ARTS

("We can't just recall the seventh fleet") in a conference room full of bickering. If Trumbull is the man with the rhetoric ("As a nation, we are never stronger than when tested"), the man with the muscles - and the eyes on the ground - is Mike Banning, an ex-Secret Service officer played by Gerard Butler, a bull-headed Scottish actor with a kind of rough charm and an air of selfamusement.

Butler and Freeman don't have any scenes together, but their characters strategize a fair bit over the airwaves. They agree that the stiff-necked orders descending from the military high-ups are ill-judged, though they have different approaches to handling adversity. While Trumbull pulls rank, closes his eyes (a Freeman staple), and solemnly orders a coffee ("in a real cup - not one of those paper or styrofoam things"), Banning engages in hand-to-hand combat with waves of North Korean henchmen and the odd American gone rogue. The two men are also engaged in personal struggles - Trumbull to regain the respect of his colleagues, which a brief early scene shows that he has lost, Banning to redeem himself for an incident years earlier which, anyway, wasn't his fault. The film ends, after much flying of flags and letting of blood and wasting of words, with both characters getting what they wanted.

Freeman has a smaller role in the similarly conventional but far less diverting science fiction thriller Oblivion, though he is a large suggests that while he is never trusted to carry a film, he is still considered an asset. Of course, the film's greatest asset is Tom Cruise, like Butler a romantic lead and an action hero, and in this case both. For an hour, he surveys the ruined and abandoned planet (it's 2077), fixing "drones", avoiding "Scavs", and generally carrying the plot, on screen and on the voiceover ("Without the moon, the earth was thrown into chaos"). Then he meets the renegade dandy Beech, who drops a few bombshells about recent history.

There was a scattering of applause in the packed Times Square cinema when Freeman match which he uses to light his cigar. He is quoting Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome ("And how can man die better / Than facing fearful odds") in a vast, abandoned space with acoustics that suit him, wearing dark glasses, a cape, and shin pads that stop slightly above the knee. But when earth faces a new threat, he sacrifices himself. In this alternative narrative of man's salvation, Cruise is merely Paul to Freeman's Jesus. Whether he is compensating for the years ful of invited luminaries. in which he could only find work playing Charlton Heston, the spectacle is the same: the frittering away of a major talent, film by mediocre film.

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Ben Whishaw, Derek Riddell, Stefano Braschi, Olly Alexander, Ruby Bentall and Judi Dench

## The way to Wonderland

presence in the posters and trailers – which " o a book man, every nook and cranny is a potential story." The particular nook or cranny of literary trivia lighted on by the playwright John Logan is a fleeting reference in The Real Alice, Anne Clark's biography of Alice Liddell Hargreaves, the inspiration for Lewis Carroll's was Peter Davies, the original Peter Pan". cence - the tragedy not of growing old but and antithesis. Because of the fantastical and account of that summer's afternoon in the peculiar markers and milestones: the loss of magical and moving, its shadows more sub-Messrs J. & E. Bumpus on Oxford Street, in war, the loss of self to a childhood fantasy Carroll (Nicholas Farrell) nor J. M. Barrie the form of an essay by the Australian writer and again to a grown-up reality. It also confinally turned up. He materializes from the Miles Franklin (the author of My Brilliant fronts the intense and complex relationships spellbinder. There is no real sense of their dark, suddenly illuminated by the spark of a | Career), published in the December 3, 1932 Peter and Alice had with their surrogate physical metamorphosis through the act of issue of All About Books for Australian and fathers and literary progenitors, showing storytelling, that the diminutive and austere New Zealand Readers. It is an enchanting how they were fixated on, dream children in Barrie became a mesmerizing giant or the chronicle in which rock cakes and ginger dreams they could not possibly compre- shy, stuttering Carroll beautiful. snaps jostle with priceless Carrolliana and a hend. The play is, in essence, two melan- Christopher Oram's set design, with its guest list brimming with unexplored thea- choly love stories half a century apart. brightly coloured Pollock's Toy Theatre protrical promise: Kenneth Grahame, J. B. Priest- Although captivated by the storied world of scenium and its borrowings from Tenniel and ley, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Walter de his childhood, the adult Peter perceives the Rackham, tends to accentuate and conspire in la Mare, and Sir Gerald du Maurier (Peter storyteller as parasitic ("he feeds on your the darker, more sinister aspects of fairy tale, Llewellyn Davies's grandfather and J. M. youth") and possessive, while Alice, fixed as do the shadowing, heartless presences of Barrie's favourite actor), to name but a hand- in time and silver nitrate by her "lover", "Alice" (Ruby Bentall) and Peter Pan (Olly

crooks, or trying to cement his identity as lows in a tradition of speculative, dramatia latter-day Tracy or an African American cally imagined coincidences in time and place – of chance encounters between historical figures, grounded in half-hidden, tangential fact. A successful example of the genre is Tom Stoppard's Travesties, which discovers James Joyce, Lenin and Tristan Tzara all working in the Zurich Public Library in Alice finds comfort in remembering "golden ingness and wonder, acerbity and vulnerabilwhich to examine the nature and purpose of truth, the truth of nightmare and wakefulness. hand as a last, failed lifeline to Peter, she art and its relation to politics. Peter and Peter is haunted, marked by and for tragedy, a says: "I'm a dying old lady, not much loved

KATHLEEN RILEY

John Logan PETER AND ALICE Noël Coward Theatre, until June 1

Alice in Wonderland: "On June 26 1932 tize, even monumentalize, the stuff of a Alice opened the Lewis Carroll exhibition at mere moment. At the heart of this chance Bumpus, the London bookshop. Beside her encounter is an examination of lost inno- ence is to feel, too reliant on aphorism There survives, in fact, a deliciously detailed of growing up. That lapsarian state has its factual territory it enters, it could be more ancient and honourable establishment of parents to disease, the loss of children to stantial. Part of the problem is that neither Logan's is a tantalizing conceit and fol- were "a safe framework to explore some played by Judi Dench and Ben Whishaw, unknown and dangerous landscape". She are beguiling studies. Whishaw is all postand "Alice" were born out of sadness and emaciated, he yearns for Neverland but is in loneliness, and terror of the place called Adulthood.

intriguing but less adroit attempt to drama- embodiment of G. B. Stern's diagnosis: land".

"They were suffering not from shell-shock, but from the echo of shell-shock". Unlike his namesake, who is untroubled by memory ("I forget them after I kill them", Peter Pan cries), Peter remembers killing a soldier at close range in the deep, dark woods and watching him die; he remembers and goes mad.

Logan's script is rather leaden and expository, too often red-flagging what the audi-(Derek Riddell) sufficiently convinces as a

knows that Carroll's photographs of her Alexander). But the real Alice and Peter, knows, too, that the characters of "Peter" traumatic stress and tenterhooks. Hunted and thrall to reality. Dench evokes, with a beautiful elegiac quality, summer on the Isis in a The burden of being Alice and Peter is dreaming and dreamlike Oxford. She can something each shoulders in a different way. communicate, almost simultaneously, know-1917, an extraordinary conjunction of revo- afternoons all gone away"; sick and alone at ity. And she provides perhaps the only true lutionary forces used as a framework in the age of eighty, she cannot afford Peter's magic of the piece when, stretching out her Alice, directed by Michael Grandage, is an Lost Boy of the Lost Generation, and the very by anyone . . . But I know the way to Wonder-