**TRANSCRIPT FOR GERRYSTORM PODCAST EPISODE 6:**

**OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN**

Sarah from cautionspoilers.com: Welcome to the Gerard Butler podcast, Gerrystorm, in which I take a deep dive or sometimes a shallow belly flop into the filmography of our Greatest Living Scotsman. I'm Sarah from Cautionspoilers.com and I literally had to fly in from outer space.

This time on the Gerrystorm podcast, we're checking out action movie, Olympus Has Fallen, Mike Banning's first cinematic outing as the ex-Secret Service agent who has to constantly rescue the American President.

Olympus Has Fallen came out in 2013 when I had a one-year old baby, and the idea of being held incommunicado without my family in a bomb-proof bunker would have sounded like a dream come true — though said baby meant I couldn't watch it until a couple of years ago. It's my second best Has Fallen film and also my second worst, there being only three so far.

Here to talk through its absurd lows and heights of greatness is film writer and ex-actor Ben Peyton who knows a thing or two about law enforcement, having played PC Ben Hayward on The Bill from 2000 to 2002. So, Ben would you like to introduce yourself and more importantly plug your film writing and where people can read it.

Ben Peyton: [0:01:06] Hello, Sarah. I'm Ben Peyton. Thank you for having me, first off. Yes I'm an ex-actor. I was in The Bill, Band of Brothers, Bridget Jones's Diary, and a terrible film called Nine Lives that I don't ever talk about. Now, I'm a full-time dad to my two children and a husband. I write for my own website, For Your Films Only, as well as being Time And Leisure magazine's resident film critic. I also review films for The Movie Waffler and Filmhounds magazine.

Sarah: [0:01:33] Excellent. Right. I'm going to start with a synopsis. So, Mike Banning — Gerard Butler — has been working a desk job in the United States Treasury for 18 months since he failed to save the First Lady when the Presidential car was hanging precariously off a bridge during a snowstorm. During a meeting between President Asher and South Korea's Prime Minister Lee, the White House is overrun by North Korean terrorists. Their leader Kang Yeonsak, played by Rick Yune — holding the President, various officials and the South Korean PM in the bunker under the White House — demands the withdrawal of the American seventh fleet and US Ground troops from the DMZ, the land that separates North and South Korea.

Lee is shot dead on camera, while Speaker Trumbull, Morgan Freeman, is now acting President, holed up in the Pentagon with Secret Service boss Lynn Jacobs, played by Angela Bassett, and the army Chief of Staff. Mike sees what's happening from his office window and heads into the White House to save the President, the President's son, the world, and probably us from ourselves, working methodically through the destroyed building. He eventually rescues President Asher, kills Kang, and stops the nuclear annihilation of most of the United States.

Ben: [0:02:33] Isn’t that enough just to make you want to watch that film right now?

Sarah: [0:02:36] It really is. So, first of all, when did you first see it? And also, what do you think?

Ben: [0:02:40] Well, similar to yourself. When it came out, my eldest was three and my youngest was one. So, yes, cinema trips were just a complete no go. So, it passed me by. I must have seen it first probably two or three years later when it was on Sky maybe, or one of the… Channel Five, I think, show it three times a day don’t they. So, about 2016, I'd say, it was my first viewing of it.

Sarah: [0:03:03] Is it a particular favourite or just something that you like to check out once you see it's on again?

Ben: [0:03:07] If it's on, I'll put it on. It doesn't have to be from the beginning. I can just dip in and out and have an actual blast. But it's probably my favourite Gerard Butler film. I love everything about it. I mean I love big dumb action films. And I feel I shouldn't really have to call them dumb because that's a bit of an insult. It's a film. It's there for entertainment and they don't get much more entertaining than this one for me, personally.

Sarah: [0:03:32] I did think that the actual taking over the White House is really, really well done. It's absolutely relentless. It's just wave after wave. So, you start off with that huge plane and it looks like some kind of, I don’t know, a cargo plane — it’s that kind of size — coming in and just firing on everything. It's causing mayhem around the streets. And then you have these waves and waves of terrorists and people have been disguised as tourists or whatever. First of all, what really surprised me is that although I've seen pictures of the White House so often just seeing it from the ground. I know it's not the real White House ,but seeing it from the ground and how close it is to the rest of the city; it just looks very vulnerable.

Ben: [0:04:10] And it's tiny as well, apparently. I’ve not been myself. I know I've had friends who visited, every one of them, they've always come back and said you would be amazed at how small it was. That sequence you're talking about watching this yesterday for research purposes, I timed it from the very moment the massive plane starts firing its first bullet. And it fires a lot of bullets. From that very moment to the agent crawling along the floor, he's the last one apart from Mike Banning. He's the last one, saying into his microphone, Olympus has fallen. It's 15 minutes.

I've got goose bumps thinking about it because, like you said, the perfect word for it is relentless. And it is absolutely relentless. It rarely stops. And I think some of the effects are slightly dodgy. Watching it back, some of the bullet holes look a bit strange, it looks a bit naff. But I can see beyond that, that's not a problem. Fifteen minutes of intense action, it's a brilliant achievement.

Sarah: [0:05:12] And also, I think shows … The Has Fallen films are varying levels of jingoistic. I mean, London Has Fallen is the worst in that respect. And Angel Has Fallen is the most thoughtful. But actually what it does show, that first section is that America's hubris at thinking that it's not vulnerable, invulnerable to attack, is really shown up. That despite all those agents — just bodies everywhere — that they are much more vulnerable than they thought they were.

It's interesting what you said about the effects because I was reading about this, and apparently, it wasn't filmed in Washington. The scenes with the White House in the background were filmed in a field and then they put the White House behind it. So, obviously, I don't know what building they used for the actual shots of people walking into it. You can do interiors anywhere. But until I read that, I mean, when I thought about it, of course they wouldn't be able to blow up the White House. But I was really amazed that it hadn't been filmed anywhere near Washington.

Ben: I've not really thought about that. Yeah. I mean it makes sense. Obviously, they can't use The White House, but I'd like to hear more about that. I hope there's a making of documentary or feature somewhere because that would be fascinating to watch.

Sarah: [0:06:14] yeah. I wish they did more making ofs. One of the things I had in my notes was “Head stabbing: the man, the myth, the legend”. Because Gerard Butler has become a bit of a joke that he stabs people in the head and threatens to stab people in the head. And I think it comes from this film. But what I actually did, I mean, you timed the initial wave of terrorists and the taking down of the White House. I timed at what point he stabbed people in the head. And actually, the film, I think it's just under two hours. At 1:08 in, he stabs one of the Korean henchmen in the head to get information out of his partner. And then presumably stabs the other one in the head too although that's off camera.

And then at 1:31, he threatens to stab Kang in the head over the surveillance cameras. And at the end of the film, he does stab him in the head when he has that big fight. I thought the fight was quite funny because you've got President Asher tied up on the floor going, “Come on, Mike”. He sounds like we used to in the playground when everyone's standing around two kids fighting, going “scrap, scrap!”.

Ben: [0:07:09] You’re missing one out.

Sarah: [0:07:10] Is there?

Ben: [0:07:11] Yeah. The baddie, the other baddie. Dylan, what's his name? Dylan McDermott as Forbes. Yeah. He gets him in the chest to start with. That's how he defeats him. And then when Forbes, says, “I've killed him. He's dead. Banning’s gone”. To finish him off, bang in the head.

Sarah: [0:07:27] You see I wasn't sure whether he just smashed his head on the floor or something like that.

Ben: [0:07:30] Oh, you know what, you could be right.

Sarah: [0:07:31] We'll have to go and re-watch it.

Ben: [0:07:33] I thought :”he's probably still got the knife in his hand”. And the way his arm-- Are we analyzing this too much?

Sarah: [0:07:37] Never too much with Mike Banning. But it is this thing now that's become his trademark, hasn't it?

Ben: [0:07:44] It works for him. If it works, why not?

Sarah: [0:07:45] Exactly. I'm sure there's other places it's easier to stab someone to death. But obviously, it's one of those films that is supremely violent but clearly you couldn't not do that.

Ben: [0:0:55] It's got to be done. It's that type of film. And he does it so damn well.

Sarah: [0:07:48] He really does. And it's almost John Wick like. Again, he's as methodical and as relentless as the North Korean terrorists are. He’s working his way through. I thought it was interesting, I think it's when he gets to the Oval Office and he manages to make contact with the Pentagon. I think it's when he's trying to find out about the Cerberus codes which are the codes which three people hold. And they're meant to be a failsafe against nuclear weapons that have been fired by mistake and that you can blow them up in the air before they reach their target.

But what Kang wants to do is use the codes to blow up American warheads in their silos so America will be left a wasteland. I think it's at this point that Banning is asking about them and the, I don’t know if it’s the chief of staff at the Pentagon, is like, oh no, no, that's classified. And he’s like, look-

Ben: [0:08:43] It’s General Clegg. He is General Clegg, Robert Forster.

Sarah: [0:08:47] He was good. He was that typical bellicose American general still thinking that he's playing by the old rules when everything has changed. But I did like that when Banning is like look, I'm here, you have to tell me who I'm supposed to be saving people from and what I'm supposed to be stopping.

Ben: [0:09:00] It reminded me, of all things, Coca Cola, the secret ingredient in Coca Cola. Isn't it a rumour that only two people know of it and they're never allowed on the same plane together in case they both die? And there's this thing where there's three people know the codes and yet somehow miraculously, they all end up together.

Sarah: [0:09:19] That was exactly my point, is that you do not give three codes to people who are quite often going to be in the same room together! You give one to some random out in Kansas or something don’t you!

Ben: [0:09:29] Yeah. The Minister of Transport or something.

Sarah: [0:09:31] I did like when we saw various officials and Secretaries of State being, obviously, I don't like seeing them beaten up in the bunker, but I thought, Ruth, who I think is, is it Ruth McMillan played by Melissa Leo, who is the defence secretary?

Ben: [0:09:46] Yeah. She’s ballsy.

Sarah: [0:09:47] It was really nice to see, you know, she's a middle-aged woman. She's not glamorous. And she is just, I don't like the term badass because it always sounds a bit patronising, but she really is tough as old boots. And even at the end where they're dragging her around and she is like swearing allegiance to the flag and everything, and she makes a lot of the other men they're just look nothing in comparison. They should have made her President.

Ben: [0:10:10] Absolutely. She really was nice and feisty. I was disappointed again watching it back that she does, it’s not thast she gives in but Aaron Eckhart as the President orders her to give her code and she obviously wants to obey the President. And she does so. But I remember feeling a twang of disappointment that she did because I wanted her to “No, you're not going to get it from me”. She says at one point “you're going to have to kill me”. Not that I wanted to see her get killed but you've got to expect as well, like when she's pledging allegiance to the flag, with a film like this, you've got to expect those gung-ho cliche moments. You see beyond them. Because they are a little bit naff, but it comes with the territory, I think.

Sarah: [0:10:50] And sometimes it does look as if they thought, okay, we're this many minutes in we'd better put another one in just to appeal to a certain core of their audience. But yeah, I mean with the Has Fallen films, I think they're not great with their women characters. They get killed off. Mike Banning's wife has very little to do in any of the films. Maybe that'll change in later ones. But actually, although I don't like seeing great women characters killed off, it probably would have been more true if Ruth had just kept it secret till the end and they had killed her.

Because when the others would have been giving up their secrets, she would have taken it to the grave with her. But of course, then, we wouldn't have had that countdown at the end where Banning is trying to stop — when the three codes have been put in and he's got a few seconds left. That really made me laugh when he's been given the kill codes and he's typing them all in. First of all, I am so non-techie, I always think in disaster films, if I was faced with all this technology and all these keyboards, and I had 10 seconds to save the world, I would inevitably just completely freak out and not be able to do it.

But they're giving him the code and he's tapping it in. And then I think the last thing is hashtag and he can't find it. And there’s Lynn Jacobs, “Shift three, Shift three”!

Ben: [0:12:01] Yeah, absolutely. Was he using a Mac book or Windows?

Sarah: [0:12:07] Exactly. Shift three would do nothing on my computer. I have to copy and paste hashtag. But then you don't want me in a disaster movie, anyway. I would inevitably be the person doing something stupid that got someone killed.

Ben: [0:12:18] In my head, I am quite clearly Mike Banning. However, in reality, I would just be some absolutely useless guy that's just looking around , “ugh? what I do, what's happening”. Yeah, I would last long at all.

Sarah: [0:12:30] But you'd be able to put on the persona of, was it Ben Hayward.

Ben: [0:12:34] Bill!

Sarah: [0:12:36] Bill Hayward. Bill Hayward from The Ben.

Ben: [0:12:39] That’s right.

Sarah: [0:12:40] And bring back that …a lot of it's just confidence. If you tell people you're a policeman, they'll probably do what you say.

Ben: [0:12:44] If you believe it, they believe it.

Sarah: [0:12:45] Yeah. But I have to say, I don't think, can anyone watch a disaster film without thinking a bit in their mind, “I'd be amazing. I'd save the world. I’d do some incredible feat of bravery which saves everyone.”

Ben: [0:12:56] Another thing that struck me watching this film is within the first five minutes, I think the main players have all been introduced so quickly and so well. I think it's only 10 minutes until the car crash happens and the President's wife dies. But instantly, you know all about, you know what kind of President he is. You know what kind of man Mike Banning is. You’d like the First Lady; the little boy as well, kids can be so annoying in films.

Sarah: [0:13:24] They can, yeah.

Ben: [0:13:25] But this one isn’t and I think he's excellent. I think he is very, very good. He's not in it a great deal which is probably why. But what he does when he is in it, what he's given to do, he does very well, I think. That really struck me, the opening how quickly and well established characters instantly are.

Sarah: [0:13:39] Also, I think, in the opening scenes when the car is dangling off the edge of the bridge over that frozen river, and although once the car has fallen in with the First Lady in it, Banning looks shocked. When he's actually trying to get the President and her out, the last second, he apologises to the President because he clearly knows he can't get her out but he can get him out. And his allegiance is always to the President not to anybody else however much he wants to save them. So, as he's pulling President Asher out, I think he says sorry.

And again, it's that moment that “this is how you do it”. Other people who you like will die but you are there to protect the President. And I thought you're right, it just sets the scene really quickly. It's quite a shocking scene that, because we still don't, even after watching lots of films and TV series and things which try and do things differently, it’s still a shock when someone who you think might be a major character is killed off in the first few minutes. Especially Ashley Judd.

Ben: [0:14:37] That’s right. I'm just going to say I've forgotten it was her until I recognised, of course it's her.

Sarah: [0:14:44] So, I thought that went really well.

It came out in the same year as White House Down.

Ben: [0:14:48] Yeah, Channing Tatum and Jamie Foxx.

Sarah: [0:14:50] Yeah, which I've not seen now. I think White House Down was slightly better reviewed but it was a lot more expensive. It cost $150 million and made $205 million. Which I don't even know if that means it made its money back when you factor in marketing. Olympus Has Fallen cost $70 million and made $170 million. I have to say Gerard Butler is very good at appearing in films that actually aren't massively budgeted — apart from Geostorm — but that are quite modestly budgeted for what they are and therefore don't have to make as much money. I mean I think he's probably quite a profitable star.

Have you seen White House Down?

Ben: [0:15:20] Yeah. Again, it passed me by for reasons we mentioned earlier. And I watched that when it was on telly over here. Yeah, it's good. It's a solid action film. It really is. I prefer Olympus Has Fallen and that's probably just because I prefer Gerard Butler. Channing Tatum is very good. He can do the action hero role very well. Jamie Foxx as the President, yes he was good. The whole thing for me was just good. I've never had any inclination to watch it again. I know a lot of people prefer it to Olympus Has Fallen but they're obviously wrong.

Sarah: [0:15:50] I never get the appeal of Channing Tatum. There are a few stars, quite often they’re good actors. I've seen Channing Tatum in some great things. But I just cannot get the personal appeal at all. So, Timothee Chalamet is one. That's probably my age. But Channing Tatum is another. I just don't get that. Everyone goes on about…

Ben: [0:16:13] Is he in Logan Lucky?

Sarah: [0:16:14] Yes. And he was great in that and he looked completely different.

Ben: [0:16:17] I've not seen him in much at all, but I remember him in that. I mean I watched that because I’m a big Daniel Craig fan, but I remember thinking, yeah, he was good in that.

Sarah: [0:16:26] People rave about him but he's just someone who I just don't quite get the appeal. So, yeah. I mean, I'll probably watch White House Down if it popped up on TV.

Ben: [0:16:33] Are you're telling me you haven’t seen Magic Mike?

Sarah: [0:16:34] No, I haven't. No. Now, there's so many sequels. I just don't really know… I don't know … there's a whole kind of discourse around it I just keep away from.

Ben: [0:16:43] Too many films, Sarah.

Sarah: [0:16:44] I know, exactly. One of things I thought was interesting is the motivations in these films because you can quite often see, first in all the Has Fallen movies, and also in Geostorm, the villains have quite convoluted or odd motivations. And you know it's partly because the writers are trying not to tap into overtly racist tropes, but they still go with these tropes quite often anyway. So, you have Middle Eastern villains in London Has Fallen. So, now this is eight years later, films look different when you see them in different lights at different times.

What these films do is they reflect the years in which they were made. The world and the atmosphere changes slightly. But I do think the motivation with this was really kind of complicated because Kang, he's a North Korean nationalist so he wants a reunified Korea, but he hates South Korea. He hates the Americans because his mum was killed crossing the border. I think she trod on a US landmine. His father was killed by the North Korean regime. He wants America to pull out which presumably means that then South Korea is very vulnerable, and reunification is more likely. But that's the regime that killed his dad.

And also he wants America to suffer because, I mean, we don't hear much about North Korea because it's so closed off but we know that starvation, there have terrible famines, and things like that even before you get down to the individual lack of freedoms. He wants America to suffer in the way that North Korean families have. But it kind of over-eggs the pudding. There are so many bits to this. I prefer, even just a megalomaniac dictator or something where you know why they're doing it. One of the reasons I like Hunter Killer, Gerard Butler's submarine film, is that it just goes back to Russians versus Americans.

And if you're my age and you grew up through the Cold War, that's your kind of classic American blockbuster villainy. And I do prefer that, I think.

Ben: [0:18:32] I agree. Yeah. Sometimes, that's all you want. It's like going back to the old Bond films. You just want a bad guy to want to take over the world and that's it. Sometimes, it’s a lot easier to watch. You can just sit back then and go, “let it happen”. And with something like Olympus Has Fallen, “yeah, okay, so, and he just shot the President of South Korea because he wants to...” Yeah. You almost start forgetting some of the action because you're trying to keep up with what's going on, and it shouldn't happen like that, maybe. Yeah, it was quite complex. I hadn't really thought of it like that. But Rick Yune does it ever so well, doesn't he?

Sarah: [0:19:10] He is very good, I thought. Sometimes, you kind of look back, do you remember Austin Powers where the world is being held to ransom for like a million dollars or something. Happier times.

But actually, what you're saying about James Bond, at different times, Gerard Butler has been considered for James Bond partly in terms of how people are talking about it because basically any up and coming British man, increasingly, women now as well, has been considered in various articles about Bond. I think he said in interviews he did go and speak to Barbara Broccoli about it at one time.

Now I guess, he's way too old for it now. But would you have liked to have seen him as a Bond? Do you think he'd have been a good Bond?

Ben: [0:19:50] He wouldn't have been my first choice, but I think he definitely could have done it. And I think this film showcases that. I've never heard him try and do an English accent in the film.

Sarah: [0:20:00] That's really interesting actually because we're always laughing at his American accent. He's normally American Scottish or Scottish American. So, if I think the little films he's done, he'll have been Scottish.

Ben: What about Phantom Of The Opera.

Sarah: [0:20:11] That's a good one. I've watched it but it was kind of on in the background and I didn't pay much attention to it. So, I don't know what accent he has. I’m in the middle of editing a podcast on Coriolanus. And in that, although it's set in a place called Rome, the idea is that it could be anywhere. He has his Scottish accent for that. Everyone has their normal accents. But yeah, I can't think of an English accent that he's done.

Ben: [0:20:35] Obviously, if he was going to be Bond, it would've happened by now. But they went with Daniel Craig. He very much would have been a Daniel Craig style James Bond. I think he could have done it quite easily if he could do the accent. I'd buy into that. Definitely, I'd watch it.

Sarah: [0:20:48] Yeah. I just can't imagine film he'd like being in more than one where he gets to do these amazing action sequences and also have all these gorgeous women throwing themselves at him. It's Gerard Butler through and through.

Ben: [0:21:03] You said earlier on that this Olympus was your second favourite Has Fallen film. What’s your first?

Sarah: [0:21:09] My favourite is Angel Has Fallen. And I like it, I mean I do mock him in it that he's so creaky but I'm creaky now as well. I just like it that he is at the stage where he's older, he's very battered. He's tired. He's physically tired. He's mentally tired. The villain is an American. I just think it was nice to get away from those tired old tropes. There are some really silly things in it as well, but I think that's probably my favourite.

London Has Fallen is quite enjoyable, but it's also got some very dodgy politics behind it. But this one, Olympus is just a great straight up, very well done action film, I think. It's very, very tense.

Ben: [0:21:54] It is. And again, it rarely lets up which in a two hour film that really needs to be applauded because it's a long time.

Sarah: [0:22:02] Yeah. And it doesn't sag in the middle either. I think it's extremely well-paced.

Ben: [0:22:08] Yeah. It reminds me of 24 as well, the TV show 24. They managed to hold the energy throughout most of that as well. That's a real achievement for a two-hour film.

Getting back to Gerard Butler, Sarah, why do you think so many people take the mickey out of him and are very dismissive of him?

Sarah: [0:22:26] Partly the accent thing. I think he's quite an old-fashioned movie star. And I think that the films he often makes are easy to mock. And even when he does — if you look at Greenland, which had very good reviews in the UK and pretty good reviews when it came out in the US. It came out in the US first, and there was still, particularly in American reviews, there still seemed to be this, like damning with faint praise. “He's better than he normally is. But everything else about the film is great”. Actually, he's good in it. And I think it's hard to step outside when you become a figure of fun. I doubt he minds. He must make loads of money. He's clearly very popular. And he enjoys what he does. He's probably got it made, maybe that's why people don't like him. I don't really know.

I think, obviously, a lot of people fancy him including me. But there are an awful lot of people, particularly men who really, really like him who you wouldn't think would. When he has a film out, people who you wouldn't expect to are really be looking forward to it and really enjoy watching it. Maybe it's something to do with, I always say, particularly in the Has Fallen films, he's kind of part everyman and part superman. And maybe it's that combination of ,although he's relentless, he does come across as quite human, and he's just relatable. I suppose that's not something you can really analyse, why some people make those connections with their audience and other people don't. I mean he's not fashionable and there's lots of films that come out where you think “there's no way he'd ever be asked to be in this or considered for it”. But I guess that's it.

I mean, why do you like him?

Ben: [00:24:15] Because I believe him in everything he does. With his action films, I like my action heroes to, you've got to believe that in that situation they can do what they're doing. Obviously, the White House is never going to get stormed by terrorists, but this is a work of fiction. You need to believe him, and I completely do. I completely believe that he is Mike Banning, and he will save the day and that, as an actor, it's a gift because not everybody, not all actors can do it.

And I think action stars, I know there's a lot more to him than action films, people like Jason Statham as well, they often get derided for doing the films they do, but not everyone can do it. It's hard.

Sarah: [00:24:43] Yeah.

Ben: [00:24:44] It’s hard. You've got to make it believable. I remember when Daniel Craig was nominated for a Bafta for Casino Royale and I think that was massive. That was absolutely huge. The actor playing James Bond being nominated for a Bafta, it just never happens. So that was great. I think with Gerard Butler, even in a slightly iffy film, Geostorm is the perfect example. I didn't mind it and I could see all its flaws and Jim Sturgess’s continuity defying hair, all that.

Sarah: [00:25:15] Oh, the hair was awful!

Ben: [00:25:16] Crazy.

Sarah: [00:25:17] Yeah, the hair was worse than the science in that one.

Ben: [00:25:21] Yeah. His performances are always solid, I think. He's made, over the last few years, two films in particular stand out for me that I thought were absolutely superb. You mentioned Hunter Killer where he-

Sarah: [00:25:30] Yeah.

Ben: [00:25:31] He doesn't run around blowing things up. He’s pretty much stood behind a load of technology in a submarine, swaying to the left, swaying to the right.

Sarah: [00:25:39] Yes.

Ben: [00:25:40] He has to act and he's brilliant in it but the other films as well. I'm so pleased that a sequel is going to be made, Den of Thieves. I thought that was an excellent thriller, really good. He played such a flawed character in it and again he had to act and he nailed it for me.

Sarah: [00:24:54] Yeah.

Ben: [00:25:19] I kind of think maybe being an ex-actor, obviously a very, very small scale compared to someone like Gerald Butler, it is very easy to criticize actors. It's very easy to praise them as well but it's easier to criticize them of course.

Sarah: [00:26:07] Yes.

Ben: [00:26:09] I think it's all personal opinion and you're never really going to change anyone's minds. When I see people deriding him, I think I've read ,thinking how he does his American accent. He talks out the side of his mouth.

Sarah: [00:26:20] Yeah.

Ben: [00:26:21] That's quite a mean thing to say because that's his way of talking maybe.

Sarah: [00:26:25] I've said that though!

Ben: [00:26:29] Oh did you – was it you? Well you're not the only one that I've heard say that then. I've read that as well and I've noticed it, it’s a noticeable trait of his, but maybe that's just how he speaks, do you know what I mean. Maybe we shouldn't focus on something like that.

Sarah: [00:26:42] Also accents are hard. I can’t do them.

Ben: [00:26:45] No they are really hard. You only have to Google that episode of , I don’t know if it was Alias or something, but the American actor trying to do Geordie. Have you heard of that one?

Sarah: [00:26:53] No, I haven't but I'd love to hear it because I'm from Newcastle so I would absolutely love to hear them mangling that.

Ben: [00:26:58] I can't remember if it was Alias or not but if you go into YouTube, type in “American actor, Geordie accent”.

Sarah: [00:27:06] I’m going to make a note of that because that's going to cheer up my afternoon.

Ben: [00:27:09] It’s spectacular. It really is.

But no, when people are dismissive of him and his films it does get my tail up a little bit because I think it's a little bit unwarranted.

Sarah: [00:27:20] It's an easy reflex action isn't it? It’s like “ooh ha ha Gerard Butler”. It's interesting what you say about Den of Thieves and also Hunter Killer and the acting because both of those are, they're not little thoughtful indies. They are reasonably budgeted Hollywood films. They are both very solid and you're right, he's not doing any big stunts in them. Obviously in Hunter Killer, he's literally stuck in a submarine and in Den of Thieves he may be running around but it's slowly because his character is out of shape. They joke about it. It's basically strippers and doughnuts and beer. So it has to be, it has to work on a different level.

I do think he's someone who's easy to mock partly because he's clearly doing well and looks pretty happy in himself. The Den of Thieves sequel seems to be mentioned and then retreats so it’ll will be interesting to see what happens with that one. Because that will be a good one to see.

Ben: [00:28:16] And they’re of course planning Night has Fallen as well.

Sarah: [00:28:18] Yes. I think it will be really interesting to see what they do with the next one, particularly with the women in it because the women in the Has Fallen films like I said earlier they’re either in the background or they die too soon. The other thing about his films is that they're not ironic. They rarely have that kind of ironic humor, but they're also not completely po-faced.

Ben: [00:28:38] The best one-liner for me from Olympus has Fallen. I burst out laughing when I heard it. “Why don't we play a game of fuck off? You go first” You heard that?

Sarah: [00:28:47] Yeah that was one of the quotes I wrote down because that's classic Banning isn’t it.

Ben: [00:28:50] It’s wonderful isn’t it. You've got to have moments like that as well. You've got to. It goes with that type of film.

Sarah: [00:28:55] Yeah, I heard it called Die Hard in the White House, which I think is a good description of it. But it's not kind of too earnest. I don't like really earnest “America is amazing” films. And there are times when ironic humour can get too knowing. It's almost like it's laughing with half of its audience and laughing at the other half and I don't like that. I think you know your audience they're paying to come and see this film. You need to do it.

But yes tonally I thought it… there's a couple of slightly off jokes at the end when they're staggering out at the very end and Banning is kind of holding up President Asher.

I mean it's a really good scene in the sense that it's quite quiet. It's getting light because it's the early hours, but it is just destruction and chaos. They come out and there are so many bodies of people who, the President would have known a lot of them on a personal level because they are employees or Secret Service people. And they make some joke about whether the White House is insured and I just thought this isn't a film that really relies on any jokes; that's probably not the time as you're stepping over dead people.

Ben: [00:30:00] That grated for me as well. I didn't notice on my first viewing. Yeah.

Sarah: [00:30:04] No I didn’t.

Ben: [00:30:06] “Sorry about the house”. Yeah. “Oh Don't worry. I think she's insured”. Yeah. It was a bit misjudged.

Sarah: [00:30:11] Yeah, it was a bit too much.

Someone like Banning always has to have a rather pointless convoluted conversation with the villain where they each threatened terrible things. You' think “you’re wasting valuable time here, you need to…”

Ben: [00:30:23] “Get on with it!”

Sarah: [00:30:25] Yeah. Normally it's at that point that something terrible is going on behind it.

Ben: [00:30:30] It’s a great ensemble cast as well.

Sarah: [00:30:10] Yes.

Ben: [00:30:32] I mean there are Oscar winners in there and Oscar nominated actors as well. It's a terrific cast. They all saw something in the script as well else they wouldn't have signed up for it.

Sarah: [00:30:43] One thing that I'd missed, of course, the first time I watched it, is that Trumbull before he becomes acting President is the Speaker. And we find out, isn't it at the very beginning, where someone says that Banning was known for having told the Speaker to go fuck himself or something like that-

Ben: [00:31:01] That’s right.

Sarah: [00:31:02] And I hadn't realized that the first time. What you do see then is that there's that slight tension between the two in the rest of the film where Trumbull, even though, you know, it's just a personal insult, it’s still affecting how he relates to Banning and how much he's prepared to trust him and how much he's prepared to take Banning's advice when Banning’s saying, “Do not send the men in because they will be slaughtered.” You can see how a little personal insult actually can eat away at somebody and then affect them when they have to work together later.

Ben: [00:31:33] And when he becomes, when he's sworn in, when Morgan Freeman is sworn in as President as well. He kind of sits down and he's taking things in. Before he starts giving his decisions, he seems to spend about half an hour ordering a coffee. I thought that was a lovely, lovely little character moment right there-

Sarah: [00:31:40] In a china cup.

Ben: [00:31:50] Yes.

Sarah: [00:31:52] You need to have some standards even when the world’s about to explode.

I don't know if you reviewed this for any of the magazines that you write for, or for your own website, what dod you, or would you give it, if you were?

Ben: [00:32:02] I would be very tempted to give it five stars. I honestly would, for entertainment reasons. I can see the flaws in it and I can see why people wouldn't like it. But you know, I always write, I don't write for other people, I can't I write for myself and I write about my enjoyment. I mean certainly unquestionably four stars that's a given but I would be very tempted to push it up to a five. I'm easily entertained as people might realise listening to this. But I can fully justify why I would give it five stars. It's purely, it’s popcorn entertainment. It's everything I want from an action film.

Sarah: [00:32:40] I didn't check on, in fact I might have a look now, but on Rotten Tomatoes — I always enjoy those films where there's a huge disconnect between the critics’ score and the audience score. I'm actually going to look it up now and see what it is. I originally gave it 3.5 and I would probably, if I was reviewing it now I'd probably give it four. With all these action films, like I say we talked earlier about the tropes that they can end up falling into. But just in terms of the relentlessness and the action – a lot of the script is quite ropey — but I think that side of it, it does incredibly well. Let me look this up.

Ben: [00:33:15] It's going to be in the forties or fifties I reckon.

Sarah: [00:33:19] Do you think? I think it’ll probably be about 40% critic and about 80% audience. But we'll see. Let's have a look, Olympus. My typing is terrible. It's even worse than Mike Banning’s. Let's have a look.

Ben: [00:33:32] Shift 3!

Sarah: [00:33:33] Yeah. Oh, it's nearer than I thought. 49% rotten — critics.

Ben: What do they know.

Sarah: 66% audience.

Ben: [00:33:42] Right.

Sarah: [00:33:43] So 198 critics reviews and over 100,000 audience reviews. The critic’s consensus: it's far from original but Olympus has fallen benefits from Antoine Fuqua’s tense direction and a strong performance from Gerald Butler, which might just be enough for action junkies”. I think that pretty much sums it up.

Ben: [00:33:58] Yeah. It's funny. Angel has Fallen was my least favourite of the three. With the second one — it's funny the little things that can sway you.

Sarah: [00:34:05] Yes.

Ben: [00:34:07] I have worked with two of the actors in London has Fallen, Charlotte Riley who is Tom Hardy's wife. I was actually married to her before Tom Hardy was.

Sarah: [00:34:15] Really? What film was that?

Ben: [00:34:17] In Holby City. I think it was her first acting job and ironically it turned out to be my last. I stopped just after that. We were married to each other in Holby City. She died and I was a cheating husband. And an actor called Patrick Kennedy. He played one of the baddies, he's a Secret Service agent, I think he's one of the baddies and gets killed towards the end. But I was in that terrible film I mentioned earlier, Nine Lives; that was in IMDb’s bottom 100 for a while. I was influenced slightly by having worked with those two. SO maybe my enjoyment of that one went up a little bit.

But Angel has Fallen, what annoyed me about it was all of these people, they'd obviously known of Banning’s heroics from the White House situation but also from the situation in London. They all knew of his involvement and the fact that he saved the day. Hardly anyone in Angel has Fallen when he supposedly tried to kill the President, nobody goes, “Hang on this is Mike Banning. He wouldn't have done that because of what happened in the previous two films.” Obviously, they are not going to mention the films, but they would know of it.

Sarah: [00:35:17] Oh yes.

Ben: [00:35:18] Nobody does it. I was thinking, I don't get it, why is no one sticking up for him? I just felt it… I love what they did with his character, he was relying on pills or something.

Sarah: [00:35:25] Yes, he's really battered. I think he's on like prescription drugs and things like that.

Ben: [00:36:29] Love all that. That's great but that really got on my nerves a little bit. So I didn't enjoy that one as much. But hey, when Night has Fallen comes out I am well and truly on board.

Sarah: [00:35:41] It'll be really interesting just to see, like I say, what direction they take that now.

But it's interesting with films that are so over the top when we talk about whether things are believable and obviously film is a medium where you suspend disbelief. But I think what often is what tips it for people, tips the balance, is not the big action pieces, that one man going into the White House and taking down all these people, that mixture of brains and brawn that he has is incredibly unlikely. But where films become unbelievable that are ridiculous in every other way is in terms of motivations and psychological details.

Sol ike you say, obviously, the film hangs on the fact that they think that Banning is guilty but that isn't realistic and that's what jars more than the entirely unrealistic action sequences, which we all want to see and which are often really well done.

Ben: [00:36:42] Yeah.

Sarah: [00:36:42] I think often it's those little details and quite often they get them right. Yeah, I just think in Olympus has Fallen considering that was our first introduction to him, he was a blank slate, he's a very well-developed archetype and I don't think a different actor, it might have been a successful film, but I doubt it would have had the… it’s almost like, you know when you get some films that are kind of cultish while also being very successful. On Twitter people are always saying you can't say it's a cult film if it made $100 million.

But you know, there's a kind of culty feeling around some films and some actors and some characters and I think he probably has that.

Ben: [00:37:21] I wonder if Mike Banning was created for him or did he have to audition? And who else did they audition?

Sarah: [00:37:26] I'd love to know who else might be up for it. I think that he was cast after the script had been written after the production company bought the script so it wouldn't have been written for him. I don't know if you've seen Law Abiding Citizen.

Ben: [00:37:39] No. I haven't. My dad watched it and was talking to me about it the other day. Yeah, why haven’t I watched it?

Sarah: [00:37:45] That was with Jamie Foxx. Originally him and Butler were meant to do each other's characters. Butler would have been the , is it the DA.

Did you ever have to do many stunts?

Ben: [00:37:55] In The Bill. Yeah. They always have me running because I was…

Sarah: [00:38:00] Because you were young!

Ben: [00:38:02] Exactly! This is awful, now I'm 43 now and I was 22 when I started. I was regularly running having to shout “Oi, stop police!” And I remember saying “why am I saying that because no one ever stops when you shout ‘stop police’”. And they “It’s in the script, just do it Ben.”

Sarah: [00:38:21] You have to shout something like “free money” and then everyone would stop.

Ben: [00:38:25] There's this one scene where it's actually quite violent and had to be cut because The Bill was before the watershed — involving knives and shotguns and I get into a fight with a big fella. He was a lot bigger than me. It's ridiculous really looking back, but it's proper grunts and groans and punches to the stomach and face and I loved every bit of it. I get punched in the tummy, but through the magic of television, it doesn't affect me, and I just make a kind of an ”urghhh” noise, I right hook this massive guy and it's a beauty. I've shown my kids it and they actually love it. It's great.

I did have one, I suppose you could call it a stunt, in Band Of Brothers. I'm only in it very briefly. It is episode 2, Day of Days and it's towards the end. There's a big battle scene and I'm crawling through a field and there's bullets zipping past overhead. And Donnie Wahlberg, his character is crawling through a field and all of a sudden, a young soldier taps him on the leg and that's me. I ask him which way Battalion headquarters is? He's a bit incredulous, like what, what are you on about? He tells me where it is. I pop my head up from crawling, and say “oh it’s back over ther…”. And as I'm in the middle of talking, I get shot in the head.

I had a squib built into my helmet with a cord that you couldn't see leading to a detonator. There was a guy four or five yards away that when I said my line, he plunged and it went off, my helmet exploded. It didn't hurt but it was quite uncomfortable. It was like a cricket ball being thrown at your head from a couple of inches. It was enough, you know, enough to go “ooh blimey”. I had to do that twice. They only had two squibs. So very, very short on screen. But yeah it was fun.

Sarah: [00:40:10] My gosh. Were you not worried that they would accidentally blow your head off or something.

Ben: [00:40:16] No, this was Spielberg and Tom Hanks were in charge. I was quite happy, and I was just in awe of being there . Ii between, in between takes I was with Donnie Wahlberg and we were supposed to speak in American accents off camera as well.

 [00:40:32] I can't remember whether we did or not. I honestly can't. I was with Donnie Wahlberg and Stephen Graham who is also in the scene I’m in, but you can't actually see him, he ends up being, he's out of shot. We were talking about New Kids on the Block. We spoke about The Sixth Sense. I didn't realise that it was Donnie Wahlberg in the sixth sense, at the very beginning, which actually shoots Bruce Willis.

And Stephen Graham — we were chatting about his casting in Snatch and how he was very cheeky to Guy Ritchie. He said something or did something that he shouldn't have done basically. It shocked Guy Ritchie, he went with it and that's how he ended up getting the part. That was all very, very cool.

Band of Brothers, I had five auditions for that for what ended up being just two lines. But my first audition, they send me pages and pages and pages of script, which I did in front of about 20 people. Then the second audition, it was down to about 17 or 16 pages. Third audition, the page numbers went down and down. So, you can see where this is going. Until finally, my last audition.

The fax — back in the day — the fax came through and it was one page. I turned up to be my final audition and I had to pretend I was in a plane about to jump out and I had to say, “We're too low. We're too fucking low.” And that was it. So I did that. The panel ,20-odd people on the panel, said “Very good Ben, thank you. Can you do it again please?” Do it again really? So I thought, how can I make this different? So I think I put a pause in there: “we’re too low, we're [pause] too fucking low.”

Sarah: [00:42:08] Or do it as a question. “We’re too fucking low?”

Ben: [00:42:11] Exactly, maybe that should have been the third time, but then they ended up casting me in a different role anyway. But I still get royalties from a lot of these things, which is great, and I assume I'm going to get royalties from this as well.

Sarah: [00:42:22] Absolutely, it'll be about eight pence a millennium.

Ben: [00:42:25] That's in the contract, right?

Sarah: [00:42:26] You have some amazing stories. Do you miss it.

Ben: [00:42:29] I do, and I don't because when it's, when it's work, when you're working, it's the best job ever. With The Bill, I was only a couple of years out of drama school. I was very young. I was doing the job I loved to do. I was on television getting very well paid and getting recognised which I used to absolutely love. It was the business. You feel so much better than everyone else.

Sarah: [00:42:49] Yeah.

Ben: [00:42:50] You just feel incredible. You're not, obviously, but for that moment when someone recognises you, you feel special. God knows how it must be for these Hollywood actors that are recognised every single place they go to. I think that would be just horrendous. But in my own little bubble that I had, it was great, and it afforded me to get a mortgage, buy a property and I met my wife there and we're still together 20 years later. So yeah.

Sarah: [00:43:14] It all worked out in the end. Once you left The Bill, how long did people still recognise you for?

Ben: They still do now. It's crazy. Because if you think about it and with TV shows such as EastEnders and Coronation Street, long running shows. You spend so much time watching them that you do get to know the characters and if someone from EastEnders from 20 years ago when I used to watch it, if I were to see one of them today, I would recognise them. So that still happens. It's weird now because it has been since I was onscreen on The Bill 19 years I think, but it's still shown on various channels throughout the world.

Sarah: [00:43:45] Do you think you’d ever go back to acting.

Ben: [00:43:46] I don't think so because I didn't like the rejection. Often you would never find out why you didn't get a job. It was very disheartening for things. I auditioned for the part of Will Turner in Pirates of the Caribbean before Orlando Bloom was on board. I was told I was auditioning for a film that starred Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Jack Davenport. I thought “wow that’s pretty cool ,”and it's a Disney film. I remember going for that and then I found out Orlando Bloom had been cast. So I’d have obviously never had a chance as soon as his name was in the mix. He was off the back of Lord Of The Rings. But that was fun.

Sarah: [00:44:15] Yes.

Ben: [00:44:17] I auditioned for lots of very cool things. I auditioned for a Bourne film as well, which was great. No, regularly being shortlisted for things and I was always penciled in for these things as well and then your hopes are up. You think “my god I’m in with a chance,” Then you don't get it. There's the disappointment that you have. When that happens two or three times a week regularly, you can't help but let it affect you. It started affecting me too much. I probably have unfinished business with it, but it's just too precarious.

Sarah: [00:44:44] You're not going to reinvent yourself as an action star in your forties.

Ben: [00:44:52] You know what…

Sarah: [00:44:58] If they came knocking you would?

Ben: [00:45:00] Of course I would.

Sarah: [00:45:01] If they came knocking, I would. I’d get in shape!

Ben: [00:45:02] I do it with the kids though, I kind of relive these things through my kids. I show them certain scenes of James Bond films. They're 10 and 7 so they’re not quite ready for full-on films like that but I do show them certain scenes and the look of excitement on my son's face when he watches the Mission Impossible films. Prime example, Have you seen, I think it's 4, The Ghost Protocol where Tom Cruise is in the building in Dubai and he jumps out of the building and is running down it. We watch that regularly and when he hangs onto the plane in 5, my son's face; and he jumps from sofa to sofa saying I'm Ethan Hunt, I'm James Bond. I've got money on him to actually play James Bond in real life.

Sarah: [00:45:44] Oh really.

Ben: [00:45:45] I contacted various bookies to say I want to put money on my son being James Bond.

Sarah: That's funny that you've got money on your son.

Is there anything else you'd like to add and anything we've missed about Olympus Has Fallen?

Ben: Do you know, I don't think so. I'm looking at my notes here. I think we've covered everything.

Sarah: [00:46:00] I quite like a film that we couldn't chat about for two hours because it's just it is what it is.

Ben: [00:46:07] Absolutely, yeah. It was never going to be deep and meaningful. Was it? Actually one thing I have written down, I wrote down Air Force One,.I found them very similar: Harrison Ford on a plane in these enclosed spaces that only they know the secret spaces, the passageways and what have you, a lot of similarities to Air Force One, which is another action film that I absolutely love.

Sarah: [00:46:27] One of the things I thought that was it really comes across with Banning is that he works best in these enclosed spaces where it is just him as a kind of lone wolf. The scenes that are least believable are when he is outside and it’s mayhem. And everyone's getting shot except him, everyone else with a weapon, any other Secret Service people and police, are getting killed — except him. He runs around telling people to get out of the way: yeah, they're trying to do that Mike. That's where it's unbelievable because there's so much shooting going on, he would have been shot.

But actually, once you get him into this quiet enclosed space where there's individual dangers around every corner, he's much better, I think.

But no, it is a film where there’s no point looking for the subtext because there was never meant to be any.

Ben: I love things about the White House as well. I've mentioned 24. I love 24 and a lot of that is set in the White House. And The West Wing, one of my favourite shows. So, anything involving the White House and secret passageways and all that I'm in.

Sarah: [00:47:25] I know it's an overused word, but it is iconic, isn't it? An iconic building.

Sarah: [00:47:32] Thank you very much for joining me. That was really good.

Ben: [00:47:33] Thanks for having me. I'm pleased.

[End of transcript]