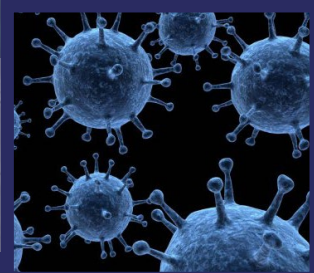


Your Quarterly Guide to the Murky Underbelly of Geekdom

# GEEK SYNDICATE



Viruses - Sci-Fi's Favourite Little Bugs



Rachel Nichols Talks Continuum



Interviewed: Kim-Jee Woon on The Last Stand



Learn about Iron Man's Evolution

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**I'm rubbish at editorials.**

That previous statement was all I had typed out in the last three months since the last issue of the **Geek Syndicate** magazine came out. Four words that quietly mocked me every time I opened up Word and tried to type something that was witty, sassy and coherent. As the months drew on, I realised I was happy to settle for something that was just coherent.

You would think that trying to sum up the sweet smelling concoction of creative juices that the **GS** team has poured into this issue would be easy. However the fear of the blank page looms large as I sit here. I mean it should be easy to bluff my way through this editorial, just like the *Bluffer's Guide to Kickstarter* on page four. Of course failing that my back up plan was to fake an incurable illness with the aid of the *Beginners Guide to Viruses* on page thirty-three and its discussion of how those pesky germs have tried to get the better of us on the big and small screen as well as books and comics.

As the months drew on and the editorial's deadline loomed I considered more outlandish solutions. One thought was to follow *Continuum's* Rachel Nichols example and travel back in time to help my younger self to write the editorial. Unfortu-

nately all Rachel was willing to do was talk to **GS** about her work on *Continuum* on page fifty and would not agree to a piggyback through time ... shame.

As we hit May I was still struggling to find my geek muse but comforted myself with the knowledge that I could make a last stand on page fifteen with Director Kim-Jee Woon as we discussed him bringing back Arnie to the action film genre. Knowing me however I'll just follow the example Tony Stark sets in our biography of the man in the metal suit man on page forty-one and turn to the demon bottle.

So here we are at the end of this mess of an editorial and I've still not told you anything about the magazine, I've just rambled on about myself. So just ignore this and go and read some cool features, reviews and stuff in this issue. If anyone wants me I'll be face down in a pot of cooking fat.

Oh I think the reviews start on page fifty-four ... I know some editor right?

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## CONTENTS

### Features

THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO ... Kickstarter .....	4
Comics Have The Pitch Factor .....	6
Horror Film Remakes .....	10
FACT VS. FICTION - The Manhattan Projects .....	22
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ... Viruses .....	33
IRON MAN: A Biography .....	41

### Interviews

Kim-Jee Woon, Director - The Last Stand .....	15
Ninja Legend - Sho Kosugi .....	28
Dawn of the (Helpful) Dead ... #dontbescared .....	35
Continuum's Rachel Nichols .....	50

### Reviews

Faster Than Light (FTL) .....	54
Half Past Danger - Issue 001 .....	56
Iron Man 3 .....	64
Hannibal - Season 01, Episodes 01-02 .....	66
Team Girl Comic - Issue 007 .....	68
Doctor Who Series Seven Part Two .....	69
Star Trek Into Darkness .....	82

### Previews

COMIC PREVIEW - Breath of Bones: A Tale of the Golem .....	84
COMIC PREVIEW - The true Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys .....	92
ELEVATOR PITCH - Monster Hunters .....	101
ELEVATOR PITCH - Death Sentence .....	103
ELEVATOR PITCH - Razorjack .....	112

## THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO ... KICKSTARTER

Ever wondered what all those geeks in the corner were talking about? Sick of missing

out of the sly references and obscure jokes? Never Fear! The Bluffers Guide is here to help!



*I have a New Plan! I'm going to be rich!*

...OK

*It's simple, I just need to find something everyone used to love, but kinda forgot about, and then launch a Kickstarter to bring it back. It's easy money!*

You know what Kickstarter is supposed to be for, right?

*Of course! You have an idea, make a quick video of you saying how great an idea it is, and then ask for cash to make it, in return for t-shirts or something. Then people give you money, you make the thing, and then sell it on to everyone! It's awesome!*

Not quite.

*Really? cos thats how it seems to work?*

We'll take this from the beginning, I guess. *Kickstarter* is a way for small independent compa-

nies or individuals to generate start-up funds for any sort of project. The sort of thing that usually struggles to get conventional funding from Banks or Private Investors and the like. Most ideas require some sort of cash up front even if its just to pay people to have the time to do it. The big difference being that with normal investors, they take a share in the project and any fiscal returns, *Kickstarter* projects offer a flat return no matter how successful that thing you just backed goes on to be.

*So you don't have to share the money, right?*

Right. A lot of *Kickstarters* aren't about money anyway; they're about making something happen that wouldn't otherwise. There are a lot of art projects and altruistic projects, which aren't going to make any sort of return. There are also a lot of projects like the "*Pebble*" watch and the "*Ouya*" games console, where backers are essentially pre-ordering a product and get to be first in line to get one.

*But they can still sell me a Pebble, right? Even though I was a backer?*

Of course. Backing a Project only gets you the rewards you agreed to have at the start, and the Intellectual Property and all the rest of it that comes out of a Project remains the Project Teams. Its one of the criticisms of the *Kickstarter*

model - backers don't share in the success of what they have backed.

*Most of the time I see Kickstarter its some-one famous, these days.*

Yep. There has been a bit of a gold-rush recently in the gaming community for "nostalgia" projects. Its seen long-dormant genres rising from the grave to make millions of dollars.

*Nostalgia was better when I was a kid...*

Yes, very clever. *Project Eternity*, from Obsidian Entertainment, raised nearly four million Dollars in October 2012, promising a isometric, turn-based RPG in the style of the legendary *Baldurs Gate* Series. They got 73,986 backers. It seemed to unleash a torrent of gaming *Kickstarters* that hasn't finished yet, all from genres that the mainstream publishers have long discarded.

*Such as?*

Well, *Double Fine* are making an point-and-click adventure game, as are the *Broken Sword* team. *Star Citizen* and *Elite: Dangerous* are space flight simulators. There are also *Populous*-style God Games and old-school RPGs. The phrase "spiritual sequel" is getting a lot of use, which seems to act as catnip for gamers of a certain age. Got any old Games you want to remake?

*Its not really my thing. Making*

them, I mean. I'm all for playing them.

Thought so. In February a project to make a movie from cult hit *Veronica Mars* made it's \$2million funding level in less than twenty-four hours. This for a show that never got stellar ratings and went off the air years ago.

Ah, the new Kickstarter Gold Rush.

Seems so. Expect a flood of similar projects and a lot of *Firefly* fans getting excited and disappointed in an endless feedback loop, because Joss Whedon is just too busy.

I should do that then. *Firefly, Movie 2* Kickstarter. I'd make a fortune.

I think it's more complex than just saying you'll make it happen. The *Veronica Mars* people made sure they had the studio on board, a script, and the main actors before getting started on it, and the whole thing raises a few questions about this sort of funding

model.

*Like who keeps the money?*

Exactly. If the *Veronica Mars* movie goes on to be a sleeper hit, then the studio will get to keep all of that, not the backers.

*But the backers get what they paid for - and they get to help make a movie get made.*

That's certainly true, but its a valid concern around the funding model. *Kickstarter* doesn't seem designed to be a revenue sharing system; its a funding system, a way of getting things you want to exist to happen, not a model for return-on-investment. And there is more to it than big money games and TV shows.

*Doesn't sound like it.*

OK, a good and somewhat high-profile example is Anita Sarkeesian's "*Tropes vs Women*". This is a series of web shorts analysing and commenting on video games' use of female characters, is completely free

to air (well, free to web) and funding was pretty much just to get a piece of interesting critical analysis made. If you didn't back it, you still get to watch it, and if you did back it, all you really got was a big thank you a glow of satisfaction.

*But what if I just want to make some big money?*

Shush. The "big idea" of Kickstarters - the democratisation of funding - remains true whether we're talking about big projects for multi-million dollar games, or a group looking for a thousand bucks for their community theatre. Its unashamedly populist, of course; complex, overly daring or avant garde projects may well struggle, but its a child born of the internet age, and hard to see how it would work without it. Which makes it important and very modern.

*And a good way to get rich.*

So you seem to think....

## Notable Kickstarters Mentioned:

- [Ouya](#)
- [Pebble](#)
- [Veronica Mars The Movie](#)
- [Project Eternity](#)
- [Tropes vs Women](#)

Matt Farr



## COMICS HAVE THE PITCH FACTOR

**I don't know about you but I love comics. I really do. I love everything about them. But of late there has become a troubling craze amongst creators that I will refer to as "the Pitch Factor".**

The Pitch Factor is something that I think is linked heavily with the move to reading comics in a collected, Graphic Novel format rather than in the traditional single-issue manner. Although they are essentially the same thing (in my opinion anyway), the development of the two forms must take a different path. The beats to the comic book are different with the reader expecting an exciting twist or something of intrigue at the end of every issue to bring them back for more, whereas a graphic novel can happily build to something slowly and then have the final act serve as the pay off.

You might be reading this and thinking that I am worrying about spilt milk, but I'm not. There is a big and yet subtle difference between the comic book issue and the graphic novel and why the slower pacing works so well in one form but not the other: with the graphic novel you have the whole story in your hands, the comic book issue you have what is effectively a chapter in an ongoing story.

Why is this a problem you ask? Say, I have bought a graphic novel for about £15. I have read the blurb on the back and I'm interested and invested enough to spend a sizeable

amount of money (especially when comparing to a traditional prose novel) for the story. I am probably going to at least read the majority of it to give it a chance. Whereas the comic book issue, costing £3 (a fifth of the graphic novel is quite a lot) has to hook me in those twenty-two pages. If they don't succeed why would I bother coming back next month? Herein lies the game and herein lies the problem that I think creators have started to have: they are writing comic book issues as if they are the opening chapter to a graphic novel and expecting us still to want to carry on even if there is little to hook us. In this article, I will be discussing how I think this has come from the pitch.

Lets take Mark Millar, Nick Spencer and Marvel NOW! as examples. When Mark Millar announced *Supercrooks*, I thought it sounded a really intriguing idea. Millar's pitch

was to the point, simple and made us all know exactly what he was talking about from the get go: *Supercrooks* is *Ocean's 11* meets *X-Men*. This was the perfect pitch: we knew it was about: supervillians who were going to pull a con on someone. Great! So I waited anxiously for Issue One to arrive on our shelves and when it did I was terribly disappointed. Don't get me wrong, issue one of *Supercrooks* isn't overtly bad: it is just predictable.

"What happens in issue one?" You might well ask. A collection of supervillains plan a con. So basically all we got in issue one was the pitch. That one sentence stretched across twenty-two pages. Any twist? Not really. Cool concept, yes but not really enough to keep me coming back month in, month out. From the master of the cliffhanger, I thought I would get more from the issue. Conversely, if I had waited for this to be collected as a trade



Ocean's 11 meets X-Men in Millar's *Supercrooks*

I would have it all there in my mucky mits. So what if chapter one only sets the scene? I have the rest of the book to read!

At first I thought that this was a symptom that only Millar had contracted, that he had changed as a writer and it was something to accept. Maybe I wasn't his audience anymore? A lot of people seemed to enjoy the issue, so that was all well and good. Yet, the pitch factor appeared once again. Nick Spencer came along with *Bedlam*. The pitch to *Bedlam* was: what if The Joker was rehabilitated back into society? Interesting I am sure you agree. Issue One was double-length, allowing for more story-telling to take place. Yet when the issue is finished, where do we end up? Only with the knowledge that our Joker-like character, Madder Red, has been rehabilitated.

I was once again disappointed, especially as I had read forty pages to get to this place - the place where that one sentence pitch ended. Yes the dialogue was nice and the art was stunning but in a market where comics are expensive (it is often more expensive to buy the comic than it is to wait for the trade paperback) and in the middle of a recession I feel I need more to draw me in than simply the pitch expanded to an issue's worth of pages. Again, this would have been fine as the opening act in a graphic novel but a comic book needs more to bring the audience back each month.



Old meets new in All New X-Men.

Next we come to *Marvel* with their *Marvel NOW!* line. I am more a *DC* boy but I have always enjoyed the likes of Thor, Spider-Man and the X-Men so this seemed like a perfect jumping on point. The pitch for *Thor* was that the hero would face a threat that spanned his entire life time, chronicling his youth, to present day through to the Thor of the future. *All New X-Men* posed the question: what would happen if the original X team came to the present to stop Cyclops and what he has become. I was intrigued by both of these so when they came out I picked them up and saw that everyone I knew was raving about them - especially *Thor*.

I read *Thor*, turned to the final page and thought - oh.... Where is the rest? Again it wasn't a bad story, anything but, however that one sentence pitch

was once more all we got in the first issue. Nothing more. With the knowledge that *Marvel* release the trade paperback on the same day as the final issue of an arc and the trade paperback is always cheaper it made me beg the question as to why I would continue to buy the more expensive version of a book month in, month out and not even get the full story before the trade-waiters.

Then I read *All New X-Men*. The issues end with the original X team preparing to come to the present. I am less sceptical of this issue because I loved the way we got to this point and until recently it has made me continue to get it bi-monthly. But on reaching issue seven, I have come to the conclusion that enough is enough and I'll wait for the trade. Also, although I preferred this comic's first issue, it still had the same

big no-no that the others I've discussed did. In all these cases I fear that by giving away your hook to issue one in the pitch, these creators were left with a hollow, less exciting start to a series.

So can we do anything about the Pitch Factor? My friend and writer John Lees is someone who managed to prevent himself from falling into this pitfall. John has won the *Scottish Independent Comic Book Award* for best writer on his series *The Standard*. Published by *Comixtribe*, the series sees its worldwide launch in February. The thing John managed to do was to intrigue the reader with his pitch but he didn't give away the cliff-hanger that drags you back for more at the end of issue one. That is what I would say makes a good pitch / first issue combination.

Am I worrying over nothing? I think it depends on the way you see the comic business progressing. Many believe it will move into graphic novels and I think this kind of storytelling will only speed this up. These books are not being written for the die-hard fans that buy it in the comic book shops anymore. Instead, the audience seems to be the fan who gets them in the book shop. It will lead to a change in storytelling and it will lead to a change in the stories that are told.

I am happy to admit that maybe these comics are not been written for me. I might be a dinosaur that still loves to read his Claremont *X-Men* and

as much Silver Age I can muster. They do seem to be attracting an audience I just don't see how they can continue to draw people in by giving them nothing but what they already knew before opening up issue one.

Luke Halsall



Image © comixTribe 2013

Avoiding the Pitch Factor - John Lees's *The Standard*



**YOU WILL ANSWER  
TO NO ONE  
ELSE**



**#WHATSNEXT**

**BUT ME**

## HORROR FILM REMAKES

In recent times, it seems to be fashionable for Hollywood to remake or reboot everything in sight, especially when it comes to the horror genre. In fact, the next few months promise remakes of classic horror films: *Carrie* and *The Evil Dead*.

We thought we'd cast the **Geek Syndicate** magnifying glass a little closer at this trend and decide whether or not remakes, reboots or rehashes were a good idea or not and irrespective of our conclusions, give some suggestion to what could be remade in the future and point out which hallowed ground should remain untouched by remake mania.

### Rules of the Game

First we thought we'd set some parameters and rules for the discussion, eventually settling on the following three:

- **A remake can only be based on an original film made after 1960** - we decided on this as the cut-off point as we felt it would be unfair to compare a black and white 'classic' with a modern day special-effects laden gore-fest - if nothing else the cinematic certification would be completely out of kilter. As a result of this decision, we cannot compare Howard Hawkes' *The Thing* with John Carpenter's version, if for no other reason than James Arness stomping around with a prosthetic forehead is no match for

Carpenter's special effects which still stand the test of time today.

- **No remakes of foreign films** - quite simply, not everyone has the patience to read sub-titles and wrongly or rightly, a Hollywood (or UK) remake by virtue of the language draws a much bigger global audience; so no comparing *Let The Right One In* or *The Grudge* with their vastly inferior US versions.
- **Proper Horror** - We are argued about this one long into the night, settling on the following definition: high body count, suspense, slasher/serial killer, zombies/vamps/wolves, but no aliens. Aliens channel a film more towards Sci-Fi rather than horror. So 'no' to *Alien* or *Predator*, but yes to *Event Horizon* and *Pandorum* (not that any of these are remakes, but you get where we're coming from)

### Remake Triumphs

So we thought we'd start with the winners. The remakes that equal or surpass the original version. In truth this is a list that lies somewhere between thin and anorexic.

We came up with one clear winner and it's a bit of a dichotomy as it is in itself, a remake of a classic - proper hallowed ground: *Dawn of the Dead*. If you speak to most Romero fans, 1978's *Dawn of the Dead* was his finest hour, the apex of his collection, detailing the survival of a group of humans holed up in a shopping mall amidst the zombie apocalypse - it had aged well.

When we all heard that it was being remade, the instant reaction was "No! Not that one! Pick a different one!" That original film had so many memorable scenes - who can forget the zombie being decapitated by the helicopter blades! What the remake did so well, was to



Dawn of the Dead (2004) The best Horror Remake?

change the rules. We all recall that first scene when the little girl zombie sprang to her feet, and ran at one of the protagonists... "They're not supposed to do that!" In taking us out of our zombie comfort zone, *Dawn of the Dead* 2004 rates as possible the best horror remake ever.

Other award winners included:

- ***I Spit on Your Grave* (2010)** - Still uncomfortable watching, especially the first half.
- ***The Hills Have Eyes* (2006)** - We thought it'd be hard to improve much on Wes Craven's gritty little horror, but this hit the mark

- ***The Crazies* (2010)** - To be honest, the original lacked a lot - but this remake had a scary realism to it
- ***Red Dragon* (2002)** - We sat on the fence here, as Michael Mann's *Manhunter* is seriously good, what with Brian Cox, William Petersen and a very scary Mr. Dollahyde. But the remake did give us back Anthony Hopkins... even if Ralph Fiennes was a little out of his depth
- ***Last House On The Left* (2009)** - Raw, depressingly good, and tough to endure in certain parts due to the "no-holds barred" approach of the content

## Remake Disasters

Unfortunately, when it came to the losers, the list was just so long. This collection of remake failures is by no means exhaustive:

- ***The Thing* (2011)** - Never before in horror film history have the final credits so been the best part of the film.
- ***Rob Zombie's Halloween* (2007)** - A little success can be a dangerous thing, Rob
- ***Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010)** - Let's just take *The Watchmen's* brilliant Rorschach and turn him into something truly forgettable.
- ***The Wicker Man* (2006)** - Nick Cage replaces Edward Woodward, and relocates deepest darkest Cornwall to somewhere in the US - enough said.
- ***The Hitcher* (2007)** - Sean Bean replaces Rutger Hauer, but forgets to turn up on set with his charisma.
- ***Prom Night* (2008)** - \*speechless\*
- ***Psycho* (1998)** - Anne Heche and Vince Vaughn as Norman Bates... seriously - they should have played this for laughs.
- ***The Omen* (2006)** - Liev Schreiber... what makes an actor commit thespian suicide?
- ***The Fog* (2005)** - save yourself the trouble and watch



Image © Overture Films, 2010



Image © Universal Pictures, 2002

*The Mist* instead.

- **Fright Night (2011)** - or let's just completely waste David Tennant instead.
- **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003 & 2006)** - because messing it up once only, just wasn't enough.

- **Friday the 13th (2009)** - note to Jared Paladecki: sometimes the career road from TV to cinema is strewn with the Devil's own pot-holes.

Rather than conducting individual post-mortems on these, we're just giving them a col-

lective:

*"Why? What were you thinking? Did you not watch the original enough times? Why would you cast him/her, or set it there? What an earth possessed you to write that THAT into the script?!"*

and the final questions:

*"Did you have a film school teacher? Do you have lawyer? Sue your teacher!"*

## Future Remake Rules

Finally, let's look at our candidates for a twenty-first century make-over. Before we launch into that, again - we thought we'd set out our stall with some rules. Here are our "remake commandments", or at least, the very worst reasons to remake a horror movie:

- **"But the original is a classic!"** - We like to think there are certain films that you remake at your peril. Especially if there is a famous twist that everyone knows about, direction that is considered cutting edge, or performances worthy of Oscar. So, Hollywood, if you're listening, leave the likes of *"The Sixth Sense"* alone... forever!
- **The remake will inevitably be watered down for lower certificate rating** - this probably was our golden rule... the "but we wanted to open it up to a wider audience" excuse. Watering down an R to a 15 serves no purpose for a horror film - yes, *The Thing* & *Let Me In*, we're talking about you!



Image © New Line Cinema, 2003



Image © New Line Cinema, 2006

Why have one bad remake when you can have two?

- **Dodgy CGI can never replaced physical special effects** - (we appear to be talking about *The Thing* again!); we're not purists, CGI can do some amazing things, such as the *Resident Evil* films. But it is no substitute for the art-form that is real physical effects, and ropey CGI just look, well - cheap!

In contrast we came up with, "The Good Reasons to Remake a Horror Movie":

- **The original was basically a really a poorly executed movie** - the premise of the movie was BRILLIANT. A great idea that if executed well could have been a classic (i.e. *Zombie Flesh Eaters*). Unfortunately, it didn't happen perhaps due to a poor storyline, bad script writing, absolutely cheesy acting from an awful cast, special effects which have not stood the test of time, or an overloading of really bad CGI.
- **A GOOD horror movie but it is now dated** - at the time it looked great, and it still does on repeated viewings, but it needs to be updated to the modern age due to the seventies or eighties hair styles, flairs/shell suits, etc. Also the dialogue & special effects may reflect the times
- **The remake could take on a slightly different tone** - While still keeping to the premise of the original, it moves off on a different

tangent, and offers new ideas/themes (e.g. *Dawn Of The Dead*)

## Geek Syndicate Horror Remake List

So, who made our remake list?

- **The Abominable Dr Phibes** - '70s Hammer-esque icon Dr Phibes was the 'Jigsaw' of his day, assembling a plethora of elaborate almost, eccentric deaths for his targets, as he sort revenge on those whom he deemed to have wronged him & his belated wife; creepily voiced by genre stalwart Vincent Price (if you below a certain age, he's the one who provided the rap voiceover on Michael Jackson's *Thriller!*), he managed to get a sequel in which he raced to find the Scrolls of Life somewhere in ancient Egypt.

- **C.H.U.D.** - a real B-movie of the 1980s in the truest sense, a series of gruesome deaths is revealed to be the effects "Chemical Hazard Underground Dumping" in creating "Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers"
- **The Birds** - Hitchcock is hailed turf we know, and if the Psycho remake was anything to go by, he should be left alone. But it is dated by today's standards, and story-wise, it's worthy of a remake
- **Zombie Flesh-Eaters** - we hummed & hah-ed here. The world isn't exactly short of zombie films, but we felt this claustrophobic, island-based nasty could be ripe for a re-hash
- **Race With The Devil** - a Satanic take on The Hill Have Eyes, this '70s B-Movie



Hitchcock's Avian Masterpiece - Are You Flapping for a Remake?

sported some big names of the time like Warren Oates & Peter Fonda. The storyline has been remade (e.g. 2010's *Hard Ride to Hell* with Miguel Ferrer), but deserves kinder treatment

- **The Car** - a 1970's James Brolin vehicle (no pun intended!) that gave us the be-deviled car before Carpenter's classic *Christine*
- **Lifeforce** - this eighties Brit-flick saw interstellar vampires invade & suck the life out of London (a bit like Thatcherism really!)
- **Creepshow** - in truth, an absolutely classic, in which Romero gave us a very good acting-Stephen King, but it is dated and a revamp with updated stories would go down well. But keep the comic-book motif!
- **House** - another little 80's gem, which probably shouldn't have worked at the time, and yet was so entertaining - cast selection would be so important to making this work again
- **Shocker** - Wes Craven gave us Mitch Pileggi's very nasty Horace Pinker and a great heavy rock soundtrack. Not repeating the *Nightmare on Elm Street* reboot errors is crucial to this not bombing
- **Prophecy** - David Cronenberg's tale of a wood treatment plant dumping mercury in rivers producing

deformed babies (of all species, human & otherwise) was brilliant. The 1979 movie with Talia Shire, Robert Foxworth and Armand Assante was utter tripe!

- **Scanners** - for its time (1981), the effects were ground-breaking, and Cronenberg writing & direction were par excellence, but the acting of the some of the key leads was notably atrocious. And the less said about the nineties sequels the better...
- **Nightbreed** - when you see *Hellraiser*, it's hard to believe that one could get Clive Barker material wrong; when you see the make-up and the special effects for *Nightbreed*, it's even harder. But the 1990 direction and look & feel for this story (based on the book *Cabal*) was all wrong... and the casting was awful. The trailer had set such a high expectation from which the end product fell - Hollywood take note
- **Poltergeist** - yeah, we like to be controversial! But as brilliant as this was, and as iconic an image of the little girl sat in front of the TV static ("They're Here!"), there's plenty of room for improvement... it was 1982 after all!
- **The Howling** - we haven't had a really, really good werewolf film in a long time, probably since *An*

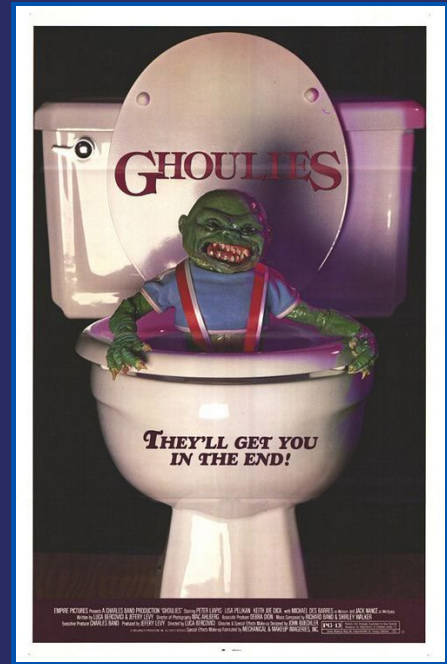


Image © Empire Pictures, 1985

*American Werewolf in London* (Nicholson's Wolf and del Toro's *The Wolfman* were both awful) ; this 1981 tale of a werewolf colony living in secret is due an update

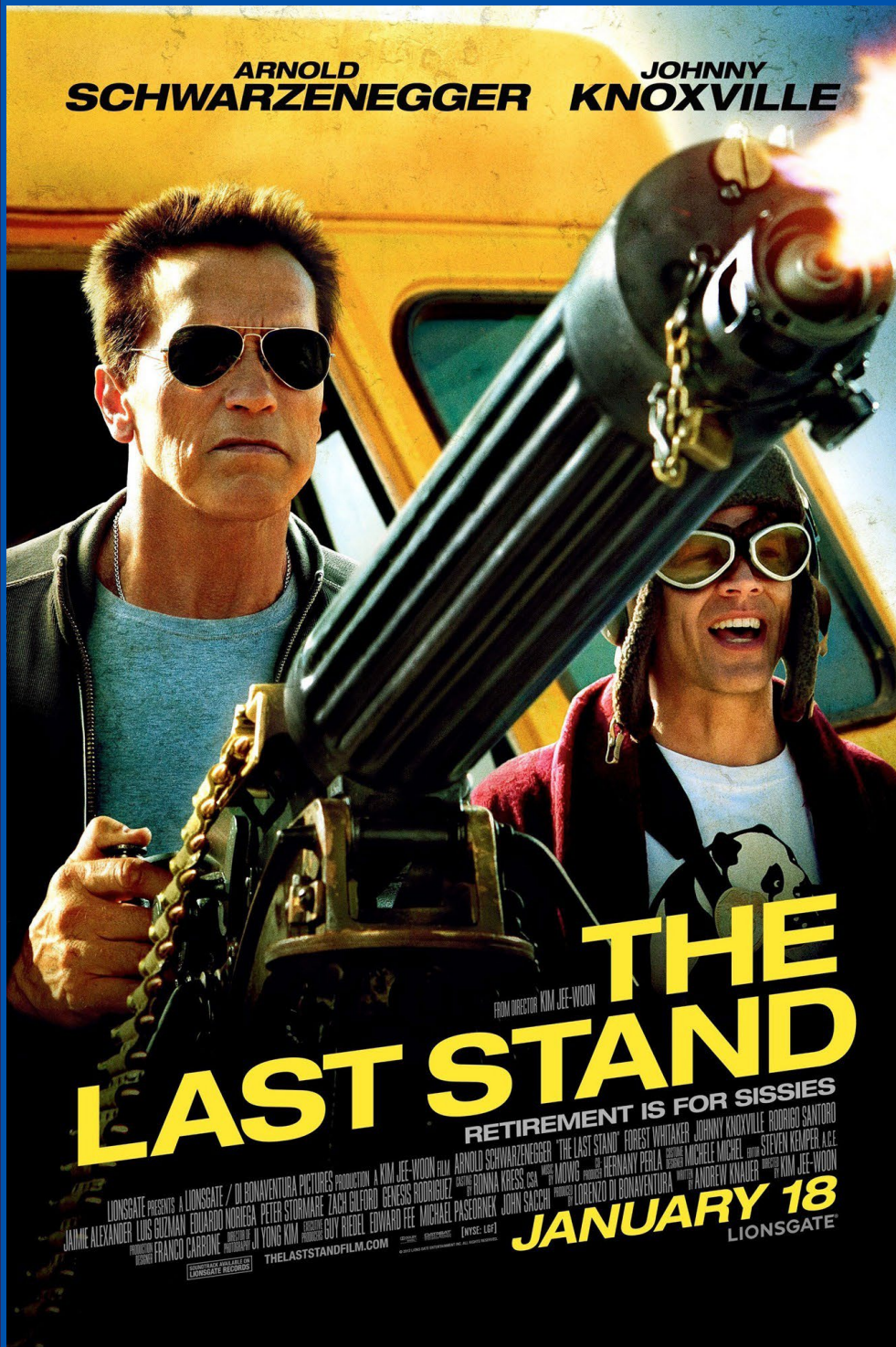
- **Ghoules** - okay, so we had to throw one joker in! But if you're not going to update *Gremlins* (and you shouldn't), there is a place for a CGI reboot of their nastier, very black-humoured demonic cousins
- **Re-Animator** - although Jeff Combs came back in 2003 for a sentimental fan-pleasing sequel, it's time to give this 1985 a 21st century make-over.

Well, we've thrown a lot of contentious stuff out there... we'd love to hear your opinions!

**The Dixon Boys**

INTERVIEW

## KIM-JEE WOON, DIRECTOR - THE LAST STAND



Meet the Director of Arnie's Latest Film

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Starting out directing theatre, the South Korean Kim Ji-woon quickly graduated to making a series of well respected films such as *I Saw The Devil* and *The Good, The Bad & The Weird*. A visually stylistic filmmaker, he recently made his Hollywood debut with *The Last Stand*, which marked the return to cinema of one of movies most recognisable faces - Arnold Schwarzenegger. We caught up with Kim Jee Woon to talk about his eclectic career so far and what it was like bring one of the icons of modern cinema back to the big screen...

**GS:** Can you tell us how you got involved in the project?

**KJW:** Lionsgate and Lorenzo di Bonaventura saw my Korean Western-style film *the Good, the Bad, the Weird*, and probably felt that I would be right for *the Last Stand*, which could be classified as a modern Western. The two films are similar in the sense that *Good, Bad, Weird* is about outlaws racing through the great plains to reach a goal, while *the Last Stand* is about a sheriff trying to stop an outlaw in a supercar racing to a destination.

**GS:** *Was there a particular reason behind choosing now as the time to make your Hollywood debut?*

**KJW:** Ever since the *Tale of Two Sisters* (which has been remade in the US), I have been receiving many offers from Hollywood. Unfortunately, most of the projects I was offered were horror films or already packaged projects that were ready to go, and I was not interested in these. On top of that, timing was not opportune due to the projects I was working on in Korea. Then right after the *Good, the Bad, the Weird*, I received the offer for the *Last Stand*. I felt that the timing was perfect, and also I was given the opportunity to work with the writer from the beginning of development, so I decided that *the Last Stand* would be my Hollywood debut.

**GS:** *Did you notice any major differences between shooting a film in the US as opposed to Korea?*

**KJW:** The whole system in itself is very different. In Korea, when a director makes a decision, that decision is immediately put into action. A director has that much power in Korea. In Hollywood however, the studio and the producer have as much authority as the director does, so the three must work together in the decision-making process.

Also, an assistant director (AD) in Korea is someone who supports the director and makes sure that the director's thoughts and artistic vision is reflected within the film. Basi-

cally, the AD is the director's closest ally, and also has the ability to make decisions on behalf of the director. However, it seems to me that the main role of the assistant director in Hollywood is to maintain the efficiency of the production.

I felt more lonesome as a director here because of that fact. At the same time though, I have learned to make more prudent decisions in this new environment. Another difference would be the existence of strong unions and their strict rules, especially regarding time. There were so many more rules to follow compared to Korea, and now I have new found respect for the US based directors who are able to create excellent films despite the constant burden and pressure of following these rules. In the end, a victory is only meaningful when all the rules of the game have been followed.

I must admit that initially, I

was shaken a bit from being in a totally unfamiliar environment, but I've begun to understand the system in the process and feel more comfortable in it now. By the end of the film, I was able to use my ability to the fullest.

**GS:** *The Last Stand looks like a very American film. How are you putting your own stamp on it?*

**KJW:** I don't know. I never make films thinking "This is my film. This right here is undoubtedly Kim Jee-Woon style."

I am not even sure what "Kim Jee-Woon style" is. When I make films I never allow myself to make hard-set decisions ahead of time.

This might be shocking from Hollywood's perspective. In the Hollywood system, everything must be under absolute control. If something is not logically acceptable, then the



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whole process comes to a halt. However, even when I write a script I always leave about 15% of it unfinished. Actually, it might be more accurate to say that I start working on a film not knowing what that 15% would look like.

After preproduction and storyboarding, a third of the missing 5% is completed. Meeting with the cast brings about another 5%. As for the remaining 5%, I discover it on set.

On the day of, I like to walk around set by myself and take in the area to discover what that location is offering, to understand how it speaks to me personally.

After the lights go on and the cameras are set up, I watch the actors go through one or two camera rehearsals, and there are times when a bright light bulb suddenly blinks in my head. This is that magical moment in which the remaining 5% is completed.

Perhaps this sort of directing is what could be considered my style. I believe that leaving 15% to be filled in later is the key factor that drives me to bring my film to completion.

I believe that within this 15% is where you will find the emotion, nuance, rhythm and every beat of the film at their pur-

est state.

In Korea, the director has absolute authority and control on set. In Hollywood, however, the director does not, so using this process and style of directing is not an easy task.

In Hollywood, everything must be set in stone beforehand. Never in Hollywood can one move on to the next stage with a vague picture in mind.



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So how did I utilize my style in Hollywood? First of all, make no mistake. I tried my best to work within the Hollywood system. I planned everything in advance, and never caused confusion for the crew or the cast because of a director's indecisiveness.

The only thing I constantly reminded everyone of was the fact that there would be moments that go beyond our plan, that there would be something more to show. This was because it was extremely crucial to not cause confusion

or uproar among the crew and cast when I gave out of the blue direction, a totally unexpected setting, or just any new idea.

That does not mean I was able to utilize this style as freely as I have in Korea. Each and every decision was an uphill battle, so it was emotionally and physically draining.

I find 85% of the film within my organized, conscious mind, and 15% in the chaos of the subconscious.

**GS:** How was it directing Arnold Schwarzenegger?! Was it nerve-wracking or exciting, and how did he take direction, being an icon!?

**KJW:** I'm not an outgoing person. Compared to an average person, I

am quite skeptical and pessimistic. This is different from being nervous.

Anyways, because of who I am it was neither nerve-wracking nor exciting for me at first. I analyzed the situation in a very cold, calm manner - like a true skeptic and a pessimist.

When I found out that Arnold was going to star in this film, I thought to myself, "I'm done for". Arnold is a man who dominated the world as a bodybuilder, rose to the top in Hollywood, and served as



Image © Lionsgate, 2013

a governor of the state much larger than Korea. The only thought on my mind was “I don’t want to mess up his biography. Why me?”

Even when I was flying from Korea to the US to meet Arnold, I just thought it would be nice to meet him as a fan, even if I were to quit.

I was invited to Arnold’s home and met him for the first time, and we talked about his character Sheriff Ray Owens (the protagonist in the Last Stand). During this conversation, I came to the realization that the Owens I pictured and the Owens Arnold was thinking of were similar in many ways, and after further explanation it was evident that Arnold and I were imagining a completely identical character.

I found courage and hope at that moment, and realized that this film is going to be my Hollywood debut.

He was very smart just as people have described him to be, and also he played a huge role in bringing positive energy to the set by always being playful and bright.

All of my directions had to go through a translation but he was always able to understand exactly what I wanted, and expressed that through his performance. He never even frowned once even after numerous takes.

Towards the beginning of production when I was not too familiar with the Hollywood system, things were progressing a bit slowly. The first AD and the producer would yell out something to someone, or tap their watches while I was watching playback in an attempt to rush me. At these times, Arnold would tell them to wait and give the director time to think and make decisions. The fact that Arnold took my side and encouraged me is what

gave me the strength to adapt to the Hollywood system in the beginning. He always respected my ideas, and from time to time when he would express his ideas, he was very firm. He is a very smart man. There is definitely a reason why he has earned so many crowns in so many fields.

**GS:** *Was it daunting to be handling the film that marks Arnold Schwarzenegger’s solo return to the big screen?*

**KJW:** Arnold is an action star icon of this generation. As an icon, there is a certain image associated with him, and the audience expects to see that iconic image in the film. I felt that I wouldn’t be able to create a realistic film with just that image, so the difficult task for me was to strike the perfect balance between that iconic image and a side of Arnold that was never seen before. For instance, if Arnold were to be only introduced as

a mellow father figure for the town and the deputies, I was worried that no one would want to see Arnold playing that type of character. Exhibiting these two sides appropriately within one character was very difficult.

**GS:** *The trailer makes it look very action heavy, but will there also be plenty of character moments, relationship arcs, etc?*

**KJW:** Yes. If *the Last Stand* were just an action-heavy film, I would've never even worked on it.

I am neither an action director nor ambitious when it comes to action sequences.

I am simply interested in portraying characters in violent situations, and give much thought as to how to portray this visually in a certain genre.

In that regard, this film is about fear, rage, and sorrow that the characters feel in a violent situation, and how they

overcome such emotions with certain calmness. As the story unfolds we see the characters grow emotionally, and I relied heavily on such character growth to design the action sequences. My hope is that the characters in this film will be loved as much as the action scenes.

**GS:** *You proved you could do amazing, inventive action in *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*. Is there anything in *Last Stand* to rival the ghost market sequence?*

**KJW:** There are a few sequences that I like. Two of my favourites would have to be the fierce town battle between the escaped cartel boss's mercenaries and the sheriff and the cornfield car chase. I don't think I am highly skilled in directing actions sequences, but in the town battle I was able to bring out all the different small town characters along with a lot of neat action beats to my satisfaction.

The cornfield chase sequence actually did not exist in the

original script, but I fought for it until the end. In this sequence, cartel boss Cortez drives his specially modified monster of a supercar, Sherriff Owens desperately goes after him in the Mayor's precious Camaro, and this turns into a sort of a cornfield car race. There are many special moments within this sequence, and I was really satisfied with the dynamics we were able to portray with the vast cornfield and the cars that drive through it.

The dried corn and cornstalks frantically crashing into the windshield and the cars driving through the cornfield is very powerful, dynamic and unique at the same time. In the midst of this chaotic car chase there are two quiet moments: once in the middle and once at the end, and I have to say these I am quite fond of these two cinematic moments. My hope is that the audience would enjoy these moments as much as the cornfield chase.

**GS:** *One of the most pleasing aspects was the use of practical stunts, especially in the car chases, how difficult was it to shoot those sequences? Were there any major problems?*

**KJW:** We have a car chase scene that takes place inside a vast cornfield. A snowstorm hit Albuquerque few weeks before the cornfield shoot, completely covering our cornfield with heavy snow. We were concerned that we wouldn't be able to shoot this scene at all, and actually looked into corn-



Image ©Lionsgate, 2013

fields in other areas. Fortunately, the snow melted away just in time, and the cornfield had a nice golden hue to it. Not only that, the cornstalks had become flimsier which made it a bit easier for the cars to drive over. We did lose some parts of the field, so we had to be very frugal with the use of corn. It was almost as if we were giving the cornfield a nice shave using our cars as razor blades. In the end, we had to replant some parts of the cornfield because we had finally run out of corn. The least of our worries was actually driving the cars through the cornfield, which in itself was not an easy task at all.

**GS:** *Did you choose the cast? It's an odd-but-very-exciting mix? Why these people?*

**KJW:** I may not know much about American film, but I have never seen such strong characters like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Johnny Knoxville, Forest Whitaker, Luis Guzman, and Peter Stormare all together in one screen. Has there been such film? Maybe, but I have not seen it.

I really enjoyed the strange ensemble and incredible synergy created by these seemingly mismatching cast with such different temperament and characters.

On top of that, actors of various nationalities like Eduardo Noriega, Jaimie Alexander, Rodrigo Santoro, Zach Gilford, Genesis Rodriguez, and Daniel Henney all brought their own unique colors to create

one ensemble, and directing this ensemble was exciting for me.

Spending time with the Hollywood actors was what I felt was most enjoyable and meaningful during my time in Hollywood.

Their professionalism, well-honed acting, respectful and devoted attitude, their liveliness which brings about a positive aura to the set - actors are actors, whether they are from the East or the West. Just like their Korean counterparts, the actors in America were sensitive to whether they were being loved by the director, and when they felt that love they returned it through their acting.

Actors are the flowers of the film, of the set, and of the director. The term "Flowers of the Screen" holds a deep meaning.

**GS:** *How important was it to have someone you'd already worked with, in Ji-Yong Kim, on set while you were making this film?*

**KJW:** It was my first film in Hollywood, so I absolutely needed a few people who I have worked with before. I had Ji Yong Kim as the director of photography during production and Mowg as the composer during post-production. The two have helped me out tremendously through the process. I was especially encouraged by their confidence and fearlessness in this foreign environment.

**GS:** *Were you influenced by any other movies? Rio Bravo, perhaps?*

**KJW:** *High Noon* comes to my mind, in the sense that it's about finding value in something small and fighting to protect it, and justice being materialized in protecting that something even in the most difficult and dangerous situation. Also, the idea of risking one's life to desperately and fiercely stop something might be similar to *Die Hard*.

After watching the film, however, maybe other movies might come to mind. Or maybe one might think that the *Last Stand* is an Hollywood action film that is totally different.

I guess we will find out once the lid is uncovered.

**GS:** *Can you see yourself doing solely Hollywood films now, or will you still be making films in Korea? What's next for you?*

**KJW:** Making films in both Korea and the US would be most ideal for me. My next project is most likely going to be a Korean film - a remake of Mamoru Oshii's *Jin-Roh* that takes place in Korea. I have a couple of US projects that I'm considering - a sci-fi noir and an elevated action thriller. Nothing is set in stone yet, however.

**THE LAST STAND is out on Blu-ray and DVD from May 27 2013, courtesy of Lions Gate Home Entertainment. You can order online from [Amazon](#), [Play.com](#) and from all leading retailers.**

**Phil Hobden**

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## FACT VS. FICTION - THE MANHATTAN PROJECTS

In Jonathan Hickman and Nick Pitarra's comic, *The Manhattan Projects*, the protagonists aren't a bunch of musclebound men in tights or sword-wielding barbarians, but rather men of science. Each character is based (sometimes loosely) on actual scientists who were part of the famed Manhattan Project during World War II. This direct parallel with the real world has surely left many a reader wondering how these alien-killing, robot-destroying scientists compare to the real men with whom they share a name.

In this article, I compare the principal cast of the book with their counterparts to determine just how far removed from reality Hickman's science fiction really is.

### Fact: J. Robert Oppenheimer

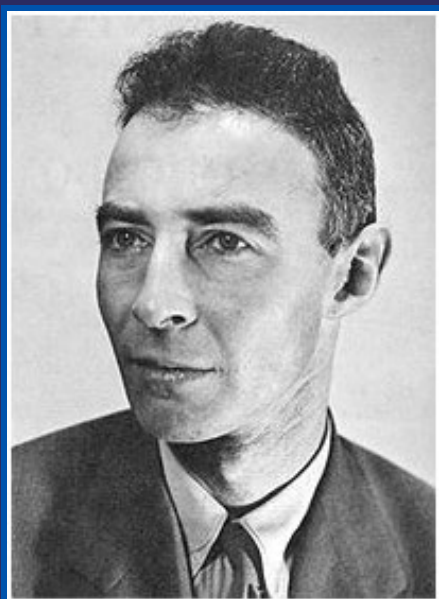


Image Tskrn From Wikipedia

Born in 1904, **Julius Robert Oppenheimer** was an American theoretical physicist and professor at University of California, Berkeley. He's often known as the "Father of the Atomic Bomb" for his role in the Manhattan Project and the creation of the world's first atomic bomb. It's become a part of American legend that Oppenheimer remarked after the first test of the atomic bomb with a quote from the Bhagavad Gita, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

After the Second World War, Oppenheimer went on to lobby for control of nuclear arms as a way to avoid nuclear proliferation and an arms race with the Soviet Union. He was also appointed the director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

Though he had a falling out with the government in the 1950s, he was always influential in the physics community and his notable achievements include the first prediction of quantum tunneling and his work on electrons and positrons.

### Fiction: Joseph Oppenheimer

In *The Manhattan Projects*, Robert Oppenheimer is most notable for actually being his psychotic, cannibal twin brother, Joseph Oppenheimer. Though he shares his brother's "super genius" level intellect, he's much more vicious. Joseph has multiple person-

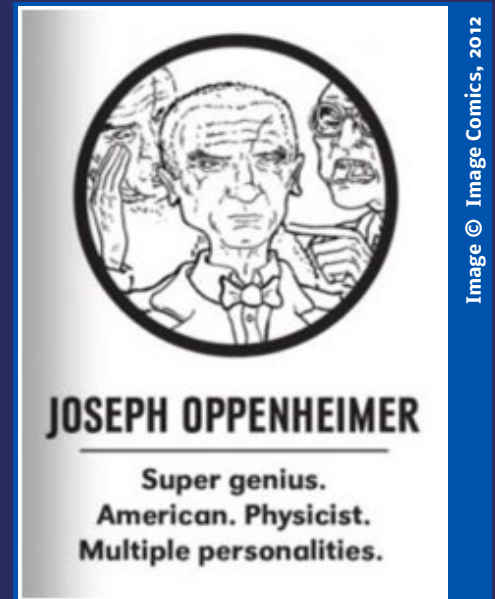


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alities and is also a presumed serial killer, eating his victims and incorporating something of their knowledge and personality into one of his own personalities. He too was part of the team that created the first atomic bomb, but as part of *The Manhattan Projects*, he's been part of much more.

He's repelled an invasion by Japanese Kamikaze robots, been to other worlds, and eaten many living things, including an alien, a president, and his own brother. He's been part of *The Manhattan Projects'* atomic bomb program, the FDR AI project, the cooperative with Star City and more. Upon finding a gateway to other worlds, he remarks, "We have become death, the destroyer of worlds."

The knowledge has gained through eating others has been instrumental in the preemptive strike that *The Manhattan Projects* crew executed against would-be alien invaders. It

also remains to be seen how much of his level of intellect is himself and what he acquired from eating his brother. Recently, Oppenheimer ingested President Truman, but it's currently unknown what sort of knowledge he gained.

## Fact: Harry Daghlian



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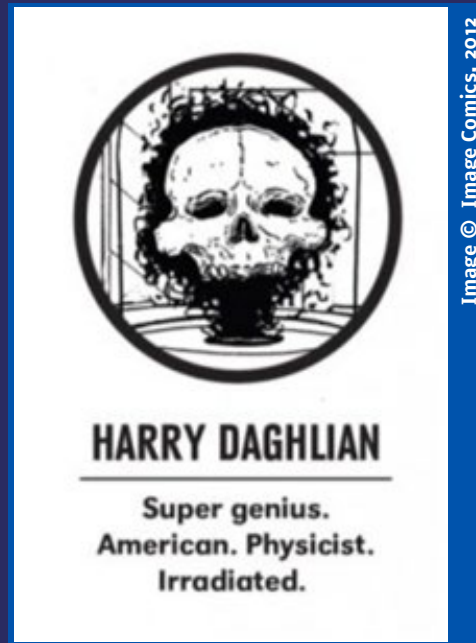


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bly caught in a radiation accident, but had a much different reaction. He appears as a skull floating above a hazmat suit appearing to be filled with radiation. He's seen "feeding" on radiation in at least instance, so it may be that he needs to

Daghlian has readily accepted his new life, stating that though the plutonium melted his skin and organs, it gave him something much greater: extended life. This statement implies that he enjoys some sort of immortality or prolonged life due to the radiation exposure, so he could be doing science and causing mayhem for many centuries to come.

## Fact: Albert Einstein

**Albert Einstein** is easily the most recognizable of the cast of *The Manhattan Projects*. In our history, he's as much known for his many, many scientific discoveries as he is for his sharp intellect and originality. He's well known for his most famous equation " $E=mc^2$ ", along with his theory of relativity and his discovery of the photoelectric effect.

**Harry Daghlian** was an American physicist who was just twenty-three when he began working on the Manhattan Project. In our history, he's little more than a footnote as he was accidentally exposed to radiation while trying to build a neutron reflector around a plutonium core and died of severe radiation poisoning on August 21, 1945, just twenty-five days after exposure. His death prompted stricter safety regulations when handling radioactive cores.

## Fiction: Harry Daghlian

The comic book version of Daghlian was also presuma-

do this periodically to survive in his new state.

Daghlian too is of a "super genius" intellect and a vital part of *The Manhattan Projects*. He was instrumental in the FDR AI program, making the data connection with the dead body of President Franklin Roosevelt and transferring his consciousness into the first artificial intelligence. He was also indirectly responsible for the xenocide of the alien Siill race, as his helmet was purposely cracked by another, causing his radiation to leak out and kill all the aliens present.

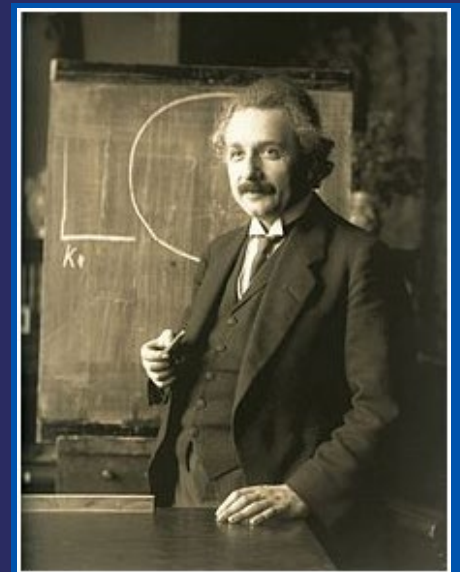
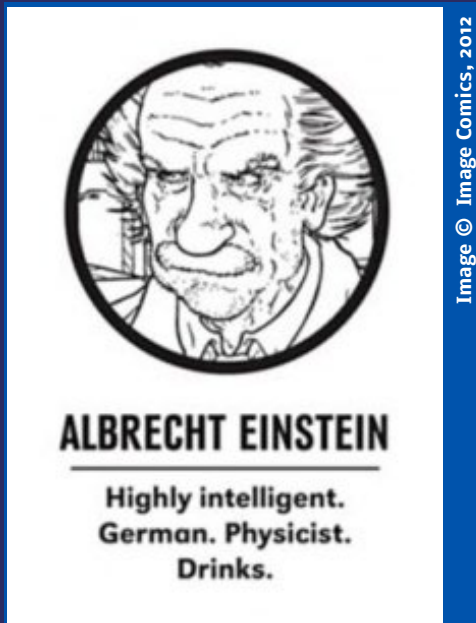


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Einstein's actual involvement with the Manhattan Project was minimal. In 1939 he was persuaded to lend his name

to a letter written by fellow physicist Leo Szilard that warned President Roosevelt of the possibility of Germany acquiring atomic weapons and the need for the American's to acquire them first. Out of this letter the Manhattan Project was born. Einstein was never directly involved with production of the atomic bomb and denounced the use of nuclear fission as a weapon.

## Fiction: Albrecht Einstein



In *The Manhattan Projects*, Einstein has been replaced by an alternate universe version of himself, known as Albrecht Einstein. Though it's unknown to any of the other members of the group, the alternate Einstein has been masquerading as our Einstein for quite a time.

He drinks, swears, has anger issues and freely admits to being not as brilliant as those around him. He arrived on

our world through a gateway known as a Pulling Way which allowed him to travel across vast distances and escape from a world which seems to be lacking in science.

Albrecht appears to have sinister plans for the Pulling Way, though his true intentions have yet to be revealed. His much gruffer and cruder personality is very at odds with our own image of Einstein, which makes for great contrast for the two characters. In our world, Einstein is one of our greatest. In this world, he's likely one of the worst.

## Fact: Enrico Fermi

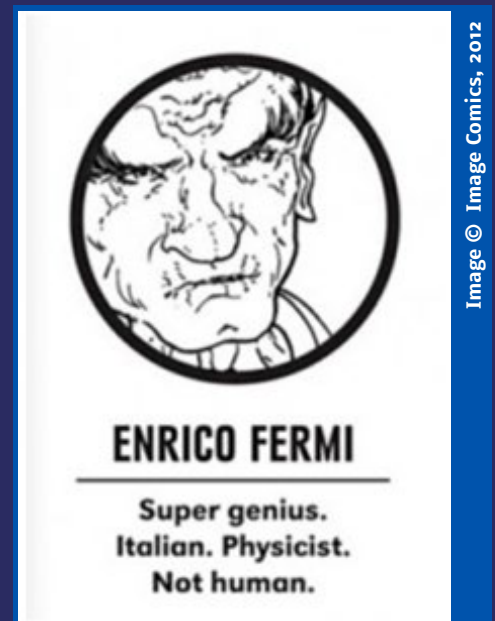
**Fermi** was an Italian scientist who emigrated to the United States in 1938. He, along with Oppenheimer, was known as "The Father of the Atomic Bomb" for his work on the Manhattan Project. He helped develop the first nuclear reactor, coined the term neutrinos, and had a variety of things named after him, including an element.



Fermi is regarded highly for his extremely high intellect and also his ability to arrive at accurate answers to complicated problems using simple methods. He was especially lauded for his success in both theoretical and experimental physics, something which was odd at the time.

One of his non-physics related namesakes is the Fermi Paradox, which questions why Earth has had no extraterrestrial contact despite the high probability of such civilizations existing.

## Fiction: Enrico Fermi



In the strange world of *The Manhattan Projects* Fermi may actually be the answer to his real-world counterpart's paradox. He's a "chromosomal" alien - the meaning of which remains unclear. Whether the term indicates he is a genetic anomaly or an extraterrestrial origin is unknown. He's



shown to have some degree of shape-shifting with his alien form being shown as a large, insect-like creature capable of completely slaughtering army troops.

In the comic he seems to be a bit of a timid man and his status as an alien is used to question his opinions. He's boldly made a trip to the Siill homeworld and helped in the FDR AI program. Fermi seems to have a friendship with Daghlian, possibly as a result of both "men" being both much less and much more than human.

## Fact: Richard Feynman



Image Tskrn From Wikipedia

Next to Einstein, **Richard Feynman** is likely the most well-known scientist involved with the Manhattan Project. He assisted with the creation of the atomic bomb, investigated the Challenger explosion, pioneered quantum computing, and introduced the concept of

nanotechnology. In addition to that, he was a science educator, somewhat akin to Carl Sagan and wrote many books about both his works and life.

He became involved with the Manhattan Project during his graduate work at Princeton at the urging of Oppenheimer. He worked mainly in computational capacities but delighted in playing jokes on the other scientists there and picking the locks on their lockers and safes. Out of boredom, he would often sneak away and play drums in the hills surrounding Los Alamos, leading to a tale of a mysterious drummer named "Injun Joe". He had a quirky personality with an odd sense of humor, took every physics class at MIT, and came off as a bit larger than life.

## Fiction: Richard Feynman

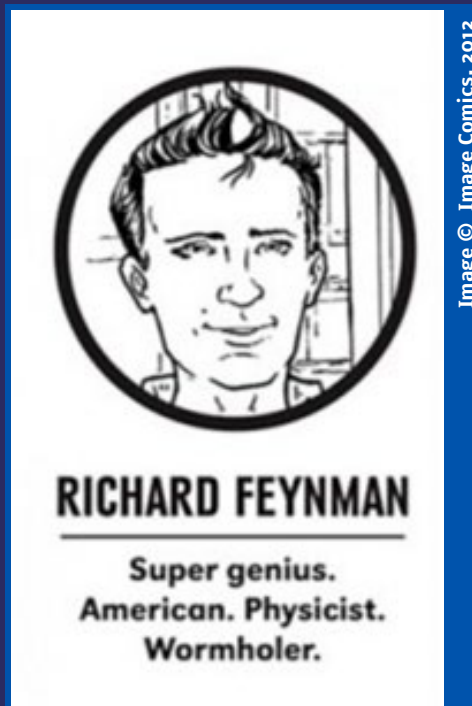


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Richard Feynman as portrayed in *The Manhattan Projects* is likely the most accurate portrayal of any of the characters. He's cocky, brilliant, and delights in jokes. If anything, he's a bit more narcissistic in the comic than in life, but that's it. He's the youngest of the group (not counting Daghlian in his irradiated state), which makes for a bit of naivety and innocence on his part.

Feynman was the one to solve the mystery of Einstein's Pulling Way gateway and open up the portal to other worlds. It's through his brilliance and insight that the group was able to use the Pulling Way and journey to the Siill homeworld. He also was the one to parachute into Germany to recruit Wernher von Braun, despite their ideological differences. In later issues he seems to reach a sort of understanding with Wernher in their pursuit of their goals.

## Fact: Wernher von Braun



Image Tskrn From Wikipedia

**Wernher von Braun** has been proclaimed as “the greatest rocket scientist in history”. He was a German rocket scientist, aerospace engineer, and space architect. He was a Nazi rocket scientist who was recruited/captured by American forces as part of Operation Paperclip. After his group was absorbed by NASA, von Braun was the chief architect on the Saturn V launch vehicle, which was responsible for landing the first men on the Moon.

His ties to the Nazi party were, by his own account, mostly for political and social promotion. It was the best way for him to continue his life’s work of rocketry, so he took the chance. After his arrival in the US, he showed little to no lingering feeling for Nazi Germany, further supporting his accounts of never fully embracing Nazi beliefs.

## Fiction: Wernher von Braun



In the comic, von Braun is first shown standing in a garden with Hitler. What follows is a plot of full of bloodshed as he ensures that he is the only scientist left for the Americans to take. He has an extremely overbearing and purposeful demeanor, made only more imposing by his robotic arm. As with his real life counterpart, this von Braun uses his alliances and appointments as nothing more than a means to achieve his goals and is driven forward by his life’s work: to reach the stars.

Von Braun risks, and loses, limbs in order to achieve his goals. He initially clashes with Feynman, believing that he does not have the will to pursue his goals to the end. Later, there is something of an understanding between the two as the two men go through some perilous events together. Von Braun and his attitude are summed up perfectly in a quote from the fictional Clavius Aurea: The Recorded Feynman: “What did I call the place beyond pain, beyond loss, and beyond suffering? Commitment.”

## Fact: Leslie Groves

**Leslie Groves** was the Army Corps of Engineers officer who oversaw the construction of the Pentagon and also directed the Manhattan Project. He graduated fourth in his class at West Point and was known as a “doer, driver, and stickler for duty”. After the Second World War, he realized that he would never again have

an appointment with near the amount of importance as his past projects and instead opted to leave military service and became vice-president of Sperry-Rand.



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Groves was an intelligent man by many standards, but after meeting with Oppenheimer to discuss the Manhattan Project, he was impressed not only by the man’s intellect but also the breadth of his knowledge, something which would be useful on a project that would involve physics, chemistry, metallurgy, and more. He also saw a drive in the man that made Oppenheimer Groves’ ideal choice to lead the project.

## Fiction: Leslie Groves

In the comic, Groves is never seen as intelligent but is constantly one step ahead of everyone. He’s completely prepared for any and all situations and plays everyone exactly how he needs to. His de-

meanor is very gruff and rude and extremely physical. He's constantly shown as having weapons of all sorts around him, even wearing a grenade as a lapel pin.

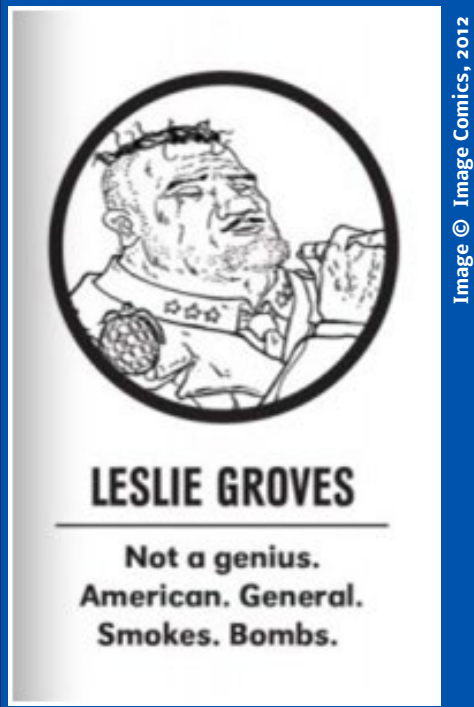


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In the descriptions, Groves is described as “not a genius”. Even so, he’s managed to not only assemble a team of super geniuses that he somehow keeps in line and commands completely, but also has maneuvered himself into a position of near limitless power and near limitless funding. As is said in the ninth issue “The General plays a pretty good game of poker.”

While many of the comic adaptations are a bit of a stretch, there seems to be a bit of truth to each adaptation, tapping into some facet or idea surrounding the person. The overall alternate take on history is at least every bit as fas-

cinating as the real life events. The scientists behind the Manhattan Project are the closest thing the real world has had to Marvel Comics’ Illuminati, and the comic versions of these scientists are even more spectacular and flawed. It’s this strange take on an already storied event that makes this story a perfect melding of history and fiction.

For more information about the real world Manhattan

Project, you can start with the following resources:

- [Britannica.com](http://Britannica.com)
- [Atomic Archive](http://Atomic Archive)
- [Wikipedia](http://Wikipedia)

*The Manhattan Projects* is an ongoing comic series published by [Image Comics](http://Image Comics). The series was created by writer Jonathan Hickman and artist Nick Pitarra.

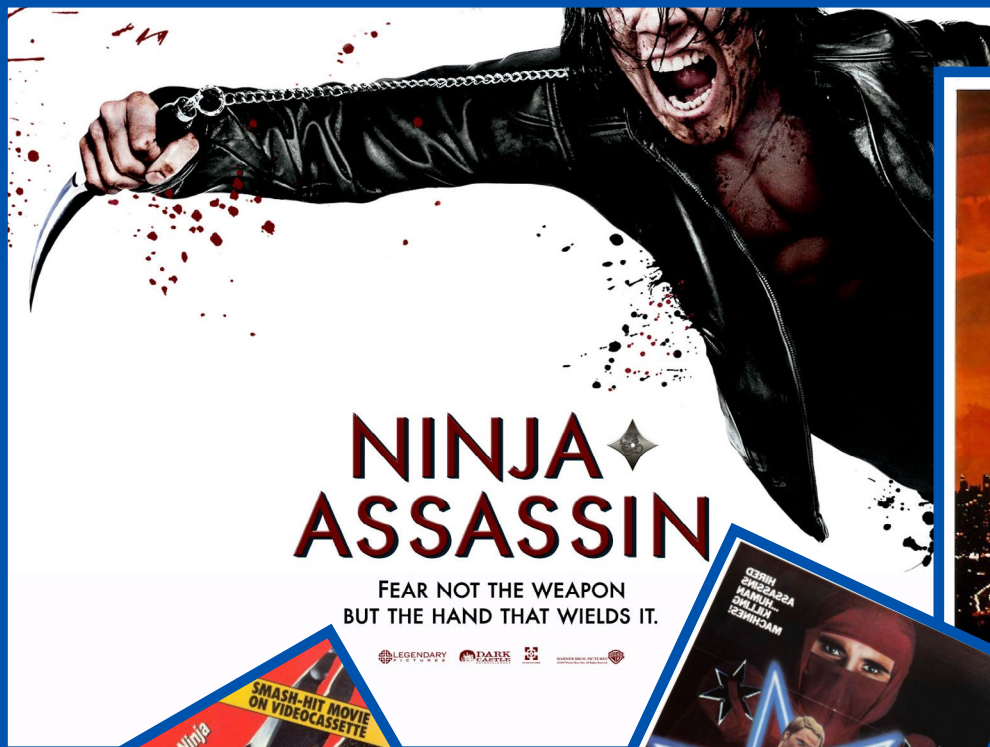
Leo Johnson



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INTERVIEW

## NINJA LEGEND - SHO KOSUGI



**Legend (Noun) – a person whose fame makes him or her seem exceptional: he is a living legend**

“Legend” is a term bandied about far too often in this day and age. But a true legend is someone who has longevity to their career. A true legend is someone that no matter how long they have been away from the limelight their star never fails to shine. An inspiration. An icon. Someone then, like Sho Kosugi.

Sho Kosugi was born in Minato, Tokyo in 1948. He began his Martial Arts training at age five and by the age of eighteen, held the prestigious title of All-Japan Karate Champion. Arriving in the US in 1968, Kosugi spent, in his own words, “Eight determined years of doing stunt and extra work in films” before finally getting his big break in the Menahem Golan produced and directed *Enter The Ninja*. Co-starring Franco Nero, Christopher George & Susan George, *Enter The Ninja* was the film that saw Kosugi step into the iconic ninja costume for the first time.

A legend was born. Not only was *Enter the Ninja* a massive hit for Cannon Films, making it a major player in the independent market, but it also launched the sub-genre of the Ninja movie that would dominate the direct to video action market for most of the late eighties and early nineties. The film's success also opened the door to a series of quickly produced Ninja sequels (*Revenge of the Ninja* and *Ninja III: The Domination*) that would not only elevate Kosugi to the lead role as the films' hero, but also to icon status. Sho Kosugi became the hottest star in martial arts cinema! Pat Rod, of the *Hollywood Reporter* once said,

**“Movie enthusiasts [In Europe] never asked me about Stallone, Cruise, or Harrison Ford; it was always, ‘Have you ever met Sho Kosugi?’”**

Roles alongside Lee Van Cleef (*The Master*) and Jean Claude Van Damme (*Black Eagle*) followed before Kosugi left the industry a few years later. Whilst it's fair to say that Kosugi movies were often low of both budget and production values, nothing could take away from the stunning action and raw screen presence that Kosugi brought to these films.

After almost twenty years away from the role that made his name, Kosugi returned to films in the *Warner Brothers* produced *Ninja Assassin*. Directed by *V for Vendetta* director James McTeigue and produced by Larry and Andy Wachowski,

the film sees Kosugi take the role of Lord Ozuna, leader of the deadly Ozuna clan in a story about Raizo (played by *Speed Racer* star Rain) who, haunted by the merciless execution of his friend, turns his back on the orphanage that raised him only to find himself entangled in a deadly game of cat and mouse through the streets of Europe. The film also stars Rick Yune, Ben Miles and Naomi Harris from a script written by J. Michael Straczynski.

Earlier this year, I flew to the world famous Babelsberg Studios in Berlin to sit down with one of my own personal heroes to discuss what led him to leave the industry in the first place, to chart a project that would see Kosugi back on the big screen for the first time since 1989's *Blind Fury* and to find out what Kosugi has been doing for the last twenty years.

**GS:** So ... where HAVE you been?

**SK:** I was in hiding, training in Japan up a Mountain... Ha!

*It's fair to say that his playful, jovial manor continues apace.*

Just kidding! Seriously... I wanted to do something else. I went to the US about forty years ago, 1968. I went to school, college, University. By that time I was a defending Karate champion. At the time, being champion, I was expecting Warner Brothers to give me big job like Bruce Lee. But it didn't happen. So I worked hard, went to two-

hundred plus auditions and eventually got a part in *Enter the Ninja* with Cannon films. So I started there. I made fourteen movies or so but after a little while I started getting tired. So many Ninja movies came around from China, Taiwan... so I thought maybe it's time to quit.”

*Kosugi is right of course. There was a massive proliferation of Ninja movies about this time, from the good (American Ninja), the bad (American Ninja 5) to the very, very ugly (Ninja Squad anyone?).*

**SK:** At the same time [as making films] I was training some kids and giving them a chance to do something in Hollywood. Especially Asian children. But adults were asking me also. So I established one school called SKI (Sho Kosugi Institute) in 1998 and I started training adult people from Japan. But they had no patience. No guts. I got tired of teaching these eighteen year olds so I decided why not just teach them from a young age. So I went back to Japan so and started opening up many different schools. I have sixteen schools in Japan now, mainly teaching small kids to sixteen years old giving them more of a chance and more opportunity that I never had.”

**GS:** What exactly do you teach at the Sho Kosugi Institute?

**SK:** It is about teaching people the skills to make a success in the film industry. We teach action with English, fighting with

English and gymnastics with English. English is important as most of our students want to work in US and Hollywood. There are many young people who seek their dreams on the streets of Hollywood. Looking back on my twenty-two years as a Hollywood star, not all my time was as productive as it could have been. But as a result of my experience, I am able to help others find success in Hollywood.

**GS:** *You started studying yourself at a very young age...*

**SK:** Yes since I was five years old I had been doing martial arts. From Japanese Karate, to Kobudo (weapon fighting), sword fighting... I did Judo and Kendo. I have done twelve or thirteen types of martial arts.

**GS:** *Growing up who were your inspirations?*

**SK:** To be honest... Bruce Lee. When I was growing up in Japan I was watching *The Green Hornet*. He was the driver - Kato. I was very impressed because he was Asian and he made me think that even the Asian people could be on TV. That was my first dream... I thought if Bruce Lee could do it why not Sho Kosugi? He was great...

**GS:** *So did you ever meet Lee?*

**SK:** Oh Yes. I was very lucky. I met him in 1968 in Long Beach. I used to fight. Not street fights you understand but in tournaments. More than three-hundred in four and a half years. I won six-

hundred or so trophies. The first tournament I went to in 1968, Bruce Lee was there. He didn't fight. He was performing Jeet Kune Do, showing the audience. I watched him and then my friend introduced me to him. He said "Mr Lee this is Sho Kosugi." He looked at me smiled and said 'Hi'. Wow! That was it but I will never forget that.

*As can often be the case with such an interesting interviewee, we got lost deep in conversation about action movies. Kosugi's knowledge of action movies is encyclopaedic and we talked at great length about Bruce Lee, about my conversations with other genre stars who also cite Lee as their influence (including Kosugi's contemporaries like Loren Avedon and Matthias Hues) and how without him the industry would have been a very different place. Aware that my time was running short I tried to bring us back on track...*

**GS:** *As it turned out Ninja Assassin was your return to the big screen, but you were also working on a project called Return Of The Ninja...*

**SK:** That is right. About three or four years ago I thought it was about time I came back to Hollywood to bring back my old Ninja! But this time a BIGGER, better Ninja. Bigger budgeted films. *The Cannon films* were low budget so this time I thought: make a film thirty to fifty million USD. I raised some money and started to look for a scriptwriter. I came across Steven E deSouza who wrote *Die Hard's 1 and 2* as well as *48 Hours*. He's one of

THE top notch script writers in Hollywood so he started writing *Return Of The Ninja* for me!

*Top notch indeed. As Kosugi points out deSouza is considered to be one of the best script writers and, as well writing films such as Commando, The Running Man and Judge Dredd, is among the handful of screenwriters whose films have earned over two billion dollars at the box office.*

**GS:** *How is Return Of The Ninja coming along?*

**SK:** Good. We now have half of the money for *Return Of The Ninja*, matching funds from the US and are ready to go. But I didn't like the script. Even this, the first draft. We needed to rework it. So all this takes a long time... I'm still working on the project. At the same time Larry and Andy [Wachowski] started looking for me in Japan and Hollywood. They didn't know where to find me either! They were starting on *Ninja Assassin* and wanted to see me to ask me to play the lead bad guy role.

**GS:** *You're best known for your good guys roles, except of course the original Enter The Ninja. What appealed about playing the bad guy in Ninja Assassin?*

**SK:** In the past I always played the good guy but this time they gave me the chance to play the bad guy! I am almost sixty, but my body is still very strong. I read the script, liked it and so I thought why not? My character is the boss, a great role. The main bad guy, the strongest. Do you know what

Ozuna the clan name means? Ozuna is the one who started the mountain priests in Japan. Mountain priests and the Ninjas are very related. That's why the clan is called Ozuna.

**GS:** *Did it feel good to be back in front of the camera again after all these years?*

**SK:** Yes it feels very good. James [McTeigue] is a very good director. Only problem with this movie is that my face is on show all the way through! From beginning to end. So I don't wear my Ninja uniform! Ha! Whilst I am not choreographing the fights I will make sure the fight choreographer knows my style so as long as you can see the action that's good. And we have BIG action fighting with Rain! I liked *the Matrix*. Larry and Andy had some great ideas in that film. The bullet time... with bullets coming towards you. Wow, amazing! So maybe they'll use this here with the Shuriken coming towards you in bullet time, maybe. But shhh! I didn't say that!

*It's fair to say that Kosugi's generation of action movie was very different from those we exist in currently. Back then it was wire work, real explosions and old hand drawn matte paintings, a lifetime away from the advent of CGI that proliferates today's action films.*

**GS:** *Your early films were, technologically speaking, a lot more basic than the action movie of today. What are your thoughts on the use of CGI in movies today, especially action films.*

**SK:** I think CGI in films is good... to a point. But overdoing it is no good. I have trained since five years old, so I have skill. But CGI makes regular people look like they can do it. I think people are tired of watching CGI movies... People want to see real martial arts again so with *Ninja Assassin* we used SOME CGI but I have been watching the fighting and mostly they are doing it for real. Very little CGI. But it's hard to find a good action film these days... even *Kill Bill*. I didn't like it. It was okay for the action, but I didn't like the sword fighting. I saw it and thought "No you wouldn't do it like that". For me it's a different way of holding the sword. But the story itself was not bad at all...

**GS:** *So what is your favourite Martial arts film?*

**SK:** *Seven Samurai*. The Concept is very, very good and the characters are very interesting. Besides that... Bruce Lee in *Enter The Dragon*. He was different. Jackie Chan and Jet Li are great but to me Bruce Lee has a different presence. He just stands there and his charisma is amazing.

*With Ninja Assassin out and Return Of The Ninja going into production I wanted to know whether Kosugi had any other film plans?*

**SK:** Well after *Ninja Assassin* I do have another project, which is even bigger, a \$100 million dollar budget. But I can't talk too much about that. I am still working on *Return Of The Ninja* as well so we will see...

*In the background I can see the diligent Warner's PR person tapping her watch (to say we have overrun our slot is a minor understatement) but just as Kosugi is being hurried out, no doubt to another room full of fact hungry journalists, I wanted to find out the answer to one last question...*

**GS:** *What is the best Ninja Film ever made? The answer (said with a massive smile)...*

**SK:** Of course... *Ninja Assassin*!!!!

Kosugi is a genuine hundred-percent legend and it's great to see him returning to the genre that he popularised all those years ago. With *Ninja Assassin*, Isaac Florentine's *Scott Adkins* starring *Ninja* and Kosugi's own *Return Of The Ninja* all available now, and *Ninja 2* currently filming, we could once again be seeing the start of the domination of the Ninja!

**For more on Sho Kosugi check out his official website at: [www.shokosugi.net](http://www.shokosugi.net)**

## Selected Filmography:

- *Enter the Ninja* (1981)
- *Revenge of the Ninja* (1982)
- *Ninja 3: The Domination* (1983)
- *Black Eagle* (1987)
- *Ninja Assassin* (2009)

**Phil Hobden**



FROM ZACK SNYDER, DIRECTOR OF WATCHMEN & 300

HENRY CAVILL    AMY ADAMS    MICHAEL SHANNON    KEVIN COSTNER    DIANE LANE    LAURENCE FISHBURNE    AND RUSSELL CROWE

# M A N O F S T E E L

WARNER BROS. PICTURES PRESENTS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH LEGENDARY PICTURES A SYNCOPY PRODUCTION A ZACK SNYDER FILM "MAN OF STEEL" HENRY CAVILL AMY ADAMS MICHAEL SHANNON KEVIN COSTNER DIANE LANE LAURENCE FISHBURNE ANTJE TRAE AYELET ZURER AND RUSSELL CROWE COSTUMES BY JAMES ACHESON MICHAEL WILKINSON MUSIC BY HANS ZIMMER EDITED BY DAVID BRENNER A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER ALEX McDOWELL DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY AMIR MOKRI BASED UPON SUPERMAN CHARACTERS CREATED BY JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER AND PUBLISHED BY DC ENTERTAINMENT EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS THOMAS TULL LLOYD PHILLIPS JON PETERS STORY BY DAVID S. GOYER & CHRISTOPHER NOLAN SCREENPLAY BY DAVID S. GOYER PRODUCED BY CHARLES ROVEN CHRISTOPHER NOLAN EMMA THOMAS DEBORAH SNYDER (DIRECTED BY ZACK SNYDER)

SEE IT IN 2D AND 3D

LEGENDARY



SYNCOPY

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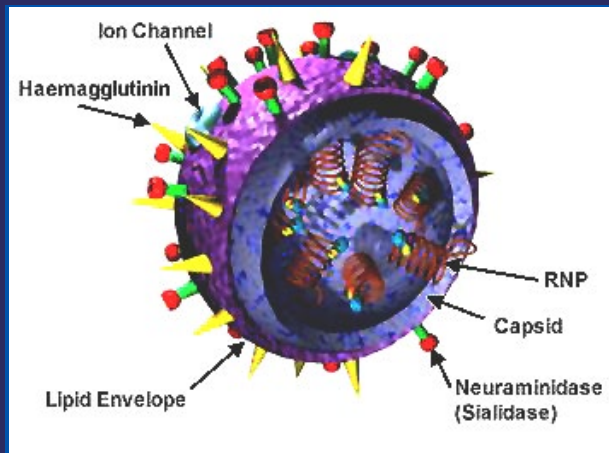
## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ... VIRUSES

**I love viruses. There, I said it. Now, usually when people here this they back away slowly, trying not to make any sudden gestures in case they "enrage the crazy", but as you are reading this at a safe distance, I hope you will allow me to explain why I think viruses are so cool.**

I've been fascinated with viruses since I was a teenager, when I watched films like *Outbreak* and *The Andromeda Strain*. This fascination carried on through university where I became a virologist. I then worked on a whole string of different viruses and the more I found out about them the more I was amazed by them. Not only do they make us sick and kill us, they have altered the course of civilization, added to our myths and legends and maybe even been a factor in our own evolution. They replicate in ways that are different from every other life form on earth. They are completely mindless, relentless and there's a certain elegance in their simplicity. I'm aware that I might be starting to sound like a delusional Bond villain, but bear with me and I'll try and explain some of those pretty big claims.

It's fitting that viruses turn up in so many zombie movies, because they are very similar to zombies. Viruses exist right on the very edge of what can be described as "life". On their own they are completely inert, unable to do anything, but once they infect a cell they quickly

hijack the cell's functions and use them to make more copies of the virus. These copies then go on to infect other cells, creating more viruses, that in turn...well you get the message. Everything a virus does is to try and make more copies of itself.



Anatomy of a Virus - Influenza

Image National Institute for Health (US)

A virus at its simplest is just a piece of genetic material (the virus's blueprint) contained in a protein shell called a capsid. Most of them are very small. Unbelievably, mindbendingly, small. In fact the analogy I've come up with sounds made up! Take the virus that causes the common cold, for instance. They belong to a family called picornaviridae and are some of the smallest viruses known, about  $2 \times 10^{-9}$  meters in diameter. That's pretty small. In fact if I magnified a picornavirus so that it was the size of a tennis ball, in order to stay at the correct scale I would have to be about 9000 kilometers tall.

At this size, if I lay down, my head could be in London and

my feet in San Francisco. The tennis ball sized virus would be trying to get into a nostril 100 kilometers across. On a side note, these picornaviruses infect your nose, as they reproduce best at temperatures a couple of degrees below body temperature. This means that if you never want to catch another cold, you just have to wear some sort of nose hat. You won't get a cold, but you might look like an idiot!

Coldscan be annoying, but some viruses are much more lethal. Amongst the most lethal (and a favorite of sci-fi and horror writers) is Ebola. Ebola

outbreaks happen from time to time, where between 50% and 90% of those infected will die in about two weeks. The organs of Ebola victims literally liquefy and they bleed from every orifice. The reason

**A WOOL NOSE WARMER** is a kooky but practical way to eliminate the red nose problem in wintry weather. Great for outdoor sports on those bitter days. Gaily tasseled warmer ties securely behind head, fits any size nose, Assorted stripes. \$1.00. Hanover House, Dept. 3536, Hanover, Pa.

**Nose Hats. Not so ridiculous After All?**

http://www.awmok.com/2012/01/31/nose-hat/

for this is that Ebola isn't very well evolved to infect us. Its natural host is out there, but still unknown. Ebola's horrifying nature is actually a benefit for the human race. To put it bluntly, Ebola kills its victims too quickly for it to spread. Of course as the world gets to be a smaller place with increased and faster travel around the globe, we may not be safe forever.



Image From <http://facstaff.cbu.edu/~seisen/Viruses.htm>

BEHOLD! The Horror of Ebola

Ebola is the stuff of nightmares, but it's not the most lethal virus known. That "honour" falls to rabies. Rabies is, to all intents and purposes 100% fatal. Without treatment you will die. Luckily there is a very effective vaccine that will work as long as the virus hasn't reached your brain yet, although, once symptoms develop it's too late. It is some of these symptoms that might have led to the creation of some of our most iconic monsters. Many of the symptoms of Rabies are similar to features attributed to both werewolves and vampires. Rabid individuals have been known to be afraid of bright lights, their own reflection and to have a debilitating fear of water, meaning that some are

not able to cross running water. They can also be affected by strong smells (such as garlic) and the madness associated with the disease can cause people to become manic and literally howl at the moon.

It's not really in the interest of viruses to kill their hosts, or at least kill them too quickly. In general the longer a virus exists, the less lethal it becomes whereas new strains are more likely to be fatal. This is one of the reasons why five hundred conquistadors were able to take over the Americas- the measles and smallpox they brought with them wiped out huge numbers of natives, weakening their civilizations. Europe, and indeed the world, could well have been a very different place if Spain hadn't had the political and economic power that The Americas gave it.

There are a lot of viruses around. We've studied about 5,000 different species, mostly the ones that cause disease but there are more out there. A lot more. In fact, viruses make up the largest biomass in the oceans, more than all other sea life put together. There are millions of viruses in every single milliliter of sea water - but don't panic! They are mostly bacteriophages: viruses that only infect bacteria.

Bacteriophages are some of the strangest looking viruses, appearing almost identical to the Apollo lunar module. It's a 20-sided capsid on top of a stalk that ends in legs. When these legs land on bacteria,

the stalk acts like a hypodermic syringe and injects the virus's genetic material into the bacteria. They kill about 25% of life in the oceans everyday and play a major part in stopping dangerous algal blooms.

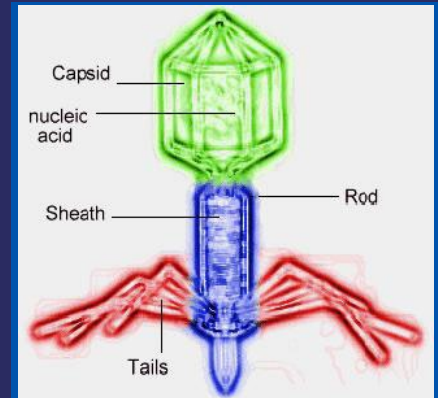


Image From <http://facstaff.cbu.edu/~seisen/Viruses.htm>

Space Pod? Or Bacteriophage?

I'll leave you with this fact, which sounds like something straight out of science fiction: If you were to take all of the viruses in the ocean and place them end-to-end, the line would stretch from here to the Andromeda Galaxy (two and a half million light years away). AND back again. TWENTY FIVE TIMES. That's a line over 100 million light years long! But it's very, very thin.

Next time I'll take a closer look at viruses in science fiction as well some of the weird and wonderful ways viruses replicate.

**Karl Byrne**

INTERVIEW

## DAWN OF THE (HELPFUL) DEAD ... #DONTBESCARED

It's a not so sunny day (come on sun) in the village of Brockham, Surrey and you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to realise that something is afoot.

The lovely village green is set up for a traditional village fete, but the peace and calm is suddenly shattered by the sound of moans - suddenly we are surrounded by hordes of zombies.....but wait a zombie with a leaf blower, and another trying to cut the hedge??? Something isn't right here.



We are at the set of a zombie short directed by Cockney Vs Zombies director Matthias Hoene, the content of which will be used in a new video for mobile network GiffGaff called #dontbescared.

We interviewed Tom Rainsford, Head of Brand at GiffGaff to tell us more about the project:

**GS:** *So, what's the whole premise of why we are here today?*

**TR:** So we are here today because GiffGaff is run by it's members and we have an amazing community of members who do all different types of stuff for us. We wanted something that would show by being different, and doing things in a different way actually it doesn't have to be perceived as being scary like zombies, or worrying. Actually by getting lots of people together good things can happen, and don't be scared of doing things differently. So we wanted to find a really interesting and engaging way of doing that. We worked with one of our agencies called Fallon who came up with this concept which is about zombies and the undead essentially looking like they are going to converge and attack this beautiful, traditional kind of classic English village, but as it turns out as you travel through watching this, they are not attacking the residents of this village, they are actually trying to help them out.

So there is someone who is on his way to work, leaves the house, sees a loads of zombies

approaching and is obviously intimidated and worried by the imminent attack of zombies - which I think is fair enough? But I enjoy his dedication of still going to work which is nice! I think some people would go back inside. But actually he gets into his car and he is trying to start it, it doesn't start, he starts panicking as the zombies start trying to encroach on his space, but actually it turns out that they are going to jump start the car for him, and he drives off. So that's the kind of premise, it is about showing how, trying to bring to life in an interesting and engaging way how GiffGaff does things differently. And by doing things differently and with like minded people, actually really positive things can happen.

**GS:** *So how did you get Matthias on board then?*

**TR:** He came on board for working through Fallon who are our advertising agency, they talked to various directors, but we really liked him and we really liked Cockneys Vs Zombies, we also didn't want to film a traditional TV commercial or Ad. We wanted someone who knew about Zombies, and he is a Zombie expert, he's also someone who could put together something that looked more interesting, more creative, and more engaging for the people that watch it. So many of us consume so many pieces of advertising, it can get dull in all honesty and they all seem one like the other, and GiffGaff is

all about doing this differently so we wanted to take a completely different approach to how we put together our marketing content or our marketing material. So we wanted someone who knows the genre, you know and can really bring it to life. So we got him on board, we went through different treatments, scripts and storyboards and that is how we have ended up with our wonderfully bizarre and bonkers end result.

**GS:** *So how long have you been shooting for then?*

**TR:** This is the third day, we have had some smaller, shots and different stuff that we have been doing, and then today on Saturday it is the big accumulation of the end scene where there has been different shots of zombies experiencing different elements of engagement with the residents of the village - be that in the local pub, cutting hedges, or starting cars, or helping someone carry stuff to school. And really this is where everyone in the village and zombies come together in a beautiful kind of cascade of zombie village-ness.

**GS:** *So why zombies?*

**TR:** I think we kind of came to the decision about using zombies for a few reasons. I think zombies are wonderfully interesting, I think that they are at the point of becoming popular in pop culture, and I think that they have always been used in different ways. If you look at *Dawn of the Dead*

Vs *Shaun of the Dead* they are very different kind of zombies, there are also the more recent Hollywood adaptations of fast moving zombies - a kind of alien-esk zombie rather than traditional zombies. And what we wanted to do in a very British way was to show zombies, but completely spin it on its head - and show that they are not the kind of scary undead that are going to attack you in the *28 Days Later* way, but actually this is quick, and funny in a tongue-in-cheek way, and is just a nice way of playing with the concept of zombies. They are easily recognisable and everyone knows that you should be scared of a zombie, so you are not going to watch it and think of what is it?

**GS:** Thank you so much Tom.

**TR:** Thank you.

So now we know what it is all about, I think it is time to show you the wonderfully mad things that we saw that day...



A sample of the great effects created in just a few minutes, I think you'll agree the contact lenses really add the creepy feeling - they certainly crept me out all day I can tell you



And just in the case the zombies get bored of being friendly, we have reinforcements just in case!



The village butcher being helped with the BBQ by helpful zombies. I would check what kind of 'meat' they are putting on though!



Darkphoenix checking out the village fete before it is overrun by zombies. The set was made up brilliantly - and I was waiting for locals to turn up thinking that it was a real fete



The great director himself Matthias Hoene



Hmmm...anyone hungry. Wait, someone check the BBQ again!



Zombies playing football? Hmmm no change there then!!



Look I found a friend!



Darkphoenix, transformation complete asks "Do I have red on me?"



Believe it or not the dude in the burgundy cap is a "Zombie Choreographer" - I kid you not!!



Why is Matthias laughing you may ask?



Zombies Morris dancing of course! This guy was completely brilliant and had everyone on the set in stitches.



Wow, those Zombies just love dancing

**Geek Syndicate** had a really great day. It was amazing to be on a film set (all be it a short), to see how it all works - it's amazing how long each shot takes to set up, and there is a lot of standing around, luckily the weather picked up later in the day. It was also really interesting to see the being zombies made up - how a person can be transformed in just a few minutes was totally amazing. Darkphoenix's transformation for instance only took about 10 minutes!

We would like to give a big thank you to *GiffGaff* for inviting us and letting us be a part of this very cool venture. And also a thank you to the very gifted make-up and special effects guys that made Darkphoenix into the zombie she has always wanted to be - I'm sure the girl at the drive through McDonalds will be a little freaked for a while!

And I hope from now on, you will look a little more favourably on zombies. Maybe from a distance at first though - just to make sure!

**Darkphoenix1701**  
**Photos: JMS1701**



## IRON MAN: A BIOGRAPHY



Image © Marvel, 2013

Are We? Sitting Comfortably? Then we shall begin ...



**PER-HEROES!  
PER-VILLAINS!  
PER-THRILLS!  
PRESENTED  
IN THE  
FABULOUS  
RVEL MANNER!**



Images © Marvel, 1963 & 2013

Take a look at the posters for 2013's *Iron Man 3* starring Robert Downy Jr, then dig out a copy of, let's say issue 1 of *The Avengers* from September 1963. You are looking at a sleek, modern Mark 42 Iron Man suit: red and gold and aerodynamic, as worn by the equally sleek and modern Tony Stark and comparing it (or him) with millionaire industrialist (and playboy, lest we forget) Anthony Stark and his chunky, shiny yellow armour with it's big domed helmet, which he has to don in sections almost like medieval armour.

Ever wondered how Iron Man came to be, and how he developed into the modern superhero we all know and love? This article examines the evolution of Tony Stark and Iron Man.

## Publication

Back in 1963, Stan Lee wanted to create a new kind of hero. He wanted to create a narrative of capitalism and power. He achieved that and much more, as Iron Man developed into stories of human failings, the nature of relationships and an examination of technology in society. Technology has and always will, evolve with humanity's growth, although it has only been in relatively recent years that its cultural impact has been examined.

*Tales of Suspense* was first published in January 1959 as a science fiction anthology (note: it eventually became *Captain America* in 1968). Originally designed as a showcase for the likes of Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby, *Tales* was the birth place for characters like the aforementioned Cap, The Watcher, and Iron Man.



Tony Stark & Iron Man's First Appearance

Image © Marvel, 1963



Tony and Iron Man encounter one of their most insidious foes!

Image © Marvel, 1968

In issue 39, Lee (editor and plotter), Larry Lieber (Lee's brother, who scripted the comic) and artists Kirby and Don Heck revealed one Anthony Edward "Tony" Stark to the world. According to Lee, Stark was a reaction against the Cold War. Of course, *Marvel's* young readers were predictably anti-war. In his own words, Lee dared himself to create a character - in Stark's case a weapon's manufacturer - that no-one would like, and

**"shove him down their throats and make them like him".**

- The Invincible Iron Man, Paramount Pictures, 2008

One might say that Stan Lee had an incredible insight into both politics and technology at that time. The fact that he created several enduring characters that could easily keep pace with an adapting society and can still speak to us today is really some achievement. In

a way, however, Lee needed either Iron Man or Tony Stark to have values and traits that would transcend his capitalism and weapons manufacturing in order for the readership to hang some kind of loyalty on. Of course, this was a time when the Red Enemy was "everywhere", so Lee created suitably communist enemies for Iron Man to fight.

Iron Man continued to appear in *Tales of Suspense* until the comic ceased publication in 1968. There was a one-shot in April 1968 called *Iron Man and Sub-Mariner* before Stark's public popularity was rewarded by being given his own comic series in May 1968: *The Invincible Iron Man*. Iron Man continued in his adventures pretty much without exception until 1978 with artist Bob Layton and writer David Michelinie's *Iron Man 116*. This

creative team introduced the idea that Stark was a major alcoholic (Issue 128 - *Demon in a Bottle*). This run also introduced noteworthy characters such as James Rhodes, who would later become War Machine, as well as Bethany Cabe and Justin Hammer.

Layton and Michelinie's stint lasted until Issue 154 and they reunited in 1987 from issue 215 for a further 35 issues. This particular run lasted until 1996, ending with issue 332. By now, *Marvel* had introduced the concept of multiple universes to their comic series'. Writers including Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb put Iron Man in one of these alternative universes for a year from 1996 (a 13 issue series). Artwork for the series (also referred to as volume 2) was by Whilce Portacio and Ryan Benjamin. It was during this short lived second volume that characters such as Pepper Potts were introduced to the world of Iron Man.

Volume 3 was written by Kurt Busiek and ran for 89 issues starting in 1998. Roger Stern and Joe Quesada were among the later writers of this volume. 2005 saw the introduction of one of the most significant new elements to Stark's character. Volume 4 of *The Invincible Iron Man* (written by Warren Ellis) featured the famous 'Extremis' storyline. Popular artist Adi Granov drew the comic for thirty-five issues. The arc dropped the "invincible" from the title and was eventually re-named *Iron Man: Director of S.H.I.E.L.D.* starting in issue 15.

The final three issues of this volume were published under the title *War Machine: Weapon of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

As volume 4 drew to a close, a fifth volume began publication, returning to its original *The Invincible Iron Man* title. Matt Fraction took over writing duties, teamed with artist Salvador Larroca. As was *Marvel's* publication plan at the time, volumes 4 and 5 overlapped publication for seven months.

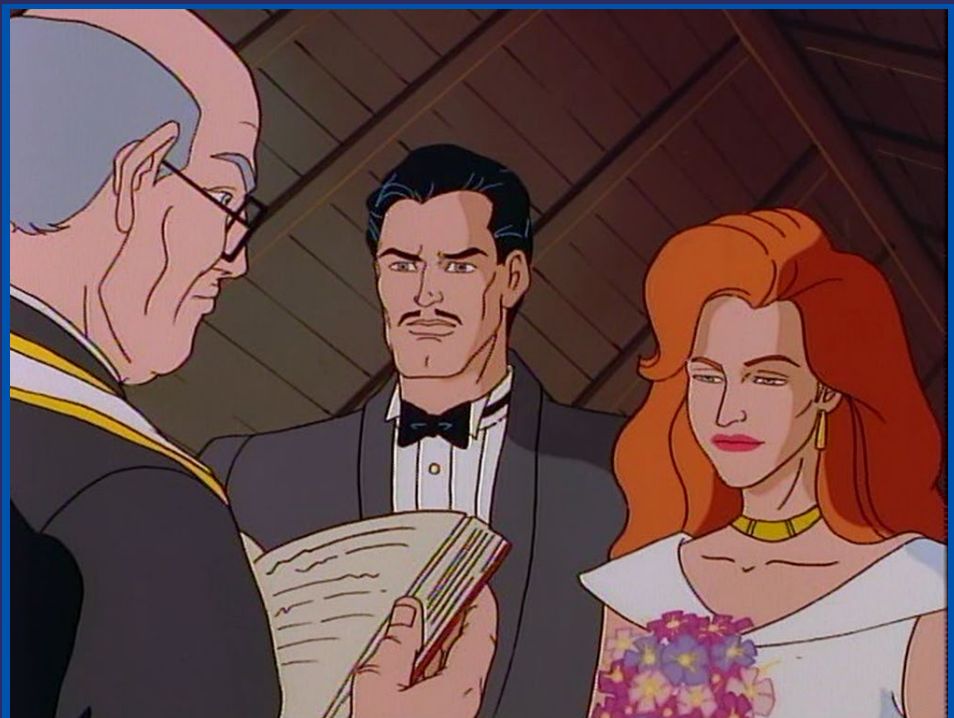
Alongside the main run of Iron Man stories, Tony Stark has featured in numerous annuals, miniseries, and one-shots from *Age of Innocence: The Rebirth of Iron Man* in 1996 to *Iron Man: Legacy of Doom* in 2008.

## Iron Man on Screen

Stark's character has made several appearances on

screen over the years. In 1966, Canadian actor John Vernon voiced Iron Man in the cartoon: *The Marvel Super Heroes*. He was originally shown in the Wednesday slot (Monday was Captain America, Tuesday had Hulk, Thor obviously on Thursday and Prince Namor on Friday). The animated TV series *Marvel Action Hour*, featuring Iron Man came out in 1994. *The Avengers: United They Stand* (1999) was another cartoon featuring Stark. He also appeared in *Iron Man: Armored Adventures* and *The Super Hero Squad Show*, both airing in 2009. He has also featured in various feature length animations, including 2013's *Iron Man: Rise of Technovore*. This story features a new bio-weapon and also stars Punisher, Hawkeye and Black Widow.

Robert Downey Jr. first brought Tony Stark to life on the sil-



Tony Stark gets hitched in this episode of the 1990s cartoon series

Image © Marvel, 1996



Image © Marvel, 2008

In Jon Favreau's 2008 film, Iron Man certainly made an impact

in 2010, which had a less favourable response.

2013 sees Shane Black, director of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, at the helm for *Iron Man 3*. Downey Jr also made a brief cameo in *The Incredible Hulk* (2008). Joss Whedon handled director duties for *The Avengers* in 2012 (also known as *Marvel's Avengers Assemble*), where Iron Man saves New York alongside his fellow superheroes.

## Tony Stark

Everyone knows the story of Anthony Edward Stark, son of wealthy industrialist and head of Stark Industries, Howard Stark and his wife, Maria. Lee based the idea of Tony Stark around wealthy inventor, business mogul, and defence contractor Howard Hughes. Tony needed to be a boy gen-

ver screen in 2008, when the weapons dealer is brought into the twenty first century by director Jon Favreau. Mirroring US foreign policy and some of the comic book output of the time, Stark is relocated from Vietnam to Afghanistan. Cap-

tured by dissidents, he escapes by creating the Iron Man suit. Upon returning to America, he renounces the arms industry. Of course, this act damages his company financially which leads to the major narrative of the film. The sequel followed

ius - how else could he eventually become Iron Man? He achieved his Master's degrees in electrical engineering and physics after studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It is with Stark's motivations that his

path diverges from the reality of Hughes. The comic hero's parents are killed in a plane crash, leaving him in charge of the company.

Stark journeys to Vietnam as part of an arms deal and is subsequently captured and mortally wounded. In the first run of comics, it is the Vietnamese Wong-Chu who captured Stark, but subsequent re-tellings of Iron Man's origins update the story to keep it closer to current events. In all the origin stories, his injury has left a piece of shrapnel moving slowly through his chest towards his heart. Only a powerful electromagnet could save his life by generating a field which halted the progression of the lethal shard.

In the first telling, it was fellow captive and physicist Ho Yinsen who constructed the chest-plate which kept him alive. Tony even describes his injury in terms of technology.

He cannot face death as just a man. Together, they constructed the armoured suit - the Mark I - so they could escape. Yinsen sacrifices himself so Tony can escape (putting his human life before Iron Man's machine existence). During the escape, Tony meets wounded American Marine fighter pilot, James Rhodes. "Rhodey" would become Tony's best friend over the course of the comic book. Other characters that pop up in Tony's evolution include his chauffeur, Happy Hogan and his secretary, Virginia - also known as "Pepper" Potts. Unlike the 2008 movie, Stark originally hides his secret identity from the public: Iron Man is his bodyguard and even his company's mascot. As Lee wanted the capitalist hero, Stark's enemies were suitably chosen for Iron Man to fight. He comes up against the Communists: Black Widow, the Crimson Dynamo and the Titanium Man. However,

the Chinese Communist the Mandarin becomes his greatest enemy.

It wasn't until the Vietnam War ended that Marvel changed Iron Man's raison d'être. The pro-Capitalist stance remained but the anti-Communist angle lessened. Buoyed on by the anti-war movement, Marvel took the bold move of having Stark question his own motives, the very traits that had made him what he was. While keeping his notorious arrogance and swagger, he changed his politics and questioned the morality of being a weapons dealer. Big topics for a comic book. The gamble paid off. He became more popular than ever.

While building new suits and developing tech for his Marvel cohorts, his biggest challenge came from the bottom of a bottle. By now, it is 1979. Tony is fighting both his alcoholism as well as rival indus-



Tony Stark show off his latest weapon system. Shortly before his kidnapping.

Image © Marvel, 2008

trialist Justin Hammer. This aforementioned arc Demon in a Bottle collects the issues dealing with Tony's toughest times.

Once Tony defeated the bottle, Hammer and others, Iron Man's story becomes more fragmented and goes off in odd tangents. He is transported back in time by Doctor Doom. He falls back into alcoholism and even homelessness when Obadiah Stane takes over Stark International. At this point, it is Rhodey who takes over as Iron Man. Sadly for his former friend, Stark must fight Rhodey as the power of Iron Man corrupts him. A series of other technological battles follow as more and more be-suited and inferior enemies are wheeled out (based on stolen Iron Man tech - known as the Amor Wars storyline, where technology is seen as a status symbol that everyone must have in order to compete). See Stilt-Man, Stingray and the Mandriods amongst others.

In the 1990s, cybernetics became the cool topic de jour and Iron Man was no different. In the comics of this time, it was the suit's cybernetic interface that caused Tony health problems, leading eventually to the creation of a remote controlled suit. This caused a massive conflict; the suit was his status symbol and kept him alive, but at the same time it held the possibility of being his killer. Next up was another time-travel tale featuring Kang the Conqueror, before

the suit itself became sentient for a time.



It wasn't until 2002 that Tony Stark revealed his identity as Iron Man to the public. This act lead him on a convoluted path to becoming the US Secretary of Defence, although he is forced to resign in an Avengers storyline, publically retiring from being Iron Man (which is of course, a lie). Marvel then reverted Iron Man's stories back to tackling business and politics (and less time-travel). This was achieved, by the Extremis storyline - widely regarded as one of the best. Stark returned to being an arms dealer. During his origin, this time he is captured by Afghan terrorists with links to Al Qaeda. This arc also introduces Maya Hansen, Tony's ex lover and scientist and Aldrich Killian. These two are trying to recreate the Super Soldier Serum that was lost after the creation of it's sole success: Captain America. Events lead to Tony taking the serum, al-

lowing him to control the Iron Man suit with thought alone. He has also developed the suit to self-assemble around him with this new mind control. He can also connect to all networked machinery on the planet. Now, man is man-plus. Something more than human, thanks to science and technology.

Marvel had become a very events-driven company by the mid-1990s and Iron Man was part of the plan. He featured in *Civil War*, *Secret Invasion*, *Siege*, *Fear Itself* and many more. The plots of these storylines are beyond the scope of this article.

## Iron Man

It may seem a little odd to the modern audience, but Iron Man's suit was originally a bulky grey affair before the golden suit appeared, as seen in 1963's *The Avengers*. According to Heck, Kirby designed the original costume, while he designed the look of the characters. Tony Stark may be a superhero, but like Batman, he has no actual super-powers (he only has skills in sciences, business and politics - up until the *Extremis* storyline at any rate) so, when Stark wanted to suit-up, he needed to assemble the suit himself, putting it on like clothing. There is a clear nod to it in the look of the suit designed by Stark to escape captivity in the movie *Iron Man* (2008); even more so in the comic book adaptation of the film (as with these things - the comic of the movie of the

comic - completing the circle), which was called *I am Iron Man* (written by Peter David, drawn by Sean Chen). The golden suit first appeared in *Tales of Suspense* issue 40. Stark visits a circus and in order to prevent a tragedy, he puts on the grey suit. The crowd don't like what they see, so Tony vows to change the suit, with advice from his female companion, Marion.

The suit became the familiar red and gold colouring in issue 43. The new suit was designed by Steve Ditko and it was at this time, that the new, shiny suit became as much the focus as the hero inside. This was the Mark III. Stark needed a new suit to in order to defeat Dr Doll, who could control the gold armour through a replica figurine. The Mark III was sleeker, lighter and more effective, although the breastplate was still used to keep Tony alive. The relationship between technology and society is clearly a dominant theme throughout the various series, and it is only natural that Iron Man's suits develop in line with the real world.

The next major upgrade was the Mark V (issue 85, 1976)

which incorporated a force field and solar power. The technology and storylines in the 1980s led to the development of a range of suits for various situations. Developments included the Space Armour and Stealth Armour

factor, rather than the human (and superhuman) characters. The technology was the be all and end all of narratives.

More specialist armours popped in the 1990s and 2000s, including a Mk II Space Armour, a Telepresence Armour (1993)

which enabled him to walk after he was paralysed, Modular Armour (1994) with interchangeable parts, Thorbuster (2003) and more. At this point, it seemed, each new adventure required its own specialist armour. The Extremis Armour, introduced in 2006 was known as Model 30. The suit fused with Tony's body, essentially turning him into a cyborg-like hybrid. A post-human who could control his tech with thought alone. It was a second skin, much lighter and responsive that all previous suits. In the real world, science

has developed artificial limbs that can be controlled with thought.

In the last few years, more specialist suits turn up in a variety of comics, perhaps most noticeably the Black and Gold armour from *Iron Man* number 1 in January 2013 as part of the new *Marvel NOW!* run.



Image © Marvel, 1987

Multiple Armours - From the Armor Wars story line

(both 1981), Recovery Armour - a nod back to the original grey suit (1985) and the self-explanatory Hydro Armour (1987). In 1988, issue 231 saw the introduction of the Mark VIII suit which Stark used to battle Firepower in the Armor Wars arc. It is possible to consider that the technology of these stories was the driving

The suits in the movies have their own history and design alongside a merchandising range. The Mark I was of course the suit Downey's Stark used to escape in Afghanistan. The Mark II featured flaps such as you'd find on an aircraft. However, it froze when Tony flew too high. Leading to the creation of the Mark III - the first in the film to feature the classic read and gold. The Mark V was the suitcase suit in *Iron Man 2*, and it was red and silver. That film also introduced the triangular arc reactor design from the Mark VI. *The Avengers* featured the Mark VII, which could self-assemble around Stark. *Iron Man 3* features the Mark 42, as well as [spoiler alert] a whole variety of the specialist suits from the comics including Stealth Armour, Hulkbuster Armour and Space Armour.

## Conclusions

As can be seen, there is a striking relationship between Iron Man's evolution and society's relationship with technology. The last forty odd years has also seen a progression of business ethics, politics, international conflict and social responsibility. All these have been reflected in the pages of Iron Man comics, the small screen animations and the silver screen films. Marvel and particularly the writers of Iron Man have understood that society needs heroes to hold up its mirror, so that it may take a good look at itself. With Tony Stark, who is just a man - al-

beit a very rich and gifted man - and not a super-powered man, alien or supernatural presence, *Marvel* has a rich and complex character that it isn't hard to relate too and very easy to like. Like many of us today who can't live without our smart-phones and tablet computers Iron Man is a human with the enhancements of technology.

Ian Simpson



Image © Marvel, 2008

Arms Manufacturer Comes Good. Iron Man: Director of SHIELD



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INTERVIEW

CONTINUUM'S RACHEL NICHOLS



With season two of *Continuum* airing on Syfy UK next week, we thought it was a good a time as any to catch up with time travelling protector herself Rachel Nichols.

For those who need a refresher, Nichols plays Kiera Cameron, a City Protective Services officer in 2077-era Vancouver. Life goes on in apparent freedom under a technologically advanced high-surveillance police state but when a group of “freedom fighters” called Liber8 escape execution by time traveling to 2012, Kiera is involuntarily transported with them and joins local law enforcement to track them down while concealing her identity as a time-traveler from the future.

**GS:** Hi Rachel.

**RN:** Hello.

**GS:** Thank you so much for giving us your time.

**RN:** Oh absolutely, thank you so much for wanting to talk to me.

**GS:** No definitely. So *Continuum* Season 1 absolutely brilliant! We were so happy that there was a season 2 and that it is even longer which



is brilliant.

**RN:** Good.

**GS:** So what attracted you to the role of Keira and Continuum as a show?

**RN:** You know, I actually came about the first script for the pilot in a very unorthodox way. One of my best girlfriends in the entire world called me one day and said 'my friend is casting this show, and it is a Canadian show, but it is really good, is it OK with you if I send the script to you, or do you want me to send it to your agent first?'. I said 'No, no, no it's fine you can send it to me, and I'll read it and see what I think'. And I was about ten pages in, and I went 'I have to get this role!', I have to do whatever it takes to get this job, I have to have this role.

The role of Keira Cameron is... you don't see leading female roles on TV like this very frequently, and it sort of reminded me of Alias, of Sidney Bristow and Jennifer Gardiner, and that strong female lead, who does the fighting, and does the problem solving but also has that emotional core and that emotional centre. And the script just has everything, it had your Sci-fi elements, your futurist elements, your drama, your character development. The idea that there was emotion there, and there were feelings and it wasn't just being a talking head. There were so many elements to the show, and the role and I just... as I said ten pages in I have to get this job, whatever it takes,

I have to play this role.

**GS:** Brilliant. How much input do you actually get into the development of Kiera? Do you get to say 'Oh I think that she would do this more' or 'I think this'?

**RN:** - Absolutely. That is the brilliant part about our show, and about the writers, and the creator Simon Berry. Everything really trickled down, from him, everything, whether it is the writer's room, or the different actors on the show, everything trickles down from him, and he is such a pillar of co-operation, and teamwork, and everybody is allowed to collaborate, and especially for me with the role of Kiera, I get into I and if something doesn't ring true in the script, or I think 'Oh can we change this a little bit ever so slightly' or 'I don't really think she would do this', absolutely.

And we all get to do that with our characters whether it is Lexa Doig and working on Sonya Valentine, or Erik Knudsen working on Alec Sadler, it is a very sort of collaborative environment which is commutative for putting out the best product. If you have a group of people who like each other, which we all do, and work well together then that is the best thing.

**GS:** You mentioned the character

Alec at the end of season 1. Your dynamic looks like it is going to possibly change a little bit. Can you tell us what is going to happen, and a bit about the 'Destiny' theme we have been hearing about coming up in this season?

**RN:** Absolutely, absolutely. At the end of season 1 Alec gets that message from his future self, and at the beginning of season 2 he is very concerned with who he becomes. And he is very concerned...I'm not



Image © Syfy, 2012

sure if Alec has said anything about future Keira, I don't know if future Alec did or did not, I'm not privy to that sort of information, which is good as I shouldn't be.

**GS:** (Laughs)

**RN:** But he is very concerned about who he becomes and Keira is obviously a big part of that and Liber8 and the members of Liber8 that are here. The theme of season 2 is very much destiny orientated and responsibility orientated because more so than in season one, especially for Keira comes

the idea of 'Wow! Everything I am doing now may affect the future that I am trying to get back to', 'the point in the future that I am trying to get back to may no longer exist as I remember it, giving what I am doing in this world right now'.

And I have a lot to do with Alec and his destiny. You know [the] poor kid 16 years old and received a message from his 70 year old self basically saying 'You need to change what you are going to become, because I am here now and it is not great'.

So that kind of thing, I mean it is obviously going to be much more involved than that, but I am only allowed to say so much. But especially for Alec and Keira this season is about responsibility and about destiny and about can they change the future, can they not change the future. Obviously Julian Randol plays a large part in this as well, so you have a lot in store for you story wise.

**GS:** Brilliant, can't wait. So how is your dynamic going to change with Carlos? Are you actually going to let him in and let him know what is going on? Or is he still not going to have a clue?

**RN:** Well again at the end of season 1 obviously Carlos has been suspect of me the whole entire first season - rightfully so. And I disappear in front of Gardiner at the end of season 1 and he has obviously worked with Carlos as well, so Carlos becomes even more suspicious

because we have Gardiner on my tail saying 'How can you believe her?' and 'How can you not have questions?', so without saying too much - because I think I would be beheaded if I gave everything away.

**GS:** (Laughs)

**RN:** Carlos and Keira at the beginning of season 2 start out at odds. Keira is very much a lone wolf at the beginning, Alec is trying to figure out what he wants to do, Carlos is kind of fed up with Keira and she is sort of a vigilante at the beginning of season 2. There does come a point where Carlos does get new information about Keira that is something perhaps she would never have told him before. What that information is I can not tell you.

But it is the straw that breaks the camels back and he has got to hear a story or two to have his need for details vindicated so that Keira can continue doing the work that she is doing whilst she is here, and I am sorry that is the most vague answer possible - but

I wanna keep my job, I don't wanna get fired! (Laughs)

**GS:** (Laughs) No, no that's fine! Going on from that apparently in second episode of season 2 Keira moves slightly more outside the law, is that something that we are going to expect more of? And is that going to make Carlos distrust her even more?

**RN:** Yeah, you know I love vigilante Keira, I love rogue Keira, I love kicking arse Keira. I find that so much fun so I encourage all of that. I was going through a read-through the other day and I was talking to some of the Liber8 guys and they were saying 'Oh you should come over to the dark side!' and I said 'Oh I don't think it's going to go that far!'.

But there is even a scene in episode 1 where she has clearly gone...she is clearly taking matters into her own hands, thinking 'You know what, I don't want to be confined by the rules of the PD in 2013, I'm gonna take things into my own hands and just go out on



my own'. And she does and I like it when she does that, I think it is very cool and makes very good TV.

**GS:** *It is very cool. Definitely, especially when you have the suit and all the gadgets and everything, that is awesome.*

**RN:** Oh yeah, that is one of the most fun parts of my job, when I get to...you know I have gadgets and it is very important that Keira, even though she has the gadgets she is also still human, they have done a very good job. There are times when she is and there are times when you have to worry for her. She is not a supergirl she is a human, she is a human girl from the future and has certain elements like her tech that make her supergirl-esque in certain ways, but at the end of the day she is still human and you know still makes those mistakes and isn't completely untouchable as a superhero

would be. She has her faults, she has got her flaws.

**GS:** *I think that is quite nice, the fact that you don't rely on the suit, you don't go a bit like the sonic screwdriver in Doctor Who, it will save all. The suit does break down and you have to deal with that.*

**RN:** Yeah and that is so important especially because we don't want her to look invincible, she has got to be human, because she is human and they have done a very good job with that. The tech breaks down, sometimes it doesn't work, but you know what sometimes the tech is wrong and that was the really important thing for her to learn because in the future the tech is never wrong and she is told to completely rely on it.

And she does even when Carlos says to her 'You need some bedside manner. You look straight through people, you

have essentially zero bedside manner. What is wrong with you?'. And she doesn't get it, she doesn't understand what instincts are really, she has relied on tech for her whole career. Being in 2013 she has to become more of a human than she ever was in 2037.

**GS:** *Brilliant. So! Do we know if Season three has been greenlit? Is there another season to look forward to?*

**RN:** We are all hoping so obviously. Three episodes have aired here [in the US] and the fourth is to air on Sunday, it is doing really well, so fingers crossed! But I doubt they will announce anything until it has aired both in the UK and the US.

**GS:** *Well I really hope they do because it is so nice to have a fresh sci-fi show out there that is just brilliant to be honest.*

**RN:** Oh thank you so much! It is so nice to talk to people who love the show. It makes me so happy so I really appreciate it. I have really enjoyed talking to you and thank you for watching.

**GS:** *Thank you for doing a brilliant job and thank you for giving up your time this evening - or afternoon to speak to me.*

**RN:** Absolutely! Have a great night.

**Continuum season two kicks off on Syfy UK on Thursday May 23rd at 10pm.**

**Darkphoenix1701**



Image © Syfy, 2012

VIDEO GAME  
REVIEW

## FASTER THAN LIGHT (FTL)

# FTL

## FASTER THAN LIGHT

Creators: Matthew Davis & Justin Ma

Game Site: [ftlgame](http://ftlgame.com)

Available: [On Steam](https://store.steampowered.com/app/239860) for PC or Mac

*FTL is a spaceship simulation roguelike-like. Its aim is to recreate the atmosphere of running a spaceship exploring the galaxy (like Firefly/Star Trek/BSG etc.) In any given episode of those classic shows, the captain is always yelling "Reroute power to shields!" or giving commands to the engineer now that their Warp Core is on fire. We wanted that experience, as opposed to the "dog fighting in space" that most videogames focus on. We wanted a game where we had to manage the crew, fix the engines, reroute power to shields, target the enemy life support, and then figure out how to repel the boarders that just transported over!*

That moment where a cunning plan unravels, when events take an unexpected turn and you are left staring blankly at the yawning black space where your lovely starship used to be. To some, it is a moment of frustration, to others, a spur to learn from mistakes made and a drive to click the "New Game" button one more time.

*Faster than Light* will present

this situation to you countless times, in the vein of all great rogue-likes (games where when you die, you stay dead - there is only one life). The defining feature of the best games of this type is, in my opinion, the ability for the player to learn from each death, slowly getting better and better, even though every now and then, the game conspires against you and there was nothing that you could re-

alistically do to avert disaster.

*Faster than Light* is a game that gives you your own starship and crew. You are given full (and I really mean full) control over every ship system. You don't actually control the ship directly, but take on the role of captain, giving orders via a mouse click dictatorship. Those classic Star Trek episodes where power is redirected from the engines to the shields? You can do that! From weapons to shields, from doors to scanners, every system can be given more power or less with a simple mouse click, and each can be upgraded using the game's scrap system as currency. Various alien races with their own alliances and abilities add some variety to proceedings, and the ability to name your crew before you start lends itself to awesome tales of your best friend suffocating when they accidentally went into an airlock and your



Managing The Ship's Systems

screen idol celebrity crush saving the day. Add into the mix a host of tasty weapons such as hull breaching lasers or teleporting bombs, and you have the ingredients of a delicious sci-fi treat.

Of course, the various systems on your ship also have their own weaknesses, which allow you in turn, to strategise where to target your weapons on the enemy ship. Their weapons ripping through your hull? Target their weapon system to disable it. They keep teleporting intruders onto your ship? Open strategic doors and airlocks and let the vacuum of space suck the air from their lungs. The latter is also a great

tactic for extinguishing fires, but keep an eye on ship oxygen levels.

The goal of the game is to always stay one step ahead of the enemy fleet that slowly encroaches across each sector you are in. While doing this, you jump from way-point to way-point and sector to sector, recruiting more crew and upgrades and aiming to meet up with the allied fleet in time for the final confrontation with the game's big boss ship. This ship is massive, with multiple weapon systems, cloaking abilities and other headache inducing problems. That of course, is if you even get that far. Even after twenty or

more play throughs, you will still find yourself sometimes dying less than a few sectors in, which is humbling to say the least.

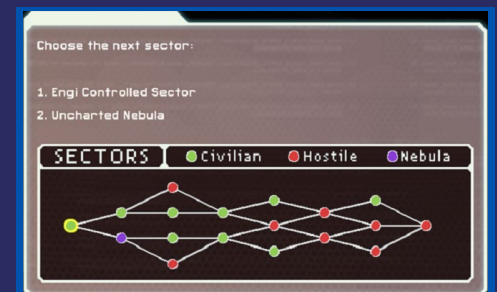
*FTL* is great as a little time-waster game, but you may soon find that a quick ten minutes has turned into an hour or more. It has good re-playability and the lo-fi graphics and sound make it sometimes feel like you really are watching an old Star Trek episode.

**Casey Douglass**

Rating:



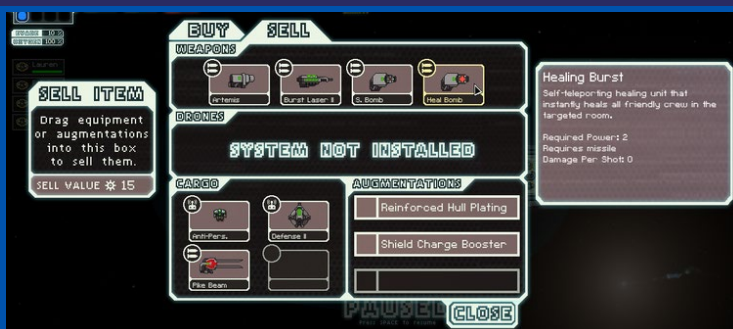
Entering Combat! Shields Up!



Sector Progression



Unlock New Ships for Future Games



The Trade Window. Not all Encounters are Hostile



Writer: Stephen Mooney

Artist: Stephen Mooney

Publisher: [IDW Publishing](#)

### DAMES. DINOSAURS. DANGER.

*Summer, 1943, and in the midst of a war waged by monsters, Staff Sergeant Tommy 'Irish' Flynn never expected to encounter a real one. But on a remote island in the South Pacific, Flynn and his squad come face-to-fanged-face with creatures long thought dead.*

At the moment pulp is very much the in thing. *Atomic Robo*, *The Black Beetle*, *Lobster Johnson* and, most recently, the sell out hit from *Image Comics' Five Ghosts* have very much shown that pulp is back with a vengeance. Joining those illustrious comics we have a new pulp adventure from Stephen Mooney: *Half Past Danger* and a new hero in Tommy "Irish" Flynn. So is *Half Past Danger* another

pulp success or a cliff-hanger too far?

Well if, like me, you were thinking "how could anything with a kick ass title like *Half Past Danger* be bad?" then rest easy friend as this is one hell of a first issue. In the space of twenty five pages we are swept off to the exotic South Pacific and the mean streets of New York. In between we get secret Nazi bases, hard bitten GI's, a damsel who is anything but in distress, a fast talking Tommy gun wielding hero, a bucket load of action oh and lets mention them again DINOSAURS!

It's clear from the first page that Mooney not only loves pulps but understands them. There is a certain rhythm and flow to telling this kind of tale and in issue one, Mooney is certainly the maestro. Tommy Flynn, aka "Irish", is in the best tradition of pulp heroes - the wrong guy in the wrong place. He's not a treasure hunter or a costumed mystery man, he's just a simple soldier who likes a fight and a drink but not necessarily in that order. He's not ready for what he and his team come across and we get a glimpse of the toll it takes on him in the second half of the book. I hope this is something that is explored in the future issues. Some of the best pulp heroes, no matter what weird gadgets are great not because of their skills but the vulnerability at the heart of their heroics which bring us to our feet cheering.

What's great about Flynn is that while being gruff and a tad prickly, he's a very likable character from the offset and you're rooting for him and his men before you now it. For you hard core pulp fans Flynn actually reminded me a little of Jake Cutter from the old *Tales of the Gold Monkey* television series, all Flynn needed was a seaplane and dog with one eye and he would have been all set.

When I first started reading the first issue, it felt like a typical war story to begin with and given some of the stuff I had seen on Stephen's site in the run up to the issue, I began to wonder if this was the comic I thought it would be. It's a great set up as it lulled me into a false sense of security which sat there right until our boys run across the aforementioned Nazi base and then we descend straight into a tale that feels straight out of a *Republic* serial.

The first issue serves very much as a platform to introduce us to Flynn and some of the other main characters who were just as engaging in the limited time we spend with them. There still a huge veil of secrecy over what's going on but that choice works well and really gives the story that cliff-hanger feel. Yes some of the dialogue and scenes you can see coming a mile off but for me that is the beauty of true pulp adventure in that it's always giving you a knowing



wink, always making sure it's tongue is firmly in cheek.

The art for *Half Past Danger* is stellar. Bright, colourful and loud with some great detail, especially in the early jungle scenes where you can almost feel the sweat creeping down your back as unsorted insects dive bomb you from every angle. However it was the action sequences which really bring the comic to life, the moves, the choice of panel angle all show that knowledge of how to tell this kind of adventure. One scene in particular with Flynn facing of against a veritable man mountain, with reminded me of Doc Savage. The opening moves of the fight echoed Indy's fight against that giant Nazi who ends up kissing the wrong end of a flying wing propeller in Raiders

of the Lost Ark. This sequence becomes part of a massive bar fight which was my highpoint for the comic in terms of the art, which manages to showcase straight up brawling, martial arts and still get a few laughs in as well.

Looking at some of the character designs in the back matter and upcoming covers (including a lovely alternate cover by Tommy Lee Edwards) it looks like the world of *Half Past Danger* is going to get a lot crazier and I can't wait. If Mooney is able to keep up this level of finesse in his art and writing then this is going to be one hell of a pretty comic once all the six issues are out. I've got my fingers crossed for some sort of hardcover edition as I would pick that up in a heartbeat.

*Half Past Danger* showcases what is great about pulp adventure when it's handled by a fan of the genre with the technical and creative weight to back up his lofty ambitions.

**Barry Nugent**

**Rating:**

**G G G G G**

*Half Past Danger* will be out on 22nd May and released monthly. For you Diamond folks you can order a copy with a Regular cover: MAR130351 and subscriber/pre-order variant: MAR130352

You can also stay up to date on the comic and see loads of pages from issue one and the future issues (if you don't mind spoilers) on [Stephen's blog](#).



HALF PAST DANGER ISSUE | PAGE 1

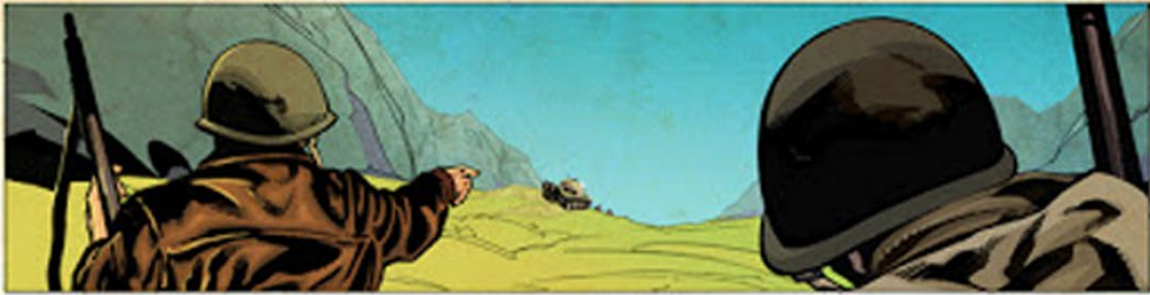




*Chapter One*

***BITE THE BULLET***







B R A D P I T T

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FILM REVIEW

## IRON MAN 3



**Writers:** Drew Pearce & Shane Black

**Director:** Shane Black

**Starring:** Robert Downey Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow & Don Cheadle

*Marvel's "Iron Man 3" pits brash-but-brilliant industrialist Tony Stark/Iron Man against an enemy whose reach knows no bounds.*

*When Stark finds his personal world destroyed at his enemy's hands, he embarks on a harrowing quest to find those responsible.*

This journey, at every turn, will test his mettle. With his back against the wall, Stark is left to survive by his own devices, relying on his ingenuity and instincts to protect those closest to him. As he fights his way back, Stark discovers the answer to the question that has secretly haunted him: does the man make the suit or does the suit make the man?

The plot of this film neatly ties

up threads from the previous two with Stark, on what is being described as the most human story of the three films, facing a villain like no other he has faced. International terrorist, The Mandarin is becoming a threat to the world and comes to Tony's radar after a personal attack. During the course of the story we see Tony Stark become the hero more than Iron Man but also we see him grow up.

Stark has been having nightmares since the attack in New York (Marvel's Avengers Assemble) and has buried himself in his work to cope. The events of New York are also causing him issues in the shape of anxiety attacks.

Robert Downey Jr is back on top form in what will be remembered as his landmark role while Gwyneth Paltrow brings a new hotness to the role of Pepper Potts that I never saw coming and I like it. Cheadle is back in the action again and seems much more at ease in the role this time out. Jon Favreau's Happy

Hogan is reduced to just a bit longer than a cameo but is integral to the plot.

There is no SHIELD presence this time as they are all tied up with the Captain America sequel (I'm guessing) but the new characters all hold their own. Guy Pearce is excellent as Aldrich Killian, a fellow inventor and someone who has score to settle with Tony. Rebecca Hall shines as Maya Hansen, who has a hand in the Extremis plot thread that plays a huge part in the film. Ben Kingsley brings something exceptional to the character of the Mandarin which just has to be seen and is by far one of the highlights of the film.

The humour in the film was hilarious and something I never expected, yes we have had it in the past but this is a different type of comedy. During the middle of the film Tony strikes up a bond with a young boy and the writing by Drew Pearce and Shane Black gives the scenes some great emotional content that and take Tony back to his roots.



Tony Stark Issues a Challenge in Iron Man 3 ...

Image © Marvel, 2013





Image © Marvel, 2013

The Mandarin prepares another video message for the world

Shane Black's direction is on top form, seamlessly blending his style with what Favreau did before him. The camera work is clean and colourful and it would not be a Black movie without Christmas.

The music by Brian Tyler (The Expendables 2, Fast & Furious 5, Battle Los Angeles) is very noteworthy with some powerful scores that do a great job of bringing the atmosphere to the scenes and build up the action. I am still disappointed that there is no memorable theme tune that I can hum on my way to work but this seems to be the case with a lot of films.

As you would expect with a Marvel film there is a lot of CGI involved and this was actually a mixed bag of emotions for me this time round. All three previous films featuring Iron Man (including Avengers) have been near perfection in terms of the armour visuals but in this I was quite taken back at a few scenes where the CGI was not up to par. This was mainly when he steps in and out of the suit and just looks

cheap. I know it is nit-picking but when a movie costs two-hundred million dollars to make I guess I expect more.

Previous Marvel films have all had a feeling that something bigger was coming or about to happen with the cameo's and SHIELD but this movie does not feel like that, it really is a stand-alone movie. Apart from an end credits scene the film feels like it has lost a little of its bigger Marvel world feel to it.

Those wanting a full superhero suited up action movie will be in two minds when they see this film because as I

said before it is the most human of the three movies and that is not a bad thing but is it right for a superhero comic book film that wants to attract families with children? I know my son will be bored for the whole first half of this film and by the time the last act arrives he will be waning which is a shame because the final part of the movie has more Iron Man than any person can handle.

This is why I am in two minds with the film, yes it is a great adult character story but children who will buy the toys and read the comics want superhero action and lots of it. Who is the film aimed at I wonder?

This does not mean I did not enjoy the film because I did but I fear it will alienate some people. Overall it was an excellent ending of what I would like to call the first Iron Man trilogy.

**Christophe Montoya**

Rating:

**G G G G G**



Image © Marvel, 2013

... and The Mandarin Responds



### Episode 01

*A graphic double murder has taken place in a residential neighborhood. Will Graham, a brilliant but socially awkward savant, is examining the crime scene. Putting himself in the mind of the criminal, Will uses extreme focus to hone in on the details of the murder. Every bullet was shot with expert precision. The killer tapped the phones in the house a week prior in order to record a conversation between one of the victims and her security company. When the murder was committed, the culprit played her voice back to keep the authorities at bay. Whoever did this was a pro.*

The first episode starts off with a man in the middle of a rather grisly crime scene. He de-constructs the scene in his head, playing it back and then re-starting it to work out how the murder was committed.

This young man is Special Agent Will Graham, a young FBI criminal profiler - he has some personal issues, the main one being that he can empathise with a killer and see things from their point of view.

This means he is perfect to help the FBI catch serial killers when they have run out of leads, and the man there to help him is Special Agent-in-Charge Jack Crawford.

During the investigation that is the focus of this episode, Jack becomes concerned that Will might be too fragile and goes to visit a Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Hmm! I'm sure I have heard that name somewhere!!) an experienced forensic psychiatrist to give a physiological profile on Will.

Both Will and Dr. Lecter meet

and whilst initially there is some animosity between them it soon becomes clear that they are almost kindred spirits with Dr Lecter understanding exactly what Will is going through. Anyway the killer is finally caught and the episode ends - not completely happily though.

There is some ambiguity at one point, I won't say due to spoilers, except to say - was the girl in the field killed by who we think, as it's never made totally clear.

In fact the relationships between Dr. Lecter, Will and Jack are all well formed and believable. However I can see that the relationship between Will and Dr. Lecter could end up leading to trouble!

A great first episode, and I can't wait to see next weeks episode. Be warned though as this is a series about Hannibal Lecter there is a lot of gore - but then I think you would expect that anyway.

Rating:



### Episode 02

*Will Graham's deadly encounter with Garret Jacob Hobbs is still affecting him. Jack Crawford wakes Will up from a bad daydream at the site of Hobb's cabin in Minnesota. The cabin is rustic and littered with animal parts in various states*

*of decay. Upstairs, the loft is splattered with deer antlers, almost from the floor to the ceiling. Jack informs Will about tips that Hobbs spent lots of time at the cabin with his daughter. Could she be an accomplice? Will doesn't buy the theory, as Abigail is still in a coma from stab wounds her father inflicted. Nevertheless, Jack insists, pondering whether Abigail was the bait Hobbs used to reel his victims in.*

Set immediately after the events of last week's episode, Will is having trouble coping after shooting dead Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Jack however wants him back out in the field asap so gets Lector to do a psyche evaluation on him to clear him for duty.

The serial killer of the week this week is The Gardener, I won't say what the M.O is as so as not to spoil the experience for the viewer - except to say that it's certainly original. This week we are introduced to an unscrupulous investigative reporter Miss Fredricka 'Freddie' Lounds, who it seems will go to any lengths to find out the truth - even taping conversations between Will and Lector.

After seeing the format of this show last week, I fell right into the episode really easily. This series really feels like I have been watching it for a while. It is well written, with well-rounded characters and a vein of dark humor running through it.

I really liked this episode again, especially how the story

just follows on as one continuous story from last week, and I would imagine next week's too. I think this helps the story flow well, allowing you get into the plot quickly and before you know it the episode is over. This week's serial killer was very imaginative and I watch with interest to see how Will and Lector's growing relationship is going to evolve and into what. Another great episode, please keep it up!

Rating:



Darkphoenix1701



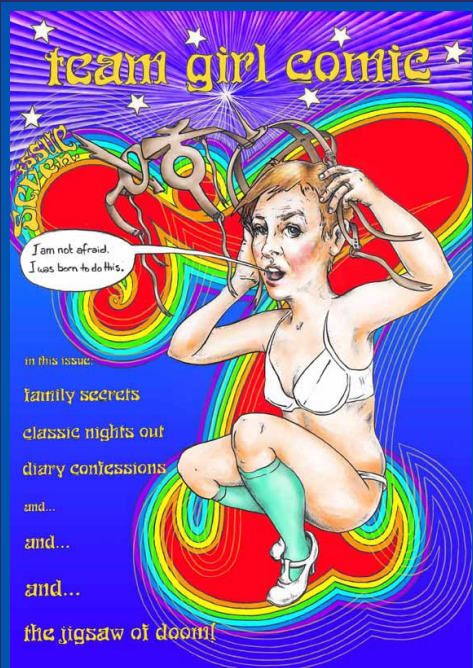
Hugh Dancy as Will Graham



Laurence Fishburne as Jack Crawford



Mads Mikkelsen as Hannibal Lecter



**Contributors:** Gill Hatcher, Penny Sharp, Evy Craig, Nondo, Jef Sinclair, Anna Clark, Claire Yvette, Honeypears, Cacachute and Claire JC Stewart tephen Mooney

Available: [Team Girl Comics](#)

*It's issue 7 of Team Girl Comic, featuring an eclectic mix of stories from Scotland's favourite all-female comix collective! Join us as we revisit the girl comics of yore, party like it's 1949 and bash those bothersome bullies. All this and plenty more drama inside.*

I have long been a fan of the *Team Girl* books, collections of short stories written by women of all ages, for anyone, with a high degree of quality thrown in. With Issue seven, the team seem to be really hitting their stride, producing more and more content at a faster pace. *Team Girl Comic* continues to be a joy to read.

Like all anthologies, there are ups and downs in terms of content. There are some real highlights here. At its best, *Team Girl* is a social commentary, often talking about the fears and worries that a lot of us have living in the twenty-first century, allowing us to feel better that we are not the only ones that feel this way. "Simply The Second Best" by Jef Sinclair does this perfectly. A bittersweet tale that we can all say that we have felt this way at some point in our life.

Yet a true highlight is the psychedelic "Jigsaw of Doom" by Honeypears. The art and story flow wonderfully well, adding some-

thing to *Team Girl* that is not often seen in the book. "Party Like It's 1949" is an elegant way of showing that although things have changed over the past sixty odd years, there is still something that links us together.

Meeting boys are shown in cleverly through "Pretty Ugly" by Carachute and Anna Clark's story is implemented beautifully with her playful innovative panel structure. The book finishes with a funny tale about what Tumblr is doing to society by Clare JC Stewart.

Overall, *Team Girl Comic* continues to be a consistently entertaining anthology. There are some stories that are better than others, but this is a return to form with some real gems on display here. A quirky, clever collection.

**Luke Halsall**

Rating:

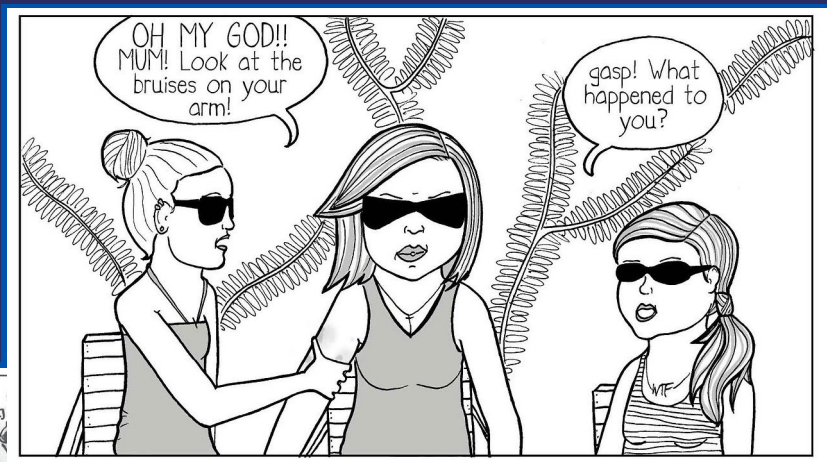


Image © Team Girl Co

Image © Team Girl Comic, 2013



## The Bells of Saint John

**The search for Clara brings the Doctor to London, 2013, where something deadly is waiting in the Wi-Fi.**

I'm still not convinced about splitting the series into two components, though it does mean we get a suite of eight episodes in this auspicious year. Following his Christmas misadventure with the Great Intelligence, the Time Lord has been searching for Clara Oswald in an effort to determine who and what this "twice-dead" girl is. If you watched the prequel on the Doctor Who site, you'll be aware that his search has been a bit fruitless so far but that advice from a young girl leads him to seek out a quiet place to think about where to find his missing friend. Which is why we find him in a thirteenth century monastery. Clara meanwhile, back in present day London is having computer issues - so she rings a Help line she was given by "a woman in

the shop". This gets her (amusingly) in touch with the Doctor. From here it's a whirlwind ride (with a few quiet moments) to discover a plot to harvest human minds via the wi-fi technology. Clever. And weird. So a classic normal-life twisted *Doctor Who* plot for us to enjoy, then.

There were moments I thought were pure genius in this episode. One was a scene where the TARDIS arrives in London and the Doctor and Clara pretend it's a magic act ... and manage to get some cash from the bewildered London-ites in order to buy breakfast! It's not often we see our hero acquiring funds and this is far more Doctorish than the theft carried out by Doctor Nine in *The Long Game!* Shortly after this, another scene appealed to me as a programmer (I'm a .net developer of desktop and web applications). The Doctor and one of his opponents are basically trying to out-hack each other to gain control over the upload / download of a human

mind. The scene is sufficiently tense, grabbing the viewer's attention and also it showed that in computing, size isn't always king. Which I think is an important message in *Doctor Who* any way. One person can make a difference to the world if applied correctly.

There were elements I wasn't so keen on though - pop-culture references never really sit well with me as they will tend to date a show. Having said that, this is *Doctor Who* and I imagine that things like *Twitter* and *Facebook* will be recognisable to future Earthlings, even if they appear primitive. Other references (like the Blue Box in Earl's Court) may be missed. In fact I missed that one as I'm oblivious to a lot of current events. I also thought that the Doctor's change of outfit wasn't necessary. It would have been enough to see him enter the TARDIS in his monk's habit, then leave in his new Purple attire with a quick twirl on exit. The extended scene really threw me out of the episode's flow, although it did give Matt Smith the chance to be particularly "Eleventh Doctorish". I do love this new look though.

The episode gives us a bit of a link between Clara and Oswin. At the start of the episode, the new girl is completely computer-illiterate but over the course of events she becomes a computer genius. Not only that, but it's alien computer genius. Which links to Oswin's

computational-prowess in Asylum of the Daleks. I really liked the chemistry between the two regular leads, although once again we seem back to a flirty-banter from the Companion which I'm not sure is necessary. Although I liked Clara and thought the character really shone in this episode, showing an initiative and feistiness that will see her in good stead moving forward, I sort of wish that Victorian Governess Clara was the companion as I think that would have given the opportunity for a fresher companion in the new series.

As has been the case with many episodes recently, I really thought the music was over-played throughout and I repeatedly found myself distracted by it. Which is the sign of a bad sound-track to me. It does seem to be the style of the show right now, though so I can't imagine it changing any time soon. Visually, the episode was gorgeous. The effect of the "Spoon-heads" and indeed their inherent creepy intent was marvellous and (as mentioned above) the data-computer elements of the story were well realised on the screen. A scene with Matt-Smith on a motorbike doing what a normal bike should not does not look ridiculous as it easily could have and the episode's villain's lair is superbly modern-business efficient.

Some of my favourite moments came at the end of the episode: The reveal of the actual villain and the handling of the minions (chilling - es-

pecially Celia Imrie as main-villain Miss Kizlet. This final scene with her in was a standout performance for me). Clara's refusing to just jump in the TARDIS with the Doctor (but she might tomorrow) and so on.

Overall, this was a nice lead into the story of Clara (and presumably the "Doctor Who?" thread that's running through) though I think any new viewers jumping in to "see what all the fuss is about this year" would have been left floundering a bit as there was no real explanation of the Time Lord's interest and concern with this pretty girl in the episode itself. I'm also left wondering ... if Clara is "protected" as stated by the Doctor to his enemy ... why is he taking her on wild, wacky and dangerous adventures? Bit selfish isn't it?

### Rating:



### The Rings of Akhaten

***The Doctor takes Clara to the Festival of Offerings, but the Old God is waking and demands sacrifice!***

After a prelude in which our hero tries to work out if there is anything sinister about this "twice dead girl", including a trip to her parents meeting, and watching the child grow up, the Doctor returns to London to pick the young woman up and take her "where-ever she wants to go." This whistle stop tour very much em-

phasises the episode's theme of memory and potential ... Clara's parents met by accident. The trigger for that meeting becomes an important element in both Clara's life - especially after her mother's passing and indeed to the story itself.

Rings has a different feel to it to a lot of *Doctor Who* episodes to me. It's very much an episode of concepts. And they are glorious, outlandish *Doctor Who* Concepts (capitals very much deliberate). A world where sentimental value is the currency. A slumbering god-being kept asleep by repeated singing of a lullaby. Space mopeds. And a normally "dead" thing being very much alive. Unfortunately the nature of this last means I'll probably need to spoiler ahead - so watch out for the warning. The story takes place in a very alien environment - not just an alien world, but one where the economy is different and one which has it's own mythology built around a sleeping-god in a temple which is situated in the asteroid belt orbiting a star.

Our heroes arrive on a neighbouring asteroid which has a thriving market filled with a multitude of the local life-forms. The star, asteroid belt, temple and market are beautifully realised and the scenes with the two regulars exploring the marketplace - together and separately are very nice viewing. I have slight issue with the alien languages that are spoken here as in my mind, the TARDIS should be



Image © BBC, 2013

The Rings of Akhaten certainly has stunning visuals

translating all the languages, not just that of the more human inhabitants.

This episode seemed light on action for the most part, but this is no bad thing. The right story with the right cast can hold the audience just as well and at no point did this episode seem to stall. Even the scenes that were essentially a child singing to a slumbering god held my attention. Speaking of the child, Emma Jones turns in quite a nice performance as the Queen of Years. Chosen as a baby to know all the songs and stories of the peoples of their system, Merry Gehelh has a more unfortunate fate in store than the single performance she fears to give. I think my favourite moment this episode came between Clara and Merry. Clara talks of her mother helping her to overcome her fear in order to do the same to the girl and both actresses truly shone in the little scene, in my opinion.

### SPOILER ALERT

The idea of keeping your “story devouring” and hence (apparently) soul devouring God-being asleep by ensuring one individual knows every single story and poem ever, then sacrificing them to feed said god-being and keep him / her / it asleep is a neat one, reminiscent of our ancestors making sacrifices to ensure the sun rose and so on. When the truth of poor Merry’s fate is realised and the pieces click one can’t help but think: well if it works, it saves a lot of lives doesn’t it?

I have several issues with the episode but ultimately I think they boil down to one thing. The episode feels incomplete - especially when compared to it’s promising concept.

Some of the action seems to have that *Quantum of Solace* feel to it wherein it’s co-incidence or out of the blue realizations that take us from one story point to the next. The “monsters” in the episode, three masked villains who’s

apparent task is to ensure the Queen of Years is sacrificed to the Old God make only two appearances. The other Monster - what we are meant to think is the God serves even less purpose. I really hate when monsters are thrown in for the sake of having a monster. Like the “husks” in the otherwise fantastic *Ghost Light*. The waking, ranting “god” (who looks very much like a Sycorax) turns out to be ... an Alarm Clock? Who puts an alarm clock by their slumbering soul-devouring god-being? That’s just asking for trouble.

Also. The big-bad turns out to be a sentient sun. Which is fine. But in the end, the Doctor and Clara kill it by gorging it on the potential held in “the most important leaf in the world.” Which is a nice resolution. Until you take into account the fact that it’s a sentient star. Which you have killed. It’s light and heat fade to nothing. So in fact, Mr. Doctor and Miss Oswald - you have consigned the inhabitants of seven worlds to death. Go team.

### END SPOILERS

Overall, I’m finding it difficult to rate this story. Ultimately it boils down to this. While it didn’t live up to its potential, the episode was not inherently bad. It was nice easy viewing for a Saturday tea time which made a nice change from a lot of the more timey-wimey or story-arc heavy episodes. I’m disposed to rate it somewhat higher than I otherwise might based on two factors:

1) the story was well realised with beautiful sound design (not overpowering for a change) and gorgeous effects work.

2) It felt very much like a stand alone adventure which is something I genuinely miss in my *Doctor Who*.

## Rating:



## Cold War

***On a Russian submarine, a frozen alien warrior is waking up, just as the TARDIS arrives.***

My wariness for this episode came mainly from the rebooting of another classic villain. I've had mixed feelings about the other re-boots - save the Silurians which I'm not a fan of. Except Madame Vastra! So how did this episode appeal? Beware: this review contains SPOILERS!

Long time Who-fan and seasoned scribe Mark Gatiss returns to pen and episode of *Doctor Who* and has the task of bringing a classic enemy to life. I'll be honest here and say that on the whole I've been a bit down on Gatiss's Who episodes in the past. Don't get me wrong, they've been perfectly entertaining romps, but I've often found myself wanting more from the writer. Probably unfairly so. This story though, I found to be really well balanced. The plot is a nice historical thriller. Which, be-

ing set in 1983, a year in which I was happily playing with my He-Man toys and watching Robin of Sherwood and The A-Team along with Doctor Who really makes me feel my age slightly! Historical indeed!

The new design for the Ice Warrior is stunningly realised - the change of two fingered claw to Sontaran style three-fingered affair makes sense and the armoured martian really looks threatening in the dim-light of the submarine. Personally, I didn't like the Martian leaving it's armour for most of the episode, although this did lend more of an "Alien" vibe to proceedings as the (presumably) naked Ice Warrior could then skitter about in far more constrained areas than it would otherwise be able to.

wiry creature had the strength to perform some of the feats that it did. Also, those fingers would never fit into the armour's gauntlets. Secondly, there is a scene where the Doctor and Skaldak (the Ice Warrior in the episode) are talking and Skaldak is hidden in the steam-filled ceiling of the submarine. The face of the Warrior is shown and to me it seemed very flat.

Oddly enough, later the Warrior is back in its armour and removes it's helmet. At this point the head of the creature is shown off properly and it's a lovely CG creation that I think fits the race perfectly. Odd that the same model can have different impacts in different circumstances.



In *Cold War*, Russian submariners face an alien menace

Image © BBC, 2013

I think I'd have been happier without two things: Firstly, the Ice Warrior's "naked arms". Although they looked great and were used to effect, I had trouble believing that such a

The supporting characters are introduced and given enough characterisation in their interactions during the pre-titles sequence that the audience knows them enough during



the episode itself. Of course, the script is aided by an excellent cast who seem to be revelling in their roles. In the past, I've often bemoaned the fact that the Doctor is able to swan into a situation and take charge without really having to prove himself. Gatiss manages to put the Time Lord in this space without it seeming forced - the threat is revealed to be extra-terrestrial very early on and the Doctor does succeed in helping to stop the submarine from sinking to a depth at which it's hull could not survive the pressure. Given these facts and the fact that Liam Cunningham's Captain is clearly the level-headed, rational type of Russian Nuclear Submarine commander it seemed only natural that he would defer to the bizarre interloper.

As mentioned, the plot is an Alien style thriller and on this level, Mark Gatiss has hit the nail on the head. The story plods along nicely with the danger and tension ramped up at appropriate points. It's possible that the inclusion of the Ice Warrior helped this opinion, but I really felt this was an episode that really hearkened back to the late 1960s. This is a proper Base Under Siege story reminiscent of the Second Doctor's finest outings.

I do have a niggle with the resolution of the episode however, which seemed to jar heavily with one of the important elements to the plot.

Early in the episode, Skaldak sets of a beacon to summon

rescue. After a while, he determines that his race is dead. At the end of the episode a Martian rescue ship turns up to tractor the submarine from the icy depths and then matter-transport Skaldak to safety. I was a bit off put by this for a couple of reasons: first, surely an acknowledgement would have been sent as this vessel was clearly in short-range of Earth. Second, it's quite convenient that the Martian teleporter required the submarine to be surfaced before the rescue could commence. Thirdly, and this is really picky, the design of the ship seemed a bit incongruous to me.

Overall, this was an excellent thriller that filled fifty minutes of Saturday evening quite nicely. It's standalone nature also means that the episode can be watched by the casual viewer and will also stand up to individual watching later. Personally, I think this will stand up as one of the best episodes of this series ... but time will tell. It always does.

#### Rating:



#### Hide

***Something terrifying is hiding in Caliburn House, and the Doctor finds himself part of the ghost hunt.***

The episode opens with guest cast Dougray Scott and Jessica Raine as intrepid 1970s ghost-hunters Alec Palmer and Emma Grayling as they

try to uncover and exorcise the Witch of the Well who has been said to haunt the site of Caliburn House since saxon times - well before the house was built. As the titles kick in, the Doctor and Clara have arrived at the house, announcing that they are "Ghostbusters". From here, our regulars must establish their credentials, get to know Palmer and Grayling and on top of this, discover the secret of the Witch. Palmer is revealed to be an ex-military man who has served behind enemy lines on many missions turned ghost-hunter. His companion is the ideal one for such a job: an empathic psychic, Grayling knows intuitively what people are feeling.

Interestingly, although the episode is particularly tense, there is no explicit threat to the four investigators. While *Doctor Who* has toyed with Ghost stories before both on-screen and off (such as *BBC Audio's The Ghosts of N Space* and Mark Gatiss's *Big Finish* audio *Phantasmagoria* and TV episode *The Unquiet Dead*), Neil Cross manages to bring a different explanation for ghostly encounters to the table.

Usually in Science Fiction, these ghosts turn out to be echoes of the past or alien beings from parallel dimensions ... but not so here. As with his previous story, Neil Cross manages to bring a fresh view of the Doctor Who universe and, as with *Rings of Akhatan*, this is refreshing. However, Hide certainly comes over as a more complete realisation of

concepts for me. Perhaps this is because of the smaller scale of the story itself.

Cross's writing is helped by the excellent direction that Jamie Payne brings together with stellar performances by our regulars, Scott and Raine. Even potentially cliched dialogue such as Clara and Emma's chat about Palmer's feelings (or otherwise) towards his young assistant don't grate, despite the revelation coming almost from nowhere. To be honest, I'd managed to imply the mutual love from the actors' performances and didn't need this and other scenes that spelt it out. But the scenes didn't detriment the episode nor did they stand in the way of the story and so there's no real criticism there.

Once the team begin to unravel the nature of the ghost, things take a turn for the more interesting. It's at this point that the adventure twists and the Ghost (not actually a threat) turns out to be in trouble. Nat-

urally, our intrepid Time Lord tries a rescue which leads him to a very atmospheric forest. I love forests and to be honest feel quite at home wandering in them. But the presentation in *Hide* almost made me reconsider. This is proper dark, Fairy tale forest inhabited by a often glimpsed but never truly seen creature that seems to stalk it's prey.

In the ongoing Clara story (which has been nicely in the background rather than the focus of the series) we are reinforced with the idea that the TARDIS doesn't like the new companion for some reason. We also get a glimpse at a projection used by the vessel to communicate with others such as in the short story *The Lying Old Witch in the Wardrobe* and Tony Lee's excellent ten-doctor story *The Forgotten* (which has recently been republished by *IDW publishing* in a beautiful hardback edition. Go read it). It also turns out that contrary to his earlier words, The Doctor was not

looking to solve the mystery of the ghost ... rather he wanted to get a reading of Clara by the empathic psychic Emma Grayling. He's still not sure about that girl.

I do have niggles. What the heckers did the title have to do with the story? It seems a bit out of kilter to me. And yes, I could be-moan Matt Smith's mispronunciation of *Metebelis 3* (I did do while watching. Both times) but you know what? It makes no odds. Yes I'm a pedantic fan-boy, but by *Grayskull*, you have to draw the line somewhere. To prove fan-boy pedantry: in the *Big Finish* audio *The Apocalypse Element*, Colin Baker mis-pronounces the word "imprimature" from a story he starred in on TV (*The Two Doctors*). Didn't complain then either. But enough digression! I also thought it odd that the TARDIS could find the Doctor almost on request by Clara, but frankly the high-speed whizz through rescue was quite a spectacle.

*Hide* is an excellent, tense ghost story which, like last week's episode is one that can be enjoyed on repeat viewings. I really enjoyed the twists taken and especially liked the almost cliff-hanger ending that clearly has no bearing on next week's adventure. Some things, we don't need to see through I guess!

Rating:



Image © BBC, 2013

The Doctor runs in fear in the creepiest forest on television

## Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS

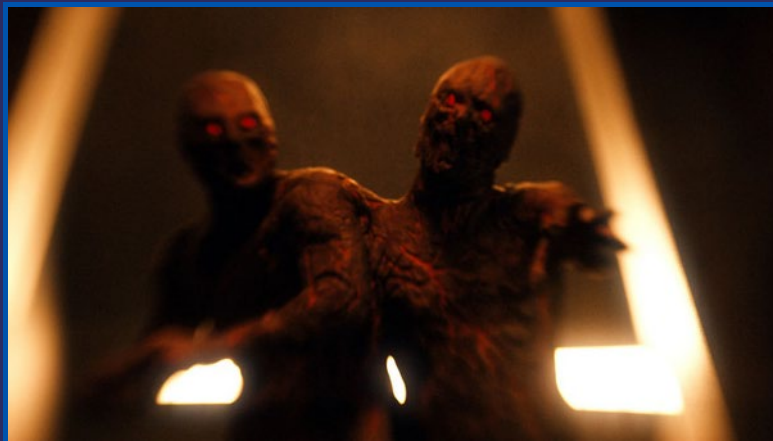
**The TARDIS has crashed, Clara is lost inside, and the Doctor has 30 minutes before his ship explodes!**

*Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS* holds much promise. An epic romp through the ship's corridors and rooms as the Doctor and a team of space-salvaging brothers seek to locate and rescue Clara before the self-destruct sequence completes, but that's getting ahead.

First of all, we need setup. We're introduced to the salvagers and their ship as it trundles through deep space, looking for a haul to bring in. As it happens, they happen across the TARDIS. Onboard the time-craft, the Doctor seems concerned that Clara and his ship don't see eye-to-eye. It's important to him they get along and so in order to try and bridge the gaps, he decides to allow Clara a go on the controls. In order to make life easy for her, he lowers the TARDIS shields. Which seems rather like giving a first-time-learner driver the keys to a brand new Aston Martin, then removing the air bags because a first time driver doesn't need safety getting in the way.

This bizarre circumstance allows the salvagers to pull the

TARDIS on board. Our favourite blue box gets badly damaged in the process and our regulars are separated by the Crazy-Random-Happstance of the Doctor being flung out the doors and Clara being thrown deeper into the ship. From here, the Time Lord ensures the co-operation of the money-hungry salvagers by setting the TARDIS self-destruct. Then it's off to find Clara on an epic trawl through rooms right?



Dark things lurk in the TARDIS Corridors.

Image © BBC, 2013

Erm .. no, actually. While we do see some rooms (mainly from the outside as Clara passes on her own attempt to return to the Console room) such as the Swimming Pool and Observatory, the only rooms we get to spend any noticeable time in are a storage-type room, the Library (a very large one!), the Architectural Configuration hub and eventually, the Eye of Harmony and engine room. The rest of the episode takes place in corridors.

Since a race against time isn't enough, Clara and later the Doctor and salvagers, are

sort-of stalked by strange zombie-like creatures with grey flesh and red eyes. While these are creepy villains and always kept slightly out of focus by Director Mat King, it's unclear until late in the story what such entities are doing on board in the first place. I'm afraid I'm going to have to head into spoiler-ville for a while before wrapping up to get some things off my chest.

During the course of events, the Doctor and Clara meet up. Shortly afterwards they discover echoes of their past. Later, we learn that the zombie creatures are echoes from the future.

Here's the problem. The echoes of the past are oblivious to events outside their own timeline, so why are the future echoes able

to hunt down the cast of characters? This isn't the first or last plot oddity.

Earlier in the episode, Clara enters the Library and casually saunters up to a podium upon which is a book titled "The History of the Time War". She turns to a page at random and exclaims "so that's who he is!". When later, she meets up with the Doctor, no mention is made of whatever this random page has told her. Later she informs the Doctor she knows his name. But no significance is really placed on this. The whole element seemed shoe-

horned in and badly played/directed to me.

Finally - the resolution. Steve Thompson seems to have attempted a Moffat style Time-involved plot. Near the beginning, a round device flies into the console room and Clara burns her hand on it. Later, it transpires that this is a handy Reset device in the form of a "Big Friendly Button" that will make everything OK, if only the Doctor can get it back to himself at the story's beginning. Neither Clara nor the Salvagers will remember the events of the episode. It's all a bit neat and trying too hard to be clever.

The guest cast are forgettable on the whole. Whether this is the writing, direction or performance, I'm not sure, but the three brothers seem to be cardboard cutouts rather than fully realised people. I will say this though. If you want one of the cruelest practical jokes ever - watch this episode. Those brothers are truly despicable individuals.

Unfortunately, I can't bring myself to rate this episode highly at all. Like *Black Spot*, there's too much "by the numbers" action and several holes in the plot. In conjunction with unlikeable and poorly characterised secondary cast, this is probably the most missable episode in a while.

## Rating:



## The Crimson Horror

***Something ghastly is afoot in Victorian Yorkshire, as bodies are found with their skin a waxy, glowing red.***

Mark Gatiss' second story of the season takes us back to Victorian times. Yorkshire, 1893 and strange happenings are afoot. The story starts out very much as a Lady Vastra and Jenny adventure and it's a full fourteen minutes before the Time Lord makes an appearance. Vastra, Jenny and (of course) Strax are drawn into the case by a gentleman looking into the cause of his brother's death - a ghastly death in the form of ... the Crimson Horror!

tering to a fist-fight, Jenny is given a lot to do this episode. In fact, the problem with Neve Macintosh's Vastra and Dan Starkey's Strax becomes evident here. Being in Victorian England, they both really have to keep to the shadows which means that any spin-off series would have to focus on the "sidekick" while Vastra works behind the scenes and from the shadows.

Speaking of Strax, he's played purely for comedy this episode and while there are many laughs to be had, I personally thought that the sat-nav joke (which also links back to the Sontarans' re-appearance in *Doctor Who*) was a line too far.



The Crimson Horror takes hold of a Time Lord

Image © BBC, 2013

I have to say that I adored this first portion of the episode, viewing it as a brief teaser for the spin-off that everyone wants to see. Catrin Stewart shines as Jenny and it's evident that she is grabbing the role with relish. From investigating to breaking and en-

Yes it was funny. But it seemed a bit out-of-kilter and somehow wrong at the same time.

The other main guests for the episode were mother and daughter Diana Rigg and Rachel Stirling, playing Mother and daughter Mrs Gillyflower and Ada. The two offered

excellent performances, Rigg presenting a charming villainy on top of her character's cruelty and callousness and Stirling showing a naive, vulnerable side. As the episode develops, however, it becomes apparent that young Ada is possibly not a girl you would want to annoy. One can't help but wonder if there was any real-world frustrations being added to a certain performance late in the episode!

Once the Doctor enters the fray, we are treated to a lovely sepia-effect flashback sequence during which we see how he became embroiled in the plot. I thought this sequence was excellent and it's a tribute to Matt Smith's presence that once he hits the screen, you almost forget that a third of the episode has gone by without him in it. It takes a while longer for Clara to come back, during which a confused Jenny quizzes the Time Lord about how he can be looking for a dead girl. Once she's back, she becomes the "perfect companion" once more, offering pointers towards and sometimes the solutions to problems themselves. Clara really is becoming quite the smug travelling companion which is somewhat annoying. Nothing against Jenna-Louise Coleman (who I continue to think is great in the role), it's more to do with the writers over-emphasizing just how right she is for the Doctor.

Without spoiling too much, Mrs. Gillyflower's plot is straight from the James Bond

movie *Moonraker*, though there is a sufficiently *Doctor Who* twist to the whole "repopulate the world with the brightest and most beautiful people" trope. The reveal of the cause of the disease is nicely written and directed, though I have to say I thought the prop itself was somewhat lacking. We're treated to two plot resolutions as the villains have a redundancy plan in place - a nice idea for a *Doctor Who* story that we don't often see.

This is definitely a fun adventure with plenty of action and laughs and a hint of the tragedy about it. While I think there was one or two jokes too many, the story was great tea-time entertainment and that is what the show is about!

Rating:



### Nightmare In Silver

***The perfect theme park day out is also ground zero for a deadly silver resurrection..***

I don't know if I've mentioned this before, but the Cybermen were always the *Doctor Who* monster I feared. Even though the only story I remember seeing on broadcast was the so-so *Silver Nemesis*, I read a lot of *Target* Novelizations of old stories and watched VHS releases when they came out. The inhuman but human empty face masks. The implacable march by the never-tiring foe... the monotonous (or even the gruff robotic voices

of the eighties version) sent a chill down my spine. Proper monsters. Not evil really, just driven to survive and unfortunately for Humans and their kindred, we just happened to be their spare parts.

Which is why the recent Cyber stories have left me somewhat cold. They looked great, but they became simple catchphrasey robots. Some how their threat-level diminished infinitely by being given an alternate-reality back story. No longer were they a space-going race looking to survive. They became ... rather pathetic. Of course the last couple of years have hinted at the resurgence of a Cyber-empire by non-Cybus Cybermen that have taken on their armoured look. So it was with both eagerness and trepidation that I sat down to watch Neil Gaiman's second story (his first being possibly the best episode of *Doctor Who* since the relaunch in 2005, *The Doctor's Wife*) this evening.

Neil Gaiman wrote a wonderful story, managing to cram a theme-park world, travelling showman, a platoon of soldiers and the TARDIS crew (together with the two childers that Clara is Nanny-ing for after their threatening of her at the end of last week's episode) AND a Cyberman or two. Or three million. Not only that, but the episode manages to be coherent and well paced throughout. The episode was well directed, further enhancing the effect of the tale and from the moment the first

(Cybus style) Cyberman was revealed, I felt a tingle of the old fear.

The new Cyber-upgrade really is something special. I love the sleek but powerful design, especially the chest units and the new face plates. Their voices are also something special - gone is the buzzing electronic voice, replaced with what I can only describe as Christian Bale trying to do his Batman voice while standing close to a robotising microphone. It really sounds threatening, especially when these Cybermen only speak when they have something to say. Or someone to upgrade. On top of this lovely design, we're introduced to a new type of Cyber-critter. The Cyber-Mite is brilliant. Like large silverfish, the Cybermite form the initial stage of a much more horrific (although slightly Borg like) conversion process. What this new process means is ...

... Matt Smith gets to perform against himself as he is infected by the critters. And what a performance. I loved Matt in this episode, switching effortlessly and noticeably between himself and the Cyber-infected version of himself. The direction of these scenes was again excellent, managing to keep a slight level of disorientation while allowing the audience to be completely sure of which "character" was speaking at any one time. I loved the scenes where the Doctor played chess against himself with Seventh Doctor relish. I liked the nod to Curse of Fenric in how the Doctor presents an unsolvable chess-puzzle to get one over on a powerful villain. On the other side of our regulars, Jenna-Louise Coleman was again strong, although I have to say I'm beginning to find Clara to be a bit too gung-ho and sure of herself. Given command of re-

ject-squad, doesn't phase her in the slightest and she brushes off the death of at least one soldier far too casually for my tastes.

My favourite character this week has to be Warwick Davis's Porridge however. From his first appearance, he offered a performance that showed a character with a penchant for fun but also a deep sadness. It was easy to see the twist coming, but I'll be honest that in no way detracted from the episode for me. The rest of the cast were pretty standard for Doctor Who secondaries ... which is to say they were well performed, although some were pretty cardboard representations of their character type. The Fat, sub-standard soldier. The Large-spectacled, massive-haired bureaucrat. The hard-nosed ex-Imperial Guard captain who refused an order, landing herself in this

dead end assignment. I've no real issue with that, but it does show how smaller-scale episodes like *Hide* can allow the full cast to shine.

My only real niggle was that perhaps this new breed of Cybermen are a tad too powerful. The first one we meet can enter what can only be described as "Cyber-Bullet Time", moving so fast that it can weave through sol-



Image © BBC, 2013

Doctor vs Doctor as the Time Lord faces his Nightmare in Silver.

diers and grab a target before the Doctor has even aimed his Sonic Screwdriver. They then display Borg-like levels of adaption, even managing to upgrade themselves to be impervious to the “anti-Cybergun” that previously disintegrated them. This level of threat was mitigated by the humans’ fear though. If a Cyberman can’t be killed quickly, it was destroy the planet time according to the Earth Empire Tactical Manual.

In conclusion, this was an excellent episode. I’m sure others are comparing it to Gaiman’s previous script. But frankly, the episodes are worlds apart in what they are out to accomplish and so it would be like comparing a perfectly roasted haunch of venisson with the best apple-crumble with that perfect 3:1 apple to crumble ratio. Both are superb, but they’re not to be eaten in the same course.

## Rating:

**G G G G G**

## The Name of the Doctor

***The Doctor has a secret he will take to his grave. And it is discovered...***

First up, this episode gains marks for having what is possibly one of the best fan-videos in history as it’s opening sequence. The narration adds to the mystery, sure - but frankly, I was too busy enjoying the sight of previous Doctors so amazingly brought to life with

an impossible girl. The entire season has led to this and yes, I’ve been one of the “do they have to make the companion special?” sort of people... but I’d say it was worth it for this episode.

Clara’s been great to watch over the past few weeks, even if she has been somewhat over-confident in new situations sometimes. She (along with the Doctor’s Name) have been the overriding mysteries

and of course Clara) come together in a conference to see how they can assist the Time Lord - of course, this is a trap and they are taken away to lure the Doctor to his tomb at Trenzalore.

Here, the Doctor’s name is required for plot reasons (and skilfully navigated) so that The Great Intelligence can have it’s final revenge on it’s greatest enemy. The contents of the Doctor’s tomb, I was very sat-



The Doctor’s Tomb at Trenzalore. Opened by *The Name of the Doctor*

Image © BBC, 2013

that have been the hook since *Asylum of the Daleks*. Well, since the end of the last series really, what with Dorian’s final words. Stven Moffat manages to bring us to the one place the Doctor should never go with the usual mix of smiles and lumps in the throat. The episode brings back one Professor Song in a different way - and one I found somewhat more satisfying some how. Early in the episode, the Eleventh Doctor’s current friends (Vastra, Jenny, Strax, River

isfied with. The revelation of Clara’s role in the Doctor’s life? I was satisfied with. In fact, I loved this story - especially in this special year for the program. I don’t know what the fiftieth anniversary episode will bring (I had to point out to my parents who rang me straight after the program that I do not know The Moff, that he is unaware of my existence and I am not psychic so do not know the answers), though I have my suspicions given hints in the episode and

the last few minutes of the episode.

It's always a joy to see Vastra, Jenny and Strax in an episode and it's clear how much enjoyment Steven Moffat gets out of writing these characters. From Vastra's deviousness in contacting Clara through Jenny's heart-rending confession during the conference to Strax's one-liners, the trio are a delight to behold. I wasn't looking forward to River's return as I think her story was complete and I've never been a fan of how the character developed over the previous series of the show. But actually, I enjoyed seeing her again. But I really, really enjoyed Richard E. Grant being back. The Great Intelligence has hovered over this half of the series since Christmas and it's great to see the resolution to this side of the story. Also - when you think about it, the villain wins here. Maybe not for long. But

the Intelligence gets exactly what it wants.

Oh, and the Whisper-men? Creepy as hell! But the stand out performance for me was the prisoner at the beginning of the episode. He was superb. In many ways he's the embodiment of *Doctor Who* actors in recent years. He may well have a teeny-tiny part, but the actor sells the part beautifully. Top marks that man.

I have one niggle and it's a pretty harsh one. Clara. When the choice she had to make came about, I was genuinely gutted at how her story would end. It would be amazing, fitting and yet sad all at once. This sacrifice was slightly undermined by the Doctor and his subsequent decision. Considering the payoff we're then treated to, however, I can easily forgive this. Also I quite like Clara, so I couldn't hold it against them for long anyhow.

So. To conclude, I absolutely adored this episode both as a long-time Who fan and a general viewer of TV. While references to the past may well be above some viewers (though everyone should be familiar with the fact that there have been other Doctors by now and google is a wonderful tool for anyone else), I don't think they will intrude on anyone's understanding of the episode at all. Congratulations, Mr. Moffat - the episode far exceeded my expectations. Roll on November 23rd. Doctor's Ten and Eleven. John Hurt. Returning monsters that I won't mention incase reader's aren't aware...

Rating:

**G G G G G**

**Antony McGarry-Thickitt**





HUGH JACKMAN



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FILM REVIEW

## STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS



**Writers:** Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman & Damon Lindelof

**Director:** JJ Abrams

**Starring:** Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto & Zoe Saldana

**When the crew of the Enterprise is called back home, they find an unstoppable force of terror from within their own organization has detonated the fleet and everything it stands for, leaving our world in a state of crisis.**

**With a personal score to settle, Captain Kirk leads a manhunt to a war-zone world to capture a one man weapon of mass destruction.**

**As our heroes are propelled into an epic chess game of life and death, love will be challenged, friendships will be torn apart, and sacrifices must be made for the only family Kirk has left: his crew.**

The first thing to note about this film is that it really is dark. Most of the action takes place

in space, at night or in otherwise dark settings. The film is also possibly the thematically darkest of all the *Star Trek* films. That does not mean that the film is devoid of the joy or hope that we have come to expect from *Trek*, but rather that this is Abrams' *Empire Strike's Back*.

We join the *Enterprise* crew midway through a mission and immediately feel at home with everyone and settle in for the ride we know is coming. Things quickly take a turn for the worst with a terrorist attack on Starfleet that sets in place a chain of events that propels the film to its violent conclusion.

During the course of the film all the crew get their moment to shine. Scotty, especially has a great side-plot that works well and resonated with me on a personal level. Scotty

asks Kirk when they became soldiers as he thought Starfleet was about exploring. This is really Abrams telling the audience that he knows this and acknowledges that this is a dark film. We also find out a little more about Starfleet before earth takes another beating. Part of me hopes the next film features Earth much less as it's getting a bit same old same old now.

All the cast are back in fine form but for me it was really Zachary Quinto who stood out in this film and made me say something I never thought I would ever hear myself say out loud. Which was "Go on Spock. Kick his \*&£\$ing ass". I kid you not I actually said that out loud. Pine is as good as ever and the rest of the cast are all comfortable in their roles except Anton Yelchin who really does not bring too much apart



Captain Kirk faces off with John Harrison aboard the USS Enterprise

Image © Paramount Pictures, 2013



Image © Paramount Pictures, 2013

Armoured Klingons on their homeworld of Qo'noS. (Not Kronos, film makers! - Ed)

from comic relief and even then not so much.

Newcomers Alice Eve and Peter Weller are both on fine form, with Weller displaying a wide range of emotions and clearly having some fun in his role. Benedict Cumberbatch's portrayal of John Harrison is nothing short of brilliant.

*Trek* fans will love the Easter Eggs and cameo's sprinkled throughout the film. *Star Trek Into Darkness* has taken inspiration from both the TV show and the previous films and

used them to sow the seeds for the future voyages of the Starship *Enterprise*. We get to see Klingons and hints at bigger things down the road but also in typical Abrams style he flips *Trek* lore on its side and make fans want to scream at the top of their lungs. Is this a bad thing? Well yes and no because it is a whole new universe where anything can happen to anyone because it does not need to follow the path of the original universe.

Abrams has not lost any of his style in terms of directing and

the action is fresh and non stop but he really needs to stop with the damn lense flares because it really is getting annoying now. Also along is his composer Michael Giacchino who, once again, brings his new theme to the movie but also a lot of drama which reflects the tone of the film.

This movie will divide *Star Trek* fans and that is good because it means we care about our franchise but it is also quite sad because we all know that there really is no way Abrams is back for a third stab at the director's chair.

Overall a really solid action movie and the darkest *Star Trek* film yet.



Kirk, Spock and Uhura - heaving into darkness

Live Long and Prosper.

**Christophe Montoya**

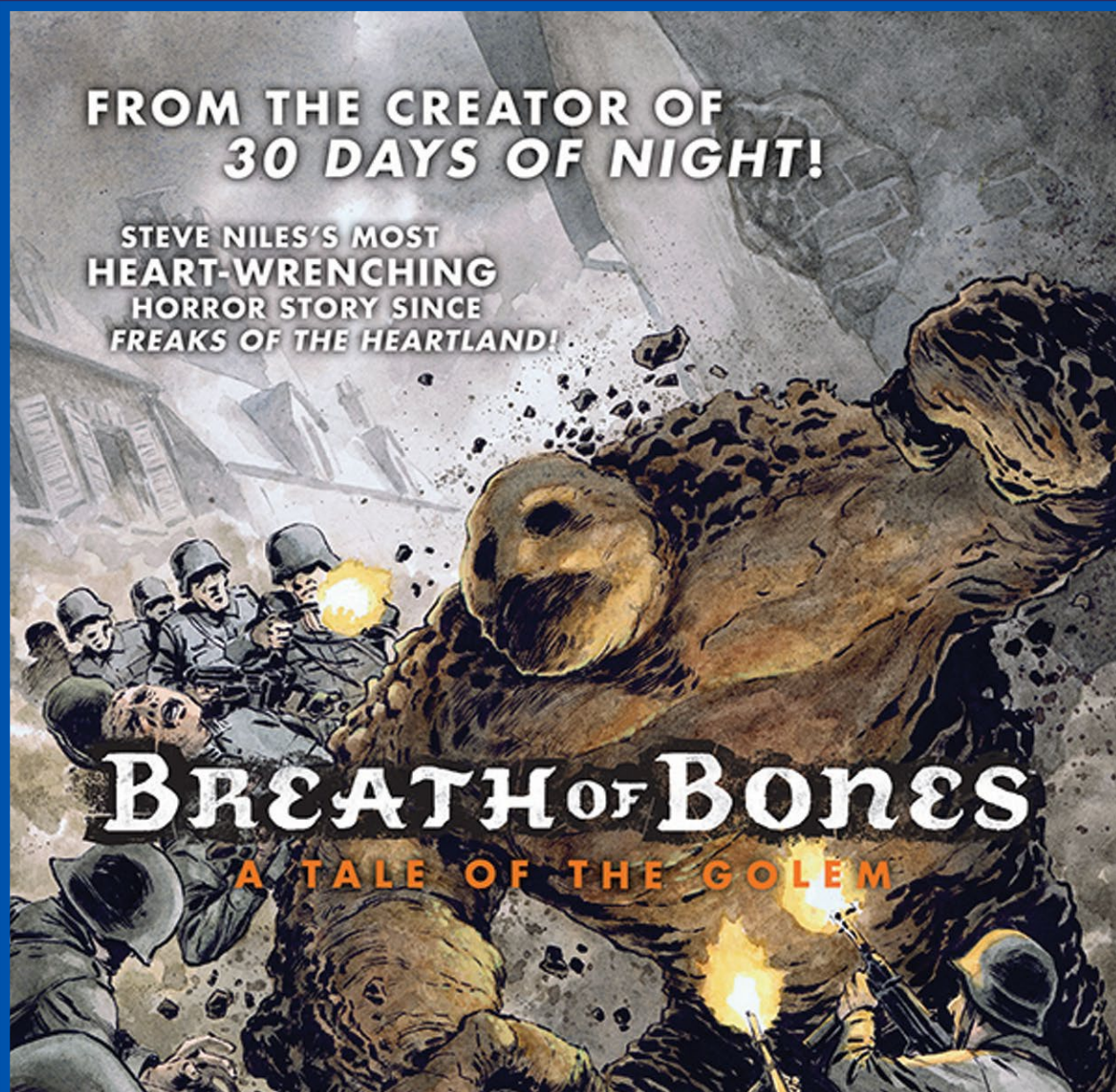
Rating:



Image © Paramount Pictures, 2013

The *Enterprise* is in trouble as it makes it's way to Earth

## COMIC PREVIEW - BREATH OF BONES: A TALE OF THE GOLEM



**Synopsis:** The giant clay monster from Jewish legend goes on a Nazi-killing rampage in order to protect the inhabitants of a small Jewish stronghold and an injured British pilot.

“Dark Horse and Steve Niles have published some outstanding horror titles, like Criminal Macabre, The Nail, Freaks of the Heartland and City of Others.” —Comics Bulletin

FROM THE CREATOR OF 30 DAYS OF NIGHT STEVE NILES!

**Release (UK):** 12 June 2013

**Writers:** Steve Niles & Matt Santaro

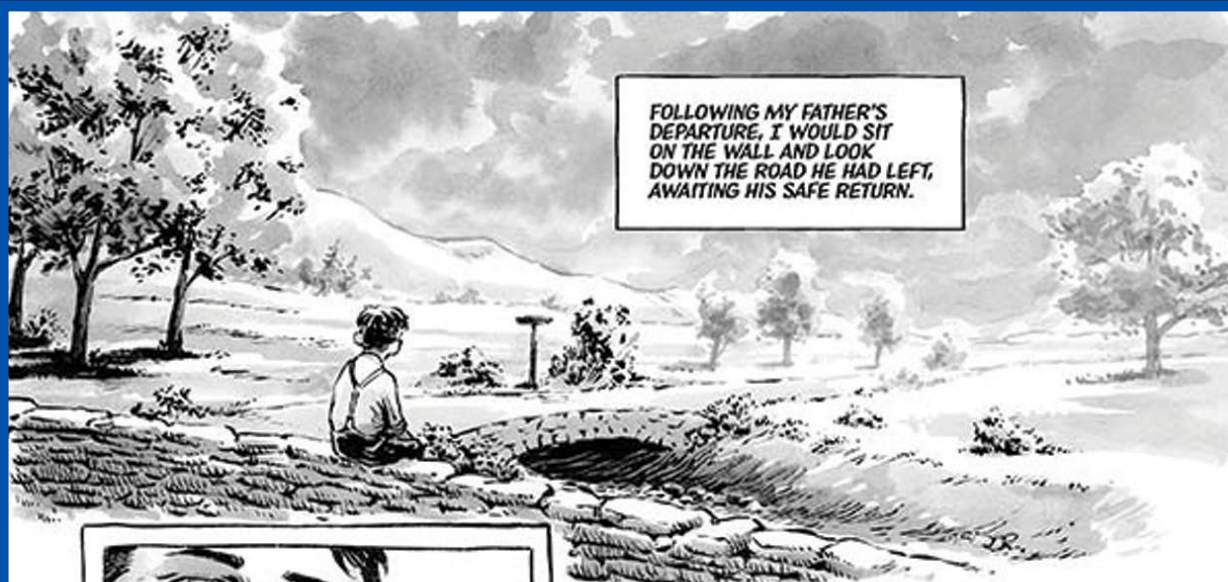
**Artist:** Dave Watcher

**Publisher:** [Dark Horse](#)



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FOLLOWING MY FATHER'S DEPARTURE, I WOULD SIT ON THE WALL AND LOOK DOWN THE ROAD HE HAD LEFT, AWAITING HIS SAFE RETURN.



DAYS TURNED TO WEEKS.



EVERY DAY I SAT ON THAT WALL, AND STARED DOWN THE ROAD, UNTIL ONE DAY MY GRANDFATHER CAME AND JOINED ME.



I'M COMING IN NOW.

I DID NOT COME TO CALL YOU IN.



GRANDFATHER, LET ME--

I CAN DO IT MYSELF.

















## COMIC PREVIEW - THE TRUE LIVES OF THE FABULOUS KILLJOYS



GERARD WAY

**Synopsis:** Years ago, the Killjoys fought against the tyrannical megacorporation Better Living Industries, costing them their lives, save for one—the mysterious Girl. Today, the followers of the original Killjoys languish in the Desert while BLI systematically strips citizens of their individuality. As the fight for freedom fades, it's left to the Girl to take up the mantle and bring down the fearsome BLI or else join the mindless ranks of Bat City!

The follow-up to the album *Danger Days: The True Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys!*

FROM THE CREATOR OF THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY

Release (UK): 12 June 2013

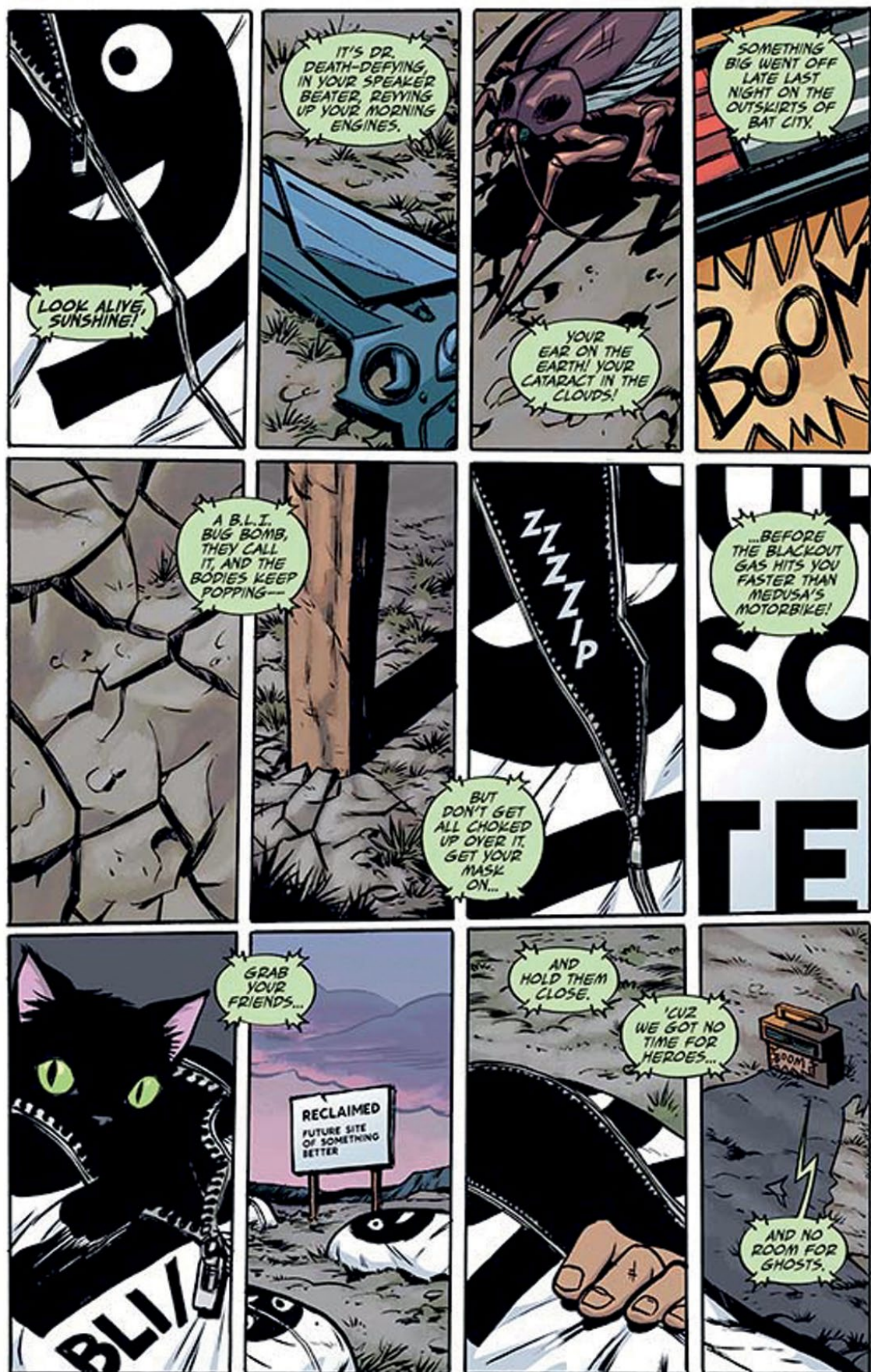
Writer: Becky Cloonan

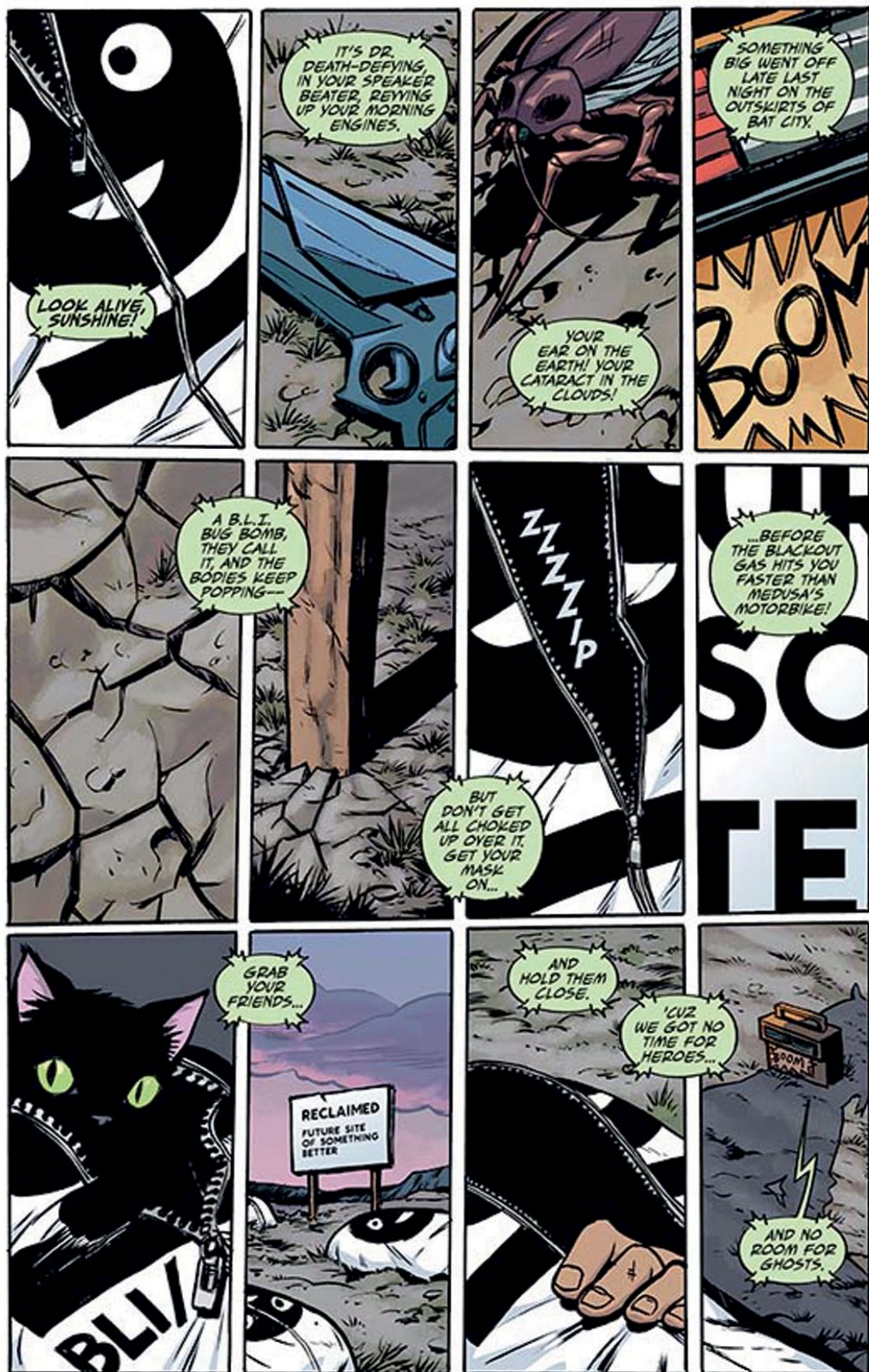
Artist: Dave Watcher

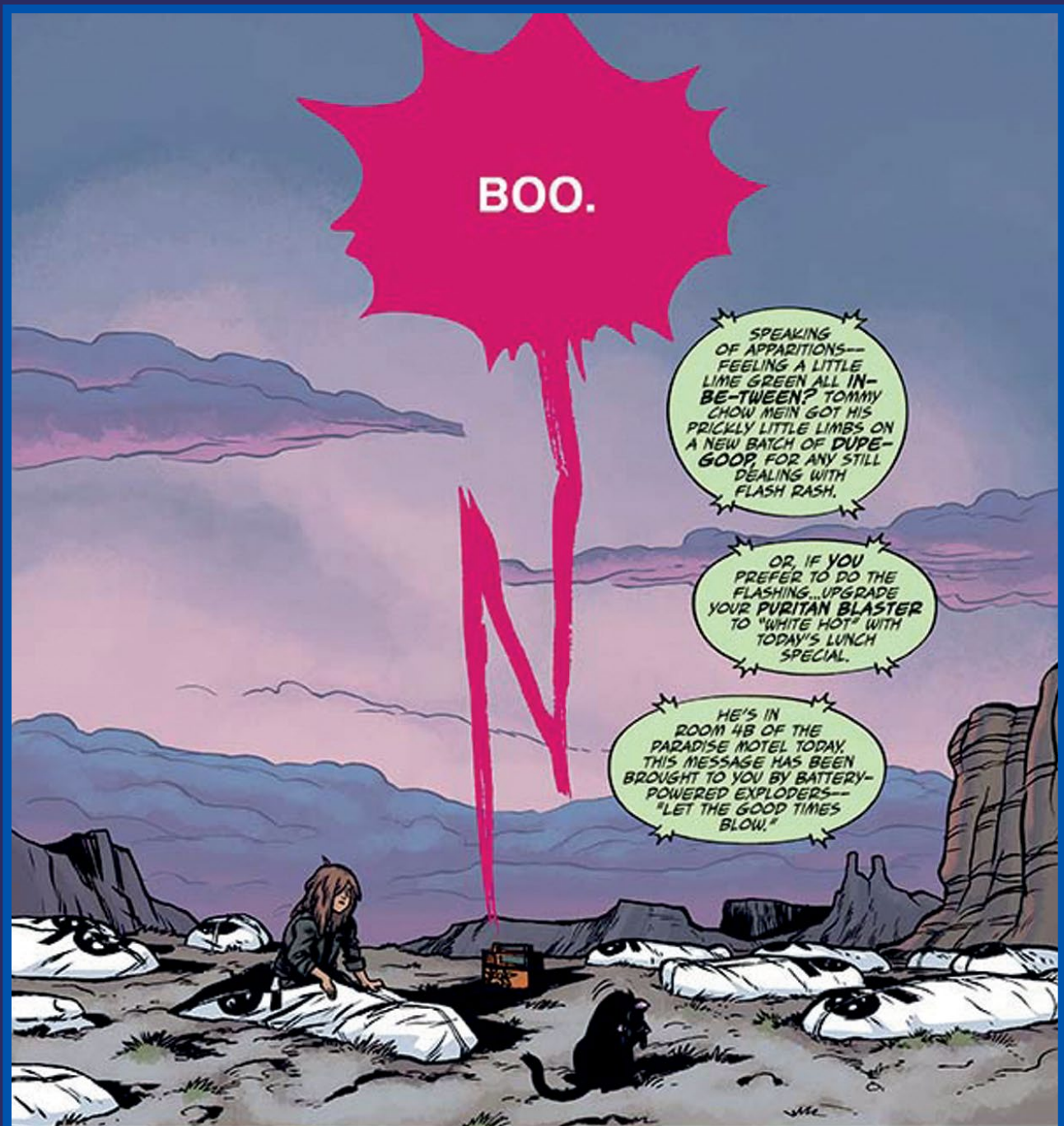
Colourist: Dan Jackson

Publisher: **Dark Horse**









**BOO.**

SPEAKING OF APPARITIONS— FEELING A LITTLE LIME GREEN ALL IN-BE-TWEEN? TOMMY CHOW MEIN GOT HIS PRICKLY LITTLE LIMBS ON A NEW BATCH OF DUPE-GOOD. FOR ANY STILL DEALING WITH FLASH RASH.

OR, IF YOU PREFER TO DO THE FLASHING...UPGRADE YOUR PURITAN BLASTER TO "WHITE HOT" WITH TODAY'S LUNCH SPECIAL.

HE'S IN ROOM 4B OF THE PARADISE MOTEL TODAY. THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOU BY BATTERY-POWERED EXPLODERS— "LET THE GOOD TIMES BLOW."



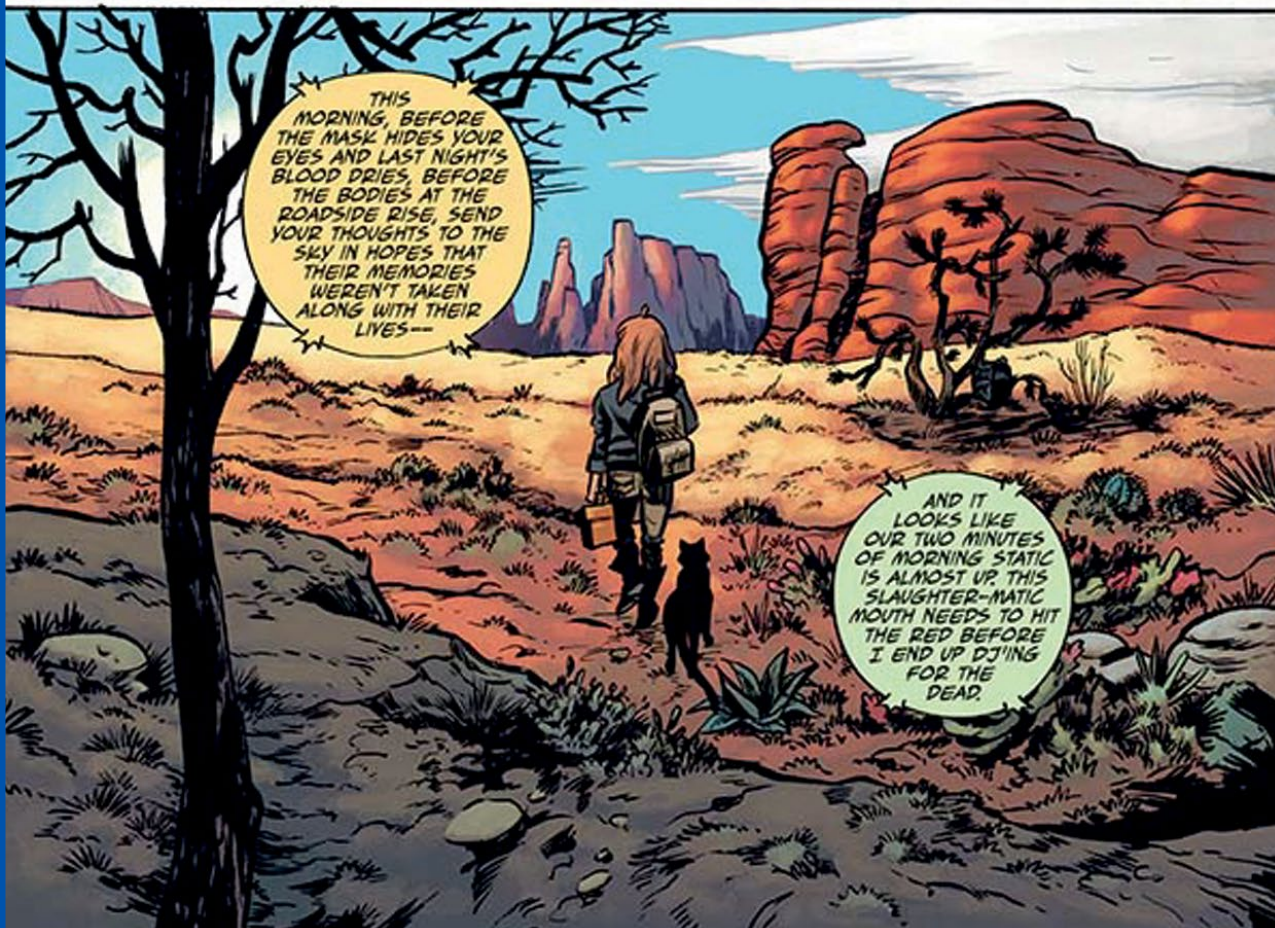
HURRY UP.



IF WE WANT TO EAT TODAY, WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO SEE CHOW MEIN.



ON A SADDER NOTE, AND IN THE WORDS OF OUR MOST POETIC D.J., CHERRI COLA...









JEEZ... COULDN'T YOU HAVE JUST STOPPED? I'M ALL SWEATY NOW.

TURN AROUND. LET'S HAVE A LOOK.



IT IS YOU! I KNEW IT! I HAD YOUR ACTION FIGURE!

THE GIRL WHO RODE WITH THE REAL KILLJOYS. YOU MUST HAVE BEEN, WHAT, SIX?

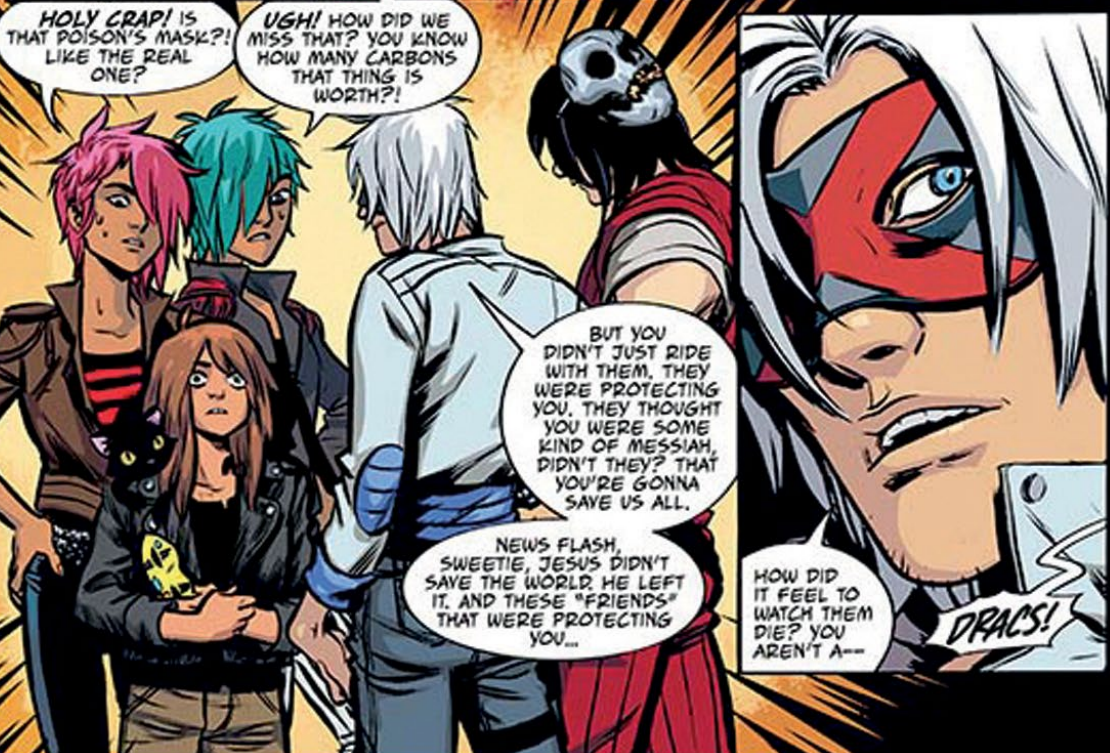
HEY, YAL. COME HAVE A LOOK.



WHAT WERE THEY LIKE? MAN, MY BEDROOM WAS COVERED IN POISON POSTERS WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

DUH. HE WAS THE LEADER. EVERYONE'S WAS! MY FAVORITE WAS KOBRA. HE HAD SOME SASS, BUT GHOUL AND JET WERE PRETTY JAZZY TOO.

I KNOW WHO SHE IS AND I KNOW WHAT SHE'S HOLDING.



HOLY CRAP! IS THAT POISON'S MASK?! LIKE THE REAL ONE?

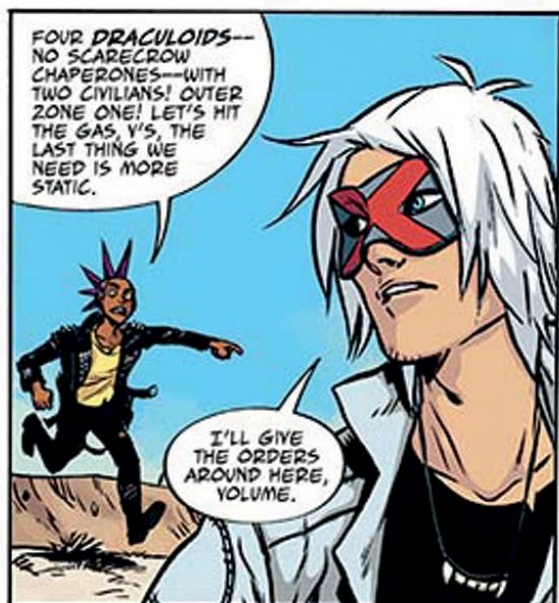
UGH! HOW DID WE MISS THAT? YOU KNOW HOW MANY CARBONS THAT THING IS WORTH?!

BUT YOU DIDN'T JUST RIDE WITH THEM, THEY WERE PROTECTING YOU. THEY THOUGHT YOU WERE SOME KIND OF MESSIAH, DIDN'T THEY? THAT YOU'RE GONNA SAVE US ALL.

NEWS FLASH, SWEETIE, JESUS DIDN'T SAVE THE WORLD. HE LEFT IT. AND THESE "FRIENDS" THAT WERE PROTECTING YOU...

HOW DID IT FEEL TO WATCH THEM DIE? YOU AREN'T A--

DRACS!



**YOU WILL ANSWER  
TO NO ONE ELSE**



#WHATSNEXT

**BUT ME**

## ELEVATOR PITCHES

### What's an Elevator Pitch?

*Imagine you have a comic that you've put a lot of work, life and soul into. You love it. You know others would to. You get into an elevator, maybe in a hotel at a convention. At the same time, in walks a well-known editor. The doors close and you are alone. This is your chance - but you only have a short time to get your work noticed ...*

That's the concept of Elevator Pitches. Provide us with a single sentence summarising your product and another explaining why we should pick it up. Follow this up with a preview and the pitch is done - let the work sell itself.

If you would like to submit an entry for this section, email:

[thegeeks@geeksyndicate.co.uk](mailto:thegeeks@geeksyndicate.co.uk).

### The Monster Hunters

Written by and Starring: Peter Davis and Matthew Woodcock

Producer: [Newgate Productions](#)

Buy It From: Free from iTunes and [www.themonsterhunters.com](http://www.themonsterhunters.com)

### What is The Monster Hunters?

**“It's what happens when you mix *The Persuaders* with *Hammer Horror*? Set in 1971, *The Monster Hunters* follows the adventures of ex-big game hunter and full time womaniser Roy Steel and Lorrimer Chesterfield, professor of occult studies at London's London University. Together they keep the streets of Swinging London safe from vampires, werewolves and the country's terrible scotch surplus. With jokes.”**

### Why should we pick this up?

**‘Crazy and hilarious’** - Geek Syndicate

**‘A successful horror film spoof that nonetheless pays homage to its various sources’**  
- Radiodramareviews.com

**‘Revels in the camp *Life on Mars* eschewed’** - pparadio.blogspot.com

**‘A portmanteau of scotch and awesome’** - Nights at the Round Table podcast

**THE YEAR: 1971 AD**

**THE PLACE: THE CITY OF SWINGING LONDON**

**THE MISSION: TO DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!**



## THE **MONSTER HUNTERS**

**"Crazy and hilarious" Geek Syndicate**

**FREE FULL CAST AUDIO HORROR COMEDY TO STREAM AND DOWNLOAD**

[www.themonsterhunters.com](http://www.themonsterhunters.com)

## Death Sentence

**Writer:** Monty Nero

**Art:** Mike Dowling

**Publisher:** [Titan Comics](#)

**Buy It From:** Day and date release exclusively through the [comiXology](#) app and [comiXology.com](#). Retailers can order Death Sentence #1 from the June edition of Diamond PREVIEWS (order code: JUN131282)

**Available:** Issue 1 Hits, 9th October 2013

### What is The Death Sentence?

**“WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH SUPERPOWERS - AND SIX MONTHS TO LIVE?**

That’s the dilemma facing three people who’ve contracted the G+ Virus, a terrifying new STD.

What can graphic designer Verity, failing indie guitarist Weasel and roguish media personality Monty do in the time they have left? Fade away - or go out in a blaze of glory?”

### Why should we pick this up?

By turns funny, dark, sad and spectacular, Death Sentence is an emotional thrill ride through celebrity, loss, passion and creativity. It’s the jaw-dropping next stage in superpowered storytelling!

Packed with unforgettable shocks, quotable dialogue and the character finds of a generation, this is an unmissable debut by two striking and confident new voices!

**“The best idea I’ve seen in years. Genuinely original.”** - Mark Millar, *Kick-Ass*

**“I absolutely love this. Top notch art and scripting encapsulating a brilliant idea.”** - Leinil Francis Yu, artist, *Superior* and *Supercrooks*



# DEATH SENTENCE #1

"BRILLIANT!  
Genuinely original."  
MARK MILLAR



MONTYNERO  
DOWLING



**SOUTH BANK:**

SO...MANLY HAND-SHAKE, WALK RIGHT ON... IN THE WORDS OF KING GEORGE 'WHAT, WHAT! AND THERE IT IS...'

I'M SURE WE'RE ALL STIRRED BY YOUR POSITIVE ATTITUDE, MONTY --

BUT WHAT PEOPLE AT HOME WILL WANT TO KNOW IS...HOW'S IT AFFECTED YOUR SEX LIFE?

HA HA! WELL... APPARENTLY, CHECKING OUT IN MERE MONTHS INFUSES MY DEMEANOUR WITH A NOBLE HEROISM WHICH IS THOROUGHLY UNDESERVED.

PICTURE ME BRAVELY FIGHTING BACK THE TEARS COMFORTED ONLY BY THE TITS IN MY FACE AND EAGER HARPIES DROOLING ONTO MY LOINS.

I SOLDIER BRAVELY ON!

SERIOUSLY?

I TELLS YA--HEF WOULD CREAM HIS PANTS FOR A SNIFF OF ME SLOPPY SECONDS!

BUT SURELY YOU --

NEEDLESS TO SAY, I PRACTICE--NAY, INSIST UPON-- SAFE SEX AND ALL PARTIES ARE FULLY AWARE OF MY MEDICAL STATUS BEFORE THE DANCE OF LOVE BEGINS.



I FEEL AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF, LIKE, *WRONGNESS* --

HANGING OVER THE CITY - TAKIN' IN THE NEW PERSPECTIVE...

THINKIN' WHAT A GREAT SONG THIS WOULD'VE MADE.



THEN I'M, LIKE, FALLING...



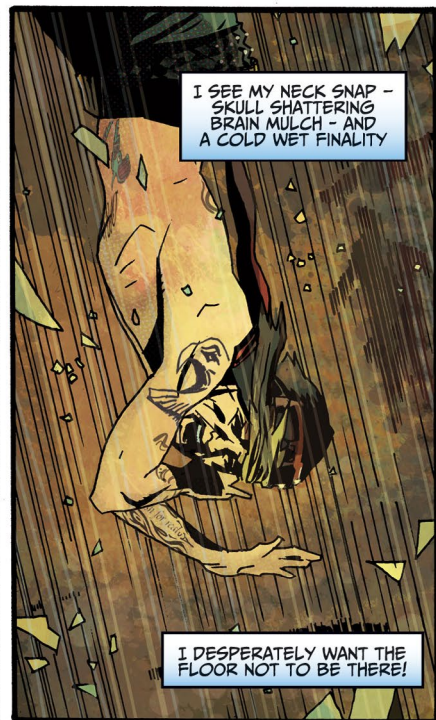
THE SICK CERTAINTY OF THE DEATH RUSHING TOWARD ME - FEARFULLY FAST.

MY BOWELS EVACUATE!



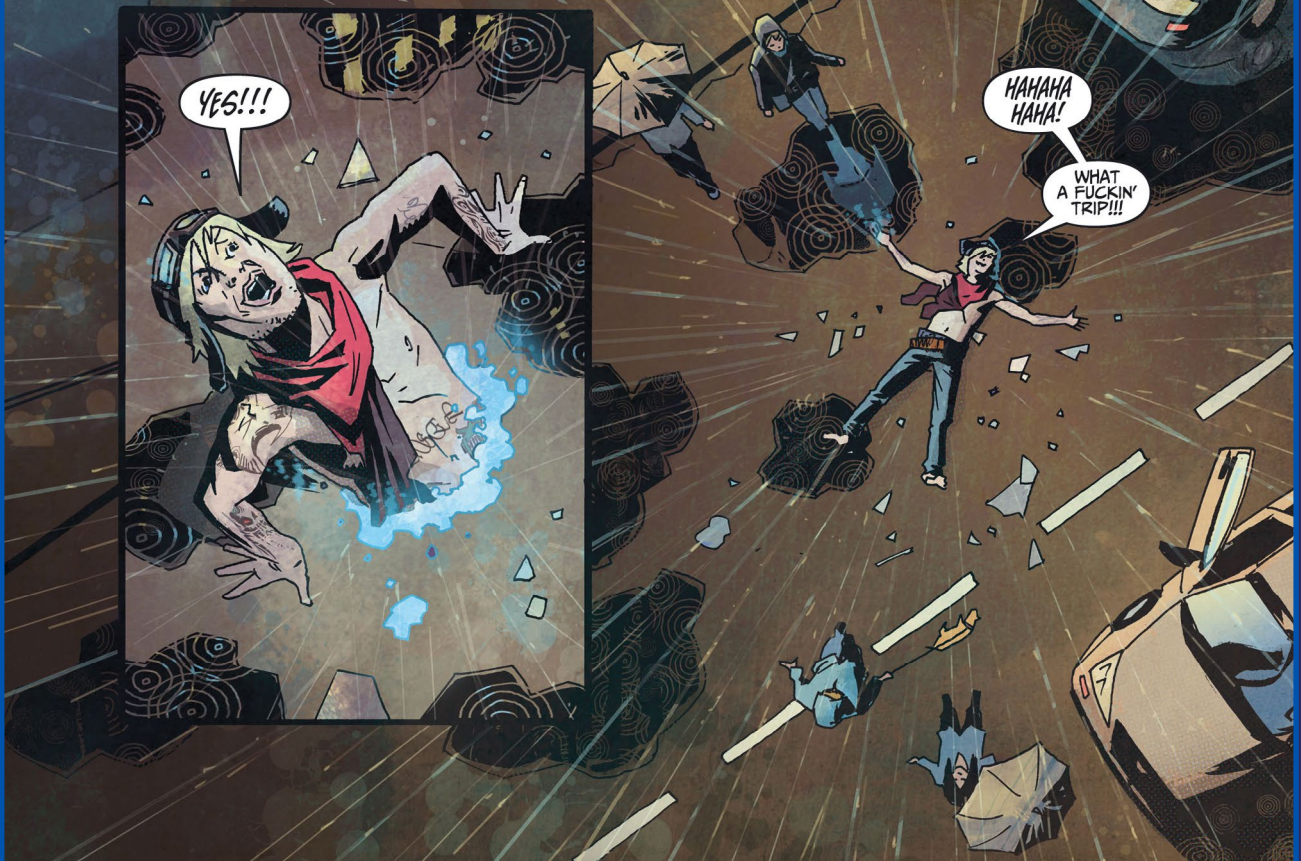
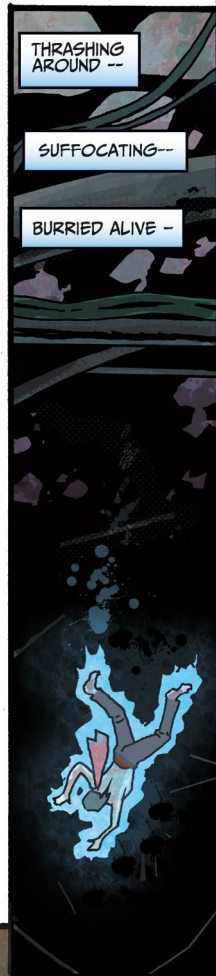
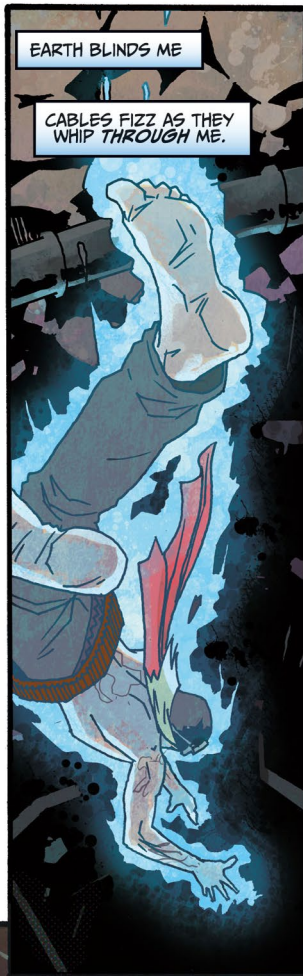
I'M THINKIN' OF MY MUM WHAT A FRAUD I AM THE TUNES I AIN'T WRITTEN THE FIRST GIRL I KISSED AND HOW NOTHING REALLY MATTERED DID IT?

I DON'T WANT TO DIE!



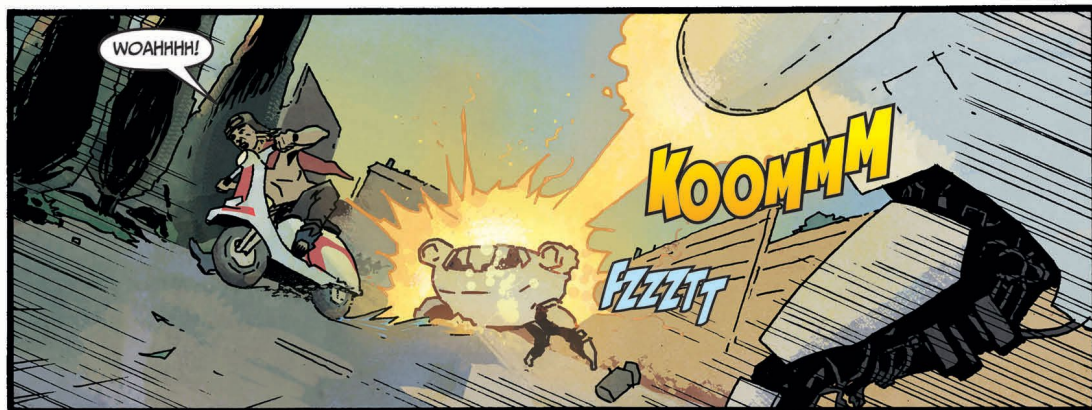
I SEE MY NECK SNAP - SKULL SHATTERING BRAIN MULCH - AND A COLD WET FINALITY

I DESPERATELY WANT THE FLOOR NOT TO BE THERE!









# STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS

PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND SKYDANCE PRODUCTIONS PRESENT A BAD ROBOT PRODUCTION

A J. J. ABRAMS FILM "STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS" JOHN CHO BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH ALICE EVI

BRUCE GREENWOOD SIMON PEGG CHRIS PINE ZACHARY QUINTO ZOE SALDANA KARL URBAN PETER WELER ANTON YELCHIN VISUAL EFFECTS INDUSTRIAL LIGHT & MAGIC

MUSIC BY MICHAEL GIACCHINO COSTUME DESIGNER MICHAEL KAPLAN EDITED BY MARYANN BRANDON A.C.E. MARY JO MARKEY A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER SCOTT CHAMBLISS DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DAN MINDEL A.S.C. B.S.C.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JEFFREY CHERNOV DAVID ELLISON DANA GOLDBERG PAUL SCHWAKE PRODUCED BY J. J. ABRAMS BRYAN BURK DAMON LINDELOF ALEX KURTZMAN ROBERTO ORCI

BASED UPON "STAR TREK" CREATED BY GENE RODDENBERRY WRITTEN BY ROBERTO ORCI & ALEX KURTZMAN & DAMON LINDELOF DIRECTED BY J. J. ABRAMS



MAY 17

BASED UPON "STAR TREK" CREATED BY GENE RODDENBERRY

WRITTEN BY ROBERTO ORCI & ALEX KURTZMAN & DAMON LINDELOF

DIRECTED BY J. J. ABRAMS



IN THEATRES, real D 3D AND IMAX 3D

SOUNDTRACK ALBUM ON VARSE SARABAND [STARTREKMOVIE.COM](http://STARTREKMOVIE.COM)

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## Razorjack

Writer / Artist: John Higgins

Publisher: **Titan Comics**

**Buy It From:** Day and date release exclusively through the **comiXology** app and **comiXology.com**. Retailers can order Razorjack from the June edition of Diamond PREVIEWS (order code: JUN131286)

**Available:** Hard Cover Collection Hits, 18th September 2013

### What is Razorjack?

**“An infernal dimension of screaming torment - ruling over this domain is queen of carnage Razorjack! All that stands in her path is a pair of rogue cops, whose investigation into a series of horrific serial murders uncovers Razorjack’s existence - and risks the end of Humanity!”**

### Why should we pick this up?

**“One of Higgins’ best-kept secrets.”** - Garth Ennis, *The Boys, Preacher*

**“Great work from a great artist.”** - David Lloyd Artist of *Nigh Raven, V for Vendetta, Kickback*.

**“Razorjack is one of his best-kept secrets. If there’s any justice, this new collection should find the audience the story has always deserved.”** - Garth Ennis Writer of *Preacher, Punisher, The Boys*.

**“...I’ve always thought Razorjack was a killer concept. A cosmic horror story of huge scope, breath-taking visuals and insane ambition: unique, wonderful, quintessential John Higgins.”** - Mike Carey Writer of *Lucifer, X-Men, Hellblazer, Crossing Midnight*.

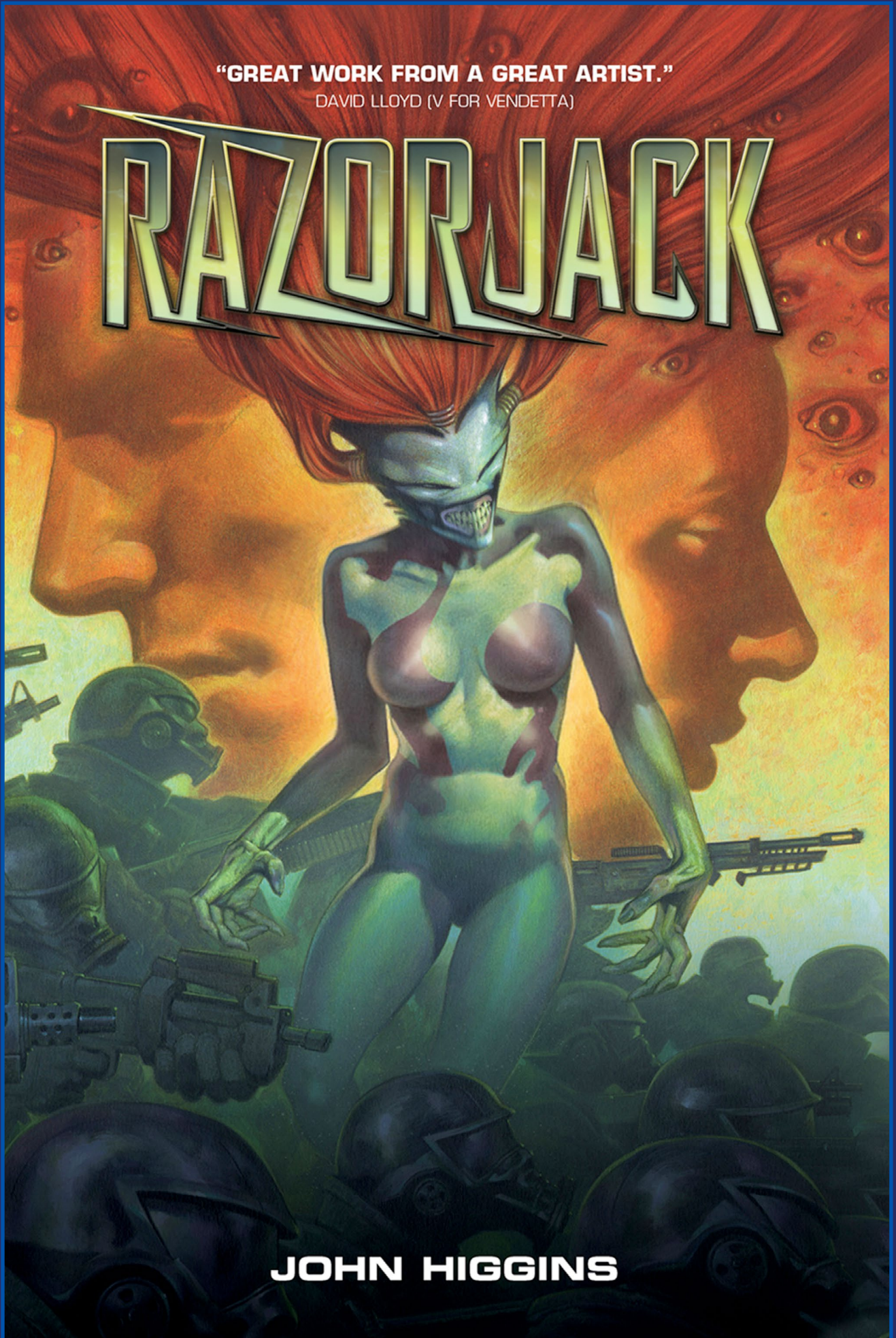
**“Razorjack is exactly the sort of thing I’ve been talking about; doing things new is the point. John Higgins is an innovative and driven artist, constantly looking for the next level, constantly expanding his capabilities.”** - Warren Ellis Writer of *The Authority, Planetary, Nextwave, Global Frequency*.



"GREAT WORK FROM A GREAT ARTIST."

DAVID LLOYD (V FOR VENDETTA)

# RAZORJACK



JOHN HIGGINS





A SILENT SCREAM! I HAVE NOT HEARD ONE BEFORE...

I DON'T BELIEVE THAT A SILENT SCREAM CAN BE--  
Ah. YES. AMUSING.

SUCH TORMENT...THE VEIL TORN FROM HER LIVING BODY, CHANNELLING THE ENTIRETY OF A LIFE'S PAIN-- FROM PAST AND FUTURE THROUGH THIS ONE MOMENT.

AH MY BITCHES, YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME GOOD LADY HELEN.

RAZORJACK, MISTRESS P'AN. IRON QUEEN. RULER OF THE TWELVE DIMS.

FREE MY CHILDREN...I HAVE GIVEN YOU MY BODY FOR THEM, AS YOU ASKED.  
FREE THEM!

Oh, HELEN, GOOD PEOPLE ARE SO BLIND, SO QUICK TO TRUST. HEED THIS, MY BITCHES--THIS WEeping FRAIL WOULD HEAL YOU. IF YOU WANT TO BE FREE FROM MY TWIST, SHE COULD KILL YOU WITH LOVE!

YOUR CHILDREN, HELEN? I HAVE TWISTED THEM. THEY ARE MINE NOW, BUT I CAN GIVE YOU YOUR CHILDREN BACK, AND YOU COULD FREE THEM IF YOU WANT.





FRAME...  
SOME HERO  
YOU TURNED OUT  
TO BE. YOU'RE BARELY  
A JOKE, MAN, NOT  
EVEN A FUCKIN'  
FOOTNOTE...



...DIE, FRAME!

...DIE, HELENI!

TWIST LOOP \_ NEXUS. MINUS I



Ahhh...! SO YOU  
ARE THE CONDUIT? A  
SIMPLE, WEAK-FLESHEO  
PRIMATE...AND ONE SO DEVOID OF  
THE USUAL AVARICE--YOU ARE  
AN INNOCENT! HOW  
INTRIGUING...

A WEAK  
LINK, BUT YOU  
SHOULD BE ADEQUATE  
TO COMPLETE THE NEXUS  
AND OPEN THE GATE-  
WAY TO THE CORE!

OPEN  
YOUR SOUL TO  
ME, MAGGOT...INVITE  
ME IN AND I WILL  
GRANT YOUR WORLD AN  
ABON OF DARKNESS!

WEEEEEEEEEE  
WEEEEEEEEEE





