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GHOSTBUSTERS 3

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TO MAKE YOU
FEEL GOOD
PAGE 33

2015 PREVIEW

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 5 • SPECTRE • JURASSIC WORLD
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON • THE FANTASTIC FOUR
ANT-MAN • TED 2 • TERMINATOR GENISYS • AND... MINIONS!

CONTENDERS READY
26-PAGE OSCARS
SPECIAL INSIDE



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS 88 THINGS WE'VE DISCOVERED

*Max's methods are somewhat... unconventional, but... I am sure you will come to respect his artistry in this matter.



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF **KICK-ASS**

Kingsman

THE SECRET SERVICE



IN CINEMAS JANUARY 29

M A R V

#Kingsman



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NEW YORK CITY 1981,
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A MOST VIOLENT YEAR

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ALESSANDRO NIVOLA

AND ALBERT BROOKS

FROM ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE J.C. CHANDOR

IN CINEMAS JANUARY 23

a

long time ago in a galaxy far, far away (okay... suburban Gloucestershire) a small boy put a tape into a VHS, and nothing was ever quite the same again...

Star Wars was the film that made me fall in love with movies, and I know I'm not alone. Cinephiles of a certain vintage will quell their talk of Coppola, Tarantino and the Nouvelle Vague to remember that obligatory queue round the block in a pre-multiplex world. Even CGI-spoiled kids today will overlook the Airfix-y space scenes, to be transfixed as I once was, by the power of a great story breathlessly told.

So it was fitting that in my first few weeks in the **Empire** office, we were all taken back to that moment for 88 seconds as we watched J. J. Abrams' early work on Episode VII. The tension was palpable — our hearts expected a show, our heads couldn't quite forgive being let down by another J. J.... Jar Jar, anyone?

Fortunately for all, J. J.'s 88 seconds met with unanimous approval, and a world of tantalising possibilities opened up for what the new films might offer — a full breakdown of which you can find on page 22. The only disappointment is that we have to wait 'til next Christmas to unwrap the rest of this present. That's 300 and something more sleeps, you know.

But 2015 isn't all about waiting for **Star Wars**, and your very own **Empire** is striking back against post-festive torpor with news of Spectre, velociraptors, T-1000s, a thousand Ultrons, haunted houses, furious motors and... life on Mars. Our guide to **the 20 top movies** you must see in 2015 starts on page 56. And if you fancy a flutter — or just some pub ammo — check out our **Oscars special** with our tips for the runners and riders this year including Jessica Chastain, **Eddie Redmayne**, Bradley Cooper and Patricia Arquette.

And finally I just wanted to say hello to you all. This is a magazine I've wanted to work on for years, and looking at the roster of films due this year, I couldn't think of a better time to be here. The Force is most definitely with us, so grab yourself some popcorn. This is going to be FUN.



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Morgan Rees, Editor-In-Chief **EMPIRE**

Illustration: Oily Gibbs

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The Man Who Would Be King, which proves that Mr. Kipling certainly spun exceedingly good yarns.



SPINE QUOTE WINNERS: Issue 307 "Come on, man. I had a rough night and I hate the fuckin' Eagles, man!" is from The Big Lebowski; "Good lord! Jolly good. Four foot one? Well, that is a long time, isn't it?" is from Time Bandits; "Walkin' down the hall, by myself, smokin' a jay with 50 elves." is from Dazed And Confused; "Yet, out of the ashes of this tragedy, we shall rise to greet the dawning of a new era..." is from The Lion King; "How, then, do you explain the establishment of the anti-goblin programme, with plans to lure them out with gingerbread traps?" is from Whoops Apocalypse; "I'm very, very choosy. I'm also very suspicious, very, very irrational, and I have a very, very short temper." is from A Good Year. **Congratulations to:** Joe Philpott, James Stokes, Andrew Robertson, Matt Williams, Gary Bishop, Wayne Littlewood, Owen Hendricks, Ryan Madden, Lewis Murray and Paul O'Reilly.



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EMPIRE ON LOCATION 02.2015 YOUR TICKET TO THE MOVIES THAT MATTER



SAN ANDREAS

→ **LOCATION:** GOLD COAST, AUSTRALIA

The Rock versus a hard place

VILLAGE Roadshow Studios (pictured) on Australia's Gold Coast takes up a fair chunk of real estate, and right now it feels like San Andreas, Warner Bros.' forthcoming 3D earthquake actioner, is using every last inch. An original property that's boldly releasing amid the jostle of summer-blockbuster heavyweights, everything about this production is *big*. Including, of course, its star.

Dwayne Johnson sits with *Empire*

in a threadbare unit tent. Clad in his favourite Muhammad Ali hoodie, he's in high spirits, despite having spent the day in the facility's five-metre deep, 1.5 million-gallon water tank. "In this I navigate a helicopter, I navigate a plane, I navigate a boat — flying and driving every vehicle you could imagine," he grins. Adding to his pantheon of larger-than-life heroes, he's playing Ray Gaines, a fire and rescue helicopter pilot who, when *The Big One* finally hits California, scrambles frantically from LA to San Francisco with his ex-wife (Carla Gugino) to find their



• Dwayne Johnson in his helicopter flying over, ahem, the rock...



• Director Brad Peyton prepares Johnson for his latest journey.

only living child (True Detective's Alexandra Daddario) as the entire west coast crumples beneath them.

This gargantuan production might only be director Brad Peyton's third movie (his second, following *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island*, with Johnson), but he's hardly fazed. "This is the most complex movie of this kind that you could possibly make," he explains. "There are *sooooo* many variables in it, that you *have* to plan it, just so that you can pick out this piece, get that element, add this visual effect, and then comp all these things together — there are shots that literally have 15 elements in them."

Appropriately for a movie about an earthquake, the adjective most used by cast and crew is "grounded". Peyton is aiming for full audience immersion. "I've invested a lot in putting the audience inside events. We have a set-piece that travels with a character through a collapsing building for about three minutes. We don't cut." *San Andreas'* visual style could be as much *Children Of Men* as, well, *Earthquake*.

For Johnson, that groundedness also applies to the characters. "A lot of times in movies like this — and it's not a knock, because they're very good — they kind of just touch on the issues the family has and then go to the big explosions and dazzling effects. But we really take moments and delve into mending their issues." He pauses. "Although just to be clear, we're not making *The Notebook* — there's a reason we're releasing in summer!" **SAM TOY**

SAN ANDREAS IS OUT ON MAY 29.

The Rock talks about *Breaking Bad*, tequila and teddy bears at tinyurl.com/The-RockVideo

EMPIRE
ON LOCATION
02.2015



THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL

→ **LOCATION: UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA**

• Dame Judi checks out the local wares.

There's more room at the inn for "The Avengers of Brit acting royalty"...

SHUT UP!" SHOUTS Dame Maggie Smith. But the squawking parrots ignore her. They have no respect for the fact that she and Dame Judi Dench are about to start a scene. It's day 41 of the 50-day shoot for *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. We are in the hotel's garden prior to the wedding of Sonny (Dev Patel) and Sunaina (Tena Desae). It is a simple exchange between Dench's Evelyn and Smith's Muriel. "Mags" and "Jude" have worked together since 1958, and if *Marigold Hotel* is *The Avengers of Brit acting royalty*, this is *Iron Man and Hulk* smashing it up. Though the parrots settle, the take is still spoiled by an aircraft overhead.

"Apart from the birds and plane, it was beautiful," deadpans Smith.

The word "sequel" is banned here. Set eight months after the first film, *The Second Best...* is being talked up as a companion piece, a continuation of the lives of the 70-going-on-18

year-olds who won hearts and almost 137 million box-office dollars in 2012. Joining Dench, Bill Nighy, Celia Imrie and Ronald Pickup as the hotel guests are Tamsin Greig, researching retirement homes, and Richard Gere as an American writer — one of whom might be a hotel inspector investigating Sonny and Muriel as they look to open a second establishment.

Earlier, *Empire* watched Patel's Sonny undertake a roll call, an innovation to check if any residents died during the night. For all the focus on the legends, Patel is the first name on the call sheet, a sign of how important his comedic energy is to the mix.

"The first one was absolutely terrifying," he says. "Now it's a lot more comfortable. Sonny is like the Donkey in *Shrek*, irritating but endearing. The challenge has been to create a character the audience can still invest in when things get dark."



• Richard Gere happily gets into "Indian time".

THE INSIDE TRACK
CHOREOGRAPHER LONGINESS FERNANDES WORKED WITH DEV PATEL ON SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE. "I'M ACTUALLY A HORRENDOUS DANCER," SAYS PATEL.

With so many storylines, director John Madden is keeping his cast on set all day, everyday, so they can pop up in shots and keep stories alive. Which means a lot of downtime...

"We're on India time here," says a content Gere. "Forget about your watch and hang."

"What's lovely about working in a country is that you don't feel like a tourist," says Dench. "I've lost my heart to it." **IAN FREER**

THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 27.

Five hotels owned by movie stars: tinyurl.com/MovieStarHotels

after SHOAH



THE LAST OF THE UNJUST

(LE DERNIER DES INJUSTES)

A film by CLAUDE LANZMANN

IN CINEMAS 9TH JANUARY 2015

“Utterly Fascinating”

- Esquire

“A Historic Film”

- The New Yorker

“A Monumental Film”

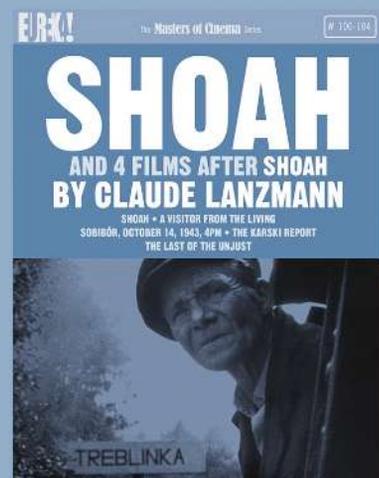
- Kent Jones, Film Comment

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SHOAH

AND 4 FILMS AFTER SHOAH
BY CLAUDE LANZMANN

SHOAH • A VISITOR FROM THE LIVING
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THE LAST OF THE UNJUST

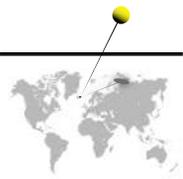


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FORTITUDE

→ **LOCATION:** REYDARFJÖRDUR, ICELAND

The Lost of Nordic noir

IT'S EASY TO SEE HOW you could go a little mad in Reydarfjörður. Just spelling it could give you a headache. This far-flung bit of Iceland is almost aggressive in its solitary, serene beauty. Which makes it the perfect location for Sky Atlantic's new blockbuster show, *Fortitude*, about people looking for solitude and finding mostly darkness.

Fortitude takes place in an isolated town with plans to welcome tourists somewhere so idyllic it's never known violent crime. You can imagine what comes next. The show opens with a grisly death, which unstops the town's bottled-up secrets, and the pure white of *Fortitude* starts to spot with blood. And it's not just the people acting oddly. Animals are turning cannibalistic and something ancient is emerging from the ice.

The residents of *Fortitude* are international and starry, including Stanley Tucci, Michael Gambon and Sofie Gråbøl. For Gråbøl, who plays "the town governor; sort of the town mother", it's her first major role since scandi-noir hit *The Killing*. "I've been wanting to work [on British TV], but it was always difficult," she says. "First I was filming *The Killing*, so there was a whole year where I couldn't do anything else. Then I got cancer (she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012). So I spent almost a whole year on that... Now's the time!"

She runs a hand over her head. "I have enough hair now." Gråbøl brushes off comparisons to previous work. "This isn't just *The Killing*. It's also *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. It's a lot of 'Nordic noir'... And it has so much of its own tone... It's a place where you don't see the dark sides — until you do."

Tucci is also making his first step into British TV, playing an American detective investigating a mysterious death, "I'm the outsider," he explains. "Nobody likes me — in real life either." To why he chose this as his international TV debut he says, "I don't know that I could compare this to anything else. It's odd. You don't know where it's going."

"We don't know where it's going!" adds Gråbøl. "I like not knowing." Think of it as a little like *Lost*, with more polar bears... **OLLY RICHARDS**
FORTITUDE AIRS ON SKY ATLANTIC HD FROM JANUARY.

• Michael Gambon's wildlife photographer Henry Tyson, surrounded by the foreboding Icelandic landscape.



• Stanley Tucci as DCI Morton and Sofie Gråbøl as Odegard.



THE
INSIDE TRACK
NO POLAR BEARS
WERE USED (OR HARMED)
DURING FILMING.
ANIMATRONICS, A MAN
IN A SUIT AND CGI FILLED
THE ROLE.

Hear Fortitude star Stanley Tucci on the Empire podcast: tinyurl.com/TucciPodcast

EMPIRE
ON LOCATION
02.2015



• Bruno (Matthias Schoenaerts) and Lucile (Michelle Williams).

THE
INSIDE TRACK

THIS IS THE FIRST
FEATURE CREDIT FOR WRITER
MATT CHARMAN, WHOSE NEXT
FILM IS STEVEN SPIELBERG'S
UNTITLED COLD WAR
THRILLER.

SUITE FRANÇAISE

→ **LOCATION:** NIVELLES, BELGIUM

Duchess director Saul Dibb tackles epic World War II romance

• The ominous tanks of the Nazis arrive.

presented challenges to director/co-writer Saul Dibb. “The biggest issue is, it was two novellas out of a projected five,” says the Duchess filmmaker. “And the two novellas aren’t directly related, apart from by their historical context.” His solution was to place at the story’s heart quiet, troubled Lucile (Williams), who develops a complicated relationship with Schoenaerts’ German soldier.

Williams, Dibb assures us, brings a unique blend of delicacy and steel. “It’s hard to find people who have got that complexity and subtlety. It’s about soul, really. I needed somebody who’d be able to convey an inner world, and a sense of somebody trying to break out from a very restrictive lifestyle.” Between takes, Williams talks to Scott Thomas of her character’s behaviour in the scene: “What I’m fighting is I don’t want to be in open space,” she says. As the film develops, she will have to step out more, forced by circumstance, cruelty and sorrow. As Dibb says, “It’s kind of a story of a mouse that roared...” **NEV PIERCE SUITE FRANÇAISE IS OUT ON MARCH 13.**

IN A WORN-LOOKING house in the Belgian countryside, the air hazy and the period production design impeccable, Michelle Williams waits while Nazi soldiers search the rooms. It’s cramped and convincing, with DP Eduard Grau (*A Single Man*) operating a handheld camera, while Williams trades hushed words with one of the soldiers, played by *Rust and Bones*’ Matthias Schoenaerts, in a tone that

suggests their relationship is closer than one might expect.

“Have your feelings changed?” he asks.

“Yes, they have.”

“Don’t lie!”

In subsequent takes this line changes to, “You’re lying.”

There’s a lot of lying here, in a war romance with an extraordinary true history. For while the film is based on a novel, this fiction itself was written in most unusual factual circumstances,

while the war was still going on.

Author Irène Némirovsky planned a series, though she completed only two volumes before dying in Auschwitz in 1942. Her notebooks lay closed for decades, as her daughter, Denise, believed they’d be too painful to read. She finally opened them in the late ’90s and they were published as *Suite Française* in 2004 to international success. A film was perhaps inevitable, though it

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- ZOO MAGAZINE

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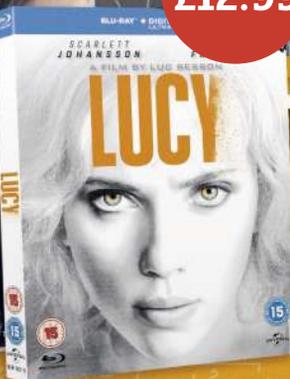
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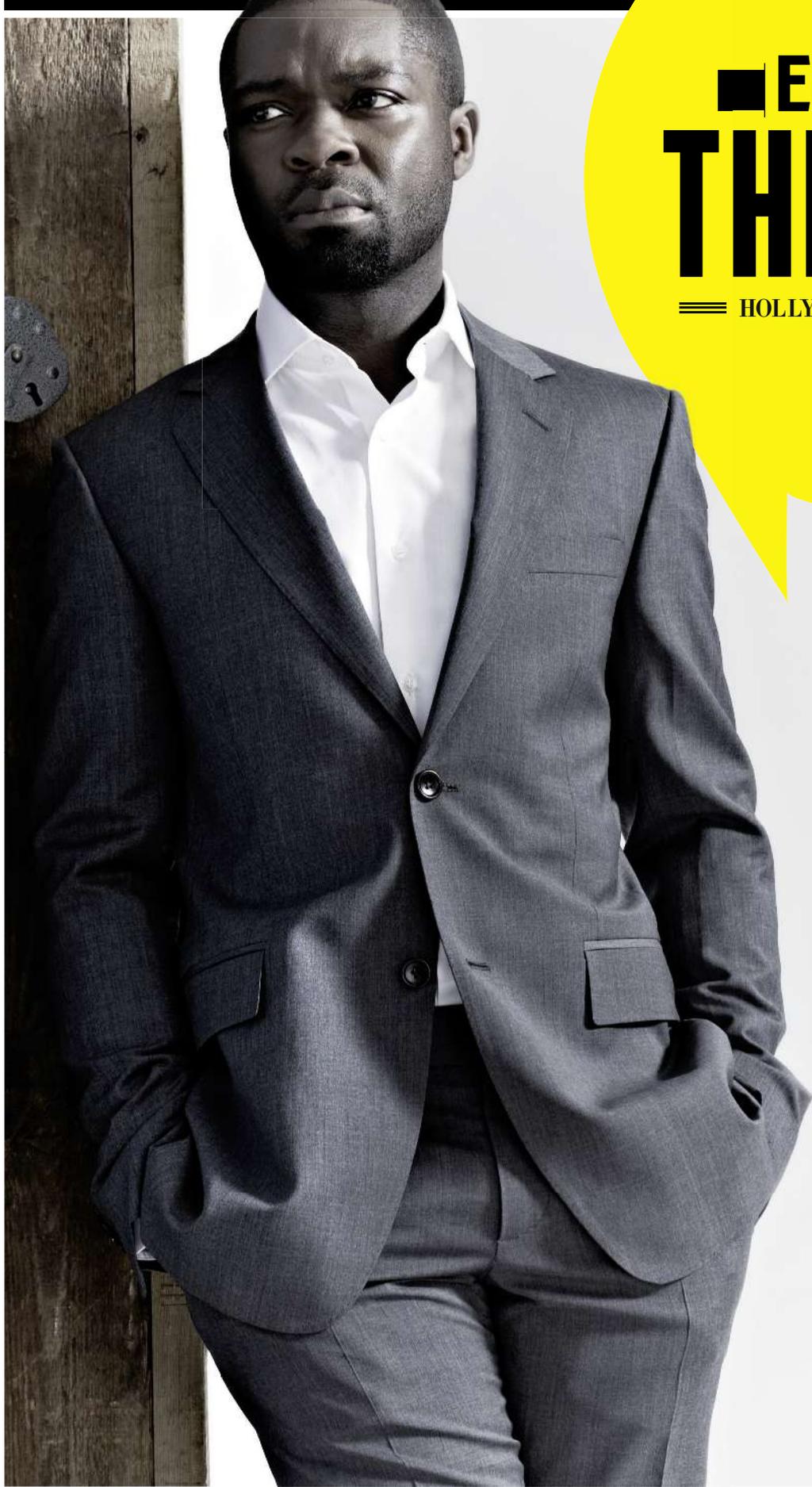


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EMPIRE THE SLATE

≡ HOLLYWOOD IN ENGLISH ≡

THE FACE

≡ **HAIL TO THE KING**

David Oyelowo's
faith pays off

→ **WRAPPED IN JULY AND NOW IN** the Oscar race, Martin Luther King pic *Selma* has been a sprint *and* a marathon for David Oyelowo. Now, he's a rising star who's worked with Cruise, Spielberg and Nolan, but when he read the script in 2007, he was a jobbing actor in L.A. "Basically God told me I would play this role," says Oyelowo, who shares Dr. King's strong faith. "It didn't make any sense — British actor, two months off the boat, not really a guy I had looked at and thought I'd love to play him. It was like a thunderbolt." He prayed and worked and... flunked the audition. But that director, and others, came and went. Then Ava DuVernay — who'd directed him in *Middle Of Nowhere* — joined, and finally Oyelowo became the perfect person for the story of King's part in the *Selma* marches over African-American voting rights in 1965. The aim was to show "who is the man behind the pulpit?" and Oyelowo's Golden Globe-nominated turn captures the orator and the man — flaws and all. "The self-sacrifice he exhibited is only accentuated by seeing that he was a flesh-and-blood guy, as opposed to some kind of Civil Rights superhero." **NP**
SELMA IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 6.

Adrian Green



88

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE STAR WARS TRAILER

The trailer for *The Force Awakens*, the first *Star Wars* film in over a decade, dropped at the end of November. Here, *Empire* breaks it down in mind-blowing detail. Beware spoilers...

- 1 It will be a day long remembered — The *Force Awakens* teaser premiered at approximately 3pm on Friday, November 28.
- 2 Not a lot of work was done in the *Empire* office after it arrived.
- 3 At that point, there was still over a year left before the film's opening.
- 4 The teaser had initially been intended for cinemas, with a handful of cinemas in the US scheduled to play the teaser before every screening they had.
- 5 The Alamo Drafthouse, in Austin, Texas, screened it 17 times in a row, with a panel discussion inbetween each showing.
- 6 At the time of going to press, the trailer had been watched over 60 million times on YouTube alone.

- 7 The trailer is 88 seconds long.
- 8 It was preceded by a handwritten card from co-writer/director J. J. Abrams, along with a sketch of a TIE fighter.
- 9 Interestingly, it doesn't feature any corporate logos at any point — no Disney, no Bad Robot, not even Lucasfilm.
- 10 It begins with a black screen. Then a guttural voice growls, "There has been an awakening. Have you felt it?"
- 11 There was much speculation that the voice belonged to Benedict Cumberbatch, despite the fact that he hasn't been cast. Not officially, anyway.
- 12 But it actually belongs to Andy Serkis, who

confirmed the news to *Empire's* sister radio station, Absolute Radio.

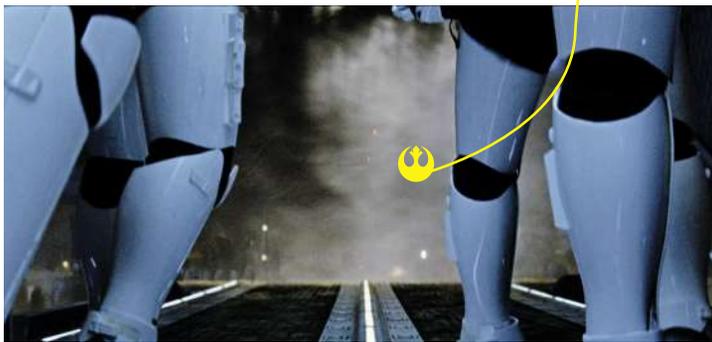
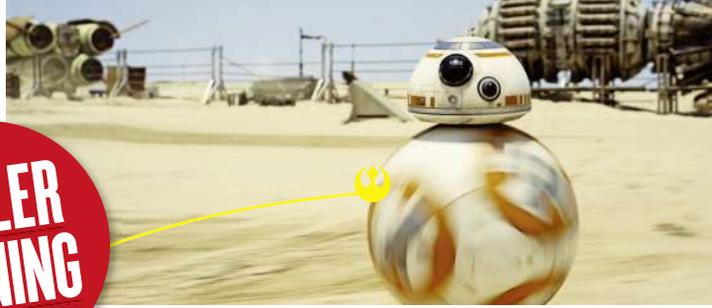
- 13 He's almost certainly playing a Sith Lord, although there has been no confirmation of character names or allegiances.
- 14 The first person we see is John Boyega as a character named Finn. And that is a stormtrooper costume.
- 15 Which explains why he's panicked and sweaty. Abrams has confirmed, in a series of character name reveals designed to echo trading cards, that Finn is "on the run". But from what? Has he crashlanded on a planet that isn't necessarily stormtrooper-friendly?
- 16 To those wondering why stormtroopers no longer look like Temuera Morrison's Jango Fett, clones were gradually

phased out from the Empire after *The Clone Wars*.

- 17 Astonishingly, some people haven't taken kindly to the idea that the lead of the new *Star Wars* film is black. In a classy riposte on Instagram, Boyega wrote, "To whom it may concern... Get used to it."
- 18 Is this a hint that Finn will be around for Episodes VIII and IX?
- 19 It's been widely assumed that the desert planet is Tatooine, but that may not be the case.
- 20 Either way, the sand dunes are from the film's location shoot in Abu Dhabi.
- 21 At around the 22-second mark, we hear a noise. A familiar one. Could this be an Imperial probe droid?
- 22 Next, we meet a new droid, rolling around as if his life depended on it.
- 23 This little chap was quickly dubbed the ball droid, and was the standout star of the teaser. That beeping sound you can hear is R2-D2 getting jealous.



SPOILER WARNING



24 The ball droid is, apparently, a gyrodroid, in the way that Artoo is a astromech droid.

25 **But we also know his name, thanks to Abrams. Meet BB-8.**

26 And what's that he's rolling past? Are those engines for podracers? They certainly are. It would seem that Abrams isn't completely erasing the legacy of George Lucas' prequels.

27 **The design for BB-8 hews very closely to an old Ralph McQuarrie concept drawing.**

28 **The stormtrooper suit** has changed in the 30-year period between Return Of The Jedi and The Force Awakens — now the their 'lips' bleeds directly into their eyes. It's very sleek, and very cool.

29 **Is Boyega inside one of those suits? Could that be him in the middle of the frame? Isn't this chap a little short to be a stormtrooper?**

30 Most of the trailer indicates that Abrams is following George Lucas' stylistic template — lots of

clean, classic compositions. But this brief sequence, with shaky-cam, also hints that Abrams is bringing his own sense of style to the movie.

31 **The stormtroopers are on an armoured transport — where are they going? It looks wet and windy, wherever it is.**

32 This is the first time in all of the Star Wars movies that we have been inside a stormtrooper transport.

33 **Meet another new face in the Star Wars universe — this is newcomer Daisy Ridley.**

34 Abrams has confirmed that her name is Rey, and not Kira, as had been rumoured. If you believe everything you hear, Rey is a resourceful young scavenger whose home may be the hollowed-out shell of an AT-AT.

35 **Her surname, notably, hasn't been revealed. Given that she may be the daughter of Han Solo and Princess Leia, there could be a very good reason for that. Is she Rey Solo?**

36 Look at her **goggles** — they seem to be taken from an old stormtrooper's mask.

37 **The design of Rey also echoes a Ralph McQuarrie concept drawing for Luke Skywalker, back when he was called Starkiller.**

38 The story would seem to be throwing Finn, stranded on the sand planet after being shot down, together with Rey as they embark upon a quest.

39 **The vehicle she's riding is a new kind of Star Wars transport — a landspeeder we haven't seen before. Some cruel online wags mocked its unfortunate resemblance to a Magnum.**

40 And what's **that** on the side of her speeder? It's a gaffi stick, the Tusken Raider's weapon of choice.

41 **Rey is headed towards a town. If this is indeed Tatooine, could it be Anchorhead? Might she be on her way to Tosche Station to pick up some power converters? >**

ON THE RADAR



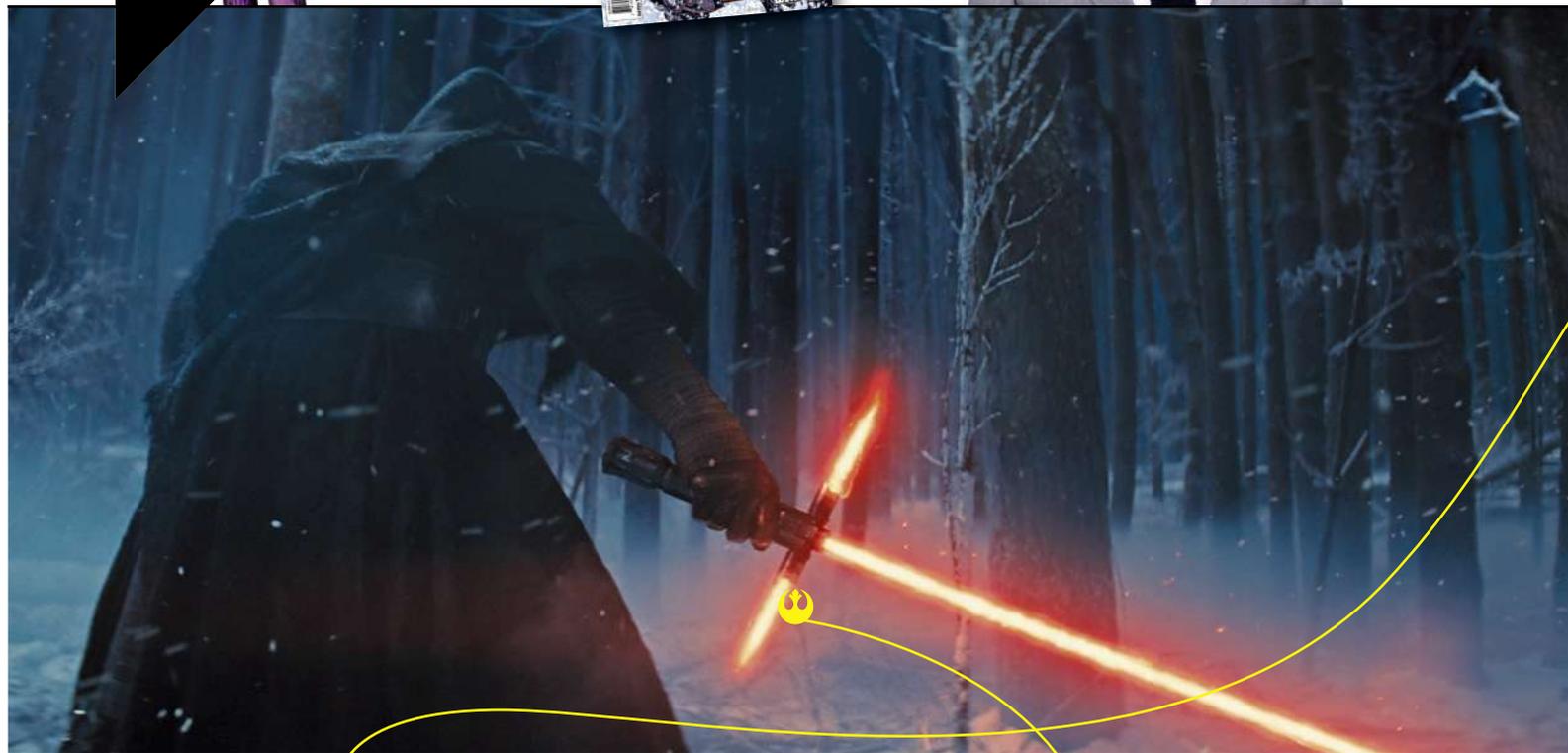
← Some call him the Gangster Of Love. But come 2016, everyone will be calling Jared Leto The Joker in WB/DC's *Suicide Squad*.



← He'll be joined by Will Smith, Margot Robbie and Cara Delevingne in David Ayer's gritty superpowered take on *The Dirty Dozen*.



← Fresh from guarding the galaxy, Chris Pratt is in talks to saddle up with Denzel Washington in the *Magnificent Seven* remake.



42 At first glance, this **X-wing pilot** seemed just like any other X-wing pilot — but this is our first look at Oscar Isaac as... Poe Dameron!

43 **Poe Dameron. What a name.** With its obvious shades of **Edgar Allan Poe** (not to mention the **Teletubbies**), does it imply that Dameron might be tempted by the darker side of life?

44 Again, there's some subtle redesign work on the X-wing pilot's costume. The helmet is black instead of white and closer-fitting; note the Rebel Alliance insignia, prominent on both Poe's helmet and vest. The X-wing-targeting computer can be seen over his left shoulder.

45 Poe's piloting **an updated X-wing**, seen here flying alongside two others in formation on an as-yet unidentified planet.

46 The presence of X-wings in the movie has been known for some

time — an X-wing pilot was seen boarding his craft in one of the Force For Change videos that J. J. Abrams released a few months ago, while pap shots of the film's UK shoot revealed several full-size X-wings on set.

47 Note the subtle differences to the X-wing: instead of four circular engines, it has two, which split in half when the S-foils are deployed. Expanded universe fans will notice design traits in common with the X-wing's predecessor, the **Z-95 Headhunter**.

48 It seems clear, as they fly over the lake, that this is a new planet.

49 It's the first time in the Star Wars saga that we've seen X-wings flying — not taking off or landing — anywhere other than space.

50 It's also notable that there isn't a single second of 'space' footage in this Star Wars trailer. Plenty of Wars, not a lot of Stars. Expect that to change.

51 Then, staggering into a clearing in a snowy forest, we get our first glimpse of the back of the film's presumed bad guy, **Kylo Ren**.

52 This is rumoured to be Adam Driver, star of *Girls* and *Inside Llewyn Davis*, as the movie's answer to **Darth Vader**. But Abrams has not confirmed that yet.

53 There have been suggestions that **Kylo** could actually be played by *Game Of Thrones*' **Gwendoline Christie**. But even though it's a made-up moniker, **Kylo** sounds like a guy's name.

54 Driver has been glimpsed on set in

55 X-wing fighter pilot costume, though. A red herring from the notoriously spoiler-conscious Abrams? Or does his character switch sides in the film — something that, **Anakin Skywalker** aside, has not happened in the saga to date?

56 Leaked concept art suggests that **Kylo** could wear a **Vader-like mask**, and have a **Vader-like robotic hand**.

57 That's the **lightsaber** of a Sith. Crucially, though, he's not called **Darth**. Is this film about **Kylo** earning the right to be called **Darth** [Insert Ominous Word Here]?

58 Then again, he could be an **Inquisitor**, a group of villains connected to the Sith. The first **Inquisitor** is currently being exquisitely evil in the animated series, **Star Wars Rebels**.

59 The lightsaber, or 'broadsaber', was an instant hit. A cruciform



→ Benedict Cumberbatch will don a goatee and wave his hands about like Derren Brown as Doctor Strange, bringing a sad but dignified end to Matthew Modine's campaign for the role.



→ Krysten Ritter — Aaron Paul's ill-fated girlfriend on Breaking Bad — will play a super-powered detective in Netflix/Marvel's AKA Jessica Jones. Don't let Bryan Cranston anywhere near her.



→ Toho Studios have announced the return of their original Godzilla. So if you're trying to hire a giant reptile costume in Tokyo any time soon, you'll be shit out of luck.



design, the hilt itself is made of light, making it a bummer to hold. Note also the jagged red blade. This is one angry laser sword.

60 **Kylo is preparing for battle. But with whom? Is Mark Hamill's Luke Skywalker about to enter the fray?**

61 Rumours about the film's plot have Luke removing himself from the Galactic fray following the events of Return Of The Jedi. Could it be that his return to action is the "awakening" referenced at the beginning of the trailer, and that Kylo could be about to hunt down the last remaining Jedi?

62 **Kylo is stepping into a snowy forest clearing, but chances are he's not on Hoth. A new planet?**

63 The clip further suggests that Abrams is definitely ploughing his own stylistic furrow — the camera tracks with Ren as he heads into the wood.

64 **That being said, there's nary a lens flare — one of Abrams' favourite flourishes — to be seen.**

65 Lightsaber ignited, the voiceover kicks back in: "The dark side..." intones Serkis... "and the light."

66 **And with that, an old friend returns. Hello, the Millennium Falcon, we've missed you.**

67 The ship — which may not be piloted by Han Solo and Chewbacca at this point in the film — swoops and glides along sand dunes in the teaser's most ostentatious shot...

68 **Revealing that it's engaging in battle with TIE fighters.**

69 Which have had a colour inversion — black with grey accents/panels instead of the reverse.

70 **Although this shot makes it look like the Falcon is performing all kinds of dexterous acts, clever online types have stabilised the shot, and therefore make it clear that it's simply swooping down to the sand dunes, before flying along.**

71 Most will assume this is the first glimpse of the Falcon since Return Of The Jedi, when it escaped the Death Star at the cost of one of its radar dishes.

72 **Not so — George Lucas included the ship as an Easter egg in Revenge Of The Sith.**

73 And that radar dish has since been replaced. It's now square.

74 **Note the contrails in the Falcon's wake — a result of flying in a planetary atmosphere.**

75 The music that greets the Falcon? You might just recognise it.

76 **Otherwise, all the music in the trailer was composed for the trailer by John Williams himself.**

77 Within hours of the teaser's launch, there were numerous parodies doing the rounds.

78 **There was a George Lucas Special Edition parody.**

79 It got over nine million views alone.

80 **Also a Wes Anderson parody and a LEGO version.**

81 And a version that added Abrams-style lens flare to every shot.

82 Plus a Saturday Night Live parody, which hilariously pointed out that the leads from the original trilogy — Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford — are older now than they once were.

83 **There's even a lightzimmerframe joke.**

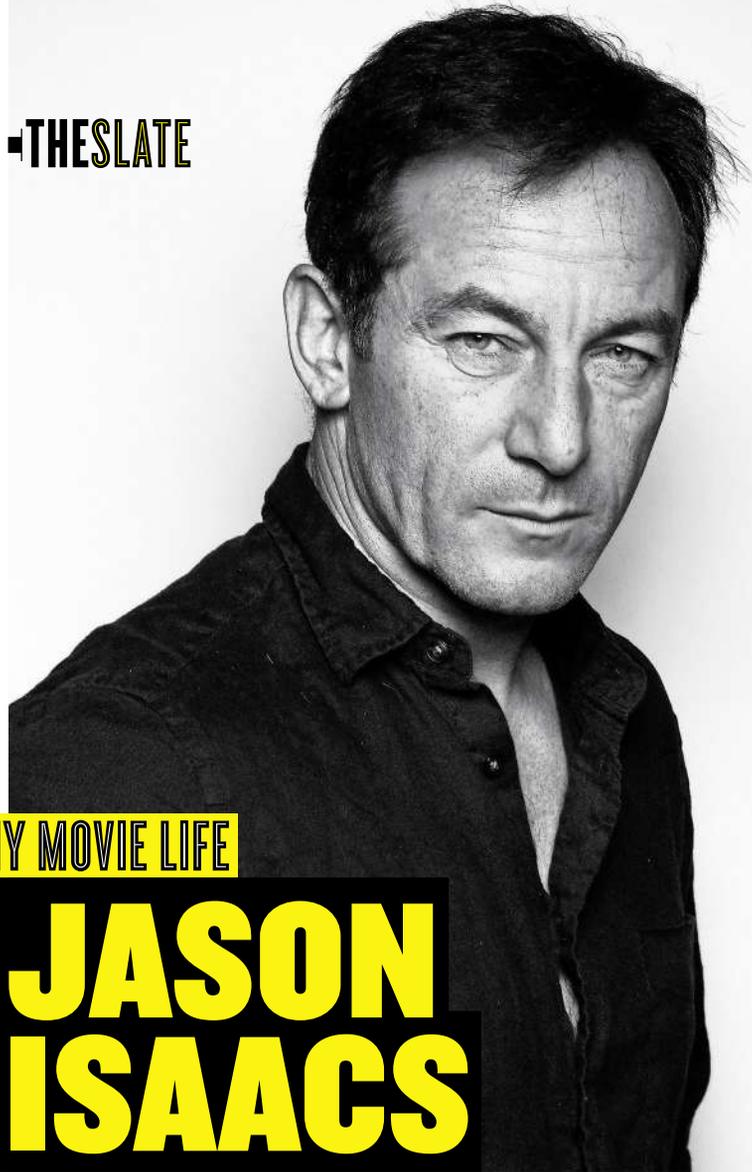
84 Of course, this ignores the fact that Abrams withheld Han, Luke and Leia from the teaser trailer in the first place. An admirable sign of confidence.

85 **But what's this? There is a lightsaber sound at the very end of the teaser... it's Luke's saber from A New Hope.**

86 This may not be an accident — early rumours about the film's plot indicate that Luke's lightsaber, which he lost when Vader cut off his hand during their clash in Cloud City, will play a crucial role.

87 **The trailer was greeted with almost universal acclaim... "That Star Wars trailer gave me the tingles. So thrilled to see John Boyega in there." - @edgarwright**

88 Despite all that, George Lucas claims he still hasn't seen it. "I like going to the movies and watching the whole thing there. I plan to see it when it's released." Get a move on, George.
STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS IS OUT ON DECEMBER 18, 2015.



MY MOVIE LIFE

JASON ISAACS

The latest Star Wars villain chooses the films that shaped him

The first movie I ever saw was *The Sound Of Music*. Not on its first run — I'm far too young. At one point someone handed someone something and I stood on my chair and screamed, "CRACKERJACK." I was marched out by my mum, crying, not understanding why everyone was booing me.

The last movie that reminded me of my childhood was *The Wizard Of Oz*. It was on television every Christmas. I've subjected my own children to thousands of viewings of it. They're completely fed up with it now. They prefer *Wicked*.

The last movie that made me fight back the tears was *Safety Not Guaranteed*. I watched it and thought it was incredibly gentle, sweet and surprising and all the things I want films to be.

The last movie that made me cry with laughter was *Blades Of Glory*. My daughter had some friends over for

a sleepover and they chose it, which I thought was hilarious but actually maybe not that appropriate. I wept, mostly with laughter and partly with fear of Social Services turning up.

The last movie I watched from behind the sofa was Sam Raimi's *Drag Me To Hell*. I loved it. I was on location in an apartment in the dark on my own — let's say it was an old house too, for effect — and even the title sequence scared me silly. Then I slept with the light on.

The last movie that surprised me was *Festen*. It changed the way I thought about cinema. It was the first Dogme film to be successful and it was the first time it seemed true that these cheap consumer cameras could democratise filmmaking.

The last movie I watched that I wished I'd appeared in was *Don*



• Above: David Fincher's *Gone Girl*. Below: (top to bottom) *Blades Of Glory*, *The Sound Of Music*, *Drag Me To Hell*.

Jon, the Joseph Gordon-Levitt film. It's not perfect but I like what he was getting at and that he let everyone in that transform.

The last movie that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end was *Gone Girl*. I saw it a few days ago and it's been a very, very long time since I've covered my face with my hands and wanted to shout at the characters on the screen. I did that to me repeatedly. I looked like someone possibly off his medication.

The last movie that I couldn't stop thinking about was Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth*. I recently watched it again, and it is the most human, most brutal, most moving picture of alcoholism that I've ever seen. And yet, perversely, full of humour and love. Ray Winstone and Kathy Burke are still sublimely brilliant and believable. As good as it gets.

The last time I wanted to download the soundtrack after watching a movie was ages ago. The last time I remember thinking, 'I must have that,' was *The Big Chill* when I was a student. But I bought the *Frozen* soundtrack for the kids.

The last movie that inspired my fashion sense was... well, I have no fashion sense. I thought Colin Firth looked incredibly stylish in *A Single Man*. I would like Tom Ford to dress me every day.

The last movie that taught me a life skill was Paul Greengrass' *Captain Phillips*. It taught me to calm down and count to ten. He handled being in a lifeboat with a load of lunatics very well.

The next movie I will see will be *Inherent Vice*. I'm dying to see it. I love Paul Thomas Anderson. *Dying* to see it. **OLLY RICHARDS STAR WARS REBELS IS ON DISNEY XD NOW.**



FIVE THINGS

INHERENT VICE

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON TAKES US INSIDE HIS SURREAL PRIVATE EYE FLICK

1 Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice* marks the first screen adaptation of a novel by Thomas Pynchon. The experience has given Anderson the taste for more. "Mason & Dixon is a great book that I'd love to try some day," he says. "Vineland is another." Would he tackle Pynchon's densest work, *Gravity's Rainbow*? "Too smart for me," he laughs. "I couldn't get through that. Now that I understand his work a bit better, I'll try again someday."

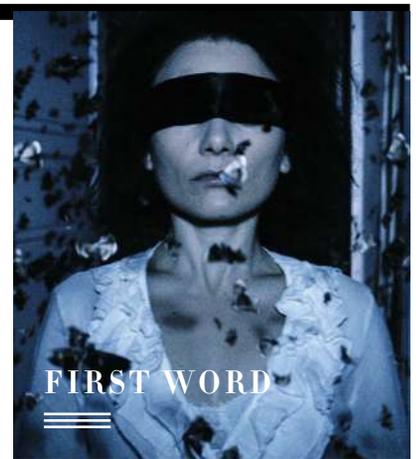
2 The movie tracks Joaquin Phoenix's stoner private eye, Doc Sportello, as he tries to solve a labyrinthine mystery in sunny Los Angeles. "I never thought in a million years I'd make a detective movie," says Anderson. In preparation, he rewatched Howard Hawks' classic, *The Big Sleep*, which was "helpful in terms of freeing up the thinking that the important thing is solving the crime or following the plot. There are other reasons to do a detective story."

3 The film has been bracketed as a '70s flick, although PTA is keen to point out that that's not quite the case. It's actually set in 1970, the year of his birth. "I remember when we were making it, people would say, 'So, it's about the '70s,' and I'd be like, 'Fuck off, we're making a movie about the '60s! Come on!'"

4 At one point, Robert Downey Jr. had been linked with the role of Doc, but word has it that Anderson told him he was too old. "I did!" he confirms. "He took it like a man. He took it like, 'Well, okay, I'm going to go cash this \$65 million check in the bank while you make your stupid little beach movie!' Robert Downey could do just about anything, but I think Joaquin was better for the part."

5 Phoenix, reteaming with Anderson after 2012's heavy-duty *The Master*, has fun as the addled Doc, often displaying his dirtied bare feet. "He really gets into stuff," laughs Anderson. "Even two months before we started shooting, he wasn't wearing shoes and his feet were so fucking disgusting. We didn't really do it justice. I wish I'd gotten more shots of how disgusting his feet were." **CH**

INHERENT VICE IS OUT ON JANUARY 30. TO HEAR MORE FROM PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON, DOWNLOAD THE EMPIRE PODCAST FROM JANUARY 30.



FIRST WORD

MEET THE DUKE

Is Peter Strickland Britain's most interesting director?

→ **LOOKING FOR SOMETHING** more, a dreamer leaves humdrum Reading and heads overseas. No, it's not the plot of Ricky Gervais' *Cemetery Junction* (although it's that too) but the career trajectory of Peter Strickland, who had to leave Britain for Budapest in order to be considered one of Britain's finest young directors. His first film, 2009's *Katalin Varga*, was shot entirely in Hungarian, while his second, *Berberian Sound Studio*, was an Argento-esque mindwarper set in Italy in the 1970s.

Now *The Duke Of Burgundy* — named after a species of moth — offers sexual submission, role-play and lepidoptery in a world seemingly without men. "I guess the film comes from that period of cinema which explored kind of wayward activities, such as female lovers and sadomasochism," Strickland tells *Empire*. Just don't call it kinky. "The word 'kinky' reminds me of reading *The Sun* in the '80s," chides Strickland of any *Fifty Shades* comparisons.

"The main thing is that, with the kink, it wouldn't be interesting for me if they were both into it. I'm interested in when one person isn't. Then you get this whole boundary of compromise and coercion." A million shades of grey, in other words. **PDS**

THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 20.





AWARDS 2015

WAKE UP — TIME TO VOTE

FOR THE JAMESON EMPIRE AWARDS 2015

• Here: A Most Violent Year. Below: (clockwise from top) 22 Jump Street, Captain America: The Winter Soldier and Paddington.

TIME, AS ANYONE WHO'S SEEN CHRISTOPHER Nolan's *Interstellar* will know, is relative. But it's also not one for standing still, so you'd best get a move on if you want to make your vote count for the most irreverent, laidback and damn fun movie awards ceremony around — the Jameson Empire Awards 2015.

To illustrate: the awards will be held in London on Sunday, March 29. Open voting will close on February 20. So now is the time for you to decide on the films and performances you're going to support.

Did *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* float your boat? Or did the *Guardians* rock your Galaxy? Were you entranced by *Boyhood*, Richard Linklater's meditation on growing up? Perhaps the blockbuster thrills and spills of *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* and *Godzilla* caught your eye, or you might be an avowed arthouse aficionado, ready to throw your weight behind the likes of *The Guest*, *Birdman* or *A Most Violent Year*. And don't forget the big comedies of the year, with the likes of *22 Jump Street*, *The Lego Movie*, *The Inbetweeners 2* and *Paddington* all vying for your attention.

Remember — the choice is yours. Any film released theatrically in the UK between January 31, 2014 and January 31, 2015 is eligible. By casting your vote, you can win two tickets to attend the awards ceremony itself, where you can rub shoulders with the big names you voted for. And those you didn't. *Awkward.*

To vote for your favourites in all 11 categories open to the public, just head on over to empireonline.com/awards2015.



THE CATEGORIES

- Best Male Newcomer
- Best Female Newcomer
- Best Sci-Fi/Fantasy
- Best Comedy
PRESENTED BY ABSOLUTE RADIO
- Best Horror
- Best Thriller
PRESENTED BY CORINTHIA HOTEL LONDON
- Best British Film
- Jameson Best Actor
- Best Actress
- Best Director
- Best Film

TO VOTE, GO TO WWW.EMPIREONLINE.COM/AWARDS2015

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TIME LINE

IS THIS THE MOST DANGEROUS MOVIE EVER MADE?

WHY THE INTERVIEW MIGHT KICK-START WORLD WAR III

IF YOU'RE READING THIS IN the middle of the smoking ruins of a major city, mankind having bombed itself back to the Stone Age, and you're asking yourself, "How did it all come to this?," allow us to tell the tale of how a seemingly innocuous Seth Rogen-James Franco comedy led to catastrophic global conflict...

MARCH 21, 2013 Sony Pictures announces that Rogen and Evan Goldberg will write and direct *The Interview*. It will star Rogen and Franco as a TV producer and talk show host, who are recruited by the CIA to travel to North Korea to assassinate Kim Jong-Un. There is no response from North Korea.

OCTOBER 10, 2013 Filming begins in Vancouver. There is no response from North Korea.

JUNE 11, 2014 Sony releases the teaser trailer for the movie, which has the bold tagline, "James Franco and Seth Rogen will attempt to assassinate Kim Jong-Un." There is no response from North Korea.

JUNE 25, 2014 There is a response from North Korea. A spokesman for the country's Foreign Ministry issues a statement where, without once naming the film, he says that its release would be considered an "act of war... If the US administration allows and defends the showing of the film, a merciless counter-measure will be taken."

Rogen, who's Canadian, takes to Twitter for his own response: "People don't usually wanna kill me for one of my movies until after they've paid 12 bucks for it."

JULY 10, 2014 North Korea's United Nations ambassador complains to the UN about the film.

JULY 17, 2014 North Korea asks US President Barack Obama to halt *The Interview's* release.

AUGUST 7, 2014 Sony halts the film's release... by two months, moving it from October to December.

AUGUST 13, 2014 *The Hollywood*



• Top: Larks in *The Interview*. Above: Merry Christmas?

Reporter reveals that Sony will digitally alter thousands of buttons that are glimpsed in the film, because they depict North Korean military hardware.

NOVEMBER 24, 2014 Sony Pictures Entertainment is hit by a massive cyber-attack that disables its entire email system.

NOVEMBER 30, 2014 Sony movies, including *Fury* and *Annie*, are released onto torrent sites.

DECEMBER 4, 2014 North Korea denies all responsibility for the hack attack.

DECEMBER 5, 2014 The hackers leak sensitive documents online, including Rogen and Franco's salaries, and the annual salary of Sony chief Amy Pascal.

DECEMBER 7, 2014 Rogen and Franco unveil their nakedly charming Christmas card. It's not clear if they've sent a copy to Kim Jong-Un.

DECEMBER 8, 2014 A group calling



THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE FOR SCREEN TIME

NOW THAT PETER JACKSON'S HOBBIT SAGA IS OVER, WE CAN ANSWER THE BIGGEST QUESTION OF THEM ALL: JUST WHAT DID ALL THOSE DWARVES (13 OF THEM, DON'T FORGET) ACTUALLY DO? OUR CHART EXPLAINS ALL*

DWARF/ ACTOR	NUMBER OF LINES (APPROX.)	DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC	BIG MOMENT
 THORIN OAKENSHIELD (RICHARD ARMITAGE)	310	STUBBORN NORTHERN BASTARD	His showdown with Azog.
 BALIN (KEN STOTT)	113	FATHERLY WISDOM	His account of Thorin's victory at Moria.
 DWALIN (GRAHAM McTAVISH)	80	HEADBUTTING NUTJOB	His introduction, full of brotherly head-butting and a truly insatiable appetite.
 BOFUR (JAMES NESBITT)	64	CHEEKY CHAPPIE	Overleeping and missing the boat to the Lonely Mountain.
 KILI (AIDAN TURNER)	67	HOT DWARF	Giving Evangeline Lilly's Tauriel a gift to remember him by. Not that.
 FILI (DEAN O'GORMAN)	41	SLIGHTLY LESS HOT DWARF	Staying at his wounded brother's side in The Desolation Of Smaug.
 GLOIN (PETER HAMBLETON)	22	MOANING	Upon seeing the Lonely Mountain up close, Gloin quits complaining and hands over all his remaining cash to the quest.
 DORI (MARK HADLOW)	17	FAMILIAL CHEER	He offers Gandalf a cup of tea.
 OIN (JOHN CALLEN)	16	HARD OF HEARING	Mistaking a thrush for a raven.
 ORI (ADAM BROWN)	15	YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM	He doesn't like green food.
 BOMBUR (STEPHEN HUNTER)	0	MUTE BUMBLING	His spinning barrel attack in The Desolation Of Smaug. Speaks volumes.
 NORI (JED BROPHY)	8	STOIC REACTIONS	Um...
 BIFUR (WILLIAM KIRCHER)	4	ENIGMATIC YELPS	Erm...

themselves the Guardians Of Peace claim responsibility for the attack. In an email to Sony, they ask the studio to "stop immediately showing the movie of terrorism which can break the regional peace and cause the War."

DECEMBER 10, 2014 In the days that follow, further documents are released on the internet, including a vituperative email exchange between Pascal and producer Scott Rudin about Danny Boyle's Steve Jobs biopic; information about talks between Sony and Marvel to allow Spider-Man (left) to take part in the Marvel Cinematic Universe; plans for the next Jump Street movie to become a Men In Black reboot as well; and an early draft of the screenplay for the new James Bond film, Spectre.

FEBRUARY 6, 2015
The Interview is released in the UK.

FEBRUARY 7, 2015
Everyone crosses their fingers.
THE INTERVIEW IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 6.

* Based on theatrical editions only

FIRST LOOK

SPY GAME FOR A LAUGH

EXCLUSIVE
MELISSA McCARTHY IS THE NEW JAMES BOND. SORT OF

ACCORDING TO THE Chinese Zodiac, 2015 is the Year Of The Sheep. But you could be forgiven for thinking that it's actually the Year Of The Spy.

Never mind comic-book movies — next year will see a glut of films about gadget-wielding, sharp-suited do-gooders. There's the daddy of them all, of course, with James Bond returning in *Spectre*, while various pretenders to the throne include Colin Firth in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and Henry Cavill and Armie Hammer as the men from U.N.C.L.E.. Even Sacha Baron Cohen will get in on the act in the brilliantly named and still shrouded-

in-secrecy *Grimsby*.

And then there's the most unlikely of them all: Melissa McCarthy. In *Spy* — formerly known as *Susan Cooper* — the actress is the sort of well-trained killing machine that would give 007 the willies. Well, ish.

"She's basically a woman down in the basement of the CIA," explains Paul Feig, the movie's writer-director, of McCarthy's Susan Cooper. "She's the earpiece girl and eyepiece girl to a super-spy played by Jude Law. She clearly has a crush on Jude, she's been working for him for ten years. And one day, something happens where she's the only person who can go out in the field. Things have gone wrong

• Above: Melissa McCarthy and Jude Law try Heston's new invisible starter in *Spy*. Top right: director Paul Feig drives McCarthy bats on set.

THINGS WE'VE LEARNED



← Cary Elwes is a big *Columbo* fan. His favourite episode? The one with John Cassavetes.



← Tim Burton operated a Muppet in *The Muppet Movie*. The one with the startled look on its face, presumably.



and she needs to fix it.”

And if you think you can fill in the blanks from there, Feig says you’d be wrong. McCarthy may have played a brash, foul-mouthed extrovert in her previous collaborations with Feig, *Bridesmaids* and *The Heat*, but the director wants to mine a different part of her repertoire this time. “It is a different Melissa than you’ve seen,” says Feig. “Susan is very smart and meek, and it’s fun to see that from Melissa. We always have her playing these balls-out characters. I said, ‘I want to see *you*.’ When it first got announced, all reporters automatically wrote, ‘Melissa McCarthy plays a bumbling spy.’ She’s not bumbling. Susan has the skill set — now she has to awaken the skill set.”

In fact, while *The Heat* showcased McCarthy’s action heroine credentials, *Spy* will take that a step or two further, as she embarks on a dangerous mission that requires her to assume different personas, team up with Jason Statham’s buff CIA agent (“Statham destroys in the role,” says Feig) and take on the bad guys in a variety of non-bumbling, badass ways.

“The genesis of this was, I’ve always wanted to direct a James Bond movie,” says Feig. “I realised early on that they’re never going to let me direct a James Bond movie — why would you? I wouldn’t! I’m just a good comedy guy. But there’s a lot of action in this one. Really good action. There’s one fight scene that I’m really excited about, involving Melissa and Nargis Fakhri, who is gorgeous and deadly. There’s all kinds of stuff going on...” **CH**

SPY IS OUT ON JUNE 5.



UPDATE

“I WANT OURS TO BE SCARIER...”

DIRECTOR PAUL FEIG TALKS HIS REBOOT OF GHOSTBUSTERS

→ **WHEN IS GHOSTBUSTERS 3** not *Ghostbusters 3*? Well, when Paul Feig was announced as the co-writer/director of the long-gestating third instalment in the franchise, two major developments came with him: an all-female crew of ‘Busters would suit up, and it would be a reboot instead. **Empire** spoke to Feig about what he has planned, and just who he’s gonna call...

ON REBOOTING THE FRANCHISE

“I have too much respect for the original one [to do a sequel]. There’s also the feeling that once the world knows ghosts and has seen them busted on such a large scale, they run the risk of becoming pedestrian. There’s something fun about introducing our world, which has never seen ghosts, to the phenomenon of ghosts. I love origin stories and to introduce new characters.”

ON “FUNNY WOMEN”

“A lot of people accused it of being a gimmick. I guess I can

see the cynics’ view of it, but for me I just love working with funny women. People said, ‘Why don’t you do a mix?’ I’m just more interested in the idea of lady *Ghostbusters*. It’s the way my brain works.”

ON THE TITLE

“It won’t be called *Lady Ghostbusters!* Certainly not... *Ghostbustieres* is the way we’re going to go.” It’s actually likely to simply be *Ghostbusters*.

ON CASTING

Rebel Wilson has admitted meeting Feig about the movie, while it doesn’t take a genius to link Melissa McCarthy to the project. “Right now, honestly, there could be 50 *Ghostbusters*. I’m just waiting to get our first draft of the script together to go, ‘Who makes sense in these

roles?’ If I put the list in front of me of people that have said they want to do it, talk about a *Sophie’s Choice*. When you do a movie like *Ghostbusters*, people get very interested.”

ON MIXING SCARES AND LAUGHS

“I want ours to be scarier than the original, to be quite honest. Katie [*Dippold*, co-writer] and I are so focused on wanting to do scary comedy. We don’t want to hold back.”

ON THE RATING

“The reason I do a lot of R-rated comedies is that you want a movie to feel honest. But the *Ghostbusters* world doesn’t need that level of swearing. We’ll have to be PG-13 with this one. I would love to make it R-rated, but I won’t. You want the biggest number of people to watch it and *not* be put off by it!” **CH**

GHOSTBUSTERS IS OUT IN 2016.



← The calypso group, D Lime, that pops up in *Paddington* was assembled for the movie by Damon Albarn.



← Doug Liman likes to watch other people watch his movies on planes.



← Bill Murray owns one of the beds glimpsed in the motel scene in *Dumb and Dumber To*.

DONE IN 60 SECONDS

THE JURY IS IN



EDITH BOWMAN

BROADCASTER, WRITER, DJ. THIS IS HER THIRD YEAR AS A DONE IN 60 SECONDS JUDGE

As a returning juror, what do you look for in DISS entries?
A combination of things. Someone who has a real vision in terms of a connection with the film that they're trying to remake, but also that they give it their own creative spin. It doesn't have to have high production values — sometimes the ones that are literally done on people's phones are great. It doesn't matter. It doesn't have to have lots of money thrown at it. It's about connecting, it's about having something about it, whether it's an emotional pull or a visual pull or a take on the film. It's just about making sure that their identity is within the film.

Humour often features strongly. Are you looking out for that?
I'm not looking for comedy. Gravity from last year was a particularly funny take on a non-comedy film. That sometimes happens. The year before there was the amazing Blade Runner film, from Philip Askins. He won it, and that was an unbelievable film noir. That was a slightly different tone. It's an easy thing to do, to make a comedy version, because you've been asked to reduce it to 60 seconds. Sometimes that works, sometimes it feels forced. Don't feel the need to make it a laugh-a-second.

What film would you remake?
Whiplash. It would just be me trying to drum for 60 seconds, and being shouted at.

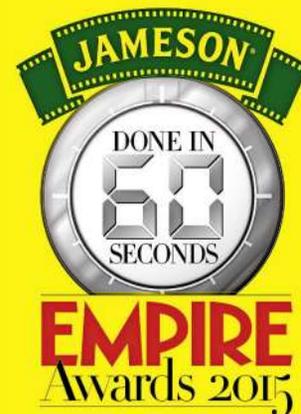
MEET THE JUDGES OF THIS YEAR'S JAMESON EMPIRE DONE IN 60 SECONDS

EDGAR WRIGHT. Tom Hiddleston. Gareth Edwards. Tom Hooper. Chris O'Dowd. The roll call of Jameson Empire Done In 60 Seconds judges reads like a Who's Who of British cinema.

This year, we're delighted that Sightseers director Ben Wheatley, broadcaster Edith Bowman and Shaun Of The Dead producer Nira Park (with more to be confirmed) will cast their beady eyes over a new batch of one-minute movies.

The five DISS finalists will be invited to the Jameson Empire Awards in London, to be held on March 29, where their entries will be played in full. The winner will be announced during the show.

So what are you waiting for? Enter now! For more information, go to www.jamesonempirediss.com



CONTENDERS READY?

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- POLAND
- SERBIA
- SOUTH KOREA
- RUSSIA
- UNITED KINGDOM



BEN WHEATLEY

WRITER, DIRECTOR. HIS NEXT FILM, *HIGH-RISE*, IS OUT NEXT YEAR. THIS IS HIS SECOND YEAR AS JUDGE

How important are competitions like this?

I think as an impetus to do something, it's really useful. This gives you a set of parameters you wouldn't necessarily impose on yourself. And also, *Done In 60 Seconds* particularly forces you to think about how the films you like are constructed, and pull them to pieces and ruminate on that.

As a judge, what are you looking for?

I want to be pleasantly surprised. They're sitting on top of tall shoulders. It's not just mimicking the movies or slightly snarkily taking the piss out of them, it's got to have something else on top of that. Former finalist Lee Hardcastle, for me, is incredibly skilful. He loves the movies, he loves filmmaking and lampooning, but he brings a lot of stuff to it. You want to see people who are just going for it.

Are you looking for high production values?

I don't mind. It's the same in cinema. Some of my favourite films are Bergman movies, and there's nary an explosion or transforming car in any of those films. You don't want to see a showreel by an FX person if it doesn't benefit the story.

What film would you remake?

Andy Warhol's *Empire*. Why would I do that one? Well, it's not very challenging!



NIRA PARK

PRODUCER. HER NEXT FILM, *MAN UP*, IS OUT IN APRIL. THIS WILL BE HER *DONE IN 60 SECONDS* DEBUT

How important are competitions like this?

Very important. Because it costs nothing to enter the competition and you can make your film for next to nothing. It motivates aspiring filmmakers to pick up a camera and give it a shot. Entrants know that a film made at home with friends dressed in tea towels has exactly the same chance of winning as a sophisticated animation. And for those who get through, the awards event gives them a chance to meet the filmmakers that might have inspired and influenced them. Established filmmakers are very supportive of it.

What stands out about *Done In 60 Seconds* in particular?

The submissions are really inventive. There's a wit and humour to them, which you see much less of generally in young filmmakers' short films. What also stands out is how international the competition is: it's brilliant seeing Kazakhstan's take on *Forrest Gump* or a Portuguese Hitchcock. A lot of the time the entrants play with the language and the casting in a way that makes the shorts even more fun to watch.

What film would you remake?

Raising Arizona, or *Jaws*, or *When Harry Met Sally*. Partly because they're three of my favourite films and I know them word for word, but also because they're structurally perfect and could be condensed into 60 seconds really easily.



Q & A

HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

LIAM NEESON

He has a very particular set of skimmed...

How much is a pint of milk? Okay, now we have to break this down into categories, because I do know quite a bit about milk. Are we talking milk in Britain or in the US of A? Because this is where I live now and have done for many years.

Britain. You see, here they don't sell them in pints. The quart would be the smallest. And then, are we talking non-organic? Organic? I have a little place near upstate New York so I buy my milk raw from a farm down the road. Milk is, in this country, more expensive than gasoline. My raw milk works out at about \$6 a gallon, so that's \$6 for eight pints. We're talking 75 cents a pint, so that's under 50p a pint.

On a scale from one to ten, how famous are you? In LA, I may be up to an eight. In New York, they don't give a fuck, so I could be an eight but they'd let you know that you're maybe a six. Or maybe a five. That's what I like about New York. Back home in Northern Ireland, I'm an eight or a nine. "There's the Big Man, who the fuck does he think he is?"

What's your favourite album? The Wall, Pink Floyd. I still play that on a very regular basis.

When have you been most starstruck? Meeting Muhammad Ali at the Dorchester Hotel, it was either 1981 or 1982. My knees literally went weak. He signed a ratty piece of paper that I had, for my father. I was in awe. He still is The Man.

Do people ever quote your lines back to you? It would tend to be the Taken thing. "I don't know who you are, I don't know what you want", that sort of stuff.

Who did you play in your first school play? It was a character called Bartley in John Millington Synge's Riders To The Sea. I think I was maybe 12. That was when the bug started to burrow itself into me.

Which film have you seen more than any other? Spielberg's Jaws. Even though I know the shark's fucking rubber and they had terrible trouble with it and I know umpteen stories that Steven has told me, it still takes me in. Robert Shaw's speech at the end is beautiful. Screen acting does not get any better than that speech.

Who was your first movie crush? It was a lady I recently had the honour of presenting an Academy Award to in Los Angeles, and she goes by the name of Maureen O'Hara. She's 94 years of age. She was my first crush, and then I really fell in love with her when I saw The Quiet Man, directed by John Ford. She's in a wheelchair now, but she still has that beautiful bone structure.

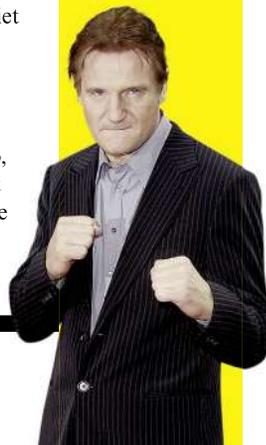
What's your favourite joke? It's Chicago, in the Depression era. This guy has lost his job, his wife leaves him and takes the kids. He's going to commit suicide. He lies down on the railway tracks, train driver sees him, screeches to a halt

NEESON FACTS!

→ Helen Mirren taught him how to drive.

→ He went to the same school as Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers (albeit roughly 20 years apart).

→ He's a former Irish Youth Champion boxer.



inches from his body. Guy says, "Fuck this." So he goes to a bar that he knows Al Capone frequents. Capone walks in with big henchmen with guns and this beautiful blonde by his side. The guy goes over, he gets a glass of water, and throws it in Capone's face. He stands there, waiting to be shot. Al Capone wipes the water from his eyes and says, "I like a guy with guts." So now the wee guy gathers up the courage and sits down beside the blonde, as Al Capone's looking at him. The guy puts his hand on the blonde's knee and gradually sidles it up under her skirt. As he reaches the magic spot, the blonde slips him this note under the table. He opens the note and what it says is, "When you reach my balls, play it cool — Eliot Ness." That's the fucking joke.

On a scale of one to ten, how hairy is your arse? Are we talking the immediate arse, or from the crack up to the waist?

The immediate arse. Maybe a two. That's natural, yeah. **CHRIS HEWITT**
TAKEN 3 IS OUT ON JANUARY 8.

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IN CINEMAS

AMERICAN SNIPER

In The Line Of Fire

RELEASED January 16

CERTIFICATE TBC

DIRECTOR Clint Eastwood

CAST Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller

RUNNING TIME 134 mins.

PLOT Based on the life of Chris Kyle (Cooper), a crack shot who became a US sniper in Iraq, the film charts his brutal training, his romance of tough-talking Taya (Miller), his highly decorated tours of duty and obsession with tracking down the high-level insurgent known as The Butcher.

EARLY ON IN CLINT

Eastwood's new film, we take a detour back to the Texan childhood of Navy SEAL superstar Chris Kyle. Here, around the family table, he informs his tough-loving pop that he had to rescue his younger brother from a bully by beating the thug to the ground. "There are three types of people," his father responds as if imparting one of those classic, Eastwood dictums. "Sheep, wolves and sheep dogs." Sheep dogs protect the sheep from the wolves.

Years later, enraged by 9/11, Kyle enlists as a sniper and becomes a sheep dog like no other. The ground troops know him as 'The Legend'. The insurgents, who put a spiralling

price on his head, dub him 'The Devil Of Ramadi'. Kyle completes four tours of duty in Iraq, amassing 160 confirmed kills. And gradually this true-blue patriot falls apart.

American Sniper has been good for Eastwood. He's not been himself lately. Venturing off range, his films have become fiddly and unsure. The indifferent biopics of J. Edgar and Invictus, the spiritual guff of Hereafter, the big-screen Jersey Boys adaptation that ended up sombre and unappealing. You can't fault the productivity; at 84, Eastwood is a monument to cut-the-crap directorial stamina. Still, it was starting to feel as if that mighty heart just wasn't in it.

American Sniper has put blood back in his veins. Based on Kyle's autobiography and nursed to the screen by star Bradley Cooper, this is Eastwood's most valuable work since Letters From Iwo Jima. More to the point, the story of this God-loving Texan boy and sharpest shooter in American military history fits the director's lean, thoughtful aesthetic like a made-to-measure poncho.

The sniper's task is to hunker down on a nearby rooftop and pick off gunmen, bystanders, mothers, children, anyone who he judges to be smuggling an IED or weapon beneath their clothing. And Kyle had nerves, less of steel than reinforced >



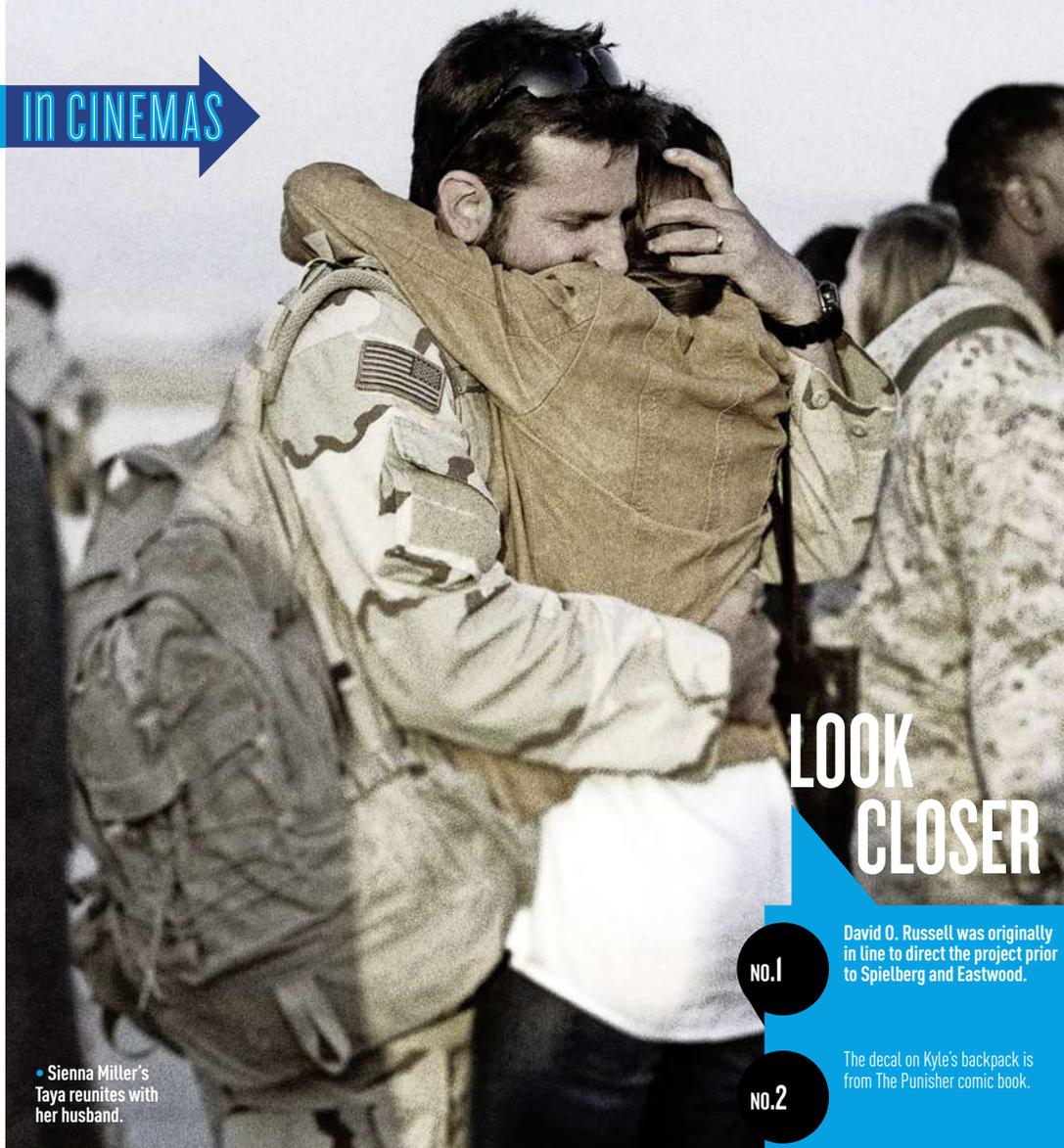
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Bradley Cooper's
broken hero.

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE: UNMISSABLE ★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ POOR ★★ TRAGIC ★



• Sienna Miller's Taya reunites with her husband.

LOOK CLOSER

NO.1

David O. Russell was originally in line to direct the project prior to Spielberg and Eastwood.

NO.2

The decal on Kyle's backpack is from *The Punisher* comic book.

NO.3

Navy Seal sniper Kevin Lacz, who taught Cooper how to shoot, cameos in the film as himself.

NO.4

As well as Morocco, the production recreated Iraq at the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch in Santa Clarita, California which has a standing set of a Middle Eastern town.

tungsten, the kind of guy able to stow his conscience to the extent that he could take a call from home just as an isolated boy entered his crosshairs.

Straightaway you're reminded of Eastwood's hot streak: *Unforgiven*, *Mystic River*, *Million Dollar Baby* — dark, compelling, psychologically astute tales of heartland American men awakening to themselves. It's the great thematic backbone of his entire career: the wages of violence. Moreover, the sunbaked, outlaw streets of Ramadi, Fallujah and Baghdad echo the scum-hive border towns and crossfire rhythms of the big man's Western mythology. Maybe somewhere in Kyle's Texan imagination he thought of himself as the star of a Western.

So Clint Eastwood has been good for American Sniper. Once Steven Spielberg passed on directing, he swung into the saddle and honed down Kyle's biography into a tightly focused journey from boot camp to

burnout. He was also determined to make a thriller. Told with trademark dramatic economy and gripping veracity, this is the most exciting and muscular Iraq movie we've had.

Even in the helter-skelter of the combat zone events are driven by story, rather than the collection of stressed-out fragments that made up *The Hurt Locker*. Across his tours, Kyle develops a personal crusade to track down 'The Butcher', whose portrayal as a snarling, driller-killing lunatic hits one of the film's few bum notes. But, standing in his way is the insurgent's own super-sniper. Amid squalls of dust and debris, a dangerously obsessive duel is acted out. A head-to-head that will culminate in a stunning firefight where Kyle's over-eager infiltration unit is set upon by Alien-like hoards of insurgent desperadoes and engulfed in a Biblical sandstorm.

Yet hanging over the blood-rush of the action is an atmosphere of

melancholy. Concepts of heroism, justice and the necessity of violence are never clear-cut. Even among the chest-bumping macho codes of men under fire there persists a background radiation of desperation.

Thickened-up like a wrestler, Cooper gives a brilliantly uncluttered yet expressive — and surely award-nomination worthy — performance. Kyle is a vivid, complex character who believes he is a simple guy. He loves his wife, his fellow soldier, and, yes sir, his country. He has convinced himself of the absolute moral virtue of the American

mission. Hell, he probably loved *Heartbreak Ridge*. Kyle, a bone-weary comrade points out, is your classic war junkie, addicted to the "lightning in your bones" of combat.

It is to Cooper's credit that we are never sure if we should consider Kyle a hero. Movie definitions become blurred. Even those categories we know as shellshock and trauma. Kyle's decline is more a sense of panic slowly building, like a sandstorm on the horizon.

In another valiant performance that could have succumbed to the ground-down wife category, Sienna Miller brings humour and pride to Taya Kyle. It is through her frank eyes that we see the erosion of Kyle's soul. "Your hands are different," she tells him, warily eyeing an alien figure home on leave. She's a vital asset, the emotionally available counterpoint to the unreadable Kyle. In a sense, the film is a romance under fire.

Eastwood never dwells on a point. God forbid this movie should ever be taken as some kind of psychodrama. He's perfectly content to cut straight from the bosom of the family to the embrace of his brothers-in-arms in a heartbeat. Equally, the bigger picture is kept at bay. This is Kyle's story, and global politics doesn't figure in it. In fact, it is the absence of moral debate that stirs such a fascinating story. In the immediacy of a war zone there isn't space for right and wrong. So can a soldier ever be right or wrong?

One last thing. There is another, shocking aspect of Kyle's life that Eastwood basically treats as a footnote, giving it only five minutes of screen time. Clearly, it didn't figure in the director's thinking, and his film doesn't necessarily suffer for it. But you are left wondering what that other film might have told us about the enigmatic Chief Petty Officer Kyle. **IAN NATHAN**

=== **VERDICT** ===
Oscar heralds will no doubt dub it *The Hurt Locker* for snipers, but the fitting combo of Clint Eastwood and Bradley Cooper have created a thrilling Iraq war story that manages to both honour the necessities of heroism and ruminate on what heroism might cost a man. ★★★★★

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BIG EYES

Jeepers peepers

RELEASED Out now

CERTIFICATE 12A

DIRECTOR Tim Burton

CAST Amy Adams, Christoph Waltz, Danny Huston, Terence Stamp, Jason Schwartzman

RUNNING TIME 106 mins.

PLOT Escaping a failing marriage, wannabe artist Margaret Ulbrich (Adams) ups sticks with her daughter to San Francisco. Everything looks good when she meets and marries fellow artist Walter Keane (Waltz) and her paintings begin to sell. Still, as Margaret's portraits of wide-eyed waifs become more popular, Walter unashamedly takes credit for her artwork.

BIG EYES, TIM BURTON'S 17th film as a director, doesn't fit into the pervading and possibly unfair caricature of his recent back catalogue. You know the one: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, oddball outsider, white make-up, off-kilter camera angles, Gothic trappings, Danny Elfman tunes... Visually his sunniest film since *Big Fish*, *Big Eyes* is part art history biopic, part portrait of a sadistic marriage and part '50s period drama with all the sexism and snobbishness the decade suggests. In scale and feel, within Burton's output, it is probably

closest to *Ed Wood* but it doesn't deliver similar degrees of flavour and insight. It's colourful and broadly enjoyable, but lacks the textures and truths to really make it great.

It's easy to see why Burton was attracted to the story of Margaret Keane (Amy Adams), the painter of saucer-eyed waifs that became hugely popular in the '50s. Both artists have the ability to mine the tender from the grotesque, turning a brand built on spooky kitsch into mainstream success, often to the befuddlement of the critical establishment. What feels a stretch for the director is the heart of the movie; Margaret's difficult marriage to wannabe artist Walter Keane (Christoph Waltz), who took all the credit for his wife's work as it grew from street art to nationwide phenomenon.

Screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski specialise in off-the-wall biopics (from *Ed Wood* to *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* and *Man On The Moon*), but they can't mine the complexity and sadness from Margaret's position. A family life where a mother lies to her perceptive daughter seems ripe for nuanced, riveting drama but here veers wildly from broad comedy to slasher horror (Walter chasing the women through the house). The film also never finds

LOOK CLOSER

NO.1

Look out for the real Margaret Keane sitting on a park bench.

NO.2

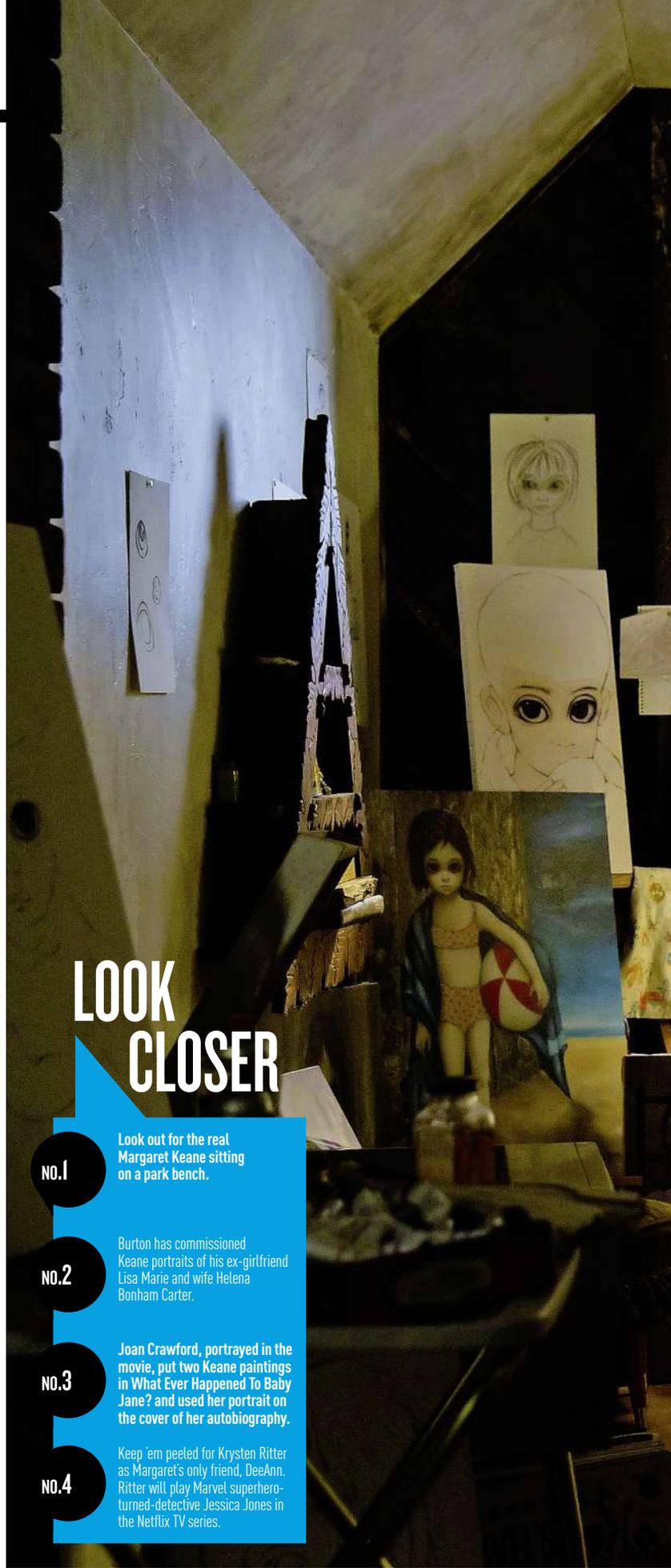
Burton has commissioned Keane portraits of his ex-girlfriend Lisa Marie and wife Helena Bonham Carter.

NO.3

Joan Crawford, portrayed in the movie, put two Keane paintings in *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* and used her portrait on the cover of her autobiography.

NO.4

Keep 'em peeled for Krysten Ritter as Margaret's only friend, DeeAnn. Ritter will play Marvel superhero-turned-detective Jessica Jones in the Netflix TV series.





a way to dramatise the source of Margaret's creativity, be it visually or verbally ("The eyes are the windows to the soul" is about as good as it gets). There is little sense of why she ostensibly paints the same debatably banal portrait over and over again.

A blonde-wigged Adams provides a compelling, sympathetic core to the movie, selling the idea that Margaret would go along with Walter's fraud while believably conveying the character's forthright conviction when enough is enough. A showman, entrepreneur and confidence trickster, Walter has an in-built capacity for loquacious language and the dramatic flourish. To start with, Waltz's teeth-and-tics flamboyance entertains, but it soon begins to suffocate the whole picture, reaching nuclear levels when Walter decides to cross-examine himself in a climactic court case. *Big Eyes* never reconciles the tone between Adams' gentle, studied delivery and Waltz's cartoony outlandishness, and the depiction of what is a controlling, exploitative relationship subsequently rings false.

The big showdown sees Margaret and Walter forced to produce duelling paintings in court to prove authorship of the Keane portfolio. It's a bizarre idea you feel must have been a prime driver in Burton taking on the project, but he delivers a potentially great moment in the most pedestrian way.

There are, however, intermittent flashes of Burton's personality. The pastel-coloured houses of San Francisco recall the suburbia of *Edward Scissorhands*, a close-up of Walter looking through a keyhole is characteristically creepy and, most strikingly, a scene in which Margaret sees the denizens of a supermarket with the pumped-up pupils of her paintings. But, while it is largely technically proficient, this is strangely anonymous filmmaking. Surely a Tim Burton film should never have a montage to a Lana Del Rey song? **IAN FREER**

=== VERDICT ===

Tim Burton's return to real-life storytelling is entertaining but flawed. See it for a fascinating true story and a fantastic Amy Adams. Beware the uneven tone, a lack of depth and Christoph Waltz's monumental mugging. ★★★

• She just couldn't shake the feeling of being watched.

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WHIPLASH

Drum And Drummer

• Cadbury's gorilla identity revealed!

RELEASED January 16

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR Damien Chazelle

CAST Miles Teller, J. K. Simmons, Melissa Benoist

RUNNING TIME 106 mins.

PLOT Andrew (Teller) is a promising drumming student at a prestigious music school, but he wants to be the best. In order to do that he's going to have to impress the exacting conductor Fletcher (Simmons), who will make his life hell.

TRYING TO MAKE A THRILLER

about jazz is like trying to make a horror about puppies; you are starting with a subject that inspires, in most people, the exact opposite of the emotion you're going for. Yet Damien Chazelle has done it. With just one short and one feature on his IMDb page, he has made a heart-thumping drama about percussion. He has made a sports movie with no sports, but plenty of balls.

In the tradition of great thrillers, it has an ordinary man trying to best a much trickier foe, and like great sports movies it has a rookie intent

on winning everything. It just finds those things in a place nobody usually looks. Andrew (Miles Teller) is a talented, but cocky, drummer who wants to join the best band at his music college. The only way to do that is to catch and hold the eye of Fletcher (J. K. Simmons), the conductor/coach, who expects those on his team to meet his high standard or get the hell out. And why shouldn't that be thrilling? Tension is just hoping for the best while expecting the worst. Chazelle yanks your heart into your throat waiting to see if a man will nail a drum roll, because he directs like everything's at stake. In the music room his camera flashes around catching blood, sweat and tears. Andrew drums until his skin cracks open. Nothing is still. Nobody is settled. You'll probably leave the cinema in need of a massage.

Taking nothing away from Teller's all-in performance, this is Simmons' film. He's always been one of the best, but now, finally, a script has caught up with him. Fletcher's a rumbling, black-clad storm of a man, ready to rain hell down on Andrew when he's less than his best.



• Brassed Off 2 really worked the pun.

And Simmons really relishes those moments, barking out lines like, "If you deliberately sabotage my band, I will fuck you like a pig." He's terrifying, yet not really a villain. Chazelle keeps the roles shifting. Is Fletcher, who believes in rewarding greatness not effort, worse than Andrew, who believes wanting is the same as deserving? We never know for sure whether Andrew is as good as he believes he is. It pulls you in, tighter and tighter, by asking you to constantly see the other side.

Whiplash is so close to faultless that its one stumble is frustrating. Having kept its rhythms perfect for the entire first hour it bangs a bit

too hard when Andrew reaches his breaking point. There's a car crash and gore and a very public attack and it is for about five minutes unbelievable. The film doesn't need that level of obvious melodrama because it's shown how much you can make without it. But five minutes of self-indulgence and another 100 of ovation-worthy hits is a great ratio for any performance. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT

Sum up the plot and it sounds interminable. Watch the film and it will spit you out elated, exhausted and cheering for an encore. ★★★★★

WILD

Thing, you make my heart wring

RELEASED January 16

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR Jean-Marc Vallée

CAST Reese Witherspoon, Laura Dern, Thomas Sadoski

RUNNING TIME 115 mins.

PLOT Crippled by grief, addiction and empty sex, desolate twentysomething Cheryl Strayed (Witherspoon) decides to hike the arduous Pacific Crest Trail, with zero preparation for the emotional and physical hardships ahead.

→ **FILMS ABOUT FINDING** yourself should often get lost. On paper, the prospect of Reese Witherspoon producing and starring in a misery memoir about recovering from grief and divorce sounds like so much Eat Pray Vomit. But as much as she's now Hollywood royalty,



Out of the blues

Witherspoon grew up in Tennessee, and this is a film that hasn't forgotten what it's like to struggle.

Adapting from Cheryl Strayed's bestselling book, screenwriter Nick Hornby resists platitudes, or a trite three-act redemption. Given that, Wild may lack the easy emotional uplift other filmmakers could have brought to it but at least — unlike the lead, after some encounters — you won't hate yourself in the morning. Canadian director Jean-Marc Vallée seems comfortable with a European pace, in a film of episodes. Strayed encounters travellers both threatening and encouraging on the trail, while

elliptical editing takes us back to what caused her tailspin in the first place. That mystery isn't quite, well, mysterious enough, but that doesn't ultimately matter, given Wild is so relentlessly honest and Witherspoon's performance so raw. Shooting up, shagging about, screaming in the wilderness, she isn't afraid to go anywhere and everywhere. It is a performance without shame in a film that partly deals with getting over that evil, paralysing emotion.

People with experience of heroin addiction may question whether it is conscientious to have the habit kicked with such relative ease. But, then,

Wild is responsible only to its own truth, with minimal manipulation. Given the predilection for biopics and memoirs to make triumphs out of tragedy or gloss over trauma, the frankness is refreshing. Wild walks to its own beat. You can fall in, you can fall out, it doesn't matter. This is, after all, a film about learning you can walk alone. **NEV PIERCE**

VERDICT

A quietly moving coming-of-age story that resists formula or easy redemption, driven by a strong, unvarnished performance from Witherspoon, who deserves huge credit as both star and producer. ★★★★★



TESTAMENT OF YOUTH

One Woman's War

RELEASED January 16

CERTIFICATE 12A

DIRECTOR James Kent

CAST Alicia Vikander, Kit Harington, Emily Watson, Hayley Atwell

RUNNING TIME 130 mins.

PLOT Based on a true story, when war breaks out in 1914, a young, vigorous and forward-thinking woman, Vera Brittain (Vikander), surrenders her ambitions to support the victims, even as her own life is ripped apart.

→ **WAR IS COMING. YOU CAN** feel the impending heartache even as this story opens with youthful frolics in the river. The story is that of famed pacifist Vera Brittain, whose Testament Of Youth is one of the few published World War I memoirs from a woman's hand — a narrative that has encouraged generations to keep striving for their dreams even as they slip from view.

This adaptation is the feature debut from documentarian James Kent, who introduces Vera (Alicia Vikander), and the young men in

her life, during an Edwardian summer under sun-bright skies. Vera fights for a place at Oxford; she wins. She meets the dashing Roland (Kit Harington), they swap poetry and she fights for their love; she wins. Everything's spiffing. Except, of course, it's not. There is war in Europe and the menfolk enlist. Everybody loses.

We know what will happen. The surprise lies not in their fate but in Vera's tenacious response. She surrenders a hard-fought university place and her dreams of a writer's life to nurse victims of battle, first at

home and then at the front. English or German, she has compassion for all. Vera is an absorbing character and Vikander's is a compelling portrayal. She doesn't so much catch the eye as dazzle it, exuding, like Vera, an emotional intelligence that far outstrips her years. She is at her brightest when the story gets darker, while Kent directs with stylish restraint, sober-eyed without stinting on the emotion.

Some moments from Vera's life are familiar. Lovers at the railway station, the outsider among the dreaming spires, the corrupted wedding day, a bad-news phone-call — these vignettes populate dozens of dramas and can nudge even the oldest and most honest tales into the realm of melodrama. Kent's film, which at times skirts the boundary, never crosses the line. **WILL LAWRENCE**

VERDICT

There are familiar moments in Vera Brittain's stirring story, though Kent's craft and Vikander's exquisite talent will ensure that the author's memories live in the minds of a fresh generation. ★★★★★

Over 14,000 reviews on empireonline.com

• The Come As Your Favourite GoodFella party was in full swing.

A MOST VIOLENT YEAR

Oil Gangs Of New York

RELEASED January 23

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR J. C. Chandor

CAST Oscar Isaac, Jessica Chastain, David Oyelowo, Alessandro Nivola

RUNNING TIME 125 mins.

PLOT Ambitious Latin-American immigrant and self-made businessman Abel Morales (Isaac) and his stylish, steely wife Anna (Chastain) risk everything on a deal that will make or break them, just as thieves, gangsters and corruption on all sides converge to drag Abel down.

FIERCELY SMART AND

refreshingly unpredictable, writer-director J. C. Chandor has made a speciality of the individual in crisis. His talkative Oscar-nominated script for debut feature *Margin Call* gave us an insightful night at an investment firm in financial meltdown. Dialogue-free *All Is Lost* set Robert Redford an ordeal in desperate peril on the sea. Now, *A Most Violent Year* presents Oscar Isaac's honest, enterprising man with a hat-trick of mounting

challenges, financial, physical and moral, as he struggles to save his business, his family and burning desire to achieve the American Dream legitimately.

The year is 1981, and New York is experiencing a historic peak in violent crimes, along with extremes of weather. Oscar Isaac's Abel Morales sells heating oil, one of several independents who buy from the big boys and sell directly to householders in the New York boroughs. An opportunity to buy land with perfect potential for his operation's expansion is grasped. It's a bold move that could take Morales from successful family businessman to empire builder, but the decision is made and the non-refundable deposit gambled just when Morales finds himself beset all at once from every direction. His truck drivers are targeted by armed robbers in a series of heists, his salesmen brutally beaten, his bank, the union, mobsters and the law are all giving him grief, and a shadowy nemesis is up to no good at the Morales' new showcase home. Miraculously Abel's beautiful camel coat remains pristine through

breakneck pursuits and danger-dodging, but whether he can keep his hands clean when the ladder for the upwardly mobile proves very greasy keeps you guessing.

Chandor is versed in the crime classics and this has knowing echoes of *The Godfather*, *Scarface* and, particularly, Sidney Lumet's *New York chronicles Serpico* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. The central character is singular, an honourable man who prides himself on his social advancement by using his hard work and charm, having spent his whole life trying not to be a gangster. This essentially decent guy has to ask himself how much he is willing to compromise to keep what he has earned.

Isaac and Chastain really take the breath away as a comely screen couple. Their suburban-chic lifestyle (three daughters and a dog), their chemistry and quarrels are believable in every detail. He, immaculately tailored and looking more than ever like the young Pacino, is strikingly intelligent and sympathetically conflicted. The daughter of a cheap Brooklyn gangster, she

is the polished, sexy, supportive soulmate until her lineage shockingly tells in her increasingly assertive *Lady Macbeth-in-Armani*. "You're not gonna like what happens once I get involved," she promises, and it's no idle threat. Albert Brooks, as Abel's lawyer and counsellor, Alessandro Nivola as a deceptively cordial, high-end competitor and David Oyelowo as the persistent Assistant District Attorney focusing his ill-timed attentions on Morales are all good. The most arresting supporting role, though, should be a breakthrough for the British Elyes Gabel (ex-*Casualty* and *Game Of Thrones*' Dothraki bloodrider Rakharo) as hapless Julian, Abel's most loyal, admiring and aspirational truck driver, terrorised into a tragic sequence of events in this startlingly gripping, beautifully dressed and shot, moral maze. **ANGIE ERRIGO**

VERDICT

Stylish, sophisticated, simmering crime and character drama with Shakespearean dimensions and bravura performances. Who knew heating oil could be a sexy subject? ★★★★★

UNBROKEN

Survival of the fittest

RELEASED Out now

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR Angelina Jolie

CAST Jack O'Connell, Domhnall Gleeson, Garrett Hedlund

RUNNING TIME 137 mins.

PLOT Olympic runner Louis Zamperini (O'Connell) had an eventful war. After his plane crash-lands in the Pacific, he survives being adrift, captured by the Japanese, interned in a POW camp, and hauling coal as a slave.

→ **ANGELINA JOLIE'S SECOND** film behind the camera, written in part by the Coen Brothers, begins somewhere over the Pacific. We dart amongst the crew of a B-24 bomber as they repel enemy fighters, with special attention given to spry, blue-eyed bombardier Louis Zamperini (Jack O'Connell). Assisted by seamless CG and Roger Deakins'

godly cinematography, it's a thrilling declaration of intent: young men pushed to their limits, where survival is its own heroism.

Based on Laura 'Seasbiscuit' Hillenbrand's vivid biography, Zamperini's story doesn't lack for incident. His next flight crash-lands in the ocean, and he and two fellow survivors (including Domhnall Gleeson's stoic Captain 'Phil' Phillips) drift on rafts and fend off sharks for a monumental 47 days. When rescue finally arrives, it is via an enemy patrol boat. In one of the few resonantly Coen lines, Zamperini awakens his pal saying, "I've got good news and I've got bad news..."

This is feel-the-width epic material complete with honey-coloured flashbacks to a youth of petty crime, endurance running, and an appearance at the 1936 Berlin Olympics to warily size up the Japanese team. Jolie is working in broad strokes, which isn't a sin.



Looking on the bright side, he was yet to encounter a Bengal tiger.

There are worse inspirations than the majesty and imperilled masculinity of David Lean.

The shadow of *The Bridge On The River Kwai* looms large. Zamperini, half-starved, is finally tossed into the cauldron of a Tokyo POW camp for his next inventory of ordeals. He is singled out for humiliation by sadistic commander Mutsushiro Watanabe (Japanese rock star Miyavi) with the obligatory queasy, homoerotic overtones.

Years ago Tony Curtis was eyed for Zamperini, and O'Connell shares that movie-star magnetism. But there's an edge to him. He is exciting but unreachable like those next-gen

Brandos Fassbender and Gosling. Where's the heart? The charm? Abetted by Jolie's Mel Gibson-like fixation with cruelty, the film exalts its hero as Christ symbol more than unbreakable American soul. A myth is made out of the man, complete with Coldplay whining over the credits.

Here lies the rub. Zamperini's life was so extraordinary it plays like a movie — a movie you may have already seen. **IAN NATHAN**

VERDICT Lavish and sporadically powerful, Jolie's POW biopic may have just enough gravity to entice the Academy, but struggles to bring truth to an unbelievable truth. ★★★

INTO THE WOODS

Happily ever after?

RELEASED January 9

CERTIFICATE PG

DIRECTOR Rob Marshall

CAST Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt, James Corden, Anna Kendrick, Chris Pine, Johnny Depp

RUNNING TIME 125 mins.

PLOT Characters from the Brothers Grimm meet on their separate quests. A Baker and Wife (Corden, Blunt) seek to undo a Witch's (Streep) curse, while Cinderella (Kendrick), Rapunzel (Mackenzie Mauzy) et al learn to be careful what they wish for.

→ **JOHNNY DEPP IN A ZOOT** suit as the lascivious Wolf. It's so perfect. Even if he still can't sing but croons, "Hellooooo, little girl," you



Meryl took inspiration from Johnny's back catalogue.

have to laugh. Since Little Red Riding Hood (Lilla Crawford) is that particularly obnoxious Broadway breed of precocious belter, he can't eat her up fast enough for us. But fairy tales are like sci-fi; apparent death isn't necessarily fatal.

Not that this is a typical fairy tale. Stephen Sondheim's acclaimed musical is a darkly smart meditation on getting what you dream of and the consequences of that. Running through the hectic plot of a pack of storybook folk crossing paths in the scary woods are also big themes of

parenthood, responsibility and morality. For years the material defeated filmmakers. Disney clearly wasn't having all of that, so the work has undergone a 'family friendly' revamp by the show's director James Lapine and Chicago helmer Rob Marshall. Characters and songs have been dropped, Rapunzel does not go mad and die, the not-so-charming princes (Cinderella's, Chris Pine, and Rapunzel's, Billy Magnussen) don't desert their brides for Snow White and Sleeping Beauty.

The eye-catching ensemble acquit

themselves nicely through dissonant songs with dizzying, demanding lyrics. Meryl Streep is fabulous. Anna Kendrick is a knockout as a yearning but unsure Cinderella. Emily Blunt's Baker's Wife is fine, but James Corden's Baker curiously subdued, perhaps missing the focus of the character's big number. Pine is a sleazy show-stopper romping from panto prince to sexual predator, the two brother princes' duet Agony a comic highlight of mock romantic fantasy with double cheese. Production design, costumes and effects are as fantastic as one would hope.

The question is: who is this for? Lapine's screenplay is simultaneously underdeveloped yet overly complex for non-Sondheimites and children. It's too edgy for those who love *Frozen*, not dark enough for sophisticates. **ANGIE ERRIGO**

VERDICT There are brilliant, bewitching moments allied to hilarious and touching ones. Just not enough of them in what veers between the clever, the terrifying and the bit tiring. ★★★

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IN CINEMAS

• It was a dangerous rendition of *Night Fever*.

KINGSMAN: THE SECRET SERVICE

The name's Bond. James Bond, innit

RELEASED January 29

CERTIFICATE TBC

DIRECTOR Matthew Vaughn

CAST Colin Firth, Taron Egerton, Samuel L. Jackson, Michael Caine, Mark Strong, Sophie Cookson, Sofia Boutella

RUNNING TIME TBC

PLOT Eggsy (Egerton), a young kid from the wrong side of the tracks, finds himself recruited by Harry Hart (Firth), a smooth spy for an international covert agency called Kingsman. Meanwhile, an eccentric billionaire threatens to wipe out most of the world's population.

IT'S HARD TO ARGUE WITH a billion bucks at the box office, of course, but at the same time, it's hard not to feel that the Bournification of the James Bond franchise may have robbed 007 of his sense of fun. These days, the upper lip is so stiff that it's impossible for the old man to raise his eyebrow.

Which is where Matthew Vaughn's Kingsman: The Secret Service comes in. It's got ingenious

gadgets, suave heroes with the ability to identify a rare brand of Scotch from smell alone, megalomaniacal villains and deadly henchwomen with blades where their legs used to be. It's filthy, funny and very violent — and frankly, it's the most fun 007 has been in years.

But, of course, it's not Bond at all. It's Vaughn's tribute to spy movies, in much the same impish way that his *Kick-Ass* was a rocket-fuelled, foul-mouthed tip of the hat to superhero flicks. As such it wears its influences on its immaculately tailored sleeve. So Colin Firth's super-spy Harry Hart wears Harry Palmer specs, brandishes a John Steed umbrella, and has more than a touch of Solo (Napoleon, not Han) about him. But it's Bond's shadow that looms largest over the movie, with Ian Fleming's creation regularly name-checked in an oh-so-postmodern way.

Vaughn, though, is something of a cultural magpie, and the film doffs its trilby to other inspirations, from *Trading Places* and *My Fair Lady* to *Men In Black*, as Harry takes Eggsy (Taron Egerton) under his wing and

teaches him to become a gentleman and a killer. Full Metal Smoking Jacket, if you will.

When the mentor/mentee duo are together, in slyly written takes on Bond staples like the Q scene, their chemistry fairly crackles. Firth, in particular, is clearly having the time of his life with the deadpan-but-warm Harry, while newcomer Egerton, bringing charm to Eggsy's rough edges, is clearly the latest off the Vaughn conveyor belt of new talent that has disgorged the likes of Chloë Grace Moretz and Sienna Miller.

However, the film strains to keep them apart — Harry during his investigation of Samuel L. Jackson's lisping villain, and Eggsy in a fairly rote training section. In fact, apart from a few F-bombs and an early scene in which Harry teaches a pub full of hooligans some manners, the first hour is all a little conventional, even a little tame. Where, you might ask, is the Vaughn who unleashed *Hit-Girl* upon an unsuspecting public?

And then he shows up, firstly with a sustained, supercharged

melee — scored, memorably, to the wailing guitar solo of Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Free Bird* — in which Firth shoots, stabs, impales, strangles, explodes and immolates a whole bunch of people in a way that would make Bridget Jones soil her massive pants. Exhilarating, morally dubious and exhausting, it pitches the film headfirst into its utterly demented third act. Here the 007 is cranked all the way up to 0011, including an outrageous and, potentially for some, offensive riff on the coy double entendres of that series' codas ("He's attempting re-entry, sir"). It all culminates in an audacious and gloriously OTT visual conceit that you simply won't have seen before in a mainstream movie. And how often can you say that? Talk about keeping the British end up. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT

Perhaps the riskiest mainstream movie in years, Vaughn's love letter to spy films may be uneven in places, but it's ultra-violent, envelope-pushing and fun enough to overcome the flaws. Bond with the stabilisers taken off. ★★☆☆

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IN CINEMAS



EX MACHINA

She, Robot

• Once again, a crucial screw was missing from the flat pack.

RELEASED January 23

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR Alex Garland

CAST Alicia Vikander, Domhnall Gleeson, Oscar Isaac, Sonoya Mizuno, Elina Alminas

RUNNING TIME 108 mins.

PLOT IT drone Caleb (Gleeson) wins a workplace lottery to spend a week with his reclusive-genius boss, Nathan (Isaac), at his remote mountain retreat. But upon Caleb's arrival, Nathan reveals a hidden agenda: he wants Caleb to assess, via a series of conversational sessions, the artificially intelligent robot he's built, named Ava (Vikander). Can she, Nathan wonders, truly be alive?

AS BOTH A NOVELIST AND screenwriter, Alex Garland has repeatedly tapped the dramatic value of the claustrophobic community: the crusty utopian tribe of *The Beach*, the odd school of his Ishiguro adaptation *Never Let Me Go*, the locked-down mega-tower-block of *Dredd*. Now, with his directorial debut, *Ex Machina*, he pushes this

further yet: three characters, one remote location. It is as if Garland has been perfecting a formula over the years. And, if you'll forgive the mixing of scientific metaphors, he may well shout, "Eureka!" with *Ex Machina*, as it is his most successful and satisfying creation yet. There are some big ideas housed in these closing walls.

Ex Machina is old-fashioned, grown-up science-fiction. It is executed with the scrutiny we'd expect from a Kubrick or (more recently) a Nolan, but it has a darkly satirical pulse, too, that distinguishes it and warms its appeal. At one point, Garland throws in an unexpected and cheeky reference to Dan Aykroyd's spectral blow-job in *Ghostbusters*; at another, there is a spontaneous disco freak-out to Oliver Cheatham's *Get Down Saturday Night*.

Which in no way means *Ex Machina* doesn't take itself seriously. Its bursts of relative levity apply a layer of discord to a plot that ratchets tension from the moment of Caleb's (Domhnall Gleeson) arrival on Nathan's (Oscar Isaac) vast estate, which, with its sterile

atmosphere, exquisite rockeries, waterfall-straddling aspect and weirdly handle-less doors wouldn't look out of place in the third act of a Bond movie. And when Caleb reluctantly agrees to sign "the mother of all NDAs" and consents to staying in a windowless basement room, you get the unsettling sense he's voluntarily incarcerating himself... with Silicon Valley's answer to Dr Moreau.

It might be harder to swallow if it weren't so well played. Steady rising star Gleeson plays Caleb as polite and diffident, yet sharp and trauma-hardened. In contrast, Isaac (who, of course, will be Gleeson's co-star in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*) imbues tech-mogul Nathan with the tarnished glamour and aggressive self-assurance of a jaded rock star. He's a peak-bearded alpha male whose ego is so all-consuming he only needs himself to party, and who pummels punchbags as a hangover cure. Then there is Alicia Vikander (who was Gleeson's co-star in *Anna Karenina*) as Ava.

Aided by Double Negative's laudable VFX, Ava is familiar, recalling Sonny in *I, Robot* and

Björk in Chris Cunningham's *All Is Full Of Love* video, yet unique, with a glowing midriff power-core on display. Her heart, in a sense, is for all to see. But it is Vikander's possession of the spirit in this machine which truly marks Ava out. With a ballerina's poise, her every movement, from footfall to facial twitch, is performed with pinpoint precision. She's mechanical enough to convince as an automaton, yet has an organic tactility which develops her impressive chemistry with Gleeson while the pair get to know each other from either side of a *Silence Of The Lambs*-ish glass screen.

For all her co-stars' fine work, Vikander is the star here, and flourishes under Garland's steady gaze and guidance. Between them, director and actress may even have crafted an icon — both sci-fi and, surprisingly, feminist. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT

Stylish, elegant, tense, cerebral, satirical and creepy. Garland's directorial debut is his best work yet, while Vikander's bold performance will short your circuits.

★★★★

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THE GAMBLER

All bets are on

• She had no truck with the shades-on-indoors thing.

RELEASED January 23
CERTIFICATE 15
DIRECTOR Rupert Wyatt
CAST Mark Wahlberg, Brie Larson, John Goodman, Jessica Lange
RUNNING TIME 111 mins.
PLOT Outspoken English professor and unremarkable novelist Jim Bennett (Wahlberg) is a gambling addict. He has just seven days to pay back \$240,000 to a casino boss. So he goes gambling again, obviously.

→ **A REMAKE OF KAREL** Reisz's downbeat, under-the-radar '70s classic starring a post-Godfather James Caan, *The Gambler* is at heart about an intelligent man who can only feel alive by risking everything on an ill-considered punt. Director Rupert Wyatt and star Mark Wahlberg, a pair united by *Planet Of The Apes* re-dos, have taken the theme, if not the mood, of the 1974 original and created an enjoyable and slick update.

Wahlberg's casting as any kind of English professor may rank as

the unlikeliest since John Wayne played Genghis Khan, but he makes a good fist of inhabiting a higher-minded intellectual life in tandem with his self-destructive gambling impulses. The actor has a track record at interpreting screenwriter William Monahan's smart, terse dialogue — think of Wahlberg's blistering turn in *The Departed* — and early doors, he has a terrific scene lecturing his wannabe writing students about the pitfalls of mediocrity ("If you are not a genius, don't bother"). But in the end, the character doesn't deepen or develop.

Monahan also creates potentially interesting roles for Brie Larson (a grade-A student who falls in with Wahlberg) and John Goodman (a bald loan shark), but the movie never really figures out what to do with them.

Wyatt's direction is brisk and efficient, with the odd moment of brilliance (time-lapse gambling) and a great ear for tuneage, ranging from Dylan, Chopin and Pulp to a terrific use of Dinah Washington's *This Bitter Earth*. He also gets effective atmosphere out of the unusual world of LA's Asian gambling dens. Yet what he doesn't really do is inject Bennett's predicament with a sense of dread or feeling. **BIG** numbers count down the time to payback day but there is little in the way of tension or suspense. And, in the end, it's hard to connect with a smart man who time and again flushes easy get-outs down the toilet. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT
 A rare grown-up thriller, full of interesting bits and a strong turn from Wahlberg. But, as a whole, Wyatt's film doesn't grip as it might. ★★★



DUMB AND DUMBER TO

DETAILS 15/109 mins./Out now
DIRECTORS Bobby Farrelly, Peter Farrelly
CAST Jim Carrey, Jeff Daniels, Kathleen Turner, Rob Riggle

→ **THERE IS A SMATTERING OF** truly brilliant jokes in the Farrelly Brothers' tardy sequel, not least the explanation of what Harry (Jeff Daniels) and Lloyd (Jim Carrey) have been up to since last we saw them in 1994. The joys are in the small, silly bits of business, like the way Carrey eats a hot dog, or their interpretation of the word "Asperger's". But the big laughs are diluted by baggy pacing and a weirdly complicated plot, which throws into the mix not only multiple MacGuffins but two *Rob Riggles*. If it turns into a trilogy, may we suggest the title *Dumb And Dumber 4?* **NDS** ★★



PADDINGTON

DETAILS PG/95 mins./Out now
DIRECTOR Paul King
CAST Ben Whishaw (voice), Nicole Kidman, Sally Hawkins, Hugh Bonneville

→ **FOLLOWING HOT ON THE PAWS** of a brouhaha over its PG certificate that put the fur in furore, you might have been forgiven for thinking that the big-screen debut of Michael Bond's beloved bear, *Paddington*, was set to corrupt the minds of a nation. Far from it — Paul King's very family-friendly movie about a very friendly family is a whimsical, magical, and quirkily British delight from start to finish, deftly serving as both fizzily inventive caper movie and a hug-warm origin tale of a young, talking bear who comes from Peru to London. Bring your inner child. **CH** ★★★★★



BEYOND CLUELESS

DETAILS 15/89 mins./January 23
DIRECTOR Charlie Lyne
CAST Fairuza Balk (voice)

→ **BRIT BLOGGER CHARLIE LYNE'S** debut eschews the talking heads and behind-the-scenes gossip of recent movie documentaries in favour of an ambitious but only partially successful slice of film criticism as film. Limiting himself to the '90s and beyond, he delivers a cliptastic taxonomy of the recent teen genre, unearthing some pleasingly marginal specimens and delivering the odd acute insight. But without any context (why are they like this?) or historical perspective (how have they changed?), it all winds up a bit trope-on-a-rope, and slightly draggy capsule plot synopses aren't given much sparkle by Fairuza Balk's drone-y commentary. **AS** ★★★



PENGUINS OF MADAGASCAR

DETAILS U/92 mins./Out now
DIRECTORS Eric Darnell, Simon J. Smith
CAST Tom McGrath, Chris Miller, Benedict Cumberbatch

→ **AFTER THE ROUSING** *Madagascar 3*, this spin-off for the Antarctic avians is an average DreamWorks Animation offering. It's a Bond-ish caper with submarines, superplanes and a funny animal cast, including John Malkovich as a vengeful octopus and Benedict Cumberbatch as a pompous wolf. There's a *March Of The Penguins*-mocking prologue, plus good running gags and some adorable octopoid goons. The penguins, meanwhile, are as chipper as ever, barring a mawkish subplot about their weakest link learning to shine. Amusing enough to pass muster. **AO** ★★★

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IN CINEMAS

• "Hold still." Legolas practised shooting the ring off Bilbo's head.

THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES

The Forces Awaken

RELEASED Out now

CERTIFICATE 12A

DIRECTOR Peter Jackson

CAST Luke Evans, Benedict

Cumberbatch, Martin Freeman, Sir Ian McKellen, Richard Armitage, Evangeline Lilly, Lee Pace, Cate Blanchett, Orlando Bloom

RUNNING TIME 144 mins.

PLOT Smaug has risen from his slumber and been unleashed upon an unsuspecting Lake-town, leaving his vast hoard up for grabs. Drawn by ancient grudges and the promise of gold, a quintet of mighty armies descend on the dwarven city of Erebor to battle it out for wealth, power and the fate of Middle-earth.

"SO BEGAN A BATTLE THAT none had expected; and it was called the Battle of Five Armies, and it was very terrible." A spinner of epic tales he may have been, but when it came to *The Hobbit's* climactic engagement, Tolkien wasn't much for showmanship. The same cannot be said of Peter Jackson, thankfully,

who here concludes his six-part Middle-earth saga by transforming a few pages of J. R. R. Tolkien's afterthought into a thunderous melee of interracial warfare.

Having navigated the barrels, spiders, riddles and ruins, it's the chance to realise this gigantic, five-way battle royale that clearly prompted Jackson's return to Tolkien's world. So much so, in fact, that most other material falls by the wayside. Smaug is unleashed and dispatched in a fleeting ten minutes, his brief but spectacular reign of fire cut short by a monologue-stopping arrow. Likewise, the rising menace of Sauron is skipped past with startling alacrity to make way for the main event.

Pelennor Fields was a noble struggle between light and darkness, observed from on high, amid the spires of Minas Tirith. This, by contrast, is a dirty barroom brawl, every hack, stab and gouge felt physically from deep within the scrum. From the moment elven warriors vault the dwarven phalanx to eviscerate onrushing orcs, the

Bad Taste director revels in carnage with gleeful invention.

As both hero and antagonist at various points, this is, in large part, Richard Armitage's film. Thorin's descent into madness under the dragon's taint is played out with maniacal intensity. His grim rebuff of Luke Evans' diplomatic overtures (the exchange framed beautifully by a hole in Erebor's barricade) and final, hallucinatory epiphany upon a floor of burnished gold are as masterfully shot as they are powerfully delivered. Bilbo, by contrast, is a portrait of quiet understatement. Martin Freeman has grown into the part like a second skin, his warmth and honesty underpinning the hobbit's self-effacing befuddlement. It's not until the end, with the film's most effective piece of foreshadowing, that we see cracks in his character as the Ring exerts its influence.

At under two-and-a-half hours, there's little flab on *Five Armies*. Jackson has been judicious with the edit, jettisoning anything not

essential to the tale at hand. It's smart work and the film never drags, but it doesn't come without cost. What could have been the stand-out set-piece is largely squandered, Elrond and Saruman facing off against the Nazgûl in a spectacular but upsettingly short-lived altercation at Dol Guldur. It's a minor disappointment in an otherwise gratifying conclusion, though, and one that may yet be addressed. With the numerous threads left unresolved and key appearances truncated, we can look forward to the certainty of a far weightier Extended Edition this time next year. **JAMES DYER**

VERDICT

A fitting conclusion to Jackson's prequel trilogy and a triumphant *adieu* to Middle-earth. Now complete, *The Hobbit* stands as a worthy successor to *The Lord Of The Rings*, albeit one that never quite emerges from its shadow. Jackson has crafted a grand old tale to do Tolkien proud, and with a single, simple bow in the final moments, one that offers a far cleaner send-off than *The Return Of The King* ever did. ★★★★★

EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS

Bible belter

RELEASED Out now

CERTIFICATE 12A

DIRECTOR Ridley Scott

CAST Christian Bale, Joel Edgerton, John Turturro, Sigourney Weaver, Ben Kingsley, María Valverde

RUNNING TIME 150 mins.

PLOT Kin to the future Pharaoh and enjoying a life of luxury, Moses (Bale) is rather shocked to discover he's actually a member of the Hebrew people 'his' family have kept in slavery for 400 years. And that God wants him to lead them to freedom...

→ **THE BIBLE SHOWS US GOD** can talk through killing or through allowing his son to be killed. It's the weird, confusing and sometimes wonderful contrast between the Old and New Testaments. The

achievement of Ridley Scott's take on the most famous story of exile, imprisonment and escape is not that it solves that contradiction, but that it lives in it. This is a film that poses more questions than it answers. Where does faith become fanaticism? When does freedom fighting become terrorism? Why does God work through people, or people pretend to be god?

All that, and shit gets blown up. Well, okay, not quite: people are devoured, sliced and starved in wide-screen spectacle. Oh and, yes — spoiler alert, if you didn't pay attention in Sunday School — children are killed in their sleep.

Scott has DeMillions to mount the ten plagues and eclipses Cecil's Ten Commandments with aplomb and invention. The script, by Adam Cooper, Bill Collage, Jeffrey Caine



• He'd only gone and walked into Christian's eyeliner.

and Steven Zaillian, brightly attempts to rationalise the horrors that befall the Egyptian people, before leading us along with Moses to realise the answer may be in how God identifies himself: "I Am."

If you ignore the scale, splendour and slaughter, then the Biblical pic this bears most comparison to is not those afternoon-long '50s costume parties, but The Last Temptation Of Christ. Like Scorsese's heartfelt, fascinating film — too readily dismissed by some Christians as heretical — Exodus: Gods And Kings has a lead who's not sure if he's the messiah or just a very naughty

boy. Is he mad or bad or from God? Bale, here, is perfect casting, at war with himself as much as he is with Egypt. You feel that tension throughout the film. It's a Bible epic that isn't sure that God exists, and isn't sure he's benevolent. But it is also a film that wants, in its heart, to believe. **NEV PIERCE**

=== **VERDICT** ===
As spectacular and surprising as you would expect from Scott. Its spiritual uncertainty — and lack of triumphalism — perhaps robs it of a truly satisfying, cathartic conclusion, but also makes for a thoroughly modern, thoughtful biblical blockbuster. ★★★★★



ANNIE

DETAILS PG/118 mins./Out now **DIRECTOR** Will Gluck **CAST** Quvenzhané Wallis, Jamie Foxx, Cameron Diaz

→ **AS AN ATTEMPT TO UPDATE THE LI'L ORPHAN MUSICAL FROM ITS** original 1933 setting, this is half shrewd twists and half clomping missteps. Quvenzhané Wallis is pure sunny determination as the girl — now a foster kid — who melts the heart of stiff tech billionaire Will Stacks (Jamie Foxx); the 'popifying' of the original numbers doesn't hurt them a bit, and adding a new bad guy in Stacks' slimy PR man (Bobby Cannavale) gives a hit of modernity. However, the new songs are duds and the sickly redemption of Miss Hannigan (Cameron Diaz, battling ceaselessly against insurmountable miscasting) ruins a terrific villain and confuses the ending. Casting stars that are not confident singers lets the air out of some of the gutsier numbers and Will Gluck's fondness for close-ups and rapid editing doesn't give them much scale or flow. **OR ★★**



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB

DETAILS PG/98 mins./Out now **DIRECTOR** Shawn Levy **CAST** Ben Stiller, Robin Williams, Owen Wilson, Dan Stevens

→ **ANOTHER FANTASY FILM TRILOGY WRAPS THIS WINTER, THOUGH WITH** none of the hoohah of The Hobbit. For newbies, Night At The Museum is a family comedy series where an ancient magic tablet brings museum exhibits to rowdy life, with everyman Ben Stiller as hapless ringmaster. Now the tablet's rusting, endangering the magic, and Stiller visits the British Museum to put things to rights. It's a predictable product, barring a surprise crowdpleasing star cameo and a slightly edgy gag about the Biblical history between Jews and Pharaohs. Otherwise it's panto business, bringing back the likes of Steve Coogan (miniature Centurion), Owen Wilson (miniature cowboy) and Ricky Gervais (Stiller's git boss). There are leaden patches, but also broadly amusing routines and ideas, like a space-warped fight inside an Escher painting. The end-credits pay tribute to two of the cast no longer with us: Mickey Rooney (a fleeting cameo) and Robin Williams. **AO ★★★**

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• In a corner:
Channing Tatum as
Mark Schultz.

FOXCATCHER

Wrestlemania

RELEASED January 9

CERTIFICATE 15

DIRECTOR Bennett Miller

CAST Steve Carell, Channing Tatum, Mark Ruffalo, Sienna Miller

RUNNING TIME 134 mins

PLOT When Olympic wrestler Mark Schultz (Tatum) is hired by athletics enthusiast billionaire John du Pont (Carell) to lead a team to international glory, it seems the chance of a lifetime. But once Mark's brother Dave (Ruffalo) joins him and du Pont's behaviour grows increasingly odd, it becomes life-changing in a very different way.

STEVE CARELL HAS DONE 'serious' before. In the otherwise breezy *Little Miss Sunshine* he was bearded and suicidal, while in the *Anchorman* films, he memorably essayed a tragic weatherman struggling desperately with his crippling intellect... Okay, so Steve Carell hasn't really done 'serious' before. He's dabbled. Yet, once you adjust to the ostentatiously prosthetic nose and starkly greyed hair, he proves a perfect fit for the deeply serious role of John du Pont



• Steve Carell is John du Pont: billionaire extraordinaire.

in this based-on-a-true-story tragedy.

Perhaps it's because, on one level, du Pont could be seen as comical — in the 'nervously snickering' sense. When he insists that his freshly hired son-substitute, Mark (Channing Tatum), call him by the self-appointed nickname 'Eagle', for example. It must push against all his instincts, but Carell never plays it for laughs. He betrays little on the surface, though you sense dark, broiling emotions beneath. It's not hard to see why Carell's been tipped for awards, just as Jonah Hill was for his performance in director Bennett Miller's last film, *Moneyball*.

Miller certainly brings something

out in his actors. Or should that be presses something down? Channing Tatum, as Mark Schultz, is required to neuter his ballsy fratish charm — less hunk, more lunk. And, as Mark's older brother, Dave, Mark Ruffalo has smoothed out all his likable tics to portray a bulked-up, balding family guy whose heavy-set normality belies a mental keenness. Sienna Miller, too, benefits from the Bennett Miller treatment, dowered down so far as Dave's wife, it takes several scenes to even recognise her.

The connection between the three men is a lack of connectivity. *Foxcatcher* is essentially a story of men who don't know how to express

themselves emotionally, or even, to some extent, verbally. In the first scene between the brothers they barely say a word; we're not even sure they get on. They just wrestle. Miller clearly savours the irony: guys who get intensely, physically close, hugging and hurling each other, but can't conduct a meaningful conversation. Carell's du Pont, meanwhile, can't even express himself through the sport. Despite all his money, and influence on this purchased blue-collar family unit, he is the perpetual outsider.

None of which makes for easy viewing. *Moneyball* presented a flipside view of the sports movie; *Foxcatcher* to some extent provides the genre's dark side. It doesn't have a Brad Pitt to charm it up, and Miller keeps the mood autumnal, the skies grey, the pace slow. But he has such a way with actors that, for all your disquiet, you remain absorbed throughout. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT

Another dramatic triumph for Bennett Miller, though it is his toughest and least glamorous outing yet. A sad and horrible story, expertly and compellingly told. ★★★★★

ALSO OUT

The rest of the month, rounded up

POINT AND SHOOT

DETAILS TBC/83 mins./January 16
DIRECTOR Marshall Curry
CAST Matthew VanDyke, Lauren Fischer, Nuri Funas, Ali Mohamed Zwi

→ **REALITY TELEVISION, SOCIAL** media, computer games and the Arab Spring collide in this disturbing profile of OCD narcissist Matthew VanDyke, who views himself as a latterday Lawrence Of Arabia. But this self-shot study of wayward American manhood lacks editorial integrity. **DP** ★★

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE WORLD

DETAILS TBC/105 mins./January 23
DIRECTOR Peter Anthony
CAST Stanislav Petrov, Kevin Costner, Galina Kalinina, Sergei Shnyryov

→ **AN ODD MIX OF DOCUMENTARY** and reconstruction, this is a sincere tribute to Soviet colonel Stanislav Petrov, whose mistrust of a computer prevented nuclear devastation in September 1983. Footage of his 2006 US tour is surreal. **PP** ★★

PAPER SOULS

DETAILS TBC/100 mins./January 16
DIRECTOR Vincent Lannoo
CAST Stéphane Guillon, Julie Gayet, Jonathan Zaccai, Pierre Richard

→ **THE SPIRIT OF WOODY ALLEN** pervades this supernatural romcom, which sees a world-weary funeral oration writer compete for the affections of a Parisian widow with her undead husband. Deftly played, if a little muddled, this exudes a poignantly melancholic optimism. **DP** ★★★



I AM YOURS

DETAILS TBC/96 mins./January 30
DIRECTOR Iram Haq **CAST** Amrita Acharia, Ola Rapace, Prince Singh, Rabia Noreen

→ **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE FLECKS** debutant Iram Haq's often unflattering portrait of a Norwegian-Pakistani single woman struggling to juggle motherhood, romance and her career while trapped between two cultures, her own desires and the expectations of her community. **DP** ★★★

NATIONAL GALLERY

DETAILS 12A/181 mins./January 9
DIRECTOR Frederick Wiseman
CAST Nicholas Penny, Larry Keith, Luke Syson, Dawson Carr

→ **WHETHER PORING OVER** paintings, watching conservationists at work, accompanying guided tours or eavesdropping on routine meetings, this is an engrossing study of the day-to-day running of a great institution by the master of observational documentary. **DP** ★★★★★



PELO MALO

DETAILS TBC/93 mins./January 30
DIRECTOR Mariana Rondón
CAST Samuel Lange Zambrano, Samantha Castillo, Nelly Ramos, Beto Benites

→ **A DECEPTIVELY SHARP INSIGHT** into life on the margins. A feisty single mother battles a Venezuelan nine-year-old's possessive grandmother for control of his personality, while he just wants his curly hair straightened before the school photo. **DP** ★★★

AU REVOIR LES ENFANTS

DETAILS 12A/100 mins./January 30
DIRECTOR Louis Malle **CAST** Gaspard Manesse, Raphael Fejtö, Philippe Morier-Genoud, François Négret

→ **PERHAPS THE FINEST, MOST** truthful drama about Nazi-occupied France, Louis Malle's memoir also offers poignant insights into the innocence of youth and the realities of tyranny, prejudice and injustice. Authentically staged, sensitively played and impeccably directed. **PP** ★★★★★



THE LAST OF THE UNJUST

DETAILS TBC/220 mins./January 9
DIRECTOR Claude Lanzmann
CAST Benjamin Murelstein, Claude Lanzmann

→ **USING SURVIVOR INTERVIEWS** and archive footage, Claude Lanzmann assesses the role the Jewish council played in helping the Nazis run the Czech ghetto camp at Theresienstadt. An unflinching and deeply harrowing postscript to landmark Holocaust documentary, Shoah. **PP** ★★★★★

THE GREEN RAY

DETAILS 12A/96 mins./January 2
DIRECTOR Eric Rohmer **CAST** Marie Rivière, Béatrice Romand, Vincent Gauthier, Rosette

→ **FOLLOWING PARISIAN** secretary Marie Rivière as she tries to find a worthwhile holiday spot, this is a masterclass in improvisation that also demonstrates perfectly Eric Rohmer's understanding of human nature, the modern world and the deceptive simplicity of pure cinema. **DP** ★★★★★



THIS MONTH AT A GLANCE

• Whiplash



WHAT TO SEE IN JANUARY

OUT NOW

Annie	p.53	★★
Big Eyes	p.42	★★★★
Dumb And Dumber To	p.51	★★
Exodus: Gods And Kings	p.53	★★★★
The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies	p.52	★★★★
Night At The Museum: Secret Of The Tomb	p.53	★★★★
Paddington	p.51	★★★★★
Penguins Of Madagascar	p.51	★★★★
Unbroken	p.47	★★★★

JANUARY 2

The Green Ray	p.55	★★★★
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JANUARY 9

Foxcatcher	p.54	★★★★
Into The Woods	p.47	★★★★
The Last Of The Unjust	p.55	★★★★
National Gallery	p.55	★★★★

JANUARY 16

American Sniper	p.38	★★★★
Paper Souls	p.55	★★★★
Point And Shoot	p.55	★★
Testament Of Youth	p.45	★★★★
Whiplash	p.44	★★★★★
Wild	p.45	★★★★

JANUARY 23

Beyond Clueless	p.51	★★★★
Ex Machina	p.50	★★★★
The Gambler	p.51	★★★★
The Man Who Saved The World	p.55	★★
A Most Violent Year	p.46	★★★★

JANUARY 29

Kingsman: The Secret Service	p.48	★★★★
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JANUARY 30

Au Revoir Mes Enfants	p.55	★★★★
I Am Yours	p.55	★★★★
Pelo Malo	p.55	★★★★

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THE
20
FILMS
YOU
HAVE
TO SEE IN
2015

EMPIRE TAKES YOU
THROUGH THE YEAR'S
BIG RELEASES... AND
STAR WARS



01

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

may 15

“You’re looking for that very intense kind of intuitive response,” George Miller says of replacing Mel Gibson who, for the generation that elevated Mad Max into the pop-cinema pantheon, *is* the leather-panted loner as much as Harrison is Indy or Arnie the T-800. “That frisson when that person walks into the room. It’s a very intuitive process. It’s exactly like when we meet certain people. There’s a sense that yes, they *fit*. There’s an idea of when people fall in love. There’s an ideal in your internal, psychic landscape, and you meet someone and that person somehow dovetails with that ideal. A very similar thing happens with casting.”

The 69 year-old director pauses, ordering his thoughts on what is, after all, an epic of its own, because for nearly two decades it seemed like Max Rockatansky would never see the light of day again.

THE TORTURED,

convoluted tale of the latest Mad Max, who roars back into cinemas this summer in a cloud of Namibian desert dust, begins a full 20 years ago amid the quiet clink of ice in gin and tonics somewhere about 37,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean. Miller, by then a Hollywood A-list director with both the plaudits (Babe/Happy Feet) and the battle scars (The Witches Of Eastwick) to prove it, sat and pondered something surprising that had happened a few weeks earlier.

While crossing the road, inspired perhaps by the sheer drama of the fragile human body placing itself in >



• Tom Hardy's Max gets on board with Charlize Theron's Furiosa and her crew.



• Max is captured and used to sup-
up Slit's (Josh
Helman) car.



the way of oncoming traffic, the notion of how his old friend Max might finally be brought back to the screen suddenly and unexpectedly parked itself in his imagination. It was complete. It was new. It worked. But, determined not to turn back to a character he felt had been pretty much wrung out by three films, he put it to the back of his mind.

"There were always people telling me, 'Do another Mad Max!'" he remembers. "But really the last thing I wanted to revisit was him. I have a fairly rich imagination and I had a lot of other stories I wanted to tell. Then a few months afterwards I was on a long night flight back to Australia, and much of the story as it exists today sort of played unbidden in my mind. That was when I really saw the full possibility of it."

Miller approached Brendan McCarthy, a British comic-book

artist and longtime Max fan. Together the pair began to work on storyboards, sketching out a new adventure for Max, in which he joins a group of women led by the tough Furiosa (Charlize Theron), and helps them on a dangerous desert journey. Even by the original's standards, where dialogue is at a premium, this was to be an almost purely visual experience, its influences reaching way back into Hollywood's history.

"This film really is just figures in a landscape," he says. "As a young director the films that really struck me were the silent chase movies. For me they were a kind of pure cinema, they existed in these little pieces of time, like the notes of music. One of the things that was attractive to me was to go back and revisit the action movie in this way. So we made the decision to tell it as non-verbally as possible. And the best way to render

**"I REMEMBER FEELING,
'WILL THIS MOVIE
EVER HAPPEN?'"** **GEORGE MILLER**

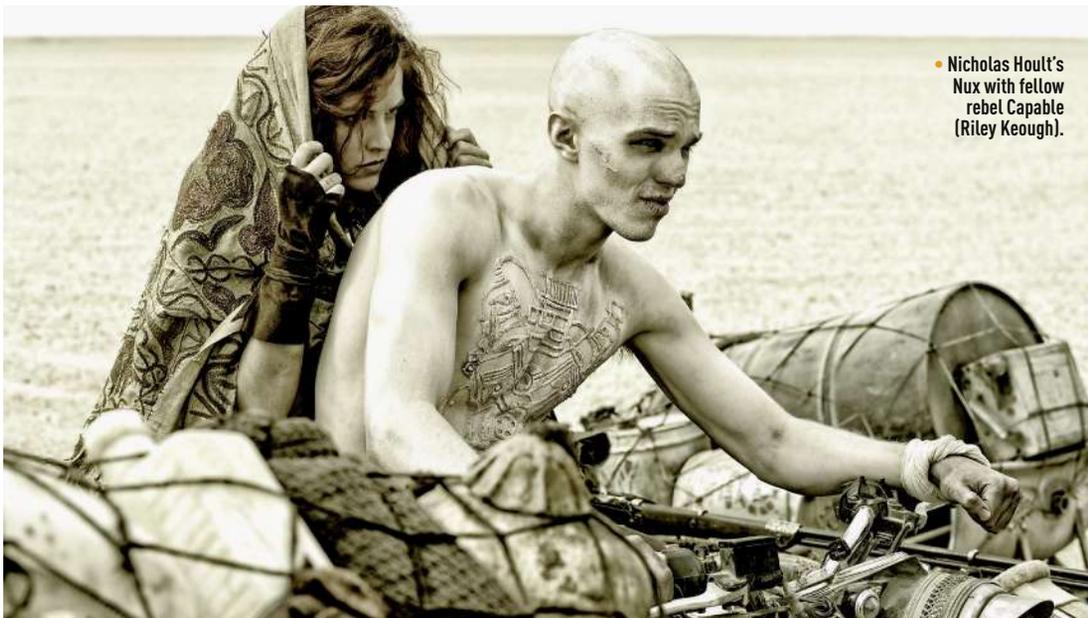
that as a full-length storyboard. We sat down and produced many, many panels of storyboards."

By the beginning of the 2000s, Miller and McCarthy's treatment, all 3,000 or so drawings (about as many shots as there are in the finished film, according to Miller), had found its way to 20th Century Fox, where Mel Gibson had a production deal with his outfit Icon, though unbeknownst to Miller, that relationship was turning sour.

"Mel said, 'Come over to Fox, we'll do it there,'" Miller remembers. "And we got very, very close. There were some issues... I didn't know at the time but it became caught up with *The Passion Of The Christ*, where my understanding was that Mel wanted Fox to take that on, and Fox were like, 'Well, you know, a film in Aramaic is not really our kind of film.' And that sort of held things up a little bit. But we were all ready to go. We were within 11 or 12 weeks of shooting."



• Furiosa can still throw a punch, even without her bionic arm.



• Nicholas Hoult's Nux with fellow rebel Capable (Riley Keough).



• Nathan Jones takes a firm stance as Rictus Erectus.

The precise reasons for the collapse of this version of what was still plain Mad Max 4 are somewhat obscured by history. 9/11 and the subsequent Iraq War certainly had something to do with it, and is the reason Miller most often cites.

"[The attacks] happened, and we were working in Australian dollars, and the American dollar collapsed," he says. "And there went a lot of our budget. We had to bring in a lot of materials and shipping closed down... The clock was ticking and things were in stasis, and within a few days we had to make cuts..."

But Gibson's strained relations with Fox, together with the pressure Miller was under to start on Happy Feet (which he was contracted to direct for Warner Bros), no doubt played a part. In mid-2003, only weeks before principal photography — locations prepped and sets half-built — Fox pulled the \$100 million budget and cancelled the film.

"I remember the day we decided to move on to the other film," sighs Miller. "I remember feeling, 'Will this ever happen?' There's that part of you that says, 'That's it. It's over.' And the other, more optimistic, side that says, 'Well, you know, maybe we'll pick it up in the future.'"

RUMBLINGS OF A

possible resurrection for the project would be heard periodically for the next few years. There were rumours of a 3D anime version. Then Miller was reportedly turning the film into a video game. But the notion of a full-on blockbuster seemed to be receding ever further into the horizon. Then, to cap it all, Mel Gibson went on a bender.

"Well, Mel started to have his public troubles," Miller says quietly. "By then it was no longer at Fox. We'd been shooting Happy Feet at Warner Bros.. They said, 'Well, we'll take it on.' And then things go out of control with Mel. I think him doing a big action film at the time was something that just wasn't on the cards. He had a lot more to deal with in his life. And by then I was already talking to other actors."

At the time he was cast, Tom Hardy's Hollywood star was just beginning its ascent. He was still firmly in the 'promising newcomer' category, yet to impress himself upon multiplex audiences with his channelling of Bane in the concluding chapter of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy. >



“There’s a certain pain and sorrow — and definitely a danger — to him that I wanted,” says Miller of meeting Hardy. “We just met and talked. My first impression was that he’s very bright and very fast. He’s got this kind of nervous energy. Mel had a similar quality of not being able to sit still, always biting the inside of his cheek. Very lively, unpredictable and funny. It reminded me a lot of working with animals, this wonderful thing where you don’t quite know what the creature’s going to do next.”

I remember talking to Heath Ledger,” he continues. “He had that same nery quality. In fact, I found the best thing to do was to go for a walk with these guys, because at least then they didn’t have to sit down and talk. And that doesn’t mean when they act on screen there isn’t that incredible stillness. But, you know, behind that stillness there’s this very

electric energy. And so when I got to meet Tom in person that was there in spades. In *Fury Road* I think Max speaks probably about as many lines as he does in *Mad Max 2*. Twenty or something, I haven’t counted them. The rest of the time he’s looking at someone, so you have to really *know* there’s a lot going on inside.”

By 2009, with Hardy cast, Miller was inching his way closer to finally calling action when yet another catastrophe hit the production.

“Climate change,” Miller sighs. “It rained. We’d built all our stuff. Rehearsals were underway. We’d created roads to do all those rehearsals. And then it rained. And it was not only rain in the Broken Hill area, which is towards the centre of Australia. Lake Eyre, where we wanted to shoot, now had pelicans and frogs jumping around. What had been flat red

“TO ME, THE ACTION FILM IS A HIGHER ART FORM.”

GEORGE MILLER

earth was, several months later, knee-high flowers. A great garden. Warners said, ‘Look, wait until next year.’ All the long-range forecasts said it would dry up and all the grass and flowers would die. So we waited a year, and by then we’d cast Tom and Charlize, and we waited and the rains kept coming. It was still a garden. So we decided to go to Namibia.”

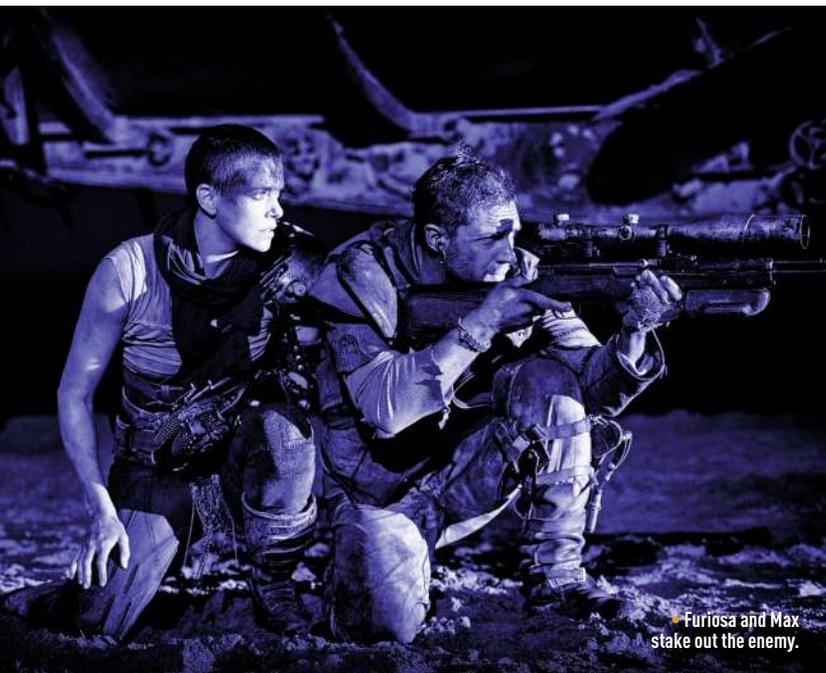
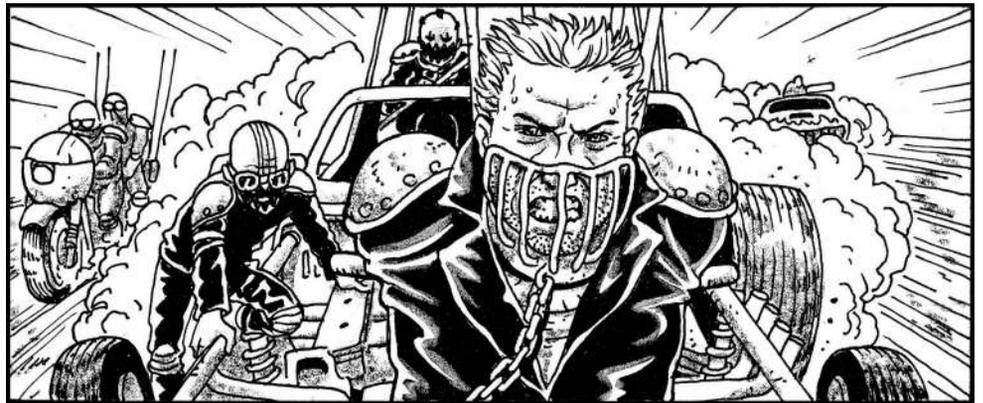
As for what audiences can expect to see this summer, Miller

is quietly confident he’s retained the stripped-down classicism of the original movies, together with their wry wit, though retooled and accelerated for a post-Matrix audience. It’s a crowd used to the image being mutable in ways unimaginable when Miller first conjured his specific flavour of automotive Armageddon.

“To me, the action film is a kind of special higher art form,” he says. “You can’t treat them as ‘well...



• Here: Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) has been raiding Hardy's Bane wardrobe... Right: Fury Road storyboards.



• Furiosa and Max stake out the enemy.

we'll just crash a lot of stuff". You've got to try to create a very clear syntax. It's not head-banging heavy metal music. Having said that, it's been 30 years. This is a faster movie. You've got to remember that the shooting technology changes. Everything had to be done back then in real time, you can't manipulate the image as much as you can now. We've done as much in-camera as possible, but we couldn't erase wires and so on back then. So if someone's in the middle of a fight and they're hanging off a vehicle we can do it for real here. If you look at videos or commercials 30 years ago, they were slower back then. We're getting faster and faster. If I had kept the rhythms of the early Mad Maxes they would have seemed too slow."

With the 20-year Fury Road odyssey finally winding to some

kind of close, isn't there a part of Miller that kind of wishes on that fateful flight he'd followed his instincts, put the zebra crossing incident to the back of his mind and just eaten his peanuts?

"You know, the first time I had been on a film set on Mad Max I was bewildered by the process," he remembers. "I went to Peter Weir and told him that I really didn't think I was cut out to be a filmmaker. Peter told me that I should think of it as a military mission, that it is a kind of battle against the elements and time, and you don't know where the landmines are. You're not killing others, but you're trying to take territory and capture it on film. That's more-or-less the attitude you have to go into making a film like this. That you're fighting a kind of a strange, lovely war." **ADAM SMITH**

02



ANT-MAN

JUL 17

PLAYERS Paul Rudd, Michael Douglas, Evangeline Lilly, Corey Stoll, Peyton Reed (director)

PLOT Petty crook Scott Lang (Rudd) decides to steal from an elderly recluse. Little does he know his mark is really genius inventor Hank Pym (Douglas), or that he's about to be launched into a huge (but also really small) adventure.

PITCH Marvel's last major gamble, Guardians Of The Galaxy, took us up, up, up to far-flung planets. Conversely, their next one will take us down, down, down to, uh, the carpet. "One of the ideas that excited me about Ant-Man is that it will seem as otherworldly as outer space," says Paul Rudd, who'll

become bug-sized for the film's action sequences. "I'm running around dodging shoes and vacuum cleaners. Visually, it will look just bananas." Coming soon after Avengers 2, it's a more low-key (but crucially not Loki) entry for Marvel, but with a fine cast and a fresh visual hook, could be one of 2015's most enjoyable surprises. Promises Rudd: "We've come a long way since Honey, I Shrank The Kids."

PITFALLS? It's had a wobbly history. Original director Edgar Wright and Marvel suffered creative differences, so for Peyton Reed it's an inherited project.

PAY-OFF To infinitesimal and beyond! **NDS**

03

CRIMSON PEAK

OCT 16

PLAYERS Mia Wasikowska, Tom Hiddleston, Jessica Chastain, Charlie Hunnam, Guillermo del Toro (writer/director)

PLOT A young woman (Wasikowska) is swept off by her feet by a charismatic suitor (Hiddleston) and taken back to his ancestral home. There she finds more than she bargained for, including a jealous sister (Chastain) and more than a few skeletons in the closet.

PITCH After taking some time away to dally with creatures great and small,



Crimson Peak finds the Mexican master of horror, Guillermo del Toro, determined to scare the bejesus out of us once again with this gothic romance which will feature plenty of brooding from a tortured Tom Hiddleston and Mia Wasikowska, and a haunted house — Allerdale Hall — that has more than its fair share of ghosts. “In the gothic, there is the possibility of ghosts,” says del Toro, who recruited regulars Doug Jones and Javier Botet to provide some phantom menace. “For me, the supernatural or monsters are a reality, and this is

in the movies I do. They are palpable for me, but it’s not alien to the genre. If you go to *Wuthering Heights*, there is the possibility of ghosts...”

PITFALLS? Few and far between. The romantic aspects of a gothic romance are new territory for del Toro. But the prospect of the director returning to his red roots is a thing to be applauded, if you can applaud with one hand clasped over your eyes.

PAY-OFF The peak of del Toro’s career? Just maybe... **CH** >



04

TERMINATOR GENISYS

JUL 3

PLAYERS Arnold Schwarzenegger, Emilia Clarke, Jason Clarke, Jai Courtney, Matt Smith, Alan Taylor (director)

PLOT Beginning in 2029, this reboot has time-travelling soldier Kyle Reese (Courtney) rocketed back to 1984 where an entirely different time-line from James Cameron's original has Sarah Connor (Clarke) being brought up by a T-800 (Schwarzenegger) she calls 'Pops'. Yes. Pops.

PITCH "I really thought finally!" Arnie himself tells **Empire** on the New Orleans set. "I couldn't do the fourth because I was Governor [of California at the time]. And I didn't like the script much anyway. When I heard the direction this one was going to take, and this team that's involved, I was really happy with it." Team-wise he's on the money. Alan Taylor has proven himself more than action-capable on *Thor: The Dark World*, so expect much bang for your buck, while the

writing team of Laeta Kalogridis (*Shutter Island/Avatar*) and Patrick Lussier has the experience to wring maximum thrills out of a whole new Terminator universe.

PITFALLS? The franchise has been through more producers than a Hollywood madam, and previous attempts at taking it beyond Cameron have not exactly hit the target.

PAYOFF He's back. Again. **AS**



05

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

APR 24

PLAYERS Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Mark Ruffalo, James Spader, Scarlett Johansson, Chris Hemsworth, Joss Whedon (writer/director)

PLOT Our heroes face their biggest challenge to date: a killer robot with a grudge against Tony Stark (Downey Jr.)

PITCH Possibly the only film this year that could beat *Star Wars* to the box-office crown. It would have been so easy for writer-director Joss Whedon

to simply rehash his mega-hit first Avengers movie, but *Age Of Ultron* promises to tear up the blueprint: it'll start with the team already together, then gradually, via the triple-pronged threat of James Spader's titular A.I.-hole, Elizabeth Olsen's Scarlet Witch and Aaron Taylor-Johnson's Quicksilver, hit the heroes where it hurts. "I want a chance to dig under the skin," says Whedon, "so *Ultron* is great. He comes from them (*the Avengers; Stark inadvertently creates*

him), so he is obsessed with them. Tony Stark is a *big* issue for him..."

PITFALLS? Too many characters could spoil the broth. And with two more Avengers movies due in 2018 and 2019, plus further films featuring Captain America, Thor and Iron Man, will there be a general lack of tension?

PAY-OFF Avengers Reassemble. Audiences assemble in their masses. **CH**

06



SPECTRE

NOV 6

PLAYERS Daniel Craig, Christoph Waltz, Monica Bellucci, Léa Seydoux, Ralph Fiennes, Sam Mendes (director)

PLOT 007 returns in a post-Judi Dench universe with the original Bond template reinstated; the spy facing off with Ian Fleming-invented sinister organisation SPECTRE.

PITCH "I hadn't finished telling their story," Sam Mendes confesses, at the launch of the new movie. "And I feel, immodestly, I am the best person to tell it." Despite hackers leaking the script, the plot remains officially secret. All we know is that Bond has a messed-up world to set to rights. "Some big shadows from Bond's past are going to resurface," Mendes teases of a storyline kicked off by a cryptic message from 007's past sending him in search of the titular outfit. The shoot will visit London, Rome, Austria, Morocco and Mexico, with the assistance of a new model of Aston Martin, while new cast members include Léa Seydoux and Monica Bellucci, with Christoph Waltz as head big bad Oberhauser. Rumours persist that Oberhauser is a cover name for one Ernst Stavro Blofeld, despicable baldy of old — so is he heading for the barbers?

PITFALLS? How do you top *Skyfall*?...

PAY-OFF ... By mixing the realistic Craig vibe with a classical Connery framework. Introspection with exploding pens! **IN**



07 EVEREST

OCT 2

PLAYERS Jake Gyllenhaal, Josh Brodin, John Hawkes, Keira Knightley, Baltasar Kormákur (director)

PLOT The true story of two expeditions that set out to conquer Everest in 1996. A combination of bad decisions and worse weather turn a life-affirming quest into a battle for survival.

PITCH You take on Earth's highest mountain at your peril. The makers of Everest, a recreation of the peak's

most notorious calamity, learned this first-hand on April 18, 2014, when an avalanche struck near where the second unit was shooting, killing 16 sherpas. While the production was only briefly delayed, it was a reminder of the massive bodycount the Himalayan whopper has amassed since it was first scaled in 1953. "There may not be a superhero in this movie," says director Baltasar Kormákur, "but the mountain is a supervillain." The Icelandic tyro is set to deliver an old-school, star-

packed disaster movie, spruced up with cutting-edge effects and 3D. "I've approached it like a space movie," he says. "Up there in the death zone you can't breathe; it's the same altitude as jet-liners fly. I'm drawn to extreme environments, and the top of Everest is as extreme as anything on this planet."

PITFALLS? Mountain movies rarely do big box office. Vertical Limit, anyone?

PAYOFF Mount Doom, on steroids. **NDS** >



08

CHAPPIE

MAR 6

PLAYERS Sharlto Copley, Dev Patel, Hugh Jackman, Sigourney Weaver, Neill Blomkamp (co-writer/director)

PLOT Meet Chappie (Copley), a rabbit-eared mecha-cop with advanced A.I. When he's thrown off the force, he's adopted by a gentle scientist (Patel) and hunted by a meanie with a mullet (Jackman).

PITCH First, a cast-iron promise: there will be no penis jokes in the

following paragraph. Now that's out of the way, let's list some of the ways in which Chappie is hugely exciting. It sees Neill Blomkamp return to the vibe (comedy sci-fi) and setting (South African slums) of his phenomenal debut, *District 9*. It has an intriguing cast, with Hugh Jackman as the villain, Sigourney Weaver in a yet-to-be-specified role, and Cape Town rappers Die Antwoord as a band of street criminals. The visual effects used to bring Chappie to life, based around

Sharlto Copley performance-capture, look beyond cutting-edge. And the robo-cop hero himself is adorable; for one, he's a fan of the cartoon He-Man. There's no doubt that, if handled correctly, Blomkamp's little Chappie could become absolutely huge. Oops.

PITFALLS? Blomkamp's last film, *Elysium*, was a little po-faced and plot-tangled.

PAY-OFF Welcome to District 10. **NDS**



09

FURIOUS 7

APR 3

PLAYERS Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Dwayne Johnson, Jordana Brewster, Michelle Rodriguez, James Wan (director)

PLOT The gang is back for more high-octane madness. This time, Dom (Diesel) and the crew must deal with family vengeance when Owen Shaw's brother (Jason Statham) comes after them. Cue some far-flung (and car-flung) action...

PITCH With James Wan taking the wheel, the new Fast film aims to keep what everyone liked about Five and Six (crazy car chaos in flashy international locations) while also bringing things home to Los Angeles. So expect vehicular mayhem in Abu Dhabi (indoors, no less) and some intense gunplay courtesy of Kurt Russell's still-classified but military-flavoured character. Though Paul Walker tragically died partway through the shoot, his scenes were completed

with the help of his brothers, and he'll be given a proper send-off. And, as you may have seen from the trailer, there will be a scene where they drive cars out of the back of a plane. A flying plane.

PITFALLS? There's always the fear this franchise could run out of fuel after so many entries — it happened before, until Justin Lin applied the jump cables.

PAY-OFF Putting the revs into revenge. **JW**



10

TOMORROWLAND

MAY 22

PLAYERS George Clooney, Britt Robertson, Hugh Laurie, Damon Lindelof (writer/producer), Brad Bird (writer/director/producer)

PLOT A young girl (Robertson) and a cranky inventor (Clooney) team up to find a hidden city that offers a glimpse of the future.

PITCH It may be stretching it to say that a movie based not just on a theme park ride, à la Pirates Of The Caribbean, but

an entire theme park zone can be considered an original property. But that's what Tomorrowland feels like. The creative pairing of Damon Lindelof and Brad Bird points to a film whose brain will be as big as its heart, and early footage glimpsed by **Empire** suggests that this will be ingenious and action-packed, and like nothing else this summer. "We're feeling around in the dark and we're excited by that, but it's also a scary thing," says Bird. "We can't point to 20 other movies and go,

'It's like that.' The closest thing we have is Close Encounters — and it's not that much like Close Encounters!"

PITFALLS? Dubious fanboys would point to Lindelof as a potential danger, but the man is smart, witty and inventive, while Bird simply doesn't do average. The biggest peril here might be managing expectations.

PAY-OFF The movie of tomorrow — today! **CH**



THE MARTIAN

NOV 27

PLAYERS Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Kate Mara, Sean Bean, Ridley Scott (director)

PLOT Botanist Mark Watney (Damon) joins an expedition to Mars, where he is accidentally left behind and must struggle to survive alone.

PITCH Based on Andy Weir's bestselling novel, *The Martian* sounds like *Cast Away* on Mars — and if you're going to have any actor to hold the screen while stranded, Damon is your man. Not that the rest of the cast is too shabby, either. "It's an incredible book about a man who is accidentally left on Mars when there's a dust storm," says Jessica Chastain, who plays the captain of the expedition. "The crew thinks he's dead, so they leave. Then he wakes up and realises, 'Okay, how much food do I have left? How do I try to grow crops on the soil where there's no bacteria?' All these things to try to live long enough for someone to realise he's there..."

PITFALLS? *Prometheus* showed how Ridley Scott sci-fi can be divisive — and occasionally nonsensical. But if anyone can dispell the cinematic curse of Mars (John Carter, Mars Needs Moms, Mission To Mars etc.), it's Sir Ridley.

PAY-OFF The All-new Robinson Crusoe On Mars. **NP >**



12

INSIDE OUT

JUL 24

PLAYERS Amy Poehler, Mindy Kaling, Bill Hader, Lewis Black, Phyllis Smith (voices), Pete Docter (writer/director)

PLOT A trip into the mind of 11-year-old Riley, who moves from the Midwest to San Francisco with her family. As her brain deals with this, her emotions, including Joy (Poehler) and Sadness (Smith), must go on their own journey.

PITCH This, along with the company's delayed *The Good Dinosaur* (see page

74) represent Pixar's long-awaited return to original filmmaking. *Inside Out* in particular seems fresh, and like the best Pixars it takes a universally relatable concept (growing up) and matches it with some clever, striking visuals, with much of the film set within a representation of Riley's mind. While there's some real psychology behind it, director Pete Docter admits they've fudged the science for dramatic purposes, especially in the number of emotions.

"Most scientists will say we're missing surprise, which to us felt kind of like fear in the way we portray him," he says. "We played with pride. But this seemed like a good blend to cover our bases."

PITFALLS? Original stories have to work harder to strike a chord with audiences than sequels or adaptations, though Pixar has a better success ratio than most.

PAY-OFF Pixar's *Life Of Brain*. **JW**



13

CHILD 44

APR 17

PLAYERS Tom Hardy, Gary Oldman, Noomi Rapace, Joel Kinnaman, Daniel Espinosa (director)

PLOT Moscow, 1953, and children's bodies are turning up on the icy streets. But how does Officer Leo Demidov (Hardy) hunt down a potential serial killer in a state that has decreed crime no longer exists?

PITCH After a career defined by extravagant villainy, Tom Hardy will be playing it straight for this adaptation of Tom Rob Smith's bestselling thriller. That said, Demidov is hardly a hero — he's effectively a government stooge who has all but used up his worth to the Soviet machine... What really entices about *Child 44* is the notion of transplanting

classic serial-killer tropes, right down to the disillusioned detective, into the through-the-looking-glass madness of Stalin's reign of terror. In many ways there are in fact two serial killers loose in the film: the terrifying child murderer and the state itself. With its supporting cast of edgy chameleons like Gary Oldman, Noomi Rapace and Paddy Considine, *Child 44* is looking to attain that high-end combo of mystery and miserablism that elevated *True Detective*, only with a lot more snow.

PITFALLS? This kind of atmospheric crime material has been better suited to television of late. Will we relate to Hardy as a downtrodden good guy?

PAY-OFF After Nordic Noir comes Bolshevik Noir. **IN**

14



THE FANTASTIC FOUR

aug 6

PLAYERS Jamie Bell, Miles Teller, Kate Mara, Michael B Jordan, Toby Kebbell, Josh Trank (director), Simon Kinberg (writer/producer)

PLOT After an experiment goes awry, four humans are endowed with superpowers that prove both blessing and curse. They bicker and bond and must work together to defeat a malevolent programmer known as Doom.

PITCH Eight years after Rise Of The Silver Surfer appeared to sink the franchise, Fox is hoping Josh Trank can infuse this reboot with the thrill and invention he gave handicap superhero sleeper Chronicle. The director is keeping details to himself but is apparently diverging from the light tone of the previous pictures with something more character-driven. Co-writer/producer Simon Kinberg says it's "a much more grounded, gritty, realistic movie". The cast, though, lives up to the title, and Kebbell dropped this nugget about his villain: "He's Victor Domashev, not Victor Von Doom, in our story... I'm a programmer. A very anti-social programmer. And on blogging sites I'm 'Doom.'"

PITFALLS? Kebbell's revelation didn't go down well with fans, while the last superhero reboot resulted in The Amazing, Alright Actually Just Okay Spider-Man.

PAY-OFF Younger. Sexier. Fantastic-er. **NP**



15

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA

mar 13

PLAYERS Chris Hemsworth, Benjamin Walker, Cillian Murphy, Tom Holland, Ben Whishaw, Brendan Gleeson, Ron Howard (director)

PLOT In 1820, the whaling ship Essex is rammed by a bull sperm whale, leaving the crew stranded at sea for 90 days. Based on the true story that formed the basis of Herman Melville's Moby Dick, relayed via a framing device with Ben Whishaw playing Melville.

PITCH Master craftsman Ron Howard this time mounts a classic seafaring adventure, full of huge squalls, awesome marine mammals, class warfare and the ultimate moral dilemma. "It's an acknowledgement of the human spirit," explains Howard. "The paradox of man trying to dominate nature." The story is also underpinned by a fascinating historical context: the hunt for whales as the world's primary source of oil. Howard's collaboration with

Slumdog Millionaire cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle on Rush seems to have invigorated him: expect In The Heart Of The Sea to feature thrilling shots of seamen and sperm whales from every conceivable angle.

PITFALLS? Malnourished seadogs might be a turn-off, and whales don't do the box office of sharks.

PAY OFF Think you know Moby? You don't know Dick. **IF**



16

JURASSIC WORLD

jun 12

PLAYERS Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard, Ty Simpkins, Nick Robinson, Colin Trevorrow (co-writer/director)

PLOT Finally, John Hammond's dream has become a reality: Isla Nublar is open to the public. But it's not long before chaos theory strikes again — and this time there are plenty more people for the dinos to chew on.

PITCH "I'm comfortable going to Crazytown," says Colin Trevorrow,

"because I used to live there when I was a kid." The 38-year-old had his mind exploded by Jurassic Park as a teenager, and aims to similarly detonate the world's collective noggin with his sci-fi-tinged addition to the franchise. The first trailer gave us some idea of what to expect from Jurassic World: a fully functioning theme park; a gigantic, great white-chomping liopleurodon; and a top-secret, lab-designed dinosaur, which looks likely to trigger the inevitable

tourist-trashing bedlam. Even more intriguingly, this time the velociraptors appear to have been tamed by the park's ranger (Chris Pratt). We're betting that doesn't last long.

PITFALLS? Trevorrow is bringing some wild ideas to the series. Fingers crossed this thing doesn't jump the shark-eating carnivore.

PAY-OFF Chris Pratt plus dinosaurs? Everything is roarsome. **NDS >**

17



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

5 DEC 26

PLAYERS Tom Cruise, Simon Pegg, Sean Harris, Jeremy Renner, Rebecca Ferguson, Christopher McQuarrie (director)

PLOT Ethan Hunt (Cruise) returns for another undertaking with the Impossible Missions Force. No story details as yet, but you can probably bet on them saving the world.

PITCH Having provided rewrites on last instalment Ghost Protocol, Christopher McQuarrie steps into the big chair, directing his Jack Reacher and Valkyrie star. It's his biggest picture by a distance, but the pair's rapport is obvious. He's an old-school action man and their last collaboration (McQuarrie rescripted Edge Of Tomorrow) resulted in one of the most enjoyable movies of 2014. Pegg played a more important role in part four, Ving Rhames is returning and Brit-Swede rising star Rebecca Ferguson (from BBC series The White Queen) should break out. But these films could do with a terrific villain... and the addition of Sean Harris raises hopes for that. McQuarrie has described Five (it's yet to get a sub-moniker) as a "love letter to fans of the series".

PITFALLS? It opens a week after Star Wars. Bold move. But then, Ethan Hunt likes a challenge...

PAY-OFF Mission: Irrepressible. **NP**

18

PAN

JUL 17

PLAYERS Hugh Jackman, Garrett Hedlund, Rooney Mara, Levi Miller, Joe Wright (director)

PLOT The origin stories of Peter Pan (Miller) and Captain Hook (Hedlund), in which Peter is kidnapped by scallywags and taken to Neverland to mine for fairy bones. Here he will meet James Hook, and begin a friendship that may not last.

PITCH At last, brilliant Brit director Joe Wright (Anna Karenina, Hanna) is

going full fantasy, putting away adult things for an epic expansion of J. M. Barrie's enchanted world. "The scale is vastly bigger than anything we have done before," says producer Paul Webster, "but still with that handmade quality you get with Joe." There may be effects galore, but Wright has insisted on creating Neverland as 'real' sets: labyrinthine forests, trippy tribal villages and full-scale pirate galleons. Staying true to the framework of Barrie's fable, screenwriter Jason

Fuchs has a host of new ideas. It is now 1940 and the Blitz, while wildest of all is a demented Hugh Jackman as Blackbeard, a piratical fiend in a dress.

PITFALLS? Last time we got a sequel to a beloved children's story it was Oz: The Grating And Pitiful.

PAY-OFF Wright doing a state-of-the-art panto with a lunatic Jackman? There are some happy thoughts for you. **IN**



19

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY—PART 2

NOV 20

PLAYERS Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Julianne Moore, Donald Sutherland, Francis Lawrence (director)

PLOT With Peeta (Hutcherson) rescued from the grips of the Capitol but significantly damaged, it's time for Katniss (Lawrence) to lead Panem's final stand against its oppressors. And not everyone will make it out alive.

PITCH If Mockingjay — Part 1 was the quiet, then this is definitely the

storm. None of the criticisms of lack of action in the last film could be levelled at this one. In Panem it's now total war, and Francis Lawrence plans to make it real and hard and dirty. "When I was making Catching Fire I was looking at Vietnam film references — Apocalypse Now, Platoon," he says. "But for this, I looked at World War I, World War II and just [today's] news. No films for this one... it mirrors things we're seeing [in the news] all the time now."

After two great and one good, but unspectacular, entry, it's time for the best young-adult adaptation to go out on a high.

PITFALLS? The final instalment in Suzanne Collins' series is heavy with death and misery. Can all that doom and gloom translate into an enjoyable blockbuster?

PAY-OFF The Mockingjay's final flight. **OR**



20

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

AUG 14

PLAYERS Henry Cavill, Armie Hammer, Alicia Vikander, Hugh Grant, Guy Ritchie (co-writer/director).

PLOT At the height of the Cold War, America and Russia put aside their animosity to tackle a mysterious new enemy. But the agents they choose to unite, Napoleon Solo (Cavill) and Illya Kuryakin (Hammer), are not entirely happy about becoming a double-act.

PITCH There is no shortage of spies in current cinema. Bond is in rude health, Mission: Impossible is about to disprove its title for a fifth time. But there is a gap, which U. N. C. L. E. could fill, for a larkier, more swaggering series. It's part mismatched buddy comedy and part good ol'-fashioned boy's-own adventure. Guy Ritchie isn't clinging to the original show but starting his own version, conjuring an origin story that the TV series never explored. "I wasn't a huge fan of the show, so that wasn't

the attraction," says Ritchie. "But the same way as something sparked when Sherlock Holmes was suggested to me, I instantly felt like I had a contemporary spin on it." If he can do for this what he did for Holmes then we're in business.

PITFALLS? The show is now 50 years old. Will the name attract the interest of younger viewers?

PAY-OFF Putting the 'cool' into U. N. C. L. E.. **OR >**

& STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

DEC 18

PLAYERS John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Domhnall Gleeson, Max von Sydow, Lupita Nyong'o, Gwendoline Christie, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, Peter Mayhew, Kenny Baker, Warwick Davis, J. J. Abrams (co-writer/director)

PLOT Why is Boyega's Finn in a stormtrooper uniform? What is Sith Kylo Ren doing in the forest? Why is a FIFA mascot on Tatooine? The only confirmed fact is that it's set 30 years after Episode VI. Still, turn to page 22 for some high-quality speculation.

PITCH The trailer suggests this is the perfect blend of old-school Star Wars (weathered planets, concept designs by Ralph McQuarrie, probe droid sound effects) with new twists (broadsabers, the Falcon duelling in recognisable atmospheres). And we still haven't seen Driver, Gleeson, von Sydow, Nyong'o, Christie and the old gang. Or have we?

PITFALLS Expectation is already at fever pitch. Can The Force Awakens be all things to all people?

PAY-OFF Have you felt it? **WT**



ALSO COMING



UNTITLED CAMERON CROWE PROJECT

Jun 5

Players: Bradley Cooper, Rachel Watson, Emma Stone, Bill Murray, Cameron Crowe (director)

Plot: Cameron Crowe redeems another world-worn romantic. In this case, unloved weapons consultant Brian Gilcrest (Cooper), who's trying to win back his very much married childhood sweetheart (McAdams).

GRIMSBY Jul 24

Players Sacha Baron Cohen, Mark Strong, Penélope Cruz, Louis Leterrier (director)

Plot Cohen's latest creation is a football hooligan whose brother (Strong) is a spy. The ill-fitting siblings are thrust together on a globe-spanning mission. Residents of Grimsby have already expressed their dismay that Cohen's script "puts the grim into Grimsby".

THE GOOD DINOSAUR Nov 27

Players: Judy Greer, Neil Patrick Harris, Frances McDormand (voices), Peter Sohn (director)

Plot: Pixar's second release of 2015 is the long-gestating story of the relationship between a 70 foot-tall Apatosaurus and a human named Spot. The particularly Pixarian twist being that they are both teenagers.



THE AGE OF ADALINE May 1

Players Blake Lively, Ellen Burstyn, Harrison Ford, Lee Toland Krieger (director)

Plot Suggesting a flavour of the Benjamin Buttons, Blake Lively plays the miraculous but reclusive Adaline, who has remained 29 since an accident in 1935. Drawn out by a new romantic interest (Michiel Huisman), she is given a chance to break the spell.



THE WALK Oct 2

Players: Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ben Kingsley, Charlotte Le Bon, Robert Zemeckis (co-writer/director)

Plot: The story of Philippe Petit (Gordon-Levitt), who masterminded crossing between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on a tightrope. Expect Zemeckis' visual stylings and 3D technology to place you precariously above '70s New York streets.

HIGH-RISE TBC 2015

Players: Tom Hiddleston, Luke Evans, Sienna Miller, Ben Wheatley (director)

Plot: Vaunted Brit-horror maestro Wheatley turns his eerie, savage gaze to J.G. Ballard's 1975 dystopian novel about a luxury tower block sealed off from the outside world, with its own complex social hierarchy. It only takes a series of small power failures to ignite a frenzy of violence...

TRAINWRECK Aug 28

Players: Amy Schumer, Bill Hader, Tilda Swinton, Brie Larson, Judd Apatow (director)

Plot: Comedy Central's hip new star Schumer becomes the have-it-all young lady at the heart of Apatow's latest romantic comedy, which charts a New York magazine reporter's struggle to maintain a rewarding sex life while falling in love.



MINIONS Jun 26

Players Sandra Bullock, Michael Keaton (voices), Pierre Coffin (director), Kyle Balda (director)

Plot: Part prequel to the Despicable Me movies but more origin story of the tiny Minions, in particular bumbling trio Stuart, Kevin, and Bob, who are seeking a leader with just the right degree of despicableness. May include scenes of gross historical inaccuracy.



INSURGENT Mar 20

Players: Shailene Woodley, Theo James, Ansel Elgort, Robert Schwentke (director)

Plot: This second movie in the four-part trilogy based on Veronica Roth's Hunger Games science-fiction novels, located in a neo-society divided by personality traits, finds "divergent" heroine Tris (Woodley) on the run, but fomenting rebellion.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES

Autumn 2015

Players: Lily James, Lena Headey, Matt Smith, Douglas Booth, Burr Steers (co-writer/director)

Plot: Jane Austen's study of relationship tribulations slightly remodelled with an army of the undead. As based on the novel (by Seth Grahame-Smith) based on the novel by our Jane, and not to be taken too satirically.

PIXELS Aug 14

Players: Adam Sandler, Peter Dinklage, Josh Gad, Brian Cox, Sean Bean, Chris Columbus (director)

Plot: When misinformed aliens decide to attack New York in the guise of '80s video-game characters, it is up to a ragtag bunch of ageing gamers to join forces and save their city. Kevin James plays the President.



PITCH PERFECT 2 May 15

Players: Anna Kendrick, Rebel Wilson, Hailee Steinfeld, Elizabeth Banks (star/director)

Plot: The sequel to the hit musical comedy finds Banks behind the camera as well as returning as wisecracking a-cappella commentator Gail. The plot sees singing group the Barden Bellas wreak merry havoc at the international contest. Liable to mock Germans.



TED 2 Jul 10

Players: Mark Wahlberg, Amanda Seyfried, Liam Neeson, Seth MacFarlane (voice/director)

Plot: The return of the world's favourite swearsy bear finds his best pal John (Wahlberg) coping with divorce, while Ted himself has run into his own legal troubles. In keeping with previous adventures, John is now in possession of a Flash Gordon-themed Harley.

SPIELBERG COLD WAR PROJECT Oct 9

Players: Tom Hanks, Mark Rylance, Joel Coen (writer), Ethan Coen (writer), Steven Spielberg (director)

Plot: This complex real-life story of CIA recruited lawyer James Donovan's (Hanks) attempts to free a U2 pilot from the Soviet Union not only reunites Hanks and Spielberg, but features a script given some spice by the Coen brothers, no less.

POLTERGEIST Jul 31

Players: Sam Rockwell, Rosemarie DeWitt, Jared Harris, Nicholas Braun, Gil Kenan (director)

Plot: A reimagining of the Tobe Hooper-Steven Spielberg '80s horror classic, about a young family who move into a new home already occupied by malevolent spirits. Fittingly, it comes from the director of Monster House.



REGRESSION Aug 28

Players: Ethan Hawke, Emma Watson, David Thewlis, Alejandro Amenábar (writer/director)

Plot: Amenábar, who brought such icy chill to *The Others*, returns to similarly creepy terrain with this psychological thriller about a father (Hawke) accused of horrific crimes against his daughter (Watson) he has absolutely no memory of committing.



CLASS

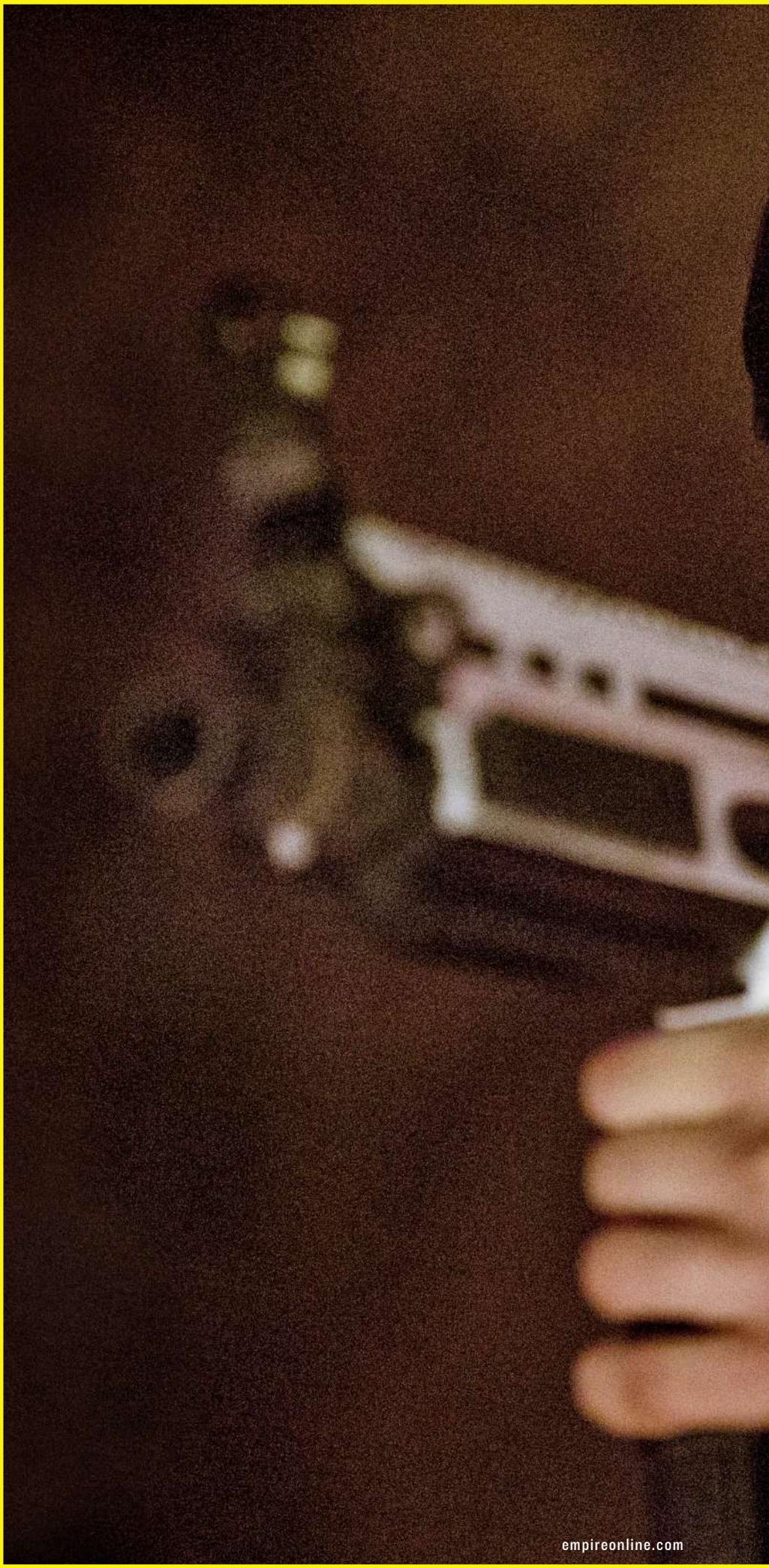
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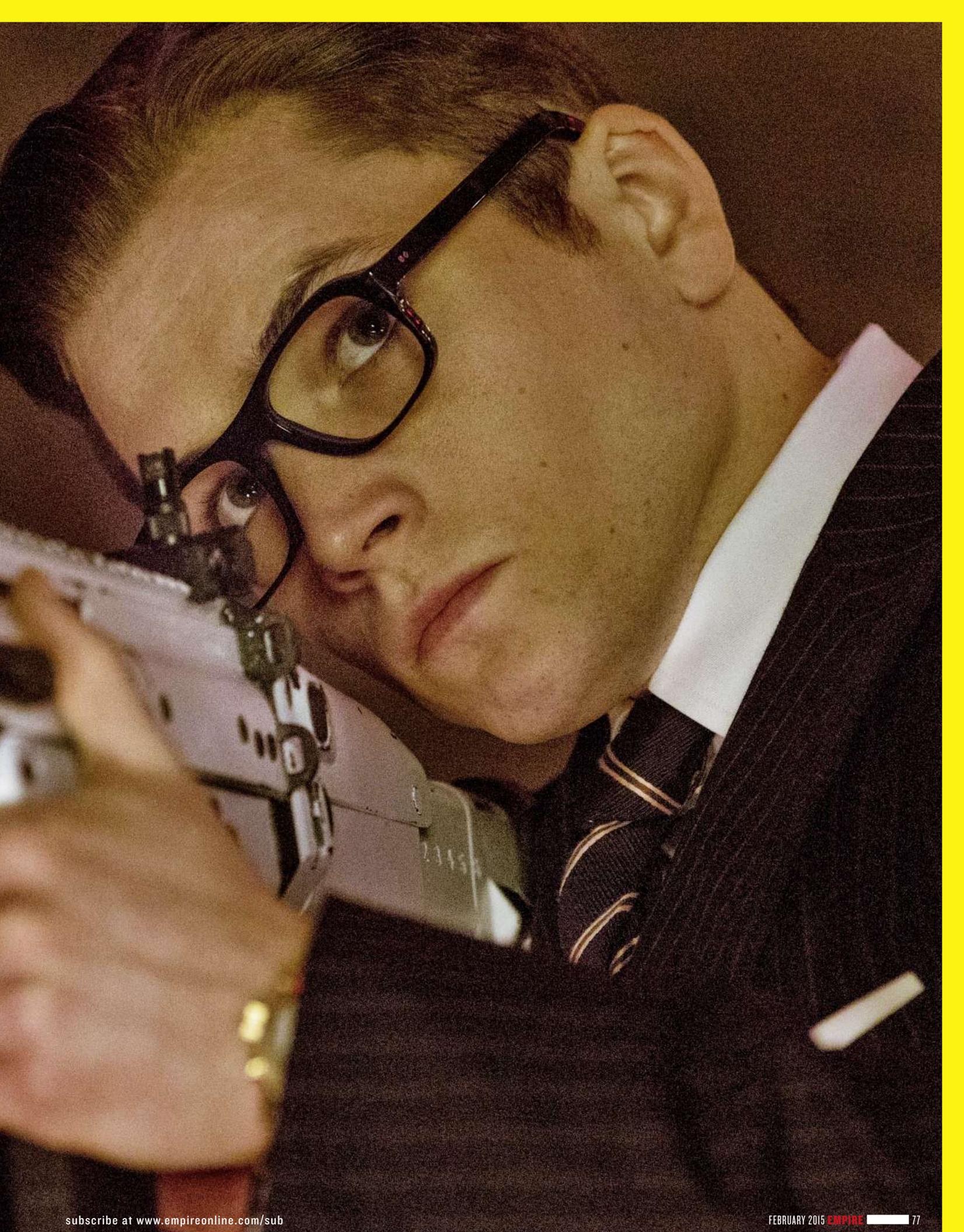
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**KINGSMAN: THE
SECRET SERVICE IS
NOT JUST 'KICK-ASS
MEETS BOND',
DIRECTOR MATTHEW
VAUGHN TELLS US.
IT'S ALSO HIS
MOST PERSONAL
MOVIE YET...**

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**





W“WELCOME TO THE BOND VILLAIN’S lair!” Matthew Vaughn is standing at the door to his home, and grinning widely. Largely because he’s not kidding. Unless you are an actual Bond villain who just happens to be reading this, Vaughn’s home is something else. It’s a vast country pile, a Grade I listed building constructed in 1574, tucked away at the end of a driveway behind forbidding iron gates in Suffolk, all the better to afford Vaughn and his wife, Claudia Schiffer (you may have heard of her), some privacy.

Today **Empire** has arranged to spend the afternoon in Vaughn’s entertaining company. From a cavernous entrance hall, he leads us into a dining room dominated by a colossal rectangular dining table. Two places are set for lunch — at either end of the table, roughly 20 feet apart. “Welcome to the Bond villain’s fucking dining table!” cackles Vaughn. “I wanted to greet you in that chair stroking a white fucking cat. But I couldn’t find the cat. It’s around here somewhere...”

He’s joking, of course. But there is a reason why Vaughn has mentioned 007 twice within minutes of our arrival (even if he compares himself to a villain; once a film producer, it seems, always a film producer). Bond is always on his mind. He grew up loving the character, loving the franchise. In 2006, as he revealed to **Empire** a few months ago, he came within a whisker of rebooting the superspy franchise, believing for 24 hours that he’d been given the job of directing *Casino Royale*. “There are two franchises that I would do — meaning other people’s franchises,” he says. “Star Wars? I’m in. And the only other franchise, which I would have done before this, was Bond. I would have loved to have done Bond.”

And so he has. Kinda. With his fifth film as director, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, in which a gentleman spy (Colin Firth) recruits a rough diamond (Taron Egerton) from the streets, Vaughn has written a virtual love letter to John Steed. And Harry Palmer. And Napoleon Solo. And Derek Flint. And Jason King. But mainly it’s a love letter to 007.

“NO, THERE HADN’T

been the slightest interest,” says Firth. Given he’s tall, athletic, good-looking and the very epitome of an upper-class Brit, **Empire** has been wondering aloud if Bond ever came Firth’s way. He shakes his head. “I met one of the directors a long time ago, around the time it ended up with Dalton,” he admits. “But I never felt that there was serious interest. I honestly do not know what I would have done had it ever come my way.”

Kingsman gives us some indication. As seriously suave agent Harry Hart,

BRIEFING

KINGSMAN: THE SECRET SERVICE

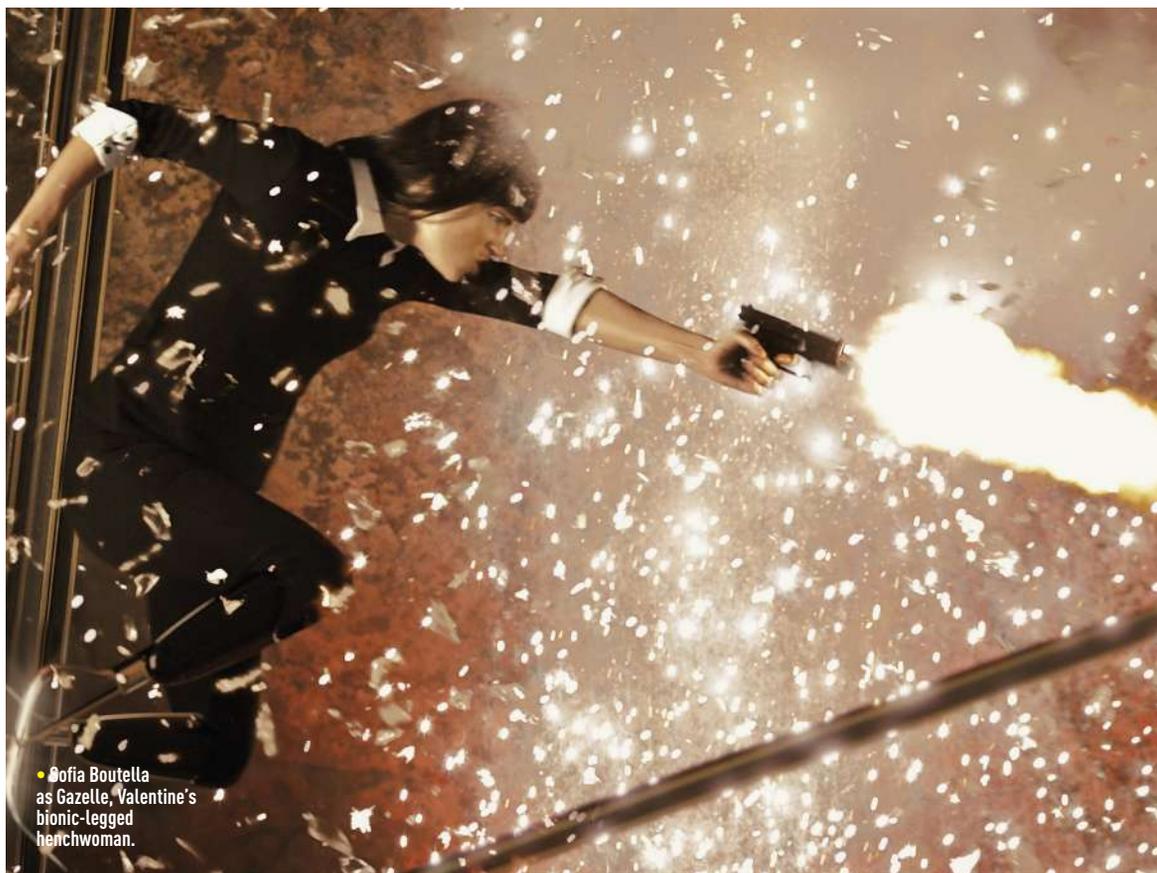
RELEASED: January 29

DIRECTOR:
Matthew Vaughn

STARRING: Colin Firth, Samuel L. Jackson, Taron Egerton, Sofia Boutella, Mark Strong, Michael Caine, Sophie Cookson

STORY: Posh British superspy outfit The Kingsmen need new blood, and veteran agent Harry Hart (Firth) finds it in rough street kid Eggsy (Egerton) — assuming he can scrub up sufficiently and survive training.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR...
That’s because it riffs on *Pygmalion*. Just like *My Fair Lady*. And *Educating Rita*. And *Pretty Woman*. And *Men In Black*.



• Sofia Boutella as Gazelle, Valentine’s bionic-legged henchwoman.

A photograph of Colin Firth in a dark pinstriped suit, holding a black handgun high in the air. He is in a church, with other people in the background, some of whom appear to be in a state of panic or confusion. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Colin Firth channels a specky 007 as secret agent Harry Hart.

“I’VE GOT A BIT MORE ROGER MOORE IN ME THAN DANIEL CRAIG.” COLIN FIRTH

Firth is a hoot, deploying that cut-glass, upper-class accent to great deadpan use and indulging in the sort of ultra-violent behaviour you imagine would appall King George VI or Mr. Darcy, but secretly get a (v.g.) from Bridget Jones. “I think Daniel Craig is absolutely brilliant,” he says. “But he’s probably as far from camp as it’s ever got. I think I’ve brought it back the other way. I’ve probably got a bit more Roger Moore in me than Daniel Craig. Although I can’t do the eyebrow lift.”

There’s no need when Vaughn has made a film that lifts its own eyebrow. Kingsman is not a Bond spoof (“It’s not annihilating the kind of thing it’s satirising,” says Firth), but it is very much to spy movies what Vaughn’s Kick-Ass was to superhero films. It nods and winks and openly references Bond, while going to places those movies always feared to tread. There are two sequences in Kingsman that are so gloriously OTT and so spectacularly violent that the Broccolis would blanch. One, a thrilling shoot-out that comes on like *The Raid* meets Peter Jackson’s *Braindead*, in which Firth racks up a body count to rival Schwarzenegger’s career best, gave the actor pause. “I’m still processing my response,” he admits. “I did think, ‘I don’t know what I’m getting into now.’ And there will be arguments, legitimate discussions, about whether it’s healthy to enjoy anything with violence. Particularly when you’re dared to enjoy it. I still don’t have the answers on what’s supposed to be good and bad. But I was exhilarated as well.”

The other, an audacious sequence we’ll refer to by Vaughn’s description — “a Busby Berkeley fireworks display” — has to be seen to be believed. And its very presence goes a long way to explaining why *Empire* is sat in Vaughn’s dining room talking about Kingsman and not X-Men: Days Of Future Past.

That was the movie Vaughn had been all set to make, following on from his success rebooting the X-movies with *First Class* back in 2011. But when plans to make Kingsman, an original property Vaughn had cooked up with his old friend, comic-book writer Mark Millar, accelerated because a couple of copycat properties were being hawked around Hollywood, Vaughn had a decision to make. “I thought, ‘Hold on, if I do another X-Men, I’ll be in that camp of being a director for hire.’ Yeah, I’ll make money, but that doesn’t really interest me. And Kingsman was in my head.”

So for the third time in his short directorial career, he walked away from a big studio movie to do his own thing. And, as with the previous times, he’s taken a risk that could well end up costing him everything. >





• Matthew Vaughn on set with Colin Firth, Samuel L. Jackson and Sofia Boutella.

THE SECOND OCCASION

came in 2009, when he left Marvel's *Thor* during the development stage. His version was very different from the Kenneth Branagh movie that emerged in 2011: "It was about Vikings," he reveals. "I wanted *Thor* to be gritty and real, and when you go to Asgard the whole thing is motion-captured and the fucking craziest world you've ever seen." But the parting of ways with Marvel and their chief, Kevin Feige ("a great guy"), was amicable. A far cry from the first occasion, then.

That had been in 2005 when, during pre-production on what would become the third *X-Men* movie, *The Last Stand*, Vaughn walked off the 20th Century Fox production just a couple of months before filming. It was a project he'd always had reservations about — when he was mulling over the offer to direct, he'd called *Empire*, among others, to seek advice — but having successfully transitioned from producing Guy Ritchie movies to directing his own with *Layer Cake*, he decided it was worth the risk. Initially, at least.

"When I joined *X3*, there was no script," he recalls. "I went off with Zak Penn and Simon Kinberg and wrote a script in six days. I *needed* a script. And then I went into a person's office — I can't say who — and saw another draft of *X3*. I said, 'What's that?' and grabbed it. It was another script, and the opening scene was Storm in Africa causing rain to get rid of the drought. I was so freaked out. I made my decision then and there, booked my flight and went home."



• Sophie Cookson's Roxy proves an impressive candidate.



• Mark Strong's Merlin: trainer of superspies.



• Michael Caine's snappily dressed veteran agent, Arthur.

Back home in Suffolk, Vaughn was barracked by furious calls from Fox, threatening to sue ("I hadn't signed a contract, so I could leave") and from his then-agent, informing him that the old cliché was true: he really would never work in Hollywood again.

Vaughn, though, is a fascinating creature. Although he comes from an aristocratic background (his father, George de Vere Drummond, is the godson of King George VI — another Colin Firth connection), with a private education and enough cash to sign at least one underperforming Premier League striker, there's more to his story than meets the eye. He's actually a self-made man, independently wealthy, and very much the product of his mother, Kathy Ceaton, who raised him as a single parent during the '70s and who, sadly, passed away suddenly last year while Vaughn was prepping *Kingsman*.

As a result, this hyper-violent, slickly stylish action movie is also his most personal. "My mother tried to bring me up to be Harry," he says. "There's so much of my mother in this movie. She hated most of my movies! But I thought she would quite like this one." He pauses, and laughs. "No, there's violence and swearing in it, so she wouldn't have."

VAUGHN HAS dedicated the movie to Ceaton, with a title card that goes beyond 'in loving memory'. His fiercely independent streak, it seems, comes from her, the same streak that led him to react to the post-*X3* threat of

a Hollywood blackballing by co-funding his next movie, *Stardust*, in 2007. "He's uniquely unbothered by what other people think," laughs Jane Goldman, who's been his writing partner since that film. "He doesn't have a filter — in a charming way. He's incredibly open about saying what he feels. He's such a complete one-off."

When he walked away from *Thor*, he moved on to *Kick-Ass*, privately funding the film "out of 'fuck you'" when every studio in Hollywood turned it down. "I mortgaged the house," he says matter-of-factly, reclining in his study. "There was a moment where we were fucked on *Kick-Ass*. I'd have lost this house. I'd be proper fucked, as they say in *Snatch*. It was really scary. My heart literally went up a bit just remembering that."

Nevertheless, he's done it again on *Kingsman*. "Listen, I didn't get proper fucked!" he laughs. "Actually, it paid off. I got fucked in a good way!" It's another huge gamble — in the grand tradition of his real hero, George Lucas, *Kingsman* is a Fox film, but the studio is merely distributing, which allowed him to turn down its more interesting notes, which

in full view of 150 people. "There were times when his voice would come over the speaker," laughs Taron Egerton, the young Welsh actor who hadn't set foot on a film set before Vaughn cast him as Eggsy. "'Taron, you're pulling a face and you look fucking stupid.' I won't lie — first week, I was going, 'This guy's a wanker.' But when you understand him, you know he's only doing that if he respects you enough."

Vaughn laughs when *Empire* brings up his reputation. "Look, I butt heads with idiots," he admits. "I had a drink with David Fincher a couple of years ago. I said, 'David, apparently you're the most difficult director in Hollywood.' He said, 'I hear you are.' And we both laughed so hard. The studios all think I'm difficult. If being passionate, opinionated and sticking to your guns is difficult, then yes, I am."

But Vaughn's solid, inspired work as a director is slowly breaking down those misconceptions. When we speak, he's wrestling with an offer to direct a huge sequel, torn between the chance to make something iconic and the loss of liberty he'd face butting heads with executives who could well be idiots. And before you

"IF BEING PASSIONATE AND OPINIONATED IS DIFFICULT — THEN YES, I AM."

MATTHEW VAUGHN

included redubbing Samuel L. Jackson's lisping performance as bad guy Richmond Valentine, and losing central set-pieces, Busby Berkeley fireworks display and all.

"The studios are not evil, by the way," he says. "But I feel so sorry for most directors. You watch a film and think, 'That guy can't fucking direct.' Then I imagine what *Kingsman* would have been like with..." And he goes on to catalogue the scenes Fox wanted cut or amended...

Vaughn is great company: swears, gregarious, and loyal to his colleagues. "We bonded a little over our backgrounds — we didn't really grow up with fathers," says Mark Strong, collaborating for the third time with Vaughn on *Kingsman* (he was also offered the Kevin Bacon role in *X-Men: First Class*). "He can be totally honest with me, and I'm the same with him. All the best directors work with the people they trust, and who trust them. You both know the steps."

But his bone-dry sense of humour has garnered him a reputation as someone a tad 'difficult'. He's no respecter of ego, often using his God Mic on set to bellow instructions to normally cosseted actors

ask, it's not *Star Wars* (a public flirtation with Episode VII, with actor pal Jason Flemyng saying at a premiere that he was set to direct it, earned Vaughn "a grumpy message from Kathleen Kennedy"), and it's not *Bond* ("Barbara Broccoli's not very keen on me," he smiles. "I've definitely done something that has pissed her off... I'm not sure what it is. I've said a lot!").

Whether he takes it or, in the event of not being proper fucked should *Kingsman* do well at the box office, goes to work on a sequel to his spy caper, the offer has given him a boost. He sees it as a sign the path he chose ten years ago, switching from being Guy Ritchie's producer, is paying off. "I used to say to people that I'm a film producer, but I'm not as interested in that now," he muses. "I was embarrassed to say I was a director. I didn't feel like one. But I've slowly realised I see movies in my head now. I think like a director. So yeah, I've become a director now." And, of course, a *Bond* villain on the side.

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KINGSMAN: THE SECRET SERVICE IS OUT ON JANUARY 29 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 48.

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BROLLY GOOD SHOW

THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR KEEPING RAIN OFF YOUR HEAD... KINGSMAN ISN'T THE FIRST MOVIE TO FIND NEFARIOUS EMPLOYMENT FOR THE HUMBLE UMBRELLA...

RIFIPI (1960)

Next time you're burgling a jeweller's by drilling through the roof, remember that you can keep telltale debris off the carpet by making a small hole, sliding an umbrella through it, opening the brolly and then using it to catch the rubble. This trick is demonstrated in Jules Dassin's classic heist movie.



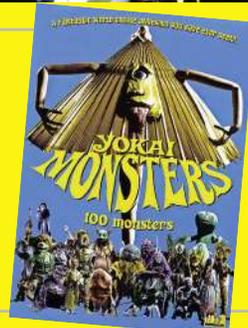
BATMAN (1989)

Burgess Meredith's Bat-foe The Penguin is the unparalleled king of repurposed bumbershoots, employing multipurpose umbrella gadgets as a personal helicopter, a gas-gun and fashion accessory. He also uses a giant, rocket-propelled flying umbrella-cycle.



THE HUNDRED GHOST STORIES (1981)

Among the many Japanese ghost species featured in this film — and in a genre of you-won't-believe-it-'til-you've-seen-one supernatural cinema — is *yurei-gasa*, an angry, one-eyed, one-legged umbrella monster. Not to be confused with the similar but friendlier *kasa-obake*.



LADY SNOWBLOOD (1971)

Japanese avenger Lady Snowblood (Meiko Kaji) conceals her deadly samurai sword inside the parasol which she flutters to attract the lowlifes she disembowels and dismembers with such style. She also never catches the sun.



INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE (1989)

A Nazi plane is making a strafing run at the Jones family — Indy's gun is empty, but his dad (Sean Connery) flaps the umbrella he has been carrying prissily throughout the film, startling a flock of birds which fly up in the path of the fighter plane and cause it to crash.



THE AVENGERS (1966)

Unlike Lady Snowblood's sword-in-parasol, John Steed (Ralph Fiennes) simply uses his perfectly rolled umbrella as a sword... Copying an act that Patrick Macnee managed with approximately 98 per cent more charm, *élan* and *savoir-faire* on the long-running television series.



KIM NEWMAN



Oscars Special 2015

**BEST FILM? BEST ACTOR? BEST ACTRESS? BEST
ANIMATED FEATURE...? EMPIRE HIGHLIGHTS THIS
AWARDS SEASON'S STRONGEST CONTENDERS**

LOGO MARTA CERDÀ



INTO THE WOODS

A TWIST
IN THE
TALE

ROB MARSHALL AND AN ALL-STAR
CAST EXPLORE THE DARK SIDE
OF THE FAIRY TALE... WITH
SHOW TUNES

WORDS IAN FREER



• Meryl Streep works her magic as The Witch.

It is day two of a seven-week rehearsal on *Into The Woods*, director Rob Marshall's adaptation of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's fairy-tale mash-up musical. In a New York rehearsal room, James Corden and Emily Blunt, as The Baker and Baker's Wife, face up to The Witch, played by Meryl Streep. Of course, Blunt has history with Streep — she played PA (Posh Assistant) to Streep's Anna Wintour-alike in *The Devil Wears Prada* — but for Corden, this is the first time he has gone toe-to-toe with The Greatest Film Actress Of The Past 40 Years.

"You can't help but think, 'Oh God, okay, this is what you've been wanting your whole life,'" remembers Corden. "You either step up or go home."

The run-through begins and Streep makes light work of the witch's rap that tells the couple how to "reverse the curse" of infertility she has placed on them. She jumps up on to a table, but immediately steps on her dress and slips backwards. Marshall, Corden and Blunt, three months pregnant, look on as Streep falls through the air towards the concrete floor. The Greatest Film Actress Of The Past 40 Years, 18 Oscar nominations (three wins) and 28 Golden Globe nominations (eight wins), is about to undergo certain injury: a fractured arm, a broken neck.

Or maybe worse.

On the face of it, Sondheim and Lapine's 1986 show is perfect material for Disney Studios. To lift the spell, Streep's witch sends Corden's Baker and Blunt's Baker's Wife on a quest into the deep, dark woods where they interact with the tales of Little Red Riding Hood (Lilla Crawford) and her Wolf (Johnny Depp), Cinderella (Anna Kendrick) and her Prince (Chris Pine), Rapunzel (Mackenzie Mauzy) and Jack, of *Beanstalk* fame (Daniel Huttlestone). It fits the Marvel template of a 'shared universe' story with a firmly young-adult skew. Plus, it's about fairy tales, duh. But dig deeper and it is surprising that Disney is bankrolling it at all. In Sondheim's fractured fairy tale, the characters achieve 'happy' by the midway point. It's the 'ever after' that proves deeply problematic. Or, as Emily Blunt puts it, "Everything goes to shit."

"I think the main idea is for the first half to explore the fairy tales that have existed for so long in a fun and interesting way and then in the second half to deconstruct them," says Anna Kendrick, who plays a feminist Cinderella. "It states that the idea of instilling any kind of mythology has to be done with a grain of salt. Nothing in life is that black and white. If you are a very, very good boy or girl, it doesn't mean that everything will turn out all right."

"I was so impressed that Disney wanted to do this," admits Marshall. "Our fairy tale does not have that animated sensibility to it. It's heightened but there is a real grit and truth to it."

BRIEFING

INTO THE WOODS

RELEASED: January 9

DIRECTOR: Rob Marshall

STARRING: Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt, James Corden, Anna Kendrick, Chris Pine, Johnny Depp

STORY: To lift a witch's (Streep) curse that has left them childless, a baker (Corden) and his wife (Blunt) have to retrieve four objects: a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn and a slipper as pure as gold. The quest brings the couple into contact with characters from classic Grimm fairy tales: Jack (Daniel Huttlestone), Little Red Riding Hood (Lilla Crawford), Rapunzel (Mackenzie Mauzy) and Cinderella (Kendrick).

CLASSIC FAIRY TALES, EH? Based on Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical, the show originally featured the Three Little Pigs and Snow White but they got the heave-ho during previews in San Diego.



• Streep shows her softer side.

SONDHEIM'S VERSION OF FAIRY

tales would make Uncle Walt spin in his cryogenic chamber: Little Red Riding Hood's Wolf is a horndog, the ugly sisters are sadists, Rapunzel is a neurotic and Prince Charming is a hairy-chested *playa*. These picture-book legends are driven by the stuff of Italian parliamentary politics: greed, lying, irresponsibility, lust. They don't so much get a reality check as a humanity check, with all the shortcomings, complexities and darkness buried deep in the stories bubbling to the surface.

"You think about the dress and the strike of midnight, but what it really is about is emotional abuse," says Kendrick. "That's the part you forget about the Cinderella myth. It's someone falling in love with the first person who shows her affection and then in our version being strong enough to say, 'No, I want something that is real.'"

"The Prince is precisely that storybook character that is presented as an ideal, but he's a bit of a buffoon," adds Chris Pine. "In this world, as Cinderella discovers, the Prince is terribly



“IT’S HEIGHTENED, BUT THERE IS A REAL GRIT AND TRUTH TO IT.” **ROB MARSHALL**



• James Corden finds his “cape as red as blood” and he’s not letting go.

flawed, tragically unaware, and nothing like she had hoped he and the life he represents would be.”

Director Marshall sees it as something beyond the world of witches and wolves. His desire to make the project started while he was listening to President Obama delivering a speech to the families of the 9/11 victims, his message chiming with one of the key songs in the show: No-One Is Alone. In the second half of *Into the Woods*, a giant comes down the beanstalk and begins to terrorise the village, forcing the self-centred icons to work together. The implications for Marshall were obvious.

“The giant is really a metaphor for fear, whether that is terrorism, climate change or school shootings,” says the director. “In many ways it is a much more unstable time today than it was when it was written. It really feels like a fairy tale for this generation.”

The authors, though, have a different take on the significance of the giant. “To James and me,” Sondheim wrote in his book of collected lyrics, “it is a giant. Enough said.” >

“IN THIS WORLD THE PRINCE IS TERRIBLY FLAWED, TRAGICALLY UNAWARE.” CHRIS PINE



Two princes: Rapunzel's Billy Magnussen and Cinderella's Chris Pine.

IN 1995, COLUMBIA PICTURES AND

Muppet master Jim Henson approached Sondheim to adapt *Into the Woods*, with a plan to use Henson's artistry to create the fantastical creatures. Changes at the studio spiked the project, but not before a script by *Splash/City Slickers* writers Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel formed the basis for two all-star read-throughs, the former including Martin Short (*The Baker*), Julia Louis-Dreyfus (*The Baker's Wife*) and Rob Lowe (*The Prince*); the latter Robin Williams (*The Baker*), Cher (*The Witch*), Steve Martin (*The Wolf*) and, ironically, Danny DeVito as *The Giant*.

For *Into the Woods* 2012, Marshall put together a similar week-long workshop as a proof of concept for Disney brass. "If I'm honest," says Corden, "I just thought, 'The workshop will be a great experience, but if the film gets made, they'll cast Jonah Hill.'" The workshop evolved into a seven-week rehearsal with chairs as beanstalks and boxes as rocks, like a provincial touring-theatre version with Meryl Streep and Johnny Depp replacing Barbara Windsor and Ainsley Harriott. "Seeing everybody in their civvies felt like we were just part of the same community," recalls Kendrick. "On set, it's a little bit more



Rob Marshall replays the shot for producer John DeLuca, James Corden and Emily Blunt.



• Johnny Depp's Wolf sizes up Lilla Crawford's Little Red Riding Hood.

intimidating, but when you are all just hanging out in comfy clothes, you can allow yourself to believe you are in the same league as some of these people.”

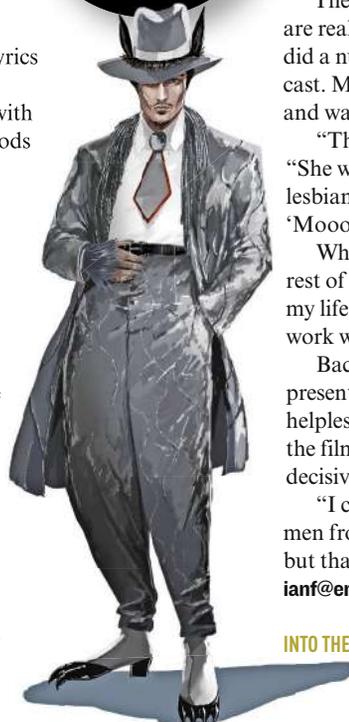
Yet getting star-struck was the least of this cast's problems. Sondheim's songs are challenging, filled with tongue-twisting lyrics and syncopated speech patterns, often reflecting the thoughts of the characters unravelling in a stream of consciousness. “He wants to trip the audience up, so they sit up rather than ease back and let the melody wash over them,” says Blunt. “It's not his desire to make you happy, he's not an obsequious musical composer.”

“It's so tough trying to keep up with Sondheim,” chimes Kendrick, “trying to do the emotional work and not let the lyrics spill out of you.”

Despite taking on *Phantom Of The Opera* and emerging with three statues at theatreland's Oscars, *The Tonys*, *Into The Woods* has never produced a hit. This is partly because the tunes are technically too difficult for talent-show winners, but as Rob Marshall puts it, “The songs don't normally step outside a Sondheim piece. They are absolutely integral to the story, which is why it is so strong as a musical.”

In short, Sondheim is the Shakespeare of showtunes. Tackling subjects as diverse as US gang warfare (*West Side Story*), London serial killers (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber Of Fleet Street*) and Parisian painting (*Sunday In The Park With George*), Sondheim's work boasts the intellect of Nolan, the playfulness of Wes Anderson and the emotional punch of Spielberg. At some point, all the cast had to perform in front of the man himself.

“There are not words to describe the terror,” laughs Kendrick. “But he is so lovely. He was updating (*Cinderella's song*) *On The Steps Of The Palace* to be more active, more present. It felt, ‘Oh, just me and Steve doing a little collabo. Yeah, sure thing, S.’ That was my little internal monologue...”



PRETENTIOUS ESSAYS ABOUND

about the “significance” of *The Woods*. Are they the collective unconscious? The womb? Bracknell? Actually, they are a mixture of Richmond Park and a soundstage at Shepperton; a forest so thick, it felt for Pine and Kendrick “like *The Truman Show* — we couldn't figure out when we were going to hit the wall.”

“I remember walking on stage,” says Blunt, “and the smell of the forest, the smell of magic, the smell of outdoors, just hitting me. There were birds living in our trees. It was so authentic.”

There is little CG sparkle to this magic kingdom. “Those steps are real stone,” laments Kendrick of the Prince's palace. “They did a number on my knees.” The realism extended to the animal cast. Milky White, Jack's cow, was played by a cow named Tug and was, Corden says, “a fucking nightmare the whole shoot.”

“The cow was the biggest diva on set,” confirms Blunt. “She was obsessed with another cow, Diamond, who was Tug's lesbian lover. If Diamond wasn't in Tug's eye-line at all times... ‘Mooooooo.’ It ruined takes, but a cow wants what a cow wants.”

While Tug is tipped for Best Bovine In A Supporting Role, the rest of the cast had a ball. “It was the best filming experience of my life,” admits Corden. “On any job, there's always someone at work who is a dick. There wasn't on this... it could have been me.”

Back to Meryl Streep flying through the air. According to all present, time slowed, sound cut out. Marshall watched in horror, helpless. Corden quickly calculated the fallout for his career if the film didn't get made. It was a time for heroes. It was a time for decisiveness. It was a time for a three-month pregnant woman.

“I caught her,” says Blunt casually. “I just love that the two men froze in abject fear. There was a general out-reach of a hand but that was it. They just let the pregnant woman take the hit.”

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INTO THE WOODS IS OUT ON JANUARY 9 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 47.

JESSICA CHASTAIN

GREAT DAME

WITH BOTH INTERSTELLAR AND J. C. CHANDOR'S CRIME THRILLER A MOST VIOLENT YEAR, SHE'S AIMING HIGHER THAN EVER...

WORDS NEV PIERCE

Since her screen career launched in 2006, Jessica Chastain's appeared in no fewer than 20 films, and now she's gone, well, *Interstellar*. "Maybe I'm a bit of a workaholic," she laughs, over a cup of tea, during which she shows what is perhaps the key ingredient to charisma — paying attention to the moment — and also an appealing frankness. "You can sense right away if someone wants you [in their movie] just because they think it'll help get financing," she says of meeting prospective directors, who she asks direct questions, to achieve a proper sense of how they would work.

What she's looking for is collaboration. To be a dance partner, not a puppet. "This might sound a bit odd, but I work really hard with the directors and the writers to make sure [my part] is not just 'The Wife'," she says. "I'm not interested in playing just a kind of 'stand by your man' person. I wanna play women that are complicated and have contradictions. 'Cause men have contradictions. We all have." The best directors, she finds, are open to exploring and open to surprise. "Christopher Nolan is definitely like that. He leaves you alone in the beginning — he's an observer. And then he comes in

after you've had some time to play around and starts to delicately guide the performance. Chris is great at that. And so is J. C.."

J. C. IS J. C. CHANDOR,

writer/director of Chastain's other Oscar contender, *A Most Violent Year*. It's quite a contrast to *Interstellar*, though another frontier story, of a sort. You could compare it to the grubby, thrilling dramas of Sidney Lumet, but perhaps its closest companion is *The Long Good Friday*. It's set in the same era, at the birth of the greed-is-good decade, and explores the border where capitalism and crime meet. Chastain's role as partner, in business and family, to Oscar Isaac's New York fuel trader could have veered towards *Lady Macbeth*-style scheming and shrewishness. Instead she feels equal, tough and surprising, the relationship lived-in and real, capturing the flip-flopping emotions of a marriage.

"I loved the character of Anna," she says. "She's such a contradiction: she loves being the wife of the most powerful man in the room. And she will push him and support him and be the politician's wife at [a business] dinner and love her man. But then, immediately afterwards, she emasculates him. It goes from, 'You are my king, you are it, babe!' to, 'What

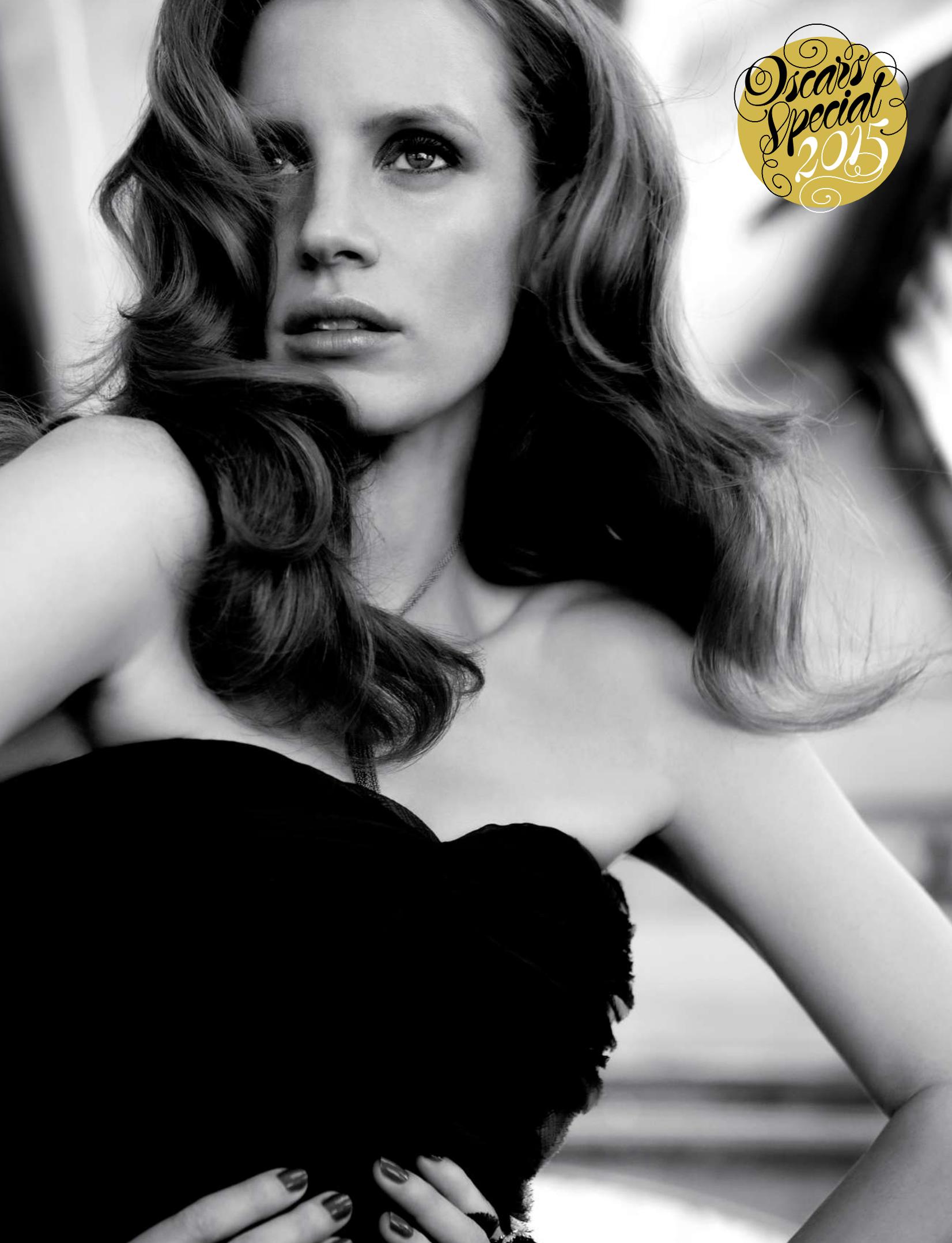
the fuck are you doing?'"

When Chastain enjoys a script she's considering, she'll go back and "make a list of everything my character says about herself and everything other people say about my character. And I look at that list and I go: what can I connect to in that?" With *Anna* she highlighted the character's assertive nature: "She says things like, 'You better', 'I'm gonna do...'. That kind of attitude." And yet for *Celia* from *The Help*, what stood out was her insecurity. Chastain thought, "Oh, okay, I can kind of connect to that quality. Maybe that's my 'in' for the woman."

That part landed her a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination, followed by a Best Actress nod for *Zero Dark Thirty*. She'll be in the mix again this year, though often feels the best performances — Marion Cotillard in *Rust And Bone*, for example — aren't recognised. "It's such an honour and makes a huge difference to your career, but if I ever won an Oscar I would never think, 'I'm the Best Actor.' Because for so long I would be the one going, 'So and so was really good this year, they weren't even nominated!'"

A MOST VIOLENT YEAR IS OUT ON JANUARY 23 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 46.

Oscar's
Special
2015





PATRICIA ARQUETTE

MOTHER SUPERIOR

THE ACTRESS PROVES BOYHOOD ISN'T JUST ABOUT A BOY...

→ **WHEN EMPIRE MET RICHARD LINKLATER EARLIER** this year, the conversation was dominated by the women of *Boyhood*. Shot over 12 years, Ellar Coltrane's time-lapsing from Mason Jr. to Mason senior is a cinematic marvel, but alongside his journey of discovery is one of recovery: his mum, Olivia, brought to life by Patricia Arquette. "I've heard a few times," laughed Linklater, "that it could've been called Motherhood."

Arquette was 33 when she started *Boyhood*, 46 when she sent Mason to college with a heartbreaking, "I just thought there would be more." "I'd already watched my (real) son's childhood blur by, so playing Olivia was deep emotional water," says Arquette. "I actually didn't want the film released." Like a family video going viral? "More like giving up a baby."

It is, in its laid-back, Linklater way, a fearless performance — ageing on screen without make-up, or a script. "Rick had set out the structure, me remarrying, the drink problem, the divorce, remarrying *again*," Arquette says. "But year in, year out, the cast would get together and contribute to this giant pot of memories."

After Best Supporting Actress wins from the New York and LA Film Critics Circles, Arquette has all the makings of a feisty Oscar outsider. There's the body of maverick work (Ed Wood, *True Romance*). And Arquette herself, in all her outspoken aceness. When asked about *Boyhood*'s appeal, she says, "Here's what I see: history changes, but people don't. They're gonna have their kids, not get the love they wanted, grow old... People identify. We're not dropping onto Mars in a space capsule, you know? In America, filmmakers are dictated to by bankers. What blows my mind is that *Boyhood* even exists." **SIMON CROOK**

BOYHOOD IS OUT ON DVD AND BLU-RAY ON JANUARY 19 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 118.

REESE WITHERSPOON

GONE GIRL

ON ROUGHING IT AND TOUGHING IT OUT FOR HER BEST TURN YET IN WILD

If 2014 was the year of the McConaissance, 2015 should prepare itself for the Reesurgence. With *Wild* and *Gone Girl* accruing Oscar heat, Reese Witherspoon, star and producer of one and producer of the other, should probably cancel any plans for February 22. It's just possible that both movies will vie for Best Picture, a prospective Witherspoon-off that brings a wary grin to the Louisianan's face. "Would I be a gracious loser? No! I'd be so nasty to myself," she deadpans. "That would be really weird. An embarrassment of riches."

After a few years in which Witherspoon has seen spy caper *This Means War* and true-life crime drama *Devil's Knot* tank at the box office, *Wild* marks a return to form. In it she plays Cheryl Strayed, a grief-stricken writer who, in 1995, embarked on a blistering 1,100-mile walk along the Pacific Crest Trail. The 27-kilo rucksack she used — "Monster" — was Witherspoon's burden too. "The physical stuff was really hard," the actress remembers of a walk-load that would have killed a hobbit, "but the emotional stuff was even harder. It was like a barrage of overwhelming emotional scenes, and usually those are the scenes I dread doing."

Her director, Jean-Marc Vallée, helped Matthew McConaughey to an Oscar for *Dallas Buyers Club* and is the kind of unorthodox filmmaker actors yearn to submit to. During *Wild*'s desert shoot, he parted his lead not just from make-up, but from all creature comforts. "I've never not worn make-up in a movie, ever in my entire life," Witherspoon laughs. "Then Jean-Marc had them cover all the mirrors because Cheryl never saw herself on the trip." Her on-set diet was a far cry from Hollywood craft services. "I ate a lot of mush. You were on set 12, 13 hours, because you had to use the sunlight, and I was in every scene, so I'd just be eating whatever I could. I'd collapse in a heap at the end of the day."

Talking to *Empire* over an entirely mush-free cup of tea, Witherspoon's

personal connection to the movie is obvious. "I bought it with my own money [and] had one of the most important conversations I've ever had with my mother after we saw the film together," she explains. "I have to say beyond anything, this is my favourite movie I've ever done, for so many reasons."

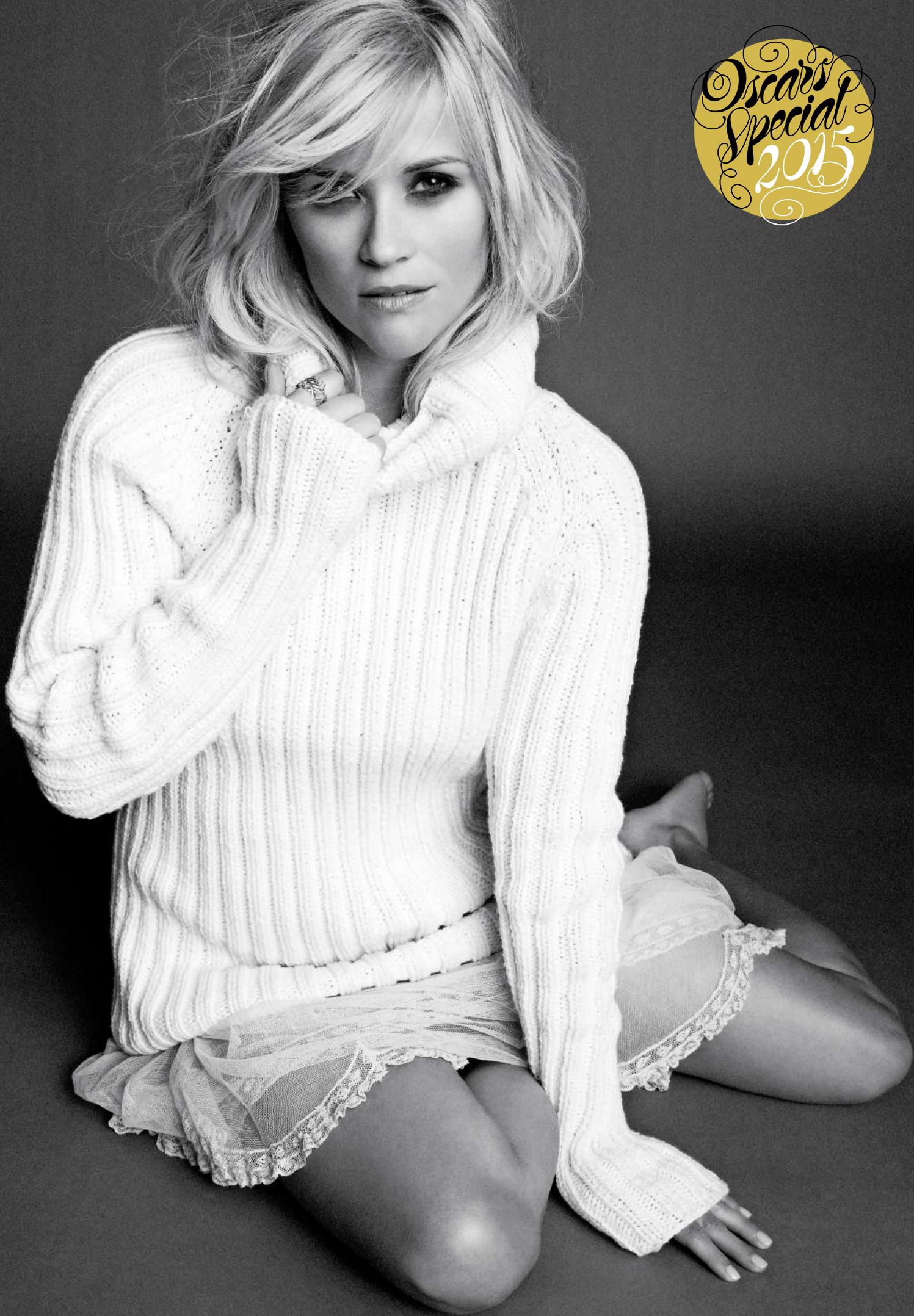
Witherspoon's new Pacific Standard production company optioned Strayed's memoir after an epiphany three years ago. "I went round each studio to ask what they were developing with a female lead and only one studio had anything," she recalls. "I was really mad about it, but then it struck me that it wasn't their responsibility; they have corporate mandates that I don't really understand. I thought, 'Why don't I get busy doing something? I know all these wonderful writers, I know how to get material, I've wonderful agents, I have to get busy.'"

A devoted bookworm, Witherspoon pursued first *Wild*, persuading Nick Hornby to pen the adaptation, and then another bestseller, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*. The latter offered an entirely different female lead. Was she ever keen to try on Amy Dunne's fractured psyche for size? "Oh yeah," she smiles. "We talked about me doing it, but the minute I sat down with Fincher, he told me why he didn't think I was right for the part and I totally agreed with him. His version of what that character was is not me at all, and when a filmmaker of that level tells you what he wants to do with a film, you just say, 'Okay!'"

"It's a fantastic movie to dissect, and to get people talking: do they like the ending, do they not like it? Should something bad have happened to her because of everything she'd done?" That question, *Empire* hazards, has sparked heated debate. "People had that frustration with the book as well," she points out, "but only Fincher can pull off an ending like that, because not everything gets wrapped up in a bow in life." **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

WILD IS OUT ON JANUARY 16 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 45.

Oscars
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2015

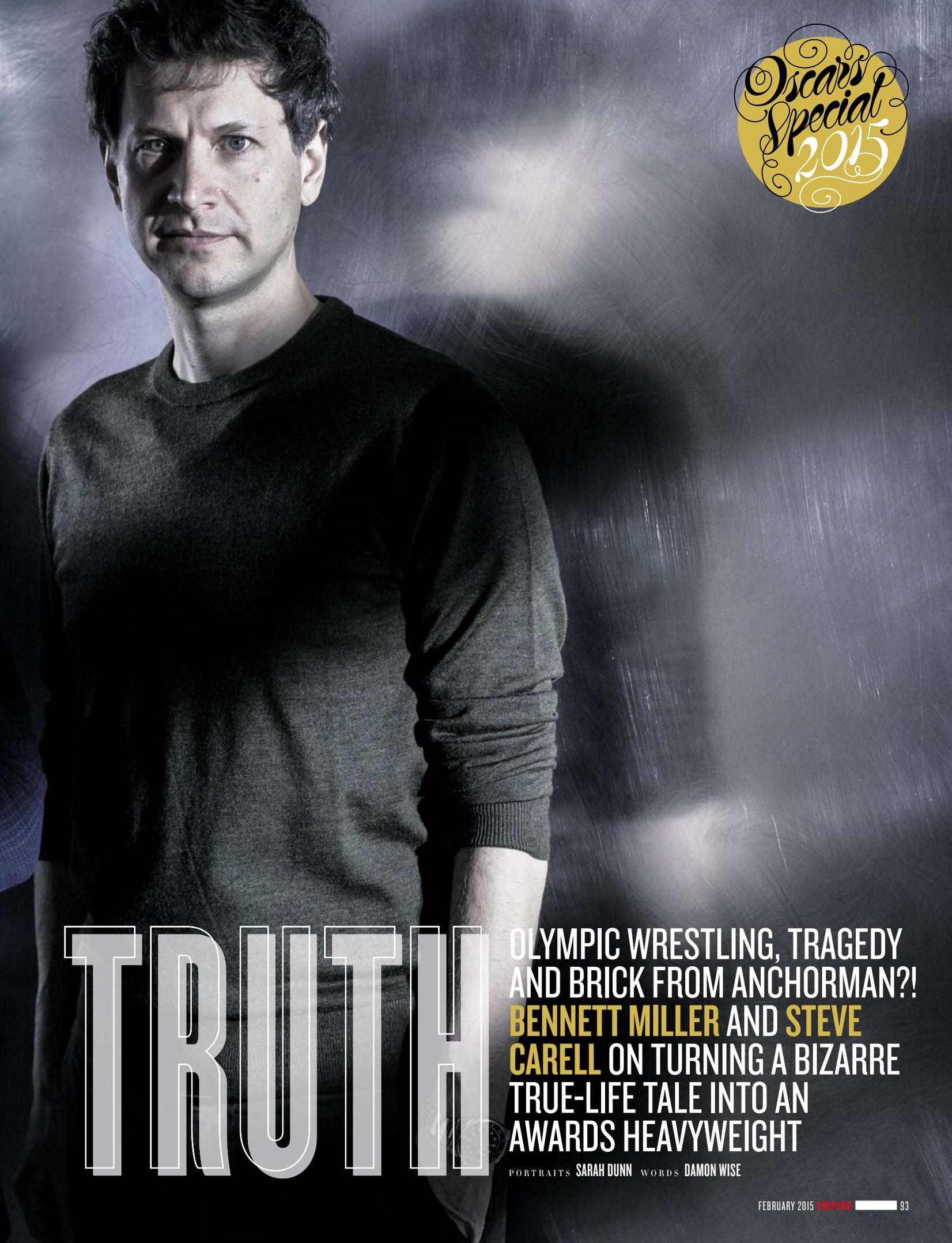


• Steve Carell and Bennett Miller, photographed exclusively for Empire at the Corinthia Hotel, London, on October 16, 2014.

FOXCATCHER

GRAPPLING

WITH
THE



Oscar's
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2015

TRUTH

OLYMPIC WRESTLING, TRAGEDY
AND BRICK FROM ANCHORMAN?!
BENNETT MILLER AND **STEVE
CARELL** ON TURNING A BIZARRE
TRUE-LIFE TALE INTO AN
AWARDS HEAVYWEIGHT

PORTRAITS SARAH DUNN WORDS DAMON WISE

In retrospect, it seems fitting that John Eleuthère du Pont — who died aged 72 in a Pennsylvania prison on December 9, 2010, having served 13 years of a 30-year sentence for a crime involving a .38 pistol — should owe his vast fortune to the manufacture and sale of gunpowder. Fitting — yet bizarre.

Then again, quite a lot of the Philadelphia billionaire's sad and lonely life was bizarre. At school he was voted both "laziest" and "most likely to succeed", and spent so much of his money on birds (\$66,000) and seashells (\$2 million) that he built the Delaware Museum Of Natural History just to have somewhere to put them. Strangest of all, however, was his passion for sport, which he took from his mother, a world-class equestrian with 32,000 ribbons and trophies. In particular, du Pont was drawn to wrestling, spending \$600,000 to turn his 800-acre estate into a training centre for wrestlers (as well as pentathletes and swimmers). It was du Pont's dream that the entire US team for the 1996 Olympics, as coached by brothers Mark and David Schultz, would come from the gym in his own backyard.

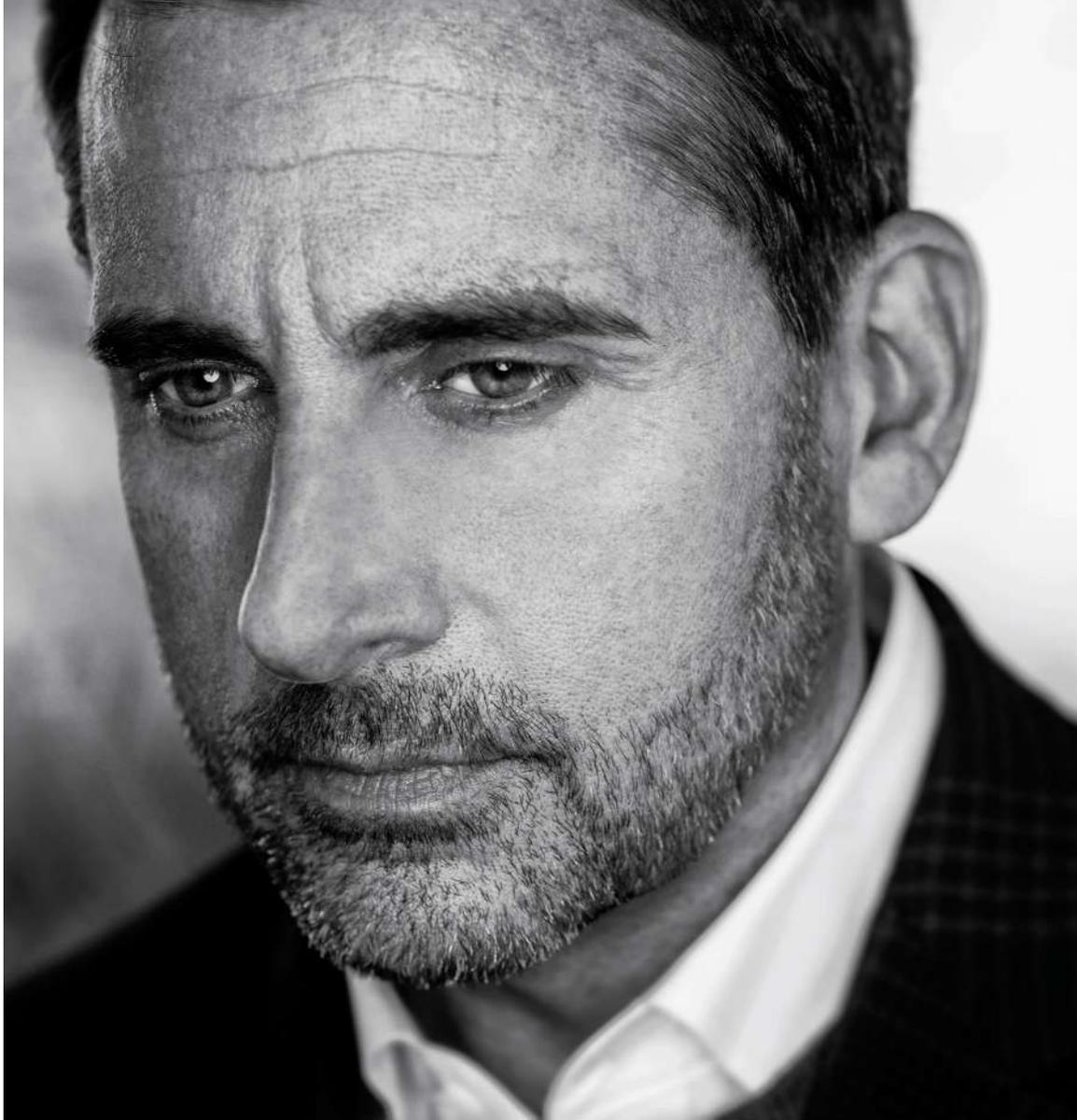
Du Pont's dream did not come true; his increasingly erratic behaviour saw to that. But when **EMPIRE** asks director Bennett Miller what he saw in this story that he thought would make a great movie, the man who also made *Capote* and *Moneyball* — both very different true-life tales — is somewhat lost for words.

The answer is all of it.

"There was something that was immediate for me about the bizarre cocktail of these odd people together," he muses. "Here was one of the wealthiest men in America from one of the most prominent families, who decided that he was going to train wrestlers on his estate. And something went terribly wrong. It was such an absurd thought. Immediately it seemed simultaneously tragic and almost comic. I wanted to know what the transaction was — what was it that these guys (*the Schultz brothers*) had that he wanted? And what were they getting from him? There was something that tickled me in an uncomfortable way about the notion of these people from very different worlds coming together."

"UNCOMFORTABLE" IS

a word that is used a lot to describe *Foxcatcher*, the film Miller made, named after the estate where du Pont's men were trained. Most of this unease can be attributed to a startling performance by Steve Carell as du Pont, an unsmiling, pasty and neurotic entity who resembles a middle-aged mix of *The Simpsons'* Mr. Burns and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre's* grandpa.



BRIEFING

FOXCATCHER

RELEASED: January 9

DIRECTOR:
Bennett Miller

STARRING: Steve Carell, Channing Tatum, Mark Ruffalo, Sienna Miller, Vanessa Redgrave

BASED ON...

The real-life tale of eccentric gunpowder tycoon John du Pont (Carell), who hired celebrated wrestlers Mark and David Schultz (Tatum and Ruffalo) to train the US Olympic wrestling team to success from a gym facility he'd set up on his own *Foxcatcher Farm* estate. It was an endeavour which ended in tragedy.

SO IT'S NOT FUNNY?

Not at all. Despite the presence of Carell, this ain't no *Evan Almighty*. Thankfully.

Despite the *Anchorman* star's presence, *Foxcatcher* is far from a comedy. It's a dread-infused drama that is rightly putting Carell centre stage as the curtain rises on awards season. Once you get past Bill Corso's astonishing make-up work, which thins out Carell's luxuriant head of hair and extends his nose into a haughty beak, there is little of his usual bonhomie. The effect is like being blanked by a good friend, and though it takes some getting used to, it turns out to make a great deal of dramatic sense.

Surprisingly, it was not Miller's own idea. "Steve's agent put his name into the hopper," the director recalls. "Which immediately caused me to pause, for a number of reasons. Part of it is that it's unexpected, and I thought we needed an actor who would be unexpected in this role. But after we met, I could really see it, based on our conversation and Steve's grasp of what this movie was and who John du Pont was. I was intrigued by his seriousness about it, and his willingness to show me another side of himself."

It should be mentioned that Steve Carell is sitting by Miller's side as he is saying this. It's the afternoon of

Foxcatcher's UK premiere at the BFI London Film Festival, but the mood is almost as awkward as the film itself. Our hotel suite is eerily silent but for the whirr of an aircon unit that visibly irks the director. Also, there is the tricky matter of good taste; it soon becomes clear that out of respect for those individuals whose lives were ruined by du Pont (more on those later), there will be no larking about.

Carell waits patiently for Miller to take the lead in all matters, even when the director, perhaps consumed by jet lag, puts his head in his hand for several (long) moments to "reset" after a hectic morning of interviews and photoshoots. But when asked if he needed to be persuaded at all, Carell says — resolutely — not.

"I wanted to do it immediately after reading the script," he says. "That was just reaffirmed when we met. Because Bennett was very specific in imagining what this would look like, explaining the scenes and conveying the tone and the look of the film. And it's the first time I've ever done anything that then turned out to be exactly true to the director's vision. When I watched the film years later for the first



**EMPIRE
EXTRA**

Get the **Empire** iPad edition for more pictures from our Bennett Miller and Steve Carell shoot.



• **Top:** Steve Carell's John du Pont turns the heat up on Channing Tatum's Mark Schultz. **Above:** Director Bennett Miller chats with Carell on set.

time, it was exactly as he described it to me during that one conversation."

Both Miller and Carell are quick to credit Corso with a good deal of the film's impact. "He's an artist," says Carell. "He was as much a part of developing the character as I was. Or as Bennett was, I think."

Miller agrees. "Part of the challenge of putting somebody like Steve in a role like this — somebody who people have a formed opinion of and an expectation of — is that it has to be convincing within three seconds, which is about the amount of time most people take to judge a person. Right out of the gate, du Pont had to be a fully realised thing."

The movie, says Miller, "was riding on" the make-up. "It *had* to work. Because his physical self was really instrumental — not just to the story, but to an understanding of who du Pont was. His misplacement in the world, y'know? There's something about him that was just awkward and repellent. And the make-up doesn't just *look* like du Pont — I think it has qualities that take on allegorical significance as well. His nose is like an eagle's beak, almost."

"By the way," he adds, even though

no question has been asked about the veracity of the nose, "the nose is, like, a replica. It's not imagined at all."

MANY OF THE OTHER

factual details of du Pont's real life didn't make it onto the screen, like the fact that after his prim, blue-blooded mother paid a child to be John's friend, she then complained to the boy's father when he introduced her son to the vulgar blue-collar delights of hamburgers and hot dogs. "There's so much about du Pont that Bennett refrained from putting in," says Carell, "because it would almost be too much. It wouldn't be believable."

The most extraordinary revelation of all is that, in doing even the most rudimentary preparation, Carell was in danger of being overqualified for the role. "I have to say," says Miller, "that we had choreographers and coaches that helped us with all of the wrestling, people who lived on the farm and trained there, and they called it to my attention very early that Steve already knew more and was

outside looking in," he says, "I always find it interesting how good actors do what they need to do in order to do what they need to do, whether that means by making space for themselves or affecting the atmosphere. Some actors need to keep things light, some actors need to lock it down. Some actors need love and some actors need abuse. They have a way of letting you know what they need and summoning it, somehow.

"And when I watched Steve..." He looks across at Carell. "I think it's true what you're saying. There was a natural inclination to give you space. In the editing, I noticed again and again that at the moment we would say cut, the two of you would just look away from each other. I always felt like that was a good thing, y'know? I think you and Channing together worked magically well."

So well, in fact, that Tatum revealed to **Empire** in Cannes that Foxcatcher, as proud as he is of the picture and the experience, "was not fun to do at all." "It was painful," he sighed. Despite several assurances from Tatum that he was not disparaging the film or his crew, Miller

"CHANNING AND I DIDN'T INTERACT MUCH. EVEN OFF THE SET." STEVE CARELL

better than du Pont ever was."

The extremity of du Pont's sepulchral looks, exacerbated by high-waisted jogging bottoms and a concave-chested posture, also plays beautifully against the Schultz brothers, the duo chosen to spearhead the eccentric heir's training scheme. Mike, played by Channing Tatum, is the more vulnerable, a gentle giant who is tortured by a crippling lack of self-confidence. By contrast, David (a brilliant Mark Ruffalo) is the epitome of normality, a family man who provides the film's societal yardstick.

Empire asks Carell whether he engaged in any of the usual actor's tricks to create tension and avoid cosy overfamiliarity on set — like staying in his trailer, perhaps? "Inadvertently," he says, hesitantly. "It wasn't a predetermined idea. A lot of it was simply based on how I looked. That just naturally separated me from everyone else on set. I had an off-putting look, and an off-putting demeanour that was, organically, very polarising. So I went with it. Channing and I really didn't interact very much, if at all. Even off the set."

Miller says he didn't give instructions and was fascinated to see this kind of anti-chemistry happening. "From the

seems strangely offended by this suggestion. "I think people's brains are wired very differently," he says. "Notions of 'fun' and 'happiness' don't fall into very neat categories. Y'know, I find going to a club, where there might be dancing and loud music, torture."

"I feel exactly the same way," adds Carell. "I mean, no, I would never use the word 'fun' to describe the set. But it was intense, and very focused, and I found that exhilarating. I remember that some nights it might be 4am, and I'd realise that I wasn't tired at all. So it was very energising that way."

And how does Miller feel now, looking back at his experience recreating the emotional wasteland that was John Eleuthère du Pont's unenviable life?

"I think my path to examining him feels sort of like the film itself," he says. Meaning what? "It goes from an intriguing and comical façade..."

He pauses briefly to find the right words. "... To a sad, lonely, tragic truth." damon@empiremagazine.com

FOXCATCHER IS OUT ON JANUARY 9 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 54.

PHIL LORD AND CHRIS MILLER

TOP OF THE BLOCKS

HOW IS THE LEGO MOVIE AN OSCAR CONTENDER?
BECAUSE OF THESE GUYS, THAT'S HOW

WORDS **OLLY RICHARDS** PORTRAIT **DAVID VENNI** DIGITAL ARTIST **JUSTIN METZ**

Phil Lord and Chris Miller are unlikely movie moguls. They do not look expensive. They don't walk into rooms trailed by assistants. During an hour in their company we see them look at a phone only once. They are un-slick. College friends-turned-directing partners, they look, despite being on the cusp of 40, like they might still *be* in college. But there are few people in Hollywood more powerful than this team. They have two movies in the top 12 highest-grossing of 2014 in the US, something no other director can claim, and they're the gatekeepers of a franchise so huge that it's mapped out until 2020. And they got here by taking one hopeless job after another.

"Honestly," says Miller, "I don't know what we'd do if we had to make a movie people expected to be good." This is not false modesty. The pair's projects so far have been: a cartoon adapted from a book with no plot; a comedy based on a TV show few people remember; a cartoon based on a toy line with no characters; and a sequel to the TV show comedy, which we all know never work. Those films are *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs*, *21 Jump Street*, *The Lego Movie* and *22 Jump Street*. All critical hits. All box-office smashes.

When we meet in a London hotel, the pair are in town stoking awards interest in *The Lego Movie*. Read that back and consider how wrong it sounds. Awards. For a movie about Lego. Imagine *Transformers* doing the same. This is the Lord and Miller magic. They take properties that sound like cynical studio product and strip them

down to what made them beloved in the first place, then nurture that until they have something original. Anything with the word 'Lego' on it would have been profitable, but that's not their style.

"I THINK THAT WAS THE

business model when (*Warner Bros.*) greenlit it," says Lord. "It was just, 'Play it safe and we'll be fine...' We said no twice. It seemed too commercial and almost cynical. Then we thought, 'It's a tool for creativity. There's this toy that makes children more creative after they play with it... Maybe we could do a movie that did the same thing.' That got us really excited."

"We were not confident at all," says Miller. "We worried people would want to hate it because it seemed like a giant toy commercial... It was a relief that people seemed to like it so much."

The success of *The Lego Movie* has moved Lord and Miller from directors-for-hire to the overlords of the Lego film empire. They are to Lego animation as John Lasseter is to Pixar. Their time is currently divided between overseeing the *Lego Ninjago* film, which Miller describes as "like a comedy Kurosawa movie"; a *Lego Batman* spin-off ("It digs into what a weird thing it is that Batman's depressed," says Lord. "He's *so* wealthy and handsome and successful"); and writing *The Lego Movie 2*.

The pair initially passed on scripting duties, but had a change of heart. "We were daunted by it, to be honest," says Miller. They didn't

want to rehash themselves. So, obviously, they're giving themselves a near-impossible task. "We were really interested in what happens to that boy [at the end of the movie], when he's four years older," says Lord. "When he's an adolescent, how does that change his point of view? When you ask a bunch of seven-year-olds if they sing and dance, their hands all go up. But ask a bunch of 17-year-olds, none of their hands go up... When does that social shame get introduced into your psyche? We're really interested in that, because I wish it wasn't the case. So we're going to make one movie that will reverse that forever."

All this success means Miller's fear, of starting a film with expectations, is now real. Everyone wants a piece. Sony has them working on a third *Jump Street*. They were courted for the new *Ghostbusters* but didn't bite because they, says Lord, "didn't come up with anything as good as [Paul Feig's all-women idea]." So they're taking their time choosing a next project, which might be original or another 'adaptation'. They've no embarrassment about always working from existing material.

"There's something quite punk rock to me in using the prevailing mode of the day against itself," says Lord. "Because previously existing properties give the marketing department so much confidence, it gives people making the movies so much creative freedom... You have the number-one toy brand on the poster. You're good. Now go make the most original thing you can make under that cover."

And that's how you become A-list directors without selling your soul.

THE LEGO MOVIE IS OUT ON DVD
AND BLU-RAY NOW.



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• Phil Lord and Chris Miller, photographed exclusively for Empire at the Ham Yard Hotel, London, on November 11, 2014.

• Eddie Redmayne, photographed exclusively for Empire in London on August 26, 2014.

$$M = -\frac{1}{8\pi G} \int_{\Sigma} dS_{\mu\nu} D^{\mu} K^{\nu}$$
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EDDIE REDMAYNE

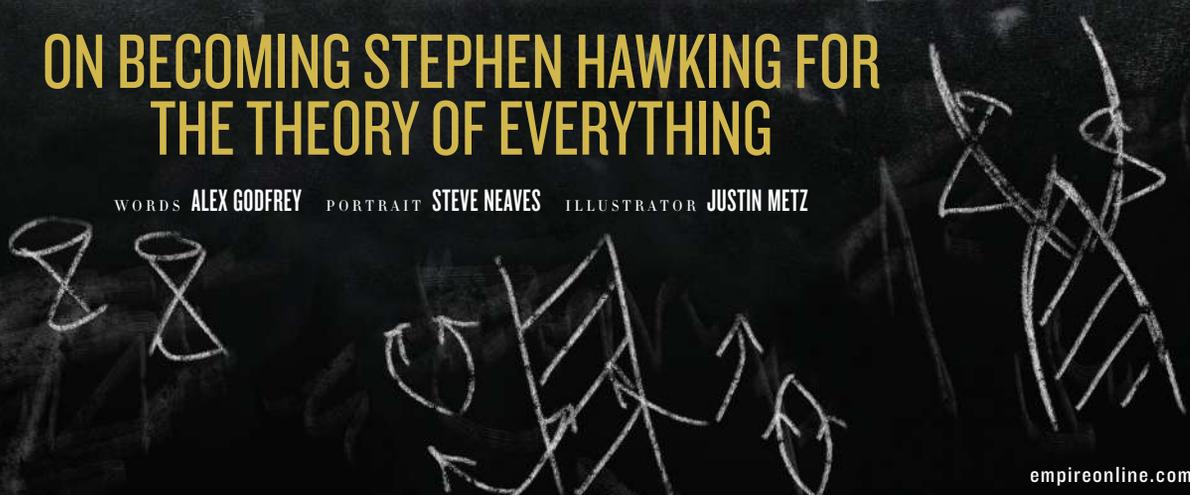
MASTER

OF THE

UNIVERSE

ON BECOMING STEPHEN HAWKING FOR THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

WORDS ALEX GODFREY PORTRAIT STEVE NEAVES ILLUSTRATOR JUSTIN METZ



Jacket by Alexander McQueen. Sweater by Sinspel. Jeans by Nudie. All at Selfridges. Brown shoes Eddie's own. Grooming: Johnnie Saopong. Stylist: Grace Gilfeather. Shot at Direct. Photographic, London. Consultant: Professor Jerome Baumlett.



$$\frac{dM}{dt} = \frac{KdA}{8\pi G} + \rho dV$$

ST LAW

$$T = \frac{K}{2\pi} ; S = \frac{A}{4} G$$

$$\Psi(h) = \int dI(\theta) \frac{d\theta}{d\tau} \approx -\frac{1}{2} \rho^2 u$$

$$I = \frac{1}{16\pi G} \int d^4x \dots$$

$$ds^2 = \sigma^2 (-N^2 dt^2 + \dots)$$

$$\Psi = \Psi$$

$$S = \frac{1}{2} \int dt \dots$$

$$M = M(A, \dots)$$



$$\dots - \rho^2 - \sigma^2 \dots$$



Eddie Redmayne has aged. Well, part of him. You have to be pretty close to see it. “These muscles started shifting on my face,” he points out, explaining that much of his physical expression as Stephen Hawking was focused on the right-hand side of his visage. “Subsequently,” he shows us, “this side is much more lined.” Indeed it is — the area around his right eye now seems a few years older than the rest of him.

Not that you’d notice; at 32, Redmayne still looks 21, the age at which we first meet Hawking in *The Theory Of Everything*, a biopic spanning more than 25 years of the über-physicist’s life. Adapted from Jane Hawking’s (Stephen’s first wife) memoir, *Travelling To Infinity: My Life With Stephen*, the film begins with Hawking studying and partying at Cambridge, then defying a diagnosis that gives him two years to live, his professional success increasing as his physical abilities decrease. It’s a

A crack team, including a vocal coach and a choreographer who worked on zombie physicality for *World War Z*, was assembled by the actor. He spent months studying motor neurone disease, meeting patients, and researched archive material of Hawking, whom he met three days before shooting, at Hawking’s home in Cambridge.

“It was terrifying,” says Redmayne. “I’d spent six months reading and watching everything, then you get to meet him, and I just ended up vomiting forth information about him, to him. I suffer from verbal diarrhoea.” Having read that Hawking was born on the 300th anniversary of Galileo’s death, January 8, Redmayne noted that their birthdays were just two days apart. “I was talking complete bollocks at him, I was like, ‘And of course Stephen you were born on the 8th of January and I was born

I kid you not. There’s a really sexy quality to him. He has this troupe of women around him and he’s a virile, funny man. In my trailer I had three images that I referred to. One was Einstein with his tongue out, because there’s that similar humour with Hawking. Another was The Joker on a pack of cards, who’s a puppeteer, because I feel Stephen has people in the palm of his hand. And the third was James Dean. That was what I gained from meeting him, the glint and the humour.”

That humour was in play when he saw a rough cut of the film, says Redmayne, who saw him beforehand. “I said, ‘Stephen, I’m very nervous about you seeing it, let me know what you think.’ And he said, ‘Yeah, I’ll let you know what I think, good or otherwise.’ I was like, ‘If it’s otherwise, will you just say, ‘Otherwise?’” Afterwards, Hawking gave them not only his blessing but his voice — i.e. the copyright to his actual voice software, rather than the simulated one they’d used up to that point.

“MEETING HAWKING WAS TERRIFYING. I SUFFERED VERBAL DIARRHOEA.”

win-win one-two punch, a triumph over adversity and a triumph of filmmaking; it seizes and guts you, and although it never seems like cynical Oscar-baiting, to watch it is to foresee awards being hurled at it.

LONDON-BORN

Redmayne himself studied at Cambridge (history of art), then accrued numerous acting plaudits before the success of 2011’s *My Week With Marilyn*, in which his love-struck Colin Clark briefly stole the heart of Michelle Williams’ Monroe. He followed that as the similarly smitten Marius in *Les Misérables*, produced by Working Title, then heard that the company was developing *The Theory Of Everything*, and went for it. After a phone conversation with director James Marsh, Redmayne won him over in a pub. Then came the reality: de-muscling after having bulked up for his bad-guy duties on the Wachowskis’ space opera *Jupiter Ascending* — and some hardcore homework. “The science that was in the script I needed to understand the reasoning behind,” he says. “I gave up science when I was 14. Would I to be able to take an exam in it? Absolutely not.”

on the 6th of January, so we’re both Capricorns...’ There was this long silence for about nine minutes, and then he said, ‘I am an astronomer, not an astrologer.’ I was like, ‘Holy shit, Stephen Hawking thinks the actor that is playing him thinks he’s Mystic Meg.’ So that was a low point. But what I gained from that meeting more than anything was his humour, and that even when he is not able to move much he is so expressive. That was really important.”

THAT PARTICULARLY

informed his performance as the older Hawking, which finds Redmayne moving mountains with his eyes and eyebrows. “Whilst it looks like not much is going on, his face is never relaxed,” he explains, seamlessly morphing into Hawking in front of *Empire*. “It’s fucking exhausting, because you are pulling in tensions, and thinking about how slowly you’re blinking or how quickly your eyes are moving. A scene might be ten minutes long but that’s a day of shooting. But of course, when you’re playing a part like that, you can get out of the wheelchair at the end of the day. What people who suffer from MND go through is so brutal.”

As well as the physical imitation, the main thing Redmayne wanted to communicate was Hawking’s “spark”, as the actor puts it. “He’s a complete player.

THE THEORY OF

Everything is out a month before the long-delayed *Jupiter Ascending*. In that, rather than playing a man trying to unravel the universe, Redmayne’s a man attempting to dominate it: buff psycho space-lord Balem Abrasax. “After university I thought maybe I’d get bit parts in posh period dramas,” says Redmayne. “And I did do quite a lot of them, but variety is what I’ve always dreamt of. I love the colour.”

For now, though, it’s all about *The Theory Of Everything*, already prompting talk of gold statuettes. Broached on the topic, a long, uncomfortable, “Eeurghh” tumbles out of his mouth. “I hope people will go and see it and enjoy it, that’s the most wonderful relief, because it felt slightly make or break,” he says. “There was a high chance of me messing it up. But as for any of the other stuff, if it’s positive towards the film, that makes me really happy. The fact that hopefully I haven’t completely shafted it is just a blessed relief.”

alex@empiremagazine.com

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING IS OUT ON JANUARY 1 AND WAS REVIEWED IN THE LAST ISSUE.

• Redmayne as Stephen Hawking before MND takes hold.



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BRADLEY COOPER

TRUE GRIT

THERE WAS NO COMPROMISE FOR AMERICAN SNIPER

→ “I LEARNED HOW HE BREATHED,” SAYS

Bradley Cooper, re-entering the slow-motion headspace of Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle. “Halfway through the exhale you stop your heart from beating. You are one with the gun. You don’t pull the trigger, you rest your finger there so that it is almost happening without you consciously doing it...”

Since purchasing the rights to Kyle’s biography, Cooper has championed the story of the greatest marksman in American military history, who did four tours of Iraq. And when Steven Spielberg passed, it took a call to “float it by” Clint Eastwood’s office for Cooper to land his ideal director. Magically, Eastwood was halfway through Kyle’s book when the phone rang. “He said, ‘Give me the weekend,’” recalls Cooper. “I called on Monday, and he said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

Interestingly, Cooper makes a good case for American Sniper’s similarities to Eastwood’s Unforgiven. They both examine men of few words, trading in violence. “This is a character study, beginning and end,” he presses. “And I’ll tell you one thing: I left no stone unturned.”

He watched videos of Kyle. Listened to voice recordings to perfect a ponderous Texan drawl. He spent time with his family. And he became skilled with a .338 sniper rifle. “You know, I got to a place where I believed I was him.”

Most immediate is the sheer physical change in the svelte Cooper. Kyle required the muscular set of a wrestler, and for two-and-a-half months the actor spent four hours a day in the gym, on a daily diet of 6,000 calories, to put on 30lbs of bulk. “It wasn’t easy,” he says, still impassioned. “It was pretty fucking hard. But I had no option, quite frankly. I even said to Warner Bros., ‘This is what I have to do to be able to show up on set as Chris Kyle. If I don’t get there you are going to have to hire somebody else. I wasn’t going to be able to fake it.” IAN NATHAN

AMERICAN SNIPER IS OUT ON JANUARY 16 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 38.

J. K. SIMMONS

THE STICK MAN

HIS PERFORMANCE IN WHIPLASH MAY JUST BE THE YEAR’S BEST. GIVE HIM SOME SKIN...

WORDS ADAM SMITH PORTRAIT DAVID VENNI

If potential Academy Award winners were heralded by the traditional drum roll, then there’s been the mother of all percussive come-ons building for Whiplash, explosive tale of an aspirant jazz bongo-botherer and his mercurial mentor. Director Damien Chazelle’s \$19 million indie has been receiving deafening industry buzz.

At the heart of Whiplash’s choke-hold narrative is J. K. Simmons’ performance as band leader Fletcher, an unpredictable, explosively violent and often terrifying figure. Think Dead Poets Society’s Mr. Keating recast as a sociopath. “This was a role that needed a really seasoned actors’ actor,” the absurdly fresh-faced 29 year-old Chazelle tells **Empire**. “I really needed someone who would guarantee that even if I was carried out on a stretcher, they would deliver something great.” His executive producer, Jason Reitman, had exactly the man. The guy from... He was in that one with... No, the one with the bloke from...

“I’m used to it,” smiles J. K. Simmons (Jonathan Kimble, since you ask) as he settles down in an upscale London hotel suite. “Damien used to refer to me on set as ‘that guy from that thing’...”

Over the past three decades as one of the industry’s more reliable character actors, the things that 59 year-old Simmons has been that guy from have included TV shows Law & Order and Oz as well as regular stints on Broadway and essaying the voice of “the yellow M&M” for the past decade. For the children of the first Spider-Man cycle he delivered the definitive rendering of explosive editor J. Jonah Jameson, before falling in with director Jason Reitman, who cast him in Thank You For Smoking, Juno and Up In The Air. And it was Simmons’ friendship with Reitman which led to Chazelle’s screenplay landing on his desk.

“I don’t think people were queueing up to throw a budget at him,” says Simmons. “One of the reasons Damien

couldn’t get it made was people were, ‘Really, jazz? There are, like, 30 people that listen to jazz.’ I wasn’t an aficionado going into it, but I have a level of faith in Jason. So when he sent it I was inclined to think that it would be worth reading.”

Simmons was perfect casting in more ways than one. A trained musician who originally intended to forge a career in opera (his bassy voice is the aural equivalent of molasses decanted over gravel), he was anything but intimidated by the musical element. “I went into that first meeting thinking I had to pitch myself to Damien,” he recalls, “and he went into that meeting feeling like he had to pitch the film to me. He wanted to put me at ease about the musical aspects. He promised they could fake it. I said, ‘Well, I went to music school and wanted to be Leonard Bernstein when I grew up.’”

Simmons’ perfectly calibrated performance as Fletcher, whose motives remain satisfyingly opaque, is the most talked-about element of a film that is both audience-pleaser and, on closer examination, a darkly ambivalent study of the destructive nature of obsession.

“I wanted to be reassured that the central debate of the film — does the end justify the means? — was going to be subtly present,” says Simmons. “But that was Damien’s idea from the beginning.”

As for Oscar aspirations... “I didn’t get that memo,” smiles Simmons when **Empire** mentions the golden fella looming over the horizon. “Baseball metaphors tend not to play that well here, but it’s like picking who’s going to win the World Series when you’re in spring training. I think when people see something as extraordinary as this, especially this time of year, they go, ‘Well, maybe...’ I encourage that buzz, by all means. But I encourage it for everyone.” ADAM SMITH

WHIPLASH IS OUT ON JANUARY 16 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 44.

Oscar's
Special
2015

• J. K. Simmons, photographed exclusively for Empire at the Corinthia Hotel, London, on October 16, 2014.



Oscars
Special
2015





TRASH

SCRAP SHOOT

STEPHEN DALDRY, RICHARD CURTIS
AND ROONEY MARA LITERALLY DODGED
BULLETS TO MAKE TRASH — A MOVIE
THAT THEY INSIST IS FAR MORE THAN ‘THE
BRAZILIAN SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE’...

WORDS MATT MUELLER

Stephen Daldry has a warning flare to send up: Trash is not the film you think it is. It is not, he insists, a film about social justice. It is not out to change the world. And it is not an awards-targeting Excocet of the kind the Billy Elliot and The Hours helmer has proved himself adept at firing.

“The joy of Trash is that there is no expectation of any of that,” Daldry tells **EMPIRE** with the tiniest note of defiance, while we look for the wool he’s trying to pull over our eyes. Are we really in a room with the Stephen Daldry whose four prior films coughed up 48 Oscar and BAFTA nominations between them? The affable 54-year-old laughs, dragging on a cigarette. “I would say that, quite consciously, this was *not* made as an awards film,” he verifies. “Hopefully, I will be spared any more awards ceremonies in my life.”

Daldry’s latest is a thriller, dipped in social-realist concerns and spoken mostly in Portuguese, about three street kids waste-picking on a Rio de Janeiro dump, whose discovery of a wallet funnels them into the path of corrupt politicians and police. It’s adapted by Richard Curtis, from Andy Mulligan’s acclaimed YA novel — “a family adventure story,” as Daldry puts it, “about three boys struggling to find hope for themselves. It was never meant to be more or less than that. At its core, it’s a fable about three kids with a treasure map.”

If you detect shades of Danny Boyle’s big Oscar-winner, you’re not the first. But Daldry is quick to caution that “Slumdog didn’t really have any influence”. While Curtis brands Trash “Bourne Identity for kids”, Daldry sees it as a mash-up: Brazil’s Cinema Novo melded with the Hollywood action movie. (“*Bourne sequels director*) Paul Greengrass is a mate and I was like, ‘How the fuck do you do this [action] stuff?’” says Daldry. “Paul said, ‘It’s an accumulation of detail. You need a fuckload of shots, but in the end you’ve just got to follow the characters and make sure you have the music in your head before you go into it.’” So Daldry started an aural diet of heavy funk-rap from Rio’s *favelas*, some of which made the soundtrack.

As for Curtis, don’t think of him as a soft-edged choice to bring Mulligan’s have-nots to the screen: “The great thing is that he’s a proper dramaturgical brain,” says Daldry. “He laid down the elements we needed to make this story work... It had to be about friendship.”

The two men are longtime chums. In 2000, they collaborated on a play about cancelling Third World debt, and when Trash first hovered into view, Daldry was toiling on a stage version of Bridget Jones’s Diary, since consigned to showbiz’s own malodorous scrapheap. “We’ve always



BRIEFING

TRASH

RELEASED: January 30

DIRECTOR:
Stephen Daldry

STARRING: Rickson Tevez, Eduardo Luis, Gabriel Weinstein, Rooney Mara, Martin Sheen

STORY: Brazilian street urchins Raphael (Tevez), Gardo (Luis) and Rato (Weinstein) eke out a living rummaging through a Rio de Janeiro garbage dump, when a seemingly lucky find kicks off an adventure that entangles them with the corrupt authorities.

SOUNDS LIKE SERIOUS STUFF... Actually, despite Daldry’s seeming prediction for tragedy, the director promises this will be both fun and action-packed.

liked the cut of each other’s jib,” says Curtis, whose standing as a Comic Relief founder and anti-poverty campaigner have put him at close quarters with Third World deprivation. “Weirdly, I spend as much time editing brutal three-minute movies about malaria or child abuse as I do my so-called happy, romantic films.”

WHEN THE PROJECT

was first assembled, Daldry and Curtis flew to Rio to visit the dumps, prisons and *favelas* that serve as Trash’s focal points. Scraps of local authenticity crept into the script, including the Rio police sharing their method for extracting information from street urchins: “Pop them in the back of the car and bounce them around for a bit,” notes Daldry drily. Villainous coppers do just that to one of Trash’s pre-teen heroes, although in a nation where the corruption and brutality of the police is as much an international signifier as Christ The Redeemer, “We’re not saying anything new. The kids were telling me all the time about how many family members had been killed [by police].”

The key to unlocking Trash was always going to lie in casting its three leads. Enter Brazilian filmmaker Fernando Meirelles,

whose outfit O2 Filmes has an established tradition of working with non-professional actors after his breakthrough picture, *City Of God*. It took six months workshopping kids from deprived Rio neighbourhoods until they’d got it down to Rickson Tevez (Raphael), Eduardo Luis (Gardo) and Gabriel Weinstein (Rato). Curtis describes Trash’s trio as “energetic and anarchic”. For Daldry, it was sacrosanct that they effectively ran the show.

“I’ve never done an improvised movie where you don’t understand what’s being improvised: ‘What the fuck are they talking about now?’” he grins. “But at their best, the kids had an infectious energy and humour which we managed to capture. We knew they were funny because the Brazilian crew were laughing all the time.”

On their first trip to Brazil, Curtis and Daldry pitched up at the notorious landfill Gramacho, since shut down, to observe its pickers and “just see how it all works”. Littered with illegal chemicals, medical waste and the occasional dead body, the appalling conditions meant shooting there wasn’t an option. Instead, the production built its own in a disused quarry outside the city, complete with shanty-town homes and sewage-strewn lagoon, and imported displaced pickers for authenticity. For the



• **Left:** Gabriel Weinstein, Rickson Tevez and Eduardo Luis with their windfall. **Above:** Martin Sheen, Stephen Daldry and Rooney Mara on set.

rubbish heap of this colossal set, 2,000 cubic metres of recyclable materials were deployed and animal carcasses added to attract vultures, “although we weren’t very successful in that,” admits Daldry. “Only a few showed up... What’s funny is we took months to build this whole fucking thing and then we only shot on it two days.”

But it all fed into the atmosphere of mild chaos Daldry was fostering, mainly to liberate his inexperienced trio from filmmaking’s rigidity. The cast and crew had to be flexible, as when hostilities between local drug militias forced production to a halt. “We had to stop our shooting so they could finish their shooting,” Daldry quips. “How much real danger we were in is debatable. People get very nervous in Rio. For the kids it was like, ‘What’s the problem? We live with this every day.’”

“I never felt unsafe,” chimes Rooney Mara, who plays NGO volunteer Olivia. Then she promptly regales *Empire* with a story about joining Daldry, producer Kris Thykier and their families at a local football stadium when a gun battle erupted in the stands. It was the actress’ second day in Brazil and she had just dispensed with her bodyguard. Mara chuckles heartily: “And I *still* didn’t feel like I needed a bodyguard. I mean, I’ve been travelling since I was

17.” One of Daldry’s young daughters came away believing that Mara had saved her life. “Rooney grabbed her and put her to the side while the bullets were flying,” he grins, “so I let her keep believing that.”

Mara and co-star Martin Sheen (as priest Father Juilliard) are only marginally more than incidental to the storyline. But neither Daldry nor Curtis wanted Trash to be a crusading-whites-in-shining-armor saga and, with social-justice agendas of their own, both actors were a snug fit. After *Apocalypse Now*, Sheen volunteered near Manila’s trash mountain Payatas, while years before she became famous, Mara

like, ‘How can you make a happy, feel-good movie with these characters?’” says Daldry, bristling. “That made me angry. It’s about people from challenged communities, but they’re full of life and hope and energy. If you tell the boys they live in a horrible scenario, they would say, ‘Fuck you.’ They live in the best possible world.”

Of course, Daldry could point to *Slumdog Millionaire* as a film which successfully turned the horrors of poverty into a feel-good winner, but he’s still keen to bury any comparisons... “I think any director gets anxious about comparisons to any other film,” he frowns, countering

“AT ITS CORE IT’S A FABLE ABOUT THREE KIDS AND A TREASURE MAP.”

STEPHEN DALDRY

founded a charity for underprivileged kids in Kibera, Africa’s largest slum.

“It didn’t feel like acting for me,” Mara says. “That’s one of the things I loved... They were so unaware of the camera and didn’t really care about acting, although as time went on they started complaining about normal ‘actory’ things like, ‘Oh, my character would never say that.’ And they’re Latin so... they were all in love with me, or at least they said they were.”

VIEWING POVERTY-

stricken lives through an alternative lens, Trash’s vision doesn’t equate with misery and despair. “Some people in Brazil were

that it’s Brazilian cinema he’s reflected most boldly. Besides copying shots from the oeuvre of Brazil’s filmmaking crusader Walter Salles (“I told him I was doing it!”), Daldry slipped in a few casting jokes. For example, the actor who portrayed City Of God’s hyperviolent L’il Zé becomes, in Trash, a kindly gardener. “I suppose if you make a fairy tale with poor people, you get compared to *Slumdog*,” sighs the director. “And maybe that’s okay. *Slumdog* was a great movie so I can’t complain.”

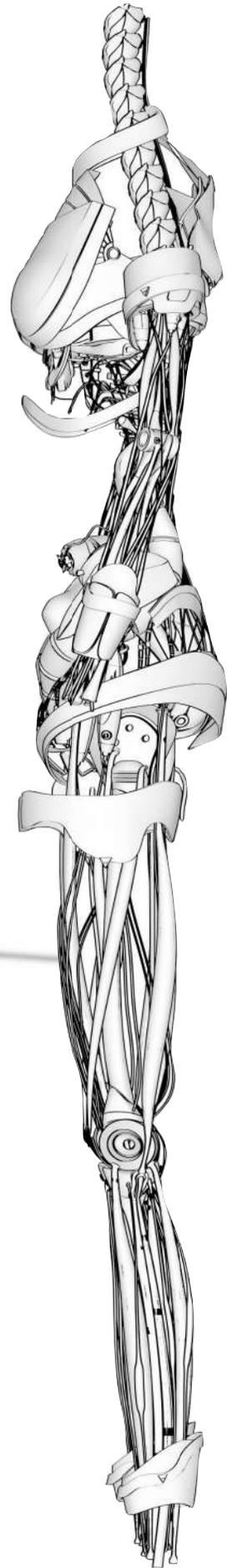
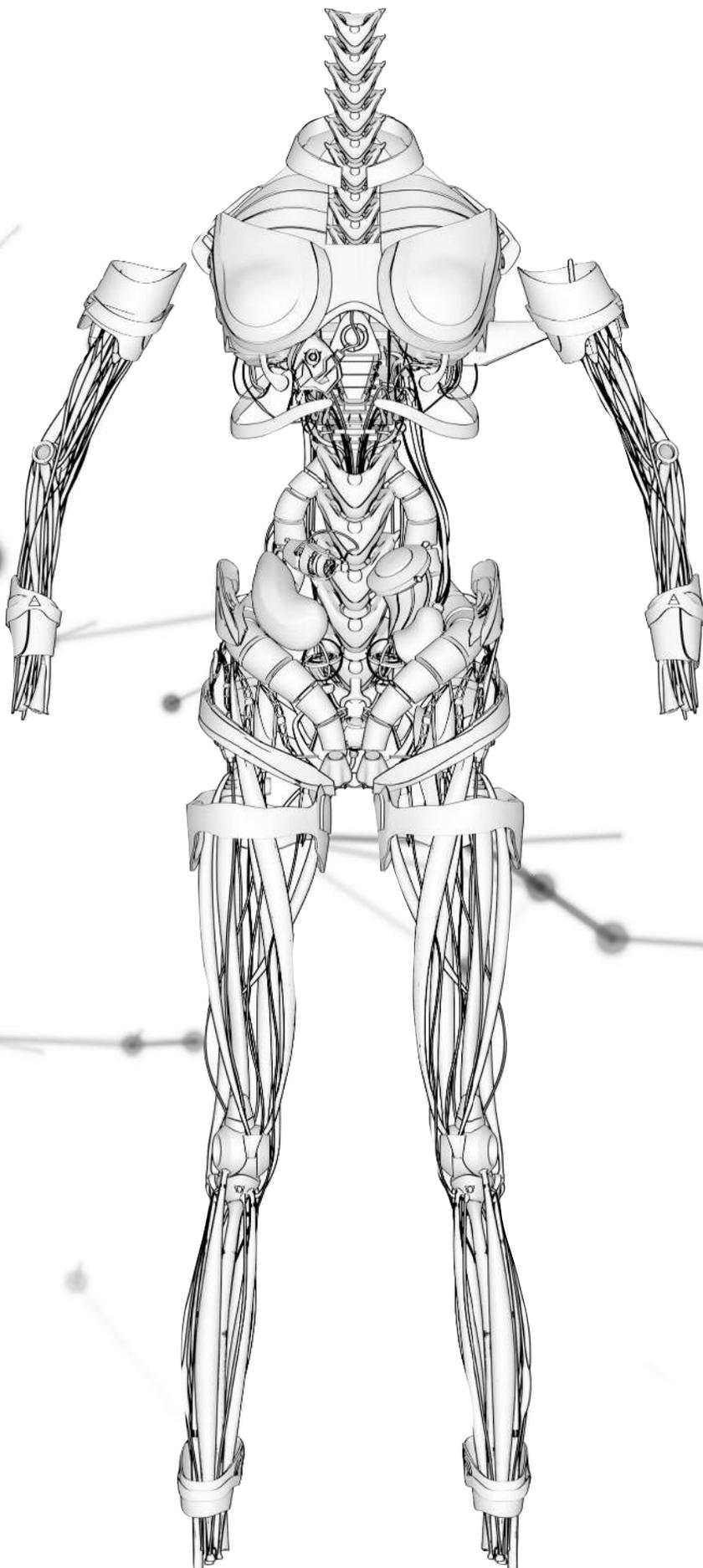
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TRASH IS OUT ON JANUARY 30 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

HUMAN CYBORG RELATIONS

DIRECTOR ALEX GARLAND AND HIS **EX MACHINA** SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS JOIN EMPIRE TO TACKLE THE THORNY QUESTION OF REAL-WORLD ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE — AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY...

WORDS MARK SALISBURY





love science-fiction,” says novelist-turned-filmmaker Alex Garland, whose screenplays to date have all revealed an interest in the more serious side of the genre.

“It just gives permission for some really, really big ideas. That could be fascist wish-fulfillment in a futuristic cop movie (*Dredd*),

or complex ethics of cloning in *Never Let Me Go*. Equally, science-fiction allows you to talk about something happening in the here and now. I’m always looking to smuggle something in. Somehow the customs officials are more relaxed in sci-fi...”

In the case of *Ex Machina*, which marks Garland’s debut as director, that subterfuge includes issues of privacy (“Some of it is to do with what we’re giving up of ourselves in everything to do with the internet”) as well as “the increasing knowledge of our organic fallibility and the power of machines”. But the film deals mainly with the blue-sky concept of artificial intelligence, having sprung from a decade-long argument Garland had with a friend over the question of whether or not A.I. could ever truly exist. While his friend insisted it couldn’t, Garland contends otherwise.

It was during post-production on his adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* (written by Garland and directed by Mark Romanek) that Garland began to get really fixated on the idea of artificial consciousness. “What happens to me with stories is I get obsessed with something and at some point that arrives as a narrative,” he explains. “There is a school of thought — and it’s not a fringe school — that says something big is happening with consciousness that we are not even close to understanding. How does dead matter become living matter and start thinking? It starts to sound metaphysical, and

• Director Alex Garland with Alicia Vikander as Ava.

MARY IN THE BLACK-AND-WHITE ROOM

→ Mary is a brilliant scientist who knows everything to know about colour. But she has acquired this knowledge from black-and-white books and TV in a locked monochrome room. One day, she leaves the room and enters the colour world. Does she learn anything new? This thought experiment is an attempt to address the central problem of experience. If she learns something new from experiencing colour, it implies the existence of entities of subjective experience that cannot be described, shared or learnt. These are called 'qualia'. Some argue qualia are fundamental and irreducible, others say that they are merely currently inscrutable brain activity. This classic thought experiment was analysed in a 2004 compendium called *There's Something About Mary*. Well played philosophers, well played.

• **Above:** Prototype skulls, photographed by production designer Mark Digby. **Right:** Domhnall Gleeson's Caleb and Oscar Isaac as Nathan.

THE CHINESE ROOM

→ Imagine you have a computer that can decipher Chinese symbols, read them and answer questions in Chinese by writing responses also in Chinese. This behaviour passes a Turing Test, so the human component in the test can't tell that it is a computer. The question posed by philosopher John Searle is this: does the computer understand Chinese, or is it simply simulating understanding? True understanding equates to proper A. I., and Searle argues that an English speaker who doesn't understand Chinese could do the same in a locked room with the right translation cards. Therefore true A. I. will not be possible.

sound religious, but it isn't, necessarily." During this research period, another friend, novelist Andrew O'Hagan, gave him a copy of *Embodiment And The Inner Life: Cognition And Consciousness In The Space Of Possible Minds* by Murray Shanahan, a professor of cognitive robotics at Imperial College, London. This, says Garland, crystallised his thinking. "It's one of the most interesting things I've ever encountered."

So once Garland had finished his script, he sought out both Shanahan and scientist/broadcaster Adam Rutherford for their opinions, to "test the science" within. "In some respects, there isn't that much science in *Ex Machina*, but there are implications of possible sciences and the arguments surrounding them. In the world Murray functions in, stuff like the **MARY IN THE BLACK-AND-WHITE ROOM ARGUMENT** or **THE CHINESE ROOM ARGUMENT** have a very specific meaning, and to misrepresent, say, *Mary In The Black-And-White Room* would be to fuck up a central point within the film." He points to Shanahan, who's sat to his left, along with Rutherford, the pair having joined him to chat with *Empire*. "Guys like him, they come up with this stuff, it's disseminated and it's hard to get your head around. If it was wrong, I needed to correct it. I like it when I watch science-fiction and there's a basis in something that is accurate."

"I got this email out of the blue from Alex," recalls Shanahan. "Of course I knew the name right away, famous author and scriptwriter, working on A. I., wants to talk to me. It was very exciting. I read through the script and realised it was a very exciting balance of psychological thriller with all the intellectual stuff subtly embedded. It was a great relief, actually. I get involved in an A. I. film and it's a really good one."

Rutherford, who was recommended to Garland by a mutual friend, found the script reassuring. "I've done consultation on movies before [and] there's a great sense from certain branches of my community, of extreme animosity and anger that's prompted by duff science on screen," he says. "Alex said it has to be right and serve the script at the same time. There's no point in doing it unless people like us are going to scrutinise it and not be pissed off."

THE TURING TEST

→ The *Imitation Game*, long before it became the Alan Turing biopic with Benedict Cumberbatch, is a kind of parlour game, where Player 1 tries to establish which of the unseen Players 2 and 3 is a man or woman, when they can only communicate with notes. In the late '40s, Turing began thinking about machine intelligence, and *The Imitation Game* got bumped up into a formal test to see if an unseen computer was capable of imitating a human to the extent that a real person couldn't tell. It's not really a test of A. I. or consciousness, but is required in one of the key A. I. thought experiments.

EX MACHINA REVOLVES

around Ava (played by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander), an artificial intelligence housed in a female-looking robot, created by Oscar Isaac's reclusive billionaire, Nathan, genius founder of Bluebook, the world's most popular internet search engine. Having built Ava, Nathan invites Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), a young programmer in his company, to spend a week with him to examine his creation for signs of consciousness, to prove whether she's self-aware, in an extension of **THE TURING TEST**. Only, unlike the human participant in a Turing Test, Caleb is able to see and interact with Ava. "Once you give something sentience, moral stuff comes with it," says Garland. "There's an ethical dimension that instantly arrives."

As the test unfolds, the film moves into thriller territory, becoming as much about human consciousness as it is about an A. I.'s. On screen, Ava is completely plausible, a highly intelligent, humanoid robot capable of wholly realistic facial movements that allow for a high degree of empathy, and who is, quite possibly, self-aware. In reality, a conscious A. I. remains the stuff of speculation. Even A. I.-like machines such as Siri or the Roomba cleaning robot aren't, strictly speaking, A. I.s, since neither possess general intelligence and, according to Shanahan, are just bits of specialised embedded A. I. technology. Given all that, how feasible is Ava?

"Mechanically or intellectually?" Garland asks back.

Both.

"You're asking two slightly different questions. One is about robotics and the other is about A. I. and consciousness. From my understanding, neither are possible right now. Certainly, A. I.'s not possible. Ava is a flight of fancy in all forms. But she's a reasonable flight of fancy."

"Certainly it's feasible," reflects Shanahan, who cautions that the time frames involved in creating one aren't short term. "We don't know when the relevant breakthroughs might occur that make us think we can make things we never thought we could. But I'm >



absolutely sure it's feasible, because there's a brute-force way we could do this sort of thing by replicating the human brain very closely. It may take us a hundred years. It could be this dramatic breakthrough has already happened in some lab somewhere, and we wouldn't necessarily know."

The future presented in *Ex Machina* is set "ten minutes from now", not a century hence, with its world recognisably our own. "The point is, if somebody like Google or Apple announced tomorrow that they had made Ava, we would all be surprised, but we wouldn't be *that* surprised," says Garland. "What Murray says, I completely understand. It's an unknowable thing, it's plausible, it's not now, it's some point in the future. But we know they're working on it."

In fact, Rutherford points out, in the time since Garland wrote the script, "Google has made this incredible land grab on A. I. and robotics companies," buying nine in total, including Boston Dynamics and Bot & Dolly. (The latter provided the robot arm that was used in the filming of *Gravity*.) "We don't have a theory of mind or an understanding of consciousness nearly sophisticated enough to do A. I., yet. We don't have

• The many faces of Ava.

"SOMETHING BIG IS HAPPENING WITH CONSCIOUSNESS." ALEX GARLAND

mechanics sophisticated enough to make robots as sophisticated and as beautiful as Ava, yet. But look at some of the stuff Boston Dynamics is doing in terms of robotics, which I think is terrifying and amazing..."

"Which I think is pretty cool and *not* terrifying," interrupts Garland.

"I think they're cool, too," Rutherford insists, before citing the example of a four-legged automaton the company's designed to carry a gun.

"Okay, that's terrifying, I suppose," concedes Garland.

In the movie, Ava is powered by electricity, charging herself using an induction plate. Her knowledge is derived from the continual flow of information gushing into Nathan's Google-esque

search. Her facial expressions and vocal interaction have been hacked from every cellphone camera user on Earth, her female attributes deliberately designed to help engage Caleb in her consciousness. Her 'brain', meanwhile, is a gelatinous white-blue orb, "structured gel" rather than circuitry.

The latter is another of Garland's elaborate flights of fantasy, although Rutherford considers it an absolutely appropriate one. "If we are going to achieve this in the near future, it's going to require something dramatically different, in terms of how you can pack the necessary amount of switching elements into a small amount of matter, which is what we have in our own brains. Traditional electronics, silicon chips, in

TOP OF THE 'BOTS

MURRAY SHANAHAN (MS) AND ADAM RUTHERFORD (AR) PICK THE SMARTEST EXAMPLES OF CINEMATIC A.I.S



HAL 9000

(2001: A Space Odyssey, 1968)

"HAL is a convincing portrayal of the way an A. I. could go wrong just by doing its job too well. HAL is devoted to the mission, and according to HAL's logic, the mission's humans are a threat. We all know how things turn out..." MS



BISHOP (Aliens, 1986)

"Bishop repeatedly saves the day, but Ripley is sceptical 'til he meets his milky evisceration. This is understandable after his ancestor, Ash, tried to choke her in Alien, but he's now fitted with Asimov-approved human protection protocols and has very human feelings." AR



ROY BATTY (Blade Runner, 1982)

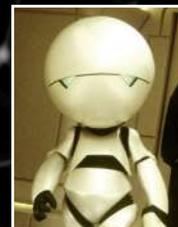
"Batty's final speech captures the essence of the biggest contemporary issue in consciousness research. His experiences, whether real or implanted, are ineffable and can't be shared. His experience of burning attack ships and glittering c-beams are extinguished with him." AR



COLOSSUS

(Colossus: The Forbin Project, 1970)

"Another example of A. I. going wrong. The Colossus computer is put in charge of the US nuclear arsenal, but when it teams up with its Russian counterpart, they collectively decide they have to protect themselves from humanity." MS



MARVIN (The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy, 2005)

"Everyone worries about when true A. I. is achieved and computers are smarter than us. But what if we just make miserable robots? 'I told you this would all end in tears,' moans Marvin, which pretty much applies to every A. I. in cinema." AR



SONNY (I, Robot, 2004)

"Although the movie departed from Asimov, it did a great job of showing how a sceptical human (Will Smith) could be won over by a human-level A. I. by interacting with it. By the end, like Smith's character, we're convinced robot Sonny has a consciousness like ours." MS



• A design for the set of Nathan's home research lab.

their current form, aren't going to do it. The brain is the most complex entity in the known universe. There are a hundred billion neurons. So the number of connections between these cells provides a framework that's more sophisticated than anything we know. At the moment we've got a pretty good understanding of how one cell works, arguably, and a not bad understanding of how a few cells work."

IF THE CREATION

of a sentient A. I. isn't possible anytime soon, what about the kind of advanced robotics that allow Ava to move like a real human? Again, don't hold your breath.

"You've got to remember humans and biology have a four billion-year advantage over the mechanics we're using at the moment," explains Rutherford, who says that while the most sophisticated robots currently constructed are capable of playing "very slow football", they can't perform the sophisticated choreography that allows them to get in and out of a car. "They can get them to open the door, but they can't get them to sit."

Even though they might not make great valet parking attendants, **Empire** wonders if the arrival of a true A. I. would pose a threat to mankind. "I'm not someone who's fearful of scientific advances," muses Rutherford. "The phrase we use in a field I'm more closely associated with, which is genetic engineering, synthetic biology, is 'prudent vigilance'. That's a useful way of providing a framework in which we are free to invent neutral technologies and allow them to be applied, investigated

and, if necessary, restricted. But that is a societal thing, not done by scientists, that's done through the processes of democracy. I'm not scared of Google buying a bunch of A. I. and robotics companies. I have anxieties about the fact they are private and closed. As is Nathan in *Ex Machina*..."

Garland's contention is that while sci-fi cinema (and literature) has generally presented A. I. as scary and evil, or at the very least rebellious (be it Skynet destroying mankind in *The Terminator*, Hal 9000 killing crew in 2001, or Roy Batty wanting to extend his life span in *Blade Runner*), he doesn't see it that way.

"I'm anti-alarmist. When we present them in fiction, it's usually as our nemesis; we're frightened by them. [In] the films we talk about, they are hostile. That's just being Neanderthal man suddenly threatened by Homo sapiens, except we can't see Homo sapiens yet. We can just see that Homo sapiens may come to be. Then we're going to have make a decision: are we going to allow them to be, and make ourselves increasingly redundant, or not? The Terminator is effectively about this. It's always A. I. as malevolent, because on an unconscious level it threatens us. So that means it threatens us in the stories we tell about it."

In the end, Garland takes a more hopeful view. "An A. I. which is sentient, self-aware, conscious, a human-level A. I., I don't feel a sense of fear of," he concludes. "That sentient creature, I suspect, has a better and equally meaningful future to ours. It will be a longer future, and it has all the rights attendant on ours. Ava is the manifestation of that. I see A. I.s as interesting and optimistic. I see them as the way forwards. A. I.s are the future. I do think they'll be better than us." mark.salisbury@empiremagazine.com

EX MACHINA IS OUT ON JANUARY 23 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 50.



“AND... ACTION!”

TWO EMPIRE READERS GET ACCESS ALL AREAS TO A MOVIE SET THANKS TO HEINEKEN STAR TREATMENT

I F YOU ARE A FILM FAN — a real film fan — the holy grail must be to go on set of a movie amid the lights, camera and, indeed, action. Simon McCracken and Sarah Craig, the latest lucky recipients of Heineken Star Treatment, part of its Open Your City campaign, got the chance to go on location with black comedy thriller *A Patch Of Fog* and chat with star Stephen Graham. Having worked with the likes of Shane Meadows, Martin Scorsese and Michael Mann, Graham is one of the most electrifying actors working today. Between set-ups in a huge, frankly jaw-dropping house in Belfast, Simon and Sarah quizzed the genial Liverpoolian on his career, the character he'd most like to play (“Iago in *Othello*”) and the most famous name in his phone. “Johnny and Leo,” he suggests, before quickly adding, “I don’t call them when I’m drunk late at night. I never do that.” But the conversation started at the very beginning...

How did you get into acting?

I played Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* at school. An actor called Drew Schofield saw me and suggested to my mum and dad that I go to the Everyman Youth Theatre. Following that I worked with the National Youth Theatre and did some things for ITV like *Children’s Ward*. I’ve been grafting for a long time.

What do you consider your big break?

I suppose it was *Snatch*. My friend was going to an audition for a short film Guy did before *Lock, Stock*. I went with him for the ride to London. My mate came out and Guy said, “Right, are you next?” I said, “No.” He said, “You’ve got a good face. Do you want to come in and read?” I went in, read it and he gave me the job. I went, “What am I going to tell me mate?” Guy went, “It’s not my fucking problem.” He then remembered me for Tommy in *Snatch*.

What do you remember about making *This Is England*?

Just that Shane (*Meadows*) creates a shared family atmosphere. He just creates the best environment for you to create the best you can. What’s great about doing the *This Is England* TV series — we’re on *This Is England* ’90 now — is that it’s like visiting your cousins.

Then you worked with Martin Scorsese and Daniel Day-Lewis on *Gangs Of New York*.

I used to meet Daniel Day-Lewis in the gym in the morning and we got on really well. On the day we started filming, he put his hand on my shoulder when I was getting my make-up done and said, “From now on, I’ll call you Shang and

• Below: The many faces of Stephen Graham. (Clockwise from bottom left): *This Is England*, *Snatch*, *Gangs Of New York*, *Pirates Of The Caribbean*: On *Stranger Tides* and *Boardwalk Empire*.





you call me Bill." I just went, "Okay." We'd still talk about football because he was a huge Millwall fan. He'd go, "You played well at the weekend," in his Bill The Butcher's voice. He is in character but he still has a normal conversation with you.

Do you ever find yourself taking your characters home with you?

No, because my wife would kill me!

You worked with Scorsese again on Boardwalk Empire. How did you build the character of Al Capone?

We created a character we wanted the audience to really like, but then you realise he is a big, horrible, violent man. In my research, I found out he was deaf. The writer Terence Winter didn't know that so we put that into the story. I was really able to immerse myself in the character but also create him from the very beginning. We started off from this little fella who used to drive the trucks to this big, outlandish, gregarious figure.

You've worked with Johnny Depp twice, on Public Enemies and the Pirates movies. What do you make of him?

Johnny Depp is a lovely man and a fantastic mate. He's probably the coolest man on the planet, followed by Serge from Kasabian.

Did you enjoy your Pirates experience?

Are you kidding? Pretending to be a pirate in Hawaii in beautiful sunshine? It was amazing.

Finally, we are on the set of A Patch Of Fog. What can you tell us about the film?

I play a lonely security guard who catches a big-name writer shoplifting and bribes him into being my friend. It's a really well-written script. I've been playing Al Capone for the past five years, being a volatile, violent gangster. So it was nice for me to play something completely different.

• **Top:** Simon gets behind the camera, under Sarah's careful supervision. **Above:** Our Heineken Star Treatment winners give Stephen a good grilling.

It does seem that you're drawn to darker characters.

If I'm honest, I just find those kinds of characters really interesting. With the likes of Al Capone and Combo from This Is England, you always try and bring out the humane side of the character. And I'm never going to be Mr. Darcy, do you know what I mean?

A PATCH OF FOG WILL BE OUT IN LATE 2015.

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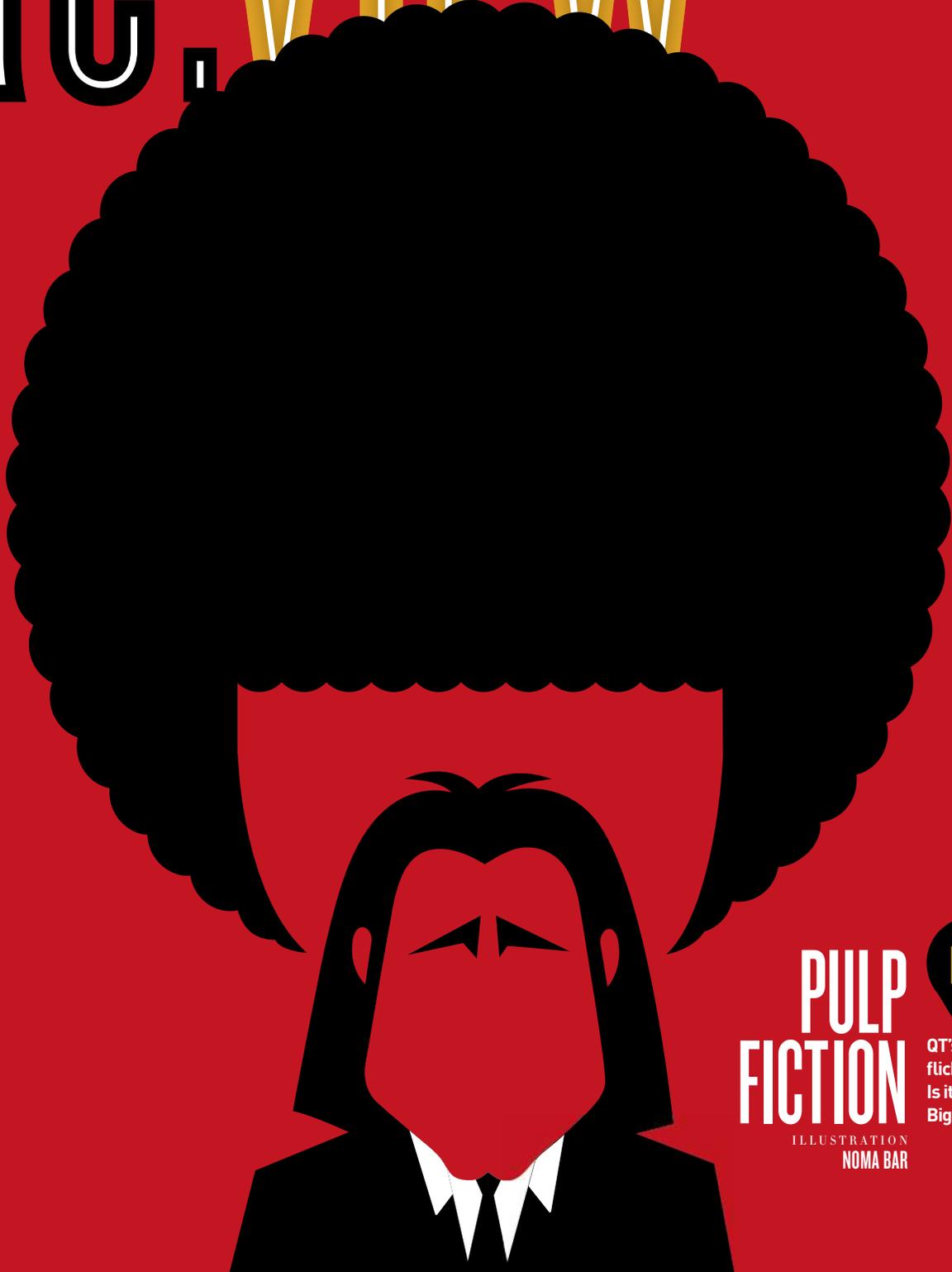
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IRE REVIEW



PULP
FICTION

ILLUSTRATION
NOMA BAR

P128

QT's crime flick turns 20. Is it still the Big Kahuna?

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DELIVER US FROM EVIL

2014. OUT: JANUARY 5. CERT. TBC

→ Before he tackles Doctor Strange, Scott Derrickson brings us Sergeant Out-There, with this tale of an NYPD cop (Eric Bana) on the

trail of a demon-possessed war vet. The movie overdoes the jump-scares but it has its pulpy pleasures, like a showdown at the Bronx Zoo and a dialled-to-11 Sean Harris as the antagonist.

EXTRAS Derrickson commentary and featurettes. **NDS**

FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★

GOD'S POCKET

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I5

→ John Slattery's directorial debut is both blessed and cursed by containing one of Philip Seymour Hoffman's final performances.

He provides the sombre centre to an ensemble of blue-collar Philadelphians during the early '80s. However, his presence causes expectation inflation; it's a likable little curio, but of modest ambition and frustratingly loose plotting.

EXTRAS Three deleted scenes.

Now get outta here. **DJ**

FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★

IDA

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I2

→ Best Film winner at last year's LFF, Pawel Pawlikowski's pensive Holocaust drama follows a callow, orphaned

nun as she uncovers her true identity and the dark fate of her Jewish family. Voicing unspoken pains, Pawlikowski evokes not just Poland's ghosted history but its cinematic past in stark, glowing monochrome. It looks and feels like a lost classic from the Polish Film School.

EXTRAS Nun. Sorry. None. **SC**

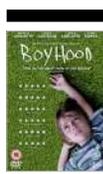
FILM ★★★★★



BOYHOOD

Family Ties 2014. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. I5

• They had progressed to advanced-level staring contests.



→ **WHAT MAKES**

Boyhood extraordinary is how ordinary it is.

In plot terms, almost nothing happens. A boy grows up, and his family changes around him, falling apart and coming together in a slow orbit of love, anger and mutual responsibility. What drama there is happens offscreen: cracks in a relationship will be hinted at, only for the whole affair to be old news when we rejoin the story a moment, or a year, later.

The film's force lies in time passing, a process that movies have faked before but rarely captured like this. By dint of shooting, on clear summer days, each year for 12 years, director Richard Linklater shows change as both a sudden and a gradual process, with Ellar

Coltrane's Mason constantly shifting appearance, haircut and interests as he grows into manhood. His older sister is sometimes enemy and sometimes ally, his parents often a source of pain as they try to figure out their own paths and keep the kids on track. A few rites of passage loom large — the first girlfriend, the first heartbreak — but the story skips others entirely in favour of minor family gatherings or ordinary days with friends.

Linklater isn't often credited as an experimental filmmaker — perhaps he is simply too Texan to invite the term — but between the 20-year odyssey of the Before trilogy, the rotoscoped weirdness of A Scanner Darkly or Waking Life and this slow-burning drama, it's clear that he is far readier to push the envelope than many acknowledged auteurs. Still, this has little

of Before Sunrise's eloquence or philosophising, being less concerned with abstract ideas and more with day-to-day life, even while dealing with some of the same themes of regret, change and hope.

While video games, Harry Potter books and songs help to pinpoint the progress of time, they are merely markers along the way; this is not a pop-culture trip. The very lack of the story leaves us free to concentrate on the universality of Mason's experience as he negotiates family life and begins to find his own way in the world. And in portraying that growth, Boyhood captures something profound and beautiful.

EXTRAS

Almost unforgivably, the single extra is a featurette that's under three minutes long. If any film called for a director's commentary or a 'making of', surely it was this one. **HELEN O'HARA**

FILM ★★★★★ **EXTRAS** ★



LUCY

2014. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. 15



→ If you have the total recall of Scarlett Johansson's kick-ass heroine, then memories of Luc Besson's Nikita and Leon will only

emphasise the disappointment of this empty if energetic picture. Big questions are posed and half-answered: what if we could use the full capacity of our brains? Why don't I watch The Matrix instead? And: how much money can Morgan Freeman possibly need?

EXTRAS 'Making of', featurette. **NP**
FILM ★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★

SEX TAPE

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15



→ The intention was a risqué but uplifting poke at marriage once bonking hits the backburner. But this is the Ishtar of romcoms, wherein

a featureless modern couple, Cameron Diaz (who tries) and Jason Segel (who doesn't), try to recover their iPadded sex video. Whole scenes make no sense, and the tone spasms from Parenthood to Apatow-for-imbeciles.

EXTRAS Offcuts, improv, and backslapping signifying nothing. **IN**
FILM ★ **EXTRAS** ★★

LET'S BE COPS

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15



→ A decent conceit — two schlubs play at policemen to pick up girls and get free drinks — results in an entertaining but unexceptional take

on the buddy-cop genre, with New Girl alumnus Jake Johnson and Damon Wayans Jr. overshadowed by better-than-the-film-required Big Bad Andy Garcia. No 22 Jump Street, but no Ride Along either.

EXTRAS Two commentaries, a fun mini-doc and a picture gallery — it's still 2003, apparently. **AP**
FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★

FILM ★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★



→ Jason was a mean paintballer.

THE EXPENDABLES 3

Old habits die hard 2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 12



→ **THOUGH STUFFED TO THE GILLS** with action gods, the Expendables series has so far been woefully light on memorable characters. This third instalment at least makes promising movements in the right direction, drafting in Antonio Banderas

and Wesley Snipes as new teammates Galgo and Doc. Both, vitally, have personality traits that extend beyond knife-fondling: Banderas plays an irritating chatterbox, less Desperado than plain desperate, while Snipes gets to run wild in the opening sequence as a mega-bearded maniac.

Alas, an ill-conceived twist soon grounds the older stars in favour of some bland young tykes, and the climax

is a never-ending pyrotechnical snooze. It's a shame, because there are glimpses here of what an Expendables movie should be: killer tool-up sequences, serious stakes, stunts built around the characters. Fourth time lucky?

==== **EXTRAS** ==== An 'unrated' cut adds six more minutes of fairly unexciting mayhem, but not enough gore to appease those disappointed by the 12 rating. The 50-minute 'making of' is okay but padded out by glib soundbites. Unusually, the best thing here is the blooper reel, which sees Mel Gibson's weaponry repeatedly falling apart, and Harrison Ford struggling with his lines. "Stonebridge... Stonebox... What the fuck is his name?" he growls. "Snowcone!" Sylvester Stallone yells back, unhelpfully. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**
FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★



OBVIOUS CHILD

Mope cute

2014. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. 15 **DVD ONLY**



→ **WHATEVER YOU MIGHT EXPECT**

from an abortion comedy, was it sweetness? Granted only the slightest, metropolitan cinema release, most of us are coming unawares to Gillian Robespierre's bite of the Big Apple. So, here's the deal: acutely self-aware Jewish stand-up (Jenny Slate) gets dumped, has rebound, gets pregnant, chooses to terminate, attempts to cope. The twist is that said rebound (Jake Lacy) is a keeper.

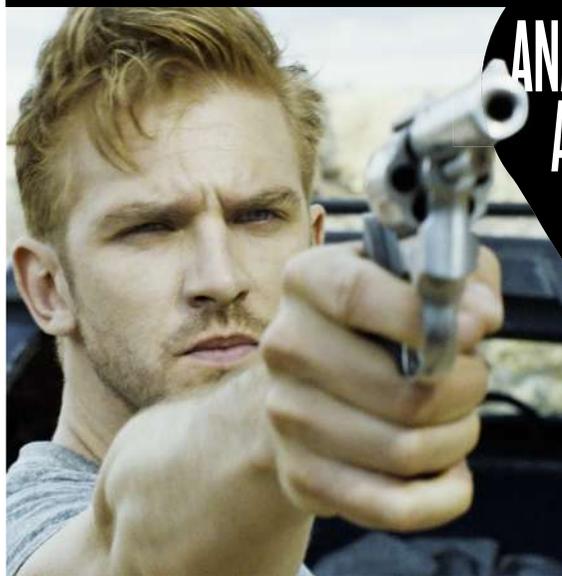
However, fear not its over-sharing indie credentials. This is Jewish, feminist dramedy blessed with unexpected grace notes and warmth. Lena Dunham for cowards.

"I used to hide what my vagina did to my underpants," deadpans Slate's Donna Stern, opening the film midway through a stage confession. Slate is to be treasured — she slides between gears so naturally. Donna's bitch queen antics are, literally, an act. As she negotiates her crisis, seeking solace and wisdom from a sundry mix of doting parents, feisty best friends and assorted Brooklyn Yodas, this vulnerable but very likable character emerges.

Another key quality is that Obvious Child doesn't moralise or even tackle the right-to-choose debate, or any debate at all. Donna chooses, and that's that. Like a finely wrought short story, it's just how this girl, wisecracking through her crack-up, deals with stuff she never expected to deal with. Otherwise known as life.

==== **EXTRAS** ==== None. **IAN NATHAN**
FILM ★★

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ANATOMY OF A SCENE



The Guest's bar fight WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

THE GUEST

Killer company

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15



→ KNOCK KNOCK. WHO'S THERE?

The Guest. The Guest who? Oh, so you didn't see it either?

And there's the rub. The Guest, which takes the unstoppable killing machine of '80s action flicks and the unstoppable killing machine of '70s slasher movies and melds them into one unforgettable character, sadly foundered at the box office. It deserved much better, for it's a sick, slick, stylish triumph, easily one of the best films of 2014.

Although the movie eventually heads into horror territory, albeit with tongue firmly in cheek, director Adam Wingard and his long-time writer, Simon Barrett, place the emphasis here on black comedy as Dan Stevens' seemingly all-American soldier, David, rocks up uninvited at the home of a fallen comrade and slowly sets about repairing the broken lives of his hosts — through violence.

As Wingard ramps up the weirdness, Stevens more than meets him halfway. Every now and again, an actor hits the big screen fully formed as a movie star. Here, the Downton Abbey alum is so charismatic and magnetic, he's virtually guaranteed to be linked with every major franchise, from Bond to Marvel, over the next few years. Adroitly handling the action and the comedy with a deadpan attitude, killer smile and a seriously forbidding stare, Stevens is a blast, making you root for David even as it becomes clear he's a few bookings shy of a full boarding house. If you missed it first time around, there's no excuse now. Let The Guest in.

EXTRAS Rightly excised deleted scenes, while Stevens is absent. No sign of his infamous Good Morning Britain appearance, where Susanna Reid asked if he beat off American men to get the role. Still, Wingard and Barrett offer a fun commentary, as they gamely point out flaws, struggle to recall people's names, and discuss how long Stevens can go without blinking. **CHRIS HEWITT**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

THE BAR

→ The bar that sees super-soldier David (Dan Stevens) throw down with a bunch of college bullies is outside Moriarty, New Mexico. "It's a truck-stop stripper bar," reveals Stevens. "We only shot the bar end. At the other end was a stage, poles and underwear pinned to the walls." Writer Simon Barrett adds, "In an '80s film this would be where they showed their gratuitous nudity. But we saved our butts for another scene."



THE WRITING

→ Barrett says he was unsure of how well the script was working until he reached this scene: a moment of self-aware fun after a first act of "depressing family drama". "The experiment of both The Guest and You're Next was a gradually shifting tone," he says. "The movie starts 100 per cent serious but gets funnier and funnier as it goes on until you realise it's 100 per cent joking. I think that's really fun and interesting."



THE COMBAT

→ The fight was choreographed by taekwondo expert Clayton Barber. "He's good at playing to the strengths of anyone in the scene," says Stevens. "A couple of guys were stunt guys, and a couple were just actors. I'll leave you to spot the experts!" Stevens himself trained in martial arts, and he's happy with the results. "That scene is the fulcrum of the film," he says. "It's the, 'Are you with us?' moment. Most people are like, 'Oh, hell yeah!'"



THE DRINK

→ David's makeshift weapon is a "fireball" — cinnamon schnapps and Tabasco sauce — flung into his assailants' eyes. There really was Tabasco in the drinks Stevens and co-star Brendan Meyer sipped (hence Meyer's authentically disgusted reaction), but Barrett didn't try a fireball until Tim League of Austin's Alamo Drafthouse made him drink one at the film's premiere. "It was disgusting. It sat in my stomach for hours," the writer winces.



• Next time he ran out of milk he'd take the car.

THE ROVER

Visit Australia. See the sights. Get killed

2014. OUT: JANUARY 5. CERT. 15



→ ROBERT

Pattinson couldn't make more of an effort to alienate Twilight fans if he burned Stephenie Meyer at the stake. But while his 180-degree choices may not be the smartest career move in terms of transferring a fan base, they're resulting in some bold, arresting movies — of which this is his best. Here he's a simple hick left for dead by his brother and forced to work with Guy Pearce's taciturn psychopath to track him down. Received less favourably than writer/director David Michôd's first feature, *Animal Kingdom*, this is arguably a braver piece of work — ruthless and unrelenting, with a pungent point of view.



Set in a post-'collapse' future in Australia, it points to a world that doesn't feel that far away. The action — when it comes, in stark, bloody bursts — is properly thrilling, yet you feel the cost of it. Pearce's rage plays well with Pattinson's innocence and Natasha Braier's photography is superb, as is Antony Partos' discordant and propulsive score.

Ostensibly a '70s-style revenge thriller — *Point Blank* in the Outback — it really feels like a great Western for the austerity age. Dealing with possessions both material and metaphorical, grief, family and justice, set in a cruel, merciless world, it suggests Michôd would be the perfect person to adapt Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Someone make that happen.

EXTRAS

The 'making of' is well-made, if not quite interesting enough to justify its 40 minutes, while Michôd opens his director's commentary by saying

he swore he'd never do another of these solo, and yet here he is...

He praises Pattinson — "He's a really, really good actor and he just hasn't really had the right car to drive to demonstrate that..." — and has the occasional filmmaking tip (always get a good, professional actor to read opposite people in auditions), but perhaps most interesting is hearing his logic behind choosing this as follow-up to his much-praised debut: "I knew that this one would be divisive, in part because of the nature of its storytelling but also because of its success or otherwise in meeting people's expectations. And I decided that I didn't care."

That speaks well for his future, even if — yes — he really should get someone else to join him in an over-the-film discussion. "Does anyone even listen to audio commentaries anymore?" he ponders, over the closing credits (perhaps to an unheard sound recordist). "You do? Was this a good one? I would love to see you give me the thumbs down. 'Yeah, it was okay.'" Yeah, it was okay. **NEV PIERCE**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

LEVIATHAN

2014. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. 15



→ Black comedy, a study in suffering, a weird thriller and an anti-Putin rant. Andrei Zvyagintsev's updating of the Book Of Job pits a working-class Joe-ski (Aleksey Serebryakov) against an evil mayor (Roman Madyanov) who is looking to redevelop his fishing community on the Russian coast. Absorbing and angry, surprisingly funny and beautiful to behold.

EXTRAS Decent 'making of', director interview. **IF**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

HONEYMOON

2014. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. 15



→ We spy a new subgenre looming: emo-horror. Like *The Babadook*, Leigh Janiak's debut claws into dark emotional spaces for its

principal fear. If you've ever doubted a partner, this is your ultimate nightmare: newlyweds, a remote cabin, and a spouse transforming into a cold, vacant stranger. Be patient: the slow-seeping tension pays off with a third act that'll pop your brain-lid clean off.

EXTRAS Two outtakes. **SC**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★

INTO THE STORM

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 12



→ Despite moments of impressive spectacle — flaming tornado! Airport-trashing super-cyclone! — this

summer-special B pic fails to engage on any other level. Its found-footage device is lazy and bogus, busting out of its 'reality' within minutes, and its characters so paper-thin, a leaf blower could send them spinning.

EXTRAS Merely a 'seriously, why bother?' five-minute behind-the-scenes featurette. **DJ**

FILM ★★★ EXTRAS ★

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ALSO OUT

The rest of this month's new releases

WORDS SIMON CROOK

WALESA: MAN OF HOPE

2013. OUT: NOW. CERT. I2 **DVD ONLY**

→ Andrzej Wajda's two-fingered salute to Lech Walesa invigorates his rise from shipyard to freedom-fighter with a crashing Polish punk score. It's like a biopic fed through warm fuzzbox, spiky and defiant, as personal as it is political, and fired up and fleshed out by Robert Wieckiewicz's gruff, belligerent Lech-alike.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★★★



PUDSEY THE DOG: THE MOVIE

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. U **DVD ONLY**

→ Pudsey The Dog can walk on two legs and likes sausages. Not enough to fill a Vine, let alone 87 desolate minutes. Mounted with the flair of a regional telethon, this Simon Cowell-produced shivering leg-cock offers joyless oblivion for all the family. Think Lassie remade as a feature-length Iceland ad.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★

WHITE SETTLERS

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I5 **DVD ONLY**

→ To Scotland, and a movie first: a home-invasion thriller inspired by the referendum. Yes. Or actually, no: the pig-masked gimps hunting Pollyanna McIntosh are Union-hating McTatties. Almost an SNP-endorsed slasher (Ye Next, maybe?) but staged with intense, hide-and-shrieky skill.

EXTRAS Brief 'making of'.

FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★

WATERMARK

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. E

→ Edward Burtynsky's documentary examines the uneasy union between man and water on a truly monumental scale: mountain-gouging glaciers, land-gulping dams, a 30-million Ganges mega-bath, all shot in screen-flooding 5K... From its breathtaking images, a deep, lucid eco-message emerges. See it huge.

EXTRAS 'Making of', deleted water.

FILM ★★★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★

EREBUS: INTO THE UNKNOWN

2014. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. I2 **DVD ONLY**

→ The blizzards, body parts and the birds... Styled like an ultra-nihilistic *Touching The Void*, this Kiwi doc relives the Antarctic plane-crash of '79 and its traumatic salvage effort, recalled in stark detail by its unsung survivors. Harrowing and feel-bleak but a vivid vision of a pure, white hell.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



THE GRAND SEDUCTION

2014. OUT: JANUARY 5. CERT. I2 **DVD ONLY**

→ In a bid to save his shabby town, Brendan Gleeson cons a city doctor into staying... FOREVER. Picture Local Hero relocated to Newfoundland and you're not far off this benevolent farce featuring Taylor Kitsch in his comedy debut. Warm, oafish laughs abound, but it's so cosy it should come framed with a log-fire effect.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



THE NUT JOB

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. U

→ To the pixeldemic of CG critters, we can add squirrels versus bank robbers. Exactly. An entire film based on a pun. Manic slapstick supercedes story, but the loo-brushy rats are fun and Liam Neeson's a raccoon. A Canadian/Korean co-production. Hence squirrels going Gangnam Style over the credits. There should be a helpline for this.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★



THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I5

→ No Nordic noir cliché is left unturned in this bleakly comforting dose of Danish Grumpy Raincoat: craggy cops, evidence walls, algae-coloured flashbacks. The hyper-drab style holds no surprises; the snaking plot, which sees a cold-case suicide thaw into a manhunt, has plenty.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★

THE ADVENTURER: THE CURSE OF THE MIDAS BOX

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. PG **DVD ONLY**

→ It's got the cast, the gloss and Michael Sheen in top hat and earring, but oh dear... Where is the wonder in this magic-box quest, as stifling and inert as a Victorian pea-souper?

Aneurin Barnard looks awkward. Same goes for the film's Indiana Sherlock ambitions: it barely manages mild peril.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★

DINOSAUR 13

2014. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. E **DVD ONLY**

→ Docusaurus. The custody battle over the world's largest T-Rex fossil mutates into a surreal legal thriller, pitting palaeontologist against the FBI in a brawl for ownership (ironically, the T-Rex is nicknamed 'Sue'). A breathtaking account of federal bullying, even if the righteous tone makes it sound like an angry herbivore.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★



BLOODSHOT

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I5 **DVD ONLY**

→ Knife-loving amnesiac meets horror FX artist. What could possibly go wrong? Billed as a mystery woman movie, this psychosexual grizzle-fest traps Danny Dyer and Zoe Grisedale in an insufferable cycle of mope-and-tantrum. Sincerely dreadful, vaguely exhausting. Warning: contains scenes of Keith Allen.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★

MOOD INDIGO

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. I2

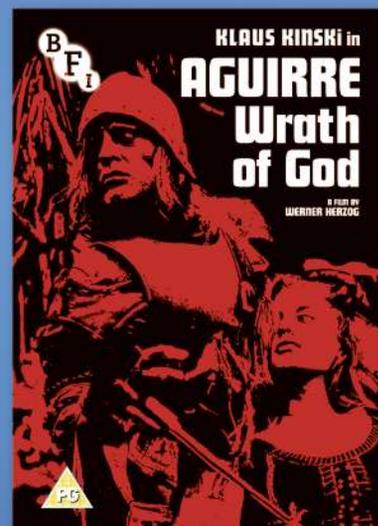
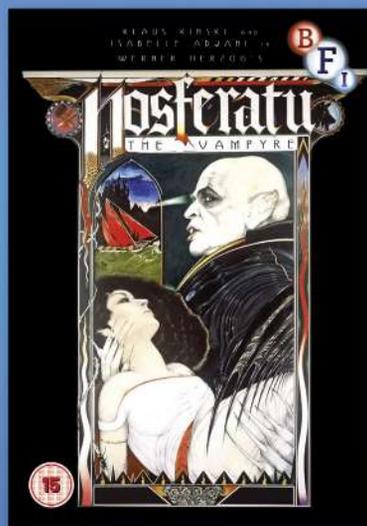
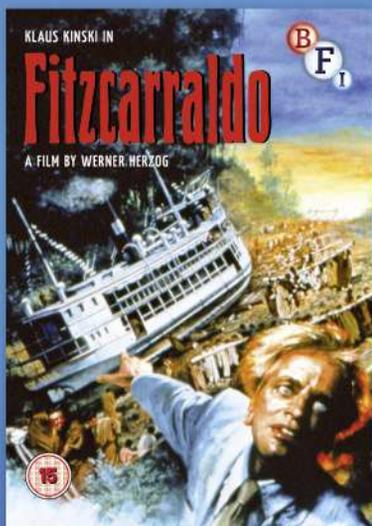
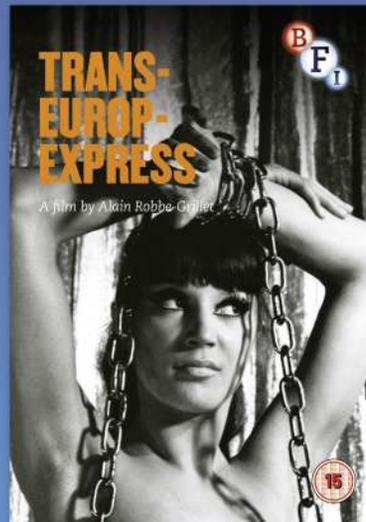
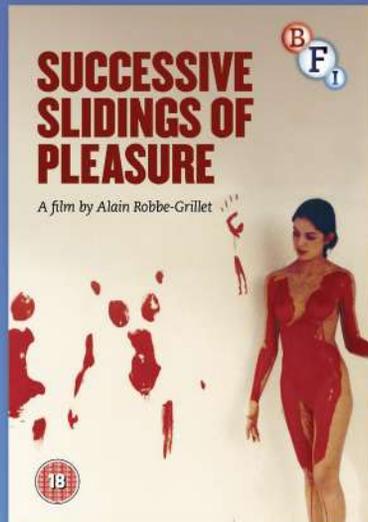
→ Michel Gondry's New Wave fantasia wears the pained smile of beautiful failure. Romain Duris and Audrey Tautou are the doomed lovers in a hollow, handmade Gondryworld so quirk-cluttered their romance is a barely felt distraction. So many ideas, in fact, that it forgets to be a film.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, Gondry chat, 'making of'.

FILM ★★ **EXTRAS** ★★

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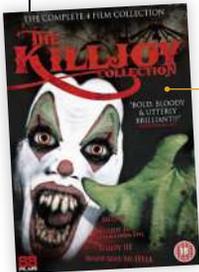
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Kim Newman's

MOVIE DUNGEON

Clowns, Kretschmann and Katnip

ILLUSTRATIONS THE RED DRESS



→ A BOX SET OF ALL FOUR KILLJOY FILMS from prolific producer Charles Band — **KILLJOY** (2000), **KILLJOY 2: DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL** (2002), **KILLJOY 3** (2010) and **KILLJOY GOES TO HELL** (2012) — seemingly disproves the law of diminishing returns in horror movie franchises. Killjoy, in which a demonic killer clown avenges a meek ghetto guy killed by gangbangers, is a shoddy effort tossed off in the two weeks or so when horror in the hood seemed like a happening genre (you know, when Leprechaun In The Hood and Snoop Dogg's Hood Of Horror battled it out for box-office glory). The sequels mostly drop the urban African-American angle and recast the lead: enthusiastic Trent Haaga takes over from bland Angel Vargas as Killjoy. The series improves, bringing in weird characters (like Victoria De Mare as body-painted squeaky moll Batty Boop and Al Burke as the ultra-creepy Punchy The Hobo Clown) and devising interesting mythology for its tricksters. The final instalment hits on the genuinely fresh notion that series demons repeatedly bested by unqualified teenage girls ought to be recategorised from menace to loser as Killjoy is put on trial in hell for not being evil enough. You have to suffer through some awful stretches to get there, but Killjoys 3 and 4, written and directed by John Lechago, are surprisingly effective.

THE CODE, an Australian essay in the Edge Of Darkness/Utopia/State Of Play brand of conspiracy-theory TV miniseries, opens with a government minion

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Is there some kind of moral to his story?" "Yeah, don't be messin' with this crazy shit."

KILLJOY 2: DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL

cynically leaking a dull ministerial sex scandal to distract the press from a seemingly ordinary joyriding accident in the Outback. A cynical reporter (Dan Spielman) and his hacker genius social misfit brother (Ashley Zukerman) dig deeper, and find themselves manipulated and bullied by the security services into chasing down baddies selling nuclear tech to rogue states. Lucy Lawless adds social conscience that roots the story in specifically Australian secret crimes, but the series' most interesting aspect is the resentful yet symbiotic relationship between hack and hacker.

In what feels like an act of distributor desperation, Dario Argento's two year-old, much-derided **DRACULA** is only now released in the UK, packaged with cover art and a subtitle (The Legend Rises) sadly pinning it to the tatty cloak-tail of Dracula Untold. The latest of Argento's disappointing-to-disastrous rehashes, this feels like a poor copy of Hammer's version of Bram Stoker and suffers from too many dud lines ("I am nothing but an out-of-tune chord in the divine symphony"), weird but not good ideas like having the vampire turn into a giant praying mantis (okay — not seen that one before) and an overall feeling of hurried cheapness. But it's imaginatively cast: Rutger Hauer is the first Van Helsing who can use his own accent on screen, Asia Argento is pale and predatory as luckless victim-turned-vamp Lucy and Thomas Kretschmann's Dracula ought to be given a stronger film.

One of the great mysteries of contemporary cinema is how come there's still a market for spoof films which chuck in random movie references but are so short on jokes that you suspect some executive producer has gone through and cut out any line or situation that might even accidentally raise a smile. **THE HUNGOVER GAMES** is a mash-up in which three lookalikes for the main cast of The Hangover (Ross Nathan, Ben Begley and Herbert Russell — forget these names) are transported to a futuristic dystopia to battle Katnip Everlean (Rita Volk) and folk doing shoddy cosplay as Carrie, gay Thor, Django, Ted, topless porn stars, some Muppets and so on. The only guest-star cameos it manages to rustle up are Tara Reid (doing Elizabeth Banks from The Hunger Games) and Robert Wagner (channelling Liam Neeson from Taken). Director Josh Stolberg also made The Attic (formerly known as Crawlspace), an economic crisis-themed hide-in-the-house suspense movie with a half-way decent maniac performance from Steven Weber which lifts a melodrama as bereft of thrills as The Hungover Games is of laughs.



DUNGEON BREAKOUT

A gory, twist-laden riff on The Breakfast Club, writer-director Matthew Spradlin's Bad Kids Go To Hell is oddly retitled **THE HAUNTING OF CRESTVIEW HIGH** in the UK, though it's more of a twisted mystery than a straight-up spooker — with one

character's streak of absurdist bad luck and a hokey Indian curse mingling with freewheeling appropriations from Carrie, April Fool's Day, Heathers and The Evil Dead. A group of nasty, privileged teenagers (and one token hapless poor kid) stuck in

detention pass time with a séance that stirs the library's ghost and leads to gruesome, amusingly sick deaths as the plot springs a series of well-disguised traps. Look out for Breakfast Clubber Judd Nelson as the headteacher!

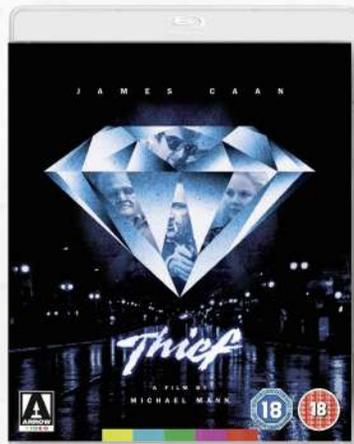
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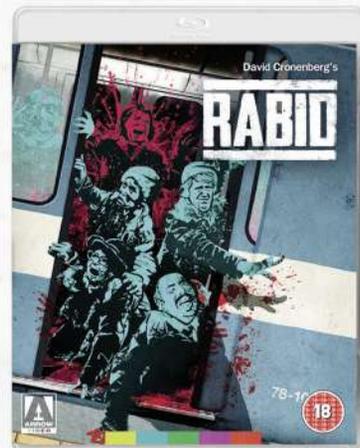
HAPPY NEW YEAR! FROM ARROW VIDEO



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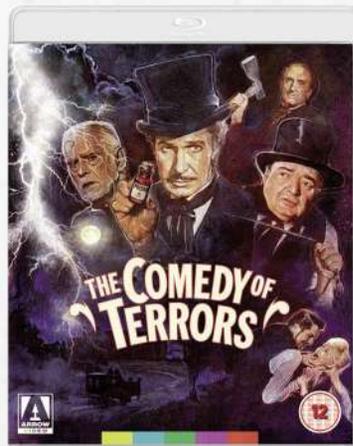
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2ND FEB



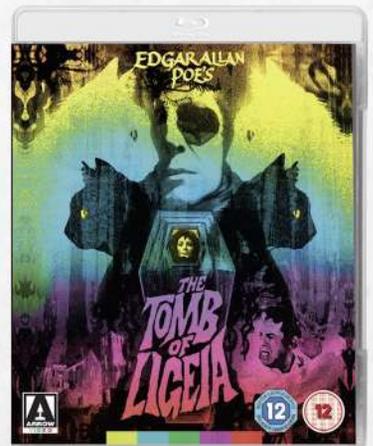
9TH FEB



16TH FEB



23RD FEB



23RD FEB

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GONE WITH THE WIND

1939. OUT: NOW. CERT. PG

BLU-RAY ONLY



→ The racial inequalities of the 1860s rightly grate, and some scenes are a tad overwrought, but this Civil War epic remains a sumptuous

delight, far edgier than newbies might expect. Still unmissable.

EXTRAS This Zavvi-exclusive disc retains historian Rudy Behlmer's commentary and 2009's 70th anniversary tribute. New are featurettes Old South/New South and a look at the '39 premiere. **LB**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

ONE HOUR PHOTO

2002. OUT: FEBRUARY 2. CERT. I5

BLU-RAY ONLY



→ It's tempting now to read too much into Robin Williams' portrayal of someone isolated from, but craving, normality.

Perhaps his own depression helped him realise stalker Sy Parrish so superbly, but that would overlook the contribution of writer/director Mark Romanek, who finally broke through from music videos to features.

EXTRAS Commentary, featurettes, rehearsals and storyboards. **DJ**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

1934. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U

BLU-RAY ONLY



→ Famously remade by Hitchcock, his original take (a family become the quarry of Peter Lorre's cabal of Euro-spies) from the great man's British period remains the better movie.

EXTRAS Wobbly intro from historian Charles Barr, plus charmingly creaky special from '70s art show Aquarius, in which host Humphrey Burton and Alfred attempt to out-pompous one another. **IN**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



THE LAST SEDUCTION

Fatale Attraction 1994. OUT: JANUARY 26. CERT. I8 **BLU-RAY ONLY**

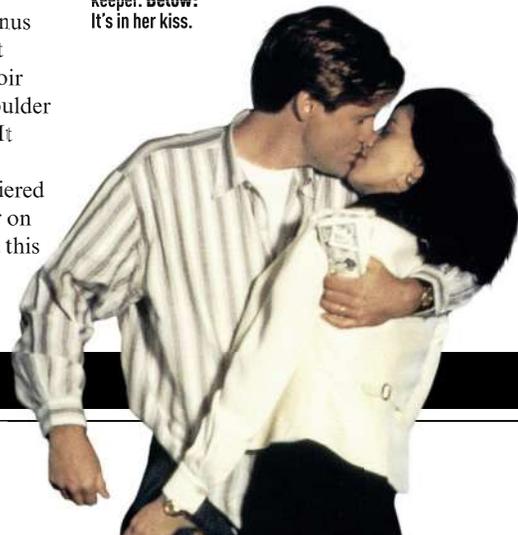


→ **IN THOSE WHAT'S-** the-greatest-year-for-movies debates, you have to feel sorry for poor old 1994. Clerks, Dumb And Dumber, Four Weddings And A Funeral, Forrest Gump, Leon, The Lion King, Pulp Fiction, Shallow Grave, The Shawshank Redemption and Speed, and it still doesn't seem to get a look in against 1939 (Gone With The Wind, The Wizard Of Oz), 1982 (E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial, Blade Runner)

or 1999 (Magnolia, The Matrix). You can't hold D2: The Mighty Ducks against it forever.

An often-overlooked alumnu of the Class Of '94 is The Last Seduction, John Dahl's film noir that can stand shoulder to shoulder with the classic 1940s variety. It was surely only denied Oscar consideration because it premiered on HBO (they had their finger on the pulse even then). But from this vantage point it stands up as a simultaneously classy but dirty little thriller, graced by

• **Above:** Beautiful monster Bridget: not a keeper. **Below:** It's in her kiss.



one of the great underrated characters/performances of the past 20 years.

Even on Blu-ray, *The Last Seduction* has a dark, murky heart. Bridget Gregory (Linda Fiorentino) is a grade A “total fucking bitch” who hotfoots it from her gullible husband (everybody’s favourite gullible husband, Bill Pullman) with 700 gees and hides out in a friendly small town, zeroing in on local hunk Mike (Peter Berg) as the next stage in her master plan. To reveal more is to spoil one of its chief delights, the carefully modulated twists and downward spirals springing believably from Bridget’s actions. She is seemingly improvising her schemes like a nefarious Greg Proops and the result is smart, cynical, witty, horny and exciting.

In an entertaining commentary, Dahl admits on reading Steve Barancik’s script, “It was hard to tell if it was meant to be funny or serious,” and the film deftly treads that line of dry humour while never undercutting the drama or sexiness. In this respect, he has a perfect partner in crime in a career-best Linda Fiorentino: she plays Bridget with a relentless black glee, be it busting balls at a telephone sales company or coolly putting her hand down Mike’s trousers checking for a “certain horse-like quality”. It’s just a crying shame that neither she nor Dahl reached such heights again.

EXTRAS

Previously available on DVD, the well-hung package includes a director’s cut with commentary option — a funny sequence where she cuffs Mike to the bed, an over-expository alternative ending — a 30-minute doco (good on lying to financiers that they were making a “sexploitation” flick), brief fly-on-the-wall BTS footage and a decent Dahl-directed episode of *Fallen Angels*, also starring Bill Pullman. All that and a booklet. **IAN FREER**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



SIX GOTHIC TALES

American Horror Stories 1960-64. OUT: NOW. CERT. 12 **BLU-RAY ONLY**

• She wished George Eastman would hurry up and invent the Kodak.



→ **THIS LUSH CASKET COLLECTS** six of the endlessly rewatchable Edgar Allan Poe adaptations Roger Corman crafted as star vehicles for Vincent Price in the early 1960s: *The Fall Of The House Of Usher*, *The Pit And The Pendulum*, *Tales Of Terror*, *The Raven*,

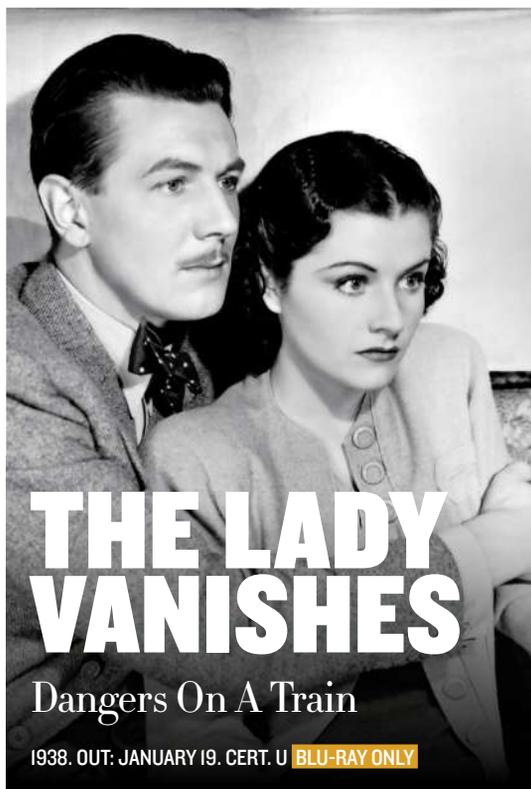
The Haunted Palace (a Poe title, but an H. P. Lovecraft story) and *The Tomb Of Ligeia*. Optimal Blu-ray presentation shows off how gorgeous these Panavision Gothics are, with swirling psychedelic dream sequences, stylised crumbling castle/house sets, bold and arch performances (Price ups his game when Corman brings in Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff and Basil Rathbone to match

him sneer for snarl), lovely doomed ladies (Elizabeth Shepherd, Barbara Steele, Hazel Court), morbid humour, well-staged shocks and climactic conflagrations. This should be a cornerstone of your horror film collection.

EXTRAS

This is why you have to upgrade previous editions — a veritable maelstrom of archival and new material, including filmmaker and critical commentaries, featurettes (warning: I’m in two of them), short films (Rob Green’s *The Black Cat and The Trick*), additional footage, documentaries about the principal creatives, a record album released in conjunction with *The Raven* and a whopping 200-page book which includes the tie-in comic-book adaptations of the films. **KIM NEWMAN**

FILMS ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



THE LADY VANISHES

Dangers On A Train

1938. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U **BLU-RAY ONLY**

→ **THE ORIGINAL GONE GIRL**, Alfred Hitchcock’s ripping yarn puts a merry old governess (Dame May Whitty) on a moving train and then whisks her away before our eyes. Was she ever there at all? Which of the colourful assortment of passengers are involved? And what on Earth could be their loco-motive?

It’s no accident that the vanishing is immediately preceded by a magic trick: this is pure Hitchcock sleight-of-hand, executed with white-glove precision. Far be it for us to spoil what goes down as the train whizzes through fictional European country Bandrika, but the zesty plot piles on poisons, doppelgängers, musical codes and a fight scene in a compartment filled with magician’s tools that’s since been lifted by *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. The characters, too, are some of Hitch’s most charming. Margaret Lockwood makes for a sparkling heroine as Iris Henderson, resigned to a fizzle marriage until she embarks on her adventure. And a nod must be given to cricket-crazy Brits abroad Caldicott and Charters (Naunton Wayne and Basil Radford), a hilarious double-act who got their own spin-off, 1941’s *Crook’s Tour*.

EXTRAS

Just a four-minute intro. Where all the great stuff from the Criterion Collection disc has gone is another mystery. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★

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• One episode from the end of *Breaking Bad* and they'd had to blurt it out.

PULP FICTION

Some serious gourmet shit 1994. OUT: NOW. CERT. 18 **BLU-RAY ONLY**

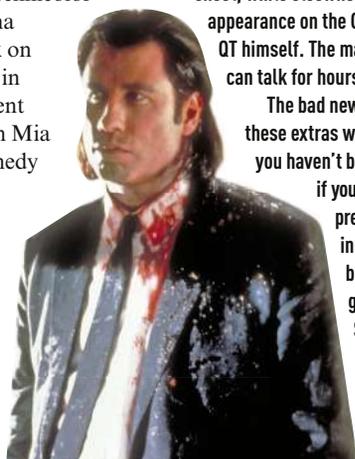


→ **AGED BUT AGELESS, PULP** Fiction — the movie that confirmed Quentin Tarantino's genius — turns 20 this year. Hard to believe, for this is a movie that hasn't dated at all, except perhaps in two minor areas: people smoke in diners, and the

mobile phones on display are the size of bricks.

Where *Reservoir Dogs* had been tight and contained, here Tarantino, the video-store clerk and movie sponge, opens up, taking every cinematic influence he'd ever had and vomiting it back up in a glorious Technicolor splurge. There are playful touches (Uma Thurman's Mia Wallace drawing a box on the screen), expertly calibrated lurches in tone (the sleazy rom-com vibe of Vincent Vega's (John Travolta, right) 'date' with Mia suddenly screeching into the black comedy of her overdose), and that trademark Tarantino tension (Butch's (Bruce Willis) flight to freedom in *The Gold Watch* still makes the heart race).

Then there's the dialogue — perhaps the best, certainly the most quotable of QT's career, beautifully delivered by a set of hardboiled bastards at various stages of career decline and recovery. It's taken some hits over



the years, from floods of Tarantino imitators to Harvey Keitel dancing all over its legacy in awful TV ads, but Pulp still feels vibrant and essential. If Tarantino really is planning to retire after his tenth film, he could do a lot worse than revisit the anthology format one more time. It brings out the best in him.

==== **EXTRAS** ==== There's good news and bad news with this anniversary box set. The good news is the extras are plentiful, with a decent talking heads doc featuring the likes of Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson and Eric Stoltz reminiscing about the shoot, while elsewhere there are a couple of fun mini-docs, and QT's appearance on the Charlie Rose show. Conspicuous by his absence: QT himself. The man's refusal to do commentaries, even though he can talk for hours, is an ongoing frustration.

The bad news, though, is that there's nothing new here. All these extras were present on the 2011 re-release. Of course, if you haven't bought Pulp before now, here's your chance. But if you have, the biggest incentive to double-dip is the presentation. The 20th anniversary Blu-ray comes in a box that looks like Marcellus Wallace's briefcase, with a strip of gold foil at the top to give it that old, 'Is that what I think it is?' gloss. Sadly, the contents don't match the glow of wonder, unless you think it is a laminated diner menu, a Big Kahuna burger bag, a wad of fake cash and stills from the film. **CHRIS HEWITT**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

YOUNG AND INNOCENT

1937. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U

BLU-RAY ONLY



→ A man wrongfully accused would become a Hitchcock staple, but rarely was such a serious plot — an innocent man

(Derrick De Marney) is charged with murder — served up in such agreeably playful fashion. It's aged better than many early British Hitchcocks, with heroine Nova Pilbeam giving a remarkably contemporary performance.

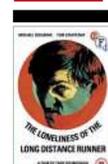
EXTRAS A 25-minute look at Hitchcock's pre-War films. **DH**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

1962. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. 12

DVD ONLY



→ Britain's answer to *The 400 Blows*, with Tom Courtenay as the rebellious teen trying to stick it to the man. Shot with an invention and

freshness that belies the kitchen-sink subject, it's still a poignant portrayal of class and alienation, with an ending that forever inspires.

EXTRAS Video essay, vintage group commentary, documentary. **NP**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP

1992. OUT: FEBRUARY 2. CERT. 15

BLU-RAY ONLY



→ "You can put the cat in the oven, but that don't make it a biscuit." The rapid-fire on-court dialogue is this Ron Shelton comedy's best asset,

with Wesley Snipes on crackerjack form. Harrelson and Snipes make such a sparky double-act that they tried to repeat the trick with *Money Train*. It didn't work.

EXTRAS Extended cut, basketball-heavy music video, TV spot. **LF**

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

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The rest of this month's re-releases

WORDS SIMON CROOK

THE FLYING SCOT

1957. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U **DVD ONLY**

→ Presented by the proudly unpronounceable Anglo-Amalgamated, this trim train-robbery thriller confines itself to a single carriage and a gang's "perfect" heist. As drunks and brats threaten to bust the job, the plan derails in real-time, adding extra shunt to the suspense. Taut, sweaty, ends. A. Bit. Abrupt. Ly.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★

YOU CAN'T ESCAPE

1956. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. PG **DVD ONLY**

→ Fearing the gallows, a novelist spins an elaborate cover-up when his mistress jumps from his car. This pulpy mad-writer noir relies on the rogue joy of seeing an infallible plan go to merry shit, but its most disturbing feature is poor Robert Urquhart's unlucky resemblance to David Cameron.

EXTRAS Gallery, trailer.

FILM ★★ **EXTRAS** ★★



BABY LOVE

1968. OUT: JANUARY 26. CERT. 18

DVD ONLY

→ A taboo-baiting hit in 1968, this outrageous, gruesome Freudian soap casts Linda Hayden as a Lolita who sets about seducing her adopted family in a psychosexual rage. Mum, dad, brother... lcky doesn't cover it. Pungent satire meets seedy camp.

Only in the '60s.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



THE GIRL WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

1963. OUT: NOW. CERT. 12

→ Preposterous slasher from Mario Bava, which sends Rome's Alphabet Killer after a trembling Leticia Román. The plot stabs itself in the back with chaotic twists, but what sticks is Bava's severe, expressionist style and Román's big, scared eyes. Hello, John Saxon!

EXTRAS Alternative cut The Evil Eye, Saxon chat.

FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★



A NICE GIRL LIKE ME

1969. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. 12 **DVD ONLY**

→ After a cheeseboard of Euro affairs, Barbara Ferris finally finds true love. Her dad's caretaker. Who's older than Mars. Scoffing at '60s liberalism, Desmond Davis' film is like an establishment manifesto dressed as a perfume ad, barking, "Freedom gets you pregnant!" in a fog of soft-focus. Frumpy, reactionary kitsch.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★

THE PROTAGONISTS

1999. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15 **DVD ONLY**

→ In 1994, two schoolboys kill a stranger, just for kicks. Out of ghoulish curiosity, Luca Guadagnino and Tilda Swinton re-enact events. Unearthing empathy from a hideous crime, it's a brave, strange, indulgent experiment, fusing forensics, philosophy, docu-drama and vigilant chin-stroking.

A bit like an arthouse Crimewatch.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



THE INTRUDER

1953. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U **DVD ONLY**

→ From battlefield to bum: diagnosed in flashback, Guy Hamilton's drama follows a neglected war hero's descent into crime, tackling post-War complacency while delivering the kind of booming tank battles you expect from a future Bond director. With Jack Hawkins and the great, unsung Michael Medwin.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



BAD TIMING

1980. OUT: JANUARY 26. CERT. 18

BLU-RAY ONLY

→ Nic Roeg's most notorious work: Cold War Vienna, a sadistic affair, and Art Garfunkel and Theresa Russell imploding in frightening intimacy. Edited into a maze of fractured memories, it's the most extreme of Roeg's films, in both toxic emotion and shattered-reality technique.

EXTRAS Copious deleted scenes.

FILM ★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★

STOLEN ASSIGNMENT

1955. OUT: JANUARY 19. CERT. U **DVD ONLY**

→ Murder was far *nicer* in '50s Britain. So harmless even the red herrings are beige, this tale of rival reporters squabbling over a scoop imagines homicide as a jaunty parlour game. Rote stuff, but a rare, brief glimpse of the humble British B picture.

Terence Fisher directs. Ends with a punch and a kiss.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★

INTIMATE RELATIONS

1937. OUT: JANUARY 26. CERT. PG

DVD ONLY

→ Suitors compete for a chirruping musical starlet. Three reasons to catch Clayton Hutton's 1937 farce-à-trois: 1) An entire breakfast scene dedicated to sausage innuendo. 2) Garry Marsh's cantankerous toff. 3) The insane optical effects that send a mini-June Clyde dinking across a giant glockenspiel.

EXTRAS None.

FILM ★★★



BATMAN

1989. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15 **BLU-RAY ONLY**

→ Zavvi-exclusive Bat-pack of Tim Burton's franchise-starter, a sleek '80s monument to MTV gothic but true to its source's murky spirit. Jack Nicholson's Joker makes all the noise, while quieter moments suggest Michael Keaton may not be the best Batman, but he's certainly the best Bruce Wayne.

EXTRAS Burton commentary, 'making of', new retro doc.

FILM ★★★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★★★

FEBRUARY 2015

EMPIRE MOVIE MASTERMIND

FEBRUARY 2015

ANTONIO BANDERAS

Puss-In-Boots takes on Quiz-In-Mag



1 In *The Skin I Live In*, what is the name of the synthetic skin created by Dr. Robert Ledgard? **I have no idea whatsoever!**
 ❖ **The correct answer is GAL, after his dead wife, Galatea.**
 That's right! I remember telling Pedro (Almodóvar) that GAL was the name of a Spanish terrorist group. I thought that might be confusing.

2 Which of your films is subtitled *The Island Of Lost Dreams*? **Spy Kids... 2!**
 ❖ **Correct.**

3 What is the name of the song you play over the opening credits of *Desperado*? **(Sings to himself) They called it Canción del Mariachi. "The Song Of The Mariachi."** What a stupid thing to call that song.
 ❖ **Correct.**



4 In *The Mask Of Zorro*, what is the name of the brother whose death you seek to avenge? **Joaquin. Joaquin Murrieta was a real bandolero (bandit) who inspired the original Zorro comic strip. He had his head cut off.**

❖ **Correct.**



5 How many words of dialogue do you speak, rather than sing, in *Evita*? **(Begins singing Oh What A Circus) I'm gonna guess... Five. No, six!**

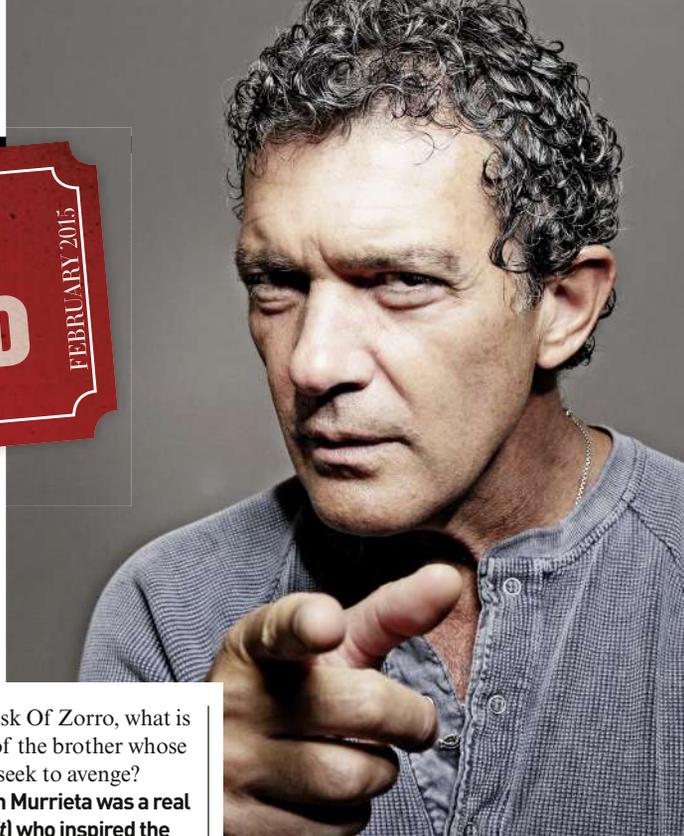
❖ **Correct.**



6 In *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, what is the name of the movie Marina has just wrapped when Ricky kidnaps her? **No idea.**

❖ **The correct answer is The Midnight Phantom.**
 Of course! Pedro (Almodóvar) did the voice of the Phantom. He was very bad!

7 Complete Armand's line from *Interview With The Vampire*: "The world changes, we do not.



There lies the irony that —"
Keeps us alive?

❖ **The correct answer is "finally kills us".**

8 What was your character's name in the original script for *The Expendables 3*? **Matador. Every part I get offered in America is named Matador. (Laughs) So I changed it to Galgo, which means "greyhound".**

❖ **Correct.**



9 In *Ruby Sparks*, what does your character do for a living? **He makes sculputures.**

❖ **Correct.**

10 What, specifically, are Puss' boots made from in *Puss In Boots*? **Dragon skin? Ogre skin? No idea!**

❖ **The correct answer is soft Corinthian leather, a nod to a 1975 Chrysler car ad featuring Ricardo Montalban.**
 Oh, that's true. I didn't know where it came from but Ricardo was a good friend of mine. I made paella for him! **SIMON BRAUND THE EXPENDABLES 3 IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY.**



THE SCOREBOARD ACTORS



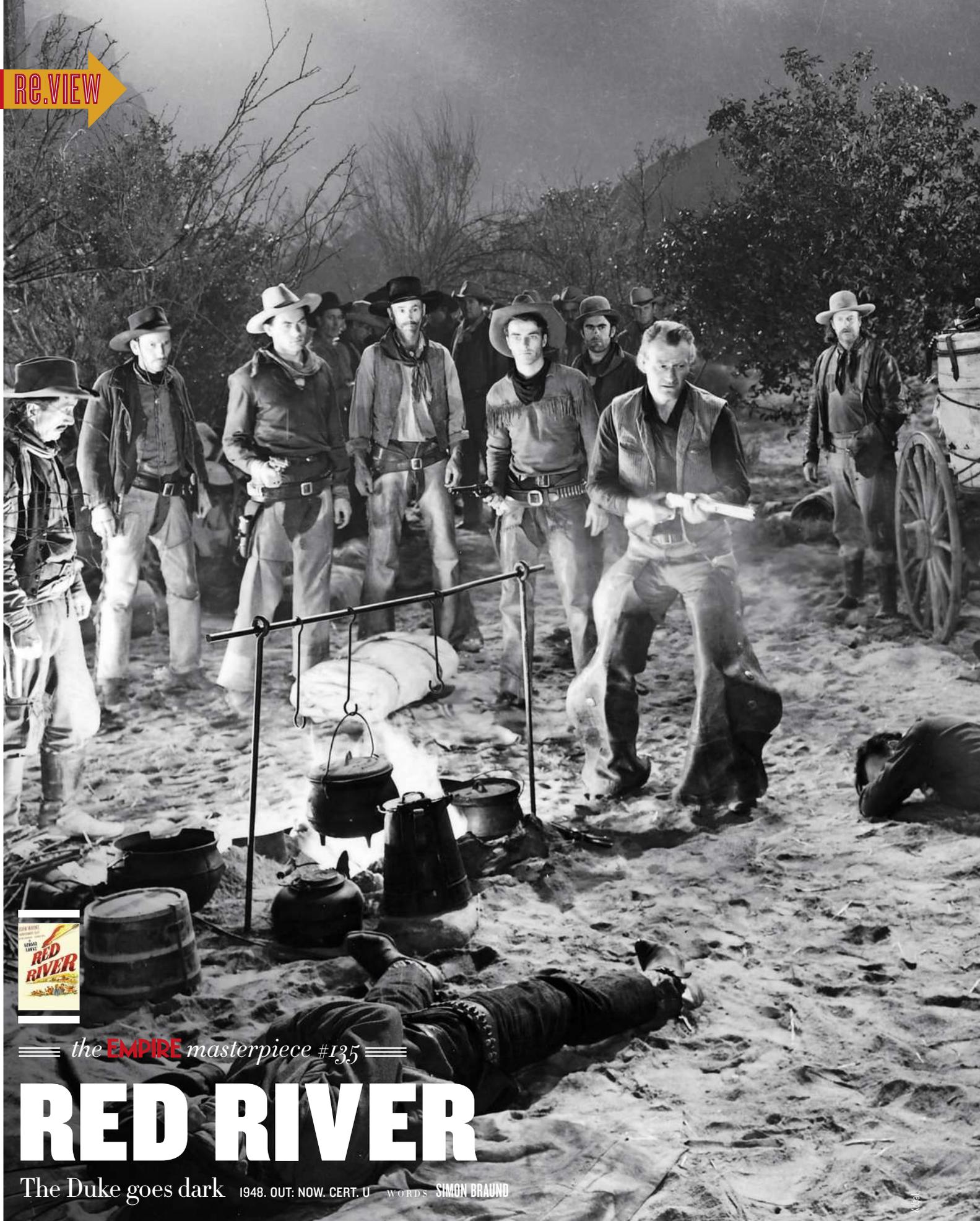
Sir Ben Kingsley/ Sir Christopher Lee/	9
Christian Slater	8.5
Hank Azaria	7.5
Jack Black	7.5
Corey Feldman	7
Kevin Pollak	7
Peter Stormare	7
Warwick Davis	6.5
Dexter Fletcher	6.5
Andy Serkis	6.5
Sigourney Weaver	6.5
ANTONIO BANDERAS	6
Jeff Bridges	6
Malcolm McDowell	6
Billy Bob Thornton	6
Bob Hoskins	5.5
John Malkovich	5.5
Danny Trejo	5.5
Andy Garcia	5
John C. McGinley	5
Eva Mendes	4.5
Heather Graham	4
John Hurt	4
Samuel L. Jackson	4
Sam Neill	4
Steve Guttenberg	3
Michael Keaton	3
Jean Reno	3
Diane Lane	2

ANTONIO SCORES 6/10

"I'm disappointed about *Interview With The Vampire*. I rehearsed and rehearsed those lines because at that time my English was very poor. I learned them perfectly. Then I put the fangs in and I sounded like Daffy Duck!"

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REVIEW



the **EMPIRE** masterpiece #135

RED RIVER

The Duke goes dark 1948. OUT. NOW. CERT. U WORDS SIMON BRAUND



• John Wayne (centre) blasts his reputation to bits as bad-guy Thomas Dunson.

FOR ANYONE WHO HAS never credited The Duke as much of an actor — and let's face it, even his most ardent fans would agree he was no Olivier — Red River will come as a revelation. "I never knew the big son of a bitch could act!" was John Ford's pronouncement when he saw the film for the first time. What is also surprising is that Wayne plays a bad guy. And not by any stretch a stock Western bad guy with a black hat and a snarl. Haunted by tragedy, Texas cattle rancher Thomas Dunson is an emotionally wounded man whose deeply flawed character reveals itself under extremes of physical and psychological hardship. In the Wayne canon, only The Searchers' Ethan Edwards rivals Dunson for complexity and inner conflict. It's significant that the role was originally offered to Gary Cooper.

shows up here in his customary role of rustic savant.

The cast was rounded out by the radiant Joanne Dru (love interest for Clift), the scarcely less radiant Coleen Gray, and Noah Beery Jr., best known for playing Jim Rockford's dad on The Rockford Files.

As an ensemble it could hardly be bettered, and the pairing of seasoned veteran Wayne with newcomer Clift was nothing short of inspired. Off screen, the two were diametric opposites in almost every conceivable respect, from political persuasion to sexual orientation, and the tension off the set undoubtedly spilled over into their performances.

The drive starts off in high spirits with the famous "Yee-haw!" scene (memorably referenced in City Slickers), Matt and the trail

and Clift is the crux of the story. Shocking as it is to see Wayne, invariably the embodiment of manly virtue, bent on cold-blooded murder, it's more shocking still to see him bested by Clift, left wounded and marooned on the prairie, swearing revenge.

The company, now under Matt's command, head for Abilene. En route, they rescue a wagon train from an Indian attack. It's here that Matt meets and falls in love with Tess Millay (Dru) who, in an echo of the events that haunt Dunson, he leaves behind in order to beat his stepfather to Abilene.

When the inevitable showdown between Matt and Dunson ensues, it is as bitter and vicious as events have led us to expect, and both Wayne and Clift are on blistering form. Oddly, though, it's here that Red River strikes its only — and

"One of the most lyrical, beautifully shot Westerns of all time."

He turned it down, worried that it would damage his wholesome image.

The saga begins when Dunson, facing hard times in Civil War-ravaged Texas, determines to drive his cattle hundreds of miles north to the railhead at Missouri where, he believes, they will sell for a decent price. He is joined in the venture by his adopted son Matt (Montgomery Clift in his film debut), trusty trail hand Nadine Groot (Walter Brennan) and hired gunman Cherry Valance (John Ireland, substitute for a reluctant Cary Grant). Also along for the ride are silent Western star Harry Carey and his son, Harry Carey Jr., whose own lengthy career encompassed many excellent Westerns (The Searchers, She Wore A Yellow Ribbon, The Long Riders, Tombstone etc.) and one absolute stinker (1966's Billy The Kid Vs Dracula). No Western of the period, it seems, would have been complete without the wonderful Hank Worden, whose quavery voice and rail-thin frame graced 17 movies with Wayne, among them Stagecoach, The Searchers and True Grit. He

hands whooping it up as they get the huge herd under way. It's interesting to note that Texas Longhorn cattle had been virtually extinct for decades in 1948, and director Howard Hawks had only a couple of dozen to work with. Using them like dress extras, he positioned them carefully to disguise the fact that the bulk of the herd were Herefords.

Conditions on the trail deteriorate rapidly and during a stampede — a legendary, superbly orchestrated sequence that builds to a thundering crescendo — Harry Carey Jr.'s character is killed. As the drive becomes more arduous, Dunson becomes increasingly tyrannical and when he refuses, against all reason, to make for a new railhead in Abilene, much closer than Missouri, dissent begins to fester. Things come to a head when Dunson, his obsession to reach Missouri now bordering on mania, attempts to lynch two hands for desertion. Outright rebellion ensues, with Matt the leader.

The face-off between Wayne

only very slightly — off note. The furious fight between Matt and Dunson is broken up by Tess who, in a miraculously persuasive moment, forces them to realise the deep love they have for each other. Of course, the conventions of the time demanded just such a reconciliation and contemporary audiences would have been outraged had they been denied it. And in fact, the upbeat ending is only disappointing in context.

In Borden Chase's original story, Dunson is shot and mortally wounded by Valance in Abilene. Matt and Tess, now betrothed, take him back across the Red River so that he can die on Texan soil. Chase fought hard to keep this ending in the script but was overruled by Hawks.

That the ending is the only controversial aspect of Red River says much. It remains one of the most lyrical, beautifully shot and compelling Westerns ever made. It also offers irrefutable evidence that the big son of a bitch could, indeed, act.

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EMPIRE
TV

REGARDING HENRY

On set of the real Game Of Thrones, Wolf Hall...

WORDS DAPHNE LOCKYER

"FEELS AS THOUGH YOU'VE STEPPED INTO a Holbein painting, doesn't it?" whispers producer Mark Pybus in *Empire's* ear. He's not wrong.

We're on set of *Wolf Hall*, the scorchingly anticipated BBC adaptation of Hilary Mantel's acclaimed historical novels. As *Empire* surveys the choir stalls, crammed with cast in tights, silky coats, velvet hats and furry collars (and those are just the men), we are transported back to the roast-me-an-oxen, hum-me-a-madrigal, behead-me-a-queen Tudor era. And speaking of the last, enter stage left Anne Boleyn (Claire Foy) — 'The Great Whore', as her critics called her. Flanked by a posse of fluttering ladies-in-waiting, she's a vision of haughtiness, decked out in scarlet damask robe and pearl-rimmed headdress.

Still, despite appearances, this is no stuffy costume drama. Mantel's books, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up The Bodies*, are a period rollercoaster ride, breathlessly recounting the skullduggery and power struggles of the Tudor court. So think of the six-part TV series as *House Of Cards* in 16th-century England. Or *Game Of Thrones* with even more wanton violence. Peter Kosminsky, best known for contemporary political thrillers *The Government Inspector* and *The Promise*, is directing a 120-strong cast that includes *Homeland* star Damian Lewis as Henry VIII. The latter is not the chicken-leg-chomping, obese and probably syphilitic

• Brody's back!
Damian Lewis as
randy royal Henry.

version we all know and love, but Henry as a young and svelte romantic, albeit one with sociopathic tendencies and a fast-developing serial marriage habit.

"Friends have said to me, 'Isn't it hot wearing the fat suit!'" says Lewis during a break in filming. "But our Henry has a 32-inch waist and he's the pre-eminent peacock in the kingdom. He can be tender, romantic and brilliant, but also irrational and cruel — sometimes both rolled into one. Playing the lute and singing love songs while thinking about Jane Seymour (*missus number three*) while his second wife is about to be executed..."

Mark Rylance plays the main man, Thomas Cromwell — a working-class boy who rises through the ranks to become Henry's closest advisor. Or, if this were a Mafia story, his consigliere. "I do see parallels between *Wolf Hall* and *The Godfather*," says Rylance, who appears in 140 of the 146 scenes being shot. "Cromwell's a man who, rather like Michael Corleone, has to degrade anything inside himself that's at all soft. He has to take a pragmatic, ruthless approach to save the family, which in this case is the brotherhood of the English monarchy at that time."

Mantel's tale, adapted for the small screen by Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy scribe Peter Straughan, seems set to translate into an unmissable tale of power, corruption, lust and lopped bonces. "I know I'm in it," says Foy. "But I am the *biggest* fan ever of those books and I can't wait to see it myself."

Okay, okay, keep your head on...

WOLF HALL AIRS IN JANUARY ON BBC TWO.

• Smooth operator:
Mark Rylance as
Henry VIII's
"consigliere",
Thomas Cromwell.

THE SIXTIES

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. E DVD ONLY



→ From *That Thing You Do!* to his now-shooting Cold War film with Spielberg, Tom Hanks is no stranger to the swingiest decade.

He's the star producer behind this slick ten-part documentary, which sets out to show how the 1960s changed everything forever. Some episodes are a little thin, but the JFK précis is a masterclass and the talking heads superior, from Vince Gilligan to Hanks himself.

EXTRAS None. NDS

SHOW ★★★

THE STRAIN

2014. OUT: NOW. CERT. 15



→ Guillermo del Toro oversees the TV adaptation of his first vampire novel (with Chuck Hogan), and as you'd expect, the result is weird, gory

and features disturbing things in jars. It sometimes plays like *Blade II* if Wesley Snipes had never shown up, but as the vampire apocalypse inexorably builds it makes for a skin-crawling and highly addictive watch.

EXTRAS Three substantial featurettes. HOH

SHOW ★★★ EXTRAS ★★★

LOOKING

2014. OUT: JANUARY 12. CERT. 18



→ Initially dismissed by some for being *Girls* but with boys, HBO's new dramedy has quickly built up a cult following of its own. It revolves

around three friends in San Francisco, who all happen to be gay. The show explores their relationships and careers with extreme frankness and visual wit, thanks largely to regular director Andrew Haigh (Weekend).

EXTRAS Commentaries and brief featurettes already on YouTube. JH

SHOW ★★★ EXTRAS ★★★



Gay had really upped the ante for Steve's stag weekend.

EMPIRE GAMES

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

Nobody expects it... OUT: NOW. PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX ONE, XBOX 360

THE DEVELOPER BEHIND BALDUR'S GATE, Neverwinter Nights and Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, BioWare has been responsible for some of the greatest roleplaying games. However, the previous Dragon Age outings never really measured up. Dragon Age: Origins struggled with a derivative story and unwieldy interface, while Dragon Age II was dumbed down and frustratingly linear. Thankfully, none of those criticisms can be levelled at Dragon Age: Inquisition. Set again in the land of Thedas, the story begins with an eruption spewing demons into a world already divided between rogue mages and magic-hating Templars. The explosion wipes out the Chantry — Thedas' ruling body — spreading anarchy (and hellspawn) across the land. As the sole survivor and head of the new Inquisition, it's up to you to rally the populace and stem the demon tide. This is achieved via indiscriminate monster-slaying, but the slaughter is one underpinned by politics. From your stronghold of Haven, you can send agents on missions, make alliances and solidify your power. And that's before you've even thought about taking on a dragon.

The battles are fast and frantic, with enemies posing a more substantial threat than in either previous title. Your abilities expand as you progress, introducing different fighting styles and tactics for your character and their three companions (selected from an ever-growing pool). The combat manages a balance between action and tactics, the latter enhanced by a top-down strategic view (reminiscent of Baldur's Gate), which pauses the action

to allow micro-management of trickier encounters. Outside of the violence there's a treasure trove of lore, a complex resource-collection system and more sub-quests than anyone with a job could hope to get through. Character is equally well served, with backstories and dialogue trees that help define your personality. The four-player co-op feels a bit tacked-on, but enhances the sense of operating as part of a tight-knit unit.

With Dragon Age: Inquisition, BioWare has recaptured its former glory, providing the new generation of consoles with their first heavyweight RPG in the process. As well as elevating the franchise to the same tier as Mass Effect among BioWare's greatest hits, Inquisition has thrown down the gauntlet for the creators of all other open-world games. Elder Scrolls VI, the next move is yours. **STEVE BOXER**

★★★★★



Spider-Man would be livid when he clocked this.



LITTLEBIGPLANET 3

OUT: NOW. PS3, PS4

→ Sackboy is joined by three new friends — Toggle, Oddsock and Swoop — in a bid to save the planet Bunkum from the nefarious Newton (voiced by Hugh Laurie). New developer Sumo Digital maintains the playful magic, both in the whimsical story mode, where the heroes' skills factor into improved puzzles, and in the vastly expanded creation mode. You can experiment with 16 layers of depth (up from three) and hundreds of tools and techniques. Although cloyingly sweet in places and forceful with its tutorials, this is Sony's most ambitious textile yarn to date. **MK ★★★★★**



FAR CRY 4

OUT: NOW. PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX ONE, XBOX 360

→ Ubisoft's latest open-world shooter doesn't distance itself much from its predecessor — but given Far Cry 3's acclaim, that's hardly a black mark. The story draws you to the mountainous nation of Kyrat to unleash chaos in the name of stopping a civil war. The hero, Ajay, is uninspiring, but scenery-chewing antagonist Pagan Min is a worthy addition. New co-op and multiplayer modes improve the gameplay, but while it's great fun, too few innovations mean it falls short of exceptional. **MK ★★★★★**

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HOWARD SHORE

From murder to Mordor, the composer reflects on his career

• Here: Legolas was being an insufferable show-off again. Below: Howard Shore in his Sunday best.

1 I MISS YOU HUGS AND KISSES (1978)

My first movie — it's pretty rare. It was based on a famous murder trial in Canada called the Demeter Case, a sensational crime, so I delivered an *experimental* score. Back in those days I read a lot of books and tried just about everything possible: recording to playback, wild tracks, all sorts of things. Lots of times it went wrong. But you've got to make mistakes, and fortunately I don't look back.

2 THE BROOD (1979)

I got up the nerve to ask David Cronenberg if I could work on one of his films. He said, "Well, okay, let's give it a try." So we did *The Brood*. It was guerrilla filmmaking, really. We didn't have very much money. The score was recorded live in six hours, with 21 strings. It was seat-of-your-pants business. That's the way we made films then.

3 AFTER HOURS (1985)

That was a lot of fun: complete electronic score, no microphones. I had a lab in the Brill Building (*in New York*) and I was doing a lot of experiments with electronics and

tape. Some of those techniques I still use today. *Maps To The Stars* and even (*the upcoming*) *Rosewater* have some of that stuff in them.

4 BIG (1988)

When I was younger I was always in repertory theatre. We'd do drama one night and comedy the next. So applying that to films felt natural. I love to switch gears and tell a story with a lighter touch. My comedy high-point may have been performing as a beekeeper in a Saturday Night Live skit with Belushi and Aykroyd!

5 THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)

Jonathan Demme was aware of my work with Cronenberg, so this score was a direct result of films like *Dead Ringers* and *The Fly*. I always enjoy the darker tales, because it allows the music an extra degree of depth. You can go into a character's mind. Which in the case of Hannibal Lecter is quite a trip.

6 ED WOOD (1994)

It's really one of my favourites. It's a period I love: the late '50s. Fusing together Afro-Cuban music and monster-movies soundtracks, it's a great, rich place to work in.

Plus he's a fantastic character to write for. You can do no wrong in Ed Wood's world!

7 SEVEN (1995)

David Fincher just gave me a great film and let me go off and write what I felt. It's a little more far-out than *Silence Of The Lambs*. We recorded it at Sony in Los Angeles, in an acoustically beautiful room. *Seven* has a huge percussion section — nine percussionists, playing largely metal instruments. That was the striking sound of that score.

8 THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (2001)

I got a cold call from Peter (*Jackson*) and Fran (*Walsh*) in the late spring of 2000, talked to them for 15 minutes and then got on a plane to New Zealand. I knew it was going to be a challenging project, but it was just too enticing. I loved writing the journey for

Frodo and Sam. And I had a great palette to work with: when Gandalf rides out from Minas Tirith, I was able to switch from the voice of one nine year-old boy to the full force of the symphony orchestra. It was a wonderful project.

9 HUGO (2011)

I was so in love with that movie. There were over 30 years of silent films, but they were never silent. They almost always had live music accompaniment. So it's a really rich period. I got to use an ondes Martenot (*similar to the theramin*). Working with Marty (*Scorsese*) is always fun. He has a fantastic archive of music and he'll always play you something new.

10 THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES (2014)

It's just striking us now that it's all finished. It's starting to sink in and it's a little bittersweet. The *Hobbit* is a lighter story, but I did enjoy exploring the dragon sickness that overtakes Thorin. That was one of the most fun aspects of this final film.

NICK DE SEMLYEN





• Sophia Loren with Charlton Heston in 1961's *El Cid*.



• Rob Lowe and Amy Poehler do startled in *Parks And Recreation*.



They're creepy and they're kooky... Anjelica Huston in *The Addams Family*.

EMPIRE BOOKS

BATTLE OF THE BIOGS

Three actresses. Three books. We read them and rate them...

YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW: MY LIFE. SOPHIA LOREN. OUT: NOW

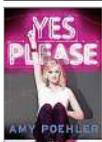
YES PLEASE. AMY POEHLER. OUT: NOW

WATCH ME. ANJELICA HUSTON. OUT: NOW



→ **EVERY YEAR, AS CHRISTMAS** approaches, publishers unleash a torrent of celebrity memoirs. In the past few months alone, we've had John Cleese's *So, Anyway...* (heavy on his school years), Ron Perlman's *Easy Street* (revealing a suicide attempt) and Gérard Depardieu's astonishing *It Happened Like That* (detailing the Frenchman's secret past as a grave-robber and rent boy).

The end of 2014 has also provided us with three actress autobiographies (femmemoirs?) to read by the fire.



Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: My Life, named by Sophia Loren after one of her '60s Italian films, begins, somewhat unexpectedly, with her watching *Cars 2*. It turns out she voiced Vanessa Redgrave's role in non-English versions of the movie, and her grandkids won't let her put anything else on the TV. It's a sweet, intimate detail in an enjoyably unstuffy book. Having become a star at the height of Hollywood's Golden Age, Loren has plenty of juice to spill: Paul Newman had sweaty palms, Marlon Brando tried to grope her, Peter O'Toole was rubbish at Scrabble. The only downside is it's all rather luvvy ("Richard Burton was one of the gods of my Olympus..."), and the long section about Omar Sharif's mother's aubergine recipe is begging for an edit.

As it happens, Sophia Loren's gynaecologist also

advised Amy Poehler on her pregnancy. "I was happy to hear that Dr. G was comfortable with beautiful and famous vaginas," writes the impish comedienne in her own tell-all, **Yes Please**. "I don't consider myself beautiful or famous, but my vagina certainly is. Everyone knows I have the Angelina Jolie of vaginas." She goes on to explain how her son Archie was delivered, a tale which involves Jon Hamm, a repeat of *Law & Order*, and ex-husband Will Arnett's car getting soaked with amniotic fluid. It's that kind of book: frank, off-the-wall and very funny. Sprinkled with photos, flyers and lists, including suggested taglines for *The Human Centipede 4*, it's up there with Bossypants, the recent tome by Poehler bestie Tina Fey.

Finally, there's **Watch Me**, the second book in a year from Anjelica Huston. While the first went over her formative years in Ireland and New York, this one is all about Hollywood. Or, more specifically, all about Jack Nicholson. Huston fell head over heels with the Wolf man after being invited to a party at his house: their subsequent affair is documented here in fascinating detail. Jack, it turns out, was prone to flooding bathrooms and giving supermodels "mercy fucks". It's as elegantly penned as you'd expect from the one-time Morticia Addams: "Herky was a kitten of the first order" is not an untypical line. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW: MY LIFE ★★★

YES PLEASE ★★★★★

WATCH ME ★★★★★

CARSICK

JOHN WATERS. OUT: NOW

→ The Tycoon Of Trash, John Waters, turns his hand to a travelogue with an entertainingly gonzo account of his attempt to hitchhike from Baltimore to San Francisco. Split loosely into two parts, it divides into a series of leftfield encounters straight from his imagination and the more prosaic reality of what actually happened as he rode shotgun cross-country. No prize for guessing which bit features a life-and-death tussle with a psychotic raccoon. **PDS** ★★★★★

BECOMING RICHARD PRYOR

SCOTT SAUL. OUT: JANUARY 15

→ With umpteen prior biographies, what could a new book possibly add to what we know about the iconoclastic stand-up comic? A great deal. Drawing on new interviews and previously unseen material, Scott Saul approaches Pryor as one might a biography of a President. His meticulous research, startling insight and empathetic prose take us so close to his subject, it's as if he is offering a brilliantly edited volume of Pryor's diaries. **DH** ★★★★★

INTERSTELLAR: BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

MARK COTTA VAZ. OUT: NOW

→ A mish-mash of concept art, behind-the-scenes stills, press notes and highfalutin forewords, this is a Frankenstein's monster of a 'making of'. The layout is a little rudimentary, but Mark Cotta Vaz's tome is still worth fans' time, with half-a-tree per page paper stock and plenty of Nolan-approved insight into the film's final act. **AP** ★★★★★

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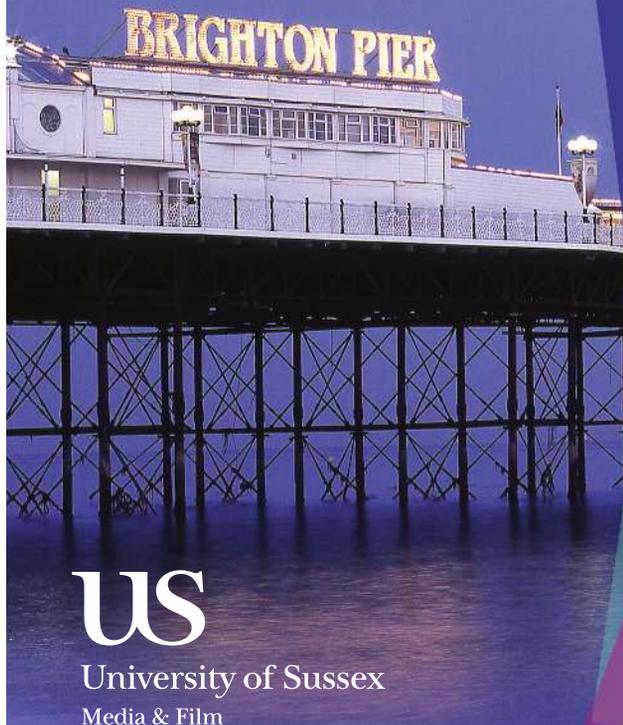
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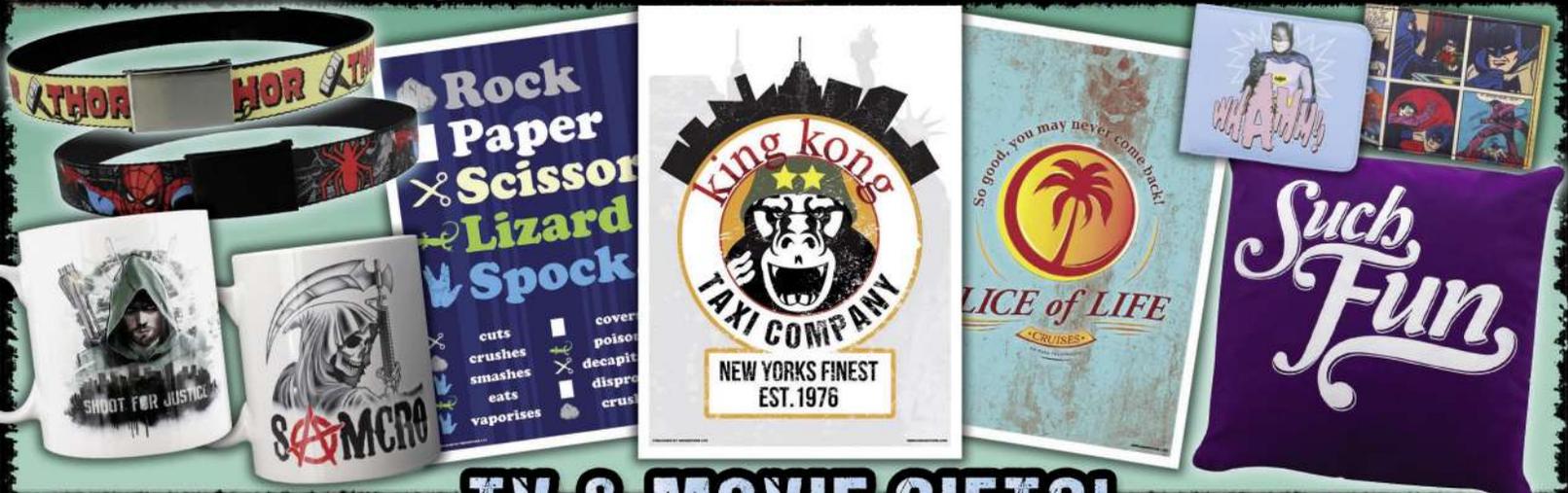
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SHORTS

YOU TALKIN' TO US



LETTER OF THE MONTH

EMPIRE OF THE NUMBER ONE

→ I see from your letters page that some readers may have a copy or two of **Empire** kept in "the smallest room of the house" to while away the time, but why not take things a little further?

After a few snips, a fair bit of wallpaper paste and around 180 front covers (not from my collection — as if! — but someone else's stash acquired especially for the purpose), we now have a guide to the last two decades of cinema for all to absorb when nature calls.

My two year-old daughter, whilst potty training these past few months, is now fully up to speed on most of the stars of the '90s. Except Godzilla. He's "The Toilet Monster" for motivational purposes.

SIMON RANCE, VIA EMAIL

Now the phrase "when nature calls" will make all **Empire** readers think of your loo kaiju bellowing as the toilet flushes. Possibly. Hopefully. To honour your impressive Art Attack skills, have £125 in Zavi vouchers to spend on movie posters to plaster up and down your flight of stairs. You can also spend the vouchers on anything else you fancy, but that's just one suggestion to get you started.

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The home of entertainment. The online store for all of your DVD, Blu-ray and entertainment needs — all with UK free delivery. Each month, **Empire's** star letter wins a £125 voucher from the fabulously generous guys at zavvi.com! When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.

INSPECTRE GADGET

→ Now that it's been announced, I'm excited about the new Bond film. But how on earth are they going to pen a song using the word Spectre? My suggestion:

Spectre,
Entertain us, we hope you can
Even although the poster looks a bit like
Spider-Man.
Spectre!
Debt collector!
Overhead projector!
Spectre!

SAUL THOMAS, VIA EMAIL

Alternative rhyming words, should you wish to use them for other verses: "Pass me a Tipp-Ex typo corrector", "That's just unsubstantiated conjecture", and, of course, "Sam Mendes is the director". Also, "Victor, what's your vector?", "Fancy a game of Connect Four?" and, "Oh shit, it's a Boa constrictor!"

FATHER COMPLEXITIES

→ Christopher Nolan, you bastard. I have a young daughter, one that I have had to leave for long stretches of time for the army and other work. Knowing that time is lost forever is crushing — many fathers will share that feeling, I'm sure. Seeing that experience put on screen in searing, raw terms by Matthew McConaughey in *Interstellar*, well, it destroyed me! They used a fantastic story to show us something simple and honest about being human and being a father. So good it hurt. Gits.
ALAN ETHERTON, CHELTENHAM
Your "Gits" comment will be passed on to Nolan and McConaughey directly — apologies if a black hole opens up in your back garden.

SUPERHEROES OF FUTURE PAST

→ I'm worried. As a new dad (offspring is currently eight months old), your Superhero Viewing Timeline in the latest issue fills me with dread. Twenty-seven films over

the next six years! How can I possibly be expected to watch all of those as well as catch up on the films I've missed due to the wonderfully labour-intensive thing that is "parenthood"? By the time *The Green Lantern* arrives in 2020 my little girl will be six years old and my list of films to catch up on will be longer than one of Doc Ock's tentacles! Please either ask them to stop this release schedule madness or create some kind of time machine to help. Thanking you in advance from yesterday.

RUSS KELLAWAY, VIA EMAIL

It was/is/will be our pleasure.

BLACK WIDOW

→ Having just watched *Lucy* I can't help but wonder if she placed the wormhole in *Interstellar*. Think about it. *Exactly.*

IMRAN BASHIR, VIA EMAIL

P. S. Michael Shannon as Jaws in a future Bond film, how good would that be?

Great point and great idea. How about Jason Statham for Blofeld?

SPOILER WARNING



CONTACT US VIA: EMPIRE MAGAZINE, ENDEAVOUR HOUSE, 189 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, WC2H 8JG

THE ORCS FACTOR

→ I know The Hobbit is already one of the biggest franchises but, being released near to Christmas, maybe Jackson wants to use the success of last year's Frozen to extend its marketing? To the tune of, of course, Let It Go:

Smaug lies in the Lonely Mountain tonight,
Not a dwarf to be seen.
He lives in isolation,
He's dangerous and he's mean

If you go in he'll make
a swirling storm inside
You will be dead, it won't
matter that you tried

Let it go, let it go
Don't let him out to fly
Let it go, let it go
We don't want to die
Here we moan
You don't need the Arkenstone
Let the town live on

The gold never bothered us anyway
ISAAC MILNE, STOURBRIDGE (15 YEARS OLD)

Two songs in one letters page. Next month we expect at least one rap.



HOW DO YOU LIKE THESE WORMHOLES?

→ I have decided that Interstellar is actually a straight sequel to Good Will Hunting.

After following girlfriend Skylar to California, Will Hunting changes his name to escape his past and gains a PhD in maths. Years later, working for NASA, he realises Earth is dying and generates the momentum for the Lazarus missions, volunteering for one himself. Once on his inhospitable planet, his sociopathic tendencies re-emerge and he begins to transmit his false data.

Cooper must even have the DNA of Morgan O'Mally somewhere in his family tree, hence the Cooper's son/Morgan resemblance.

I'm hoping Nolan's next film completes the trilogy with Chuckie's descendants living on Edmunds' world, drinkin' beer and standing in for their buddies at corporate interviews.

OLLIE FITTON-COOK, BATH

Great stuff. With this and the Lucy suggestion, most of the Empire office's brains are leaking.

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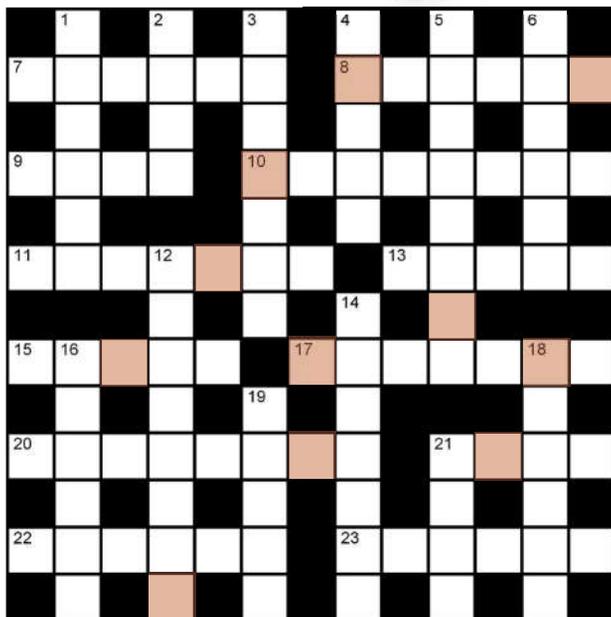
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"I'm not angry. It's just my face."

CROSSWORD

Win A Most Wanted Man on Blu-ray, a 42" HDTV and a Blu-ray player!

→ THE FILM ADAPTATION OF JOHN LE CARRÉ'S ACCLAIMED novel, **A MOST WANTED MAN**, comes to Blu-ray and DVD this January and we've got copies to give away. Starring Rachel McAdams, Willem Dafoe and the late, great Philip Seymour Hoffman, **A MOST WANTED MAN** tells the story of an illegal Chechen immigrant on the run in Hamburg. To be in with a chance of winning the movie on Blu-ray, along with a 42" HDTV and Blu-ray player, have a bash at this month's crossword. Good luck! **A MOST WANTED MAN** is available on Blu-ray, DVD and On Demand from January 19.



Terms and conditions: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before January 27 or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

ACROSS

- 7 It featured a pregnant Big Arnie (6)
- 8 Film title utilised both by Otto Preminger and then Ridley Scott — the latter with additions (6)
- 9 Audiences shelled out for this Brad Pitt tank drama (4)
- 10 Burt Lancaster and Gary Cooper's 1954 Mexican destination (4,4,)
- 11 Fighter first flown by Ice-T, then by Josh Lucas, Jessica Biel and Jamie Foxx (7)
- 13 The kind of rider Keisha Castle-Hughes once was (5)
- 15 Sounds like a knotty problem for Will Smith (5)
- 17 This Barry Levinson movie won four Oscars in 1989 (4,3)
- 20 "Don't set him off" runs the poster blurb for this imminent Keanu Reeves action thriller (4,4)
- 21 Sean, or Rowan Atkinson's bumbling hero (4)
- 22 The iconic Humphrey, once wed to the no less iconic Lauren Bacall (6)
- 23 Margot who was once fond of wolves but is now keen on Tarzan (6)

DOWN

- 1 Just the month for a Josh Harnett-Adam Scott-Naomie Harris dot-com startup (6)
- 2 Mark Wahlberg and Russell Crowe's was broken (4)
- 3 In which Sandra Bullock and George Clooney were placed in orbit (7)
- 4 Tom's famed partner in animation (5)
- 5 He directed The Fast And The Furious (3,5)
- 6 Director Luis, hailed as the father of cinematic Surrealism (6)
- 12 Notes on this related to Cate Blanchett and Judi Dench (1,7)
- 14 Jonny Lee Miller and Angelina Jolie's computer caper (7)
- 16 This Will Smith sci-fi outing was inspired by the stories of Isaac Asimov (1,5)
- 18 Land inextricably linked with Peter O'Toole's Lawrence (6)
- 19 The provision of an offspring, filmwise, to Nicole Kidman (5)
- 21 Cinematic pig, later seen in the city (4)

COMPETITION ENDS JANUARY 26

DECEMBER ANSWERS:

ACROSS: 1 Iron, 3 Peggy Sue, 9 The Gift, 10 Annie, 11 Lily Tomlin, 13 Coogan, 15 Troisi, 17 Night Moves, 20 Akira, 21 Lilting, 22 Kerry Fox, 23 Heat.
DOWN: 1 Intimacy, 2 O'Neal, 4 Estate, 5 Graeme Revell, 6 Santini, 7 Evey, 8 William H. Macy, 12 Big Night, 14 Olivier, 16 Emilio, 18 Shine, 19 Jack.
ANAGRAM: JENNIFER LAWRENCE

PUB QUIZ

Witchy business

- 1 How many Oscars has Meryl Streep won, and for which films?
- 2 Emily Blunt has played which famous queen on the big screen?
- 3 What is the name of James Corden and Mathew Horne's disastrous 2009 horror comedy?
- 4 Anna Kendrick had a number six hit in the US with which song?
- 5 What does the T stand for in James T. Kirk?
- 6 Name the nine films in which Johnny Depp has played the title character.
- 7 Who directed Chicago?
- 8 Where did Sweeney Todd live?
- 9 Which 2005 computer-animated family film pokes fun at fairy tales?
- 10 In which upcoming musical might you hear the song Agony?

ANSWERS: 1 Three; Kramer Vs. Kramer (1979), Sophie's Choice (1982) and The Iron Lady (2011). 2 Queen Victoria in The Young Victoria. 3 Lesbian Vampire Killers. 4 Cuffs, as originally heard in Pitch Perfect (2012). 5 Tiberius. 6 Cry-Baby (1990), Edward Scissorhands (1990), What's Eating Gilbert Grape (1993), Ed Wood (1994), Don Juan DeMarco (1999), Donnie Brasco (1997), The Libertine (2004), Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (2007), and The Tourist (2010). 7 Rob Marshall. 8 Fleet Street. 9 Hoodwinked: Into the Woods.

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WIN!

A FIVE-STAR TRIP FOR TWO TO THE FRENCH RIVIERA



BLOCKBUSTER VETERAN DAVID KOEPP brings Johnny Depp, Gwyneth Paltrow, Olivia Munn, Jeff Goldblum and Ewan McGregor together on the big screen this month with his action comedy *Mortdecai*. Debonair art dealer Charlie Mortdecai (Depp) must cross the globe armed only with his waxed moustache and special kind of charm in a race to recover a stolen painting rumoured to contain the code to a lost bank account filled with Nazi gold. Glamour and crime go hand in hand in this one, and to celebrate its release, we're giving you the chance to taste some of the high life for yourself. To be in with a chance of winning a trip for two to the French Riviera, including three nights in a five-star hotel, head over to empireonline.com/mortdecaicomp and crack our multiple choice code. *Bonne chance!*
MORTDECAI IS OUT ON JANUARY 23.

• Johnny Depp as suave sophisticate Charlie Mortdecai.



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**EMPIRE
CLASSIC
SCENE**

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

“You may kiss my royal arse.”

SETTING THE SCENE

→ John Huston's thrilling adventure sees Sean Connery and Michael Caine share the screen for the first of only two times (see also *A Bridge Too Far*). Danny (Connery) and Peachy (Caine) are ex-military chancers wandering colonial Asia. After he appears to survive a direct arrow hit, Danny is given the chance to become a god...

INT. KAFIRISTAN DWELLING — DAY

Danny, Peachy and local interpreter Billy (Saeed Jaffrey) are talking, when they hear Kafiri tribesmen chanting “Sikander” over and over outside.

Peachy: Sikander. Sikander. What does Sikander mean, Billy?

Billy: Sikander a god. Come here long ago from the West.

Danny: That'll be the Greek bloke Brother Kipling told us about.

Peachy: Alexander?

Billy: Alexander. Sikander.

Peachy: Here — Alexander!

Billy: He builded great city. Sikandergul, high in mountains. Sit on throne. All peoples worship him. Then one day, time comes, he say he must go to East. People pull their hairs out, tear clothes. So Sikander promised to send back son.

Peachy: 328 BC. Encyclopedia said.

Billy: Soldiers saw arrow go into Danny's chest, him pluck it out, and not bleeding.

Peachy: So?

Billy (pointing to Danny): So, son of Sikander.

Danny: They think I'm a god?

Danny and Peachy laugh.

Peachy: A god! Put your foot out that I may kiss your big toe.

Danny: You may kiss my royal arse.

Peachy: Not royal — holy! You're a deity, remember?

Billy: Peachy?

Peachy: Yes, Billy?

Billy: Is Danny not son of Sikander?

Peachy: No, Billy, he's a man like you and me. He can break wind at both ends, simultaneous, which I'm willing to bet is more than any god can do.

Billy: But the arrow...

Danny: The arrow stuck in the bandolier. There was no miracle, Billy. So you better tell them that,

out there. And my dad's name was Herbert Dravot Esquire, and he was bar steward in a knocking shop in Durham!

Peachy: Hang on a minute, Danny. Maybe we're missing a bet here.

Danny: What do you mean?

Peachy: Supposing you was an ignorant Kafiri... who would you rather follow, a god or a man? Now, we're here to conquer this country, ain't we? Well, with you as a god, it would take half the time and half the trouble.

Danny: The idea is a bit blasphemous, like.

Peachy: No, Danny. Blaspheming is when you take His name in vain. God Almighty's.

Danny: And what if they found out we was having them on?

Peachy: Why should they? We won't tell them. And you won't tell them, will you, Billy?

Billy: Oh, no. Indeed, by Jove, no.

A horn blows outside.

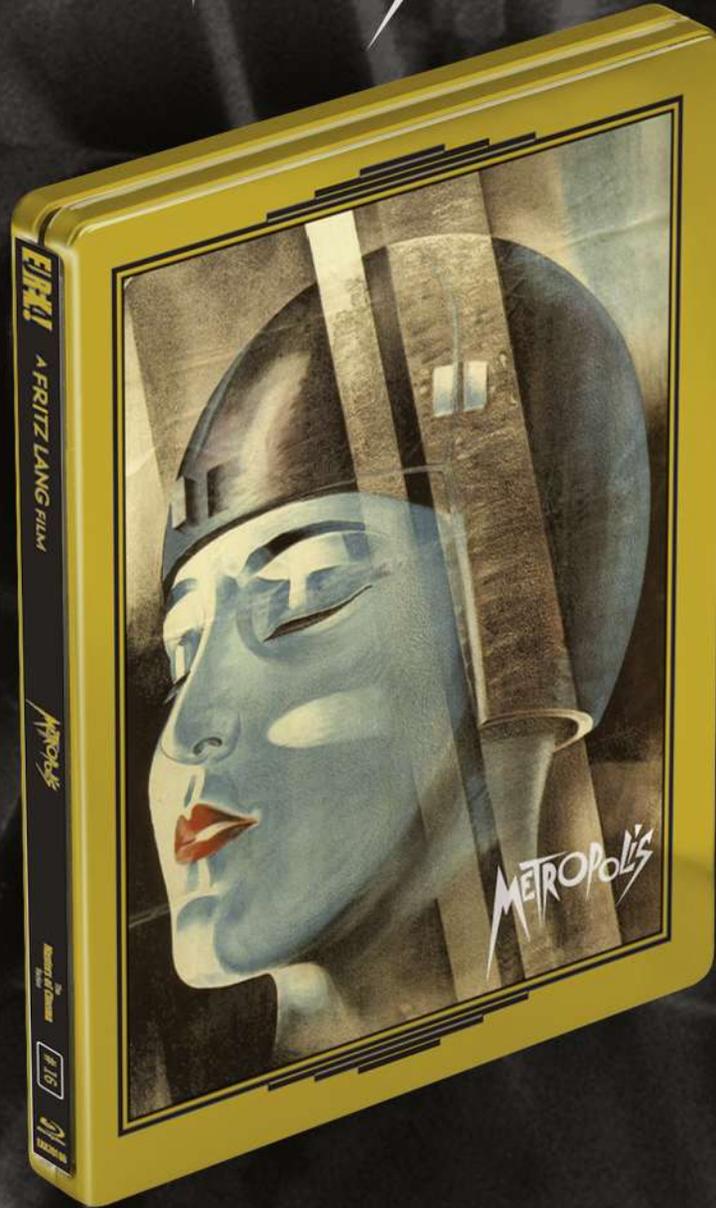
Danny: Polo.

Peachy: Polo...

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