

NOTES FROM THE UPSIDE DOWN

AN UNOFFICIAL GUIDE
TO *STRANGER THINGS*

GUY ADAMS

APPENDIX 1

HARDLY STRANGERS

Who were all those people? We spent so long with them I think it's time we found out. In alphabetical order (see, it's not just because I'm obsessed with Karen Wheeler), a rundown of the main cast of the show:

CARA BUONO—Karen Wheeler

Buono is a New Yorker of Italian descent. An actor, writer, and director, well known for her roles in both *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men*. Genre credits include: yet another mother not entirely aware of quite what horrors her son is brushing up against in *Let Me In* (2010), the English-language remake of the masterful Swedish novel and movie *Let the Right One In*; a recurring role in the TV adaptation of Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*, as Anna Turner (2008); Bruce Banner's mom, Edith, when he looked like Eric Bana rather than Mark Ruffalo in Ang Lee's ill-received (but what do they know?) *Hulk* (2003); and—terribly obscure one, this—a bored housewife who ends up assisting aliens (and fixing her love life) in Barry Strugatz's well-meaning but flawed sci-fi comedy *From Other Worlds* (2004).

MILLIE BOBBY BROWN—Eleven

Born in Marbella, Spain, to English parents, Brown moved to the UK at the age of four, living in Bournemouth. Her family emigrated again when she was eight, this time to Florida to launch a tooth-whitening business.

Brown signed up for a weekend acting school and was picked up by an agent who saw her perform. When the agent told Brown's family that they should move to Hollywood, they

took a gamble and did. It didn't work out. Despite a handful of jobs coming her way,¹ the family ran out of money and were forced to move back to the UK.

Brown, disconsolate and assuming she would never get anywhere in the business, attended an audition for a casting agent that didn't go well. Tearful and despondent, she had one more audition that day: *Stranger Things*. When asked to cry in the audition she found it all too easy. She got the job. Obviously.

JOE CHREST—Ted Wheeler

“What did I do?” asks Mike's dad as he finds himself alone at the dinner table in the first episode of *Stranger Things*. The answer is: a fair bit, frankly.

A United States Air Force veteran where, slightly terrifyingly, he earned commendations for Cold War service and expert marksmanship (perhaps I shouldn't have mocked Ted Wheeler, as the actor playing him could kill me from a distance), Chrest holds both a BFA and MFA degree² in directing and is a founding member of the Swine Palace theater in Louisiana and the founding artistic director of Ignition Film Repertory Company, which is dedicated to producing original works for the screen.

As an actor his credits are extensive, from recurring roles in shows like *True Detective* and *Treme* to appearances in movies

1 Including a starring role in *Intruders*, the BBC America TV show adapted from Michael Marshall Smith's novel of the same name. A book that all fans of *Stranger Things* should seek out, as it's wonderful and right up their alley. Now. I mean it. Go. Buy. Read.

2 Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts.

such as *Ant-Man*, *21 Jump Street* (and its sequel), and the catchily titled *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 2*.

Bonus genre appearance for further homework: Chrest appeared as a villain in the first season of *Millennium*, the follow-up show from *The X-Files*'s Chris Carter. He'll be the one masturbating while he watches a bomb he's just planted explode. *Millennium* is a clever and subversive horror fantasy show that is certainly worth your time, most particularly its deliriously nuts second season.

NATALIA DYER—Nancy Wheeler

Natalia Dyer started acting at the age of twelve, appearing in Disney's *Hannah Montana—The Movie* (2009). In 2011 she worked with Aidan Quinn, Brooke Shields, and Kris Kristofferson in *The Greening of Whitney Brown*, a somewhat saccharine tale of a rich girl forced to realize what's important in life by spending time with a horse. *Blue Like Jazz* followed in 2012, an adaptation of a semiautobiographical Christian memoir by Donald Miller. The movie was partially funded through Kickstarter after an investor backed out. One of the most successful campaigns of the year, with nearly three hundred and fifty thousand dollars being raised, director Steve Taylor possibly regretted his gracious offer to personally call every backer who contributed ten dollars or more on the phone, as it took him over a year to do so.

It was 2014's *I Believe in Unicorns* that gave Dyer a role to really sink her teeth into. The coming-of-age movie featured Dyer in the lead and saw her gain a number of good notices, with Brain Tallerico of RogerEbert.com saying: ". . . the film simply wouldn't work at all without the committed, fantastic

performance of Natalia Dyer. She balances the innocence and desire of her character in perfectly equal measures, sketching a person in that dangerous part of life in which they are not a child and yet also not quite yet a woman. She holds every scene, adding emotional weight to clichés that would have been paper-thin without her work.”

Currently she is studying at New York University’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study, a school specializing, as the name suggests, in courses devised by the students themselves. Notable alumni include: Isabella Rossini, Anne Hathaway, and Rooney Mara.

DAVID HARBOUR—Jim Hopper

David Harbour is a New Yorker who received his acting break in 1999 playing a farmhand in a Broadway revival of N. Richard Nash’s play *The Rainmaker*. His theater career included a Tony Award for Best Actor in a Featured Role (Play) for his performance as Nick in a 2005 revival of the Edward Albee play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Onscreen, he has had recurring roles in TV shows such as *Pan Am*, *The Newsroom*, and *State of Affairs*, as well as appearing in many movies.

Fans of watching a man in a dinner suit punch people will recognize him in 2008’s *Quantum of Solace*, the second of Daniel Craig’s appearances as James Bond. Harbour can be found beneath a moustache as dodgy as the character he’s playing, a CIA section chief striking an illicit deal with the film’s villain in order to allow the US access to Bolivian oil. Such underhand dealing would never happen in real life. Obviously.

RANDALL P. HAVENS—Scott Clarke

Not only is Mr. Clarke the nicest science teacher in the world, he plays John Carpenter’s *The Thing* to get his girlfriend in the mood. Because nothing opens someone’s curiosity door quite like watching a severed head grow legs and try to kill Kurt Russell.

Actor Randall P. Havens (usually credited as the rather less formal Randy Havens)³ has appeared in numerous TV shows, including the animated comedy *Archer*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Halt and Catch Fire*. The latter is of particular interest, not only because it charts the rise of the personal computer in the eighties but because it’s the show Havens grew that luxuriant mustache for.

CHARLIE HEATON—Jonathan Byers

Heaton is an English actor, born in Bridlington, East Yorkshire.⁴

Moving to London when he was sixteen, he became a drummer for noise-rock band Comanечи.⁵ With Akiko Matsuura on vocals and Simon Petrovitch on guitar, the trio went on a world tour for a year. To see Heaton in stick-flinging action head here: <https://youtu.be/LIIqMTZjRlc>.

3 Maybe he relishes sounding like a place you might hold sexual orgies? I certainly would. Maybe the publisher’s legal team will cut this joke, even though I hid it so well in a footnote?

4 Where I spent many a boring Sunday as a child, sitting on a beach staring at sad donkeys. Yes, I appreciate you didn’t really need to know that.

5 A genre of music blending traditional rock instrumentation with the atonal, dissonant sounds of the avant-garde. Much like *Stranger Things*, it has its roots in the eighties.

Short of money on his return, his sister suggested he try his luck enrolling with a commercial talent agency, which led to a commercial for a Swiss insurance company. Film roles followed, including the indie picture *As You Are*, which won the Special Jury Award at the 2016 Sundance festival.

On television, he was mainly to be found in close proximity to corpses and coppers with an appearance in the UK crime dramas *DCI Banks* and *Vera*. After that he ticked *Casualty* off his list, as all British actors eventually must.⁶

JOE KEERY—Steve Harrington

Joe Keery is also a musician, guitarist/vocalist for Post Animal, a garage rock band from Chicago.

Stranger Things is certainly the role that will make him, though he's appeared in a handful of other TV shows as well as the movies *Harry Gamble's Birthday Party* (2015) and *The Charnel House* (2016).

Not everything on the Internet is true, though if enough people believe something it may as well be. A fan theory based on the similarity between Keery and *Parks and Recreation* actor Ben Schwartz suggested that their characters were father and son. The sitcom creator Michael Schur was happy to sign off on such silliness and the genetic link was made “official” via a comedy sketch on *The Late Late Show with James Corden*.

6 For non-UK readers, *Casualty* is a long-running medical drama/soap that chews through actors remorselessly as they're thrown off ladders, hit by cars or caught in the middle of a bizarre industrial accident on their inevitable path toward a hospital bed and a few scenes shared with the regular cast.

GATEN MATARAZZO—Dustin Henderson

Stranger Things is only Matarazzo's second onscreen acting role (the first being an appearance during the second season of NBC's *James Spader Has Fun Hour*, or *The Blacklist* as it's also known). He has a couple of significant theater credits, however, having appeared in both *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (in 2011) and *Les Misérables* (in 2014). In the latter, he appeared on Broadway before touring for six months playing the part of Gavroche, a wily little street urchin.⁷ In an interview with Vincent Jackson for Pressofatlanticcity.com Matarazzo, age ten, admitted, "Gavroche has been my dream role since I was seven." Which is just so adorable I have to mention it.

His sister, Sabrina—four years his senior—also sings and acts, and encouraged Matarazzo into the profession. They sang together in 2009 at the US Open tennis tournament.

Matarazzo originally auditioned for the role of Mike but was told he didn't look demanding enough, so ended up reading Lucas's lines before being cast as Dustin!⁸

Matarazzo has cleidocranial dysplasia, a congenital disorder that affects the development of bones and teeth. While Matarazzo's form of the condition is mild, he has no collarbones and his teeth never fully developed so he wears false ones. He hopes that his appearance on the show will

7 SPOILER: Mini, loveable Gavroche buys the farm in the second act of the play when he's shot by soldiers. This, awful, awful writer was struck by a fit of the giggles when watching the scene during the London production of the show. This earned him actual death threats from the tearful audience members near him and a reprimand from theater staff.

8 As Matarazzo explained to Ben Travers at indiewire.com.

raise awareness of cleidocranial dysplasia and encourage others with the condition to feel more comfortable about their appearance.

CALEB McLAUGHLIN—Lucas Sinclair

Like Matarazzo, Caleb McLaughlin started his career on the Broadway stage. He trained in dance at The Harlem School of Arts (and freely admits that he can't stop dancing, frequently busting out moves for the sheer hell of it) going on to appear as Young Simba in a production of *The Lion King*. A run of appearances in TV shows followed: *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Forever*, and *Unforgettable*, then a recurring role in NBC cop show *Shades of Blue*.

When his agent secured him an audition for *Stranger Things*, he auditioned three times in New York before flying to Los Angeles to meet the Duffer Brothers, who offered him the part. He had already known Gaten Matarazzo for three years before they filmed together, the two having met during their time on Broadway. They weren't appearing in the same shows, but met at a nearby park where a lot of the kids appearing on Broadway would hang out when not working.

As well as, obviously, filming the second season of *Stranger Things*, McLaughlin went on to appear in *The New Edition Story*, a miniseries based on the rise to success of the American boy band. He appears as the young Ricky Bell, one of the founding members of the group.

MATTHEW MODINE—Martin Brenner

Modine grew up in cinema; his father, Mark Alexander Modine, managed drive-in theaters.⁹ The large family (Modine has seven siblings) moved frequently as the land the theaters were on was often deemed more valuable as real estate than as a cinema.

Moving to New York after he graduated, Modine went on to appear in a number of seminal movies, including Alan Parker's *Birdy* (1984) and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).¹⁰ He also appeared in John Schlesinger's 1990 thriller *Pacific Heights*, which I mention purely because it's wonderful and you should all watch it.

He famously turned down the part of "Maverick" Mitchell in 1986's *Top Gun* as he didn't agree with the film's pro-military stance. Good for him. Tom Cruise took the part instead and we all know how that worked out.

9 Accepting that the drive-in is now as lost to time as a good deal of the trappings of *Stranger Things*, perhaps I'd better explain. Drive-in theaters were exactly what they sound like; large open-air lots where patrons would drive up, park, grab a—usually god-awful—wired speaker from a wooden post next to the parking space, bring it in through the window, and watch movies projected on a massive screen. Later, they became so advanced as to broadcast the movie soundtrack on AM or FM radio (I haven't time to explain to you what they are, just roll with it) so you could tune your car radio in and listen through your own speakers. They reached the height of their success in the fifties in America, but experienced a resurgence of interest in the seventies when they began showing exploitation movies such as 1977's *Drive-In Massacre* (deteriorating carnival turns itself into a drive-in theater to make more money; when patrons end up being murdered with a sabre, could the onetime sword swallower be the culprit?).

10 As well as the odd well-meaning flop of course—what great actor hasn't? While I'm not one who relishes being negative, 1995's pirate action picture *Cutthroat Island* is perhaps notable enough to mention. The movie had a troubled production and stands as one of the biggest box-office flops of all time. This is not, of course, Modine's fault.

Modine is also well known for his environmental activism and his promotion of the bicycle as a mode of transport.

ANNISTON & TINSLEY PRICE—Holly Wheeler

Right, fine, so maybe Mike's kid sister isn't exactly a main character, but the twins who play her share another genre TV credit so I'm mentioning them anyway. They are one of the number of children to have played Judith Grimes, baby daughter and constant potential zombie amuse-bouche to Rick (or was it Shane?) and Lori in AMC's *The Walking Dead*.

SHANNON PURSER—Barbara Holland

In the eighties, becoming viral was something to be feared—not anymore.

Purser has always enjoyed acting, performing in small-scale theater, which led to her getting picked up by an agent. A couple of years of auditioning and meeting with casting directors didn't lead to work—as it so often doesn't in that competitive and fickle business. Then her agent got a call about *Stranger Things*. Purser sent in a taped audition, which led to her being called in to read for the Duffer Brothers.

Shortly after, she was sat in a movie theater with her mom. She checked her emails on her phone and discovered she'd gotten the job.¹¹ Her very first on-screen role.

The fact that her character in general and Purser's performance in particular won the viewers' hearts has led

11 A cinema crime but we'll let it pass. Interestingly, Purser might not be so lenient, as she once worked in a movie theater.

to lots more opportunities, including being cast in the CW's *Riverdale*.

WINONA RYDER—Joyce Byers

Winona Ryder was born Winona Laura Horowitz. The Winona came from the Minnesotan town near where she was born, whereas the Laura was in honor of Laura Huxley, friend of Ryder's parents and wife of novelist Aldous Huxley. Her godfather is Dr. Timothy Leary, the renowned psychologist and writer who controversially advocated the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs such as LSD and psilocybin.¹² Family friends also included beat poet Allen Ginsberg and novelist Philip K. Dick.¹³

Ryder began acting at the age of twelve, making her first movie appearance in 1986 in *Lucas*, starring Corey Haim.¹⁴ It was her appearance in two 1988 movies that thoroughly cemented her stardom. First, her wonderfully dry Goth turn in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice*, and then her murderous turn alongside Christian Slater in *Heathers*.

12 Unsurprisingly given his drug use, Leary was arrested countless times and was once described by US President Richard Nixon as "the most dangerous man in America." Now that's what I call a godfather.

13 Who must also be on every *Stranger Things* fan's reading list. While he is most often remembered for writing novels that became highly successful movies (not least *Blade Runner*, based on Dick's far-better-titled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), those movies rarely do justice to the raw power and imagination of his original work.

14 Perhaps the most obvious poster boy for eighties cinema were it not for the tragic turn his life took. He died, destitute and depressed, of a drug overdose at the young age of thirty-eight. Probably most famous for his lead role in revisionist vampire horror comedy *The Lost Boys* (1987), he was a charming presence in a great number of other movies.

Countless great roles followed, from reuniting with Tim Burton (and appearing alongside Johnny Depp, whom she was engaged to at the time) in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) to her award-nominated performances in *Little Women* (1994) and James Mangold's 1999 thriller *Girl, Interrupted* (which she also executive produced).

NOAH SCHNAPP—Will Byers

Schnapp saw the musical *Annie* on Broadway at the age of six and left the theater crying because he realized how much he wanted to be on the stage. He started working professionally two years later and ended up landing a gig with Steven Spielberg (as Tom Hanks's son in 2015's *Bridge of Spies*) a year later. Go Schnapp.

He also voiced that perennial comic dreamer, the long-suffering Charlie Brown, in *The Peanuts Movie*. He credits following the advice of his mother as the reason he got that job, having spent days before the audition watching old *Peanuts* cartoons to get a handle on how Charlie Brown spoke.

MARK STEGER—The Demogorgon

He may never speak, but how can we ignore Mark Steger?

Steger, a dancer and choreographer as well as actor, first brushed up against the monstrous through his experimental dance performance group, Osseus Labrynt, who would perform naked in unusual locations.¹⁵

Having been introduced to the metal band Tool, Steger

15 Don't try this at home; when Steger does it, it's art; for you it may simply be an arrestable offense.

worked with guitarist Adam Jones¹⁶ to create the creepy music video for the band's song "Schism."

He then went on to work on *American Horror Story*, choreographing sections for the third season of the show and then appearing as the slick, horrid "Addiction Demon" in the fifth season.

A note given to Steger by the Duffer Brothers particularly struck home. They described the Demogorgon as being like the shark from *Jaws*, something that remained hidden much of the time, only to emerge, raw and hungry, when it needed to feed.

FINN WOLFHARD—Mike Wheeler

Wolfhard has appeared in a couple of independent movies, a handful of music videos, and the shows *The 100* and *Supernatural*, but it was *Stranger Things* he was arguably born for. Unlike the rest of the young cast, Wolfhard was already up to speed on a lot of the eighties movies the show would riff on. His father, pursuing a career as a screenwriter,¹⁷ watched a lot of movies for inspiration and showed Wolfhard *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* when he was two! Wolfhard continued to dip his toes, both with his brother and father, and considers *The Goonies* one of his favorite movies. In fact, it's the fact that he is "obsessed with retro eighties movies" that made his agent

16 Jones had previously worked for the famous Stan Winston special effects workshop, where he helped create monsters for movies such as *Predator 2*, *Jurassic Park*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and the fourth and fifth *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels.

17 Something that, utterly adorably, his son is now hoping to help happen through his own success!

first suggest the casting as they felt—quite rightly, as we can all now agree—that the part was perfect for him.

He auditioned and was then invited to have a Skype call with the Duffer Brothers, during which they apparently discussed nothing else but what movies they all liked.

Wolfhard's enthusiasm and knowledge clearly shone through, as they invited him over to LA to perform another audition. Then, a month later, one more. Finally, after a further month of waiting he got the call from Matt Duffer telling him the part was his. Wolfhard is convinced a big part of why he was cast is because "I'm basically [the Duffer Brothers] as a kid."¹⁸

18 As said to Jen Chaney for *Vulture*.

APPENDIX 2

EVEN STRANGER SOUNDS

So, you've worn out Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein's soundtrack¹⁹ but need some more aural goodness to keep you fed? I'm happy to help. A mixture of vintage tunes and modern, electronic soundtracks, I am happy to give your iTunes account a thrashing.

Tron: Legacy (Daft Punk)

The French, helmet-wearing Daft Punk can be a trifle hit-and-miss in my opinion, with a number of their tracks starting wonderfully then going on precisely three times longer than you want them to. Their 2013 album *Random Access Memories* (mentioned earlier when we were discussing Giorgio Moroder) is a worthy exception, but their soundtrack to 2010's *Tron* sequel is simply a revelation. Bristling with epic, soaring melodies, a warm blend between the orchestral and the electronic, it contains huge worlds of expression and, like all the best movie soundtracks, delivers an experience that stands entirely on its own.

Maniac (Rob)

Franck Khalfoun's remake of the eighties slasher movie shows its roots in its soundtrack, composed and performed by Robin Coudert, a French musician who works under the professional name Rob. A swirling neon of synths combine with pulsing rhythms and delicate, beautiful melodies. Like the work of Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein, it manages to be both eerie and

19 No, obviously you can't wear out a soundtrack, especially not an MP3; believe me, I've tried, particularly with a number of the entries on this list.

yet surprisingly warm; it's music for a city at night, a city that has bad things in it.

***Lost Themes* (John Carpenter)**

Having given Carpenter more than enough space, I considered leaving him off this list; then, listening to his 2015 studio album, *Lost Themes*, decided I simply had to give it another push.

It's Carpenter's first album of original compositions but that simply frees him up from the narrative of a movie score. Each of the nine tracks here (fifteen if you get the expanded version, which includes extra remixes) pulses with energy, showing that Carpenter hasn't lost an ounce of power over the years.

***Phantasm* (Fred Myrow & Malcolm Seagrave)**

The soundtrack to 1979's *Phantasm* sees two classically trained composers put their prog rock and synth hats on for a trippy, eerie selection of music that combines organ, piano, and conventional rock sounds with electronica to deliver something unearthly and impossible to forget, much like the movie itself.

***The Entity* (Charles Bernstein)**

Charles Bernstein's career as a composer is long and illustrious, and he'll always have a place in a horror fan's heart as the man who gave us the sigh and piano theme for the original *Nightmare on Elm Street*. As wonderful as that soundtrack is, *The Entity* is its equal. We open with a piano in its death throes before suddenly the looping combination of

strings, piano, and synths bring us into the dreamy world of the 1982 movie, the tale of a woman tormented by a ghost.

***The Beyond* (Fabio Frizzi)**

I could put any of Fabio Frizzi's scores on this list—they're all magnificent, but I'll settle for this one, the score to Lucio Fulci's bizarre Lovecraftian zombie picture from 1981. A combination of piano, synth, violins, and the funkier bass in horror, he makes you want to tap your feet even while you're watching plumbers having their eyes gouged out. Look, we're talking Lucio Fulci here, that's just the sort of movies he made.

NOTES

APPENDIX 3

EIGHTIES MOVIE PLAYLIST

This book, like the show itself, is intentionally packed full of references to movies you should watch. But, as with the previous section on music, I can't resist another list. Books like this need lots of lists. Some of these movies have direct, thematic links to the show; others are just movies whose tone fit well with the world of *Stranger Things* and therefore . . . Well, I hesitate to say they're films I think you'll like because, look, I'm a film obsessive; I own thousands of movies,²⁰ movies are my thing, and I have learned that there's no such thing as a surefire hit. I have sat down to force-feed my cinematic babies to friends and family time and again and time and again; I've been told my taste stinks just as often as I've had the joy of adding new converts to a beloved movie. This is just how taste works. You don't all have it.²¹

20 Around four thousand, actually. Which, now I think about it, isn't actually normal, is it?

21 Though if any of you watch *The 'Burbs* and dare to dislike it, you're dead to me.

WATCHERS (1988)

Director: Jon Hess

Two specimens escape from a secret research laboratory—one is friendly and heroic, the other terrible and made out of special effects and sharp teeth. Sound familiar? If this isn't valuable homework for a *Stranger Things* fan then I don't know what is. In the case of *Watchers*—based on a novel by Dean Koontz²²—the friendly escapee isn't a young girl but a golden retriever called Einstein. As a bonus, the movie also contains Michael Ironside, an always reliable screen psycho who enlivened many a low-budget movie in the eighties and nineties (as well as his mind-blowing appearance in David Cronenberg's *Scanners*).

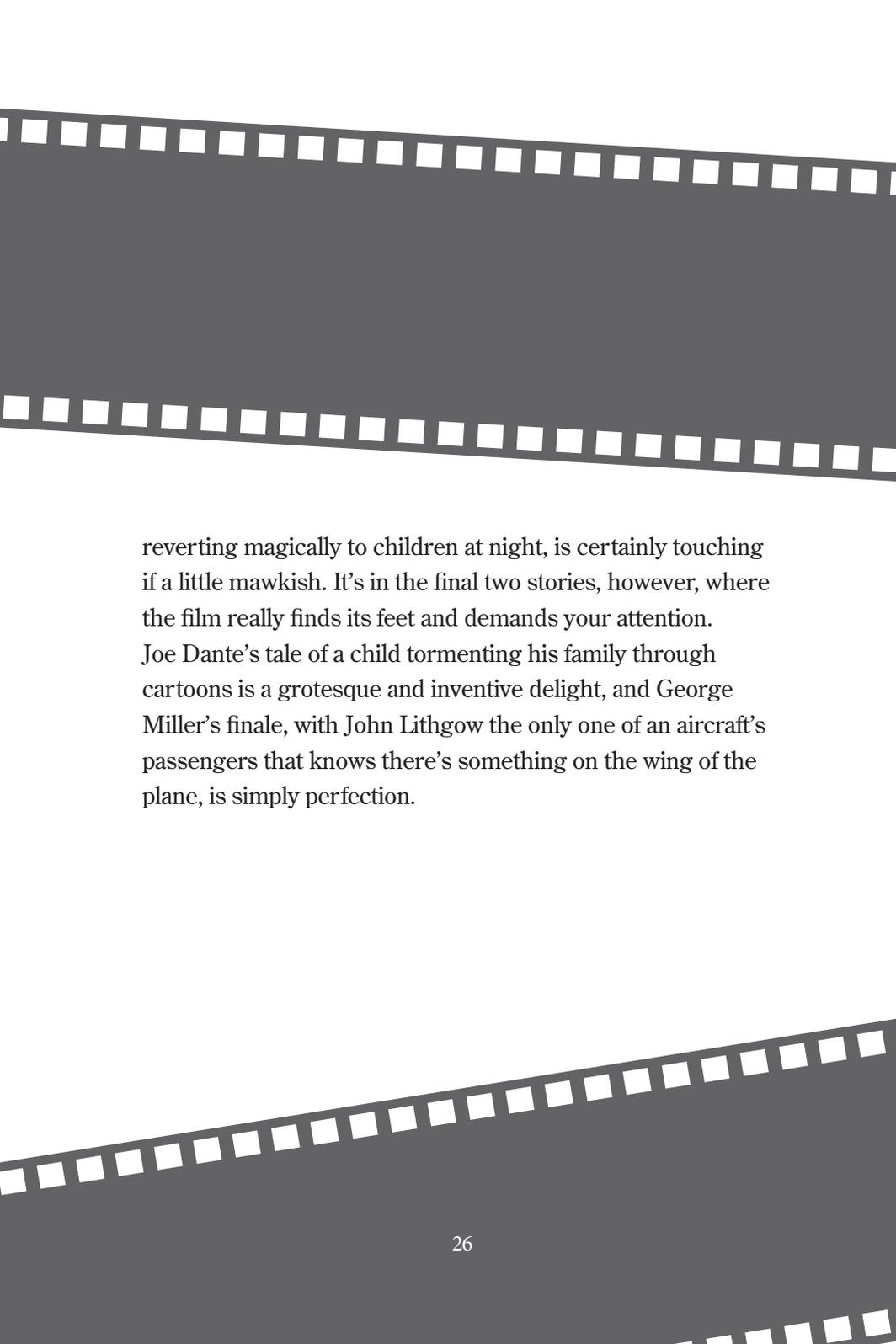
22 Exceedingly prolific author of more than a hundred suspense, horror, and sci-fi novels including the Odd Thomas series, concerning a short-order cook who sees dead people. All the time.

TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE (1983)

Directors: John Landis, Steven Spielberg,
Joe Dante, George Miller

As you will have gathered by now, *The Twilight Zone* was an anthology series created by Rod Serling.²³ It ran in the US between 1959 and 1964.²⁴ This movie, though flawed and marred with a horrific accident during production,²⁵ features four major directors offering a story each, all bar the first being direct reworkings of original episodes. Landis's opening tale is uncomfortable to watch given the accident (see previous footnote). Steven Spielberg's tale of pensioners in an old people's home,

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- 23 A show that offered a different, completely unrelated story and cast each week. A popular format in its time—see also *The Outer Limits*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, or, in the UK, Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected*—but one that has passed out of favor in recent years. Nowadays the term is more usually applied to shows like *American Horror Story*, where each season is a new story, but not each episode. One notable exception would be Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror*, a clear stepchild of *The Twilight Zone*.
- 24 With a couple of revivals, one in 1985 that ran for three seasons and another in 2002 that was canceled after one season.
- 25 The opening story, a parable on racism, presents William Connor, played by veteran character actor Vic Morrow, flung into conflicts of the past to learn what it feels like to be oppressed for his religious beliefs or ethnicity. In the original script, the character is finally redeemed after rescuing two Vietnamese children from an assault on their village by American soldiers. The story had to be reedited after a helicopter—the pilot blinded by pyrotechnic special effects—crashed, killing both Morrow and the two child actors. While a long-running court case cleared the filmmakers of blame in their deaths, it's inarguable that knowing their fate casts a pall over the whole thing.



reverting magically to children at night, is certainly touching if a little mawkish. It's in the final two stories, however, where the film really finds its feet and demands your attention. Joe Dante's tale of a child tormenting his family through cartoons is a grotesque and inventive delight, and George Miller's finale, with John Lithgow the only one of an aircraft's passengers that knows there's something on the wing of the plane, is simply perfection.

SILVER BULLET (1985)

Director: Dan Attias (initially Don Coscarelli)

Another appearance from Corey Haim on our list, this time as a wheelchair-bound kid who becomes embroiled in a battle against a werewolf who is picking off residents in a New England town. Adapted by Stephen King from his own novella, the film has had its detractors over the years, but personally I think it's a charming, effective, and often heartwarming picture. Yes, I appreciate these are strange words to use when describing a movie about a man-wolf eating people, but King always was one for sentiment as well as scares.

Gary Busey, now famous for being Slightly Mad Gary Busey, is at his best as Haim's irresponsible, flawed, but ultimately heroic uncle and Everett McGill (who will, like Haim, appear again on this list) delivers his all, as usual.



PHANTASM (1979)

Director: Don Coscarelli

Yes, it was a year early to truly fit the title of this section but I don't care.

Young musician Jody brings up his kid brother, Mike, in a Cozy American Town that, like all Cozy American Towns in horror, is far from cosy at all. Now we have that piece of predictable plot out the way I'm willing to bet you won't second-guess anything else in this wondrously off-kilter movie from Don Coscarelli. It includes Space Dwarfs, evil, silver balls of death and a giant looming caretaker (played by the glorious Angus Scrimm) who is sometimes a woman.

For the most part it's an exercise in dreamlike horror, which, like the best nightmares, has little interest in logic or answering the questions its own story poses. It led to four more—equally bizarre—sequels, the final film having been released in 2016, a mere eighteen years after the one preceding it.

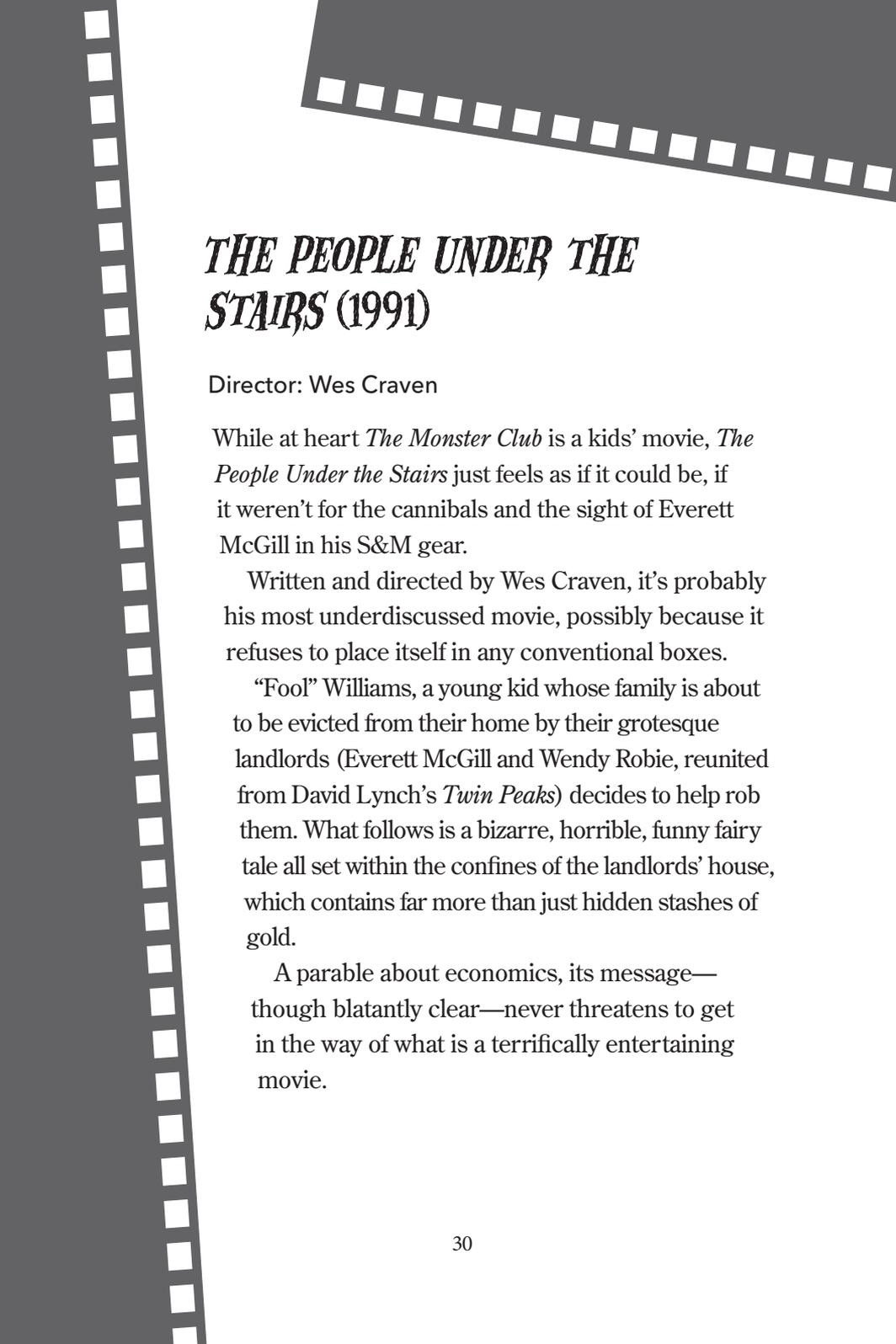
It was recently released in a very shiny restored version on Blu-ray thanks to J.J. Abrams, a devoted fan of the movie (he named a character in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* after it). He had his studio restore the film and its soundtrack, and it looks better now than I suspect it ever did.

THE MONSTER SQUAD (1987)

Director: Fred Dekker

Shane Black, cowriter and director of *Iron Man 3*, used to be known for his witty “buddy cop” movies such as the *Lethal Weapon* franchise and *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. In 1987, the same year that the first *Lethal Weapon* movie appeared, he also brought this curious slice of fun nostalgia.

The *Monster Squad* are a gang of kids obsessed with horror movies; little do they know they’re about to live one. Reviving the old Universal Monsters (as Universal is about to do again), the movie pits the kids against Dracula, the Mummy, the Wolf Man, Frankenstein’s monster, and the Gill-man. It’s a strange, slightly uneven movie but when it’s fun—as it so frequently is—it shines brightly enough to carry you over the odd speed bump.



THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS (1991)

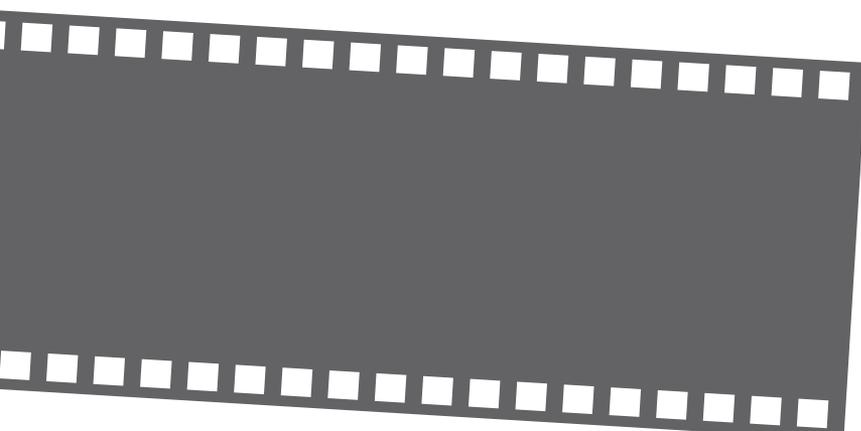
Director: Wes Craven

While at heart *The Monster Club* is a kids' movie, *The People Under the Stairs* just feels as if it could be, if it weren't for the cannibals and the sight of Everett McGill in his S&M gear.

Written and directed by Wes Craven, it's probably his most underdiscussed movie, possibly because it refuses to place itself in any conventional boxes.

"Fool" Williams, a young kid whose family is about to be evicted from their home by their grotesque landlords (Everett McGill and Wendy Robie, reunited from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*) decides to help rob them. What follows is a bizarre, horrible, funny fairy tale all set within the confines of the landlords' house, which contains far more than just hidden stashes of gold.

A parable about economics, its message—though blatantly clear—never threatens to get in the way of what is a terrifically entertaining movie.



THE LAST STARFIGHTER (1984)

Director: Nick Castle

The ultimate youth wish-fulfilment movie. Alex Rogan (Lance Guest) aces his scores on the Starfighter arcade game, only realizing when he becomes the game's highest-scoring player that he's been auditioning for a real interstellar war.

A fun chunk of eighties sci-fi nonsense, enlivened by its cast and characters. It feels like, with a little more money and a couple more drops of talent, it could have been a Spielberg movie, but it is still plenty of fun to watch.

DEAD AND BURIED (1981)

Director: Gary Sherman

From Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett²⁶ we have this strange, terribly eerie, and clever little movie about a small town where death isn't necessarily all it's cracked up to be. To discuss the plot too much would be to do it a disservice, but it has a touch of Stephen King to it and, while some of its twists and turns are signaled a mile off, it's all played out with such flair that it's hard to criticize.

²⁶ Or possibly not—O'Bannon once claimed the script was entirely Shusett's and that he had nothing to do with it.

THE 'BURBS (1989)

Director: Joe Dante

I feel like I haven't talked about Joe Dante anywhere near enough in this book. *Gremlins*, *Innerspace*, *Explorers* . . . he's a director whose work is littered all over the eighties (and beyond) and is never less than hugely entertaining.

The 'Burbs is a witty, dark comedy about the suspicion that breeds in suburbia. Tom Hanks leads a kooky selection of neighbors in an investigation of new arrivals, the Klopeks, whom he believes are killing people. Naturally, their wives—including Carrie Fisher—are far more sensible.

A film whose theme is perhaps even more relevant now than it was then, it stands tall as an inventive and subversive movie with real teeth buried underneath its genuinely amusing, sometimes slapstick surface.

NOTES

APPENDIX 4

QUIZ ANSWERS

CHAPTER ONE

1. He throws a seven but needed thirteen. So the Demogorgon gets him. Obviously.
2. Sausage and pepperoni. Which is sausage and sausage frankly, but whatever.
3. The couch, that snuggly consumer of all lost things. I'm surprised they didn't look for Will there.
4. Midnight, Frogface, Toothless. Lucas considers Troy and his friend James "assholes," and who are we to disagree?
5. His garden gnomes; like the rest of you I'm now terrified that, what with Will's disappearance, Hopper never got round to tracking them down. Hopefully this vitally important plot point will be resolved in Season Two.
6. Coffee and contemplation. I agree.
7. An owl attacking Eleanor Gillespie's head because it thought her hair was a nest.
8. Kangaroos.
9. Miss Ratliffe.
10. Starch and cellulose. Though they are by no means the only polymers that occur naturally; there are many. Nancy could also have said rubber (which is often produced synthetically but is a natural substance), protein, chitin... But she didn't. So no bonus points if you tried to show off. This is a quiz about the show, not a science test. I'm not Miss Ratliffe.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Penthurst, a "nuthouse" that, according to Lucas, is in Curly County. Perhaps he should be sent there because there's no such county in Indiana. But then, there's no Hawkins either, so maybe they're all mentally ill.
2. Michael Myers, who, of course, came home in the Halloween movies.
3. Twenty-two inches (which is, like, ten times bigger than Dustin's).
4. Their reclining chair. You get a bonus point if you correctly stated the brand: La-Z-Boy.
5. Camels.
6. Yoda it is.
7. Rory (though probably spelled Roary, as he's named after the speaker in his mouth that allows him to do just that).
8. The answer to number eight is ... eight. I know, I'm such a tease.
9. 1923.
10. Summer of 1961.

CHAPTER THREE

1. AV Club.

2. Operation: Mirkwood. No, the colon isn't said out loud, obviously, but codenames always look better with a colon.

3. The war in Vietnam. (Yes, you were allowed to just say 'Nam.)

4. Space Lasers. Not such an outlandish idea given that President Ronald Reagan had just announced the Strategic Defense Initiative, nicknamed the "Star Wars" program. The SDI was a combined ground and orbital system designed to protect the US from nuclear missiles. It would have used laser weaponry to achieve this. Ultimately, it was decided that the initiative was too ambitious to be successfully realized.

5. Tom Cruise.

6. Nicole, and I suppose we shouldn't blame her, even though actress Glennellen Anderson delivers all the smug during the scene where Steve breaks Jonathan's camera.

7. Blow me.

8. Casserole.

9. The Tigers. The middle-school team is called the Cubs.

10. He calls him a mouth-breather. Which is a common enough insult but a weird one. Presumably our IQ drops whenever we're suffering from a cold or get really out of breath.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Gary, but he would have got bored cutting up a rubber facsimile so he was sent home.
2. Shepard.
3. "The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down toward the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz's life was running swiftly, too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time." A clue is hidden in the quote; the novella is *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, the basis for the movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979).
4. Sandie Sloane.
5. Hideaway.
6. "It's a fancy word for" toothache.
7. The Satler Company, run by Frank Satler. He's a decent guy.
8. Patty.
9. He forgot his hat. He's all about the lies in this episode, isn't he?
10. Cujo. And he wasn't always, he used to be positively lovely until that pesky bat bit him.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. A toy lion, and she's not the only one: Will also has one, as did Hopper's daughter. A clue for season two? Or, and without wanting to be Mr. Boring here, I think this is more likely: Did the prop department just hope we wouldn't notice? Bless them, they don't know sci-fi fans, we notice EVERYTHING, even things that aren't actually there!
2. Jennifer Hayes. She's played by Kaylee Glover, an eleven-year-old from Gastonia, North Carolina. Glover has worked as a model, and claimed she had no interest in being an actress but that her two days on set has changed her mind and she wants to pursue it in the future. When she auditioned she was told that crying on demand was a requirement for the role; apparently she imagined it was her mother in the casket. She cites her main inspiration as actress Dove Cameron.
3. Green, because he couldn't find the right crayon.
4. His ceiling light. Bet he wishes he'd checked there before ruining his sofa.
5. *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan. It was a TV series cowritten (and presented) by Sagan, the book being published at the same time to complement it.
6. Hugh Everett, an American physicist and the first to propose such a theory. He was derided for it at the time and ended his physics career as a result. He's the father of Mark Oliver Everett (often known as "E"), frontman of the band Eels.
7. Dale and Henry.
8. *All the Right Moves*, the 1983 football drama featuring "lover boy from *Risky Business*" and Lea Thompson, most famous for her waterfowl-loving ways in *Howard the Duck* (and *Back to the Future* if you're going to be dull about it).
9. None whatsoever. Nancy, however, hits a can on her very first shot.
10. Nine, and yes, Lonnie's King of the Assholes.

CHAPTER SIX

1. The Indiana AV Club.
2. The boys couldn't agree on which direction to take, so the trolls took them out one by one. I'm assuming this was a D & D campaign, either that or it's been a tad Frisky in Hawkins, Indiana, even before Dr. Brenner started playing with alternate dimensions.
3. Robert. The store, Bradley's Big Buy, is a real one (though it now seems to be part of the absurdly named Piggly Wiggly chain); it's in Palmetto, Georgia.
4. Four. I did the naughty-clue-in-the-question-number thing. Sorry.
5. Bonsai.
6. Fourth grade.
7. During the third trimester.
8. Thirty percent. Bargain.
9. The Hawk.
10. Byers is a perv.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. The corner of Elm and Cherry.
2. Russian.
3. \$1.20
4. 3DS 4GT2
5. Melted plastic and microwaved bubblegum.
6. Fun. Dustin is not great at spur-of-the-moment lies.
7. Bobbing for apples.
8. 1500 lbs.
9. He rests an uncooked egg on the surface to see if it floats.
10. A fire extinguisher.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. A Smiley. The Smiley as we know it—it is, after all a very simple image and similar designs are everywhere—was designed in 1963 by Harvey Ross Ball, a graphic artist who was paid forty-five dollars to come up with it. It took him ten minutes and it was originally used as a method of lifting the morale of employees at the State Mutual Assurance Company, Massachusetts.
2. *Anne of Green Gables*, written in 1908 by Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery (you didn't need to know the last bit; I'm just sneaking facts onto what would otherwise be a rather dry page).
3. I know, I know, that was horrendously easy but it's hard to find difficult questions for this episode. By question eight I'll be asking you what Eleven likes to eat, just see if I don't. The answer, as if you needed to check, is chocolate pudding.
4. Three or four minutes past ten.
5. "No more."
6. "Where am I?" Because he knows it's traditional.
7. A new mix-tape. You just know that going out with Jonathan would involve a LOT of mix-tapes.
8. See? I warned you. Now go away, I feel terrible.
9. Thessalydra. He rolled a fourteen so I guess it won't try to kill him next season. Probably.
10. They're runny. So runny. I said there was no prize for this homework but, you know what? You got to see a grown man reduced to asking questions about potatoes. And his career.