

FAN THE FIRE

MUSIC // FILM // ART // STYLE

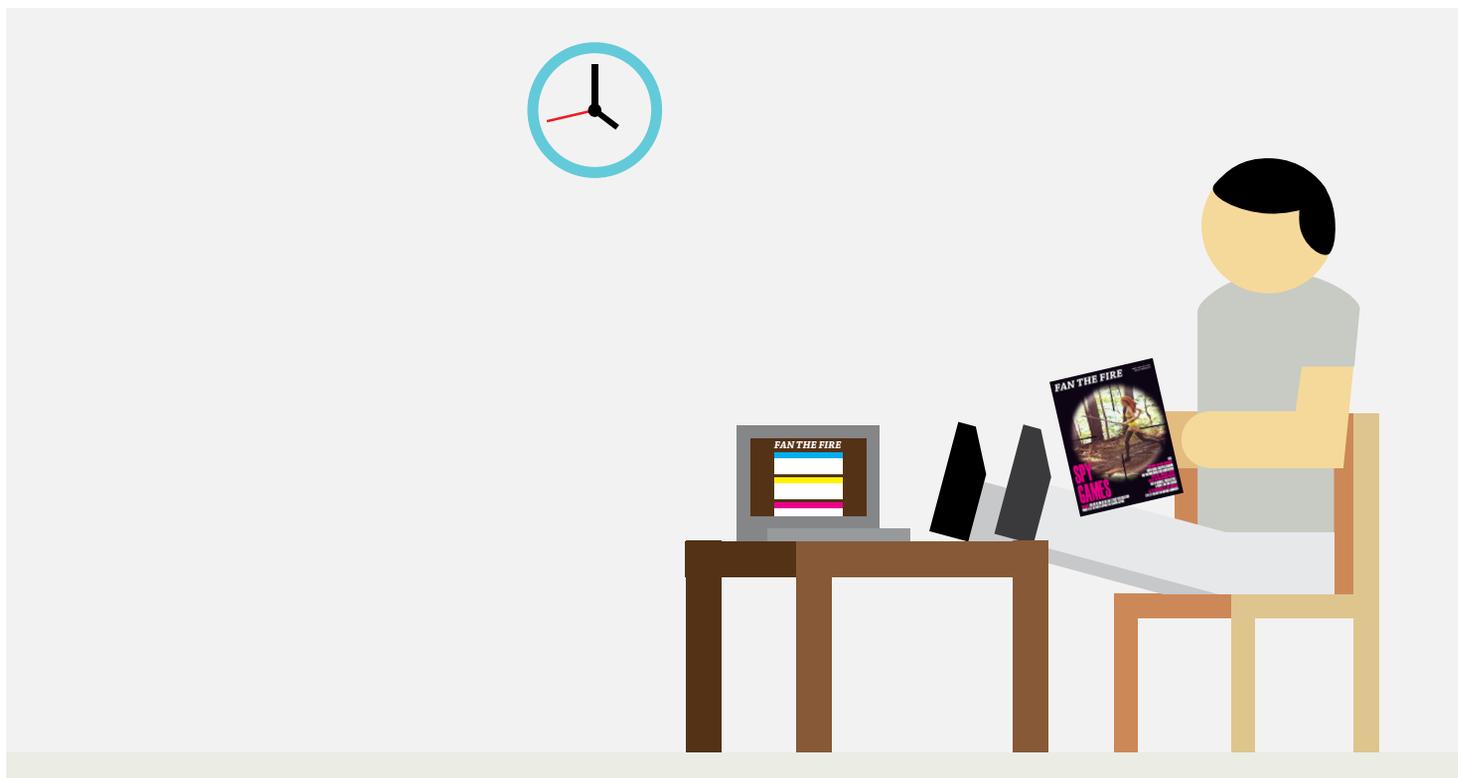
ISSUE 29 // FEBRUARY 2010



SPY GAMES

TOM HINES GOES ON THE RUN AS THE LAKE & STARS' NEW COLLECTION PROVES TO BE THE PERFECT APPAREL FOR ESCAPING CAPTURE

PLUS
NEW BANDS AND INDIE COMEBACKS
SURFER BLOOD, LIGHTSPEED CHAMPION
AND TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB ALBUM REVIEWS
GREEN ZONE, JONAH HEX, COP OUT
AND HOT TUB TIME MACHINE PREVIEWS
EDGE OF DARKNESS, YOUTH IN REVOLT
A PROPHET AND TONY REVIEWS
ART BY CHRISTOPHER LEE AND CAMPEAUX
STYLE BY FRED MEYLAN AND DIRK LAMBRECHTS



After wading through the awards films in recent weeks, it's now high time for the actual ceremonies. Despite considering themselves the second most important film (and television) awards each year, the Golden Globes have been rapidly losing respect in the entertainment industry, and though clinging onto their fading reputation as an Academy Awards predictor, the 2010 event put the final nail in their credibility's coffin.

From the moment the nominations were announced, you couldn't help but raise an eyebrow when the likes of *The Hangover* and *It's Complicated* were up for awards.

Though he made the shortlist, Neil Patrick Harris again lost out for Best Supporting Actor In A TV series Or Mini-series, but there were far more ridiculous decisions before the night was over.

Though I like *The Hangover*, and I've seen it on several occasions, albeit with fewer laughs each viewing, for it to beat *(500) Days Of Summer* to Best Comedy Or Musical is a travesty. While *The Hangover* is a decent amount of fun and broke amazing new talent in Zach Galifianakis, it has nothing on the clever, well-crafted and beautifully told *(500) Days Of Summer*, and how *It's Complicated* even made the shortlist is equally baffling.

While *Avatar* positioned highly on our end of the year list, we were adequately aware of its deep flaws, and if we were to hold our own awards, rather than just a top ten, *Avatar* would be outstripped by almost all of its nine other competitors. At the Golden Globes, *Avatar* was named Best Drama to director James Cameron's, and to the entire audience's, great surprise. In terms of filmmaking and as a completed project, *Avatar* is a masterpiece, but *The Hurt Locker*,

Precious and *Up* are all superior films. Similarly Cameron also picked up the award for Best Director, and in his speech remarked that it should have gone to his ex-wife Kathryn Bigelow for *The Hurt Locker*. He was right.

Across the rest of the board lie several other confusing picks. The incredibly baggy *Inglourious Basterds*, was up for Best Drama and a couple of other prizes, but no-one else was in on the joke when there wasn't room for *A Serious Man*, which didn't get a nomination beyond Best Supporting Actor. And even there it was laughably topped by Robert Downey Jr. for *Sherlock Holmes*.

Glee surprisingly ended the dominance of *30 Rock* in the Best Comedy Or Music TV Series but the awards failed to even recognise the brilliance of *Community*.

On the brief occasion that the Golden Globes did get it right, Alec Baldwin won again for *30 Rock* in Best Actor In A Comedy Or Musical TV Series, and Jason Reitman won Best Screenplay for *Up In The Air*, though even he was calmed somewhat by a nominations field that included *It's Complicated* over *(500) Days Of Summer*.

With viewership of the Oscars and the Golden Globes flagging, organisers have spoken of creating more public-friendly events, with nominations extended to allow the better of the films that stormed the box office. But while there's a slim chance of *Star Trek* making the Academy Award shortlist for Best Film, it certainly won't win. At the Golden Globes, the farcical decisions went beyond the already ludicrous nominations and to say they have sold out to try and win over the public is a gross understatement.

Sam Bathe

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Online: www.fanthefiremagazine.com | Back issues: www.fanthefiremagazine.com/backissues

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Fred Meylan

PHOTOGRAPHER

Starting out as a photographer in the French army, Frederic was hired by the prestigious Sygma Agency (now known as Corbis) as a photo-reporter.

Within the same agency he then turned to shoot celebrities for 10 years, including Monica Bellucci, Uma Thurman and P  n  lope Cruz, before moving on again to fashion photography. Travelling the world for his work, Frederic has shot in Italy and America and has now also started to direct TV commercials and music videos.

In 1999 he launched several personal projects deforming the human body, and exhibited his work in 2000 and 2006 at the Gallery Laurent Strouk, Paris and Opera Gallery, SoHo, New York. Companies including L'Oreal, American Express, Clarins, Zadig et Voltaire, Winston, Lacoste, La Redoute, Galerie Lafayette, Peugeot, Chaumet, Palmolive, Bayer, Rasurel, Wacoal and Le Bourget have hired him to do their photos.

More of Frederic's photography can be found at:
fredmeylan.com

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The Lake And Stars

DESIGNERS

In an era of diversity and expansion in the world of intimate apparel, unique intimates have become a fashion staple as important and sought-after as the rest of the designer repertoire. With *The Lake & Stars*, designers Nikki Dekker and Maayan Zilberman answer this demand with collections that couple strong, sexy aesthetics with highly tailored comfort, for a versatile addition to the lingerie wardrobe.

Named after a Victorian euphemism for a woman's skill in the bedroom, *The Lake & Stars* intimates balance provocation and humour, and intelligence and sensuality, for a new vision of feminine style. Streamlined trench coats and day wear find a place among more traditional lingerie essentials, for creative pairings that revive the classic and redefine the seductive.

Designed to stand alone or complement other items, the styles embody a broader view of lingerie as fashion expression, rather than costume. Their clean lines and assertive detailing describe unique stylistic characters all of their own, making each collection as personal as they are diverse, and as accessible as they are luxurious. They are intimates meant to be seen.

Their website is found at:
thelakeandstars.com

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Campeaux

PHOTOGRAPHER

Campeaux is a photographer and industrial designer living in Southern California, though before 2009 he had never manually loaded a roll of film by himself. Choosing lomography because it completely removes the digital element, Campeaux is forced to experiment at great consequence.

Most of Campeaux's current lomography work contains no human focus, something he hopes to change in the coming months.

Initially his interest in photography stemmed from creating packaging art for his products. Influenced by mid-century modern art, and a French ancestry, he set out to capture things as they are.

Campeaux is now focusing on an industry that's showing new growth, men's fashion, where he aims to offer lifestyle accessories for the tech-minded individual who values simple form. His sketchbooks are rich with functional concepts, well on their way to fruition.

You can find Campeaux's Flickr stream here:
flickr.com/lomofi

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Christopher Lee

ILLUSTRATOR

Born in Sacramento, California, during the great era of Saturday morning cartoons, Christopher Lee is a multidisciplinary designer and illustrator. A graduate from Sacramento State University, his formal education was in graphic design, but his entire life has revolved around drawing since he was old enough to hold a pencil.

Christopher's favorite quote, and constant motivator, comes from Picasso when he stated; "art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." A simple statement that nicely sums up Christopher's personal philosophy.

In July of 2006, Christopher moved to Southern California in search of new inspiration and surroundings, and currently resides in Burbank working as a full-time freelance illustrator for a variety of clientele.

Through the course of his career, Christopher has had the amazing opportunity to work on a lot of exciting projects on a corporate level as well as on a personal one.

Christopher has exhibited his work in galleries around America and even had some of his characters translated into vinyl toys.

You can find more of Christopher's work on his site:
thebeastisback.com

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MUSIC

***“I DON’T WANNA BE YOUR
RUSSIAN BRIDE.
NOT ANY MORE.
BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA WOULD
HAVE A FIELD DAY
IF HE KNEW AT ALL.”***

- SURFER BLOOD

FEATURE



(Pictured: Surfer Blood)



FIFTEEN FOR 2010

As a new decade begins, the list of bands hoping to make it big in the Teenies is endless.

Alex Brammer and **Nathan May** pick out the 15 acts you should be looking out for in the coming year.





Sunshine pop New York four-piece who are already THE hype band of 2010, The Drums' stripped down sound is reminiscent of Joy Division, with its wonderfully catchy, reverb driven guitar riffs, and minimal industrial sounding drums. Singer Jonathon Pierce's lyrics perfectly capture youthful angst and teenage melancholy, whilst his delivery is akin to that of a young Morrissey. Far from the 'anti-surf' label which has been thrust upon them, The Drums' sound is closer to The Cure than The Beach Boys, however, it is hard to ignore that the location in which the songs were written (Florida) has certainly affected the band's overall tone, with the Sunshine State shining through to make this group very much a summertime band. The Drums deliver their doses of sunlight mostly in punchy, sharp, three minute tracks which are hard to dislike, lead single *Let's Go Surfing* is a prime example, and will be the festival anthem of this year whether you like it or not.

GOLDHAWKS

I know what you're thinking, another 'landfill indie' band right? Not this time my friends, Goldhawks are attempting something different. You only have to listen to the first few bars of *Running Away*, their debut single, to tell you that you are in the presence of big music. The band was conceived on, and named after, Goldhawk Road in West London, and since its inception, Goldhawks have set their sights on stadium-filling rock anthems, not a half-baked three minute download for your iPod shuffle. The next single, *Where In The World*, is on its way and an album is due to be released later this year. Whether or not Goldhawks achieve what they set out to do on a U2 scale will remain to be seen, but you can't help admiring them for trying. It's been a while since I wandered upstairs in Barfly, and came back down again 45 minutes later with my ears ringing and my eyes widened by a sheer wall of sound.

Fair play.



WAVVES

After taking the US hipster world by storm following the release of their self-titled debut album, Wavves, aka Nathan Williams and drummer Ryan Ulsh were set to conquer the rest of the globe last year with their lo-fi, adolescent punk, that is until Williams suffered a complete meltdown at May's Primavera Festival in Barcelona.

After allegedly consuming a cocktail of valium, ecstasy and three other drugs, Williams insulted the crowd and swore at Ulsh who eventually stormed off, thus ending their set, and in turn leading to the cancellation of the rest of an extensive European tour. Fast forward to November and a new line-up appeared, sans Ulsh, made up for in notoriety, what they lost in their fanbase. Let's see if Wavves can make it happen in 2010 like it should have last year.





DELPHIC

Post-dance Manchester trio Delphic are intent on saving what they perceive to be a 'stagnant' indie scene. Touted by the BBC for big things this year, their sound comprises of a sea of synths and samples merged with Bloc Party-esque guitars, or 'electronic music with soul'. Their debut LP *Acolyte* received critical acclaim upon its release this month, with NME calling it "the first great debut of 2010". Delphic are currently embarking on a mammoth European tour in support, however, if you want to catch them this time around, buy your tickets quick as catchy single *Doubt* has already attracted plenty of attention.





TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB

Hailing out of Bangor/Donaghadee, Northern Ireland, this three-piece consisting of Alex Trimble, Sam Halliday, and Kev Baird combine oceanic guitar riffs, beautifully crafted vocal harmonies and snappy electronic drumbeats, to deliver their doses of undeniable breezy indie-pop in three minute bursts. *Something Good Can Work*, *I Can Talk*, and *Undercover Martyn* are three examples and are also (coincidentally) the three main reasons why you should buy their debut LP, *Tourist History*, released March 1st through Kitsuné.

ALAN POWNALL

Alan Pownall has been threatening to ride in on the crest of the nu-folk wave (not to be confused with nu-rave) for some time now. He must be getting a little frustrated though, as the wave that brought in the likes of Mumford And Sons last year, his flat-mates no less, seems to have petered out a fair bit. But with Marling's second LP coming imminently, and on hearing the news that Noah And The Whale are back in the studio (a synagogue in East London to be precise), it's easy to worry that Pownall has missed the boat.

That said, he definitely has the tunes. After a successful release of the super-catchy *Clara* on Young & Lost, and then a well-documented residency at Pure Groove last Autumn, things seem to be moving in the right direction. He is now with Mercury Records, and on his debut album set for release this year, Pownall enlists the help of violinist Tom Hobden from the aforementioned Noah And The Whale. I don't doubt that the upcoming album will host a clutch of catchy little tracks, but will it do enough to capture the imagination of an already saturated corner of the pop music industry? It almost seems as if you either need to be friends with, have gone out with, or since broken up with Miss Laura Marling to make it happen in this nu-folk niche.

REAL ESTATE

Currently embarking on their first European tour, lo-fi popsters Real Estate will hit the UK music scene with less of a bang, more a gentle caress in 2010. Hailing from New Jersey, their sound is reassuringly slow and confident. After the musical innovation of recent records, Vampire Weekend's *Contra* inclusive, Real Estate's debut "7", out in February, will come as a welcome return to conformity for your ears. Real Estate's tracks are led by melodic guitar repetitions and booming drums, with vocals only a muted afterthought. It works though, and tracks like *Suburban Beverage* have enough of a catchy chorus to keep you humming along all day.



BROKEN BELLS

After initially meeting through their respective bands' shows at 2004's Roskilde Festival in Denmark, lyrical genius James Russell Mercer (The Shins) and super producer Danger Mouse (Gnarls Barkley) have been slowly working on dual venture Broken Bells. Their album is set for a release through Columbia on March 9th and preview single *The High Road* was aired on the band's website in December. Said single and leaked track *Vaporize* hint at an acoustic sound akin to that of *Oh, Inverted World* era Shins, with Danger Mouse providing meatier drum beats and thick sonic layers of synths and organs. Danger Mouse has since remarked that recording the album was the most fun he'd had in the studio and he hopes that the collaboration will continue in the future.

OTHELLO WOOLF

With a surfeit of style you would expect from an artist five albums in, Othello Woolf will leave you wondering where he has been all your life, if 2010 goes to plan. The truth is Mr. Woolf has been in and out of bands since he was 16, and growing up in Elstree, his first instrument was a keyboard, which has helped build the foundations for many of his songs to date. January saw the launch of his new single *Stand*, an upbeat mix of old time soul and modern funky sounds that really makes you stop and take notice. Be warned, it might also get your feet moving on the dance floor.

Comparisons to Roxy Music, even a young David Byrne, have been made and his unique take on neo-soul promises to make big headlines this year. Woolf plays with a small backing band comprising of guitars, drums and keyboards, yet all the while you are drawn to his leading presence as the songs unravel with an almost tangible confidence. The debut album has already been recorded with the help of producer David Andrew Sitek (TV On The Radio), and is ready for release later this year.





SURFER BLOOD

Florida five-piece Surfer Blood have combined elements of surf, lo-fi, and straight-up stadium rock to ascend the US blogosphere extremely quickly since their formation just last year. Their reverb drenched riffs resemble early Weezer, whilst the vocal harmonies that wrap beautifully around singer JP Pitts's eloquent lyrics are akin to The Beach Boys. Listen to lead single *Swim* or the David Lynch referencing pop gem *Twin Peaks* to see what I mean. The band supported The Drums towards the end of last year but their sound already makes them appear stadium ready. Surfer Blood's first album *Astro Coast*, released on January 19th through Kanine Records has received rave reviews, and for good reason, it's marvellous. They hit the UK in February.

SUNDERBANS

New London-based outfit Sunderbans are sure to feature on the radar in 2010. The trio are signed to Young & Lost Club and a debut EP is out in the coming months, though for now you will have to make do with debut single *Road Kill*. Sunderbans create a pretty raw sound; rough guitar riffs and speedy drum rhythms clatter out with emotionally-led vocals presiding over the controlled chaos. *Road Kill's* lyrics are stark and unrelenting; "Someone hit the front of the car with a deer/Hope it wasn't you driving/A train did the same to a fox/Don't want to see it smiling it back at me". With that rare haunting quality, there is something of the Joy Division to this band, and that can only be a good thing. The second single on MySpace provides an equally austere sound; "I saw you in the dark light/I bet you wish you had your friends around", but the track is composed in such a raw format that the overriding tone is convincing.

DARWIN DEEZ

'White music for black people', 'happy music for sad people' and 'indie rock with a side of calisthenics' are the three sentences New York hipster Darwin Deez uses to describe himself and his band. It is unclear as to whether Darwin Deez is the man or the group, but it is clear that he/they make undeniably catchy indie-pop that deserves to be a lot more popular than it is. Their sound is strongly influenced by 80s pop like Prince or Michael Jackson; the drumbeats are electronic and perfectly support the clean Stratocaster rhythm which wraps around the catchy and sometimes downright funny lyrics. With other members credited to the group calling themselves names such as 'rhythm works' and 'mash deez', tagging themselves with roles such as 'muse' and 'liberator', it would be easy to pass off Darwin Deez as novelty hipster trash, yet somehow it and the music all seems to work, making them/him all the more endearing. Try listening to *Constellations* to see what I mean.



THE SOFT PACK

Formerly The Muslims, this laid back San Diego five-piece played their first show in the UK back in February last year when they supported The Black Lips at London's Islington Academy, and since then have been steadily building momentum in the US. Musically their guitar driven California sound draws resemblances with other West Coast lo-fi bands such as The Dandy Warhols; their music compliments singer Matt Lamkin's astute lyrics which delivered in his effortlessly cool West Coast drawl. It was expected for this group to blow up last year, but they held back the release of their debut LP until February to coincide with their UK tour. With the sudden move towards the so-called 'anti-surf' genre, thanks to bands such as aforementioned NME pin-ups The Drums, this could turn out to be a very shrewd move.



ELLIE GOULDING

It has been a heady six months for Hereford born singer-songwriter Ellie Goulding. Since signing to Polydor in September 2009, she has picked up the Critic's Choice Award at the 2010 Brit Awards as well as topping the BBC Sound Of 2010 poll. Her mix of folk music and song writing with electro beats and production (dubbed 'future-folk') is intriguing in itself, but what really sets Goulding apart is the uniqueness of her voice. She has drawn comparisons with Kate Bush and Stevie Nicks, and with the backing of the UK press, looks set to be huge in 2010. Listen to *Under The Sheets* and watch this space.

GIRLS

Girls are a US buzz band, consisting of Christopher Owens and Chet 'JR' White, whose story is nothing short of extraordinary. Singer Owens was raised in a 'Children Of God' cult until he ran away to Texas where a local millionaire took him under his wing and moved him to San Francisco where he met White, and formed Girls.

Whilst intrinsically a guitar band, sonically

Girls are hard to describe, with varying types of production and instruments used on each track. However, Owens' distinctively evocative voice and heart wrenching lyrics are what really characterises this band.

Their debut album *Album* was released in late 2009 to critical acclaim and if there's any justice in the world they will be huge by the time they tour the UK in February.





FEATURE



(Pictured: Klaxons)



AND TEN COMING BACK

Alex Brammer previews the ten most anticipated comebacks of 2010.





MGMT

2008's festival anthem providers and hippy dance duo MGMT are releasing the follow up to sensational debut, *Oracular Spectacular*, this spring. The sophomore album is set for April 2010, although the band have hinted that there may not be any singles in the run-up. The psychedelic pair spent the summer in Malibu recording with Peter Kember and have already road tested a few of the new tracks live. Potential album track titles are *Congratulations*, *It's Working*, *Song for Dan Tracey* and *Flash Delirium*.



KLAXONS

There has been much speculation surrounding the 2007 Mercury Prize-winners' hotly anticipated sophomore release. Their new LP was set to be an experimental combination of dubstep, dance, folk, and prog., but at the beginning of 2009, the Klaxons' record label allegedly ordered them to re-record parts of the album deeming it 'too experimental'. The band started re-recording in November with producer Ross Robinson (Korn) and some album potential tracks including *The Parhelion*, *Moonhead* and *Marble Fields And The Hydrolight Head Of Delusion*. The London trio have recently stated that their influences for the new album are Shamanism, the year 2012 and the coming of the fifth or sixth sun.

HOT CHIP

Their first studio album since 2008, electro-poppers Hot Chip will release their fourth LP *One Night Stand* on February 1st. The tracks, which are influenced by early house music, are said to be 'bigger' and 'more upbeat' than previous album *Made In The Dark*. The London five-piece have also announced a world tour in support, kicking off in Glasgow on February 12th and finishing up late April in Washington DC.

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

Since rumours the New York dance punks were splitting back in 2008 were quashed, LCD Sound-system have been slowly working on their follow up to 2007's stellar album *Sound Of Silver*. Little is known of the new work to date, other than it will be released in the first half of 2010, and there will be a mammoth world tour shortly after its release. If their first two albums are anything to go by, we could be in for a real treat.



Since releasing their genre defining debut in 2001, inadvertently becoming style icons for a generation of indie kids in the process, these New York garage rockers released hit after hit and saw *Is This It* named album of the decade by NME. Collectively they haven't played live or released a record in nearly four years, instead consumed by a number of solo projects; Nickel-Eye (bassist Nikolai Fraiture's venture), Little Joy (drummer Fab Moretti's band), and guitarist Albert Hammond Jr. and singer Julian Casablancas' respective self-named projects. Despite talk of front man and principal songwriter Casablancas performing at the summer festivals on his own, The Strokes have been booked to headline the Isle Of Wight and RockNess. The only question remains as to whether they can all get together in one place and record an album by then. On current reports the forecast looks good after a somewhat arduous recording process, and the band have claimed that they are working night and day with the bulk of the recording done. The only disagreements remaining are in the vein of which tracks are good enough for the album.

THE BLACK LIPS

After returning to their lo-fi roots on last year's *Two Million Thousand*, The Black Lips are already set to release their sixth studio album later this year. Claiming to be working on an LP of 'three minute pop songs', it will be interesting to see whether 2009's antics influence any of the song writing.

By antics I am referring, of course, to their chaotic Indian tour which saw them having to strong-arm their passports back before being chased out of the country following a show in Chennai. It is unclear whether Indian authorities took exception to male band members kissing on stage, Cole Alexander playing the guitar with his privates, or the mooning which took place (Alexander again). Maybe it was all three.



MYSTERY JETS

Erol Alkan-produced *Twenty One* was one of the standout sophomore albums of 2008 and catapulted

Mystery Jets from art-school also-rans, to indie-pop headliners. Their next offering, due out in the spring, is to be produced by Chris Thomas (The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Elton John, Pulp) and is looking set to be one of the most fascinating albums of the year.

Rumour has it they have built a bigger and bolder sound, featuring slick drums and roaring synths reminiscent of Roxy Music or Fleetwood Mac, while still maintained their classic croon-worthy choruses that we know and love. This one should be very interesting indeed.

FOALS

Foal's 2008 debut *Antidotes* was a shape-shifting cacophony of minimal techno, indie-electro, and math-rock which achieved surprising commercial success given its myriad of ingredients. The 'Oxford' five-piece only started work in earnest recording its follow-up in August 2009, despite giving fans a few snippets of their new sound, entitled *A Future Dub*, *A Future Dub Deux* and *XCFAVA* via MySpace this time last year. The recording is taking place in Gothenburg, Sweden, under the watchful eye of producer Luke Smith. Singer Yannis Philippakis has commented to the press that their sound has become "a lot darker" than anticipated.

INTERPOL

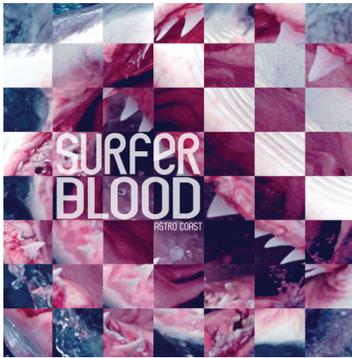
Claiming to be returning to the style of their critically acclaimed and fan-loved debut *Turn On The Bright Lights*, Interpol are due to release their fourth studio album in the first half of this year. The New Yorkers haven't recorded an album since 2007's *Our Love to Admire* although singer Paul Banks released a solo LP last year under pseudonym Julian Plenti. Drummer Sam Fogarino stated in an interview for Paste Magazine; "In trying to move forward, there was an unspoken realisation that you can't let go of your sonic-defining tag. There was an effort in Daniel [Kessler]'s guitar tone; he rediscovered it playing in his loft space for a year without anybody. The quality of that tone, played in a big room, is just beautiful. It creates an atmosphere." 2010 could see one of the best bands of the decade return to form.

ARCADE FIRE

Despite original reports that the Canadian band were releasing their album in May of this year, with a single preceding it, a spokesperson for the group has confirmed that whilst work on the follow up to 2007's *Neon Bible* is underway, the LP will probably not be due for release until the latter half of 2010. The spokesperson also explained that the producer responsible for their sophomore release Markus Dravs will be involved again, but will not be solely responsible for the record's production. Arcade Fire are expected to hit the road this year with their mind blowing live show, the US summer festivals predicted as their starting point.





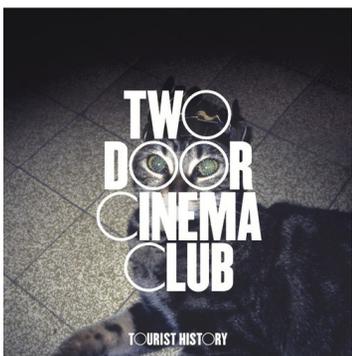


SURFER BLOOD 'ASTRO COAST'

RELEASED OUT NOW

Surf meets stadium-rock, this reverb-driven debut LP from Florida's hottest young five-piece perfectly combines, Weezer-esque rock riffs, with eloquent lyrics and lo-fi production to ensure it will be in your playlist come the summer. First single *Swim* charts their more rock-laden sound, while *Take It Easy* dons a fair few similarities to Vampire Weekend..

★★★★★



TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB 'TOURIST HISTORY'

RELEASED MARCH 1

Sprightly indie-pop debut from the rightfully touted Two Door Cinema Club, from the first track to the last, *Tourist History* is infused with energy and enthusiasm, keeping the band's indie sensibilities but offering a sound with a wider appeal. Singles *Something Good Can Work* and *I Can Talk* might steal the headlines, but there's quality all the way through.

★★★★★

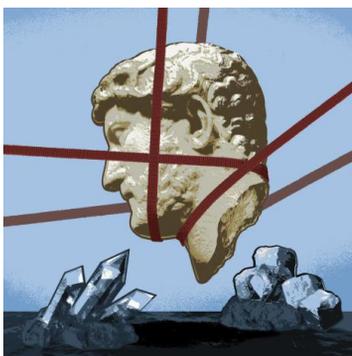


LIGHTSPEED CHAMPION 'LIFE IS SWEET! NICE TO MEET YOU'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 15

Dev 'Lightspeed Champion' Hynes returns with his second, more mature, sophomore LP. From opener *Dead Head Blues*, Hynes delivers a carefully crafted heart-felt pop album, ditching in-part the tearful tone of his debut. *Life Is Sweet! Nice To Meet You* is multi-layered and timeless, and an early call for the album of the year.

★★★★★



HOT CHIP 'ONE LIFE STAND'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1

More down-tempo than their previous efforts, this suits the band and showcases the beautiful production and a newfound lyrical maturity. Stylistically *One Night Stand* jumps between disco (*We Have Love*) and euphoric quasi-house (*I Feel Better*) but nevertheless it is a coherent piece of work held together by singer Alexis Taylor's falsetto tones.

★★★★★



LOS CAMPESINOS 'ROMANCE IS BORING'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1

Seems like the seven-piece have gone for quantity over quality on this hefty 15-track album. Los Campesinos have tried to replace the youthful vigour of *Hold On Now, Youngster...* with slower, darker, more grown-up songs but it doesn't work, and means listening to *Romance Is Boring* is a dull and long trip through tawdry indie.

★★★★★



HADOUKEN! 'FOR THE MASSES'

RELEASED JANUARY 25

Fans of the London five-piece's debut album will enjoy another dose of dance-punk in this sophomore release with traces of drum and bass more prevalent on *For The Masses* thanks to the production of Dutch collective NOISIA. However, the redeeming features of the group's first album (namely originality and a standout single) are thoroughly lacking.

★★★★★



CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG 'IRM'

RELEASED JANUARY 25

An elegantly crafted album of quirky anglo-french folk, considering Gainsbourg's *IRM* was inspired by the frequent MRI scans she underwent after an accident, the album is surprisingly uplifting. Sample heavy *Me And Jane Doe* and *Heaven Can Wait*, a duet with Beck, whose influence is clear throughout as producer and co-writer, are the best tracks.

★★★★★



CHEW LIPS 'UNICORN'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1

The next wave of electro takes a retro feel, but not the 80s glam from 2009, Chew Lips' *Unicorn* is commanded by Tigs' emphatic vocals, with prickly electro-drone filling out the empty space. Some of the bleeps feel forced and it's not all hit on the 10-track LP but there's certainly enough to get your attention, even if *Unicorn* won't hold it for too long.

★★★★★



THE SUNSHINE UNDERGROUND 'NOBODY'S COMING TO SAVE YOU'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1

More polished than their intentionally rough debut *Raise The Alarm*, The Sunshine Underground draw out the dance-floor edge of their previous album for the follow-up. Sadly after a promising start, however, The Sunshine Underground can't follow through and end up feeling like Kasabian-lite, while Kasabian themselves are nothing special to begin with.

★★★★★



MARINA AND THE DIAMONDS 'THE FAMILY JEWELS'

RELEASED FEBRUARY 15

Destined to be compared with Florence for her equally dominating voice, Marina Diamandis is a different animal. Less anthemic than the Machine, her Diamonds take a more gothic turn and once you've bitten the bullet there's a lot to enjoy but it's a much less accessible than Florence's *Lungs*, and it pays the price for that.

★★★★★

FILM

***“I’M GONNA WRAP YOUR LEGS
AROUND MY HEAD
AND WEAR YOU LIKE THE CROWN
THAT YOU ARE.
IF THAT’S OK WITH YOU.”***

- YOUTH IN REVOLT



JONAH HEX

RELEASED JUNE 18 (USA) TBC (UK)

Films that describe themselves as 'westerns' are generally few and far between at present, and whilst *Jonah Hex* isn't going all out for originality (the license comes from a DC comic book), it is still pleasant to see something trying to be at least a little different. The character first appeared in the early 1970s and immediately established Hex as a cynical yet honourable anti-

hero. Echoes of Leone's *The Man With No Name* are bound to be heard.

Jimmy Hayward's forthcoming film adaptation, which stars Josh Brolin in the lead role, covers fairly familiar ground in terms of plot, bearing a distinct similarity to the yarn spun in John Hillcoat's excellent *The Proposition*. Hex, coerced into working with the US military under the promise of a clean slate, must track down and put a stop to notorious terrorist Quentin Turnbull (*John Malkovich*). Unfortunately for Hex, Turnbull is also his oldest nemesis and bears a long-standing

grudge against him.

A canny bit of casting – which is sure to see audiences of a certain age flocking to the cinema – sees rising star Megan Fox supporting Hex as a 'gun-wielding prostitute' who provides a much needed human connection for the embittered gunslinger. Brolin reputedly disliked the script when he first read it – which immediately sounds alarm bells – but his eventual decision to stick with the film hopefully means it will have enough redeeming features to be worth a trip this summer.

COP OUT

RELEASED FEBRUARY 26

Cop Out, brilliantly, was developed under the working title *A Couple Of Dicks*. Heaven knows why they changed that. Anyway, the newly titled film is still a buddy comedy about two veteran police officers on the trail of a rare, vintage baseball card that has been stolen by a memorabilia-obsessed (yes, you read that right) gangster. The leads

are filled by Bruce Willis, whose recent output has been lukewarm at best, and Tracy Morgan, best known for his ongoing role in highly rated sitcom *30 Rock*.

The film is directed by Kevin Smith (*Clerks*, *Clerks 2*, *Zak And Miri Make A Porno*) and was penned by brothers Mark and Robb Cullen. It all looks a little flimsy – Morgan is definitely more at home than Willis in the trailer – but it can't be denied that those two minutes did raise one or two decent laughs. There also looks to be a

little more action than first anticipated.

Male buddy comedies and so called 'bromances' are certainly in vogue at present, and whilst unfortunately it's a genre in which the majority of the output falls somewhat short of being interesting, there is no reason to think *Cop Out* won't be at least as good as any other upcoming entry in the genre.

Its scheduled release date – two weeks before market-competitor *Hot Tub Time Machine* – may also help it at the box office.





GREENBERG

RELEASED MARCH 26 (USA) TBC (UK)

In *Greenberg*, Ben Stiller stars as Roger Greenberg, an unemployed man disenchanted with his life. Drawn by an invitation to house sit for his more-successful brother (and thus secure six weeks of free accommodation in LA), Greenberg decides to try to reconnect with his old friends.

Quickly discovering that even the

closest bonds can strain over time, Roger finds himself becoming more and more involved with his brother's personal assistant Florence (relative newcomer Greta Gerwig), an aspiring singer.

Directed by Oscar-nominated Noah Baumbach (*The Squid And The Whale*) the film features Rhys Ifans and Jennifer Jason Leigh in supporting roles. The film is attempting to straddle the fine line between comedy and drama, and in some ways the tone in the trailer is reminiscent of Adam

Sandler's *Funny People*. Stiller looks convincing as the unmotivated loner and Gerwig suitably sweet as his growing love interest.

There aren't too many films of this type due to arrive early in 2010 so *Greenberg* could stand to do fairly well, particularly given the pull of having a big name in the lead role.

Time will tell if Baumbach's latest will be received as positively as *The Squid And The Whale* or, to a lesser extent, his hit or miss last film *Margot At The Wedding*.

HOT TUB TIME MACHINE

RELEASED MARCH 19 (USA) TBC (UK)

Hot Tub Time Machine, from United Artists/MGM, is an upcoming comedy starring John Cusack, Chevy Chase and Rob Corddry. The premise is simple: four ageing, down and out men, unsatisfied with their lives, return to the ski resort where they used to party as teenagers in the hope of

reigniting the passion for life they once possessed but have long since lost. A moribund holiday swiftly picks up as the drinks are consumed and the four guys find themselves in the hot tub together, at which point they travel back in time and wake up in the eighties. Obviously.

If you're thinking this sounds rather like *The Hangover* with time-travel, you wouldn't be too far from the truth, but that isn't to say *Hot Tub Time Machine* should be too eagerly dismissed. Although the story will inevitably consist of a series of morality tales interwoven with 'bromance' style comedy – it's pretty easy to guess

how the character arcs will form, even now – the writers have clearly had a lot of fun here. A lot of the gags seem to be rooted in the gap between the time zones; cue plenty of pop-culture references ("What colour is Michael Jackson?") and technological misunderstandings ("I'll text you...are you online?").

Granted, short of the slightly bizarre twist of having the time-travel instigated by a high-tech hot tub, the story isn't exactly breaking new ground, but the cast of assembled actors seem to be enjoying themselves and Cusack, when on form, can certainly provide a watchable lead.



GREEN ZONE

RELEASED MARCH 12

Green Zone, or *Bourne-Goes-To-Iraq*, as some cynics are calling it, is the latest upcoming film from director Paul Greengrass. Comparisons to the *Bourne* trilogy – which Greengrass and star Matt Damon collaborated on twice – were always inevitable, and whilst it may be a little unfair to preemptively tar the film with the same brush, the similarities are, to put it mildly, un-

canny.

The film is based loosely on a book written by Rajiv Chandrasekaran, detailing the period following the coalition's invasion of Iraq, primarily in the film's titular 'Green Zone', a small area in central Baghdad. As with Greengrass' 2006 film *United 93*, which received glowing praise and earned him a best director nomination at the Oscars, the film is defiantly contemporary, although naturally liberties will have been taken for dramatic effect.

Damon stars as a warrant officer tasked with finding weapons of mass

destruction in the Iraqi desert. During his search he unearths an elaborate cover up that distorts the purposes of his mission and, crucially, his perspective on why he is doing what he is doing, whilst contact with Amy Ryan's (*The Wire*, *Gone Baby Gone*) news reporter also throws up doubts over a previously well-thought-of source. Greengrass' achievements in the thriller genre up to this point should be taken into account here: despite the obvious resemblances, this is not *Bourne 4*, and it should be judged on its own merits.





LEAP YEAR

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 26 (UK)

The trailer for *Leap Year* is likely to divide expectation. Fans of the romantic-comedy genre – who will faithfully lap up the sentiment, predictable storylines and repetitious motifs – will be soundly at home. We all know how it finishes, but some viewers won't care. If you're one of the many who won't care, then *Leap Year* will almost

certainly fill a worthwhile afternoon. If, however, you watch the trailer and see a thinly veiled amalgam of countless other entries in the genre, then it might be best to just stay away.

Amy Adams stars as Anna, a woman who travels to Dublin to propose to her boyfriend on February 29: leap day. Along the way she gets sidetracked in Wales and can't get a ferry to Ireland. Enter Declan (Goode), a rugged Irishman who eventually offers to taxi her up north in return for cash to keep his pub open. It wouldn't be

ruining anything to reveal that Anna and Declan 'form a connection' during their journey and realise that, hey, after some comical bickering involving mud and cows, they actually quite like each other after all.

This obviously is targeting a very particular market – and a big one at that – and will probably make a bit of cash, although critics have not taken kindly to it across the pond, but that isn't to say it'll fare badly at the box office. After all, *The Proposal* went on to make millions.

A PROPHET

DIRECTED BY JACQUES AUDIARD **STARRING** TAHAR RAHIM, NIELS ARESTRUP, ADEL BENCHERIF, HICHEM YACOUBI, REDA KATEB & JEAN-PHILIPPE RICCI

RELEASED JANUARY 22 (UK) FEBRUARY 12 (USA)

Jacques Audiard is perhaps the only filmmaker working today whose cannon of films can be uttered in the same breath as those of Melville and Chabrol. Like those giants of the Nouvelle Vague, Audiard is a master of the thriller/crime genre and has spent the best part of his career unpicking its tightly knit conventions and tropes to create some of the most affecting and unforgettable films of the past few decades.

A Prophet tells the story of Malik (Rahim), a French Arab of North African descent embarking on a six-year sentence in a French jail. The prison is ruled by Cesar Luciani (Arestrup) and his Corsican gang; so when they approach Malik with an offer to accept him into the gang if he murders an unruly Arab inmate, it is clear that this is not an offer he can refuse. Malik is made a lieutenant in the gang after committing the gruesome act, and we are not spared a single detail, from Malik's agonising attempts to conceal a bare razor blade in his mouth to the pathetic gurgling screams of the unfortunate Reyeb.

Things do not improve for the unfortunate outsider, however, as he is slanted by the Corsicans (who call him 'Arab' and suggest he is only fit for belly-dancing and house-work), berated by the Arabic community in the prison for siding with the enemy, and haunted by Reyeb's ghost as he lies alone in his murky cell. Malik teaches himself to read and, by carefully studying Cesar and the gang, learns to speak Corsican, slowly picking up the ins-and-outs of the gang's operations. He also makes an ally in Ryad, a softly spoken man with the cold, dark eyes of a killer.

Malik works his way up the chain of command to become Cesar's right-hand man and most trusted ally in the prison; and when Cesar organises for him to be released for a day (to check on Cesar's interests on the outside), he uses the opportunity to start up a side-business moving vast packages of drugs with Ryad (just recently released) between France and Spain. As Cesar becomes a more desperate and alienated figure in his cell, and powerful adversaries work up the courage to confront him, Malik benefits

from all the new connections he is making.

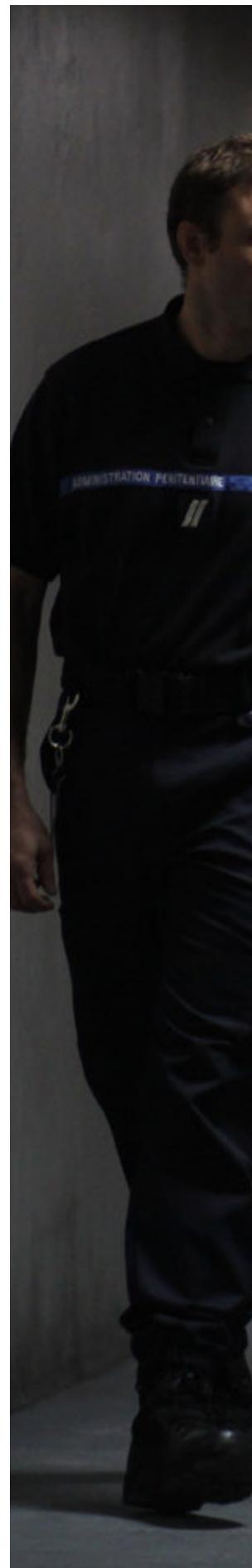
One of the founding tenets of the Nouvelle Vague was an admiration for American film noir, and a mystical ability to inject the rigid genre with a flowing, intuitive, philosophical dimension. Melville, Chabrol, Godard, et al were open about their worship of Humphrey Bogart, John Huston, and the other legends of Hollywood noir; but they were all cineastes and academics who knew that the 'camera-stylo' could be used for so much more than Dashiell Hammett adaptations.

In *A Prophet*, Audiard has created an accessible and stomach-churning prison drama that the most cautious American viewer could enjoy. All the genre tropes are there – gang initiation, deceit, loyalty, criminal codes, corrupt authorities, car chases, gun battles – but these comforting and visceral moments only exist as sharp jabs to the stomach in what is actually a flowing, complex study of loneliness and masculinity. There is no attempt to validate Malik as a hero; he, along with every other character in the film, is a victim of the brutality they were born into. There is no hope, just a daily fight to survive and make tomorrow's fight a little bit easier. When Ryad develops a terminal disease, there is no despair or sadness shared between these two close friends, just an understanding that Ryad will be released from his bondage slightly sooner than Malik.

Having worked with some of the biggest stars in French cinema (namely Jean-Louis Trintignant, Mathieu Kassovitz and Vincent Cassel) Audiard has chosen a relative unknown to lead this brutal character study. Tahar Rahim's performance will, without a doubt, be one of the most infecting and memorable performances of the year. He creates a perfectly conflicted and tragic figure in Malik; cold and toughened by a lifetime in the penal system, but he has a child-like vulnerability and a need for human connection. And his friendship with Ryad is perfectly portrayed, a deep affection that can never be admitted by either party.

This is undoubtedly one of the finest films of the last year. It is an inspiring proof that the genre conventions of American story-telling can be fused with the mystifying explorations of the human condition more present in European independent cinema, to create films that perhaps rise above both camps purely because they are capable of fulfilling the highest aims of culture and communication; to inform, educate, and entertain.

★★★★★







THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

DIRECTED BY RON CLEMENTS & JOHN MUSTER STARRING ANIKA NONI ROSE, BRUNO CAMPOS, KEITH DAVID, MICHAEL-LEON WOOLEY, JENNIFER CODY & JIM CUMMINGS

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 5 (UK)

Returning to their classic 2D animation style for the first time since 2004's *Home On The Range*, *The Princess And The Frog* brings Disney well and truly back to its roots.

Set in olden New Orleans, when Prince Naveen (Campos) visits from the land of Maldonia, desperate to meet a rich girl to solve his financial problems, he is transformed into a frog by scheming voodoo magician, Dr. Facilier (David). Now required to lock lips with a princess, when he eyes local girl Tiana (Rose), he thinks she will break

the curse, and asks her to kiss him.

Tiana, however, didn't grow up on the privileged side of life, and has been saving up to open up a restaurant in memory of her father, only when she finally appears to be on the brink of fulfilling her dreams, kissing Naveen turns her into a frog as well.

Together, the two of them must find the good voodoo priestess of the Bayou, Mama Odie (Lewis), befriending the animals of the forest along the way, and after travelling the long distance to rid themselves of their transformation, might just have found their soulmate.

On *The Princess And The Frog*, it's hugely refreshing to see Disney go back to traditional animation, and with graphics so clean, crisp and vibrant as anything from Disney in recent years; the film possesses a wholly warm feeling.

Sadly, however, several other aspects of the film, didn't receive the update they required. *The Princess And The Frog's* story lacks the magic

of Disney's classic films and lets the technical achievements down. The plot is lightweight and forgettable, and struggles to draw you in as it takes the well trodden path down redemption to 'true love'. It's the classic themes from a Disney animation, but by now we need something more, something new, especially on the forever re-told frog prince fairy tale.

Most disappointing are the musical numbers, once the real showpiece of *Aladdin* et al. *The Princess And The Frog's* sing-a-long songs don't have any imagination and feel forced into the narrative.

There is perhaps just enough for kids, though expect them to certainly grow restless despite the brief 97-minute running time, while for adults it's more than a little lacking, and despite the honest, authentic ideals, Disney's traditional animation studios can't compete with the imagination and storytelling of their CGI colleagues, Pixar.

★★★★★



IT'S COMPLICATED

DIRECTED BY NANCY MEYERS **STARRING** MERYL STREEP, ALEC BALDWIN, STEVE MARTIN, JOHN KRASINSKI, LAKE BELL, CAITLIN FITZGERALD, ZOE KAZAN & HUNTER PARRISH

RELEASED OUT NOW

With rom-coms revitalised in 2009 by *(500) Days Of Summer*, what is normally a tired genre faces tough competition to keep up appearances. The chick-flick variety, however, has struggled for years, though with Oscar-bait Meryl Streep involved, perhaps *It's Complicated* would be the film to break the rule.

About Jane (Streep), a successful bakery owner, divorcee and mother of three grown children, it's taken 10 years for her to at last reach a good relationship with her ex-husband. Jane and Jake (Baldwin), however, soon spoil it all. Despite his new, much younger wife, at the graduation of their son, the divorced couple spend an intimate night together, and what started off as a one-time thing soon

turns into a full blown affair. If things weren't complicated enough, Jane's emotions are thrown further up in the air when Adam (Martin) appears on the scene, leaving her with the impossible decision of whether to turn over a new leaf or go back to her previous love.

With a great cast along for the ride, you might have been expecting something beyond the usual rom-com fodder, but writer/director Nancy Meyers delivers nothing except the norm, in fact, even its traditional messages are undone by a convoluted script and misconstrued characters.

Alec Baldwin, and notably John Krasinski as the eldest daughter's boyfriend, are great, and give the film it's moments of comedy, though it is Baldwin's Jake that is at the route of *It's Complicated's* problems. While the tone of the film is remarkably biased towards the female perspective, with his charisma, Jane's newfound attraction Jack is less than half-heartedly played as the villain. Instead, Agness (Bell) is deemed at fault for the break-up of Jane's marriage. With Jack and Agness now married, however, looking

after a young kid themselves, Jane is implored to continue her affair, even though it will mean the break-up of another marriage, but she doesn't feel an ounce of guilt. You'd struggle to create a more blind-sighted and hypocritical situation.

For a pivotal role Agness is entirely underwritten and doesn't get the chance to put her side across. Perhaps Meyers drew from personal experiences when penning *It's Complicated*, but she has let her personal feelings come in the way of creating a well-rounded, mature script. While the title would have you believe *It's Complicated* is delving into deeply entangled relationships, the film is nothing new. Meyers' latest doesn't have the honesty, intelligence or vulnerability of the characters in her earlier films. The pacing though is good, and builds rapidly as the events unfold, with Alec Baldwin standing out if little else does.

The Oscar buzz surrounding *It's Complicated* is way off and the film is certainly nothing to get overly excited about, and certainly shouldn't be winning any awards.

★★★★★

EDGE OF DARKNESS

DIRECTED BY MARTIN CAMPBELL STARRING MEL GIBSON, DANNY HUSTON, RAY WINSTONE, BOJANA NOVAKOVIC, SHAWN ROBERTS & DAVID AARON BAKER

RELEASED JANUARY 29

The next in an increasing line of BBC TV miniseries adaptations, *Edge Of Darkness* is based on the 1985 television show. After working on the classic series, Martin Campbell now finds himself a major Hollywood director and returns to his roots with producer Michael Wearing.

Edge Of Darkness falls down the classic smart conspiracy thriller template and follows Thomas Craven's (Gibson) pursuit of justice. When the homicide detective's daughter, Emma (Novakovic), is murdered in front of his very eyes, while the rest of law enforcement presumes the shots were meant for Craven himself, revenge from a criminal he put away, he can't quite make the evidence add up. Severely ill before being gunned down, Craven's daughter spoke of a secret, but gave no indication as to what she was hiding, and when he starts to delve a little deeper, uncovers a world of corporate conspiracy and government deception, and won't stop until he gets to the bottom of the mess that cost his daughter her life.

His first major role since *Signs* in 2002, it's great to see Mel Gibson back on the silver screen in front of the camera, and there's no doubt he's still got what it takes, although there are a number of problems that hold *Edge Of Darkness* back.

While screenwriters William Monahan and Andrew Bovell do a

good job of condensing the 6 hour TV miniseries into a 2 hour movie, *Edge Of Darkness* doesn't quite feel all there. Conspiracy thrillers should be a non-stop thrill ride but despite Gibson's performance, *Edge Of Darkness* lacks real pace to the story and a sense of urgency in the narrative. Though Craven is pushing hard for the truth, you never get the impression that he's really going all out, which is surprising given director Martin Campbell's great work on emphatic *Casino Royale*.

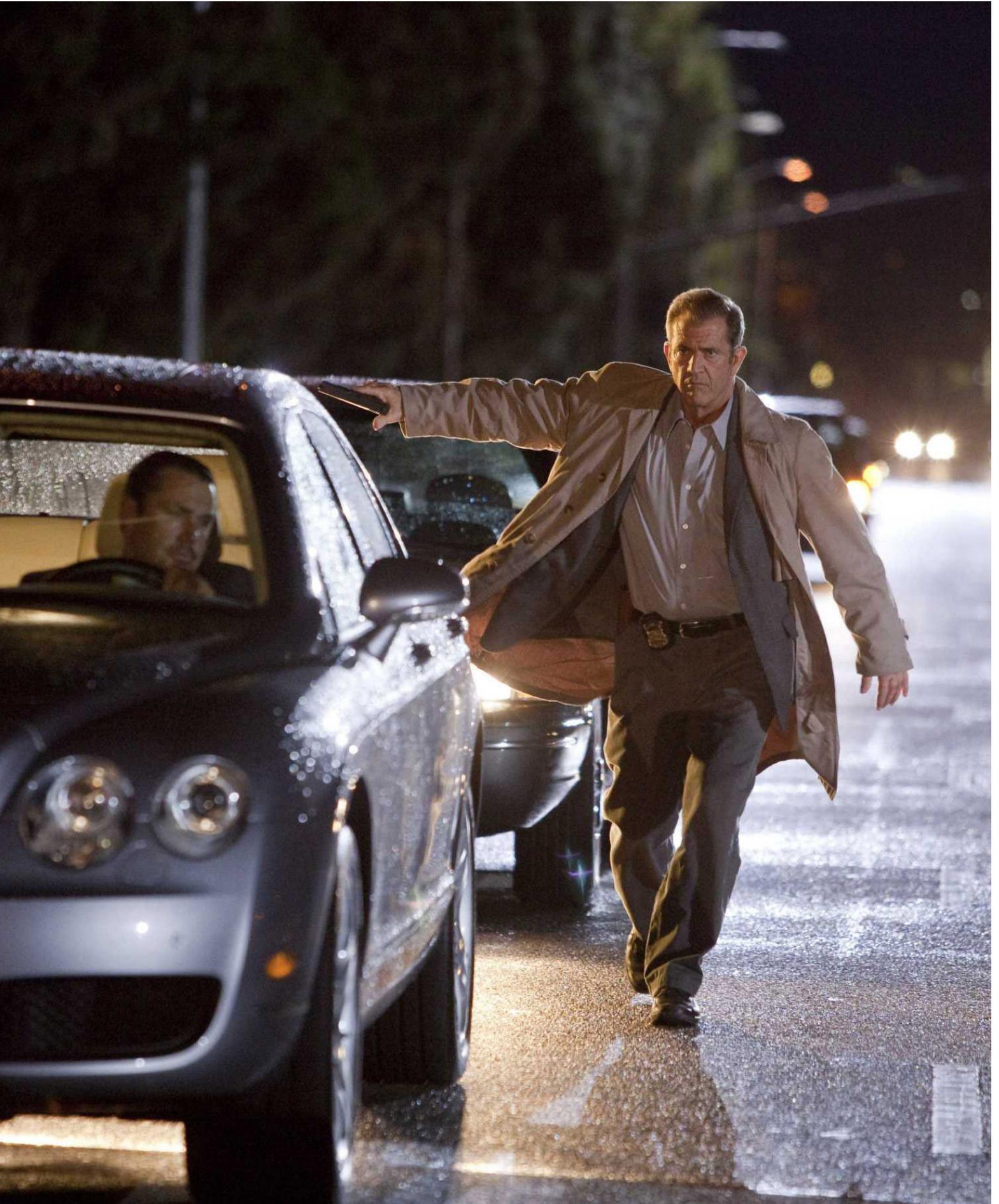
Given equal billing in the trailers, en route to the truth, Craven comes up against Darius Jedburgh (Winstone). A secret government operative, it's Jedburgh's job to clear up the mess and wipe away any evidence along the way. While you might expect Jedburgh and Craven to clash, embroiled in a fight to the death over what really triggered Emma's murder, Jedburgh loses his patience with sweeping justice under the carpet and finds himself questioning whose side to take.

Robert De Niro was originally cast as Jedburgh but walked out as shooting began, citing creative differences, although he didn't miss a great deal. The Jedburgh role is a staple in conspiracy thrillers but lies thoroughly underutilised in *Edge Of Darkness*, and the film wouldn't have been harmed by cutting him altogether.

With the lack of energy infused in the film it's hard to get truly embroiled in the conspiracy but that's doesn't mean *Edge Of Darkness* is a complete failure, not by a long shot, and there's still a lot of fun to be had with the two-hour thriller. It's always great to see filmmakers go back to this great genre, and while *Edge Of Darkness* might not be the finest modern example, it's still a solid pick for an evening's entertainment.

★★★★★







ASTRO BOY

DIRECTED BY DAVID BOWERS **STARRING** FREDDIE HIGHMORE, NICOLAS CAGE, KRISTEN BELL, SAMUEL L. JACKSON, EUGENE LEVY, BILL NIGHY, DONALD SUTHERLAND & MOISES ARIAS

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 5 (UK)

With Pixar stepping up their game yet again on the magical *Up*, any computer-animated film is always going to be compared to the Emeryville production studio's offerings, though *Astro Boy* is after a different crowd, and targets fans of the less narratively astute DreamWorks films.

Astro Boy starts off, however, on the Pixar path. Though it isn't handled anywhere near as well as the heart-break in the opening ten minutes of *Up*, *Astro Boy* is about a young robot boy (Highmore), whom after a scientist's (Cage) son is tragically killed, is created to try and fill the void of losing a loved one. Astro Boy is no usual robot, fitted with retractable rocket blasters on his feet, and laser guns that can morph from his hands, but when

his carbon copy appearance starts to cause turmoil for his father, Astro Boy is cast out of his city and left to find a new home. But when evil then attempts to take control of his homeland with a monstrous and gigantic machine, only Astro Boy has the power to save the day and must decide whether to return and forgive those who turned him away.

Although *Astro Boy's* plot is unfortunately limp, the film is undoubtedly a lot of fun for kids, with enough bright lights and big explosions on-screen to keep them interested, although those who paid for the ticket will get more than a little bored.

As the narrative stutters, *Astro Boy* struggles to develop at a steady pace, and lacks the class or maturity of *Up*, or even the other recent CGI success, *Cloud With A Chance Of Meatballs*. There are certainly a handful of moments of fun, and director David Bowers' second effort is not as bad as you might go into the cinema expecting, but there isn't too much to shout about either.

The vocal work is lacklustre, from the voice behind the titular character

in particular, and this is certainly not Freddie Highmore's greatest work, though perhaps he was a little let down by the non-descript animation. As the film progresses, you get the impression his heart was never really in the role, but he's not the only one and across the board from the ensemble cast to direction, writing and the visuals, all needed a good tightening up.

As an adaptation of a much-loved cartoon and manga series, *Astro Boy* had a target audience ripe for the taking, but it is unsurprising they failed to march out to cinemas for the film's release in the States. *Astro Boy* doesn't match the originality or tone of the source material; it's safe, and doesn't have that edge to really set it alight, leaving a very hollow experience.

There are a few laughs in *Astro Boy*, but not enough to keep you fully entertained, even over the lite 94-minute running time, and though the introduction of the villain strays away from the usual opening set-up then ensuing duel, *Astro Boy* is one film unlikely to be given the franchise its good name previously deserved.

★★★★★



TONY

DIRECTED BY GERARD JOHNSON STARRING PETER FERDINANDO, GEORGE RUSSO, FRANCIS POPE, IAN KILLGANNON, LUCY FLACK, IAN GROOMBRIDGE & RICKY GROVER

RELEASED FEBRUARY 5 (UK) APRIL (USA)

Part of a new model for releasing small indie films, after *Tony* hits cinemas on Friday 5th February, the DVD will be in stores the following Monday, instantly available on iTunes and on demand through Sky Box Office. Unlike some of the more forgettable films to be treated as an experiment, however, *Tony* appears to have real potential, and could show the way for more indie releases in the future.

About the chronically lonely Tony (Ferdinando), a man who thirsts for human interaction, Tony befriends two junkies on the street before inviting

them back to his council estate flat. Offering the pair countless (VHS) Steven Segal films to stick on the TV, when one of them is rude to him, Tony enacts his revenge. With the junkies out of it on drugs, Tony murders the ungrateful houseguest, tying up the other, and his murky private life is unveiled.

Sure enough, Tony soon finds himself in equally uncomfortable situations unwittingly picking up a gay clubber, prepositioning a prostitute and speaking with the police in his home about a missing local boy; it doesn't really need to be said what happens next. All Tony would really like though is a friend, but whether that'll ever happen, is another question entirely.

Raw and unglamorous and filmed with a dark and brutal tone, *Tony* is so delightfully straight to the point you can't take your eyes off it. Tony doesn't murder out of the thirst for blood

but of a sheer lack of social function, and his life is utterly compelling, with funny moments thrown in from time to time.

Critical to the film's success, Peter Ferdinando is brilliant as Tony; so awkward and nervous there's not a second you don't believe in the character. His performance is matter of fact and understated, and the murders match his demeanour. Tony's killings are simple, ruthless and unplanned, and the film doesn't make a big deal about them, he just gets on with normal life. Everything is so thoroughly down-to-earth compared with the overplayed characters in Hollywood's counterparts.

Tony is primed for cult status, announcing director Gerard Johnson on the scene and set to kick-start Peter Ferdinando's career after bit-parts in various Brit-flicks and TV series. *Tony* is Dalston's answer to American Psycho and it's almost every bit as good.

★★★★★

YOUTH IN REVOLT

DIRECTED BY MIGUEL ARTETA STARRING MICHAEL CERA, PORTIA DOUBLEDAY, JEAN SMART, ZACH GALIFIANAKIS, ERIK KNUDSEN & STEVE BUSCEMI

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 5 (UK)

With January generally considered a studio dumping ground for movies they're not sure what to do with, before the thoroughly underwhelming *Year One*, any Michael Cera comedy released at the turn of the year would have been considered a buck of the trend, but now there's that inch of doubt; he might have lost his charm again.

About the innocent and inexperienced 16-year-old Nick Twisp (Cera), Nick is the average geeky teenager, thinking he doesn't fit in, and that everybody else is having sex but him; only when he is dragged to a caravan park by his mother (Smart) and her dubious boyfriend (Galifianakis), there's a chance his luck might have changed. Setting up next to the intriguing Sheeni Saunders (Doubleday), Nick falls in love at first sight, and though Sheeni is somewhat drawn to his wispy frame, she's far from convinced and returns to her perfect, poetry-writing boyfriend Trent (Wright).

But this is the last time Nick misses out on a girl because of his lack of assertiveness, and needs to try something new. Creating alter-ego François Dillinger, a moustache-laden, pot-smoking bad boy, something new is drawn out of a once muted personality. Exhibiting his wild side to win over temptress Sheeni, François' schemes are so ridiculous they just about work, but sooner rather than later the trouble

catches up with him and Nick's life is out of control with no sign of a solution.

While the plot feels a little construed, in conjunction with some improvised lines from the wonderful Cera, *Youth In Revolt* boasts a never-ending dialogue that is hilarious to the core. Great credit must go to screenwriter Gustin Nash, who adapted C.D. Payne's original novel, and the collaborative lines will be quotable for years to come, with a line in every sequence to have you going.

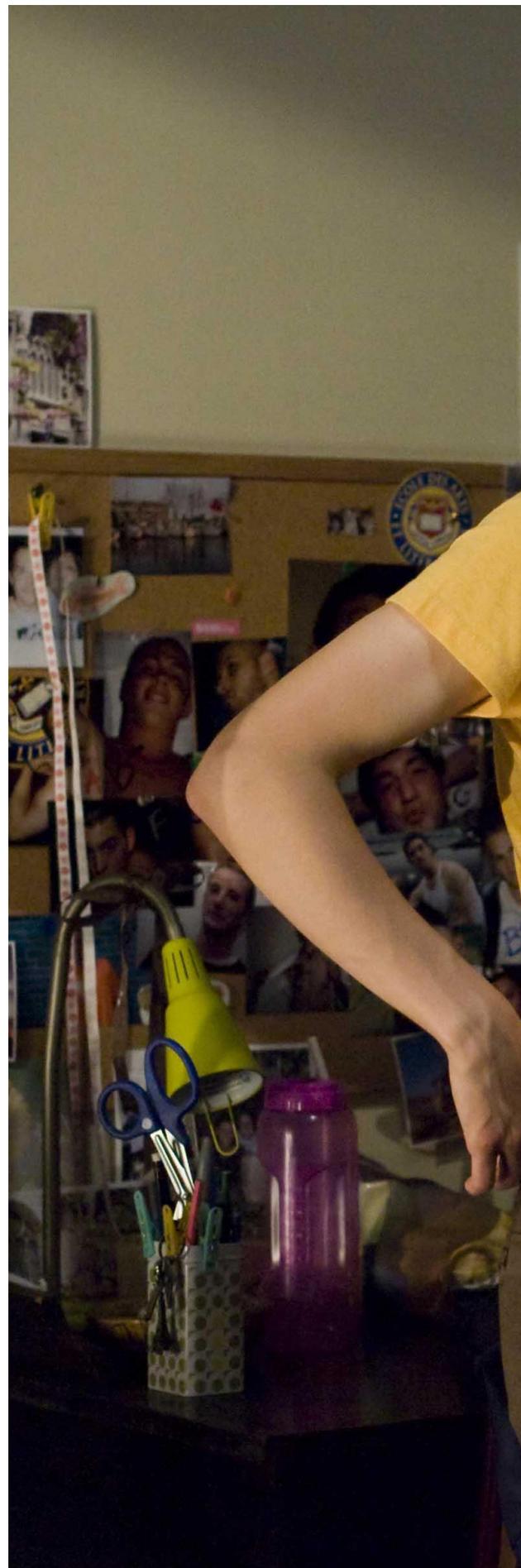
Though his cynics will argue that Nick Twisp is same-old-same-old from Michael Cera, both his comedic timing, on-screen personality and sheer charisma are effortlessly entertaining once again. Cera's performance feels as fresh as his first outing in cinema or TV, and in alter-ego François Dillinger, his playful side is a joy to behold. Young or old, there are few comedic actors more watchable at the moment.

Alongside Cera, a number of smaller roles give some big names the chance to raise a smile. In front of the camera for anything from five minutes to several brief appearances throughout the film, Zach Galifianakis, Steve Buscemi, Ray Liotta, Justin Long and Fred Willard are all enjoyable and ensure there's never a dull moment.

With Cera's subtlety and the indie style of filmmaking, *Youth In Revolt* doesn't feel like a raucous Hollywood comedy, certainly a move for the good, and to bring together a great range of talent and let them feel free in the scene is a great effort from director Miguel Arteta.

Youth In Revolt is a cut above the rest of the New Year fodder, and though we're only in month one, not only makes claims for the best comedy of 2010, but will be pushing top 10 lists come December.

★★★★★







PONYO

DIRECTED BY HAYAO MIYAZAKI STARRING NOAH LINDSAY CYRUS, FRANKIE JONAS, MATT DAMON, TINA FEY, CATE BLANCHETT, LIAM NEESON & KURT KNUTSSON

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 12 (UK)

One of the highest grossing films of all time in its native Japan, *Ponyo* sees legendary filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki return behind the camera after his son Goro took charge of Studio Ghibli's last outing.

When a fish-girl escapes her father, Fujimoto's (Neeson), underwater castle dreaming of seeing more of the world, Ponyo (Cyrus) is taken in by a young boy called Sosuke (Jonas). After she licks a cut on his hand and

it quickly heals, they soon develop a close bond which convinces Ponyo she wants to become a human. When her father then brings Ponyo back to their home, she tells him of her desire and suddenly grows a pair of legs.

Fujimoto temporarily stops the transformation but when Ponyo escapes for a second time, she dispels his magic, imbalancing the world and causing a meteoric storm. With Sosuke's mother lost when tidal waves hit, he and Ponyo work together to bring parity back to the world and rescue her from danger.

Ponyo sees Studio Ghibli go back to the hand-drawn animation of old and the visual style is stunning, topping Disney's similar throwback on *The Princess And The Frog*. *Ponyo* is full of life in every frame, and after being intimately involved with every second

of animation, Miyazaki deserves great credit.

Compared with Studio Ghibli's best, however, *Ponyo* is left a little lacking. The story feels somewhat shallow and uninvolved, and the film suffers from uneven pacing. With Miyazaki at the helm though, the problems are masked with relative ease and *Ponyo* is full of life and energy, and has a youthfulness engrained in every shot.

As you'd expect from a John Lasseter produced English language dub, the voiceovers are completely up to scratch, and make Ponyo and Sosuke utterly charming.

Though not Studio Ghibli's best film, *Ponyo* is still a magical experience that will bring back memories of classic hand-drawn cartoons and animated films of old.

★★★★★



THE BOYS ARE BACK

DIRECTED BY SCOTT HICKS **STARRING** CLIVE OWEN, LAURA FRASER, EMMA BOOTH, GEORGE MACKAY, EMMA LUNG, JULIA BLAKE, STEVEN ROBERTSON & NATASHA LITTLE

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JANUARY 22 (UK)

The Boys Are Back follows Joe Warr (Owen) and his wild son Artie (McAnulty) as they try to overcome the death of their beloved wife and mother, Katy (Fraser). Joe is an English sports writer who followed Katy to Australia after getting her pregnant. He is a man's man with a boisterous exuberance; but in losing Katy he has lost his biggest fan, and he is broken and scared at the prospect of living without her.

Artie is unable to register the enormity of his loss on a cerebral level, but he feels it powerfully in his heart. He possesses an implacable and passionate energy that saves them both from despair; as Joe writes "just say

yes" on their fridge, and they decide to say yes to whatever wild and fanciful whim takes hold of them. They have water balloon fights in the house, eat pizza in the middle of the night, and drive along the beach with Artie hanging on to the bonnet of the car.

It is at this point that Joe gets an unexpected call from his ex-wife in London (it turns out he was married with a child when he followed Katy to Oz) explaining that his teenage son is heading out to Australia to live with him...

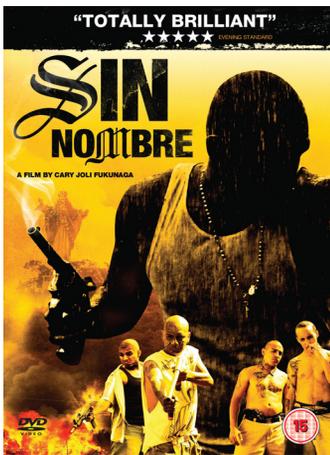
Harry (MacKay) is an awkward teenager who could not be more of an antithesis to the Warr's frenetic new lifestyle. But when he is eventually won over by their vivacity the trio realise that, as a team, they stand some chance of achieving happiness. When Harry returns to England after an apocalyptic argument, Joe and Artie follow him to beg for his return. It is in England that Joe is forced to confront his personal demons in order to persuade Harry to return to their new family.

Scott Hicks' adaptation of Simon Carr's novel is certainly a beautiful

film. Visually it is quite stunning, and evocative of rural Australia's warmth and vibrance; and the tone is perfect, feeling neither dull and depressing nor insincerely uplifting. There are moments of deeply-affecting and powerful drama, and Hicks even manages to elicit a respectable performance from Clive Owen, one of the most boring and awkward actors around.

But there are inherent flaws that affect the emotional journey of the story and prevent this from being one of the year's great films. The film starts out exploring the theme of grief and the effect it has on familial relationships. We see Joe's relationships with his friends and family changing dramatically and worry about how he can overcome his grief. But as the film develops, it becomes a story about his relationship with Harry and his inability to confront the mistakes he has made in the past. At the end of the film we are not really sure he has done either, and despite the poetic beauty and emotional tone, the ending lacks the emotional power the story deserves.

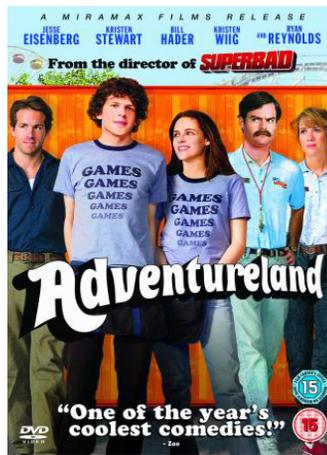
★★★★★



SIN NOMBRE

Following the journey of Honduran teenager Sayra as she makes her way north to Mexico before joining her estranged father in the US. *Sin Nombre* misses a trick on the politics but director Cary Fukunaga is set for greatness.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



ADVENTURELAND

More matured follow-up to director Greg Mottola's breakthrough comedy *Superbad*, *Adventureland* is a coming-of-age film as James finds his path in life, and what his next step is after a summer at a languid adventure park.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



UP

Breathtaking computer-animated feature from Pixar; a pensioner, accompanied by an enthusiastic young boy, jets across the world in a house held up by thousands of balloons. *Up* pushes Pixar's finest to the final stretch.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



MESRINE: PARTS 1 & 2

The emphatic story of French criminal Jacques Mesrine as he scaled the heights of public notoriety. Now brought together after a divided cinematic release, his life is a compelling tale, hard to take your eyes off.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS

Effortlessly fun and entertaining comedy about a scientist who unwittingly changes his town's weather systems into food, raining spaghetti one day and jelly the next.

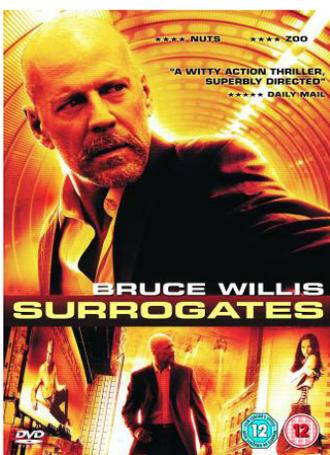
Show ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



(500) DAYS OF SUMMER

A bittersweet rom-com that makes it okay to enjoy the flagging genre. *(500) Days* is about Tom, who after losing the love of his life, recounts their days together to work out where it went wrong and how to get her back.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



SURROGATES

Promising but grossly flawed sci-fi action based on a far superior graphic novel series, Bruce Willis plays a police officer investigating a series of crimes where people have died while controlling robot versions of themselves.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



COUPLES RETREAT

Lazy comedy about four couples that travel to a tropical island to try and work out their relationship problems. *Couples Retreat* tries nothing new and offers less than a handful of laughs throughout the whole film.

Film ★★★★★
Extras ★★★★★



**TO CELEBRATE THE RELEASE OF
THRILLING GANGSTER BIOPIC **MESRINE: PARTS 1 & 2**
WE'RE GIVING YOU THE CHANCE TO WIN
A BLU-RAY OR ONE OF TWO DVDS FOR YOURSELF**

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Mesrine director Jean-François Richet's foray into Hollywood saw him
direct action-thriller *Assault On Precinct...*?

A. 5 B. 13 C. 21

Send your answer to competitions@fanthefiremagazine.com
Deadline 15/02/10

ART

***“FOR ME THE BEST TOY(S) EVER
WERE THE MASSIVE INHUMANOIDS
FIGURES FROM THE 80’S. MELTAR
AND DECOMPOSE WERE KINGS!”***

- CHRISTOPHER LEE





OLD GAME, NEW TRICKS

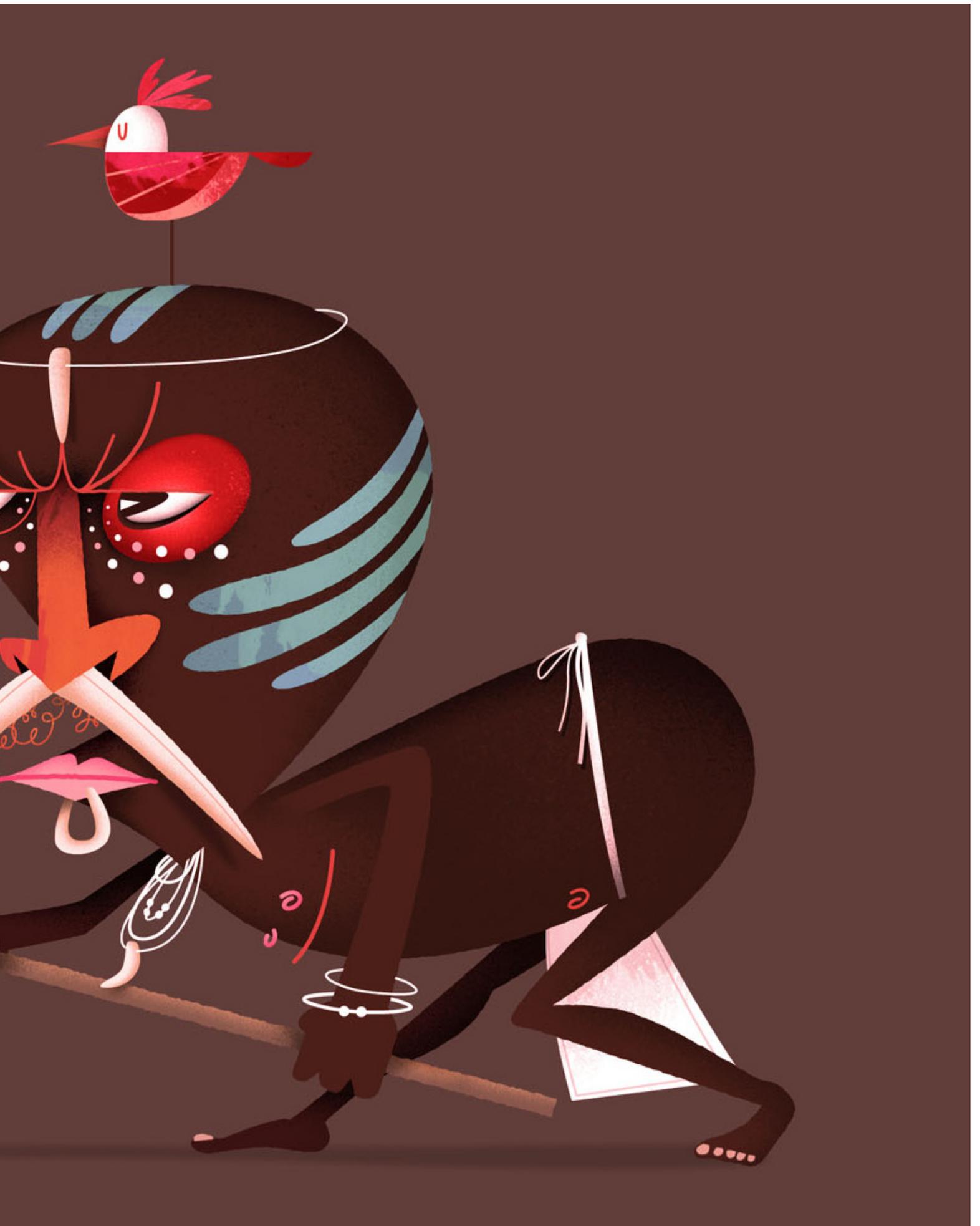
THE GREAT HUNTERS

Illustrations Christopher Lee





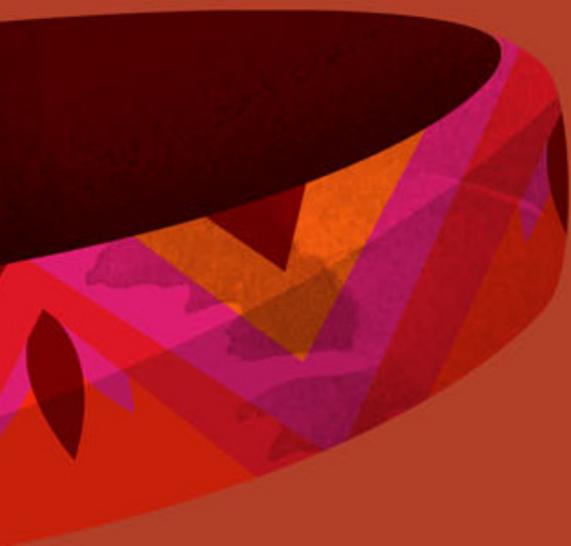
















ART

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN,
IT GETS ALL THE MORE INTERESTING

LIFE AFTER DARK

Photography Campeaux







ART













ART

**IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, THERE AREN'T
MANY FACES YOU CAN REALLY COUNT ON**

HERO FOR HIRE

Illustrations Jamie Roberts



























STYLE

**“I’VE MADE IT CLEAR TO MYSELF
THAT THE REASON I OFTEN ENJOY
FASHION OVER ART IS; FASHION
ISN’T BURDENED BY A CRITIQUE.
IN OTHER WORDS, ART HAS BEEN
ACADEMICISED TO THE POINT
WHERE, IF IT’S NOT AS ARTICU-
LATE AS A NEW YORKER ARTICLE,
IT NO LONGER MEETS THE BAR.”**

- TOM HINES

STYLE



Curveball teddy and silk jersey by The Lake & Stars



THE LAKE & STARS MAKE EVADING
CAPTURE LOOK LIKE A GLAMOROUS BUSINESS

MAKE GOOD YOUR ESCAPE

Photography Tom Hines
Hair and make-up Fernando Haddad
Prop stylist Jesse Kaufmann
Model Nell Rebowe at Trump Models
Clothing The Lake & Stars



Vantage Point bikini top and bottom by The Lake & Stars



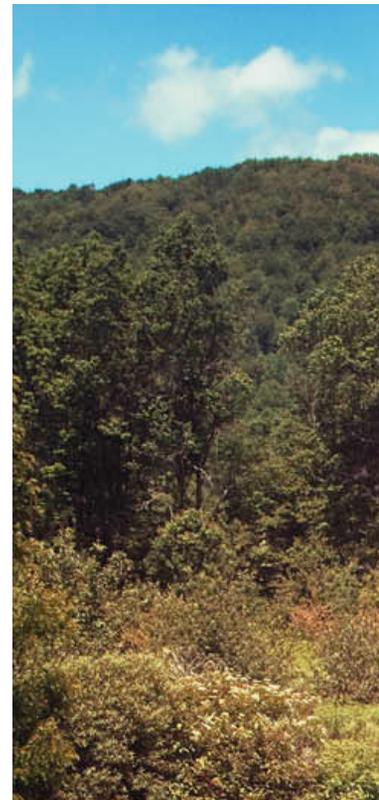
STYLE

Curveball teddy and silk jersey by The Lake & Stars





Curveball bustier and bikini bottom by The Lake & Stars



Vantage Point bikini top and bottom by The Lake & Stars





STYLE



Torchlight bikini bottom
by The Lake & Stars

STYLE



Vantage Point one-piece swimsuit by The Lake & Stars





Vantage Point bikini top and bottom by The Lake & Stars

Vantage Point halter one-piece
swimsuit by The Lake & Stars



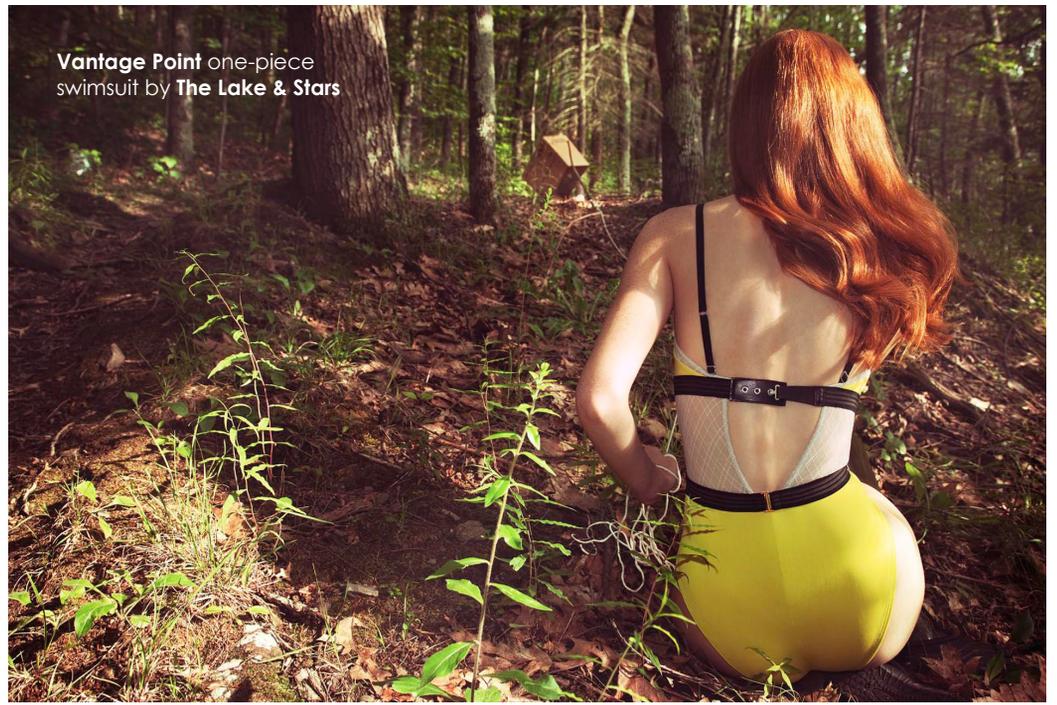


Vantage Point bikini top and bottom by The Lake & Stars



Curveball busfier and bikini bottom
by The Lake & Stars











Field Of Vision camisole and
top pant by The Lake & Stars

STYLE



STYLE

COLOUR IS OVERRATED

FADE TO GREY

Photography Dirk Lambrechts
at House of Orange Photographers, Amsterdam

















STYLE



STYLE







IT'S HARD TO FIND YOUR WAY HOME WHEN
NO-ONE'S AROUND TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS

LOST ON THE HIGHWAY

Photography Fred Meylan



STYLE







STYLE















STYLE







STYLE





PLAY

45

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