

The good guys dress in black, remember that,” as Will Smith’s iconic rap once told us, “just in case they ever relaunch the series with a new cast.” OK, he didn’t say that last bit, but maybe he should have done, now Sony has decided to give the Men In Black franchise a new lick of paint.

Why bother coming back for another bite of the cherry, though? *Men In Black 3* gave the original cast a very tidy ending, after all, with Will Smith’s Agent J learning that Tommy Lee Jones’ Agent K had been looking out for him since the ’60s. J’s three-film arc, from mouthy cop to honourable defender of the planet, is absolutely complete.

However, the franchise’s original USP was too good to let lie. “It’s a very strong concept,” argues the series’ overseeing producer, Walter F Parkes. “The idea of a secret police that monitors alien activity on Earth.” And now that seven years have gone by since *MIB 3*, the time has come to expand the world of the Men In Black, and bring in a sense of newness...

NOT ON THE HIGH STREET

Den Of Geek steps onto the set of *Men In Black: International* – during an August heatwave – at Leavesden Studios in Watford (just around the corner from the Harry Potter Studio Tour). The set currently being used is an exact replica of a real street in London – near St Paul’s Cathedral – where location filming took place last week. This means that while stars Tessa Thompson and Chris Hemsworth are pulling out massive guns to blast the worst scum of the universe, they’re stood just a few feet away from hollow recreations of Greggs and Pret A Manger.

But if cardboard cups of coffee and top-notch sausage rolls aren’t your idea of glamour, fear not: the ‘International’ element that gives this film its name does extend to some more exotic locations. Thompson’s Agent M starts off in New York (watch out for the iconic ‘giant fan room’), before travelling through a transatlantic tube network to MIB UK, where she meets Liam Neeson’s High T and is paired up with Hemsworth’s legendary Agent H.

Their journey together begins in London, and it will take them to Morocco (we saw concept art for a sand-covered sci-fi motorbike chase) and Italy (where Rebecca Ferguson’s character, an ex-flame of Hemsworth’s H, lives in some eye-catching ruins). Las Vegas was also considered during development, but that’s one new idea that didn’t make the cut.

It was the journey of Thompson’s character that inspired Parkes and the other producers to get this >>

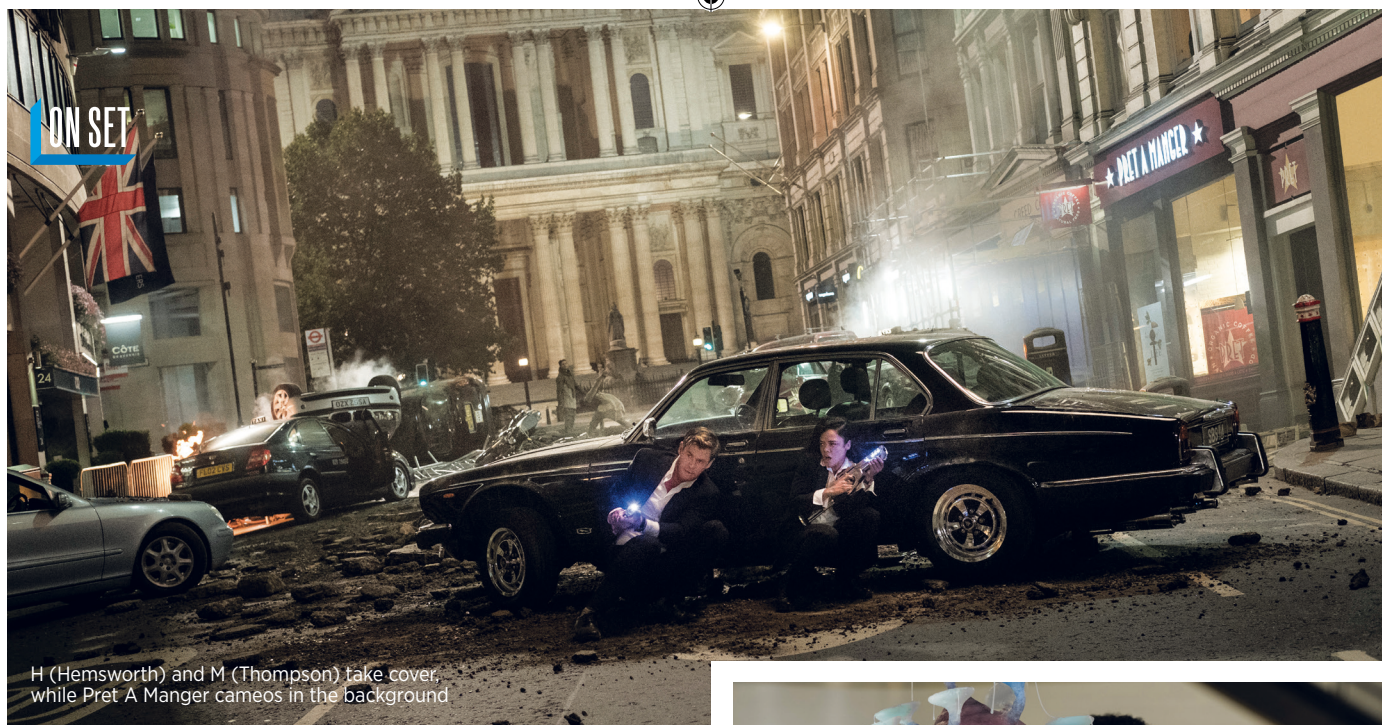
Agent M (Tessa Thompson) and Agent H (Chris Hemsworth) get ready for action on the streets of London



Everything old is new again in *Men In Black: International*, the fresh-faced fourth film in the franchise. *Den Of Geek* visited the set at Leavesden Studios to get the skinny

WORDS: ROB LEANE

BLACK IS THE NEW
BLACK



H (Hemsworth) and M (Thompson) take cover, while Pret A Manger cameos in the background

» sequel going. M's origin story couldn't be more different to that of Will Smith's J, who stumbled onto the MIB's radar by accident in the first film.

"The idea [is] of a young woman who had, in fact, had an encounter as a child," Parkes explains on set, surrounded by monitors in a little marquee. She "has been lied to her whole life, and has spent 20 years trying to find the Men In Black."

When it came to casting this new hero and her arrogant mentor, it took a certain God Of Thunder to put the perfect duo on Parkes' radar. Asked if he'd considered Thompson and Hemsworth as his central duo before seeing them together in *Thor: Ragnarok*, Parkes laughs. "Absolutely not," he admits.

"I remember thinking, 'Who's that amazing Australian or New Zealand actress that [director] Taika Waititi found? She's great!'" Parkes recalls, describing the experience of watching *Ragnarok* and being impressed by Thompson, but not realising she's an American actress who's been building an impressive CV for years – including the likes of *Creed* and *Westworld*.

Thompson, who's resplendent in a tailored black suit (sans tie), takes a break from battling by Greggs to recall texting Hemsworth about taking the gig: "Chris was like, 'Hey, legend, are we going to rock this?' And I was like, 'Yeah, we're gonna!'"

Hemsworth laughs, clearly happy to reprise his easy banter with Thompson. Hemsworth's not wearing a tie either, because, as he explains, they're "on somewhat of an undercover kind of

mission" right now. "So we're trying to blend in a little – by removing the tie. Obviously, that does all the work."

And as for whether their characters' chemistry will lead to an onscreen hookup, Thompson has the perfect *Ragnarok* quote to deflect the question. "Nuh-uh," she says. "It's against company policy. He's a friend from work."

"Chris was like, 'Hey, are we gonna rock this? And I was like, 'Yeah, we're gonna!'"



Not all of the MIB's agents are from Earth...

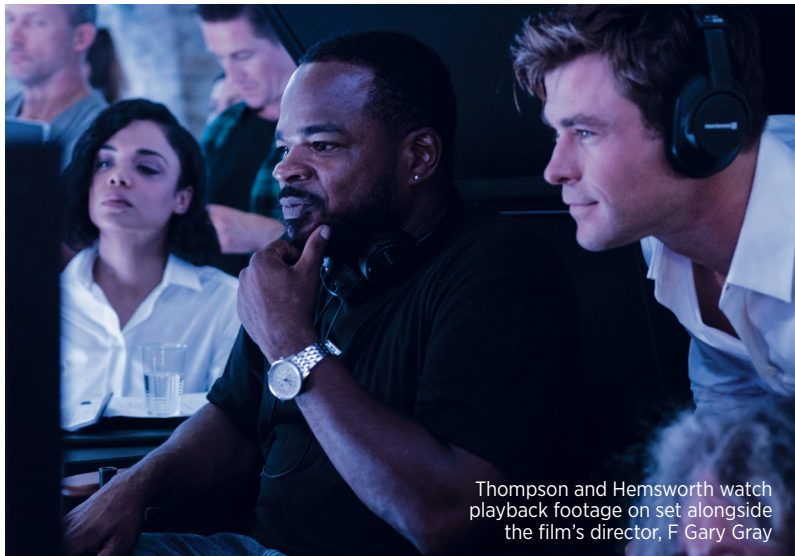
It's all-change behind the camera, too, with Barry Sonnenfeld stepping away from the director's chair after closing out the original trilogy. Taking over for this new instalment is F Gary Gray, who impressed producer Parkes with his work on *Fast & Furious 8* and *Straight Outta Compton* (which Parkes believes is "one of the great movies of the last 10 years").

"[Gray is] a guy who's had major hits in many different genres," Parkes enthuses, while the man himself yells orders to his actors from a distance. "And the other thing is, I think that you look at these things in *Straight Outta Compton*, and you see what he can do in terms of intimate relationships."

GETTING INTO CHARACTER

Character dynamics are important in the MIB universe, as Thompson recalls during an impassioned description of the previous films: "When you found out about Tommy Lee Jones and this life that he's left behind, you understood why he was such a curmudgeon. You understand what drove them. It's really inspiring to me to be a woman in this space, because for so long, we played parts where that's not the case."

As for Gray's own stance on things, he pops over to the media marquee to explain why signing up was an easy choice. "I get a chance to be a kid again," he explains in a brief gap between filming. "I had some fun with cars on the last movie, and a lot of seriousness in the movie before that. So I get a



Thompson and Hemsworth watch playback footage on set alongside the film's director, F Gary Gray

chance to really step out and be a kid again and have some fun with the toys.”

These toys may be inspired by the old favourites, but everything has been given a face-lift. Even the memory-wiping neuralyzer, still slim and silver, has been revamped with previously unseen flaps and functions, as the props team are keen to show off. And although there are still big shiny guns, they’re dished out to the agents in unique ways.

While *DoG* gawks at a desk covered in neuralyzers and trinkets, the film’s central duo are pulling hidden weapons out of a slick new Jaguar made especially for the film. As you might have glimpsed in the trailers, this car has a bit more to offer than a big red button.

The hubcaps, the exhaust and the wing-mirrors can all be removed and assembled into guns, a bit of practical-effects trickery that Thompson and Hemsworth are getting to grips with today. Their characters are sure to look skilled in the

“We make different weapons. There’s a tommy laser gun, which is pretty epic”

finished film, but don’t be surprised to see bloopers of these Hollywood stars struggling to unsheathe their weapons, and chuckling as they fail to construct them properly.

“Have you seen all this?” asks an enthusiastic Hemsworth when he comes back off set, his voice slightly hoarse from shouting his lines. “We make different weapons. There’s a tommy gun, a tommy laser gun, which seems pretty epic.”

The new heroes need new villains to face, but the baddies aren’t on set at the moment. Thompson and Hemsworth have been firing at nothing, with the latter actor improvising a lot of different takes on the action, pushing his British accent from the Marvel movies to hammy new heights. (By the actor’s own admission, Hemsworth’s character is “a little nutty.”)

When the film is cut together, they’ll be shooting at The Twins, a pair of evil aliens played by Laurent and Larry Nicolas Bourgeois, aka French dance duo Les Twins. They’re not French in the film, though. “They come from a planet comprised of pure energy,” Parkes explains, to try to help us picture it, “and they are sort of able to mimic the form of the planet they come to, because they’re assassins.”

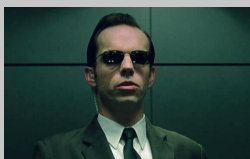
The Big Sick star Kumail Nanjiani also voices an alien character called Pawny – a tiny sidekick the size of a chess piece. “I really kind of stalked him,” jokes Thompson, who, as a huge fan, urged him to sign up and believed “he would be the perfect person to voice that character.”

All of this sounds very promising, and everyone is clearly having a blast on set, bringing fresh flourishes to this familiar franchise. But only time will tell if Parkes and co manage to capture the most important new thing of all: new fans. At the very least, they’ve made us fancy a trip to Gregg’s. **DENofGEEK!**

Men In Black: International opens on 14 June

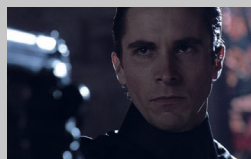
SUITS YOU!

These dapper sci-fi characters give the MIB a run for their money... WORDS: PATRICK SPOULL



Hugo Weaving in *The Matrix*

While Neo may have looked wickedly good in his neat trench coat, it was Agent Smith that caught our eye. A perfect uniform for murder, Agent Smith matched his suit with a stylish pair of shades and, of course, a gun. Evil has never looked so debonair.



Christian Bale in *Equilibrium*

With his monochromatic grey outfit, mandarin collar and demure pose, Christian Bale’s John Preston cuts a chic figure in 2002’s *Equilibrium*. It’s a refreshing change from the traditional FBI-style black suit and cuffs, and fits Mr Bale down to the ground.



Cillian Murphy in *Inception*

Christopher Nolan’s trippy sci-fi stars so many fashionable gents, all wearing different suits from different eras, it was difficult to pick out the best. Cillian Murphy definitely dressed to impress with those large lapels and a sleek silver tie, though.



Jake Gyllenhaal in *Source Code*

It’s not often that we get to see Jake Gyllenhaal rock a straightforward suit but for most of the film he’s clad in a fetching grey jacket with a matching tie. Though a lot more ordinary than some of the other suits on this list, Gyllenhaal definitely looks the part.



Ben Whishaw in *Cloud Atlas*

Though *Cloud Atlas*’ narrative jumps around a lot, Ben Whishaw’s Robert Frobisher sticks out as a particularly trim gent. As a man in high society 1930s Cambridge, you’ve got to look the part, and his elaborate layering and patterned waistcoats earn him brownie points.