

Entertainment & Leisure

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No place to hide: George MacKay as Schofield in *1917*, directed by Sam Mendes. Dean-Charles Chapman co-stars

War film draws us in — in real time

IT was called the war to end all wars — and there have been no end of films made about it ever since.

Everyone will have their favourites, but Sam Mendes's *1917* promises to be as immersive an insight into the First World War as anything we have yet seen.

The film, which the director and producer co-wrote with Krysty Wilson-Cairns, is based in part on an account told to Mendes by his paternal grandfather, Alfred Mendes.

At the height of the First World War, during the spring of 1917 in northern France, two young British soldiers, Schofield (George MacKay) and Blake (Dean-Charles Chapman), are given a seemingly impossible mission to deliver a message warning of an ambush during one of

CINEMA PREVIEW

Film: 1917

Certificate: 15

Director: Sam Mendes

Stars: George MacKay, Dean-Charles Chapman, Mark Strong, Andrew Scott, Richard Madden, Claire Duburcq, Daniel Mays, Jamie Parker, Benedict Cumberbatch, Colin Firth

the skirmishes soon after the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line during Operation Alberich.

The soldiers race against time, crossing enemy territory to deliver the warning and keep a British battalion of 1,600 men — which includes Blake's brother — from walking

into a deadly trap. The pair must give their all to accomplish their mission and aid the survival of their fellow Tommies.

Filming took place from April through June 2019 in Wiltshire, Hankley Common and Govan, Scotland, as well as at Shepperton Studios.

Under the supervision of cinematographer Roger Deakins, this was accomplished with long takes and elaborately choreographed moving camera shots designed to have the entire film appear as one continuous shot.

Concern was raised over the planned filming on Salisbury Plain by conservationists who felt the production could disturb potentially undiscovered remains in the area. They requested a survey be conducted before any

construction for sets begin on the land, with some shots requiring the use of as many as 500 background extras.

Sections of the film were also shot in and around Low Force, on the River Tees, in June 2019. The production staff had to install signs warning walkers in the area not to be alarmed by the bodies strewn around the site as they were prosthetic.

Time Out hailed the film as possibly the director's best to date, adding: "Mendes marries technical virtuosity with jittery thrills and an emotional core to reinvent the Great War movie." Rotten Tomatoes called it: "Hard-hitting, immersive, and an impressive technical achievement."

● *1917* is showing at the Regal Picturehouse cinema from today (Friday).

Matthew Wilson

Fifty years of children's pantos is why the show must go on...

Review

Puss in Boots
Kenton Theatre
Saturday, January 4

IF ever there was a fitting testament to Henley Children's Theatre's reputation as the grande dame of family entertainment, it was their wonderful feel-good pantomime *Puss in Boots* at the Kenton Theatre.

The show marked fully 50 years that the company has thrilled Henley's child performers and audiences of all ages.

Many families in the town have been attending the HCT's annual panto for generations.

Five-year-old Alice sitting next to me is a first-timer, excitedly sporting a light-up ring bought in the foyer. What's she looking forward to the most? Puss!

Happily for Alice, Puss doesn't disappoint — our feline hero was purr-fectly played with charming flair by both Bea Adam and Ethan Bentley (the cast is split into two groups who perform alternate shows).

The scene opened with a hiss-terical joke at the audience's expense as the young compère (Theo Good and Lilia Taylor) welcomed us to the show, only to be met by a hidden heckler (the side-splitting Evie Crowther and Frankie Moore) shouting "It's not natural!" [for a cat to wear boots] and repeatedly questioning the size of the giant — before the compère summoned "security" to hoist said heckler over his shoulder and frogmarch them out. The audience was by now delightedly panto-ready. Oh yes they were!

The unfolding story has it that principal girl Jesse (played equally warmly and deftly by Izzy Hubbard and Ella Chambers) is in love with the feckless and obscenely vain Prince Georgeous (elegantly portrayed by Ruby Marshall and with comedic panache by Thomas Horsley), but knows his mother Queenie (the haughtily hilarious and



Talented: *Puss in Boots* involved 100 young performers

most "wegal" Capucine English) won't let her, as an impoverished nobody, marry him.

Jesse's father dies and the Mayor (Tilly Adam and James Edwards) announces that he is only leaving her in his will a silver coin and a flea-ridden cat — but one with a fur-midable secret. This Puss can talk!

Not only that, Puss has history with the evil, flatulent, Mexican-hating Giant Trump (Louis Van Der Mark and Daisy Carter doing a bigly great job with an American accent and cheerfully eliciting boos from the audience).

Trump — cue loud farting noise — had used villainous magic to turn the then rich landowner the Marchioness of Carabas into our hero cat and to steal their lands and castle.

Puss has a plan to defeat Trump and help Jesse win the hand of Prince Georgeous through a series of tricks — and ultimately to restore Puss's own real identity.

There are many other star turns throughout, not least the rowdy Knights of the Rectangular Table — Sir Laughalot (the wonderfully comic swaggering boulder Casper Good), Sir Gerkyl Truss (a delightfully slapstick Huw Williams and Josh Grocock), Sir Gawaynetta (Seran Chopra and Lily Koorts merrily waving the banner for women in a man's world), and Sir Gei (Woody Hamilton Hurst and Olga Egrevva nimbly firing off satirical political

jibes with perfect comedy timing).

Trump's servant Igor (Theo Good, Woody Hamilton Hurst) is delightfully revolting and, from the titters in the audience, a firm favourite with the children.

An endearing trio of peasants (Emma Sage, Sophie Barrows and Abbie Stimfig, and Lottie Maxwell, Kitty Howett and Holly Edwards) are shuffled on and off stage throughout, and are a delight in their grotty, jaded dimness.



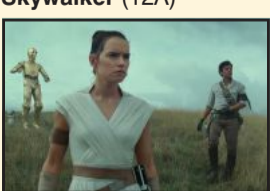
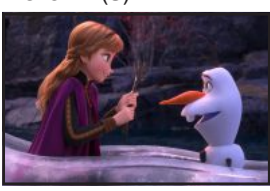
Gerdame Greer (Katie Zabel, Orla Huxtable) is a refreshingly modern-day feminist Dame, and other eye-winking satirical cultural references are delivered by Jesse's siblings — Jeremy [Corbyn] (Manuel Fernandez) and Diane [Abbott] (Maisie Marshall, Rose-Anna Nicolson).

Alongside these characters, and at the heart of what is so special about HCT's panto, are the chorus lines of young singers and dancers.

The Surplus Knights and the Villagers delivered a polished stream of old favourite numbers that roused the audience to hearty clapping, while the adorable Sophistocats and impossibly cute three-year-old-plus Fleas steal the show with their erratic tap routines, costume-fidgeting, slipping headbands and combination of wide-eyed awe and heart-swelling glee.

Emma George

Also showing this week:

Title	Cast	Synopsis	Rating
Knives Out (12A) 	Daniel Craig, Chris Evans, Ana de Armas, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Shannon, Don Johnson, Toni Collette, LaKeith Stanfield, Katherine Langford, Jaeden Martell, M Emmet Walsh, Christopher Plummer, Frank Oz	A detective investigates the death of the patriarch of an eccentric, combative family.	<i>Knives Out</i> sharpens old murder-mystery tropes with a keenly assembled suspense outing that makes brilliant use of writer-director Rian Johnson's stellar ensemble.
Little Women (U) 	Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh, Eliza Scanlen, Laura Dern, Timothée Chalamet, Meryl Streep	Four sisters come of age in America in the aftermath of the Civil War.	With a stellar cast and a smart, sensitive retelling of its classic source material, Greta Gerwig's <i>Little Women</i> proves some stories truly are timeless.
Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (12A) 	Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Adam Driver, Oscar Isaac, Anthony Daniels, Naomi Ackie, Domhnall Gleeson, Richard E Grant, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill	After Palpatine mysteriously returns, the Resistance faces the First Order once more in the final chapter of the Skywalker saga.	<i>The Rise of Skywalker</i> suffers from a frustrating lack of imagination, but concludes this beloved saga with fan-focused devotion.
Frozen II (U) 	Kristen Bell, Idina Menzel, Jonathan Groff, Josh Gad, Jason Ritter, Evan Rachel Wood	Anna, Elsa, Kristoff, Olaf and Sven leave Arendelle to travel to an ancient, autumn-bound forest of an enchanted land. They set out to find the origin of Elsa's powers in order to save their kingdom.	<i>Frozen II</i> can't quite recapture the showstopping feel of its predecessor, but it remains a dazzling adventure into the unknown.

Commentators are going for broke in their war on 'woke'

TWO of Britain's leading social commentators are joining forces to tackle what they see as the problem of political "wokeness", writes Matthew Wilson.

This summer will see Andrew Doyle and Douglas Murray declare war on social justice warriors with a UK theatre tour that visits the Hexagon in Reading on Wednesday, May 27.

Each show will feature a conversation, along with an extensive audience question and answer session, in which the pair will consider how best to resist the rise of the woke mindset and the challenges it presents to individual liberty, intellectual diversity and free speech.

A spokesman for the show, which will be hosted by Swansea University academic Ashley Frawley, said: "For many, the social justice movement is a kind of cult.

"Although well-intentioned, most of these new 'woke' activists have an



Partners in thoughtcrime: Andrew Doyle and Douglas Murray are hitting the road

unshakeable certainty that their worldview is correct.

"They feel the need to identify and cast out the sinners in our midst, insisting that redemption is not possible.

"And even though they are capable of the most horrendous acts of public shaming and bullying

behaviour, they think they are the good guys.

"So join Andrew Doyle and Douglas Murray as they consider how best to resist the rise of the woke mindset."

Andrew Doyle is a writer, comedian, and one of the UK's foremost political satirists. As well as creating Twitter sensation Titania McGrath, until recently he was the co-writer of Jonathan Pie. He is also the co-founder of Comedy Unleashed, London's free-thinking comedy night.

Douglas Murray is an author and journalist based in Britain. His latest book, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, Identity*, was published in October and immediately became a *Sunday Times* bestseller.

● Tickets for "Resisting Wokeness" at the Hexagon are £32. The event, which starts at 7.30pm, is recommended for ages 16 and up. To book, visit www.whatsonreading.com or www.resistingwokeness.com