

INSIDE TRACK

GUST BUSTERS

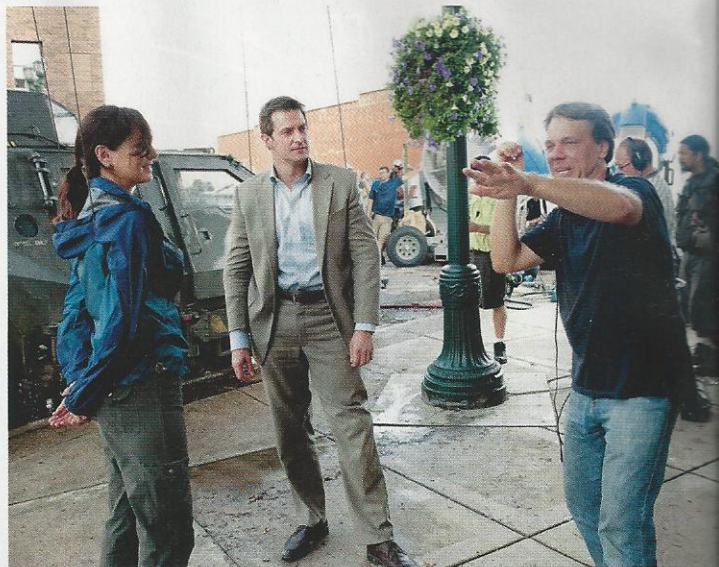
EXCLUSIVE RICHARD ARMITAGE HEADS INTO THE STORM

RICHARD ARMITAGE HAS battled Robin Hood, enemy spies and, most recently, a bloody great dragon. But *Into The Storm* could represent his most daunting challenge yet — Mother Nature's deadly halitosis. In *Into The Storm*, Armitage plays Gary Morris, a man whose name tells you he's the polar opposite of your average action-hero. But when an unprecedented series of tornadoes lays waste to his sleepy Oklahoma town on the day of the local high school's graduation, and one of his sons goes missing, Gary will have to man up. "He's a maths teacher and the football coach, so he's a sporty guy at least, but he's no hero," says Armitage. "An extreme event like this becomes about a normal guy having to effectively run into a burning building or dive into the water to save someone, and you don't know if you can do it until the moment presents itself."

And there will definitely be more than one of those moments in this film. "In the course of seven hours, this character goes through an extraordinary journey. So he's very different at the end from when he starts, but it happens very quickly and he doesn't know it's happening to him until he's in the middle of it." He'll be off to a support group with Jack Bauer before he knows it.

Directed by Steven Quale, who shot second unit on *Avatar*, *Into The Storm* brings the found-footage genre touch to a disaster movie, following various characters from different perspectives, but all via handheld cameras. "It's much more about being caught on camera than presenting a performance to the camera, which is kind of a new area for me," admits Armitage. "So it's a bit more thrilling to work this way, and feels more real." But Quale and co. aren't planning to skimp on the spectacle. Massive double funnels, fire tornadoes (which do exist), planes being lifted and thrown like a giant baby's plaything... It's all been brought to life with a combination of CG and some very lo-fi techniques. "We spend most of the film wet and being blown around by huge wind machines!" laughs Armitage. "You're given a scene and you're trying to achieve a moment with the characters and you're faced with the elements — most of which are coming straight at you."

"The actors don't need to act," smiles Quale, who last directed *Final Destination 5*. "Our practical special effects guys had these huge, 100 mph fans that blow on the cast, so they're just reacting to the winds. And we have very carefully made, safe materials that can hit them and don't cause any harm, but it looks like all the nasty debris in a tornado."



• Main: Richard Armitage's Gary Morris cradles a survivor. Above: Armitage with director Steven Quale.

No-one involved explicitly says they want to outdo *Twister*, but the 1996 film is clearly on the brain here. "We can use state-of-the-art technology and digital effects to put you into the eye of a tornado," explains Quale. "They did a lot of things in *Twister* to make it accurate, but they also didn't have the real footage of tornadoes. Nowadays, YouTube has given us giant, high-resolution images of these storms, where you can see the beauty and the terror and what it actually does."