

OUTLANDER: **BLOOD OF MY BLOOD**

WE TRAVEL BACK IN TIME TO VISIT THE SET OF SEASON TWO

STX



**AMERICAN
HORROR STORY**
WITCH, PLEASE!

RESIDENT EVIL
ZACH CREGGER'S BACK

**SHAUN THE
SHEEP**
INSIDE MOSSY
BOTTOM!

POSSESSION
DESIGN SPECIAL

**FILM IS
FABULOUS!**
SAVING ARCHIVE TV

**A GHOST STORY
FOR CHRISTMAS**
WE GO BEHIND
THE SCENES

DADDY ISSUES!

VISIONQUEST

PAUL BETTANY ON HIS MCU FUTURE

THE CRAFT
AT 30
WE'RE STILL THE
WEIRDOS



**PLUS! THE WALKING DEAD | HELLRAISER | DOCTOR STRANGE
HER PRIVATE HELL | TALES OF WONDER | THE HORROR SHOW
ALIEN VS X-MEN | JOE DANTE | SPIDER-WOMAN | SPAWN 77**



ISSUE 409 OCTOBER 2026 £5.99
PRINTED IN THE UK

DIGITAL EDITION



"I DIDN'T BURY MY PAST.
SOMEONE MUGGED ME FOR IT
AND LEFT ME HOLDING THE BILL."





24

FEATURES

24 VISIONQUEST

We're picking up good vibranium.

34 RESIDENT EVIL

No number. No colon. No escape.

44 AMERICAN HORROR STORY

Season 13? Unlucky for all.



34

48 SHAUN THE SHEEP

May the fleece be with you.

52 DESIGNING POSSESSION

Some behind-the-scenes magic from the Sky supernatural drama.

62 FILM IS FABULOUS!

Have you checked what's in Grandad's shed lately?

RED ALERT

6 HER PRIVATE HELL

Nicolas Winding Refn is hell bent for Leatherman.

8 THE WALKING DEAD

Play until your thumb rots.

11 ALIEN VS X-MEN

In space, no one can hear you SNIKT!

15 HELLRAISER: RESURRECTIONS

Let's not torture ourselves.

16 JOE DANTE

Enter Dante's unmade inferno.

REVIEWS

70 THE DOG STARS

We told you it wasn't man-flu.

74 STUART FAILS TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE

Big Bang multiverse theory.

76 THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Are we there, Yeti?

84 EXIT PARTY

Emily St John Mandel's American scream.

REGULARS

66 BROUGHT TO BOOK

Talking to novelist Jake Arnott about new book *Netherwood*.

89 THE WRITE STUFF

Emily St John Mandel answers our author questionnaire.

94 FLASHBACK

Bring out the chimp! We take a trip to May 1971.

96 BLASTERMIND

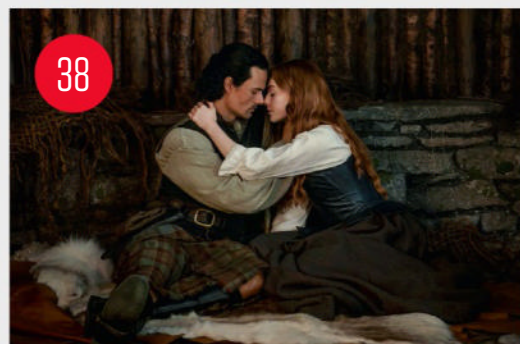
And on that farm there was a quiz...

98 TOTAL RECALL

The Owl Service is china in our hand.



44



38

Captain's Log



© MARVEL STUDIOS



WandaVision, and the collective experience of watching it during the pandemic, almost seems like another lifetime now... but it's actually only been five years. It's aged me, as Jackie Tyler would say – "Skin like an old bible!" Still, I'm excited to see the conclusion of the trilogy with *VisionQuest* – especially in the hands of the brilliant Terry Matalas, a good friend to us at *SFX*.

Speaking of friends – or should that be fiends? – of the mag, what an absolute delight it has been to delve into the personal archive of Mark Gatiss to bring you his previously unpublished photographs from the set of *A Ghost Story For Christmas*. I'm sure the BBC will also be delighted that I'll now stop pestering them for a Blu-ray release (until there's enough for Volume Two).

Speaking of ghosts from the past – and something else that brings me giddy joy – Film Is Fabulous! has recovered the very first episode of 1968 anthology series *Late Night Horror*. Television fans will know it's the very first BBC horror made in colour, so quite a historic moment. Of course, the work of Film Is Fabulous! might be known to you more for *another* recovered series. You can read more about their fascinating work elsewhere in this issue. Please donate to them, if you can.

More frights loom in the form of our annual *SFX* Halloween Horror Special, coming next month – an ambitious feat if we can pull off our plans. But fret not – we return to sci-fi and fantasy with a bang from November. There'll be something for everyone, I hope!

Darren
X

Get in touch!

Email
sfx@futurenet.com

Facebook
facebook.com/
SFXmagazine

X
x.com/sfxmagazine

Instagram
instagram.com/
sfxmagazine

YouTube
youtube.com/SFX

TikTok
tiktok.com/@
sfxmagazine

Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind



DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

- Absolutely adored *Ann Droid* – hilarious and heartwarming.
- Really enjoyed *Colony*, it felt like a new spin on "zombies".
- Loved *Teenage Sex And Death At Camp Miasma*.

RANTS

- Finally caught up with *Stranger Things* season five. What happened?!



IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

- Thought *Ann Droid* was surprisingly good – genuinely moving at times. The only thing that really let it down was the subplot with the son and his ex-wife. That seemed much less well-characterised, and far less subtle.
- Delighted to hear that Clive Barker is going to be releasing another three collections of short stories next year (bit.ly/barkerbooks).

RIP

- Sad to hear about the death of "Screaming Mad George", aka Joji Tani, master of gooey, squishy horror effects. A rewatch of *Society* is most definitely in order.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

- Wowed by the 50 years of Aardman exhibition at Bristol's M Shed. A cosy, plasticine perfect antidote to the tribulations of modern life.



NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR AT LARGE

RAVES

- Loved *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*. With the Punisher and the Hulk folded in, it felt like a classic couple of issues of *Marvel Team-Up* brought to the screen.

RANTS

- You're not allowed to announce season two of *Wonder Man* and then go and cancel it. Sorry, but that's not on.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

- I really enjoyed Madeleine Roux's *Star Wars* novel, *Legacy*. Carrie Fisher passing away really doomed *The Rise Of Skywalker*, but this book helps honour the Leia (and Rey) characters in a satisfying way.

RANTS

- Still not feeling any excitement for *Avengers: Doomsday*. However, my eyebrow is raised with interest at the recent *X-Men* cast reveals. Huzzah to that bunch of theatre nerds!

THE FUTURE FIRST! Red Alert

→ NEWS /// INTERVIEWS /// INSIGHT /// ANGELS (TO SOME)!

OCTOBER 2026

12 Horror's Prime Time



TELEVISION ANIMATION OF FREDDY KRUEGER FROM A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: DREAM Warriors (USA, 1987). PHOTO BY JOSHUA WHITE © ACADEMY MUSEUM FOUNDATION.

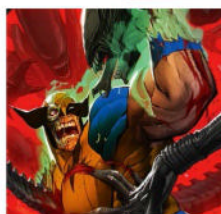
The Academy Museum awards horror its dead flowers in a new exhibition

Highlights



8 THE WALKING DEAD

→ The *All Out War* storyline comes to a gaming platform near you.



11 ALIEN VS X-MEN

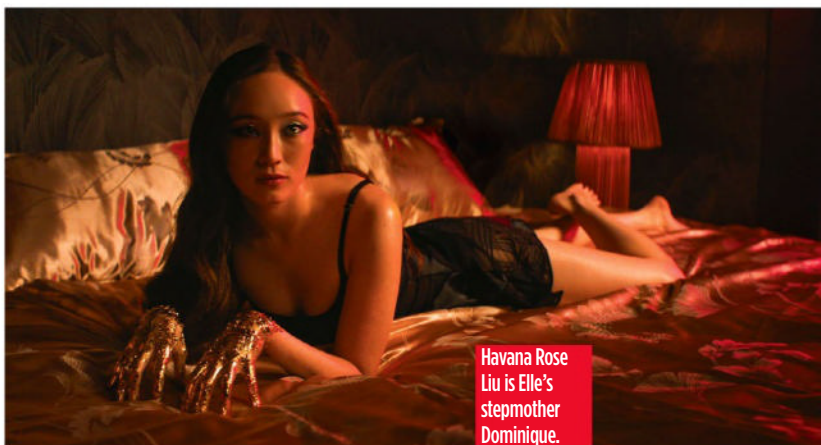
→ The xenomorphs continue their biased attack on everyone in the Marvel universe.



16 JOE DANTE

→ The *Gremlins* director looks back on some of his most exciting film projects that sadly got away.

BOBRIHA, JR./GETTY



Havana Rose Liu is Elle's stepmother Dominique.



Charles Melton as the mysterious Private K.



The cast of sci-fi film-within-a-film *Candy Floss*.



IN 2023, NICOLAS Winding Refn – the director of *Drive* and *Pusher* – underwent surgery for a “leaking heart” – a condition that saw his lungs filling with blood. During the operation, he technically died for 25 minutes before he was resuscitated. Understandably, it left him in a philosophical mood. “When I woke up again, and was brought back to life, I realised that time is all I have left,” he says, “[that] this is actually an opportunity. I’m going to become the Bionic Man! I’m going to be the Six Million Dollar man and I’m going to survive.”

Given a sense of renewed purpose, this near-death experience fired up a desire in Refn to return to feature filmmaking after a decade working for streamers (on shows *Too Old To Die Young* and *Copenhagen Cowboy*). “Before I died, I’d come to the end of the other road. I had nothing left I wanted to do,” he explains. Now it’s different, with a revitalised Refn returning with *Her Private Hell*, his first movie since 2016’s *The Neon Demon*.

An acid trip bathed in neon, the story follows multiple strands: Sophie Thatcher plays Elle, an actor holed up in a futuristic hotel as she shoots a *Barbarella*-esque

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Death Becomes Him

Nicolas Winding Refn is back from the dead – literally – with **Her Private Hell**

WORDS: JAMES MOTTRAM

sci-fi, *Candy Floss*. Then there’s Private K (Charles Melton), an American GI searching for his daughter who soon faces off with some sumo-sized yakuza. Oh, and there’s the Leather Man, a demonic gimp ripping out the hearts of innocent victims, shortly after he gets them to say ‘Daddy’.

While Refn started out wanting to make a horror movie, and then a sci-fi, he moved the dial, as he began to explore melodrama and the films of John Waters. The result is a bizarre, plot-free mash-up – designed to entertain and infuriate in equal measure.

“Before I died, I had nothing left to do. Now it’s different”

“There is so much impulse and so much information just being washed down our bodies, especially for young people,” Refn suggests. “So I thought, ‘Okay, I’ll do the exact opposite. I’ll do the one thing that’s going to piss [everyone] off – that is stillness – and just take it slow’. Because they will always remember it afterwards.”

Ever the provocateur, Refn isn’t afraid of challenging audience patience with a transgressive

narrative hooked on sex, violence and enigmatic dialogue. While the reactions are destined to be divided, there can be no doubting the visual panache of a film that was shot entirely on soundstages in Copenhagen, with its gold-decked Tower Hotel and misty, moody *Blade Runner*-like cityscapes. Shot over 57 days in the summer of 2025, it’s a style-heavy world vividly realised by cinematographer Magnus Nordenhof Jønck.

With a cast that also includes Shioli Kutsuna (*Deadpool & Wolverine*), Aoi Yamada (*Perfect Days*) and Hidetoshi Nishijima

Yellowjackets’ Sophie Thatcher stars as actor Elle.





Kristine Froese
as Elle's co-
star, influencer
Hunter.



Nicholas
Winding Refn's
signature neon
hues return.

(*Drive My Car*), the Japanese influence looms large in the film – something that comes from Refn's long-held obsession with the country, from where he's collected toys for years. "I was like, 'I want to live in that world of the fetishisation of objects.' Making these girls as dolls in *Candy Floss*

or making Private K an action figure in a uniform with his utility belt. I wanted to make a superhero movie, and this was my version of a superhero."

Certainly, a musclebound Melton displays heroics in one remarkable fight that sees him take on a bunch of Japanese

heavies with a sword – lending the film the vibe of Refn's earlier Bangkok-set thriller *Only God Forgives*. "[That film] was about a mother and son, and this is about a father and daughter, so it kind of rounds out the entire family structure," chuckles the director, who has two daughters of his own.

Excitingly for horror fans, Refn also snagged Italian veteran composer Pino Donaggio, who previously scored Brian De Palma's *Carrie* and *Body Double*. It was a notion that came to him during the edit, when he realised he wanted to heighten the operatic tone. "So who better to contact than Pino Donaggio? I reached out, and he was very willing and happy to join the process, and I said, 'Well, you're going to write an opera, and you're going to write more music than you have ever done before in a movie.' I think his contribution completely transformed the movie."

Refn is now planning a remake of *Maniac Cop*, William Lustig's 1988 B-movie tale of a killer masquerading as one of New York City's finest – a project briefly considered as an HBO TV series. With this set to shoot in January, Refn appears to be embracing his career again, following his return to the land of the living. "I was on an odyssey, I was left blinded, I was given eyes again, and I'm certainly not going to go the other way. I'm going to keep on going forward." ●

Her Private Hell is in UK cinemas from 25 September.

SCI-FACT! Refn cast Melton because his daughter Lizzielou is a fan of *Riverdale*, in which he played Archie's friend Reggie.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Arcade Apocalypse

Pressing start on a new adventure

for **The Walking Dead** WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

➔ BEAT-'EM-UP SIDE-scrollers have enjoyed something of a resurgence in recent years, with *Terrifier* and *Halloween* among the latest horror franchises to get the treatment. Now it's *The Walking Dead*'s turn, courtesy of *Streets Of Survival*.

For Alex Knight, senior producer at Trailmark Games – previously behind *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Arcade: Wrath Of The Mutants* – the format taps into the nostalgia of classic console gaming, particularly for those who grew up with it. “There’s also a familiarity to side-scrolling games that can appeal to a broad audience,” he tells *SFX*. “The controls are often straightforward, the objectives are typically linear, and there are plenty of interesting ways to bring the art style to life.”

Rather than revisiting the show’s earlier seasons, as previous *Walking Dead* games have done, *Streets Of Survival* takes its cue from *All Out War*, the year-long comic-book storyline that formed the basis of season eight. “It allowed us to do something fresh and exciting, while giving us such an iconic adversary in Negan,” explains Knight.

Negan’s heavily armed followers, the Savivors, provide another threat alongside the Walkers. “We think players will enjoy revisiting the key beats from this era of the show,” he continues. “We were able to give our main characters missions inspired by that arc that are nevertheless all-new and unique to the game.”

Players can choose from familiar faces including Rick, Michonne and Daryl, each with a signature weapon and unique playstyle that adds variety to the

traditional melee combat. “If you’re all about a full-on hack ‘n’ slash experience, you’ll enjoy missions with Michonne as her katana ruthlessly hacks through Walkers and Savivors,” Knight explains. “Rick’s magnum is a hard-hitting ranged weapon, and we were even able to animate his signature stance as he fires. I definitely recommend beating the game for the opportunity to play as Negan, too!”

Multi-phase boss battles will test players’ skill, strategy and killer instincts. Knight won’t give away the full line-up, but names the Well Walker – the bloated, waterlogged zombie found on Hershel’s farm – as one of his favourites. “If/when you kill it, it’s quite gnarly and gruesome,” he says. “We certainly wanted to bring that visceral on-screen gore of the Walkers into the game.”

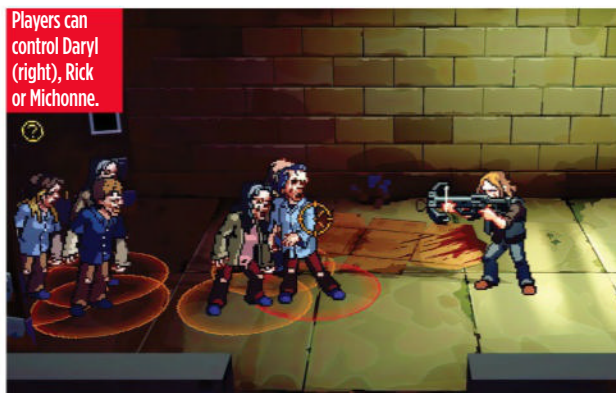
Knight describes the game’s visual style as “medium-high pixel”, detailed enough to make familiar environments such as Alexandria, Hilltop and the Sanctuary instantly recognisable, while retaining the arcade style.

From its story-driven moments to its dynamic set-pieces, the series’ influence can be felt throughout the game. “The music was originally created and blends a frenetic pace with the deeper mood of the show’s score,” Knight says. “Then we have what we call lore items – collectibles to explore and find throughout each level – which help further tie the *Walking Dead* universe into our game.”

Completing the campaign unlocks New Game+, the feature Knight is most excited for players to discover. “We open it up more so that you’ll have the opportunity



The team even recreated Rick's shooting stance.



Players can control Daryl (right), Rick or Michonne.



Michonne (left) and her iconic katana take no prisoners.



Rick faces off against Negan (right) in a boss battle.



Pure *Walking Dead* nostalgia in one handy image.

to play as other characters in each level, and your progression and levelling of characters continues on, meaning you can have some really intense but accessible and exciting gameplay moments with buffed-up characters. It'll be pretty fun to see people start learning speed-runs of the game, too."

Knight cites broadcaster AMC's weekly feedback and guidance as "absolutely crucial" to the project's success, with its knowledge of the IP helping the team deliver "a very faithful *Walking Dead* game and experience". Throughout development, however, he admits the team felt the pressure of living up to the series' passionate and knowledgeable fanbase.

"Given it's become such a global brand, it's everyone's job here to be brand ambassadors to the best of our abilities to ensure players have a great gaming experience,

while also enjoying what makes *The Walking Dead* special, as represented in this medium," he says. "One of the goals of the demo we released was to get that first real public glimpse of feedback, and we're happy to say that most folks really loved what they played. There was a lot of excitement and great recommendations that we hope to consider in the future, too."

Looking ahead, Knight sees plenty of scope to explore other *Walking Dead* storylines. "We'd love for fans to tell us where they'd want to see a potential sequel go," he says. "And we know there are a lot of folks who would love to see a cooperative experience..."

For *Streets Of Survival*, this may only be level one. ●

The Walking Dead: Streets Of Survival is available on PS5, Xbox Series X|S, Nintendo Switch, Switch 2 and PC, from 18 September.

The 2010s meet the 1980s in retro side-scroller style.



"We wanted to bring that visceral on-screen gore into the game"

SCI-FACT! *The Walking Dead* has inspired more than a dozen videogames, from mobile puzzlers to award-winning narrative adventures.

Raúl Allén's cover art for *Endless Nightmare*.

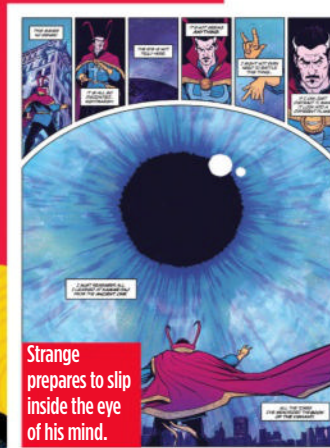


whole line – *Endless Nightmare* is the latest release from Abrams' *Marvel Arts* imprint.

"Obviously, much of my career has been intertwined with all aspects of *Dune*," Anderson tells *SFX*. "I've worked closely with Abrams on *Dune*, and my editor Charlie Kochman knew I was a big Marvel fan, so he asked if I'd be interested in doing one of the first *Marvel Arts* books. After that, it became quite a quandary to choose the best character. *Doctor Strange* was always a favourite of mine – I remember reading the comics when I was a kid in the 1960s. My cousins and I would circulate copies amongst ourselves. I was also very interested in Lovecraftian Cthulhu mythos and I wanted to weave Lovecraftian elements into a *Doctor Strange* story."

Harking back to Stephen Strange's original career as a highly-skilled surgeon, the 64-page centres around a mysterious hospital patient who – with shades of HP Lovecraft – keeps raving about how life is 'nothing but the sleep of a dreaming god,' leading to a deadly, mystical

“I wanted to weave Lovecraftian elements into a Strange story”



Strange prepares to slip inside the eye of his mind.

worldwide outbreak of insomnia. "I was most inspired by the Cthulhu connection and the horrific netherworld creatures that could come out of the imagination of a disturbed mind," says Anderson, revealing that Strange's old foe Nightmare is the main villain. "Marvel suggested using him very early on, but most importantly they found the very interesting demonic entity the Guigol, who had only ever appeared once in a very small story, so we had a lot to play with."

While his long-time foils Wong and Clea are conspicuous by their absence, Strange is supported by his faithful ghostly canine companion, Bats. "Strange needs a sounding board, someone to have a conversation with. Otherwise he's just a guy alone in a weird house talking to himself! I find Bats adorable and he adds a lot to the story while letting Strange do the big adventuring."

Endless Nightmare reunites Anderson with artists Raúl Allén and Patricia Martin, who illustrated Abrams' *Dune* graphic novels. "We talked to Alex Ross about how to best present the distorted, surreal and crazy world of the nightmare realm, and they particularly drew upon some of the amazing and unsettling art from the *Little Nemo* comics," says Anderson. "Raúl and Patricia created a fantastically unsettling visual canvas that was clearly unlike our normal world." ●

Doctor Strange: Endless Nightmare is out now.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Doctor Sleep

Kevin J Anderson goes from *Dune* to **Doctor Strange** with new Abrams graphic novel WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



DEBUTING IN 1963'S *STRANGE Tales* #110, Doctor Strange first appeared two years before Frank Herbert's original *Dune* novel was published in 1965. Now, after co-writing several prequel comic series set on the desert planet Arrakis

for BOOM! Studios, and adapting *Dune* itself into a trilogy of graphic novels for Abrams Books with Frank's son Brian Herbert, Kevin J Anderson is focusing on Marvel's Master of Mystic Arts. Following on from *Marvel Dimensions* by Alex Ross – who curates the



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Wolverine sizes up the egg of a xenomorph.

X-tra Terrestrials

Different feared outsiders clash as xenomorph battles mutants in **Alien vs X-Men**

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

→ AFTER BATTLING MOST of Earth's Mightiest Heroes in 2024's *Aliens vs Avengers*, the xenomorphs are now taking on Marvel's Merry Mutants in *Alien vs X-Men*. Written by former *Immortal X-Men* scripter Kieron Gillen and illustrated by Geraldo Borges, the four-partner also includes a back-up by long-time *Uncanny X-Men* author Chris Claremont, which sees a young Kitty Pryde caught in the crossfire between the xenomorphs and Marvel's answer to *Alien*, The Brood.

"Giving it the *X-Men* flavour was such a core part of the book – specifically the interesting areas where *X-Men* iconography rubs up against the *Alien* iconography," says Gillen. "That Jonathan Hickman and Esad Ribic had already done some X-stuff in *Aliens vs Avengers* narrowed my focus too – I wasn't going to touch anything they did."

Sampling from various X-ages, the series takes place in its own specific continuity. "I thought of it as like a standalone movie on paper, an adaptation of all this great stuff," continues Gillen. "The main backbone is from the *Astonishing X-Men* era – that gorgeous John Cassaday-drawn team including SWORD and the Anti-Alien League. I add in some details from earlier, some from later and make it its own thing."

While according to Gillen, "the vibe is very *Aliens*", the choice of the titular, singular *Alien* is deliberate, underlining that the mutants and xenomorphs are both outsider species. "There's certainly an idea of what 'alien' means, as after all mutant haters have tended to look at the X-Men as the alien," explains Gillen. "The mutant is seen as an alien by their enemies, growing inside normal humans and then emerging,

revealing their true self – a true self that is hostile to humanity and will kill you. Now something that is what the mutants' enemies actually fear is here, and it's a lot of fun!"

Noting that 1986's *Aliens* is "a core movie in my personal iconography", Gillen also draws on several other *Alien* films. "There's an aspect of love song here," he says. "There are aspects of *Alien 3* in there too, and some gentle nods to *Prometheus*, but *Aliens* is the core of the beast. For me, it's a case of knowing that there are certain ideas you get when you push through to all the unexpected stuff, and by the end of the first issue we're very much there."

While issue one opens in space with the search for a Phoenix egg and "a perhaps unexpected villain cameo", the story rapidly returns to Earth. "As much as I love all the X-mythos, I wanted to keep it to the core stories – and that's the Earth stories," says Gillen. "The exception is the Phoenix egg, which remains part of the story. The Phoenix is interesting to me in that it's part of the cosmic X-stories, which comes back to Earth with them – the 1970s star child kind of thing. The ultimate expression of what homo superior could mean, for better or worse." ●

Alien vs X-Men is out on 16 September.



A cover for issue two by Rafael Loureiro.

→ SCI-FACT! Created by Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum as "miscellaneous alien henchmen", The Brood debuted in *Uncanny X-Men* #155.



CURATOR EXCLUSIVE

Something Wicked This Way Comes

The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opens **The Horror Show** WORDS: TARA BENNETT



WHETHER IT'S YOUR taste or not, there's no debating horror cinema's consistency in landing box office successes, feeding pop culture conversations and launching careers. Yet horror films rarely earn awards or get the respect of more "serious" genres.

The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles hopes to change the genre's standing this month when they launch their massive exhibition, *The Horror Show*. Assembled by senior exhibitions curator Jessica Niebel and her team, this will be the Academy's first-time celebrating the depth and breadth of horror cinema's impact. Residing in the museum's fourth

floor Marilyn and Jeffrey Katzenberg Gallery, visitors can expect a paradise of original props, visuals, sound and experiential terrors.

Niebel tells *SFX* that *The Horror Show* was an idea they'd been developing for many years. "Conceptualising any exhibition is always a challenge. You have to structure it, and you have to find an organisation and a spatial way for the visitor's experience," she explains. "When I think about developing exhibitions, I always start, thinking of a floor plan: Where are we going? What are we experiencing, and what are we seeing? I knew from the beginning that creating highly designed environments would be very

important because we wanted to evoke emotional responses from our visitors because that is what horror films do.

"We all go to the theatre to expose ourselves to this idea of threat and fear, and experience these very fundamental feelings

that otherwise we're trying to avoid in our lives. I felt the exhibition needed to echo that experience. We're going in willingly, knowing there's something coming our way that will do something to us that we might not entirely be prepared for.

A Frankenstein gallery will have Karloff's shackles.





A wig from *Bride of Frankenstein* is one exhibit.



Bela Lugosi's Count Dracula cape will be on display.



Modern classics like *Get Out* are also well represented.

Motion picture mecca, The Academy Museum, LA.

“We’re really proud that the Academy is ready to celebrate horror for its originality”

But at the same time, we know we’re in a safe space.”

With that in mind, *The Horror Show* takes visitors on a journey of sight and sound exploring core tenets of horror cinema: Gothic, Psychological, Science, Slasher, Religion, and Ghosts.

“This is the framework I felt could most find consensus and connection within these stories,” Niebel explains. “But, equally, it was really important to say that we needed some freedom. This show is not about defining a genre and then defining sub-genres. We had to find other ways to structure this that makes sense to visitors, that is fun for visitors, but that also makes sense for what horror is and reflects the very nature of horror films.”

Citing director Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* as a prime example, Niebel says it’s a horror film that defies just one label out of their six categories. “It can be so many different things, so we wanted to have that flexibility and that freedom that a title like that could appear in different areas of this exhibition, and it will.”

Niebel teases their Frankenstein science lab gallery as another standout. “Almost half of that gallery is dedicated to Frankenstein, and the whole Frankenstein phenomenon,” she says of the enduring character. “On one display, we have the original shackles from the original 1931 *Frankenstein*. We have an operating table from *Young Frankenstein*. We have a wig

from *Bride Of Frankenstein*. And then artefacts from the recent Guillermo del Toro [film]. We also have Mary Shelley’s original edition of *Frankenstein*.”

Niebel says the exhibit will also pull from history and display the source influences of many horror films, from *Grimms’ Fairy Tales* to documents from the Salem witch trials. “We [have] writings of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, with clips from 1922’s *Nosferatu* and [The Cabinet Of Dr] *Caligari*, all the way to costumes from last year’s *Weapons* and *Sinners*.”

The exhibit has also allowed the museum to expand its acquisitions. “Horror hasn’t traditionally been collected quite as much as the other genres have, and so we were able to get in touch with horror filmmakers and collectors,” Niebel explains. This exhibit will be the first time the museum displays their original Bela Lugosi *Dracula* cape and the

restored baby from director Larry Cohen’s *It’s Alive*.

Running until July 2027, Niebel confirms they’ll have a host of horror programming to support the exhibit updated online at academymuseum.org. “We’re all feeling very proud that a large institution such as the Academy is ready to celebrate horror for its originality and for its wide range of representation,” the curator adds. “It’s important enough to be our main exhibition. We have more than 60 lenders contributing to this exhibition; studios, private collectors and filmmakers. And there’s been support within this institution, which is beautiful, and it’s wonderful to see so many people really excited about it. If we can contribute to [horror’s] legitimisation, all the better.”

The Horror Show is included with Academy Museum admission tickets from 26 September to 25 July 2027.

PICTURE CREDIT COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS LICENSING LLC

SCI-FACT! Industry advisors for the exhibit include director (and lender) Osgood Perkins, and special effects legend Howard Berger.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Greg Land's dynamic art for a variant cover.

True Detective

Marvel Comics celebrate Jessica Drew's past and future in **Spider-Woman** 50th Anniversary Special WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



ALMOST FIVE DECADES SINCE Jessica Drew first appeared in February 1977's *Marvel Spotlight* issue 32, Marvel Comics are marking half a century of Spider-Woman with a 50th anniversary one-shot. Simultaneously celebrating her

past while pointing to the future, it sees Dan Watters and Andrea Broccardo setting the scene for a forthcoming new monthly series, while former Marvel editor Ann Nocenti scripts a classic tale alongside artist Stefano Raffaele.

Describing her new story as “redemptive”, Nocenti was previously given the unenviable task of making her monthly scripting debut on the *Spider-Woman* title's final four-issue arc in 1982-to-1983's issues 47 to 50. Controversially concluding with Jessica's death, the four-parter provoked a furious backlash from readers, resulting in Jess later being resurrected in *Avengers*. “Fast forward about 40 years of *Spider-Woman* stories later and Jess is still a beloved character,” says Nocenti. “She's best friends with Captain Marvel, and she's a single mum raising a son.”

Wanting “a flawed, tough guy” and “a hard-luck villain”, Nocenti pits Jess against Flying Tiger, one of several members of Jess's rogues' gallery featured in *Spider-Woman* issue 50. “Using Flying Tiger gave us a cool visual: an aerial battle set against the sunny skies and palm trees of Los Angeles during a graffiti art competition for the best, highest tag,” explains Nocenti, who highlights how Jess's pheromone powers impact upon her capabilities as a private eye.

“Part of a detective's skill set is the ability to charm others in order to get them to spill a few clues to solve whatever case they're on,” continues Nocenti. “So how does Jess solve

“She could be a femme fatale, but it's more fun to have her be a PI”

that when her pheromones can be frightening to others? It's this flaw that sets her apart from other heroes and forces her to work harder.”

Using a major plot thread from the recent *Spider-Versity* miniseries as “a starting gun”, Watters returns Jess to her sleuthing roots. “Everyone takes a different approach with her,” he says. “She's been a superhero and a secret agent, but there's just so much to mine with the private investigator angle. She could be lazily stereotyped as a femme fatale, but it feels far more fun to have her become the PI instead.”

Emphasising how “she's not intrinsically connected to Peter Parker or a radioactive spider”, Watters notes that Jess's powers and origin are very different to most other Spider heroes. “Her life has been defined by a push-pull between different parts of the Marvel Universe,” she says. “A bit cosmic, a bit black magic, a bit mad science.”

Describing it as “an extremely New York story”, Watters teams up Jess with ace reporter Ben Urich, with whom she has some history. “I've lived here for a few years now and I've been waiting for an excuse to write about the city,” says Watters. “It's a grisly detective story, allowing us to get in and out while leaving you with some understanding of who Jess is.”

Spider-Woman 50th Anniversary Special is out now.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

A "depraved gooner incel" summons the Chatterer.

Dark Judges

Pinhead and his fellow Cenobites return in **Hellraiser: Resurrections**

WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

AHEAD OF A NEW monthly title next year, BOOM! Studios are first returning Clive Barker's Cenobites to comics in *Hellraiser: Resurrections*.

A series of five self-contained one-shots, it starts with writer Mike Costa and artist Paco Carnallonga's *New Wounds*, in which an investigation into the classic puzzle box opens up a gate to Hell, and an infernal new member is introduced to the ranks of the demonic collective.

"It's not a typical Cenobite as we usually imagine it; it's more of a fire being that conveys great power and lots of evil," teases Carnallonga. "It really fits my style and aesthetic as I love conveying lots of emotion, tension and violence in my drawings, and being able to create this new fire character has felt like a great responsibility and a great honour that one of my designs will be a part of this iconic saga."

Like the other remaining issues, Zac Thompson and Gavin

Mitchell's *The Onanistic Ritual* highlights a specific Cenobite. It centres on a fanatical 'looksmaxxer' who becomes obsessed with the Chatterer after watching a snuff movie of his apparent death. "The Chatterer is a brutal enforcer, who's visually terrifying and can't speak," explains Thompson. "Our story looks at a depraved 'gooner' incel who finds themselves with the puzzle box. This gooner is on a collision course with Chatterer. Meanwhile, Chatterer is pulling himself together after his violent demise during the events of *Hellbound: Hellraiser 2*, and the way the stories intersect is the heart of the issue."

"Even though Chatterer can't talk, Zac makes him speak volumes," adds Mitchell. "It was a hell of a lot of fun to draw his



"Number one diva" Pinhead is the star of one issue.

rebirth and the demise of others by his hand/teeth. I also found it interesting the way these two characters are on ascending/descending paths, and so I tried to incorporate that theme into my art, as well as making the gooner as morbidly authentic as possible."

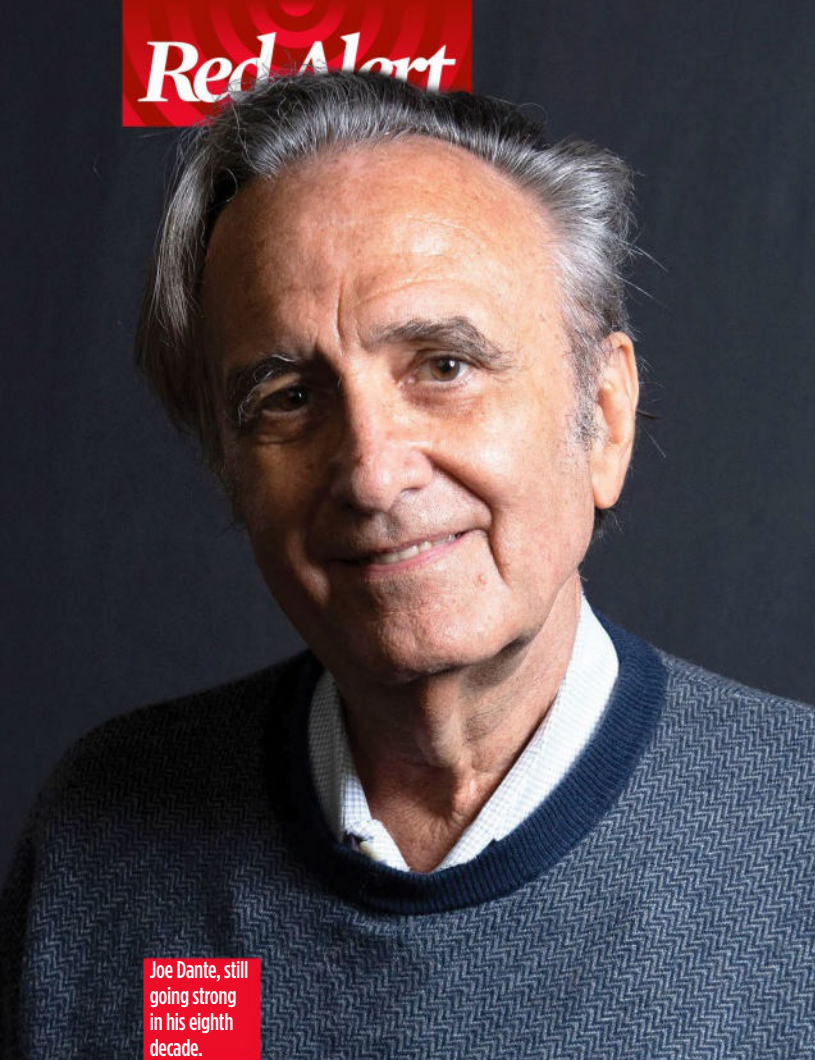
Describing him as "the number one diva of the *Hellraiser* universe", Sarah Gailey's *The Return Of The Priest* focuses on the Cenobites' leader Pinhead, and involves his original identity, World War One British soldier Elliot Spencer. "Pinhead possesses powerful sadomasochistic impulses, which are enhanced by his true belief in the value of his work, and in this story he discovers how deep that belief runs – and what you can change

about a person who learns to worship," explains Gailey. "Clive Barker has a particular understanding of the appeal of casual, effortless cruelty, and in writing *Hellraiser*, I'm pushing myself as hard as possible to rise to that cruelty."

Believing that "a detailed, violent, classical eroticism would be important to the end product," Gailey found the perfect collaborator in artist Alessio Avallone. "Alessio approached the brief with precisely the correct eye for the correct details," continues Gailey. "His work is focused intently on the body – as a vessel for pleasure, for pain and for beautiful lines. He has brought the same lens to this work that Pinhead brings to his work. It has been such a sight to behold." ●

Hellraiser: Resurrections – New Wounds is out now. The Onanistic Ritual is out 9 September. The Return Of The Priest is out 30 September.

SCI-FACT! The other one-shots: *The Deep Gospel* features the Female Cenobite, while *Hell's Council* follows on from *Hellbound: Hellraiser II*.



Joe Dante, still going strong in his eighth decade.



Corey Feldman (left) and Zach Galligan with Dante in 1983.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Dante's (Development) Inferno

A glimpse at the unmade projects of cult director

Joe Dante

WORDS: **MATT MAYTUM**

➔ FEW FILMMAKERS HAVE A LIST of unmade projects as exciting as Joe Dante's, the director behind *Gremlins*, *Innerspace* and more. "I have more unmade films than I have made films," he jokes with *SFX* when we catch up in April 2026. We couldn't pass up the opportunity to grill him on some of those projects that never saw the light of day, kicking off with one that has recently been unearthed... sort of.

GREMLINS: THE ROUGH CUT
Gremlins has been a Christmas perennial since

its 1984 release. But fans got excited about Mogwai all over again when Dante found the VHS tapes featuring the three-hour assembly cut of the film, which he handed over to the *Gremlins* Museum and curator Ian Grant. Though rough, unfinished and with limited sound, the footage was salvaged by Grant into a watchable edit featuring deleted scenes and alternate takes.

"I sent [the footage] to him and he made a compilation that runs the same running time as *Once Upon A Time In The West*, if you can imagine that many gremlins," laughs Dante. "It takes an hour for gremlins to even show up. But he did a wonderful job. He took Jerry's [Goldsmith] music and he took some of the sound effects and used them, and he made a very credible presentation, which is interesting for people who like the movie."

Dante recently introduced a

screening of the assemblage to a group of horror filmmakers and superfans in LA, but it's unlikely to get a wide release any time soon. "My view is that if it ever does see the light of day, it would probably be when the next *Gremlins* movie comes out, they might wanna use it as an advertising tool. I think a DVD extra is its future."

LITTLE SHOP OF HALLOWEEN HORRORS

Dante cut his teeth as a director under the guidance of the legendary producer Roger Corman. One of the last things

Corman wanted to make before his death in 2024 was a new version of the horror-comedy musical, but it never got off the ground, and will remain unmade. "One of his last plans was to make

Rick Moranis in Frank Oz's *Little Shop Of Horrors* (1986).

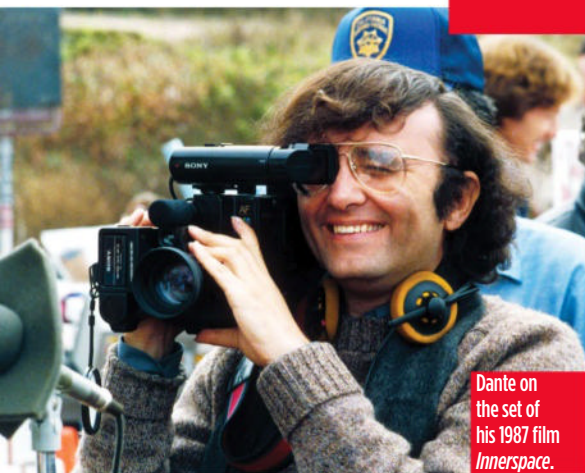




Behind the camera on *Twilight Zone: The Movie*.



Gremlins offers up a not-so-silent night.



Dante on the set of his 1987 film *Innerspace*.



Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, the stars that got away.

another version of *Little Shop Of Horrors*," explains Dante. "I got Charles S Haas, who wrote *Matinee* and *Gremlins 2*, to write the script, and it just didn't work out for various reasons. So it's another notch that's not up."

THE MUMMY

A cinema staple, which has seen recent versions such as the Tom Cruise-starring misfire and Lee Cronin's 2026 take, *The Mummy* was once nearly a Dante movie. "I had a version of *The Mummy* that John Sayles wrote that I thought was pretty good," explains

Dante. "But it was a modern take on it. Sidney Sheinberg, the head of Universal, said, 'Well, it should be a period picture, like the first movie.' It was like, 'Sid, it's your studio. You're supposed to know that [the original was made in] 1932. It was a contemporary movie!'"

BATMAN

Another of the big almost-made movies of Dante's career was *Batman*, which he nearly directed before Tim Burton landed the gig. "I was asked to do that right after *Gremlins* because I was suddenly hot," recalls Dante.

"I had to go to the studio and say 'I don't believe in Batman'"

"There was a different script by Tom Mankiewicz, so it's not the one that Tim [Burton] ended up filming."

However, there was a big roadblock for Dante, personally. "I met Bob Kane and I did some preliminary research, and the problem was that I woke up one night and I realised, 'I'm not the guy to do this picture because I only like the Joker. I don't believe in Batman. I just don't buy it.'" Dante had John Lithgow, who he had worked with on *The Twilight Zone*, in mind as the Joker.

"I had to go to [the studio] and say, 'I hate to tell you this guys, but I think I'm the wrong guy to do this picture. They said, 'What? Are you crazy? You're nuts, throwing away this great opportunity.' I said, 'I'm telling you, if I make the movie, I won't like it and you won't like it. You've got to get somebody who believes in Batman to do it.' Then the whole thing fell apart, and eventually they made it with Tim with a different script."

AND THE REST...

When *SFX* asks if there's one that got away that Dante particularly wishes he had made, he responds, "I would've liked to make *Termite Terrace*, which is about [Looney Tunes animator] Chuck Jones at Warner Bros in the '30s, but they made *Space Jam* instead."

He also nearly paid homage to his filmmaking mentor Roger Corman in a film about the making of *The Trip* (1967). "[It] came close to being made twice and it didn't happen. Listen, my career is filled with unmade movies. As any director you talk to will tell you, sometimes they were made, by other people." ●

Innerspace is out now on Limited Edition 4K UHD.

SCI-FACT! A frequent collaborator with Kathleen Kennedy, Dante's never come close to making a *Star Wars* film: "I'm not a *Star Wars* person."

PHOTOGRAPH BY VALERIE MACGREGG/GETTY IMAGES. PHOTOS BY WARNER BROS./KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK, MOVIESTORE/SHUTTERSTOCK, EVERETT COLLECTION INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

► **SCI-FACT!** Stu and Jack appear to bear a resemblance to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who created much of the Marvel Universe.



A real rogues' gallery of the series' madcap world.

Dynamic Duo

Veteran comic creators reunite in *Matrix* artist Steve Skroce's series **Tales Of Wonder** WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL



HAVING PROVIDED STORYBOARDS for the Wachowskis on numerous films, including all four *Matrix* movies, Steve Skroce is channelling his experiences in both Hollywood and the comic book industry into his new miniseries for Skybound Entertainment. But rather than more

dramatic fictional comics histories such as Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures Of Kavalier And Clay*, *Tales Of Wonder* – which centres on comics veterans Stu Reed and Jake Crumsby, whose famous characters come to life – takes its main influence from a more irreverent source.

“The Holy Trinity of inspirations for *Tales Of Wonder* are films like *Three Amigos*, *Tropic Thunder* and especially *Galaxy Quest*,” Skroce tells *SFX*. “Having creators go on a real action adventure, the kind of adventure that they create in the work, has always appealed to me. It’s a parallel universe comic book biz, and some events are referenced that sound similar to real-life comics history, but you won’t see any *Spidey* or *Absolute Batman* in the background anywhere.”

Stu and Jake first collaborate during World War Two, but creative differences cause them to go their separate ways. They reunite in the present day for the launch of the Freedom Force cinematic universe, only for their heroes to appear and embroil them in a desperate attempt to save the world. “We meet Stu and Jake as old men, and then at the end of the first issue the heroes use a serum to young-ify them for the big mission,” explains Skroce. “Stu and Jake befriended the heroes back in World War Two after the creators were ‘magically infected’ by the story’s villain, Atum Black. Black and the heroes were dead-landed on an alien world, leaving Stu and Jake behind on Earth, where they used their adventures as inspiration for the Wonder Comics Empire.”

“Now Black has returned, and needs Stu and Jake to summon his dark God that’ll make Hell

“There are a couple of my own epic falling outs weaved in”

on Earth. The duo’s magical infection was really Black hiding a fragment of his world-ending spell within them. Now the heroes, who have also recently returned, need to protect Stu and Jake from Black or the world will end.”

While “they all have their own little twist that makes them their own”, Skroce has drawn on classic superhero archetypes for the heroes. “The Ugly American fits that super-soldier mould, while Dragovexia is a witch with demonic magical power,” he says. “And Fly-Boy and Man-Bear are both products of science experiments that went awry.”

“Weaved into every panel”, Skroce has also incorporated “little bits” of his own personal dealings. “There are a couple of my own epic falling outs with creator friends, which have informed the drawings and the dialogue – modified for humour or drama, of course,” he says. “We get some mileage over the division of credit and labour. But at its core, it’s about two friends getting a second chance to get it right, and it’s about recognising the magic that can come from creative collaboration, and it’s about forgiveness and knowing having your friends back can mean more than a paycheque or position or status.” ●

Tales Of Wonder is out now.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

A 1970s-style Spawn, as designed by Mark Spears.

Costume Drama

It's back to "scary and dangerous" 1970s New York in this reimagined **Spawn** comic

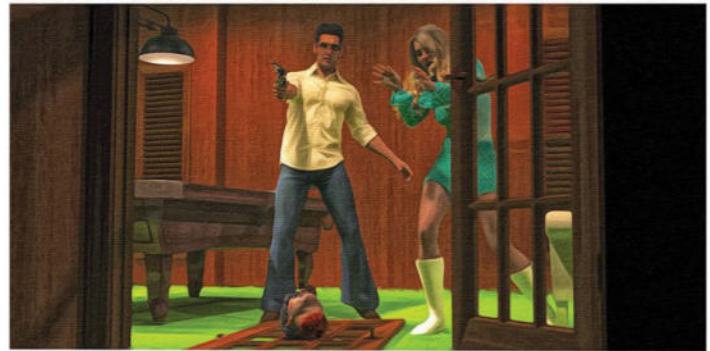
WORDS: STEPHEN JEWELL

➔ NEARLY 50 YEARS after Todd McFarlane first created *Spawn* as a teenager, the original costume that he drew in 1977 is set to star in a new miniseries. Premiering with an extra-long 64-page issue, *Spawn 77* was actually the idea of McFarlane's co-writer Mark Spears, who lavishly illustrates the three-parter in the same fully painted style as his own *Mark Spears Monsters*.

"I saw the Spawn suit online, and even though you're talking about 16-year-old Todd who hasn't yet had all the experience at Marvel and DC, it still had something really cool about it with all the little details like the mask, the eyes and the boots with little skulls on them," recalls Spears. "Then, around 2023, I was

wondering, 'What would it look like if I did it today?' So I did a little test picture, put it on social media and it just blew up, and that's when I first talked to Todd about it. Now I'm doing *Spawn 77* with Todd, which is a dream. And they say don't meet your heroes..."

"If you look at the original design, it's pretty rudimentary as it's based on classic comic book designs with gloves, belt, boots and a mark on the chest, which was an 'S' like the Spider-Man or Batman symbol, and a cape and mask, which was pretty cliché stuff," continues McFarlane. "Then, around 1992, I broke into the comic book industry, graduated and got a bit of fame and fortune, and then we went off and started Image Comics, so I had to upgrade the character."



Drawing on many iconic '70s films, including *The French Connection*, *The Godfather*, *Rocky* and *Shaft*, the story takes place in 1977 New York, which in McFarlane's words was quite "cruel, scary and dangerous in certain spots" at the time. "We wanted to reflect the time period and the atmosphere of where it's set and for New York to be like a character in itself," explains Spears, who refuses to reveal the identity of *Spawn 77* himself.

"We were trying to figure out how to make him into another Spawn when Todd goes, 'The only way this is going to work is he needs to *not* be a Spawn, because that story's already been told', as no matter what you do, when you

put someone else in that suit, it's still Al Simmons," continues Spears. "So Todd said, 'Why don't you make him someone pretending to be Spawn?'"

"I said it can't be a 100% true Hellspawn because in 1992 Al comes along, and I don't want there to be a Hellspawn every 15 years," adds McFarlane. "By this point in 2026, there's over 350 issues of *Spawn*, so the mythology of Spawn and the lore of the Hellspawn has been going on for centuries. So somebody could find out about that, even if you thought it was like somebody following the theory of Bigfoot. You don't have to believe it's true, but it's there." ●

Spawn 77 is out on 9 September.

➔ **SCI-FACT!** Having sent his first submission to McFarlane as a 17-year-old in 1992, Spears's first professional job was a *Spawn* cover in 2023.



Director Jake Schreier (left) and the all-new *X-Men* cast were unveiled at Disney's D23 fan event in California.

➔ The mutants are among us! Marvel Studios has officially unveiled the cast of **The X-Men**. Joining Sadie Sink as Jean Grey is Christopher Abbott as Professor X, Kit Connor as Cyclops, Maya Boyd as Storm and Samara Weaving as Emma Frost. *Obsession*'s breakout star Inde Navarrette is our new Rogue, while Adam Driver plays the nefarious Mr Sinister. *Thunderbolts*' Jake Schreier directs. Expect Cerebro to go into overload on 5 May 2028.



➔ Disney+ has cancelled the proposed second season of Marvel's **Wonder Man**.

➔ *Outlander*'s Caitriona Balfe is teaming with Alfonso Cuarón on new Apple TV series **Ascension**, based on Adam Nevill's novel *Last Days*.

➔ **Interview With The Vampire** has been renewed for a fourth season, one set to adapt Anne Rice's novel *Queen Of The Damned*.

➔ Nathan Fillion will reprise Guy Gardner in **Mister Miracle**, the upcoming DC animated series based on the character created by Jack Kirby.

➔ Disney is developing an anime series based on video game franchise **Kingdom Hearts**.

➔ **It: Welcome To Derry** has been renewed for a second season, set in 1935.

➔ *Tenet*'s John David Washington stars in NYC-set supernatural horror **Mime**, directed by Nikiyatu Jusu.

➔ *Alien: Romulus* star David Jonsson will play the son of T'Challa in **Black Panther III**. Letitia Wright is back as Shuri, while Ryan Coogler returns to direct. Wakanda awaits on 15 December 2028.

➔ *Scream*'s Mason Gooding and *One Piece*'s Emily Rudd will star in the sequel to 2019's **Crawl**. Alexandre Aja returns to direct as

the scaly, ravenous action relocates to a hurricane-struck New York.

➔ Gareth Edwards has stepped down as director for the **Jurassic World Rebirth** sequel. We can apparently blame a creativedifferenceosaurus.

➔ **The Mummy**'s Oded Fehr and Kevin J O'Connor reunite with Brendan Fraser, Rachel Weisz and John Hannah in the fourth instalment of the franchise.

➔ Zak Penn is writing a sequel to 2018's **Ready Player One**.

➔ Mary Holland from the American version of *Ghosts* is the female lead in the **Jimmy Olsen** TV series.

➔ Kumail Nanjiani will star in and make his directing debut on werewolf comedy **Howl**.

➔ An animated **Warhammer 40,000** series is in development with Henry Cavill attached as executive producer. It spins off from the 2024 episode of Prime Video anthology series *Secret Level* set in that universe.

➔ The late Sam Neill will make a posthumous appearance in the live-action **The Legend Of Zelda** movie, currently targeting a 30 April 2027 release.

➔ TikTok filmmaker Savanah Moss will bring viral icon **Jeff The Killer** to the big screen.

➔ Sam Raimi is producing a movie adaptation of Stephen King's 1996 novel **Desperation**. *Final Destination: Bloodlines* helming duo Zach Lipovsky and Adam B Stein are onboard to direct.

➔ Hasbro and Working Title are reportedly developing a movie based on UK toy legend **Action Man**. The search is on for a star with realistic hair... 🕒

➔ Ryan Gosling will rock the flaming skull of hellfire in Marvel's **Ghost Rider**. Directed by his *Star Wars*: *Starfighter* collaborator Shawn Levy, it's due to burn up the highway in 2028.



MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY, KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY

► **SCI-FACT!** Tommy Knight's chaperone on *The Sarah Jane Adventures* until he was 18 was his mother – taking hundreds of photographs.

NEW AUTHOR

BEN SHEPHERD

MEET THE FORMER POLICY ANALYST BEHIND VAMPIRE THRILLER *BLOOD DRUNK*



JONNY DONOVAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Freddie Burns is too smart to get a job, too cynical to drop out and too lazy to leave South London. Then a vampire eats his uncle, Freddie finds out he can do death magic, and he's forced to choose between saving the world and going to the pub.

Was there any particular spark of inspiration?

→ Three things: vampires that felt right for London – not the floppy kind that sparkle – magic but no wands, and a hero that was anything but a long-lost prince. Then I aimed for something I'd be pleased to find in a bookshop – action, jokes, swearing – and went for it.

How long did the book take to write?

→ I wrote the bones of it in about three months – all the main ideas and people were there very quickly. The rest took a decade, on and off, chipping away at the characters and endlessly rejigging the structure.

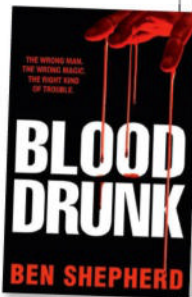
Did you have to do much in the way of research?

→ Almost none. The good thing about magic and vampires is that you get to make up your own – no one owns the canon. And the book is set in a version of the '90s South London where I grew up, so it was more about getting the feeling right.

Any advice for would-be authors?

→ Get out of your own way. There's nothing wrong with easy – start with something you already know and go from there. Depth, meaning, theme – all of that will come if you concentrate on the characters.

Blood Drunk is out on 24 September, published by Tor.



Gotham's Finest

The best Dark Knight film, *Batman Returns*, is immortalised in brick form as the Batmobile – and Batmissile – gets a long-overdue Lego release. Visit lego.com



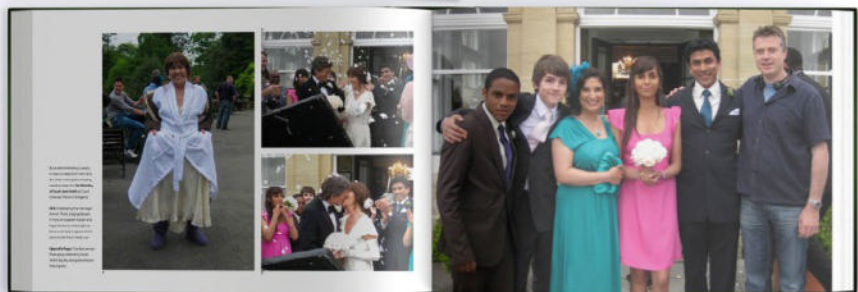
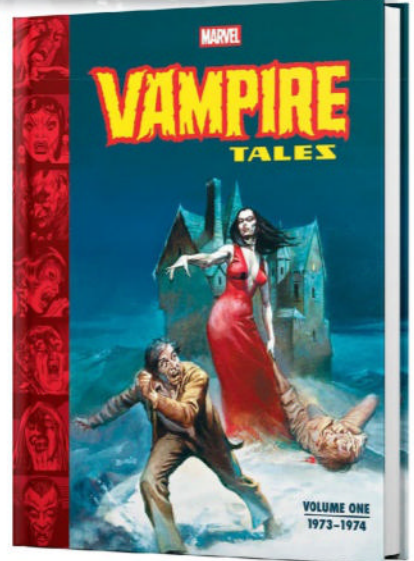
Tomorrow's Times

The *Radio Times* anniversary *Doctor Who* specials from 1973 and 1983 are back in November, in remastered hardback form, lovingly recreated by the team at Big Finish. They love restoring. Visit bigfinish.com



Bite Back

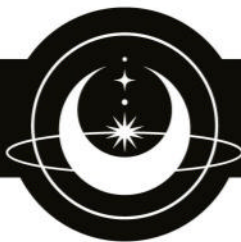
Get ahead of spooky season with this Dark Horse Comics collection of *Vampire Tales*, from 1973-1974. Yes, Marvel used to do horror comics! Visit darkhorse.com



Luke-In

Have you ever wanted over 350 behind-the-scenes photos from *The Sarah Jane Adventures*? Then you're in luck – Roundel Books are releasing *Adventures On Bannerman Road*, featuring images by Tommy Knight's mum. Visit roundelbooks.co.uk

THE FINAL



FRONTIER

CHUCK RUSSELL 1952-2026

The man behind *The Mask*

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD

An unmasked
Chuck Russell in
February 1995.



“I’M ALL ABOUT entertainment,” declared director, screenwriter and producer Chuck Russell, who had a showman’s instinct for incorporating next-level spectacle into his work. “I don’t want to school my audience”, he said, preferring to wow them instead.

Born Charles Raymond Russell in Park Ridge, Illinois, he graduated in his home state before relocating to California to pursue a career in movies. He began as a production manager and assistant director on such grindhouse fare as *Carquake* (1976) before serving as line producer on supernatural horror *The Hearse* (1980). As an executive producer, 1981’s occult slasher *Hell Night* brought him into the orbits of *The Exorcist* star Linda Blair and future creative collaborator Frank Darabont.

Russell’s first screenplay sale was *Dreamscape* (1984), while *A Nightmare On Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (1987) marked an equally reality-bending directorial debut. “I wanted to take Freddy into a scarier space, but also

a funnier space,” said Russell, who expanded the innate surrealism of the blade-gloved franchise with groundbreaking visual effects. Scripted by Russell, the film earned more at the box office than the two previous entries combined. *The Blob* followed in 1988, a loving retread of the ’50s drive-in sci-fi/horror classic.

The Mask (1994) would be Russell’s most commercially successful movie. Based on the Dark Horse comic book, it was conceived as a more horror-tinged take before Russell amped up the comedy, mixing physical and digital effects to establish a whole new benchmark in VFX buffoonery. The film made international stars of Jim Carrey and Cameron Diaz.

The Scorpion King (2002) spun off from *The Mummy* franchise and gave The Rock his first leading role. “I knew Dwayne Johnson would be a big star, and I had a lot of fun trying to develop his brand,” said Russell, whose later credits included the 2010 *Fringe* episode “The Abducted” and 2024 horror remake *Witchboard*. ●



Hayden
Panettiere as
Heroes’s lead
Claire Bennet.

HAYDEN PANETTIERE 1989-2026

● Born in Palisades, north of New York, Hayden Panettiere made her screen debut in a toy commercial at just 11 months. A part in daytime soap *One Life To Live* followed when she was four years old, and she went on to voice Dot in animated fantasy *A Bug’s Life* (1998) and Suri in *Dinosaur* (2000).

The role of indestructible high school cheerleader Claire Bennet in *Heroes* made Panettiere’s name in 2006. Her character was crucial to Tim Kring’s ensemble superhero saga – “Save the cheerleader, save the world” became the show’s immortal slogan – and she played Claire across all four seasons. “It was like a dream come true,” she remembered.

Earning two Golden Globe nominations for playing a rising country star on *Nashville*, Panettiere was also part of the *Scream* franchise as horror fan Kirby Reed in *Scream 4* (2011). The character returned in 2023’s *Scream VI*, now battling Ghostface as an FBI agent.

REGGIE BANNISTER 1945-2026

● American horror actor and musician best known for playing heroic ice cream vendor Reggie in the *Phantasm* series. He also composed the song “Have You Seen It” for *Phantasm IV: Oblivion*.

KAYLEE HOTTLE 2008-2026

● Deaf American actor of Korean descent who made her film debut in *Godzilla vs Kong* (2021) and reprised the role of Jia for the sequel *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* (2024), earning a Saturn Award nomination.

FRANCIS DEMANGE/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY

MITCH HAASETH/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY

MORE

HORROR

THAN

ANYONE

ELSE

**THE UK'S LARGEST FREE
STREAMING SERVICE**

tubi



VISIONQUEST

RAGE

AGAINST

THE

SHOWRUNNER
TERRY MATALAS
EXPLAINS HOW HE
BROUGHT VISION BACK
TO LIFE IN

WORDS:
TARA BENNETT





FIVE YEARS AGO, MARVEL STUDIOS MADE ITS STREAMING Disney+ debut with *WandaVision*, a high-concept ode to grief and sitcoms that finally gave Marvel Cinematic Universe supporting characters Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) and Vision (Paul Bettany) a meaty vehicle in which to shine. The limited series ended with Scarlet Witch/Wanda accepting reality, de-magicking the town of Westview, ending her conjured version of Vision, then going into hiding. Meanwhile, a SWORD (Sentient Weapon Observation And Response Division) reactivated White Vision absorbed magic Vision's memories and flew away.

And away White Vision has remained through MCU Phases Four through Six, finally returning in October for his own Disney+ series, *VisionQuest*. While comic book writer John Byrne wrote a "Vision Quest" arc in 1989's *West Coast Avengers*, this series is the brainchild of creator/showrunner Terry Matalas (*Star Trek:*

Picard), who exited the final frontier to enter the MCU.

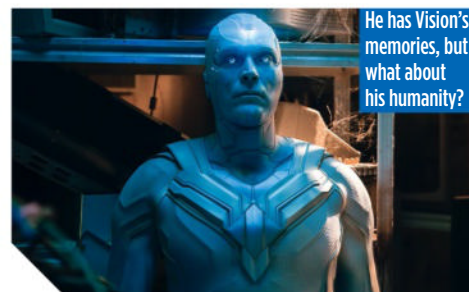
Matalas tells *SFX* that by late 2023, he was looking for his next project when Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige, also a *Trek* fan, brought him in for a meeting. "He had seen *Picard* season three, and mostly just wanted to talk *Star Trek*. And I mostly wanted to talk about Marvel," Matalas chuckles. *WandaVision* creator Jac Schaeffer had exited *VisionQuest* to make the series *Agatha All Along*, which opened the door for Matalas to pitch Feige and head of streaming, television and animation Brad Winderbaum his idea for the follow-up series.



After 11 years, James Spader (left) returns to the MCU.

that he has been remade? And how much of the old him is in there? How much is new?"

Matalas says that in the pitch he compared White Vision's journey to the mind-wiped Spock (Leonard Nimoy) in 1986's *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, and added the novel twist of reintroducing Vision's maker, the artificial intelligence robot, Ultron (James Spader), from 2015's *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*. Feige and Winderbaum were excited, but Matalas had to first sell his concept to Bettany, then Spader.



He has Vision's memories, but what about his humanity?

THE ROBOT SHOW

"No one's a bigger fan of *WandaVision* than me, and I think when you see *VisionQuest* that'll be loud and clear," Matalas says of his excitement to continue Vision's story. "It's extraordinary to jump into something that you were a fan of – not only of Marvel and Vision, but Paul Bettany, who is one of my bucket list actors."

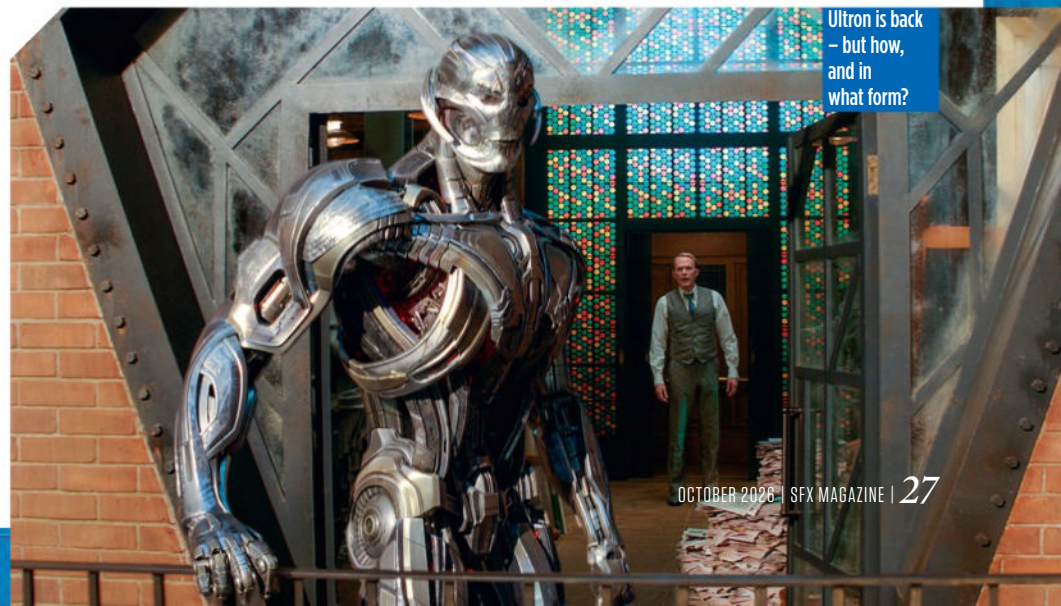
Matalas flew to New York to personally soft-pitch the actor his idea for the series, while hoping to incorporate Bettany's objectives as well. "Paul and I were so creatively aligned, it's →



Marvel's assorted AI incarnations team up.

Informed that Olsen had retired from the MCU and would not be part of this series, Matalas says he instead thought about finally getting granular about Vision having a choice in determining his place in the universe. "It felt like this was a guy who was on a quest for his identity," Matalas says of the White Vision who disappeared from Westview. "Who is he now

“Who is he now he has been remade? How much of the old him is there? How much is new?”



Ultron is back – but how, and in what form?

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE

Paul Bettany finally gets to dive into Vision's mind

VisionQuest went on quite the journey to get made. Were you ever worried that it wouldn't reach the screen?

► In the general scheme of running one of those big studios, things don't necessarily happen at the time that you think they're going to happen, and that can be frustrating. But I've never found it ever to not have been beneficial because you end up thinking things through, and it goes through different iterations. There was a time when I thought I'd be making this with [*WandaVision* creator] Jac Schaeffer, and you can imagine I felt like the rug had been pulled under my feet when that turned out not to be the case. But the truth is, 24 hours after I spoke to Jaq, I met with Terry [Matalas], who flew into New York, and we had lunch together. I had had such an amazing process with Jaq, and Matt Shakman too, so I was nervous. But we really hit it off, and he had really great ideas. It was fantastic, actually. I guess what I'm saying is that as much as you try to control things, life is curly.

What hadn't been explored about the character of Vision that particularly interested you when approaching *VisionQuest*?

► I felt like there are a couple of things that you can do with robots. One of them is, "I'm a real boy now," and I felt like we'd done that, as that's really the heart of Vision. The other thing, of course, is *Frankenstein*. "What am I here for? What made me? What is my purpose?" I thought that some mixture of that would be great, and [Matalas] was super excited

by that idea. Consequently, we have ended up with a show that has a lot of male energy. So much of our time is spent talking about sort of toxic male energy, and this is really positive male energy about fathers and sons and grandfathers having a conversation in the wonderful broad church that Marvel is, and that comic books in general are, but wrapped up with full-on action, high drama and emotional entertainment.

Why has *Vision* been worth revisiting for you for almost two decades?

► What I have noticed over the years is that the people who are attracted to Vision are the people I was when I was at school. It's the misfits. It's the ones that were bullied. The ones that felt always on the outside and wondering how they might fit in this world. That's exactly how I felt as a child, and it's exactly how the children and adults that come to me to talk about Vision feel.

Is this series the bookend to *WandaVision* in that we get to discover what makes him tick?

► Yes, *WandaVision* is very much from Wanda's point of view. I guess that's really what we're trying to get to in *VisionQuest*: what is the crux of Vision? What is he for? What does he want to do and be? This is absolutely from Vision's point of view, and that's a first, and I love that.

Where do we first find Vision?

► The Vision, in quite a discreet, incognito way, is observing the world. Then at night, when everybody else goes to bed, he goes into his mind space, where he lives in this very peculiar, cool mansion with all these other characters. He downloads and discusses what has happened to him, what he has experienced during the day, and what meaning they might have. These AIs that he has inside of his head – Ultron, EDITH, JARVIS, DUM-E and U, and FRIDAY – he can bounce his questions off and his ideas, and that's just fun stuff.

Ultron's back – how was it reuniting with James Spader to evolve the characters of Vision and Ultron?

► I find James Spader to be delicious. He's a surprising human being, and he's surprising on set. I had really high hopes that he would just say yes; that it was eccentric enough an idea that it would appeal to him, and it did. To have James Spader in the flesh in this show is fantastic. It's all taking place inside my head, with him as this sort of father figure/psychotherapist/psychotic. It was so much fun. Those scenes really form the spine of the show.

In *WandaVision*, it's revealed that White Vision was rebuilt to be a weapon for SWORD. Do they want him back?

► Vision is trying to put these memories that he has been given and attach them to some feelings, trying to re-understand humanity. But all that gets thrown out the window the moment a bounty is put on his head and he is forced out into the world.

Do you see potential for more Vision stories/seasons in the future?

► We start off the show where we left him as White Vision, who has been repurposed as a weapon. I think that where we get to at the end of this, he's clearly escaped the confines of whoever repurposed him, and he is looking for agency. By the end of our show, I think you'll see that it's a really exciting springboard for what Vision might do in the future.



Bettany has been a part of the MCU since the very start.





Star Trek: Picard's
Orla Brady plays
AI assistant
FRIDAY.

uncanny," he remembers. "What was important to Paul was something that I think is inherent to the character, which is that [Vision] is the outsider, the oddball who is looking out at humanity trying to figure out can he connect. The old Vision did that better, and this new one, because of everything that has happened, is struggling with that.

"And what's great about that is that's exactly where we wanted to find this character," Matalas continues. "We both had the same desire for the journey we wanted to take him on, and where we knew we wanted to end with him. He's everything you love about the old Vision. He's got his struggle, but is not necessarily like, 'Rah-rah, human beings!' And that's what we'll find out in the show, in this journey to self-discovery. How he feels about humanity is maybe a little different than the original Vision. So he's brought some of the [MCU] AIs to help him decipher who we all are out there in the real world as humans, and whether or not he can connect with us."

Matalas says it was then time to sit down with Spader, who hadn't had a conversation

about this controversial robot in a decade. "He sat down, I think a little mystified, but curious," the showrunner remembers. "He's like, 'What are you *planning*?' And then I told him the whole story. By the time we were done with lunch, he was like, 'I want to do this. This is going to be fantastic.' And that's



Ruaridh
Mollica (right)
as Tommy
Maximoff.



Vision
frequently
disappears
into his mind.

“It really has to be this father/son triangular relationship with Vision, Ultron and Tommy”

good, because I didn't have another idea," Matalas laughs.

"It really had to be this father/son triangular relationship with Vision, Ultron and Tommy Maximoff [Ruaridh Mollica]," Matalas continues about the emotional core of the series. "You have a case of a father who is going through an identity crisis, and a son who is also going through one. But are they father and son? Are they not? It is a question that will be answered."

How they get those answers will be the fun part, as Matalas structured *VisionQuest* to continue the surrealistic approach of *WandaVision*, letting the audience work out the mysteries as the series unfolds in this heightened reality. A robot in flux, Vision exists straddling two realities – the real world, where he's hiding from SWORD, and the interior world of his mind, which is populated with an evolved version of Ultron, along with every other AI that's been introduced into the MCU.

"It's the robot show," Matalas says. "This one gives the robots their due, all of them, going all the way back to DUM-E [Henry Lewis] and U [Jonathan Sayer] from the *Iron Man* series, to EDITH [Emily Hampshire] and even JARVIS [James D'Arcy]. They're all family and they have the ability, because they're AI, to exist where they need to exist."

For the first time, the AI that have been technically integral to the existence of →

PRODIGAL SON

Ruaridh Mollica debuts as Tommy Maximoff

What can you tell us about where we first meet Tommy?

► We meet Thomas Shepherd as a hurt young man. He's a grifter, he's a small-time thief, he's a bit of an artful dodger at the time, and he's lost in his life. He's looking for a purpose and he ends up on the road with Vision. And that's probably all I can say for now.

Can you talk about the father/son relationship?

► The show follows an incredible father/son relationship in all aspects. You've got Ultron involved in the show who's almost a strange figure for Vision as well, and it is a beautiful moment of... yeah, I don't know if I can talk about that!

Where were you when you found out you had the role?

► Oh my god... when I found out I actually got the role, I was in London and I'd just come out of dinner in a restaurant. We left pretty quickly because I was getting a call from my agent, and I was literally walking along the street. It was quite late at this point, maybe 9pm, I guess because everyone else was on American hours. It was actually an unknown California number, and I went, "Oh my God, this might be it." I get the call, and then my American manager, in the most movie-like way, was like, "Your life's about to change, kid." And I literally broke down. Oh my God, I'm actually getting emotional talking about it now, but I literally just broke down in tears. It was raining a bit, and I was just sitting on this wall crying. My partner was there and it was the most surreal feeling in my life. My knees just buckled.

It's one of those things as an actor – I maybe only ever had one other Marvel audition in my whole time of getting auditions. When they come through it's like a lottery ticket, almost.

What was the previous audition for?

► I don't know; it was all fake names, sides, fake everything. So I actually will never, never know.



Did anybody give you advice about being part of the MCU?

► Paul Bettany, for sure. Stepping into this world, my screen test was with Paul before I even got the job. Even just trying to understand what was going on, because before my screen test I still didn't really know who my character was properly. Having someone like Paul, who has been part of the MCU for 18 years, anything that I didn't know or was unsure of... Even the first days of filming or rehearsal, I was so anxious and scared and it was all so new and big and exciting, and having Paul by my side, who's able to guide me and tell me about what this actually means and how important this is and these characters are to people... I couldn't have had a better person by my side.

What about the much-discussed Marvel fitness regime?

► Terry's so cool because he just wanted everything to be as human as possible. At the start, if people started working out more, he was like, "Guys, I want everyone to watch this show and just be like, 'These are just real people.'" I can understand that element of you want everyone to be relatable, and if everyone's got six packs or something, that's not as true to reality. There was no pushing or pressure for that. I definitely went to the gym a little bit because I wanted to feel in good shape and, you know, it's Marvel. It's notorious for high-stakes action and stuff. So I wanted to be ready to do that kind of thing. But I didn't actually dive into anything too crazy.

What was the costuming experience like?

► Oh, it's actually incredible. Sarah Young was our costume designer. The storytelling involved in costume in the MCU is *absolutely* mind-boggling. Every detail had a callback to some earlier moment, somewhere in a different series or a different film, every tiny thing on your costume was a reference to something else or some little internal reference to what your character is like, or something like that, and it was a process where we'd sit down and we'd talk about every little thing and get excited by all these ideas, and then Terry would come in and bring something else into that and it was incredible. I've never been in an environment where the creation of costume is something so a) collaborative and b) just its own story in itself. It was quite incredible.

Do you have a Marvel filming moment that you can talk about?

► Some of the moments that were most incredible were the fact that, like with *Agatha All Along* and with *WandaVision*, they really have tried to get so creative in how they do things that almost everything was practically built. I have never been in anything where they've had the ability to do that. So you're stepping into these sets, or you're having to portray these crazy emotions, but it's all doable because the wild room that you're meant to be in has been actually built and you're sitting in it. That is amazing. And also because your brain is so easily fooled, suddenly you're like, "Yep, I'm just here. This is real." For me, those moments were the most incredible, actually just doing the damn thing.

Is Tommy's bisexuality referenced at all in this series?

► I don't know if it's explicitly referenced, but I feel like myself as a bisexual actor embodying Tommy, hopefully that comes through in just personality and self and is something that can be explored in the future.



Will Tommy give us a glimpse of his Speed powers?



It's probably fair to say that Vision isn't in the best place.



Emily Hampshire (right) is the AI EDITH.

characters like Tony Stark, Peter Parker and even Vision will get their broader stories told. "It brought all these really interesting questions that we get to bring to the surface here when we bring them all together," Matalas says of getting to develop the existing stable of AI characters. "Like, FRIDAY was there when Tony Stark died. What's that like for an AI, to not be able to protect the one they're programmed to protect? I guess the [bigger] question is, are they corporeal? Or, are they digital? Are they avatars? Can they be corporeal? Do some characters want to be corporeal? Some definitely do not," he asserts. "But that's a question that the pilot will very quickly answer."

TEASING WANDA?

In the real-world half of the story, Matalas reminds that White Vision is still the lost weapons property of SWORD, and teases that the new bounty hunter character Paladin (Todd Stashwick) will become the bane of the robot's existence. "I can't talk too much about Paladin because of his connection to the plot, but he's on his own journey when we meet him."

What he can talk about is bringing some of his favourite actors into the MCU with him like Stashwick, Hampshire and Orla Brady as the new FRIDAY. "Todd always comes up organically. Everybody is like, 'Oh, you pick a project and figure out how Todd fits into it,' but not really," he clarifies regarding his frequent collaborator and friend. "It's if there's a character that suits him, because I know his

Paul Bettany gets a quick touch-up from make-up.



voice and what he can bring to the table. For Paladin, there was a very distinct idea as to who this bounty hunter is, who plays a pretty big role in comic canon, and who he could be in the MCU."

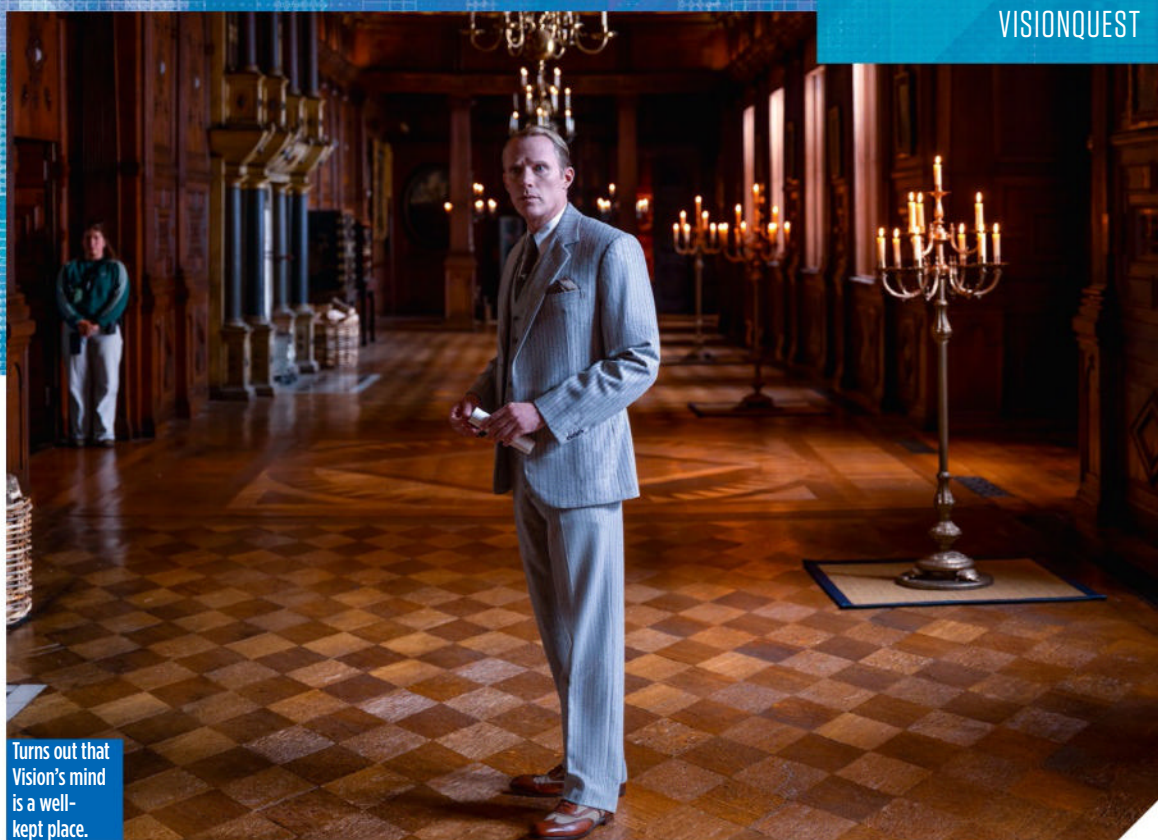
Hampshire, who was in Matalas's series *12 Monkeys*, had no clue about the MCU. "She knew Marvel existed, but she didn't understand it. But then she went and binged it all and became the biggest EDITH and Vision fan. I don't know anybody who loves Ultron more than Emily

“What’s it like for AI to not protect who they’re programmed to protect?”

Hampshire, other than me. Maybe James. James has become quite fond of that guy.

"Then I had worked with Orla Brady on *Picard*, but only briefly because her character left early in the beginning of season three," Matalas says. "She's such a phenomenal actress, that when it became clear we needed somebody for FRIDAY, she was the only one who came to mind."

Since it took so long to get this series made, many will wonder if he was asked to create



Turns out that Vision's mind is a well-kept place.



VisionQuest is described as "a sequel to *WandaVision*".

Enjoy this random close-up of Vision's shoulder.



late in the season that we were running towards, but we didn't know exactly how we would get there. Paul had an amazing idea for the kind of scene it should be. Who he is within that particular scene is kind of amazing, and that we were able to pull that off." He then pauses to clarify, "I want to make sure that people don't think I'm teasing Wanda because I'm not teasing Wanda."

He continues, "The second we wrapped, Paul, James and I were immediately ready to go into 10 more seasons of whatever this could be. But that's up to Marvel Studios and the television gods as to what happens."

"I'm the most proud of this than anything I've ever done. I'm very proud of *Picard* and *12 Monkeys* but I think this is going to be really emotionally satisfying for fans if you've been there from the beginning." ●

VisionQuest is on Disney+ from 14 October.

VisionQuest as a trilogy closer to *WandaVision* and *Agatha All Along*. Matalas says, "No, not really. I would say, if anything, it's definitely more of a sequel to *WandaVision* in a lot of ways. But it really exists on its own. It's more the Vision story, just because we're going to dig into so much of who he is in ways that the films and *WandaVision* couldn't, including

some deeper parts of his origin that may go back even further than what we believed. So it's very much its own entity, but it does obviously touch upon what has come before for this guy."

And it will most certainly set the stage for where Vision could go next in the MCU. Excitedly, Matalas says, "There's a moment



Since *Resident Evil* first infected the PlayStation in 1996, Capcom's survival-horror series has become one of pop culture's most enduring franchises, spawning dozens of games, seven live-action films, five animated features and a television series, as well as comic books and novels. Now it's heading back to the big screen, with *Barbarian* and *Weapons* writer/director Zach Cregger at the helm.

Resident Evil is Cregger's first film based on an existing property, but he tells *SFX* that he had just as much creative freedom as he did on his original features. By the time he approached production company Constantin Film, he already knew the story he wanted to tell. "I pitched: 'Here's the movie. Here's the beginning, here's the middle, here's the end. Here's what I would do with it. Take it or leave it.' And they liked it."

A long-time fan of the games, Cregger wanted his take on *Resident Evil* to feel "fresh". He didn't write it with either newcomers or die-hard fans in mind. "I wrote it for me," he insists. "If I feel I like it and it feels like *Resident Evil* to me, which it does, then okay, I can check the fan box. But if I feel this can stand as a story all by itself – if, let's say, the *Resident Evil* games didn't exist, would this still be a good movie? And yeah, I think it would."

That desire to stand alone explains the back-to-basics title. "It's like, this is *my* version of *Resident Evil*. It feels self-contained, you know? To give it any sort of subtitle or heading underneath it just felt kind of unnecessary. I don't really think of it in relation to the others."

Not that Cregger has much to compare it with: he hasn't seen any of the previous films. ➔

RACECOON RUN

ZACH CREGGER CALLS THE SHOTS
ON HIS "LOVE LETTER" TO
RESIDENT EVIL

WORDS:
ROBBIE DUNLOP



Zombies in a hospital? What could go wrong?

MAN ON A MISSION

Resident Evil follows Bryan (Austin Abrams), a medical courier sent to deliver a cooler to a hospital in Raccoon City, the Midwestern metropolis at the heart of the games' mythology. When he hits a bedraggled woman on a remote woodland road, he stops to help and bundles her into his car. Bad move. As he drives on, it becomes clear that something is very wrong with her – not least because she can't keep her hands to herself. With a deadly virus spreading across the city, Bryan must fight his way past ever more nightmarish zombies and mutants to complete the delivery. The pace, Cregger promises, won't let up.

"You go from the rural first act where he is dealing with all the craziness of the woods, then he gets to the city. He's got to go into the sewers, then up to the streets to get to this hospital in the centre of town, and the hospital's overrun. And then he's got to go up through the hospital to the top floor to deliver the package."

Cregger compares Bryan's mission to the central quest in *The Lord Of The Rings*. "He's on a kind of crusade, like Frodo heading to Mount Doom. He's gotta fight his way into the centre of everything. It's pure outbreak horror until the end of the movie."

Unlike the protagonists of the previous *Resident Evil* films, Bryan is no battle-hardened action hero. He has no experience with guns, and at first misses most of his targets. As the night wears on, though, he improves – much like a player getting the hang of the controls. "It feels like a really fun thing to follow a guy like that through this crazy saga," says Cregger. "It was a great way to enjoy the set-pieces in a new way."

The story unfolds on the first day of the T-virus outbreak, alongside the events of *Resident Evil 2*, the 1998 game that introduced Cregger to the series. But don't expect Leon S Kennedy or Claire Redfield to come into play here. Cregger felt that even a cameo would risk stepping on the game's toes.

"I didn't want to do any kind of fan service," he emphasises.



Flashlight, gun – oh it's *Resident Evil*, alright.

The first casualty of the Raccoon City Run Club.

"I just didn't want to let any of that stuff down. It's like when you read your favourite book and you fall in love with these characters, and then you see a movie adaptation and they get it wrong. I have such a strong, self-contained story here," he adds. "It's better to just keep it simple."

DREAD CENTRAL

This isn't quite the Raccoon City fans of *Resident Evil 2* will remember. Bryan's iPhone – which swiftly loses signal – is the first clue that the action has shifted from 1998 to the present day. The weather has changed too, with the game's rain-soaked streets replaced by snow-covered ones. Cregger took those liberties to "make it a better story", but reassures fans that "the general world is the same". They will immediately "feel that this is a *Resident Evil* movie through and through", he insists.

The camerawork is central to the "authentic experience" Cregger wanted to create. Bryan is often framed from behind, recreating the games' over-the-shoulder perspective.

"You're kind of moving through this space behind him, so you get a really clear sense of the space. As he looks left, the camera swings to look left.

As he looks up, we swing to look up. I also utilise a lot of

first-person shooter angles," he adds. "The games do such a great job of immersing you in the space. I wanted to borrow that visual language to do the same thing."

Several mechanics carry over from the games, including a steady

progression through increasingly powerful weapons. Bryan starts with a pistol taken from an unfortunate police officer – the film's first on-screen casualty – before graduating to a shotgun, an MP5 and heavier firepower. There's even a "save room" where Bryan can catch his breath and reload – complete, of course, with one of *Resident Evil*'s signature typewriters. "For the fans, my whole point was to try and make a movie that felt the way I feel when I play the games," Cregger says. He likens

“I have such a strong, self-contained story here. It's better to just keep it simple”

the film to "one gigantic cutscene".

Gigantic or not, a cutscene cannot hand control to the player. Cregger believes Abrams helps make up for that. "You're following a performance that is really top-notch," he says. "Austin is in every shot of this movie, running around, constantly going through some panic attack. He is so compelling and so much fun to watch that you're entertained by him and, hopefully, by the storytelling, which mitigates that lack of control."

Cregger may favour intimate, contained horror, but he knew *Resident Evil* had to match the scale and scope of its source material. The result, he says, "really swings for the fences". Some sequences are more ambitious than anything he has attempted before, although horror remains the priority. "We lean into dread and atmosphere and tone," he says. "It's really horror first and foremost, and action is secondary."



One carpool too many for Abrams's courier Bryan.



"You can't do *Resident Evil* without gore", says Cregger.



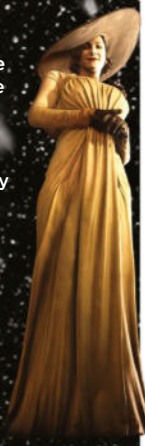
We don't even want to know what these attach to...

GAME OVER, MAN!

Which *Resident Evil* was too much for Zach Cregger?

The *Resident Evil* games have been scaring players for three decades. But have they ever proved too much for Cregger?

"I'm generally not scared by much, but I played *Resident Evil 8* [aka *Resident Evil Village*] with VR on the PlayStation. I did the virtual reality thing and there was a moment where I had to stop because it was too intense for me. So generally I'm not a scaredy-cat, but *Resident Evil 8*, that got me!"



The film is "pretty gory", but Cregger says the bloodshed is never gratuitous. "I'm not a big torture porn guy," he explains. "I don't really love gore for the sake of gore, but you can't do a *Resident Evil* movie and have no gore. That wouldn't be cool. There are moments of pretty shocking stuff in it," he emphasises. "But even if you're weak-kneed and don't love gore, I wouldn't be deterred. You'll make it. You'll survive."

Bryan may not be so lucky. Waiting for him are several familiar threats from the games, including the trusty zombie dogs, along with new mutations created for the film. Cregger won't reveal his favourite – "it's sort of a spoiler" – but he will talk about one of the trickiest to realise: "A creature that is like an amalgam of many people. Like a giant human tumbleweed. I used a lot of physical performers, like Cirque du Soleil people, to approximate it, so we could see how it would move and how it could stop and start and roll correctly," he says. "That was a really fun thing to research and study, and eventually bringing it to life was really, really satisfying."

The creatures combine practical effects and CGI, with performers and props providing the starting point wherever possible. But Cregger's version of the T-virus has its limits. He has steered clear of the series' more fantastical mutations, such as *Resident Evil Requiem*'s 15-foot-tall, childlike monstrosity The Girl. "I wanted to keep this a bit more grounded," he explains. "*Resident Evil Village* uses a lot of magic. People turn into bats and fly away. I wanted to be like, there's no magic here. The virus can transform you, but it can't suddenly add mass that wasn't there before. I'm trying to keep it a bit more rooted in some sort of real-world mechanic. Not to say there's not all kinds of weird, bizarre, crazy shit, but I wanted it to feel a bit more plausible."

The T-virus does have a few new tricks though. "I don't think they break the rules of the games, but you'll see unique behavioural

RESIDENT XXX



"Raise your hand if you're a ravenous zombie."

things about the way the T-virus works that the games don't do," Cregger teases. "That's something that I really enjoy. I think it's cool."

NERVOUS LAUGHTER

Cregger brings the darkly comic edge of *Barbarian* and *Weapons* to *Resident Evil*. At one point, a zombie chases Bryan round and round a car in a sequence that recalls a certain moment in *Weapons*. He admits he can't help putting humour into his scripts. "It's just in the DNA of how I write," he says.

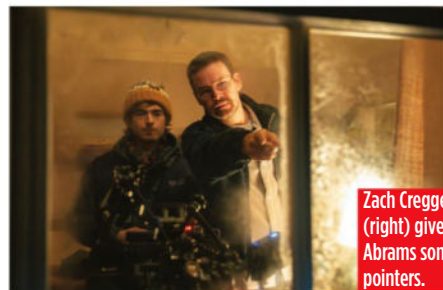
The same goes for his casting, with Cregger drawn to actors who are "naturally funny." "A lot of the humour in this movie comes from Austin being Austin," he says. "He's a phenomenal actor, but he's also a very funny guy. He kind of tickles me, no matter what situation I put him in. With horror, you're always introducing these incredibly absurd situations, right? And to have a person just behave authentically in the face of absurdity, that's when it feels good."

"If I'm trying to write a joke and I think I'm being clever, it's probably not going to make it all the way into the final movie," he adds. "But if I have something where it just feels like we're laughing with the character at how fucking crazy this is, that's when it works well."

After two horror hits, Cregger is set to bring a following of his own to *Resident Evil*. Many of those viewers will know nothing about its world, but that's fine by him. He says the film is for the "uninitiated" and long-time fans alike, while remaining recognisably his. "The storytelling and the characters and the dialogue and the DNA of the movie is me. So if you liked *Barbarian* and *Weapons*, I think you're going to enjoy *Resident Evil*. I'm very proud of it."

Your Raccoon City residency awaits. ●

Resident Evil is in cinemas from 18 September.



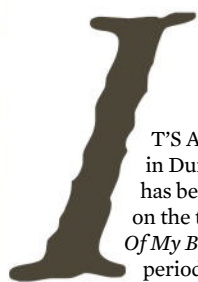
Zach Cregger (right) gives Abrams some pointers.



ROMANNCING *the* STONES

SFX STEPS ON TO THE SCOTTISH SET OF
OUTLANDER: BLOOD OF MY BLOOD
FOR A KILT-FILLED PEEK AT SEASON TWO OF THE
TIME-TRAVELLING PREQUEL SERIES

WORDS:
ADAM TANSWELL



T'S A CHARMINGLY SUNNY DAY in Dunfermline, Scotland, where *SFX* has been transported back to the 1920s on the top-secret set of *Outlander: Blood Of My Blood*. A myriad of extras in period clothing – flat-capped men in tweed suits and bonnet-wearing women in their Sunday finest – wander around the interior of a performing arts centre called Carnegie Hall. They're making small talk in a scene where they exit an auditorium. It's all very pleasing.

When the cameras stop rolling, the atmosphere changes and it's a far cry from the 1920s. Actors head over to craft services for a quick cappuccino. Denim-clad crew members emerge from their hiding spots on stairwells. Walkie talkies are abuzz with activity as the team resets the area.

SFX is here to witness a season two flashback scene for Henry (played by Jeremy Irvine) and Julia (Hermione Corfield) – and the incongruous contemporary coffee cups are swiftly put away, as they're about to roll again.

"Every time we have a flashback scene, we discover something new about Henry and Julia as a couple," Corfield tells *SFX*. "With this season, I read the flashbacks and I think, 'Oh, that's cool. They were into that? That was something they enjoyed doing together?'"

"I think it's a really nice element to the story. In the 1920s, they are free to be who they are, whereas they're always longing for each other in the 1700s. It's nice to see them in their natural habitat where they are free in the 1920s."

Carnegie Hall is a beautiful Art Deco building that's been transformed into a cinema for today's scene, which sees Henry and Julia take a trip to the movies. Inside the elegant lobby, the loved-up twosome have an interesting run-in with a woman from Henry's



past. We're only a 10-minute train ride from Edinburgh, but it feels like an eternity away with classic, period-appropriate posters adorning the walls and the immaculately costumed extras all dressed up for a night out in the post-World War One era.

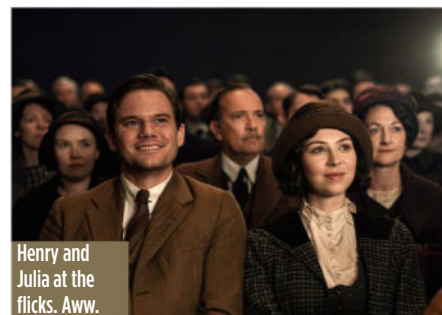
"This scene is set in 1923," confirms Azhur Saleem, the director for today's shoot. "It's a lovely moment for us to go back in time with Henry and Julia. They're watching a movie, which is Douglas Fairbanks' *Robin Hood*, and they have an awkward encounter afterwards – but Julia has the final word."

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

It's day two of *SFX*'s set visit to Scotland to see the world created in the much-loved *Outlander* spin-off series and we've already tackled a ton of interviews with the cast and crew.

We've also been treated to an elaborate tour of Wardpark Film And Television Studios – located an hour's drive from Edinburgh – to see the intricate and complicated sets built for the show, as well as an enlightening wander around the bustling and impressive costume department.

We've seen kilts, castles and a host of behind-the-scenes goodies – including the standing stones of Craigh na Dun, which are an important piece of *Outlander* lore. When the magical stones are not being used on set, they're stored in a long hallway that's crammed with a random array of prop thrones, tables,



Henry and Julia at the flicks. Aww.

“In the early days, we had two small stages. Last year, we had seven stages on the go”

weapons and historic bric-a-brac. There's also a colourful corridor where the walls are adorned with impressive military flags – or standards – from the show's visceral battle scenes. It's a feast for the eyes.

When you enter Wardpark Studios, you're greeted by what's affectionately known as the "Wall Of Smiles", which features a selection of photos from *Outlander* and *Blood Of My Blood*. There's a solid mix of iconic shots from the first season of the time-travelling spin-off – including a picture of the scenic bridge where Brian (Jamie Roy) and Ellen (Harriet Slater)



Henry (Jeremy Irvine) and Julia (Hermione Corfield).

HIGHLAND FLING

Need a quick recap? EP Matt Roberts explains where we last saw the four main characters of Outlander: Blood Of My Blood

"At the end of the first season, we left Henry and Julia at the stones, where they tried to escape. Brian and Ellen found an abandoned bothy [a stone shelter] and they want to start their new life together – but then the fiery crosses are lit, calling all the clans. As Brian is in a clan, he has to answer this call or face being a fugitive for the rest of his life. Those are the dilemmas facing our four core characters at the end of season one. What will happen to Julia and Henry? Will they go back in time? Will Brian fight? And what will happen to Ellen while he is fighting? That's our jumping-off point for season two."



It's all kicking off for Brian Fraser (Jamie Roy).



"It's stopped raining. Quick, shoot something!"



Jamie Roy as Brian gives it the action hero.



In Scotland, weather protection is not optional.

begin their life-changing love affair. There's also a photo of the city steps where Julia and Henry first meet. However, there's not much time to have a gander here. We're speedily whisked away to a meeting room called "Wee Bob" to conduct a batch of interviews.

"It's been incredible to see how much we've grown at this studio," reveals producer Patrick

Conroy, who has worked on *Outlander* and *Blood Of My Blood* since day one. "In the early days of *Outlander*, we had two small stages. Last year, we had seven stages on the go, which were split between the two shows. On average we have between 250 and 350 people working full-time on construction and costumes and everything we do here. There's a lot going on."

While most of the show's exterior scenes are filmed on location in Scotland, the crew also use a Volume stage and bluescreen visual effects on occasion. "Scotland is so beautiful and pretty and dynamic," enthuses Conroy.

"This year we're trying to have a separate unit that goes out and just films Scotland in all its glory. We're able to take those plate shots and get our actors against bluescreens and we'll use VFX. Instead of taking 150 people halfway up a mountain, we've been able to film certain scenes inside a studio."

It's important to note that the team is clearly not averse to traversing across the rugged Highlands – and up steep, jagged mountains – along with the cast, crew and extensive filming equipment should the scene require it, however. "Over the years, we've learned a lot," adds Conroy. "If we're heading up to the mountains, we know we need to find one that's close to car parks because our kit is very big."

The logistics involved in bringing a crew to a remote location is staggering. "When we did season two's battle sequence, we had 510 people on set," explains Conroy. "We had three cameras, huge cranes and everything else – and we shot over seven days. Thankfully, Mother Nature was on our side, but it was a huge undertaking."

The brisk, bold and often unpredictable Scottish weather is a strong factor in deciding which scenes are shot on a specific day. "I think I probably know more about weather apps and →

weather conditions than anybody else,” chuckles Conroy. “I’m constantly going, ‘Oh, shoot... We’ve got a storm coming. Let’s run to the studio to film.’ We’ve always got a plan of attack and other options available.”

When it comes to the brutal and bloody battle scenes of season two, executive producer Matt Roberts is happy to share a little background. “We usually do a big set-piece in the middle of the season,” he tells us. “This year, it’s the Battle of Sheriffmuir.”

According to history books, this notable battle took place in 1715, during the first major Jacobite rising. “The first half of season two is the gear-up to get to Sheriffmuir,” continues Roberts.

“All of our main characters will be swallowed into the battle in one way or another. After the battle, we then look at the ramifications and the consequences of loyalties and betrayals. That’s how we play out the second half of the season.”

Roberts is careful not to reveal major spoilers, but teases what audiences can expect from the 18th century carnage: “We like to do battles when you have people you care about – or at least the audience cares about – on both sides. In Sheriffmuir, we happen to have a lot of people we love on both sides. It’s a really cool clash.”

LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE

Fans of the show know that romance is one of the core themes of the *Outlander* universe, so it’s apt that we ask how some of the key love storylines will progress in season two.

“I think people are going to be very happy with the love story of both couples this season,” reveals Jamie Roy. “And not just the two main couples, but also the romances we see in the rest of the ensemble cast. There are a few different romances weaving in and out of the story in season two, which people will be very pleased to see.”



Harriet Slater
as Ellen
Mackenzie in
the castle.

And what about the saucier scenes in the show? When quizzed about whether the steamier moments will return for season two, executive producer Maril Davis confirms: “In this universe, we talk a lot about the intimate scenes being a love language between the characters and a way of them communicating with each other. For both of the couples in this story, we will continue to see that intimacy there. Yes, you can expect more this season.”

“Those scenes are very much choreographed and planned,” explains Harriet Slater, talking

about her work with intimacy co-ordinators on *Outlander: Blood Of My Blood*. “Firstly, we have an initial meeting where the creative brief is outlined to us. We’re told what the scene will look like, to the most minute of details. It’s like, ‘This is where you’re going to kiss. This is how long the kiss is going to be. This is where we need your hand to be.’ We don’t really choreograph much of it ourselves. It’s all outlined for us.”

“If there’s something that we’re not comfortable with or we don’t want to do, then

THE HIGH(LAND) LIFE

Hermione Corfield and Jeremy Irvine share their season two highlights

Hermione Corfield: “When we finished season one, we didn’t know what was going to happen next. Our showrunner, Matt Roberts, doesn’t tell us anything – mainly because he knows we all gossip amongst ourselves. For me, I think the backdrop of the war is a really interesting facet of season two. It’s fascinating to see how everyone reacts to it and how it has a knock-on effect for all the clans. Even for Julia, it becomes a very integral part of her storyline. I’m very excited for people to see it play out.”

Jeremy Irvine: “We shot five different endings to season one and we had no idea which one they were going to choose. In season two, Henry ends up somewhere, which was a complete shock to me. I’m very excited to see the audience’s reaction. We’ve also got a very epic battle, which was huge to shoot. It felt like being on the set of a big-budget film. I really enjoyed it, although the flashback scenes in the 1920s are definitely some of my favourite scenes. They’re always great.”



“What’s that coming over the hill? Is it a... No.”

Dougal MacKenzie
(Sam Retford) and
Maura Grant (Bobby
Rainsbury).



WAR OF THE WORLDS

Jamie Roy and Harriet Slater share their season two highlights

Jamie Roy: "This season is quite significant for the historical events that happen in the story. In season two, we cover a couple of events that actually happened in Scottish history. The Battle of Sheriffmuir was a big one, and that was great fun to film. Season two is also significant because Brian and Ellen's relationship deepens and goes on its own journey, which is a little different to the first season. I think a lot of fans are going to really enjoy that little rollercoaster for sure."

Harriet Slater: "I'm excited for fans to see a new side to Ellen in season two, because the women didn't go to war. They stayed at home, but there was a lot happening back at home at Castle Leoch, which comes under attack. Ellen and the women of Leoch band together to defend themselves, the castle and the land from a potential new laird. It was awesome for me because I had weapons training and stunt training. I have a lot more horse riding this season too."



It may only be a set, but Castle Leoch is cosy.



Don't be tempted to try the food, though...

Henry in a season two flashback to the 1920s.



we'd simply say, 'I don't think I would do this, or my character would do this,'" adds Roy. "Or we can even just say, 'Personally, I don't want to do this.' That's totally fine, too. We're never forced to do something that we're not comfortable with."

UNDER LEOCH AND KEY

During *SFX*'s tour of the series' extensive interior sets, an interview with Conor MacNeill (who plays Ned Gowan) and Séamus McLean Ross (Colum MacKenzie) takes place inside the vast, stone-walled Great Hall of Castle Leoch.

"Welcome to Leoch," quips MacNeill, taking a seat at a huge wooden table in the middle of the room.

"The attention to detail is crazy on this set. Everywhere you look, it's so detailed. We found a cupboard the other day that we didn't see last season.

We opened it up and there are all these trinkets inside it. It was packed and it hadn't even been opened."

We look around the space and spot scratches on the brickwork. "The sword markings on the stone walls are things you'll never see on screen, but they're there and they really help give a sense of reality," adds Ross. "It's always easy to imagine you're in a place like this when you're here."

"There are little trapdoors everywhere," continues Ross. "The walls open up, so that cranes and cameras can get in. It's amazing. For me, I really feel at home in the study, which is just through there." He points to another section of the set, which we later investigate.

"It's so tight and snug in the study," explains Ross. "It fosters an atmosphere of intensity when you're shooting inside it. The study is very, very small – but you'd be surprised to know they can fit about 80 people inside. It's tiny and it's so hot – and there's nowhere to go, so it's a real playground of intensity."

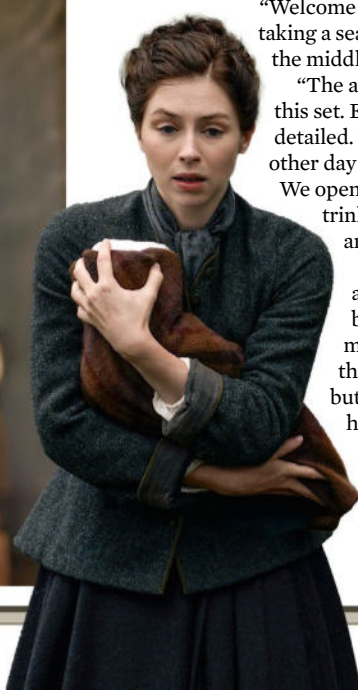
HAPPY (N)EVER AFTER?

With our visit about to be wrapped, our thoughts return to the heart of the show and the two couples at the centre of the story. For all the diehard fans, we ask executive producer Maril Davis if love will prevail in season two.

"In the *Outlander* universe, the road to true love is never easy," she tells us. "In this show, the road for Henry and Julia – and Ellen and Brian – is going to find its share of hurdles this season. It's not like they get to run off to Hawaii together and sit on the beach. That's never the way with *Outlander*."

Let's just see where the story of these turbulent lovers takes us this season... ●

Outlander: Blood Of My Blood is on MGM+ (UK) from 19 September and Starz/Starz On Demand (US) from 18 September.



SEASON OF THE WITCH

WORDS:
ROBBIE DUNLOP

LESLIE GROSSMAN AND GABOUREY SIDIBE REJOIN THE COVEN AS **AMERICAN HORROR STORY** SUMMONS ITS MOST EPIC SEASON YET

THE FIRST RULE OF *AMERICAN Horror Story*? You do not talk about *American Horror Story*. Much like the witches in *Coven* (season three), whose existence was hidden from the world until the finale, the series has long operated under a veil of supreme secrecy. That goes double for its 13th season, aptly titled *13*. So what do we know? For starters, co-creator Ryan Murphy has billed it as an *Avengers*-style crossover, one that brings back fan-favourite characters from throughout the anthology show's 15-year run.

Those confirmed so far include Rubber Man, the latex-clad killer introduced in *Murder House* (season one), and Twisty the Clown, the disfigured murderer who stalked *Freak Show* (season four). The New Orleans coven, last seen in *Apocalypse* (season eight), is back in

business too, with Gabourey Sidibe and Leslie Grossman reprising their roles as witches Queenie and Coco St Pierre Vanderbilt.

Speaking to *SFX* six weeks before the premiere, the pair tread carefully when asked to explain exactly how the crossover unfolds. Grossman will say only that *13* is "kind of like a crescendo, in the best way", with familiar elements woven together "in ways that are really clever and unexpected and satisfying, up until the final moment".

Already an *AHS* fan when she joined the cast, Sidibe calls it "almost like a casserole dish of our favourite seasons", adding: "There are seasons that are my favourites that I was not involved with, and I'm really excited to see those characters come back."

For Grossman and Sidibe, it's one role each. Sarah Paulson and Evan Peters, meanwhile, →



both play as many as half a dozen characters. At times, they even share the screen with themselves. “They do it in a way that’s really, really fun,” says Grossman. “And, for lack of a better term, it’s just really cool to see *how* they do it. The directors are just so brilliant.”

Yet for all its nostalgia, *I3* has its “own energy”, Sidibe insists. “It’s its own quilt with its own stories and its own spookiness.” Grossman calls it a “love letter” to long-time viewers. “It’s epic.”

ROLL CALL

For Sidibe, returning to the *Coven* storyline is “kind of wild”. When she made her *AHS* debut in 2013, she assumed Queenie would be a one-off. “I was like, ‘I’ll move on with my life, and the show will also move on without me.’ So it’s kind of beautiful, but also really, really surprising that I would be asked to come back a whole 13 years later. And being back there with the same people and, essentially, the same energy on set... We still joke and play around and have a lot of fun with it.”

Grossman joined the *AHS* repertory company with 2017’s *Cult* and made her debut as Coco in *Apocalypse* the following year. She still feels lucky to “get invited to the party”. “I have a lot of affection for Coco,” she says, adding that this time audiences will see the witch “channel her inner tough girl more than she has been able to do before”.

One of the coven’s newer recruits, Coco is now fully at home among her sisters. For Grossman, those relationships are a big part of the role’s appeal and “really come through” in *I3*. “There’s also a lot of reality there, because I truly love and adore these women,” she says. “They’re very important members of my life, both at work and outside of work.”

Eight years on from *Apocalypse*, the witches have largely put their old rivalries aside. “They really are a solid and cohesive unit,” says Grossman. “The coven gets to really work as a team.” Sidibe agrees. “You see them settled into who they are,” she adds. “They have a really, really strong bond and sisterhood. And that bond is probably built because they’re constantly in strife. They’re just trauma-bonding together.”

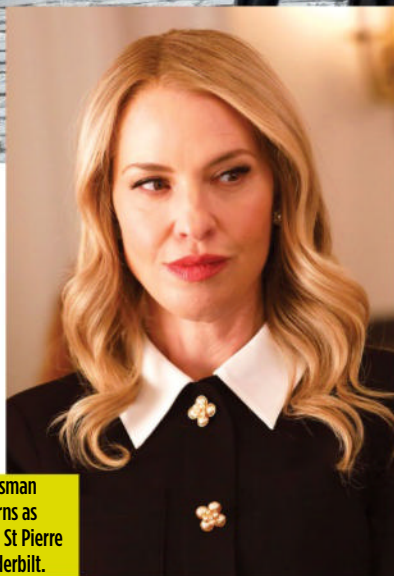
So what are they up against this time? Sidibe teases only that Queenie is “trying to defend not only herself and her sisters, but maybe the entire world at large”. For Grossman, *I3* comes down to “the fate of the world, good and evil, all of the biggest issues you can possibly think of”.

Murphy has described the season’s Big Bad as “the ultimate evil”. Sidibe confirms that description is “pretty on point”. “We’ve had ghosts, we’ve had monsters, we’ve had aliens. Although I don’t believe that aliens are bad,”

“All the things that we’re supposed to be afraid of, this is probably the worst”



Back in black, the witches stride through SoHo, NYC.



Grossman returns as Coco St. Pierre Vanderbilt.

she laughs. “I think we don’t know enough about them to think that they’re evil. They’re simply other. But anyway, all the things that we’re *supposed* to be afraid of, this is probably the worst. Like, this is the cherry on top of what in this world is bad.”

Then there’s the small matter of *Apocalypse*’s finale. Mallory (Billie Lourd, also returning) travelled back in time and killed Michael Langdon (Cody Fern) before he could end the world, rewriting history in the process. How much of that erased future do the witches remember? Are these even the same versions of the characters we knew? “That’s a great question,” says Grossman. “There are different timelines, right? And there’s different parallel universes that all have to mesh together.”

The writers, she explains, took “great care” to establish exactly what happened when.



Sidibe is back as “human voodoo doll” Queenie.



Mena Suvari reprises her role as the Black Dahlia.

WITCH QUEENS OF NEW ORLEANS

You better walk, witch!

The coven was back in black in early July, when photos and videos of Sidibe, Grossman and company striding through New York's SoHo began circulating online. The scene, one of the last to be filmed for the new season, echoed the original "witch walk" from the *Coven* premiere, "Bitchcraft".

"That was really fun," says Grossman. "When you get to do things that feel kind of iconic, and when I see all the witches together dressed up in character, I'm always going to get a thrill. Seeing Frances Conroy [as Myrtle Snow] with the iconic red hair and the umbrella... I mean, she's just the best."

"It was so funny because we had to film that walk over and over again," she adds. "We were walking on these cobblestone streets and the truth is, the entire time I was just like, 'Please don't fall. Please don't fall. Please don't fall.'"

"When you look at some of the takes, I looked like it was my first day on two legs, because I'm just trying so hard. I'm like, 'Don't screw this up. Everyone else looks so cool. I just want to make it to the end of the block without falling!'"



Paul Anthony Kelly is joining the cast for this season.

Queenie's not the only witch who gets to show off her powers this time around. "What is so fun this season is that everybody's specific talents get highlighted," says Grossman, whose character can sense danger. "Everybody gets to have their own special moment of shine in their particular strength."

Inevitably, *13* makes much of the number's reputation for bad luck. Sidibe says the season plays heavily "on superstition and on what people fear." "It is an important theme that you will see coming up over and over again," Grossman confirms, adding that "a lot of fun is had with the trope."

Sidibe deliberately kept herself in the dark about the wider story, reading only her own scenes. She almost succeeded. "On the very last day at the studio, I said to [actor] Joey Pollari, 'So what do you do around here?' He told me his entire storyline, and I was like, 'Wait a damn minute. I had no idea *this* was what was happening.' I was like, 'Oh, okay, so this whole time you've been... and so we've been... oh!' But that's only one piece of this gigantic puzzle," she continues. "I'm truly going to be gagging, screaming right along with everyone."

Grossman, on the other hand, knows exactly what's what. "When I got to read the final episodes, I was like, 'No way. That's so cool.' All of the elements really come together. It's going to be exciting and unexpected."

Even before *13* airs, Murphy has confirmed that a 14th season is in early development. Neither actor would need asking twice.

"Not only am I excited to see it continue, I would be really, really excited and happy to be brought back," says Sidibe. "If Ryan thinks that I have something that can help with the service of the story, I'd be thrilled to be there," adds Grossman. "He's got an unbelievable brain that comes up with the most brilliant stuff, and I'm as excited as anyone else to see what's next."

Thirteen may be unlucky for some, but not for *American Horror Story*. ●

American Horror Story 13 is on FX, Hulu and Disney+ from 24 September.



Jessica Lange as Constance Langdon in season 13.

"Where are we in this timeline? What happened before this? Has this happened after? They all mesh and diverge in interesting ways. You will have to tune in to see how they do that, but it's very smart the way that they run all the different timelines together."

One thing, at least, is clear: Cordelia still reigns Supreme. Miss Robichaux's Academy is back too, with its set rebuilt for *13*. Grossman sees something of Paulson in Cordelia, describing the actor as "the heartbeat in so many ways of the show". "Sarah is such a leader and makes everyone around her so good," she adds. "Cordelia also has that power."

Working with Jessica Lange for the first time was another highlight for Grossman. After returning for a single episode of *Apocalypse*, Lange reprises all four of her *AHS* roles, including former Supreme Fiona Goode. "It was really thrilling, really exciting, to see someone who really is a legend doing what they do best," Grossman says.

Sidibe, meanwhile, particularly enjoyed sharing more scenes with Angela Bassett, back as Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau. She hints that Bassett may crop up in another guise too, though "I could be lying about that! I love her so, so much," Sidibe enthuses. "I was so, so excited to see her again. Not just Angela, but I love the character of Marie. I think she is fantastic. I would put her in the top five. Perhaps top three, maybe top two. I love

her so much. The hair, the outfits, just the drama, everything."

WOMAN'S WORLD

Queenie and Madison Montgomery (Emma Roberts) are not quite the rivals they once were. "Their relationship has always been filled with strife, and they can be a little hateful towards each other," Sidibe says. "But you'll see that it's not just strife, it's not just hate. And maybe it isn't actually hate at all. We get to see that there really is a kinship and a sisterhood between them."

Now more secure in both the voodoo community and the coven, Queenie puts her power as a human voodoo doll to a surprising new use. "We definitely get to see how powerful she is," Sidibe says, promising "a completely different weapon: a weapon that we don't expect her to use. A weapon that's not even really a weapon."

One clue may lie in a full-body scan Sidibe underwent at a special effects studio ahead of filming. Practical effects, she says, are her favourite part of being Queenie. "I love doing the movie magic, and I love that so much of what Queenie does, what her witchcraft is, has to do with her own body. They rebuilt my neck in season eight. They've rebuilt my hands, my arms, my feet... so many things. They've recreated me. I'm somewhere in the storage space, just waiting for when my actual body fails!"

Sarah Paulson plays Supreme witch Cordelia Goode again.

SHAUN THE SHEEP:
THE BEAST OF MOSSY BOTTOM

WE HERD IT HERE FIRST – THE INSIDE SCOOP ON HOW
SHAUN THE SHEEP IS BROUGHT TO LIFE

WORDS: HENRY CALVERT

SHEEPISH BEHAVIOUR



SHAUN THE SHEEP: THE BEAST OF MOSSY BOTTOM



WALKING INTO AARDMAN STUDIOS AND immediately being greeted by an Oscar and a cabinet including models of iconic characters from *Chicken Run* and *Wallace & Gromit*, it's impossible to not be in awe of its success over its 50 years in action.

For 31 of those years, an Aardman staple has been Shaun the Sheep, and as he prepares to make his return to the big screen, *SFX* is here to go behind the scenes on his spooky Halloween special *Shaun The Sheep: The Beast Of Mossy Bottom*.

So far, production is 380,000 shots into the movie, which only equates to 61% of the entire film. With 12 movements making up every second of the film and 24 individual frames going into each of those seconds, it's immediately evident the patience and craftsmanship that goes into making one of Aardman's stop motion movies.

UNLEASH THE BEAST

The first stop on our tour is the puppet workshop, where eight team members work meticulously over miniature props, strands of fur and the Shaun puppets. "There are 24 different Shaun puppets used throughout the production," Will Harding, the Head of Puppets, tells *SFX*, "but the most intricate and exciting addition to this film is the titular beast. We have 10 different models of the beast and within each model are three different types of fur that give it such a rich and tactile feel.

"We have to make a lot more special, unique models for our full-length features, compared to something like the TV show," he explains. "Our job on that is mostly maintenance, so projects like this give us a lot more opportunity to experiment and create, which is always fun."

While the base model for Shaun remains the same, the puppet workshop assistant animators work on creating the plethora of malleable mouths and eyelids that can be interchanged on him. Over 1,000 have already been used in production on Shaun alone, not to mention the other members of the flock.

Above the animators sits an in-depth timeline breakdown of the entire film.

All Hallows' Eve has come to Mossy Bottom...



...Which adds to the film's autumnal coloured vibe.



A bespoke software was developed in-house to schedule the required shots in real time and develop a day-by-day breakdown for animators to stick to.

One such shot for today sees Shaun cross a laboratory, and look at a glowing fluid passing through some pipes and into a flask. A simple enough shot on paper, but one that will take an animator at least half a day.

We're led onto the unit and are immediately struck by the attention to detail put into every corner of the set. Tiny shredded bits of paper, near unnoticeable scratch marks on walls, the lighting glinting on the glass props... it's an impressive sight in such a tiny space.

Our animator requires a live-action video to use as a point of reference for the shot, and of course we're first to volunteer, a task that Nick Park, Aardman's founder tends to step up to for Wallace. While we can't say we're a natural sheep, our animator still took the reference and immediately set to work bringing Shaun to life.

A purpose-built software links to the camera, and after an appropriate camera lens and

framing is decided on, we get hands-on with Shaun. For every tiny movement two frames are captured, a meticulous task which includes movements that seem unnoticeable to the untrained eye. Our lack of grace and detail led our elephant fingers to immediately jump Shaun seemingly halfway across the room, so we thought best to leave it to the professionals.

HERD MENTALITY

With 47 units operating at any given time, there's a constant buzz in the air, and around every corner, a new miniature masterpiece to explore: from smaller sets like Shaun's laboratory, all the way up to fully fleshed-out streets, all set for the film's larger set-pieces. Even in these larger sets the attention to detail remains ever present, noticeably in the lighting. Every street lamp and car headlight glistens with an astounding sense of authenticity. One particular scene sees the whole flock wreaking havoc in a busy town.

With each character requiring individual movement per frame – and each of them requiring a plethora of individually sculpted, unique mouth pieces and eyelids – the attention and care that's on display from each animator is astounding.

After walking the studio floor we're taken to the next stage in the creative process, the edit room, where, again, attention to detail is at the

“Projects like this give us more opportunity to experiment and create, which is always fun”



The Beast of Mossy Bottom gives the flock a hand.



Meticulous attention to detail is required.



Hundreds of models are created for the production.

forefront. While stop-motion is the primary form of animation in the movie, there are still elements of CG and effects added in post-production where editors meticulously integrate them into each individual frame. From removing external rigging on the puppets to adding glowing effects to the various strange objects Shaun is experimenting with, the process feels as intricate as anything to do with stop-motion.

As our day at the studio winds down, we're taken to the farm set, the home of Shaun and his flock. As this is the same set that's been in every feature and multiple series of the show, a wave of nostalgia hits. Aardman's 50 year legacy is undeniably one of the most celebrated things in the UK film industry. Its constant attention to detail, to respecting its craft while still advancing it, and respecting its existing audience while nurturing new fans, is truly something to be admired. A generation of kids who grew up on *Shaun the Sheep* will be excited to see Shaun's latest adventures, and for newcomers, well, we're slightly jealous of those who'll flock to see the wonder of stop motion in all its glory. ●

Shaun The Sheep: The Beast Of Mossy Bottom is in cinemas from 18 September.



Shaun the Sheep PhD hard at work in the lab.

SHEPHERDS OF THE FLOCK

Directors Steve Cox and Matthew Walker get to the bottom of things

When did you first start working with stop-motion?

Steve Cox: My first proper job after uni was working on *Bob The Builder*. I was actually a prop maker rather than an animator. After a year or so I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to animate?" I got a job there and off I went.

Matthew Walker: Alternatively, my background was all in CG 2D animation. My first experience working with stop motion was here, on series six of *Shaun*, and that was such a steep learning curve because it's such a longer process that you have to get right the first time around. There's not a lot of space for error.

What does a typical day look like for you as directors of a stop-motion feature?

SC: It's hard to pinpoint a typical day because every day feels so varied, but as standard, we'd begin with watching the previous rushes from the day before. We'd discuss them with the other heads of department and also talk about what's coming up. Then we'd go into edit, check the shots cut in edit. Following that, we go down to the floor where we get picked up by our ADs.

MW: The ADs take us to whichever unit we need to be in – sometimes it's a unit that's just being set up. We'll meet the director of photography and the set dressers, then from that we might go to one where the animator's ready to go. In that case, we'll brief the animator on the shot, talk about character, framing etc. Sometimes we'll be going to units where the shot's just been finished, in that case we'll be watching the shot, and most of the time we'll approve the shot there and then. It's a varied day filled with working with every single team, it's such a collaborative effort.

Were there any new technologies or techniques you developed for this film?

MW: The biggest new technology was called Splats. It allowed us to scan models of sets in different lighting conditions, creating a 3D image of the set. With that, we'd then duplicate and expand those sets

with the scans of the models. It essentially provided us an alternative to using paintings or CG as backgrounds, and instead we could expand the physical models on the sets, giving it a much more tactile feel.

There are so many departments that go into making one of these movies, are there any you want to draw attention to that audiences may not consider?

SC: One of the departments that gets very little airtime is the rigging department. Our puppets have to jump and fly through the air whilst being supported. External of the puppets, we have the rigging department holding our characters up with these metal bars and all these bits of machinery, and it's critical. At the end of the film, all of the rigging work just gets deleted, you never see it. So these guys do all this hard work, and yet that work is never seen. So shout out to the rigging department.

How do you hope this film will stand out from the previous *Shaun* instalments?

MW: It's definitely the most ambitious of the films. We really leaned into the Halloween theme with the colours and aesthetic, and I think that it's given it a really nice identity that stands out from the others with these rich, autumnal colours.

SC: We were really ambitious on it. We've got tons of massive set-pieces and huge new sets, which are really exciting. We just decided to really, really push it this time and go as big as we could, and we're pretty proud of it.

Finally, who's your favourite sheep?

SC: I like Nuts. The goofy-eyed one. He's the one we always get to do the weird, random gags with.

MW: I like Timmy's mum because she's a proper badass when it comes down to it. Whenever Shaun has gone off on a tangent in any of our films, Mum always has to step up and sort things out. So she's one of my favourites.



WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN

WARNING:
do not use
these spells on
your boss.

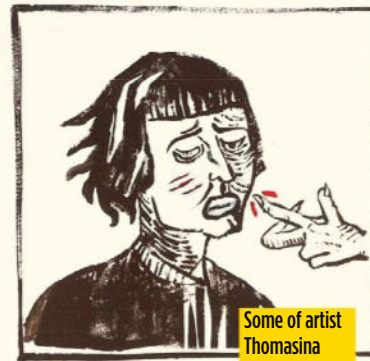
Ut cumque Maria Del Mulieris Vis Amare Posse

Stabiliter steterit. Annulos luctus, miniaturas, basias, mementos, armorum gestus et gloriæ præconii sunt sed tot reliquæ doctrinae Talismanicae, apud homines in genere, multum est talismanicae opinionis; testantur abibitatem qua vitellum infantis expetitur ad conserbandum a periculo aqua, sicut etiam celeberrimus Romanorum "The Talisman," by Sir Walter Scott; Vehemens interest quod oritur ex narratione singularis exempli fidei olim in Talismanica opera repositae. Nunc notum est, cum Napoleon in Aegyptum proficiscitur, phylacterium tunc a mago orientali erubito donatum fuisse, cuius effectus erat eum ad repentinis incursionibus, sicactis, omnibusque noctis sclopis protegere ac defendere. Spiritus temperantia saepe deficit. armorum gestus et gloriæ præconii sunt sed tot reliquæ doctrinae Talismanicae, apud homines in genere, multum est talismanicae opinionis; testantur abibitatem qua vitellum infantis expetitur ad conserbandum a periculo aqua, sicut etiam celeberrimus Romanorum "The Talisman," by Sir Walter Scott; Vehemens interest quod oritur ex narratione singularis exempli fidei olim in Talismanica opera repositae. Nunc notum est, cum Napoleon in Aegyptum proficiscitur, phylacterium tunc a mago orientali erubito donatum fuisse, cuius effectus erat eum ad repentinis incursionibus,



Dum legit Aligis Xos (Victoria Cepa del allum biterali) haec verba dicit:





Some of artist Thomasina Smith's illustrations.

Anulum Eme

Anulum eme; non refert, aurum, ut
similitudinem anuli nuptialis habeat; et
optimum est hoc in natali tuo experire
tempore. Redde anulum tuum cum
aliqua parva libellum, nam
quancumque mutationem acceperis,
oportet primo mendici, quem in via
convenis; et si nemo a te petit
elemosinam, da alicui pauperi; non
enim debes, heu, longe ante inbeneris
cui acceptabilis sit caritas tua;
Diligenter notandum quid retribuatur, ut
fortunam et prosperitatem, ut solet.
Cum bonum veneris, scribe in charta
singulas quatuor angulos, et in medio,



Egit, si ab peccatis
lecti praesentabit,
sed mori transierit.
Non videt, non
habet, et tunc, si
ante mane notis
similibus, res te
innotat habiturum
demonstrat;



pone duas primas epistolas
nominis tui, aetatis tuae, et
epistolas planetarum tunc
regnantium ut mane et vespere.
saberum. ut olibae ramum et
pone anulum in culmo cum filo
perfusa tota die mixtis mellis et
areti, vel omni compositione
contrariarum qualitatium,
dulcissimae et acerrimae, anulum
tuum et caulem cum charta
scriptum, circumbolatum
diligenter et rotundum; in sinu
tuo usque ad horam noctis nonam
indue, deinde ad proximam
coemiterium repara et
amoenitatem in sepulcro sepeli.
Iuvenis innuptus; et, dum sic
agis, ter repetitas litteras
nominis tui nominis tui repetas,
domum redi, et quam maxime
silebis, donec ibis cubitum, quod
ante videris faciendum est, pone
in camino tuo vel aliquo lumine.

Because it can come across as a bit tacky sometimes, and it's nice to have your own style."

PROP ART

There was only one copy of the grimoire prop. Rather than being made from scratch, it was created by modifying an existing vintage book. "The props buyers found this really amazing book – I think it came from Europe," Light explains, flicking through the grimoire and pointing out that most of the pages are in German. "Then we worked with the graphics department and changed a couple of pages. We had to cut out some bits, then we put in our own pages. The paper had to be special paper, because it had to match the original paper – they found it in London. I made a list of what I thought would go with the script, and could be extra pages. We worked with an artist to design all these little drawings – she just nailed it. Then I wrote explanations for them, and we translated it into Latin."

SPELLING IT OUT

"Some of the pages are actually real spells – even though no one's probably going to know or read it," Light reveals, with a laugh. "I bought some books on magic and spells and rituals, went through and chose ones, then gave them to the graphic designers and the artists, and they put it together." Light's role usually involves being on set throughout shooting as an art department representative, to deal with any issues relating to props and sets. "We do continuity and stuff like that. So it's lovely that I got to have a little go at adding to the creativity." →

New pages had to be inserted into an old book.



ASHEN-FACED

Though the enslaved under Charlotte's control are "zombified", they don't resemble the pale-skinned zombies you might find in a '40s voodoo chiller (or a George Romero movie). "We didn't want to go down that route, or black eyes or whatever," says make-up designer Jody Williams. "Because we're in such a shiny, hot, tropical world, in a lot of the other scenes there's lots of glow and sheen in everybody's skin. I wanted them to look lifeless – to make them look very lustreless. They're ashy, very ashy. I painted their faces with a matt sealer, then put an ash powder over the top. And we made sure their nails didn't have any lustre."

SQUAD GOALS

Williams took a "less is more" approach. "It's very easy to get caught up in, 'Oh, they've got to look like this.' We talked about giving everybody zombie lenses, but it's been done a million times. I thought [digitally] removing the wetness out of people's eyes could be subtle but really effective." In the end, that didn't happen, but as Williams underlines, other departments still made a contribution. "The actor's got a huge amount to bring. Also, speaking to the DOP, there's what we can do to adjust the lighting to make it look cooler and lifeless. So it's a collaboration. It's not just, 'How are Make-up going to make him look like a zombie?'"

YOU'RE SO VEINY

When it came to featured characters under Charlotte's control – like her husband Kenneth, or the modern-day Cudjoe East – there was a fungal factor... "We decided that it would be nice to have not just the prosthetic sitting on the actor's face, but some sort of story that there's something growing inside him," Williams explains. "So we

“We talked about zombie lenses, but it's been done a million times”

PHOTOGRAPHY: JODY WILLIAMS, DES WILLIE, PICTURES © SKY STUDIOS.



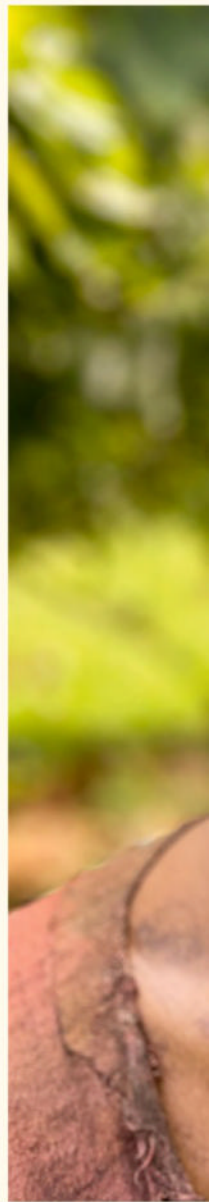
It looks like Charlotte's clawed this poor chap.



A close-up of a particularly chunky keloid scar.

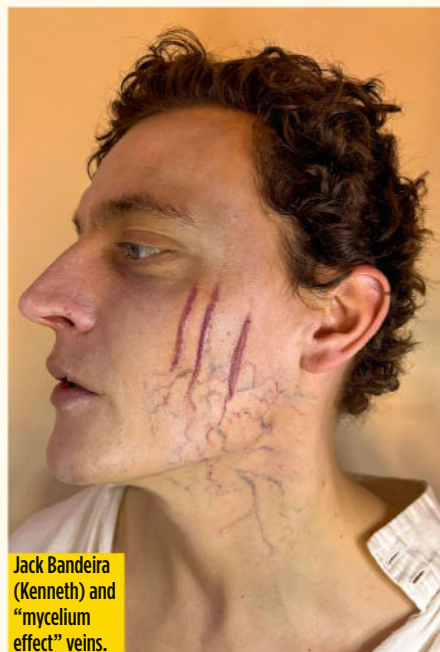


A supporting artist gets some dramatic lighting.





Most of these photos were taken by Jody herself.



Jack Bandeira (Kenneth) and "mycelium effect" veins.



This wound gave Charlotte control over Angelo.



Stock scars were made in eight different shapes.



Williams had a "zombie factory" on set in Jamaica.

decided to put veins on the actor, and had those made into tattoo sheets, in varying colours. So Cudjoe gets a split lip, then it forms into a keloid [a raised scar], and that's when he becomes a zombie. Then the idea is to have a mycelium effect [like a fungus' root network] of veins running through his face."

SCAR ISSUE

Just deciding where to place an injury can be tricky. Take the keloid scar Jonny Lee Miller's Oliver Connaught gets after a door slams shut on his hand. Williams refers to it as "the snake keloid" – though Miller nicknamed it "the worm!"

"First we thought, 'Surely the finger that we should do is the middle one.' But when Storm [Saulter, director] told me he wanted to do a reveal of Johnny turning his finger, I said, 'Do you want the actor doing *that*?' [Williams flips the bird.] He said, 'Absolutely not!' So we decided on the index finger. There was a lot of discussion about where it would snake around his finger, because he's got to use his hand, and I don't need to be stepping in after every shot and putting it back on, because I've put the keloid across the crease of his finger."

How important is medical accuracy? "Generally speaking, things that are 100% medically correct aren't quite what works creatively for where we've got to put it, how we've got to shoot it, or what money we have – factors that mean we have to have creative licence," Williams says.

"We start off absolutely medically correct. Then I run that by the director, or put my penny's worth in and say, 'This is what it's supposed to look like, but if we have it made like this it's not going to register.' With the keloid, we wanted to make it look as correct as it should be, but we had to make it much deeper. Generally, when we see it, we see it for a second. So we have to punch it all up, so when you see it for a second it has the same effect of looking at it in a medical journal." ●

Possession is available to stream on NOW.

YOUR GHOST

MARK GATISS IS responsible for bringing the BBC's festive horror "strain", *A Ghost Story For Christmas*, back to screens regularly after a 35-year absence (or three, depending on how pedantic a fan you are). The first eight of his annual episodes are finally getting the Blu-ray treatment this month in *A Ghost Story For Christmas: The Collection*.

We asked him for "a couple of pictures" from each of the stories to celebrate, and he sent over 100, with commentary. Write a(nother) book, man!

Watch this space for more ghostly goings on from Gatiss soon... Until then, catch him in *Bookish* on U&Alibi.



Scribble of Dead Paul from "The Dead Room" (2018).



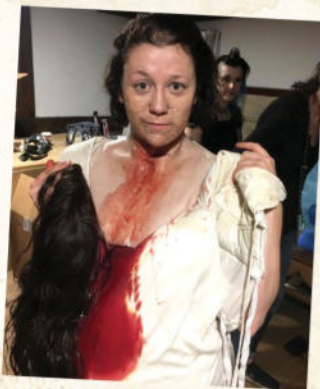
Cowering Callow.



The director and friend.



Mark Gatiss with Wilf Scolding and Jessica Temple on the set of "Martin's Close" (2019).



Jess Temple post throat slitting.



Elliot Levey and Peter Capaldi.



Jess Temple in full prosthetic.

Mark Gatiss and John Hopkins on location at Harrow School for "The Mezzotint" (2021).



Gawdy.



James Swanton - are you my mummy? "Lot No 249" (2023).



James Swanton attacks producer Isibael Ballance.

HOST

MARK GATISS DELVES INTO HIS PERSONAL ARCHIVES TO BRING SFX SOME PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED BEHIND-THE-SCENES PHOTOS FROM **A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS**

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



Éanna Hardwicke and Phoebe Horn on location for "Woman Of Stone" (2024).



Mawaan Rizwan.



"You're probably wondering how I got here. Well..."



Mawaan Rizwan and Mark Gatiss.



Tobias Menzies wakes from the dream in "The Room In The Tower" (2025).



Dame Joanna Lumley and Mark Gatiss.



Tobias Menzies and Nancy Carroll.



Mark Gatiss, Max Bremer and Jason Watkins on location for "Count Magnus" (2022).



MyAnna Buring and Jamal Ajala.



Michael Carlo in make-up.



John Castle meets his doom in "The Tractate Middoth" (2013).



“W” ARE THE



“I

T WAS ABOUT THE OUTSIDER in high school: the rejects, the weirdos. That was the genesis of the line: ‘We are the weirdos, Mister!’ I was claiming ownership of your weirdness, of your otherness. It’s saying, ‘I’m a freak, and I’m okay

with it.” Writer/director Andrew Fleming talks to *SFX* about the immortal line from his 1996 supernatural cult classic *The Craft*, which follows a trio of outcast teenage witches whose dynamic is upended when a new girl joins their coven, and they begin to use their powers for personal gain.

Emerging just ahead of *Scream* and predating the TV version of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *The Craft* is as much an exploration of adolescent rage and alienation as it is a supernatural horror film. Fleming injected Peter Filardi’s original screenplay with lived-in detail, grounding it in something far more recognisable: the volatility of being young, female and on the outside.

“The truth is *The Craft* isn’t really much of a horror movie; it’s as much a comedy of manners about people and behaviour and high school,” continues Fleming. “I remember having those conversations with Robin Tunney [lead character Sarah Bailey]. I was thinking, ‘Well, it’s really not a horror movie; it’s a psychological, paranormal, dramatic...’ We were trying to justify what it was, but then I thought, no matter what, if you go to the video store and say, ‘Where’s *The Craft*?’ they will say, ‘Horror’. But I think it’s funnier than most horror movies; there’s more humour in it without it being camp, necessarily.”

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

The chemistry commences with a trio of witches, then evolves into a coven. Rochelle, Nancy and Bonnie exist as a tight, self-contained unit until Sarah’s arrival completes the quartet and shifts the balance. Off-screen, →

WEIRDOS”

THIRTY YEARS ON, *THE CRAFT* STILL CASTS ITS SPELL. WE TALK TO WRITER/DIRECTOR ANDREW FLEMING ABOUT THE ULTIMATE OUTSIDER MOVIE

WORDS: OLIVER PFEIFFER

COLUMBIA PICTURES/GETTY

Fleming was just as deliberate in constructing that chemistry. Avoiding heavy rehearsal, he chose to let relationships form gradually, shooting largely in sequence and working with Tunney separately from the other ensemble, portrayed by Rachel True, Fairuza Balk and Neve Campbell.

"I thought they should start off not being a unit, and Sarah should be alienated from the other three," he explains. "I worked with Rachel, Fairuza and Neve separately so that they seemed like a cohesive 'brand' group."

That careful sense of cohesion was hard-won. Resisting studio pressure to cast recognisable faces, Fleming instead embarked on a lengthy search for the right combination of actors. "I thought it would be really important to get four good actresses and not try to get famous people," he recalls. "It was a point of contention between the studio and me because I was interested in quirkier, darker people, and they wanted pretty and famous, so there was a lot of back and forth for about nine months."

Casting arguably the film's most coveted role, that of the volatile, mesmeric Nancy Downs, came more instinctively, however. "I had always been interested in Fairuza Balk, because I'd seen her in *Gas Food Lodging*," Fleming says of the former child actor, who had also headlined belated sequel *Return To Oz* and appeared in the original 1986 TV version of *The Worst Witch*. "She was a practising pagan at that point and a really good actor, and I thought, 'She's Nancy!' She has an ethereal quality."

Securing the remaining roles proved more elusive, particularly when it came to Sarah Bailey. "When Robin Tunney first came in, she was very nervous, and I wasn't quite sure what to make of her," says Fleming, who soon began to see something more compelling beneath the surface. "She actually wanted to play the part of Bonnie, that Neve Campbell played, so we did this very elaborate screen test on a soundstage, and I thought Robin was really great, and so did the producers at the studio. So we asked her if she wouldn't mind playing the lead instead of Bonnie, and she didn't want to, so I had to talk her into it."

With Sarah locked in, the search for Bonnie continued until timing intervened. "Neve Campbell was on our radar, but it was taking so long because she wasn't available. I think she was doing *Party Of Five*. Then she suddenly was, and we offered it to her. Thank goodness she did it."

STRANGER THINGS

Another key touchstone of *The Craft* is its carefully calibrated descent into the supernatural.

"It's a movie about magical things happening, and I wanted the magic to start off

Instantly iconic: the coven of *The Craft*.



“It was important to get four good actresses and not try to get famous people”

very small and for it to be more about the mood and the possibility of something supernatural happening, and to ramp it up gradually," says Fleming. "Whenever we did use special effects, they had to really pack a punch – like Nancy walking on water. It was more about the idea and the image than the effect itself."

That restraint was deliberate, with the film starting off as a reality-based story until practical magic intervenes halfway through. "It was all, 'Maybe that was our power – Wicca, witchcraft – or maybe that was a coincidence,'" considers Fleming.

As the story darkens, that restraint gives way to something much more volatile. "Even when it's dark at the end, people are making jokes and being snarky and vicious and fun," says Fleming. "I feel that's one of the accomplishments of the movie – that it's a very specific tone. It's snarky, it's vicious, it's sad, it's scary – it's all those things."

The Craft is confronting as well and doesn't shy away from the provocative, most notably in an attempted rape scene involving Sarah and high school jock Chris Hooker, played by a pre-*Scream* Skeet Ulrich.

"People didn't talk about rape in the context of being somebody you know. Date rape wasn't something that got discussed because it was thought that if a woman was on a date with a man and they had sex, well, it's consensual," continues Fleming. "But I remember in the dorm at my college, my best friend was the manager, and she would tell me that rapes were very common, and it was always somebody they knew, somebody in the dorm. So I thought this was really problematic, it's epidemic, and the idea of date rape was kind of a joke. And I thought, 'It's not – it's really awful, and it's still rape.'"

There's a valid reason *The Craft* became the go-to film for misfits and outcasts, living out the fantasy of using magic to win out over the popular, socially advantaged types at school. "This was before *Buffy*, before *Scream* and anything like that, and *Heathers* was the only kind of dark look at high school, but that was very satirical," explains Fleming. "I felt like it's a movie that's taking the problems of young women seriously and treating them with dignity, but then telling a story that's fun and enjoyable. I had no idea how long it would last, but it felt like it was a sort of rite of passage that you had to watch the movie, and that it might tell you something about yourself. As an out gay man, I have lost count of the number of times somebody told me that they realised they were gay watching the movie."



DVD sales ensured cult status was achieved.



"Light as a feather, stiff as a board." Let's levitate.



The Craft probably did wonders for candle sales.



THE CRAFT OF SCREAM

We have *The Craft* to thank for the casting of *Scream*, according to director Andrew Fleming.

"I was ephemerally linked up with *Scream*, but I knew the two producers, and they asked me, 'Who's good?' and I said, 'Neve Campbell!' I absolutely hyped her to them, and when they heard about Skeet [Ulrich] and they cast the two of them off *The Craft*," reveals Andrew Fleming.

So it would appear the original *Scream*'s casting grew out of the world of *The Craft*. However, (in a "What if?" scenario), Fleming almost directed the film too.

"They gave me the script for *Scream* originally, and I said, 'I'd love to do this, but I'm doing *The Craft*.' And we got delayed so much I could've done both, but I think Wes Craven did a pretty good job, and it all worked out," he adds.

"My then partner was an executive on *Scream*, so I was on-set visiting Neve and Skeet and hanging out. I always avidly championed Neve; I said that she's great and that she's really nice and you should work with her."

CRAFTING A SEQUEL

Although it performed well initially, it was on home release where *The Craft* truly found its audience. As one of the first Sony films released on DVD, it sold strongly, remaining in the top 10 for years and outpacing newer releases. That enduring popularity meant there was little immediate push for a sequel.

Nevertheless, a follow-up arrived in 2020 with a new coven of witches, headlined by Cailee Spaeny. *The Craft: Legacy* didn't match the impact of the original. Fleming served as executive producer, though his involvement was limited. "I was around. I thought it was a great pitch, and I read the script and gave notes," he explains. "But when they were shooting, I was doing the first season of *Emily In Paris*, and filming took place during Covid,

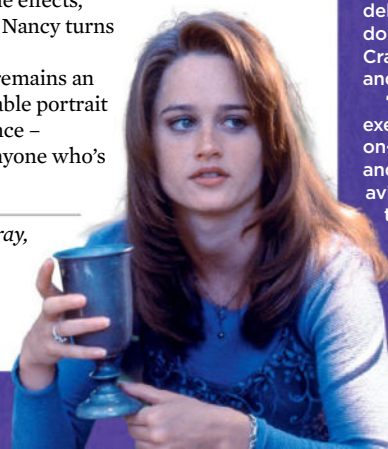
so we were quite isolated from one another. It was a tough break, especially as the film was finishing just as Covid hit, and there were a lot of reshoots at the last minute."

Returning to the original, Fleming recalls how financial constraints shaped its climax, leading to more intentional reshoots. "We were constantly fighting the budget battle, and the studio didn't have a lot of confidence in the movie, so they held firm on the budget," he says. "We knew we wouldn't be able to deliver a big enough climax, because we wanted some pretty big special effects at the end."

As a result, the climactic confrontation between Nancy and Sarah was scaled back before the preview screening. "Everybody said they loved the movie, but the ending wasn't big enough," Fleming explains. "So the studio said, 'Let's do a reshoot and make the ending bigger.' And we were like, 'Our plan worked!' It was literally the plan – we'd rebuild the ending after the preview. We reconstructed the bedroom set and added the effects, including the moment where Nancy turns into the Medusa."

Thirty years on, *The Craft* remains an ode to the outcast and a relatable portrait of the difficulties of adolescence – serving as a rallying cry for anyone who's ever felt like a weirdo. 🧛‍♀️

The Craft is available on Blu-ray, and on Prime Video.



FILM IS FABULOUS!

PICTURE CREDIT: S/ENGINE / iSTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

FILM IS FABULOUS!

THE LOST PICTURE SHOW

MEET FILM IS FABULOUS!, THE TEAM BEHIND THE AMAZING
RETURN OF THOSE MISSING *DOCTOR WHO* EPISODES.
WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE OUT THERE?

WORDS:
NICK SETCHFIELD

DALEKS ARE ENGINEERED TO survive. Whether entombed in a bunker on Skaro or facing total annihilation in the great Time War, these malevolent pepper pots have an inherent knack for the dramatic comeback.

So were we truly surprised when two long-lost episodes of “The Daleks’ Master Plan” defied apparent oblivion to return to our screens earlier this year? Of course we were. Astonished. Gobsmailed. Flabbergasted. All those pathetic human responses Davros purged from his mutant master race. It’s the kind of find that electrifies not just *Doctor Who* fans but anyone with a passion for the preservation of vintage media.

“I couldn’t believe it,” says Sue Malden of Film is Fabulous!, the initiative behind the recovery of “The Nightmare Begins” and “Devil’s Planet”, parts one and three of the epic 1965 Dalek tale. “It was amazing.

“I’ve been interviewed in the past and asked, ‘Do you think any more [missing *Doctor Who* episodes] will be found?’ And I’ve always said yes, because I’m fairly sure they were all recorded, one way or another, so potentially they could all be out there. Some came back around the 50th anniversary, and that was a surprise. Now we’ve found two more. It’s kind of mindblowing, it’s just wonderful.

“For me it reinforces the fact there could be some out there. Why not?”

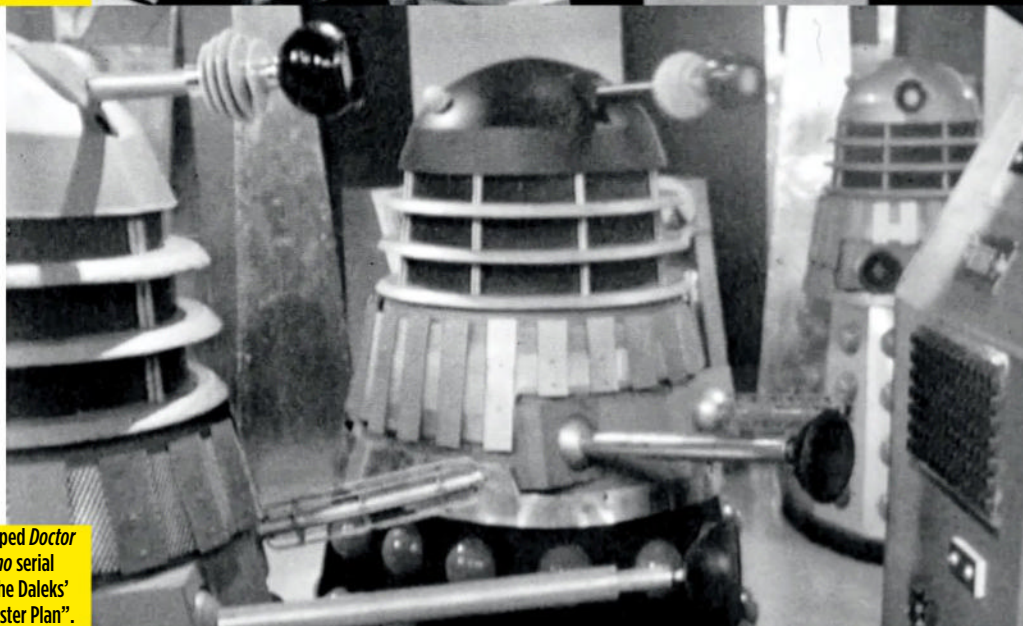
MAKING HISTORY

Established in 2023, Film is Fabulous! is a charitable trust dedicated to the protection and cataloguing of vulnerable private film collections (preserved as technical review prints, the Dalek episodes were discovered in a trove of film cans belonging to an elderly enthusiast). The team includes founder John Franklin, himself a film collector for over 40 years, and Professor Justin Smith, a film and TV historian at Leicester’s De Montfort University.

“More and more people seem to have confidence in what Film is Fabulous! is doing,” says Malden, who brings to the team decades of experience as a television archivist. “John’s reputation within the film collecting community has been a great help, and it means that people trust Film is Fabulous! People are coming forward, saying ‘I found this stuff in my dad’s garage!’ It’s almost more than we can cope with.”



Nicholas Courtney and William Hartnell.



Wiped *Doctor Who* serial “The Daleks’ Master Plan”.

Her name may never have featured against a swirling vortex in the show’s end credits, but Malden is a crucial figure in *Doctor Who* history. Appointed as the BBC’s Archive Selector in 1978, she was the first to discover just how many of the Time Lord’s exploits were lost from the vaults. A pragmatic if short-sighted BBC policy had seen over a hundred episodes erased so that precious videotape could be reused for newer output. And the series wasn’t alone in such a fate.

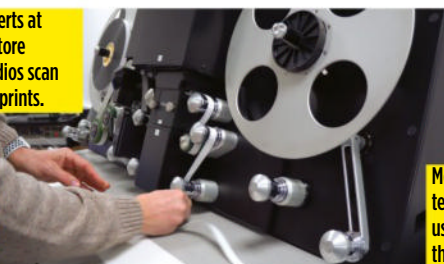
“I was just so shocked when I realised how much was missing. Most people, I’m sure, think the tape comes off the machine, gets put on a trolley and sent to the shelves, but it wasn’t like that.”

Doctor Who became a test case for an investigation into just what was gone from the corporation’s archive. “I thought it would be useful to find out why some programmes didn’t exist,” Malden recalls. “So I decided to select an iconic series that had run for a long time, that had touched a lot of people’s lives, when they were young and old. *Doctor Who* fitted the bill.”

A pivotal 1981 interview with Malden in *Doctor Who Magazine* revealed the scale of the losses. But it wasn’t only *Who* fans startled by the gaps in the BBC’s holdings. “Dudley Moore was a good one at getting on *Parkinson* or something and having a rant about *Not Only... But Also* tapes being wiped, but other people were also complaining that things hadn’t



Cans of 35mm film piled up in a collector’s loft.



Experts at R3Store Studios scan the prints.



Modern technology is used to clean the film.



An episode of *Late Night Horror*, with Andrew Keir...



...and Cynthia Etherington, was recently recovered.

been retained. Eventually someone had to deal with the answers, and it used to keep filtering down to me!

"One day, I was talking to my boss and I said, 'Why don't we just come out and say, 'There's a lot that's missing from the archive, and we'd love to get it back.'"

After partnering with the BFI on the landmark Missing Believed Wiped project in the early noughties, Malden eventually found herself recruited for Film is Fabulous!. "At that point I knew nothing about the film collecting world at all. I was on a panel at a *Doctor Who* convention, talking about finding lost episodes, when a guy came up and said, 'Can I have a word?' And that was John Franklin.

"He started telling me all about film collectors, and what a sad state of affairs things were for them. He told me they were all getting a bit old, maybe even dying, or getting dementia. Not many of them made lists of what they'd got, they just liked to collect. John said, 'I've got this idea...'

"We met again a few months later, with Professor Justin Smith. We talked about the plight of these collections. If they hadn't made a list no one's going to know what on earth that stuff in the garage is, and the family is not going to know what to do with it, and they'll probably throw it all away. That guy's spent his life collecting all this only to have it put in the skip. We thought we should do something about this and we set up an event in Leicester aimed specifically at film collectors. The whole set-up grew from there."

HORROR RESURRECTION

Malden describes the work of Film is Fabulous! as "a triaging system of checking through a collection, seeing what's there. You can't trust what it says on the label, you've actually got to run it. Then we check the condition, looking for nitrate [a notoriously unstable film stock] and 'vinegar syndrome' [the chemical degradation of cellulose acetate film]. You're finding those things in people's collections. Then we work out what to do if we find stuff that's missing from an archive."

Along with rediscovered episodes of *Play School*, *The Basil Brush Show* and *The Third Man*, the team has recently recovered "No Such Thing As A Vampire", the first instalment of the BBC's six-part anthology series *Late Night Horror* from 1968. A 16mm telerecording was found among a collection of film cans in the Regent cinema in Christchurch, Dorset, an art deco picture palace from the 1930s.

"It was found by a film enthusiast, a guy who's a projectionist," says Malden. "He was putting on shows of old material there and was asked to sort out a bundle of cans that were left in a cupboard somewhere. He was interested in horror anyway so his eyes popped out when he saw the title! It was absolutely amazing to find that."

Directed by Paddy Russell, who would go on to helm such classic *Doctor Who* adventures as

"More people are coming forward, saying 'I found this stuff in my dad's garage!'"

"Invasion Of The Dinosaurs" and "Pyramids Of Mars", "No Such Thing As A Vampire" adapted a short story by the legendary Richard Matheson. One of only two full episodes of *Late Night Horror* now known to survive, this opening entry has an extra significance – the series was the first BBC horror drama to be made in colour.

"It's a serious part of television history. They would have been learning how to use colour and how to light it, what the camera angles needed to be." Ironically, the newly discovered copy is a black and white print. "Of course that's a bit sad, but we're trying to get it colourised. Charles Norton is working on that. I haven't seen it, but it's got to have a lot of red blood in it, hasn't it? The colour is probably important there, so it'll be fantastic to see what they can achieve."

While such finds offer hope that other treasures may be out there, it's sobering to consider just how much has been lost across the decades. Some pieces of TV history we



Another grab from "No Such Thing As A Vampire".



A once-lost episode of *The Morecambe & Wise Show*.

know we can never see again – the BBC's live 1954 adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, starring Peter Cushing, was never recorded and immediately vanished into the ether; only a second performance, broadcast four days later, survives as a 35mm film telerecording. Cushing considered it inferior to the original.

Up to 80% of movies from the silent era are believed to be lost, denying 21st century audiences the chance to marvel at 1919's HG Wells adaptation *The First Men In The Moon* or 1927's *London After Midnight*, the unholy grail of horror cinema, the last known copy of which perished in the 1965 MGM vault fire. Only photographs of Lon Chaney's top-hatted, shark-toothed ghoul remain.

"If we turn up a copy of that you'll be the first to know!" laughs Malden. "So much of early film would have been very fragile. A lot of them might well have been on nitrate, which will self-combust. You've got to be so careful handling it, though some of it will last forever. Before the year 2000 there was a big project called Nitrate 2000. The plan was to get all nitrate film transferred to safety film by 2000. They never managed to achieve that."

"Once the talkies came in – it was a bit like television, once there was colour nobody gave a monkey's about black and white. Possibly that was the same in the film business [with silent movies]. Plus, roofs fall in, fires happen, floods happen. Also, there's a level of ignorance, of not knowing, 'This is a classic. This should be kept.'"

But Malden and the rest of the Film is Fabulous! team don't see this as a treasure hunt, a raiding of the lost archives. For them it's about the community, the unsung heroes who have cherished and preserved the past with all the dedication of the great British hobbyist.

"The primary aim is to help the collectors. Finding things that are missing is the most wonderful spin-off from that. Everything has to be checked to see if it's missing, if it's unique, and then we'll try and get it back to where it belongs, and then help the family or the collector dealing with the rest of the stuff."

"The publicity that we've got has given us such a boost. If people are concerned about a collection, they now know they can come forward and we'll help them." ●

For more information, visit filmisfabulous.org.uk.

Brought



To Book

JAKE ARNOTT

Occult fiction: the novelist tells us about moving from crime into horror

Words by Jonathan Wright // Portrait by Crispin Hughes

When occultist Aleister Crowley died in Hastings in 1947, he seemed set to fade from view. Aged 72, he was past his prime, a wheezy, sickly shadow of his former self. A dozen people attended his funeral in Brighton's Woodvale Crematorium. Throughout much of the '50s, nobody was much interested in him, at least outside those with more esoteric interests. So how is it that Crowley the folk devil so haunts the present?

According to Jake Arnott, whose new novel *Netherwood* is set in the present day, but named after the boarding house where Crowley met his end, one way to understand what happened is to think about the '60s TV version of *The Addams Family*. "If you look at Uncle Fester," he says, "he's like a comic version of Aleister Crowley. After the war, you know who's the wickedest man in the world? It ain't Aleister Crowley." In a world where the brutality of the Second World War was recent history, Crowley just wasn't scary enough to worry about.

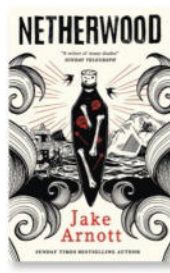
But things were changing. "The folk revival brought with it a horror revival and an interest in the occult," Arnott points out. Thus, to simplify madly, was born folk horror. A cultural space for Crowley to occupy from beyond the grave had begun to open up, so much so that Crowley is a constantly loitering presence in *Netherwood*, a novel that initially began to come into focus when Arnott moved to St Leonards, just down the coast from Hastings. "It's funny, another writer said, 'Any writer who moves down to Hastings, within hours is thinking about the gothic novel they're going to write, because it's really calling out for it.'"

Including Arnott. But he forgot about the project until he received a text saying, "Do you want to come and look at my cave?"

CAVE IN

This didn't emanate from a troglodyte, but a woman called Jude, who owned a fisherman's cottage that she rented out, which had a cave in the back of it. This is less unusual than you might suppose in a town with a rich smuggling tradition, built on soft sandstone that's relatively easy to tunnel.

Suddenly, one of *Netherwood's* key elements clicked into place. What if a failing artist and his art critic partner, driven out of London by the expense of living there and in need of a new start, moved to a similar property in Hastings? A similar scenario to *Rosemary's Baby*, where a couple move into a spooky building in Manhattan, began to present itself. "What I realised I could do was have a tight, realistic premise, because I think that's what you need [with horror]," says Arnott.



BIODATA

From
Buckinghamshire

Greatest Hits
Arnott's debut, *The Long Firm* (1999), was made into a BBC drama, while his second book, *He Kills Coppers* (2001), was adapted for ITV.

Random Fact
Earlier this year, Arnott was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (RSL), part of an intake that also featured Nigella Lawson.

The book is shot through with references to the counterculture, and this anchors *Netherwood*. When he was younger, Arnott squatted in Bonnington Square in Vauxhall, South London, a site marked for demolition, but saved when squatters formed a housing cooperative. At moments, the novel has an elegiac quality, because these kinds of spaces, where people can be creative, so rarely survive in our contemporary cities. "You'd have your own house," remembers Arnott, "because you could find an empty building, and you could change the locks, and you could go and live there for six months, or a year, or five years."

As for the fantastical elements of the story: without giving away spoilers, enter Crowley. "What I find perplexing about all sorts of people, from the Kray twins to Aleister Crowley, is that people often get the mythology wrong," Arnott says. "They find out things that are not that interesting about these characters, and probably wrong. What I found interesting about Crowley is the journey he had – and the end of the journey is *really* important."

CHANGING TIMES

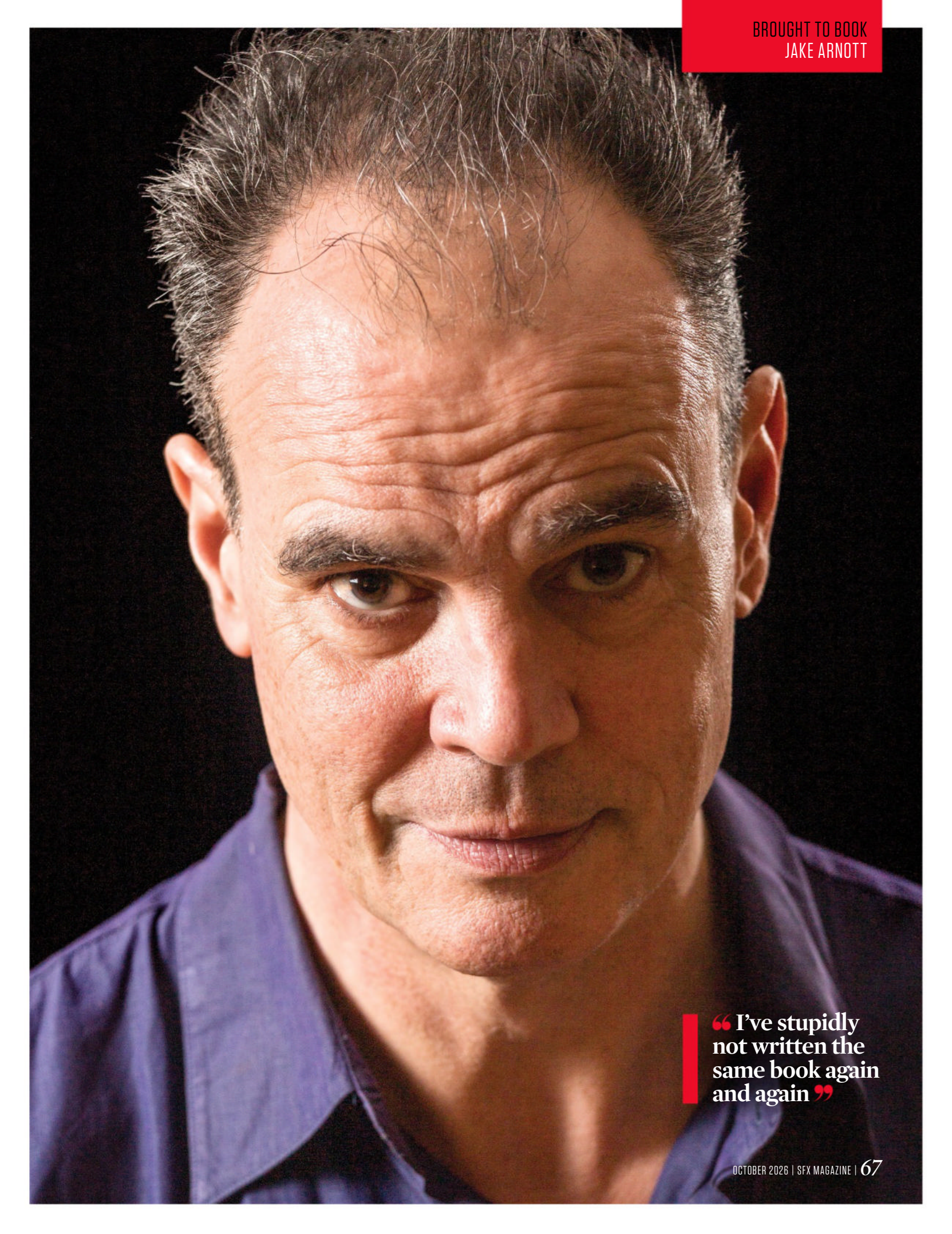
This idea of reframing what we think we know runs through Arnott's fiction. His debut, *The Long Firm* (1999) is set in the '60s and centred on a gay East End gangster. For *Johnny Come Home* (2006), he moved to the '70s and a plot involving far-left terrorist group the Angry Brigade and a glam rock star. *The Devil's Paintbrush* (2009) detailed a 1903 encounter between a disgraced British Army officer, Sir Hector MacDonald and – that man again – Crowley.

He's also written about the Golden Age of SF in *The House Of Rumour*, which finds connections between Rudolph Hess, Ian Fleming, L Ron Hubbard and Jack Parsons, one of the founders of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and an occultist who was in regular correspondence with, yes, Crowley.

The West Coast novelists associated with the Mañana Literary Society, a group centred around Robert A Heinlein, also feature. "I suppose the big thing about that time was how utopia becomes dystopia," says Arnott, reflecting on, for instance, Heinlein's sharp tack right after the Second World War.

What's next from Arnott? Who knows. He's "got something that has a kind of disturbing paranormal element", but he's still "trying to find out what it is" and things may change. As Arnott himself, simultaneously restless and drawn to details that open up stories, says, "I've rather stupidly not written the same book again and again, so I don't have a fixed sense of how I work." ●

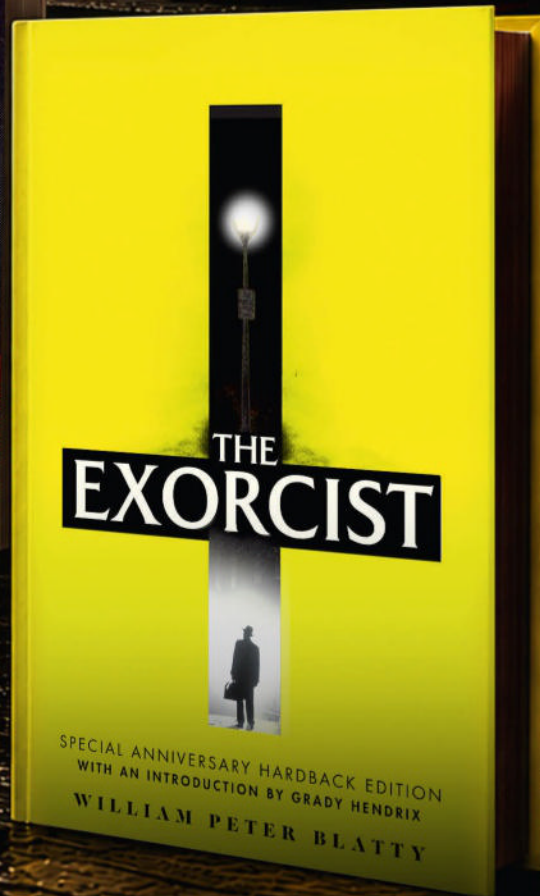
Netherwood is out now, published by Titan Books.



BROUGHT TO BOOK
JAKE ARNOTT

“I’ve stupidly
not written the
same book again
and again”

3 WAYS TO LOSE SLEEP



3AM
BOOKS

SLASHERS.
CULT CLASSICS.
FOLK HORROR.
AND EVERYTHING LURKING IN BETWEEN.

OCTOBER
2026

edited by Ian Berriman

Reviews

CINEMA 70

TV 74

HOME ENTERTAINMENT 76

BOOKS 84

COMICS 90

GAMES & STUFF 92

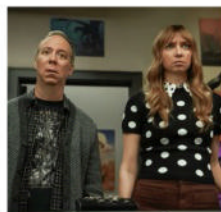
THIS ISSUE
58
REVIEWS

70

The Dog Stars

Canine And Company

Highlights



74

STUART FAILS TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE

→ A *Big Bang Theory* spinoff you might actually watch!



76

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

→ Nigel Kneale's 1957 Yeti movie gets a swish Hammer box set.



84

EXIT PARTY

→ *Station Eleven* author Emily St John Mandel's latest is a tale of doubles and parallel universes.

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ SUPERB ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ AVERAGE ★★★★★ POOR ★★★★★ TERRIBLE



"Quit brooding and throw me a stick, dude."

THE DOG STARS

Apocalypse Bow-Wow



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 118 minutes

▶ Director **Ridley Scott**

▶ Cast **Jacob Elordi, Margaret Qualley, Josh Brolin, Guy Pearce**

❗ **It's unfortunate for *The Dog Stars*** – Ridley Scott's adaptation of Peter Heller's 2012 novel – that it captures the boredom of living in a post-apocalyptic wasteland a little too well.

In the aftermath of a pandemic that has wiped out the vast majority of the population, Hig (Jacob Elordi) ekes out an existence with his canine companion Jasper and human pal Bangley (Josh Brolin). They defend their compound from occasional marauders, but Hig – who pilots a small aircraft to pick

up supplies from nearby towns and visit a local religious community – yearns for something more than survival.

It's an oddly paced film. It begins rather slowly, and while there are small pleasures to be found in the resourcefulness of Hig and Bangley's day-to-day life, the lack of a clear goal stifles any chance of momentum. Even when Cima (Margaret Qualley) and her father, Pops (Guy Pearce), enter the picture and double the principal character count, the plot can feel like it's as grounded as

“There's a pleasingly tactile quality to this world”

Hig's damaged plane. If you've got the patience, the more exciting moments are backloaded, including a Western-inspired chase, a night-vision assault, and a genuinely creepy interlude. That in particular hints at a potentially more intriguing film that could've been – or that maybe this story would've been better suited to multiple episodes on TV.

On the plus side, there's a pleasingly tactile quality to this world, with its awe-inspiring natural backdrops and some stunning aerial photography. The cast, too, are uniformly decent – the brooding Elordi, who's frequently pointing a gun, has done no harm to his Bond chances, and Brolin is good value as ever, though Pearce is strapped with a fairly thin role.

However, the romance between Cima and Hig plays out at a slightly unconvincing crawl, especially given their believable chemistry. Even with their tragic backstories, would they really have any hesitation hooking up, given

how well they get on and how otherwise bleak their prospects are looking? In the film's slower stretches, there's a little too much free time for you to ponder such plot holes.

Also not doing *The Dog Stars* any favours are obvious comparisons to the recent likes of *28 Years Later* (and sequel *The Bone Temple*) and *The Last Of Us*, all of which presented more unique and compelling scenarios than we get here. In fact, it's hard to tell what the allure was for the prolific Scott here, and visuals aside it doesn't bear any of the hallmarks of the best of his oeuvre.

Everyone involved is too talented for the film to be anything less than watchable, but that level of talent also renders the end result as something of a disappointment. It's no dog's breakfast, but certainly doesn't reach for the stars.

Matt Maytum

i Peter Heller wrote the book after learning to fly in 20 days, and buying a 1956 Cessna 182. Hig flies the same plane.



COYOTE VS ACME

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 103 minutes

▶ Director Dave Green

▶ Cast Will Forte, John Cena, Lana Condor, Luis Guzmán,

➤ When Warner Bros

Discovery cancelled its plans to release *Coyote Vs Acme* and instead opted to write it off as a \$30 million tax loss, it wasn't just fans of Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner who felt aggrieved. One could argue, though, that the studio behemoth did Dave Green's film a favour, not only by letting a smaller distributor purchase the rights but also by giving it a curiosity factor that may prompt punters to seek it out.

That CVA should see perennial underdog Wile E take on the gargantuan corporation whose dodgy products repeatedly foil his attempts to nab his prey lends an additional layer of meta to the knockabout proceedings. For those unschooled in the film's tortuous history, though, it still works perfectly satisfactorily as a *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*-adjacent courtroom caper that comes stuffed to the gills with delightfully Looney cameos.

Will Forte heads the non-animated contingent as the hapless Albuquerque lawyer who becomes Wile E's representative, with John Cena offering his worthy support as Acme's own legal eagle. Both actors, though, are sufficiently self-aware to know that they are merely human stooges for Daffy, Bugs et al, with a priceless scene involving Tweety being interrogated by Cena emerging as an unexpected comedic high point. **Neil Smith**



Thatcher fact: her middle name is Bathsheba.

HER PRIVATE HELL

Mist opportunities

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 25 SEPTEMBER**

18 | 110 minutes

▶ Director Nicolas Winding Refn

▶ Cast Havana Rose Liu,

Sophie Thatcher, Charles Melton, Kristine Froseth

➤ Filmmaker Nicolas Winding

Refn relishes positioning himself as an enfant terrible of cinema – he does his own thing, and cares not one jot for what anyone really thinks of his work. Probably a good idea, as despite making some excellent films in the past (*Pusher*, *Drive*), he's descended into an arty netherworld where style triumphs every time.

Shot like an extended perfume advert (albeit one that features wildly fetishistic portrayals of sex and violence), *Her Private Hell* is set in an anonymous metropolis where a creeping, weird mist has settled, bringing a gimp-suited serial killer/potential demon

“An excuse for Refn to indulge himself in dreamy weirdness”

called the Leatherman along with it. We meet Elle (Sophie Thatcher), an actor/director working on her latest project and working out her conflicted relationship with former best friend-turned-stepmother Dominique (Havana Rose Liu). At the same time, soldier K (Charles Melton) is hunting for his missing daughter and battling the yakuza. Yet the story is really only a feather-light excuse for Refn to indulge himself in all manner of dreamy weirdness. It aims for operatic, but mostly hits soporific.

The cast do what they can with this wafer-thin material, Kristine Froseth generating some actual laughs as Hunter, an influencer who is to be Elle's new co-star. But as the characters sit around, chat, argue, fight, hook up and suffer at the hands of the Leatherman, it all becomes so very meandering, too enamoured of the director's endless desire for shock and salaciousness, which overwhelms anything of real meaning or consequence. Less enfant terrible, more just terrible. **James White**

i Refn constantly re-wrote the script, and didn't let anyone know what the ending was until it was time to shoot it.



LADY

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 95 minutes

▶ Director Samuel Abrahams

▶ Cast Sian Clifford, Laurie Kynaston, Juliet Cowan, Olisa Odele

➤ Mockumentary meets

magical realism in Samuel Abrahams's engaging debut feature, in which a lonely blueblood desperate to be noticed is afflicted with a seemingly irreversible case of progressive invisibility.

Largely set within the confines of her sprawling estate, *Lady* begins as a genial spoof on its absurd attention-seeker of a protagonist (*Fleabag*'s Sian Clifford) but gradually expands to offer a more nuanced sketch of an aristocratic agoraphobe nursing a tragic secret. The invisibility facilitates a variety of comic interludes, culminating in a talent-show striptease that lends new meaning to giving one's all for one's art.

Arriving at the isolated Ravenhyde Hall to film what he believes to be a Netflix-funded fly-on-the-wall doc, director Sam (Laurie Kynaston) is dismayed to find that the commission is merely a ruse cooked up by its scatty owner. When Lady Isabella starts to dissolve before his eyes, though, Sam sees dollar signs that drive him to use questionable methods to retain her trust.

Genre fans won't find much to involve them in the ethical dilemmas that ensue. The more transparent the eponymous Lady becomes, however, the more they'll be able to draw connections with the cultish likes of *Hollow Man* and *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. **Neil Smith**



Two people in love? Positively evil...

LEVITICUS

Putting the fear of God in you



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 88 minutes

► Director Adrian Chiarella

► Cast Joe Bird, Stacy Clausen, Mia Wasikowska, Ewen Leslie

◆ **This Australian horror poses** the question, "What if conversion therapy was a monster?" – or more broadly, a killer. Something it often is in real life, which is still way more terrifying than anything you could see on-screen.

Adrian Chiarella's feature-directing debut sees a mother and son relocate to a Christian town in Victoria, Australia. There, Naim (Joe Bird) falls for son of the local pastor, Ryan (Stacey Clausen).

When the relationship is uncovered, the pair are forced to endure conversion therapy at their church – but this is no "ordinary" conversion, there's something

supernatural at play. Something which, even more sinisterly, the parents are told beforehand "can't be stopped".

It's more exorcism than conversion, with an entity unleashed that's only seen when it takes the form of what the other person desires the most – for Naim and Ryan, each other. And with shades of *It Follows*, it's not looking for love and kisses...

The performances are solid, and as a whole *Leviticus* is a deeply unsettling watch. It's just maddening throughout – not because it's a bad movie, far from it, but because the subject matter is so frustrating. Haunting for all the reasons you don't expect a horror film to be.

Darren Scott

i The title refers to a book of the Old Testament often cited as "proof" of divine prohibition of homosexuality.

THE END OF OAK STREET

Block Rockin' Beasts



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 99 minutes

► Director David Robert Mitchell

► Cast Anne Hathaway, Ewan McGregor, Maisy Stella, Christian Convery

◆ **Did you emerge from**

Disclosure Day wishing Steven Spielberg had truly made something that transports you back to his '80s and '90s heydays? *The End Of Oak Street*, directed by *It Follows*' David Robert Mitchell, might just go some way to answering that wish.

Produced by JJ Abrams (no stranger to following in Spielbergian footsteps himself), this thriller sees a family – Ewan McGregor's Greg, Anne

Hathaway's Denise, Maisy Stella's Audrey and Christian Convery's Brian – discover that their neighbourhood has mysteriously been transported back to prehistoric times. Dinosaurs are wandering the streets, snacking on the fauna and the locals, while the climate is tropical and sweaty, like something out of a big-budget *The Twilight Zone* episode.

As they try to survive, the dysfunctional family unit is forced to confront the simmering issues (cash flow, Denise's frustrated literary ambitions, worry over faithful dog Starbuck) that have slowly been driving them apart.

Mitchell infuses this Amblinesque creature feature with his horror instincts: there are effective



"Oh god, I've forgotten to put the bins out!"

jump scares and real tension at points. And credit to him for a healthily dark sense of humour running throughout, with violent deaths and a contender for the year's most memorable (and unusual) sex scene.

It is, perhaps, a little let down by a predictable, exposition-heavy script, one that even veteran actors like McGregor and Hathaway can't always make sound natural. And as the third act dawns, so the

conveniently lucky escapes mount up. Yet the entertainment value remains high, the kids are believable without ever becoming cloying, and Mitchell knows to keep the action moving and the spectacle manageable. Even Spielberg would be happy to have this one on his CV.

James White

i The film was originally titled *Flowervale Street*, with the final name announced by Warner Bros in January this year.



INSIDIOUS: OUT OF THE FURTHER

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 106 minutes

▶ Director Jacob Chase

▶ Cast Lin Shaye, Sam Spruell, Amelia Eve, Maisie Richardson-Sellers, Island Austin

➡ **It's always tough to keep** finding fresh ways into a horror franchise, especially one that already has five entries under its belt. With *Insidious: Out of the Further*, co-writer/director Jacob Chase finds one or two decent moments among the torrent of predictable jump scares, twisted camera angles and grinning ghouls.

With the Lambert family's story told, we're introduced to Gemma Hall (Amelia Eve), whose haunted, troubled mother seemingly killed herself one night. Twenty years on, Gemma is living in the same house and raising her daughter Maya (Island Austin). Turns out Gemma has the ability to pull spirits from the void between our world and the next known as *The Further*, which puts her in the crosshairs of a malevolent spirit.

There's the standard creepy build-up and the contractual expository appearance from Lin Shaye's Elise Rainier. The concept of Gemma's abilities does at least help inject a new twist into very familiar scares, and there are some well-realised sequences, including one set in a supernaturally labyrinthine pillow fort. Despite some very basic characters and frequent dumb decisions on their part, *Out of the Further* does at least prove there's life in the old fog yet.

James White



HOPE

It takes a village

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 25 SEPTEMBER**

TBC | 156 minutes

▶ Director Na Hong-Jin

▶ Cast Hwang Jung-min, Hyeon, Alicia Vikander, Michael Fassbender

"Protect the nation from infiltration!" reads a government poster in this creature feature from South Korea, which unfolds in a remote village near the demilitarised zone whose residents have long been tutored to be on the lookout for incursions from the North. The incomers to Hope, though, are of a different hue altogether, as the local police chief (Hwang Jung-min) soon realises when a call-out to inspect a slaughtered bull alerts him to the existence of a rampaging killing machine a thousand times more destructive than anything Kim Jong Un might come up with.

In his first feature since 2016's *The Wailing*, director Na Hong-Jin

"An uproarious and full-tilt actioner"

deftly keeps this beastie out of sight for a good 50 minutes before finally revealing it in all its sprinting, snarling and hirsute glory. Subsequent monsters, alas, aren't nearly so effective, with one's cerulean skin and another's gaping mandibles suggesting nothing so much as some unholy union between the Na'vi and *Venom*. A fourth critter's penchant for climbing trees lends some *Predator* to the mix in a film that divides its impressively mounted mayhem between a spectacularly trashed harbour town and a dense surrounding forest. Throw in nods to *Alien* and *A Quiet Place*, and you have an uproarious, full-tilt actioner whose gripping first hour and blistering car-chase climax more than compensate for a baggy middle third.

The fact that real-life couple Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander eventually pop up in the unlikelyst of guises adds another intriguing element to a shameless crowd-pleaser whose huge success on home soil makes a follow-up a formality. **Neil Smith**

i *Squid Game* star Hyeon underwent specialist weapons training and driving instruction to play rookie cop Sung-ae.



BOORMAN AND THE DEVIL

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 25 SEPTEMBER**

TBC | 112 minutes

▶ Director David Kittredge

➡ **John Boorman's 1977 sequel** *Exorcist II: Heretic* was savaged by critics and mocked by audiences, prompting a panicked re-edit. So you may wonder who the audience is for a near two-hour documentary. Still, people went to see *Ed Wood...* and the behind-the-scenes story is interesting.

Boorman is a key contributor, capable now of discussing the film which nearly ended his career with wry humour (on Richard Burton: "He couldn't act from the neck down.") The late Louise Fletcher is good value too. Also rounded up: Linda Blair, various crew, and defenders like Karyn Kusama.

An accessible affair, it progresses chronologically from pre-production to release, charting factors like the valley fever which laid the director low for weeks and the endlessly reworked script. Co-writer Rospo Pallenberg emerges as the nearest thing to a villain.

Crude animation helps to bring alive anecdotes (like Burton's regular trips to the toilet during the readthrough), and no film goes referenced without an accompanying clip; David Kittredge's team have also clearly done the hard yards in the Warner archive, digging out documentation.

An even-handed account, it doesn't whitewash *Heretic*'s many absurdities, but rightly points out its ambition, and its often lyrical visuals. Hell, it's a masterpiece compared to *The Exorcist: Believer...* **Ian Berriman**

STUART FAILS TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE Season One

More Bang for your B-list schmucks

★★★★★

▶ UK/US HBO Max, streaming now, Thursdays

▶ Showrunner Chuck Lorre

▶ Cast Kevin Sussman, Lauren Lapkus, Brian Posehn, John Ross Bowie

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 After the Big Bang the universe expanded rapidly. The same thing appears to be happening with *The Big Bang Theory*. *Stuart Fails To Save The Universe* is the nerdcentric sitcom's third spin-off, after *Young Sheldon* and *Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage*. But there's something different about this one.

No, scratch that. There's something a lot different about

this one. And you don't need to be a fan of *The Big Bang Theory* to enjoy it, which is handy if you're the kind of geek for whom *Big Bang* was televisual Kryptonite.

By his own admission, after decades of creating sofa-centric, multi-camera, laughter-tracked sitcoms, *Big Bang* co-creator Chuck Lorre has decided to give us instead the kind of show the characters in *Big Bang* would love. *Stuart Fails To Save The Universe* is a single-camera screwball comedy, with an ongoing multiverse storyline, featuring various supporting characters from the parent show as alternate versions of themselves, plus loads

of Easter eggs and special geekverse guest stars.

In a dystopian alternate Pasadena, Stuart Bloom (Kevin Sussman) is still a failed artist and owner of a failing comic book store. Geologist Bert Kibbler (Brian Posehn) remains a loyal customer, bartering with canned food. But then a Stuart from another universe appears, claiming that Leonard, Sheldon and Howard (the big three from *Big Bang*) built a quantum interference gizmo that has altered reality, and tells alt-Stuart he must find the device at Caltech and set reality back to normal.

However, when Stuart and Bert find the device and switch it on, it propels them on an odyssey through ever stranger alternate universes, where they meet bizarre versions of their old friends. That includes Stuart's girlfriend Denise (Lauren Lapkus) and creepy, sex-obsessed physicist Kripke (John Ross Bowie), who join them on their adventures.

It's all delightfully bonkers, and just as it seems like it's going to be a formulaic "universe of the week" show (*Magic World! Totalitarian World! Pinko Commie Sex Tribe World!*), it shakes things up and goes down some very bizarre rabbit holes. It's fast-paced, both in terms of plot and gag rate, and takes some on-point satirical swipes at US politics at times.

Sure, some of the gags fall flat, and earlier episodes rely a little too much on "Oh look, it's you-know-who being different". Overall, though, it's a hugely enjoyable slice of sci-fi silliness, and the kind of thing Sheldon and co would no doubt rave about on the socials. **Dave Golder**

i When "wizard" Wil Wheaton battles with Bert in the magical universe, one of his spellmaking gestures is a Vulcan salute.



STAR WARS VISIONS PRESENTS: THE NINTH JEDI

★★★★★

▶ UK/US Disney+, streaming now

▶ Supervising Director

Kenji Kamiyama

▶ Cast Kimiko Glenn,

Andrew Kishino, Masi Oka, Simu Liu

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 A lightsaber-wielding villain in a mask. A planet-obliterating space laser powered by kyber crystals. A rookie Jedi learning the ways of the Force from a world-weary veteran... On paper, *The Ninth Jedi* looks like another retread of *A New Hope*. On screen, however, this anime follow-up to an episode from hit-and-miss anthology series *Visions* feels fresh and new.

With its iconography, sound effects and numerous callbacks to the original trilogy ("I have a bad feeling about this", etc), it's unmistakably *Star Wars* – even Nobuko Toda and Kazuma Jinnouchi's score is a pretty good approximation of John Williams. But with no mention of Skywalker or Galactic Empires, this adventure in an alternative galaxy far, far away is happy to cherry pick from existing canon. The eight-part series isn't afraid to go to some dark and unexpected places as it pursues its own path – the colour-changing lightsabers are particularly satisfying.

The team from Japanese animation house Production IG also put their own spin on the visuals, particularly in the lightsaber duels and epic space battles. So even though pretty much everything in *The Ninth Jedi* echoes what's come before, you've never seen *Star Wars* quite like this. **Richard Edwards**



Jacket with torch £2500, gloves model's own.

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON Season Three

Family Misfortunes



UK Sky Atlantic/NOW/HBO Max, streaming now

► Showrunner Ryan Condal

► Cast Matt Smith, Emma D'Arcy, Olivia Cooke, James Norton

EPISODES 3.01-3.08 *After A Knight Of*

The Seven Kingdoms showed us a lighter side of Westeros earlier this year, we're back in familiar grimdark territory for the latest leg of the dysfunctional Targaryens's ongoing family feud. This renewal of hostilities isn't quite as explosive as the abrupt ending to season two suggested it might be, but when the gloves do come off, it's spectacular stuff.

House Of The Dragon's third season is bookended by battles

worthy of *Game Of Thrones* at its most epic, the first a cinematic sea skirmish, the second a cast-of-thousands castle siege. The show also continues to deliver – and then some – on the fire-breathing reptiles of the title.

In-between, however, it remains a talky affair, for better *and* worse. Feuding matriarchs Rhaenyra (Emma D'Arcy) and Alicent (Olivia Cooke) captivate whenever they're on-screen, balancing responsibilities to the realm (sometimes ruthlessly) with loyalties to their usually unreliable

“When the gloves come off, it's spectacular”



Prince Daemon: compensating for something?

relatives. James Norton is also a scene-stealing addition to the ensemble as Lord Ormund Hightower, a stuck-up noble with kingmaking aspirations of his own.

But with every protagonist connected by blood – usually in multiple incestuous ways – keeping track of who hates whom and why gets frustrating at times. The squabble for the Iron Throne

is also getting more complex at a time when – with just one season left – an endgame should surely be coming into view.

Showrunner Ryan Condal has promised that the “whole [of season four] is pay-off” – on the evidence of this, he's got a lot of work to do. **Richard Edwards**

i Don't skip the opening credits. The tapestry evolves throughout the season to reflect recent game-changing events.

THE TERROR: DEVIL IN SILVER

The Beast Wing



UK Sky Atlantic, Mondays/streaming on NOW

US Streaming on AMC+ and Shudder

► Showrunners Chris Cantwell,

Victor LaValle

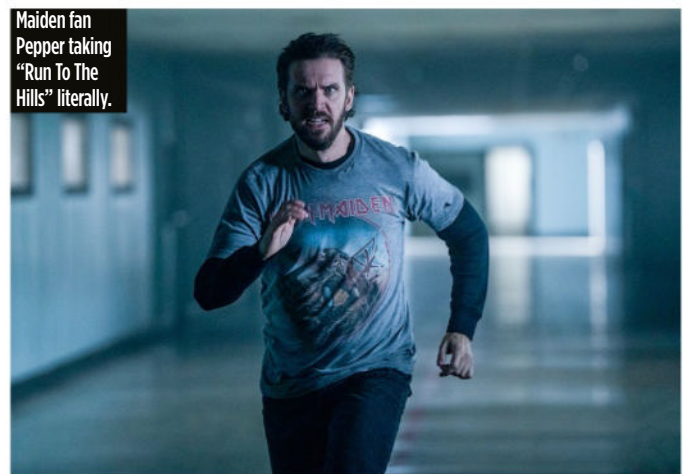
► Cast Dan Stevens, CCH Pounder, John Benjamin Hickey, Judith Light

EPISODES 3.01-3.06 *Presumably the* producers of horror anthology series *The Terror* have an ethos for the show – what kind of story suits *The Terror* treatment. But after season one (a gorgeous-looking blend of creature feature and Victorian seafaring set in the Arctic), season two (a ghost story set in a Japanese-American internment camp during the Second World War) and now

season three (a supernatural thriller set in a contemporary psychiatric hospital), the main criterion seems to be: cheaper than the last one.

If there is another criterion, it's possibly that the literal “monster” in each story is less monstrous than “the system”. This certainly applies to *Devil In Silver*, which starts with short-fused rock drummer Pepper Coffin (Dan Stevens) being sent to a decrepit psychiatric hospital after decking his girlfriend's ex, mainly because it's less paperwork for the cops than booking him. Once he's in there, he finds it difficult to get out. Which becomes increasingly problematic when he realises there's something ancient and

Maiden fan Pepper taking “Run To The Hills” literally.



malevolent trapped in the hospital that's killing patients.

Based on a 2013 novel by Victor LaValle, *Devil In Silver* is a weird, claustrophobic affair where the staff act as oddly as the patients. At first it seems like they may be in cahoots with the supernatural threat, but it turns out their behaviour has more to do with the desperate state of the mental health system in the US.

But there's plenty of spooky supernatural stuff going on, too. And while some of the gore may be a little low-rent and some of the revelations a little ho-hum for horror aficionados, the series benefits from a superb cast, edgy direction, and an ending that's satisfying and creepy. **Dave Golder**

i Dan Stevens starred as another patient in a mental health institution in the Marvel TV series *Legion* (2017-2019).

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Peak-a-boo!

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1957 | PG | 4K/Blu-ray

▶ Director Val Guest

▶ Cast Peter Cushing, Forrest Tucker, Maureen Connell, Richard Wattis

BLU-RAY DEBUT Originally staged

as 1955's BBC TV play *The Creature*, Nigel Kneale's expedition into the folklore of the Himalayas never quite rattled the nation like his breakthrough hit *The Quatermass Experiment*.

That didn't stop Hammer remounting it for the big screen though, with Peter Cushing reprising the role of a scientist searching for the truth behind the

fabled footprints in the snow. This impressive 4K remaster showcases the sheer ambition of the movie: stunning widescreen shots of the French Pyrenees (doubling for the Asian mountains) blend with ingeniously persuasive studio snowscapes, while astonishingly detailed interiors complete our immersion in the legend-haunted realm of "the high valleys".

Emphasising the psychological and the philosophical in crisp black and white, *The Abominable Snowman* has none of the gothic excess of Hammer's more celebrated productions. In later years the studio would undoubtedly have made a bloodier,

more lurid version, chasing an X certificate. Here, director Val Guest wisely insists on restraint and mystery, enhancing Kneale's literate screenplay with the power of the unseen. "There's something out there on the ice!" someone cries, and we peer again into the snowblinding unknown.

▶ **Extras** The UK theatrical version comes with a new audio commentary by Kneale gurus Toby Hadoke and Andy Murray, along with an archival commentary featuring Kneale and Val Guest; the more clunkily titled US cut *The Abominable Snowman Of The Himalayas* is also included, complete with a new commentary by film historians Toby Roan and Heath Holland, and a separate audio essay by comic artist Stephen R Bissette.

Assorted experts power an informed retrospective on the making of the movie (58 minutes), and reassemble for a deep dive into now lost small screen forerunner *The Creature*, offering some fascinating insights into the birth of TV along the way (54 minutes). Elsewhere, a celebration of production designer Bernard Robinson reveals the resourceful secrets of the Bray Studios backlot (25 minutes); horror journalist Heather Wixson presents a video essay on the eternal imaginative pact between filmmaker and audience, drawing a throughline from this movie to *Jaws* and *Alien* (18 minutes); and there's a chance to gawp at Kneale's own behind-the-scenes photos, full of the finer details of the incredible sets (eight minutes).

A 2003 interview with Guest finds the nonagenarian in sharp, charismatic form as he discusses "the real Peter Cushing" (14 minutes); he also features in archival audio (29 minutes), along with *The Creature* director Rudolph Cartier (22 minutes). An entertaining look at the Yeti's cryptozoological roots takes in the snowman genre in general (40 minutes), while Bissette and critic Tim Lucas geek out in a free-ranging Zoom chat (75 minutes). **Nick Setchfield**

i Cast member Wolfe Morris also appeared in the 1967 *Doctor Who* story "The Abominable Snowmen".



THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE – VRACH FRANKENSHTEYN

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Director Chris Carter

▶ Cast David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Billy Connolly, Amanda Peet

DISNEY+ Not even a psychic

could have seen this one coming... The second *X-Files* movie was released in 2008, a week after *The Dark Knight*. That film became a pop culture juggernaut, while *I Want to Believe* was mostly forgotten. Still, with Ryan Coogler's *X-Files* reboot in development, the show's creator Chris Carter has been granted the chance to recut the film to bring it closer to his darker original vision.

The theatrical version of *I Want to Believe* wasn't terrible, but it was ponderous and unbalanced, focusing more on the state of Mulder and Scully's relationship following the end of the series than the central mystery of a missing FBI agent and a paedophile priest with ambiguous psychic powers. It was only in the final act that it moved into horror territory.

I Want to Believe – Vrach Frankenshteyn (would it really be an X-File without a tongue-twisting title?) rebalances things. It trims much of the humour and eases up on Mulder and Scully's romance, without excising it completely. The result is a film that's more convincing as a standalone supernatural thriller – better than the original version, but hardly a lost classic. **Will Salmon**



The face of a man who's serious about Blu-ray extras.

FACES OF DEATH

Up to snuff

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 7 SEPTEMBER

2026 | 18 | Digital

▶ Director **Daniel Goldhaber**

▶ Cast **Barbie Ferreira,**
Dacre Montgomery, Josie Totah,
Aaron Holliday

▶ **“Someone’s remaking *Faces Of Death!*”** yells final girl Margot Romero, in one of the most metatextual moments of this chronically online horror. But it isn’t really a remake. It’s both weirder and more conventional than that: a film that acknowledges the 1978 film of the same title exists, displays a copy of the VHS tape, and shows clips of it, but also makes up its own cat-and-mouse serial killer plot in case you’re not into Mondo movies.

Margot is a content moderator at “Kino”, a not-even-slightly veiled TikTok. She’s internet-

famous herself because of a video gone horribly wrong, and trying to do penance. So when she comes across violent videos that look a little too real, she decides she has to stop the killer, who’s basing his kills on – yep, you guessed it – scenes from the original film.

The plot trundles along engagingly enough, but falls into too-familiar tropes towards the end when it becomes clear that it’s all just an excuse to open up a conversation about voyeurism, desensitisation, and online security. It’s almost like the film wants to tell you off for watching it. When Charli XCX shows up for a couple of scenes of snotty mean girl action, you might wonder if it has a point.

Sarah Dobbs

i Composer Gavin Brevik says he wanted his theme to sound like a VHS tape stretching and distorting as it’s fast-forwarded.



His Michael Jackson cosplay needed work.

BATMAN: KNIGHTFALL PART 1 – KNIGHTFALL

Back-breaking work

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | 15 | 4K/Blu-ray/download

▶ Director **Jeff Wamester**

▶ Cast **Anson Mount, Michael Mando,**
Pablo Schreiber, Bruce Boxleitner

▶ **Still ranked as one of the** legendary Batman stories, 1993-1994 arc “Knightfall” has been adapted and reinterpreted multiple times over the years. It was only a matter of time before we got an animated version of the saga, and Warner have gone the full trilogy route to try and do a largely faithful interpretation.

This first instalment stays fairly close to the original story, with wily supervillain Bane unleashing

“There’s kinetic, well-crafted animation”

every Arkham inmate on Gotham, as an already-exhausted Batman is driven to the brink.

It all leads up to the infamous moment where Bane triumphs by breaking Batman’s back, but the

brisk 78-minute running time also tries to set up unstable vigilante Azrael, and deliver a self-contained 15-minute origin story for Bane.

The result is some very weird pacing, but once the film gets going it does capture the

momentum and brooding menace of the original comics. There’s kinetic, well-crafted animation in the frequent fight scenes, and impressive work from the voice cast – especially Michael Mando (Nacho Varga in *Better Call Saul*) as Bane.

It’s a pity, though, that the film is also chasing the “superheroes are for adults” market by cranking up the violence to absurdly gory levels. This makes an already dark story even more unrelentingly grim, and while there are strong choices in this opening chapter, it’s not an especially fun watch.

▶ **Extras** A Making Of featurette (10 minutes) focuses on adapting the story and animating the action. Another featurette (seven minutes) delves into the character of Robin (with an emphasis on Tim Drake). **Saxon Bullock**



i Bane creators Chuck Nixon and Graham Nolan conceived the character as an evil version of 1930s pulp hero Doc Savage.



"If you brushed more often this'd be easier."

HUNGRY Hippo critical

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Director **James Nunn**

▶ Cast **Madison Davenport, Tracey Bonner, Joaquim de Almeida, Michel Curiel**

SKY CINEMA **The hippopotamus** is a deeply unlikely candidate for a creature feature. Lacking the sleek, photogenic menace of a great white shark or the sheer in yer face screen presence of a grizzly bear, these dumpy mud-wallowers surely reached their cinematic pinnacle prancing in tutus in Disney's *Fantasia*.

Hungry is out to reset our expectations. Titled with a wink to the boardgame *Hungry Hungry Hippos*, James Nunn's film recasts the beast as a ferocious apex predator, unleashed in the far from traditional environs of the

Louisiana swamps (yes, there is an explanation, one that draws on an obscure true life footnote in American history).

It's standard survival thriller stuff, stranding a boatload of tourist bait in the bayou, at the mercy of a creature determined to persuade us that behind its vaguely comical exterior lurks a total badass. "The only cute hippo is a dead hippo," declares the mandatory grizzled hunter character.

Some atmospheric nocturnal visuals can't quite compensate for the generic storytelling beats. And while it's all played commendably straight, *Hungry* feels like it simply hit find and replace at the scriptwriting stage, substituting "hippo" for "gator". **Nick Setchfield**

i The never passed American Hippo Bill of 1910 proposed introducing the animals to Louisiana to solve a meat shortage.



PENNY LANE IS DEAD

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2026 | N/A | SVOD

SHUDDER **Up for another** debate about whether rape-revenge films become feminist if the revenge is bloody enough? If not, give this Aussie horror a swerve. Because: yikes.

Four college-aged girls are on a weekend away. Things take a nasty turn when bad girl Kat calls her boyfriend to pick her up, and he brings his friends. In theory, it's a reclamation of a misogynistic subgenre, but in practice, it's not smart or subversive enough to avoid the same old pitfalls. **Sarah Dobbs**



BIG BABY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 7 SEPTEMBER**

2026 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ **The real villain in this meta** slasher? Horror podcasters. Specifically, the kind who deride everything they watch without really trying to understand it. Hosts Steve Strange and Vampire Greg are so mean about screenwriter Adam's last film, in fact, that it drives him to create something new... at the cost of his sanity.

The work of Rob Zombie's brother, *Big Baby* comes across as a horror film for horror filmmakers, but its villain and his kills are inventive enough to keep fans entertained too.

▶ **Extras** None. **Sarah Dobbs**



THE DEMON DETECTIVE

★★★★★

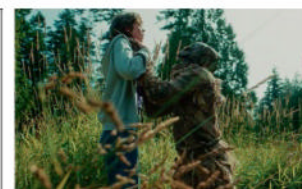
▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2025 | N/A | Digital

▶ **Putting Doug Jones in your** exorcism movie but not turning him into an elaborately weird demon seems like a waste.

It's one of many ways this movie makes it clear it has no any ideas of its own: its hero is an excommunicated exorcist who scrapes a living via minor demon investigations, who inevitably has secrets of his own he'll need to address before he can defeat evil.

It's all very predictable, and the visual effects are both cheap and unimaginative. **Sarah Dobbs**



RL STINE'S PUMPKINHEAD

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2025 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/digital

▶ **Who knew vegetable** growing competitions could be deadly? When teenager Sam steals Farmer Palmer's prize pumpkin, his family become the latest sacrifices in a *Wicker Man*-esque harvest ritual...

Writer/director Jem Gerrard fleshes out RL Stine's short story with family trauma, a double-jointed scarecrow, and a bleak ending. Maybe it could've been a feature-length episode of *Goosebumps*, if they ended in utter desolation.

▶ **Extras** None. **Sarah Dobbs**

UNDERWORLD

New Faces

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 7 SEPTEMBER

1985 15 4K

▶ Director **George Pavlou**

▶ Cast **Denholm Elliott, Steven Berkoff, Larry Lamb, Miranda Richardson**

▶ **A little-known line on Clive Barker's CV, this noir/fantasy/horror mash-up predates *Hellraiser* and *Rawhead Rex* (which director George Pavlou also helmed). Barker wrote the original screenplay, later reworked by (to use his words) "a tits and car-chase man".**

It's packed with familiar faces. Steven Berkoff, Art Malik and Brian Croucher are baddies; Ingrid Pitt a blue-haired bordello madam. Larry Lamb rocks dyed red hair as the hero. Miranda Richardson and Phil Davis pop up as lumpy-faced mutants. Then there's Denholm Elliott as a doctor whose

experimental drug has caused these surreal disfigurements. When the mutants kidnap Nicole (Nicola Cowper), a prostitute unaffected by its side effects, her former lover (Lamb) is dispatched to find her. He's unaware that once he's located this sewer-dwelling subculture, it will be wiped out.

It's a vague, elliptical affair, which feels like details have gone missing. The purpose of the experiments is unclear. There's much talk of dreams, never fully explained (Barker's idea was the drug could cause dreams to take physical form). Extended gun battles attract zero attention. Has civilisation fallen? Lord knows.

You can appreciate how Barker concluded that he could do better. Still, oversized performances (Malik's cackling henchman, who wears sunglasses at night, is a delight), lurid music video lighting



When you spot someone hogging the wedding cake.

(the dry ice guy was *very* busy), and outlandish prosthetics lend the film a certain low-rent charm.

▶ **Extras** Disc one of this Arrow Video release is 4K, and has the theatrical cut. There are three new interviews. The DOP (26 minutes) reveals *Suspiria* was his model. Brian Croucher (12 minutes) has no insights. Finally, Nicholas Vince (17 minutes) – the Chatterer Cenobite – discusses *Hellraiser*

and Barker's work in general. Stephen Thrower moderates a commentary by the director. Disc two (a Blu-ray) presents the US cut *Transmutations*, which runs about 11 minutes longer. Plus: make-up tests and designs by Clive Barker; storyboards; galleries; trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i New wave band Freur supplied the music. They later evolved into Underworld, taking their new name from the film.

THE UK'S BIGGEST HEAVY METAL MAGAZINE

METAL HAMMER

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW

THE BIGGEST BANDS.
THE HEAVIEST MUSIC.
WORLD-EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS.

BUY YOUR ISSUE TODAY

PRINT EDITION AVAILABLE FROM
bit.ly/buyhammer
DIGITAL EDITIONS AVAILABLE ON IOS AND ANDROID
WWW.METALHAMMER.COM

[f /metalhammer](#)
[i /metalhammeruk](#)
[x /metalhammer](#)

Available from all good newsagents and supermarkets

THE LAST CIRCUS

Tears Of A Clown

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2010 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Álex de la Iglesia**

▶ Cast **Carlos Areces, Antonio de la Torre, Carolina Bang, Manuel Tallafé**

BLU-RAY DEBUT This **Álex de la Iglesia** film is overlooked in the UK, no doubt due to the specificity of its cultural references (it helps to know about the Spanish Civil War and its legacy). A shame, as it shares the chaotic brio of his earlier work like *Acción Mutante* and *The Day Of The Beast*.

Blending a love triangle melodrama, a portrait of circus life, scabrous humour and Grand Guignol, it kicks off in 1937, but eventually settles in 1973. Carlos Areces is the meek Javier, a “sad clown” who yearns for trapeze artist Natalia (Carolina Bang), partner of abusive happy clown

Sergio (Antonio de la Torre). That passion eventually leads Javier to bash his rival’s face in with a trumpet, leaving him horribly deformed – and to self-mutilate with caustic soda and an iron. At such moments, appearances by the likes of Lon Chaney in the opening credits make perfect sense.

Barrelling along at a breathless pace, it’s a film that repeatedly throws surprises at the viewer: a *Kojak*-themed nightclub; a wild boar attack; an infamous real-life car-bombing. A metaphorical reading about “the two Spains” – the political split which is the legacy of General Franco – is clearly valid, but it can also be appreciated simply as a bracing tale of deranged amour fou. File alongside *Freaks* and *Santa Sangre*.

▶ **Extras** Radiance’s world genre cinema label Chasm Films brings us this 4K restoration. A new



Truth be told, it wasn’t the best of disguises.

interview with de la Iglesia (18 minutes) finds the director in philosophical mood, espousing the benefits of “diving in headfirst without thinking”. Xavier Aldana Reyes’s video essay (21 minutes) helpfully explains the significance of things like the Valley of the Fallen, the monument which serves as the site of the finale. Academic Valeria Villegas Lindvall’s commentary unpacks

further cultural references, though her accent makes this hard work.

Eleven minutes of VFX footage reveals the full extent of the greenscreen work. Plus: a decent Making Of (2010, 15 minutes); seven minutes of behind-the-scenes footage; textless credits; trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i The circus animals had to be kept on location; sometimes the director couldn’t hear his actors over a lion’s roar...

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT

It’s only an exploitation movie

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 7 SEPTEMBER**

1972 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director **Wes Craven**

▶ Cast **Sandra Cassel, Lucy Grantham, David Hess, Fred J Lincoln**

▶ **Wes Craven may have pinched** the basic structure from Ingmar Bergman’s *The Virgin Spring*, but his debut is unlikely to appeal to the Swedish director’s admirers.

Two teenagers are kidnapped by criminals, who molest or rape the pair before killing them. The murderers then unwittingly take shelter at a victim’s house. Her parents demonstrate that even a mild middle-aged couple are capable of bloody vengeance.

Lacking the wherewithal, it’s

relatively tame gore-wise, but the girls’ humiliation is unpleasant. Craven framed the film as a reaction to sanitised depictions of violence, but the mum performing castration by blow job is tawdry “How far can we go?” exploitation.

The killers have personality, with David Hess memorable as the sadistic Krug, but two bumbling comic relief cops are a drag. And the vérité style confers a feeling of scruffy incompetence as much as a sense of raw, unmediated reality.

▶ **Extras** A bountiful spread from 88 Films, but the major additions disappoint. A feature-length doc focused on Italian rape-revenge flicks (91 minutes) feels long-winded and out of place. A second collecting Craven memories from



He was a bit over-dressed for a walk in the woods.

the likes of Michael Berryman and Heather Langenkamp (108 minutes) is equally baggy. A video essay (23 minutes) on teens and violence in Craven’s work is a bore. Two new critical commentaries bolster one by three key cast.

Best to start with two Making Of’s (2002, 40/29 minutes). Actor Fred J Lincoln’s candour amuses (he calls the film “a piece of shit”); accounts of the abuse heaped on

the female lead don’t. Elsewhere, Hess talks about his score (2002, 10 minutes), “strong” scenes are discussed (2002, eight minutes), and Craven’s interviewed (2009, 15 minutes); Plus: unfinished Craven short (11 minutes); isolated score; deleted scene; dailies (47 minutes); gallery; intro; trailer. **Ian Berriman**

i Marc Sheffler (Krug’s junkie son Junior), went on to write for US sitcoms *Charles In Charge* and *Who’s The Boss?*.

NOW ON DIGITAL FORMATS *Evil Dead Burn* • *Lesbian Space Princess* • *Minions & Monsters* • *Momo And The Time Thieves* (14 September)
Nirvana The Band The Show The Movie • *Pinocchio Unstrung* • *Resurrection* • *Scary Movie* • *Toy Story 5*



MARSHMALLOW

Reboot camp

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★
RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER
 2025 | 15 | Blu-ray
 ▶ Director Daniel DelPurgatorio
 ▶ Cast Kue Lawrence, Kai Cech,
 Paul Soter, Max Malas

➤ **This oddly-titled indie puzzler** (marshmallows only feature briefly, as an accompaniment to cocoa) starts like a generic '80s summer camp slasher, with one variation: kids, not counsellors, are the people under threat.

Kue Lawrence is shy 12-year-old Morgan. The bullying he receives is the least of his problems, given recurring mysterious dreams about drowning, and his discovery of a sinister figure armed with a stun baton stalking the camp.

Once people actually believe him, there's much running around and hiding. This doesn't really hold your attention. What does is the mystery of WTF is going on. However, when the cat is let out of the bag in the *Twilight Zone*-ish final act it's too much to swallow.

It doesn't help that Nicholas Elert's score (or "tense chords" and "low metallic grinding", as the subtitles have it) is an overbearing racket. Still, there's a sweetness to

the coming of age elements, particularly Morgan's blossoming relationship with a kind girl.

➤ **Extras** This is one of the first releases for Toy Robot Video, a new subsidiary of Arrow Video. Across three video podcast interviews (31 minutes), director Daniel DelPurgatorio appears twice (addressing, for example, the challenges of working with kids – they only had a half-hour window to shoot night scenes), and the writer once. The director is also joined by two kids (who've clearly grown a foot since...) for a slightly sparse commentary.

Two shorts by the director – 2012's "Other" (14 minutes) and 2015's "Body(s)" (17 minutes) – are both downbeat, body horror affairs about extracting something unwanted (cancer/a voice in the head). You also get three minutes of behind-the-scenes footage from filming a dream sequence. Plus: a brief deleted scene; eight pages of fight scene storyboards; all 90 pages of the script (good luck squinting at that...); behind-the-scenes gallery. **Ian Berriman**

i A sequel, set years later, is in the works. We're promised it will "descend into darker territory, expanding the mythology".

(ROUND UP)



Steven Spielberg returns to the subject of alien contact with **DISCLOSURE DAY** (28 September, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD), the earnestly paranoid tale of a whistleblower and a weather presenter suddenly gifted psychic powers, pursued by a corporation contracted by the US government to preserve potentially world-rocking secrets. We said: "Feels deeply mid-'90s... old-school to the point of dated." Extras: a 54-minute Making Of; a four-minute piece on Spielberg's collaboration with composer John Williams. Nowt to do with Kurt Cobain, Canadian mockumentary **NIRVANNA THE BAND THE SHOW THE MOVIE** (21 September, 4K/Blu-ray) riffs on *Back To The Future* as two struggling musicians are accidentally transported to 2008. We said: "A scruffy, often hilarious story of time travel that contains a solid dollop of unsentimental heart." Extras include commentary by writers/stars Matt Johnson and Jay McCarroll, animatics, the pilot of the original webseries and more. It comes with four art cards and a poster. In **OBSESSION** (7 September, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD), a sadsack music store drone uses a magical charm to make the co-worker he has a crush on love him... with disastrous consequences. We said: "An unsettling but darkly funny chiller... takes a well-used idea and brings an exciting new twist." Extras: commentary by writer/director Curry Barker; a 19-minute Making Of. A couple's *Nomadland*-style van life takes a dark turn when a demonic entity hitches a ride in *Trollhunter* director André Øvredal's **PASSENGER** (7 September, Blu-ray/DVD). We said: "It's all very familiar, with

few inventive moments and thin characterisations, but Øvredal gives it a real sense of style and momentum." Extras: nada. The latest effort from the people behind *Winnie-the-Pooh: Blood And Honey*, **PINOCCHIO UNSTRUNG** (7 September, DVD) gives Carlo Colliodi's puppet boy a horror makeover. Robert Englund voices his anti-conscious, evil wood demon Cricket. We said: "It looks great, at best veering into Guillermo del Toro-style existential fantasy... much smarter than it looks." Extras? Nope. After her cameo in the closing moments of James Gunn's *Superman*, the Man of Steel's cousin gets to lead a movie in **SUPERGIRL** (7 September, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD). Inspired by comics miniseries *Woman Of Tomorrow*, it pairs Kara Zor-El (Milly Alcock) with an orphan out to get revenge on the bandit leader who murdered her family. We said: "Misses the wit, exuberance and unrestrained love of the lore found in Gunn's universe-launcher... Alcock is terrific, with an engaging, sour-sweet likability." A decent bonus spread includes a 25-minute Making Of, nine short featurettes (totalling 68 minutes), and two deleted scenes. Brad Anderson's gloomy survival thriller **WORLDBREAKER** (7 September, Blu-ray/DVD) is set in a future where men are succumbing to a deadly infection, leaving women (like a kickass Milla Jovovich) to hold the line as creatures spew from cracks in the Earth. We said: "As the plot wheel-spins you realise this is a movie that's mistaken a situation for a story." Extras: just a Making Of. Finally, the latest TV box set is **OUTLANDER Season Eight** (28 September, Blu-ray/DVD).

First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

Son Of The

INVADERS MASS. KINGS TOPPLE. MAGICAL POWERS RISE

In the thrilling second volume of Gael Song: Era II, Shauna Lawless returns to the tumultuous, magical world of medieval Ireland.

Sleipnir walked slowly through the forest.

I hadn't the heart to make him go any faster. I should. At this very moment, I should have been galloping to King Ruaidrí's dun. Toward Dúnmór. I was in Connacht, yes, but only just, and it would be safer for me to be with my uncle rather than alone on the western road. I wouldn't put it past King Diarmait to command his men to ride over the Leinster border to find me, even if it meant their presence was noted. Even if it meant the warriors of Connacht killed every one of them.

That thought should have urged me onward, but instead it made me still. Being with Ruaidrí was not safe for me either. Perhaps I would not be blood-eagled before a crowd baying for blood, but a knife in the dark was more than a possibility. No spectators to watch. No jeers. But blindness or death could come for me all the same.

What am I doing? Go back. Go back.

An inner voice that I had ignored for many years whispered inside of me. I didn't want to go to Connacht. I wanted to return to Isolde. To take her somewhere nobody knew either of us.

"Come on, Sleipnir. Keep going."

Sleipnir was clever, clever enough that he'd run into the forest during the attack at the ráth, and once Isolde had healed me, I'd been able to follow his tracks. Grateful that I had found him, I patted his neck and urged him forward. He trotted for a few

steps, then returned to his slow walk. There, he was being clever once again. He could tell my call to go faster was no true command. No true wish.

This hesitancy was most unlike me. Usually, I made a decision and saw it through with all haste. *Speed is good*, my uncle Godred had always said. *Less chance for your enemies to know what you are doing if you barely know what you're doing yourself.*

And perhaps that was part of the problem. I'd been avoiding thinking about what to do. Strategies of how to prevent blood eagles and knives in my eyes should be running through my mind, but they didn't capture my interest

this evening. Instead, I found I could only look backward. Every so often I would turn in the direction of Seir Kieran and wonder if Isolde was alive. She had been shaking when I left her outside the monastery. Eyes closed and pale, lips black, splattered with the same dark liquid that had covered my mother's mouth. *What if Isolde was dying?* She had spent her energy saving me. I knew this now. *What if in helping me, she died in my place?*

Taking a breath, I held it. *No, Isolde was alive.* Her people, the Descendant healers, would save her as she had saved me. She was gone from me but not gone from this land. *Not dead.* How could she be? Isolde was too vivid in my mind for that to be true. When I closed my eyes, I forced myself to forget the way she looked when she was lying in my arms and close to death. Instead, I pictured her sitting under the tree at Kells. She was wearing her blue dress, her expression focused on the insects crawling along the soil, completely oblivious to the fact that the women working by the tents were staring at her. Completely oblivious to the eyes of the guards who watched her from afar. It had made me smile when I found her

like this, perhaps the first smile that had been true for many years.

This memory made me want to go back to her all the more. To see her again. To watch her. To be with her.

Isolde did not want me though, I had to remind myself. She had said we could not be together, and now it was on me to accept that. Isolde was alive, yes, *she had to be*, and a whole life awaited her.

A life that would be better than any I could give her. For, even if our ancestors were not enemies, what happiness could she derive from a man who more wanted to kill than see alive? What joy could I give her when I didn't even understand what I was?

Staring at my hands, I curled them into fists. Fire had burst from my skin on two occasions now. First when I was a child at Dúnmór and second when I was trying to escape King Diarmait. I had killed men on both occasions. Burned them.

Keep your emotions tight, Cuan. If you don't, the curse will kill you, my mother had said to me once.

And now I had to pull in my emotions once again. I was almost of an age with my mother when she died. Losing control of our emotions was what caused the fire to come, and it was this fire that killed us in the end too. Indeed, if I had not been with Isolde, I would already be dead. I had to make sure not to let that happen again, though this was easier said than done. The love that I had felt for Isolde had stretched the threads I had coiled tight around myself, and they needed to be tightened once more. Not for long, and perhaps that made it easier. Death was coming for me whether I wanted it or not, for I had sworn oaths to my father three years ago, and soon I would have to make a move against Ruaidrí.

The memory of making these vows moved me back to stillness. Back to ridding myself of emotions. Once I returned to Dúnmór, my father's plan to make me King of Connacht would be set into motion. Then I would die, for there were many men who would strike me down if I killed Ruaidrí. I was sure, had been sure ever since I'd made this vow, that this would be how I met my death – not with a sickness that ate me from the inside out, but

The Author



Shauna Lawless is an avid reader of Irish mythology, folklore and history, which inspired Gael Song, her historical fantasy series set in turbulent medieval Ireland. Her critically acclaimed novel *The Children Of Gods And Fighting Men* was nominated for Best Debut at the British Fantasy Awards. She lives in Northern Ireland with her family, where you can often find her writing or curled up with a good book. Follow Shauna via her newsletter or shaunalawless.com. Instagram: [shauna_lawless_author](https://www.instagram.com/shauna_lawless_author).

Serpent

by Shauna Lawless

with a sword deep inside of me. The way men were supposed to die. Other men feared the blade. Ran from it, but if they had watched my mother dying, they would embrace it. They would know, as I did, that there were worse ways to go.

Once I was far enough away from the Leinster border, I dismounted and led Sleipnir to a narrow river. It was shallow here, slow-running, and Sleipnir walked a couple of steps into the water and swished his tail as he nibbled at the grass along the riverbank. The forest was thick here, and the smell of moss filled the air, though this deep into the forest, the smell of rot filtered through too. I crouched down, wanting to splash some water on my face, to feel something cool and living upon my skin, but before my fingers touched the water, I paused, catching the reflection before me.

Scarless. Unbroken. I knew Isolde had healed me, but somehow, I had not expected this. I ran my fingers over my left eye and nose and then over to the right side of my chin, feeling for the scar that should be there. *It was gone.*

The memory of the man attacking me, axe pressing against my skin, had not left me. It was Conchobar, of course, who had paid someone to take my eyes last year. He'd wanted to give me the same punishment that his father had given mine, and just like his father, he had been too scared to do it himself. However, this mercenary had failed to take my eyes, instead he had left me with a scar that crossed over my face. Now that deep scar was gone. And it wasn't just the scar on my face. The scars on my arms had vanished. Every wound, every broken bone, every fracture, even the blood inside of my left eye... all as if they had never happened.

Slowly, I took out my sword. I couldn't return to my family like this. They would know there was something wrong with me. Something *unnatural*. I set the blade against my eyebrow and carefully pressed the sharp blade against the trail of my old scar. From browbone to chin.

Blood ran down my hand and over my wrist, and the pain was sharp, but even so, I pushed the blade deeper. Only after I was satisfied that I had made the cut the same as before did I stand and clean my blade.

"Come, Sleipnir," I said. "Let's rest for the night."

I set up a shelter in the forest, knowing that I needed to let the scar heal over for a week or two before I continued my journey.

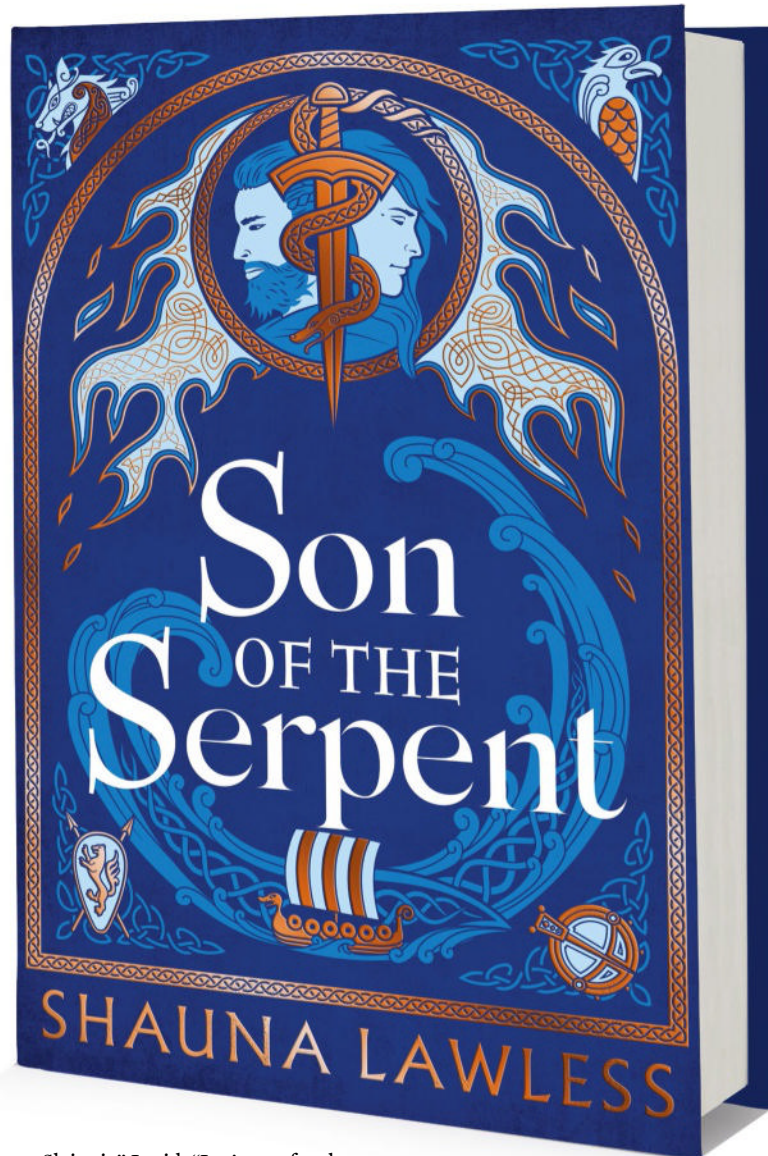
It looked too fresh right now, and I needed the scabs that would form over the cut to fall away.

Days of hiding like this were never easy, for it was never easy to be alone with my thoughts.

They were dark, full of screams, full of death. My mind would move to memories of my mother dying. Of my father losing his eyes. And now, of Isolde dying in my arms.

Enough, I told myself. Enough.

Son Of The Serpent, the latest entry in Gael Song: Era II by Shauna Lawless, coming 10 September.





EXIT PARTY

Leading a double life



★★★★★

► **RELEASED 17 SEPTEMBER**
320 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
► Author Emily St John Mandel
► Publisher Picador

✦ **Alternate facts.** A heat dome over Europe. A sense of things beginning and ending that seems far more acute than the usual human propensity for conjuring imagined catastrophes. How should we describe the strangeness of our current moment? One answer is to open the toolbox of near-future slipstream fiction, which is precisely what Emily St John Mandel does in her sixth novel, *Exit Party*.

Accordingly, this is a novel of quantum entanglement; of adjacent realities in which characters become stranded. It shows the first days of times when things have fallen apart, but new ideas about how we might live have yet to truly coalesce. We visit places we recognise, if only because they exist in our own world, but which are simultaneously deeply unfamiliar. A sense of picking through the decaying debris of the present pervades the text.

The book opens in 2031, in California at the shindig that gives the book its name. (Before going on any further, it's worth noting that *Exit Party* has links to previous books by Mandel, so reading it is to risk minor spoilers, but it nonetheless functions as a standalone.) In the wake of a curfew lifting, the mood is upbeat. What lies ahead on the west coast of a balkanised USA cannot possibly be as bad as the recent past, can it? But then comes a strange moment where reality abruptly shifts. Kareem, the party's host, suddenly disappears. A confused doppelgänger leaves. What has just happened?

In terms of setting the plot running, this is the question that drives *Exit Party*. Different characters have partial answers and, accordingly, Mandel shows us what has occurred from multiple perspectives. In the first half of the book, that primarily means we follow Ari Waker, a former prisoner, as she navigates a violent USA of militias and shifting alliances. She's a tough cookie with a *flexible* moral outlook and often needs these qualities, but also an immensely attractive character who never fools herself about her own culpability.

If the first half of the novel is Talking Heads' "Life During Wartime" writ large, then the second part takes us to a society that's authoritarian – a surveillance state where technology is turned against citizens and, as in the old East Germany, there's a constant sense of spies spying on spies. The version of Ari that lives in this world has made very different life choices, choosing to uphold the law, although in other ways her choices are remarkably consistent with her double.

The contrast between these two realities is deliberate. In a kind of updating of the 17th century philosophical argument between Thomas Hobbes, who believed that without government there would be a constant state of conflict, and John Locke, who thought people would come together to form a civil society, Mandel shows us how overlapping crises might push us into living in

“Mandel takes genre tropes and creates something new”

dystopias. Yet she avoids binaries: one of these futures is chaotic, one regimented, but both are rotten at their core.

That may sound bleak, but this isn't a novel of despair. It can also be read as an exploration of connection. Though its narratives jump across time and different versions of reality, it's not *Exit Party*'s world-building or plotting that stays with you, but the characters and their choices, the way they find beauty amidst despair. There's a strong theme too of parenting, of how we shape those who follow on.

Within even the most compelling slipstream fiction, this kind of emotional depth is rare. Mandel's triumph here is to take genre tropes and create something new from them. Literary science fiction of the highest standard.

Jonathan Wright

i A TV version of *Exit Party* is currently in development; it will be stop-motion studio Laika's first live-action TV series.



THE ISLAND OF THE LOST

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 SEPTEMBER**
288 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
► Author Daisy Stephens
► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

✦ **This atmospheric ghost story** has a gloriously old-fashioned feel. Set on a small, uninhabited Italian island with a dark past, and full of family secrets, unresolved emotions and people frowning a lot (honestly, few novels have paid so much attention to the bit of skin between your eyebrows), this is not a book for people who skip prose to get to the dialogue. The evocative descriptions are a vital, impressionistic part of its DNA. Plus, you could probably read all the dialogue in half an hour.

It's the tale of a twin, Liv, searching for her missing twin, Mia, on a fog-shrouded Venetian island where plague victims were once sent to die. Liv, a journalist, is a sceptic about the supernatural, while Mia is drawn to the island after their mother dies, due to its unique place in their family's folklore. What they discover there both divides them further and brings them closer together.

There's not much plot, and some of the story elements feel overly familiar from both screen and written horror – yes, it's Venice, of course plague doctors play a part. But the prose is compelling, beguiling and claustrophobic, suffusing the narrative with an edgy, charged, even cloying mood. It's definitely more *The Haunting* (1963) than *The Haunting* (1999). **Dave Golder**



ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

★★★★★

► RELEASED 10 SEPTEMBER

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Rachael Stirling

► Publisher John Murray

◆ **The cover gives us the icon:** Emma Peel the gun-toting '60s pin-up, frozen in pop art colours. But Rachael Stirling's vivid, vivacious celebration of her mother delivers so much more. This is Diana Rigg unPeeled.

In a way it's unfinished business. Rigg attempted an autobiography but abandoned it after a handful of pages. Stirling draws on old letters, diary extracts and treasured text messages – plus, of course, her own memories, recalled with emotional honesty and an eye for the absurd – to trace an extraordinary life from childhood to damehood.

Signing up for *The Avengers*, we learn, was a calculated decision to boost Rigg's commercial standing in the theatre. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* co-star George Lazenby is dismissed as "ghastly". The late career high of *Game Of Thrones* finds her in imperious form on set; one director openly confesses that she terrified him.

Filtered through Stirling, a self-confessed unreliable narrator but a hugely entertaining one, Rigg emerges as many things: formidable, enthralling, mischievous, hilarious and, you suspect, just a little exhausting. A tough, empathetic account of her final days, succumbing to cancer while determined to legalise assisted dying, finds her all too human. **Nick Setchfield**



MASSIF

Moving mountains

★★★★★

► RELEASED 17 SEPTEMBER

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Garth Nix

► Publisher Gollancz

◆ **Massif is a hard book to pin down.** This is an ambitious novel steeped in big space opera ideas, whose broad scope also embraces military SF and a tense race against time, while keeping the focus on a bunch of likeable characters. That it crams all of the above into a fast-paced 350 pages – and ticks those disparate boxes with style – makes it even more impressive.

Australian author Garth Nix has sold millions of books in the fantasy arena, and his first adult sci-fi novel deserves to reach similarly stratospheric heights. He grabs your attention instantly, with opening chapters that explain the bizarre but compelling premise that underpins his universe.

By the early 23rd century humans have started exploring the galaxy, but not under their own steam. Instead, they hitch rides on self-aware spacefaring mountains of extraterrestrial origin (the eponymous Massifs), whose

“You genuinely care about the protagonists”

motives remain shrouded in mystery. Even weirder, they appear to be happy to facilitate a war between the residents of Earth and Mars, on the proviso that it takes place light years from our Solar System. Against this backdrop, Parnell Shi-Sawahla and his crew are thrown into a battle for survival when their ship is wrecked in an interstellar skirmish, and one of their number is marooned on an alien world.

Nix masterfully juggles gripping drama with satisfying character beats and intriguing world-building. As a result, you genuinely care about the protagonists, even when you're desperate to find out what the Massifs (and their freaky alien avatars) are up to. The novel is also infused with wit, a healthy cynicism for authority, and some quirky retro weirdness; the “M-field” surrounding the Massifs prevents the use of electronics, forcing passengers to return to the dark ages of typewriters and correction fluid.

In fact our only frustration is that *Massif* is billed as a standalone, because it feels like there's plenty more story to tell – cross your fingers that Nix decides to return to this highly promising universe. **Richard Edwards**

i Nix has first-hand experience of the military – he spent several years as a part-timer in the Australian Army Reserve.



THE STAR TREK ARCHIVE

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

192 pages | Hardback

► Author Ben Robinson

► Publisher Titan Books

◆ **Subtitled 100 Objects And Stories From The Final Frontier,** *Star Trek's* spin on the popular “let's condense a subject into 100 things” subgenre is more satisfying than its counterpart from a galaxy far, far away. Frustratingly, 2023's *Star Wars: 100 Objects* limited itself to in-universe descriptions of its artefacts, but this entertaining reference book brings some welcome real-world context to its props and ephemera.

Covering the full six decades of *Trek* history (from *The Original Series* through to *Starfleet Academy*), author Ben Robinson ensures that this is much more than a painstakingly researched photo album. From Gene Roddenberry's original pitch document (typed up by legendary *TOS* writer DC Fontana, no less) to bottles of Chateau Picard wine, every object here has a story to tell. Kirk's famous chair on the Enterprise bridge, for example, was repurposed from office furniture commonly found in American offices.

The infamous warp salamanders from *Voyager* episode “Threshold” get an unexpected look in, while entries on Mego action figures and NASA's test Space Shuttle (named Enterprise) highlight the franchise's cultural legacy. *Trek* luminaries such as Michael Okuda and Brannon Braga also show up in a fun and eclectic snapshot of the final frontier. **Richard Edwards**

MacLeod's sword's hilt has a mythical beast's head.



An illustration of the forge Quicken sequence.



The director, his two leads, and a sword fight double.

A James Acheson costume design for Ramirez.



THE ART AND MAKING OF HIGHLANDER

Who Wants To Browse Forever?

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

192 pages | Hardback

► Author Jonathan Melville

► Publisher Titan Books

► **Very much a coffee table book**, the ratio of "art" to "making of" in this glossy tome swings hugely in favour of the art. But since the centuries-spanning '80s cult hit *Highlander* is a film whose

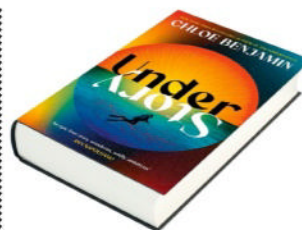
reputation is mostly built on its striking images (and definitely not on its authentic accents or coherent storytelling), this is no bad thing.

The book is packed to bursting with production sketches and behind-the-scenes photos, many from the private collections of those involved in the making of the film. Sometimes it will go prose-free for six or so pages just

highlighting the details in swords or costumes. While some of the images are a little grainy, mostly they're of decent quality and build up to a fascinating visual archive, even if the layout looks a little '80s film mag at times.

The text is another matter. Blandly functional and light on detail, it does feature quotations from a wide variety of sources, and does a great job in early chapters championing Gregory Widen, the writer who came up with the concept. After that it rarely brings the making of the film to life, with a "just the facts, ma'am" approach, occasionally livened up by fun trivia. **Dave Golder**

i Many of the same extras (redressed) played both MacLeods and Frasers for the shots of the clans running into battle.



UNDER STORY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

512 pages | Hardback/ebook/

audiobook

► Author Chloe Benjamin

► Publisher Tinder Press

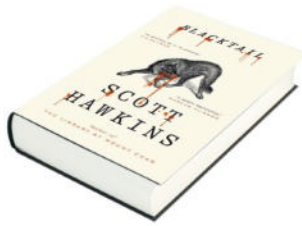
► **This is one of those reviews** where we have to be a bit circumspect. Around a third of the way into this study of grief, nostalgia and the weirder properties of fungi, there's a pretty big reveal. We advise avoiding spoilers if you can, because the process of discovery – the way Chloe Benjamin peels back the layers of her story's transformed world – is the most enjoyable aspect of the novel.

Former biologist Laurel takes a dishwashing job at a research station in Antarctica, determined to leave her past behind. But of all the science joints in all the world, her physicist ex-husband Eli has to walk into hers – and there's a weird glow in the sky, linked with his research on neutrinos, that might offer a second chance.

Benjamin gives the Antarctic landscape an otherworldly beauty; the day-to-day drudgery and danger of research station life is, likewise, very effectively drawn. The science-fantasy worldbuilding is wobbly if you think about it for too long, but *Under Story* is a really fun ride nonetheless.

Rather more ponderous is our long, flashback-driven trek through Laurel's tragic backstory; both she and Eli feel more like compilations of moments than fully-rounded people, which means that the novel never quite develops the emotional heft it needs.

Nic Clarke



BLACKTAIL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

272 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **Scott Hawkins**

► Publisher **Tor Nightfire**

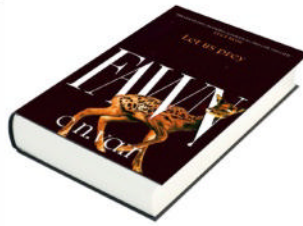
❖ **If you're the kind of person** who checks doesthedogdie.com before settling in to watch a horror movie, don't read this book. Don't even read any more of this review. There's a lot of animal violence in this wolf-centred fantasy, and a lot of it is extremely upsetting.

Still here? Okay. So, the titular Blacktail is a half-breed: half wolf, half... something else. He's still pretty much a puppy when he falls for a domestic dog. He plans on freeing her from the confines of her leashed existence, but instead she dies after a botched spaying. What gets unleashed instead is Blacktail's rage: an ancient, biting thing that wants to tear the world apart. And with the help of an ancient cat sorceress, he might just manage it too.

Taking the perspective of a wild animal is a bold storytelling technique, and reading it requires a hefty suspension of disbelief. But the world of the wild hunt is alluring, even at its most grotesque. The horrors Blacktail encounters are wide-ranging and frequently stomach-churning, from squirrel death cults to scheming lynxes, but the worst among them are always human.

It's such a bleak depiction of our species that you might find yourself rooting for Blacktail by the end of the book – or, at the very least, being a lot kinder to your pets.

Sarah Dobbs



FAWN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

360 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **CN Vair**

► Publisher **3AM Books**

❖ **This is a book for people** who like animals more than humans.

CN Vair's folk horror-adjacent debut sees sanctuary owner and local pest controller Tess finding a newborn deer who appears to have grown preternatural teeth and bitten her way out of her mother's womb. The fawn is an odd creature, but Tess is driven to protect her. But then, Tess is a witch, who's made a pact with the Devil for the sake of her natural surroundings...

The novel is set in the remote, almost invisible Appalachian town of Burrsville. Tess is caught here, using her charms to keep away the local cop so that she can harvest roadkill to feed the litters of tiny raccoons, squirrels, groundhogs and the like before she sets them free to roam. But the arrival of a new preacher unsettles her idyll and up-ends her group of friends, who want to keep the peace.

Fawn is a genuinely beautiful piece work, and has an incredibly strong narrative voice, mixing nature, love, sex and gore, with a palpable sense of rage, betrayal and familial dysfunction at its heart.

Read it as a weird romance between a woman, the creatures she cares for and the Devil himself, or as a rail against humanity and just how cruel and pointless people are capable of being. Either way, it's compelling stuff.

Rosie Fletcher



THE CAROUSEL OF FORGOTTEN PLACES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

266 pages | Paperback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **S Hati**

► Publisher **Angry Robot**

❖ **Fairgrounds: made up of** stalls, rides, candyfloss and... time travel? Apparently so in this whimsical romantasy, which stars a once-young doctor who stewards the ghosts of the fairground and fixes the time threads that weave through its carousel, all while trying her hardest not to think too hard about the very sexy time god who oversees the fair.

It's been 487 years since Ryka made a deal to save the life of her best friend, a deal in which she unwittingly signed up to be the fair's next time keeper. Refusing to allow anyone else to be tricked in this way, she's now spent centuries fixing the timelines as needed while researching possible ways to return to her own, desperately missing her family and the career she'd worked so hard to build. Of course, she's also trying not to think too hard about the simmering tension between her and Everest, the aforementioned time god.

It's a tale of fierce friendships, grief and, eventually, acceptance, as Ryka slowly realises that she has a new life just as full and valuable as the one she left behind. The central romance is a little *too* obvious – just get together already! – but *Carousel* is a cosy, human story of time travel, friendship, adventure and longing.

Rhian Drinkwater

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks this time is Joe Hill's latest, **KING SORROW** (★★★★★, 15 September, Headline). The



plot sees six college students in Maine summoning a fire-breathing dragon to dispose of the drug dealers blackmailing one of them.

Unfortunately, the bargain they've made means they must also choose a new sacrifice for King Sorrow each year, or one of them will be killed instead. We said: "Often genuinely creepy... Magnificent: by far and away Hill's best book to date." Set in a grotesque city which grows like a fungus from the remains of an ancient tree, Hiron Ennes's skin-crawling, bug-infested horror novel

THE WORKS OF VERMIN



(★★★★★, 1 October, Tor Nightfire) centres on an exterminator of uncanny pests whose latest quarry

is a gigantic centipede dripping hallucinogenic slime. We said: "Visceral prose conjures a too-vivid world of repulsive insectoid monsters and morally grimy politics."

Finally, Andrzej Sapkowski's seventh Witcher novel, **CROSSROADS OF RAVENS** (★★★★★, 17 September, Headline) can be read as a standalone. A prequel, it shows us the misadventures of a



teenage Geralt of Rivia as he's taken under the wing of a veteran Witcher, offering

insights into how the monster hunter's early life shaped him. We said: "A book brimming with energy, and grimdark-tinged bleak humour... Often seems to delight in eschewing conventional plot beats."



THE HORRORS WE HARBOUR

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 SEPTEMBER**

295 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Emily Cooper

► Publisher Solstice Books

On the isle of Ynys Halen (Salt Island), the lighthouse is the difference between life and death. But not for ships at sea – instead for the residents of the island, as the light from Point Beacon drives back the terrifying tidewraiths who would otherwise reach the shores and savage them at night.

Guin is the lighthouse keeper, tasked with keeping the islanders safe – knowing that before her ancestors first lit the Point, Ynys Halen's women were instead sacrificed in the sea in order to keep back the monsters. And when she misses one night and people are harmed, the new Halenprophet says that the island's god Llyr has decreed Guin's friend Catrin must now be given to the sea in order to keep the island safe.

This is an immersive and fantastical horror driven by a righteous anger, that of all women so carelessly and cruelly treated in a patriarchal world. Guin is unafraid to call out misogyny from the start, but is left powerless against the villagers' fear and their ability to overlook and even participate in horrors when their way of life is threatened.

With shades of Edgar Allan Poe and a powerful, unapologetic ending, this is a feminist fable not to be missed.

Rhian Drinkwater



DOCTOR WHO: THE KALEIDOSCOPE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

246 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Jo Martin

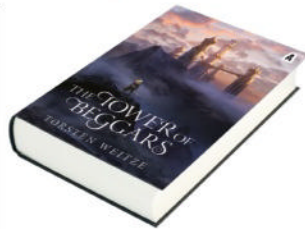
► Publisher BBC Books

Doctor Who's history isn't short of controversy, but the revelation in 2020 that the Doctor was the Timeless Child, a being from another universe raised by a Gallifreyan scientist, whose regenerative capabilities formed the basis of the Time Lords, was definitely one of its most contentious. Anyone who hoped the BBC might quietly ignore that mythology, however, will be disappointed, as it remains central to the *Circuit Breaker* series' characterisation of the Fugitive Doctor.

We join her here as she works with Martha to return the last of a number of energy-charged objects to its rightful place in space and time. There are new details about the Fugitive Doctor's past, and the Silence pop up to mess with everyone's memories.

Told in the first person by the Doctor (the book is also written by Jo Martin, the Fugitive Doctor herself), this is a rare Doc's-eye-view of an adventure – though in part it works because she doesn't yet have the memories of the Doctor we know. We also see her frustration as everyone continually refers to the male Doctors that are in her future.

The memory-hopping can make it hard to follow, as can the technobabble, but this is an intriguing examination of this Doctor's view of the world, which helps humanise one of the most unfamiliar incarnations. Rhian Drinkwater



THE TOWER OF BEGGARS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Torsten Weitze

► Publisher Absurd Ventures Press

A multi-million selling phenomenon in its native Germany, Torsten Weitze's Stormfell Academy series arrives in English, reading like a cross between *Harry Potter* and *D&D*. Niri, an orphaned half-Aeldae, seeks to escape poverty by enrolling in the Stormfell Academy, where students learn combat and magic. But life at the school is no less dangerous than the slums, as the students must raid ruins inhabited by Wildlings and predatory creatures in search of valuables to pay for their room, board and tuition.

Many story elements feel familiar: there are snooty nobles and tough but fair instructors, Niri has a hidden power lying dormant, and she gets a comedy sidekick in the form of Grabbasnack, a pocket dragon reminiscent of Mushu from *Mulan*. She learns that appearances are deceiving and finds friendship from an unexpected source.

The world-building is expansive, and Weitze balances action with character development as he sows seeds sure to sprout in subsequent volumes. Disappointingly, Niri seeks to climb the ranks of the Academy's class-based system rather than challenge the injustice of a hierarchy where the rich thrive and the poor struggle to survive, and the plot, although well-paced, offers few surprises. David West

ALSO OUT

As ever, there's lots more books we couldn't fit in. Dragons soar over small towns and mech-animals dream of freedom in

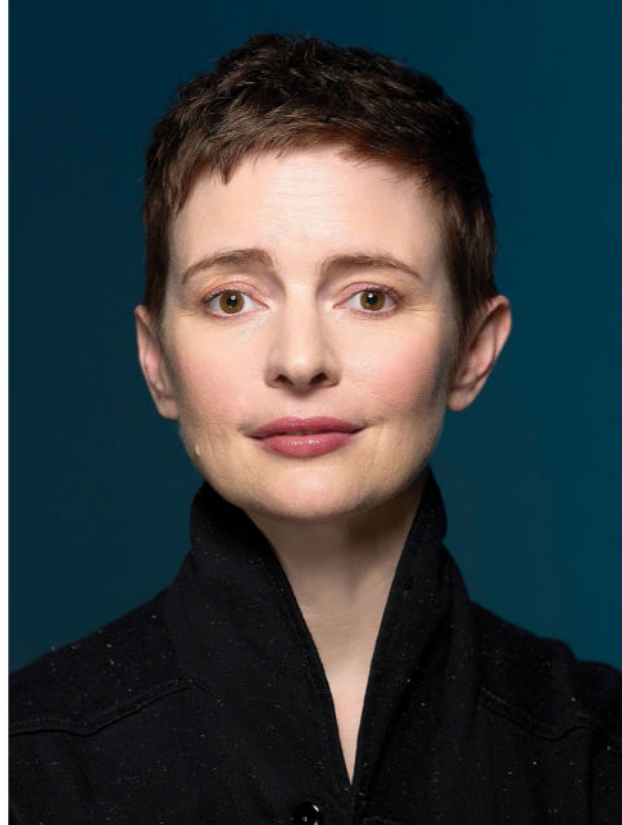
THE PASSING OF THE DRAGON AND OTHER STORIES (out now, Head Of Zeus), a collection of 13 tales by Ken Liu. In Adam Simcox's high-concept thriller **TIME JUMP** (out now, Renegade) a woman travels back to 1997 to save a man she accidentally killed in a car accident. Of course, this could have unintended consequences if he turned out to be a wrong 'un... A 15-year-old lad leads a rebellion in Frances Hardinge's YA fantasy **TRAITORS' NEST** (out now, First Ink), set in a medieval Europe-style kingdom where god-like Players move castles around the realm like chess pieces. *SFX*'s former editor Dave Bradley is a co-writer of **MYTH-MADE MACHINES** (out now, Bloomsbury Academic), which explores humanity's relationship with artificial intelligence through the lens of our cultural imagination. Featuring new interviews, Jeff Bond's **THE CROW: THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY** (out now, Titan Books) takes a deep dive into the making of the 1994 goth favourite. Volume two of a series that aims to chart the entire behind-the-scenes history of classic *Who*, day by day, **THE DOCTOR WHO PRODUCTION DIARY: THE TROUGHTON YEARS** (5 September, Telos) will surely be as exhaustive as the first, which we called "a truly impressive feat of contextualisation". Finally, **MAN AND CYBERMAN** (5 September, Telos) is a memoir by David Banks, the Cyber Leader in three '80s *Who* stories. Hopefully it will be excellent (clenches fist).





Emily St John Mandel

The *Station Eleven* author is still chipping away at her craft



© LAURA BARISONI

What is your daily writing routine like?

► I have a 10-year-old, so on a typical day I'll get her off to school in the morning, come home, go for a run and then start working. But I've never really had any protected time for writing. The time I have for writing is the same time I'm using for, say, school forms, answering emails and all of the other administrative tasks of adult life.

Describe the room in which you typically write.

► I live in New York City, where no one ever has quite enough rooms, so I share an office with my wife. Her job (photographer/videographer/director) requires an enormous amount of gear, so she takes up more of the room, but I got the side by the window, so I'm happy with the arrangement. I work at a standing desk, on a laptop with a second monitor. On the wall behind my computer there's some art that I like, and a few photographs of my daughter. My favourite thing is the view of the East River out the window beside me. I love watching the tugboats go by.

Do you have any writing "bad habits" that you have to keep in check?

► I think I suffer from a character-development affliction fairly common among bisexual writers, which might reasonably be described as "everyone's vaguely bisexual". I'm trying to keep it in check.

Have you ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

► Once, I had a dream a long time ago where I worked in an office, and there was a visitor – a perfectly pleasant man – who came in once a week for a mysterious appointment. I understood in the dream that this visitor came from very, very far away. The dream became the basis for my short story "Mr Thursday", in which a time traveller from the future comes to

“Give yourself permission to write a bad first draft”

an office for his weekly check-in with his handler in the local time. On, you guessed it, Thursdays.

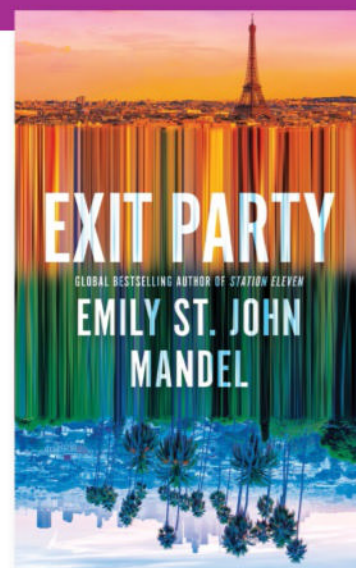
If you could recommend one book you love that's not very well known, what would it be?

► A 2009 novel by the American novelist Dan Chaon, called *Await Your Reply*. I think Chaon is criminally underrated, and that novel had a huge influence on the way I write.

Where's the oddest place you've seen one of your books?

► One time, I was on a tiny prop plane in British Columbia – one of those that seats no more than 12 or 18 people – and one of the other passengers was reading my first novel. It's very normal to read a book on a plane, but this story's strange only because of the vanishingly tiny numerical odds of me and the book being in the same place.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've



received or read?

► Give yourself permission to write a bad first draft. There are writers who work in such a meticulous fashion that their first draft is very close to the final version, but they're a rarity. For myself, I think of my first draft as raw material. If I were a sculptor, the first draft is just the block of marble. It's the material in which I'm going to find the book, not the book itself. Everything in my work that's good comes about through round upon round of obsessive revision. ●

Exit Party is out on 17 September, published by Picador.



St Mandel's view may look a bit like this.

MARVEL ARTS

Dreams and realities

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
17 September

► Publisher Abrams ComicArts
► Writers Alex Ross/Kevin J Anderson
► Artists Alex Ross/Raúl Allén

GRAPHIC NOVELS The first of two new releases in the Marvel Arts range of standalone graphic novels, **Marvel Dimensions**

★★★★★ opens with Alex Ross in familiar mythic mode. Lushly rendered spreads recap the origins of the central pillars of Marvelism, from the first Human Torch to Phoenix. The art distills the heroic essence of these icons, while some sly choices of narrator add ironic counterpoints: Daily Bugle blowhard J Jonah Jameson shares his thoughts on Spider-Man, and it's as glowing

a character reference as you might imagine.

If these Rockwellian vignettes recall Ross's career-making work on 1994's *Marvels* then be prepared for a sudden conceptual swerve, supported by a 32-page comic book insert that provides crucial context for the bigger story. Switching from paint to pen and ink, Ross takes us into the In-Verse, a previously uncharted corner of the sprawling Marvel multiverse. It's "a distorted mirror", a darker, harsher realm, home to twisted new versions of established heroes and villains. Captain America is reimagined as the American Sword, champion of the American Stronghold. Draw your own political comparisons; Ross has admitted this story is

"conceived for the times we're living in".

The dense world-building echoes Ross's work on *Earth X*, while there are shades of *Kingdom Come* in the dystopian armageddon that pits these alt icons against each other. Essentially one giant fight scene, it's chaotic to the point of cluttered and undercut by a frustratingly abrupt ending. But there's no denying just how much ambition and imagination Ross has poured into these pages, gifting us over 200 brilliantly redesigned variants of classic Marvel characters.

Doctor Strange: Endless Nightmare ★★★★★ proves a more straightforward proposition, inasmuch as any existential threat to the multiverse can be. Reuniting *Dune: The Graphic Novel*

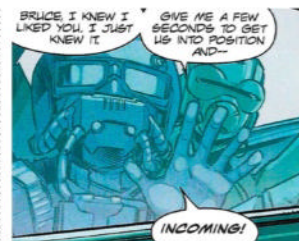
“There are fun Lovecraftian undercurrents throughout”

collaborators Kevin J Anderson and Raúl Allén, it finds the Master of the Mystic Arts investigating a mysterious case of mass insomnia in New York City. But that's only the beginning. "Something is deeply wrong with my sense of reality," confesses Strange – and when the Sorcerer Supreme says that, you know it's time to worry...

There are fun Lovecraftian undercurrents throughout, from tentacled menaces on the streets to the notion of a slumbering god. And Allén's art is stunning. Enhanced by Patricia Martin's gorgeously subtle colouring, it pays tribute to the mind-bending psychescapes of Strange's creator Steve Ditko while making Manhattan an equally vivid playground for the otherworldly.

Nick Setchfield

i Alex Ross provided concept art for *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004), including unused costume designs.



MASK

★★★★★
► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Skybound
► Entertainment/Image Comics
► Writer Dan Watters
► Artist Pye Parr

ISSUES 1-3 Based on the

Kenner/Hasbro toys, *MASK* (short for Mobile Armored Strike Kommand) makes for a natural addition to Skybound's Energon Universe: *MASK*'s high-tech headgear and vehicles are like a compact version of the Transformers.

Brits Dan Watters and Pye Parr bring a high-octane energy to the series, with issue one's enthralling opening car chase emulating films like *The Italian Job* as much as *The Fast And The Furious*.

MASK founder Matt Trakker is like James Bond and Q combined, and Watters gradually introduces the other agents over the next two issues: racing car driver Gloria Baker and toy designer Bruce Sato.

Equally adept at dynamic figurework as he is at depicting sleek, timeless cars – issue two's underwater vehicle resembles *The Spy Who Loved Me*'s Lotus Esprit S1 – Parr's artwork is enhanced by Pierluigi Casolino's vibrant colours.

Involving alien wormholes sticking out of the ocean, villainous *VENOM* head Miles Mayhem's nefarious scheme has yet to really unfold. And while it has implications for the wider Energon Universe, references to *GI Joe* and *Transformers* have so far been limited to the first issue – though issue three's final-page appearance by a certain shape-shifting villain points to the return of another, miniature Hasbro toy line... **Stephen Jewell**





THE DEADMAN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC Comics

► Writer W Maxwell Prince

► Artist Martin Morazzo

ISSUES 1-3 The creative team behind recent *Superman* miniseries *The Kryptonite Spectrum* are back with another self-contained and deeply peculiar dive into the DCU.

Murdered acrobat and ghostly crime-fighter Boston Brand (aka Deadman) has always been a bizarre superhero, and this series casts him as an unseen “janitor” maintaining the afterlife’s balance between good and evil. When a demon attack upsets that balance, Brand is pitched into a wild supernatural quest across the DCU, in a story that’s already been successful enough for this miniseries to expand from six to 12 issues.

These first three chapters show that writer W Maxwell Prince and artist Martin Morazzo are continuing their weird, playful tone and packing each issue with a tremendous number of ideas. Not all of these fully cohere together – there’s one gory background plot-thread that currently feels a bit out of place – but the story is taking wild narrative swings, and it’s hard not to get swept along by its oddball approach. This is especially the case when it comes to the way it’s using other DC characters (like a hilarious appearance from Batman), and the dazzlingly intricate visual storytelling.

The Deadman’s deep strangeness won’t be for everyone, but those able to get on this series’ unique frequency will be in for a very interesting ride. **Saxon Bullock**



To be honest, we prefer Cuppa And A Biscuit Time.

JESSICA JONES: ALIAS

A Devil of a case

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Sam Humphries

► Artist Geraldo Borges

ISSUES 1-5 Now that the Krysten Ritter version of Jessica Jones has finally joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe (via season two of *Daredevil: Born Again*), Marvel has tapped back into the grittier side of Jessica’s comic-book life for a five-issue miniseries revival of her original comic series, *Alias*.

The story is set in current Marvel continuity, where Jessica’s husband Luke Cage has become mayor of New York – a political situation that has forced Jessica to give up working as a private detective. Then, however, she discovers a gruesome murder scene next door to her old office, and is soon conducting a potentially illegal investigation to find the culprit.

As the mystery heads in bizarre and seemingly demonic directions, the script from Sam Humphries does a good job of

capturing the world-weary tone set down by original *Alias* writer Brian Michael Bendis, while Geraldo Borges’s art is both atmospheric and stylish.

At its best, the miniseries gives us a violent, character-driven thriller with an effective emotional hook, and also showcases some well-crafted and involving dialogue sequences between Jessica and Luke.

Unfortunately, it fails to stick the landing in its final issues, especially since (unlike the original *Alias*) the plot leans way too heavily on gory supernatural horror. As a result, almost all of the effective characterisation gets derailed by goofy pulpiness, excessive violence, and a climax that gives us Jessica literally punching the Devil in the face.

Combine this with an underwhelming final plot twist, and this haphazard noir mystery ends up stuck as a deeply frustrating misfire. **Saxon Bullock**

i Before Jessica’s creation, *Alias* was originally planned to focus on Jessica Drew (aka Spider-Woman) as a PI.



IF DESTRUCTION BE OUR LOT

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Image Comics

► Writers Matthew Rosenberg,

Mark Elijah Rosenberg

► Artist Andy MacDonald

ISSUES 1-4 “What happens to our tech when we’re no longer around to use it?” is a familiar and well-used narrative hook, but this new ongoing series finds some fresh ways of exploring the concept.

Playing like a bleaker version of Pixar classic *Wall-E*, the story is set in a future where humanity is extinct, and robots now control the Earth. Most of them are much happier now that their previous owners are gone, but an animatronic theme park duplicate of Abraham Lincoln doesn’t quite fit in this new society – and that’s before he discovers humanity might not be as dead as everybody thinks...

This opening four-issue arc sets up a weird, deliberately existential tale that’s often engaging, and features a strangely compelling protagonist in robot Abe Lincoln. It also showcases spectacular art from Andy MacDonald that brings this world to life with an impressive level of detail, while delivering inventive character designs.

Script-wise, the series is frequently fun and imaginative, but by the end of this first arc the plot hasn’t built up enough momentum and focus. While there’s plenty of weird humour and kooky satire on display here, this offbeat sci-fi saga needs to hurry up and get out of first gear if it’s going to really succeed. **Saxon Bullock**

STAR WARS ZERO COMPANY

Turn-based tactics go galactic



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PC

► Also available on PS5, Xbox Series

► Publisher Electronic Arts

VIDEOGAME After all these years criticising Stormtroopers for not being able to aim a blaster, *Zero Company* might give you fresh sympathy for their plight. It's a *Star Wars*-ian take on the turn-based tactics formula first established in *XCOM*, where you command a small squad of plucky soldiers and try to keep them alive through skirmish after skirmish.

As you move units into cover and line up enemies in their sights, the game presents a to-hit percentage chance. And as any long-time *XCOM* player will warn you: it might say 80% on-screen but somehow, when it really matters, you always seem to land

in the 20, and spray laser-fire across the walls instead.

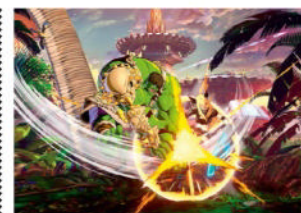
Missing shots really matters, too, since your squad is in real danger on these missions. With the exception of Hawks, your custom-created protagonist and leader of Zero Company, everyone can die in battle. Permanently. This includes randomly rolled recruits you can hire to your ragtag band of mercenaries – Twi'lek scoundrels, Weequay bruisers, chirpy Astromechs, even the odd Clone Trooper – but also handcrafted characters you'd think were essential to the plot, which turns out to be cleverly structured to work around their absence.

If waiting your turn and eyeballing line-of-sight sounds like a fusty way of living out your *Star Wars* fantasies, then be reassured: this ever-present danger keeps things tense throughout, and

ensures that every decision matters. (You'll be thankful for that turn structure when you're sweating over the best way to repair your favourite droid and get them safely to the extraction as more reinforcements keep pouring in.) It also makes it extra exciting when *Zero Company* lets you play with its best toys, including a one-shot rocket launcher that can wipe half a dozen Battle Droids off the map, saboteurs who've primed explosive barrels to detonate, and even a real live Jedi with all the Force powers you could wish for. But remember: you're always just a couple of bad dice rolls away from losing them forever.

Zero Company is a *Star Wars* game that will *always* tell you the odds, and remind you – brutally, brilliantly – that they can't always be trusted. **Alex Spencer**

i *Zero Company* represents the remnants of the 100th Clone Company, after their demise shown in the *Clone Wars* TV show.



MARVEL TŌKON: FIGHTING SOULS



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PS5

► Also available on PC

► Publisher Sony Interactive

Entertainment

VIDEOGAME It'd be easy to assume *Marvel Tōkon* is a cash-in relying on the comic publisher's cultural dominance, but legendary fighting game developer Arc System Works makes it an opportunity to embrace fans into a typically unwelcoming genre. Oozing love for the source material, with plenty of fan favourites and deep cuts, it adds the studio's own twists – Blade has learned to be a samurai, and Iron Man's suit looks *Gundam*-inspired, for instance.

The mix is infectious, with menus lined with editor annotations as if the game were a printed comic book, and a story mode where veteran comics writer Kieron Gillen collaborates with top industry artists from across western comics and manga alike.

But the proof of this fighting game pudding is in the punching. Gorgeous visuals look like a top-tier anime as tag-team fighters collide with bountiful visual effects, and high-impact launchers rip across comic pages to neighbouring stages. *Marvel Tōkon* boasts some of the easiest-to-learn controls we've seen in the genre, so anyone can feel like a superpowered force to be reckoned with, yet the depth of strategy is untouched, meaning it's about *what* you do more than how you do it. Even a novice will feel like they've been bitten by a radioactive fight stick. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



GAME OF THRONES: THE MAD KING



A Time For War

★★★★★

▶ **RUNNING UNTIL**

INITIAL RUN COMPLETED

5 SEPTEMBER

▶ Venue **Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford Upon Avon**

▶ Production Company

Royal Shakespeare Company

STAGE PLAY *The Mad King* is an ambitious, intensely immersive spectacle. Set before the events of the novels, it chronicles the tourney at Harrenhal, which saw Rhaegar Targaryen crown Lyanna Stark the queen of love and beauty – and kickstart a civil war that ended with Robert Baratheon ascending the Iron Throne.

The play is stunningly grand in approach, adapting not just the

tourney, but also the entirety of Robert's Rebellion. The result is a breathtaking three hours and 40 minutes of action, drama and tragedy.

With its interest in the realm's complicated politics, the first act recalls classic *Game Of Thrones*, revelling in putting its players together and letting them talk. This is where Harmony Rose-Bremner's Lyanna Stark shines: a wilful character who wants to forge her own destiny.

But it's Michael Shaeffer's Mad King who steals the show. Aerys is humanised to an almost painful degree, introduced with wildly long hair, fingernails like claws, and covered in gashes from sitting on the Iron Throne.

Always keep a spare sword or 50 close by.



He's a cruel monarch, but one who can be overcome with grief, and loves his eldest son – his only redeeming quality.

It's in act two that *The Mad King* perhaps overreaches itself. Act one works beautifully because it's a contained, character-driven story, but when the show expands to the action of Robert's Rebellion, it loses some of this closeness. Conversation is swapped for communicating via raven, and often the players react

to things they hear second-hand. But the action remains superb, and the show still finds time for intimate moments.

Hopefully a West End future is on the horizon – and a professional recording – because this extraordinary production deserves to be seen by the biggest audience possible.

Molly Edwards

i Playwright Duncan Macmillan also co-wrote an adaptation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first staged in 2013.

DEATH NOTE THE MUSICAL

Let there be Light

★★★★★

▶ **RUNNING UNTIL**

12 SEPTEMBER

▶ Venue **Barbican Theatre, London**

▶ Production Company **HoriPro**

STAGE MUSICAL A furious piece of teen wish-fulfilment, *Death Note* was a phenomenally popular noughties manga and anime. Its memorable antihero was Light Yagami, a Japanese student who discovers the titular magic notebook. If he writes someone's name in it, they die!

As Light starts a killing spree to change the world, his one obstacle is a scruffy oddball boy, known as L, who's a great detective working with the police. The story becomes a battle of wits

– think Sherlock versus Moriarty, with magic.

This stage musical adaptation is ludicrously silly and stupendously energised, and the characters sing their hearts out – especially Light himself, who is played by Singaporean actor Xander Pang. Telly Leung brings the humour as Ryuk, a visiting death god with a love of apples and *Deadpool*-ish quips about what's happening. The second half changes

“Ludicrously silly and stupendously energised”



“Sometimes I feel no one appreciates my poetry.”

tone somewhat, highlighting a lovelorn girl and the death god who loves her, as the rock-style songs get mixed together with romantic ballads.

From a technical standpoint it's splendid, with platforms suspended over the stage, background projections, gliding scenery and huge screens – though the show also leaves room for some quiet moments between the actors. The script draws mainly on the early chapters of the manga,

though the speeded-up story may lose some newbies, and the changed ending is a bit of a cop-out.

The main thing the show misses is the story's downbeat darkness, which was crucial to why it was a hit in the first place. But this is still an invigorating tribute act, daftness and all.

Alan Neal

i *The Simpsons* included a lavish anime-style spoof of *Death Note* in “Treehouse Of Horror XXXIII”, with Lisa as Light.

MAY 1971

SFX's time machine hurls us back to a random month once again

WORDS: NICK SETCHFIELD



Dr Milo, Zira and Cornelius in their spacesuits.

FLASHBACK

The Great Escape

26 MAY 1971 Just how do you follow the end of the world?

That was the challenge facing Paul Dehn, whose screenplay for 1970's *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes* had definitively climaxed with the far-future Earth exploding, victim of a "Divine Bomb" worshipped by a cult of mutants. As Dehn recalled, he was only obeying the wishes of studio paymasters 20th Century Fox, who told him "kindly destroy the entire world and wind up the series."

Intended as a modest cash-grab, the film became an unexpected hit. An appetite clearly remained for this oddball simian saga. Keen to resurrect a profitable franchise, even if it demanded an act of creative

necromancy, Fox sent Dehn a telegram. It simply read "Apes exist, sequel required."

Dehn's solution was inspired, flipping the central premise. *Escape From The Planet Of The Apes* finds Cornelius (Roddy McDowall), Zira (Kim Hunter) and the doomed Dr Milo (Sal Mineo) salvaging Charlton Heston's spacecraft from the first film and timewarping to 1973. As the ape astronauts are feted in a celeb-obsessed, polyester-draped Los Angeles, the movie dials up the strain of satire that had lurked in earlier entries. Before the plot darkens, it's the closest an *Apes* film ever comes to outright comedy.

Director Don Taylor – a TV veteran who would also helm 1978's *Damien: Omen II* – had his own take. "I consider it a love story," he told *Cinefantastique* in 1972. "I don't try to hammer the sociological overtones. I just let it happen." Whatever the genre, the sight

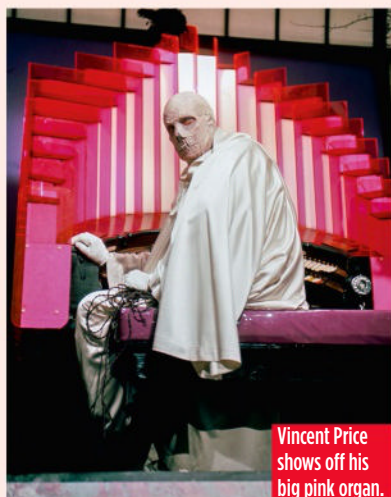
of Zira luxuriating in a hotel bath, fur smothered in bubbles, is almost as uncanny an image as the surf-lashed wreck of the Statue of Liberty in *Planet Of The Apes*.

Escape didn't enjoy the runaway success of *Beneath*. "It's really not so much science fiction as the others were, and I think that was a letdown for some kids," reflected producer Arthur P Jacobs a year on from the film's release. Still, its box office haul was enough to greenlight a fourth instalment – and this time, helpfully, Earth had been left intact.

One of the provisional titles for the movie was *Secret Of The Planet Of The Apes*.

The cast relax during a break from filming.





Vincent Price shows off his big pink organ.

The Price Is Fright

18 MAY 1971 “The great thing Vincent had was his voice,” said Robert Fuest, director of the sly and stylish horror *The Abominable Dr Phibes*, which received a gala premiere on Hollywood Boulevard. “So what did we do? Make a film where he doesn’t use it!”

In fact, star Vincent Price does speak as the eponymous fiend, but that trademark silken rasp is filtered through a mechanical device jacked directly into his throat. Slathered in ghoulish make-up that gives him the air of a dodgy waxwork, the disfigured Phibes schemes from his opulent Art Deco lair, avenging his wife’s death by unleashing an ingenious spree of murders inspired by the Ten Plagues of Egypt.

Fuest had directed seven episodes of Tara King-era *The Avengers* and brought more than a touch of that show’s twisted whimsy to *The Abominable Dr Phibes*. *The Avengers’* creative supremo Brian Clemens even made an uncredited contribution to the finale, replacing an ambitious set-piece in the original screenplay where Phibes made his escape from Wembley Stadium courtesy of a hot air balloon.

The New York Times was sniffy – “The tone of steamroller camp flattens the fun” said critic Howard Thompson – but the film was enough of a hit to earn a sequel. 1972’s *Dr Phibes Rises Again* reunited Price with Fuest. “He’s the only person in the world who is mad enough to direct the Dr Phibes films,” the suave horror icon enthused. “He’s a genuine, registered nut! He even looks like a madman.”

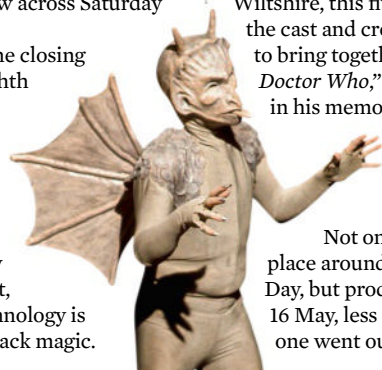


The Doctor is captured mid-maypole dance.

Village People

22 MAY 1971 The occult craze of the early ’70s even cast a satanic shadow across Saturday tea times.

But “The Daemons”, the closing story of *Doctor Who’s* eighth season, owed as much to Erich von Däniken and Arthur C Clarke as Dennis Wheatley. In the village of Devil’s End, the Master is raising a horned beast who’s really an ancient alien astronaut, one whose advanced technology is indistinguishable from black magic.



Filmed in the cosy environs of Aldbourne, Wiltshire, this five-parter was a favourite of the cast and crew. “The Daemons managed to bring together all the best elements of *Doctor Who*,” Jon Pertwee remembered in his memoir *I Am The Doctor*. “The key to the story’s success was, I think, the atmosphere.”

It’s firmly a tale of May, too. Not only does the action take place around Beltane, the Gaelic May Day, but production was completed on 16 May, less than a week before episode one went out.

Troops guard a Washington bridge against protestors.

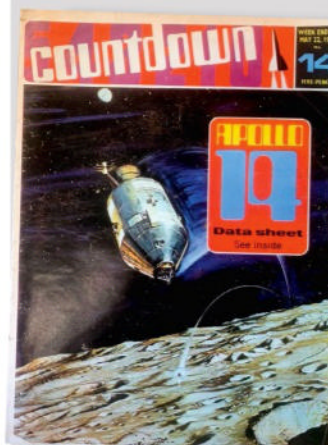


IN REAL LIFE

- ▶ **Prime Minister:** Edward Heath
- ▶ **US President:** Richard Nixon
- ▶ **In the charts:** “Knock Three Times” by Dawn is at number one, with the Rolling Stones’ “Brown Sugar” bubbling under.
- ▶ **In the news:** Left-wing guerillas attack public buildings in Ceylon; anti-Vietnam War protests take place in Washington; Major earthquakes in Turkey devastate the cities of Burdur and Bingöl; the Soviet Union launches the Mars 2 probe, while America launches Mariner 9.

AFP VIA GETTY

ON THE SHELF



- ▶ Apollo 14 is a fitting cover star for issue 14 of SF-inclined TV strip weekly *Countdown*.

© POLYSTYLE PUBLICATIONS



Farm Animals

In honour of Shaun the Sheep's latest big-screen outing, we take a trip down to the farm

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

In which sci-fi television show did a cow named Gene make regular appearances?

QUESTION 2

In which country was the 2006 killer sheep movie *Black Sheep* produced?

QUESTION 3

What is most notable (and also annoying...) about the pair of goats given to Thor in *Thor: Love And Thunder*?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

In which *Doctor Who* story would you find this animal?

QUESTION 5

The HP Lovecraft film *Color Out Of Space* is set on a farm for which animals (which end up horribly fused together...)?

QUESTION 6

In *Jurassic Park*, which dinosaurs do we see being fed with a cow (as it's lowered into their pen)?

QUESTION 7

In *Carrie*, what animal do Carrie's bullies kill so that they can tip its blood on her?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

In which TV series would you find this animal?

QUESTION 9

What inexplicable thing happens to a cow in *The X-Files* episode "The Rain King"?

QUESTION 10

In HG Wells's *The Food Of The Gods And How It Came To Earth*, which farm animals grow gigantic due to an experimental substance?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 11

Name the production company responsible for *Poultrygeist: Night Of The Chicken Dead*.

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Identify the classic film featuring this bovine moment.

QUESTION 13

What's the name of the sinister goat in *The Witch*?

QUESTION 14

Captain Link Hogthrob and Dr Julius Strangepork featured in which series of comedy sketches?

QUESTION 15

In 1987's *Bad Taste*, there's a scene where a sheep is blown up with a rocket launcher. Who directed it?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

In which *Doctor Who* episode would you find this critter?

QUESTION 17

Which sci-fi movie has a scene where a herd of cattle run past, all on fire?

QUESTION 18

Which zombie outbreak film takes place during a kindergarten class field trip to a farm?

QUESTION 19

What's unusual about the titular creature in the 2021 film *Lamb*?

QUESTION 20

In which comedy movie is a catapulted cow just the beginning of a barrage of farm animals?

Answers: 1 *Fringe* 2 New Zealand 3 Their screaming 4 "City Of Death" 5 Alpacas 6 The Velociraptors 7 A Pig 8 Alien: Earth 9 It crashes through the ceiling 10 *Muppet Show's* "Pigs In Space" 11 Peter Jackson 12 "Aliens Of London" 13 Mars Attacks! 14 Little Monsters 15 It's a sheep/human hybrid 16 Monty Python And The Holy Grail

How did you do?

What size is your brain?

0-5

Chicken (3.59 grams)

6-10

Goat (104 grams)

11-15

Pig (180 grams)

16-19

Cow (394 grams)

20

Horse (599 grams)

SFX

OCTOBER 2026 | Issue 409
Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editor

Darren Scott
darren.scott@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor

Ian Berriman
ian.berriman@futurenet.com

Editor At Large
Nick Setchfield

Art Editor

Jonathan Coates
jonathan.coates@futurenet.com

US Editor
Tara Bennett

Contributors

Stanley Bull, Saxon Bullock, Henry Calvert, Nicola Clarke, Milford Coppock, Sarah Dobbs, Rhian Drinkwater, Robbie Dunlop, Molly Edwards, Richard Edwards, Rosie Fletcher, Dave Golder, Stephen Jewell, Phil King, Matt Maytum, James Mottram, Alan Neal, Andrew Osmond, Ed Ricketts, Will Salmon, Neil Smith, Alex Spencer, Adam Tanswell, Oscar Taylor-Kent, David West, James White, Jonathan Wright, Steve Wright

Cover Images

VisionQuest © Marvel/Disney.
Outlander: Blood Of My Blood © Sony.
The Craft © Sony/Columbia. All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected.

Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future.

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email:
mfcommunications@futurenet.com

International Licensing/Syndication

SFX is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at futurecontenthub.com.

Back Issues

Active subscribers have instant access to digital back issues through their iOS or Android device at no extra cost. For help, visit bit.ly/digitalback. To purchase single print back issues, visit bit.ly/singleSFX.

Advertising

Media packs available on request
Commercial Director Clare Dove
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Head of Commercial Jon Restall
jonrestall@futurenet.com
Account Manager Ella Sherman
ella.sherman@futurenet.com

Subscriptions

New subscribers
magazinesdirect.com
Email help@magazinesdirect.com
Renewal mymagazine.co.uk
Email help@mymagazine.co.uk
Manage your subscription online at
www.mymagazine.co.uk
Consumer Revenues Director
Sharon Todd

Circulation

NewsTrade Director Ben Oakden

Production

Head of Production Mark Constance
Production Project Manager
Clare Scott
Advertising Production Manager
Joanne Crosby
Digital Editions Manager
Jason Hudson
Senior Production Manager
Maaya Mistry

Management

SVR Tech & Games Simon Collis
Managing Director, Games and Ents
Matthew Pierce
Group Art Director, TV and Ents
Paul Breckennridge
Design Director, Future Living
Simon Maynard
Head of Art & Design
Rodney Dive
Director of Group Finance
Oli Foster

SFX (ISSN 1358-5959) October 2026, issue 409, 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.

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2026 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

"A mucky tail with a few winnets dangling."



SFX is a member of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) which regulates the UK print and digital news industry. We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint, please contact legal@futurenet.com. If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange
(symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer Kevin Li Ying
Non-Executive Chairman Mark Brooker
Chief Financial Officer Sharjeel Suleman

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

MYKHAILO KOKHANUK/GETTY

All contents are subject to change, like a rebooted meta-requl.

NEXT ISSUE

SFX 410
ON SALE
7 OCTOBER

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE RETURN OF THE LEGENDARY SFX HALLOWEEN HORROR SPECIAL

PLUS:
GHOSTS! CLOWNS! VILLAINS! WITCHES! SLASHERS!
VAMPIRES! CENOBITES! HAUNTED HOUSES!
MORE!

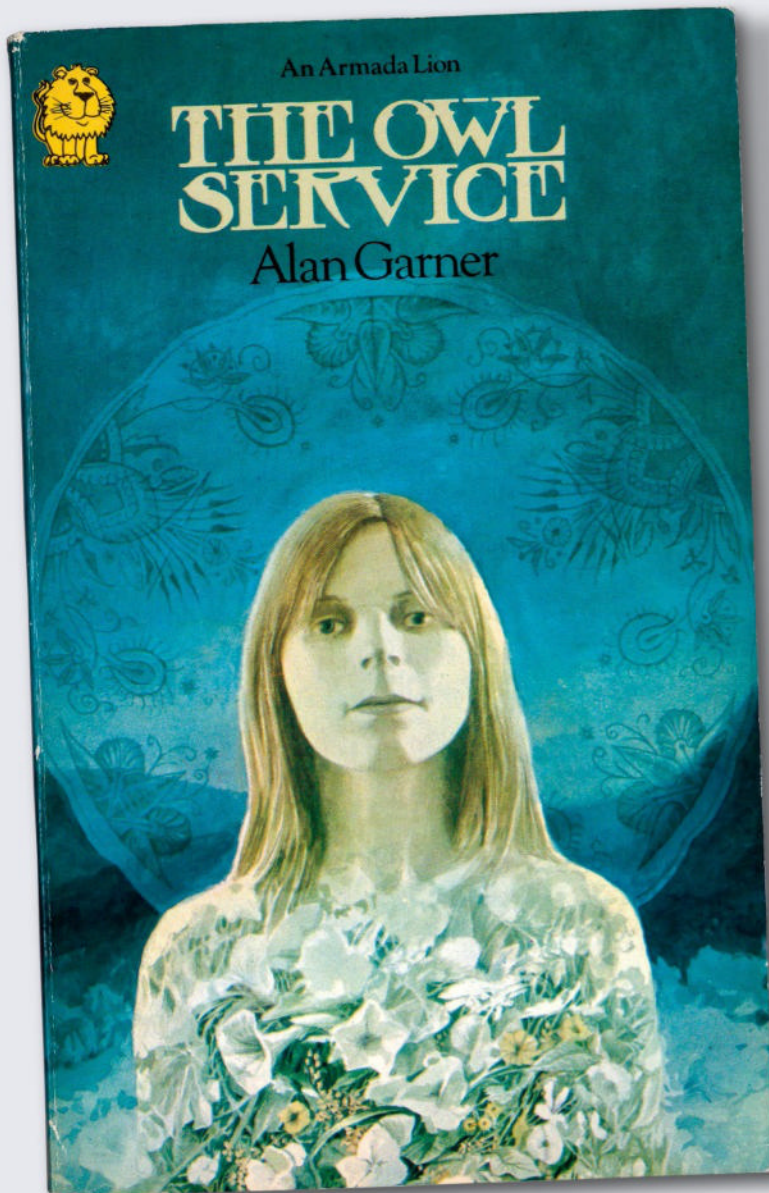
BUMPER
EDITION
WITH BONUS
ITEMS!



Sign up to our monthly newsletter to receive a sneak preview!
bit.ly/SFXnewsletter

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



“I found it frightening and fascinating, and I saw aspects of my own life in these pages”

books each featured ordinary people to whom extraordinary things happened. They held out the promise that I might suddenly find myself central to a bigger story, an adventure.

But *The Owl Service* was different – strange, sad, scary. Based on a Welsh legend concerning Blodeuwedd, an unfaithful wife made of flowers, her lover, a cuckolded husband who magically returns to life, and a pay-off involving forced transformation into a bird of prey, the book was domestic yet claustrophobic. I didn't know it, but I was encountering folk horror for the first time.

It begins with a blended family taking a holiday in a Welsh valley as a way to bond. At its centre are a trio of teenagers: middle-class step-siblings Roger and Alison, and Gwyn, the working-class son of a housekeeper and cook, Nancy. After Gwyn, at Alison's request, explores the attic, where there are stacks of plates with a floral pattern, eldritch events unfold.

In a postscript, Garner later reflected on writing *The Owl Service* as a process “of finding, not inventing, a story”. Perhaps because of this, the book reads like a lucid dream, but not one where the writer is moving towards the fantastic. Rather, this is a book where Garner directs himself away from the fantastic to explore themes you might find in a kitchen-sink drama: unhappiness, shame, adolescence, sexual awakening, privilege, class, compassion, and things left unsaid.

As the half-brother from a second marriage and the child of parents whose marriage was quietly troubled, I found *The Owl Service* both frightening and fascinating. While I didn't fully realise this until later, I saw aspects of my own life in these pages.

But don't let the melancholy linger. Re-reading it as an adult, I think it the best of Garner's children's novels and, for all the unhappiness it surfaces, uplifting. The patterns of the past, Garner gently reminds us here, needn't define the future. ●

The grown-up Jonathan still has dreams shaped by events in Garner's books.

The Owl Service



**Jonathan Wright,
freelance writer**

If it weren't for Alan Garner, I wonder whether I would be interested in fantastic fiction at all. You would, then, think I would remember

how I first encountered his novels. In truth, I can barely remember a time when his books weren't close to hand.

As a child, I read and reread *The Weirdstone Of Brisingamen*, *The Moon Of Gomerath*, *Elidor* and *The Owl Service*. The first three of these

Fact Attack!

→ *The Owl Service* won the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the first of just six books to achieve this feat.

→ The book was partly inspired by a dinner service. Tracing its pattern, Garner's wife realised, produced a template for a paper owl.

→ Alan Garner also wrote the script for a TV adaptation of the book, which was first screened over the winter of 1969-1970.

→ The TV version starred Gillian Hills as Alison, who can also be seen as a blonde picked up in a record shop by Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*.

→ The cast found their experiences during filming to be uncanny. Hills later noted: “It was all so real, it was frightening.”

© HARPERCOLLINS

STAR WARS™

STAR PILOTS

**Wedge Antilles—hero, warrior, star pilot.
The only rebel to face two Death Stars
and live to tell the tale.**

**THIS IS HIS STORY, THAT OF THE
PILOTS HE SERVED WITH, AND OF THE
ELITE ENEMIES HE FOUGHT AGAINST.**



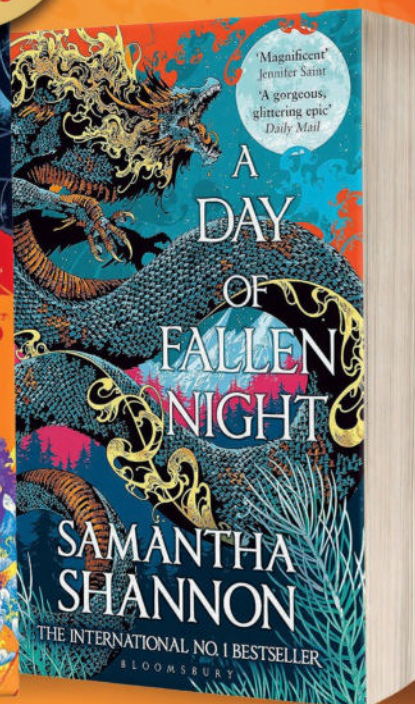
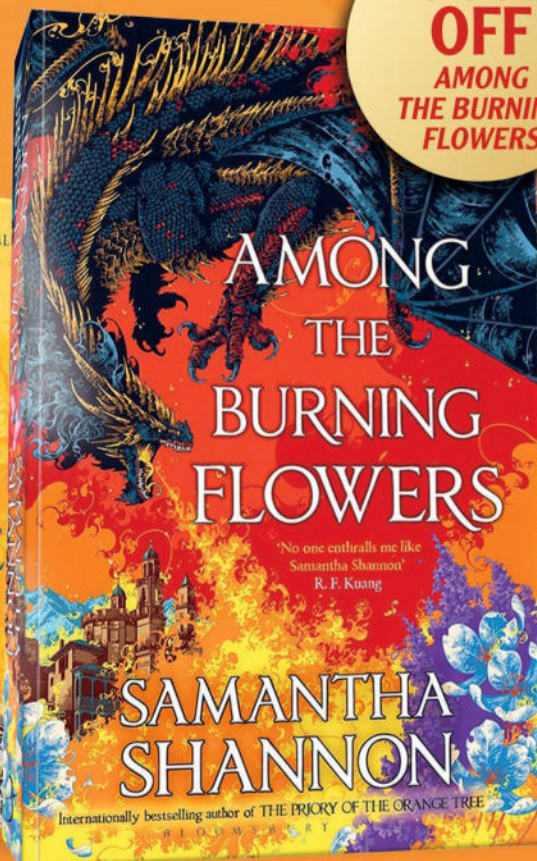
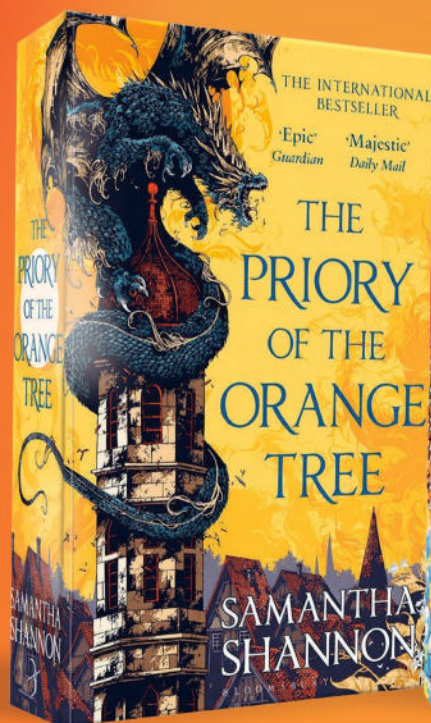
Disney • LUCASFILM
© & ™ 2026 LUCASFILM LTD.

Order your
copy now



TAKE YOUR FIRST STEPS INTO THE EPIC...

**30%
OFF**
AMONG
THE BURNING
FLOWERS



Enter ATBF30 at checkout on Bloomsbury.com. Offer valid until 31/09/26 for *Among the Burning Flowers* by Samantha Shannon, paperback only.

BLOOMSBURY ★ ARCHER