

ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

JUMANJI:
WELCOME TO
THE JUNGLE
OUT 20 DECEMBER

BUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

Dwayne Johnson returns for
a new take on a family classic

WORDS JOHN NUGENT

LONG BEFORE HE became The Rock — when he was merely The Pebble, perhaps — Dwayne Johnson was a freshman at President William McKinley High in Honolulu, Hawaii's state capital. Fast forward 30 years, and Johnson is driving a flame-throwing motorcycle through a jungle half an hour north of his old school, filming the new *Jumanji* movie as the highest-paid actor in Hollywood. "To be able to come back like this," he beams, "on a movie of this size, to put a lot of good people to work, it's very cool."

Johnson is speaking from Kualoa Ranch, Hollywood's 'Hawaii backlot' (it's recently played host to *Godzilla*, *Kong: Skull Island* and *Jurassic World*). This is the jungle we'll be welcomed to for *Jumanji: Welcome To The Jungle*, the follow-up to 1995's Robin Williams adventure movie. This time the board game has been upgraded to a video game, with Johnson as the lead in-game avatar of a new set of hapless high-school kids (Jack Black, Karen Gillan and Kevin Hart).

Later that night, *Empire* ventures on set. Surrounded by monkey pod trees, flaming torches, in-game henchmen known as 'dragoons', and the base of what will become (in post-production) a giant jaguar statue, we see the 5'4" Hart try and fail to fight his 6'2" co-star, Bobby Cannavale. "It's because he's so small," notes Johnson, never missing a chance to rib his co-star.

Despite punishing days, the cast are having a blast. Indeed, at the mere mention of his character name, the delectable Dr Smolder Bravestone ("the best name of any character I've ever played!"), Johnson bursts into a hearty laugh.

In fact, one of the cast wonders if they're not having *too* much fun. "Some of the best movies ever made were fucking horrible sets, filled with turmoil and strife," jokes Black. "Maybe I'll cause some strife, to make sure it's one of the best films of all time."

Clockwise from above: Game on: Ruby Roundhouse (Karen Gillan) and Moose Finbar (Kevin Hart) accompany Dr Smolder Bravestone (Dwayne Johnson) into the jungle; Ruby makes a decisive move; A Moose has a close encounter with some rhinos; Director Jake Kasdan talks strategy with Johnson between takes.

