

### The modern gentleman



n the Spring/Summer 2011 issue of *Another Man* magazine, editorin-chief Jefferson Hack interviews Tom Ford, not about his latest menswear collection, nor about the followup to his quite wonderful film debut, *A Single Man*, but instead about being a gentleman.

With the world forever in a rush, treating strangers with respect and kindness and looking out for others seems to be a pleasant surprise, rather than the expected norm you might have assumed some decades ago. Talk of being a gentlemen will likely be partnered with the term 'old fashioned' in the same sentence, but what's really so un-modern about having good manners?

The ability to read a social situation and measure your behaviour has become a rare quality in modern

society. More so than ever, the arrogance of youth delves deep into public perception, and while certainly not always a bad thing (in the right measure, it can bring confidence, drive and ambition), it can taint and cloud judgement, and is perhaps the reason the well-mannered are seen as a surprise.

Simmered down from the compelling 10-page print interview, the *Another Man* website presents Ford's five easy lessons in how to be a modern gentleman, and the 21st century man would be advised to take note. To put on the best version of yourself when you go out in the world; to work, be engaged, and be passionate; be well mannered, open doors for women, stand up to greet and bid farewell people at the dinner table; to not judge people by their background; and to never wear shorts in the city,

and certainly avoid flip-flops. While I couldn't disagree more on his views on men's shorts (though flip-flips I would happily eradicate from this earth), on everything else, he makes fine points.

When people say 'you only live once', it is generally applied to taking risks and having fun, but hey, why not give a good impression of yourself in the mean time. Certainly the era of the gentleman is over, but it wouldn't it be nice if it just popped its head back in. An all-suited Oxford Street would be a dream, with Band Of Outsiders tailoring our nation. Certainly society is still doing alright, but some old fashioned charm and romance once in a while sure doesn't go amiss, and if we all look suave and sleek in the mean time, well that's just better still.

Sam Bathe EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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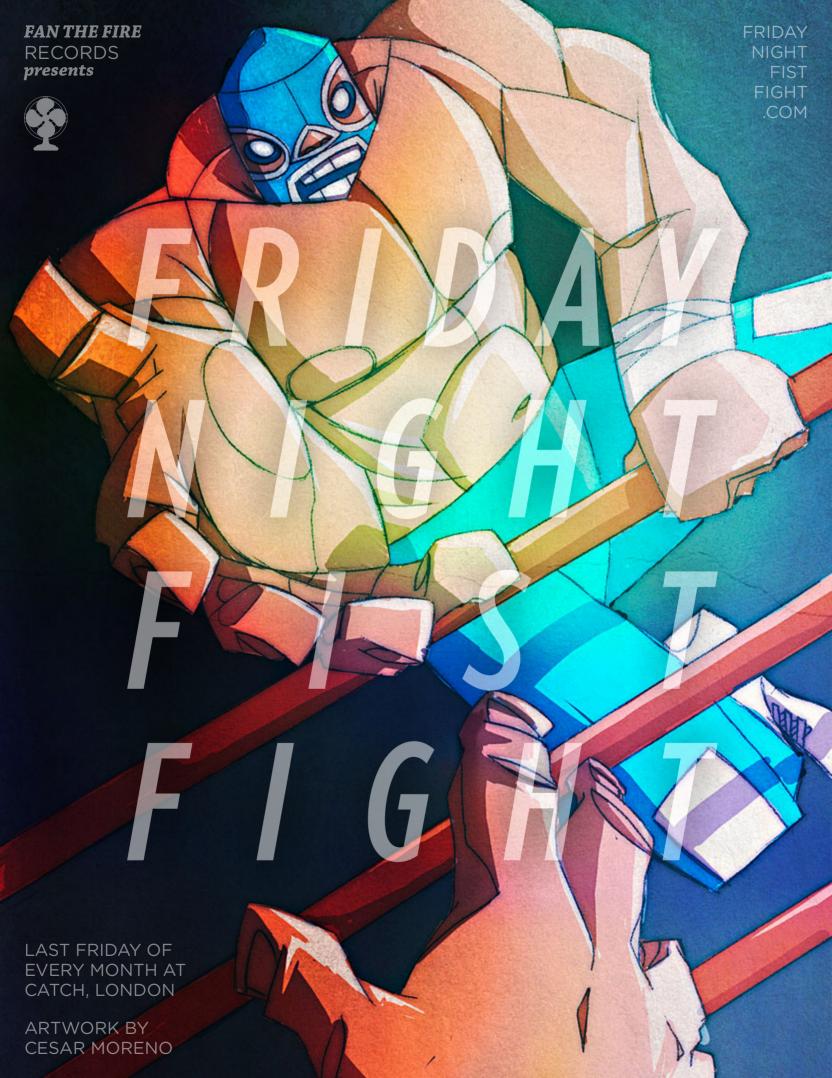
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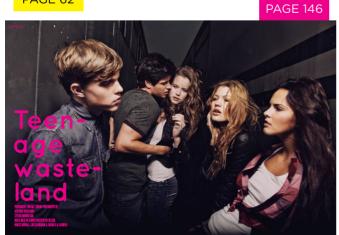


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BUMPING INTO CELEBRITIES IN LA

**THE COUNTER** 

JACK DANIEL'S HONEY WHISKEY





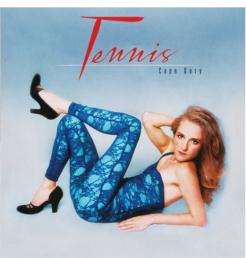


**BOB'S BURGERS** 

I SAW THE DEVIL







CAPE DORY BY TENNIS



BAND OF OUTSIDERS SUITS







THE WONDER WOMAN
TV SHOW OUTFIT

**BOB GELDOF** 

THE WAIT UNTIL NEXT YEAR'S SXSW







THE DAILY

**JETLAG** 







POINTLESS REVIEW EMBARGOES



BAND OF OUTSIDERS' SUIT PRICING





### ROBERT FRANCIS



DELS



ROB SHERIDAN INTERVIEW

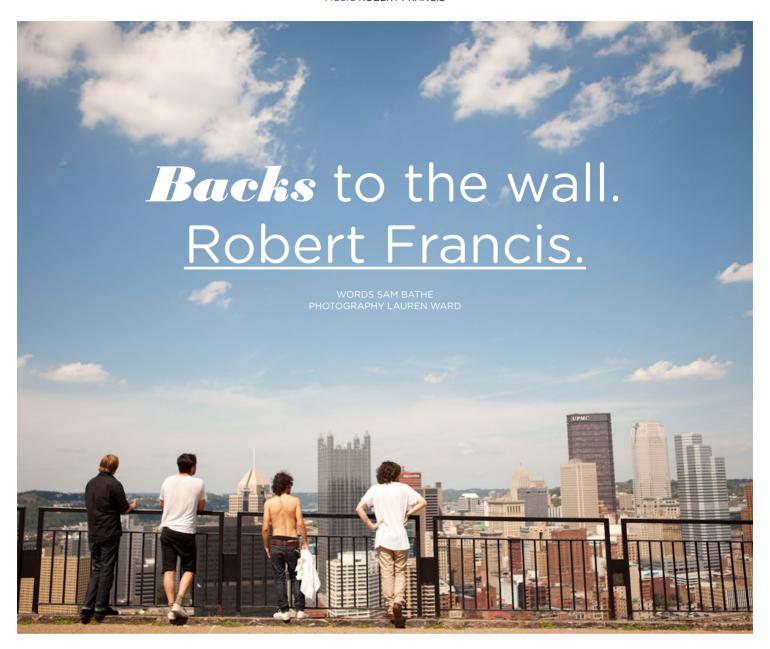


SXSW 2011



THE PERFECT FESTIVAL





ife must be a whirlwind for Robert Francis, but one that certainly sounds like it would be a lot of fun. The talented singer-songwriter-comefolk-rock frontman started early in the music business, and hasn't looked back since. Bored of school, and with ambitions beyond what he was then on schedule to achieve in live, at just 17, Francis took on the guitar full time and dropped out of high school to embark on his real passion as a career. Touring with his sister's band, Hello Stranger, it was a breakneck start to life as a musician, but one he grabbed hold of with two, firm hands.

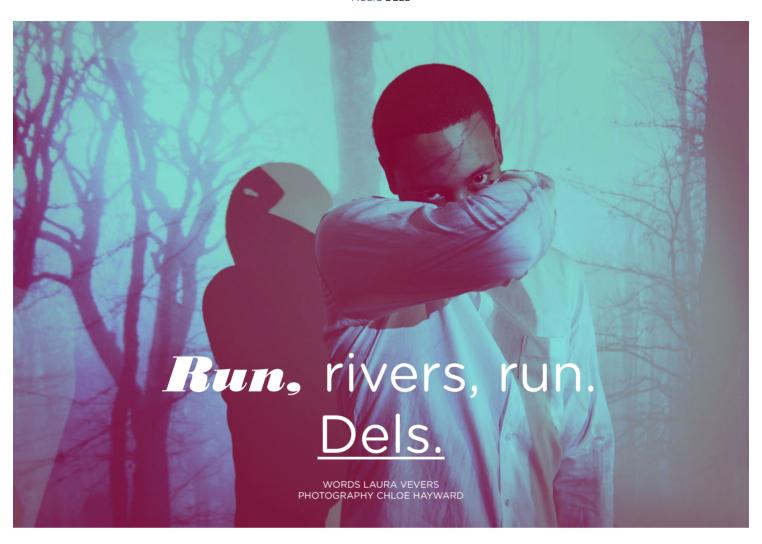
Handling pretty much everything, in front of, and behind, the studio glass, Francis' down-tempo, emotional and striking debut album, *One By* 

One, was critically-acclaimed and soon made him a name to look out for, even far beyond the LA scene within which he was born and raised. Putting the LP out on tiny local label Aeronaut Records, soon indies and majors were baying at his door, and pairing with Atlantic for number two, and with a full band in tow, things really got moving in the direction he had wanted.

Before Nightfall was a much fuller sounding release. Francis had moved into folk-rock with a real tempo to it, but still keeping the very personal nature it seems his writing always brings. Just two years after Francis released One By One, 2009's Before Nightfall this time took only 3 weeks in the studio, as the assistance from a major certainly did him well.

With things really moving for Francis in Europe, and his name perhaps bigger in the likes of France and Germany than his native USA, the album at last reached stores in the UK late last year and he's similarly celebrated a spot playing on Jay Leno's *The Tonight Show*, alongside other TV appearances.

With a third album due out later this year, the talented 23-year-old has already done a lot with his life, with countless nationwide support and headline tours under his belt. His life is a far cry from things six years ago, then restricted by a monotonous life in school, but the future is still getting brighter. Look out for where the next six might take him, for Robert Francis, the sky really is the limit.



pswich rapper Dels (Kieren Dickens) used to be a visual artist, but on debut album Gob he manages to conjure an uneasy urban landscape through the medium of sound. On repetitively hypnotic recent single Shapeshifter he claims: "I'm a bird, I'm a tree, I'm a bike, I'm a plane, I'm the ground underneath your feet, I'm the rain in the sky, I'm a cloud, I'm the sun, I'm a star..." Essentially, this boy can be anything, and with help from an all-star production team including Micachu, Hot Chip's Joe Goddard and the brilliant Kwes, he has fused grime, hip-hop, indie and electronica to create a record that is overwhelmingly original; no mean feat in an industry already oversaturated with rap/rock hybrids and mainstream indie-electro 'experimentation'.

Dels doesn't compromise lyrically or melodically in a bid to sound commercial either. This is highlighted on the hard-to hear Droogs, where Dickens tells a painful and uncensored

tale of child sex abuse. His urban troubadour style of delivery recalls some of the rawness and power of Dizzee Rascal's debut, but this is definitely a record for 2011.

Goddardproduced Trump*alump* is a skillful slice of electronic grime brilliance, while Another Goddard collaboration, Capsize, sees Dels and UK hip-hop maverick Roots Manuva taking it in turns to spit anti-Tory sentiments against a backdrop of uneasy beats and computer

game bleeps. Dickens more than holds his own against the formidable Rodney Smith, and the result is a simultaneously powerful and tongue-in-cheek

dystopian anthem that begs to be played loudly on repeat – preferably outside David Cameron's house (you know the address). Kwes-produced DLR is a minimalistic gem that shows

> off the melancholic, almost monotonous quality of Dels' voice, complemented by Elan Tamara's simple but heartshattering chorus. Already lauded in the music press and gaining airplay both underground and on Zane Lowe's Radio 1 show, Dels is set to be deservedly huge in 2011. For

such a magical record, the Mercury Music Prize seems a fairly expected shout too.

# Visualising downward spirals. Rob Sheridan.

WORDS SAM WALKER-SMART



or twelve years Rob Sheridan has been the creative force behind Nine Inch Nails' iconic and ground-breaking visual output. Album covers, music videos, posters, websites, apps, photography and stage productions have all been part of his day job as Trent Reznor's resident art director. And when not busy with one of the world's biggest bands, Sheridan manages to put out his own acclaimed illustration and photography work to. We caught up with the living legend to talk gaming, Grammy nominations and children's books.

FAN THE FIRE: You were hired at the tender age of 19 by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor on the merits of your NIN fansite. How did that feel? ROB SHERIDAN: It was completely surreal, I hadn't even finished my first year of college. It was like someone carefully crafted my dream job and then dropped it on my lap. It was a lot to process for an awkward 19-year-old kid, I felt like I was quitting school to run off and join the circus.

FTF: Is there any particular work with the band you're especially proud of?
RS: I think I'm most proud of the stage production we did for NIN's 2008
Lights In The Sky tour. Aside from being incredibly pleased with how it turned out, something like that also gives you the satisfaction of watching thousands of people react to it in real-time. It's a great feeling watching people really be blown away by something you've worked on, you don't get that type of feedback with most other mediums.

FTF: You've found success as a graphic designer, photographer and illustrator. Do you believe that the modern artist should be versatile in the digital age? RS: It has its benefits, absolutely. For my job, the versatility has been key, and I love learning new skills and experimenting in new fields. On the other hand, I've suffered a bit from being a jack-of-all-trades, in that I haven't honed in on one particular medium and devoted myself to it. I feel like in that sense, I haven't reached my potential in some areas. At some

point I need to pick a discipline and really grow in it for a while, but for the moment I'm happy doing a little bit of everything.

FTF: Under the 'tourist' heading on your website you can find some amazing photography from around the globe. Are there particular shots or locations that will stay with you forever?

RS: Unquestionably post-Katrina New Orleans is the first one that comes to mind. I've never seen devastation like that. Some many homes and lives in ruins. It was heartbreaking, especially having lived there for a few years. It was nice to be able to go there and take photos and put them online, and hopefully help some people better understand the sheer scale of that disaster.

FTF: The Grammy nomination you received for art direction on NIN's Ghosts I-IV must be quite nice on the CV. How did you feel about winning the award?
RS: It was a bit of a surprise, I certainly wouldn't have thought of myself as a Grammy nominee. Mostly I was happy to see that package get some recognition as I'm really proud of the work we did on it, and by its nature as a deluxe package, not all that many people got to actually see it.

**FTF**: It's known you're a bit of a gamer. If you could pick a childhood favourite and a contemporary releases to be stuck on a desert island with what would you choose?

**RS**: That's a tough decision! The first old favourite that comes to mind is *Galaga*. I never get tired of trying to beat my high score on that game. The classics from that era of arcade gaming had the most amazing complex simplicity, if that makes any sense. They were incredibly simple to play but they had tonnes of little nuances that made them so addictive and extremely difficult to master. Contemporary game? I'm at a loss. Since I'd be stuck on a desert island, maybe I'd have to finally get into *Minecraft*, I hear it's an amazing timesuck.

FTF: You've mentioned you would like

to tackle a children's book down the line, would it be as dark as your current illustrations or a complete departure in tone?

**RS**: I'd like to do something a little bit dark, something that maybe feels a little edgy to kids, and challenges them a bit, while also being very enjoyable for adults. I love stories that can crossover and be just as entertaining to a 40-year-old as they are to an 8-year-old. These days Pixar is doing the best work out there in that department.

FTF: If any, what bands or music do you like to listen to as you work?

RS: Nothing specific really. If there isn't some new album I want to check out, I'll usually put on a genius mix in iTunes, or listen to Pandora. But sometimes if I'm working on something with a very specific tone to it, I'll find some mood music that really fits where I want the work to go.

**FTF**: Any advice for digital artists just starting out?

**RS**: People often ask me for career advice and I have to tell them I'm a pretty terrible person to ask because I've had such an unusual career path that it's hard for me to even know what I'd do in a typical career path. But one thing I've always had success with, and seen others have a lot of success with, is doing really cool work, doing a lot of it, and putting it out on the internet. Everywhere you possibly can. Join communities, share it with people in your field, send it to people you respect, post it on every art site you can. If you only post it on your own website and hope people will somehow show up and see it, then you're going to be disappointed. And don't be overprotective of your work, either. Put it out in hi-res, let people download it. One of the best ways I've gotten attention to my illustrations is by making them available as hi-res wallpapers. It frustrates me when I see people putting their work online as tiny little files with huge watermarks. Worry about getting people interested in your work before you worry about them ripping it off.

# 

WORDS SAM BATHE
PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICE JACKSON



Tuesday night is normally quiet in Austin. Film and Interactive attendees can be seen wandering the streets, but on the music front, events, bands, badge-holders and all, there's normally little going on. This year? Well, Tuesday was pretty busy.

Alongside a handful of unofficial parties, including Syndicate at Purevolume House where the line went all the way around the block, official showcases were already going.

We hit Emo's, and it was a pretty wise choice. Flittering between Emo's and Emo's Jr. (one's a more regular inside venue, and the other outside, under a long wooden canopy), already checking off a bunch of bands we wanted to see at this year's SXSW.

First up was Jamie Woon at Emo's Jr., instantly breaking our rule of trying to avoid British bands/artists. He was worth it though. Somewhere between James Blake and John Legend, the R'n'B soul singer draws comparisons to Plan B, who has made it big of late. His voice is powerful and the background music feels fresh, making great use of classical influences.

Weekend, up next, couldn't have been any more different. Vocally reverb-heavy rock, each track is endlessly driven forward by great percussion. They could have done with stronger guitar and bass, with more hooks and signature riffs to go against the drawl-

The start of SXSW proper,

unofficial day shows werea-plenty on the Wednesday, but
we opted to see some old friends, and
the recently resurgent, Eastern Conference Champions first. Fresh off the
back of a track on the latest Twilight
OST, the Cali three-piece debuted a
bunch of new songs that go further
than all of their material in the past.
A little similar to best track to date,
Noah, ECC exhibited more variation
and all faster songs. Anticipation for

ing vocals but they're a great example of lo-fi that isn't Best Coast or Wavves, lacking currently on the music scene.

Weekend played outside, and following them were Beach Fossils, the first revelation of 2011's festival. Summery, bright indie, Beach Fossils are like The Drums, only good, and not formed of four pretentious New Yorkers. Where The Drums are so forced on-stage, Beach Fossils just go for it, dancing up and down and running about no end; they're great live. They don't quite have the same energy in mp3 form, but check them out in the flesh and you'll be blown away.

Also under the Emo's canopy, PS I Love You had a lot of hype in the latter half of 2010 and in the run-up to SXSW. Who knows why? Semi-screaming indie, their vocal style was a little reminiscent of Tenacious D but they don't have the fun or playful nature, and there's no spark to their music. They're solid, but certainly nothing special.

With Gold Panda headlining the night, Mount Kimbie played just before at Emo's Jr., and it was pretty obvi-

sophomore record *Speak Ahh* is build-

their

ing.
Teased into hanging
around at Cedar Street Courtyard
for Voxhaul Broadcast, the similarly
LA-based band have been building
momentum in their hometown. Funny
on stage, they introduced each member and gauged how much the crowd
liked them from their cheer, entertaining interludes between the still quite
captivating tracks. Voxhaul Broadcast
play heavy indie rock, there's a touch
of Angels And Airwaves to them, and
they could go far.

One of the most hyped acts going into SXSW, Yuck have failed to fully capitalise on their early potential and haven't exploded in the way they would have hoped in the UK, still, big

ous why they were there as support. Perhaps inevitably, however, they ended up as little more than a weak, if still promising, copy. Spikey and eclectic, Mount Kimbie drive a lot from guitar effects but the sound on a whole is still largely electronic.

Gold Panda were the real standout of our first night. Reworking synths and samples for a collection of powerfully rhythmic tracks, Gold Panda sound like little else out there, and while on record Gold Panda's Lucky Shiner tracks are quite wonderful, but there's even more to them live. Playing an incredible 40-minute set with barely a break to introduce himself, Derwin Panda seamlessly merged tracks, one into another, and went off to rapturous applause. A pretty incredible end to what we had expected to be a quiet opener in Austin.

were
expected of
them on their foray
into the States. Though

things

Operation would have you believing they're fairly slipstream indie, hook-driven rock, quite reminiscent of The Cribs, in general their music is far more reverb-based, often slower and more moany.

Heading to The Parish next for 1,2,3, we were treated to a brief snippet of Fidlar first. If only. A Hivesish garage that probably shouldn't have made it as far SXSW, we quickly returned to the bar, but when 1,2,3 later came out, they weren't much better either. Playing light rock, they're competent enough, and certainly indie movie soundtrack material, but nothing to particularly shout about.

Fairly soon we ducked out for Maggie Mae's, and Errors certainly put on a much better performance. The British band have made significant inroads in the UK over the last couple of years and it's pretty clear why. Playing math-y prog. synth-rock, though they can't entirely back up standout track

*Supertribe*, they're still great live and wowed the on-looking crowd no end.

As is often the case for visiting bands, Veronica Falls, playing at Beauty Bar, soon announced that they were tired and highly jetlagged, but vowed not to let it get in the way of a stirring show. And it didn't. Lo-fi has threatened to take over of late and Veronica Falls are likely one of the first of a raft of post-Best Coast bands. While the London four-piece's tracks are quite twee, and they similarly lack a 'big' song, if the rest of the onrush are going to sound like this, we're more than up for it. I kind of wish they had soundtracked Richard Ayoade's Submarine too, rather than Alex Turner and his more than depressing, and entirely monotonous, solo effort.

When flicking through the band listings the day before, I picked out Tennis to go and see, purely based on their name. Then after looking into them a little online, it seems they've been getting some hype, and I quickly grew ever more excited about their set. Dashing up Red River to Club de Ville, we snuck into what was a fairly packed venue just as they took to the stage, and the three-piece quickly impressed. Hugely summery, Tennis play soft vocals off against light, airy indie, but it feels much stronger than such a description might suggest. They're reminiscent

They're reminiscent of Chairlift or

Princ-

etown, and are really captivating live with a lot of life to their music, and similar to Beach Fossils the day before, put The Drums to shame with a more natural vein of joyous post-surf music.

With so many bands playing at SXSW, there are always going to be acts that overlap meaning at some point or other you have to make sacrifices. Walking up to Club de Ville, our plan was to ditch Tennis half way through and head down to Dirty Dog for White Arrows. Pleasingly we stuck it out and instead dropped half of the latter's set, which we soon realised was a very clever move.

We've been meaning to write about White Arrows for a while now – though had never seen them live – and sadly catching them at SXSW has put us off. They play upbeat indie, and though they have a very full sound, a misguided keytar player (glowing visor and all) certainly doesn't help matters as they come across, if anything, quite irritating, and certainly nothing beyond average. Luckily to end the night we had Casiokids to venture back to Beauty Bar for,

and they

were much better.

It feels strange still talking about Casiokids as an up and coming band after they first started to make major inroads two years ago in the UK, though that was about as far as they got. In the US, things are only starting to kick off now, and their official showcase was pretty packed. Despite an ill-advised amount of awkward crowd talk between songs, as spacey eclectic Scandinavian electro-indie goes, they're amongst the best. Good live too, although their time might have passed.

16 bands down after the first full day was a pretty good effort, so when Casiokids rounded things off at Beauty Bar, despite our legs still full of energy, we called it a night knowing fatigue would catch up much sooner rather than later.

"

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ians were or not, sadly the more well-known The Naked And Famous didn't come close to making a similar impact."

before flving out to Austin we were hanging out in LA, and while lunching at The Counter caught sight of Jason Batemen chomping on a burger two tables down. It was a big deal. So when on SXSW's opening evening our friends messaged us that at a secret Asis Ansari stand-up show Michael Cera was right next to them, it kind of blew our minds. Foolishly we were tricked into thinking Jeffrey Tambor was there too (a royal Arrested Development fest our trip would have then become), and although that was just a practical joke, Cera and Bateman was still good going.

Why was Cera in town? A little sleuthing overnight revealed his band, Mister Heavenly, to be playing, so of course, we were one of the first in line. An 'indie supergroup' with members from Modest Mouse and Man Man, imagine if Wes Anderson crafted an indie band, this is how they would sound. With quite a cultured feel to their music, Elysium soon filled up as Mister Heavenly's stage time was approaching, and the crowd were not to be disappointed. Though the band wouldn't blow anyone away, it's no surprise they're already signed (and to Sub Pop no less), and not just because of the famous members. Similar to Modest Mouse, they boast a cultured, Americana-influenced sound, and a couple of tracks at least have got 'hit' written all over them. It was pleasing to see a band back up their promise (or moreover Michael Cera seriously forge a music career), and follow through on undoubted potential. Two tracks before the end of their set though we had to head off, and for good reason.

In the months leading up to SXSW we were a little back and forth on whether to make the trip. You get the rewards, but the Austin festival is a crippling experience on body, mind and ears, returning home more exhausted than ever before, while of course, having the time of your life in the process. When We Barbarians con"Foolishly we were tricked into thinking Jeffrey Tambor was there too..."

firmed. however. our tickets were booked the next day.

Part of a great opening day at the Lustre Pearl, Dickies always curate a fantastic line-up, day and night, and with the Cali-now-Brooklyn three-piece starting things up. Now pumping out a heap of new songs, We Barbarians are really stepping it up and buzz is building around a band that has always harboured limitless potential. Fast and effortlessly rhythmic, Headspace and The Wait Is Over especially showcase a move to slightly less atmospheric, more straight-up indie, a change that comes off very nicely. Playing with such energy and vigour, it's hard not to be drawn in, and even for much of the crowd who probably hadn't seen We Barbarians before, you could tell they made a big impression.

Whether it was entirely relative or not to how great We Barbarians were, sadly the more well-known The Naked And Famous didn't come close to making a similar impact. Quite samey from the first track to the last, they're very flat live despite obviously going for it. Cracking out hit single Punching In A Dream fairly early on in an attempt to liven up the audience, the New Zealanders are surprisingly boring onstage as their music struggles to craft any sort of edge.

Every year at SXSW the organisers put on a big free show on the lake, with a couple of the biggest names announced gracing the stage. Some guys called The Strokes headlined 2011's Auditorium Shores, and a packed crowd witnessed one of the best events of the week. Playing a 'greatest hits' set with a handful of new tracks along the way, while The Strokes have always lacked a certain spark live,

they're still pretty great, and with huge fireworks set off behind the stage during closer Last Nite, it was a pretty unique experience.

Leaving on the last beat of their encore, we raced back into town for our second We Barbarians show of the day, this time at Palm Door. Never were we to doubt it but the boys were great again, with Cold War Kids showing up just before they started, joining a busy crowd lap up every track.

Next up it was another LA affair at The Driskel, the most glamorous official venue at this year's SXSW; a small side room in the old hotel laid host to Superhumanoids. Filled up on free popcorn, we readied ourselves for one of the bands we were looking forward to most in advance of the festival. Possessing great rhythm and tempo to their music, Superhumanoids are like a less expansive Local Natives, but that certainly shouldn't be counted against them, and with a female singer sharing vocals, they still have their own place on the music sphere.

Ending another day at Beauty Bar, this time in their backyard, if we were after a quiet end to the night, Miami Horror certainly had other ideas. A potent mix of Jamaica and Daft Punk, the Australian band know how to impress and put on a wonderful show, and though much of the crowd didn't seem to know every song, everyone was instantly dancing away; the perfect end to day two.

A nyone who's been to SXSW before will know that day three is the day you crash. Even if you hit the pillow the second after getting back to your hotel every night, by the Friday, legs are weary and eyes are heavy, and we'd been privy to some late night catching up with friends after the bands had finished too. Day three therefore, was a late starter, although we didn't let that stop us having fun.

Venturing south of the main action to Bar 96, we were pleasantly surprised to make it in time for Art Vs. Science. Interviewed some issues back, the electronic band put on quite a live show, and while some of their music feels narrow and already outdated, other tracks are awesome, and they pull off the more than slightly ridiculous nature of many songs.

The reason we hit Bar 96 though was for The Romany Rye, and the last remnant of The Colour I had yet to see live. After double We Barbarians the day before (another 3/5ths of the once quintet), finishing the job (after previously catching Wyatt Hull's Cheatahsaurus months ago in LA) was

a momentous personal occasion. It was even better then that The Romany Rye were great too, and Luke Macmaster's band are really finding a groove in folksy Americana. The new songs sound superb, so lookout for another LP later this year.

After a quick sit down dinner (our first proper meal of the festival), we headed to Rusty Spurs for Delorean, only to make a very speedy exit. It was actually Dolorean on-stage, and not the *Subiza*-touting lo-fi dance band we were expecting, so when they did little to inspire, we dashed to Latitude 30 for Gallops instead.

The UK band have been doing well the other side of the Atlantic, and their heavy prog. synth-rock music could catch on in the States. They're similar to a less spikey early Foals, but much harder in their make-up, and certainly could make big on their potential.

After a number of failed attempts to see We Are Enfant Terrible in the UK, their showcase at Swan Dive quickly became one of our most anticipated performances at SXSW 2011. The French three-piece set to it in

front of a busy crowd, and pleasingly it didn't take everyone long to get up to speed with their relentless, part-8-bit electro. We Are Enfant Terrible feel expansive and unrestrained; very fresh even though there are others quite similar. In song make-up and style they draw comparisons to Sebastian Tellier, but everything they do is much rockier and more driven. This is where CSS should have gone, but with a great debut album already hitting shelves, We Are Enfant Terrible will take over the Brazilians' place on the music mantle.

Though We Are Enfant Terrible turned out to be a fitting end to the night, our next three shows were a hattrick of non-events. Trekking across town for Yuck, we failed to get into the venue before hitting Palm Door again for A-Trak, and again finding disappointment. Running late, before the French electro master hit the decks we had to dash, only to find MSTRKRFT at Mohawk, perhaps unsurprisingly, was completely full too. A sad end to the day, but on the whole, still a wildly successful third evening in Austin.

Sadly the last day of SXSW 2011, the sun was out in force for what is often the busiest (in terms of footflow in Austin) of the whole festival. First though we stayed out of the centre and plotted a journey back to Auditorium Shores and the entertainment on offer. Man Man were first up; an eclectic unconventional rock band with a touch of the dramatic Dresden Dolls about them, though really it was Middle Brother we were there to see.

Formed of members from two of our favourite bands (Matt Vasquez of Delta Spirit and Taylor Goldsmith of Dawes), plus John McCauley of Deer Tick, it didn't take long for the Texan crown to jump on board. With Matt rocking a Gibson Flying V, after crowd surfing he lost his strap and funnily powered through a couple of tracks, propping it up with his arm until the end. Johnny Corndawg even made an appearance as everyone in attendance

left happy and as new fans.

There were two hip-hop outfits getting buzz at SXSW. Odd Future were leading the way but actor Donald Glover's music project Childish Gambino isn't doing half badly too. Glover packed out the expansive Red 7 Patio, though charming and funny between songs, the tracks themselves are harsh and raw. Even for non-hip-hop fans there's enough to get into, and after free-styling with Kendrick Lamar at the end, plus with Glover's Community co-star Dani Pudi in the crowd, it was quite a show.

With an hour to kill before rocking over to Stubb's for our guilty pleasure of the festival, we at last made the trek east of the i35 to ND. Taken over by the Windish Agency, their extensive roster offered quite a line-up over the four days but Young Empires were one of the most anticipated, and didn't disappoint. Throwing a heap

of lime wedges into the crowd during their last track, the three-piece play lively electro-rock with a strong funk edge, and with big, accessible choruses, they hold similarities to Friendly Fires though aren't quite as catchy.

One of the bigger names at SXSW this year, at least if you're a 16-yearold emo girl, Panic! At The Disco are back touring after a little time away from the limelight, but even two members short, they still know how to rock it. With Ryan Ross and Jon Walker gone, and their Beatles direction with them, Panic! largely played tracks off their first album, with only a couple from Pretty. Odd and three new ones. The new guitarist is great and fits into their aesthetic perfectly, although the touring bassist still isn't spot on. The four-piece were pretty impressive though, and threw in a more than random 30 seconds of screamo between tracks while a technical issue was fixed.





So said once Mahatma Gandhi, "unity to be real must stand the severest strain without breaking," and the wise man had a point, something that should be well remembered with the festival season now officially underway. With many worldwide to pack their beers and bikinis, the calendar is marked with a summer full of promise, with even spanning the world over. From the deserts of Nevada to the fields of Somerset and the parks of London, there's a little loud music to look forward to for everyone.

Glastonbury Festival's success has always been down its wide appeal and truly original atmosphere; a unifying sense that after the eternity it took to secure that elusive ticket, you've been permitted to enter hallowed ground, with the whole crowd just happy to be there. Like any good gig the masses are united by a singular purpose; to chant, dance and scream away those joyous hours away from a mundane office. It's an experience; a real festival should be something completely alien to the rest of your year, an almost tribal vibe where nomadic strangers gather to pitch up and decide upon that year's trademark that will annoy the neigh-

bours continuously at 3am.

Drugs may pass around but if things are pulled off right, they won't be needed, with the crowd feeding of each others' buzz, in a potent mix with sleep deprivation and mild sunstroke. If the organisers have done their jobs, everyone should have a safety haven to eat, drink,

chill and rock out; cover these basics and, weather permitting, everyone should be pretty happy and be able to leave with the immortally smug "were you there?" line in their vocabulary.

Promising line-ups are no guaran-

tee of a good time, however, there's a special magic to pulling off a legendary weekend, a lesson never more keenly learnt than at Woodstock '99. Rehashing the same motto used twice before by the titular original and the mud

soaked Gen X '94 event Three Days Of Peace & Music proved an epicly ironic slogan. With Rage Against The Machine, Metallica, The Chemical Brothers, James Brown and The Roots on the bill, the festival seemed the best, nay, only way to see out the last summer of the nineties, and the business folks

knew it. Charg-

ing over \$150 a ticket (a lot for 1999) was the first warning signs of an event soon to forget about the 'one world, one people' message of the original. With the insufficient number of toilets overflowing too, water fountains

overcrowded and bottles costing a painful \$4; attendees soon took to tearing open the supply pipes to deal with the 100+ Fahrenheit heat. This was made worse as the organisers more thought into providing vendor malls: ATM's and email stations proudly displaying the dozens of corporate sponsors. With garbage

and human waste covering the ground and attendees not permitted to bring their own refreshments, looting and violence erupted as early as Saturday night. Sunday didn't fare any better, using candles handed out by a peace promoter the crowd started numerous bonfires during the Red Hot Chili Peppers' headlining set, using sections of the so called 'Peace Wall' and perimeter fence as fuel. With an audio tower now flaming and Chili's frontman Anthony

Kiedis comparing the scene to *Apocalypse Now*, the fire brigade and state troopers in full crowd control gear were called in.

The night was flatteringly described by many media outlets as a 'war zone', 'concentration camp' or commonly just 'complete chaos'. When the dust finally settled twelve trailers and

a small bus were no more and numerous injuries were reported as well as a tale of a crowd surfing woman being pulled down into the mosh pit and viciously gang raped. Three days of 'Peace & Music' indeed.

What can be learnt from this? Well while money is required to run such events, a high level of greed on the promoter's behalf generally doesn't equal success in an environment that thrives on unison and a laid back atmosphere. Festivals are escapism, and crowds are only ever an escalating scale of annoyance away from unreal levels of carnage. The 'business-as-usual' psyche is left at the door for 72 hours; people need to be stimulated but still left to roam free. They need to be able to spend their own cash as they please, not be forced to lay out for something with every step they take. Equally it's the festival-goers' duty to enjoy themselves and try to spread the good times, all within the law, to befriend strangers and scream their lungs out together.

Love is the drug, and everyone people remember this, organisers and attendees alike, festival season 2011 should be pretty sweet.

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### HOLY GHOST! Holy Ghost!

### **RELEASED APRIL 11**

Around for a number of years now as producers and remixers, to say Holy Ghost!'s debut album as musicians was eagerly anticipated by those in the know would be a gross understatement. At last wowing people with their new live outfit, the New York duo's self-titled LP doesn't disappoint and will bring you right back around to loving electropop again.

Though opening with a bang on *Do It Again*, it's the more subtle *Wait And See* that really sets out Holy Ghost!'s stall. Layered and energetic under the surface, silky synth and vocals make their music listenable in any mood, taking it beyond the throwaway sound you might normally attribute to this sort of genre.

Mixing it up later in the album with faster and slower tracks, peaking with the quite brilliant *It's Not Over*, Holy Ghost!'s first major release to the world has been more than worth the wait, and another gem of a band from wonder-label DFA. **SB** 





# WE ARE ENFANT TERRIBLE EXPLICIT PICTURES

### RFI FASFD APRIL 4

When Crystal Castles first hit the scene and the public almost instantly became fascinated by 8-bit, samples and retro-sounding synth, it was interesting to see where electro musicians would take the genre next. It's taken a while, but with *Explicit Pictures*, We Are Enfant Terrible have at last shown how it's done, and take over from CSS as the most fun band around, playing unrelenting, instantly danceable music.

Clicks and beats a-plenty, *Make You Laugh* is the perfect introduction to what WEAT are about, soon ramping up to 100mph, bombarding the listener with vibrant electronica and singer Clotilde Floret's smooth vocals layered on top. Though keeping to quite a strict regime, *Explicit Pictures* still sounds expansive and won't grow tired easily. We Are Enfant Terrible are a band that could sound similar to a lot of other artists but very firmly hold their own spot on the horizon, and don't they let you know it with a great debut. **TM** 





### TENNIS Cape dory

### **RELEASED APRIL 4**

Soon feeling a little like a young, indie She & Him, in part thanks to Alaina Moore's beautifully sweet vocals, you'll quickly fall in love with Tennis. Made up of sumptuous harmonies, their music is calming but never boring, and though at times *Cape Dory* is simply formed, it still manages remain engaging and much more than just background music.

Right from opener *Take Me Somewhere*, Tennis' summery, upbeat nature shines through, as they move through *Marathon*, the slower *Pigeon* and onto *Seafarer*, you get the impression their sound won't grow old. Cultured but unreservedly fresh and new, Tennis have a special quality that doesn't come along too often; an instant appeal, and you'll quickly harbour the desire to sway along to every track.

No-one can claim *Cape Dory* will change the world, far from it, but it's such a delightfully charming album that you'll be drawn in from the first beat. **SB** 





### BRAIDS Native Speaker

### **RELEASED APRIL 4**

One of the first from the incoming wave of eclectic, post-Animal Collective, atmospheric bands, Montreal quartet Braids, are a pleasure to have thrust upon us, or more appropriately to their music, sneak up from nowhere, with calmness and assurance.

As you might expect from the earlier comparison, *Native Speaker* has a real pace and energy to it throughout. Percussion plays a big part in keeping everything moving, although it's far from the most prominent element in Braids' music. Layering guitar, harps, synths and other general noise delicately over each other, *Plath Heart* and *Little Hand* are dreamily textured, though other tracks on the album are certainly much more regular, falling down the avant-garde-pop route that has brought them so many fans. If *Native Speaker* is a sign of things to come from the music scene over the coming months, we're all for it, and will be closely watching Braids in their development too. *TM* 





### JAMIE WOON Mirrorwriting

### **RELEASED APRIL 18**

Plan B rejuvenated his once grime career by retro-styling his last album, *The Defamation of Strickland Banks*, stripping away the rappers sound to make way for a soulful, R'n'B effort. It majorly paid off. Quite literally at record stores too.

Slow it all down a bit, throw in some James Blake, and you've got Jamie Woon, sumptuously captivating ears on debut album *Mirrorwriting*. With the focus quite obviously on his vocals, there's plenty to showcase, but the backing music certainly doesn't let him down. Smooth harmonies and catchy vocal hooks on *Lady Luck* will have you coming back for more over the rest of the album, but the whole thing is a soulful and passionate, yet still understated and perfectly measured, LP. At times *Mirrorwriting* can grow a little boring but there's plenty either side of the fillers to keep you interested enough to stick it out until closer, and slow acoustic number, *Waterfront*. **SB** 





### HUNX AND HIS PUNX Too young to be in love

### **RELEASED APRIL 11**

The quite brilliantly named Hunx And His Punx were always going to have to go some to match their pretty unique moniker, though on debut LP *Gay Singles*, the lo-fi rock and roll band just about managed it, and with a second album in quick succession, aren't ready to let their quickly-building hype die down. And they sure do deserve to be hyped.

Drawled bubblegum pop through and through, *Too Young To Be In Love* might lack variation, so get used to riff-led chorus to verse routines until closer *Blow Me Away*, but there's certainly enough to rouse your attention and keep it too. With a sense of unbridled fun, Hunx And His Punx race through 10 quick and dirty tracks, not over-thought, nor over-complicated, each has a simple edge that works well for the band.

Though Hunx grow a little tired a couple of listens over, they're brimming with potential and with a little more curation, should wow with album three. **TM** 





### METRONOMY The English Riviera

### **RELEASED APRIL 11**

Three years on from their 2008 breakthrough, *Nights Out*, it feels like an age since we've heard from the highly-talented four-piece. Singles *Heartbreaker* and *Thing For Me* double-handedly put them on the map, though really the rest of the album was pretty great too; now with expectation on their shoulders, the heat is on for them to deliver again.

The English Riviera is still undoubtedly a Metronomy record but it's much calmer and much less-spikey than their best work on Nights Out. A departure? Certainly; still the bright and airy electro-tinged indie flows through every track but it's much more measured, slower moving, and though playful, tip toes far too much. While the unbrash sound could bode well in the long term, The English Riviera lacks punch and that big single or more energetic shining light that made Metronomy's name to date. It might be a grower, but it might be some while before you find out. **SB** 





### PANDA BEAR Tompoy

### **RELEASED APRIL 11**

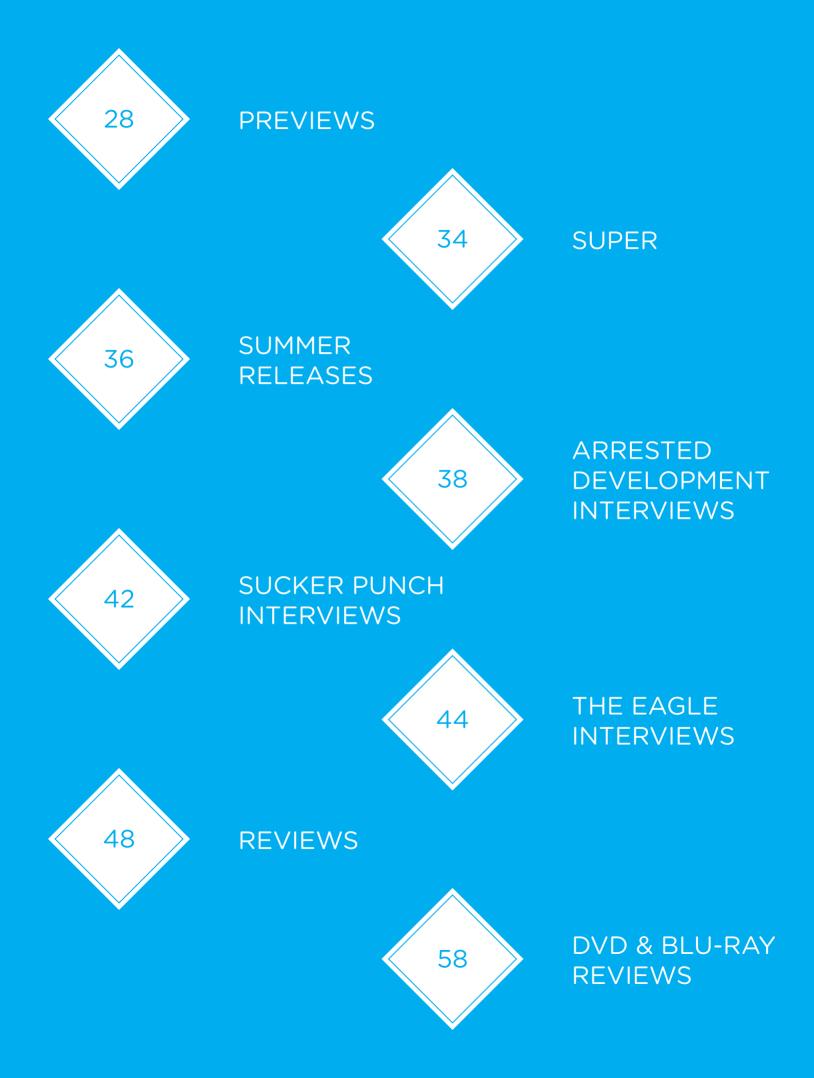
One of the founding members of the critically-acclaimed Animal Collective, Panda Bear took time out of his solo career until picking things up again in 2004, and now with his third solo LP in seven years, still seems still keen to go his own way too.

His vocals are instantly recognisable so it might take you a couple of listens to take *Tomboy* on board as a Panda Bear record, rather than the latest from Animal Collective, although whatever the packaging, it's a startling and beautiful production. Scaled back slightly from what we're used to, *Tomboy* isn't quite perfection but still manages to effortlessly guide the reader down a magical and engaging journey, forever meandering yet always feeling directed and to a purpose.

Despite at times feeling a little cold and disconnected, *Tomboy* will sprawl across 'best of' lists at the end of the year, and while it's not a masterpiece, you can't doubt Panda Bear holds a talent truly special. *TM* 







# CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER

### RELEASED JULY 22 (USA) JULY 29 (UK)

2011 is going to be a big year for Marvel. It's the year when the remaining characters set to appear in their Goliath 2012 production of *The Avengers* will be introduced to the world. Oh, and *X-Men* is being rebooted, too. With three marquee releases in one summer, and competition from other huge films, Marvel need audiences to buy into their newest on-screen characters.

Fan reaction to the *Captain*America trailer has generally been stronger than that afforded to *Thor*, Kenneth Branagh's take on Marvel's Nordic hero. The WWII setting appears to be working well – it certainly offers something different to the countless other comic book adaptations out there – and the film has a distinct look about it that is, say it quietly, rather exciting.

Chris Evans looks to be wellcast as Steve Rogers, our hero, even if the CGI-shrunk body shown off in the trailer does look a little weird. Plot details, thankfully, are still pretty thin on the ground, but hopefully the film's story won't be a throwaway narrative designed simply as a functional depiction of the hero's origin. Director Joe Johnston and his writers have opted to include Cap's most prominent enemy, Red Skull (Hugo Weaving), so there can be no excuse for making the story feel tacked on. Similarly, although Marvel need to link this universe into that of Iron Man and Thor (brief evidence of which can be seen in the trailer, if you listen carefully), they need to be wary of fumbling those connecting lines, as they did in Iron Man 2, where the crossover stuff felt incongruous and badly thought out.





# MR. POPPER'S PENGUINS

### **RELEASED** JUNE 17 (USA) AUGUST 5 (UK)

Based on the children's book of the same name by Richard and Florence Atwater, this film adaptation stars Jim Carrey as Mr. Popper, a man obsessed with business who cares little for anything else. That is, until he inherits some penguins.

"Classic children's film setup" you may be thinking, the age old story of a man who learns to appreciate the important things in life, but it's a classic story for a reason, and hopefully those involved in this project will conjure up the right mix of charm and warmth. Both of those things should at least be provided by the live penguins that were used during filming, practically guaranteeing this will pack out screens in the summer. That, and the fact that the source material is frequently taught in American schools, so many will be familiar with the property already.

Mark Waters (Mean Girls, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*) is directing, and he's a man who has plenty of experience in making films with universal appeal. Another who has that same appeal is leading man Jim Carrey, whose output of late has slowed, but has proven in the past that he can do everything that will be necessary to carry this film. Current Zack Snyder muse Carla Gugino will provide support alongside British actress Angela Lansbury.



## RETREAT

### RELEASED Q3 2011 (UK) TBC (USA)

Here's an interesting one. Cillian Murphy and Thandie Newton play Martin and Kate, a couple who head for an island retreat in an effort to recover from a personal tragedy. Things are complicated when an unknown man is washed ashore, claiming that a lethal airborne disease is currently ravaging Europe. Is he telling the truth?

With its minimalist setup, scant cast list and high-concept story, Retreat sounds almost Beckett-esque. First time director Carl Tibbets has put together a very interesting British cast, and as the piece will be so charactercentric, it will be important that they gel. 2011 is set to be a prolific year for Jamie Bell in particular, the young actor having no fewer than five projects lined up, the first of which, The Eagle, having already landed. Retreat is something different for him in a varied year that also includes a part in Cary Fukunaga's Jane Eyre adaptation and a mo-capped performance as legendary character Tintin in Steven Spielberg's animated epic. Cillian Murphy is a British actor who continues to excel, his ability to choose interesting parts, and to stretch himself, making him a stand out in his generation.

To an extent, *Retreat* will be hoping to emulate the success of *The Disappearance Of Alice Creed*, a recent Brit flick that bore a similar three-character structure. Tibbets also has a writing credit, along with Janice Hallett, and it

will be essential that their script does justice to the film's concept and gives its well-cast actors something meaty to work with. Its release will be low key, that's for sure, but this could be something different to look out for in 2011, a year of sequels and blockbusters.

## **BAD TEACHER**

### **RELEASED JUNE 24**

Cameron Diaz, of course, made her name in comedy, most notably with There's Something About Mary, and so it should come as no surprise to see her leading Bad Teacher, an upcoming comedy about a teacher who is frankly unfit for the job. She is jealous of her colleague Amy (Lucy Punch) who is dating 'hot' new substitute teacher Scott (Justin Timberlake) and is also driven primarily by money. That latter point comes into focus when it is announced that the teacher with the highest class average will get a bonus, and thus she is thrust into competition with Amy in more than one way. The film is directed by Jake Kasdan, who last directed Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story, and features Jason Segel (How I Met Your Mother) and Molly Shannon (Evan Almighty) amongst others.

For some of you, the similar concept behind Billy Bob Thornton's 2003 film *Bad Santa* may have immediately sprung to mind, but does the thought of Cameron Diaz spouting foul language and acting as a bad role model for kids sound interesting? Well, maybe. The film has been rated 'R', so

it isn't likely to be pulling any punches, and there is clearly a lot of potential in the set up for good gags; whether the film will match that potential, however, is an entirely different matter. The script was penned by Lee Eisenberg and Gene Stupnitsky who last collaborated on *Year One*, the critically derided Jack Black comedy; hopefully things have moved on since then.

### DRIVE

### RELEASED SEPTEMBER 16 (USA) SEPTEMBER 23 (UK)

Nicolas Winding Refn has had an interesting and somewhat unusual career to date. After getting his break with *Pusher*, a Danish crime film, he went on to make two sequels before coming at last to *Bronson* in 2009, a film that helped put Tom Hardy on the map. After that, the decidedly uncommercial epic *Valhalla Rising*, in which the director continued his love affair with Mads Mikkelsen, who had also starred previously in his *Pusher* films.

Drive is the Danish director's latest project, and is something of a change in direction. Originally slated for Neil Marshall (Centurion) the film stars indie darling Ryan Gosling — most recently of Blue Valentine — as a Hollywood stunt driver who discovers that a contract has been put out on him. A diverse cast unites Gosling with Brit sensation Carey Mulligan, as well as Ron Perlman and Oscar Isaac (who will probably be hoping Drive receives a better critical reaction than his last film, Sucker Punch).

At present it is unclear exactly what 'type' of film *Drive* will be; that is, how much it will be a straight-up thriller, and how much action there will be. It is certainly an intriguing prospect, however, and the collaboration between Refn and his promising cast will be interesting to see. Gosling and Mulligan, on current form, are a potentially great combination of leads, indeed, everything currently points toward a potentially exciting experience, come the autumn.





Evidently the brunt of the film will concern itself with Oliver's reactions to his father's revelations, all in the knowledge that he may not have

explored in cinema - the set up of this film feels like a natural extension of that trend. Christopher Plummer should bring the required weight to

either cack-handed or overly austere in handling big issues, but with its solid cast and an interesting premise, hopefully Beginners will live up to both.





ver the last ten years comic book films have taken over cinema. From the arrival of *Spider-Man* back in 2002, a new era of old heroes stepped forward, ripping through the box office and turning once-niche characters into mainstream hits. Since then, every credible comic book star has had (or is about to have) his turn on the big screen. Last year, however, something changed slightly; the big superhero films came from cult graphic novels. The heroes weren't heroic or wise or super, and they were the type of people who would have read their own graphic novel, if they could. Kick-Ass and Scott Pilgrim crafted a new style of hero at the cinema; the scrawny, geeky slacker, and with Super on the surface, Rainn Wilson seems to be following in their

footsteps as The Crimson Bolt, a hero whose heroic credentials leave a lot to be desired.

Super centres around Frank, a seemingly dull, average guy who loses his wife to someone far cooler and edgier than him. In order to win her back, he decides to transform himself into a superhero and turn to crimefighting, building himself up to extract revenge on the guy that stole her away. But if you thought Super would tread down the same path as the films that preceded it, Frank's personal reasons take him down

a much darker route, fuelled more by revenge than the desire to do good. He tows the line of being a hero and a bit of a lethal villain.

While *Kick-Ass* was a self-proclaimed geek who wanted to do justice

because of his love of comic books, Frank isn't like that. In many ways he's your regular human being, who would have probably looked away at a crime occurring outside his window, before life was just as cruel to him. It's only through a plucky comic store employee, Libby, where Frank finds the inspiration to turn into The Crimson Bolt. Without her he's just a nutter in a suit.

Frank had a normal, boring life before it was wrecked. He didn't have his parents brutally murdered in front of him, like Batman, but it was the domestic equivalent. And what's more the home-breaker in question, played by Kevin Bacon, also happens to be a small-time drug dealer, certainly giving Frank reason enough to dislike crime.

In *Super* we have a hero that only reaches for spandex gloves when life goes crappy on him. It's completely selfish and ridiculous, but at the same time The Crimson Bolt seems more real than any other hero we see in the movies. He wants revenge more than justice, and would rather beat the hell out of a bad guy than turn him into the police. He also counts queue jumpers and people who key cars as villains, just like a majority of the quietly tutting members of the public. And how does he serve

his justice? Well instead of friendly spider-webbing as his defence, Frank wields a great, bloody wrench, clobbering his way through bones and dealing verbal blows like "Don't deal drugs!", "Don't molest kids!" and his catchphrase, "Shut up, crime!"

Rainn Wilson strikes a fantastic balance of being inoffensive and genuinely threatening. He's best known for playing Dwight Schrute in *The Office: An American Workplace* – the counterpart to Gareth in the British original. But while Gareth would boast of his SAS training and never appear as anything other than laughable, Dwight can really come across as being rather dangerous.

His desk conceals an unhealthy array of machetes, maces and throwing stars, and he has a little smile that wipes across his face like a sinister force. It's this smile that Wilson carries over into *Super*. There are times when you worry for the poor guy's sanity. There are times when you're not even on his side.

The charm of *Kick-Ass* was that it was centred in the real world, where comic book characters are idolised and someone could technically become one, but with a price. Yet Kick-Ass still had the benefit of having his bones reinforced with metal after his first foray into crime fighting went wrong. Scott Pilgrim had the benefit of being in his own world where anything could be punched into coins and, if he failed, an extra life could be granted. The Crimson Bolt is not a man with high ambition, and certainly one who could break very easily. It's Libby that follows the same route as Kick-Ass, idolising heroes to the point of becoming one, and then realising the true brutal nature of trying to bring people to justice. It's her that has to watch a brutal hero in real life situations. The Crimson Bolt is like an original hero; unaware of other comic book stars, but driven by personal vengeance against anything that stops him from living his normal, boring life. He's how a hero should be; you really don't know whether to love or fear him. The Crimson Bolt will have to contend with the likes of Captain America, Thor and the return of the X-Men this year, but if we really want crime to shut up, there's only one hero we should be calling. Super is out now in America, release date TBC in the UK Ŷ



If you've taken the time to look ahead to this year's release schedule, you may have noticed that it's cluttered, practically bursting at the seams, with blockbusters. This is particularly the case over summer – a situation we have long been used to – but throughout the year as well. There have been years with clusters like this in the past, but has there been a year quite so loaded (or should that be 'overloaded'?) with big-hitters?

A quick look back at the box office figures for 2011 so far shows that The Green Hornet is currently leading the way with Rango just behind it. That may have changed in the interim period between writing and publishing. Battle: LA is in there too. So there have been big(ish) releases already, but it's from April/May that things really begin to pick up, when Marvel releases its first effort of the year, Thor. And so begins a flow of huge flicks aiming to dominate a thoroughly crowded market. The thing is, some of these films will flop, or at least fail to satisfy their studios' expectations - so is

fixture congestion detrimental to these expensive projects? History proves that it is.

Let's start with the latest wave of comic book (and graphic novel) films, which even by modern standards, is quite astonishing. We've already had The Green Hornet. Next we're getting Thor, Priest, X-Men: First Class, Green Lantern, Captain America: The First Avenger and Cowboys And Aliens. Those films are all released with three months of each other. The world-weary public would have to cumulatively shell out well over half a billion dollars simply to recoup their combined budgets.

You may have noticed that three of those films come from Marvel. All are risky in their own ways – risks compounded massively by their tight scheduling. Firstly, *Thor* and *Captain America* are both untried franchises in the current climate and history repeatedly tells us that some IPs just don't capture the audience's imagination in the same way that others do. Be it because of the times, or perhaps the film's artistic direction; any number

of factors can affect results, and that's why it's extremely risky for Marvel to launch two new franchises in this period; they are needlessly competing against themselves for audience approval. Throw in *X-Men* and they're dividing their own audience three ways; it's difficult to imagine a scenario where all three go on to be huge box office successes. Thor, primarily by virtue of being out first, has a good chance of doing good business, although internet reaction to the trailers that have been released has been relatively muted. Captain America and X-Men, meanwhile, have garnered more critical attention, but may yet suffer from a loss of faith in the studio if *Thor* turns out to be pants. Cap, meanwhile, will have to deal with a possible backlash against its title - audiences expecting a patriotic, all-American orgy may be put off - indeed, Marvel is releasing the film simply as The First Avenger in some territories to avoid exactly this type of reaction. And it's not as if First Class is going to have it easy, either. Granted, they've put together an

impressive cast and crew, but, as with The Amazing Spider-Man next year, time will tell if people are ready to dive back into a franchise they've already so recently been invested in.

Whether Priest and Cowboys And Aliens get a look in depends largely on how well the others do. Priest will compete pretty much directly with Thor – it comes out a couple of weeks after and will probably lose that battle - while Cowboys And Aliens is unfortunately placed towards the back end of the summer schedule, languishing in August after countless big releases - and not just comic book projects. Things are also looking shaky for DC's big-budget spanner-in-the-works Green Lantern, a Ryan Reynolds-lead sci-fi actioner which, like Thor, has not received overwhelming support from fans. So that's your comic book line-up this year: Marvel will duke it out with themselves in an effort to establish new franchises before The Avengers hits next year (which could turn out to be a bad move if Thor or Captain America bomb), while DC will weigh in with an effort of their own and a couple of young pretenders will hope to tear audiences away from the big guns.

But that's not even half the story. There are some other little franchise installments - and some new bloods waiting in the wings to rain on everyone's parade. Slap bang in the middle of everything is J.J. Abrams' muchhyped Super 8, a Spielberg-produced monster movie that received a positive response when the trailer was finally released, and looks set to do big things. There are also potentials in ranks such as The Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes and Conan 3D; nobody expects big things of either but they might just spring a surprise or two.

Franchise heavyweights include Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part Two which has every chance of being the biggest of the lot. Part One was the tenth highest-grossing film of 2010 and you'd get pretty long odds betting on its sequel not to at least match it in 2011. Then we come to Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides, a fourth film in the giant box-office franchise

which is bound to make money. Sure, it looks like it's retreading a significant amount of old ground (irrespective of replacing some of the cast members), but it seems almost impossible for it not to be a hit. The same cannot quite be said of Transformers: Dark Of The

Moon, coming off the back of terrible press for its predecessor, but will surely, perhaps inevitably, pack screens out.

There are also a few big animations arriving in the summer period to steal some of those precious audience seats away. Cars 2 and Kung-Fu Panda 2 are obviously the

biggest, followed by the likes of Winnie The Pooh and The Smurfs. The first two, in particular, will be big successes. It's true that animated films tend to draw out different audiences - more families and kids - but there is also a significant crossover audience that could be drawn away from the live-action flicks or, conversely, kept away from the animated features.

It's all about competition for seats and screens in the world of cinema. When films fail to perform right off the bat, ruthless picture houses and cinemas will strike them off the billing, cut the number of screens they're shown on and relegate showings to trickier times such as early mornings and late nights. With the schedule so crowded this year, competition is going to come thick and fast - box office charts are going to jump around like crazy and there are sure to be big losers. Zack Snyder's CGI-fest Sucker Punch, at time of going to press, seems set to do disappointing business, while Mars Needs Moms is proving another massive flop.

Towards the end of the year you'd think there'd be a let up, but in fact the big releases just keep coming. Spy Kids 4, that long-delayed prequel

to The Thing, Hugh Jackman in Real Steel, Paul W.S. Anderson's The Three Musketeers reboot, Shrek spin-off Puss In Boots, Tarsem Singh's intriguing Immortals project, Happy Feet 2, the behemoth that it's likely to be, Twilight: Breaking Dawn: Part One, Scorsese's

WHATEVER HAPPENS, IT'LL

BE INTERESTING TO SEE

DECEMBER 31ST.

much-anticipated epic Hugo Cabret, Mission: Impossible: Ghost Protocol, Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows, the US remake of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn and, gasp, Spielberg's War Horse. And that's without mentioning large-scale comedies like The

WHAT THAT BOX OFFICE TOP TEN LOOKS LIKE COME Hangover 2 or horrors like Don't Be

Afraid Of The Dark and Scream 4.

There are going to be disappointed studios this summer, that much seems certain. Sure, that happens every year, but the sheer volume of expensive projects all competing for seats in such compact spans of time – in particular over the summer – is going to be very interesting to watch for the remainder of 2011.

It will be hard work for theatres to keep up with the times - they will need to judge the zeitgeist, see what is working and what is not, and schedule accordingly. But overall, they'll be foaming at the mouth at the prospect of all these big releases.

Will there be room amidst all this big-budget opulence for indie-hits and smaller scale successes? We can only hope so. Hopefully in May, a significant number of people will turn out to see Terence Malick's latest, Tree Of Life, though we imagine it'll be on limited release, and everybody'll be watching Chris Hemsworth hit robots with a hammer anyway. Still, we can dream.

Whatever happens, it'll be interesting to see what that box office top ten looks like come December 31st. And then there's 2012...

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interview with

## Mitch Hurwitz & Will Arnett

creator and star of *Arrested Development* words by Natasha Peach

f you speak to television junkies, never mind comedy fans, what their favourite shows is, odds are *Arrested Development* will place pretty high in their top five or ten.

About a formerly wealthy family held together by Michael Bluth when his father, George, is imprisoned for 'creative accounting', the show only ran for three seasons before it was cancelled by Fox, but it's since amassed a feverish cult following and kickstarted the careers of Michael Cera and Jason Bateman, further playing host to the likes of Will Arnett, Tony Hale and David Cross.

When the opportunity arose to sit down with creator Mitch Hurwitz and aforementioned star Will Arnett, it's therefore fair to say we jumped at the chance, and one crisp morning in Soho, with four coffees downed just before stepping into a room with each of them, considered ourselves readily prepared, and pretty darned excited, for 30 minutes with two of the most influential men in US comedy.

Will was up first, and it was a baptism of fire despite leaving it a little while before discussing the real topic at hand...

FAN THE FIRE: Have you ever wanted to play someone more dramatic like the role you had on *The Sopranos?*WILL ARNETT: What a terrible first question! I'm kidding. Up to that point I was taking whatever work I could get really, and I when I got out drama school I wanted to be taken more seriously. I guess I never really considered having a career in comedy, but then when I was 30 I had an audition for Arrested Development and I knew that it was right for me.

**FTF**: Would you ever like to get back into more serious roles again?

**WA**: I think that comedy is what interests me more, but I am very open to doing some more dramatic stuff. I had a small role in *Jonah Hex* which came out last year, and while the film wasn't as successful as we wanted to be, it was nice to do something a little bit different from what I had been doing for the last 10 years.

**FTF**: Do you spend much time in Canada anymore, or are you a full-time American now?

**WA**: I guess I don't spend much time in Canada anymore. I moved down when I was 20 because there was more for work and to attend the Lee Strasburg Institute. That's what I had to do if I wanted to be an actor. Now we're years on and I have a family in tow; we live in New York, that's just the way it is. My mum and dad still live in Toronto though.

I was actually just up there for Christmas; I hadn't been back in years and it had changed quite a bit. It was nice though, and despite moving away I am still a really big hockey fan. It's great being a Canadian in America as well because the world that we live in, I can watch it at home in the States whenever I want, and I do watch every Toronto hockey game.

**FTF**: Moving on to the topic at hand; for your character in *Arrested Development*, Gob, did you make the chicken dance up?

**WA**: [laughs] No, the chicken dance was actually a very specific bit by Mitch [Hurwitz] and Jim Valley, penned in the writer's room, then they came down and pitched about what it could be. We were actually just talking about it today at lunch; I have a very distinct memory of Mitch and Jimmy coming onto the stage at Fox and saying; "this is what this bit is supposed to be," and then Jimmy and Mitch did this kind of dance, and I kind of took that and ran with it, pretty much made it more aggressive but less ridiculous to look at than the two of them trying to do it. Then it sort of became an onset joke and manifested into everyone having his or her own dance.

**FTF**: Another of Gob's trademarks is the song *Final Countdown* song for his magic tricks, do you still react now when you hear it?

**WA**: I always look around to see if anyone is filming, trying to trick me into my Gob alter-ego. Once while I was home visiting family I went to a hockey game in Toronto and they

started playing that song. I was with my dad and I looked up and there I was on the big screen. I was kind of embarrassed so I didn't tell him because he would have gone crazy. That song just makes me so self-aware; I don't own it in any form, so I never play it, or try to attract attention to myself!

FTF: I'd love it if you were driving, the song came on, and you tried to

the song came on, and you tried to perform magic tricks from behind the wheel... do you like magic yourself?

WA: [laughs] I do like magic... although I can't perform it!

**FTF**: Do you have experience with dysfunctionality in your family that you drew on for your character?

**WA**: Well, not really. I mean there is dysfunction in every family right? 'Dysfunction is the function!' There are things though; there are things that my parents, and especially my siblings, do that I might have drawn from. Mainly the character of Gob was always based on Mitch Hurwitz, and who he is. Only joking! Write that down though, he will be horrified!

**FTF**: When all the rifts started appearing with Fox and there was the looming threat of cancellation, did it affect you and the rest of the cast?

**WA**: Yeah, definitely. You know, there is that point when it's kind of depressing that you are constantly living with the axe swinging over your head just waiting for it to drop. It starts to fuel the work, and I know that it fuelled the writing. It was an interesting time, it just felt like there was a kind of screen of animosity between two sides; it was very strange and very sad.

FTF: Did you enjoy working with David Cross again on Running Wilde?

WA: We've actually been doing two shows simultaneously. There's a show here called The Increasingly Poor Decisions of Todd Margaret and Mitch, Jim Valley and I wrote Running Wilde; David worked with us on both. That [Running Wilde] was great, although it appears to be finished now because it never really found its audience. It took us a while to find what the show

was, and without a huge ratings hit out of the box, we just ran out of time. **FTF**: It didn't have the same kind of following *Arrested Development* found? **WA**: No, certainly not the following *AD* had, but it was definitely starting to generate a something, and then we were told that it was 'too little, too late'. Bummer.

**FTF**: Do your children recognise your voice in your animation work like *Despicable Me* or *Monsters Vs. Aliens*?

**WA**: They're too little still for those movies really but every once in a while they've seen stuff that my wife and I have been in. We actually happened to be watching TV the other night where my wife was presenting an award. I was watching with our son and he was yelling at the screen, "Mama! Come here!" We don't watch ourselves very often so it was really funny. We don't just plonk him in front of the television and say "Look! There we are!", it just happened to be on in the kitchen.

**FTF**: What is it like working with your wife?

**WA**: Great, we always have a great time, it's not something we do all the time though. We have done a few things together, and we enjoy it, but we try to plan not to do it too much, just because you don't want it to be too incestuous. When it happens though, we get to spend a lot of time together, which is really nice, like on *Blades Of Glory* where we had an amazing time.

N ext up was Mitch, although it ended up being a double-play with his wife joining us, and what a lovely lady she was too...

FTF: Hi, I'm Natasha MITCH HURWITZ: Hi, I'm Mitch, do you mind me asking who you write

**FTF**: I'm from **FAN THE FIRE**, we cover film, TV, design, art and fashion; that kind of stuff.

**MH**: Great! Can we talk about fashion...?

Me: OK! Let's talk about fashion...

MH: I really want to focus this interview on fashion. God- no one ever

## "Then he immediately started getting death threats..."

takes me seriously!

Me: We do! What do you think about this years Prada collection?

**MH**: I think it's so bold. I think that is exactly what the UK needs. Perfect! **FTF**: This is a great start, this is actually only my second ever interview, Gob, sorry Will, was my first.

**MH**: [laughs] You know almost the entire time Arrested Development was running everyone called him Gob, Will's called Gob, even on my speed dial. Please, though, carry on

**FTF**: You've worked on such a wide variety of TV shows, are there any that you particularly hold dear to your heart?

**MH**: Perhaps obviously, but, Arrested Development is closest to my heart. It represented a period of creative risk taking and finally allowed me to be in a position to maintain a vision and grow a series from what a lot of the actors were going through. I feel like we all had a great, though a little challenging, experience. A lot of exec.'s would roll their eyes about it but I don't think the actors would ever think anything but what a privilege it was to put it all together, even when we were getting low ratings and they took us off of the air. It might have sounded a little disingenuous when they cancelled the show and I talked about how grateful I was for the experience but I really, really was. I did feel really great at the end of the day, and we had a lot of fun.

It's a lot of money to make these things, and they did allow me, albeit sometimes reluctantly, to pursue a vision, and typically that's the stuff that tends to end up working. You need a lot of other factors to click too, like timing and allowing an audience to find you; it's just unfortunate that they didn't find us at the time.

College campuses and a lot of young people did, but they weren't counted, so I always found myself saying anecdotally to the networks, "Young people are watching! They really are! The actors are being stopped on the street and, as vain as this sounds, we have something great here!"

FTF: Fox didn't think much of Arrested

Development despite numerous awards

and a big cult following, what did this do the atmosphere on-set? **MH**: We always had to remind ourselves not to believe the press, because the press was saying it was a very 'smart show', and in a way, I think that was what really kept audiences away. I think they meant in the best sort of way – what they meant was that it was funny, and it makes you laugh – but it looked like hard work to an audience.

looked like hard work to an audience. So when we would get awards or were nominated for something we would have to say to ourselves, 'just tune it out, and make an effort to keep doing what we were doing.'

Fox had a kind of funny identity

Fox had a kind of funny identity at that time too, in that they really hadn't been too successful with liveaction comedy. You'd be hard-pressed to find real people in a comedy that worked, and though they had a series called *That 70's Show* which was kind of successful, it didn't really have an identity. Fox wasn't really a destination for people who would like a show like *Arrested Development*, I think many people didn't find it at the time

because it wouldn't have occurred to them to watch a show after some cartoons like *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy*. Even though they're both amazing, the audiences are just a bit different.

At another time or on another network it might have been more successful, but you never really know. It does seem though that at that time NBC and others like them were taking risks by showing things like *Seinfeld*, and people who liked that sort of adult comedy were used to going to NBC.

**FTF**: Were you pitching it elsewhere or just to Fox?

**MH**: Well, we pitched it everywhere really. We told the concept to all of the major networks in the States, ABC, NBC, CBS, and the newcomer, which was Fox. I was making it through Imagine Television, which was Ron Howard's company, and they had a financial arrangement with Twentieth Century Fox, the production company. So in a way it was kind of predetermined that we'd go to Fox because the owner of the person making it was also the owner of the network. When another broadcasting company wanted the show, Fox wanted it too, and we went with Fox. Nonetheless it could have been cancelled after an hour on NBC, you never know, and we lasted 54 episodes on Fox, and they supported it. I think, though, if we did it again today, we would probably just say that we should take this to cable.

**FTF**: When you started writing *Ar*rested Development did you already have the first season scripted or did it develop during casting and as the characters developed into their roles? MH: No, it all came in casting. I had the character Tobias as Jeffrey Tambor for a while, and a friend said to me that it was very depressing; "If they are all in their 50s, it's really depressing." I kinda just thought they'd all be in their 50s! I was a big fan of The Larry Sanders Show at the time, which is very adult and everyone is 40. I didn't really have a cast in mind either, except for Michael Cera; I had seen him in a pilot and thought he was incredible so he was the only character that I sort of

wrote for a particular actor. He was so wonderfully awkward.

I remember pitching that character to Fox and thinking that he didn't really feel like a Fox kid. At that time everything was still all about being cool. They wanted a sort of hip, heartthrob kind of character. Ironically now that kind of kid is the heartthrob now. Now all of a sudden, there are people like Jonah Hill that are heart throbs! Geeks are cool! Fox said, "Well... he's really not going to be very cool," but I was thinking the whole time, "Yeah I know! That's the point!", they asked, "Well what's funny about him?" and I just said, "Nothing," but it was hard to explain why that is funny.

For the rest of the casting process we only had three weeks, which was never going to happen. I remember when Jason Bateman came in, and I really didn't want him to come in; he was a sort of teen idol and I had this kind of pre-judgement; of course he was wonderful, and we wanted him on board immediately.

Gob was the character we couldn't cast; we really couldn't find anyone. We had his character already written, with a long back-story, and I was so surprised no-one heard Gob the way I heard him. Everyone kind of though of him as this New York cool guy with a swagger, like really street, but I just kept saying, "No, he's a country club kinda guy. He is entitled." Finally Will came in – actually after Fox threatened us with cancellation as we couldn't find Lucia or Gob – and within a second I knew he was it. He saved the day.

FTF: How did you get the all of the actors to work so well together?

MH: We did one or two table reads beforehand and I had been through enough pilots already to articulate to them that we had to 'fake it to make it.' I told them that they would get fired if it didn't work, not by me of course, but we needed to show that we could do this. I told them to just jump ahead like it was their 100th rehearsal and really go for it. And they did. It was so successful. I think though what the helped most was the simple fact that

they liked each other.

[At this point I was told that I only had one question left, when Mitch proclaimed over the top of everyone; "Thin belts! I think thin belts are what will be big this season. I also think that people are going to start finally wearing jewellery on their penny loafers!" I told him to look down and on my shoe was a gold cat with emerald eyes adorned with little diamonds. So he grabbed my foot to get a better look, but I forged on, and despite not getting the chance to ask who he thought was the better actor; Will Arnett or his wife Amy Poehler, I did sneak in something about the much talked about film adaptation]

FTF: How will the Arrested Development movie differ given that you won't have the same sort of censoring? **MH**: Well it's funny, I mean I always liked the censoring. It was funnier in the absence of it bad language, almost like a silent beat in music, just funnier to fill it in. There was a joke that we were playing with for a little while where the family has just promised to not use any bad language, so it would just be a really clean, which we thought would make for some pretty funny happenings. I think it will be shot in the same way, but we have some pretty great ideas to make it fresh. Of course, we need money to make the film, and in the absence of Arrested Development we have all been doing other work to earn a living, but now we are all finally in a place to really work on the project.

We were actually kind of faking it that Michael wasn't interested because of his fame; we thought it would be funny to make sweet little Cera the bad guy. Then he immediately started getting death threats, so we had to retract that... it was still pretty funny though! Particularly because he is such a good guy, I mean he is so talented. He still looks like a teenager too, which is good; I am so happy he is a bit of a heartthrob now, as he is such a kind, sincere guy. He is Canadian too, which is a plus, they aren't as self-centred and are so polite!

Arrested Development re-runs air every Tuesday night on FX interview with

## Emily Browning & Abbie Cornish

stars of *Sucker Punch* words by Sam Bathe

eading a largely all-female cast in Zack Snyder's action-fantasy Sucker Punch, Emily Browning and Abbie Cornish had both the pressure and excitement of fronting an unusual spectacle on the Hollywood horizon. But with such a visionary filmmaker at the helm and audacious project to put on-screen, we caught up with the film's leading stars to re-cap probably the most exciting project each have worked on to date.

FAN THE FIRE: How did you get involved in the film? Was the audition process difficult or challenging? **EMILY BROWNING**: I think it started out the same way for all of us; we all put down the same monologue of Sweet Pea's. Then after that, for me, I was called in to meet with Zack, who was great, and I read the script before that, which I loved. I thought it was amazing to see such a strong, wellwritten action film with almost an entirely female cast; something you very rarely see. Then a couple of weeks later Zack asked me to put myself on tape again, this time reading as Baby Doll and he wanted me to sing for him too. That aspect of it was certainly challenging.

**FTF**: Did you worry that you were not going to get the part?

**EB**: Absolutely! I've never sung before in my life, but I wanted this role so badly, and I love Zack so much, so I agreed to do it. I went into my agent's office, locked myself in a room and did maybe 20 takes before finally telling my agent, "you pick it, I can't even look at which one we're going to send him." Then I didn't sleep for about three days until we heard back.

ABBIE CORNISH: I did the same initial audition that everyone did, which was with the Sweet Pea monologue, so when I got called back in to actually audition for Sweet Pea I was really excited. I read the script in between those two auditions on the Warner Bros. lot and was beside myself; I couldn't believe someone had come up with this film, had developed this concept in their mind and managed to transfer it to the paper, let alone to the

screen. It really is a testament to Zack that he got *Sucker Punch* all the way from his mind onto film.

**FTF**: What did you like about Sweet Pea?

**AC**: I just felt that there were so many layers to her; I was interested in the idea of someone living in those confines; within an imprisonment that was placed upon her by the outside world, and what that did to her as a human being, as a woman. She had learnt to live by the book, squashed all of the sensitivities of the inner child, all of the vibrancies of who she is, deep, deep down inside, and locked it away so no-one could get to it, no-one could harm it. She took on the role of the protector, the survivor, particularly having a sister like Rocket who's so wild and free, she really is Rocket's reigns. To play and explore that, and the journey of Sweet Pea releasing and opening up, the journey back to find that place deep down inside and bring everything back again, was amazing.

FTF: Where did you find the motivation for your roles and did playing such a dark and layered character take its toll when you were off-set?

AC: I was constantly thinking and processing, not just about the film, but about the relationships, about the metaphors, about the symbolism, about this character; I kind of danced a fine line for a little while, between those things that were inside of her, and then this tough outer shell. I didn't know whether to try and embody it all within the whole film or to have faith in the book-ends of the film, and let Sweet Pea be a dimensional character that you see different sides of in different worlds. But certainly, it was hard to play a role that tough every single day, and sometimes I would get home and all I wanted to do was snuggle up, cuddle and be sensitive. It was an interesting thing for me because I was playing a character that's hard on the outside, who's tough, who has to drive decisions, who has to look after her sister, and there is no relief for her from that.

**EB**: I think everybody has a certain

darkness that they're able to tap into; just as humans we have that side to us. I just spent a lot of time thinking about the character and imagining her back story and there's where it came from for me; I think you get a pretty clear idea in the montage at the beginning of the film that Baby Doll's home life had not been the most pleasant.

**FTF**: Is there an actress or character in action movies that you drew further inspiration from?

**AC**: My female action hero was my mum, she was Australian national karate champion when I was about 9 years old, full contact champion. It was pretty amazing.

**EB**: My mum wasn't a karate champion [laughs] but I feel like I have a similar relationship. She was my main female role model, and similarly in a physical way; my mum played basketball her whole life and she was a personal trainer for a long time. Every time I bring a boy home she wants to arm wrestle them, and she usually wins, so it was a similar kind of thing for me I suppose. In terms of cinema, definitely there are some very cool female characters in the Kill Bill movies; I think Uma Thurman's character is just amazing, and also the schoolgirl with the pigtails, the Japanese schoolgirl. The actress is also in *Battle Royale*, so especially in terms of inspiring the Baby Doll character, she has that same school girl kind of look, but also is just a very stoic, tough character, though obviously baby doll is the good guy.

**FTF**: What did you make of the film when you first saw it?

**EB**: I loved it; completely blown away. **AC**: For me it kind of evoked even more thought and I'm more and more becoming fascinated by the bookends in the film. I'm kind of fascinated by the symbolism, and every time I watch it I see more detail, which is interesting because after having worked on it for seven months, and talking about it for seven months, to actually watch it, sometimes it takes a while to understand and uncover the film's subtleties. Sucker Punch is out now

interview with

## Channing Tatum, Jamie Bell & Kevin MacDonald

director and cast of *The Eagle* words by Andrew Simpson

hanning Tatum is taking a step ✓ into serious leading man territory. Known up to now for *Step Up* and G.I. Joe, Tatum this year arrives with The Eagle, a historical adventure taking us into the wilds of Scotland during the Roman Empire's dominion over Britain. It's an altogether harsher, more dramatic experience than we're used to from him, but Tatum seems relaxed with the demands of an arduous shoot in the Scottish Highlands, breezily recounting an unfortunate accident on set as he slips into a London hotel to talk about a film that may well give him a new level of credibility.

"They tried to keep us warm,"
Tatum recalls when discussing how hot water would be poured into their clothes to stave off the cold on-set.
"This poor guy was running up and down a hill that was about ten minutes out of where we were shooting. He forgot to dilute the boiling water with river water one time, and once it's poured down you pull your suit away from your body and it just keeps going lower. I had no skin anywhere down there to speak of. But we're good now; it's pretty regenerative!"

If that seems like an unusually jovial way to recount a pretty gruelling experience, then it is in keeping with the tone of the conversation. Jamie Bell, Tatum's co-star, is also on hand to discuss a long, cold shoot. Despite the travails it seems they had a whale of a time. "It was childish stuff," says Bell, grinning ear to ear. "We got to ride around and throw swords and spears on horseback. It was really good fun."

The story of *The Eagle*, even if it takes in some serious themes of honour, reads like the perfect boy's own adventure. Based on Rosemary Sutcliff's much-loved *The Eagle Of The Ninth*, it sees Tatum play Marcus Aquila, a young centurion who travels north of Hadrian's Wall in AD 140 to recover the eponymous Eagle, the standard of his father's regiment which disappeared more than twenty years before. Joined by Bell as Esca, the slave on whom he relies to pass unnoticed amongst the Gaelic speaking tribes, it is a tale of an arduous journey

# "The guys were only wearing period costume most of the time. It was hardly Gore-Tex."

and blossoming friendship across societal and class divides.

Kevin MacDonald (The Last King Of Scotland) came to make the film as a fan; "I read the books when I was eleven or twelve and they had a big impact on me. I grew up in Scotland, and I couldn't imagine there being any Romans there, so it captured my imagination. Then I heard 25 years later that Duncan [Kenworthy, producer] had the rights." His stars, though, had some catching up to do. "It was my favourite subject in school," says Tatum, explaining his attraction to the part, "I think because of the stories and the characters, Gladiator and Braveheart were my favourite films. But Kevin was great. He comes from the documentary world, and he inundated me with a lot of material that I could sink myself into."

Bell came to the film from a different perspective; "I was completely unaware of the novel, and it was really the screenplay that I read a long, long time ago. After I had met Kevin I then went and read the novel, which is obviously a fantastic journey of the same characters."

The result is a surprisingly physical adventure story, and one that has gotten into some trouble with American censors. "We agreed that the film would tell us what the rating should be," Kenworthy explains. "You can't have a film on battle and warfare without having some violence, but we weren't making it because we were

driven to make a gory spectacle." Of the cuts, he says, "I'm glad that the film is 12A here, and that is the director's cut. It was rated a hard R in America, and the studio wanted a PG-13, so we had to make a few." MacDonald elaborates; "They're very literal in America. You're allowed blood on the ground but not in the air," to which Channing responds, "I'm sorry!" in a voice of mock-apology. The spirit of the team seems unusually good, and MacDonald in the end dismisses any controversy over the film's gore, "I think that it's striving to be historical, and to put these men's lives into some sort of context. In doing that you have to have a certain amount of horror to show the danger they're in."

It was a tough experience, but one that was aided along by a spirit of fun, as well as an element of competition. "We're both competitive with each other, and we really pushed each other through some of the harder scenes," says Bell. "You know; who's got the fastest horse, who's got the best fight scene, who can stay in the river for longer!" Tatum agrees . "Jamie and I got along so well right off the bat. We had to make sure we reminded each other of it because we never really laugh until the very last scene, but we were laughing all the time [on-set]. It's just a close-knit family and you go through hell together. I really think that's what Jamie and I did."

MacDonald agrees about the arduousness of the shoot. "A lot of

the shooting was in quite remote locations, particularly in the villages up in the Northwest. You had to walk quite a long way, it was so windy and there was a terrible a patch of weather just before we started shooting. The guys were only wearing period costume most of the time. It was hardly Gore-Tex." Tatum nods in agreement. "Even if they'd told me it was the coldest thing you'll ever go through in your life, I still don't think I would have understood until the second day. You're soaked all the way through, and outside for thirteen hours like that. We couldn't get trailers out, and we would hike in for twenty or thirty minutes. Kevin was carrying cameras and reels out to the set." If the film's producers had asked why only Rob Roy had really shot on location, here was why.

An often spectacular battle with the terrain, *The Eagle* is a physical, CGI-light affair. Bell at least was partly prepared, having had a similar experience when making Defiance with Daniel Craig. "The next time I make a film and it's comfortable, that will be uncomfortable," he grins. Indeed, while the plot becomes increasingly silly, the thing that keeps it compelling is the convincing physical journey of the two leads. "The physical nature of getting it done was part of the struggle," says Bell. "In the story, it's their endurance and stamina that gets them through it. I don't think we had the same endurance and stamina. There were moments when we had to keep each other going."

It was not just the landscape that needed conquering. "I think we got very lucky, because we're very good physically," says Bell, discussing the training that went into the roles. "We both have physical backgrounds, predominantly in dance, and you can compare that to things like sword fighting or even horse riding. I had never ridden a horse before, which was a big gamble, but I was very honest about that. A lot of actors lie, but I learned from scratch." Bell's training, though, was very different from Tatum's. "I tried to bulk up a little bit, as we wanted these characters to feel

that they could definitely take care of themselves. But obviously Channing is very big, and his character is a trained, formal fighter. We wanted to differentiate Esca as a feral, wiry, instinctual fighter. We did that in rehearsal."

Tatum, meanwhile, practised relentlessly with weapons in the lead up to the shoot. "My first training was probably in the backyard swinging around sticks, and I have had training before with martial arts. But you've got to be really careful. You want to make it look like it's an extension of you, just a part of you that you've trained over and over again." Portraying a fearless centurion decorated for bravery, his determination also extended to stunt work. "We did almost all the stunts except for the river scene," he says, talking about a sequence in which Marcus and Esca swim down a dangerous river canyon. "They wouldn't let us go down the rapids because it had been raining for a month straight. The river had risen three feet, so it was too dangerous." You can sense the disappointment in his voice.

Bell seems to agree about the toughness of the stunts, although the seriousness doesn't last for long; "I think when you've got your fellow actors incredibly game for doing a stunt," he begins, "and obviously very competent at doing it, it requires you to really step up." Channing instantly guffaws at Bell's use of a film title that might be coming back to haunt him now he's in the serious acting world. Bell protests, "that really wasn't intentional at all! You can't pussy out on them, you've gotta step up to it!" The whole table breaks into fits of laughter.

Not all of the shoot was such fun, though. Of shooting a scene in which Tatum holds nemesis the Seal Prince (Tahar Rahim, *A Prophet*) underwater, he says, "It's so cold that when your head goes under all thought, all air goes out of you, and you are just in shock. He's supposed to tap me when he's ready for me to pull him up, but he didn't." Rahim was unharmed (he is sitting next to Tatum as he recounts the story) but it underlines the risks of making such a film.

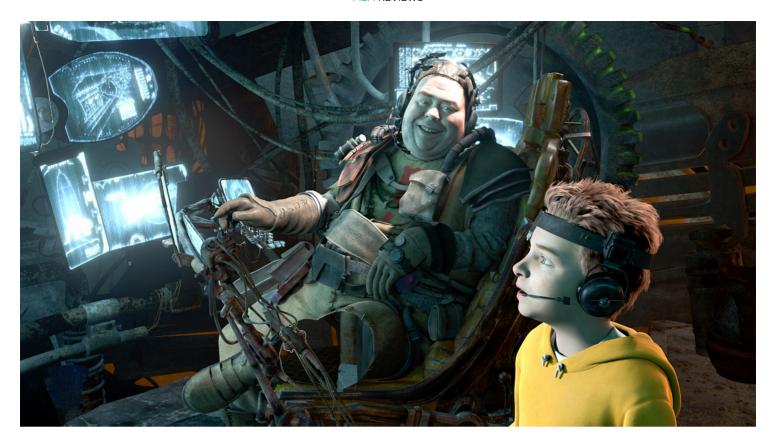
Unpleasantness of a different kind occurred during a scene in which Esca, accustomed to the necessities of surviving in the wild, forces Marcus to eat a dead rat. "I still don't know what they gave us to eat, do you know Channing?" says Bell, with Tatum laughing, shaking his head. "They said it was the gelatin that holds together Haribo treats. Bullsh\*t!" MacDonald pipes up at this point; "Let's break out the rats!" he says gleefully. Tatum glances at him, amused. "He decided to do a few extra takes because I think he was enjoying it so thoroughly. We were literally retching!"

It is in these scenes that The Eagle manages to separate itself from the pack, by acknowledging the harsher realities of a warrior's world. This extends to the near total absence of women. "I don't think it's ever refreshing not having women around," says Tatum, "but I thought it was really smart to make the decision to really stay with these two, and not feel the need to fall into the stereotype of needing to have a love story. They really just focus on the friendship." Bell agrees, "I don't know how you bring that convention into the film without it becoming convoluted. But there was a serious lack of women around; way too much testosterone!"

Bell was filming Steven Spielberg's motion-captured adaptation Tintin shortly before making The Eagle. "They're two completely opposite things. One is technology, one is nature," he says. "You would think that one would be more freeing then the other, being in nature and having that physical environment, which did inform the performance, but I find that motion capture allows you to 'fill in the blanks.' It is a space which is inventive and it becomes much more creative than you can imagine. It's strange to go off to the Highlands of Scotland and actually interact with real animals and real people. But it's funny, it works against the way you think." It's an appropriate final note about a film, and its stars, that impress in ways you don't expect.

The Eagle is out now





## MARS NEEDS Moms

DIRECTED BY SIMON WELLS STARRING SETH GREEN, TOM EVERETT SCOTT, JOAN CUSACK, ELISABETH HARNOIS, DAN FOGLER, DEE BRADLEY BAKER & MINDY STERLING

#### **RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) APRIL 8 (UK)**

Mars Needs Moms is the final production from Robert Zemeckis' ImageMovers Digital, which was a part of Disney but has now been closed down. Like many of the films produced there, it is computer animated and uses the motion capture technology that Zemeckis has championed for some time. Unfortunately, as a send off to the production house, this family-friendly feature is mostly forgettable fare.

We follow nine-year-old Milo (voiced by Seth Dusky but, a little bizarrely, performed by Seth Green, who is approaching 40, perhaps as a way of getting a bigger name on the posters) a basically good kid who, in a classic childish sulk, professes to his mother

(Joan Cusack) that his life would be better if she were not around. Later he comes to regret this outburst, but is denied his opportunity to apologise when aliens from Mars descend in the night and take his mother away in order to steal her parenting abilities to raise their own Martian young.

The story is obviously hogwash, (particularly given some of the later developments) but makes for a decent enough parable about loving one's mother that does manage to evoke one or two endearing moments. Problem is, the story feels decidedly stretched at times, overly hurried at others, and is frequently too eager to have our protagonists fall down holes screaming (no doubt because this is a 3-D film).

Milo is a likable protagonist, brought to life through some fairly impressive motion capture work, but the supporting cast are a mixed bag. Gribble, the hyperactive boy-trapped-in-a-man's-body who serves as Milo's sidekick, dangerously risks making us hate him before we're given a chance to discover his importance. Dan Fogler plays him as a fast-talking man-child, full of adolescent 'attitude', but is disastrously unfunny at first. As time goes by he becomes more bearable.

There's a similar problem with Ki, a friendly Martian who aids our heroes; besides the fact that her motives for helping our heroes are paper thin, her main character trait – that she learned about humanity from videos from the 60s – is never well exploited. At least visually, with her smiling face, she is easy to like.

The overall design of the picture is pleasant enough but derivative of countless other sci-fi pics and children's animations. The 3D, though, is a non-event. It's a shame the film's art design doesn't reflect the same quality as the motion-capture, which is generally very good. The Martians themselves are fairly standard tall, thin creations with big heads. Their city is the kind of clean white metropolis we've seen before in better films.

With some weird gender politics thrown in for good measure, *Mars Needs Moms* is a decidedly average children's animation. Perhaps add a third star for the really young ones, but most kids (and any accompanying parents) will find this to be of a noticeably lower standard than many of the other children's films that have been released recently. *MR* 





## INSIDIOUS

DIRECTED BY JAMES WAN STARRING PATRICK WILSON, ROSE BYRNE, BARBARA HERSHEY, TY SIMPKINS, ANDREW ASTOR. LIN SHAYE. LEIGH WHANNELL & ANGUS SAMPSON

#### RELEASED APRIL I (USA) APRIL 29 (UK)

Horror at its best is a reminder that we are scared by the simplest things. While the genre has often been at its most inventive revelling in excess – a fact to which the work of Dario Argento, David Cronenberg and George Romero amply attests – gore is generally more concerned with shock than in the most primal terror, which languishes in what we can't see rather than what we can.

Our fear of the dark, which speaks to our most base, animalistic survival instincts, won't come as a surprise to anyone, fans of horror or not. What is more surprising, though, is that James Wan and Leigh Whannell seem to understand this as well. The double act behind the first Saw film, and producers of that most schlocky of series thereafter, have a reputation for many things, but subtlety and restraint certainly isn't one of them. But having arguably contributed more than anyone to horror's forgetting its own roots in recent years, they now return with Insidious - which Whannell wrote and Wan directs - and have just revealed an unexpected, new side to their work.

The story of a suburban fam-

ily haunted by not one, but several ghosts, *Insidious* perhaps inevitably shares a producer with Paranormal Activity. The latter was intermittently frightening, as well as a reflection of attempts by most genres – and especially horror - to refresh themselves in recent years by adopting the guise of documentary realism. Last year's second instalment saw the approach showing signs of wear and tear, and the prospect of that franchise meeting Saw could scarcely be less appealing. Thankfully *Insidious* rejects the styles of both in favour of a richer tone heavily influenced by classic 1970s horror.

Using the creaky, picket fenced houses instantly evocative of films like The Amityville Horror, Insidious sees the son of Patrick Wilson and Rose Byrne fall into a mysterious coma after suffering a seemingly innocuous fall. A series of strange visitations prompts the couple to move house, only for the ghostly presences to follow, as it transpires that it is actually the boy, and not the walls, that are haunted. Shifting from generic haunted house chiller to encompass a range of stylistic influences, the result is like the movie equivalent of a ghost train, and while not remotely original it smacks of something put together by people who have both seen and understood the scares of a litany of horror films.

Obviously owing a debt to *Polter-geist*, *Insidious* also borrows elements from *Twin Peaks-*era David Lynch, with dreams acting as gateways to the supernatural, and includes nods to *The* 

Exorcist, A Nightmare On Elm Street and even Ghostbusters along the way, moving between the gothic, the surreal and the comic to surprisingly good effect. Even the introduction of two nerdy supernatural experts doesn't disrupt proceedings too much, and Wan seems to revel in throwing a series of stylistic jumps into the mix, undercutting audience expectations whilst moving into new territory. A suitable level of creepiness is meanwhile provided by ghostly widows, clownish murderers and clawed demons, aided by the presence of Barbara Hershey channelling more than a little of the eerie disconnect of her mother from Black Swan.

An over-reliance on the influence of other films has its drawbacks, and Insidious is not without its flaws. The characters of Wilson and Byrne are frustratingly hollow, and while the former eventually assumes the film's key role, his character remains mostly unemotional and puzzling. This final act, in which he travels into a dark realm known as The Further, also sees Insidious occasionally tip into camp, becoming more funhouse than haunted house. But whilst Wan makes a few missteps along the way, and his film has nothing like the thematic power of the hundred other films that spawned it, there remains one more trick up its sleeve guaranteed to chill your bones. It may be an essentially shallow ride, but it will make you scared of the dark again. It is a strangely comforting to be reminded of what that feels like. AS





# THE EXTRAOR-DINARY ADVEN-TURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

DIRECTED BY LUC BESSON STARRING LOUISE BOURGOIN, GILLES LELLOUCHE, JACKY NERCESSIAN, PHILIPPE NAHON, JEAN-PAUL ROUVE, MATHIEU AMALRIC & NICOLAS GIRAUD

#### RELEASED APRIL 22 (UK) TBC (USA)

Luc Besson, the mastermind behind Leon and The Fifth Element, has shed his love for gritty action thrillers and created a peculiar and whimsical Gallic fairytale that will almost certainly, almost intentionally, not make it across the Atlantic. The Extraordinary Adventures Of Adele Blanc-Sec is a fluttering and magical romp through a Paris, filled with pterodactyls, Egyptian mummies, grunting policemen and cocky big game hunters. It is a wonderfully absurdist, decadent farce without a smidgen of style or class.

Adele is a brazen bombshell of a heroine: she has the sort of ringlets and curves that have weakened men's knees for centuries, and her brown eyes smoulder and purr until they flash with feisty energy. A director flirting with Hollywood might have had her racing around some Dystopian metropolis on a 15,000bhp motorbike, or guiding a gang of time-travelling pirates through Gary Oldman's brain; but Besson isn't flirting anymore, he isn't even playing hard to get.

Adele's extraordinary adventures see her Raiding a Tomb™ so that she can enlist the help of a Pharoah's physician to cure her ailing sister. The physician's death, a few thousand years ago, is a hurdle that might intimidate a lesser hero, but not Adele. She knows an ancient Parisian doctor who has mastered the ability to bring creatures back from the dead; but by the time she returns to Paris, the senile doctor has already bitten off more than he can chew bringing a pterodactyl back to life.

The rest of the film continues in this farcical (and I don't use that word negatively) mould, with big game hunters and pompous detectives on Adele and the pterodactyl's tail, across the Arrondissements of 1911 Paris.

This film feels much closer to Jean Pierre Jeunet than Luc Besson; and indeed Besson's bulky compatriot might feel his feathers have been ruffled by this assault on his artistic territory. Besson has forgone any of the darkness of his iconic earlier work, and has thoroughly embraced the folkloric fantasy of Jeunet's vision. The make-up is grotesque, reminiscent of Punch & Judy puppets in some antique Romany travelling show, and the whimsical

treatment of this iconic city owes much more to *Amelie* than *Leon*.

At the opening, Besson is bursting with energy and eager to tell his story, but he isn't really sure where to begin. We follow a number of openly irrelevant characters and catch snippets of information on the doctor's metaphysical powers and the raising of the Pterodactyl, before zoning in on our heroine being lowered into the Pharoah's tomb. From here, Besson never looks back. The long sequence in the tomb is pure Indiana Jones, without even a hint of irony or a twist of originality, but it perfectly frames the energetic nonsense and slapstick that is to come.

Spielberg and Lucas knew what they needed to do with *Indiana Jones*; thread the story from one chase to the next as seamlessly as possible. It is a shallow and predictable technique, but it is undeniably entertaining when done properly. That is what Besson did with *The Fifth Element*, and he has not lost this rousing and erratic ability over the past decade.

Although most of the story takes place in Paris, it is a magical and surreal Paris that perfectly suits the tone of the story, and it never becomes boring as the characters race around in circles. The zipping speed of the storytelling even drips down into the minutiae of the editing, with cuts occurring on opening doors, or using visual cues with dialogue: the story never calms down for a second. **ND** 





## **SUCKER PUNCH**

DIRECTED BY ZACK SNYDER STARRING EMILY BROWNING, Abbie Cornish, Jena Malone, Vanessa Hudgens, Jamie Chung. Oscar Isaac. Carla Gugino & Jon Hamm

#### **RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) APRIL I (UK)**

If you were looking forward to *Sucker Punch* then it will unfortunately live up to its title. If you weren't, it might live up to your expectations.

Zack Snyder made his name with a good remake of *Dawn Of The Dead* and then 300, which, though it was a box office hit, already bore some of the hallmarks that would come to hinder the development of his career. Thanks to that early success, he has become a go-to guy in Hollywood, and has recently been handed the mantle of resurrecting the Man of Steel from cinematic purgatory. On the evidence of *Sucker Punch*, we should all cross our fingers very hard for that one.

Sucker Punch, which is written, directed and produced by Snyder, tells the story of Baby Doll (Browning), a young woman who is incarcerated in a mental asylum after a short prologue which tells the story of her unhappy home life. On entering the institution she overhears her stepfather talking to Blue Jones (Isaac), the sinister head of the place, who reveals he will accept a bribe to have the girl lobotomised. From there the film delves into Baby Doll's realm of fantasy, in which she has five days to escape the procedure. Unfortunately, the film's brains were removed long before it found its way

to the screen.

Why is Baby Doll's fantasy a brothel in which all the female cast members are required to wear revealing costumes at all times? Perhaps it's all the result of a psychosis picked up during her troubled childhood, which may have been an acceptable explanation if it carried even the slightest weight. We are presented with Baby Doll's background in a pop-video of an opening drenched in slow-motion and stylised visuals (both irksome Snyder traits) and this aesthetic continues throughout, diluting almost any sense of character through a vacuum of special effects, poor musical choice and deadening violence.

Baby Doll joins up with four other (obviously scantily clad) ladies including Rocket (Malone), who she befriends quickly, and her sister Sweet Pea (Cornish), who treats her with suspicion. Why should they, who have been unhappily surviving in this place for years, suddenly risk everything for an ambitious outsider? More pressingly, why should they want to act on a crack-pot plan that involves finding four arbitrary items? Nevertheless, they do, and thus we have the format of the film. Our ladies must acquire the items required for escape while Baby Doll dances for baying male customers, only we never see her dance; instead, we are whisked away to fantasy action sequences in which our girls (still scantily clad) must stab, shoot and destroy their way to a series of throwaway objectives. Why? If you can answer that question, your name is probably Zack Snyder.

And so our girls fight steam-pow-

ered Nazis in the trenches of World War II while a big robot shoots planes out of the sky. Why? Because it's totally awesome! Baby Doll must fight three giant samurai before she can return and tell the others of her quest. Why? Because, hello, samurai are freakin' cool, right? This is all an excuse for Snyder to pack as many of his 'awesome' ideas as he can into one film, an excuse to show off some occasionally impressive but mostly boring special effects, an excuse to have attractive women running around in skirts and corsets with guns. And, my goodness, it's boring. Dragons! Samurai! Hot girls! Yet boring. I couldn't believe the runtime was less than two hours.

And the shame of it all is that the five girls (in particular the main three named above) are well cast. They're likable. They do their best. They can act. We want to root for them but we can't because every time there might be a hint of involvement, a hint of character, we're taken away to the next vacuous distraction. One of the sequences, an almost-unwatchable train battle with faceless CGI robots, thankfully gives way to something meaningful, but by that time you're just glad it's finally over. Bar some decent choreography and effects in the trenches sequence, the fantasies are tedious.

So Sucker Punch is a failure, and Snyder's worst film. Along with his disappointing foray into children's animation last year, this does not bode well for Superman. He isn't without talent, he just needs to reign himself in, as overall, this is overblown and shallow. **MR** 





## **LIMITLESS**

DIRECTED BY NEIL BURGER STARRING BRADLEY COOPER, ROBERT DE NIRO, ABBIE CORNISH, ANNA FRIEL, JOHNNY WHITWORTH. ROBERT JOHN BURKE & TOMAS ARANA

#### **RELEASED OUT NOW**

Bradley Cooper's rise continues. After the breakout success of *The Hangover* in 2009, the speed of his move from TV ensemble actor to leading man has seemed, well, limitless. All of which makes his new film, about a man who goes from obscurity to the toast of the town in a matter of days, somewhat thematically appropriate. The fact that his character has been helped by a revolutionary new drug is, we trust, where the parallels end.

Cooper plays Eddie Morra, a failed writer recently dumped by his girlfriend. An underachieving, heavy drinking slob, his life is seemingly going nowhere until he bumps into an old friend following a less than legal career path. Given a clear pill known as NZT, Morra is suddenly able to access and utilise every part of his brain – as opposed to the usual 10% – and soon enough he is learning and thinking at prodigious speed, finishing his novel in the space of a weekend.

Finding his supplier murdered, Morra steals his stash, and becoming able to absorb and find patterns in huge amounts of financial data, quickly becomes the protégé of Robert De Niro's legendary financier. But he also has to deal with the police, loan sharks and fellow addicts on his tail, as well as the potentially fatal side effects of his new addiction.

The film begins with Cooper standing on a ledge of an apartment building, the camera teetering over the edge and tumbling to earth. It is a vertiginous opening, as well as a metaphor for Morra's precarious lifestyle. Director Neil Burger, most famous for the underrated *The Illusionist*, creates an energetic visual style, brightening the world when Morra is on his kick, and having letters fall from the ceiling as he writes. He even has lead seeing earlier versions of himself, a clever way of showing a man thinking a few steps ahead. Limitless is at it's best when evoking the whirlwind of success, and these early scenes steam past in a whirl of colour and energy.

Cooper, meanwhile, is an actor built to swagger. In his brashness and sharp, quipping exchanges with De Niro, he's like an amped up version of Gordon Gecko. But despite accruing wealth and status, there is always a sense that a stupid decision can bring it all crashing down. Portraying a character leading a wild lifestyle off the back of a drug habit, mixing with dangerous criminals and riding high in the boardroom, Limitless is like a cross between Wall Street and Blow. where addiction and success are shown to only go hand in hand temporarily. The film isn't shy about showing the depths to which Morra will go for both success and his habit - which may in the end be the same thing. It could be read as a take on the sorts who caused the global financial crisis.

While the freewheeling nature of the film initially works well, however, there is always a danger that it will fly off the rails and stay there. In the end Limitless collapses under the sheer number of storylines it juggles, and the unpredictability that initially makes it endearing gives way to inconsistency of tone and narrative drive. Morra flits between negotiating a corporate merger, winning back his girlfriend, being chased by a Russian gangster, attempting to track down the origins of his precious pills, face a murder wrap and, finally, make a run for public office. Unable to decide between broad comedy, thriller plotting or character study, Burger instead decides to do all three, ten minutes at a time, tying up and resurrecting storylines seemingly at random.

Also, while Cooper may swagger, he struggles, when required, to add extra dimensions to his character. His moments of emotional vulnerability don't quite convince, and while Limitless will confirm his leading man status, he is yet to prove that he has an enduring actor's range. The same can't be said of Abbie Cornish, who in Bright Star showed herself capable to taking on roles far more rewarding than that of Morra's girlfriend. In the end the film is guilty of not really having any idea of where it's going, and by the time it reaches what seems like a fifth ending, Limitless becomes the very equivalent of drug addiction; there are highs, and it may be fun for a while, but in the end it's a thudding, relentless road to nowhere. AS





## THE SILENT House

DIRECTED BY GUSTAVO HERNÁNDEZ STARRING FLORENCIA COLUCCI, ABEL TRIPALDI & GUSTAVO ALONSO

#### **RELEASED APRIL 8 (UK) TBC (USA)**

The camcorder and the horror film have a love-hate relationship. Whilst The Blair Witch Project offered up all the possibilities inherent in the use of small, handheld cameras, it is frequently the 'found footage' concept that has proved the most influential, spawning a legion of horror films representing the good (The Last Exorcism, Rec), the bad (Quarantine) and the indifferent (Paranormal Activity). The lesson less frequently learned from films that use this technology well is the way that whatever smaller cameras lose in terms of pictorial richness they can make up for in tense, claustrophobic atmosphere, offering us a uniquely intense cinematic experience.

Thankfully there are some film-makers that have paid attention, and the result is Gustavo Hernández's *The Silent House*, a stripped back slice of Uruguayan terror that adopts that idea and throws in a few additional tricks of its own. A compelling account of a young woman trapped alone in an

abandoned house, it not only sticks to its leading (and more or less only) character's side throughout, but does so in one, single take. Shot on a Canon D5 – essentially an expensive dSLR – the visuals that cinematographer Pedro Luque manages to create from such materials are truly breathtaking, but that is far from the only reason to be deeply impressed with what may be the most bracing sixty minutes of horror cinema to appear this year.

The Silent House sees Laura (phenomenally played by Florencia Colucci) travel with her father to a remote, uninhabited house, with the intent of preparing it for sale by its owner. Almost immediately strange noises and movements plunge her into a nightmare as she is pursued around the house by ghostly apparitions. Seemingly lacking any off-screen lighting, her ordeal is illuminated only by candlelight, the flash of a Polaroid camera and the halogen lamp that she carries for the duration. A lonely figure surrounded by near total darkness, this setup gives The Silent House a peculiarly monochrome look, adding another dimension to its sheer sense of unreality.

This incredible palette is matched by the brilliantly choreographed, continuous 78 minute take in which the film was made, an absolute masterclass in the use of on-screen space. Circling its heroine and subtly mapping her confinement, the camera sketches the lines of her terrain like a coiling trap, and brilliantly switches between different points of view, variously occupying the role of heroine, observer, victim and ghoul. Hernández's use of reflections, photographs and shadows add a whole other layer of affect to the film, effectively giving himself more shots to play with, and he uses them wisely to offer glimpses both of what might be chasing her and her own fractured psyche. Equally this is matched by some brilliantly atmospheric sound design, and an unsettlingly low key score that perfectly matches the eerie unease of what happens on-screen.

Unfortunately The Silent House also has a downside, and it lies with plot. The use of some fairly obvious horror motifs is a little unnecessary considering the skill with which Hernández builds tension without them, but The Silent House's major drawback lies in its final, significant twist, which both stops cold the film's own momentum and demystifies what has gone before. As is so often the case exceptional filmmaking is at the mercy of plot devices, but while the latter come up short in a big way, the film's first hour announces the arrival of a major talent. The Silent House is the most striking (not to mention scary) film of its type since Blair Witch, and a dazzling technical achievement. The image of its heroine standing in silhouette in a doorway, unsure of whether to cross over, is quite simply the most iconic horror image of the year. AS





## HOP

## DIRECTED BY TIM HILL STARRING RUSSELL BRAND, JAMES MARSDEN, KALEY CUOCO, BILL HADER, CHELSEA HANDLER, ELIZABETH PERKINS, HUGH LAURIE & HANK AZARIA

#### RELEASED APRIL I

Everybody loves children's films. The popularity of Pixar's combination of child friendly larks with weighty themes of mortality, death, friendship and loneliness has meant a new level of critical acceptance of films primarily aimed at the under-tens. With studios like DreamWorks (How To Train Your Dragon), Columbia Pictures (Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs) and even Disney (The Princess And The Frog) being forced to up their game in response to Pixar's output, parents are now blessed with higher quality cinema with which to treat their children.

Hop, the tale of a blossoming friendship between the yawningly named Fred O'Hare (James Marsden) and the runaway heir to the Easter Bunny dynasty, therefore arrives both in time for the eponymous holiday and during a period where parents can be a little more critical about what they take their children to see. When the Easter Bunny (voiced by Hugh Laurie) decides that the time has come to hand over the reins to his successor, his son E.B. (Russell Brand) elects instead to run away and pursue his dream

of becoming a rock 'n' roll drummer. Arriving in Hollywood, he convinces O'Hare to both accept the existence of a talking rabbit and to put him up while he pursues his dream.

Director Tim Hill, with profitable monstrosities such as Alvin And The Chipmunks and Garfield 2 in his back catalogue, can make computer animated rabbits and humans not look entirely ridiculous when sharing screen time. Unfortunately that is about as much as can be said in the film's favour, as Marsden's apparent twenty-something (he is 37, and looks it) is subjected to a series of utterly charmless embarrassments by a talking rabbit, including a job interview at a record company scuppered by E.B's playing drums for The Blind Boys of Alabama, and a public sing-along at a school play in which Marsden has to fake ventriloquism to disguise his sidekick's rendition of I Want Candy.

In amongst all this is a story of two children struggling with the pressure not to disappoint their parents, and adults in turn learning to accept that their children's individuality. Marsden contends with paternal disappointment, whilst E.B's father struggles to accept his son's dream even while his number two, a duplicitous Spanish chick, tries to insinuate that he should look elsewhere for an appropriate heir. The latter's donning of bunny ears in an attempt to convince his boss of his suitability for the task provides the film's only amusing

moment, but otherwise *Hop* is populated with humour that is slow, dated and mindless, an ADD confection of half-baked slapstick and notions of the healing power of Easter chocolate.

By the time Marsden has made the startlingly obvious realisation about his calling in life there is a chick uprising on Easter Island, but Hop has already tested the patience of its audience long before, with nonsensical plotting and a battery of clunky references to contemporary culture, including an America's Got Talent knockoff hosted by David Hasselhoff. Such elements make Hop seem dated before it has even hit the screen, and more importantly come at the expense of any coherent attempt to develop characters, create believable on-screen relationships or actually be any fun. Instead the film is left as a series of fairly dull set pieces, glossily filmed but lacking humour or sweetness.

Ultimately the final decisions that the two leads make about their futures don't really make any sense, but their lack of personality – nowhere has Brand's apparent gift for comic timing and rebellious shtick been so absent – means that audiences, both child and adult, are unlikely to care either way. With Easter around the corner, family trips to the cinema are even more likely than usual. Where *Hop* is concerned, parents would do well to remember that these days, they are spoiled for choice. **AS** 





## THE EAGLE

DIRECTED BY KEVIN MACDONALD STARRING CHANNING TATUM, JAMIE BELL, MARK STRONG, TAHAR RAHIM, DENIS O'HARE. DONALD SUTHERLAND & DOUGLAS HENSHALL

#### **RELEASED OUT NOW**

The historical epic has been mistreated. With *Troy* and Oliver Stone's *Alexander* utterly failing to capture the physicality and broken honour codes that made films like *Gladiator* compelling, the space that Ridley Scott's film managed to open up for Greek and Roman adventures has been largely squandered. With comic books now the dominant player in the male adventure stakes, only the inexplicably successful *Clash Of The Titans* has made any kind of case for swords and sandals in the multiplex.

In that context the arrival of The Eagle comes as something as a surprise, and a welcome one at that. Based on Rosemary Sutcliff's much loved 1954 children's book The Eagle Of The Ninth, the film stars Channing Tatum as Marcus Aquila, a young Roman centurion who requests to be posted to Britain in 140AD in the hope of recovering the Eagle, the standard of his father's legion that disappeared 20 years before in the wilds of Caledonia. An embarrassment that prompted the Empire to build Hadrian's Wall to mark the edge of the 'civilised' world, the event has been a source of shame for Aquila's family, and he uses the first opportunity available to travel into the wilderness in search of it, with his slave Esca (Jamie Bell) his ticket into a new land.

The Eagle is impressive for its rough hewn physicality. Early set piece battles with local tribes boast both claustrophobic tension and a sense of all-encompassing perspective, effectively inhabiting the chaos of the moment while offering a keen sense of how Roman soldiers act as a unit.

The team behind the film have spoken of their aim of making a stripped down 'Roman documentary', and while this may be stretching it a little, these scenes have a hard hitting, realistic feel for both blows and tactics that other similar pictures conspicuously lack.

Tatum, in his most demanding dramatic role to date, is a physically imposing presence, and Jamie Bell, playing his Briton slave, also achieves a kind of convincing, wiry toughness. The chemistry between them works effectively throughout, with the two remaining torn between mutual respect and enmity. Esca has been enslaved by the Romans, yet his life has been saved by Marcus, and their conflict is interestingly explored in a sequence where Marcus has to act as Esca's slave when they are taken in by a Gaelic tribe. There is real drama in the moments where Esca is visibly wrestling with going along with the con for good.

It has become something of a cliché to praise the cinematography of Anthony Dod Mantle (Antichrist, Slumdog Millionaire), but his phenomenal use of natural light combined with director Kevin MacDonald's feel for imposing environments (developed on The Last King Of Scotland and especially Touching The Void) creates an on-screen terrain that convincingly needs to be battled by its leads. The film's feel for its tough, imposing wilderness is

its major strength, and a subtext of civilisation and savagery, underlined by clashes with intimidating, mudcaked tribesmen, gives *The Eagle* a New World-esque quality. Neither does it shy away from some of the more unpleasant moments of warrior life: one scene sees Esca force Marcus to eat a dead rat while hiding in rain-soaked ditch.

The Eagle, though, is a film beset by tonal problems, veering from an impressively mature portrayal of violence towards the simplicity of its children's book roots. The script decides to avoid the brusque formalities of military men and the codes of master and slave, but while this is excusable up to a point, the broad American colloquialisms in which characters speak to each other is jarring, failing to create a convincing interior world. Bell and Tatum are persuasive as two people struggling to get along, but not as owner and property, and Tatum doesn't quite manage to put across Aquila's emotional journey. Most damningly, the plot essentially collapses in the final third, switching from the visceral to the faintly silly. The impression is of a film unsure of its audience.

The Eagle's portrayal of warfare and wilderness offers thrills and intelligence, managing to be impressive while also offering glimpses of a deeper, better film. A lack of plausibility and uneasy shifts between serious battle drama and Boy's Own Adventure may leave MacDonald's vision both too dark for children and not meaty enough for older audiences, ultimately making it a victim of its own inconsistency. In the end The Eagle's flight is often striking, but a little erratic. **AS** 





## **SOURCE CODE**

DIRECTED BY DUNCAN JONES STARRING JAKE GYLLEN-Haal, Michelle Monaghan, Vera Farmiga, Jeffrey Wright. Cas anvar. Russell Peters & Michael Arden

#### RELEASED APRIL I

Duncan Jones surprised a fair few people in 2009 when his debut feature, *Moon*, turned out to be really rather good. Made on a relatively shoe-string budget (for a sci-fi flick, at least) Jones gave us picture which heralded him as a talent to look out for in the future.

That future is now the present, and understandably a lot of expectation has anticipated the release of Source Code, his sophomore effort, which stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Vera Farmiga. Gyllenhaal plays Captain Colter Stevens, a man who has been handed a very delicate task: to enter into the identity of a man who was killed in a terrorist attack on a train and, through this process (known as 'source code'), identify the person responsible for the attack, who is on the same train. The catch is, he can only do this in eight-minute segments (the span of the brain's residual memory, as explained by Jeffrey Wright's hobbling Dr. Rutledge) and so the film adopts a Groundhog Day-esque repeating structure, looping back on itself as information is revealed.

Now, there are some gaps in this film's logic, but spend your time focusing on them while watching and you'll deprive yourself of what is generally a very enjoyable experience. Don't bother wondering how Stevens is able

to do what he likes within his eight minute jaunts, despite the fact that he is inside the persona of another man who would've had to be omnipresent to provide the architecture of his visits. As we move on the film offers some explanations, but none entirely hold water. The plot's contrivances, though (why does the bomber need to be physically on the train to blow it up? In fact, why does he need to blow it up at all, since his real target is elsewhere?), are one of its few weaknesses.

What we end up with is a thriller with some great ideas as its foundation. It has a significantly ramped-up budget compared to *Moon* but hasn't lost all of that film's indie sensibility. Indeed, it isn't the budget that makes this film work – had the film been made on an identical budget to *Moon*'s, it would probably be just as good. As a result what CGI there is feels a little unnecessary.

But Jones handles the narrative well, allowing Gyllenhaal's charismatic lead performance to sweep us along, with only minor bits and bobs of trickery along the way. Crucially our protagonist is allowed time to breathe as a character even in a film with a story that demands things don't stand still for too long.

The film takes the story's concept seriously (this leads to a genuine sense of meaning underlying the action, as opposed to popcorn fluffiness), which is to its credit, but doesn't refuse its audience a smirk here and there. As Stevens gets involved with the other passengers, most notably Michelle Monaghan's delightful Christina, he does the classic announcing-things-before-they-happen routine, but it's

played well enough that it doesn't feel stale.

As things move along Stevens naturally begins to realise that all may not be as it seems, and the nature of his situation becomes more apparent, thanks in part to interactions with Goodwin (Farmiga) and Rutledge (Wright) who are the faces behind the source code operation. We seem them mostly via computer screen, and thankfully they make the required impression. At the beginning Farmiga is the typical voice that knows but doesn't tell, which is irksome, but develops nicely as time goes by, as does Rutledge, who benefits (and occasionally suffers) from some scenery-chewing work from Wright.

As the film moves towards its finale(s) it becomes apparent that despite the great setup, those involved weren't quite sure how to finish the thing. It feels like a few good endings were suggested but then, unable to decide which was best, Jones has bolted them all together in a final reel that somehow works but doesn't quite. But it is dramatically satisfying, which is the main thing, and even nudges some affecting emotional notes which build on the film's central theme of individual moments, and the value that lies therein.

All in all Duncan Jones has done nothing to suggest that his successful debut was a one-off. This is more mainstream, granted, but it still has ideas and isn't afraid to explore them. The bloated ending tries to give more than it has, but this film in general is deserving of credit. Fingers crossed for that third effort, eh Duncan? **MR** 





## THE WAY

#### DIRECTED BY EMILIO ESTEVEZ STARRING MARTIN SHEEN, Deborah Kara Unger, James Nesbitt, Yorick van Wageningen, Emilio Estevez & Spencer Garrett

#### RELEASED MAY 13 (UK) SEPTEMBER 30 (USA)

Tom is playing golf with his Country Club buddies in California when he receives news that his estranged son Daniel has been killed in a storm in the Pyrenees. Daniel was one day into the famed 'Camino de Santiago de Compostela' – an epic two month pilgrimage across the mountains from France to Spain, to the supposed resting place of St James. Tom travels to France to collect the ashes; and after a tormented, sleepless night he decides to take the trip in Daniel's place, wanting to better understand the son he never knew.

But Tom is not alone for long, for the pilgrimage is a busy route populated with the world's devout, overweight, and nicotine addicted. Joost is a sensitive and powerful Dutchman hoping to lose enough weight to persuade his wife back into the bedroom; Sarah is a sardonic Canadian with a smoking problem and a difficult past; and Irishman Jack, despite the torrential flow of words pouring from his mouth, is suffering from a rare case of writer's block. These troubled souls – attracted to Tom's aching, stubborn silence – form a makeshift gaggle, and help one another on their respective journeys.

Estevez's script never quite does justice to the indescribable beauty of the pilgrimage. For each of the lonely souls that trudges through these mountains, the journey is an ethereal challenge: mundane and desperate, yet brilliant and life changing. But Estevez imposes a traditional narrative of highs and lows that will be enjoyed by even the most hardened of Hollywood hacks. This is supposed to be an adventure of discovery; but the route is all too familiar, the destination all too obvious.

The script is overly wordy, filled with twee clichés and simple emotional responses for actor and audience alike – do "sad", do "elated", do "flustered". Long sequences that could have been beautifully rendered in silence are filled with the blabbering dialogue of a filmmaker too scared to film quietness in all its untameable beauty. Similarly, Estevez uses crass ghostly hallucinations to evoke the painful feelings of loss and guilt from which Tom is suffering; and every time 'ghost Daniel' appears on screen you can almost hear

the frowns of those viewers hoping for a touch of subtlety.

But somehow, despite the simple and sometimes obtuse storytelling, there is something strangely intimate and mesmerising about this film. Estevez and his father, Martin Sheen, have a clear artistic chemistry, and a rare level of honesty that translates beautifully onto the screen. Sheen is excellent as Tom: he is fragile and confused, but still ruddy and headstrong.

His explanation, to his doctor, that he is "going overseas to bring Daniel home" is a peculiarly American, almost military reaction to grief. We watch the walls of his California Country Club life come crashing down around him, and we know he is scared, exhilarated, and somehow relieved by it all.

Another reason for the mesmerising beauty of the film is the physical location of the pilgrimage. This long, meandering path has been etched into the ridges and fields of the Pyrenees for hundreds of years, and it doesn't require a religious sensibility to feel overawed by the calm, gentle power of the area. It is not a beauty on the scale of the canyons of Utah or the mountains of Montana, but it is an unassuming beauty that lends the film a sense of eternal hopefulness. **ND** 



## GLEE: SEASON 2: Volume 1

If you doubted whether *Glee* could keep it up rolling into season two, the show answers with a fairly emphatic 'yes' as the glee troupe are back for another musical school year.

Film ★★★★ Extras ★★★

## **MONSTERS**

Interesting idea, and a great achievement on such a low budget, the highly uneventful adventure film, however, can't stand up to its over the top praise. Gareth Edwards, though, is a director to watch out for in the future.

Film  $\star\star\star\star$ Extras  $\star\star\star\star$ 

#### THE LAST LOVECRAFT

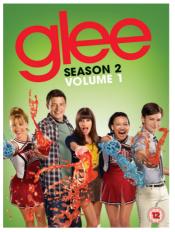
The latest entry in the significantly flagging horror-comedy genre, *The Last Lovecraft* follow office worker Jeff, who bored of the daily grind and finds himself and a bunch of friends embroiled in a monster-heavy adventure.

Film  $\star\star\star\star\star$ Extras  $\star\star\star\star$ 

## BLOODED

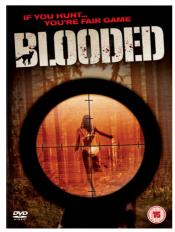
Fake docu/thriller about a bunch of hunt enthusiasts on the wrong end of a rifle scope when animal rights extremists turn the tables in quite brutal and torturous fashion. Slack acting and looking like its low budget let it down.

Film  $\star\star\star\star\star$ Extras  $\star\star\star\star\star$ 





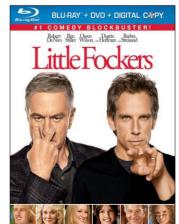












### TRON: LEGACY

Visually stunning but wholly inadequate sequel to the original, and game-changing, *TRON*, twenty years on, Flynn's son, Sam, unintentionally transports himself to The Grid and must fight to get back to the real world.

Film ★★★★★ Extras ★★★★

## THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNETS' NEST

The last in the *The Girl Who...* thriller series, *Hornets' Nest* improves on the disappointing second outing to aptly round off the series with some flair and suspense.

Film ★★★★★ Extras ★★★★

#### **CORALINE 3-D**

(Somewhat pointless) 3-D release of the entertaining 2009 animated fantasy film about a little girl who discovers a whole other world through a mysterious little door in her parents' new apartment.

Film  $\star\star\star\star\star$ Extras  $\star\star\star\star$ 

## MEET THE PARENTS: Little fockers

The first in the *Meet The*Parents franchise for seven
years, *Little Fockers* smells of
a cash-in, and sadly neither
the script nor film try very
hard to suggest otherwise.

Film ★★★★★ Extras ★★★★







## DOUBLE OR QUITS BY DEREK VINCENT



#### STREETS OF RAGE BY ALED LEWIS



VITAL SIGNS BY CARLES RODRIGO



HURRICANES FOR HIRE BY MILIKEN GARDNER





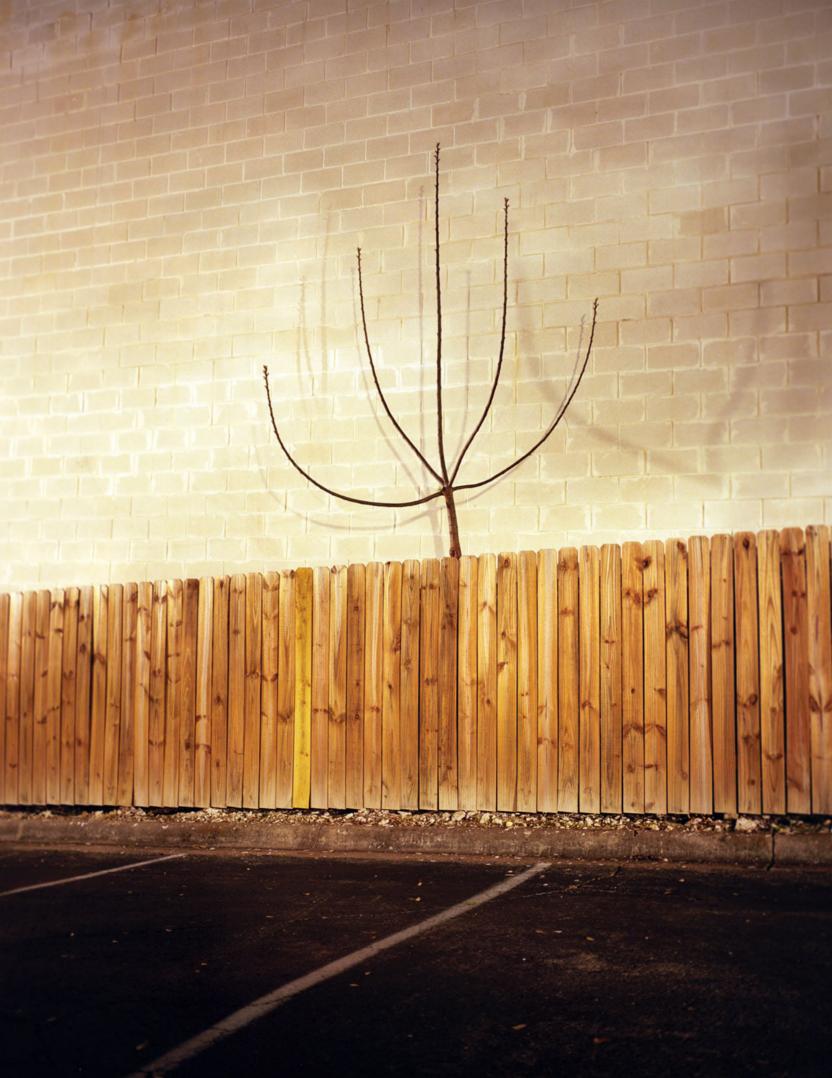




























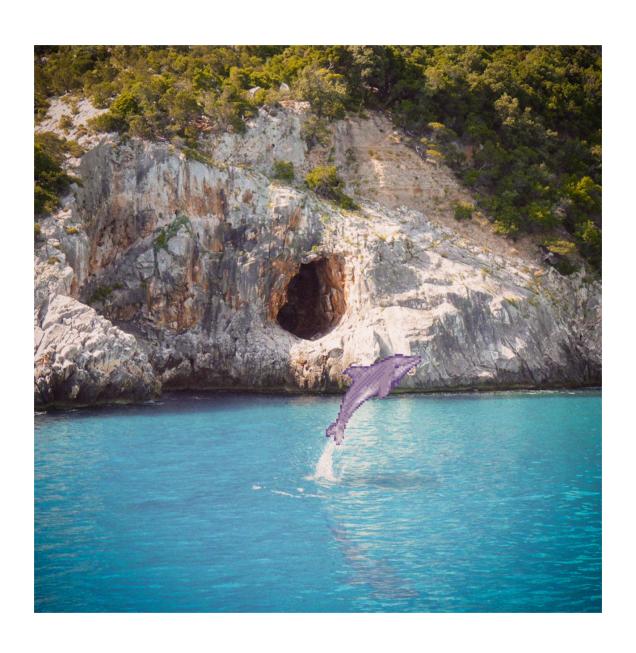




## STREETS OF RAGE

ILLUSTRATIONS ALED LEWIS (ALEDLEWIS.COM)



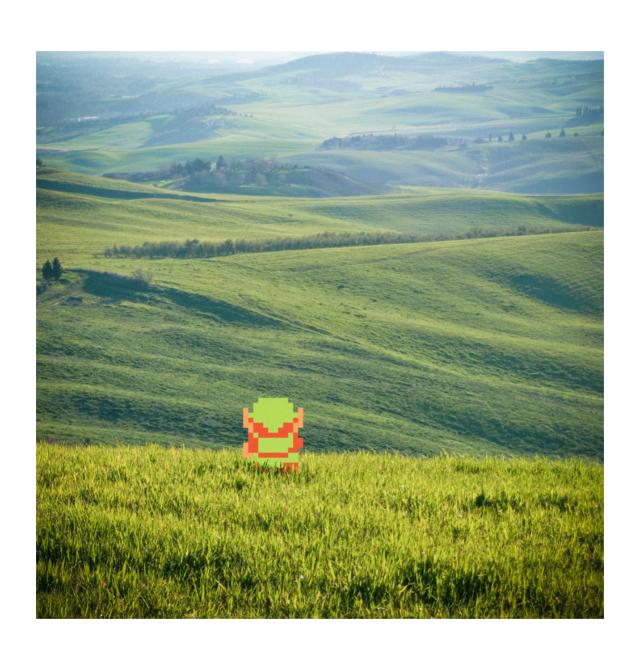
















## MITAL SIGNAL AND THE SIGNAL AND THE

PHOTOGRAPHY CARLES RODRIGO (CARLESRODRIGO.ES)













































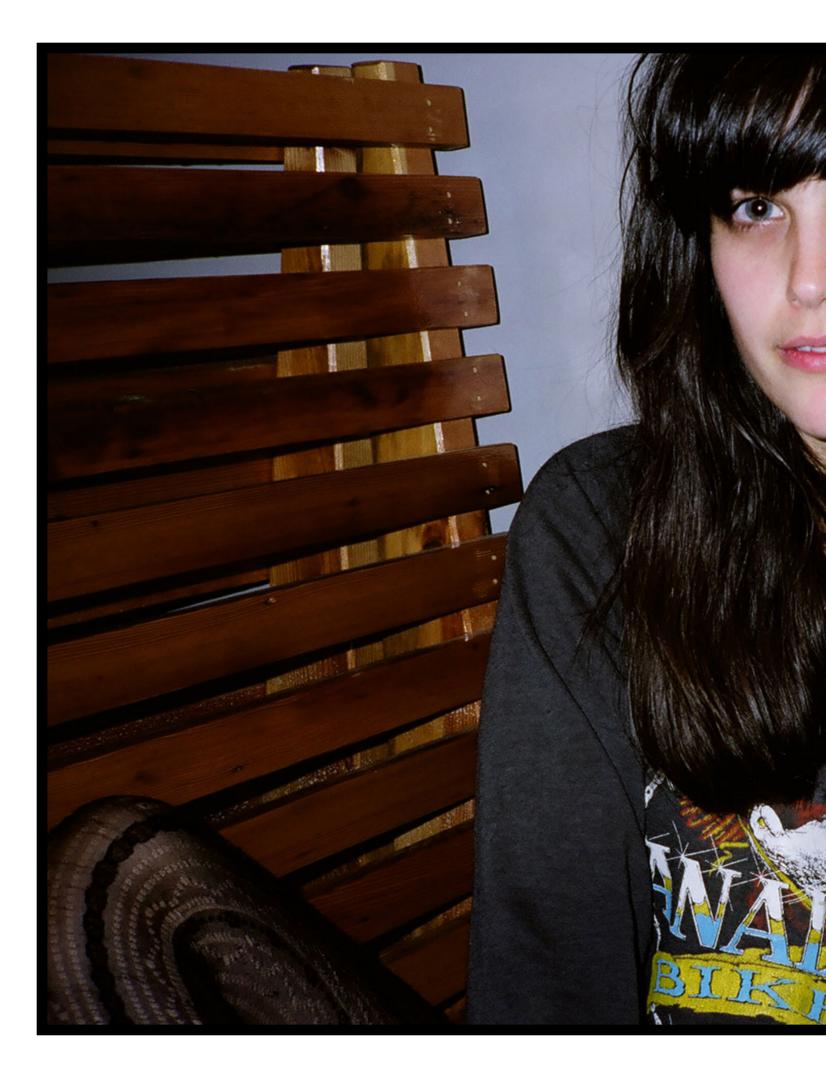






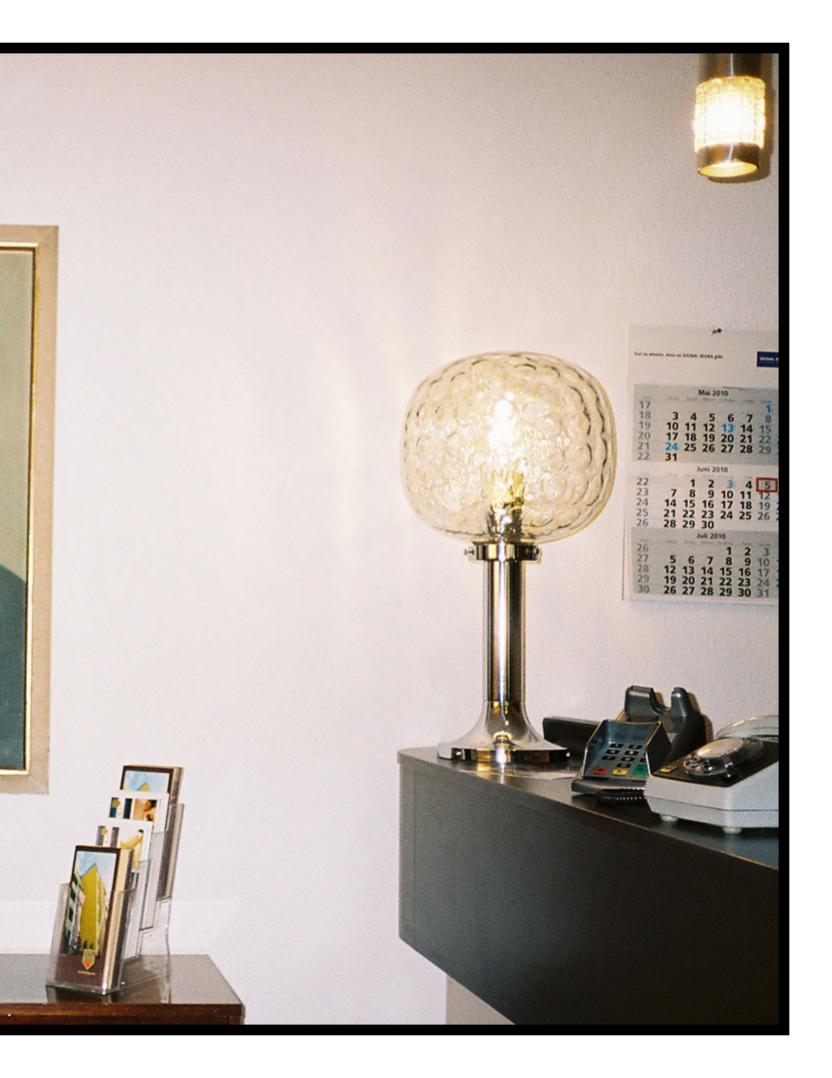




















## SHOW YOUR SPOTS BY ALEX SCHIER



## LET'S KILL TONIGHT BY LINUS MORALES



## TEENAGE WASTELAND BY TINO OAC



WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING BY YUSUF BUTOLLI



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