A rumour mill round-up of the most anticipated movie since, well, The Phantom Menace...

RUMOUR: Most of the old cast are back
Luke, Leia, Han and Lando are all strongly expected to return for Episode VII. Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill have kept their cool under intense media scrutiny, but word is J.J.’s apparently keen to keep as much focus on the old gang as possible. Harrison Ford’s expected to return as Han Solo (as well as reprising Indy for Disney).

LIKELIHOOD: 100%

RUMOUR: Adam Driver is the villain
The star of HBO’s Girls is set to be the new villain according to Variety, which claims he’ll be an iconic baddie ‘in the vein of’ Darth Vader. It’s the closest we’ve got to a rock-solid announcement, and would be an intriguing choice: cool, edgy, but not so famous that he’d bring baggage to the character.

LIKELIHOOD: 99%

RUMOUR: John Williams is doing the score
Star Wars without John Williams is like Star Wars without lightsabers. Or rubbish dialogue. “The story is still unknown to me,” said Williams, “but I can’t imagine there won’t be some references to the existing stories that would make appropriate use of some of the earlier themes.”

LIKELIHOOD: 95%

RUMOUR: The young guy will be so hot right now
Hamill was an unknown back in 1977, but Disney are unlikely to let a vehicle this big slip into hyperspace without hitching it to a rising star. Everyone who values their agent has auditioned for the “young, handsome, athletic man” – with Zac Efron, Alex Pettyfer, Jack Reynor, Jesse Plemons, Adam Driver and Michael B. Jordan all in the running.

LIKELIHOOD: 90%

RUMOUR: It’s going to have a proper thespian in it
The casting call asks for a “40-something military man”, but that probably just means they need a famous old guy who can make midi-chlorians sound interesting. Gary Oldman seems to be the favourite (“‘they called... bloody hell!’”) but Michael Fassbender, Hugo Weaving and David Oyelowo have also been tipped – not to mention Judi Dench mooted for Mon Mothma.

LIKELIHOOD: 80%

RUMOUR: It’s going to have a strong female lead
For all the chasm-swinging, back-chatting princesses, Star Wars isn’t exactly an equal-opportunities universe. Gratuitous underwear shots aside, J.J. has a good track record with strong female leads (Felicity, Alias), and there’s every chance that new Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy will let the girls do more than look good in a metal bikini.

LIKELIHOOD: 93%

RUMOUR: Boba Fett! Obi-Wan! Yoda!
The fact that no one ever really dies in Star Wars means that J.J. is free to bring all the fan favourites back as glowing blue ghosts if he wants to. But did clumsy bounty hunter Boba Fett really earn an afterlife? Is it really worth paying Ewan McGregor for an Obi-Wan cameo? Isn’t Yoda too busy doing Vodafone ads?

LIKELIHOOD: 80%

RUMOUR: There’s going to be Star Trek crossover
Fanboys might be reaching for the Kleenex at the very thought of it, but is it too much to hope J.J. will slip in a quick Enterprise crossover?
Use the force: but who will be back for Episode 7?

fly past? Probably. But we do know that Benedict Cumberbatch has been in talks for a role – and you can bet uber-fan Simon Pegg hasn’t stopped pestering him either.

LIKELIHOOD: 8%

RUMOUR: There’s a REAL Millennium Falcon in London
There’s been mysterious hammering sounds coming from the Pinewood backlot for months but an “inside source” has now reportedly confirmed that a full-scale Falcon has been built. If true, it’s another promising bit of news that follows J.J.’s decision to shoot on film and Kathleen Kennedy’s comments about using “model makers, real droids and artwork you actually can touch.”

LIKELIHOOD: 85%

RUMOUR: R2-D2 is back
The first piece of actual, confirmed casting news is pretty predictable. Obviously R2 is coming back for Episode VII (what else has he got on next summer?). Interestingly though, there’s no word yet on whether J.J. is planning to stuff 79-year-old dwarf actor Kenny Baker back inside the little droid – or whether his gold-plated BF will be joining him.

LIKELIHOOD: 100% PB

Star Wars: Episode VII opens on 18 December 2015.

THE HOBBIT: THERE AND BACK AGAIN
The ends of Middle-earth

Bilbo might have got ‘there’, but the ‘back again’ bit isn’t going to be quite as easy. For one thing, there’s a fire-breathing dragon in the sky who isn’t too happy about being woken up, robbed and covered in molten gold – and then there’s all the goblins, wargs, dwarves and eagles waiting to fight the infamous Battle Of The Five Armies. Peter Jackson’s epic trilogy concluder is, in his own words, “going to be emotional”. PB

The Hobbit: There And Back Again opens on 12 December.

NEIL GAIMAN
The dream weaver slips into movie consciousness.

The dark genius behind Stardust and Coraline has been lurking behind the scenes for decades, but the next few years are set to see him step out of the wings. American Gods and The Ocean At The End Of The Lane have both been optioned – but it’s the recent greenlight for his cult graphic novel The Sandman, with Joseph Gordon-Levitt producing that we’ve been waiting 25 years for. PB

The Sandman is currently in development.

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Total Film 83 May 2014

31
32