

CALENDAR

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JOEL WARREN Crackle.com

SUSPENDING DISBELIEF: Zoe Bell, top, stars in "Ed Brubaker's Angel of Death," which will premiere today on Sony's Crackle.com

A drawing power

Hollywood gets deeper into comic books and their writers' screen-ready concepts.

GEOFF BOUCHER REPORTING FROM SAN FRANCISCO >>> These are strange, heady days for comic-book creators who find themselves signing autographs in the same room as Hollywood celebrities — and sometimes the movie stars are the ones asking for the signatures. ¶ "This is pretty awesome," said Ed Brubaker, the Seattle-based comic-book writer, as he wandered through a backstage room where the cast of the film "Watchmen" was preparing for a promotional appearance at WonderCon, the huge Bay Area comic-book convention. ¶ Dave Gibbons, the artist of the original "Watchmen" comics, was at a center table signing posters and enjoying the attention of cast members, among them Jackie Earle Haley, an Oscar-nominated actor who gave the bespectacled British illustrator a reverent bow. "I am shocked again and again," Gibbons said of the mad swirl. "I never expected this." ¶ Brubaker has high hopes of joining Gibbons, Mike Mignola ("Hellboy") and Frank Miller ("300" and "Sin City") in the vanguard of printed-page auteurs who are all the rage in Hollywood. Sam Raimi, best known as director of the massive "Spider-Man" franchise, and Tom Cruise are moving forward with a feature-film adaptation of the writer's "Sleeper" series (it's a dark [See 'Angel,' Page E8])



AL SEIB Los Angeles Times

ACTION HERO: Bell, who did stunts for "Kill Bill" and "Xena," acted in "Grindhouse."

Stuntwomen don't cry

Zoë Bell, death-defying stand-in for the stars, takes a scary leap into acting for Crackle.com's 'Angel of Death.'

GREG BRAXTON

As a stuntwoman, Zoë Bell knows about being photographed from awkward or distant angles that obscure her face. But with the Crackle.com online series "Angel of Death," she had to get used to her close-up.

Playing Eve, the ruthless assassin at the center of the series, required the New Zealand native to display both action and acting chops — and at times, she found it easier to brawl than bawl.

"I had to get over that fear of showing emotion," said Bell. "Doing the butt-kicking stuff was no problem. But crying? That's scary!"

The 30-year-old Bell, who has doubled for Lucy Lawless ("Xena: Warrior Princess"), Uma Thurman

("Kill Bill: Vol. 1" and "Kill Bill: Vol. 2") and Sharon Stone ("Catwoman"), is the star of "Angel of Death," launching today on the Crackle video network, which is backed by Sony Pictures Entertainment. With "Angel of Death," Bell joins a small club of actresses who are credible in action roles. Though others like Thurman, Jennifer Garner, Michelle Yeoh and Milla Jovovich have all played action heroines, none of them performed all of her own stunts. But in "Angel of Death," Bell does everything herself.

"It's a little bit daunting," she said, chomping down on French fries at a Hollywood diner. "I'm not used to carrying all the weight. I was very comfortable being where I was in the industry. As far as acting, I really had no clue."

But thanks to Quentin Tarantino, she felt ready to take the plunge. The writer-director cast her in "Death Proof," his half of "Grindhouse." In the film, Bell plays "Zoë Bell," a fun-loving stuntwoman terrorized by a psychotic stuntman (Kurt Russell).

In much of "Death [See Bell, Page E8]

HOLLYWOOD BRIEF

Oscars are over — what a relief

Consultants, publicists and filmmakers come down after a stressful campaign period.

RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ

It was only after the champagne had been drunk, the diamonds returned and the statuettes flown home that the invitations went out.

The event? The first Awards Consultants, Publicists & Studio Execs Wrap-Up Party, a 200-person gala for the legion of BlackBerrying worker bees who've been toiling 24/7 for the last several months to make sure that Kate, Penélope and the "Slumdog Millionaire" team went home with gold in their hands.

It's an opportunity for the "stars behind the stars to get together and chitchat," said Hollywood Film Festival founder Carlos de Abreu, whose festival is sponsoring the upcoming fete.

Drinks (and lots of them) will probably be in order. It was a particularly stressful and intense awards season, given the proliferation of the online press devoted to Oscar minutiae and an increased focus on the backstage campaign machinations in the consumer media. And the economy had its toll too, because there was added pressure to make up in old-fashioned sweat equity — human toil — what the studios were reluctant to spend on ads and media buys.

The week after the Oscars [See Brief, Page E4]

BOOK REVIEW

The family as sparring partners

HELLER McALPIN

The Believers

A Novel
Zoë Heller
Harper: 338 pp., \$25.99

It's not a laurel everyone strives for, but Zoë Heller has become a master of misanthropy. And on the stage of moral comedy, there are worse role models than Molière's 1666 masterpiece, "Le Misanthrope."

Like her two previous novels, "Everything You Know" (2000) and "What Was She Thinking? (Notes on a Scandal)" (2003), "The Believers" features an unpleasant, outrageous, sharply funny character who derides and deprecates everyone she comes into contact with. This snarling misanthrope isn't just difficult, she behaves monstrously. Yet Heller deftly turns her nasty, [See 'Believers,' Page E6]

'Echelon' echoes a superior film

It's like Shia LaBeouf's entertaining "Eagle Eye" but with a tired "technology-is-the-enemy" plot line and far less style. Other than that... PAGE 2

Buy into 'Rent'; it still works

Jonathan Larson's rock musical is a flawed but fab look back at a moment in time: pre-9/11 N.Y. PAGE 3

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CHANNEL ISLAND

Call it Octo-Mom's webchild

SCOTT COLLINS

Journalists like to talk about "owning" a story. But the people at RadarOnline.com have practically stamped their corporate logo on the forehead of Nadya Suleman, the "Octo-Mom" from Whittier whose shockingly prolific reproductive habits have made her a media sensation.



They really, really love to talk about Octo-Mom over at

RadarOnline. In fact, since the news of her octuplets first broke in late January, the website has published 56 items about her, an average rate of nearly two per day. Five stories landed on Friday alone, including an exclusive video interview with Suleman, who revealed that she gained 130 pounds during her pregnancy: "I've never in my life been so big and swollen," she said.

Suleman's mother, Angela, who appeared alongside her daughter in Friday's video scoop, was, according to a family attorney, paid \$40,000 to appear in a much-discussed RadarOnline video earlier this

month in which she assailed her daughter's child-bearing as "unconscionable." So you might say that RadarOnline, which is based in New York, is bringing its own version of fiscal stimulus to a select group of California residents.

Most Americans had likely never heard of RadarOnline before now. But the site almost instantly made a name for itself with the Octo-Mom story, generating huge pickup on NBC's "Today," CNN and elsewhere (traditional print publications, including this newspaper, have also delivered scoops that the TV networks [See Channel, Page E7])



MOM OF THE MOMENT: RadarOnline.com has done 56 stories on Nadya Suleman since her story broke in January.