

## Early Man

France/United Kingdom 2018  
Director: Nick Park  
Certificate PG 88m 33s

### 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 enjoyably squishy claymation. Palpably handmade, it is packed with child-pleasing puns and sight gags, and has an overtly British, artisanal feel.

Park's love of British cinema surfaces as Harryhausen-homage dinosaurs 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 relearn it to play against the sophisticated Bronze City invaders and win back their stolen valley. Young Dug (a chirpy Eddie Redmayne) exhorts his insular tribe to work together, and the admittedly well-worn 'teamwork' trope provides a tidy template for this 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 Bronzio 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 rockfalls, to adult-aimed satire. The tribe's trajectory, from inventing football to decades of lost matches (depicted in cave paintings), slyly suggests the '50 Years of Hurt' of post-1966 England teams.



A Briton: he spears

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Carla Shelley  
Richard Beek  
Peter Lord  
Nick Park  
David Sproxtton  
**Screenplay**  
Mark Burton  
James Higginson  
**Story**  
Mark Burton  
Nick Park  
**Additional Story**  
John O'Farrell  
**Director of Photography**  
Dave Alex Riddett  
**Edited by**

Sim Evan-Jones  
**Production Designer**  
Matt Perry  
**Music**  
Harry Gregson-Williams  
Tom Howe  
**Supervising Sound Editor**  
Adrian Rhodes  
**Animation Directors**  
Will Becher  
Merlin Crossingham

**Companies**  
Studiocanal, BFI and Aardman present in association with Amazon Prime  
Instant Video an Aardman production  
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund  
Supported by Creative Skillsset's Skills Investment Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Alicia Gold  
Ron Halpern  
Didier Lupfer  
Danny Perkins

Ben Roberts  
Natascha Wharton  
**Voice Cast**  
**Eddie Redmayne**  
Dug  
**Tom Hiddleston**  
Lord Nooth  
**Maisie Williams**  
Goona  
**Timothy Spall**  
Chief Bobnar  
**Miriam Margolyes**  
Queen Oofeeaa  
**Rob Brydon**  
message bird/  
Brian/Bryan/

Gonad the Gaul  
**Kayvan Novak**  
Dino/Jurgend  
**Richard Ayoade**  
Treebor  
**Selina Griffiths**  
Magma  
**Johnny Vegas**  
Asbo  
**Mark Williams**  
Barry  
**Gina Yashere**  
Gravelle  
**Richard Webber**  
Grubup  
**Simon Greenall**  
Eemak/Thongo  
**Nick Park**

Hognob  
**Luke Walton**  
Huegelgraber  
**Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]**  
**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited  
French theatrical title  
**Cro Man**

Britain, the Neopleistocene era. A group of cavemen invent football, using a meteorite as a ball. Millennia 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 Bronzio, they will keep their valley; if they lose, they will work in Nooth's mines. Dug's attempts to train the tribe fail. He sneaks back to the Bronze City, finds talented Goona secretly playing football, and enlists her help.

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 mallard, determined to compete. They take an early lead, until Real Bronzio fight back. Nooth cheats as referee and the tribe's goalkeeper is knocked out. Dug's hog, Hognob, becomes goalkeeper. While Real Bronzio's players argue over the ball, the tribe boost Dug into the air and he scores the winning goal. Nooth steals the game's takings, is caught by the giant mallard and disgraced. The tribe return happily to their valley.

## Erase and Forget

United Kingdom/Denmark 2017  
Director: Andrea Luka Zimmerman  
Certificate 18 88m 0s

### 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-yer-face 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 of any truly reflective or comprehensive view of the event, any angle of vision aspiring to more than a 'grunt's-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 Luka Zimmerman'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 lying behind the veneer of jingoistic, flag-waving certitude.

At its centre – though he 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 reputed 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 contrition – 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 500lb bomb.

*Erase and Forget* is no confessional. Gritz is portrayed neither as a hero nor as a thug. At times he comes across as an actor in the endlessly strung-out franchise fare of post-war American geopolitics. He claims to have had many names – among them Swamp Fox, China Boy, James Bond and Marauder – but also declares, "I am who I say I am." He describes his memories of combat warfare – the euphoria, the triple-fast motion of certain scenes – in a language evocative of a film editor. The late Tudor Gates, screenwriter of *Barbarella*, pops up to call him the "apotheosis of a war hero", and says he could have been a Hollywood star.

Gritz, not unlike other prominent American figures in the present day, had a darkly compelling talent for self-fabulation that approached will-into-being. It's highly unlikely that he was the original Rambo, given that the first novel on which the film series was based was published in 1972. Yet, by the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan quoting lines from *Rambo* at presidential hustings, Gritz was widely talked up as a can-do hero, a real-life version of George Peppard's Colonel 'Hannibal' Smith in the hugely popular television series *The A-Team*. Clint Eastwood gave him \$30,000 to head to South-east Asia



Bo jest? James Gordon 'Bo' Gritz

and rescue captive US soldiers. William Shatner gave him \$10,000. In 1992 he ran for president.

It was during the 1980s, after a trip to Burma convinced him that senior US officials were involved in drug-trafficking operations, that Gritz's vision of American politics turned sour. He became increasingly identified with paramilitary and survivalist groups, set up Spike (Specially Prepared Individuals for Key Events), and endeared himself to white supremacists when he helped end an 11-day standoff between Aryan Nations icon Randy Weaver and US marshals. These episodes in his many-storied life are interspersed with homemade videos and mid-1980s footage that purports to show him training Afghan mujahideen in the Nevada desert, as well as with contemporary reflections on the state of the nation.

Zimmerman purposefully doesn't try to discover the truth behind Gritz's stories. That may or may not even be possible. She's more interested in the ellipses, grey areas and suggestive resonances in his narration: the arch-nationalist who married and had children with a Chinese prostitute he brought back to America from Vietnam; his invocations of 'conscious' and 'subconscious' thinking. Material that in other hands might be milked

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Andrea Luka  
Zimmerman  
Ameenah Ayub Allen  
**Written by**  
Taina Galis  
Andrea Luka  
Zimmerman  
This film grew from early collaboration with Vision Machine (2003-2006)  
Christine Cynn,

Joshua Oppenheimer,  
Michael Uweredimo  
and Andrea Luka  
Zimmerman. It is based on PhD research by Andrea Luka Zimmerman  
**Cinematography**  
Andrea Luka  
Zimmerman  
Taina Galis  
Adam Philip  
**Edited by**

Taina Galis  
**Original Music**  
Adam Paroussos  
**Sound Design**  
Nick Baldock  
Adrian Furdul  
Serin Kucuk  
@Erase and Forget  
Films Limited  
**Production Companies**  
An Andrea Luka

Zimmerman/Bright  
Wire Films production  
Supported by The Wapping Project Commissions with funding from Women's Playhouse Trust  
Developed with the support of FLAMIN and Arts Council England, New Danish Screen

Additional support from the CTBF John Brabourne Awards  
**Executive Producers**  
Gareth Evans  
Meg Clark  
**Film Extracts**  
*Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)  
*Apocalypse Now* (1979)  
*Rambo III* (1988)  
*First Blood* (1982)

**Dolby Digital In Colour [1.78:1]**  
**Distributor**  
Erase and Forget  
Films Limited

A documentary about Bo Gritz, one of the most highly decorated US veterans, addresses attendees at a weapons fair. He talks about his time serving in Vietnam and in Latin America, his possible

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

USA 2017  
Director: Lawrence Sher  
Certificate 15 112m 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 groaners – "Good news, I found your car keys" and "Buy me dinner first" respectively – occur during a rectal exam conducted by Peter, the film's proctologist protagonist, played by Ed Helms with little evident enthusiasm.

*Father Figures* hardly seems any fresher a few scenes later, when Peter's brother Kyle takes the opportunity to give an innuendo-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 slacker-charmer persona that was more appealing in his younger days, and Helms stuck in the uptight 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 bro-comedy cycle. Indeed, that's pretty much what it is, the project having begun as *Bastards*, 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-quest road-trip conceit of David O. Russell's infinitely superior *Flirting with Disaster*. It's not clear what happened to the fun part.)

Arriving six years later, *Father Figures* – with relentlessly puerile humour and a slut-shaming central premise concerning Peter and Kyle's attempts to discover which of their mother Helen's many former sexual partners is their dad – couldn't be more out of step with the female-centric nature of the few studio comedies that still attract big audiences in the US, such as last summer's *Girls Trip* and the *Bad Moms* and *Pitch Perfect* franchises. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Father Figures* owes much 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. Too bad she's otherwise poorly served by Malen's script, which is sloppy enough to have her waxing



Grim brother: Owen Wilson