

PREVIEW



THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU

CHASING SHADOWS

ON THE RUN AND FLEEING DESTINY...
MATT DAMON AND EMILY BLUNT FIGHT
FOR THEIR LOVE IN A WORLD WHERE
NOTHING IS AS IT SEEMS. FROM THE
WRITERS OF MINORITY REPORT,
BLADE RUNNER AND THE
BOURNE ULTIMATUM COMES THE
ADJUSTMENT BUREAU, THE MOST
MIND-BENDING ACTIONER
SINCE INCEPTION...

The scribbles of future-shock mastermind Philip Kindred Dick have inspired film versions good, bad and impenetrable. Sometimes a name change helps (*Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* to *Blade Runner*), sometimes it backfires (*The Golden Man* to *Next*); sometimes a multiplex behemoth does the trick (Spielberg with *Minority Report*), sometimes they screw it up (John Woo with *Paycheck*). So where does *The Adjustment Bureau* sit on the Dick-adap spectrum?

"*Blade Runner* is one of my favourite movies of all time," Matt Damon gabs to *Total Film*, registering himself as a member of the generation for whom Ridley Scott's prescient sci-fi represents both colossal achievement and defining youth episode. He's still gobsmacked that Harrison Ford doesn't like it. "I think it's one of his greatest movies but when Ben [*Affleck*] tried to talk to [*Ford*] about it at the Golden Globes eight or nine years ago, he was very dismissive," marvels the just-turned-40 actor. Unsurprisingly he's inclined to feel more positive about his own Dick adaptation – but won't be pinned down on what the hell it is. "It's in its own category. I describe it as a fantastical love story. It's a hybrid; it's got real romance and the darkness that was in *Minority Report*."

The romance lies between Damon's charismatic congressman David Norris and Emily Blunt's enigmatic dancer Elise, who have a fiery, fatalistic encounter in a the men's room of a hotel, during which she inspires him to make a brilliant concession speech for the US Senate seat he hopes to win. The darkness falls when Norris bumps into her again on a bus, a second encounter that was never meant to happen, prompting the ominous 'Adjustment Bureau' of the title – literal agents of fate – to set out to ensure our man doesn't stray from his path by falling for Elise. By any means necessary.

By now, anyone who's read Dick's original will realise that precisely none of this happens in it... When George Nolfi's producing partner Michael Hackett first suggested an adaptation, >>

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Life-changing: (inset) Matt Damon contemplates his fate; (below clockwise) George Nolfi gives his cast notes; Damon and Blunt on the run; the titular bureau.

I would work my arse off in the dance studio." She did, plunging into months of immersive training with innovative modern-dance troupe Cedar Lake while surviving on "lettuce, rabbit food, poached chicken and salmon... When I finished the movie, I didn't eat anything but pizza for three weeks straight, out of defiance."

Nolfi was (un)kind enough to squeeze Blunt's dance routines into one intensive four-day stretch of filming, by the end of which she'd pulled several muscles and was quite weepy. "There were tears of pain," confesses the Brit actress, who for all her tribulations accepts that Natalie Portman would still beat her in a dance-off. "I loved *Black Swan*. She's got some incredible gams on her. She could definitely out-tutu me!"

the *Bourne Ultimatum* scripter was electrified by the concept of personifying agents of destiny and seeing the repercussions of peeking behind the curtain at an alt-world where all of our destinies are planned by pen-pushing bureaucrats. And he wanted to twist it into a love story. "It's one of the only times in my career where right away I felt, 'I'm definitely the right person to do this,'" says Nolfi. "It gave me the opportunity to break the genre moulds." It was also his ticket from scriptwriting to the Hollywood directors' club – provided, of course, he could attach an A-lister to his ambitious spec script. Having met Damon on the set of *Ocean's 12* and been through the fires with him on *Ultimatum*, Nolfi had his in, slipping the star an early draft in 2007 and tinkering away for another couple of years before Damon would finally commit.

Along with the added romantic entanglement and protagonists' glamour-amped professions, Nolfi reimagined the adjustment team itself into a vast, corporate-style bureaucracy headed up by The Chairman and enforced by shadowy agents (Terence Stamp, Anthony Mackie and *Mad Men's* John Slattery). There is a master plan, which only The Chairman knows – he's God, in effect, although Nolfi and Damon insist there are no religious underpinnings. "It's the idea of free



will versus destiny: do we make our own decisions, or are we on a predetermined course?" muses Damon, saying he's asked himself the same question. "I like to think that my choices matter, but I've had so much luck in my life that it leaves me wondering... It's all those things that you wish for at the time and then later you realise, 'Thank God that didn't happen for me because things worked out so much better.' Looking back at myself at 20 going on auditions, I'm so lucky that I didn't get those parts."

Making Norris a rising politician was partly to entice Damon to the project (he'd never played one before), and partly to give Nolfi scope to comment on the current dysfunctionality of America's political system, where malicious mudslinging and special interests hold sway. Meeting with real elected officials and political strategists to research the role, Damon learned one certain thing about his own future: "I don't want to be a politician..."

For Elise, who's meant to be one of the world's best dancers, Nolfi wanted to find a real professional dancer who could act, or failing that, an actress with hoofing experience. Blunt ended up on a shortlist of eight who screen-tested with Damon – and won the part despite being neither. "I was forthright in telling George that he needed an actor because if no one invested in the love story, then he didn't really have a movie," says Blunt. "And I promised him

At its most metaphysical, Nolfi's film boils down to the fact that, he says, "we have this amazing gift of free will but most of us don't use it. It's about the fact that fate will bear down on you unless you make your own decisions." All told by way of a dewy-eyed romance in which Damon and Blunt's lovebirds are forced to fight for their love – largely by legging it.

"There *will* be running," laughs Blunt. "Matt had chosen rubber-soled shoes because he's used to this, he knows the tricks. I was like, 'These sandals are cute!' No, they weren't cute. After Day 10 of streaking across Sixth Avenue, those flip-flops were not my friends... And Matt was unrelenting. He didn't want to look like a pansy so he wouldn't slow down. He was like, 'You'd better keep up.' I could definitely out-plee him; I couldn't outsprint him."

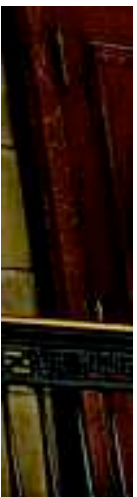
Films that set out to peel back the fabric of reality are a bastard to get right – for every *Matrix*, there's *The Box* – but Nolfi insists his wrenching writing process ("It's the hardest script I've ever written") ironed out the logic issues before he shouted 'action'. "Hollywood history is littered with fantastical movies that don't work. That's the problem with big, mind-bending ideas – how do you make it make sense *and* seem realistic. I had to ask my actors to trust me."

That wasn't a problem for Damon. He calls Nolfi "unflappable" – he should know, having witnessed him construct the *Bourne Ultimatum* script from scratch *during the shoot*. Seeing Nolfi withstand that kind of pressure helped the actor entrust himself to the first-timer's hands. "As a director, no matter how many millions of dollars have been spent, it's all your responsibility," says Damon. "It's hard not to have a panic attack but I knew George could do it."

Nolfi's a bit more sanguine. When you consider *Adjustment Bureau* was shot mostly in New York City, a terrifying undertaking for any

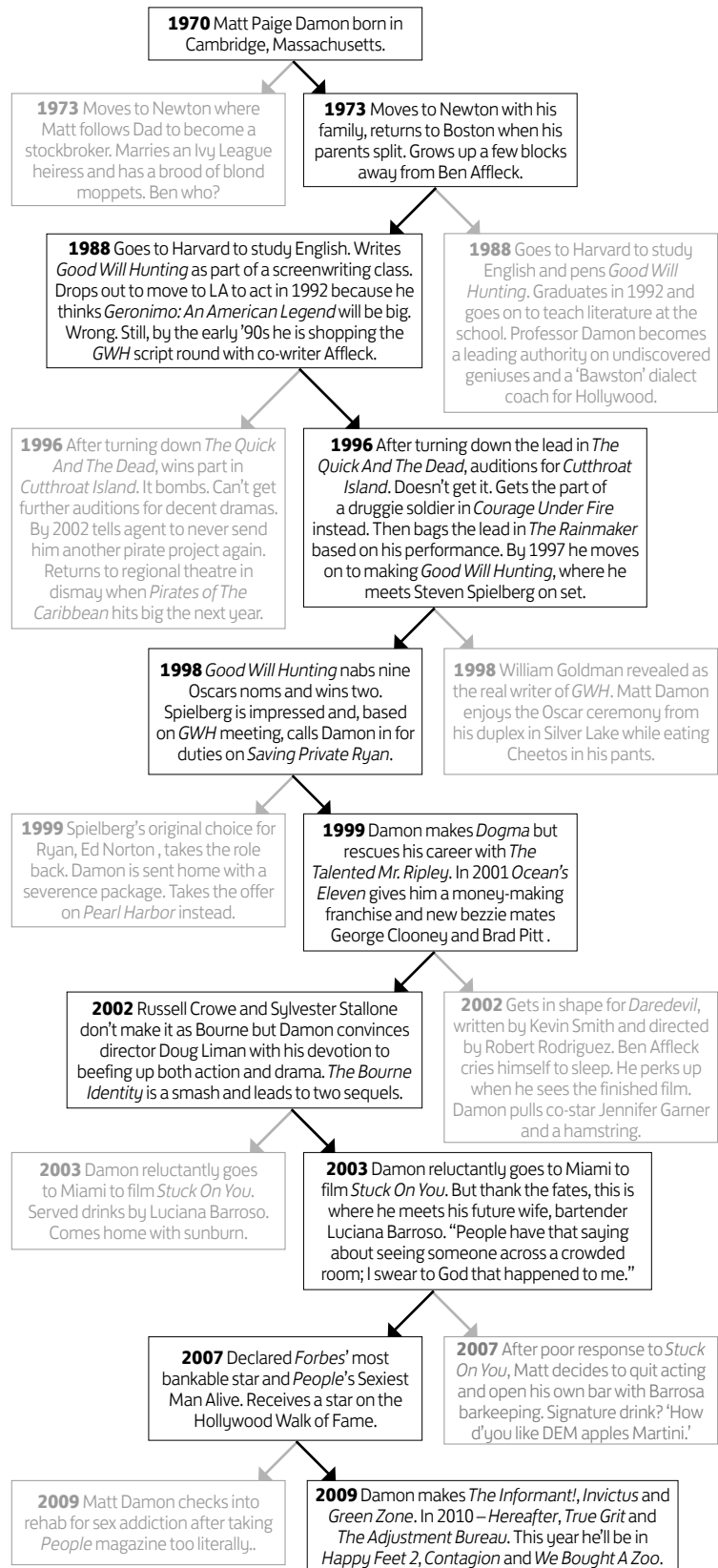
'I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT MY CHOICES MATTER, BUT I'VE HAD SO MUCH LUCK IN MY LIFE THAT IT LEAVES ME WONDERING...'

MATT DAMON



DESTINY'S CHILD

MATT DAMON'S LIFE COULD HAVE GONE SO DIFFERENTLY HAD THE FATES NOT BEEN WITH HIM...



BLACK BOXES = MATT DAMON'S REALITY. GREY BOXES = OUR LAWYERS HAVE ASKED US TO POINT OUT THAT MR DAMON HAS DONE NONE OF THESE THINGS AND THAT THIS IS AN ALTERNATE REALITY DREAMED UP BY OVER-IMAGINATIVE FF MINDS.

filmmaker, it's easy to understand why. "I bit off more than I should have as a first-time director," he confesses, setting out to depict NYC with flint-edged realism rather than fantasy futurism. "The look and feel is more *All The President's Men* than *The Matrix*," he offers. Wearing three hats (he also produced), Nolfi found no respite in Manhattan's canyons as he bumped up against the challenges that all NY filmmakers encounter: rain, noise and paparazzi. "If I could have turned to somebody else and said, 'We need to make some changes in this scene. Will you go off and write something?', that would have been very helpful. But there was no one else. The buck stopping with me could get overwhelming."

Nolfi soldiered on and, after wrapping in late 2009, reconvened cast and crew last June to reshoot a sequence set on the Statue of Liberty and the finale, which he'd never been satisfied with. "It was a question of how much we revealed about the inner sanctum of the bureau," he explains. "We thought we'd show it all, but the problem with that is you're getting into ultimate questions. People have different ideas of what a higher power is." Nolfi had to wait for Damon's schedule to free up before he could tackle reshoots, which prompted the first release date shuffle from summer to fall 2010. Then into 2011... Not spurred by the desire to get out of *Inception's* mindscrew slipstream then? Nolfi insists not. "Nobody had a sense that *Inception* was going to be as big as it was so we felt, in advance, that *Inception* wasn't a threat..."



Some internet chatter barracked *Bureau's* first trailer for giving away the film's ending, although Nolfi merely chuckles: "Uh, no. There's so much more going on in this movie. It's really ambitious. Maybe *too* ambitious..." Having emerged from her first look at the film "in its final glory" only hours before chatting to *Total Film*, Blunt insists she still can't pin it down. "I can't really say it's like any other movie," she demurs. "It crosses many boundaries – that's what's cool about it. I'd call it a modern love story where you're really rooting for these two people to be together..."

The Adjustment Bureau opens on 4 March. For more features and video go to totalfilm.com