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Dissecting the Miniseries: “Edge of Darkness” shines a light on the – then – future of television drama

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 3, 2012 BY [TOPE](#) IN [DISSECTING THE MINISERIES](#)

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Edge of Darkness

(317 minutes, 6 parts)

Directed by Martin Campbell

Written by Troy Kennedy-Martin

1985, UK, BBC2

The way in which *Edge of Darkness* reaches its final moments of grandiloquence feels like tonal prolapse; as if, in giving birth to a Cold War-sized tale of nuclear espionage and corruption, a once firm-

bellied thriller with a very *Northern* type of English brooding pushed too hard and ended up stretching itself irreversibly. Then again, from the outset there is a sense, a feeling that the boxy reserve of the visuals will not necessarily extend to theme or narrative or intellect. Think back to the moment in Jacques Audiard’s *Un Prophète* when it becomes evident that the film has no interest in being your garden variety realist prison thriller. Well, while not as ostentatious or perhaps as *mystical*, at several points during the six stellar episodes that comprise *Edge of Darkness*, the show’s genre-blurring ambition – whatever it may pertain to – is made bombastically clear.

It’s the kind of dark, rainy night on which the crunch of gravel under car tyres sounds particularly shrill. Ronald Craven, a widowed Yorkshire police Inspector investigating labour union corruption, is being briefed inside what seems like a disused local council hall by a mining unionist who instantly comes across as somewhat suspect. From the muted palette, shifty camera setups and uneasy atmosphere, and the two policemen keeping watch outside in their patrol car, one wonders exactly what kind of character Ronald is. Clean cop? Dirty cop? Dangerously righteous cop? Or perhaps a

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‘Wasted on the Young’ might be an understatement

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Quebec’s most divisive new director of the last few years, as well as one of its most prominent, Xavier Dolan has already produced three features, each of which have played at Cannes. His latest, *Laurence Anyways*, is a hugely ambitious ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Trailer: ‘The Perks of Being a Wallflower’

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The Perks of Being a Wallflower Written by Stephen Chbosky Directed by Stephen Chbosky USA, 2012 Being Mr. Obvious over here, I say that high school sucks. But, what sucks even more is finding a good high school movie. Adapted ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Trailer: ‘Premium Rush’

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clean cop. Dirty cop. Dangerously righteous cop. Or perhaps a George Smiley-like acquirer of intel whose frank amorality accounts for his air of stolid silence. Either way, good guy or bad guy, there is an immediately sympathetic quality exuded by actor Bob Peck, a deep-set melancholy often associated with the good man beset on all sides *by the iniquities of evil men*, or perhaps the flawed man resigned to his own nature and that of the world around him. Over the course of the series this quality never secedes – it is the very creasing of his face, but is thankfully built upon and is not Ronald Craven’s one and only defining characteristic. Yes, Peck’s is an intelligent, subtle, almost modest piece of acting – one that might appear deceptively one-note. To further set the opening scene, the viewer is made privy to a malevolently shady character concealed in some bushes outside, whose presence the watchmen intuit but fail to confirm and act upon. The consequence of this is murder by gunfire, one which accelerates Ronald Craven to the show’s eponymous edge.

Edge of Darkness is widely considered a landmark of British television serial drama. Premiering on BBC2 in 1985, *Edge* came after some already acclaimed BBC offerings. From *I, Claudius* in 1972 to 1977’s more restrained but easily more labyrinthine thriller *Tinker, Tailor Solider, Spy*, to the masterful adaptation of Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* in 1981, by 1985 the miniseries could no longer comfortably remain cinema and long-form television’s lesser esteemed relative. The medium was proving itself to be indispensable

in the realm of motion picture narrative storytelling, and *Edge* commences with a brashness and swagger that seems to suggest an awareness that the miniseries is no longer just ‘mini’ anymore. In fact, so well-received was the show that it was promptly re-aired on BBC1 and spawned a Mel Gibson remake a quarter of a century later.

Seeing as Ronald Craven is not the victim of the central killing – though it is later revealed that he was perhaps the target – it would not spoil much to say that this role belongs to Ronald’s daughter Emma (played by Joanne Whalley), a beautiful, environmentally-minded scientist barely out of university, the apple of her father’s eye and remedy to his odd loneliness, the opinionated and lively secretary of a local socialist youth collective. That she is blown to lifelessness on the steps of their house by a bellowing maniac compels Craven to seek vengeance with the single-minded but disciplined relentlessness of a highly functional loner whose last bastion of serenity has been robbed of him. Couple this with Emma’s political bent in the era of Thatcher plus his own murky vocation and you have a man who is convinced of foul play, not the random act of a simply crazed gunman. It should be noted that while Emma departs quite early, the relationship is kept alive in a way that should feel cheaply sentimental, but which quickly takes on an ambiguous quality. Emma’s appearances to Ronald – their conversations – could be projected memories, the work of a grieving mind, fanciful dramatisations of Ronald’s thoughts and reasoning, or actual visitations from an apparition if one prefers a more paranormal stance. Besides, however one feels about these moments, they are used sparingly and are tastefully brief.

Surely enough, the murder makes national news and Ronald, now a low level celebrity, leaves for London as a way to escape the scene of the crime which happens to be his home, but also to pre-empt the whereabouts of the killer whom he believes will eventually end up somewhere in the nation’s capital seeking to lower their profile. Ron’s colleagues and superiors worry that he is more than just a little grief-shaken, but what can they do or say? As often happens in these kinds of espionage yarns, in his drably comfortable London hotel room Ronald is contacted by and eventually acquainted with a pair of brainy governmental aides who inform him that Emma was known to the Prime Minister’s administration as a terrorist of sorts, an eco-terrorist linked to a Greenpeace-like group called GAIA. To add spice

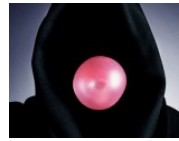


today is a trailer for a ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Premium Rush Written by David Koepp and John Kamps Directed by David Koepp USA, 2012 Excited for Looper? Can’t wait for The Dark Knight Rises? Sorry, JGL fans – all I’ve got for you

The Televerse #40- Summer TV Preview/Dead Like Me with Amrie Cunningham

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After going through a slightly fuller week in TV than last time, including a slight disagreement about the Cougar Town finale, brief looks at Eagleheart, So You Think You Can Dance, Girls, and

Sound on Sight Game of Thrones Podcast #10: “Valar Morghulis”

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Kate, Mike and ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

And so, Season 2 of Game of Thrones comes to a close with a super-sized 64-minute episode that wraps up a whole whack of storylines while setting up what’s sure to be an epic season in 2013.

‘Foreverland’ is not just bad, but stereotypically so

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indeed), the hosts of the show agreed that the Canadian film industry lacks ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Foreverland Directed by Max McGuire Written by Max McGuire and Shawn Riopelle Canada, 2011 Listening to a Canadian movie related podcast recently (not Sound on Sight. Shocking,

The Three Faces of Snow White

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Judging from the dialogue about various tellings of Snow White at places that concern themselves with gender themes in film, finding a properly feminist way of telling the story is the holy grail, a constantly pursued but always elusive quest. ...

‘Saudade’ hampered by its paltry running time

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without ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Saudade Written and Directed by Yasmine Ghorayeb Canada, 2012 It’s been said that the short film is the director’s medium. Free of studio politics and overbearing financiers, the

Game of Thrones, Ep. 2.10: “Valar Morghulis” brings payoffs galore, hints at cataclysm to come

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Game of Thrones, Season 2, Episode 10: “Valar Morghulis” Written by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss Directed by Alan Taylor Aired Sundays at 9pm ET on HBO Even more than the heavily hyped (and very expensive) “Blackwater,” “Valar Morghulis” shows ...

Mad Men, Ep. 5.12, “Commissions and Fees”: The End Is Nigh

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 4, 2012 BY ADAM FARRINGTON-WILLIAMS

to the stew, Ronald grabs the interest of a rambunctious CIA operative called Darius Jedburgh, a man in possession of information about Emma’s dealings with GAIA which reveals a passionately reckless and risky side to his darling deceased. This revelation involves, amongst other things, Big Energy in the form of International Irradiated Fuels Ltd (IFF) and The Fusion Corporation of Kansas; a radioactive waste site run by IFF on a property ominously called Northmoor which may be the location of a secret facility for the development of weapons-grade Plutonium; and an illegal covert mission to Northmoor undertaken by six members of GAIA, some of whom are missing or have been gradually turning up dead with high levels of radioactivity in their tissue, Emma being one of them.

Speaking of bombast, Ronald’s meeting Jedburgh is probably the point at which *Edge’s* terse tautness gains a measure of scope and a dose of the absurd, the playful. With his unapologetic idiosyncrasy and oratorical air, played here with relish by Joe Don Baker, Jedburgh may or may not resemble Orson Welles in his big-chinned, boozily melancholy sense of mischief, but he certainly evokes something of the great iconoclast. His and Ronald’s loose friendship is in many ways the central relationship of the series, but it is an uneasy one for it becomes clear that while the two may be roughly on the same side it is for quite disparate reasons. Ron’s quest for vengeance melds with his policing instinct for investigating dirty dealings. On the other hand, Jedburgh’s motives appear more philosophical and political, but also deeply personal, and it becomes difficult to separate his ideals from his idealisation of himself, his well-meaning egomania so to speak. This conflict makes for an interesting and vital evolution in their buddy pairing, and it underscores a sizable proportion of the tension that propels the series’ arguably most technically ambitious sequence set in the echoing, subterranean bowels of Northmoor, one of the show’s two of three main climaxes. As previously mentioned, the father-daughter relationship that forms *Edge’s* emotional core is ever present, but rather than persisting with apparitions, hallucinations and voiceovers from beyond, it transitions from the motif of Ron as avenger to Ron as activist in proxy. Where he once seeks to appease his personal loss, he inadvertently finds himself honouring Emma’s memory and essence by continuing her cause, whether or not it gels with his own politics and values, which it certainly does not as fleshed out in some of Ron’s personal séances. There is an element of sacrifice here, one which takes on a very literal significance that positions *Edge of Darkness* firmly in the realm of tragedy once the final episode comes to a conclusion.

For a show with an admirable sense of comfort with amorality and a non-simplistic approach to human nature and the motivations of people, there is something slightly disappointing in the show-runners’ willingness to create a clear villainous element in Jerry Grogan the owner of The Kansas Fusion Corporation, and Robert Bennet, the managing director of IFF. This is not to say that these are dandily dressed men with ambiguous European accents stroking cats in chairs that spin, but their portrayal leaves few questions regarding their malevolent motives and wilful wrongdoing. In the show’s final episode, in an otherwise bravura sequence that brilliantly articulates the show’s intellectual and philosophical concerns, Grogan gives a faux-visionary speech to an esteemed gathering of leaders in the fields of nuclear energy and security, but seems here and in other scenes to be under no illusions about advancing mankind. His is one of personal ambition, megalomania and pragmatic profiteering, and his behaviour betrays no delusions of genuine philanthropy. But to be fair, his British counterpart Bennet (whose pending sale of IFF to Grogan is the subject of a parliamentary inquiry) feels like the more generic antagonist, with his pinched features and unblinking stare that is equal parts threatened and threatening. Thankfully though,



Mad Men, Season 5, Episode 12: “Commissions and Fees” Written by Andre Jacquemetton & Maria Jacquemetton Directed by Chris Manley
Airs Sundays at 9pm (ET) on AMC A major thematic arc this season has been the dissatisfaction of characters, derived ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Lesbian Scene Analysis: ‘Game of Thrones S01E7 – You Win Or You Die’

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 3, 2012 BY JUSTIN LI



The critically acclaimed HBO series, Game of Thrones, has been lauded for a great many things, and rightfully so. But amongst the few criticisms that this Golden Globe

winning television series has attracted is one of irrefutable cogency – the show features ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

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there is here none of the invincibility that renders so many antagonists frankly uninteresting.

Much has been said about the narrative content thus far, which in terms of ambition and complexity would hardly leave anybody wanting. But as a work of filmic art this miniseries must have undeniably been proof of television’s truly cinematic mettle, and an inspiration for television yet to come. Something as recent as the *Red Riding* miniseries is a direct artistic heir to *Edge of Darkness*, with its Yorkshire roots and its unflinching look at the corruptibility of the human soul, seen through the eyes of a protagonist with mild anti-heroic streaks. As a piece of writing, *Edge* requires nothing less than an undivided mind for it rarely explains itself and it never condescends. Like the best intellectual thrillers, scribe Troy Kennedy-Martin’s characters are unafraid to be as smart or witty as they know themselves to be, and they are either not privy to or do not care whatsoever for the presence of couch-ridden audiences used to insistent texting, pausing for piss-breaks and frequenting the fridge for nibbles. So please abstain from such behaviour for your own viewing pleasure.

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If there is one thing that defines “television” in the ungenerous collective consciousness, it is technical reservedness. *Edge of Darkness* has much more on its mind. Director Martin Campbell (who brought us the 2010 remake – *shame*) should be – and was – applauded for his disciplined adventurousness, his inventive storytelling choices that are unafraid to break from the usual BBC traditionalism. From towering high-angle shots and intimately raw hand-held moments, to several action-oriented sequences helmed with a touch of Hollywood excess, *Edge* is less ‘safe’ than many feature films, which is only really a good thing when there is a sense of principle and intelligence underlying it. Led by Bob Peck, the cast is broad and uniformly solid, the only reservations being reserved for odd bit players with thankless roles and two lines of dialogue.

Now, one could easily take issue with the way the miniseries chooses to end, with a vaguely mystical (so it’s not so unlike *Un Prophete*), karmic bent. The penultimate scene and the shot which closes the show are in many ways melodramatic, but it’s a melodrama that is reached organically, prefaced from the very first episode. The GAIA group of which Emma Craven was a fateful part is supposedly named after the Gaia Hypothesis, an environmental principle developed by chemist James Lovelock in the 1970s, one which proposes that close integration of the organic and the inorganic ultimately governs and maintains stability in a complex biosphere. Knowing this, there is a creeping overtone of a *living breathing* earth, an entity that is not at all impotent or inert but which in due time responds to its wrongful treatment by some of its own rogue elements. *Edge of Darkness* gently plays with the idea that Gaia (in the enviro-spiritual sense) might prevail, or that she might at least kick back. This goes beyond open-endedness into the realm of infinite possibility, and lends this genetically pragmatic and realist thriller *something more*, something dare I say greater.

– Temitope Ogundare

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