

EXCLUSIVE
FIRST LOOK THE
NEW
PIXAR
MOVIE

The Women Who *Really*
Run Hollywood

Entertainment



OCT. 10, 2014 • #1332
CHARLIE HUNNAM AND
KATEY SAGAL

SONS OF Anarchy!

The Final War

**BEHIND THE SCENES AS
TV'S WILDEST RIDE COMES TO AN END**

Unexpected Deaths! / Photos From the Set! / Charlie Hunnam Gets Naked (Twice)!

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Katey Sagal and Charlie Hunnam photographed on Sept. 18, 2014, in Los Angeles

Chart Attack
Let's hear it for the girls. (And Demzell)
BY KAT WARD

THE DARK NIGHT
THINGS
DIGITAL
SES
Caped Crusade
ched Peak
what?

THE LAST

IN THE ROAD



HIGH DRAMA. HUGE RATINGS. DEATH BY CARVING FORK. *SONS OF ANARCHY* HAS BROUGHT IT ALL IN SIX SEASONS. FOR ITS SEVENTH, THE FX HIT IS HELL-BENT ON AN EVEN BOLDER GOAL: AN ENDING FANS WILL NEVER FORGET.

BY MANDI BIERLY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL MULLER



AN ACT OF RETALIATION IS UNDER WAY.

That's nothing new for *Sons of Anarchy*, the FX show famous for doling out death sentences to beloved characters—except this bit of revenge is happening in between takes. It's a September morning at Stevenson Ranch in California's Santa Clarita Valley, and Charlie Hunnam is shooting a scene in which his character, Jax Teller, dodges gunfire from an angry redneck. After a break in the action, Hunnam delivers a quick and dirty punch to the arm of his costar Tommy Flanagan—payback for an earlier prank where Flanagan left a band of bruises on Hunnam's bicep for fun.

Hunnam runs for cover behind a gun-laden cart a few feet away from where EW stands. "I will find you!" Flanagan bellows. For a moment, there's a temptation to rat him out. But as any Sons fan knows, you never, EVER rat.

When *Sons of Anarchy* debuted in 2008, the adrenalized drama was quickly dubbed "Sopranos on wheels," thanks to its darkly complex portrait of the gunrunning club known as Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club Redwood Original (SAMCRO). But over the course of six seasons, fans began using "Hamlet on Harleys" to describe the Shakespearean drama of creator Kurt Sutter's story about a son (Hunnam) who rises to lead his late father's motorcycle club but can't escape the grasp of his manipulative mother, Gemma (Katey Sagal). Now, as the show barrels toward its Dec. 9 finale, it's earned the right to stand on its own. *Sons* may well go down as one of the most savage—and addictive—family dramas, even if the family is bonded by honor instead of blood. After all, in addition to TV's fiercest matriarch, it features the most moving man-hugs (fan and onetime guest star Stephen King has crowned it the "best bro show ever"); the most brutal-but-beautiful montages ("ballets of death," executive producer Paris Barclay likes to call them); and the only leading

Niko Nicotera, Kim Coates, Hunnam, and Tommy Flanagan on the *Sons* North Hollywood set



man with both the looks to land a Calvin Klein fragrance ad and the street cred to get props from tattooed fans in East L.A. ("You keep the hood safe on Tuesday nights," one recently told him.)

That strange, special mix draws an average of 8.1 million viewers a week—an audience as loyal to the series as the members of SAMCRO are to their outlaw brothers. Blockbuster ratings and profitable merchandising (from branded bikinis to cigars)



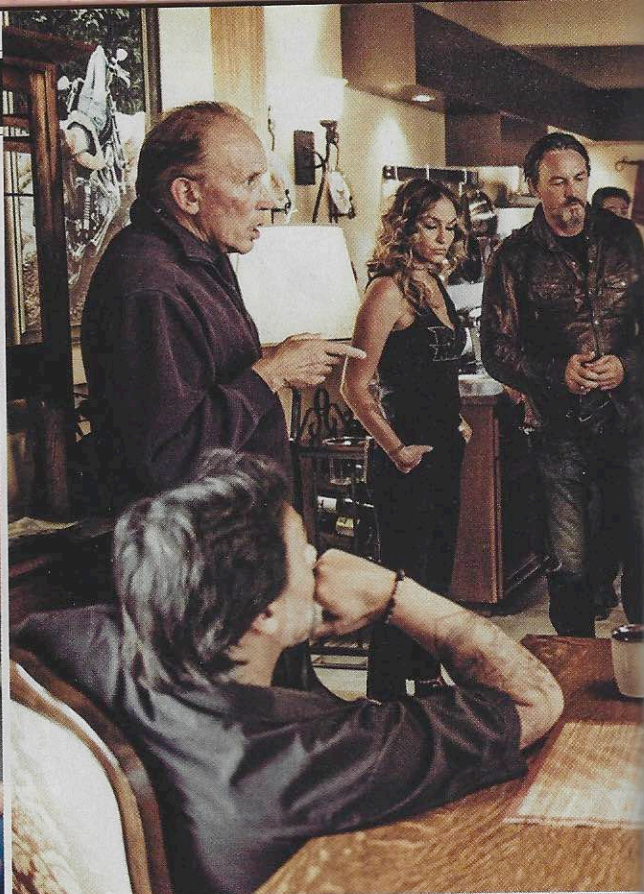
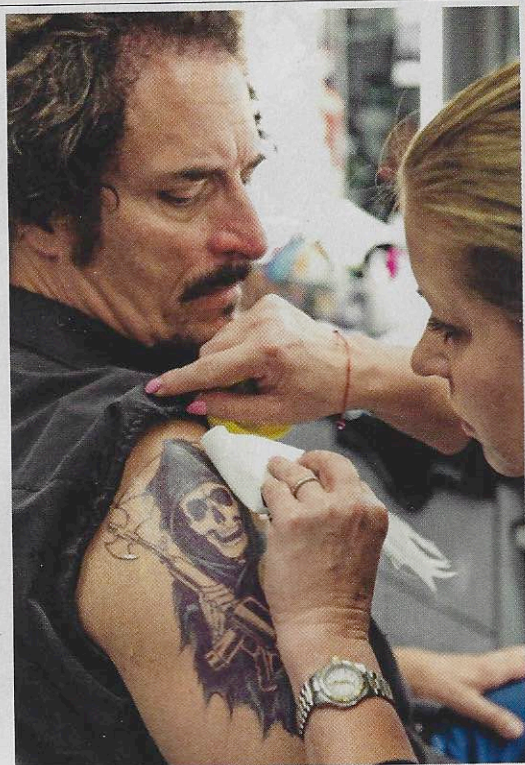
have made the show not just FX's biggest hit but also its most valuable one. All eyes are now on the Men of Mayhem and Queen Gemma, with fans anxiously awaiting the answers to two looming questions: What's going to happen when Jax finds out it was his mother who killed his wife with a carving fork to the head in one of the most gruesome deaths in TV history? And how will Sutter drive his series into the sunset? "I know how I want it

to end," says the showrunner. "I think the legacy is already out there: People have embraced the world. They love that they can have fun watching it, yet the next scene they can be bawling. If we can continue to do that, that's really what I'll be most proud of."



I T'S 8:30 IN THE MORNING INSIDE A HOUSE ON THE SANTA CLARITA set. Hunnam, 34, is listing the goods that get him through his workday. "Three liter-and-a-half bottles of water, just tap water with lemon. One pint of vegetable juice and a liter of smoothie. And usually two apples, a granola bar, an avocado, and three eggs." He starts rummaging through the backpack he seems to carry with him everywhere. "Scripts. Phone. Gum. Cigarettes. iPod. Marijuana grinder," he says, holding

(Clockwise from left) Makeup artist Michelle Garbin applies a tattoo to Coates; Jimmy Smits, director-star Peter Weller, Drea de Matteo, Flanagan, Sagal, Rusty Coones, and Hunnam on set; a SAMCRO Harley



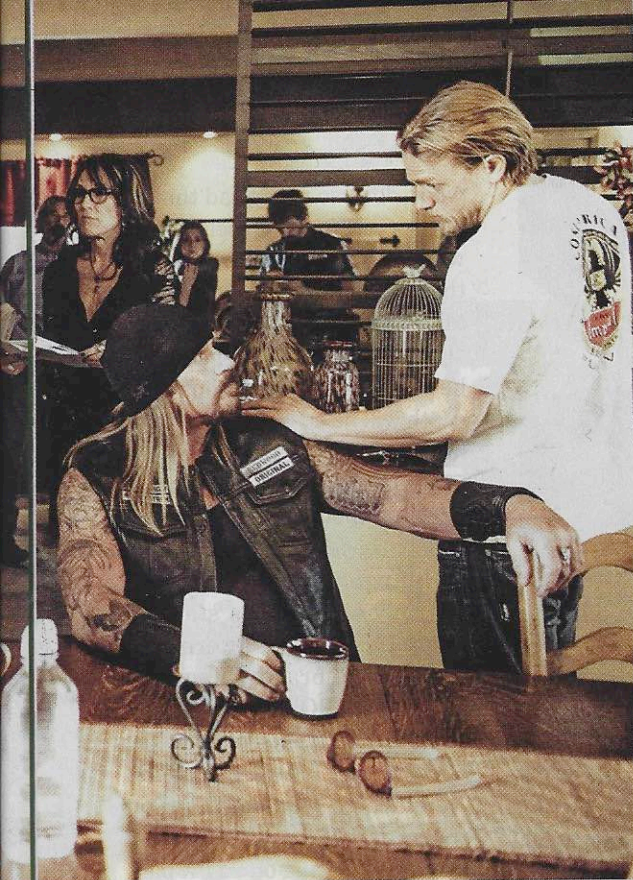
up a small circular container. He smiles. "Everything I need."

Considering what Jax is facing right now, it's no surprise Hunnam is prepared for a tough day. The wounded leader is trying to bring down gangster Henry Lin (Kenneth Choi), the man Jax believes had Tara (Maggie Siff) killed. But the plan has blown up in his face (literally: Good-bye, new clubhouse) and provoked Lin to stage a massacre at a brothel that Jax co-owns. Besides Lin's Triads, Jax is crossing a powerful crime boss, August Marks (Billy Brown), the man who made his bones being the deadliest guy on the street. "Tara was really his moral anchor," says Hunnam, who explains that even his SAMCRO brothers will grow wary of their president's bloodlust, starting with the club's conscience, Bobby (Mark Boone Junior): "Everybody is progressively feeling like, 'Oh, f---, this guy's really off the deep end now.' It's really fun to play that. The tricky thing is, it's not like playing a bad guy where you just go all out. There's still a sense that Jax is the one that the audience follows."

They've been following him since the early days, when Jax was a reluctant heir grappling with his stepfather's violent reign as SAMCRO president and his late father's dream to take the club legit. Hunnam has evolved too. Previously known for playing ladies' man Lloyd on the cult comedy *Undeclared*, the British actor is now a name brand in Hollywood, where he has the clout to pick and choose between high-profile projects (see sidebar). And his partner in every scene, step, and even squabble has been Sutter. "We've had arguments, we've got upset, but every time the resolution led to a deeper bond," says the showrunner. According to Hunnam, the head butting is the product of the show's high-intensity nature. "We've always been completely on the same page creatively," he says. "We're both just stressed as f--- the whole time. It's a very hard show to make. I'm operating from a place of being borderline



sociopathic most of the time playing a guy who almost invariably handles every obstacle with violence. You play a character like that in the burning sun for 16 hours a day, five days a week, and then a real-life problem gets presented in the midst of doing that, and at that moment my default setting is like, 'All right, well, maybe I'll just punch this f---ing c---t in the face. Maybe see how he feels about that,' you know." Sagal puts it more diplomatically: "Everybody's got big emotions. We've had big



fighters around here, and big lovefests around here. It's like a dysfunctional family, for real."



O **N A SOUNDSTAGE IN** North Hollywood, Katey Sagal, 60, is killing time gossiping with the crew about Justin Theroux's jogging attire on *The Leftovers*. "You can't help but notice, dude is quite endowed," she says. "Swinging in the breeze! I thought I was the only one who noticed, but everyone is talking about it!" Sagal has just finished a read-through of an upcoming *Sons* episode in which a core cast member dies. (We're sworn to secrecy, but we can tell you it goes down in episode 9 or 10.) She's waiting to film another take of a white-knuckle scene that ends with Gemma threatening to shoot Sheriff Althea Jarry (Annabeth Gish) in the throat. But just like Gemma—who can murder her daughter-in-law

CHARLIE HUNNAM'S GREY MATTER



Last September, Charlie Hunnam landed the coveted role of S&M-loving billionaire Christian Grey in the film adaptation of E.L. James' erotic *Fifty Shades of Grey*. But just a month later, he made headlines again when he pulled out of the project. Why? The idea of wrapping

Sons' sixth season and being ready to step into Christian's suits 48 hours later was giving him "something of a nervous breakdown," the actor says. And delaying *Fifty's* start date wouldn't have helped him because he was committed to shooting Guillermo del Toro's horror flick

Crimson Peak right after. "It's very hard to say no when you love and respect people," Hunnam says. "I just kind of made a bit of a rookie mistake in that one in biting off more than I could chew." —Mandi Bierly

and later make a "mommy fetish" crack to her son—Sagal is brilliant at compartmentalizing. "Guys talk about girls' boobs like this all the time," she says, before motioning to the reporter in the room. "Are you getting all this?"

If the *Sons of Anarchy* cast is a family, Sagal is their mother, both on screen as Gemma and off as Sutter's wife. But that doesn't mean she's safe from the show's notoriously busy grim reaper. In a preseason poll on EW.com, 81 percent of readers assumed that Gemma has to die for killing Tara in a misguided attempt to protect Jax—an act that eventually ignited a street war with a devastating body count. "I kind of agree with them," Sagal admits. "That seems like a correct assumption. I mean, it's pretty heinous where she is now. Even though she didn't mean it."

Another fan assumption: Jax will find out Gemma's terrible secret. But is Jax capable of avenging his wife's death if his own mother is the murderer? "Anyone else in the world, 100 percent guaranteed he's gonna murder them in slow and brutal fashion, but it's his mother, you know. It's gonna be complicated," says Hunnam. "I don't envy Kurt in trying to figure out the right way to approach that." Sutter already knows how the story will unfold—not that he's willing to reveal it. "The question is, does Jax ever get the whole truth? Is he supposed to get the whole truth? If he only gets part of the truth, what does that mean? We'll play with all that stuff," he says sagely. "I think once he gets information, as much of it as he gets, we'll see it play out in a different emotional way."

The only person fans think is more likely to die than Gemma is hapless Juice (Theo Rossi), who helped her cover up the murder. The club already wants him dead for a list of old sins, and now Gemma may no longer trust him to keep silent. "Recently Kim [Coates] and I were at a charity event in Canada, and a guy came up to meet us, and he literally couldn't even look at me," Rossi says. "He was like, 'I'm so mad at you, man. I don't know how to be around you.' This was a fiftysomething-year-old business guy." And Juice hasn't reached his lowest point yet. "It gets tremendously dark and tremendously sad," Rossi teases. However, Sutter promises that Juice isn't the ill-fated character who dies in episode 9 or 10—which he knows will surprise many. "That'll f--- people up," he says.

The show also has plenty of other loose plotlines to tie up before its finale. Chibs' (Flanagan) relationship with Jarry, which started out as a



(From top) de Matteo and Flanagan in the hair and makeup trailer; Kurt Sutter



game to keep her close, will get messy. “It’s been a slow burn, and then finally of’ Chibby’s coming to life!” Flanagan says. Tig (Coates) will see his love interest Venus Van Dam (*Justified*’s Walton Goggins) again. Curiosity may kill Unser (Dayton Callie) if his cancer doesn’t get him first. Nero (Jimmy Smits) could remember his “exit strategy” and decide to use it. And bringing the series full circle, will Jax’s son Abel (Ryder and Evan Londo) follow in his father’s footsteps, or can the cycle of violence be broken? “I think fans should watch him very carefully, because these moments with Abel and what’s going on in school become quite significant,” Barclay says. As across the TV landscape these days, there are more questions than answers. But Hunnam can say one thing for certain: “Twice I have been completely naked on the set of *Sons* in season 7. I’m not going to tell you how that came about,” he says. “But you will definitely be seeing my ass again.”

KURT SUTTER IS NOT SMOKING. AT LEAST THAT’S WHAT HE’D probably want us to say. He’s sitting down for a chat in front of *Sons*’ North Hollywood production office, where he’s invited EW to come outside and “not smoke.” As the 54-year-old puffs away on a cigarette, his hyperactive brain bounces between everything from the show’s impending finale to the style of this reporter’s jeans. “I know. I’m so bad,” says Sutter. “I’m like this all the time. Ask my wife—I’m like Walter Mitty. Suddenly she’s like, ‘Why are we talking about roses?’”

Sutter understandably has a lot on his mind with the end of *Sons* drawing near. As an executive producer on FX’s *The Shield*, he saw firsthand the impact that an ending can have on a show’s legacy. But where those fans were ready for Vic Mackey to receive his punishment, *Sons* diehards are still improbably rooting for Jax. “This is a much more complicated decision than it was for *The Shield*,” he says. “I know no matter how many bad things Jax does, there are going to be those people who just want him to ride off into the sunset and be okay. And yet as a storyteller, can you really have a character that’s had that kind of mythology,

who’s done so many bad things, just sort of brush himself off and walk away?” Hunnam, for one, thinks Jax might end the show alive—though not unscathed. “He’s such a troubled character; he’s got so many demons that death will be an easy way out for him,” he says. “Living for another 50 years with the s--- that’s going on in his mind, that’s going to be the challenge.”

Hunnam and Sutter aren’t the only ones with a stake in *Sons*’ afterlife: FX is determined to keep the brand going long after SAMCRO’s final ride. The network is in talks with Sutter about a *Sons* prequel, *The First Nine*, which would center on the origins of the club. But first Sutter is working on an FX pilot called *The Bastard Executioner*, about a 14th-century knight in England. “Honestly, it’s really hard as an executive to contemplate the loss of something as special and as difficult to achieve as *Sons of Anarchy*,” says FX Networks CEO John Landgraf. “Obviously I don’t want it to go, but we made a decision a long time ago with *The Shield* and *Nip/Tuck* and *Rescue Me*, our first three dramas, that the serialized dramatic-television business requires planned endings.”

Sutter has long known the events that lead up to the ending, down to which song will be playing during the final montage. (It’s by an artist who rarely lets his music be used. Start guessing!) For him, the struggle has been about the last frame. “You know, I totally understood the whole *Sopranos* cut-to-black thing,” he says. “I think I have a sense of what [David] Chase was trying to accomplish with that, in terms of that it’s not something that can be tied up, and that it ultimately goes



COURTESY: SONS OF ANARCHY

on. I definitely want to have the sense that people will walk away feeling satisfied but also having a sense of wonder: Now what happens?"

As for the actors, they're lining up projects to jump into after *Sons* wraps at the end of October. Sagal will start shooting the film *Bleed for This*, playing the mother of world-champion boxer Vinny Pazienza (Miles Teller). Now that Hunnam's no longer bound to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, he'll head to England for a few months of dialect, sword, horse, and fight training for the title role in Guy Ritchie's King Arthur project. (When he was cast, members of SAMCRO showed up on the set wearing Burger King crowns to celebrate.) He's also attached to *A Prayer Before Dawn*—an indie based on the true story of a British fighter who earned his way out of a Thai prison through a Muay Thai tournament—and the adaptation of the romantic survival story *The Mountain Between Us*. But he knows *Sons* isn't an experience he can easily replace. "I will certainly have a couple of quiet moments saying goodbye to Jax," he says. "But I don't think it's going to be a little ceremony and then he's out of my psyche. I think it's gonna take a while to exorcise him from my life."

Coones,
Nicotera,
Coates,
Hunnam,
Flanagan,
and David
Labrava



quite been anything like it," says Coates. "I really mean that."

Hunnam stands in the shade surrounded by the men who have been his onscreen brothers for seven years. "*The Sopranos* was the benchmark that we got held up against," he says. "If we could have that type of life beyond the actual airing of the show, I'd be really happy."

Soon it's time to get the shot. The actors climb onto their bikes, rev up the engines, and ride toward the horizon. The crew cheers, happy to wrap a long day of shooting. Suddenly the bikes start getting bigger again—they've turned around. The stars are headed back to the set, where there will be back pats and small talk. Hunnam gives the director a hug. SAMCRO may be done for the day, but the cast isn't ready to walk away just yet. ■

IT'S THE FINAL SCENE OF THE DAY BACK AT STEVENSON RANCH, AND the actors are hanging out by their bikes while they wait to shoot. Coates lies back on his, and everyone laughs as Hunnam tells a story involving Marilyn Manson, who appears this season as an Aryan shot caller in prison. Then the conversation turns to a more serious topic: the show's legacy. "There's just never really