June 2016, and there's a reason they can pinpoint this with such accuracy — the historic vote that had taken place the day before. "It was the night of Brexit," remembers Wilson-Cairns. "And we were lamenting the fact that Brexit had happened." That turned into the two embarking on a whirlwind tour of Soho, during which he told her the story that had been forming in his head, and then, just a few weeks later, an offer to write the screenplay together.

And even though that story was something Wright had been chipping away at for a while, and certainly before Brexit, the shifting of the political landscape over the last few years also seem to very much chime with the themes that drive *Last Night In Soho*. This is a movie that charts what happens when rose-tinted yearning for a bygone era of sunlit uplands crashes into the harsh reality of what that period was actually like.

And so Eloïse — who is infatuated with the '60s — begins to see that there's a darker, grimmer, and maybe even murderous heart just beneath the flawless skin, as she watches, seemingly helpless, as Sandy gets involved with Jack (Matt Smith), a roguish but charming promoter who may or may not have an unscrupulous side. It's here where it becomes clear that Wright also

wants to explore some tough themes.

It's a movie — at least partially — about toxic masculinity, trauma, abuse, grief, and the manipulation of women. Wright points out that he was working on the movie before the rise of *Me Too* and *Times Up*, but there's an undeniable and powerful current running through the movie. "It's about the exploitation of women," agrees Wilson-Cairns. "And the exploitation of any marginalised group, really. I don't think people talk about it enough. I don't think we see it on screen enough and I don't think we understand the full implications of it enough. And I think we need to talk about it in fiction, because that's how people begin to grapple with stuff that's not directly connected to them. So it couldn't not be a theme, because we're talking about the '60s, and it was rife."

By way of explanation, Wright proffers an anecdote about the time Dame Diana Rigg, one of Terence Stamp and Rita Tushingham, asked to take a tour of the Café De Paris set that had been meticulously recreated on a soundstage at Leavesden Studios. (The film was Rigg's last; it begins with a title card dedicated to her.) "Diana said, 'Oh, I went to the Café De Paris on my 18th birthday to see Shirley Bassey,'" Wright recalls. "So it's a Saturday and it's an empty soundstage and





Clockwise from here: Matt Smith as man-about-town Jack; Taylor-Joy and McKenzie chat in the shadows; McKenzie enjoys a milkshake as Stamp broods. Below, top to bottom: Ekise with Ajan; Stamp — debonair as ever.



I'm walking Dame Diana Rigg on my arm to the Café De Paris. She looks around and goes, 'It's very good.' And then there's a pause and she says, 'I remember being walking down the stairs, and I remember lots of rheumy-eyed men looking me up and down, and feeling like a piece of meat.' In that recollection of everything that was great about the '60s, very quickly the darker side of it bubbled to the surface. And I was thinking, 'Well, that's the whole movie.'"



When *Empire* visited the set of *Last Night In Soho*, there was little evidence of that darkness. It was a slightly muggy evening in July 2019 and we had come to the Empire (cinema, that is) in Haymarket to watch Wright and co at work. If anyone on the production had been trying to keep the 1960s cat in the bag, it was clearly too late now. Because on that night, 2019 London had given way to a big old blast from the past, in the form of a huge marquee for *Thunderball*, resplendent above a recreation of the entrance to the Café De Paris.

It's here where *Empire* watched McKenzie's Eloise take her first steps into the '60s, emerging from a nearby alley into the dazzling, disorientating lights of another era. Time, and timing, was everything. The production had got the all-clear from Westminster Council to shut down all three lanes of traffic, but

# MIRROR MIRROR

OTHER MOVIES THAT HAVE USED REFLECTIVE GLASS TO OUTSTANDING EFFECT



## DUCK SOUP (1933)

Harpo, disguised as Groucho, breaks a full-size mirror — and then poses as Groucho's reflection. Groucho tries to catch Harpo out in the imposture, but his 'reflection' predicts and matches his every move.



## ORPHÉE (1950)

In Jean Cocteau's reimaging of the myth of Orpheus, Jean Marais enters the underworld by putting on rubber gloves that enable him to walk through a mirror.



## DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES (1967)

Two monster hunters, disguised as vampires, infiltrate the Count's party to rescue Sharon Tate — but are exposed when everyone dances towards a huge mirror and only three have reflections.



## POLTERGEIST III (1988)

An anthology of mirror-effects trickery — most startlingly when the haunted girl looks out of a high-rise window and sees nothing, but her reflection in the mirror behind her is tormented by a floating spectre.

KIM NEWMAN



**Clockwise from left:** Stargp takes a breather on set; Elise ascends a spooky, shadowy staircase — eek!; Darro Davis Pigg in what would be her final movie role; Taylor-Joy in full '60s starlet mode as Sandy; Edgar Wright looks through the dillos with Taylor-Joy and Smith.

could only shut down the third lane for two minutes at a time, and no more than four times per hour. So when Wright called, "Action!", everything had to be executed to the nth degree as McKenzie — listening to Cilla Black's 'You're My World' on a hidden earpiece — walked into the traffic (the cars stopped miraculously for her; this is both a dream and a movie, after all) and gazed in awe at the world she'd somehow gatecrashed. "That was overwhelming," she says now. "I remember having to get the timing so I didn't get run down by a car!"

And, as all this unfolded, across the street, wedged between barriers, were crowds of onlookers, rubbernecking their hearts out. And modern shops. And buses and cars, impatiently waiting for the green light to begin rumbling through once again. In many ways, this was the movie in microcosm. Glitz and glamour at the centre, with harsh reality on the periphery, ready to impinge upon everything. Bruce Springsteen sang of darkness on the edge of town. Here is darkness on the edge of frame, ready to seep into everything, corrupting, condemning. In a later scene, the gusto with which Matt Smith's Jack sweeps Amy Taylor-Joy's Sandy off her feet and into his sports car is a far cry from what will follow. "It really was extraordinary," says Taylor-Joy. "I think one of the first things that really intrigued me about it was being able to unpack all the different layers of history that places hold, and how strong that impact can be."

Later that night, with filming complete at Haymarket, Wright and his crew — including director of photography Chung Chung-hoon — would race to another location just off Brewer Street, right at the top of what used to be Paul Raymond's Revebar, to capture another sequence, this one set in the modern day. That makes it abundantly clear, in case the title didn't already do so, that this isn't a film about ticking off tourist destinations. This is a film whose camera will swoop and stalk down Soho's dingier passages, aiming to capture London as it's rarely been captured in cinema. "There's a bit in the movie where Thomas sees a bit of architecture in a dream and then is confronted with the real building," says Wright. "And that came from that thing they



always say about London. 'If you're walking around London, always look up.' Because if you're only looking at ground level, you're not seeing the original architecture. And that was sort of the start of the idea for this — Soho is so steeped in history, and all of those buildings have stories to tell."

And some of those stories are soaked in blood. "You can tell that Edgar understands the rhythm and the weird madness of Soho," says Matt Smith. Like the film's attitude to the '60s, reverential but at a remove, *Last Night In Soho* is a love letter to London, but a love letter that's been tied to a brick and thrown through your window.

**W**hen Wright first spoke about the film — in the pages of this magazine back in January 2019 — he described it as a "psychological horror". But even then, you could sense some caution about the use of the H-word. Not because Wright is reluctant to embrace horror — far from it; in fact, aspects of horror are scattered throughout his filmography — but because he was afraid of what might happen when that word got mentioned. To an extent, he was right. Even the title set imaginations sparking, dreaming up

a grand, and Grand Guignol, Edgar Wright thriller-ride. A slasher movie, perhaps, in which young girls are stalked around Soho by a masked killer, and with enough murder murder murder to keep Nicholas Angel busy for a week.

The reality is very different. "I don't think I ever promised anybody that it was a full-on horror," he says. "I never necessarily intended it to be a full-on horror movie. I would call it a psychological thriller, because you're not necessarily sure of the reality of what you're seeing."

Psychological thriller alone doesn't even begin to cover it. Without giving anything away, *Last Night In Soho* is not the movie you think it might be. It's weirder, trippier, more emotional. It's unquestionably an Edgar Wright film, with entire sequences, such as a freaky descent into a sordid chamber of horrors, psychological, sexual and psycho-sexual, all done in one shot; or a dance sequence in which Smith switches partners between Taylor-Joy and McKenzie at dizzying speed. And there are certainly elements of outright horror, including some images that will fuel your nightmares for some considerable time to come. But it's not 'Fear Street Part Four: 1965'. It's not 'Repulsion Part II: Even More Repulsed'. It's not 'Friday The 13th On Frith



Street, Just Outside The Nando's. ("I love Nando's," laughs Taylor-Joy. "The halloumi sticks are pretty solid!") It's very much its own beast.

And as the result of Wright's decision to test himself, and navigate the choppy waters outside his own comfort area, what it is, ultimately, is a character drama, depicting a very unusual relationship between two remarkably similar but absolutely distinct women, separated by nearly 60 years and yet somehow joined at the metaphorical hip. "Thomassin and I had an instant sister connection," says Taylor-Joy, who was Wright's original choice to play Eloise before he decided to cast the younger McKenzie. "Which was really useful, because it kind of is a dual performance. We were incredibly protective of each other, which was cool, because the characters themselves have this bizarre protectiveness that spans across the waves of time."

In many of the scenes featuring the two, Eloise is the figure we see when Sandy looks in the mirror (and there are a lot of mirrors in this movie), *Quantum Leap*-style. Wright did those scenes for real on set, with the actors having to mirror—literally and figuratively—each other's movements. "It felt so nurturing," adds Taylor-Joy. "I couldn't move unless she moved. That gave

us a lovely sense of creating something together."

That sense of sisterhood, and the creation of well-rounded female characters, is the result of months honing the script with Wilson-Cairns. "You never go in and say, 'We want to write great female roles to pass the Bechdel Test,'" she says. "To tell this story, it was important to have two strong female characters. It was more important to tell the story correctly and develop interesting characters rather than write women for the sake of it. I wouldn't have been involved in that. But I admire Edgar for saying, 'You know what? I'm going to take on this challenge.'"

And it may yet prompt Wright into further uncharted waters, to take on further challenges. He's currently attached to adaptations of several novels, including Adrian McKinty's bestselling thriller *The Chain*, a mooted remake of *The Running Man*, *Baby Driver 2*, and more. If he's having trouble making up his mind, he could always shoot Abbi Jacobson a text. "I actually sent her the trailer of the movie the other day," he laughs. "I said, 'I took your advice!'" She should send him texts more often. The fate of *The Next Edgar Wright Film* could well depend upon them. ●

LAST NIGHT IN SHOW IS IN CINEMA FROM 20 OCTOBER

THE

# WRITERS

TALE

FROM PULLING PINTS IN SOHO TO OSCAR NOMINATIONS AND STAR WARS, **KRYSTY WILSON-CAIRNS'** ASCENT HAS BEEN AS ACTION-PACKED AS HER SCRIPTS. THE LAST NIGHT IN SOHO CO-WRITER TALKS US THROUGH HER UNLIKELY STORY

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT / PORTRAIT BY SPHELIA WYKIE





Krysty Wilson-Calma,  
photographed  
exclusively for Empire  
at The Toucan in  
Soho, London, on  
4 August 2021.



"KRISTY WILSON-CAIRNS trained at the National Film and Television School, London. She loves screenwriting, storytelling and writing about herself in the third person."

Not our words, readers, but the words of Krysty Wilson-Cairns' mini-biography on the IMDb. And if the crack about writing about herself in the third person wasn't already a strong hint, what comes next — references to "her Mother's gin" and "why the dog is wearing a polo neck" — seems to suggest that the bio was, in fact, written by Krysty Wilson-Cairns herself. "When I was at film school," she says, with a wince and a laugh, "you had to write a bio, and I thought, 'This is absolutely fine. It's not like I'm gonna be nominated for an Oscar or anything.'"

Others in her position might by now have taken it down, but why should she? After all, it's all true. Krysty Wilson-Cairns does love screenwriting, and storytelling, and writing about herself in the third person. (Although Krysty Wilson-Cairns did not write this article.) But the thing about her bio is that it stops with a declaration that "Krysty has just finished her first feature, *Prophecy*, a high-concept black comedy, and has two shorts in post production."

It stops, in short, just as the going gets good. Or, more accurately, really good. It stops before she gets nominated for an Oscar for her first produced screenplay. It stops before she co-writes one of this year's most anticipated films. It stops before she bags a gig working on a *Star Wars* movie. It stops just before the 34-year-old Scot becomes one of the hottest screenwriters in the world. There are a lot of blanks to fill in, and given that Wilson-Cairns admits that, "I probably don't know my password," it's up to *Empire*. Let's begin.

Krysty Wilson-Cairns didn't love screenwriting or storytelling. Not for the longest time, in fact. It wasn't that she didn't love movies. She did. Growing up in Glasgow, where she lived with her mum and her grandparents, movies were huge for her. "We didn't have a lot of money," she

says, relaxing on a sofa in her new offices in Soho. "We weren't driving through to Edinburgh to see the theatre. It was cinema cinema cinema, at least once a week to the Odeon in Renfield Street. I had a Global Video membership card. I can still remember the membership number: 793."

She inhaled movies, anything she could get her hands on. Arthouse movies came later, so she developed a worrying obsession with *Police Academy*; so much so that her local video store gave her free a copy of the inferior sequel, *Police Academy 2: Their First Assignment*. "I was like, 'The promised land!'" she laughs. "To me, films are total escapism. I loved that growing up. I didn't have anything to escape from, but growing up in the south side of Glasgow was not that interesting, compared to a *Mission To Moscow*."

For all that, though, the idea of screenwriting didn't occur to her for many years. "I'm quite dyslexic," she says. "I can't spell to save my life. My mum, and my business partner, and my boyfriend spellcheck all my work. I was terrible at English at school. I was a maths brain, which is why I was gonna do engineering."

Two things intervened, and changed the flow of Wilson-Cairns' river. Naturally, those two things were *Charlie's Angels* and *Taggart*. It was while watching McG's 2000 masterwork, *Charlie's Angels*, that the teenage Wilson-Cairns had an epiphany, as she watched Lucy Liu, Drew Barrymore and Cameron Diaz soap themselves up to wash a car. "I was utterly taken by that," she laughs. "They were having so much fun, and either I wanted to be a *Charlie's Angel*, or I wanted to work in films." With *Charlie's Angel* quickly crossed off the list, due to the fact that they don't exist ("That we know of," cautions Wilson-Cairns), filmmaking it was. Which is where *Taggart* comes in.

With a burning desire to stick her foot through the door of the film industry, but no idea where any such doors might be found, Wilson-Cairns lucked out when she heard that the long-running ITV detective drama was shooting nearby. So she wandered over. Wandered onto the set. Wandered around. Wandered up to people and, with an admirable lack of guile, and



Clockwise from here: Krysty Wilson-Cairns in Soho; Welsh actor Eddi Winter on the set of *Last Night in Soho*, which she cowrote with Wright; Angel Rodriguez and Matt Smith in the film



not knowing any better, just started asking them questions about what they were doing, and why. "And I went back, day after day. It was like summer holidays." Eventually, someone decided to reward her moxie and make it official. So she became a runner, then a runner-driver. And then real life beckoned, in the form of an engineering degree. A fork in the road. Wilson-Cairns was expected to go left. She went right instead, doing a degree in digital film and television at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. And it was there that she discovered foreign cinema, a tutor called Richard Smith, and a course in screenwriting: "The definitive course of my life." A simple writing exercise, which tasked Wilson-Cairns with coming up with a short story, saw her lose the best part of a day to a story about two murderous guinea pigs. "I sat down to do it on a Sunday morning, and it was like time travel," she recalls. "When I finished it was five o'clock, and I'd had such a fun day. I would get such a kick out of writing something and getting a reaction from people, making them laugh or making them scared or making them cry. I thought, 'What power is this? And you can do it in your pyjamas?'"

Smith saw enough raw promise in Wilson-Cairns' writing to encourage her to branch out into screenwriting, setting her various tasks to hone her new skillset. "Write me a one-scene bank heist, write me this, write me that," she says. "I became completely obsessed with it." After graduation, she decided she needed to study further, and so headed off to the NFTS, and the bright lights of London.

**K**irsty Wilson-Cairns loves to write. In a way, she might be making up for lost time. But a day without writing is a day wasted, as far as she's concerned. "I like to work loads," she says. "I feel very uncomfortable on holiday." After moving to London, where she lived above a strip club on Dean Street ("It was noisy, but cheap and it had a roof terrace. We had fantastic parties"), she turned that unrelenting desire into a crash course in



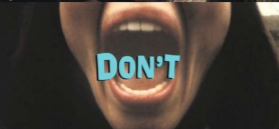
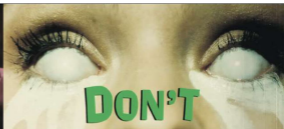
Clockwise from here:  
Outside the famed  
Raymond Reubar;  
With Sam Mendes on  
the set of *1917*, a movie  
for which they received  
a Best Screenplay  
Oscar nomination;  
George Mackay as  
Lance Corporal  
Schiefel in the film.





# HORROR

IT LASTS 93 SECONDS AND IS A TRAILER FOR SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T EXIST, YET THE GORY, CAMEO-PACKED **DON'T** IS AS INVENTIVE AS EDGAR WRIGHT'S ACTUAL FILMS. WE DIVE DEEP INTO THE MADNESS



**SHOW** →

WORDS: ALEX GOOPREY

# G

**A DEMONIC, MURDEROUS** bride. A mad, murderous cannibal. A maniaced, probably murderous man-baby. And half of the British film industry having the time of their lives. It's hard to think of another piece of cinema that is so unashamedly affectionate for 1970s horror films while also being so damn funny. Certainly in 93 seconds. Edgar Wright's *Don't* is a mini-miracle.

Wright was in Los Angeles in 2005 when Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, both *Show Us The Dead* fans, told him about their planned *Grindhouse* double-bill, inviting him to make one of the fake trailers for the intermission. The idea came to him quickly. In the 1970s, when US film distributor American International Pictures would buy the rights to European horrors, they'd promote them with trailers that offered no semblance of plot, removing all dialogue to disguise the fact that a film might not be in the English language, and gave them grabby titles. Jorge Grau's zombie epic *No Profanar El Sueño De Los Muertos* (Do Not Speak Ill Of The Dead), for instance, became *Don't Open The Window*. "What's funny about that," says Wright, "is that it's not like there's a big window scene in the movie. So, I thought it would be funny to make an American trailer for a Euro horror film, and just strip it right down to *Don't*." The mini-opus was on.

In early 2007, with Wright editing *Hot Fuzz*, he brought many of the same crew together for *Don't*. He wanted to "throw in the kitchen sink of everything that's ever been in a horror film. And I had this idea for every set-up to have a different actor," Stuart Conran, who did the incredible prosthetics for it, sums it up with a rundown of his work. "I did the make-up on Michael Smiley, making him pretty unrecognisable as a mad axeman," he says. "I did the letters carved into Bafe Spall's chest. I did the best split open. Hands bleeding milk. Matthew Macfadyen pulls his eyes out. Peter Serafinowicz, a scar up his chest as though he's been experimented on. And a trio of cannibalistic crazies. It was a lot to build in a fairly short space of time."

With the cast, "It was about finding types of people that I knew would be really up for it," says Wright. "I knew Mark Gatiss would be up for it." Gatiss laughs hearing this. "Absolutely correct," he grins. "It just made me so excited." Wright



Left, top to bottom: Mark Gatiss, Jeremy Isaacs and Georgina Chapman, channeling those '70s Bitch-honor vibes; Lucy Punch checks out the basement; Lee Ingleby reaches for the door — as Katie Melua and Nylahra flung look on; Simon Pegg's cannibal's really got the hairy; (l-r) Bum, baby, bum! Below: Prosthetics supreme Stuart Conran.

wanted him to play a take on Roddy McDowall's look from 1973 British horror *The Legend Of Hell House*. It was in Gatiss's "wheelhouse." "There's just something in that *Legend Of Hell House*, madhouse, fog end of the British film industry area that's so attractive," he says.

Nick Frost, meanwhile, would play a man-baby in a basement, surrounded by baby dolls. Frost named him Little Arthur. "Edgar wanted me to wear a nappy, and these big glasses," says Frost. "And to appear as if I'd smeared human shit all over myself. I knew Little Arthur. I just wanted him to be a really shortsighted, shit-eating baby. You don't want to get too close because he's tremendously powerful. He's like an adult chimpanzee. And he has a taste for human babies."

Jason Isaacs was brought on — he'd been offered a role in *Hot Fuzz* and was devastated that he couldn't do it. "So when I got a phone call from Edgar saying, 'Do you want to do this?,' I went, 'Yes!' Not thinking it would be only eight seconds. But I was absolutely thrilled to be asked; I would have gone just to make the coffee." The singer Katie Melua is in it because, says Wright, "in a lot of films of that period there'd be a pop star or a children's TV presenter that you were surprised to see in something like that. You wouldn't expect to see Katie Melua in a horror film. She was totally up for getting kind of drenched in blood."

It was a two-and-a-half-day shoot, the myriad set-ups making for a revolving door of actors. "The great thing about it was that these actors would cycle in and cycle out," says Wright. Some quicker than others. Pegg, unrecognisable as a hirsute cannibal, spent three hours in



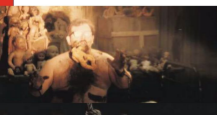
make-up for a single shot of film. "I'm proud to be Edgar's Bruce Campbell," he says.

The locations — two separate mansions — hardly needed dressing, says production designer Marcus Rowland: "We took the best bits of what was there and ran with it." That wasn't quite the case with Little Arthur's basement, which Rowland decided to fill with baby dolls, its walls decorated with human excrement. "Yeah, that's quite disturbing, isn't it?" he laughs. Frost got a kick out of playing the lunatic. "Honestly, it's probably one of the things that I'm most proud of," says the actor. "I loved him as a character. I think he had legs. Not the ones he was eating. I think there's somewhere for him to go."

Everybody was in hog heaven. "It was so thrilling to be dressing up and playing at it, even for a day," beams Gatiss. "I hung around as much as I could, because it was a party," says Isaacs. "Edgar was jumping up and down with glee. He was like a directing goblin. He was having such a good time." He was, says Wright, "It was one of the most fun things I've ever shot."



**Clockwise from left:** The eyes have it; Michael Stenley as Minister Simon Pegg, after three hours in make-up; That's gotta hurt; Peter Serafinowicz; Nick Frost (left) as man-baby Little Arthur; The night hurt a tad; Rufus Spall — just hanging around; Minister, just doing what he does best. You wish!



organ fugue thing with guitars and drums. Utterly pretentious. In those days those trailers were never scored, they just used to get a piece of music and slop it on. There's something so low-rent about the way those things were put together. Like a bad DJ at a gothic nightclub." And just as Wright had kicked the film around a car park, Arnold treated the music with similar disrespect. "I degraded the final stereo master where it feels like the tape is ever so slightly speeding up and slowing down, like a slightly dodgy reel," he says. "The sound of mechanical failure. As well as spiritual failure."

Given all of this attention to detail, Wright was understandably taken aback when, attending Grindhouse's Los Angeles premiere with Tarantino, Rodriguez and many of the *Don 7* cast, he discovered as *Don 7* screened that Rodriguez had removed some frames himself to push the point home. Pegg's single shot had been reduced to a barely visible couple of frames. "Simon turns to me and says, 'You cut out my shot — what the hell, man?'" remembers Wright. "And I said, 'I don't know what happened.' It was only then I realised that Robert had edited it." Pegg wasn't happy. "I was a bit pissed off, to be honest, with Mr Rodriguez," he admits. Amends were made... ish. "He sent my daughter a *Spy Kids* box set so he's off the hook," laughs Pegg. Wright asked Rodriguez to promise to restore it all for the DVD release.

But more horror befell *Don 7*: in the US, Grindhouse tanked, leading it to be released in the UK as two separate features, with *Don 7* nowhere to be seen. "I was really bummed out that *Don 7* didn't make it to UK cinemas," says Wright (it has only been screened on rare occasions). "But maybe it's like a lot of horror films at the time that grow in legend because of their unavailability. Maybe *Don 7* has become exactly the film that it was destined to be." On Blu-ray and YouTube, it lives on.

And then there was the talk of it becoming a full feature. "On set I remember Edgar saying, 'Why don't we make this film, why are we just doing this?'" laughs Gatiss. "But there's something very beautiful about the brevity of it." Frost has his own ideas. Namely, a Little Arthur spin-off. "I love the fact that someone has to get his glasses," he says. "At some point he has to go to Specsavers, and they have to take him there. That's the film *I'd* like to see."

Neither, alas, are likely. So if you're waiting for Wright to expand it into a full-length feature, maybe just... don't. ●

**W**right edited *Don 7* himself, and for added authenticity inserted "weird splices — it's got slightly jumpy editing as if frames have been cut out. And then we took it into the car park and kicked it around so it was really dirty. It's got pops all over it." For the voiceover he brought out the big guns: Will Arnett. "I remember trying to catch my breath on it," says Arnett, "because of all the 'Don't, don't, don't.' There were so many, we did it in real time and I had to take so many breaths. I ended up getting the hiccups. I was like, 'Oh, that's new...'" Wright cracked up at how Arnett delivered the final, speedy, "Don't. Rated R" at the end. "Good. My goal the whole time was to make him laugh," says Arnett. "I wanted it to be good but also absurd. It was fun, to the point that it gave me hiccups."

Having worked with him on *Hot Fuzz*, Wright hired David Arnold to score it and referenced the Italian band Goblin, responsible for many Argento soundtracks. Arnold knew the milieu, creating "a prog rock, self-important sub-Bach



MAKING A

# SCENE

FROM MUSICAL DOG BARKS TO GUEST-STAR PILE-UPS, EDGAR WRIGHT SEQUENCES ARE ALWAYS FULL OF SURPRISES. CAST AND CREW FROM THREE OF OUR FAVOURITES SHARE THEIR MAKING-OF STORIES

# THE DOPPELGANG

## SHAUN OF THE DEAD (2004)

WORDS: CHRIS HEMMIT



**Far left:** Yvonne's gang: Jessica Hynes, Martin Freeman, Reece Shearsmith, Tarrin Grogg, Julia Deakin and Matt Lucas. **Left:** Shaun's gang (from left): Nick Frost, Penelope Winton, Lucy Davis, Dylan Moran, Kate Ashfield, Simon Pegg. **Above, top to bottom:** Shaun's gang on the prowl; A hug from Shaun (Pegg) for Yvonne (Hynes); Doppelgängers Ed (Frost) and Cousin Tom (Lucas).

**I**T LASTS ROUGHLY a minute and consists of only a handful of shots (and none of Edgar Wright's trademark visual wizardry), yet the moment in *Shaun Of The Dead* when Simon Pegg's hapless hero and his group of survivors round the corner and bump into another group is possibly the film's most ambitious gag. Mainly because the other gang is played by a who's who (then and now) of British comedy: Martin Freeman, Reece Shearsmith, Tamsin Grogg, Spaced mainstay Julia Deakin, Matt Lucas and, at the vanguard, Pegg's *Spaced* co-creator, Jessica Hynes. A finer cavalcade of cameos, you'll never see.

**Edgar Wright [co-writer/director]:** We used to call it *Shaun Of The Dead* Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern. You're watching one story and the idea is, "What if they bumped into another film?" **Simon Pegg [co-writer/Shaun]:** We just thought it'd be funny if Shaun met a bizarro version of his own group. And we immediately thought, "Well, let's try and cast people that are perceived as our counterparts, in a way." You know, me and Martin were always going out for the same roles.

**Kate Ashfield [Liz]:** I remember thinking, "I'm glad [my counterpart] is Martin Freeman, because I think he looks as intelligent as Liz. He looks like he could handle the situation."

**Reece Shearsmith [Mark]:** I did the very early read-through of *Shaun Of The Dead*. It wasn't definite, but they had me going that I was going to be David. Maybe I really was, because I ended up doing the crossover bit.

**Wright:** Reece had been one of the people to maybe play David. It's tough when your friends are in the running. But nobody should take things personally. It's just the way things shake out.

Dylan Moran was a really interesting choice for David. And I came back to Reece saying, "Hey, I know you didn't get this, but would you do this?"

**Pegg:** We filmed it all in North London, apart from the exterior of the Winchester.

**Nick Frost [Ed]:** It was Finchley. Maybe Hendon-y way as well.

**Shearsmith:** That day was in the back gardens of Finchley on this very rainy day. There are some pictures of us all under beillies, because it was pissing down and we had to keep stopping.

**Pegg:** It was a party. I remember we had someone's back garden as a green room/seating area. We all sat around on deck chairs in various combinations.

**Julia Deakin [Yvonne's mum]:** I felt very honoured to be among that group. I just turned up and somebody put me in an outfit I couldn't understand, which presumably was the same as Penny Wilton was wearing.

**Penelope Winton [Barbara]:** It was a very amusing concept. I got the joke, but didn't know everyone was going to be there on the day.

**Matt Lucas [Cousin Tom]:** We were filming *Little Britain* and there was one Sunday where we weren't filming. That was the day they filmed the doppelgänger scene. Edgar said, "Would you come and be Nick's doppelgänger?" I was thrilled.

**Wright:** His T-shirt says "I Heart Pussey". It was one of the potential T-shirts for Ed. And it's a picture of a cat.

**Frost:** I didn't get to speak to Matt Lucas a lot. I was fucking nervous and didn't really talk to anyone.

**Lucas:** I was very happy because I wore a wig. I remember thinking it looked like Ben Folds' hair.

**Frost:** It's a bad wig Matt's got.

**Lucas:** We had just filmed some Lou and Andy sketches and I remember telling Reece about that and doing the voice. I feel like me and Reece spent the day doing Andy from *Little Britain*.

**Shearsmith:** I think I was doing Pam Doove to his Andy. There were a lot of stupid things going on.

**Lucy Davis [Dianne]:** My main memory is trying not to laugh. But it's such an economical scene. That's what makes the best comedy work.

**Pegg:** We wanted Jess [Hynes] to be in it.

**Wright:** Originally, we had written Diane for Jessica. She didn't really want to play that part. Maybe she thought it was too on-the-nose for her, or she didn't want to be in support to Simon after *Spaced*, which I totally understood.

**Pegg:** We asked, "Will you do a cameo?" We wrote Yvonne specifically with that in mind. She carries so much weight because of the shared history we have. That moment has an extra layer of poignancy.

**Jessica Hynes [Yvonne]:** Of course it had a layer of poignancy, and I was fully aware of that. But I always had an off-the-scale amount of fun working with Simon and Edgar. They're like joyful children.

**Wright:** There's even fan art—a great poster I have on my wall in my house, with a split of *Shaun Of The Dead* and then an upside down "Yvonne Of The Dead", so you can have it both ways.

**Hynes [laughing]:** I did it on the explicit understanding that there would be an "Yvonne Of The Dead". It never happened. When are we shooting it? Everyone keeps asking. Maybe it's time.

**Shearsmith:** It's been a lovely thing to have over the years. It's so blink-and-you'll-miss-it that people are finding it even now.

**Lucas:** One of things Edgar did was, whenever he showed it to someone like Tarantino, he would always say, "Oh, you got a laugh from Quentin!" He didn't need to do that.

**Wright:** That was one of the more fun days, because suddenly you got ten very funny actors on set together. It was just sweet and funny.



## THE VEGAN POLICE

### SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD (2010)

WORDS: ELIZABETH AUBREY

**I**N A FILM full of gloriously surreal moments, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World's* vegan-police scene might well outdo all else. After an epic showdown with evil ex and professed vegan Todd Ingram (Brandon Routh), Scott (Michael Cera) tricks him into sipping a coffee with half-and-half; cue the arrival of the VPD (Thomas Jane and Clifton Collins Jr.), bursting through a wall, wielding neon-green finger laser guns and arresting Todd for infraction of vegan code 827. This is not how combat sequences are generally resolved in a Hollywood film.

**Edgar Wright [co-writer/director]:** The scene was always in the script. The idea was to cast two well-known actors in that part, but who were more from an action or crime background, not specifically comedy actors.

**Michael Cera [Scott Pilgrim]:** I remember Thomas and Clifton arrived and those two really changed the energy of that scene entirely. They brought it to life immediately. I love just how silly the scene is.

**Thomas Jane [Vegan Police]:** We were parachuted in to create these characters for a brief moment. I suppose that's something of the brilliance of Edgar, to be able to put human beings together in the right place at the right time. It worked perfectly.

**Wright:** Thomas and Clifton were a little older than the main cast. It feels like they've come from another movie and that was sort of the idea.

**Brandon Routh [Todd Ingram]:** I think it was just a couple days to shoot the whole thing. It was very quick.

**Cera:** Thomas and Clifton had really rehearsed beforehand; they were a little team. They were very clear in what they were doing.

**Jane:** We knew we needed to catch a '70s-cop-show vibe; we channelled those.

**Clifton Collins Jr [Vegan Police]:** He's correct. If you look at my hair, there is a slight hint of '70s feathering. The beaded necklace thing I wore was something else: I'd never heard of or seen a necklace made out of macadamia nuts before.

**Routh:** I knew from Edgar's track record on his films and *Sparrow* that he has such a great ability to do the outlandish, but have it still be grounded enough that this scene wasn't going to jump the shark. We all knew it would work.

**Cera:** I mean, the whole sequence plays like a Bugs Bunny scene. I do this very Bugs Bunny-like milk switch and double bluff thing. It's completely cartoonish.

**Collins Jr:** I loved the laser guns. The lasers were added later; you had to visualise it in your mind. We both had to keep the same eyeline exactly or else it wouldn't work. It was a Charlie



**Clockwise from left:** Thomas Jane and Clifton Collins Jr. bust a 'half-and-half' coffee-drinking Todd (Brandon Routh); Neon-green finger lasers at the ready; Ervy Adams (Brie Larson) looks on; Michael Cera as the titular Scott; Channeling their inner Charles Bronson to great effect.



Bronson *Death Wish* moment where you just go, "Pew, pew!"

**Wright:** The slow-motion high-five wasn't in the script. That's the bit that most people remember. After Michael headbutts Brandon, it felt a bit weird going straight back into real motion.

**Collins Jr.:** The high five was the longest take. I remember plenty of times getting hit in the face.

**Wright:** It's always something that gets a massive laugh.

**Collins Jr.:** Edgar wanted the cool factor of it being like a shorthand with your partner, like just another day at work. It was hard to pull off. It was hilarious how many times we missed each other.

**Routh:** I love Michael just sitting on the floor, sipping the coffee and the contrast of me freaking out. I love the audacity of the vegan police busting through the doors and barking at Todd and his complete innocence. I think he

understood that chicken wasn't vegan, but gelato, maybe he wasn't sure about.

**Jane:** "It's milk and eggs, bitch!" is one of those lines you don't forget in a hurry.

**Cera:** The "ve-gone" line is probably the cheesiest line in the whole movie. No pun intended.

**Wright:** Brandon was still on a retainer for Superman and he had to stay in shape. I remember there was one bit where we were filming and Brandon said, "How long is this shot going to take to set up?" I said, "Twenty minutes," and he goes, "Oh good, because I have to go and eat a whole chicken."

**Cera:** Brandon was eating a lot of protein. We all went out to dinner: Brandon ordered some buffalo steak or bison. We were, like, "Wow. This guy is very serious about his protein."

**Routh:** I'm actually having a vegan shake today, a smoothie. I did eat quite a bit of vegan food

when filming in Toronto too. I dabbled, but I did not stay.

**Collins Jr.:** I've gone in and out of phases as a vegan.

**Jane:** I'm a die-hard meat-eater.

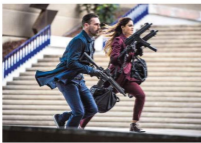
**Wright:** Thomas Jane was barefoot for most of the filming.

**Jane:** Shoes feel like prison for my feet, so yes, as often as I can, I don't wear shoes. I remember people were making fun of me.

**Wright:** We wrapped and Thomas left the set in his costume. He texted me and he said, "I'm going straight to the airport. If you cut me out of the film, I'll put it straight on eBay." He was sort of holding the costume to ransom!

**Jane:** I put it in my suitcase and flew home with it. I've never worn it, but I've still got it in my closet.

**Collins Jr.:** I'm so jealous. He got the T-shirt, I knew it. I didn't get one.



**Clockwise from left:** Darling (Eiza González) hangs tough; Baby (Ansel Elgort) nearly comes a cropper; Buddy (Jon Hamm) and Darling on the move; The crew sure earned their fee on this scene...



## BABY SPURTER

### BABY DRIVER (2017)

WORDS: NICK DE SIMILYEN

W

**E EXPECTED CAR** chaos in *Baby Driver*, and it delivered in spades. What we didn't expect was the mother of all footchases, with Baby (Ansel Elgort) forced

to hop out of his getaway vehicle and rev his legs instead. The subsequent sequence, as Baby flees from cops through a park, a shopping mall and a car park, is a five-minute sugar rush, all synced to a '70s tune by a Dutch rock band and an orchestra of sound effects. The team behind it remember putting together the high-speed pursuit.

**Edgar Wright [writer/director]:** The idea was to have, in what is ostensibly a car-chase movie, a really crucial action scene not be a car scene. Everything is starting to spiral out of control and it turns into a footrace.

**Julian Slater [sound designer/mixer]:** It's a bit of a left turn. You feel like you're settling into the pace of the movie, and then Edgar takes you on a 90-degree turn and sends you off on this journey.

**Paul Machliss [co-editor]:** It's a definite highlight of the film. I remember, way back in 2011 or 2012, Edgar saying, "Wouldn't it be great to have a running scene, dropping Focus in?"

**Wright:** I knew it was going to be Blur's 'Intermission' going into 'Hocus Pocus' by Focus. Later somebody pointed out to me, "Was it intentional to have Blur go into Focus?" I said, "Yes, it was!" [Laughs] "I'm going to claim that I meant to do that the whole time and I'm really clever."

**Steven Price [composer]:** When I was at college, a friend of mine had this radio show and we used to play 'Hocus Pocus' by Focus all the

time, because we liked saying, "Hocus Pocus" by Focus." But I love the track. There are so many funny bits in the scene, like when he's hiding and the track goes down to that little quirky accordion sort of thing.

**Machliss:** I am a big fan of that much-maligned genre, progressive rock. It was just so nice to get a track of that vintage, something unique even back in '73, and make a thing of it. You're off on this footchase through all these locations at breakneck speed, and I can't think of any other track now that would suit it better.

**Wright:** The studio were trying to cut days. And they always zeroed in on the footchase: "Can we not just go straight from the bank to the car park where it ends?" Eventually, I had to put my money where my mouth was and say, "Okay, I'm going to pay for the footchase days. And then, if the movie goes into profit, I want



to get paid back." I paid out of my fee two days of filming, which is not an insignificant amount of money. But, you know, that was how convinced I was that it was going to be the standout set-piece.

**Paul Darnell [parkour stunt double]:** I get hired a lot to do footchases for movies and TV shows. I doubled Paul Walker in *Fast Five*, on the favela rooftops. I got chased by Dwayne Johnson and Samuel L. Jackson in *The Other Guys*. *Baby Driver* took it to the next level. Jumping over a car that's coming at you? I'd never done that. And Ansel was super on par to do as much as he could do himself. We just got to play and experiment.

**Wright:** You've got this guy who's extremely precise as a driver, and now he's just out in the wild, flailing around, trying to figure out what to do and where to go. There's a lot of stuff going on in that scene that I'm really happy with.

**Darnell:** Baby does a kong vault over a desk. There's a lazy vault. And Ansel did the slide down the escalator, which Edgar actually tested out himself. That was pretty cool.

**Slater:** It's a highly choreographed footchase with a crazy amount of stunts and parkour. And then of course the sonic aspect of it. We amped it up to 11 with that footchase. The rap track that's happening in the thrift store is in sync with 'Hocus Pocus'. Even the dog barks as he's running through the park are working with the music. It was the culmination of everything we'd been working on in that movie.

**Price:** Every gunshot is in time with the track. And sometimes clusters of gunshots are working like musical phrases. Police sirens and car engines would be pitched — everything was drawing into the music.

**Jonathan Amos (co-editor):** With Edgar's work there's always a sense of the music being folded into the action at an early stage and influencing the edit. But nowhere near this level. This was like a maniacal level of puppeteering. It was like having all the shackles taken off. Just letting creativity run wild.

**Macliss:** The big thing was to have the footsteps land in the right time and make sure we had Baby running on the beat. I mean, it just demanded a supreme level of concentration.

**Darnell:** I was just blown away by how they pieced it together. We shot it over multiple months, and seeing how it all blended, it just made me smile. I was like, "Yes. Okay. I'm proud of this."

**Wright:** When the film was done, I was very happy that it was talked about as a standout moment. And eventually I got my money back! ●





# SOUND AND FURY

**EDGAR WRIGHT AND GEORGE MILLER ARE FILMMAKING TITANS WHO BOTH CONTINUALLY PUSH THE ENVELOPE. HERE, IN A WARM, FRANK CONVERSATION, THEY DISCUSS THEIR FRIENDSHIP AND HOW THEY CONTINUALLY INFLUENCE ONE ANOTHER** →

WORDS BY NEEB / ILLUSTRATION BY NATHAN WATTS



**FUN FACT:** WHEN Edgar Wright wants to test out a new home cinema set-up, he uses George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* to put it through its paces. "Even during a busy AV technician's working day, he can't not watch a whole 20-minute set-piece," says Wright. "I can think of no higher compliment." *Fury Road* was instrumental in forging Wright and Miller's friendship, the former hosting a Q&A with the latter, even giving him a lift in his Prius. "That was the first time I was in an electric car," recalls Miller. It's hard to imagine the man behind *Mad Max*'s V8 Interceptor and The War Rig in an eco-friendly Toyota.

Wright had discovered Miller's work through *Mad Max* on VHS ("It's amazing how films became legendary, just through their poster or the cover art on the box," says Wright) before watching *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* and *The Witches Of Eastwick* on a big screen. For his part, Miller first sampled the Wright stuff watching *Hot Fuzz*. "I remember the opening montage, the quick cutting," says Miller. "And feeling there was a unique tone. Edgar quickly became one of those filmmakers for me — I would go simply because it was Edgar Wright making the movie, no matter what it was."

But the pair are more than just filmmaking friends. When Wright was finishing up his 1960s-set psychological thriller *Last Night In Soho*, he invited Miller in to see early cuts, the Australian filmmaker watching various iterations and giving advice ("Minimal," he says modestly). It's no surprise, then, that when *Expire* invited Wright to pick a pal for an informal conversation, he turned to Miller. "I just wanted to thank George on record for being the person I could call on any hour of the day to watch five minutes and tell me if it works," he says. "I trust him implicitly as the best objective eye I could ever ask for to watch something." Our chat started with talk of their unique collaboration on *Soho*, which began at an unprecedented time.

**Edgar Wright:** Even though you weren't involved in the production of *Last Night In Soho*, I started thinking of you as my talisman because there's a weird thing that happened, which is I showed you the unfinished version of the movie on the last night before London lockdowns. We watched it at [production company] Working Title and then we went to Fischer's, a restaurant on Marylebone High Street. I remember our conversation was a) about the film and b) about the fact that the world was about to shut down.

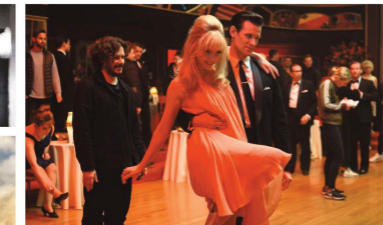


Left: Directors Edgar Wright and George Miller talk shop via the wonders of Zoom. Right, top to bottom: Trigger-happy in *Hot Fuzz*; *Mad Max: Fury Road* — Top Gear, eat your heart out!





**Clockwise from left:** Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron in George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*; Nick Frost and Simon Pegg (*Corsettes at the ready!*) in Edgar Wright's *Hot Fuzz*; Wright, Anya Taylor-Joy, and Matt Smith on the set of *Last Night in Soho*; On location for *Fury Road*.



It was very clear in my head because it was the last dinner I had in the *Before Times*. **George Miller:** Look, I've had one dinner since. And I'm gonna tell you something else, your film was the last time I watched anything in the cinema.

**Wright:** Oh, wow.

**Miller:** We left that night. Things were shut down by the time I got back to Australia. I haven't been to the movies since. So that screening has a special meaning for me. Of course, I've seen quite a bit on the home screen, including subsequent cuts of your film. I don't know if you remember but we were both coughing.

**Wright:** [Laughs] Yeah. And obviously, given that you are a real doctor [Miller was an Emergency Room doctor], I was very interested to see what you thought about what was about to happen. It was very vivid in my head because I got to have my last dinner before lockdown talking about my film with another film director, and talking about the pandemic with a real doctor.

**Miller:** Of course, we were delayed in Australia, with the film we were doing [Idris Elba-Tilda Swinton drama] *Three Thousand Years Of Longing*. Our AEs were talking to you guys about how you actually managed it.

**Wright:** A couple of days after I saw you, we had to fully shut down because we were about to do some additional filming. When movies started shooting again in the UK, it was with *Jurassic World* [Dominion] and us. People don't usually like talking about additional filming. I would say if it's studio mandated you use the word 'reshoot'. If it's directors, we'd call it 'additional filming.'

**Miller:** I admire filmmakers like Steven Spielberg who build additional shooting into the original plan. They shoot a maximum of three takes and they know that if they don't have it when the film comes together, they've got the option to clean it on the other end. It's a real question I have about takes. What's the sensible thing to do? Do you do a Stanley Kubrick or David Fincher and go up to 80 takes and maybe jettison the first 30 and get wonderfully precise movies? Or do you just do the one-take movie, like Clint Eastwood and Steven Spielberg, and then improve it if you need to later? I'd go in-between. What do you think?

**Wright:** I think I'd go in-between. The highest number of takes I've ever done might be in the 20s, if something on a technical level was going wrong. But usually it's between three and eight. I think a lot of people assume that directors are all about what something looks like. You're always trying to use the best take and sometimes there might be a take where the best performance



take has a focus issue or something. So, then you go to the VFX people and say, "Hey guys... we really like this take. Can we take information from the sharp one and put it in?" Using digital effects to create the perfect take, you can save things.

*One thing that emerged at the early Soho screening proved very significant for Miller. As the director watched Last Night In Soho, and in particular Anya Taylor-Joy as '60s wannabe singer Sandy, it sparked an idea about casting for an upcoming project: the lead in upcoming Fury Road prequel Furiosa.*

**Wright:** I had the *Soho* idea for over a decade. Then, in 2015, I was on the jury at Sundance, and I saw Anya in Robert Eggers' *The Witch*, which was her screen debut. And even without the screenplay, I thought she should be Eloise, the lead in *Soho*. So, I had a general [meeting] with her in Los Angeles. I don't think I necessarily was going to tell her about the movie, but I ended up pitching her the entire story. And she said, "Oh, wow, that sounds amazing, I would love to be a part of that." That's 2015. So what happened is that Sandy's part expanded and nearly three years later, I had seen Anya in a lot of other movies like *Split* and *Thoroughbreds*, and also saw her emerge as an amazing fashion icon on a red carpet, just seeing her in loads of different looks. And I started to think that maybe her doing Eloise was too on the nose.

**Miller:** I'd known about Anya but I'd never seen her in a film until I saw her in *Soho*. And I remember thinking, "Gee, she's interesting." I started to say to you, "I'm looking for someone to cast as Furiosa," and I barely got the sentence out before you said, "Don't go any further, she's great, she's gonna be huge. She's fantastic to work with." You were so emphatic about it. Do you remember?

**Wright:** I remember. I spoke to Anya and I knew what you guys were talking about. It was like [rubs hands in delight]. When the news came out I texted Anya with the *Deadline* headline saying, "Now the world knows." What's interesting is that I shot my movie before she did *The Queen's Gambit*. She left London to go to Berlin to do that show. It's been an amazing thing to see her just explode. We talked about that at Fischer's. And then my recollection is that you talked to her the next day?

**Miller:** Well, this is a strange world we live in. I've never met Anya in person. We've spoken many, many times now. No-one at the studio had seen your movie, no-one had seen *The Queen's Gambit*. I said to her, "I'd like you to do a very simple test, which is read something to camera." And it was the speech from *Network*. The "I'm mad as hell" speech. Apart from the brilliance of the writing, it's a piece that can be done to camera. It doesn't need an acting partner. Anya did one version, which was really good. Then I gave her just a couple of simple notes about intention and she just absolutely nailed [it]. I think it was done on an iPhone. I sent it to the studio. I explained why I thought she was right for the role. I said I was really happy to talk about it but it was so persuasive that we didn't need to talk. The studio said, "Tick."

*With Furiosa in mind, it would have been remiss to get the directors of the Mad Max movies and Baby Driver together and not talk vehicular action. We asked them about the secrets to a good car chase.*

**Miller:** Well, there is no point to it unless it's about the character progression in our knowledge of the character, or the interaction of the characters. The second thing is, it's all about the progression of the shots. It's like chord



From above, to bottom: The Mitches Of Eastwick; Director George Miller having fun in the Fury Road props department; Chelsea Theron on location, having just unleashed Furiosa's sonar.



Left: No, it's not the LAPD in hot pursuit — it's the car-chase sequence in Edgar Wright's *Baby Driver*. Below, top to bottom: Furiosa and her mighty Turbo Model 3 — sorry, War Rig. Edgar Wright and Chung Chung-hoon on the set of *Last Night In Soho*; Pegg and Frost in *Spacey*; Inevitable Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) and his War Boys, ready to unleash hell.



**Left:** Jamie Foxx — and a seriously cool jacket — as *Bats* in *Baby Driver*.  
**Below:** Edgar Wright with Jon Hamm on set.



is Jane Campion's *The Piano*. She sent about ten tiny little black-and-white photographs of the period. Then she asked me what I thought of the finished movie. I said, "I feel I've already seen it." Somehow the reading of it prompted by those images was very powerful.

**Wright:** Walter Hill is fantastic at making the action and screen directions vivid. *The Driver* script, that's the way to write an action scene. And then James Cameron and Tarantino are both really good at writing action, because you get the sense of propulsion, the snap. I often wonder what the script for *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* was like. What was the script for *2001* like? I've never read either of those screenplays, but I can't imagine that they're able to get the whole thing across.

*Talk turns back to Last Night In Soho. The night before a shoot, it's a Wright tradition to screen a film a) for good luck and b) to remind him of the direction he is going in. For Soho he screened Powell and Pressburger's 1947 nun-go-bastard masterpiece Black Narcissus. Soho shares not only Narcissus' lurid style, heightened emotions and a dream-like state, but also a sense of subterranean impulses bubbling beneath the surface.*

**Miller:** That film had a very big impact on me. There's way more to it than meets the eye.

**Wright:** *Soho* is like that. It's one of those places where you don't necessarily notice the seamy side of things happening until you stand still in the street for 90 seconds, and then something will happen to you. When I was editing *Spacey* I remember walking down Old Compton Street on a Sunday morning, which is *Soho's* main drag, to go into work on my own. I went onto Dean Street and there was this walk-up brothel with a guy standing outside the closed door. We were the only two people on the street and he said to me, "When do they open?" I just burst out laughing and said, "I love the fact you think I know the opening and closing times." Not to make light of anything in the movie but it's just a strange neighbourhood, everything being just under the surface. *Soho* is the centre of the film business but after midnight, it takes a turn where a really fun nightlife area starts to become a bit more menacing.

**Miller:** I remember the first time I saw *The Silence Of The Lambs*. I knew Jonathan Demme, and I sent him a note saying, "You got me, you damaged me, you had me there." I was no longer in a cinema. It was just me and the experience. I was filled with all these feelings of dread and all the other stuff. And *Last Night In Soho* is one of those films — you got me. It's very clearly an Edgar Wright movie. Only you could have made it, but you've done nothing like this before.

**Wright:** That's the biggest compliment you could pay me. A couple of friends who've seen the movie emailed me the next day saying, "I had a nightmare about your film. I saw it and then started dreaming about neon and *Soho* streets and it was spooking me out." I said: "Good." ●

progressions, how one moment leads to the next, the whole experience. And the third note would be to try and work off the cliché. You can't avoid established tropes, but try to find a new approach to what is expected.

**Wright:** My thing would be that it's like a war of attrition. You're building up storytelling shots to tell the story. The opening car chase of *Baby Driver* was a set-piece that we kept having to return to because we needed more stuff, more storytelling bits. Poor Jon Bernthal [Griff] was flown back to Atlanta nine times during the shoot, he kept wrapping and coming back, wrapping and coming back. On the last day of the shoot, I apologised to him. And he said this, which I think are Words To Live By About Filmmaking: "Hey, listen, if this shit was easy, everyone would do it." And I said, "You just summed up all of cinema."

**Miller:** I remember the first time I read and listened to your screenplay for *Baby Driver*. I'll never forget. You not only had the music, there was a little symbol on the side where you asked us to play the song as we were reading the scene, or you put together a montage for the opening scene in the screenplay. You got a screenplay, but you also got this incredibly palpable experience of seeing something with the music. Without question, it was the most memorable screenplay experience I've ever had.

**Wright:** Writing the words for something that is ultimately going to be enjoyed with sounds and pictures is a weird thing. It's strange. With the songs and sound effects mixed in I was selling it as more than just words on the page.

**Miller:** Some people can write like that. Many, many years ago I remember reading the Coen Brothers' screenplay of *Raising Arizona*. And I remember thinking, "Somehow, they made me visualise the film." And the other one I remember





# THE FIRST CLASS

**SEX EDUCATION** HAS BLAZED A TRAIL OVER TWO STUNNING SERIES. AS THE THIRD ARRIVES, WE ASSEMBLE THE KEY PLAYERS TO DISCOVER HOW IT WILL CONTINUE GOING PLACES OTHER SHOWS DAREN'T

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## FEATURING



**LAURIE NUNN**  
CREATOR/WRITER



**ASA BUTTERFIELD**  
OTIS MILBURN



**EMMA MACKAY**  
MAEVE WILEY



**GILLIAN ANDERSON**  
DR JEAN F. MILBURN



**NCUTI GATWA**  
ERIC EFFIONG



**JEMIMA KIRKE**  
HOPE HADDON

SINCE *SEX EDUCATION* thrust its way onto our screens back in 2019, it has lived up to its name, covering everything from ugly orgasm faces to fingering techniques and alien kinks. The Netflix phenomenon (series 1, announced Netflix back in 2019, was tracking to be watched by 40 million accounts within its first month) left no sexual stone unturned as Otis (Asa Butterfield), a virgin with an uncommonly mature grasp on intimacy thanks to his sex-therapist mother, Jean (Gillian Anderson), set up an unsanctioned sex clinic at school, dishing out tips to his hormone-crazed classmates.

It was the unshamed, explicit and often hilarious sex scenes that initially grabbed viewers, but magic really struck when the show moved beyond the awkward horny fumbling to address how bewildering, joyful, unexpected and wide-ranging sexual experiences can be. Few other shows on television could claim to have depicted storylines about pansexuality, a chlamydia outbreak, sexual assault, masturbation, asexuality and countless bodily insecurities with such nuance, sensitivity and

emotional depth.

And as the students of Moorale High — *Sex Education*'s specific and stylised John Hughes-esque school setting — return for a third series, the show continues to up the ante, with an exploration of shame and a raft of new characters. Jason Isaacs joins as ex-headmaster Mr Groff's boorish brother, while the show's first non-binary character, student Cal, is played by musician and actor Dua Saleh. And also shaking things up is *Girls* actor Jemima Kirke as new headteacher Hope Haddon, who swiftly makes some serious changes, including introducing — shock, horror — uniforms and clamping down on the students' self-expression.

The school rules might be stricter, but mercifully *Sex Education* remains as revolutionary as ever, from its bold approach to portraying all kinds of sex on screen, to its dedication to telling inclusive stories. In keeping with the nature of the show, *Esquire's* Zoom chat with the class of Season 3 was frank, funny and unfettered. Just what you'd expect from the least-squeamish cast on TV.

**Does anyone on this show get embarrassed anymore? The opening montage of the new series is another sexual smorgasbord...**

**Neuti Gatwa:** I don't think so.

**Emma Mackey:** I think we're past that point now...

**Gatwa:** So far past. It's a dot. It's a line!

**Mackey:** Far behind!

**Gatwa:** By the third season, we're all so comfortable with each other now.

**Asa Butterfield:** Thank you, Laurie, for that. We're all so comfortable... That sounded sarcastic but it wasn't! It was genuine!

**Mackey:** It sounded so sarky! "Soooo comfortable. Thank You, Laurie."

**Gillian Anderson:** The unfortunate thing is the writers have to keep topping themselves. So if we continue to do more seasons, I don't even want to think what we're going to end up witnessing.

**The show has been pushing boundaries since the start. How are you continuing to break new ground in the third series?**

**Nunn:** We're tackling a lot of different storylines that are to do with sex, but really at the core of series three it's very much about shame. It has the power to be such a destructive emotion when it's used as a weapon against people and when it's used to keep people in boxes and to shut down their identities. Looking at the way that we're told to think about our bodies and our identities and our sexuality when we're young—if it's not handled in a very sensitive and delicate way, it can really continue to wreak havoc on people's lives as they get older. That's very much the thing that interweaves between all of the characters this year, but hopefully in a *Sex Ed*, fun way... Shame, but fun!

**Mackey:** Shame, but cool!

**Jemima Kirke:** It's a show about normalising experimentation and normalising not knowing what the answer is. It starts with sex, right? There's this myth as teenagers that we're supposed to be good at sex right away, you know? And we have a lot of shame about not knowing what to do, which is absurd because how could we know how to do something we've never done before?

**How about the new characters? How are they pushing things on?**

**Kirke:** Well, Hope is the new antagonist, I suppose. I don't think there really was much adversity for the students to push back against in the other seasons. She sort of forces everyone to unite against her, and in doing so, they find their true characters. When you put people in uniforms and tell them a certain way to be, and what they can and can't do, the rest of their character has to come through.

**Nunn:** We've also got a new character called Cal, who is our first non-binary trans character to join the cast. They're played by an amazing new actor called Dua Saleh, who is also a musician as well. We've worked very closely with non-binary people throughout the whole process and with Dua themselves, who is also non-binary; just to





**Clockwise from here:** Eric (Nouh Gattwa) and Otis (Aoi Butterfield); Aimee (Aimee Lou Wood) and Maeve (Emma Mackey); Head boy Jackson (Kedar Williams Stirling) chats to Cal (Dua Saleh); and Vv (Chinyere Ezeudu); Newly pregnant Jean (Gillian Anderson, center); Lily (Tanya Reynolds) with new head Hope (Jemima Kirke).



make sure that character is as authentic as possible. They were really, really fun to write.

**Jemima, you mentioned the new Moordale school uniforms. Presumably those don't go down well with the main characters?**

**Kirke:** There's this moment where one character, Ola, is asked to take off her LGBTQI+ badge and there's a line, "Do you need to wear that badge for that to be expressed as a value to you?" It's interesting to see what happens to a person if you strip them of their expression. And we do see at the end, without giving anything away, how those values are expressed.

**Nunn:** I think actually that uniforms in many ways are a really positive thing for people — they can be a real equaliser. But once that freedom of expression is taken away, the things that the students really care about, those real core beliefs, come to the surface. It actually doesn't become about uniforms at all. It becomes about being passionate about freedom of expression beyond how you dress. It's how you express your identity and your sexuality, and it's a real celebration of when people feel that it's okay not to fit in.

**And what's going on with everyone beyond the new outfits?**

**Butterfield:** Otis gets a bit more mature. He's now having casual sex with Ruby [queen bee of Moordale's coolest clique]. If you'd said in Season 1 that this was where Otis' storyline ends up, I would not have believed you. But it's a sweet and surprising relationship that these two end up in, and I think Otis comes into his own a bit. She brings a real sassiness out in him. Him and Jean are getting on quite well this year, which is nice.

**Anderson:** Jean is pregnant and choosing to embrace that regardless of her age and being unpartnered. She is making the most of it and trying to feel joyous and free and respond to all



the maternal instincts that are going on inside her. And at the same time, she's contending with the fact that she's a woman of a certain age who is pregnant, out and about in the world where other people may not have the same opinions about how free and happy she should be.

**Mackey:** Mueve and Otis aren't really talking anymore, and she has developed her other friendships. I feel like she is in a position now where she's making decisions for herself. As selfish as she is, and as generous as she is, she is learning to take a stand a bit more and back herself and make choices that are gonna affect her life and her path. And I think that's a really important thing to do.

**Gatwa:** Beautifully worded!

**Mackey:** Thank you, darling.

**Gatwa:** This season, Eric and Adam [who previously bullied Eric] are in an official relationship and we see them make a go of things. Which was really exciting and interesting to explore. Eric also goes back to Nigeria this year and connects with his family more and extends his journey of discovering all the different intersections that he sits in and how he can work with them all... I think this season he's just completely done with waiting to be accepted. He's ready to live his fullest and loudest life now. It's quite exciting that because he's so unapologetic, it means that you can upset people. I'm quite excited to see a likeable character not be so likeable.

**Does working on a show like this make you reflect on your own teenage years and whether you were clued up or clueless?**

**Anderson:** I certainly had experiences of low self-esteem and feeling like a fish out of water at times. I think I was quite advanced sexually and I don't feel like I really even had necessarily people to discuss it with at the time. I didn't really have girlfriends to go, "Ooh, guess what happened?" So I think I spent a lot of time pretending I knew what was up and what to do and acting as if I knew everything. I think it's really, really healthy that [the show] is out there and embracing all of it. Whatever your tastes are, whatever your preferences are, whatever your feelings about it are — positive or negative — it's all good. It's all part of the human experience.

**Gatwa:** It's interesting playing a character that's half my age because I think, "Wow, that's a wild decision that you just made there," but I also would have made that decision had I been 15. But then also it makes you think about life as a whole. Mr Groff's storyline this year is so touching; he's lived his life by the book and then it's just crumbled under his feet. I think all ages can relate to a character within it. Was that your question or did I just go off on my own...? Hal "So what I had for breakfast this morning..."

**Kirke:** No, that was an answer to the question! Because Mr Groff is also screwing up and making decisions that have caused destruction to his life in a way that a younger person would too. It's not like we arrive at a landing spot in our lives where we are no longer making destructive choices.





found it enjoyable. I assumed that it was going to be mostly a show for teens and twentysomethings. **Kirke:** I find that all generations, aside from children, love it. It was one of the only shows that I watched before I got offered the role. I was preaching it to everyone.

**Gatwa:** Positive messages about the show empowering people — especially from people in countries where, for example, being gay is illegal or there are very limited women's rights — are very special. I always notice how nuanced the reactions get and how into the characters' lives they get.

**Mackey:** One thing I like about the show, and we get this season particularly, is that we are focusing as much on home life, which is super key to figuring out why these characters are the way they are. There's a whole world behind closed doors, beyond school doors, that we get a peek into.

**Kirke:** Everyone's got a facade, and then as the episodes go on, the layers fall away. We get their behaviours, then we get their feelings, then we get the reasons for their behaviours and feelings, then we get the triggers. That's something that the show does really well. And I think that's why the two generations can share it and watch it.

**Nunn:** In separate rooms, though! Usually, the parents are watching in a different room, then they talk about it at breakfast. That's what I've heard.

#### Perfect breakfast chat! Do people approach any of you, wanting to talk about sex?

**Gatwa:** I've not had any questions about sex!

**Butterfield:** I've got a stack full of questions posted through my letterbox every week! No, people are generally aware that the characters are not representative of us, so I don't get self-help questions on Twitter. Thankfully — I wouldn't know what to do.

**Nunn:** It's the opposite for me, because I spend so much of my time thinking about the show and therefore thinking and writing about sex. I kind of have to check myself. Sometimes I'll be in a group of new people and start talking about something entirely inappropriate, and then I'm like, "Oh, this is not normal. I shouldn't have brought this into this space."

**Anderson:** I think I might have the same issue! I feel like I've spoken about it for so long in my life that most of the time I can judge when it feels appropriate and not. But *yeahhhhh...* Americans in general are a bit more open to speaking about uncomfortable things than the Brits, but thanks to shows like this, maybe people are getting a bit more comfortable. ●

SEX EDUCATION SERIES 3 IS ON NETFLIX FROM 17 SEPTEMBER



#### Clockwise from above:

Hopo fills the halls with super student Vic; Jean in the frame; Eric and Otis rock call-centre chic; A serious moment for Jackson and Cal.

The show makes a real point of being inclusive and telling lots of different types of stories. What's the key to telling those stories in the right way?

**Nunn:** I don't know whether there's a key. It's about trying to find the intersections and the nuances. If we've got a character who is LGBTQ, for example, it's about making sure that they're not defined by that one characterisation. I think sometimes, in other shows in the past that have dealt with teen issues, you would sometimes feel that things were slightly ticking a box. You might

have a gay character and then they have their gay storyline and then they disappear. Usually they die, to be honest. They're here, they're gay for a bit and then they die. It's really depressing. I do view the show as a comedy first and foremost, so it's trying to find what's going to make people laugh, and then as a writer I'm able to deal with the darker or more sensitive things within that.

#### And what kind of reactions have you had?

**Anderson:** At least in the first season, I was amazed at how many contemporaries of mine



# ORIGINAL

BLOODY HITS. GOOMARS. MADE MEN IN A PORK STORE. WHILE INGREDIENTS YOU'D HOPE FOR FROM A **SOPRANOS** PREQUEL, IT'S



# GANGSTERS

**THE MANY SAINTS OF NEWARK** MAY HAVE ALL THE  
NOT, SAY ITS CAST AND CREW, THE FILM YOU'RE EXPECTING BY JEFF LABRECQUE



## THE MANY SAINTS OF NEWARK

WAS BORN NOT UNDER A BAD SIGN WITH A BLUE MOON IN ITS EYES, BUT ONE HUMID NIGHT IN 1967, AS **DAVID CHASE** WATCHED A CITY BURN.

"I was there when the riots happened, and remember thinking, 'I hope they tear this fucking place down,'" the creator of *The Sopranos* recalls. Chase was in his early twenties at the time, and living with his parents in North Caldwell, New Jersey. Each day, he'd drive his girlfriend to her job in downtown Newark, a 20-minute ride away. It was July and temperatures were rising in every sense of the word: on top of the brutal heatwave that had descended on the area, tensions were at a record high in the city's majority-Black population, simmering with anger at being ignored by white government officials, as well as being abused by cops. On 12 July, that tension finally boiled over. When news emerged that John William Smith, a local trumpet player-turned-taxi driver, had been viciously beaten by two white police officers over a minor road misdemeanor, thousands took to the streets. Five days of violence followed, ending in 26 deaths.

Prequels aren't usually rooted in events of this fury. Sometimes — okay, frequently, if we're being honest — they have the vibe of cozy cash-cows, parachuting the formula of a successful film or TV show into another time zone because they've run out of narrative ground

going forward. Wondering how a certain character got a certain coffee mug? Prequels, usually, have got you covered. At their worst, they're festivals of fan service that exist for one reason: moolah, as they might call it in the Mob.

It's easy to imagine *The Many Saints Of Newark* playing out as one such movie. Fourteen years after *The Sopranos* abruptly ceased transmission, we could have got a *Joker*-esque story of young Tony Soprano beginning his ascent to DiMeo crime-family infamy. But instead comes a much more complex and unpredictable drama, one designed to pulse with danger and electricity, set against the backdrop of those five days in Newark over 50 years ago.

For Chase, it's a necessary extension to a story he felt destined to tell. "When I first entered the business, I had an idea for a movie about four suburban young men who join the National Guard to avoid being drafted to go to Vietnam," he tells *Empire*. "Instead, they get sent down to Newark in a tank." The idea "floated away", but Chase's fascination with the fault lines he saw exposed that day remained. Years later, he channelled what he saw that night — the cracks collapsing into craters beneath America's feet — into a pilot for an ambitious new TV show, about a Mob boss with anxiety issues. Perhaps you've heard of it.

"*The Sopranos* was about America — American greed, opportunism, selfishness, self-involvement," Chase explains. In Tony Soprano, the gangster-come-family man with a twinkle in his eyes and blood spatters on his loafers, he crafted an emblem of the American id, eternally teetering on the brink of eruption. Played by the late, great James Gandolfini, the character took a hit out on preconceived notions of what TV could be: without Tony, you can

**Above:**  
Dicie Morrissette  
(Alexandro  
Nivola) has it out  
with Buzkha  
(Joey Coco  
Diaz).



say *arrivederci* to the likes of Walter White, Jaime Lannister and Don Draper. It sparked enduring conversations about morality, America, good and evil.

And this autumn, *The Sopranos'* scion is set to be conversation-provoking too. Before that cut-to-black in Holsten's diner, before the war with Phil Leotardo, before Paulie and Christopher got lost in the Pine Barrens, before Carmelo's flirtation with Furio, before Junior's descent into dementia, before the panic attacks and drive-bys and ducklings in the pool, Tony Soprano was a boy, idly bouncing a basketball on the first night of the riots. In *The Many Saints Of Newark*, Michael Gandolfini — James' son — plays the kid who would be capo, the boy who would be boss. But that character's corruption is just one element of a movie that is looking for shotgun shine in unexpected new places.

"We know where Tony Soprano wound up. This is showing how he began," says director Alan Taylor. "But it's not just Tony's story." Not by a long shot.

Remember when 'is the lowest form of conversation," a certain mobster once complained to his Bada Bing underlings as they recounted better days. Chase himself might not be quite so averse to nostalgia — that particular line was cribbed from a high-school classmate of his — but you'd never guess it

from his track record. Since *The Sopranos'* controversial climax in 2007, the showrunner has stood firm in refusing to revisit the series. "Warner Bros have asked me about it every single year,"

he laughs. "I just wasn't interested in a sequel. We set out to tell a story, and as far as I was concerned, we had told it."

In 2013, when James Gandolfini — or Jim, as he was affectionately known to his friends — died tragically of a heart attack in a Rome hotel room, a sense of finality sunk in for fans: The *Sopranos* story really was over. Or so it seemed. What led Chase to reconsider and look for a route back into that world? "There was a health crisis in my family," Chase replies, preferring not to say too much. "One day, [co-writer] Lawrence Konner called me and convinced me that I needed to work. He thought it was important to my health that I get to work. I hadn't done much of anything for two years, and he said I needed it. And you know what? He was right."

There had been ideas for *Sopranos* spin-offs before. "One thing I wanted to do was a crooked police-station show set in Hoboken, New Jersey. Jim was going to be this crooked lieutenant," Chase reveals. "The guys who played Paulie, Chris — all of them were going to be different characters, but the same types of people in the show, on the other side of the law." This time, however, Chase opted to delve into the past, revisiting an idea first raised by Oz creator Tom Fontana during Season 2 of *The Sopranos*. "I remember he said, 'You know, it'd be interesting to see Junior and Johnny in their younger days in Newark.' I responded positively to that, because my mother was born in Newark. She met my father in Newark. There was a personal connection and I loved those characters."

Chase describes falling back into the writing process with ease, like he'd never been away. When he presented his idea to Taylor, the director saw a fun opportunity to explore parts of the *Sopranos* mythology that had so far gone untouched. "This was set in a time that Tony romanticized in the show. He always talked about how he wished he lived back then. But Tony's romanticization of it was a complete fantasy. Now we had the chance to show the reality."

"It's a movie about fate," says Alessandro Nivola, who plays dashing mobster Dickie Moltisanti, whom Tony admires. It's with Dickie that the movie begins to depart from what fans might be anticipating, focusing not on beloved characters such as Paulie Walnuts and Silvio Dante, but on hitherto unknown ones. Yes, there are younger versions of Tony's mother and father, played by Vera Farmiga and Jon Bernthal, as well as Paulie, Pussy, Junior and co. But the rapidly changing Newark neighbourhood that *Many Saints* takes place in is also inhabited by Dickie's father, 'Hollywood' Dick Moltisanti (played by mob-movie royalty, Ray Liotta) and Hollywood's new wife, Giuseppina Bruno (newcomer Michela De Rossi), who get far more screen time.

"It does tie in some of the characters and what they were like when they were younger, and that's definitely exciting for the complete *Sopranos* fan," Liotta says. "[But] you definitely don't need to love the show to appreciate this." De Rossi — who learned not one but two new languages (English and Neapolitan) for her role — is similarly full of admiration for the decision to not just repeat former glories. "*The Sopranos* was *Hawkeye* for television. Tony was a character who felt things and wanted things that normal human beings [want]. In *The Many Saints Of Newark* we have that — but also lots that's new."

"This just seemed more interesting to us," Chase says simply, insisting that they didn't want the film to be mere fan service (though there's plenty of detail for long-time *Sopranos* lovers to pore over). More exciting was the idea of venturing into an area that the series rarely explored in detail — the experience of Black Americans "trying to make a life for themselves," as *Hilltop* star Leslie Odom Jr puts it, "in a country where that was incredibly difficult to do."

*The Sopranos* TV show touched on racism, but typically from the perspective of white characters grappling with their own prejudice: In Season 3, when Tony's daughter Meadow (Jamie-Lynn Sigler) begins dating a Black man, we spend ample screen time with Tony as he seethes to Carmela — but little with the boyfriend on the receiving end of Tony's abuse. In *The Many Saints Of Newark*, Odom Jr has a key role to play as rival gangster Harold

**Top to bottom:** 'Hollywood Dick' (Ray Liotta), flanked by *Buddha* and the Bishop (John Bonaso), at Justice Soprano's confirmation party; Leslie Odom Jr as rival criminal Harold McBrayer (with Gemma Terrell Gardner as Cyril; Director Alan Taylor and writer David Chase center on location, the set showing the fallout of the Newark riots.



McBrayer that shows his experience of racism, and Newark's Black community at large.

Any echo of recent world events was accidental, says Taylor — the film was in production long before the murder of George Floyd “foregrounded the issue of race, violence and the relationship between police and the Black community like never before”. During a Covid-induced shutdown in production last year, he recalls wondering, “How is this movie gonna play in this new world that’s emerging?” The movie became more timely than we thought it’d be.”

This is something *The Many Saints Of Newark* has in common with the show that preceded it, with all that it had to say about America at the time. “I’ve dabbled in period pieces quite a bit, the only way to tell them if you want them to be potent is to find out what they say about today,” says Odom Jr. “Sometimes it’s like wiping the dust off a black-and-white photo. Bring the picture close enough and you realise, they’re not so different from us today. That’s true of the Founding Fathers in *Hamilton* — and it’s true of the characters in the *Sopranos* universe too.”

ave you ever jumped out of a plane?” Michael Gandolfini asks *Empire*. “That feeling when you’ve done something crazy that you just cannot believe you did, that’s the feeling I have right now.”

The 22-year-old is still riding an adrenaline high from the experience of playing

Tony Soprano, his father’s most celebrated character, and you can understand why. There was a tremendous technical challenge

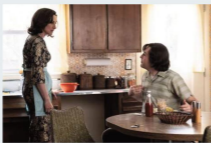
**Clockwise from  
middle Hollywood:**  
Dick, Dudits,  
Junior (Corey  
Stoll), Pussy  
(Sanson)  
Mowklotaj and  
“Wainuts” (Billy  
Magnussen) in  
the back room of  
Satriale’s; Joanne  
(Gabriella Pizzia)  
and Giuseppeina  
(Michela De  
Pisso); try to look  
interested;  
Michael  
Gandolfini as  
a young Tony  
Soprano (with  
Jon Bernthal  
as his father  
Johnny); Vera  
Farriga as Tony’s  
mother Livia.

to conquer — Gandolfini, who had never seen the show before getting the part, sat in his room alone for months on end perfecting Tony’s vocal tics and mannerisms. But there was also an intense emotional mountain to scale, too. Questions coursed through Gandolfini’s head as he contemplated taking the part: “Was I going to be associated with Tony forever? Is it going to feel like I’m not my own person? There was going to be a lot of baggage that came with it.”

Movie lovers often don’t cry during hard-boiled gangster thrillers. The emotion of seeing Gandolfini step into the shoes of a character made iconic by his late father, however, might just have you weeping up. Add it to the pile of ways in which *Many Saints* might surprise.

“It really is like a 1940s noir, about the crumbling of moral codes,” says Gandolfini, who warns that this Tony is not the Tony you remember. “My dad’s character had all this beautiful sensitivity underneath this aggression. This version of him is the reverse. His curiosity and sensitivity comes first. He’s not a gun-wielding gangster. He’s a kid who gets whittled down and pulled in.” Deciding to step into the role made iconic around the globe by his father, while still submerged in grief over his passing, was “probably the toughest decision I’ve ever had to make,” the 22-year-old confides.

Gandolfini had to audition — a process, Chase insists, that was no formality: “We auditioned a lot of young men.” While Chase says he always wanted Gandolfini, initially “not everyone was gung-ho on the idea,” *The Many Saints Of Newark* aspired to be one of the pop-cultural events of the decade. Some worried it may



look like stunt casting. On set, it quickly became apparent that no-one needed to have worried. "It was incredible. There were moments with Michael where he really did seem to channel his dad, which gave me very powerful flashbacks to the intense relationship I had with James," Taylor says. "You really see him take on the essence of his father's character — that strength with soulful sadness beneath it."

Being on set brought back bittersweet memories for Gandolfini. "My dad really wanted me to grow up in a very normal way, despite the very un-normal circumstances of who he was and what that meant for our family. He didn't want me to watch the show. He didn't want me to see him as Tony. But a few times, I got to come down, see him work and even help hold the boom mic," he chuckles. "Mostly I just sat in his trailer playing with Play-Doh."

Did taking on the role help him heal from the loss of his father, or feel closer to the man he greatly missed? Gandolfini takes a moment to consider the question. "You know, I didn't want to put pressure on myself to walk out of this feeling like I'd grown in terms of my feelings towards my dad. I just wanted to be the best actor I could be, portraying Tony in the way David wanted, scene by scene. I didn't think about my grief, because... well, I would have shit the bed," he says, bursting into laughter.

Taylor suspects it did have a cathartic effect for the young actor, however. "We all had dinner one night. At one point, he stood up and said, 'I want to thank everyone for doing this because it was a chance to say hello to my father... and goodbye again.' There wasn't a dry eye in the house."

Don't be surprised to see tears in the cinema, too. Fourteen years after the final episode of *The Sopranos*, and 54 after that humid night in 1967, a defiantly different — and highly emotional — new chapter in the tale of TV's most iconic anti-hero has been written. "Everybody came with their guns loaded!" laughs Ray Liotta. Cut to black. ●

THE MARY SAINTS OF NEWARK IS IN CINEMA FROM 22 SEPTEMBER

## BADA BINGE

FOUR SOPRANOS EPISODES TO WATCH IN PREP FOR THE PREQUEL



### SEASON 1, EPISODE 7 'DOWN NECK'

Twenty-two years ago, in *The Sopranos*' first season, came this trial run for *The Mary Saints Of Newark*, in which Tony's childhood is revealed through flashbacks, allowing a glimpse inside his tumultuous upbringing. Johnny and Janice Soprano get their first outings in the show ("The belt was his favourite child-development tool," Tony says of his dad), and there's even a reference or two to the Newark riots.



### SEASON 3, EPISODE 5 'ANOTHER TOOTHPICK'

Remind yourself of the anti-Black prejudice ingrained in Tony and the culture surrounding him before we see it from the other side in *The Mary Saints Of Newark*. "You're so fucking racist," his daughter Meadow yells at him in a kitchen argument, comparing him to KKK leader David Duke after he leaps to the conclusion that her bike was stolen by a person of colour. "You stay with your own people!" Tony angrily replies, as the FBI listens in.



### SEASON 6, EPISODE 1 'MEMBERS ONLY'

Uncle Junior is one of the classic *Sopranos* characters seen in his younger days in the new film, sharing scenes with a young boy who'll grow up to become, at one point, a violent adversary. 'Members Only' is the culmination of her sometimes twisted, often tender relationship — with the ageing Junior (Dominic Chianese) suffering from early signs of dementia, an accident occurs that threatens Tony's life.



### SEASON 6, EPISODE 18 'KENNEDY AND HEIDI'

*The Mary Saints Of Newark* shows where Tony's relationship with the Moltisantis' family begins. This episode late in the series shows where it went. Tony and his troubled nephew Christopher (Michael Imperioli) take a late-night drive in the opening scene, proving to be one of the most emotional sequences in the show's whole run — so much so that director Alan Taylor won an Emmy for the episode.



# GODS AMONG US

In our regular series, we pay tribute  
to the towering, mega-watt stars  
who still roam Hollywood

This month: The screen siren  
with an affinity for outsiders

## MICHELLE PFEIFFER

WORDS: CHRISTINA NEWLAND | ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS OPHIR TEREVONS

IN FEBRUARY THIS year, a video from the set of Tim Burton's 1992 film *Batman Returns* went viral on Twitter. The clip showed a black-latex-clad Michelle Pfeiffer, looking sleek and hyper-focused. She handily cracks a whip, decapitating four mannequins at lightning speed in one take. The cast and crew around her applaud. *Now that* — the entire internet seemed to agree — was true commitment to a part.

Pfeiffer's performance as Catwoman — once a spineless secretary pushed to the margins, now proudly stalking those margins instead of cowering in them — walks the line between tongue-in-cheek fun and derangement, never tipping too far either way. And the almost pathological outsiderdom that the character represents is a strikingly prevalent theme in Pfeiffer's work. In fact, that love for the peripheral and the shadowy may well be the defining trait of her career.

At first glance, seeing anything 'shadowy'

about her might be difficult. With her wide blue eyes and blonde hair, she has regularly been touted as one of the most beautiful stars in Hollywood. Her upbringing, in Santa Ana, California, was, by her account in *Los Angeles Magazine*, "pretty normal" and "suburban". Pfeiffer was the second-oldest of four, with parents who owned a small air-conditioning business, and she remains close to her family today. Yet, for whatever reason, none of those markers of good adjustment seemed to waylay her sense of dislocation. "A little bit, my whole life," she told *Elle* in 2011. "I felt like an outsider."

That's translated to her work, with Pfeiffer embodying all manner of oddballs, from screwball-comedy heroines to down-and-out nightclub singers and vampy crime mavens. She can toggle between extremes at will, unafraid to commit to a "big" performance, and infusing those larger-than-life roles with glee. This capacity for chameleonic transformation,







## THE BOX OFFICE

Michelle Pfeiffer's top five money-makers\*

**AVENGERS: ENDGAME\*\***

**\$2.8 billion**

**ANT-MAN AND THE WASP**

**\$623 million**

**MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS**

**\$353 million**

**WHAT LIES BENEATH**

**\$291 million**

**BATMAN RETURNS**

**\$267 million**

\*Global box office, according to BoxOfficeMojo.com

\*\*Seen as Janet Van Dyne at Tony Stark's funeral but has no dialogue



paired with a notoriously exacting eye for her chosen roles (she turned down so many films in the '90s, including *Pretty Woman* and *Thelma & Louise*, that her agent nicknamed her "Dr No"), has kept her from being limited as any one type of actor, or as any one type of woman.

In the beginning, Hollywood just "didn't quite know where to pigeonhole me", Pfeiffer told *Indiewire* recently. But that doesn't mean they didn't try.



Her first major film role, in the maligned *Grease 2* (1982), was not what you'd call an auspicious beginning. Pfeiffer got to show her big-screen chops — and a singing voice that would later come in handy in *The Fabulous Baker Boys* — but ultimately was left frustrated by the "bimbo" nature of the role, as she told *The New York Times*. This was something she was stridently looking to avoid; Pfeiffer was well aware of the stereotypes around her appearance. As director and friend Jonathan Demme would tell *Empire* back in 1990, "I think that more than any other

quote-unquote beautiful actress, Michelle has been handicapped by her appearance. She has such an overwhelming face that people have tended to cast her because of the way she looks." In the same issue, Pfeiffer herself put it prosaically: "Beauty? I kind of scowl at it. I wouldn't recommend it to a single soul."

She grappled with being judged entirely on her appearance, and with the pains of showbusiness trying to decide who you are for you. "One of my first jobs was a television show, and I played the blonde bombshell where I had fake breasts and was in hot pants," she told *The New Yorker*. "I didn't even have a name. She was just called 'the bombshell.'" Yet Pfeiffer still turned early

jobs to her advantage, despite never training professionally, providing surprising nuance to characters who might, on paper (or in the hands of lesser actors) be reduced to wispy female stereotypes.

When she was cast as Elvira in Brian De Palma's *Scoobyface*, fresh out of the gate of her film career in 1982 and cast opposite a dialled-up Al Pacino, Pfeiffer admits she used to shake with nerves on set. But that's not visible in the least on the screen. She plays the kingpin's trophy wife, all silky tresses and diaphanous clothing, but there's a titanium core in her trim frame. The logic of *Scoobyface*'s world is brutal and misogynistic, but Elvira knows how to play the



**Clockwise**  
from above:  
As Elvira in  
*Scarface*  
(1983); Pfeiffer's  
first starring  
role — as  
Stephanie in  
*Grease 2*  
(1982); *The*  
*Witches Of*  
*Eastwick*  
(1987);  
With Dean  
Cain in  
*Married To*  
*The Mob*  
(1988).

game to suit her. And finally, when it doesn't, she's the one who points out precisely what that game is.

In an explosive fight in a lavish restaurant, played to perfection by Pfeiffer, Elvira jumps from her seat, coke-fueled and yet utterly clear in expressing her isolation and unhappiness. She asks if her husband will even be alive to see their future children grow up. "We're not winners, Tony," she says. "We're losers." In the end, Elvira might be a gold-digger, but it's Tony who is far, far worse. More to the point, *Scarface* began to establish Pfeiffer as far more than merely decorative.

Her cold, chic hauteur in the film transformed into something else entirely when she played a gangster's moll again, this time in Jonathan Demme's *Married To The Mob* (1988). Yet the performances — and films — couldn't be more different in their approach. In Demme's witty, screwball-esque comedy, a brown-haired, ever-gesticulating Pfeiffer plays Angela de Marco, the hapless wife of a Mafia up-and-comer who is abruptly slayed by his boss. When both the FBI and the Don take an interest in



the widow, Angela is forced to go on the run with her young son, fighting to learn her independence from a secretive world run almost totally by men. Playing like a farcical flipside to *GoodFellas* (which didn't come out until the following year), the film is striking for how pointedly female-led it is, and how much sympathy it finds for Pfeiffer's stubborn Long Island Mob wife.

In 1987, she took a role in George Miller's *The Witches Of Eastwick*, playing Sukie, an exhausted single mother and local reporter who discovers, along with two of her pals, that she is, in fact, a witch. The three women join into an unholy alliance with Jack Nicholson as the devil himself, setting off waves that rock their conservative small town. But rather than coast through the role of a besotted witch in Nicholson's coven, Pfeiffer went deep on her performance. In a TV interview at the time for a local Austin news channel, she spoke about the pagan symbolism implicit in her character. Sukie, she insisted, has the power of the maternal and of fertility. With a smirk, she cannily noted that this is the sort of female power that might scare off men.



By the late 1980s, Pfeiffer's star was seriously on the rise, allowing her more freedom to choose roles. For two consecutive years, in 1988 and '89, she would be nominated for Best Actress Oscars — her first for her role as Madame de Tourvel, the collateral damage of sexual intrigue and violence in 17th-century France, in Stephen Frears' *Dangerous Liaisons*. It was a reactive role in some ways, that of a woman constrained by social forces and sexual double-standards. But her innocence and victimhood are made curiously modern through Pfeiffer's blushing close-ups and stammering discontent; in the flames of frustration that seem to spark behind her eyes.

The next nomination would be for Pfeiffer's part as ex-escort and nightclub chanteuse Susie Diamond in *The Fabulous Baker Boys*. Diamond is a gum-smacking girl with a working-class edge; a hard-boiled '30s dame dressed in '80s taffeta who turns up too late for a singing audition. Pfeiffer's performance is multivalent, vulnerable and sharp by turns, telegraphing brittle self-assurance but never

losing the softness — particularly the softness that falling in love with your emotionally constipated bandmate (Jeff Bridges, charming and terrible in turns) will give you. As Pfeiffer herself put it to *W Magazine*, "I'm always attracted to characters who are a little bit broken. And Susie was definitely damaged in an intriguing way."

In her review of the film, legendary film critic Pauline Kael compared Pfeiffer to Bita Hayworth's notorious femme fatale in *Gilda*, hitting upon something that others would notice too — that the star seemed like she'd teleported into Hollywood from another era. In so many of her roles, Pfeiffer manages to combine the intractably icy beauty of a Grace Kelly type with the durable, down-to-earth physical humour of a Jean Arthur. In fact, she was almost cast in a remake of a classic Jean Arthur romcom, *The Talk Of The Town*, originally made in 1942 by director George Stevens, which never got off the ground. Jonathan Demme compared her to Greta Garbo, while Vogue in 1991 declared, "Pfeiffer seems to have bubbled up from the past." In a memorable photoshoot for that issue, Pfeiffer posed as various Golden Age icons, from



**Left:** Felice Brooks — as Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992). **Right:** With John Malkovich in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), which earned her an Oscar nomination. **Below:** The Fabulous Baker Boys (1988).



the brassy, red-lipsticked Lix Taylor in *Car On A Hot Tin Roof* to silent vamp Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box*. The choices of roles she was recreating were hers.

That sense of a star from another time still persists. Pfeiffer's most recent director, Azazel Jacobs, told *Turn & Country* that, "When I was developing the script [for *French Exit*], I thought a lot about Bette Davis or Rita Hayworth, actresses from a different generation." But Pfeiffer has always been careful not to fall into a rut. She likes to shake things up. And as the 1990s began, she got an opportunity to deliver a performance that was anything but old-fashioned.



In 1992, a fortuitous turn of events saw Annette Bening dropping out of a production. It was a decision that would prove fateful; the production was *Batman Returns*, and Michelle Pfeiffer, as Bening's replacement, would step into one of her most iconic roles: Catwoman. Pfeiffer had loved the character since watching Julie Newmar play her on '60s TV growing up.

As she told *Rolling Stone*, "She was just such a forbidding kind of heroine for so many little girls."

In Tim Burton's topey-turvy, high-artifice Gotham, part cartoon and part nightmare, Pfeiffer is sly, retiring secretary Selina Kyle. A mousy singleton with an apartment decorated like a child's bedroom, she is transformed after her evil boss throws her from a window and is reborn as a seductive supervillain, donning gleaming black latex (Pfeiffer had to be sewn into the costume). In one memorable scene, Catwoman lays waste to her frilly pink home, spray-painting her insipid clothing black and symbolically casting aside the nicey-nice image of a girl who plays by the rules.

And Pfeiffer is not merely sexy; Catwoman emerges as the id of the browbeaten, submissive woman she once was, with her unhinged feline gestures and sleekly predatory voice. The schism between victimised nice girl dressed in pastels and vicious bad girl in black is, for once, cinematically delineated with the latter as the more positive. Or as Catwoman puts it: "Life's a bitch. Now so am I."



## THE MOMENT Makin' Whoopee

The Fabulous Baker Boys (1988)



Ask anybody who's seen *The Fabulous Baker Boys* about the scene they remember, and it's likely to be the one in which Michelle Pfeiffer, as nightclub singer Susie Diamond in a red velvet dress, performs a sultry cover of jazz classic 'Makin' Whoopee'. She wriggles over a piano-top as the camera circles sinuously around her, and her bandmate, Jack (Jeff Bridges), expertly accompanies her on piano. The audience is spellbound, but Susie makes a pointed choice halfway through her rendition: she leans forward and faces Jack as he plays, turning her back on the crowd. The friction between them is electric, and as she ends the song, she curls herself against Jack's shoulder like a clinging vine.

At the time, Bridges bet Pfeiffer \$1,000 that her strong singing voice would lead to her being offered a recording contract; he was proven right, though she turned the contract down. In fact, the scene was so memorable it was even spoofed by *The Simpsons*, in the episode 'The Fabulous Faker Boy'. We always knew Pfeiffer could act, and now we know she could sing; but here, in this performance within a performance, she combines authentic musical chops with the knowingness of an old-school siren. In so doing, she also proved she was an honest-to-goodness movie star.





**Left:** Getting close to Daniel Day-Lewis in the Scorsese-directed *The Age of Innocence* (1993).

**Above right:** Another cat-woman: Pfeiffer's Golden Globe-nominated role as an heiress who moves to Paris with her son (Lucas Hodges) in *French Exit* (2022).

**Right, top:** *Ant-Man And The Wasp* (2018).

**Right, bottom:** With Harrison Ford in *White Lies* (2000).

Pfeiffer trained for the role extensively, learning martial arts, kickboxing, gymnastics, and how to wield a bullwhip. Her skill with the whip was particularly incredible; as director Tim Burton pointed out to *Rolling Stone* at the time, "She was better than her stunt people. She made the whip beautiful, kind of an art form." And the work paid off: the film was a box-office smash, earning nearly \$270 million worldwide.

And then Pfeiffer did something unexpected: she traded her latex for crinolines, stepping back into period drama in Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, in the role of Countess Olenka. You simply cannot not overstate the tonal and thematic differences between the two films, and Pfeiffer's respective parts in them, but something does unify the characters — both are outsiders, cast out from their traditional worlds.

Countess Olenka is a spirited woman with the audacity to seek a divorce within the intricate, rigid world of 1870s New York society. A world, as the film's voiceover puts it, "balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper". And Pfeiffer reels in her

typically expressive physicality, restraining her gestures as though her limbs are encased by the cosseted luxury of her gowns. Her daintiness seems itself like a costume; an indication of her character's attempt to seem proper in the face of malicious gossip about her reputation. In a world where the constraints of society close around Olenka, it's all down to her furtive expressions, the bitten lip or a faint trace of a smile, to communicate her concealed passions.

Pfeiffer has admitted that she considered other career paths — ones that seem pertinent to a highly interior role like this one. "At one point I was interested in psychiatry, or becoming a psychologist," she told *ELLE*. "That's what fascinates me about acting — understanding what is really underneath people's behaviour. You know, we're pretty much never really speaking to what we're really thinking or feeling."

Her director in *The Age of Innocence*, Martin Scorsese, claimed Pfeiffer could express inner conflict with her eyes and face better than nearly any other movie star. Sometimes, a bullwhip just isn't required.



Notoriously private — "I'm the world's worst interviewee," she joked in a recent *Interview Q&A* — Pfeiffer has long been something of an outsider when it comes to the celebrity world, too. She's known for eschewing glitzy events and declining to share personal information with the press. She has regularly made choices that keep her closer to home than to any Hollywood glamour circuit. "It's moved me in a direction that's more natural to me," she said in an interview about her family life. "I tend to want to stay home anyway, and this is a great excuse. Sorry, I can't get a babysitter! I'm a homebody, to a fault."

There's a certain courage — a strong sense of self that clangs against the expected arc of an A-list actor — in what Pfeiffer decided to do next. She chose to slow down. She did appear in several more notable roles in the early noughties — memorably including *What Lies Beneath*, a smash-hit thriller opposite Harrison Ford, where she is a wife imperiled in her own home, and as a murderess in *White Oleander*. But in the main, Pfeiffer wanted to raise her children



and spend time with her family, and it wasn't really until 2007 that she began to resurface. As she told the *New Yorker*, "It had a lot to do with having a family and prioritizing the family, and being very picky about where I went, when I go, how many weeks was it, could I bring the kids with me, could I get back to see them. And it became so complicated to hire me that it just probably wasn't worth it."

It's striking that Pfeiffer fully understood the risks of taking a five-year hiatus and did it anyway; Hollywood is fickle, and women are historically thought to have a short shelf-life. From Jean Harlow to Marilyn Monroe to Grace Kelly to Sharon Stone, the Hollywood blonde has long been fundamentally interchangeable in the eyes of the men who have run the studios. Each has faced the pitfalls of their own attractiveness and the corresponding fear of aging in an industry which is prone to upgrading frequently to a younger model.

But Pfeiffer believes there are opportunities in aging, too. In 2002, she told *Moviefone*, "Our window of opportunity expands

incrementally year by year. I feel like the roles have only gotten more interesting. I want to grow up to be Judi Dench or Ellen Burstyn. The older we get, the less we work. But look at the work just those two women are doing. It gets deeper."

Over the last decade or so, her screen appearances have steadily begun to increase again — instead of "aging out," Pfeiffer returned to our screens with the same force and elegance as ever. She has often appeared in smaller or supporting roles. But crucially, it was done at her own pace and her own typically choosy way. She jumped in with both feet for a small but unforgettable part in Darren Aronofsky's divisive *Mother!* (2017), another richly unusual choice on her CV. In the film, she plays one of many mysterious houseguests in Jennifer Lawrence's home, a symbolic figure who personifies a primal maternal energy in avant-garde fashion. Even with limited screentime, she runs away with the movie. The same year, she would also return to a role that showed her affection for playing criminal women, this time as Ruth Madoff — wife to the Ponzi Scheme mastermind Bernie Madoff — in Barry Levinson's HBO miniseries *Wizard Of Lies*.

Now 63 years old, Pfeiffer seems to be as eclectic as ever. In her latest film, the offbeat *French Exit*, she plays an elegant yet déshabillé Upper East Side lady who absconds to Paris after losing her fortune. Her recently deceased husband is along for the trip in the form of a reincarnated black cat, and Pfeiffer is a riot, by turns deeply tragic and terribly bitchy, clutching a martini glass like it's life support. Meanwhile, she's due for a big-budget return to the world of superheroes via the Marvel franchise, continuing her part as Janet Van Dyne in *Ant-Man And The Wasp: Quantumania*, and has been cast as '70s First Lady Betty Ford in an upcoming Showtime series. You can't get three more varied parts than that.

Drawn to characters outside the mainstream, a frisson of weirdness always beneath her beauty, Pfeiffer has managed to win fame and acclaim without ever compromising. She is both actor's actor and a luminous movie star, a "California beach chick" who says her "basic nature is dark"; with the range to play both a whip-slinging villainess and a tired blue-collar waitress. It's impossible to say what she might do next, but one thing's for sure: she won't kowtow to anyone else's expectations. ●



## MIA

The Pfeiffer roles that never were



### THELMA & LOUISE

Having turned down the role of Louise — because she was making *Love Field* — she never quite got over it. She loved the script. "It still kills me," she said recently.



### BASIC INSTINCT

Pfeiffer was offered ice-pick enthusiast Catherine Tramell, but her own instinct stepped in. "I just couldn't do that one, because of the sexual parts, the nudity," she explained. "My father was still alive."



### PRETTY WOMAN

Originally, Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman* was a darker drama, with Al Pacino and Pfeiffer under consideration. Pfeiffer, though, decided against it.



### THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Rejecting Clarice Starling is Pfeiffer's biggest regret. She didn't like that "there was such evil in the film", but was conflicted about having not teamed with Jonathan Demme. "I think of that one a lot," she has said.

ALEX GOODFREY

# PREVIEW

! SPOILER  
WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT (EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT)



## Call to arms

Director Cary Fukunaga on how the chaotic shoot of **BEASTS OF NO NATION** prepared him for James Bond

HAS ANYONE HAD as eclectic a career as Cary Joji Fukunaga? The filmmaker burst onto the scene with Mexican thriller *Sin Nombre*, dabbled in English melodrama with *Jane Eyre*, helmed watercooler TV hits such as *True Detective* and *Maniac*, and will (hopefully) soon be shaking and stirring with 007 in *No Time To Die*. But his most acclaimed work remains 2015's *Beasts Of No Nation*, based on the book by Uzodinma Iweala. Set in a never-named West African country (heavily inspired by the real-life civil war in Sierra Leone), it's a harrowing, sweeping war film about child soldiers, hinged around a masterful

performance by Idris Elba as the menacingly charismatic rebel leader Commandant. Released as the first-ever Netflix Original, the film now earns a coveted place in the Criterion Collection, a feat Fukunaga describes as "a dream come true" — but as he explains here, it took years of research, a tumultuous shoot in Ghana, and a minor bout of malaria to get there.

**Congratulations on the Criterion release. This must be the final stage of a very long passion project for you...**

It first started when I was still an undergrad,



Idris Elba as Commandant, a charismatic African warlord, in 2015's *Beasts Of No Nation*.

working on my thesis. I saw a professor whose office had all these news snippets on his door outside about child soldiers and Rwanda and Uganda. The concept had never really occurred to me at that time. And then, when I graduated, I applied to NYU for film school with this short story about a village being overrun in Sierra Leone. I was reading Sebastian Junger books, and getting deeper into research about what that war was like in Sierra Leone, and ended up going to Sierra Leone in 2000 to do research while working on a documentary. So the subject was something that I was definitely passionate about.

I was trying to figure out how to write a feature when I got sort of sidetracked by my immigration story. That ended up becoming [Fukunaga's debut feature] *Sin Nombre*.

**You'd been working on the project before you came across the book, right? Was there almost a very different film to the one that ultimately got made?**

I had a few ideas. A lot of them were about the displaced person's journey, which in a lot of ways ended up becoming *Sin Nombre*, strangely enough. And then a friend of mine had read

*Beasts Of No Nation* and said, "You might find it interesting." I thought that Uzo [Iweala, the author] had done an incredible job writing it. I could really picture it, but I hadn't even thought about necessarily adapting it yet at that time, when I walked into Focus Features in January of 2006. I was there for a meeting about *Sin Nombre* and I happened to have *Beasts Of No Nations* in my hand, walking in the office. One of the executives at Focus saw the book and said, "I love that book! I want to make that into a movie!" And I was like, "I love this book! I want to make it into a movie!" And so

I walked out of the offices that day with Focus optioning *Sin Nombre* and starting the contractual process on *Beasts Of No Nation*.

**Wow. Quite a big day.**  
Huge day. I mean, life-changing.

**But *Beasts* was ultimately made outside of the studio system. Was it a hard project to find money for?**

Yeah. I made *Sin Nombre* in 2007. That came out in 2009 — the same year as *Johnny Mad Dog* [another war film about child soldiers in West Africa]. My intention was to do *Beasts Of No Nation* next, but *Johnny Mad Dog* did not perform well on the international market, and this was right in the middle of basically the entire economy collapsing. So Focus Features decided to pass on *Beasts*. It got shelved for a while. I didn't give up on it. I went off and I made *Jane Eyre*, and I made *True Detective* — and while I was making *True Detective*, I found producers who were down to produce it independently.

**Was casting Idris Elba instrumental in getting it made?**

It's funny how things happen. Steve Golin, one of the main producers on *True Detective*, and I were sitting on set — I remember the exact day, because we were shooting the long take sequence in episode four — and you know, there's a lot of reset time when you do a long take. I was talking about *Beasts*, and he's like: "Idris Elba!" I was like, "I love Idris, but I don't think he'll do this." He's like, "He's a client! Why don't you reach out to him?" So I was able to get a phone call in with Idris Elba while shooting *True Detective*, and Idris just signed up for it. You know, there are no white people in the story to get this thing financed. It is a small story about this child's journey. And I wanted it to be authentic. What was amazing about Idris is his father's Sierra Leonean and his mother's Ghanaian. So he's 100 per cent West African. Just having Idris involved was huge in getting the film off the ground — it allowed us to basically hire unknowns for the rest of the film.

Also, I can't actually imagine another actor pulling off the complicated layers that that role required. You need that charisma to pull off such a dark, manipulative character.

**So you shot this film almost back-to-back with *True Detective*, right?**

Yeah, I think we wrapped on *True Detective* in the summer of 2013. I did post-production up until January. It came out in February — and I was already on a plane to Ghana by February.

Below, top to bottom: "Are you ready to fight?" Commander berfs child soldier Agi (Abraham Attah), Agi and fellow child soldiers stride through the undergrowth; Commander and Agi; Rallying the troops.



**How was the shoot in Ghana, then? It seems like a challenging place to make a film on this scale.**

It was quite difficult. The infrastructure, the remoteness of the shoot, the terrain, the bureaucracy... I think of other people who have shot there, like Werner Herzog. Werner's done some of the most complicated shoots on this planet, but even Werner said that Ghana was one of the most difficult places he ever shot.

**Is it true you got malaria in pre-production?**

Yeah, two weeks before we started shooting. They pushed the shoot by one week, but I couldn't stop working because I was writing and prepping. I was in a meeting with my costume designer, looking at the military uniforms, and I just felt like I had to sit down. I'd never felt so tired. Later on, the second AD was knocking on my doors telling me to go to rehearsal. I was like, "No, you don't understand, I can't get up." So I saw a doctor, who took my blood and said, "You have pretty bad malaria at this point." But it was good, because it gave me more time to write.

**As well as directing, you were also cinematographer and camera operator. That seems like a lot on your shoulders — figuratively and literally...**

I had planned on being a cinematographer. But I had not planned on operating. On our very first



Here! Director Cary Joji Fukunaga with Idris Elba on location in Ghana. **Below, top to bottom:** Adu on patrol; Planning their next move; Commandant interrogates Adu, later forcing him to join his rebel militia.

day, on our very first scene, the A-camera and Steadicam operator pulled his hamstring. He couldn't operate the camera with any kind of movement. I mean, I'd already lost weight from malaria, but then operating every day, and just having a deficit of calories... I think I lost about 20 lb on that shoot. But it worked out fine.

**Much of the film — such as the scene where the village evacuates — seems like organized chaos. How did you maintain control of that?** I mean, it was *partially* organized chaos. We shot the chaos! That scene, where the cars are filling up and people are fleeing, we couldn't put wardrobe on all the extras. So we asked the extras to show up in their own wardrobe. It was fascinating, because people showed up like it was a costume party. People were wearing Christmas tree costumes and dressing up as Santa Claus. They were hanging ornaments off themselves. It was as if this was a festival rather than a realistic moment of war, or terror, I should say, on a civilian population. It was impossible to control. The expression "herding cats" is completely applicable.

**It's such an ambitious film. How do you look back on it, in the context of everything you've done since? Did something of this scale prepare you for a film like *No Time To Die*?** You're always trying to improve things, right? You want every shot, every scene to be living to

your fullest potential. And even on *Bond*, I'd get there and I'd see a better version of doing this. I became so used to just adapting on my feet in Ghana. As chaotic as it seems, it's a better way of doing things. Why lock yourself into something, if there's something better that you can do? On a *Bond*-style production, which is far more traditional — you pre-vis things, second unit goes out and shoots things, you plan weeks and months ahead of time with storyboards and all of that — that feels in a way very limiting, because you're just imagining ahead of time what the best version of it is, and not seeing what the moment gives you. So on set [*of Bond*], sometimes I'd go through the plan, but sometimes I'd be like, "I want to see if we can make this better. How about we do the camera like this instead? And move these extras this way?" Trying to find something that is far more elegant in its execution. It does create chaos, but it also just gives you much more beautiful things. You're seeing what the light of the weather of that day provides you. You're seeing what the actors are giving you at that moment. You're just taking advantage of every spontaneous thing that's happening. From my end, I enjoy it. I think for other people, it might drive them crazy.

**It was Netflix's first original film. Did it feel like a leap of faith at the time? They weren't the major filmmaking studio they are now...**

I mean, I knew that Netflix were going to be huge. I should have bought stock! But I remember the feeling. It was very interesting. I had to do a call with [*Netflix Chief Content Officer*] Ted Sarandos to really sell me on Netflix, while I was in a jungle in Brazil, in the hills above Rio de Janeiro. I needed to get these shots in the jungle that we never were able to do in Ghana, getting these nighttime explosions, while talking to Ted. I wanted this film to go to cinemas. But I knew that going with Netflix would put the film in front of more people. I remember being in that forest and just thinking, "Okay. My ego wants it to be in the theatres. But I know the best thing for the film, for this story, and for everyone who worked on it, will be for Netflix to make sure more people see it." So that's the way I went.

**Do you feel vindicated? Netflix is such a huge player now — and you were the first.** I don't know. I still think we're in the middle of it. We were pioneers in something. We were a guinea pig in some ways, too. I love cinema, I love going to the movies, I love watching movies with people. What I think would be the most tragic thing for *Bond* is if we don't get the full audience participation. Because that movie was shot to be experienced in a group. I shot *Beasts Of No Nation* also to be experienced as a group, too. The vindication is the Criterion release. JOHN NUGENT

BEASTS OF NO NATION IS ON CRITERION BLM-RAT  
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# Young at heart

## SEAN YOUNG on the roles of her controversial career

WHEN IT COMES TO '80s It Girls, no-one stirred up quite so much Hollywood drama as Sean Young. The American actress was infamous for saying her piece to directors and going to outlandish levels to try to secure parts. She once dressed up as Catwoman to convince Tim Burton to cast her in *Batman Returns* and, she tells *Empire*, once followed Quentin Tarantino to a screening — “I sort of put my face in front of him and said, ‘Hey, we should do something.’” Neither pitch worked, and her direct approach didn’t do her many favours in a male-dominated industry. But one thing’s for sure: she never phoned a role in. She talks *Empire* through some of her key career moments.

### JANE AUSTEN IN MANHATTAN (1990)

This Merchant Ivory romantic drama, about two competing theatre productions of an early Austen work, marked the beginning and the end of two acting careers: it was the final film of the legendary Anne Baxter, and the debut of Sean Young as a newly married actress embraced by her avant garde director. “I remember checking out *All About Eve* and realising that I was working with Anne so I was very impressed with that, but I was so new,” Young tells *Empire*. “I didn’t know that much about how to act in front of a camera so I did a lot of learning and a lot of watching.”

### BLADE RUNNER (1982)

Soon enough, Young was chosen by Ridley Scott to star in his dystopian tech-noir thriller as the “more human than human” bioengineered humanoid replicant Rachael, opposite Harrison Ford’s brooding detective Deckard. “*Blade Runner* is the best movie I got to make but I was pretty raw at that point, so it was very important to me to be able to follow direction,” Young says.

Clockwise from top left: *Bone Tomhawk*; *Dune*; *Blade Runner*; *Jane Austen in Manhattan*; *No Way Out*; *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*; *Fatal Instinct*.



That was a good mentality to have when faced with a taskmaster like Scott. The British director was notoriously demanding on set, but Young had producer Katherine Haber in her corner: “She was more of a mentor than a trainer. She made sure that I was able to understand what was expected of me and [would] be very nice about it.”

### DUNE (1984)

From one cult classic to another. Young had been a fan of the seminal sci-fi novels before she was cast in the role of Chani, the Fremen love-interest to Kyle MacLachlan’s messianic lead Paul Atreides. “I read Frank Herbert’s books and couldn’t put them down,” Young says, admitting she was ignorant of how white-washed her role and the cast had been. “I did not have that kind of comprehension in my twenties.” David Lynch’s big-budgeted sci-fi epic was not appreciated upon release which, she says, was a surprise. “We expected *Dune* to be better. It had issues and David wasn’t happy with not having final cut, but over the years, it has become many people’s beloved version.” Now she’s looking forward to the new adaptation, even if she didn’t

get a cameo: “I begged Denis [Villeneuve] to put me in but he didn’t,” she says. “I was kind of annoyed by that but it’s his movie so...”

### NO WAY OUT (1987)

Young might not have lasted long in Roger Donaldson’s political thriller, as love interest and mistress Susan, but she definitely went out with a bang after being knocked to her death from the top of a flight of stairs. “Roger stole the shot from *The Olsen*,” she recalls. “The point of view is from above where you think that I’m falling down. Actually, we were filming it in an upright position.” She has fond memories of working with “complete gentlemen” Gene Hackman and, er, not so fond memories of Kevin Costner. “He was not as easy to work with,” she claims. “It was a movie where he had to have a love scene and I don’t think [his then-wife] Cindy was into that. Nor would [I] be if I were a wife of an actor — I wouldn’t much like it either.”

### FATAL INSTINCT (1985)

Young had developed an unfortunate reputation for being “difficult”: “I mistakenly thought that



I was equal to everyone," she says now. But her forthrightness with directors certainly impacted her career, to the extent that she's previously claimed it cost her roles. "You have to learn to shut your mouth. That's the price you pay as a woman... Women want to be able to swing out the same way men do, but this is the thing: they're not men. I was trying to save people from themselves. I was like, 'I don't know if you really want to do it that way,' and, 'I don't think that's gonna work,' you know, 'Okay, cut your own foot off.'" Luckily, Carl Reiner was willing to look past the set drama and cast Young in his erotic thriller parody despite wariness from producers. "He said, 'You're a great actress, you're going to be in this movie, I have perfect confidence in you,'" she says. "I really appreciated him. I did a really great job in it... We had a great time."

#### ACE VENTURA: PET DETECTIVE (1994)

Another man to have her back was Jim Carrey, who was integral to her casting as Lt. Lois Einhorn in his version of a creature feature. "Jim was the only leading man who ever demanded I be hired," Sean recalls. "He's like, 'No, no, I want her.'" While the

film is a beloved comedy, the handling of the plot-reveal that Lois used to be a man doesn't quite hold up under modern scrutiny. Young agrees that the punchline wouldn't be written "today", but she's happy that a woman played the role rather than a man: "People asked me if I'm transgender and I was like, 'Really?' Damn, I'm a good actor."

#### BONE TOMAHAWK (2015)

In recent years, Young has been content to appear in low-budget indies and VOD releases, but getting to spend a day shooting S. Craig Zahler's Western cannibal film was a delight. "Patrick Wilson was the one that impressed me the most," she says. "I wasn't a big fan of Richard Jenkins. He has let the success go to his head a little bit and he wasn't as pleasant as I was expecting him to be." Working with Kurt Russell was a reminder of just how she liked to act. "He's got the attitude that I do: show up, do a good job, know your lines, don't keep anybody waiting. I could relate to Kurt a lot. He's very practical, down to earth. No dramatics." **HANNA FLINT**

DOUGLAS IS OUT ON BLU-RAY NOW



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THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO PRESENTER CHOOSES HIS ULTIMATE CINEMATIC SOUNDTRACKS

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- 1. THE CIDER HOUSE RULES**  
Swearing end-credits beauty from Rachel Portman.
- 2. TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME**  
Angelo Badalamenti hears The Voice Of Love.
- 3. JEREMY**  
Opens and closes with Robby Benson's "The Hourglass Song" — be still my aching heart!
- 4. THE TAKING OF PELHAM ONE TWO THREE**  
"Gesundheit!"
- 5. THE ROCKETEER**  
A Scala listener's favourite — the film flopped, but James Horner's score soars.
- 6. CLEMENCY**  
Kathryn Bostic captures the open-ended sound of incarceration.
- 7. THE AMAZING MR. BLONDIN**  
A wonderful curtain-closer from Elmer Bernstein.
- 8. BLACK PANTHER**  
Ludwig Göransson's 'End Titles' unites themes... and nations.
- 9. THE EXORCIST**  
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Gene Hackman, bruised and battered as private investigator Harry Moseby.

## THE MASTERPIECE

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

# Night Moves

IN *THE PRIZE* (1963), a big-budget, near-miss bit of cod-Hitchcock based on a thick paperback, Paul Newman plays a Nobel laureate for literature who finally breaks down and admits what he's been doing since his last Great American novel was published — writing cheap mystery paperbacks, which he dismisses as “private eyewash”.

Already, the great private eye movies — *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), with Humphrey Bogart as Dashiell Hammett's shamus Sam Spade, *The Big Sleep* (1946), with Bogart as Raymond

Chandler's Philip Marlowe — were backlist items. Yet the fantasy of the idealised hero persisted. Spade, Marlowe and many others — Shaft in the movies and Rockford on TV — were as much knight errants as sleuths. These men were tough but not mean, loyal to clients who didn't deserve it, saved the girls and caught the killers (though often the girl was the killer). In the end, the eye kept his integrity in a rotten world. That seemed absurd in the shadows of Vietnam and Watergate, but Hollywood couldn't let the detective go in the 1970s, even as hip writers and directors competed to bury Sam Spade.

In 1973, Elliott Gould shambled as Marlowe in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, which made Chandler's hero a sap who couldn't cope with the loss of his cat. In Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), Jack Nicholson's J.J. Gittes is a cynical loser — the film is set in the 1930s, and insists the great days of private eyes weren't so great. You could have been forgiven after that for thinking no-one need ever make another film noir — at least, not until *The Big Lebowski* (1998), *Jihovevič Vice* (2014) and *The Nice Guys* (2016) got nostalgic for 1970s movies that said nostalgia was a cultural poison. Maybe the Coen Brothers, Paul Thomas Anderson and Shane Black — not to mention Quentin Tarantino in *Once Upon*

*A Time In Hollywood* (2019) — just looked back in wonder at an era of moviemaking when audiences had to pay attention to character, plot, mood and nuance.

Too often overlooked in the rush to enshrine *The Long Goodbye* and *Chinatown* is Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* — the last and, arguably, most perfect of the 1970s trio of revisionist private eye movies. Penn had already taken swings at the gangster film (*Bonnie And Clyde*, 1967) and the Western (*Little Big Man*, 1970) and made the best American film about the counterculture (*Alice's Restaurant*, 1969), but — just as writer Robert Towne was the impetus behind *Chinatown* — *Night Moves* is as notable for its script as its direction. Scots novelist Alan Sharp had already written one of the best Westerns of the 1970s — *Ulzana's Raid* (1972), directed by another auteur of violence, Robert Aldrich. Like Tarantino after him, Sharp novelised his *Night Moves* screenplay into a slim paperback that makes an interesting contrast with the film. An often-quoted moment in the movie has private eye Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman) diss his wife's taste in cinema by sneering, “I saw a Bohmer movie once... it was kinda like watching paint dry.” In the novel, the cited director is Claude Chabrol and the author



Clockwise from top: Harry tackles suspect and movie mechanic Quentin (James Woods); Melanie Griffith as young runaway Dolly; Marital discord for the PI and wife Ellen (Susan Clark); Hackman and Penn on location.

movies, or at least movie sets, as he digs about in the industry hinterland Tarantino will be drawn to. The case involves a stunt arranger (Edward Binns), a daredevil movie pilot (Anthony Costello), a dolphin farmer/tour guide (John Crawford), smuggled Incan artefacts, and a woman of mystery (Jennifer Warren, who should have been a huge star, only they stopped making movies like this). When Paula (Warren) gives Harry her hard knocks backstory, he comments, "Sounds kind of bleak — or is that just the way you tell it?" That's the whole deal of *Night Moves* — it's bleak, but admits the possibility that Harry is too tough on himself and the world. It ends out on a boat with three characters, just like in *Jaws* (released two weeks later in 1975), only with very different results. Penn was as much a filmmaker of action as contemplation. A key plotpoint is a movie stunt that goes wrong, which must have hung heavily over the staging of an elaborate and eye-opening gambit with a seaplane that's astonishing as pure cinema but also emotionally devastating.

It's a film shot through with humanity. When Harry tries to be hard-boiled, he can't sell it, spitting out put-downs but wincing in sympathetic pain with whoever he's trying to needle. Only Hackman could have played the scene where after make-up sex with his wife Ellen (Susan Clark), Harry rubs her nipple with his big toe while preparing bedside fondue in a way Eric Rohmer couldn't best. Only Penn could have directed a finale where an insanely complicated plot is fully understood but the detective is still stuck on a boat going in circles around patches of blood in the water. **KIM NEWMAN**

WANT BRICKS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

## THE WIT AND WISDOM OF ALAN SHARP

NIGHT MOVES IS AS QUOTABLE AS ANY THRILLER YOU'D CARE TO NAME. HERE ARE A FEW OF ITS MOST MEMORABLE EXCHANGES



Harry is watching a football game on TV. Ellen, his wife, asks him, "Who's winning?"

**HARRY:** Nobody. One side is just losing slower than the other.

**PAULA:** Where were you when Kennedy got shot?

**HARRY:** Which Kennedy?

**PAULA:** Any Kennedy.

**ARLENE:** Are you the kind of detective who, once you get on a case, nothing can get you off it? Bribes, beatings, the allure of a woman...

**HARRY:** That was true in the old days. Before we had a union.

**PAULA:** There's a big demand for dolphins. Lots of people want 'em — you'd be surprised. People buy them for their swimming pools. They think it's chic to have a dolphin for a pet. Like that craze for baby alligators in New York years back. When they got bored with 'em, they flushed them down the john. Now they got a sewage system swarming with blind, albino, shit-eating alligators.

**HARRY:** I'm not too sure I believe that.

**PAULA:** You're not one of those "intent on the truth" types, are you?

**HARRY:** Listen, Dolly, I know it doesn't make much sense when you're 16. Don't worry — when you get to 40... it isn't any better.

Harry demonstrates a chess endgame to Paula — restating a match played in 1921.

**PAULA:** Oh, that's a beauty.

**HARRY:** Yeah, but he didn't see it. He played something else and lost. He must have regretted it every day of his life. I know I would have. As a matter of fact, I do regret it and I wasn't even born yet.

**PAULA:** That's no excuse.



makes it clear that Harry is lying about having seen a French movie (which, in the text, is the serial killer drama *Le Boucher*, exactly the sort of film *Night Moves* is, rather than the more respectable *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*). Harry is the most undervalued of Hackman's great performances, as fully rounded as Popeye Doyle in *The French Connection* and Harry Caul in *The Conversation*. An ex-football player, which explains why he can pull off surprising fight moves, Harry is an independent thinker the lure of signing up with a big agency and so addicted to detection that if he doesn't have a case he'll pick at the scabs of his own marriage. He smiles often and he can't help liking people — which means he's almost always in pain when they disappoint (or try to murder) him.

Harry is hired by ex-starlet Arlene Iverson (Janet Ward) to retrieve runaway daughter Dolly (a young Melanie Griffith), not out of concern but because an entailed inheritance is at stake. The first suspect is Quentin (a young James Woods) — imagine how Tarantino felt bearing his unusual name on screen in this context — a mechanic for the movies whose face is covered in bruises. "I won second prize in a fight," snaps Quentin, in one of Sharp's many killer lines (this movie is an endlessly quotable as *LeBowski*). Then Harry skips the Rohmer film but goes to the

# THE CULT OF KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist on this month's weirdest straight-to-video picks

IT'S WATCH-THE-SKIES month as we turn our attention to recent hostile visitors from outer space.

Written and directed by Alex Huston Fischer and Eleanor Wilson,

**Save Yourself!** drops a Brooklyn couple out of an indie comedy-drama (Sunita Mani, John Reynolds) into an alien-invasion movie. Stressed by urban living, they take a week's cabin break from being online... which means they miss the news that Earth has been invaded by Critter-Tribble types. They mistake the first specimen for a pouffe, but eventually twig that the literally gas-guzzling furballs are dangerous, fast and (bizarrely) hallucinogenic, which prompts them to assess their own uselessness in a changed world and at least try to adapt. Mani and Reynolds are refreshingly different from most movie survivalists, and the film has a wistful, humane approach that's rather appealing.

Writer-director Steven Kostanski riffs on '80s models in **Psycho Goreman**, which is like *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, but if Elliott were a mean little girl and E.T. the arch-villain of an unfolding cosmic saga. Tween Mimi (Nita-Josée Hanna, in an incredibly out-there performance) is distracted from bullying her older brother Luke (Owen Myre, also good) when she gets hold of an alien artefact that gives her total control over galactic-level genocide monkey the Duke Of Nightmare. Other monsters show up — with incredible, imaginative, truly bizarre design — but the best joke is that the ongoing war between ruthless angels and demons never distracts Mimi from her playground obsessiveness, which extends to turning the boy she likes into a giant, slithering brain and



## CULT HERO OF THE MONTH JOHN MURLOWSKI

Writer-director John Murkowski has been making low-budget genre fare since *Return Of The Family Man* (1989) — with such VHS-era items as *Amityville: A New Generation* (1983) and *Black Cadillac* (2003) to his credit. Lately, he's specialised in those mid-peril thrillers Channel 5 run every afternoon (*Sisters In Crime*, *Killer Contractor*, that sort of thing). 2019's *Assimilate*, a lively spin on *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, is his best film to date.

Misfit teens Joel Courtney and Callum Whiffert post videos to show how dull their small town is, yet wind up chondrioid's take-over by alien duplicates. The movies need to tell this story every few years, and it always feels relevant. Murkowski blends small-town satire with gruesome, inventive business. In a fresh wrinkle, people set to be replaced are first attacked by their asked dopplegängers — which gives the normals at least one shot at resisting duplication.

consistently one-upping her downtrodden older brother.

Luke Sparke's *ZD4*-style Australian epic *Occupation* was obviously set up as a franchise-funder. *Occupation: Rainfall* offers plenty of action, including a George Lucas-style chase/fight scene with alien steeds, flying tanks and zappy little drones. Between the explosions, it's a bit of a plod, devolving into the sort of soap-opera alien-invasion antics TV series tend to get mired in when the recycled effects from the pilot have run out and hours have to be filled. Still, it has Jason Isaac voicing an alien called Steve who sports a false moustache and has a double act with Ken Jeong.

Also from Australia, Sandra Seiberras' **Alien Parasite**, aka *The Zustwälder*, doesn't break new ground — but has a nicely desolate Outback look, interesting and mostly laid-back characterisations, and a rare trust in an audience figuring out exactly what's going on. A meteor lands, a small town is cut off by a dust storm, townsfolk become alien-infected zombies, and a big CG monster struts around. Sheriff Jolene Anderson, her mulletted deputy Richard Davies, and geologist Cassandra McGrath try to get through the day without being forced to kill former friends and family members.

Think Americans (and Australians) get overly violent and paranoid when invaded by aliens and zombie hordes? That's nothing compared to how Russians react. Egor Baranov's big-budget **The Blockout** has the Russian military take on hordes of alien-enslaved semi-zombies (not to mention mind-controlled bees) when a long-in-the-planning alien attack wipes out all life everywhere on Earth except for a circle around Moscow. An enormous amount of weaponry gets used, from guided missiles to an axe, and a Nosferatu-looking alien traitor (or is he?) recruits mutant psychics to assist in the defence of what's left of the human race. It's a broad-strokes, huge-scale action movie populated by characters made of three-ply cardboard with more tracer bullets and a higher body-count than Michael Bay's entire filmography — but you have to appreciate the many wild ideas jammed in between the devastation.

# RAY HARRYHAUSEN'S TALOS AWAKES

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## Director Bill Duke on how he turned **DEEP COVER** into a modern crime classic

EVEN THOUGH BILL Duke has notched up more than his fair share of memorable moments as an actor — he's sweaty and unhinged in *Predator*, and his delivery of the line, "There's one thing I don't understand... the thing I don't understand is every motherfucking word you're saying", in response to Terence Stamp's Cockney ranting in *The Loser*, is a hall of fame moment — he always knew that he would need to have a back-up plan. And that back-up plan was directing.

All through the '80s, when he wasn't being stabbed by Arnold Schwarzenegger or killed by an alien, Duke was racking up quite the career directing episodes of TV. "I was the first Black director on *Duflus*," he says. "There were not a lot of Black directors at that time doing major

features." But Duke kept plugging away. In 1991, he made his feature directorial debut with *A Rage In Harlem*, and that put him in the running to direct a Michael Tolkin and Henry Bean script that was then pretty hot. It was based on a book by former DEA agent Michael Levine, and had the unwieldy title of *Deep Cover: The Inside Story Of How DEA Infiltrating Incompetence And Subterfuge Lost Us The Biggest Battle Of The Drug War*. In the end, the film was simply called *Deep Cover*, a film in which simplicity reigns, and which is now considered to be one of the great modern thrillers. And much of that is down to Duke, who took the source material and ran with it in a way that nobody quite expected.

"The script had the basics in it," says Duke, talking to *Empire*. "But when we went

through the book we really wanted to focus on what the message of the movie was. Back then, the bad guys were the mules. But the book pointed to the fact that the guys on the street aren't growing the drugs, and they're not importing it. They weren't the people making the big, big dollars. Well, who are they?"

A former drug user himself ("I never smoked crack," he says, "but I took alcohol and drugs that numbed me"), Duke was determined to shift the focus onto those he considered truly responsible for the drug epidemic. And so *Deep Cover*, years before the likes of *The Wire*, charts the attempts to bring down the bigwigs — including government officials — getting rich off the drug trade, and off the exploitation of poor and underdeveloped neighbourhoods. In *Deep*



Cover, this is personified by a single cop, who goes undercover and, as he climbs the ladder, begins to lose sight of his soul and his sanity. For the role of Russell Stevens, Duke had a masterstroke in mind. Even though Michael Levine was white, Duke wanted to cast a Black actor. "It's different for a Black man in the Black community dealing with these issues," says Duke. "A white man dealing with these issues couldn't have gone as deep. The irony is, because he was Black, he was most trusted."

And, specifically, he wanted to cast Laurence Fishburne. "I wanted an actor who could show those two faces," adds Duke. "And Laurence is such a great character. This had to be a guy that

Clockwise from far left: Partners in fighting crime; David Jason (Jeff Goldblum) and Russell Stevens (Laurence Fishburne) stride out; Neo will be getting ideas; Red light spells danger; Blamed lines; Drug-riddled neighbourhoods become no-go areas; Stevens is in deep.

you love and hate at the same time. And the tearing between those two aspects is something I really wanted to see."

And alongside him, as David Jason (no relation), the flashy lawyer with whom Russell forges an unhealthy partnership, Duke plumped for Jeff Goldblum, who gives a remarkably un-Goldblum-like performance, shorn of all his usual tics, but all the more powerful for it. "He's a multi-layered person, and a multi-layered actor," explains Duke. "You feel the energy, you feel the synergy, you feel the collaboration between those two guys."

Goldblum gets some of the more memorable lines in *Deep Cover* — repeating, "I want my cake and eat it too," in a deadpan whisper as he decides to have his immediate superior whacked, or sing-shouting "motherfucker" as he whacks said superior — but the emotional meat of the film belongs to Fishburne, whose Stevens is a straight arrow that gets knocked off-course slightly with each exposure to this new underbelly of society. "Visually, there are two colours you'll see repeated over and over," says Duke. "Red and green. The green stands for money. The red for blood. And I repeat it over and over again. When Fishburne moves into his fancy condo, look at the couch very closely next time." No prizes for guessing what colour that couch is.

For all its swagger and modern trappings, including a startling early scene in which Charles Martin Smith's smug Fed tries to goad Black candidates for the undercover role by using the N-word (only Stevens retains his cool, getting the job in the process), *Deep Cover* is at heart a fairly old-fashioned morality play. The good guys win, the bad guys lose. Russell emerges through his crucible a better man. "I wanted to send a message that says, 'We have a responsibility to our children,'" says Duke. "The question is, what are we leaving, in this age of division, to our children and their children's children? We have a greater responsibility." In making a stone-cold thriller that has a healthy moral compass hiding beneath the surface (in *deep cover*, you might even say), Duke not only made one of the best modern thrillers — he had his cake and ate it too.

CHRIS HEWITT

DEEP COVER IS OUT NOW ON DVD FROM COLLECTION BLU-RAY



# THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic  
images came  
to life

## Face/Off

MICHAEL COLLEARY DIDN'T understand what John Woo was getting so excited about. It was very late into a long night shoot on *Face/Off*, and Woo had beckoned Colleary, the co-writer and originator of the demented face-swap action thriller, across to see a shot he was lining up. Colleary peered at the monitor and saw two stand-ins — one representing Nicolas Cage, who was playing FBI agent Sean Archer (who was trapped in the body of psycho terrorist Castor Troy), and the other representing John Travolta, who was playing Castor Troy (trapped in the body of Sean Archer) — standing either side of an ornate mirror. “John very excitedly pointed,” recalls Colleary. “I don’t

remember him doing that any other time. And I was like, ‘Oh, okay... and he went [throws his arms up in the air], like, ‘I’m just so frustrated that you’re not getting this!’ But I didn’t understand what he had in mind until the actors came in, and you saw Travolta and Cage on both sides. And it was, ‘Oh, well there’s the iconic image for the whole movie.’ It’s like looking in a mirror, only not.

Yet grabbing that iconic image had been something of a happy accident. Initially, the confrontation between Archer-Castor and Castor-Archer (it’s confusing, we know), in which the two muse on their plight before moving quickly to “Plan B... let’s just kill each other”, was meant to take place in — symbolism alert — a mirror factory. “We knew pretty early on that this movie demanded a Hall Of Mirrors sequence,” laughs Mike Werb, the film’s

other co-writer/creator. With budget and time a factor, that got pared down to this brief confrontation, which is the calm at the end of the storm that is the film’s celebrated shoot-out set to the strains of “Over The Rainbow”. But then, disaster struck: with that sequence overrunning, Werb and Colleary were told that even this sequence would have to go. “We went to the producers and said, ‘How often are these two in the same shot? Not very often!’” says Werb.

Scene restored. Woo and his production team, led by production designer Neil Spisak, hustled, turning part of the Downtown LA apartment building in which they had been shooting into Castor Troy’s very own hall of mirrors. All in all, it took about five hours, culminating with the wild moment in which the two leads whirl around and fire at each other. “You often have sequences where people are shooting each other through wooden doors,” laughs Werb. “But we’d never seen it in this manner, with people staring at reflections of themselves, but on the other side of the barrier is who they really are and what they used to be.” As for the gonzo moment where their bullets seem to collide in mid-air, Werb recalls a moment where Cage came up with a theory. “He said, ‘We keep shooting at each other and we always miss,’” says Werb. “And I finally figured out why: we’re secretly in love with each other.” Bear that in mind the next time you watch it again. **CHRIS HEWITT**

FACE/OFF IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

### INSTANT TRIVIA



1

Castor Troy has a golden gun in the movie. Five were made for the production by weapons co-ordinator Robert “Rock” Galotti.

2

Travolta is two inches taller than Cage. That might take you out of the movie next time you watch it.

3

The film’s novelisation, by Clark Carlton, contains a sequence in which Archer gets an erection, which is described thus: “He was sure that inside his boxer shorts, a thousand topless French women, the size of aunts, were erecting the Eiffel Tower.”

4

The original script, by Mike Werb and Michael Colleary, was set 100 years in the future.

## THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers.  
Ten movies.  
Ordered  
definitively.

# The Fast & Furious franchise

**Chris:** How did we get here? How did this franchise that started out as overblown low letter to preposterousness and become one of the biggest movie franchises of all time?

**Helen:** It was nearly dead. I was the only person at *Empire* who went to a press screening for *Tokyo Drift*. Everybody else was like, "No, not even bothering."

**Chris:** Well, if Vin Diesel and Paul Walker couldn't be bothered, why should we?

**Helen:** Absolutely. But there were the glimmerings there, thanks to Justin Lin, who got what mattered and jetsuiced the rest. It amped up the action a lot, sometimes to a ridiculous degree. And then he went back after that and got the original cast and made them cooler than they had been.

**Ben:** It became a perpetual motion machine. There are so many ingredients that make *Fast* what it is these days, but one of them is Vin Diesel taking it super-seriously, while everyone else is having the best time possible. I think it was this real commitment to big, crazy but really fun action. It's playing by its own rules, and those are not the rules of gravity.

**Amon:** There's a line said by Mr Nobody in *Fast 8*: "Know your audience." And that is a perfect line for the franchise. It's earnest in all the right ways and flat-out ridiculous in others.

**Chris:** I want to talk about Justin Lin, who directed *Fasts 3-6* and then came back recently for *Fast 9*, and the tone of the franchise. I thought for the longest time that he was in on the joke. Every *Fast* movie tried

to outdo the one that came before, but he always had his tongue in his cheek. With *Fast 9*, I felt there was an earnestness there that sat uncomfortably with the movie. It wasn't quite as knowing or ironic.

**Ben:** Part of the magic is that truly the more seriously Vin Diesel takes it, the funnier it is. Like the moment in *Fast 8* when he wins the race in Cuba. Backwards. In a car on fire. And then a crowd of children comes in, gathering all around and cheering him. It's the funniest thing I've ever seen.

**Helen:** The thing that makes these work is somebody taking these insanely silly things completely seriously. In *Fast 7* Paul Walker is screaming, "Cars don't fly!" And I'm like, "It's the third time this film that you've been in a flying car."

## OUR CRITICS



### CHRIS HEWITT

Founder of the #Justice4Gisele campaign. It's slowly gathering pace.



### HELEN O'HARA

Once worked out that the runway at the end of *Fast 8* is a squillion miles long.



### BEN TRAVIS

Lives his life a quarter of a *Fast & Furious* box set at a time.



### AMON WARMANN

Donned his thunderwear specially for this occasion.



Illustration: Jeremy

is the first film in the franchise to have an antagonist who's the team's equal in Hobbs, played by The Rock. He elevated the franchise.

**Helen:** I think it's been up and down. *Fast 6* tried to do the same, but bigger, and I don't think it necessarily worked. *Fast 7* tried to do the same but sillier. But it also had this emotional resonance because Paul Walker tragically died during shooting. We knew going in that they were going to have to say goodbye to Brian, this central character, and they did it. I have to say, pretty well.

**Chris:** Yeah, the end is really touching. Is there an argument that the franchise should have retired gracefully at that point?

**Ben:** There's something nice in them carrying it on. The whole notion of family with *Fast & Furious* is hilarious and ironic, but it also holds true. The films aren't deep, but that metaphor of him going down a different road at the end is lovely.

**Chris:** Where do we stand on *Hobbs & Shaw*, the spin-off? It's much more fantastical than anything in the other movies. We literally have characters with superpowers.

**Helen:** You can see what they were going for. If *Fast 9* is Vin Diesel unrestrained, this is The Rock unrestrained, and they need to balance each other out.

**Chris:** If we can get them in the same shot, that's a bonus.

**Helen:** I'm not over, and probably never will be, the redemption of Shaw. He's introduced in *Fast 7* as the baddest of bads. And Statham is such a good bad guy. He's so menacing. And then to turn around and make him into the good guy, I mean...

**Chris:** It's just a giant soap opera, isn't it? It doesn't matter whether you're good or bad or alive or dead, they'll find a way around.

**Ben:** I grew up watching *Neighbours*, and characters would always die or disappear and then come back months later with amnesia.

**Chris:** That's literally what happens with Letty. She is the Harold Bishop of the *Fast & Furious* franchise.

**Ben:** And Deckard Shaw is the Paul Robinson.

**Amnon:** I'm completely with you on his redemption, but the scene in *Fast 8* where he fend off bad guys while saving a baby is a top ten scene in the franchise.

**Ben:** Moment for moment, my favourite is The Rock flexing off his cast and saying, "Daddy's got to go to work," in *Fast 7*. That is for me the peak *Fast & Furious* moment. It encompasses everything — it's great, and glorious, and stupid.

**Amnon:** I like the scene in *Fast 6* where Letty flies off a tank and Dom catches her with a car.

**Helen:** Cars are famously soft and cushioned.

**Ben:** That's part of the fun of escalation in these movies.

In *Fast 9*, every five minutes somebody is landing very softly on a car bonnet.

**Helen:** In *Fast 2 Furious*, a car jumping onto a boat was the craziest thing.

**Chris:** Next time, the boat will be in space.

**Helen:** On fire!

**Ben:** And children will run in from the sidelines, even though they're in space.

**Chris:** The first film was *The Fast And The Furious*. Before *Fast 5* pressed refresh, that was also the best film in the franchise.

**Helen:** *Fast & Furious* is better than *The Fast And The Furious*, which is a *Point Break* wannabe that is not *Point Break*.

**Chris:** Yes, but as a result it's built on fairly solid foundations. I'd say it's hard for even a director as hacky as Rob Cohen to fuck that up.

**Amnon:** Looking back at it now, given where the franchise has gone to, it looks so quaint. They're ripping off DVD players.

**Ben:** *Fast & Furious* is worse for *Fast Five* existing and being better in absolutely every respect, whereas *The Fast And The Furious* is doing its own thing.

**Chris:** By that argument, almost every film that existed prior to *Fast Five* is worse for *Fast Five* existing. *Fast 5* is worse for *Fast Five* existing.

**Ben:** Fellini couldn't even get it up to nine.

**Chris:** Right, enough squabbling. Let's vote!

# THE TOP TEN



**FAST FIVE** (2011)  
Helen: "Each generation has its defining artistic masterpiece, and lucky us, we get *Fast Five*. The pinnacle of the franchise is exactly the right amount of ludicrous — and Ludacris — fun."



**FAST 7** (2015)  
Ben: "Adding The Stath makes for the most bombastic entry — but sincere too with its farewell to Paul Walker."



**FAST 6** (2013)  
Amnon: "Come for the return of Letty, stay for the longest runaway on film and the Statham mid-credits scene."



**HOBBS & SHAW** (2019)  
Ben: "It's not full-blooded *Fast*, but it's ludicrous fun — with bonus Idris Elba as 'borg baddie Britton.'"



**FAST 8** (2017)  
Chris: "Fun in places, but the tipping point had well and truly kicked in by this point."



**FAST & FURIOUS** (2009)  
Helen: "Lose the definite article, bring back the original family, and reorientate the series. Underrated."



**THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS** (2001)  
Amnon: "The franchise's quaint first go gave us 'NOG,' the first family BBQ and Dom's 'winning's winning' spiel."



**FAST 9** (2021)  
Chris: "Justin Lin's return was not the ironic hoof I was expecting. Instead, it was a noisy, humourless mess."



**TOKYO DRIFT** (2006)  
Helen: "Gave us the coolest character who would define future sequels. Not bad for the series' teen delinquent."



**2 FAST 2 FURIOUS** (2003)  
Amnon: "Introduces Ludacris and Tyrese Gibson to the franchise, and an all-time-great film title to the culture."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE



!  
SPOILER  
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## THE VIEWING GUIDE

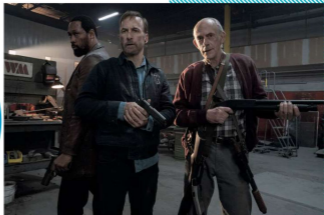
A deep dive into the  
must-see moments from  
the month's big release

# Nobody

IF ILVA NAISHULLER'S *Nobody*, in which Bob Odenkirk does a complete 180 from playing Saul Goodman on *Better Call Saul* to play a lean, mean killing machine out for revenge, comes on like John Wick's crazy, hyper-caffeinated cousin, it's not by chance. The movie shares a writer (Derek Kolstad), producer (David Leitch) and stunt team (the insanely tough maniacs at 87North) with the John Wick franchise, but has a sardonic, absurdist brand of black humour that sets it apart from other entries in the geriatric sub-genre. It may be the freshest, funniest action movie in ages, and we'd be very happy to see Odenkirk, once he's recovered from his real-life heart attack, saddle up again as 'nobody' Hutch Mansell. We spoke to the director about the key moments in his demented movie.

### HELLO, NOBODY

Starting a movie in media res before rewinding time to show how we got to this point is all the



rage these days. But Naishuller's hectic, hilarious film has one of the more intriguing opening sequences in a while: Bob Odenkirk, bruised and battered, smoking stoically in a police interrogation room, calmly producing a can of cat food, and then an actual cat, from inside his jacket pocket, prompting a baffled cop to exclaim, "Who the fuck are you?" Which is exactly the question the director and Kolstad wanted people to ask. "That was there from the very early draft," Naishuller tells *Empire*. "It doesn't make any sense, really, but it does sell the tonality of what's about to happen if there's a kitten in the shot, in the middle of an interrogation."

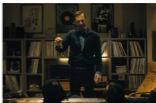
### THE MUN-TAGE

Very quickly, we flash back to meet Hutch Mansell, a husband and family man, who's at the end of his tether. Trapped in a marriage that's lost its spark, working a job he hates, and with kids who seem to despise him, Hutch is caught in a loop of mediocrity, something Naishuller accentuates with what he calls the "Montage Of Mundane", a series of increasingly short snapshots of Hutch's routine, whether it's missing the binmen by seconds or

being given a cup of coffee by his wife (Connie Nielsen). "We went searching for a way to show how bored Hutch is," says Naishuller. "Originally the mundanity was supposed to be more mundane. But the wonderful thing with Bob is, a little goes a long way. A two-second shot of him on a bus sells that he's bored out of his mind; you don't need to see it for 20 seconds."

### NO TICKET

The reason that Hutch is bored out of his mind is that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a CIA assassin gone straight, who is beginning to chafe at the ropes of domesticity holding him back. After his house is burgled and thieves make off with his daughter's kitty-cat bracelet, Hutch is chomping at the bit to do some damage to someone. He's granted his wish when a bunch of Russian thugs board the bus he just happens to be sitting on. What follows next is a brutal, bone-crunching, blood-soaked fight with the goons led by Daniel Bernhardt, who trained Odenkirk for this movie) and Hutch; one that will make anyone forget who Saul Goodman is. "My pitch to Bob



early on was that this is a Korean thriller shot by a Russian guy in America," laughs Naishuller. "That's what this film is. And this set-piece was super important. The movie would live or die by that scene. So Bob was nervous, but I wasn't, because Bob had trained. And he killed it."

## MEET YULIAN

If Hutch gets a great entrance, that's nothing compared to the movie's bad guy, Yulian (Aleksy Serebryakov), a psychotic Russian mobster who is introduced in a single shot that follows him across the street as he enters a nightclub, loaded with menacing intent, and then walks on stage where he starts blasting out karaoke. "The film changes tone at that point," explains Naishuller. "With Yulian, it was important to do this big scenery-chewing moment where people would be like, 'What the fuck am I watching?' And then, 'Okay, I get it.'"

## LOST AND FOUND

In a nice example of the blackly comedic subversion that runs through the movie, Hutch

— after killing, approximately, 4,000 goons during his bloody war with Yulian — finds the kitty-cat bracelet that started the whole bloody mess. At home. Under the sofa. "That was in an early draft," admits Naishuller. "I'm pretty sure it was the original draft. My feeling with that was I wanted to highlight how silly the whole thing is. If by that point an audience-member doesn't understand that everything happened because of Hutch's wrong choices, then they'll never understand. But this is all over nothing. It's a Kitty-cat bracelet. It costs literally six bucks!"

## HOME ALONE 5: HUTCH'S REVENGE

"I honestly wanted to do a little homage to *Home Alone*," laughs Naishuller of the final showdown, which sees Hutch set up a series of traps for Yulian and his goons. "There was a French review that said, 'A *Home Alone* for degenerates'. And I thought, 'I take that.'" The goofiest trap is saved for the end, when Hutch takes out Yulian with a Claymore mine, only escaping death thanks to, erm, a Perspex shield. "I always told myself, 'If I'm going to do action movies I want to make sure I go for as many

original, fresh things as possible," adds Naishuller. "That shield, in real life, would crumble like a piece of paper. But in Movie World it can work."

## WALKING THROUGH A STORM

Fans of Liverpool FC might have pricked up their ears when, in a movie filled with interesting needier drops, Naishuller cues up Gerry And The Pacemakers' version of "You'll Never Walk Alone" during that final fight, as Hutch and his equally badass dad (Christopher Lloyd) and half-brother Harry (RZA) come together to kill the bad guys. So, is Naishuller a massive Red? No. "I'd heard the song before," he says, "and I do my due diligence when I check the things we put into the movie. So when I saw it was a Liverpool anthem I thought, 'Cool! The Beatles are from there, aren't they?' But that's my favourite version of that song. It's somewhat on the nose, but you kind of forgive it because the rest of the sequence is on the nose." And in the ears, and eyes, and brains, and other assorted body parts. **CHRIS HEWITT**

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE FOR EW.COM; STYLING BY JESSICA HAY AND JON

## 6 OF THE BEST

Team *Empire* on the month's essential movies

PICK OF THE MONTH



## THE SERVANT

OUT 20 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 116 MINS

TV 14

Joseph Losey was a director with a taste for darkness: in Hollywood he made nihilistic noir *The Prowler* and remade Fritz Lang's child-killer classic *M*. After being blacklisted in the 1950s, he headed to Europe, where he teamed up with playwright Harold Pinter and created his most acclaimed work, *The Servant*. Suffice to say, he hadn't lost his edge. The chilling tale of a servant who becomes the master, the film sees an iconically creepy Dirk Bogarde sap power from an indolent James Fox, like a spider sucking blood from a wounded beast. With its crisp, gloomy cinematography, inspired use of mirrors and finely honed dialogue, it's still unnerving today, a horror movie about class that has plenty of it. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



## SUPERNOVA

OUT 27 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 90 MINS

TV 14

The year's best cinematic love story is not about a young couple and their meet-cute, but between two men in their sixties with decades behind them. If Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci seem like they've been together for years in *Supernova*, it's partly because, in a way, they have, skillfully utilizing their long off-screen friendship to craft a rich, lived-in romance, the kind where tenderness is found in the same breath as bickering. That warm, authentic pairing makes the early-onset dementia of Tucci's character so much more harrowing, and while *Supernova* is undeniably heartbreaking, it's as much a celebration of life as it is sad study of mortality. And Firth and Tucci — hardly slouches, either of them — have never been better. **JOHN NUGENT**



## A QUIET PLACE PART II

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 97 MINS

TV 14

John Krasinski knocked it so far out of the park with *A Quiet Place* that it would have been a Herculean achievement to create a sequel of the same quality. He falls slightly short, but still, long stretches of this movie prove that, when it comes to his ability to ratchet tension up to painful levels, the original was no fluke. After an excellent prologue, detailing what happened on the day the aliens came to Earth, things settle down into familiar territory as Krasinski continues the story of Emily Blunt and her family, tiptoeing around a world where the slightest noise can kill you. Millicent Simmonds emerges as a Ripley for the new generation, and Krasinski marshals several set-pieces so well that you'll be screaming for a third and final part. **CHRIS HEWITT**



## JOHNNY GUITAR

OUT 20 SEPTEMBER / CERT PG / 110 MINS

TV 14

This proudly melodramatic Western has vivid details (unusually, almost all indoors) and operatic levels of emotional and physical violence. In a reversal of genre expectations, the fetishistically outfitted cowboys — Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden) and the Dancing Kid (Scott Brady) — are the sex symbols, while the women (Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge) are trouser-wearing antagonists driven to slaughter by their seething lusts. With sharp cheekbones and a quick trigger-finger, Crawford struts in one of her most iconic roles. Like several '50s Westerns, it evokes the anti-communist witch hunt of the era — leftist director Nicholas Ray cheekily cast real-life red-baiter Ward Bond as the leader of the lynch mob. **KIM NEWMAN**



## TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME

OUT 13 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 135 MINS

TV 14

David Lynch's bold, baffling *Twin Peaks* follow-up has experienced a renaissance in recent years. Having crashed and burned upon impact in 1992, *Fire Walk With Me* has emerged, phoenix-like, from the ashes as an ambitious, uncompromising companion piece. The prequel takes place seven days before the murder of Laura Palmer, the event that sets the wheels of the show into motion. Bolstered by a raw central performance from Sheryl Lee and Angelo Badalamenti's peerless score, the film moves through the shady underside of *Twin Peaks* with an acute visual style among Lynch's best. As a satisfying extension of the show, *Fire Walk With Me* may not always work. As a surreal and tragic standalone horror, it triumphs. **BETH WEBB**



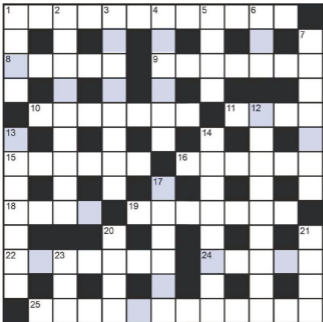
## SWEET CHARITY

OUT 20 SEPTEMBER / CERT PG / 142 MINS

TV 14

A freemform adaptation of Fellini's *Nights Of Cabiria*, Bob Fosse's directorial debut might not scale the heights of *Cabaret* or *All That Jazz*, but it still packs a punch. Shirley Maclaine brings cock-eyed optimism as Charity, a sleazy club taxi dancer who has terrible luck with men until she meets mild-mannered insurance clerk Oscar (John McMartin) in a lift. But can he forgive her chequered past? The film thrives on bangers such as "Big Spender," "The Rhythm Of Life" and "If They Could See Me Now," brought to life not only by Fosse's influential choreography but also his innovative use of camera and cutting. As musicals go it's pretty downbeat — the ending is bitter-sweet — but, at its best, it remains electric. **IAN FRIER**

# CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



## ACROSS

- Sergeant Howie had to keep his appointment with it (3,6,3)
- George, who made *THX 1138* (5)
- Comedy with Robert Downey Jr and Zach Galifianakis (3,4)
- The surname of acting dad and daughter Christopher and Amanda (7)
- See 23 Down
- It links Jessica with an 8 Mile rapper (8)
- Germa Arterton's Drewe (6)
- Could be Miles, could be Farmiga (4)
- *Of The Fall* (Brad Pitt) (7)
- Animated 15 Across, Bloufed henchwoman, sandworm summoner or possibly 12 Down (7)
- The country of Sophia Loren, Monica Bellucci and Federico Fellini (5)
- She was Mildred Pierce and Baby Jane's big sister (4,8)

## DOWN

- The — Guy (Jeff Goldblum) (4)
- In which Liam Neeson played a knight and Helen Mirren a sorceress (5)
- A restless thriller from Mr Nolan (8)
- Margot, who played Lois Lane (6)
- Directors Carol and Peyton (4)
- Her characters include Joi, Marta Cabrera and Paloma (3,2,5)
- "If he dies, he dies" may have been his punchline (4,5)
- The poster blurb to pull in the punters warned us, "Don't let go" (7)
- Terrace (Samuel L. Jackson) (8)
- José, Cyrano de Bergerac Oscar-winner (6)
- Your Eyes, remade as *Vanilla Sky* (4)
- Stallone, Bill and Ted's excellent band (4)
- 23/11 Across Cill German actor who was Andy Warhol's Dracula (3,4)

# WIN!

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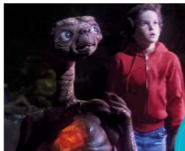
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**SEPTEMBER ANSWERS ACROSS:** 1 Kiss Me Deadly, 8 Kim, 9 Carpenter, 10 Cornely, 11 Star, 13 Inside, 15 Bo Coe, 18 Drew, 19 Candyman, 22 Nicholson, 23 Rio, 24 Frankenstein. **DOWN:** 1 Kikuchi, 2 Simon, 3 Macready, 4 Darkly, 5 Axel, 6 Let It Go, 7 TRON, 12 Weddings, 14 Spencer, 16 Lincoln, 17 Matsie, 18 Dune, 20 Merle, 21 John. **ANAGRAM AWKWAFFINA**

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**CLASSIC SCENE**  
Standout sequences from the great movies

# E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial

Chosen by **JON M. CHU**

Jon M. Chu: "I think of the last moment in E.T., when the spaceship is there and E.T. goes to Elliott, and his finger glows and he says, 'I'll be right here.' There's almost no dialogue, the acting is incredible, and the music is so big. If I put that score in any of my temp scores, people would be like, 'You're crazy, dude, this is way too big!' But Spielberg plays it on such a giant human level. That, to me, is what storytellers are here to do. So small and so big, all in one."

**EXT. THE LANDING SITE — NIGHT**

Having evaded the authorities, Elliott (Henry Thomas), his brother Michael (Robert MacNaughton) and Michael's friends have brought E.T. to a landing site, to await the arrival of the alien's family. They watch, awestruck, as a spacecraft, lights flashing, begins to touch down. E.T. looks up at it, a smile forming.

**E.T.:** Home.

As the spaceship lands, E.T.'s heart glows bright red.

Nearby, we see a car driven by

Elliott's mother, Mary (Dee Wallace). We hear Gertie (Drew Barrymore) scream from within.

**GERTIE:** Stop the car, mama! They're over there! They're over there!

As the spaceship's gangplank lowers, Gertie — clutching a germanium — approaches E.T.

**GERTIE:** [sobbing] I just wanted to say goodbye.

**MICHAEL:** He doesn't know "goodbye".

E.T. takes the germanium from Gertie, and points to her.

**E.T.:** Be good.

**GERTIE:** Yes.

Gertie leans in and pecks E.T. on the nose. E.T. turns to Michael, his neck extending out. Michael tentatively pats E.T. on the head. E.T. coos happily in the background, we see the silhouette of another E.T. appear in the door of the spaceship.

**E.T.:** Thank you.

**MICHAEL:** You're welcome.

E.T. sets down the potted plant. Now Mary and Keys (Peter Coyote) arrive in the clearing. E.T. turns to look at Elliott, who walks over to his friend. They look at each other for a few seconds.

**E.T.:** Come.

**ELLIOTT:** Stay.

E.T. sighs at this. He raises his left hand, extending his second finger.

**E.T.:** Ouch.

Elliott, eyes brimming with tears, raises his own finger to his lips.

**ELLIOTT:** Ouch.

He hugs E.T. Mary, heart breaking for her boy, sinks to her knees. Michael and Gertie are distraught.

Elliott, after what seems an age, finally breaks the embrace. They stare at each other. Then E.T.

raises his finger again. This time, the tip glows as he holds it up in Elliott's face.

**E.T.:** I'll be right here.

**ELLIOTT:** Bye.

E.T., retracting his neck, lifts up the plant and waddles up the gangplank. The family dog, Harvey, goes up after him, thinks better of it, and goes back down to be with Elliott. The gangplank retracts, as John Williams and his orchestra play the E.T. theme at full volume. Through the latticework of the gangplank we see the silhouette of E.T. Shadows play on Elliott's face as he watches the spaceship door close. The last thing he, and we, see of E.T. is his glowing heart.

The spaceship lifts off and heads into the sky. It suddenly accelerates, leaving a rainbow in its wake. Mary smiles as she sees it. As the rainbow begins to fade, we hold on Elliott's face as the music swells. And then:

**CUT TO BLACK.**

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