SFX



HALFWAY TO HALLOWEEN
HORROR SPECIAL!

UPSIDE DOWN EXCLUSIVE!

The Hawkins gang are back!

STRANGER THINGS

TALES FROM '85

The biggest coverage on the planet!

STAR CITY
FOR ALL MANKIND SPIN-OFF

THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU
JON FAVREAU SPEAKS TO SFX

SPIDER-NOIR
MARVEL'S NEW SERIES

GOOD OMENS 3
THE FINAL CHAPTER

HOCUS POCUS
THE UNSEEN EDIT

PLUS! THE LOST BOYS | MORTAL KOMBAT | OBSESSION | STAR TREK | DEVIL MAY CRY | HOKUM FROM | ROSE OF NEVADA | STAR WARS | BEN 10 | WIDOW'S BAY | MY BROTHER THE MINOTAUR

BBC

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We spend so much time pulling everything together on *SFX* with a small (but dedicated) team, and move so quickly onto the next issue (we're every four weeks, not once a month), that sometimes we don't really stop to think about just how stacked an issue really is.

To give you a better idea – if you're even interested! – things aren't linear. We don't start work on the next magazine the day after the previous one is finished; we always have fingers in different editions going right through the next year – and sometimes more – ahead. So while everything is (finally) coming to pass for the copy you're reading right now, behind the scenes we're laying the groundwork for different things in loads of different issues at the same time. While that's all happening, we're in "work mode", so it's still pretty cool to step back and look at something as a *fan*.

I've said this before, but I love that we're living in such good times for fans of genre – just look at what we've got this month! A new *Stranger Things* series, *Star Wars* back in the cinema, a live-action Spider-series starring *actual Nicolas Cage*, the return of *Good Omens*, a spin-off series from *For All Mankind*... Plus people keep digging up new information and materials for fan-loved franchises. It's almost like we need another outlet for everything that's available. If only we had a time machine...



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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ Missing *Doctor Who* returned with hope for more! Rumours of a *Late Night Horror* episode being out there too – how very exciting.

→ Discovered that Dame Bonita Melody Lysette Langford released a pop single in 1984! Take a look at this performance: bit.ly/BonnieSFX.

→ Loving the ongoing updates about the recently recovered *Gremlins* three-hour Rough Cut. Take a read here: bit.ly/GremlinsSFX.

RANTS

→ Sad to see *Starfleet Academy* go. I wonder if the fan-demanded *Star Trek: Legacy* is all they'd accept now?



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ What a joy to get together with some pals and watch the first three episodes of "The Daleks' Master Plan" in a row.

→ Delighted that *Firefly* may soon fly again. Praying this project doesn't end in a *Buffy*-style disappointment.

→ Thrilled that Spanish short "La Cabina" is finally getting a Blu-ray release, thanks to Radiance Films.

→ Intrigued by the trailer for *The End Of Oak Street*. Okay, it looks like a movie-length episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but is that necessarily a bad thing?



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ Love a bit of folk horror, and *Hokum* has a great setup. Book me in!



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR AT LARGE

RAVES

→ So exciting to watch those two rediscovered episodes of "The Daleks' Master Plan". It felt like brand new *Doctor Who* being beamed directly to us from 1965.

→ Great news that Charlie Higson is returning to write a full-length Bond novel with *King Zero*, out in September. Loving the gold sharks on the cover.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ Bless all the collectable companies investing in weird, niche licensed items for fandoms that don't get much attention. So happily take my money, Plastic Meatball Emmet Otter replicas!

RANTS

→ Where's our *The Muppet Show* series pick-up news? Come on Disney!







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Blowing up “The Red Balloon”.





Hiroyuki Sanada as Hanzo Hasashi, aka Scorpion.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Next Level

Director Simon McQuoid talks going another round for **Mortal Kombat II**

WORDS: **JACK SHEPHERD**

GET OVER HERE! Fatality! Toasty! *Mortal Kombat*'s not exactly short of iconic catchphrases, or fighters who shout them while decapitating enemies. Yet, despite this, the first instalment in the franchise's cinematic reboot shied away from its videogame source material, the scriptwriters deciding instead to create a brand new protagonist, Cole Young, and introducing a new inner fighting power, Arcana.

"The script was done when I pitched [for the job]," director Simon McQuoid tells Red Alert now. "What was nice about the sequel was, I came in with a clean sheet of paper and worked with Jeremy Slater, the writer, who did an amazing job. The intent was to swing harder. I felt more assured, knowing what we did well and what I didn't do so well on the first one, and it allowed me to understand where we needed to go. We just listened to the fans and understood the task at hand."

Understood the task, McQuoid and Slater certainly did. *Mortal Kombat II* continues elements of the first movie's story, though the focus pivots to the fan favourite game character Johnny Cage, a wisecracking Hollywood star who's forced to fight in a deadly tournament alongside four other Earthrealm heroes.

Should they lose their battle against the villainous Shao Kahn and his evil forces, our home shall belong to him. It's a plot that sticks close to the game, and a story that takes us on a wild adventure across realms, where everyone is ready to fight – even the dead. "The thing we wanted to embrace was the outrageous nature of *Mortal Kombat*," McQuoid says. "I got better at seeing that as an advantage [with this film]. Then we amplify things, so that we carve out our own unique space in the greater cinematic landscape.

"Not everyone can bring back dead characters like this! There are some really unique things about *Mortal Kombat* that we really wanted to push to the forefront. It's a purposeful swing into the crazy."

> **"It's really easy for something like this to slide into the ridiculous"**

McQuoid stresses that, while things certainly get wild, he never wanted to take his eye off the movie's heart, keeping "the emotions truthful" and making sure audiences connect with the characters in a way they may not have with the first movie.

"It's really easy for something like this to slide into the ridiculous, and then you don't care as much. I hope the scope of the film comes from how audiences feel about the characters, having a deeper connection with them. My hope was to do a better job than I did on the first one in that respect."

Still, that didn't stop the filmmaker from pushing the sheer scale to the next level. The movie starts with an impressive set-piece in which Shao Kahn brutally

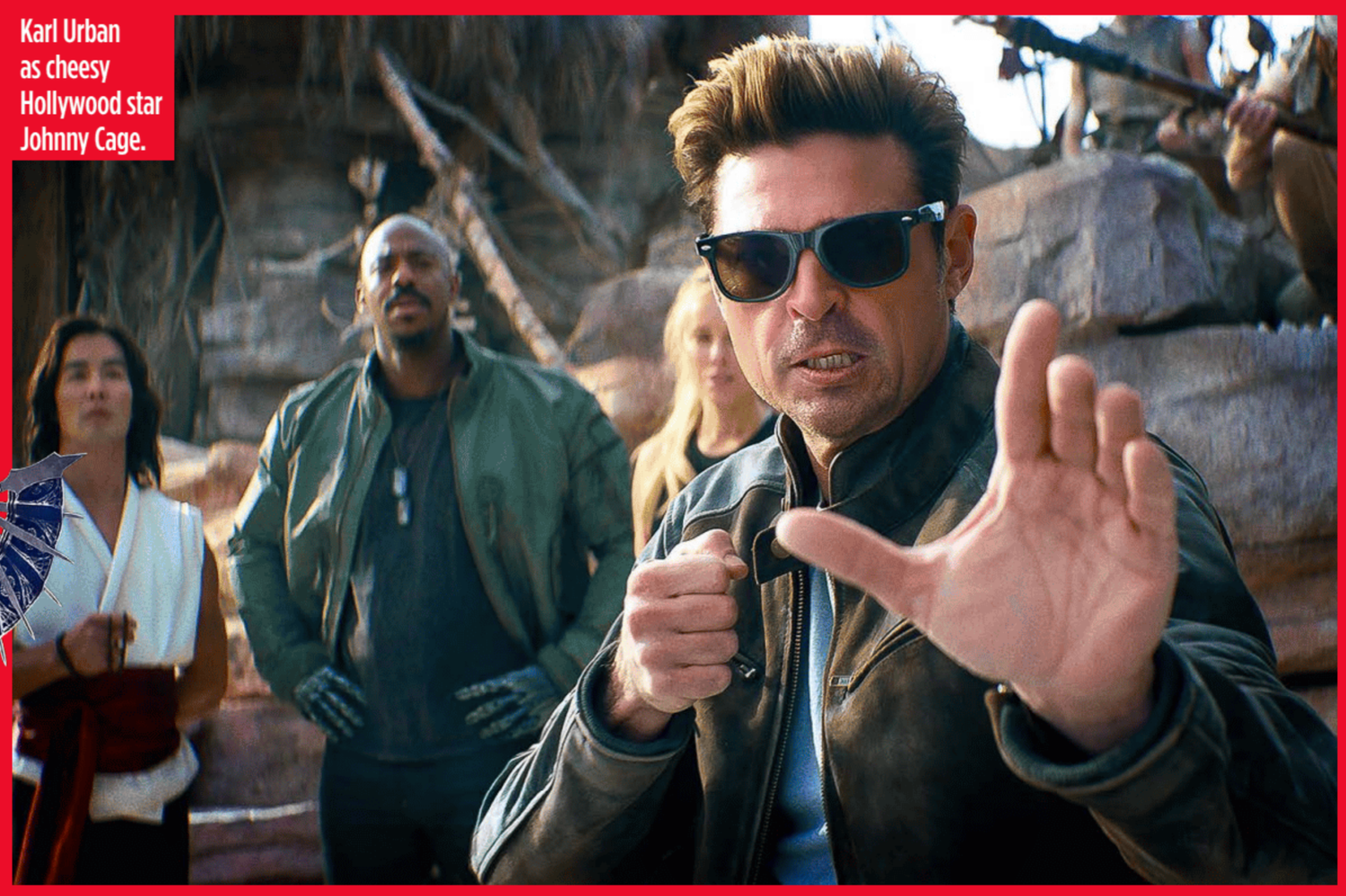




The "Blue Portal" stage gets a massive upgrade.



Kitana (Adeline Rudolph) has plenty of fans.



Karl Urban as cheesy Hollywood star Johnny Cage.

murders the king of Edenia in front of his people, with Khan marrying the realm's queen and adopting its princess, Kitana. Then, as the titular tournament progresses, multiple stages from the game are brought to life. "I thought, 'Let's take the spiked Pit from its most basic, 16-bit rendition and make it the huge IMAX version of it," McQuoid says. "There's satisfaction in seeing that upscaling, where you feel like, 'Oh shit!'



Martyn Ford as the villainous Shao Kahn.

"I love the idea of that happening in the audience's brain. We did that with the Blue Portal stage, which on the Sega Genesis was a very simple swirl. I wanted to make something quite beautiful and big."

One thing critics resoundingly agreed on with regard to the 2021 movie was the excellence of the action. Stunt director Kyle Gardiner returns for the sequel, and his stunt team appear in the trailer for the (fake) Johnny Cage-fronted film, *Uncaged Fury*.

"I love that, because you get to see all their faces," McQuoid says. "Kyle and his stunt team just took the brief and delivered it. They would spend a lot of time developing great ideas, researching by playing the game. They understand the game, they know all the different versions, so it was just a big, fun collaborative process. It was like Christmas morning when they'd show me what they came up with."

Although there are dozens of *Mortal Kombat* games and numerous spin-offs, McQuoid says there's not been too much thought given to future movies. "We really don't get too ahead of ourselves, we just focus on the film in front of us, knowing that it's the audience who are going to decide whether there's a third one. But the games have got so much in them, it really doesn't take much to think, 'Oh, we could do that.'"

In other words, if *Mortal Kombat II* proves to be a flawless victory at the box office, we could see more.

Mortal Kombat II is in cinemas from 8 May.

SCI-FACT! **Stunt director Kyle Gardiner has worked on multiple Marvel movies, as well as the recent MonsterVerse films.**

CURATOR EXCLUSIVE

All Our Tomorrows

A 60th anniversary celebration brings **Star Trek** to the Science Museum. Engage!

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



"OUR MISSION IS about inspiring futures, inspiring the next generation of scientists, engineers and medics," says Dr Glyn Morgan, Head of Collections and Principal Curator at London's Science Museum. "*Star Trek* has been doing that for 60 years.

"We opened our new Space Gallery last year, so we're talking all the time with people from ESA, NASA and space agencies all over the world – and you just can't swing a Tribble without hitting someone who was influenced by *Star Trek*. That's what turned them on to space science. That's just as true of all the other fields of science as well."

Created in collaboration with Paramount, a themed programme of events at the South Kensington museum celebrates both the inspirational power of *Trek* and the interplay between fiction's final frontier and true-life science.

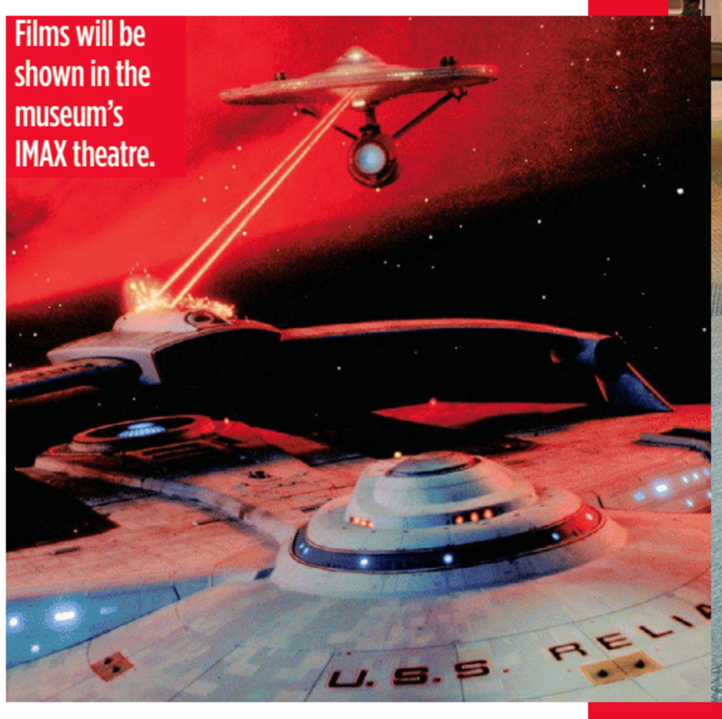
"Paramount was looking for somewhere in the UK to champion 60 years of *Star Trek*," says Morgan, a bona fide fan of the franchise who mixes academic insight with deep-cut geek knowledge. "It's the perfect marriage in a lot of ways. They've been really supportive. We've had full access to their chief archivist and they've let us rummage through some really choice pieces from the archive.

"There's a lot of *Star Trek*'s history which is in private hands. And the USS Enterprise model is a centrepiece in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum – there's no way we're getting that! But the archive still has objects and materials that cover the full 60 years of the franchise, every stage of the story."

Visitors to the museum will experience these treasures in a free, curated *Star Trek* Trail. Screen-used props and costumes illustrate the connections between the warp-drive imaginations of *Trek*'s creators and real-world innovations in various aspects of science.

"We knew we wanted to do a trail, not an exhibition in the traditional sense. We wanted something that would bring people through the museum and really celebrate the connection with our permanent collection. So that meant we had to look at what galleries we have and what stories would align. We managed to settle on a range of objects that cover space, communications technology, AI, aliens, medicine... the full gamut."

Items on display include Tribbles, communicators and



Films will be shown in the museum's IMAX theatre.

Put yourself in the hotseat as you follow the trail.





Come face to face with Data. Or B-4. Argue it over later.



Simon Pegg's shirt is among the costumes on display.

"Science has ended up imitating SF and vice versa"

then you can point out that Data and B-4 merged their programming and in *Star Trek: Picard* they become one, so it's effectively Data's head! This is the thing with *Star Trek*. You can really get into the weeds when you've got 60 years of continuity to keep straight."

Another highlight is a spacesuit worn by Sonequa Martin-Green in *Star Trek: Discovery*. "It's just such an intricate, really cool piece of kit. We're putting that in the Space Gallery so there's a really nice interaction between science-fiction spacesuits and real spacesuits. There's been quite a lot of cross-pollination in that area over the years, as science has ended up imitating science fiction and vice versa. So that's a really nice talking point for us as well."

As part of the 60th anniversary celebrations, the Science Museum is also showcasing all 13 theatrical movies on its dedicated IMAX screen in a season that runs until 18 June. "I know it's a cliché to say it but my favourite is *The Wrath Of Khan*," says Morgan. "I love that it's basically a submarine warfare film. I think it was just such a brilliant shift for the franchise and you can just feel the confidence."

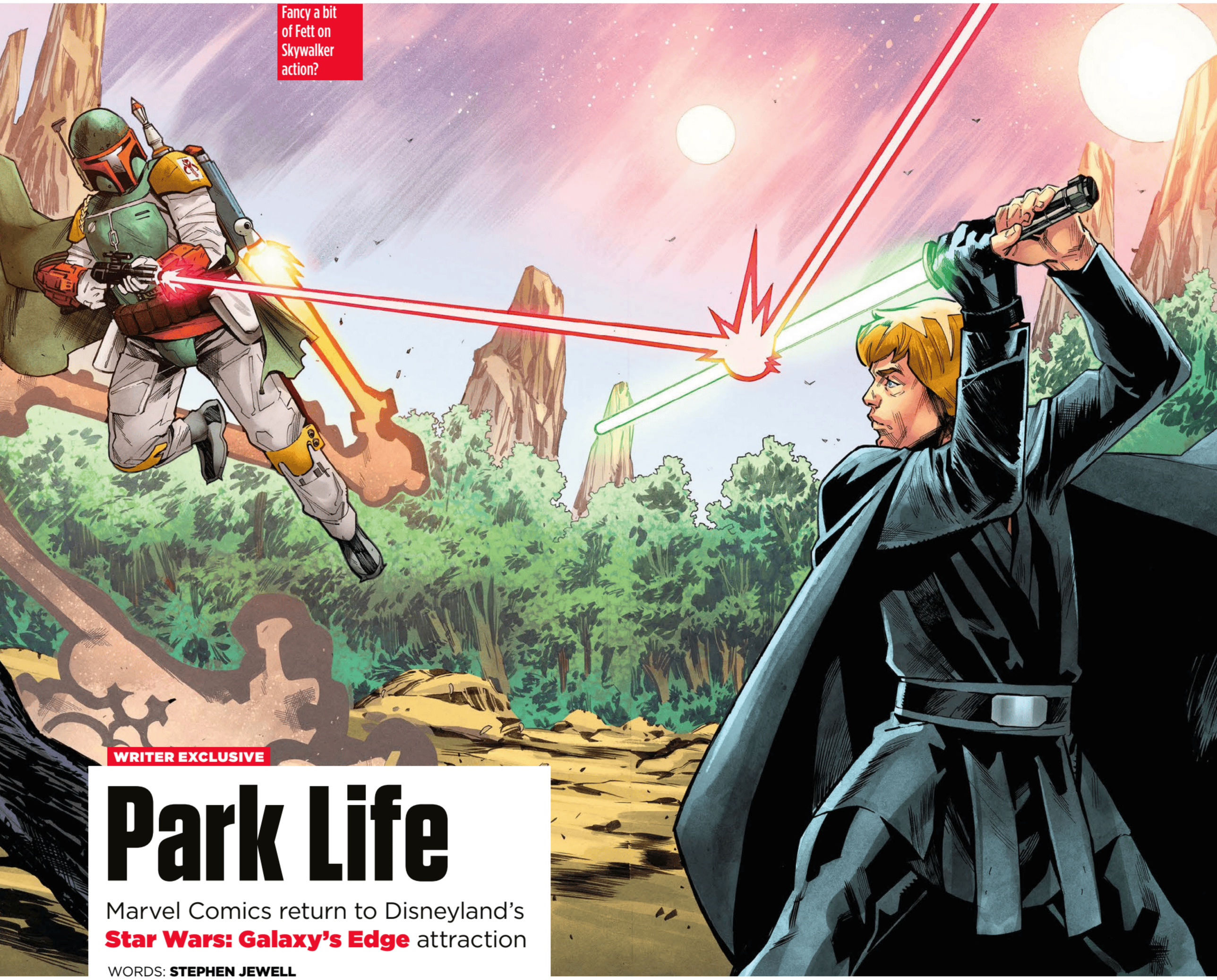
The technology – and the budget – may have evolved over six decades on screen, but for Morgan the essence of *Star Trek* remains the same.

"It's a really powerful message for people. We are all a part of the same mission, and our mission is to build a better future, and we only do that by moving forward together. The frequency of the message has maybe altered but there's a consistent thread and it's one of hope, which is really powerful."

For more details head to sciencemuseum.org.uk/star-trek-60

SCI-FACT! **Look out for the photon collector used in Chekov and Uhura's search for "nuclear wessels" in *The Voyage Home*.**

SCI-FACT! **The latest updates to the Galaxy's Edge attraction mean visitors may cross paths with Darth Vader near the TIE assault shuttle.**



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Park Life

Marvel Comics return to Disneyland's **Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge** attraction

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

COMPARING HIMSELF TO "A vampire who keeps getting invited back inside", Ethan Sacks is returning to the planet Batuu after previously scripting two other miniseries set in Disney Parks' immersive *Star Wars* land: 2019's eponymous *Galaxy's Edge* and 2022's *Halcyon Legacy*. *Echoes Of The Empire* takes place between *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise Of Skywalker*, and coincides with more recent characters like Rey being joined by the iconic heroes and villains from the original trilogy.

"This series is extra special because we were given the responsibility of helping dream up the story of why Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Han Solo and Chewbacca were on Batuu during this time period," explains Sacks, who has visited Galaxy's Edge itself on several occasions.

"There's something special about seeing a statue you dreamed up for the first *Galaxy's Edge* series now a physical object on display at Dok-Ondar's Den of Antiquities," he adds. "The artists and I have drawn a lot on the characters and lore from the experience."

Starting with Boba Fett, the five-parter features plenty of familiar faces. "The first issue features an epic battle between Luke and the greatest bounty hunter in the galaxy," teases Sacks. "It's a fight I dreamed about since

> **"For readers who haven't visited Galaxy's Edge, there's no barrier to entry with the story"**

I was crashing those two action figures together in a sandbox as a kid, and now I get to will it into existence."

A remote planet deep in the outer rim "and away from the direct influence of the Empire and later the First Order", Batuu makes for an interesting backdrop. "It's a haven for scoundrels but also a place with enough of a



connection to the Force that it had drawn Jedi in the past," explains Sacks, noting that the most enticing aspect about its main settlement Black Spire Outpost is that fans can actually visit it.

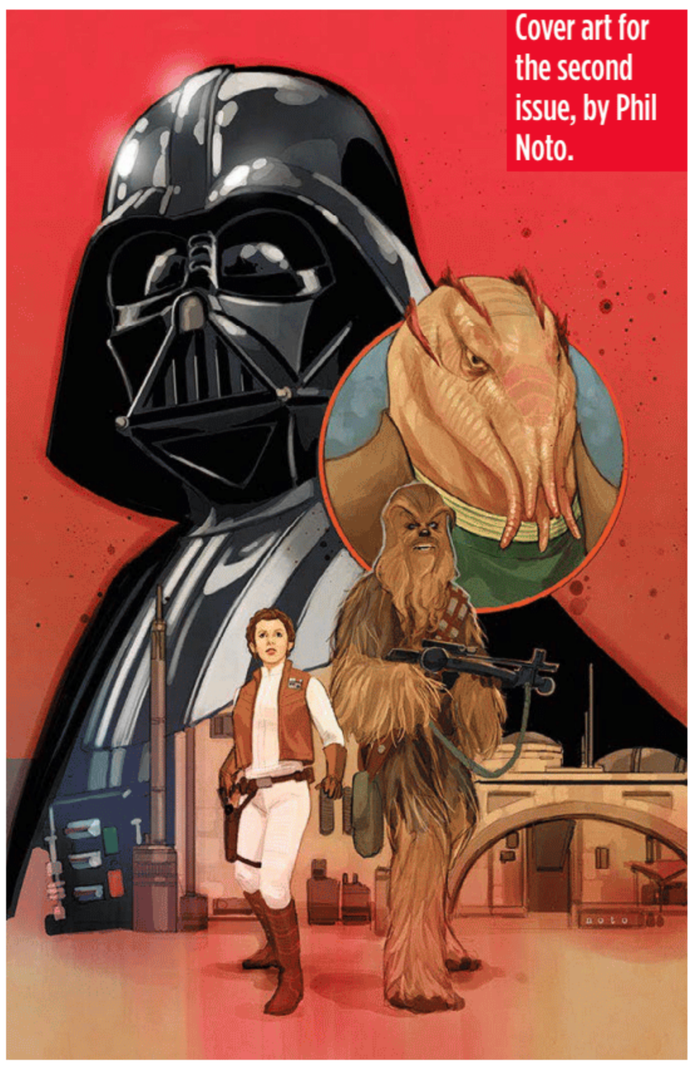
"It's the closest you can get to being in the *Star Wars* galaxy on our planet, and *Echoes Of The Empire* is going to be a shared experience that visitors to *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* can take with them to feel an extra level of connection," he continues. "As for readers who haven't visited Galaxy's Edge, there's no barrier to entry with this story. It's an exciting romp set in an extended time period with a number of classic characters."

The story sees Luke, Leia and Chewbacca heading to Batuu in search of vital intelligence before discovering a strange relic, but Sacks refuses to reveal any more details about the ancient artefact.

"That's the MacGuffin of the story so I'm going to largely leave it shrouded in mystery," he says, before suggesting that clues can be found in George Mann's short story collection *Star Wars: Myths & Fables*, in which Batuu also appeared.

Praising them for "nailing the likenesses and the emotional feel of the characters, no small feat because these characters as so iconic," Sacks is impressed by artists Jethro Morales and Roi Mercado. "They also have unique art styles," he says. "Roi is kinetic while Jethro is cinematic and they blend seamlessly."

Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge – Echoes Of The Empire is out on 22 April.



Cover art for the second issue, by Phil Noto.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Suicide Squad

Marvel highlights **Rogue One**'s fallen heroes a decade on, with added Vader

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**





BUILDING TOWARDS THE TENTH anniversary of *Rogue One*'s release this December, Marvel is releasing a sequence of one-shots starring the main characters, many of whom also appeared in *Andor*. With less emphasis on *Star Wars*' usual comedy and mysticism, both the film and TV show took on a darker tone, which the creators of the five self-contained tales also emulate.

"That grittier quality comes from a story that channels a different kind of force, the passionate determination and the muddy, bloody, boots-on-the-ground tactics of the Rebellion," says Benjamin Percy, the author of May's Luke Ross-drawn *Cassian Andor* issue, which details his meeting with the informant Tivik on the Ring of Kafrene.

"It was such a startling introduction to Cassian's character during which he kills Tivik in cold blood," continues Percy. "My jaw dropped when it happened as I knew we were in for a different kind of hero and story."

With writer Ethan Sacks promising "plenty of action and plenty of heart", June's title sees him and artist Ramon Rosanas documenting Jyn Erso's spell in an Imperial labour camp after her time working for Rebel outlaw Saw Gerrera. Meanwhile, his own background will be charted in July by scripter Marc Bernardin and illustrator Gabriel Guzman.

"We've been told that Saw Gerrera was too extreme for the nascent Rebel Alliance, but how exactly did he cross that line?" says Bernardin. "And could we connect this Saw Gerrera one-shot to *Rogue One*?"

August's *Chirrut & Baze*, by writer Stephanie Phillips and artist Kieran McKeown, centres on the inseparable blind warrior-monk and his fearsome protector. "I really wanted to centre this story around a moral dilemma for Baze and Chirrut," says Phillips. "The decisions they face will test their ideas of faith and morality while also offering a grounded, dark look at the Resistance. They may not always agree on a method but they both believe in the overall outcomes that have put them in a dangerous position in our story. I also really enjoyed working on their tag team fight sequences to take out Stormtroopers and other threats. They're so in sync that it was cool to write them together and see Kieron really bring that great dynamic to life."

Rogue One itself climaxed with Darth Vader boarding the Rebel command ship and slaughtering all around him, and the Dark Lord's malign presence is definitely felt in September's final issue, from writer Christopher Condon and artist Luke Ross.

"Fans had been waiting to see that for 40 years at that point, so it felt particularly satisfying to watch it play out on the big screen," says Condon. "So my thoughts revolved around capturing the essence of that scene and bringing it into our story.

"We wanted the character to appear like a tornado, just ripping into whatever stands in his way. You get that in *Rogue One* and you certainly get it in our story. I'm incredibly proud of it."

Star Wars: Rogue One – Cassian Andor is out on 6 May.

SCI-FACT! **It was actor Donnie Yen's idea to make Chirrut blind – and give the warrior monk more of a sense of humour.**

We'll see more of the dynamic between the brothers.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Family From Hell

Netflix's **Devil May Cry** finally unites the hybrid demon twins, Dante and Vergil

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

ONE OF THE BEST videogame character rivalries ever to grace any console is that of identical twins/devil-human hybrids Dante and Vergil in Capcom's ongoing action adventure franchise *Devil May Cry*. Endlessly entertaining, younger twin Dante is the cocky, for-hire demon hunter, while Vergil revels in being his non-apologetic demon archenemy.

In 2025, Netflix released creator Adi Shankar's (*Castlevania*) anime take on *Devil May Cry*, where he placed Dante (voiced by Johnny Yong Bosch) into our world circa 2000 and used remixed nu-metal needle drops to score the show's kinetic action. The propulsive season ended with the opening of a portal that allowed the Americans, under VP Baines (Ian James Corlett), to imprison Dante, and then invade and subjugate the demons of Hell. In the last seconds, the long-lost Vergil (Robbie Daymond) arrives to free his demon kin and make the humans pay.

Shankar tells Red Alert that their much-anticipated sibling rivalry will serve as the spine for season two of the animated series. "There's a darker feel to season two because the stakes are heavier," he teases of what's coming for the brothers.

It picks up where season one left off – with Vergil's rebellion and Dante on ice. Shankar says the world of Hell, or Makai, will be a primary setting to tell the brothers' origin story. "We're experiencing more layers of Makai and it makes the whole thing interesting," he says of the change of scenery. "Makai is more of a fleshed-out universe where we understand the ecology. What's interesting about this world is it's not like, 'Oh, this is where all the evil people live.' This isn't like Skeletor and his goons in this land, because they exist in shades of grey in Makai, not just good and evil."

That fits with Shankar setting up the humans as the bloodthirsty aggressors and betrayers of Dante, and the demons as the victims. "I really wanted to bring psychological and emotional realism to season one. Now with season two, there's just so much more room to land the plane with that psychological and emotional realism, especially with Dante and Vergil," Shankar explains. "I wanted every swing of the sword, every line of dialogue, or every confrontation to be rooted in what would happen, given who





Childhood flashbacks will form part of the story.

these characters are as we've established them."

Shankar says he was also given longer episodes to play out the dynamics between the twins, who are who they are because of their separation following the death of their mother. "It's confronting the inadequacy that comes from this loss. When you peel back the videogame characters' veneer, they are actually quite deep," he emphasises. "There's that meme that Vergil just wants power. But *why* does he want power? He wants power because he doesn't feel safe. For anyone who is this power-hungry – and I've met a lot of these people who are massively power-hungry in my own life – usually there is a sense of safety that was lost as a kid that they then internalise as, 'I will be safe if I attain power' and then it's *never* enough."

As for other existing characters, Shankar confirms that Baines is a "player" in this season. However, Mary (Scout Taylor-Compton), very present in season one, will not be central to this arc. There'll be some new characters too. "I don't want to say there's more characters because at the end of the day, season two is very much Dante's story," he clarifies. "The events that are happening directly affect him, versus in season one when he was the MacGuffin that everyone was chasing."

When it comes to the series' signature style of animating action beats to music from the era, Shankar says season two is more ambitious in creating a musical tapestry that underscores the emotion of what the characters are going through. "In season one, Limp Bizkit's 'Rollin' was the theme song because that was what Dante would be listening to in this jukebox," he explains. "In season two, it's of the same era, but it's no longer Dante's music. It's darker, moodier, melancholy music from that era." Shankar says his four-song playlist for writing season two speaks volumes about the vibe: "Un Nouveau Soleil" by M83, "XX Intro – Original Mix" by Kate Simko and London Electronic Orchestra, "Mantra Of Buddha" by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and "In Tibetan Bowls" by Bokar Rinpoche.

> **"At the end of the day, season two is very much Dante's story"**

Unbothered about building an ongoing franchise, Shankar says he crafted both seasons to exist as satisfying movies broken up into eight chapters. "Season two is very much a movie," he says. "I'm using the language of film, and I think with season two, I brought cinema to it."

Devil May Cry is on Netflix from 12 May.



The action is very much character-driven.



Mary won't be a focal character this season.

SCI-FACT! **Vice President William Baines is primarily voiced by legendary voice actor Kevin Conroy, who passed away in 2022.**

SCI-FACT! **Man Of Action's Steven T Seagle and Duncan Rouleau also created *Big Hero 6* for Marvel Comics.**





CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Four of the five variant covers for the first issue.

Superboy

Creators Man Of Action return to **Ben 10** for a new comic series

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

HAVING WORKED INDIVIDUALLY on series such as *Uncanny X-Men*, *Sandman Mystery Theatre*, *Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Metal Men*, the members of Man Of Action Studios had a lengthy comics track history even before they created *Ben 10* for the Cartoon Network in 2005.

Now Man Of Action – Joe Casey, Steven T Seagle, Joe Kelly and Duncan Rouleau – are collectively returning to Ben Tennyson's high-tech adventures on a new monthly title, the latest offering from Dynamite Entertainment's Warner Animation line.

"The fact that all of us come from comic books means that it was a big part of *Ben 10*'s DNA all along," says Joe Casey, who is writing the first arc. "This is natural for us to reimagine it in this medium, and having created *Ben 10* in the first place, we've always been involved in all of its various media incarnations, so this comic is just the next phase for us."

It's being compared to Marvel's Ultimate line or DC's similarly continuity-light Absolute Universe. The first issue retells Ben 10's origin as a mysterious meteor crashes to Earth and 10-year-old Ben discovers the all-powerful alien gauntlet the Omnitrix. "This Ben 10 is, without a doubt, a full-on superhero comic book – 'nuff said, right?" laughs Casey. "So you can expect the same kind of continuing narrative that you'd find in classic runs of *Spider-Man* or *Batman*, and that means subplots, cliffhangers, dramatic reveals and deeper characterisations – the works!

"There'll also be plenty of new insights, plenty of familiar faces, and plenty of Easter eggs for longtime fans. Everything that has sprung out of the wide world of Ben 10 is fair game for this series."

Irish artist Robert Carey has previously drawn *Outsiders* for DC Comics, and is currently illustrating *Event Horizon: Inferno* for IDW Dark, and was specially selected for *Ben 10*. "I'm proud to say that I basically headhunted Robert for this gig," says Casey. "Man Of Action and Dynamite Entertainment have been developing this series for more than a year and I've had my eye on Robert's work from the very beginning. I just had the feeling





that he was the guy, and I'm glad that when the time came he was actually available and enthusiastic for the gig. His versions of the classic *Ben 10* aliens have already caused intense, passionate excitement throughout the fanbase, so it's gratifying to be proven right. He was the only choice and the perfect choice."

Artist Duncan Rouleau has contributed a variant cover to the first issue of the new series, and Casey's fellow writers Kelly and Seagle will script future arcs. "This is way different than any other *Ben 10* comic book material that might have previously existed," says Casey.

"All four of us in Man Of Action are all in on the overall plotting of the series, laying the story foundations. Then one of us will always be stepping up to actually script the issues and work directly with Robert when it comes to executing our collective vision onto the page."

Ben 10 is out on 6 May.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Divided Loyalties



Christos Gage returns to his own Marvel past in **Civil War: Unmasked**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

CHRISTOS GAGE WAS JUST starting out in comics when he wrote one-shot *Iron Man/Captain America: Casualties Of War* in 2006, and is now returning to *Civil War* two decades later, scripting new miniseries *Civil War: Unmasked*. The five-parter marks the 20th anniversary of Mark Millar and Steve McNiven's crossover, which is not only one of Marvel's bestselling collections but was also turned into 2016's big-screen *Captain America: Civil War*.

"Despite all the tie-ins, I was surprised after rereading the original series that there were a lot of untold stories to be explored," says Gage, "and plenty of questions central to the main characters and story."

While he has recently written other historical Marvel series, this is the first time Gage has drawn on his own prior work, with issue one springing out of *Casualties Of War* itself. "When I wrote that issue, one of the reasons I had Tony Stark tell Captain America he supported the Registration Act was that the alternatives were far worse, and he specifically cited Project Wideawake," he explains.

"That's the programme which in another timeline led to the creation of an army of killer Sentinel robots and brought about the dystopian Days Of Future Past world.

"My thoughts at the time were that Tony would know about this because he had served as Secretary of Defence and he would have seen the various proposed plans. When I was brainstorming for the miniseries, I thought, 'Hey, what if the reason he knew about it is because he saw it for himself because Bishop showed him?', so I literally picked up a plot thread I'd dropped 20 years earlier."

According to Gage, the miniseries' title has several meanings, including Peter Parker publicly revealing that he is Spider-Man in *Civil War* issue two. "It's also an allusion to going back to the original event and unmasking some of the motivations, feelings and actions we as readers didn't necessarily get to see at the time," adds Gage.

"Such as in issue four, where we explore why Tigra apparently defected from the pro-registration side to Captain America's resistance, but remained a mole for Iron Man's team. Most of our stories take place during *Civil War*, except for issue three which focuses on Tom Foster, the current Goliath, who is original Goliath Bill Foster's nephew.

"His issue begins during *Civil War* at Bill's funeral but jumps forward to *World War Hulk*, which is when Tom got his powers as he torn between his anger at Iron Man and what Bill would want him to do with them."

Gage says returning colourist Morrie Hollowell "brings the same qualities" he brought to both *Civil War* and *Casualties Of War*, and believes artist Edgar Salazar shares "a certain quality" with Steve McNiven. "Edgar conveys both a sense of realism and genuine emotion, even when dealing with things like giant-size humans and genocidal robots!" he laughs. "Each issue is self-contained and issue three has Goliath fighting one of my favourite villains, who can also grow to giant size, and Edgar composes the pages beautifully."

Civil War: Unmasked is out on 6 May.





Covers by Steve McNiven (left) and Edgar Salazar.

SCI-FACT! **Christos Gage partly modelled *Casualties Of War* on Michael Mann's 1995 film *Heat*.**



Paul Kaye voices shapeshifting bunny Pooka.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Feeling Bullish

Apple TV's **My Brother The Minotaur** draws on Irish folklore WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

IF YOU GREW UP DEVOURING kid-led mysteries like *From The Mixed-Up Files Of Mrs Basil E Frankweiler* and movies like *The Goonies* and are looking for more of the same, Apple TV's new animated series *My Brother The Minotaur* has you covered.

A collaboration between Irish animation studios Cartoon Saloon (*The Secret Of Kells*) and Dog Ears (*Puffin Rock*), this original mystery is set on the fictional isolated Bryony Island. Twelve-year-old Lorcan (Ely Solan) is increasingly having nightmares about stalking creatures, Celtic standing stones are calling to him, and he just doesn't feel like himself.

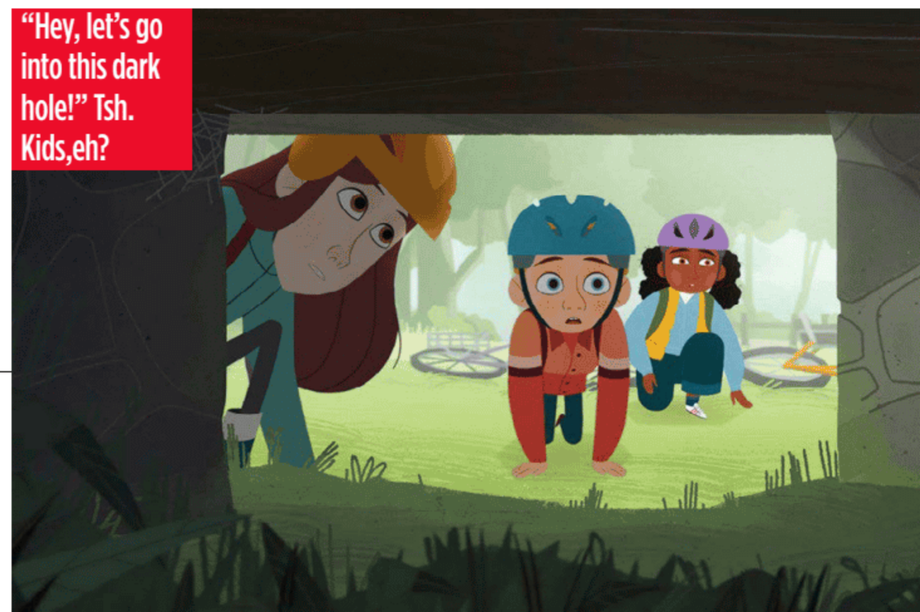
Oh yes, and Lorcan also happens to be the only minotaur hybrid in the world. Protected by his community, his adopted parents and his fiercely loyal younger brother Charlie (Billy Jenkins), the brothers aim to get to the bottom of the secrets the islanders have kept about Lorcan's origins. Series executive producer Fionnuala Deane and producer John McDaid tell Red Alert that *My Brother The Minotaur* is their passion project that's been in development since 2016, when animator Donal Mangan (*Wolfwalkers*) first pitched that title and his long-gestating concept to Dog Ears.

"We were really interested in exploring with Donal this idea of friendships and siblings," Deane says of their immediate interest. "It was a coming-of-age story, essentially about two brothers. One brother was incredibly different, and the other brother was supporting him.

"And if he is this bull creature, how can we turn that on its head and explore ideas of power, strength, and brute force? We tried to find a story which explored that so it's full of action and mystery and folklore all intertwined with a real emotional kick to the storyline."

With the help of a Northern Ireland Screen grant, Dog Ears and Mangan developed a pitch reel that got Cartoon Saloon on board as production partners, with writer Mark Hodkinson and director Maurice Joyce attached. They helped develop the story into a series with an '80s style of storytelling, featuring a group of kids who go out and save the day.

"Between the two studios, we curated that process as best we could and really encouraged them to go for it and explore what could happen," Deane says. "Simultaneously, there were character design and backgrounds and the development of the visual world which was beautiful. When Apple came on board, we had created a lush world for them to engage with."



"Hey, let's go into this dark hole!" Tsh. Kids,eh?





Lorcan (with the horns) is voiced by Ely Solan.



Films such as *The Goonies* were a direct influence.

The dynamic between the sullen Lorcan and charmer Charlie is also unique. "He doesn't want to be a grumpy teenager, but he is," McDaid says of Lorcan. "He's trying to figure out his way in the world, and he's Charlie's hero, so even though he's throwing stuff back at Charlie and lashing out, it's not personal, like the fights we have with our own siblings.

"There are some aspects of this show, like Craignelder's [Michael Sheen] attitude to Lorcan as a stranger, a monster who's come to terrorise the community, where they are unsettling and something that we can recognise in society at large. We do see some ugliness and scariness in the show, but that sibling closeness is an antidote to that, and I love it."

Along with the familial story, *Minotaur* mines Celtic folklore, including chilling visuals of possessed creatures and supernatural phenomena that bloom in the shadows the more the brothers and their two friends, Harper (Luciana Akpobaro) and Dana (Billie Boullet), uncover.

> **"Our director had a clear aspiration to make something cinematic"**

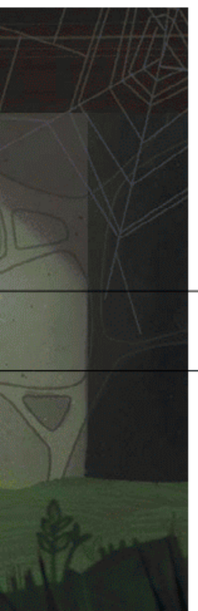
"Our director Maurice had a really clear aspiration to make something cinematic," McDaid enthuses about the look of the show. "He built dynamic symmetry into his shot compositions and really went for it on a cinematic level. In the same way, the colour was approached by our art director, Stefano Scapolan, who did an incredible job.

"He had such a clarity of vision, and it married perfectly with our ambition for the actual storytelling. You've got a kid who's a minotaur. You've got scary creatures from Irish folklore, so let's weave in some dark energy, and how much fun can we have with the folklore and the myths that surround us?"

Deane adds, "We created a world and an island and a whole universe which is fictional, but it draws on story influences, historical influences and design influences from different traditions. We deliberately didn't want to dumb down that ambition for children. This was our first attempt at something for slightly older kids, so we just went for it."

McDaid says they hope audiences respond to this world so they can make future seasons. "I think you can see the potential in the characters, and we've left little chinks of light in there to explore. We would love to see our characters branch out into different storylines in the future."

My Brother The Minotaur is on Apple TV from 24 April.

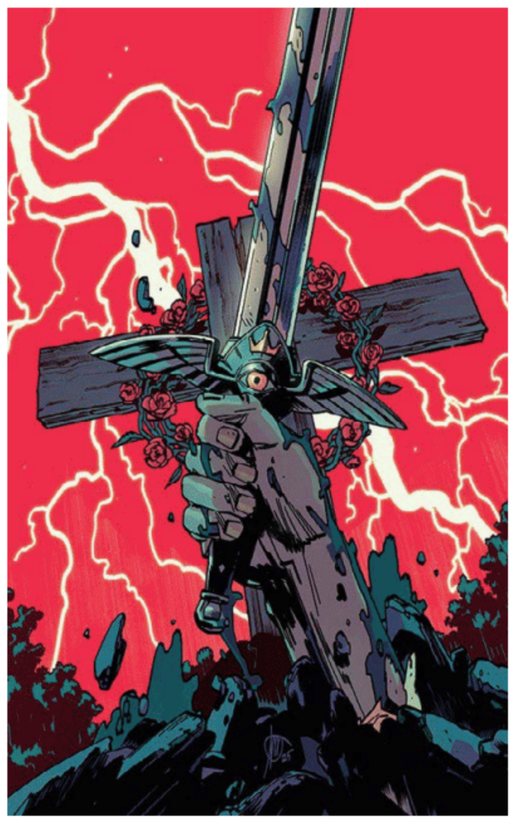


SCI-FACT! ***My Brother The Minotaur*** **also features voice work by Brian Cox, Andy Serkis and T'Nia Miller.**

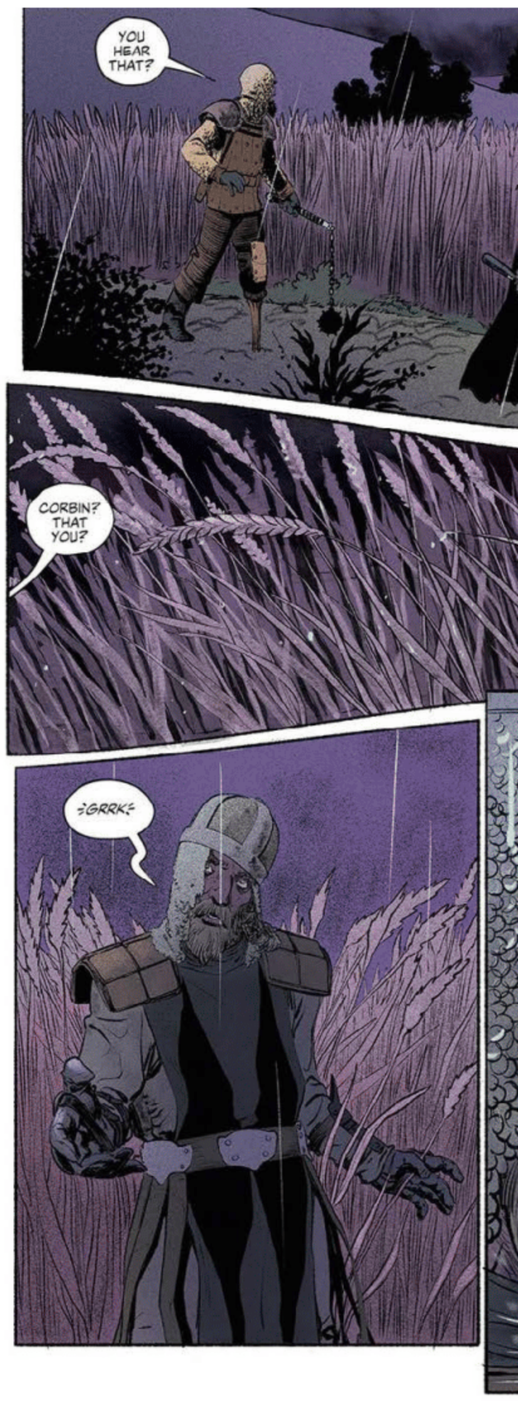
SCI-FACT! **As a fan of Todd McFarlane, Chaves says "*Spawn* has had a deeper impact on *Corpse Knight* than I previously acknowledged."**



One of the variant covers for issue one, by Matthew Roberts.











WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Dark Knight

The Conjuring: Last Rites director Michael Chaves on his first comic book, **Corpse Knight**

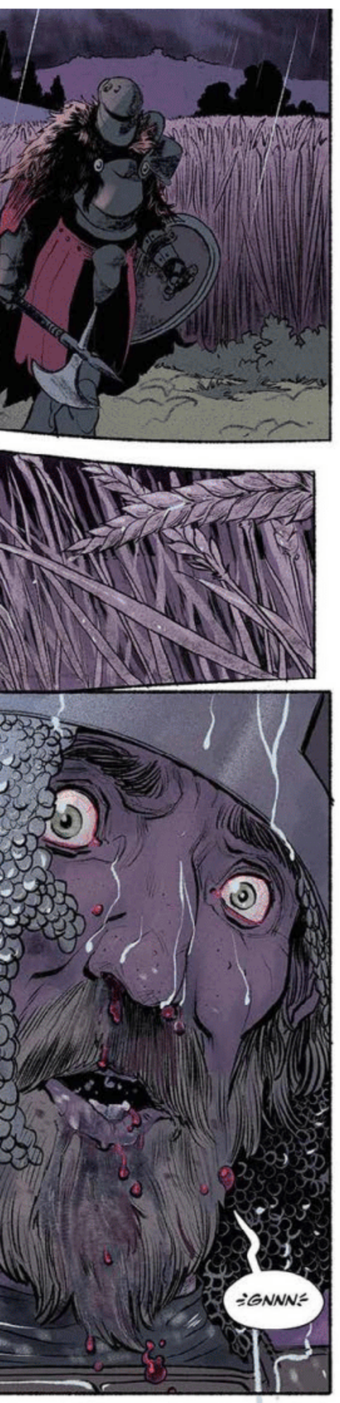
WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

THE CONJURING: LAST RITES' director Michael Chaves's debut comic series *Corpse Knight* is the story of a young girl in medieval France whose father returns from the dead to protect her. He first thought of the idea when he was shooting his 2023 film *The Nun II* around Provence.

"*The Nun II* had a storyline about saints and relics and I was reading about a lot of different saints at the time, and specifically about Joan of Arc and her relationship with Gilles de Rais," explains Chaves, referring respectively to the French patron saint and her companion-in-arms, the nobleman who was also a serial killer of children.

"Without spoiling anything, I was hooked and really wanted to incorporate that into some kind of story," he continues. "So I was shooting the movie during the week and then writing on the weekend. I couldn't crack it because I couldn't find a strong emotional main character. Then I finally shifted their story into the background and the last third of the arc, and that's what really unlocked it."

Chaves compares the quest of young Foy to *The Wizard Of Oz*. She and her resurrected father set out to track down Joan of Arc, whom she believes can make everything right again. "I love history and even stories set in alt-history worlds," says Chaves, citing Mike







Mignola's *Hellboy* as an example. "For me, history grounds these types of genre stories. Especially when you get into stories that deal with demons and faith, so making it have some thread of history or realism is important."

Describing the story as "an intense horror fantasy", Chaves doesn't only draw on history and legends but also his own experiences as a father. "There's a bigger mythology and journey ahead for Foy and the Corpse Knight," he teases.

"As much as this is a sprawling, period horror epic, I wanted it to be ultimately a very personal story about being a parent. I have two little kids and ever since they were born I've been obsessed, probably to an unhealthy degree, with my own mortality. The idea of them being alone in the world without me has kept me up at night, and writing this book really is a way of dealing with that fear."

Admitting that "this is the first time I've made a comic and I simply had no idea what I was doing," Chaves was surprised to discover that scripting comics wasn't so easy.

"When I started, I naively thought 'Comics are just like storyboards and I've directed three movies, how hard can this be?' and then I learned the answers were 'No' and 'Very hard!'" he laughs.

"Having said that, it's been such a fun, rewarding experience, working with our artist Matthew Roberts. But comics are such a different beast than movies: the page to page structure, the storytelling..."

Chaves is open to returning for further series of *Corpse Knight* after this initial six-parter. "It comes to a big, definitive emotional conclusion," he says. "But I really love this world, so anything is possible."

Corpse Knight is out on 22 April.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Abe-Bodied

Filmmaker Mark Elijah Rosenberg on co-writing **If Destruction Be Our Lot** with brother Matthew

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**





Pages from the first issue, drawn by Andy MacDonald.

WITH ITS IMAGINATIVE SCOPE limited only by the illustrator's ability, filmmaker Mark Elijah Rosenberg is enjoying the unlimited budget of a comic. He's teamed up with his seasoned Marvel/DC-scripter brother Matthew Rosenberg and artist Andy MacDonald on new Image Comics series *If Destruction Be Our Lot*.

"In comics, it takes the same amount of work to create a scene with two people chatting as it is to draw a robot-eating monster chasing an automated dead president in a stolen talking bus," says Mark. "So guess which option we chose?"

***If Destruction Be Our Lot* takes place in a post-apocalyptic future where humanity is extinct and robots dominate the planet, a topic which appears very timely right now. McDonald reveals that he hates artificial intelligence almost as much as he loves drawing robots.**

"Those kinds of advances have informed some of the world-building design, which reflects an alien perspective which didn't evolve directly from human necessity but from efficiency," he explains. "There's no need to build anything useful to any human, so the visual language only makes sense to the AI that created it.

"From there, I've tried to establish different levels of robots, ranging from giant, incomprehensible machinery that could destroy and rebuild a city block, to a user-friendly egg that was built to make breakfast for a family every day for eternity."

Unlike most robots who are happy to perform their functions without interference from their former human masters, our hero Abe isn't content with his lot. He's a replicant of Abraham Lincoln, with the series taking its title from one of the 16th President's famous speeches.

"We debated using other characters such as Elvis or Albert Einstein – and maybe some of them will make an appearance – but kept coming back to Abe," says Mark. "He's visually iconic and a unique mix of noble and comedic, and a humble hero who met a tragic demise.

"We also have access, through Lincoln's writing, to a fantastic amount of his ideas and emotions, and know that he was a complicated soul with a flair for language and a great sense of humour. We needed someone with all those characteristics."

"Part of the fun of Abe is that he really longs to be human in many ways, which is a very *Pinocchio* story," adds Matthew. "There's something very relatable about a character who isn't sure where he belongs and isn't comfortable in his own synthetic skin."

The opening four-parter acts as an introduction to the larger storyline. "Abe discovers that the world is not exactly what he's been led to believe, and that there are powerful forces that would keep him from learning more," says Matthew. "And while I can't say exactly how long Abe's quest will be, we have a lot of world for him to explore and lots of friends – and enemies – to make along the way."

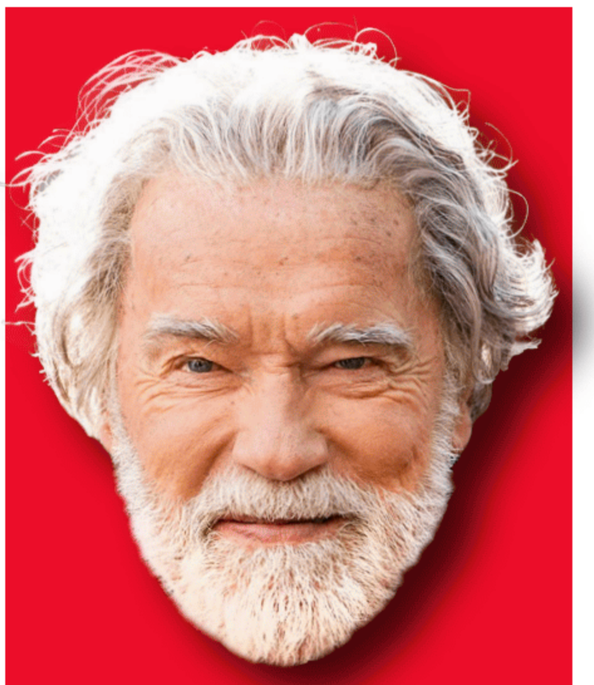
If Destruction Be Our Lot is out on 6 May.

SCI-FACT! Mark Elijah Rosenberg directed 2016 astronaut film *Into The Unknown* and the 2017 TV miniseries *Year Million*.



Patel also plays John Watson in *Enola Holmes 2* and *3*.

The doof-doof is out there: former *EastEnders* star Himesh Patel is the male lead in Ryan Coogler's reboot of **The X-Files**. He'll enlist in the FBI opposite Danielle Deadwyler, his co-star from *Station Eleven*. *Sinners* creator Coogler is set to write and direct the pilot, setting up the next generation of truth-chasing torch-wagglers.



Arnold Schwarzenegger returns to his barbarian past with **King Conan**, showing Robert E Howard's musclebound Cimmerian in his twilight years. *Mission: Impossible* maestro Christopher McQuarrie is on board to write and direct.

NEWSWARP
Breaking Genre News!

Star Trek: Starfleet Academy will finish after its second season.

Marvel's **Wonder Man** has been renewed for a second season, with Yahya Abdul-Mateen II and Ben Kingsley returning as Simon and Trevor respectively. Creative forces Destin Daniel Cretton and Andrew Guest are also back behind the scenes.

Hulu has plunged Mr Pointy into the heart of its proposed revival of **Buffy The Vampire Slayer**. It's passed on the pilot that was directed by Chloé Zhao.

A sequel to **KPop Demon Hunters** is officially in development. Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans return to direct.

Anne Rice Immortal Universe extension **Talamasca: The Secret Order** has been axed after only one season.

There's a sequel to 2016's **Lights Out** on the way, written by Connor Osborn McIntyre.

John Hannah's returning as **The Mummy**'s unscrupulous Jonathan Carnahan, rejoining Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz in the fourth instalment of the undying franchise.

Spider-Man: Brand New Day's Michael Mando will join Noah Centineo, Sydney Sweeney and Jason Clarke in Netflix's live-action **Gundam** mech movie.

Lost's Sonya Walger joins the **God Of War** TV series as the goddess Freya.

Talk show host Stephen Colbert is developing **The Lord Of The Rings: Shadow Of The Past**, a sequel inspired by Tolkien material that didn't make it into the movie version of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*.

Sasha Calle – Supergirl in 2023's *The Flash* – has signed on to Mike Flanagan's **The Exorcist**.

Jack O'Connell, Jason Clarke and Katy O'Brian will star in **A Quiet Place Part III**. John Krasinski returns to direct.



Patrick Wilson joins the cast of season three of **The Last Of Us**. Other newcomers to the post-apocalyptic drama include *Bridgerton*'s Michelle Mao and Kyriana Kratter from *Star Wars: Skeleton Crew*.

Netflix's live-action **Scooby-Doo** prequel series will star Maxwell Jenkins as Fred, Abby Ryder Fortson as Velma and Tanner Hagen as Shaggy alongside the previously announced Mckenna Grace as Daphne.

Noomi Rapace and Sean Harris are joining Netflix's live-action **Assassin's Creed** TV series.

Disney+ is developing **Tink**, a live-action series based on *Peter Pan*'s fairy Tinker Bell.



For All Mankind renewed for a sixth and final season.

Firefly is set for an animated revival with new spacefaring adventures set between the original one-season TV run and 2005's big-screen outing *Serenity*. Marc Guggenheim and Tara Butters are the showrunners.

Lanterns star Aaron Pierre joins **Man Of Tomorrow**, James Gunn's follow-up to *Superman*.

Chris Pine, Ray Winstone and Sofia Boutella will be facing an abominable threat in **Yeti**, directed by *The Conjuring: Last Rites*'s Michael Chaves.

PICTURES: KC ARMSTRONG/DEADLINE VIA GETTY, KRISTIN CALLAHAN/SHUTTERSTOCK, IRVIN RIVERA/GETTY IMAGES FOR IMDB, APPLE TV

EDITOR EXCLUSIVE

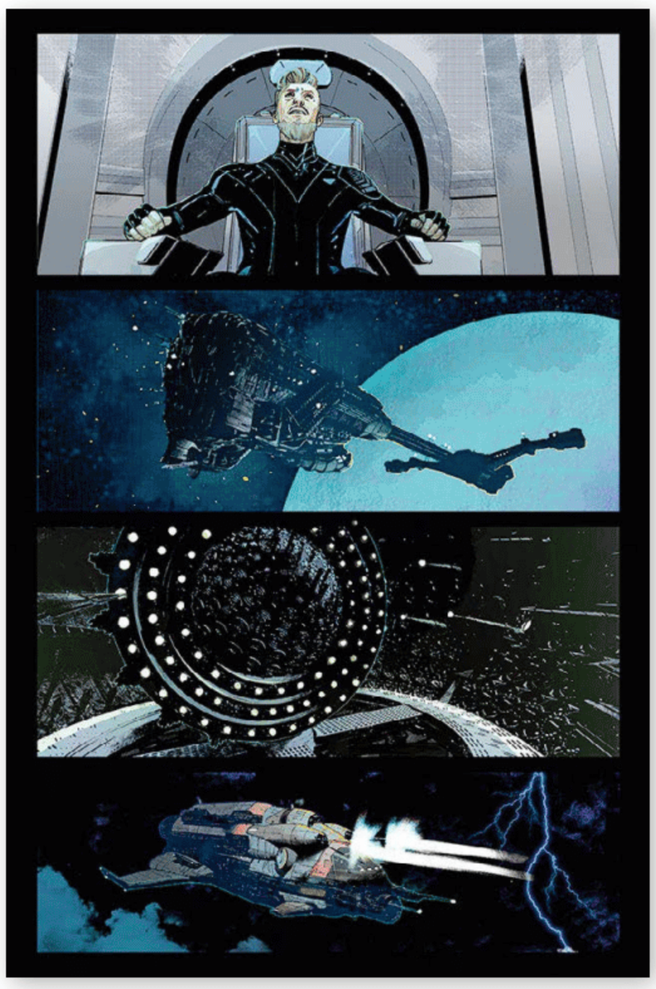
Hell To Pay

IDW Dark explore what happens after Paul WS Anderson's film in **Event Horizon: Inferno**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

AFTER *EVENT HORIZON: DARK Descent*'s prequel miniseries revealed exactly how the crew of the titular spaceship plunged into the ominous black hole, IDW Dark are now exploring what happens not in the immediate aftermath of Paul WS Anderson's original 1997 film, but in the far-flung future. New five-parter *Event Horizon: Inferno* takes place a whole 200 years later. Since the Event Horizon's crew were mostly blank slates and he could navigate his way to *Dark Descent*'s end point almost as he saw fit, returning writer Christian Ward is enjoying the relative creative freedom that comes with scripting a sequel.

"The plan was always to jump in time to after the film with *Inferno*, and we're excited to tell a story that doesn't have to end in a certain place," editor Nicolas Niño tells Red Alert. "It also means that Christian and Rob [Carey, artist] can play with some of the events of *Event Horizon* itself now that the film and its characters are in the past, which means that they can be mentioned."



Ward has compared the miniseries to "*Aliens* crossed with *Dante's Inferno*". The five-parter centres on Daniel Durante, a tech-billionaire who heads up a private star fleet of mercenaries tasked with recovering the wreckage of the Event Horizon. "He's fascinated with the Event Horizon's experimental gravity drive, which is rumoured to have made it disappear," teases Niño. "Imagine Lex Luthor travelling to a haunted house floating around Neptune."

With Niño refusing to confirm whether they actually fall into the black hole, Durante's crew are known as the Tank Tops. "They're soldiers for hire, people for whom this is their nine to five, which is what differentiates them from the crew in *Dark Descent*, who were all running from something, whether it was something they did or that happened to them."



Demons greet space marines aboard the Event Horizon.

"The Tank Tops have no such trauma," continues Niño, "as they're just people who are trying to pay their bills who were told to suit up for a high-paying excursion to space. And what more perfect victim is there for a billionaire than a group of people who need to pay their bills?"

While Niño won't confirm whether we can expect to see Paimon – the demonic entity at the heart of the Hadean realm, whom Ward named in *Dark Descent* – we do know that the miniseries introduces a new threat in the shape of Samael. "In various mythologies, Samael is a tempter, a seducer, and some texts believe he was the snake in the Garden of Eden," explains Niño. "Readers will see a lot of him and many other lower-level demons in *Event Horizon: Inferno*."

With Ward having created a very different visual world to *Dark Descent* that instead emphasises armoured space marines and futuristic technology, Niño praises artist Rob Carey, who is also currently illustrating Dynamite Entertainment's *Ben 10*. "Rob is a master of action and his designs on *Inferno* have been so much fun, such as with the Tank Tops and their big, crazy-looking weapons," he says. "And wait to you see his demons in issue two!"

Event Horizon: Inferno is out on 22 April.

SCI-FACT! **While *Dark Descent* was about trauma, Christian Ward has said that *Event Horizon: Inferno* is about agency.**



Stop. Hammer Time

Not only have Hammer Films revived many of their most iconic movies, they're also bringing their classic magazine, *The House Of Hammer*, back from the dead as a new multimedia and Blu-ray release (1 June). That's not all: *The Hammer Horror Omnibus*, which collects eight film novelisations by John Burke, is returning in two updated volumes from Titan Books.
Visit hammerfilms.com



Add To Kart

Super Mario Kart gets the Lego deluxe treatment once again, with Luigi and Mach 8 now available in a new 2,234-piece set, to go alongside the previously-released Mario and Standard Kart.
Visit lego.com



Give Us A Ring

It's nice to see some love for Ralph Bakshi's 1978 animated adaptation of *The Lord Of The Rings*, with Dark Horse releasing a three-piece PVC figurine set featuring Frodo, Aragorn and Samwise as depicted in the film. Elsewhere, the Peter Jackson movies feature on a new range of Royal Mail stamps and collectables.
Visit darkhorsedirect.com and royalmail.com/lordoftherings





Boxing Clever

People say physical media is making a comeback – true believers will tell you it never went away... Either way, a 4K/Blu-ray release for the complete *Stranger Things* (27 July) is good news. Goodies include a HellFire Club patch, a d20 die, and an artbook. **Visit arrowfilms.com**

SCI-FACT! **Mario's foray into bricks began in 2020 with the release of the interactive Lego Super Mario sets, with LEDs and scanners built in.**



Plastic Fantastic

The *Masters Of The Universe* movie merch continues to arrive in abundance – and we've still to see any inappropriate popcorn buckets at the time of going to press. What we do have are Barbie dolls of He-Man and Teela, with the tables finally turned in terms of barely being clothed. And He-Man's even got Nicholas Galitzine's mole!
Visit creations.mattel.com



Clowning Around

Tickets have gone on sale for the 35th anniversary of Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios Orlando, with the creative team announcing the first haunted house to be Jack & Oddfellow: Chaos & Control, featuring two of the event's icons colliding. It forms part of the overarching Infernal Carnival Of Nightmares event theme, opening in August.
Visit halloweenhorrornights.com



NEW AUTHOR

MAHMUD EL SAYED

MEET THE AUTHOR OF "ARABFUTURISM" NOVEL *THE REPUBLIC OF MEMORY*



Tell us about your protagonist.
→ On a generation ship divided by language, Iskander Ezz is a translator, which makes him a kind of bureaucrat. It's his job to represent regular crew before Administration, so he's something of an insider, and that's a problem when his sister gets mixed up in the brewing revolution.

Did the book have any particular spark of inspiration?
→ It's inspired by the real-world events of the Arab Spring. As an Egyptian, Tahrir Square was like our Woodstock. Unfortunately I was not there to witness it myself, so writing this book is kind of my way of doing that.



How long did it take to write?
→ I started writing in 2019 and finished in 2023, so four years or thereabouts. It's very multi-POV, so there were a few POV chapters that were added over the course of writing.

Did you have to do much research?
→ The rebels speak a secret language (technically an argot) called Nupol, which is made up of French, German, Italian, Cockney rhyming slang, Polari and even Nadsat (the language from *A Clockwork Orange*). Creating that was a lot of research and a lot of fun.

Any advice for would-be authors?
→ Yes: whatever you do, don't start your first book writing multi-POVs and made-up languages. It really does complicate things!

The Republic Of Memory is out on 14 May, published by Gollancz.

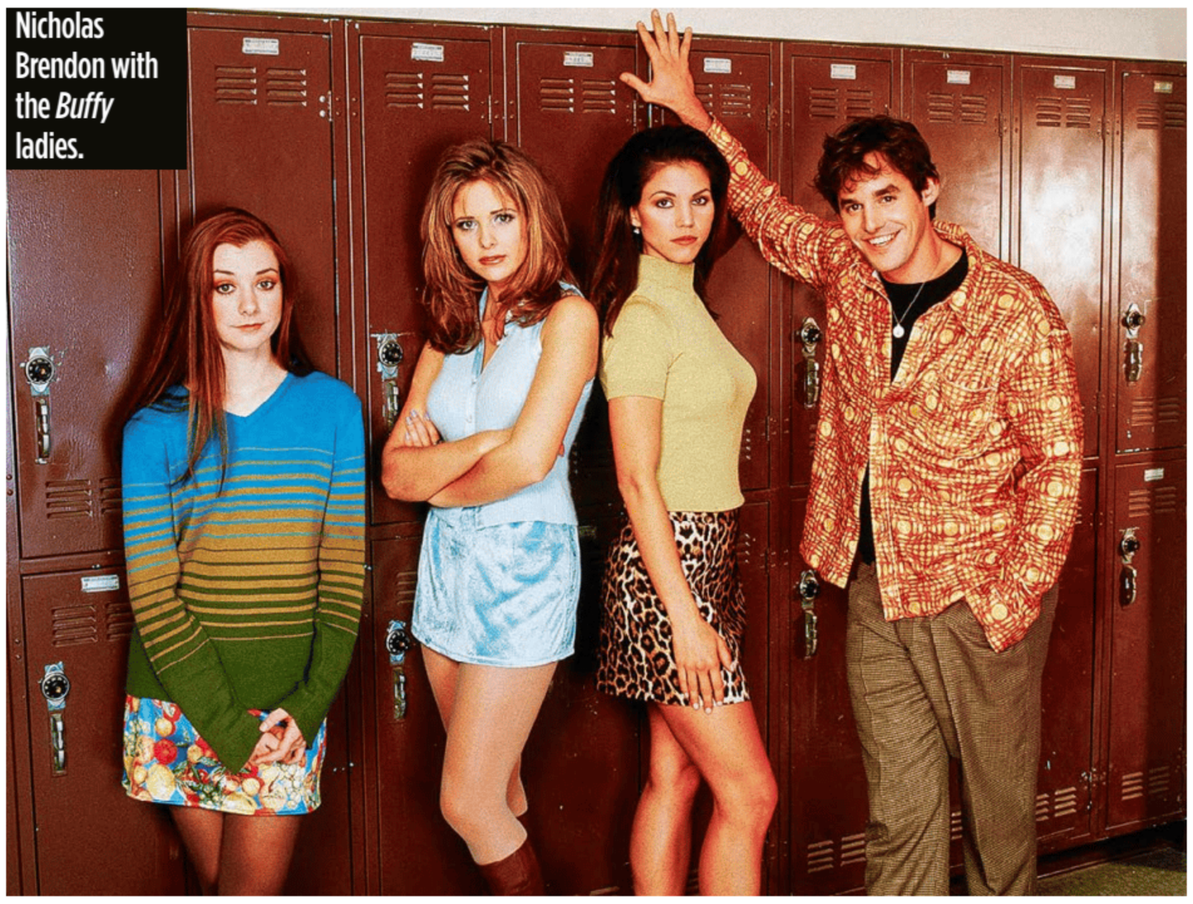
SCI-FACT! **Brendon's identical twin brother Kelly Donovan appeared in season five *Buffy* episode "The Replacement".**

THE FINAL FRONTIER

NICHOLAS BRENDON 1971-2026

Remembering the *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* star

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



Nicholas Brendon with the *Buffy* ladies.

WB TELEVISION NETWORK/UNITED PARAMOUNT NETWORK/LANDMARK MEDIA / ALAMY

"HE WAS THE EVERYMAN," said Nicholas Brendon of Xander Harris, the quippy, resourceful sidekick he played across all seven seasons of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. "He didn't have powers, he wasn't a vampire. He's easy to relate to because he's just a guy trying to get through the day."

Born Nicholas Brendon Schultz in Los Angeles, he had early ambitions to play baseball for the LA Dodgers before an arm injury derailed his dream. Acting was a way to manage a severe stutter that had left him socially isolated since childhood; he would later become a figurehead for the Stuttering Foundation of America.

Brendon made his professional debut in a Clearasil ad before small parts in sitcom *Married... With Children* and horror *Children Of The Corn III: Urban Harvest*. Disillusioned with what he called the politics of Hollywood, he briefly abandoned acting, making ends meet as a plumber's assistant, veterinary janitor and waiter.

Brendon finally found his break in *Buffy*, playing a character who channelled creator Joss Whedon's own high school experiences. Revealing a deeper soul beneath the firecracker one-liners, Xander quickly became a fan favourite, winning Brendon three Saturn Award nominations. Calling the show "the most wonderful experience of my life", he cited the episodes "Once More With Feeling" and "Hush" as his personal favourites.

Brendon appeared in indie horrors *Survival Island* (2002) and *Unholy* (2007) and had a recurring role as Kevin Lynch in *Criminal Minds*. He would return to the world of Sunnydale, voicing Xander in video game *Chaos Bleeds* and contributing to comic book *Buffy The Vampire Slayer Season 10*.

A gifted artist and photographer, Brendon struggled with depression and substance abuse issues and faced multiple arrests and convictions. But he remained proud of his time on *Buffy*: "It almost spoiled me, to have such a great job right at the start!"

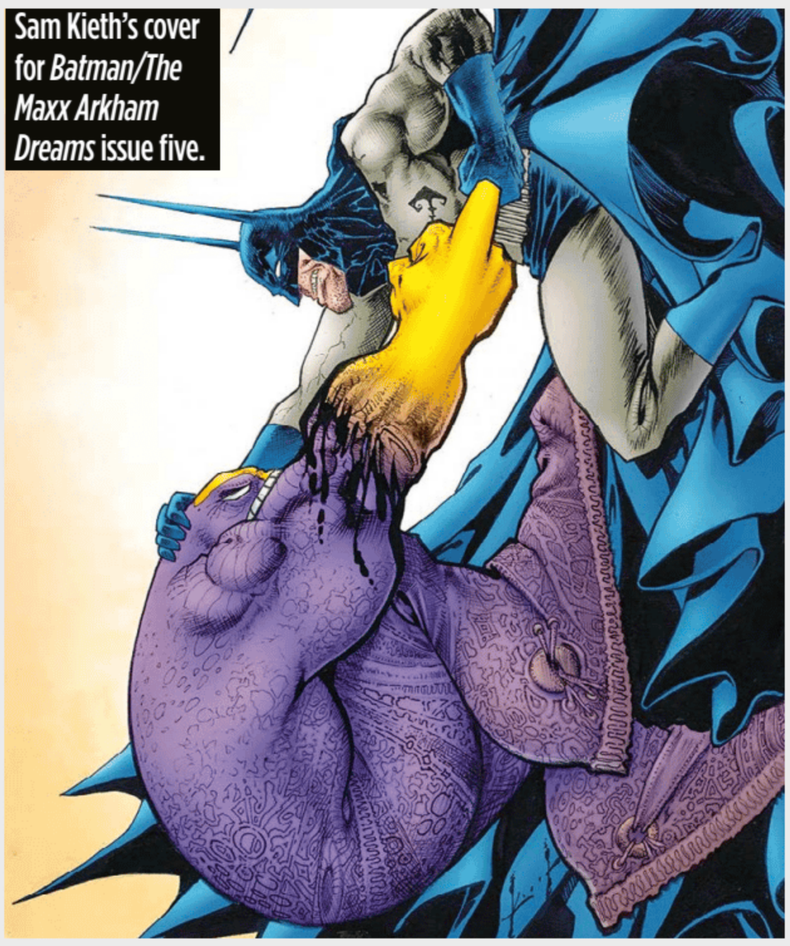
SAM KIETH 1963-2026

Born in Sacramento, California, comic book artist and writer Sam Kieth first found recognition for inking *Mage*, Matt Wagner's metaphorical fantasy adventure for Comico.

In 1988 he collaborated with Neil Gaiman on *The Sandman* for DC's Vertigo imprint, launching the series with the "Preludes & Nocturnes" arc. It was a creatively unfulfilling experience for Kieth and he quit after five issues, saying "I feel like Jimi Hendrix in the Beatles. I am in the wrong band."

1990 brought *Aliens: Earth War* for Dark Horse before he created *The Maxx* for Image Comics in 1993. Kieth plotted and illustrated the adventures of this dimension-straddling hero, which were later adapted as an animated series for MTV's *Oddities*.

Other key works include *Zero Girl* for Wildstorm, *Batman: Secrets*, one-shot graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: Madness* and *Lobo: Highway To Hell*, written by Scott Ian of thrash metal band Anthrax.



Sam Kieth's cover for *Batman/The Maxx Arkham Dreams* issue five.

ART © SAM KIETH/DC COMICS/IDW

VALERIE PERRINE 1943-2026

American actress best known as Lex Luthor's moll Eve Teschmacher in *Superman* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980). Also appeared in Kurt Vonnegut adaptation *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

TED NICHOLS 1928-2026

American composer who scored some of Hanna-Barbera's greatest cartoon shows, including *The Flintstones*, *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!*, *Jonny Quest* and *Josie And The Pussycats*.

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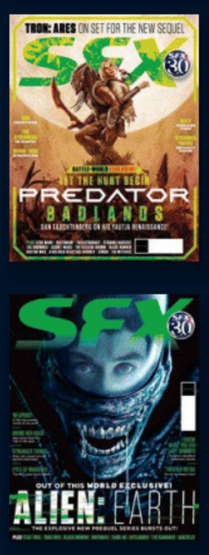



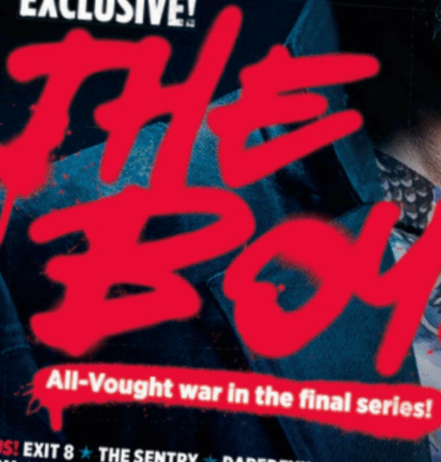





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STRANGER THINGS:
TALES FROM '85

RE-THINGS

PREPARE FOR ANOTHER ADVENTURE IN HAWKINS! SFX MEETS THE TEAM BRINGING MIKE AND ELEVEN BACK TO LIFE IN

STRANGER THINGS: TALES FROM '85

WORDS: **JACK SHEPHERD**

ANIMATED

The characters' voices are provided by a new cast.

WHEN THE FINAL episode of *Stranger Things* streamed on Netflix, Eric Robles couldn't help feeling sad, as though his close friends were gone too soon. "I'm able to disconnect myself emotionally and just watch *Stranger Things* for what it is," he tells *SFX*. "So when I saw the first trailer, and then the show's last episode, I felt so sad."

Bear in mind, this is coming from a guy who has spent almost every waking hour of the last few years animating Eleven and Mike's next adventure. "When I saw the trailer for our show and heard the music again, it was like my friends were not gone, and I was going to hang out with them again," he continues. "That's what *Tales From '85* literally does for the audience. It's like, 'Hey, guess what? We're going to have fun in this little winter of '85.'"

Robles's series, his first since Nickelodeon and Netflix collaboration *Glitch Techs*, takes place between the flagship show's second and third seasons. It's a cold winter in Hawkins, and the gang – rounded out by Dustin, Will, Caleb and Max – are back at school. Of course, things are a little different now; they did, after all, just defeat the Mind Flayer.

Yet, despite their victory over the Upside Down's Biggest Bad, something's not right in their small town. The young teens (who are properly teens again) quickly start investigating a mysterious monster attacking their classmates and causing chaos under the cover of snow. Perhaps surprisingly, things quickly get pretty gnarly.

"When you're making an animated series, people immediately assume that it's going to be for six to 11-year-olds," Robles says. "But we have the creative freedom to really say, 'Hey, let's find great stories that really capture the viewer.' We have these moments of terror, and not only mystery, but real, heavy moments. Maybe it was just the way I grew up, but I was watching things like *The Lost Boys*, and I felt



Brooklyn Davey Norstedt voices Eleven.



The concealing snow provides a source of tension.

PICTURES © NETFLIX





New character Nikki (Odessa A'zion) joins the gang.



Anna Baxter (Janeane Garofalo), Nikki's mum.

Getting the scale, as well as the look, of it all right.





there were real stakes in these stories, and I felt that much more invested. When you feel there are real dangers surrounding our kids, that things might not be okay for everybody involved, those stakes really allow you to have that intense investment.

"When Spielberg was making *ET*, I don't think he was thinking, 'It's only going to be for the young kids.' It was about capturing a good story, good characters, that was the goal. I feel like we went into this series with open eyes, saying, 'Let's tell the best version of a *Stranger Things* adventure with these kids, and let's do our best version of that thing.' I mean, we're mixing the finale today, and it is probably the most ambitious and epic thing I have ever been a part of in my career, and I've been doing this for 30 years."

PIE TO DIE FOR

There was, however, an obvious problem raising the stakes too high: we, the audience, already know that all the main characters come out of this alive. On top of that, the gate to the Upside Down was closed by Eleven at the end of season two, meaning there should not be any Demogorgons in Hawkins. But, Robles says, the Duffer Brothers – who created *Stranger Things* – wanted to set the spin-off between seasons two and three, meaning the incoming showrunner had to find a way to make it work.

"Technically, there shouldn't be anything from the Upside Down even existing, but there's something in Hawkins and we, as the audience, want answers to how that's possible," he says. "That's what the flagship set up. The kids have those conversations and explore the 'why' of why this is happening, allowing you to really dissect the mystery of Hawkins. I always had on my wall in the writers' room, the show should be: 'Kids riding bikes solving mysteries with walkie-talkies and flashlights.' It's very simple, right? The Duffer brothers were really saying, 'Let's focus on these really fun adventures with these kids'. I mean, by the time we get to season four and five, the kids are saving the world, right? We just wanted to focus on saving Hawkins."

The question of what exactly *Stranger Things* storytelling is came up a few times while working on the show. "It really has all the feels," Robles explains. "We didn't want to just do a Monster Of The Week show. We want to make sure that things happen for a reason, and there's not just creatures for the sake of creatures. Everything that happens in the show, whether it's monster-related or character-related, there's a reason for it, and it's not just a miscellaneous monster. So if you follow from episode one to the finale, you'll understand →

TELL A TALE OF '85

How Robles came to make a Stranger Things spin-off

Robles first came into the Duffers' orbit after pitching Netflix a show inspired by vampire movie *The Lost Boys*. "After I had finished *Glitch Techs*, I asked myself, 'What do I want to do?' I'm like, 'I want to do horror!' I spent a few months working on this thing and pitched Netflix. They were really excited about it, but they said, 'Look, Robles, we cannot move forward, it would compete against something else that we're developing.' About two weeks later, they called me back, and they were like, 'Hey, would you like to come over and take a look at this project we have?' I end up meeting with them, and they're like, 'It's *Stranger Things*.' I threw my idea out the door. I've been such a fan of *Stranger Things* since the very first episode. I'm an '80s kid myself. I grew up watching all of these films that inspired it. It gave me that nostalgic feeling again."

Rumours have spread online that the series was partly based on a cancelled videogame version of *Stranger Things* developed by narrative game specialist Telltale Games. "No, absolutely not," Robles says. "It was completely clean when I pitched them. I actually had two ideas, but one was hitting too close to ideas that they were doing in season four, because I hadn't watched it at the time. They were like, 'This is really cool, but you can't use any of this stuff.' It was a positive in the sense that we were thinking in these same areas, but it was something really specific that they gravitated towards."





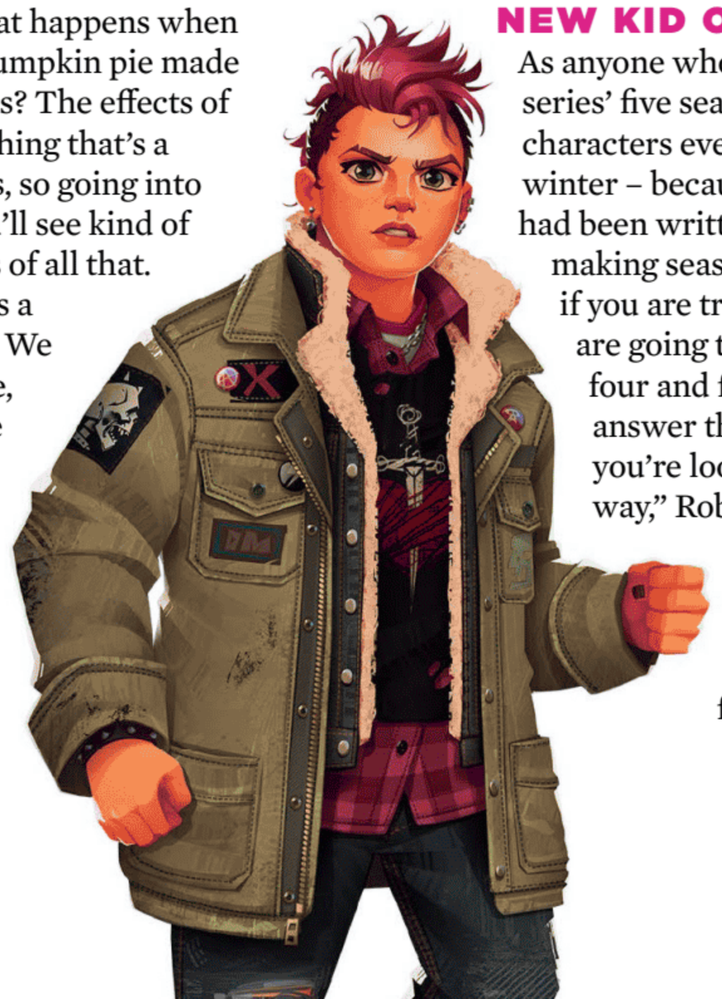
Steve and Dustin, back in action together.

how every single piece mattered within the season as a whole."

Robles is keen to stress that there's "something bigger" happening within the series than just a whimsical monster take-down story. The writers wanted to go "deep" into the characters to remain true to the flagship series, and so everything they do has repercussions. He uses an example: in the second episode, an infected pumpkin patch suddenly comes to life. Zombified pumpkins start to chase Max and Caleb, who have to fend for their lives.

"After that, what happens when someone eats a pumpkin pie made of those pumpkins? The effects of that create something that's a danger to the kids, so going into episode three you'll see kind of the repercussions of all that. There definitely is a science behind it. We follow the science, and we follow the journey of that science to make sure that the kids ultimately put all the pieces together."

Elaborating on the science of the show, Robles brings up the classic horror movie *Re-Animator* multiple times. "What if there is some version of Hawkins lab science meets Upside Down in this world?" Robles asks. "That really sparked these really great ideas, opening up new adventures that do not have to affect the main storyline of *Stranger Things* as a whole. We can now pocket these unique adventures into the winter of 1985, where the kids can start exploring these really fun mysteries."



NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

As anyone who has watched the main series' five seasons knows, none of the characters ever bring up this exciting winter – because it's not like *Tales From '85* had been written when the Duffers were making season three and beyond. "Look, if you are trying to look for pieces that are going to connect to seasons three, four and five, with some mysterious answer that was never mentioned, you're looking at the series the wrong way," Robles says. "If you're looking for a genuinely fun, awesome, new adventure with these kids, then you're going to get that. If you're a fan of the series who just





Explaining it all to the Baxters updates the viewers.



Eleven uses her powers against a big beastie.



Hawkins' flora develops some Upside Down hybrids .

"Fans of the show are going to enjoy having the barbarian added to the party"

wants to hang out with your best friends all over again, that's what this series does. There's nothing more that we all enjoy than just seeing your favourite characters coming back to life, having relationships."

That's not to say there won't be "fun little Easter eggs" throughout the series, but anyone looking for fuel to add to the Conformity Gate fan theory fire will be looking in the wrong place. "The Duffer brothers are huge fans of this series; they just enjoyed the adventure," Robles says. "Will the kids ever talk about giant pumpkin-type creatures in the main show? Obviously not, right? But at the same time, they also have Vecna and the Mind Flayer to deal with, which are much bigger problems than a pumpkin creature. Certain things happen within the flagship's early seasons that are usually never mentioned, and probably not as epic as the stuff we're going to be doing."

One of the big, but necessary, risks Robles has taken with the animation is introducing a major new character who comes to learn all about the Upside Down and the Mind Flayer. Odessa A'zion, previously the lead of 2022's *Hellraiser*, voices Nikki Baxter, the show's "new kid". She has a punk attitude and the pink mohawk to go with it.

"When we introduce new characters into the series, we're hoping that they'll be the audience's point of view into what's happening in Hawkins," Robles says. "One of the things that I think the main series does so well is, when they introduce new characters, they have this unique new perspective, which acts as a reset for viewers. There are questions that they are asking that need to be said out loud, that way the kids can help answer any questions the audience might have. With Nikki Baxter, fans of the show are going to enjoy having the barbarian added to the party."

Nikki's addition to the cast also serves to help our main characters go through a few emotional changes, too. "Seeing the young love between Mike and Eleven was really fun," Robles says. "Will is really developing his own voice, because by the time he gets from seasons two to three, you see, Will has kind of found himself in a different way. What we want to do is explore how he got that voice. I feel like Nikki had something to do with that – but not just with Will, with all the kids, she affected them all."

Again, you may be asking, 'Why does someone who had such an effect on the main characters not appear in the main series?' But Robles has an explanation. "One thing that's probably hard for a lot of people to understand is that in the '80s, it wasn't like it is now – you would have a friend that you would meet for summertime, if you went to →

ANIMATING HAWKINS

Why Tales From '85 looks as good as it does

"Animation is such a group effort," Robles says. "We have such amazing, talented people working on the show. Our cinematography, our action sequences are full on. There might be some limitations in live action, but this is animation. We are able to scale things in a different way. We're able to bring brightness and colours that you probably wouldn't get naturally from the flagship series and we're able to really bring the art to life.

"As far as inspirations go to the art of the show, I really looked at Kyle Lambert's posters that he did for *Stranger Things*, and I told myself, 'If I can find a way to bring those posters to life, then I got myself a pretty kick-butt show!' That was our target: to bring those really vibrant colours to life. You can feel the '80s warm colours when the kids are enjoying their day-to-day, then when something Upside Down starts to creep into the world, you start seeing these dark colours absorbing the world. That's the magic of the storytelling that we're doing. It's not only just with the scripts, but writers from the flagship series also worked as consultants on this series to make sure that we stay as true as we can to the flagship."



While clearly *Stranger Things*, it has its own style.

camp, and they'd be amazing friends, and you'd have amazing adventures for that one summer," he says. "It wasn't like you stayed in touch via Instagram or anything. If you got a phone number, maybe you stay in touch. But for the most part, people came in and out of your life, and they were your best friend ever for the two weeks or three months that you were with them, and then they're out of your life. It's the same concept with Nikki, but we'll see what happens to her at the end of this thing."



Steve and Dustin encounter... what exactly?

THE LONG WING

While Nikki may be the newest on-screen addition to the gang, the show's voice cast are all new to the franchise, with fresh actors taking over the roles of Mike, Eleven, and the rest. Watching the episodes, it takes a moment to adjust to the new voices, but they quickly feel natural to these characters.

"Sometimes the universe just aligns things for you," says Robles. "The universe aligned and brought us these amazing kids. Braxton [Quinney] who plays Dustin, he sounds like Gaten [Matarazzo], right? We even had Gaten come by the studio once and listen to it, and he said, 'Is that me?' And we're like, 'No!' Which was the biggest compliment we could get.

"But at the same time, they add their unique flavour, their unique energy, to it. The uniqueness of kids being kids, that's what these voice actors have. They brought the sense of youthfulness that you lose as you get older. They really captured that unique point of view of just being young and being a kid that maybe





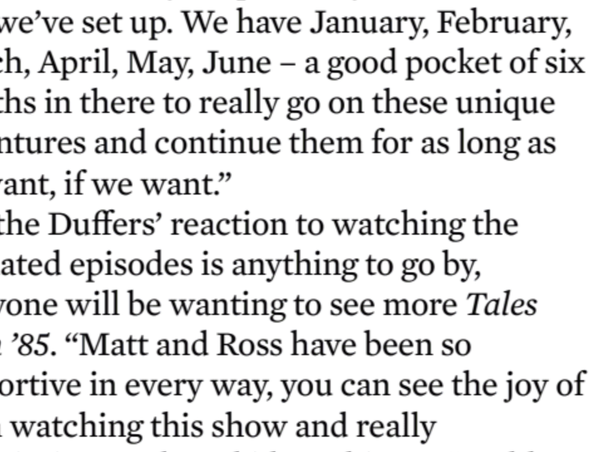


THAT SPIELBERGIAN FEELING

The '80s inspirations for the series

"There are so many fun little homages to some of our favourite films in the series," says Robles. "That's what we do best, we can touch on a little bit of all these things. *Stranger Things* does the same thing. You can feel a little bit of *ET* sprinkled in. We've also done a really good job at that, like with referencing *Jaws*. I mean, how cool is that we're in Hawkins when it's winter time and there's snow everywhere, but you have no idea what's underneath that white snow, allowing you to have these really scary moments of feeling like you're out in the ocean, not knowing what's underneath the snow.

"I'm a huge fan of the '80s and '80s films, but I also really enjoy a lot of B-movies. I mean, I don't know if they're B-movies, but I know they were not as epic as a Spielberg film. Movies like *Fright Night* and *Re-Animator*. We have our zombie homage in here, in the form of pumpkins. If you are a fan of all these great horror movies, you will see familiar things, and adventure movies, right? Because there are times where we reference Indiana Jones, because we were like, 'Indiana Jones had these really fun moments in the middle of danger.' We really try to emphasise all these films, and it makes for this buffet of moments for everybody to really enjoy. If you are a fan of adventure, we cover that. If you want to see the relationships of these kids and see how their young love is blossoming, we touch base with that as well. That was such a sweet thing from the main show's season two, where you see young love. It's very innocent, and it's very pure. We cover so many bases on this series, allowing us to just make sure that, if you are a fan of the flagship, we are trying to stay as true as we can to the characters."



an adult actor trying to portray a kid wouldn't get, because they forgot that innocence. When these kids are in the booth, and they're running for their lives, they can imagine the monster right behind them, and the fear of that, and it comes out in such a natural way that you even hear voice cracks. That's another piece of the magic that you're going to really feel."

Those new voices, plus the art style of the animation, inspired by the main show's posters (see left), have meant that *Tales From '85* has found its own, distinct style away from the main show – a remix of familiar elements that creates something altogether new, just like the shorter, techno-infused version of the opening credits that begin every episode.

"The fun part about watching this series is that you're going to find that it has its own unique voice outside of just being one to one to the flagship series," Robles says. "It has its own unique voice while respecting the content and respecting the characters, respecting everything. But that's what we want. We want you to feel this rejuvenated energy to *Tales From '85* and you're just on for the ride, and you're not trying to dissect every little plot point and how it connects to the flagship. We want to immerse you in these great adventures. And when I say the word adventure, I truly mean it. You really are going to find yourself enjoying what we can do within this winter."

So, it has to be asked, just how long can one winter last? The main series continued for five seasons, but *Tales From '85* seems constrained by the fact that the events of season three – the completion of Starcourt Mall, and Billy's mind being taken over – are on the horizon. "Here's the amazing thing about *Stranger Things*; you can watch an entire season and then realise that all took place in a week," says Robles. "Our show literally does the same thing. It goes day by day. You'll be very surprised by the timeline that we've set up. We have January, February, March, April, May, June – a good pocket of six months in there to really go on these unique adventures and continue them for as long as we want, if we want."



Brett Gipson voices chief of police Jim Hopper.



What other surprises lurk beneath the winter snow?

> **"The uniqueness of kids being kids, that's what these voice actors have"**

If the Duffers' reaction to watching the animated episodes is anything to go by, everyone will be wanting to see more *Tales From '85*. "Matt and Ross have been so supportive in every way, you can see the joy of them watching this show and really reminiscing on these kids at this age," Robles says. "If we were able to do that for them, I think my biggest wish is that everybody embraces the series in the same way and really falls in love with these kids all over again."

Stranger Things: Tales From '85 is on Netflix from 23 April.



LJ Benet and Ali Louis Bourzgui pose for the camera.

LOST IN MUSIC

SFX GETS TO THE BEATING HEART OF BROADWAY'S KILLER MOVIE-TO-STAGE ADAPTATION, THE LOST BOYS: A NEW MUSICAL

WORDS: **ADAM TANSWELL**

AUDIENCES CAN EXPECT SCREAMS, scares and, according to the creative team, some sexy surprises with the opening of *The Lost Boys: A New Musical* on Broadway. Previews for the musical adaptation of Joel Schumacher's immortal 1987 vampire movie opened in New York at the end of March, ending the highly anticipated rollout of the beloved boardwalk-based fang-fest in its new incarnation – on stage with a rock band full of supernatural blood-suckers.

"When you go to a musical, you usually go to laugh and you go to cry – but you don't go to scream," explains director Michael Arden. "That was a really exciting challenge for us. We wanted to make to make it sexy and scary – but also, the movie is set in the late '80s, which is fucking delicious. I mean... The clothes, the hair, the lighting, the technology. This was a real opportunity to create a world on stage that is both nostalgic and venerable – and hopefully full of surprises."

The origins of the musical version of the movie go back many years, but it wasn't until 2020 that the project's three producers, Patrick Wilson (best known as the actor from the *Insidious* and *Aquaman* franchises), Marcus Chait and James Carpinello secured the rights to the stage version of the cult classic. The producing trio – who met while studying at Carnegie Mellon University – then brought together a team of creatives, including Arden.

"We knew we needed somebody to guide the ship, so we went to Michael super early on," says Wilson. "We were also trying to figure out the sound of the show. As much as I love musicals, it didn't seem like we wanted a typical musical theatre composer/lyricist. We knew we wanted the music to be anthemic and we wanted the audience to walk out singing the tunes, but we also needed it to be theatrical. Michael said, 'You guys should check out this band, The Rescues.'"

Arden adds his version of the story: "When I lived in LA, I would go and hear The Rescues play every moment I could. I sat in the back corners of dingy LA clubs and listened to them play and sing – and they had such a unique sound. It's vampiric. When we were throwing around names of big rock stars and pop stars with huge brand recognition, I said, 'I want you to listen to The Rescues.' Then our producers went to see them play and they cast their spell."



Maria Wirries (right) plays the half-vampire Star.



Behind the scenes during rehearsals.

> **"This was a real opportunity to create a world both nostalgic and venerable"**

The band jumped at the chance to be involved, eagerly writing 35 prospective songs in the early stages of development. When it came to finding the cast, the team honed in on rising stars LJ Benet, Ali Louis Bourzgui and Maria Wirries to play the love triangle at the core of the story: Michael Emerson (played by Jason Patric in the film), David (Kiefer Sutherland) and Star (Jami Gertz).

On the subject of casting the show's lead, Arden recalls: "As Michael in the film, Jason Patric is the hottest thing that anyone's ever seen. I think many of us wanted to join whatever gang he was in, so we knew we had to find somebody who had that type of charisma. When LJ came in, everyone knew immediately that this was the voice of our guide into the world of *The Lost Boys*. He flew in on a red eye and sang first thing in the morning. By the afternoon, we were like, 'This is our Michael.'"

In order to round out the rest of the melodious – and rather striking – ensemble, the team set up a musical camp. "The Lost Boys play musical instruments," enthuses Patrick Wilson. "The Lost Boys are a real band. They play on stage, which you'll hear eight times a week. They're not playing air guitar!"

Fans of the film can expect to see a number of iconic scenes from the 1987 feature represented on stage, as well as an all-singing, all-flying (yep, flying!) cast. What movie moment is the show's director particularly excited to bring to Broadway? "The initiation scene," says Arden. "I think it's so incredible because it's a moment that is a real pinnacle. The bridge scene is really exciting, too. I can't wait to bring that to the stage."

Arden is also looking forward to audiences experiencing the softer moments in the story. "There are so many iconic moments and we go to a lot of places, but I think my favourite scenes are with the family," the director concludes. "Getting to explore the relationship between Sam (played by Corey Haim in the movie) and Michael is incredible. It's so rare that we get to explore love between men on stage; love that is familial and brotherly. I'm really excited about all of those things."

Bring on the blood-soaked rock-fest...

The Lost Boys: A New Musical is at the Palace Theatre in New York. For more information, check out lostboysmusical.com.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MURPHYAND AVERY BRUNKUS STOCK ART: REVEL.STOCKART/GETTY

The *Good*, The *Bad* And The *Finale*

GOOD OMENS IS ENDING WITH A 90-MINUTE SPECIAL AND A NEW DIRECTOR, RACHEL TALALAY. SFX DISCOVERS WHY SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN HEAVEN SENT TO SEE THE SHOW OUT ON A HIGH NOTE

WORDS:
DAVE GOLDER



AFTER TWO SEASONS AND 12 episodes all directed by Douglas Mackinnon, there's somebody new calling the shots on *Good Omen's* 90-minute finale – Rachel Talalay. But it's almost like her arrival was preordained.

"I was actually originally the person they asked to direct the whole series," she reveals. "But I wasn't available because it was 2017 and I was doing the final three episodes of Steven Moffat's time on *Doctor Who*. They also talked to me about coming in on series two, but then it was Covid, so that also didn't happen. But I feel like I had my own tiny bit of ownership of it.

"I'd worked closely with David Tennant right before on his return to *Doctor Who*, so I had that relationship in place as well. It kind of felt like I was in the wings for a reason."

You could almost say that the omens were good. Especially as Talalay has earned a reputation as a TV director with a bold visual style making standout episodes not just of *Doctor Who* (including the widely acclaimed "Heaven Sent" and "The Star Beast") but *The Flash*, *Supernatural*, *Sherlock* and *Superman & Lois* too.

"I came in and said, 'Let's embrace what's great about series one and series two, but take it further. I think what's very important to me is to make it beautiful; working particularly on just a little extra element of beauty. And magic."

There is, of course an elephant in the room throughout *SFX*'s interview with Talalay – and not one that's carrying Discworld on its back. There has been an upheaval behind the scenes that's lead to many production changes on this final instalment of *Good Omens*, including a cut from six episodes to one 90-minute feature-length episode. The PR department has requested we don't mention the G-word, and *SFX* respects that. A whole half-hour interview could vanish down a sordid rabbit hole otherwise, when they want to concentrate all that's good and great about the finale.

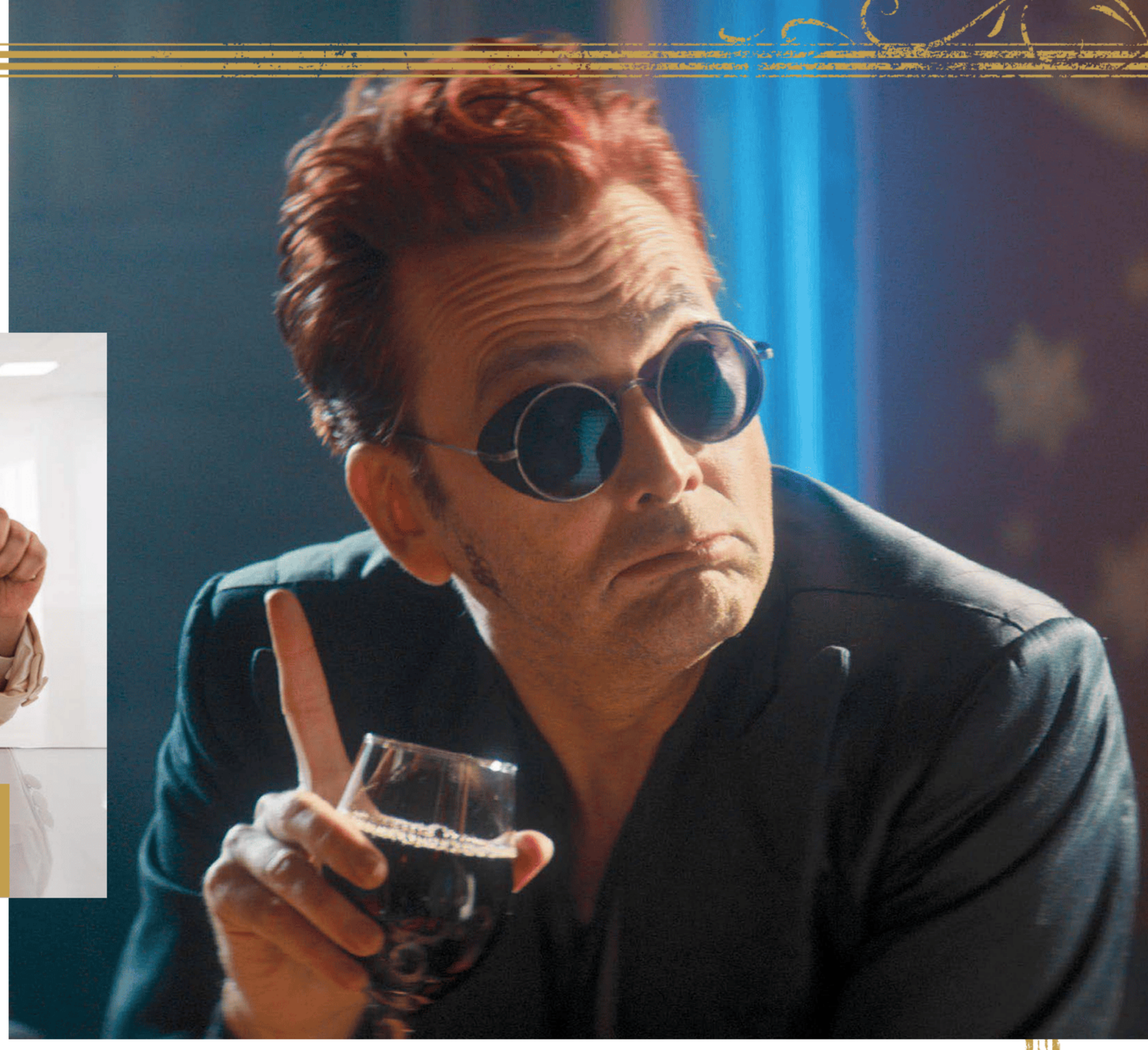
Talalay's enthusiasm is invaluable in that regard. "I think this is some of my best work. →



Rachel Talalay (centre) finally gets to direct *Good Omens*.



Quelin Sepulveda returns as the Angel Muriel.



David Tennant *is* Crowley



Do we get to see any new sides to Crowley?

Crowley has pretty much hit rock bottom at the start of this story. Friendless, car-less and hopeless. He's now sleeping in an old sleeping bag in an alleyway. But still not far from the bookshop. He's keeping an eye. He's very much a free agent now. He bears no allegiance to Heaven, Hell or anyone else. He's not in a great place...

Describe the finale in five words.

It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine)... that's far too many words, I know, but it's a great song and it sums it up perfectly.

What has Rachel Talalay brought to the show?

I'd had the great pleasure of working with Rachel on *Doctor Who* so I knew that she was a perfect fit for the world of *Good Omens*. She's an enthusiast. She understands what a story like this needs and her feel for the genre is very instinctive. She is also a total delight of a human being, so her presence not only meant the story was in very safe hands but we were on a happy set which buzzed with warmth and creativity.

It's quite possible that 'Heaven Sent' is my best work – *Doctor Who* fans love that episode – but I think that there are many elements of this that stand alongside my best work."

There's also the issue of spoilers. Talalay ain't giving anything beyond the vaguest of teases. Season two ended with demon Crowley (David Tennant) declaring his love for angel Aziraphale (Michael Sheen), but Aziraphale deciding to go off to become Heaven's new boss instead, and usher in the Second Coming. So what happens next?

"I can't," she splutters. "It's very difficult for me to say much except this version is very much tilted toward pleasing the fandom from the standpoint of keeping it concentrated on Aziraphale and Crowley. Then allowing there to be a mystery, along with everything that's brilliant about the *Good Omens* book and mythology, which is Heaven and Hell, and religious concepts."

She does confirm, though, that the Second Coming does indeed happen.

"Bilal Hasna plays Jesus," says Talalay. "He's wonderful, utterly versatile. He was nominated for a BAFTA [for Disney's *Extraordinary*]. He's a relatively new actor with a meteoric rise – a fascinating, committed, versatile actor. So to be BAFTA-nominated at the same time that you're playing Jesus is a pretty good omen."

Pressed for other titbits, she apologises for being so vague, but admits, "Michael, as Aziraphale, has a showcase scene that's a different type of showcase scene that is an absolute joy. He gets to really just eat it up. I'm really looking forward to, um, showing that off. It's terrible I can't say anything more to you. I'm so sorry!"

SIX OF ONE

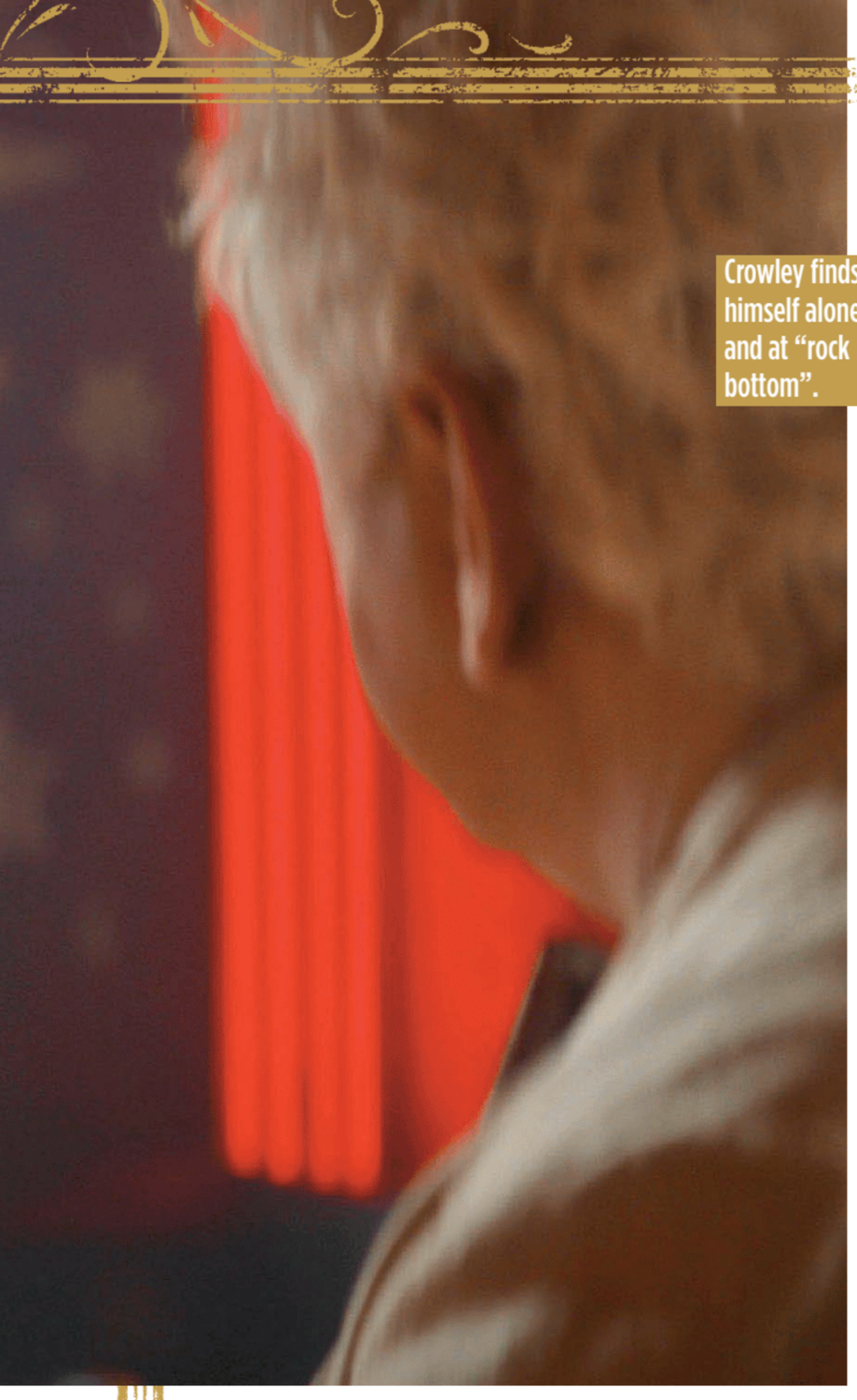
So if we can't talk about plot specifics, how about the production side of things? When Talalay signed up for the final season, the intention was still to make six episodes.

"I was involved in taking it down to the 90," she confirms. "That was producer-driven to start with. There's something really, really great about the 90 minutes. I mean, of course I'm heartbroken that bits and pieces of the six hours will not be filmed. But at 90 minutes we can just focus on one incredibly strong story. Sometimes with six parts, you just go off [on a tangent] and it's fun, but often I hear people say, 'You know, I didn't like that episode as much because it wasn't really about [the main characters].'

"Now, I love those random things, but we didn't have space for that. So it became a very much a cohesive story. People I've talked to who have seen the 90 minutes have said how brilliant it is that it became one really strong, cohesive story. So yes, I would have liked to have done the random bits and pieces of comedy. It's *really* random bits and pieces of comedy that dropped out for a story that concentrates on those things that I talked about – a really good, strong mystery, the Second Coming, and Aziraphale and Crowley."



The duo were never going to stay apart for long.



Crowley finds himself alone and at "rock bottom".

Ralph has also updated the main Soho street set that contains Aziraphale's bookshop, giving a slight hint that there may be a time jump involved. "It's a stunning set and Michael had to do quite a few alterations because Soho has had some changes between the time that we left and the time we come back. Michael was able to do some really brilliant redesigns. That's an interesting first early step toward a different show."

She also teases an ambitious opening for the finale. "It was probably the thing we discussed the most: how to do the opening sequence, which is expansive and a different world. It takes you into the history of their relationship... of when they met and different places that they met. That's a spoiler without being a spoiler. Working out how to do it was probably the hardest thing we faced.

"Because it was the first scene, when we started going through the script together, every time we would sit down I would be like, 'We can't spend four hours on the first three pages and not do the rest of the script!' But that's how much time went into it."

"I'd also like to give a shout out to our producer, Sarah-Kate Fenelon, for being the creative and production glue that held together season three as we went forward, while ensuring we honoured seasons one and two. And Gavin Finney is just a brilliant cinematographer who made everything look so expansive."

Michael Sheen has been on social media promising "nightingales" (fans will understand) but also saying, "There'll be bits you absolutely love and there'll be things you'll argue about."

Talalay, of course, won't go into specifics, but says, "I know exactly what he's talking about and he's right. You can never please the whole fandom anyway. But the idea is not to try and please the whole fandom. It's to give them a really satisfying story and hope they love it as much I, and Michael and David do.

"The thing about Michael and David is they're both so incredibly smart. Their incisiveness analysis of each point and each line is like the way you'd interpret Shakespeare. So listening to that and watching them fold nuances into each line and then thinking, 'What can I do to add to that?' That's the magic. That's what makes my directing the greatest job in the world."

It seems that her stars were happy to return the compliment.

"I feel really, really attached to this project," says Talalay. "I know that Michael and David have seen it. We saw it at different times. But they both texted me afterwards and said, 'We are so proud. We hope you're as proud as we are.'"

Good Omens is on Prime Video from 13 May.



The finale will have time for plenty more scrapes.



The reg of Crowley's car is "curtain" backwards.

> **"At 90 minutes we can just focus on one incredibly strong story"**

While the finale may have new scriptwriters (Michael Marshall Smith and Peter Atkins) as well as a new director, the design crews remain largely unchanged, and Talalay is full of praise for them.

"Kate Carin, the costume designer, is a complete genius. When the fans starts screenshotting each costume and saying, 'Oh, look, that little badge is from series one,' or 'This is a throwback to that Scottish thing,' – those kinds of Easter eggs, she particularly embraced that."

Talalay also liked the details in the costume that would go unseen if she didn't decide to highlight them, including a snake lining to one of Crowley's waistcoats. "I'm like, 'David, can you open your vest so we catch a piece of the lining?'"

Meanwhile, production designer Michael Ralph did "incredible things with nothing. Clearly the budget was pulled back when we became an hour and a half, and he can make cardboard look like chrome. I would go to Michael and say, 'I'm struggling with this little moment.' Then he would come back with 10 amazing ideas.

"One of the more... interesting final images – I can't spoil it – is entirely Michael saying, 'I think that this is what this should be. And it's not at all what's in the script.' And everyone went, 'Yeah, absolutely!'"

Michael Sheen *is* Aziraphale



Is Aziraphale on board with the Second Coming?

Well, yes... as long as it's nice and not too apocalypticky.

Was returning to the character easy, or were there new challenges?

It's always like putting on a comfy pair of slippers. A comfy and neurotic pair of slippers. However, this time the challenge was how to do justice to where we'd ended up at the end of *Good Omens* 2 and to not shirk from how difficult it had to be for them to find their way back to each other.

Describe the finale in five words.

Emotional. Nosy. Crossword. World-ending. Ineffable.

HOKUM



We won't be in any danger of sleeping tonight now.



FEARCH

DAMIAN MCCARTHY DELIVERS NO-NONSENSE SPOOKS IN HOKUM

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

SET IN A RURAL IRISH INN SAID to be haunted by a witch, *Hokum* finds Damian McCarthy returning to the old-school chills of his earlier horrors *Caveat* and *Oddity*, but this time with a more focused storytelling approach.

"I thought it might be an interesting challenge to see what it would be like to stick with one character," the writer/director tells *SFX* of his starting point. "I wanted to get back to that idea of: what if we followed a guy trying to survive the night and never really left his side – like *Evil Dead II* and those kinds of 'just got to make it to dawn'-type movies?"

Another challenge McCarthy set himself was to introduce a lead who isn't immediately likeable, but still keeps the audience invested. "If you're watching a film and there's a villain, you may find him so fascinating that you don't want to see anything happen to him for as long as possible," the filmmaker considers. "So it's about how do you take a guy who's very isolated or just seems very in his own head – he's a little bit prickly, not very approachable – and then see what it'd be like to torture that guy and see how he comes out the other end. Does it give him a more positive outlook or a positive peace of mind?"

Out of those ideas came American horror novelist Ohm (Adam Scott), who travels to Ireland to scatter his parents' ashes, only to find himself drawn into a series of hauntings and disappearances, all seemingly connected to Bilberry Woods' honeymoon suite. For McCarthy, the process of unsettling an audience – and *Hokum* already stands as a strong contender for the scariest film of the year – begins on the page. "If I'm writing something and it's not scaring me, I'm like, 'Well, nobody else is going to find this very scary' – and then I know I'm in trouble," he laughs.

"Of course, if I'm writing something and I start glancing over my shoulder, and I start laughing nervously because I like an idea, then I'll go, 'Okay, well if it's working on me, then hopefully it'll connect with other people too.' "It very much has to have an effect on you as you're writing," he emphasises.

He cites *Ring* as a key touchstone for its "simplicity and oddness". But one film he was keen to steer clear of – given the obvious parallels with a hotel setting – was *The Shining*. "It would be so tempting to follow that," he says. "So it was almost like, we really can't do anything that was done in that because it's *been* done.





Adam Scott plays homecoming author Ohm.



Florence Ordesh is hotel bartender Fiona.

HOKUM

ECKS IN

It's got its own voice. It was one we were trying to avoid."

Like McCarthy's other films, *Hokum* was made with a largely Irish cast and crew, and marks his third feature set in his native West Cork. It opens with Ohm's car driving along the Cork and Kerry border, "which is where I would have grown up. That would have been our Sunday drive as kids. I still go over there regularly. It's lovely to see it now with these beautiful drone shots and all looking very cinematic."

Hokum draws heavily on the Irish folklore McCarthy encountered in childhood storybooks. Jack – the long-eared, bulbous-eyed creature glimpsed in the trailer's closing moments – is a púca, a "shapeshifting trickster that appears as animals". Its design, he says, was inspired by the "half jackass, half boys from *Pinocchio*, which I always found very frightening."

Then there's the witch herself – or, in Old Irish, the Cailleach. "We leaned into the stereotypical idea of the bony old crone," McCarthy notes, pointing to the Russian horror *Viy* as an influence. "The witch in that is depicted in almost a cartoonish way. I like to lean into those tropes."

But *Hokum* isn't solely concerned with the supernatural. Some of its most disturbing moments are rooted in McCarthy's fear that "the things people do could be so much worse". "Things that can actually happen," he explains, "as opposed to ghosts and witches. There's something very physical in there – an actual antagonist who's just a regular guy, who's done something terrible."

Working with his biggest budget to date, McCarthy was able to bring more "fantastic imagery" to the screen without having to rein in his ideas. "It was like, I could write this and not have to figure it all out myself, because I'd have great producers and a bigger team around me," he says of his Hollywood backing. "There's more VFX, there are stunts, there are burning buildings – all this kind of stuff."

As with his earlier films, McCarthy set out to make *Hokum* as frightening as possible without it becoming overly bleak. "There are some brilliant horror films, and I love them, but they're very heavy, and I don't know if I'm going to be in a hurry to revisit them," he admits. "I definitely try to keep my films entertaining as well as scary. With *Hokum* I would hope audiences get a good scare along with a few laughs – and hopefully there's something in there to revisit."

While he plans to remain in horror for his next two projects, McCarthy is already eyeing new territory. "It would be lovely to get into science fiction someday," he says. "I love sci-fi movies, and the crossover between horror and sci-fi has so much potential."

Whatever direction he takes, he remains committed to his home turf. "A huge alien invasion movie set in Ireland? Who knows? I would love to keep telling stories here."

Hokum is in cinemas from 1 May.

PICTURES: NEON. LANDMARK MEDIA/ALAMY

The Unseen HOCUS POCUS

THE CURATOR OF THE SANDERSON WITCH MUSEUM, AN ONLINE COLLECTION OF ALL THINGS HOCUS POCUS, HAS UNCOVERED NEW INFORMATION ABOUT THE CULT MOVIE

WORDS: **WILLIAM CUTHBERT** ★ ART: **GIACOMO GHIAZZA**

FIRST RELEASED IN THE US ON 16 July 1993, *Hocus Pocus* – as you might expect for a Halloween film released in the summer – didn't do so well at the box office. Although originally considered a flop, the film has gone on to find a huge following, with its fanbase growing year after year.

A long-awaited sequel was released on Disney+ in 2022, and there are talks of a third film on the way. But after all this time, is there anything new to discover about the original movie? For fans, of course there is.

Thanks to early script drafts and original storyboard artwork by Giacomo Ghiazza, we're now able to get a glimpse into what might have been and also see the ideas behind various cut scenes, including a fantastic skeleton battle that was originally part of the film's finale.

One special draft of the script has recently been shared via sandersonwitchmuseum.com, an online collection curated by a fan, for fans. The script, dated 3 December 1991, is the third draft – the very first had the alternative title of *The Halloween House*, which was later changed to *Hocus Pocus*. Of particular note is that this specific draft is what made Disney give the film the green light and push it into production. During production more drafts were created, with further changes and an entire storyline about candy crows being cut. But let's start at the beginning...

WHICH WITCH?

In this draft, some of the first changes are in the opening. We're introduced to James Wickerson, who has been kidnapped by the Sanderson sisters and is tied up inside the cottage. Thackery and Emily Binx are watching the witches through the window – they see James, which results in Thackery sending Emily back to the elders to alert them of James's potential demise. As the witches are about to take his life, they're stopped by Thackery, who in turn is turned into a cat. Not much else is known about James, although it does appear he survives, along with Emily.

The witches are slightly different, too. Winifred is described as being corrupted by evil, her fingers have grown talons and her teeth are sharp. Sarah is more like Mary in this draft. She's described as obese and gluttonous. Her character throughout the entire script is almost identical to what we see of Mary in the film – it appears as if the names were switched at the last minute before filming started. Mary is the youngest of the three, with a pointy chin, warts and a long crooked nose.

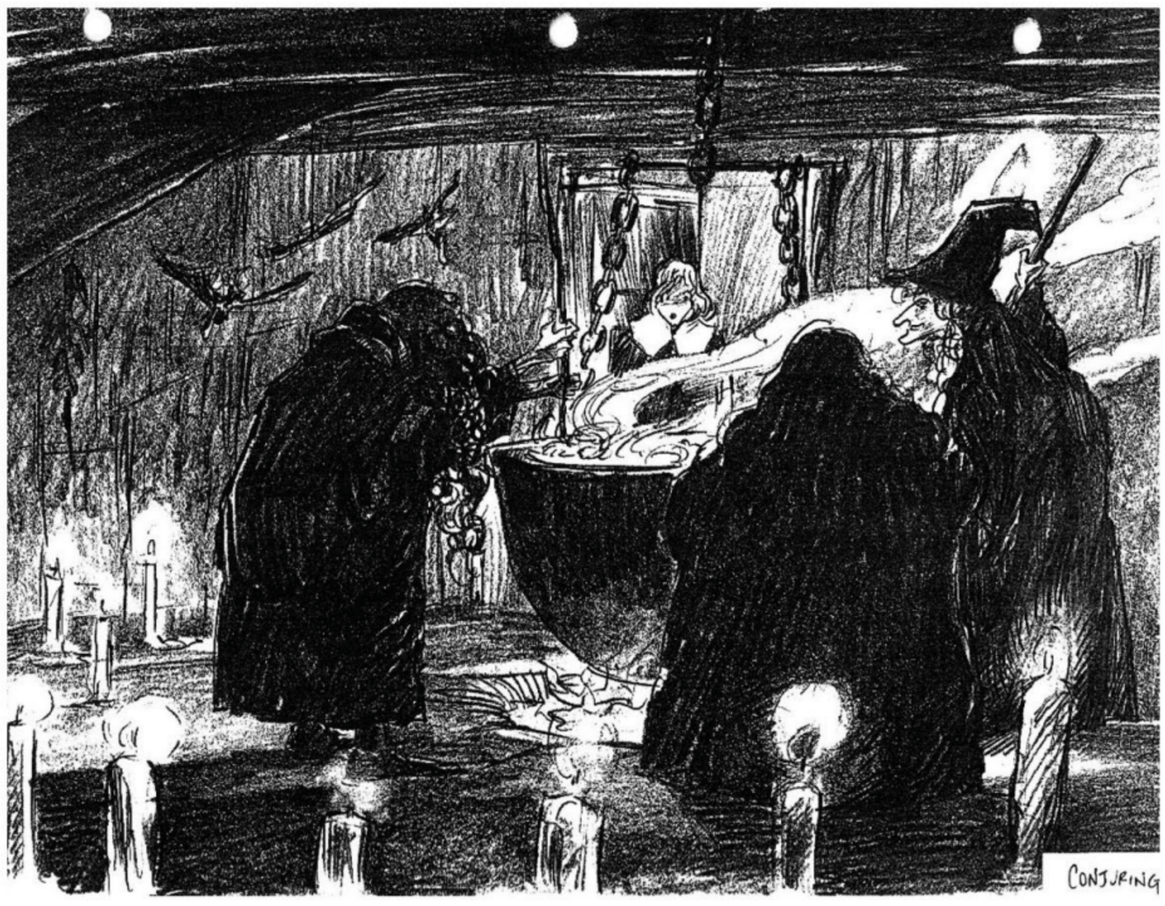
In the present day, Max has lived in Salem his entire life, with Allison recently moving to the Witch City from Tarzana, California. He still has a crush on her, alongside two new characters and friends of Max, Alan and Ben. Like with James Wickerson, their characters are not seen much at all throughout the script, with only a small scene of them eating candy and also being bewitched at the end. Surprisingly for a Disney script, Max is a little sexist towards Allison. When he tells her he doesn't believe in witches and Allison disagrees with him, he responds with, "Hey you're a chick and chicks are susceptible with this junk." He also describes the Salem witch trials as "a classic case of chick hysteria meets parental over-reaction", which makes you wonder if Max would be as well-loved as he is today if his character had been seen in this light. Along with the odd bit of sexism throughout the script, a small amount of profanity also comes from not only Max, but Binx, too... which is another surprise for a Disney film. Furthermore, Max's first interaction with Jay and Ice sees them all sharing a cigarette, before Max rides off with Ernie's lighter, his cross trainers still on his feet.

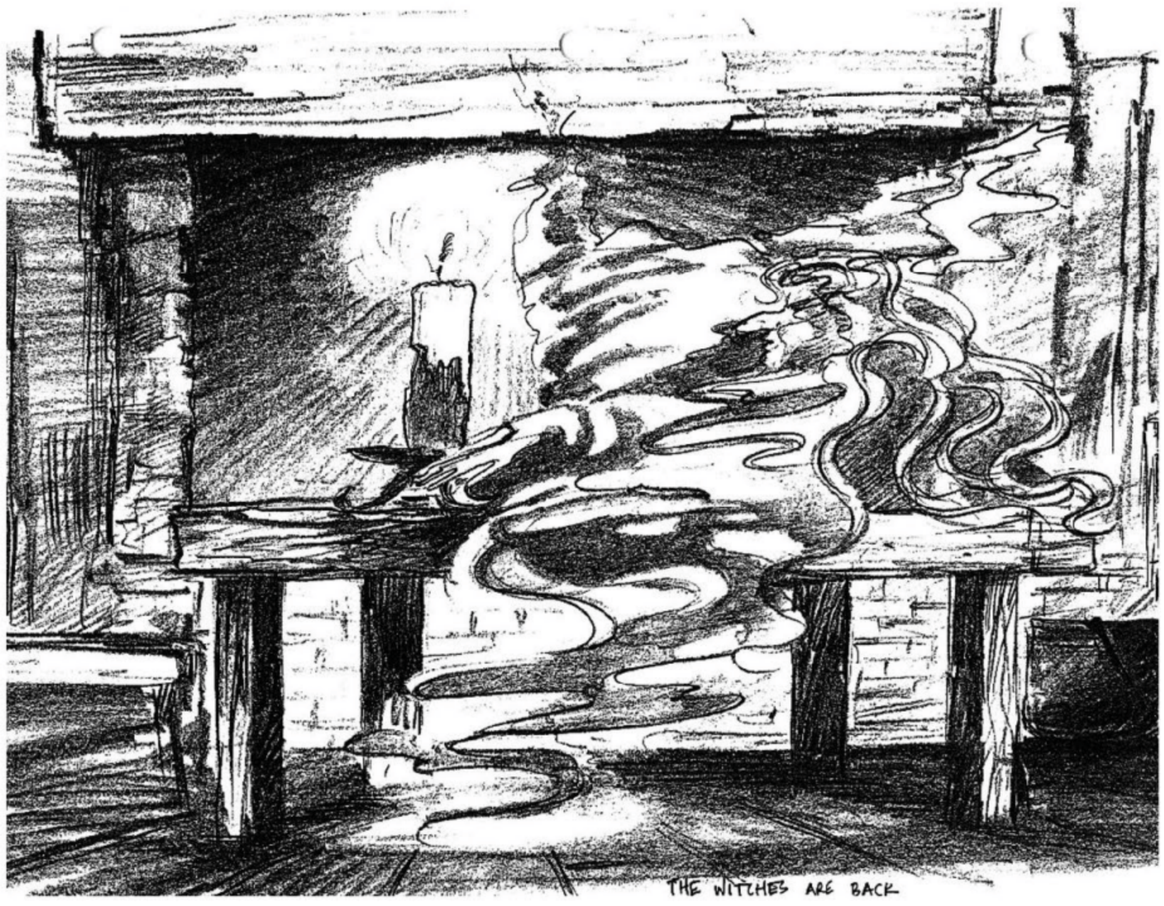
Max, Dani and Allison break into the Sanderson sisters' cottage, and in this draft it's stupidity, not Max showing off, that brings the witches back. While trying to find Dani's trick-or-treating sack that has been left in the cottage, he lights a candle to help him see... only it's *the* Black Flame Candle. Instead of →



Original storyboards by Giacomo Ghiazza.

STORYBOARD ARTWORK BY GIACOMO GHIAZZA © DISNEY COURTESY OF THE SANDERSON WITCH MUSEUM. PICTURES: DISNEY/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK. STOCK IMAGES: GUNTUR SEPTYAN/GETTY.







Ghiazza's illustrations hint at a darker film...



STORYBOARD ARTWORK BY GIACOMO GHIAZZA © DISNEY COURTESY OF THE SANDERSON WITCH MUSEUM. PICTURES: DISNEY/THA/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK. STOCK IMAGES: GUNTUR SEPTYAN/GETTY.

bursting through the doors, the witches return as three flaming forms through the floorboards of the cottage, eventually fully forming into themselves again. They float down; Mary crashes and the kids panic.

The kids end up fleeing the Sanderson sisters' cottage and the witches follow; they fly around Salem trying to track them down, with one of the storyboard sketches featuring a brief scene where they fly across a screen at a drive-in theatre. From the sketch, it appears that *Frankenstein* might be playing on the big screen. This particular scene isn't mentioned at all in the script.

COUNTING CROWS

One of the biggest scenes that was cut entirely is a montage featuring Binx. When the kids are hiding in the graveyard, Binx tells them about Billy Butcherson and how he was stolen from the gallows and brought back to life to be their slave. He also shares his life with them and tells them how it was great to begin with: his family looked after him until they grew old and died. When asked by Max if he ever tried to end his life, Binx tells them he attempted it many times. Binx picked fights with bears, ate poisoned berries and even jumped down a well.

While walking the streets of Salem in search of their spell book, Winifred notices how the costumed children knock on doors asking for candy, and gets the idea of tricking them with candy crows. She pulls these from a magic sack that is attached to her belt, and she and her sisters give them to children, bewitching them. Disney did actually film these scenes, and tiny snippets can be seen very briefly in early trailers. However, the candy crow storyline was cut entirely from the film – but kept in the novelisation by Todd Strasser that was released alongside the film.



Director Kenny Ortega (right) on set.

In an October 1992 draft (also available to view via the Museum website), this storyline is extended further, with the witches going to a grocery store to collect supplies. Mary attempts to steal a child, and all three of them run out of the store with a stolen barbecue. In this December draft, however, the storyline is quite short, with only a few mentions of the candy crows and the use of spectral crows, too. Winifred summons the spectral crows from her magic sack, and uses them to bewitch the sleeping children of Salem and make them head for their home in the hopes of sucking the life from all of them.

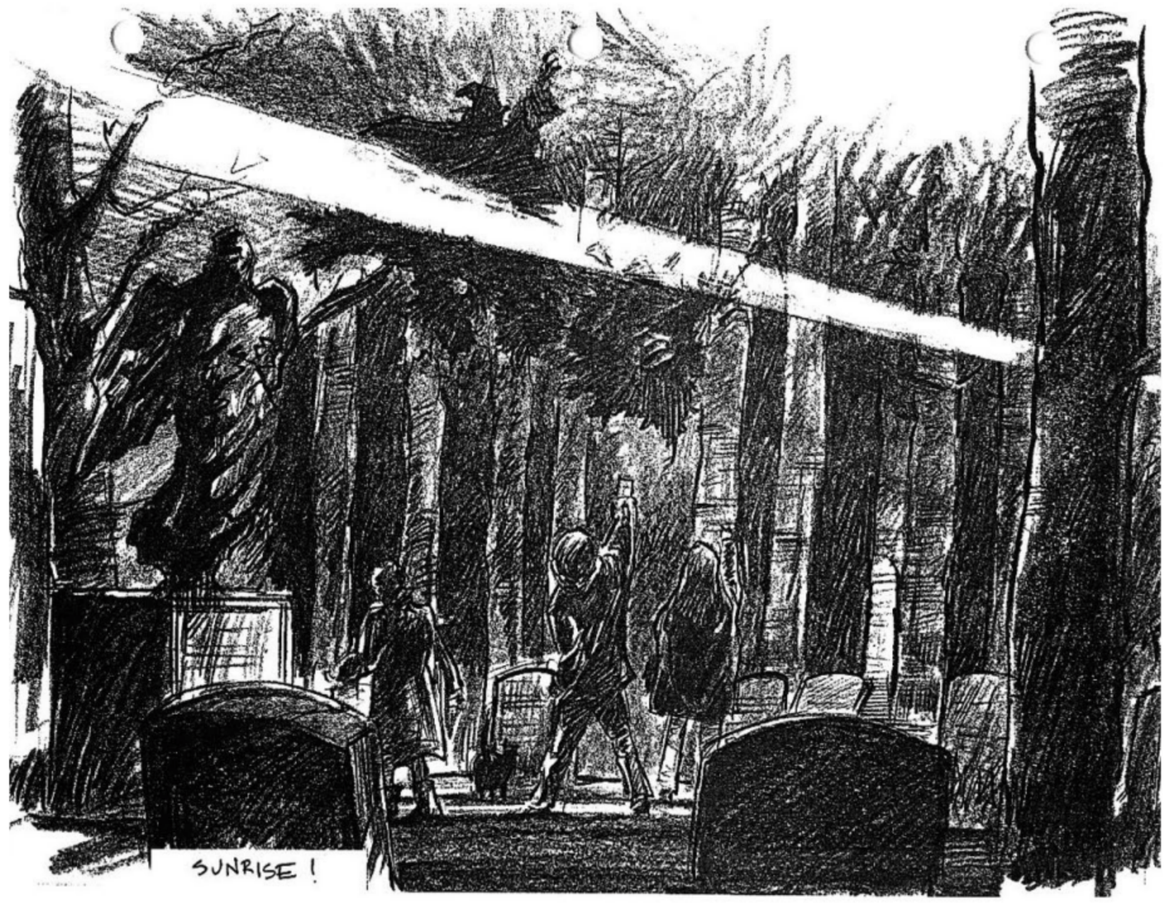
The scene at the school is also quite different, and it's another that was filmed and cut. This particular scene involves the witches trying to find the children in the school. They walk through the basketball court and Sarah tells Mary that the hoops are gallows. Later, Mary tells Sarah that the lockers are where they hang the children off hooks and close the





... complete with an army of skeletons in the final act.





doors, and that the swimming pool is called a drowning pool, with the diving board being where victims are made to walk the plank into the poisoned water.

Reading through this draft, you'll also find that Billy has no lines at all. He does follow the Sanderson sisters wherever they go, and apart from the odd grunt and moan and a yowl towards the end of the script, he is almost entirely mute.

THE BONES OF IT

The kids all hide out at the Dennison house, with Max's bedroom now being in the basement. Dave and Jenny (Max and Dani's parents) are upstairs in bed, Dave tries to persuade Jenny into a little bedtime fun, but she's having none of it, and while this is happening, the witches sneak inside and cast a spell on them to make them sleep forever. They head downstairs, steal the book and take Dani and Binx back to their cottage.

Upon their return, Winifred commands spectral crows from her magic sack to fly into the houses of all of the sleeping children in Salem. This causes them to wake in a zombie-like state and head for the witch's cottage. Inside, Winifred takes the life force from a caged Jay and Ice and turns them old. She tells her sisters that they'll steal all of the life force from the children of Salem and by sunrise they'll all die of old age. However, Max is able to trick them with daylight savings (in this draft they use Jenny's cone bra over the car headlights to create a soft glow of sunlight through the windows) and he takes the book, Dani and Binx, and heads for the graveyard.

"This original draft made Disney greenlight the film and push it into production"

En route there is a car chase scene and, unlike what is seen in the finished film, this time Winifred crashes into a clump of trees, Max runs Sarah over and Mary is trapped through the passenger window by her nose and is attacked by Binx, just as they arrive at the graveyard once more.

Inside, the witches fly over them and Winifred uses the Black Flame Candle and a spell to raise the dead. The children and Binx fight a never-ending army of skeletons. Just as it seems like the skeletons and witches are winning, Max throws a skull directly at Winifred and she falls down onto hallowed ground. She turns into a stone sepulchral angel, with her sisters and their spell book turning to dust as the sun rises. The skeleton fight is assumed to have been cut due to the budget of the film, but what an ending that would have been...

For more Hocus Pocus art and information, visit sandersonwitchmuseum.com.



LOVE HURTS

DIRECTOR CURRY BARKER ON NIGHTMARISH HORROR ROMANCE OBSESSION

WORDS
ROSIE FLETCHER

LOVE ISN'T BLIND, BUT IT IS monumentally stupid in the debut feature from LA resident Curry Barker. His low-budget horror movie debut *Obsession* sparked a bidding war after premiering at the Toronto Film Festival and subsequently screened at SXSW to rave reviews. When we speak to Barker, he's just leaving the Austin festival, and is about to hop on a plane to Canada to resume filming on his next feature *Anything But Ghosts,* which will be produced by Jason Blum. It's been quite the whirlwind all round.

"That was really quite an exciting experience for me," says Barker, about the bidding war. "Me, someone who's never had an experience remotely close to anything like that!" Making his name as part of YouTube sketch comedy duo That's A Bad Idea, with his best friend Cooper Tomlinson, Barker caught the attention of British producer James Harris of Tea Shop Productions with his horror short "The Chair" – Harris wanted to make it into a feature, but Barker pitched *Obsession* instead. The premise: what if you wished for your dream girl to fall in love with you and it came true?

"I had this idea for a while of this couple that was obsessed with each other and the journey of how far that could go," Barker says, explaining a "The Monkey's Paw"- themed episode of *The Simpsons* gave him a way in.

Our "hero" in *Obsession* is sad-sack music store worker Bear (Michael Johnston), who has a long-nurtured crush on his friend Nikki (Inde Navarrette). On a whim, Bear buys a "One Wish Willow" charm and casts the fateful love spell. Nikki goes from devoted to demented on a dime, and it's a credit to Navarrette's physical performance that she makes Nikki so terrifying. Barker says he made tiny CG enhancements – making her eyes slightly bigger or smaller, making her mouth open slightly wider – but that "99% of it is performance".

"I always wanted it to feel like an extremely jealous girlfriend. I never wanted her to play too far into the 'possession' of it. A lot of the notes were like, 'play this more whiny and less angry, more leaning into the whininess of a little kid versus the anger of a demon.'"

Obsession was made for less than $1 million, but manages to combine a fun premise with a dark streak of humour, sufficient gore, and several good jump scares, which should please horror fans. Barker says the trick is to keep viewers on their toes.

"I think it's about playing with tension and release, and I think it's about setting expectations early. Things can flip on a dime with Nikki really early in the movie. So once you've set that up, the audience is already on the edge of their seat, because you've created a character that's so unpredictable."

Nikki is unstable, but Bear is to blame. The IMDb synopsis calls Bear a "hopeless romantic", but Barker is under no illusion that he is a good guy. "The movie is about how love should be earned," says Barker. "It starts from a guy who just wants his crush to like him back. But as it goes on, you stop rooting for Bear."

It's not just a two-hander though – Barker cast his own best mate and comedy partner Tomlinson as Bear's awful pal Ian. Ian is almost irredeemably terrible, and Barker laughs when we ask if that was a joke between he and Tomlinson.



Director Curry Barker gets hands-on with his debut.



PICTURES: MANNY LIOTTA/FOCUS FEATURES LLC

> The movie is about how love should be earned

Nikki (Inde Navarrette) and Bear (Michael Johnston).



Barker draws inspiration from the likes of Ari Aster.

"100%! Yeah, of course," he says. "I feel like everybody has either had a friend like that in their friend group or had an acquaintance like that."

He and Tomlinson are playing the lead roles of two fake paranormal investigators in *Anything But Ghosts*, a straight narrative feature (ie not a mockumentary or a found footage film) that Barker promises will be scary, but also lean more heavily into the comedy than *Obsession*. Barker lists Ari Aster as one of his main influences in the horror world, who also gained recognition for his impactful horror short "The Strange Thing About The Johnsons" in 2011 before emotionally scarring audiences worldwide with his feature debut *Hereditary*. A decade and a half later, there are worse footsteps to follow in.

"I'm on my journey of figuring out what my style really is," says Barker, who admits he loves breaking the rules and taking an untraditional approach when it comes to filmmaking. "I want to have a very distinct voice in every single film of mine." He might be just making inroads into the genre scene right now, but we predict a bright future for this young filmmaker, who could prove to be our next horror obsession.

Obsession is in UK cinemas from 15 May.

FROM

A TOWN CALLED MALICE

SPOILER ALERT! TREAD CAREFULLY AS SFX STEPS ONTO THE SET OF *FROM* TO UNCOVER SINISTER TWISTS AND BLOOD-SOAKED SECRETS FROM SEASON FOUR OF THE CHILLING HORROR SERIES

WORDS: **ADAM TANSWELL**

JACK BENDER IS CASUALLY sitting in a director's chair on the Canadian set of the MGM+ series *From*. The director and executive producer is wearing headphones and is absorbed in the action that's unfolding on two video monitors in front of him.

On one of the screens, we can see three actors standing on the roof of Colony House, an important location in the show where several characters reside. It's an impressive two-storey building that's been constructed on private land near Beaver Bank, Novia Scotia. Scott McCord (Victor) is standing near the edge of the structure, close to Harold Perrineau (Boyd Stevens) and Ricky He (Kenny Liu). If we squint hard enough, we can see that McCord is harnessed and there's a rope tied to his back. Safety is key.

"There are a limited number of people allowed on the roof and I'd have to be in a harness if I was up there with them," explains Bender. "I can watch everything from down here and speak to them via walkie talkie."
He returns to his makeshift media village, which has been set up in a quiet corner inside Colony House.

While the exterior shell of the Victorian mansion is exactly how it looks on TV, the interior is a maze of wooden beams and heavy blackout drapes. In one section of the space, there's a long craft service table, and a back area doubles up as a storage room for the show's diner. The bedrooms, bathrooms and living areas of Colony House are nowhere to be found. This striking construction is basically a shell. "The interior scenes of Colony House are shot on our sound stage up the road," adds Bender. The magic of television... →



SFX went on location, visiting the Colony House.

FROM



MELLOW YELLOW

ACTRESS **JULIA DOYLE** DISCUSSES HER NEW CHARACTER, SOPHIA

How did you become involved with *From*?
I was sent dummy sides [script pages] for the audition and the show was under a completely different name. My scenes took place in the clinic and Kenny's name was switched to Reggie. One of my lines was something like, "Oh, so the monsters, they live inside the walls?" I thought I was auditioning for a new MGM+ paranormal hospital show.

What was the appeal of the show?
I've been telling my agent that I want to do more horror. I can be a bit of a freak sometimes and I want to explore that side of life, so I was excited to land this role.

Does this mean you're a scream queen in the making?
Oh, stop it! That would be really cool. Obviously, that's the dream. I love horror. Whenever I have a choice of movie night, I'm always saying, "Let's watch something spooky." I always love scaring my friends and family, so I love that I get to bring out those traits.

How would you describe your character?
She's a church girl – and I felt like I had a good grasp of her because I actually grew up altar serving. She's a wounded bird, as well as a whole lot more.

What went through your mind when you discovered she's connected to the Man in Yellow?
I felt so lucky. I was like, "Wow, this is such a juicy role. I have so much to play with." It's a really meaty, juicy character to play.



Randall Kirkland (left) has been in the wars.

FOUR PLAY

For newcomers to the acclaimed horror drama: the story follows a group of disparate people trapped in a mysterious town. There are malicious murders and marauding monsters (Frombies!), as well as themes of reincarnation and story-walking (aka the *From* version of time travel). When it comes to season four, the storyline picks up directly after the mind-blowing season three finale.

"I felt that the end of season three was extraordinarily written," Bender tells us later. "We showed enough to the audience so that they could put together pieces of the puzzle and still left enough space for people to not know everything. That's a delicate balance.

"Visually, the season three finale was both terrific and challenging," he continues. "I mean, that birth scene. The fact that we decided to have Smiley in that sticky embryo. Our team really delivered."

The finale also saw the startling, bloody and vicious slaughter of Jim Matthews (Eion Bailey). "Jim getting killed was massive for all of us," reveals Bender. "It was very bold. As we learned on *Lost* with the loss of Charlie, you've got to kill your darling sometimes. You've got to feel like this place is life and death. That's the bottom line. Those are the rules of the road."



Showrunner Jack Bender watches the monitors.



Tabitha comforts the sheltered Sophia.



Jade found out more about his true nature.



Looks like Ethan (Simon Webster) is in trouble...

LOST AND FOUND

Jack Bender is no stranger to *Lost*, having served as an executive producer and director on the acclaimed sci-fi drama (he directed 38 episodes, including the finale). While many comparisons have been drawn between these two genre shows, *From*'s creative team does not shy away from the association.

Not only do *From* and *Lost* share a main actor in Harold Perrineau, they also share creatives, including Bender and Jeff Pinkner (who has served as an executive producer and writer on both). Fan theories on the MGM+ show lean into questions of purgatory, much like the revelations in the finale of *Lost*. Both fantasy shows are entertainingly mysterious and drop curious clues into the narrative, with fervent fans eager to unlock secrets and puzzles unfurled on to audiences.

Speaking of the comparisons, Bender explains: "One of my obligations in the first few episodes of *From* was to make characters that the audience could relate to. The *Lost* characters were so inviting and wonderful and relatable – and I think that's true of *From*, too. You've got to have that. Nobody wants to be in *From* town, but you want to see how these people are going to get out. You hook into them and relate to them. You think, 'Wow, what if this was me?'"

"To be spoken about in the same conversation as Lost is a huge honour for our show"

"*Lost* changed the game for genre storytelling on television," says the creator of *From*, John Griffin. "To be spoken about in the same conversation is a huge honour for our show. It's no different than when people mention *The Twilight Zone* or David Lynch, or when someone says our show has a Stephen King vibe. In some ways, our show probably wouldn't exist if not for *Lost*."

Griffin is clearly proud of the association – and rightly so. He has also been prudent in debunking a number of incorrect fan theories that tied the two shows. "We've confirmed a few things from the very beginning," he tells us. "With Jeff and Jack both having worked on *Lost*, it's impossible to not be aware of the things that people would want to be sure of. In season one, I dated myself by saying, 'Look, Bobby Ewing is not going to walk out of the shower at the end of the series.'"

So what do we know for certain about the residents of this mysterious and freakish town? For starters, it is not purgatory. "They are not dead," confirms Griffin. "It is not a dream. They have not been abducted by aliens. I'm certain that the Jade [David Alpay] and Tabitha [Catalina Sandino Moreno] reincarnation revelation in season three was also a theory that has now been confirmed, but I think there will probably be further debunkations and further confirmations as we move forward."

SPOILER ALERT

If you haven't seen the first episode of season four and don't want to know upcoming plot points, stop reading now as we enter spoiler territory. You've been warned!

At the end of the horrifying first episode, a devilish twist is divulged when the dark secret of a new character is revealed: the new girl in town, Sophia (Julia Doyle), is actually the Man in Yellow.

"Having the ability to have our villain present and living under the noses of our characters – and forming relationships with them – has been a very exciting thread to play out in season four," reveals Griffin. "There's a car crash in the final moments of episode one. The audience – and the characters – will see a car careening into town with Sophia and her father, who is a pastor. In flashback, we then reveal that Sophia is the Man in Yellow."

"We pick up the story of season four about 30 seconds after the season three finale," adds Bender. "We see the hateful and terrifying Man in Yellow and learn a little bit more about him. By the end of the episode, we see him take off his rumpled, dirty, yellow jacket and we begin to see him shapeshifting in a really painful way. He rises as Sophia."

Julia Doyle was chosen to play the duplicitous new character. "It's a very difficult role," explains Bender. "Sophia comes into this community appearing to be an innocent pastor's daughter. She's wounded and terrified – and yet she's holding some cards very close to her vest. Underneath, we know she's being manipulative. In subsequent episodes, we enjoy how deftly and seductive she can be in her sincerity."

TALK OF THE TOWN

Bender shares these spoilers during a second interview session held inside the show's diner, which has been built on a private road a short drive from Colony House. When he's called back to work, *SFX* is free to roam the mammoth outdoor set. This is the first time journalists have been allowed past the security gates – and it's epic.

A talented team of builders has painstakingly constructed the main road of *From* town on land near Halifax, Canada. The striking site includes the show's church, diner and barn, as well as the post office, which doubles up as the local sheriff's HQ. There's a playground rusting away next to a Grand Rapids bus. There are old, abandoned cars and wooden houses, including one that's eerily demolished. There's an empty swimming pool next to a motel sign, but no motel. In the distance, we can see Colony House perched on a hill.

"It is incredibly immersive," says Elizabeth Saunders, who plays Donna. "When I first walked on set, I was blown away. I was agog and I did a lot of exploring. I've always been really interested in [set decoration] and the building of the world. This is so impressive."

Saunders is preparing for a night shoot, where she'll be filming in a forest area nearby. "It will be cold, it will be spooky and it might be full of ticks," she chuckles, rather uneasily. "I've not shot where we're shooting tonight, so it will be interesting to see something new. What can I tell you about the scene? Well, we're in the middle of the fourth season and I can't really say much. You'll just have to watch the show and see..."

From is on MGM+ in the US. UK TBC.

PICTURES: CHRIS REARDON © MGM+ STUDIOS. STOCK ART: REVEL.STOCKART/GETTY

CORPORATE RETREAT

STAFF CUTS

A WORK GETAWAY MAY BECOMES A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL IN **CORPORATE RETREAT**

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**



FOR MANY, A WEEKEND AWAY with work colleagues might sound like hell on earth. For those in *Corporate Retreat*, however, awkward bonding exercises are only the beginning – this getaway is less about team-building than team-cutting (quite literally).

As writer/director Aaron Fisher tells *SFX*, the film grew out of the practical constraints of a modest budget. "I watched a lot of horror movies, trying to get inspiration from them," he explains. "When I saw *Saw* for the first time, I thought it was really interesting how they created a whole story where most of it takes place in one room.

"I started thinking maybe I could make a movie that takes place in one room to cut down on costs, so that most of the money goes into actually shooting the movie rather than just moving equipment around."

When it came to devising a scenario that would trap a group of people together in a single location, Fisher found an unlikely source of inspiration in his father. "He was the CEO and co-founder of his company, but he was ousted from it and financially ruined. My dad's a very sweet, nice guy, but I was imagining, what if he was a psycho killer and wanted to get revenge on his old colleagues?"

In *Corporate Retreat*, Abnormal Psychology student Ginger (Odeya Rush) finds herself on the Phoenix Corporate Retreat alongside eight executives from the billion-dollar company Immaculate Pond Technologies. Among them are her boyfriend, the company's general counsel Cliff (Elias Kacavas), and chief revenue officer Deborah (Rosanna Arquette).

Led by guides Amber (Zión Moreno) and Lola (Sasha Lane), the group are encouraged to connect with seven "gateways", including laughter, willpower and sacrifice. What begins with simple mindfulness exercises soon descends into savage workforce downsizing.

While the film satirises the strange world of corporate retreats, Fisher admits his attempts to research the real thing all too quickly hit a brick wall.

"First of all, you needed an email address at Google or Apple or whatever," he says. "And you had to spend a minimum of $250,000. I was like, 'Wow, that is insane.' Obviously, I don't have the money to spend on research, so I ended up just making everything up."

He did, however, draw on memories of exercises from school and summer camps, "so I had some sense of how they might want to make these people relax and trust each other".

This is Fisher's second film, but his first to receive a theatrical release. His interest in filmmaking goes back to his childhood. "I saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* when I was 11, and that's when I knew I wanted to direct," he says. "So I

PICTURES: PASSAGE PICTURES



Ashton Sanders as an employee giving 110%.

begged my parents for a MiniDV camera – and I got one. I shot hundreds of short videos and edited them together." Describing his early efforts as "just silly things", Fisher says he made his first horror short at the age of 13.

"At the time, I was afraid of being in the house alone. I was seeing a therapist, and he knew I was making videos. He said, 'Why don't you make a video about your fear?' So I made this weird horror thing where it was someone chasing me into the house with a knife."

Corporate Retreat is largely set inside a single, locked-down house – a setting that draws on some of Fisher's early anxieties. Among the influences he cites are Ti West's *X* and *Pearl*, along with *Smile 2*, *Nosferatu* and *The Substance*. The film's impact is heightened by its practical special effects make-up, supervised by Gary J Tunnicliffe (*Candyman*, *Halloween: Resurrection*). "He's a true artist," Fisher enthuses. "He puts a lot of care into his work. My brother Josh [Fisher, cinematographer] and I, we would have meetings with Gary. We would go over storyboards and talk about how we were going to go about making things basically look real. To my surprise, everything was much simpler than I thought it was gonna be.



Benjamin Norris (*Andor*) doesn't have a clear vision.

"I mean, it was still hard to execute correctly," he continues. "Certain things with gore and stuff, people who've seen the movie are like, 'Oh my god, how did you do that?' It's like – I don't want to tell them. I don't want to give away our secrets!"

Fisher is similarly reluctant to go into any detail about the film's gorier moments, though he does single out one piece of equipment used by Tunnicliffe. "I liked that Gary had a pump with his blood – that he makes," he says. "He's just literally pushing down on a pump and blood is gushing. That stuff is pretty gnarly."

The cast includes Alan Ruck (*Succession*) as the vengeful founder and former CEO of IPT. "He's a veteran," Fisher says. "He brings his own ideas and takes direction really well." Rush, meanwhile, impressed Fisher as "really down to earth and easy to work with". "Everyone is amazing in the film," he adds. "I'm proud of all the actors."

With *Corporate Retreat*, Fisher mixes horror with a touch of dark comedy. "I'm hoping people find it a little funny, like in *The Substance* where it gets really gross, but it's also pretty funny," he explains.

After this retreat, the office might be looking a little emptier on Monday. ●

Corporate Retreat is in US cinemas from 22 May. UK TBC.



THE HORRORS OF VEGAS

YOU THOUGHT LAS VEGAS WAS ALL GAMBLING AND MUSIC RESIDENCIES – BUT SFX TOOK A TRIP TO THE DARKER SIDE OF THE STRIP

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK...

Universal Horror Unleashed

UNIVERSAL PARKS AND Destinations – the company behind six global film-related theme parks, with another due to open in England soon – are the undisputed masters of immersive experiences. Their after-hour celebrations and themed events are award-winning and continue to grow each year.

But it's Halloween Horror Nights that sets them apart from their competitors, an annual celebration of all things spooky that's in its 35th year. So it's no surprise that the creative team has a year-round live horror celebration in Las Vegas's Area 15: Universal Horror Unleashed, which opened in September 2025.

This permanently standing attraction is the first of hopefully many – another is due in Chicago next year – and allows for the design to be even more impressive than their great-yet-temporary seasonal cinematic set builds.

It's an impressive space, taking over an 110,000 square-foot warehouse, with 4K surround audio and four interactive entertainment areas – aka "Scare Zones": Dead Storage, Kill Vault, Jack's Alley and Prop Graveyard, where you can also have character meet and greets, as well as unexpected frights.

These link not only the four haunted houses, but also drink and dining areas – all centred around The Boiler Bar, a towering furnace that looms menacingly above the action.

Jack's Alley, unsurprisingly, is home to Jack the Clown and his partner in crime, Chase – stalwarts of HHN events – and live stage show, *Jack & Chance: Stay Or Slay*, a darkly comedic yet chaotic circus production.

There are four haunted houses, expanding on fan favourites that were previously staged in Orlando. *Universal Monsters* takes guests through incredible classic movie scenes, putting you right in the action – and sometimes fights – as you follow Van Helsing's battle with the likes of Dracula, Wolf Man, Frankenstein's Monster and his Bride. You'll also get to see the Phantom of the Opera, Gill-Man and the Mummy. As you might expect, the company never fails to hold these cinematic icons in the highest regard, and this house is no exception. It feels like the longest of the four, and is truly elevated to the next level. Outside of their *Monsters Unchained* ride at Epic Universe, this is the Universal Monsters at their best.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is far more brutal, as you might expect, but equally as impressive. It's based on the original movie – following the story in a linear fashion – and takes you through the home of Leatherface and



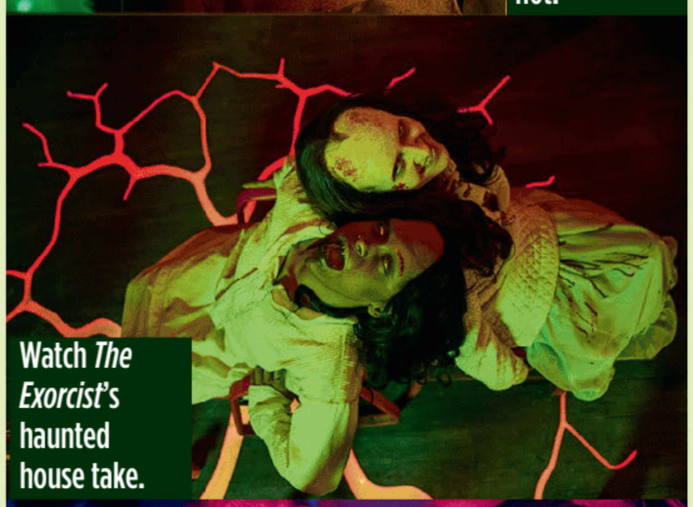
It wouldn't be horror without a terrifying clown.



Meet some classic Universal monsters.



Nope. Absolutely definitely not.



Watch *The Exorcist*'s haunted house take.



Whatever your poison, there's something to scare you.

his family. Unsurprisingly, it's *intense*. How can it not be when you're chased by Leatherface?

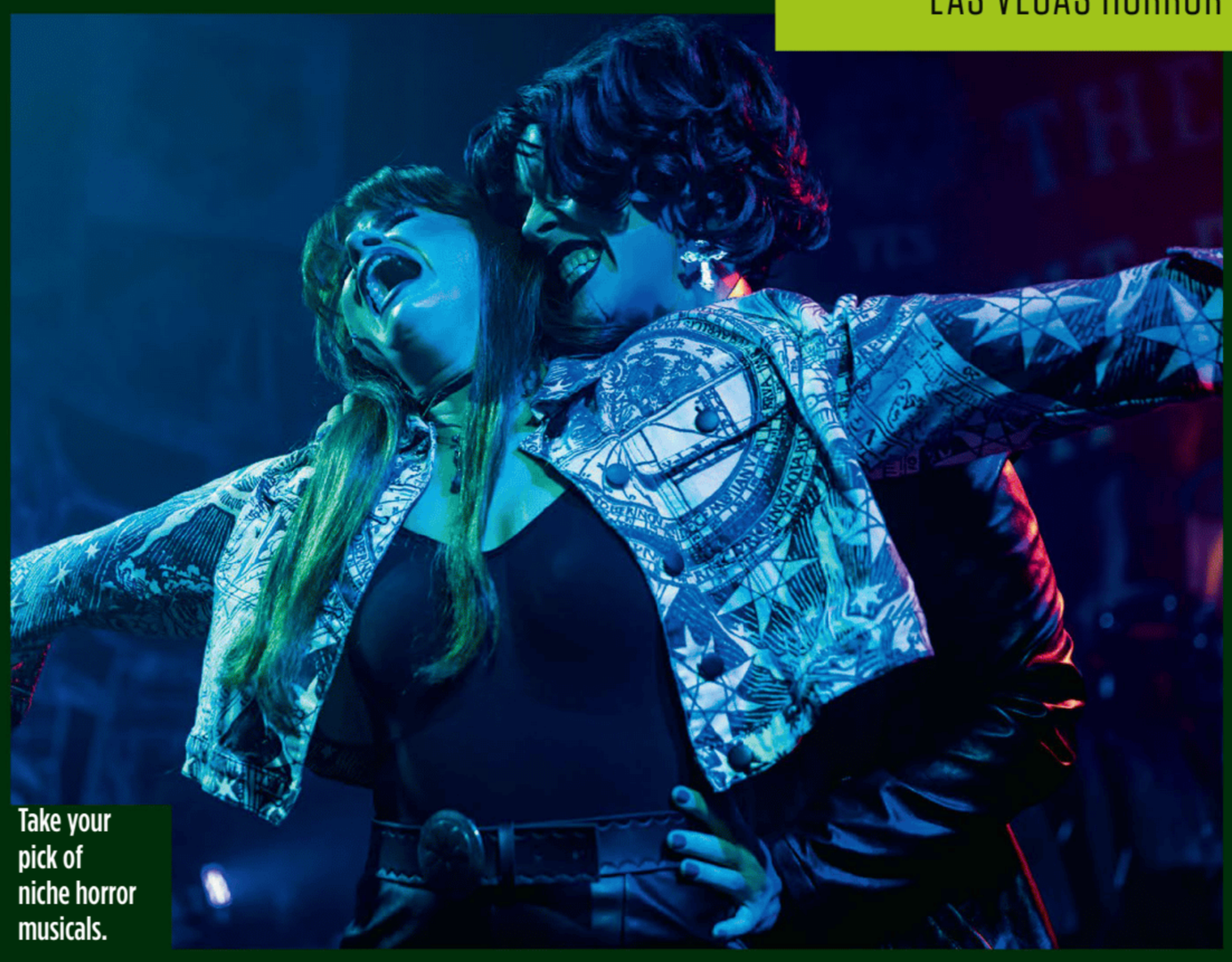
Original house and fan-favourite *Scarecrow: The Reaping* puts you in the middle of a cursed harvest in the Dust Bowl era, where evil lurks within the cornrows. There's rotten pumpkins from the off – always a winner for those who love their Halloween a bit twisted – billowing wind and evil scarecrows at every turn in an abandoned mid-west farmhouse. It's relentless and breathtaking.

The Exorcist: Believer might surprise people who didn't take to the recent Blumhouse movie, but the original house was visceral and just felt plain *wrong*, and this is no exception. Again, it's told in a linear way, leading to the exorcism of the two afflicted girls with a whole lot of possession along the way.

The content and themes of the venue – apart from the houses – are constantly evolving and updating, particularly to offer seasonally-themed experiences, such as Krampus & Kin in December and the Feaster Grievings Rotten Egg Hunt in spring.

An Unlimited Access Ticket allows guests to repeat houses – which, naturally, we're going to recommend – while also giving them the opportunity to fully explore their surroundings. While this is the latest essential Las Vegas destination, here's hoping we start to see these horrors unleashed to other countries soon.

Visit universalhorrorunleashed.com.



Take your pick of niche horror musicals.

LIGHT AS A FEATHER...

Majestic Repertory

NOT ACTUALLY A HORROR VENUE, but the Majestic Repertory theater in the Las Vegas Arts District has its fair share of live horror productions. Some relevant stage shows include *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *The Bad Seed*, *Carrie The Musical*, *Krampus*, *Horrorwood Video* and *The Sandman*.

But of particular note – and with the hope that they'll transfer to locations outside of the US – are *Scream'd, An Unauthorised Musical Parody* and, most recently, *The Craft'd: An Unauthorised Musical Parody*.

Both productions lean heavily into the love of '90s pop culture, paying homage, but also poking fun at both the films and the decade.

The Craft'd – obviously based on the 1996 classic – is absolutely *brilliant* and deserves a much wider audience. The show has also enjoyed a very limited run in Los Angeles, but is a hit just waiting to happen. UK theatre producers, consider yourselves tipped off to a surefire win of horror and nostalgia!

It's easy to see this staging becoming as popular as the formerly unauthorised *Cruel Intentions* musical, given the chance. This time the music leans into indie and rock – with cultural touchpoints that fans of other classic horror franchises will recognise.

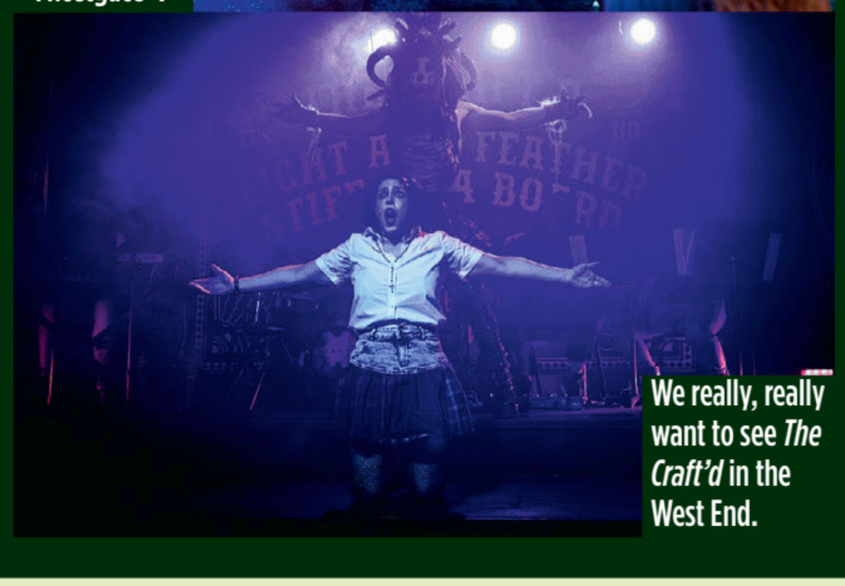
It all feels underground, but consummately professional, with the audience clearly having the best time as the actors move among the intimate space. There are meet and greet options for some shows, embracing fan culture from the off. It was one of the most fun nights out we've had in a very long time – we'd be there all the time if it was closer, so make sure to check out their latest listings when visiting Sin City.

They've also been responsible for a *Showgirls* musical, but that's a different kind of horror altogether!

Visit majesticrepertory.com.



The baddie is presumably called "Fhostgace".



We really, really want to see *The Craft'd* in the West End.



Take in the many frights of the Haunted Museum.

WHO YA GONNA CALL...

Zak Bagans's Haunted Museum

YOU MAY KNOW ZAK BAGANS FROM his long-running Discovery+ series *Ghost Adventures* and adjacent spin-offs, but the paranormal investigator also owns a Haunted Museum in Las Vegas – an essential destination for fans of the macabre. So of course we had to pay it a visit!

While it largely focuses on the supernatural and unexplained, including some very unsettling dolls and related items, there's also a lot of real-life horror on display – such as collections including artefacts from crimes you may have seen dramatised in recent years on Netflix. But there are also many things in the museum that will be of particular note for fans of horror movies and the events that inspired a large number of them.

Iconic Dracula actor Bela Lugosi's mirror (yes, he could see himself in it...) is said to have been present during mob killings, among other spooky activities. You have to give permission before the staff will let you gaze at it.

There's a screen-used painting from the 2006 movie *Silent Hill* of the witch burning at the stake that was a prominent scene in the movie. There are also items from the original *Poltergeist* movie throughout the museum, including the actual screen-used clown doll, and various items from star Heather O'Rourke. The Dybbuk box, which now resides at the museum, had a notable movie created about it in 2012 called *The Possession*.

The rocking chair from Ed and Lorraine Warren's case that inspired *The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It* dares you to approach it (yes, they manage to make a rocking chair scary!).

There's also a huge original demon animatronic suit from *The Conjuring 2* – which was going to appear in the film instead of Valak The Nun – and a wealth of *Ghostbusters* memorabilia, including a screen-used hero ghost trap.

All these things are housed in special, bespoke displays and rooms, all of which adds to the uniqueness of the experience as the corridors wind round and round.

Many of these items – and a great number of others housed in this incredible collection – are included in Bagans's output for Discovery+, including specialised documentaries for many of the larger true crime set-pieces.

Be warned – some of these, such as former property and items pertaining to real-life killers like Ed Gein, Ted Bundy and John



Many props and items from movies are on display.

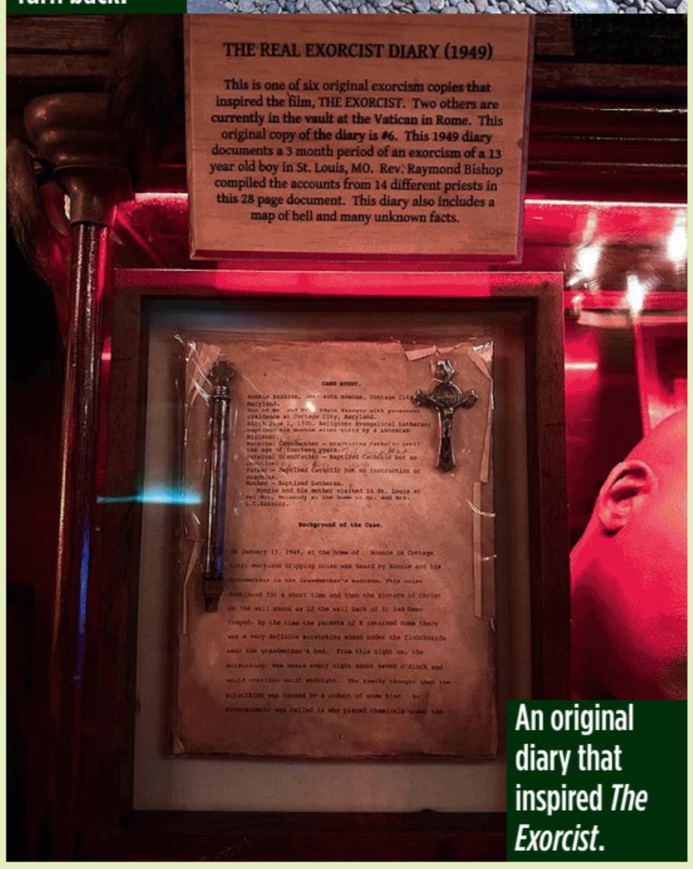


We wouldn't want to get locked in this room.





Abandon all hope ye who enter here... Turn back!



An original diary that inspired *The Exorcist*.



Escape IT is the latest from Egan Productions.

WE ALL FLOAT...

Escape IT

ONE OF SEVERAL ESCAPE ROOMS IN Las Vegas operated by the same company – they also have *Saw Escape*, *Escape Blair Witch* and *The John Wick Experience – Escape IT* is the latest immersive offering from Egan Productions.

Based on the original two *IT* movies, *Escape IT* is part haunted house, part puzzle-solving, so your enjoyment levels may vary depending on whether you have a preference. Unless you're booking a VIP experience, you (and your party) will be grouped with other guests, which means if everyone's competitive at solving the clues that allow you to proceed throughout you might struggle to make your voice heard. That said, if you're happy to let others do all the heavy lifting – sometimes literally – then you can stand back and soak up the spooky atmosphere.

At times, it can be wonderfully unsettling – while we were trying to solve a puzzle, we heard chuckling and thought someone in the group was mucking around, only to look up and see Pennywise the clown slipping back into the shadows.

There are actually two different attractions: The Funhouse and The Sewers. Naturally, we had to book both, and we'd encourage any fans to do the same as each offers unique set designs and experiences, with more than 20 rooms in total. There are some really impressive set-pieces, such as the Neibolt House – both inside and out – and the sewers below Derry. The "clown room" is there too (with optional coffin "exit"), as well as a pretty spectacular finale featuring Pennywise in his travelling wagon. The dancing clown pops up in various forms throughout, so keep your eyes peeled.

This is the closest you'll get to experiencing the *IT* movies for real – which is probably good, all things considered – and definitely one to add to the "must-do" list for fans of Pennywise and horror movies in general.

Visit escapeit.com.



Would you like to meet Pennywise in a sewer?

SFX travelled with Virgin Atlantic.

Wayne Gacy, may not sit well with many. But the viewing figures for podcasts and drama series about their heinous crimes suggest our fascination with murder and death shows no signs of dissipating.

A two-hour guided tour is standard – which is already an incredible offering – but there's also the option for a RIP All Access ticket which includes a badge, lanyard, t-shirt and extended access on your tour, including off-limit areas. Naturally we'd suggest you go for the extras... that is, if you dare!

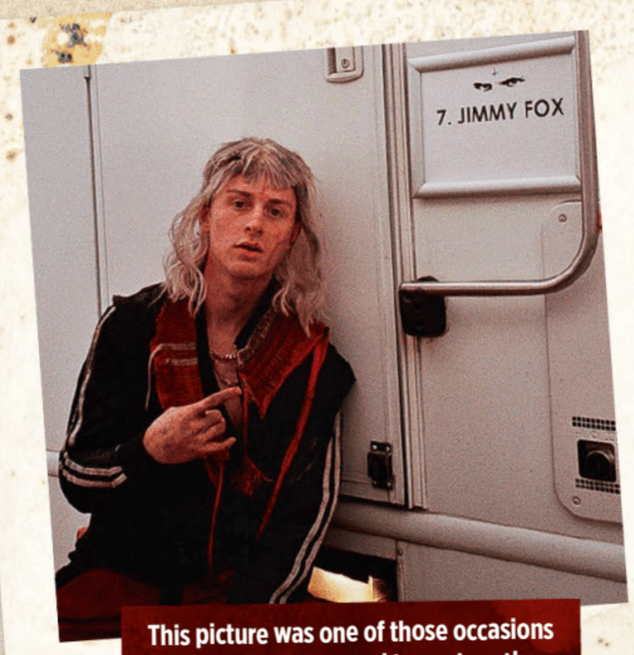
Incredibly deceptive from the outside, the property seems to stretch on and on and the tour just keeps on going. We genuinely could have spent hours longer there and still not have been able to take it all in.

As hardcore followers of all things horror, even we were unsettled by many of the elements on the tour – not least of all having to descend into a basement by ourselves. Yes, we may have walked *slightly* faster than was necessary, but we couldn't *not* look, could we? Some people have even fainted while visiting, while others claim to have felt strange presences or even been attacked.

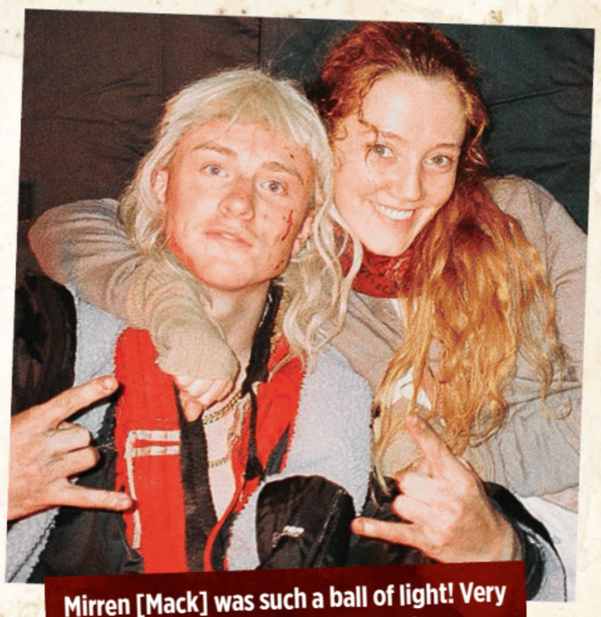
Whether you're a believer or not, it's a truly fascinating collection with some incredible stories, staged in a delightfully spooky atmosphere.

Visit thehauntedmuseum.com.

21st CENTU



This picture was one of those occasions where I really wanted to capture the weight of the production I was in. My own trailer, seventh on the cast list – proud.



Mirren [Mack] was such a ball of light! Very contagious happy energy! So when we weren't hunting her down after what she does to Jimmima [Emma Laird], we were laughing and taking pictures!



Just capturing Ghazi [Al Ruffai] being a diva!



The prosthetics were so visceral. So I wanted to at least capture some of that gore on my camera!



This was a lovely moment. We'd finished shooting the opening scene, so wanted to capture that point. It was a heavy, emotional and tough one to film, so it was a mixture of relief and pride. Great vibes. (Not sure where Erin [Kellyman] and Emma were though...)



The barn set is probably where we spent most of our time when filming. That hay bail area was the perfect backdrop for taking photos! Me and Ghazi look intimidating while Emma continues to be her cute self!



A picture of me arriving back to base from set on a night shoot. I brought my sunglasses on this day because I wanted this cool vibe in base, so I had to get them on the camera...



Another one by the hay bail. This time with Maura [Bird] and Jack [O'Connell]. We knew this picture was going to look badass as we were taking it, but when we first got it developed it exceeded all expectations. The fans online loved it!



Taken in the same session as my picture with Mirren. Taken in our easy up! On filming days, between times you're needed, you're spending your time in an easy up, chilling, eating etc... so we had a little photoshoot.

STOCK IMAGES: SULJO, NATALYA BOSYAK/GETTY

RY FOX

SAM LOCKE, WHO PLAYS JIMMY FOX IN *28 YEARS LATER: THE BONE TEMPLE*, TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES WITH HIS PERSONAL ON-SET PHOTOS

WORDS: **LUKE SMITH**



Similar to the group picture on the hay bails, we knew this one would look badass too. Myself, Alfie [Williams], Erin, Maura and Ghazi were at base at the same time with our masks, so we knew we needed a picture in them. It's a sick picture.



Taken in the barn, this picture is a mixture of being patient for a lens to swing for our next shot, and being delirious...



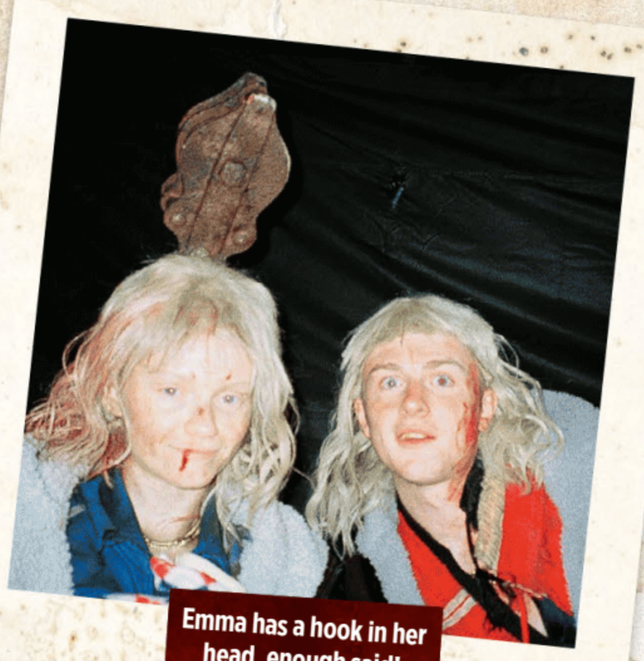
Another from the easy up photoshoot – showing off my knife!



Ghazi with his Diet Coke, he loves the stuff! This one was a spur of the moment, "Ghazi, get in this picture" situation.



This was us on our final day! Myself, Erin and Ghazi along with such a key figure in the makeup department. Being our fabulous selves!



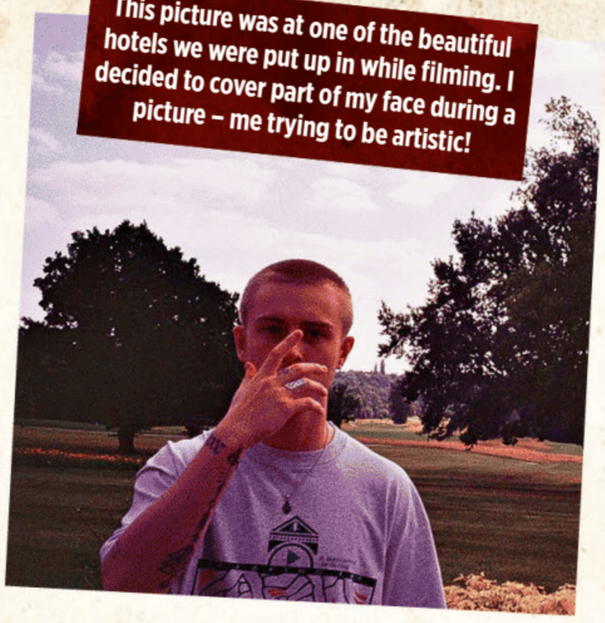
Emma has a hook in her head, enough said!



We had just had a fresh batch of fake blood added to our hands prior to the next take. It was *freezing*.



This picture is one of the rare times we didn't know one was getting taken. It was during the filming of the pool scene. As you can see, Erin and myself are relaxed in conversation – but look at Connor [Newall] he's in the zone! I love the juxtaposition of this picture.



This picture was at one of the beautiful hotels we were put up in while filming. I decided to cover part of my face during a picture – me trying to be artistic!

28 Years Later: The Bone Temple is available on 4K, Blu-ray and DVD now.

DANCE WITH

IT'S TIME TO REVISIT THE ACCLAIMED *28 YEARS LATER: THE BONE TEMPLE*

WORDS
LUKE SMITH



Dr Kelson has spent his life building to this moment.



RAGE HARD!

- *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* is released on DVD, Blu-ray, 4K UHD and a limited edition 4K UHD Blu-ray Steelbook.
- All formats come with an exclusive feature-length commentary with director Nia DaCosta.
- Three behind the scenes featurettes are included: "New Blood", "The Doctor And The Devil", and "Beneath The Rage".
- Included on the Blu-ray and 4K UHD are a deleted scene and a bloopers reel.
- There's also a two-movie collection containing both *28 Years Later* and *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*, available on DVD, Blu-ray and 4K UHD.

THE DEVIL



IT'S ALREADY BEEN DECLARED "the best horror film of 2026" – and that's saying something with the line-up of horror this year. The critically-acclaimed *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* – the fourth instalment in the long-running horror series – is available on a variety of physical formats now.

Starring the award-winning Ralph Fiennes, Jack O'Connell and Alfie Williams, *The Bone Temple* is written by series-creator Alex Garland and directed by Nia DaCosta (*Candyman*, *The Marvels*). One thing's for sure – you'll never listen to Iron Maiden in quite the same way again.

The Bone Temple has two main narrative strands. One follows "the Jimmys", a brutal gang led by cult leader Jimmy Crystal (O'Connell), as briefly introduced in the previous film's coda. There's also the continuing story of Fiennes's Dr Kelson, and his mission to study infected Alpha Samson (Chi Lewis-Parry). The *memento mori* skeleton structure Kelson has built – seen in *28 Years Later* – gives this film its title.

When director Nia DaCosta was asked about directing, she pitched her own take. "I said, 'Here's what I think. I'm not gonna try to make a Danny Boyle movie. That is, one, impossible, and two, not creatively interesting for me. But here's how I see the film. Here's what I love about it, and here's how I would want to do it.' And they bought into it." The finished film is exactly the one she described in that meeting, she says.

"The whole conceit is not that they've been turned into literal unhuman things"

What DaCosta calls the "heart" of the story is the strand following Kelson and Samson. "I remember reading the script for the first time and my jaw just dropping a couple of times...

"I just thought, how exciting to read something so different and unexpected, but also how cool to have this character and engage in something that I like to think about a lot, which is humanity and knowing oneself, and this line between nature and nurture and all of these things. It was just really exciting for me to dig into that character and that relationship.

"What we work [through] with Samson, is the monsters are also humans, and that's kind of the thing," she explains. "The monsters have a virus, they're infected. But the whole conceit is not that they've been turned into literal unhuman things.

"They are human beings who are accessing a part of humanity that we all have. So I find that really interesting. Then to have humans who are not infected, engaging in that sort of brutality is, I think, really interesting. I definitely love the dichotomy of that, and it's kind of why I like horror overall."

SET SECRETS

Gareth Pugh and Carson McColl of creative studio HARD + SHINY share some behind the scenes facts of building The Bone Temple

McColl: When we built in Redmyre – we never knew this until we had selected the location – it's actually also a training ground for military aircraft. Every so often you would be in the middle of the Bone Temple, which looked like this sort of Neolithic prehistoric structure, and overhead would be a fighter jet. It was amazing and every time it happened, it was like a gift.

Pugh: The site's really close to Catterick Garrison, which is a huge military training base up in North Yorkshire. But fun fact, Redmyre Falls is where we built the Bone Temple, and the same river joins to a place called Aysgarth Falls, and Aysgarth Falls is where they filmed Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood* [*Prince Of Thieves*]. If you remember that scene where he first meets the merry men and he has a big fight in the river, it's the same river.

McColl: Because we shot both films back to back, we also had in the back of our minds there was Spike climbing the spire at the end of the first film, but then we really wanted Kelson to climb it during his performance at the end of the second film. We wanted there to be a circle, so we could do that fire circle, so it was trying to pre-load things into that set that you don't necessarily see in the first movie, but then the second movie, to keep it fresh like a series of reveals. It gave us two bites at the cherry.

Pugh: The moment Carson was talking about, with Spike putting Jody Comer's [Isla's] skull on top of the spire – Jody was taken to a 3D scanner place in London and had her head scanned, and all of the muscle tissue was redacted from the scan. So that skull is basically Jody's skull!



Infected Alpha Samson goes on a whole new journey.



Cult leader Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal plans their attack.

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Fisherma

SUPERNATURAL SERIES Widow's Bay BRINGS HORROR CHILLS WITH A COMEDY TWIST

HORROR MEETS HUMOUR in Apple TV's upcoming drama *Widow's Bay*. "It's *Children Of The Corn* meets *The Goonies*," chuckles Welsh actor Matthew Rhys, trying to describe the show. "I'd never read anything like it. I'm a child of the '80s and I grew up with movies like *The Wicker Man* and *Jaws* – and this has everything I'd always thought I would never get to do. When I heard it was this mash-up, I knew I had to do it."

Widow's Bay is a 10-episode supernatural series set in a kooky island town. A three-hour ferry ride from the coast of New England, USA, takes you directly to the once-bustling harbour. It's a rustic setting that feels similar to Amity Island in *Jaws*, but with more of a sinister and spooky undercurrent. Superstitious locals believe their island is cursed, but Mayor Tom Loftis (Rhys) is trying to revive the community and bring the tourists back.

"It's a cosy, idyllic town – but something lurks underneath the surface," explains the show's creator and showrunner Katie Dippold. Cue some blood-curdling horror and supernatural scares with an eerie sea shanty twist.

"I was an anxious kid," admits Dippold, speaking about the inspiration behind the series. "I always looked forward to going to the boardwalk every summer in Long Branch, New Jersey. It had this terrifying haunted house and I was way too young for it, but this was the '80s. This was before regulation, so they would hunt you down in this place and scare you.

"I'd make my way through [the haunted house] and we'd scream and we'd laugh and we'd scream and we'd laugh again – and it was all strangely cathartic. That moment where terror turns into laughter is a feeling I've been trying to recapture ever since."

FUNNY PECULIAR

Jaws and Stephen King are just a couple of the horror inspirations Dippold cites for the supernatural story. "We always talked about the show being like a big stew," she says. "We talked about what different things could belong in it. [Donald Glover's TV show] *Atlanta* was also another huge inspiration for me because it just did something I hadn't seen before in half-hour television. That's why I forced [*Atlanta* director] Hiro Murai at gunpoint to do this."



Matthew Rhys (Tom, left) with Stephen Root.



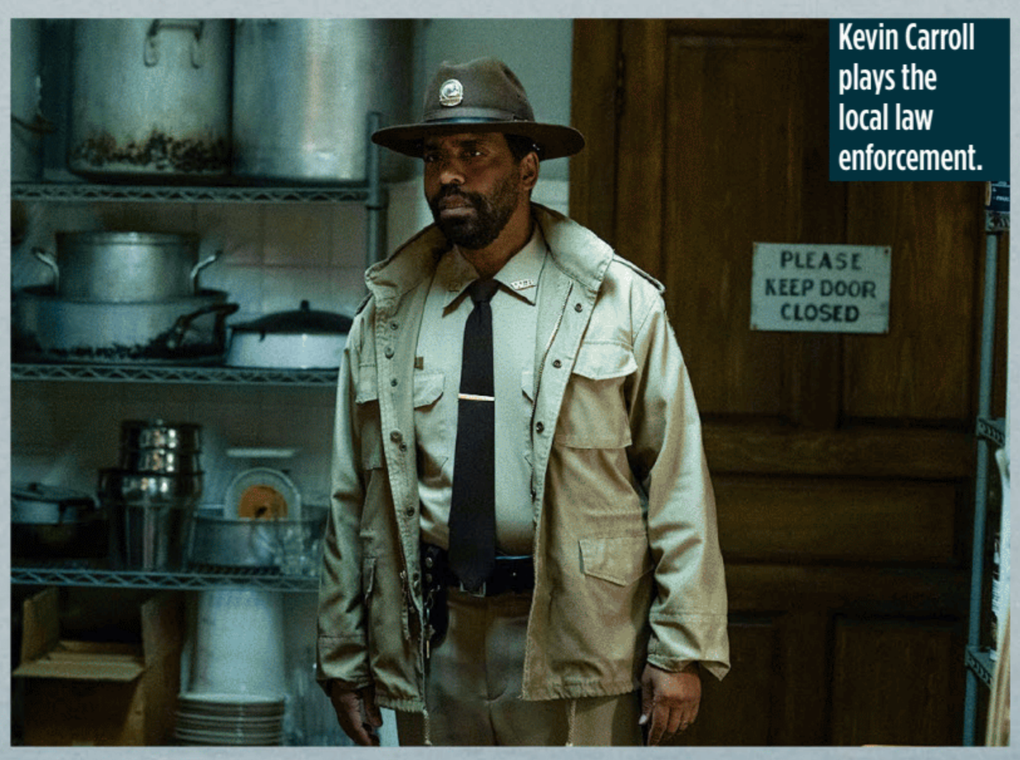
Kate O'Flynn is another Brit starring in the series.







The finest technology the island has to offer...



Kevin Carroll plays the local law enforcement.

WIDOW'S BAY

Executive producer/director Murai is a Japanese filmmaker best-known for his directorial work on shows including *Atlanta*, *Barry* and the short-lived dystopian drama *Station Eleven*. "I've never read a script that has so much hard comedy and truly scary, terrifying horror while trying to be honest about the emotional lives of these characters," he explains.

How does this mash-up manifest in *Widow's Bay*? "The tone of the show is interesting," admits Dippold. "It's a comedy horror, but it was very important for us to take it all very seriously. We wanted people to act like they would in these very tense and terrifying situations – and then, if you know the characters well enough, all the humour comes from character. That's the tightrope we walk in the show."

"There would be moments in the writers' room where we would be excited about a joke, but it would take you too far out of it," the creator continues. "That was something we're always trying to balance. On every step of the way, we were constantly trying to find the tone and not stray off the path."

"It felt like we're just hanging on to two sled dogs at the same time," adds Murai. "The game became really fun. Some of these situations are truly absurd and heightened, but it became a show where we go, 'Okay, how would these characters actually respond?' A lot of the humour and horror comes out of that."

THE OLD WAYS

The look of the show is another melting of styles, with it feeling modern and also having an evocative, old-school vibe. "A lot of the look comes from what Katie said about her experience of the haunted house in Jersey," explains Murai. "There's something inherently nostalgic about the show. It feels like your memory of seeing a scary '80s movie in some ways – but it's inherently a little uncanny and strange to revisit your memory."

Talking about the quaint island setting of Widow's Bay, Murai concludes: "It's a little removed from civilisation, so everything's a bit anachronistic. Their technology is old and there's something about it that feels removed from our time – but we wanted to make it as real, tangible and lived-in as possible. You can feel the sea breeze and see the patina on the woodshed. All that stuff needed to feel really grounded." We're ready to dive in... ●

Widow's Bay is on Apple TV from 29 April.

PICTURES: APPLE STUDIOS. STOCK IMAGE: MICHAEL DUVAGETTY.

n's Fiend

WORDS: ADAM TANSWELL

STAR CITY

BACK TO THE







ІИ USSR

STAR CITY





WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**

A NEW *FOR ALL MANKIND* SPIN-OFF IS ABOUT TO PEEK BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN. AS CO-CREATORS BEN NEDIVI AND MATT WOLPERT EXPLAIN, THE SOVIET UNION-SET STAR CITY WILL TAKE A VERY DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE SPACE RACE





EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT the first humans to walk on the Moon were American. That well-publicised victory in the Space Race was, however, totally against the run of play.

By the time Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin set foot on the lunar surface, the Soviet Union had already notched up the first artificial satellite (Sputnik), the first man in space (Yuri Gagarin), the first woman in space (Valentina Tereshkova) and the first spacewalk (Alexei Leonov). Even the unfortunate first dog in space, Laika, would have answered to "сидеть" rather than "sit".

"People forget this because the Americans won the last stage," laughs *Star City* co-creator and co-showrunner Matt Wolpert. "But the Soviets pretty much beat us every step up to that point."

Apple TV's *For All Mankind* imagines an alternative history where it's the aforementioned Leonov – rather than Armstrong – who plants his nation's flag on the Moon. Over four-and-a-bit seasons (new episodes of the fifth are currently available on Fridays), we've seen how NASA missing out on another spaceflight milestone became the catalyst for lunar bases, orbital hotels and a fully fledged colony on Mars – all by the dawn of the 21st century. Now new spin-off *Star City* is going back to 1969 to see how this reinvented timeline played out from the USSR's perspective.

"Obviously there was a lot of research done into the Soviet space programme when we were working on *For All Mankind*, because so much of that concept started from a place of them and us," says fellow co-creator/showrunner Ben Nedivi. "The more we read and researched it, the more we were fascinated by it.

"One of the challenges of *For All Mankind* was that there was so much already known about the early days of the American space programme, about Apollo – there have been countless movies, TV shows and books about it. But with the Soviet space programme, nobody really knows so much at all, even now. I think the secrecy of it was what made it so intriguing."

SECRET WARS

The Star City of the title is the Moscow-based headquarters of the Soviet space programme, a research and training facility so secretive that most Russians had no idea it even existed.

"It just exploded our minds when we heard that Star City did not appear on maps in the Soviet Union," admits Wolpert. "You had to know the specific route of like, when to turn right, when to turn left to find the front entrance. [The authorities] were actively trying to hide what they were doing, because it gave them power.

"But," he adds, "they were also able to hide their mistakes. That's a big part of why they launched [rockets] from Kazakhstan. It's a terrible place to launch from but it's secret. There's nobody around for hundreds and hundreds of miles, so if a spaceship blows up on the launchpad, nobody knows."

That's crucial, because in the communist USSR of *Star City*, the space programme is powered as much by propaganda as Soyuz rockets. In other words, cosmonauts are generally considered expendable if they can be used to prove the East's supremacy over the decadent West.

"In *For All Mankind*, the conceit was that by losing the Moon, the Americans ended up winning," says Nedivi. "But I think that by winning the race to the Moon, in many ways the Russians have lost, because suddenly the pressure to continue that success is tremendous. That they were afraid of success as much as they were of failure is something we wanted to capture.

"The Soviet space programme was launching ships that were not ready to launch," he continues. "They were taking risks every day with every mission that would be unfathomable to the Americans. There's cosmonauts in *Star City*, like there's astronauts in *For All Mankind*, but what we wanted to show is how different that same role is in a totally different programme, with different pressures and responsibilities. That's not to say one is easier or harder, because the more we wrote these characters, the more we fell in love with them, just as we did on *For All Mankind*."

SPY HARD

Contrasting political ideologies also play a huge part in how the cosmonauts are regarded in comparison to their American counterparts. Indeed, while many of NASA's pioneers become media superstars and chat show darlings in *For All Mankind*, the Soviet Politburo demands superhuman levels of humility from its space pioneers.

"The cosmonauts did go on parades and do tours of the world, but when they came back they had to fit right back into that communist/equality world view," Wolpert explains. "Yuri Gagarin was a touchpoint for us. He had all this acclaim for being the first man in space and met all of these world leaders. Then, when he came back, he did have a hard time – as anyone would



Anna Maxwell Martin as Lyudmilla Raskova.

PICTURES © APPLE TV/SONY PICTURES TELEVISION



PHOTO © KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GETTY

MYSTERY MAN

The real-life inspiration for Rhys Ifans's Chief Designer

It's been previously stated that the 1966 death of Soviet rocket engineer Sergei Korolev is the point where the *For All Mankind* timeline started to diverge from real Earth history; in the show's alternative timeline, his survival is pivotal to Russian progress.

"We've always felt that him living is what allowed the Soviet space programme to thrive," explains Nedivi. "His success rate was incredible, in terms of beating the Americans at every stage. It did feel like, if he were to survive the botched surgery that killed him, the Soviet space programme would continue to thrive."

Korolev is never mentioned by name in *Star City*, but the "Chief Designer" played by Rhys Ifans is definitely based on him. "The anonymity of that role is completely accurate," explains Wolpert. "Up until [his death], no one knew his name and he was known as the 'Chief Designer'.

"There was this fear of what the Americans would do if they knew who he was. Would they try to assassinate him? Would they entice him to defect? It was a way to control the narrative and also control the person. We found in our research that the state was very concerned about no one thinking they were bigger than the state – that was a part of keeping these huge key figures in check."

It's in stark contrast with the celebrity of Wernher von Braun, the Nazi engineer who defected to work for NASA, and was the architect of the Saturn V rocket that carried Apollo to the Moon. "Having to watch your rival get all this acclaim when you've just beaten him, that's got to be a bitter pill," says Wolpert. "So as much as we imagine him understanding the reasons for the secrecy, there's also a human element of wanting recognition for your achievements."



Anastasia (Alice Englert) gets comfy for take-off.



Rhys Ifans plays the mysterious Chief Designer.



Solly McLeod (Sasha) and Adam Nagaitis (Valya).

– of fitting back into that mould of just being a good worker. He died in a plane crash and there are questions about whether it was really an accident, because there were concerns about whether he thought he was bigger than the state. Even if that's not true, all of the cosmonauts in our world are aware of that story, and have to make sure they keep in line."

Ensuring they don't forget who's in charge is Lyudmilla Raskova (Anna Maxwell Martin), a ruthless KGB officer with a brief of making sure that everyone knows their place. She's a reminder that *Star City* is more than a *For All Mankind: Moscow*, a *CSI*-style spin-off that simply transfers a familiar formula to a new location; this is as much a Cold War spy thriller as a Space Race period piece.

"We really loved the idea of taking what was cool about *For All Mankind* and meshing it with spy thrillers and this more paranoid world," says Nedivi. "Two movies that stood out to us were *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *The Lives Of Others*, because I think what they did is they told exciting stories in a way that didn't feel like James Bond – they were subtle, normal and everyday. The space programme was so public that the pressure must have been enormous to make sure that people stay quiet and don't break the rules. That meant the ingredients were there for something very exciting."

> **"In Star City, landing back on Earth is just as dangerous as what you did up there"**

Nothing is private in *Star City*. Rooms full of secretarial staff – including a young Irina Morozova (Agnes O'Casey), who'll go on to become director of the Soviet space agency in *For All Mankind* – listen to behind-closed-doors conversations, meticulously noting down details of leaked flight plans, marital infidelities, and anything that might signify a potential betrayal of the Party.

"What was fascinating to us about Star City is they all live in the same place," says Wolpert. "They all live in that apartment block, so the people listening to your conversations are potentially right next door to you. That was a fascinating element of the everyday tension, where they're all just doing their job, punching their timecard and going back home. It has to seep into every aspect of your life when you don't know if the person getting their mail next to you is somebody that, if you say the wrong thing, is going to report you."

"In *For All Mankind*, the danger is in space," chips in Nedivi. "In *Star City*, landing back on Earth is just as dangerous as what you did up there, in some ways even more so. That made *Star City* a really different kind of show."

One thing that will be familiar to viewers who've been following *For All Mankind* since blast off is the painstakingly reconstructed 1960s, a world of slide rules and approximately 50 shades of beige. Over subsequent years – and via some significant time jumps – the parent show has evolved to become increasingly sci-fi, as technological advancements have outstripped what's possible in the real world. (A sixth and final season was officially greenlit in March.)

But even though the alternative *For All Mankind* timeline has already confirmed that the Soviet Union will exist well into the 21st century, *Star City*'s creators say they're not planning on showing those subsequent decades from the other side of the Iron Curtain.

"Our intention is to stay in this 1970s world of *Star City* and tell a more kind of immediate story than doing the time jumps of the other show," Wolpert reveals. "It was more interesting to us to explore a different type of story, so it didn't feel like it was just matching *For All Mankind*."

Star City is on Apple TV from 29 May. New episodes of For All Mankind's fifth season debut on Fridays.

ROSE OF NEVADA

A TRAWL

MARK JENKIN, THE WRITER/DIRECTOR BEHIND BAIT AND ENYS MEN, IS BACK WITH ANOTHER UNIQUELY HAND-CRAFTED FILM SET IN CORNWALL: ROSE OF NEVADA, THE TALE OF A TIME-TRAVELLING FISHING BOAT

WORDS:
IAN BERRIMAN



TALE

IF YOU'RE AN AFICIONADO OF British cinema, you're bound to be aware of the work of Mark Jenkin. The BAFTA-winning *Bait* (2019) and the fantastically-tinged *Enys Men* (2022) were both set in his native Cornwall, and shot using a wind-up 16mm Bolex camera, capable of filming for a maximum of 27 seconds, without synchronised sound.

The same goes for his third feature. *Rose Of Nevada* centres on the titular fishing boat, which went missing at sea three decades ago, but now inexplicably returns to harbour. Remarkable enough, but when a crew of three – inexperienced deckhands Nick (George MacKay) and Liam (Callum Turner), and weather-beaten skipper Murgey (Francis Magee) – take her out, they find themselves travelling back in time to 1993.

Jenkin tells *SFX* his starting point was the scene of the boat's return. When the first Covid lockdown shut down work on *Enys Men*, he further developed the idea with his partner, actor Mary Woodvine. "Me and Mary just lay in bed one night, and I pitched her the opening scene, then she pitched me another, and it went back and forward until we had a story. It was quite hollow – just this setup. But there was enough of a hook in the idea of a time travel movie that I pursued the story long enough to realise there was some substance to it."

Jenkin didn't initially intend to make the film himself. "Originally I was thinking I'd write this script and sell it – without thinking about my logistical constraints. The first draft was a huge world of loads of characters. It was a much bigger fishing boat with a much bigger crew, and everybody had their own story. But it felt like I was writing a four-part Netflix series, which freaked me out! Once I'd realised that it was saying something, I realised this is a film I'd want to direct. I then stripped it all back."

SFX readers may be amused to learn what Jenkin's principal research resource was. "To get my head around the idea of quantum physics and the ramifications of travelling through time, the first thing I did was buy the complete box set of *Quantum Leap*," he reveals. "That was my research above anything – not even *Quantum Physics For Beginners*, *Quantum Leap*! Obviously, it's got a bit of *Back To The Future* in it, and a bit of *Quantum Leap*, which were both big things for me growing up." →



In the past, the harbour is bustling with activity.



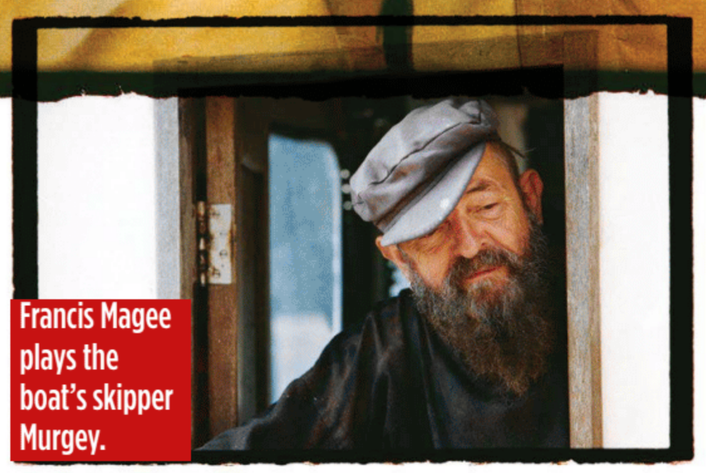
Liam (Callum Turner) and Nick (George MacKay).

Nick, who's desperate to return to his wife and child, is bewildered when the deckhands are treated by villagers as if they're two of the men lost at sea. Liam, however, is quite content to have obtained a loving family by "leaping" (as Sam Beckett would put it) into someone else's life. As events progress, *Rose Of Nevada* becomes a story of community and sacrifice.

There's a dash of politics in the mix, implicit in the way the time frames are distinguished. In 1993, the village has a bustling pub and a post office. In the modern day, the former's deserted and the latter has closed, replaced by a food bank. "Inevitably if I'm trying to create authentic worlds you do tap into something a little sociopolitical, without meaning to," Jenkin says. "If it'd just been set in the present I don't think it'd be commented upon, because that's the wallpaper of our life. But once you jump back in time 30 years, and the food bank magically turns back into a post office, it becomes much more powerful, because you realise what you've lost."

The notion of a non-linear conception of time – also central to *Enys Men* – is becoming a running theme in Jenkin's work. Why does that hold such fascination? "I've really got no idea where that comes from," he confesses, before musing that in a sense it's inherent to the medium. "All films, really, are ghost films. Even if you're playing back an image 30 seconds after you've shot it, you're watching a moment that doesn't exist anymore. It's a ghost image of reality. I think I've fallen into having to exploit that part of filmmaking because of the way I've ended up working, not having much coverage. I don't have many options of cutting together in a conventional way. I'm having to jump around, and by accident it's fallen into this formal language.

"I'm very interested in the way film, especially the way we edit, can replicate the non-linear way our consciousness works," he adds. "There's something comforting in the way that you can cut around in time and space with film language, in a way that replicates the way that certainly *my* brain works."



Francis Magee plays the boat's skipper Murgey.



Actor Rosalind Eleazar with Mark Jenkin and his Bolex.

ROCK THE BOAT

This was, by Jenkin's standards, a big production. "At times we had 120 people. That was because for two weeks of the shoot we

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The boat's moniker explained

Rose Of Nevada is an evocative title. But why is a Cornish fishing boat named after a landlocked US state? "There was an old sailing boat that came into Mousehole, our local harbour, called the Rose of Argyle," Jenkin explains. "I liked the sound of that. It's also named after Nevada City in California, which was a gold rush town. Cornish miners set up [Wisconsin town] Mineral Point. When gold was discovered in northern California, overnight they upped and left and ended up in Nevada City. That's a key Cornish-American mining town. So my idea was that a lot of the Cornish émigrés, when they came back, brought names with them. And maybe Rose was an unrequited Californian love.

"Also there's a Cornish folk song [heard in the film] called 'The White Rose'. So, Rose of Nevada: 'Nevada' meaning [in Spanish] snow, the snow rose, the white rose. There's a whole world there, but pretty convoluted and just invented to justify the name really!"





Mary Woodvine plays a lost fisherman's mother.



The storm sequence was shot in Hayle harbour.



The pub is a lively place in the past, quiet in the present.

A BIG DEAL

New FADS, old song

One way the film establishes the time period shift should delight viewers who – like Jenkin, and this writer – listened to John Peel in the early '90s: "Big", a track by Mancunian band New Fast Automatic Daffodils, is blaring out of the pub jukebox. Jenkin initially reached out to a band member on Twitter, but found they didn't own the publishing. "However, they had a demo that they did own. So we did a deal away from the record label to license it. Once we EQ-ed it so it sounded like it's coming out of the jukebox, it's indistinguishable from the album version.

"I didn't want something obvious," he adds. "To start with I was thinking of "Unbelievable" by EMF, which is not very subtle! I thought I'd do something more obscure, that to everybody sounds like that sort of music from that era, but is a bit of a treat for people like me and you, for whom that was our formative music years."

were working in a studio – we built a studio in an old warehouse, and built the boat within it.

"We made sure it was small so that it felt claustrophobic below deck. We had [removable] flying walls, but the rule was that the camera lens was never outside the set. It was built on a gimbal as well, so it rocked. It took eight people to manually rock."

Everything above deck, however, was shot on a real boat – including a sequence where the Rose Of Nevada is lashed in a storm. "That was shot in the inner harbour at Hayle harbour, where the boat is moored," Jenkin explains. "We built a temporary water tank, and had dump tanks, wavemakers and rain machines."

Besides being able to travel in time, the Rose Of Nevada has something else in common with the TARDIS: it's bigger on the inside! "That actual boat has no space below deck," Jenkin points out – nowhere Nick and Liam could load up their catch. "It's got an engine room, and a tiny little bunk room underneath the console. If you try to fit what we show below deck on that boat, you'd have a very funny-shaped boat! And the big mystery of that boat, if you look closely, is where's the engine? Because we didn't account for that on the set. We decided, 'Let's ignore the fact there's no engine room. We'll just have the fish hold, and the galley and berth [sleeping area]."

Beyond the expanded art department, and use of a water tank, fundamentally nothing changed, however. "It was still very much me wandering around carrying this little clockwork camera," says Jenkin. "We didn't want to throw out the working practices that make the work so distinct just to have more resources."

Jenkin's two leads have appeared in multi-million dollar productions: McKay starred in *1917*, while Turner played Theseus Scamander in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies. How did they take to Jenkin's way of working? "It took a bit of adjusting, but they came in with their eyes open." he says, "I brought the camera into the rehearsal room, day one, to demystify that. I was nervous – I was thinking, 'I'm going to bring this camera, and it looks a bit like a toy.' I explained how it worked, and I think they were both quite into the immediacy of it.

"It was still very much me wandering around carrying this little clockwork camera"

"What's been really touching is both said how honoured they were to feel so included in what we were doing. I can be perceived as having this very regular company, working at the extremities of the British Isles. And George and Callum both said they felt very welcomed into that family. George's family came down, Callum's partner [Dua Lipa] came down. At weekends we hung out together. They were very involved – not just in the filmmaking, but in the whole way of life down here."

Francis McGee plays the third member of the crew, the laconic Murgey. Jenkin toyed with hiring a real trawler skipper, but once McGee's agent flagged that he worked as a fisherman for eight years prior to becoming an actor, he went to the top of the list. "The only thing different about Francis and how I'd imagined Murgey was that because Callum and George are both 6' 2" or 6'3" I thought, 'They're gonna really struggle below deck', and I thought it'd be great if Murgey was 5' 2" and could walk around with plenty of headroom.

"It worked out well though, because there was a real contrast between the way Francis held himself compared to George and Callum. Francis has this built-in way of being able to walk on a boat. Now I've got a bit of a distance on the film, I look at it and think, 'That guy's so convincing as a skipper.' I think it would've been difficult to act that authenticity if it'd been an actor who'd never lived that life."

What's next for Jenkin? Something of a departure, as it'll see him leaving his home county behind – though there'll be a Cornish connection. "My new film is called *Mineral Point*, and is partly set in that town, which is in southwest Wisconsin." A centre for mining in the 1830s and 1840s, Mineral Point attracted many Cornish immigrants. "The subject matter is very grounded, but it will have a bit of poetic realism within it. It's a road movie, and I'm going to do the route from the East Coast, doing 1,000 miles over to Wisconsin. A lot of it's going to be based on what I research while I'm over there."

Another script is also in the works. "I'm writing something at the moment with a couple of writers in the States," Jenkin reveals. "We were trying to work out whether we were writing a ghost story or a time travel film!" Either way, hopefully we can welcome him to the pages of *SFX* again in the not-too-distant future.

Rose Of Nevada is in cinemas from 24 April.

PHOTOS STEVE TANNER, IAN KINGSNORTH

THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU

MAD ABOUT THE BOY

AS DIN DJARIN AND BABY YODA GET READY FOR THEIR BIGGEST ADVENTURE YET, DIRECTOR JON FAVREAU TELLS *SFX* HOW HE'S BRINGING *THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU* TO THE BIG SCREEN ✦ WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**





THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU





Mando and Grogu blast off in the film's concept art.

LONG TIME AGO in a... okay, definitely this galaxy but undeniably a few years back, *Star Wars* was all about the big screen. We'd had animated shows like *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, of course – and even '80s direct-to-video fare like *Caravan Of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* – but it was easy to silo them as side projects made for kids and/or hardcore fans. George Lucas's sci-fi empire was built around tempting people out to the pictures.

Then, in November 2019, there was a great disturbance in the Force. The headline act of the newly launched Disney+ streaming platform was the story of a loner who dressed like Boba Fett and took a cute alien kid under his beskar-plated wing. Before long, the first ever live-action *Star Wars* TV show was fuelling rather more watercooler chat than *The Rise Of Skywalker*, which crash-landed in multiplexes just a few weeks later.

"We were making the show when the sequels were on the big screen," recalls *The Mandalorian* creator Jon Favreau. "Nobody expected anything of us. We were small screen, shorter schedule, smaller budget, and we had to find a way to make *Star Wars* for a new medium. So to get the opportunity to go to the big screen with these characters is very exciting for me."

Yes, you read that right. The Mandalorian and his little green friend Grogu are following in the footsteps of Kirk and Spock, Mulder and Scully, and Norman Stanley Fletcher from *Porridge* by making a transfer from TV to cinema. Because after three (and a bit) seasons of adventures on the Outer Rim – they also cropped up in a couple of episodes of spinoff series *The Book Of Boba Fett* – the duo have now been given the responsibility of taking *Star Wars* back to the big screen after six years in the theatrical wilderness, during which time the franchise has shifted most of its attention to the small screen.

It seems that no one's more excited at the prospect than the man who helped lay the groundwork for the Marvel Cinematic Universe when he directed *Iron Man*, and was also the perfect age to enjoy the original movie when it debuted in 1977.

"I was patient zero when that blockade runner passed over," admits Favreau, who's multi-tasking on *The Mandalorian And Grogu* as both director and co-writer. "But people who are now the age I was when I saw *Star Wars* for the first time would have been too young to have seen it in a movie theatre before, and I want to make those people feel the way I felt when I first saw *Star Wars*. So how do we make them fall in love with this? Of course, if you're a fan, we're going to be building on existing storylines and characters, but it still has to work if you don't know who anybody is. This movie has to be fun for everybody, just as the first *Star Wars* was.

"But," he adds, "what's good here is that the characters' reach goes way beyond the TV show. *Everybody* knows Baby Yoda."

MANDO AND BOY

That Grogu has now been given title billing alongside the eponymous Mandalorian Din Djarin is no accident. It reflects the fact that this mercenary and his surrogate son are now inseparable, a *Star Wars* double-act that, in theory at least, trips off the tongue like R2-D2 and C-3PO.

Six years on from his debut, it's hard to believe that the Child/Baby Yoda/Grogu (he has gone by all three names) was nowhere to be seen in the TV show's original marketing, as Favreau chose to keep his prize asset under wraps until release. But as soon as the helmeted merc laid eyes on the kid at the end of the first episode, the world was smitten – and a legion of memes and GIFs was born.

"I knew that the reveal was going to be a big deal," Favreau admits. "In the marketing material we had to present the show as though it was just about a bounty hunter, but the idea that it was also about the idea of the lone wolf and cub was something we were very cognisant of. That dynamic is what makes it special and relatable. Everybody says, 'Oh, the kids gravitate towards Baby Yoda.' Yeah, but people my age gravitate towards a character who's a parent. The show's about a really cool dad, which is something those of us who have kids all fancy ourselves as."

Although the little green guy is undoubtedly the most recognisable face in *The Mandalorian*, he's not its only star. Since the show launched, Pedro Pascal has gone stratospheric, evolving from an actor best known for meeting an extremely unpleasant demise in *Game Of Thrones* to an A-list leading man in *The Last Of Us*, *The Fantastic Four: First Steps* and *Gladiator II*. So even though he spends most of his time with his head hidden under a helmet as Din Djarin – and some of the time it's not even him in the armour – that voice is a major weapon in *The Mandalorian*'s arsenal.

"The genre fans already knew he was awesome from *Game Of Thrones* and *Narcos*, but not everybody knew him," says Favreau. "But now he's a bona fide movie star, it's great.



Introducing Rotta, son of Jabba the Hutt.

> **"You really want to pull out all the stops, because people are asking, 'Is this just the TV show?'"**

PICTURES: FRANCOIS DUHAMEL © LUCASFILM LTD.

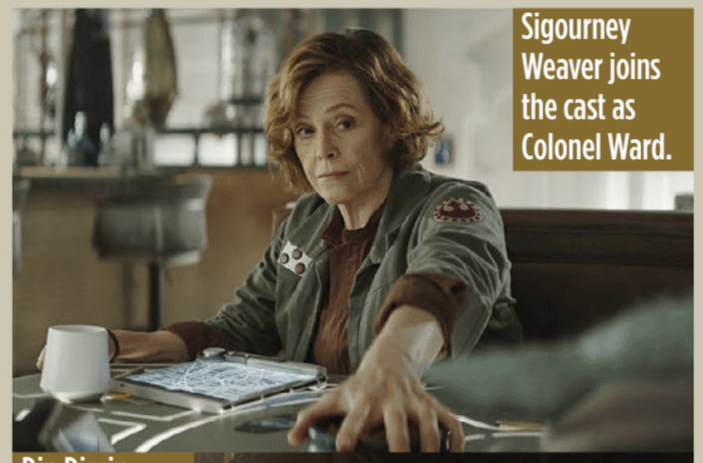
With him and Sigourney Weaver [who plays New Republic officer Colonel Ward], all of a sudden the film feels pretty big."

Maybe Lucasfilm and Disney betting on a TV show to revive Star Wars' big screen fortunes isn't so crazy after all...

THE FOURTH AWAKENS

Last time we saw Mando and Baby Yoda, they'd seemingly found their happily ever after at the end of season three.

Having helped the Mandalorians reclaim their homeworld, they'd settled down in a homestead on Nevarro. With his honour restored after committing the cardinal sin of removing his helmet, Djarin had adopted Grogu and taken him on as his apprentice. He'd also offered his services to the New Republic, helping them hunt down rogue Imperial officers causing a nuisance in the Outer Rim – while he'd still be bounty hunting for money, he had most definitely picked a side.



Sigourney Weaver joins the cast as Colonel Ward.



Din Djarin finds himself in a less than ideal spot.

The original plan was for the duo to come back for a fourth season of *The Mandalorian* on Disney+. Favreau even wrote a whole run of episodes, before the double-whammy of Hollywood's 2023 writers' and actors' strikes prompted a rethink. The big screen was now the preferred destination for *Star Wars*' latest dream team, but when your story is designed as part of an interweaving, MCU-esque tapestry of post-*Return Of The Jedi* TV shows that has also included *The Book Of Boba Fett*, *Ahsoka* and *Skeleton Crew*, relocating your heroes to cinema screens isn't quite as easy as dusting crops.

"You can't just take those scripts and turn them into a movie," Favreau tells us. "There were a lot of characters, it assumed you'd watched the whole show, and it was teeing up what was happening moving into [the second season of] *Ahsoka*. It was about Grand Admiral Thrawn and following the larger storyline [of this era of the *Star Wars* timeline]. →

MARTY SUPREME

How *The Mandalorian And Grogu* enticed Martin Scorsese to another galaxy



As one of George Lucas's "movie brat" mates, Martin Scorsese got to see the original *Star Wars* when it was still in the editing suite. "My first reaction was that it was going to be tapping into this extraordinary revolution in technology, particularly in video games," he later recalled. Now, half a century later, the *Taxi Driver* and *Goodfellas* director is making his outer space debut, voicing a four-armed Ardennian cook in *The Mandalorian And Grogu*.

"As we wrote the character, I always wanted it to be an Ardennian, which was the species of the character [Rio Durant] that I played in *Solo*," recalls Jon Favreau. "I thought the idea of one of them with a food truck was fun, because he cooked in *Solo*. Then we were talking about our dream casting, and we talked about Marty."

Favreau had worked with Scorsese when he acted in *The Wolf Of Wall Street*, but was still nervous about approaching the legendary director.

"I know him, and I'm friendly with him when I see him," Favreau says, "but also I'm a fan, so I get a little tongue-tied, to be honest with you, when I'm around him and his generation of filmmakers that were so influential on me."

No such problem, however, for recently departed Lucasfilm president (and producer) Kathleen Kennedy.

"She knows him well, she socialises with him, and she's like a gold-star producer, so this was an easy one for her. She called him up, he said yes and I got to direct him. He was improvising, and we recorded his whole performance, which we then gave to the CG animators. Boy, it's quite impressive what they were able to do. It's one of the funnest parts of the film. It works well for the story, as a fan of Marty and as a fan of *Star Wars*."



Grogu kicks back with his Anzellan mates.

"This is a completely different medium," he continues, "so I had to start from scratch, essentially. There were certain things I wanted to pursue, like the idea of Grogu being the Mandalorian's apprentice. As long as you understand the archetypes of this hardened warrior with their vulnerable young apprentice, you'll know these characters well, even if you've never seen the show. But there's still a lot of *Star Wars* in there. You're going to see where things are going [in the wider universe], but that doesn't diminish from the experience of watching it as a standalone film."

"Where things are going" is no secret if you've watched *The Force Awakens* and the subsequent sequels. The second Death Star may have been blown up – and the Emperor with it – but the Empire hasn't gone quietly. The dastardly Moff Gideon (Giancarlo Esposito) is now out of the picture, but he was just one of many members of Palpatine's entourage scrapping to overthrow the newly formed New Republic. These Imperial Remnants will eventually rebrand themselves as the First Order, but for now they're hiding in the shadows, waiting to strike.

"Anybody who saw the sequels knows that there's a First Order coming in, like, 20 years from where we are now in the storyline," Favreau points out. "And then *Ahsoka* season two is coming out – which I've seen all of – and that's definitely more dealing with the larger [picture], a higher level. That's about the officers and we're the enlisted men – this is more of a ground-level experience of what's going on. You're seeing the backdrop – which, by the way, is what the first *Star Wars* started off as."

But while we, as an audience, have eavesdropped on meetings of the secretive "Shadow Council" and, of course, watched the sequel trilogy, the nascent New Republic has no idea that the Empire is plotting a headline-worthy comeback. Some, like Outer Rim X-wing pilot/space cop Carson Teva (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee) and Djarin's aforementioned



"One Guinness and a glass of blue milk for the kid."



Jabba's twin cousins make their big-screen debut.



Din Djarin gets to grips with an Imperial AT-RT walker.

“As much as Star Wars is about visuals and locations and vehicles, it’s also about families”

new handler Colonel Ward, are wary of the oncoming storm. Others, however, are remarkably – some might say naively – complacent.

“If you look at the fall of empires, historically, a lot of the power brokers become war lords,” explains Favreau, “and anybody with a standing army had power in the ancient world. We see that repeat itself in history. I guess what the Shadow Council alluded to is that they’re starting to actually connect. It’s not just insulated war lords anymore, and there’s a larger scheme afoot. There’s something going on and Thrawn [the master Imperial strategist who returned at the end of *Ahsoka*’s first season] is sort of the missing link that we began to allude to at the end of season three.”

But that appears to be a story for another day. Indeed, while it’s unclear whether *The Mandalorian*, *Ahsoka* and the rest are still building up to the *Avengers*-style “climactic event” announced back in 2020 – when it comes to *Star Wars* films, always in motion is the future – there are obviously plans afoot for the future of this era of storytelling.

Responsibility, however, now falls to Dave Filoni, the former *Clone Wars* showrunner who’s been Favreau’s right-hand-man on the current slate of *Star Wars* TV shows, and was recently appointed as Lucasfilm’s president and chief creative officer.

“Dave has grabbed the baton now with the *Ahsoka* show, and that’s going to be taking the next step,” says Favreau. “There’s a lot in that man’s head and I know that he takes how it all connects very seriously. Now Dave is in his new position, he’s been figuring out where things are moving forward after this. He’s got a lot of responsibility there.”

WHAT A ROTTA

For all Favreau’s talk about making a *Star Wars* movie for everybody, hardcore fans can rest assured that there’ll still be some more obscure references. Embo, a bit-part bounty hunter from *The Clone Wars*, cropped up in a recent *The Mandalorian And Grogu* trailer, while Jabba the Hutt’s son Rotta, a baby in the original *Clone Wars* movie, is a key character here. The Hutt offspring (voiced by *The Bear*’s Jeremy Allen White) has even been working out in preparation for his close-up.

“Dave Filoni would always joke that I only get to play with the toys that my older siblings don’t want!” Favreau laughs. “So I had an Ugnaught [Kuiil] and the IG-88 [IG-11] in *The Mandalorian*. But I like the deep-cut characters where you can do something with them to make them more dimensionalised and cool. It’s like an untapped resource to me. With Rotta, you start to ask what it’s like to be Jabba’s son? How does that affect a character? I remember it was really cool in *Creed*, when they were asking what it was like to be Apollo Creed’s son, to be in the shadow of such an iconic cultural figure. I think there’s room for exploring what that really means, because at the end of the day, as much as *Star Wars* is about visuals, locations and vehicles, it’s also about relationships and it’s about families.”

But let’s not forget about those visuals, which were one of the main reasons the original *Star Wars* generation fell in love with Lucas’s galaxy far, far away in the first place. We already know that *The Mandalorian And Grogu* will feature X-wings, Imperial Walkers and monsters (original AT-AT/Rancor animator Phil Tippett is on the movie’s payroll), and Favreau says they’ve tried hard to up the scale on the TV show, shooting in IMAX and utilising physical sets – much of the small-screen incarnation was famously filmed on groundbreaking video wall sets.

“That level of spectacle is what I was aspiring to,” says Favreau. “You really want to pull out all the stops, because people *are* asking, ‘Okay, is this just the TV show [on the big screen]?’ Well, there’s only one way to answer that question, and that’s to sit in a movie theatre and watch it. I have to make my case that we made the most of this opportunity.”

In other words, if the Mandalorian and Grogu don’t cut it as movie stars, it won’t be for the want of trying. ●

The Mandalorian And Grogu is in cinemas from 22 May.



STOCK ART: REVEL.STOCKART/GETTY

SPIDER-NOIR

THE DARK WEB

Thwip! Nicolas Cage swings out of the Spider-Verse and into live-action in ***Spider-Noir***

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

SPIDER-NOIR

KING OF THE gumshoe yarn, Raymond Chandler put it best in his 1944 essay, "The Simple Art Of Murder": "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. He is the hero; he is everything."

It's safe to assume Chandler never envisaged a man swinging through those selfsame streets. But why waste precious shoe leather when you can sling a length of webbing from your wrist?

Welcome to the world of *Spider-Noir*, a new live-action series that relocates the Marvel icon to the skyscrapers and shadow-smeared back alleys of New York City in the 1930s. Populated by mobsters, dicks and dames, it's a hard-boiled riff that puts the PI into Spider-Man.

"I'm a big fan of that kind of private detective character that Humphrey Bogart and others made so famous and iconic," says co-showrunner Oren Uziel. "What if you could make a story like an old Bogart movie, but Bogart just happened to be Spider-Man? Whenever you're doing something you love, you want to put your own fresh spin on it, so the idea of how those tropes would play out if that character had those abilities was really intriguing to me."



Hollywood legend Nicolas Cage stars as the Spider.

VARIANT EDITION

This trench-coated, goggle-masked vigilante debuted in print in 2009 as part of the Marvel Noir universe, a splinter line of comics telling tales of Earth-90214. Voiced by Nicolas Cage, the character broke into the mainstream in 2018's dazzling, Oscar-nabbing animated feature *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*, part of a mismatched team of multiversal variants.

While *Spider-Verse* supremos Phil Lord and Christopher Miller serve as executive producers, the TV series stands alone. Yes, Cage is under the fedora, now embodying the two-fisted hero in the flesh, but prepare yourselves for yet another twist of quantum possibility. Animation gave us a brooding, uncompromising Peter Parker, a shadowy figure a long way from Aunt May's wheatcakes and crushes on Mary Jane. The show keeps that essential idea, but switches secret identities to Ben Reilly, a name shared by Parker's clone in the comic books.

So is this a variant of a variant? "I would say yes!" smiles Uziel. "The character in the show is not the same as the character from both the comics and the animated movie.

"A big part of it was I have seen the high-school story of Peter Parker many times. It's been done really well and it's continuing to be done really well. And then Phil and Chris did the Miles Morales version. For me, it was a way to tell our own take. It definitely signals that we're going to do something that hasn't been done before with this character, so you're not as beholden. It frees you to make it a little more your own, and to let you know that it might not be the exact same story you've seen before with Peter Parker.

"Nick Cage is a huge fan of comics and of noir, so this was very appealing to him"

"That was one of the biggest marching orders for myself and Nick [Cage]. It was important to both of us that we were creating a character that was absolutely familiar and is going to do a lot of things that you expect him to do, but his story is different, his origin is different, his reasoning is different. Almost his make-up, right down to the core, is different.

"Nick and I talked a lot about how we can make this feel absolutely respectful to everything that has come before, but in addition, not more of the same."

PICTURES © AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES LLC



Nicolas Cage with EPs Harry Bradbeer and Oren Uziel.



It's all very reminiscent of the likes of *The Big Sleep*.

The series opens some years after Reilly has abandoned his double-life as the Spider. Still haunted by the personal tragedy that brought him to this decision, he ekes out a living as a private eye, investigating cheating spouses while the crime rate surges in his alter ego's absence. As Uziel tells *SFX*, Reilly's seasoned but bruised nature was both a welcome contrast to the eternally boyish Peter Parker and a way of unlocking the show's protagonist.

"I'm not a high-school kid anymore!" he laughs. "I am comfortably middle-aged!

"On a personal level, it's like a version of the story of anybody who starts out young and wide-eyed and optimistic and feeling powerful, thinking that they're the superhero of the story. As you go through life, you kinda get punched in the face a bit, you'll get cut down, you'll encounter difficulties and hardships. It can feel a little like, 'What am I doing here – and is it even worth it?'

"I think for a lot of us the answer is yes, no matter what. We're optimists beneath the cynicism. And that was my way into it. What if you had a character that had all these abilities, but was a little tired of everything that came with it – but underneath they knew they really love it."

It's Cage's first time as a leading man on television. Did he need persuading to take on the role?

"Not really," shares Uziel. "When I sat down and talked it through with him, we got on the same page so completely that he got excited, which only made me more excited.

"He definitely had some trepidation about doing TV. He's really a movie guy, for decades now. So for him, it was important that it felt cinematic, it felt like movie-style storytelling. I think he had heard from friends who had done TV that things can change on a dime. And he's so prepared, he's a huge preparer. He knew all the scripts before we even did the table read. I'm a feature writer at heart, so it was also important to me to have all the scripts in advance. It was a big thing for him – let's not change things too much. Even on the day, when we had to change things for a location reason or something small, I always discussed it with him and got him comfortable.

"He's a huge fan of the superhero genre. He's a huge fan of comics. Then on top of that, he's a huge fan of noir. So I think the opportunity to do all of those things at once and make it his own was very appealing to him." →

THROWING SHADE

Hue do you do?

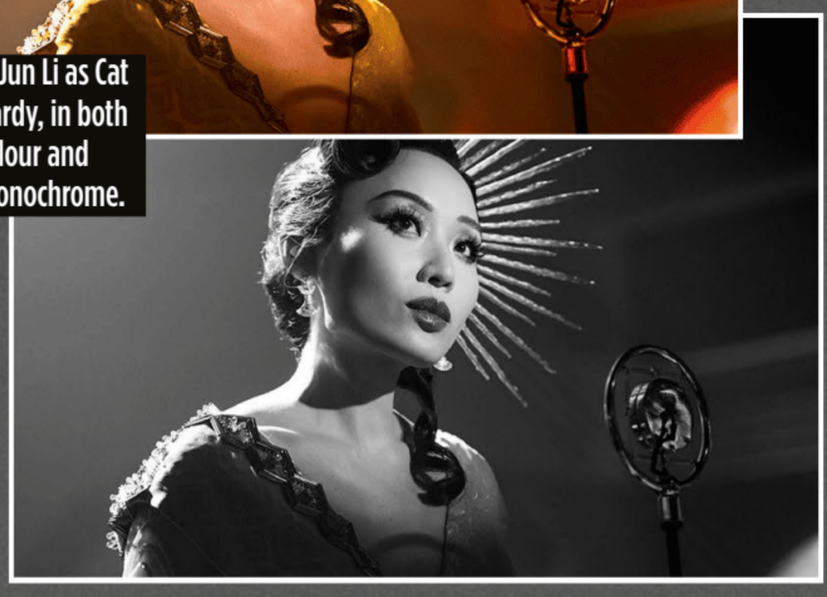
Every episode of *Spider-Noir* offers two distinctly different viewing experiences. If you want the genuine film noir flavour, you can watch in Authentic Black and White. Alternatively, the True-Hue Full Color option brings this monochrome world alive in stylised, saturated shades, closer to the comic page.

"It was definitely a challenge technically to pull off," says Oren Uziel. "It gives you both ways in. If you're a Spider-Man fan, you can see him in this stark shadows, high-contrast world, and it introduces you to a way of looking at things like *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep* or *The Third Man*.

"The same goes if you're a noir fan. For someone who's used to looking at things in that particular palette, let's look at it through the comic book sensibility, let's give it a real burst of colour and energy and see how it feels. And it really does affect the watch. They are two different experiences."

We're all just going to have to watch it twice, aren't we? "Yeah!" laughs Uziel. "It's worth it. The same scene can play very differently. We even found it with the sound design. We played around with using some mono effects to mimic the way things felt in the '30s and '40s, and then we'd bring things more into surround in certain moments. You could get away with more in the colour version, but once you robbed your senses of the colour you needed a little more of the sound or else it felt off. It's interesting how much it affects the viewing."





Li Jun Li as Cat Hardy, in both colour and monochrome.



Cage is known for his idiosyncratic performance choices – and he brings that eminently watchable special sauce to *Spider-Noir*. "I'm so grateful to him and that unique energy," says Uziel. "As a writer, I write a certain way. I have a certain point of view, and I'm so respectful of the classics of the genre that, at times, my instinct would be to be overly respectful, and Nick is always trying to bring something special and unique. I just think it's in his DNA.

"On set, he would often bring things that would push me outside of my comfort zone. Frequently I would get [a take] for 'safety', just so we have it in the edit, so I can see how it cuts together. Almost always I'd end up using the direction Nick took it, just because it was more interesting, it was more challenging to the viewer. He's such an original voice."

PULP FICTION

As its title more than hints, the series is indebted to film noir, a classic style of Hollywood crime drama that favours mood and moral complexity.

"I've devoured them my whole life," says Uziel. "Everything from *The Third Man* to *In A Lonely Place* to *The Night Of The Hunter*, all the way through the neo-noirs like *LA Confidential*, *Chinatown* and *Miller's Crossing*. There's a cynicism to them and a selfishness to some of the characters. *Casablanca* was an influence. There's this world of darkness and shadow and style that influences everything about the show."

Further inspiration came from the cheap, lurid thrills of the great pulp magazines, where the avenging likes of the Shadow and the Black Bat waged war on gangland and other forces of wickedness. There was an actual pulp hero called the Spider, though Uziel notes "we never really talked about that character in making this show". Still, Stan Lee himself claimed the Spider as an influence on Spider-Man, which gives *Spider-Noir* a pleasing sense of coming full circle, however unconsciously.

For Uziel, the pulp school of storytelling possesses one essential ingredient the series needed to capture. "The fun of it. They never took themselves too seriously. So there's fun to be had, even as people are getting killed, people are committing crimes, people are falling in and out of love. There's always a little bit of a wink and a heightened nature to them."

The glory years of the blood-and-thunder pulps were the 1930s, an era that provides a richly eventful backdrop for Ben Reilly's adventures.

"It gives you so much built-in conflict and drama to work with," Uziel tells *SFX*. "The '30s obviously had the Great Depression. Things had really changed for a lot of people after the '20s. Their situation had altered.

"The city was going through extremely hard times, but it was still New York. You had Prohibition [the curtailing of the alcohol trade] at play, which is the tail-end of it, when the laws were still in place but people were breaking them left and right. You also had a city that was dealing with racism and the politics of the time were getting heated. It's fertile ground for a city in crisis, but a city that's very much still alive.

"The world is a dangerous place!"

ROGUES' GALLERY

Reilly's own imminent danger involves Silvermane, a ruthless crime lord who has the city in a chokehold after the Spider's abrupt exit from the justice business. An antagonist transplanted from the comics – the series reskins a number of familiar

STOCK ART: RUSSELL JOHN, PIALHOVIK/GETTY



"The character is not the same as in *Spider-Verse*."



Lamorne Morris stars as Robbie Robertson.

"Nick is always trying to bring something special and unique"

foes, including Flint Marko, aka the Sandman – he's brought to the screen by a pugnacious Brendan Gleeson. It's a failed assassination attempt on this mobster that sets the events of *Spider-Noir* in motion, in all their tangled web-strands.

"Gangsters played a huge part in a lot of those old movies," says Uziel. "And given someone of his stature, it was an opportunity to get an actor like Brendan Gleeson to play the role and bring a level of gravitas and intimidation, but also humanity to the character. He's an actor I've always admired and respected and was sort of in awe of, so to get to work with him was a dream."

Every noir demands a femme fatale, of course. Here, it's nightclub chanteuse Cat Hardy – a nod to Felicia Hardy, Black Cat in the comics – played by *Sinners* star Li Jun Li.

"There's a dimensionality to her, there's a danger to her, there's a survival instinct. You're always wondering whether you can trust her, and you're always wondering what her motivations are. But what was beautiful to me is that over the course of eight episodes, as opposed to a movie, you actually get a little more colour as to who she is, where she comes from, what she's up to. *Casablanca* was an influence here as well. *Casablanca* meets *The Last Seduction*."

For now, *Spider-Noir* is one-and-done. But if the show earns a second season, how does Uziel see this world expanding?

"It's a great question. One thing I love about the genre is that when you have a private detective, all it takes is a knock on the office door and a new client walks in... Whether it's New York or a different setting, I really feel like this is a great jumping-off point to expand your story. And obviously as time passes from 1933 we're heading towards not just trouble in the financial markets in New York, but also a geopolitical struggle that would be an amazing canvas for any future storytelling."

Whatever our own reality holds for Ben Reilly, *Spider-Noir* may be a crucial proof of concept for the future of Sony's *Spider-Man* universe. Until now, the studio's live-action projects have mined the rogues' gallery: Kraven the Hunter, Venom, Morbius. Is it time for multiversal variants of the wall-crawler to claim the spotlight?

"Absolutely," agrees Uziel. "What drew me to it, and what I think presents an opportunity going forward, is that you can take these characters and these variants and put them into a genre. Try to find different ways to make a chocolate and peanut butter combination, where you can take two things that are familiar and put them together; see what the Spider-variants can do with these tropes to make them feel fresh again.

"I'm focused on *Spider-Noir*, but I know there are others in the works. I've talked a bit to the people working on them and I think they are very exciting. They're following a little bit of that same formula [as *Spider-Noir*], that same idea of taking a genre and elevating it by putting a Spider-variant into it.

"It opens up a whole new world, and it's just an extremely exciting opportunity."

Spider-Noir is on Prime Video from 27 May.

Brought To Book

THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW

FONDA LEE

Meet the award-winning novelist battling space-ageism

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Michael Verity

EVERY YEAR STILL BRINGS BOOKS WHERE A farm boy of humble birth heads into the big wide universe to become a hero. But why aren't there more older characters driving stories, especially middle-aged women? "When you go to a convention, you see people of all ages," says Fonda Lee, who was born in 1979, "including a lot of folks who are older and have grown up in the genre for 30 or 40 years."

This ageism came into focus for Lee as she completed her Green Bone Saga fantasy trilogy. Characters in their twenties at the beginning of the series were in their fifties by the final volume. She took "a real satisfaction" in following them through their lives. "They're still very much themselves," she says, "they still have the core personalities they had at a younger age, but their concerns are different."

Writing her latest novel, *The Last Contract Of Isako*, she decided to centre the story on an older character. Her protagonist, 50-something Isako, is a sword-wielding "atier", a samurai-like retainer who serves dubious corporate interests on a desolate planet, yet defines herself via a strong ethical code. "I really wanted it to feel like a place that's deeply unfair, but unfair in a way that felt so codified that people don't really question it," says Lee.

It's a book that draws inspiration from cyberpunk and chanbara cinema, both of which lean heavily on "the trope of the outcast", someone "betrayed by the system". In cyberpunk, this means the lone wolf hacker battling a mega-corporation. In chanbara, a recurring character is the rōnin, a warrior with no master, but who in the past served feudal overlords.

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

It's also a novel that maps the idea of a company town onto the claustrophobic environs of a colony planet undergoing terraforming. "They're kind of naturally dystopian," Lee says, reflecting on her research into settlements associated with mines, plantations and factories. "Oftentimes, these company towns would have their own currency and you could only use the company currency to buy necessary goods from the company store."

Company towns inevitably decline without funding from head office. *The Last Contract Of Isako* projects this idea out into space. One reason Lee explores this question from Isako's perspective is that the character came relatively easily to the novelist. In a former life, Lee was a strategic management consultant who worked 70-hour weeks. "I had a career crisis where I realised, 'Well, I don't really want to keep working in corporate America for the rest of my life,'" she remembers.



BIODATA

From
Calgary, Canada

Greatest Hits
***Jade City* (2017), the first volume in the Green Bone Saga, won the World Fantasy Award and was included on *Time* magazine's list of the best fantasy books of all time.**

Random Fact
Lee has been working with Shannon Lee (no relation), the daughter of Bruce Lee, on YA books inspired by the martial arts star's writings.

What to do instead? She reached back into her childhood in Calgary (where her father worked as an engineer in the oil industry). While there was tension at home and her parents eventually split up, she "always felt very cared for". Her parents were from Taiwan and, with no close family nearby, there was a sense of "us against the world in a way where we had to rely on each other all the time".

A "nerdy kid", Lee's happy place was in books. Looking after her younger brother, for whom she "felt very responsible", she found her first audience. "I was always making up stories using action figures and stuffed animals, and telling these stories to him," she says. It was this sense of responsibility, she explains, that made her choose corporate finance over writing as an initial career.

A PIECE OF THE ACTION

The dream of writing a novel never faded, however, and came back into focus when she discovered YA fiction. This was an area where writers were leading the charge in terms of "diversifying" away from "traditional fantasy". The genre had changed – developments that drew her in. From her perspective as a reader, YA was fast-paced, the novels were short and they fitted with her schedule. Her 2015 debut, *Zeroboxer*, was an SF story about a martial artist.

Librarians liked her books, Lee says, because of their action scenes. "They could hand them to reluctant readers, especially teenage boys, who didn't particularly like to read all that much. And they could say, 'Here's a book about fighting in space,' and they then might give it a chance."

In the meantime, a more ambitious idea was gestating as she worked on *Jade City*, the first Green Bone book. "My conception of [the trilogy] from the start was that it was a family saga," she says of a novel that draws heavily on martial arts and gangster tropes. She was on her way to becoming a writer who was "character-focused".

The success of the series kicked her career to another level. But writing can still be a struggle. Parts of *Isako* were written during the pandemic. She found herself simultaneously inhabiting "a fictional dystopian world" that felt real and "a real dystopian world". At different points in this process, she also totally restructured the book, moved from the Pacific Northwest to Boston, and found the time for a "zombie movie binge".

Still, Lee adds, there's much to be said for "leaning into the darkness". It helps us to process trauma and distress, a recurring theme in Isako. "There's a sort of reassurance, mentally and emotionally, from doing that," she says, before smiling. "At least I think there is."

The Last Contract Of Isako is published by Orbit on 5 May.



> “When you go to a convention, you see people of all ages”

ONE SMALL STEP. ONE FATAL MISTAKE.

'An explosive debut novel that's out of this world.'

JANICE HALLETT, bestselling author of *The Appeal*

'A brilliant new addition to the 'don't go to Mars' genre.'

SIMON TOYNE, bestselling author of *Solomon Creed*

'Charlotte Robinson is a story genius!'

NAOMI ALDERMAN, bestselling author of *The Power*



LAUNCHING 23 APRIL

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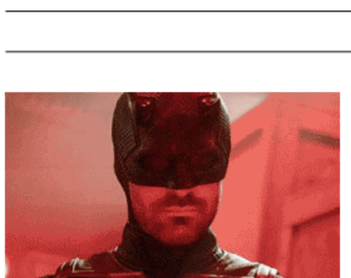

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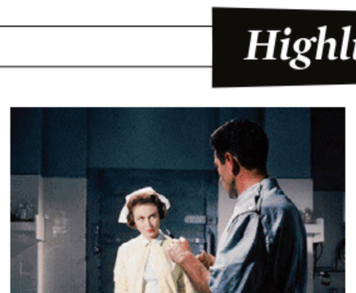

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He hadn't picked the best of places to hide.

OBSESSION

When you wish upon a stick

★★★★☆

RELEASED 15 MAY

18 | 109 minutes

Director **Curry Barker**

Cast **Michael Johnston, Inde Navarrette, Cooper Tomlinson, Megan Lawless, Andy Richter, Haley Fitzgerald**

Low-budget doesn't mean low-impact in this unsettling but darkly funny chiller from filmmaker, actor and YouTuber Curry Barker, who made his name as part of sketch duo That's A Bad Idea with his best friend Cooper Tomlinson, as well as the very creepy horror short "The Chair" (do check that out).

Michael Johnston plays sad-sack music store drone Bear, who has a mad crush on his co-worker Nikki (Inde Navarrette). He's the sort of shy boy who thinks he's a nice guy, so rather than mustering the courage to tell Nikki how he feels when she offers him a clear window of opportunity, he opts to utilise a magical "One Wish Willow" charm to force her to "love him more than anyone else". Inspired by a "The Monkey's Paw"-riffing "Treehouse of Horror" episode of *The Simpsons*, Barker takes a well-used idea and brings an exciting new twist to the story.

We root for Bear at first, but he wants a woman who is crazy in love, but not actually, you know, genuinely crazy. *Obsession* plays with gender politics and incel culture expertly, juxtaposing the ostensible sweetness of a couple in thrall to each other with the understanding that Nikki isn't able to consent to any of this. Bear may be kind and caring, but he's knowingly sleeping with a woman who isn't in charge of her own feelings.

> **"Plays with gender politics and incel culture expertly"**

Obsession was made for less than $1 million, but plays to its budgetary constraints, setting most of the action in Bear's place, the store where he works, and in one wonderful, terrible scene, at the party of his best friend Ian (Cooper Tomlinson). The awful Ian makes Bear look like Prince Charming, though it's their female friend Sarah (Megan Lawless) who adds a dose of reality.

Though this is a story that explores oft-trodden territory, it nevertheless oozes menace, helped by an excellent physical performance from Navarrette, who makes standing in a doorway unbearable, and a reading at a gathering the worst you could ever imagine. Though the cast are made up of unknowns, their chemistry is palpable, and Barker chooses odd angles and lighting that deliberately unnerves.

The director has namechecked *Hereditary* director Ari Aster as an influence, and you can see shades of this in the way that moments are framed in order to force the viewer to search the image for demons in the shadows even where there are none. At the same time, one brilliantly timed, impossible to predict jump-scare comes so out of nowhere that it made audiences in the critics' screening yell out loud. This is deft filmmaking, and very effective grass-roots horror. Barker is already shooting his next feature. We can't wait to see what he does next. **Rosie Fletcher**

i Curry Barker's screenwriter dad wrote Nikki's disturbing monologue so it would sound very different from Curry's voice.



THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE

★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

U | 110 minutes

Director **Ben Gregor**

Cast **Andrew Garfield, Claire Foy, Nicola Coughlan, Nonso Anozie**

There's an alternate fantasy land in which this well-meaning adaptation of Enid Blyton's classic children's novel is a lovely nostalgic throwback to simpler times and purer entertainment. But the reality is duller: much of the sparkle is dimmed from page to screen, and as the three Thompson children discover the magical tree near their new home, there's a distinct lack of excitement, and not enough charm or laughs to make up for the shortfall.

While the trio of kids (Delilah Bennett-Cardy, Billie Gadsdon, Phoenix Laroche) are likeable enough – and share the film's most touching moments with parents Claire Foy and Andrew Garfield – the fantasy characters frequently underdeliver. Nicola Coughlan is likeably spry as fairy Silky, and pairs well with Nonso Anozie's reimagined Moonface, but the Saucepan Man and Mr Watzisname are among the secondary figures that fail to make an impression.

The plotting is also rather episodic, as fantasy realms are explored and hindrances are quickly overcome. Rebecca Ferguson is criminally underused as Dame Snap, her much-needed villainy foiled with a minimum of fuss. In the end, it's hard to imagine many kids wanting to put down their screens for this.

Matt Maytum



You can tell he's a writer because he wears glasses.

HOKUM

A locked room mystery

★★★★☆

RELEASED 1 MAY

15 | 107 minutes

Director **Damian McCarthy**

Cast **Adam Scott, David Wilmot, Florence Ordesh, Peter Coonan**

Ornaments, crawl spaces, clockwork, rabbits... Irish director Damian McCarthy is fast developing his own cinematic language with his third feature, *Hokum*, following on from *Caveat* and *Oddity*.

He has a keen eye for the old and weird, a love of folklore, and a masterful sense of timing for scares, which often involves achingly slow reveals and unbearable tension – though *Hokum* has a few choice jumps thrown in for good measure.

Severance star Adam Scott plays obnoxious American novelist Ohm Bauman, who has ventured to rural Ireland to visit the rustic Billberry Hotel, where his deceased parents had their honeymoon, and to finish his latest book.

> **"This is a very dark tale, but there's space for humour too"**

The honeymoon suite is now forever locked because a witch is trapped in there, we are told, and when friendly hotel worker Fiona (Florence Ordesh) goes missing, Bauman is determined to get that room re-opened to investigate.

The staff are obstructive, but living wild out in the forest is Jerry (David Wilmot), a spiritual man hopped up on his own poitín and home-ground magic mushrooms, who runs on instinct and an open mind, and becomes Bauman's ally.

This is a very dark tale, but there's space for humour too, right up to the terrifying ending. *Initial* ending, we should say; the movie adds an extra beat which is unnecessary and confuses things, but doesn't detract from the impact of *Hokum* as a whole.

Satisfying, unnerving and indelible in its impressions, *Hokum* once again sees McCarthy prove himself a folk horror legend in his own right.

Rosie Fletcher

ℹ The film was shot at West Cork Film Studios, opened in 2023. Jimmy Stewart biopic *Jimmy* recently filmed there too.



THE SUPER MARIO GALAXY MOVIE

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

PG | 98 minutes

Directors **Aaron Horvath, Michael Jelenic**

Cast **Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy, Charlie Day, Jack Black**

Three years on from *The* *Super Mario Bros Movie*, Nintendo's sibling plumbers return for a busily ambitious follow-up outing that takes its cue from their hugely popular 2007 game.

Whisking Chris Pratt's gung-ho Mario and Charlie Day's tremulous Luigi into outer space, the film finds room for a dizzying assortment of characters, planets and cameos while also offering heart-tugging homilies on the value of family. The result is a considerable step up from its fun but flimsy predecessor.

With Bowser (Jack Black) left miniaturised and impotent at the end of the last movie, it's his son Bowser Jr (Benny Safdie) who assumes the villain's mantle. His scheme? To control the universe of course: a plan that demands both the liberation of his father from his Mushroom Kingdom captivity and the powers of a galactic guardian (Brie Larson) with ties to Princess Peach (Anya Taylor-Joy).

With diminutive dinosaur Yoshi (Donald Glover) and *Star Fox* import Fox McCloud (Glen Powell) also along for the ride, there's plenty here to delight devotees. Yet those unsteeped in franchise lore will be tickled too, with one ingenious fight scene inside a gravity-defying casino recalling nothing so much as *Inception*. **Neil Smith**



"This is nothing, mate – I've been to Ikea *twice*."

EXIT 8

Tales From The Loop

★★★★☆

RELEASED 24 APRIL

15 | 95 minutes

Director **Genki Kawamura**

Cast **Kazunari Ninomiya, Yamato Kôchi, Kotone Hanase, Nana Komatsu**

The inherent spookiness of liminal "in-between" places like hotels, subways and train stations is a growing trend in horror, especially thanks to online phenomena like *Backrooms*. This Japanese movie explores such territory, taking a creepy 2023 videogame and turning it into an inventive cinematic nightmare.

The story follows an unnamed man (Kazunari Ninomiya) travelling on the Tokyo Metro, who's on his way to make a potentially life-altering decision. Suddenly, he finds himself trapped in a deserted, endlessly looping Metro corridor. Confronted by bizarre anomalies, his only way out is to find the signposted Exit 8, but as reality continues to fracture around him, escape seems to be impossible...

Sharing a lineage with 1997's *Cube* in the way it makes the most of a single set, this is a slow-burning but brilliantly unsettling movie that uses slick direction and nerve-jangling sound design to build an oppressive, claustrophobic atmosphere.

There's also a heavy dose of *The Twilight Zone* in its elusive, surreal structure, and the way the escalating scares are used to explore the main character's psychology. It's a haunting, dreamlike chiller that will stick with you long after the credits roll.

Saxon Bullock

i The endless corridor was actually two identical sets, which the crew referred to as Hitchcock and Kubrick.

THEY WILL KILL YOU

Hotel Hell

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 94 minutes

Director **Kirill Sokolov**

Cast **Zazie Beetz, Myha'la, Patricia Arquette, Tom Felton**

This super-violent body-horror should please gorehounds and videogame fans alike.

Joker/Deadpool 2's Zazie Beetz plays Asia, who crashes into the Virgil hotel on the look out for her kidnapped little sister (*Industry* star Myha'la). What starts as a home invasion movie moves on to being a slasher, and before you know it you are in David Cronenberg territory.

The upstairs inhabitants of the hotel, including characters played by Patricia Arquette, Tom Felton and Heather Graham, are part of a devilish cabal; the downstairs workers are largely women of colour who hope to be able to find favour with their wealthy overlords and progress to the upper levels themselves. There's an "eat the rich" and race conversation here, but a Jordan Peele movie this is not.

The set up is unfortunately very similar to that of the superior *Ready Or Not 2: Here I Come*, but lacks that film's joyful ingenuity and lightness of touch. However, that doesn't take away from *They Will Kill You*'s brash, forceful energy. Russian director Kirill Sokolov, who previously brought us the 2019 comedy thriller *Why Don't You Just Die?*, pointedly sets his tale on many storeys of the Virgil; we track the levels of ex-con and experienced fighter Asia as she attempts to defeat an elite clique who can't be killed, right up until the final boss.

"Fight scenes are exceptional, with limbs all over the place"



"Psst. PSST. Housekeeping. Is now a good time?"

Fight scenes are exceptional, with limbs all over the place, and there are some very funny body horror moments. Ultimately, however, *They Will Kill You* is somewhat incoherent, full of ideas but with a dearth of logic, and lacking in heart. Dare we say it, it's also a little bit boring...

It should play well with crowds, and has some outrageous set-pieces, but punch up after punch up becomes tiresome after a time. A fun but forgettable journey. **Rosie Fletcher**

i Kirill Sokolov intends his next project to be "a sci-fi thriller with a strong John Carpenter vibe", which he's written.

Reviews



ROSE OF NEVADA

All at sea

★★★★☆

RELEASED 24 APRIL

15 | 114 minutes

Director **Mark Jenkin**

Cast **George MacKay, Callum Turner, Rosalind Eleazar, Francis Magee**

Surely sci-fi 's most grounded take on time travel, Mark Jenkin's latest Cornish tale has all the artisanal delights of his first two.

Like the enigmatic *Enys Men*, it's a story where time is out of joint – though here, in ways much easier to articulate. After the titular fishing boat – lost with all hands 30 years ago – reappears, the brassic Nick (George MacKay) and Liam (Callum Turner) agree to earn a few bob as deckhands.

On landing their catch, they're bemused to find it's 1993, with the locals treating them as the original crew. Nick theorises that if they go out again, they'll return to harbour in the correct year, but time and again his hopes are dashed.

Shot in Jenkin's trademark style, using a 16mm Bolex camera with all the sound added later, *Rose Of Nevada* is every bit as visually ravishing as its predecessors. The limitations of the equipment practically force the director to capture vivid details (raindrops on a souwester, veins bulging on a clenched fist). Jenkin has a keen eye for textures (flaking paint, bark and rust), and the colours really pop. Add some unusually foregrounded foley (a creaking deck, a rumbling net winch) and you have a feast for the senses.

Performances are solid. MacKay's angular features faintly recall the late Murray Melvin; Francis Magee steals the show as Murgey, the skipper with a nice line in catchphrases ("'Ead to arsehole!"; "Home to mother!").

However, it feels like there's one fishing trip too many. And the central theme of sacrifice doesn't land as well as it might. The story came together during lockdown: Jenkin has said he was inspired by seeing a community come together when faced with a common threat. But for Nick to plug the gap left by another man's death, he must leave behind his wife and child. Your natural inclination is to root for the protagonist to be reunited with his loved ones, not become resigned to his fate. **Ian Berriman**

i Jenkin's stepson pops up at one point: look out for a lad in a t-shirt famously worn by The Stone Roses' Ian Brown.

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DAREDEVIL: BORN AGAIN Season Two

Having a mare with the mayor

★★★★½

- UK/US **Disney+, streaming now**
- Showrunner **Dario Scardapane**
- Cast **Charlie Cox, Deborah Ann Woll, Vincent D'Onofrio, Genneya Walton**

EPISODES 2.01-2.08 **After the** production nightmares of *Daredevil: Born Again* season one (shoot half a series, stop, rethink, bring in new showrunner to slice-and-dice the existing footage and combine it with new material), season two couldn't help but feel more coherent. But considering that replacement showrunner Dario Scardapane managed to make anything halfway decent out of last season given all those hurdles, you might expect that left to his own devices he'd produce a masterpiece.

He nearly does. You just have to put up with a little saggy mid-season stodge, which at least feels like a nostalgic nod to those old Netflix Marvel series.

Kingpin/Wilson Fisk is mayor of New York. In true Trumpian style he's manipulating the media to circulate the message he wants out there – that he's made New York great again – all the while keeping his criminal activities ticking away in the background. That includes arms smuggling through the port of New York, a situation the CIA is happy to take advantage of. Meanwhile, Fisk's own ICE-style boot boys are using brutal methods to expose masked vigilantes, so Matt Murdock and Karen Page are in hiding, plotting to expose Fisk.

But every small victory they win, Fisk spins to his own advantage in the press. It's a fraught situation which Karen can only see ending with Fisk's death, but Matt still believes in the law as much as his fists.

The season starts in grand form, with some great, gritty action sequences, Daredevil in his dark costume (emblazoned with the DD logo for the first time in the MCU) flinging his billy club around like billy-o. The political parallels to the real world are cleverly nuanced, and the range of motivations for the various levels of scum on team Fisk (from prejudice to ambition to just plain enjoying their job) make for a range of interesting villains.

But even at a relatively short eight episodes, the season hits a languid patch midway. The plot starts meandering, there's a little too much navel-gazing (why have one set of flashbacks in an episode when you can have two?), and it starts to feel like a watered-down version of *The Penguin*.

Don't panic! Because the quality takes a huge leap back up in the last three episodes – and not just because Jessica Jones finally turns up, though she is all kinds of fun. All the plotlines come together for a blockbuster finale and a fateful decision by Matt that changes everything in a tense, shocking, twisty-turny courtroom battle (both verbal and physical). It will leave you desperate for more.

Dave Golder



Alliteration abounds: Charlie Cox as Matt Murdock.

i For the brutal boxing match, Vincent D'Onofrio had to fight wearing a fat suit to look suitably Kingpin-y.



MY BROTHER THE MINOTAUR Season One

★★★½

- UK/US **Apple TV, streaming from 24 April**
- Creator **Donal Mangan**
- Cast **Ely Solan, T'Nia Miller, Brian Cox, Michael Sheen**

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 **Hitting** puberty and sprouting hair in new places isn't an issue for Lorcan McCready in this new animated series. As a minotaur, he's been hairy all over since birth. But where did he come from? And why was he adopted by a normal human family on a remote island? (Possibly somewhere near Ireland judging by the local Celtic folklore and accents, but possibly not, judging by the use of cents as currency and houses with elevated verandas...)

When the full moon starts making Lorcan go weird and raging, his friends and brother, Charlie, go on a quest to discover Lorcan's origins. It's a quest that opens doors which many of the islanders have been struggling to keep closed for a long time.

Tonally and story-wise, *My Brother The Minotaur* feels very similar to Netflix's *Trollhunters*, with a similarly starry voice cast. Visually, though, it's very different, with a charmingly naive 2D animation style, even if all the adults have noses that make them look like old soaks.

It's funny, action-packed, full of plot, and boasts Paul Kaye voicing an odious hotel owner, so there's a lot to like. What it lacks is originality – there's little here that han't been seen before in dozens of other children's fantasies. **Dave Golder**

MONARCH: LEGACY OF MONSTERS Season Two

Mishmash Of The Titans

★★★☆☆

UK/US **Apple TV, streaming on Fridays**

Showrunner **Chris Black**

Cast **Anna Sawai, Kiersey Clemons, Kurt Russell, Wyatt Russell**

EPISODES 2.01-2.10 ***Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters*** is something of an outlier on Apple TV's impressive sci-fi slate. While the likes of *Severance*, *Silo* and *Pluribus* can all be described as prestige television, the Monsterverse spin-off is an unashamed piece of multimedia brand extension. And for all its blockbuster-level visuals – this kaiju show really does look spectacular – *Monarch* feels like an experiment to see what would happen if the people making a network TV series from the '00s were given a massive budget to play with.

One criticism of the first season has, at least, been remedied. Back then the Titans were too often conspicuous by their absence, but now you can't move for creatures of unusual size. A freaky addition to the menagerie, Titan X, delivers large-scale carnage, while franchise superstars Godzilla and Kong both make extended cameos – if you're into kaiju carnage, you'll find plenty to enjoy here.

"If you're into kaiju carnage, you'll find plenty to enjoy here"



The show's called *Monarch* – and there's only one King.

The show remains, however, an awkward chimera of soap opera histrionics and increasingly convoluted mythology. This dragged-out, over-serious season gets bogged down in the extended family dramas of Monarch founders Keiko (Mari Yamamoto) and Bill (Anders Holm) Randa and their descendants – if it wasn't for the presence of all-action military guy Lee Shaw (played, at different ages, by Kurt and Wyatt Russell), you'd forget the fate of the world was at stake. It also fails to make the most of subplots about time travel and remote-controlled monsters as it strains to fit in with movie canon. Hopefully Amazon's upcoming *Pacific Rim* series will be a lot more fun. **Richard Edwards**

i Coming soon, from Titan Books: *The Monarch Files* (30 June), an in-universe guide to the organisation and the Titans.

SOMETHING VERY BAD IS GOING TO HAPPEN Season One

A Very Wrong Engagement

★★★½☆

UK/US **Netflix, streaming now**

Showrunner **Haley Z Boston**

Cast **Camila Morrone, Adam DiMarco, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Ted Levine**

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Netflix's latest** prestige horror series boasts the Duffer Brothers as executive producers. And sure enough, the world of bride-to-be Rachel (Camila Morrone) turns upside down when she and her fiancé, Nicky (Adam DiMarco), reach his family's cabin in the woods.

In fact, things get weird before they arrive at the cabin (which is closer in size to the Overlook Hotel than Sam Raimi's idea of an isolated shack). The first episode maps out a night-time road trip involving oddball locals, deserted bars and an abandoned baby, and the dread only intensifies when the destination heaves into sight, with Nicky's family forming an ominously weird welcome party. Well, Jennifer Jason Leigh is the matriarch and she's married to Ted Levine, so what did you expect?

Consisting of eight episodes counting down the five days to the wedding, *Something Very Bad Is Going To Happen* is too drawn-out and works in a surplus of tropes as it juggles a curse, *Ring*-style detective work, a séance, a mythical monster, enough twiggy pagan signifiers to raise the Blair Witch, and, in sixth episode "Triangle Of Death", an extended found-footage sequence. A lot of this is good, but it *is* a lot. Similarly, the sound design is too consistently amplified and the colours too unremittingly muted.



This hen party sucks. And she isn't wearing her L-plate!

Instead of wondering why no one turns the big light on, perhaps you'd best view *Something Very Bad Is Going To Happen* as a mood piece, or even a physical rendering of Rachel's mindset. Cold feet before the big day? Try ice blocks. If only this show froze viewers' hearts as effectively. **Jamie Graham**

i The number of the "cabin" house is 11376, a nod to the day that *Carrie* was released in the USA (3 November 1976).



Doctor Blood's Coffin – a bit of a mouldy oldie.

HAMMER PRESENTS

Injected With A Poison

RELEASED 4 MAY/4 MAY/20 APRIL 1961/1961/1971 | 15/PG/15 | Blu-ray

Directors **Sidney J Furie, Viktors Ritelis**

Cast **Kieron Moore, Hazel Court, John McCarthy, Susan Travers, Yvonne Mitchell, Michael Gough**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Hammer's imprint** showcasing the horror output of their contemporaries brings us three curios this month: a pair of early efforts by Sidney J Furie, later to direct *The Ipcress File*, plus a real hidden gem.

Doctor Blood's Coffin ★★½☆☆ is deceptively titled: yes, there's a medic with that surname, but a coffin is only on view for 20 seconds. Kieron Moore plays the biochemist who returns home to furtively continue the experiments that got him kicked out of Vienna. A Frankenstein type who believes the ends justify the means, he's happy to chloroform "useless" drunks and drifters, then inject them with curare to prove his theory: that you can reanimate the dead by transplanting a heart. Hazel Court is the nurse/love interest whose suspicion grows.

For the time, it's surprisingly graphic – we see hearts removed from live victims. Sadly, until the final stages, in which Dr Blood resurrects the nurse's now mouldy late husband, it's a bit of a trudge. The principal draw is the setting: a Cornish village and the adjacent cliffs and old tin mine – filming took place in Mark Jenkin's neck of the woods, around Zennor.

Shot back to back with it, **The Snake Woman** ★★★½☆ feels a little like the folkloric Japanese ghost tales collected by Lafcadio Hearn. Once again, we're in "dodgy injection" territory, as a herpetologist in 1890 Northumberland decides to fix his wife's mental health by jabbing her with snake venom. Why doesn't she drop dead? No idea. The wife is pregnant, and said treatment results in a cold-blooded child... Twenty years on, she's a much-feared legend, freezing locals with a look, Medusa-style, then turning into a cobra or a viper.

Made in black and white, on cramped soundstage "moors", it's a silly film, but one with much to enjoy, including Elsie Wagstaff's turn as a psychic crone with a "voodoo doll" that looks like the prop man nipped out and bought a Tiny Tears. Sadly, it's missing the one thing you want from a movie titled *The Snake Woman*. The transformations are achieved by cuts, so the closest thing you get to an actress flicking a forked tongue about is a priceless scene where the hero picks up a five-foot-long skin that she's shed. Still, when the film wraps up at 68 minutes, you'd happily watch 20 more.

Crucible Of Horror ★★★★☆ stars Michael Gough as the domineering patriarch of a middle-class family. After he viciously birches his teenage daughter, the mother (Yvonne Mitchell) whispers "Let's kill him" – and when dad goes away for the weekend, the two duly do so. All goes well until – à la *Les Diaboliques* – the body vanishes... then keeps reappearing.

Scripted by Olaf Pooley, who *Doctor Who* fans will know as a monomaniacal scientist in Jon Pertwee's "Inferno", it's a compelling affair. Initially, with its tightly wound dinner table scenes, brimming with waspish remarks, it feels like a Pinter play – a study in simmering passive aggression. The cast are uniformly excellent, and Latvian director Viktors Ritelis, making his sole feature, demonstrates impressive control.

> **"For the time, it's surprisingly graphic"**

It's strikingly edited too, punctuated by knife-jab flash cuts of abuse which underline that dad deserved his fate. A haunting, still topical tale of women imprisoned in a world of misogyny.

⊕ **Extras** Slim, by Hammer's usual standards. All three have new commentaries by pairs of critics: on *Doctor Blood's Coffin* ★★★☆☆, Jonathan Rigby and Kevin Lyons; on *The Snake Woman* ★★★☆☆, Heidi Honeycutt and Sarah Morgan; on *Crucible Of Horror* ★★★½☆, William Fowler and Vic Pratt. All three offer US and UK versions, a trailer, and a gallery. *Crucible* also has an appreciation by the reliably insightful Rigby, author of *English Gothic* (32 minutes). He spends a bit too much time recounting favourite bits, but the film's so quotable, we kind of understand... **Ian Berriman**

ⓘ In the original script, *The Snake Woman* was titled *The Lady Is A Snake*, and was set in Arizona.



HIGHWAY TO HELL

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 20 APRIL

1990 | 15 | Blu-ray

Director **Ate de Jong**

Cast **Patrick Bergin, Adam Storke, Chad Lowe, Kristy Swanson**

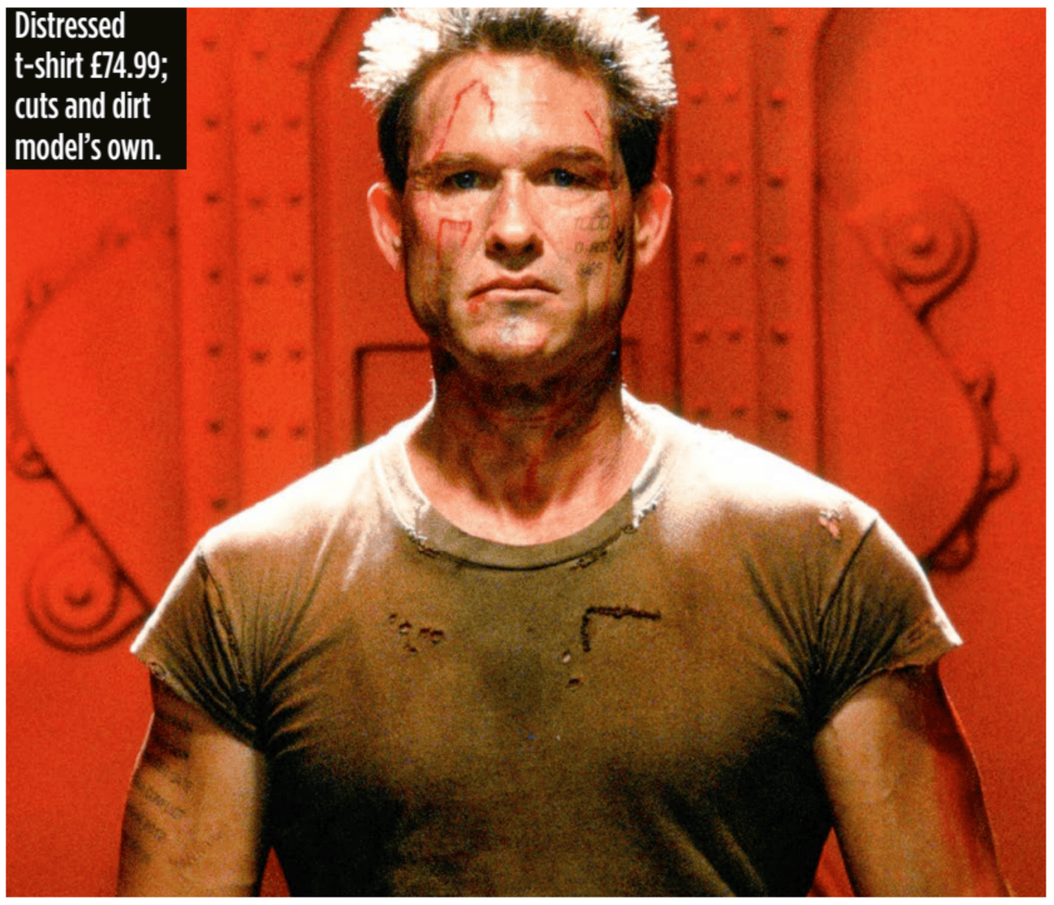
BLU-RAY DEBUT **The myth of** Orpheus and Eurydice gets a goofy makeover in this horror-comedy, penned by Brian Helgeland (later to bag an Oscar for *LA Confidential*).

Chad Lowe (Rob's little bro) plays Charlie, who must venture through a portal to Hell after his girlfriend (movie Buffy Kristy Swanson) is kidnapped by a demonic cop ("To endanger and enslave" reads the motto on his petrol car).

A picaresque affair, it strings together random episodes. The humour is hit and miss, and certain references (like a strip bar named after Jimmy Hoffa) have dated. Still, there are some pleasingly quirky touches, from a saggy-boobed succubus to "Sergeant Bedlam"'s handcuffs, which have literal disembodied hands. Look out for a young Ben Stiller, playing both a cook and Attila the Hun.

Extras This Radiance Films release has one brand new bonus: a commentary by critics Kim Newman and Sean Hogan. It also hoovers up a 2016 yack track by director Ate de Jong, and three archival interviews. CJ Graham (15 minutes), the actor beneath the Hell cop prosthetics, recalls surviving on protein shakes; make-up guy Steven Johnson (11 minutes) talks dust storms and drug abuse; de Jong (25 minutes) discusses how he nearly took his name off the film after his original ending got the chop. Plus: gallery; trailer; booklet.

Ian Berriman



Distressed t-shirt £74.99; cuts and dirt model's own.

SOLDIER

The Kurt Locker

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 27 APRIL

1998 | 18 | 4K

Director **Paul WS Anderson**

Cast **Kurt Russell, Jason Scott Lee, Jason Isaacs, Connie Nielsen**

Paul WS Anderson's follow-up to *Event Horizon* did so badly at the US box office, it went straight to video elsewhere. This sci-fi actioner isn't quite the disaster its fate suggests, but it's nowhere near as memorable as you'd hope from a film with *Blade Runner*-adjacent origins. (David Webb Peoples wrote both films, and references are peppered throughout.)

A pumped-up Kurt Russell was clearly hoping to find himself a *Terminator*/*Rambo*-type franchise playing a soldier hot-housed to become the ultimate killing machine. Sergeant Todd's calling is derailed, however, when his superiors literally leave him on the scrapheap in favour of a new breed of genetically modified warriors.

It's the catalyst for a familiar journey of self-discovery as Todd gradually discovers his humanity among a bunch of peaceful colonists on a landfill world. Alas, he doesn't come close to finding a sense of humour, as this over-serious film wanders towards a predictable (and predictably violent) final act siege.

Extras Beyond the vintage on-set interviews and an archival commentary, don't expect input from the big names.

Instead, Arrow Video dishes up featurettes with supporting player James Black (10 minutes), AD Dennis Maguire (13 minutes), producer Fred Fontana (10 minutes), production designer David L Snyder (14 minutes), and effects supervisors Craig Barron, Van Ling and Michael Joyce (18 minutes).

There's plenty on the movie's long gestation (Sylvester Stallone was targeted to star at one point), and widespread resentment that the film wasn't marketed better. Author Danny Stewart (seven minutes) and film historian Heath Holland (12 minutes) do their best to convince you the film is better than it is. But it's the VFX retrospective (a celebration of the film's miniatures and late-'90s CG) that stands out. **Richard Edwards**

i Flashbacks confirm that Todd fought at the Tannhauser Gate and the Shoulder of Orion – like Roy Batty in *Blade Runner*.



PHASE IV

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 20 APRIL

1974 | 12 | 4K & Blu-ray

Director **Saul Bass**

Cast **Nigel Davenport, Michael Murphy, Lynne Frederick**

Saul Bass's only feature-length credit as director, this eco-chiller anticipates the "nature's revenge" cycle of '70s cinema, but proves distinctly weirder than such creature-led schlock as *The Swarm*.

Closer to the cerebral, procedural vibe of *The Andromeda Strain* or *2001*, it finds a mysterious cosmic event empowering and mobilising the ant population. When a pair of scientists come to the Arizona desert to investigate, they discover the insects have an apocalyptic new agenda...

Given Bass's genius in graphic design it's no surprise that the visuals are striking, conjuring a haunting, often trippy sense of the uncanny. Stunning, real life micro-photography may make the ants here the most genuinely alien lifeform in SF movie history.

Extras Academic Dr Deborah Allison explores the film's allegorical dimension (28 minutes) in a enjoyable critique, making the point that this is essentially a first contact story. Illustrator Graham Humphreys brings an equally perceptive artistic perspective while championing the unsung role of Bass's wife Elaine (27 minutes).

Film historians Nathaniel Thompson and Troy Howarth provide commentary. This 88 Films release also includes the dazzlingly impressionistic original ending (18 minutes), but sadly not the six Bass shorts from the 2020 Blu-ray. Plus: trailer; booklet. **Nick Setchfield**



Ultra-retro sunbathing attire was in that year.

HAMMER HORROR

Egyptian queen and urges, obscene

RELEASED OUT NOW!
1971/1972 | 15/18 | 4K & Blu-ray
Directors **Seth Holt, Peter Sykes**
Cast **Andrew Keir, Valerie Leon, Paul Jones, Patrick Magee**

The latest Hammer Films releases are both B-features which, in different ways, show the studio trying something fresh.

Adapted from 1903 Bram Stoker novel *The Jewel Of Seven Stars*, **Blood From The Mummy's Tomb** ★★★☆☆ has no bandaged baddy: instead, like *Frankenstein Created Woman*, it puts a female spin on one of their templates.

This was a jinxed production: Peter Cushing dropped out after his wife fell ill, while director Seth Holt dropped dead of a heart attack with a week of filming to go. The latter may explain why some sections feel strangely abbreviated.

Valerie Leon plays the daughter of Andrew Keir's egyptologist – the spit of "queen of darkness" Tera, whose perfectly preserved body dad has stowed in the basement. It beats well-thumbed copies of *Mayfair*... Pop may be conflicted about his destined role in Tera's resurrection, but another expedition alumnus has no such qualms: the disdainful Corbeck (James Villiers) makes for a deliciously camp villain.

But the USP is the statuesque Leon, whose physical attributes are exploited to the full; she seems to spend half her screen time sweeping about in nightdresses, cleavage cantilevered up into the audience's eyeballs. To be fair, Leon's own soulful peepers are equally attention-grabbing, but the decision to dub the character's voice makes a final determination on her acting prowess impossible.

Sadly, the plot – a discovery phase, followed by a gathering of stolen relics from other expedition members, who all cop it in the process – is pretty humdrum, and after a protracted buildup the film wraps up with indecent haste.

Demons Of The Mind ★★★☆☆ has the form of Hammer's period gothic, but strikingly different content. Here the threat is aberrant psychology, as the fears of Robert Hardy's Baron Zorn that his blood holds a "heritage of disorder" prove to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In imprisoning his offspring, he's driven them towards the incestuous desire and insanity he's so eager to prevent.

It's a film of morbid eroticism and grandiloquent expression, whose key mystery concerns who's strangling village girls. With so many loopy characters, including Patrick Magee's quack and Michael Hordern's cuckoo priest, there's plenty of candidates.

The principal location, Gothic Revival mansion Wykehurst Place, makes for a stunning backdrop. Sadly, Hardy's OTT performance competes with the building for scale, and the film is so downbeat as to be pretty hard-going.

Extras *Mummy's Tomb* ★★★★☆ is well-stocked, but the same subjects (Holt's death, Cushing's departure, etc) are addressed many times. There are two new bonuses: an interview with Leon (nine minutes), and the regulation Kim Newman overview (19 minutes). 2017 retrospective "The Pharoah's Curse" (18 minutes) draws on four Hammer experts – and Leon. She pops up again in a 2001 retrospective (10 minutes), along with writer Christopher Wicking.

Camera operator Neil Binney (five minutes) has the best anecdote: when Leon was muttering mumbo-jumbo, Holt instructed her to say "Knickers!" We also hear from sound recordist Tony Dawe (six minutes). Plus: commentary by film historian Steve Haberman; galleries; TV and radio spots; trailer; 64-page booklet; two posters.

> **"Here the threat is aberrant psychology"**

The one new bonus on *Demons Of The Mind* ★★★½☆ is an interview with actor Virginia Wetherell (14 minutes), who recalls a "lovely atmosphere" – except when she was pressured into nudity. Archival offerings include another 2017 assembly of Hammer mavens for a retrospective (16 minutes), and four minutes of reminiscences by Binney. Two commentaries offer a choice between Haberman and a director/writer/Wetherell team-up. Plus: galleries; trailer; two posters. **Ian Berriman**

Demons Of The Mind's composer, Harry Robinson, also had a number one hit in 1953: Lord Rockingham's XI's "Hoots Mon".

INNERSPACE

The inside story

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED 27 APRIL
1987 | 12 | 4K/Blu-ray
Director **Joe Dante**
Cast **Dennis Quaid, Martin Short, Meg Ryan, Robert Picardo**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Picture *Fantastic*** *Voyage* stumbling out of an '80s Hollywood coke den and you have the spirit of *Innerspace*.

Joe Dante's manic miniaturisation romp trades Raquel Welch for Dennis Quaid, a test pilot in an experimental vessel who's injected into the bloodstream of neurotic supermarket clerk Martin Short. Some industrial spies add to the madcap complications – Robert Picardo's a stand-out as a thickly-accented Euro goon with a cowboy fixation – and Dante keeps it all fizzing, even if diversions into face-swaps and half-sized bad guys suggest a story that can't quite make enough mileage out of its central premise.

The visuals went on to win an Oscar, and this impressive new 4K restoration does justice to the craft of Dennis Muren and his team. Quaid navigates through blood cells, dendrites and ganglia, brought to the screen in all their queasily authentic biological glory.

The wow factor may have faded slightly with the years, but one credit remains immortal: "Martin Short's interiors produced at Industrial Light & Magic, Marin County, California".

Extras Critic Drew McWeeny provides an appreciative new audio commentary, while Dante and other members of cast and crew offer their recollections in a track from 2002. A new documentary (59 minutes) includes contributions from key talents, including some great stories from Robert Picardo, who reveals that he took an air jet in the face for his art. You suspect there's probably more to be mined from Dante's clashes with studio execs, but this is a solid retrospective nonetheless.

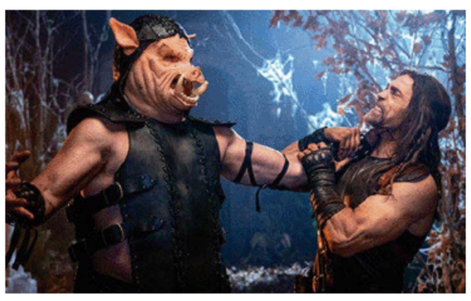
A compilation of on-location camcorder footage proves surprisingly tedious (23 minutes), but Muren's equally informal VHS tour of ILM offices and workshops makes for a fascinating historical document (20 minutes).

Plus: trailer; extensive galleries of storyboards, promo images, posters and some wonderful original continuity polaroids; double-sided poster; booklet.

Nick Setchfield



Burt Reynolds was in the frame for Dennis Quaid's role, originally conceived as a grizzled veteran test pilot.



DEATHSTALKER

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2025 | N/A | SVOD

SHUDDER **Pretend the last 40** years never happened with this tongue-in-cheek reboot of Roger Corman's '80s sword-and-sorcery franchise. It looks and acts the part too, with a chiselled hero, rubbery monsters, and plenty of gore.

Like *Galaxy Quest*, *Deathstalker* plays around with genre tropes without mocking them, its fun script offering a knowing wink to fantasy's dafter excesses. Despite some hammy acting and a repetitive plot, this is more entertaining than many of the films that inspired it. **Richard Edwards**



STAR PEOPLE

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2025 | N/A | Digital

As a child, Claire witnesses the largest mass UFO sighting in North American history. Decades later she returns to the Arizona desert, seeking the truth behind the lights that haunt her.

Director Adam Finberg roots this indie drama in a tangible sense of place, exploring the tipping point between faith and obsession through some deftly sketched characters. The ending may stray into treacly New Age sentiment, but it's a timely, compassionate tale that foregrounds the human over the aliens. **Nick Setchfield**



THE CURE

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2026 | 15 | Digital

Ally has protective parents. *Really* protective tech billionaire parents. Claiming she has lupus and any contact with the outside world could prove fatal, they keep her isolated at home. Then one day she sneaks out, meets a new friend, and realises everything they've been saying is a lie.

Part sci-fi silliness, part heavy-handed satire of weirdo wellness trends, *The Cure* has distinct straight-to-streaming energy, but the cast – including David Dastmalchian and Ashley Greene – ensure it's watchable enough. **Sarah Dobbs**



ITCH!

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 20 APRIL
2026 | N/A | Digital

If thinking about ants gives you a phantom itch, give this outbreak horror a swerve.

Widower Jay has a lot on his plate: his kid's being bullied, his mum's ill, and someone's trying to rob his shop. Then there's an outbreak of a mysterious disease that makes people scratch themselves to death.

Unfortunately, the gruesome opening gives away the ending, so most of the film is just a trudge through the usual zombie tropes. Probably needs a content warning for the pregnancy horror though. Yuck. **Sarah Dobbs**

DANGER: DIABOLIK

Going hell for leather

★★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED 20 APRIL

1968 | 12 | Blu-ray

Director **Mario Bava**

Cast **John Phillip Law, Marisa Mell, Michel Piccoli, Adolfo Celi**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **We challenge** anyone to nominate a comic-book movie cooler than *Danger: Diabolik*. It even bests *Barbarella*.

Mario Bava's adaptation of the Italian *fumetti* with a masked thief antihero is a compendium of swinging '60s style, and in John Phillip Law and Marisa Mell it features two of the decade's most beautiful stars. For the longest time you can simply wallow in the seductively sensuous luxury lifestyle it presents. Who wouldn't love to roar about in an E-type Jaguar, head to toe in black leather, stealing at will, before returning to your underground lair to frolic with your honey on a revolving bed strewn with bank notes?

Ennio Morricone's score, with its twangy guitar and cooing female voices, is some of his best work, and Terry-Thomas provides amusing comic relief as a hapless minister for the non-specific nation that provides the setting.

The narrative graph is pretty flat, mind. Beyond liking theft, his squeeze, and humiliating politicians, Diabolik has no character to speak of, and the plot is simply a string of escapades, as the trickster thief pinches millions of dollars, a necklace or tons of gold. But they're such gloriously groovy escapades, you won't care.

Extras The highlight of this Eureka! release is 2005 featurette "From Fumetti To Film" (20 minutes). It assembles notable fans: *Swamp Thing* artist Steve Bissette, Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys (whose "Body Movin'" video used footage from *Diabolik*), and director Roman Coppola (whose *CQ* paid homage).

Author Leon Hunt provides a useful overview (22 minutes), discussing how France's Fantômas inspired Diabolik, and what strips the film drew on. Rachael Nisbet's dry video essay on the film's politics (27 minutes) makes valid observations, but at gruelling length; it'll come in handy if you have insomnia. Two of the three commentaries feature Bava know-all Tim Lucas: he moderates John Phillip Law, then flies solo. The third pairs Troy Howarth and Nathaniel Thompson. Plus: the Beastie Boys video; trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



John Phillip Law does his best Spock eyebrow work.

i Catherine Deneuve was originally hired as love interest Ava, but she fell out with Bava and within a week the role was recast.

SALEM'S LOT

Eerie Barlow

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1979 | 15 | 4K

Director **Tobe Hooper**

Cast **David Soul, James Mason, Lance Kerwin, Bonnie Bedelia**

Genuine event television at the time, this two-part Stephen King adaptation captures the collision of the prosaic and the supernatural that made the original novel a phenomenon.

David Soul grounds the horror as a homecoming author who uncovers a vampiric infestation in small-town America, orchestrated by a magnificently silky and supercilious James Mason.

The pace occasionally drags, but Tobe Hooper's restless camera fights for cinematic style against the factory realities of '70s TV production. And while the Count Orlok cosplay of lead vampire Barlow may be an all too blatant homage, Hooper's staging of an undead visitation at a bedroom window remains a generation-scarring triumph.

Extras This limited edition release includes fresh 4K restorations of both the original TV two-parter and the shorter international theatrical cut. It comes with a new audio commentary by critics Bill Ackerman and Amanda Reyes, alongside an archival track by the director.

King biographer Douglas E Winter (21 minutes) shares some insights into the man – did you know he writes to the sound of cranked-up rock 'n' roll? Horror author Grady Hendrix (26 minutes) offers his own, equally engaging perspective on the Maine maestro's career, championing the democratic power of the cheap paperback. And filmmaker Mick Garris (13 minutes) makes the case that this adaptation brought "an attitude that had never been seen before in vampire movies".

Elsewhere, Heather Wixson (nine minutes) gives a critical appreciation, arguing that the story's protagonists are proxies for horror fans, and the hosts of the *Horror Queers* podcast unpick themes and subtexts (20 minutes). A locations featurette (seven minutes) revisits a spookily unchanged Ferndale, California and reveals that the Marston house was just a facade. Plus: alternate TV footage; image/shooting script gallery; booklet; a town sign sticker for your car. **Nick Setchfield**



Nope, he's no relation to Deirdre.

i Stephen KIng originally planned to call the book *Second Coming*, until his wife noted that it "sounded like a sex manual".

NOW ON DIGITAL FORMATS *Avatar: Fire And Ash* • *THE BRIDE!* • *Cold Storage* • *Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die* • *Looney Tunes: The Day The Earth Blew Up* • *Primate* • *Rabbit Trap* (20 April) • *Send Help* • *The Strangers: Chapter 3* (20 April) • *Whistle*



DEAD KIDS

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1981 | 18 | Blu-ray

Director **Michael Laughlin**

Cast **Michael Murphy, Louise Fletcher, Dan Shor, Fiona Lewis**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Co-written by** Bill Condon (later to win an Oscar for *Gods And Monsters*), and lensed in Auckland, this update of '50s mad scientist movies sees Michael Murphy's Illinois police chief investigating murders whose varying MOs suggest several killers. Could they relate to conditioning experiments at the local university?

It's an odd kettle of fish, awkwardly plotted: the chief simply assumes a connection to a dead scientist he holds a grudge against, so no deduction is required. Louise "Nurse Ratched" Fletcher is wasted as his girlfriend. The domestic milieu is established well... the villain's motivations, less so.

There are cute moments (a murder seen via shadow play; synchronised dancing at a teenage party), but overall, it's frustratingly lacking in polish.

⊕ **Extras** This Indicator release has the Aussie version and the shorter US cut. There are new interviews with three cast – Murphy, Fiona Lewis and Dey Young (21/10/15 minutes) – plus a fresh critical appreciation (18 minutes). Archival goodies include an interview with producer Anthony Ginnane for doc *Not Quite Hollywood* (11 minutes), and one from 2004 (five minutes). Actor Dan Shor talks to a podcast (13 minutes) and on video (44 minutes); the make-up FX guy (21 minutes) is also quizzed. Plus: two old cast/crew commentaries; isolated score; trailers. **Ian Berriman**



His suit survived – unlike his passengers.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY

THE SURVIVOR

A crash curse

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1981 | 15 | 4K & Blu-ray

Director **David Hemmings**

Cast **Robert Powell, Jenny Agutter, Angela Punch McGregor, Peter Sumner**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **After *Harlequin*** and *Thirst*, Indicator's latest Ozploitation release is this comparatively big-budget take on a James Herbert novel. His verdict? "Absolute rubbish".

A bit harsh. The early stages, in which director David Hemmings stages a 747 crash, have a pretty impressive sense of scale. Thereafter, the mystery of what caused it, and how only Robert Powell's amnesiac pilot walked away from the fireball, are fairly engaging. Langorously paced, it's a film with classy cinematography and spooky moments – like a ghostly child slipping its hand into that of a photographer who has been snapping charred corpses.

However, it's also frustratingly elliptical, with certain plot points left unclear (some of the victims of the plane's unquiet spirits seem random). And the final reveal of what lay behind the disaster is a little hard to swallow.

⊕ **Extras** You get three versions: a previously unseen director's cut, the Australian theatrical release, and the abbreviated US one.

Academic Stephen Morgan offers a solid new appreciation (20 minutes). Then Indicator scour the archives. In interviews for 2008 doc *Not Quite Hollywood*, DoP John Seale (seven minutes) labels Hemmings "a handful", while producer Anthony Ginnane (15 minutes) is frank on the film's failings. An earlier Ginnane interview (10 minutes) covers the same ground. He also features in commentaries from 2018 and 2012.

A nine-minute featurette addresses Herbert's work via two critical talking heads. Half an hour of extracts from Adelaide TV show *Clapperboard* showcase some pricelessly naff interviewing skills. There's also a 15-minute promo made to flog the film, 21 minutes of Super 8 footage shot by a stuntman, three minutes of Powell on Herbert; and another vintage TV interview (four minutes). Plus: isolated score; galleries; trailer; TV spot; 80-page booklet. **Ian Berriman**

ℹ Songwriter Tim Rice (a friend of David Hemmings) cameos as a TV newsman reporting from the crash site.

(ROUND UP)



Besides **28 YEARS LATER: THE BONE TEMPLE** (see page 58), there are four more theatrical releases hitting shiny disc. **LOONEY TUNES: THE DAY THE EARTH BLEW UP** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) has a bonkers plot involving zombies created by alien bubblegum. We said: "Enjoyable enough lightweight fluff, with a good few moments that recapture the original shorts' crazed visual wit." In Timur Bekmambetov's sci-fi thriller **MERCY** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD), Chris Pratt plays an LAPD detective accused of killing his wife. We said: "Utter hokum, but an engaging ride while it lasts." *Silent Hill* director Christophe Gans revisits the horror videogame franchise's world with **RETURN TO SILENT HILL** (4 May, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD). We said: "A questionably remixed story completely defangs the original's horror... Jeremy Irvine is shunted from set-piece to set-piece so unceremoniously that there's no risk of building a sense of intrigue." Extras: four featurettes, totalling 10 minutes. Sam Raimi's **SEND HELP** (4 May, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD) sees office worker Linda and her boss stranded on a remote island. We said: "A whole lot of fun... not perfect, but always capable of surprising." Finally, a decent bonus spread! Raimi and producer Zainab Azizi provide commentary. Five featurettes (totalling 22 minutes) address a boar hunt scene, the leads' filming experience, Linda's look, survival skills and the score. You also get 22 (!) deleted/extended scenes, and bloopers. Finally, the latest TV box set is **IT: WELCOME TO DERRY** SEASON ONE (11 May, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD).



THE LAST CONTRACT OF ISAKO

Living by the sword

★★★★☆

RELEASED 5 MAY

528 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Fonda Lee**

Publisher **Orbit**

Should humanity ever make it to other planets, a recurring dream is that we will do better out there. The *Star Trek* future. At which point it's worth considering how so many of those who headed across the Atlantic to the New World had an idealistic idea of creating better societies. How's that working out?

Another view sees us heading for the stars and taking our problems with us. Indeed, in parts of the universe where resources are scarce and conditions aren't optimal for squishy meat puppets, we may create societies that are far more unequal than those around us today. Here is a future you might find in sociological science fiction. Think of the downbeat SF novels of Ursula K Le Guin or Doris Lessing.

But there are ways for writers to imagine even dystopian futures without embracing extremes of optimism and pessimism, as Fonda Lee's new novel proves. Set on a planet that's being terraformed and has no contact with Earth, it imagines a highly stratified and tightly controlled society where "atiers" serve as chief advisors to those who manage the companies that dominate life on the planet.

With Lee riffing off chanbara films such as Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, atiers are basically samurai. Their greatest strength is their discipline and grace under pressure. This is also their weakness in that they live by a code where their duty is to serve their employers, whatever moral questions this might throw up. Not to have a master is to be a rōnin, a warrior who attracts suspicion, because who knows what such a highly-trained fighter might do when left to their own devices?

There are financial penalties too for losing a contract and having no client, as the lead character, Isako, learns when her boss retires by walking out into an icy wasteland and dies. She plans to follow him, but things don't work out as planned after her contract is passed to another bigwig. Instead, she is set the task of undermining one of her new employer's rivals.

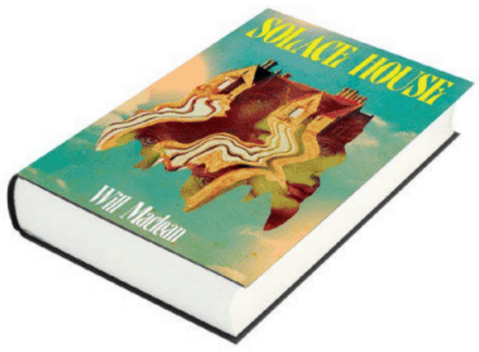
Speaking to *SFX* this month, Lee spoke about how difficult this novel was to write, essentially because it's set in a dystopia – even seeming concerned that some readers might find the book too downbeat. But she really shouldn't worry, because *Isako* is never less than entertaining, written with an energy that calls to mind the cyberpunk novels Lee also says were an influence.

Then there's Isako herself. Clever, tough and deadly with a blade, she's a rare figure in popular fiction: a middle-aged action hero who never feels sorry for herself, even when her knees bother her. The main supporting cast is equally memorable, especially her friend, the rōnin Kob, a lion in winter who allies a still-imposing physical presence with strategic insights his colleague needs.

That's because Isako is caught up in a conspiracy orchestrated by her planet's great and (not so) good. To find out what's going on, she needs to discover the fate of Martim, a younger atier she helped train. But as the second part of the novel makes clear, if she finds out what's really going on, her prospects of living longer will diminish. Drastically.

At times, *Isako* reads like a novel where Lee had trouble getting the pacing and plotting right. But that may be a good thing, in that Lee often delivers unexpected plot twists. That she does this while crafting fast-paced action scenes and layering details to create a convincing portrait of an isolated frontier society is even more impressive. A novel that takes familiar tropes and twists them into new shapes. **Jonathan Wright**

i While she can't go into detail, Lee says *Jade City* has been "reoptioned" after a previous TV series fell through.



SOLACE HOUSE

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

512 pages | Hardback/ebook

Author **Will Maclean**

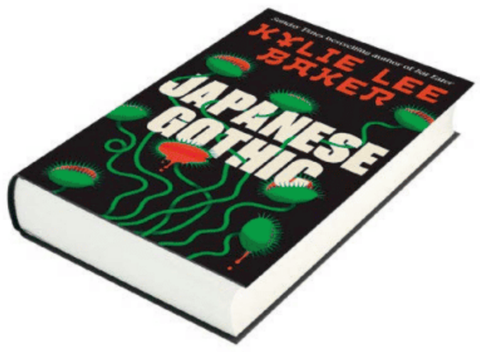
Publisher **Atlantic Books**

Britpop-era nostalgia, outsider art and possible glimpses into other dimensions collide in this impressive second novel from the author of *The Apparition Phase*.

It's the early '90s, and Alex Lane has an empty summer ahead of him. Haunted by the sudden death of his parents, he has nothing to do except take a job clearing junk from a dilapidated Victorian house that belonged to a painter named Flayne. That's harder than it sounds, given that the artist blocked every room and stairway, either because of some hoarder instinct or to stop something getting out.

Like Maclean's previous novel, *Solace House* is equal parts an nostalgic evocation of a time period and a supernatural mystery that maintains just enough wiggle room for a rationalist explanation, with each chapter teasing out a new nugget of information about Flayne's life, the house, and the secrets that are stored within. It's a big book, but its length is justified by the scope of its ambition, its thematic richness and strong characterisation.

The final act goes off the deep end in a way that will leave you with more questions than answers (and cause some to deploy the word "Lynchian"). It's a cryptic conclusion, but an appropriate one for such a fascinating and mysterious work from an increasingly essential author. **Will Salmon**



JAPANESE GOTHIC

★★★★½

RELEASED 30 APRIL

368 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Kylie Lee Baker**

Publisher **Hodder & Stoughton**

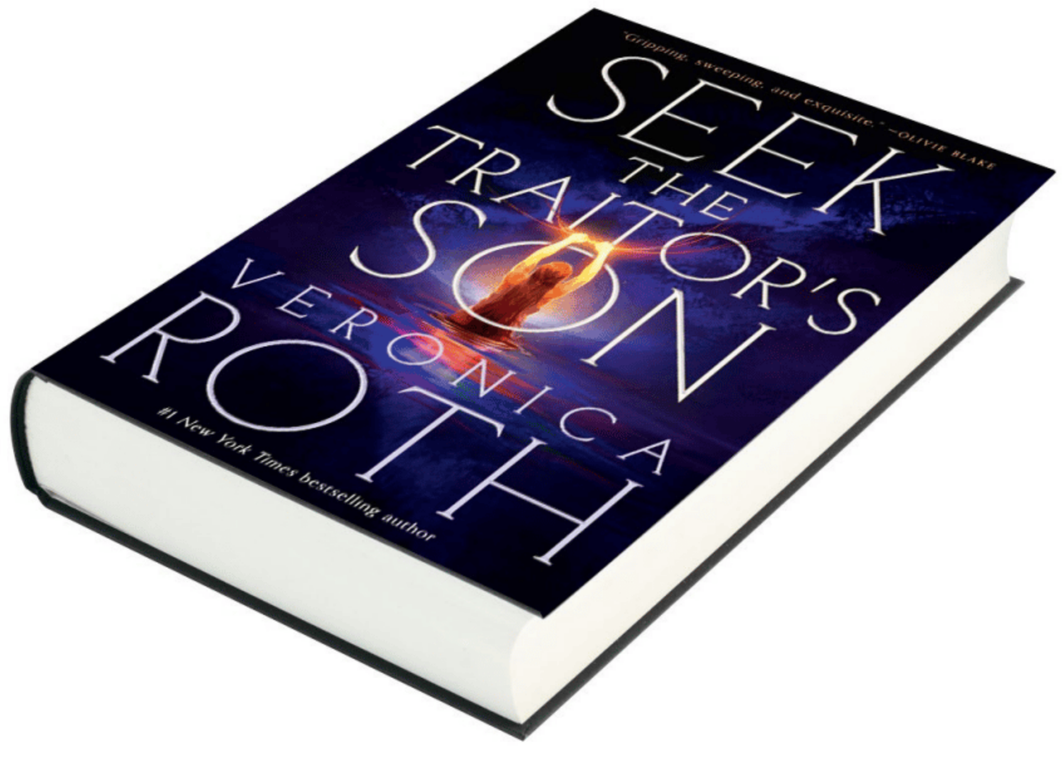
"Trust the process" is one of the most irritating phrases floating around social media at the moment, but for this book it is, unfortunately, apt. For much of its duration, you're not really going to know what's going on. But ride it out, and it goes somewhere fantastic.

Lee Turner is hiding out at his dad's house in a remote corner of Japan after murdering his roommate. He doesn't remember why he did it, or what he did with the body, but he knows he's in trouble. And his dad's house only adds to his problems, with its windows that seem to disappear, and the closet door that opens into the Meiji era.

Which is where trainee samurai Sen waits for Lee. Her father returned from the rebellion somehow wrong, and now she's seeing a ghost from the future. Working together, Lee and Sen discover a bridge through time that takes them somewhere truly weird.

Through repetition, dreams, and wildly unreliable narrators, *Japanese Gothic* tells a harrowing story about grief... and gore. As much of this story is about bloodshed as it is a haunted house, and it's truly disgusting in places. But Kylie Lee Baker finds beauty in the horror, and while no-one could claim this book has a happy ending, it does at least have an original, deeply weird and satisfying one.

Sarah Dobbs



SEEK THE TRAITOR'S SON

Prophecy Girls

★★★★½

RELEASED 14 MAY

432 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Veronica Roth**

Publisher **Pan Macmillan**

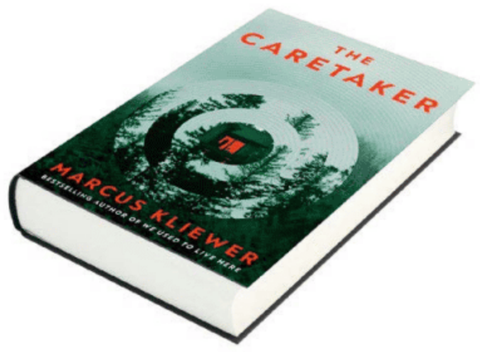
Read the title above. Now look away. Chances are that you've already forgotten it, haven't you? That's because it's a terrible title for what is thankfully *not* a terrible book – the first part of a new series, The Burning Empire, from *Divergent* author Veronica Roth.

Naming issues aside, for her latest tome, Roth has constructed a hefty brick that relishes all the dystopian themes we've come to expect from her: an evil empire; a reluctant "chosen one" heroine; and protagonists with special powers. By this point in her career, Roth can handle these elements with ease, leaving her free to plot and world-build with her sleeves fully rolled up. The result is a meaty and satisfying read that even hints at a bigger universe, The Expanse-style.

We begin on a planet loosely based on our own (possibly even our future Earth). Two women on opposing sides of political regimes are given a prophecy that one will be victorious over the other. The first, Rava Vidar, is a bloodthirsty general in an army that wants to wipe out its enemies with a virus that only 50% of people survive. Elegy Ahn, quite understandably, wants to keep her country virus-free. She is the prophecy girl we follow as she's joined by Theren, the Knight picked to keep her safe – although he has his own traumas to work through. Oh, and the prophecy implies that both women will fall in love with him. Who needs free will anyway?

Chock-full of angst, violence, sex and yet more angst, this could have been a rather miserable, even self-important slog. Yet despite all the portentous character-arcing, warmth and humour still shine through from Elegy and her friends. These are humans in peculiar circumstances – easy to empathise with and root for. Roth's so good at creating these people and their lives, we can even forgive her for that title. Er, what was it again? **Jayne Nelson**

i Also out now: a Deluxe Limited Edition of *Divergent*, with exclusive bonus content and a foil case. Shiny!



THE CARETAKER

★★★★☆

RELEASED 23 APRIL

290 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Marcus Kliewer**

Publisher **Bantam**

What a tricksy so-and-so author Marcus Kliewer is. In his second novel (after *We Used To Live Here* was acquired by Netflix), he brings us a slow-burn haunted-house story of a young woman hired to carry out strange rituals for a widow to honour her deceased husband's bizarre requests. Lights, rabbits and visitors with cold blue eyes are all terrible portents, and in each case, an envelope must be opened or a phone call received to prevent disastrous consequences.

Plot-wise, *The Caretaker* feels like a padded-out novella, with chunks given to dream sequences that aren't strictly relevant, but as a whole it's incredibly gripping, and has tension and atmosphere in spades. Kliewer pulls you into the remote household by the hair and won't let you leave, anymore than poor Macy Mullins, our resilient but depressed heroine, who's working to provide for her younger sister Jemma.

She's a fully fleshed-out character in an impossible situation, but just like Macy, the reader remains in the dark about what exactly is going on. We, like her, are left dangling over a precipice without much foothold by the end, though the journey itself is never less than thrilling. *The Caretaker* has already been acquired by Universal, and as a film will surely be just as maddening as the book.

Rosie Fletcher

Reviews



MARS ONE

SFX Loves

★★★★★

RELEASED 23 APRIL

576 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Charlotte Robinson**

Publisher **Bantam**

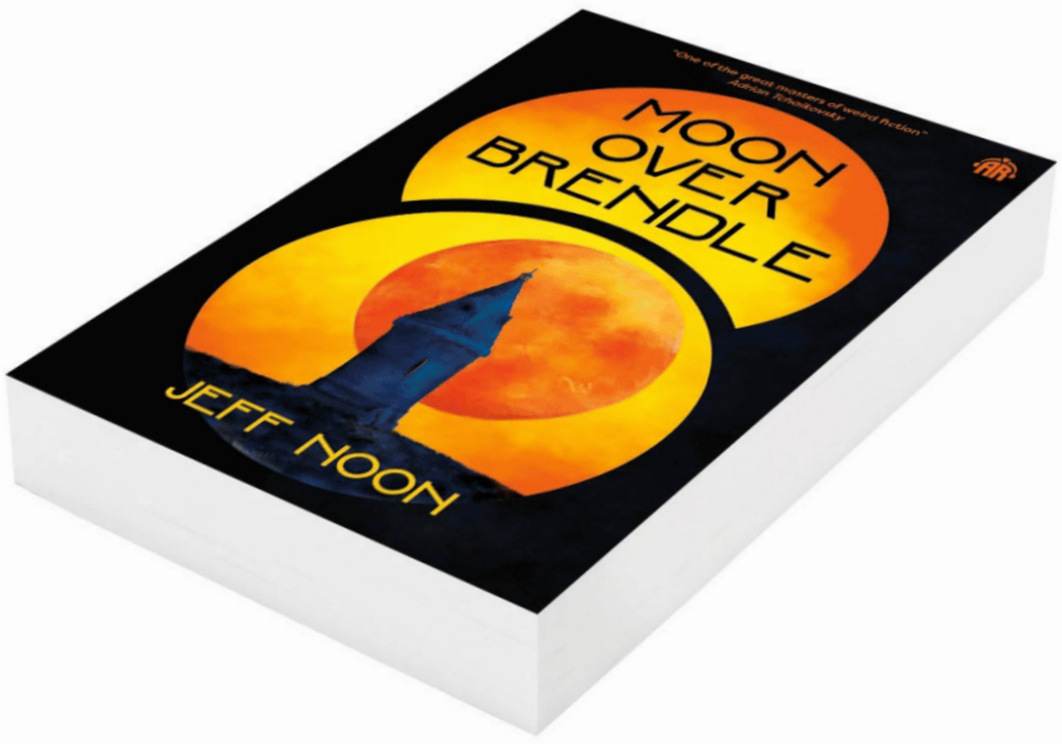
This gripping near-future thriller is an impressive debut from Charlotte Robinson, a TV script editor/producer whose credits include *Fortitude*, *The Tunnel* and *The Power*.

As a privately-funded mission makes its way to Mars, its original commander (grounded by a pre-flight accident) starts to suspect that sinister forces are conspiring to make it fail. Meanwhile, a young woman in Hong Kong goes looking for her missing coder brother, the only clues to his whereabouts hidden on a microchip inside his cat.

At nearly 600 pages, *Mars One* is a long read, yet never comes close to outstaying its welcome. Passing the storytelling baton between multiple narrators on Earth and en route to Mars, Robinson seamlessly segues between meticulously researched hard SF and fast-paced, *Enemy Of The State*-style action, before the plotlines coalesce in a deeply satisfying final act.

It's beautifully and propulsively written, led by characters who talk and behave like actual people, and have to deal with real-world issues – estranged families, dementia, alcoholism – even when they're fighting for their lives. There's also room for environmental themes, media satire and a few well-placed pop culture references in a brilliant novel that includes a little bit of everything, and does it well.

Richard Edwards



MOON OVER BRENDLE

Life In A Northern Town

★★★★½

RELEASED 12 MAY

304 pages | Paperback/ebook

Author **Jeff Noon**

Publisher **Angry Robot**

There's something magical about the school summer holidays, even if you never quite experienced them the way fiction paints them: no schedule, no parental supervision, just weeks of freedom to while away with your friends, until September rolls around.

Jeff Noon's latest, a fantasy inspired by his own Lancastrian childhood, channels every bit of this nostalgic, sun-drenched, bittersweet energy. It's set in an alternate 1968, in which the skies dance – for those born with the ability to see it – with a multi-coloured, ever-shifting dust known as Greot. Think the northern lights, but with tactile, sandy traces that settle on things and people.

In a fictional town in the foothills of the southern Pennines (if you're from the area, you may recognise the inspiration behind the tower on the cover), Joe Sutter is on the verge of going to big school, with all the life changes that entails. Fantastical and mundane points of divergence resonate with each other: Joe can see Greot, but his best friend can't; both of them have a crush on the same girl. Noon sensitively draws out the rhythms of pre-teen friendship, and the ways these friends grow apart.

> **"Nostalgic, sun-drenched, bittersweet energy"**

The fields and hills where the boys spend their days brim with wildlife, history, and untapped stories, even before you factor in the swirling sparkle of Greot. Noon draws wonder out of everything from a diving kestrel and a rusty abandoned train track to a mysterious science fiction writer in a creepily run-down cottage. Back home, Joe's family is fractious and fractured, but still loving in a gruff, undemonstrative way, even if Joe struggles to see the point of his irritated older sister, or his harried single mother.

A warm, affecting tale of imagination, experience, and home, alight with wonder, and generous to even its most flawed characters. **Nic Clarke**

i Jeff Noon also grew up in a town east of Manchester and invented story worlds after his dad left home.



FEMME FERAL

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Sam Beckbessinger**

Publisher **Bloomsbury Archer**

Lycanthropy as a metaphor for puberty has been done to death. As a metaphor for a different kind of life change, though? Yeah, there's plenty of meat still on the bone there.

Ellie's in her mid-forties, with a high-pressure job and an even more high-pressure home life, thanks to her teenage daughter and ailing father-in-law. The last thing she needs is another problem for her to-do list. But her body is doing weird things: growing hair in new places and scrambling her memory every 28 days. Dr Google says it's perimenopause, but that doesn't explain why she woke up naked in the woods.

Meanwhile, across town, Brenda, a partially blind octogenarian, is investigating a spate of gruesome cat murders, which also seem to be happening on a 28-day cycle.

Sam Beckbessinger's first adult novel is billed as a comedy, but women of a certain age might find Ellie's predicament too relatable to be funny. It's not that she's a likeable character – she isn't, really – but her struggles will be familiar, especially the way her terrible new boss treats her. The supernatural horror comes second to the real stuff, to the point where you might find that the idea of becoming a werewolf is kind of appealing. It's a good-for-her howl of feminine rage. **Sarah Dobbs**



TRAD WIFE

★★★★½

RELEASED 14 MAY

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Sarah Langan**

Publisher **Tor Nightfire**

We all know online influencers are lying to us. There's no way anyone's skin is as perfect, home as spotless, or relationship as harmonious as it looks on social media. And yet we keep watching, don't we?

Disgraced journalist Jenny has never quite bought into "trad wife" vlogger Mia's wholesome brand. So when she gets commissioned to write a feature on the perfect woman and her perfect family in Black Swan Farm, Jenny envisions herself exposing the grubby reality behind Mia's glossy content. What she doesn't expect is to uncover a nightmare several centuries in the making...

Whether you're into psychological, societal or cosmic horror – or even just plain old body horror – this book's got something that'll make you squirm. Set in a very specific time and place (basically, *right now*) it captures the anxieties of our too-online, post-Covid world and turns the volume up on all of them.

Genre nerds will find plenty of references to chew on, like the creepy yellow wallpaper in Mia's house, but this isn't a story that's trading on familiar references, and neither is it some kind of lofty metaphor for social ills. This is a full-throttle supernatural horror novel that's not ashamed to be just that.

A story to give you night terrors... and also stop you ever being tempted to buy from the TikTok shop. **Sarah Dobbs**



LOCHBOUND

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Rebecca Templeton**

Publisher **Sphere**

This tale of star-crossed lovers is half *Outlander* and half *The Little Mermaid*, seasoned with a pinch of Loch Ness Monster. Set in Scotland in 1725, its "lochbound" protagonist is Iris, the daughter of a laird.

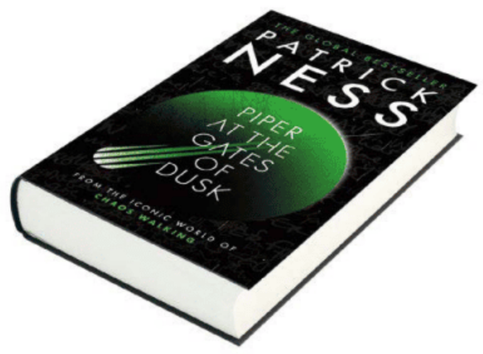
After falling in love with the wrong man and rebelling against her father, she succumbs to a horrible curse: by night she remains human, but at dawn she must return to the loch and become a nasty, scaly monster named Moireach.

Fifty years later, the miserable, soggy and still lovelorn Iris meets Henry: a hunter sent to kill Moireach. Sparks fly, other men get jealous, and Iris's hidden side threatens to take control and eat them all.

While the prose does get bogged down in its own gloominess (given that she spends half her time as a giant fish-beast, Iris isn't the most cheerful of narrators), the plot does unfold in a succession of satisfying twists and turns. It's a little off-putting that everything Iris does revolves around men, but at least the author addresses this by having another character point it out.

One bigger frustration is that we don't learn much about Moireach's life under the water. Okay, so it probably involves eating lots of fish and not much else, but still... you can't shake the feeling that half the story is missing.

Jayne Nelson



PIPER AT THE GATES OF DUSK

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Patrick Ness**

Publisher **Walker Books**

Patrick Ness unleashed his Chaos Walking series back in 2008. The bestselling books – which, in 2021, also inspired a mediocre Tom Holland movie – plonked a bunch of human settlers on a new planet, where they promptly went to war against its indigenous people, the Spackle.

Now those books' main characters, Viola and Todd, return for this sequel, which focuses on their sons. Previous knowledge of the Chaos Walking books is preferred, but not necessary.

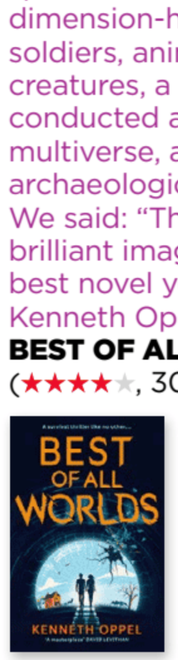
Teenagers Max and Ben are learning to navigate a new world without a) war and b) the psychic Noise that used to blight all human males. But the arrival of a mysterious rock in the sky stirs up trouble.

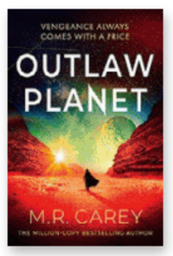
Children start having nightmares and, much worse, giant flaming "gods" start stomping around and eating people. As is his habit, Ness refuses to shy away from horror and grief; every sequence involving these gods is terrifying. But he also takes time out to examine love, identity and intolerance.

It's a cracking read, the kind of book you pick up on a rainy Sunday morning and finish in one sitting (take this reviewer's word for it). The only downside is an absolutely *killer* cliffhanger, but there's no doubt whatsoever that book two will be worth the wait. **Jayne Nelson**

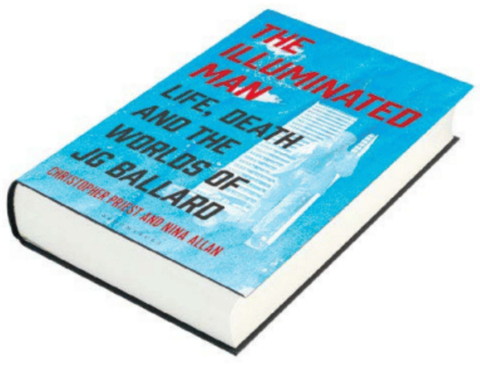
REISSUES

Space opera maestro Alastair Reynolds moves into murder mystery territory with **HALCYON YEARS** (★★★★½, 14 May, Gollancz). A private eye on a generational spaceship is hired by a mysterious femme fatale to investigate the deaths of two teens from rival powerful families, and uncovers a conspiracy that shakes the ship's society to the core. We said: "A hugely entertaining film noir pastiche... there's a winning lightness of tone throughout." MR Carey's latest, **OUTLAW PLANET** (★★★★½, out now, Orbit), is a standalone book set in the world of his Pandominion universe. The anti-heroine of this SF Western is outlaw Dog-Bitch Bess, who packs a self-aware gun, Wakeful Slim. The split narrative involves dimension-hopping soldiers, animal-human creatures, a war conducted across the multiverse, and mysterious archaeological remains. We said: "The product of a brilliant imagination... His best novel yet." Finally, Kenneth Oppel's YA book **BEST OF ALL WORLDS** (★★★★☆, 30 April, Guppy) bagged *The Times*' award for Children's Book Of The Year. It centres on Xavier, who wakes up on a family weekend to find that he, his parents, and the farm they were staying on have inexplicably been scooped up and imprisoned inside a gigantic transparent dome. Three years later, a family from the Deep South turn up. Cue a clash of cultures. We said: "a realistic, occasionally chilling tale that manages to be both claustrophobic and expansive."





Reviews



THE ILLUMINATED MAN

★★★★½

RELEASED 23 APRIL

496 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Authors **Christopher Priest, Nina Allan**

Publisher **Bloomsbury Continuum**

When Christopher Priest died in 2024, he left behind an uncompleted biography of JG Ballard. Priest wanted to make the case that Ballard wasn't just a major figure, but one of the 20th century's very greatest writers. It fell to his widow, the novelist and critic Nina Allan, to complete the project.

The Illuminated Man proves this was an impossible task. While Priest's work was left intact, he never, for example, finished gathering together his thoughts on Ballard's 1994 novel *Rushing To Paradise*, let alone refining them.

But that doesn't mean the book is a failure: just the opposite. Weaving in the story of Priest's last days, Nina Allan expands the biography's remit. This is not just a book about Ballard, although it remains this first and foremost; it is also the story of the last days of her husband, a considerable novelist in his own right, and a mediation on grief.

At times, this means the book seems oddly structured and, in conveying the heightened sense of life that arrives with the presence of an imminent death, hallucinatory. Paradoxically, there's also a precision about the prose that's authentically Ballardian. This is needed to prevent Allan's sense of loss overpowering the text. That it never does is greatly to her credit. **Jonathan Wright**



IF WE CANNOT GO AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

★★★★☆

RELEASED 7 MAY

192 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Kim Choyeop**

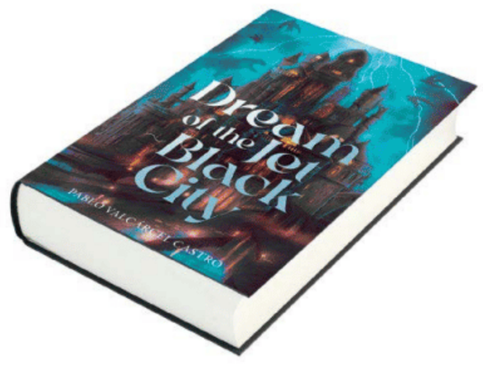
Publisher **MacLehose Press**

This short story collection was a bestseller in South Korea in 2019. Finally translated into English, its seven stories reveal Kim Choyeop as an author with impressive range and a subtle sense of humour.

It opens with "Symbiosis Theory", which speculates that human empathy may come from an extraterrestrial source. It's followed by "Spectrum", an interstellar exploration tale, told from the point of view of a woman remembering her astronaut grandmother.

This contrast of the cosmic and the everyday is a recurrent theme, repeated again in the titlular story, an emotional two-hander between a worker on a decommissioned space station and a woman who has been separated from her family on another world.

"Archival Loss" explores the idea of a digital afterlife, but is chiefly about a mother/daughter relationship. "The Materiality Of Emotions" is weaker, though its concept – that emotions can be synthesised into physical objects – is intriguing. "Pilgrims" and "My Space Hero" are both about protagonists discovering a sinister truth behind the world they thought they knew. Even so, both end on a note of hope. A collection of epic SF told on a human scale. **Will Salmon**



DREAM OF THE JET BLACK CITY

★★★½☆

RELEASED 14 MAY

496 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Pablo Valcarcel Castro**

Publisher **Zaffre**

Pablo Valcarcel Castro builds an exceptionally detailed world in his debut novel, a sprawling affair following three intersecting stories.

In the city of Onyxia, Ash is a lightning-hunter, catching valuable energy from the Motherstorm that constantly rages overhead. Daerna is a member of the Wailing Sisters, a devout order that sings to soothe the Motherstorm. Geil is a shapeshifting Dreamblood who hunts monsters for a living. All three become entangled in the fate of the city, beset by a mysterious plague and the Charnelite cult, who seek the apocalyptic return of their malign goddess.

Castro sprinkles his tale with references to Onyxian history, with quotes from holy texts, proverbs and philosophers – although despite that attention to detail, the nature of the Motherstorm remains elusive. There are complex backstories and politics to navigate, and Castro likes to build tension by rapidly switching perspectives between his three protagonists at moments of maximum peril – a little too frequently.

The mechanics and limits of the storm and dream-powered magic systems aren't always clearly established, and the novel lacks a compelling, memorable antagonist. Still, Castro's prose is evocative, and he delivers battle scenes with energy and verve. **David West**

ALSO OUT

As ever, there's plenty more books we couldn't fit in. In Frances White's horror fantasy **THE BONE DOOR** (7 May, Michael Joseph), the protagonist wakes up in an ancient labyrinth, with no memory of his life before. He also doesn't recognise the mysterious girl trapped with him. Together they're forced to navigate a series of realms to find the elusive Bone Door – the only means of escape. Set in the wake of the First World War, Moorea Corrigan's whimsical fantasy **THISTLEMARSH** (23 April, Del Rey) sees a woman receiving the news that she's been left a crumbling manor in the countryside, once blessed by the Faerie King himself – but if she doesn't rehabilitate the house in a month's time, she'll forfeit her inheritance. Naturally, this involves teaming up with an "insufferably handsome and arrogant" faerie... oh aye? Subtitled *A Creeping Guide to Plant Horror*, **NATURAL THORN KILLERS** (24 April, Telos) examines the many ways vegetative menaces have been depicted in movie, taking in the likes of *The Thing From Another World*'s "walking carrot", the *Killer Tomatoes* franchise, that wince-inducing tree attack in *The Evil Dead*, and much more. **BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE COMPLETE SCREENPLAY** (14 May, Insight Editions) reproduces the final draft script. It includes annotations by writer Bob Gale, and is illustrated with stills, storyboards and concept art. Finally, Mark O'Connell's **BOND, QUEER BOND** (14 May, The History Press) shines a light on some of the unsung LGBTQ artists who helped to shape the franchise. Try not to be put off by the hideous cover design.



THE WRITE STUFF
THE SFX AUTHOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Sylvain Neuvel

The Canadian author can tell you all about squirrels' nuts



DANILA RAZYKOV

Describe the room in which you typically write.

I write on the couch in my living room. I suppose it makes it feel less like work, but mostly I like the open space. Plus I can put *When Harry Met Sally*, *Working Gir*l or anything else I've seen a billion times on TV and raise my head whenever there's a scene I really like. Hockey works well, too; they tell you when to look... (GOOOAAALLL!!!!)

Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

Sometimes, but the only thing I know that fits every kind of scene is Pat Benatar. I did write an entire trilogy (Take Them To The Stars) where every chapter title is a song title, and I wrote each chapter to its own song. That took forever, though. I must have listened to 1,500 songs just to find the right ones. I'll probably stick to Pat Benatar from now on.

Do you have any writing "bad habits" that you have to keep in check?

I do way too much research. I just love it. I have an academic background and part of the fun in writing novels is spending an absurd amount of time learning about stuff I don't know. And no, I don't keep it in check. I put it in the book for no real reason and force you to read about ricket engines and things like squirrel nut-retrieval abilities.

Which of your books are you the most proud of?

That question is evil. It's usually the last one. I'm really happy with the way *The Many* turned out, but I'm proud of every book I wrote in a slightly different way. *Sleeping Giants* is basically 80,000 words of dialogue and yet somehow it works. *A History Of What Comes Next* is fiction, but every event in the book is real. Books two and three in a trilogy are always a challenge.



Pat Benatar: perfect music to write along to.

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY

Were you a keen reader as a child? Which books were your favourites?

My parents didn't have much money, so whatever was on the cheap table up front. Mass-market paperback, usually French translations of whatever was popular a year or two before. Robert Ludlum, Anne Rice, John le Carré, that sort of thing. My guess is they were all translated by the same few people, because they all sort of had the same voice.

If you could recommend one book you love, that's not very well known, what would it be?

Easy. *The Steerswoman* by Rosemary Kirstein. The protagonist uses the scientific method to basically turn a fantasy world into a sci-fi one. And the prose is gorgeous.

What's the biggest misconception that people have about being a professional author?

That we actually know what we're doing. I'm on my seventh novel and think we just get more comfortable not having a clue.

> **"I'm proud of every book I wrote in a different way"**



What's the most frustrating thing about being a professional author?

Time. Everything takes forever. Publishing, and everything that goes with it, moves on geological time. 99.9% of an author's life is waiting for emails.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've received or read?

Don't listen to writing advice. Seriously, just do your thing. All that matters is that you're happy with what you wrote. It's the only thing you have control over.

The Many is out on 23 April, published by Solaris.

SUPERMAN/SPIDER-MAN

Your friendly neighbourhood team-up

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Publisher **DC Comics/Marvel Comics**
Writers/artists **Various**

ONE-SHOT **The new era of Marvel/** DC crossovers is already a huge success thanks to last year's *Batman/Deadpool* specials, and now we've got a new one-shot issue teaming two of comics' biggest superheroes. In this case, it's a more natural and obvious pairing, with Superman and Spider-Man sharing a similar style of colourful, fast-paced superhero adventure (as well as both having different types of tragic past).

As with the previous specials, there are two versions of this team-up happening – the Marvel-produced *Spider-Man/Superman* should be in stores by the time you read this.

Here we have a wide selection of DC creators delivering varied remixes of the DC and Marvel universes. The main 24-page story of *Superman/Spider-Man* doesn't bother with any of *Batman/Deadpool*'s multiverse-related shenanigans, and instead just drops us into a world where all Marvel and DC heroes comfortably co-exist.

Peter Parker is helping Clark Kent out with a potential story when they both face a deadly team-up between Doctor Octopus and Brainiac. The resulting romp is brisk, funny and engaging, with the script from veteran writer Mark Waid giving both heroes moments to shine.

It's a lively adventure that's pushed up several notches by the excellent visuals from Jorge Jiménez, who packs each page with vibrant energy and inventive panel layouts, while continuing to prove he's one of the best superhero artists around.

The main story alone is enough to make this one-shot worth it, but the seven back-up tales are also enjoyable. Each one features a different creative team, and almost all of them are Spidey-related in varied ways.

We go from Lois and Mary-Jane sharing experiences in Tom King and Jim Lee's "The World's Finest" to Jimmy Olsen having an unfortunate encounter with Carnage in Matt Fraction and Steve Lieber's "Jimmy Con-



> **"The main story alone is enough to make this one-shot worth it"**

Carnage", and Jonathan Kent and Uncle Ben crossing paths in Jeff Lemire and Rafa Sandoval's "The Bridge".

Not all the stories completely land, and a couple of them read more like teasers than self-contained tales (especially Sean Murphy's "Beyond the Cobwebs Of Tomorrow", which teams Superboy and Spider-Man 2099.)

However, the occasional misfires are more than made up for by Gail Simone and Belén Ortega's delightful "Blind Date", which throws Power Girl together with the Punisher for a hilarious and charming encounter.

It all adds up to a brightly entertaining slice of crossover fun. Hopefully Marvel and DC can keep these team-ups coming for the foreseeable future. **Saxon Bullock**

i Superman and Spider-Man were also the stars of the very first Marvel/DC crossover issue, published back in 1976.



1776

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Publisher **Marvel Comics**
Writer **J Michael Straczynski**
Artists **Sean Daniel Hill, Ron Lim**

ISSUES 1-5 **Certain comics** aren't afraid to be old-fashioned, and new Marvel miniseries *1776* feels like it could have dropped through a time-warp from decades ago. Utilising the classic "superheroes visit important historical events" set-up that was a staple of the '60s Silver Age, this out-of-continuity adventure sees Captain America, Spider-Man, Iron Man and the Hulk travelling back in time to prevent evil sorceress Morgan Le Fay from changing history.

Morgan has journeyed to the 1770s and plans to derail the American Revolution by ensuring that the fledgling USA loses the War of Independence. It's up to our Marvel heroes to stop her, resulting in plenty of intrigue and action, alongside far too many extended patriotic monologues about the various historical figures they meet along the way.

Timed to coincide with the 250th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence, this five-issue miniseries tries to be both a Marvel superhero romp and an educational exploration of history, but barely succeeds at hitting either of these targets. Stuck between competing tones, J Michael Straczynski's inert script only occasionally manages to inject real tension into the story. The frequently sloppy art from Sean Damien Hill and Ron Lim doesn't help either, leaving this well-meaning, painfully earnest adventure as an awkward disappointment. **Saxon Bullock**



KING COBRA
Volume One

SFX Loves

★★★★★

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Publisher **Hibernia Comics**
Writers **Unknown**
Artist **Ron Smith**

COLLECTION **King Cobra** preceded his more illustrious fellow British superheroes Captain Britain and the Leopard from Lime Street by mere months when he debuted in *The Hotspur & Hornet* in February 1976. Now he's returning to print for Hibernia Comics' new Red Dagger Presents imprint, which will showcase classics from the DC Thomson weekly stable.

This "enemy of the underworld" brings to mind a London-based Clark Kent in his day job as *Daily Scene* reporter Bill King, but resembles Batman with his numerous nifty gadgets. And this 68-page collection's numerous stories – scripted by several uncredited writers – are great fun as he meets arch-enemies like Diablo and Mongoose for the first time.

But the real highlight is Ron Smith's art; he brings a James Bond-esque elegance to his depiction of Bill King that may not have been apparent in his more rugged work for *Judge Dredd*. Smith was more a fan of *Flash Gordon*'s Alex Raymond than Jack Kirby, but there's a kinetic, superheroic dynamism to his figurework, and his layouts never look crowded, despite each weekly instalment only consisting of two or three pages (plus the front cover).

Featuring around the first 12 months of King Cobra's adventures, this is a welcome and important piece of British comics history. **Stephen Jewell**



IRON MAN
Stark Truths

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Publisher **Marvel Comics**
Writer **Joshua Williamson**
Artist **Carmen Carnero**

ISSUES 1-3 **There's a neat** narrative reversal in the prologue of the first issue of this latest relaunch of Marvel's Golden Avenger: it appears to hark back to the streamlined armour of Shellhead's 1962 debut, before revealing it to actually be a botched experiment by technology-based criminal organisation AIM.

Best known for his work for DC Comics and Skybound Entertainment's Energon Universe, Joshua Williamson brings something of the Transformers to Iron Man himself as Tony makes an impressive entrance into a lavish gala on a Stark Hoverbike 3000; after the event is gatecrashed by AIM terrorists, this turns into his latest futuristic suit of armour.

There's also a touch of *GI Joe* to the industrial espionage plotline, which proves to be enthralling – though it does involve the over-familiar trope of Tony's tech being stolen and used against him.

Very much his own worst enemy, Tony precipitates his own undoing here by sleeping with Whitney Frost's Madame Masque, who makes for a formidable, almost Bondian adversary. Williamson contrasts that by surrounding him with a mostly female supporting cast including Pepper Potts, Melinda May and promising new romantic interest Luna Lucia, all deftly depicted by artist Carmen Carnero.

With her fluid linework and vibrant action sequences including issue three's spectacular cliffhanger aboard a hijacked Helicarrier, Carnero channels Jimmy Cheung and Jim Lee as well as classic '80s *Iron Man* artists John Romita Jr and Bob Layton. A massive improvement on Tony Stark's misfiring previous series, this is definitely an *Iron Man* worth investing in.

Stephen Jewell

i Williamson resolved to work for Marvel again after visiting Avengers Campus during a family holiday to Disneyland.



THE LAST DAY OF HP LOVECRAFT

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Publisher **BOOM! Studios**
Writer **Romuald Giulivo**
Artist **Jakub Rebelka**

ISSUES 1-5 **There's** "complicated", and then there's HP Lovecraft. One of the most influential and impactful horror writers of all time, he was also a questionable man with wildly racist views who died long before his work rose to any serious prominence.

This five-issue miniseries (originally published as a French-language graphic novel) sets out to explore Lovecraft's controversial history by focusing on 15 March 1937, the day of his death. The tale that unfolds is a hallucinatory journey into Lovecraft's mind, as he lies dying in a hospital bed and receives visitors from both the past and the future, while his own nightmarish creations start to fracture reality.

Full of well-researched historical detail, this is a serious mix of biography and dream-like fantasy, but frequently feels more like a dry analysis of Lovecraft than a satisfying story. The atmosphere of doomy surrealism is often effective, and the watercolour-based art by Jakub Rebelka is impressively grotesque. The script also doesn't back away from wrestling with Lovecraft's unpleasant views, but fails to reach any proper conclusions.

Instead, it just throws more ideas into the mix, and relies too heavily on dream logic. A meandering and shapeless misfire that only dedicated Lovecraft fans will fully enjoy.

Saxon Bullock

JOHN CARPENTER'S TOXIC COMMANDO

Big Trouble... They Live!

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

- Reviewed on **PC**
- Also available on **PS5, Xbox Series X/S**
- Publisher **Focus Entertainment**

VIDEOGAME **While there have** been games based on *The Thing* and *Halloween*, and it's well known that John Carpenter is a fan of videogames, this is the first time he's put his name to a new interactive IP. How deeply he's actually involved beyond seven spoken words in a trailer, and a light touch to the synth-infused soundtrack, is unclear. What *isn't* in question is the fact that mowing down hordes of zombies is gory fun.

We really are talking *hordes* here. Alongside three players, bots, or a mix of the two, you'll be completing missions in large open maps that occasionally require you to dig in and survive an undead siege. These set-pieces involve hundreds of zombies pouring into your worryingly small defensive position for minutes at a time, a visually impressive onslaught that can generate tension and panic.

Sounds intimidating (and it is), but the experience has been designed in a way that ensures these tidal waves of enemies are manageable. These against-all-odds fights are the heart of *Toxic Commando*, but they're dotted around each map, with lower-pressure objectives and room for exploration in between. There are weapons and extra healing items, but the key to success is often digging out spare parts, which can be used to build defences such as barbed wire, and mortars that can make a huge difference.

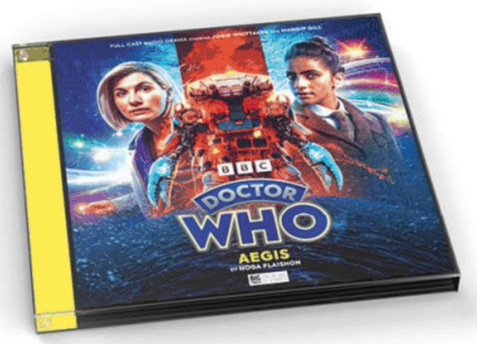
As a co-op always-online game, it's little surprise that there's also XP to be earned and upgrade materials to be found. There are a variety of weapons and four character classes. The former are uninspired, but fun to use; the latter could've done with more work. Each class has an upgrade tree and an ultimate ability, but only the medic can consistently make themselves useful – odd for a game centred around squad play.

With only nine missions to keep you coming back, your interest may fade after your first run through if you don't have a friend group to play with. While it manages to keep your attention though, *Toxic Commando* is a bloody good time. **Luke Kemp**

i The zombies are powered by Saber's Swarm Engine, used to similar effect in its *World War Z* and *Space Marine 2* games.



They'd trespassed on his lawn one time too many.



DOCTOR WHO: AEGIS

★★★½☆

RELEASED 12 MAY

- Running time **54 minutes**
- Format **CD/download**
- Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA **The mystery of** who "the Tourist" is has swirled around the last few stories in this season of 13th Doctor and Yaz adventures. An alien entity seemingly obsessed with the Time Lord, it has followed the TARDIS from destination to destination. Now it's time to get some answers.

The Doctor and Yaz have infiltrated a defence expo attended by Zygons, Sontarans and other alien races with an interest in conflict ("It's like Comic-Con... for war!" quips Yaz at one point). It's run by the Aegis Protectorate, a group of intergalactic arms dealers which is there to promote its lethal new Trojans – no, not condoms, but war machines with human pilots. As the Doctor digs deeper into the company, Yaz starts to experience flashbacks to Earth and her time in the police thanks to the Tourist (Maddison Bulleyment).

Aegis is roughly split between these two storylines, and how they are linked is an interesting, if slightly anti-climactic reveal. We won't spoil anything here, but while it's an intriguing twist, it does leave you wondering if the last few months of build-up were entirely justified.

Still, Noga Flaishon's script is solid, and the story continues to do good work with Yaz, who is becoming a far more fleshed-out character on audio. **Will Salmon**

CRIMSON DESERT

Too much of a good thing

★★★★☆

- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Reviewed on **PC**
- Also available on **PS5, Xbox Series X|S**
- Publisher **Pearl Abyss**

VIDEOGAME **One of the largest** open-world fantasy RPGs in recent memory, *Crimson Desert* is the new patron saint of "feature creep", an overflowing pot of mechanics, ideas and ambition that swings between awe-inspiring and exhausting.

Set in the stolidly generic world of Pywel, its completely disposable narrative concerns Kliff, a burly commander who loses his team in the game's intro and must reassemble the squad for one last rebellion. Character work is thin, and the world doesn't feel very deep on a narrative level, despite obvious ambitions to ape *The Witcher 3*, *Dragon's Dogma* and newer *Zelda* games, among others. But things come together when it's time for combat and exploration.

Battling whole armies with swordplay, spellcraft and wrestling moves never stops being fun, especially when you can hurl a hired goon through a destructible guard tower and watch it fall on him, or catch projectiles in a tornado and hurl them back.

The world looks gorgeous (on PC at least), so travel is inherently pleasing, and there are plenty of puzzles that can be genuinely tough, which is good for the more cerebral sellswords out there.

Then it all gets messy again when you realise *Crimson Desert* clearly doesn't know when to stop

> **"Every feature imaginable appears here"**



Time to master the ancient art of running away.

(the design document must have been carried around with a forklift truck). Every feature imaginable appears somewhere here – gambling, farming, mech combat, interior decorating, investment banking, to name a scant few – and some elements are far less thought out than others, leading to occasional frustration or boredom.

There are two playable protagonists beyond Kliff, but one isn't even unlocked until two-thirds of the way through the campaign... All this means that the *Crimson Desert* experience is definitely at its best after you've sunk some time in, learned what elements of this gigantic game appeal to you, and if you're comfortable exploring its vast map with a podcast in your ears. It's no masterpiece, but it's a darn good time-waster.

Joel D Franey

i *Crimson Desert* reunites much of the cast of *Baldur's Gate 3*, including Devora Wilde, Neil Newbon and Rebecca Hanssen.



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DECEMBER 1973

SFX's time machine hurls us back to a random month once again

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



Sinbad takes on a six-armed statue of Kali.

FLASHBACK

Turban Charged

20 DECEMBER 1968 The promo art promised "Adventure beyond belief!" But for effects genius Ray Harryhausen and his sharp-elbowed producer Charles H Schneer, *The Golden Voyage Of Sinbad* was a statement of belief: a chance to prove that their brand of cinematic showmanship could still reap the box office.

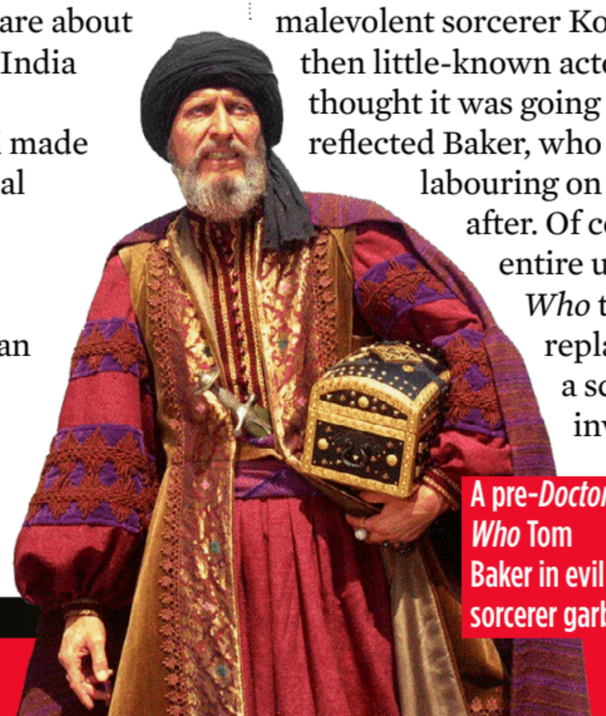
The pair had been away from the screen since the disheartening response to 1969's *The Valley Of Gwangi*. Now they returned to the character that had powered their benchmark 1958 production, *The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad*. John Phillip Law – the masked lead in *Danger: Diabolik* and the equally striking blind angel in *Barbarella* – took on the part originally played by Kerwin Mathews. A turban and the services of an on-set dialectician attempted to make him a more plausible Arabian adventurer than his clean-cut Wisconsite predecessor.

In fact, the film almost featured another hero altogether. "It started out as a different character – Barbaru," Harryhausen revealed to *Starlog* in 1977. "I developed an 8-10 page outline, but then we thought, 'Who cares about Barbaru?' Whereas you might care about Sinbad." Plans to set the film in India were also abandoned, though a six-armed, sword-wielding Kali made it intact to the screen – a vestigial mythological trace of this original vision.

Marvel Comics adapted *The Golden Voyage Of Sinbad* in *Worlds Unknown* issues seven and eight.

Scripted by *The Avengers* supremo Brian Clemens, weaving together stop-motion set-pieces laid out in preliminary sketches by Harryhausen, *Golden Voyage* puts Sinbad on a quest for the fabled Fountain of Destiny. Clemens recommended Caroline Munro for the role of slave girl Margiana after casting her in Hammer swashbuckler *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter*. The filmmakers originally eyed Raquel Welch, hoping to recapture the impact of 1966's *One Million Years BC*.

While Sinbad battles such unearthly Harryhausen creations as a griffin and a centaur, flesh-and-blood villainy comes from malevolent sorcerer Koura, embodied by a then little-known actor named Tom Baker. "I thought it was going to change my life," reflected Baker, who found himself labouring on a building site soon after. Of course, it changed his entire universe: the *Doctor Who* team, struggling to replace Jon Pertwee, caught a screening and promptly invited him in for a chat...



A pre-*Doctor Who* Tom Baker in evil sorcerer garb.

COLUMBIA/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK, MASHETER MOVIE ARCHIVE/ALAMY





Linda Blair spawned many a nightmare.

A Pea-Souper

26 DECEMBER 1968 The day after Christmas Day was a provocative choice for the Stateside roll-out of *The Exorcist*, especially given that one studio exec believed its sacrilegious shudders should remain unreleased. "He thought it was totally obscene and should not be shown to people," remembered Joe Hyams, the film's publicist.

Adapting the 1971 novel by William Peter Blatty and helmed by *The French Connection*'s William Friedkin, this tale of demonic possession in the quiet, brick row streets of Georgetown, Washington DC immediately became a cultural flashpoint. Word of mouth erupted, egged on by rumours of the movie's cursed production and reports of audience members screaming, fainting and even vomiting in what appeared to be collective, contagious hysteria. Local news crews descended to grab vox-pops with nerve-shredded patrons, stumbling to the exit lights in a state of cinematic PTSD. "It's probably the grossest thing I've ever seen," said one guy, shaken by the scene where Regan's head demonically revolves.

Even the film's stars witnessed the phenomena. Ellen Burstyn recalled seeing a woman faint in the aisle at one screening: "I ran over and she was out cold. I took her hand and was trying to bring her back. And then suddenly I thought, 'If she opens her eyes and sees me on her face, she's going to think she died and went to Hell or something...'"

The Exorcist proved as hard to expel from cinemas as the demon Pazuzu itself. Its first theatrical run lasted an astonishing 105 weeks. The total puke-scrubbing bill went unrecorded.

WARNER BROS PICTURES/SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS/GETTY



Sladen and Pertwee posed for a press call in June.

DAILY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/MIRRORPIX/GETTY

New Girl

15 DECEMBER 1968 Perhaps the platonic ideal of the *Doctor Who* companion, journalist Sarah Jane Smith debuted in episode one of "The Time Warrior", investigating a centuries-spanning case of missing scientists. While the character was inspired by the nascent Women's Lib movement, the archetype of the plucky, pushy girl reporter dated back to such '30s scoop-chasers as Lois Lane, Penny Parker and Torchy Blane.

Sarah now feels indivisible from Elisabeth Sladen, who would return to the role in the noughties. But she was nearly brought to the screen by April Walker – not to be confused with *The Girl From UNCLE*'s April Dancer – who had previously appeared in *Dad's Army* and *The Onedin Line*. Although Walker was signed to play the part, received scripts and was measured for a costume, personal reservations expressed by star Jon Pertwee saw the BBC release her from her contract. "I could never quite forgive him," Walker admitted in 2020.



Slade rocking out on Dutch TV.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY

IN REAL LIFE

- **Prime Minister:** Edward Heath
- **US President:** Richard Nixon
- **In the charts:** Lovable glam yobs Slade rule the festive roost with the inescapable "Merry Xmas Everybody".
- **In the news:** Chile breaks off diplomatic contact with Sweden after their embassies offer refuge to people fleeing Augusto Pinochet's coup; NASA probe Pioneer 10 beams back the first close-up images of Jupiter; separatist group ETA assassinate Spanish Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco in Madrid.

ON THE SHELF



- Jon Pertwee fronts the 15-21 December issue of *Radio Times*, along with such showbiz pals as Michael Parkinson.

© BBC MAGAZINES/IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY

Blastermind
The SFX quiz

The '30s

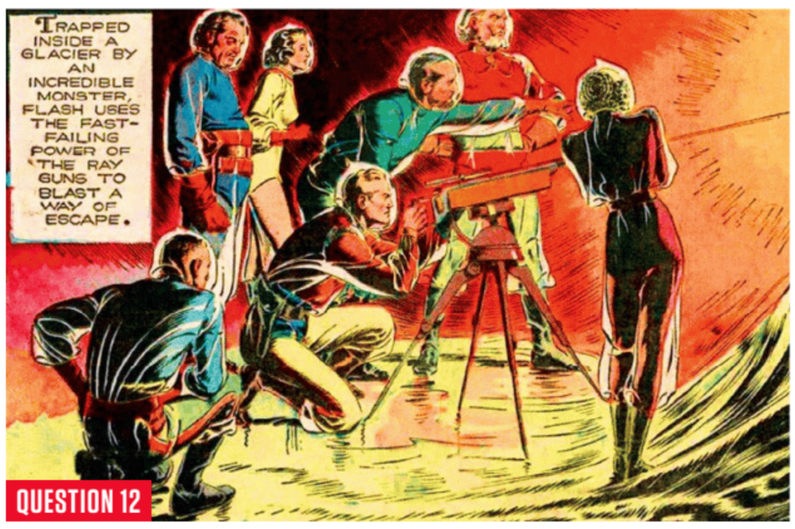
It's the setting for *Spider-Noir*, but how much do you know about the decade that shaped the future of fantasy?

Quizmaster **Nick Setchfield, Editor at Large**


QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 1
Debuting in 1932, Conan the Barbarian was the creation of which author?

QUESTION 2
Name the stop-motion effects genius behind 1933's *King Kong*.

QUESTION 3
Which horror writer died on 15 March 1937 in Providence, Rhode Island?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question
Who's the screen icon pictured here, in 1936 SF chiller *The Invisible Ray*?

QUESTION 5
Superman was the Man of Steel, but who was the Man of Bronze?

QUESTION 6
Raiders Of The Lost Ark is set in a) 1935 b) 1936 c) 1938?

QUESTION 7
Which future screen legend gave voice to pulp avenger the Shadow on radio?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question
What's the name of this pulp magazine hero?

QUESTION 9
1939's "The Case Of The Chemical Syndicate" introduced which hero?

QUESTION 10
Dr Septimus Pretorius is a character in which classic Universal monster movie?

QUESTION 11
Who wrote the screenplay for the 1936 HG Wells adaptation *Things To Come*?

QUESTION 12 Picture Question
A panel from the Flash Gordon newspaper strip – but who's the artist?

QUESTION 13
Debuting in 1939's *Marvel Comics* #1, android Jim Hammond was better known by what name?

QUESTION 14
Which celebrated '30s horror director started out in carnivals as The Living Hypnotic Corpse?

QUESTION 15
Premiering in 1937, what was the first animated feature film produced in America?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question
Supply the title that's missing from the poster of this 1933 horror.

QUESTION 17
Orson Welles's 1938 radio version of *The War Of The Worlds* relocated the story to which location?

QUESTION 18
Name the drug that's used to pacify the population in Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel *Brave New World*.

QUESTION 19
Superman's creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were also behind which of these characters: a) Sam Strange b) Blue Ghost c) Dr Occult.

QUESTION 20
What was the title of the second *Flash Gordon* movie serial, released in 1938?

Answers

1 Robert E Howard 2 Willis O'Brien 3 HP Lovecraft 4 Boris Karloff 5 Doc Savage 6 b) 1936 7 Orson Welles 8 The Spider 9 Batman 10 *Bride Of Frankenstein* 11 HG Wells 12 Alex Raymond 13 The Human Torch 14 Tod Browning 15 *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* 16 *Mystery Of The Wax Museum* 17 New Jersey 18 Soma 19 c) Dr Occult 20 *Flash Gordon's Trip To Mars*

How did you do?

Think you're a wiseguy, huh?

0-5 Crummy

6-10 Rinky dink

11-15 Just Jake

16-19 Peachy

20 Ain't that swell?

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SFX

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Pascal Lamorisse and his scarlet sidekick.

"The Red Balloon"

Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor



I can't pretend that "Le Ballon Rouge" was a formative influence during my childhood – '50s French shorts weren't part of the cultural landscape in Hull in the early '80s. However, whenever I watch it I'm left *feeling* like a child. It's a film that engenders a naive sense of wonder. Written and directed by Albert Lamorisse, and starring his six-year-old son Pascal, this Technicolor magical realist tale (which clocks in at just 34 minutes) has minimal dialogue, and a charmingly simple conceit.

On his way to school, a boy finds a red balloon tied around a gas lamp, and proceeds to take it with him. When he returns home, his mother throws it out of the window... but instead of floating off, the balloon inexplicably hangs around. The next day, it follows the boy to school like a faithful (albeit rather cheeky) hound, becoming a firm friend – unfortunately one coveted, and then targeted, by the other boys in the neighbourhood.

The balloon's motions were, of course, controlled by wires – and it was actually two balloons, not one. A yellow balloon was placed inside the red one. "The use of a double balloon means it doesn't become transparent," Pascal Lamorisse explained to Japanese journalist Kuriko Satoy in 2008. Furthermore, "We applied varnish to it and made it glossy. It is very shiny when inflated, so as to reflect the surrounding scenery."

Shot largely using hidden cameras (thereby capturing real passers-by – the beret count is off the scale), principally in the Belleville and Ménilmontant districts, "The Red Balloon" provides a fascinating snapshot of decaying areas of post-war Paris which have since largely been redeveloped, with their cobbled streets, boulangeries and ads for Gitanes cigarettes.

For me though, the most remarkable thing about it is how sentimental it makes you feel about a bit of latex. When the balloon slowly deflates after one of Pascal's bullies hits it with a stone, you share his sense of grief. It's hard to think of another film where the "death" of an inanimate object is so affecting.

Thankfully, that's not the final beat. Balloons from all around the arrondissements flock to comfort the boy, then carry him off into the sky, ending the film on a literally uplifting note – and leaving the viewer, if they're anything like me, with something in their eye.

With all this hot air, Ian hopes he hasn't inflated the film's importance.

Fact Attack!

→ **Pascal says he didn't really follow a script. "My father explained the situation on the spot, and I acted as if it was my true story."**

→ **Despite this, "The Red Balloon" won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. It also bagged the Short Film Palme d'Or.**

→ **It was turned into a book, using photos from filming. To promote the UK release, Pascal signed balloons that were released over London.**

→ **Albert Lamorisse went on to create a boardgame called *La Conquête Du Monde*. You probably know it better by the English title: *Risk*.**

→ **The director tragically died in a helicopter crash in 1970, while filming a documentary in Iran. His son was with him, but survived.**

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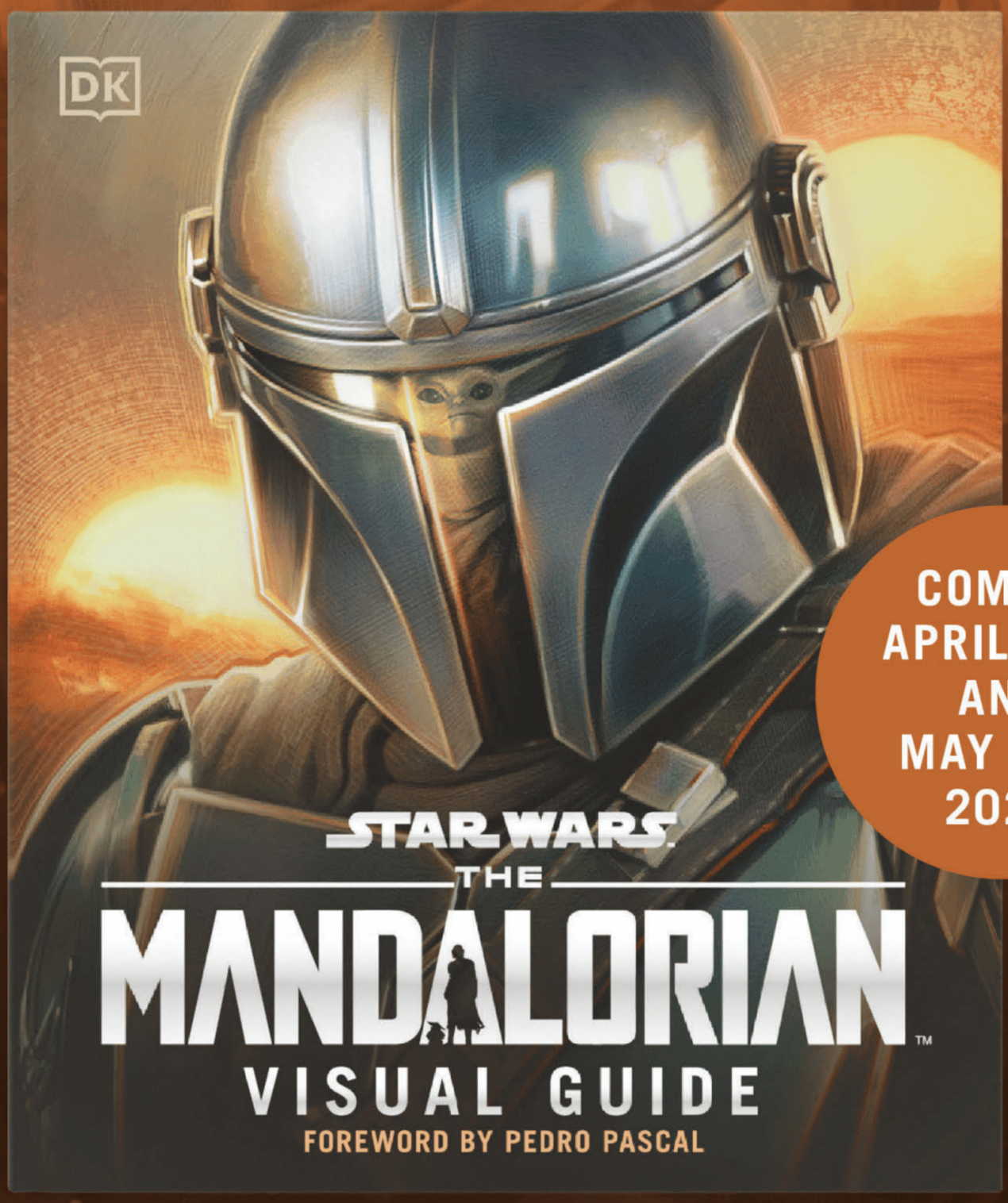

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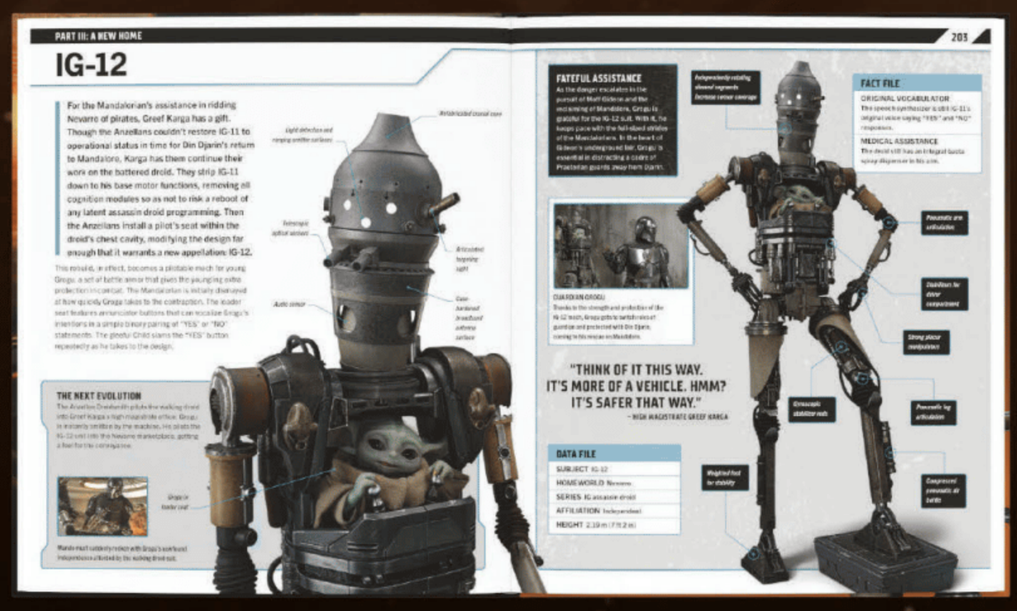

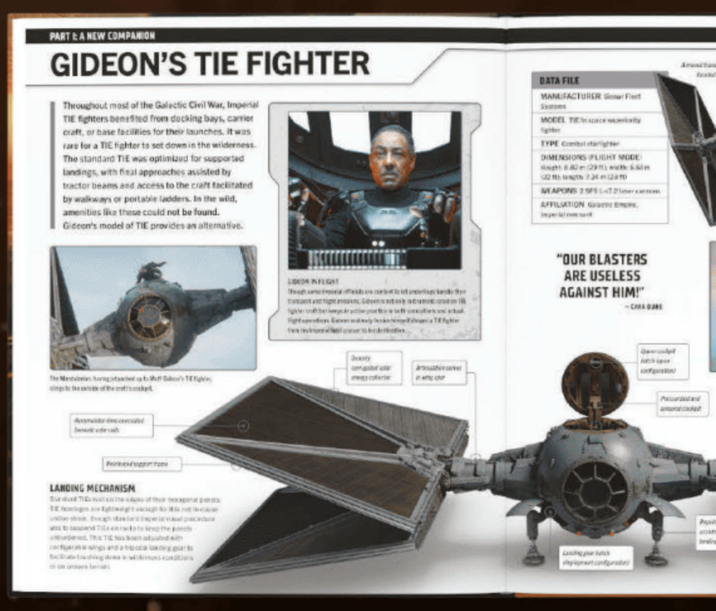

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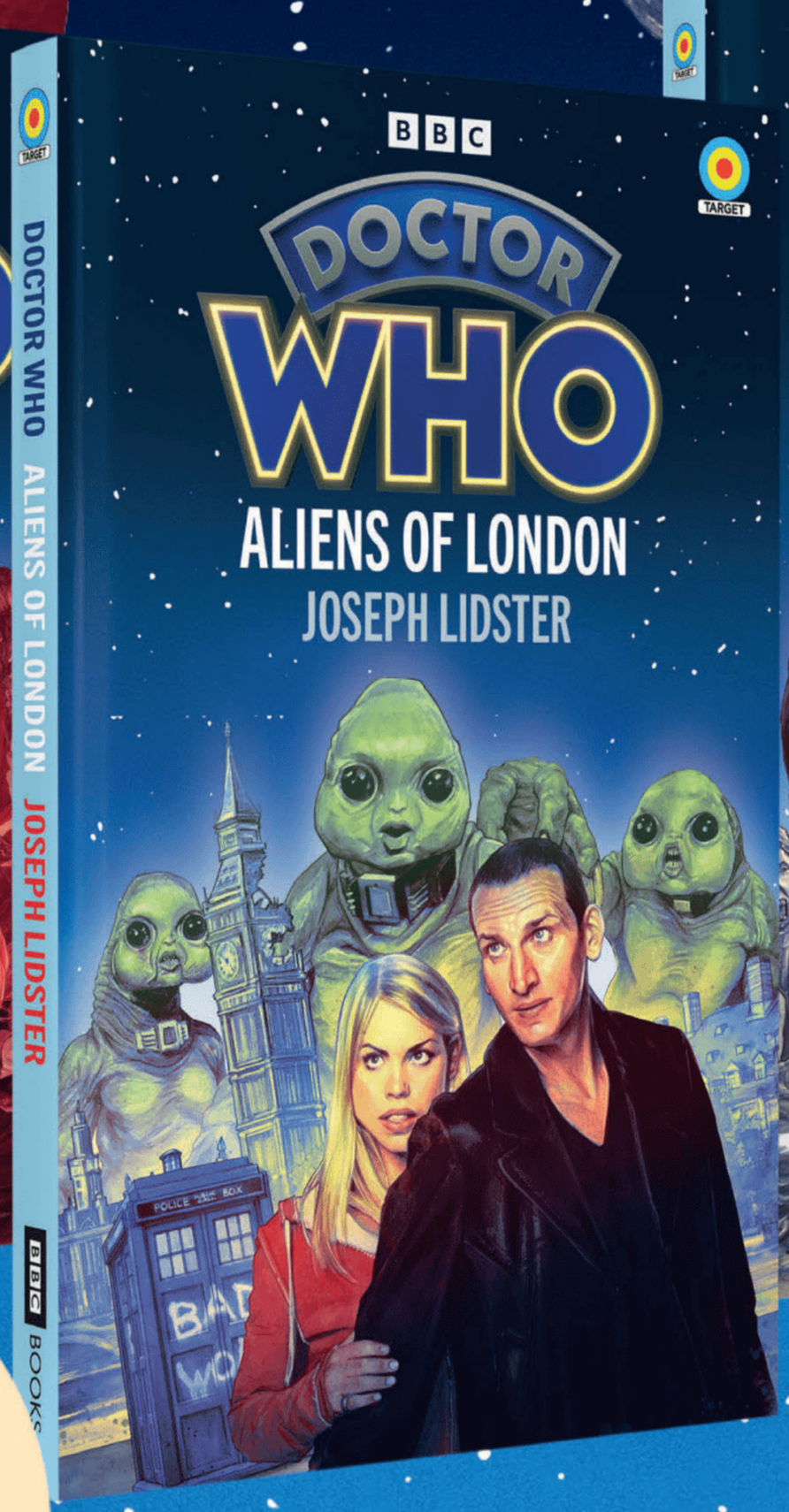

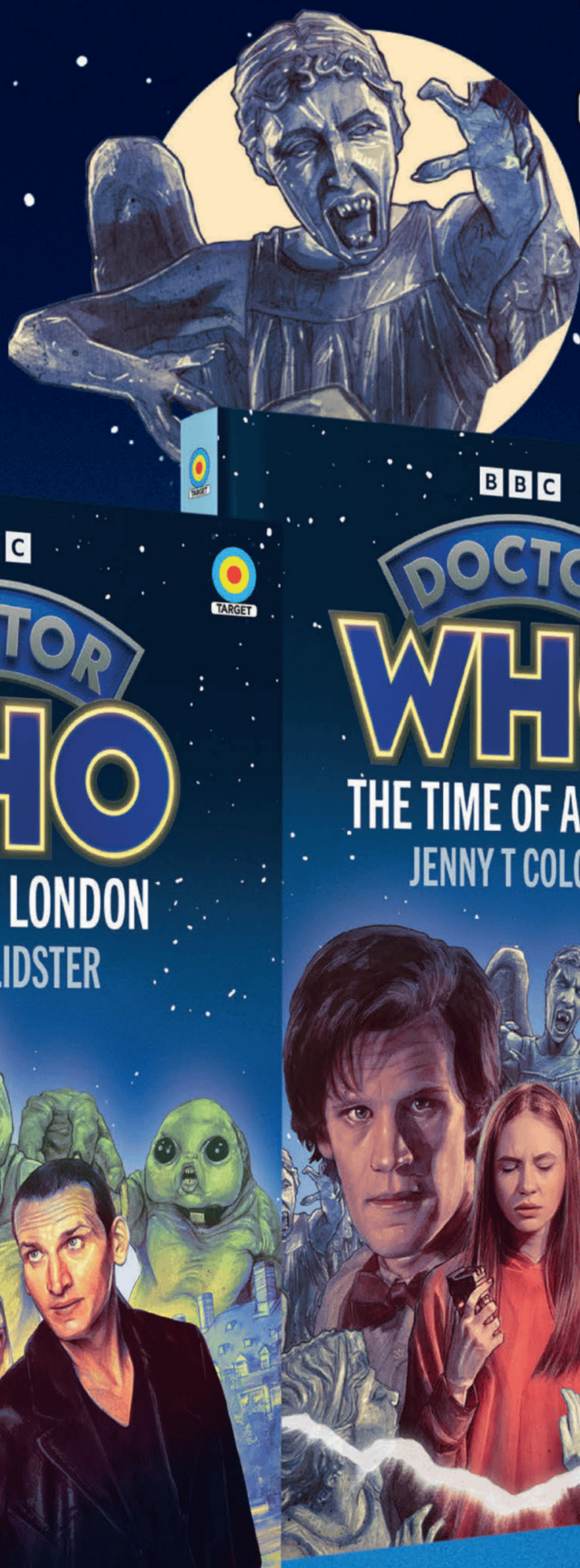

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