

FAN THE FIRE

#17
FEBRUARY 2009



THE MARKET CRASH + ISSUE



HOW LABELS ARE FAILING IN THE DIGITAL MARKET. 2009'S FIRST CROP OF ALBUM RELEASES. THE INFORMANT. LESBIAN VAMPIRE KILLERS. OSCAR SEASON LETDOWNS. DAN MUMFORD ARTWORK. VALERIA LAZAREVA STYLE SPREAD.

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The start of the year is always a funny time. Everyone makes resolutions to try and improve on the 12 months just past, most of which will be already broken, the music press reveal their often thoroughly uninspiring highlights for the following year and the film industry get their awards ready. With the global economy in meltdown, however, just staying afloat, for all but the flourishing video game companies, should be target number 1.

Though don't get bogged down, as we explored last issue, there's a lot to be excited for in 2009 and the real picks start to reveal themselves from now on.

After a lacklustre end to the year, the first major music hopefuls spill their creative efforts this month. With new albums from Franz Ferdinand, Eagles Of Death Metal and The View, plus debuts from much-touted White Lies and Empire Of The Sun, it's time to see how they all really shape up.

After last year's writer's strike, we have yet to feel the true extend of the delays put on a vast number of productions, but film in 2009 should a strong one, at least for the first two quarters.

The wonderful Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist makes the trip across the Atlantic and after sneaking into our top films of last year, we give it the review it's been waiting for. We also cast a gaze for some of this year's main Oscar hopefuls, namely The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button, Milk, Rachel Getting Married and awards no-show Seven Pounds.

In our biggest art coup to date, we exclusively feature the work of artist, and designer behind cover art for punk band Gallows, Dan Mumford.

On the style side, we tout the captivating photography of Valeria Lazareva.

Enjoy the issue, and try to make the most out of 2009.

Sam Bathe



CONTRIBUTOR OF THE MONTH



Creating artwork for the likes of Gallows, Evil Nine, Callahan and Azriel, **Dan Mumford** has built up an enviable reputation in the music industry.

Working out a studio in central London and screenprint club in Dalston, there aren't many that come close to his sense of imagination and powerful use of colour and dark imagery. With a lot of new projects planned for the forthcoming year, expect to see his work once again in the public domain before too long.

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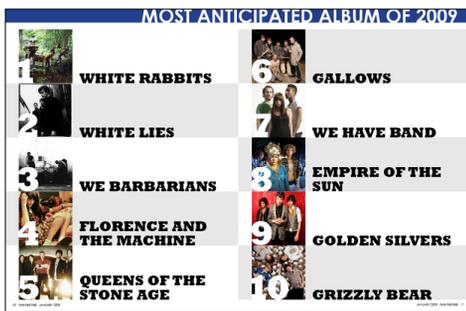
WEB: www.fanthefiremagazine.com

BACK ISSUES: www.fanthefiremagazine.com/backissues

FAN THE FIRE MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY.

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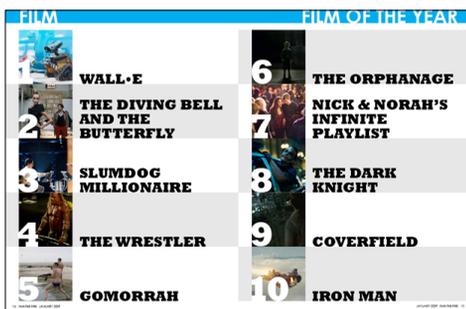


SOUND OF 2000-BLEUCH

It annoyed me when every 'bands to look out for in 2009' list featured identical names and missed out on a ton of acts with great albums due this year. Sure, you've got to include White Lies and Florence And The Machine, but as with Fan the Fire, I'm more excited about new material from White Rabbits, QOTSA and We Have Band than Little Boots and VV Brown.

Tim Chester, via email

Missing We Have Band is a big oversight indeed.



WHERE'S WALL•E?

How Wall•E didn't get an Oscar nomination I'll never know. The little robot's adventures were so captivating, taking animated cinema to such great heights, the Academy's oversight is one in a long line of forgotten masterpieces that should be given the higher credit they

deserve. And don't get me started on Christopher Nolan not getting a directorial nomination.
Lucy Penman, via email

And don't forget Robert Downey Jr.'s nomination. Sure it was a fine performance, but not Oscar worthy you'll agree. There'll be a feature on the Academy's nomination failures next issue.



BRING ME AVATAR

I've been thoroughly unenthused by 3-D cinema so far. The new My Bloody Valentine is a good effort at last, but hopefully Avatar will be the industry shaker the technology the badly needs.

Chris Nevas, via email

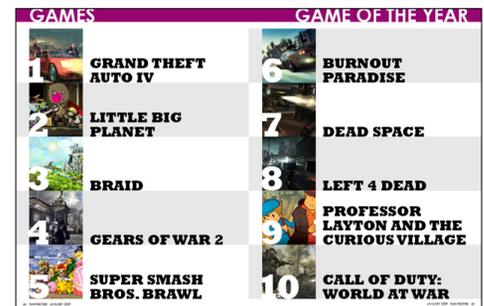


FORZA SCHWARTZ

The O.C. wasn't given a long enough run in my opinion. It did drag on towards the end and never quite reached the highs of

the amazing first season but I think it should have been given one last chance in a fifth season, or a movie. Still, Josh Schwartz hasn't done badly for himself since. Gossip Girl is far too addictive and Chuck is the best adventure comedy in years, so I guess something good came from The O.C.'s collapse in the end.
Molly Wood, via email

Don't remind us The O.C. is over, Gossip Girl is keeping us going though, guilty pleasure #1.



HUNTED FOREVER

Arguably the best thing about the current the community inclusive software running the new crop of consoles and Apple's iPhone is the all-access online stores. Giving bedroom coders the chance to put their skills to good use, to see a game such as Braid, only released digitally is a great achievement. With Hunted Forever, an online flash game, making it into Time's games of the year list, and amazing creations like Fieldrunners and Rolando in the iPhone App Store, gaming has hit a new age. The industry is streaks ahead of its counterparts, and reaping the rewards.
Jon Rinchmond, via email

We were playing Fieldrunners for far, far too much of the day when it was first released.

OUR OTHER SITES...



Piracy Rules

As the IFPI announce shocking figures about the current state of the music industry, piracy has long been a major problem, but only now the labels are starting to realise.

BY SAM BATHE

It's long been known that the music industry faces uncertain times. Struggling to understand the digital market, never mind control the impact of the internet on music or even make the most of a new platform, labels and artists across the board are still picking their brains about which way to step forward, but whatever, they choose, they better do it fast.

Announcing the results of their annual study on the music industry, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) claim a huge 95% of downloaded music is done so illegally. With 1.4bn songs legally purchased in 2008, worth just over £2.5bn, the IFPI claim more than 40bn music files traded hands illegally, causing a savage dent into the income of recording artists and labels alike.

While the high estimate of illegal downloads is unsurprising, it is difficult not to pick point with how the IFPI came to this figure. There is no doubt the IFPI have centred focus in their new report on these striking numbers, and for the casual onlooker they will easily draw a gasp, but when they have little data to back everything up, their strategy is a little gung-ho. Given the nature of the grey market, it is impossible to quantify activity over P2P networks such as BitTorrent, via websites like ThePirateBay, IRC chat programs and Usenet, never mind the new phenomenon of sharing on blogs and host sites such as RapidShare and YouSendIt. Validity of their figures aside, however, the overall point is still very important, if still drawing a blind eye to certain factors.

There's no doubt artists and labels are missing out on crucial income, but the 95% claim would not directly channel into legal purchases if the illegal methods were not there. Frequently downloaders will access a song or an album merely because they can, because

it is there ready on a website and all they have to do is click a simple link. The music may lie in their library untouched and unplayed until the day they have a clean-up and delete the unused files.

Further given the price of CDs, and the tightness within which the public's spending has been restricted, with artists regularly churning out money-making, half-baked releases, listeners cannot afford to take the risk on a new disc, so they turn online and to the free, and yes, illegal, base online, where they can try anything they want at no cost. Websites such as the Hype Machine, a blog consolidator and search engine, enable users to find a vast array of music in a matter of minutes, enabling the casual user, confused by talk of BitTorrent, to get their hands on a track.

Should they then like what they hear, they may then be urged to buy the album, and more often than not, see the artist on tour. Sure, these related incomes from illegal downloading will not match the profit lost in the bigger picture, but it does not mean they should be overlooked, and are points with which the music industry should look to get a grip on the market.

Users have always said that they are willing to pay for content, assuming the price is right and the service meets their expectations. Illegal downloads have always offered content suitable for whatever hardware or software they use, something the likes of iTunes and other online stores have only just caught up on, though they have still doing something right.

Digital downloads rose 25% in 2008 from figures the year previous, and while CD sales expectedly fell, overall profit in the industry grew. But still they demand more.

“Their industry is being hurt, yes, but this is driving labels to take unnecessarily high moral standpoints.”

If you quantify the illegal 95% of music downloads, it gives an astronomical figure of £48bn, though as we have discussed, a very big chunk of this would not materialise even if illegal methods were unavailable. The digital market and use of the internet is undoubtedly being greatly underused by labels and artists, hoping to push listeners down legal channels, and there is a vast potential to improve their service appropriately. Industry heads are instead focussing their efforts on cutting illegal downloads by force, rather than coercing users onto their own turf.

With little success in taking individual users to court and suing the likes of a deceased grandmother for illegally downloading 13 hip hop tracks, the fight is being taken to the internet service providers (ISPs). Demanding that Governments the world over force new laws on ISPs that will impose sanctions on illegal downloaders, sending letters of warning and threatening to cut them off or simply by blocking the content, but where does this leave the ISPs?

Let's say in a couple of year's time, the ISPs have stopped illegal downloading as users fear their punishments or access to distribution is stopped, the internet industry will severely suffer. As ISPs offer ever increasing speeds and the opportunity for unlimited bandwidth, who needs a 40mb/s fibre optic service to read emails and check the weather. Restrictions to websites such as RapidShare and use of BitTorrent networks would cause mass outcry, and is surely crossing some sort of legal boundary. Both may deal in illegally available content, but in equal measure, are used for general sharing of personal files and make up a big function of the internet that cannot be lost.

Their industry is being hurt, yes, but this is driving labels to take unnecessarily high moral stand-

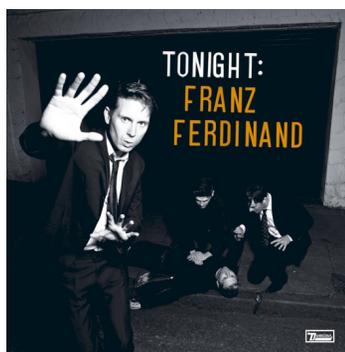
points, and making demands that should seem ludicrous. With reports Universal take a small chunk of profit for each Microsoft Zune media player sold, record labels are increasingly taking the opinion they should all be making money from hardware sold. Of course, the music player market would be nothing without a vast industry of music to play on it, but likewise, without the opportunity to carry music around with you, CD sales would have never boomed like they did back when the first players were introduced. Times are changing, but the music industry is undoubtedly stuck in the past.

Music, though, is not alone in feeling the pain of illegal downloads. Film studios have long been complaining of lost income, throwing out equally bloated figure of lost income due to online piracy. And while gaming has never been stronger, consoles have filled the void left by a now defunct PC platform.

The way forward should be for the music industry to beat illegal download networks at their own game. Not cut them off, as there will always be ways around restrictions, but offer services consumers are happy with and can get the most out of.

Initial feedback from the Nokia 'Comes With Music' all-you-can-eat download service is positive, taking an idea that has been running online for sometime, though never with full label backing, and offering unlimited downloads for an extra fee on top of the usual mobile contract.

There was talk of such in the iTunes store some time ago, but it never materialised, several majors were unhappy about how the income will be split and their share quantified, though their inability to strike a deal has cost them dearly, apparently £48bn's worth. ■



FRANZ FERDINAND
'TONIGHT'
 (DOMINO)

After four years away from the game, you'd have hoped Franz Ferdinand would return with a little more than 'Tonight'. Without the imagination of their debut, this is a far from poor third album, but fans of their previous two, will have wanted more.

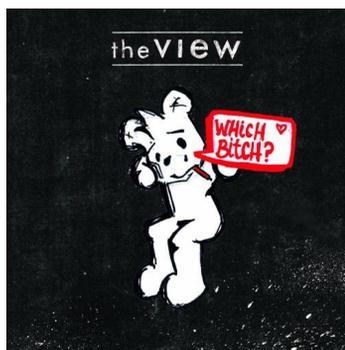
★★★★★



CHEETAHSAURUS
'GET POOR OR DIE TRYING'
 (SELF-RELEASED)

With labels pushing genre frontrunners, it's not very often you come across something that feel fresh but Cheatahsaurus' sound is so individual and yet so accessible with a tinge of Cold War Kids, a heap of TV On The Radio and limitless ability.

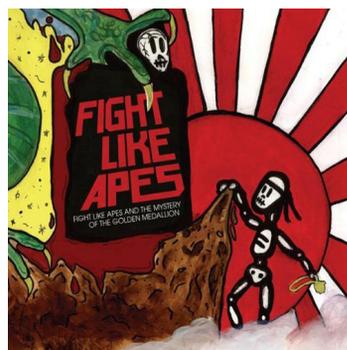
★★★★★



THE VIEW
'WHICH BITCH?'
 (1965 RECORDS)

After their grossly over-hyped debut in 2007, The View's sophomore record takes a much poppier tune and greatly benefits. 'Which Bitch?' feels far more enjoyable, if without the vigour that has made them famous. Pity they didn't put as much effort into the cover art.

★★★★★



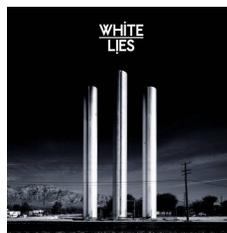
FIGHT LIKE APES
'... AND THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN MEDALLION'
 (MODEL CITIZEN)

Heading out on tour with The Prodigy, and oddly, The Ting Tings last year, the Fight Like Apes machine has been slowly been rolling onto stardom. Their debut isn't perfect, but as modern punk goes, Fight Like Apes have done a very good job.

★★★★★



WHITE LIES
'TO LOSE MY LIFE'
 (FICTION)



Circling under the radar with former name Fear Of Flying, it all took off for the Ealing three-piece when they changed their name to White Lies.

Reimagining their old songs with a darker undertone and throwing themselves at new, more personal tracks, after a relaunch gig at the Hoxton Bar & Grill, labels were soon swooning to sign them up.

With a sound reminiscent of the glam-rock age,



White Lies mix in a little post-punk and synths to give a stiking first impression.

Sounding like nothing on offer in today's indie music scene, with a lot of help from the music press, White Lies has fully made the step into the mainstream

Recognised as the first big release of 2009 'To Lose My Life' carries a heavy burdon, which it to some extent, shrugs off. Lead single 'Death' makes for a powerful introduction, pushed on by an unrelenting bass drum before each vibrant chorus, it's no surprise White Lies have drawn so many fans so fast.

Follow-up 'To Lose My Life' is more of the same. Harry McVeigh's sultry vocals make for an attractive proposition, as the on-rushing songs have a certain intrigue to them.

While you should be sure not to miss '80s throwback 'E.S.T.', after a while 'To Lose My Life' drags on. Not on the first or second listen, but it soon starts to date, and won't have the staying power in terms of new fans coming back to listen time and time again.

There's a brilliance in there but it requires too mach patience to reach.

★★★★★



EAGLES OF DEATH METAL
'HEART ON'
(DOWNTOWN)

Proving a surprise success, 'Heart On' is the record everyone knew EoDM had in them, but were unsure if they could tease it out. Going for a more subtle approach, their third album is an effortlessly listenable, rough and ready in perfect measure.

★★★★★



EMPIRE OF THE SUN
'WALKING ON A DREAM'
(EMI)

The first of the 'class of 2009' to make a big splash, 'Walking On A Dream' is not as revolutionary as it would have been had MGMT not made last year so memorable, but still wonderful in its own right, Empire Of The Sun make a new genre in smooth electro.

★★★★★



DELTA SPIRIT

WATER RATS, LONDON

19/01/09

Playing their first UK show just hours after touching down in London from LA, you couldn't tell for a second the San Diego five-piece were somewhat drained by jetlag.

Instantly up to speed and treating the onlooking crowd to tracks from debut album 'Ode To Sunshine', set for a UK release in March, the Fan the Fire favourites gave a memorable performance.

Not forgetting their signature trashcan lid and huge drum for the finale, the tiny Water Rats venue was a far stretch from their sold out show at LA's 900 capacity El Rey a few days before.

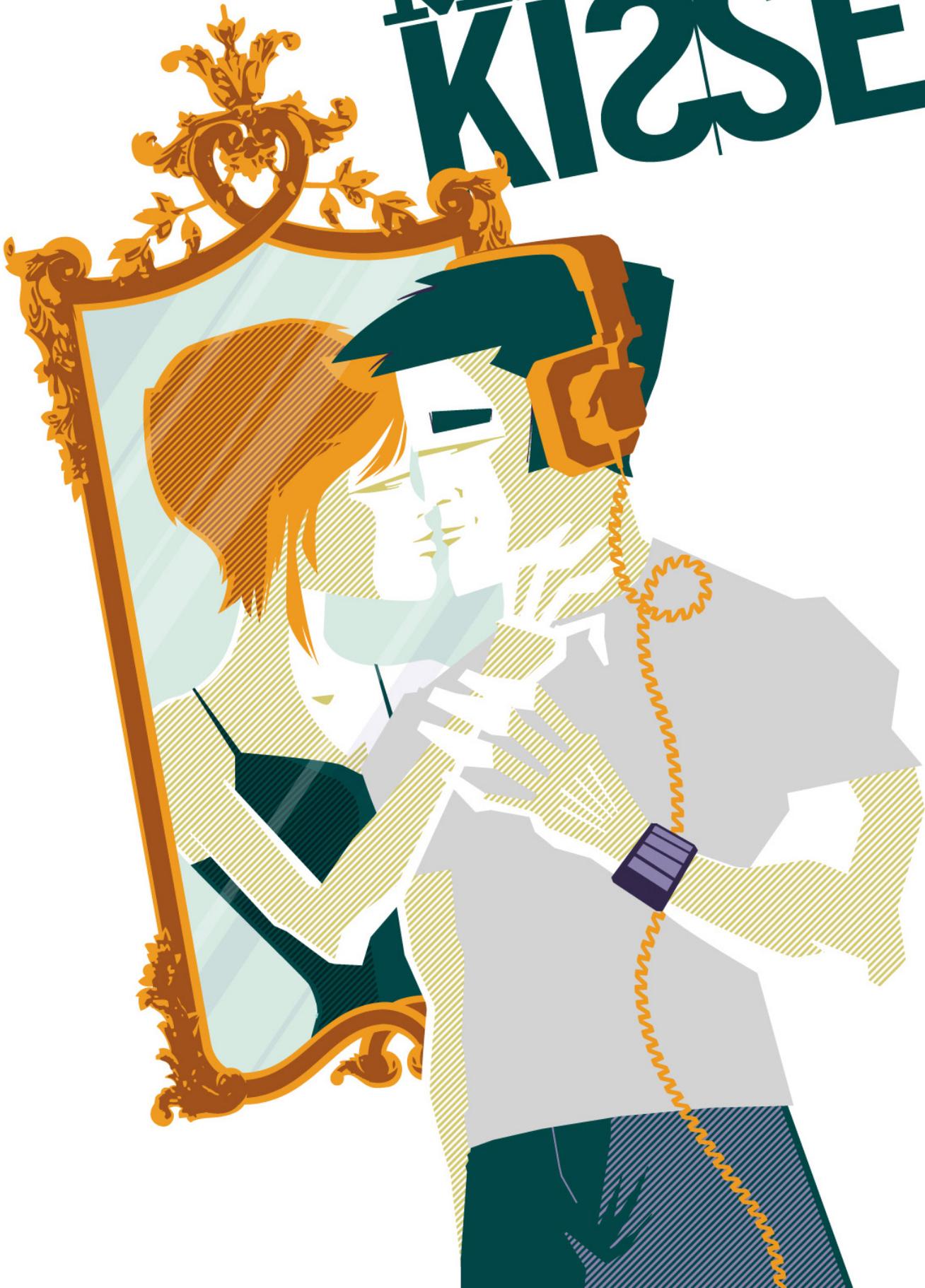
On terrific form, Matt Vasquez's thunderous vocals would have been enough to blow away any audience, but in the tiny Water Rats, Delta Spirit's emerging sound proved thoroughly captivating.

Expect bigger shows when they return in March/April.



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MIRROR OR KISSES



L O N D O N ' S
H O T T E S T
N E W
I N D I E
A L T E R N A T I V E
E L E C T R O
C L U B
N I G H T
C O M I N G
E V E R Y
M O N D A Y
F R O M
F E B R U A R Y
2 3 R D
T O . . .



THE INFORMANT

Based on the 2000 nonfiction thriller by Kurt Eichenwald, *The Informant* finds Matt Damon at the centre of a price-fixing scandal in the food industry.

Playing company executive Mark Whitacre, Damon blows the whistle on conglomerate Archer Daniels Midland's illegal trade agreements, gathering hundreds of hours of audio and video footage to present to the FBI for one of the nation's biggest price-fixing clamp-downs.

Directed by Steven Soderbergh, *The Informant* adds a dark comedy element to the original novel, focussing on Whitacre's inner turmoil and bipolar disorder, struggling to cope with the stress of going under cover.

The Informant will see Damon again working on a script written by screenwriter Scott Z. Burns, previously penning *The Bourne Ultimatum*, with filming done at Whitacre's former property in Moweaqua, Illinois to add authenticity.

The role has seen Damon put on considerable bulk, not quite reminiscent of De Niro for *Raging Bull*, but still moving up a couple of waist sizes, the Bourne star could at least enjoy a more relaxing dietary environment, and the film should be equally entertaining.

THE INFORMANT WILL BE RELEASED ON SEPTEMBER 18TH.





X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

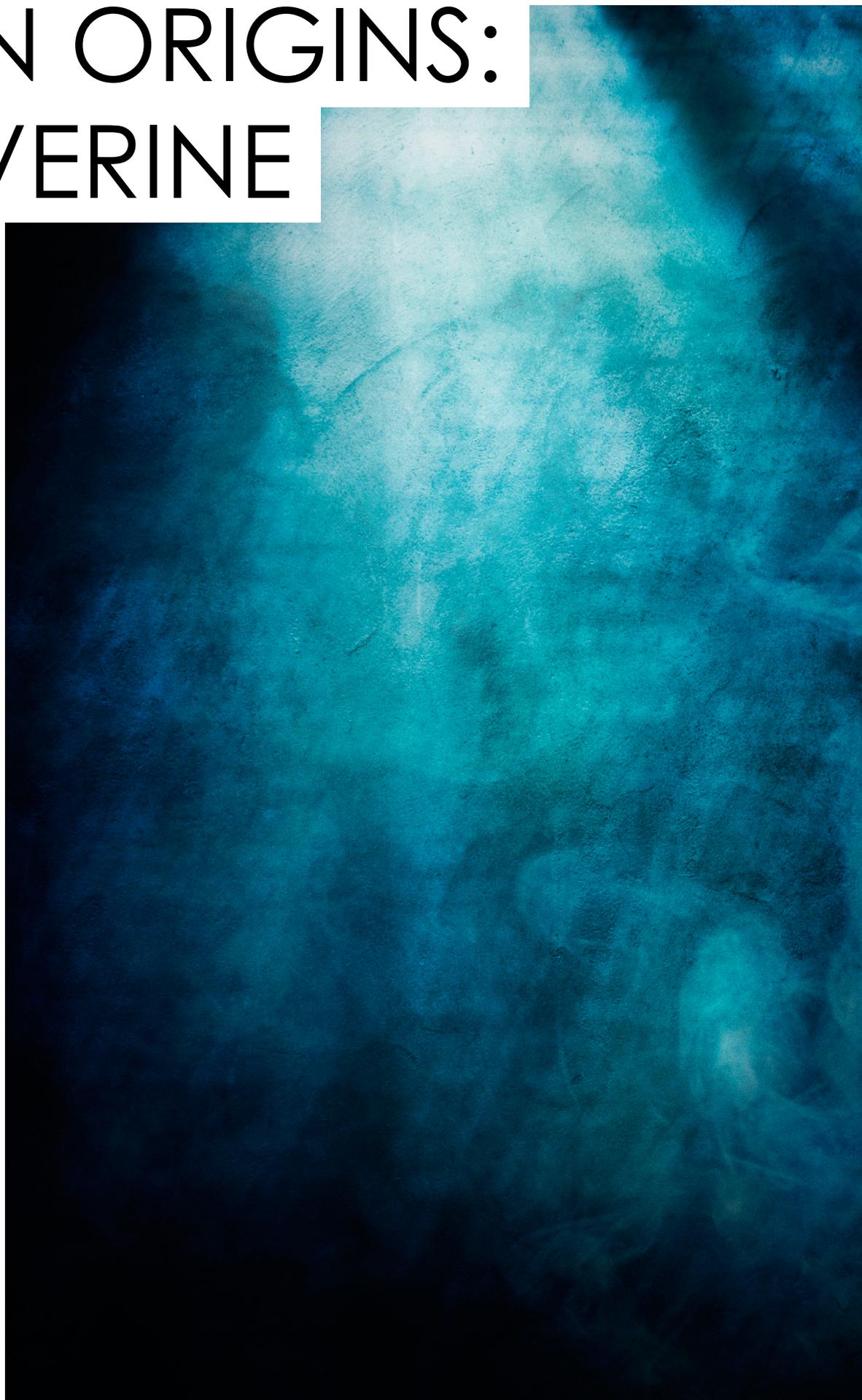
After the great success, if meagre quality by the end, of the X-Men trilogy and with audiences lapping up all the comic book adaptations they can get, it was only a matter of time before a fourth X-Men was in production.

The first of three planned 'origin' films, X-Men Origins: Wolverine is set long before the recent trilogy and explores the mutant's early life, before his skeleton was bonded with indestructible metal Adamantium, starring Hugh Jackman once again as the clawed central figure.

Integrating the Weapon X program, Wolverine's battles with humanist William Stryker and his relationship with fellow mutant Sabretooth, early buzz was hugely positive until mid-last year when reports of turmoil threw the production into chaos.

After tensions rose surrounding the creative drive of the film, Fox lined up several names to replace director Gavin Hood, but each side was slowly calmed, and after reshoots in the first few weeks of 2009, at last Wolverine is nearing its debut.

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE WILL BE RELEASED ON MAY 1ST.





LESBIAN VAMPIRE KILLERS

Hoping to emerge onto the international film circuit as Simon Pegg and Nick Frost did in 2004 with *Shaun Of The Dead*, BAFTA TV award winning duo James Corden and Mathew Horne head the cast of *Lesbian Vampire Killers*. Following the horror/comedy trend that worked so well for *Shaun Of The Dead*, *Lesbian Vampire Killers*, however, is much more high concept, hoping to pull in audiences to some extent, with the title alone.

Though they did not write the script, as Pegg and frequent directorial partner Edgar Wright did for *Shaun...*, *Lesbian Vampire Killers* is undoubtedly Corden and Horne's vehicle. Playing two slackers visiting a remote Welsh village, the local women are enslaved by an ancient lesbian vampire curse, and you guessed it, it's left to them to roam the town and kill them all.

It remains to be seen if *Lesbian Vampire Killers* will prove as successful as *Shaun...*, but if the script is well written, backed up with heaps of charm and a romantic edge to keep your heartstrings i check, all the right ingredients are in place.

LESBIAN VAMPIRE KILLERS WILL BE RELEASED ON MARCH 20TH.





NICK AND NORAH'S INFINITE PLAYLIST

Directed by: Peter Sollet Starring: Michael Cera, Kat Dennings, Alexis Dziena, Aaron Yoo, Rafi Gavron, Ari Graynor & Jay Baruchel
 Studio: Mandate Pictures Distributor: Columbia Pictures
 Release: Out now (USA) January 30 (UK)

Billed as a sleeper comedy hit, after returning its budget an unheard of 35 times over, *Juno* quickly became arguably the most successful indie comedy to date. With a market that spreads from teens to parents, it's no surprise to see a heap of similar releases on the horizon and *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist* is pick of the crop.

Similarly starring Michael Cera, *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist* feels like *Juno's* younger, teenage cousin. Boasting a cruder vocabulary, a lot more indie rock music and an absence of teenage pregnancy, *Nick And Norah's* still maintains the angst and dead pan nature that made *Juno* so entertaining, and in parts, hilarious.

Cera is again the leading man, whom with a raft of new roles lined up for 2009, could soon become the Shia LaBeouf of the comedy world. After finding love with Ellen Page in *Juno*, this time around his relationships are falling by the way side. Breaking up with his girlfriend Tris, Nick is broken hearted, compounded further by an endless stream of made-for-her mix CDs lying around his room. But with favourite band *Where's Fluffy* playing a secret gig somewhere across New York that evening, and his own band *The Jerkoffs* booked for a matinee show, another evening moping around his house is soon is forcibly cut short.

Despite their acrimonious break-up, Tris still makes it out to Nick's gig, and gazing into the crowd from the stage, he sees her cosying up to another guy. Before he has a chance to go up to Tris after the show, however, Norah intervenes. Sharing a close mutual friend with Tris, Norah and Nick's ex more often than not are in each other's company, despite no real feelings of friendship, and after the break-up, Norah felt sorry for the guy on the other end of Tris' behaviour. Unbeknown that Tris' ex is

the guy on stage, Norah approaches Nick after admiring his performance asking him to pretend to be her boyfriend when Tris mocks Norah for coming alone.

After a brief period of fireworks, all involved soon turn their attention to the more important quandary of finding *Where's Fluffy* but with the rest of Nick's band fed up of Tris, after seeing Norah approach Nick, throw the pair together in the search for their favourite band. Scouring New York for the secret venue, and in time, Norah's drunken friend, the pair's evening takes countless unexpected turns in what becomes a memorable evening for all.

With a marvellous performance from Cera, *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist* really takes off as the humour takes centre stage. The comedy is intertwined perfectly in the story, with hilarious dead pan one-liners that will have you rolling around in your seat. Though as successful as the laughs become, the film never feels forced and the entertainment always natural. Proof once more that Cera is a true star in the making.

Bar a couple of lewd moments towards the end of the film, *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist* is effortlessly captivating and just as charming as any indie comedy should be, with that edgy feel that takes it beyond the bog standard teen rom-coms. The plot is slightly rambling and pulls around for an ever predictable finish, but given the entertainment to be found over the brisk 90 minute running time, this is an easy crime to forgive.

Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist is limitlessly rewatchable, and not just the new *Juno*, but makes improvements on Cera's last big success.

★★★★★



REVIEWS





RACHEL GETTING MARRIED

Directed by: Jonathan Demme Starring: Anne Hathaway, Rosemarie DeWitt, Mather Zickel, Bill Irwin & Tunde Adebimpe
Studio: Marc Platt Productions Distributor: Sony Pictures Release: Out now

You might have somewhat forgotten about Jonathan Demme as a directorial force since his assault on the Oscars in the early 1990s with *Married To The Mob*, *The Silence Of The Lambs* and *Philadelphia*, but taking on Jenny Lumet's debut screenplay, with *Rachel Getting Married*, Demme is well and truly back on the ball.

Centred around non-titular character Kym (Hathaway), fresh out of rehab she jumps back into family life on the eve of her sister's wedding. Yet to meet her future brother-in-law and out of touch with the hoards of relatives set to arrive for the ceremony, Kym's return is turbulent to say the least, as her awkward, unforgiving persona ruffles a

few feathers in the family.

While the story won't blow you away, the direction and intense performances set *Rachel Getting Married* apart. Kym's complex character is portrayed wonderfully by Anne Hathaway, pushing as hard as anyone for an Oscar.

Though at times she can be unthoughtful and selfish, her actions are driven by love and you'll take her to your heart before the credits roll, thoroughly fascinated along the way as you never quite know what she'll do next.

With the entire cast and core crew moving into the house where the film was based and shot, Rachel

Getting Married feels like a home movie, giving it a sense of intimacy so many other films lack. From integral scenes like the rehearsal dinner or heart stopping revelations blown up as father and son-in-law race to fill the dishwasher, you feel in the scene, more than just a viewer to a cinematic production.

Easily Demme's best film since *Philadelphia*, *Rachel Getting Married* is a marvellous take on the turmoil family situations can cause, and the inner grief of the struggling Kym.

Far from an easy watch, but an almost two-hour picture not to be missed in the awards season.

★★★★★



SEVEN POUNDS

Directed by: Gabriele Muccino Starring: Will Smith, Rosario Dawson, Woody Harrelson, Michael Early, Barry Pepper & Robinne Lee
 Studio: Escape Artists Distributor: Sony Pictures Release: Out now

Teaming up once again with director Gabriele Muccino since their efforts on 2006's wonderful *The Pursuit Of Happyness*, Will Smith makes another play for the awards in *Seven Pounds*. Starring as IRS agent Ben Thomas, Smith's character sets out to change the lives of seven ordinary people, but he holds a secret that explains his unrelenting do-good actions.

Focussing the entire film's efforts on building towards the powerful emotional conclusion, Muccino took a big risk in developing a film

that at times can feel drawn out. The plot develops very slowly, and in truth, spends a lot of the time going no where, only just justified by the strong tearjerker ending.

And without Will Smith, *Seven Pounds* would be a definite failure, but as is his on-screen charisma, even during the slower sections, he maintains your interest. His character is very complex, with strange quirks, Smith, however, pulls it off, without quite the amazing results of *The Pursuit Of Happyness*, though still somewhere close. Aside Smith,

Rosario Dawson gives a superb, understated performance, proving once again, that she has bigger and better things ahead.

Seven Pounds is a very intriguing film, that makes a heavy play for your heart, at some consequence to the precluding action. While flawed at times, Smith keeps the film together and adds another memorable film to his career, if not the true Oscar hopeful it was planned to be.

★★★★★

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

Directed by: David Fincher Starring: Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Julia Ormond, Tilda Swinton, Taraji P. Henson, Jared Harris & Jason Flemyng
Studio: The Kennedy/Marshall Company Distributor: Universal Pictures/Warner Bros.
Release: Out now (USA) February 6 (UK)

Touted as this year's biggest Oscar contender, *The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button* is a film of truly grand scales. Based on the 1921 short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, boasting a remarkable plot, director David Fincher's latest feature is his most ambitious to date.

Born in a body physically older than any of his aging relatives, medical marvel Benjamin Button (Pitt) is dumped on the doorstep of a nursing home by his father. Though initially shocked by his remarkable appearance, a middle aged couple working at the home raise him as their own, as over time, his mind grows older but his body younger.

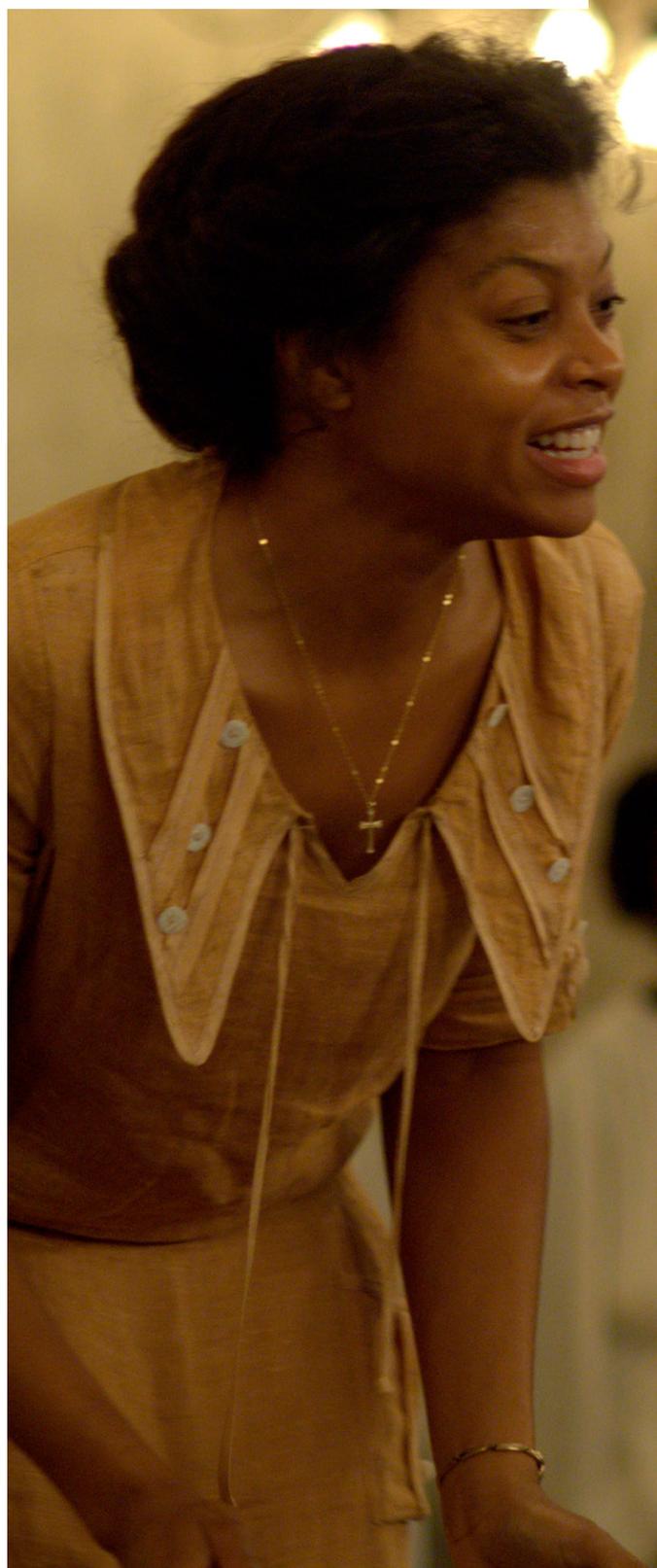
Retold in segments, the film advances through Button's life as his aging love is read memoirs from his diary. First meeting when they were children, Daisy (Blanchett) passes into and out of Button's remarkable life, but a powerful bond develops between them as *The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button* proves at its heart, a love story.

To take on such a vast project and return with a thoroughly captivating and rounded film very much stamps Fincher up there with the finest in the film industry. In all senses of the presumed qualities, *The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button* is an Oscar film, with big performances, a vast, ambitious plot and sumptuous visuals. Brad Pitt is fantastic in the titular role, again proving his matured talents, and likewise for Blanchett, but it is the make-up and CGI efforts that deserve greater praise. With the help of older and younger actors in the role, Button's switch from physically old to young is remarkably believable. With an aged impression of Pitt's face placed onto the actor's faces at either extreme, for the duration of the film at least, you'll believe his amazing condition is real.

Despite the richness of the plot, being retold in segments greatly undermines the overarching love story, and it is difficult to pick up the connection between Benjamin and Daisy. As is often the case with Oscar hopefuls, at times the film can also feel a little cold and uninviting, despite the astounding visual flair on offer.

The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button certainly deserves to be touted as the biggest hope for the award season, and despite a few drawbacks, it is sure to be up there on announcement day and commands that you take the time to experience a remarkable movie.

★★★★★







MY BLOODY VALENTINE 3-D

Directed by: Patrick Lussier Starring: Jensen Ackles, Jaime King, Kerr Smith, Betsy Rue, Edi Gathegi, Megan Boone & Tom Atkins
 Studio: Lionsgate Distributor: Lionsgate Release: Out now

Starting out as an editor on MacGyver, director/editor Patrick Lussier teamed up with legendary filmmaker Wes Craven on 1994 horror New Nightmare, and hasn't looked back. Editing almost all of Craven's films since, including the Scream trilogy, Lussier found a much celebrated mentor en route to his directorial debut in 2000 with The Prophecy 3: The Ascent and more recently the new Dracula franchise and White Noise 2: The Light.

With My Bloody Valentine 3-D comes Lussier's biggest challenge to date, and added the pressure of remaking the 1981 classic, widely considered to be one of the best slasher films to date. Mirroring the original story, My Bloody Valentine 3-D is set in the small mining town of Harmony, shaken by the events of one tragic Valentine's Day.

Son of the owner, and down in the mines for one of his first times, Tom Hanniger (Ackles) causes a collapse in the tunnels, killing five and leaving the only survivor, Harry Warden (Walters), in a coma. With doctors ready to pull the plug, exactly one year on, Warden woke up, going on

a killing spree in search of revenge. Disturbing an illegal party in the mines, Warden comes face-to-face with Hanniger and his friends, killed just as he was about to reap vengeance.

Ten years on, and life is almost back to normal. With townspeople at last putting the horrific events out of their minds, Hanniger returns to town to sell the mine his recently deceased father put so much work into, but before too long the mysterious killings start again, and Harmony fears Harry Warden is back to complete the job.

Shot using new camera technology finished just days before filming began, My Bloody Valentine 3-D looks visually stunning, which combined with the claustrophobic score, gives a thoroughly immersive experience. While the 3-D aspects are integrated especially well, giving the best extra dimensional experience in cinema to date, and adding little extra work for your eyes and mind unlike the strain similar films created, for the experience as a whole, there's little to prefer over a cleverly crafted 2-D picture.

As crowds get used to the new technology, Lussier is clever to keep the tense scenes confined, giving you a break to enjoy the film as the story develops, rather than being overly bombarded with a pickaxe flying through the screen in every scene.

While at times the blood and gore feels unnecessary, at no point does it come across as over-indulgent. The film's main downside instead lies with a cliché that has made horror films so famous. With the film's main cast suggested to be barely pushing 25, My Bloody Valentine 3-D is cursed with the classic over-performance you seem to always find in the slasher genre, and as such, for much of the audience, it would feel strange without it.

Certainly a film the original would not be ashamed of, My Bloody Valentine 3-D pushes the envelope when it comes to 3-D technology, and while it feels superfluous to the entertainment, it doesn't subtract from what is a surprisingly entertaining modern horror.

★★★★★



MILK

Directed by: Gus Van Sant Starring: Sean Penn, James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Josh Brolin, Diego Luna, Alison Pill & Victor Garber
Studio: Groundswell Productions Distributor: Momentum Pictures Release: Out now

Charting the story of one of the most important modern day activists, *Milk* documents the life of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay male elected to public office in California. Unsatisfied with life, Harvey (Penn) moved to San Francisco with lover Scott Smith (Franco), opening a camera shop on Castro Street.

Not ashamed to openly conduct their gay relationship, some of the surrounding businesses became unhappy with the new tenants, but rather than Milk being forced to move away, The Castro developed

as a predominantly gay neighbourhood, and centre for equal rights. Taking his mantle up a notch, becoming a gay activist, Milk saw his burgeoning power would be put to greater use in politics, and turned his attention to being elected to the Board of Supervisors.

Throwing himself into the role, Sean Penn give the perfect performance as Harvey Milk, not overpowering but with the perfect amount of conviction to portray a remarkable man. The entire ensemble cast though deserves praise from

the electric James Franco to Emile Hirsch's jubilant role and Diego Luna as one of Milk's passing romances. *Milk* is a very tender film, well written and an important story to be told in cinema, but sadly it lacks a spark to really set it alight.

Though the plot is enthralling, the film feels passive at times, failing to involve the viewer, but don't let that put you off too much, *Milk* is a definite return to form for director Gus Van Sant.

★★★★★



VALKYRIE

Directed by: Bryan Singer Starring: Tom Cruise, Bill Nighy, Kenneth Branagh, Tom Wilkinson, Carice van Houten & Terence Stamp
Studio: Bad Hat Harry Productions Distributor: 20th Century Fox Release: Out now

One of the lesser known rogue German operations to take down Hitler during WWII, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (Cruise) and his team of high ranking officials' scheme was always perfect for the silver screen.

Losing patience and the will to continue serving their leader, von Stauffenberg helped formulate a plan that would see them take power and overthrow Hitler's government. First scheming to kill Hitler, and then put Operation Valkyrie into force, making use of the Reserve Army to take control of Berlin and all important government of-

ices, as their plan takes shape, the real life tale makes for an enticing thriller.

A near spitting image of von Stauffenberg, Tom Cruise learnt German to fully grow into the role and gives a very solid performance and another step on his road to recovering his once lefty reputation. Sadly, despite a who's who of British actors, the rest of the cast are often a little stiff, but this stems from a critical decision that changes the final output of the film.

Spoken entirely in English and without a sniff of a German, as a whole,

Valkyrie has a very strange, unnerving feel to it. Given the fantastic state of the current German film industry, or the effective accents used in the likes of *Defiance*, it was a strange choice to vocalise the film in plain English, and it undermines the whole experience.

Valkyrie is an intriguing piece, boasting a captivating plot, but held back by several flaws along the way, all in all giving a positive experience, but lacking on what the anticipation building up to its release.

★★★★★



BRIDE WARS

Directed by: Gary Winick Starring: Anne Hathaway, Kate Hudson, Bryan Greenberg, Chris Pratt, Steve Howey & Candice Bergen
 Studio: New Regency Pictures Distributor: 20th Century Fox Release: Out now

If they talk in film about stars shooting 'one for yourself, and one for the bank', this would be Anne Hathaway's banker. After her stunning performance in *Rachel Getting Married*, Hathaway returns to romantic comedy for Fox's annual female-orientated outing.

Alongside Kate Hudson, the pair are your stereotypical childhood friends dreaming of the perfect wedding since meeting years before as young girls in New York's wondrous Plaza Hotel. When each at last gets engaged to their respective partners, the wheels are at last in motion for the days they have been dreaming of, and hand-in-hand they set about planning dresses, flowers, food, and of course the venue. After visiting the best wed-

ding planner in town, Emma (Hudson) and Liv (Hathaway) book two of the last remaining open slots at the Plaza, but after a mix-up in the dates, end up with appointments at the same time, and no room to budge.

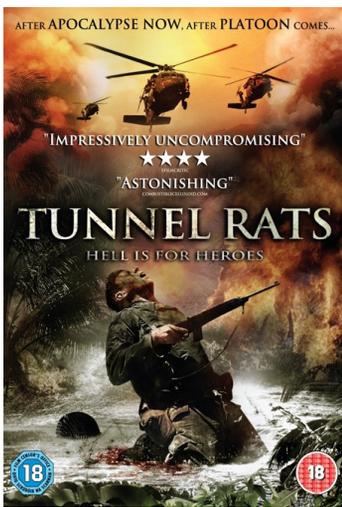
With neither willing to switch venues, an almighty tussle ensues, each trying to plan the best wedding and disrupt the other's before the final showdown on the big day.

Following a well-trodden formula, *Bride Wars* offers very little in terms of originality but at least develops the story well despite a slight lag in the immediate run up to the weddings. For the targeted female audience, there'll be plenty of laughs along the way, showing up men's

inability to understand the complexities of the pair's quarrel and the importance of having a perfect wedding. As a result, the humour will run a little light for male audiences. There's still enough to carry the film until the end, however, and Hathaway easily steals the show from a bumbling Kate Hudson with a captivating persona inside the confines of a rom-com.

Perhaps one to leave husbands or boyfriends behind, and for a male viewer, you'd struggle to justify much more than 2 stars, but for the female crowd, while *Bride Wars* certainly isn't as good as gossip magazines will make it out to be, it is a step up from last year's *27 Dresses*.

★★★★★



Tunnel Rats

Resorting to gore towards the conclusion, Tunnel Rats at least holds firm for the majority as Uwe Boll turns in his best film to date, but there are still much better war epics out there.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



Pineapple Express

Giving stoner comedies a good name once more, Pineapple Express follows Seth Rogan and James Franco as they go on the run after unwittingly witnessing a murder. A surprising joy to behold.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



You Don't Mess With The Zohan

Adam Sandler stars as a special forces soldier-turned-hairdresser, hoping to make it big in New York. Sadly a fairly low grade effort but there are a handful of laughs.

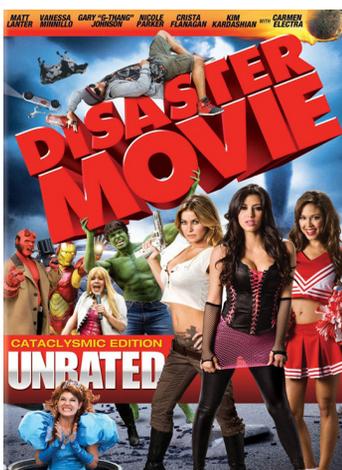
Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



Tropic Thunder

Left to film a war epic in a real jungle warzone, Stiller et al turn in a commendable performance, even if the plot does draw a little thin towards the end before a cameo from Tom Cruise steals the show.

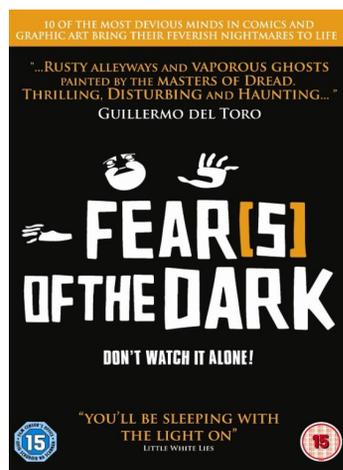
Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



Disaster Movie

Yet another in the long line of so called parody movies as the cinema audiences at last begin to lose patience. Disaster films take centre stage this time but you'd be better with the source material.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



Fear(s) Of The Dark

Thoroughly inventive and entertaining series of animated horror tales. Coloured in contrasting black and white, Fear(s) Of The Dark is a joy to behold if somewhat disjointed as a whole.

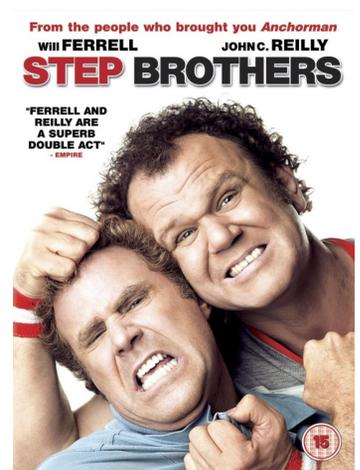
Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



The House Bunny

After being banished from the Playboy Mansion, ex-Bunny Shelley turns around failing university sorority Zeta Alpha Zeta. The House Bunny is surprisingly entertaining and funny throughout.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



Step Brothers

Brought together as their parents marry, aging step-brother played by Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly fall out, but the following mayhem is no where near as funny as it should be, or in fact needs to be.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★

COMPETITION



To celebrate the release of spoof comedy Disaster Movie on DVD and Blu-Ray across the UK, in stores today, we're giving you the chance to win one of 3 copies for yourself. To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

What was the first film in the '... Movie' spoof series, written by Disaster Movie writer/directors Jason Friedberg and Aaron Siltzer?

A. Scary Movie

B. Horror Movie

C. Rubbish Movie

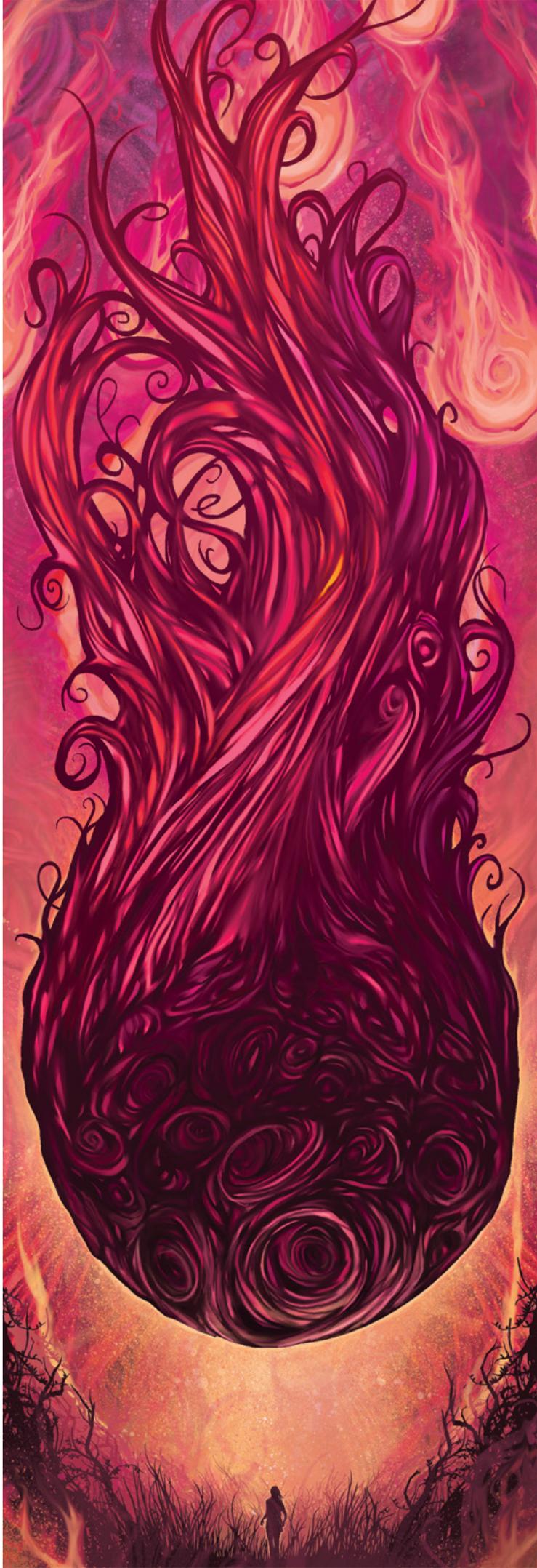
Email your answer to competitions@fanthefiremagazine.com. Deadline 16/02/09.



DEATHLY



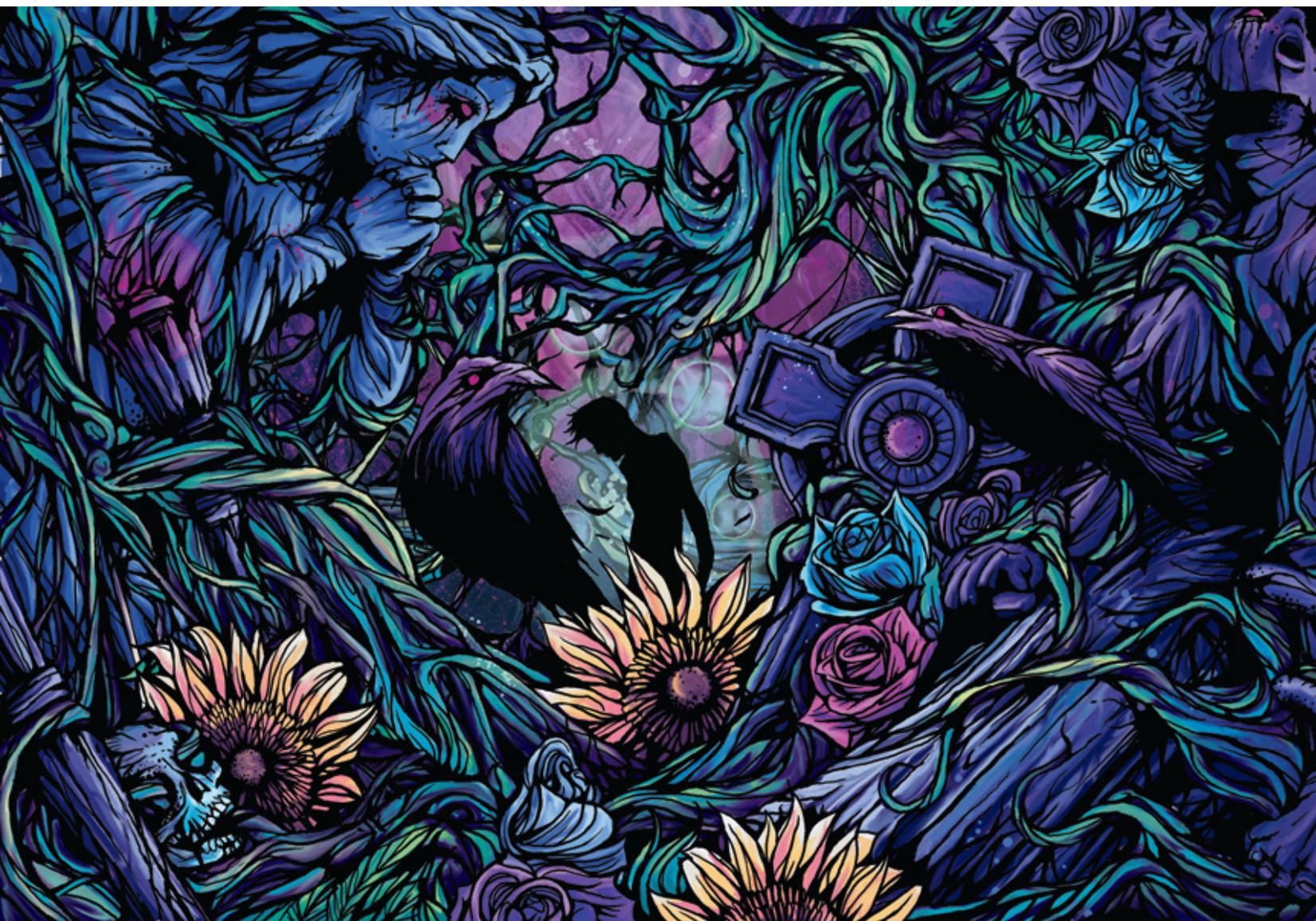
HALLOWEENS

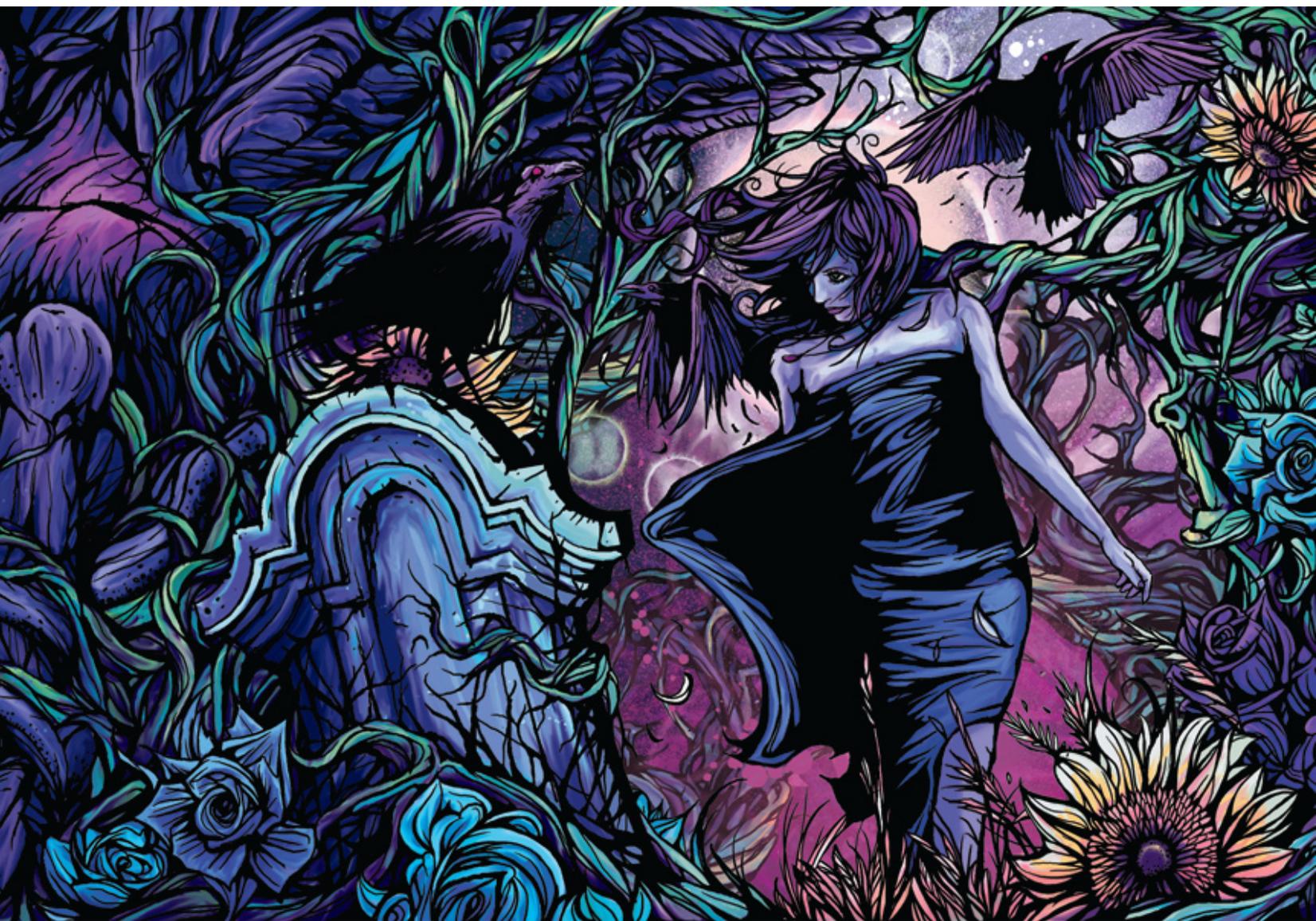












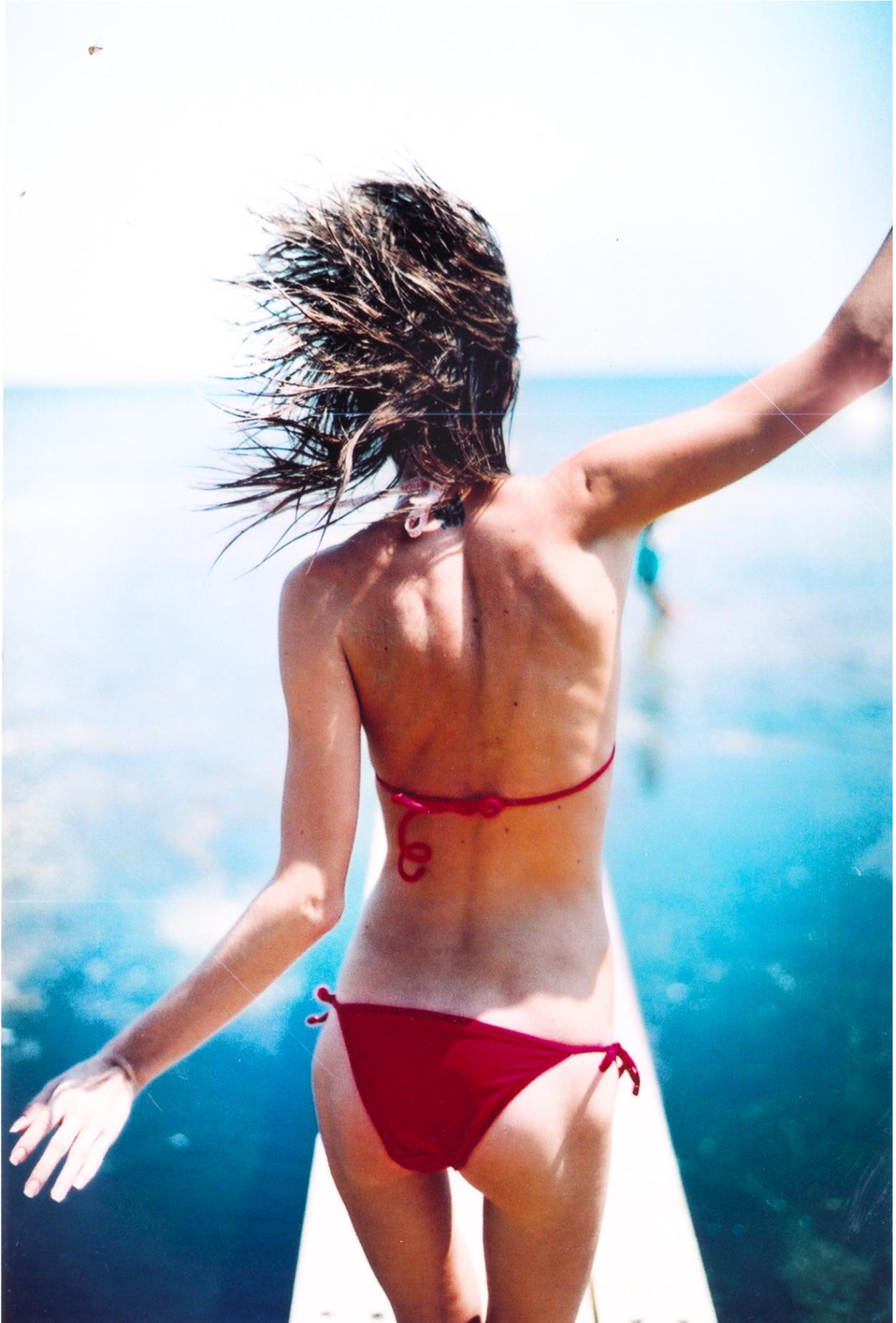
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A photograph of three young women standing on a purple-carpeted staircase with ornate black metal railings. The woman on the left is wearing a plaid skirt, a plaid jacket, and a large white hat with a red flower, holding a mobile phone and a folder. The woman in the center is wearing a red dress with a white fur stole, holding a mobile phone. The woman on the right is wearing a red and black plaid shirt, a black skirt, and black tights, holding a mobile phone and a purple folder. The word "FICTION" is overlaid in large white letters across the middle of the image.

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