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This page will self-destruct in 15 seconds!

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BBC

DOCTOR WHO

TIME LORD VICTORIOUS

THE KNIGHT, THE FOOL AND THE DEAD



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Rants & Raves

Inside the SFX hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR



RAVES

- Lovecraft Country had my heart in my throat – for both the fantasy and reality elements.
- Thoroughly enjoyed the *Star Trek: Lower Decks* premiere episode that was streamed free on YouTube. I hope someone in the UK picks the show up.

RANTS

- For the first time in seven years I won't be at the *Halloween Horror Nights* opening event. Yet people are still flying away on holidays... Stay safe, wear a mask (not a Halloween one).

RIP

- My friend, NME and Guardian journalist Dan Martin passed away last month. *Doctor Who* events won't be the same without him.

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR



RAVES

- Loved the video of theremin player Carolina Eyck performing the *Doctor Who* theme: bit.ly/wotheremin.
- Pleased that the Usborne book reissues are continuing with *The World Of The Unknown: UFOs* (1 October).
- Similarly delighted that there's a Blu-ray box set of *Monkey* coming (5 October). (Hums the theme tune)

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR



RAVES

- Summer's the perfect time for a bit of folksy '70s sci-fi, so I've been re-watching *Children Of The Stones*, plus *The Owl Service* and *Raven*, both of which I missed the first time around and which are fantastic. All topped off, for lightness, with a large dollop of *Catweazle*. Bliss!

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR



RAVES

- Just discovered – a mere year late – that Roman Polanski's obscure supernatural (?) oddity *The Tenant* (1976) is out on Blu-ray, which makes me very happy.

RANTS

- Speaking of which, is Disney discontinuing 4K Blu-ray releases for all its brands, or not? Rumours and confusion are rampant. Please don't make us rent inferior-quality streams on Disney+ instead...

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE



RAVES

- Judging by the trailer, Matt Reeves's *The Batman* looks slickly done and deeply intense. A little too gloomy and rain-lashed for my Batman, but we're clearly in good hands.

RANTS

- All this endless prevarication over the pitches for the next *Star Trek* movie! Just make 'em all – Tarantino's first, please.

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR



RAVES

- HBO's docuseries *The Vow* gives the full story behind the Allison Mack (from *Smallville*) NXIVM cult. It's a compelling, timely watch.

RANTS

- Wish I liked Netflix's *Away* more. Every episode is so earnest and emotionally over the top, I think I may be diabetic now.

All you know how to do is play it safe!



Captain's Log



Things all feel a bit *Sapphire & Steel* right now. Just how long have I been stuck in this motorway café? It feels as long as the gap following *that cliffhanger*, back in 1990. Waiting from June until September to discover the fate of Captain Picard felt like a lifetime back then. Little did we know how time would be passing when we looked at celebrating the 30th anniversary of *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* "The Best Of Both Worlds", a classic that I've revisited yet again during lockdown. Sci-fi with a sense of real danger and consequence has always been my favourite – in the days before the internet and spoilers, how was I to know that Picard would live to be plagued by the Borg for another three decades?

A shiny Federation-esque beacon of hope in the debris of Wolf 359 that is the world that we currently inhabit is the return of cinema. The floodgates should, hopefully, have been opened by the theatrical release of *Tenet* by the time you read this, and *The King's Man* should be gracing a screen near you soon. When *The New Mutants* finally gets released, maybe I'll believe there's light at the end of the tunnel! But it's good to see these other Marvel(ish) characters making their way to the silver screen at last – leading a packed autumn schedule that I promise you is going to be worth being indoors for! Resistance is futile...

Darren X

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"Piggy looks like she's a recovering meth addict"



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First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!



The editor's
Christmas party
last year was
particularly good.

DOOM PATROL IS GREAT!

Rob Graham, email *Titans* and *Doom Patrol* are up among the all-time great superhero shows and *Swamp Thing* deserved a lot better than cancellation after just a few episodes. The only real problem is I'm getting bored with all the gritty reboots. Not every superhero needs one. It's one of the reasons why I enjoy *The Flash* so much. So light and fun it feels refreshing. *The Boys* – which isn't DC or Marvel – is another show I rate up among the all-time great superhero shows. It is very adult and gritty as well, but it works as a brilliant satire and these were original characters originally meant to be adult and gritty. While I am thoroughly enjoying both *Titans* and *Doom Patrol* I honestly think enough is enough with the dark and gritty adult reboots for seemingly every character. Maybe superhero shows should take lessons from *The Flash*, *Supergirl* and *Legends Of Tomorrow* and learn to lighten up.

SFX Just wait until you see Squirrel Girl: Blood Oath, Rob.

DOOM PATROL IS RUBBISH!

Paul Castell, email You were right and wrong about *Doom Patrol* in issue 327. It isn't just a bit shit, it is total shit. Or am I missing something? Not one character is likeable. In fact they are all horrible, with Jane and Cliff the worst. They don't do anything but argue and swear at each other. And the swearing is so much it loses its drama when it could be funny or shocking – but it's just relentless. There is no action, no real story and Alan Tudyk is wasted in it. Makes *Black Lightning* look like Shakespeare. Worst DC show ever.

SFX Paul wins a Doom Patrol season one box-set for his letter. Oh, wait...

DC UNIVERSE/HBO MAX, MARVEL PRODUCTIONS



Project Power was a good start
to a franchise.

Andrew Taylor Timeboss



I might have to watch *Dungeons & Dragons* again after reading Darren Scott's Total Recall in the new *SFX*. Maybe this time they WILL get home...

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2020

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

10 Dino Riders

What is it with kids and *Jurassic World*? Time to go back as *Camp Cretaceous* opens its gates...



Highlights ↗



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RENTAGHOST

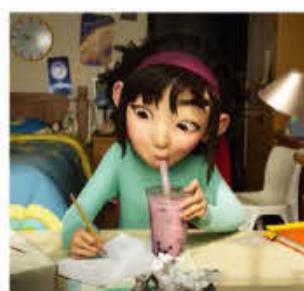
→ The BBC's supernatural sitcom *Ghosts* raises the stakes as it returns for a second season.



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**MOMMIE
FEAREST**

→ Emily Mortimer on playing the lead in supernatural horror drama *Relic*.



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**TO THE MOON
AND BACK**

→ Disney legend Glen Keane discusses new Netflix animation *Over The Moon*.

► **SCI-FACT!** Consulting producer and pilot co-writer Zack Stentz also wrote the screenplays for *Thor* and *X-Men: First Class*.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Parklife

Time for some kid nightmares with this **Jurassic World** in-canonical animated series



LET'S BE HONEST: THE JURASSIC Park universe has never been kind to kids. From Tim and Lex in the very first film to Maisie Lockwood in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, not one of them has had an easy time with the cloned and genetically modified dinosaurs.

If you know that, then you can anticipate exactly the kind of wild ride coming in DreamWorks' new computer-animated series for Netflix, *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous*. It's the first television series set inside the canon of the film world. And while it's geared towards kids and tweens, they better be the kind who can handle their scares. Why? Because Steven Spielberg says so.

"When I came aboard, I was told that when DreamWorks pitched the idea to Steven, his only comment was basically, 'Don't do the kiddie version of it. It has to feel like *Jurassic*'," showrunner Scott Kreamer tells Red Alert about the tone mandated for the show. "So, when [consulting producer] Zack (Stentz) and I went in with the DreamWorks people to pitch it to Netflix, we were very clear it's for kids but the stakes have to be real. Not everybody that appears in the show is going to make it."

MORE THAN MILD PERIL

The conceit of the series is that it takes place during the events of *Jurassic World*, as six teenagers from all walks of life are the inaugural visitors at a brand-new adventure camp on the opposite side of Isla Nublar. What's supposed to be a problem-free trip goes from Slush Puppies to screams in two shakes of a T rex's tail.

As a long-time animation industry writer and producer, Kreamer admits he's well aware that having the opportunity to avoid churning out a lightweight version of a major IP project for kids is a true rarity. "You don't have the stakes this real, or the time to tell interpersonal stories," he says of many other projects he's worked on.



"Yay, live dinosaurs! What could go wrong?"

"With *Camp Cretaceous*, we don't want to show anything too gory or graphic, but as far as subject matter and stakes, we don't pull too many punches," he continues. "Between the sounds of the dinosaurs and the actual peril, it's scary. We don't want to turn off younger viewers, but it's for real."

Attached to the project since June 2018, Kreamer says *Camp Cretaceous* has been treated as part of the entire evolving *Jurassic World* universe from the get-go. As such, *Jurassic World* executive producer Colin Trevorrow has been extremely involved in the show's creation as a frequent contributor to the writers' room.

"He's a wonderful storyteller and really collaborated with us along the lines. And he has all the information as far as canon goes, like what's coming in *Dominion* and all those things that can help inform us. Plus there's also a lot of information that Universal has regarding timelines, and dinosaurs that could and couldn't be on the island."

From that primordial stew came forth the eight episodes of season one. Kreamer says he and the writers watched *Jurassic World* on repeat to find the entry points for their ensemble of characters. "We tried to insinuate our kids, in a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fashion, to where they could be interacting

Kids, probably about to be of the meddling variety.





**"Oi mate,
wind your
neck in!"
"Shut up, Ed."**

with the events of the movie, or come upon scenes that had happened in the movie. A great deal of time was plotting out the logistics of where they are going to be, and then from there fleshing out the character stories and exciting set-pieces."

Much like Tim, the charming, knock-kneed dino expert in *Jurassic Park*, Camp Cretaceous' Darius fills that role of the enthusiastic but wise exposition kid who knows his dinos. "What's fun with Darius is he's the youngest of all

the kids," Kreamer enthuses. "You want him to be an underdog and beat the odds, because we have stacked the odds against all these kids in

the series. I've worked on plenty of shows where the lead character becomes the least interesting character and in this, we have a hero you can root for. I think there will be a lot of dinosaur-loving kids watching this and they will see themselves in Darius. Plus Paul Mikél Williams has done such a wonderful job voicing him."

As for the dinosaurs themselves, Kreamer says audiences shouldn't

expect to have to lower their standards in order to watch this show. "We've been really lucky to get the actual dino models and some of the sets from *Jurassic World*. They are way too complex for us to use, but they're a starting point, and our designers simplified.

"When I look at the show after it's been rendered and colour-corrected, I've never seen anything like it on TV. We feel like there is a lot more story to tell with these characters. There's more stories to be told, and hopefully we'll tell them." **TB**

Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous starts streaming on Netflix from 18 September.



► SCI-FACT!

The house used in *Ghosts*, West Horsley Place, is owned by former *University Challenge* host Bamber Gascoigne.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Crowded House

Tom Kingsley, director of delightful BBC sitcom **Ghosts**, discusses series two – and the hassles of Covid-19

LAST YEAR AN UNASSUMING COMEDY series named *Ghosts* became a hit and surprised everybody – much to the delight of the show's director, Tom Kingsley, who helmed its entire six-episode run and has just done the same for series two. "When we made the first series I thought it was good," he tells Red Alert, "but then some of my coolest friends liked it, so I knew it was cool."

So cool, in fact, that not only was it given two more series by the BBC, it was also snapped up by CBS for an American remake. "They've found a really good spin on everything," Kingsley reveals, along with a few tantalising across-the-pond changes that we're not permitted to reveal (yet). Sadly, the filming of the US pilot was postponed by the Covid-19 crisis, and so it will be a while before we get to see how the oh-so-British series is translated for American tastes. But the good news is that the lockdown didn't have too much of an impact on the shooting of *Ghosts'* second series here in the UK: in the end the production was simply shut down one day early, just before the government made this compulsory.

"We felt a bit uncomfortable keeping everybody on," says Kingsley. "We got rid of a lot of crowd scenes the last couple of days of filming. On our last morning of shooting we had an emergency meeting with all the ghosts – ie the six writers and executive producers; that's what we call them, the ghosts – and they were in make-up as their plague victim characters. So we were in the trailer at 7.00am with people in ludicrous outfits talking seriously about how we could change the schedule to stop early. That scene sums up what's quite fun about working with the writers! They're so silly, but they also take it very seriously and are very involved. It's funny seeing them switch modes from playful and trying to make each other laugh to thinking quite rigorously about the show."

BUDGET BARRY LYNDON

With filming in the can, the series was then assembled from home, with Kingsley liaising with editor Mike Holliday via Google Docs. That just about worked, but the director admits that social distancing was tougher at the effects stage. "The producers aren't allowed to be in the same room as me at the post-production house, so that was a bit hard. But the main thing is, we've been very lucky."

Ghosts' first series saw a couple move into a crumbling stately home, only to discover it teeming with an oddball array of ghosts – recognisable to viewers as the creative talent behind *Horrible Histories* and *Yonderland*. With that format established, we're now ready to learn more about

It's like every Perry and Croft sitcom in one.

Ben Willbond photobombs Tom Kingsley. Typical actor...



the spooks' respective backstories. "There are more flashbacks, not necessarily about the ghosts' deaths, but about stuff in their pasts," promises Kingsley. One such scene focuses on mournful poet Thomas (Mathew Baynton) and was the director's favourite day of filming. "We were in the 1820s; we redecorated the house and had all these extras in period costume. It felt like *Barry Lyndon* in my head: 'Wow, we're making a movie!' But because it's a TV comedy, you're trying to film a period drama in two and a half days. We try to make it look lavish: it's an ambitious show. The budget is basically no bigger than an ordinary comedy with people in a modern flat. We just push it far."

There's been so much pushing, in fact, that Kingsley claims that series two will be bigger and better than series one. "It's more exciting, there's more heart to it," he declares, adding that there are three or four moments across the series that make him cry every time he watches them. ("They're nice cries, though," he hastens to add.) "Some of the episodes are so ambitious," he adds. "There's one in particular where we go into how one of the ghosts dies – we go really deep into a ghost's backstory and I think

it's going to blow people away. There's a very action-packed finale, too. It's been more challenging to film. Also, in the first series there were quite a lot of scenes of the ghosts sitting around chatting, which are fine, but it gets a bit more exciting when you split the ghosts apart and follow one or two of them on a little adventure of their own. So it's more dynamic. Overall it's the same show, but better."

Several episodes have already been penned for *Ghosts'* third series, so the future looks bright. Well, unless any exorcists ever turn up at Button Hall... "That would be really exciting," Kingsley laughs, before adding enigmatically, "There's something along those lines in this series, actually!" **JN**

Ghosts series two will air on the BBC in late September.



AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

- The axe falls on **Penny Dreadful: City Of Angels**, **I Am Not Okay With This** and **The Society** after just one season.
- **Supernatural**'s Jensen Ackles to play Soldier Boy in **The Boys** season three.
- Talks about potential **X-Men: The Animated Series** revival at Disney+.
- Nickelodeon premieres CG-animated **Star Trek: Prodigy** in 2021.
- **Crawl**'s Kaya Scodelario rumoured for Amazon's **The Lord Of The Rings**.
- Disney+ bringing us **The Lego Star Wars Holiday Special** on 17 November.
- Bek Smith adapting Mark Millar's **Reborn** for Netflix.
- Peacock's **Jade City** will adapt Fonda Lee's *The Green Bone Saga*.
- Terence Stamp playing Giacomo Paradisi in season two of **His Dark Materials**.
- **The Ren & Stimpy Show** set for revival at Comedy Central.
- Kevin Smith masterminding animated **The Green Hornet**, focusing on a new generation of crimefighters.
- Riz Ahmed and Octavia Spencer starring in SF thriller **Invasion** for Amazon/Film4.

BBC

► SCI-FACT!

In an early version of the *Scream 3* script, Mortimer's character was revealed to be a second Ghostface killer.

ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

Scare Home

Emily Mortimer on **Relic**, her thrill-filled Australian horror with a twist



THERE'S A LOT MORE TO THE haunted house story of *Relic* than a smattering of sinister shadows, stifled sounds and an ever-growing sense of dread. Sure, there's an ominous creak or two to be heard inside a crumbling country home – but first-time writer/director Natalie Erika James adds a multi-generational twist to the action, along with an insidious presence and a heartfelt theme of ageing and dementia.

"This is a story about a family coping with someone who has dementia," explains Emily Mortimer, who plays the lead role of Kay. "It's about the ramifications, as well as the real-life horror, of dealing with an elderly relative who starts losing their grip on reality."

"There's no horror film that's as scary as the horror of real life," she adds. "Especially when it comes to people getting older. It's a really horrifying and scary process when you have to say goodbye to people you love, or when you watch the people you love decline and disintegrate, both mentally and physically. However, just like in this film, it's also very beautiful, very deep and very important. I think Natalie really tapped into that in *Relic* in a way that was audacious, visceral and clever – but also really moving."

Most of the unnerving horror was filmed in the Australian city of Melbourne, where a number of locations were used to create the haunted and decaying mansion at the heart of the story. "We shot at a real house in a very normal, suburban Melbourne street, as well as another house in the countryside," recalls Mortimer. "Then there was also the third element, which was an extraordinary labyrinth. The labyrinth was built inside a studio, and it



Robyn Nevin (Edna) was in two of the *Matrix* films.

was intense. There were corridors leading into more corridors or blind corners and it felt like we were inside there for weeks, but it was probably only three or four days."

Why were those scenes the most gruelling? "You have to dredge up a lot of emotion, but you're also having to use your imagination because it's not like any of us have ever been stuck in the rooms of our mother's house with a sinister figure chasing us around... If you don't come up with real emotion for the camera, the whole thing falls flat. It had to be real terror, which was tough. I feel like I lost my mind in that labyrinth! I was so happy when that part of the film was done."

With cinemas slow to reopen around the world, studios are taking huge risks by launching movies right now – but Mortimer has high hopes for the sinister story of *Relic*. "It's impossible to know what people are going to respond to when there's a pandemic going on, but I hear that horror films have been playing well," the actress explains. "I think there's something about a horror film that always feels like a bit of an escape, even though



Pfft. And they have the gall to call this work.



Bella Heathcote was in *Neighbours*. Obviously.



"I'M COLD AND
IT'S WET AND
I WANT TO GO
HOME!"

it's dealing with some really scary shit. I think Natalie has managed to create a film that is both a perfect example of its genre and is escapist, even though there were almost times where I was laughing with the audaciousness of it and the bold craziness of it. They use clever and brilliant devices to make it a real thrill ride, but she's also managed to transcend the genre and make it something that is very affecting – but not in a depressing way. I found it very cathartic, beautiful and extraordinary, despite the fact that you're seeing some of the craziest moments of film."

Mortimer is no stranger to the horror genre. "Wes Craven gave me my first break in

Hollywood with *Scream 3*," she reveals. "I was very proud of that horror film. In some ways, I feel like Wes Craven was my mentor. I got the job during a trip to visit my husband in LA, who was my boyfriend at the time.

"I queued up for an audition with all of these girls that looked like they were so much more perfect for the part than me – but for some reason Wes took a liking to me. I ended up staying on to shoot the movie and I found myself being chased down the corridors of these 1930s mansions in the Hollywood Hills by somebody in a *Scream* mask. It was a crazy but amazing way to discover Los Angeles. Never in a million years would I have dreamt

that that would have been in my destiny, but it was."

But despite *Scream 3* providing her breakout role, Mortimer isn't a fan of the horror genre. "It's true," she confesses with a giggle. "I am not a big horror aficionado at all, although there are certain horror films that I love. I feel like the horrors I adore are the movies which transcend the genre, like *Rosemary's Baby*, *Get Out* and *The Shining*. They used the genre to do something interesting and new, which feels really cool to me. And *Relic* is no different." **AT**

Relic is due for a simultaneous theatrical/digital release on 30 October.

► SCI-FACT!

Although Keane is best known for his Disney work, one early job was as a layout artist on *Star Trek: The Animated Series*.

FIRST LOOK!

Love & Rockets

Renowned animator Glen Keane tells all about his charming family fantasy *Over The Moon*

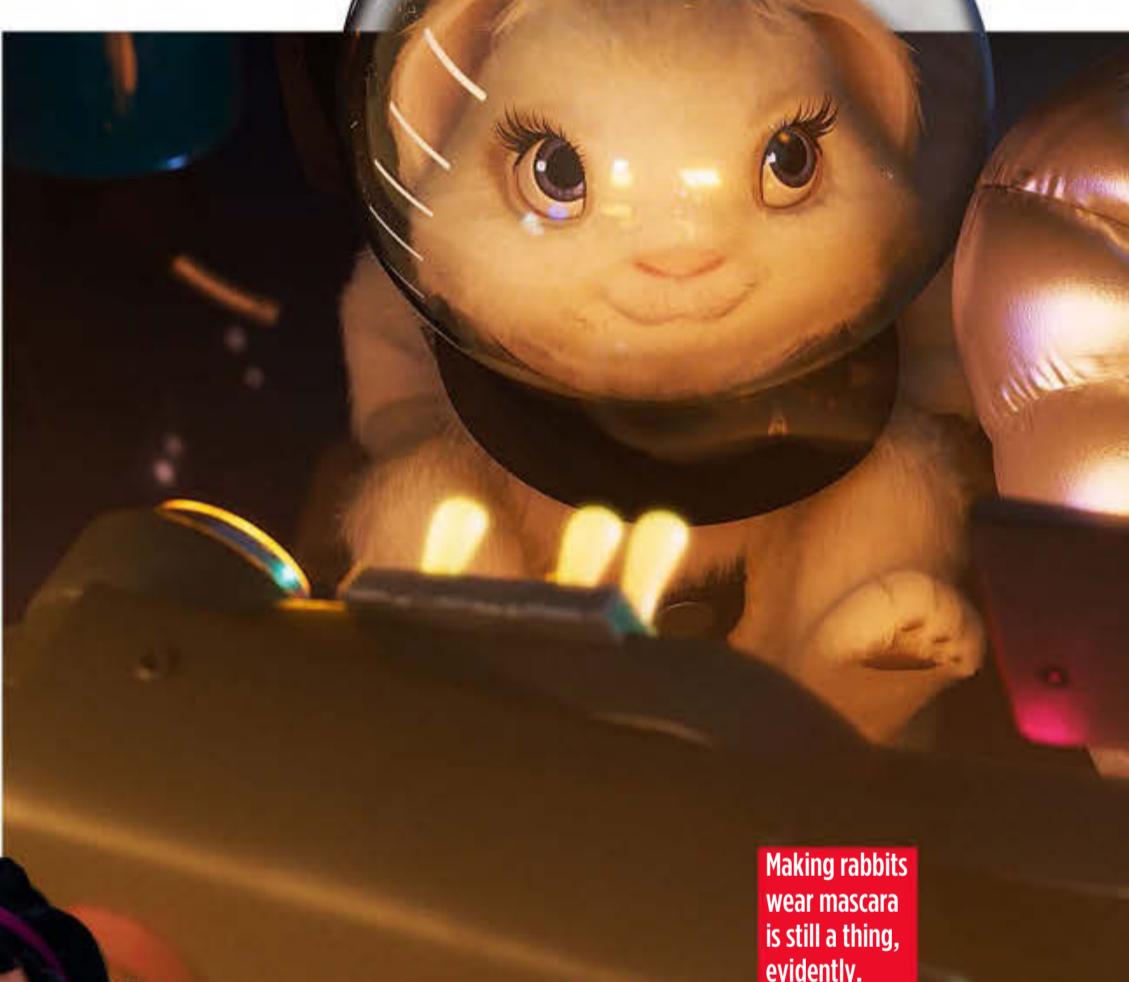
→ WHAT UNITES YOUR FAVOURITE DISNEY films? If they include the likes of *Aladdin*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Pocahontas* then chances are the answer is Glen Keane. The animator built an incredible career with the House of Mouse (this was the fella who designed Ariel herself, after all) before he departed to do his own thing, winning an Oscar for his short film *Dear Basketball* along the way. Now he's ready to reveal his first full-length feature as a director: the animated musical *Over The Moon*.

In the film, young Fei Fei (voiced by newcomer Cathy Ang) is mourning a terrible family loss when she learns the story of Chang'e – the Chinese moon goddess. She sets out to prove Chang'e's existence by building a rocket to go and visit her. For Fei Fei it's not simply about a trip to the moon and back, but an attempt to bring a little joy back to her family.

"The story really touched me," says Keane of why he took on the project. "For me it's always about the characters. My first question was, 'Can I live in the skin of this character? Do I believe in what she believes?' When I was a kid I just believed in things you couldn't see. I'm still that way as an adult. This story really touched me."

Much of the film is set in China, and Chinese culture is integral to its look and feel. "At the very beginning of production we [the producers] went to visit this wonderful little town that was like a mini-Venice. That's where the story really takes place. We were walking around and I said, 'I wish we could go inside one of the houses and see what it's like inside'. Our guide goes up to a house, knocks on the door and says, 'We have some visitors from Hollywood'. The door opens and there's a group of elderly folk playing Mahjong. I got my sketchbook out and they were all so open and free. That experience is in every frame of the film."

"... so you see, we're all going to die someday."



Making rabbits wear mascara is still a thing, evidently.



Bringing life to the film's characters is a cast which includes *Hamilton*'s Phillipa Soo as Chang'e, Ken Jeong as Fei Fei's cutesy companion Gobi, plus *Killing Eve* star Sandra Oh and the once (and future?) Sulu, John Cho. Soo was already very familiar with the story of Chang'e when she took on the part. "I knew her from a beautifully illustrated children's book by Amy Tam called *The Moon Lady*. When I first read the script, I was so excited to bring a modern twist to this story."

Cho cites the film's warm depiction of Chinese family life as one of the reasons he signed on to the picture. He is also full of praise for his director. "Glen is a very empathetic person. He was my connection to the other characters at all times. As a planet we're struggling with our capacity for empathy and



understanding each other. To have this character, this little girl experiencing the greatest grief you could possibly imagine... For me this movie is an exercise in understanding our common humanity."

A real-life loss brought an added personal resonance for many of the cast and crew, with the death of screenwriter Audrey Wells in 2018. Producer Peilin Chou says: "Audrey had such a strong connection with Fei Fei, this really strong girl who loves science. About a year into production she shared with me that she was sick and she didn't know how much time she had left, but that she had written this script as a love letter to her daughter and to her husband, with a wonderful message about what happens when you lose someone – that the love lasts forever. She told me it was the most important script she had ever written." Happily, Wells

was able to see an early version of the film. "She was so thrilled," says Chou. "She really, really loved it."

Keane has nothing but praise for Netflix, who will stream the film. "It was incredible! There was real creative freedom and that was essential for the choices that we were making with the film. It's wonderful to be able to follow a vision all the way to the end and be supported." But although he's no longer working for the House of Mouse, Keane is clear that his work ethic remains the same. "My mentor always said, 'Glen, don't animate what the character is doing, animate what the character is *feeling*.' I feel like I get Fei Fei. She believes the impossible is possible. And that's kinda me." **ws**

Over The Moon is released in cinemas on 16 October and streams on Netflix from 23 October.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Rev up your Light Cycles! *Lion's* Garth Davis bringing *Tron 3* to the screen for Disney. Jared Leto stars and produces.



→ **Christopher Eccleston** reprising the Ninth Doctor for Big Finish. A 12-part series of full-cast audio dramas debuts May 2021.

→ James Wan producing movie version of *Knight Rider*.

→ James Hawley's reportedly virus-themed (up!) *Star Trek 4* back-burnered at Paramount.

→ Rejoice, criminal lowlife - Rocksteady Studios (of *Batman: Arkham Asylum/City/Knight* fame) turning *Suicide Squad* into a videogame.

→ *Little Woods* and *Candyman* revival helmer Nia DaCosta signed for *Captain Marvel* sequel.

→ Tom Hanks in talks to play Geppetto in Robert Zemeckis's live action *Pinocchio*.

→ Tig Notaro replacing Chris D'Elia in Zack Snyder's *Army Of The Dead*.

→ Thwip! *Spider-Man 3* snags *Avatar 2*'s abandoned 17 December 2021 release slot.

CINDY ORD/GETTY

► SCI-FACT!

Space Invaders creator Tomohiro Nishikado surprised the filmmakers by arriving at the shoot with his original drawings for the game.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Arcade, Fire!

New gaming documentary series **High Score** showcases the creatives beyond the code



GAMERS HAVE A TENDENCY TO know absolutely everything about their gaming obsessions. There are certain universals, like knowing the basic timeline of *Spacewar!* to Atari to Nintendo to PlayStation and beyond, but what about the stories behind the big titles and consoles?

Now two female gamers/filmmakers, Melissa Wood and France Costrel, have unlocked for audiences some real characters in the videogame industry whom you may have never known about. In *High Score*, their six-part documentary series, they showcase an astounding array of creators and innovators, both known and unknown, who have had a lasting impact on the gaming landscape.

"We've always looked at games like a universal language for everybody around the world to relate to," director Costrel tells Red Alert. "And when you play a game, it doesn't matter your gender or your age, your religion, where you're from, or what your socio-economic background might be, we all

just want to have fun and reach that high score. That was really something that mattered to us. And with that, we're also showing the story behind videogames."

From the Japanese creator of *Space Invaders* to a black, queer videogame executive who introduced players of colour to *Madden NFL*, *High Score* shines a light on the people who have made a lot of impact without a lot of fanfare. "We have quite a bit of diversity overall," showrunner Wood says of their mandate to reveal unknown stories.

"It was so important for us to really find that diversity, because the goal of the series was to deliver to gamers, but we also wanted to deliver to people who might be more passive gamers. We wanted to make a show that was interesting to somebody who just really wanted interesting stories. Those stories had to be surprising and diverse and inclusive."

As well as making use of a mix of personal archival footage, rare stock-footage finds, clever recreations and talking head

segments, *High Score* also features bespoke animations that are both colourful and comedic, to set the framing of its subjects apart. Wood explains, "We wanted to tell these stories in a way where the visuals feel as surprising as the games themselves. We did want them to look and feel kind of game-like, but we also wanted them to reflect the humans behind them as well. What we really tried to do was straddle the line: we didn't want it to feel completely videogamey and devoid of humanity. But we wanted it to celebrate the subject as well."

High Score tracks the industry up to the first-person shooter classic *Doom*, but there's obviously a wealth of other paths which could be explored relating to games which have come since then. Wood laments, for instance, that they couldn't fit her personal passion of *The Sims* into the mix, but that's certainly a topic to dig into if they get a season two. "There's just an infinite amount of possibilities, as you can tell," she enthuses. **TB**

High Score is streaming on Netflix now.



► SCI-FACT!

Back in 1991, Dorkin wrote and drew an adaptation of *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*. It was his first work for Marvel.



WRITER/ARTIST EXCLUSIVE

Drawn To Be Wyld

Evan Dorkin and Roger Langridge take the dude buddies on the road in Dark Horse's new spin-off comic, ***Bill & Ted Are Doomed***



DESCRIBED BY WRITER

Evan Dorkin as "a kind of a side quest," Dark Horse spin-off series *Bill & Ted Are Doomed* is both a prequel and a sequel, bridging the gap between 1991's *Bogus Journey* and the recently released *Face The Music*. Set in the year 2000, it charts how their band Wyld Stallyns falls out of favour after embarking upon a disastrous world tour.

"The year dovetailed with a specific event mentioned in the *Face The Music* script, which was a nice turn of events," says Dorkin, who has teamed up with artist Roger Langridge. "You don't have to read it to know the Bill and Ted story, but it fills in some gaps and explores the beginning of their slide into obscurity, as seen in *Face The Music*."

Along with *Bogus Journey*'s robot Bill and Ted, and shape-changing alien Station, *Doomed* also features a cameo from time-travelling agent Rufus, played in the first two films by the late George Carlin. "Rufus has a small role in the comic – based on the third movie continuity he couldn't appear in the past,

but I wanted him to show up as a nod to the fans," explains Dorkin. He also includes Bill and Ted's wives Joanna and Elizabeth along with their respective daughters Billy and Thea, who at this point in the story are both nine years old. "That turned out to be a lot of fun – especially because of the way Roger portrayed them."

"I had to tweak them to fit the year the comic is set, so they won't look a whole lot like they do in the film as our versions are much younger," adds Langridge, who also hasn't attempted to replicate Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter's likenesses too closely. "My versions of Bill and Ted are somewhat impressionistic and cartoony, but hopefully they capture the essence of their characters as far as possible." SJ

Bill & Ted Are Doomed #1 is out on 9 September from Dark Horse.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Behind The Mask

Christopher Cantwell is taking **Iron Man** back to basics, with a little help from Alex Ross

→ Tony Stark is going back to his roots in the Armoured Avenger's latest series, released as the adjectiveless *Iron Man*. As writer Christopher Cantwell notes, it's actually the 625th issue of Shell-Head's various titles.

"That's a massive tapestry of legacy, and we're not throwing all of that out," Cantwell tells Red Alert. "What it really means is we're going to dig down and try to find the character's fundamental core and generate the next chapter of his story from there."

While Cafu is illustrating the interiors, Iron Man's suit has been redesigned by Alex Ross, who also supplies the covers. "I said I wanted to see Tony's eyes again in the helmet," he says. "Alex has brought the suit back to that iconic feel of what many of us unanimously agree is Iron Man. But he's also incorporated an essential modernity into the look. This isn't just a nostalgia piece. He's detailed how the armour would work and contract and assemble. He's a mad genius!"

Tony is initially pitted against classic Avengers villain Michael Korvac. "Korvac hails from the '70s, and in the same way, narratively, he's trying to reach a former glory, just as Tony is," explains Cantwell, who also promises appearances by some other familiar faces.

"Korvac will also be working with some recognisable rascals. A lot of the supporting cast should make readers go, 'Oh wow, *that* person', and then allow them to see them in a new context; which is particularly true of Hellcat, who ends up being Tony's right-hand for a while."

"But the biggest threat Tony is going to face is his own ego, which eclipses the sun! I'm also trying to get Tony out of his comfort zone, so he's not sitting in the safety net of his usual posse. He's scrambling for allies here and there, and continuing to really piss people off," he adds with a satisfied chuckle. SJ

Iron Man #1 is out on 16 September.



SCI-FACT!

Black Beth was originally created for an early '70s comic called *Scream!* (different to *Scream!*), which never saw the light of day.



EDITOR EXCLUSIVE

Terror Tales

Misty and **Scream!** return with another Halloween special to sink your teeth into



AFTER THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR'S solo outing last year, Rebellion is once again bringing classic IPC horror weeklies *Misty* and *Scream!* together for a third anthology of spine-chilling strips. While Kek-W and Simon Coleby reunite on *Thunder's* vampiric World War One flying ace *Black Max*, and Alec Worley and DaNi continue the fantastical adventures of *Black Beth*, Cavan Scott and Vincenzo Riccardi take charge of the Prince of Darkness's excursions in modern-day Britain in *The Dracula File*.

"Cavan pitched a really intriguing story that reintroduces an old character from the original strip," editor Keith Richardson tells Red Alert. "It's bloody and brutal, with a fantastic twist, and I wanted Vincenzo's art to show that off and really get in your face. With *Black Max*, we wrap up the first story arc in spectacular fashion, while Alec and DaNi's *Black Beth* tale is a spooky little one-off, which gives the reader a little more of a look into Beth's world. I'm pretty certain that we will be seeing more from Beth in the future."

Richardson also reveals that "Olivia Hicks and John Lucas bring on the coulrophobia with *Bumps In The Night*, Greek mythology meets high drama in *The Aegis* by Kristyna Baczynski and Mary Safro, and Maura McHugh and Robin Henley transport us to a spooky Victorian London in *The Thief Of Senses*". There are also a trio of self-contained stories that evoke *Misty*'s spooky spirit. "We've ramped up the one-off *Misty* strips for this special," says Richardson, admitting that *Misty*'s lack of continuing characters has proved to be a problem.

"*Misty* and *Scream!* are also very different tonally," he adds. "I was tasked from the beginning to merge the two titles, and overall I think we've done well. But kids' humour titles aside, ongoing anthology titles featuring short one-off stories wouldn't last too long, as readers want to invest in characters and longer strips." SJ

The Misty & Scream! Halloween Special 2020 is out on 30 September.

NEW AUTHOR

FINBAR HAWKINS

MEET THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR FOR AARDMAN ANIMATIONS BEHIND *WITCH*



Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Evey is 15, and along with her younger sister Dill has been raised in "the witching way" by her mother. But she's looking to make her own way, to be free of her family. That's when the witch hunters arrive and change her life completely...

Is magic a real thing in this version of the 17th century?

→ This was a time of turmoil, Puritanism against both Catholicism and ancient paganism. "Magick" is channelled through belief, strong emotion, the natural world. When Evey starts to understand this, then it's a very real thing indeed, but emotions are hard to keep in check, and magick is an unruly thing.



Did you have to do much research?

→ I did a lot of reading to place it during the unrest of 1646 – how the Civil Wars and the witch-hunts affected communities. The most chilling discovery was how many people lost their lives: 190,000 out of a population of five million, a greater proportion than World War One.

What's your one piece of advice for would-be authors?

→ The most important thing would be to keep going! Finishing a first draft is great, but writing is essentially rewriting, so be prepared to take feedback, listen to gatekeepers and editors, and rewrite and edit your work to make it as good as it can be. IB

Witch is released on 1 October, published by Zephyr.



Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

HOST WITH THE MOST

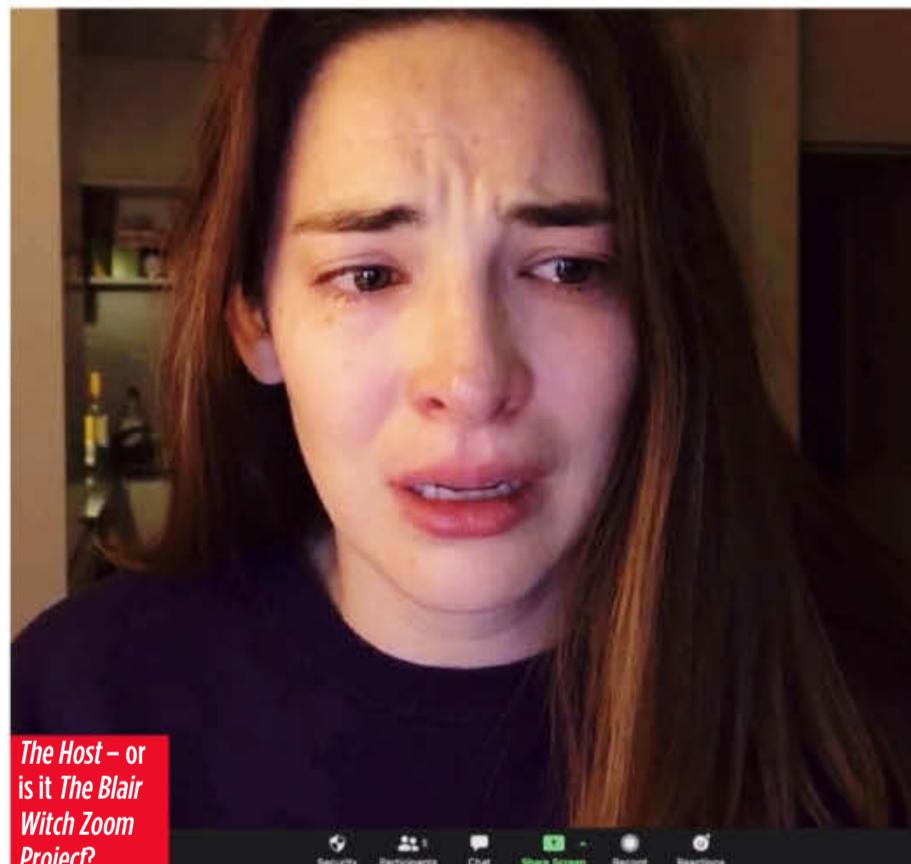
The best thing to have come out of being stuck at home for months is **Host**, a movie made in 12 weeks and available to stream on Shudder. It's the most zeitgeisty and frankly ingenious movie around, and destined to be the defining horror of 2020. It was directed by Rob Savage, who wanted to challenge people's expectations about what was possible in isolation. He himself says that if he'd read about a horror movie all done via Zoom he'd have thought, "Oh fuck off!", but this is infinitely better than it sounds.

Employing clever stunt work, pyrotechnics, prosthetics and smart bits of tech, it's legit impressive, and scary in its own right, though also a perfect snapshot of where we are right now. It's about an online seance which invites an entity into the homes of five friends (played by real-life mates). The whole thing feels real and relatable, and there's a good joke about having to hide a cough with a fart because of Covid-19. With *The Dead* director Howard J Ford having also made a lockdown feature, *The Lockdown Hauntings*, this is the shape of things to come.

SHADOW PLAY

There's more lockdown cleverness in Australian live film experience **In The Shadow It Waits**. This is a super-innovative horror event which plays somewhere between theatre and film, as the cast performs and edits the movie in real-time: it boasts 61 scenes and 58 camera setups, with actors based in different Australian states who haven't even met director Michael Beets in person. While not quite as good as *Host* as a finished piece it delivers something else: remote horror in real

Screw you, lockdown! Horror fights back! They can lock us down but they will never take our horror...



Dreadful Old Movie

Romero's 1978 classic *Dawn Of The Dead* is getting a seven-disc (!) 4K/Blu-ray release, featuring 4K scans of all three cuts, and a disc of bonuses (many new). Also included: three CDs of Goblin's score and the library cues used, a 150-page hardback, and the novelisation. Prepare to lurch down your local mall on 27 October.



time, with a live Q&A after. Sadly the UK dates are done for now – bless them, these guys were getting up to perform at 6.00am for 9.00pm our time – but keep an eye on intheshadowitwaits.com in case more pop up.

ON THE BEACH

Shudder is nailing it right now with original content. As well as *Host*, **The Beach House** has also hit the service, bringing body horror grossness right when we need it. Jeffrey A Brown's excellent feature debut sees a couple retreat to a beach house for a romantic weekend and find that not only are their parents' friends staying there too, but also that something strange appears to be emanating from the sea...

A little bit Lovecraftian, a little bit Cronenbergian, plot-light but strong on performances and effects, this is well worth a watch – but skip it if you're planning on heading to the seaside anytime soon.

BLUMING MARVELLOUS

Halloween isn't far off, and Amazon Prime and the amazing Jason Blum have planned ahead, with a new series of original movies under the banner **Welcome To The Blumhouse**. The first slate of four lands this October. *The Lie* sees a couple trying to cover up a horrible crime their daughter has committed; *Black Box* follows a man with amnesia attempting an experimental treatment with side-effects; in *Evil Eye* a mother suspects her daughter's new boyfriend is connected to her past; and in *Nocturne* a notebook that belonged to a dead classmate influences a timid music student. The series showcases diverse emerging talent, with another four films due to arrive next year.

► SCI-FACT!

Music Clarke listened to while writing *Piranesi* included David Sylvian's 1986 track "Wave". She named one section of the book after it.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

A Very Big House

Jonathan Strange author Susanna Clarke talks about her long-awaited return, **Piranesi**

SIXTEEN YEARS HAVE PASSED since Susanna Clarke's multi-million-selling debut *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Now she's back with a new novel, *Piranesi*, set in a desolate labyrinth called the House, adjacent to our own world, which contains thousands of rooms (and an ocean!), and is filled with statues. It centres on the eponymous solitary researcher, who wanders its corridors, recording his findings in his journal. Clarke tells us about her inspirations.

We gather CS Lewis's Narnia book *The Magician's Nephew* was an influence...?

There are two worlds in that book which have strong connections to Piranesi's reality. One of the worlds the children visit is a very old, dying world called Charn. They spend a long time wandering through the courtyards and halls of a deserted, ruinous palace. Lewis meant this to be an utterly desolate place, literally empty and spiritually empty. But I always rather liked it. I liked the silence and the crumbling architecture and the endless, empty courtyards. I think Piranesi's world owes something to Charn. There's also a place called the Wood between the Worlds which has two striking

qualities. The first is that some of the people who come there find it a marvellous place. They feel part of that reality, part of the quietness and part of the green light. They feel absolutely content and peaceful; they never want to leave. But other people hate it. They find it a deathly place. What the second quality is, I don't intend to say, but it has an important parallel in *Piranesi*...

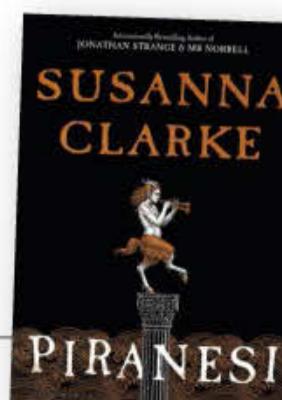
Did you do much in the way of research?

I'm a terrible researcher. I pile up books on every subject. I think I need to know *everything*. If I realise that the characters possess a number of forks, I can easily get sidetracked into reading a history of forks. For *Piranesi*, I read about the history of clouds. I thought, 'I need to know this because there are clouds in the House'. As it turned out, it was completely irrelevant. I also read Gary Lachman's *The Dedalus Book Of The 1960s*. That was much more useful. It described an intellectual landscape where psychedelia, the occult and religion butt up against each other. Very much the sort of

place where Laurence Arne-Sayles [an "anamnesiologist", who was the first to find the House] would feel at home.

Was *Piranesi* written with a particular audience in mind?

The thing is not to write for an imagined person, the thing is to find the right characters to serve the purposes of the story. In both novels I've written there's been one character who's turned up and said, "Relax, I've got this." In *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* it was Childe Mass. Whenever he appeared in a scene I felt like he pulled up a chair for me, made me a cup of tea, and told me he'd handle everything. Then he pretty much wrote the scene. In *Piranesi*, when the Prophet appeared he waved me airily aside and just wrote his own dialogue. I had to type really fast to keep up. When he'd finished, he looked round and smiled, like he was saying, "That's the way it's done". Then he strutted off! **IB**



Piranesi is out on 15 September, published by Bloomsbury.

PORTAIT © SARAH LEE

► SCI-FACT!

Creators Jeremy Burnham and Trevor Ray wrote a sequel novel, *Return To The Stones*.

Retro-active

Curios from yesteryear that never quite made it here...

100%
FAKE!

In an alternative, inflatable universe this *Children Of The Stones* product would make perfect sense. In fact, we think it still does make perfect sense. The kind of thing that would also appear attached to the first issue

of *Children Of The Stones Adventures* magazine. Kickstarter, anyone?

ART BY @ANDYDREWZ

Size Isn't Everything

Finally, Baby Yoda vinyl that isn't a Funko Pop. This 10" picture disc from Walt Disney Records features the Mandalorian on one side and the Child on the other. Both feature the theme from the live-action Star Wars series by Oscar and Grammy-award winning composer Ludwig Göransson.

£15.99, thesoundofvinyl.com



IN THE NEXT SFX



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An all-new take on the apocalyptic zombie drama

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The Turn Of The Screw gets the Netflix horror series treatment

CANDYMAN

The '90s horror icon returns

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Revisiting a classic from the *Halloween* multiverse

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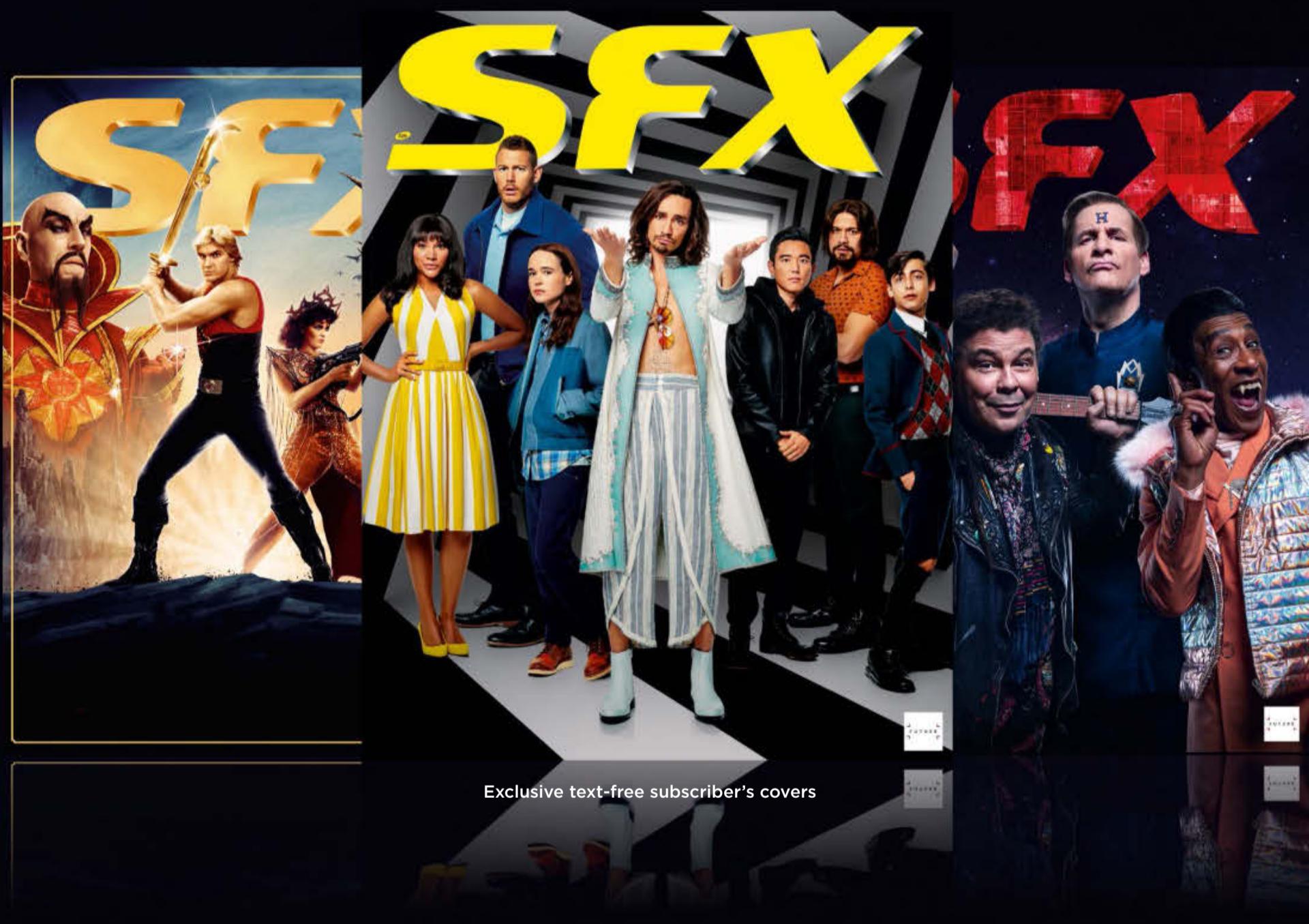
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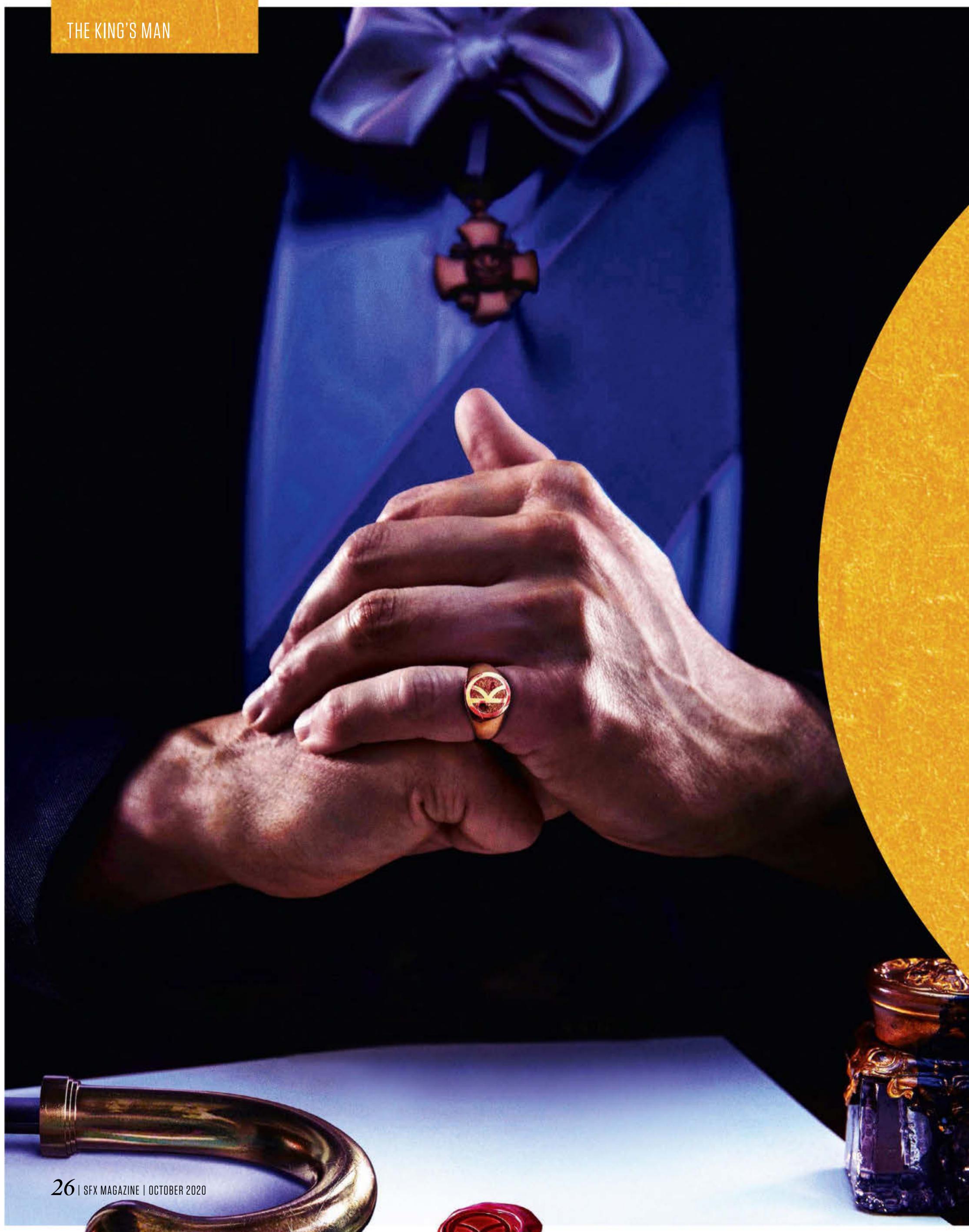


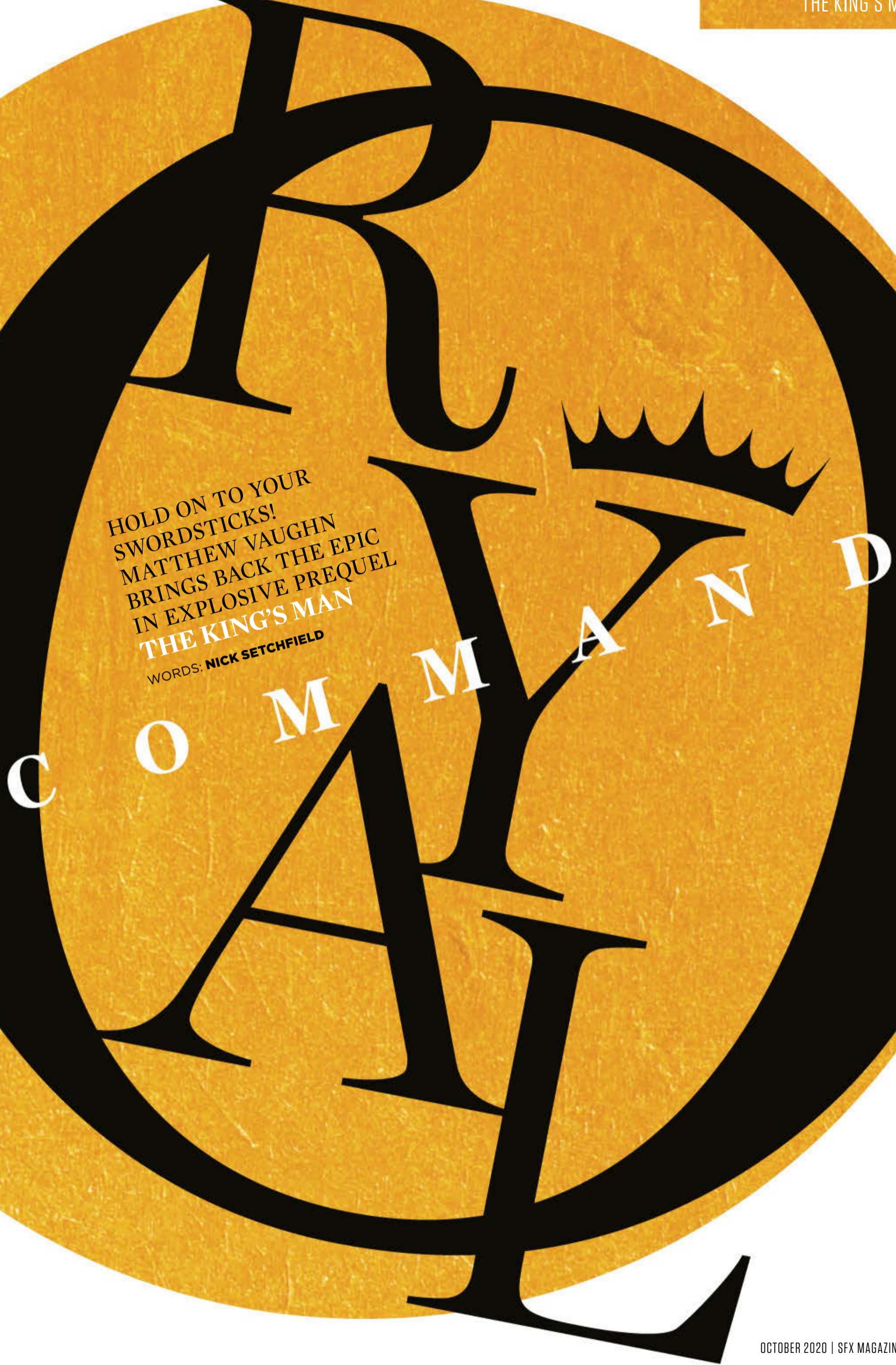
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THE KING'S MAN





HOLD ON TO YOUR
SWORDSTICKS!
MATTHEW VAUGHN
BRINGS BACK THE EPIC
IN EXPLOSIVE PREQUEL
THE KING'S MAN

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



"IT'S WHY WE GO TO THE CINEMA"

Gemma Arterton is Polly

This is one of the first films to be released amid the pandemic. Does that make it special for you?

Yes, absolutely. It just affirms exactly why we go to the cinema. It's spectacle and fun and loud and uplifting and you have to see it in the cinema. I think it makes you appreciate the magic of film. I think we've all missed that and I think we'll appreciate it when we finally get the chance to go again.

It's a period adventure, but does it have something to say about the 21st century too?

I think that the relationships are completely relevant and contemporary. A son wanting to impress his father, a father wanting to protect his son and do all the very best for his son, grief... all of these things are timeless.

The movie tells us "The world is ruled by corruption and greed".

Do you think that is still true?

It's definitely something that I think Matthew wanted to get across in his own way. And I think it's so great how this film has real pathos - it's got ethics and it has an agenda. It doesn't whack you over the head with it, but it's there. It's entertaining but it also has something to say.



"Well I don't know, he's the one you should ask..."

SOMETIMES FILMMAKING IS ABOUT entertaining the masses – all those unseen, unknowable faces in the dark. And sometimes all that graft and money and talent is about making the movie that you want to see. The kind of movie that first electrified your blood as a kid. If you can combine those two impulses, you're winning.

All immaculate tailoring and fine, upstanding ultraviolence, 2014's *Kingsman: The Secret Service* – and 2017 sequel *The Golden Circle* – scratched a cinematic itch for writer/director Matthew Vaughn: high-gloss, high-tech spycraft as defined by James Bond. New franchise extension *The King's Man* takes its cue from a quite different breed of big-screen escapism, one that made history its canvas.





"This whole movie came out of me thinking, 'What happened to the big epic adventure films I grew up on?' Vaughn says. "These big, big films that the family could watch. I remember as a 10-year-old liking *Gandhi* – why the fuck would I like *Gandhi* as a 10-year-old? It was the scale of it. *Lawrence Of Arabia*, *The Man Who Would Be King*..."

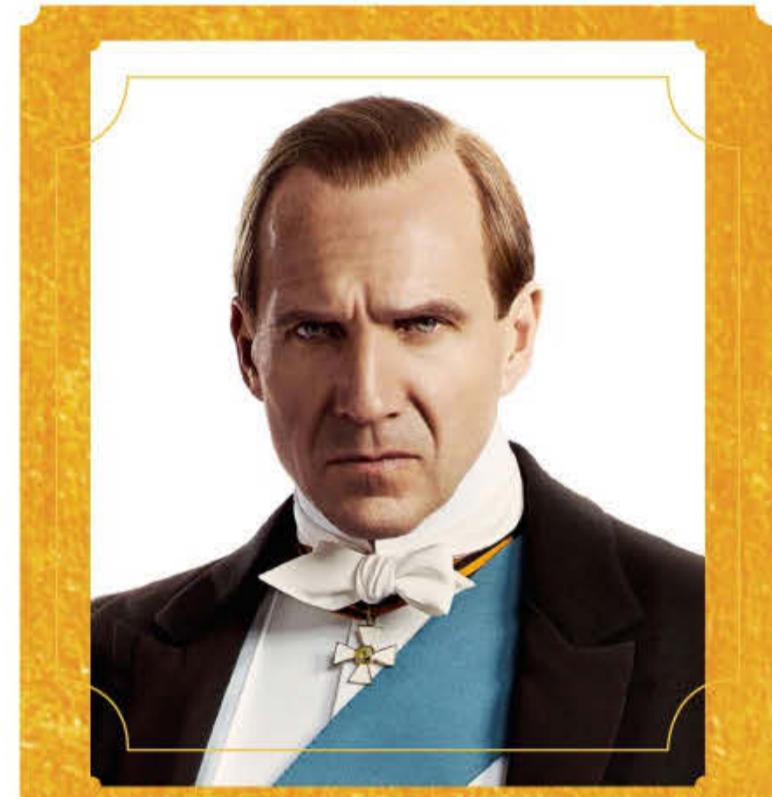
1975's Caine and Connery caper – a ripping, Raj-era yarn set in an uncharted Afghanistan – was the key influence, he admits. "My joking name for this movie is *The Man Who Would Be Kingsman!* I remember seeing that film as a kid and being blown away by it. I couldn't remember why, so I watched it again and I was shocked by the influence it's had, whether it's

“I remember seeing *The Man Who Would Be King* as a kid and being blown away by it”

Spielberg with *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*... There's a scene on a bridge which is virtually identical to *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*. It was epic, it was an adventure, it was funny, it was poignant, it had political messages, it had landscapes. It had everything. And I was like, 'That is the sort of film that I want to make.'

"And then I thought, 'Shit, now I've got to find an epic... where do these things exist? Am I going to get a book?' And I thought, 'Hold on. You wrote the story of Kingsman, where it came from, the foundations of it in World War One. You've already got it. And guess what – you can now put a franchise name onto a film that normally would never get financed in a →

“Hmm. This might be easier if we could see.”



“MATTHEW REWRITES THE FILM SPY MANUAL”

Ralph Fiennes is the Duke of Oxford



How does *The King's Man* compare to James Bond, your other spy franchise?

Matthew Vaughn rewrites the film spy manual by his style and by his imagination. He's a very individual voice in this world. I think he was initially inspired by Bond but he's redefined it. For me there's a kind of wit, there's humour. It's slightly outrageous in the other, earlier films – stuff that teased the politically correct faction, which I got a lot of pleasure out of! And Matthew owns it. I think to have one individual voice at the head of one of these big-budget franchises is really to be valued. Matthew's a very original mind and everything about this is very different from any Bond or other film like that.

It's a historical adventure, but does it have relevance for the times we're living through?

Often you have period films that reflect and echo our own time. This is about the nationalistic politics, the greedy manipulators that were operating out of narcissism and vainglory that led to the First World War. So the antagonists in the film are mostly leaders, or people who are manipulating leaders, and anyone can draw parallels with today and certain leaders and the people around them and all the shit that goes down. And the Kingsmen are in the tradition of spy heroes and action heroes who are the good guys. There's nothing more complicated than we all want to identify with people doing good and fighting the fight for good and justice. I don't think there's anything more complicated than that, and that's always relevant.

Is our world still ruled by corruption and greed?

We're living in an extraordinary time and this pandemic has really moved the goalposts for everyone. Maybe the positive side is that it creates movement and flow for addressing key issues of disparity and wealth and inequality. We're seeing all kinds of notions of authority being challenged. I think the film does present a quite attractive, ethical proposal. It's been done before, but

Matthew brings his stylistic and his wit and his lightness to this kind of chivalric notion of an independent spy agency which is going to go out and take the bad guys down to make the world a better place. It's simple but always an attractive proposal.



"THE CHALLENGE IS THE PHYSICALITY"

Djimon Hounsou is Shola

Your character's a combat expert. What's his fighting style?

Dealing with the time period of the film, we tried to keep the fighting sequences organic. They had those high-kicking ways of fighting back in the day, so we at least tried to keep that organic to the time.

What was the biggest challenge you faced?

The challenge is obviously the physicality of the character. He's very physical. That said, what I liked about the character of Shola is that it reflected the history of so many Africans who went and fought the various European wars for Europeans that nobody ever talks about, nobody ever hears about. It's nice to see the friendship of these two men develop, all the way to where he was a chaperone within his country.

How does this compare to the other *Kingsman* movies?

It still has the *Kingsman* signature but the backdrop of the story is interesting, given its time period, the history of Europe. It would be nice to have films where we enjoy the entertainment and the action and all that, but you can also learn a thing or two about our history.

“Once you start dealing with animals, water and kids, it’s always a nightmare”

million fucking years! So you’re going to get your cake and eat it. I’ll make the big epic historical adventure film that I’ve been itching to make, but I’ll give it a marketing tool to get people to watch it, and surprise people.”

Adapting the graphic novel by Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* saw Camden tearaway Gary “Eggsy” Unwin recruited and weaponised by Kingsman, the clandestine intelligence agency operating outside the British government. *The King’s Man* rewinds to the early 20th century, revealing the origin of these shadowy but dependably dapper protectors of the realm. It’s an origin forged against the backdrop of the Great War.

“Weirdly, I was thinking, ‘God, no one makes movies about World War One,’” smiles Vaughn. “Fucking 1917 coming out of the woodwork! I could never understand why, cinematically, World War One has been less used. There’s a lot of World War Two films. World War One’s a much shorter list, which also gave me room to do things differently.”

GOATS IN THE MACHINE

Ralph Fiennes is the Duke of Oxford, a swashbuckling but emotionally wounded aristo introducing his son Conrad (Harris Dickinson) to the ways of Kingsman. A dastardly international conspiracy is afoot, led by that rummest of coves Rasputin (Rhys Ifans). The forces of good include Gemma Arterton as Polly and Djimon Hounsou as Shola, the Duke’s former comrade in arms. In true Peter Sellers style, Tom Hollander plays no less than three royal personages: Britain’s King George V, Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II and Russia’s Tsar Nicholas II.

Bringing widescreen mayhem to the age of biplanes and monocles, *The King’s Man* ditches the streetwise vibe of the Eggsy movies but keeps their energy intact (*Kingsman 3* is, however, written and “ready to go”). “It’s a period piece but done in a more accessible, modern style,” says Vaughn, “while totally respecting what it is.”

And it’s a movie with its own, unique challenges, far from Eggsy’s beat. “There’s a whole sequence with goats,” sighs Vaughn. “Just saying that should answer the question of why that was tough. It was one of those things where you write it then you go, ‘Oh, fuck! How am I going to film it, all these bloody goats?’ And we had water. Once you start dealing with animals, water and kids, it’s always a fucking nightmare.”



Rasputin, the original hipster, with chums.



“Sod it, let’s go to Burton’s down the road instead.”





"And just interweaving everything I wanted to do: World War One, the period, the epicness, while having the shadow of *Kingsman* and the expectations, and that tone of going from fun and humour to poignant and sad, from historical accuracy to make-believe, and this huge cast. Bringing it all together was a balancing act, that was for sure."

But for all the outsized action, all the logistics and creative demands, the hardest scene to shoot involved nothing more than shortcrust and frangipane.

"There's a massive scene which is literally four minutes of Ralph and Rasputin, and they're just looking at each other and talking and talking," says Vaughn. "I had the worst fucking flu I've ever had – I probably had pre-Covid, for all I know – and when you're directing, you've got to pretend you're not sick, you've just got to carry on."

"It was a tough scene to shoot because it was all about a tart. Rhys had to eat a Bakewell tart. Within two days I'd say he ate 30 to 40 tarts, ↗



"YOU JUST CRANK THINGS UP!"

Rhys Ifans is Rasputin



How did you approach playing this real-life figure?
I was fully aware that this wasn't *Dr Zhivago*! But when I was offered the role I naturally went and read as much as I could, purely because it was an opportunity to learn more about Rasputin. You take what history tells you and you illuminate or you exaggerate. We make a meal of Rasputin's sexual deviance and prowess, his inhuman strength, which was well documented – whether that was due to genetics or drug-induced or whatever. You just kind of crank things up. You take the historical figure and put it through a mixing desk and turn up the volume on the bits that are required to elevate the script.

How did you create Rasputin's fighting style?

In this film Rasputin is a great fighter, and Matthew wanted to find a language that was unique and particular to Rasputin. And that language was this exquisite amalgamation between Eastern disciplines like kung fu and judo and jujitsu and what have you, and then we mix it up with Cossack and Georgian traditional dancing, which in itself is a discipline that requires as much attention as any of the others. So that took a great deal of trial and error to get something that looked dangerous and amusing. That's a real delicate balance and I think it's been achieved. I find watching the fights absolutely thrilling, just that language which I guess is unique to the *Kingsman* universe. There's a very particular form of fighting and action and combat in Matthew's own cinematic world.

So you had to learn Georgian dancing...?

I was very privileged and honoured to work with two Georgian traditional dancers who were members of a famous dance troupe from Georgia, who were just phenomenal dancers. They trained from the age of four. They were flown over to teach everyone how to achieve these huge leaps and spins. Of course what you see in the film is not all me, but I learnt enough to walk away from the film with a real respect and admiration for what I thought was some kind of folky curio, but is in fact a great dance tradition steeped in history. I walked away with great admiration for these guys, and Matthew's stunt team. In any case, I didn't embarrass myself, I don't think!



"IT'S DANGEROUS AND FUNNY!"

Tom Hollander is George V/Wilhelm II/Nicholas II



How much research did you do into these real-life characters?

I didn't do slavish research because a lot of that work has already been done by Matthew Vaughn and you are servicing his vision, so you need to inhabit his world rather than any real historical version that you could read in a biography. Obviously the Kaiser had this unfortunate withered arm, so we had fun with that - I tried to make telephone calls with it. I don't suppose he did that in reality! There's a root in historical fact and there's a crazy, fun travesty of it to entertain you. Like the idea that the villains are all connected and all want to create a world more like America and destroy the old aristocratic [order]... That could all be true, it's all half-plausible. It's not the version of history that we all know, but it's not completely mad.

How would you describe the world of this film?

Dangerous and funny - that's a very good way of describing the Matthew Vaughn world. There's an energy to the whole thing, like in the way that *Tom And Jerry* is dangerous and amusing, because people get flattened by 10-ton weights but in a way that's supposed to make you laugh.

and didn't complain once. And then I started finding it funny, and got him to eat more and more, which was probably bad. That was probably the toughest."

Vaughn began his career producing 1996's lo-fi gangland thriller *The Innocent Sleep*. Teaming with Guy Ritchie on *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels* in 1998, he made his directing debut with 2004's *Layer Cake*, the film that put Daniel Craig firmly in the frame for Bond. The past decade has seen him move into more extravagant big-screen fantasy, from *Kick-Ass* to *X-Men: First Class*, all delivered with his signature propulsive style. Does the pressure escalate with the budget?

"Weirdly, I think the smaller movies are harder than the bigger movies," he tells SFX. "With the bigger films you've got so many people, you've got money, you can sometimes buy your way out of trouble. When we made *Lock, Stock* that was the most pressure I ever had in my life. We made it for 900 grand. I had real gangsters saying they were going to blow my knees off if their part was cut out – and they couldn't act. I thought, 'I'm definitely cutting them out!' And I'd got friends to give money so I had to get their money back. It's the only time in my life I've had a fucking panic attack."

“I was 23 when I made my first picture. I was bullshitting and trying to keep it all together”

"So that was pressure. This is fun. I love it. I don't feel pressure when I'm making movies. I'm enjoying it. It's like I'm being paid to play. It's probably because I know what pressure is from when I was younger. When you're broke and you're worrying about your rent and you're making a movie and you really have no fucking idea... I was 23 when I made my first picture. I didn't have a clue what I was doing and I was bullshitting and trying to keep it all together. That was pressure. Now, you get older and it's different. Yeah, you want people to like the movie but that's ego, not pressure."

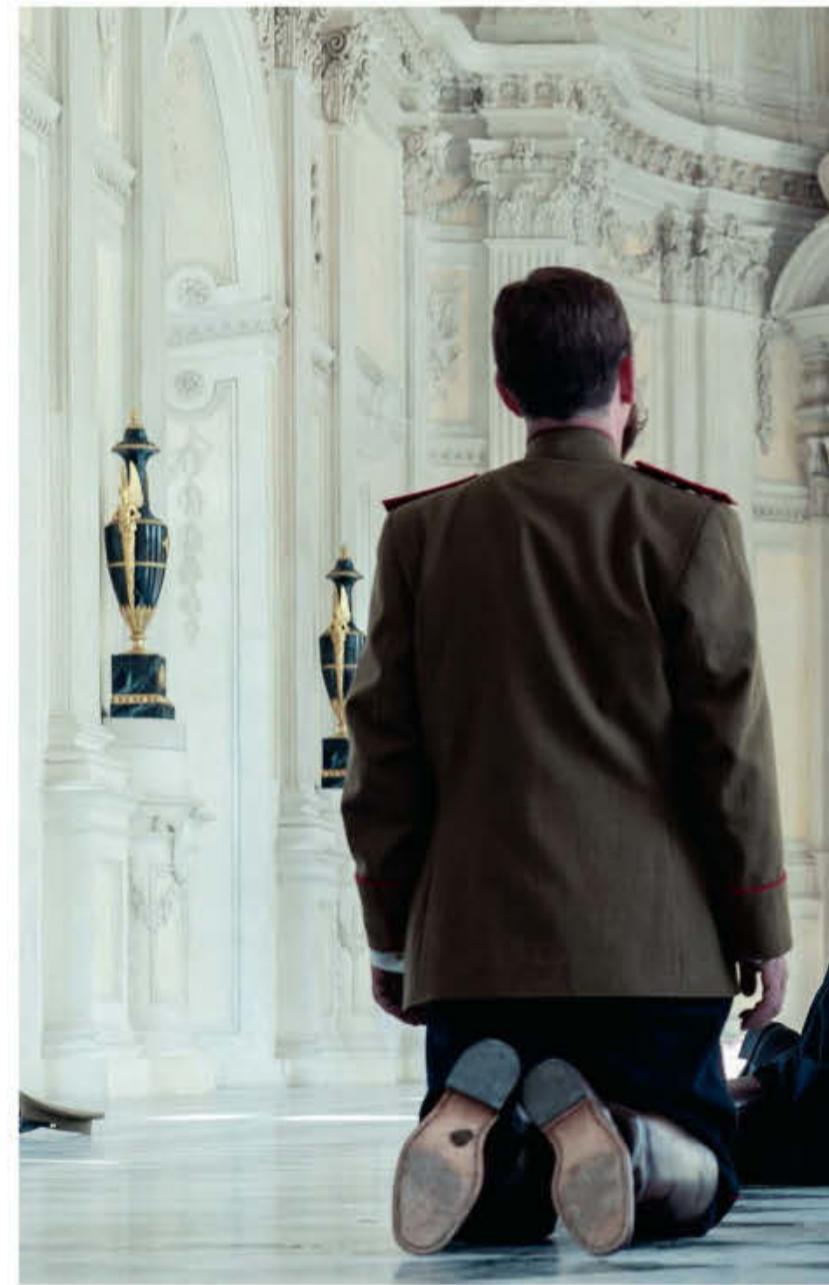
Vaughn has another agenda, beyond entertaining himself and all those people in the dark. "If you watch the *Kingsman* movies, manners maketh man. If we all abided by having good manners, etiquette, respect, we'd be a better place. I'm hoping that *The King's Man* can inspire more modern gentlemen. There's nothing wrong with some tradition and some decorum is needed right now. The films preach it but whether people will get converted, time will tell."

Stand tall. The planet needs you. Some bounder's scoffing all the Bakewell tarts. ●

The King's Man is released on 16 September.



Cheer up darlin', it might never happen.



"Not my left, your left! And mind those bombs."



"IT'S A WHOLE NEW LEVEL"

Harris Dickinson is Conrad



How does your character hold the torch of *Kingsman*?
I don't know if he necessarily holds the torch, but he's trying to. He's a young idealist. He wants to change the world and he wants to do it with his own hands. And I think that's representative of the world we're in now, and taking matters into your own hands, and fighting for causes that you believe in. I think the character is not restricted to the boundaries of who he is or where he's from. Once he exits that world he's just a young man trying to find his own strength and find his own path. That's probably all I can say without ruining the film!

How does this compare to the other *Kingsman* movies?
I think *Kingsman* fans can expect the same level of intensity, action, comedy and ridiculousness. But there's definitely a more serious undertone, a weightier undertone, because of the subject matter. Matthew didn't want to shy away from telling that with some truth and seriousness. And all of us, we didn't want to do a disservice to the struggle that that time was. But in terms of action and cinematic scope and an epic adventure story, I think it's a whole new level.

You're battling historical tyrants. Does history really repeat itself?

There have been tyrants ruling by corruption and greed throughout history. I think now we're just living in a time when there's way more transparency and way more accountability, which I think is important. It's certainly interesting seeing it played out in the film with certain figures. I think Matthew's done a really cool job of showing history but also having a twist on it.

Matthew says it only took 10 minutes to know you were the lead for this film...

I'm never sure how good I've done. I always think I've messed up in some way. Matthew was really relaxed in the audition and it gave me some form of confidence. I remember getting a call and getting the job and I was delighted. We met in London for a coffee and then we met again and I read a few pages for him and I went on my way, started another film and then a few days later he called me and said, "You want to do it or what?" In true Matthew fashion - straight to the point!

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS



RESISTANCE

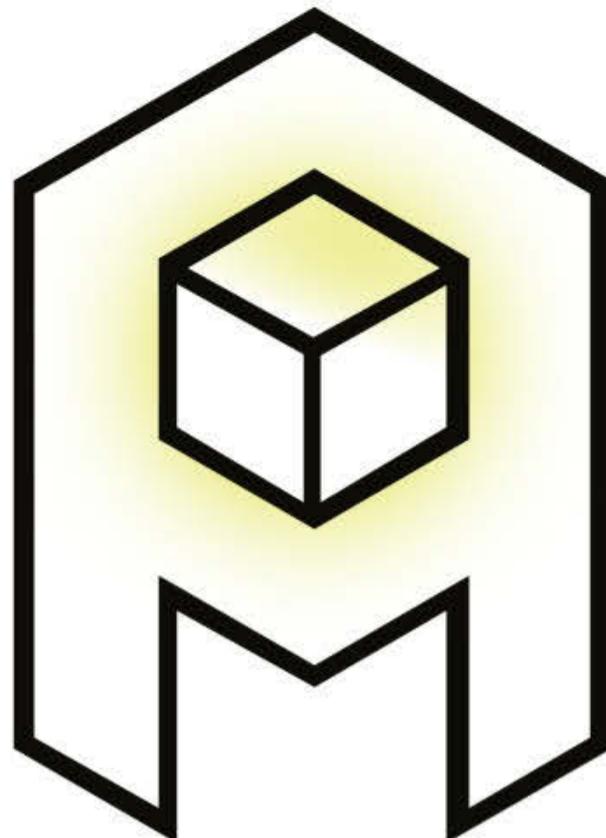


C E N T R A L S F U T I L E

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WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF
THE BORG TO STAR TREK: *THE
NEXT GENERATION* IN 1989, THE
SCENE WAS SET FOR A GAME-
CHANGING TWO-PART STORY,
AND A COMING OF AGE
CLIFFHANGER. THIRTY YEARS
ON, WE LOOK BACK AT
“THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS”

WORDS: MARK SMITH



A RED LASER SLICES THROUGH THE mist as the familiar silhouette of Patrick Stewart walks towards the screen. But it's not Captain Picard who addresses the assembled Enterprise bridge crew, it's something altogether different. "I am Locutus of Borg. Resistance... is futile."

It's 30 years since arguably the most iconic moment of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s entire run was aired. "The Best Of Both Worlds" broke new ground with the scope of its storytelling, effects and score, as well as the fact that it was *Trek*'s first season-spanning two-parter. All combined to ensure it has left a legacy not just in the *Star Trek* universe, but wider pop culture.

Although *The Next Generation* was now three years into its run, it hadn't all been plain sailing, with many fans of the original series still resistant to the new incarnation. But season three is where most fans and critics alike agree the show started to fulfil its potential. "There was, for me, a sense that the show had found its footing," says Michael Okuda, who headed up *Star Trek*'s Scenic Art Department at the time. "When we saw the fan reaction to Part I [of "Best Of Both Worlds"], we realised it had become its own entity and people liked the show for itself, not because it was a follow-on to something that was also very special."

ALL PICTURES © CBS



Lieutenant
Shelby
(Elizabeth
Dennehy).

The writers had wanted to return to the Borg ever since the cybernetic race were introduced in season two episode "Q Who". The problem was that with a force so unstoppable, figuring out how the crew could stop them presented a tough writing challenge. During the third season, producer and writer Michael Piller began to formulate an idea for the Borg's invasion of the Federation.

The story begins with the Enterprise investigating the disappearance of a remote colony which had been "scooped" off a planet, with it soon becoming apparent that the Borg are behind it. An engagement with a Borg Cube sees Picard kidnapped, assimilated and turned into Locutus, a spokesman for the Borg who leads their attack right into the heart of Federation space. Setting a course for Earth, Locutus announces the Borg's intention to force the "unconditional surrender" of the Federation itself.

Beneath the sci-fi drama there were echoes of Piller's own personal dilemma. At the time of writing he was debating whether to leave the show – a question played out through Riker's plot arc, which involved him being offered command of his own ship and asking in one scene, "Why am I still here?"

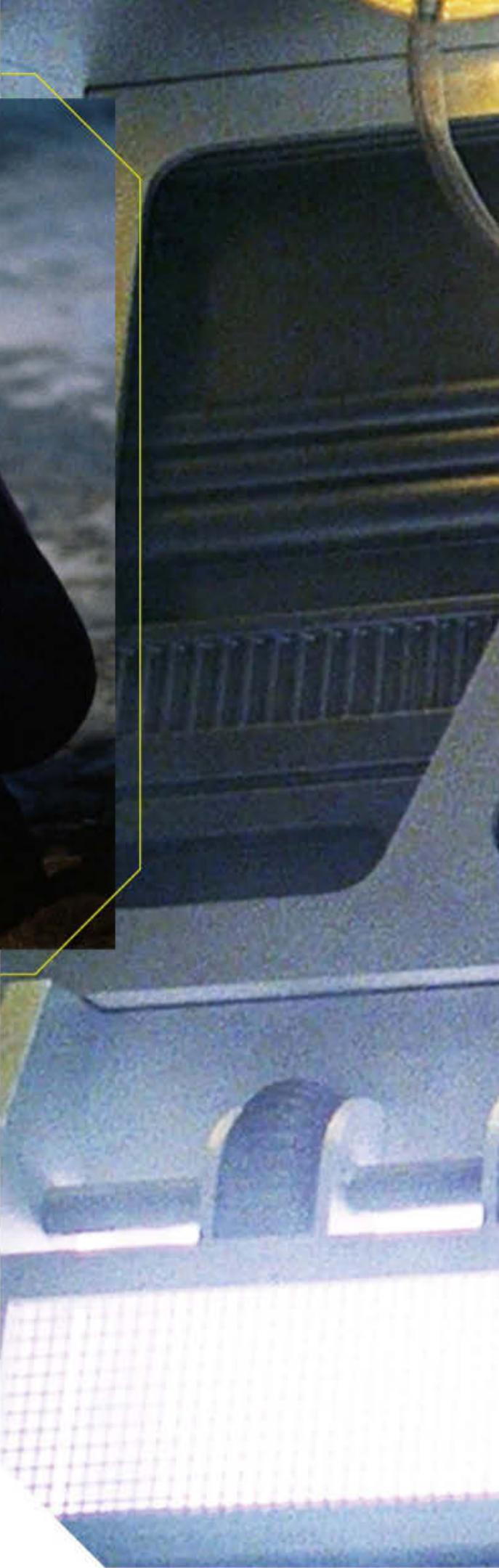
SHELBY SHOCK

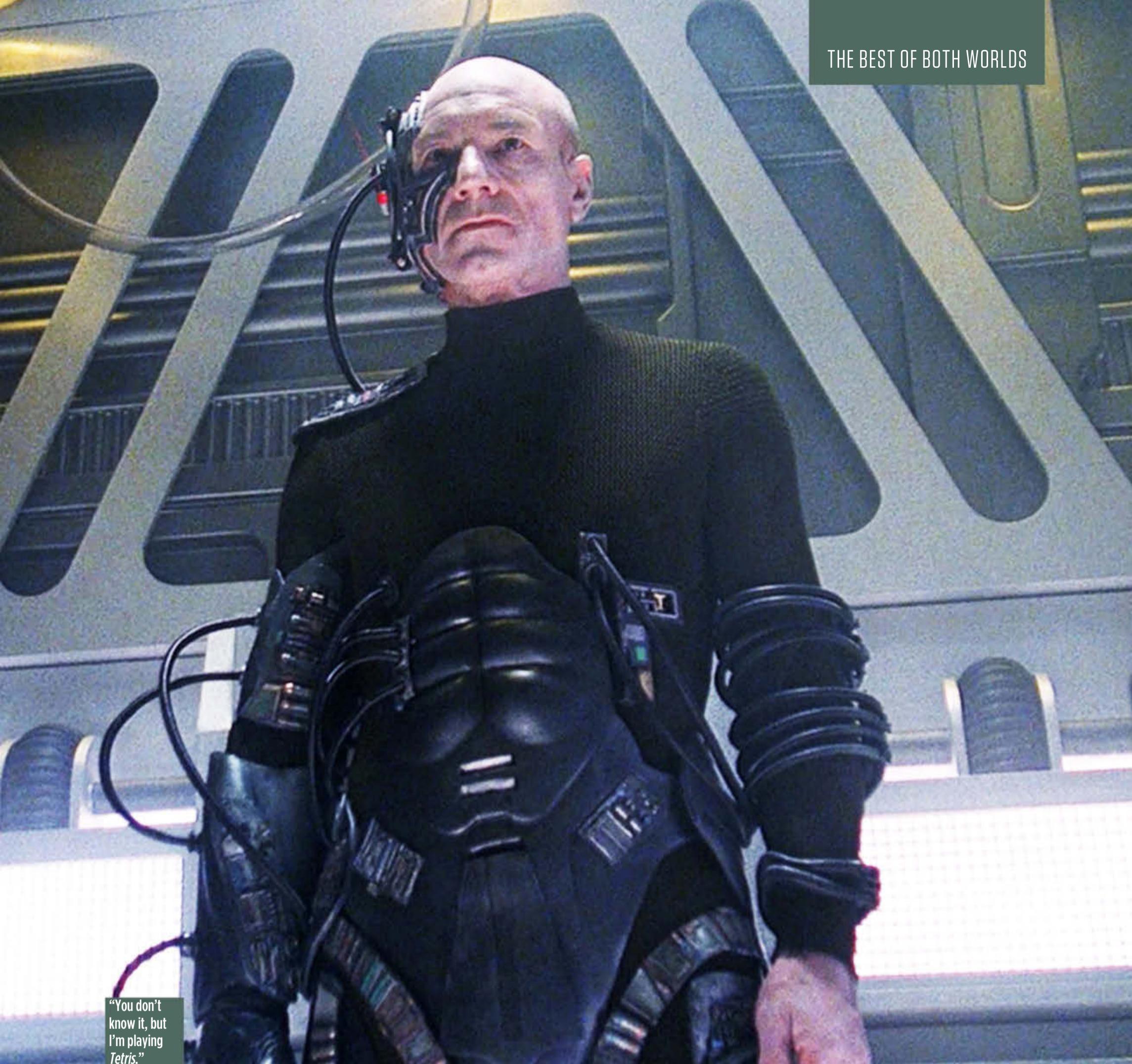
In keeping with Gene Roddenberry's vision of the future, life aboard the Enterprise-D was marked by a distinct lack of internal conflict among the crew. That is, until the ambitious Lieutenant Commander Shelby arrived. While the Borg posed a threat to the exterior of the ship, Shelby would serve to disrupt its inner

harmony. Introduced as a Borg specialist, she came aboard to add her expertise. Tough and ambitious, she also set her sights on Riker's job – something she happily told him to his face.

"I think of Shelby as a straight-A student whose hand is always in the air," actress Elizabeth Dennehy tells *SFX*. "She knows the answers, and she doesn't care if people like it or not."

For Dennehy, daughter of the recently deceased Hollywood legend Brian Dennehy, it was one of her earliest roles in TV. Thirty years later, she's still surprised by its lasting





"You don't know it, but I'm playing Tetris."

legacy. "I'm 59 now – I can't believe people still talk about it and still care," she laughs. "I was 28 and wasn't into sci-fi. I was living in LA and auditioning. I would just go from audition to audition to audition. It was just another job. I didn't know who [Jonathan] Frakes was, I didn't know Riker, I had no clue. I was completely ignorant, and I think it was actually a good thing. Because I think that if I had been a fan, or been a part of that world, I would have been too nervous."

This blissful ignorance of just what she'd stepped into helped her develop Shelby's ➔

Well, it was a valiant attempt, but things...



...aren't going so well for Picard and his crew.



SETTING A SCORE

Composer Ron Jones on scoring the Borg invasion



Everything about "The Best Of Both Worlds" was different to what had come before on *The Next Generation*, and the soundtrack was no exception. Scored by the show's then composer Ron Jones, the synth-heavy soundtrack has gained a strong fan following; in 1991 it became only the second *TNG* soundtrack to be released as a standalone album.

"It was about encountering a superior, digital, amoral enemy and the challenge to survive," Jones tells *SFX*. "So I had to make the score very dark, and show the Enterprise to be pressed to near death. If the audience did not feel that this might be death and total destruction, it all would not have worked."

"The Borg were represented in my score by a sampled, electronic choir," he continues, "And the Borg theme was a numeric, tone-row motif, very devoid of humanity. The crew of the Enterprise was analogue, human and the thematics are more about the human meeting a great challenge," he explains.

To illustrate the scale of the piece, the orchestra for Part I and Part II was double the size of that for other episodes, at 77 musicians.

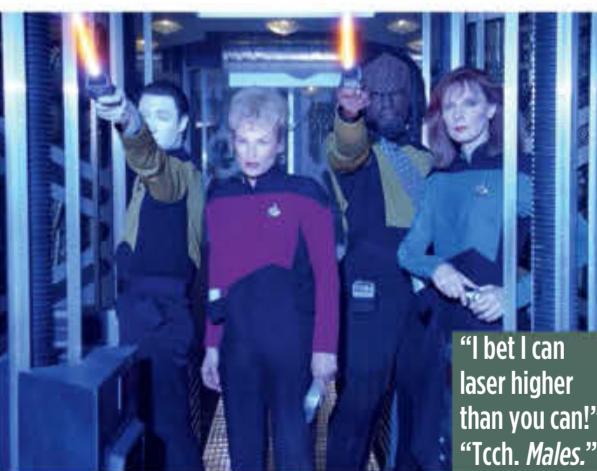
"Television rarely goes where that two-part film went," Jones says, with pride. "It still stands up well."



"So, how often do you trim it? Twice a day?"



ALL PICTURES © CBS.



"I bet I can laser higher than you can!"
"Tch. Males."

character. Dennehy wasn't overawed – so Shelby wasn't either. "I think the cool thing about Shelby is that she was not nervous," she says. "Nobody scared her. There was the ballsy part of her which was, 'I have a job here to do – you're in my way. And I don't care if you like me or not, I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to get a job done'."

The Next Generation cast were famously close friends. Coming into a tight cast and crew can be daunting for an outsider, but Dennehy says that was never a problem. "Jonathan Frakes was so kind to me, so generous. I was in a tiny little honey wagon [TV slang for a toilet trailer]. He was like, 'Come in and use my trailer,'" she remembers.

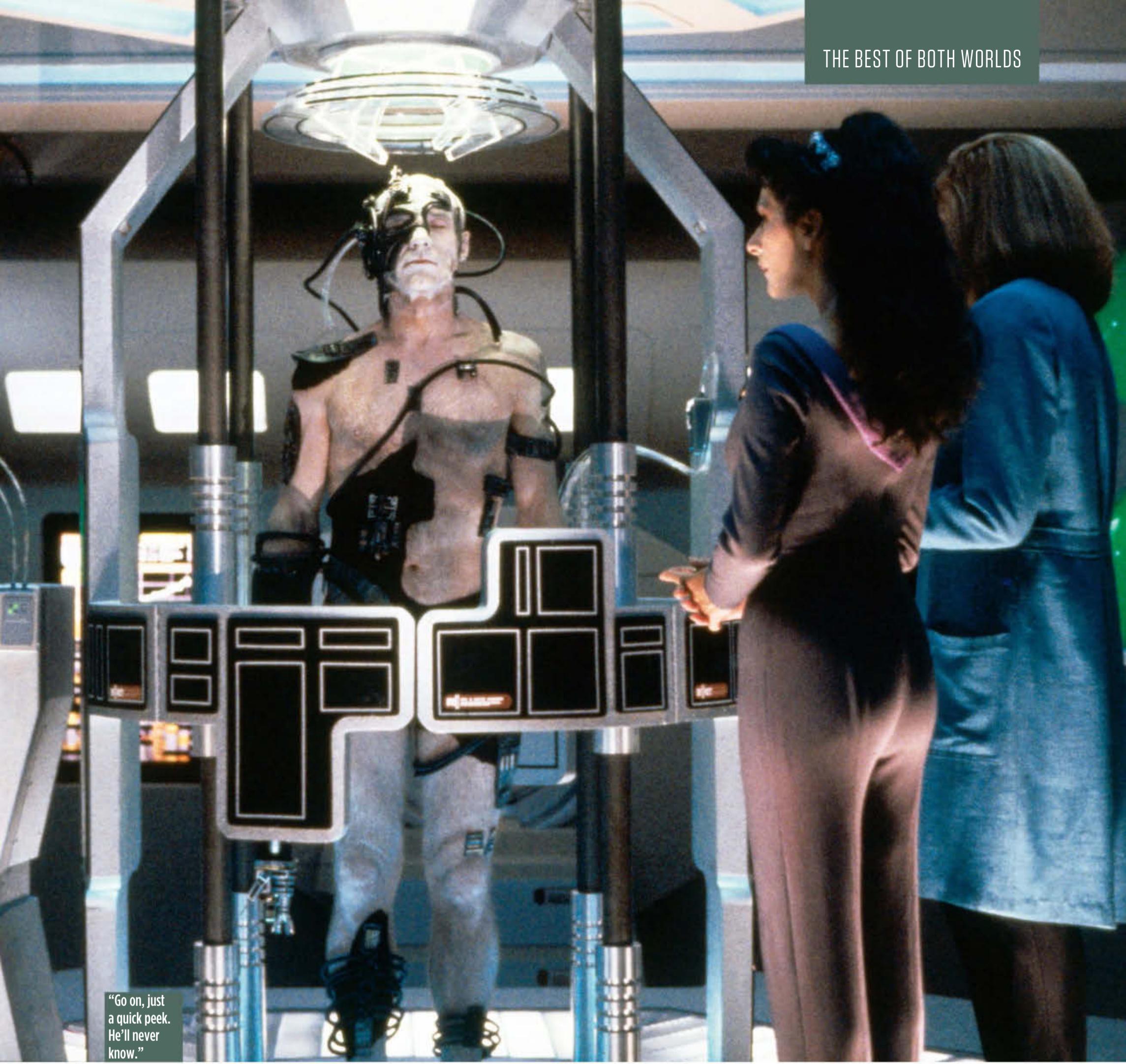
A certain Shakespearean actor also played Cupid on set. "I remember that Patrick Stewart was constantly trying to fix me up with people," Dennehy reveals. "He was trying to get me and Brent [Spiner] to go off on vacations together! He was like a little matchmaker. That was pretty funny. They were all very, very sweet."

Despite the warm welcome, Dennehy says she was unprepared for the demands of the shooting schedule. She'd previously been used to commercials, where an actor gets to shoot the same scene over and over again. *The Next Generation*'s schedule meant actors had to learn their lines before each scene, then move on to the next.

"On my first day I thought I was going to be fired. I did not know my lines well enough," she admits. "And I'll never forget them now. It was the scene where I said, 'Projections suggest that a Borg ship like this one could continue to



GETTY (1), SHUTTERSTOCK (1)



function effectively even if 78% of it were rendered inoperable'. I will never forget those lines, because I did not know them really in-my-bones well enough. On that first day I kept screwing that line up. It was the most embarrassing, mortifying experience of my life!

"I haven't watched [the episode] in a long time," she continues. "But I can see the terror in my eyes. I don't think anybody else ever remarked on it, but I can see my eyes are like, 'I can get through this!'"

Rumours swirled at the time that Picard might be killed off due to contract negotiations ➤



reaching an impasse between Stewart and Paramount, with Shelby brought onboard as a permanent addition and Riker taking the role of captain – but Dennehy says that was never raised with her. “Nobody said anything to me at the time. It was just a job and I was just a guest star. I only heard rumours about that after it was the end of the season,” she recalls.

LASER FOCUS

One of the most iconic moments in *Star Trek* history is undoubtedly the first appearance of an assimilated Picard as Locutus (Latin for “he who has spoken”). This new character solved the problem of how to centralise the drama when you’re up against a race with a group mind, who by definition have no leader. The writers had mulled over creating a Queen – an idea later realised in the feature film *Star Trek: First Contact*, but on this occasion Piller chose instead to make Picard the villain.

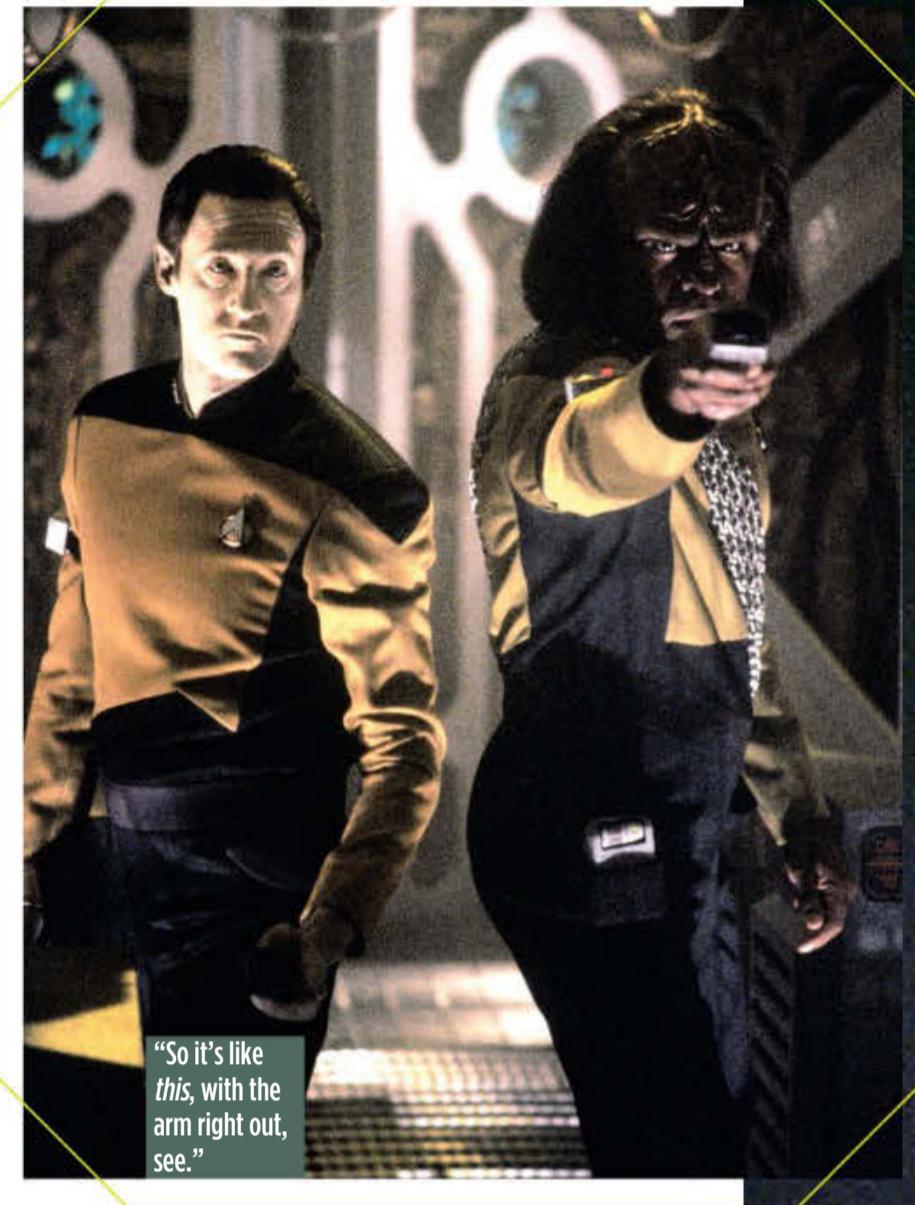
The task of crafting this iconic new character fell to Michael Westmore Snr, the make-up artist whose credits included films such as *Rocky* and *Mask* (for which he won an Academy Award). Westmore, who supervised the make-up for all 10 Borg on set, needed a way to make their leader stand out. His son Michael Jnr – who created all the electronics for the make-up appliances on the show – came to the rescue. “He found a newly developed two-inch laser that had only been seen in one other show prior to *Star Trek*,” Westmore Snr says.

“He mounted it on the appliance that was adhered to the right side of Patrick’s head, at eye level.

Wherever Locutus would look, the laser

would follow. We knew that with a little smoke in the air we could see the laser’s bright red beam cut through the mist, but had no idea what would happen if Patrick looked directly into the camera lens.

“On the director’s word, Locutus swings his head and points the laser beam directly into the camera lens. We had no idea what the results would be until the next day, when production



would view the results on film. The following day I received a phone call from Rick Berman, our producer, who said, ‘The laser scene is incredible.’ To complete the look, Westmore also used a small windscreens wiper, which moved independently just above Stewart’s eye.

“Its purpose was to add motion as he was being assimilated, and another Borg attachment to his character without covering up either of his eyes,” he says.

One of the most famous incidents in all of *Trek* lore took place in this episode, yet due to budgetary constraints it wasn’t shown on-screen. “There are tools now that you didn’t have back then,” says Michael Okuda. “A lot of the genius of *Star Trek*’s production is how our writers, going back to Gene Roddenberry, would say, ‘Okay, these are our production constraints. We want to tell a show about the

vastness of the cosmos and space adventures, but we actually can’t afford to show very much of it’. And one of the ways they figured to do that was in “The Best Of Both Worlds Part II”, where you wanted to have this tremendous battle: the Battle of Wolf 359.”

This was the location where Starfleet chose to make its stand against the rampaging Borg Cube. A fleet consisting of 40 Federation starships engaged the solitary Cube near Wolf 359 (a real star).

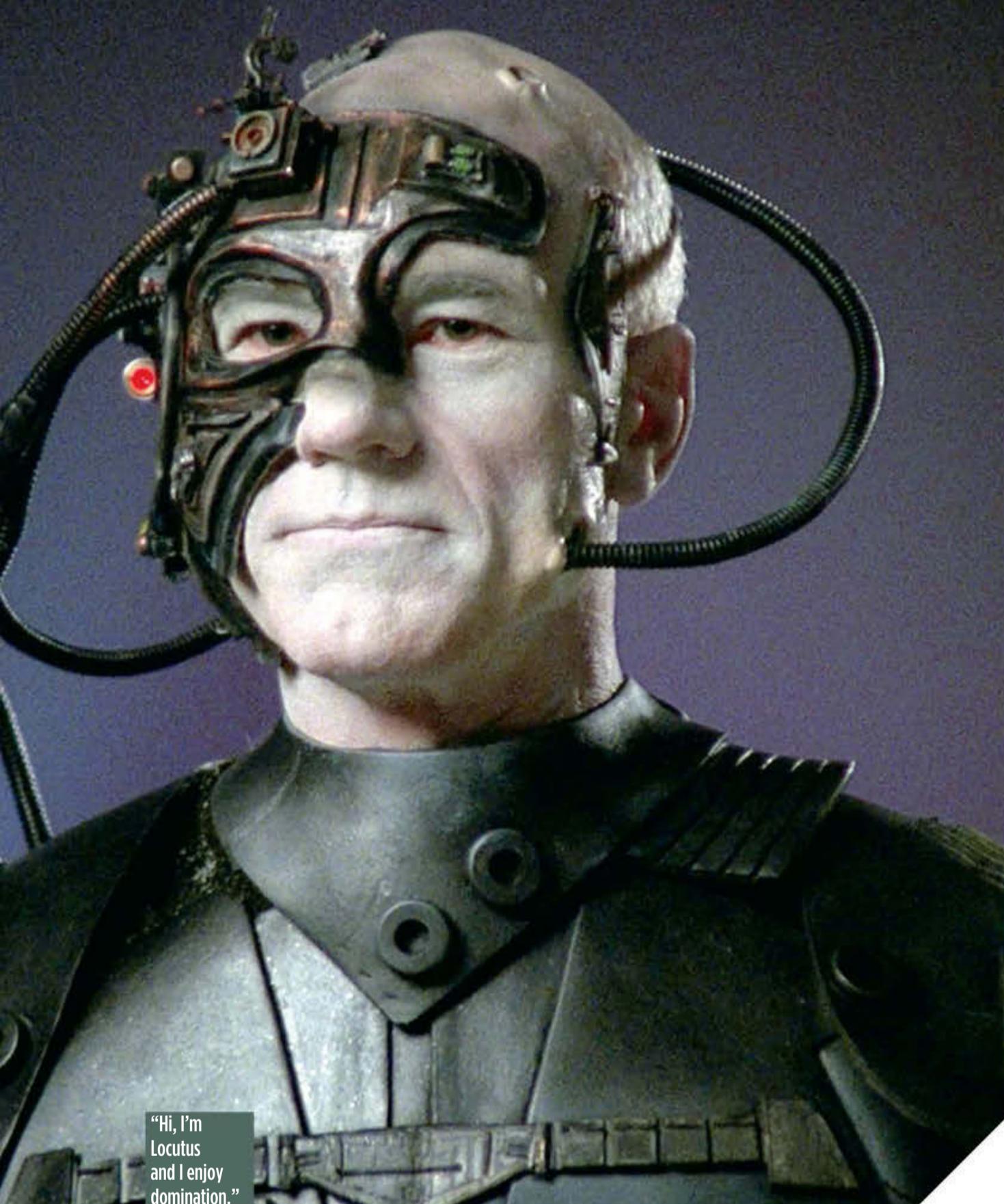
The battle was a disaster, with the fleet massacred, due in part to the tactical knowledge and experience of Captain Picard, now part of the Borg collective consciousness.

Although part of the battle was shown in the *Deep Space Nine* pilot “Emissary” three years later, finances meant it couldn’t actually be shown in “The Best Of Both Worlds”.

“It was gonna be a big episode anyway,” Okuda recalls, “so they couldn’t show a big *Star Wars*-style space battle. Or at least, if we did that, then you can’t do other things. So Michael Piller’s brilliant, dramatic solution was: we don’t see the battle, we see the aftermath. And

ALL PICTURES © CBS.





"Hi, I'm Locutus and I enjoy domination."

your brain kind of fills that in and goes, 'Wow, this must have been amazing.'"

So Okuda and his team created a "graveyard" scene for later in the episode. As the Enterprise reached Wolf 359 they were met by the burning and twisted hulks of what was left of the fleet. Many of those ships had been cobbled together as "kitbash" models, with bits of other models recycled and glued onto others to give the appearance of a variety of starship designs.

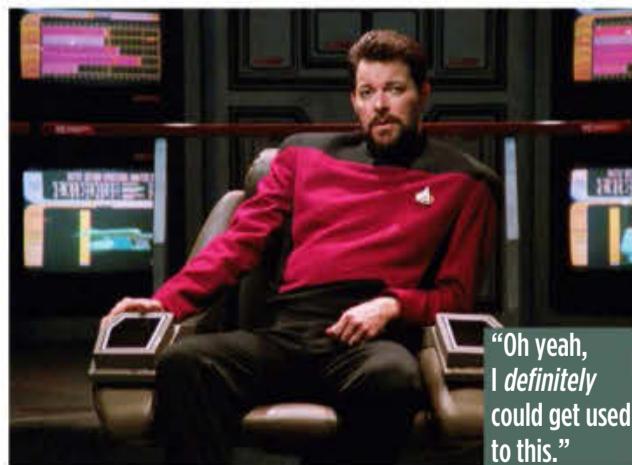
SIMPLY THE BEST

"The Best Of Both Worlds" is still revered by fans, with the events it depicted still reverberating in *Trek* today, notably in *Star Trek: Picard*. The *Washington Post* ranked it as the best episode of all *Star Trek*, and said it had the greatest cliffhanger in television history. The episode also won two Emmy Awards, for outstanding sound mixing and outstanding Sound Editing.

Elizabeth Dennehy, now a high school theatre teacher, says the attitude of fans to Shelby has changed over the years, from outright hatred to a newfound appreciation.

"It wasn't always the way, but what I hear now is, 'I love Shelby. You weren't afraid of taking the guys down, you weren't afraid of being right. You were brave, you were smart'. I think it's the role that I'm most known for. So yeah, I'm really grateful for it."

Okuda adds: "At the time, we were so busy on *Star Trek*. We were doing 26 episodes a year and then we were making 52 episodes a year. But it's really fun to look back and say, 'Hey, remember when we did that?'"



A CHANCE OF SHOWERS

How Michael Okuda and co pranked the fans



The conclusion to "The Best Of Both Worlds" cliffhanger resolved with a "Bobby Ewing from *Dallas*" kind of twist... or so some fans were mischievously led to believe.

With debate raging among Trekkies during the summer hiatus between Part One and Part Two about how the story was going to be resolved, Michael Okuda and his colleagues in the art department decided to have some fun, by creating a fake script page and inserting it into the genuine one.

This fake page had a scene reminiscent of the infamous "Bobby Ewing in the shower" moment. Ewing, a popular character in the soap opera *Dallas*, had been killed off, but with producers wanting to reverse the decision, he later appeared in wife Pam's shower, with his death and much of the previous season's stories written off as a dream.

Okuda deliberately left the script lying around in the art department, and it was promptly pilfered, later finding its way onto fan bulletin boards. "I think it was either Picard or Riker in a sonic shower, and Q just appears and says, 'Surprise!'" Okuda says. "It was fascinating to see that even in those early, pre-World Wide Web days, it propagated out there!"



It's the beginning of the end for the Borg.

RAISED BY WOLVES



M O T H E R

AS RAISED BY WOLVES COMES TO HBO MAX IN THE STATES, SFX TALKS TO SHOWRUNNER AARON GUZIKOWSKI ABOUT THE EXPLOSIVE DROID DRAMA AND WORKING WITH SIR RIDLEY SCOTT...

WORDS: WILL SALMON

'S R U I N

W

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PARENT?

Is it showing your children love, care and attention? Patiently and kindly explaining the world to them and preparing them for the future? Dedication to their well-being?

Or is it the ability to atomise potential threats with a single glance from your weaponised eyes?

Parenthood is at the heart of *Raised By Wolves*, the new HBO Max show from executive producers Aaron Guzikowski and Ridley Scott – yes, *that* Ridley Scott. Set several hundred years in the future, in the aftermath of a devastating holy war that has ravaged Earth, it follows two androids, Mother (Amanda Collin) and Father (Abubakar Salim), as they try to raise a family of human children on the perilous planet Kepler-22b.

HOLY CALAMITY

Although the majority of the series' action takes place away from Earth, the rich backstory is revealed with flashbacks throughout the season.

"Basically, the idea is that this religion, Mithraism, becomes very influential about 100 years from now," explains showrunner and creator Guzikowski, calling from his home in LA where his son Valis – named after the Philip K Dick novel – is celebrating his birthday. "It is actually a real religion. It was competing with Christianity for a while back in Roman times. The idea is that it has a resurgence and, discovered within these scriptures, are these kind of encrypted schematics for certain technologies..."

"So they start to build these amazing pieces of technology, among them this type of android called the Necromancer. A holy war breaks out and the opposition to the Necromancers is nuclear – and basically destroys the Earth. The Mithraics build a ship, the Ark of Heaven, that can take them off world to the one place where they can start again, Kepler-22b."

This is, in fact, a real planet – the first world that NASA has discovered that exists in the habitable

"Look, I just can't work with you lot watching..."

"Goldilocks" zone of another star. What the Mithraics aren't counting on, however, is that they've been beaten to their destination by the enemy. "Unbeknownst to them, an atheist manages to reprogram one of the Necromancers and a service android to be caregivers, and he sends them with frozen embryos to the planet. Because they're in a tiny craft with no life support, they get there much quicker than humans."

Having arrived on the planet the droids – Mother and Father – defrost their cargo and start to raise their family. The pilot episode follows them over the next 13 years through highs and lows, as they struggle to survive in



South Africa makes a very convincing Kepler-22b.



Pretty sure
Ridley's seen
*The Man Who
Fell To Earth.*



this harsh, alien environment. Then the Ark of Heaven arrives and the Mithraics try to take the surviving children, with disastrous results.

Guzikowski, previously best known for scripting the Denis Villeneuve-helmed abduction thriller *Prisoners*, had been working on the world and the story of *Raised By Wolves* for quite some time before Scott Free – Sir Ridley's production company – got involved. “I had been working on other stuff and this

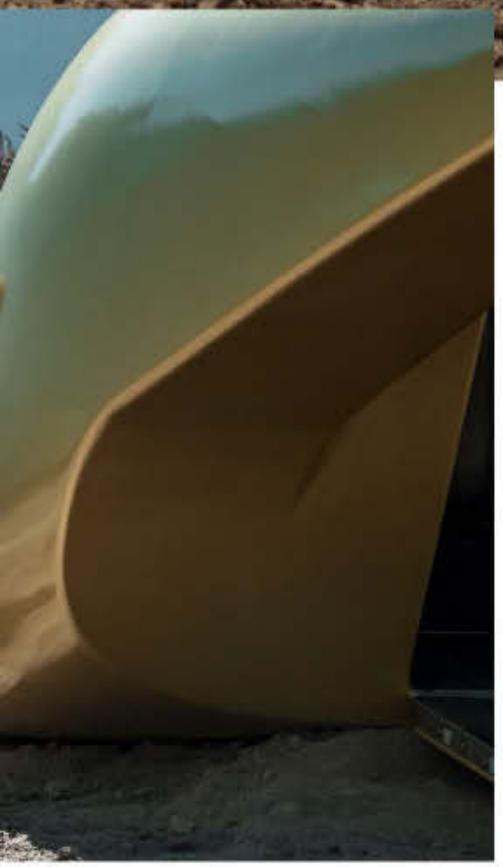
“Ridley Scott literally drew up the whole pilot as this kind of beautiful comic book”

story in the background,” he explains. “Then a few years back I wrote the pilot on spec and sent it out to a few places. Scott Free became interested in it, which was great.”

Even so, the big man’s hands-on involvement with the show wasn’t guaranteed. So it came as a surprise when Guzikowski got a call from David W Zucker, President of Television at Scott Free. “He told me that Ridley was reading the script, really responding to it – and that he had even started to storyboard it! He literally drew up the whole pilot as this kind of beautiful comic book. I was just completely blown away.”

Scott helms the first two episodes of the season – the first time he has directed for television – and his legendary craft and eye for detail is immediately apparent in the production. This is a tough and believable future that feels both technologically advanced yet historically inspired. While the droids ironically live a mostly agrarian lifestyle, the Mithraics’ Ark is somewhere between *Star Trek* and *Warhammer 40,000*: hyper-advanced yet creepily gothic.

Anyone who has been paying attention to Scott’s career of late will know that the possibilities – and the →



You're never
alone with a
dome of your
own.

limitations – of artificial intelligence are something of a preoccupation. But the similarities between *Raised By Wolves* and Scott's *Alien* prequels are purely thematic. Nobody pokes a space snake here, though there are lashings of white android blood.

"Obviously I've been hugely inspired by his work," says Guzikowski. "Y'know, Ash from *Alien* was so impactful to me. Seeing that film as a child and the way he [Scott] brought all that to life, that definitely fed into how we represent the androids here. At the same time we're evolving it and trying to do stuff people haven't seen before."

The 10-part series was filmed entirely in and around Cape Town, South Africa. "We tried to do as much practically as we could, using locations to make it feel as real as possible. We built the whole settlement and real versions of the ships. We like to do practical effects, you know, really setting people on fire and blowing stuff up! Safely, of course." Should *Raised By Wolves* return for a second run – and that is the hope – the intention would be to return there to explore more of Kepler-22b. "The light there is so beautiful and just the whole vibe. So yeah, hopefully we'll be going back there."

FAMILY MISFORTUNES

Bringing the androids to "life" are

Amanda Collin and *Assassin's*

Creed: Origins voice actor

Abubakar Salim. The latter

plays Father with a mixture of practicality, warmth and a gentle humour that's instantly appealing. "As soon as I saw Abu and heard his voice, I knew he was the guy," says Guzikowski. "He just has this aged wisdom – and he's only 26!"

But it's undeniably Collin's Mother who steals the show in the early episodes. Eerily still, Mother is a far more unnerving presence than the genial Father. The Necromancer we mentioned earlier? This is her – and it's not spoiling anything to say that early on in the series she takes some drastic – and astonishingly violent – action to protect the family.

"It was really late in the game," says Guzikowski of finding the right person for the show's most pivotal role. "All kinds of people had read for the part, but none of them really felt like they were encompassing every aspect of what the character needed to be. We didn't want somebody who acted like an android, but at the same time she *is* a machine, that's part of the character." Amanda Collin was eventually

“Father kind of has this affection for Mother that she doesn't really reciprocate”



"Sod this, anyone fancy a pizza tonight?"



The Golden Peanut must be guarded at all times.



Who are the real monsters, eh? (It's the humans.)

spotted by the series' casting director, Kate Rhodes James, at a film festival showcasing new talent. "She saw Amanda in one of these films, tracked her down at the bar and asked her to put herself on tape the next day. As soon as we saw that tape, it was obvious that she was Mother. She just really clicked into it."

The relationship between the two droids is caring, combative (prepare to wince at one scene late in the pilot) and "enormously complex", as Guzikowski puts it. "Father kind of has this affection for Mother that she doesn't really reciprocate. But she does obviously have deep feelings for him. It's a great relationship that we just love playing around with." When SFX speaks with Amanda Collin later, she

describes the dynamic between the droids as "A partnership. A team. There's no romance, it's just practical and supportive and completely dedicated to raising this family."

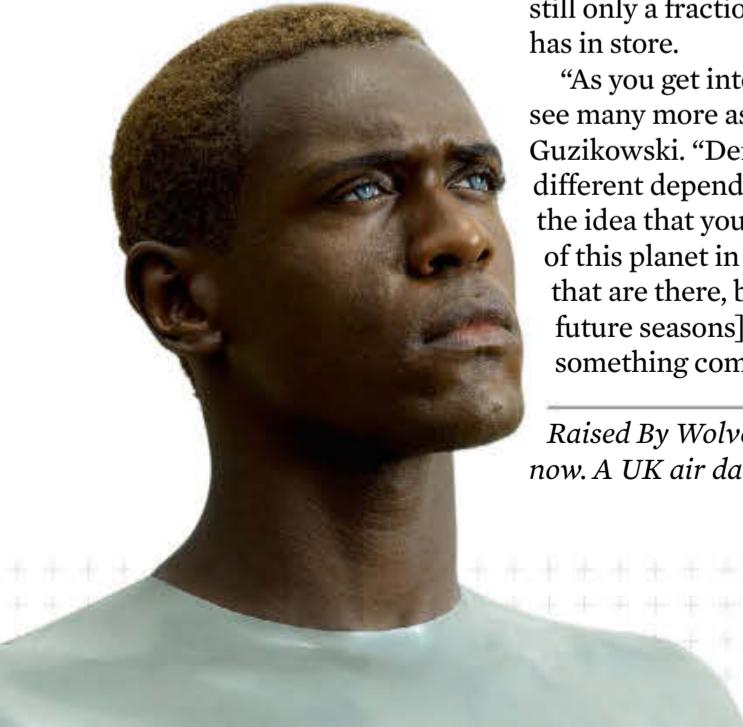
Aside from the everyday fight for survival on an alien world, the droid duo face a host of threats. It's not just the Mithraics – most notably Marcus, a soldier played by *Vikings'* Travis Fimmel, whose murky motivations put him at odds with both the androids and his fellow humans – but also the planet's deadly wildlife. One early episode sees their encampment beset by feral beasts, and there's the ominous skeleton of a gigantic serpent



uncovered early on. We'll learn more about Kepler-22b as the season goes on, but that's still only a fraction of the secrets the planet has in store.

"As you get into the season, you're going to see many more aspects of the planet," says Guzikowski. "Definitely. But like Earth it's very different depending on where you are. I love the idea that you can have this understanding of this planet in this region and the creatures that are there, but then as we move on [into future seasons], we'll be discovering something completely different."

Raised By Wolves is streaming on HBO Max now. A UK air date has yet to be confirmed.



SHALL I BE MOTHER?

Amanda Collin is Mother – the caring android who can explode you with her eyes...

+++

How do you get into the headspace required to play an android?

I think it was lucky that we are "born" on Kepler-22b, because that way we could discover, as actors, what we were like along with the show. It's not like we just jump into an episode and they've been on this planet for 20 years. And I kept the mission in mind. What am I here to do? Raise the children with... not empathy, because I'm not sure that Mother can feel that, but she can make them feel loved. And provide them with whatever they need to grow and evolve.

The pilot covers many years and not all the children survive. How does that change Mother?

A thing we talked about was, I'm always observing the children. Later on she has a bigger capability for showing grief, I think, because she's observed the children grieving. That part of the story isn't very long, but I had a lot of fun thinking about the difference between year one and year 12, and how different is her ability to show emotions.

Mother takes some drastic steps to protect her family. How did you feel about the darker side of her?

She's terrified of herself, terrified of the darkness inside her. At least in the beginning – and then she gets to know it. But aren't we all afraid of our darkness? Of what we might do if something happens to us? Some people in the world have to fight for their children's lives every day. What would you do in that situation? I think it's very relevant to ask yourself that.

How did you feel when you first got the role?

It was very late when I got the call because of the time difference [in Denmark – Collin is Danish], and I was just trying not to wake the family, but definitely it was both amazing and terrifying. I was so excited then I cried for 48 hours through anxiety. It's such a big change in my life, but I love it.

What do you make of the show's religious themes?

Aaron chose religion, but to me it's not really about the faithful versus the atheists, it's more about what happens if you believe in something blindly. Because Mother also believes in her mission blindly, right? She will do anything to complete her mission, to raise these children – and that becomes dangerous later on in the season.

THE FATE OF THE WORLD LIES NOT in the hands of the planet's mightiest heroes but... a band of comic book geeks? That's the case in Amazon's new version of the Channel 4 series *Utopia*. The show follows Ian, Becky, Wilson and pals as they stumble across a graphic novel that details future cataclysmic events and nefarious conspiracies. It's up to these fledgling friends to save humanity and keep the book away from a shadowy organisation that aspires to possess it, at any cost.

"Dennis Kelly, the creator of the original series, was the greatest gent in the world for letting me take this amazing DNA, that world of his, and sort of stomp around in it and make it my own," says showrunner Gillian Flynn (author of the bestselling *Gone Girl*). "From the beginning, I would send him scripts, because I wanted him to feel a part of it. Each time I'd be worried, when things were changed, what he was going to say. I'd be on tenterhooks.

"He just consistently said, 'Why bother doing this if you're doing exactly the same thing? Make it your own. Make it different.' He's so much more generous than I ever would have been if someone expanded or changed my material. And here we are now."

“It was important to figure out this small group of comic-book nerds... Who are they? ”

It's September 2019, and *SFX* is in Chicago, where *Utopia* is shooting on location. Production have transformed a suburban hotel into the pop culture extravaganza Fringe Con. A sign in the lobby provides directions to an artist alley and discussion panels. Booths selling merchandise, T-shirts and comic books (*Antler Man*, anyone?) fill the main space. To one side, Ian (Daniel Byrd) and Becky (Ashleigh LaThrop) are chatting at a bar, nursing some drinks and enjoying their initial meeting, blissfully unaware of the perils awaiting them...

"To me, it was cool to be able to explore all the characters a little more," Flynn explains of her approach. "My stuff has always been very character-driven. It was important to figure out this small group of comic-book nerds. Who are they? What is each of them missing that brings them all together and creates this sort of family vibe? And to make sure that you even feel for the bad guys and know them."

There's a new spin on Jessica Hyde, whom fans of the original will remember as the on-the-lam daughter of the graphic novel's creator (played here by *American Honey*'s Sasha Lane). "We get a glimpse of her origin story, which is going to be a little different

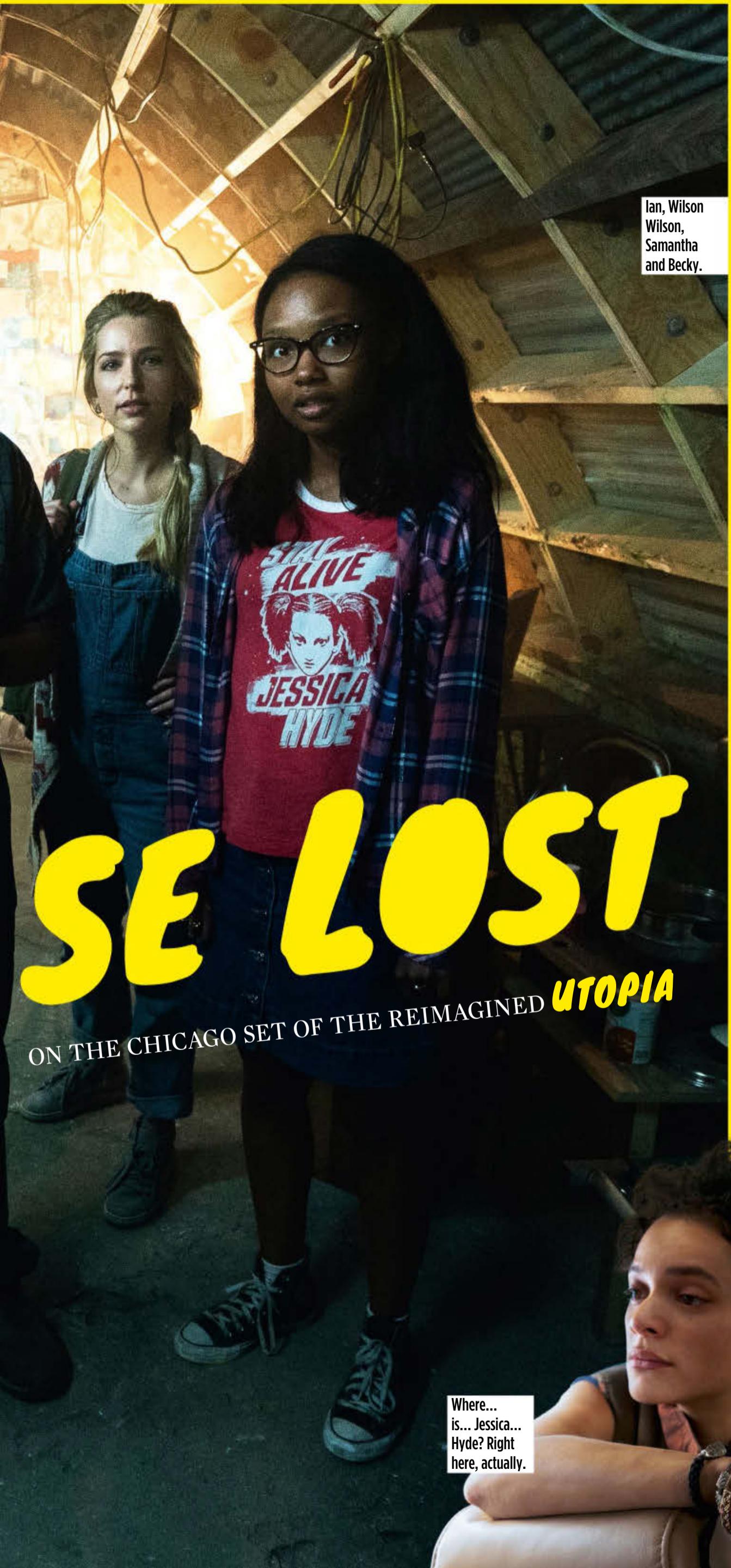
ELIZABETH MORRIS/AMAZON PRIME VIDEO



PARADISE

YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD IDEA DOWN – AS WE DISCOVER

WORDS: BRYAN CAIRNS



Ian, Wilson,
Wilson,
Samantha
and Becky.

SE LOST

ON THE CHICAGO SET OF THE REIMAGINED **UTOPIA**

Where...
is... Jessica...
Hyde? Right
here, actually.

from the UK version... and to know where she comes from, and how she became this person," Flynn says. "I didn't even watch much of Dennis's second season, because mine goes to a different place and takes us to a different ending," she teases.

SAY ANYTHING...

One entirely new plotline involves John Cusack's character, Dr Kevin Christie, the charismatic, media-savvy CEO of a multinational corporation in crisis mode. Christie's been developing a product to help supplement food supplies. However, issues with the FDA and accusations (which we won't detail, to avoid spoilers) continue to plague him... Cusack may be a movie veteran, but *Utopia* marks his first dive into television.

"I've tried to get some long-form things done myself, but I couldn't get the funding," Cusack tells us on set. "I don't know why. Maybe because some of them were period pieces. I thought this was great, because it was with somebody who was an artist, a creator I respected so much. It was a great character and a great studio. This was the best way to enter this sort of material. I'd done two-and-a-half and three-hour movies, but I hadn't been able to start to develop a character and see where it goes. *Utopia* is like a nine-hour movie. So this is a first for me."

Surveillance and tech feature prominently in *Utopia*'s narrative. The role they play in society is another thing which hooked Flynn on the project. "One of the primary attractions was to touch on climate change and what we are doing to the world, which is certainly a thread through the UK version," she says.

"But I wanted to explore it and make it much bigger, that idea of what we are doing to the planet. I have a whole Word document where I would write down little things that drive me insane!"

The original *Utopia* was cancelled after two series, due to low ratings. So in light of that, has Flynn attempted to make her show broader and more accessible?

"No. I think there's a real danger in trying to tailor any material to a broad audience," she concludes. "The one thing that I've always liked about genre is it's sort of like a razorblade in chocolate. It goes down easily, and then you start bleeding. What's helpful about genre is you can attach a theme, information, and important things you want to talk about, and people will access it that way." ●

Utopia starts streaming on Amazon Prime Video from 25 September.

AWAY

UP, UP
AND AWAY





DOTING MUM EMMA IS THE EPITOME OF SATELLITE PARENTING IN NEW NETFLIX SERIES **AWAY**, BIDDING FAREWELL TO HER DAUGHTER AND HUSBAND TO LEAD A MISSION TO MARS. WE VISIT THE SET AND SPEAK TO HILARY SWANK AND HER CO-STARS

WORDS: JAMIE TABBERER

TALKING SPACE

Cosmic musings with the cast of *Away*



HILARY SWANK
“I wanted to be an astronaut before I wanted to be an actor.

I grew up in a lower socioeconomic background, and school was never talked about as being super-important. I kept wanting a telescope, it was all I asked for. I finally got one, probably on sale – it didn’t work. I could not get the thing to work, no matter what I did! That became my [character’s] backstory.”

VIVIAN WU

“I was born and raised in Shanghai, China. In those days, China was closed doors. I’d read magazines about Hollywood movies – I was privileged to get access to them, because my mum was an actress – and nobody [else] really knew about Hollywood. At 13 I was saying, ‘I want to go to Hollywood!’ In those days, Hollywood was like Mars!”

ATO ESSANDOH

“None of us have had the privilege of actually going out into space, but I can imagine seeing Earth and [realising] there are no borders. They’re our own construct. We made it up. My parents are from Ghana, but that’s just a line in the dirt. To be in space, to be alone and know everything that’s ever happened in human existence happened there [on Earth], and then there’s going to be a time when we can’t even see it, because we’ve gone so far... What country are we from? What people are we? It’s just us, and our loose, tenuous connection to the Earth.”

TOFU STIR FRY, TWO CUPS OF broccoli, one cup brown rice. 0% yogurt, one grapefruit. Thirty baby carrots, 4 tsp hummus.

No, this isn’t the pre-holiday diet from hell, but a typical day’s food for Emma Green, an astronaut played with trademark intensity by Hilary Swank in Netflix’s new 10-episode drama series *Away*. At least, that’s what she eats when she’s earthbound. Up there, it’s a lot worse...

SFX is having a nosey around Emma’s tasteful family home (actually an elaborate set in Vancouver), opening drawers to examine cutlery, and picking up and playing with space-themed ornaments.

“Lex, money for pizza on fridge” is scrawled across a blackboard; naturally, we head to the fridge, where we find no money, but rather the meal plan in question, pinned under a family photo just as it might be in any kitchen. We’re in pain just looking at it.

Have you ever imagined life as an astronaut? Wondered what it would feel like to be only the 663rd person to see Earth from space? Would such privilege make the preparation, the isolation, the confinement, and the diet – the dehydrated, freeze-dried, ultra-processed “Neapolitan ice cream” and such that’s de rigueur for astronauts – worth it? Such are the questions posed by *Away* – inspired by a 2015 *Esquire* article of the same name, about astronaut Scott Kelly’s year-long stay on the International Space Station, as the first step towards a human expedition to Mars.

MARS NEEDS MOM

Food is the least of Emma’s problems. In episode one of *Away*, shortly after embarking on a trailblazing and dangerous mission to Mars, her husband Matt (Josh Charles) falls ill, leaving their teenage daughter Alexis (Talitha Bateman) in pieces, and Emma taking “satellite parenting” to a new level. But before you jump to any conclusions, be warned: Swank – chatting to SFX with her co-stars on Emma’s front porch during a break in filming – is not here for “ingrained, old patterns of thinking”.

“I did an interview last week,” recalls the double Oscar-winner, “and was asked, ‘In that first episode, when you make that decision to not go back, I was like, ‘How could you do that?’ Then [the interviewer] checked herself. If Emma was a man, she wouldn’t be asking that question. It would never have gone through her head. She’d have been like, ‘Yeah,



Everyone at NASA wears a suit. FACT. (Not a fact).



You were supposed to pack Travel Scrabble!

you gotta go to Mars.’ She’s as well-educated and trained as her male counterparts. She’s needed if this exploration happens. Her family is supporting it. Why wouldn’t she go?”

“But there is that dynamic of that maternal bond, the pull,” Swank adds. “The pull of family and the pull of work – which we can all relate to, whether we’re on Mars or not.”

Family is a major theme in *Away*, including the family Emma becomes a part of on her mission. In addition to the US-born Swank, the international cast is rounded out by fellow American Ato Essandoh, who plays Kwesi; Ukraine-born Mark Ivanir, who plays Misha; and British-born Ray Panthaki as Ram. Finally, Vivian Wu, who hails from China, plays Yu.

“That’s really the beauty and the meaning of this show, and why I love it so much,” Wu says. “All of us become one.” The cast’s tight bond is palpable. All have travelled long distances for



Everyone in space wears a suit. FACT. (No, it is.)

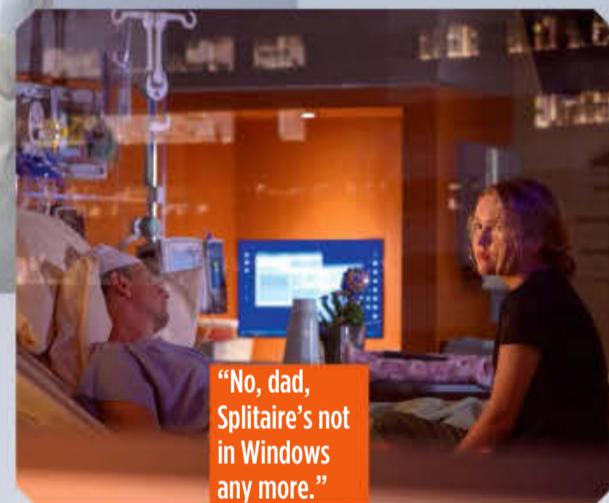
the shoot: there's a link between life and art here, offering insight into the sometimes isolated lives of actors. That said, on-set creature comforts like restaurant-quality curried fish for lunch must make up for it...

"We leave our families behind – kids, brothers, parents, everything," explains Ivanir. "We go to a different place for six months. It's not the Moon, but I'm FaceTiming with my family just as the astronauts do. It's an interesting parallel to grapple with. All of us have had conversations about this."

"Because of the great opportunity of working on the show," shares Essandoh, "I missed my parents' 50th anniversary, and my dad's 80th birthday. I'm still so homesick now, even though I'm among this new family."

While Emma's gleaming show home impresses, her spaceship digs are pretty cool too: the sleek, compact bedrooms, for instance, are all straight lines and surfaces in muted shades of grey; sparkingly clean, no clutter. They're a bit like a futuristic halls of residence. But it doesn't take long for cabin fever to set in. Then it all seems rather less appealing: the thick, tiny window, the rock-hard bed. Especially disquieting is the lack of personal possessions, rendering the rooms essentially identical.

The latter makes good sense, though: in 2018, Robert Frost, Instructor and Flight Controller at NASA, wrote on Quora about



"No, dad,
Splitaire's not
in Windows
any more."

TIME cover featuring the five crew, and press some command centre buttons to see what happens (answer: nothing) – production will move to NASA.

"We're only the second project ever able to film there," says an excited Swank. "I have a friend at NASA who's been supportive of me, but also loves the project, how we're depicting it. They're really doing it – we're pretending we are! And clearly, it's great for us to pick their brains. It was part of our research, too."

"One of the most profound moments on this show was when we met the astronaut Michael Massimino," adds Panthaki. "I asked him, 'When you're in space, does it make you have more faith in God? What do you feel?' What he said was amazing. He's been in space with people who are religious, scientists who believe in the Big Bang, and he said, 'It seems to increase your belief in whatever you believe in.' I asked what he believes, and he said, 'When I look down at Earth from space, I believe it to be heaven.'"

"And no matter what your belief is rooted in," Swank says, "they all agree Earth is so spectacular, and we have to take care of it. From that vantage point..."

Wu jumps in to finish her sentence:
"... It's paradise." ●

Away is streaming on Netflix now.

UNDER THE WIRE

The cast of *Away* had to get used to hanging around

SFX watches a monitor as the cast film a short (and at first glance, simple) scene set on the spaceship. In it, Yu describes to Emma the protocols of a perilous assignment, as Ram artfully jumps into a spacesuit with the help of Kwesi and Misha.

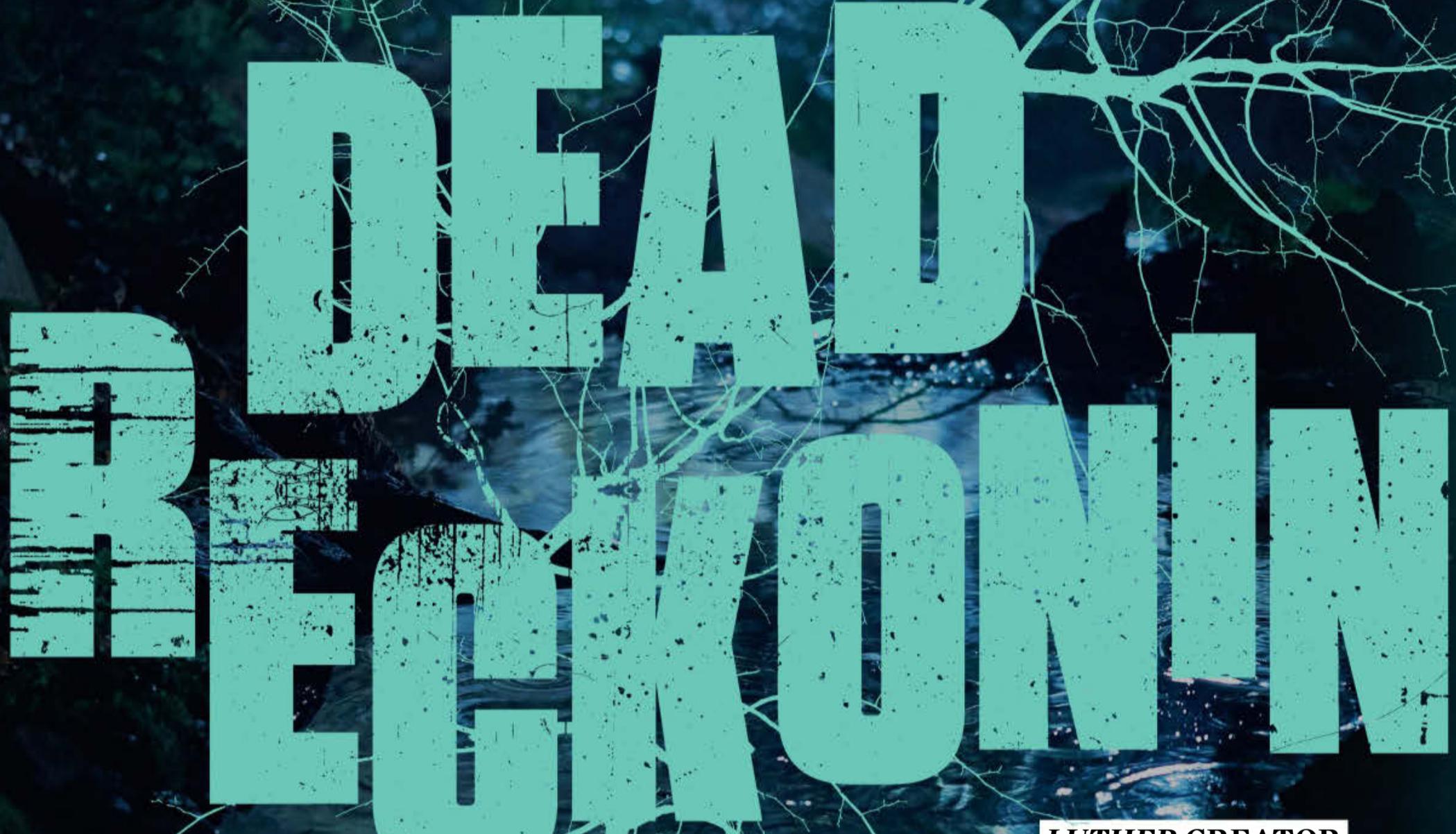
It can't involve more than 100 words of dialogue, but because the cast are on wires, things constantly go awry; thus they have to do the same scene over and over and over again. The patience required is eye-opening.

Vivian Wu (Yu) is suspended mid-air throughout, body steady as a rock, no pain visible on her face, but upon the word "Cut!" – when the set erupts in activity – the physical toll is plain to see. Yet she insists the harnesses are "the coolest thing," adding "I'm doing a lot of Pilates. I think I'm in the best shape I've been now."

Ato Essandoh (Kwesi) describes the core prep as "Two weeks of 'astronaut boot camp'; we were hanging for two hours every day." Mark Ivanir (Misha), meanwhile, admits, "At one stage, some parts of my body started going numb – it cuts the blood flow. Now I'm just used to it!"



DEAD RECKONING



LUTHER CREATOR
NEIL CROSS HAUNTS
US WITH A TALE OF
GHOSTS AND GUILT
IN THE SISTER

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



THE SISTER



“I spend my life being cripplingly terrified of ghosts, and the dark, and being alone,” confesses Neil Cross, on the line from New Zealand, safe in daylight while *SFX* burns the bulbs against a British night. “When I was 25, that was winsome and interesting to say. Now I’m 51, it’s just weird!

Darkness to me is like turbulence for a nervous flyer. It’s a deeply unpleasant experience that I’ve never accommodated myself to.”

It’s a surprising admission, and not just for a 50-something. As a TV screenwriter Cross has mapped his fair share of darkness, most memorably across five seasons of urban crime drama *Luther*. But while Idris Elba’s tenacious DCI confronted psychological shadows, the sunless mazes of the human mind, new ITV drama *The Sister* tells us that the dark conceals things that are rather more inexplicable...

Originally announced as *Because The Night* (“That was focus-grouped by people who don’t know Patti Smith records, and it wasn’t liked!”) the four-part series is based on *Burial*, a novel Cross wrote a decade ago.

“It’s always been a favourite story of mine, in as much as it came to me very quickly,” he tells *SFX*. “This is a bizarre thing to say, given the subject matter of the story, but it’s the most autobiographical story I’ve ever written. And of all the people I’ve made up in one medium or another, Nathan is the character that I most closely identify with.”

PRIVATE PARTS

Nathan is the troubled protagonist of *The Sister*, a man whose past holds a secret he’s done his best to bury – a secret that threatens to derail his life when an old, unwelcome acquaintance arrives with a shocking piece of news. Given the autobiographical resonance, what aspects of himself did Cross dig into to create Nathan?

“My everyday experience of lived existence, which is basically fear and guilt! Fear, anxiety, guilt and love, really. In common with almost every other living being in the UK, I spent my late teens and early adulthood drinking far too much. I never had a drinking problem – I had what Billy Connolly called a behaviour problem. Every single capital R regret I’ve ever had, every moment of self-hatred and embarrassment, was in some way involved with the abuse of alcohol. Sometimes exacerbated by drugs, but drugs just made me work. Drugs and booze made me misbehave.

“It’s very obvious that most murders in the UK are committed by people who are drunk”

And even that I didn’t mind, the toll on your health, the toll on your well-being. None of that ever bothered me.

“What I hated was that moment of waking up in the morning where you think, ‘Oh holy Jesus Christ, what did I say? What did I do?’ Or now and again waking up in a police cell. It’s that yawning, sinking feeling of horror at yourself in the morning. It’s a very quotidian and obvious fact that most murders in the UK are committed by people who are drunk. Not only is it people who are close to us and who ostensibly love us, it’s people who are drunk. I just put those two very common things together and thought, ‘What must it feel like to wake up in the morning and remember that you killed somebody?’”

Cross laughs when *SFX* reminds him that all novels are supposed to be accidental autobiographies. “Yeah, that’s terrifying. That’s why I don’t understand how people can write sex scenes. By definition, when you’re writing a sex scene you’re giving away a private part of yourself.”

The same could be said for murder scenes, of course. “Absolutely. Weirdly, I’m much more comfortable writing those! I don’t know what that says... Every choice you make gives away something about you. It’s troubling.”

How did it feel revisiting the original book for the adaptation process?

“It all burned!” Cross laughs. “I find it impossible to read anything I’ve written, or indeed to watch anything I’ve written, without

“Yeah, it’s the drainage. Gonna cost a bob or two.”



The Liam Neeson Fan Club's AGM was tense.



“Run up there and turn left at the cameraman.”



“Body? Any body? No, no body. Nobody, I mean!”

"I WAS DROWNING IN HIM"



self-excoriation. There is no paragraph I've ever written that I don't look back on, even with only two months' hindsight, without thinking, 'God, I'd write that completely differently now.' So there is a sense of haunting my past self, and I have a number of sense memories associated with writing *Burial*. It was the first book that I wrote upon emigrating to New Zealand, when we were financially on the bones of our ass. We had two very young children and we were living in a damp-ridden hovel, and I was introduced to the phenomenon of earthquakes...

"It was an interesting time in our lives and I wrote it very quickly with an energy that I can rarely summon now. Going back to it was fascinating, but there are certain stories you tell that are dead and they're gone

and you don't think about them again, and other stories that just live with you. And *Burial*'s always lived with me. So in some sense it's been there in potentia, just waiting to be told for the screen, to be transformed rather than adapted."

Transformation, not adaptation. It's a distinction Cross is keen to emphasise. "You can't adapt a book. You turn it into something else. The greatest challenge for *Burial* was how to transform it. Literally, what form should it take on the screen?

"Famously there's a network or studio note you get when you write for the screen. Writers get it again and again. It is 'How do we make this guy more likeable?' And fair play to ITV, they did not give me this note, because I pre-empted it. How are we going to tell this story such that we like Nathan? And that led me to thinking about deconstructing the linear narrative and telling it in the form of three nested timelines. So we meet Nathan in the present and then we have these three timelines during which we unveil what happened..."

It helps that Nathan is played by Russell Tovey, one of TV's more sympathetic and empathic actors. "I was very nervous about casting Nathan because uniquely he is a character with whom I quite closely identify," Cross tells SFX. "I was worried that the process of casting him would be letting go of something private. It's like watching

someone you love marry someone else. I thought it would be a bit of a heart-wrench. But Russell just embodied the character exactly as I saw him. It was an extraordinarily pleasing thing, almost unique in my experience. I've seen somebody portray exactly the character that I imagined."

HOST WRITER

The Sister is pitched as a tale of psychological suspense. How does it balance the grounded thriller elements with the more fantastical edges to the story?

"I don't think about the nature of hauntings as being fantastical," Cross counters. "I think of that as being lived reality. There's some dialogue in episode two about post-bereavement hallucinations. An enormous majority of the recently bereaved will in some way experience the presence of the deceased loved one, be it a parent, a spouse or a child. We see them or we hear them or we sense them or we smell them.

"Given that it's such an overwhelming majority, that necessitates the conclusion that the experience of the supernatural is not just 'normal', but almost universal. The only thing at question is what is being experienced.

"Apart from some strange stuff in my sister's house, I have never had the experience of seeing a ghost. It's never happened to me. My wife is the most rational, scientific person you can possibly imagine. She's the Scully. And it's my wife who has experienced a ghost. And she rationalises the experience. She sees it as a psychological projection, not an objective experience. Nevertheless, it's my wife who's seen the ghost. Never me."

Does he want to see a ghost? "Fuck, no!"

The paranormal element in *The Sister* is unambiguous, says Cross. You wonder how the presence of the genuinely supernatural might warp a show like *Luther*.

"That's a really interesting question, because it's something which I have played around with," Cross reveals. "This is non-canonical, because we've never done it, but I have often considered the possibility of a revelation of the supernatural in *Luther*, just to consider what it might do. And if we were ever to do it, it wouldn't be central to the plot. It wouldn't be

Luther versus a ghost – though I wouldn't mind seeing *Luther* versus a haunted house, I quite fancy that idea! But the inexplicable sighting of a victim is something I've certainly considered. It's never made its way into a first draft. But I'm always thinking 'What if...?'"

The Sister is on ITV this October, date TBC.

Russell Tovey is Nathan

You've described Nathan as the biggest acting challenge of your life. Why?

I wanted Nathan to have the honesty and the truthfulness which is on the page, and to do that I had to give a lot of myself. You always do give yourself but this one was even more challenging because it took the biggest chunk out of myself than anything I've ever done before. When I finished I just had to have air, because it was like I was drowning in him, in Nathan. It took over.

Can we ever escape our pasts?

Depends what sort of brain you've got. If you're someone that can do something and then feel nothing then I guess you're a psychopath, but if you're just a decent person with morals and feelings then no, I don't think you ever can. Nathan is definitely a really moralistic, good person that something terrible has happened to and that's why it's so sad, and why people are really going to feel for him, even though they're going to be conflicted by what he's been involved in. Poor Nathan goes through an absolute meal of trying to keep all the fragments of his life from dispersing.

Do you believe in ghosts yourself?

100%. Ghosts and aliens. No doubt about it. I thought I saw a ghost dog years ago. I don't really talk about it too much. The best sort of ghost to see would be a ghost dog. I love dogs. I think this dog was just trying to find me.



DESIGNING STAR TREK: PICARD

JEFF LOMBARDI, PROPERTY MASTER IN THE ART DEPARTMENT ON STAR TREK: PICARD, TAKES SFX ON AN ALL-ACCESS TOUR OF THE 24TH CENTURY

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

GUN FRAMES

That's a super-early mock-up of the Federation's phaser rifle, for me to see how the ergonomics were working out. That's just the raw frame of the gun, essentially. It doesn't have the main barrel there, or the scope put on yet.

This was the black market Romulan disruptor that Laris and Zhaban have stowed inside of the château. As the Romulan weaponry evolved, I was building it for this military faction that's on the Borg cube. The idea early on with the writers was that the Romulans are scattered across the galaxy in different factions, and so they're just claiming whatever old stuff they have. So something that would have been like where it was maybe 15 or 20 years ago. So instead of Zhat Vash weaponry we call this Tal Shiar, the idea being these old Romulan guns are all just sold on the black market now.





REMOTE CONTROL PHASER

None of the creatives wanted to do the “remote control phaser” from *The Next Generation*. Patrick didn’t want to either. Jonathan Frakes didn’t want to, beyond Alex Kurtzman and Michael Javan. It’s not even just a design thing. It was looking back at how that weapon works – you couldn’t aim it, so there’s a lot of shots of people holding the phaser and yet the shot is beaming in some odd angle. It’s a weird thing, like a boomerang essentially.

We went to the drawing board. I had John Eaves conceptualise some new shapes, just pencil shapes, of what the new phaser could be for this period. There’s this one where the grip was forward, closer to the barrel and then a long stalk on back, and it just felt right and Alex loved it. We designed it from there. In the last little bit they wanted to kind of riff off that concept from the JJ movies where an oscillating barrel went from stun to kill, and they could switch it. Instead of an oscillating barrel, I had this concept of you have a fingerprint and have control on it, and it snaps the coiling back and engages it into the kill setting.

So there’s a closed setting – that’s its standard setting, always in stun unless you have the rights to this gun and can activate it, when it’ll go into its kill setting. So in other words, if somebody disarmed you on the Enterprise, they could only stun you with the gun. They couldn’t kill you with your own gun. That was the concept. It’s never shown in the show, but it’s there. That was what I tried to do with a lot of the stuff: y’know, put some kind of ingenuity into it, so that whether or not it was shown later at least we knew that there was something to it – there was a reason behind it. Rather than something just put there superfluously to look cool.

FEDERATION Phaser RIFLE

The Federation phaser rifles, you don’t see a lot of their features either but they were built with stalks that are able to pull out the forward hand grip that rotates down. So you can actually extend the gun from a smaller compact gun to an elongated sniper rifle. The scopes are electronically triggered to raise up and down, and there’s flashlights in them as well, just like they have in *First Contact*.

The side paneling, the concept behind that was that you could switch from stun to kill as well, where your trigger finger is also activating these control panels on the side – but also you would be phase-modulating there as well, which in the past, they had to crack open the phasers to do.

So they’re the ultimate Borg killers in this future timeline. The phaser rifles are really designed for taking out Borg because that’s kind of the only threat at this point the Federation has. I mean, they’re the main threat that we know of...



FEDERATION PISTOL

Seven of Nine uses the Federation pistol and rifle, but that’s only because, as a Fenris Ranger, she would be getting black market guns. The Federation, in the past, really labelled the guns very clearly with deltas and graphics as Starfleet or Federation guns. I did that with these, but actually everything’s scorched, blacked-out and scraped off. If you get into the finer details of it, the idea was that they were grabbing Starfleet and Federation stuff, but scratching out serial numbers, so that this more ragtag group of Fenris Rangers could use the equipment.

SOJI'S RINGS

Allison Cimino of RockLove Jewelry in New York really helped me pull off Dahj and Soji's omega necklace from a pencil sketch from me. She found the frictionless chain and delivered to me a beautiful sterling silver pendant that was not a prop but real finished jewellery. My favourite part of seeing the finished pilot episode for the first time was seeing the necklace transform into a nebula that a Romulan warbird flies out of. That was very cool for me!

HANDCUFFS

These I borrowed from *Discovery*, actually! These were concepts that Mario Moreira, the prop master from *Discovery*, lent me and then we made our own. He regrettably couldn't give us the force cuffs he had, as he was still using them... But we just made our own with his designs, and that was because the creatives wanted to use the same tech.

TRANSPORTER ENHANCER

One serendipitous moment for me on the show was in rehearsal for the Freecloud episode ["Stardust City Rag"]. When Rios gets off the transporter pad he was scripted to leave the transporter enhancer on the console. Well, all the consoles on that ship are built on a slant - nothing is flat. Thankfully I had built a magnet into the enhancer in case it needed to be worn like a badge. Santiago [Cabrera], not even knowing that I did this, places the enhancer on the metal console and it sticks like magic!





NEPENTHE BUNNICORNS

This one was fun. This is another perfect example of Michael Chabon's whimsy. When the bunnicorns showed up, I'm like, "This is what I think it is, right? A bunny mixed with a unicorn?" The bunnicorns were made by Makeup Effects Lab, the same guys who did most of my prosthetics. They were tricky because we wanted them to be based on a hare, actually, because as props master I also deal with all the animal wrangling on the show. So I actually got real hares that we filmed for that first shot of Picard and Soji beaming into Nepenthe. After that, we knew that we were only going to see one real practical bunnicorn, and then it would be Kestra carrying the dead bunnicorns the rest of the episode.

Eventually she would be skinning them and need to bring a skinned version of the bunnicorns. Making bunnicorns was fine. They use real rabbit furs and just reconstructed them from scratch, essentially. We had to make sure that the bodies still felt like they were weighted, so we put these beanbags on the insides so they still felt like they were packs of dead meat.

When we did the skinned ones I actually wasn't happy with them. These aren't actually what ended up on screen, the one from Makeup Effects Lab. They felt too stiff to me, they didn't feel like real skinned meat. The morning we were filming the bunnicorn pizza scene, I actually went out to Chinatown here in Los Angeles and bought a real skinned rabbit and brought it back to set. We got some power drills, drilled holes in their heads - rude! - put bunnicorn horns in them and brought them to set. It was one of those things where I've been showing the creatives the skinned bunnicorn and they were like, it was fine. They weren't super-happy with them and neither was I, but it was kind of like, we're going to see this thing for, like, five seconds.

Again, it's needing to be the perfectionist artist that I am. I wasn't happy with them. So I just went out and got the real thing. It just made all the difference, even to the point where you see Jonathan Frakes throw them on the counter and brush off whatever goop was put on them onto his apron in the show. I wish I had imagery of brains spiralling up the drill bits. It was pretty horrific!



RIKER AND TROI

I really wanted to do their established wedding photo above the mantel in their cabin in Nepenthe. But regrettably, CBS and Paramount had licensing rights issues at the time, so I couldn't clear anything that was generated for a Paramount show to be on CBS television show. Things that were made for the show can be in the movie, but things that were made for a movie couldn't be in the show. And this was one of those. I wanted to try and change it. I was still adamant about it: "30% [difference], will that be enough?" And they were like, "Well, yeah, maybe". So I took the cake out, and we turned it into a watercolour. It still wasn't different enough for them to clear it, but I really liked it. I actually ended up liking what we did better than the original one. Everyone loved this imagery. We were gonna put it in the show, we just couldn't clear it.

**VARIOUS MAPS OF NEPENTHE**

This was a unique opportunity to give character backstory to somebody who you were never going to meet. Michael Chabon's kid did a lot of cartography and fantasy maps growing up. So we used some of his fantasy maps as a reference, but more than that Chabon had a 17-page essay on this magical land of Ardoni - seven different continents, 13 different species, 15 different languages - and so I had this bible to go off. This is what Thad had spent his entire life developing. That was really fun for me. I also, as a kid, loved doing maps, but mine were of Jurassic Park!

I probably had six or seven different graphic artists working to get this episode done. It was bizarre. We had painters and illustrators and several different graphic artists working on all the different elements you see in that house. It's pretty remarkable. Everything in every map is exactly to Chabon's specifications. He was there meticulously going through it to approve it. So it was like, "This city is wrong - this is based on Japanese pagoda-style architecture, not Islamic arches, so you should mix the imagery here for these cultures". It was extensive. It was pretty amazing.

A little insight too: I put one of his childhood maps in there and I also put one of my *Jurassic Park* island maps from my childhood as well, in the collage of maps you see on the wall. You'll never notice, but it's just one of those little personal touches.



अङ्ग देव निर्मल अंग देव

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अङ्ग देव निर्मल अंग देव
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अङ्ग देव निर्मल अंग देव
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अङ्ग देव निर्मल अंग देव
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अङ्ग देव निर्मल अंग देव
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FONTS OF ARDANI

Chabon came up with the language, but I needed to visually represent it. Being a dinosaur freak as I am, I loved these books called *Dinotopia* [created by fantasy artist James Gurney]. In *Dinotopia*, they have a language that's based on the footprints of the dinosaurs, and so you can use an alphabet based on patterns. I love that idea.

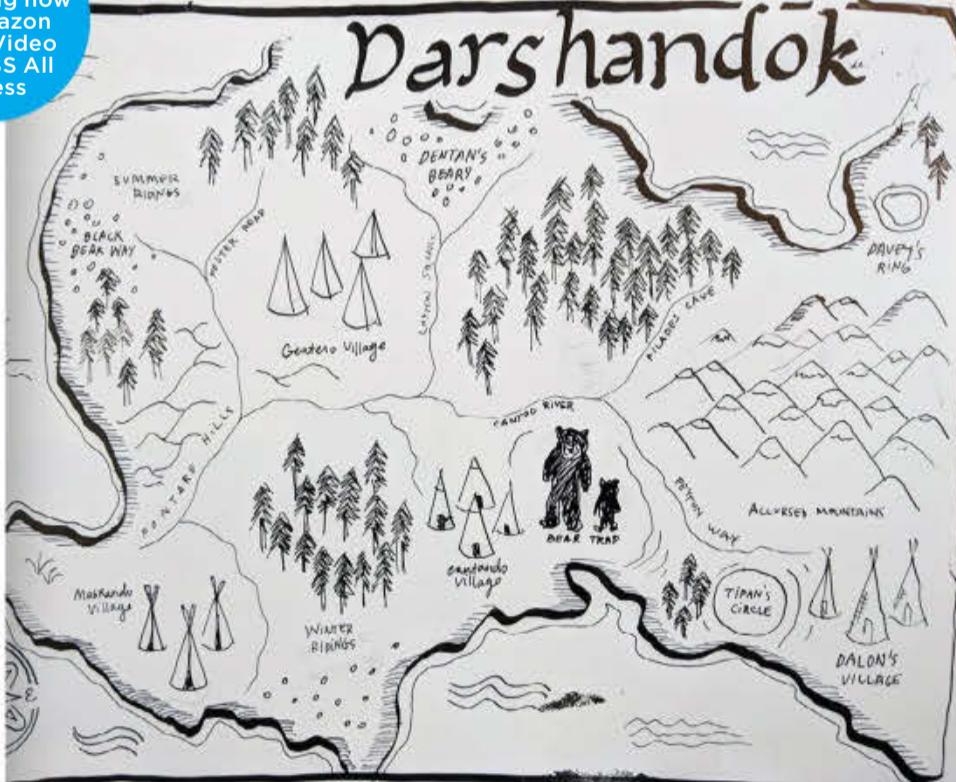
In this one he had bear people, working with or against the archers in the woods. And so I was like, well, there's a perfect opportunity which we should do: a bear language. I just used that idea of dinosaur footprints and turned it into bear footprints, and that's the bear language. The other languages, it was just finding things that Chabon liked, really. He's obsessed with typefaces and fonts. He told me that early on: "Really, I'm obsessed with graphics and fonts and typefaces. And I will be very picky about it!" He showed me a lot of artists' illustrations that were done for his novels, so I used that as my template to build from there. That's actually how I ended up doing all the graphics on the show. Chabon ended up coming to me to do it because we felt like we had a similar taste.

Star Trek:
Picard is
streaming now
on Amazon
Prime Video
and CBS All
Access

Nik̄lin



Darshandōk



A close-up portrait of Tom Ellis. He is wearing a dark grey suit jacket over a white dress shirt and a dark tie. He is leaning his head against a light-colored metal railing, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a clear blue sky.

“This year is quite an emotional season, especially the second half”

Close Encounters

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BIGGEST STARS

TOM ELLIS

The star of *Lucifer* dishes on resurrecting the Devil

Words by Bryan Cairns // Photography by Allegra Messina

Normally, the Prince of Darkness evokes images of a red-skinned individual with horns, a pointy tail and a pitchfork. Tom Ellis defies those expectations. Sure, there's still a bit of the devil in his Lucifer – those crimson eyes, that grin and his true demonic form – but he infuses charm, vulnerability and sex appeal into his version of the character. He took time out to speak with *SFX* about the show's season five twist, Lucifer's redemption, getting into shape for the role and the possibility of a happy ending for the Devil and love interest Chloe.

Chloe said those three magic words to Lucifer: "I love you". So just where do they stand when the lovebirds finally reunite?

➲ What happens in this season is Chloe is on Earth all alone, trying to move on with her life. Lucifer is in Hell trying to get on with his life. Chloe gets into really bad trouble. When we think Lucifer is never going to be there to save the day again, all of a sudden, Lucifer turns up. We know that down in Hell, Lucifer has been notified that Chloe is in trouble. What we don't know at this point is that Lucifer has a twin brother, Michael. Michael has assumed Lucifer's identity on Earth, knowing that his brother is down in Hell. He's decided he wants to wreak havoc on all the things that matter to Lucifer.

What does Michael think of Lucifer?

➲ He doesn't believe that Lucifer going down to Hell is anything but selfish. He doesn't believe his brother is anything but selfish and that people will see through this charade. As soon as he starts messing around with Lucifer's life, Lucifer will be up from Hell to straighten things out. That is Michael's MO and mission. Of course, a lot of people fall for it. But the one person you think is going to fall for it – or Michael believes is falling for it – is Chloe. But Chloe being Chloe, she can tell there is something slightly off about this Lucifer.

How did you differentiate Michael from Lucifer?

➲ It was a challenge. I've never done that before. When I started to break it down, there were a few things that I wanted to make sure to do. One, I wanted to make sure that there were some physical differences. Another thing is Lucifer is an open and very flamboyant character, and I

BIODATA

From Cardiff, Wales

Greatest Hits
Prior to Lucifer, Ellis provided a love interest for Martha Jones in Doctor Who, was chef Gary in Miranda, and played a king in Merlin.

Random Fact
William Shatner and Alice Cooper are both fans of Tom Ellis as Lucifer, with the former supporting the campaign to save the show and the latter asking for a selfie with him.

wanted to explore the notion of Michael being the opposite of that. He is a schemer, who observes and watches.

Last season, you hit the gym hard. How rewarding was it to see all that work pay off on the screen?

➲ It was rewarding. I was proud of the work I had put in. Obviously, there's a noticeable difference and lots of people have mentioned that. There was a sense of pride. The big thing is staying there now – or trying to, at least.

Lucifer participated in the Arrowverse's huge crossover Crisis On Infinite Earths. There's still plenty of history to mine between Lucifer and Constantine.

Are you hoping to revisit that dynamic?

➲ There haven't been any official conversations. Matt Ryan and I have known each other for quite a long time. It was just fun for us to finally be on set together. A couple of years prior at Comic-Con, we drunkenly said one night, "Wouldn't it be fun if we could get the two characters together?" And we did. Never say never is one of my things. Season six of *Lucifer* is going to be our final season. Who knows what the future holds?

You've previously stated that this TV series is the ultimate redemption story. How close is Lucifer to achieving that goal?

➲ Season five goes a long way to telling a big part of that story. It's not something we are going to see in the first half, but it's out there that God does come in the second half of the season. Lucifer's issues with his dad are at the heart of most of his problems. His redemption story has a lot to do with finding peace. A lot of his journey happens this year. This year is quite an emotional season – especially the second half, because there's a lot of baggage to be dealt with.

The heart of the series is Lucifer and Chloe. Is a happily-ever-after even obtainable for them?

➲ That is the big question, isn't it? If Lucifer is immortal and Chloe isn't, what is the happily-ever-after in that story? And if Lucifer is in Hell, and Chloe presumably won't be going to Hell, what does that mean? Finding the happily-ever-after story isn't as simple as people think it is. There are a lot of factors to build in. ●

The first eight episodes of Lucifer season five are streaming now on Netflix.

Boogie Boogie Nights

"HE'S A LOT OF FUN! HE WEIGHS HALF A TON!" WE LOOK BACK AT THE LOVEABLE ROBOT WHO ALWAYS TOOK THE MICKEY IN HIS SATURDAY TEATIME ITV SITCOM, PULLING UP TO 12 MILLION VIEWERS AND HELPING TO BLOW DOCTOR WHO OUT OF HIS TRADITIONAL TIMESLOT

WORDS: ALISTAIR MCGOWN



ONCE R2-D2 AND C-3PO HAD popularised cute robots in the late '70s, every TV show was chasing android action; *Doctor Who* had K9, *Battlestar Galactica* Muffit the daggit, and *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century* had his little pal Twiki.

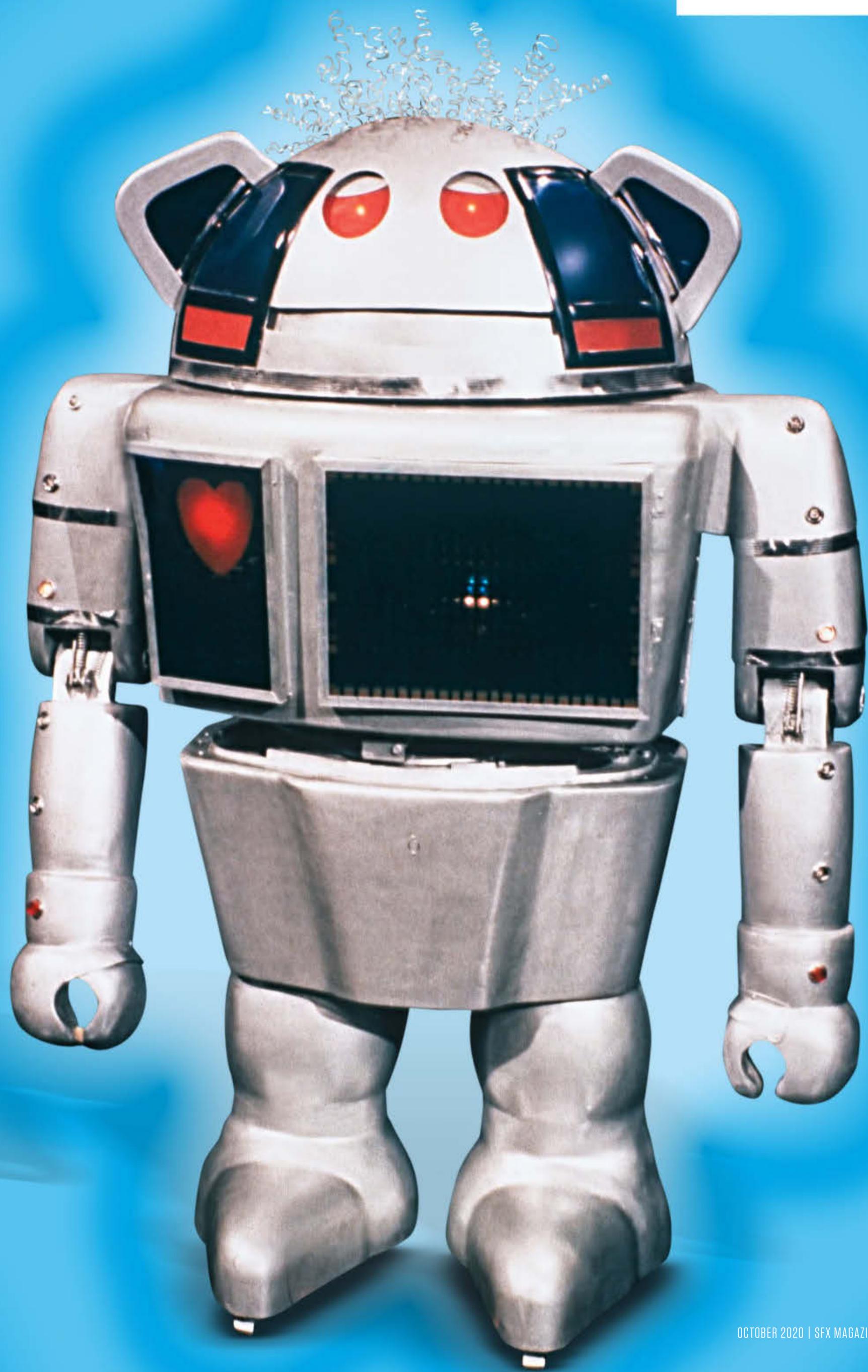
But Britain's cheekiest robot entertainer was Metal Mickey, created in 1978 by record producer (and one-time guitarist for David Bowie) Johnny Edward as a robotic pop star. Andy Thompson and Chris Verner of effects company Theatrescene built a sophisticated remote-controlled robot, voiced and operated by Edward himself.

Mickey quickly became a star in some ITV regions, co-hosting Saturday morning show *The Saturday Banana* with Bill Oddie from autumn 1978, before making a bid for pop stardom with a cover of '50s doo-wop ditty "Lollipop" (it didn't break the Top 40).

In spring 1980, BBC1's *Jim'll Fix It* presented Mickey to not only a wider audience but also to Humphrey Barclay, comedy boss at ITV franchise London Weekend Television. Barclay had recently rejected the idea of a Metal Mickey show, after Edward pitched him a tape of *Saturday Banana* highlights, but a *Fix It* clip, showing Bracknell youngster Stuart Finn with Mickey in his local supermarket, finally clinched the deal.

Barclay engaged Micky Dolenz, former drummer with the Monkees, to produce and direct (prompting Dolenz to switch to using Michael, "so people wouldn't think that I was the robot"). Writer Colin Bostock-Smith, meanwhile, had scripted for *The Basil Brush Show* before joining LWT. "I'd written for their disastrous series *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night*," Bostock-Smith tells SFX. "I was still under contract, and I'd casually wandered into Humphrey's office. On his desk was a picture of Metal Mickey and I said, 'Oh, that's Metal' →

METAL MICKEY



Metal Merch

Mickey cemented his place in '80s pop culture with a host of tie-ins

Metal Mickey publications included a weekly strip in *TV Tops* comic (*Look-in* abandoned its plans after Edward complained about the way Mickey was drawn in the pilot effort), four Christmas annuals and a best-selling Mickey-shaped paperback, *Metal Mickey's Boogie Book*. None of the six 7" singles issued, ranging from "Metal Mickey Magic" in 1980 to "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" in 1983, troubled the Top 75. Perhaps the most inventive tie-in marketed Mickey's favourite sweets, produced by Liverpool firm Taverers. "They actually made Atomic Thunderbusters!" remembers Colin Bostock-Smith. "My village shop had a jar of them on its shelf. And a year later it still had a jar of them on its shelf! They were disgusting!"



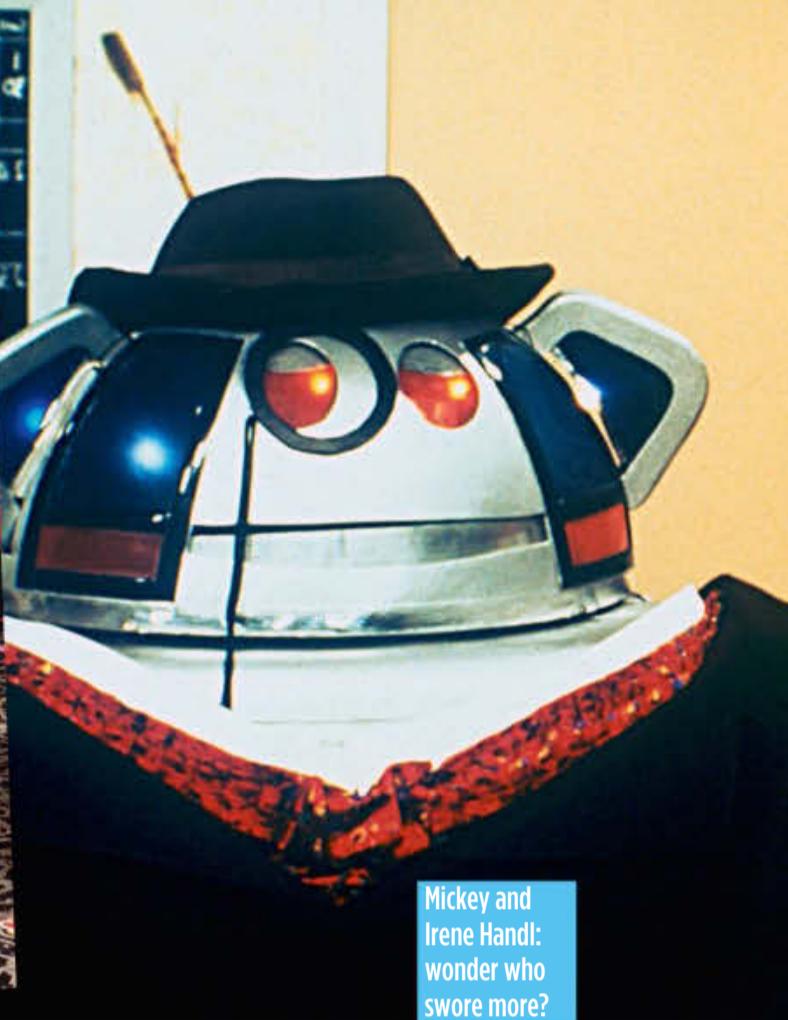
Mickey, isn't it? He said, 'Yes, we're thinking of doing a show with him, would you like to try out to be the writer on it? I'm going to try several writers for sample scripts and see which is the best.' But I don't actually think he tried anybody else!"

Barclay was set on a domestic sitcom format. "He said, 'I want this to be about a family, I want there to be a mother and father, and there's got to be three children in the family, and the girl next door, and also I'm trying to get Irene Handl to play the granny'. It was all laid out for me.

"It was quite difficult to service those seven actors and Mickey, and give them each enough in an ITV half hour to make them come alive. I wasn't at all experienced in writing TV sitcom,



Dolenz and
Lucinda
Bateson
flank Mickey.



Mickey and
Irene Handl:
wonder who
swore more?

so it was a learning process, and I wouldn't like to be closely examined on many of the early scripts now! I think I got better as the series went on."

Sniffing a hit, Barclay rushed the show into production, with the cast meeting their chromium-plated co-star at a press call on 21 May 1980. Ashley Knight, today a stage musical performer and pianist but then an experienced 21-year-old juvenile lead, played Mickey's teenage inventor. He recalls this fateful meeting: "We were on the pavement outside LWT and I hadn't met this robot before. We were all quite puzzled by this robot that twiddled around and had a real-life conversation with us. We wondered how it knew what we were going to say.

"Later we realised he had a microphone in him so that Johnny Edward, who was sat in reception, could hear us, and had a vocoder to speak back to us. It seems tame by modern standards, but it was really quite incredible in 1980!"

A first episode was recorded on 10 June 1980. "Things were much simpler then," recalls Bostock-Smith. "You didn't have layers of associate producers and editors. The whole thing was done between Humphrey, Michael Dolenz, John Edward and me. It happened all at once. They thought they had a hit right from the start."

Bostock-Smith, Edward and Dolenz were the series' driving force. The latter directed more than half the series – though he was occasionally absent, as Bostock-Smith recalls. "Once he suddenly wasn't there and David Crossman came in [to direct].

"When Michael returned the next week he eventually admitted he'd been in Japan, where they'd pay him a fortune to mime to Monkees records! He didn't want anyone to know!"

"Michael had a very American energy – wacky and frenetic,"

remembers Ashley Knight. "He was really fun, but he was firm and got the job done."

The show launched ITV's autumn 1980 schedules on Saturday 6 September, airing at 5.15pm. Its sitcom format saw the suburban Wilberforce family shaken up by Mickey, built by whizzkid son Ken but magically brought to life by some Atomic Thunderbuster sweets given him by girl next door Janey (Lola Young). Bostock-Smith had specified a sherbet lemon in the original draft script, until Barclay said it sounded too ordinary.

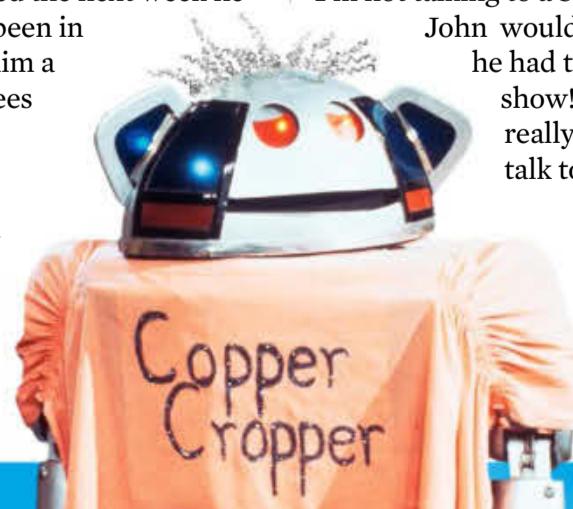
Exchanging cheeky banter with the Wilberforces, the extrovert robot fondly granted them nicknames. Creator Ken was Clever Clogs, cute Haley (Lucinda Bateson) Stringbean, mouthy punk Steve (Gary Shail) Little Squirt, building society manager Dad (Michael Stainton) Bootface, and scatty mum Marjorie (Georgina Melville) Dippy. Anarchic Granny (acting veteran Irene Handl), meanwhile, was Fruitbat.

Mickey had to perform in front of a live studio audience. "We were in LWT Studio 1 with 400 people," explains Bostock-Smith. "To achieve it in those circumstances was quite amazing. I don't think he bumped into the furniture that much more than the actors did!"

Johnny Edward was essentially an electronic puppeteer, controlling Mickey's movement and voicing him live. "In front of the set you had this big black box where John sat operating the thing," recalls Bostock-Smith. "In rehearsals and camera rehearsals, you talked to Mickey – not John in his box – and Mickey talked back to you. We had a floor manager who absolutely refused to. He said, 'I'm not talking to a bloody robot!' and then

John wouldn't reply. I'm not sure if he had to leave the set or leave the show! I thought John was really right to say 'You have to talk to Mickey.'"

"You chatted with him as Mickey, laughed with him as Mickey, moved





In the make-up dept.
at London Weekend TV.



"The family" pose with Mickey on a PR shoot.

with him as Mickey," adds Ashley Knight. "You knew John was there, but in the rehearsal room or on the studio floor that was Mickey. I don't think anybody called him John – they sort of forgot he was there."

"You have to take your hat off to John," enthuses Bostock-Smith. "I think he was a genius, to get the whole thing together and then actually to operate Mickey; to move him, his eyes, the arms, to speak the words at the same time... It was a terrific challenge, and the show was down to him in that sense entirely. I can't think of a better robot!"

With remote control still limited, there were occasional technical hitches; one famous outtake saw Mickey miss his cue and, without skipping a beat, ask, "Did I cock it up?", to much audience hilarity.

Bostock-Smith's scripts became more outlandish as the series progressed. "Once we established that Mickey could do Metal Mickey magic, if he tried he could do almost anything," he agrees. "We went back into Roman times. We did a cowboy one, which might have been a dream sequence. After a while you felt you could do almost anything you liked."

"It was definitely wacky," concurs Knight. "In one, Michael Stainton fought an octopus on the settee, and I remember talking plants in the greenhouse as well, like Audrey II [from *Little*]

Shop Of Horrors]. There wasn't a lot of realism going on..."

Bostock-Smith added the occasional sentimental touch. "In one show I killed him off: Mickey sacrificed himself so that a girl could live. It was all very sad. Then of course, by magic, we brought him back again. Somebody wrote to the *Daily Express* saying her mother had been reduced to tears, which pleased me. This was several years before *ET* – I wonder if Spielberg took it from me?" he laughs.

Metal Mickey attracted a wide family audience, as Knight remembers: "You wouldn't put a strictly children's show on after the football results, would you? Nothing was particularly rude, but it wasn't patronising either. We had Gary's sarcastic dialogue, for example – and there was lots of teenage love going on."

The show also attracted some notable guest stars. "It became a thing that people wanted to be in," recalls Knight. "Roy Kinnear and Clive Dunn did it, and the pop star Hazel O'Connor. And we had people who went on to do interesting things; Robbie Coltrane was in one as a camp hairdresser."

Drawing up to 12 million viewers to ITV's first fully-networked Saturday night schedule, the show was double-billed with *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century*, with a robotic tag team of Mickey and Twiki dealing a knock-out blow to the venerable Time Lord in Tom Baker's swansong season. The combination of "Boogie boogie" and "Bi-di-bi-di" blew away *Who*, with a ratings collapse forcing the BBC to abandon its traditional Saturday slot.

Metal Mickey even earned a prestigious Banff TV Festival prize. "We got the award for the world's best children's entertainment programme," says Bostock-Smith. "It consisted

'Bot On The Box'

Mickey made many TV appearances outside of his own show

Mickey helped cockney comic Mike Reid present a "Techno special" of kids' gameshow *Runaround* in 1979, met hapless superhero Cooperman on *Russ Abbot's Madhouse* in December 1980, appeared with his producer Micky Dolenz as part of a Thames TV Telethon, was interviewed by Sally James on Saturday morning flanfest *TISWAS* in January 1982, and featured with a robotic dog in *Game For A Laugh*. One of his most memorable appearances was on an edition of *Larry Grayson's Generation Game* aired on 12 December 1981, where contestants had to identify a robotic line-up consisting of himself, R2-D2, K9, a Cyberman and Marvin from *Hitchhiker's*. Mickey attempted a fair impression of host Larry ("It's a bit mucky in 'ere, dear!") before goosing hostess Isla St Clair.



of a certificate and a little metal representation of the Canadian Rockies! When LWT moved offices I found them forgotten in a corner, so I nicked 'em. The metal thing is now in my downstairs loo!"

Following two recording blocks aired back-to-back over winter 1982/83 as a 17-episode fourth season, the show abruptly disappeared, after 41 episodes. "We knew we were on the last series," he explains. "I don't know the figures, but I wouldn't be surprised to hear we were down."

Bostock-Smith moved onto robot-free sitcom *Me And My Girl* and became principal writer for Clive James. Johnny Edward, meanwhile, penned the syrupy 1982 number one "Save Your Love" for Renee & Renato. Mickey still lives with Edward, making occasional public appearances.

"I think he refurbished him – I saw some pictures on the internet," says Ashley of Mickey's current whereabouts. "He's been pimped up! 'Pimped-Up Mickey' – that could be the next episode!" ●

Brought To Book

THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

The SF luminary charts a way through climate breakdown

Words by Jonathan Wright // Photography by Will Ireland

IT IS, KIM STANLEY ROBINSON NOTES, QUITE possible “to conclude that we’re doomed, that the trajectory we’re on is so powerful that we won’t get our shit together fast enough to avoid a mass extinction event and total catastrophe”. But what if humanity could find a way through the problems, largely caused by global heating, that lie ahead?

Robinson imagines one such potential route in *The Ministry For The Future*, set in the “very near future” and likely, he says, his last “big long novel”. It’s a book where things begin to get better only after a terrible event has shaken enough people out of complacency. With visceral power, Robinson shows us a “wet-bulb 35” incident in India, where a combination of temperature and humidity overwhelms the human body (35 °C being the threshold beyond which it can no longer adequately cool itself).

“I thought, ‘Yeah, that’s the way to start,’” Robinson says, speaking via Skype from his garden in California. “Let’s smack people in the head with what’s coming down, and then go on from there and try to explore what the ramifications will be.”

Robinson shows us how this ugliness ends with a good outcome in an unusual way. The book cuts between multiple viewpoints and, amid a jumble of sources, eyewitness testimony is especially important. This was ideal for telling a global story, because such first-person narratives are typically condensed as people look back and judge what they saw.

To explore the lives of so many characters more conventionally would have made the book unwieldy – something that happened to some extent with Robinson’s *Science In The Capital* trilogy. “I sank under the weight of too many things going on at once and it wasn’t the right form for the content,” says Robinson, who later edited the trilogy into a single volume, *Green Earth*.

FRANK TALK

Nonetheless, one relationship provides the book with a spine: the interactions between Frank May, traumatised by events in India, and Mary Murphy, head of an international organisation dubbed the Ministry for the Future because of its role as an advocate for generations as yet unborn.

May is especially important, because his post-traumatic stress disorder represents a wider collective trauma. “If you live long enough, everybody has it,” says Robinson of PTSD

BIODATA

From
Born in Waukegan, Illinois; grew up in Orange County, California.

Greatest Hits
Robinson's Mars colonisation trilogy (1992-96), which began with Red Mars, won multiple awards and established his reputation.

Random Fact
Robinson routinely writes in his front courtyard, near his garden – even if it's raining, thanks to a small tarpaulin overhead. "I get a little damp, but not too damp."



– though some, he adds, seem to be able to process difficult events; to practice a kind of “structured forgetting” that eludes May, who’s haunted by flashbacks.

“It’s one of the main things that the book is about,” says Robinson. “How do you have a healthy reaction to trauma? Because we’re going to go into a world trauma. The pandemic is a good precursor. 2020 is going to be a traumatic year; do we then have a good stress response? Or do we have a bad stress response?”

Robinson’s own initial Covid-19 experience was unusual. In March, he was rafting in the Grand Canyon. “I was out of touch when the big shutdown happened [in the USA] on 13 March, so I came up out of the Grand Canyon and the whole world had changed,” he says. “And it was completely stunning. I mean, even as a science fiction writer, I was thinking, ‘I’m not prepared for this. This is too big a change, too fast.’ So I spent a lot of time in catch-up mode.”

There were consolations. One feature of lockdown – for those not assailed by money problems – was a sense that things got simpler; that we escaped, as Robinson puts it, “entertainment that isn’t really entertaining, that was exhausting all of us”.

LET'S GO TO WORK

While he’s by nature someone who sees the glass as half-full, Robinson has said he’s neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the future, because putting things in these binary terms is artificial. Better to think about what we need to do. So what does Robinson himself think that is?

First and foremost, he says, we’ll need to decarbonise. “It doesn’t mean suffering,” he says. “It doesn’t mean wearing a hair shirt and living like saints, it means being smarter about the burning of carbon. And the whole civilisational project will be equality and sustainability with the biosphere. This will be the work, and I think it’s necessary work. It’s unavoidable work because if you avoid it, everything falls apart and goes smash! This is what I’ve been trying to point out.”

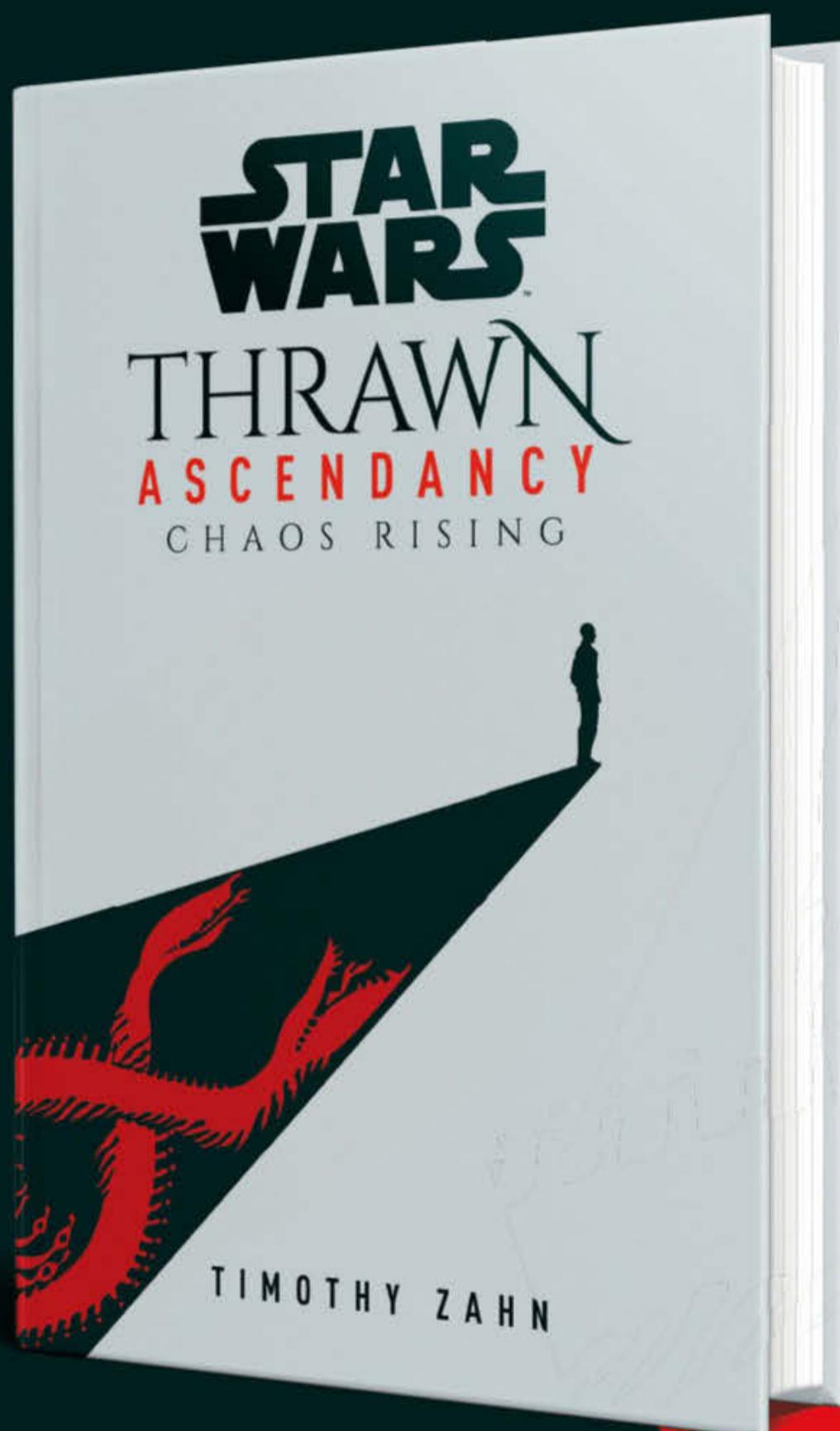
In the future, he plans to do that via novellas. “I want to try a new form, which is compression, and see if I get something springy and interesting,” he says. “I think I’ve said what I have to say [in longer-form SF]. I’m kind of done, and I don’t want to repeat myself!”

The Ministry For The Future is out on 8 October from Orbit.

“Let’s smack people in the head with what’s coming down, and then go on from there”



THE FIRST BOOK IN AN EPIC
NEW STAR WARS TRILOGY.



DISCOVER THE ORIGINS OF
THE FUTURE GRAND ADMIRAL.



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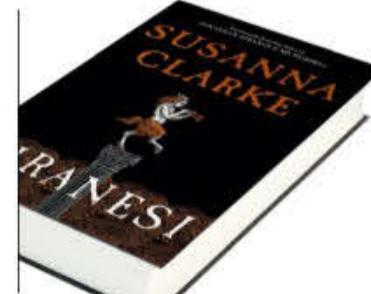
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The Wyld Stallyns make a belated return.



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Hilary Swank stars in this Mars mission drama based on an article in *Esquire*.



86 PIRANESI

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★★★★★ SUPERB

★★★★☆ GOOD

★★★☆☆ AVERAGE

★★☆☆☆ POOR

★☆☆☆☆ TERRIBLE

TENET The Rewinds Of War



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 150 minutes

► Director Christopher Nolan

► Cast John David Washington, Elizabeth Debicki, Robert Pattinson, Kenneth Branagh, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Himesh Patel

➲ **There's a paradox at the heart** of *Tenet* that has nothing to do with its time-travel antics. More on that in a while.

Before the film was released there was much speculation, partly fuelled by its curious title, partly because of all the reverse action in the trailer, that it was going to be a palindromic film; that somewhere around halfway the action would go into reverse, with John David Washington's main character moving forward as time went backwards. That seemed a perfect fit for Christopher Nolan. After all, he's previously dabbled in time travel (*Interstellar*), storytelling in reverse (*Memento*) and high-concept SF ideas with extraordinary visuals (*Inception*).

Well, there is an element of that in *Tenet*. But there's a lot more besides. Maybe too much. Washington plays an unnamed agent of something or other. Following a botched operation, he learns he's passed some kind of test and is given a new mission based on little more than a single word: tenet. If that all sounds a little vague, don't worry – Nolan's leaving things deliberately ambiguous for reasons that become clear. Um, clear-ish.

Soon Washington discovers that the world is under threat from weapons from the future: "inverted" bullets (and other tech) travelling backwards through time, which are apparently the

detritus of some upcoming temporal war. As Washington tracks the arms dealer behind these weapons the film moves into globetrotting James Bond mode, with impressive action set-pieces and an immensely entertaining Robert Pattinson as a louche, British Felix Leiter (another subtle inversion, perhaps: an American superspy with a British sidekick). During this section the temporal schtick seems little more than an exotic MacGuffin, although those acquainted with the Steven Moffat school of time-travel plotting will pick up on a few clues that all is not what it seems.

When Washington finds the Blofeld of this tale, arms dealer and abusive husband Andrei Sator

“Worth dissecting and arguing about”

(Kenneth Branagh), the time travel really grabs hold of the narrative and things become very complicated indeed. Yes, there's some of that backwards action we were all expecting, but that's just one aspect of what's going on.

It's certainly an ambitious film, with some carefully crafted, labyrinthine plotting based on an intriguing central conceit. There's a lot of decent action, arresting visuals and some fine performances, although Washington has to fight hard to bring anything to his character beyond being a walking enigma. The problem is, the more levels of complexity Nolan shovels on, the less interesting the film becomes.



“When I tap the dash, bring the car to a halt.”

It's clearly been designed as a film you need to see more than once. Sure, some will be ordering their "I UNDERSTOOD TENET FIRST TIME" T-shirts from Etsy, but even they're going to pick up more on repeated watches, while the rest of us mere mortals will need at least a second viewing to confirm or dash theories.

Which is all well and good (and will certainly lead to some interesting discussions on the internet), but the paradox we mentioned at the start of the

review is: will you actually want to pay to see it a second time? Because sadly, *Tenet* isn't particularly gripping. Sure, films that require you to engage your brain are refreshing, but if you're being asked to put in the effort you need to be rewarded, and *Tenet* is short on the kind of wow factor that encourages multiple viewings.

Part of the problem is that too much of the mechanics of time travel is explained through curt infodumps – often fighting against a noisy soundtrack – rather than



being demonstrated through the action. Another issue is that the film never really has much fun exploring its concepts. For a long while all we get are those "magic" bullets, which aren't particularly visually interesting, while the climactic battle borders on incoherent and offers few memorable images. Even a centrepiece backwards car chase feels oddly mundane.

It also doesn't help that most of the characters react to learning about time travel like they've just

been told Elvis is dead. It's as if Nolan became so bogged down in the intricate details of time travel that he's forgotten about the broad-stroke delights that the genre can offer.

For all its faults, *Tenet* is certainly worth seeing, dissecting and arguing about online. But it's at its most entertaining when it's being a James Bond spoof.

Dave Golder

IPattinson drew on the mannerisms of the late Christopher Hitchens, after getting obsessed with watching his debates.



Men of 55
wearing
sneakers.
The horror.

BILL & TED FACE THE MUSIC

All The Old Dudes



► RELEASED 23 SEPTEMBER

TBC | TBC

► Director Dean Parisot

► Cast Keanu Reeves, Alex Winter,
Brigette Lundy-Paine, Samara Weaving

► It had to fall somewhere

between bogus and excellent, and this belated threequel turns out to be *Bill & Ted's Perfectly Decent Adventure*. The good news is that Wyld Stallyns' reunion doesn't come over as a cynical tour through the band's greatest hits. Unfortunately though, *Face The Music* doesn't feel particularly essential either.

The last three decades haven't been kind to Bill S Preston, Esq and Ted "Theodore" Logan. Superficially they're happy enough – they don't know how to be anything else – but their wives are becoming increasingly disillusioned. Meanwhile, the failure to write "the song" destined to bring peace and harmony to the universe is weighing heavy on them.

This all brings a melancholic air to proceedings that – while dramatically satisfying – feels at odds with the movie's gloriously carefree predecessors. Indeed, in terms of humour, spark and clever timey-wimey stuff, *Face The Music* simply can't compete with the past – it's like watching an ageing band trying to recapture the magic of records they made in their youth. Bill and Ted even spend much of the movie as the support act, their own story less headline-worthy than that of their daughters, Billie and Thea (Brigette Lundy-Paine and Samara Weaving, both of whom are excellent).

When it comes to the crunch, *Face The Music* still hits the right comedy notes. Through a prism of famous historical figures, celebrity cameos and air guitar riffs, that central tenet of being excellent to each other shines through. We could all do with more of that right now. **Richard Edwards**

IBill and Ted co-creator/*Face The Music* co-writer Chris Matheson is the son of Richard Matheson, author of *I Am Legend*.

Reviews

TV



AWAY Season One What a bunch of Mars-holes



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Creator Andrew Hinderaker
► Cast Hilary Swank, Josh Charles, Talitha Eliana Bateman, Vivian Wu, Ato Essandoh, Mark Ivanir

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 In the age of Chris Hadfield singing Bowie songs in space, NASA boasting 60 million followers on Instagram and Tim Peake seemingly never off our screens, a layman's knowledge of what it really means to be an astronaut is probably at its, er, peak. Which is why, when you watch Netflix's new space drama *Away*, it's hard not to notice all the glaring mistakes. Shocking, really, when you consider the entire series was prompted by a thoughtful, science-filled article in

Esquire in 2014 about how tough mankind's journey to Mars will be, once we finally get around to it.

The biggest error in *Away* lies in expecting us to believe that the world's space agencies would put together a crew for a *three-year* mission who are not only poorly trained – only one of the five, for example, knows how to fix the water reclamation system which they all depend on to survive – but who actively hate each other from the get-go.

There's no drama without conflict, we get that, but with the astronauts already mutinying against Hilary Swank's commander, Emma, before they've even left the Moon, these people just suck. They also hide ailments that could threaten the mission,

act without consulting Ground Control and, worst of all, never stop whingeing. If NASA really did assemble a crew like this, you'd have to feel sorry for Mars.

The nonsensical parts of *Away* might have worked if some cheese had been served alongside the drama. But alas, the show is so *worthy*: full of ponderous music and slow, emotional beats, ending

“It feels at least two episodes too long”

too many episodes with a gloomy song. There's a little bit of interesting action as things go wrong on the ship or crew members experience problems, but we're also subjected to repetitive scenes of Emma pining for her family back home. Sure, her daughter Alex (an excellent Talitha Eliana Bateman) has a lot

DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...



Someone becomes ill (such as the bottom of their foot falling off) but hides it.

A Chinese character is emotionless and talks of the "motherland". (Are they actually Romulans?)

Daughter Alex cries.

An astronaut cries and their tears don't react to zero-g even though they're in the "weightless" part of the station.

There's a long, boring conversation between Emma and Matt.

Astronaut Misha gets his puppets out.

to contend with – her dad falls ill just as her mum heads towards the Red Planet – but Emma worries about her to such an extent that she barely seems to remember she's leading the first manned mission to Mars; at times you wouldn't even trust her to lead a school trip to a museum.

There are other issues, too: the Russian and Chinese characters are stereotypes, botanist Kwesi (Ato Essandoh) is the best of the bunch but gets bugger-all to do, and a subplot about Alex being romanced by a biker boy back on Earth seems to exist in another show. Yes, space is pretty, and sequences involving space walks are tension-filled, with some interesting wrinkles thrown in. But *Away* feels at least two episodes too long, too obsessed with Emma's family life and too up its own brooding arse to merit a sit-through. Watch the 2016 series *Mars* instead.

Jayne Nelson

i The "fireball" accident depicted early on in the show actually happened to astronaut Scott Kelly after his toilet leaked.

FIRST
LOOK



Android mums
don't do
single file
either.

RAISED BY WOLVES

Meet The Parents



US HBO Max, Thursdays

UK TBC

► Creator Aaron Guzikowski

► Cast Amanda Collin, Abubakar Salim, Travis Fimmel, Winta McGrath

EPISODES 1.01-1.03 HBO Max's new

SF series gives Ridley Scott the chance to explore his android obsession away from the confines of the *Alien* and *Blade Runner* universes. Scott's not the showrunner – that's *Prisoners'* scriptwriter Aaron Guzikowski – but he produces it, directs two episodes, and his influence is keenly felt in the show's ruminations on artificial life.

Two atheist androids flee a religious war on Earth, taking a pod full of human embryos to Kepler-22b to start again. Mother (Amanda Collin) and Father (Abubakar Salim) then try to raise

a family, though only young Campion (Winta McGrath) survives on the perilous planet. When some humans arrive and try to forcibly "rescue" him, Mother takes extreme measures...

Collin's performance is at the heart of these opening episodes. She's a genuinely terrifying character, both a woman who's lost almost everything and a god-like weapon of mass destruction. The humans, meanwhile, are part of a repressive religious order that adds a touch of *Warhammer 40,000*'s interstellar gothic to the background – they are their own kind of scary.

It all adds up to a uniquely dark and compelling new show, worth keeping an eye on. **Will Salmon**

i Kepler-22b is a real planet, 587 light-years from Earth. It's the first world discovered in the habitable zone of a star.

STARGIRL Season One

You can get the staff



UK Amazon Prime, streaming now
US DC Universe, streaming now

► Showrunners Melissa Carter, Geoff Johns

► Cast Brec Bassinger, Yvette Monreal, Angelika Washington, Luke Wilson

EPISODES 1.01-1.13 **Hanson's**

"MMMBop" pops up in *Stargirl*'s first season finale. It's the perfect musical accompaniment. An earworm quickly dismissed by some as bubblegum pop from teenybop himbos was later lauded with two Grammy Awards, and even serious musos sheepishly admitted it was kinda cool.

Stargirl has a similar vibe. On the surface it's the most juvenile Arrowverse show yet, and not just because its main characters are junior versions of classic DC heroes and villains, re-enacting superhero slugfests at high school.

The overriding feel of the show is breezy, bouncy, brightly coloured superjapes. Part of its success is its willingness to embrace this innocent approach. But there's also some unexpected depth;

moments when the show becomes more than the sum of its tropes.

Courtney Whitmore's stepdad, Pat Dugan, is a former sidekick to Starman, who was killed when the Injustice Society defeated the Justice Society years ago. When Courtney discovers Starman's cosmic staff in Pat's garage, it gives her Starman's powers – which is incredibly handy, since the town which her family has recently

moved to is full of former Injustice Society bad guys who badly need taking down.

Helping Stargirl are the high school next-gen of various JSA members, such as Wildcat, Doctor Mid-Nite and Hourman. Oh, and Pat's gone and built himself a giant mecha too.

Sure, it's derivative, outrageously contrived, coincidence-driven tosh. But it's smart, witty and gorgeous to look at, with some of the most imaginatively choreographed fight scenes ever witnessed in small-screen superheroics. The young cast are all excellent and energetic, there are plenty of intriguing twists, and the finale is spectacular, with a truly epic battle and a doozy of a cliffhanger.

So even if you're weary of the Arrowverse, give *Stargirl* a try. It doesn't re-invent the wheel, but it does make the wheel look all sparkly and new.

Dave Golder

i Blue Valley's cinema shows films based on such obscure DC characters as GI Robot, Unknown Soldier and The Haunted Tank.



There's a
Stargirl waiting
in school
(high)...



FIRST
LOOK

THE THIRD DAY



US HBO, from 14 September
UK Sky Atlantic, from 15 September
► Creators Felix Barrett, Dennis Kelly
► Cast Jude Law, Katherine Waterston, Paddy Considine, Emily Watson

EPISODE 1.01 | The destination of this Sky/HBO co-production seems blindingly obvious. Our hero (Jude Law's grieving parent Sam) visits an island community, drawn in by concern for a girl – whom he finds hanging herself in the woods. The locals are true believers in their traditions. There's a festival imminent, and mention of a dwindling crop (oysters). It's even centred on a pub. Remind you of anything? All that's missing is Britt Ekland's arse.

This first instalment sets up an agreeable slow-burn mystery, with Paddy Considine stealing the show as a suspiciously cheery publican. It's a classy production – though all the out-of-focus extreme close-ups of the middle of Law's face frustrate. Give us a proper look at him!

Whether *The Third Day* will do more than recycle folk horror tropes remains to be seen. Perhaps, given its unusual structure. Episodes 1-3 make up "Summer". "Autumn", a theatrical event, due to air on Sky Arts on 3 October, will follow the events of a single day, live. Finally, Naomie Harris takes the lead in "Winter", another three-episode phase, on Sky Atlantic from 6 October. Right now we look headed to a clifftop on Summerisle – but maybe we're being led up the garden path.

Ian Berriman



"Pay up or these photos go public, pally."



THE BOYS Season Two

Cape Fear



UK/US Amazon Prime, streaming now
► Showrunner Eric Kripke
► Cast Karl Urban, Jack Quaid, Erin Moriarty, Dominique McElligott

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 When it comes to deconstructing the superhero genre, *Watchmen* may have grabbed all the Emmy nominations, but *The Boys* is a lot more anarchic, punky fun.

Sure, watching a show plotted like a cryptic crossword can be intellectually stimulating, but sometimes satire works best when it's punching you in the face. And *The Boys* season two is an even heavier hitter than its predecessor, taking broad swipes at fake news, Scientology, social media, institutionalised racism and pompous superhero movie franchises. It also boasts some glorious sucker punches, unexpected moments of gore that make "The Red Wedding" look like *The Vicar Of Dibley*.

Season two's main new element is an addition to The Seven (the self-serving superteam at the heart of the show). Stormfront (a male character in the comics) is a social

media-savvy feminist foisted on team leader Homelander after he passes on Daredevil-ish superhero Blindspot ("What made you think I would ever allow a cripple into the Seven?"). She's a lot more than she seems.

Meanwhile, anti-Seven vigilantes the Boys are left leaderless while Billy Butcher is off searching for his wife; Starlight continues to plot against the Seven from the inside; Homelander stokes a populist hatred of non-American supers; The Deep turns to religion; and Hughie extols the redemptive qualities of Billy Joel.

It's a splattershot approach that should be a mess, but holds together through sheer bloodmindedness. An over-reliance on "incriminating footage" as a plot device becomes tiresome, and attempts to humanise Butcher feel a little contrived, but, hey, but just wait for the next head to explode. *The Boys* done good.

Dave Golder

i In reality, Vought International HQ is (a digitally extended) Roy Thomson Hall – a concert venue in downtown Toronto.



TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON SIEGE



UK/US Netflix, streaming now
► Showrunner FJ DeSanto
► Cast Jake Foushee, Jason Marnocha, Joe Zieja, Georgia Reed

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 "Cybertron needs freedom," Optimus Prime says early on in this excellent animated series. "Cybertron needs strength," Megatron replies. "My strength." It's perhaps the purest distillation of the central conflict driving *Transformers* – making it superior to anything in Michael Bay's five movies.

But let's not speak of those. Especially when *Blade Runner* – referenced when Ultra Magnus mentions the Tannhäuser Gate – is a more fitting comparison, with its tireless dedication to world-building and synth theme. Plot-wise, *War For Cybertron*'s title is as descriptive as you'd expect from a franchise where the villains are called Decepticons. There's a war, and it's happening on Cybertron. The Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, are weak and in hiding. Meanwhile, MagaTrump – sorry, Megatron – gives rallies to his baying hordes of loyal idiots. Scavenger Bumblebee is the audience's eyes in this new world, with a Han Solo-ish arc.

Visually this is the closest the series has felt to its original incarnation since 1984. But there are depths buried beneath the nostalgic design, with considered motivations on both sides of this "good vs evil" battle. So: freedom, or strength? *War For Cybertron* has both.

Sam Ashurst

"A TRUE PAGE-TURNER"

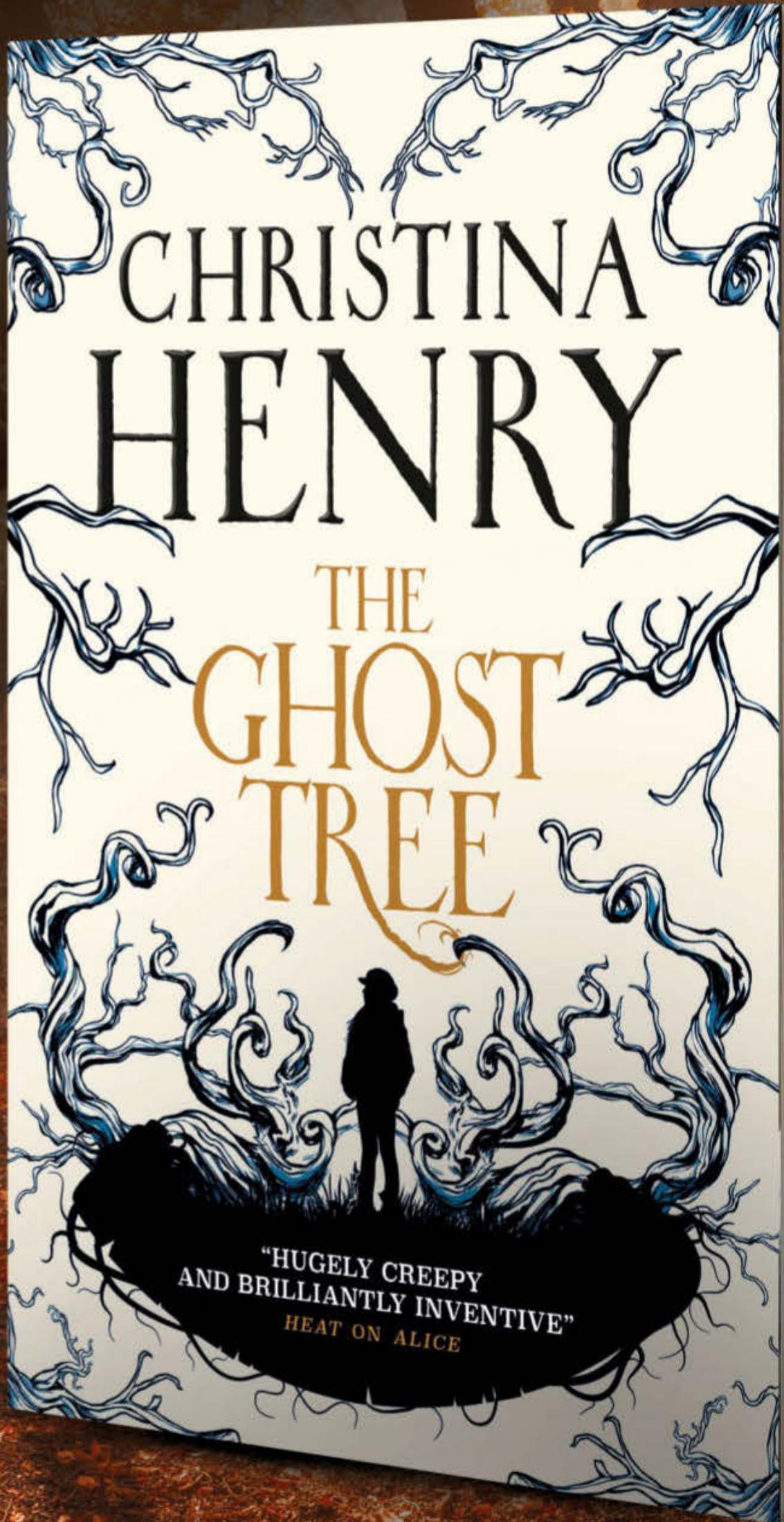
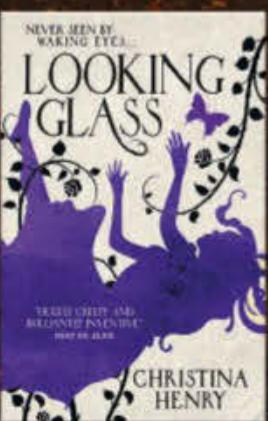
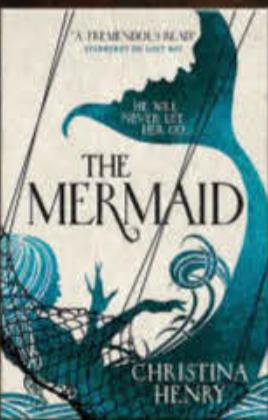
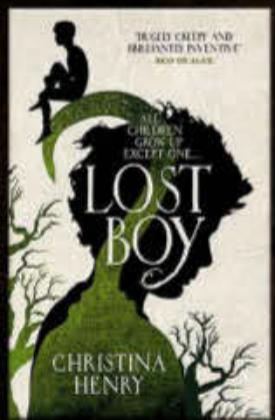
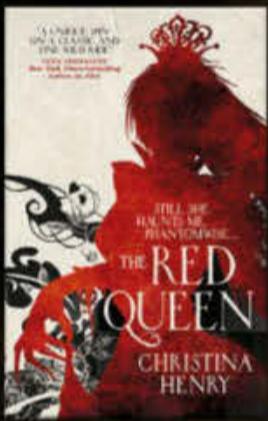
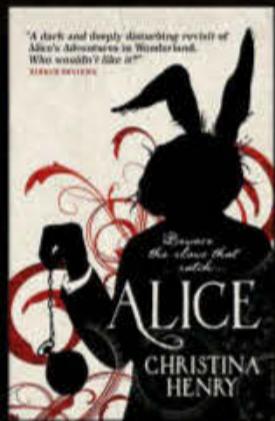
PAUL TREMBLAY.

AUTHOR OF *THE CABIN AT THE END OF THE WORLD*

PREPARE TO BE SWEPT AWAY IN THIS DARKLY BEGUILING FANTASY, FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ALICE* AND *RED QUEEN*

OUT NOW

ALSO BY
CHRISTINA HENRY





If LucasArts had ever made a *Doctor Who* adventure...

DOCTOR WHO: FURY FROM THE DEEP

Gas Panic!



EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER

1968 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD

► Director Hugh David, Gary Russell, Luke Marcatili

► Cast Patrick Troughton, Frazer Hines, Deborah Watling, Victor Maddern

• In terms of atmosphere, lost Patrick Troughton six-parter "Fury From The Deep" was clearly a success. This animated reconstruction amplifies the menace in some respects, but struggles to convey it in others – and also takes some liberties.

Featuring the deeply sympathetic TARDIS trio of the Doctor, Jamie and Victoria, the story tackles the then-topical subject of North Sea gas (the West Sole field, first to be developed, started production in 1967). A heartbeat pulse in the

pipes, an abundance of sea foam and strange behaviour by control centre staff all lead back to sentient seaweed: but can the Doctor convince bullying boss Robson to take action?

One surviving fragment, which sees Laurel and Hardy-esque duo Mr Oak and Mr Quill overcoming a woman by exhaling toxic gas, may be '60s Who's most eerie sequence. That doesn't come across so well in animation, but the grotty green colouring of the animated "sets" dials up the doominess. Likenesses are excellent (especially Troughton), though when the characters run, their bobbing about is faintly comical. Animation-wise the chief problem is the foam, which arguably looks more like clouds, or maybe blancmange. But then, did

these Ibiza club night moments look sinister in the first place?

Narratively, the main issue is the story's length. Later, Who would find ways to switch direction, unleashing a viral outbreak or visiting an alternate Earth. Victor Pemberton's script falls back on having the characters repeat themselves. Robson and an advisor have the same "I'm in charge!" argument so often you may think you've accidentally skipped back an episode.

Expecting a faithful recreation of the original? Hard cheese. Not only is the animation widescreen and colour (though there's a B&W option), but while "Tele-snaps" (off-screen photos) were used for reference, they weren't slavishly followed: the environments are often vast in scale; the angles way

beyond what was possible in a '60s TV studio. Head honcho Gary Russell goes further, in ways that may make purists froth. The surviving audio isn't tampered with, but room for interpretation is eagerly explored. A light relief sequence of the Doctor struggling to fly a helicopter is now imbued with threat, as we see him guiding it between towering seaweed fronds. The end result is an improvement, but do we really want to see classic Who improved?

► Extras Retrospective "The Cruel Sea" (39 minutes) may be the best Who featurette of its type. It takes Frazer Hines (Jamie), production assistant Michael Bryant and helicopter pilot Mike Smith on a boat trip to a key location: the rusting sea forts off the coast of Whitstable which stood in for oil rigs. They also meet AFM Margot Hayhoe for a pint. The history of the sea fort is fascinating, the drone shots are impressive, and the reunion is truly touching, with some great anecdotes (like "Mad Mike" bringing down a pub ceiling by swinging on a chandelier!).

"Animating Fury" (21 minutes) breaks down a very international effort, and sees Gary Russell explaining his creative choices. He does likewise on commentary for two episodes, moderated by Toby Hadoke. Hines, Bryant and Heyhoe team up on two more; a fifth has the production designer; the sixth is a patchwork of old (late director Hugh David, late actor John Abineri) and new (cameraman Ken Westbury, make-up designer Sylvia James). There are archive interviews with Pemberton (six minutes) and the effects designer (nine minutes). You also get the surviving clips (four minutes), four minutes of trims from the start/end of scenes, and four minutes of on-set 8mm footage. Tele-snap recreations come with optional narration by Hines. Finally there's *The Slide* (1966), a seven-part radio drama by Pemberton, originally submitted to Who. Featuring sentient mud and dodgy science, it's fun if you enjoy corny old SF clichés. Plus: *Radio Times* and script PDFs; gallery. Ian Berriman

i The sonic screwdriver debuted here. But Patrick Troughton lost the prop, and had to make do with a whistle on his lifejacket!



MORTAL

★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | 15 | DVD/download

► Director André Øvredal

► Cast Nat Wolff, Iben Akerlie, Priyanka Bose, Per Frisch

Here's another *Thor*-ful tale to add to the other films/shows/books sparked by Chris Hemsworth's iconic hammer-wielding. Shot among the Norwegian fjords for verisimilitude, *Mortal* nevertheless stars an American, Nat Wolff, who suddenly develops god-like electrical abilities and, *X-Men*-style, causes mayhem because he can't control them. An angsty romance ensues as he bonds with a psychologist (Iben Akerlie) and goes on the run from the US authorities, who – weirdly – are allowed to chase him across Norway.

The lightning effects are gorgeous, there's a fabulous helicopter set-piece and Wolff commits to his agonised role with conviction, but through it all you can't stop yelling at the screen: "When are you going to realise you're Thor, dummy?" Which ruins the suspense somewhat. This is eventually fixed using the hoary old trope of "old man, after staring thoughtfully at proceedings, grabs a book about the Norse gods and opens it at the right page for our hero to read". Give us strength.

The film is helped immensely by Norway's pretty waterfalls, earnest performances and solid, unflashy direction from *Troll Hunter*'s André Øvredal. It's just a shame the central romance feels so forced. You've seen all this before: somewhere, Mjolnir is yawning.

► Extras None. **Jayne Nelson**



"Got a fuselage for you, love. Where to?"

SUPERMAN: MAN OF TOMORROW

Cape of Good Hope

★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

► Director Chris Palmer

► Cast Darren Criss, Zachary Quinto, Alexandra Daddario, Ryan Hurst

Titled after the *Man of Steel*'s lesser-used sobriquet, *The Man Of Tomorrow* actually rewinds to yesterday, recounting a formative adventure for Supes.

Thankfully, this latest DC Animated Movie isn't just another rehashed origin story. The familiar rocketship-to-Kansas creation myth is background narrative, allowing Clark Kent – a Daily Planet intern – to discover his alien roots as the tale unfolds. Cosmic biker-bro Lobo and the shapeshifting Martian Manhunter help him carve out a place on his adopted homeworld while taking down the Parasite, a city-stomping menace of *Cloverfield* proportions.

The plain, anime-influenced animation is efficient rather than remarkable: it moves but it doesn't

dazzle. You feel the constraints of the budget. But *Man Of Tomorrow* nails the spirit of its hero. This Superman may be wet behind the cape – and the script teases him for being an overgrown Boy Scout – but he's a fledgling god who ultimately triumphs through empathy and kindness.

Christopher Reeve would approve.

► Extras A frantic featurette on Lobo (10 minutes) includes contributions from writers and artists. The Martian Manhunter gets the same treatment (nine minutes) – this is less exhaustingly edited but equally short on proper comic book history. There are also advertorials for *Batman: Soul Of The Dragon* plus the already-released *Justice League Vs The Fatal Five* and *Superman/Batman: Public Enemies* (total 29 minutes), as well as two episodes of '90s toon *Superman The Animated Series* (20 minutes apiece). **Nick Setchfield**

i Actor Ray Middleton played Supes in a World of Tomorrow exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1940, hence the name.



GORMENGHAST

★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2000 | 12 | Blu-ray

► Director Andy Wilson

► Cast Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Ian Richardson, John Sessions, Christopher Lee

BLU-RAY DEBUT The cover blurb promises murders and seductions, but *Game Of Thrones* fans should be warned that this is an utterly different kind of fantasy.

The beginning feels nearer to *Alice In Wonderland*, as we're introduced to the denizens of the titular giant castle, most of whom seem deranged. The Alice character might be Steerpike, the power-hungry kitchen boy climbing (often literally) through Gormenghast's high society – though Steerpike often plays mad as well, with Jonathan Rhys Myers seemingly channelling a young Rik Mayall.

Based on the first two *Gormenghast* novels by Mervyn Peake, this four-hour BBC series was a massively ambitious screen fantasy in 2000. The dialogue is literate and witty, the interiors stagey yet opulent. The performances are shouty and fruity, but there are gems among them.

Ian Richardson has pathos as the owl-obsessed elder Earl; John Sessions is a lovable court physician whose prattling and prancing suggests a different Doctor. The last episode is the worst, with squeaky melodrama and fumbled big moments, but the character pay-offs are still affecting. Yet the show's gaping absence is Peake's own authorial voice: his poetic, luxuriant, melancholy prose.

► Extras Making Of (30 minutes). **Andrew Osmond**



PROJECT POWER

Five-minute wonder

★★★☆

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | 15 | SVOD

► Directors Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman
► Cast Jamie Foxx, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Dominique Fishback, Machine Gun Kelly

NETFLIX **Pharmaceutical**

companies seem to be tied with multinational tech giants now as the go-to Big Bad for Hollywood actioners. In *Project Power*, Netflix's latest sort-of-superhero effort, they're behind a new drug that empowers humans with superhuman abilities for exactly five minutes. "Our goal is simple," one of their honchos explains handily, "The next evolution of the human species."

There are two people on their case: Jamie Foxx's Art, a tough-as-nails ex-military type searching for his kidnapped daughter, and Frank

(a charismatic Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a New Orleans cop on a one-man mission to clean up his city. And despite their strident anti-drug rhetoric, they're not immune from downing it themselves whenever need be.

There's not much original about *Project Power*, but it does what it does with style and humour. The final act goes a bit CG-heavy, but it's better when it's not trying to compete with the Marvel hits. With this and *The Old Guard*, Netflix has introduced the mid-budget superhero flick into the cultural conversation, and the contrast in scale between them and their MCU counterparts is kind of refreshing. Its very limitations give it a modicum of freshness. **Steve O'Brien**

i Rapper Chika, who coached Dominique Fishback to perform her character's raps, also cameoed as one of her classmates.



DEEP BLUE SEA 3

★★★☆
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
2020 | 15 | DVD/download

Remember the genetically enhanced super-intelligent sharks who escaped at the end of *Deep Blue Sea 2*? No? Never mind: they're back. The third in this sharksploitation series is more or less a standalone action movie, with plenty of mad science, sexy mercenaries and the obligatory sudden shark attacks. It's all very '90s, right down to the ropey CGI, but the production design is stunning and the underlying message about climate change feels entirely righteous.

► Extras Two five-minute Making Of. **Sarah Dobbs**



THE TOMB: DEVIL'S REVENGE

★★☆
► RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER
2019 | 15 | DVD/download

William Shatner and Jeri Ryan are the Trekkie-bait stars of this horror-actioner, from a screenplay by *TNG*'s Maurice Hurley. It's a brash, often nonsensical slice of hokum, mixing spelunking, ancient Aztec curses and demons.

Visually it punches above its budget, making effective use of real world cave locations, but even the joy of a flak-jacketed, near-90 Shatner blasting a demon in the head can't save the muddled writing.

► Extras None. **Nick Setchfield**



INVASION

★★★☆
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
1965 | PG | Blu-ray

BLU-RAY DEBUT Barely an incursion, let alone an invasion, this tale of alien contact is based on a story by future *Doctor Who* script editor Robert Holmes, who recycled many of its tropes in Jon Pertwee's debut "Spearhead From Space". Shot like a foggy British murder mystery, far from the groovy heart of 1965, it's an edgy, shadowy crawl of a movie, steeped in rocket age paranoia. The low-key creepiness is shattered by one outstanding shock moment.

► Extras Trailer, gallery.
Nick Setchfield



GAMEMASTER

★★★☆
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
2020 | PG | VOD

Tabletop gaming is enormous again, with hits like *Catan* and *Pandemic* becoming household names. This doc tells four indie creators' stories, from the wildfire success of *Exploding Kittens* to the struggles of *Thug Life*. It meanders, visiting conventions and awards, but there are big-name talking heads too, and it doesn't shy from issues like diversity. Art and finance are centre-stage. There's less about history or game mechanics. But if you've ever fantasised about designing a game, there's inspiration here. **Dave Bradley**



GET DUKE!



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | SVOD
► Director Ninian Doff
► Cast Samuel Bottomley, Viraj Juneja, Rian Gordon, Lewis Gribben

AMAZON PRIME *Get Duked!*

arrives garlanded with gushy reviews, and with an audience award from the SXSW Film Festival under its belt, having wisely juked its original title of *Boyz In The Wood* as it “didn’t feel respectful” in the aftermath of John Singleton’s death and Black Lives Matter. Not that it made sense anyway – the entire film takes place in the Scottish Highlands, with barely a tree in sight.

Happily, Ninian Doff’s debut feature lives up to the hype, delivering a film that has faint echoes of *Attack The Block*, *Sightseers* (indeed, Alice Lowe guest-stars) and *Eden Lake*, while at the same time being quite unlike anything else you’ve seen before.

Part folk horror, part class satire, part lowbrow teen comedy, its central story of upper-crust oldies led by The Duke (Eddie Izzard) hunting down hapless members of Generation Z could be read as some kind of Brexit allegory, but it’s to Doff’s credit that he manages to keep the comedy broad, while also offering up some chewy social commentary along the way.

Chock full of great lines (“I can’t die, I’m the future of hip-hop!”; “I’ve never seen a murder before, I’m homeschooled”) and directed with swagger and pizzazz, *Get Duked!* is quite the calling card not just for Doff, but for its four likeably doltish leads.

Steve O’Brien



HIGH SPIRITS



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

1988 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD
► Director Neil Jordan
► Cast Steve Guttenberg, Peter O’Toole, Daryl Hannah, Beverly D’Angelo

BLU-RAY DEBUT

Written and directed by Neil Jordan – who was soon to be acclaimed for his similarly Ireland-based classic *The Crying Game* – this is a wacky comedy desperately in need of some subtlety. Peter O’Toole shows up for the paycheque as the oft-drunk owner of a waning Irish estate who decides to raise funds by luring a gaggle of Americans with the fake promise of a haunted holiday. Naturally his castle’s *real* ghosts torment the guests instead, with a special shout-out going to the freaky, Jawa-like nuns and a fab cardboard squid.

At the film’s heart is Steve Guttenberg, an actor in his pomp when this was filmed. Sadly he makes for an unlikeable, wet hero, and is saddled with Beverly D’Angelo’s screeching wife as a co-star. The film might have worked better with a warmer, softer human centre – not only are some of the ghostly tricks *horrible*, it’s also hard to like a single person on screen, dead or alive.

Oh, and Daryl Hannah is hampered by a wig so bad you can see the mesh underneath it. However, the sight of her ghost running away from her murderous husband (Liam Neeson), a ritual they’ve re-enacted every night for 200 years, is oddly affecting, adding a touch of pathos to what is, otherwise, an unfunny mess.

► Extras None. Jayne Nelson



JESUS SHOWS YOU THE WAY TO THE HIGHWAY



► RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER

2019 | 15 | Blu-ray
► Director Miguel Llansó
► Cast Daniel Tadesse, Gerda-Annette Allikas, Agustín Mateo, Solomon Tashe

► Miguel Llansó’s second feature is a gloriously deranged reimagining of low-budget action films and cyberpunk thrillers. Daniel Tadesse is CIA agent Gagano, dispatched into VR to take out a malicious computer virus. When his body is harmed, Gagano finds himself lost in a dizzying maze of virtual worlds.

You can watch *Jesus...* purely for its Garth Marenghi touches – its playful use of stock footage, jarring cuts and dodgy dubbing (Stalin inexplicably has a Northern Irish accent) – but there’s also a sharp satirical edge to the film’s subversion of pop culture icons. Llansó’s handmade absurdism is hilarious and strikingly original.

► Extras Disc one presents a very solid extras package. There’s commentary by critics Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Anton Bitel; an interview with Llansó (26 minutes); a visual essay by Will Webb, delving into the film’s influences (14 minutes); and two of Llansó’s shorts, “Chigger Ale” and “Night In The Wild Garden”. Disc two presents Llansó’s debut feature, *Crumbs*. Tadesse again stars, this time as a man on a journey through a post-apocalyptic Ethiopian wasteland. It’s accompanied by a trailer and anecdotes about its production (seven minutes). Will Salmon



PIRANHA II: THE SPAWNING



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

1982 | 15 | Blu-ray
► Director James Cameron
► Cast Tricia O’Neil, Lance Henriksen, Steve Marachuk, Ricky G Paull

BLU-RAY DEBUT *Aliens* wasn’t

James Cameron’s first shot at sequelising a beast-based ‘70s horror. He earned his stripes on this high-schlock encore to Joe Dante’s *Piranha* – though given that he was swiftly booted and replaced behind the camera by the film’s Italian producer, it’s debatable whether it truly counts as part of the King of the World’s oeuvre.

It’s boilerplate exploitation fare: randy holidaymakers become fish-bait in paradise. Breasts are flashed, limbs are munched, marine life explodes. The weaponised piranha of the first movie are mutated still further, gaining the power to fly (it looks as goofy as you imagine). There are obligatory steals from *Jaws* and, ironically, a blatant filch of the chestburster scene from *Alien*.

Occasionally you catch glimmers of Cameron’s future: the presence of Lance Henriksen, the diving scenes, Tricia O’Neil’s pleasingly tough and proactive lead. And yet the perfunctory, tension-free setpieces point to the lack of his genuine stamp on proceedings.

This 2K scan is admittedly glorious, but some movies will forever have the soul of VHS.

► Extras The US release had commentary, a Making Of, bloopers, extra scenes from the TV version and more. We get the trailer and a double-sided A3 poster. Nick Satchfield



THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS

In the land of the blind



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★
RELEASED OUT NOW!
 1981 | PG | Blu-ray
 Director Ken Hannam
 Cast John Duttine, Emma Relph, Maurice Colbourne, Stephen Yardley

BLU-RAY DEBUT If the road sign

“Heavy plant crossing” occasions a shiver, you’ve no doubt seen this BBC version of John Wyndham’s classic 1951 novel, in which civilisation falls apart after most of the world’s population is blinded by a celestial lightshow, presenting the perambulatory Triffids with an all-they-can-compost buffet.

It’s the best adaptation. Unlike the 1962 film (which visits France, and is padded with lighthouse sequences) or the Beeb’s 2009 take

(which crowbarred in a plane-crash set-piece), it’s scrupulously faithful to the book. A section on a religious community is contracted; a character returns at the end. Otherwise, this is Wyndham’s story, free of unnecessary “fixes” or embellishments.

John Duttine excels as former Triffid farmer/everyman hero Bill Masen, who wakes in hospital to find that he’s one of the few who can still see. Duttine’s restless anxiety really sells the peril, and his Masen’s a likeably decent chap, honourable but practical.

There’s enough plot here for a 10-part Netflix series, so once we’re past a first instalment heavy with expository flashbacks, the six 25-minute episodes fair whip

SHE DIES TOMORROW

Catching Fear



RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | 15 | VOD

Director Amy Seimetz

Cast Kate Lyn Sheil, Jane Adams, Kentucker Audley, Katie Aselton

When the ultimate playlist of “Movies that sum up how much 2020 sucked” is drawn up, this existential fever-dream is a shoe-in. Though shot pre-Covid-19, it feels eerily like an expression of our collective unconscious now that awareness of mortality has been dialled-up across the globe.

Funded by Amy Seimetz’s *Pet Sematary* earnings and featuring various of her actor friends, it centres on Amy (Kate Lyn Sheil), a young woman who realises – suddenly, and with absolute certainty – that she’s going to die the next day. Her best friend

doesn’t take this seriously... until she has the same epiphany. Then her friends do. It’s anxiety as infection. Quite what’s going on is left ambiguous: we see people bathed in coloured lights during their moment of realisation, but maybe it’s all just in their heads.

Though the subject matter is bleak, Seimetz mines plenty of humour from her characters’ idiosyncratic reactions (Amy becomes obsessed with having her skin fashioned into a leather jacket). Thick with non-sequiturs and combining dispassionate absurdism and wry fatalism, *She Dies Tomorrow* should appeal to admirers of the likes of Luis Buñuel, Chris Morris’s *Jam* and Don McKellar’s *Last Night*.

Ian Berriman

While writing the film, Seimetz repeatedly listened to Mozart’s Requiem In D Minor and Peggy Lee’s “Is That All There Is?”



along. Compared to Terry Nation’s thematically similar *Survivors*, it’s like watching on fast-forward.

Creating towering walking plants that aren’t completely risible was a tall order, but effects designer Steve Drewett pulled it off. Their veiny blooms, dripping stings and twitching roots combine with first-rate sound design to create something faintly

obscene. The finest flowering of Wyndham’s work on the screen.

Extras A restoration featurette (nine minutes) shows how they removed film dirt, fixed scratches etc via split-screen before/after footage. The results are impressive. Plus: a booklet. Ian Berriman

i The Triffid props had a go-kart seat and a fan inside. Their base sections were inspired by a ginseng root.



RANDOM ACTS OF VIOLENCE

★★★
► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | SVOD
► Director Jay Baruchel
► Cast Jesse Williams,
Jordana Brewster, Jay Baruchel,
Niamh Wilson

SHUDDER You don't generally expect a gory slasher flick to come pre-packaged with a ticking off about how they "legitimise violence and fetishise evil". But Jay Baruchel employs just such cake-and-eat-it tactics here, with only partial success.

The actor's directorial debut – a pet project he spent eight years getting to the screen – adapts a 2010 graphic novel of the same name. It centres on Todd (Jesse Williams), a comic book artist keen to wrap up his creation Slasher, a welding-mask-wearing serial killer based on a real-life '80s murderer. Unfortunately for Todd, as he and his girlfriend take a research road trip through the killer's home turf, it becomes clear that the I-90 Killer is active again and recreating his comics.

Featuring all the red/green Italian horror lighting and sculptural tableaux of slaughter a gorehound could wish for, it's a very meta movie, whose outbreaks of earnestness can be a touch "student who thinks they're the first person this insight has occurred to". But what really lets it down is the big twist, torpedoed not only by its inherent lack of sense, but a casting decision that makes it nigh-on impossible for the audience to arrive at the right conclusion via reasonable guesswork. **Ian Berriman**



THE COMIC

★★★
► RELEASED OUT NOW!

1985 | 18 | Blu-ray
► Director Richard Driscoll
► Cast Steve Monroe, Berderia Timini, Jeff Pirie, Vass Anderson

BLU-RAY DEBUT Despite the title, there aren't many laughs in this remastered curiosity. Part gritty social drama, part dystopian nightmare, *The Comic*'s meandering story follows wannabe comedian Sam Coex (Steve Monroe) as he murders his main rival and hooks up with a dancer (Berderia Timini), only to find success isn't quite what it's cracked up to be.

Writer/director (plus producer, editor and production designer) Richard Driscoll rewrote the script partway through production after a disagreement with his original lead, which probably explains the film's lack of coherence. It drifts in and out of dream sequences, never quite committing to any real place or time; half of the sets are genuine '80s nightclubs, the other half borrowed exteriors from a Victorian gothic horror, and everything's smothered in a thick layer of dry ice. Performances range from unconvincing to outright bizarre, while Monroe's mullet is so violently orange it's hard to look directly at it.

But somehow, probably by accident more than design, it ends up feeling avant-garde. Yes, it's a mess, but it's an inventive one, and clearly made with enthusiasm if not skill.

► **Extras** An intro and a new 17-minute interview with Monroe; 49 minutes of grumbly commentary by Driscoll. Plus: trailer; booklet. **Sarah Dobbs**



THE FIFTH ELEMENT

★★★
► RELEASED OUT NOW!

1997 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/DVD/download
► Director Luc Besson
► Cast Bruce Willis, Milla Jovovich, Gary Oldman, Ian Holm

► **Bruce Willis** can play vest-sporting action heroes in his sleep, but even *Die Hard*'s John McClane would have his work cut out saving the whole of existence. That's the mission facing 23rd-century cabbie Korben Dallas, however, as the ex-special forces soldier is dragged on an unlikely quest to defeat a seething, planet-sized ball of evil.

You could say that people don't make movies like *The Fifth Element* any more, but then nobody was making them beforehand either. This is a one-of-a-kind mish-mash of cartoonish aliens, crazy mythology and impressive visuals that somehow come together to form a semi-coherent whole. It barely matters that the plot – about the eponymous being (Milla Jovovich), who can defeat evil by joining forces with earth, wind, fire and water – makes no sense at all.

With quality actors (most notably Gary Oldman and Ian Holm) hamming it up spectacularly, and Jean-Paul Gaultier's outrageous outfits giving cosplayers plenty to work with, you can forgive many of *The Fifth Element*'s excesses – even if some of the 20th century sexual politics haven't aged quite so well.

► **Extras** Nothing. Not the commentary and featurettes from the old UK Blu-ray, or the Besson interview from the 2017 US 4K. **Nothing!** **Richard Edwards**

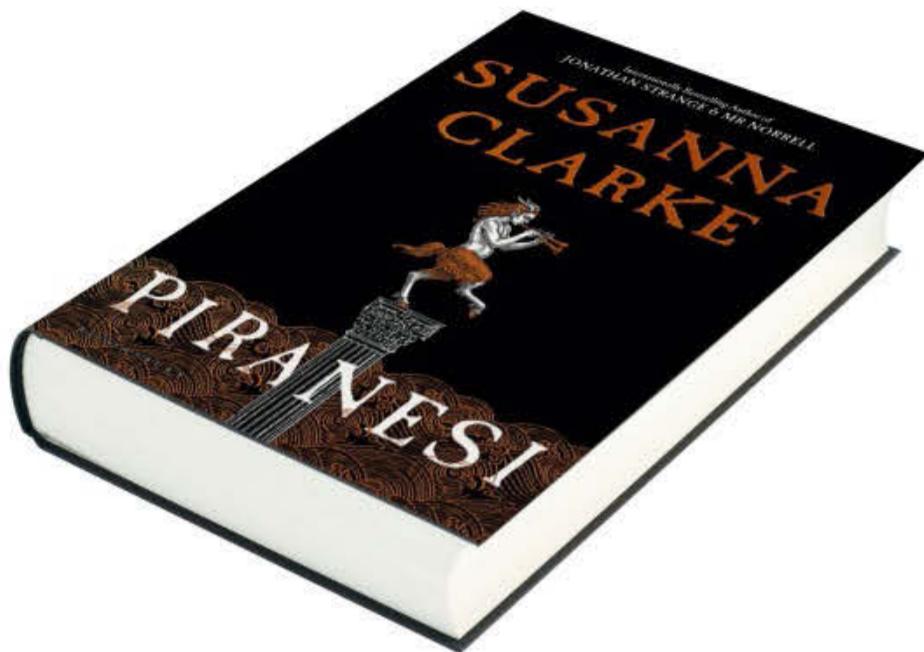
(ROUND UP)



BEETLEJUICE (out now, 4K/Blu-ray), Tim Burton's madcap early effort, sees a ghostly couple summoning "bio-exorcist" Betelgeuse (a wired Michael Keaton) to scare off their home's new owners. There's little in the way of plot, and Keaton's in it surprisingly little; the real stars of the show are the freaky production design and practical effects, which mash up German expressionism, *Looney Tunes* and goth. The Blu-ray extras are carried over: three episodes of the spin-off toon; a music-only track; trailer. An HMV-exclusive Cine Edition comes with a poster and patch. Whoop. We reviewed the surreally nightmarish Swedish/Danish film **KOKO-DI**

KOKO-DA (out now, Blu-ray/VOD) in issue 325, when it was set for theatrical release, but Covid-19 put paid to that. It follows a bickering couple out camping, who are attacked by a freakish fairytale trio – over and over, *Groundhog Day* style. We said: "Some will find both its repetitiousness and enigmatic approach deeply frustrating. However, those willing to surrender to the film's rhythms should find it disturbingly eerie." Finally,

ESTATE (out now, VOD/download – pictured) adapts an enigmatic six-page China Miéville story, in which a stag with flaming antlers appears on a council estate. Writer/director Tom Harberd's moody 24-minute short effectively brings this startling vignette to life, and has a stab at articulating what it might mean. Samuel Anderson (*Doctor Who*'s Danny Pink) is appealingly soulful as the sensitive hero of this strange fable.



PIRANESI



The man of the House



► RELEASED 15 SEPTEMBER

272 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Susanna Clarke

► Publisher Bloomsbury Publishing

So vivid was the impression left by Susanna Clarke's debut *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* that it's a shock to be reminded it dates from 2004. Here was a book that, while clearly rooted in a deep appreciation of fantasy literature's deepest currents, was like nothing else, a waking dream of an alternative history set in an exotic 19th century England where magic has been revived.

If one did stop to think on why there hadn't been a follow-up, a suspicion was that perhaps Clarke had Difficult Second Album jitters – and there have been hints of an abandoned novel. Less speculatively, in 2006 it was reported she was suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome. Clarke might have been known for writing a near-perfect bestseller and then quietly slipping from public view.

It's a joy to report that *Piranesi* stops this narrative in its tracks for any number of reasons, the first of which is that it's as gloriously

imaginative as its predecessor. It's also a novel that could have been written by nobody else, both because of the distinctiveness of Clarke's prose, and themes that recur from her earlier work – and yet it's a wholly different kind of book to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*.

It's also a sod to write about without giving spoilers, and such is the nature of *Piranesi* that it seems especially important not to offer clues as to how the plot develops. Why? Well, imagine being given the best surprise present ever and then having someone tell you what it is before you've got the wrapping paper off.

This much we can safely say. At the book's centre lies its narrator, Piranesi, who lives in the House, a labyrinthine domain of seemingly endless halls containing thousands of statues. The lower halls, as Piranesi knows because he's a methodical researcher, are sometimes engulfed by tides. In the upper halls, there are clouds.

Presumably named with artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78) in mind – a man who created lowering, atmospheric etchings of Rome and of imaginary prisons – Piranesi spends his days

largely alone. Except twice a week, the Other comes to visit him. It sounds like a lonely life, but Piranesi is a man largely contented. He takes notes, he's an explorer of his world, he has the day-to-day business of harvesting food provided by the sea that sloshes through the House. He also has a touching regard not just for the Other, but for the skeletons that he's found in his explorations, remains he treats with a kind of religious reverence.

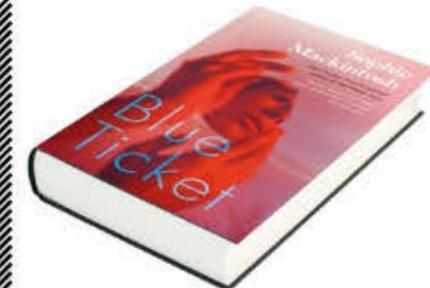
But the rhythms of Piranesi's life are disturbed when messages left for him make it clear that another person is moving through the halls of the House. Further unbalancing Piranesi, in key respects an innocent who basks in the wonder of creation, this new figure is someone the Other treats with huge suspicion.

“Reaches back to a '70s sense of the eldritch”

Throughout, there's the sense of a book where Clarke is gently revealing the solution to a puzzle, hoping you will guess but still helping you out. And yet if *Piranesi* sounds obscure and arty in outline, that's misleading, because her prose is crisp, direct and unfussy. There's a sense too that Clarke, for all that the book is prefaced by a quote from CS Lewis, has reached back to a '70s sense of the eldritch – of illicit thrills accessed by reading, or at least pretending to read, Aleister Crowley by candlelight – and given it potency and punch.

Finally, although – as we've already noted – it's a very different book to *Strange*, *Piranesi* shares this with its predecessor: it's a book about the tension between those who want to possess a world and those who delight in it, describe it, honour it. It's an extraordinary book, well worth the wait. **Jonathan Wright**

i Clarke's top two labyrinth stories: Ursula Le Guin's *The Tombs Of Atuan*; "The House Of Asterion" by Jorge Luis Borges.



BLUE TICKET



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

304 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Sophie Mackintosh

► Publisher Hamish Hamilton

Literary fiction takes on genre tropes can be Marmite affairs. For some readers, it's refreshing to see familiar ideas tackled with different priorities: characterisation, say, over plot. For others, fancy prose is all very well, but no substitute for a story that makes actual sense. Ordinarily, this reviewer falls into the former camp. Not, alas, with *Blue Ticket*.

Mackintosh's follow-up to her Booker-nominated *The Water Cure* deals with gender and choice in a dystopian society. On reaching puberty, girls' futures are determined by a lottery. Those who receive white tickets will become mothers; blue-ticket recipients, by contrast, are permitted to become anything except mothers. The novel follows one such unhappy blue ticket, Calla, as she goes on the run after getting pregnant.

Mackintosh doesn't explain how this state of affairs came to pass; nor do the mechanisms by which it works hold up to any sort of scrutiny. This is dystopia as metaphor, narrated in short, elliptical paragraphs by a protagonist whose gaze is largely internal.

But even as metaphor, it's dissatisfying, because it's never clear what the story is meant to signify. Could it be the impossibility of work/life balance under capitalism? Or that nothing is more guaranteed to make us want something than being told that we can't have it? **Nic Clarke**



A GIRL MADE OF AIR



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

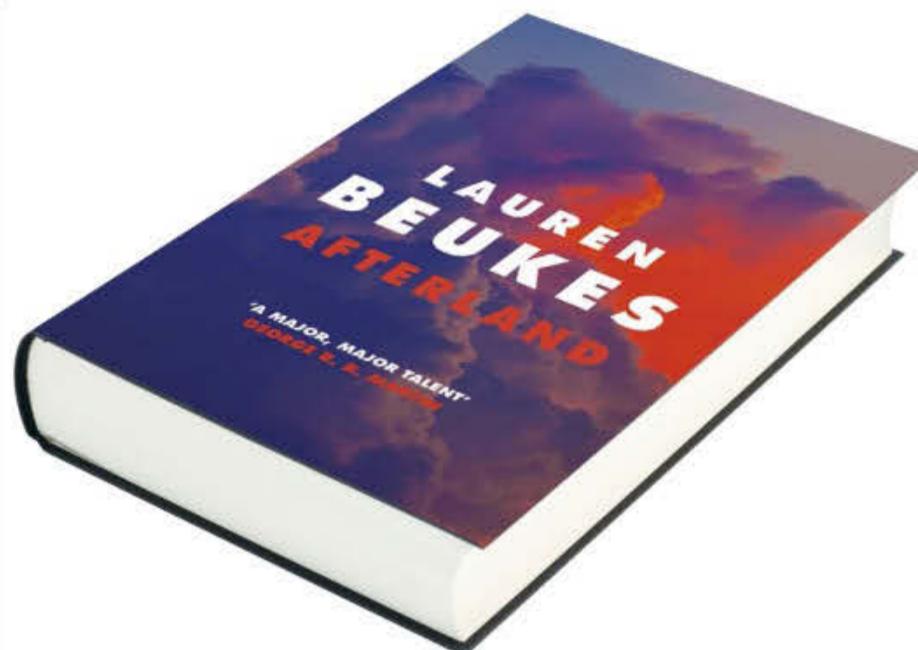
► Author Nydia Hetherington

► Publisher Quercus

➲ Glamour, danger and a seamy underside: circuses are made for stories. But while the title and cover of this debut novel might lead you to expect lots of the former, Nydia Hetherington's main interest lies with the latter.

At the prompting of a journalist, a famous former funambulist – say that five times fast – looks back over her difficult early life and rise to tightrope-walking glory. Seen through the pages of her childhood diaries, the circus is a place of neglect, cruelty, pungent animal smells and grubby sex, framed by parental myths and Manx folktales. Much of the novel revolves around the nameless narrator's relationship with Serendipity, a surrogate mother-figure who recognises her talent for the tightrope, and the search for whose lost daughter eventually takes her to the US.

There's plenty of potential here, but the narrator isn't great company – there's not much more to her personality than self-pitying regret and periodic bouts of vicious unpleasantness – and the execution is uneven. There are some really striking individual passages, but they don't hang together as a cohesive whole, and the somewhat aimless plotting means that, even after you've finished the book, it's difficult to pin down what the story is actually about. **Nic Clarke**



AFTERLAND Mad About The Boy



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Lauren Beukes

► Publisher Michael Joseph

➲ It's no surprise that the near-future dystopian novel has become a subgenre so popular that it practically demands its own section in bookstores. Even before Covid-19 hit, we were living through an era when the years ahead seemed unusually contingent, whether because of global heating, populism or economic insecurities.

But the kind of subtlety and character development you find in, say, *The Handmaid's Tale* is often less in evidence, with many of the more successful dystopian novels – *The Hunger Games*, *Divergence* – aimed primarily at YA readers, as if the genre is stuck in adolescence.

Lauren Beukes's *Afterland* reminds us that it doesn't have to

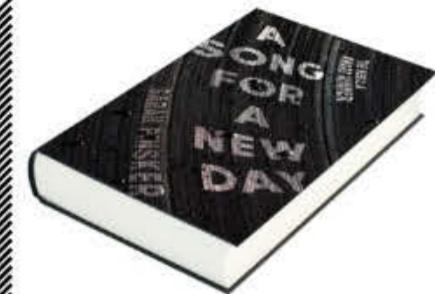
“A troupe of road-hardened nuns”

be that way, in part by focusing on a cross-generational relationship between a mother, Cole, and her 12-year-old son Miles. When a pandemic wipes out 99% of men, Miles becomes too valuable for the authorities to do anything other than detain him. The novel follows what happens when mother and son, pursued by Cole's venal sister Billie, escape captivity.

The US they move through is rough, dangerous, in transition – and yet not wholly chaotic, as we catch glimpses of how an emerging matriarchy is gathering power to itself. It's also a religious society, which in part explains how Cole and Miles, disguised as a girl, come to be travelling with a troupe of road-hardened nuns, a scenario with which Beukes has huge fun.

Less happily, *Afterland* lacks the sense of place so central to much of her previous fiction, and that's sometimes a big miss. However, it makes up for this in the way it teases out the deep familial currents that run through its relationships, explores gender and reminds us that dystopian fiction can be seriously grown-up entertainment. **Jonathan Wright**

i Beukes is currently developing an original horror TV show with fellow writers Sam Beckbessinger and Dale Halvorsen.



A SONG FOR A NEW DAY



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

384 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Sarah Pinsker

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

➲ The winner of this year's Nebula Award for Best Novel is published in the UK at an eerily apposite time. *A Song For A New Day* follows Luce Cannon, a singer, whose music is finally gaining major recognition when a wave of terrorist attacks and a viral pandemic cause live music to grind to a halt.

Several years later and now involved in the underground gigging scene, Luce meets Rosemary, a naive young woman working for VR gig giant StageHoloLive. Luce opens Rosemary's eyes to a world she had no idea existed, but will they save or destroy each other?

It's refreshing to see a novel focus on the (very real) problems facing musicians in the 21st century – not simply the ban on live performances, but also the rise of tech giants greedily carving up the musical landscape. There's an SF gloss to everything, with VR accessed via "hoods", but this is very close to our world.

A shame, then, that the book is so fond of rock 'n' roll clichés and that the intensely earnest tone leads to more than a few passages of purple prose. *A Song For A New Day* aims to be rousing and inspirational – an anthem, in other words. In that respect it succeeds. You're left with no doubt about the power of music, and both Luce and Rosemary are very likeable. But like many anthems, it's also not a little bit corny. **Will Salmon**

STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE THE ART AND VISUAL EFFECTS

Wise men say...



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

192 pages | Hardback
► Authors Jeff Bond, Gene Kozicki
► Publisher Titan Books

“The human adventure is just beginning” declared the tagline to *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. But there’s no mention of the industrial vats of human sweat poured into the film’s creation, the backroom apocalypse that saw one effects firm dismissed, another working 24-hour days and a warp-speed scramble to an immovable release date that

ensured the print for the premiere was still wet.

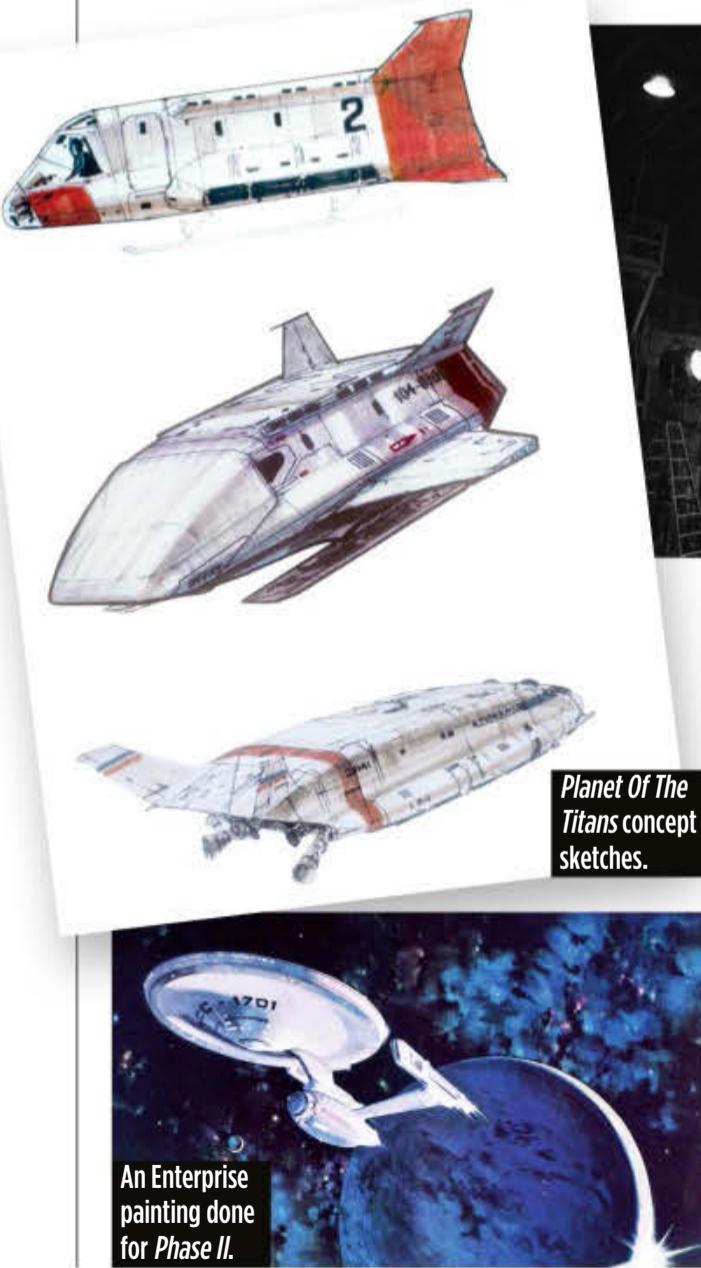
The saga of the inaugural *Trek* movie is charted in this new *Making Of* book. From the first stumbling steps to the big screen – there’s a tantalising peek at the unmade *Star Trek: Planet Of The Titans* which was originally set for 1976 – to the abortive *Star Trek: Phase II* TV show and on to *The Motion Picture* itself, it’s a bumpy history, recounted with candour by the people who were there and illustrated with an impressive array of production art, storyboards, model images and

behind-the-scenes shots.

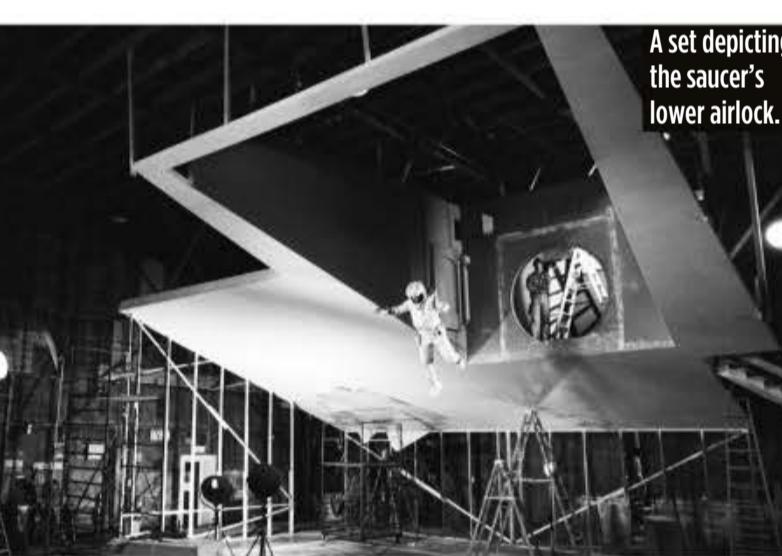
The detail is granular, and exhaustive. You’ll learn the exact type of plastic used to vacuum-form the surface of the Enterprise. A pity, then, that some aspects of the film’s visual aesthetic are shortchanged: the costumes are dismissed in a matter of paragraphs, Bob Peak’s magnificent poster art unexplored. Still, it’s an otherwise thorough dive into a very human adventure.

Nick Setchfield

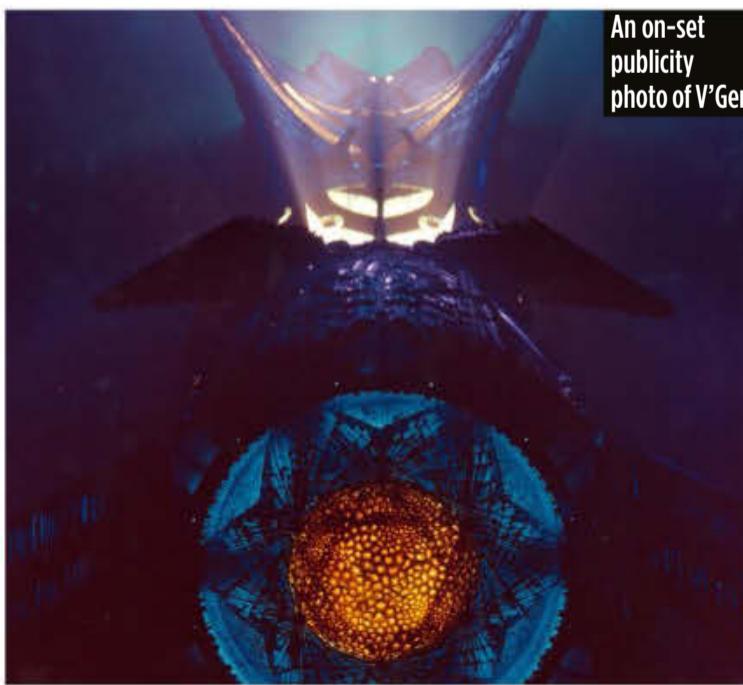
i The engines of Spock’s shuttle were inspired by the shape of a Vulcan gong in original series episode “Amok Time”.



Planet Of The Titans concept sketches.



A set depicting the saucer’s lower airlock.



An on-set publicity photo of V'Ger.



SETTLING THE WORLD



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

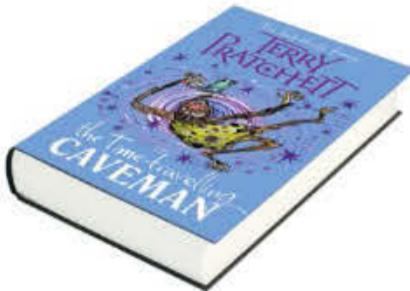
288 pages | Paperback/ebook
► Author M John Harrison
► Publisher Comma Press

When he’s not described as a science fiction novelist, M John Harrison is often called a slipstream writer, you can understand why. His work is eerie, and often focuses on events and details half-seen or half-understood. Insofar as Harrison seems interested in genre tropes at all, he distorts them to make us look at things anew. But a slipstream novelist? The reality is that others work in Harrison’s slipstream.

How has this happened? The career-spanning *Settling The World* offers clues by gathering together short stories written over five decades. The younger Harrison, it turns out, was a far more conventional writer in terms of shouting for your attention. The 1975 story that gives the volume its title, for example, rests on the idea of a vast road, “God’s Motorway: a lasting enigma”, linking the south-east with the Midlands.

Progressively, Harrison becomes less *flashy*, his tone far drier in, for example, the previously unpublished “Colonising The Future”. And yet the author’s preoccupations – loneliness, alienation and characters surveying failed relationships – remain constant. This is perhaps the reason why so many of us return to Harrison’s fiction. It’s not because we expect any particular resolution but a sense that he’s looking for new ways to approach these themes.

Jonathan Wright



THE TIME-TRAVELLING CAVEMAN



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

336 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Terry Pratchett

► Publisher Doubleday Childrens

➲ This book collects the last previously unavailable fiction by Sir Terry Pratchett. He had been working on novels and an autobiography before he died in 2015, but those unfinished works were posthumously destroyed at his request. Instead, this collection of 17 stories for children returns to the start of his career when, as a 17-year-old, he was published in the *Bucks Free Press* and the *Western Daily Press*.

Many of the tales here are set in Blackbury, the author's fictional English everytown, where he would later situate the *Johnny Maxwell* trilogy. Here the Pied Piper might come and steal the duplicitous councillors away ("The Pied Piper Of Blackbury"), a lonely and obsolete computer might end up playing a pivotal role in a war ("The Mark One Computer"), or, as in the title story, kids might encounter an apparent caveman. Other tales show off his influences: "Ub And The Toad" is a clear riff on *The Wind In The Willows*.

For the most part the stories are slight things; gently amusing scenarios that demonstrate Pratchett's confidence as a writer, and his moral core. It's not prime Pratchett material of course, but for completists and young fans there's much to entertain and amuse here. **Will Salmon**



A KIND OF MAGIC



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

292 pages | Hardback

► Author Jonathan Melville

► Publisher Polaris Publishing

➲ The fact that the Scottish climate isn't always ideal for blockbuster filmmaking is hardly a revelation, but its inclusion says a lot about this thorough *Highlander* Making Of. While you can't fault *A Kind Of Magic*'s attention to detail, the book never overcomes a significant obstacle: the fact that the behind-the-scenes story of the Immortal actioner simply isn't that memorable. Sure, there were bumps along the way – a creative clash here, an unreasonable deadline there – but you're left feeling that cast and crew generally rubbed along pretty well. It's hardly *Ben Hur*.

Jonathan Melville rounds up an impressive number of the key players – Sean Connery is the only significant absentee, not surprisingly – and mixes his new interviews with plenty of material from the archives. As he charts the movie's journey from film school script to VHS smash, the level of research is impressive – to the point where the book could have done with a stricter edit. There are plenty of decent anecdotes, but there's also information that even the most hardcore *Highlander* fans are unlikely to deem essential.

The closing chapters hint at what the book might have been like, with brief mention of *Highlander II: The Quickening*, the famously risible sequel that star Christopher Lambert and director Russell Mulcahy were contractually obliged to make. Now that's a story we'd really like to read. **Richard Edwards**



THE NOBODY PEOPLE



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

656 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Bob Proehl

► Publisher Titan Books

➲ The mentor figure at the heart of *The Nobody People* goes by the name of Kevin Bishop, but you're less likely to get him confused with the British comedian than you are with Professor X.

That's not to say the book is a mere *X-Men* rip-off, but the story has many dramatic beats that feel very familiar from Marvel's mutant comics. When a former war journalist discovers that a secret society of people with special abilities is preparing to come out to the world, he's employed to write stories that place them in a good light. But then guess what? There are plenty of normal humans who loathe and fear them.

So what is it? Homage? It's certainly not pastiche; it's all far too serious and earnest for that, weaving in a whole host of social issues with an admirable lightness of touch. There are plenty of vivid, well-drawn characters – though way too many of them – and bravura set-pieces powered by passionate prose that paints glorious widescreen images. But the book's also overlong, overplotted and full of subplots that fizzle out. Not only that, it's the first half of a duology, so expect a plethora of unanswered questions by the end of it.

The Nobody People has little new to offer, but at least it treats the genre with a refreshingly grounded tone. **Dave Golder**

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks this month includes **BODY TOURISTS** (★★★★★, out now, Sceptre), by Jane Rogers – her first SF novel since the 2011 Clarke Award winner *The Testament Of Jessie Lamb*.

It's set in a near-future Britain where the brains of the wealthy dead have been preserved. Flitting between multiple perspectives, it concerns a programme that can place their minds into the bodies of people willing to rent out their physical form for a fortnight. We said:

"Clever, thought-provoking and well-written – its lack of focus can be a little frustrating, but if you stick with it, it'll reward your time." Chuck Wendig's doorstop-thick post-apocalyptic novel **WANDERERS** (★★★★★, out now, Solaris) follows a 17-year-old girl, a former CDC scientist, a pastor and an ageing rock star as a fungal disease

mysteriously causes flocks of "sleepwalkers" to determinedly head across America. We said: "Surprisingly cosy – and that's not a bad thing... Reminiscent of the likes of Stephen King and Robert McCammon at their '80s peaks." Finally, Rob Hart's capitalist dystopia **THE WAREHOUSE** (★★★★★, out now, Corgi) centres on *The Cloud*, a vast retail giant that's just about replaced every other shopping outlet, turning the populace into consumer zombies. We said: "It's exciting and pacy, with plenty of unexpected plot turns. An absorbing read... But while often thought-provoking, it can be clumsily didactic and on-the-nose."

A woman stands in front of a massive, modern retail building under a cloudy sky.



THE BONE SHARD DAUGHTER



► RELEASED 10 SEPTEMBER

448 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Andrea Stewart

► Publisher Orbit Books

• Epic fantasy has long had a thing for One True Kings. You know the drill: a dreadful tyrant is murdering people for fun and generally imperilling the world, but it'll be sunshine and kittens for everyone once the right dude is sitting on the throne. In recent years, though, some authors have had their characters dream a little bigger: how about instead of a different ruler, we try a different system?

Here's where Andrea Stewart's debut, the first of a trilogy, comes in. Stewart's layered worldbuilding – inspired by east Asia – produces a story in which the Big Bad isn't simply an evil emperor, but the mechanisms by which the empire maintains its power. That these mechanisms are both magical and economic is something we learn gradually, through a clever plot structure combining organic story development with compelling (and horrifying) mysteries.

Central to this unfolding are the experiences of a well-chosen range of characters, such as a feckless smuggler reluctantly drawn into rescuing children from bone-shard rituals, and a privileged governor's daughter whose girlfriend is holding out for revolution before she marries her. All this, plus a sort of otter/puppy animal companion at the right end of the charming vs annoying spectrum. What more could you ask for? **Nic Clarke**



D (A TALE OF TWO WORLDS)

When Worls Collie



► RELEASED 17 SEPTEMBER

304 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Michel Faber

► Publisher Doubleday

• Rejoice, anyone who had "Under The Skin" author publishes children's book" on their Unlikely Things To Happen In 2020 bingo card (right after "US President encourages people to inject bleach"). Yes, Michel Faber, who gave us the tale of aliens kidnapping Earth men to fatten them up for slaughter, has turned his hand to a whimsical adventure story – and the result is charming.

In a small town on the south coast of the UK, 12-year-old Dhikilo wakes up one morning to find the letter "D" has disappeared. Suddenly, everyone's calling her Hikilo, the road signs have all changed, and her English homework is full of new spelling mistakes. One visit to retired history teacher Professor Dodderfield later, she's stepping through a doorway into another world with only a very self-possessed sphinx called Mrs Robinson for company, on a

perilous quest to find and liberate the missing letters.

The style is warm and chatty, with an omniscient narrator whose delight is infectious, and who intervenes occasionally to clarify key details. Faber mingles elements of CS Lewis, Charles Dickens and Monty Python with some lovely imaginative touches, like countless tiny letter Ds being carried off by dragonflies.

The story also tackles weighty issues of belonging, with a light touch. Dhikilo is a refugee from Somaliland, a country whose independence from Somalia is unrecognised by the rest of the world; while her adoptive British parents are kind, Dhikilo thus has more reason than most adolescents to feel out of place and misunderstood, especially with anti-immigrant headlines a daily feature of the newspapers around her. It's slight, the humour doesn't always land and for adult readers the villain's plans are unsatisfyingly vague, but still well worth your time. **Nic Clarke**

i The Professor's road is named after the home of Dickens, who died 150 years ago, and to whom the book is a tribute.

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



THE X-FILES: THE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES

► RELEASED 15

SEPTEMBER

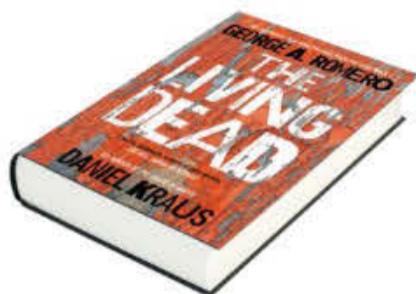
309 pages | Hardback

► Author Paul Terry

► Publisher Abrams

- This pricey hardback (RRP £35 – expect to pay £25) has a neat conceit: it's a collection of "archival documents" assembled by Agent Leyla Harrison.
- That means typed reports, mugshots, lab results, newspaper clippings, interview transcripts, suspect sketches and so on for 50 cases – all suitably stapled, stamped, scuffed or (thanks to the office fire in "The End") scorched.
- Author Paul Terry has tracked down all manner of ephemera from the Fox archives.
- Producers Chris Carter, Vince Gilligan and Frank Spotnitz all lent support (including new facts).
- Arguably it's pretty inessential – much of this material is in the episodes, just presented here in a different format. But it's cleverly designed and visually interesting.
- Would make a nostalgia-inducing gift for any X-Phile.





THE LIVING DEAD



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

656 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Authors George A Romero,

Daniel Kraus

► Publisher Bantam Press

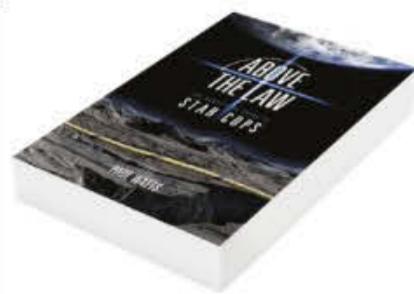
➲ You don't need us to tell you how important George A Romero was when it comes to movie zombies. This novel, written in fits and starts by Romero and eventually completed posthumously by Daniel Kraus, feels like an attempt to tie a gory bow on the director's legacy.

An original tale (with scattered nods to the movies), it starts in the present day with the first corpse to come back to life, and ends decades in the future and a very different world. To convey the vast scope of their tale, Romero and Kraus take an anthology-style approach, dropping in on various characters as they deal with the dramatic changes unfolding around them. Because of this at times it feels more like a short story collection than a novel, though the many threads are eventually woven skilfully together.

Political subtext was always a key feature of Romero's work, and issues of race and class are a strong throughline here. Less successful is a vein of technological scepticism that's perilously close to your granddad shouting "Hey kid, get off your damn phone!"

But that's a small gripe. This sprawling novel achieves exactly what it sets out to do: encapsulate the brutal, funny, reflective and human approach to horror that made Romero the king of the living dead.

Will Salmon



ABOVE THE LAW



► RELEASED SEPTEMBER

344 pages | Hardback/paperback

► Author Paul Watts

► Publisher Miwk Publishing

➲ For a series that managed to grab itself a *Radio Times* cover in 1987, *Star Cops* was never as well treated by the BBC as it deserved to be. Just nine episodes were made of Chris Boucher's groundbreaking SF crime drama, and yet here we are, 33 years later, reviewing an unofficial guide to this prematurely canned series.

Author Paul Watts was, he tells us, "an impressionable 15-year-old when *Star Cops* was broadcast" and has never fallen out of love with it. This book is an unashamed lust letter to Watts's favourite series, an immaculately researched tribute that burrows into every nook and cranny of not just the show's nine televised episodes but also the unmade tenth (writer Philip Martin has contributed a specially-written synopsis of "Death On The Moon") and the recent Big Finish revival.

There's an impressive array of interviewees, from actors David Calder, Trevor Cooper and Linda Newton to director Graeme Harper. Sixteen pages of colour images include some great photos of the sets and models (with an effects guy busy painting the Moon!). The result is something so forensically detailed that it may prove an exhausting read for less hardcore fans, but if your love of *Star Cops* runs as deep as Watts's, then *Above The Law* contains just about everything you could ever want.

Steve O'Brien



THE MAKING OF ALIENS



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

239 pages | Hardback

► Author JW Rinzler

► Publisher Titan Books

➲ *Aliens* was a war movie in more ways in one, with the unstoppable force of a perfectionist James Cameron colliding with the immovable object of a British crew, used to their tea breaks and resentful of this "upstart Yank" who had dared to usurp Ridley Scott. It eventually came to a head with them all threatening to walk.

JW Rinzler documents this simmering conflict with the same mind-bogglingly comprehensive detail he brought to previous coffee table epics on *Alien*, *Planet Of The Apes* and *Star Wars*. It's clear he's scoured every surviving call sheet and memo. Though Cameron and Weaver aren't among the 14 interviewees, they're adequately represented via old quotes.

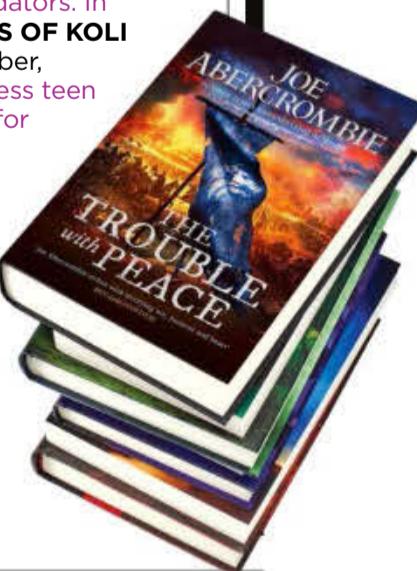
Fans are sure to glean new trivia: like the fact that a confused set decorator made futuristic "sharp sticks" for Hudson, or that a prehistoric fish inspired details of the Alien Queen's head. Archive access means a feast of visual treats too, including scores of concept drawings, many by Cameron.

Most agree that the film benefitted from having 12 minutes excised, and the same might have applied here. Side panels on the effects can be a slog. And do we really need to know how many honeywagons were sent on location? (Two.) All the same, there's probably no one out there writing better Making Of s. Ian Berriman

ALSO OUT

Covid-19's impact means a book deluge this month, with many more titles we'd love to have fitted in. *Chocolat* author Joanne Harris's illustrated novella **ORFEIA** (out now, Gollancz) is a modern fairy tale. Inspired by a medieval Scottish version of Orpheus and Euridyce, it sees a heartbroken mother venturing into the underworld to save her lost daughter. Lauren James reliably gets glowing reviews in *SFX*. Her YA tale **THE RECKLESS AFTERLIFE OF HARRIET STOKER** (out now, Walker Books) sees the titular teen dying after falling from a balcony, and discovering a world of ghosts with magical powers. Lev Grossman, author of *The Magicians*, has his first go at kid-lit with **THE SILVER ARROW** (out now, Bloomsbury). It sees a brother and sister whisked off on a colossal train for the adventure of a lifetime, accompanied by a load of talking animals. Set in his *First Law* universe, Joe Abercrombie's *The Age Of Madness* trilogy explores what happens when industrialisation hits the world of The Union. Book two is imminent: **THE TROUBLE WITH PEACE** (15 September, Gollancz).

We called first instalment *A Little Hatred* "one of Abercrombie's best yet". And there's more of MR Carey's *The Rampart Trilogy*, set in a post-apocalyptic Yorkshire where trees have become deadly predators. In **THE TRIALS OF KOLI** (17 September, Orbit) restless teen Koli heads for London in search of precious old-times tech. We said of book one, "if Netflix have any sense, they'll snap up the TV rights very soon."



WONDER WOMAN: DEAD EARTH

Amazon apocalypse



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher DC Comics/Black Label
► Writer/artist: Daniel Warren Johnson

ISSUES 1-4 Optimism has always been a vital element of Wonder Woman's character – right from her creation, she's been forever looking to find the best in humanity, even in times of war – so there's something instantly challenging about thrusting her into a post-apocalyptic future.

This DC "deluxe format" series doesn't mark the first time the heroic Amazon has had to deal with the end of the world, but it does take the idea further than ever before, in an adventure that's both thrilling and traumatic in equal measure.

Dead Earth starts from a similar setup to the recent Black Label series *Batman: Last Knight On Earth*, as Diana awakens from a mysterious hibernation with hazy memories, only to find that the



world has been devastated by a nuclear holocaust. Trying to make sense of how this disaster happened, while also fighting the twisted monstrosities that now populate America, Wonder Woman forms an alliance with a ragtag outpost of humans, and sets out to relocate them to her home island of Themyscira.

Things don't go according to plan, however, and when the truth is revealed about exactly how the apocalypse began, the story takes an exceptionally dark direction, pushing the whole concept of Wonder Woman's sense of justice and empathy to the limit.

A bleakly beautiful adventure that blends mythic grandeur with *Mad Max*-style grit, *Dead Earth* wastes no time in proving that it's going to be very different from other DCU apocalypse tales, with a level of violence that always feels like it fits the themes and nature of the story. Writer/artist Daniel Warren Johnson uses the same

“Takes an exceptionally dark direction”

jagged, energetic art style he displayed in his Image Comics series *Extremity*, using the oversized page format to showcase dense dialogue scenes, eye-catching splash pages and visceral manga-esque action sequences.

He also doesn't back off from the consequences of violence, as the story pushes Wonder Woman into difficult moral quandaries where there are no easy answers. There are a handful of moments where he slightly overdoes the boundary-pushing violence, but overall this is a thrilling and expansive tale with a powerful message at its heart. The future of Black Label projects might be uncertain, but for now it's good to see that edgy, ambitious stories like this are getting the treatment they deserve. **Saxon Bullock**

i The comic which most influenced Johnson is *Calvin & Hobbes*, which inspired him to be an artist when he first read it, aged six.



DARK NIGHTS: DEATH METAL



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher DC Comics
► Writer Scott Snyder
► Artist Greg Capullo

ISSUES 1-3 Remember the 2015 comic event *Secret Wars*, where the Marvel universe was transformed into a fantasy kingdom? DC must be hoping you don't, because its latest seven-issue event comic is basically a shameless *Secret Wars* rip-off with a more heavy metal aesthetic, and a narrative approach that cranks everything up to 11.

The basic story of *Dark Nights: Death Metal* is that the DCU has been remixed by the evil Batman Who Laughs into a magical hellscape, and now Wonder Woman has to find a way to defeat him – but three issues in, the plot is so buried in convoluted "Dark Multiverse" lore and so dependent on having read dozens of other comics that it's borderline incomprehensible.

Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo have always embraced the more lurid edges of superhero action, but here they go too far, and the results are like being forced to listen to a six-hour heavy metal guitar solo. There's so much self-aware comic-book craziness that the story becomes impossible to care about, while the continued DCU plundering of concepts from *Watchmen* is downright embarrassing.

Dumb, colourful and packed full of luridly OTT visuals, *Death Metal* is rarely dull, but it's so desperate to please that it wears out its welcome in record time. **Saxon Bullock**



SPACEWARP



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Millsverse Comics
► Writer Pat Mills
► Artist Various

ISSUE 1 It's 1977 all over again!

At least, that's likely what 2000 AD creator Pat Mills is hoping. This new all-ages sci-fi anthology (digital for now, with a print release to follow) feels like an attempt to recapture the anarchic brio of Britain's most celebrated comic. The first issue (or "Phase") features six strips and a linking narrative drawn by a variety of British comics artists, and all penned by Mills himself.

That last point is *Spacewarp*'s biggest failing. *Jurassic Punx* (art by Bruno Stahl) finds two survivors taking on prehistoric monsters in the ruins of Liverpool. In *Xecutioners* (Gareth Sleightholme) an anti-alien taskforce take out infiltrating ETs. *SF1* (Ade Hughes) is a future war tale. *Slayer* (James Newell) finds a heroic robot fighting a tyrannical empire... Despite the varied settings, the all-action approach starts to feel very samey. It's all guns, gags and future slang. Even the horror-tinged *Hellbreaker* (Ian Ashcroft) imagines the afterlife as a place where the demons are packing heat.

Fu-Tant, at least, changes things up with an intriguing academy setting and a relatable hero, while Mike Donaldson's excellent art conjures a setting that's both otherworldly and strangely everyday.

It's a fun enough first issue, but if *Spacewarp* is really going to shake up the UK comics industry, it needs to broaden its scope. **Will Salmon**



Jim Henson's *The Storyteller* gets a surprise reimaging.

DECORUM

Assassination with style



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Image Comics
► Writer Jonathan Hickman
► Artist Mike Huddleston

ISSUES 1-4 Going into a Jonathan Hickman comic, it's safe to expect mind-melting concepts, a massive sense of scale, and lots of elaborate text pages. While all these are present in his new eight-issue miniseries *Decorum*, there's also an engaging central plot that plays like a bonkers, female-centric SF

“This is a demanding read”

remix of Mark Millar's *Kingsman*. Set in a startlingly weird future, it's the intergalactic tale of what happens when well-mannered contract killer Imogen Smith-Morley meets courier Neha Noori Sood and starts teaching her "the womanly art of assassination". At the same time, potentially universe-shattering events are

unfolded, and while these first four issues are in no hurry to tie these threads together, Hickman is clearly setting up some major plot twists.

Playing like the hard SF aspects of Hickman's *House Of X* saga pushed even further, *Decorum* is a demanding read which also utilises that series' approach to text pages, embedding the comic with infodumps, maps and graphics that massively expand the story's world. While the scale of the narrative sometimes feels a bit too sprawling, the oddball central character relationship makes the occasional inscrutable moment easier to cope with, while the stunning visuals are both breathtaking and experimental.

Artist Mike Huddleston deploys a tremendous number of techniques, switching rapidly from photoreal surrealism to boldly coloured caricatures and full-on psychedelia. Wherever *Decorum* may be heading in its climactic four issues, it's going to be one hell of a trip. **Saxon Bullock**

Guillermo del Toro liked Huddleston's art for *The Strain*'s comic adaptation so much, it influenced the TV show's look.



ADLER



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Titan Comics
► Writer Lavie Tidhar
► Artist Paul McCaffrey

ISSUES 1-3 Bringing to mind

a "League Of Extraordinary Gentlewomen", *Adler*'s cast of classic, mostly Victorian characters means it explores a well-worn furrow, but Lavie Tidhar brings enough verve and invention to this five-part to make it stand out from the likes of *Penny Dreadful*. And not just by making the main protagonists female, as Charlotte Bronte surely would never have imagined that Jane Eyre would later become a nurse in the Boer War, let alone the Watson to Irene Adler's Holmes in a partnership which owes more to *Sherlock* than Arthur Conan Doyle's novels.

Tidhar doesn't make his literary nods too obvious, so much of the fun is in spotting the various homages that not only include familiar faces like *Great Expectations'* Miss Havisham, Little Orphan Annie and H Rider Haggard's villainous She, but also real-life historical figures like Marie Curie and Nikola Tesla – as well as Fogg, from the writer's own 2014 novel *The Violent Century*.

Paul McCaffrey, who illustrated Titan Comics' spin-off of Kim Newman's similarly referential *Anno Dracula*, combines dynamic, manga-esque linework with an ornate, Bryan Talbot-style eye for detail, meticulously designing everything from an Art Nouveau concert poster to some authentic periodicals of the day. So while *Adler* might seem like old news, that's part of the charm. **Stephen Jewell**

MORTAL SHELL

Under The Skin



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Reviewed on PlayStation 4
► Also available on PC (Epic Games Store), Xbox One
► Publisher Playstack

VIDEOGAME The latest contender

in the subgenre of action RPGs hoping to successfully copy the formula of *Dark Souls*, *Mortal Shell* is at least aptly named. Below the surface it is hollow, devoid of the depth and charm that made its inspiration such a classic.

You play as an undead character who has the ability to possess the bodies of fallen warriors, and in doing so gain their powers. It's a fun (if morbid) conceit, but by confining you to a mere four well-defined classes, *Mortal Shell* doesn't add much to the conventions of the genre, limiting

the customisation and fine-tuning that's one of the fundamental appeals of these intense RPGs. When you're up against the staple challenge of punishing foes, and the game's combat never feels less than sluggish, the lack of reward grinds you down.

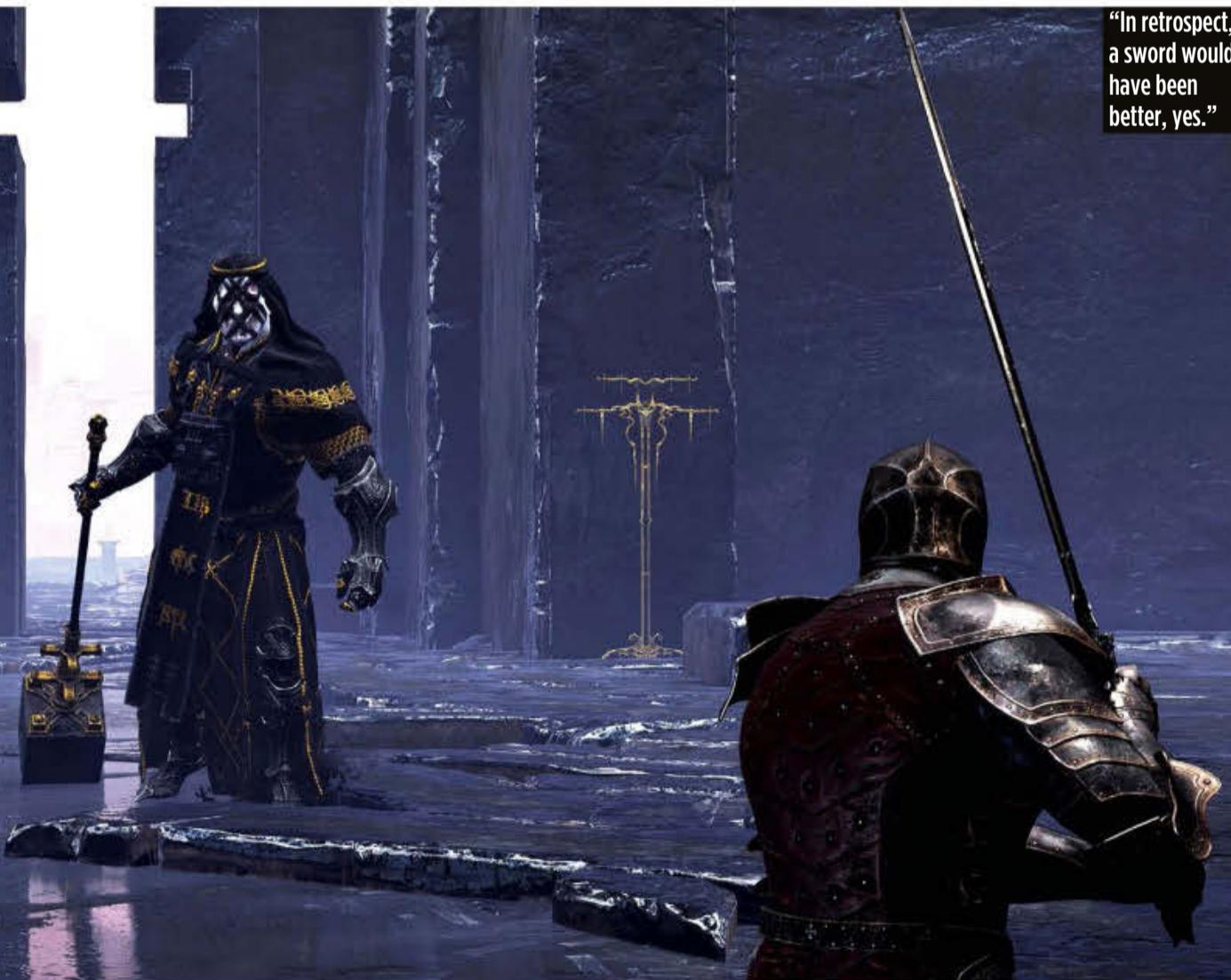
Perhaps the world could be the star of the show, but for the most part you'll be wandering a very dull and lifeless setting. Big, vague abstract spaces clearly hoping to land as some kind of Nine Inch Nails album art instead end up feeling empty, and are a chore to explore. We need nooks and crannies to pique our curiosity; big endless expanses of flat granite don't fire up the imagination.

There's very little story to speak of, though presumably this is deliberate, with developers Cold Symmetry hoping to capture the

mystery that kept *Dark Souls* on everyone's minds. But it feels like *Mortal Shell* has gone too far into vagueness, leaving players grasping not for an answer to questions raised but simply for a reason to care about any of it. The assumption you're willing to spend 30 hours on running the gauntlet of misery and torture is the most daring thing the game does.

Aiming to emulate such a lofty title is always a risk, and more novelty and imagination is needed to set a game like this apart, especially when it's not quite up to the same level of quality when it comes to combat. Despite some neat tricks, *Mortal Shell* winds up being as much of a husk as its protagonist. **Samantha Greer**

i The game includes a pettable cat. During the open beta, over 150,000 strokes were logged from over 350,000 players.



THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY THE ORIGINAL ALBUMS



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

160 minutes | Vinyl
Label Demon Records

ALBUM Everything's just a little bit off. It's as if you've slipped into a parallel universe where the differences can be hard to put your finger on.

If you first experienced *Hitchhiker's* via radio, that may be the creeping feeling this reissue inspires. Attractively packaged on green/blue/purple vinyl, this first-phase Record Store Day release (more on 24 September and 24 October), combines the two LPs put out in 1979 and 1980, re-recordings of the first BBC series.

Featuring all the key cast (except Susan "Trillian" Sheridan, busy with voice work on *The Black Cauldron* – stage show actress Cindy Oswin stepped in), it's generally abbreviated subtly, though the excision of the Vogon Guard sequence is mildly upsetting. So is the replacement of backing tracks by the likes of Terry Riley or György Ligeti with soundalikes. The one significant bonus is a song, by Milliways band Reg Nullify and his Cataclysmic Combo. It's not exactly a major selling point.

Of course, if you first thumbed a lift via the albums, it'll feel like coming home. Either way, you get most of Adams's original scripts, performed by most of the original actors. File this under mostly harmless. **Ian Berriman**



WE APOLOGISE FOR THE INCONVENIENCE



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

42 minutes | Vinyl/CD/script book

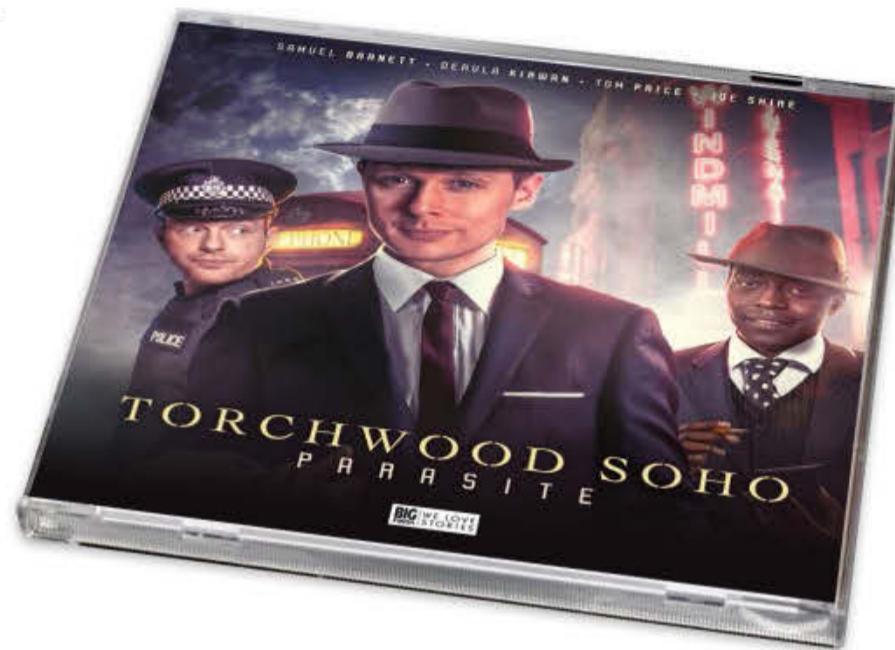
Publisher CutAwayComics

AUDIO DRAMA Originally a stage play, then a download, this Douglas Adams drama is now available in physical formats – including a 200-run LP signed by writer Mark Griffiths.

It centres on a notorious incident in the author's life, when his editor stuck him in a hotel suite until he'd finished writing the fourth *Hitchhiker's* book *So Long, And Thanks For All The Fish*. As the procrastinating Adams (Adam Gardiner) takes one of his infamous long baths, he verbally fences with a rubber duck (presumably representing an aspect of his psyche).

It's an idea with potential, and there are similar examples: like Heathcote Williams's *Hancock's Last Half Hour*, which sees the depressed Tony Hancock looking back on his life shortly before ending it. But Adams's life in general, and his struggle with writer's block in particular, aren't that dramatic, and the play doesn't penetrate far below skin-deep.

To Griffiths's credit, he's not shy of critiquing Adams, with his plastic pal pointing out the selfishness of missing deadlines, and the author's tendency to recycle his work. But while the vocabulary is Adamsian, as impersonation it seems shaky, with Gardiner's fussy enunciated performance too splenetic. Importantly, it's also just not that funny. **Calvin Baxter**



TORCHWOOD SOHO: PARASITE

Fungis to be with



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

192 minutes | CD/download

Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA Following on from previous "retro Torchwood" audios, *Torchwood Soho: Parasite* heads back to visit another team in '50s London – but don't worry, this bunch are just as dysfunctional/heroic as ever.

Torchwood agent Norton Folgate (a recurring character in the range) meets journalist Gideon Lyme, newly arrived from Tobago. A secret agent and a journalist probably aren't the best combination, but this being Torchwood, professionalism will always come second to sexual tension. Someone is sending mysterious packages into England, and Folgate's trying to discover who, while Lyme's striving to uncover exactly what Torchwood is. Meanwhile, Lizbeth Hayhoe must have a bigger role to play – she's voiced by Dervla Kirwan, after all. Oh, and there's something hiding in the London smog... Nazi mushrooms, anyone?

This is an interesting, intricate adventure, undermined by being

simply too long. Slow conversations are dragged out, and simple plans massively overexplained. Classic *Doctor Who* taught us that most stories simply don't justify being six episodes long, and unfortunately this confirms it.

However, around those overlong sections there's some really interesting storytelling. The casual racism encountered by Lyme, a black man, even in supposedly progressive places, still feels weirdly familiar in 2020. Trapped-in-time pub The Stagnant Pond is an intriguing idea that doesn't really achieve its full potential, while Folgate is an archly camp Torchwood agent who manages to hold his own in a universe overshadowed by the inimitable Captain Jack's larger-than-life (and death, come to that) presence.

Meanwhile the non-linear structure, which sees flashbacks illuminate new discoveries, is skilfully done. A *Torchwood* treat, then – there's just a bit too much of it at times. **Rhian Drinkwater**

Norton Folgate shares his name with a medieval "Liberty" (an autonomous area) in London – now part of Stepney borough.



ADVENTURE PRESENTS: TARTARUS GATE



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

Number of players: 2-7

► Writers Grant Howitt &

Chris Taylor

► Publisher Rebellion Unplugged

RPG **Rebellion** has hit upon a neat idea for the first release from its new tabletop division. *Adventure Presents* is a pen-and-paper roleplaying game series in the form of a magazine. Each issue gives you everything you need to play out a standalone scenario over several sessions with a games master and up to six friends. Sure, it's a bit tricky to socialise right now, but RPGs are *much* easier to play online than tabletop games.

Issue one's game, *Tartarus Gate*, is set hundreds of years in the future. Players take on the roles of crew members aboard a starship heading to the titular waystation. When they're unexpectedly disturbed from suspended animation, they must discover the true purpose of the station and the corporation behind it. To say any more about the plot would risk spoiling the mystery.

The rules are straightforwardly concise and the locations and characters brought vividly to life by Pye Parr's art, which adds to the sense that you're playing through a *2000 AD*-style sci-fi adventure. The emphasis here is on shared storytelling and having fun, rather than loads of stats. A system like this is never going to have the vast level of complexity of something like *D&D*, and that's fine: it'll make a great first RPG. **Will Salmon**



"Chitty Chitty Bang Bang"

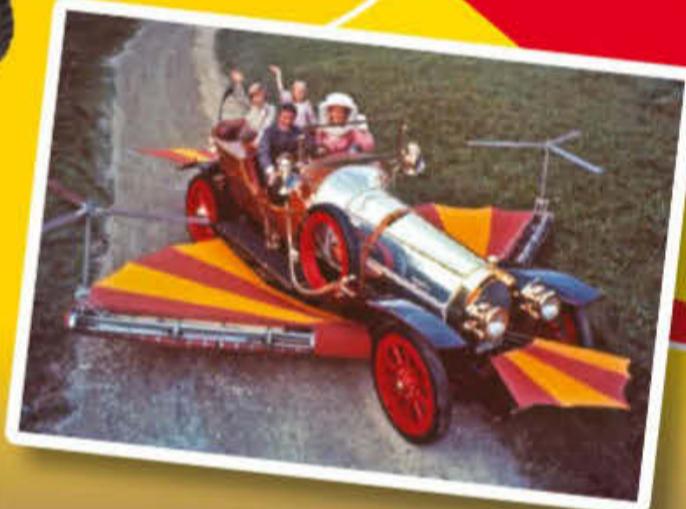


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Quizmaster Nick Setchfield, Editor-at-large

QUESTION 1

What's the name of the agent played by Leonard Nimoy in *Mission: Impossible*? a) Monaco b) Oslo c) Paris

QUESTION 2

How did the pilot episode of *Danger Man* anticipate *The Prisoner*, which also starred Patrick McGoohan?

QUESTION 3

Which member of the Rat Pack played Matt Helm in four films between 1966 and 1969?

QUESTION 4 PICTURE QUESTION

Supply the title missing from this spy movie poster.

QUESTION 5

The Final Programme starred Jon Finch as dandy secret agent Jerry Cornelius. Which SF author created the character?

QUESTION 6

Who played Dr Arliss Loveless in the 1999 movie version of *The Wild Wild West*?

QUESTION 7

Miami Beach, Kent, Switzerland, Kentucky: four of the places that are featured in which specific James Bond film?

QUESTION 8 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the comic book artist closely associated with this secret agent.

QUESTION 9

What connects *The Girl From UNCLE* with 1968's *The Thomas Crown Affair*?

QUESTION 10

Spooks had a near-future spin-off on BBC Three in 2008. What was its title?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 11

"Oxfords, not brogues" – sartorial advice from which finely tailored spy movie?

QUESTION 12 PICTURE QUESTION

Which Bond film does this handy Q-branch gadget appear in?

QUESTION 13

Which Harry Palmer movie sees the downbeat British spy battling a supercomputer?

QUESTION 14

In *Austin Powers*, Dr Evil ups the figure of his ransom bid from \$1 million to how much?

QUESTION 15

In *The Man From UNCLE*, what does the secret agency's acronym stand for?

QUESTION 16 PICTURE QUESTION

She's never as well-remembered as the other *Avengers* women – can you name her?

QUESTION 17

Which short-lived '70s spy show pitted UNIT (not *that* one) against the forces of KAOS?

QUESTION 18

"Sorry about that, Chief..." is a catchphrase from which '60s spy craze-spoofing TV series?

QUESTION 19

Deadlier Than The Male and *Some Girls Do* gave a spy-fi makeover to which classic hero?

QUESTION 20

What links Monica Vitti, Ann Turkel and Alexandra Staden?

- 1 C Paris 2 It was filmed in Portmeirion
- 3 Dean Martin 4 In Like Flint 5 Michael Moorcock 6 Kennerly 7 Goldfinger 8 Jim Steranko 9 Co-star
- 10 Spooks: Winidmills Of Your Mind" 11 Noel Harrison sang the theme song "The
- 12 A View To A Kill 13 Billion Dollar Code 9 14 \$100 billion 15 United Network
- 16 Venus Smith 17 A Man Called Sloane Commedies for Law and Order 18 Get Smart 19 Building Drummond
- 20 They've all played Modesty Blaise

Answers

How did you do?

Which secret organisation are you?

0-5

SHITE

6-10

THRUSH

11-15

SHIELD

16-19

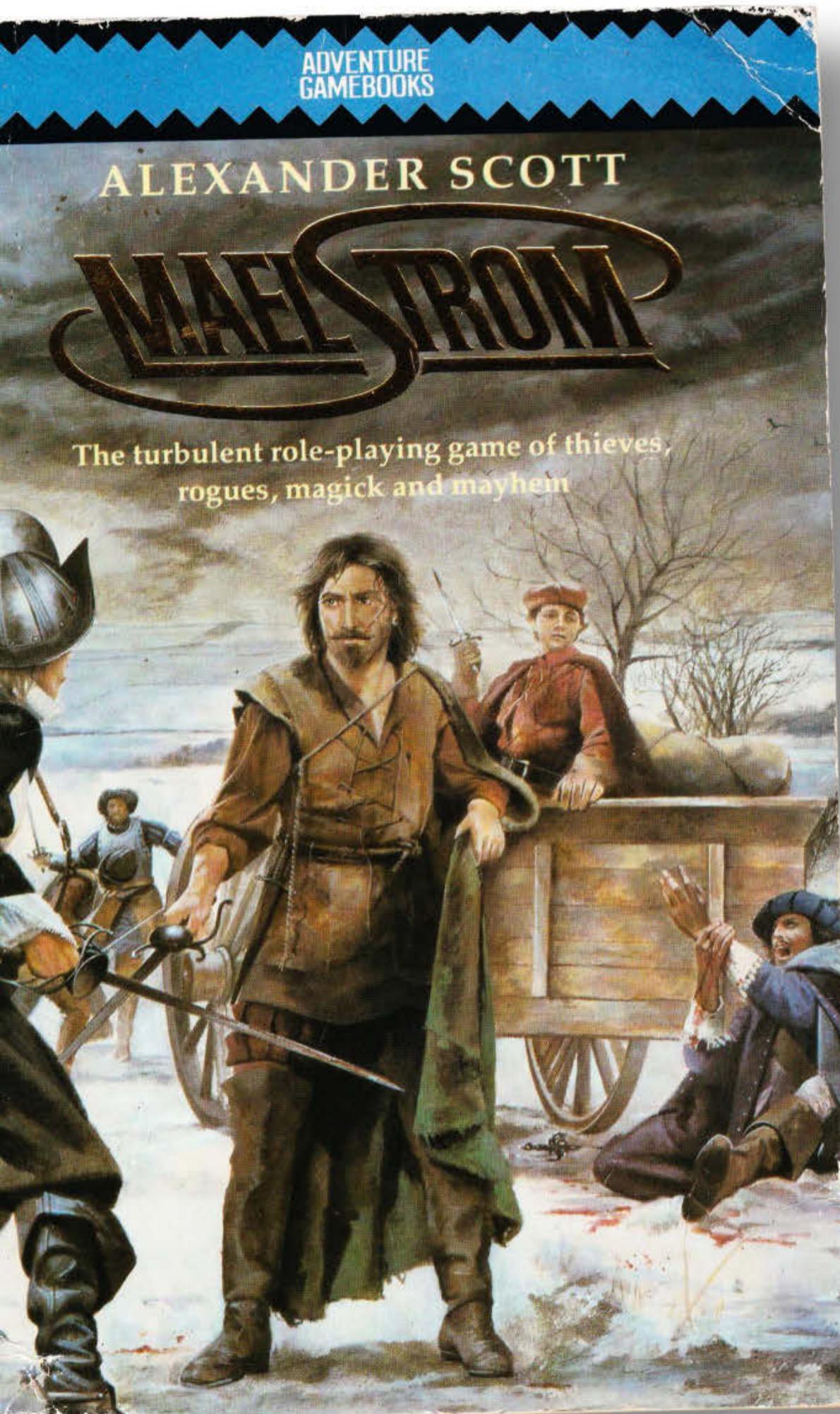
ZOWIE

20

WIN

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



Maelstrom



Dave Bradley, Former editor-in-chief

In 1984 I was addicted to *Fighting Fantasy*. But I soon craved harder stuff, and those pushers at Puffin took advantage of me, labelling this little book part of its *Adventure Gamebooks* range.

This proved to be no “turn to paragraph 100 if you choose to punch the goblin” story, though. Disguised as a thin paperback was a fully fledged tabletop role-playing game. It required actual friends to play, and – weirdly – a working knowledge of 16th century herbalism.

Three things make *Maelstrom* unusual in the chronicles of RPG history. For a start, there’s that paperback format. During this boom time in tabletop gaming, big hitters like *Dungeons & Dragons* were quite an investment. *D&D*’s basic set came in a shiny red box the size of a place mat, with polyhedral dice, and was supported by a library of supplements and source books. But *Maelstrom* sat on the smaller end of the bookshelves, right next to *Deathtrap Dungeon*, and cost an unintimidating £1.95 – about £6 in 2020 cash.

Secondly, it’s not your typical high fantasy setting. *Maelstrom*’s milieu is Tudor England. There’s some wizardry involved: the maelstrom of the title is the magic system, and there’s a section with optional rules for omens and spirits. The focus, however, is mainly on historical details. Instead of playing an orc-slaying paladin, you’re more likely to play an apprentice tanner or master vintner (“Can identify any known wine with speed and accuracy” is the thrilling character claim). The sample adventure scenario included for beginners is... a walk from St Albans to the Southwark fair. A solid 19 of its 300 pages are about the miraculous properties of plants. Far from being dull, this somehow intrigued the young me even more. A magical game set in the real world? A chance to explore the streets of Olde London? Irresistible.

Another factor that instantly inspired loyalty is the author himself. Alexander Scott “wrote *Maelstrom* while still at school”, as the preface proudly exclaims. He was 16 at the time, only a few years older than me. He wasn’t a big name in the gaming community, or an established author. He simply pitched an idea to Penguin’s children division, who were so hungry for new material that they snapped it up.

It was a bountiful decade for young gamers, and it felt as if with the right idea you didn’t need to be part of an elite publishing clique – or even a grown-up. You could just be a young history nerd and still get the world playing along with your adventures.

Dave is practising hard to identify any known wine with speed and accuracy.

Fact Attack!

→ Scott later commented that he regretted the hyper-realistic rules. Characters wound easily, and take months of game time to heal.

→ In 2008, Arion Games licensed and re-released *Maelstrom*, then expanded it into other periods – notably *Maelstrom: Domesday*.

→ Scott’s more recent publications include “Intersections Of Hypergraphs”; he’s an Oxford University maths professor.

→ *Maelstrom* was translated into one other language: Japanese. The Japanese edition has a red logo instead of the UK’s blue one.

SEE YOU
NEXT MONTH!
7 OCT
DETAILS ON
PAGE 23

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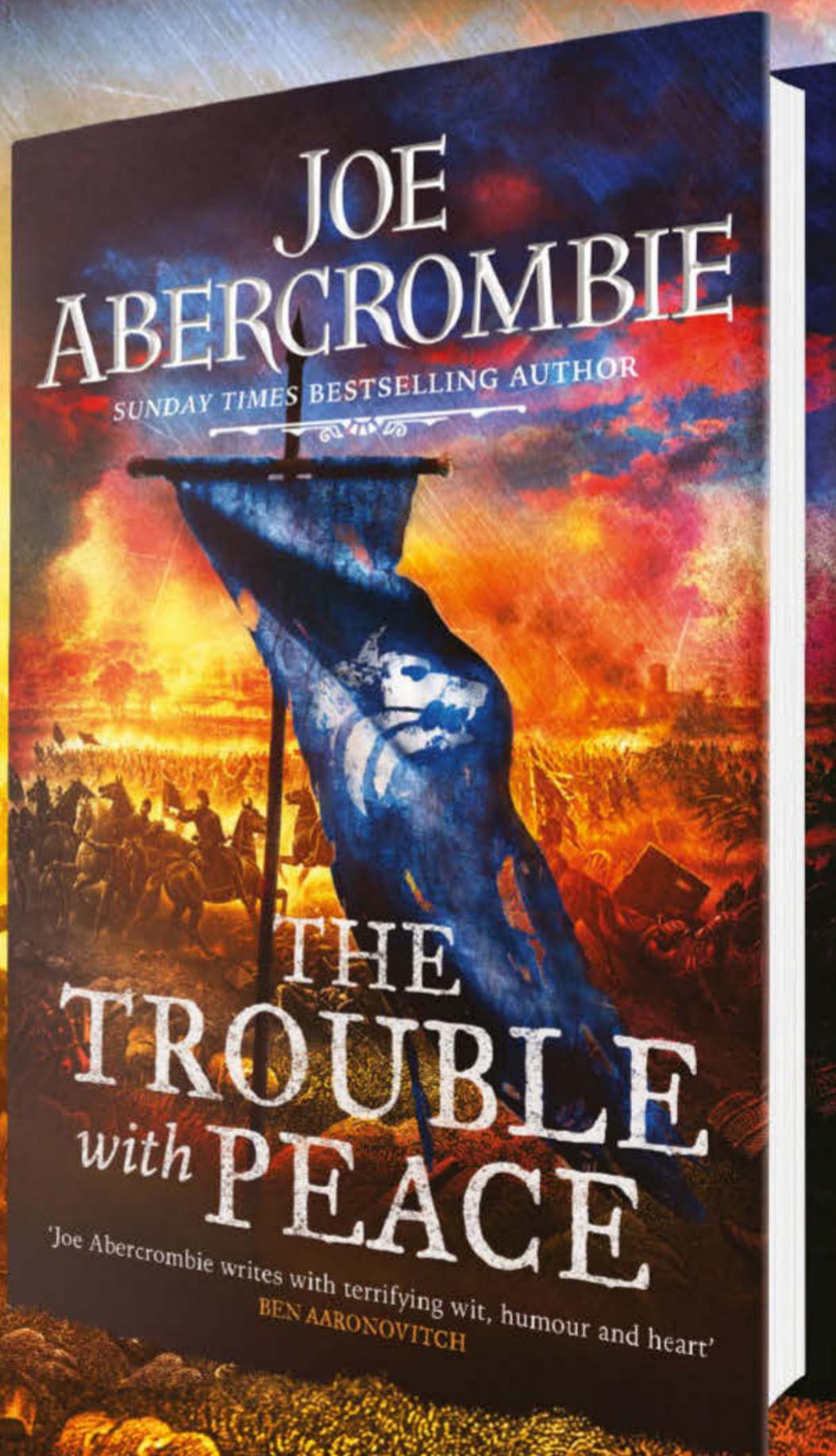
SFX

Praise for *A Little Hatred*

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