

THE (TWENTY-THIRD) FORTNIGHTLY Fix



“Blogging isn’t writing. It’s graffiti with punctuation.”
‘Dr Ian Sussman’, *Contagion* (2011)

News From Planet Me

When last we gathered on this blasted heath, I was on the verge both of entering my fifty-second year and counting down the final hours on the 2011 TAFF race. The former proved rather a low-key affair, although my good friend Ray Holloway kindly kept me company the evening before and even brought me a cup of tea in the morning. John Coxon’s victory in the latter, whilst unexpected, caused far less controversy than I and my fellow TAFF administrators might have anticipated from the TAFF’s past history (perhaps it’s a side-effect of the so-called ‘greying’ of fandom, or maybe such disputes now swiftly burn out over the internet in a matter of days rather than festering over months, as fanzines fly back and forth).

Honestly, you blink and six months have passed. Less than a week from now, I’ll be nearer fifty-two than fifty-one. Meanwhile, John’s returned from his TAFF trip and relieved me of my duties as administrator, meaning I’m now free to shout “**Jacq Monahan for TAFF!!**” from the rooftops, providing those buildings haven’t *too* many storeys (I have a fear of heights, a condition Ann refused to acknowledge until she dragged me to the top of the Eiffel Tower and watched me turn grey as cardboard). You’ll find the ballot form at taff.org.uk. Alternatively, download *All Jacq’d Out #1* over at eFanzines.com; it’s a collaboration between myself, Nic Farey and Ms Monahan herself, with external contributions from Alan White (cover art), John DeChancie, John Purcell, John Nielsen-Hall and Aileen Forman (who point-blank refused to change her first name to John, strange girl).

In other news, this year’s Nova Awards have been opened up to all UK & Irish fans (not just members of Novacon 41); full details at novacon.org.uk. Please note the deadline for online votes is Saturday, 7 November (Novacon members can still vote at the convention).

Lastly, Ray and I sorted out the Delta Film Award shortlist yet again, although neither of us were able to attend this past weekend’s Festival of Fantastic Films in Manchester. We provided compilation disks, summaries and forms for the judges to complete; it’ll be interesting to see if Saturday’s screening echoes last year’s disarray.

Film Capsules

- *Arthur*: Although I was never a huge fan of the 1981 original, this remake with Russell Brand stepping into Dudley Moore’s shoes shows just how over-cautious the Hollywood Machine has become during the past 30 years. The drunken whoremonger of old is now directed down the road to sobriety and social redemption, courtesy of the young author he falls for (Greta Gerwig), whilst his fiancée (Jennifer Garner) has been injected with venomous ambition in order that we applaud her eventual downfall. A waste of all concerned.

- *Les aventures extraordinaires d'Adèle Blanc-Sec* (aka *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*): A truly delightful fantasy adventure set in 1911 Paris, starring Louise Bourgoin as the feisty explorer and journalist whose attempts to save the life of her twin sister lead to the city being terrorised by a resurrected pterodactyl as well as an Egyptian pharaoh and his afterlife entourage. Luc Besson clearly loves Jacques Tardi's graphic novels, and this is one heroine I'd very much like to see granted a return engagement.
- *Apocalypse Now* (1979): Francis Ford Coppola's conflation of the literary horrors of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (one of my all-time favourite books) and the true-life horrors of America's failed war against North Vietnam (and Cambodia) still packs a sharp punch, with Martin Sheen in stunning form as the CIA assassin sent on a journey as much into his own fears as into deep country. Modern audiences might find this movie slow, but it contains several extraordinary set-pieces and has at its own dark heart a meditation on inhumanity.
- *Attack the Block*: Underwhelming British sf comedy set on a London sinkhole estate and largely featuring teenage thugs I'd be quite happy to watch being chewed up by alien invaders. To writer / director Joe Cornish's credit, he eschews the usual cgi in favour of physical props, but it isn't really enough to get us to care about his characters.
- *Bad Teacher*: Refreshingly meanspirited comedy featuring Cameron Diaz as a scheming gold digger out to ensnare fellow teacher and jewelery heir Justin Timberlake, which means crossing swords with their disturbingly upbeat colleague Lucy Punch. Includes one of the oddest demonstrations of safe sex in recent years.
- *Beginners*: Writer / director Mike Mills launches his second feature by daringly charting what appears to be his entire story arc, but we soon learn there is far more to this tale of commitment-averse cartoonist Oliver (Ewan McGregor) losing his septuagenarian father Hal (Christopher Plummer) and moving out of grief into a new romantic relationship (Mélanie Laurent). That Hal had recently come out and found a much younger boyfriend (Goran Visnjic) adds another level to an amiable tale of two men desperately trying to recreate themselves, made marginally more interesting through Mills' manipulation of the timeline. Pleasantly diverting.
- *Blitz*: Unremarkable but entertaining cop drama set in London and starring the ever-reliable Jason Statham as the no-holds-barred detective prioritising justice over civil rights in his search for the serial killer targetting his own colleagues (Dirty Harringay?). Paddy Considine provides solid support as a boss who's crossed the line himself.
- *Bridesmaids*: Despite the 'gross-out' expectations from its trailer, *Bridesmaids* is at times rather touching, as Kristen Wiig (who shares screenplay credit with her *Saturday Night Live* partner Annie Mumalo) struggles to balance her rocky sex life with the increasing pressure of her maid of honour duties for childhood friend Maya Rudolph, none of which is helped by the pushy trophy wife of the fiance's boss (Rose Byrne), who plots to take charge of the event. The result is a very funny movie, with several stand-out scenes and nicely targeted support from *The I.T. Crowd*'s Chris O'Dowd as Wiig's putative love interest.
- *Captain America: The First Avenger*: After the surprisingly enjoyable *Thor* (never my favourite Marvel character, particularly since Stan & Jack moved on), the *Avengers* franchise shifts back up to *Iron Man* levels with this wartime superhero romp, achieving the tightrope act of portraying fervent patriotism whilst never slipping into gingoism. Chris Evans plays a blinder as the revitalised Steve Rogers, Hayley Atwell is in fine form as the sparky Peggy Carter (as comic fans know, aunt of the woman he'll eventually bed) and Hugo Weaving is

definitely value for money as the raving Red Skull, the only man Hitler was afraid of. In a strong summer, this is an unmitigated highlight. [Note: If you stay through the credits, there's an extensive preview of the forthcoming *Avengers* movie.]

- *Cedar Rapids*: Surprisingly warmhearted comedy in the *Hangover* vein from *Youth In Revolt* director Miguel Arteta, starring Ed Helms as a naïve insurance salesman forced to represent his smalltown company at a regional conference following the sudden death of a high-shooting colleague. There's great support along his journey of awakening from John C Reilly, Sigourney Weaver, Anne Heche and Isiah Whitlock Jr (the last offering a great in-joke for fans of *The Wire*).



- *The Conspirator*: Worthy but relatively unexciting account of the show trials which followed Abraham Lincoln's assassination, with James MacAvoy as the young lawyer forced to sacrifice both his social standing and impending marriage in order to defend the mother of the one conspirator who got away. The parallels with recent calls for alleged terrorists to face military trials have clearly not escaped writers James D Dolomon and Gregory Bernstein, nor director Robert Redford, but that doesn't quite give it the energy necessary for a truly successful legal thriller.

- *Cowboys & Aliens*: Pretty much exactly what it says on the tin, just as with the original comic. Daniel Craig is the amnesiac gunslinger thrust into an extraterrestrial invasion, Harrison Ford the cattle boss with the wits to recognise him as an asset, Olivia Wilde the femme fatale with a deadly secret. Don't expect more than shoot-outs and explosions, and you won't be disappointed.

- *Delhi Belly*: Uproriously funny Bollywood crime farce, like the Coen Brothers spliced with the Farrellys. If there's any justice, this should relaunch the career of director Abnihay Deo after his box office squib *Game*.

- *The Devil's Double*: Solid fact-based portrait of Latif Yahia, the Iraqi soldier chosen under threat of family assassination to become the double of Saddam Hussain's psychotic son Aday. There are few surprises, but Dominic Cooper does sterling work in the dual role, with Ludivine Sagnier as the girl they share.

- *De vrais mensonges* (aka *Beautiful Lies*): Like his previous collaboration with Audrey Tautou, 2006's *Priceless*, writer-director Pierre Salvadori's latest is an intricate comedy of errors, intrigue and disinformation. Beauty salon manager Émilie (Tautou) is inspired by a mysterious letter from a secret admirer to create a similar figure for her lonely mother (Nathalie Baye), inadvertently dragging one of her employees (Sami Bouajila) into the subterfuge. To say more would be to spoil the joys of this soufflé-light confection, other than to observe the final quarter-hour reflects a highly Gallic attitude towards sexual manners.

- *Fast Five* (aka *Fast & Furious 5*): Tuba-voiced anti-hero Vin Diesel leads his gang on one last hurrah, facing off a South American drugs baron whilst trying to evade steel-eyed G-man Dwayne Johnson. You'd have to be dumber than Megan Fox to expect originality at this point, but this live-action videogame is not without its sheer visceral appeal.

- *Green Lantern*: DC has never had anything like the same luck with its superhero movies as arch-rivals Marvel; other than Batman and Superman, most of its characters have ended up as tv projects, and even its *World's Finest* duo tend to go south after the first sequel (although Christopher Nolan will hopefully buck that trend). Contrary to the lukewarm reviews, I rather enjoyed this first big-screen outing for the guardian of Sector 8214; Ryan Reynolds cuts a dashing figure as Hal Jordan and the plot, whilst slightly unfocused by the presence of two enemies, manages to cram in the entire backstory of the Green Lantern Corps.
- *The Hangover Part II*: The legendary Joe Bob Briggs once explained that the purpose of a sequel should not be to launch into fresh waters, but rather to remake the original hit. Director Todd Phillips and his writing team obviously have no intention of tinkering with their winning formula (the first instalment scored more than \$277m in the USA alone), so what we have is a mildly amusing retread of its predecessor, relocated to Bangkok.
- *Hanna*: Fast-moving thriller featuring Saoirse Ronan (*City of Ember*, *The Lovely Bones*) as the teenage survivor of a CIA-backed supersoldier programme, on the run from her father's handler (Cate Blanchett). Director Joe Wright maintains the action at breakneck speed, backed by a soundtrack from the Chemical Brothers, and just about keeps his audience from noticing how thin the narrative actually is.
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*: Fitting conclusion to the fantasy franchise, and a decided improvement upon the first half (though the centre of Rowlings' seventh novel is so leaden, I doubt anyone could have saved it). If you've seen the others, you'll no doubt go see the finale; if you turned up this late, I seriously doubt you'll hook into the final battle, much of which depends upon existing emotional links with the characters.
- *Horrible Bosses*: Enjoyable modern fable of three downtrodden, basically decent guys (Jason Bateman, Charlie Day, Jason Sudeikis) worm-turning against their vile employers (Kevin Spacey, Jennifer Aniston, Colin Farrell). It's not quite as acid as it might have been, but by no means less than entertaining.
- *The Inbetweeners Movie*: A suitably raucous conclusion to the sixth-form misadventures of Simon, Will, Neil and Jay. Whilst following the well-established route of taking a British sitcom to foreign climes, it uses the additional armroom to allow the characters to interact more with their surroundings and for there to be a slightly more expansive plot than the usual twenty-plus minutes.
- *Insidious*: Highly effective ghost train ride, written by Leigh Whannell and directed by James Wan, previously responsible for *Saw*. It's hugely derivative -- you can spot slices of *Halloween*, *Don't Look Now*, *The Haunting* and especially *Poltergeist*, to name just four -- but there's a solid track of genuinely creepy moments along the route.
- *Jûsan-nin no shikaku* (aka *13 Assassins*): Solid but overlong samurai saga from the usually reliable Takashi Miike, a remake of Eiichi Kudo's 1963 tale of a band of champions gathered together to rid feudal Japan of an insane overlord. To be honest, I'd have been happier if we'd lost six assassins and at least twenty minutes.
- *Karigurashi no Arrietty* (aka *Arrietty*): Faithful but curiously pedestrian adaptation of Mary Norton's first 'Borrowers' novel. Anime veteran Hayao Miyazaki co-writes and storyboards (the design is reminiscent of 1989's *Kiki's Delivery Service*), Hiromasa Yonebayashi directs, Mirai Shida plays the eponymous besmalled kleptomaniac; I just wish it had ampted up the tension.

- *Last Night*: Thoughtful, intelligent study of a modern marriage in crisis. Joanna (Keira Knightley) suspects husband Michael (Sam Worthington) of having an affair with co-worker Laura (Eva Mendes), then faces temptation herself when she encounters former lover Alex (Guillaume Canet). Appropriately, director / screenwriter Massy Tadjedin ends the movie in mid-conversation: this is merely a chapter in their relationship, even if it might be the concluding one.
- *Mother's Day*: Well-crafted 'house invasion' thriller which, despite having Darren Lynn Bousman (*Saw II* through *Saw IV*) in the director's chair, concentrates on the interplay between its characters rather than the inevitable bloodshed. Rebecca De Mornay is in fine form as the murderous matriarch.
- *Los ojos de Julia* (aka *Julia's Eyes*): Easily the most accomplished thriller in the *giallo* tradition I've seen in years, a tense, claustrophobic cocktail of murder and deception spun around a young woman (Belén Rueda)'s investigation of her twin sister's death whilst struggling with failing eyesight. This is only director / co-writer Guillem Morales' second feature, and full marks to co-producer Guillermo del Toro for using his Hollywood street cred to promote a highly promising newcomer.
- *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*: The theme-ride franchise gets a minor retooling, drops several of its regular characters (those contractual pay hikes really start to bite after a while) and lifts its plot from a 1987 Tim Powers novel. The result is utterly unsurprising, mildly entertaining and instantly forgettable.
- *Potiche* (aka *Trophy Wife*): Surprisingly old-fashioned comedy starring Catherine Deneuve and Gerald Depardieu, and that's not simply because it's set in 1977/8. Director François Ozon has adapted the original play by Pierre Barillet & Jean-Pierre Grédy -- a farce revolving around a philandering umbrella magnate, his wife (daughter of the factory's founder), their children, his mistress and her former lover -- but pretty much confines the action to a couple of sets. Despite this, it's rather sweet, and has a few twists up its frilled sleeve.
- *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*: Everything Tim Burton's 2001 misfire failed to achieve: both a fitting tribute to the original movies and an ingenious springboard from which to reboot the series. Whereas Burton's 'reimagining' was singularly lacking in the very element that phrase promised, *Rise* hits its target at every juncture, effectively creating a third timeline but one which is totally in sympathy with those established in *Planet* and *Escape*. Director Rupert Wyatt (*The Escapist*), screenwriters Rick Jaffa & Amanda Silver and a top-notch cast (most notably Andy Serkis) have quite simply produced one of the best science films in recent years.
- *Scre4m*: Director Wes Craven and screenwriter Kevin Williamson reunite after more than a decade to orchestrate yet another massacre in Woodsboro, but its self-referential smart-assery has little of the freshness they brought to the genre in 1996, even if a few of their digs at torture porn manage to amuse.
- *Something Borrowed*: What could have proven a passable romcom about two childhood friends (Kate Hudson, Ginnifer Goodwin) whose relationship becomes strained when the former gets engaged to the man the latter secretly adores (Colin Hanks, looking alarmingly like Tom Cruise's maxi-me) is torpedoed by a refusal to make the star-crossed lovers face the moral consequences of their actions through the contrivance of making the bride-to-be just as guilty as her duplicitous bff.

- *Super 8*: Much in the manner that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg paid tribute to Saturday morning serials with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, JJ Abrams's latest movie is a love letter to the 1980s genre output of the likes of Joe Dante (*Explorers*), Richard Donner (*Goonies*) and Spielberg himself (there's a heavy dash of *E.T.* in this mix). In fact, Abrams has so meticulously caught the tone and look of that period, *Super 8* feels as though it's just been lifted out of a time capsule.
- *Thor 3D*: Of all the current Marvel projects, this was the one I had the most concerns about: even in the original comics, the son of Odin always seems an odd fit for that universe's legion of mutants, radiation victims and genius scientists in exoskeletons. I'm delighted to say director Kenneth Branagh hits just the right tone, a mix of Shakespearean bravado, intrigue and warfare, stirred in with plenty of self-deprecating humour and some pretty nifty computer graphics. For those who stay through the closing credits, there's also a heavy hint that next summer's drawing-together of all these threads will include a narrative nod to *The Avengers #1*.
- *X-Men: First Class*: Slick, inventive reboot of the *X-Man* franchise, exploring the initial friendship between Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) and Eric Lehnsherr (Michael Fassbender), the future Professor X and Magneto, against the backdrop of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Director Matthew Vaughn was originally in the frame for *X-Men: The Last Stand*; based upon this entry, that series would almost certainly have stretched to a fourth instalment, but this fresh start is a far better use of his talents.

Aside from *Apocalypse Now*, all these were released during 2010-11. One small correction to last issue's review of *Chalet Girl*: the second sentence should have opened with "That they'll end up in bed despite his impending engagement is entirely predictable, but that pretty much goes with the territory".

Food For Thought

Life is a sequence of choices: you are what you are, then you make what you are, and finally harsh reality intervenes and you have to rebuild.

Given the option, I would always eat in Burger King rather than MacDonalds. Actually, I haven't eaten in MacDonalds for more than two decades, and whilst I haven't eaten in Burger King for several years, that's more to do with my current finances than my culinary tastes.

I also prefer Coke to Pepsi, which I learned much later was on some level unsound at the party political level (Coca-Cola supports the GOP, Pepsi-Cola the Democrats). Do I get a hall pass if I admit preferring Pepsi Max over both?



This has been the much-delayed *Fortnightly Fix #23*, dated 24 October 2011. Edited by Steve Green. Illos by Sue Mason & Pete Lyon. Usual thanks to Bill Burns. Feedback welcomed at stevegreen@livejournal.com. This is a Gutter Press fanzine: accept no substitutes.