

KICK ASS

PLAYERS Aaron Johnson (Dave Lizewski), Christopher Mintz-Plasse (Red Mist), Chloe Moretz (Hit Girl), Nicolas Cage (Big Daddy), Mark Strong (Frank D'Amico), Matthew Vaughn (director/co-writer), Jane Goldman (co-writer)
STATE OF PLAY Having flirted with *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *Thor*, Vaughn directs Mark Millar and John Romita Jr.'s violent deconstruction of the superhero genre, in which high schooler Dave attempts to reinvent himself as a costumed superhero named Kick-Ass but gets pulverised in the process. Vaughn raised his \$30m budget independently to keep true to Millar's hardcore vision after every Hollywood studio poo-pooed the project as written. "This is a movie about comic-book guys made by comic-book guys," states Millar. "We are absolutely in our comfort zone and we are doing something really special here. This is the one. I hereby declare *Kick-Ass* as the greatest movie of 2009."

EXCITE-O-METER 8.5

AARON JOHNSON

WORDS **MATT MUELLER** PORTRAIT **ELLIS PARRINDER**

The Kick-Ass kid talks to Total Film about, erm, kicking ass...

Aaron Johnson is no stranger to film sets. He played lust interest Robbie in *Angus, Thongs And Perfect Snogging* and a young Edward Norton in *The Illusionist*. But the curly-haired 18-year-old from High Wycombe jumped into the big time when Matthew Vaughn anointed him the teenage hero of *Kick-Ass*.

Johnson labels it “pure luck” that he bagged the role of New York City high-schooler Dave Lizewski, a comic-book geek who resolves to turn himself into a superhero despite lacking any special abilities. “They already had a guy but Matthew was looking for something different. I came in just at that point where the director was about to break so I guess I was a breath of fresh air.”

Adapted from Mark Millar’s hardcore comic, *Kick-Ass* shot last autumn in Toronto and Elstree. Alongside Dave – who Johnson describes as “this kid that no one wants to talk to who becomes one of the coolest icons out there” – the actioner also features Nicolas Cage as an ex-cop united in vigilantism with his daughter Hit Girl (Chloe Moretz) and Christopher Mintz-Plasse – aka McLovin’ – as co-wannabe Red Mist. Johnson was gutted, however, to learn that extensive physical training wasn’t required. “I was thinking, ‘This is great! I can get buff and learn how to fight!’ But

my character happens to be very bad at fighting.”

Unlike last year’s adap of *Wanted* (“I wasn’t that impressed with the film because Mark’s comic-book is so incredible”), Johnson insists that Vaughn has stuck closely to Millar’s frenzied universe. “It’s not all clean-

cut and 12A, it’s got this raw edginess to it,” says Johnson, his fingers calloused from guitar lessons for his next gig, playing one John Lennon

in *Nowhere Boy*. “People at the studios are like, ‘It’s too hardcore!’, so Matthew may have to dial it down. But imagine an 11-year-old girl getting out two samurai swords, chopping a guy’s head off and going, ‘What cunt’s next?’ And then killing everybody in a massacre. It’s bad-ass.”

And, indeed, kick-ass...



Smack down: a costumed Aaron Johnson sticks it to the bad guys in *Kick-Ass*.



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HEAVY METAL



PLAYERS David Fincher, Kevin Eastman (director/producers), Zack Snyder, Gore Verbinski, Guillermo del Toro (directors)

STATE OF PLAY Nine-part ‘toon adap of stories from the legendary adult sci-fi/fantasy comic mag, edited by Eastman. Each of the above will direct a segment.

EXCITE-O-METER 7.5

HIDING IN TIME



PLAYERS Beau Thorne (writer)

STATE OF PLAY Created by Christopher Long and illustrated by Ryan Winn, this Image series is set in the not-too-distant future where the Witness Protection Programme transports whistle-blowers into the past for safe-keeping. When the programme is compromised, a government scientist is forced to travel back through key moments in history to rescue the “squealers” from being offed by assassins.

Max Payne scribe Thorne is scripting.

EXCITE-O-METER: 6

HYBRID



PLAYERS Ernie Barbarash (director), Peter Kwong (creator/scriptwriter), Kirk D’Amico, Alex Leung (producers)

STATE OF PLAY Holidaying college students discover the nest of a mutant creature, born of environmental abuse. “We feel it has the marketing potential and appeal to be a great horror franchise,” says D’Amico.

EXCITE-O-METER 2

IRON MAN 2



PLAYERS Robert Downey Jr (Tony Stark/Iron Man), Gwyneth Paltrow (Pepper Potts), Don Cheadle (Jim Rhodes/War Machine), Jon Favreau (director), Justin Theroux (writer)

STATE OF PLAY Marvel Studios are keeping any and all plot details close to their collective chests. Rumours? Tim Robbins will play Tony Stark’s dad Howard in a flashback setting up *The Avengers*, Sam Rockwell is Stark rival Justin Hammer and Mickey Rourke will be either Whiplash or tattooed Russian heavy Crimson Dynamo. The facts? Cheadle replaces Terrence Howard and incoming scribe Theroux was recommended by Downey after they worked together on *Tropic Thunder*. “I’m trying to sing in the same key,” Theroux insists.

EXCITE-O-METER 9

JONAH HEX



PLAYERS Josh Brolin (Jonah Hex), Jimmy Hayward (director)

STATE OF PLAY With *Crank’s* Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor set to direct and Josh Brolin in talks to play the title role, things looked very good for DC’s scarred western anti-hero and former Confederate soldier. Then Neveldine and Taylor bailed over “creative differences” and Brolin’s been sounding, well, uncertain of late. “When I first read it, I thought, ‘Oh my God, it’s awful!’” he’s been quoted as saying. “Then I had a moment and thought, ‘Why is it awful?’ In the last couple of months, I’ve been going back and forth. Is it a sellout? What is it like about this movie? It’s so tongue-in-cheek. It’s so ridiculous. Now I love it. If you have a great filmmaker come in, then suddenly these gags and characters become interesting.” And who is that “great filmmaker”? *Horton Hears A Who’s* co-director Hayward.

EXCITE-O-METER 6

WITH MANY THANKS TO FORBIDDEN PLANET, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON

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