

FAN THE FIRE

ISSUE #33 // JULY 2010



PIXEL PERFECT

EBOY SHOW US WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE A LIFE IN 8-BIT

PLUS

PONY-PONY RUN RUN INTERVIEW,
BEST COAST AND ISLE OF WHITE 2010
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KELE, M.I.A. AND O. CHILDREN ALBUM REVIEWS
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SHREK FOREVER AFTER AND THE COLLECTOR REVIEWS
ART BY LYDIA NICHOLS, NICOLAS BOUVIER AND TOBY BURROWS
STYLE BY KATHRYNA HANCOCK,
ERIC RAY DAVIDSON AND ANTONELLA ARISMENDI

“£9.99 A MONTH FOR THE TIMES NEWSPAPER'S IPAD APP, AND YOU DON'T GET ACCESS TO THE NEW PAYWALLED WEBSITE IN WITH THAT? YEAH, GOOD LUCK MURDOCH”

@FANTHEFIRE, TWEETED 11:10AM, MAY 28TH

To think that this summer we'll be five years old is a pretty mind-blowing thought. Looking back at our first few issues, crudely designed in Photoshop CS2 and formatted for the PSP, the magazine today is barely even comparable.

Then titled *LOAD*, we were one of a handful of digital magazines for Sony's gaming handheld, and so far ahead of the online media surge, major publishers had no idea this market even existed and of all our competitors back then, we're the only magazine left. We rebranded to *FAN THE FIRE*, spread out to music, film, art and style and took up a pleasing position in the indie publisher circle.

With magazines now closing left, right and centre, in a couple of years time there won't be many of the

household names left. The time is ripe for start-ups to stake a claim in the media world, and we're ready to make that step-up to really challenge the current autocracy.

Very shortly we'll be launching our iPad app (there's every chance you might even be reading this issue on there), and unlike a lot of other publications' tablet offerings, we really feel we're onto something inventive and original. If Rupert Murdoch thinks he can charge £9.99 for The Times' iPad app then demand a further fee for access to their new paywalled website, despite talking up a futuristic game, his head is still thoroughly in the past.

This month we've got the legendary eBoy on our cover, a fitting tribute to media's pixelated future, and a statement from us that we're ready to

mix it with the big guns.

While we're talking about coming a long way too, as you've probably guessed by now, we're pretty big fans of last month's cover stars Delta Spirit. Featured, interviewed and reviewed on numerous occasions, we were on the scene before they even released their first EP and several years ago now, gave them their first ever magazine spot. A couple of weeks ago they released their sophomore LP, entitled *History From Below*, and while they didn't top the charts, to make the Billboard 200 alone is a huge deal for the indie four-piece, so a massive congratulations for charting at #179, and an even better #8 on Heatseekers. Boys, you've done us proud.

Sam Bathe

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It's been a long time coming but our brand new website is here at last.

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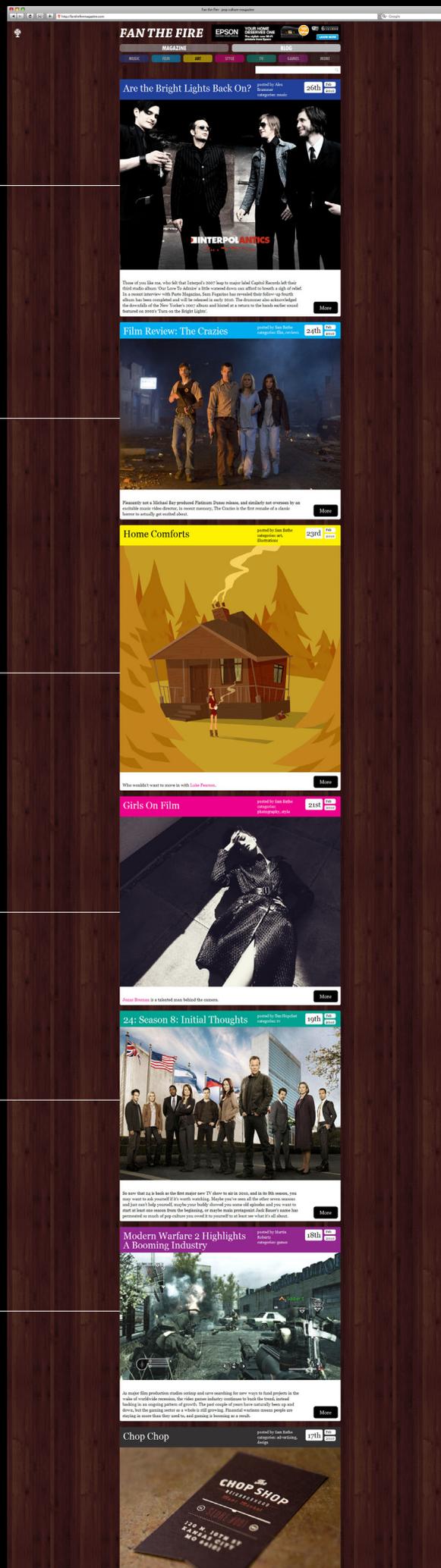
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MUSIC

“WE WANTED TO DO BETTER THAN WET WET WET OR DURAN DURAN BY REPEATING TWO WORDS IN OUR NAME.”

ALEX

BRAMMER

INTERVIEWS

FRENCH

MUSIC'S

BEST

KEPT

SECRET,

PONY

PONY

RUN

RUN

One of the bands that really caught our eye at Brighton's Great Escape Festival last month was indie-electro power-pop trio, Pony Pony Run Run. In their native France the band are blowing up, big time. They've sold out 3,000 capacity venues as well as tours with Simple Minds, Calvin Harris and La Roux, however, in the UK they have yet to break into the mainstream. We caught up with keyboard player Antonin Pierre at the end of their whistle-stop UK tour to discuss English and French crowds, their TV duet with Two Door

Cinema Club and why their name is better than Duran Duran's.

Fan the Fire: How did Pony Pony Run Run meet?

Pony Pony Run Run: We met in Nantes as we were graduating from fine art school. I first met Gaetan, and then his brother Amaël.

FtF: Pony Pony Run Run is certainly a memorable name, but is there a story behind it? How did that name come about?

PPRR: We wish it was memorable but

it doesn't seem like it! People usually say, "Pony Run Run" or "Pony Pony Run", it's kind of too much for French people! Especially for radio DJs, I think they hate us! Mostly we wanted to do better than Wet Wet Wet, Duran Duran or Talk Talk by repeating two words in our name! We don't really love ponies that much...

FtF: FAN THE FIRE readers will know your individual names from the blog we wrote about you guys last month after catching you at Great Escape Festival, however, elsewhere on the ➔





internet (e.g. your MySpace and Wikipedia pages) you're simply listed as 'G', 'A' and 'T'. Are you trying to keep your names secret? Have we blown your cover?

PPRR: We didn't realise this until we read the notes in the Great Escape programme. Yeah, why? At the beginning we didn't want to appear so much, it was the music that was important and not having our faces and names everywhere. But in the end, we let it go because you can't avoid people filming you and taking photographs and so on. So G is for Gaetan, A is for Amael, and T is for Antonin a.k.a Tono, Tony or Tonus, it depends on the hour...

FtF: I've heard your sound be described as 'genre-bending nuclear power pop' Do you agree with this description?

PPRR: At the beginning we used to describe our music as power pop; 5 years ago we gathered around influences such as Weezer, The Rental etc., but now we like to say it's pop music. We love the simplicity of it, and also its freedom; you can add everything to it, either rock or electro or dance or every kind of weird and crappy music we're listening to.

FtF: I really enjoyed your show at The Great Escape Festival in Brighton. How have you found your UK gigs?

PPRR: Thanks! We are working with a great promotion and booking team called Curious Generation. They've been really kind and made our trip to England a pleasure!

FtF: Are there any differences between UK and French crowds?

PPRR: Well it's difficult to say now, because we're getting a little bit popular in France, and for the last 9 months the gigs are crazy every night! But it's funny because we used to say that the French audience was the worst, never moving, never letting go; the opposite to an English or German audience.

One thing for sure is that France lacks clubs or places to play for young bands.

FtF: What do you think of the French music scene at the moment?

PPRR: There are plenty of new exciting bands coming out! We have been really impressed by many of our opening bands in France, to name a few: Curry And Coco, The Popopopops and Moon Pallas. French people are getting more and more open to French musicians singing in English; they stopped bothering bands asking them why they did that, when the music is good, it's OK.

FtF: Who are Pony Pony Run Run listening to?

PPRR: There's so many! We all love The Drums and Surfer Blood. Amaël is listening to a lot to Wave Machines and Gaetan listens to Best Coast.

"...we used to say that the French audience was the worst, never moving, never letting go; the opposite to an English or German audience. One thing for sure is that France lacks clubs or places to play for young bands."

FtF: You recently did a duet of Lady Gaga's *Poker Face* with Two Door Cinema Club on French television. How did that come about?

PPRR: Well common friends of us and Kitsuné asked us if we wanted to play with them for their cover of *Poker Face*.

We said of course, because we are really fond of their music, and also it was on the best musical TV show in France. This was a really good experience, pretty wild as we didn't get much time to rehearse, but it sounded good on TV.

FtF: And finally, the single *Walking On A Line* has just been released here but what does the future hold for Pony Pony Run Run? When are you coming back to the UK?

PPRR: The near future is summer festivals in France, Switzerland and Belgium, but we are eager to come back to England and do a proper tour! Soon, I hope.

New single 'Walking On A Line' is out now on 3ME Bureau





BEACH PATROL

*MAKING A BIG IMPACT ON THE UNDERGROUND INDIE SCENE, LA'S LATEST MUSIC EXPORT, **BEST COAST**, HAVE FOUND EARLY SUCCESS ON THE EAST COAST AND ACROSS THE ATLANTIC*

Californian Pitchfork darlings Best Coast are certainly not the only breezy, lo-fi surf pop act to have emerged from sun-kissed US shores in the past couple of years. The music media have gone crazy for this exciting new seaside scene, purveyors of which include Floridians Surfer Blood, along with fellow west coasters The Morning Benders and Wavves, amongst others. But Best Coast's honey-blond frontwoman and solo visible band member Bethany Consentino is only 22, and, a chick. Whilst bassist Bobb Bruno takes a backseat, Bethany serves as the poster-girl for their sun-drenched, laid-back indie pop stylings; like a tattooed twenty-first-century incarnation of one of The Beach Boys' original California girls.

On her blog Bethany puts up lots of pictures of late rapper Tupac Shakur, with whom she has in com-

mon a puritanical adoration for all things west coast (get it?). This is evident in her songs – essentially a series of melodic odes to the Cali lifestyle and her various male-shaped crushes and boyfriends. Pared-down but heartfelt lyrics tell of a young girl preoccupied with boys, falling in and out of love then back in again. All with an angsty fluidity, the ethereal yet nonchalant quality of her sugar-sweet voice and grittily basic production values though, contradict her sentiment, creating a fuzzy, almost sixties-style nostalgia vibe which adds maturity to what might otherwise be overtly straightforward pop songs.

The charming bright yellow cover for the debut album features a picture of Bethany's pet cat Snacks chilling in the California waves on a palm-lined beach at sunset, whilst old-school letters made up of the state map pro-

claim "Best Coast". The message, and Consentino's geographical obsession, could not be clearer, but even sitting in a cramped London office whilst the sky drizzles down outside you can appreciate Best Coast's perfect, sunny simplicity, and like the best dream-pop bands, they have the ability to take you away to another place, where cats sit in the sea at dusk and all anyone cares about is boys, boards and ice-cream. Clichés about idyllic climes, beaches and oceans are abundant and unavoidable when describing music of this ilk, but if the Californian summer could sing, she would sound like Best Coast. Consentino and (we hope) her cat are currently playing festival dates in the States, but here's hoping she will head back to the UK in the autumn – we need some sunny weather. *Debut album 'Crazy For You' is out July 27 on Rough Trade*

DAWES

N O R T H H I L L S



ON TOUR

June 18	Aspen, CO	Belly Up Aspen^	July 18	Camden, NJ	XPoNential Music Festival
June 19	Boulder, CO	Fox Theatre (Dawes headline)	July 21	Baltimore, MD	Ottobar (co-headline with Deer Tick)
June 21	Santa Fe, NM	Santa Fe Brewing Company^	July 22	Easton, MD	The Night Cat
June 22	Tempe, AZ	Clubhouse Music Venue^	July 24	Montauk, NY	Montauk Surf Lodge
June 25	Portland, OR	Wonder Ballroom (supporting Josh Ritter)	July 27	Columbus, OH	Rumba Café
June 27	Seattle, WA	Showbox (supporting Josh Ritter)	July 28	Louisville, KY	WFPK Waterfront Wednesdays (FREE SHOW)
July 02	St. Paul, MN	Taste of Minnesota	July 29	York, PA	Capitol Theatre
July 03	Madison, WI	Rhythm and Booms at The Terrace (FREE SHOW)*	July 31	Newport, RI	Newport Folk Festival
July 04	Des Moines, IA	80/35 Music Festival*	Aug 02	Northampton, MA	The Iron Horse
July 04	Maquoketa, IA	Daytrotter Presents at Codfish Hollow Barn	Aug 05	Grand Rapids, MI	The Intersection
July 08	New York, NY	Hudson River Rocks - Pier 54 (FREE co-headline w/ Phosphorescent)	Aug 06	Cincinnati, OH	Fountain Square (FREE SHOW)
July 10	Los Angeles, CA	Saturdays OFF THE 405 series at the Getty Center	Aug 07	Chicago, IL	Lollapalooza
July 14	Ft. Worth, TX	Casa Manana	Aug 13	Reno, NV	The Underground
July 15	Shreveport, LA	The Collective	Oct 10	Austin, TX	Austin City Limits Festival
July 16	Birmingham, AL	Art on the Rocks			

^ supporting Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros

* co-headline with Justin Townes Earle



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dawestheband.com

ISLE

OF

WORDS
ALEX BRAMMER,
EVA LIU
AND ANNA FELIX

WIGHT

2010

It's hard to imagine that Isle of White Festival was once considered bigger and better than Glastonbury. Now, it seems the legendary festival - that Bob Dylan famously missed Woodstock '69 for - has lost its charm opting for noisy eyesore amusement park rides over tranquil hippy havens.

For us, it all started with a *FAN THE FIRE* DJ set. On Friday night, when the IoW festival was already under way, we were back home in London for a Beck's Viers 'Music Inspires Art' club night at the Amersham Arms. We spun the decks 'til 3.30am for 350 happy partiers, along with Vampire Weekend's Chris Baio who told us to catch them on the main stage at the Isle Of Wight Festival late the next afternoon. We didn't want to be rude, so we said, 'yeah, ok' and the last minute rush to the Isle of Wight began.

The next morning wasn't looking too promising. Having already missed the likes of Juliette Lewis, Marina And The Diamonds, I Blame Coco, Suzie Quatro, Florence And The Machine and Jay-Z, we knew we had some catching up to do. With a sore head from too much Beck's, countless delays and train difficulties we were finally on our way, pulling out of Waterloo at a pathetic 3pm - an hour before the 4 o'clock deadline for collecting our passes.

Arriving backstage at 5pm, an hour late, we were, as predicted, refused entry for failing to get there on time. The next 2 hours were spent ringing and texting pretty much everyone who ever had anything to do with the festival until we finally got hold of someone who was on their way with our passes. Itching to get in, and able to hear the crowds cheering as Vampire Weekend emerged and opened

with *White Sky*, we temporarily went insane from frustrated anticipation, and danced away to *A-Punk* and *Cousins* at the gate to get into the festival spirit. Mid-dance Kate Moss, Jamie Hince and Nick Grimshaw wandered straight past and as we watched them walk through the festival gate, our saviour finally arrived with a handful of bright pink VIP passes. Once fastened tightly on our wrists we ran down the road leading into the festival like kids entering Disneyland, just as Vampire played our favourite song (and their last), *Walcott*.

Wandering briefly through the VIP area and seeing various familiar faces, probably from *T4* or *Hollyoaks*, we had to cross over to the other side of the festival to set up camp. This is when it came to our full realisation that the crowd were not what we expected from a festival with this kind of line-up. It was, to be blunt, a chav-fest, dominated by kids in football strips, girls in bikinis who seemed more bothered and excited about the football and hair-straightening tents (yep) than The Strokes, who were headlining a festival for the first time in 4 years.

While many reviews praise IoW for being unpretentious and down to earth, it quickly became apparent the festival was now going the other way. Sure, we're as interested in the World Cup as much as the next man, but we certainly didn't fancy spending a sunny Saturday at a music festival watching it, drinking White Lightning and wrapped in a St. Georges cross flag-turned-cape. Sadly, for a large proportion of the festival crowd, their experience revolved around precisely that, with the occasional act on the main stage like Pink or The Saturdays

attracting their attention for a couple of hours. We witnessed 2 fights in as many headlining acts, specifically The Strokes and Paul McCartney. When fights break out during a heartfelt, nostalgic headlining set of a legendary one-time Beatle, you know there's a problem.

On top of that it just seemed like one massive cheesy funfair, with only two stages, and not really much else to offer on the side except obnoxious, noisy, atmosphere-killing amusement park rides and greasy fast food stands. The layout was pretty much one straight line, meaning it took ages to get from one side of the festival to the other, and you had to walk through about three separate amusement parks between stages. That meant everywhere we went we were dominated by hardcore dance and trance club music, overpowering the sound while around the stages. Someone even thought to put a ride directly in front of the main stage so all the fans at the back half of the crowd were forced to hear the monotonous drawl of a 90's techno song on repeat rather than actually enjoy what's going on in front of them.

It wasn't all doom and gloom, however, one thing the festival did have going for it was an amazing line-up and, after all, that is what we were there for. After we set up camp, we headed straight over to our first act for the weekend; Blondie. Front woman Debbie Harry may be getting on a bit but she was still her stunning and classy self with a captivating performance. The crowd were loving it, and loving her, as she roared through classics *Atomic*, *Heart Of Glass*, *Rapture* and personal favourite *Hanging On The Telephone*. Frustratingly we could hear the heavy dance beats coming from the ferris wheel near the main stage through the entire set.

As soon as Blondie wrapped up it was time to make our way closer to the front to position ourselves for The Strokes. A couple of our group headed to the VIP area while the rest charged

The layout was pretty much one straight line, [...] it took ages to get from one side of the festival to the other and you had to walk through about 3 separate amusement parks between stages.

forward to get as close as possible to Casablanca et al. The main stage was in good view and the sound was, in fairness, very good for a festival, certainly a lot better than neighbour Bestival who decided to put their main stage at the top of a hill last year.

By the time The Strokes hit the stage for their first festival in 4 years, the crowd was at fever-pitch, and for the first time I felt like I was at a music event. Julian, Fab, Nick, Nikolai and Albert walked on to *We Will Rock You* before kicking things off with *New York City Cops*. Proceeding to rip through their back catalogue of classic hits, barely pausing for breath, they were as tight as they were four years ago, and Julian surprisingly coherent. Whilst they played tracks from all three of their studio albums, it was *Hard To Explain* and *Someday* that were the most well received, bringing back nostalgic memories from Strokes days of old. Another *Is This It* track, set closer *Take It Or Leave It*, proved to be the highlight with the New York five-piece walking off to rapturous applause. They have been greatly missed.

After the set, everyone was buzzing, chanting Strokes lyrics and ready for a party of some kind. Only problem was that we were all immediately forced to leave, with the entire crowd ushered out of the festival like teenagers at an underage disco. There wasn't even a hint of an after-party or all-night dance tent which is surely the standard festival thing. Our only option was to gatecrash a backstage VIP party at a pub next to the Premier Inn Hotel. We quietly snook in the back entrance, but after taking a look around and realising that the only people there were others trying to get a glimpse of festival celebrities, we had a couple of drinks, charged our phones and trekked all the way back to our tents on the other side of the festival.

Sunday brought a day of great weather and the prospect of some great bands. We caught

two stellar shows from Friendly Fires and Editors on the main stage but it was The Big Pink who proved to be our highlight from Sunday afternoon.

Playing over at The Big Top with their big (pink) amps, the four-piece performed tracks featured on their debut album, *A Brief History Of Love*. Lead singer Robbie Furze looked truly in his element but drummer/backing singer/all-round sex pot Akiko 'Keex' Matsuura stole the show when she took to the stage adorning a hot (definitely not big) pink ice-skating leotard. At least that's what we think it was. After a tidy set the east London punk rockers finished with a slowed down cover of Beyonce's *Sweet Dreams* and fan favourite *Dominoes* before Keex stood up and threw her drumsticks into the crowd.

From The Big Pink to a more standard-sized Pink on the main stage, for whom, let's face it, we were only there for to get a good position for Paul McCartney. Her impressive mid-air acrobatics over the audience with accompanying crane and harness made having to endure listening to her songs almost worthwhile; top marks to her for talent of the non-musical variety.

But we were only there for one thing. And when the sun went down and Paul McCartney took to the stage for Sunday evening's headlining slot the crowd naturally went wild. It was the ultimate nostalgic performance as the giant screens flashed shots of old Beatles memorabilia while Macca gave tributes to buddies John, George and Jimi Hendrix.

Before the show I've scoffed at people who rave about Paul McCartney, as let's face it, everyone's favourite Beatle is George, but I was completely converted by the end. I don't know if it was the balmy June evening

on the Isle of Wight or the cheap Vodka, but far from being cheesy, Macca and his band put on a great show. *Live And Let Die* and it's huge fireworks display that basically droned out the music was undoubtedly a highlight,

but it was *Hey Jude* that predictably brought the best crowd reception, with Paul orchestrating an acapella recital of the closing vocal hook for what seemed like hours. In total Paul played 22 Beatles songs and was on for well over two hours; it wasn't until we looked

back that we realised how lucky we had been to get so close to the stage, it seemed like everyone on the Isle of Wight had turned out to see him.

The set, which we will no doubt be telling our grandchildren about, left us all in high enough spirits to squeeze one more act in so we raced over to the Big Top to catch the last half of James - just in time for their classic song *Getting Away With It*. The band ended with favourite *Laid* but, despite a solid set, the crowd were raring for more - probably with the knowledge that there was nothing for them to do once the show was over. Rowdy cheers for an encore were ignored before the disappointed fans were directed back to their tents like good little festival children.

Islle of Wight Festival was a juxtaposition. We enjoyed some amazing acts that we wouldn't have got anywhere near as close to the front for at other gigs but the atmosphere throughout the rest of the festival was non-existent. Come to think of it, the reason we got so close to the front was probably because a large section of the crowd didn't seem to be that fussed about the music. So for that, we should probably be grateful.

Before the show I've scoffed at people who rave about Paul McCartney, as let's face it, everyone's favourite Beatle is George...

THE BIG PINK DRUMMER AIKKO 'KEEX' MATSUURA ALMOST STOLE THE SHOW FROM HEADLINERS THE STROKES AND PAUL MCCARTNEY



LISSIE 'CATCHING A TIGER'

RELEASED OUT NOW



Produced by the legendary Jacquire King, *Catching A Tiger* is Lissie's eagerly anticipated folk-rock debut, though while bursting onto the scene just recently, she started making a name for herself some while ago with songs on TV shows *The O.C.*, *Veronica Mars* and *House*. Lissie even opened for Lenny Kravitz on his *Love Revolution* tour back in 2008.

Quickly snapped up by Sony,

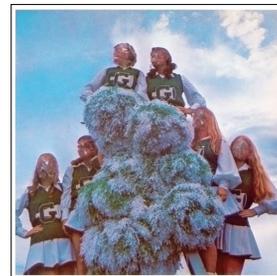
on first listen you can see why. Playing classic-sounding, country tinged folk-rock pop songs, Lissie has that wider appeal that'll see *Catching A Tiger* played non-stop in Starbucks and plugging any gap going on commercial radio, that's not without merit though. While her debut feels a little too rounded; missing the rough edges and intimate quirks you grow to love from more indie artists, the major label polish is there for all to see.

This isn't the finished product from Lissie yet, but she'll draw you in if you give her a chance, and all the ingredients are there for a mesmerising second album and almighty career ahead of her.

★★★★★

SLEIGH BELLS 'TREATS'

RELEASED OUT NOW



Rumbling, wobbling deep bass and two-step beats will have Sleigh Bells labelled as dub-step lite, but this album is more than that. They sound like *The Kills* and *Crystal Castles* tripping with *Diplo* and *Rusko*, and it's

an unusual combination that pays dividends right from the start.

Tracks such as *Tell 'Em* and *A/B Machine* are huge, noisy and fun whilst *Rill Rill* is a welcome break from all the drone, and showcases Alexis Krauss' voice. For such a brutal LP, it's a very pretty tune. Occasionally you get the feeling that a desire for distortion and white noise has got the better of the band; *Crown On The Ground* sounds like a good track that has been mastered badly.

The criticism of dub-step is that it's monotonous and reliant on the novelty of the bass wobble but Sleigh Bells take the two-step beat and run with it. After all it's the shiny ten a penny, blog-friendly 'club-step' tracks that are devaluing the genre, not innovative releases like *Treats*.

★★★★★

★★★★★



O. CHILDREN 'O. CHILDREN'

RELEASED JULY 12

The post-Horror, post-White Lies revolution begins; O. Children sound like a Shoreditch mix of the two, with deep vocals, pounding guitar and a forever unrelenting beat. If it all sounds for show, well, watch a couple of O. Children's videos and you can tell that it is, but somehow it still works. O. Children pull it off, they have a swagger that's not too prevalent to annoy but means the '80s glam electro touch suits the modern day.

There are a couple of tracks on O. Children's self-titled debut that aren't so successful, but on the most part it's full of invention and endeavour. Lead single *Ruins* has garnered a decent amount of airplay already on the radio but get ready to hear a lot more of them.

★★★★★

KELE 'THE BOXER'

RELEASED OUT NOW



Bloc Party frontman Kele Okereke takes a dance turn as he steps away from the indie rock table, at least for the time being. There have been inclinations to his future direction though for some time. Moments on Bloc Party's second album *Something For The Weekend* and predominantly on *Intimacy*, there were showcases for Kele's new electro leanings, if anything the latter is a guitar riff-based dance LP, but given the preconceptions about Bloc Party, was heard by most as an indie offering.

Unsurprisingly *The Boxer* feels like a Bloc Party album, although under his

new moniker, you are free to judge it for what it is, and it certainly sounds different. The guitars are gone, to be replaced by synths and electronic effects, and the result is a very anthemic record, something that once you get to know, will be a favourite in clubs and dancefloors across the country.

There are elements of garage and house, an influence Kele has explained goes back to his music tastes while growing up. From *Rise* to *The Other Side* and single *Tenderoni*, there are highlights you'll come back to time and again. *The Boxer* is an aggressive LP that showcases Kele's penchant to experiment and explore, it could flow better but it releases a side of his music that was perhaps held back during Bloc Party, and he's done himself proud once again.

★★★★★

PULLED APART BY HORSES 'PULLED APART BY HORSES'

RELEASED OUT NOW



Pulled Apart By Horses certainly know how to put on a good show, whether you like their music or not. Live, they cause (harmless) riots in the crowd, have lost teeth in melees on stage and perform with so much energy you can't help but watch on with a strange admiration, though most music fans might be fearful of getting involved themselves.

The problem for wild live performers is always how to translate their exuberance into a studio album, although pleasingly PULLED APART BY HORSES have instilled their every essence in the recorded tracks. From *Yeah Buddy* to *My Ghost Train*, this debut LP is a chaotic ride, heavy on the ears and will certainly please seasoned fans, but should be a callback to the organised mayhem of Queens Of



M.I.A. 'MAYA'

RELEASED JULY 12

Already roughing up public opinion with the fantastic video for *Born Free*, M.I.A. returns to the scene with $\wedge\wedge\wedge Y\wedge$ (or *Maya* as we'll call it for ease), and one of biggest album releases of 2010 to date. Produced along the way by the superstar team of Diplo, Rusko, Blaqstarr, Switch and M.I.A. herself, *Maya* is already shaping up to be something special without even pressing play.

Shifting away a little from the pop hooks that have served her well to date, on *Maya*, M.I.A. takes on a more distorted electro-grunge sound. The lyrics are as powerful and divisive as ever but what backs it up certainly isn't as entertaining, and with a dancier edge, it's much harder to get into as well.

At times a little grating, but then M.I.A. was never the perfect artist for a relaxing Sunday afternoon, *Maya* has its moments, but you feel she should have spent a little more time culturing the sound instead of using raw noise.

★★★★★

The Stone Age back in their early years, something gets lost along the way, and it's a crucial difference that sees this offering come up short.

Pulled Apart By Horses is loud, brash and abrasive, all certainly not a bad thing to instil on a record, but when the make-up of the songs gets mostly forgotten along the way, that's where they fall down.

★★★★★



MYSTERY JETS 'SEROTONIN'

RELEASED JULY 5

Mystery Jets' amazing 2008 second album *Twenty One* was just the burst they needed after a compelling, if flawed, debut. Quickly scaling the indie hierarchy, they now sit under a cloud of expectation, with *Serotonin* being the album set to tip them into full-scale stars.

Where *Twenty One* harked to light '80s electro, *Serotonin* moves a little closer to their indie rock roots. Still they carefully craft harmonies and choruses a-plenty, but there's more guitar in there, while retaining that feeling of the unbridled passion and fun.

Serotonin is a light-hearted, joyful pop album that leaves a smile on your face, while a darker turn to some of the lyrics means it's anything but vapid. Don't miss opener *Alice Springs*, title track *Serotonin* and the somewhat epic closer *Lorna Doone*, that prove even though there are a couple of stale fillers along the way, the boys' invention wins out, and their latest is a fine compliment to their discography, if not quite the best they've even produced.

★★★★★

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB 'FLAWS'

RELEASED JULY 12



Not a year since the release of debut *I Had The Blues But I Shook Them Loose*, Bombay

Bicycle Club are back for more with acoustic follow-up *Flaws*. Penned largely by frontman Jack Streadman, the album also features a couple of cover tracks and overall a very different feel to the album that won them so many fans.

Flaws is a much more set-

ttled down affair than the band's debut; gone are the sweeping hooks and anthemic touches, this is much slower, more reserved, and well, as I said before, acoustic offering.

These boys are still young, and there's a lot more to come from them yet, but *Flaws* is a bold move from Bombay Bicycle Club so soon after their feverish first album. It's not what you'll expect given *I Had The Blues But I Shook Them Loose*, but when you're in a different mood, it might be just what you're after, and as it's so intricately put together there's a lot to get out of it too.

★★★★★

FILM



22 BULLETS

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 3 (UK) TBC (USA)

22 Bullets (or *L'Immortel* as it is also known) is the upcoming French film helmed by (and co-starring) French actor-director Richard Berry. Also featuring Jean Reno, it marks the third collaboration between the veteran French actor and Luc Besson (though Besson here only serves as producer).

Reno plays Charly Mattei, an ex-gangster gone straight but some three years after his 'retirement', he is shot twenty-two times and left for dead. The film then plays out as a revenge thriller, with Mattei searching for the man who tried – and somehow failed – to have him killed.

Both Reno and Besson will be hoping for success with *22 Bullets*; Reno has not starred in an acclaimed film for some years and Besson's recent career as a producer has been up and down at best; the likes of *Hitman* and *The Transporter 3* standing out as blemishes on a period that also includes 2006's fantastic *Tell No One*. *22 Bullets* has potential – Reno is always a charismatic screen presence, and his heavily scarred physique here will surely make for interesting viewing – so hopefully the film will live up to the pedigree of the people involved.

THOR

RELEASED MAY 6 2011 (USA) MAY 20 2011 (UK)



All blockbusters in development have the producers shaking in their boots. No one wants a *Waterworld*-style disaster on their hands, and the comic book movie world is now so saturated that studios have to worry about competition not just from the rest of Hollywood (which tough enough as it is) but from other comic book releases too. They know that only some franchises will take off (*Batman*, *Iron Man*) whilst others (*The Punisher*, *Catwoman*) will flounder, although you can somewhat tell in advance.

Thor scored points against its competitors when it began to secure an interesting cast; primarily Natalie Portman and Anthony Hopkins as support for up and coming star Chris Hemsworth. Perhaps the most exciting news though was that Kenneth Branagh had been attached to direct. As if that wasn't enough, Idris Elba (most recently of *The Losers*, but best known for *The Wire*) is playing Heimdall.

Thor is based on the Marvel comic of the same name and follows the story of the titular God, whose arrogance causes an ancient war to be rekindled, sentenced to live amongst mortals as his punishment. Overall things look surprisingly promising for this adaptation and Marvel will be hoping their Norse hero can conjure up similar box office figures to those recently posted by *Iron Man*, and that this will be the start of yet another franchise.

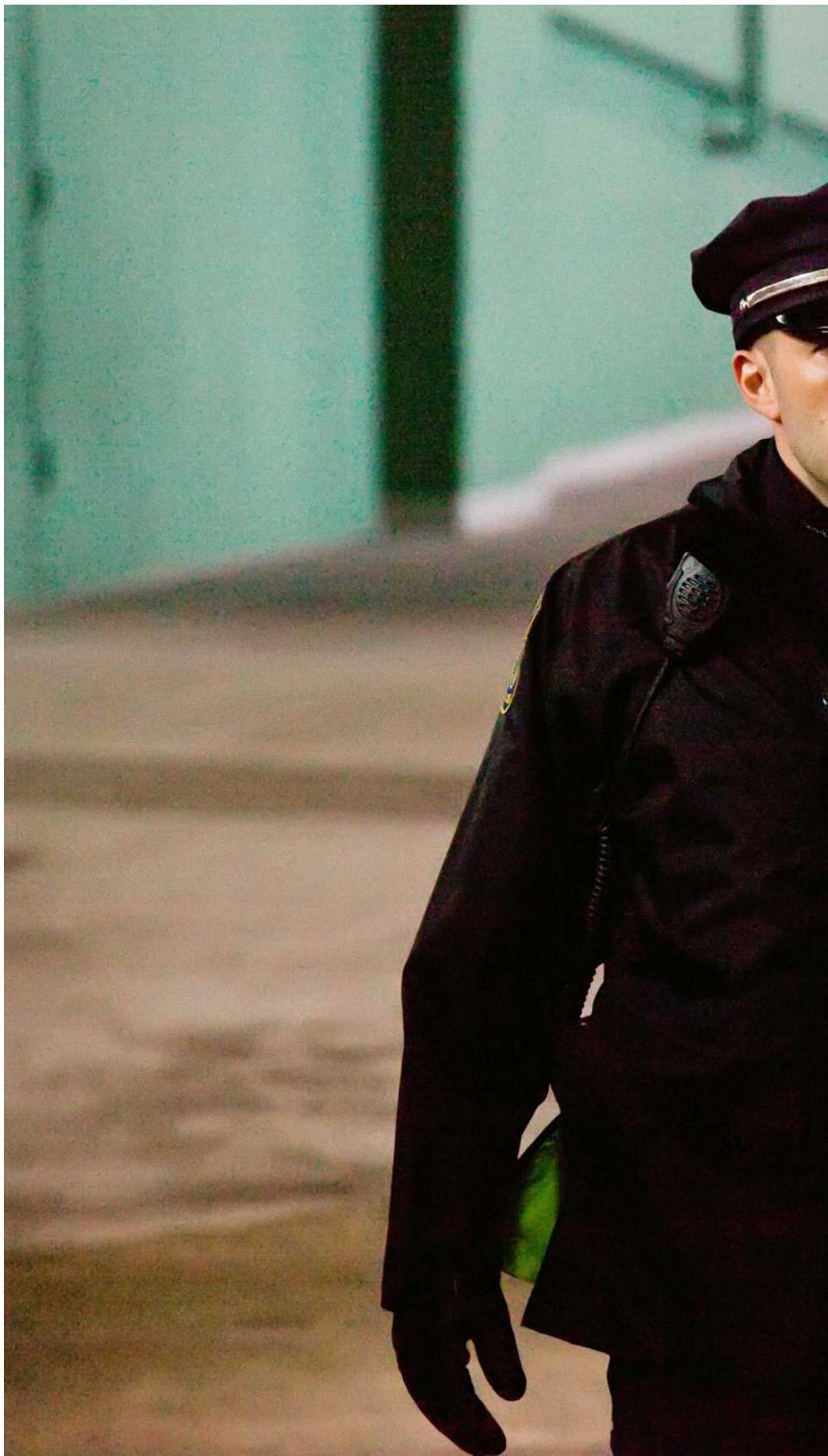
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ON STRANGER TIDES

RELEASED MAY 20 2011 (USA) TBC (UK)

Ah, the whiff of a franchise that may just be outstaying its welcome. The announcement of *Pirates 4* (as we shall call it to save space) came as a sort of surprise that managed to surprise no one at all. Riding the wave of the third film's box office haul (which was larger than the wave of critical appraisal), *Pirates 4* is at least something of a departure and should take the plot down a new vein.

The many-tiered storyline that came to a close in the third film is done with, and the new film sees Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) teaming up with Captain Barbosa (Geoffrey Rush) on a quest to find the Fountain of Youth. As much as this film may feel superfluous to many, those involved have at least been sensible enough to begin a new storyline and the pair up two of the strongest aspects of the past films.

Perhaps we will be pleasantly surprised come summer 2011, or at least a bit more surprised than when the film was first announced. It's easy to be cynical, but the film is not without hope. There's enough pirate love out there to ensure audiences will flock to it (it will almost certainly be an unmitigated success, financially) and hopefully the elements that made the original films enjoyable will be retained: namely a sense of playfulness and good old fashioned adventure.





THE TOWN

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 10 (USA) TBC (UK)

Ben Affleck's career seemed to be struggling for breath a few years ago, but to his credit the actor came back with an acclaimed performance in 2006's *Hollywoodland*. He then followed it up by impressing behind the camera, rather than in front of it, when he directed his brother Casey in *Gone Baby Gone*. It seems only natural then that, having been the recipient of plaudits for acting and directing, Affleck should attempt to combine the two.

That is what he will be doing in *The Town*, a crime drama based on Chuck Hogan's novel *Prince Of Thieves*. Affleck stars as Doug MacRay, a career criminal leading a group on the run from the FBI. Support comes from Jon Hamm (of *Mad Men* fame) and Jeremy Renner, fresh from the success of *The Hurt Locker*, and carrying with him an Academy Award nomination.

It will be interesting to see if Affleck's second directorial effort can mirror the success of his first, also an adaptation of a novel, and whether his performance on-screen can match his performance off it. Time will tell, but *The Town* will certainly attract the critical eye when it is released later this year.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

RELEASED DECEMBER 22 (USA) TBC (UK)

The trailer for Rob Letterman's reimagining of *Gulliver's Travels* begins with Jack Black ('Black is the new big', apparently) playing with *Star Wars* figures and doing voiceovers. It then proceeds to outline his life: tired of his boring job and lack of a love life, he pretends to be a travel writer and gets sent to the Bermuda Triangle. On his way he is shipwrecked in Lilliput, and so the classic, familiar tale begins in earnest.

Jonathan Swift's novel of the same name was a bitingly satirical, often hilariously funny tale, in other words, it is going to be difficult to live up to. Jack Black can be very funny, and whilst the trailer doesn't inspire a huge amount of confidence in this update, judgement should be reserved until the final product is out there.

That said, it is difficult to imagine this modernised story capturing the charm or wit of the source material. The cast, aside from Black and Jason Segel, has a particularly British feel to it, with Billy Connolly, Catherine Tate and Emily Blunt also starring. Hopefully the mediocre trailer belies a much better film hidden underneath.

COWBOYS & ALIENS

RELEASED JULY 20 2011 (USA) TBC (UK)

As high concept as the title makes it sound, *Cowboys & Aliens* is based on the 2006 comic book series created by Scott Mitchell Rosenberg. Here's the setup; aliens land in Arizona in the 1800s and plan to enslave humanity, however they meet a stiff resistance from the cowboys and Apache.

The plot is ridiculous and potentially a lot of fun, but there are other reasons why *Cowboys & Aliens* just might end up being pretty good. For starters, the cast. Director Jon Favreau (most recently of the *Iron Man* films) will be overseeing, amongst others, Daniel Craig, Harrison Ford and Sam Rockwell, who recently worked with Favreau on *Iron Man 2*.

The script has been penned by long time collaborators Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci (who together wrote *Star Trek* and *Transformers* amongst others) along with Damon Lindelof, who co-created and frequently wrote for the recently departed TV epic *Lost*. So there's pedigree here. A great cast and a promising writing team will hopefully put together a film that makes use of its high concept, rather than being buried under it.



3-D: REVOLUTION, EVOLUTION OR DEVOLUTION

WORDS MARTIN ROBERTS

When confronted with the excesses of modern cinema it's hard to imagine that the first 'special effects' committed to film were the kinds of things that today are not even considered to be in the field. We're talking about editing, fast and slow motion, dissolves; run of the mill techniques that are now so commonplace we hardly notice them. In fact, when French filmmaker Georges Melies accidentally discovered the stop-trick in the late nineteenth century (in which the simple switching on and off of the camera appears to remove objects from existence or replace them with others) he could hardly have imagined where it would lead.

An important thing to remember in the advent of new techniques (and the potential they bring) is that cinema, after all, is an art form before it is a showcase. Of course, it can simultaneously be both; pioneering new cinematic techniques alongside, but not in preference to, exceptional filmmaking, can lead to classics too, as history has proven time and again. After Georges Melies discovered, or rather stumbled upon, the stop-trick technique, he went on to make a series of shorts specifically designed to show off his new camera control and catch audiences by surprise. And it worked, for a time. This, of course, is an early example of the gestation periods that

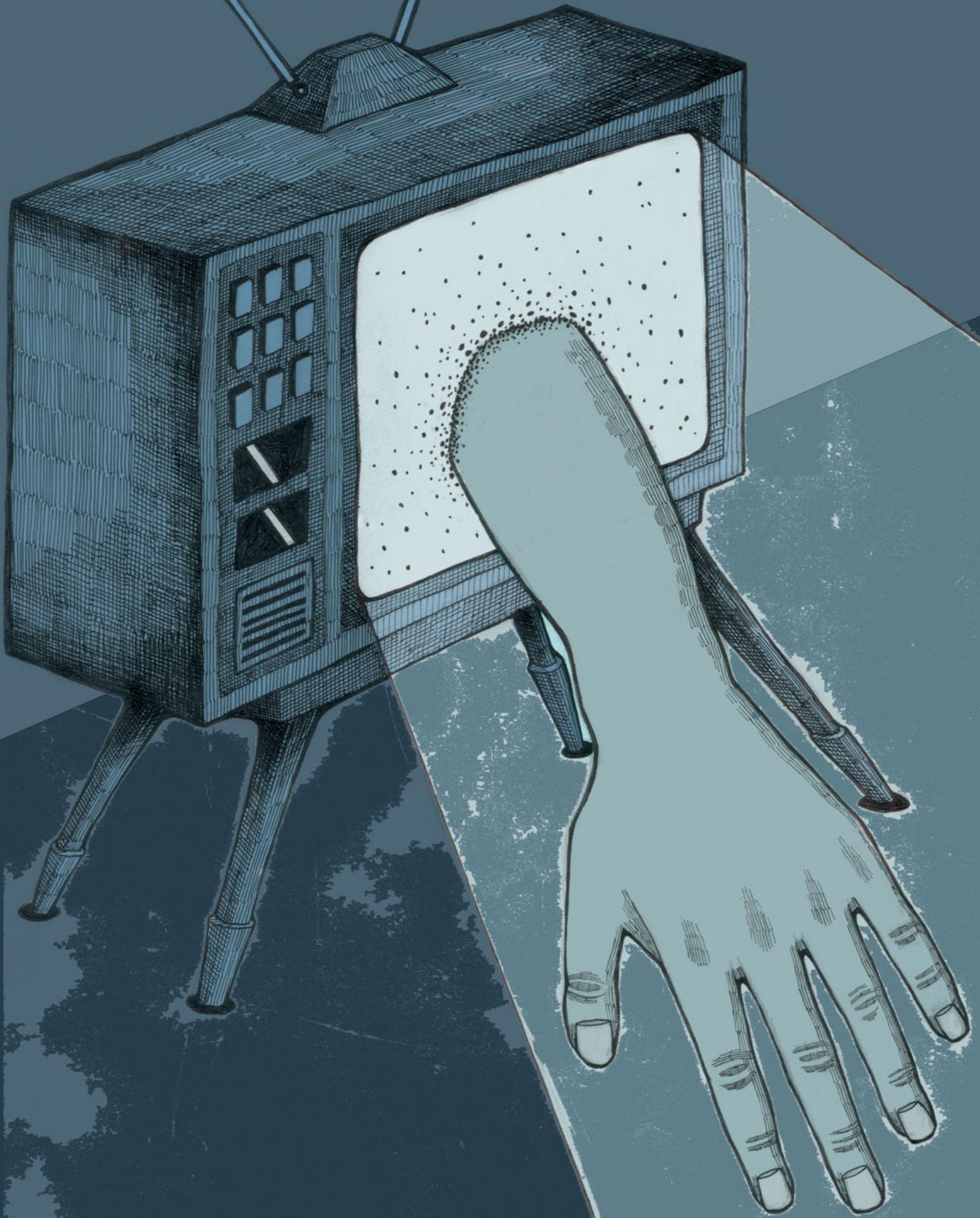
most new techniques would have to go through before becoming a genuine asset to filmmaking; that is, they must become a novelty before they can be intelligently implemented. And there's no more pressing example than the ebbing tide of 3-D filmmaking, which has gone in and out of fashion but now seems here to stay. This is not a rule, granted, but it is a repeating pattern, and one that extends beyond the fundamental techniques themselves. As filmmaking progresses there will naturally be fewer revolutionary inventions and more evolutionary ones; the effect this has on cinema is no less prevalent. The phrase 'less is more' is often unfortunately forgotten.

But what of 3-D? First of all, let us banish the assumption that 3-D is anything new. Indeed, 3-D films date back to the beginning of the twentieth century and, as such, what we are currently experiencing is simply the latest wave. Technology, in recent times, has finally caught up with filmmakers' imaginations; James Cameron's *Avatar* is undoubtedly the most famous and lucrative example of this.

Avatar is the film that was meant to change everything, the film that would reinvent the way we look at 3-D and advance special effects to the next level. It certainly achieved the latter, but the debate as to whether anything has really changed as a result of *Ava-*

tar's monumental success goes on. One thing has changed, and that is that a lot more films are being filmed in 3-D or, rather cynically, retrofitted into it. This latest issue is perhaps the most distracting, and certainly the most overtly money-grabbing, culture that 3-D has created so far. It is one thing to jump on the 3-D bandwagon and make your film in 3-D, it's quite another to retrofit a film shot in 2-D into 3-D and pass it off as the same thing. What's even worse is the worryingly large amount of recently announced '3-D remakes' that seem destined to head our way in the coming months and years. Do we not suffer enough remakes as it is?

Does anybody need to see *Titanic* retrofitted into 3-D? How about *300*? Or the *Star Wars* films? The answer is no, and the perfect case study would be *Toy Story 2*. *Toy Story 2* differs from *Avatar* in many ways, but in one crucial one: it existed before without 3-D. Say what you want about *Avatar*, but at least it was filmed in a particular way; the re-release of *Toy Story 2* in 3-D was the first time that 3-D actually annoyed me, as opposed to me simply being able to ignore it. It was released to a) make money, and b) drum up the hype for the recently released *Toy Story 3(D)*. That's it. We already know that



Toy Story 2 is a good film, but selling it as a 3-D product is frankly a crock. The 3-D is virtually indistinguishable from the original film, bar some slight hints, and overall it suffers from the infamous 30% colour loss currently associated with all 3-D films. This feeling of being sold short is a definitive result of the retrofitting process; *Coraline*, for example, also benefitted nil from its third dimension, but it didn't matter so much because we weren't being convinced to pay to see it again.

Coraline is an interesting case in itself. The film stands out as one of the best 3-D releases I have seen, but none of the good qualities I remember about the film were down to the 3-D. This isn't just a cynical quip at 3-D film-making, it's simply the truth. The great animation, the lovable characters and the haunting art design were all there anyway, regardless of the 3-D. BBC critic Mark Kermode succinctly suggested that *Avatar* was "the defining moment in the argument about 3-D" because it displayed what 3-D could do; essentially not that much, because the film's good points (ala *Coraline*) held up without it. At present, it's difficult to disagree with him.

There is, of course, the long-running suggestion that 3-D is one big anti-piracy tool. And not only that, but a cash cow as well. 3-D films are more expensive to go and see; anyone who has balked at the extra cost of tickets and the irritation of having to pay for new 3-D glasses can attest to that, but the film industry must be chuckling to itself at present because box office gains of 3-D films have generally been good. *Avatar* aside, films such as *How To Train Your Dragon* and *Clash Of The Titans* have

made big bucks, whilst Tim Burton's most successful film to date (and – who would have predicted this? – the fifth highest grossing movie of all time) *Alice In Wonderland* was a massive box office hit. As long as people are willing to pay the inflated prices, the burgeoning market for 3-D films will only continue to grow. And as for anti-piracy, it's not difficult to see why Hollywood (and production companies in general) would want to protect their work, but somebody will always figure out a new way to get hold of this stuff early, 3-D or not.

If all this sounds somewhat negative, then perhaps it is because 3-D, in my eyes at least, has yet to prove itself. The new wave of 3-D reflects multiple things including technological advances and more industry based factors such as piracy and pricing. We will undoubtedly reach a point sometime soon when 3-D films – as with Georges Melies' stop-trick shorts – will have to prove themselves worthy of a continued place in the cinematic canon. 3-D, admittedly, is starting to look less like a fad (as it has been in the past) and more like a development that is likely to stick around. The artistic credentials of 3-D are as yet unproven but not entirely without promise. Perhaps we will see 3-D become ingrained into film over time, so that in the end it will become as fundamental and as commonplace as editing.

Perhaps the litmus test will come when 3-D begins to enter as yet unvisited territory. 3-D, at present, is a tool for spectacle. This is difficult to argue against. The true limitations of 3-D (or lack of) will be revealed when directors begin to use it in a broader range of genres.

At present, it is difficult to see how the addition of 3-D would benefit, for example, Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* or Sam Mendes' *American Beauty*. These are just random examples, but if 3-D can weave its way successfully into drama and comedy films, for

instance, then perhaps it can begin to make a claim for being more than a tool for visuals. If 3-D does remain a tool for spectacle, however, we must accept that this is not, by definition, a bad thing. The evolution of special effects over time has contributed to many great filmic moments, and if that is to be the long-standing realm of 3-D, then we should not disregard it. Take something like *Jurassic Park* and you begin to see how spectacle, when backed up by true quality and artistic intent, can produce something special.

3-D is certainly not a revolution. It's far too old for that. Technology has advanced to meet the requirements of filmmakers and its effect on global cinema is, at least for now, an evolution. Whether it is a development that will stand the test of time (3-D has come and gone before, remember) remains to be seen, but the indicators so far suggest that it will. To call 3-D a devolution would be harsh. Although the technology is not entirely new, it has entered a new phase, and as such, it is entirely natural to treat it with trepidation. The rebirth of 3-D has well and truly begun.

3-D films are more expensive to go and see, anyone who has balked at the extra cost of tickets and the irritation of having to pay for new 3-D glasses can attest to that.

It is one thing to jump on the 3-D bandwagon and make your film in 3-D, it's quite another to retrofit a film shot in 2-D into 3-D and pass it off as the same thing.





TOY STORY 3

DIRECTED BY LEE UNKRICH **STARRING** TOM HANKS, TIM ALLEN, JOAN CUSACK, NED BEATTY, DON RICKLES, MICHAEL KEATON, WALLACE SHAWN, JOHN RATZENBERGER & ESTELLE HARRIS

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 19 (UK)

The second sequel to the trend setting series, already widely regarded to have produced two of the best computer animated films ever made, if it were anyone other than Pixar behind *Toy Story 3*, you'd be questioning their motives. And more than a little bit worried about the final product. With the Emeryville studio involved, however, you sense they're going to have something special up their sleeves.

Back to the same family we've grown to know and love in *Toy Story 1* and *2*, *Toy Story 3* picks up several years on, with Andy about to leave home for college. Packing up his stuff, while tidying his room and dividing up storage and trash, his old toys though are mistakenly thrown in the rubbish pile and find themselves on the curb and fearing the worst.

Making a last ditch attempt for freedom, they scrape their way into the recycling pile on the front lawn, and with the group thinking Andy didn't want them any more, bar Woody who saw what actually happen, are happy to be sent off to Sunnyside Daycare. What should be a paradise with kids to play with all day, however, soon turns into a nightmare. Being thrown about the room, shoved up noses and yanked and pulled by manic toddlers during the day, below the surface it's even worse. Ruling over the new recruits with more than a brash hand, one of the elder toys keeps the gang boxed away at night before, when at last convincing the toys Andy never meant to throw them out, Woody sets about breaking them all out. Escaping the daycare centre though, and making the impossible journey back to where they belong, is going to be their hardest challenge yet.

Given that this is Pixar, never mind another *Toy Story* film, anything less than brilliance would have been a disappoint-

ment, and I'm happy to say you won't leave the cinema with anything but a smile on your face.

Toy Story 3 is funny, at times heart-breakingly, and always full of life; I could be wrapped up in the *Toy Story* world for film after film, although this would also be an apt way to round the series off.

As you'd expect from Pixar, the animation is second to none. Compared with *Shrek Forever After* and even some of their own more recent releases, *Toy Story 3* is world ahead of the competition. While it didn't need to boast the water physics of *Finding Nemo* nor the thousands of balloons in *Up*, *Toy Story 3* feels supremely polished and vibrant; from a new sheen to the classic characters to the thousands of individual hairs on cuddly Lotso the bear, somehow keep outdoing themselves in the technology department.

Even with Pixar involved, sadly the pressure of Hollywood though has still got to their films again. Released in 3-D with no benefit to the experience at all, if anything the extra dimension detracts from the film and will certainly take you out of the experience on a couple of occasions. Where possible, search out the film in 2-D.

Hollywood seems to have had another impact too. *Toy Story 3* feels like more of a conventional film compared with the indie touch of their works in the past. This isn't necessarily a problem, but be prepared for a slight tonal change after what you've been used to.

Toy Story 3 is a little more child friendly than Pixar's last couple of outings, but there's still just as much for older viewers. The references and darker side is still there, but may be a little more hidden.

Managing to create real moments of suspense, a hugely powerful emotional sequence towards the end is testament to the relationships we've built up with this bunch of toys. Given Pixar's track record since they released the first *Toy Story* in 1995, and their non-stop brilliance up to this day, it's hard to differentiate between some of their releases in terms of picking out a favourite, but *Toy Story 3* is every bit as good anything they've done. We've got the first classic film of 2010 on our hands.

★★★★★







HEARTBREAKER

DIRECTED BY PASCAL CHAUMEIL **STARRING** ROMAIN DURIS, VANESSA PARADIS, JULIE FERRIER, ANDREW LINCOLN, HELENA NOGUERRA, FRANÇOIS DAMIENS, JACQUES FRANTZ

RELEASED JULY 2 (UK) TBC (USA)

Gathering a lot of buzz on the festival circuit and released to critical acclaim in its native France, from the outside *Heartbreaker* might look like nothing beyond the standard chick-flick fayre, but with a witty and incisive edge, there's a lot more to it than you might expect.

About a three-man team, Alex (Duris), his sister Mélanie (Ferrier), and her husband Marc (Damiens), the threesome offer a quite unique service. Largely hired by unapproving parents, Alex and co. break people up, and they've got a 100% record. Going about their business not with treachery or lies but instead by showing the woman that she can do so much better than her current, half-arsed, partner,

everything has gone swimmingly to date, but the latest assignment is their hardest by far.

With only a week until Juliette (Paradis) marries the straight-laced and well-off Jonathan (Lincoln), Juliette's father (Frantz) makes a last ditch attempt to halt proceedings and brings in Alex and his team. Though Juliette appears to be deeply in love with her fiancé, the one crux that means Alex will turn down jobs, driven by a desperation for the hefty pay check waiting at the end (thanks to a bunch of goons currently on his tail for an unpaid debt), and deeper feelings for his target he has never experienced before, Alex pushes on to break the couple up amidst the glorious surroundings of Monaco and the arrival of Jonathan himself to their hotel.

Hoping to do with chick-flicks what *(500) Days Of Summer* did within the rom-com genre, *Heartbreaker* is a clever film despite an aesthetic that doesn't stray an inch from the expected clichés.

The script is witty, clever and well written and the story does enough to

keep you guessing despite following the tried and tested, and albeit now fairly boring, plotlines. *Heartbreaker* though is genuinely entertaining; there are moments of comedy, sadness, and, unsurprisingly, romance, but they're effectively portrayed and serve to have the impact *Sex And The City's* brigade could only dream of, especially after the most recent film.

Though it can't match the heady heights of the aforementioned *(500) Days Of Summer*, and the plot stutters a little as it preserves the clichéd story twists, *Heartbreaker* has a feeling of fun and energy to it that adds freshness and long-lasting appeal.

Heartbreaker is certainly still aimed at the female audience but it won't be a bore for men too, and differently to how brainlessly entertaining some chick-flicks can be, it has genuine filmic ambition and endeavour to it. This is a clever entry to the chick-flick genre, and even if it does still fail to push the limits of the standard plot, the film manages to keep you guessing, and more importantly, entertained.

★★★★★



MACGRUBER

DIRECTED BY JORMA TACCONE STARRING WILL FORTE, KRISTEN WIIG, RYAN PHILLIPPE, VAL KILMER, POWERS BOOTHE, MAYA RUDOLPH, RHYS COIRO & ANDY MACKENZIE

RELEASED OUT NOW

You might think feature length adaptations of shorts or TV characters don't work as well as their counterparts but there are a fair few exceptions that will push Shane Acker's *9* to the back of your mind. For better or worse, the exciting *Saw* short from James Wan spawned a multi-feature franchise, while *The Evil Dead*, *Bottle Rocket*, *Office Space*, *THX 1138* and most recently *District 9* first found audiences in their relative bitesize chunks.

Not a short of sorts, but a recurring sketch on *Saturday Night Live*, *MacGruber* is the latest to make the jump up to the silver screen. Parodying

the late '80s TV character MacGyver, a super-intelligent secret agent who time and again seemingly got himself out of even the most impossible situations using what you might think were entirely useless, every day objects. *MacGruber* is more of the same, only to the nth degree, and in his film debut he (Forte) attempts to foil the plot of a master villain (Kilmer), and his nemesis, who takes control of a nuclear warhead and kidnaps MacGruber's partner while he's at it. That's pretty much the whole plot, with time on the side filled with funny quirks and set-pieces to keep you interested.

Plot-wise, *MacGruber* is fairly light, but that was probably always to be expected. The script though is funny, if a little all over the place, but there's certainly talent shown by the team behind the camera. The parody elements are used well and don't feel clichéd the way that similar films have fallen down.

Several wrestlers make great cam-

eos towards the start and really the acting the whole cast is entertaining and effortlessly watchable. In the lead role Will Forte is fantastic, and set for much bigger things in the future after similarly great appearances on TV shows *How I Met Your Mother* and *30 Rock*. Kristen Wiig feels a little diluted from her usual charisma, but she's still good as one of MacGruber's sidekicks; the other being a resurgent Ryan Phillippe, who will win you back around if you had been doubting his talents of late, and many have.

Definitely a not classic spy caper parody, the action for instance doesn't go for much beyond competency and the narrative feels like it goes missing at some points, severely losing focus, *MacGruber* though is a lot of fun and certainly very funny. If you're a fan of the *SNL* sketch, you'll like what you see here, though newcomers might be left asking why they bothered to adapt it for the big screen at all.

★★★★★



THE A-TEAM

DIRECTED BY JOE CARNAHAN STARRING LIAM NEESON, BRADLEY COOPER, JESSICA BIEL, QUINTON 'RAMPAGE' JACKSON, SHARLTO COPLEY & PATRICK WILSON

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 30 (UK)

There aren't many TV shows more iconic and with more of a cult following than *The A-Team*. The '80s series ran for five seasons, ending just short of 100 episodes and making the four lead actors legends for life. If anything it's a surprise it's taken Hollywood so long to give the franchise big screen treatment.

Centring around a refresh of the four-man team, mercenaries for hire to carry out numerous all-action missions to both clear their name and fulfil more or less any task dropped at their door, the film goes back to the start as they built up their reputation within the army.

Regarded as the best of the best, it's only so long before someone wants to take the foursome down from their perch. Framed on an unofficial black ops mission, the A-Team, after break-

ing out of jail, must uncover who was behind the plot against them before clearing their name.

You might think the plot is sounding a little light, and you'd be right, there's really not much more to the film than those simple, linear, plot points. As with the TV series, however, that doesn't mean things go quiet in between.

The A-Team is an action film, emphasis on the action. While sometimes the set-pieces feel like action for action's sake, on the whole, director Joe Carnahan does a decent job and a couple of scenes at least will have you on the edge of your seat. With the team at one point 'flying' a tank and earlier capturing a moving truck, though the latter obviously looks like a set, there's an intensity and pace to the action that will bring universal appeal and please fans of the original series with over the top and lavish SFX.

On the whole it is to the filmmakers' credit that the movie captures the spirit and freewheeling attitude of the original series, at least as far as a big studio film ever could. The actors were always going to have an enviable task of living up to some of the most loved characters in entertainment his-

tory, but do they all do well and even Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson as B.A. Baracus won't shame Mr. T's memory. To some surprise Jackson possesses a good amount of charisma, and the MMA fighter is here to stay on the silver screen.

A fun, if brainless, romp that will bring back good memories of the classic TV series, without traipsing all over them, *The A-Team* serves as a nice addition but won't replace past outings just yet. With a wafer thin plot you'll forget about it the second the credits roll and a lack of staying power is certainly an issue that should have been addressed.

Very similar to the recent film *The Losers*, only not as well executed in either action, plot nor comedy, the two share similar elements, plot points and tone, but it's the comic book adapted film that I'll be more looking forward to revisit.

No doubt being groomed as a trilogy, on this showing that won't be a terrible move, but they'll have to redouble their efforts to keep fans happy a second time around; *The A-Team* is a brainless action film, don't expect anything more or less, and that is both its success and undoubted failings.

★★★★★



SPLICE

DIRECTED BY VINCENZO NATALI **STARRING** ADRIEN BRODY, SARAH POLLEY, DELPHINE CHANÉAC, BRANDON MCGIBBON, SIMONA MAICANESCU, DAVID HEWLETT & ABIGAIL CHU

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 23 (UK)

Billed largely as a straight-up monster movie but while there's a humanoid creature involved, it couldn't be any further from a 2010 *Godzilla*.

Following two genetic scientists, Clive (Brody) and Elsa (Polley), working on creating a new lifeform to help synthesise life-saving proteins, their cutting edge experiments have led them to the top of their game and within reach of real medical history. Clive and Elsa have though hit a turning point. With their investors demanding they take their research into sustainably creating a saleable product, it means stopping work on splicing genetics, something they're not yet ready to give up.

With the opportunity to combine

animal and human DNA, against the wishes of their superiors they push ahead, forgoing the ethical concerns as development of the ensuing embryo occurs much faster than they had anticipated. When the resulting creature is birthed, they must deal with the consequences and look after their part-human new species and the problems that come along with it.

One half a great movie, unfortunately *Splice* struggles when it develops beyond the genetic research side of the plot. After the creature, named Dren, is born and starts to grow up, it moves into dark areas it doesn't quite have the aptitude or confidence to handle. *Splice* had the opportunity to raise questions about the ethics of experimenting with human DNA and explore the effect science is, and will continue to have, on social responsibility. Sadly it doesn't really capitalise on the opportunities it creates.

Given a wide release in the States, however, distributors Warner Bros. and the filmmakers that worked behind the camera deserve great praise for their ambition and faith in a film

that steps outside of the Hollywood comfort zone, even if the product doesn't have the execution to match.

In particular *Splice* struggles towards the end and with the narrative stuttering it starts to drag on and it's likely you'll grow bored in the closing scenes despite the new horror turn it takes. A couple of chase sequences do though create a feeling of uncomfortability you'll struggle to find elsewhere.

If anything it is co-writer/director Vincenzo Natali that comes out of *Splice* with the biggest gain, more so than the film itself. Natali does great things with a relatively small budget of \$30m and while he's not quite made his masterpiece yet, his filmmaking talents and the potential of his imagination are there for all to see. Next he moves onto cult classic *Neuromancer* which could be his real breakthrough.

Splice will shock, tease and excite on the whole, and despite boredom creeping in as the closing credits draw near, it will stay with you for a while after you walk out of the theatre, and that's certainly not a bad thing.

★★★★★

SHREK FOREVER AFTER

DIRECTED BY MIKE MITCHELL STARRING MIKE MYERS, EDDIE MURPHY, CAMERON DIAZ, ANTONIO BANDERAS, JULIE ANDREWS & WALT DOHM

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 2 (UK)

After a very forgettable third outing, and a lazy sequel for that matter too, we're at a sad state of affairs in the film industry when projects are green lit purely on their money-making potential, with cinematic integrity and any scrap of imagination having run out some time ago. *Shrek Forever After* is a prime example.

With the titular green ogre struggling to cope with the stresses of life, three kids demanding every second of his attention, tourists at his door and townsfolk asking for autographs and him to roar on cue, it's all getting a little too much for Shrek (Myers). Bumping into magic deal-maker Rumpelstiltskin (Dohm) after storming out of his own birthday party, though somewhat suspicious he accepts the offer of a day back being a normal ogre, feared by all and able to enjoy life's simple, quieter pleasures. But in return, Rumpelstiltskin wants a day from Shrek's childhood. Rumpelstiltskin expectedly has a wicked vein to his thoughts, and takes away the day Shrek was born, and with the modern world in chaos, Rumpelstiltskin is the king as Shrek hadn't shared the true love's kiss with part-ogre Fiona, as lived years back in *Shrek 1*. And now he must to win her over all over again and return parity to his magical homeland.

Starting to outstay his wel-

come in the second film, never mind the third and now fourth, *Shrek Forever After* feels entirely lazy and tired. While the first was an interesting take on classic fairy tales, it all feels thoroughly aged by now and this fourth is a mere a rehash of the past three outings.

While the animation is adequate; bright and colourful enough if nothing extraordinary, and the vocal acting ample without winning any awards, there's really nothing to make *Shrek Forever After* demand your attention, or justify the time, effort and money that went into making it.

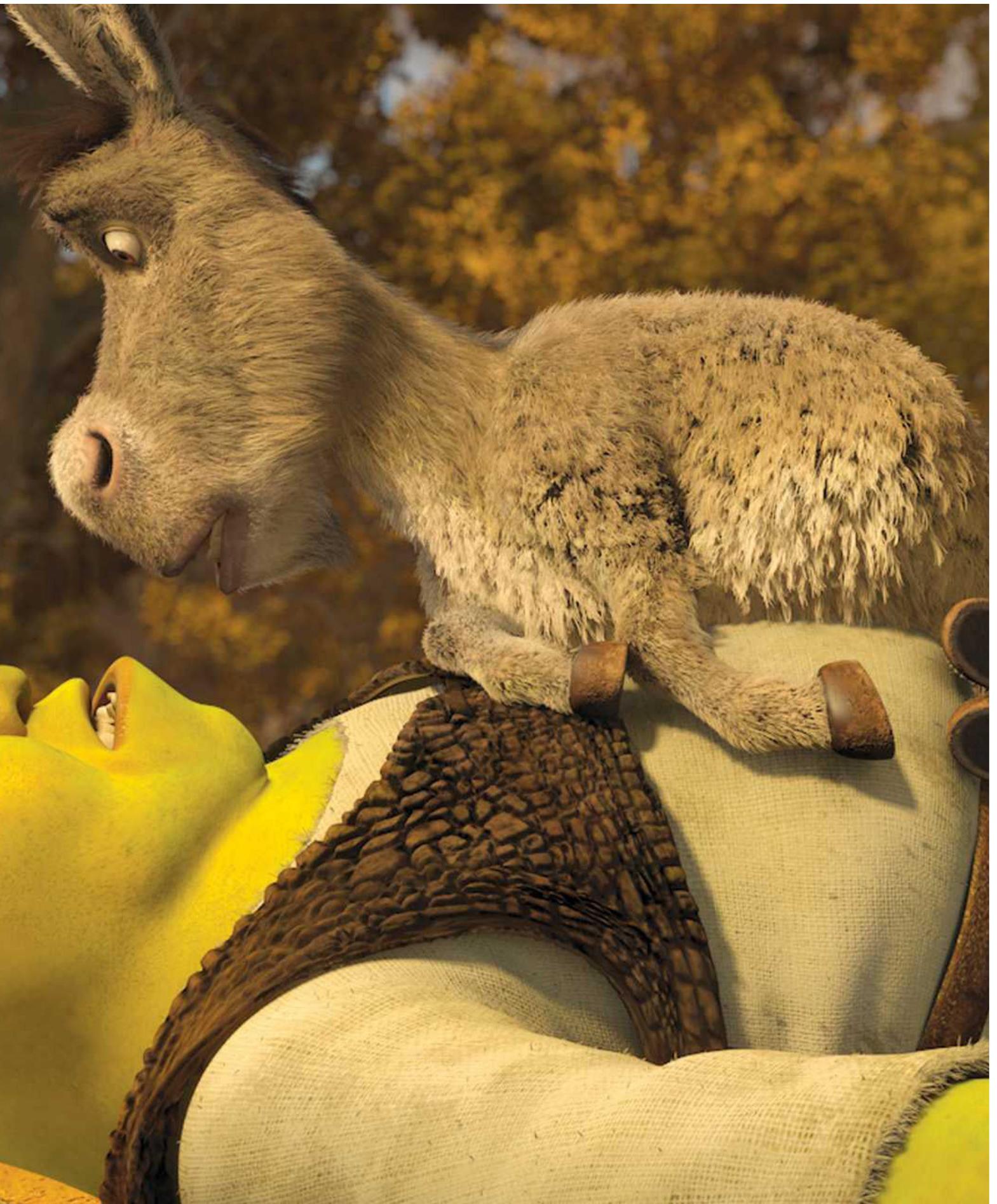
There are numerous attempted jokes along the adventure but nothing really comes off, and likewise with the action set-pieces, what should have been inventive and entertaining additions to the plot end up feeling forced and without merit.

With Hollywood falling head over heels for 3-D, it's no surprise *Shrek Forever After* is being released in the extra dimension but it's sadly another blot on the film's already dreary book. The implementation of the 3-D feels pointless and adds nothing to the experience, while to add insult to injury, the technology used feels old and unnatural for your eyes, unlike some of the more recent 3-D films that embed the dimension much better.

Redoubling back around at the end of the film, the whole adventure is rendered entirely pointless, and will leave you baying for the 90 minutes of your life back, but *Shrek Forever After's* problems run much deeper. There's no life to the film, no spark, and more importantly no real reason for this fourth outing to have ever been made. Hopefully at last DreamWorks will now move onto other new projects, and leave the green ogre well alone in the future.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★







THE COLLECTOR

DIRECTED BY MARCUS DUNSTAN **STARRING** JOSH STEWART, MICHAEL REILLY BURKE, ANDREA ROTH, JUAN FERNÁNDEZ, KARLEY SCOTT COLLINS & DANIELLA ALONSO

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JUNE 25 (UK)

Released last July in the States, that's 2009, it's taken nine months to find a DVD release over there and longer for a cinematic release in the UK; walking into *The Collector*, you certainly won't be inspired with confidence.

Falling down the *Saw* direction, the story picks up with ex-con Arkin (Stewart), desperate to get his wife the money she needs to pay off a hefty debt. After working by day as a labourer on a jeweller's expansive home, when the family go on holiday, Arkin returns after hours to steal a rare jewel from their safe, only the house certainly isn't empty like he had expected.

Coming across the father of the family badly beaten and crudely

dragged downstairs by wires strapped to his legs, the real extent of the situation is soon revealed. With the whole house booby-trapped and a brutal masked character dealing torture to both parents in the basement, Arkin stumbles upon a strange box in the closet. A bloodied and starved man tumbles out, revealing that the killer not only wants to deal wanton violence to those who cross his path, but he collects people for his own purpose.

Not that making a run for it was easy but Arkin doesn't yet try to find an escape. With the jeweller's two daughters still unaccounted for the burglar becomes their only hope for escape, only tracking them down within the four walls before the Collector does, then making a getaway from the trap ridden house is going to be something of a difficult task.

Though the film effectively creates tension and suspense, and the tone gives it the gruesome edge it needed to push down the *Saw* vein (with producers shared from the never-ending horror series), the violence is portrayed

in such a comic manner that it wholly undermines the overall effectiveness. The plot is ridden with clichés which is frustrating given that the producers broke away from *Saw* to make this, yet with a clean slate they've just put together the same thing all over again, and without the 'let's play a game' element that gave *Saw* its only quirk.

With a group of friends, and in the right mood, *The Collector* does though have the potential to be a lot of fun. 'Horror romp' would be an apt description of the 90 minute story, only with the original concept detailed as a burglar breaking into a serial killer's home, it's difficult not to think what might have been.

Strangely, despite all of its flaws, I'd still like to see a sequel, certainly more than yet another *Saw* film, and production is already underway for *The Collector 2*. The script though will need to be a lot tighter, and it would be nice if UK shores didn't have to wait almost a year after the Stateside release this time too.

★★★★★



KILLERS

DIRECTED BY ROBERT LUKETIC **STARRING** ASHTON KUTCHER, KATHERINE HEIGL, TOM SELLECK, CATHERINE O'HARA, KATHERYN WINNICK, ROB RIGGLE & MARTIN MULL

RELEASED OUT NOW

The chick-flick men genuinely enjoy if something of a futile beast. *Heart-breaker* does a pretty good job, a better job than anything in recent memory certainly, but *Killers'* hope to make it two for two in June/July is looking like being an empty threat.

About a couple for whom a few years after settling down it is revealed that the husband (Kutcher) used to be a contract killer, boring old suburban life takes a turn for the dangerous as when Spencer's former contact goes south, suddenly their entire neighbourhood is out to get them, and with bullets flying in from every angle, can

he prove his mettle and save their family a threat on their lives that has been a long time coming.

Billed as an aforementioned chick-flick for both sexes, with men occupied by the action scenes while women flitter over Kutcher's abs and the fairy tale romance, sadly in practice there a whole lot less going on on-screen. The action is tame and devoid of any real thrill or excitement, while the comedy falls flat and you'll be lucky get a handful of laughs over the duration.

Quickly becoming typecast, not only in rom-coms but as neurotic, OCD characters, it's unfortunately more of the same from Heigl; an unimaginative and unprogressive performance in a film without a wisp of ambition. Heigl has a lot of charisma herself so it's frustrating she doesn't give acting a chance to show it.

Similarly there's no real spark between Heigl and Kutcher. While he does an adequate job as the male lead, the interplay between the two feels

forced and unnatural and certainly each have shared better film romances in the past.

It is, however, nice to see Tom Selleck back in front of the camera, and himself plus Heigl's on-screen mother played by Catherine O'Hara and one of Spencer's adversaries in the form of Rob Riggle, also have some good moments but aren't given any where near as much screen time as they deserve.

Certainly there's a level of fun to be had in the ridiculous circumstances that surround *Killers*, but with an unfocused narrative it is the flaws that win out. Instead of growing in tension and excitement as Spencer's secret life is revealed, the film ramps up on the absurd. The real problem though is that it never really goes anywhere. *Killers* feels like the build-up of *Mr. And Mrs. Smith*, only that's the whole movie and the chronic lack of a third act when even the second act is wafer thin is almost unforgivable.

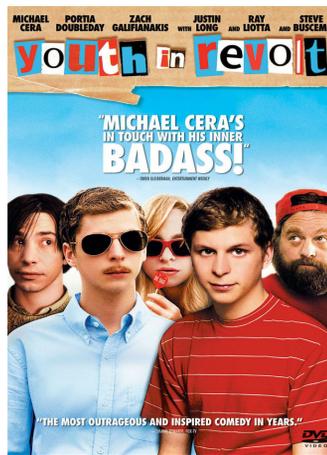
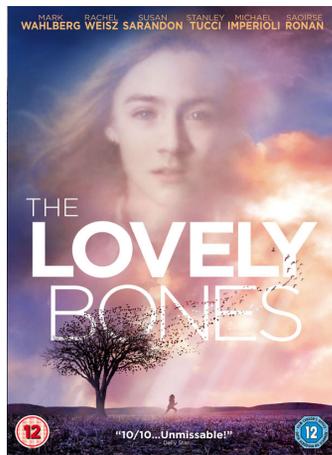
★★★☆☆

THE LOVELY BONES

Disappointing drama from Peter Jackson as a murdered daughter attempts to help her family find her killer from beyond the grave. There are a couple of great performances but the narrative stutters too much for it to be effective.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



YOUTH IN REVOLT

Showing another side to Michael Cera, his character Nick creates an alter-ego to win over his dream girl. Before long it all gets out of hand and with Cera's comic timing and improv. dialogue you'll be in tears on several occasions.

Film ★★★★★

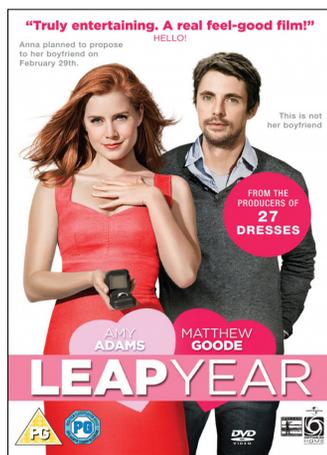
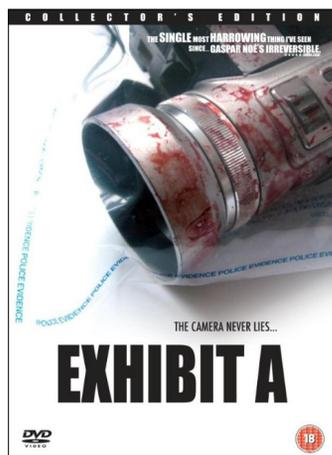
Extras ★★★★★

EXHIBIT A

Low budget, found footage thriller about tempestuous life in the home after a domestic incident. Gritty and honest to its ideals, some of the performances though are a little too raw and it feels a removed from the viewer.

Show ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



LEAP YEAR

Planning an elaborate scheme to propose to her boyfriend on February 29th, when bad weather delays Anna, she crosses paths with innkeeper Declan, and might just end up being proposed to herself. Very forgettable.

Film ★★★★★

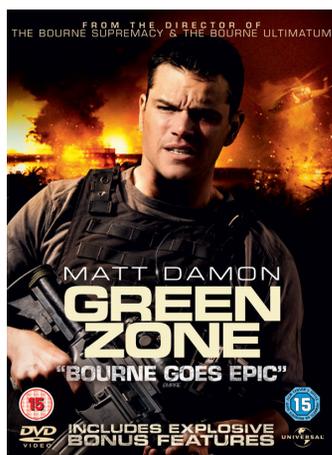
Extras ★★★★★

GREEN ZONE

Billed, somewhat wrongly, as Bourne fighting with the army in Afghanistan, *Green Zone* though takes a more serious tone and follows Damon as his character attempts to uncover a dodgy WMD location source.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

Hugely disappointing return to classic animation from Disney. Following all of the expected plot points, it lacks imagination and the storytelling charm of Pixar.

Show ★★★★★

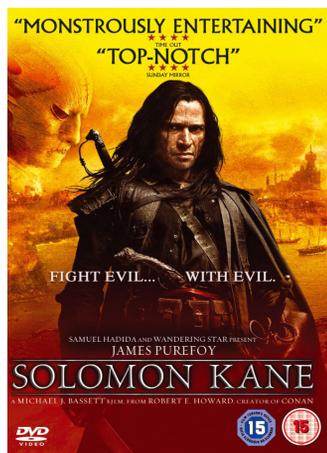
Extras ★★★★★

VALENTINE'S DAY

With half of Hollywood involved, *Valentine's Day* is certainly watchable, but cutting from story to story, it's far from cohesive and merely an amalgamation of clichéd moment, without the backstory for them to have meaning.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



SOLOMON KANE

Based on the famous character, Solomon Kane follows the mercenary as he attempts to seek redemption after an encounter with the Devil, only the emergence of an evil sorcerer means he must go back to his old ways.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



TO CELEBRATE THE DVD RELEASE OF **YOUTH IN REVOLT**, WE'RE GIVING YOU THE CHANCE TO WIN ONE OF THREE COPIES FOR YOURSELF

TO BE IN WITH A CHANCE OF WINNING, SIMPLY ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

IN MICHAEL CERA'S NEW FILM *SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD*, HIS CHARACTER MUST CONQUER HOW MANY OF HIS NEW GIRLFRIEND'S EVIL EXES?

- A. 3
- B. 7
- C. 15

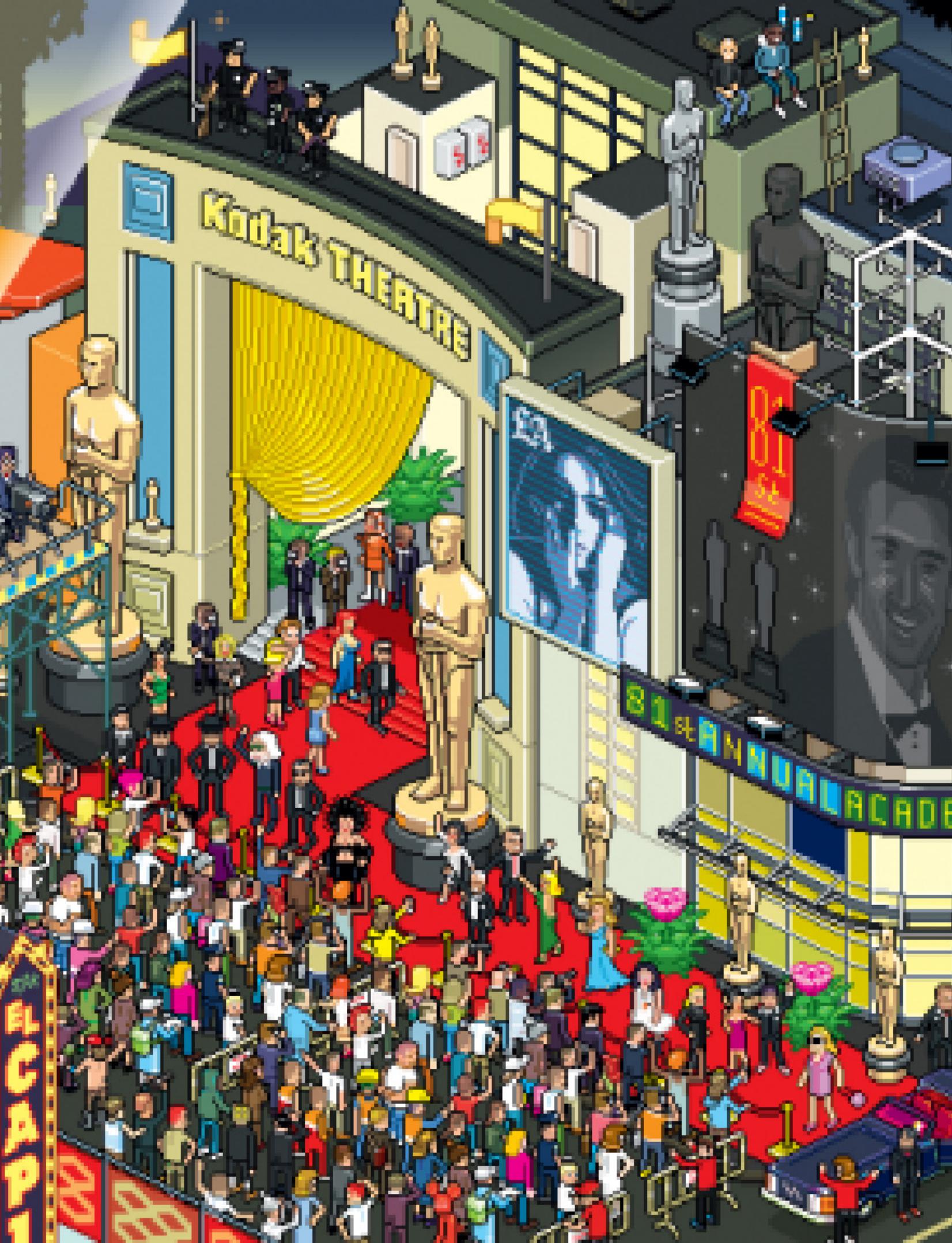
SEND YOUR ANSWER TO
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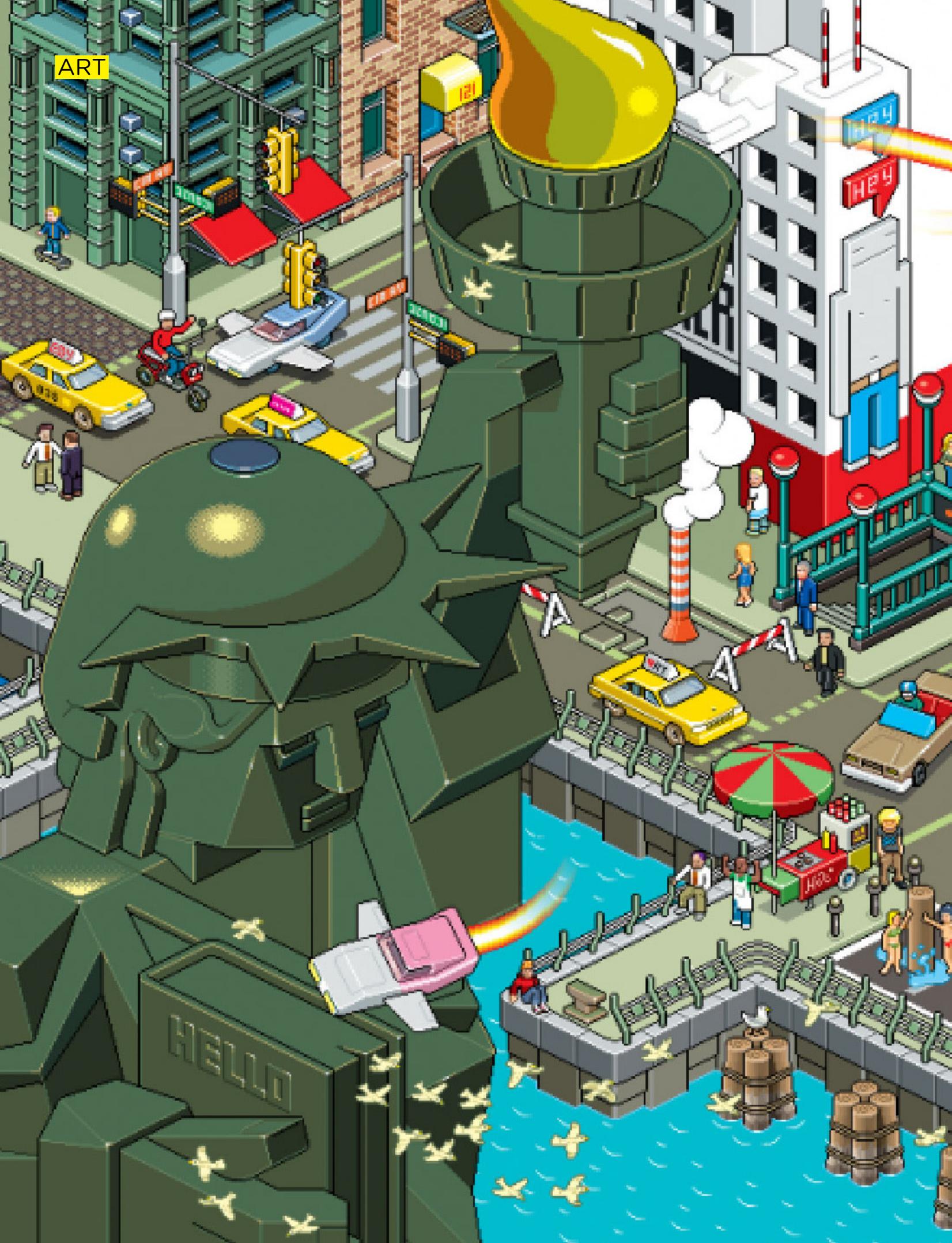
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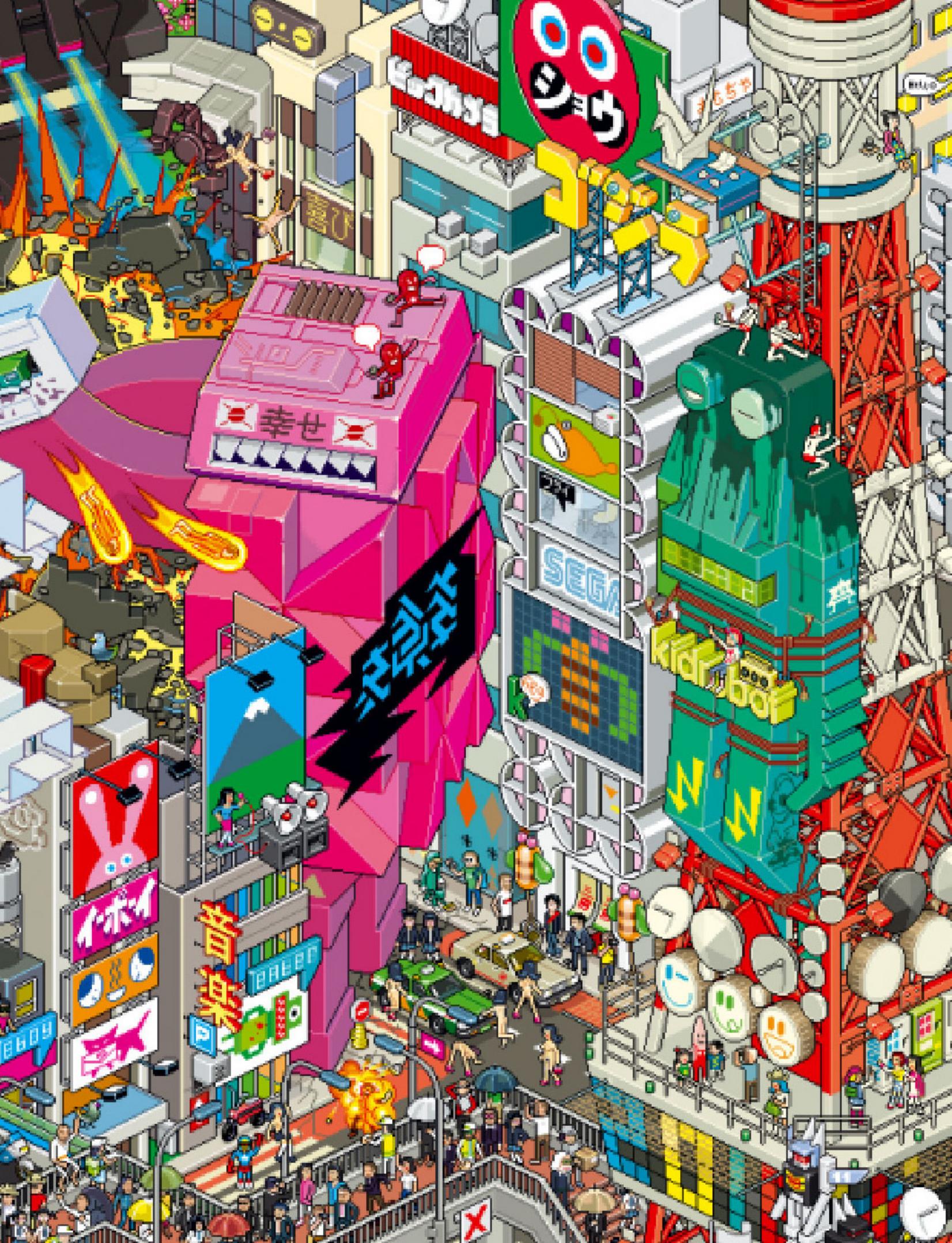




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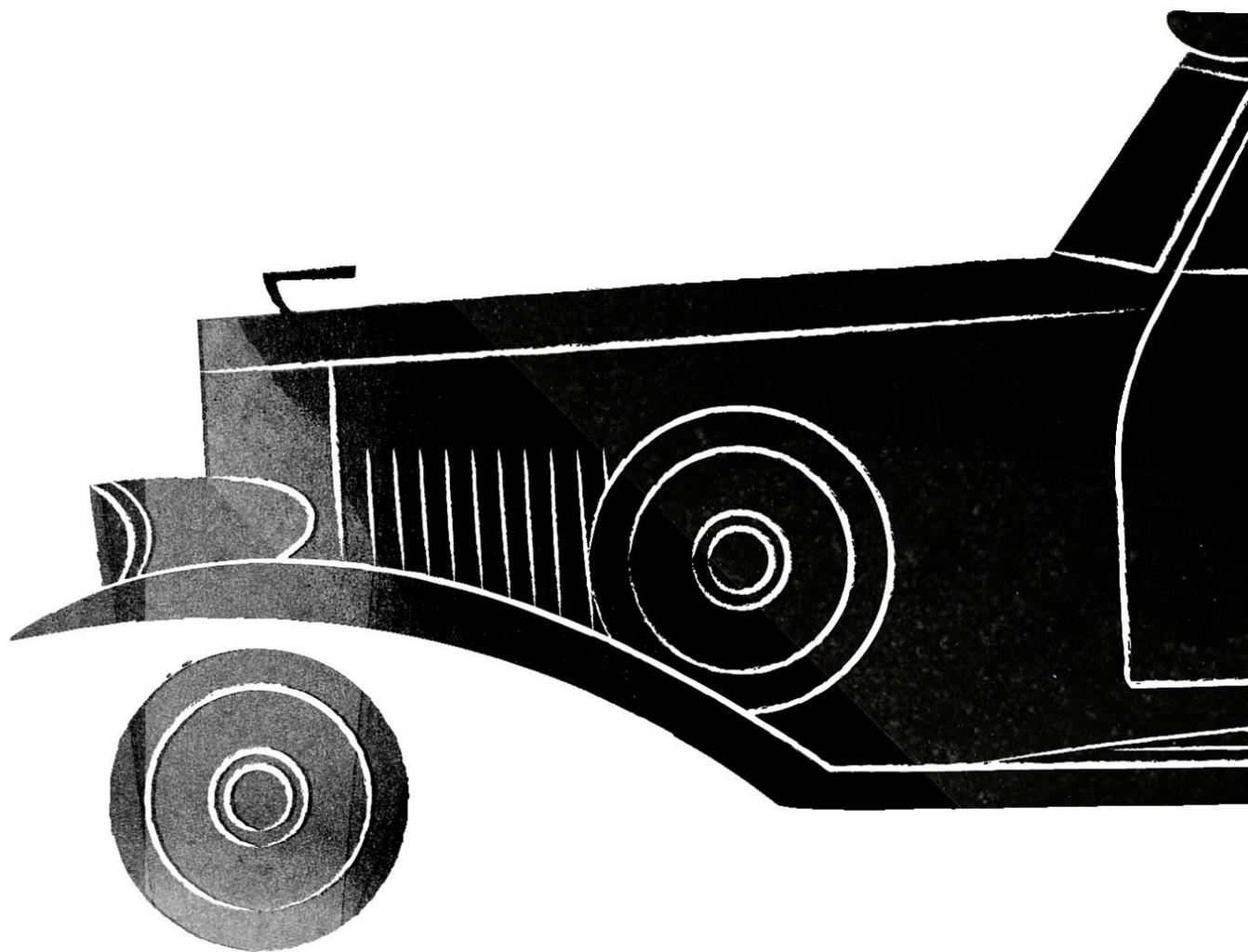
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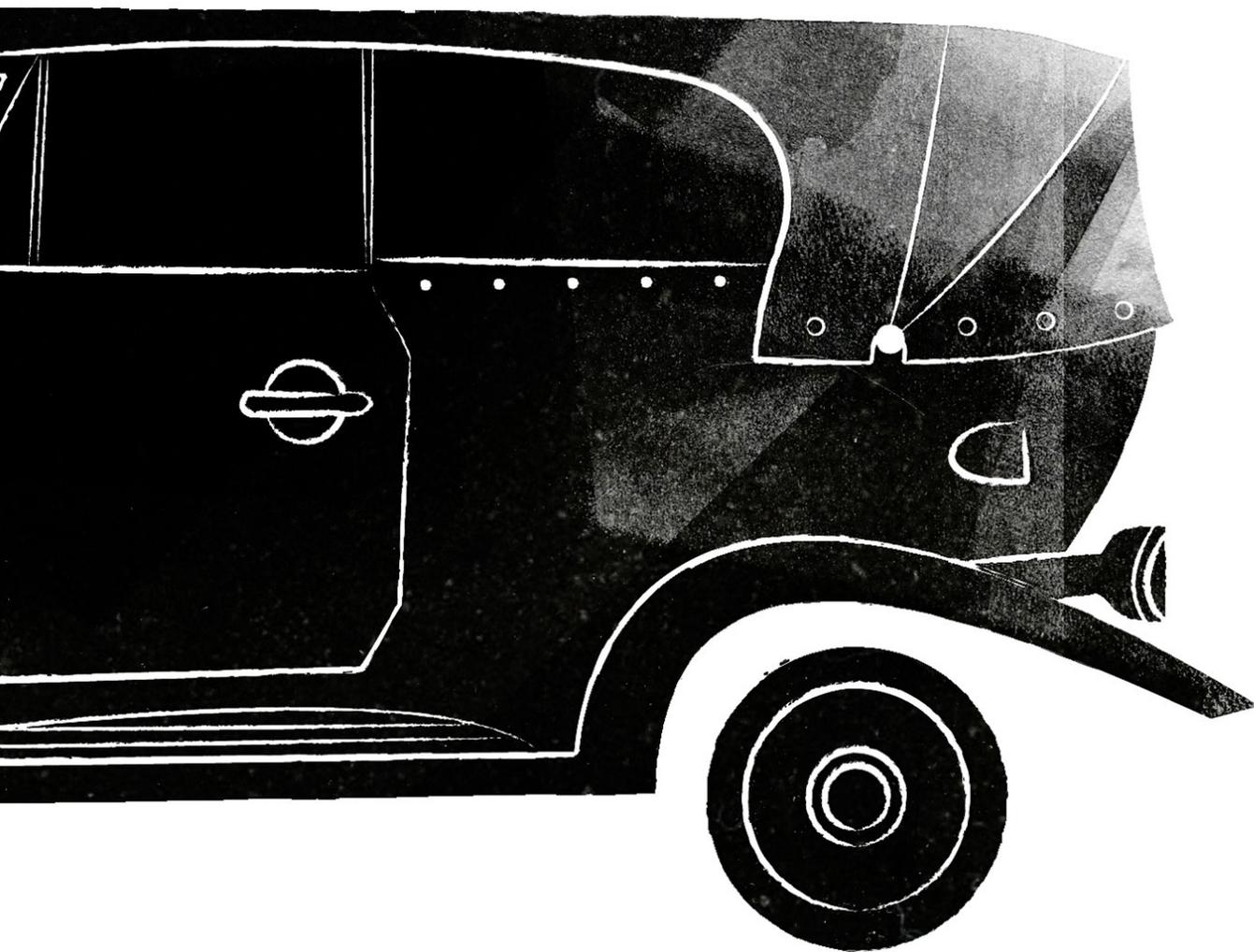
THE DEVIL'S THRONE

PHOTOGRAPHY LYDIA NICHOLS (LYDIANICHOLS.COM)









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**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY**

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ONWARD

SO



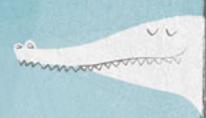
IT

GOES



SEE YOU LATER

ALLIGATOR



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ART

TOMORROW'S WORLD

ILLUSTRATIONS NICOLAS BOUVIER (SPARTH.COM)



















ART





SUMMER FLING

PHOTOGRAPHY TOBY BURROWS (TOBYBURROWS.COM)





















STYLE



DOUBLE DAZED

PHOTOGRAPHY KATHRYNA HANCOCK
(KATHRYNAHANCOCK.COM)













PHOTOGRAPHY ERIC RAY DAVIDSON
(ERICRAYDAVIDSON.COM)
ART DIRECTION ROBERT VARGAS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON
THECONTRIBUTINGEDITOR.COM

COLOUR BURN





















STYLE







STYLE

A photograph of a festival scene. In the center, a person wears a large Bugs Bunny headpiece and a black t-shirt. To the right, a woman with long dark hair wears a blue and pink patterned dress. The background is a sunlit outdoor area with trees and festival decorations. The text 'WHERE THE WILD' is overlaid at the bottom.

WHERE THE WILD



THINGS ARE

PHOTOGRAPHY ANTONELLA ARISMENDI
(ANTONELLAARISMENDI.COM)





























STYLE

PHOTOGRAPHY JAREK CZACHOR
(PHOTOESSENCE.ORG)
MAKE-UP & STYLIST IWONA KOPEC
MODEL IWONA KOPEC (8F1 MODELS)

KNOCK- OUT BLOW









I ❤️ TOKYO













STYLE









A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is lying on a wooden bench outdoors. She is looking upwards with a serene expression. The background is filled with a bright, warm light, likely from the sun, creating a soft, golden glow and some lens flare effects. The overall mood is peaceful and summery.

**NEXT ISSUE
AVAILABLE
JULY 23**



