



'Watchmen' finally makes it to the big screen in 2009

Opal Bonfante is...

CELEBRITY VIGILANTE



Opal's crystal ball

Britney Spears was arguably the most reported celebrity of 2008 and with all her trials and tribulations, it's a sweet victory that as we go into 2009, she's managed to pull together another hit album with *Circus*. Look out for the title track and 'If U Seek Amy' as singles this year.

I'm predicting big things for *The White Lies* in 09. These west London boys have a great 80s sound, look out for the album *To Lose My Life* in January.

Last year I exclusively revealed that Simon Cowell has been hounding a top Hollywood scriptwriter to get the Paul Potts story on the big screen. Although the music mogul failed to win the writing team he was hoping for, the other gossip pages reported my story a full four months after I broke it!

own gossip column, though it obviously won't be as good as this one!

My favourite *Skins* actress Hannah Murray will be looking to fill Keira Knightley's corsets as ITV have signed her up to star in some classic period dramas. The blonde played airy-fairy Cassie in the Channel 4 teen drama and is now looking at more serious roles. I told you last year how I spotted the teenager after a heavy night of partying wearing a bizarre outfit of men's clothing that swamped her tiny frame. She'll have to swap the alcopops for English tea if she's going to be a serene screen siren...

Catch my friend Thaila Zucchi on tour in 2009 as she travels the UK with comedy play *Boeing Boeing*. The *Star Stories* actress will be singing, stripping and swearing in this hilarious musical about one man trying to keep three girlfriends happy!

Set to be huge in the next 12 months is Asin Thottumkal. Every major film studio entered a bidding war to sign the singer/actress, with Disney clinching the deal. The family friendly corporation want to make her their new Miley Cyrus.

2009 THE YEAR TO COME

Your month-by-month guide to the year's biggest and best films

JANUARY

Valkyrie

The world's most famous sofa jumper (and didn't DFS miss an advertising trick there?) is back headlining a big screen release for the first time since the underrated and under-performing *M.13* back in summer 06. And what a doozy of a premise his return to main man action is, as Tom Cruise takes on the true-to-life role of the eye-patch sporting Nazi Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, the man that tried to assassinate Hitler. It suffered from production problems and its release has been delayed, but if the trailer is anything to go by this is going to rock.



FEBRUARY

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

Adapted from the 1920s short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is the third collaboration between David Fincher and Brad Pitt. And if this team-up is as good as their previous (*Seven*, *Fight Club*) then we're surely in for something special. An epic time-spanning story of love, life, death and the beyond, *Benjamin Button* is the peculiar fable of a man that is born in his eighties and ages backwards. Much rides on the technical wizardry behind the scenes, but if early footage is anything to go by then the techies at Digital Domain have pushed the envelope once more.



The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

MARCH

Watchmen

Watchmen is widely regarded as the best graphic novel of all time. Its adaptation has been attempted by no less than three visionary directors (Darren Aronofsky, Terry Gilliam and Paul Greengrass) before new uber-adaptor-on-the-block Zack Snyder (*Dawn of the Dead* remake, *300*) got his talented hands on it. Since then a film version has become an actuality with every single shred of information leaked, still released, and trailer glimpsed mind-blowingly awesome. So the best graphic novel of all time finally gets a chance to be the best superhero movie of all time. Gotta go some to get anywhere near *The Dark Knight*, mind.

APRIL

I Love You, Man

The second of two high-concept Paul Rudd comedies to watch in early 09 (the other being the hilarious LARP-mocking *Role Models*), *I Love You, Man* sees Rudd playing an engaged man who realises he has no close male friends to stand by him at his impending ceremony. Embarking on a series of man-dates to find his best man, he meets and instantly bonds with *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*'s mirth-inducing man-mountain Jason Segal, leading to relationship woes and some side-splitting scenarios. Basically it's a bromance between two of the funniest guys on the planet in an Apatow-style comedy. Sounds worth watching.



Star Trek

MAY

Star Trek

Moved back six months from its original Boxing Day 08 release date is JJ Abrams' much-hyped revival of the *Trek* franchise. Clever viral marketing has built up to an excellent trailer that has phased both fans and curios into a stupor. Specific details still remain elusive however (this is from the man that brings you *Lost* and the super-secret *Cloverfield* after all), but what you can expect is a time-spanning adventure - Leonard Nimoy has confirmed he will be donning the pointy ears once more - that hopefully presses all the right uber-geek buttons and goes boldly where no *Trek* movie has gone before.

JUNE

Terminator: Salvation
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

June 2009 will be the battle of the bots, as the Terminator takes on Optimus Prime®. First up is the return of the *Terminator* on the 5th with Batman (Christian Bale) newly recruited as the future John Connor in its locker. The movie picks up the *Terminator* story in post-apocalyptic 2018, with John Connor leading the fightback against the machines that devastated the world. McG is the man at the helm, causing consternation among fans, but he's gone some way to winning them over thanks to the fantastic footage seen so far.



As for the *Formers*, not much has yet been revealed about the sequel, except the fact that new robots joining the rumble will include Soundwave and Arcee and that humans (including the returning Shia LaBeouf, Josh Duhamel and Megan Fox), Autobots and Decepticons may have to team together. *X-Men 2* style, in order to defeat an uber-powerful new foe: the titular fallen. And that there will loadsa bombastic battles, babes and booming bass: the three Bs of Michael Bay.

DECEMBER

The Lovely Bones

Alice Sebold's novel is one of the most moving of recent times as well as one of the most successful (it remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for well over a year). It's a good thing the talented Peter Jackson is adapting it then. The story of a young girl watching how her family copes with her murder from heaven, there is the off chance this could be sickly sentimental doo doo. But with Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* cohorts also involved in the screenplay it's doubtful. Plus there's the talented cast to consider: Rachel Weisz, Susan Sarandon, Stanley Tucci and Saoirse Anonement Ronan as the ghost daughter.

JULY

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Year six, so just one more to go. And despite the *Half-Blood Prince* being widely regarded as the worst HP novel, returning OOP director David Yates looks to have knocked this one out of the Quidditch park. Focused on Voldemort's dark past, *Half-Blood Prince* sets the end story in motion as Harry begins to learn his role in the impending clash between good and evil. Then of course, there's a super-secret ending (for the two people that haven't read the novels) that sees the demise of a main character and should pack the most emotional punch of the series so far.



AUGUST

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Or *Pirates of the Caribbean: Format Refresh*. Because with that trilogy wrapped up, Bruckheimer obviously needs to milk a new cash cow. And with Disney rides tapped out he's turned to computer games - of which there still hasn't really been a decent adaptation. Perhaps this will be the first? Following his *Pirates* plan almost exactly,

SEPTEMBER

The Soloist

Everybody knows you never go full retard. Let's hope Jamie Foxx takes 2008's man-of-the-year Robert Downey Jr's advice. Especially as he is acting right alongside him in this Oscar baiter. Based on a true story, *The Soloist* is about Nathaniel Ayers (Foxx), a monumentally talented musician, who suffers from schizophrenia and ends up living rough on the streets. Stumbling across him when looking for a story, a journalist (Downey Jr) comes to befriend him and try to help turn his life around. Solid awards-friendly material then.

OCTOBER

Up

Could Pixar possibly top themselves again? Well one thing's for sure, *WALL-E*'s going to be a hard act to follow. Their continuing attempt at movie world domination comes in the form of *Up*, the story of one elderly man's attempt to fulfill a lifelong dream of seeing the wilds of South America. Doesn't sound very Pixar-esque, does it? Too straightforward. Well that's until you consider just how he intends on travelling there: by tying thousands of balloons to his home and drifting on the winds. Now that sounds more like a Pixar premise!



NOVEMBER

Sherlock Holmes

Why should you get excited about yet another re-imagining of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective? Because this one's from *RocknRolla* Guy Ritchie and sees Downey Jr (there's that man again) step into the legendary private dick's boots. An original story, but taking its cues from Lionel Wigram's comic book adaptation, Ritchie's *Sherlock* is much more of an action man: kicking ass as well as taking the names of the guilty. Let's just hope there's a role to squeeze The Stath into though after he missed out on Ritchie's return to form.

Slumdog Millionaire (15)

Director: Danny Boyle
Cast: Irfan Khan, Anil Kapoor, Dev Patel, Freida Pinto
Runtime: 120 mins



MATTHEW RODGERS
EPOCH TIMES UK STAFF

Danny Boyle is the most versatile and accessible director working in cinema today. He's as successful creating a canvas for heroin riddled Scottish youths and apocalyptic space escapades as he is ravaging London with rage infected zombies. The one thing that permeates his films is the high standard they all effortlessly achieve. Sure, there are genre specialists such as Scorsese and Romero but there are few that can effectively traverse the cinematic landscape as well as Britain's finest.

Continuing that trend is this astonishing feel-good epic set in the vibrant and volatile world of India, and more specifically the tale of Jamal Malik (Dev Patel - *Skins*), a slumdog orphan who is one question away from the jackpot on the Hindi version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* But don't think you're about to sit through an extended version of the show, it is simply a clever framing device to tell a remarkable against-the-odds tale of Jamal's struggle to be reunited with his soul mate.

Something of an uplifting *City of God*, with some comparable violence to boot, its success is made easy by the infectiously engaging performances. All incarnations of the cross generational characters are brilliantly acted.

Patel in particular holds the attention as grown-up Jamal, convincing from his initial, brutal torture through to the nail-biting final question, he could be quite a find. Ayush Mahesh Khedekar as young Jamal is also a wide eyed triumph and many of the more enjoyable scenes are during the flashbacks that involve him and brother Salim getting into all sorts of mischief. An impromptu tour of the Taj Mahal and a train top montage are just two of the many, many excellent set-pieces.

Beautifully shot by Boyle, you'll struggle to find a better looking film, not just because of the stunning locales but the way in which the visuals are balanced to be inventive yet not intrusive. A reliance on *28 Days Later* shaky-cam jars, and the cheeky Bollywood style end credit sequence will only see the already face stretching smile increase some more.

Yes, it's slightly overlong and some of the melodrama borders on cliché but you forgive it because of the romanticism of the expertly written story by *Full Monty* scribe Simon Beaufoy, and the powerful passion of a director crafting the best film of his career to date. This is a stunning movie.

Slumdog Millionaire is released January 9th nationwide.



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