

Early Man

France/United Kingdom 2018
Director: Nick Park
Cast: Eddie Redmayne, Nick Park
Certificate: G, 99m, 53s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

The Pleistocene era meets plasticine man, in Aardman's charming old-school stop-motion tale of prehistoric tribes warring on the football pitch. A first solo feature outing for Nick Park, and his first film since *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005), *Early Man* returns to the classic Aardman template with some enjoyable squishy cartoonism. Palskiy hanna made it's packed with child pleasing puns and sight gags, and has an overly British artsnafel feel.

Park's love of British cinema surfaces as Harry Hansen homage dinostrans clash in the style of Hammer's *One Million Years BC* (1966), before a kickabout with a red-hot meteorite sees a valley tribe invent football. Their descendants, who have forgotten the sacred game, must reclaim it to play against the sophisticated Bronze Age invaders and win back their stolen valley. Young Dug (a chirpy Eddie Redmayne) exerts his insular tribe to work together and the admittedly well-worn teamwork trope provides a tidy template for its underdog sports comedy. Released in advance of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, it reflects the commercialisation and corruption of today's soccer world, with the arrogant Real Bronzo team and their grasping leader Lord Nooth.

Screenwriters Mark Burton and John O'Farrell let the footballing comedy range from simple slapstick, as the valley folk train on lava flows and rock-throwing to adult-themed satire. The tribe's trajectory, from inventing football to decades of depicted matches (depicted in cave paintings), slyly suggests the 50 years of Hart of Dixie post-1966 England teams.

A Briton: his spears



Produced by Catal Shawley Richard Beak Neil Lane New Line David Spoto	Screenplay Mark Burton John O'Farrell Sally Mark Burton	Director of Photography David Weir David Weir	Composers Stefano Bollani Antonio Antonio
Production Designer Matt Perry	Music Antonio Antonio	Executive Producers Sally Mark Burton	Editors Sally Mark Burton
Production Office Sally Mark Burton	Visual Effects Sally Mark Burton	Production Office Sally Mark Burton	Production Office Sally Mark Burton

Britain, the Neolithic people are a group of cavemen invent football using a meteorite as a ball. Millions later, their descendants, an isolated non-footballing Stone Age tribe, are chased from their idyllic valley by Bronze Age soldiers, whose villainous leader Lord Nooth claims it for ore mining. One young member of the valley tribe, Dug, is accidentally transported to a football match in the Bronze City, and challenges Nooth: if the tribe can beat champions Real Bronzo, they will keep their valley. If they lose, they will work in Nooth's mines. Dug attempts to train the tribe fall, he sneaks back to the Bronze City, finds champion Goona secretly playing football, and enlists her help.

Erase and Forget

United Kingdom/Denmark 2017
Director: Anders Lutz Zimmernann
Cast: Anders Lutz Zimmernann
Certificate: B, 99m, 10s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

Back in 1989, towards the close of his study *Hollywood's Vietnam*, Gilbert Adair lamented how the bigger studios had focused their energies on bringing out movies that sought to recreate the visceral in-vice-combat experiences of warfare at the expense of anything that "smacked of the abstract or conceptual." He argued that one consequence of this concern to bring the war into extreme close-up was that "we have been frustrated in any truly reflective or comprehensive view of the event, any angle of vision aspiring to more than a grunt '8-eye-view'."

America hasn't stopped embarking on military adventures since 1989 – and many of these have engendered levels of disavowal and disenchantment comparable to those of the Vietnam War. Adair's assessment still holds true and is all the more reason to welcome Andrea Lutz Zimmernann's *Erase and Forget*, an eerie, quietly disturbing essay film that probes the erasures and edge spaces of the American Dream, the blurry line between fantasy and reality in modern-day US culture, and the sadness and disorientation jingling behind the veneer of flag-waving certitude.

At its centre – though it remains elusive throughout – is James Gordon Gritz, better known as 'Bo' Gritz. Born in 1939, he became one of America's most decorated veterans (he is reported to have killed more than 400 people) and has often been hailed as the inspiration for John Rambo. Much of his career has been spent in black ops, doing things unknown to or deniable by US politicians, circulating as a violent ghost. He admits – without much conviction – to carrying out atrocities in Latin America, where he arranged for innocent people to be run over by trucks kitted out in opposition colours. In Vietnam he sat up dead insurgents around a table and switched on a radio to trick nearby combatants into thinking they were alive; as they approached their countrymen, he detonated a satchel bomb.

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Her tough training regime turns the tribe into a team. Nooth shows Dug cave paintings revealing years of football losses by valley teams. Dug goes to the big game alone and concedes the match. But the valley tribe fly in on a giant mammoth determined to fight back. Nooth cheats as referee and the tribe's goalkeeper is knocked out. Dug's hog, Hogpog, becomes the goalkeeper. While Real Bronzo's players argue over the ball, the beast Dug runs into the air game he scores the winning goal. Nooth steals the game's takings, is caught by the giant mammoth and disgraced. The tribe return happily to their valley.

Boo! Boo! Boo!

USA 2017
Director: Lawrence Sher
Cast: Owen Wilson
Certificate: B, 115m, 40s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

It's probably not the wisest idea for a comedy full of tired, worn-out gags to open with jokes that the characters openly acknowledge are as old as the hills. Even worse is the fact that the punchlines to these gnomes, "Good news, I found your car keys" and "Buy me dinner first" respectively – occur during a recital eam conducted by Peter, the film's procoligist protagonist, played by Ed Helms with little evident enthusiasm.

Bad News hardly seems any fresher a few scenes later, when Peter's brother Kyle takes the opportunity to give an unmemorable-filled speech at a wedding – something the same actor, Owen Wilson, did with far more brio in *Wedding Crashers* (2005). What with Wilson having yet another go at the sackler-chamber persona that was more appealing in his younger days, and Helms stuck in the uplight mode of his long-suffering Stu in *The Hangover Trilogy* (2009-13), the film can't help but feel like a relic of the Hollywood pro-comedy cycle. Indeed, that's pretty much what it is: the project, having begun as *Reunited*, a spec script that future *Office Christmas Party* screenwriter Justin Malen originally sold in 2011. (In an interview at the time, the writer said his ambition was to put a fun *Hangover*-like twist on the parental-centre trip concept of David O. Russell's infinitely superior *Fighting with My Family*. It's not clear what happened to the fun part.)

Arriving six years later, *Bad News* – with relentlessly punnle humour and a suit-shaming central premise concerning Peter and Kyle's attempts to discover who of them Peter Helms is many former sexual partners is their dad – couldn't be more out of step with the female-centre nature of the few studio comedies that still attract big audiences in the US, such as last summer's *Girls Trip*, *The Bad News Bears*, and *Pitch Perfect* franchises. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Bad News* franchises more of whatever vitality it has to the women in its cast, most notably Glenn Close as Helen. Though her sexual prowess and promiscuity as a younger woman may be mentioned ad infinitum, at least Helen doesn't express any shame about her behaviour in the 1970s. "Everybody was high and fucking," she explains. Close wringing all the juice she can from the line, "No had she's otherwise poorly served by Malen's script, which is so sloppy enough to have her waxing

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status as the real-life Rambo, his efforts to bring back US POWs from Laos and Burma in the 1980s and his plans for an autonomous community in Idaho. Associates allude to a suicide attempt.

Father Figures

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Grim brother: Owen Wilson

