

# FANTASY FIRE



ISSUE #44 // JUNE 2011



THE TREE OF LIFE  
SENNA  
NANDO ESPARZA  
JOHN PAUL THURLOW  
ALI MITTON  
FOSTER THE PEOPLE  
THE STATE OF  
ANIMATION  
MISTER HEAVENLY

## MIAMI HORROR

DON'T GET STINGY WITH YOUR BULLETS. GREG ADAMSKI DOES THE DOUBLE TAP



# The perfect crime. *L.A. Noire*.



It feels like every year Rockstar put out a title that the video game industry touts as 'game-changing'. Just in the last four years we've had the absorbing story of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, a miniaturised version on the Nintendo DS with *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars*, the epic landscapes of *Red Dead Redemption*. And now the latest, the remarkable facial movements and graphics of *L.A. Noire*.

Set in Los Angeles in 1947, players take control of Cole Phelps, a war hero-turned LAPD detective, thrown into the corrupt and brutal underworld of a city unable to cope with its own growth and success amid an expansive post-war boom.

With much of the game charging you with tracking down the real culprit behind the famous Black Dahlia murders, after tracking down clues at each crime scenes and investigating the bodies and often limited evidence, much of your time in the game is spent

interviewing suspects and gauging whether they're telling the truth.

With lie-detectors no where to be seen, instead it's your human intuition that'll need to lead you down one path or the other, but it's only made possible by the implementation of remarkably realistic impressions and reactions. While at first a felon's tells will be little less than obvious, soon they become more subtle; the slight twitching of an eye, or moving one's head around a little too much. It feels like you're really in the scene, sat right at the table, shaking your suspect down.

And at one point, the characters really were. To get such remarkable realism, every scene, piece of dialogue and storyline was acted out by professional actors (most of which seem to have walked straight off the *Mad Men* set), their every move charted by detailed motion capture on the body, and in particularly, the face.

It creates a finished product that puts a lot of films to shame. Bar perhaps *Avatar*, you won't find such detailed facial mapping on the silver screen, and after another very well-written plot, it makes you wonder just when Rockstar, or some of their team, will try their hand at movies.

Executive producing *The Football Factory* has been their only real foray to date, and starring Danny Dyer, it can't really be counted as a serious piece of filmmaking. But all the ingredients are there for them to make a real stab as the silver screen; the world of *Red Dead* is perfectly set-up, while the story of Cole Phelps would have made for a much better Black Dahlia movie than the 2006 Brian De Palma production. Then again, if it means they'd have to slow up on making video games (and it almost certainly would, I'm not sure I'd be so exciteable.

**Sam Bathe**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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# FRIDAY NIGHT FIST FIGHT

FRIDAY 19TH AUGUST  
AT THE OLD BLUE  
LAST, LONDON

ARTWORK BY  
CESAR MORENO



## JUNE 2011



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## The state of animation.

"Animation can explain whatever the mind of man can conceive," said Walt Disney. Humans have always been fascinated by the idea of the moving picture, now perhaps more so than ever. From the earliest cave paintings through the zoetrope and into CGI, animation has provided a canvas on which our imagination can run wild.

Animation has not so much been locked down upon by the active cinema over the years as it has been overshadowed by it. Naturally animation on film occupied at around the same time the first film camera was being conceived at the end of the nineteenth century when George Méliès was busy making such magicians and Charles-Émile Reynaud was pioneering animated projection. Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) is often incorrectly cited as the first feature-length animation, although it was the first to use the full range of techniques (speaking from behind the glass) that have become hallmarks of the medium. In full-color and the first to be widely recognized, it has since not only been remade but also been remade in 3D.

The Academy Awards, now routinely designated for celebrating the position of animated features (also compared to live-action, voice and all else to pick up on the arbitrary behind animation as a right-

he reported. In 1932, four years before Snow White, the Oscar for Animated Short Subjects (now Best Animated Short Film) was established and went to Fleischer and Pope. Disney's eight-minute Technicolor short, The Tortoise and the Hare, was an Academy Award Award Best Short Film. The Oscar nomination that year was awarded to that of seven, longer what was to be a remarkably early of success for the production house.

Getting to work and having the success they did with Snow White and Disney to the what would be the first of a generation of animation directors (Fleischer Studios had been the leading cartoon studio in 1930, which was later taken over by Warner Bros. and then by the studio that was founded by Disney).

And, of course, for comparison, we will be getting that movie on the screen in the industry. Disney continued to put out

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# FAN THE FIRE

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ONLINE: FANTHEFIREMAGAZINE.COM

BACK ISSUES: FANTHEFIREMAGAZINE.COM/BACKISSUES

FAN THE FIRE MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY ONLINE, ON IPHONE AND ON IPAD USING THE FAN THE FIRE PUBLISHING PLATFORM

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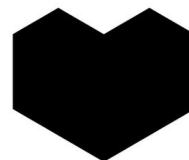


**FOSTER THE PEOPLE**



**THE KILLING**

DIGITALISM  
I LOVE  
YOU DUDE



**DIGITALISM  
ON RECORD**



**SUPER 8**

LO-  
VE



**A REDUCTION IN  
BOX OFFICE TAKINGS  
FOR 3-D FILMS**



**L.A. NOIRE**

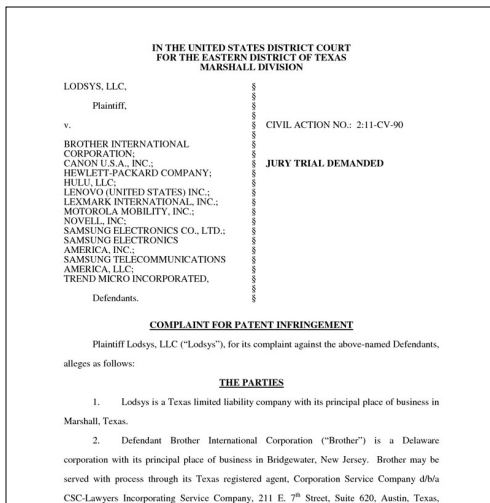


**TREEHOTEL**



**HIMYM  
SEASON FINALE**





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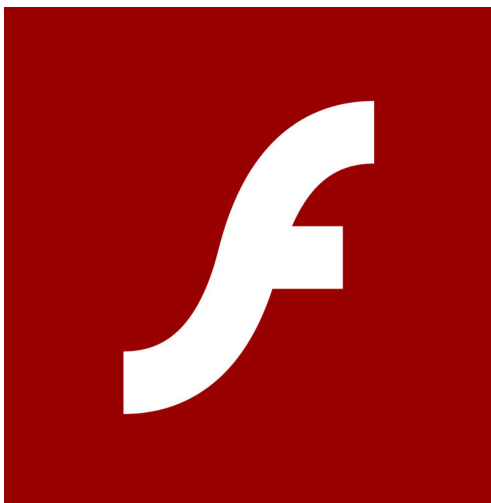


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ALBUM REVIEWS



# Paradise lost. Veronica Falls.

WORDS SAM BATHE

The music industry has been patiently waiting for the next genre to take centre stage, and lo-fi seems as perfectly placed as any. Since Best Coast and Wavves lead the way in 2010, a number of interesting new bands have been at the forefront of a second wave, with few more promising than the excellent Veronica Falls.

Playing jangly lo-fi rock, Veronica Falls though have much more variation than the aforementioned breakouts. Boasting sickly sweet melodies on top of much darker lyrics, at times their music sounds quite twee, but it's anything but superficial, with a deep '60s influence evident throughout.

Now based in London, the four-piece are formed of present and ex-members of Sexy Kids, The Royal

We and Your Twenties, while bassist Marion had never been in a band before; the three others had to teach her the instrument so she could join.

First wowing us at SXSW earlier this year, live, Veronica Falls are very charming, not arrogant or over-confident at all. They're very earnest in their excitement to share their music with you, but then it seems making a great early impression has always come naturally to the band.

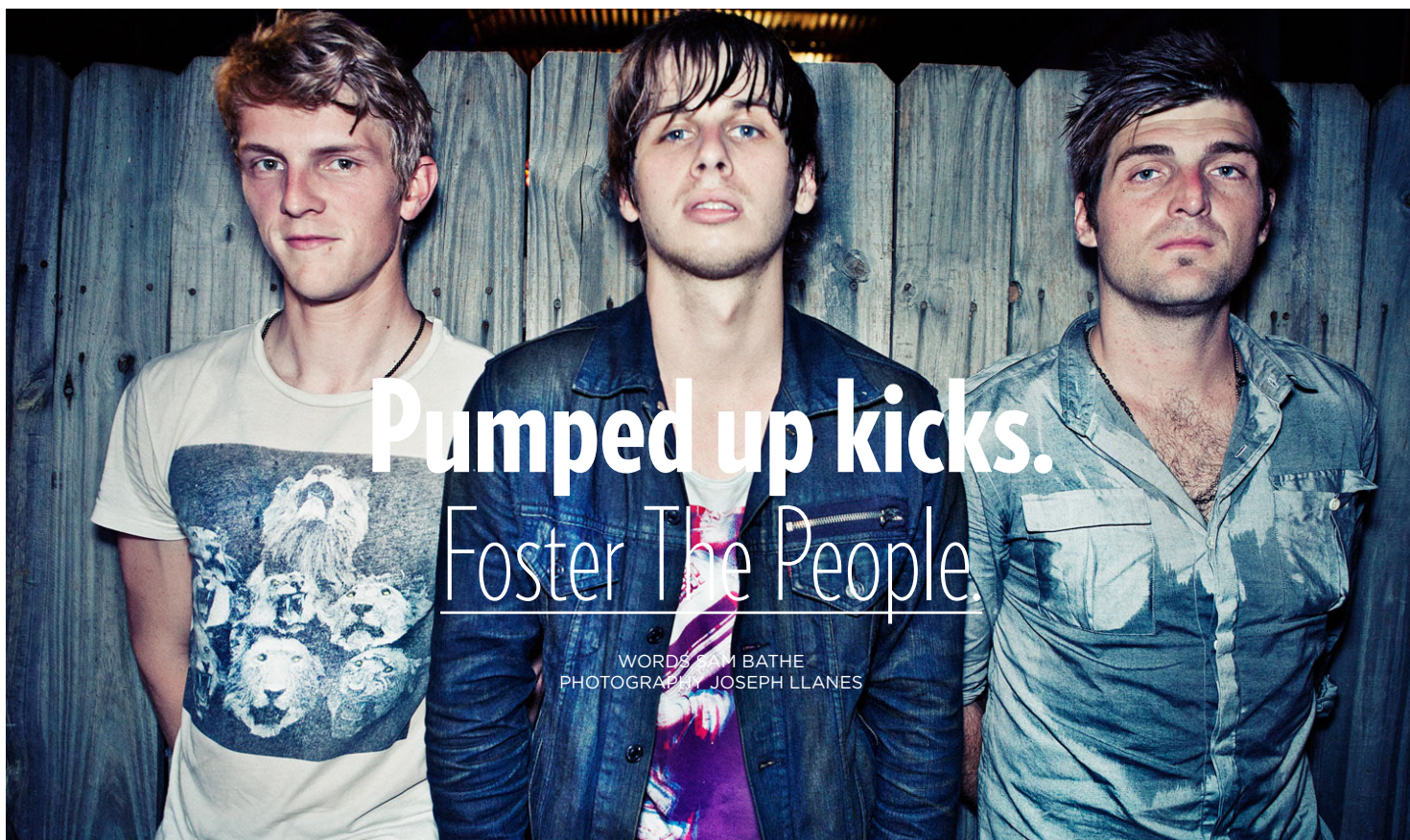
Just ten minutes after launching their MySpace page last year they were contacted by New York label Captured Tracks – though founder is actually an acquaintance of the band, tipped by a friend that their site had just got live – who went on to release Veronica Falls' debut seven-inch.

Just recently now signed to Bella Union for an album deal, covering worldwide bar the States where Slumberland are going to put out their music, while an exact date for their first LP hasn't been locked in just yet, expect it to drop in the fall.

In the mean time you'll have to get your fix when Veronica Falls hit the road, with a number of upcoming dates including Hard Rock Calling with Stevie Nicks, XOYO supporting Vivian Girls, whom very soon they'll be bigger than, and Field Day in August, never mind this year's Rockorama and Benic-assim festivals in July

On the cusp of becoming a major trend, get ready to see, and hear, Veronica Falls at the forefront of the lo-fi movement of late 2011 and 2012. ♣





Foster The People's rise to fame hasn't quite come overnight, but you could certainly call it a snowball. Forming in October 2009, the three-piece (or five-piece if you count two extra more touring musicians) quickly got some tracks together and played SXSW in 2010 to get things moving, it wasn't until that summer though, that a future really took shape. Releasing single *Pumped Up Kicks* in mid-September, buzz and airplay have spiralled ever since, with the track first finding fame on Hype Machine, after a German blogger's post hit their charts. Considering just how infectious their music really is, though, their rise to prominence comes as no surprise.

Falling snugly into the indie-pop genre, the band put out a self-titled EP this January through Columbia, which given its roaring success, and *Pumped Up Kicks* going viral, was briskly-released followed up by album, *Torches*, just this May. Though it's that track that's mostly to thank for their fame, Foster The People are far from a one trick pony. Sounding a little post-MGMT with the energy and momentum of Jamaica, *Torches* bulks up with

brilliant opener *Helena Beat* and the absorbing *Waste*.

The band, however, could have ended up a completely different being, or moreover, just a solo, acoustic project for frontman Mark Foster. Playing alone before teaming up with Mark Pontius (drums) and Cubbie Fink (bass), its lucky he found himself feeling limited by just vocals and a sole guitar, or we might not be sitting here today.

Currently in the throngs of a sold out nationwide US tour, their second of the year, Foster The People have further played gigs in Europe and Down Under, culminating recently in a huge set at Coachella and showcases at SXSW.

Their slot at the California festival was a homecoming of sorts, and Foster The People are the pride of LA right

now, and part of a new breed bands coming out of the sprawling city

Big in LA before their popularity spread, they're part of a new breed of LA bands, with Grouplove also at the forefront, taking over from the Long Beach scene that proved so fruitful in recent years. With Delta Spirit and Cold War Kids to show from the coastal town, the new scene has some

high standards to live up to, but given that *Pumped Up Kicks* was written and produced in just three hours, we'd certainly bet that Foster The People and co. are up to the challenge.

**BIG IN LA BEFORE THEIR POPULARITY SPREAD, THEY'RE PART OF A NEW BREED OF LA BANDS, TAKING OVER FROM THE EVER FRUITFUL LONG BEACH SCENE.**



# Hell and back. Mister Heavenly.

WORDS TOM MOORER





Given the exciting plethora of artists that have been signed to Sub Pop Records over the past 30 years, any new addition to the roster is usually worth a listen. Though penning a deal late last year, Mister Heavenly aren't fresh-faced kids, but grizzled veterans of indie rock.


The band is comprised of Nick Thorburn (Islands/The Unicorns), Ryan Kattner (Man Man), and Joe Plummer (Modest Mouse), and had actually been playing together since 2007 under various aliases during the final days of The Unicorns and the early days of Islands. Furthermore, Modest Mouse and Man Man had toured together a number of times and both Kattner's and Thorburn's bands were signed to the same label.

The genre 'doom wop' is often banded around to describe the group's sound, born out of a shared love of 1950s vocal-based R&B by ensembles like The Platters or the Moonglows, and also a fascination with ill-fated romance. It's a style drawn out of a songwriting process the band describe as a "push and pull" collaboration. "I'd

never had the opportunity to bounce songs off another person, especially one who I trusted would carry his weight, and it was very refreshing," admits Kattner.

They are currently putting the final touches to their first album, *Out Of Love*, which is due for release in August. Recorded and mixed in 12 days with Ryan Hadlock (The Gossip, Ra Ra Riot, Love of Diagrams), the band have attempted to evoke the feel-good era of Elvis Presley. Two singles have also already been released, the eponymous *Mister Heavenly* and the breezy *Pineapple Girl*.

Thorburn believes that the songs have some footing through their other groups but have taken a life of their own. "They [the songs] really sounded like a mash-up of our styles but at the same time a wholly new entity."

The future looks buoyant; they have just finished touring with Passion Pit and a full US tour is pencilled in during the winter, to coincide with their debut LP. Who knows, perhaps one day they'll be mentioned in the same breath as the Nirvanas and Soundgardens on Sub Pop. 







Writing the follow-up to one of the sleeper hits of 2009, *Hospice*, was never going to be easy. Especially when that album was such an emotionally-wrought piece of work, told through the analogy of a hospice worker and terminally-ill patient. Fast forward two years and the New Yorkers have just released their next effort, entitled *Burst Apart*, and are in the midst of a world tour.

Recording for *Burst Apart* began in September 2010 and continued over a five-month span. Rather than bring in an outside collaborator, singer/guitarist Peter Silberman, drummer Michael Lerner, and keyboardist/multi-instrumentalist Darby Cicci decided to and produce the record entirely on their own; "It's a record about moving forward," says Silberman. "*Hospice* was kind of all-encompassing for a while and *Burst Apart* feels like us moving on from it. Not to abandon it, but to keep it in its place and figure out what's next." It's an apt summing up.

Initially a solo-project created by Silberman in 2006, The Antlers have grown to become one of the most critically-lauded bands over the past

five years. The band's first two albums *Uprooted* and *In the Attic Of The Universe* were entirely written by Silberman himself but shortly afterward, Lerner and Cicci joined too and they settled on the name "The Antlers" after The Microphones' song, *Antlers*.

The group's first full-length album was then released independently in 2009, the aforementioned *Hospice*. An elaborate song cycle dealing with life, death, and all the in-between, the album earned rapturous praise and a place on many 'best-of' lists.

*Burst Apart* marks a change of direction for the band, who had developed an increased interest in electronic music during the recording process.

While creating the follow-up, The Antlers were anxious to avoid being branded by their previous album's mournful content.

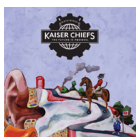
"It began to feel like we were being pigeon-holed as a 'sad band,'" Silberman explains, "but we're not particularly sad people. We have a lot of different feelings about things. There's a whole spectrum of emotion to explore and I think that's what we were trying to do on this record."

However, one thing is for sure, the band's rise to prominence has been no fluke, and make sure you catch them on tour for a truly hypnotic and encapsulating liveshow.

*The Antlers' Burst Apart is out now*







## THE KAISER CHIEFS THE FUTURE IS MEDIEVAL

RELEASED JUNE 27

There was a time when The Kaiser Chiefs were the darlings of the indie scene. They were new, refreshing and put out quite an entertaining debut. Then they got big. Then they got lazy. And then their unfortunate third album, *Off With Their Heads* happened. And everyone forgot about them. Perhaps surprisingly though, they didn't break up, and three years on from that ill-fated effort, return with *The Future Is Medieval*, with their stock as a band having never fallen lower.

Another title, with album are to boot, that has a label-friendly 'indie with a mainstream appeal' tag written all over it, the first release though was original. From list of 20 tracks, the band offered fans the chance to pick and choose their favourite 10, customise the artwork, then download their own unique version. A clever idea, but it got them surprisingly little column inches, so here's the physical release too, and well, it's just average Kaisers all over again. **SB**

★★★★★



## THE HORRORS SKYING

RELEASED JULY 11

The Horrors started life as a gigantic ball of buzz; they were huge before they even had enough tracks to play a full set. But when their album came out, while it was still pretty good, it wasn't the game-changer everyone said it would be, more just – and I mean this literally – 11 tracks of heavy noise. Follow-up *Primary Colours*, though, was different. More cultured and expansive, it was nominated for the Mercury Music Prize and brought post-punk, shoegaze back towards the mainstream, and *Skying* is an expansion again too.

Self-produced in their East London studio, The Horrors' new LP is even more wideranging, with a spacey, ethereal feel balanced aside influences from decades gone by. It's a quite brilliant LP, and though the sound and tone is much less summery, draws comparisons in its make up to Metronomy's recent, and wonderful, *The English Riviera*, passing over on the real punch some of their music possessed in the past. **TM**

★★★★★



## DAWES NOTHING IS WRONG

RELEASED OUT NOW

Dawes tour. They tour a lot. And they tour non-stop. To be honest, touring, albeit on a stellar debut album, is probably the main reason they've made such a big name for themselves in the States, but their increased fame means that this time, more than ever, it'll be the reception of an LP on record that decides their fate in the near future.

Fans, though, need not worry, as *Nothing Is Wrong* is a triumphant return, even if the band certainly didn't take any time off to write it. LA four-piece Dawes' sophomore LP is another sumptuous mix of down-tempo and more alluring energetic Americana-folk. Starting with a bang on *Time Spent In Los Angeles*, the faster songs take most of the plaudits – *If I Wanted Someone* and *How Far We've Come* back that track up especially well – but really the whole thing is a very rounded and impressive song collection. Dawes' fame continues to impressively roll on forward. **SB**

★★★★★



## THE BLOOD ARM TURN AND FACE ME

RELEASED JULY 4

The Blood Arm should be bigger. Two albums in, their music has been critically-acclaimed across the board while their live show is anything but boring, and yet, so very few have heard their name.

Maybe with their third effort that will change, and the small but feverish fanbase expand to the band's potential, although sadly while it has the potential to be their biggest commercial release yet, it doesn't quite stand up to the lofty heights of *Lie Lover Lie*.

*Turn And Face Me* is still worth your time though, echoing a bygone era of rock'n'roll based around heavy hooks and drawling vocals; their sound might be simplistic from the outside, but its still captivating and easy to get into. Mixing in a Brit-pop and '70s punk influence, The Blood Arm didn't quite hit the nail on the head with *Turn And Face Me*, but are still doing interesting work that hopefully many people now will sit up and listen to. **TM**

★★★★★



**FILM**



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# IMMORTALS

RELEASED NOVEMBER 11

I was rather looking forward to *Immortals*, mainly because Tarsem Singh was a fairly leftfield choice of director, and one who seemed likely to bring a unique aesthetic to this fantasy action epic. But having now seen the full trailer, it would be an understatement to describe my hopes as dashed.

The film stars Henry Cavill (the new Superman) as Theseus, an ordinary man chosen by Zeus to help protect the world (and the gods) from an attack by the Titans, lead by Mickey Rourke's Hyperion. It also features an interesting supporting cast including Freida Pinto, Stephen Dorff and John Hurt.

The trailer, emblazoned with the words "from the producers of 300" reveals a little more of what we can expect, and in flaunting the film's production team, basically acknowledges where its visual style comes from. It looks like 300. It just does. Nice artistic touches here and there can't escape that fact. In amongst the dodgy helmets, gravelly voices, distracting slow-motion and unconvincing CGI backgrounds, the spectre of Zack Snyder's successful film echoes almost constantly. This is a huge let down; one of the most disappointing trailers of the year for a film that had originally seemed like it might be something a bit different – a tonic for *Clash Of The Titans*, maybe. But now it ranks amongst the most average-looking blockbusters of 2011, in a year which is hardly light on that front.











# JOHNNY ENGLISH REBORN

**RELEASED** OCTOBER 7 (UK) TBC (USA)

*Johnny English*, remember that? The *James Bond* parody released eight years ago starring Rowan Atkinson and Natalie Imbruglia. You know the one: uninspired, dull, generally not very good. Still nothing? John Malkovich was French in it. There you go, that was it. Many of the films released in 2003 have had sequels already, some of them more than one (*X2*, *Pirates Of The Caribbean*), and some have been more deserving than others. But another

*Johnny English* film, really?

Nevertheless, it's happening, with Rowan Atkinson reprising his role as the titular bumbling spy. Natalie Imbruglia, though, misses out this time around, and has been replaced by Gillian Anderson, playing another secret agent. Meanwhile, the supporting cast has accumulated a fairly impressive list of names, even if many of them will be in bit part roles. That list of names includes Pierce Brosnan (a previous

Bond), Rosamund Pike (who starred opposite Brosnan in the disastrous *Die Another Day*), Dominic West and Rik Mayall. Having lived in exile for years following a bungled mission in Mozambique, English is called back into action to prevent an assassination attempt on the Chinese Premier.

Will *Johnny English Reborn* be any good? Our guess at this point is no, but stranger things have happened. Probably.









# THE THREE MUSKETEERS

**RELEASED** OCTOBER 12 (UK) OCTOBER 14 (USA)

Hollywood is currently pillaging left right and centre for adaptations, re-makes, reboots and re-imaginings. So it shouldn't come as any great surprise that Alexandre Dumas' novel is being adapted again (there have been countless prior TV and cinema adaptations); the only real surprise is that Paul W. S. Anderson – who has worked frequently in poorly-received computer game adaptations – is at the helm, and that he has assembled such an interesting cast.

Logan Lerman (*Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*) stars as D'Artagnan whom, as we know

by now, teams up with the legendary Three Musketeers Athos, Porthos and Aramis to prevent a plot that will see Europe plunged into war. The titular band are played here by Matthew Macfadyen, Ray Stevenson and Luke Evans, with supporting turns by Anderson's wife Milla Jovovich (she stars in all four *Resident Evil* films, two of which he directed and all of which he produced), Orlando Bloom, Mads Mikelsen and Christoph Waltz.

The trailer certainly confirms what was expected: that this will be the most action-packed adaptation yet.

And, [shudder], it's also the first to be shot in 3-D. Whether Anderson's will have enough about it to distinguish itself from any number of other action blockbusters will be the real test, and it notably comes out following a summer which is packed to the rafters with big spectacle feature films. There's the chance audiences will be tired of blockbusters by then, or they may have had enough of a break to gear up for another, so it could yet prove a sensible bit of scheduling to screen *The Three Musketeers* essentially out of competition with the summer's big guns.







# ZOOKEEPER

RELEASED JULY 8 (USA) JULY 29 (UK)

Frank Coraci is well known for his collaborations with Adam Sandler, and he is behind the camera here for *Zookeeper*, to which Sandler lends his voice, but which stars Kevin James in the lead. James had a big hit a couple of years ago with *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, a film which wasn't well received by critics but defied negative press to storm the box office. A cynic might suggest that *Zookeeper*, in which James plays Griffin Keyes, a lonely man who is good at his job, aims to cash in on that success.

Griffin is loved by the animals in the zoo but he's decided that he's too much of a loner and need to get out and about a bit more. When the animals learn of this, they reveal to him that they can talk and set about trying to get him the girl of his dreams, Kate (as played by Rosario Dawson). The animals are voiced by a stars ranging from Sylvester Stallone and Nick Nolte to producer-extraordinaire Judd Apatow.

It will probably do well at the box office, though its budget is markedly higher than that of *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. Distributors Columbia are probably banking on the big name voice cast and the appeal of talking animals (a proven box office draw) to make up the difference. It's difficult to look past the film's outwardly derivative nature – it looks like *Doctor Doolittle* meets *Paul Blart* via *Night At The Museum* – but it'll be a family-friendly affair and shouldn't be criticised too harshly for perceived similarities. Hopefully there'll be some good laughs in there to back up the inevitable heart-warming central narrative.









# DREAM HOUSE

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

Generally speaking, horror films don't tend to attract the biggest names around, but Jim Sheridan (*In The Name Of The Father*, *The Boxer*) has managed to entice not one, not two, but three big names to headline his forthcoming project *Dream House*. That he's a six-time Oscar nominee probably had something to do with it, even if his filmography includes the strange anomaly of *Get Rich Or Die Tryin'*.

Those three stars are Daniel Craig, Rachel Weisz and Naomi Watts. Craig and Weisz play husband and wife Will and Libby, who to set up the plot, move to their 'dream home'. But as this is horror, we can be quite sure that something is 'not quite right' in the house and they're haunted by the previous residents, who were murdered there.

This is an interesting and slightly unusual project. Would it be presumptuous to assume, given the host of big name actors appearing in *Dream House*, that the script must have been something different, something a bit special? Perhaps it is more reliant on character than many shock-focused horrors? Or maybe the cast just felt like taking on something a little different? Whatever the reason, it'll be interesting to see how *Dream House* turns out. Its budget is said to be around \$60m, which is fairly high for a horror that doesn't involve aliens or other special effects-reliant elements, so it can be reasonably assumed that a fair amount of that money has gone to the three stars. Universal will hope that each proves bankable enough to pull the audience in to this one.













# HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 2

RELEASED JULY 15

Virtually guaranteed to be in the top three movies, box office wise, at the end of the year, *Harry Potter 8* (which we'll call it for simplicity's sake) is the explosive conclusion to the series which, at the risk of sounding like the overblown advertising campaign, has become a worldwide phenomenon.

J.K. Rowling's books have been an absolute revelation and for Warner Bros., who must now be chuckling all the way to the bank after their punt

paid off and they got the rights ahead of the other major studios; they've broken box office records. The final chapter will do massive business, quite possibly the most in the series, but crucially, will it be any good?

The ingredients are all there for a spectacular finale, but the inconsistency of the *Potter* films means that they sure can't rest of their laurels. Director David Yates has done some really great things for the series since

taking over on *Order Of The Phoenix* but his last entry, the first part of this epic double-header, was lacking a vital spark. It was exposition heavy too, and certainly dragged its feet. That may well have been because all the best stuff was saved for the real last film. *Potter 8* will be a box office behemoth, but here's hoping the critics receive it just as warmly as the cinema turnstiles will. God be with any lesser releases hoping to compete come July.



INTERVIEW WITH

# ***ASIF KAPADIA***

DIRECTOR OF *SENNA*

WORDS BY ANDREW SIMPSON



Asif Kapadia, the 39-year-old BAFTA winning director of *The Warrior* and *Far North*, has a reputation for visually striking accounts of surviving in dangerous, unfamiliar landscapes. His latest film, more than five years in the making, is a documentary retelling the story of the life and tragic death of Ayrton Senna, the three-time Formula One World Champion. An extraordinarily complex character, Senna makes for riveting viewing, made all the more bracing for Kapadia's bold decision to create the film entirely from archive footage. Retelling the story in the present tense, *Senna* works as a drama or thriller as much as a documentary, and the film has been attracting rave reviews. It also won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year.

**FAN THE FIRE:** What first attracted you to Ayrton Senna as the subject for a film?

**ASIF KAPADIA:** I'm a sport fan. I used to watch racing, and I remember staying up late at night to listen to the climaxes of the races, so I had seen enough to know that period and know that era. But I wouldn't have said in any way that I was an authority on Formula One, and I wasn't the biggest Senna fan. It was really five or six years ago when the producer, got in touch with me. I'm a drama director, and I've never done a documentary before, so straight away I thought it was an interesting idea. At the time I was making a film in the North Pole, so it was one of those things where you say: "God, anything to get me out of the cold!"

**FTF:** So it was the sport, rather than

Senna, that sold you on the idea?

**AK:** Formula One is fast, it's exciting, it's dangerous. The difficulty was always going to be how do you make it emotional? People driving in a giant cigarette packet for two hours round in circles: how do you make anyone care about that? That was my worry. Then when you spend more time with Senna, you think, "actually, we're going to be alright. This guy is good. This guy is amazing at what he does, and how he does it is also very visceral." You know, he's drama.

**FTF:** So you knew very little about him when you took the film on?

**AK:** The worry is that you make a film about a person, and as you go along you like him less and less, and you're faking it. But actually he is amazing, and I was quite glad to not know that much about him. I feel like I've been on this big journey that I want a lot of non-Formula One fans to go on. He transcends the sport and I can see why he has so many children named after him, and why people really love him. But then what's been interesting is taking the film to the US, where they don't watch Formula One. They don't know how it ends, so, it's really amazing. There's this moment where they go: "something's about to happen."

**FTF:** Did you know how it was going to be structured when you started?

**AK:** When I came onto the project there was an outline, a 20-page document which dealt with the golden age; the Mansell, Senna, Piquet and Prost period. Essentially what happened during the development was bit by bit we said: "We can't do it... we can't have this many characters. We can't have that many great races. It's just going to get a bit boring for the non-fans." The script, the editing, the interviews, the research, it was all happening at the same time. What Manish [Pandey, the film's writer] was able to do was to look at a sequence and say: "We're not showing this part of his character." Then I'd say: "OK, well what race shows that? What scene can we find?" Then we'd send our researchers off in Japan, in Rio, in Sao Paolo, in France, in Italy, ➔

***"I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN ON THIS BIG JOURNEY THAT I WANT A LOT OF NON-FORMULA ONE FANS TO GO ON. HE TRANSCENDS THE SPORT AND I CAN SEE WHY HE HAS SO MANY CHILDREN NAMED AFTER HIM, AND WHY PEOPLE REALLY LOVE HIM."***

and we'd go into Bernie Ecclestone's archive to find a scene that visualised what Manish felt we had to show.

**FTF:** You've made a documentary that only uses contemporary footage, keeping the audience in the moment. When did you decide to do that?

**AK:** There's not a frame in there that I've shot. The challenge was to be stupid enough, or brave enough, to not shoot anything. *When We Were Kings*, *Man On Wire*, *Touching The Void* – they all have talking heads. Working Title haven't made a doc., Universal haven't made a doc., the producer hadn't made a doc., the writer hadn't made a film, and I've never made a doc! We were all new to it, and I was a lone voice. I'd say to everyone "I think we can make this entirely without interviews" and everyone would say, "Everyone wants to do that, no-one pulls it off." The only way to show it was to go and cut the film. I'd show them stuff and finish with that final lap, and even if they didn't know anything about Senna, they're watching and they think "He's going to crash, isn't he?" And people would start crying. I just thought, "I know there's something special here." I knew it was all there, from very early on. The issue was always 'how much time do we have to cut it down?' That was always our battle. Every day we'd go in and say "What can we lose?" The first cut was seven hours, we were like £5m over budget, and I was accused of doing everything I could to get fired! But everyone laughed in the right places and everyone was crying by the end and you knew it worked. So we'd go away for another few weeks and cut it down, down, down, without losing the heart and the gut of it.

**FTF:** Will a longer cut surface?

**AK:** I'm asked this a lot. I have a dream that one day, if the film does well enough – and that's the bottom line with movies, obviously – then maybe there will be a way that we can somehow go back and talk to Bernie again to have permission to show a longer version on DVD.

**FTF:** Do you have any favourite bits that you were most sorry to lose?

***“PEOPLE DRIVING IN A GIANT CIGARETTE PACKET FOR TWO HOURS ROUND IN CIRCLES: HOW DO YOU MAKE ANYONE CARE ABOUT THAT? THAT WAS MY WORRY. THEN WHEN YOU SPEND MORE TIME WITH SENNA, YOU THINK, ‘ACTUALLY, WE’RE GOING TO BE ALRIGHT. THIS GUY IS GOOD. THIS GUY IS AMAZING AT WHAT HE DOES, AND HOW HE DOES IT IS ALSO VERY VISCERAL.’ YOU KNOW, HE’S DRAMA.”***



**AK:** There's a very famous scene where he's driving a car in qualifying and there's an accident in front of him. There's this terrible accident and he [Senna] jumped out of the car and went to help the driver, nearly getting run over. It's just unbelievable. I've seen so many hours of footage and in his era no one stops. But as we know from the film *Senna* is the guy who would go and see what it looks like to be in a terrible accident and then look at the state of the car and then look at the road, and try and figure out how it happened, whether it was something on the track. Basically he needed to understand to be able to deal with it – and then he'd get in the car and go even faster!

**FTF:** There are lots of other moments that reveal sides to his character that haven't been seen before.

**AK:** The drivers briefings are great character scenes. They show us what Senna was really like. I've seen so many and he would be the only guy who spoke up, he would be the only one fighting for other drivers, minutes before he's about to race for the world championship.

**FTF:** It's actually more like a drama than a documentary in many ways.

**AK:** Yeah! I'm a drama director and I wanted to make a drama. Like a good fiction film you set it up, you have the middle and then you have the payoff, and there were so many scenes like that. I think dramas and documentaries aren't that different; when I'm doing a drama I'm trying to make things feel as believable and real as possible. The real guy is so interesting, so why would you want to get anyone to play them? I'll just have to find a creative way to tell the story.

**FTF:** One key scene is the 1991 Brazilian Grand Prix, where Senna wins his first race on home soil. He's so desperate to win he drives the entire race in sixth gear after his car breaks down. It nearly cripples him.

**AK:** It's my favourite moment and the most emotional bit for me. Brazil was a character [in the film]. The first time he wins in Brazil is a really big deal, but

I don't think many people knew that story. My favourite bit is the podium. When you understand what he's been through in that race, to win at home and what it means to the crowd, and then that struggle to lift the trophy. He's not going to quit, he's not a quitter, he doesn't give up. That little moment on the podium almost sums him up entirely.

**FTF:** You had lots of co-operation regarding footage and from the family, why do you think that was?

**AK:** It's Senna. He has a special aura and presence. Obviously there's the tragic element to the story, but there's something else – it's something magical. People would call us and say "We hear you're making a film about Senna, how can we help?" That doesn't happen with people. The film's composer [Antonio Pinto] is a case in point – he rang us and said "I want to do this film! What can I do?" We don't have a contract, and it was consistently like that. I'd get emails and calls all over the world. That fondness for him has just grown stronger and stronger over the years. That's why we were able to make this film, because there is something so special about Senna.

**FTF:** What was it like showing the film to his family?

**AK:** They're all still in mourning. It's really tough interviewing people, you realise "I'm not making a drama, these are real people." There's a moment when I was cutting the funeral, and I'm looking at his mother trying to pick which bit of the shot to use. Ethically, morally, I'm in a place that I've never been in before. We put on a screening for about 15 members of the family, and it was just unbearable. Even when he was winning there were sobs in the room. The lights come up and you look around and everyone's in floods of tears. But then Viviane [Senna's mother] stood up and hugged us all and just went: "You got it right."

**FTF:** Some people aren't portrayed too kindly in the film, especially Alain Prost, Senna's teammate and fiercest rival. How has that gone down?

**AK:** I didn't want to talk about it in hindsight. You are two who are the best at what you do, and you happen to be in the same team. You're the first rivals, you have to do whatever you can psychologically to beat each other. And I'm just going to show what was going on at the time. It's just the nature of what it was and why he was so special. We were making it from Senna's point of view.

**FTF:** You make his spiritual side a very big part of the film as well.

**AK:** That's part of the whole Brazilian thing. The religion, his spirituality, is a key part of his character. It's amazing how many people respond to that, people who are not religious at all. But it's the way he speaks, the way he eloquently uses that and the way it was used against him by certain people. He'd give an English press conference and it would be pretty bland, then he gives a 45-minute interview in Portuguese and he'd be amazing. He's saying one thing to the English guys, who didn't like him talking about God, who would pick on him, and then he'd say something else to his home fans. We want the film to work as if you walk out and feel a bit Brazilian at the end. It was a very important character trait, and the spiritual element is almost the way he drove. It was an out of body experience. Of course the tragedy of his journey is such that for me his accident is an act of God. It's a freak accident, so that is a part of his life and his death.

**FTF:** There is a moment where he answers a question about his faith by saying that just because he is religious doesn't mean he is immortal, which takes on an eerie significance shortly afterwards. Is that a turning point in the film?

**AK:** "Just because I believe in God doesn't mean I'm immortal, doesn't mean I think I can't hurt myself." It's a brilliant answer. It's where the change happens in a way because danger comes into the film. Something starts to happen at that period and you realise, 'this is really dangerous, what you guys do for a living'.

*Senna is out now*



# The state of animation.

“Animation can explain whatever the mind of man can conceive,” said Walt Disney. Humans have always been fascinated by the idea of the moving picture, now perhaps more so than ever. From the earliest cave paintings through the zoetrope and into CGI, animation has provided a canvas on which our imagination can run wild.

WORDS MARTIN ROBERTS



Animation has not so much been looked down upon by live-action cinema over the years as it has been overshadowed by it. Naturally animation on film emerged at around the same time the first film cameras were being invented at the end of the nineteenth century, when Georges Méliès was busy tinkering with stop tricks and Charles-Émile Reynaud was pioneering animated projection. Disney's *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* (1936) is often incorrectly cited as the first feature-length animation, although it was the first to use the cel animation technique (penning frames by hand), the first to be shown in full-colour and the first to be widely recognised, in fact *El Apóstol*, was screened in 1917.

The Academy Awards, now routinely denigrated for overlooking the qualities of animated pictures when compared to live-action, were not as slow to pick up on the artistry behind animation as might

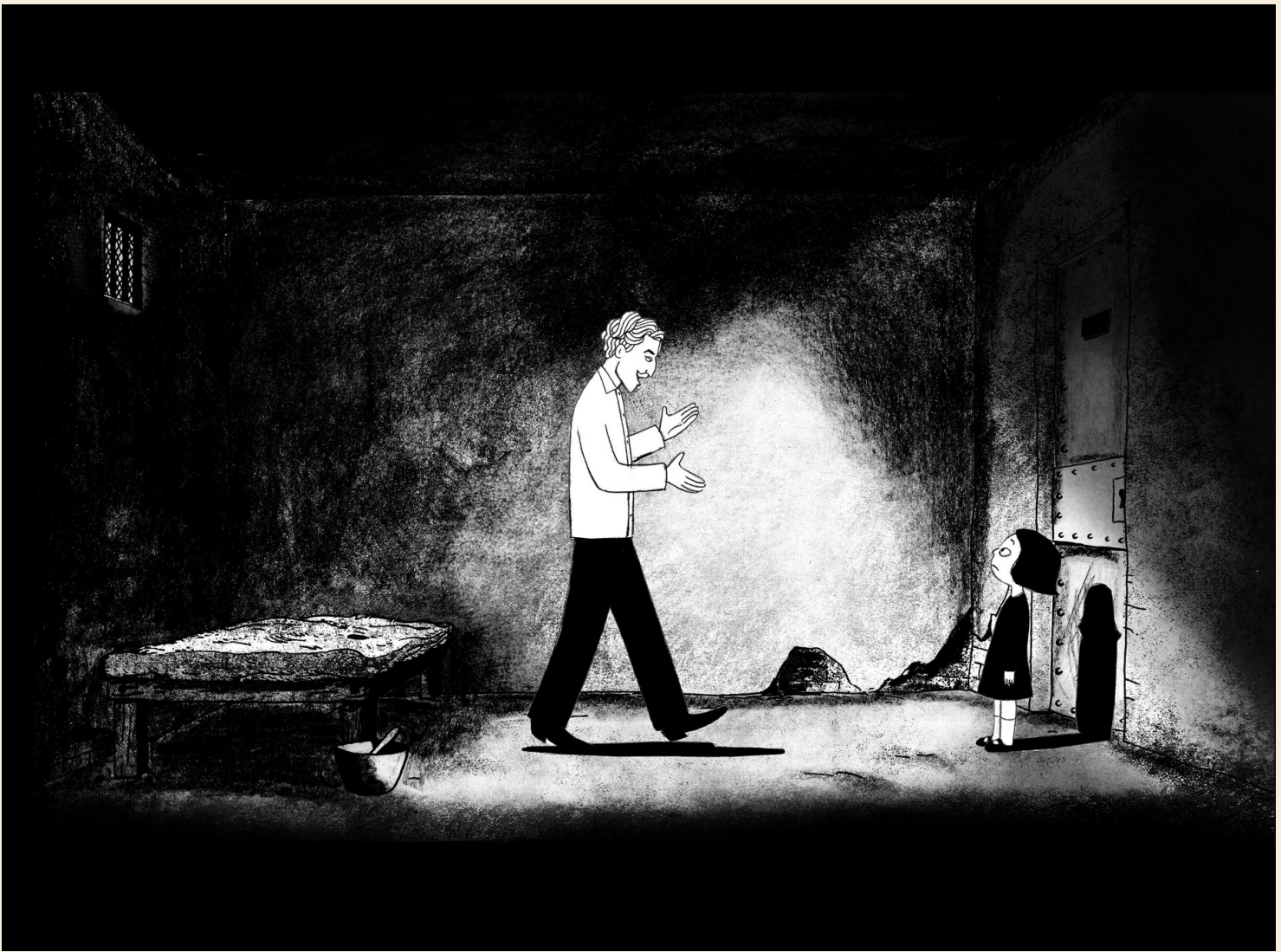
be expected. In 1932, four years before *Snow White*, the Oscar for Animated Short Subjects (now Best Animated Short Film) was established and went to *Flowers And Trees*, Dis-

ney's eight-minute Technicolor showcase. Walt Disney won an Honorary Academy Award four years later for screen innovation when *Snow White* was released. That, of course, begun what was to be a remarkable run of success for the production house.

Getting in early and having the success they did with *Snow White* set Disney up for what would be the first of its periods of animation dominance. Fleischer Studios – best known for making *Gulliver's Travels* in 1939, which used Max Fleischer's patented rotoscoping technique – were Disney's main rivals, but couldn't

really compete. Disney had already cornered the market. And unfortunately for competitors, as well as getting their noses in front in the industry, Disney continued to put out ➔

**PIXAR ORIGINATED AS THE 'GRAPHICS GROUP', A DEPARTMENT OF LUCASFILM, AND CUT ITS TEETH WORKING ON EFFECTS SHOTS ALONGSIDE INDUSTRIAL LIGHT & MAGIC. FOUNDED BY LUCAS IN 1975**



features that were not only technically impressive but also great films in their own right, and this purple period continued for many years. *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi* – considered four of Disney’s early classics – were released in a remarkably short period between 1940 and 1942. It proved impossible for anybody else to match such a roster.

Despite going through periods of flux in the following decades (including a partial hiatus as a result of World War II), Disney continued to dominate. It wasn’t until the late ‘70s, when Don Bluth, a respected animator at Disney, left to form a rival company, that any genuine seeds of doubt appeared. Disney was experiencing an uncharacteristic loss of popularity and was seemingly losing direction. Don Bluth Productions (*An American Tail*, *Thumbelina*, *Anastasia*) established itself as a serious, if comparatively short term, rival to Disney’s monopoly on animated success. Unfortunately for Bluth Group – as it was later known – Disney were not in the mood to lie down, and the golden era of the early-to-mid-’90s essentially cemented their downfall.

It is important to establish this (heavily abridged) history of animation in order to understand how different things are today. The expanded competition on display in modern times comes primarily as a result of what has undoubtedly been the biggest shift in animation since *Snow*

*White* was first released: CGI (computer-generated imagery). In the ‘90s CGI became more prominent in live-action pictures and revolutionised the special effects industry. Naturally, feature-length animation was soon to follow and, in what looks now like a repeat of Disney’s early dominance, Pixar moved in to fill the gap.

Two men perhaps not generally associated with animated films played a large part in this transition. The first is George Lucas. Pixar originated as the Graphics Group, a department of Lucasfilm, and cut its teeth working on effects shots alongside Industrial Light & Magic, founded by Lucas in 1975. From there the second man, Steve Jobs, comes into the equation. He had just left Apple and bought the group from Lucas in 1986, ensuring it stayed in business. Again reminiscent of Disney, Pixar’s short film *Tin Toy* won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 1989.

Having struck a deal with Walt Disney Feature Animation to release three computer-animated feature films, Pixar struggled through financial hardship and the threat of dissolution to eventually release *Toy Story* in 1995, the first feature-length CGI feature and an enormous box office success. Funnily enough, it was partially the backing of Disney – originators of mainstream animation – that gave Pixar the chance they needed to release *Toy Story*. In the years



Digital animation provides a natural home for the current wave of 3-D popularity as it's easier to shoot CGI in 3-D than it is to shoot live action. Similarly, it's easier to convert previously 2-D projects into 3-D, for example *Toy Story 2*. But is that a good idea? The evidence of *Toy Story 2* suggests not; the great film was re-released frankly as a marketing tool to ensure a spike of interest in the second sequel, and while *Toy Story 2* remains a great film in 3-D, none of that success comes from the added dimension. If anything, the pointlessness of it all registers as an irritation that would otherwise be absent. In short, retrofitting in animation is, to date, as redundant and infuriating as it is in live-action.

Certain animated films released in 3-D have been massive successes – *Toy Story 3* and *How To Train Your Dragon* for example – but, as with gigantic live-action box office successes such as *Avatar*, it is unclear whether the 3-D element itself was directly responsible for audience interest. In the case of *Avatar*, it may well have had a big effect, as people clamoured to see 'the next big step in film technology', but *Toy Story 3* was the long-awaited third entry in a well-loved franchise, and as such surely would have been huge anyway. That said, ticket receipts benefitting from the extra projection fee ensured that total numbers were higher than they would've been had the films been released solely in 2-D.

that followed, Pixar went on to develop a stranglehold on CGI that echoed Disney's own in the early years of traditional animation. After years of disputes, the film giants then purchased Pixar in early 2006, for a lofty \$7.6bn, but crucially, the deal established ground rules that kept Pixar as a separate entity, who would not be creatively controlled by its parent company. Disney, meanwhile, would retain its animation wing, a scenario that remains in place today.

Compared with Disney's decades of domination, Pixar have enjoyed a relatively truncated period of monopoly, but that isn't to say they haven't dominated – since the inauguration of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, Pixar have made eight films, all of which have been nominated and six of which have won – though several conditions have contributed to a more competitive marketplace.

The most striking difference between 1936 and 1995 is that when *Snow White*

#### BOX OFFICE HITS

1. **TOY STORY 3** \$1.06BN
2. **SHREK 2** \$919M
3. **ICE AGE 3** \$886M
4. **FINDING NEMO** \$867M
5. **SHREK THE THIRD** \$798M
6. **THE LION KING** \$783M
7. **SHREK FOREVER AFTER** \$752M
8. **UP** \$731M
9. **ICE AGE 2** \$655M
10. **KUNG FU PANDA** \$631M

was released, the film industry was in its relative infancy. Even taking inflation and the like into account, it was nothing compared to the behemoth that it is today. As such, more companies today are in a financial position to compete. Studios, reacting to Pixar's unbridled success, have been able to set up rival animation wings in-house and accumulate talented people along the way to populate them.

In 2000, for example, Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks got in on the act. Although they had previously produced *Antz* and *The Prince Of Egypt*, a new division was to be dedicated solely to animation. Similarly, Sony set up an in-house wing in 2002 called Sony Pictures Animation, openly attempting to stake a foothold in the ever-growing market. In 2008, Marvel announced a dedicated animation wing, too, which has yet to delve into mainstream cinematic features but plans to do so in the future. Put simply, Pixar aren't going to have the easy ride that Disney ➔



enjoyed. The huge success of DreamWorks' *Shrek*, for example, or that of Blue Sky Studios' *Ice Age* trilogy, has produced box office figures which suggest they are here to stay.

Not only is there now more money around to accommodate animation wings, but there are a greater number of talented people out there available to work in them; the industry is so big now that a countless population aspire to be involved in it. Before Disney released *Snow White*, animation was hardly a proven prospect from a business perspective – the same is true of *Toy Story* and CGI – but when people saw what could be done, they wanted to be a part of it.

It would be criminal at this point, not to give at least a fleeting mention to overseas animation. While there have been countless releases, most of them tend to use other mediums than full CGI, something which is still primarily the domain of the US market. Recent examples include *Persepolis* (France), *Waltz With Bashir* (Israel/Germany/France), *Mary And Max* (Australia), and *Chico And Rita* (Spain/UK). But perhaps the most prolific country in this category is Japan, where animation (anime) has a long-standing and unique history.

Films like *Akira* (said to be getting its own live-action Hollywood remake, though this now seems to be on the rocks) have popularised the medium outside Japan, but be-

fore that, the success of *Nausicaä Of The Valley Of The Wind*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, helped kick-start the studio that has for years been the most popular and enduring Japanese animation house: Studio Ghibli. Their masterpiece *Spirited Away* won the Best Animated Feature Oscar in the award's second year and, in doing so, broadened the studio's appeal in the West. Studio Ghibli's continued usage of traditional animation (CGI-enhanced though it may be) exemplifies an enduring faith in the medium, indeed Disney recently returned to its roots with the well-received *The Princess And The Frog*, produced in the classic style. Pixar's Lohn Lasseter, who has been so instrumental in shaping modern CGI animation, has played a significant part in bringing Studio Ghibli's films to an English-speaking audience. Other techniques persist, too. British production house Aardman Animations, for example, has had international success with its stop-motion clay animation techniques.

But what is it about animated films that truly sets them apart? The most obvious advantage of animation is that, as far as bringing imagination to the screen is concerned, there are essentially no limitations. Technology is powerful enough now that anything we are capable of thinking about, technically gifted animators are capable of bringing to life. The case can be made that the integration



of CGI-based special effects with live-action filmmaking (ala *Avatar*, for example) has made that gap redundant, and while to an extent that's true, it is still far more expensive to blend technologies than it is to stick with one or the other. One possible limitation still levelled at CGI is its inability to create fully convincing human characters, but the individual art styles of animated films have rendered this argument mostly meaningless. The one obvious deficiency as yet is the now famous 'dead behind the eyes' look of human characters created using the motion-capture techniques Robert Rodriguez is such a fan of. Steven Spielberg's *Tintin* film will hopefully prove the next step in resolving the issue come the winter.

However, like it or not, animation for the most part still resolutely exists in the realms of family-friendly entertainment. It's understandable; since they first came into existence, Disney have adapted

fairy tales and fantastic, family-orientated stories that all age groups could enjoy. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but it has meant that animation has not often

strayed from the safe ground. Yes, works such as *Akira* have strived to promote 'adult' animation, but these days in particular, mainstream animations are all family-friendly affairs.

Recent efforts including *Chico And Rita* have successfully brought more broadly 'adult' themes to the table, but they are granted nowhere near the expansive releases of the big studio efforts, simply because animation that doesn't cater for the broadest possible market, is considered a risk not worth taking. Given the success of Disney and Pixar, it isn't difficult to see why things

have remained this way, and it isn't as though those companies' films are only appreciable from a youthful standpoint, surely the bounds of animation would instead be perfect ➤

**ARE ANIMATED  
AND LIVE-ACTION  
PICTURES JUDGED  
ON A LEVEL PLAY-  
ING FIELD? IF  
WE TAKE HOLLY-  
WOOD'S PRESTIG-  
IOUS ACADEMY  
AWARDS AS AN IN-  
DICATOR, THEN NO,  
THEY AREN'T**





ground to allow filmmakers to really branch out and create some stylistically interesting projects in all genres?

One minor gripe with the current state of mainstream animation is that it tends to rely on an increasingly familiar set of proven archetypes. Anthropomorphised animals or objects with comic visual tics, for one, and a brand of humour that caters broadly to children while satiating adults with societal nods and winks that'll blow over the younger generations' heads. This isn't a complaint – Pixar, in particular, have an extraordinary line in this kind of thing – but it seems like companies are playing it a little too easy.

Having been around almost as long as live-action films, are animated pictures yet judged on a level playing field? If we take Hollywood's Oscars, the most prominent awards ceremony in mainstream cinema, as an indicator, then no, they aren't. It has often been discussed, particularly now the shortlist

AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...

2001 **SHREK**  
 2002 **SPIRITED AWAY**  
 2003 **FINDING NEMO**  
 2004 **THE INCREDIBLES**  
 2005 **WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT**  
 2006 **HAPPY FEET**  
 2007 **RATATOUILLE**  
 2008 **WALL-E**  
 2009 **UP**  
 2010 **TOY STORY 3**

for Best Film has been upped to up to 10 nominees, that the existence of the Best Animated Feature award essentially prevents an animated film from winning the big prize. Since cinema began, only three animated features – *Beauty And The Beast*, *Up* and *Toy Story 3* – have even been nominated in the overarching category. It's all well and good moaning about the lack of animated winners and not coming up with any examples of films that deserved to win, but would *Wall-E* really have looked out of place had it been given the gong in February 2009? I don't think so. As it stands, it wasn't even nominated.

But whether people believe there has yet been an animated film genuinely deserving of winning Best Film or not, what is important to remember is that when vast swathes of people gather to make these pictures, they do not set out to make an *animated film*; no, they set out to make a *film*. Animation is a medium, not a genre, and proud of it too. ♣

INTERVIEW WITH

***PAUL FEIG,  
KRISTEN  
WIIG, CHRIS  
O'DOWD,  
MELISSA  
MCCARTHY  
& ROSE  
BRYNE***

DIRECTOR CO-WRITER/STAR AND STARS OF *BRIDESMAIDS*

WORDS BY ANDREW SIMPSON



It transpires that American comedy in 2011 doesn't consist entirely of *The Hangover: Part 2*. While expectations for the rushed-out sequel to a fun (if over-praised) comedy were never likely to be met, and duly weren't, the year's real comic touchstone is set to be provided by *Bridesmaids*. Also an ensemble comedy, it instead follows a group of out-of-control women preparing for their duties on a day of matrimony, and is infinitely more witty, perceptive and memorable than the year's biggest comedy release.

Written by and starring Kristen Wiig, a *Saturday Night Live* star who remains relatively unknown in the UK (her biggest on-screen role so far coming earlier this year in the Pegg and Frost's *Paul*), it has already been a huge hit in America, taking more than \$120m in its first month of release. But more importantly, it is one of the most sharply-written comedies to emerge from Hollywood in some time, and features both refreshingly complete female characters and a real comedic chemistry between its leads. Produced by Judd Apatow (*Knocked Up*) and directed by *Freaks And Geeks* and *Arrested Development* veteran Paul Feig, it is likely to turn Wiig into a major star, and also sees *The IT Crowd*'s Chris O'Dowd make a very successful leap into Hollywood. Wiig, O'Dowd, Feig and fellow cast members Rose Byrne and Melissa McCarthy recently sat down to talk about improv, sex scenes and how to make comedy work.

**FAN THE FIRE:** This is a collaborative project isn't it?

**KRISTEN WIIG:** I think the collaboration started at the very beginning. We [Wiig and Annie Mumolo, Wiig's co-writer] worked with Judd [Apatow] at the very beginning to write the script, and then when Paul came along we worked with him. It was very collaborative, and Paul was extremely generous. When the cast signed on it was the same thing. We all wanted them to feel comfortable playing their characters and we encouraged improvising. We didn't stick to every word in the script and we had so many funny im-

provisers that we wanted to use them.

**FTE:** Does the script remain a work in progress right up until the shoot?

**PAUL FEIG:** The script has to be a very strong blueprint for an emotional story as well as for the comedy. You know when you're an improviser that you never ever go and do a scene like 'hey let's just see what happens'. It's more like 'here's what's going on with the scene, here's the written version of the script which is great anyway, now you go play with it on top of that and make it your own'. What that does is it takes you away from what a lot of comedy has, especially romantic comedies, which is that it's very scripted and very written, and doesn't feel in the moment. It just feels like two people having a conversation and then you can surprise each other, and then you have that energy.

**FTE:** How unusual is that method?

**MELISSA MCCARTHY:** I've never had that kind of freedom as an actor, to work like that. Having done it now, it now feels like 'oh, why isn't everything done like this?' Again, when the script is that good and fully-formed, you're not doing everything. The energy goes into playing the character.

**PF:** It's a form that Judd Apatow really brought to movies. We used to do it on *Freaks And Geeks* and then on other pilots, but then he really brought it into the movie world and it's one of the best ways to make movie comedy, because again there's a freshness and a surprise among the performers that then filters through to the audience.

**CHRIS O'DOWD:** It's because Americans have so much more money! [laughs] I'm being flippant, but the amount of time that a bigger budget gives you does mean that you can play an awful lot more. We don't improvise at all [in *The IT Crowd*], although to be fair, we do have a whole week's rehearsal, so you do have time to get it all out on the floor. What I really liked about this project is that you had a script that was really great. There are a lot of people who improvise for the sake of improvising, because they like doing it, but what they're actually doing is taking away really good lines that

were there in the first place. What was great with *Bridesmaids* was that we got the script and then we would do loads of lovely improv. Kristen's just the best improviser I've ever worked with, it's kind of an amazing thing. And then you would go back to the script and try and make it better using the bit of improv that you've got. The kind of fluidity and naturalism you get doing it that way really gives a reality to a scene.

**FTE:** Can that get out of control?

**PF:** That's the thing when you work with comedy professionals. It has the illusion of chaos but really it's not. It's like a dance, everybody knows what to do, how to do timing, when to back off and when to move forward. It's my job just to stay out of the way and not interfere with that natural rhythm. You need to stand back and just occasionally say 'try this', adjusting the ship as it moves along. It's much easier to do if you have the right people!

**FTE:** How competitive can it get?

**PF:** I've worked with competitive comedy people and it's generally somebody who's trying to showboat, or get one over on somebody else. With people who were brought up in improv you don't have that. You are so reliant on the person you are with that if you are trying to shut them down it's only hurting you. The smart performers know that. It's give and take in service of the scene.

**FTE:** Were you influenced by other wedding comedies?

**KW:** When we were writing it we really didn't think about any other movies [set at weddings]. We didn't watch any films; we just wrote what we wanted to write. It wasn't written in reaction to anything.

**PF:** I think it works because most wedding movies are about the wedding. There's not a lot that you can tell about a wedding so you have to amp up all the emotions around it. *Bridesmaids* is very much a story of a woman going through a terrible time in her life, and getting this duty of a maid of honour just throws it all off. What the wedding does is it brings a bunch of characters together who wouldn't normally be ➡







together, which drives them forward in the story.

**FTF:** Kristen has some comedic sex scenes with *Mad Men*'s John Hamm early on. What were they like to film?

**KW:** That question is hard to answer, because if I say it was fun I sound like a big perve. Honestly we laughed through the whole thing, and Paul made me laugh the way he was calling out things for him to do to me! It wasn't written out on paper so it was a case of saying, "right what can we do now?!"

**PF:** It was like choreographing the world's hardest fight scene!

**FTF:** Have any of you been to any bad weddings?

**MM:** The only horrendous wedding I've been to was in Palm Springs, which is like the centre of the sun in August. Kristen was there; it was like 115 degrees, one in the afternoon, and people were just cracking open bottles of water mid-ceremony and pouring them over their heads, saying things like: "I don't care if it works out." Kids were going down!

**KW:** I was in the wedding, I was a bridesmaid! And I was nearly having an anxiety attack because I was standing up there and it was wet between my foot and my shoe, and I was telling

myself 'don't pass out, don't pass out!'

**MM:** I was just thinking if I pass out please let me not pee my pants, because I knew I was going down!

**FTF:** Chris O'Dowd, you're not being described as a sex symbol.

**CO'D:** It's so fleeting! I can't wait to play a bald monk in the next movie. And we need to remember that if John Hamm had tried 10% to get the girl, he would have!

**FTF:** Are you still doing the next series of *The IT Crowd*?

**CO'D:** Yeah, if we can get it going; we're talking about the end of the year or next year for the last series. Looking forward to it.

***"I WAS IN THE WEDDING. I WAS A BRIDESMAID! AND I WAS NEARLY HAVING AN ANXIETY ATTACK BECAUSE I WAS STANDING UP THERE AND IT WAS WET BETWEEN MY FOOT AND MY SHOE. AND I WAS TELLING MYSELF 'DON'T PASS OUT, DON'T PASS OUT!'"***

**FTF:** Rose, you wanted to be the bitch in this film didn't you?

**ROSE BYRNE:** Yeah! I was originally going for Lillian [the bride, eventually played by Maya Rudolph], and then I said to my agent: "Do you think they would let me go for Helen?" He said: "You want to have a crack at the bitch!" They let me audition for both, which was great.

**FTF:** Your character is a bitch but she's not a pantomime villain.

**RB:** It's much more interesting for the viewer if you like the villain, and you're intrigued by them and you want to see more of them. She's very Stepfordy.

**PF:** It was important for all of us to make sure that that character didn't become the arch, because that's where these women's movies fall apart, in all the cat fighting. Here we have Annie being in such a bad state that she is grafting some of her angst onto Helen, and thinking "is Helen a bad guy or is she just in a really bad place?"

**FTF:** Have you had any thoughts towards a possible sequel?

**PF:** Well, there has been no official talk of it. It would be a crime not to reassemble an amazing team like this, but we would only do it if we could make it as good as or better than the original, because there's nothing worse than a sequel that lets everyone down. So we'll see.

*Bridesmaids is out now*





# THE PRINCESS OF MONTPENSIER

**DIRECTED BY** BERTRAND TAVERNIER **STARRING** MELANIE THIERRY, LAMBERT WILSON, GASPARD ULLIEL, GREGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET, RAPHAEL PERSONNAZ & ERIC RULLIAT

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 8 (UK)**

Bernard Tavernier's *The Princess of Montpensier* is a charmingly old-fashioned period piece set in 16th-century France during the European Wars of Religion, and stars Mélanie Thierry in the title role.

Thierry's Marie is in love with her courageous cousin but is forced by her scheming father to marry the Prince of Montpensier (Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet) for political reasons. In so doing she is removed to a countryside castle where an ex-soldier, the Count de Chabanes (Wilson), becomes her tutor. When her husband is called away to fight, Marie spends her days in the company of Chabanes, who teaches her to write, to appreciate poetry and to understand the machinations of the

world she has been born into. She is to be a tool for the ruling men to work around; she is to be married off and forgotten. What she feels, he warns her, is out of synch with the politicians and aristocrats that dictate events, and as such she should play her part and try to accept it.

This section of the film is very enjoyable. Wilson gives Chabanes an empathetic and believable charisma that belies his sense of duty. We understand that, beneath his warm but steely composure, he has feelings just as Marie does; he's just better at keeping them inside. Mélanie Thierry gives a strong performance in a role that could've been bland. Her transformation from giggling teenager to embittered aristocrat is touching; despite attracting the attentions of pretty much every man in the film, she is lonely. The machinations of the war pass over her: she doesn't understand or seem to care. She admits to Chabanes, endearingly, that she doesn't really know what the fighting is about. He, with all his experience channelled into his charismatic smile, tells her about the stars.

There are action scenes in the film, but they take a back seat. In a film that is technically very proficient in all areas, the battle scenes are some-

thing of an oddity. While the action is choreographed well, it lacks a real sense of heft; people are stabbed and slashed in relatively bloodless affairs that at times seem to be taking place in water; the actors glide around almost too slowly. I appreciated and enjoyed the way the action was shot – no jump-cuts or flash-editing – but at times the stunt work didn't seem quite up to the standard of the choreography.

But this isn't an action film, it's a period drama populated mostly by young actors that do an excellent job. It's played pretty straight (though Tavernier allows us a couple of wry laughs) and crucially it maintains the weight of a real drama, as opposed to feeling like a teen romance in a castle (which is essentially what it turns into). In some ways it's a bit of a throwback – its sweeping scope relies not on battle scenes, but on conversations in castle corridors – but it has a modern sentiment that makes a heroine out of Marie, a clever woman with a big heart who was born in the wrong century. At the close it lacks an emotional punch, but perhaps that is the point; as we listen to Marie's last, chastened speech, we understand how difficult life is going to be for her. **MR**

★★★★★





# THE TREE OF LIFE

**DIRECTED BY** TERENCE MALICK **STARRING** BRAD PITT, JESSICA CHASTAIN, HUNTER MCCrackEN, LARAMIE EPPLER, TYE SHERIDAN, KARI MATCHETT & JOANNA GOING

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (USA) JULY 8 (UK)

Terrence Malick's fifth feature, his first since 2005's *The New World*, is a beautiful, tonal meditation on life. Malick's staples are present and correct, though his preoccupation with nature is now more thematically focal than ever. The film is ambitious and spectacular.

Its centrepiece is an American family. Three children and their parents, the latter played by Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain, grow up together in Texas. Their story is folded into layers of naturalistic imagery and bookended by out-of-time sequences; their development as a family is crucial, essential, irresistible, and yet, Malick is trying to tell us, ultimately incidental. That isn't to say it is meaningless, however, on the contrary, as Mrs. O'Brien tells us in her voiceover: "The only way to be happy in life is to love."

Voiceovers and whispered commentaries provide gentle grounding to ethereal sequences with no direct relevance to the story. These sequences are

mesmeric; the film as whole is outrageously beautiful. Malick is known for his unique camera work but his some of his shot-making here is breathtaking. His camera dances with his characters, holds them close and casts them away; embraces and enjoys them. An extended sequence abstractly detailing the genesis of life on earth – set to a soaring orchestral backdrop – is the most staggering of the lot. In terms of sheer emotional resonance, this ambitious and resolutely unpretentious jaunt is an unmatched feat; the remainder of the film, while breathtaking in its own way, is more subtle.

The main narrative arc – that of the O'Brien family – is played languidly, as the boys run and play on their wide lawns, shooting air rifles aimlessly in rivers and rolling in the mud. These sequences form the memories of eldest son Jack (Sean Penn) whose preoccupation with the past reminds us that while time may heal all wounds, it cannot close them completely. Pitt's performance as Mr. O'Brien – the stern but loving head of the household – is tremendous; opposite him, Jessica Chastain (soon to become a huge name) plays her more sentimental character with charismatic ease; she is radiant, loving, believable. As she washes her feet with the garden hose, we realise how sensory an ex-

perience this film is; the memories in this case are Jacks, but they could be anybody's. They could be our own. The performances by the children – lead by Hunter McCracken as the young Jack – are largely dialogue free but are nonetheless intoxicating. Through Malick's lens, the simplest shots – a child's hand clutching the side of a bathtub, a dog lapping at a puddle in the road – are rendered immeasurably beautiful; he illuminates this part of the film in unexpectedly touching asides. He searches for and often finds the natural poetry around us at any given time. The film's ethereal sensibility is helped by the score, which is rousing, or otherwise entirely absent, when it needs to be. The sound design in general is extraordinarily good; voices come from nowhere, fade away, spring from visual catalysts or are simply sucked into the undulating music and lost forever. Reviewing this film was not easy. It is difficult to explain quite how I felt about it. I did not think that it was perfect – the ending is surprisingly lacking and the mid-section, while spellbinding, is perhaps a little too languorous for its own good – but I measure the film's success by the effect it had on me; by the images and feelings it has left with me. And it stirs me still to think on it now. **MR**

★★★★★



# SENN

**DIRECTED BY** ASIF KAPADIA **STARRING** AYRTON SENNA, ALAIN PROST, FRANK WILLIAMS, RON DENNIS, VIVIANE SENNA, MILTON DA SILVA, NEIDE SENNA & SID WATKINS

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (UK) TBC (USA)

Cinema struggles to recapture the essence of real people and events. The pressure to be both accurate and entertaining in the telling – not to mention the challenge to appeal to both fans and a broader audience – complicates the tough decisions filmmakers have to make about what to include, and how, in their 'version' of a famous person's life. Sport is perhaps the toughest of all, with the rare success of *When We Were Kings* highlighting just how difficult it is to make a compelling film from interviews and highlight reels. That film also underlines how few sports possess a character as interesting as Muhammad Ali, whose blend of the personal and the mythical transcended the boundary of his profession, and made for great cinema.

*Senna*, then, is something of a risk. Asif Kapadia's account of the life and tragic fate of Formula One prodigy Ayrton Senna portrays a figure with both a fanatical fan base and a profile outside the sport dominated by his 1994 death. That it was made with the support of Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone offers little hope of objectivity either. The surprise, then, is that what could have been a straight recap of an often dull sport is in fact a master-class in on-screen drama, and

ultimately tragedy.

Often closer in tone to fiction than traditional documentary, *Senna* achieves its power by living in the moment. Rejecting the overreliance of most documentaries on talking heads, Kapadia constructs his film entirely from contemporary footage, taking the audience inside the personalities, politics and high drama of Senna's rise and fall. It makes for tense viewing. Footage taken from inside cars travelling at some 200mph, complete with deafening engine noise, make the race sequences more terrifying than anything that could be recreated in fiction film – giving *The French Connection* a run for its money – and by only speaking in the present tense about the on-screen action, will be gripping for those not intimate with Senna's history.

Kapadia is the first to get access to both the Senna family and Formula One archives, able to use a wealth of previously unseen footage. With Senna caught both at home and preparing for races, Kapadia is able to cut the footage like a drama, building tension and meaning with every scene. Senna emerges as remarkable not just for his ability – he was three-times world champion – but for his candour and intelligence. A figure with an unassailable urge to go faster, and to do so with a purity of purpose that constantly put him at odds with a politically compromised sport, he is a fascinating, complex figure.

The poignancy of the story is only enhanced by his spirituality, with Senna speaking openly and often about his faith, connecting his belief in God with the purity of racing. His deep love for

his homeland, meanwhile, sees him so desperate to win the Brazilian Grand Prix that he drives an entire race in sixth gear, almost crippling himself. Having won the race, he is only able to life the trophy after his Brazilian fans cheer him on. It is a remarkable moment, and the film is littered with touches that would have fallen flat in a scripted film. Racing emerges as both central and somehow irrelevant, a conduit for a tale of a man struggling to achieve some sort of grace, and crashes that could easily belong to a rubber-necking TV show are instead loaded with tragic significance.

Like all great dramas, *Senna* features its share of villains. Arch-rival Alain Prost is the slick political operator who uses dirty tricks to keep his nemesis down, while the head of the racing authority is the spitting image of a mob boss, complete with slicked hair, sunglasses and rants about his word being law. Providing several moments both hilarious and disturbing, his conduct in previously private drivers' meetings offers a picture of a corrupt family turning on itself, with Senna fighting for his right to drive his way, and for more safety on the track.

That *Senna* ends in tragedy will be no surprise to those already aware of his story. Nevertheless, it does so in a manner that will be deeply shocking and emotional for both the initiated and the unaware. It is a testament to a film that manages to create thrilling, poignant drama from known history, and if *Senna* makes the heart beat fast before breaking it, it is all the more wonderful for that. **AS**

★★★★★





# Win a pair of tickets to an exclusive preview screening of *Beginners* plus Q&A with writer/director Mike Mills

From writer/director Mike Mills comes ***Beginners***, a comedy/drama about how deeply funny and transformative life can be, even at its most serious moments.

***Beginners*** imaginatively explores the hilarity, confusion, and surprises of love through the evolving consciousness of Oliver (Golden Globe Award nominee Ewan McGregor). Oliver meets the irreverent and unpredictable Anna (Mélanie Laurent, *Inglourious Basterds*) only months after his father Hal Fields (Academy Award nominee Christopher Plummer) has passed away.

This new love floods Oliver with memories of his father, who, following the death of his wife of 45 years,

came out of the closet at age 75 to live a full, energized, and wonderfully tumultuous gay life – which included a younger boyfriend, Andy (Goran Visnjic, *ER*). The upheavals of Hal's new honesty, by turns funny and moving, brought father and son closer than they'd ever been able to be. Now Oliver endeavours to love Anna with all the bravery, humour, and hope that his father taught him.

At once deeply personal and universal, ***Beginners*** was inspired by Mike Mills' own father and is meant in turn to inspire everyone weighing their chances and choices in life and love.

***Beginners*** hits cinemas across the UK on **July 22nd**.

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

NAME THE GOLDEN GLOBE AWARD NOMINEE ACTOR WHO STARS IN ***BEGINNERS***:

- A) EWAN MCGREGOR
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- C) COLIN FIRTH

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**TERMS & CONDITIONS**  
COMPETITION OPEN TO UK RESIDENTS ONLY. NO CASH ALTERNATIVE IS AVAILABLE. SCREENING + Q&A WILL BE TAKING PLACE IN LONDON ON 11TH JULY. WINNERS MUST BE AVAILABLE TO ATTEND ON THAT DAY. A UNIVERSAL PICTURE © 2011 UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



# SUPER 8

**DIRECTED BY J.J. ABRAMS STARRING JOEL COURTNEY, KYLE CHANDLER, ELLE FANNING, RILEY GRIFFITHS, RYAN LEE, GABRIEL BASSO, ZACH MILLS & RON ELDARD**

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) AUGUST 5 (UK)**

I feel like I should preface this review with a disclaimer. I love *Alias*. I love *LOST*. I quite love *Fringe*. I watched *Undercovers*. I love *Cloverfield*. I quite love *Star Trek*. I quite love *M:I:III*. I love the mystery box. You can probably see where I'm going with this.

Struggling to cope with losing a wife/mother in a tragic industrial accident, father Jackson Lamb (Chandler) and son Joe (Courtney) throw themselves into work and play. Heading up the police force in their small town, Jackson is soon about to find himself very busy, while with a local film festival on the horizon, Joe is chief make-up artist and second hand on-set for best friend Charles (Griffiths), shooting a zombie movie in time for submission. Sneaking out one night to shoot, however, Joe and his friends witness something far beyond their wildest dreams, putting even their zombie plotline in the mundane.

Derailed by a marauding pick-up truck, a sprawling cargo train explodes off the tracks; it's flammable load causing huge amounts of damage to the station and land around. But before the kids can investigate any further, their biology teacher, and the driver of the truck, warns them instantly away, demanding they never speak of this night again. With strange occurrences

soon sweeping across their small town, however, and an extensive inrush of the army, the gang can't help but try to put two and two together. When they discover that they accidentally filmed the aftermath, the kids rewatch the footage to discover a terrifying and mysterious monster, whom after kidnapping Joe's love interest, Alice (Fanning), they must track down in an attempt to rescue her, and stop the town from falling into total destruction.

Co-produced by Steven Spielberg and his Amblin Entertainment production company, *Super 8* wonderfully harks back to the early '80s filmmaking style and the days of *E.T.* and *The Goonies*. With Abrams' movie set in 1979, it fits perfectly, sitting comfortably as an homage rather than a rip-job.

The action is powerful and the shot selection impeccable throughout, as always from the master entertainer; this is a smart and clever movie but will still easily please the mainstream.

Abrams' work is so captivating because he invests so much in the characters, here with a quick plot development prelude that sets up the tone of the film, and introduces the main character arcs seamlessly. You're happy to be spending two hours with them, in fact, I could quite easily watch a high school comedy/drama about the kids, a small town cop show starring the policeman dad, or follow the military from place to place, closing up shop on paranormal and extraterrestrial entities. Despite being a monster movie, *Super 8* has emotion at its core, not an alien as the focal narrator.

It's this that is the key to success in most action or monster movies like *Super 8*; if you're absorbed in the

characters then you care what happens when they inevitably fall into danger.

The pace of the narrative and plot development throughout the film is similarly well-crafted. Master of the reveal, Abrams teases little snippets throughout the first act, while there's significant payoff, in terms of the alien and the central characters, at the end.

With young kids at the centre of the plot, the acting talents of the mainstay cast was always going to be integral to *Super 8*'s success, and to say the film was the first proper role for many of them, they do a remarkable job. All effortlessly filling their boots, though a great performance might have been expected of the much more experience Elle Fanning, Joel Courtney is a revelation, while newcomer Riley Griffiths is equally impressive.

Seasoned fans (which if you hadn't guessed from my introduction, certainly includes myself) of J.J. will find that extra nugget too, as he so regularly sneaks into all of his projects. With numerous Easter eggs throughout, look out for *Cloverfield*'s Slusho in the gas station, John Locke's name along the way, and if you're eagle-eyed enough, even Leonard Nemoy makes a brief appearance.

A little heavy on the lens flare, but that doesn't matter at all, hang back for the credits; Charles and his friends' film plays alongside the scrolling sequence as J.J. Abrams next step to super stardom draws to a close. *Super 8* is a complex movie about family issues, young love and friendship, that just happens to have a strange monster running around in the background. And boy is it worth the ride. **SB**

★★★★★





# THE BEAVER

**DIRECTED BY** JODIE FOSTER **STARRING** MEL GIBSON, JODIE FOSTER, ANTON YELCHIN, JENNIFER LAWRENCE, CHERRY JONES, RILEY THOMAS STEWARD & ZACHARY BOOTH

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (USA) JUNE 17 (UK)

Everything is going wrong for Walter Black. His business is failing, his marriage is falling apart, and his relationship with his elder son seems beyond repair. Even attempts to kill himself don't pan out. And to make matters worse, he's also being played by Mel Gibson. But then he finds the Beaver.

Talking through a hand puppet, Walter takes a fresh start in life, adopting a gruff voice, talking about himself in the third person, and seemingly ignoring, though never really dealing with, his emotional and psychological problems of the past. But against all odds it seems to work. Making the full step back into normality, however, is a whole other question, and even after moving back home and smoothing

things over with his wife, the Beaver becomes a permanent part of his being, and slimming down to just Walter again is something he seems very unlikely to stomach.

*The Beaver* is a film with a lot of potential but it so regularly fails to capitalise on it. With a largely original plot, an interesting central character, and plenty of opportunities for both hard-hitting drama and incisive, witty comedy, instead it comes out thoroughly half-baked. The comedy lacks punch, while the drama is, to say the least, inadequate and under-developed; like Walter and his mental anguish, *The Beaver* so regularly skirts around without really talking about any of its central issues.

From the pen of newcomer Kyle Killen, creator of the brilliant but instantaneously cancelled, *Lone Star*, it reeks of promise but vast inexperience, while Jodie Foster perhaps could have helmed the narrative better too.

Yes, Jodie Foster is the director, although with *The Beaver* so overplayed at Mel Gibson's whacky 'comeback' movie, you probably didn't even realise

it was her name pulling the strings behind the camera, as well as acting in front of it. Gibson himself is quite good – he does well with what he's given, and delivers a rounded performance – but surprisingly doesn't quite have enough screen time for his character arc to be fully explored.

Out of nowhere, instead a romantic narrative for eldest son, Porter (Yelchin), and queen bee, Norah (Lawrence), largely steals the limelight, despite deserving barely five minutes. Anton Yelchin is dreadful, and really holds the film back, and when coupled with a cheesy soundtrack that undermines every emotional moment, that side of the story feels wholly forced, and entirely ineffective.

This film is far from dreadful, but it is still thoroughly unsatisfying. There are far worse films out there, but through *The Beaver's* own capitulation, many of them are more entertaining and much more rounded than this 'dip your toe in', unconvincing dramedy. They don't make one crude genitalia joke the entire film too. **SB**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# X-MEN: FIRST CLASS

**DIRECTED BY** MATTHEW VAUGHN **STARRING** JAMES MCAVOY, MICHAEL FASSBENDER, KEVIN BACON, ROSE BYRNE, JENNIFER LAWRENCE & JANUARY JONES

**RELEASED** OUT NOW

*X-Men: First Class* is the fifth *X-Men* film since 2000 and yet, in the wake of *Pirates 4*'s tedious rehash, it serves as a pleasant reminder that remoulding a familiar formula can be successful if the individual elements are strong.

And that's the case with *X-Men: First Class*, a film which many, including myself, feared had come too soon. With the exception of one or two unnecessary (though admittedly satisfying) cameos, this is a reworking of the franchise which eschews everything we saw in the trilogy Bryan Singer started in 2000. The film also stands alone outside the Marvel Cinematic Universe that is building up to *The Avengers* next year, and as such doesn't suffer from the same narrative qualms seen in *Iron Man 2* and, to a lesser extent, *Thor*.

Though many of the characters will be familiar, the screenwriting team (which includes director Matthew Vaughn and Jane Goldman) have wisely decided to shift the central focus away from Wolverine (who isn't involved here) and onto Charles Xavier and Eric Lehnsherr, Professor X and Magneto respectively. The advertising campaign suggested their relationship would be at the film's core and the storyline establishes itself around it.

It's the '60s and villainous Sebastian Shaw (Kevin Bacon) is attempting to manipulate US and Soviet forces into clashing in order to bring about World War III, thus leaving the path clear for mutants, the "next stage of human evolution" to take their rightful place. Xavier's and Lehnsherr's reactions to the question of whether mutants should integrate with ordinary

humans or set out on their own have always been at the heart of the *X-Men* canon, and here the dilemma is posed again. But don't let those alarm bells put you off, because there is new life in this reboot.

The film's opening reel has a lot to do and not much time to do it in, as it flits about between time zones and locations, establishing connections and motivations for the various characters. Fortunately, though it's fast-paced and jumpy, the strands don't feel disconnected and, once the film settles down, it's easy to understand the necessity for such a compact and efficient beginning. Crucially, the script manages to keep the motivations and anxieties of its many characters mostly in check, even if some are obviously sidelined in favour of others. Though the script handles them well, those character nuances, so important to ensembles like this, would have been lost were it not for the efforts of the cast. In particular, James McAvoy (as Professor X) and Michael Fassbender (as Magneto) bring weight to their roles. Watching the professor attempt to guide his friend to turn a satellite dish (in a scene reminiscent of *The Empire Strikes Back*) with his burgeoning powers is heartfelt rather than hammy.

Around them, the young cast do well in truncated roles. Newcomers Havok, Angel, Darwin and Banshee aren't given a huge amount of screen time, but that allows the film's primary subplot, concerning Mystique and Beast, to come through strongly. Jennifer Lawrence and Nicholas Hoult establish their relationship in double-time, and their youthful concerns about fitting in and being normal are believable, even if the story is thematically familiar and bears similarities to the previous trilogy.

In terms of spectacle, the film doesn't disappoint. Vaughn handles his mutants carefully and the action scenes in general are well choreographed and edited. Shaw's mutant followers include lesser-known mutant Azazel (Jason Flemyng), a teleporter who provides some of the best moments, even if his jumping antics can't quite match the bravado opening scene of Singer's *X2*. In general the film looks great, though there are a few CGI weaknesses here and there, most notably the sound waves emitted by Banshee, Riptide's tornadoes and White Queen's crystal form. Also, I never quite came around to the design on Beast's full blue form, but you can't have everything.

Although every film should be judged on its own merits, it is inevitable that people will compare this to the recent trilogy. For my money, *First Class* is closest to *X2* in terms of overall quality (though it doesn't equal it) and it crucially doesn't feel recycled (take note, *Pirates 4*). It's far from perfect, though. At times the dialogue

becomes quite exposition heavy and some of the motivations, particularly those of the military in the climactic scene, feel a little forced. It also suffers from a desire to resolve all the issues it thinks the audience are expecting to be resolved in the space of one film. As I said, the film in general handles its narratives well, but it does feel like the screenplay wants very much to get everything in place for a sequel by the time the credits

**VAUGHN HANDLES HIS MUTANTS CAREFULLY AND THE ACTION SCENES IN GENERAL ARE WELL CHOREOGRAPHED AND EDITED**

role. There will almost certainly be a sequel in the coming years, possibly two, but after seeing *First Class* I find myself actually looking forward to that prospect rather than dreading it, which was my fear before I went in. **MR**

★★★★★



# School's out. Class of 2000 or 2011?



## Professor X and Magneto

It's a coup of quite considerable magnitude that Marvel have managed to cast these two characters well not once, but twice. Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen brought a stately quality to their older versions of the characters, but McAvoy and Fassbender manage to make them interesting again just five years later. Who's better? It's too close to call, though they certainly get more involved in the action in *First Class*.



## Mystique

Rebecca Romijn played Raven Darkholme beautifully across the trilogy Bryan Singer started, but here the character is something of a different animal. Young and insecure, crucially lacking the confidence of Romijn's iteration, Jennifer Lawrence's Raven is still coming to terms with being Mystique. In *First Class*, her anxieties about her 'true self' manifest themselves in the form of insecurity, leading to a flirtation with the idea of a 'cure', reminiscent of Singer's Rogue (Anna Paquin).



## Villains

Kevin Bacon puts in a sterling performance in which he gets to play with lots of accents. The film also establishes him well as a bad, bad man, though it doesn't allow him any sort of back story. The same is true of January Jones' Emma Frost, whose motivations are never explained, while background henchmen Azazel and Riptide are on screen a fair amount but barely utter a word. In the original trilogy Brian Cox provided great scenery-chewing in *X2* and, despite being human, ended up carrying a significant amount of threat. When Brett Ratner went nuts in *The Last Stand* and introduced far too many new characters, things got out of hand. All in all, things are looking good for a new franchise, especially as the semi-focal Magneto has been established strongly.

## Peripheral X-Men

Singer assembled an interesting cast of supporting actors to inhabit Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters, none of which feature in *First Class*. The most memorable absentees are perhaps Rogue, Iceman, Pyro and Alan Cummings' great Nightcrawler from *X2*. In their place are a collection of new mutants, some of which make more of an impact than others. Angel (Zoë Kravitz) isn't gifted much screen time and her motivations aren't exactly watertight, while Banshee and Havok are likable but are little more than window dressing in *First Class*. Further films will hopefully establish them more strongly. One of the standout elements of *X2*, was Singer's ability to bring so many supporting characters together and manage to make most of them interesting. If *First Class* gets a sequel, it wouldn't hurt to take a few pointers from him, though this certainly isn't a failure.



## Beast

Played with an air of wisdom by Kelsey Grammer in *The Last Stand*, Beast's only appearance in human form in the original trilogy was a tiny background cameo in *X2*. Here, he's far younger and is human for most of the film. Nicholas Hoult manages to make him a believable scientist (despite looking so young) and a believable character in a fairly short space of time, giving him a much greater depth than he had in *The Last Stand*. Although his physical appearance was probably stronger in Brett Ratner's film, he's more of a stand-out here.

## Absentees

In the original trilogy, there were several grown-up mutants – Wolverine, Storm, Cyclops, Jean Grey – to watch over the little ones, but they've all been lost. Instead Xavier's recruits are all young and all in need of certain training. Non-mutant Moira MacTaggart (Rose Byrne) has been included to establish some continuity and though her role drifts in and out, she is certainly a welcome addition. This is a new story in which mutants are only just beginning to find each other, so the absences aren't felt too strongly.



# SUPER

**DIRECTED BY** JAMES GUNN **STARRING** RAINN WILSON, ELLEN PAGE, LIV TYLER, KEVIN BACON, MICHAEL ROOKER, ANDRE ROYO, SEAN GUNN & STEPHEN BLACKHART

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JULY 8 (UK)**

In *Super*, Rainn Wilson stars as Frank D'Arbo, a washed-up loser whose wife is stolen from him by a drug lord. By means of revenge he dreams up the Crimson Bolt, a superhero alter-ego who will help him face his sense of worthlessness.

As Kevin Bacon's Jacques mistreats Frank's wife Sarah (Liv Tyler) and reintroduces her to the drugs she has tried to put behind her, Frank goes about beating drug dealers over the head with a wrench in a crusade against "evil". All this is training, of course, for the final showdown, and along the way he also runs into Libby (Ellen Page) who, after working out his not-so-secret identity, tags along as his sidekick, Boltie. Wilson plays Frank

fairly straight and doesn't go for obvious laughs – which definitely helps the film's deadpan sensibility – while Ellen Page turns it up to eleven in her supporting role.

Unfortunately, *Super* has a fair few issues. Most damagingly, it's tonally all over the place. Wilson's everyman performance is almost touching at times, but doesn't sit well with the violent acts he's committing, while much of the comedy is hit-and-miss. It's all very well making a piece that plays with audience expectations, and I'm sure that's what writer-director James Gunn was going for, but *Super* rarely justifies those intentions.

The stark violence, intended to be darkly comic, is at first amusing but later just deadening; watching our leads brutally murder and wound people (and, in Boltie's case, genuinely enjoy it) becomes tiresome. We get the joke first time around, and while Gunn finds chuckle-worthy ways to play on his theme, it gets tired long before the final reel. And by that point the violence gauge is notched up and the whole thing feels redundant.

It just doesn't sit quite right. Subverting comic book conventions and playing with the depiction of on-screen violence is one thing, but in the end the film doesn't have much to offer other than that. Its lead characters are kind of likable but kind of repulsive; the film's story is kind of funny but kind of boring, and that feeling of not quite hitting the nail on the head persists throughout. The lurching tone doesn't help. A sex scene later on manages to be erotic, amusing and disturbing all at once; I can't decide if it was enjoyable or not.

The best way I can describe *Super* is as an experiment that seems noteworthy for a while but ultimately produces no results. Decent performances are jaded by a hit-and-miss script and are stretched too thin over a high-concept film that doesn't quite manage to find its feet. Its closest companion piece is obviously Matthew Vaughn's *Kick-Ass*, but that film actually ended up a more successful piece because it aimed more broadly for comedy and hit the beats more often. **MR**

★★★★★





# GREEN LANTERN

**DIRECTED BY** MARTIN CAMPBELL **STARRING** RYAN REYNOLDS, BLAKE LIVELY, PETER SARSGAARD, MARK STRONG, TIM ROBBINS, TEMUERA MORRISON & CLANCY BROWN

**RELEASED** JUNE 17

With the summer of blockbusters quickly picking up pace, one or more of these tent pole releases is sure to end up a massive critical and box office flop, and sadly for Warner Bros., most people's money had been on this

Scared of nothing but commitment and responsibility, there's a great man inside Hal Jordan (Reynolds), but he just hasn't quite found how to let him out yet. That is until a little green ring drops into his life, and his priorities are changed forever.

With the universe protected by a team of mighty guardians – the Green Lantern Corps – empowered by the force of will, every Green Lantern has the ability to create in reality what they think in their mind, but when an enemy emerges, more formidable than anyone or anything they have ever faced before, their very existence is thrown into serious danger.

After Lantern Abin Sur is fatally injured while protecting his sector, his ship crash-lands on Earth, soon

casting the Lantern power out to find a worthy successor. And for better or worse, it picks Hal Jordan.

At first bemused by his new abilities, then excited, and finally almost shirking the responsibility being a Green Lantern brings, when the evil Parallax turns its attention to Earth, it's down to Jordan to save his home planet, and at the very start of his tenure, defeat an enemy that has left even vastly experienced Lanterns inequitate to its power.

There are two types of superhero movies; those that try to be gritty and dark (*The Dark Knight*) and those that try to be silly and easy-going (*Spider-Man*). There's little doubt that *Green Lantern* falls into the latter. Following the classic superhero movie structure, it's a film that feels familiar and easy to get into, even if much of the action and plot is utter nonsense.

Also utter nonsense, is Jordan's Green Lantern suit. Entirely CGI, when sitting on Ryan Reynolds' toned up frame, the body and mask don't feel at all at ease. Similarly with some of the all-CGI characters, the size and facial work are awkwardly out, really making you wonder why the filmmakers didn't opt for a physical outfit when it was quite clearly the better option.

At least demi-villain Dr. Hector Hammond's (Sarsgaard) expanding head is a success, while the Lanterns'

planetary base, Oa, is done very well, putting *Thor's* Asgard to shame.

Just about managing to carry the weight of expectation the lead role in such a behemoth, big-budget franchise brings, Reynolds is amply good as Hal Jordan, bringing his natural charisma to the role and making the most of some of the cheesy and predictable dialogue. Blake Lively is solid too, but nothing extraordinary; she just about pulls off her brunette, anti-*Gossip Girl* role as Jordan's colleague and hugely predictable love interest. Tim Robbins also has a pleasing side role as a US Senator, while the aforementioned Peter Sarsgaard is strong too.

Behind the camera though, *Green Lantern* could have done with a bit more work. The direction and editing is a little slack and it certain could have been cut together in a much snappier fashion, while the third act flies by far too quickly. A lazy and drawn-out exposition sequence at the start and annoying flashback and back-story for Hal Jordan will also serve to frustrate, and all within the first five minutes.

There's not much depth to *Green Lantern*, and you'll probably struggle to find many more forgettable, flyby experiences all year, but it's a fun movie that you can lose yourself in for a little over 100 minutes and get a thrill and laugh or two along the way. **SB**

★★★★★



# STAKE LAND

**DIRECTED BY** JIM MICKLE **STARRING** DANIELLE HARRIS, KELLY MCGILLIS, CONNOR PAOLO, BONNIE DENNISON, MICHAEL CERVERIS, NICK DAMICI & SEAN NELSON

**RELEASED** OUT NOW (USA) JUNE 17 (UK)

In some ways Jim Mickle's *Stake Land* is reminiscent of Gareth Edwards' *Monsters*, not because they are particularly similar films (though they do share certain sensibilities), but because it, like Edwards' film, makes a mockery of many Hollywood blockbusters by delivering something compelling on a comparatively shoe-string budget.

Connor Paolo stars as Martin, a teenager who finds himself taken under the wing of 'Mister' (Nick Damici, who co-wrote with Mickle) when vampires attack his home and slaughter his family. After the fast-paced opening, Martin tags along with his unlikely saviour – a stern, tough hunter – and must quickly learn how to survive in a desolate, depopulated US. The country – and possibly the world, or at least parts of it – has been overrun by a swarm of vampires and turned into an apocalyptic wasteland. Amidst the

wreckage, territory is divided between safe havens – overseen by ragtag military collectives – and areas under the control of the sinister Brethren, religious fanatics who believe the world is undergoing some sort of divine retribution.

If none of this sounds very original to you, that's because it isn't; indeed, Mickle uses every trick in the book, but what he's put together is nonetheless an entertaining genre entry. Paolo and Damici, though they don't talk much, make for convincing, charismatic company and sensibly the narrative turns into a coming-of-age story. As they gather more survivors to accompany them, Martin touchingly notes that, after losing his own family, he has stumbled across a new one.

The film's narrative is bitty, broken into segments that flit between horror set pieces and serene travel sequences, played out to Jeff Grace's melancholic piano-based score. It is credit to Mickle and the cast that the travelling sequences don't become repetitive, although the jumps from day to night and from vampire-based set pieces to calm mornings do strain the patience a little at times. When action is required the film handles it well, capturing the staking and shooting with

aplomb, though this isn't an all-out fright fest; it's more considered than that. There's a fairly thick smothering of political commentary layered over the film, as well as plenty of religious symbolism, but these elements stubbornly refuse to become distractions.

Ultimately *Stake Land* is held back from being a great film by a number of small factors. The narrative drifts here and there, and while the action is well staged, the film doesn't offer too many surprises. Supporting characters are generally well-played but aren't really given that much to do – the survivors who join the party could easily be substituted for other similarly one-note characters. Meanwhile, the narrative goal of reaching 'New Eden' is a very familiar one in this type of film, and while it should be noted that the genre tends to be more about the journey than the goal, the ending does feel thin and a little unsatisfying.

But despite its issues *Stake Land* is a more-than-competent and often very entertaining vampire thriller. It doesn't stray far from the well-established path, but it does what it does well and, crucially, it does it better than countless films with vastly more significant budgets. **MR**

★★★★★





# KUNG FU PANDA 2

**DIRECTED BY** JENNIFER YUH **STARRING** JACK BLACK, ANGELINA JOLIE, DUSTIN HOFFMAN, GARY OLDMAN, JACKIE CHAN, SETH ROGEN, LUCY LIU & DAVID CROSS

**RELEASED** OUT NOW

*Kung Fu Panda*, the tale of a most unlikely creature recruited by an ageing martial arts master, was a decent, if derivative, computer-animated feature. Made in 2008, it featured a kitsch, chocolate box rendition of 'Ancient China' and a story that mixed a charming 'finding oneself' trajectory with inventive fight sequences and irreverent humour. It also came at what might come to be seen as the end of Jack Black's heyday, the period in which his dumbstruck, short-circuiting shtick could seemingly enliven any material. More of a gimmick than a coherent idea for a movie, it was nevertheless the closest DreamWorks had come to challenging Pixar until upping their ante considerably with *How To Train Your Dragon*.

After three seemingly very long years, *Kung Fu Panda* is back, and in some respects is worth the wait. This time Jack Black's Po is forced to take on Shen (Gary Oldman), an evil war-

lord with designs on all of China, as well as a dark character in Po's past. Shen is, like the rest of the film, beautifully designed; a peacock envisaged as part-flowing, graceful bird, part-mechanised monster. Incredibly realised landscapes and Chinese palaces make this easily one of the most visually stunning and textural animated films ever made. It's this that captures the eye more than the action over the first hour, and therein lies the problem.

Like the first film, Po teams up with a set of companions comprised of a menagerie of animals, including a tigress (Angelina Jolie), a crane (David Cross) and a praying mantis (Seth Rogen). As well as representing China's calendar animals (one wonders where the rat is hiding), they represent one of the story's key themes: that where you come from isn't important compared to who you choose to be. But whereas the first film used its colourful collection of characters – and comic talent – to create winning camaraderie, the sequel settles for pushing them into the background in favour of Po's duel with Shen, and himself. This wouldn't be so noticeable if Black's voice performance weren't so leaden. Failing to add the crackle that has made him so endearing in recent years, he seems on something of a downward slope, perhaps weighed down by having made

too many films, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, that are frankly beneath his ability.

What emerges from a story that contains such interesting elements as Shen's role in Po's orphaning – in what amounts to a fairly blatant evocation of a panda massacre for a children's film – and the invention of gunpowder, is essentially a rehash of the plot of the first film. Po must discover who he is through the art of Kung Fu (again), but this time an underwritten script, which under-uses its cast and fails to develop any coherent sense of plot development, treads water from one handsomely-mounted fight sequence to the next.

The overall impression is of a computer game in which one kills time with plot until the next fight sequence, and nothing is really at stake until the final boss on the last level. But whereas *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* picked up that idea and ran with it, *Kung Fu Panda 2* feels like the by-product of only half the team showing up to work. An eleventh hour *Lost*-style twist, meanwhile, just feels tacked-on for the sake of another potential cash cow. A visually engrossing, technical triumph, *Kung Fu Panda 2* is worth seeing on the big screen for the sheer eye-popping nature of its realisation. But dramatically, it's not packing a punch. **AS**

★★★★★

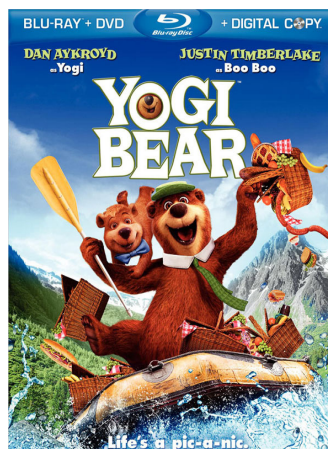


## THE FIGHTER

Boasting a performance from Christian Bale that he wholeheartedly deserved his Oscar for, *The Fighter* is an entertaining biography of boxer Micky Ward and his half-brother, Dicky Eklund. Great even for non-sports fans.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## YOGI BEAR

If only the central characters were based around the wonderful T.J. Miller's Ranger Jones and the hilarious Andrew Daly's Mayor Brown, then *Yogi Bear* would have been a great film. But it wasn't, and it's dreadful.

Film ★★★★★

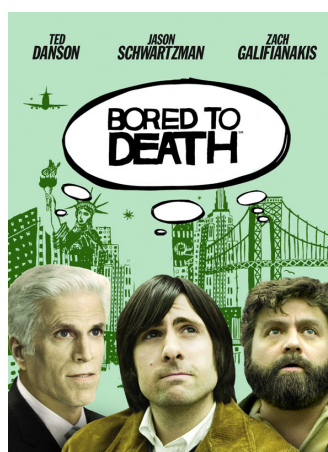
Extras ★★★★★

## NEVER LET ME GO

Film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's acclaimed 2005 science-fiction novel, Mark Romanek's movie is set in a dystopian world where medical breakthroughs have allowed humans to extend their lifespan.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## BORED TO DEATH: SEASON ONE

The premier season of HBO's must-watch dramedy, the series follows a stuttering writer-turned-private investigator on his various Manhattan assignments.

Show ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

## DRIVE Angry

Flashy and yet utterly boring, though a great performance from William Fichtner almost save the movie, the ludicrous storyline and senseless plot twists will so easily turn you off. And then you'll turn the film off too.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



## NO STRINGS ATTACHED

First of 2011's friend who sleep with each other comedies, *No Strings Attached* is a hugely forgettable and almost entirely unfunny movie that really shows Ashton Kutcher's age and is nothing more than a banker for Portman.

Film ★★★★★

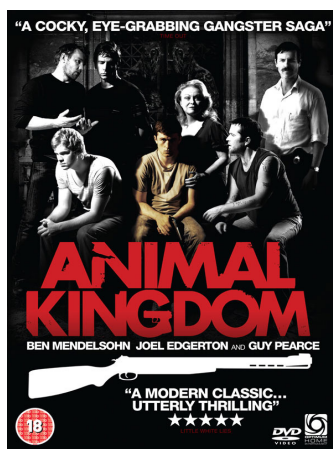
Extras ★★★★★

## ANIMAL KINGDOM

David Michôd's confident debut feature *Animal Kingdom* is a calm, studied approach to the crime genre that sensibly plays out more like a family drama. Michôd's direction is calm and unhurried; impressive for a first film.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★




## BATTLE: LA

After generating a remarkable amount of buzz with early trailers and footage, sadly *Battle: LA* proves a massive letdown, as the drag narrative turns alien invasion into a boring and wholly lacklustre affair.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★





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DREAM WEST  
BY ALI MITTON



TO DRAW NOT  
REPRODUCE BY  
JOHN PAUL THURLOW



SINGING BEACHES  
BY COLIN LEAMAN



VANISHING POINT  
BY MARIA CORTE

A landscape photograph of a rural field with a line of trees and a small building in the distance under a cloudy sky.

# dream**west**

PHOTOGRAPHY ALI MITTON ([MYCUPOFTEA.COM.AU](http://MYCUPOFTEA.COM.AU))







































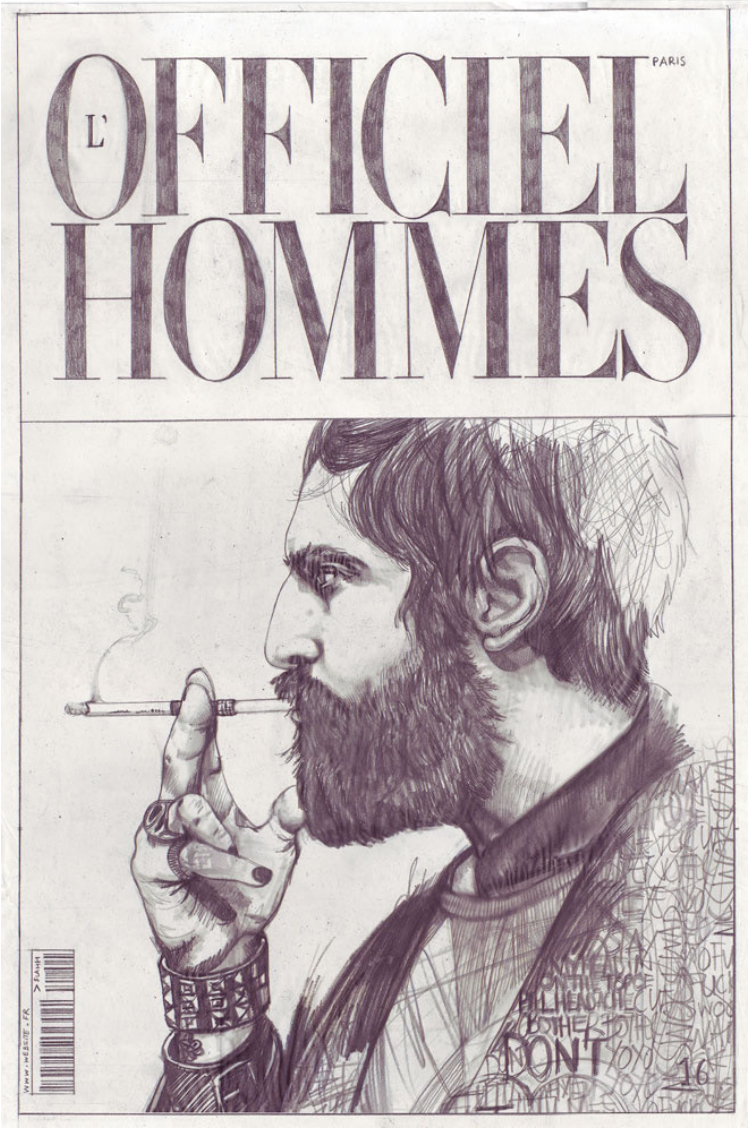
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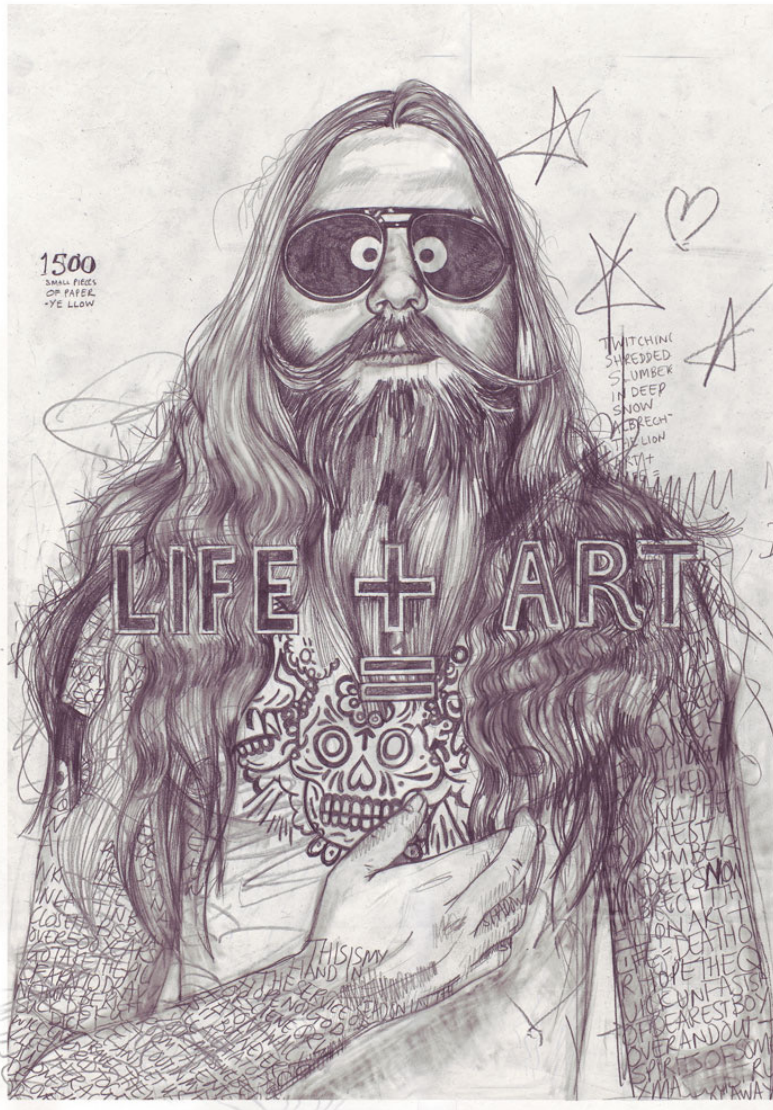






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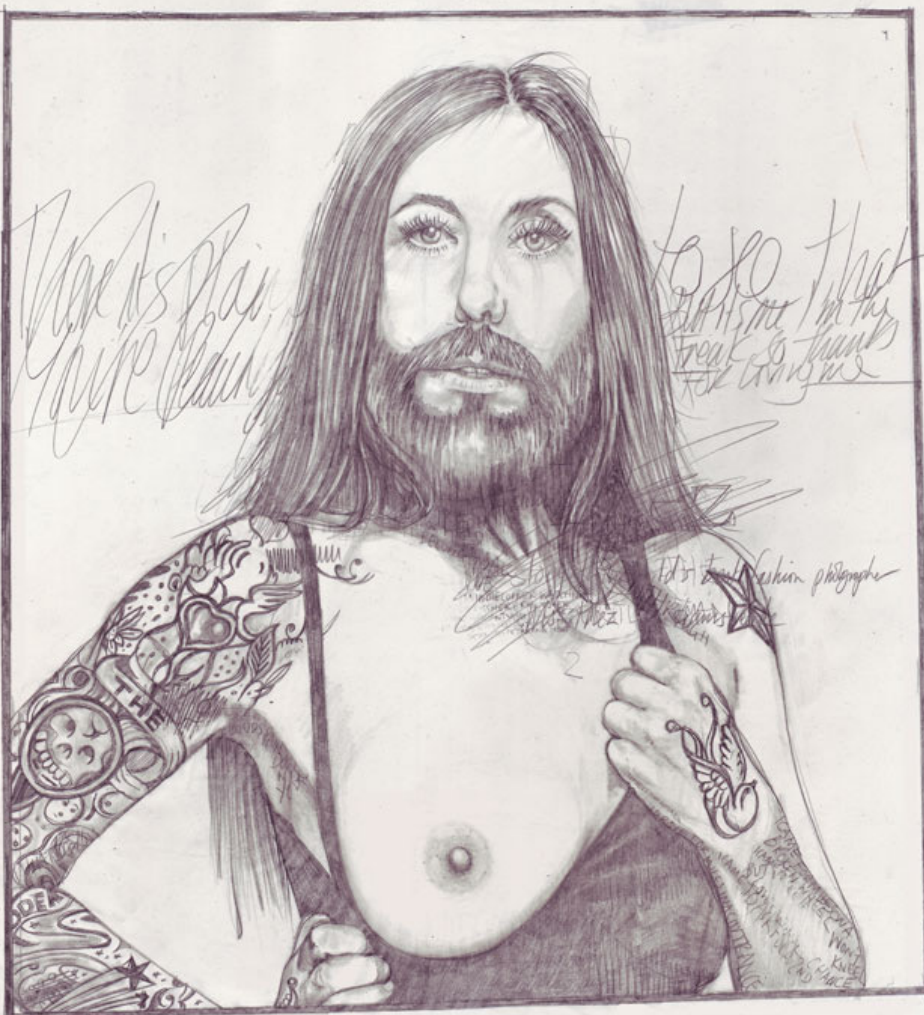
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# the gentlewoman

Fabulous women's magazine, issue n° 2  
Autumn and Winter 2010



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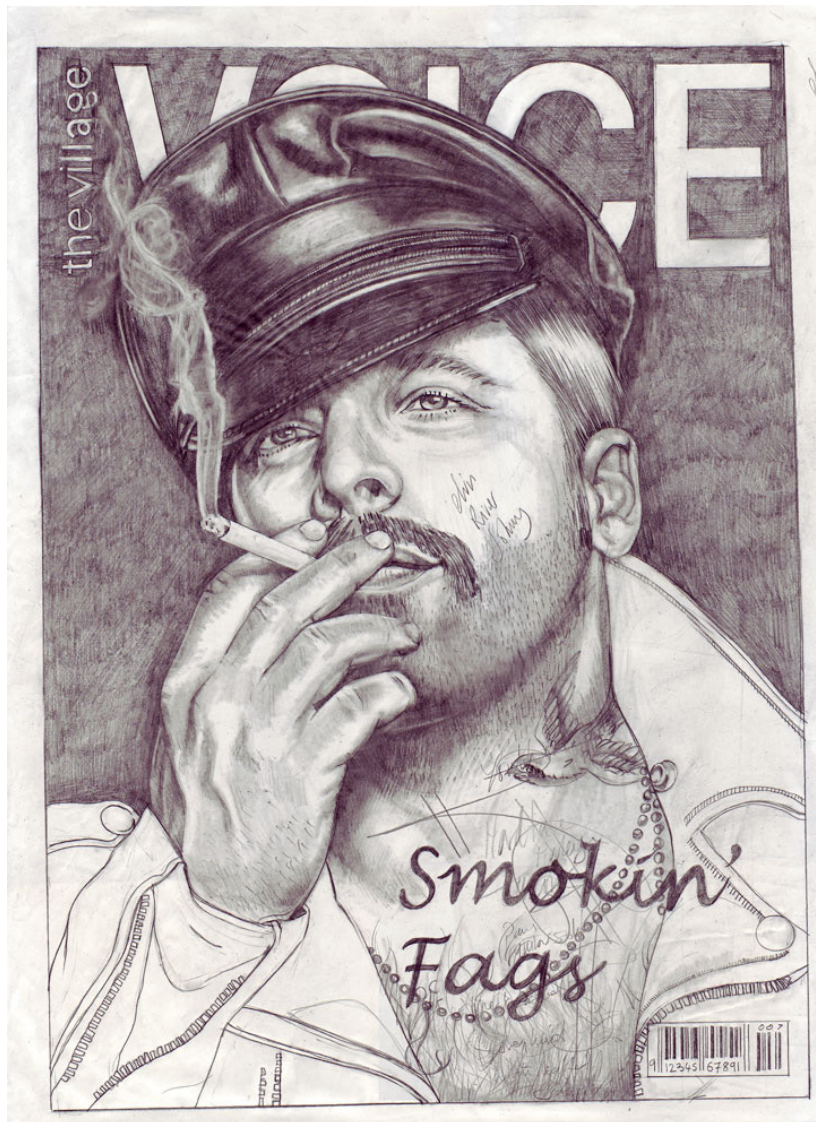
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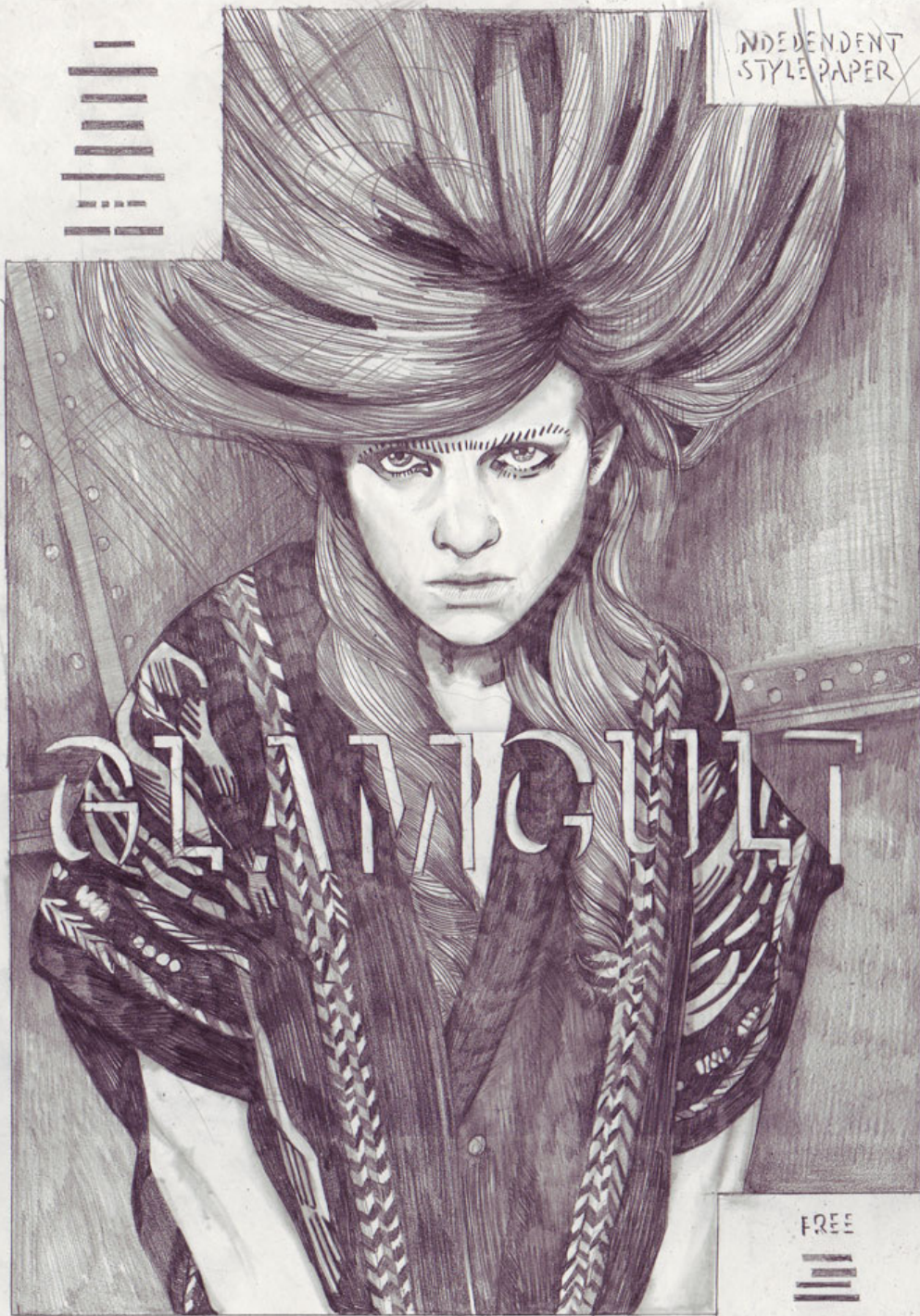
ⓧ **HOMMES**  
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**VOGUE**



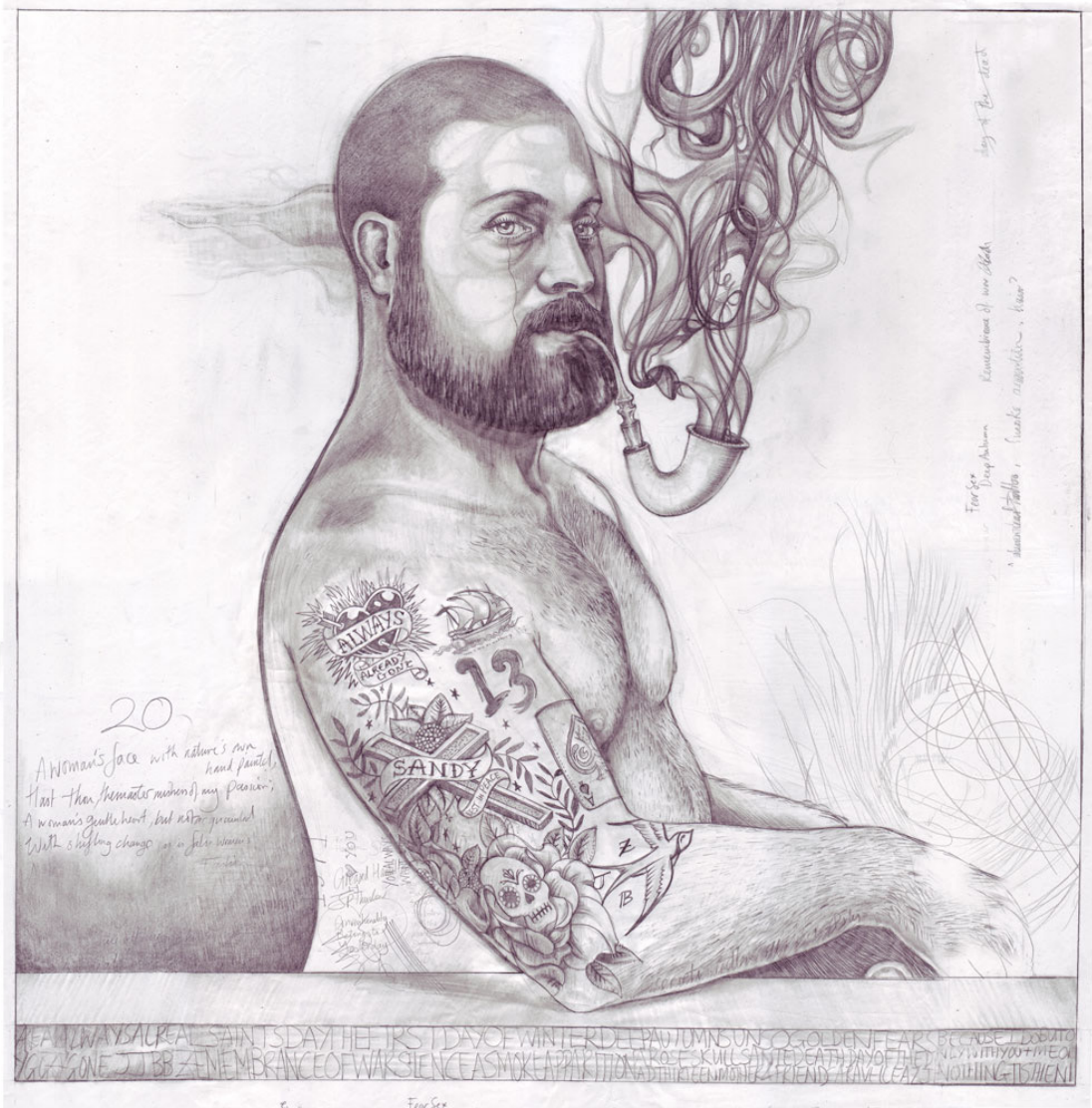




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STYLE PAPER



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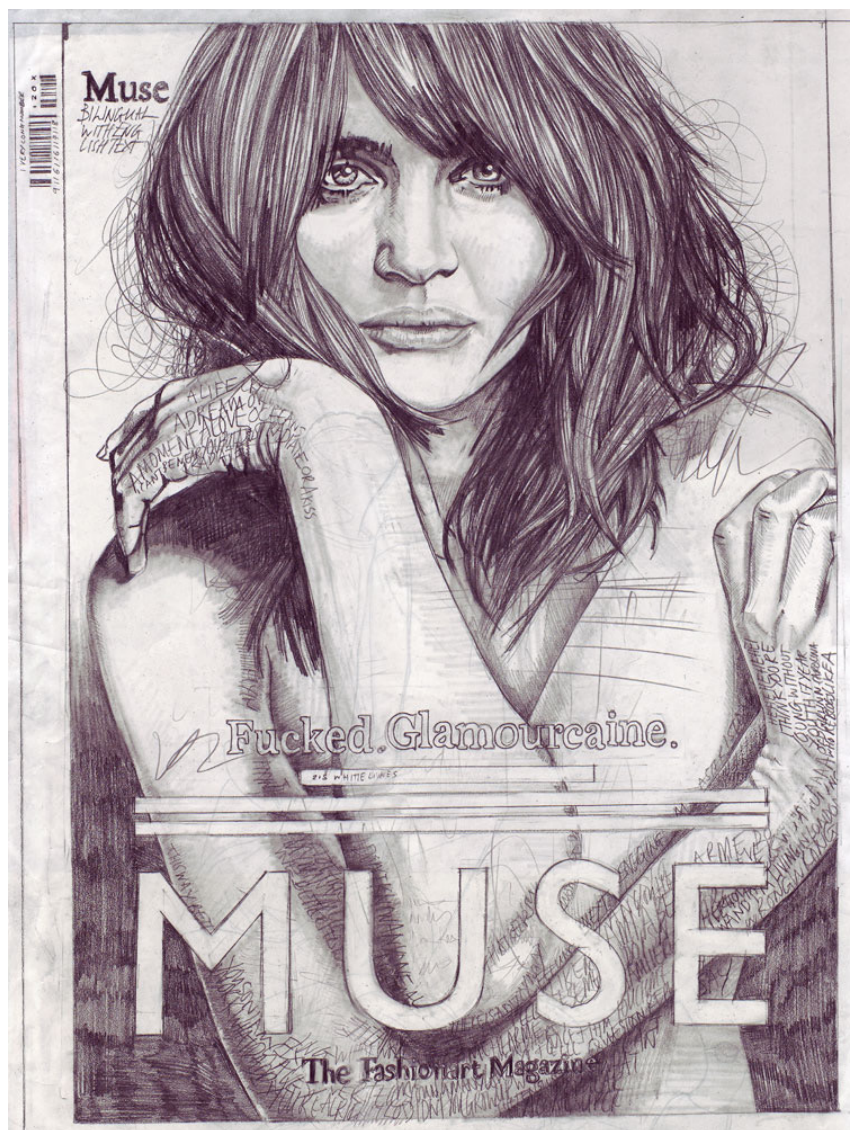
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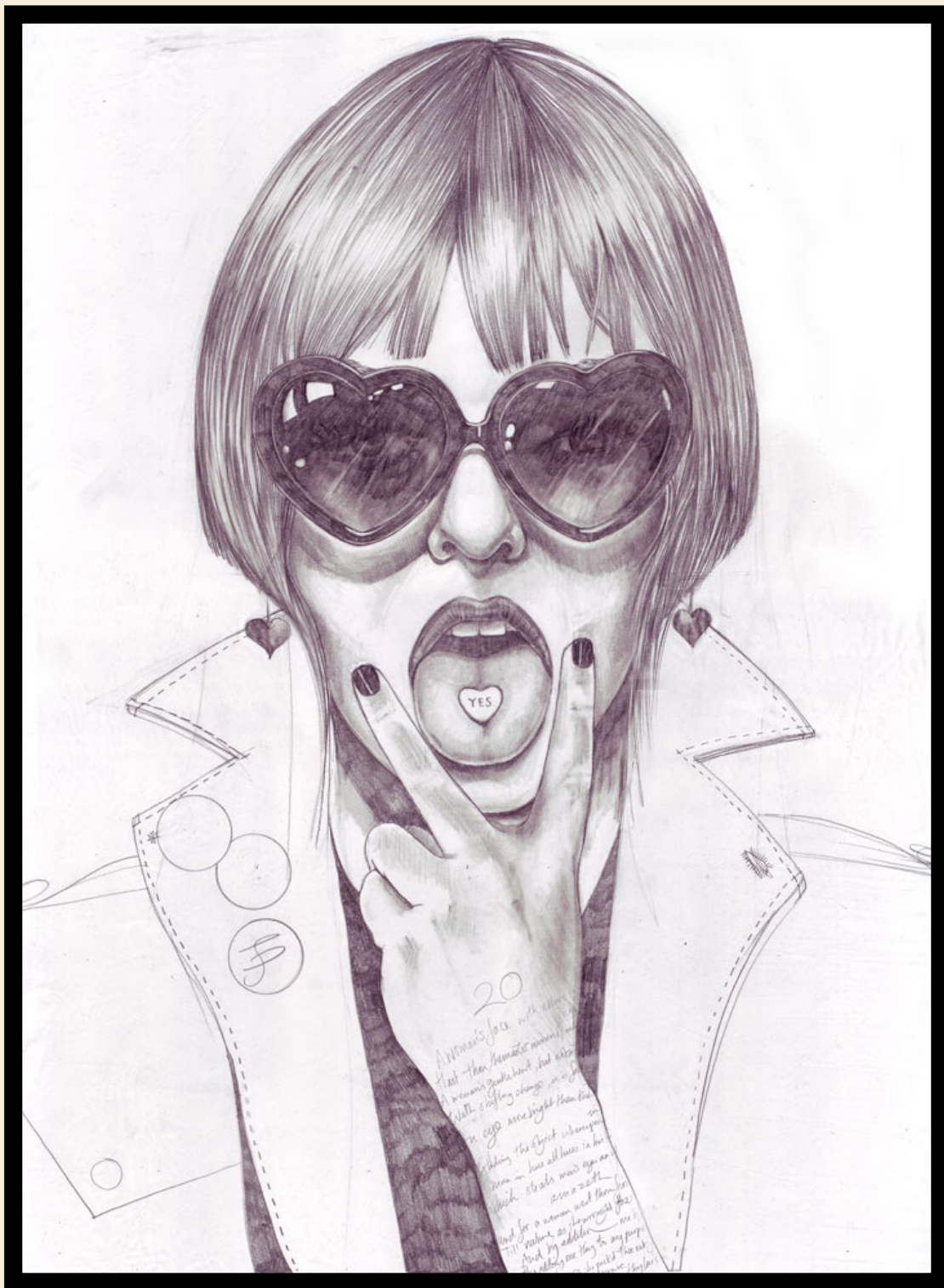
LONDON CALLING



ELLE CELEBRATE 25 YEAR DE LONDON FASHION WEEK









ART







# SINGING BEACHES

PHOTOGRAPHY COLIN LEAMAN (COLINLEAMAN.COM)

















































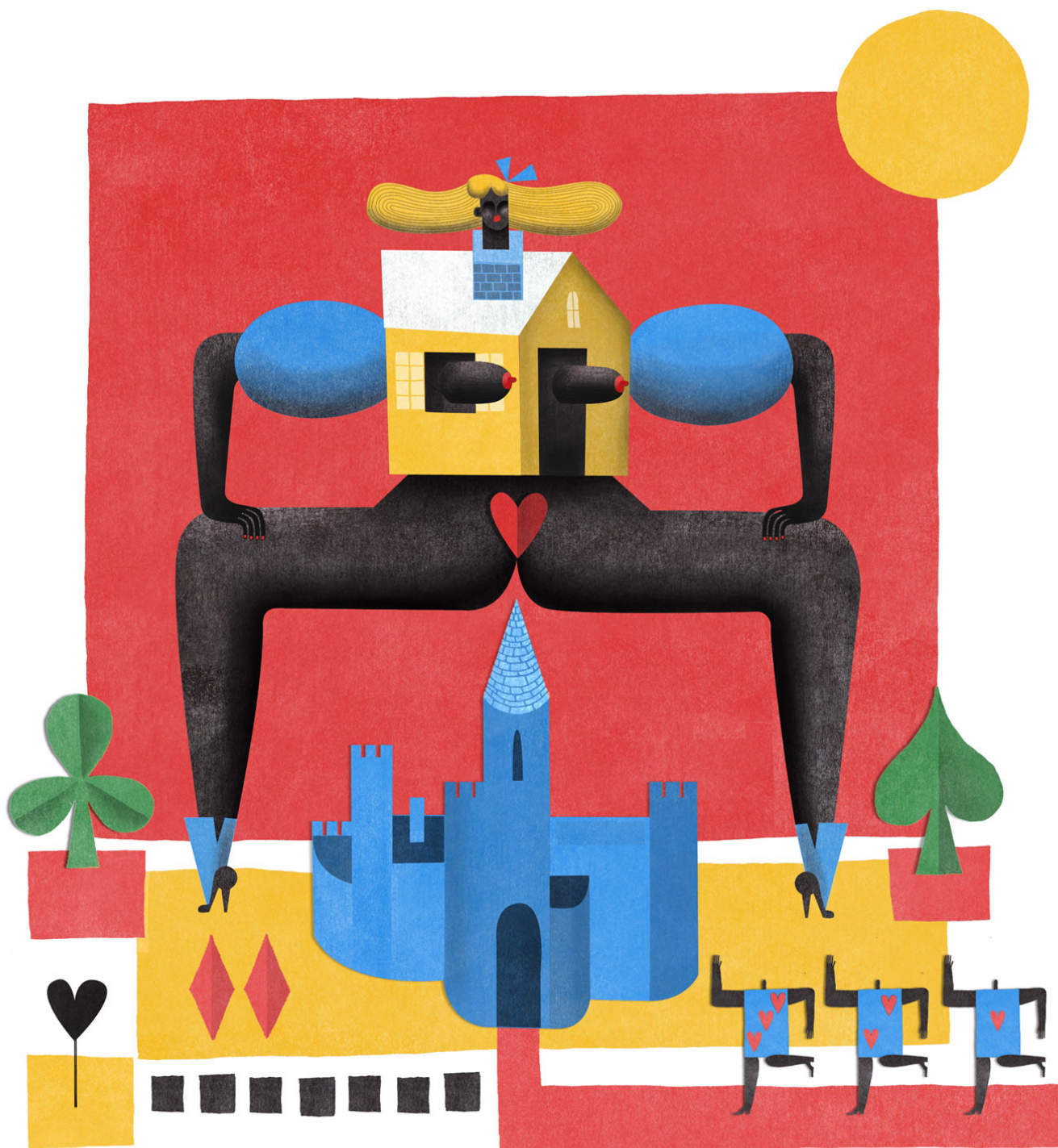






# *Van- ishing point*

ILLUSTRATIONS MARIA CORTE (MARIACORTE.COM)









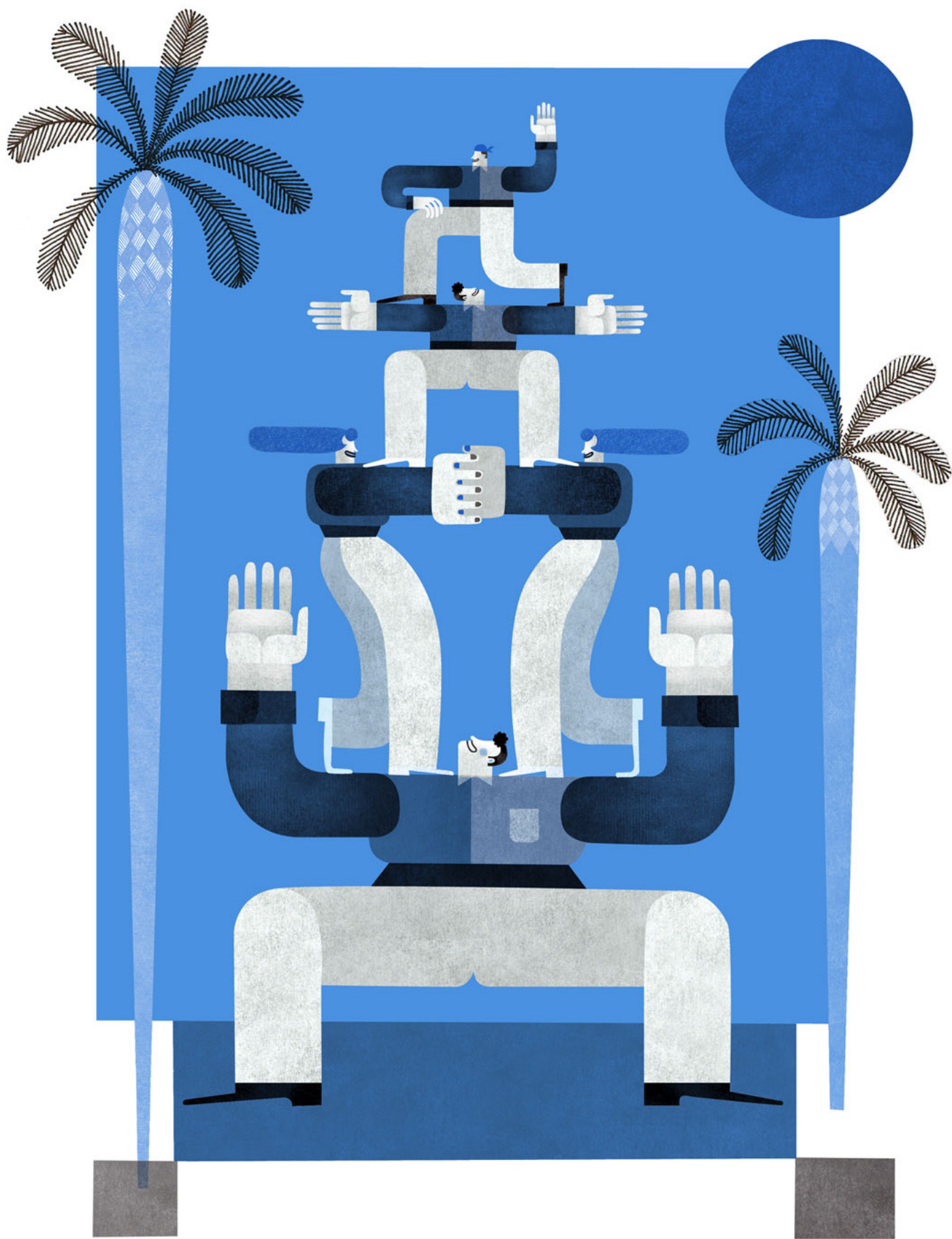








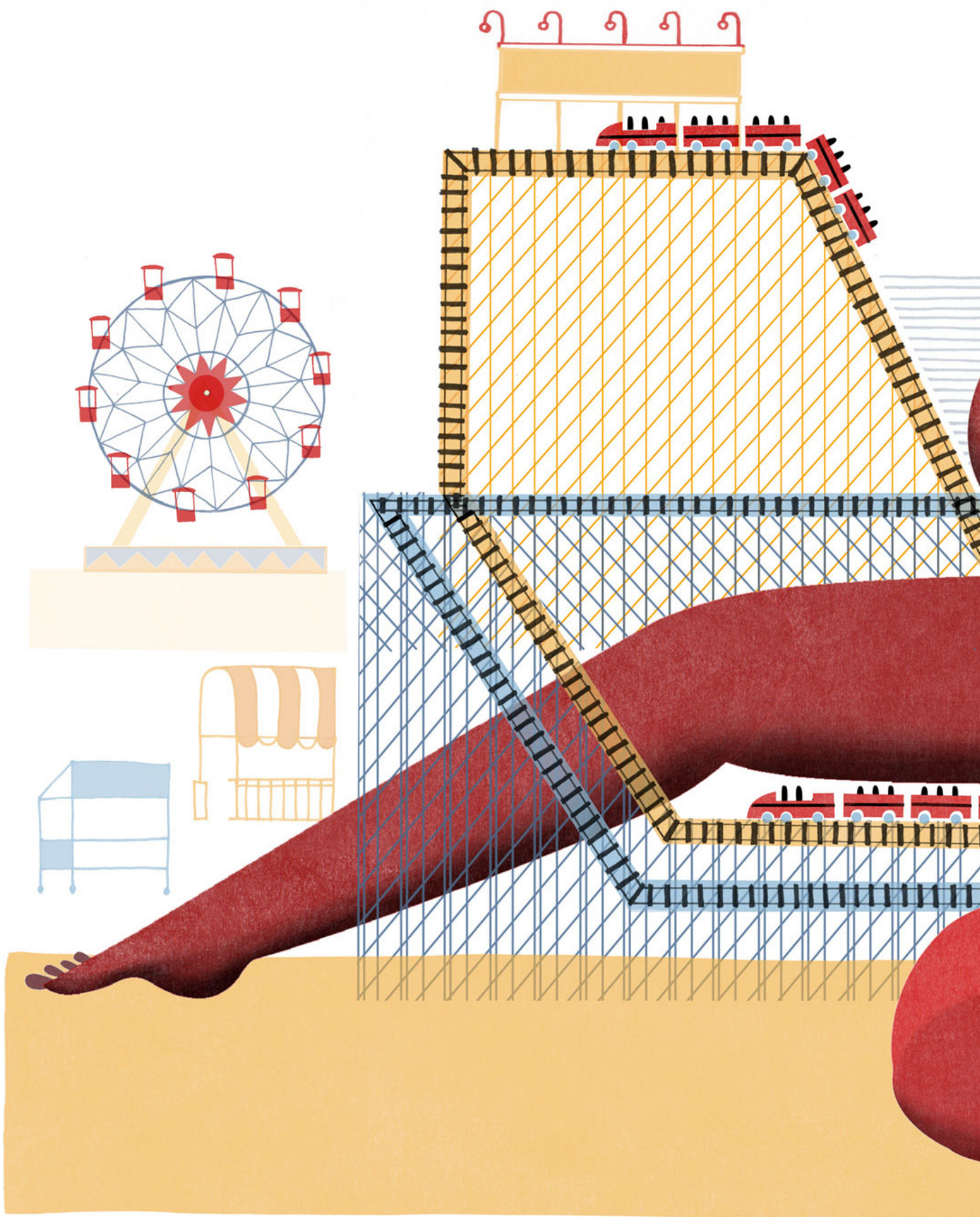












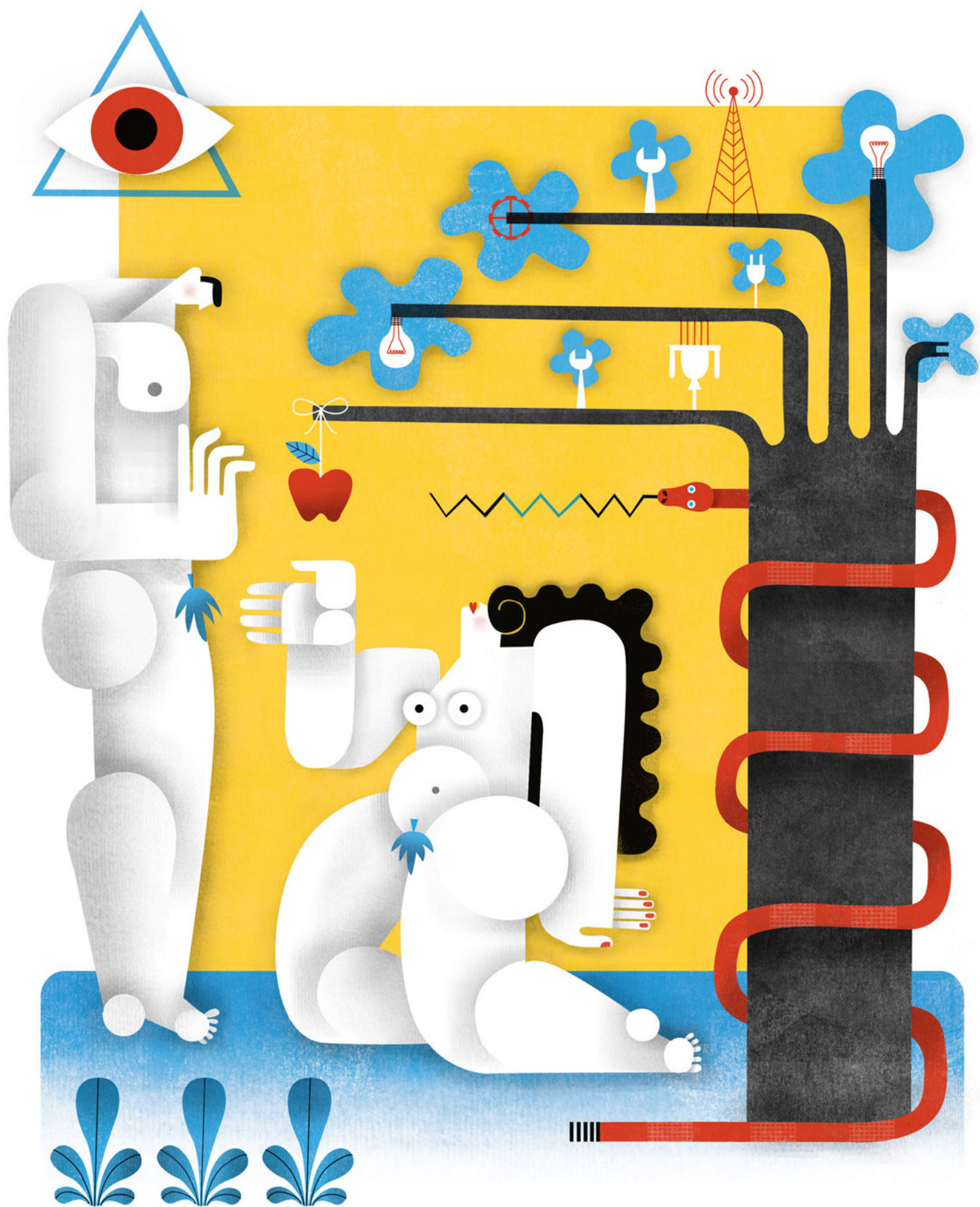






















**STYLE**





NECTARINE DREAMS  
BY ADAM RINDY



TODAY'S PERIL,  
TOMORROW'S PAIN  
BY GREG ADAMSKI




CASTLES IN THE SNOW  
BY HICHAM RIAD



HEAVEN'S GONNA  
HAPPEN NOW BY  
NANDO ESPARZA





A photograph of a person's arm and hand in a field of yellow flowers at sunset. The person's hand, with light blue nail polish, is resting on their arm. They are wearing a blue denim shirt. The background is a field of yellow flowers with a wooden fence post visible. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow.

# nectarine dreams

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM RINDY (ADAMRINDY.COM)

































# Today's peril, tomorrow's pain

PHOTOGRAPHY GREG ADAMSKI (ADAMSKIPHOTO.COM)

STYLIST SZYMON DUZY

MAKE-UP MARIANNA JURKIEWICZ

HAIR PAWEŁ WRÓTNIAK

SET DESIGN ZUZA SŁOMINSKA

MODEL PAULINA ZAREBSKA (AVANT MODELS)

ASSISTANT: ŁUKASZ BRZEKIEWICZ



































# CASTLES IN THE SNOW

PHOTOGRAPHY HICHAM RIAD (MYHICHAM.NET)































STYLE

# HEAV- EN'S GONNA HAPPEN NOW

PHOTOGRAPHER NANDO ESPARZA ([NANDOESPARZA.COM](http://NANDOESPARZA.COM))



























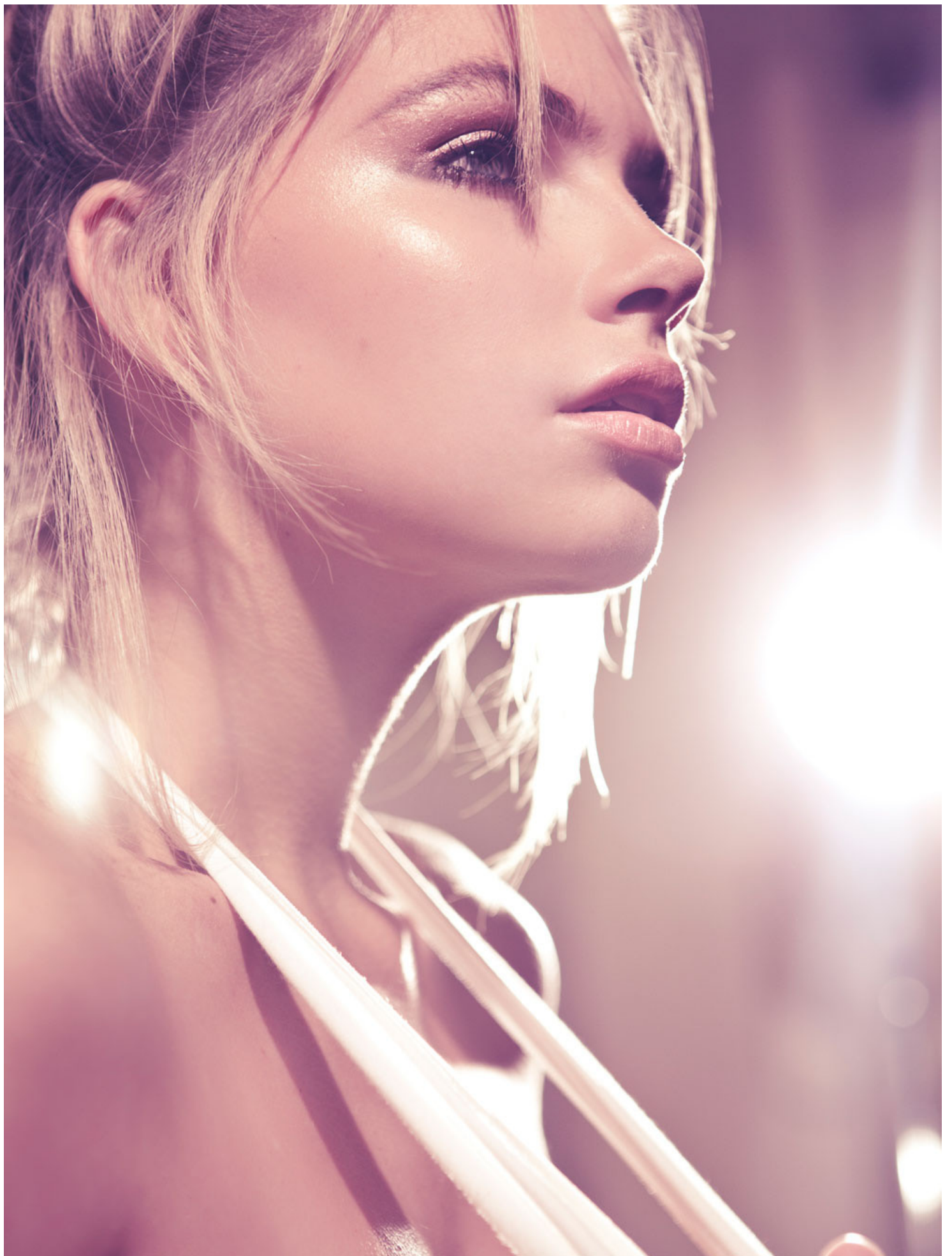




STYLE

















STYLE









A photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, a person's leg is resting on a wet, dark rock. The ocean is turbulent with white-capped waves crashing against the rocks. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The overall mood is dramatic and moody.

**NEXT ISSUE** JULY 15







