

FANTASY FIRE

ISSUE #49 // FEBRUARY 2012

ALONE IN THE FOREST
ROBERT HARPER GETS TO GRIPS WITH NATURE
PLUS 2011 REVIEW, STEVEN GILBERG, DELTA SPIRIT AND VINTAGE QUEER



RON F***ING SWANSON

NBC SHOWS TRIGGER-HAPPY HBO THE WAY FORWARD, BACKING ONE OF THE BEST COMEDIES ON TV RIGHT NOW WHILE THE CABLE-ONLY CHANNEL JUST CANCELLED THREE OTHERS

The last couple of months have seen massively contrasting fortunes for my television watching habits. The end of December was as bad as it gets. In the space of one press release, HBO execs cancelled *Bored To Death*, *How To Make It In America* and *Hung*. Perhaps the latter wasn't quite as big a deal, though the recently concluded third season developed very nicely over its succinct 10 episode run, but to cancel the other two is an embarrassment. Arguably HBO's best two shows, perhaps they had not been matching their quality with viewership of late, but to say HBO has always prided themselves on quality content, confident a fanbase will win out in the end aided by critical acclaim, they went against their own ideals.

Bored To Death felt like a lamb to the slaughter. Part of an experimental scheme to make episodes available a week in advance on their HBO Go streaming service, the show, which has a hungry online cult following, suffered a big drop in the ratings. Love it or hate it, piracy has a big impact on eyes on screen, so for such a niche show, exposing the Nielson numbers to a week early leak every episode was always going to be suicide.

How To Make It In America was more confusing. Improving episode-on-episode and, by the

end of the second season, setting up for an even more captivating third, ratings had been holding strong, with its stars building appeal outside of the brand. And then like that, it was off the slate.

With little going forward to get me excited, at the turn of the year I didn't have much left to do but delve back. For a long while now I'd been meaning to catch up on *Parks And Recreation*. The award-winning *Office* spin-off has been lauded for some time, truly building an identity aside from the iconic sitcom, and for good reason. Every member of the central cast will become your favourite. From the good-willed but simple-minded Andy, to geeky ladies' man Tom, leader of the pack Leslie Knope to the amazing moustachioed don Ron Swanson.

If you haven't had the honour, track down all four seasons as soon as you can because it'll be some of the best comedic television you'll see your entire life, and an example, take note HBO, that if you back a talented bunch of television makers even when their ratings chips might be down, you can see an even greater reward in the end. And that's when you really get the true appraisal.

Sam Bathe
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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PARKS AND RECREATION



**UPCOMING FTF
WEBSITE REDESIGN**



OSX MOUNTAIN LION



DENTS DRIVING GLOVES



**WITHDRAWAL OF
SOPA/PIPA**



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**DELTA SPIRIT'S
NEW ALBUM**



DYSON VACUUMS



RUPERT MURDOCH



**SONY'S SHAM TRAILER
FOR *RESIDENT
EVIL: RETRIBUTION***



SOPA/PIPA



**FINCHER'S *THE GIRL WITH
THE DRAGON TATTOO***

HA-
TE



THE GOLDEN GLOBES

HBO

**HBO'S TRIGGER
HAPPY FINGERS**



**POINTLESS REVIEW
EMBARGOES**



***EASTBOUND AND DOWN*
SEASON THREE**

Music

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BIG in 2012

WORDS SAM BATHE
ADDITIONAL WRITING COCO
WONG & MICHAEL RAMEY



HOWLER (LEFT)

Via projects entitled Tits, The A-Cups, Gay Animals, Our Dark Lord and Total Babe, it took Howler front-man Jordan Gatesmith a little while to find something that fit.

Settling on an indie-rock direction, Gatesmith wrote and demoed a handful of tracks before he even set about finding the rest of the band, but once he knew what he was after, recruited four partners-in-crime took only half the effort.

Not adverse to success, licensing tracks to *Grey's Anatomy* and a couple of commercials with Total Babe, Gatesmith and co. have coped well with being dubbed "the new Strokes". While in any case, they're much closer to the criminally short-lived Japanese Motors, Howler are certainly their own people, and a sure-fire bet to find success in 2012.

Signing to Rough Trade last summer, exec Geoff Travis instantly despatched an A&R rep to get a deal swiftly done upon hearing early demos, and the famous label released debut album *America Give Up* in January. Finding critical acclaim, Howler will hope to cement their already burgeoning reputation when they play taste-making festival SXSW in March, with full US and European tours to follow.

NEW IVORY

A talented young three-piece band hailing from London, New Ivory are part of a growing movement back to a much more emphatic, less electro indie scene. Single *A Knight* really started to make New Ivory's name, a punchy rock track less keen on subtlety, more about bombardment, but their music is not without thought. Their sound is energetic, finding order through a more familiar song structure, slotting nicely into a sub-genre-opened up by The Vaccines early 2011.

Signed to the well-regarded Dim Mak Records, an album is due in 2012 after wrapping in the studio late last year as they hope to capitalise on a number of successful tours. Despite their tender years together, New Ivory have nationwide UK tours already under their belt, as well as supporting dates across America and Europe, and things are only going to get busier from here on in.





DELTA SPIRIT

Long Beach five-piece Delta Spirit have been bubbling under the surface for quite some time now, but in 2012, they're set to really make a name for themselves. With Sean Walker leaving the band a couple of years ago, shortly before the release of their second album, *History From Below*, they had been joined by a number of stand-ins before Will McLaren joined full-time over the summer.

A long term friend of the band, McLaren, formerly of The Willowz, turned what was a touring arrangement into his permanent gig, and he fits the bill perfectly.

Coming March 13th is their third album, a belatedly self-titled LP that delves deeper into rock than they've

ever delved before, and a step away from their folkier influences of the past. "We found the sound that we've been looking for, that we've been growing into, and as soon as we hit on it, we ran with it. That's why it's a self-titled record, so we could connect our identity, with what we think Delta Spirit is," explains frontman Matt Vasquez.

Produced by Chris Coady (Beach House, Delorean, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, TV On The Radio) at Dreamland Recording Studios, Woodstock, New York, a converted church built in 1896, *Delta Spirit* was recorded in two sessions last summer, giving away a bunch of their old music, some T-shirts and performing at Lollapalooza during 2011 too. It was a year that has really shaped what could come over the next 12 months.

Single *California* debuted on *The Wall Street Journal* of all places but still

picked up a heap of buzz and column inches across the rest of the web. The band have been hyped before, and always turned in stellar releases, but things seems to be picking up an unparalleled pace. They're to be featured as one of the emerging bands in *Sports Illustrated's* annual Swimsuit Issue, a new idea that pairs models with music in the digital editions and a multi-page spread in the print magazine. Delta Spirit are all set for a nationwide tour too as soon as the album hits stores. Kicking off at Austin's SXSW music festival in mid-March, they pair up with Waters for an impressive set of dates spanning the States, with locales further afield coming later in the year.

Delta Spirit have never appeared to be running out of steam but they've never quite gotten the recognition they deserve either, so hopefully a promising 2012 turns buzz into acclaim, and they hit the heights their music has always been due.



THEME PARK

The latest band to be taken under the Kitsuné wing, featuring on their *Maison* compilations and touring billed on the French label's renowned tours and club nights, it's Transgressive though who have snapped them up for their upcoming album. Formed of two brothers and two school friends from London, Theme Park supported Bombay Bicycle Club last autumn to end what was a massively successful 12 months.

Previously going by the name of Ark People, the four-piece used to play post-punk but took the outfit down a different route in January. Renaming the band Theme Park, the four-piece ditched their rockier sound for a David Byrne-style, with touches of *English Riviera* Metronomy to boot. It's a switch that has paid dividends.

Garnering significant airplay with singles *Milk* and *Two Hours*, Theme Park are set to tour the UK over the coming weeks, playing fun-size venues for perhaps the last time in their history before their eagerly anticipated debut album touches down in the summer.



[ABOVE] BLEEDING KNEES CLUB

Lo-fi trio Bleeding Knees Club at last sound like what hours of Best Coast, Wavves and Veronica Falls have been leading up to, though their variation of super catchy hooks make listening to tracks on a loop not sound like the same one-minute segment over and over again.

While monotonous drone could be charged to much of the lo-fi music scene, Bleeding Knees Club are hoping to break out of it, and after employing Dev Hynes of Lightspeed Champion and Blood Orange to produce, they are well on their way.

Signed to IAMSOUND/Columbia, it's energetic performances, nay "recklessness" according to their PR agent, that kick-started an already loyal fanbase. Winning audiences over far beyond their native Australia, Bleeding Knees Club's lust for life will take them far, even if they it doesn't always show beneath a lackadaisical, smooth exterior.



WE BARBARIANS

Putting out what was hands down the best EP of the last year, We Barbarians made good on a great deal of potential with five-track record *Headspace*. In 2012 the three-piece hope to follow it up with a sophomore album that encapsulates the energy and momentum of their electric live performances. Tracking throughout 2011, at the turn of the year, the band hit the studio again to get things moving on what will be an all important release.

Moving to the Big Apple in 2010, and sitting on *Headspace* for a few months, bolstered at the last minute with a cover of Brian Eno's *Stranger Overtones*, the upcoming LP will be their first entirely written under a New York state of mind. Songs debuted on tour match the heights We Barbarians have hit to date, with SXSW in March set to be a fairly crucial testing ground before everything really kicks into gear at the end of spring.



FRIENDS [ABOVE]

Sounding as if they were dragged forward to year 2012 from the glorious eighties, Friends from Brooklyn bring catchy pop to the modern ears with a tinge of retro touch. It's not hard to recognise Friends' sound as their tracks are always filled with solid beats and the distinctive vocals by Samantha Urbani. Joined by fellow bandmates Lesley Hann, Oliver Duncan, Nikki Shapiro and Matthew Molnar, Friends are currently in New York City recording their album, due in May, and have been touted as this year's Warpaint, only

they're funkier and more upbeat so get ready for big things.

The Friends hype is unstoppable judging by the constant play of their two best-known tracks on Radio One, *Friend Crush* and *I'm His Girl*. The two songs offer quite polar attitudes on love from a girl's perspective, which is fairly interesting as they are both coming from the same band. To catch Friends in action, they are playing Manchester and London in February and have been confirmed as part of Field Day's line up this year. **CW**



SLEIGH BELLS

When the guitarist from the hardcore band Poison The Well and a member of teen pop group Rubyblue got together, they created Sleigh Bells. A band with such a powerful noise you can't help but bop your head to it. It all began when Derek E. Miller was looking for a female vocalist and while waiting tables at a neighbourhood restaurant he met Alexis Krauss' mother who told him her daughter could sing and immediately volunteered her (Thanks mom). One year on they were signed to M.I.A.'s record company N.E.E.T. and then Mom + Pop Recordings. Sleigh Bells was named the band to watch in 2009 by *Stereogum* after releasing their first self-titled EP.

The next year Krauss and Miller went into the recording studio to record their very first studio album *Treats*. The first single off the debut album *Tell Em*, was released as a free download the month prior. Before releasing *Treats* in May 2010, Sleigh Bells played at the annual music and arts festival Coachella. On top of all their success their music was featured on television shows *Gossip Girl*, *Skins* and even the video game *Brothers in Arms: Furious 4*.

Last June Sleigh Bells began tracking songs for their second studio album set to be released this month February 14th but was pushed back to the 21st. Like many bands do they released a video teaser of their upcoming album on their website, with the words *Reign Of Terror* being featured which would later be revealed as the title of their latest album. On *Reign Of Terror* Krauss said, "It sounds really huge, so there's going to still be tons of volume". So expect the same loud, heart racing sounds as the previous albums. *Comeback Kid* is the first single off of *Reign Of Terror* and is climbing the charts with the release of the music video. Which opens with Krauss jumping up and down on a bed holding a sniper rifle, why not? The song on the other hand is great with that huge sound Krauss promised.

Out to prove they are the next big thing, they announced their 2012 tour of strictly venues in Florida. Although they will be opening for Rock & Roll Hall Fame inductees The Red Hot Chili Peppers on their spring tour. If opening for The Peppers isn't proof enough they are the next band to watch I don't know what is. **MR**



SURFER BLOOD

Though their live performances, or more demeanour, always left a lot to be desired, Surfer Blood could never be criticised for their recorded output. 2010's debut *Astro Coast* is a quite brilliant LP before they followed it up last year with the bite-sized *Tarot Classics*. The EP lost a little of their quirkiness but certainly not the signature hooks we've come to expect, with *Voyager Reprise* possibly their best track to date.

2012 though is going to be even more exciting. Signing to Warner Bros. Records shortly after the release of *Astro Coast*, Surfer Blood recently ventured back into the studio record to follow-up with Phil Ek (Fleet Foxes, The Shins, Built to Spill), after writing it over the summer. This could be the year that births Surfer Blood as one of the biggest names in modern indie rock. And that's in the mainstream, not just indie crowds.

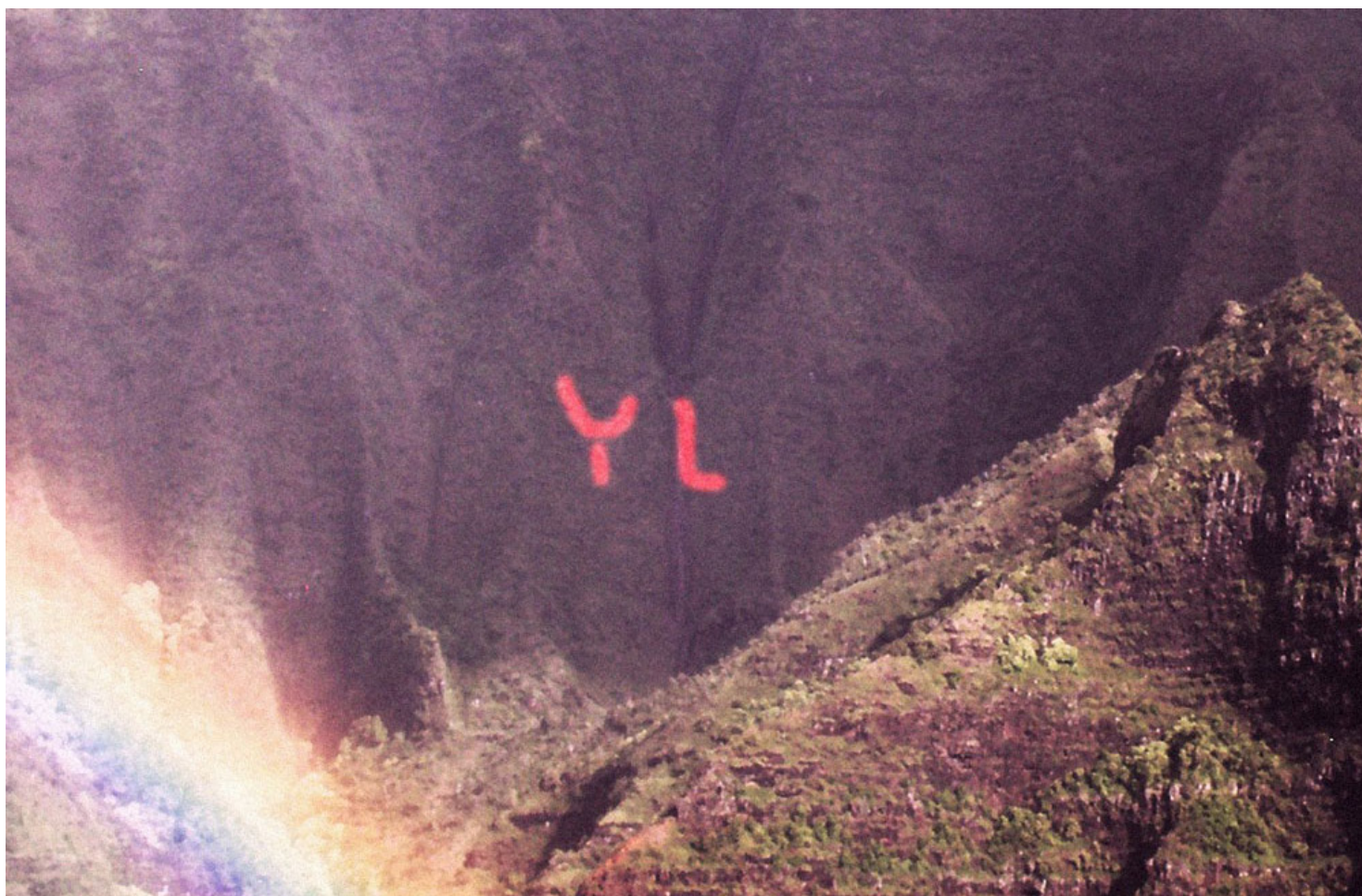


THE ROMANY RYE

Putting out their eagerly anticipated full-length *Quicksilver Sunbeam* at the turn of the year, The Romany Rye are a call back to classic Americana folk that the music scene really needed. With frontman Luke Scott MacMaster smoothly raspy vocals taking the lead, the band's inviting hooks and measured percussion make for a sumptuous combination. MacMaster's lyrics are heartfelt without falling into cliché and bring an older style of music right up to date. Based out of LA, the band got through to the final stages of Rolling Stone's Cover Star competition, offering unsigned acts the chance to win a position on the famous magazine's cover, as voted for by readers.

Only two tracks from debut EP *Highway 1, Looking Back Carefully* make it onto the band's recent album, and that's an example of their strength in depth. *Quicksilver Sunbeam* will pick up momentum throughout 2012, with The Romany Rye likely to prove that up and coming unsigned bands are often band served writing and recording their own music, building fans as they go, rather than waiting for a label to take the jump in what is often more of a blind leap of faith.





1

The Year of Hibernation

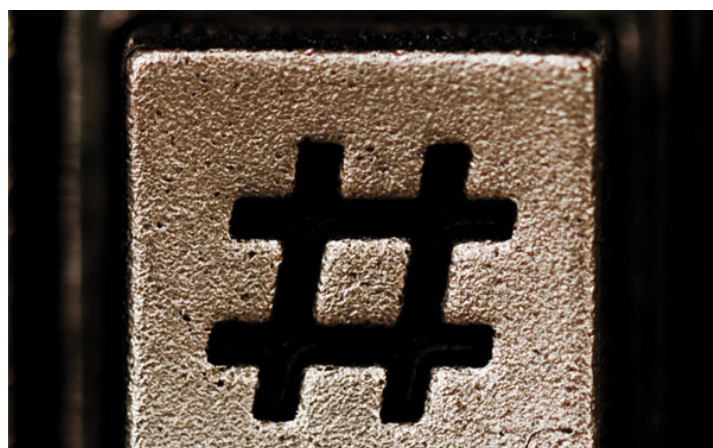
By Youth Lagoon. Label: Fat Possum



2

The English Riviera

By Metronomy. Label: Because



3

Codes & Keys

By Death Cab For Cutie.
Label: Atlantic

[illegible]

A photograph of a couple sitting in front of a white shelving unit filled with toys and books. The text "M83." is overlaid in large white letters at the top. The couple is sitting on a bed, and the woman is leaning her head on the man's shoulder. The room is dimly lit, with a lamp visible on the right. The shelving unit is filled with various items, including books, toys, and a large teddy bear. The overall mood is intimate and cozy.

DAWES
Nothing Is Wrong



WAS
HED
WITHIN and WITHOUT
OUT

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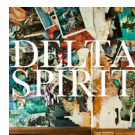
HUNX HAIRDRESSER BLUES

RELEASED FEBRUARY 28

Seth Bogart's first release without his Punx after Amy Blaustein and Michelle Santamaria left the band, the multi-talented musician puts out his second LP on Sub Pop off-shoot Hardly Art and another foray into their cliché bending lo-fi post-punk power-pop.

After wonderfully-titled debut *Gay Singles LP* and sophomore *Too Young To Be In Love*, *Hairdresser Blues* is Hunx's third release in as many years, and business as usual though the subject matter takes a more poignant turn. Singing about dearly departed friend Jay Reatard and losing his father, the musical accompaniments are harder and fuller too, with surf more prominent than ever. Don't think this is a sombre affair though, as *Private Room* will attest, *Hairdresser Blues* is another step forward for Bogart, if not the finished result. It's an LP of promise, that still doesn't quite deliver but there are still a few tracks that really make it worth your while, and live, they've always been fantastic. **SB**

★★★★★



DELTA SPIRIT DELTA SPIRIT

RELEASED MARCH 13

Seven years in the making, Delta Spirit felt their sound had come so far on their latest release, and at last into what the band truly represents, that they belatedly made it their self-titled LP. And if this is their true calling, we want a lot, lot more.

Empty House is the perfect introduction. An example of their more rock-driven direction, Delta Spirit's folk touches aren't forgotten but they're no longer as prominent. The opener simmers under the surface but it's still so rousing that by the end you won't be able to wait for what's coming. Following track *Tear It Up* could be from Vampire Weekend, only Matt Vasquez's dominating vocals power it down their own vein, it's *California*, *Idaho* and *Money Saves* though that are the real standouts. *California* has a wonderful new wave, shoe-gaze feel before *Idaho*'s electrifying hooks only further blow you away. Penultimate *Money Saves* is the pick of the album, double-dropping to perfection. **TM**

★★★★★



FRANKIE ROSE INTERSTELLAR

RELEASED FEBRUARY 21

A founding member of Vivian Girls as well as drumming for Dum Dum Girls and Crystal Stilts, by now you'd probably be expecting reverb-heavy garage rock from Frankie Rose's solo project. Think again.

Actually the second album with her own band, *Interstellar* is certainly the breakthrough, much lighter and chirpier than her previous projects, even if a similar song structure does remain. The LP is the latest offering to reference the '80s, but don't let that put you off just yet. Teasing synth alongside predominant bass and the guitar riffs that power each of Rose's tracks, while there are a handful of missteps along the way, *Interstellar* is still a pleasurable fifth-coming of the talented musician.

Night Swim is probably the best song on the LP, although dreamer *Know Me* and the grandiose *Moon In The Mind* push it close. Frankie Rose has found something to stick with at last, let's hope she does. **SB**

★★★★★



HOWLER AMERICA GIVE UP

RELEASED OUT NOW

One of the first bands to put out an album at the turn of the year, "the new Strokes" Howler have the same drawl as Casablancas' vocals although their sound is much more classic rock/surf than the New Yorkers.

Fairly fuzzy throughout, what Howler lack in smooth hooks on a few tracks they certainly make up for in energy and hustle. If anything their tracks are a little too busy, and there'll come a point where you'd like to strip just a little bit of the noise away.

But Howler certainly still have a charm, and they need to live up to their name after all. *Back Of Your Neck* is probably their strongest track, packing sing-along lyrics and catchy guitar, though the smooth *America* and enticing closer *Black Lagoon* aren't far behind. If you're disappointed by *America Give Up* you probably believed the hype a little too much, but Howler are still a band you should have a lot of time for, just maybe more so when their sophomore comes around. **TM**

★★★★★



TENNIS YOUNG AND OLD

RELEASED OUT NOW

While their debut *Cape Dory* was effortlessly brilliant, its sickly sweet nature soon started to grate. It's not like Tennis needed to throw in some swear words but a little more of an edge would have given the LP that staying power and timelessness that it lacked. *Young And Old*, however, doesn't suffer from such one-dimensionality and it's as if they'd read our latest critique before we'd even written it.

The follow-up is deeper with more layers to the music, and no longer feeling like a sugar cane field in your ears. Expanding a little more down the She & Him route, Tennis have explored their sound and come back with a few more instruments, backing singers and something that could really stick. It's not perfect like perhaps *Cape Dory* sounded at first listen but it's a better, still quite breezy, indie-pop LP that's uplifting from the first to the last beat, without the twee. And perfect to warm you up for the spring and summer ahead. **SB**

★★★★★



SLEIGH BELLS REIGN OF TERROR

RELEASED FEBRUARY 21

Maybe we were alone in the thought, but we didn't love Sleigh Bells 2010 debut, *Treats*. It had its high points, but the stop-start LP couldn't back them up to the finish, and even the high-hitting singles started to grate over time. A title like *Reign Of Terror* probably suggests Sleigh Bells won't be letting up, but at last it isn't just a high volume the duo are relying on the make an impact, they can back it up with some music too.

Or at least that was the idea, as *Reign Of Terror* is still a pretty lacklustre affair. Aptly categorised into the "noise pop" genre, on their latest LP they expand a little, throwing in a couple of ballads, but this is basically a diluted *Treats*. Rather than the harsh electro of their debut, they're shifted focus more towards rock, but they've lost some of the hip-hop elements however too which added that finishing touch. This album isn't terrible – hell, Pitchfork will tell you it's the opposite – but I certainly wouldn't call it "good". **TM**

★★★★★



WHITE RABBITS MILK FAMOUS

RELEASED MARCH 6

Masters of percussion, White Rabbits, have made a name for themselves turning untold layers of music into compelling and digestible tracks. They may owe a heavy influence to the band Spoon on their earlier records, but *Milk Famous* sees them branching out and turning their brand of organised chaos into something darker and more compelling.

While their music never lacked depth, its layers were mostly the same vein; *Milk Famous* spreads it out. The basslines are brooding while electronics make a bigger impact than ever, as do the lack of noise on occasion, where as before, it was something of a barrage.

White Rabbits could be the new Battles, they could go mainstream, and *Milk Famous* is the start of that; it's an LP that can be digested by a much larger audience, and that's an audience that their talents deserve. There's real brilliance coming from the Brooklynites, and be sure to check out the prelude. **SB**

★★★★★



GRIMES VISIONS

RELEASED FEBRUARY 21

A band name of Grimes and the demonic cover art for *Visions* are an odd choice for Claire Boucher who's music is sing-as-high-as-you-can driving '80s electro. Still, with electro stock having fallen so markedly in the public eye, no thanks to Little Boots, La Roux and their endless copycats, maybe that's a good thing.

Visions then comes direct out Kavinsky's notebook, rather than that of Satan, overlaid with sweet vocal harmonies and darkened synth and computer effects. At times it's an odd mix, but when Boucher gets it right, she really gets it right.

Oblivion sounds like it's off the near-perfect Drive soundtrack building an instant momentum with digital percussion and perfectly pitching high BPM in the background against her slower vocals. *Skin* is another high point, I just wish it sounded a little fuller. Where Grimes is hoping to push boundaries in the mainstream, some deviation wouldn't have gone amiss. **TM**

★★★★★

Film

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FILM IN 2012

WORDS MARTIN ROBERTS

The top seven of last year's top 10 highest-grossing films were sequels. There was a further sequel, too, in ninth place, meaning eight out of the top 10 were follow-ups. If you delve a little further and look at the top 20, there are another five franchise entries. Difficult to complain about a lack of originality when the 'mainstream' audience votes so tellingly with its wallet.

That said, the success of those sequels doesn't necessarily provide an accurate portrayal of the state of modern cinema. Far from it, in fact, because despite relative franchise 'success', many of those films actually earned less than their predecessors, and although we are still talking about staggering sums of money (*Deathly Hallows Part 2*, top of the pile, earned over \$1.3bn) 2011's

box office was still down on 2010, and attendance figures continued their steady decline too.

But despite the disheartening figures, distributors still realise that the big franchises and sequels are, generally speaking, safe bets, the irony being that they cost the most to make. In my humble opinion, the final box office top 10 for 2011 – like most years, to be fair – gives a far from accurate representation of the year as a whole, mainly because it isn't a high quality list. Far from it. In 2012 we'll still be overrun with blockbusters and franchise entries, but fingers crossed we'll get some better ones. What follows is an abridged rundown of some of what we can expect to see in 2012, promising or otherwise.



• BLOCKBUSTERS •

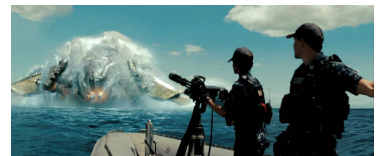
There are perhaps four or five releases which could be considered 'objectively big' (for want of a better phrase) depending on preference, but the 'biggest' releases are probably Christopher Nolan's hotly-anticipated Batman trilogy-closer *The Dark Knight Rises* and Peter Jackson's return to Middle Earth with part one of his adaptation of *The Hobbit, An Unexpected Journey*. They're pretty much guaranteed to rake in the big bucks.

Sci-fi fans have a lot to be excited about too. Ridley Scott is making his long-awaited return to the genre with *Prometheus*, an intriguing prospect with a good, solid cast and a hefty pedigree, though the degree to which it actually exists as a prequel to *Alien* is still up in the air. The trailer, released not long ago, certainly plays up the connection, but that might be more for brand-recognition purposes – at various times, the cast and director have played down the links. Quite how much the warmth felt for Scott's original *Alien* film will translate into box office success remains to be seen.

Alfonso Cuarón is making ripples in space which could soon become cosmic waves. James Cameron was blown away when he saw footage of what Cuarón was doing with his film *Gravity*, which stars George Clooney and Sandra Bullock as the two remaining survivors of an accident on a space station orbiting Earth. The film is being photographed by Emmanuel Lubezki, who recently shot *The Tree Of Life* for Terrence Malick. Given how that film looked, we can be fairly sure of at least a visual treat. The Wachowskis, meanwhile, are tackling David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, and Guy Pearce is starring in *Lockout* with Maggie Grace.

At the other end of the excitement scale we have *Battleship*, an implausible big-budget adaptation of that board game you've played. Yep, that's right, the one where you read grid coordinates out in an attempt to 'hit' the other player's hidden vessels. Naturally, the film shoehorns-in an alien invasion and stars Rihanna.

The comic book film bandwagon rolls on and on, and no matter how bored you may or may not be of it by now, 2012 won't be the year it dies out. In fact, it could be the most profitable yet, and you won't be able to escape it. *The Dark Knight Rises* we have already mentioned, but you can add *The Avengers* to that for a start – a film



FROM TOP: THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, THE HOBBIT, BATTLESHIP, PROMETHEUS, GHOST RIDER 2





ABOVE: THE AVENGERS
LEFT: THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

which has five other films essentially serving as its prologue. The trailer didn't give a great deal away, despite blowing lots of stuff up, so it's up in the air as to whether it's actually going to be any good. Joss Whedon was a popular appointment to direct, as fans tend to see him as "one of them"; hopefully his enthusiasm can rub off on the project as a whole. Although the trailer suggests that Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark will be leading the pack, it will take a witty script and more than action set pieces to make this something worth remembering.

In a different sense, *The Amazing Spider-Man* is also preceded by a collection of films. In this case, though, it's another franchise reboot. Sam Raimi's first two wall-crawling efforts are fondly remembered, and were generally good, but number three was a catastrophic mess and enough to put an end to the franchise, even though it made a shed-load of money. Can Marc '(500) Days Of Summer' Webb inject enough freshness into this to kick-start another franchise? He's got a likable cast in place – Andrew Garfield as Peter and Emma Stone as love interest Gwen Stacy – but it will inevitably be compared to the previous trilogy. If people react badly, they'll just think "what's the point?" And that first-person sequence in the trailer was awful. Hopefully there won't be too much of that going on.

Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance (by Crank directors Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor) is the flaming piss-drenched sequel (see the trailer) which nobody asked for. Nic Cage kinda had a good time as Johnny Blaze the first time around, but the result was not well received in most quarters, and early buzz suggests this new effort is hardly a step up.

Prepare to see plenty of lies in 2012; lies like "experience it like never before" draped on posters around the globe. Sound familiar? That's because it's the tagline for *Titanic 3D*. Will people flock to see a 15-year-old film again because it's been converted into 3D, and pay more for the privilege? Some probably will, and some will undoubtedly feel conned.

It's true that I haven't seen the 3D edition of the film, but I can almost guarantee my reaction will be "meh", and the same goes for

the other 3D re-releases heading our way this year, all previously box office hits. I'll confess to being a little excited about *Beauty And the Beast 3D* (because it's a great film, not because it's in 3D), but I'd be more excited if they re-released it in 2D, which says a lot. *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* is also on the way in 3D.

Elsewhere on the blockbuster horizon are various bits and bobs; curiosities bathed in or bereft of potential. Those include hopeful franchise-starters like *The Hunger Games* and *John Carter*, franchise resurrections and dubious sequels (*Men In Black III*, *The Expendables 2*, *Wrath Of The Titans*), two (two!) *Snow White* adaptations, a remake of *Total Recall*, Bryan Singer's Nicholas Hoult-starring *Jack The Giant Killer*, something called *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, a new Bourne film starring Jeremy Renner and not Matt Damon, the George Lucas-produced WWII film *Red Tails* and a bunch of other stuff.

Tim Burton has a new Johnny Depp film coming out, Daniel Craig is Bond once again under the directorial guidance of Oscar-winner Sam Mendes, and Karl Urban stars as the titular character in a reboot of *Judge Dredd*, imaginatively entitled *Dredd*. There's the final instalment of the *Twilight* saga and Brad Pitt in *World War Z*, too.

COMEDY

2011 was a good year for comedy. That is, in terms of box office figures; not so much for quality. There was *Bridesmaids*, which was delightful, but there was also *The Hangover II*, which wasn't. The latter made the top 10, naturally, although Kristen Wiig's crowd-pleaser still managed to rake in pretty big bucks.

Sacha Baron Cohen makes his return to leading roles in 2012 with *The Dictator*, in which he lampoons...well...dictators. Cohen plays the amusingly named General Admiral Alladeen in what will surely be a film to inspire debate.

Movie 43, as it is currently still known, boasts a frankly ludicrous 'ensemble to beat all ensembles' cast list, though actual details beyond that are scarce. There will be multiple directors handling different sections, and the film will take the form of a collection of shorter pieces. The directors list includes people such as Brett Ratner and Elizabeth Banks, but the acting cast is something else. To name but a few, the film boasts Emma Stone, Halle Berry, Richard Gere, Hugh Jackman, Justin Long, Chloe Grace Moretz, Uma Thurman, Naomi Watts, Kate Winslet, Anna Faris and Gerard Butler.

Ted is *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane's first feature film, and stars Mark Wahlberg as a man whose wish for his teddy bear to come to life comes true. The film is live-action, though Ted himself will be a CGI creation. Just how similar this will be to MacFarlane's well-known brand of comedy is a mystery. The premise sounds vaguely reminiscent of *Harvey*, in which James Stewart had an invisible rabbit friend, though this is likely to be tonally very different.

There a couple of high profile musicals

worth mentioning, too. On the one hand, Tom Cruise stars in *Rock Of Ages*, an adaptation of the Broadway musical of the same name. The supporting cast includes the likes of Russell Brand, Bryan Cranston and Paul Giamatti. There's also Tom Hooper's adaptation of *Les Misérables*, the popular long-running Claude-Michel Schönberg musical. The last thing Hooper directed was a little thing called *The King's Speech*, of course, which went on to do quite well, so there should be some hope for this one. The material is there – it's just up to the cast, which includes Hugh Jackman as Jean Valjean, Russell Crowe as Inspector Javert and Anne Hathaway as Fantine – to transfer it powerfully to the big screen.



RIGHT: THE DICTATOR

• ANIMATION •

For animated delights, there should be plenty to enjoy in 2012. Illumination Entertainment's interpretation of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* looks like fun, while there are big screen sequels for the *Madagascar* and *Ice Age* franchises (third and fourth entries respectively); how much those appeal will likely depend on responses to the earlier films, because they're likely to be more of the same.

The collaboration between Sony Pictures Animation and Aardman Animations, *The Pirates! Band Of Misfits*, starring Hugh Grant as an inept ship captain, could be fun, while Tim Burton's second film of the year (after *Dark Shadows*) is an adaptation of his own short film from 1984, *Frankenweenie*, starring Winona Ryder. *ParaNorman* – from Laika, the studio responsible for Henry Selick's *Coraline* – certainly boasts an impressive voice cast, with the likes of Casey Affleck, John Goodman, Jeff Garlin and Leslie Mann on board.

Pixar experienced something they are not used to last year: critical division, or in some cases, derision. *Cars 2* wasn't widely loved (more praise was reserved for the *Toy Story* short film which preceded its theatrical performances), although there were some notable exceptions. Pixar's return to original material, *Brave*, will be eagerly awaited. In a way you have to have sympathy for them – they've set such high standards, they'll inevitably be judged against them for all time. This Scottish fairytale starring Kelly MacDonald looks interesting, certainly, even if the trailer wasn't the most polished in Pixar history.

Depending on where in the world you live, Studio Ghibli's *Arrietty* (or the mouthful *The Secret World Of Arrietty*) may yet be coming to a cinema near you soon, and is worth seeing. The studio's latest effort, *From Up On Poppy Hill*, may yet see a release some time in 2012 as well. Finger's very and truly crossed.



FROM TOP: BRAVE, THE PIRATES!, THE LORAX

• DRAMA •

There was a time when you had to wait 20 years for a new Terrence Malick film but, after last year's *The Tree Of Life*, we already have three (that's *three*) tentatively pencilled in. That said, the only one we're likely – if “likely” is the right word – to see in 2012 is the still-untitled love story starring Ben Affleck and Rachel McAdams, about which almost nothing else is known. Sure to be divisive when it comes out, a new Malick is still something to get excited about.

The end of 2012 is rather loaded with drama of varying types, meaning it could be an exciting period, although shifting release dates (including, undoubtedly, delays for international releases) will probably see some move forward and some maybe slip over into 2013. Ang Lee returns during this period with *Life Of Pi*, an adaptation of Yann Martel's popular novel of the same name. The other big literary adaptation in the festive period (excluding *The Hobbit*, of course) will be Baz Luhrmann's very promising interpretation of *The Great Gatsby*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as the title character, and a supporting cast including Tobey Maguire and Carey Mulligan.

Django Unchained, meanwhile, is Quentin Tarantino's latest effort, and also stars DiCaprio. Not a great deal is known of the plot – save that it involves a “slave-turned-bounty hunter” out to rescue his wife from a plantation owner. DiCaprio shares an impressive cast list with the likes of Jamie Foxx, Sacha Baron Cohen, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Tarantino ‘regulars’ Samuel L. Jackson and Christoph Waltz.

Steven McQueen's *Shame* deserves a mention, even if many people have already seen it, because it'll be cropping up here and there throughout the year. Similarly, the George Clooney-starring *The Descendants*. *Martha Marcy May Marlene* is another film which has been doing the rounds for some time, impressing at film festivals last year, and which will see a wider release in 2012.

One of the most exciting prospects on

paper is the latest reunion between director John Hillcoat and Guy Pearce, who made *The Proposition* together in 2005. Pearce also cropped up in Hillcoat's adaptation of *The Road*. Nick Cave, who put together the score for *The Proposition*, is also returning for *Wettest County* (previously *The Wettest County In The World*), which stars Shia LaBeouf and Tom Hardy. The story concerns three brothers who run a bootlegging business which comes under threat from the authorities.

It's worth mentioning Ruben Fleischer's *Gangster Squad*, too, primarily because it boasts yet another impressive cast. The ever-present Emma Stone is accompanied by Ryan Gosling, Sean Penn, Nick Nolte and Josh Brolin for this tale of the LAPD's efforts to clean up their city in the 1940s and 50s. There's also Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus* adaptation, which was shot in Belgrade and has received good buzz.



ABOVE: ARGO

• ROUND-UP •

There are plenty of other things we simply don't have enough room to devote to, like Ben Affleck's *Argo*, the Farrelly brothers' interpretation of *The Three Stooges* (starring Larry David), *47 Ronin* (which seems to have been on the horizon for years) and endless other trifles.

It should be an entertaining year; that's for sure. And in the meantime we have the awards season to look forward to. Let the creative backlashes, unfair reassessments and strongly-worded opinion pieces begin. Enjoy. ♣

INTERVIEW WITH

STEVEN SPIELBERG

DIRECTOR OF *WAR HORSE*

WORDS BY ANDREW SIMPSON

When Steven Spielberg arrived in London, he was in a relaxed mood. In the UK to talk up *War Horse*, his new adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's beloved children's novel, the director's conversation was littered with enthused talk of family, the English countryside, and the triumph of the human spirit. Best known until now as an award-winning stage play, *War Horse* is Spielberg's second release in little more than two months. But unlike his recent motion captured take on *Tintin*, *War Horse* features almost no computer animation, instead serving up a grand, old fashioned family epic tale about a teenage boy who leaves his Devon farm to volunteer for service in World War One in a bid to find Joey, his beloved horse.

The film has made headlines for its use of the previously unknown Jeremy Irvine as Albert, its lead. But as well as featuring an all-star cast, all of whom come into contact with Joey during his often nightmarish adventure on the front line, *War Horse* is a film that makes a noble animal its central character, and refreshingly does so without the use of CGI. If it may be a tad sentimental for some, it is a story that has no shortage of admirers, and Spielberg seemed driven to talk about his emotional connection to the story, as well as how *War Horse* represents his first genuinely British film.

FAN THE FIRE: What is so special about the story of *War Horse*?

STEVEN SPIELBERG: It's a love story, and that's what makes it universal. It was that way in the book and it was certainly that way on the boards, and that's what we really tried to do in our adaptation, to really create a bonding story where Joey basically circumvents the emotional globe of the Great War. Joey has a way of bringing people together, especially people from both sides of that war.

FTF: How much responsibility to history do you feel when you make a film set during WWI?

SS: We feel responsible if we make a movie that even touches on historical

"MY FIRST 8MM MOVIES WHEN I WAS 13, WERE ALL WAR MOVIES, WWII MOVIES."

fact that there has to be more than a kernel of truth in the history, and especially the First World War. So we did a lot of research, and the thing that really struck me was the vast numbers of casualties among the horses, not just the men who died on the on the American, British, French and German sides.

FTF: So does that mean you wanted to tell people something about WWI?

SS: This [the First World War] was the death knell of the horse, the end of the horse as an instrument of warfare. It was an era... where the machine, the tank, the aeroplane, chemical warfare it all kind of converged on the First World War, almost an experimental that was the war to end all wars, or at least that's what they thought.

FTF: Why do you think you've done so many war films?

SS: I don't see this really as a war story. This isn't *Saving Private Ryan*, this isn't *Band Of Brothers*. In the movie there's only about fifteen minutes of combat, from the cavalry charge to the fighting in the Somme. I wanted families to see this picture together: there's hardly any blood in this movie at all, and unlike *Saving Private Ryan* where I was trying to acquit the actual testimonies of the young men who actually fought in France on D-Day, when I was trying to make the movie as brutally authentic as I possibly could, I took a different approach to this story.

FTF: But you do seem to have an interest in war, even if you are exploring it in a very different way in *War Horse*.

SS: I'm not ashamed to admit I was not a good student [in school], but I loved history. My dad fought in World War Two and he's turning 95 this month. He was based in Karachi which is now Pakistan. He fought in Burma against the Japanese, and he told these stories, so I grew up hearing these war stories. My first 8mm movies when I was 13, were all war movies, WWII movies. Also war throws characters into chaos and there's no better way to test who a person is than to put him in the middle of a war. That's really going to show you what kind of a character you're telling the story about.

FTF: So *War Horse* has something to say about courage in combat, spurred on by Albert's love for his horse?

SS: Albert shows tremendous courage in pressing forward on the Somme, when he's crossing No Man's Land, and it's almost blind fear that makes him race forward, and that so often happens. But he also has a reason to be racing forward, he has a goal in his heart of finding a horse he's hoping to find amongst the millions of horses in France he actually is audacious enough to think he may find the one, and in fact the one finds him instead.

FTF: What made you cast an actor who had never had any speaking parts in the lead?





“YOU CAN JUST LOOK BACK INTO MY CAREER AT E.T. AND DREW BARRYMORE. CHRISTIAN BALE FROM EMPIRE OF THE SUN AND HAD NEVER MADE A MOVIE BEFORE, AND THAT’S A VERY SIMILAR HISTORY AND CAREER THAT COULD BE IN STORE FOR JEREMY.”

SS: What made Jeremy stand out was that ineffable quality that certain exceptional people have that just stand out and rise above the rest. There were hundreds of very interesting actors and newcomers and nobody had the heart or the spirit or the communication skills that Jeremy had. And I’m accustomed to working with actors who have no experience. You can just look back into my career at *E.T.* and Drew Barrymore. Christian Bale from *Empire Of The Sun* and had never made a movie before, and that’s a very similar history and career that could be in store for Jeremy.

FTF: Was it ever a concern asking someone with no experience to carry a film?

SS: I really trust the authenticity of real people, and my job is get them to be themselves in front of the camera. Often what happens is that when you get a newcomer in front of the camera they freeze up or they imitate actors and other performances that they’ve admired, and they stop becoming themselves. So my job is the director is to always return them to what I first saw in them. I didn’t want Jeremy to be someone he wasn’t, I simply wanted him to be the person he is today. He did a wonderful job playing himself. Scarcely has the British landscape looked so good on film.

FTF: Could you talk the Devon and Castle Combe locations?

SS: Castle Combe looks like Hollywood built it! It doesn’t look real. The Devon location has some of the most natural wonders in all of England, with the tours that are so beautiful. There’s nothing like the landscapes of Devon, we couldn’t believe it. The original script didn’t have the budget that allowed us to go to Devon. We stretched the budget a bit to afford to go there and it was worth every penny.

FTF: Were the horses hard to control on camera, and were you ever concerned for their safety during such tough shoot?

SS: The most difficult shots of the entire film is where the British soldier ➔

and the German soldier are trying to free Joey [who is caught on barbed wire on No Man's Land]. You can get a horse to lie down but it's very difficult to get a horse to kneel down on its forelegs and its back legs, it wants to get right up. So we had very little time to get those shots and to have the actors giving it their best. But the important thing about that was Bobby Lovgren who trained all the horses. He was the one who guarded the horses, who kept them safe, who protected them, and if I had a crazy idea he would say I can do that safely or I can't do that safely... but you have to understand that these horses were really smart.

FTF: *War Horse* once again features a score from John Williams. How important is his music to your films?

SS: We started working together in 1972 on *Sugarland Express*, so this is year forty. John is the most important collaborator I've ever had in my career. He's made me look good, he's made my work look better. I get a lot of credit but it really should be going to John. But I've kept the people in my career who I feel are my family: Kathy [Kennedy, Producer] has been with me since 1978, Janusz Kamiński my cinematographer has made every movie with me since *Schindler's List*; Michael Kahn has cut every movie I've made since 1976 when we made *Close Encounters* together; Rick Carter has done fifteen of my directed films as a production designer. I really believe in the family of collaboration. But John certainly has the most considerable impact because he immediately bypasses the brain and goes right to your heart, and that's how it's always been with him. He's an amazing talent.

FTF: What is your decision process when choosing a script?

SS: How do I choose my movies? They choose me. That sounds glib but it's true. I don't go through a tortuous intellectual process to decide what to direct. I know when I want to direct the second I read something and hear a story, I just know when it grabs me in a

"I'M WAITING FOR THE PHONE CALL WHEN CLINT SAYS HE'S HANGING UP HIS SPURS. THAT'S NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN."

certain way I want to direct it. It's just an undeniable feeling I get, and it's not the same feeling I get when I wind up producing something.

FTF: What was the turning point in your career?

SS: The turning point in my career was *Jaws*. It was a turning point because I was a director for hire before *Jaws* and after *Jaws* was such a big hit, I could do any movie I wanted and Hollywood just wrote me a cheque. I wanted to make this crazy movie about flying saucers, and nobody wanted to make it before *Jaws*, and I tried to get them to make this crazy film about flying saucers... people thought I was crazy and they wouldn't give me the time of day. And the second *Jaws* was a hit everybody said 'Do you still want to make that?' So *Jaws* for me was the turning point.

FTF: What do you see as the ups and downs of your career?

SS: Well I think the perceived downs in my own career are just managing my time, and not feeling that I have enough time for my family and my friends... that usually happens when I'm away and I can't physically get there because I'm in the process of shooting a movie. But those are the real downs, everything else you just have to take with a pinch of salt. The movie does well or the movie doesn't do as well you would have hoped. Some

movies get great reviews, some movies don't. That's just part of what I do for a living.

FTF: So you don't see yourself retiring any time soon?

SS: Well I have no plans to quit. I've always said, and Clint Eastwood is one of my best friends, I've known Clint for 40 years and we have a great, almost a jokey relationship about retirement, and Clint is 81 now, and I always say 'Clint are you ready to retire this year?' and he says 'No, are you?' and I say 'No'. I'm waiting for the phone call when Clint says he's hanging up his spurs. That's never going to happen, if it doesn't happen for Clint it won't happen for me!

FTF: Do you ever think of your children when making movies?

SS: My daughter Destry had a lot to do with me directing *War Horse*. She's fifteen now and she's been competitively riding for eleven years. We live with horses – we have ten horses at home – and we've been living with horses for almost eighteen years. Destry, when she heard that Kathy [Kennedy, Spielberg's Producer] had found this book and this play and I was about to go to London to see it play for the first time, even before I saw the play and came back to report that it made me cry and that I loved it so much, my daughter said 'You have to make *War Horse*, you have to make it for me'. So I did. *War Horse* is in cinemas now







1

I Saw The Devil

Director: Kim Ji-woon. Origin: South Korea. 141 mins. Rated 18



2

The Ides Of March

Director: George Clooney.
Origin: USA. 101 mins. Rated 15



3

50/50

Director: Jonathan Levine.
Origin: USA. 100 mins. Rated 15



4

Super 8

Director: J.J. Abrams. Origin: USA.
112 mins. Rated 12A

5

Drive

Director: Nicolas Winding Refn.
Origin: USA. 100 mins. Rated 18



6

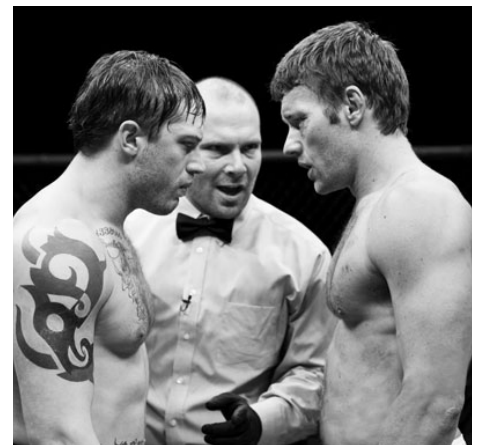
Submarine

Director: Richard Ayoade. Origin: UK.
97 mins. Rated 15

7

Senna

Director: Asif Kapadia. Origin: UK.
106 mins. Rated 12A



8

Bridesmaids

Director: Paul Feig
Origin: USA.
125 mins. Rated 15

9

The Help

Director: Tate Taylor
Origin: USA.
146 mins. Rated 12A

10

Warrior

Director: Gavin O'Connor
Origin: USA.
140 mins. Rated 12A

INTERVIEW WITH

***DANIEL
ESPINOZA
& DENZEL
WASHINGTON***

DIRECTOR AND STAR OF *SAFE HOUSE*

WORDS BY ANDREW SIMPSON

Safe House arrives in cinemas billed as one of the newer brand of action-thrillers. Ryan Reynolds plays Matt Weston, the lowly guard of a CIA safe house in Cape Town, whose normally mundane existence is turned upside down by the arrival of new prisoner Tobin Frost (Denzel Washington), a devious ex-spy turned mercenary who is in possession of valuable information. When the safe house is compromised, Weston is forced to flee across the city with Frost in tow, with dangerous enemies in pursuit.

Safe House uses many of the grainy, handheld camera techniques of the Bourne films, and like them is also a tale of moral corruption at the head of the US secret service, revealing Weston's employers (represented by the reliably terrific Brendan Gleeson) to be not all that they seem, beginning with an early scene in which Frost is water-boarded by US agents. With a series of spectacular chase sequences across Cape Town's poorer neighbourhoods, it is a solid, enjoyable action romp, with Washington on charismatic form. Washington, and the film's Swedish director Daniel Espinosa, who makes his Hollywood with *Safe House*, sat down in London recently to talk politics, fight sequences and the decision to shoot in the Southern Hemisphere.

FAN THE FIRE: *Safe House* makes a strong point about the line between heroes and villains in the war on terror being blurred, especially when your character is water boarded. What was your reaction to that?

DENZEL WASHINGTON: What is it over here, MI5, MI6? Who knows what they do? We don't know what they do, we know that we want to be protected. We claim we want them to be fair and don't torture people. I think that on 9/11 everybody was for torture, or they wanted to get to the bottom of whoever it was [responsible]. I think everyone wants their country to play fair. I don't think it would have made sense for President Obama to come on the air and say, 'Oh by the way, next Tuesday we're going to shoot Bin Laden'. They are going to do it, the way

"I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT I'VE WORKED AS HARD AS I COULD AND I DID THE BEST WORK THAT I COULD DO."

they're going to do it. It's a dirty business.

FTF: People involved in that line of work advised on the film didn't they?

DANIEL ESPINOSA: What moved me was not so much the practical expertise – I always like having these experts there because I want to direct my movie – what got to me was when we were shooting certain scenes I could see that he [the 'interrogation consultant'] was emotionally moved. We talked a lot about how this work had affected his personal life and how it affects you as a human being. These people who go into that line of business go there for ethical reasons at the beginning, but what they're forced to do for their country is sometimes a highly unethical act. How does that affect you as a human being – that's nothing political; that's something that's human. How do we live with compromising our own ethics? For me, that's the core of the movie.

FTF: Denzel, what was your reaction to the material?

DW: I just took it from the opposite angle; I just think that Tobin Frost was a sociopath. When I thought of 'sociopath' I thought of violence. I didn't realise that they say 85 per cent of sociopaths aren't violent, but they are manipulative; they'll lie, they'll use

charm and wit, pity – you know, I'm not as good as you. As soon as you say, no you're alright. You're a nice guy; I'm starting to manipulate you. I think Tobin Frost had the skill set that the CIA appreciated, but they didn't necessarily know he was a sociopath. I think his blood pressure goes down when there's murder and mayhem. I think he was interested in winning; every day I wrote in my script or in my journal, how am I going to win today? What am I going to win? When the guys talk about 'water boarding' I said 'You don't even have the right towels. How stupid are you?'

FTF: You are also a producer on *Safe House*. How did that come about?

DW: I can't do it any other way. When I saw *Snabba Cash* [Espinosa's previous film], and I was fascinated by this young filmmaker. When I met Daniel we talked about his life, where he grew up, what his father did, I was in, as far as Daniel was concerned. I wasn't in as far as the script was concerned – I didn't think it was good enough. I'd been in the habit of helping develop material for a long time – I've been doing it for 20 years or more now – so my agent said "hey, you're doing all this work, you should get credit for it", so we're going to get you a producer credit... I enjoy helping to develop material; ➔



it's a way for me to get into the part. We'd sit in a room day after day and we'd work with two or three different writers for five months.

FTF: Why did you decide to set the film in South Africa?

DW: We had talked about the fact that not wanting to be too similar to *Man On Fire*, but Daniel went to South Africa, and he liked South Africa. And that was it. I think just practically, aside from the look and all that, for my character's perspective, it was going to be easier for me to blend in in a Black

country than in a Brown country.

FTF: You have been quoted as saying that you don't see *Safe House* as an action film. That's surprising given the physicality on show.

DW: I didn't think this was an action movie. I've been hearing that but it didn't read like one. I don't even know what an action movie is. What does that mean? I think it's a testament to Daniel's vision. I think it's intense – I just saw the finished product about a week or so ago, but it plays more intense than it read. One thing Dan-

iel talked about from the start was how funky and dirty he wanted these fights. So I don't know if that's an action movie or it was a little uncomfortable as to how real it was.

DE: I don't think you can direct a movie like an action movie – you can make a movie. I never saw it as fighting; I saw it as struggling. I think that's how you should perceive something not a set piece but a scene. I think all scenes that are in the movie move the character, and if you perceive it as an action movie, maybe that's a testament to thinking it's intense. Then I'm happy.

FTF: Do you ever tire of more physical parts?

DW: I went through a phase where I was sick of acting. I was tired of it; I didn't really want to do it anymore. I was bored with it. Then I tried directing a movie, and I was like shoot, I'll get back over here. It made me appreciate acting more. When I turned 50 I looked in the mirror and I realised, hey, this ain't the dress rehearsal; this is life. I don't know how much more that I'm going to have, and even if I have 50 more years, I probably won't remember the last 20 or 30 of them anyway. In the last three or four years, especially after doing this play on Broadway with the great Viola Davis [*Fences*]... I recommitted myself being thorough as an actor. I want to do good work. I want to do good work with people I want to work with – that's why I mentioned the screenplay [for *Safe House*]; I wasn't that impressed with the screenplay. If I hadn't met Daniel I probably won't have done this movie because it didn't interest me that much. I didn't think it was that good. But I liked Daniel and I liked the way his film was. So when you get the chance to work with people you like and people who are talented, that's rare. I don't know how many more movies I'm going to get the opportunity to make, and I don't want to look back and go, man I just kind of floated through that one, or I just did that one for the money. I want to be able to say that I've worked as hard as I could and I did the best work that I could do.

Safe House is in cinemas February 24th ♣

"I WAS TIRED OF IT; I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO DO IT ANYMORE. I WAS BORED WITH IT. THEN I TRIED DIRECTING A MOVIE, AND I WAS LIKE SHOOT, I'LL GET BACK OVER HERE."



P R O J E C T X

DIRECTED BY NIMA NOURIZADEH **STARRING** THOMAS MANN, OLIVER COOPER, JONATHAN DANIEL BROWN, DAX FLAME, MARTIN KLEBBA & KIRBY BLISS BLANTON

RELEASED MARCH 2

You know that feeling when you're dragged along to a party you aren't really in the mood for, and then when you get there everyone's already drunk and rowdy? When you can't get involved, no matter how much you want to, or how hard you try? Watching *Project X* encapsulates that feeling.

A boy turns 17 and has a crazy party. That's the film's plot, if it can be described as such, and there are no characters in it. But that in itself isn't necessarily criticism, just an observation. Music video director Nima Nourizadeh has attempted to stage the most epic party imaginable, and in a very basic way he satisfies that claim. Todd Phillips (*The Hangover*) is on board here as producer, meaning you can guess the general tone.

We're introduced to the film's three protagonists as they say goodbye to Thomas' (Thomas Mann) parents, who are leaving him in charge of the house. It's his birthday, and his obnoxious friend Costa (Oliver Cooper) and more likable sidekick J.B. (Jonathan Daniel Brown) are desperate to

make it a night to remember. We're also introduced to the film's framing mechanism, which is that all footage is captured on handy cams and various mobile devices. Most of the context for this comes in the form of Dax, an almost entirely off-screen cameraman, but even early on there are holes in the logic of this device. Later, at the party, phone footage and the like is mixed in to create a montage effect.

Any potential the film had in its early stages for *Superbad*-like charm is ignored altogether. Costa's insufferable gags about "getting pussy" and his crass, mock-gangster trash talk wear thin almost immediately, and given that he's clearly intended as the film's most hilarious character, it's damaging how little he does that's actually funny. He makes the other two positively likable by comparison, even though they possess equally little depth.

But the film's star is really the party, not the people in it, so let's deal with that. This is not a long film, but about two thirds of it are spent in and around Thomas' party, which of course escalates beyond all reckoning, and things get progressively more and more out of control. In a way, Nourizadeh and his crew have created a believable party atmosphere in the film, regardless of the more fantasti-

cal elements, and every now and again the up-and-down mechanics of partying are captured in fleeting moments of quality. But that can't disguise the fact that the vast majority of the film is shot like a particularly tiresome music video, one which would likely induce sleep were it not so loud. Countless times the music stops for a brief moment to allow a spattering of dialogue, before dropping again into heavy basslines and another montage of people dancing and falling over. And whenever we start to tire of the dancing and drinking, Nourizadeh has a woman take her bra off, or throws in some downright leery up-skirt shots. Now, it's not being prudish to take issue with these elements, because the film is using them simply to alleviate the monotony of its one, groaning set piece. In a film with no story and no characters, it's left to the escapades of this unlikable mob to entertain us, and they routinely flatter to deceive.

It gets one or two laughs, mainly provided by two extremely young security guards 'hired' to protect the property from destruction, and there are a couple of good sequences, but this house party quickly gets to the stage where you're siding with the angry neighbours wanting to shut the thing down. By the time a ludicrous plot contrivance shows up wielding a flamethrower, you'll be glad of *Project X*'s mercifully short runtime. **MR**

★★★★★



BLACK GOLD

DIRECTED BY JEAN-JACQUES ANNAUD **STARRING** TAHAR RAHIM, MARK STRONG, ANTONIO BANDERAS, FREIDA PINTO, RIZ AHMED, JAMAL AWAR, LOTFI DZIRI & AKIN GAZI

RELEASED FEBRUARY 24 (UK) TBC (USA)

Here is one of those strange mid-budget epics which seems destined not to be seen by many people; a real curio from director Jean-Jacques Annaud. Then again, from the director who followed up *Seven Years In Tibet* with *Enemy At The Gates* and then *Two Brothers*, perhaps we should expect the unexpected.

Black Gold is the story of oil-inspired disputes in the Arab states in the 1930s, when Americans (portrayed here as drawling Texan money-grabbers with almost no screen time) moved in to make the Sultans, and themselves, rich. Antonio Banderas, playing Sultan Nesib, asks “How rich, exactly?” and sees opportunity in the oil fields hidden beneath the contested Yellow Belt territory to improve the lives of his people. He bemoans his existence as a poor king. To be a Sultan in Arabia, he says, is to be “a waiter at the table of the world.” The film’s script occasionally throws pleasing curveballs

like this the audience’s way.

Opposite Nesib is Sultan Amar (Mark Strong), who we are introduced to as he is reluctantly giving his two young sons over to Nesib as part of a peace deal. The treaty will make the contested Yellow Belt a neutral zone, free of conflict. Those two sons, in particular the youngest brother, Auda (*Un Prophète*’s Tahar Rahim) become the film’s protagonists.

After a first act which struggles to maintain its voice, dipping here and there into both sentiment and comedy, the film begins to find its feet. Tahar Rahim, who is 30, somehow convinces as a very young prince, and his transformation into an adult frames both the film’s narrative and its own progression from unsure beginnings into something more confident in itself.

In some ways the film is messy, inconsistent in its tone (at times Banderas seems to be in a different film, only to remember where he is and fall back in line) and occasionally a little wishy-washy for its own narrative good. Freida Pinto, as Princess Leyla, Auda’s lost childhood love, is largely wasted, reduced in the first act to forlornly gazing out of a window. When

she’s at last given some proper scenes, and her character begins to come through, the mechanics of the story serve to keep her screen time minimal. Mark Strong, as conservative Sultan Amar – wary of ‘infidel technology’ and not believing in money – gives a good performance here, although the cast list in general does beg the question as to why more of the lead roles weren’t given to Arab actors.

While a plot contrivance late in the day ensures that an opportunity for a climactic battle sequence is not wasted, the film is not really an action epic, but a sweeping story about belief sets in the Arab world. At times the themes actually come across quite strongly, even if they are sporadically layered on a little thick, and the film doesn’t try your patience nearly as much as you might think after 30 or 40 minutes. There are instances when the narrative veers off course, but it always looks pleasant enough and the score, although it shoots for epic too often, is effective. If you give it a chance, the film manages to just about hang together, and when the strongest performances – Rahim, Strong and Riz Ahmed (introduced fairly late on but worth the wait) – are given time to breathe, it’s actually quite likable at times. **MR**

★★★★★



MARTHA MARCY MAY MARLENE

DIRECTED BY SEAN DURKIN **STARRING** ELIZABETH OLSEN,
JOHN HAWKES, SARAH PAULSON, HUGH DANCY, BRADY
CORBET, CHRISTOPHER ABBOTT & MICHAEL CHMIEL

RELEASED OUT NOW

Already established as a critical darling, *Martha Marcy May Marlene* is the latest American indie to make its way to the UK via Sundance. Sean Durkin's stylish, controlled debut about a young woman's escape from a dangerous cult features a potent combination of dark atmosphere and committed performances, with the latter provided by newcomer and star-in-waiting Elizabeth Olsen. The younger sibling of the famous Twins has rightfully made hay for her performance, a portrayal of a survivor that is rarely less than magnetic. It is almost enough to disguise what is an ultimately insubstantial if bracing piece of cinema.

Olsen plays Martha, a young twenty-something that turns up at her wealthy sister's plush lake house having apparently been missing for more than two years. Exhibiting increasingly

strange behaviour whilst refusing to discuss her previous whereabouts, the film elliptically shifts from one time-frame to another, offering glimpses of her former life on a strange, quasi-Buddhist communal farm run by the alternately intimate and intimidating Patrick (Hawkes), marshalled by intense young convert Watts (Corbert).

Transitioning between these episodes, Durkin draws parallels between the oppressive formality of bourgeois society and the psychological control of commune life, all anchored around Martha's spiralling mental state. Using the camera to make even the ordinary seem unnerving, Durkin successfully creates a lingering sense of dread, illuminating Martha's need to escape both her upbringing and the very frightening new world in which she finds herself. As Martha's mind begins to unravel, the film reveals more of her life under Patrick's watchful control, and the lengths to which his group will go to maintain their existence and power over their members.

But if *Martha Marcy May Mar-*

lene possesses all the atmosphere and personnel to create something truly striking, it ultimately lacks the desire to take its premise further. Instead of electing to say more about its heroine, it opts for a slow and predictable revelation that the basis for Martha's paranoia is all too real. The comparisons of two supposedly oppressive worlds is ultimately leaden, and in choosing suspense over any further development of Martha's crumbling mind, the result is an admittedly tense, yet less interesting, psychological thriller.

The haziness surrounding Martha's experience – and her time on the farm in particular – is never resolved, and ultimately serves to undermine *Martha Marcy May Marlene* as a psychological portrait. The performance of Olsen, effortlessly moving between playful girlishness, catatonia and hysterical paranoia, is remarkable, and in Hawkes' display of more of the strange menace that characterized his Oscar nominated turn in *Winter's Bone*, and an impressive Paulson as Martha's self possessed sister, lie the building blocks of a richer, more lingering tale of indoctrination. Durkin has the tools to create something extraordinary, but seems more in love with the feel than the purpose. The result is a startling if ultimately unenlightening portrait of a woman in trouble. **AS**

★★★★★



THE DESCENDANTS

DIRECTED BY ALEXANDER PAYNE STARRING GEORGE CLOONEY, SHAILENE WOODLEY, BEAU BRIDGES, AMARA MILLER, JUDY GREER, NICK KRAUSE & MATTHEW LILLARD

RELEASED OUT NOW

A return to filmmaking after a seven year hiatus, *The Descendants* represents both a return and a step into new territory for Alexander Payne. The misanthropist auteur's drama about a middle aged man on the verge of bereavement instantly recalls *About Schmidt*, and its focal point of an emotionally stunted schlub dealing with personal crisis could easily be lifted from *Sideways* or *Election*. But whilst those films were often a little too calculated or willing to resort to caricature, *The Descendants* is something altogether looser and more satisfying. Featuring a vanity-free performance by George Clooney, it is Payne's best film to date by some distance, and one of Hollywood's finest on the subject of grief.

George Clooney plays Matt King, a wealthy Hawaiian lawyer who acts as the trustee for his family's last piece of ancestral paradise. Facing pressure to sell to developers and make a killing, King is plunged into crisis when his wife Elizabeth suffers a boating accident and falls into a coma. Dealing with the twin revelations that she had been unfaithful and that she will never wake up, he decides to take his chil-

dren on a trip to confront her lover.

Payne, adapting Kauai Hart Hemmings' novel, has crafted a film neatly attuned to the messiness of life, and filled with lightly comic moments. Mostly avoiding the cathartic, on the nose dialogue of *Sideways* and the snideness of some of his earlier work, *The Descendants* is alive to the banal practicalities of bereavement. Cranky relatives (here wonderfully played by Robert Forster), friends and even adulterers have to be told the news, and a seemingly idyllic island community disguises petty family squabbles, secret resentments and tacky tourism.

Throughout, there is an emphasis on people unable to express themselves. Playing King as an emotionally uncommunicative putz, Clooney's performance is a nuanced study of chinowearing passivity. A master at evading emotional confrontation, his nature has left him estranged from seventeen year old tearaway Alexandra (Shailene Woodley) and ten year old Scottie (Amara Miller). Challenged to face up to his emotions and responsibilities, what begins as an infuriatingly courteous journey inevitably becomes an avenue for family reconciliation, and opening up about anger and grief.

Seeing life as both comedy and tragedy, *The Descendants* is frequently funny in moments of sadness, with Clooney's girlish sprint to a friend's

house upon learning of Elizabeth's betrayal simultaneously hilarious and agonising. Both mocking and sympathising with his characters, Payne's growth as filmmaker is shown by minor players previously used for comic effect (a naked Kathy Bates in *About Schmidt*) being replaced by recognisably human fodder, such as convincingly squirming adulterer Matthew Lillard, who King confronts in a moment of witty catharsis.

Meanwhile Alexandra's surfer friend Sid (Nick Krause) steals a few scenes with his clueless insensitivity, and Woodley is particularly impressive, humanely complimenting her father's confused, blossoming self-awareness. Their wordlessly morphing, solidifying relationship is perhaps Payne's finest and most subtle achievement, and again it is a willingness to let meaning flow without dialogue that represents *The Descendants'* strongest suit.

Suffering a slight misstep in its final third, *The Descendants* makes the mistake of offering Clooney an emotive speech suited to an Oscar campaign, and some of the other conclusions also feel a little too pat. But the emotional resolution is earned, the result of Payne having created characters with lives tangible beyond their narrative function. The sharp wit and commitment to damaged men remain, but with his newfound appreciation of what goes unsaid, *The Descendants* sees Payne finally becoming the filmmaker many have claimed he was all along. **AS**

★★★★★



THIS MEANS WAR

DIRECTED BY MCG STARRING REESE WITHERSPOON, TOM HARDY, CHRIS PINE, TIL SCHWEIGER, CHELSEA HANDLER, JOHN PAUL RUTTAN, ABIGAIL SPENCER & ANGELA BASSETT

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) MARCH 2 (UK)

His first film in three years since the intrinsically disappointing *Terminator Salvation*, *This Means War* makes you wonder whatever made McG a big name in the first place.

When two top CIA operatives (Hardy and Pine) start to date the same girl (Witherspoon), they enlist the help of their respective tactical squads to wage an epic war on each other as they attempt to win Lauren's affections. So far so good, and the plot actually sounds like it might be entertaining, but McG's laughable execution falls at the first hurdle.

The success or failure of a rom-com largely boils down to the relation-

ships in the middle. You always know what you're going to get with the resolution, and can probably predict the plot points along the way, so how the characters interact can make or break a movie. Here, it breaks it.

Overseen very sloppily by McG, with continuity errors in the film-making and screenplay from the very beginning, the all-important chemistry between love rivals never takes off. Apparently best friends and with countless secret missions under their belt together, Pine's FDR and Hardy's Tuck appear as if they met the day before the movie picks up. There's no bravado, no banter, no bromance, and while Hardy comes out on top in the acting stakes, his character doesn't really fit the man's persona. With Sam Worthington dropping out of the film fairly late on, with Hardy taking up the slack the script needed to be tweaked

to realign with his demeanour and physicality, but quite apparently, it was left untouched.

And neither have chemistry with Witherspoon too. Well within her comfort, you never feel like the actress is really pushing herself, failing to make believable connections with either leading man. It's most disappointing because all three have proven acting ability but they never get a chance to show it, as the narrative skates over them as people to focus more on their pizzazz. Which fails too.

This Means War lacks conviction and the mere heart it needed to captivate an audience. A ridiculous plot is punctuated by out of place action scenes and a chronic lack of humour, while the side-story that's supposed to be keeping the agents busy when they're not vying for Lauren's heart – after all, they're meant to be fighting international crime, not each other – has no impact at all. *This Means War* is average on all corners. **SB**

★★★★★



THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL

DIRECTED BY JOHN MADDEN **STARRING** JUDI DENCH, BILL NIGHY, DEV PATEL, CELIA IMRIE, MAGGIE SMITH, TOM WILKINSON, PENELOPE WILTON & RONALD PICKUP

RELEASED FEBRUARY 24 (UK) MAY 4 (USA)

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel can best be described as a light confection of the type of quintessentially British humour that has proved increasingly popular with audiences over the last few years. Director John Madden (*Shakespeare In Love*) conjures an in-offensive tea-and-crumpets sort of charm, and with an all-star cast including the likes of Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, it is impossible to imagine that *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* will be anything less than a hit.

The story follows the exploits of a group of jaded pensioners who, finding resources, adventure and purpose lacking in Blighty, embark on a journey of soul-seeking in India. So far, so *Eat Pray Love*, but the story is given some

substance by stand-out performances from Tom Wilkinson as the repressed and unfulfilled high court judge Graham, Bill Nighy as the unhappily married Douglass and Judi Dench as the recently widowed Evelyn. Maggie Smith charms as the acerbic, xenophobic Muriel, seeking a cheap hip-replacement in India.

This disparate group arrive at the romantic but dishevelled Marigold hotel where the young, overzealous manager Sonny (Dev Patel) promises to help them 'outsource old age' in peaceful and tranquil surroundings. *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel's* appeal hinges on Brits-abroad humour (Muriel is scared of Indians) and is livened up by the romance between Sonny and his girlfriend Sunaina, of whom his mother staunchly disapproves.

While the initial pace is satisfyingly quick (characters are on their way to India within 15 minutes of the opening titles) the film somewhat drags

in the middle and the final act is too drawn-out for what should be light-hearted Sunday-afternoon fare. This would be acceptable if the additional running time contributed to further character development but it is fair to say that everything to be learned about these characters is revealed in the first hour, raising questions as to why the excess footage failed to hit the cutting room floor.

The film also seems to abandon some of its characters midway through; Celia Imrie's sexed-up Madge is mysteriously absent for much of the film, and some loose ends are tied together rather too neatly (or implausibly) to be convincing at the end.

At its peak *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* does evoke genuine warmth but it does not entirely escape the usual travel clichés. 'India is noisy, the food is spicy but the people are welcoming' appear to be the main cultural observations. How true they are, the film doesn't bother to say, but it would be churlish to condemn *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* in its entirety. It delivers some real laughs and offers brilliant performances from an experienced cast; just don't expect anything you haven't seen before. **MW**

★★★★★



R A M P A R T

DIRECTED BY OREN MOVERMAN **STARRING** WOODY HARRELSON, BEN FOSTER, ICE CUBE, NED BEATTY, ANNE HECHT, STEVE BUSCEMI, SIGOURNEY WEAVER & CYNTHIA NIXON

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 24 (UK)

One of the most stylistically uncompromising American dramas of recent years, *Rampart* is a film preordained for cult status. Like some of the most distinctive American New Wave films of the 1970s, from Robert Altman to Arthur Penn, Oren Moverman's second feature is less concerned with plot than mood, and more focused on capturing the mindset of a character than feeding easy resolutions to its audience. Likely to exhilarate and enrage in equal measure, it will appeal to those that like their cinema a little crooked, and will ultimately get more plaudits – though no Oscar, it seems – for Woody Harrelson's performance than for its distinctive take on the crime genre.

Offering one of the most convincing on-screen sociopaths in recent memory, Harrelson plays 'Date Rape' Dave Brown, a foot soldier for the scandal-hit L.A.P.D. of the late '90s.

Having created a worldview to justify everything from the violent abuse of suspects to his keeping of two ex-wives in adjacent homes, his rhythm of drinking, womanising and avoiding responsibility is interrupted when he is filmed brutally beating a suspect. Suddenly sucked into the role of a poster boy for all that is wrong with his department, he finds his various misdemeanours, both personal and legal, coming back to bite him.

Besides Harrelson's performance, *Rampart* is most striking for the way it continually sidesteps genre conventions. With any number of difficulties potentially set to bring Brown to heel, Moverman instead has his character use his sharp mind to bat away the attentions of Attorney General Sigourney Weaver, pursue an abusive relationship with damaged lawyer Robin Wright, and commit murder in an attempt to hijack a robbery. Even whilst being drawn deeper into the mire, the conflicts Brown creates for himself remain unresolved, offering a snapshot of the whirlwind within which he exists rather than building towards the

traditional thriller payoff.

Shot digitally, *Rampart* imagines Los Angeles as a flat, hazy panorama. The perfect environment for a character seemingly living within a dream, the air of unreality around Brown's world is emphasised as his mental state continues to spiral, with particularly woozy scenes including a 360 degree pan around a conference room and an off-the-wall sequence in an underground nightclub. *Rampart's* eccentricities will offend those committed to a straighter, chillier style, but its stylistic looseness only serves to underline Brown's utter disconnect from reality, proving very effective.

Repairing with the leading man from his impressive debut *The Messenger*, Moverman has used a script from that master of moral obfuscation, James Ellroy, to create something distinctive and uncompromising, and Harrelson is simply a revelation. Playing Brown as gaunt, manic and utterly paranoid, his character is utterly unknowable yet completely realised. For those unwilling to ride alongside its antihero, *Rampart* may seem like a frustrating dead end. Those that are will be taken on a lingering journey into fantasy land. **AS**

★★★★★



JEFF WHO LIVES AT HOME

DIRECTED BY JAY DUPLASS & MARK DUPLASS **STARRING**
JASON SEGEL, ED HELMS, JUDY GREER, RAE DAWN CHONG,
SUSAN SARANDON, J.D. EVERMORE & JOE CHREST

RELEASED MARCH 16 (USA) APRIL 20 (UK)

Jeff Who Lives At Home, is a predictably quirky, left-field slacker comedy. Written and directed by comedy duo Jay and Mark Duplass, the film reflects their trademark indie-spirited humour, and is in parts mildly reminiscent of their (much funnier and breakthrough) 2010 comedy, *Cyrus*.

The eponymous Jeff (Jason Segel) is 30, he lives at home in his mother's basement and has no job, no girlfriend, nor any of the modern hallmarks of a

successful well-adjusted man. Totally lacking in earthly ambition, Jeff believes that he has a true destiny and maintains a vigilant lookout for cosmic signs directing him towards his true calling. But when his mother Carol (Susan Sarandon) forces him to leave the house on an errand, he bumps into his far less divinely-inspired brother, Pat (Ed Helms), and the two soon find themselves embroiled in an unexpected adventure. Although Jeff's innocent, childlike worldview initially clashes with Pat's more pragmatic concerns the two brothers bond while attempting to spy on Pat's seemingly adulterous wife.

The problem with this movie is

that Jeff is really rather annoying. His naïve, happy-go-lucky insistence that the universe has a divine plan he must follow becomes cloying within 20 minutes, and were it not for the magnificent Susan Sarandon on top form as his lonely put-upon mother, and Helms in the supporting role as the more grounded Pat, the film would be unwatchably saccharine.

So it's just as well that *Jeff Who Lives At Home* is brief. At 84 minutes it feels remarkably like an extended episode of a good sitcom. The laughs are reasonably regular and there is some real truth in its more bittersweet moments. Its pared down cinematography even closely resembles the mockumentary style employed in TV shows like *The Office*. The fact that it is reminiscent of a TV show does not make the film any less entertaining but it does mean that it lacks a cinematic feel, making it difficult to take seriously as a feature-length film. **MW**

★★★★★



WAR HORSE

DIRECTED BY STEVEN SPIELBERG STARRING JEREMY IRVINE, EMILY WATSON, PETER MULLAN, BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, DAVID THEWLIS & TOM HIDDLESTON

RELEASED OUT NOW

After what has been, by his standards, a fairly restful period (in which we have seen only one film – *Indiana Jones 4* – with his name in the director slot), Steven Spielberg returned with two films in 2011. The first, his interpretation of *Tintin*, was fairly successful in what it attempted, and *War Horse* is too, with a few caveats, meaning this year has been an altogether a decent one for the veteran filmmaker.

Spielberg and his cinematographer Janusz Kamiński get things moving in picturesque Devon, where Ted Narracott (Mullan) has just spent what little savings his family had on a stallion, even though they need a horse to help them plough the rocky field outside their farmhouse. His wife Rose (Watson) is horrified – after all, their sleazy landlord (Thewlis) is already breathing down their necks – but Albert (Irvine), their young son, christens the horse Joey and begins to form a deep bond with him.

In these opening scenes, Kamiński simply points his camera at the gorgeous Devon landscape, and

we are immediately drawn in. Joey – played by seven horses over the course of the film – is gradually trained among the quiet fields in a series of playful, almost Malick-esque scenes, where horse and boy romp together in mainly wordless communication while nature fills in the gaps. It's an endearing introduction, even if it does also serve to introduce Albert's friend Andrew (Milne), who is the film's most irritating supporting character; a gurning simpleton who grins gormlessly through most of his lines. The family goose is more effective and gets twice as many laughs.

When WWI is announced, Ted dispiritingly sells Joey to an army officer called Captain Nicholls (Tom Hiddleston) and Albert and his horse are separated. The emotions conjured in these scenes don't feel forced, because we already believe that Albert and Joey have a connection. Hiddleston – like many other famous faces who turn up for a fairly short time – does well in his role. All this leads to a nicely shot, kinetic battle scene in a German camp, which is completely bloodless but still effective.

So far, so good, but it's at this point that the film loses its way. The story is now Joey's to command, and the machinations of the narrative

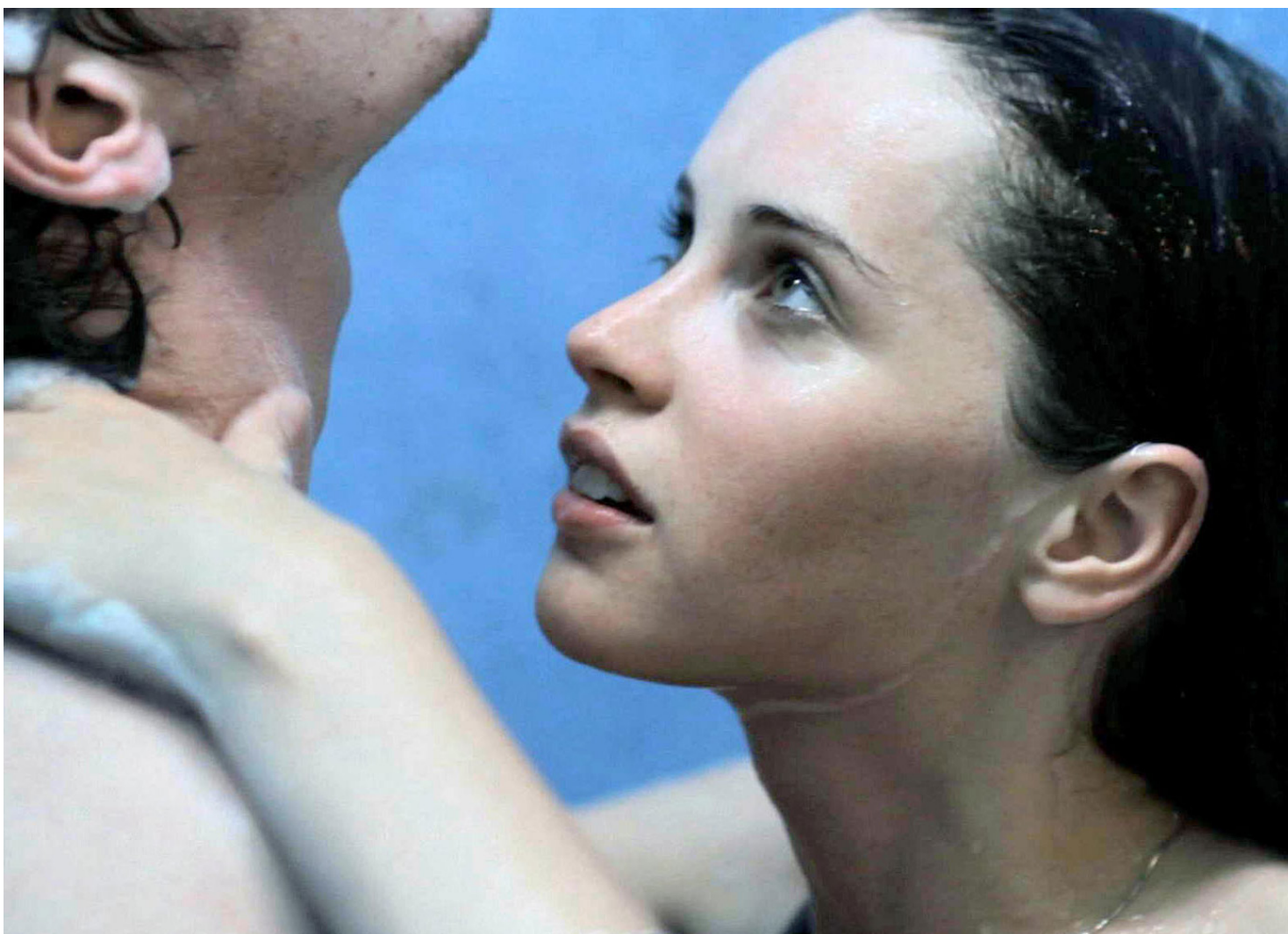
have him travelling with deserting young German troops before hiding out with an elderly French farmer and the young girl in his care, Emilie. Then we're back with the Germans and off to war again, before a series of reunions can begin. Incidentally, don't think you're free from Andrew's grimacing, even in the trenches of No Man's Land.

The story slows to a crawl in this section because the weight of Joey's relationship with Albert, or indeed with Captain Nicholls, is completely off-screen. Indeed, the most believable and touching comradeship he finds is with another horse.

The scenes on the French farm, in particular, feel forced and inconsequential. Once things get back on track in No Man's Land, the film picks up again, and builds to a predictable but heart-warming conclusion. Before that, we get a powerful scene involving barbed wire (which could distress very young viewers) followed by a touching, if overly dragged out, conversation in the quiet mists when all the gunfire has stopped.

The film is nicely shot and ultimately earns its right to tug on your heart strings, even if it does so quite blatantly at times. There are some laughs, some good set pieces, and nicely complementary supporting performances. If it lags in the middle, it can be forgiven, because it has a warm heart despite its inconsistencies. **MR**

★★★★★



LIKE CRAZY

DIRECTED BY DRAKE DOREMUS **STARRING** ANTON YELCHIN, FELICITY JONES, JENNIFER LAWRENCE, CHARLIE BEWLEY, ALEX KINGSTON, OLIVER MUIRHEAD & FINOLA HUGHES

RELEASED OUT NOW

Falling for native Jacob (Yelchin) while in LA to study, Anna (Jones) knows she's pushing her luck by overstaying her student visa but in a moment of passion, turns her back on the airport for an extra couple of weeks with her darling before spending the summer back in England.

What is portrayed as a crazy, unpredictable plot is quite the opposite, telegraphed the moment Anna chooses to miss her flight. Downhill from there, for Anna and Jacob and the film in general, as she is banned from re-entering the States, and ultimately,

their relationship pays the price.

Like Crazy though fails to explore each's new partners, forever fixated on the central relationship. And while that isn't always a bad thing, when main duo fail to captivate in their own right, it feels a misstep not to have expanded the narrative a little wider.

Like Crazy's success largely depends on you rooting for Anna and Jacob from the very beginning, but I unfortunately, did not. I didn't feel any sympathy for the difficulties of their long distance relationship after such stupidity at the start of the film.

It's not all bad though and the film's entirely improved dialogue feels wonderfully naturalistic. The plot was mapped out in advance, based loosely on one of director Drake Doremus's earlier relationships, immigration

problems and all, but the actual dialogue was either made up on the spot, on the day of filming or borrowed from a run-through some two weeks prior to shooting. And the shoot, it should be noted too, was wrapped on a \$250,000 budget and filmed with a consumer Canon EOS 7D dSLR camera.

Anton Yelchin turns in another uninspiring performance, although opposite, Felicity Jones proves again that she's going to be a big star in the future and here is something of a revelation, easily stealing the show.

Like Crazy is a younger generation's more indie version of *One Day*. It suffers from a lot of problems, but in the end the positives just about come out on top. In Felicity Jones, Doremus struck gold and unsurprisingly she's to return for his next film, if only frustrations that lead right back to the start of the film had been ironed out and the sky would have been the limit. **SB**

★★★★★



THE WOMAN IN BLACK

DIRECTED BY JAMES WATKINS **STARRING** DANIEL RADCLIFFE, CIARÁN HINDS, JANET MCTEER, SOPHIE STUCKEY, LIZ WHITE, ALISA KHASANOVA & MISHA HANDLEY

RELEASED OUT NOW

A fitting recent companion piece to *The Woman In Black* is perhaps Nick Murphy's *The Awakening*. Both films were made on reasonably tight budgets (although *The Woman In Black* reportedly cost significantly more than *The Awakening*'s humble £3m), both feature partially-observed faces peering out of windows, and both feature well-known actors wandering alone through haunted houses for much of their run times. They are also both adeptly handled, satisfying chillers which capitulate frustratingly in their final act.

This adaptation of the well-liked book and stage play of the same name was penned by Jane Goldman (*Kick-Ass*, *X-Men: First Class*) and directed by James Watkins. It stars Daniel Radcliffe in his first post-*Potter* role, although drawing attention to that is perhaps to do the actor a disservice. People will see this performance as an attempt to diversify, but in reality his career has been directed up to now by the size and weight of the *Harry Potter* franchise, not so much out of personal choice. This is simply an actor who is well-known for a particular role no longer playing that role.

And he's perfectly fine as Arthur Kipps, although I did have a funda-

mental issue with his casting. He simply looks too young for the part. When a character asks him how old his son is, and he replies "four", I immediately thought "Hang on a minute. Really?" I was expecting a character in the film to give some context to his age, but that never happened. Not having read the book or seen the play, I may be missing something here, and to be fair it isn't exactly a deal-breaker as regards the effectiveness of the film, but it did sit a little uneasily as I watched.

The plot sees Arthur travelling north from London to a remote village which has not yet embraced the technology of the age. Sam Daily (Ciarrán Hinds), a local landowner who befriends Arthur, drives the only car in the village. Arthur has been tasked with sorting out an old estate which no longer has any occupants, although we quickly learn that the prospect of his messing around in the affairs of the past has the locals on edge. Arthur is compelled to finish his task because he has been threatened with redundancy, which explains why he is determined to carry on with his investigation, even when things begin to turn sour.

The old estate (in classic horror tradition) is an isolated, lonely place; a yawning old building filled with creepy decorations and separated from the mainland by a causeway. The sight of water drowning the road and washing away Arthur's escape route provides an effective visual reminder that he is cut

off from any source of help.

The first two acts are based around a central set piece in which Arthur is trapped in the house for a night, and here Watkins serves up an effective slice of haunted house filmmaking. Like countless protagonists in the films which serve as inspiration for this, Radcliffe stalks the house's seemingly endless rooms, chasing shadows and cocking his ear to mysterious, faraway sounds. It's formulaic in the extreme, but effective lighting and sound, as well as strong set design (there are plenty of visual cues and reminders lurking in the frame) make it a suitably tense and creepy mid-section. Radcliffe is mostly silent through long stretches of the film, and though the script doesn't give him as much to do as Rebecca Hall in *The Awakening*, he is effective enough in what is required of him.

The film's ending (and indeed Arthur's history) may rankle those who know the source material, as changes have been made. My issues with the ending, however, are purely based on the fact that it scuppers the tension and intrigue of the build-up, misses the chance to give us an emotional pay-off, and generally feels rushed.

In the end, the film doesn't do much more than tell an effective haunted house story. Decent supporting performances help lift the sections which unfold away from the old estate, but the film doesn't separate itself enough from the tropes of the genre to truly stand out. There are plenty of effective jump scares, and it's nicely shot, but beneath the surface there isn't a great deal going on. Which is a shame, because for a fair while it gives a very good account of itself. **MR**

★★★★★



H A Y W I R E

DIRECTED BY STEVEN SODERBERGH **STARRING** GINA CARANO, MICHAEL FASSBENDER, EWAN MCGREGOR, BILL PAXTON, CHANNING TATUM & MICHAEL DOUGLAS

RELEASED OUT NOW

Set up on a botched job, private-ops Government contractor Mallory Kane is forced to go on the run as she attempts to get to the bottom of who doubled-crossed her and just how high the conspiracy goes. But thinking she's gone rogue, Kane's team from their last successful mission in Barcelona are tasked by boss Kenneth (McGregor) to stop her in her tracks, though as they soon find out, it takes more than you'd expect to bring the feisty Kane down.

Gina Carino is impressive in her debut performance but doesn't quite possess the charisma to carry the film's lead role. Coming out of an MMA background, she's thoroughly at home in

the action sequences but is still very raw elsewhere and fails to possess the emotion and subtleties the film needs from her in the several sequences of extended dialogue.

The rest of the cast put in solid turns, providing solid ground for Carino's all-action spectacular, though their collective effort unfortunately still stutters at best.

It's that rawness from Carino and a lack of sheen in the filmmaking that makes it fall flat on the big screen. The plot is contrived and massively over complicated, meaning as a result, it never truly picks up real pace as the twists and double-crossings do little to draw you in. *Haywire* feels like a lot of people aimlessly running around for 90 minutes, kicking each other to the whimsical jazz score.

The choreography is frenetic, and with the soundtrack on mute for these

brief moments, you'll quickly learn to savour the action; the opening fight in an isolated diner is particularly impressive. But thanks to many of the above frustrations and more, *Haywire* doesn't add up to the sum of its parts.

Everything feels very clean cut and sparsely put together, which while adding to certain elements of the film, on the whole, leaves it cold and uninspiring. For a thriller, it's shocking low on thrills, another impact of the lean production values. *Haywire* just doesn't suck you in, with a plot that by the end, resolved twists and all, that appears lifeless and convoluted. Director Steve Soderbergh and writer Lem Dobbs have unfortunately mistaken a story that criss-crosses the world for a captivating narrative, but the two are far from the same thing.

I wanted to like Soderbergh's latest, I really did, but *Haywire* needed to offer up at least a hint of emotion before I could return the favour with my own. And I got nothing. **SB**

★★★★★



I N D A R K N E S S

DIRECTED BY AGNIESZKA HOLLAND **STARRING** ROBERT WIECKIEWICZ, BENNO FÜRMAN, AGNIESZKA GROCHOWSKA, MARIA SCHRADER, HERBERT KNAUP & MARCIN BOSAK

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) MARCH 16 (UK)

In Darkness is perhaps the bravest setting for a film in recent years: not because of its social context (although in dealing with the ransacking of a Polish ghetto by German forces, it certainly stakes a claim), but because it is set almost entirely in the dark and fetid confines of a sewage system.

When news of an impending attack spreads through the ghetto of Lvov, Leopold Socha agrees to aid a group of Jews into the city's sewers. Socha is the only man left in Lvov capable of looking after the sewers, and is trusted by the local authorities and their German overseers to maintain the labyrinth of tunnels and caverns that burrow beneath the crumbling city. His decision to aid the group is born out of a need for money (he dislikes "Yids" as much as the rest of his country folk, and has no qualms telling Chiger to turn some of his group away to their certain deaths). But as

the months wear on, and the money runs out, Socha must decide whether he is the sort of man who will stand back and watch evil run its course, or risk his life and the safety of his family to save an innocent group of people he barely knows.

Working under Poland's cinematic talisman Andrzej Wajda – followed by stints directing episodes of *The Wire*, *The Killing*, and *Treme* – has given Agnieszka Holland a mature confidence and masterful touch. The opening is gripping; choreographing vast numbers of extras across a large set to perfectly capture the panic and hysteria of an impending Nazi invasion. The scope of the scene condenses to a small room with a rabble of desperate Jews attempting to escape into the sewers: and all that energy is packed into the room with them. Moving further, we find ourselves trapped and disoriented in the darkness of the sewers, racing through the muck and mire.

The cinematography down in the tunnels is wonderful: using limited lighting to great effect. In moments of great tension, the darkness is interrupted by sudden bursts of action and

light. Torchlight that seems a great way off suddenly ruptures the entire screen; blinding us momentarily in the darkness of the cinema and leaving us preying not to be caught. At other times the lighting is cruel and cold: projecting a sickly, Francis Bacon pallor across the fetid sewers as we come face to face with the constant, plodding degradation. But then somehow there are also moments of great warmth: bathing the characters in a homely glow as they find brief glimpses of humour and humanity in their plight.

The performances are equally astute. Fraying nerves, desperation and utter grief are boxed up in the confines of this dank, dripping hell. It is almost inconceivable that such horror could be composed and structured into a meaningful emotional journey shared by so many individual characters, yet somehow Holland and her cast have succeeded spectacularly.

Despite its many merits, the story drags, and at 145mins it is perhaps too long. Of course it should be moving and melancholy; but other films have used the Holocaust as an excuse to be *just* that. This film is trying to do more – it wants to be visceral, and energetic – and with a more confident cut it could achieve it in bundles. **ND**

★★★★★



SAFE HOUSE

DIRECTED BY DANIEL ESPINOSA **STARRING** DENZEL WASHINGTON, RYAN REYNOLDS, VERA FARMIGA, BRENDAN GLEESON, NORA ARNEZEDER & ROBERT PATRICK

RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 24 (UK)

As enemy of the state Tobin Frost, Denzel Washington channels much of the same charismatic energy that won him an Oscar for *Training Day*, conjuring up an anti-hero (or is that anti-villain?) worthy of his screen time.

Daniel Espinosa's frenetic thriller *Safe House* pits this performance against Ryan Reynolds' Matt Weston, whose job it is to guard a 'safe house' – a location the CIA keeps secret and empty, ready for situations in which it may be needed. Matt is young and eager to succeed in the international intelligence business, but he wants to be a field case worker, not a babysitter to a house full of empty rooms. His girlfriend, naturally, doesn't know what he really does for a living.

When his safe house is finally called into use, Matt is brought face-to-face with Frost who, we are told, has been selling international secrets for years. People fear and respect him. Washington instils him with just the right amount of ambiguity required by a script which is fairly break-neck at times. Espinosa's handheld style of

shooting quickly establishes his lead characters by cross-cutting two storylines, and isn't afraid to launch into action as soon as possible, making the film's opening act pretty strong. We get a clear sense of what's going on despite the on-screen chaos.

From there, *Safe House* begins to resemble a *Bourne* film, though this is intended mostly as a compliment. The supporting cast expands to include reliable actors such as Vera Farmiga and Brendan Gleeson, whose main role for the first couple of acts is to walk around a CIA control room looking variously stressed, suspicious or incredulous. These two bring likability and weight to characters that have to deal with most of the film's exposition, as random CIA operatives chime in with back story and context.

This leaves Reynolds and Washington alone to fizz off of each other, and they actually make for very pleasing company. There is plenty of head-cracking action, particularly for Reynolds, and he comes out of this really well. There is also a lot of *Bourne*-style fast cutting and kinetic editing, but Espinosa keeps this mostly on the right side of watchable, and there are some well choreographed fight scenes as well as some meaty car crashes.

The whole thing is far more

watchable and likable than it has any right to be. It's derivative of many thrillers we've seen in recent years, but the strength of its cast and the technical quality of the action do a lot to make us forget those similarities.

Frustratingly, it's when the film enters its third act that the over-familiarity becomes more of an issue, as twists are revealed and motivations are explained. Those motivations aren't given enough attention and are left too late, while the twists, though still effective, are predictable. Similarly, the true importance of the film's central MacGuffin (which, to give the screenwriters credit, never actually feels like the film's driving force) is skimmed over somewhat.

The machinations of the plot don't give a huge amount of time for sentiment, but there is a nice, if clichéd, scene between Matt and his girlfriend (Nora Arnezeder), and Washington and Reynolds do build up a convincing, if tried and tested, connection. There is also an unexpectedly poignant scene between Frost and one of his former criminal allies.

We've seen most of this before, and in many ways it's very similar to the *Bourne* films, but frankly it still works as a standalone piece. With good central performances, hard-hitting action and a controlled sense of style, *Safe House* is much better than you may be expecting. **MR**

★★★★★



JOURNEY 2: THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

DIRECTED BY BRAD PEYTON **STARRING** DWAYNE JOHNSON, JOSH HUTCHERSON, VANESSA HUDGENS, MICHAEL CAINE, LUIS GUZMÁN, KRISTIN DAVIS & MICHAEL BEASLEY

RELEASED OUT NOW

I don't think it would surprise anyone that *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island* is a nonsensical experience. First, there's the name. Do you get it? This is a sequel, but also they're travelling to a mysterious island. The follow-up to *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, calling it just *The Mysterious Island* would have been much better, or at least *Journey To...*, but in all honesty, that's the least of its problems.

After accessing a segment of a recorded broadcast, Sean Anderson (Hutcherson) breaks into a satellite research centre to borrow their technology to hear the rest, only the schoolkid unsurprisingly catches the interest of the police. Were this *Journey 1* and Sean would be in trouble as his volcan-

ologist uncle probably doesn't hold any favours with the law. Lucky therefore this is a film with an entirely different cast. Dwayne Johnson now plays the father role, married to Sean's re-cast mother, Liz (Davis). A cop himself, Hank gets the troublemaker off the hook, only with a full recording now in Sean's possession, and a series of clues that lead to a mysterious island, deep in the Pacific Ocean, Hank actually opened a can of worms.

Bankrolling a trip halfway across the world in an attempt to bond with his step-son, against all odds, Hank, Sean and their tour guides actually make it to the island, although with animals, insects and secrets beyond their wildest dreams, a 10ft butterfly is just the start of one incredible getaway adventure.

For this sort of silly, family fantasy to work, it's key the filmmakers get you in the mood from the off. In *Journey 2*, it felt like none of them wanted

to be there. Though Josh Hutcherson is fairly solid, and Michael Caine is full of energy as Sean's castaway grandfather, from Johnson to Vanessa Hudgens, Kristin Davis and an under-used Luis Guzmán, most of the talent look embarrassed to be on-screen. They turn in laborious, awkward performances when electric actors might have been the only thing to kickstart this languid effort. If they were thrown into a real jungle environment it might have helped, but despite very briefly shooting in Hawaii, sequences on the island wild are largely from a studio. The use of sets and CGI is painfully obvious, and while life-like attention to detail certainly wasn't to be expected, something better than what is lazily dumped around the cast should have been a necessity.

The plot and script leaves a lot to be desired, but that isn't what attentive young eyes will come to see. *Journey 2* lacks thrill and excitement, and doesn't accomplish even the most basic of desires from a film such as this: to be fun. There are moments when you won't be utterly bored, but if that's all you look for in a film, you need to broaden your horizons, and certainly those of your kids. **SB**

★★★★★



EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE

DIRECTED BY STEPHEN DALDRY **STARRING** TOM HANKS, SANDRA BULLOCK, THOMAS HORN, MAX VON SYDOW, VIOLA DAVIS, JOHN GOODMAN & JEFFREY WRIGHT

RELEASED OUT NOW

After decades of prolific work in many excellent films, the wonderful Max von Sydow has now, at 82, received his second Academy Award nomination, for his supporting turn in Stephen Daldry's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, an adaptation of the novel of the same name. This is a decision which throws up a conundrum. Yes, it's good to acknowledge a great performer, but to do so in a film like this, in which the best male performance comes from a 15-year-old unknown, Thomas Horn, smacks a little of sentimentality.

This is a film which surprised a few people when it turned up on the Academy's Best Picture shortlist, but some of the harshest reviews have perhaps treated it a little unfairly. Horn plays Oskar Schell, a young boy whose father is killed in the attacks of September 11, 2001, which immediately sets it alongside a mini canon of works which have dealt with the problematic subject. Rather than focusing on the heroism of the emergency services or the experiences of those trapped firsthand in the disaster, like Oliver Stone did in *World Trade Center*, or on the tense preceding events, as Paul Greengrass did with *United 93*, Stephen Daldry's film focuses on a family and how they are dealing with their loss,

one year on.

Oskar's father Thomas (played by Tom Hanks in flashbacks) was a good role model to his son, who has been tested ("inconclusively", as Oskar tells us) for Asperger's syndrome. Unable to accept his father's death, Oskar keeps a hidden shrine to his absent parent, while his relationship with his distraught mother (Sandra Bullock) worsens. When he finds a key amongst his father's old possessions, Oskar sets about finding a person whom he knows only as 'Black'; the name on the key's envelope. Naturally, he sees this as a link to his missing father. But as he quickly learns, there are a lot of people with that name in NYC.

Oskar carries a tambourine with him at all times to keep him calm, and this (along with his sometimes precocious attitude), is an example of the kind of whimsical attitude the film takes with some of its subject matter. This treatment of the material has put some viewers off, and that is understandable, but I found that the film's occasionally irritating quirks would almost invariably fade into the background of a piece which is at times genuinely affecting.

It helps that Thomas Horn is so good as Oskar, inhabiting the character to such a degree that his performance, at times, saves the film. The character's eccentricities – which are often hinted at as being symptoms of his possible condition, but never overtly stated as such – are made endearing

in his hands, while the film's sentimental moments (and there are a fair few) feel less calculated than perhaps they are. There is a degree of contrivance to be endured along the way, particularly with regard to Bullock's character in the final act, and some sprinklings of cringe-worthy schmaltz, but these are minor and don't squander the favour the film has earned.

Von Sydow plays 'the renter' – a stranger who rents a room in Oskar's grandma's house across the street. His character is mute, meaning he communicates with Oskar via snappy written notes and the words 'Yes' and 'No' tattooed onto his palms. This isn't as problematic as it sounds, or wasn't for me, but again I can understand why some audiences have taken against it. His performance, like much of the supporting cast (which also includes John Goodman and Viola Davis), is strong.

Perhaps if this was not a '9/11 film' it would not have attracted quite the level of backlash that it has. Then again, maybe it would have. Films which aim to move, and which play the sentiment card overtly, are often divisive. At times, we all feel manipulated by them. I knew after I came out of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* that I had been manipulated, but I didn't feel it mattered because the film told a story about a grieving family which had weight, which was technically very adept, which had strong performances and a very touching score by Alexandre Desplat.

It's fair to say that the story teaches us almost nothing about the attacks other than that they caused grief, which we all know already, so perhaps it's better to think of it as a film about grief, rather than 9/11, however overt the context may be. **MR**

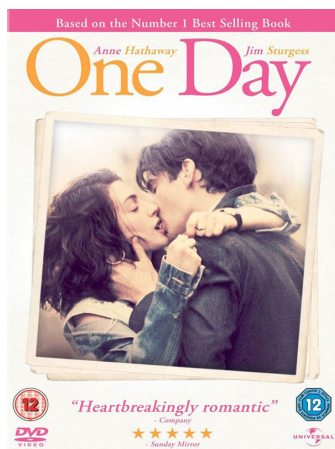
★★★★★

ONE DAY

Chick-flick that follow an on-again-off-again couple through the decades, mixing heartbreak with marriage, children with affairs. The couple frustrate at times but it proves more emotionally satisfying than you'd think.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



THE HELP

Entertaining drama about the treatment of black maids in the 1960s deep South, Emma Stone ties the film together well although it's the wonderful supporting cast around her that steal the show. Based on the best-selling novel.

Film ★★★★★

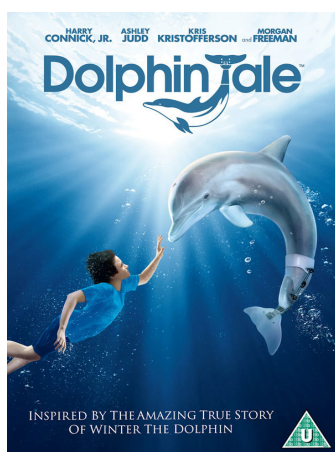
Extras ★★★★★

DOLPHIN TALE

Understated kids' drama about a young boy who finds a passion in caring for an injured dolphin he helps rescue on the beach. Coordinating efforts to have a fake flipper built, Sawyer hopes to save his new friend's life.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN

Unforgiving insight to a mother's life with a son she never connects with, leading up to an unspeakable event that she pays for the rest of her life. All are fantastic.

Film ★★★★★

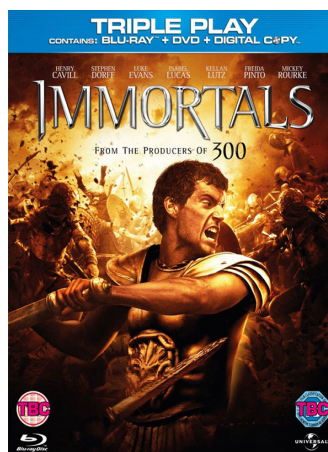
Extras ★★★★★

THE IDES OF MARCH

Captivating political drama about the relationships behind a candidate's mask, rather than the policies and public face in front of it. In a year of Gosling, this is his most assured performance; suave and confident.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



IMMORTALS

Underwritten, dramatically shallow and visually disappointing, would-be 300 sequel *Immortals* is a missed opportunity. Unlike the myths upon which it's based; it will be quickly forgotten and even the CGI is remarkably poor.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

IN TIME

Intriguing concept that stutters as it develops, Justin Timberlake stars as an ordinary guy living in a futuristic city in which money, in the traditional sense, no longer exists. Instead people live by a ticking clock on their wrist.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

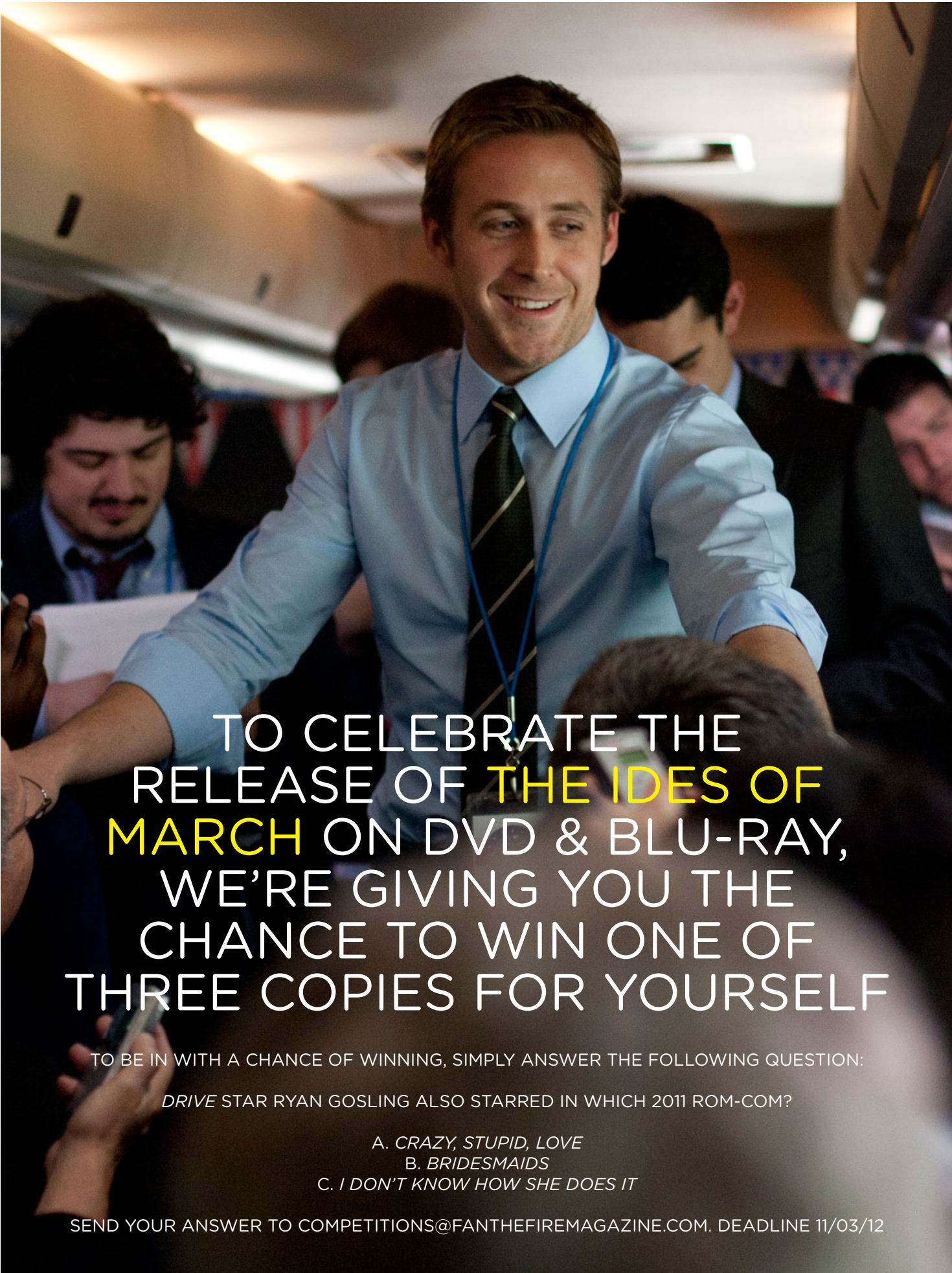


CONTAGION

Caught between outbreak thriller and political drama, in the end *Contagion* predictably falls somewhere awkwardly in the middle. It feels a like a Fincher wanna-bee, rather than boasting an identity of its own.

Film ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★



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Art

64. DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD BY
KATHERINE SQUIER

78. CATCH AND RELEASE BY PETER ANDREW

96. TROUBLE AT THE TOP BY GABRIELA HERMAN

106. GIMME SOME MOTIVATION BY DANIEL
GEBHART DE KOEKKOEK

ART

DEVIL YOU'RE

PHOTOGRAPHY KATHERINE SQUIER (KATHERINESQUIER.COM)

A photograph of a bathroom wall covered in square tiles with a yellow and brown floral pattern. On the left, a chrome showerhead is visible. In the upper right, the brown ceramic tank of a toilet is partially shown. The text "KNOWS" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the upper center.

KNOWS

DEAD









TURISTA

















ART

Catch and re- lease

PHOTOGRAPHY PETER ANDREW (PETERANDREW.CA)



































ART

Trouble at the top

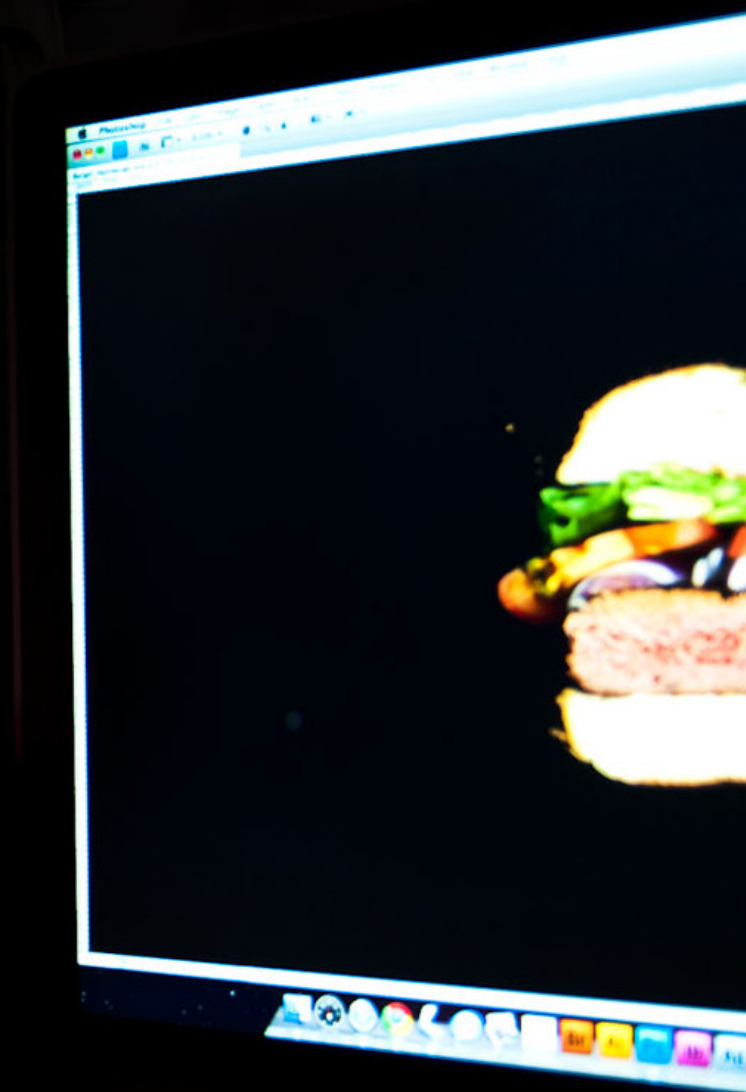
PHOTOGRAPHY GABRIELA HERMAN (GABRIELAHERMAN.COM)

















SCRABBLE

IT'S YOUR

AGAINST MINE



ART

GIMME SOME MOTIVATION

PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL GEBHART DE KOEKKOEK (GEBHART.DK)











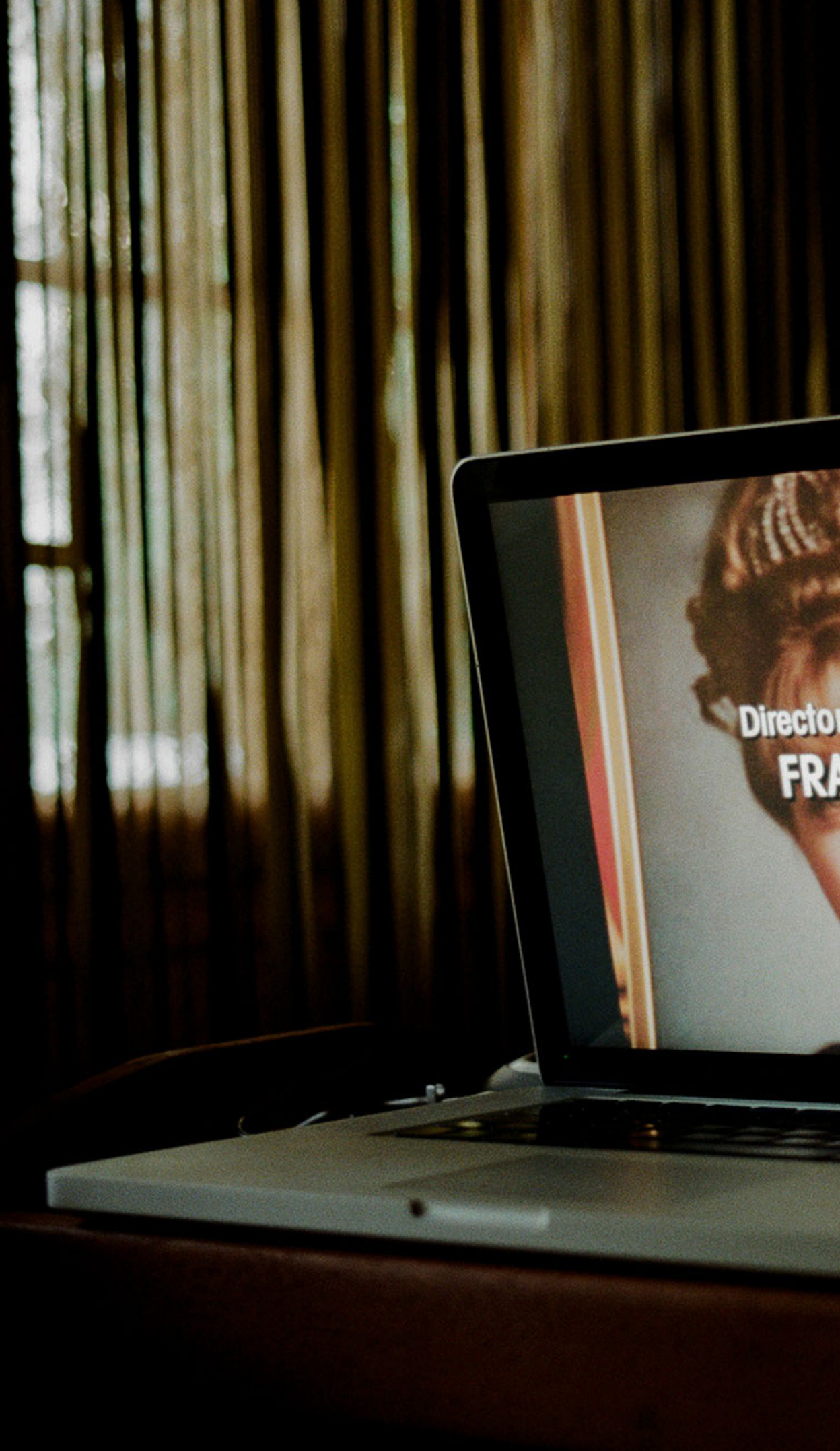


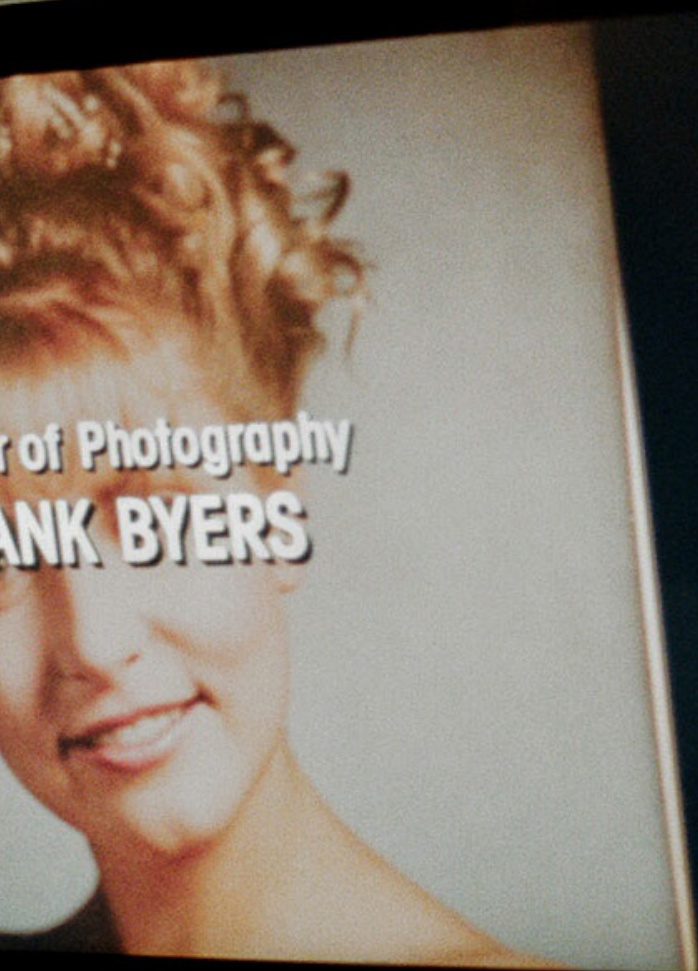






ART





MarBook Pen









ART









Style

128. HURRY UP, WE'RE DREAMING BY MARCO TRUNZ

138. BLISTERS IN THE WIND BY KNOTAN

152. VOYAGER REPRISE BY MICKY WONG

164. FIELD DAY BY ROBERT HARPER





HURRY UP, WE'RE DREAMING

PHOTOGRAPHY MARCO TRUNZ (MARCO-TRUNZ.DE)
LOCATION HOTEL ORION, ATHENS



















Blister in the wind

PHOTOGRAPHY KNOTAN (KNOTAN.COM)















STYLE













STYLE

Voyager reprise

PHOTOGRAPHY MICKY WONG

STYLIST JUMIUS WONG (JUMIUSWONG.COM)

FASHION ASSISTANTS JACK WANG, MELANIE AW & CAI HONG

GROOMING GINGER LYNETTE & SEAN ANG

MODEL MIRO V (AVE)

Shirt **Ermenegildo Zegna** Pullover **Ermenegildo Zegna** Tie **Ermenegildo Zegna** Coat **Fendi**





(Left) He wears: Shirt **Raoul** Pullover **Burberry** Suit **Burberry** Coat **Chanel** Glasses **Stylist's own** She wears: Bracelets **Prada** Ring **MCL** by **Matthew Campbell** **Laurenza**
(Right) Coat **Jil Sander** Trousers **Jil Sander** Shirt **Burberry** Pullover **Prada** Shoes **Prada**





Coat **Burberry** Watch **Louis Vuitton** Hat **Ermenegildo Zegna**







He wears: Tuxedo **Dior Homme** Shirt **Dior Homme** Trousers **Dior Homme** Bow-tie **Dior Homme** Watch Louis Vuitton
She wears: Coat **Burberry** Ring **MCL by Matthew Campbell** Laurenza Bracelet **Prada** Clutch **Prada**

Shirt **Dunhill** Blazer **Dunhill** Pants
Tie **Dunhill** Shawl **Dunhill** Shoes
Prada







(Left) He wears: Sweater **Jil Sander** Trousers **Z Zegna** Blazer **Louis Vuitton** She wears: Coat **Burberry**
(Right) He wears: Shirt **Raoul** T-Shirt **Sport B by Agnes B** Jeans **Sport B by Agnes B** Jacket **Fendi** Shoes **Ermenegildo Zegna** She wears: Shoes **Muse @ Pacific Plaza**



STYLE





FIELD DAY

PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT HARPER (ROBERTHARPER.CO.UK)

















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