



Editor's Choice

Better off without you?

Toxic relationships are placed under the microscope in three of this month's big releases. *By Paul O'Callaghan*

DON'T MISS

Final Girls Berlin Film Fest

Flying the flag for women-centric horror at Ladenkino, this fourth edition includes Issa López's dark fairy tale *Tigers Are Not Afraid*, talks about reproductive and body horror, and a horror-themed self-defence workshop. **Jan 31-Feb 3**

Hellas Filmbox Berlin

This fourth edition at Babylon Mitte champions the best of new Greek cinema, with highlights including Tassos Boulmetis' nostalgic basketball movie *1968*. **Jan 16-20**

Fantasy Filmfest White Nights

This midwinter edition of Germany's touring genre fest hits Cinestar Sony Centre featuring previews of gritty cop drama *Destroyer* and masterly Korean thriller *Burning*. **Jan 19-20**

A sexually charged, delightfully twisted three-way power struggle drives Yorgos Lanthimos' bawdy period romp **THE FAVOURITE** (photo). Set in early 18th-century England, it takes place in the royal court of a sickly, childishly temperamental Queen Anne (Olivia Colman), who we swiftly learn is dependent on her confidante Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz). Into the picture steps Sarah's down-on-her-luck cousin Abigail (Emma Stone), who begins her life in the palace as a lowly maid. But on discovering that Sarah and Anne are embroiled in a secret romance, Abigail attempts to climb the social ladder by seducing the queen herself. The film is at times as self-consciously quirky as you'd expect from Lanthimos: in one amusingly anachronistic sequence, guests at a formal dance begin pulling off moves that would look more at home on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. But beneath *The Favourite's* frivolous surface lurks a sense of pathos, which comes to the fore once the queen realises she's being manipulated by both of her lovers. All three central performances are stellar, but Colman's is the showstopper, equal parts monstrous narcissism and heartbreaking vulnerability.

It's looking likely that Colman will compete for this year's Best Actress Oscar against Glenn Close, who delivers a commanding turn as the long-suffering spouse of a revered

author in Björn Runge's **THE WIFE**.

Based on Meg Wolitzer's 2003 novel, this intimate drama sees outwardly warm Joan Castleman (Close) travel to Stockholm to stand proudly by the side of her husband Joe (Jonathan Pryce) as he receives the Nobel Prize in Literature. When Joe is assigned a young photographer (Karin Franz Körlof) to document his trip, it becomes clear he's a voracious womaniser, which Joan copes with by demurely turning a blind eye. But as tension between the couple grows, it transpires that the true source of their conflict is an explosive shared secret. In its quieter moments, the leads deftly convey both the reassuring intimacy and spirit-crushing mundanity of a long-term partnership. And Runge paces the film well, building gradually towards an explosive climax. But the film is utterly pedestrian in aesthetic terms, while scenes featuring Joe's aggrieved unauthorised biographer Nathaniel (Christian Slater) feel stagey and contrived.

For many, the chief pleasure of 2012's *Wreck-It Ralph* was as a cameo-filled celebration of retro video games.

As such, the prospect of a sequel that jettisoned this focus for a broad riff on online culture was decidedly unappealing. But while it's destined to age horribly, and some of the humour falls flat, **RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET** is a largely charming affair. This vibrant animation reteams misunderstood villain Ralph (John C. Reilly) with his best buddy Vanellope (Sarah Silverman), the perky star of a garish racing game. When a kid breaks the steering wheel of the ageing arcade cabinet that Vanellope calls home, the pair disappear down a wireless router in search of a replacement. There's surface-level enjoyment to be derived from the film's inventive visualisation of cyberspace, but it really excels as a moving exploration of a dysfunctional friendship. As big-hearted as Ralph seems, it becomes apparent that his inherent neediness is stifling Vanellope's growth – a post-modern sequence featuring a host of pissed-off Disney princesses emphasises this point in amusing fashion. It all builds to a conclusion that will likely prove enlightening for kids, and unexpectedly wrenching for their parents. ■

Starts Jan 3 *The Wife* ★★☆☆☆ D: Björn Runge (Sweden, UK, US 2017) with Glenn Close, Jonathan Pryce | **Starts Jan 24** *The Favourite* ★★★★★ D: Yorgos Lanthimos (Ireland, UK, US 2018) with Olivia Colman, Emma Stone | **Starts Jan 24** *Ralph Breaks the Internet* ★★☆☆☆ D: Rich Moore, Phil Johnston (US 2018) with John C. Reilly, Sarah Silverman