

# FAN THE FIRE

ISSUE #34 // AUGUST 2010

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ART BY GRACIA LAM, BENJAMIN ANDERSON  
AND TATA VISLEVSKEYA  
STYLE BY ANTONELLA ARISMENDI,  
EDUARDO RIVERA AND EMMA TEMPEST

## CATCH HER IF YOU CAN

SOLVEIG SELJ SNAPS REBEKKA SAMIRA  
RACING OUT THE DOOR



**O**n June 30th, television lost one of the best shows airing on US screens, although whether you've heard of it, unfortunately, is another question.

Putting out 20 episodes, 10 per season, *Party Down* was as short lived as some of the classic comedies, stopped in its prime, although you can certainly see why Starz cut the cord. The second season finale drew an audience of just 74,000, ratings suicide for any TV show (it literally hit a 0.0 on the Nielson scale), what's strange is that more people didn't get the bug.

Centering around a half-arsed catering company, made up entirely of failed (or failing) actors, it's the classic Hollywood cliché but done so well the

awkward comedy really hits a beat.

With a couple of faces leaving part way through, with others taking up the slack, over its run *Party Down* played host to Adam Scott, Ken Marino, Lizzy Caplan, Martin Starr, Megan Mullally, Ryan Hansen, Jane Lynch, and Jennifer Coolidge, about as stellar cast as you could find on TV at the moment. While behind the scenes, two of the four co-creators, Paul Rudd and Rob Thomas (*Veronica Mars*), are names you need not mention twice.

Sadly, even if Starz had kept the show on, it may never have been the same again. Lead Adam Scott is set to take up a regular role on *Parks & Recreation* this fall, while Ryan Hansen and Lizzy Caplan both have pilots booked

for new shows, while one of the stand-out stars, Jane Lynch, left last year for *Glee*. There's little doubt *Party Down* is a better show than any of their new projects, but in terms of public appeal and commercial viability, by the end, it certainly didn't make financial sense for Starz to keep it going.

Like *Freaks And Geeks* before it, ironically another of Starr's old shows, *Party Down* fans were in uproar after the announcement of its cancellation, although at least the latter's finale offered up some kind of resolution. It'll (hopefully) go down in history as one of the best comedies of its generation, and find a cult following on DVD. If that doesn't get cancelled too.

Sam Bathe

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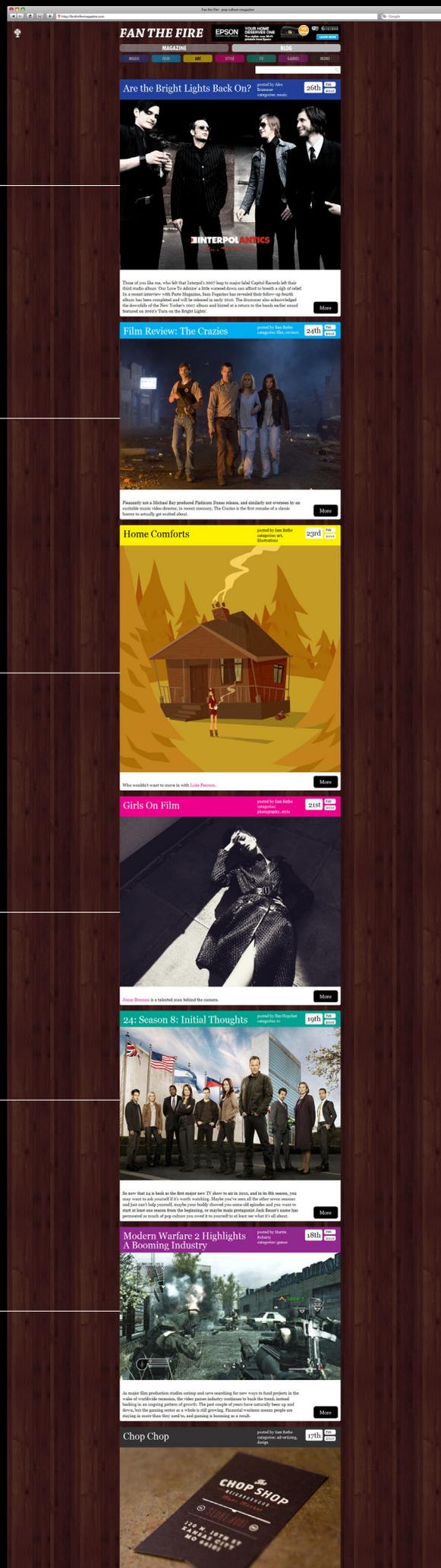
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***MUSIC***



# TAKING CENTRE STAGE

EVA LIU INTERVIEWS BERKELEY GRAD TURNED BROOKLYNITE CHRIS CHU  
OF NEW ROUGH TRADE DARLINGS THE MORNING BENDERS

**T**he band that opened our account at this year's SXSW, The Morning Benders have been skating along largely under the radar for a couple of years now, but thanks widespread critical acclaim for their debut album *Talking Through Tin Cans* and rave live reviews for the perennial tourers, the once Cali four-piece are starting to make the major impact they deserve. We caught up with vocalist and guitarist Chris Chu ahead of their sold-out show at London's Barfly to talk about hooking in Grizzly Bear's Chris Taylor to produce their sophomore album, eating junkfood at truck-stops and playing shows at Washington's The Gorge.

**FAN THE FIRE:** You met and formed in Berkeley right?

**CHRIS CHU:** Yeah, that's right.

**FTF:** Where you at college there or is that a childhood home?

**CC:** I went to college there, and I studied music.

**FTF:** Where are you based now?

**CC:** We were there until January, when we moved to New York, but we went on tour the first week of March and we haven't been back since. So we were only there January and February, two months.

**FTF:** There's a definite West Coast sound to your music, what do you make of the other bands coming out of California at the moment?

**CC:** Umm, let's see... I have to say I think I probably relate to bands in New York more. That's not by choice, but just because I end up liking bands from New York, at this point. I do really like the California attitude, and I think we still have that in ourselves. We are pretty laid back in our certain approach to music in that way. We don't practice songs for hours and hours and have everything figured out in the studio, we go in and we set a little rough outline, and get the mood and the time and the experience to shape it.

**FTF:** How are you finding the UK? Is it

the first time you've been over here?

**CC:** Yeah it's great. It's not our first time, it's our second time actually. The first time was really super. It was last summer; we played a lot of different cities, Brighton, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham and a couple of others.

**FTF:** Who were your influences for new album *Big Echo*? Were there any bands you were listening to in particular when you were writing it?

**CC:** Yeah there were a lot! [laughs] But I'll tell you a few key ones. Hounds Of Love by Kate Bush, Talking Heads, Blur, and a load more.

**FTF:** The album art is pretty eye catching; where did you find the piece or did one of your paint it yourself?

**CC:** Ah no, a friend of ours painted it. She's a good friend of Julian's [drummer] from a few years back. We've always known her; seen all her artwork and been to a few gallery shows.

**FTF:** What's the explanation behind

# SERVICE



LOADING ZONE  
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HELLAI DEE

MUSIC  
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KEAL

“We’ve supported a lot on tours and I have gotten used to the feeling that we’re trying to win everyone over who have never heard us but that was the first time when it wasn’t the case when we were playing these Broken Bells shows and a lot of people already knew the songs, or at least a couple of songs, which is really helpful. So yeah it was nice. A nice change.”



the album title?

**CC:** Umm, it explains a lot! Well, there's a few reasons, the songs that we recorded are a general embracing of space, like the space we recorded in in the studio. We kind of played around with that, with interesting ways of placing the drums or myself or the guitarist in certain places. Or mic-ing from around the corner. We also did some of the vocals in a church. So yeah, we just wanting to choose all these different kinds of sounds, pulling from different areas of music and then having that all come together; the title represents all of that.

**FTF:** Did you feel under a lot of pressure after the buzz and acclaim surrounding your first album?

**CC:** Umm, not really. I mean we weren't really thinking about it. We went into the studio intentionally trying to let go of all that. And I guess to get an idea of what our sound is.

**FTF:** What did iTunes' pick of *Talking Through Tin Cans* as the best indie/alternative album of the year (2008) do for your profile?

**CC:** Yeah I think that helped a lot actually! Most people are selling more music digitally now than CDs.

**FTF:** How have things differed between recording and putting out *Talking Through Tin Cans* and *Big Echo*?

**CC:** It's pretty much changed in every way. It feels really different. It's interesting now that I have a certain perspective of releasing an album and going from doing it all yourself to now through a bigger label.

**FTF:** What was it like working with Chris Taylor (of Grizzly Bear)?

**CC:** It was great. It was really helpful.

**FTF:** You can certainly feel his influence on the second half of *Big Echo*, it's a little "swampier" as Pitchfork pretty accurately put it...

**CC:** Swampier? Oh yeah definitely. [laughs]

**FTF:** How did the producer collaboration come about?

**CC:** Um, it took place over a long period of time. I was in touch with Chris from a few years back. While in New York, we spoke at a couple of their shows and flirted with the idea of doing something together. We wanted to get to work on the album, but he wasn't around so we couldn't do it but then towards the end of the process he had some free time and came in to help out.

**FTF:** Is there anyone you're trying to tap up for the third album?

**CC:** No, not yet... [laughs]

**FTF:** You just finished up on a tour with Broken Bells, what was it like touring with two massive names of music at the moment?

**CC:** Well, first up, it was great. I was continually amazed how warmly the crowd embraced us on that tour. They were so supportive. And also, you meet a lot of people who maybe are at that level of being an established musician, you know, they never really hang out that much. Or you know at least they've been kind of doing it so long and they just want to do their own thing but we hung out with the Broken Bells guys a lot and got to know each other pretty well.

**FTF:** How did the crowds take to your music? Did you get a sense a lot were already familiar with your songs after the nationwide tour just before Broken Bells?

**CC:** Yeah actually, it was a new feeling on the tour. We've supported a lot on tours and I have gotten used to the feeling that we're trying to win everyone over who have never heard us but that was the first time when it wasn't the case; when we were playing these Broken Bells shows, a lot of people already knew the songs, or at least a couple of songs, which is really helpful and a great experience. So yeah it was nice. A nice change.

**FTF:** Are you coming back for a full UK tour later in the year?

**CC:** Yeah, I think we are. I'm not exactly sure on which dates, but sometime soon.

**FTF:** You've been touring a lot over the last few years, what are the best and worst things about being on the road for you?

**CC:** [laughs] Well, the best part is just getting to play almost every night. It's different everywhere, a different show. We did a week of shows in London last time here and each one was been different. The worst part is definitely the food. It's just hard to eat well on the road, and especially when in driving mode you just have to stop at truck-stops and it's just really horrible. To keep busy we listen to a tonne of music, we watch DVDs sometimes. We love *Seinfeld* and I read a lot. The last two tours, I've been really reading; got a tonne of novels.

**FTF:** So you haven't you gotten sick of touring yet? Did you get much of a breather last year?

**CC:** [laughs] We don't get any breather! Yeah, we pretty much have a week or two off since March until the end of the year. But, I haven't gotten sick of it yet. I feel pretty good.

**FTF:** That's good. What's been your favourite venue or festival from the last couple of years?

**CC:** There's been a few... last time we were in the summer we played Sweden. That was pretty incredible. It was just so strange to come and play a place like that, where we've never been to and have people come to the shows who have never seen us before. That's just really surreal. There's a place in Washington we played a couple of years ago, part of a festival called Sasquatch. The venue was called The Gorge, it's this outdoor festival set-up on a gorge, like a massive gorge. It's the most beautiful place we played. It was pretty cool.

*The Morning Benders' new album 'Big Echo' is out now on Rough Trade* ♣



# CREATORS COME TO TOWN

VICE AND INTEL'S **CREATORS PROJECT** HIT LONDON ON JULY 17TH, AND IT WAS QUITE A NIGHT

**M**usic meets art, with a little dash of film, Vice and Intel's co-branded Creators Project is pretty much the biggest thing in creative culture right now, or at least it is in the States.

Invading NYC last month with a party that saw Interpol, M.I.A., Mark Ronson, NASA, Gang Gang Dance, The xx and Animal Collective all get involved, never mind interactive art, Spike Jonze's new short film and a tonne more. The night was a riot and the whole of Brooklyn, never mind Manhattan wanted to be there.

Though it didn't quite create as big a storm as amongst their US friends, Londoners still seemed fairly hyped for the UK launch. Getting a ticket was near impossible, and even if you were on top of the weekly draws and Twitter competitions, there were certainly a lot more entrants than winners.

The idea was conceived by Vice co-creator Shane Smith and acclaimed indie filmmaker Spike Jonze. Asked what he would do if he had no financial restraints to abide by, Smith explained to Jonze he dreamed of a collective along the lines of the old 1920s salons in Paris. Writers, artists, musicians and playwrights would gather to

exchange ideas and contribute to each other's platforms.

Intel stepped in to help out with the unlimited budget, in return they get to look cool, although rather than a place for leading creatives to mingle, the Creators Project became a bustling culture for fans to enjoy.

On the Creators Project website, Vice interviewed artists, musicians, filmmakers; talented individuals they wanted to expose, while the parties became a physical celebration of the whole scheme. And so to London.

Hitting Victoria House on July 17th, the Creators Project packed out the expansive central London basement space. Drinks were on the house, so the few hundred people that managed to get in were always going to have a great time, while musically, Peaches, Mark Ronson, Kele, Yuck and Filthy Dukes provided the lively entertainment.

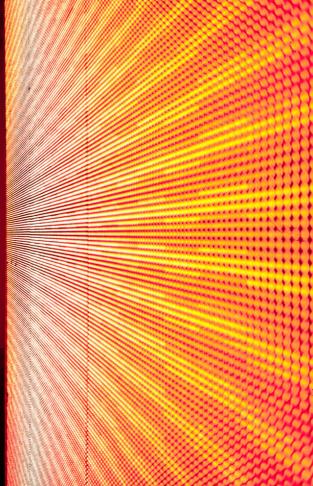
There's no doubting the line-up was stellar, none could claim Interpol's brilliance, sure, but it wasn't a bad line-up. Kele mixed it up with some new solo material and a couple of Bloc Party medleys, Peaches tore up the dance floor with a DJ set despite being wheelchair bound after recently

breaking her leg on stage, while Filthy Dukes and Yuck are always fun. Mark Ronson, though, was the odd one of the bunch.

You'd maybe have thought taking a massive handout from Intel went against everything Vice ever stood for. They're meant to be edgy, non-conformist and independent, three things Intel certainly are not, and neither is Mark Ronson; about as mainstream an artist as you'll find, while still hitting a couple of the musical notes Vice like to pull. To trash the entire project though would be far too critical, and certainly everyone had a good time. The art on the side was fantastic; bar a simple chair with a light behind it, a few custom 8-bit games, amazing VJ sets and stunning photography ensured there was culture for people to take in too.

The Creators Project next hits Brazil, before moving onto South Korea and finally China in late September. There might be lingering doubts over the direction Vice is heading these days, but whatever cause for the Creators Project, you'd be a fool to miss out on the party of the month if it comes by your town.

*The next Creators Project event is in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on August 14th* ♣





# HEY SCENEESTERS

THE COOLEST BAND IN HOXTON, **O. CHILDREN** THOUGH HAVE MORE GOING FOR THEM THAN JUST EDGY AESTHETICS AND THE POTENTIAL TO DO SOMETHING BIG WITH THEIR MUSIC

**O** Children have been described rotation as an East London Joy Division, '80s post-punk revivalists, and goth-rock scenesters. Essentially the band, (named after the Bad Seeds song) are both none and all of the above, but to be continuously compared to what came before (however astutely), must be pretty irritating. Right now, in 2010, when compared to their many indie peers O. Children stand out head and shoulders above the pack. Brooding baritone frontman Tobi O'Kandi is the best part of 7 feet tall (ok, 6'8"), which somehow suits the richness and depth of his vocal. His charisma is electric, and the foursome make for a coolly ominous onstage vision, though you wouldn't want to run into these boys in a Shoreditch alleyway at night un-

less you were in a particularly macabre mood. O'Kandi and drummer Andi Sleath used to be in the amusingly named Bono Must Die, and there is a definite camp, melodramatic quality to their sombre, theatrical posturing and morbid lyrics.

The single launch for their debut *Dead Disco Dancer* was held in the appropriately dark and red-tinged hip Hoxton boozier *The Macbeth*, where O. Children put on one hell of a mini-show, including a surprisingly alluring cover of the Prince classic *I Would Die 4 U*. O'Kandi remarked that he didn't know the lyrics, and read them from a scrap of paper, adding to the quartet's aura of aloofness.

But the band might need to start working on their smiles, as their eponymous first album could see them

break through from their fashionable East London enclave into the mainstream(ish) sphere, with songs that are as accessible as they are deep, both lyrically and vocally. Highlights include recent release *Ruins*, a foreboding and unapologetically epic number, and the excessively synthy *Heels*, as well as their first single *Dead Disco Dancer*, which is riotously catchy and showcases the key juxtaposing elements that make up O. Children's sound; eeriness and excess. Whether they can achieve critical and public acclaim whilst retaining their credibility as one of N1's best-loved acts remains to be seen, but at the moment it looks like this band's hard work and stoic cool has paid off nicely.

*O. Children's self-titled debut album is out now on Deadly Recordings* ♣



## DARKER MY LOVE 'ALIVE AS YOU ARE'

RELEASED JULY 23



Moving slightly away from their dark pop, alt-rock sound of second album, *2, Alive As You Are* is not quite a revelation for the Los Angeles five-piece but a release on which they certainly find a tone that sits well with their new direction.

Turning the clock back some 50 years, *Alive As You Are* takes great reference from '60s psychedelic and country-tinged pop/rock. The sun-soaked tracks perhaps won't

get your heart racing like *Darker My Love* of old might have, but with tracks like *June Bloom*, the rockier *Dear Author* and retro-sounding *18th Street Shuffle*, though the album isn't one to really throw yourself into, it's a great soundtrack to whatever activities the summer brings.

Taking down the pace and volume from their previous efforts, *Darker My Love* though are still somewhat without identity. In between the highlights, what feel like off-shoots of classic Beatles or Neil Young albums lack originality and meaning at times, *Alive As You Are* merges into one and isn't quite as involving as it should be.

★★★★☆



## WAVVES 'KING OF THE BEACH'

RELEASED AUGUST 2

2009 was quite a year for Nathan Williams and Wavves. We won't again go into what happened but let's just say he over did it. With touring partner Ryan Ulsh gone, Williams refocused, perhaps thanks to new management, and took on two of Jay Reatard's ex-touring members full-time.

Though *Wavvves* was thoroughly enticing, he over distorted the finished tracks, so fans will be happy to know *King Of The Beach* is a lot cleaner, without losing the energy or thrills you might have been expecting.

On tracks *Post Acid*, *King Of The Beach* and *Green Eyes*, Wavves still revel in their lo-fi sound but it feels like Williams is enjoying it all again, coming out with a generally sunnier vibe. In some ways *King Of The Beach* isn't quite as striking as *Wavvves*, but in others it's leaps and bounds ahead, and it's the exact right album Williams should be making right now. The future is looking bright again for someone who has been trying remarkably hard to throw it all away.

★★★★★



## LA ROUX 'SIDETRACKED'

RELEASED OUT NOW

The second in Renaissance's *Sidetracked* project, compilations hoping to rival Kitsuné's megalithic *Maison* releases, La Roux take charge this time around after Hercules & Love Affair curated the *Sidetracked* debut.

Though the album is certainly rooted electro, the compilation draws tracks from a number of genres. Opening with '80s post-punk band Japan to a Fever Ray remix, Jam Crew's *Exotic Notions* and La Roux themselves covering The Rolling Stones. For La Roux fans it will be pleasing to explore some of their influences and favourite tracks, although as compilations go it doesn't set the world alight, nor uncover the best big thing as *Kitsuné Maisons* are famed for.

★★★★☆



## ARCADE FIRE 'THE SUBURBS'

RELEASED AUGUST 2

The eagerly anticipated return for the masterful Arcade Fire, after their mostly hit, while still a little miss, gothic last outing, *Neon Bible*. Recorded between front pair, and husband and wife, Win Butler and Régine Chassagne's Montreal home studio, the band's space in Quebec, and across the border in New York City; it's an album that pulls in a great range of influences and styles. Though as you'd expect with the eclectic seven-piece, they pull it off with aplomb.

Where *Neon Bible* felt a little forced, *The Suburbs* feels more natural. Described by Butler as a mix of Depeche Mode and Neil Young, you might expect a perplexing, unfocused sound, but from the very first listen it's as captivating as ever.

Perfectly planned, *The Suburbs* flows effortlessly from start to finish. Without a wisp of veering astray, leave this album on repeat and you'll lose hours if not days without even

realising. The lyrics are perhaps more cutting than before, in *Ready To Start*, Butler warns that businessmen will drink your blood and goes on to explore what goes on behind the scenes in local neighbourhoods, the accompanying instrumentals though are as expertly crafted as ever.

The drums are a little bigger than on *Funeral*, the guitars more echoey and the sound a little harder hitting, *The Suburbs* though is no less melodic nor expansive. To pick out highlights is difficult; like with all of their releases, this is something you should listen to as a whole, rather than picking and choosing single snippets. It's not quite perfect, but it isn't far off.

★★★★★



## TOKYO POLICE CLUB 'CHAMP'

RELEASED OUT NOW

Tokyo Police Club aren't as big as they deserve. After bursting onto the scene with debut EP *A Lesson In Crime*, first album *Elephant Shell* didn't quite have the impact they would have hoped. After a year off touring to write and record their follow-up, *Champ* is the fruits of their labour as the Canadian band start round three of their attempt to become the next big indie breakthrough hit.

Though it'll take a couple of listens to really bite into, Tokyo Police Club have made another big step forward. *Champ* is more expansive and more mature than *Elephant Shell* but retains the exuberance, pace and tone of *Elephant Shell*. Landing somewhere between The Cribs and Death Cab For Cutie, Dave Monks' crawling college vocals layer over the meandering guitar

to provide an appetising sound.

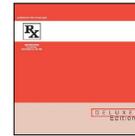
First single *Breakneck Speed* offers up a rampaging chorus with the subtlety of old, while future anthem *Favourite Colour* is a joy to beat along and has the instant appeal to settle you in. The (minor) problem with *Elephant Shell* was that it felt a little one note. Tracks often merged and you could be lost at times playing through it, but with the slower *End Of A Spark*, sharp hooks of *Bambi* and Strokes-esque guitar in *Not Sick*, that's never at risk on *Champ*.

Tokyo Police Club are back with a bang, and though they still feel like a college band at heart, there are more layers and edges to their sound now that they really stake a claim to stand tall on the indie landscape. And they're here to stay.

★★★★★

## QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE 'RATED R' (RE-ISSUE)

RELEASED AUGUST 9



Re-released for its tenth anniversary, Queens Of The Stone Age's *Rated R* was rightfully called one of the best rock albums of the last decade, even if they did immediately outdo it with follow-up *Songs For The Deaf*. Birthing classic QOTSA tracks *The Lost Art Of Keeping A Secret*, *Feel Good Hit Of The Summer* and *Autopilot* and truly cementing the band on the rock A-list after only two albums, *Rated R* certainly caused a stir when it was first released in 2000.

The re-issue contains a second disc with a handful of B-sides and nine live recordings from their Reading Festival appearance in 2000 plus another from Seattle. For those who already boast a copy of the original, the extended disc might not warrant another purchase, but for newcomers to the band or fans looking to stock up on their back catalogue, it's a no-brainer.

★★★★★



## SKREAM 'OUTSIDE THE BOX'

RELEASED AUGUST 9

Rising to mainstream prominence with his remix of La Roux's *In For The Kill*, and largely credited with the emergence of the dubstep genre, producer Skream's sophomore album picks up the slack right where his debut left off.

Opening with the slower, more electronic *Perforated*, things quickly kick into gear with *Where You Should Be* and *How Real*, though given dubstep's split appeal, it's largely love it or hate it stuff. *Outside The Box* is unrelenting at times, more chilled at others; the beats and song make-up is strong although it doesn't feel like the full sum of Skream's talents just yet.

★★★★★

## BEST COAST 'CRAZY FOR YOU'

RELEASED AUGUST 2



Picking up the reverb slack a refocused Wavves have moved slightly away

from, Best Coast's sun-drenched lo-fi debut is quick to perk up your attention with openers *Boyfriend* and *Crazy For You*, packing in another 11 tracks in the 30-minute running time. The non-stop feel certainly works in their favour, although after a few listens towards the

middle it does start to grow a little repetitive as Best Coast's lack of depth and variation is exposed. There's still a lot to love though, and they certainly pull it back around before the end with the energetic *Each & Everybody*. *Crazy For You* is the perfect beach soundtrack and a nice introduction for a band that will no doubt become a spearhead for the indie scene. They're another example that lo-fi is here to stay, and we're pretty happy about that, it's just a pity the best four tracks on the album are the first and last two and they didn't plan the tracklisting out a little better.

★★★★★

**FILM**





# SALT

RELEASED JULY 23 (USA) AUGUST 20 (UK)

*Salt*, the upcoming action thriller from Australian director Philip Noyce (*The Quiet American*), has an interesting history, mainly because Tom Cruise was initially cast in the lead role and later pulled out, only for the entire thing to be rewritten for Angelina Jolie. It certainly adds an amusing twist to Sony's tagline for the picture: 'Who is Salt?' That change of schedule also means that Cruise's *Knight And Day* (with Cameron Diaz) will compete for the same summer market, although it's fair to say *Salt* is taking things a little more seriously than its competitor.

Evelyn Salt (Jolie) is a CIA agent who goes on the run to try to clear her name after having been accused of being a KGB sleeper agent. Sounds like pretty familiar stuff, although the trailer promises some interesting twists on the story, and certainly looks suitably action packed.

The supporting cast includes Liev Schreiber as Salt's CIA colleague Ted Winter and Chiwetel Ejiofor as a young agent being mentored by her. It's been a while since Noyce directed something as action-focused as this, but he certainly has experience in the thriller genre, with films such as *Clear And Present Danger* and *The Saint* on his back-catalogue. Sony might be hoping to develop a female spy franchise off the back of this, so it will be interesting to see how much of a response it will get from the public.

# CARS 2

RELEASED JUNE 24 2011

Remember when Pixar said it wasn't interested in doing sequels? With *Toy Story 3* upon us, *Monsters Inc. 2* in full development and the recently confirmed, straight-to-DVD spin off of *Cars*, *Planes*, although they aren't producing it themselves, it looks as though there has been a change of heart somewhere along the line. Along with the recent cancellation of one new project, *Newt*, this situation may worry some people. Maybe Pixar are at last starting to run out of ideas.

That said, Pixar's output has included more original material than other studios have put together in recent times, so they can probably be forgiven for revisiting old franchises. *Cars*, though, is an interesting choice; it has probably been Pixar's least critically acclaimed release to date. Of course it was still a big hit financially (though weaker than some of Pixar's efforts), and the marketing and merchandise from the film has been huge.

So the demand is there. *Cars 2* will see Lightning McQueen, Mater and co. travel around the world for The Race Of Champions, but hindered when a case of mistaken identity gets Mater involved in international espionage. Although *Cars* was not Pixar's best film, and the story may sound a little flimsy at present, the film is still a year away and a sequel to one of Pixar's least great films is still an exciting prospect. Expect more of that lovable blend of quirky characters and broad humour come summer 2011.



# IT'S KIND OF A FUNNY STORY

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 24 (USA) TBC (UK)

Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck have collaborated a few times in different capacities (on, amongst others, 2006's well received *Half Nelson*) and are returning this year with *It's Kind Of A Funny Story*, a joint directorial effort that follows the life of a teenager who checks himself into a mental health clinic.

Keir Gilchrist (*United States Of Tara*) stars as said teenager, Craig, who suffers from depression. The film describes itself as a comedy-drama, and that may explain why Zach Galifianakis (whose popularity continues to grow) has been brought in to provide support as one of the clinic's other residents. Elsewhere, Zoe Kravitz (daughter of Lenny) appears as Craig's love interest.

The film seems to be shooting for the indie crowd, with a soundtrack by Broken Social Scene and employing one of the biggest cult comedy actors around. The film is distributed by Focus Features and they will be hoping that *It's Kind Of A Funny Story* will be able to emulate the successes recently enjoyed by the company. Hopefully Boden and Fleck (who also co-wrote the screenplay, adapted from Ned Vizzini's novel) will be able to find some originality in tried and tested subject matter, but certainly there's potential for success, so fingers crossed they pull off something interesting.





# RANGO

RELEASED MARCH 4 2011

What an odd looking project this is. Distributed by Paramount, *Rango* is a CGI effort starring Johnny Depp as a chameleon with an identity crisis. It looks to all intents and purposes like a western, and to be honest it looks fairly promising. The film is directed by Gore Verbinski, who worked with Depp on the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* movies, and who also had a hand in the story.

*Rango* looks to have a pretty unique aesthetic, which is fairly uncommon these days in CGI projects, and the early trailers are amusing. The film will obviously tout Johnny Depp as its big selling point (and why wouldn't it?), but elsewhere the stellar voice cast includes Alfred Molina, Bill Nighy (is this a *Pirates* reunion?), Isla Fisher and Abigail Breslin.

This is an intriguing film that looks like it could genuinely be something a little different. Hopefully the story will stand out and match the unique art style to create something fresh come early 2011. Of course, there are some other noteworthy CGI projects coming out that same year, including *Kung Fu Panda: The Kaboom of Doom* and *Cars 2*, so this smaller scale project will have some stiff competition.



# MIDDLE MEN

RELEASED AUGUST 6 (USA) TBC (UK)

George Gallo's *Middle Men* stars Luke Wilson as Jack Harris, a businessman who builds the first online company specialising in adult entertainment. Inspired by true events (or so the website tells us) the film is a drama with a comedy edge, dealing with our protagonist's drastic lifestyle changes as his business takes off overnight and surrounds him with porn stars, money and everything he ever dreamed of.

The film's diverse supporting cast includes Giovanni Ribisi (last seen searching for 'Unobtanium' in *Avatar*) and Gabriel Macht, star of the critically trashed Frank Miller film *The Spirit*. Elsewhere, somewhat bizarrely, Kelsey Grammer shows up as a government official with, shall we say, a personal stake in Harris' fledgling business venture.

Jokes about porn are dime a dozen, so Gallo's film will have to do something new to warrant much excitement. As Harris tries to keep his marriage together, and gets involved with the mob, the film will hopefully take the opportunity to offer up some originality.

# X-MEN: FIRST CLASS

RELEASED JUNE 3 2011

The *X-Men* franchise ran its course over three films that oddly echoed the *Spider-Man* franchise, in that the first one was decent, the second was much improved, and the third was a step backwards. Although, I would argue that Raimi's third *Spider-Man* picture was more of a step back than Brett Ratner's *X-Men: The Last Stand*, which is almost impressive given that X2 is still one of the best superhero films around.

So Fox have decided to reinvent the franchise by going back in time to the younger days of our heroes Cyclops, Beast, Jean Grey etc, and also, of course, (Professor) Xavier and Magneto. Over the past few weeks and months some interesting casting decisions have been made, particularly in the choices for Xavier and Magneto, who will be played by James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, respectively. So there are already big names involved; support is provided by, amongst others, Nicholas Hoult as Hank McCoy (aka. Beast) and Kevin Bacon as the yet unnamed villain of the piece.

The cast is shaping up quite nicely for a project that initially seemed like a desperate attempt to cling onto a popular franchise, so it's looking ever more likely to surprise people. Plus *Kick-Ass*' Matthew Vaughn will direct, and co-write with long time collaborator Jane Goldman. Fox will be hoping that the new cast will be enough to draw the crowds back in, even with the loss of Hugh Jackman's now iconic Wolverine, thanks to the talent behind the camera.





# SCORN OF THE DEAD

NICK THE DEIGMAN CRAZIES, INTERVIEWS AND THE REMAKER HUGELY TALENTED EXTRAORDINAIRE, DIRECTOR OF BRECK EISNER

**W**ith a few successful TV projects (including an episode of Steven Spielberg's *Taken*) and a big budget action feature (*Sahara*) under his belt, Breck Eisner piqued the interest of a somewhat unexpected crowd with his hit 2009 horror flick *The Crazies*. The film, which came stamped with Romero's seal of approval, delighted many horror fans and made the industry sit up and take note of this new force in 'genre' filmmaking. After a few false rumours (including a supposed remake of Cronenberg's *The Brood*) Eisner has officially announced a slate of exciting remakes and adaptations, including *Flash Gordon* and *Escape From New York*. We sat down with this exciting and prolific new filmmaker.

**FAN THE FIRE:** With *The Crazies* and many of the films on your slate at the moment, you have developed a clearly defined voice within the horror genre. Is this just an accident or is horror a genre that has been close to you heart since childhood?

**BRECK EISNER:** Well for me, 'genre' movies are my real love; horror, sci-fi, and the specific world of 'genre' movies. As a kid, I think it was when I saw Carpenter's *The Thing* that I really got hooked. I'm a huge fan of Kaufman's *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* but it was really *The Thing* that got me. I have this memory of being in a packed

movie theatre in Los Angeles and being absolutely terrified and not being able to sleep. For some reason I found that to be a really compelling draw into genre movies. I think that is because I like horror movies that are 'solid' movies that really stand up on their own; that aren't just about the kills but are also about the story and the characters' journeys. Then when you add the element of horror it has the ability to sit with you for a while. I think it is a really interesting way to pull characters apart and explore their inner-core.

**FTF:** Hmmm, often quite literally! *The Crazies* is a perfect example of a

horror film with a strong human story; but the thing that really stuck in my mind after watching the film were some of the excellent set-pieces (the combine harvester, the car wash, the truck stop). Are these homages or just the result of throwing ideas around?

**BE:** Those elements really came from just throwing ideas around. I think the combine scene was one of the first things that I threw out there while developing the movie. I remember thinking about the fact that it was going to take place in a farming community so you are thinking about what elements can seem horrific when considered in

a state other than the way that was intended. A combine is really a giant, rotating sharp blades, so it is clearly a fantastic use of a farm-based, everyday piece of technology in a horror setting. The car wash also just came about when we were throwing around ideas about what

was the best thing we could use where water is a possible threat when people are contained within a car. When

I was a kid, in Los Angeles you weren't allowed to ride through the car wash in a car, there was an ordinance against it. But then on the East Coast, my friends that I had grown up with were all allowed to ride through the car wash and they all loved the experience and as a child; I was very jealous that I didn't get to do it. So I think maybe that's where that one came from.

**FTF:** The film, like any good horror, is respectful of its heritage and pays tribute to the genre it is contained within. But then the appearance of 'the infected' is unusually subtle and realistic. Was that a conscious decision throughout the development of the project or just an aesthetic 'make-up' decision?

**BE:** Well that is a result of multiple factors. In the beginning, when the people are first infected, there is no physical manifestation of the disease. It is simply behavioural; it doesn't affect the way they walk or anything so you would have to know the person when they are first infected to know that they are sick, otherwise you would think that this is just the way they are. As the movie progresses and the infected become more and more ill, the disease takes on accelerated physical manifestations; we researched real

events to help us design the 'look' of the disease.

**FTF:** There were rumours that you would be remaking Cronenberg's *The Brood* but then you turned the project down. Did you feel this was a film that shouldn't be remade?

**BE:** Well I am a huge fan of *The Brood*; it was very risky and it took some huge chances. I don't think nowadays you can do

that film justice and push the edge as far as Cronenberg did.

**FTF:** So how do you decide, on a personal level, which horror films you would like to have a creative involvement in remaking, and which should be left alone?

**BE:** Well, two of my favourite movies, as I mentioned, are Carpenter's *The Thing* and Kaufman's *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, and those are both remakes. And that gave me a great deal of confidence in my decision to remake *The Crazies* (as well as the fact that George Romero owned the rights and personally sanctioned it). But what is most important is, you have to decide if you can make a good movie. I believe that the horror audience is the most sophisticated film-going audience, they are the real cinephiles, and they will respect you if you make a good movie. It doesn't matter necessarily what the title is or what the remake is or what the original was; if you set out to make a movie that has a strong plot, strong characters, and real character journeys, and I suppose a real message to the movie, then you can pull it off. So I think the key is to make sure that the source material you are using will allow you to do all of these things and to first and foremost make a movie that is good.

**FTF:** What inspired you to create a remake of *Flash Gordon*?

**BE:** Well I set up the rights for *Flash Gordon* with Sony about a year ago. We optioned the Hearst comic books from the '30s to the present day. We actually didn't even option the '80s version of the movie; this is very much a movie based on the original comic books and the original strips, so it's not in any way a remake of the De Laurentiis movie.

**FTF:** *Escape From New York* is another classic movie that has piqued your interest. What is it about that project that inspired you to get involved?

**BE:** Well as a kid I absolutely loved that movie, and this is a direct remake. I was hired by New Line and Canal+ who are co-financing the movie; and they had a good draft and I hired a writer to do the final production draft. Hopefully in a few months we'll have that draft done and then we'll go to talent and start budgeting the movie.

**FTF:** Most of the films on your slate are specifically American (*The Crazies* is firmly rooted in the mid-West farmland, and *Escape From New York* speaks for itself). Do you prefer making films about America?

**BE:** Not necessarily, I actually just started developing a comic book, *Blood Of The Innocent*, by a guy named Mark Wheatley, which is about Jack the Ripper. Specifically, it is about Jack the Ripper versus Dracula; it sort of twists history on its side and suggests that Jack the Ripper was actually fighting vampire brides and trying to prevent a vampire infection and chasing Dracula across England. I am certainly interested in the middle-American world explored in *The Crazies*, but the history and origins of great horror really are not from the United States, so I'm very interested in exploring other areas.

*'The Crazies'* is out now on DVD and Blu-Ray



# THE LAST AIRBENDER

**DIRECTED BY** M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN **STARRING** NOAH RINGER, DEV PATEL, NICOLA PELTZ, JACKSON RATHBONE, SHAUN TOUB, AASIF MANDVI, CLIFF CURTIS, SEYCHELLE GABRIEL & SUMMER BISHIL

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) AUGUST 13 (UK)**

Widely reported as the worst reviewed film of the year, and currently on a less than 10% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes, *The Last Airbender* was talked up as M. Night Shyamalan's *Indiana Jones* (the filmmaker was once called the next Spielberg and this was to be his film to conquer the action/adventure genre), but it doesn't seem like critical and general public opinion has taken to it as planned.

This should, however, still be a huge event. Based on the cartoon series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (James Cameron's own *Avatar* put pay to using the first part of the original title), considered by many not only as one of the best animated TV shows ever made, but one of the best TV shows full stop. The accompanying acclaim brings with it a heavy burden, but in equal measure, it left fans baying with anticipation for Shyamalan's effort.

Set in a world where four nations dominate the world, each tied to raw element, gifted individuals have the ability to control their nation's power, be it air, water, fire or earth. Twelve-year-old Aang (Ringer) though, learns he's different. Able to manipulate all four elements, Aang is the cartoon title-centric Avatar, tasked with the job of maintaining peace between the four nations.

Somewhat predictably reluctant to take on his new mantle, it's a lot of weight to place on such a young boy's shoulders and Aang runs away from home before he has the chance to perfect controlling any other elements beyond air.

When the rogue Fire Nation attempt to take reign over the whole world, Aang, however, has no option but to fulfil his destiny, and after first tracking down masters of earth, water and fire to learn each elemental way, must defeat the bold Fire Prince Zuko (Patel) and save each race from wanton destruction.

In interviews and press conferences in the run-up to the American release, Shyamalan talked about the widespread negative reviews, explaining that critics don't get his storytelling accent and that all he can do is portray the visions in his head onto the screen. He likened moving away from his filmmaking touches as like asking an artist to change his style. But we are not asking him to change his style, but bar the visuals and set design, which on the most part work OK, everything else is a catastrophic failure. All we want is for him to keep doing what he does, but instead do it well.

His most successful film to date, *The Sixth Sense*, possesses many of the same storytelling accents, the qualitative difference between that *The Last Airbender* is a good script, a well-executed narrative and an entirely focused and confidently-directed cast.

Some of the action and fight sequences in *The Last Airbender* are nicely choreographed and planned out but it's all put together in such an incoherent fashion that not for a second do characters ever feel in danger, nor the element bending feel serious.

Controlling air, earth, fire and water looks so cool in the cartoon but doesn't transfer at all well into live action. With the characters performing a ten second kung fu for each elemental move, the fight sequences look ridiculous and lose any sense of realism they may have once possessed.

As similarly hit *The Happening*, *The Last Airbender* suffers from chronic, and often amateurish over-acting. Bar Dev Patel, who gives the only performance that might suggest that actually, they are taking this film seriously, the entire cast really struggles to portray believable roles in an ensemble that quickly escalates into farce. Shyamalan needs to rapidly rethink his on-set guidance because what he's doing at the moment really isn't working.

Moving away from the cartoon, Shyamalan also cast an almost entirely white Caucasian cast, at least within those fighting for good, where as in the series, the central characters are generally Asian. In cinema today, where there is great acting talent on offer from all over the world, and especially given the performances the hired actors gave, it was a great misstep to not be faithful to the source and match the ethics and values in the





original cartoon.

The problems though go far beyond the talent in front of the camera. The dialogue is sloppy, unnatural and thoroughly ill-conceived. There's no emotional connection between the characters, no bonds, depth or emotional development, instead the interactions are based solely around exposition and detail purely what has happened, what is happening or what is going to happen, each multiple times over.

Despite a multi-angled plot, there's a surprising lack of story to the film. Aang's journey to all corners of the earth, with battles here and there, and cuts to scheming from ulterior enemies back at their own base, yet you can describe the story in a couple of lines and still capture all of the major plot points.

For a \$150m film, the CGI is passable if not revolutionary. Some of the set pieces look nice, even if the fire and other elements won't blow you away. Releasing the film in 3-D, however, was a definite bad move. Adding nothing, in fact even more so than *Avatar*, this film is 95% in 2-D, poor implementation where it is used only detracts from the experience, and with the film already given a largely dark, mysterious look, the darkened tint 3-D specs give to the screen makes it almost pitch black at some points.

The first of a planned trilogy, be surprised if two and three get green lit, at least while Shyamalan wants to retain control. *The Last Airbender* possesses enough energy for this film and more but somehow it quickly grows drab and boring. If you aren't a fan of the original cartoon series, prepare to be disappointed, and if you are, it'll be even worse.

*The Last Airbender* completes writer/co-producer/director M. Night Shyamalan's fall from grace; once regarded as the most exciting talent in film, he now sits pretty as the laughing stock of Hollywood. Shyamalan certainly once had the vision to create great concepts and ideas, but he no longer possesses the oversight to follow them through, nor the structure or craft to produce an accomplished piece.

The trailers looked so promising, and the cartoon series is unabashedly brilliant, it's a then that pity *The Last Airbender* can't close the deal, instead it might just be the end for Shyamalan until he lifts his head from beneath the sand, and sees his recent efforts for what they really are; way, way below standard.

★☆☆☆☆



# THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES

**DIRECTED BY** JUAN JOSÉ CAMPANELLA **STARRING** RICARDO DARÍN, SOLEDAD VILLAMIL, CARLA QUEVEDO, PABLO RAGO, JAVIER GODINO, BÁRBARA PALLADINO & RUDY ROMANO

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (USA) AUGUST 13 (UK)

After last year's Best Film In A Foreign Language Oscar winner, *Departures*, scant got a release outside of its native Japan, it's pleasing to see this 2010's winner hit screens while it's success is still just about clinging on in people's minds.

Based on Eduardo Sacheri's book, *The Question In Their Eyes*, *The Secret In Their Eyes* is told in one, almost continuous, flashback. Kicking off in 1999, federal justice agent Benjamín Espósito recounts the rape and murder of Liliana Colotto, re-evaluating the events as he as he writes a novel to try and get to the bottom of the crime, even after some 25 years passed.

Jumping back to 1974, Espósito

and his team had been investigating the case for some time before at last they stumbled upon a clue that might lead them to the killer. Eerily staring at the deceased Liliana in a bunch of her old pictures, they have a new prime suspect, though even knowing he is a Racing fan, with a stadium packed weekly with tens of thousands of people, a vengeful husband waiting in the wings, even after attaching a face and a name to the suspected killer, catching him is still a near impossible task, and making it stick, even harder.

After spending a few years away from Argentina and movie-making (directing episodes of *House, M.D.* and *Law & Order* in the States), *The Secret In Their Eyes* marks an superb return for screenwriter/director Juan José Campanella. The film is shot with an effortless style, grace and class, and though it doesn't necessarily feel like an arthouse film, each scene is carefully curated, the lighting subtly warmed and the tone is dynamic, stopping the steadily moving film from ever feeling stagnant.

The plot is rich yet methodical, but it plays out perfectly, and despite taking the expected steps along the way you'll never lose interest. The

screenplay feels very accomplished, with a depth and backing to it that you don't often find in cinema now. Though we don't see everything that's going on in the background, you feel this is set to the hustle and bustle world within the courts and the police and that we're just seeing one strain of the every day fight for justice Espósito and his colleagues usually face.

Sadly, lead actor Ricardo Darín isn't quite as charismatic as he needs to be, not quite compelling enough to drive forward this complex and involving story, although this instead leaves the film to focus on just that, the story. As an ensemble cast, the actors work well but they always feel somewhat secondary to the plot, rather than fully entwined in it. The ending is similarly problematic, but despite feeling somewhat out of place, it does round off the story nicely.

Though it's not quite the masterpiece you might expect, you can certainly see why the Academy fell head over heels for *The Secret In Their Eyes*. Arguably a couple of the other films up for the Oscar deserved it a little more, but it's tough to argue that this doesn't deserve recognition too.

★★★★★



# THE KARATE KID

**DIRECTED BY HARALD ZWART STARRING JADEN SMITH, JACKIE CHAN, TARAJI P. HENSON, WENWEN HAN, RONG-GUANG YU, ZHENSU WU, ZHIHENG WANG & ZHENWEI WANG**

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 28 (UK)**

Re-watching the original *Karate Kid* by way of research for this 2010 update was perhaps a bad idea. This is a remake whose faithfulness and respect for the original is both a great strength and a crucial weakness; it brings back the old debate of whether updates are really a) needed and b) desired. It is ironic that this film, which at times is almost indistinguishable from its predecessor (bar some beautiful new location footage), should take that film's strengths and somehow labour under them.

But let's not be too harsh; it should be made clear from the off that this is not a generic update and it is certainly more than a cash-generator. It's much better than that. In taking the old story of a kid in a new town, struggling to make friends and adapt, who falls under the wing of an old martial arts master and forms a loving bond, the film succeeds. The original,

for all its occasionally cheesy '80s trappings and imperfections, was at heart about a relationship that not only worked, but was also touching and believable; rest assured, that has not changed.

The project has broadened in scope a little since the original. Our hero this time has moved from Detroit to Beijing (as opposed to California from New Jersey) and naturally has trouble adjusting. Then he meets a sweet Chinese girl (Wenwen Han) who befriends him and the local bullies who will inspire his transformation. Jaden Smith, in the lead role, carries the film adeptly, and his transformation from picked-upon new kid to martial arts hero is arguably more believable than the original film, thanks to a bit more screen time being devoted to training montages, and due to the fact that Smith is, in fact, a kid, whereas Ralph Macchio was well past 20 when he took up the mantle.

The Pat Morita role of ageing maintenance man/martial arts teacher has been taken over by Jackie Chan, an interesting piece of casting that turns out to be one of the film's strongest decisions. Chan's is the best performance here, channelling wisdom, charisma and underlying grief in a role that goes against his recently more jovial out-

ings. A surprisingly dark (and welcome) sequence involving a poignant car metaphor is handled well. There is also a nice reference to the original film near the beginning when Chan, chopsticks in hand, proceeds to splat a fly against the wall with a swatter.

So the film carries over the same fundamentals that made the original a memorable film, and there is no doubt that for a new generation, this film updates the story nicely. Appreciation of the film will come most strongly from those who have either never seen the original, or who have a nostalgic memory of it locked somewhere in their brains. At times the film is basically a shot for shot, sometimes even line for line mirror of the original, which couldn't help but feel a little too easy. The bully's motivation is also not as strong and gets a little lost in the mid-section, which has enough to deal with as it is.

That said, the film should be commended for updating the story so well, and for allowing a new generation (who may not be interested in the 1984 original, but might love Jaden Smith and Jackie Chan) to appreciate the timeless story. Add a fourth star if you haven't seen the original, or if it's been a long time.

★★★★☆

# GAINSBOURG

**DIRECTED BY** JOANN SFAR **STARRING** ERIC ELMOSONINO, LUCY GORDON, LAETITIA CASTA, DOUG JONES, ANNA MOUGLALIS, MYLÈNE JAMPANOI, KACEY KLEIN & SARA FORESTIER

**RELEASED** JULY 30 (UK) TBC (USA)

The name Serge Gainsbourg brings to mind that peculiarly French brand of charming and sexually liberated arrogance. His music was playful and rude, his showmanship delightfully droll. Cigarette in hand, with croaking wisps of biting sarcasm, he encapsulated perfectly the laconic but immense passion of the French spirit.

But behind this illuminated public persona lay an introverted and stubborn individual. Gainsbourg's stooping physique may have seemed, to his fans, like the sulking, lackadaisical haunch of a genius; but in fact it was the gait of a stubborn man ploughing forward through his life without a thought for the friends, relatives, and lovers he was leaving in his wake.

Gainsbourg was born to Russian-Jewish parents in Paris in 1928. His father was a bar pianist and his mother a soprano, but Gainsbourg was determined to become a painter and, after being expelled from school, he enrolled at the Ecole de Beaux Arts. He played piano in the bars and clubs of Paris to pay for his life as a struggling artist; and in 1958, after meeting the novelist and satirical songwriter Boris Vian, finally realised he was much more talented as a songwriter than a painter.

He gained notoriety writing the song *Sucettes À L'anis* for teen idol France Gall, which included the lyrics "Annie likes lollipops/ Aniseed lollipops/ The aniseed taste flows down Annie's throat/ She is in paradise." He began a passionate and famous affair with Bridget Bardot before falling desperately in love with British actress Jane Birkin on the set of *Slogan* in 1968. Their relationship was immortalised by the song *Je T'aime... Moi Non Plus*, which topped

global charts despite being banned on radio and being singled out by the Vatican for its explicit lyrics and use of 'orgasmic' sound effects.

The brightness of this glamorous and blessed life was dimmed by Gainsbourg's excessive lifestyle. After suffering a heart attack in 1973, he announced he would fix the problem by "upping his alcohol and tobacco consumption." He was untouchable as an artist, but unreachable as a human being. He blamed his fits of rage and waywardness on his alter-ego "Gainsbarre"; and as Gainsbarre began to take over, Gainsbourg's life began to fall apart. Birkin left him in 1980, stating that she "loved Gainsbourg, but was scared of Gainsbarre". He died, a recluse, in 1991, and the public outpouring of grief affirmed his status as a French cultural icon.

Joann Sfar's lugubrious and ethereal film is a delightful, thrilling tour through Gainsbourg's life. Sfar takes every facet of Gainsbourg's life – from his rebellious but starry-eyed youth to his stubborn and lonely autumn years – and mingles them with a touch of Russian fairytale to create an evocative and pleasantly sporadic homage. Given the period of Gainsbourg's fame, it would have been easy to turn this film into a New Wave homage with grainy jump-cuts and lots of bed-haired couples arguing in kitchens while smoking filter-less cigarettes. But while Sfar has paid tribute to this evocative period in French culture, he has also piqued out less obvious elements of the Gainsbourg legend (namely his Russian ancestry and love of folk stories) to create a magical and floating story with giant puppets and surreal Parisian rooftop settings. He has also taken an unusual route with the soundtrack, choosing to rerecord all of Gainsbourg's songs using contemporary bands and members of the cast.

Sfar has not attempted to entirely understand Gainsbourg or have the final say on his image; he has simply provided a fascinating and refreshing perspective on this overlooked and enigmatic icon.

★★★★★





# INCEPTION

**DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER NOLAN STARRING LEONARDO DI CAPRIO, JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT, ELLEN PAGE, TOM HARDY, KEN WATANABE, DILEEP RAO, CILLIAN MURPHY, MARION COTILLARD & TOM BERENGER**

**RELEASED OUT NOW**

Christopher Nolan is fast becoming synonymous with quality. So great is the man's ability, so great is his understanding of cinema, that watching him develop on screen has been an absolute pleasure. From relatively humble beginnings (*Following*) to blockbuster box-office success (*The Dark Knight*) he has proven himself to be a filmmaker bursting with ideas, brimming with intelligence and contagious enthusiasm.

With *The Dark Knight*, Nolan crafted a blockbuster that was so good it almost came as a culture shock; audiences had been fed so much Hollywood dross that the word 'blockbuster' was starting to become almost pejorative, and yet suddenly here was a picture with ideas as bold, bright and explosive as the explosions themselves. *Inception* is the film that Nolan has always wanted to make. And now, on the back of *The Dark Knight's* monumental success, he has made it at long last. And Warner Bros. should be praised for giving this man free reign, for not limiting him, for not chastening his imagination, because *Inception* is a cinematic rarity.

Quite how all of this came together is anyone's guess, but the vision was clear in Nolan's mind at least, and that was enough. Heaven knows it's taken long enough to get this on the screen. Leonardo DiCaprio (in the lead role) said that he barely understood the script the first time he read it, but he simply knew that he wanted to be involved. It would be remiss of me to elaborate too much on the story here – going in with as little prior knowledge as possible is advisable – but to briefly surmise: DiCaprio plays Cobb, an 'extractor' working for a firm who want him to steal some critical knowledge from inside a man's mind. In a deftly paced and mechanically efficient (though it doesn't show it) opening half hour, Nolan establishes the rules and groundwork of his world, and from there the film is its own beast.

The final hour of this film is frankly a miracle of editing (not to mention screenwriting); an absolute stand out sequence that is almost

impossibly audacious in its complexity. This breathless conclusion is the grand scale payoff the film gradually works towards, weaving the threads together as more cast members are added and more secrets are revealed. The pacing is almost perfect. At two and a half hours, this film felt too short. And that is one of the highest compliments you can give in cinema.

Nolan's on screen ensemble are so well cast it's hard to believe this is the first time we're seeing them all together. Everything is anchored by DiCaprio's nuanced, entirely convincing central role, but the cast around him shine just as bright. Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*(500) Days of Summer*) is effortlessly likable as Arthur, the team's researcher, as is Tom Hardy as 'Forger' Eames. Ellen Page as Ariadne (her name being perhaps the film's only unsubtle, though undoubtedly intended, element) is also charming, but it seems almost harsh to single out single actors, so convincing is the entire cast. And not only is the team in front of the camera impressive, but those behind it stand out as well. Nolan's regular collaborators Wally Pfister and Hans Zimmer (cinematography and music respectively) are both once again on top form. The film is gorgeous, sweeping effortlessly (and with a level of almost arrogant audacity) between myriad locations to the rousing booms and choruses of Zimmer's excellent score.

But there is a beating heart beneath this film that anchors the action (and there is a fair amount) in reality (ironic, given the film's concept). This comes across most strongly through DiCaprio, whose flaws come to represent more than simply the film's emotional core, but it's physical landscape as well. Similarly, the film is packed to the rafters with symbolism and poignant little asides that compliment the grandiose special effects and witty surrealism perfectly. You could spend hours discussing the different layers woven into this tapestry; as Ariadne says: "...it's pure creation."

This picture could easily have fallen apart. So complex is its narrative, so heavy are its themes, that it could have collapsed in on itself like the broken cities of its dream world. It is hugely impressive that, given what was at stake, Nolan has managed to not only pull this out of the bag (which would've been impressive enough), but to absolutely nail it. The film is as all-encompassing as the concept of its title: grand, epic, smart and unforgettable.

★★★★★







# BLACK DYNAMITE

**DIRECTED BY** SCOTT SANDERS **STARRING** MICHAEL JAI WHITE, ARSENIO HALL, TOMMY DAVIDSON, KEVIN CHAPMAN, RICHARD EDSON, DARREL HEATH & BUDDY LEWIS

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (USA) AUGUST 13 (UK)

Conceived after star Michael Jai White showed director Scott Saunders a picture of himself in his early '20s, moustache-laden and toting a huge gun and nun-chucks, titular character Black Dynamite remained a carbon copy of the actor's youth. Spoofing the blaxploitation films of the 1970s, *Black Dynamite* is an over-the-top movie that aims to laugh tongue-in-cheek at the ridiculous traits of the almost forgotten genre, but it's not all successful.

About a renegade neighbourhood hero (White) who goes on a mission

to clean up the streets and uncover who killed his brother, Black Dynamite discovers a secret plot that goes all the way to the top of national government, and via heroin pushing and cheap malt liquor, must fight to the death to save the day.

Nowhere near as funny as it needed to be, *Black Dynamite* is a low-grade, slapstick spoof, falling short where more insightful and clever offerings pull through. While it does offer up a few laughs, the film does nothing innovative or witty and is far too reliant on callbacks rather than attempting to entertain in its own right.

Though the film blends satire and nostalgia well, it always feels like it's trying too hard, working to imitate rather than breathing the blaxploitation tones itself. *Black Dynamite* is fun for a while but it gets tired very fast. The narrative needed to offer something new in the second and third acts

but instead it trips over the same quips and references over and over again.

Only just finding a release in the UK after hitting US screens last October, after obviously weighing up whether it was worth taking a chance on finding a British following, Icon would be much better lumping it straight onto DVD where it might yet find a cult following.

Spoofs are one of the hardest genres to do well, and though the cast and crew stuck at the production with vigour and confidence, it's such a bland and lifeless experience even the most ardent of Scott Sanders or Michael Jai White fans will do well to not grow bored before the end.

The concept within *Black Dynamite* certainly had potential, but as a short film or YouTube sensation, certainly as not the feature length picture it has become.





# KNIGHT AND DAY

**DIRECTED BY** JAMES MANGOLD **STARRING** TOM CRUISE, CAMERON DIAZ, PETER SARSGAARD, JORDI MOLLÀ, VIOLA DAVIS, PAUL DANO, FALK HENTSCHEL & MARK BLUCAS

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) AUGUST 6 (UK)**

You can see what James Mangold (*3:10 To Yuma*) and co. were trying to achieve with *Knight And Day*; a star driven chase movie with plenty of action. They aimed for a non-stop thrill ride with comic overtones but, alas, have failed to impress, delivering a standard blockbuster that has opened poorly in the States despite its two leads – Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz, reuniting for the first time since *Vanilla Sky* – and has garnered fairly negative reviews.

Roy Miller (Cruise) meets June Havens (Diaz) at an airport early in the film, and it isn't long before

things speed up, with a plane crash and plenty of fighting in the first ten minutes. From there the film hops between locations and set-pieces as Miller's quirky personality and dubious motives come under question. All of this revolves around a central MacGuffin known as the Zephyr, the invention of an under-used Paul Dano. The fact that the central plot point is almost casually thrown away in the last reel is the final evidence of this film's unsubtle approach.

The action is frequent and mildly boring throughout (the film's supposed piece de resistance, a motorbike chase during a bull run, is monumentally disappointing), whilst the relationship between Miller and Haven fizzles occasionally (the pair have undeniable chemistry) but isn't ever allowed to do more than that. Cruise gets some decent comic moments and Diaz is likable, though she doesn't do much except scream and talk over the action scenes, which are loud and occasionally

suffer from dodgy CGI.

One of film's running jokes involves what can only be described as 'catch-up' sequences, in which a character is rendered unconscious for some length of time and as such has only brief recollections of how they came be where they are. You can see the thinking behind this, but in reality these sequences only end up mocking the viewer. Why should we watch a film that thinks it's funny to leave gaping holes in the narrative, either because it can't or simply doesn't want to explain what's going on?

This film is saved from complete failure by Cruise, who seems to be having fun and does his best to inject some verve into the lacklustre plot and monotonous chase sequences. Overall though, this is very standard fare, and in a summer when it will be competing with the marvellous (and intelligent) *Inception*, it would be criminal if this were to win the box office.

★★★☆☆

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# DOWN TERRACE

**DIRECTED BY** BEN WHEATLEY **STARRING** ROBIN HILL, ROBERT HILL, TONY WAY, GARETH TUNLEY, JULIA DEAKIN, MICHAEL SMILEY, KERRY PEACOCK & DAVID SCHAAL

**RELEASED** JULY 30 (UK) AUGUST 13 (USA)

If you thought the Hollywood ladder was difficult to get a step up on, well it isn't much easier in Britain. The UK film industry is a similar quagmire with countless pictures hoping to find distribution and a release.

When a small budget film does make the breakthrough, you'd think, given the competition, that it would be an inventive and captivating experience, but sadly *Down Terrace* doesn't fit the bill.

About a father and son duo, fresh out of jail after being acquitted of their crimes, they settle back into their old life but before long curiosity gets the better of them, and rather than moving on they feel pushed to find out who grassed them up to the police in the first place. The plot certainly had potential but rather than taking the *Dead Man's Shoes* route of a dark, brooding thriller; it feels like a soap opera trying to do a gangster story line. And it's equally as unconvincing.

Though it takes place over a week, it feels like the cast are just sitting down in the living room the whole time, drinking tea and eating biscuits, as pretty much nothing happens the whole film. Even at only 89 minutes, it really starts to drag towards the final act, and coupled with a grossly misplaced acoustic guitar soundtrack

you'll want to see the credits long before the film is over.

Shot in low quality digital, *Down Terrace* lacks atmosphere and cinematography is nonexistent. The film tries to be gritty but doesn't have the strength of ambition nor quality of execution to pull it off, and what's left is bland and without emotion.

The father and son leads are good and it was enjoyable to see some bit-part British TV actors get bigger roles, it's just a shame there wasn't more polish. *Down Terrace* doesn't just feel like the work of a first-time filmmaker, but that of someone who's never before thought about making movies.

Credit goes to Metrodome for backing such a small budget British indie picture, it's just a pity *Down Terrace* can't return their faith.

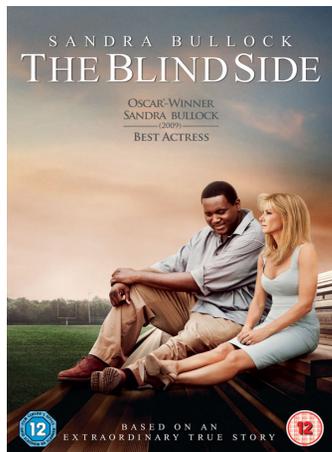
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## THE BLIND SIDE

Home to Sandra Bullock's Oscar-winning performance, *The Blind Side* re-lives American footballer Michael Oher's rise from foster care to the 2009 NFL draft and being picked for the professional league in an affecting tale.

Show ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## SHUTTER ISLAND

Mystery/thriller directed by Martin Scorsese, Leonardo DiCaprio and Mark Ruffalo lead the investigation of a missing person at the Ashecliff Hospital for the criminally insane. Will keep you guessing until the end.

Film ★★★★★

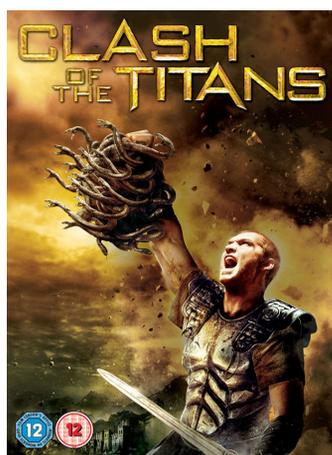
Extras ★★★★★

## CLASH OF THE TITANS

Remarkably dull action-epic as Sam Worthington leads the charge to stop evil forces from the underworld from invading earth and the heavens. Despite good CGI, the action lacks excitement and the narrative is stop/start.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## BREAKING BAD: SEASON 2

Breathtaking TV drama about a loyal husband and father who starts cooking meth to provide for his family after being diagnosed with cancer. Amazing on every level.

Show ★★★★★

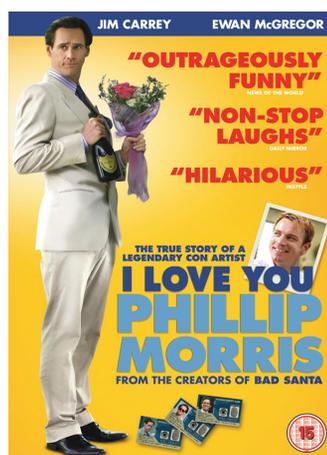
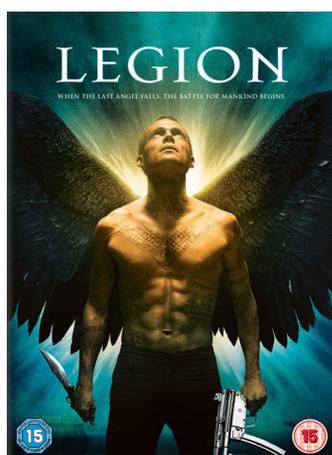
Extras ★★★★★

## LEGION

Fantasy/horror starring Paul Bettany, he plays an archangel sent to earth by God to eradicate all of humanity, only, he sets up camp in a roadside diner to instead protect the young saviour of the mankind. Forgettable.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## I LOVE YOU PHILLIP MORRIS

Con artist and multiple prison escapee Steven Ray Russell's real life story as he falls in love behind bars and does anything to spend time with Phillip Morris.

Film ★★★★★

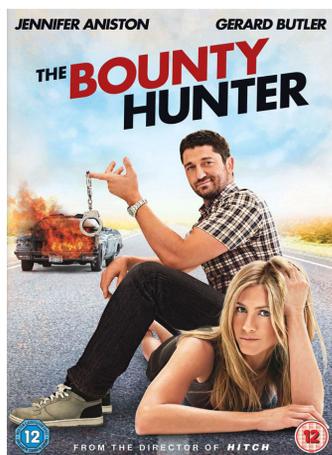
Extras ★★★★★

## THE BOUNTY HUNTER

Romantic-comedy starring Gerard Butler and Jennifer Aniston, they play an ex-husband and wife, but with him now a bounty hunter and her on the run, he's hired to track her down. Sadly doesn't try anything new.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## CENTURION

Tired, gore-heavy action/adventure as a roman soldier fights for survival behind enemy lines. Suffers from a chronically linear plot and no character development meaning despite the full throttle set-pieces it grows boring.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



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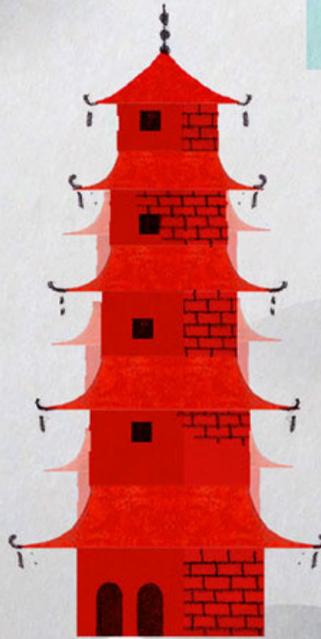
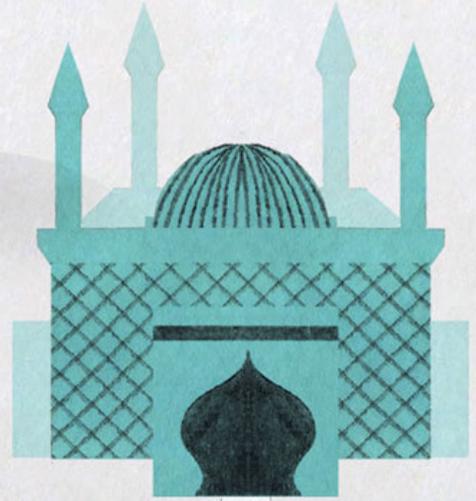
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***ART***



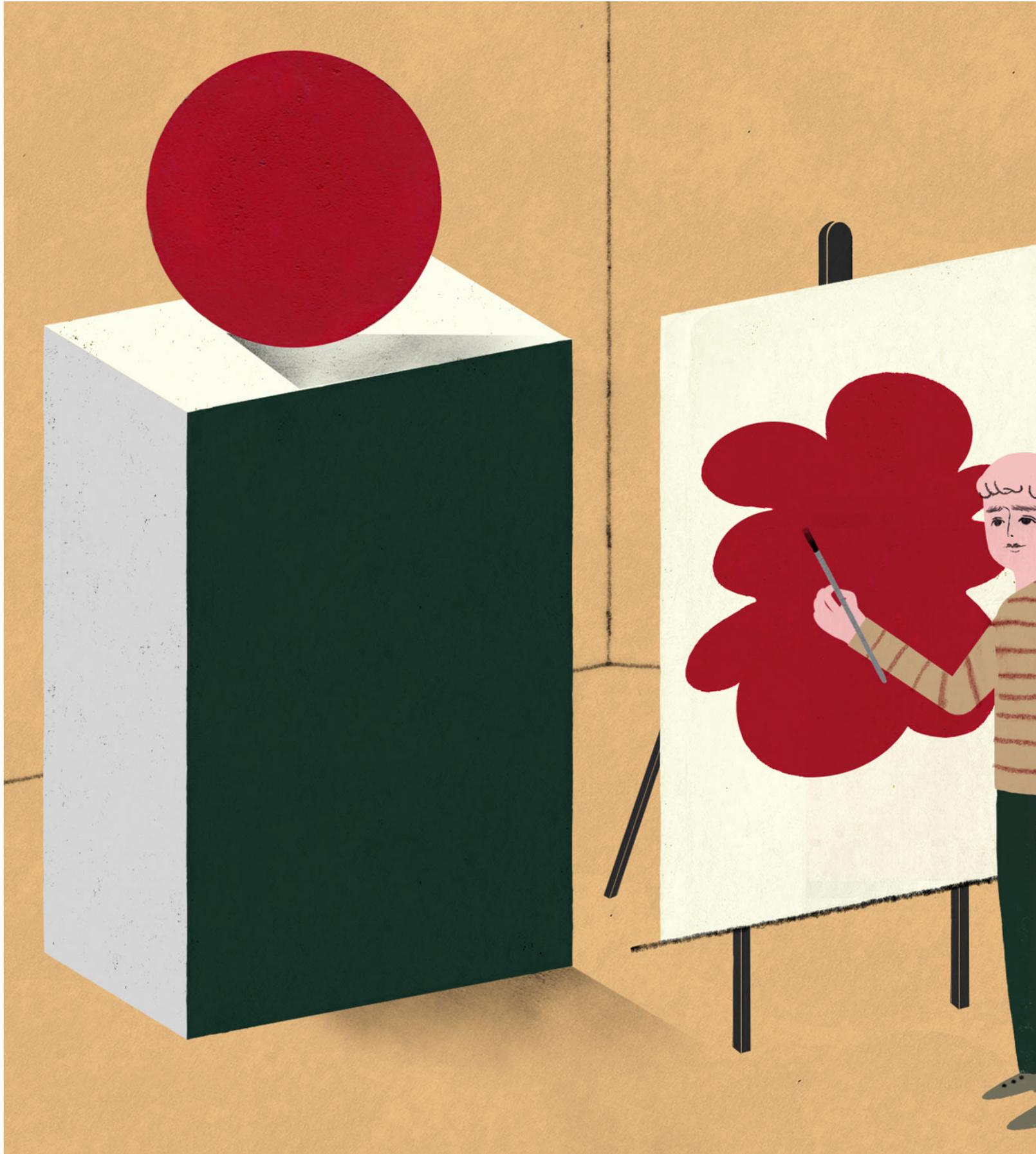




NOW YOU  
SEE ME























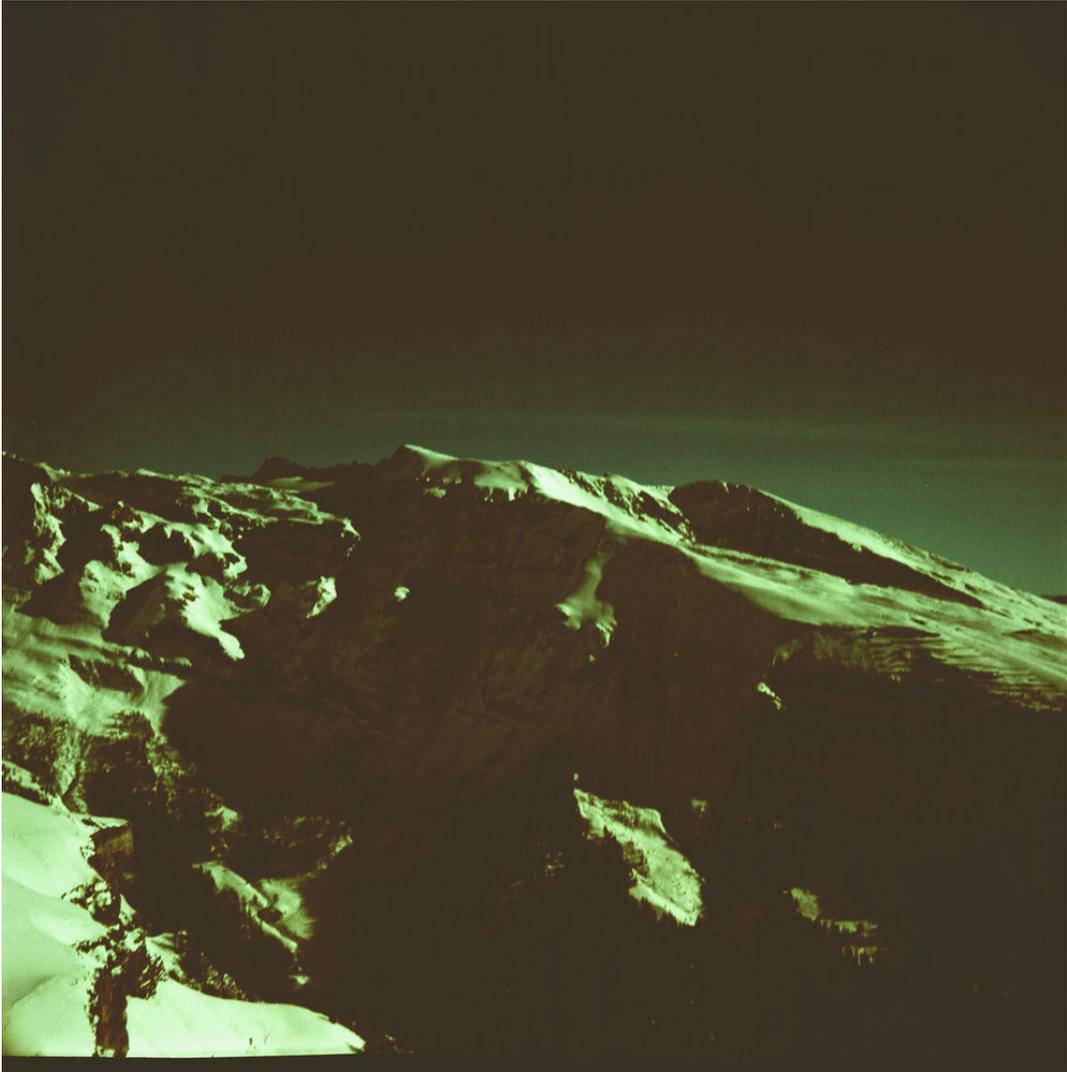




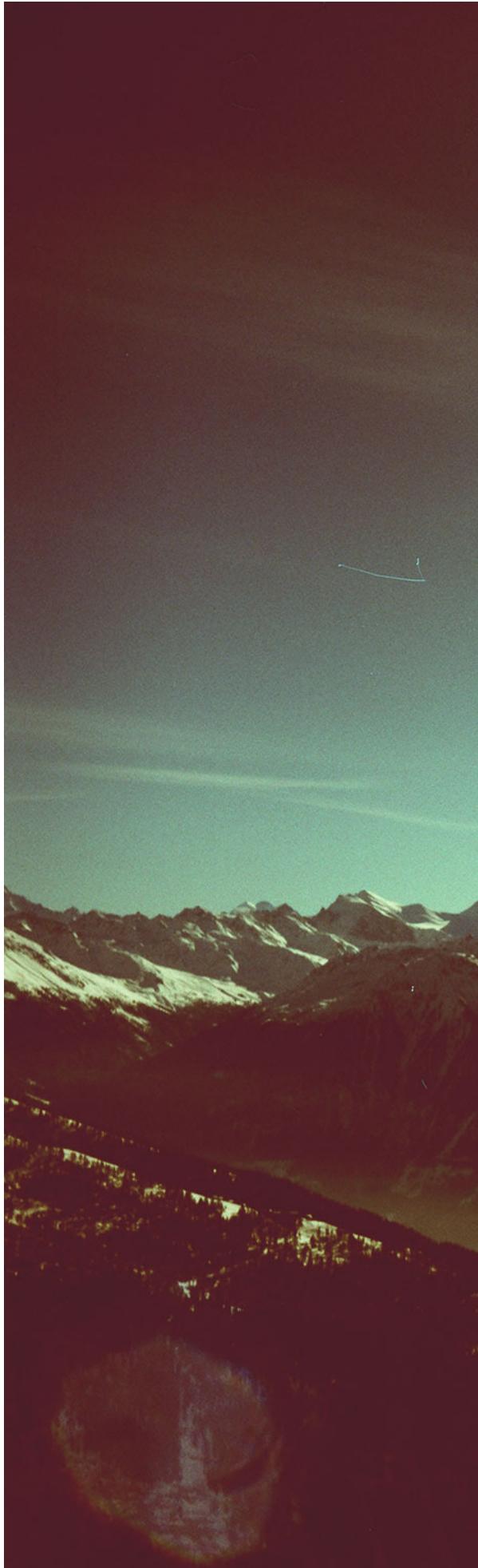


# TWIN PEAKS

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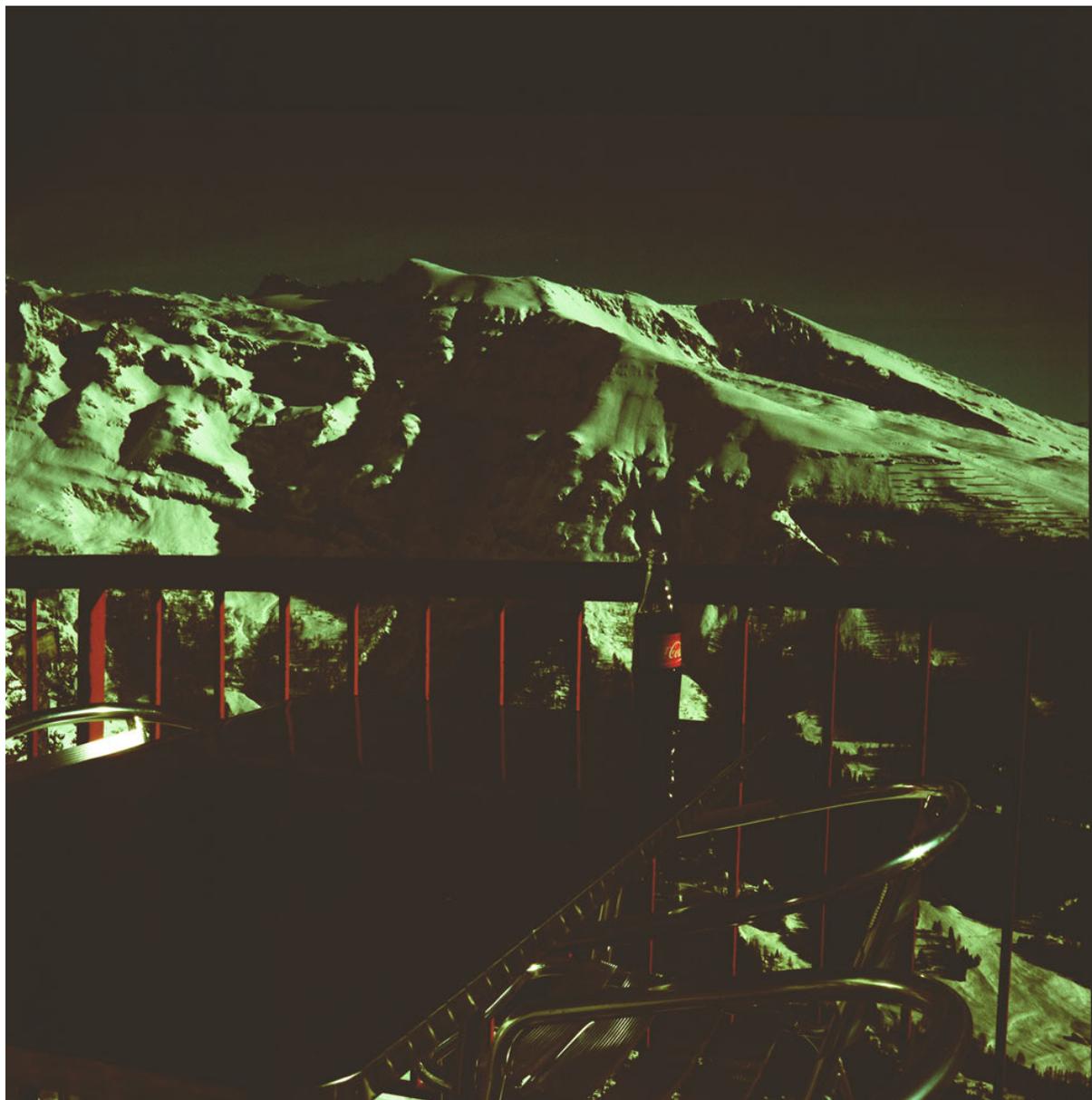
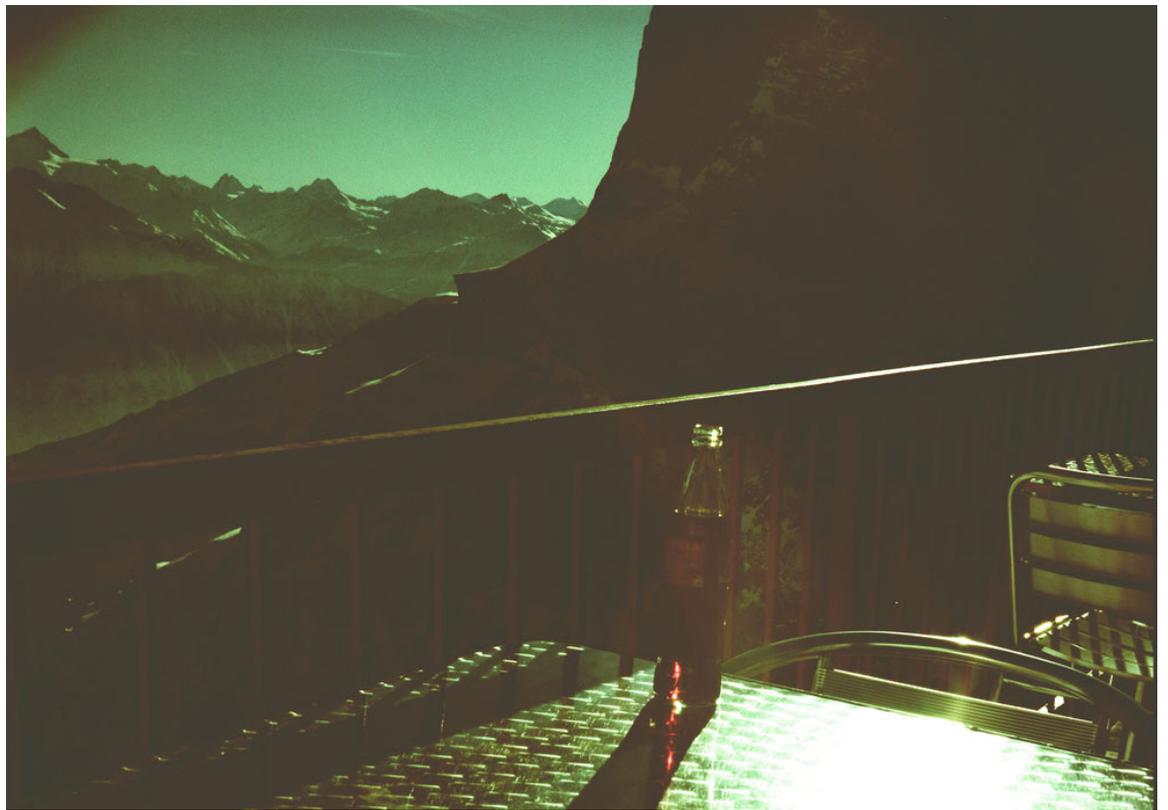










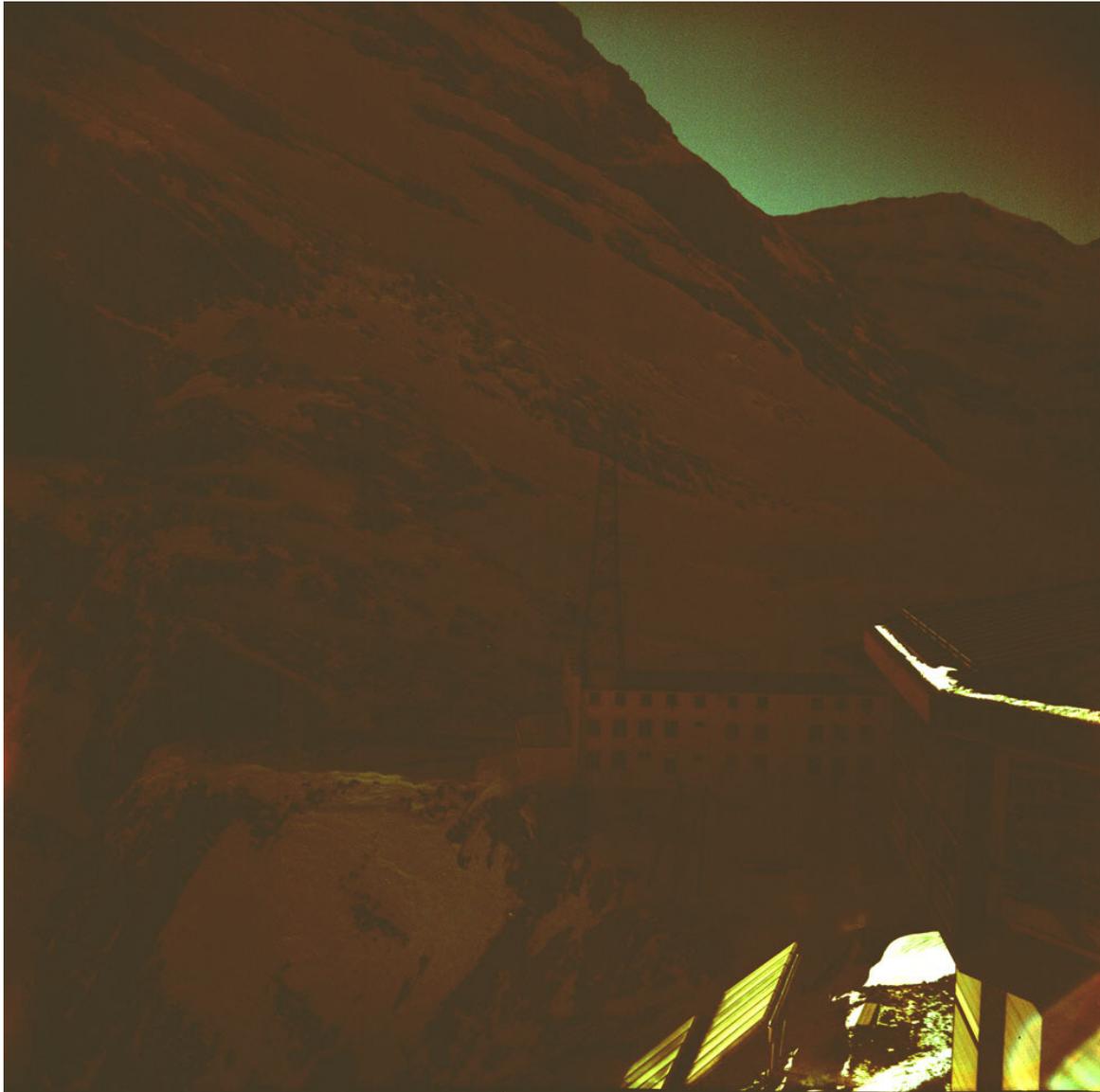














ART



# LADY IN THE WATER

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# THE PRINCE'S COUSINS

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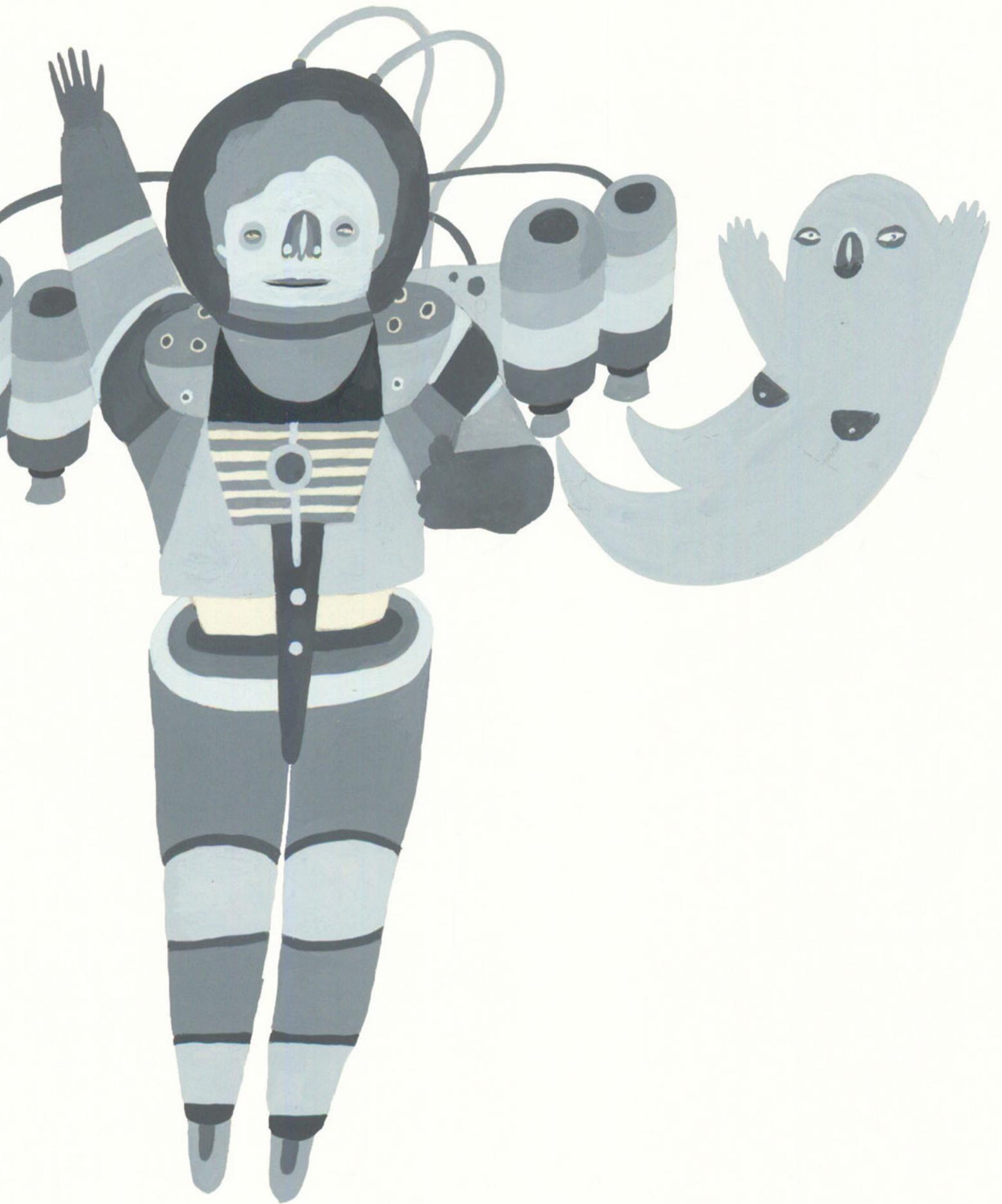
















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# SUMMER OF LOVE

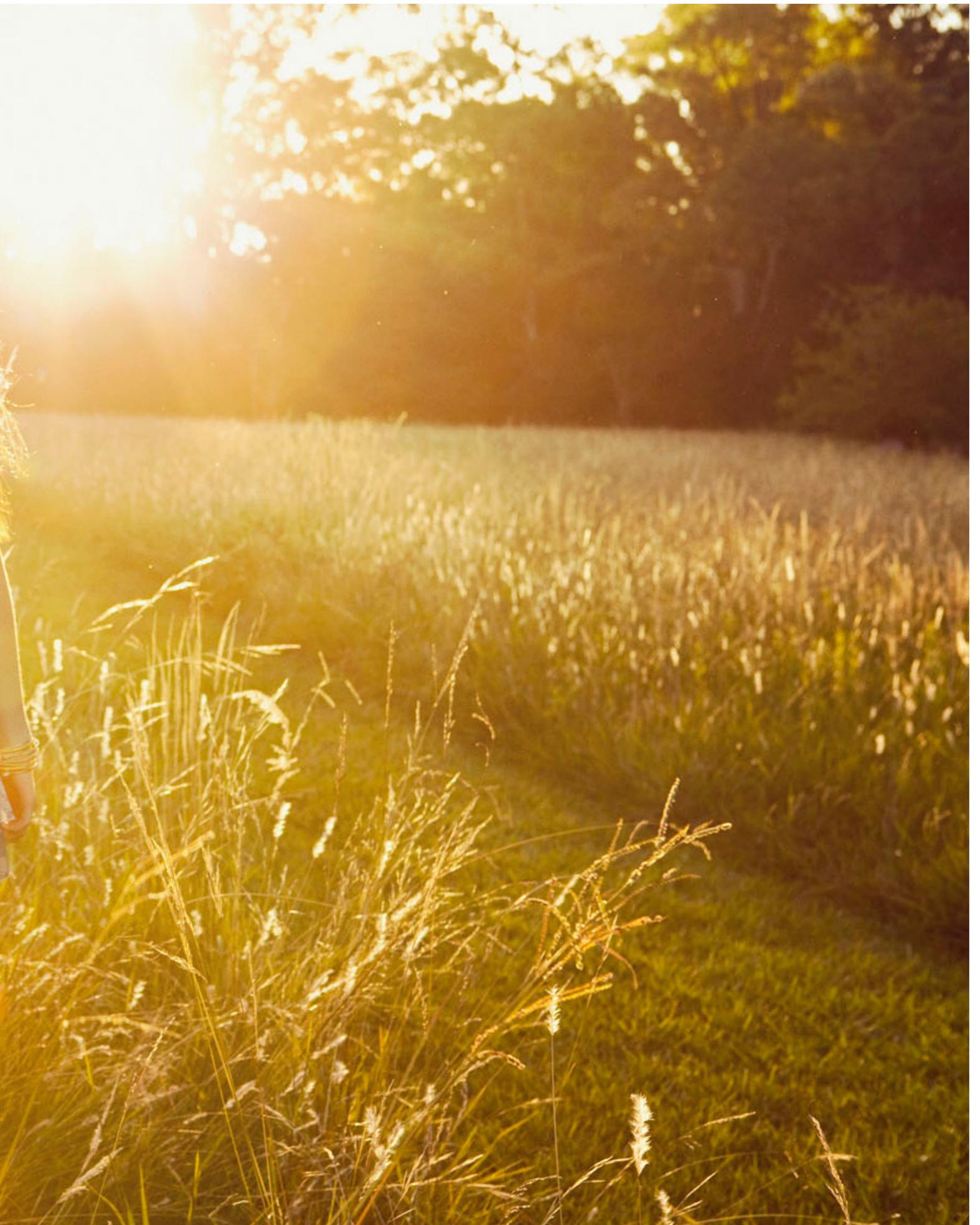
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# THE WALLS ARE CLOSING IN





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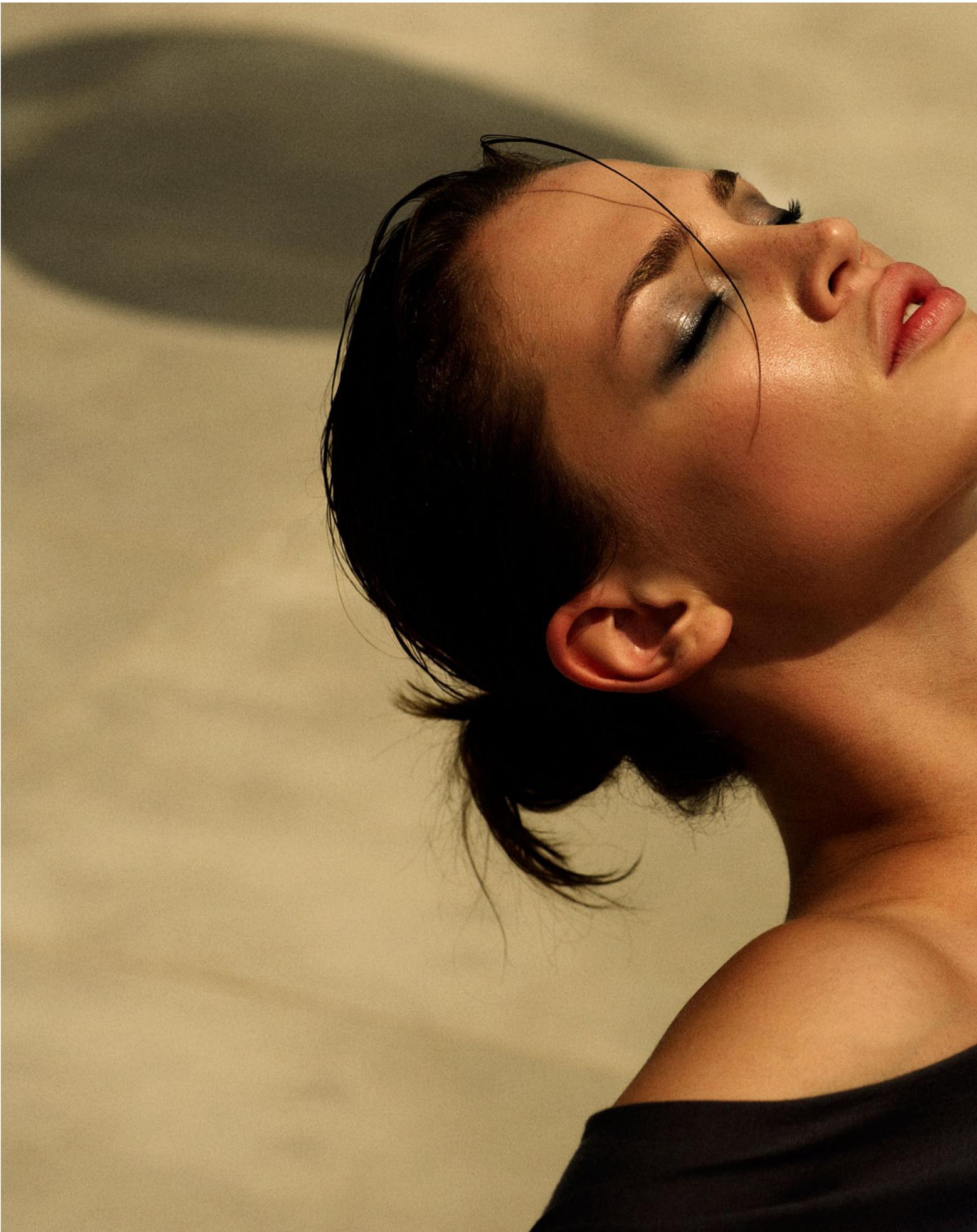


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# STREETS OF RAGE

















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