

LANTERNS THE DC UNIVERSE GOES GREEN

SPIN



INSIDIOUS
OUT OF THE FURTHER
DEMONS TAKE OVER
THE WORLD!



**LOCK UP YOUR
BABYSITTERS!**

MICHAEL MYERS IS BACK...

HALLOWEEN

THE GAME

POSSESSION
WHAT LIES IN
HOPE HILL?

HUNGRY
ON-SET HIPPO HIJINKS

**TEENAGE SEX
AND DEATH AT
CAMP MIASMA**
GILLIAN ANDERSON'S
FINAL GIRL TRIUMPH

**HALLOWEEN
HORROR NIGHTS**
EXCLUSIVE NEWS
ON HHN 35

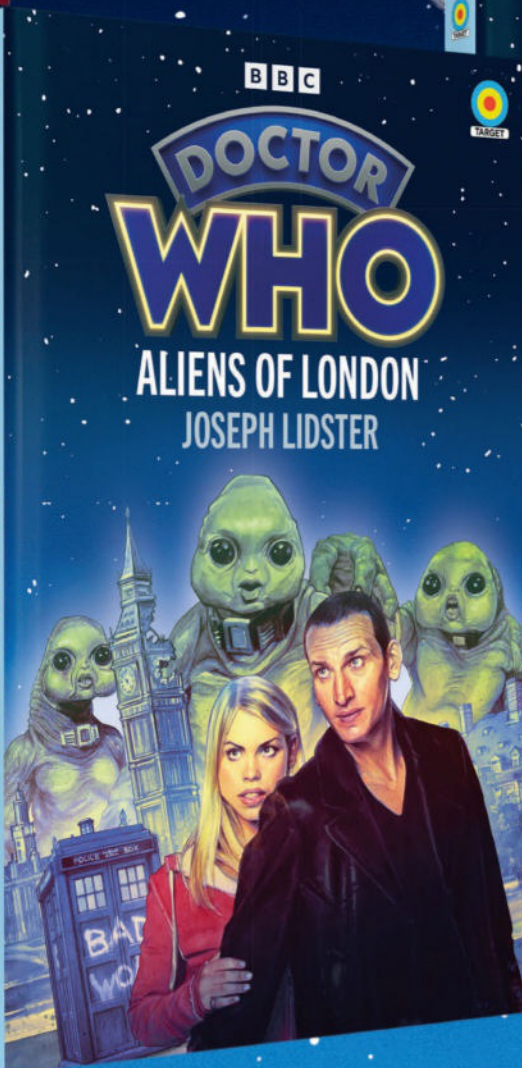
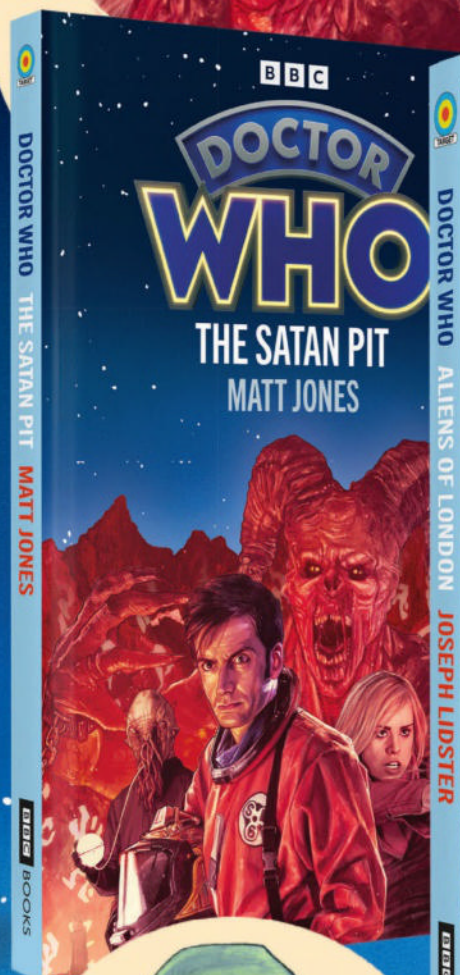
**MASTERS OF
THE UNIVERSE**
ON-SET WITH
MEKANECK

**PLUS! COYOTE VS ACME | MARVEL DIMENSIONS | INNERSPACE | X-MEN
DARK MATTER | GREATEST AMERICAN HERO | ONSLAUGHT | LEVITICUS
ADAM FRANKENSTEIN | PROJECT SWORD | COLONY | THUNDERBIRDS**



ISSUE 408 SEPTEMBER 2026 £5.99
PRINTED IN THE UK

DIGITAL EDITION



OUT NOW



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We dare to gaze upon *The Medusa Touch*.



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Captain's Log

"It was the Boogeyman."



Something happened when I became a teenager – no, wait, stay with me! I lost the ability to play computer games. I have no idea what happened. I no longer seemed to have the coordination or concentration required. Something was missing. I had to make do with watching my younger brothers as they gleefully moved from the latest console system to the next.

I used to *rush* home from school to load up my ZX Spectrum, having sat all day going through the levels of *Dan Dare* or *Flash Gordon* in my head. Hell, I even completed *Return To Oz* (I think that might have been foreshadowing another life-changing event in my teenage years).

Flash-forward many years to a boyfriend trying to explain the buttons on a PlayStation. "Press square!" he shouted. "What the hell is a square?" Just hand me the Werther's Originals and put me out to pasture already.

Sadly, VR isn't an option either, as it just makes me unwell. So I'm slightly gutted that I'm probably not going to be able to stalk the streets of Haddonfield in *Halloween: The Game*. I'd love to give it a go, but I did *Alien: Isolation* and just got stuck in a closet. Ironic.

But... with *Halloween* and *Hellraiser* making their way to consoles over the next couple of months, perhaps there's never been a better time to teach an old dog new tricks. Now, which one is the square again?

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HALLOWEEN © THA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Rants & Raves

Inside the **SFX** hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ If you thought *Halloween: The Game* was vicious, there are some truly horrible horror games coming up. Mama mia!

RANTS

→ It was stupid of me to not consider that there would be "discourse" about *Crystal Lake* being "woke". Grow up! Have you even seen the original movie?

→ My love of vintage genre television took me to the 1973 BBC *Jack The Ripper* series. How did they manage to make it so boring?



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ Really liked *Backrooms*, and appreciated that they didn't overexplain things. The way I saw it (SPOILERS!): the unconscious somehow becomes materialised, and people create a personal Hell. The sort of idea that really lingers unpleasantly...

→ Delighted that *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* will be back in cinemas soon (from 4 September). Not the best, but surely the most charming of all *Trek*'s big-screen adventures?

→ FrightFest is nearly upon us (27-31 August), and *Wrath Of The Gods* (based on ideas by *The Wicker Man*'s Robin Hardy, and directed by his son Justin) is the title intriguing me most.

→ The Buckingham Palace band playing music from *Doctor Who* as Keir Starmer resigned was amusingly weird.



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR AT LARGE

RAVES

→ Had a great time at the Q The Music concert in Bath, hearing Bond songs and iconic incidental music played loud and live. Keeping the British end up in style.

→ Good to hear that Indy's coming back to comics this December in *Indiana Jones And The Sword Of Pandemonium*.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ The third season of *Interview With The Vampire/The Vampire Lestat* is fantastic. Over the top, stacked with genuinely great songs and performances. Fingers crossed for a much deserved season four.

RANTS

→ As someone who overall loved the first three phases of the Marvel Studios franchise, I'm not feeling the tingles for the *Avengers: Doomsday* trailer.

**THE
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Red Alert

→ NEWS /// INTERVIEWS /// INSIGHT /// MUTANTS!

SEPTEMBER
2026

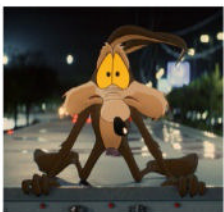


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Teenage Kicks

Director Adrian Chiarella
on supernatural
romance **Leviticus**

Highlights



6 COYOTE VS ACME

→ You can't keep a persistent canine down, no matter how many anvils you drop.



8 COLONY

→ Zombies in the office! Real ones, not people stopping you for a "quick chat" about the match.



16 ONSLAUGHT

→ Super soldiers on the run – what's a mother to do? Good thing she's an army sniper!

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Class Action

The Looney Tunes are resurrected in more ways than one in **Coyote vs Acme**

WORDS: TARA BENNETT



ASK SOMEONE “WHAT’S UP, DOC?” or utter to a stranger, “I taw a putty tat”, and you’ll witness the instantaneous, enduring power of the Warner Bros Looney Tunes characters. For more than 80 years, Bugs Bunny, Tweety Bird, Daffy Duck, Wile E Coyote, Road Runner and many more have remained in the pop culture zeitgeist, based on two decades’ worth of appearances in the brilliant *Merrie Melodies* cartoons.

Because the characters remain so ubiquitous, it’s easy to forget that they never dominated as feature film stars. Some of them cameoled in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) and co-starred in two *Space Jam* movies, or *Looney Tunes: Back In Action* (2003). It wasn’t until 2025’s *The Day The Earth Blew Up* that they got their own original animated feature, or in this month’s *Coyote vs Acme*, a headlining character in a hybrid big-screen adventure. And these last two were almost deleted by Warner Bros Discovery as tax write-offs, until Ketchup Entertainment saved them both.

So *Coyote vs Acme* director Dave Green is especially happy to be talking to Red Alert about his soon-to-be-released movie, which survived to put a spotlight back on these criminally underused legends. “We really look at it as a giant privilege to be able to play with these characters,” Green says with pride. “The goal of the entire cast and crew was to honour them and to treat them right. I was very nervous and careful, and wanted to make sure that we got the characters right, and I hope we did.”

Green’s live-action/animation comedy is based on Ian Frazier’s comedic essay of the same name, published in *New Yorker* in 1990. Screenwriter Samy Burch shaped the final version, which stars Will Forte (*Sweet Tooth*) and Lana Condor (*X-Men: Apocalypse*) as the human lawyers of a very fed-up and frustrated Acme Corporation customer, Mr Wile E Coyote. After decades of buying faulty Acme

Acme rocket skates? What could go wrong?

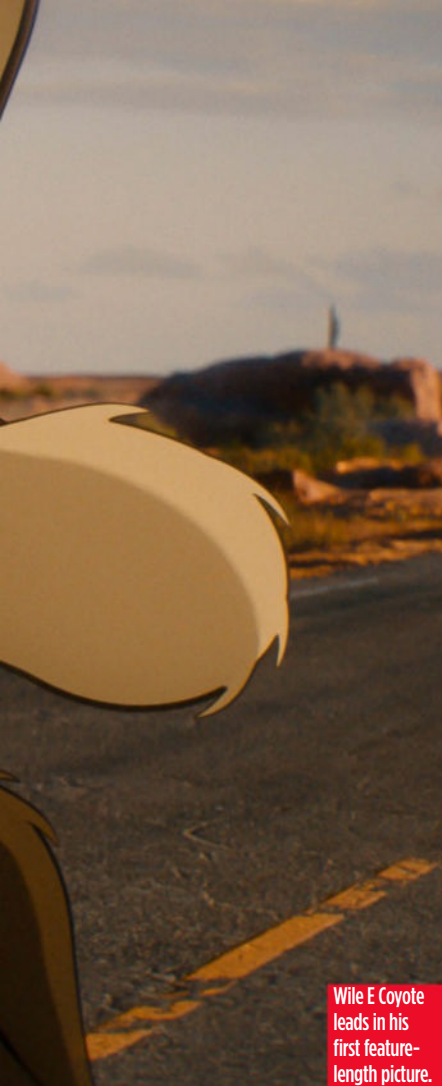
products that have thwarted his capture of the Road Runner, the Coyote leaves the desert to pursue legal action.

Like *Roger Rabbit*, its human cast lives in a contemporary world alongside the deep bench of Looney Tunes characters, from Daffy Duck to Beaky Buzzard. Green says they borrowed their approach and techniques from “the

best hybrid movie of all time”, shooting on location in New Mexico and using renowned puppeteer Dave Barclay as a performance stand-in to interact with the cast.

“But the thing that was different is that Roger is such a needy character,” Green points out. “He wants to grab and tug, annoy and bother Bob Hoskins, so there’s a lot of physical interaction. When you look at Wile E, he is very much a lone wolf and





Wile E. Coyote leads in his first feature-length picture.



Still no closer to catching that pesky Road Runner.



Coyote and his infamous written signs get existential.

“This is a subversive and funny courtroom drama for kids”

animators, is really the lighting and compositing detail that they bring, which did not exist when they were making *Roger Rabbit*. I’m talking about things like reflection and shadows. Wile E has got his elbows on the table, and we are getting the reflection of his

look. We’re getting bounce from the window behind him. All of that lighting is like he is really sitting in those scenes.”

The result is a hilarious and eye-boggling showcase for these revered characters that proves they belong in 2026 and should be allowed outside of the archive frequently. “The teams who made the movie, from the cast, the animators, the musicians, the crew who worked so hard in Albuquerque and everyone who worked on the previs of the film for a year, we’re all just beyond thrilled,” Green says.

“This is a weird, subversive, funny, and hopefully outside-the-box courtroom drama for kids that stars the Looney Tunes. And if you think about

that sentence, it sounds absolutely insane,” Green laughs. “It’s a win in the first place that we were able to make this. The second win is that this movie is coming out and it’s coming out on the big screen, and we could not be more thrilled about that, honestly.”

Coyote vs Acme is in UK cinemas from 21 August and US theaters from 28 August.



How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

an individual. I think he would prefer to be a little standoffish and not have those same types of interactions. So as much as I was wanting live action and animation to collide and have that real physicality, every time we looked at it in [story]boards, I was like, ‘Oh, this is out of character, or this is forced in.’”

Green was adamant about staying true to the characters as established, so *Coyote vs Acme*

instead used visual effects and modern technology to convince audiences what they’re seeing is real. “Our workflow begins with our two 2D artists drawing pose-to-pose and then working with [computer animation studio] DNEG to find and then refine those poses in 3D, and then adding a toon shading look to the film. But the real benefit of working with DNEG, on top of them being talented

SCI-FACT! Looney Tunes Cartoons artists David Gemmill, Ryan Kramer and Carlos Lutterbach were key animators for *Coyote vs Acme*.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Hive Of Activity

Yeon Sang-ho jumps back on the zombie train with

Colony WORDS: JAMES MOTTRAM

“I’M A REALLY BIG FAN OF THE horror genre, because it stimulates the brain and it gives us a chance to think,” remarks Yeon Sang-ho. The Korean director has already proved his mettle in the genre with 2016’s electric zombie thriller *Train To Busan*, a worldwide hit that he followed with the animated prequel *Seoul Station* and 2020 sequel *Peninsula*. After time away from the undead, most recently directing 2025’s psychological drama *The Ugly*, Yeon is back with *Colony*.

Set in Seoul’s Doongwoori Building, the rapid-fire story begins as a disgruntled scientist (Koo Kyo-hwan) unleashes a virus, turning his former boss into a flesh-hungry zombie. As the virus spreads from conference rooms to the shopping centre below, the building is locked down, leading those left inside – including Jun Ji-hyun’s biotech professor – desperately trying to survive the onslaught. To make matters worse, Koo’s character injects himself with the antidote, meaning he can’t be killed.

Yeon didn’t initially intend to return to the genre he’s already conquered. “The starting point of making this movie was not to make a zombie movie,” he explains. “It was about dealing with the potential fear of our time, and for me, it was about the high-speed exchange of information, which leads to collective conscience. I wanted to make a movie about this problem, and at one point I realised that the adequate genre that could represent this would be the zombie genre.”

If *Train To Busan* was an allegory for unchecked capitalism and the way it destroys community, *Colony* looks at the evolution of technology, with so many lives now dominated by social media and artificial intelligence.

“You have a lot of point of views on social media, they really spread rapidly, and you just



Train To Busan fans will find their fix in *Colony*.



Colony sees people trapped and under siege.

realise that consciousness is ruling everything,” he says. “For me, the greatest fear is human individuality that becomes completely powerless.”

The freshest element of *Colony* sees the zombies become a hive mind of sorts, rapidly sharing information. “What I wanted to depict was that the zombies... they are starting in a very primitive state, and then they quickly



Ji Chang-wook plays one of the trapped survivors.



The story sees another terrifying outbreak.



Jun Ji-hyun in the wrong place at the wrong time.



The film is freely inspired by classic Romero.

“For me, the greatest fear is individuality that becomes powerless”

feeling that will be familiar for so many across the globe.

Needless to say, Yeon remains a huge fan of George Romero, the grandfather of the zombie genre. If *Colony* borrows from Romero's 1978 classic *Dawn Of The Dead* for its shopping mall setting, it's also inspired by the less appreciated 2005 film *Land Of The Dead*, with its tale of zombies developing cognitive intelligence. “It really was a great influence to *Colony*,” he says. “I wanted to make a really fresh new zombie movie, but at the same time with a classical side.”

Yet Yeon butts against Romero's love for shambling, ambling zombies. In *Colony*, the undead are fast and feverish, as they desperately claw at any human flesh they can find. Yeon, who has used breakdancers and stunt performers to play zombies in the past, turned to an avant-garde dance troupe this time. “I need people who would move as a group,” he says. “There were three teams, so I wanted them to move collectively.”

While the sheer physicality of the zombie actors astounds, as they twist and gyrate their bodies, Yeon's team accentuated the effect with grisly prosthetics. For the substance spat out by the zombies, Yeon looked to Ridley Scott's *Alien* and its queasy palette for inspiration. “Inside, you have the white substance... I thought that it created a very intense feeling. So we did a lot of tests with the make-up team, and that's why we decided to choose the white and red.”

Where Yeon goes next will be fascinating. “I'm just happy to make all kinds,” he says. His limited series, sci-fi crime thriller *Human Vapor* – inspired by Ishirō Honda's 1960 film *The Human Vapor* – hit Netflix last month. And he's just wrapped *Paradise Lost*, a low-budget “deep and dark” drama. But he has also finished writing a novel, *Dr Apocalypse*,

evolve,” says Yeon. “And on the opposite, that you have all the human beings who actually start in civilisation, and they quickly go back to savagery. I wanted to show how much people can decline.”

Understandably, Yeon was also influenced by the pandemic, and the global trauma that

caused. “A lot of things that I experienced, or thought about, during the pandemic nourished *Colony*,” he says. While in *Train To Busan*, the virus spreads outwards, the characters in *Colony* keep it contained. “The outside world is completely virus free, and they try to lock down the people in the building,” he adds – a

which tells of a surgeon who operates on zombies to try and cure them; as he recently told *Screen International*, “maybe it will also be made as a movie”. He's not done with the undead just yet. ●

Colony is in cinemas from 28 August.

► **SCI-FACT!** After its debut at the Cannes Film Festival in May, *Colony* sold to over 120 territories. Kerching!



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE



Thunderbirds are well and truly Go in this new series.

Storm Warning

Silver anniversary celebrations continue in multimedia event **Thunderbirds: Hidden Danger** WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



AS *THUNDERBIRDS* CONTINUES to celebrate its 60th anniversary, *International Rescue* are the focus of Anderson Entertainment's new multi-platform event. Occurring in and around various classic episodes, *Thunderbirds: Hidden Dangers* encompasses short story collection

International Rescues, a *Comic Anthology*, and miniseries *Burnout*.

"Each format tells its own story, which is broadly self-contained, but there are ideas and plot points seeded throughout that lead to something big, like the first little wisps of cloud gathering before an almighty thunderstorm,"

explains range producer Andrew Clements. "*Burnout* is a single story told across four issues, while *International Rescues* and the *Comic Anthology* tell 10 stories apiece. So that's 21 individual stories across three releases, with more on the way, all leading to something huge further down the line."

"We take a core plot point from season one episode 'The Perils Of Penelope' about a secret formula to convert water into rocket fuel, and theme a rescue around it," continues writer Chris Thompson, who partners artist Connor Flanagan on *Burnout*. "We touch upon what happens when *International Rescue* is pushed beyond its operational limit, and then throw a burning refinery with a near infinite fuel source at them."

"It's *Burnout* in several senses – mentally, physically, and literally due to the fiery mission they have to face," adds Clements. "As always, there's a ticking clock and lots of lives at stake, but this time *International Rescue* have reached breaking point after an unrelenting series of back-to-back missions and they make mistakes. Before the story is over, they'll make the situation worse before it gets better."

"I'm working with artist Gary Erskine on a comic strip set around a rescue we've seen on TV, which has the opportunity to do the big launch moments and to spotlight all

“There's no such thing as a quiet day off on Tracy Island!”

the vehicles," says Paul Cornell, who also contributes to *International Rescues*. "I have some fun in my prose story with Lady Penelope and Parker, told from the Hood's extremely arch point of view."

"I've written a Lady Penelope, Parker and [lab assistant] Tin-Tin Kyranos story for artist Mike Collins, set in swinging 1960s Soho sometime after the episode 'The Cham-Cham'," continues Ian Edginton. "It sees Lady P reprising her disguise as nightclub chanteuse Wanda Lamour."

"We've got two strips that pick up from the end of 'The Impostors' and 'Attack Of The Alligators'," adds *Comic Anthology* editor Dan Whitehead. "It means we can show the full scope of what running an organisation like *International Rescue* involves – like how they respond when there's an emergency and Thunderbird 1 and 2 are already on a mission? It all adds to the sense of peril and urgency that the show did so well, allowing us to show there's no such thing as a quiet day off on Tracy Island!"

Thunderbirds: Hidden Dangers – Burnout is out on 28 August. *The Hidden Dangers: International Rescues short story collection* and *Comic Anthology* are out later this year.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

How many variations on old characters can you spot?

Event Horizon

The 616 isn't big enough for Alex Ross in new graphic novel

Marvel Dimensions WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

FOLLOWING ON FROM 2002's *Fantastic Four: Full Circle*, Alex Ross is now encompassing the entire Marvel Universe in his new graphic novel for Abrams ComicArts. Beginning by recounting the origins of Marvel's leading heroes, *Marvel Dimensions* is ambitiously multidimensional, as Ross experiments with the very concept of a superhero event book – even incorporating a bonus 32-page comic into the 112-page hardback.

"*Marvel Dimensions* started as two separate ideas that I melded into one," says Ross, who has long played around with the idea of doing origin spreads for the Marvel characters. "It hadn't inspired me enough on its own until I married the concept with an orphaned idea I had conceived

for a whole other bizarre look at the Marvel Universe. Uniting them both gave the origins a context of setting up the other storylines."

Having risen to prominence with 1994's Kurt Busiek-written *Marvels*, which offered a down-to-earth, human angle on superheroes, Ross next teamed up with scripter Mark Waid in 1996 on apocalyptic DC crossover *Kingdom Come*. "My grounding of the heroes' histories is to vary the perspectives on their telling to include critical viewpoints," he continues. "A traditional perspective on the genre might not investigate some of the cracks in a character's defining qualities."

Ranging from the original Human Torch to Captain America, the Silver Surfer, the X-Men and once again the Fantastic Four, Ross

mostly concentrates on Marvel's classic '60s pantheon. "I covered everybody that I felt mattered the most in Marvel's history," he explains. "I may let some readers down with who I limited myself to, given that every key character I determined to focus on are all over 50 years old at this point... these icons can be as fresh to readers as any newer concepts."

With even the Marvel Cinematic Universe having explored the wider Marvel Multiverse, Ross is also venturing beyond the bounds of Earth-616 (the primary continuity), introducing around 200 variations of existing Marvel characters. "I was going in a particular direction with the notion that I would be the first person to do a certain obvious version of Marvel's

universe that hadn't strictly been done this exact way before," he teases. "The name 'Dimensions' was used to have the double meaning where it is a substitute for an 'Origins of' title with the other possibilities implied. Believe it or not, the word 'dimensions' was pulled from my friend's quoting the line 'another dimension, another dimension' in the Beastie Boys' song 'Intergalactic'. We were talking about my book's concept and the lyric came to mind."

As with *Full Circle*, Ross combines the lush painted pages he is famous for with some scratchier, more fluid linework. "I really enjoyed doing that flat colour, pen-and-ink style, and it's become more exciting for me to see the parts of the final book I've done with that approach," he says. "I mesh the painted art here and there for dramatic contrast and it makes up half of *Marvel Dimensions*. My difficulty will be returning to just painting alone in any future projects." ●

Marvel Dimensions is out on 1 September.

SCI-FACT! *Marvel Dimensions* is linked to *Earth X*, Ross's alternate Marvel Universe series with co-creators Jim Krueger and John Paul Leon.



Jennifer Connelly and Joel Edgerton as the Dessens.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Outside The Box

The Dessens seek a new reality in season two of **Dark Matter** WORDS: TARA BENNETT

➔ IF YOU DISCOVERED that a better version of yourself was living it up in an alternate reality, would you want to switch places? That's essentially the conundrum thrust upon unassuming physics professor Jason Dessens (Joel Edgerton) after he was kidnapped by a more dynamic Jason (#2) who invented interdimensional travel in season one of Apple TV's *Dark Matter*.

Once Jason #1 was separated from his wife Daniela (Jennifer Connelly) and teenage son Charlie (Oakes Fegley), he acquired a new appreciation for the quiet life. So, he spent all of season one trying to outwit Jason #2 to access his

interdimensional Box to get back home.

Confusing? While it was intense keeping track of the multiple Jasons in season one, it ended with Jason #1 reuniting with his family, seeking a safe reality to start over without threats from angry alt-Jasons or betrayed colleagues like Leighton Vance (Dayo Okeniyi), or his friend Ryan Holder (Jimmi Simpson).

Creator/showrunner Blake Crouch tells *Red Alert* that season two is less about what reality the Dessens or any other character exists in, and more about the psychological toll of knowing there are endless versions of

themselves out there. "Seeing these dead versions of yourself and knowing that a version of your husband was capable of doing heinous shit and that

capability exists in your husband, that starts to then ask for a story that examines what is the state of Daniela's and Jason's marriage coming into season two."

Season two takes Jason to some (literal) dark places.





Amanda Brugel and Dayo Okeniyi...

“How do you know that there aren’t other versions of you that could pop up any time?”

The Dessens will use the Box to find the best reality for themselves, but best for whom? Crouch says Jason must deal with the repercussions of his alternate self’s invention, good and bad, as well as its temptations. “He wonders how he created it,” Crouch says of Jason’s quandary. “Yeah, it’s dangerous and has a lot of downsides, but it’s also this unbelievable scientific marvel.”

Crouch says that the Box advances into the position of adversary in season two. “In season one, Jason #2 is undeniably the antagonist, so we wanted to think a little bigger and broader,” he says. “The Box is this device that spawns infinite numbers of any character that

dares to walk inside of it, so it just gave us interesting, fertile ground to build out and build on top of what we did in season one.”

The Dessens family moving together through realities will also be novel for the series, which kept them separated last season. “I really wanted this season to treat the family as a functioning, sometimes dysfunctional family thrown into the chaos of not just moving to a new town or a new state, but moving to a new world,” Crouch explains. “How do you know that there aren’t other versions of you running around that could pop up any time and spiral everything out?”

Charlie Dessen will also get more screen time, which will reveal how he’s dealing with this

quantum chaos that’s sabotaging his young life. With his own teens at home for inspiration, Crouch says, “I thought it would be fascinating to explore and to beef up Charlie’s journey this time.”

Crouch is also excited to expand upon Leighton Vance, CEO of tech company Velocity, whose lab facilitated the creation of the Box. “Leighton has a huge role in this season,” he says. We’re gonna get a little bit more of the lore, like what was going on at Velocity when they were finally bringing the Box online for the first time? They weren’t just building this for no reason. There was a purpose behind it, and Leighton was the driving visionary of what that purpose was. It always interested us to see, what was Leighton’s original intent with the Box and is it still viable?”

Season two will also connect strangers Amanda and Ryan, the “multi-pats,” who find each other.

“They were both done dirty,” Crouch says. “Ryan comes from Jason #1’s world, and she [Amanda] comes from Jason #2’s world. But they have the shared trauma of being in a world that is beautiful on the surface, but it’s not their home. They’re going to head out on a bit of a journey to try to get home.”

While not wanting to give away too much about where the Box will take everyone this time, Crouch does say that this season is about the people who are essentially exiled from their worlds. “It starts out with everyone separate and on their own, trying to deal with their own shit. But of course, everyone’s going to come together,” he teases. “I think that people would be really disappointed if we didn’t do a third season after where we leave things.” ●

Dark Matter is on Apple TV from 28 August.

SCI-FACT! Christopher Diamantopoulos, current voice of Mickey Mouse, joins the series as the mysterious Agent Mitchell McNamara.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Fantastic Beasts

Beast vs Beast as the X-Men and Fantastic Four fight for the future in **DNX** WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



TAKING ITS TITLE FROM THE X-Men's advanced DNA, Marvel's new event series *DNX* is almost the polar opposite of 2005's *House Of M*, which famously radically reduced the Children of the Atom's numbers. The culmination not only of last

year's *Age Of Revelation* crossover, but also writer Jed MacKay's *X-Men* run to date, it sees the X-Men joining up with the Fantastic Four to combat the menace of 3K, which unleashes the X-Virus upon an unsuspecting world, threatening to turn humanity into mutants.

"Something I've always found interesting is a statement frequently made by disability advocates: it's in everybody's best interest to champion accessibility for those with disabilities, as anybody could become a part of that community at any time," says MacKay, who is working with artist Federico Vicentini. "We've seen a lot made of the mutant/human divide, but with the X-Virus being able to flip a genome from one to the other, we're in a position to see what happens when a human with strongly held beliefs about mutants actually becomes one."

Resembling a modern-day Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, former Orchis agents-turned-mutants 3K were introduced by MacKay in 2024's *X-Men* issue one. "3K was created to be a super-tech gene-terror organisation to both stand against and hold a mirror to the X-Men as each group is run by a founding X-Man and each has their own dream in the absence of Xavier's," explains MacKay, referring to the three flagship titles, which currently also include *Uncanny X-Men* and *X-Men United*. "Despite their outward futurism, they're a deeply regressive institution – as we saw from their broadcast in last year's *Hellfire Vigil* issue one, their rhetoric is reminiscent of those

“Having Beast on my X-Men team has been a highlight”

conservative online influencer clowns always going on about 'RETVRN' and building up a narrative of a golden age that never existed."

3K are led by The Chairman, who is actually the original Beast Prime, who gradually transformed into a malevolent, scheming bad guy over the course of 2019 to 2024's Krakoa Age storylines. "It's a matter of having one's cake and eating it too!" laughs MacKay. "The Beast has always been one of my favourites and having him on my X-Men team has been a highlight. That said, Benjamin Percy did a great job of turning him into a villain in *X-Force* and he's now a rare addition to the X-Men universe – a new villain that can hang at the level an *X-Men* book requires. Having the two of them on opposite sides presents all sorts of opportunities for drama."

DNX's core rivalry can be traced back to the original '60s *X-Men*. "Much of it centres around the final conflict between the X-Men and 3K, which means we're talking about a conflict between Cyclops and the Chairman, aka Dr Henry McCoy, the mutant Cyclops grew up with and called his brother," continues MacKay. "Meanwhile, the other, younger McCoy, the X-Men's Beast, has come to Reed Richards for the help he believes only one of the greatest scientific minds can give him." ●

DNX is out on 2 September.



A cover for issue two by Rafael Loureiro.



Captain America

Ralph Hinkley from **The Greatest American Hero** is back from space in a new comic

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**



RUNNING FROM 1981 to 1983, TV comedy drama *The Greatest American*

Hero was an early forerunner for the Marvel Cinematic Universe with its more offbeat, gentler tone. Now, high school teacher-turned-costumed crimefighter Ralph Hinkley is returning in a new series from AMP Comics. It's co-written by Don Handfield and Tawnia McKiernan – daughter of the late Stephen J Cannell, the show's original creator, whose credits also included *The A-Team* and *The Rockford Files* – and illustrated by Alper Geçgel.

"Other superhero shows like *Wonder Woman* and *The Incredible Hulk*, which had been released a few years before that point, were not really comedic and took themselves extremely seriously," recalls Handfield. "*The Greatest American Hero* really nailed the humour, the heart and the fun in a way that really laid the groundwork for the success Marvel has had since with films like *Iron Man*."

A massive childhood fan of the show, Handfield closely developed the opening arc with McKiernan, an experienced writer and director, who also oversees her father's considerable legacy. "The foundation of the story came out of our very first conversation, as we both felt that the father/son relationship was the natural and most meaningful continuation of *The Greatest American Hero*," explains McKiernan, who picked up on an unresolved plot thread from the TV show as Ralph returns from space in the first issue to be reunited with his incredulous son and more enthusiastic grandson.

"Fans will remember that Ralph had a son who essentially disappeared after the first season," she continues. "I always wondered why, and more importantly I wondered what it would be like to grow up as the

son of an unlikely superhero. How would that shape a son and how would Ralph balance saving the world with being a father? Those questions felt like the natural emotional continuation of the story, which in many ways mirrored my own experience growing up as the daughter of such a prolific storyteller whose work helped shape television for decades. While my father wasn't a superhero, I did know what it was like to share him with the world, and that perspective gave me a unique connection

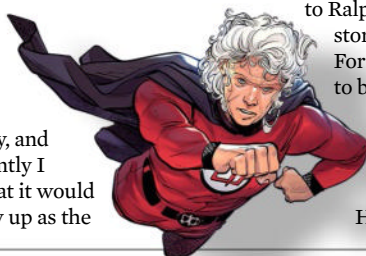
to Ralph's son and the story we're telling. For me, Ralph had to be a part of it and is not there simply for nostalgia – he's the heart of the story. His relationship

with his son creates a bridge between the original series and a new generation."

"We'll be exploring the origins and also answering the question of how Ralph got into space in the first place," adds Handfield, who has secured the distinctive likenesses of not only William Katt, who played Ralph Hinkley but also those of the late Robert Culp (FBI agent Bill Maxwell). Michael Paré (high school student Tony Villicana), and Connie Sellecca (Ralph's girlfriend/wife Pam Davidson).

"We also have plans for classic stories with the original crew in the vein of *Wonder Woman '77*," continues Handfield, "as well as some fun spin-offs, so expect the old crew to return soon." ●

The Greatest American Hero is out now.



SCI-FACT! William Katt wrote a three-issue *Greatest American Hero* miniseries for his own *Catastrophic Comics* in 2008.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Meet An Army Of Me

Director Adam Wingard goes feral with **Onslaught** WORDS: TARA BENNETT

FOR THE FIRST SEVEN years of director Adam Wingard's career, he was known as the indie horror guy behind *Pop Skull* (2007) and breakthrough hits *You're Next* (2011) and *The Guest* (2014). Then for a decade, Wingard went on what he tells Red Alert was a "willing journey" directing big IP movies, including *Death Note* and two chapters in the Monsterverse *Godzilla* saga.

During postproduction on *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* Wingard says he felt the itch to develop his own original films again. "I thought, 'I'll spend a couple of hundred grand and get a couple of actors together, like Dan [Stevens] and Rebecca [Hall]. I'll come up with a little tiny movie that we can do.'" That notion became the earliest incarnation of his latest sci-fi/horror thriller, *Onslaught*.

After collaborating with frequent co-writer Simon Barrett, *Onslaught* is now a more violent, ambitious film about former US Army sniper Celeste (Adria Arjona), a flawed but protective mother, versus a gaggle of escaped Nazi super-soldiers on a rampage in the desert.

"The crux of the story always started from a single mother with a slightly difficult relationship with her daughter, and that was something I really wanted to explore," Wingard says, explaining that becoming a parent himself fed the concept. "It's all the new horrors that it brings you as a human. It opens up a lot of doors to scary things in lots of ways."

"This one is really the most personal film I've made," he continues. "I wanted to do

something that I felt really represented pretty much all my interests, wrapped up in all my influences. In some ways, it was a refresher for me. I needed to clean the slate and remember who I was before I went into that studio world."

Along for the ride with Wingard are regular collaborators Stevens and Hall, and Arjona, as well as '80s legends Reginald VelJohnson (*Die Hard*) and Michael Biehn (*Aliens*), and even UFC fighter Alex Pereira.

Wingard cites *Assault On Precinct 13* and *The Fog*, among others, as major influences on *Onslaught*. "It wears its references on its sleeves to John Carpenter and James Cameron '80s movies," Wingard points out. "But at the end of the day, I wanted it to be scary. I want there to be at least a couple of sequences that are a little upsetting, because a good horror film can both be fun and a little disturbing. And then you bring it back to the fun, and ultimately that's the way to really resonate."

While the whole supporting cast is colourful, the movie hangs on the solid shoulders of Arjona, who Wingard says impressed him from their very first meeting. "She pulled up at the restaurant in this old 1970s orange pickup truck. Adria enjoys shooting guns and she's good at it. She's an authentic tough person," he emphasises.

"When you're looking at a role like this, you have to cast from a starting point where they can't fake it. She exudes femininity, but there's still a toughness to her. I like that we're not just trying to impose a masculinity on a female. I think pretty much everything she

Wingard's childhood hero, Michael Biehn.

Veteran actor Reginald VelJohnson also appears.

Celeste (Adria Arjona) goes for the John Rambo look.

The Three Weaponsmen of the Apocalypse?



Drew Starkey (left) as the leader of the Nazis.

does is very believable from her perspective as well.”

When her daughter Daisy (Blake Kennedy) is threatened, Celeste overcomes her PTSD to burst into action. “This is a character who’s damaged and is very nuanced in that sense,” Wingard says. “I look at our whole society as one that’s been so traumatised over the years. If it’s not a war, it’s Covid.”

“I felt like this character was an exploration of generational trauma that we’re all trying to deal with. The thing about trauma is that it makes you put certain aspects of your personal life on hold because you just don’t have any more space for it.”

“This is a character who, under other circumstances, would probably be a great mom. But she is just not able to explore that

because she’s so haunted by her past. So these super-soldiers end up being literally the personification of her PTSD. These almost undead-type, unstoppable soldiers are like ghosts from the past. She can’t escape it. She’s out of the military but somehow these ghosts of the past keep coming back.”

Wingard says *Onslaught* has rekindled his desire to make future films. “I’m developing two projects simultaneously, and we’ll see which one comes first,” he shares. “One’s a bigger budget, one’s a medium-sized budget. But I feel like I’m ready to go forward in a different way, and it’s exciting.” ●

Onslaught is in US cinemas from 4 September and UK cinemas TBA.

“I like that we’re not just trying to impose a masculinity on a female”

Shoot first and ask questions... well, never.



SCI-FACT! In sixth grade, Adam Wingard and his friends created a Michael Biehn fan club, and he used to slick back his hair like *Aliens*’ Hicks.



Looks like Frankenstein's Monster's been working out.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Creature Feature

Tate Brombal and Soo Lee on **Adam Frankenstein**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

➔ DESCRIBING IT AS "A QUEER adaptation of the text", writer Tate Brombal – along with artist Soo Lee – puts a very personal spin on Mary Shelley's tragically misunderstood creature in *The Perfectly Monstrous Life Of Adam Frankenstein*. First serialised in the pages of Dark Horse Comics series *The Oddly Pedestrian Life Of*

Christopher Chaos, the new one-shot continues their adaptation of the classic 1818 novel, incorporating it into the Chaos universe, which was co-created by James Tynion IV.

"Monsters have always felt like kin to many in the LGBTQIA+ community," Brombal tells Red Alert. "Here, we bring the queer experience to the most famous monster of all

by bringing some of what I saw as subtext in Shelley's novel to the forefront."

The narrative takes the form of the true autobiography of Adam Frankenstein (aka the Creature), which the villainous Helwing Corps have subsequently suppressed. "This means we see familiar events with new twists and from new perspectives, which really separates it from other adaptations," explains Brombal. "It builds upon what Mary Shelley wrote and reimagines iconic moments while keeping the core themes and emotions intact."

"Tate created a really beautiful version of our Frankenstein in the Chaos world, so I wanted to make sure I was being true to that character," adds Lee. "He's a version of Frankenstein that exists in fiction, but he's also uniquely different and I really love that Adam is Asian. It made him so much fun to draw for me, and it also helps that he's ridiculously handsome!"

Lee has put her own visual stamp upon the character, originally designed by Nick Robles. "I wanted my Adam to be expressed as a gentle giant type with a very kind face," she continues. "Throughout the book, I made his expressions very innocent because he's still discovering himself at this point, so he stands out in more ways than one in this time period."

“We’ll see the true monster rise to reclaim some semblance of a life”

Chronicling the eponymous creature's bloody birth at Victor Frankenstein's hands, the more downbeat title reflects the 56-pager's darker tone. "In the first half of Adam's story, we witnessed his creator and then the world continuously beat him down again and again, so it was innocence lost, and now we'll see the true monster rise to reclaim some semblance of a life," explains Brombal, noting that Adam is a name often attributed to Shelley's monster. "We just thought it fit, and there are definitely lots of biblical allusions in Shelley's novel – and here as well."

"There are definitely moments you realise he's not human," adds Soo Lee. "But he has such a gentle face, it'll catch you off guard."

As in the novel, Victor's relationship with Elizabeth and best friend Henry came to a sticky end in *Christopher Chaos* issue eight, although "without spoiling anything", Brombal teases they both "continue to play an important role in both Victor and Adam's lives", while there are implications for future storylines.

"It's all connected, which is one of the best things about writing within a larger universe," adds Brombal. "We can just continue to build outward and upward in endlessly surprising ways." ●

The Perfectly Monstrous Life Of Adam Frankenstein is out on 2 September.



Project SWORD starts over 1,000 years in the future.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Strike Force

Project SWORD goes from TV21 to the 21st century in a new Time Bomb comic

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

AFTER PRODUCING new stories for *Space Precinct*, *Terrahawks* and *New Captain Scarlet* in their two Spectrum anthologies, Time Bomb Comics are on less familiar territory in their latest collaboration with Anderson Entertainment. *Project SWORD* was never actually developed for television, instead beginning as a toy range, and was later turned into a comic strip in titles like *TV Century 21*.

"I'd never heard of *Project SWORD* before, but after some digging, I quickly became very excited about it," says Time Bomb publisher Steve Tanner. "As it wasn't tied to an actual TV show with the associated limitations that will always have, it immediately seemed like we could really creatively run with it. It then seemed that creating an adaptation of a TV episode that never actually existed would be a really interesting route to take, with the added angle that this

Project SWORD was a binge-watched contemporary series, and not something originally broadcast 50 years ago. At the same time, it had to capture that nostalgic Gerry Anderson vibe, mixing the past with the present to create a great comic set in the future."

It takes place in 3031 on an Earth ravaged by a meteor strike. Project SWORD – aka the Space World Organisation for Research and Development – brings to mind similar teams in other, better-known series like *Thunderbirds*, *Captain Scarlet* and *UFO*. "The setting is genuinely post-apocalyptic, as people are desperately trying to leave Earth and are packed in refugee camps next to rocket launch sites," says writer Lizbeth Myles, who used the 1969 *Project SWORD* annual as reference. "The sea levels have risen, volcanoes erupt without warning, and devastating earthquakes are the norm."

Though she "tried to use as much of the established world as

possible", Myles has updated some aspects of *Project SWORD*. "I wanted to keep the feel of what existed and the only thing I consciously changed was having a female co-lead," she explains. "I've expanded the role of a character who appears in the first story in the annual, so along with SWORD agent Alex Peake, we now have the reluctantly recruited Professor Helen Bannock on an interplanetary adventure to discover who's trying to destroy the only thing giving hope to the people trapped on Earth."

Having been an art student of veteran Gerry Anderson artist and designer Mike Trim in the '90s, *Project SWORD* artist James Gray has long harboured the ambition

to follow in his footsteps. "Mike used to bring in photocopies of his vehicle and ship designs for us to peruse through and I knew I wanted to do exactly that one day, and it's only taken me 30 years to finally get there!" he laughs. "The sci-fi ship and vehicle designs were always very lovely looking with lots of curves and bubbles, which was typical of the '50s through to the '70s, so I took that in mind when creating the updated designs for this book. Staying away from sharp corners and straight edges as much as possible, but not making the ships, vehicles and wardrobe too vintage looking." ●

Project SWORD is out now.



Artist James Gray aimed to use lots of curved shapes.

SCI-FACT! Debuting as a comic strip in short-lived 1967 weekly *Solo*, *Project SWORD* later became a text feature in *TV21*.

Stacy Clausen (Ryan, left) checks out a scene.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Gospel Of Fear

Love kills in queer horror
Leviticus WORDS: JAMIE TABBERER



NAMED AFTER THE BIBLICAL Book, Adrian Chiarella's horror film *Leviticus* follows teens in rural Australia plagued by an evil entity after undergoing so-called LGBTQ "conversion therapy". "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death," is a verse still printed in the Bible today. Forget the supernatural – what's scarier than weaponised faith?

"I thought, 'What if I lean into that tradition of a horror movie cold open?'" recalls director Adrian Chiarella of writing the film, which begins with a young woman alone in the communal shower of a swimming pool, seduced – and then attacked – by an unseen force.

Is it a ghost? An invisible man? An invisible woman? Her imagination? Upended expectations hark back to *Scream* and

Halloween; the claustrophobic, chlorine-soaked mood is pure *Carrie*, *It Follows* and *Let The Right One In*.

"That opening scene wasn't even in early drafts of the script!" Chiarella laughs. "It was just, here's this love story between these two young men that went for about 25 pages..."

Or should that be lust story? Enter our leads Joe Bird, the 19-year-old *Talk To Me* star, as sweet, gentle Naim, and *Thrash*'s Stacy Clausen as the more caddish Ryan. We first meet the pair getting down and dirty in an abandoned warehouse.

"From the chemistry test, it was immediately apparent: there was this natural energy between them – which some films just *don't* have," enthuses Chiarella. "The casting director, our producer and I thought, 'This is it, this is the movie'. I was *terrified* we wouldn't be able to find two young actors able to do this. I didn't want 25-year-olds playing teenagers!"

When the pair's hormone-fuelled hook-ups catch the disapproving eye of their small town conservative Christian community, the tricky rituals start. *Leviticus* is informed by Chiarella's

observations of systemic bigotry at his religious school. "Mardi Gras, the LGBTQI+ celebration, was going through Sydney; I remember hearing teachers, chaplains talk about it in a really derogatory way," he recalls.

"That would ripple through the schoolyard. An endorsement of homophobia." Decades later, *Leviticus* feels timely. "I noticed a regressing back, the last 10 years," says Chiarella of the "toxic language" currently used to discuss LGBTQ lives globally.

Joe Bird plays Naim, the object of Ryan's desire.



Tyallah Bullock as Marnie, in a spot of trouble.

Naim and Ryan share a rare moment of calm.



Joe Bird gets ready for more gruelling scenes on set.



Not sure you've got this entirely right, chap.

Brutal shades of homophobia abound in *Leviticus* – it's part of the horror, and it's damn effective. Hoodied youths brandish planks of wood; "deliverance healers", eyes gleaming with hate, perform so-called "conversion therapy", the scientifically debunked process of trying to change sexuality or gender identity. The subtle disgust comes from Naim's coolly complicit mother, played by Mia Wasikowska. ("My parents are not religious – Naim's parents are not based on mine!" clarifies Chiarella.)

If self-hatred is the greatest horror of all, it's symbolised here as a manipulative, murderous presence that takes the form of the person you desire the most, invisible to everyone else. Cue demonic smouldering and breathtaking bodywork from Clausen.

"Stacey worked really hard on the physicality with the stunt team in the early days of rehearsal," explains Chiarella. "He kept working at it every day, to come up with ways the monster would stand and react." The choice to not show something traditionally

“There’s ‘show, don’t tell’, but sometimes you can over-show, overexplain as well”

"monstrous" is a risk, but it's one the director thought was worth taking. "One of the earliest lessons I learned was how little you need to show the audience," says Chiarella, who has also worked as an editor (*Leviticus* clocks in at a lean 88 minutes).

"There's 'show, don't tell', but sometimes you can over-show, overexplain as well." To explain in simple terms: Naim and Ryan must repress the irrepressible – lest it kills them. "This metaphor spoke very loudly and clearly," says Chiarella, to victims of conversion therapy who have been in touch.

Queer representation in horror, at least, is at an all-time high: *Swallowed*, *Talk To Me*, Jane Schoenbrun's films. "It's been happening for a

long time, right back to [*Frankenstein* director] James Whale – extraordinary filmmakers who were openly queer," observes Chiarella. Clive Barker and Don Mancini also spring to mind. "They used the genre to explore the themes that have affected people in our community. Otherness, destabilisation on the journey to self-discovery."

Asked what subgenre he'd like to explore next, Chiarella teases going "deeper into body horror. I find that fascinating, visceral. I've always loved Cronenberg's stuff." He also, naturally, worships at the altar of the religious classics that came before his.

"Whether it's Christian faith or *The Wicker Man* – pagan beliefs and stuff – there's something really interesting about those themes of how far people will go for their very old, ancient doctrines that have been passed down. It's fertile ground for exploring our deepest fears." ●

Leviticus is in cinemas from 4 September.

SCI-FACT! Adrian Chiarella started his filmmaking career editing pre-visualisation work on the 2008 Baz Luhrmann movie *Australia*.



➔ Expect delays on the approach to Gotham: Matt Reeves's **The Batman: Part II** now arrives 18 February 2028, four months later than the previously announced release date. Holy delayed gratification!

➔ JJ Abrams's fantasy adventure **The Great Beyond** now arrives 1 October 2027.

➔ Peter Jackson confirms that his next movie will be a belated sequel to 2011's **The Adventures Of Tintin**. He's completed the script with Fran Walsh, but there's no word on which Hergé tales they may be adapting.

➔ *Scream 7*'s Jimmy Tatro has signed to play classic DC villain **Gorilla Grodd** in the Jimmy Olsen TV show.

➔ Paddy Considine, Kit Harington, America Ferrera and Alex Hassell star in Channel 4 drama **Army Of Shadows**, which follows the resistance in a near-future Britain under American occupation.

➔ *Loki* and *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness* writer Michael Waldron is developing a movie based on cosmic Marvel hero **Nova**. The project was originally intended as a TV series.

➔ Animated features based on **ThunderCats** and **The Powerpuff Girls** are in development.

➔ Ariana Grande has exited season 13 of **American Horror Story**. Blame scheduling conflicts with her touring commitments.

➔ DC Studios and Warner Bros Animation have three new series on the way. Look out for **Absolute Batman**, **Krypto** and **Joker: Laugh Riot**.

➔ T-Spheres ahoy! Edi Gathegi returns as *Superman*'s goddamn **Mr Terrific** in a spin-off TV series. *Wonder Woman*'s Allan Heinberg pens the pilot.

➔ *Overlord*'s Julius Avery directs high-concept snake thriller **Crush**, the tale of a woman who finds herself trapped in the grip of a giant python while hiking the Everglades.

➔ TV's **God Of War** adaptation needs to recast Kratos after star Ryan Hurst suffered an injury while filming.

➔ Sydney Sweeney will star in **Hollow**, an adaptation of the upcoming novel by Lindsey Anderson Beer that's pitched as a saucy reimagining of Washington Irving's *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*.

➔ Tracey Ullman, Sam Spruell and Jerome Flynn join the cast of **Alien: Earth** season two.

➔ Gothic horror soap **Dark Shadows** returns as an adult animation series, set to be showrun by *A Discovery Of Witches*' Lisa Holdsworth.

➔ *Weapons*' Zach Cregger and *Whalefall*'s Brian Duffield will co-write **Siren Head**, based on the viral horror meme created by Trevor Henderson. Duffield is due to direct.

➔ Garrett Wareing and Amanda Fix will play the young Ed and Lorraine Warren in horror prequel **The Conjuring: First Communion**.



➔ Xolo Maridueña suits up once more as the Blue Beetle in *Superman* sequel **Man Of Tomorrow**. He first played the scarab-powered hero in 2023's origin movie.



➔ **Steve Buscemi has joined the TV adaptation of the Far Cry videogame franchise, from Noah Hawley and Rob McElhenney.**

➔ There's a revival of **A Nightmare On Elm Street** on the way from Paramount, based on Wes Craven's original screenplay for 1984's blade-gloved franchise launcher. It's set to be released through the studio's new Paramount Primal label.

➔ *Supergirl*'s Craig Gillespie is in talks to helm Glen Powell AI thriller **Homewreckers**.

➔ Steven Spielberg is set to produce **The Mandela Catalogue**, based on the hit YouTube series about a Wisconsin county invaded by shape-shifting creatures. Creator Alex Kister directs. ●



PICTURES © DC/WARNER BROS. SARA LAJE/GETTY, MIKE MARSLAND/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

➤ **SCI-FACT!** *Dark Shadows* ran for 1,225 episodes. It spawned three films, two revivals and an audio series. An animated series is planned.

NEW AUTHOR

CN VAIR

MEET THE FORMER JOURNALIST BEHIND FOLK HORROR *FAWN*



Tell us about your protagonist - what's her story?

➔ Tess is a witch and wildlife rehabilitator who sold her soul to the devil to save her own life, so when she finds a fawn who ate her way from her mother's roadkill corpse, she understands how the cost of survival can make someone monstrous.

Did the book have any particular spark of inspiration?

➔ Several! One of the earliest ones was watching *Jennifer's Body* and thinking, "What if the Devil was on Jennifer's side and sent her back to take revenge on the men who wronged her?"

How long did it take to write? Did it evolve much?

➔ It took me about two years. I had several false starts that were all wildly different from each other, but once the real story crystallised, it stayed largely the same from draft to finished copy.



Did you need to do much in the way of research? Learn anything interesting?

➔ I did quite a bit on wildlife rehabilitation, and I was fascinated to learn the reason most people drop out of rehab licensing programmes is because they realise their job is to protect people from wildlife - less so the other way around.

Any advice for SFX readers who are would-be authors?

➔ Finish the book. There'll always be a time when the current project feels messy and broken, and by contrast, the idea that only lives in your head is clean and bright and new. The act of creation should be - must be - messy, so finish the book.

Fawn is out on 27 August, published by 3AM Books.



Marine issue

In space, no one can see the seams... Stance follow their *Star Wars* and *ET* sock collaborations with a new *Alien* box set, featuring "iconic xenomorph graphics and Weyland Yutani vibes".

Visit uk.stance.com



House wins

To celebrate 60 years of supernatural soap opera *Dark Shadows*, a new issue of charity magazine *Daytime Gothic* is now available from Ten Acre Books. But hurry, it's a limited run...

Visit tenacrefilms.bigcartel.com



Deep cuts ➔

As part of the 30th anniversary celebrations for *Scream*, Varese Sarabande and Craft Recordings are re-issuing Marco Beltrami's score. A standard "Woodsboro Bloodbath" red vinyl will be widely available, alongside different limited colourways in participating US retailers. An extended version, featuring all 40 film cues, will also be released on CD.

Visit varesesarabande.com/scream30



THE FINAL



FRONTIER

SAM NEILL 1947-2026 Remembering a brilliant career

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



For many, Sam Neill will always be Dr Alan Grant.

➔ SPY, WIZARD, ANTICHRIST and paleontologist: Sam Neill's career plan was simple. "It's really just making sure that the next thing is as different from the last as it could possibly be," he shared in 2001.

Born Nigel Neill in Omagh, Northern Ireland, he moved to New Zealand at the age of seven, renaming himself Sam at boarding school. After acting in college, he toured with the New Zealand Players Drama Quartet and directed documentaries for the National Film Unit.

1979's *My Brilliant Career* gifted him an international profile. Early roles accentuated the steel: he was the devil-spawned Damien Thorn in *The Final Conflict* (1981) while TV miniseries *Reilly*, *Ace Of Spies* earned him a screen test for James Bond. "I remember thinking he was very good indeed," recalled John Glen, director of *The Living Daylights* (1987). Neill was unconvinced: "You really don't want to be the Bond that no one likes."

Over the course of a prolific career, he remained a frequent and welcome presence in genre projects, from Andrzej Żuławski's unsettling *Possession* (1981) to John Carpenter's Lovecraft homage *In The Mouth Of Madness* (1994). *Event Horizon* (1997) proved a skin-prickling collision of sci-fi and horror while the title role in 1998 miniseries *Merlin* saw him nominated for both a Primetime Emmy and a Golden Globe. TV's time-bending *Alcatraz* (2012) was produced by JJ Abrams.

Jurassic Park (1993) cemented him as a genre icon, a chino-clad proxy for the audience, awestruck at the dinosaurs. He returned as Dr Alan Grant in *Jurassic Park III* (2001) and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022). "I think I was better at it the second time around," Neill confessed in 2004. "I rather thought that I was the guy with the hat in the first one. You know you're the action guy when you get a hat like that." ●

JOANNA PETTET 1942-2026

● Born in London and raised in Canada, actress Joanna Pettet relocated to New York City at 16. After training at the Neighbourhood Playhouse School of the Theatre she made her Broadway debut at 19 before beginning her screen career with an episode of *Route 66* in 1964.

Notable genre credits include the role of 007's daughter Mata Bond in 1967 spoof *Casino Royale* and no less than four appearances in Rod Serling's '70s anthology series *Night Gallery*, including a striking turn as the title character in season three's "The Girl With The Hungry Eyes".

Welcome To Arrow Beach (1974) saw her returning to the horror genre, as did 1978's *The Evil*, an Amityville-inspired tale of a mansion built above a portal to Hell. There were also guest shots in *Thriller*, *Fantasy Island* and *Tales Of The Unexpected*, plus "Always Say Always", a Bond-flavoured episode of *The Fall Guy* in 1984.



JUSTIN RICHARDS 1961-2026

● Born in Epping, author and scriptwriter Justin Richards began in *Doctor Who* fandom, co-editing the acclaimed '80s 'zine *The Black And White Guardian* and the In-Vision reference project, a behind-the-scenes guide initially covering the Tom Baker years.

After studying English and Theatre at the University of Warwick, he made his first professional fiction sale with the Seventh Doctor adventure *Theatre Of War* (1994). He went on to be a prolific *Who* novelist and writer of reference works, serving as creative consultant to BBC Books' *Doctor Who* range between 2000 and 2017. Richards was also a contributor to Big Finish, writing audio dramas and script-editing the *Blake's 7* and *Jago & Litefoot* ranges.

As a children's author he wrote such popular series as *The Invisible Detective*, *Time Runners*, *The Department Of Unclassified Artefacts* and *The School Of Night*. *The Chaos Code* won the Hull Children's Book Award in 2008.

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THE
EVERYONE IS
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OF
ILLFONIC BRINGS
GAMES
SLASHER LEGEND
TO
HALLOWEEN
COME
INTO PLAYERS' HANDS

WORDS:
ROBBIE
DUNLOP



The relentless Michael Myers in all his gloomy glory.

AFTER GIVING PLAYERS THE CHANCE TO face – and become – Jason Voorhees in *Friday The 13th: The Game* (2017), developer IllFonic is turning its attention to another horror icon. Coming to PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S and PC, *Halloween: The Game* transports fans to Haddonfield in 1978 – the night Michael Myers came home and carved his place in horror history.

Featuring immersive cinematics, a single-player campaign retells and expands upon the events of John Carpenter's original film through the eyes of the Shape himself. Meanwhile, those who opt for multiplayer can team up to protect the town as civilians – with legacy characters Bob, Lynda and Annie among the options – or step into the boots of Michael Myers, whose innovative Shape Jump ability allows him to vanish and strike when least expected.

"The opportunity to work on *Halloween* was a massive privilege," Jared Gerritzen, chief creative officer at studio IllFonic, tells *SFX*. Jordan Mathewson, the game's design director, adds: "Everyone knows Michael Myers. We're so excited to make something around such an impactful and iconic character."

How did the opportunity to take on the world of *Halloween* come about?

JG: Jordan and I both joined a little bit after *Friday The 13th*. Jordan actually did a lot of the cinematics for that. We did *Predator: Hunting Grounds*, then *Ghostbusters: Spirits Unleashed* and all these others, and we had this really random opportunity to meet Malek Akkad [associate producer of *Halloween: The Curse Of Michael Myers* (1995) and producer of every subsequent film] and Ryan [Freimann, SVP of *Halloween* production company Compass International Pictures], and we just really clicked. It was one of those like, "Hey, why haven't we done this?"

What sets *Halloween: The Game* apart from previous IllFonic horror titles?

JM: Being a game studio that has done a lot in the asymmetrical space [multiplayer games where players take on different roles or

KILL ALL THE RESIDENTS

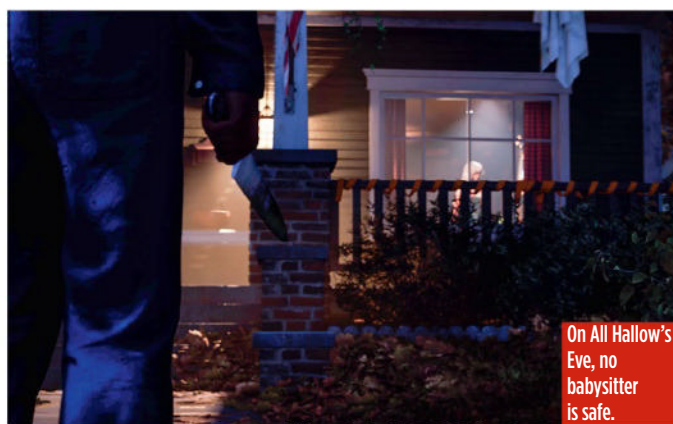
SPECIAL TARGETS

- Marcus
- Rachel
- Thomas

The game lets you get closer than you'd like to Michael.



HALLOWEEN: THE GAME



On All Hallow's Eve, no babysitter is safe.

objectives], *Halloween* gave us the opportunity to go back and re-explore that brutal slasher sandbox concept. There's so much that we've done in different avenues, but this one is a return to really building up the true experience that we know everyone is looking for in this genre. Asymmetrical, I feel, is still very unexplored. It's tough to pull off because you're building so many different games into one. Our goal here was to build the best, cleanest and most interesting asymmetrical loop.

The single-player mode closely follows the story of *Halloween* while adding new scenes and exploring previously unseen moments – including Michael's escape from Smith's Grove Sanitarium. How did you approach expanding such an iconic film?

JG: We wanted to tell a story that connects deeply with the original film, making sure we respect it at the same time. We brought on some really great writers: Adam Goldberg and

Hans Rodionoff. They've always been really big horror fans. We met them shortly after they wrote the *Aliens: What If?* comic and we vibed really well. Hans is a massive *Halloween* fan. He wrote this kind of reverse shot for shot: like, where's Michael? If the camera wasn't focused on the other characters, what is he doing?

But also, what can we do to make the town really, really afraid of Halloween? It would be a bigger thing. We worked with Malek and Ryan to make it more than just him chasing a couple of babysitters. So Michael's taking on Haddonfield and he's really just going for it. We have these parts where we touch the film and then we go off, and then we touch the film and then we go off, and then we add little parts that, when you're watching the film, there's these other cookie crumbs of things Michael's done. So we elaborate from that.

We ran it by Malek and Ryan and they gave their feedback. I think we went back and forth four or five times. It was a really cool process because we had the torch holder of *Halloween*, Malek, who was like, "These things need to be here, this doesn't make sense." We spoke almost weekly. And we showed it to John [Carpenter]. We really worked very, very closely with them. It's as close to *Halloween* canon as a videogame could be.

How involved was Carpenter in the development process?

KILLER THEMES

Sound was key to recreating the atmosphere of Haddonfield. Composer Mark Rutherford, whose previous credits include *Aliens vs Predator* (2010), *LittleBigPlanet 3* (2014) and *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* (2015), incorporated elements of John Carpenter's original score into his music, while Sophia Leader, who previously worked with IllFonic on *Killer Klowns From Outer Space: The Game*, designed the wider soundscape.

"I don't think that we could have found any better people to be doing the music and sound to match the film," says Gerritzen. "Mark came in and really brought to it a lot of that vibe. I feel like everything really hits tonally and sonically. It's really, really cool."

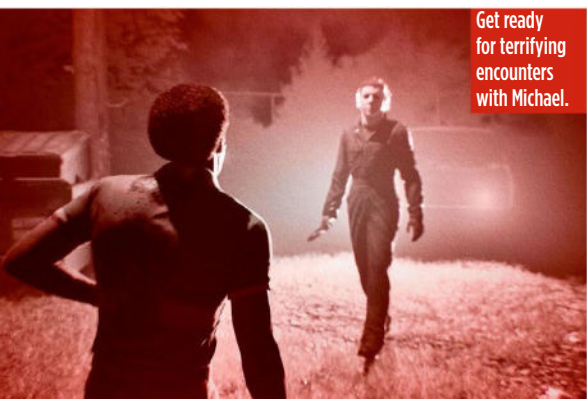


JG: We had quite a few meetings. The first meeting that Mathewson and Charles [Brungardt, IllFonic CEO] and I had with him, we went down to LA, and it was very surreal. We were asking all of these questions: "Should we do this?" and "Can we do that?" and "What was the theory behind this?" And he told us, but then he's like, "Guys, I've been doing this forever. This is yours now. You can take this and you can move forward from what I've done." It was really scary but a massive honour to have the guy who created this so long ago just be like, "You guys take it on."

How important was it to capture the look and feel of Carpenter's direction in the cinematic sequences?

JM: We really scoured the film and broke it down. Obviously there were restrictions based on the budget. There were no helicopter level →

Get ready for terrifying encounters with Michael.



READY PLAYER RUN!

There have been numerous horror film videogame tie-ins over the decades, from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* to *Alien* and *The Thing*.

The *Halloween* series, however, has had a surprisingly limited gaming history, with only two officially licensed titles before now.

The first – one of the earliest such tie-ins – arrived in 1983 with Wizard Video's release of *Halloween* for the Atari 2600. In it, players controlled a babysitter who had to keep the children in her care safe from an increasingly fast-moving and rather pixelated Michael Myers.

Forty-one years later, Boss Team Games released *RetroRealms: Halloween*, a 16-bit-inspired side-scrolling action platformer that saw Michael Myers slash his way through locations inspired by the film. With its cutting-edge visuals, *Halloween: The Game* marks Michael Myers's most ambitious videogame outing yet.



© WIZARD VIDEO GAMES

shots. This was a very grounded film in the sense that they used a Steadicam – something that was brand new at the time.

Working with [co-developer] Pollard Studio, we were able to dive into the camera tech and the lenses to recreate the cinematography as closely as possible. The colour grading is just right, so we get a lot of that same darkness and depth – and the coolness that you see that's so iconic – then blend it all together with the pacing, the longer shots and the things that build that sense of eeriness. A lot of research was done into the look of our scenes. We were like, "Does this feel like a shot they would have been able to pull off?"

JG: It's been kind of a case study because I know way more about old-school Steadicams and lenses than I ever thought I would! *Ghostbusters* fans are very hardcore, but *Halloween* fans are massive. It's just crazy how many people consider *Halloween* their favourite film of all time. We know how important it is to a lot of people, and the team have really done everything that we could to make it feel like the original '70s film.

What sets the single-player and multiplayer modes apart?

JG: The single player is really there because of what we experienced so many times, especially on *Predator*. There were so many fans who were excited about it, but because it was multiplayer only, they kind of wrote it off.



Strip club the Rabbit In Red Lounge features.

Multiplayer and single-player-focused people are so different – they wanted a different type of experience.

Halloween multiplayer has so many layers, but then the single-player is really dynamic in how you choose to take on the town. Making a single-player horror game is relatively controlled. You build everything around your scare moment. With multiplayer, those moments happen dynamically. The game is genuinely scary because you don't know what you're going to be in store for. We want you to come out of being the optimal killer, having had a great experience with that world and era, and be like, "I know how to play the game – I could probably kill some people online!" Hopefully that drives a bunch of players into multiplayer. That's where I feel our big, fun, replayable, scary-as-shit element is. You don't know what you're gonna get. I'm super excited for people to play it.

How has the process of making games changed since *Friday The 13th*?

JM: Technology-wise, the lighting in Unreal Engine 5 versus Unreal Engine 4 is crazy good. It allows us to quickly get that moodiness, that vibe, that feeling. Being able to throw more polygons into a scene and the way that it renders differently is also a major thing.

JG: We've also had the chance to really formulate how we want to build a game, to make it newer and more engaging, and approach things we didn't quite have the opportunity to do from a gameplay sense before. Our previous games have also given us a lot of insight into the players – the new gamers and the people that have always been into it. There's a lot to learn from that. Then on top of that, it just looks so much better. *Halloween* has benefitted a lot from that gap.

JM: But also, our backend technology compared to nine years ago? We're not afraid to ship a game anymore because the servers won't explode!

Tell us about the inspiration for Shape Jump.

Michael knows his way around kitchen utensils.

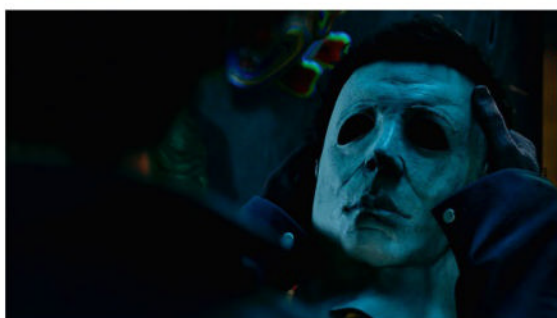


JG: The keystone of Michael Myers is that he's this slow, relentless force, and when he locks onto you, you're kind of fucked. You can watch any *Halloween* and there are so many shots where everything's fine... and then Michael's there. It makes the film so scary. The biggest thing coming into this was "How do we do that?" What struck me – watching the film over and over – was that long shot of the house... and then the lights turn off. It's like, "Why would Michael turn the lights off? Why would that matter to him?" And I thought, "What if Michael needs the darkness? What if that's where his power comes from?" So I was like, "Let's remove the light. What does it allow him to do?" You look away, and he's gone.

JM: One of the major reasons Michael Myers is so scary is that he doesn't run. He's a slow, terrifying, creeping presence. We wanted to respect that in how he plays, but we also needed to give him the ability to move quickly and silently, to get in front of you or behind you



Hand-to-hand combat isn't for the faint of heart here.



Michael's iconic mask, modelled on Bill Shatner.



It wouldn't be a *Halloween* game without a few tears.

or around the next corner. That's one of the most iconic things about the movie: he's able to appear where you least expect him. So it was all about creating opportunities for him to disappear and reappear. He can't Shape Jump if someone's looking at him or there's a light source on him. He has to move through the world using the darkness, making sure no one's looking at him, so he can make those terrifying reappearances.

JG: Shape Jump was one of the things that really stuck. It took a few months to get it to work, but I think we did it. It is one of our scariest games because of this ability and the vibe of the world. The number of times I've been running around, and I know the house is clear, and then Michael comes out of a closet or around the corner!

In terms of gore, the original *Halloween* is much less

graphic than many of the later films. How did you approach translating that style into the game?

JM: We had to find the balance between what makes videogames cool and the budgets they had at the time. There was a place we wouldn't go because it's just not part of the IP, but there is a need to reinforce that kind of violence when you're portraying this type of game because that's part of the fun and thrill of it. So we definitely added a little bit more than what you see in the movies. It's a game, it's about the slasher, and we felt that that would really tie in the experience; updating it to really give that extra impact to the kills.

How much of Haddonfield can be explored?

JG: Our maps are big enough for you to lose Michael, grab a bike, run around and try to escape in different ways. We took lots of stills

Dr Samuel Loomis gets a videogame makeover.

“The team have done everything that we could to make it feel like the original '70s film”

from the film, then looked at the real locations and reimagined Haddonfield as if it was a real town. We have the main street, we've got a bunch of other maps like the Orange Grove Estates, and then we have areas that you never see in the film, such as the Rabbit In Red Lounge [a strip club whose name is seen on a matchbook] and the garage. We built what you would expect around those locations – if you were to go “What would happen if the camera were to pan around, what else would be around there?” The art design team did a killer job. We've added a lot to this world which makes *Halloween* feel way more realistic in my head when I think about it.

Are there Easter eggs for longtime fans?

JM: We have a lot of friends that are fans of the film, so there have been questions like, “Oh, are you gonna do this?” or “Are you gonna do that?” It's like, “Hey, we should write some of these down!” And Malek has given us a lot of stuff. There's lots of really cool elements throughout the world that we will not even be talking about. We'll let the fans discover them.

Will there be a Switch version, as there was for *Friday The 13th*?

JG: No. Who knows, technology changes all the time and updates always happen, but there are a lot of systems that we use that are pretty heavy. It'll be great on all the high-end next-gen consoles.

You've already announced DLC for launch day. Will there be further updates in the future?

JG: We support all our games after launch. We do a lot of great stuff afterwards. We don't just fire and forget. That's not in our DNA. I'm still designing *Predator* right now. It's an amazing medium because it's not like, “I need this 100% done.” We will put it out and we'll iterate and we'll see how people are playing. We'll see if there are things that we didn't see and we'll keep on kneading that dough as we start the next project, whatever that might be.

JM: Videogames are complex forms of art. You start at the top and build down from there to make sure that what we're delivering is exciting *Halloween* fans while also bringing in new gamers – anyone who hasn't seen the franchise, but just wants to play this type of game. There's so much here we want to offer. And we're really excited to make it happen. ●

Halloween: The Game is available from 8 September.

INSIDIOUS
OUT OF THE FURTHER

THE FURTHER S

BEHIND THE VEIL WITH **INSIDIOUS: OUT OF THE FURTHER** DIRECTOR JACOB CHASE:
WHY THERE'S STILL UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN THE FURTHER, AND HOW
ONE SCENE WAS "LEGITIMATELY TERRIFYING TO SHOOT"

WORDS:
ELLIE ADDIS



SECOND
FAMILY

U TTER THE TITLE *INSIDIOUS*, and the image arrives unbidden: the lipstick-faced demon leering out from behind Patrick Wilson's oblivious shoulder. Just a few seconds of composer Joseph Bishara's shrieking score is enough to fill you entirely with dread. But do we really need a sixth continuation? Wilson's directorial debut *Insidious: The Red Door* closed the book on the Lambert family in 2023, leaving us right back where we started. It should, by most logic, have been the ending. But writer/director Jacob Chase, working alongside original creators James Wan and Leigh Whannell (both back as producers), is set to prove that the Lambert family's conclusion was never the franchise's. There is, he insists, "so much yet to be explored" in the demon-ridden purgatory the franchise calls the Further.

The film, which was originally set to release in 2025, focuses on a new family entirely: dentist Gemma, a single parent to a young daughter, who discovers she's a gifted traveller who is not only able to enter the Further, but is also able to bring back with her the darkness that dwells there. "She's a single mum really trying to do her best with her daughter and trying desperately to not repeat the mistakes of her own family's past," says Chase.

TAKING THINGS FURTHER

Talking of his prior feature *Come Play*, which deals with themes of loneliness and isolation, Chase explains he always approaches these stories "from a character perspective", and that the new focus of the sequel is dealing with being "unable to move on from their past". This haunting will be portrayed "in a very visceral and real way, by way of the Further". He was, he says, "exploring ideas of how your past envelops you and creates this claustrophobic feeling – both in the way I shot it, and in some of the set-pieces."

It's a feeling Chase knows firsthand – he admits he's claustrophobic himself. He knew that going into the film's most unnerving sequence to shoot: Gemma, trapped inside an endless pillow fort maze. "I was really scared



A pillow fort becomes a creepy labyrinth.



Fan favourite Elise returns alongside new lead Gemma.



Maisie Richardson-Sellers plays a tattoo artist.



Don't you just hate it when the in-laws come to stay?

to begin with," recalls Chase. Building it was worse. "The sound got all dead in there. You could barely hear each other. I'd be shouting for someone to do something from down the hallway, and we're all crouched in there, trying to crawl to each other. It was legitimately a terrifying set to shoot on." The sequence, he says, "turned out really scary as well".

It's not the only fear Chase has brought to the film from the depths of his own subconscious. He mentions a scare in a dentist's chair that he hopes "will make people not look at dentists the same way", though he's quick to admit he himself has a fear of the dentist. Whether deliberate or not, it's hard to miss that the fear he holds is also his protagonist's day job. His own personal dread leaking onto the page – not too dissimilar from the concept of the Further bleeding into reality, which we have been promised.

Any scepticism about whether this film really needs to exist doesn't survive five minutes in his company. "I have loved the *Insidious* movies from the beginning," he says, and the franchise's

still untapped potential convinced him there was still a sixth film worth making. "It was just clear that there were so many fun ideas left to explore."

Such as the new abilities belonging to main character Gemma, played by British actress Amelia Eve, known for her role in *The Haunting Of Bly Manor*. Something that really excited Chase was creating a new part of the franchise's deep lore that we haven't yet seen, the goal being a story that "could feel like it's tying into the greater franchise, but also has this original new concept at its core".

"There's certain things, stylistically, that I wanted to keep – a big one being the music," he adds. Joseph Bishara, who's scored every *Insidious* film to date, and is also under the makeup as the lipstick-faced demon, returned

“In horror you are writing the pulse of every audience member, like a symphony”

JACOB CHASE'S TOP INSIDIOUS SCARES

Insidious (2010)

Chase's pick from Wan's film that started it all: Rose Byrne's Renai Lambert glimpses a long-haired figure lurking behind the curtain in the nursery. "That one's amazing," he says.

Insidious: Chapter 3 (2015)

From Leigh Whannell's directorial debut. "In the third one, the one Lee did, we go out the window, and then the camera comes back and then goes out the window again, and all of a sudden he's closer."

Insidious: The Last Key (2018)

Elise senses someone behind her, spins around with her flashlight ready – and finds nothing waiting for her but a hanging jacket. "Which was great", Chase says. It's the anticlimax that gets you anyway, which he's so fond of.

Insidious: The Red Door (2023)

Chase describes the MRI scene as "fantastic". Trapped and immobile inside the scanner, Josh Lambert has nowhere to run. The perfect scare for claustrophobics like Chase.

for *Out Of The Further*. The two of them, Chase reveals, "wanted to push outside the comfort zone of the franchise a little bit", so the score felt familiar to the previous entries, but also "took it in a whole new direction in some ways".

The other non-negotiable was Lin Shaye. Despite her character, the medium Elise, being killed off, she went on to become a fan favourite, and has appeared in every entry since. "It was so amazing to get to write a new chapter for her, because I had the person who originated the character there with me," Chase says. Shaye, in turn, "was willing to push boundaries and push beyond what I knew about the character before, because it's been a while since we've seen what she's been up to in the Further". He stays tight-lipped about what might be seen of Elise in the new film. "I don't want to spoil too much about her role in the movie, but I will say that she is a warm, familiar face," one who turns up, he adds, "at a very troubled time for our main character."

FURTHER INSPIRATION

"Because there's also new characters," Chase continues, "I was able to take a new approach to the cinematography



Entities from the Further enter the real world.

language and also the scare language." Chase leaned into invention. "As a fan, I always love when we get introduced to new characters," he says, pointing to the series' original antagonist. "The red-faced demon from the first movie – he's obviously a classic. I love him, and his design. But he was original once as well." He can't reveal too much, but he teases: "some big new ideas happen that have never happened in an *Insidious* movie before. I'm just really excited for people to see where we take the story."

The toughest sequence to actually execute, though, wasn't a jump scare – it was an element of the movie that involved intercutting between the real world and the Further "in a very direct, visceral way". He pauses before he'll say more, mindful of spoilers. As written, it was "this really long, sort of *Inception*-style intercut sequence" – shot in pieces across the entire production, meshed together for the first time in the edit. "To see it all come together was just pretty incredible."

Ask Chase what draws him to the horror genre, and he'll tell you it's his theatre background. He warms to the subject instantly. "I love the communal audience experience, that's a big part of it for me," he says. "There's this larger-than-life quality to theatre, where you're just digging into what makes people feel, just pulling emotion from the audience as best you can." Horror, he feels, "is the closest genre to me where you are really writing the pulse of

every audience member, like a symphony trying to create suspense and shocks and emotion and heart and hopefully catharsis by the end. I just love how it feels like I'm in connection with the audience when I'm making a horror movie."

His own experiences sat in the cinema audience are easy for him to name. "The first *Insidious* has always been inspiring," he says. He gets visibly more animated talking about *The Conjuring* and *The Ring*. The wardrobe scene from the former, he recalls, is one he'll "never forget", while the closet scene in the latter is one he's always rewatching "to learn how that scene is so effective". It's a lesson he's tried to carry into his own work ever since; a scene he's "always tried to learn from and adapt".

Horror fans, he offers, are "really smart audiences" who know those familiar beats all too well: "If people start expecting a scare, it gets harder and harder to actually scare them." So he enjoys scaring his audience when they're "not expecting it at all" – scenes like the one in *The Haunting Of Hill House* in the car, which he says are "moments that I'm always craving and that I'm trying to design when I'm writing and directing a movie".

What he hopes people take with them when they walk out of the cinema is less a specific scare than a feeling: that same mix of fear and warmth that's kept the franchise alive for 16 years. For all the new demons and corners of the Further, Chase points out, *Insidious* has always really been about family. It's the reason, he believes, that the franchise refuses to fade. "I'm really proud of the scares we did," he says. "I hope it stands up to all the other *Insidious* films." But, he adds, "One of the reasons *Insidious* is so everlasting is because, ultimately, these are stories about family. At the end of the day, they leave us all with this warm feeling of family and hope." That's why audiences keep knocking on the red door, and why *Insidious* refuses to rest in peace. ●

Insidious: Out Of The Further is in cinemas from 21 August.



POSSESSION

HOUSE



OF PAIN

SUPERNATURAL SHOCKS
AND THE REAL-LIFE
HORRORS OF SLAVERY
COLLIDE IN SKY'S NEW
DRAMA **POSSESSION**.
WE VISIT THE SET AND
SPEAK WITH WRITER
KARLA CROME – WHOSE
ASBO SUPERPOWER
HAS THANKFULLY
WORN OFF...

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN

JANUARY 2025. *SFX* IS walking the corridors of a Jamaican plantation house, taking in the old-fashioned decor: the oil paintings of stern-looking, bewigged men; the wicker furniture; a stuffed peacock. Spying a musket mounted on one wall, we wonder if it might eventually end up as an example of *Chekhov's* musket...

Areas we are free to wander include a somewhat disorganised study, and a dimly lit dining room, all dark wood floors and terracotta-coloured walls. In a bedroom, there's a baffling intrusion: a hospital bed, its sheets stained with blood. Having completed the tour, we descend steps which should lead to the veranda... but actually take us off the set, onto the studio floor.

Yes, we haven't actually taken a flight across the Atlantic, but a taxi ride to Bristol's Bottle Yard Studios, where filming for Sky drama *Possession* is in full flow. Its boilerplate title feels cleverer once you cotton on to its double meaning: both the kind of possession you get in *The Exorcist*, and the status of enslaved people as property.

The series' five episodes switch back and forth between two time periods, whose storylines run in parallel. In 2026, Claudia (Gugu Mbatha-Raw, no longer sporting her *The War Between The Land And The Sea* fins), a British lawyer who never knew her Jamaican mother, is sent to contest a will left by the aristocratic owner of Hope Hill, the property we've been exploring. Expected to leave both it and £5 million in assets to his son, Oliver Connaught (*Trainspotting* ledge Jonny Lee Miller), he has instead bequeathed it to Cudjoe



One of the Jamaican crew touches up the make-up.



Filming took place at the site of a real plantation.

East, a mystery Jamaican man the family have never heard of.

In the 1760s, meanwhile, we meet an ancestor of Oliver, Eugene Desfrienies (Richard Dillane), who's welcomed a slave called Matthew (clearly the product of rape) into his household, promising to eventually make him a free man and let him oversee the running of the estate. But Desfrienies's jealous daughter Charlotte (Bel Powley) has other ideas... and is willing to draw on dark forces to achieve them.

A spoiler we can't really avoid discussing is let out of the bag at episode one's conclusion: Matthew and Cudjoe East are actually the same man, now 292 years old.

Today, Mbatha-Raw and Miller are filming the aftermath of episode two's cliffhanger – a pivot point, where the story's supernatural aspects manifest with full force. Oliver has just been violently thrown up against the ceiling, then dropped to the floor – where we see a circle of salt has been scattered.

Before what a clapperboard informs us is 455/take one commences, Miller takes a big swig from a coffee cup brought on by a crewmember. We soon understand why, as on being helped to his feet by a wide-eyed Claudia, Oliver promptly vomits into a nearby sink.

Filming Charlotte (Bel Powley) get vengeful.



MY JAMAICAN GUY

SHELDON SHEPHERD ON ACHIEVING IMMORTALITY

Sheldon Shepherd is one of those people who creates a powerful impression the moment he walks in the room. The Rastafarian actor is a riot of colour, resplendent in a Burberry scarf and KidSuper sweater (yes, we asked) so vibrant we feel obliged to apologise for being dressed head to toe in black. "This morning I got up and I said to myself, 'I feel bright today! Let me put on some colours,'" he explains. "Maybe because I wanted the sun."

A dub poet as well as an actor, he's a passionate advocate for *Possession*, describing it using words like "deep", "nuanced", and "wicked". "When I did [2024 film] *One Love* and I played Neville Garrick [Bob Marley's art director], I thought that it was my most important contribution to the culture. But this one... even though it's a fictional piece, it's *not*. It's our reality, and we still fighting this fight – physically, maybe not so much, but emotionally."

On first reading the script, he found the duality of the part "an actor's dream". And when it came to playing a man who's hundreds of years old, maybe he had a head start... "I've always been called an old soul, from when I was growing up", he explains. He regales us with an anecdote about how he devised a concept of "five principles of man", only to find, on reading the Book of the Dead, the same ideas expressed in the ancient Egyptian concept of Ma'at. "So if you believe in past lives, maybe in one of my journeys I was a scribe writing the Medu Neter [hieroglyphs] on the walls," he smiles.

Confusion reigns, with Oliver asking "What happened to me?" and "Was I attacked?", and Claudia spluttering, "It wasn't me!" and "I didn't launch you into thin air!"

A little later, we watch Oliver and Claudia arguing. "How could he attack you from out there?", she asks, as he takes a kitchen knife from a drawer, explaining "I'm protecting myself." After "Cut!" is called, Miller jokes, "Get a bow and arrow. Get a bazooka!". Mbatha-Raw laughs.

We break for lunch. One of the crew delights in showing us a Tupperware box containing one human ear, three tongues, five fingertips and a bunch of teeth. Appetite gone.

Sheldon as Matthew, in the 1760s time period.



Nevertheless, some strategising was required to give Matthew and Cudjoe “different vibrations”. For example, he decided to make the older version of the man more measured. “Matthew has elements of the modern man, because he wants to be somebody. He wants to achieve. He wants the status kind of vibration. Cudjoe has none of that. Cudjoe has done that – he realises that it makes no sense! So he’s more slow. He has nowhere to go. He has no dreams and aspirations.”

And while Cudjoe will switch from Jamaican patois into standard English when required, to make a point clearly understood, Matthew is always “putting on a front”. “Even when he’s communicating with his other kinfolk who work on the plantation, he tries his best to be that mirror of [plantation owner] Eugene, his dad.”

“Funnily enough, things don’t really change that much in our journey here in this physical realm,” the actor muses, reflecting on Matthew’s willingness to “sacrifice his own happiness” to win his father’s approval. “We still have that going around: you want to be that presentable person. You want to be that houseboy, so to speak. He wants to play it so safe, so straight, so narrow. That’s the majority of us today, as people who are living in this Western world.” But not, it’s abundantly clear, Sheldon Shepherd.

As an *SFX* reader, you may be unaware of writer Karla Crome’s previous scripts, but you’d probably recognise her face. Crome (who, like Claudia, is of mixed British/Jamaican heritage) played the straight-shooting Jess, gifted with X-ray vision, in the last two series of *Misfits*. Since then she’s pursued a dual career as an actor – in shows such as *Carnival Row* and *Something Very Bad Is Going To Happen* – and writer.

Credits on Harlan Coben thrillers and prison drama *Screw* suggest *Possession* could have been out of her comfort zone, but she assures *SFX* “it’s not a departure from my taste”, which is “a bit left-field, a bit uncanny/sci-fi/fantasy”.

“It’s not a departure from my taste: a bit left-field, a bit uncanny”

The series had a protracted gestation. Black filmmaker Jefferson Bannis is credited with the original story, which production company Snowed-In’s head of development brought to Crome. “I know it’s seven years ago, because this would coincide with the birth of my first son, who’s seven on Sunday!” she tells us. “We’d gone for coffee, and she said she’d been talking about this idea about an enslaved man

who had survived to the present day, who was involved with an inheritance dispute, and whether I’d be interested in developing that.”

Blending slavery with fantastical elements (not only immortality and possession, but control over insects, and a form of zombification) is fraught with potential pitfalls, among them trivialising a serious subject. Beyond 2020’s *Antebellum*, we can’t think of other examples where it’s been tried.

Did that cause Crome any anxiety? “If you’re talking about somebody who’s lived through enslavement, you have to confront it,” she says. “It was there right from the beginning, and it wasn’t something that we could skirt around →



"IT'S CHILLING TO BE ON THAT LAND"

GUGU MBATHA-RAW PLAYS LAWYER CLAUDIA

What appealed to you about the scripts for *Possession*?

Karla Crome's writing was very vivid and bold, and the arc for Claudia is really a big journey, which is something that I look for in a character. She goes from this woman who's ambitious and career-driven, but also quite disconnected from her roots, and through the process of the story has this spiritual awakening.

She's also able to connect more authentically to her Jamaican background, and uncover a lot of truths about her heritage. There were so many holes in her background, and bringing that truth to light is what helps her become a whole person and go from this slightly numb, brittle career woman into a woman who has much more of a sense of herself, comfortable in her own skin and able to heal those traumas and find a deeper sense of purpose.

How did you find filming in Jamaica?

It was incredible, really. We were based in [resort town] Ocho Rios, on the coast, and the plantation house is inland from that area. Then also Kingston, the capital – we were there for about a month. It was a real privilege to film there. We got to have access to areas that you wouldn't see as a tourist, the inland areas where real people live, away from the resort – a much more authentic Jamaica. And our director, Storm Saulter, is Jamaican, so he brought a lot of authenticity to the story.

The plantation house that we filmed in was a real one. So it felt like we had a

responsibility to honour that culture and that legacy. One evening, when we were filming at the plantation house, we could hear all this music across the valley, and there was another Nine Night [a wake]... we have a Nine Night in the show, but there was a real Nine Night happening on the other hill. Those kind of traditions are very real and very present in the culture, so it was really an interesting experience.

How was it filming around a real plantation house? Did a sense of its past come through?

It's definitely chilling to be on that land, knowing the blood that was shed there and the history that is associated with it. Our show is in two time periods, so I wasn't really around for the historic scenes, and there were obviously differences in some of the sets for the present day. But that land really was used in that way. So you can't help but feel that there are spirits there with you, and around you.

What do you hope viewers take away from the series?

First and foremost, it's a thriller – a fast-paced, edge-of-your-seat psychological journey. But for some viewers there might be other things to bring up conversation. I think everybody's going to take different things from it – it depends on their perspective and awareness. Certainly I know the intention from Karla and Storm, in creating the story, was also that it generates conversation – that it's really entertaining, but also thought-provoking.

Charlotte inherits Hope Hill after her father's death.



Matthew/Cudjoe ends up cursed with immortality.



Jeff Crossley plays Hope Hill employee Angelo.

because it was at the heart of the provocation. But yeah, it was really daunting because historically the representation of brutality to black bodies on-screen has been quite gratuitous and difficult for people to engage with. I think you have to be careful with your handling of it. And I was hyper-aware that we had to do something different.

"There's this phrase: 'You can't climb the tower without ringing the bell,'" she continues. "I guess there was a version of this story that only existed in the present day, and didn't have a historical timeline. But I felt the story we were trying to tell was about how the past affects the present, and how history is still alive in the present day."

An early scene subtly nods to that. As Claudia walks through Bristol, viewers who (like your *SFX* hack) live there will clock that she passes an empty plinth. Until 2020 – when protestors pulled it down, then rolled it into the nearby harbour – this bore a statue of Edward Colston, honoured for charitable deeds despite his role in trading 84,000 Africans into enslavement. "That's really cool to me that you would see that," Crome says, "Because it's not an overt thing, but if you know, you know."

Another detail struck us in the final episode. Treading carefully, to avoid spoilers: the phrase "willing victim" is used, in a way which feels like it has a broader resonance in the context of colonialism's legacy. Unless this is just a theory we're projecting onto the series...

"You can project anything that makes me look intelligent!" Crome says, laughing. "I do think you're right, in a sense that perhaps there's an argument there that if you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem."

However, the main way Crome draws a throughline from then to now is more overt.



A harmless bit of DIY, or something more sinister?

Jonny Lee Miller plays heir Oliver Connaught.



Angelo lets it all hang out at a Nine Night celebration.



The price of getting on Charlotte's bad side...

Possession also touches upon the wildly divergent outcomes for pregnant women, depending on their ethnicity. "At the time I started writing this, in the UK black women were five times more likely to die in childbirth than white women," she notes. "That's now lessened slightly, but it's still really significant and shocking."

"To me that's one clear statistic that shows there's a legacy to racism that exists in the present day. So this isn't just an exercise in history where we can look back, pat ourselves on the back, and go, 'See how far we've come.' There are ways in which the legacy of colonialism exists that actually put people's lives at risk."

Jamaica is much more than a flat backdrop for the story. In episode one, we witness a "Nine Night" ceremony for Oliver's father – a party-like wake, so named because it lasts nine days. And in episode two, Claudia pursues Cudjoe East through bustling streets during Jonkonnu, a colourful masquerade festival. The diasporic African spiritual traditions often referred to as Obeah also play a role. In episode

four, Claudia visits her aunt, Mercy (Nadean Rawlins) – a priestess – for help communing with the ancestors. "I did my research, then gave myself licence to be creative and playful," Crome says of how she approached Obeah. "You have to carefully tread the line of being respectful of tradition, whilst also making it work for your narrative."

She gives an example of how it helped to have a cultural advisor giving notes. "I'd imagined that a spirit journey would look like someone lying on the floor, akin to a Dreaming. She told us that in her own tradition, spirit journeys actually happen with people sitting upright. Small, thoughtful tweaks like this meant we could ground the story in something more truthful."

It's a drama embedded in the culture, which has real three-dimensionality to it. Crome says it was "really key" to have a Jamaican director, Storm Sauter. "He brought authenticity to the story, because even though I have Jamaican heritage, I'm culturally British. I can imagine things and write it on the page, but at some point you have to have somebody with lived experience come in and say, 'Oh, this isn't quite right. Let's adapt that slightly.' With things like the patois, I was like, 'I'll have a go. But you need to help

me, and the actors need to feel like they can tweak it to make it feel authentic."

Crome went on a location recce, visiting plantation houses and speaking to historians, which was "really useful". And she was able to go back once filming was underway.

The principal exterior for Hope Hill was the Annandale Estate in St Ann, whose great house was completed in 1765 by a Scottish physician. Records show that by 1819, 140 slaves lived on the grounds. What was it like being there?

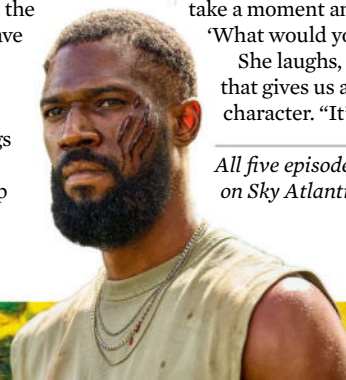
"There's something about it, with the dry stone walls as you're travelling up there, where you feel like you could be in Yorkshire," Crome observes. "That's a direct link to colonialism, just taking particular architecture and dropping it in the middle of Jamaica."

"It was a creepy house," she adds. "Literally a house on a hill. It was dark – it had those dark wood colonial features on the inside. It was very remote, very difficult to get to – a nightmare for the crew to get all the gubbins up there. And it just felt creepy. It felt like there was history in the walls."

A history that's still – as the watery fate of Edward Colston's statue shows – the subject of contention. As part of its dramatic discussion of slavery's legacy, *Possession* also addresses whether financial reparations should be made to descendants of the enslaved – in this case, on an individual basis, rather than by the state. There's plenty to chew on. So what does Crome hope viewers take away from the series? "It's a really good question that I don't know the answer to. I hope they turn off the TV, then take a moment and turn to each other and go, 'What would you do?' That's all."

She laughs, wrapping things up in a way that gives us a brief flash of her *Misfits* character. "It's a bit of a shit answer!"

All five episodes of *Possession* are available on Sky Atlantic and NOW.



IT CAN TAKE A WHILE before a director finds their voice. James Cameron's feature debut was famously *not The Terminator*, but the far less beloved *Piranha II: The Spawning*. *Fight Club* and *Seven* director David Fincher started out with the critically reviled – though we'd argue underrated – *Alien 3*. Edgar Wright's debut wasn't *Shaun Of The Dead*, but a barely-seen Western pastiche named *A Fistful Of Fingers*.

Then there are the directors who seem to emerge from nowhere with a distinct cinematic vision. That's the case with Jane Schoenbrun, whose low-budget screenlife chiller *We're All Going To The World's Fair* lit up the indie horror festival circuit in 2021. The film's dreamlike ambience, sense of creeping dread and haunting soundtrack heralded the arrival of a brilliant new talent whose work bore the influence of

greats like Davids Lynch and Cronenberg, but with an aesthetic that was entirely their own.

Schoenbrun followed up *World's Fair* with 2024's *I Saw The TV Glow*, a hallucinatory coming-of-age film which blurs the lines between reality and fiction as teenagers Owen (Justice Smith) and Maddy (Jack Haven) come to believe that a *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*-like TV show is far more real than they previously imagined. The film was a breakout indie hit and inspired a devoted fanbase that includes the likes of Martin Scorsese and *The Lord Of The Rings* star Elijah Wood.

Two years later, and Schoenbrun is back with their boldest work yet. *Teenage Sex And Death At Camp Miasma* is a meta-slasher that, on first glance, looks like an artier take on *Scream*, but quickly reveals itself to be something far stranger. It's a genuinely bold and boundary-pushing film – and one that nearly didn't get made at all.

LITTLE DEATH IS COMING

At the heart of the film is Kris (*Hacks* star Hannah Einbinder), a promising young director who's been tasked with reviving the ailing *Camp Miasma* franchise following a string of bad sequels (*Camp Miasma Part VII: Psychic Warriors* and *Medieval Miasma: Brandish The Spear* were particular stinkers). More than just a journeyman hack, Kris wants to restore the series to its former glory and so sets out to track down the series' mysterious star, Billy Preston (Gillian Anderson), a final girl turned eccentric recluse who now lives in the abandoned camp where the original movie was shot. The two hit it off, but it's not long before things take a more sinister turn...

Einbinder was quick to sign on to the project on the strength of its director. "It was about working with Jane, first and foremost," she says, speaking shortly after the film received a rapturous welcome at

ENTER THE WORLD
OF JANE SCHOENBRUN'S
DELIRIOUS NEW ART HORROR,
**TEENAGE SEX AND DEATH
AT CAMP MIASMA**

WORDS:
WILL
SALMON

SLASH

this year's Cannes Film Festival. "I'm a fan of their work. Reading the script, it just felt really exciting and like something that I wanted to be a part of."

Schoenbrun was equally enamoured with their star. "I had seen Hannah on *Hacks*. I would read the script and I could hear her voice in my head, which isn't always the case for me. The thing that got me really excited was actually watching her stand-up special. On *Hacks* she's so charming and witty, but her stand-up is really physical. She isn't afraid to make people uncomfortable using her body. I watched it and thought, 'That is someone who I am going to get along with and who I can pull something out of that no one will expect.'"

The director says the impetus for creating the film came from a very personal place. "I was just finishing the screenplay for *I Saw The TV Glow*, and I remember I was sitting on my couch at home and those words just popped into my head, exactly as →



Fiction

“We don’t see sex on camera in the way that this film tries to show it very often anymore”

they are on the screen: *Teenage Sex And Death At Camp Miasma*. I knew then that it would be something to do with slashers and something to do with gender transition and sex. I was at a stage of my own early transition, where I was finally starting to feel like myself for honestly the first time in my life, but that word ‘miasma’ was there too. There was something that smelled bad, and I think it was some of the lineage of the trans monster in film, right? The Buffalo Bill or the Norman Bates who haunts our cultural representations of transness throughout film history. It just made implicit sense to me that the way to talk about this liberatory coming into myself that I was experiencing needed to be explored through the dark and thorny woods of that genre, the trans slasher monster, if you will.”

In the *Camp Miasma* universe, that monster is the punningly-named Little Death, an enigmatic masked killer played by *I Saw The TV Glow*’s Jack Haven. As Kris and Billy grow closer, however, it becomes clear that Little Death is more than just a fiction...

SEX AND DEATH

Of course, while cinema has never shied away from depictions of violence, Hollywood has become far more squeamish when it comes to the other half of the film’s title. The focus on sex here – erotic, sure, but also cathartic rather than leery or exploitative – meant that every major studio passed on the film until arthouse streamer MUBI came to the rescue.

“It’s funny, we don’t see sex on camera in the way that this film tries to show it very often anymore,” muses Schoenbrun. “I looked at the history of sex on film and about how I wanted to film and direct the scenes and work with the actors. One thing that I kept returning to was a quote from David Cronenberg, when he was talking about *Crash*. He would talk about how,

usually in film, sex is a break from the narrative, it’s pure titillation or entertainment, but in his film he wanted all of the deepest emotional moments and all of the narrative developments to happen during sex. That was something that I thought a lot about from very early on.”

“In America we have Christian nationalism that is trying to criminalise homosexuality, trying to strip women of their bodily autonomy,” adds Einbinder, reflecting on the taboo that surrounds screen depictions of physical intimacy. “It is totally puritanical, it is totally oppressive and repressive and that is sewn into the fabric of our culture. It’s my hope that in watching this film, people step back and think, ‘In what ways have I been made to feel

Future scream queen Hannah Einbinder as director Kris.



The Little Death – an iconic villain in the making?



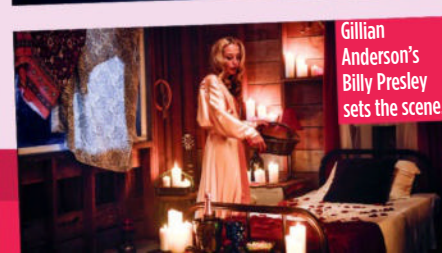
Is now really the best time for a bloody selfie?



Director Jane Schoenbrun (centre) at work on set.



Kris settles in for a *Camp Miasma* marathon.



Gillian Anderson's Billy Presley sets the scene.



shame about myself and others?" I hope it encourages an examination of those systems and how toxic they can be."

"I wanted to make a film that represented sex and sexuality, honestly," Schoenbrun continues. "So much of it is about entering a scary place with someone else, but in a space of trust and curiosity. It was really important to me that not only was I making a film about sex, but almost that the film *felt* like sex, that it felt like queer sex, and that it's making you feel safe to go to some places that are going to be raw and also hopefully healing or liberatory."

We've not yet touched on the film's canniest piece of casting. In an ensemble that includes multiple actors with strong horror associations, such as *Mulholland Drive*'s Patrick Fischler and recent *Scream* star Jasmin Savoy Brown, Schoenbrun cast a bona fide genre legend in the form of the iconic, incomparable Gillian Anderson.

"Gillian was definitely in my mind's eye while I was writing the script for this movie

about somebody connecting with an iconic actor who is partially responsible for her queer awakening. I think a lot of people have that association with Gillian," says Schoenbrun. "I grew up watching *The X-Files*. It was a large part of my personality from a very young age. And then you meet her and she's just so kind and thoughtful and gentle, and clearly so smart and considered in everything she does. It's a vulnerable and fully committed, and at times almost shocking, performance from her. I felt challenged by her and I hope that she felt challenged by me. You're seeing her in a way that you never have before."

"You know it's a strange thing to be making these weird art films in a commercial system," Schoenbrun finally reflects. "One of the ways I think that you can lend it some flair is by bringing together a really unexpected and iconic group of people." ●

Teenage Sex And Death At Camp Miasma is in cinemas from 20 August.



"I HAD TO BE A PART OF IT"

GILLIAN ANDERSON
ON ENTERING THE
WORLD OF CAMP
MIASMA

What drew you to this project?

I understood the world that Jane had created before with *I Saw The TV Glow* and that this was almost an expansion of that. It felt like it had so much in it that made it a profound exploration of identification, recognition and compassion – but simultaneously fear and shame and terror and joy. I thought it was an important film to have out there and I felt like I had to be a part of it.

What's Jane Schoenbrun like to work with as a director?

They are meticulous. There was a moment, I think on our second day of shooting, and they'd taken a while with [cinematographer] Eric Yue to set up a shot. It was a long scene, they set it up and then Jane said, "Shall we shoot?" I was kind of taken aback and thought we should rehearse it first. But then it occurred to me that Jane has already thought about this so much. They'd thought about every single frame in such an intricate way to the point where it's almost already happened. Watching the two of them and understanding the degree to which they would recreate moments from previous films that they have been obsessed with, and add all these Easter eggs for cinephiles, I thought, "Okay, I need to let go of any preconceptions of how this is going to be and just give over to the process."

You share some intense scenes with Hannah. What was that like?

It was amazing to work with Hannah. For one of our final scenes in the film, she really placed herself there in the terror. I don't know, if I were playing that scene, if I would have gone to that length, where the actor seems literally on the edge of a panic attack. There are ways to go there without going there, but she was absolutely there in the minute, take after take after take. And so it became my job to do whatever I needed to do to hold this safe space for her to be able to let her go into that and come on out the other side.



Billy and Kris heat things up during the big shop.



A young Kris watches the TV glow...



Severance's Zach Cherry spins a spooky campfire yarn.



Amanda Fix (right) plays the young Billy Preston.

HUNGRY



HUNGRY

THE HUNGER GAMES

FORGET SHARKS. THE
HIPPO IS HORROR'S NEXT
APEX PREDATOR IN

HUNGRY...

WORDS:
ROBBIE
DUNLOP

“HIPPOS ARE absolute shits!” laughs Ben Jacques. It’s December 2024, and cameras are about to roll on day 24 of *Hungry*’s

25-day shoot in Malta. Looking out over a murky bayou, where an overturned boat lies half-submerged between banks dense with foliage, the producer is feeding *SFX* a few terrifying facts about the film’s unlikely four-legged antagonist.

“They kill more people every year in Africa than lions,” he emphasises. “They’re top of the food chain. They’re vegetarians, so they don’t eat you for food – they eat you because they don’t like you. They’re easily spooked, very territorial. And they’re *fast*. You couldn’t outrun them or outswim them. They’re the perfect killing machine!”

Given all that, it seems remarkable that hippos have taken so long to unleash their people-munching potential on the big screen. Perhaps, as Madison Davenport – who stars as Sistine – points out, hippos have an image problem. “When people think of hippos, they think of something kind of precious, like Moo Deng [a baby hippo in a Thai zoo which went viral],” she says. “They’re almost cute with their little Shrek ears. But they’re *dangerous*! This is a scary animal that’s been portrayed in a way that’s not accurate. In this movie, we get it.”

Before *Hungry*, writer/director James Nunn had already navigated his share of dangerous waters, serving as second unit director on *47 Metres Down* and its sequel, *47 Metres Down: Uncaged*, then directing *Shark Bait* off the coast of Malta. The experience inspired him to devise a creature feature of his own. “I’d done sharks, so I thought, ‘What’s the next worst-best predator?’ It didn’t take much googling to see that hippos are terrifying and crazy. But people weren’t ready. Every time I went into a room to pitch, they were laughing: ‘Hippos? They’re funny, right?’ It wasn’t in the public psyche that they’re actually really dangerous.”

One production company eventually took an interest, leading Nunn to write a 10-page treatment entitled *The Bayou*. It followed a gang of criminals who, after pulling off a heist in Chicago, headed into the swamps to hide their loot. Development stalled, however,



The hippo: horror’s newest monster.

when the outfit folded. By December 2023, the world finally seemed to have caught up with Nunn’s idea, thanks in part to widely shared Instagram stories showing hippos crushing whole watermelons between their jaws. Jacques, who had produced several of Nunn’s previous films for Signature Entertainment, remembered the treatment and asked to read it, sensing an appetite for original creature features. Signature picked up the project, though the story would change considerably.

The resulting film follows a group of tourists – among them Davenport’s Sistine, Dionne (Tracey Bonner) and Tim (Jim Meskimen) – who travel seven miles from civilisation on an alligator tour through a Louisiana bayou. When a hippo overturns their boat, they scramble into the trees for safety. Stranded in the swamp, they must contend with the elements while evading the world’s third-largest land mammal, whose bite – as those watermelons demonstrate – is 10 times stronger than a human’s. “Chaos ensues!” says Nunn gleefully.

SWAMP THING

Around 70% of *Hungry* is set in the production’s impressive 50-by-50-metre bayou, created on what, just three months earlier, had been little more than a gravelly wasteland. “The minute you walk on, you’re like...” Davenport opens her mouth, holding it agape. “You see the swamp on screen and you’re like, ‘That’s not what I’ve just been looking at!’ They’ve done an amazing job.” At the

centre of the bayou stand four steel-framed trees, bolted to the concrete base and designed for the actors to climb up and across. And, inevitably, fall out of.

A strong swimmer, Davenport was keen to tackle as much of the water-based stunt work as possible. “I was like, ‘You guys can’t take swimming away from me! I promise I’ll be safe!’ I always think of myself as a clumsy person,” she admits. “I’ve actually hurt myself more on this set by walking normally, twisting my ankle simply going to get a coffee. And then I climb trees and dive in ice-cold water, like, no problem!”

Nunn describes the cast’s eagerness to perform their own stunts as a “Tom Cruise mentality”, albeit one kept firmly in check. “As long as it’s safe and within reason, they’ve been doing them,” he says.

“I collect my bruises like trophies,” Davenport adds proudly. “I have one on my hip right now that I’d show you, but it would be inappropriate. It’s huge and I

Louisiana swamps are the setting for this feature.



We sense some limbs are about to be severed.

Samantha Coughlan and River Codack in a muddle.

Makes alligators look like tadpoles.

Wouldn't want one of these stamping down on you.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

With its unmistakable nod to a certain children's game, *Hungry*'s title has attracted almost as much online attention as the hippo itself. Even the poster joins in the joke with the tagline: "This hippo isn't playing games."

The film began life as *The Bayou*, but that title was dropped because several other horror films were already using it. "Coming up with titles is really, really difficult," admits Nunn. "I suggested *Jaw*, and they said, 'You can't do that - it's like *Jaws*!' I was like, 'That's kind of the point!' Then they came back and said, 'We're going to call it *Hungry*.' I said, 'What, like *Hungry Hungry Hippos*?' They were like, 'Not really, but there is a sort of connotation.' I thought it was a genius title. Then they checked with legals whether it would be possible, and it was.

"I was never trying to make a *Hungry Hungry Hippos* movie, but since writing it and it being called *Hungry*, I get sent floods of memes and things," Nunn adds. "I'm like, 'Oh shit, this whole subculture existed!'"

MARTIN LEE/SHUTTERSTOCK



love it." The latest comes from one of the film's most physically demanding action sequences, which plays out in and around a derelict abattoir at the edge of the swamp. Davenport and Bonner have spent much of the past two days on it and will return tonight to complete the remaining shots.

"We've had a lot going on," says Nunn, listing stunts, creature effects, visual effects and a hippo rampage filmed in a single take. "We pre-rigged a door with lead, so as the hippo was busting into it, rather than the door slam open, the hippo starts imprinting through the metal," he adds. "I'd never done anything like that so I was really intrigued as to how it would work. And it worked really well."

Before heading back onto set, Bonner - on her first trip to Europe - gives SFX an idea of what lies ahead. "There will be some running, some slipping and some falling," she says. "We'll be facing this 9,000-pound hippo head-on, trying to outsmart it. Hopefully we'll be victorious!"

A little later, we settle into a tent crammed with camera equipment and crew, following the action from a bank of monitors. In close-up, a terrified Bonner edges down a flight of stairs, her back pressed to the wall, while Davenport - busy fending off the four-legged intruder - shouts at her to get clear. With knee pads concealed beneath her costume, Bonner jumps through an open hatch in the floor.

Once Nunn is happy with the shot, Bonner heads off to have prosthetics

applied to her leg; the fall leaves Dionne badly injured. Meanwhile, the crew film several takes from the hippo's point of view, the camera jolting up and down as the animal charges towards Davenport. Nunn is an energetic, hands-on director. Throughout the evening, we watch him block scenes with the cast, animatedly acting out their panicked reactions and even scampering about in a crouch as the hippo. Later, he leaps up onto a cage outside the abattoir before Davenport follows his lead.

Davenport's parents are visiting the set today and join us in the tent. Her mother has a cameo of sorts, appearing as Sistine's mother in family photographs. As filming resumes, we watch on the monitors as Davenport swings down from the frame of an industrial bone saw, skids on spilled oil, crashes to the

"You couldn't outrun them. They're the perfect killing machine"

floor and scrambles backwards from an unseen attacker. One more bruise for the collection.

Back on her feet, she pulls a matchbox from a bag and tries to light a match. Five or six strikes later, still no flame. She glances away in mock defeat as the camera tilts down in empathy. While the shot is reset, Davenport closes her eyes and jogs on the spot. "That's to get the adrenaline," she explains later. "It was very high stakes and, honestly, if you sit for too long, and then try and just" - she snaps her fingers - "go into *that*..." She shakes her head. "Sometimes it's really helpful to close my eyes and block everything out. I try not to go too deep, dark, into horrible things. I just think about what is happening. The five senses: 'I'm here in this building. What can I touch, smell and hear? What's happening?' It's one of my favourite things to do."

A fresh matchbox is brought onto set, one of half a dozen lined up on a table →



Practical effects are the name of the game here.



The producer calls hippos "absolute shits".

outside. Standby props Rita La Corte has individually labelled each one for Hank's Jazz Bar, a location featured at the beginning of the film. "Details are the best," she says, carefully inspecting the matchboxes for any imperfections. "If you don't do details, I find it boring. When I watch films, I notice." She has created bottles of beer, too. "Non-alcoholic!" adds lead propsman Joseph Majri, who single-handedly dressed the bayou with its 450 plants.

Both Maltese, the pair have overseen everything from rifles, darts, life jackets and torches to several live animals, including a snake. Not every creature, however, came with a handler. "When they were shooting on the boat," La Corte recalls, "they saw a real chameleon on one of the trees. It just happened, so they got it in the film. It was big, it was free of charge, and then they put it back on the tree."

After a crew member replenishes the spilled oil, cameras roll again. This time, the match lights. Davenport shouts an obscenity at the rampaging beast, her voice echoing through the night. She drops the match. Whoosh! A flame bar ignites and the abattoir begins to burn. Filming then shifts to the grounds outside the abattoir, where we spend the rest of the night watching Sistine and Dionne take on one angry, angry hippo.

HEAD CASE

Time to address the elephant in the room. Or, in *Hungry's* case, the hippo in the shipping container. At the edge of the set

SPLASH ZONE

One scene, featuring several cast members hiding from the hippo in the trees, was given an unexpected boost by what Tracey Bonner describes as a "little happy accident".

"It started raining and we just kept going, of course," she explains. "And then James [Nunn] said, 'Hey, that was so cinematic, we're gonna have to keep it.' That was in the wide shot, and we had like seven other close-ups that we needed to get. So we shot for about five hours, and they had to manufacture rain.

"It was cold and windy and we were soaked - our wetsuits didn't even matter at this point. At the time, it was like, 'Oh my gosh!' But now, looking back, it's gonna be a really, really great addition to the cinematography."

What's the story behind these skeletons?



stands a makeshift workshop, its shelves lined with severed body parts - props, we're reliably informed. Dominating the space is Nancy, the crew's affectionate nickname for an enormous, fully animatronic and unnervingly realistic hippo head. "We're traditionalists," says Jacques of the decision to combine visual effects with "something you can reach out and touch".

For Nunn, the puppet offers a chance to recapture the spirit of some of the creature features he grew up with, including *Arachnophobia*, *Jumanji* and *Jurassic Park* - "movies that got down and dirty with real animatronic props". Nancy was built in London over four months by a 12-strong team led by prosthetics designer Dan Martin of 13 Finger FX. She is used primarily when the hippo gets up close and personal with her human prey. Made largely from steel and weighing around 250kg - three-fifths as heavy as a grand piano - she can only be moved by crane. "If you swung her against someone as hard as you could, you'd knock them off their feet!" Martin cautions.

Her outer form is made from high-density foam latex that is covered with a removable fabric skin, coated in silicone and painted. Whenever it's Nancy's turn in front of the camera, she is "glossed down with glycerine water and a little bit of dish soap". Her eyes - based on those of a real hippo - were digitally sculpted in 3D, printed in acrylic and painted by hand. The same attention to detail extends to the 350 bristles around her



The practical effects ape the spirit of old monster films.



The hippo needed five puppeteers to operate.



The Louisiana bayou was recreated in a studio in Malta.

snout. Made from 3D-printing filament, each was inserted by a member of Martin's team. Her eyebrows and ears are made from yak hair, while her teeth are dense urethane rubber. "Each tooth is on a little square aluminium peg that goes into a socket in her steel jaw," explains Martin, "so we can pull them out and replace them with softer foam ones when the actors are battling her."

A separate fibreglass back piece is used for shots of the hippo moving through the water. Before Nancy is revealed in full, animatronic feet are seen paddling along. "And later in the film she crushes someone," adds Martin, "so they were used to push an actor to the floor."

Bringing Nancy to life takes five puppeteers working with tiller-control cables of the kind used on superyachts. Adjustable counterweights help the team manage her considerable bulk. Between them, the team control both her head and its various moving parts. "The ears flip about. We've got a mechanical jaw and a mechanical tongue, and there's air lines in the nostrils and the throat so she can clear water out her nose." Martin recalls that Nancy received a round of applause when she was unveiled to the cast – "which was delightful."

"The prop is stunning," Davenport enthuses. "They did such beautiful artistry." Nancy also gives the cast a proper eyeline and a sense of scale. As Nunn puts it, they are not reacting to "a tennis ball on a rock". That makes a real difference for Bonner. "A lot of the time we're imagining it," she says. "When we

have it in our face, for me, it's very helpful to bring the emotion that I need."

Nancy hasn't been entirely trouble-free. When *SFX* visits the workshop, the effects team have only just finished carrying out a few repairs. "With all the will in the world, we could only test her so much, and then she came to set and took a beating," Martin laughs. "On day two, we snapped a weld on the jaw rig, so we had to do a quick re-weld on that. Then the tongue got damaged – the cable had a kink in the line, which meant it wasn't returning. You could lift her tongue up, but it wasn't dropping back down. So we've been fixing it."

"The hippo is like a typical Hollywood actor," jokes Nunn. "No, she's been excellent. It takes time to shoot, particularly in the water – it requires safety divers and marine crew to move it around – but it's worth it. You look through the lens and see these little magic moments being created in front of you. It's just amazing!"

HUNGRY FOR MORE

A day before filming wraps, there's still a palpable excitement in the air. Everyone *SFX* meets seems to be embracing the sheer madness of making a killer hippo movie. "I think we have been dying for something quite like this," says Bonner. Judging by the huge social media reaction that would follow, she had a point.

Nunn is keenly aware that *Hungry* is venturing into unusual territory. From the outset, he wanted to play the material straight – "more in a *Lake Placid* vein

than *Cocaine Bear*" – and treat its formidable antagonist with respect. "It's a killing machine," he says. "We see its power when it destroys stuff. That was important to me. We might be making the first or *only* ever hippo movie. So how do we make the best version of that? I think we've got a good mix of stuff going on."

Jacques insists that *Hungry* is not trying to "reinvent cinema", but it is trying to do something original. "It's got action, horror and emotion, with the odd laugh here and there," he says. "It just so happens to have this unique villain."

Before *SFX* leaves Davenport to tend to her latest bruise, she has one last thing she wants audiences to know: the cast really did everything they'll see on screen. "Like, we fucking did that," she emphasises. "We were in the cold water, climbing those trees, working our asses off. Tracey was up in a tree for three hours one day! We're all so in it and we love it. I just hope that people go and they have a really fucking fun time."

In two days, Nancy will be placed into storage. Nunn, however, would readily return for a sequel. "I'd love to go bigger, rather than smaller," Nunn says. "If the movie gods allow us to make another one and have more of a budget, then I would be there in a heartbeat." "Maybe, if this hippo survives, it could make it to New Orleans, the city!" laughs Jacques.

If audiences are hungry for more, this hippo may yet be back for seconds. ●

Hungry will premiere as a Sky Original on Sky Cinema on 4 September.



FRIGHT NIGHTS

THIS YEAR'S
HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS
PROMISES AN INFERNAL CARNIVAL
OF NIGHTMARES

The undisputed premier Halloween event in the world, Halloween Horror Nights returns to Universal theme parks in Hollywood, Japan, Singapore and Orlando – where it celebrates 35 frightening years.

Lora Sauls – assistant director of creative development and show direction for art, design and entertainment at Universal Orlando – talks us through what to expect this year...

WORDS:
DARREN SCOTT

Hellraiser comes to HHN for the first time.

HAUNTED HOUSES: ORLANDO & HOLLYWOOD

HELLRAISER

For over 10 years, we've been asking, "Can we do *Hellraiser*?" It was a weird thing about figuring out who owned the rights for a long time. All of a sudden we asked again – because every year, we ask – and all of us fell out of our chairs. We really wanted to focus on the first movie and then the second had such great content. *Hell On Earth* tells the origin story of Pinhead, so that's really what we're gleaning from Three, that and a few other scenes.

The house is *stunning*. Dylan [Kollath] has outdone himself again with brand new scenic design, new ways to view and to scare. You're going into the Labyrinth – you go through the Lament box, which is *absolutely incredible*. The lighting integration, the video effect of the blue lightning that comes off of it...

Then these chains and pillars that are moving around you – then Pinhead is right there talking to you. The first two scenes are just absolutely incredible, but then you turn the corner and it's winding, but all the walls are open. So you're going to see the Cenobites moving, so they could scare anywhere. I don't think we've ever done that before.

You'll see all of the Cenobites from One and Two. We purposely stayed away from some of the Cenobites in Three. They got a little kitschy. You know, it was the early '90s...

Doug Bradley did the voiceover for our house. He is the voice of Pinhead. He was awesome, he went right back to that same voice. We're able to use the score from the first and second films. This house is going to blow people's minds. It's that classic horror that we need within the event. Because we have such really rich new stuff that's out there. But you need that touch of "classic" horror for the event.

We got a handwritten letter mailed to us by Clive Barker. It was pretty amazing, saying how spectacular everything looks, so we were pretty honoured by that. He's a horror icon and that's pretty special.



There aren't many *Stranger Things* than Vecna.



STRANGER THINGS 5

There's a lot of emotional journeys that get wrapped up and we went into the creative going, "Okay, we can't do that. We're a haunted house." We can put touches in there, but really, we have to go where the demogorgons are attacking, when Will gets his power, when Vecna is attacking us, we have to go to those horror moments, those most aggressive parts. The demogorgons are *everywhere*. Vecna is around *every* corner, and literally our make-up team and that sculpt of Vecna, when we saw that, we were like, "That is *powerful*."

"You're going to see someone's head get bashed with a dishwasher"

If you've experienced the *Stranger Things* houses we've done, I believe this is even bigger. You're going to go into the Abyss, you're going to follow that party as they're fighting those monsters and yes, you're going to see Derek give the finger to Vecna.

I wanted merchandise with him saying, "Suck my fat one". I don't think it's going to happen, but I sure wanted a big old shirt with that on.

For our lagoon show [in Orlando] *Stranger Things: Return To Hawkins*, we wanted to celebrate with Netflix, 10 years of *Stranger Things*. So you



Jack the Clown welcomes you to Downtown Clowntown.

can celebrate those emotional journeys – we're still putting the big bads on the lagoon, because it's still HHN. But also the lagoon can play so much more of the music. It's just a bigger moment; the lagoon was the perfect location to celebrate the whole series.

SINNERS

Ramon Paradoia is the show director on that one. He actually saw the film five times in the theatre. Then it was

us watching it, saying to our clearances and legal group, "We need to reach out to whoever we need to!" *None* of us at that time knew it was going to be Academy Award nominated. Then none of us knew it was going to be an Academy Award *winner*.

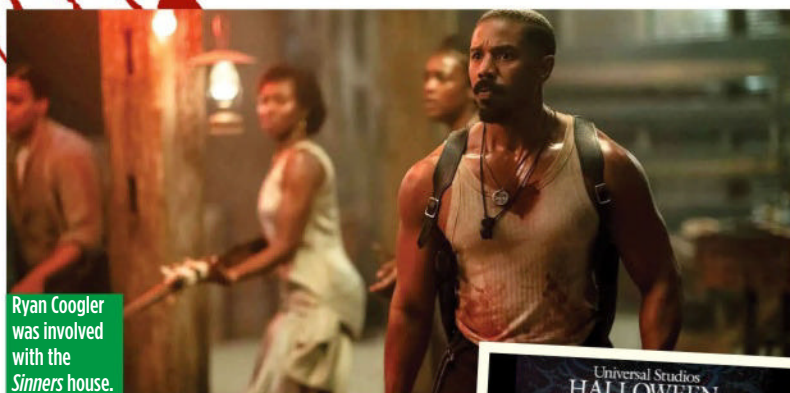
Ryan Coogler was involved from the very beginning. We gave our high concept to the Warner Bros team. We got feedback back that Ryan was very excited about it happening at HHN. You'll see Smoke and Stack and hear them talking about setting up this juke joint.

You'll hear Preacher Boy at the bus station, see Remmick's first appearance where he's turning Joan and her husband into vampires, and you're going to go right into the juke joint.

The part I'm most excited about is you're going to see that moment where Preacher Boy sings on stage, that veil comes down and you start to see musicians of the past, present and future. It's a new collaboration of technologies that we're doing to make that happen.

A really cool lighting effect that makes it look like those walls are burning down, but paired with a video and audio effect of those musicians appearing around us. All the while you have Remmick just swooping in as the vampires are coming at us – a vampire onslaught! We're doing UV eyes for some of them in a couple of scenes.

In Hollywood they're doing some glow applications on their eyes. We do the same properties, but there are some unique differences that are at both properties. There's going to be two houses, telling the same story, at the same moment in the



Ryan Coogler was involved with the *Sinners* house.

film, but they're gonna be uniquely different, and they're gonna have different applications.

We're gonna hear some of the songs. We're definitely gonna hear Preacher Boy singing in the juke joint. We're going to hear Remmick singing those old Irish folk tunes outside of the juke joint. Music plays a huge part and we're going to hear those classic songs that you heard in the film. And yes, the sun does come up... Sorry, vampires!

EVIL DEAD BURN

We got a script [early]. We had already been working with Warner Bros on *Sinners*. It was an easy in. It was a really nice flow of getting assets to see what these characters were going to look like – we did sculpts using filmmaker assets. We were really happy that, towards the end of their process, it pretty much remained intact to what we had initially read.

You're going to see the Deadite dog, but *not* how the dog died. You're going to see someone's head get bashed with a dishwasher... It's mainly set in the Price family home. The facade is in the woods, when Will's car crashes and he burns to death. Jessica's severed head is right there – that is going to be fully articulated and talk to us.

Then you're going through the woods where the Evil Dead curse is coming after you. You'll see those pages light up within the woods, and then you're at the Price family home. Then we do go to the end scene at that construction site for Alice and Will's final battle. What we're trying to achieve with this house is getting it hotter as you go through. I mean, Florida's already hot, but we're really trying to put the heat on in that house as well!

OTHER HAUNTED HOUSES:

OZZY OSBOURNE: PRINCE OF DARKNESS

A tribute on both coasts to the UK musician, focusing on his albums, performances and *that* bat. Plus five original content haunted houses, including two sci-fi horror scenarios, one apocalyptic story and a traditional Halloween horror movie tribute.



HHN UK...

Universal United Kingdom Resort opens in Bedford in 2031 – does that mean we'll see HHN in the UK?

"We're gonna manifest it," Sauls smiles. "We're also going to say this: HHN is at Universal Beijing. HHN is at Universal Studios Japan. HHN is at Universal Singapore. So we're manifesting that Halloween Horror Nights will be in the UK..."

SCARE ZONES

FORTNITEMARES

Fortnite is a huge gaming demographic. We're building Freaky Fields, but also the storm with some really cool lighting effects to get that purple glow moving through the trees. We really worked closely with Epic Games to actually bring their characters to life, because they're mostly 2D. We also went, 'Can we HHN some of them?' So the Shadows and Husks we're putting a little Horror Nights spin on – those are our main aggressors.

Then you'll see some of their amazing characters elevated – because we know they're going to be popular and they're going to be photographed. So we didn't put all of them on the ground to cause us chaos within the area itself. When you get to the point of entrance, you'll see a custom-made Battle Bus and more of those iconic characters. Skull Trooper and Female Skull Trooper are classic Fortnitemares characters.

You'll see some static figures of iconic characters like Peely, the ones we can't really make into a costume. We have a character that will learn the emotes – emotes are like dance moves – that have been approved and they can emote with the fans. Epic Games provided music to go into the Scare Zone as well. It's just reaching out to make a new demographic a HHN fan. And once we grab 'em they're our fans for life!

DOWNTOWN CLOWNTOWN

Killer Klowns [From Outer Space] is going to be its own borough, so it has its own street in Downtown Clowntown. We're building the float from *Killer Klowns* for this street. It's going to have some guest activated triggers that guests can actually pull. You're going to see all your favourite Klowns roaming out there. We're going to have cotton candy cocoons, we're going to have fog bubbles.

Art the Clown [from *Terrifier*] is going to have a borough in Downtown Clowntown, we're featuring Art as Santa in the third film. He'll have his own Santa chair and moments where he'll have a victim that he will scalp and kill. There's a Christmas tree farm area where we got to work with Damien Leone – our character creators created these little demon elf Art clowns that are inspired by Art's look. It's so horrifically amazing.

We're going to cast smaller humans to play those roles. We created the character, and we showed Damien – he's like, "Oh my god, I love this!" He was just so happy.

OTHER HAUNTED AREAS:

Two more carnival-themed Scare Zones, plus three additional spooky street experiences and a new live show. ●

Halloween Horror Nights is at Universal Orlando from 28 August and Universal Studios Hollywood from 3 September to 1 November. Visit halloweenhorrornights.com.



Probably best not to sit on Art's lap, all told.

IN THE UNIVERSE OF *LANTERNS*, a cop's a cop, even if their beat is cosmic, the perps interplanetary and the tech beyond human comprehension.

"We thought okay, let's take this absolutely at its face," says showrunner Chris Mundy. "These are people and this is their job. What would that look like? What would that feel like? They've still got to go home at night. They've still got to go to bed. They've still got to get up. Their job just happens to be a strange one. The abilities they have actually help us in our storytelling.

"We just tried to take it really practically. 'This is a real story about these people – what would it entail emotionally?' If we could close that circuit then we'd feel like we'd done a good job."

Mundy has form when it comes to small screen crime. He was Emmy nominated for his work on *Ozark* and *True Detective*, the latter an acknowledged creative touchstone for *Lanterns*. "I think superhero shows and crime dramas have incredibly common ground."

DOWN TO EARTH

The next chapter of James Gunn's revamped DCU, the series offers a grittier take on decades of sprawling comic book lore. The original Green Lantern first appeared in 1940, co-created by Bill Finger, one of the founding fathers of Batman. A masked crimebuster whose ring channelled the powers of a magical lantern, the character was subsequently retconned to Earth-Two, one of DC's myriad of parallel realities.

A sleeker jet age version debuted in 1959, trading magic for hard science – or at least the freewheeling comic book equivalent. This was Hal Jordan, a hotshot test pilot recruited by the Green Lantern Corps, an interstellar law enforcement agency presided over by the Guardians of the Universe (not to be confused with Gunn's ragtag Marvel heroes the Guardians of the Galaxy).

Another Lantern, John Stewart, arrived in 1971. One of DC's first black superheroes, his look was inspired by actor Sidney Poitier, just as Hal Jordan's was indebted to Paul Newman.

Rooted in the small town of Rushville, Nebraska, *Lanterns* pairs Hal and John, exploring their mismatched buddy cop dynamic as they probe a mysterious incident at a local football stadium – one that soon proves to have implications for the entire planet.

"For us the rhythm of the show rested in the dialogue between Hal and John," says Mundy, who developed the series with *Lost* and *Watchmen*'s Damon Lindelof and comic book writer Tom King. "And you could take the familiarity [of that dynamic] and then

THIS RING





CALL THE COPS! DC'S STARFARING LAWYERS COME DOWN TO EARTH IN **LANTERNS**

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD

completely blow it up, because what they're talking about is absolutely different from *Lethal Weapon* or *Training Day* or *Midnight Run*, all these things that have strange partnerships at their centre."

The investigation plays out against a backdrop of dirt roads and desolate highways scattered with motels and taco stands. Did it ever feel counterintuitive, making such a dustily grounded take on DC's most astrally inclined hero?

"No, we just committed pretty early," Mundy tells *SFX*. "It wasn't like, 'Oh, should we do it this way?' [We said] 'We're going to do it this way.' So we just started building it. In that way we were all in from the beginning."

"We wanted to make sure that we were firmly walking the Earth first, and then hopefully you can build those relationships and that trust inside the show, and you can keep doing more and more. We'd be stupid not to use everything that you can do inside the Green Lantern universe."

"They have these abilities. They have the ring. Their world is just bigger, and

“We really want the fans to understand how much we care and take the canon seriously”

the way we use our storytelling can be bigger too. We sometimes had to remind ourselves that there's as much or as little sci-fi in it as we want there to be."

A teaser trailer saw pushback from hardcore fans, fretting that the series seemed to be erasing its colourful comic book origins. How fine is the balance between wooing a mainstream audience and servicing a fanbase that's followed this universe for years?

"In one way you think about that a ton," shares Mundy. "In another way you try to think about it as little as possible. It's a weird push and pull, because we really want the rabid fans to understand how much we care and take the canon seriously and respect it."

"At the same time, it's like Damon said the other day, we're the keepers of this story for a short time and then someone else will be the keeper. We're in that lineage. There have been so many different iterations of it. So you want to take your approach to it and do it as best as possible, and know that you're doing it with love and respect."

"And it's important that [the fans] feel that. But you want to make sure that you're doing it the way you're trying to do it, because otherwise you'll have feet in so many different worlds it won't come out the way it should." →

Friday Night Lights star Kyle Chandler plays Hal as a rumpled, sardonic Air Force veteran, equally at home supping brewskis in rural dives as breaking the light barrier.

"We talked a lot about him being like a Chuck Yeager type," says Mundy, referencing the ace pilot who beat the speed of sound in 1947. "The guy who everyone respected because he was the first out there. Other people might have got more acclaim but he was the guy back at the bar who had done it all. Even just the look and feel of the character is so lived in, and Kyle played it so lived in. He's really leaning into the fun of it as an actor. We want to have a kind of throwback feeling to it. It's part of the charm of it, hopefully.

"That whole storyline is about the idea of 'Will John replace Hal? Will Hal eventually step aside?' It has a generational feel. We wanted there to be a grudging respect coming from both sides. It'd be so much easier if there was no respect from either side, but there's a lot, going in both directions.

"We also wanted the hazing that Hal does to John to have some humour inside it, so it's not just harshness. Some of that is the writing, hopefully, and tons of that is just Kyle, and how good he is, and how much you just like him even if he's being a bit of an asshole!"

WORLD BEYOND

Dealing with the bantz – and still studying the manual for superhuman flight – is *Rebel Ridge*'s Aaron Pierre as John, a former Marine sniper newly drafted into the Green Lantern Corps.

"Aaron brings an incredible physicality and presence. He's physically imposing. Aaron was a sprinter in high school. [For one scene] we couldn't cut the stuntman against his footage because Aaron was just faster and his form was perfect, because he was that guy.

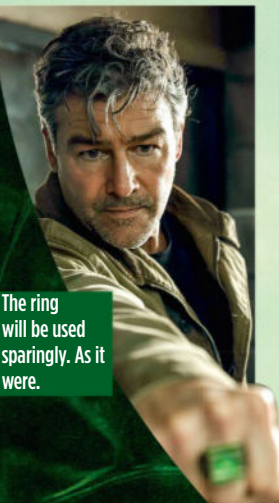
"When you embody the role almost exactly perfectly physically, and you're so magnetic in that that way, then you don't have to be 'Acting! Acting! Acting!' You can just be very still, and in the character, and be present with him, which is a nice thing to bounce off the other side of Kyle."

The power ring and the lantern that recharges it were always going to be two essential parts of the show's iconography. "Obviously we looked at every iteration through all the comic books. We wanted it to feel like they were practical tools. We wanted a utilitarian feel that still nodded to the classic feel, to the best art from the comics since the beginning. It wasn't perfectly shiny or new. It's been used, because it's been through stuff."

Weaponising willpower, conjuring reality out of pure imagination, the fabled ring isn't



John (Aaron Pierre) and Hal (Kyle Chandler).



The ring will be used sparingly. As it were.

John's got a long road ahead of him...





Scotland's own Kelly Macdonald as Sheriff Kerry.



When someone won't get to the punchline.

simply a perfect metaphor for TV production. It's potentially the ultimate get out of jail free card, as the showrunner acknowledges with a smile.

"We talked about it at the beginning all the time. If it can do too much there's no story, because it just solves every problem. Some of it we speak to directly – you essentially have a weapon of mass destruction on your finger, and when and where to use it is the whole ballgame.

"You don't go wielding that thing all the time. You make sure you really need to use it. It's the equivalent of a cop and a gun. It's a big deal to take it out of the holster. Then it's a really big deal to point it at someone. Then obviously it's an even bigger deal to pull that trigger. We wanted to layer in that same responsibility when it came to the ring."

Lanterns arrives two months after *Supergirl* stumbled at the box office. Does that add extra pressure, given this is the next DCU project out of the gate?

"It's a better question for the folks at DC, honestly," says Mundy. "I feel like

“John will be part of the greater DCU. That was good for us to know”

there's pressure on everything that comes out all the time. We did our absolute best on this show and it was the moment in time when we made it. I want people to watch it and like it. And my desire doesn't change whether or not *Supergirl* was a huge hit. I'd still want them to see that this group of people came together and did this thing.

"But on the business side of it, I'm sure if I was sitting in a boardroom at Warner Bros or DC or whatever, people are more incentivised to hope it does well."

For all its grit and muted uniform choices, *Lanterns* slots into the colourful universe established by *Superman*, *Supergirl* and *Peacemaker*, even down to a guest shot by Guy Gardner. In fact, as Mundy reveals, the eight-part series offers a stepping stone for the interwoven saga Gunn is shaping on screen.

"We weren't tasked with having any specific landing point, which was great for us because it gave us freedom to land the story where we wanted to land the story. But John will be part of the greater DC Universe. That was good for us to know. And where we land him is somewhere that they're happy with us landing him and somewhere they can take him, if they want." ●

Lanterns is on HBO Max UK from 17 August.

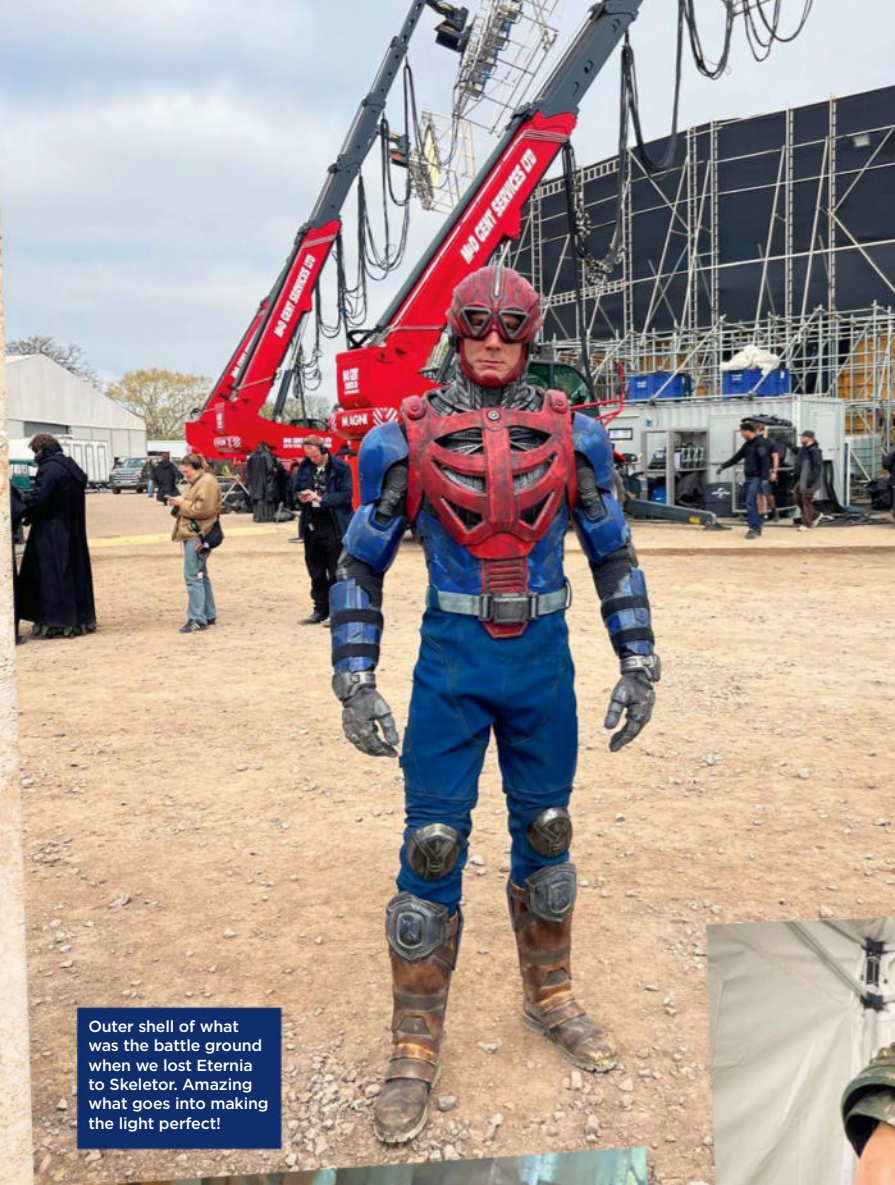
BUILDING ETERNIA

TRAVIS KNIGHT'S MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

MOVIE SAW SOME OF
ETERNIA'S FINEST
— AND GNARLIEST —
MAKE THEIR LIVE-
ACTION DEBUTS,
INCLUDING BRITISH
STUNT PERFORMER
AND ACTOR

JAMES WILKINSON
AS **MEKANECK**. SOON
TO BE SEEN IN THE
NEXT AVENGERS
MOVIE, WILKINSON
TAKES SFX BEHIND-
THE-SCENES ON
BRINGING THE
CLASSIC '80S
CARTOON TO LIFE
WITH HIS EXCLUSIVE
PHOTOS

WORDS:
DARREN SCOTT



Outer shell of what
was the battle ground
when we lost Eternia
to Skeletor. Amazing
what goes into making
the light perfect!



Guys being
dudes. This was
the day we
filmed "Here's to
Alan". I think
there were more
lines filmed that
day, but that was
the best one.

STOCK ART: SYLVEBARTS, ALSIMONOV/GETTY

Masters Of
The Universe
album cover!

The Masters have no beef with Tri-Klops in real life. We all built a lasting friendship.

Jon [Xue Zhang], Christiaan [Bettridge] and I had so much time waiting for shots to be set up, we spent a lot of time in the easy ups, mainly taking pictures.

Tom Wilton and I. Creature puppeteer extraordinaire. He plays Cringer. It's always great to work with old friends from another life on set.

Gym buddies. Jon [Xue Zhang] and I spent a lot of time messing around on our "workout" time before it was time to film.

This day was my first time meeting Christian. Now, he calls me up on podcasts and asks for Venmo because he's stuck in a car wash (long story).

My fave sums up how that day on set went. These sets were so fully realised, we were really stepping into Eternia.

Jóhannes [Haukur Jóhannesson, as Fisto] out-fisted me in this shot...



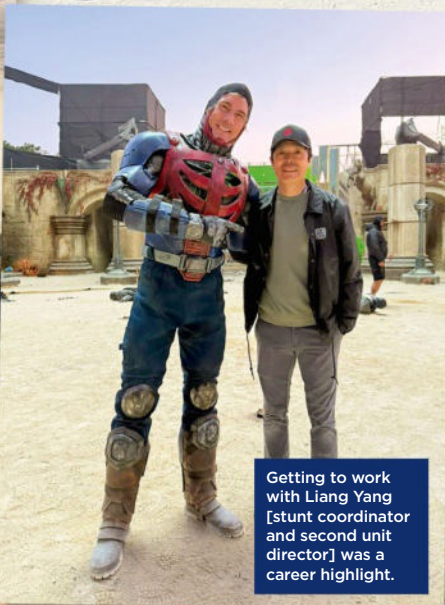
This was the camera test. The first time Jon [Xue Zhang] and I met Travis [Knight] and wore what was pretty close to our final looks for the film.



I defy you to meet a more rockin' stunt team. Absolute elite team, best in the industry.



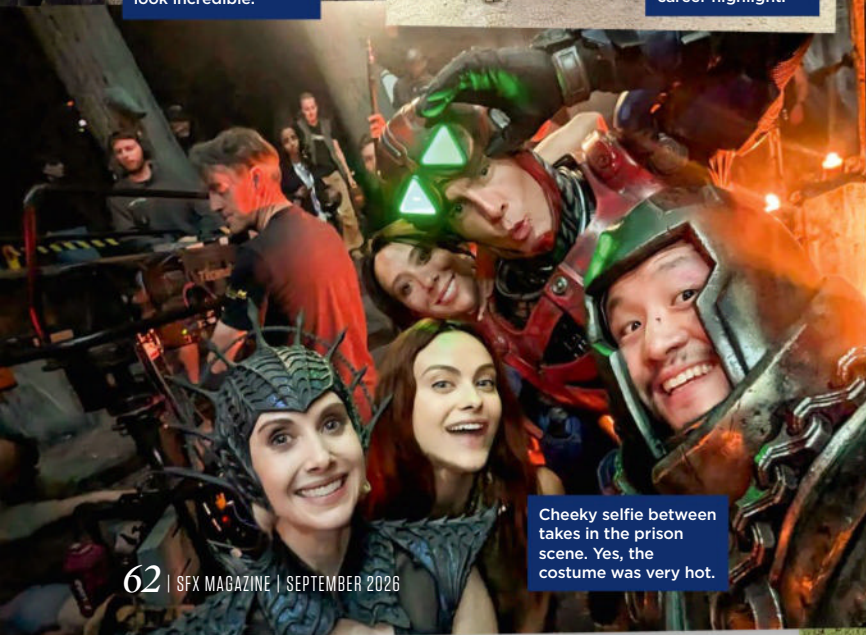
Hung [Dante Dong, as Karg] rocking the prosthetic. These guys sat in the chair for hours each day! But the prosthetics look incredible.



Getting to work with Liang Yang [stunt coordinator and second unit director] was a career highlight.

A night shoot I'll always remember! This was the night Liang [Yang] told all the goodies and baddies to CLASH! One take, no rehearsal, and with five minutes until dawn, you better believe we clashed.

Fun fact: the green LED lights during night scenes made it tough to see. Making it tougher was the red lining glass, a great challenge.



Cheeky selfie between takes in the prison scene. Yes, the costume was very hot.



Continuity shot or "Thriller" dance?



We were always in good hands when Andy Lister [assistant stunt coordinator] was on set. We all had man crushes for him.



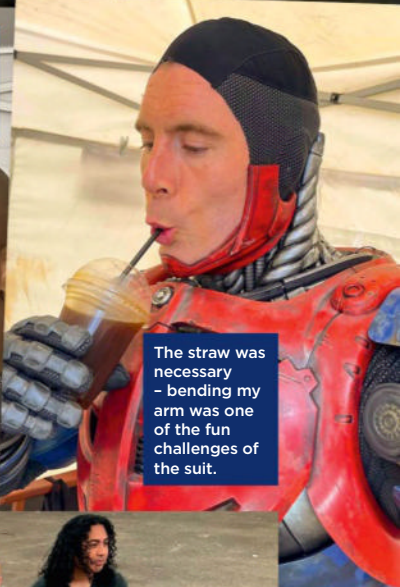
Charlotte Riley [Queen Marlena] was so lovely. I spent just a few days on set with her, but it was great always feeling welcomed by such an established and talented actor.



This is one of my best memories on set. Chilling in the sun, half the armour off, and setting the worlds to rights with some great friends.



Michael Oladele is one of my closest friends, and getting work on set with him was awesome. He stunt-doubled Tri-Klops.



The straw was necessary - bending my arm was one of the fun challenges of the suit.



I hope Skeletor's henchmen have health benefits, as Spikor's [James Apps] seen better days...



Richard Sale, the man responsible for designing all our incredible costumes. He was a joy to work with.

Masters Of The Universe is now on Prime Video.



INTERNAL AFFAIRS

JOE DANTE – THE genre veteran behind the cult classic likes of *Gremlins*, *The Howling*, *Explorers* and *The 'Burbs* – is in fine fettle when *SFX* catches up with him to talk about the new 4K UHD release of his sci-fi comedy *Innerspace*.

The 79-year-old still has the wry sense of humour you'd hope for from the B-movie veteran who has paired knowing humour with serious filmmaking craft throughout his storied career. He's straight-talking, funny and astute, reflecting on the new transfer of the almost four decades old *Innerspace*, a (very) loose remake of *Fantastic Voyage*.

"It's validating, you know?" he says of seeing the film scrubbed up and re-released. "I mean, this is a movie that I loved making, and audiences really thought it was funny when they saw it, but it didn't do very well at the box office. It mainly found its life in home video."

Produced by Steven Spielberg, *Innerspace* sees maverick pilot Tuck Pendleton (Dennis Quaid) shrunk down in a submersible pod, to be injected into the body of a rabbit. But when rival scientists try to steal the experimental miniaturising technology, Tuck accidentally ends up inside hypochondriac Jack Putter (Martin Short) instead. While Tuck takes an extended journey around Jack's innards, the pair must work together to recover the stolen tech and retrieve the microscopic adventurer.

"It's fun to go back and look at these things, and especially if they turn out to be good, which this one did," says Dante. It's also an opportunity to ponder what-ifs. "Every so often, you second guess yourself," he smiles. "Oh, why did I do that? I could have done something differently..." But, you know, it is what it is... I would've made all my movies CinemaScope if I didn't think that they were going to be seen on television in pan-and-scan versions forever."

CAST OFF

Before Dante boarded *Innerspace*, a previous version was set to be an altogether different prospect, until Spielberg ushered a change of direction. "I had been offered it – by the other two producers, Peter Guber and Jon Peters – as a serious spy movie with this plot, if you could believe it," says Dante. "I said, 'Guys, you can't make a serious spy movie with this plot. People

will laugh at it.'" So Dante passed, and moved on, but in the interim Spielberg became involved.

"[Spielberg] got a hold of it and he hired a guy named Jeff Boam who had written *The Dead Zone* and the third Indiana Jones movie. Jeff's idea was to turn it into a comedy. His concept was what would happen if Dean Martin was shrunk down and injected into Jerry Lewis. I saw that idea, and said, 'Now I could see how I can make this work'."

The director also came to the material not having been a huge fan of 1966 adventure *Fantastic Voyage*, from which *Innerspace* loosely lifts its premise (in that film, a submarine crew is shrunk down to perform a brain surgery that will have global implications).

"I appreciated *Fantastic Voyage*, and I'm a big Richard Fleischer fan as a director, but it was one of his few movies that I thought didn't quite work for me," says Dante, "because it was so jokey. I just couldn't get into it, you know?"

"Also it was so obvious who the villain was gonna be in the movie. If you cast Donald Pleasence in a group of people, then he's obviously going to be the guy. So it wasn't my favourite picture. I'm not big on remakes, but I didn't consider [*Innerspace*] a remake."

DIFF'RENT STROKES

Talking of casting, Dante hit the bullseye with the chalk and cheese combo of Quaid and Short (not to mention a pre *When Harry Met Sally...* Meg Ryan). "The idea was they had to be two different types in order for it to work," he recalls. "One guy had to be sort of [meek] and the other guy had to be a jock."

In order to get audiences invested in what's "basically a ridiculous story", Dante knew that he needed the audience to identify with these characters to the point they'd be compelled to stick with the story. "We were very lucky in the casting, and we had all the right people."

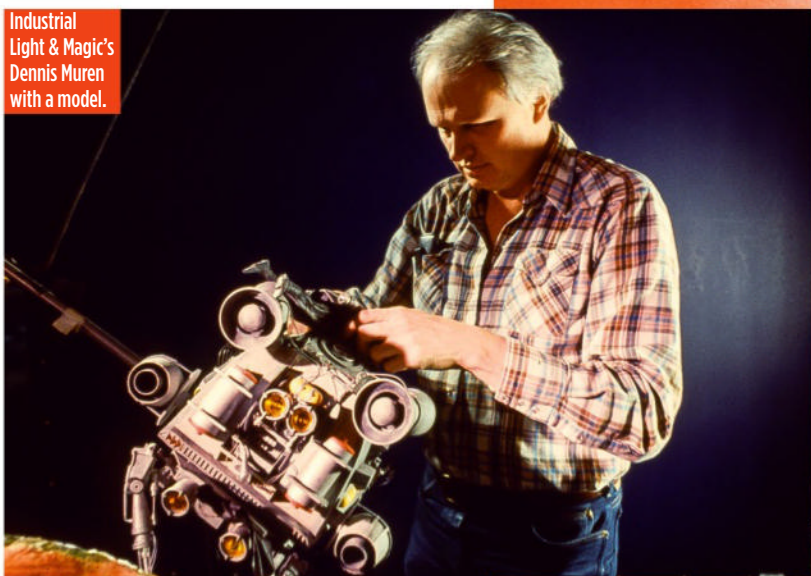
It's with particular fondness he recalls working with Short. "Marty Short was so inventive, and so much fun to work with that every day you go to work thinking, 'I wonder what he's gonna do today'."

Quaid and Ryan's chemistry also spilled over into real life, as they got together and married after finishing work on the film. "They were very friendly on the set, but I didn't get vibes of [romance]. But they were a great couple. Stayed →

JOE DANTE BURROWS
INTO THE MAKING OF
SCI-FI COMEDY
FAVOURITE
INNERSPACE,
REFLECTING ON
PRACTICAL EFFECTS,
DELAYED SUCCESS
AND DREAM CASTING

WORDS: **MATT MAYTUM**

Industrial Light & Magic's Dennis Muren with a model.



© ILM/DENNIS MUREN

together for a long time. Had a nice kid [*The Boys'* Jack Quaid].”

Dante isn't able to corroborate the persistent trivia nugget that Michael J Fox and Arnold Schwarzenegger were once in line to star. “Not that I ever heard,” he shrugs. “But considering the fact that I was away when it was a serious movie, I wouldn't be surprised if Guber and Peters had decided that maybe that was the route that they wanted to take.”

Among the inspired casting decisions that did make it into the movie was to surround Short and Quaid with “really interesting and offbeat characters, like the one Robert Picardo plays, the Cowboy”.

Dante also used real scientists as extras. “We had the people at Jet Propulsion Laboratory, JPL. We used their scientists as our scientists in the movie because [I thought], ‘I don't know how to direct the extras to be scientists, so let's get real scientists’. A lot of the people who are in the scenes where the pod is being shrunk and enlarged are all real scientists and they're doing scientist things that they do.”

Perhaps what stands out most in Dante's memory was the huge effects component of the film. It actually won an Academy Award for Visual Effects – “It's as close as I'll ever get to

Details of the body's interior are largely accurate.

an Oscar” – and deploys various techniques, including cutting edge (for the time) work by Industrial Light & Magic, as well as miniatures and practical effects galore. “I think that on the credits is ‘Martin Short's interiors by ILM,’” he says. “And we were pretty specific. We had scientific advisors about the body.”

One of Dante's favourite scenes is a transformation that occurs when Jack poses as the Cowboy, with *Star Trek: Voyager* actor Picardo effectively playing Jack playing the Cowboy, before the interior shenanigans – Tuck is controlling Jack's facial muscles from

“A lot of the people are all real scientists and they're doing scientist things that they do”

inside – malfunction, and Jack's true form is revealed in front of some shady characters. “It was really fun,” recalls Dante. “Rob Bottin [make-up effects designer on *The Thing*, *Total Recall*, *The Howling* and more] came in and did all these transformation things for when the character turns back into Martin Short. We did those with air jets and he built a fake head that would shake around, and we intercut it with the other actors in a way that worked out pretty good.”

Old-school movie magic was also used for a sequence in which two of the villains, shrunk to half size, fight with Meg Ryan from the back of the car, with forced perspective and a custom set creating the illusion. “That was done with a thing called the Schüfftan

Process,” Dante explains. “Basically you have a person in the foreground who is large and you have another person way, way, way, way in the back who is a normal-sized person, but looks smaller because they're so far



The pod has a rummage round Jack's innards.



The “diving suit” that Tuck has to wear for exploring.



Martin Short, Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan in a PR shot.



Turns out your mum was right about watching TV.

INTERIOR REDESIGN

Has *Innerspace* ever come close to being remade?

Many of Dante's movies have been remade or rebooted, including *The 'Burbs*, recently adapted for TV. Has *Innerspace* ever come close to the remake treatment? "I always hear that movies of mine are being remade," Dante tells *SFX*. "*The Howling* is being remade again. After seven times they can't get it right. There's obviously *Gremlins 3*, and there was talk of remaking *Explorers*, which I found rather odd considering what a disaster it was. I don't think I've ever heard of anybody wanting to remake *Innerspace*. But that doesn't mean they won't. Anybody who has intellectual property that they think they can exploit, they're going to figure out a way to make another."

The way that *Innerspace* ends, with Jack racing off into the sunset in pursuit of the villains, would be seen as pure sequel fodder if it was released today. But that wasn't the plan in Dante's mind. "I don't think there was any intention to make a sequel. I guess there are places you could go with that. But I don't think anything ever came up. You try to perfect what you're making without thinking about how we're going to make five more of them. That's making a TV pilot."



Director Joe Dante (left). Don't ask about the cap.



The gang anxiously await Tuck's return.



Jack with Mr Wormwood (Henry Gibson).



"Now this won't hurt a bit... well, a bit."

away. So we built a giant back seat of a car so that Kevin McCarthy and Fiona Lewis could be back there as supposedly small people. Yet they have to interact with the people in the front. It was exacting. But it really paid off and it's all done in the camera."

As for why *Innerspace* didn't take off upon its initial cinema release in 1987 – despite it being the movie that turned out most as Dante had expected it to – he has a couple of theories. "We had a fantastic preview, and then the studio got all excited and they said, 'Great, we're gonna make so much money.'"

"Then they put out this awful advertisement for it, which had a giant thumb and no indication that it was a comedy, and crickets chirped in the theatre." The studio tried again with a different poster a couple of months later, but that didn't work either.

"I have to give them credit. They tried, but they just did not sell it. It took home video for people to discover what the movie was."

Now a new wave of viewers can make that discovery. "I benefited from a lot of movies that I've made that have been seen by succeeding generations," smiles Dante, "which is certainly not something you ever think of when you're making a movie."

Innerspace is out now on limited edition 4K UHD Blu-Ray from Arrow Video.

HANNAH KANER

It's grimdark up north: the fantasy writer discusses her new novel

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Magdalena Kaminska

CLASSIC NARRATIVE FORMS ARE REASSURING. Readers understand what's going on. So it's hardly surprising that when fantasy writers start, many follow JRR Tolkien in turning to stories of quests. But what to do next? This was the question facing Hannah Kaner when she came to write *A Snake Among Swans*, the first volume in a new sequence.

"It's not about a journey," she says, "it's about a network of relationships." Admitting to nerves over how the book will be received, she adds, "I wanted to push my writing skills and to take the grace I've been given and say, 'Okay, well, what can I do with it next?'"

One answer to that question is that *A Snake Among Swans* is "a love letter to high grimdark" based on "The Six Swans" a German fairy tale that revolves around a princess whose brothers take an avian turn thanks to a wicked stepmother.

"The fairy tale is usually told from the perspective of the good princess, the steady patient woman who weaves shirts out of nettles and saves her brothers," says Kaner. "But I love wicked characters, or ostensibly wicked characters, like Lady Macbeth, or Medea, or Cersei [Lannister]."

Accordingly, the novel shows us the world largely from the perspective of Tilde, the royal daughter of a conquered realm who agrees to marry an ageing warlord. "There is a huge age difference, it's incredibly uncomfortable," says Kaner, "he is an invader of her country." At first, Tilde's plan is to murder her spouse "in his wedding bed", until her mother warns her of the reprisals that would follow.

Instead, Tilde begins to play at politics, trying to change the balance of power at court. Rather than cut down her spouse, she looks for opportunities to "slice through networks of obedience" and gather influence. "She isn't a benign character," says Kaner. "She has to make terrible decisions about her own body, about her ethics, about her morality, because power is never without corruption."

THE TURNING TILDE

Tilde's route through life can be viewed as one of "little degradations" driven by "her own sense of righteousness and anger and vengeance". And yet she does achieve a level of self-awareness as the book progresses. As readers, we may not always like Tilde, but we do come to understand her. And even admire her, as we do some of the historical figures that helped to inspire her, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine (1137-1204), who at different times in her life was the queen of both England and France.

Another historical inspiration was Celtic culture, facets of which are recognisable in the Morogian society in which Tilde grows up. In part, says Kaner, this was because she wanted to challenge the way Celtic culture has been passed

**BIODATA**

From
Northumberland

Greatest Hits
The Fallen Gods trilogy made *The Sunday Times* bestseller list. The first volume, *Godkiller*, was shortlisted for multiple awards, including Best First Novel at the British Book Awards.

Random Fact
Kaner says three writers "changed" her brain chemistry" over how "we could emotionally see the characters in a dark world": Joe Abercrombie, Robin Hobb and NK Jemisin.

down to us via the Romans, who had a self-justifying interest in portraying those they conquered in the west as "passive, fragile people who were just essentially waiting, sitting ducks, to be invaded". In reality, many Celts were traders and travellers rather than homebodies.

There speaks someone who, while she now lives in Edinburgh, was born and raised far from centres of power – Northumberland, to be precise. When she was growing up, her father worked in IT, and her mother in public health. They were "very driven, very ambitious folk" who "valued education" and encouraged their children "to argue, to fight back, to challenge, state an opinion". It was, Kaner says, a combination of "northernness and bickering-ness" that was "a joy".

It was a bookish house, where she was made to tackle *The Lord Of The Rings* before the films came out. "I was eight," she remembers, "I didn't know what was going on!"

TERRY'S ALL GOLD

As a teenager she read Ursula K Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, Robert Jordan and Joe Abercrombie. And Terry Pratchett, of whom she says, "He was angry, he was so incisive and truly tender about people. He really poked holes in people, people's received attitudes and little foibles, and still you felt this love for people, this tenderness for humanity that I think is so special in Pratchett's books." You can find similar qualities, she adds, in Becky Chambers and Iain Banks.

Kaner was academically bright and, via state school, made it to Cambridge, where she chose to study English because "for me, literature is a primary source on history", a way to understand how people perceived "the world they were in at the time they were in it". Already, she had her eyes set on a writing career.

It took a while. After university, she worked in app development for 14 years and endured multiple rejections before the epic high fantasy *Godkiller* was accepted for publication. She quit the day job after finishing its sequel, *Sunbringer*, but not before working out that she could "subsist" for three years as a full-time writer.

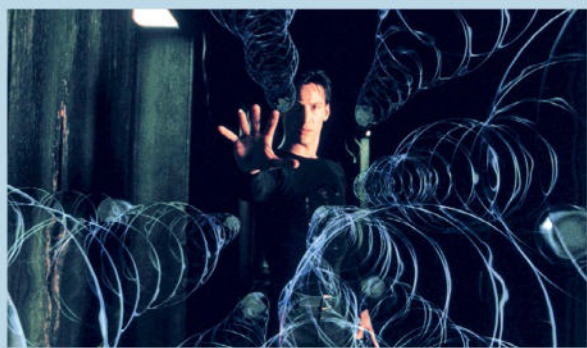
Those are almost up, so a decision awaits. We hope she carries on writing, not least because *A Snake Among Swans* makes you look at the present from a different angle as it explores how "oppression and suppression" warp people's choices. "Our world can turn on a pin, rights that we've taken for granted can be taken away from us," says Kaner – who doesn't seem inclined to let this happen without some northern bickering first. ●

A Snake Among Swans is out now, published by HarperVoyager.

A close-up portrait of Hannah Kaner, a woman with light brown, wavy hair and freckles, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a dark green blazer over a white button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. In the top right corner, there is a red rectangular box containing the text "BROUGHT TO BOOK" and "HANNAH KANER". In the bottom right corner, there is a red vertical bar followed by a quote: "For me, literature is a primary source on history". At the very bottom right, the text "SEPTEMBER 2026 | SFX MAGAZINE | 69" is visible.

BROUGHT TO BOOK
HANNAH KANER

“For me,
literature is a
primary source
on history”



CURATE MOVIE GOLD!

GET SERIOUS ABOUT CINEMA WITH MUST OWN CLASSICS WORDS: LUKE SMITH

WHETHER YOU'RE a lifelong fan, committed to the cause of collecting physical media, or whether you're just starting to fill your shelves with shiny discs, Warner Bros. have you covered with their new campaign, Must Own Classics.

The title says it all really – with a particular onus on the word *own* – as the legendary filmmakers of over 100 years are responsible for thousands of both classic and modern movies that any film fan really should have in their collection.

That's an incredible amount of cinematic history, spanning all the way back to 1923 and coming right up to date with record-breaking recent releases.

Get ready for spooky season with Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* – a stunning audio and visual journey through one fateful night at a Mississippi juke joint. Only some of the attendees are definitely not invited...

Nominated for a historic 16 Academy Awards in 2026 – and taking home four of them – this new take on vampire mythology certainly earns its place in the Must Own Classics category.

Also, right alongside vampires and other things that go bump in the night, is Zach Cregger's *Weapons* (also an Academy Award winner this year) and a truly modern take on the story of Frankenstein, which *SFX* awarded five stars, Maggie Gyllenhaal's *The Bride!*

Take a trip back through the film vaults for further cinematic treasures, including more partying vampires in 1987's *The Lost Boys*, a never-dull Jack Nicholson in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, and some adventurous kids who never say die in Richard Donner's *The Goonies*. You can also revisit the first case in *The Conjuring* series

– if you dare...

Fear not
– there's some
heroes (and

some with questionable morals) at hand to save you... James Gunn's new DC Universe kicks off with *Superman* (2025), but you can also dip back into the likes of *Constantine* and *V For Vendetta*, alongside many other comic book movies.

Warner Bros. have always excelled at sci-fi – again, going back decades, right up to modern day. Just a small fraction of what's on offer for fans includes Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* – not only all bona-fide classics, but genuine cinematic trailblazers.

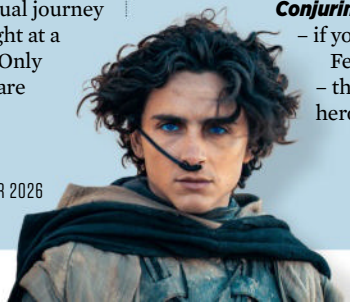
And speaking of masterpieces, you can return to the spice-filled world of Arrakis in Denis Villeneuve's space epic, *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two*, to prepare yourself for the final part in the trilogy, in cinemas this December.

Presented in outstanding 4K Ultra HD, these titles are the ultimate in film excellence, restored and presented with the

physical consumer in mind. Many of these releases also include a slew of bonus behind-the-scenes features you won't find anywhere else, giving you further insight into the production of some of history's greatest films.

The Must Own Classics campaign includes special price points and multibuy options in participating retailers – so what are you waiting for? The only thing it doesn't have is the shiny new shelves you're going to want for your ultimate movie collection... 🍿

Great offers on Must Own Classics titles, available now on 4K Ultra HD, Blu-ray and DVD at Amazon, HMV and Rarewaves.



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2026

edited by Ian Berriman

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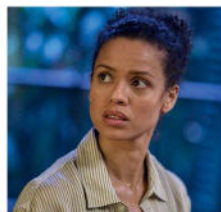
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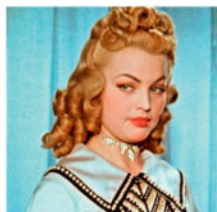
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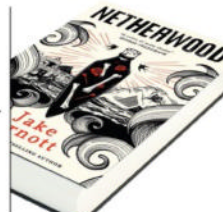
→ One-time *Misfits* star Karla Crome's ITV drama addresses the legacy of slavery via supernatural horror.



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→ A Blu-ray box set of East German fairy tale films – including *The Singing Ringing Tree*!



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→ Jake Arnott switches from crime to horror for this gothic tale set in the former home of an occultist.

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"Behold our box-office takings and weep, Elon."

THE ODYSSEY

Homer's where the heart is

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 173 minutes

▶ Director Christopher Nolan

▶ Cast Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway,

Tom Holland, Robert Pattinson,

Lupita Nyong'o, Zendaya, Elliot Page

✦ **Forging the template for the** hero's journey, Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* has informed much of Christopher Nolan's work (and storytelling, period), so you might say this adaption is a homecoming for him. And it's a triumphant one at that, with the source material's rich offering of gods, monsters and a flawed, courageous man who undergoes a series of terrifying ordeals more than satisfying the filmmaker's penchant for awe-inspiring spectacle freighted with psychological anguish.

Given that Nolan has previously fashioned such time-twisting tales as *Memento*, *Dunkirk* and *Tenet*, it's no surprise that the story of Odysseus (Matt Damon), King of Ithaca, enduring a 10-year journey home after laying waste to the city of Troy, is spliced and jumbled. But only to a point. The quest, slow to begin, gains momentum as the action slip-slides all the way down to Hades. En route, our traumatised hero confronts man-eating monster Cyclops, the oversized, silver-armoured Laestrygonians, honey(trap)-voiced sirens, and witchy goddess Circe (Samantha Morton). The last

“Never loses sight of the intimate”

makes for the film's most arrestingly disturbing sequence. Remember those rumours, before *The Odyssey* was announced, that Nolan was making a horror movie next? On this evidence, he'd make a great one.

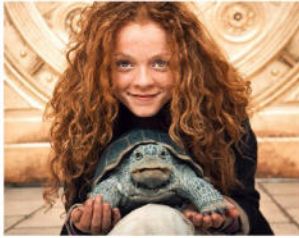
The first narrative feature to be shot entirely in IMAX, *The Odyssey* is a supersized epic that never loses sight of the intimate as it assembles its dark delights from more than 2,000,000 feet of 65mm film. Back in Ithaca, queen Penelope (Anne Hathaway) and prince Telemachus (Tom Holland) await Odysseus's return, slowly losing the battle to fend off a squad of ill-mannered suitors led by the serpentine Antinous (Robert Pattinson). Performances register, and emotion – often absent or tin-eared in Nolan's films – takes hold.

But what impresses the most is how Nolan, a vociferous advocate of both film and practical effects, here locates the mythical, the magical and the spiritual in an earthy realm. There is talk

of omens and sacrifices, but if there are gods, they communicate through blood and death and the raw beauty of nature. Landscapes are sprinkled with snow, lashed by rain or wreathed in mist, while placid oceans roil if offence is made. Throughout, Ludwig Göransson's god-tier score – pipes, lyres, gongs – is on-message, rooted in Bronze Age instrumentation yet hauntingly ethereal.

In this tactile world Odysseus tussles not just with deities but his own PTSD and guilt for wrongdoings. Conflicted, he laments the untold corpses that litter his wake, and is shamed by his breaking of Zeus's law (treat strangers with deep respect), while simultaneously swearing to clean house upon his return to Ithaca. Asked if he'll be bringing vengeance, his reply rouses as it chills: "Bringing it all." Nolan does likewise. **Jamie Graham**

i A 60-foot puppet and animatronics brought Cyclops to life. Bill Irwin acted as the monster to aid actors' reactions.



MOMO AND THE TIME THIEVES

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED 14 AUGUST**

PG | 92 minutes

▶ Director Christian Ditter

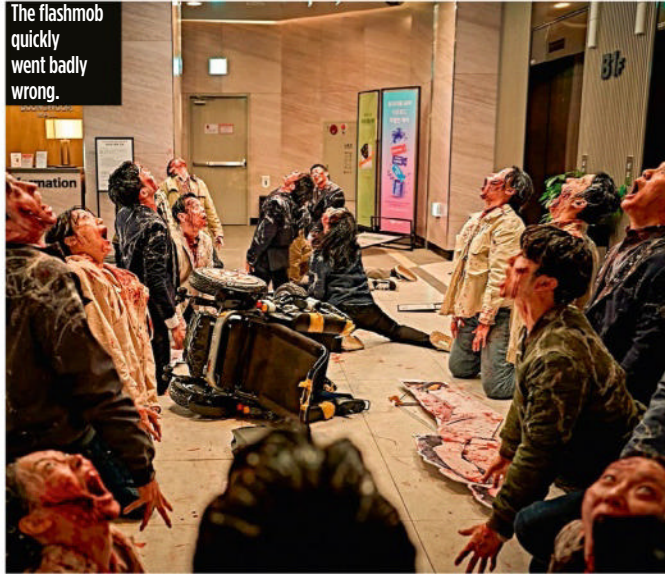
▶ Cast Alexa Goodall, Araloyin Oshunremi, Claes Bang, Martin Freeman

🔗 **The German children's** novel *Momo* has been adapted for both stage and screen several times since its publication in 1973. This latest version is a spirited affair, with an impressive cast including a sinister Claes Bang and a jolly Martin Freeman.

Momo (Alexa Goodall) is a young girl who lives in a Roman amphitheatre, can't remember where she came from, and has a superpower that consists of listening to people's problems. Her happy adventures with her friends come to an abrupt end when new tech arrives, courtesy of mysterious people clad in grey, that encourages citizens to "save" their hours and minutes for the future, like depositing money in a bank. As society gets more and more time-poor, only Momo can defeat the Greys.

It's a timely (pun intended) topic that critiques big corporations, social media and influencers, with beautiful effects and pretty location filming in Croatia and Slovenia. Momo herself is a little disappointing, though: Goodall is decent enough – and her bouncing red mane is a force unto itself – but we're too often told that she's special without really feeling what that actually entails. Luckily, she's still likeable enough to root for, and the film trots along at a brisk pace. **Jayne Nelson**

The flashmob quickly went badly wrong.



COLONY

Hive alive

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED 28 AUGUST**

15 | 123 minutes

▶ Director Yeon Sang-ho

▶ Cast Jun Ji-hyun, Koo Kyo-hwan, Ji Chang-wook, Kim Shin-rok

🔗 **Just when you thought** zombie movies were dead on their feet, two come along (almost) at once to change the field. *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* was a corker about the descent of human civilisation, while *Colony* explores the threats of science and technology – and both call their antagonists the Infected.

The work of South Korean director Yeon Sang-ho, who won acclaim for 2016's *Train To Busan*, *Colony* is equally exciting, frenetic and fresh. Set in a shopping centre, it harks back to George Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead*, though it's a very different beast.

Koo Kyo-hwan plays science genius Seo Yeong Cheol, who

“Harks back to *Dawn Of The Dead*, though it's a different beast”

triggers the release of a toxin that almost instantaneously causes those who come into contact to morph into frantic creatures hell-bent on infecting the next human. These people aren't undead, and they're not out to kill or feast on brains. Instead, they're part of a new evolution of humanity: a hive mind whose inspiration is taken from ants, and that is quickly mutating. A group of plucky survivors are the last hope – quarantined in the mall, they need to get to the top floor and capture Seo, who is a living vaccine, before his army becomes all-powerful.

These Infected are fast and relentless, but they're also balletic, and there's some fabulous imagery of the horde gradually becoming so symbiotic that they begin to conjoin. A slick, knowing videogame aesthetic, an outrageous monkey attack sequence and an indelible final shot further elevate this above the norm. Intelligent, thrilling and satisfying. **Rosie Fletcher**

i *Train To Busan* choreographer Jeon Young teamed with dance choreographers to create the movements of the Infected.



MOANA

★★★★☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 115 minutes

▶ Director Thomas Kail

▶ Cast Catherine Laga'aia, Dwayne Johnson, Jemaine Clement, Rena Owen

🔗 **Last year, DreamWorks'**

How To Train Your Dragon retold a CG cartoon with live actors, practically beat for beat and scene for scene. Now, it's the turn of *Moana*, Disney's story of a Polynesian girl on an ocean quest to save her people.

Dreamworks' *Dragon* remake worked better because its key CG element was the dragon Toothless, a sympathetic character. In contrast, *Moana* contends with CG storms and lave eruptions that are far more emotionally distancing in a supposedly "live-action" film.

Many of *Moana's* adventures could have been switched for new ones, but instead they're all the same. The film only cuts loose with a restaging of the signature "You're Welcome" song that's playful and fun.

Dwayne Johnson reprises his role as demi-god Maui, brimming with charisma and occasional pathos. Rena Owen (*Once Were Warriors*) is strong as Moana's mischievous but wise grandmother. As Moana, newcomer Catherine Laga'aia has the pipes to cover the famous songs, but she's otherwise just passable.

Some critics condemn these "replica" films as pointless crimes against cinema, but it can be heartwarming to see beloved cartoons reenacted with real humans. And for anyone seeing the film who doesn't know the original, *Moana* holds up as an enjoyable adventure. **Andrew Osmond**



The Ice Cream Man: he's gotta lotta lolly.

ICE CREAM MAN

Vanilla Killer



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 86 minutes

► Director Eli Roth

► Cast Ari Millen, Charlie Zeltzer, Benjamin Byron Davis, Sarah Abbott

► **Watch out for children in Eli Roth's latest extreme exploitationer, which sees a malevolent ice cream vendor (Ari Millen – who has next to nothing to do) recruit a small town's young folk via his sweet treats to enact a terrible revenge.**

The kills are frequent and gory and we guess relatively inventive, with the youngsters enjoying various childhood activities involving body parts – entrail skipping, decapitated-head ball games, arts and crafts with corpses, that kind of thing. But really, this is little more than a mildly amusing short.

It's padded out with our lactose-intolerant hero Jared (Charlie Zeltzer) and his two ice cream-eschewing buddies trying to save the day as all the adults in town are massacred around them.

Ice Cream Man is a sort of zombie riff where the kids want to recruit more young 'uns by shoving ice cream into the uninitiated's faces. It's not intrinsically scary – it's not scary at all, in fact – just kind of gross. The whole film is really just brain freeze, with one very late pointless post-credits scene that isn't worth waiting for and an ending that you won't predict – and that's not a compliment. Mindless empty calories.

Rosie Fletcher

i This isn't the first horror film titled *Ice Cream Man*. A 1995 one saw Clint Howard putting human body parts into his wares.

TEENAGE SEX AND DEATH AT CAMP MIASMA

Behind the mask



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 112 minutes

► Director Jane Schoenbrun

► Cast Hannah Einbinder, Gillian Anderson, Jack Haven, Patrick Fischler

► **I Saw The TV Glow** director Jane Schoenbrun gets wild with this thrillingly original meta-horror – a horny and hallucinatory fever dream that grapples with big themes amid gore and gags.

Kris (Hannah Einbinder) is a young filmmaker who's been tasked with reinventing the creatively moribund *Camp Miasma* slasher series (VHS titles spotted in the opening sequence include *Camp Miasma 3D* and *Medieval Miasma*). She sets out to meet the franchise's original final girl, Billy Presley (Gillian Anderson), an eccentric recluse now living in the derelict camp

where the first film was shot, and the lines between reality and fiction become blurred. Billy believes *Little Death* (Jack Haven), *Camp Miasma's* enigmatic (and punningly named) masked killer, is real – and she may be right.

You would be forgiven for assuming that *Teenage Sex And Death At Camp Miasma* comes from the *Scream* school of postmodern horror, but this is a Jane Schoenbrun film, so expect something more distinctive and personal. Certainly, it's hard not to see Kris's dealings with Hollywood as reflective of the director's own experiences as a celebrated trans filmmaker who has to fight to get projects funded. At the same time, this is about sex, something Kris has a difficult relationship with. As she grows closer to Billy, this starts to feel both threatening and liberating.



Rustling papers in the cinema: criminal.

It's heady stuff, but in contrast to the moody *I Saw The TV Glow*, *Camp Miasma* is also laugh-out-loud funny, with a thick vein of absurdism undercutting the violence, and some gorgeous visuals that recall Peter Strickland and Wes Anderson's immaculately

imagined fantasias. Amid all this, Einbinder and Anderson's visceral and vulnerable performances ground this haunting and cathartic film in a tangible reality. **Will Salmon**

i The winter sequences were filmed in spring, with biodegradable paper snow sprayed in the forests of Vancouver Island.



SPIDER-MAN: BRAND NEW DAY

Man or Spider-Man?

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 145 minutes

► Director **Destin Daniel Cretton**

► Cast **Tom Holland, Zendaya,**

Jacob Batalon, Sadie Sink,

Jon Bernthal, Mark Ruffalo

► **After a run of seriously mixed** fortunes at cinemas, Marvel and Sony are pinning their hopes on the friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man to deliver. Thankfully, with Tom Holland back slinging webs and *Shang-Chi*'s Destin Daniel Cretton in the director's chair, it's a relief to say that this latest Spidey outing lives up to the

previous trilogy, while also doing something distinctive.

Brand New Day whisks us forward to four years after the shot of pure nostalgia and emotion that was *No Way Home*, but doesn't hit the reset button on the reality-warping spell that removed Peter Parker from the world's collective memory. Peter – with Holland as ever excellent in the role – still struggles in a lonely life of crime-fighting without anyone, even his closest friends, knowing him. Add to that some disturbing, horror-tinged DNA changes and a mysterious, powerful new threat, and you have the makings of a

more intense, brooding, but never depressing *Spider-Man* movie.

If incoming director Cretton doesn't have the punk rock sensibility of Jon Watts, he makes up for it with superior action chops and a respect for the characters, while returning writers Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers ensure that the heart and humour remain – this hews closer to the comics in ways that work, while not losing the spirit of what came before cinematically.

Around Holland are the returning likes of Zendaya as MJ and Jacob Batalon as Ned, and while the two friends obviously don't play quite the same closely linked role as in past adventures, they are certainly not sidelined, and remain the beating heart of the story. Mark Ruffalo (as a more conflicted Bruce Banner) and Jon Bernthal likewise bring something worthwhile to the film, his Punisher in particular finding a great new dynamic with our hero, his more brutal, violent side dialled down for the family

friendlier film audience, but his gruff snark happily intact.

While various villains pop up, we never fall into the danger levels of *Spider-Man 3*, with most of the baddies here (such as Michael Mando's Scorpion) used sparingly and inventively. After all the multiversal madness (as fun as it was), it's mostly a relief to get back to the largely street-level nature of Spider-stories.

Though some elements of Marvel's tendency to overstuff lore remain (to say more would step too far into spoiler territory), *Brand New Day* remains true to the previous Holland-led films in that it's character-driven, emotional, comical and grounded. But it's also something more, giving us what we expect yet also delivering on darker, more mature themes as the web-slinger ages up and faces fresh challenges. *Brand New Day*? Yes, and also a welcome new direction. **James White**

i Tom Holland suffered a concussion while shooting a stunt. Production shut down for a week so he could recover.

POSSESSION

Chain of events



▶ UK Sky Atlantic/NOW, streaming now

▶ Creator Karla Crome

▶ Cast Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Sheldon Shepherd, Jonny Lee Miller, Nadean Rawlins

EPISODES 1.01-1.05 *Possession.* You couldn't really get a more generic title – but then, as anyone who's seen Andrzej Żuławski's 1981 film of the same name can attest, you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. And this slice of Caribbean gothic has much to recommend it, having the bravery to risk stirring together supernatural goings-on with the authentically brutal horrors of chattel slavery.

Gugu Mbatha-Raw plays Claudia, a bi-racial lawyer who knows nothing about (and appears to have zero interest in) the Jamaican side of her heritage.

Tasked with discrediting an inheritance claim to land that once hosted a sugar plantation, she soon discovers that the claimant, Cudjoe East (Sheldon Shepherd), was one of those enslaved on its grounds over 250 years ago. WTF?

While half of the script doles out the 18th century backstory, the other follows Claudia's journey, which sees her becoming immersed in the traditions and rituals of Jamaican culture, and hesitantly opening up to a heritage she never previously gave a second thought. It's a well-handled arc – although the way it's visualised through her hair, which goes from ruthlessly flattened to au naturel, before being put in braids, is perhaps a bit on-the-nose.

Sadly, we get little sense of what the passing years have done to Cudjoe; immortality was placed

upon him as a curse, but has he experienced it as such? Shepherd is so often charged with delivering answers that at times he threatens to become a Dr Exposition figure with added teeth-sucking. The question of how he came to be the will's beneficiary is also left hanging – did he just rock up and say, "I'm 292 years old"? And you might come to the conclusion that if someone had done the natural thing and buried a certain something six feet deep in a *field* instead, we'd have had no further trouble.

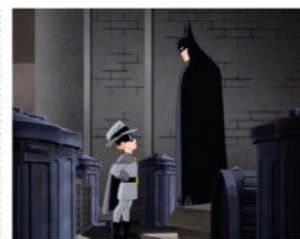
Frankly it's the sort of thing you hesitate to say about a series with a majority black cast, but Bel Powley rather steals the show as the villain of the piece, Charlotte, an 18th century plantation owner's daughter who becomes an exponent of the dark arts.

“Bel Powley rather steals the show as the villain of the piece”

Charlotte's deeds – which stretch into the present day – are horrific, but writer Karla Crome has the courage *not* to paint her as two-dimensionally evil. Charlotte's desperate loneliness and yearning for a child may not exactly make her a sympathetic character, but do ensure that she doesn't come across as utterly inhuman. Which is important, really, because racism is the work of human beings, not monsters.

All quibbles aside, it's a neatly put together series, one that invites the audience to consider the continuing legacy of slavery, but which – never losing sight of the fact that entertainment is the principle goal – wears its politics lightly, rather than haranguing the viewer from a soapbox. **Calvin Baxter**

i Cultural advisor Dr L'Antoinette Stines blessed the set, and adapted some scenes to avoid inviting malignant spirits.



BATMAN: CAPED CRUSADER Season Two



▶ UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

▶ Creator Bruce Timm

▶ Cast Hamish Linklater,

Jason Watkins, Krystal Joy Brown,

Gary Anthony Williams

EPISODES 2.01-2.10 *This Dark*

Knight animated series, executive produced by Bruce Timm and Matt Reeves – though set in a different continuity to Reeves's movie – returns for a second season. For those who are new to it, *Caped Crusader* is a brooding mix of *Batman: The Animated Series* and film noir, with a cast of familiar but smartly reinvented heroes and villains.

Caped Crusader leans hard on the horror. This season sees Batman tackle zombies, a bat-worshipping cult, and classic fearmonger Scarecrow. It builds to a two-part finale that sees Bruce face the Joker for the first time, here presented as an anarchic terrorist with a Germanic lilt – a callback to the character's visual inspiration, Conrad Veidt in 1928's *The Man Who Laughs*. But the show doesn't just riff on the past. It also offers an interesting new take on the Carrie Kelley Robin, while presenting a more sympathetic view of Harley Quinn than we've seen before.

“What if Batman was dark?” is hardly a new thought – it would be fun to see a more Silver Age approach to the character. Still, in returning Bruce to his '40s-tinged roots, *Caped Crusader* delivers a dose of classic Bat-thrills with a few quiet innovations. **Will Salmon**



She definitely was not in the mood for dancing.

HUMAN VAPOR Season One

That smoke isn't funny anymore

★★★★☆

UK/US Netflix, streaming now

► Showrunner Yeon Sang-ho

► Cast Yu Aoi, Shun Oguri, UTA, Takashi Okabe

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 Despite the cheesy title, there are some notable reasons to take this TV update of a '60s B-movie creature feature about a man who turns into a sentient gas a little bit more seriously. No, really.

For a start, the script's been co-written by Yeon Sang-ho, director of zombie hit *Train To Busan*, while the special effects have been provided by Shirogumi, who won the Best Visual Effects Oscar in 2024 for *Godzilla Minus One*. Plus, while the original 1960 film may not be well-known in the West, it was directed by Ishiro Honda, who gifted the world *Godzilla* six years earlier. So this

silly sounding show is actually quite a big deal for Netflix.

The series opens with the gruesome death of a scientist live on TV. The killer reveals himself as the Human Vapor (yes, American spelling, don't write in...), a mysterious man who can literally turn into living gas, and then announces that he plans to kill everyone involved in a mysterious project called "the White Center". A disgraced cop and his journalist ex-girlfriend both try to track down the Human Vapor before he strikes again, but there's a much bigger conspiracy surrounding him that goes to the very top of Tokyo politics.

“There's a Sam Raimi's Darkman vibe”



“Wait a minute... do I have a birthmark?”

There's a Sam Raimi's *Darkman*-esque comic book vibe and stylised colour palette, along with some mild body horror. The plot's driven by so many contrivances, handy guesswork and convenient accidents that it stands up about as well as a house of cards in an earthquake. But it has an appealing, off-kilter energy that keeps things fun, and an almost anarchic use of flashbacks that

seems to delight in making you go, “Hang on, did I miss something?”.

The biggest disappointment is how off-the-shelf and generic the “living gas” effects are; they look less *Godzilla Minus One* and more Arrowverse. Come on guys, these visuals should be cooking on gas!

Dave Golder

i Professor Sano, who's killed in the opening scene, is named after the evil scientist in the original *Human Vapor* film.

SILO Season Three

The hole wide world

★★★★★

UK/US Apple TV, streaming now, Fridays

► Showrunner Graham Yost

► Cast Rebecca Ferguson, Tim Robbins, Jessica Henwick, Ashley Zukerman

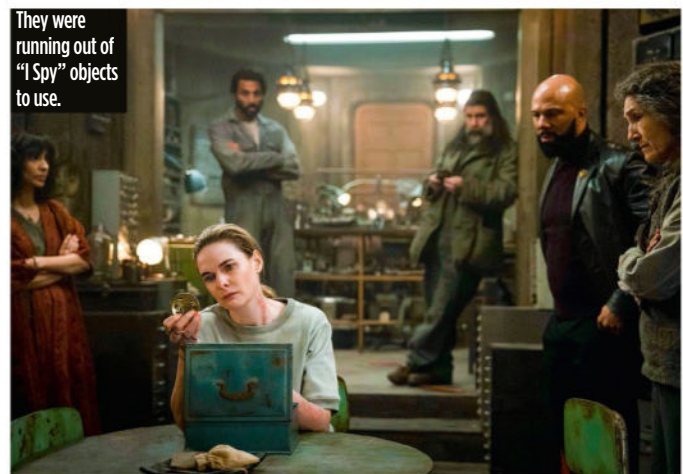
EPISODES 3.01-3.10 You want answers? Season three of *Silo* – the show's penultimate season – has them. Not all of them, of course. Some biggies have to be left for the final run. But for a “mystery box” show like *Silo*, it's a refreshing change to have so much of the truth exposed so early, rather than just piling on more questions. More importantly, some of what's revealed is truly jaw-dropping.

The vital new element in season three was teased at the end of season two: a parallel storyline set back in the “Before Times”, detailing how and why the Silos were built. It follows journalist

Helen Drew (Jessica Henwick) and congressman Daniel Keene (Ashley Zukerman) as they investigate a conspiracy involving an arrogant tech bro (Colin Hanks), a dodgy senator, and an even dodgier doctor (Matt Craven) who's tinkering with patients' memories.

Back in Silo 18, Juliette (Ferguson) has a convenient-for-certain-people memory loss, as she's thrust into the position of the new mayor. It's not a great job in the aftermath of the uprising, and with the “Algorithm” in secret command of the Silo, threatening to exterminate everybody living there every other breath if they won't play nicely.

“Some of what's revealed is truly jaw-dropping”



They were running out of “I Spy” objects to use.

The two stories dovetail effortlessly, building to a mighty brace of final episodes, full of twists, revelations and memorably shocking visuals. There's a bit of a mid-season lull when the *Silo* plot starts treading water to let stuff happen in the *Before Times* plot. And with Robbins's badly injured Bernard Holland in a reduced role, Camille Sims (Alexandria Riley) is a rather bland replacement as

Head of IT, while her hubby Robert (Common) practically fades into the background.

But Ferguson remains impressive throughout, as Juliette has to figure out who's conning who all over again. The signs for season four are looking very promising. **Dave Golder**

i Peter Gabriel sings in *Silo* so far: “Red Rain” (2.03), “Come Talk To Me” (3.01) and “Here Comes The Flood” (3.09).



The new *Little Mermaid* film was... different.

Engelmann impresses as a scheming fox, occupying his mangy-looking costume with twitchy physicality. A puppet squirrel is also super cute.

The Singing Ringing Tree – a children's TV mainstay once cut into three parts by the BBC – is the main draw. It makes a strength of its studio-bound artificiality, with gloriously kitsch sets and bizarre elements like a giant fish. And the green hair visited upon a brattish princess to punish her arrogance is now in fashion! Viewers with brat summer locks probably won't approve of the "kidnap a woman and eventually she'll fall in love with you" subtext, though...

✦ **Extras** *Three Golden Hairs* has German/English dub options. *The Singing Ringing Tree* comes with the TV cut, with added narration. *Fortean Times* columnist Bob Fischer (21 minutes) concentrates largely on the latter's UK impact, while a 2003 interview with star Christel Bodenstein (16 minutes) has good "working with animals" anecdotes. Mary Going's video essay "DEFA And The Devil" (25

INTO THE FOREST

And they all lived happily DEFA after

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1955/1977/1960/1962/1957 | PG | Blu-ray

► Directors Herbert Ballmann, Egon Schlegel, Christoph Engel, Götz Friedrich, Francesco Stefani

► Cast Willy A Kleinau, Hans-Joachim Frank, Karl-Heinz Rothin, Blanche Kommerell, Christel Bodenstein

BLU-RAY DEBUT Eureka's latest raid

on East German studio DEFA's archives collects five fairy tale films, which usually share several traits. Most are very obviously studio-bound, and based on tales from the Brothers Grimm. And their messaging is generally less propagandistic than the movies in sci-fi box set *Strange New Worlds* – more "be kind to animals" than "Workers of the world, unite!"

The Devil From Mill Mountain is the most Soviet. A miller burns

down a neighbouring mill, allowing him to monopolise the means of production and exploit the "peasant rabble". Boo, hiss, evil capitalist! But villagers secretly rebuild the mill, then rise up as one to protect it. It's a shame that the fantasy elements are disappointingly slight, with forest spirits materialising every so often to help our heroes along and put a stamp of approval on their socialistic unity.

The Devil's Three Golden Hairs escapes DEFA's soundstages to use real caves, as a hapless apprentice is tasked with plucking the titular strands. Broad humour – pratfalls, corny sight gags and speeded-up footage – grows tiresome, but the Underworld sequences are memorably weird. This Heath Robinson-esque Hell looks like it was made by a hippy performance

troupe; you could bracket it with the offbeat tableaux of 1973 horror *Malatesta's Carnival Of Blood* and 1980 musical *Forbidden Zone*.

Rumpelstiltskin looks cheap as chips. Adapted from a stage production, it's very, um, stagey, complete with fourth wall-breaking addresses to the kiddies. And no matter how much he crouches, Siegfried Seibt is too tall as the imp who strikes a deal to spin gold from straw in return for the heroine's first-born. Amuse yourself by imagining Kevin Eldon in the role (not much of a leap).

Little Red Riding Hood's makers had a job extending the tale to feature length (58 minutes pass before "What big ears you have!"). Their solution: insert more animal foes and friends. We could have done without a hopping bunny-boy and a dopey bear, but Harald

“More ‘be kind to animals’ than ‘workers unite!’”

minutes) delves into Martin Luther and the Faust legend.

Sight & Sound's Michael Brooke provides a jam-packed commentary for *Mill Mountain*, rattling off facts on topics like the mountain region setting and how heroine Anne embodies the "socialist realist woman". On *Rumpelstiltskin*, Sam Goff, of streaming service Klassiki, is more laid-back, but also well-informed.

Of three animated shorts, 1956's "The Magic Scissors" (19 minutes) impresses most, a witty silhouette animation about scissors that can produce a complex figure with one snip. In "Sleeping Beauty Was A Beautiful Child" (1987, five minutes), kids recount the fairy tale in song; You also get Grimm tale "The Wolf And The Seven Little Goats" (1990, 10 minutes). Plus: 60-page booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i Tony Billow, the UK narrator of *The Singing Ringing Tree*, also wrote episodes of *Please Sir!* and *EastEnders*.



TINSMAN ROAD

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2026 | 15 | Digital

▶ Director Robbie Banfitch

▶ Cast Robbie Banfitch,

Leslie Ann Banfitch,

Salem Belladonna, Nancy Bujnowski

❖ **The found footage genre** has been declared dead many times over the last decade or so. Still, every now and again a film will come along and remind you how uniquely haunting the format can be when handled well. Such is the case with writer, director and star Robbie Banfitch's *Tinsman Road*, a richly atmospheric film that owes a clear debt to classics like *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Last Broadcast*.

Robbie Lyle (Robbie Banfitch) returns home some years after the disappearance of his sister, Noelle (Salem Belladonna). While Robbie has thrown himself into filmmaking as a way of coping, his mother Leslie (Leslie Ann Banfitch) has fallen to pieces and is increasingly convinced that her daughter's spirit is communicating with her. As Robbie documents his visit home, he starts to believe that there may be an answer to the mystery of her disappearance.

The film is impressively naturalistic, immediately plunging you into Robbie and Leslie's suffocating sense of despair. This is as much a well-acted meditation on grief as it is a convincingly creepy ghost story. It's defiantly low-key, and some may find the slow pace frustrating. Still, the strength of so much build-up is that when the threat becomes tangible in the final act, *Tinsman Road* becomes genuinely gripping. **Will Salmon**



It was a thrill to bump into Richard Osman.

KILLER PARTY

Fools seldom differ

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 10 AUGUST

1986 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director William Fruet

▶ Cast Martin Hewitt, Ralph Seymour, Elaine Wilkes, Paul Bartel

BLU-RAY DEBUT One of three 1986

slasher movies centred on April Fool's Day, this Canadian-made effort draws deeply on the spirit of the day, opening with fake-out scenes that turn out to be a drive-in movie and a music video. And once the story proper kicks off, it involves an improbably convincing prank – the staging of a death by guillotine.

All this primes the viewer not to take anything at face value, so once the film switches into *Evil Dead* mode for the final act party at an abandoned fraternity house, you may not fully believe it until someone's crawling on the ceiling.

While the bookending sections add a little freshness, the high school stuff in-between is formulaic fodder. The film's central trio of sorority sisters are likeable, but its frat boys, given to tipping bees on girls in a hot tub and then filming their boob-flashing distress, are

tiresome company. And don't get us started on a key plot point: the idea that someone killed in a fraternity house hazing would be laid to rest in the back garden...

❖ **Extras** This Arrow Video release has three brand new bonuses. In her commentary, critic Stacie Ponder (an enthusiast for the film) debunks a few myths and raises unanswered questions. Two video essays address the history of the US's "Greek life" college culture (12 minutes), and the ways the film subverts slasher tropes (11 minutes).

Six brief cast and crew interviews (42 minutes) are carried over from Shout Factory's 2021 US release; effects guy Gordon J Smith's explanation of how they chopped off a hand for a scene ultimately cut is the best of a not especially insightful bunch; another highlight comes when actor Sherry Willis-Burch unfurls her character's naff pink sweater. You also get a 17-minute history of White Sister, the rock group in the music video sequence. Plus: booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i Californian hair metal band White Sister took their name from a song by Toto, but nearly plumped for Tyrant instead.



WHOEVER SLEW AUNTIE ROO?

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 17 AUGUST

1971 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Curtis Harrington

▶ Cast Shelley Winters, Ralph Richardson, Lionel Jeffries, Mark Lester

BLU-RAY DEBUT Given its

coffin-bothering gothic shocks, it's hard to square this British horror as a children's movie. But it plays as the morbid older cousin of such contemporaries as *The Amazing Mr Blunden* and *Flight Of The Doves*.

Shelley Winters is Roo Forrest, a grief-twisted widow processing the death of her daughter. A party at her mausoleum of a home lures two local orphans, who become the objects of her obsession. It's Hansel and Gretel with tea cakes and teddy bears.

Kenneth Anger acolyte Curtis Harrington maintains an unsettling sense of something nasty in the nursery. But while there's an intriguing ambiguity about both Roo's intentions and the morality of the kids, Winters's kindly, vulnerable turn never quite sells the necessary menace.

❖ **Extras** This Hammer Presents release offers the film in both a 1.37:1 aspect ratio and the 1.85:1 of the theatrical release. An audio commentary by 1000 *Women In Horror* author Alexandra Heller-Nicholas tackles the gender politics of hagsploitation cinema, while critic Heather Wixson narrates a video essay (19 minutes) that explores the film's psychological tragedy, championing Winters's performance. Plus: trailer; radio spot; gallery. **Nick Setchfield**

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

The Dark Ascending

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2007 | 18 | 4K/Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director David Slade

▶ Cast Josh Hartnett, Melissa George, Danny Huston, Ben Foster

➔ **Restored in 4K ahead of its** 20th anniversary, this wintry horror delivers a tautly efficient adaptation of the comic book by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith.

The premise is suitably killer: Barrow, Alaska, northernmost town in the USA, is plunged into a month of darkness each year. A perfect dining opportunity for the undead, who proceed to feast on a dwindling band of survivors, led by an earnest Josh Hartnett as the local sheriff.

It's a siege story, tough and raw, stripped of humour and utterly committed to the desperate reality of the situation, hard moral

choices and all. There's no romance in these vicious, piranha-mouthed vampires: not only are they fast and agile, but they're philosophically terrifying too, gore-spattered nihilists who declare, "There is no escape. No hope. Only hunger and pain."

An immersive, atmospheric watch, piling tension as high as the bloodstained Alaskan snow.

➔ **Extras** Some excellent new interviews find assorted talent reflecting on their contributions. David Slade shares his vision of the film as "a punk rock Western", and attempts a very respectable imitation of the vampires' trademark shriek (25 minutes). Composer Brian Reitzell gives insights into how he created the richly textured soundscape (25 minutes). Mark Rendall, who played Jake, remembers how "the carnage on-set was beautiful to



He kept quiet about having a spare pair of gloves.

watch" (15 minutes). Steve Niles, meanwhile, discusses his background as a horror geek and the influence of George Romero (14 minutes).

Elsewhere, former Fangoria editor-in-chief Chris Alexander brings an entertaining energy to a history of the screen's nastiest bloodsuckers (33 minutes), while critics Kim Newman and Sean Hogan provide a perceptive new

audio commentary. Plus: original special features, including an audio commentary by Hartnett, George and producer Rob Tapert, along with eight behind-the-scenes documentaries. The limited edition UHD SteelBook is packaged with a poster and booklet. **Nick Setchfield**

i A vampire language was created for the movie with the help of a linguistics expert from the University of Auckland.



HELLCAT

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 14 AUGUST**

2026 | 15 | Digital

➔ **Do people still listen to talk** radio? The plot of *Hellcat* wouldn't work if its antagonist didn't, so let's assume there are still listeners out there. Driving through Tennessee, trucker Clive ends up calling into his favourite radio show for advice... on how to handle the injured girl he's kidnapped.

Conceptually, it's brilliant: part chamber piece, part survival horror, part creature feature. But the story isn't compelling enough to hold it all together, and the ending's so silly it undermines everything that went before. **Sarah Dobbs**



MOCKBUSTER

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | N/A | Digital

➔ **This documentary about** director Anthony Frith's experience working for The Asylum – the company behind such shock-fests as *Sharknado*, *Transmorphers* and *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* – is an eye-popping look into the world of trash movie-making.

Tasked with conjuring a dinosaur flick in six days on an impossible budget, his dreams of "turning the familiar into the unforgettable" soon crash and burn. But in *Mockbuster*, he's made a movie infinitely better than the one it goes behind the scenes of. **Steve O'Brien**



HARBINGER

★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED 10 AUGUST**

2026 | 18 | Digital

➔ **Peter Woodward is good** value in this low-budget British horror. He plays murderer Henry Decker, killed in the opening minutes, but whose evil lingers on in a spooky fortune-telling machine. When Henry's widow Jean foolishly agrees to appear on a ghost-hunting TV show, things take a sinister turn.

Doctor Who's Carole Ann Ford has an enjoyable cameo, but the rest of the performances are, ahem, *variable*, and the film doesn't add up to much more than people running around a badly-lit set. **Will Salmon**



NIGHTBORN

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | N/A | SVOD

➔ **SHUDDER Want to feel old?** Rupert Grint now plays the *dad* in horror movies.

When Jon agrees to move to his Finnish wife's childhood home to raise their kid, he's prepared for some difficulties (rotten floorboards, no neighbours), but not for others (trees that look like people, a carnivorous baby). Yep, this is another post-partum depression horror.

Seidi Haarla's performance goes full *Hereditary*, but beyond that and a graphic birth scene, there's little to distinguish this from its peers. **Sarah Dobbs**

THE HOURGLASS SANATORIUM

The time is out of joint

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | 15 | 4K & Blu-ray

▶ Director Wojciech Has

▶ Cast Jan Nowicki, Tadeusz Kondrat, Irena Orska, Halina Kowalska

➔ **If you've managed to digest** films by his fellow Poles like Andrzej Żuławski and Walerian Borowczyk, you may be ready for Wojciech Has. But it won't be easy.

Named after the title story in Bruno Schulz's 1937 book *Sanatorium Pod Klepsydrą*, *The Hourglass Sanatorium* scatters elements of various other tales too. Józef (Jan Nowicki) visits a crumbling sanatorium, where he's told his father is both dead and alive, because here "we reactivate

past time, with all its possibilities". Describing what follows is a challenge, but it's clear that much of the time Józef is revisiting childhood incidents.

A narrative this freeform, where the hero stumbles ever onward – crawling under a bed in an interior, crawling out again in an exterior – demands concentration. But eventually you realise you can quit worrying about losing the thread, and simply relish the tableaux Has and his designers created: the sumptuous decrepitude of the sanatorium, where plants grow through cracks; the off-kilter hall of waxworks; the sudden eruptions of surrealism – mud-caked soldiers using a dog-on-wheels as a bloodhound; a



As far as disguises go, they weren't the best.

random pack of elephants. Repeated use of fisheye lens makes the odyssey through this grotty phantasmagorical landscape even more dizzily delirious.

➔ **Extras** This limited edition is a dual-format job. Polish cinema expert Michael Brooke provides a meticulously-researched commentary – you may still not fully grasp the film afterwards, but you'll feel much closer to doing so.

A 1997 interview with production designer Jerzy Skarzyski (15 minutes) sees him arguing that set-dressing objects should "help to create a mystery". Early Has short "Accordion" (1947, 12 minutes) sees a boy pawn his boots for the instrument; it's poignant, if slight. Plus: booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i Bruno Schulz was shot dead by a Gestapo officer in 1942, while returning to his house in the Jewish ghetto of Drohobych.

TWO BOXES

The Spanish Prisoner

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1972/1974 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Antonio Mercero,

Narciso Ibáñez Serrador

▶ Cast José Luis López Vázquez, Narciso Ibáñez Menta, María Fernanda D'Ocón

BLU-RAY DEBUT Subtitled **Televised**

Terror In Franco's Spain, this release on Radianc imprint Transmission combines a short that traumatised UK viewers who stumbled upon late-night transmissions in the '80s with a much less well-known TV movie.

"La Cabina" (35 minutes) deservedly won an Emmy. A Madrid man enters a newly installed phone box, then finds the door has jammed shut. No spoilers, but the final reveal may be seared into your brain for life.

There are some neat comedic touches, and José Luis López

Vázquez excels in a role which – being trapped behind glass – requires him to soundlessly convey embarrassment, panic and despair. A fiendishly brilliant concept, professionally realised, it's all the more impactful for the total absence of any rationale.

El Televisor (68 minutes) sees a kindly father (Narciso Ibáñez Menta – writer/director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador's dad) achieve his dream of owning a colour TV. Obsessed with it, he neglects his family and loses his job. Matters grow darker still as he becomes convinced that threats from the screen are escaping into reality.

Though not subtle, it boasts strong performances. The twist ending is top-tier *Tales Of The Unexpected*. And the themes still resonate in the age of social media.

➔ **Extras** The coup here is an entertaining commentary on "La



He shouldn't have made Richard Osman angry.

Cabina" by *Inside No 9* creators Steve Pemberton (who hasn't seen it for yonks) and Reece Shearsmith (who's come armed with a stack of facts). *El Televisor* benefits from the velvety tones of Jonathan Rigby, paired with Kevin Lyons. Spanish horror expert Antonio Lazaro-Reboll (38 minutes) provides useful context, covering topics like Serrador's anthology show *Historias Para No Dormir*.

"La Cabina" co-writer Jose Luis Garci (18 minutes) describes it as what Umberto Eco terms "an open work". In a 2025 piece, the director's son visits the main location (13 minutes). Plus: seven minutes of archival press conference blather from Serrador (1999); booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i In a 1998 TV ad for Spanish telecoms company Retevisión, José Luis López Vázquez finally got out of the phone box!



He knew he should have brought the washing in.

THE LAST HOUSE

A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | N/A | SVOD

▶ Director Louis Leterrier

▶ Cast Wagner Moura, Greta Lee, Riley Chung, Noah Alexander Sosoowski

NETFLIX The idea of being

trapped inside your home for an indefinite period feels uncomfortably familiar after the Covid lockdowns, adding a frisson of relatability to this high-concept sci-fi from director Louis Leterrier. A family of four finds themselves under house arrest when a mysterious, unceasing rain seals their doors and windows, and cuts off contact with the outside world.

There are shades of Shyamalan to *The Last House* in the withholding of the mystery, and it also feels a bit *A Quiet Place* as it becomes more of a survivalist

story: rationing food, water and power becomes essential as the looming threat continues.

The film's biggest strength is the believable chemistry between the parents played by Wagner Moura (*Civil War*) and Greta Lee (*Tron: Ares*) and their children. The performances ground the heightened scenario, and Leterrier aims for an ambitious tonal blend – by turns tense, funny and sad; the production design of the single-location setting also intrigues.

Alas, the disappointing final act is something of a damp squib, its revelations and set-pieces not as convincing as what came before. Still, there are worse ways you could spend an evening stuck indoors. **Rob James**

i According to Louis Leterrier, the frog tablet glimpsed early on is not a nod to Greta Lee's role in *Toy Story 5*.

ON THE BEACH

All over down under

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1959 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Stanley Kramer

▶ Cast Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, Anthony Perkins

➔ **In the aftermath of the bomb,** cinema typically processed post-atomic fears as monstrous, rampaging metaphors, roaring fire and crushing cities underfoot.

By contrast, this thoughtful if overlong adaptation of Nevil Shute's novel tackles Oppenheimer's legacy head-on. In the then-imminent future of 1964, nuclear warfare has devastated the planet. A lone outpost of survivors in Australia is five months from a deadly drift of fallout.

It's the most leisurely of armageddons, a character study in hope, fatalism and guilt, lifted by a top-tier Hollywood cast (Fred

Astaire is outstanding as a scientist haunted by his role in the bomb's creation). Director Stanley Kramer deals in apocalypse, but rations the spectacle: the image of an empty, lifeless San Francisco arrives with all the more impact for the film's extraordinary restraint.

➔ **Extras** This BFI release carries over several bonuses from Signal One's 2015 Blu-ray. Star Donna Anderson shares some wonderful insights in an interview from 2015 – Astaire, she says, went unrecognised in public because “He didn't wear who he was” (19 minutes). Some 8mm amateur movie footage offers a fascinating look at the Melbourne shoot (nine minutes). An audio commentary provides observations from Dr Philip Davey, author of *When Hollywood Came To Melbourne*.

A second commentary track by critic Scott Harrison is the first of



“I've tried to get Kiss FM on this, but no luck so far.”

the new additions. Elsewhere, Kim Newman contextualises the movie's “nuclear neurosis” (22 minutes), while costume historian Elissa Rose dissects Ava Gardner's wardrobe choices (15 minutes). A brief Kramer retrospective from 2004 is billed as a celebration of his life and career; disappointingly, the focus is confined to 1961's *Judgment At Nuremberg* (14 minutes). “Operation Hurricane”

(1952, 33 minutes) is a sobering documentary account of British nuclear testing in Australia's Montebello islands; in stark black and white, it's a fitting companion piece to the main attraction. Plus: trailer; galleries (including Kramer's personal photo album); a 34-page booklet. **Nick Setchfield**

i The shoot in the Melbourne suburb of Berwick is commemorated in the street names Kramer Drive and Shute Avenue.

NOW ON DIGITAL FORMATS

All You Need Is Kill • Backrooms • Disclosure Day • The Mandalorian And Grogu • Masters Of The Universe (free on Prime Video) Obsession • Passenger • Rose Of Nevada (BFI Player, 24 August) • Supergirl



A USEFUL GHOST

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | N/A | SVOD

▶ Director Ratchapoom

Boonbunchachoke

▶ Cast Davika Hoorne, Witsarut

Himmarat, Apasiri Nitibhon

MUBI Brace yourself for the strangest ghost story of the year. At points, characters' mouths hang open. Yours may too.

Thai director Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke's directorial debut begins as deadpan absurdist farce, but slowly transmutes into something fistpump-inspiringly righteous.

After buying a vacuum cleaner, an unnamed academic is bewildered to hear it coughing. A repairman explains that a ghost is responsible, recounting the tale of another haunted hoover, possessed by Nat, dead wife of the factory owner's son, March.

The sight of a talking vacuum cleaner is irresistibly silly, and that's before Nat and March, ahem, get intimate. A cut from a poignant exchange to someone declaring "Please stop screwing your vacuum cleaner!" is just one example of tonal whiplash.

Cheekily playful (it takes three tries for a bit of exposition to be delivered, due to planes passing overhead), it's blessed with moments of grace-note beauty. And it really develops. As Nat (now in human form) is pressed into getting rid of other ghosts plaguing VIPs, it becomes a meditation on the importance of honouring the struggles of the dead. Add numerous sympathetic gay characters, and you have a film with a surprising amount to say. Our one regret: they couldn't use a Henry...

Ian Berriman



"Hi, joke shop? I'd like a refund for the teeth please."

VAMPIRE'S KISS

American Sicko

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 10 AUGUST**

1989 | 18 | 4K & Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Bierman

▶ Cast Nicolas Cage, Jennifer Beals,

Maria Conchita Alonso,

Elizabeth Ashley

BLU-RAY DEBUT The spectacle of a method-crazed Nicolas Cage munching on a live cockroach has long overshadowed Robert Bierman's quirky yuppie-era satire. This 4K restoration offers a chance for a reappraisal beyond that *Jackass*-style piece of shock theatre.

Cage is Peter Loew, an obnoxious Manhattan literary agent. Bitten on the throat by a sultrily mysterious pick-up (*Flashdance*'s Jennifer Beals, giving it full '80s erotic thriller), Loew is convinced that he's been turned into a vampire. The movie dances with horror tropes, but it's really a blackly comic portrait of mental disintegration, as well as a twisted love letter to a ravishingly photographed New York.

Even this early into his career, a preposterously boyish Cage is given his head, indulging in an amusingly outsized

performance that's equal parts *Looney Tunes* and Max Schreck. Watch him stalk the streets in joke shop fangs as if waiting for memes to be invented.

▶ **Extras** This dual-format release on Radiance's Transmission imprint includes a meaty new interview with Bierman, who's entertainingly candid about the movie's many tribulations – and the art of casting a cockroach (66 minutes). The director also shares a 2002 audio commentary with Cage, while critics Kim Newman and Nick de Semlyen provide an informative new track.

Screenwriter Joseph Minion makes for an illuminating interviewee (18 minutes), as does composer Colin Towns (17 minutes), who collaborated with Bierman on 1979's De Palma-esque thriller short "The Dumb Waiter". That's also included here (18 minutes), complete with a new introduction by the director (12 minutes). Plus: trailer; brief behind-the-scenes gallery; poster; six postcards; booklet.

Nick Setchfield

i When Cage briefly pulled out during pre-production, potential replacements included Mickey Rourke and Judd Nelson.

(ROUND UP)

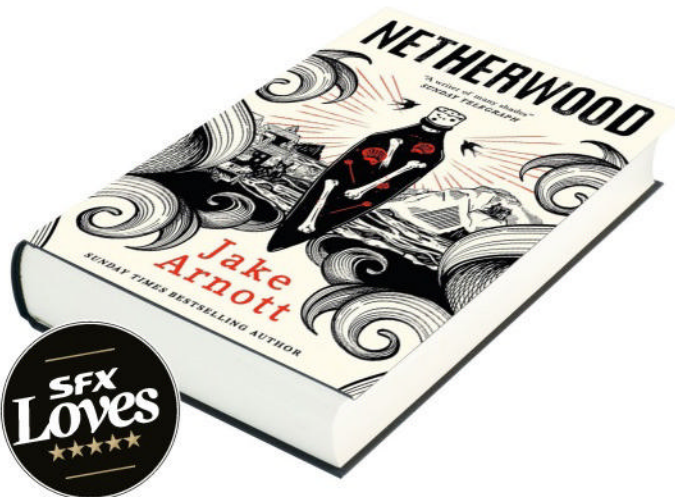


HOKUM (Blu-ray/DVD, 10 August) sees a horror writer (*Severance*'s Adam Scott) visiting an Irish inn to scatter his parents' ashes, and finding the honeymoon suite they once stayed in is locked up, supposedly because a witch is trapped inside. We said: "A very dark tale, but there's space for humour too... Satisfying, unnerving and indelible." Extras include director's commentary, a Making Of, and the "Jack the jackass" TV show footage seen in-film. Adapted from a novel by *The Martian*'s Andy Weir, **PROJECT**

HAIL MARY (4K/Blu-ray/DVD, 10 August) has a very odd bromance at its heart: one between Ryan Gosling's scientist and a crab-like alien being, both on deep space missions to learn why Tau Ceti is immune to a micro-organism that's draining power from their own suns. We said: "The repartee is immensely entertaining... A sci-fi spectacle with smarts and heart." Directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller provide commentary. There's about 18 minutes of other goodies: a featurette on *Rocky*, and deleted scenes. Mark Jenkin's

ROSE OF NEVADA

(Blu-ray & DVD, 24 August) sees a Cornish fishing boat travelling back in time to 1993. We said: "Every bit as visually ravishing as its predecessors... however, the central theme of sacrifice doesn't land as well as it might." Extras include commentary by Jenkin and Mark Kermode, a 16-minute Making Of, a BFI Southbank Q&A (37 minutes), a chat with the director (15 minutes), and four shorts. You also get the 1958 marine life "Between The Tides", and the public information film briefly seen on a TV.



NETHERWOOD

The Book Of The Lure

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 25 AUGUST**

256 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Jake Arnott**

► Publisher **Titan Books**

❖ **Few figures cast such a long shadow over British counterculture as Aleister Crowley.** He's one of the figures on the cover of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. He's referenced in the songs of David Bowie. Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page once lived at Boleksine House, a Scottish manor previously owned by Crowley.

So why the fascination? In part, it's because he was an occultist so notorious that he has become a kind of folk devil. But it's also down to Crowley's stare-at-the-camera charisma and the sheer weirdness of a life that encompassed Trinity College, mountaineering, writing and painting, possible links to British intelligence, and founding his own religion, Thelema. Crowley was a fitfully brilliant yet weird iconoclast and polymath.

Crowley's exit from this mortal coil was prosaic. A septuagenarian suffering from chronic bronchitis, his health failed while he was resident at a boarding house in Hastings, Netherwood, which

gives Jake Arnott's first horror novel its name.

Without giving too many spoilers, Crowley's pervasive presence is central to the book, which begins with a young couple, Adam and Justine, respectively an artist and art critic, moving to East Sussex after their lives in London begin to unravel. As the acronym has it: FILTH, failed in London, tried Hastings. Life on the coast holds out the promise of a new start, especially when they get the opportunity to buy a fisherman's cottage overlooking the sea at a knockdown price.

Except sometimes there are reasons property is being sold cheap, especially in horror novels. One of the cottage's former residents was John Malachy, a man also fascinated by the occult and notorious in the '60s. Then, there's the fact that the cottage comes complete with its own cave, where the couple find a witch bottle seemingly placed there to ward off evil, as well as curious carvings. Compounding matters, it seems the story of the couple's new home is associated with the disappearance – or perhaps murder – of a vulnerable young woman.

It's Justine who, using her journalistic skills, begins to ferret

out these stories. Slowly recovering her mental health following the devastation of a miscarriage, she has more time on her hands than her partner. That's because Adam, whose career as a bright young artist had stalled, is suddenly inspired, feverishly working on a series of paintings that are as disturbing as they are fabulous.

Were this just a novel that riffed off Crowley's notoriety, it would soon become tiresome, but Arnott, who made his name in crime fiction with gay gangster novel *The Long Firm*, is far too good a writer to let that happen. Instead, as he weaves in, at different points, the life and death of Brian Jones, London's squat land history, the high-end art world's reliance on the oligarch class, and the way coercive behaviour functions, the novel has depth and complexity.

Arnott also invents his own band, Sacred Disease, who played "extreme synthesiser stuff" in the '80s and whose stunts attracted

“What price would you pay to survive?”

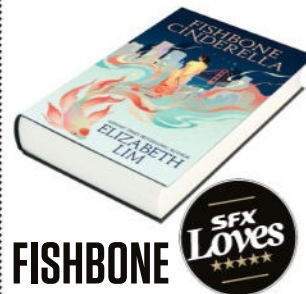
the attention of the tabloids. Psychic TV with a dash of Einstürzende Neubauten, perhaps? Although it's the former name that seems more apposite, as *Netherwood* also touches on COUM Transmissions, the art collective founded by Genesis P-Orridge.

But it's where *Netherwood* lands that's most impressive of all. Again, without giving too much away, the novel's different subplots converge brilliantly so that you know exactly what has happened.

As to how, as a reader, you should feel about this, that's more ambiguous, as Arnott leaves the reader with a terrible question: what price would you pay to survive and, more than this, prosper in what looks set to be a turbulent 21st century? Horror fiction has a new (dark) star.

Jonathan Wright

i Among those involved with Thelema in the '40s was L Ron Hubbard, science fiction writer and founder of Scientology.



FISHBONE CINDERELLA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

448 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Elizabeth Lim**

► Publisher **Hodderscape**

❖ **Oh look, an adult retelling of a fairy tale!** “You’re joking – not another one?” we hear you cry, much like Brenda from Bristol upon hearing there’ll be another General Election. Yet, Elizabeth Lim, in her first novel for adults after focusing on younger audiences, has shaped her Cinderella tale into something wonderful.

This story spans two eras: first there's the Second World War, as China lies under occupation by the Japanese and little Ha Yut Ying discovers she can make herself invisible. It's a skill that comes in handy when she's hiding from soldiers, but as she gets older – moving to Hong Kong to live with her narcissistic stepmother, and then finally having a family of her own in America – it becomes dangerous.

Then, in 1980, we follow her daughter, Marigold, who we meet on a flight from the US to Hong Kong with her now-ailing mother. She's determined to save her life, which means delving into the past Ha Yut Ying has left behind.

It's a rich, sprawling, utterly bewitching brew of fascinating history, gut-wrenching trauma, love, hate, loss and magic. It may riff on the story we all know so well – even in its Chinese form, in which the Fairy Godmother is a golden fish – but this is as fresh as a brand-new fable. *Gorgeous.*

Jayne Nelson



SLOW BURN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** 18 AUGUST

224 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Amal Singh

► Publisher Flame Tree Publishing

❖ **How would you handle** instant wealth and fame? In the case of the protagonist of Amal Singh's latest novel, the answer is: very badly indeed.

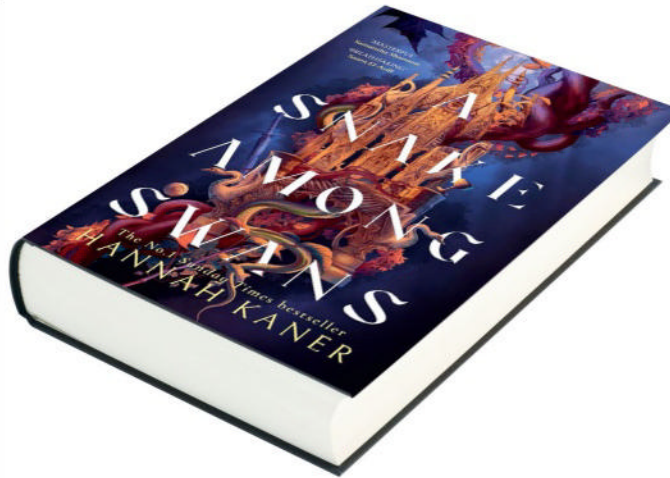
Rishi Tripathi is a struggling actor living in Mumbai. He's failing audition after audition, while his dancer girlfriend Manisha is also having a hard time. One night, miserable following their break-up, Rishi tumbles through a mirror and finds himself transported to a very different world – another version of the city he dubs "Mumbai-Right".

Here, he is still with Manisha and, what's more, he's a major movie star, having achieved all of his wildest dreams. Rishi is, of course, delighted by this development, but it's not long before he discovers the catch: he has swapped places with a malevolent alternate version of himself who is now on the loose in the world of Mumbai-Left.

Singh's depiction of two alternate versions of the city is vividly imagined, as is a late-in-the-book exploration of the nature of the magical mirrors. Ultimately, though, this is a character study of a deeply flawed and infuriating man who has lost sight of why he wanted to be an actor in the first place, having handed most of his craft over to AI while he enjoys the shallow excess of celebrity life.

Part magic realist fantasy and part critique of the movie industry, *Slow Burn* is a unique and memorable fable.

Will Salmon



A SNAKE AMONG SWANS

Serpent's tale

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Hannah Kaner

► Publisher HarperVoyager

❖ **If revenge is a dish best served** cold, how might this twist the psyche of someone planning to get their own back? Explored via the character of Tilde, the heir to a conquered realm, it's a question that runs through Hannah Kaner's follow-up to her *Fallen Gods* series.

When we first meet Tilde, it seems she has powers she only dimly understands, introducing a recurring theme of Celtic-tinted mysticism. The book then jumps to her marriage. Her husband, the warlord Liran, wants to bind together two kingdoms, and also another son. Tilde just wants Liran dead, as quickly as possible – until her mother intervenes, and suggests a more *strategic* approach to destroying Liran and his family.

What follows is a story of court politics based loosely on the fairy tale "The Six Swans", in which princes are transformed thanks to the actions of a wicked stepmother. Though these courtly manoeuvres are conducted with

the intensity of bloodsport, there's a lot of talking, which occasionally becomes wearing, but Kaner handles it with aplomb.

"Stepmother" Tilde's new family are not attractive people. Her ageing husband is a capricious brute. His sons have been traumatised by their upbringing. They're also spoilt brats who see human life as cheap. These contradictions could be more fully explored. Maybe in a later volume.

And yet, is Tilde any better? Princess Elise, the novel's other POV character, isn't so sure. Then again, she's not sure about a lot of things, including the righteousness of her father's need to expand his lands, and her own sexuality.

While this opener is influenced by grimdark fiction, don't expect lashings of blood. Instead, first seeming to be heading into romantasy territory, Kaner ratchets up the tension until violence becomes inevitable. A fantasy novel that, confidently and at times brilliantly, plays with familiar tropes without being constrained by them.

Jonathan Wright

i As a kid, Kaner was always making up stories, including tales that involved "waging war with swords on my cousins".



(MOSTLY) HUMAN RESOURCES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Grace Viall

► Publisher Aria Fiction

❖ **Normally, the scariest thing** any HR caseworker would expect to face is the threat of an employment tribunal. But Alexys works in HR at Entity, the organisation in charge of managing the world's supernatural entities, so when one of the Wardens in her department doesn't show up for a check-in, she finds herself up against something really scary.

Luckily, she's got backup: Nic Dyre, head of the research and cataloguing department. Dyre is annoying in that good-looking-and-snarky kind of way you only find in romantasy novels, so when Alexys ends up alone with him in a forest full of monsters, her irritation inevitably turns into attraction.

Despite being set in a fantasy corporate world, there's something very young and naïve about the tone of this book. The world-building isn't particularly sophisticated; it's never clear how secret or otherwise Entity's work is meant to be, or what it would mean for the world if suddenly monsters were everywhere.

The action (and horror) ramps up in the final chapters, but after Alexys is forced to make a terrible bargain, it feels like there ought to be a reckoning, and there just isn't. And so many plot threads are left dangling for a sequel that it feels like half the book's missing. Underwhelming, really. Sarah Dobbs



Effects artists hard at work on two whale segments.

A worker waves at the crew in this storyboard.

Nimoy celebrated his 55th birthday on set.

On location at San Francisco's Sentinel Building.

STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME – THE MAKING OF THE CLASSIC FILM

A whale of a time

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 1 SEPTEMBER**

192 pages | Hardback

► Authors **John Tenuto,**

Maria Jose Tenuto

► Publisher **Titan Books**

◉ **With a reissue beaming into** cinemas soon, there couldn't be a better time for this Making Of.

Husband-and-wife team John and Maria Jose Tenuto accessibly talk us through every stage of the *Trek* movie franchise's most comedic outing. A discussion of differences in early script drafts proves fascinating; so is a chapter on the creation of the film's

humpback whales – a mix of life-size body parts (filmed in an old water tank excavated from a Paramount car park) and remote-control models (shot in a high school swimming pool) so convincing they drew the ire of animal rights activists.

Diverse archival sources are drawn on for the likes of Leonard Nimoy, but 14 new interviews were conducted, too; Kirk Thatcher, whose associate producer role also encompassed playing “the punk on the bus”, is especially good value.

Stand-out visual treats include designs for the array of different

aliens seen in a Federation Council scene. The Tenutos appreciate fans' love of Easter eggs, gaffes and cameo spots, and cram

yet more trivia into picture captions. With side-panels offering potted biographies, breakdowns of unfiled scenes and more, it really feels like a 360-degree view.

Given that it surpassed the box office takings of every other *Trek* movie until the JJ Abrams revival, *The Voyage Home* deserves more respect. This book delivers it in spades. **Ian Berriman**

i Kirk Thatcher says Nimoy was keen on making an MTV video for “I Hate You”, with the band on the Enterprise bridge.



THE SALT KING

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 20 AUGUST**

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

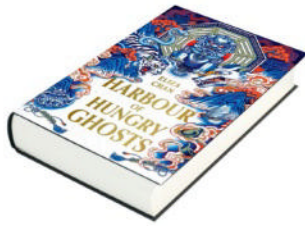
► Author **Natasha Pulley**

► Publisher **Gollancz**

◉ **Here's the end-of-civilisation-as-we-know-it** disaster epic Roland Emmerich never directed: a salt-based apocalypse. For her seventh novel, Natasha Pulley goes full-on widescreen blockbuster, and also tackles some big religious issues. But don't worry, Pulley fans, there's still a lot of whimsical fantasy, queer romance and daft footnotes.

It starts in a folk horror vein, with a young Jesuit priest from the Vatican, Avelyn Brocken, returning to his birthplace in the English fens to investigate a claim that a man turned into salt. His hometown is a little different, though – Hreodwater is practically an autonomous nation with its own culture, language and faith, made rich by its salt mine. But has Avelyn actually been summoned by the local deity, The Salt King, in preparation for a global threat coming from salt mines around the world?

That summary only scratched the surface of an incredibly ambitious novel with a vast cast and parallel plotlines in Rome and the Jordan, as Pulley delves deep into faith and belief (in science as well as religion). In fact, there's so much going on, and so many weird fantasy ideas, that the novel loses its focus when the apocalypse hits, and the world-building is a little vague on certain points. But few novels blend such disparate elements with so much entertaining skill. **Dave Golder**



HARBOUR OF HUNGRY GHOSTS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

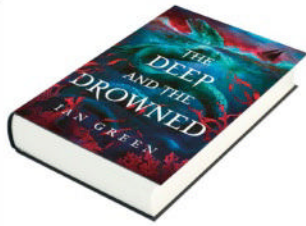
375 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Eliza Chan
► Publisher Orbit

◆ **Eliza Chan's debut novel**, *Fathomfolk*, dealt with a variety of real-world issues – prejudice, migration, refugees – in a fantasy setting. This novel, the first in a new series, brings things closer to home, being set in 1850s Hong Kong, where it combines both Chinese and British folklore in the then-colony.

Kiamling is a yiu gwai hunter, trained by and working with her grandmother to keep monsters at bay with charms, rituals, and if necessary her sword. The British running Hong Kong, of course, do not believe in such things, and when they interrupt an important festival, things begin to go very wrong. With her grandmother missing, Kiamling must work with friends old and new to try and discover just what is happening to the spirits of the island.

Kiamling is an infuriating character, stubborn and hot-headed, but she grows on you as she gets used to her role, learning more about her family's past even as she learns how the beliefs and superstitions the British have brought with them have combined with those of the Chinese. And though the novel takes a while to hit its stride, once it does Chan is back on fine form, dealing with the complexities of identity and growing up with nuance and flair. **Rhian Drinkwater**



THE DEEP AND THE DROWNED

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Ian Green
► Publisher Head Of Zeus

◆ **Ian Green returns to the world of his Rotstorm trilogy** to launch another seafaring fantasy trilogy, *Cutlass And Crow*. To clear his debts, Killian Heroneye, captain of the Cutlass Hawk, is forced to accept a mission to storm a pirate stronghold and to take his ship across Burner's Run, where the ocean is home to a giant, divine serpent called Zalan the Shipbreaker. Rough seas lie ahead.

Green's world-building is broad and detailed, replete with different religions, races and magic. It takes a while for the plot to have the wind in its sails, and Killian spends much of the story reacting to events, rather than driving them. However, once the raid on the pirate lair kicks off, the pace gathers significant momentum to keep the plot moving forward.

There's an intriguing supporting cast, particularly the tide-mage Kaikatsu and Killian's enigmatic companion Silver, although in this first instalment of the trilogy, Green plays it coy, revealing little of their motivations for joining the Cutlass Hawk's motley crew. The antagonists are equally memorable, particularly the knight Mournchild, a religious fanatic who kills to honour his gods. While Killian occasionally feels like a passenger in his own adventure, the blend of mystery and bloody battles produces a compelling voyage. **David West**



AFFAIRS OF STATE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

496 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Calvin James
► Publisher Titan Books

◆ **Romance and space opera** prove amenable bedfellows in Calvin James's high-spirited romp. His protagonist is Levar Boylan, a lowly and war-weary supply officer in the Commonwealth army, recruited to join a vital diplomatic mission to negotiate for peace with Astrid, demon ruler of the Empire that stands on the cusp of galactic dominion. The catch is that 12 years earlier, Boylan and Astrid were lovers, and he's still carrying a torch for her.

James playfully inverts the conventional dynamic between paramours. As a demon, a race descended from genetically enhanced humans, Astrid is considerably larger and stronger than Boylan. She's more powerful in every sense – politically and physically – and while Boylan may be the story's hero, he's the one being ravished. Robert Crumb would doubtless enjoy this image of a tall, powerful woman taking her pleasure from a willing partner.

The world-building blends futuristic technology and 18th century European culture, with cavalymen riding hoversteeds instead of horses, and interplanetary portals alongside galas, ballroom dancing and scheming nobles. James writes with a lively voice, imbuing his characters with colourful personalities, mapping out the competing factions and shifting alliances while gradually raising the stakes. In a genre swamped by unwieldy epics, *Affairs Of State* offers a brisk sugary hit.

David West

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks this time is **THERE IS NO ANTIMEMETICS DIVISION** (★★★★★, 3 September, Penguin) by "Qntm" (aka Sam Hughes). Mixing sci-fi and horror, it focuses on the secretive Unknown



Organisation, which catalogues and battles strange phenomena – in particular, the division

that deals with "antimemetics", ideas that resist being spread, and conceptual entities that can't be easily recorded. We said: "A symphony of escalating dread with multiple bravura sequences that are properly nightmarish in their execution... About as unmissable as sci-fi/fantasy novels get." Set in medieval Brittany, Finn Longman's queer romance



THE WOLF AND HIS KING

(★★★★★, out now,

Gollancz)

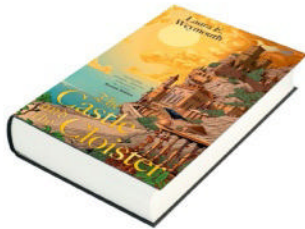
retells the 12th century

tale of Bisclavret, a man who changes into a wolf. Since boyhood, he hasn't left the forest, but when a prince ascends to the throne, he must pledge fealty... We said: "A beautiful, lyrical tale of love, betrayal, and above all yearning." Finally, Van Jensen's **GODFALL** (★★★★★, out now, Penguin) is set in a town that's utterly insignificant... until a three-mile-tall alien



corpse falls from the sky. Two years later, the town is a government research site, and the

sheriff is hunting a serial killer somehow connected to the dead giant. We said: "Van Jensen does a good job of tapping into a Stephen King-adjacent tone as the book evolves into a twisty murder mystery with a light dusting of weird sci-fi."



THE CASTLE AND THE CLOISTER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

448 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

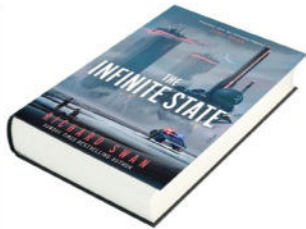
► Author Laura E. Weymouth
► Publisher Del Rey

❖ **The power behind the throne** would be a tidy, if woefully inadequate, summary of the central premise underpinning Laura Weymouth's knotty fantasy.

The story is set on a richly imagined continent called the Hand, marked by the clash of kingdoms and faiths. Queen Ariana tries to temper husband Orden's bellicose instincts towards their enemy Afon, king of Caervallion. With the aid of a blind priest and Fia, a postulant from the last surviving cloister, Ariana tries to steer the course of nations and prevent another devastating war.

The book requires attention and patience as Weymouth builds her world, but once the groundwork is laid, the storytelling gains momentum. The plotting is dense, full of intrigue and subterfuge, while the clash of religions vividly reveals Weymouth's ideas about liberation and oppression. The cruel Honorian faith demands darkness, bloodletting and sacrifice, and Ariana's suffering during childbirth – an act bound by ritual – explores how religions control women's bodies.

Weymouth imbues her characters with complex inner lives, caught between missions and desires, making their struggles to control their fates all the more compelling. A demanding, handsomely rewarding read. **David West**



THE INFINITE STATE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Richard Swan
► Publisher Gollancz

❖ **It was the worst of times.**

Such is life in *The Infinite State*. This likely won't surprise anyone who read Richard Swan's excellent *Empire Of The Wolf* novels, which functioned as grimdark thrillers examining power dynamics.

Swan's new SF sequence has similar concerns as it explores life in the fascistic Decurion Empire, where the Pater Aeternus party holds sway. This is a deeply conservative society where "so-called *intellectuals*, *cripples*, *homosexuals*" are regarded as "purposeless". It's an unequal society where secret police practice Orwellian levels of surveillance. How can anyone escape this suffocating embrace? And, in passing, couldn't Swan occasionally just interject a scene where someone has a nice cup of tea?

Brews aside, money gives you options, and newly widowed Katherine Fuller has become a multibillionaire. What's she to do with this cash? Her answer is radical from someone embedded in the elite. As the story moves towards a conclusion that's also a jumping-off point, there's much to admire in a book that, in turning our current reality up to 11, lands brilliantly. Although maybe next time – a recurring criticism of Swan's books – he could be more ambitious, and zoom out to show us what's occurring from more points of view. Still, this is a rare novel, in that you wish it was 200 pages longer. **Jonathan Wright**



ALL WE HAVE IS TIME

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

450 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Amy Tordoff
► Publisher Atria Books

❖ **A woman makes a deal** she doesn't fully understand with a supernatural being and is granted immortality, but finds it more a curse than a blessing. After hundreds of years, she meets a man who really sees her – but it turns out he may have the opposite problem to her own. So far, so *The Invisible Life Of Addie LaRue*, but this debut is still different enough to forge its own identity.

In the 16th century, Beatrix Woodward dies in childbirth. She bargains with a faerie for her life, but is cast out by her husband, who believes her to be a demon. Beatrix sets off to London and a long life alone – until she meets Oliver a century later, and then again in Venice a century after that. He's not immortal, but a time traveller from 2202, and can only enter the past for 12 hours at a time. They meet each other again through the following centuries, with Beatrix waiting decades for each meeting, while for Oliver merely days pass.

It's an intriguing concept, and an engaging journey through British history as Beatrix survives war, fire and plague. Oliver is less well-realised as the rather wet time traveller that she allows herself to fall in love with, while the twist is unsurprising (especially if you've read *Invisible Life*). It is still fun to skip through a lifetime, stopping only for the interesting parts, though.

Rhian Drinkwater

ALSO OUT

As ever, there's plenty more books that we couldn't squeeze in. Set in Los Angeles, Olivie Blake's gothic mystery

DREAMLAND (13 August, Tor) centres on actor Anya Morris, hired to work for an influential movie dynasty whose villa holds buried secrets... Will she sell her soul to achieve her dreams? Winner of the Japan Fantasy Award in 2024, Kentaro Utsugi's

THE NINE LIVES OF A BOOKSHOP CAT (27 August, MacLehose) explores themes such as reincarnation, plus the supernatural history of various moggies who once belonged to famous authors – and naturally, the bookshop is the magical kind. Megan Bontrager's

THE SEA HIDES ITS DEAD (out now, Run For It) puts an aquatic spin on

Lovecraftian horror. After the members of an expedition studying the Cult of the Leviathan

become trapped in an underwater cave, they're forced to atone for their sins. **HIGHLANDER** (out now, Sphere) is an

updated edition of Garry Kilworth's original novelisation for the cult 1986 fantasy film about

immortal warriors battling across the centuries. American literature professor Susan Farrell's

VONNEGUT'S WAR: THE MAKING OF SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE (20 August, Bloomsbury Academic) draws on oral

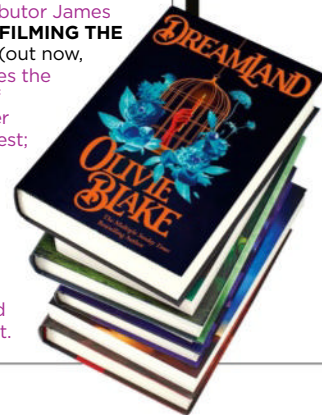
histories and new archival discoveries, shedding light on how cultural forces

shaped the classic 1969 time travel novel. Finally, *SFX* contributor James

Mottram's **FILMING THE ODYSSEY** (out now, Titan) traces the creation of

Christopher Nolan's latest; it includes interviews with the director, cast and crew, on-set

photos and concept art.





Saara El-Arifi

We really hope the fantasy author doesn't die in the bath...



© MUSTAFA RAEI

Describe the room in which you typically write.

► When I moved into my current home, I designed my dream office. An eight-foot bookshelf lining one wall, bespoke wallpaper (from incomparable artist Sophie Dunster), and a painting by Lauren Mele in pride of place. Despite this haven, I struggle to create behind a desk. I prefer writing in the bath, with a plank of wood across the edge, and my laptop sitting precariously on top – clearly the threat of electrocution helps my process!

How do you deal with writers' block/the urge to procrastinate?

► Deadlines really help me focus. The tighter the deadline, the better I work. My innate teacher's pet gives me a real fear of disappointing anyone, so I strive harder to complete my work in the timeline given.

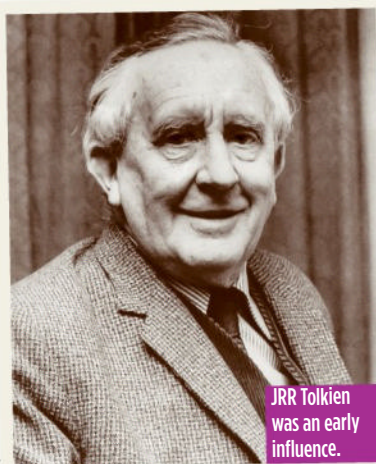
Which of your books are you the most proud of?

► *The Final Strife*. Prior to landing on Sylah's story, I'd been writing and rewriting another novel. I'd failed to get an agent for 14 years. When I

finally let that other story go, *The Final Strife*, true to its title, came out of that strife. It taught me that failure is just as important as success in this industry.

Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

► *Cleopatra* was the most challenging, because it was the first time I was creating in a world I hadn't entirely created. The research took years, and included a master's degree and a research trip to Egypt. When it came to drafting it, I was also in a unique situation of being two weeks post-partum from the birth of my son. I think that's partly why the novel is such a raw portrayal of womanhood and motherhood.



JRR Tolkien was an early influence.

“Failure is just as important as success in this industry”

Were you a keen reader when you were young?

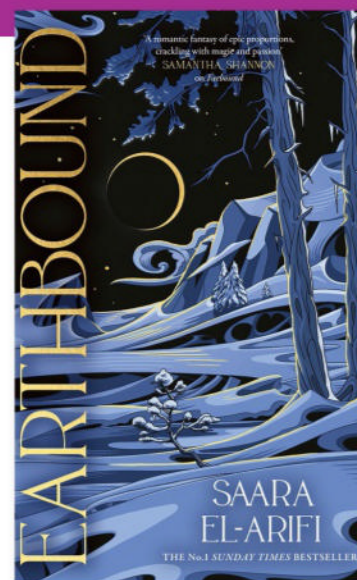
► I read voraciously as a child. My local library was my solace, and I spent many hours among the Young Adult section (and sometimes adult section). Fantasy was my genre of choice. Works by Tamora Pierce were particularly transformative, as well as Robert Jordan and Tolkien, who both taught me the scope of worldbuilding at a very early age.

Which SF/fantasy book published in the last year has most impressed you?

► *A Snake Among Swans* by Hannah Kaner [see page 85] is one of the most captivating epic fantasies I've read in a long time. It deftly explores the political machinations of empire, and the innate power of feminine rage to bring them down.

What's the biggest misconception people have about being a professional author?

► I think there is often an assumption that being an author is glamorous, but it's actually



quite a lonely job. Prior to being a full-time author, I spent a decade working in offices, so it was a significant shift no longer having colleagues around me. In addition, most jobs allow you to leave the job behind, but I work all times of the night – I can never switch off my imagination.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've received or read?

► Finish the book. Everything can be fixed in edits. ●

Earthbound, the conclusion to the trilogy which began with Faebound, is out on 27 August, published by HarperVoyager.

ABSOLUTE GREEN ARROW

Hits the bullseye



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC Comics

► Writer Pornsak Pichetshote

► Artist Rafael Albuquerque

ISSUES 1-3 **Marvel may have** recently shuttered its Ultimate Universe line of comics, but DC's rival Absolute Universe is showing no signs whatsoever of slowing down. Alongside the spectacular success of *Absolute Batman* and its other ongoing *Absolute* titles, DC is also taking chances on shorter miniseries in order to test out some of the more left-field options for character reinvention.

Following in the footsteps of *Absolute Martian Manhunter* (and arriving alongside the current *Absolute Catwoman* miniseries), we have this new

six-issue take on the familiar Robin Hood-inspired vigilante, which pushes the character in a much grislier and more violent direction.

In this new setup, billionaire Oliver Queen has seemingly been murdered, but now a mysterious masked killer armed with a bow and arrow is hunting the corrupt super-rich of Star City, and doesn't seem to care who else gets killed in the crossfire.

This is all viewed from the perspective of Dinah Lance, aka Black Canary, who here has been remixed as a super-tough bodyguard who has been strong-armed into tracking down the Green Arrow Killer. It's also through Dinah's eyes that we get to witness the more political themes of the story. Writer

Pornsak Pichetshote's script isn't afraid to wrestle with the nastier side of the way our lives and futures are increasingly being shaped by the whims of billionaires. While the series is heavy-handed in the way it explores this (including some inevitable Jeffrey Epstein references), many of its thematic points do hit home.

Alongside this, there's a well-executed plot structure, intriguing twists and some eye-catching set-pieces, serving to make these first three issues work well as an enjoyably nasty thriller with a compelling protagonist.

The series also benefits hugely from the presence of Rafael Albuquerque on art duties. His characterful and stylised visuals

“Pushes the character in a much grislier direction”

fit perfectly with the series' blend of investigative thriller and lurid horror. He brings energy to the big moments, and showcases his talent for striking, high-contrast images.

Because of its mystery-box structure, it's hard to say whether *Absolute Green Arrow* is going to stick the landing or fall apart in its second half. Issue three does feature a couple of narrative wobbles thanks to some briefly clunky overuse of flashbacks, which might develop into a bigger problem later on.

However, there are enough strengths in the pulpy storytelling on display here to suggest that this is going to continue as an intriguing and effective addition to the Absolute Universe's ongoing success story. **Saxon Bullock**

i Pichetshote was DC's Head of TV in the late 2000s, where he helped develop the early stages of The CW's Arrowverse.



THE SHRINKER



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Bear Alley Books

► Writers David Motton,

Roger Noel Cook

► Artists Mike Western, Carlos Cruz

COLLECTION **Surely inspired by** 1957's *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, "The Shrinker" preceded Irwin Allen's *Land Of The Giants* by five years when it originally appeared in *Buster* in 1963.

Its first storyline has an enticing, down-to-earth quality, opening with RAF pilots Flint and Slake being reduced to minuscule size by the titular Shrinker, aka sinister mad scientist Capek, who's given a brooding Peter Cushing-esque quality by the excellent Mike Western. It's largely told in one and a half-page instalments. Consequently, writer David Motton stretches the plot out too thinly, but he still wrings plenty of thrilling drama out of the pair's potentially deadly encounters with otherwise innocuous household items, particularly the resident moggy.

Turning an entire town into a real-life miniature village in sequel "Return Of The Shrinker" is an eerie highlight, but subsequent stories become repetitive as Capek constantly downsizes Flint and Slake, who tie down the villain Lilliputian-style on several occasions. Finally, the trio join forces for "The Shrinker In Space", which with its alien funguses and Martian warriors has more in common with Motton's *Dan Dare* work, but isn't half as scary as a big cat. Accompanied by a splendid new cover by Martin Baines, this is a victory for the little people.

Stephen Jewell



The hood wasn't the best disguise, really.



SWAMP THING 1989

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC Comics/Vertigo

► Writer Rick Veitch

► Artists: Tom Mandrake, Michael Zulli, Vince Locke

ISSUES 1-4 Back in the late '80s, Swamp Thing found himself unstuck in time – both within his reality and ours. Rick Veitch, picking up from Alan Moore's seminal run, had everyone's favourite botanical monster travelling back to Nazi Germany and Camelot, before topping off his tenure with a visit to the scene of the Last Supper. At least, that was the plan. The idea of a comics character meeting Jesus proved too controversial, the comic was canned, and Veitch quit.

Four decades on, it's been resurrected, finally completing the story Veitch wanted to tell. And in 2026, it's hard to imagine anyone getting worked up over its content. It handles Christ with respect, and even lets him do a spot of biblically accurate (but also rather kickass) demon banishing. That turns out to be just one pitstop on Swampy's adventure through time, which takes him to the Big Bang and beyond.

Swamp Thing 1989 reads like an artefact of the period. Issue one sees Michael Zulli's pencils completed by inker Vince Locke, while the new art for issues 2-4 by veteran *Swamp Thing* artist Tom Mandrake is in step with Veitch's deeply purple prose. It even features facsimile ads from the time. More historically important than an enjoyable read? Perhaps, but you're unlikely to regret taking the time. **Alex Spencer**



BATMAN/GREEN ARROW/ THE QUESTION: ARCADIA

The power of three

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC/Black Label

► Writer/artist Gabriel Hardman

ISSUES 1-4 Out of all the DC superheroes who've grappled with political issues, Green Arrow and the Question sit at the top. Both have a history of confronting difficult or challenging subjects, and this four-issue Black Label miniseries throws them together with Batman to face some distinctly modern problems.

The story begins with all three investigating the same mystery: the Question (aka Vic Sage) is battling a human trafficking operation, while Oliver Queen is trying to work out what his company's connection is to the Arcadia project, and Bruce Wayne encounters a billionaire with a plan to help humanity tackle environmental catastrophe.

Various plot twists eventually bring all three characters together

to tackle the corruption at the heart of the story. It's here we get a tremendous number of gritty action set-pieces, while the biggest narrative gambit sees Batman not always entirely on the side of the oppressed in the same way as Green Arrow or the Question.

Writer/artist Gabriel Hardman has a potentially intriguing conflict, but his storytelling and dialogue isn't engaging enough to make this out-of-continuity tale properly gripping. Instead, the moral questions and grey areas lead us to a flashy but overfamiliar confrontation with a bunch of conveniently evil mercenaries.

Hardman's kinetic art means the action is vivid and impressively handled, but it isn't enough to prevent this self-consciously edgy and overly grim thriller from eventually wearing out its welcome. **Saxon Bullock**

i Hardman has worked as a storyboard artist for almost 30 years, on movies like *X-Men 2*, *Inception* and *Disclosure Day*.



ODIN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Image Comics

► Writers Marguerite Bennett,

James Tynion IV

► Artist Letizia Cadonici

ISSUES 1-3 Norse mythology isn't exactly *top* of the list of good things Nazis have ruined, but having been a part of white supremacy since its iconography was first co-opted by Hitler's propaganda machine, it's certainly on there.

Odin is an attempt to settle the score, as a gang of American neo-Nazis make a pilgrimage to Norway, planning to summon up a god, and discover – in short, bloody order – just how unimpressed the gods are by their “master race”.

For a horror story, this presents something of a challenge. When your cast of future victims is so impossible to root for, even the most brutal fates can feel like just desserts. Protagonist Adela, an undercover journalist embedded within this group, presents a more immediately sympathetic figure, though after three issues – and a lot of wordy caption boxes – she's still something of a cipher.

That's true of the entire cast: they're just mouthpieces who spout horrific ideology, with three of the male characters drawn by Letizia Cadonici to look almost identical (long red hair and beard). Though maybe that's the point: that these supposed iconoclasts are blind followers, entering a world where the one-eyed man is king. *Odin* is yet to really dig in beyond its premise, but in the meantime it's enough to just watch Nazis get what's coming to them. **Alex Spencer**

HALO: CAMPAIGN EVOLVED

2001's space odyssey, remade



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PC

► Also available on PS5, Xbox Series X/S

► Publisher Xbox Game Studios

VIDEOGAME Somehow, 25 years have passed since Master Chief first touched down on Installation 04. In celebration of that big birthday, here's his debut adventure once again.

As the reworked subtitle suggests, this remake excises the competitive multiplayer element of *Combat Evolved* to focus on its core campaign, tweaked to include many of the mod cons from later in the series – a wider arsenal, vehicle hijacking, co-op that supports up to four Masters Chief – and served up with a brand new mini-campaign on the side.

Campaign Evolved very much looks and feels the part. The kick

of the shotgun and the energy-blast pop of a Grunt headshot; the Chief's movement, a ludicrous mix of walking tank and Yoshi flutter-jump; the rugged green and blue scenery of an alien planet that looks like it was filmed on location in the Pacific Northwest... it's all perfectly intact here. Even the weapons that have been grandfathered in from later games – your Energy Swords and Battle Rifles – don't interfere with what remains a classic of the genre.

Okay, the campaign's best moments all come in its first half, and there are a few notorious blips along the way (The Library, anyone?), but it still holds up remarkably well for a game from 2001. So well, in fact, that you might wonder what happened with the new levels.

The side campaign tells a prequel story, teaming the

taciturn Chief with fan favourite Sergeant "Sarge" Johnson (think Al Matthews's cigar-chomping sergeant from *Aliens*). Not that this narrative framing is especially important, mind. It's just an excuse for some sub-MCU banter between this heroic odd couple, and another three levels' worth of blasting aliens – the majority of which takes place in tight, uninteresting corridors. Somehow, working with the same basic components, Halo Studios has turned out something inferior to a game made a quarter-century ago.

Of course, you don't need to play these bonus missions (which, tellingly, is how they're presented in the menus). If you're happy to stick with the classics, this remade campaign is still worth your time. But "evolved"? That might be stretching it a bit. **Alex Spencer**

i The quintessential Xbox title? Maybe, but *Halo* was originally meant for Mac, and even revealed on-stage by Steve Jobs.



NECROMUNDA SKIRMISH



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Players Two

► Publisher Games Workshop

TABLETOP GAME *Necromunda*

has long felt like the hidden gem of Games Workshop's catalogue. The skirmish title sees rival gangs battling it out in the industrial maze of the titular world's Underhive. It's a game with a deep ruleset that feels more like an RPG than a traditional war game, with the emphasis firmly on building a gang that grows more storied with each encounter.

The announcement of this new edition was met with a degree of scepticism, however. *Necromunda* played just fine as it was, and fans were concerned that this retitled relaunch might ditch the aspects that made the game feel so rich. Happily, that's not the case. It's every bit as detailed as before, just with a few rules tweaks, like some new specialisations for your gangers and a quicker, more streamlined after-game sequence.

In the box you get two gangs: the all-female House Escher and the muscle-bound punk House Goliath, plus a sprue of small terrain pieces. It's only the latter that underwhelms: *Necromunda* relies on a varied, three-dimensional board (the original iteration came with a vast array of cardboard structures), and while you can play with just the included pieces, you'll want to get your hands on more as soon as possible to bring the Underhive to life.

Will Salmon





WARHAMMER: THE OLD WORLD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Players **Two players**

► Publisher **Games Workshop**

TABLETOP GAME This is the second go around for *The Old World* in just two and a half years. The *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* revamp launched in early 2024, in a curiously inaccessible format seemingly aimed solely at veteran gamers. Despite this, it was a success, and it now gets a more approachable “1.5 edition”, with two armies in the box and the sense that Games Workshop has finally realised that it’s onto a winner here.

The included “goodies” are the warriors of Grand Cathay. We’ve seen these miniatures before, but the Cathay range remains one of Warhammer’s most appealing model lines. The “baddies”, meanwhile, are the new Chaos Warriors: chunky and imposing foot troops and cavalry that give an iconic faction an overdue glow up.

The core rules remain similar, though some have been given a bit of spit and polish. The most substantial change is the introduction of Battle March, a new skirmish format that allows for small scale battles. It’s well-balanced and makes for a more realistic entry point to the system, both from the point of view of time and cost. For many, epic battles with hundreds of troops on each side is the entire point of *The Old World*, but the fast and fun Battle March should open this terrific game up to many more players. **Will Salmon**



DOCTOR WHO: THE DEADLIEST WEAPON

Tempus Fugitive

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 62 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher **BBC Audio**

AUDIOBOOK We may not be getting any new television *Doctor Who* this year (Commonwealth Games opening ceremony aside), but what we are getting is *Circuit Breaker*, a 13-part multimedia series starring Jo Martin as the Fugitive Doctor.

A short story on the official website, “Calling The Doctor”, came first, setting up the concept. Objects have been appearing in the Black Archives, each associated with a different Doctor and surrounded by a strange energy signature. Osgood and assistant Andrew reach out to the Fugitive Doctor – an earlier incarnation than any associated with the objects, so hopefully unaffected – to return and neutralise them.

“Martin is not a strong narrator, with strange line readings”

Next up was a comic, *Adversary Of The Daleks*, and then a *Doctor Who Magazine* comic strip, “The Honourable Society”, as the Doc returned a Dalek gun and Sontaran mace respectively. This brings us to *The Deadliest Weapon*, an audiobook by Steve Lyons, read by Jo Martin. Which at first glance doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the overarching story at all...

The Doctor is on a mission: to kill arms dealer Kashan Akkravar and save the universe from his new “deadliest weapon”. But when Cybermen attack the hotel they’re staying in, she must find a way to complete her task with as few casualties as possible.

Unfortunately, Martin is not a strong narrator, with strange line readings and pauses in odd places (“beyond the picture, window”), though David Banks puts in a good guest performance as the Cyber-Leader. The story itself is intriguing and pacy, though, with a feel of the old *Doctor Who* annual stories. Next! **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Latest additions: comic *Dawn Of The Daleks* and mobile game *Casting*. A short story, “Don’t Blink”, debuts on 17 August.



DOCTOR WHO: DARK TIDES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 11 AUGUST**

► 56 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA With the force that was trapping the TARDIS on the Powell Estate dealt with in June’s release, the Ninth Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) and Rose (Billie Piper) are free to roam the galaxy once more. As these audios are set within the 2005 series, however, which tended towards space stations rather than elaborate alien worlds, we get a claustrophobic story on a crumbling starship.

The TARDIS has arrived in an area of “liminal space”, ominously named the Dark Tides. The Doctor and Rose quickly encounter the Knights of Atlas, a chivalric order on a quest to reclaim a long-lost mapping ship named the Vesterbold. They’ve been beaten to it, however, by the mysterious Dr Vivian Rest (Doon Mackichan), a scientist with some dark secrets.

It’s clear from the off that Rest is a villain, and Mackichan’s standout performance glitters with malevolence. While the story is lacking in any real surprises, Tim Foley’s script fits perfectly into the era – you can easily visualise the Vesterbold’s shadowy corridors being created on a BBC budget – while the Knights of Atlas provide a dash of classic *Who*’s eccentricity. It’s also bracingly bleak, a story that reminds you of just how dark this show can be when it dials down the whimsy and dials up the teatime terror. **Will Salmon**

JUNE 1949

SFX's time machine hurls us back to a random month once again

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD

A very early entry for that regular feature in *Viz*.

FLASHBACK

Vision On

27 JUNE 1949 By the late '40s, the skylines of American cities were beginning to bristle with television aerials. And as this fledgling medium slowly supplanted the radio as the heart of the home, an even more astonishing future arrived, summoned from the ether in ghostly monochrome.

The creation of New York City's pioneering DuMont Network, *Captain Video And His Video Rangers* was the first science fiction adventure series on US TV. It was shepherded to air by director of programming James Caddigan, who had caught a screening of 1941 movie serial *Adventures Of Captain Marvel*, and now sought a similarly fantastical crusader for the age of the

coaxial cable. Even the hero's name riffed on the promise of this upstart technology.

Broadway's Richard Coogan was cast as the Captain, a morally upstanding boffin who battled evil from his icy mountaintop retreat. He was, the title sequence assured us, an "electronic wizard, master of time and space... Guardian of the safety of the world". Don Hastings played teen sidekick the Video Ranger, while Bram Nossen was arch foe Dr Pauli, an immoral genius patterned after Professor Moriarty in the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Broadcast live five nights a week, the series was a crude, micro-budget affair that conjured its flickering tomorrow out of plywood, cardboard and some dramatically flashing bulbs. Props were frequently raided

Writers for the series included such SF luminaries as Robert Sheckley, Isaac Asimov and Arthur C Clarke.

from the auto parts shelves of Wanamaker's department store. Director Charles Polachek recalled how a crucial Opticon Scillometer – a telescope that could peer through solid objects – was lashed together from "a spark plug, a muffler, a rear-view mirror and an ashtray".

Bizarrely, each night's futuristic adventure would pause for a lengthy excerpt from a dog-eared Western in DuMont's archives. In the fiction, Captain Video was simply checking in on his frontier agents via the Remote Tele-Carrier; in reality the crew were changing the set.

For all its flaws, the show was a hit, winning a sizeable adult audience. When rival network ABC countered with a TV revival of *Buck Rogers* in April 1950, the series jettisoned its earthbound format. "It's about time we got into the interplanetary stuff," said Coogan, who actually quit the same year.



By George

8 JUNE 1949 In the totalitarian reality of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “books were just a commodity that had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces”. In our world, thankfully, George Orwell’s last completed work endures as a landmark in dystopian fiction.

Set in a bleak future Britain renamed Airstrip One, the novel charts protagonist Winston Smith’s struggles against a repressive, omniscient state that has weaponised surveillance and propaganda.

Nearly titled *The Last Man In Europe*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a popular and critical hit on publication. *The New York Times Book Review* described it as “pages of sustained physical and psychological pain that have seldom been equaled and never in such quiet, sober prose”.

Its impact has been felt far beyond an initial print run of 25,575 copies: such phrases as Big Brother, thought police, doublethink – and, yes, Orwellian – have embedded themselves in our lives; language as a cultural nervous system, warning us of danger.



GRANGER/SHUTTERSTOCK, ULLSTEIN BILD/ULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY



Tristram Coffin does some dramatic pointing.

EVERETT COLLECTION INC/ALAMY

Rocket Launch

8 JUNE 1949 If TV threatened the cultural dominance of radio in the late '40s, it was also gunning for the picturehouse.

King Of The Rocket Men arrived at the tail end of the movie serial’s golden age. Released in 12 dependably breathless chapters – such titles as “Plunging Death”, “Molten Menace” and “Ten Seconds To Live” convey the general air of peril – it found the fiendish Dr Vulcan targeting America’s greatest geniuses while plotting the destruction of Manhattan with a sonic detonator. Only one man can save the day, and a Rocket Man at that: Jeff King, a two-fisted scientist equipped with an atomic backpack that grants him the power of flight.

Cast as the bullet-helmeted hero was Tristram Coffin, a serial veteran more usually

seen as the heavy or villain. Director Fred C Brannon was another seasoned pro of the genre, with credits on *The Purple Monster Strikes* (1945), *The Crimson Ghost* (1946) and *Dangers Of The Canadian Mounted* (1948). The crucial scenes of King in flight saw a lifesized dummy slung along a length of wire at a trick angle.

While *King Of The Rocket Men* marked the twilight of the cliffhanger era, this Republic Pictures serial found a fresh lease of life in March 1981 when its creaky charms filled a teatime slot on BBC Two. That summer, Lucas and Spielberg restored Saturday matinee thrills to the big screen with *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. A whole new generation of kids knew just where they were coming from.



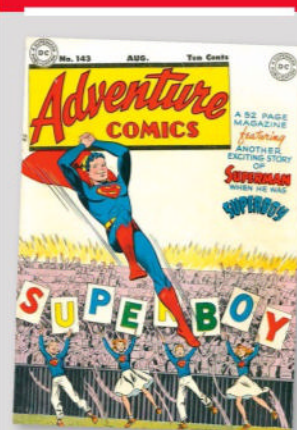
The Andrews Sisters and some equine friends.

IN REAL LIFE

- **Prime Minister:** Clement Attlee
- **US President:** Harry S Truman
- **In the charts:** Sheet music sales make “The Wedding Of Lilli Marlene” by the Andrews Sisters the number one song in the UK.
- **In the news:** Albert II becomes the first monkey in space; troops step in as dock workers strike in the UK; Dorothy Parker, Danny Kaye and Edward G Robinson are named as Communist Party members in an FBI report; mixed marriages are banned in South Africa.

GRAPHIC HOUSE/ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY

ON THE SHELF



- Superboy headlines *Adventure Comics* issue 143, with Aquaman, Green Arrow, Shining Knight and Johnny Quick on back-up duty.

© DC COMICS



The X-Men

Test your inner Cerebro with a quiz all about Marvel's mutants

Quizmaster Nick Setchfield, Editor At Large

QUESTION 1

Issue one of *The X-Men* was released in which year: a) 1961 b) 1962 c) 1963.

QUESTION 2

What onomatopoeic sound effect accompanies Nightcrawler's teleportations?

QUESTION 3

Original X-Men Iceman and the Angel later formed which other Marvel superteam?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Who's this beneath the helmet in *X-Men: The Last Stand*?

QUESTION 5

The Hellfire Club saga was inspired by an episode of which classic British TV series?

QUESTION 6

Who was originally set to play Wolverine in *X-Men*, until scheduling issues arose?

QUESTION 7

Which island nation became a mutant sanctuary under Magneto?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Who's this villainous mutant from *X-Men: The Animated Series*?

QUESTION 9

Name the material used to create the lenses that control Cyclops's optic blasts.

QUESTION 10

Wolverine is also known as Logan, but what's his actual birth name?

QUESTION 11

Stan Lee's original title was: a) *The Mutants* b) *The Atomic Five* c) *The Freaky Strangers*.



QUESTION 12 Picture Question

There've been many mutant teams over the years – which one is this?

QUESTION 13

As Corsair, Major Christopher Summers leads which group of space pirates?

QUESTION 14

Which member of the X-Men briefly went by the aliases Sprite and Ariel?

QUESTION 15

James Mangold directed two Wolvie movies, but who helped *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Identify the artist behind this iconic '60s cover image.

QUESTION 17

X-Men: The Animated Series crossed over with which other '90s Marvel cartoon?

QUESTION 18

Back in 2003, a resurrected Princess Diana was set to join which X-team, before outrage from the media (and Buckingham Palace) forced writer Peter Milligan into a rethink?

QUESTION 19

Professor Xavier's School For Gifted Youngsters is situated in which New York county?

QUESTION 20

True or false: Storm evolved from a character by the name of Tempest.

Answers
1 c) 1963 2 BAFM! 3 The Champions 4 1 c) 1963 2 BAFM! 3 The Champions 4
Scott 7 Genosha 8 Pyro 9 Ruby-quartz
10 James Howlett 11 a) The Mutants 12
X-Force 13 The Starliners 14 Kitty
Pryde 15 Gavin Hood 16 Neal Adams 17
Spider-Man: The Animated Series 18
X-Statix 19 Westchester 20 False – it
was Typhoon

How did you do?

How powerful a mutant are you?

0-5

Beak

6-10

Wraith

11-15

Colossus

16-19

Storm

20

Dark Phoenix

SFX

SEPTEMBER 2026 | Issue 408
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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future.

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5SH marketforce.co.uk

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SFX (ISSN 1358-5959) September 2026, issue 408, is published monthly with an extra copy in December by Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Future plc, c/o World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Full subscription prices: £71.50 for UK, €158 for Europe, \$178 for US, £137 for Rest of World. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perryman Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.

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"I could literally be taking a dump and having more fun"

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All contents are subject to change, like twins in the flash of an eye.

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Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Medusa Touch

Jayne Nelson, freelance writer



Richard Burton was, by all accounts, a bit of a bastard. Perhaps that's what makes his performance as John Morlar in *The Medusa Touch* so chilling: as

he spews his hatred for humanity into the camera lens, you sense that he actually means every misanthropic word. Those cold blue eyes certainly had an effect on me when I stumbled across this film late one night on BBC1 as a teenager. I was utterly transfixed.

If you've never seen this superb example of '70s British horror – and please do – Burton's Morlar is a man who, in his own words, has a "gift for disaster". He can kill with his mind: whether it be a neighbour who annoys him (he makes her leap to her death), astronauts on a

Moon mission (he's got quite the range, it seems) or – most memorably – the congregation at a London cathedral, which starts to collapse just as Her Majesty The Queen rolls up. Well, I did say he was a bastard.

We follow French police inspector Brunel (Lino Ventura), in London on an exchange trip, as he pieces together the impossible truth. He's aided by Lee Remick's psychiatrist and an array of British thespians, including Harry Andrews, Michael Hordern and Derek Jacobi.

Much of my affection for *The Medusa Touch* stems from Ventura, whose presence was mostly a way for the producers to snag some European funding by slotting in a French-Italian actor. My father died when I was little and I don't remember him, yet every time this film popped up on TV, my mum would freak

out over how much Ventura resembled him. That evolved into me feeling closer to my dad when I watched it, which is rather lovely.

In 2016, I was able to feel even closer to him when Bristol Cathedral screened the movie as a Halloween treat. Why there? Because it doubled for "Minster Cathedral" in the movie – itself a stand-in for Westminster Abbey. Watching Morlar "bring the whole edifice down on their unworthy heads" while actually sitting under *the same roof* was a bizarre experience. This *Medusa* meta-event has given this film its spot in my top 10 movies of all time. Now, I really must see about watching *Tremors* in the Californian desert... ●

Jayne still ducks every time she walks into a church.

Fact Attack!

→ Peter Van Greenaway's novel has no French detective named Brunel. Instead, its hero is Scotland Yard's Inspector Cherry.

→ A chunk of the £5 million budget went to Burton, so Brian Johnson's VFX team had to be inventive. He would soon win an Oscar for *Alien*.

→ One of Morlar's disasters features a plane hitting London's Centrepoint. The model plane came from Space Models in Feltham.

→ Lino Ventura's accent was unfortunately so strong that he ended up having to be dubbed throughout the film by David de Keyser.

→ Burton's line about bringing down "the whole edifice" is sampled in the Manic Street Preachers' 1998 song "Ready For Drowning".

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