

40 The Observer  
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# Television

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## The week's highlights

### Today

#### Pick of the Day When Ruby Wax Met...

BBC Two, 9pm

"Trump scared the shit out of me," recalls Ruby Wax. "And I think it's my fault that he kept a career going." It's a striking opening gambit but undeniably, the footage of their 1996 joust is truly squirm-inducing in places. This series in which Wax – now with the perspective supplied by a master's degree in cognitive therapy – looks back on her previous career as a celebrity interviewer is funny, sometimes revelatory viewing. Other featured encounters include OJ Simpson and Carrie Fisher.



#### The Handmaid's Tale

Channel 4, 9pm

A brutal and cathartic conclusion to season four of the dystopian drama. June (Elisabeth Moss) risks everything to ensure that justice is served. But how will that justice look? The journey towards it doesn't always make for easy viewing. It has been suggested that season five might mark the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*; the show is certainly preparing to go out with a bang.

#### Did Covid Leak from a Chinese Lab?

Channel 4, 10.15pm

With bad-faith actors intent on establishing a link between the Chinese state and Covid-19, this investigation will need to tread carefully. With insights from Biden insider Prof David Relman and the University of Oxford's Sir John Bell, the film wonders how much we know about the origins of the virus. PH

#### Film Contact

(Robert Zemeckis, 1997)

5SELECT, 9pm

In his prime one of the true experimenters in modern Hollywood, Robert Zemeckis is the man who took Michael J Fox back to the future three times, cast Bob Hoskins opposite Jessica Rabbit, and walked Forrest Gump through modern American history (but no one's perfect). His *Contact* was one of the first mainstream attempts to use CGI for something subtler than the usual. A speculative, serious-minded drama about the attempt to contact alien life, it stars Jodie Foster as a SETI scientist who discovers that the truth is out there – and in here, as this is as much about psychological inner space. A certain self-help sentimentalism creeps in, but the visual invention is used for genuine emotional resonance. JR

### Monday

#### Pick of the Day Tsunami

Channel 5, 9pm

Millions of geological years in the making and yet arriving completely out of the blue, the 2004 Asian tsunami was one of the most shocking natural disasters in recent memory. This three-part series stripped across the week and presented by Xand van Tulleken and Raksha Dave tells the story. There's plenty of amazing and horrifying footage and some entry-level science, although the eyewitness testimony feels a little heavy on tourists and lacking the voices of Thais and Indonesians.



#### Summer of Wild Weather: Is Worse to Come?

Channel 4, 9pm

Could 2021 come to be regarded as a tipping point – the moment the chief architects of the climate crisis saw the effects arrive in their own backyard? From the US "heat dome" to the German floods and the general wildness of the weather all over northern Europe, this documentary wonders whether we are at the dawn of a scary new normality.

#### Love Island: The Live Final

ITV2, 9pm

It has been the usual guiltily compelling mess of manipulation, friend-zoning and mild trauma. An alternative summer narrative for people unmoved by either the Olympics or the Euros – and inescapable once you're sucked in. This climactic 90-minute helping promises cash and career opportunities for the winner. PH

#### Film The Old Man & the Gun

(David Lowery, 2018)

Film4, 9pm

One from the director of the forthcoming, much raved-about Arthurian fantasia *The Green Knight*, and 2017's almost abstract supernatural reverie *A Ghost Story*. This sees David Lowery in much more earthbound mode, offering a tender but gritty tribute to his star Robert Redford. Grizzled but dashing as ever, he plays real-life criminal Forrest Tucker, on the run after escaping from San Quentin and still robbing banks into his 70s. Sissy Spacek plays the woman he kindles a passion with, Casey Affleck is the cop on his trail, and Danny Glover, Elisabeth Moss and Tom Waits flesh out a gentle but emotionally rich, stylistically finetuned reconnection with the more fluid and poetic American crime cinema of the 1970s. JR

### Tuesday

#### Pick of the Day Britannia

Sky Atlantic, 9pm

A third series for Jez Butterworth's daft but engaging semi-historical drama. Three years have passed since the Roman invasion and things seem to be settling. David Morrissey's Aulus fancies he has Druid head honcho Veran (Mackenzie Crook) over a barrel and he's letting him know it, in a manner that may come back to haunt him. As ever, *Britannia*'s tone is uneven but it retains a profane, unpredictable and manic edge that is its saving grace.



#### Paralympics Opening Ceremony Live

Channel 4, 11.30am

The Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony was an unusually sombre affair, reflecting the unusual circumstances surrounding these Games. It will be interesting to see whether the Paralympic equivalent adopts a similar tone. Ade Adepitan presents live coverage with Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson alongside him.

#### Love Your Cottage Garden Special

ITV, 8pm

More handy horticultural hints from Alan Titchmarsh and the gang. Tonight, he's showing off his painstakingly created mixed border and explaining how anyone can assemble something similar. To demonstrate, the team tackle the messy cottage plots of a pair of nurses, one in Redditch, the other in Stoke. PH

#### Film The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

(John Ford, 1962)

Sky Cinema Greats, 1.15pm, 3.10am

Black and white, studio bound, strangely theatrical – a distinct anomaly among Ford's later westerns, but generally regarded as one of his greatest. It is certainly among his most provocative in terms of the complex light it sheds on the American imagination and on history and its making. James Stewart plays Senator Ransome Stoddard, a man looking back at his past – precisely, a quarter-century back when, as an attorney, he tangled with Lee Marvin's titular bandit. John Wayne plays Tom Doniphon, a rancher who takes a hand in the conflict. The famous line "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend" has made this one of the most controversial and politically revealing films in the Ford canon. JR

### Wednesday

#### Pick of the Day H<sub>2</sub>O: The Molecule That Made Us

BBC Four, 9pm

Some deep-dive geology as Kelly McEvers presents this three-part series looking at the substance upon which all life on Earth depends. With the help of various learned, enthusiastic and slightly eccentric experts, she shows how water is the link between the organic and mineral worlds and how dramatically nature has adapted itself to its presence – for example, there are seeds that are primed to wait 30,000 years for a drop or two to reach them. Fascinating and even slightly mind-bending at times.



#### Burning Man: Art on Fire

Sky Arts, 8pm

"This is the largest art gallery in the world, for one week of the year," says one attendee. But how does it feel to know something vast and complex in the full knowledge of its temporary nature? Gerald Fox's film about the desert-bound festival of art, hedonism and fire offers a fascinating insight into the Burning Man mindset – creativity as a sort of spiritual practice.

#### Gossip Girl

BBC One, 10.35pm

The definitive millennial New York high school drama in which popularity contests are mediated by an unknown blogger is rebooted. As the school year begins, a new student is thrust into a harsh spotlight. A slightly incongruous sense of nostalgia now hangs over the show – but it's still very watchable. PH

#### Film Aquarea

(Victor Kossakovsky, 2018)

BBC Four, 9.50pm

An extraordinary environmental documentary from the Russian director of the superb recent pig portrait *Gunda* – and given the latest warnings about the state of the planet, it couldn't be more timely. As the title suggests, Kossakovsky's film is about water, in all its manifestations – some extreme, many arrestingly beautiful – taking us from Siberia's frozen Lake Baikal, via Greenland's ice floes and a hurricane-lashed Miami, to Venezuela's awe-inspiring Angel Falls. Kossakovsky and co-cinematographer Ben Bernhard shoot in HD to mesmerisingly immersive effect, the images speaking eloquently for themselves without commentary – although sometimes struggling against occasional heavy metal music. JR