

TV

Second skin

On set with small-screen sequel *This Is England '86*

It's any director's nightmare. You have a crucial scene to shoot, you arrive on set ready to lock and load – and discover that one of your star performers is nowhere to be found. He's taken off – literally, since the performer in question is Ian the parrot, the constant companion of both actor Joe Gilgun and Woody, the character he's reprising in Shane Meadows' four-part TV sequel to his

skin-gang tour de force *This Is England*. "We've lost an actor – he's green," producer Mark Herbert tells *Total Film*.

"He was on my shoulder and usually he's fine but he got freaked out by an alarm," sighs Gilgun, cutting a mournful figure on Sheffield's Ironside Row Block, an appropriately named

strip of grim concrete housing cubes playing host to today's shoot. "Everybody's heartbroken – he's like my son." Local DJs have issued the APB for Ian's safe return, although their on-air comments aren't helping the on-set mood: "Sick as a parrot" is the *bi*-larious radio phrase of the day.

With Gilgun emotionally indisposed, Meadows and Herbert have been forced to reshuffle the deck, not only reeling in Thomas Turgoose on his day off but bringing forward his pub-toilet sex scene with goth Smell (Rosamund Hanson). "I'm really nervous," admits Turgoose, "with my girlfriend being down it makes it even worse." But as frightful as the day is panning out, the sense of camaraderie that Meadows fosters is ubiquitous: "He's a fucking wonderful bloke," says Gilgun.

"My parrot's flown off, which could have potentially bugged up his entire schedule, but he couldn't have been nicer about it."

Serial lover

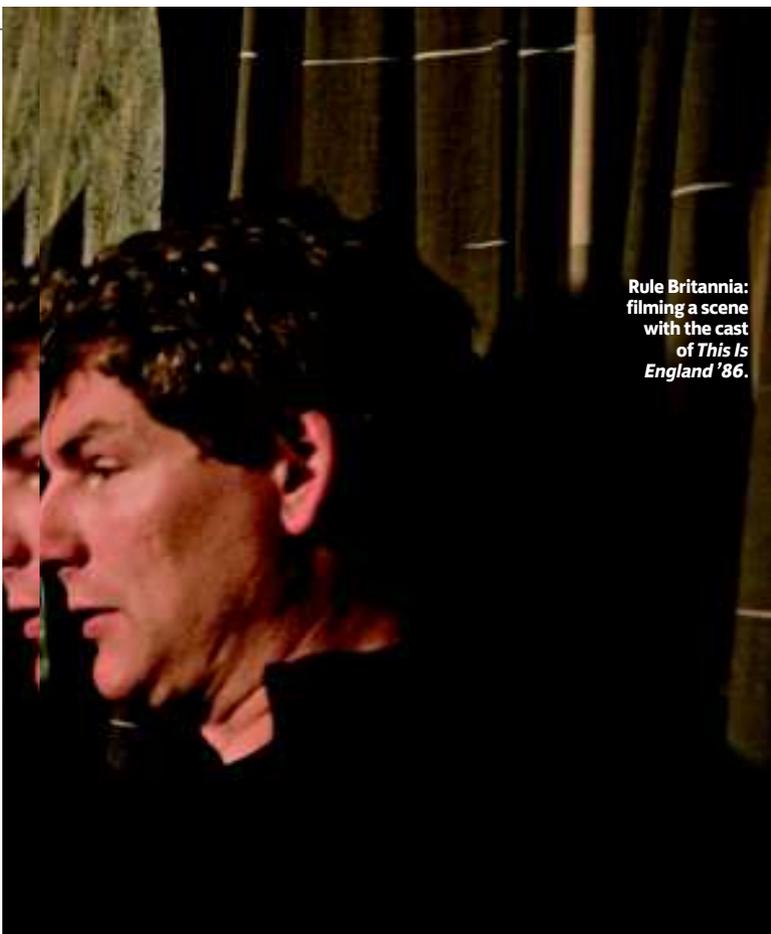
Meadows has long talked about revisiting the brilliantly drawn characters he created for his searing, truth-laced account of his own

'I'm a huge fan of '80s drama and HBO, so it was an exciting challenge'

youthful engagement with skinhead culture, including its ugly tumble into neo-Nazism. When the Midlands filmmaker half-jokingly suggested a follow-up TV series at a Film4 pitch meeting, the channel didn't need convincing, and neither did Meadows. "They

TALKING POINT

Co-writer Jack Thorne's next script is an adaptation of Nick Hornby's *A Long Way Down*, focusing on four strangers whose paths cross on the same roof from which each intends to commit suicide...



Rule Britannia: filming a scene with the cast of *This Is England '86*.

shadow of unemployment and Maradona's hand of God. "When you put these characters together it's impossible not to have loads of humour," says Meadows, "but this has some of the most intense drama of my career." While Turgoose's Shaun was the original's focal point, here Woody and Lol are the linchpins, while Combo (Stephen Graham) is set for a late-series appearance.

Back on Ironside Row, a crowd of estate denizens have gathered round to observe the filmmaking gorilla in their midst. One local's pitbull has just pissed on Andrew Shim (aka Milky), while a woman out with her grandchild offers her pithy analysis of *Avatar* when she overhears Herbert saying how many copies it's shifted on DVD. "Ooooo, it were rubbish," she declares. "I don't like these unreal movies - I like *real* stories. Like this one here..."

Watch the birdie

Today, though, Meadows' efforts to keep his real story on track keep slamming into

unexpected obstacles. A gaggle of young girls have been drawn like moths to a flame by Gilgun's presence (he's an Emmerdale regular) and their chatter and chirping cellphones are disrupting Meadows' concentration through the open doors and windows of the "burned-out, shit-hole flat" he's shooting in today. Still forlorn, Gilgun nonetheless agrees to take charge and, wearing a tatty bathrobe over his jeans and Doc Martens, leads them away down the hill like a Pied Piper with ADHD ("Before you ask, I'm not taking Es," he tells *Total Film* as he pops a pill for his condition).

And, in the spirit of filmmakers always ensuring that audiences know a plucky onscreen critter

has managed to escape certain death, *Total Film* can report that the tale of Ian the missing parrot has a happy ending. Ten hours after taking flight from the set, a family returning home from a funeral found him sitting on their fence and, as their just-buried relative happened to be a massive bird lover, they knew how to approach the feathery tearaway without scaring him off. Ian and Joe were reunited at last. "They're inseparable, so the day Ian went missing was not good," admits Meadows. "But it turned out to be a great story with a great ending." Who would expect anything less from a Shane Meadows production? **Matt Mueller**

> *This Is England '86* will be broadcast on Channel 4 this September and released on DVD on 11 October.



Moment in the sun: Shane Meadows (centre) and the cast.

commissioned us to write one episode and then more stories kept coming out," he says. "We wanted this to stand up in its own right, that you could watch the series without seeing the film. Also, I'm a huge fan of classic '80s drama and some of the stuff coming out of HBO so it was an exciting challenge. I love the fact that we finish end of August and it's on TV a week later. With films you can be waiting ages for it to come out..."

Co-writing with Jack Thorne, Meadows opted to direct the series' final two episodes, recruiting Tom Harper (*The Scouting Book For Boys*) to handle the story's kick-off. Picking up four years later, *This Is England '86* sees Woody get cold feet on the day of his wedding to Lol (Vicky McClure), sparking torrid affairs, revelations of abuse and violence, all under the gloomy mid-'80s

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

THIS IS ENGLAND 2006
You don't *have* to see it to get the TV show, but you should - it's one of the finest Brit films of the decade.

SHAMELESS 2004-present
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MADE IN BRITAIN 1982
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