IF IT BLEEDS
By Stephen King

If Stephen King only wrote novels he would still occupy a place in many horror fans’ hearts, thanks to the likes of The Mist, Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption, and The Body, which was brought to the big screen as the beloved Stand by Me. His newest collection contains four tales of terror occupying the no-man’s-land betwixt short story and novel, and finds the Master of the Macabre in fine, if mostly unsurprising, form.

The titular story showcases a character who has become very familiar to King’s army of “Constant Readers”—private investigator Holly Gibney. A major player in the Bill Hodges Trilogy and The Outsider (and memorably portrayed by Cynthia Erivo in HBO’s recent adaptation of the latter), the OCD-suffering sleuth is drawn into danger in If It Bleeds after becoming obsessed with a vanishing mole on a TV news reporter’s face. Holly devotees will also be interested to know that King fills in a lot of her troubled background along the way. Mr. Harrigan’s Phone, meanwhile, further highlights King’s ambivalent attitude toward technology (see also his novel Cell and Kindle-centric novella UR) in a tale about the benefits and dangers of burying someone with their favorite Apple product. And Rat finds the author returning to the subject of the hardships endured by, well, authors, and centers on a writer striking a Faustian bargain so he can finish his book.

The odd man out? That would be the inventive, and by King’s standards fascinatingly gnomic, The Life of Chuck, a story of choreography and global catastrophe—told backwards! —Clark Collis
In its 11-year run, RuPaul’s Drag Race has won 13 Emmys and pushed a subculture to heights taller than Trixie Mattel’s hair. It’s also become big business. ViacomCBS plans to become big business. Mattel’s hair. It’s also lights taller than Trixieushed a subculture to win 13 Emmys and Rs’ 11-year run, one of the quickest-transforming communities.

The show features folk in six small communities such as Gettyburg, Pa., and Twin Falls, Idaho, who are gussied up by Race alums Bob the Drag Queen, Eureka O’Hara, and Shangela. “We don’t just do a physical transformation,” says Shangela, 38. “We’re hoping for an entire human transformation.” Like the original Race and Netflix’s Queer Eye, here aspires to be a force for acceptance, helping participants cope with rejection, homophobia, and racism while rocking six-inch stilettos. At the end of each episode, a newly made-over queen lip-synchs a tune at a local bar, both a statement of identity and a call for others to join them. “Drag has been hidden for so long,” says Eureka. “People are finally being exposed to it—they’re starting to accept that they love it, and they’re seeing the power behind it.”

The show takes the network gloss off an often gritty subculture. “They let us present these people the way we wanted them to be presented, from the locals to the queens,” says Stephen Warren, who co-created the series with Johnnie Ingram. The hope, adds Ingram, is to bring divided communities together: “Even if it’s just one night to say: We’re here, we exist, we belong, and we’re staying.” — JOY NOFI

RELAX! HERE ARE MORE LAID-BACK GAMES

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IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO DEPICT FICTICIOUS FEMALE SUPERHEROES IN ENTERTAINMENT; IT’S BETTER TO SHOW REAL ONES.

That’s what prompted actress Geena Davis, with the help of philanthropist Lyda Hill, to executive-produce Mission Unstoppable With Miranda Cosgrove—a CBS Saturday-morning show hosted by the former iCarly star that showcases female engineers, mathematicians, and astronauts doing all sorts of world-changing stuff. Davis believes their lively reports on superstars like Diana Trujillo—the head of the Mars Rover program—have already inspired young viewers in the series’ first season on CBS and its streaming service, CBS All Access. “There’s a direct correlation between what happens on screen and what people do in real life,” says Davis, who also cites a study saying 63 percent of women pursued STEM careers because of Gillian Anderson’s forensic-pathologist character, Dana Scully, on Fox’s The X-Files. “That’s an overwhelming impact.”

FOR SOME REASON, relocating to a remote island where resources abound, everyone is healthy, and the economy is a paradise of effortless productivity and zero-interest loans really seems appealing to people right now. Gamers with an influx of time at home have turned to cuddly capitalist Tom Nook and his escapist getaway package in record numbers, making New Horizons one of the quickest-selling Nintendo Switch titles. Have some guilt-free social time by inviting friends to your island to fish, net bugs, chop wood, exchange gifts, or just marvel at your decorating skills. Oh, to live in a world where the museum and the airport are open 24/7, and the worst thing that can happen is the occasional spider bite. — EVAN LEWIS

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ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

MUST FOR KIDS
MISSION UNSTOPPABLE WITH MIRANDA COSGROVE

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It may not be totally appealing, but social distancing has made the reclusive-author lifestyle a lot more achievable. This feverish account of artistic isolation can be read as both a how-to manual and a chilling warning about the dangers of walling yourself off. The very meta Drifts follows a struggling writer working on a memoir about her day-to-day life called... Drifts. It’s a life of mostly sitting around—binging TV, bickering with her spouse, and masturbating. (The protagonist also walks her dog every once in a while; no word on whether she keeps herself six feet away from strangers.) As her grip on reality begins to slip, Drifts gives us a window into an anxious, lonely soul. How relatable.

—DC

If you haven’t already read Sally Rooney’s best-selling 2018 novel, chances are someone has recommended it to you. So it went for British actress Daisy Edgar-Jones. “My best friend had bought it for my family because it’s her favorite book—she’s writing her dissertation on it!” says the native Londoner. But Edgar-Jones still didn’t get around to it until the opportunity arose to costar in Hulu’s splashy adaptation (April 29).

The lyrical romance follows the relationship of Marianne (Edgar-Jones) and Connell (Paul Mescal) over several years, from high school in small-town Ireland to college in bustling Dublin. They fall for each other, they break up, they try things again. “They’re intelligent people who aren’t the best at communicating,” Edgar-Jones says. “They love each other, but they don’t know how to talk about the hard stuff.” The original novel, told from both characters’ perspectives in alternating sections, was a sensation across the pond before becoming a critically acclaimed best-seller Stateside last year.

The 12-episode series, directed by Oscar nominee Lenny Abrahamson (Room) and partly written by Rooney herself, maintains the book’s authenticity, sexiness, and emotional intensity. But it offers something new and rich besides. “You have your whole character’s psyche written in incredible detail on the page,” Edgar-Jones explains. “But [TV] is only visual. You have to give away big chunks of the story with a single glance.” Trust that both she and Mescal do so brilliantly—and that they’ll break your heart.

—DAVID CANFIELD
DC’S STARGIRL BREAKS NEW GROUND FOR DC COMICS—AND NOT JUST BECAUSE IT’S AIRING ON BOTH DC UNIVERSE (May 18) AND THE CW (May 19). While most of DC’s shows are about adult heroes in various metropolises, this charming Greg Berlanti-produced series is more comparable to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. It’s set in Blue Valley, Neb., a small town that may not be quite as idyllic as it looks. While rummaging through her basement, high schooler Courtney Whitmore (Brec Bassinger) finds the glowing staff of her stepdad Pat’s (Luke Wilson) former partner-in-crime-Starman (Joel McHale), a deceased member of the Justice Society of America. She takes the rod to become a star-spangled avenger and helps revive the JSA as one of a new crop of young heroes to fight bad guys. “I love that they’re kids, because kids’ paths are uncertain,” says the character’s creator, Geoff Johns, who is also an executive producer. “We see them make mistakes and we see them succeed, and we see them figure out who they are and who they want to be.”

With DC’s Stargirl, Johns—a producer on Wonder Woman 1984 and Aquaman—wanted a cinematic feel, which “required doing things differently than other shows.” DC’s Stargirl is the first Warner Bros. TV show to use previsualization, a technique for rendering effects-heavy scenes that’s usually reserved for blockbuster movies. Here, it’s employed to pull off such eye-poppers as a 15-foot-tall robot suit. Says Johns: “Utilizing the same tools we used in the films [allowed us to] not only have these great, emotional, heartwarming stories but also these visuals that you haven’t seen in superhero shows before.”—CHANCELLOR ASADO

Cyrano De Bergerac’s much-reinvented tale gets a fresh update, on Netflix May 1. This time, Nancy Drew’s Leah Lewis becomes a Gen-Z version of the lovesick poet—Ellie, a high schooler cursed with awkwardness instead of a mega-schmo. When jock Paul (Daniel Diemer) develops a crush on popular girl Aster (Alexxis Lemire), he enlists Ellie to pen his love notes to her; what he doesn’t know is that she loves for Aster too. Writer-director Alice Wu manages to weave contemporary ideas about race and sexuality into a sweetly timeless yarn—proving that after more than a century of remakes, Cyrano has a lot of life in him yet.

Why is Magda so well suited as a villain to tackle this story’s themes?

[Series creator] John Logan sought to write a great historical drama with the supernatural element raising the tension. Therefore, he created Magda, a metaphor for the darker side of men’s souls. Magda is not the devil incarnate. She’s a taken a position on mankind: They will always choose the more selfish or baser option. For me, it’s certainly more interesting if you’re doing empirical experimentation to see how bad mankind can be.

Magda takes three human forms this season. What do you have to do to prepare for four roles? Costumes help. Your physicality changes immediately. [The characters] all move differently. You find a voice, whether it’s an accent or tone. There is a process that happens in that hour and a half when you’re sitting in the hair-and-makeup chair. It’s not just physical; you’re getting your brain into it as well.

It’s interesting to hear Magda’s perspective and then see how real-world leaders act on the coronavirus pandemic. Closing the borders and pointing fingers at other countries. I know... just everything being thrown out the window and values having to be reassessed [too]. It’s the whole adage of good versus evil. There is more interesting if you’re not sure who the devil incarnate.

Q+A

NATALIE DORMER

Why is Magda so well suited as a villain to tackle this story’s themes?

In her first cable-TV role since Game of Thrones, Natalie Dormer takes on a devilish new challenge on Showtime’s City of Angels (April 26), a “spiritual descendant” of the first Penny Dreadful series that trades gothic horror for 1920s Los Angeles. Shape-shifting demon Magda (Dormer) tries to use her influence to spark a race war. Can Det. Tiago Vegga (Here & Now’s Daniel Zovatto) stop it? Not if Magda can help it.

In an interview, the sequel. You won’t find Eva Green, star of the 2014 series, in a killer corset. It’s a new story, new world, new show.

Penny Dreadful: City of Angels

Two years before Woody Harrelson won over fans with his role as Woody Boyd on NBC’s Cheers, his father, Charles, was sentenced to two lifetime sentences for his third alleged murder—at least on record. Woody and his two brothers, Jordan and Brett, grew up with the Harrelson name smeared with the blood-drawn by the lustful hitman, or so people are led to believe, in the upcoming Spotify podcast Son of a Hitman. Now, two years later, Brett and Brett take a deep dive into the life of Charles, a professional gambler convicted of assassinating a federal judge. The episodes bring to light revelations about Charles’ relationship with the law, why he claimed to have been involved in the JFK assassination (you read that right), and what his sons believe truly happened...—OMAR SANCHEZ

SON OF A HITMAN

CITY OF ANGELS – The True Life Story of Penny Dreadful’s Charles Harrelson: Star of the 2018 Netflix miniseries, and the son of NBC’s Cheers’ coach. In this true crime audio series, Brett Harrelson and Jordan Harrelson talk to their father about the life leading up to two lifetime sentences for murder. You won’t find Eva Green, star of the 2014 series, in a killer corset. It’s a new story, new world, new show.

SON OF A HITMAN

WOODY HARRELSON

Penny Dreadful: City of Angels